



Confederation
of Tomorrow

The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation

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2025 SERIES

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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.

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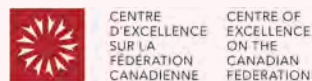
The Confederation of Tomorrow surveys give voice to Canadians about the major issues shaping the future of the federation and their political communities. They are conducted annually by an association of the country's leading public policy and socio-economic research organizations.

The 2025 study consists of a survey of 5,391 adults, conducted between May 1 and June 16, 2025 (92% of the responses were collected between May 6 and May 29); 90 percent of the responses were collected online. The remaining responses were collected by telephone (both landline and cell phone) from respondents living in the North or on First Nations reserves, or from francophone respondents in New Brunswick.

The 2025 survey is the seventh annual sounding of opinion on issues about the federation across Canada's 13 provinces and territories. The survey includes 1,103 respondents in Atlantic Canada (303 in Newfoundland and Labrador, 300 each in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and 200 in PEI).

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The political context in 2025

“Atlantic Canada” refers to the region of Canada bordering directly on the Atlantic Ocean, including four constituent provinces of the Canadian federation. Three of these – New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia – are also known collectively as the “Maritime provinces”. The fourth province, which did not join Canada until 1949, is Newfoundland and Labrador. These provinces share much common geography, history and culture, and similar economic and social circumstances. While, today, the four provinces are the country’s smallest in terms of population, and have levels of income and wealth below the national average, their economies and populations are dynamic and growing, closing the gap with the rest of Canada.

Despite their commonalities, the provincial boundaries do matter – and each province has had, and continues to have, unique aspects of political culture, leadership and party dynamics. There remains a strong sense of regional solidarity and cooperation – but, when it comes to policy priorities and political outcomes, the provinces constitute four separate political communities.

All four Atlantic provinces have experienced significant political changes in the past year.

In **New Brunswick**, the provincial Liberal party, led by Susan Holt, won the general election in November 2024 with 31 seats, defeating the Progressive Conservatives, led by then Premier Blaine Higgs, who were reduced to 16 seats (with the Green Party winning 2). Holt is the first woman to become Premier of the province. The Biggs government had been in power since 2018, and had a somewhat combative relationship with Justin Trudeau’s federal government, notably over health care, the carbon tax, and a number of social and justice issues. The provincial PC party has had close links to the Poilievre-led Conservative Party of Canada. Thus, the election outcome set the scene for an improved federal-provincial relationship; both Holt and the new federal leadership under Mark Carney share a centrist Liberal approach, and have an important cabinet champion in New Brunswick MP Dominic LeBlanc.

In **Nova Scotia**, a provincial election in December returned the Progressive Conservative party, led by Premier Tim Houston, with a significantly increased majority. In that campaign, the PCs were able to take credit for significant improvements in health care. The PCs now have 43 seats, the NDP nine and the Liberals two. First elected in 2021, the Houston government is now the longest serving in the region, and Houston is by far the most experienced Premier. Yet, compared to the Higgs-led PC government in New Brunswick, the Houston government has had its differences with the federal Conservatives, and could be considered moderates. Since the start of this year, Houston has received media attention for his lead positions on interprovincial trade and other actions in response to the Canada-U.S. trade crisis; his good relationship with other Premiers, notably Ontario's Doug Ford; and for his contrasting leadership style with that of Poilievre.

In **Prince Edward Island**, political leadership remains uncertain since the resignation of Premier Dennis King in February 2025. The moderate Progressive Conservative government has been in office since 2019, most recently re-elected in 2023. The PC government is now into their second interim Premier, Bloyce Thompson, and will elect a new leader in February 2026. In fact, all three party leaders in the provincial legislature are "interim", a potentially vulnerable political position in a time of crisis. With no election due until 2027, the current party standings are PCs 19, Liberals four and Green Party three. During King's tenure as Premier, the big political issues were the pandemic, natural disasters and trade - but it also presided over significant economic and population growth, even with attendant issues of housing shortage, immigration settlement and the cost of living.



The fourth province, **Newfoundland and Labrador**, also went to the polls in 2025. The Progressive Conservatives, led by Tony Wakeham, defeated the Liberals in the October election. The Conservatives won the majority of seats in the rural areas of the province, while the Liberals won chiefly in the urban area around St. John's – a historic realignment reversing trends since the 1830s! The Liberals had been led by Premier Andrew Furey since his electoral victory in 2020. Furey resigned early in 2025, replaced as party leader and Premier by Health Minister John Hogan. Party standings in the NL legislature are now PCs 21, Liberals 15 and NDP two. While, traditionally, there has not been much to differentiate the Liberals from the Conservatives in Newfoundland and Labrador in terms of policy, the alignment (or not) with the federal party in power has been important. Premier Wakeham took stands close to the federal Conservatives on such issues as energy, carbon taxes and affordability. He was also able to take advantage of public concern over the terms of a major hydroelectricity agreement that the Furey Liberal government had negotiated with Quebec. The Wakeham government will also be looking for support from the Carney federal government for natural resource projects, including offshore oil and gas.

These political developments have also taken place against the backdrop of major political change at the national and international level, notably the election of Donald Trump for a second time as President of the United States in November 2024; the resignation of then Prime Minister Justin Trudeau as federal Liberal Party leader in January 2025; and his replacement as leader and Prime Minister by Mark Carney in March, followed by the re-election of the Liberal Party in April 2025. The Trump administration's major realignment of trade and defence policy, underscored by the President's rhetoric about Canada becoming a 51st state, has hugely impacted political priorities in the Atlantic region, as much as any other part of Canada.

Despite the change in federal leadership from Prime Minister Trudeau to Prime Minister Carney, the April 28, 2025 election made little difference in federal party standings in the region. Of the 32 seats in the region, the Liberals won 24, one more than in 2021. The Conservatives won the rest, for eight seats. These results mask increased Conservative popular support under Poilievre's leadership since 2021. The Conservative victories were all in rural areas: four in New Brunswick, three in Nova Scotia, and one in Newfoundland and Labrador. Partly helped by a collapse in NDP support, the Liberals prevailed in all of the region's urban areas, including Moncton, Fredericton, Saint John, St. John's, Charlottetown, Sydney and Halifax.



Key findings

Overall satisfaction rebounds

After several years of decline, the proportion of Atlantic Canadians satisfied with the way things are going in the country rebounded in 2025 (up 9 percentage points, from 35% to 44%). The rebound was especially pronounced in Nova Scotia (up 12 points).

Assessment of government performance improves


Atlantic Canadians' assessment of the performance of government, and in particular their provincial governments, improved between 2024 and 2025 in several areas:

- The proportion that views the federal and provincial governments as working well together jumped by 20 percentage points.
- The proportion that sees their provincial government as their best representative increased in three of the four provinces in the region (the exception is Prince Edward Island).
- The proportion trusting neither the federal nor their provincial government to manage such issues as health care, the economy and climate change declined.

More Atlantic Canadians feeling respected within Canada

The proportion saying their province is treated with the respect it deserves in Canada increased by 10 points (from 34% to 44%), including a 16-point increase in Nova Scotia. Despite this, residents of Newfoundland and Labrador remain more likely than their counterparts in any other province to say they *do not* get the respect they deserve. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are also more likely than those in any other province to say their province has a distinct culture that is often misunderstood by people living in the rest of Canada.

