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Institute**
For Survey Research



*Confederation
of Tomorrow*

Spotlight on Atlantic Canada



2023 SERIES



Confederation of Tomorrow

The Confederation of Tomorrow surveys are annual studies conducted by an association of the country's leading public policy and socio-economic research organizations. The surveys give voice to Canadians about the major issues shaping the future of the federation and their political communities.

The 2023 study consists of a survey of 5,365 adults, conducted online in the provinces between January 26 and February 9; and by telephone in the territories between January 24 and February 26.

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The Environics Institute for Survey Research was established by Michael Adams in 2006 with a mandate to conduct in-depth public opinion and social research on the issues shaping Canada's future. It is through such research that Canadians can better understand themselves and their changing society.

For more information about the survey, contact us at:

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Findings

Introduction

In recent years, discussions of regional discontent in Canada have tended to focus on opinions in Western Canada or Quebec. But over the past two years, dissatisfaction among Atlantic Canadians with the way things are going in the country has increased significantly: for the first time since this series of surveys began in 2019, dissatisfaction in the region is higher than the national average. A number of factors could lie behind this change, including the rising cost of living. But, without a doubt, higher dissatisfaction is also linked to growing concern about the region's health care systems, and declining confidence in governments' ability to manage them.

Each year since 2019, the **Confederation of Tomorrow Survey of Canadians** has tracked the priorities of Canadians in each region of the country and their assessment of how well governments, and the federal system, are responding. In 2021 and 2022, opinions on these questions were shaped by the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2023, however, the pandemic no longer dominates the list of top concerns. The issues that have taken its place vary by region. This report focuses on the priorities of Atlantic Canadians. Atlantic Canadians stand out from other Canadians for their greater concern about health care and their more negative assessment of government performance in this area.

Satisfaction with the direction of the country

In 2023, only one in three Atlantic Canadians say they are satisfied with the way things are going in the country today. But what makes the region stand out is not so much this lower than average level of satisfaction, but more specifically the greater than average mood swing over the past two years.

In early 2021, almost one year into the COVID-19 pandemic, Atlantic Canadians bucked the national trend by becoming slightly more, not less, satisfied than they had been 12 months earlier. At the time, this may have reflected greater success in the region at limiting the spread of COVID-19. But between 2021 and 2023, satisfaction in the region declined by 19 percentage points (from 52% to 33%), compared to no overall change at the national level. As a result, for the first

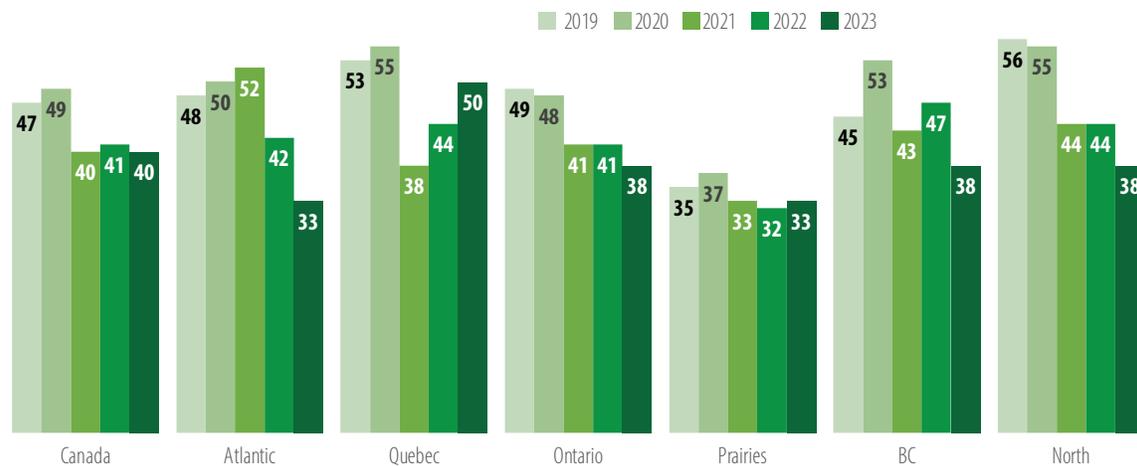
time since this series of surveys began in 2019, the level of satisfaction in Atlantic Canada has fallen below the national average. A majority of Atlantic Canadians (54%) now say they are dissatisfied with the way things are going (up from 37% in 2021).