After several years of decline, the proportion of Atlantic Canadians satisfied with the way things are going in the country rebounded in 2025. The rebound was especially pronounced in Nova Scotia.



Attachment to both Canada and one's province remains strong

Atlantic Canadians remain more strongly attached than their counterparts in other provinces to both Canada and to their province. At the same time, the proportion that identify as a Canadian first or only, rather than as someone from their province first or only, or as both equally, has been growing in both Newfoundland and Labrador, and in the Maritimes. In fact, for the first time, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are now more likely to identify as Canadian than as someone from their province.

The issues agenda is evolving

Last year, from the perspective of Atlantic Canadians, the most important issues facing the country are related to the cost of living or housing, and health care. But, in 2025, these concerns have been joined by another: relations with the United States and the trade dispute resulting from the Trump administration's imposition of tariffs. At the same time, the priorities of Atlantic Canadians have shifted somewhat, away from prioritizing the environment and the need to address climate change, and toward the need to focus more on protecting jobs and economic growth.

Atlantic Canadians remain more strongly attached than their counterparts in other provinces to both Canada and to their province.

Moving away and moving back

New questions on interprovincial mobility show that Atlantic Canadians are more likely to move away from their province for a while and then return; this is the case for 15 percent of the region's residents, compared to five percent of other Canadians.

Assessing governments' performance

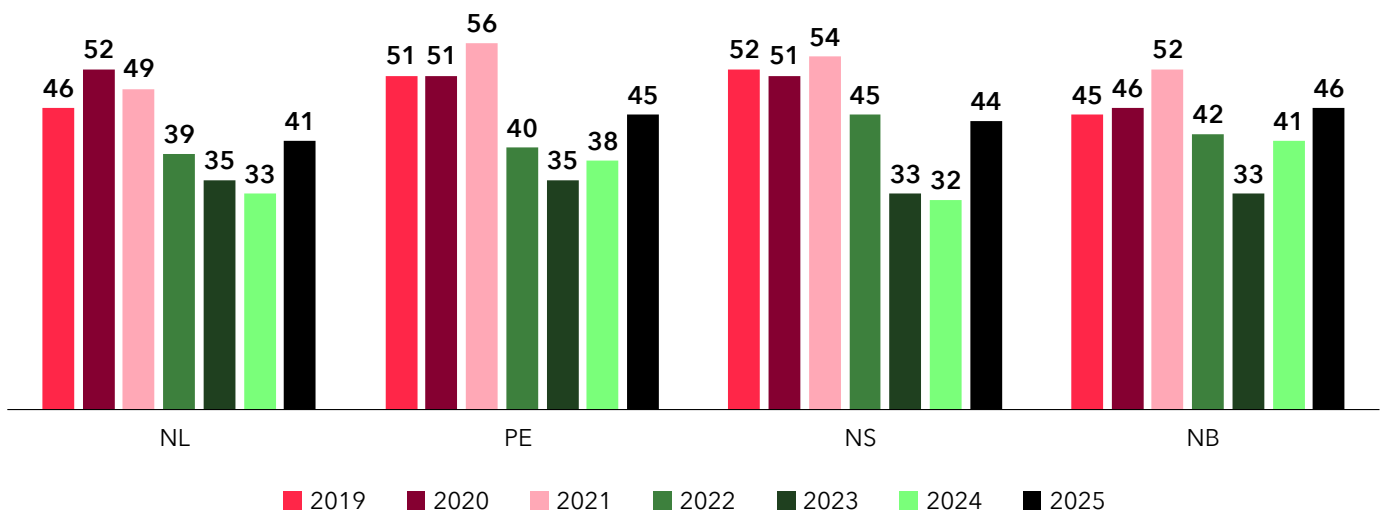
Atlantic Canadians' views of their governments have cycled up and down over the past several years – and swung upwards again in 2025.

Overall satisfaction with the way things are going in the country was higher than average across the region in early 2021, at the end of the first year of the pandemic. But satisfaction then fell dramatically between 2021 and 2023, including roughly 20-point drops in each of the Maritime provinces. But, following little change in 2024, satisfaction is back up again in 2025, including eight-point and 12-point boosts in Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nova Scotia, respectively.

Figure 1

Satisfied with the way things are going in our country today

2019 – 2025, Atlantic provinces



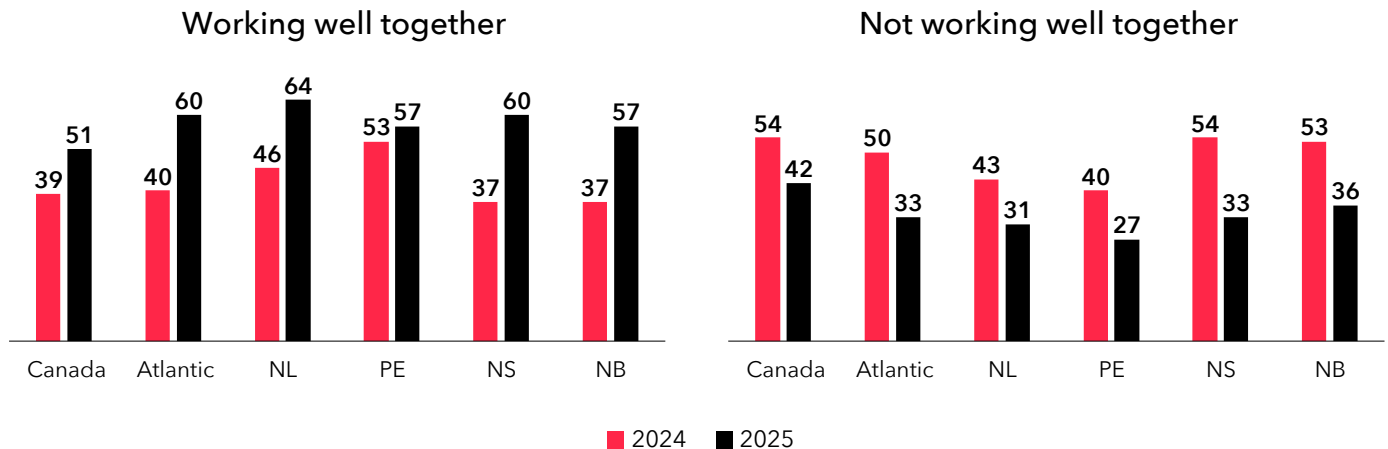
Overall, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in our country today?

This change in overall satisfaction is accompanied by a significant 20-point increase in the proportion of Atlantic Canadians who say that the federal and provincial governments are working well together. Atlantic Canadians are now more likely than their counterparts in every other region – outside of the territories – to hold this positive view of the state of government collaboration.

Figure 2

Are governments working well together?