The trend is similar in each of the four individual Atlantic provinces. Since 2021, satisfaction with the way things are going in the country today has declined by 14 points in Newfoundland and Labrador, by 20 points in Prince Edward Island, by 22 points in Nova Scotia and by 19 points in New Brunswick.

The decline in satisfaction is roughly similar among men in the region (a drop of 17 percentage points, from 55% to 38%) compared to women (a drop of 20 points, from 51% to 31%).

Satisfaction with the way things are going in country today

2019 - 2023 Satisfied, by region

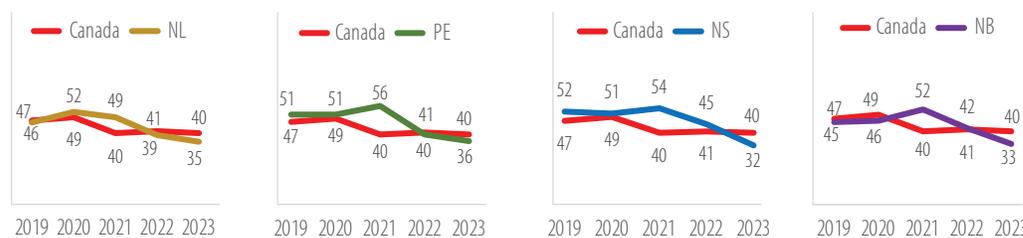


Q.1

Overall, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in our country today?

Satisfaction with the way things are going in country today

2019 - 2023 Atlantic provinces



Q.1

Overall, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in our country today?

Management of the pandemic

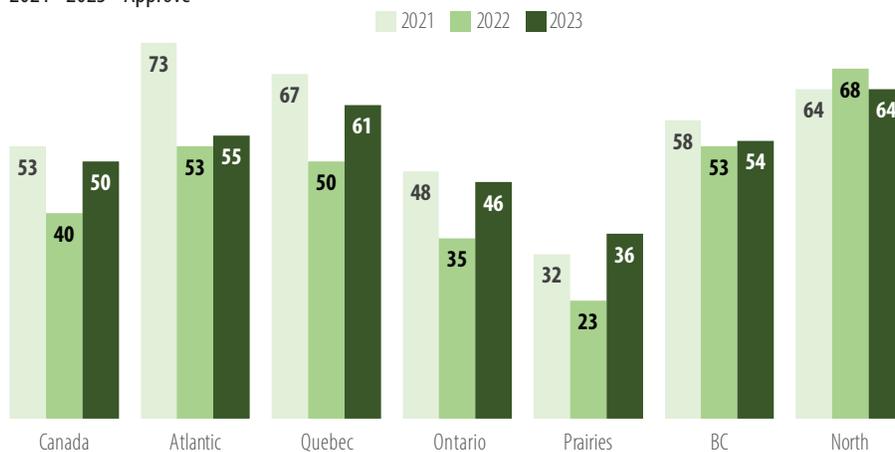
The drop in overall satisfaction in Atlantic Canada mirrors the drop in approval of how governments have handled the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2021, Atlantic Canadians were the more likely than Canadians in other regions to approve of both the federal government’s and their provincial government’s handling of the pandemic. But this difference eroded over the next two years. Whereas Atlantic Canadians were 20 percentage points more likely than average to approve of their provincial government’s handling of the pandemic in 2021, they were only 13 points more likely than average in 2022, and five points more likely than average in 2023. (The gap between average approval of the federal government’s handling of

the pandemic in Atlantic Canada and the national average narrowed from 12 points to two over the same period).