2024 – 2025, Atlantic provinces



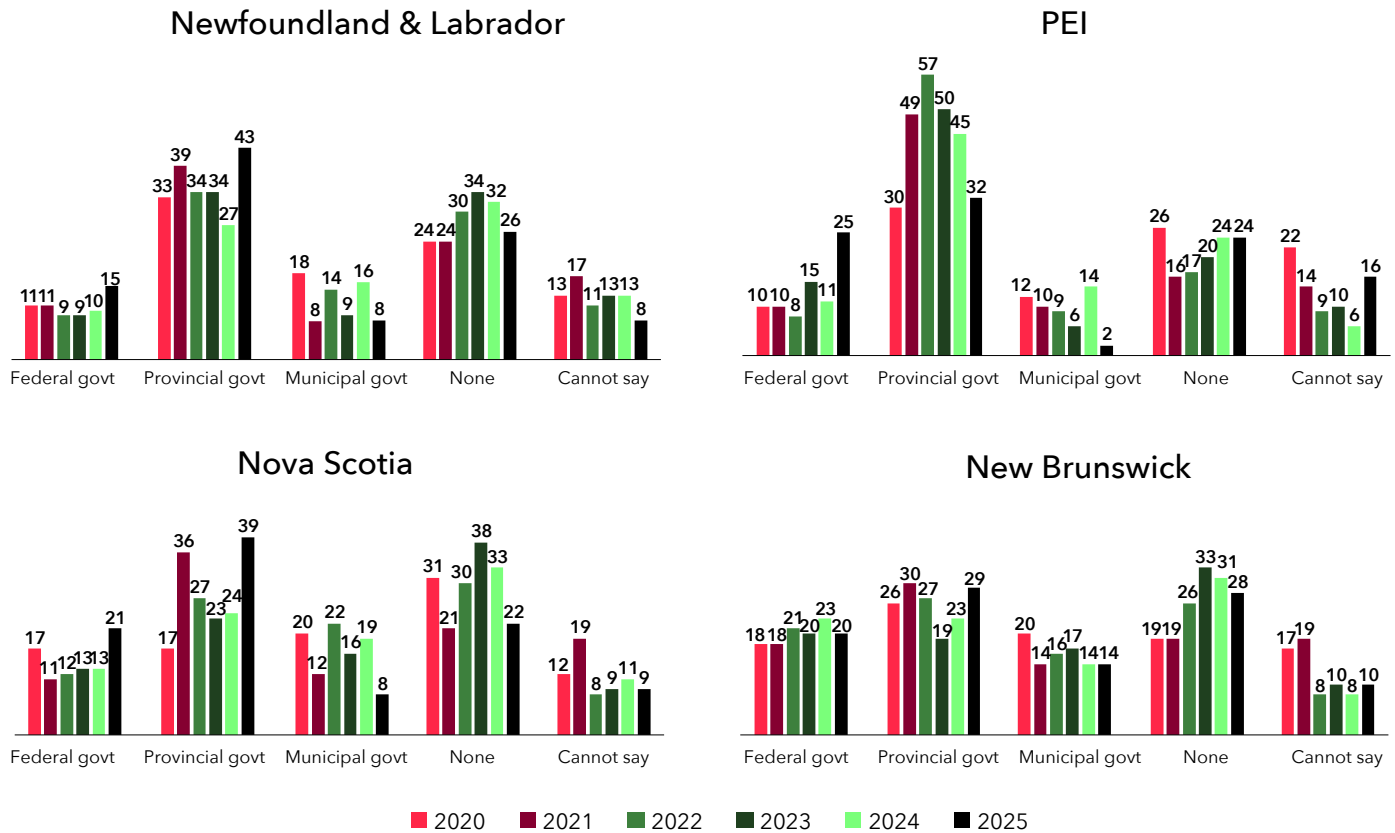
Do you think the federal and provincial governments are working very well together, somewhat well, not very well or are they not working at all well together?

Another sign of this improvement in the public's assessments of their governments' performance is the decline between 2024 and 2025 – in three of the four provinces in the region – in the proportions that choose no government as the one that best represents their interests (the exception is Prince Edward Island). This is accompanied by an increase in these three provinces in the proportions saying their provincial government is their best representative: up by six points in New Brunswick, 15 points in Nova Scotia and 16 points in Newfoundland and Labrador. In this case, the trend is in the opposite direction in PEI; in that province, the proportion saying their provincial government best represents their interests dropped by 13 points between 2024 and 2025, continuing a decline that began after 2021.

Figure 3

Which government do you believe best represents your interests?

2020 - 2025



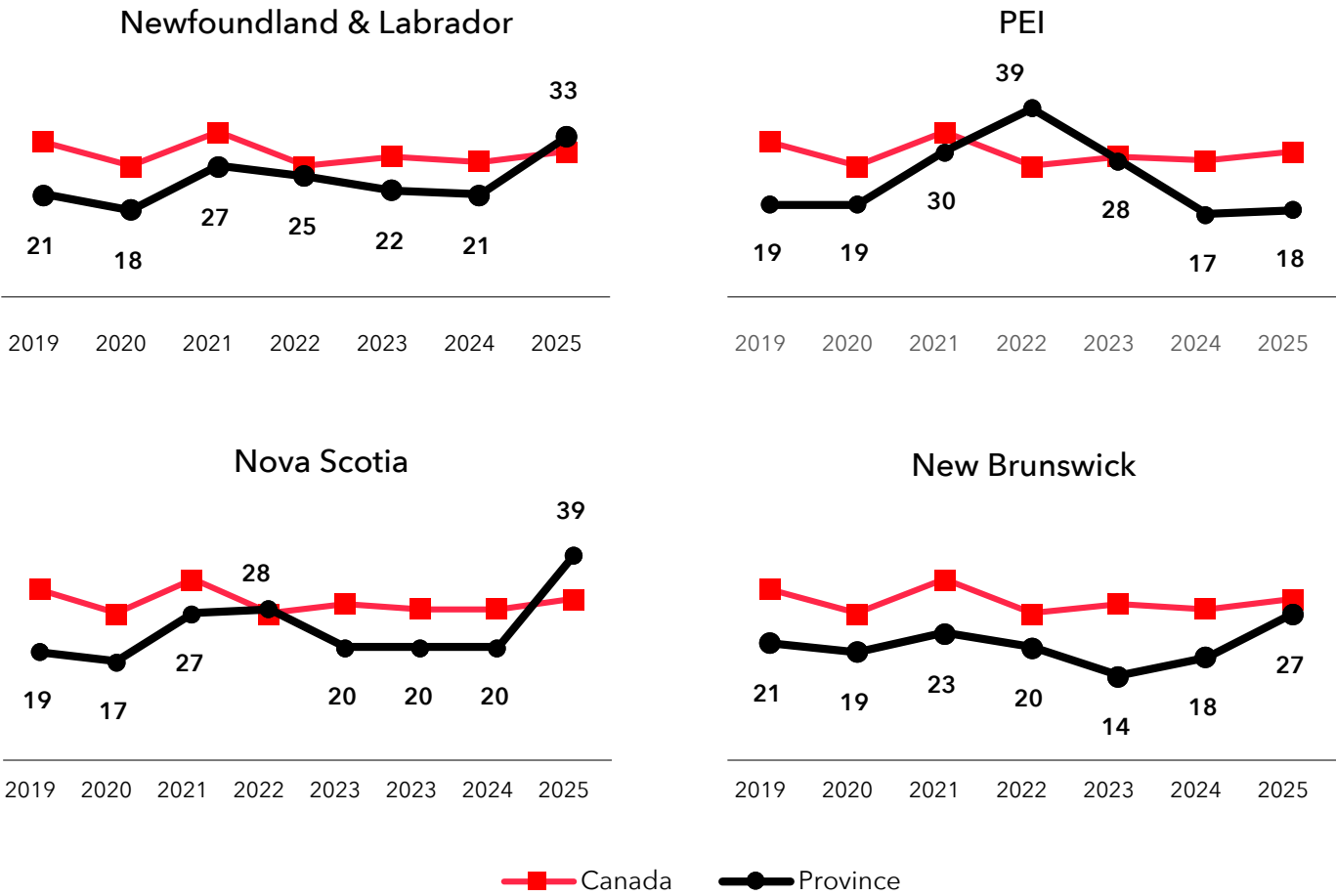
Which government do you believe best represents your interests?