The decline in general satisfaction in the region since 2021 cannot be attributed solely, or even mainly, to changing perceptions of how governments managed the pandemic. But it is worth emphasizing that the higher than average general satisfaction among Atlantic Canadians in 2021 coincided with higher than average approval of the response at that point to COVID-19. Compared to those in other regions, opinions in Atlantic Canada were more anomalous in 2021. Since then, they have become more negative, and in so doing they have also moved closer to the national average.

Approval of the provincial / territorial government’s handling of the COVID-19 pandemic 2021 - 2023 Approve



Q.COV4B

To what extent do you approve or disapprove of your provincial [territorial] government’s handling of the COVID-19 pandemic so far?

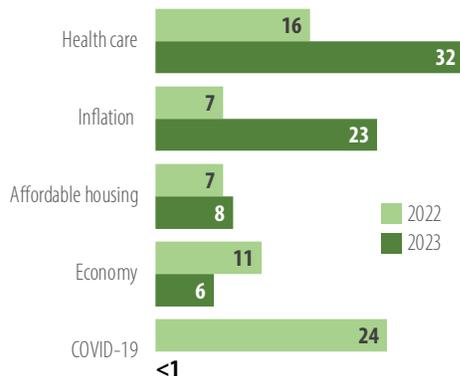
Most important problem

The increase in dissatisfaction in the region comes at a time when inflation and health care have emerged as Atlantic Canadians' top concerns.

Not surprisingly, in both 2021 and 2022, the COVID-19 pandemic was most likely to be seen as the country's most important problem. But while 45 percent of Atlantic Canadians in 2021, and 30 percent in 2022, said that COVID-19 was the most important problem facing Canadians, in 2023 fewer than one percent held this view. In its place, the proportion in the region mentioning inflation or the cost of living as most important increased from two percent in 2021 to 31 percent in 2023, while the proportion mentioning health care increased from seven percent to 19 percent.

The same pattern is evident when Atlantic Canadians are asked what they consider to be the most important issue facing their province. Between 2022 and 2023, the proportion in the region who named COVID-19 fell from 24 percent to fewer than one percent. But the proportion naming health care as their province's most important issue doubled, from 16 to 32 percent, while the proportion naming inflation or the cost of living tripled, from seven to 23 percent.

Most important issue facing province/territory today 2022 - 2023 Atlantic Canada



Q.2b

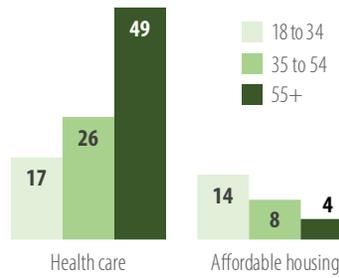
And what would you consider to be the most important issue facing (province/territory) today?

Other findings of note include the following:

- Compared to Canadians in other regions, Atlantic Canadians are currently much more likely to be concerned about health care. The proportion of Atlantic Canadians naming inflation or the cost of living as the most important issue in their province is the same as the national average (23%). However, the proportion naming health care is almost twice the national average (32%, compared to 17%).
- Within the region, inflation/cost of living is especially likely to be mentioned as the most important provincial issue in Newfoundland and Labrador (32%), while health care is especially likely to be mentioned in Nova Scotia (37%) and Prince Edward Island (35%).
- Concern about health care within the region increases with age, but the opposite is true for concern about affordable housing. Health care is almost three times likely to be mentioned by older Atlantic Canadians compared to their younger counterparts; conversely, concern about affordable housing is three times as high among younger Atlantic Canadians compared to those in the older age group.
- It is also notable that Atlantic Canadians age 55 and older are almost twice as likely as the national average for that age group to see health care as the most important issue in their province (49%, compared to 27%).

Most important issue facing province/territory today

2023 Selected issues, Atlantic Canada, by age



Q.2b

And what would you consider to be the most important issue facing (province/territory) today?