These changes are matched by similar drops in the proportions trusting neither the federal nor their provincial government to manage such issues as health care, the economy and climate change. In the case of health care, the proportion trusting neither government fell by 11 points in both Newfoundland and Labrador, and PEI, and by 15 points in both Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. In Nova Scotia, this was accompanied by a dramatic 19-point increase in the proportion trusting the provincial government more on this issue. At the same time, the proportion of Atlantic Canadians who express confidence in accessing health care treatment within a reasonable period of time improved by 10 points over the past year, from 45 to 55 percent.

Figure 4A

Trust my provincial government more to make the right decisions in managing the health care system

2019 - 2025



Which government do you trust more to make the right decisions in the following areas:

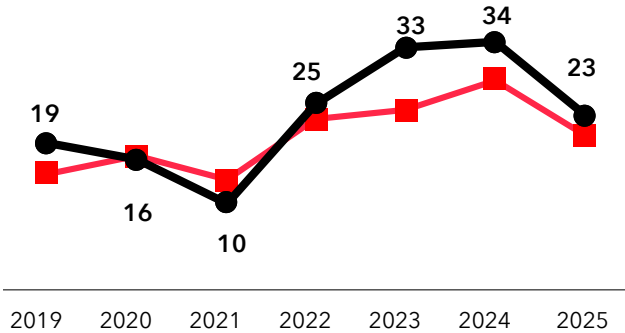
Managing the health care system?

Figure 4B

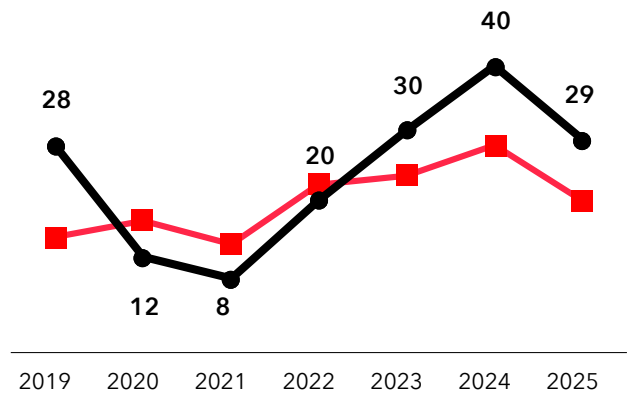
Trust neither government to make the right decisions in managing the health care system

2019 - 2025

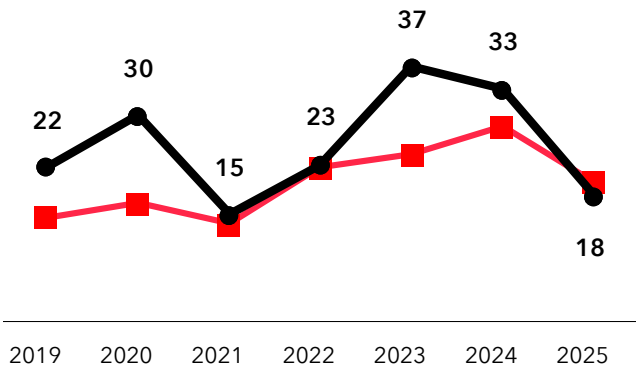
Newfoundland & Labrador



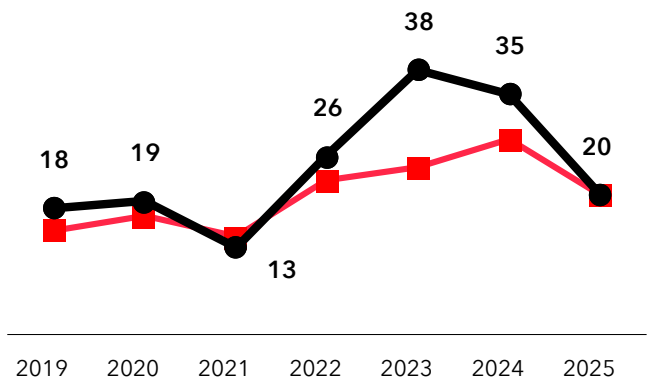
PEI



Nova Scotia



New Brunswick



—■— Canada —●— Province

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

Atlantic Canada in the federation

Atlantic Canadians' sense of how their province is treated within the Canadian federation generally improved in 2025, though more so in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick than in the region's other two provinces.

On questions relating to fairness in the federation, Newfoundlander and Labradorians stand out as being much more dissatisfied than their Maritime neighbours. In fact, residents of Newfoundland and Labrador are more likely than their counterparts in any other province to say they *do not* get the respect they deserve within Canada, have less than their fair share of influence on national decisions, and receive less than their fair share of federal spending. There has been little change in opinions in this province compared to last year – though, in general, opinions are somewhat less negative today than they were when this series of surveys began in 2019.

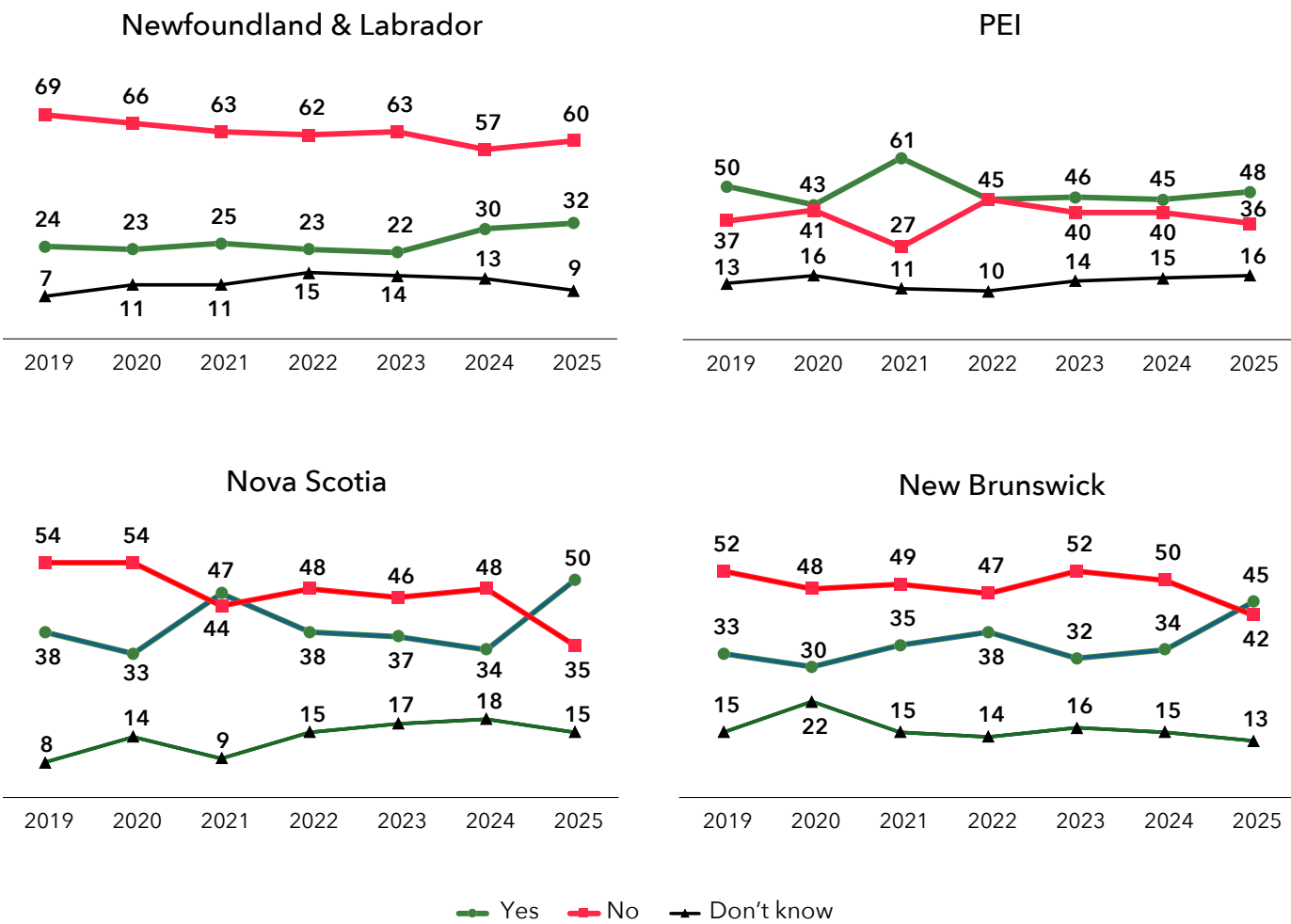
Opinions are less negative in PEI than in Newfoundland and Labrador. But, some year-to-year ups and downs notwithstanding, there has been little change over time in how Islanders perceive their province is treated within the federation.



Figure 5

Is your province treated with the respect it deserves?

2019 - 2025

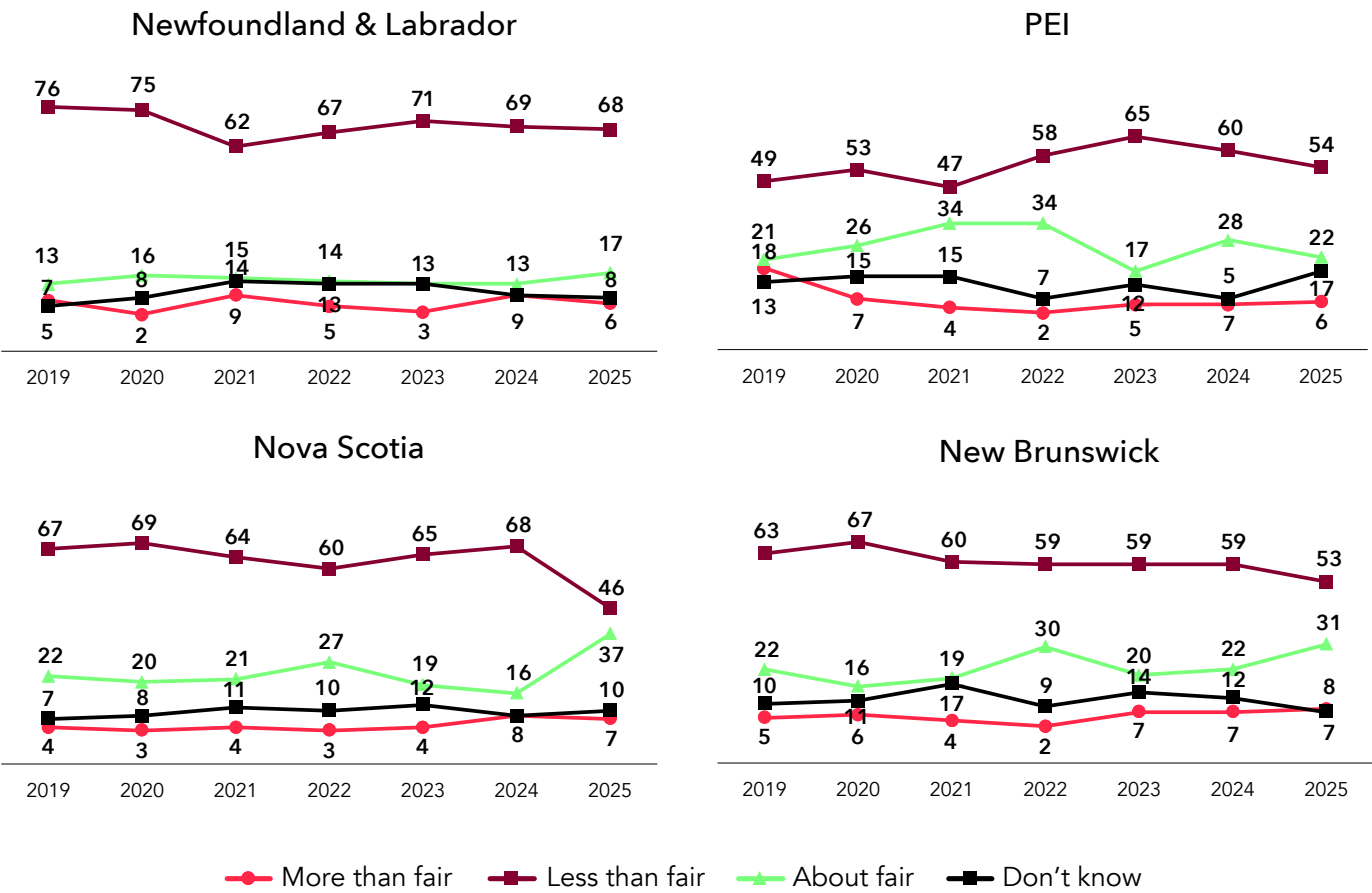


In your opinion, is [name of province] treated with the respect it deserves in Canada or not?

Figure 6

How much influence does your province have on important national decisions?