Assessment of the health care system

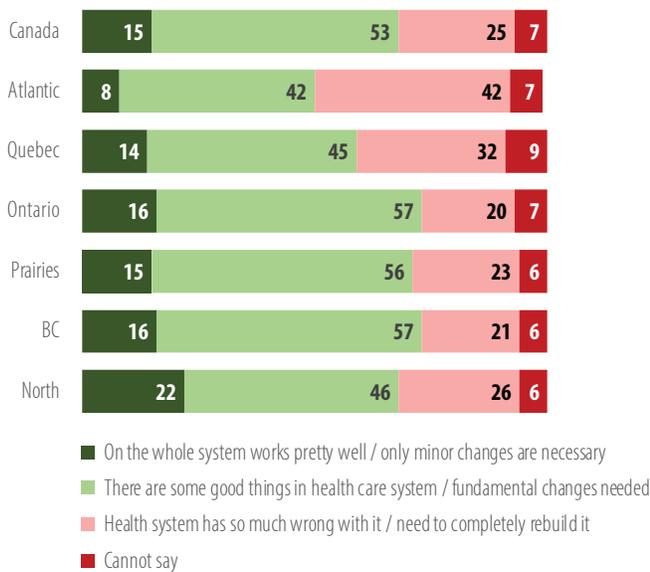
Atlantic Canadians are not only more likely than their counterparts in other regions to say that health care is the most important issue facing their province, they also more likely to express concerns about how their health care system is performing.

On average, a majority of Canadians (57%) are either very or somewhat confident that, if they or a member of their family were to get sick and need to see a doctor, they would be able to get treatment from the health care system within a reasonable period of time. But the proportion expressing this degree of confidence is much lower in Atlantic Canada, at 41 percent. In fact, Atlantic Canada is the only region of the country where a majority (57%) says they are either not very or not at all confident in obtaining prompt treatment.

Similarly, presented with three statements describing the state of the health care system, Atlantic Canadians are the most likely to agree with the most negative one: 42 percent of those in the region feel that “our health system has so much wrong with it that we need to completely rebuild it.” This is significantly higher than the national average of 25 percent.

Overall view of the health care system

2023 by region

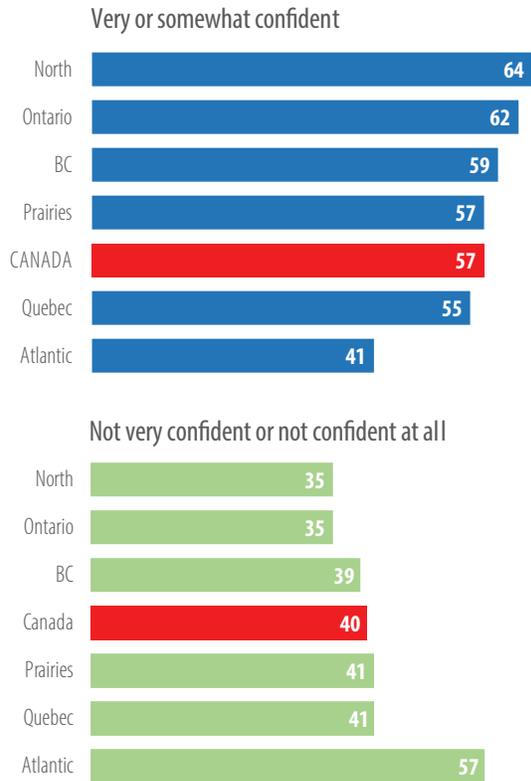


Q.NEW2

Which of the following statements comes closest to expressing your overall view of the health care system in your province?

Confidence in accessing treatment from the health care system

2023 by region



Q.CONF3

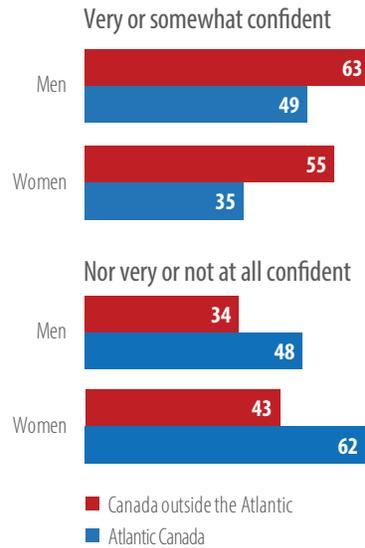
If you or a member of your family were to get sick and need to see a doctor, how confident are you that you would be able to get treatment from the health care system within a reasonable period of time?