2019 - 2025

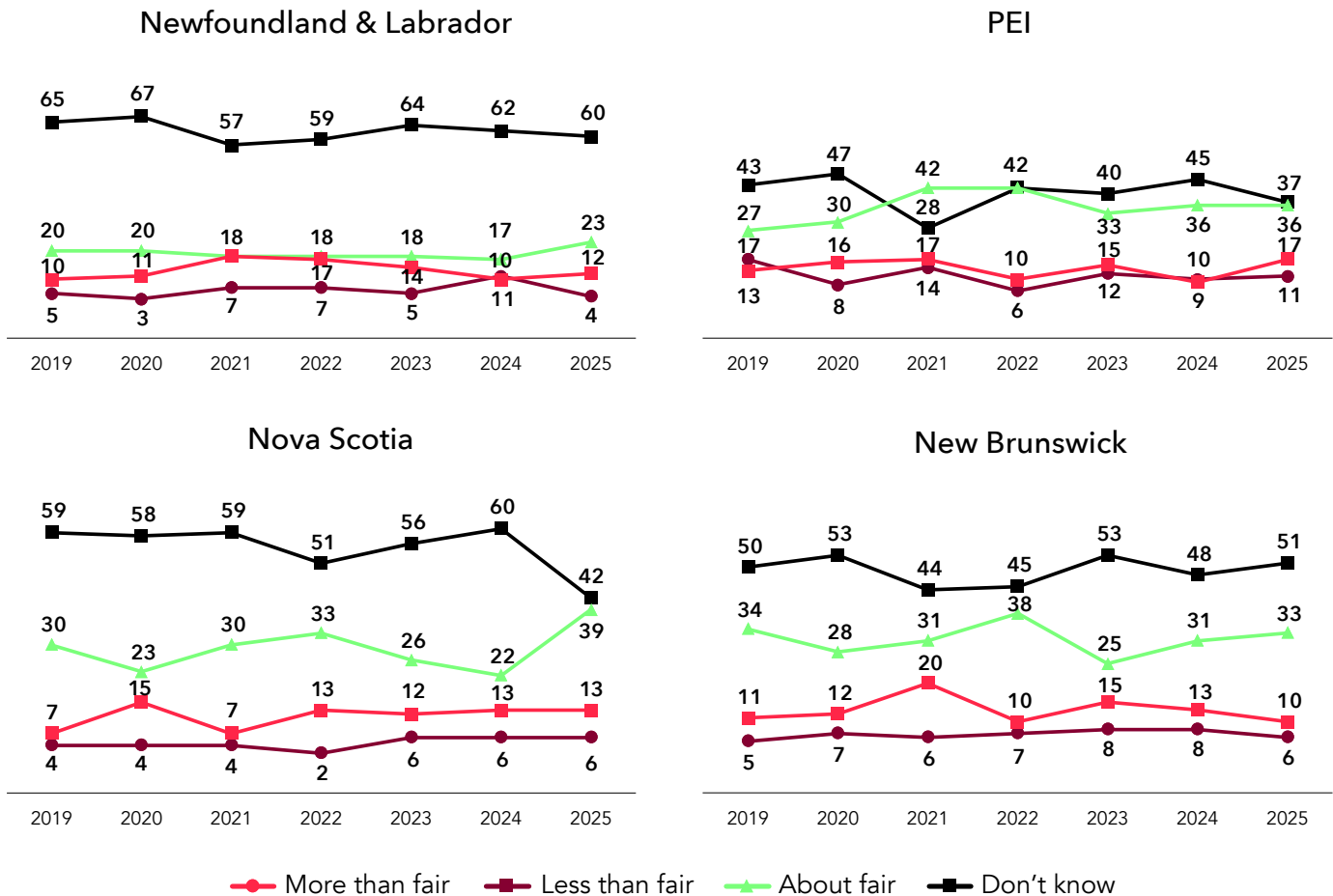


In your opinion, how much influence does [name of province] have on important national decisions in Canada?

Figure 7

Does your province receive its fair share of federal spending?

2019 - 2025



Thinking about all the money the federal government spends on different programs and transfers to the provinces and territories, do you think [name of province] receives...

There has been noticeable change, however, in both Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. The proportions saying their province is treated with the respect it deserves in Canada increased by 16 points between 2024 and 2025 in Nova Scotia (from 34% to 50%) and by 11 points in New Brunswick (from 34% to 45%). At the same time, the proportions saying they have less than their fair share of influence on national decisions fell in both provinces, though more significantly in Nova Scotia (from 68% to 46%). And, in Nova Scotia, there was also a dramatic drop in the proportion saying their province gets less than its fair share of federal spending (from 60% to 42%).

Canadian and regional identities

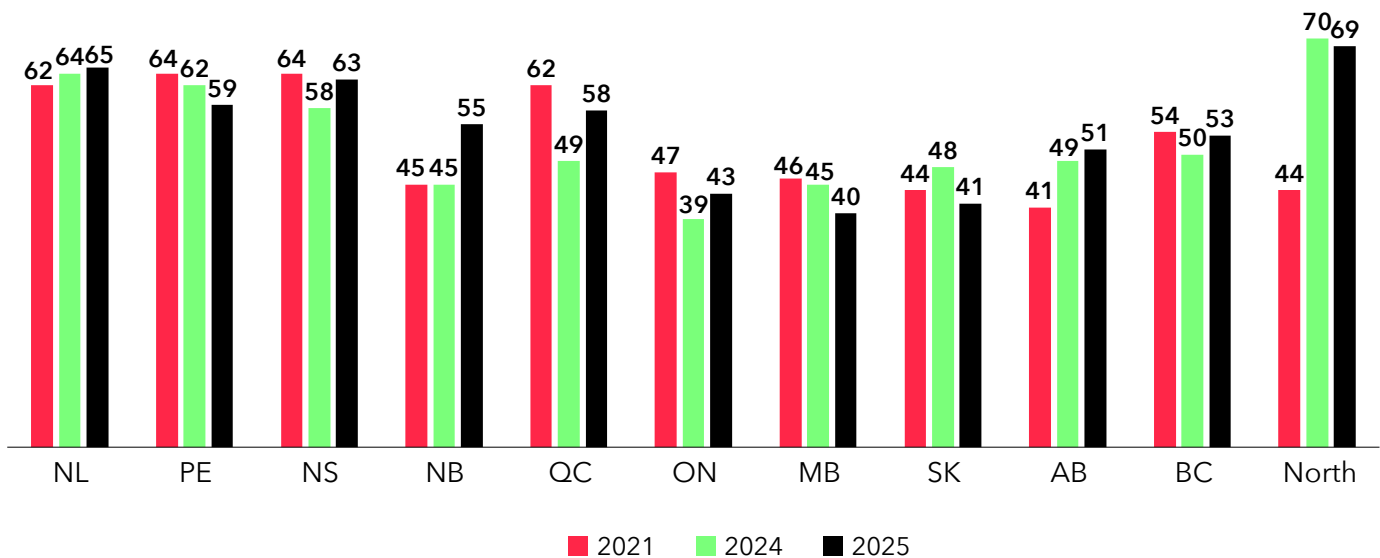
Atlantic Canadians stand out for combining a strong attachment to both Canada and to their province.

Two in three people in the region (67%) say they feel very attached to Canada. Almost as many (61%) feel very attached to their province. In both cases, these figures are higher than those for residents of any other province. Among all provinces, strong provincial attachment is highest in Newfoundland and Labrador (65%), and second highest in Nova Scotia (63%).

Figure 8

Very attached to province or territory

2021 - 2025, by province



How attached do you feel to each of the following: to [name of province or territory]?