Women in the region are especially critical of their health care system:

- In Atlantic Canada, a majority of women (62%) are *not* confident that they would be able to get treatment from the health care system within a reasonable period of time. This compares to 48 percent for men in the region.
- Almost one in two Atlantic Canadian women (48%) say that their health care system needs to be completely rebuilt, compared to 34 percent of men.
- Compared to women outside the region, Atlantic Canadian women are 19 percent points more likely to lack confidence in getting prompt medical treatment (62%, compared to 43%), and 22 points more likely to say that their health care system needs to be completely rebuilt (48%, compared to 26%).

Confidence in accessing treatment from the health care system

2023 by region, gender



Q.CONF3

If you or a member of your family were to get sick and need to see a doctor, how confident are you that you would be able to get treatment from the health care system within a reasonable period of time?

Which government best represents your interests?

At a time when health care has emerged as a top concern in the region, fewer Atlantic Canadian are seeing their provincial governments as the one that best represents their interests, and a growing proportion are saying that no government best represents them.

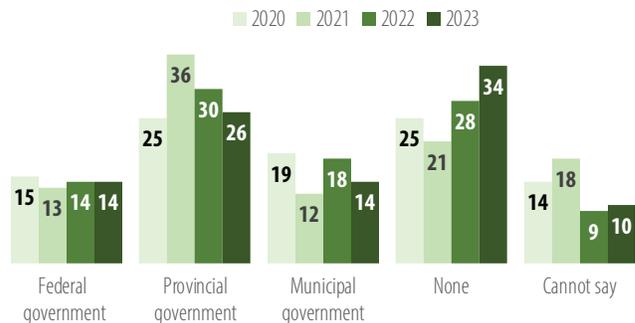
As is the case throughout the country, relatively few in Atlantic Canada say that the federal government best represents their interests. In early 2021, almost a year into the pandemic, the choice of the plurality in the region was their provincial government: at that time, 36 percent said their provincial government was their best representative. This represents an 11-point increase from a year earlier (2020), just prior to the pandemic, suggesting an initially positive reaction to how provincial governments in the region were managing the crisis.

Since 2021, however, the proportion of Atlantic Canadians saying their provincial government best represents their interests has fallen by 10 points, returning to pre-pandemic levels. The proportion that says that no government is the best representative has increased by 13 points – a sign of growing public discontent. For the first time in this series of surveys, Atlantic Canadians are more likely than their counterparts in other regions of the country to say that no government (or “none of the above”) best represents their interests.

The increase between 2021 and 2023 in the proportion selecting no government as the best representative is greater among women in the region (up 18 points, from 18% to 36%) than among men (up 7 points, from 25% to 32%).

Which government best represents your interests?

2020 - 2023 Atlantic Canada

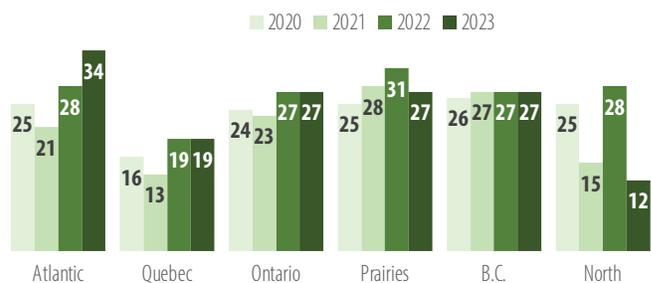


Q.15

Which government do you believe best represents your interests?

Which government best represents your interests?

2020 - 2023 None of the above, by region



Q.15

Which government do you believe best represents your interests?

Which government is trusted more?

The increase in the proportion of Atlantic Canadians saying that no government best represents their interests is mirrored by a similar increase in the proportion trusting neither the federal nor their provincial government to make the right decisions in managing the health care system.

In 2021, roughly equal proportions of the region's residents said they trust the federal government more (25%), their provincial government more (26%) or both governments equally (26%) to make the right decisions in managing the health care system. Only 13 percent at that time trusted neither government.

Since then, however, the proportion trusting neither government has almost tripled, to reach 36 percent in 2023. The proportions trusting the federal government more, their provincial government more or both governments equally have all declined.

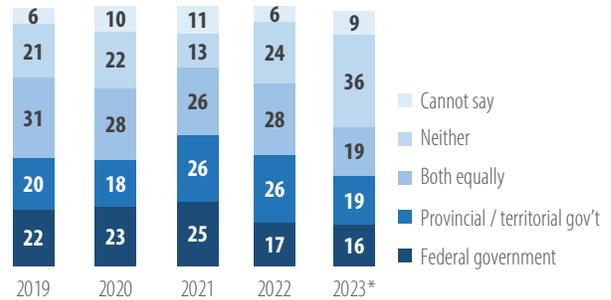
The 23 percentage-point increase since 2021 in the proportion trusting neither government is similar in scale in each of the region's four provinces. And it compares to a more modest nine-point increase (from 14% to 23%) in the rest of the country.

Once again, the souring of opinions about government performance is more pronounced among Atlantic Canadian women compared to men. In 2021, roughly equal proportions of women (13%) and men (12%) in the region trusted neither the federal nor their provincial government to make the right decisions in managing the health care system. But while the proportion of men holding this view in 2023 has doubled (reaching 27%), it has tripled among women (reaching 41%).

Growing discontent with governments in the region is not confined to the area of health care. There has also been an increase since 2021 in the proportion of Atlantic Canadians trusting neither government to make the right decisions in promoting economic growth and job creation (from 14% to 25%) and in addressing climate change (from 18% to 30%). The increases of 11 and 12 percentage points in the region in the proportions trusting neither government in these areas compares to a smaller increase of only five points in each case in the rest of Canada.

Which government do you trust more to make the right decisions in managing health care?

2019 - 2023 Atlantic Canada



* In 2023, Indigenous respondents could also select "your Indigenous government or Indigenous health organization." One percent of the total sample selected this option.

Q.25a

Which government do you trust more to make the right decisions in the following areas: Managing the health care system?

In both instances, the increase is more pronounced among women in Atlantic Canada than among men.

The jump in the proportions trusting neither government on economic growth or climate change is more modest than in the case of health care, but is still noticeable. Growing discontent in the region may be accentuated when it comes to health care, but is not limited to that issue.

Conclusion

The outlook in Atlantic Canada has changed significantly over the past two years. In 2021, almost a year into the COVID-19 pandemic, people in the region stood out from other Canadians as being much more satisfied with the direction of the country in general, and with the way both the federal government and their provincial governments had managed the crisis so far. Two years later, the situation looks very different.

The region's more negative outlook today coincides with a growing concern about health care. Since last year, the proportion of Atlantic Canadians naming health care as the most important issue facing their province has doubled. Atlantic Canadians are much more likely than Canadians in other regions to worry about getting timely access to medical treatment, and to say that their health care

system needs to be completely rebuilt. And, since 2021, the proportion of the region's residents who trust neither the federal government nor their provincial government to make the right decisions in managing the health care system has almost tripled. Women in the region are especially likely to express a lack of confidence in the health care system and a lack of trust in governments' ability to manage it.

The message from public opinion studies can sometimes be difficult to discern, with opinions changing slowly over time, and the public signalling multiple – and sometimes conflicting – priorities. This is not the case today in Atlantic Canada. In the region, health care has emerged as a pressing concern, and confidence in governments' ability to respond is declining. The only unanswered question is how long it will take governments to turn these negative trends around.

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