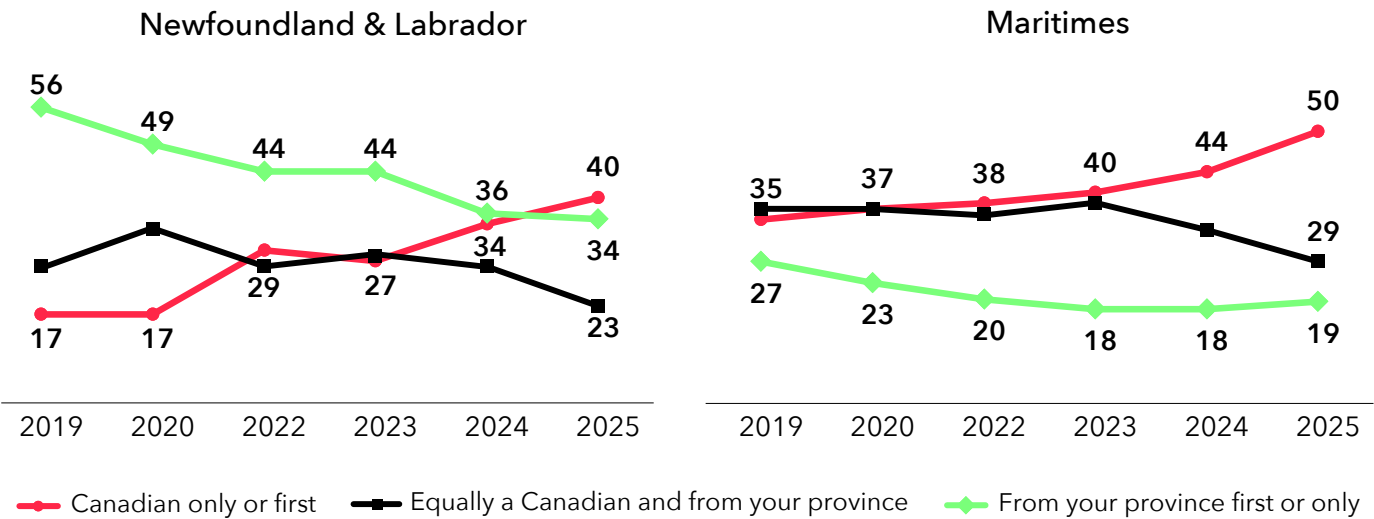
Attachment to Canada strengthened between 2024 and 2025 in each of the region's four provinces, though less so in the Maritimes than in Newfoundland and Labrador. The proportion of Maritimers who say they are very attached to Canada increased by five points, from 62 to 67 percent. But, in Newfoundland and Labrador, there was a 15-point jump, from 50 to 65 percent.

Strong attachment to province increased by 10 points in New Brunswick, from 45 percent in 2024 to 55 percent in 2025.

Newfoundland and Labrador differs from the Maritime provinces in leaning more strongly toward a provincial rather than the Canadian identity. One in three (34%) Newfoundlanders and Labradorians say they consider themselves as someone from their province first or only, almost twice the proportion of that in the Maritimes (19%).

At the same time, over time, the trend in Newfoundland and Labrador is actually toward the Canadian identity and away from the provincial one. While the proportion of the province’s residents who consider themselves as someone from their province first or only remains higher than in any other province outside of Quebec, it is lower than in previous years – having fallen from 56 percent in 2019 to 34 percent in 2025. A similar gradual trend is evident in the Maritimes.

Figure 9
Identity: Canadian, provincial or both?
2019 - 2025, Atlantic Canada



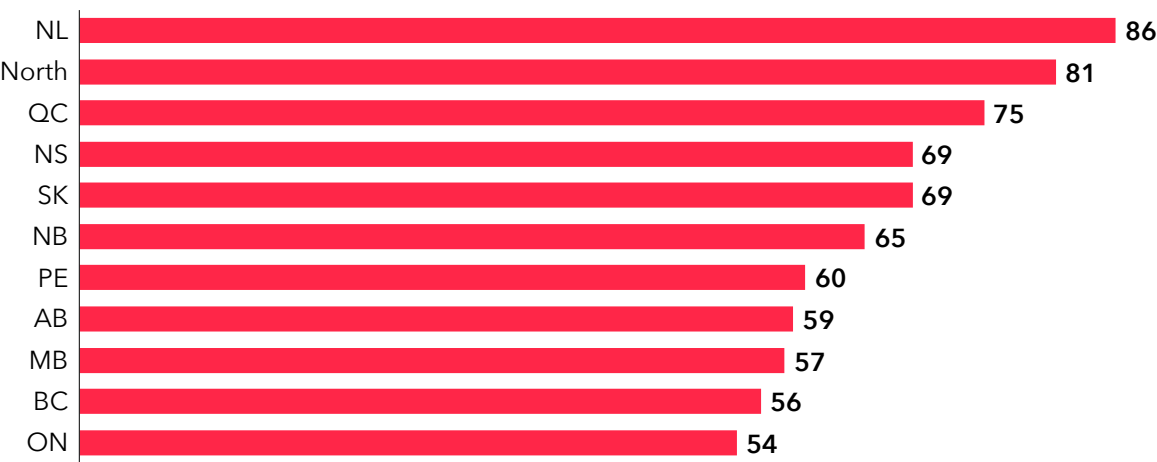
People have different ways of defining themselves. Do you consider yourself to be: A Canadian only; A Canadian first, but also one from your province; Equally a Canadian and someone from your province; Someone from your province, but also a Canadian; Someone from your province only. (Non-Indigenous respondents only).

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians stand out on one additional question related to identity: they are more likely than those in any other province to say their province has a distinct culture that is often misunderstood by people living in the rest of Canada.

Figure 10

Agree: my province / territory has a distinct culture that is often misunderstood by people living in the rest of Canada

2025



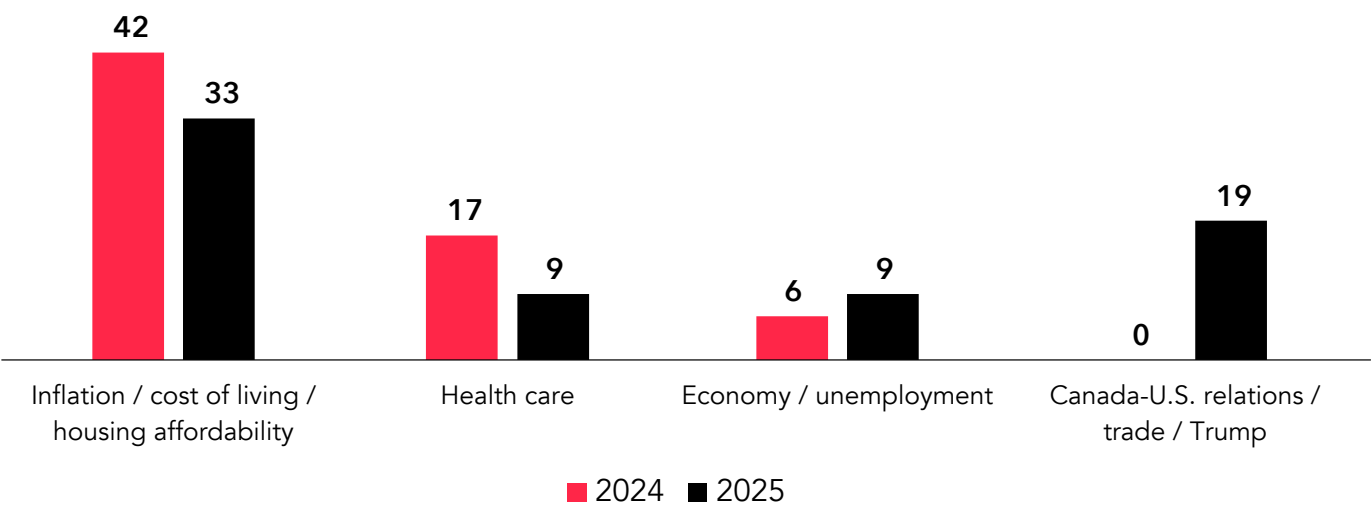
Agree / disagree: [Name of Province/Territory] has a distinct culture that is often misunderstood by people living in the rest of Canada



Issue priorities

The evolutions in opinions noted in this report have unfolded alongside a shifting set of priorities. Last year, from the perspective of Atlantic Canadians, the most important issues facing the country are related to the cost of living or housing, and health care. But, in 2025, these concerns have also been joined by another: relations with the United States and the trade dispute resulting from the Trump administration’s imposition of tariffs. The cost of living continues to be the most frequently mentioned top issue (33%), but 19 percent of the region’s residents now mention Canada-U.S. relations.

Figure 11
Most important problem facing Canadians today?
2024 – 2025, Atlantic provinces

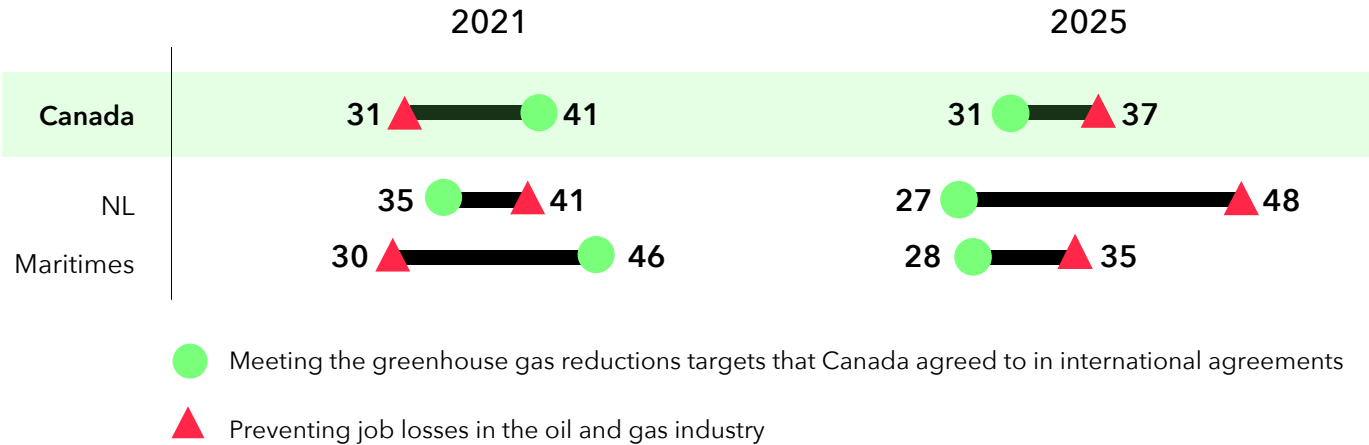


In your opinion, what is the most important problem facing Canadians today?

At the same time, the priorities of Atlantic Canadians have shifted – away from prioritizing the environment and the need to address climate change, and toward the need to focus more on protecting jobs and economic growth. For instance, the proportion of Maritimers who say that “Canada should not worry so much about phasing out the use of fossil fuels and should focus on protecting the jobs of people who work in industries like oil and gas” – as opposed to the options of phasing out the use of fossil fuels either gradually

or quickly – increased from 22 percent in 2021 to 34 percent in 2025; over the same period, the proportion in Newfoundland and Labrador holding this view increased from 22 to 36 percent. Similarly, in 2021, Maritimers were more likely to say that meeting our Paris climate change agreement targets should be a high priority for Canada (46%) than they were to say the country should prioritize protecting jobs in the oil and gas industry (30%). But the reverse is true in 2025: protecting jobs in the oil and gas industry is now supported as a high priority by 35 percent in the region, but there has been an 18-point drop in the proportion prioritizing meeting our Paris climate change agreement targets (28%).

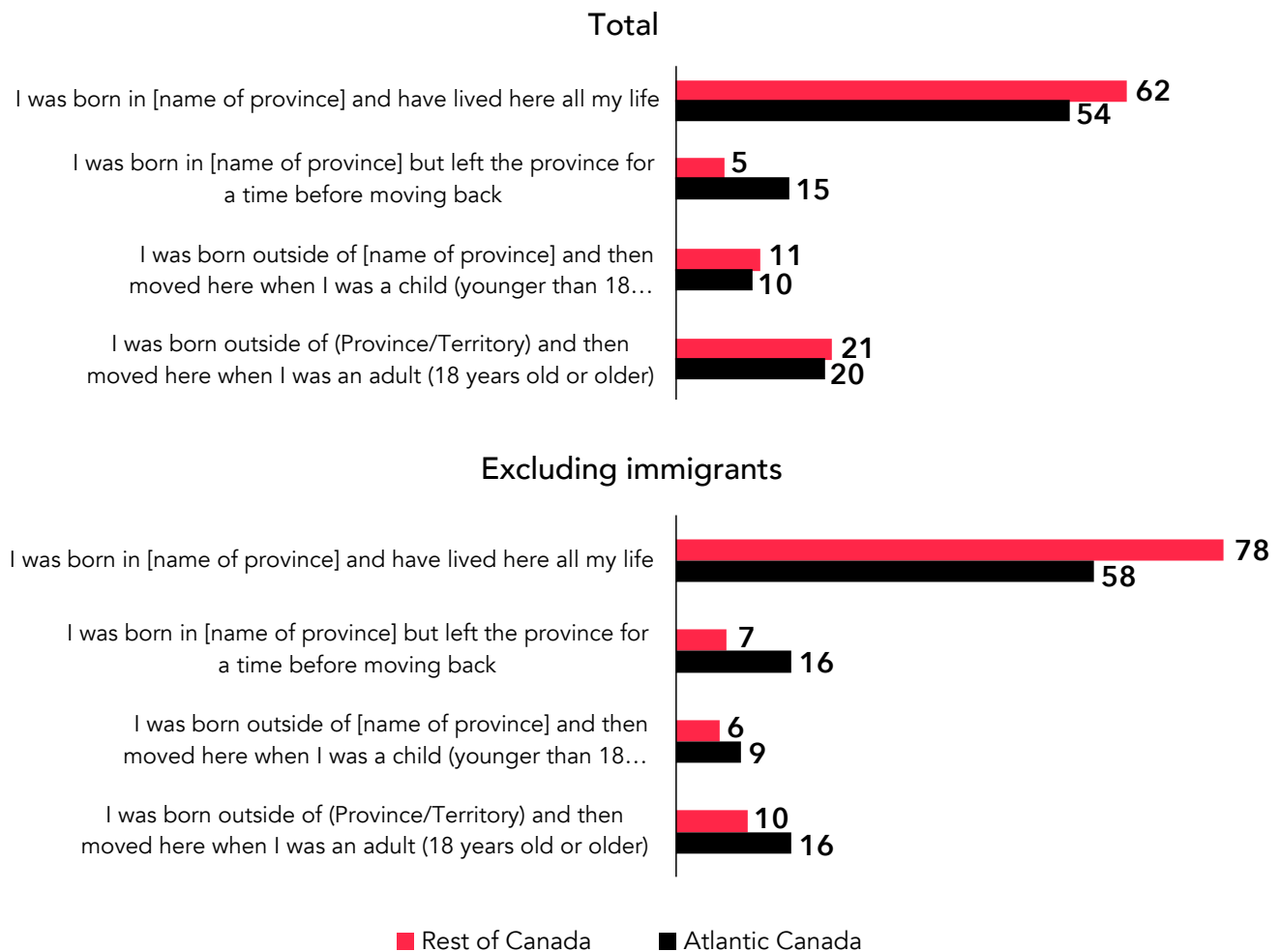
Figure 12
Contrasting priorities in developing a strategy to fight climate change
High priority, 2021 and 2025



Moving away and moving back

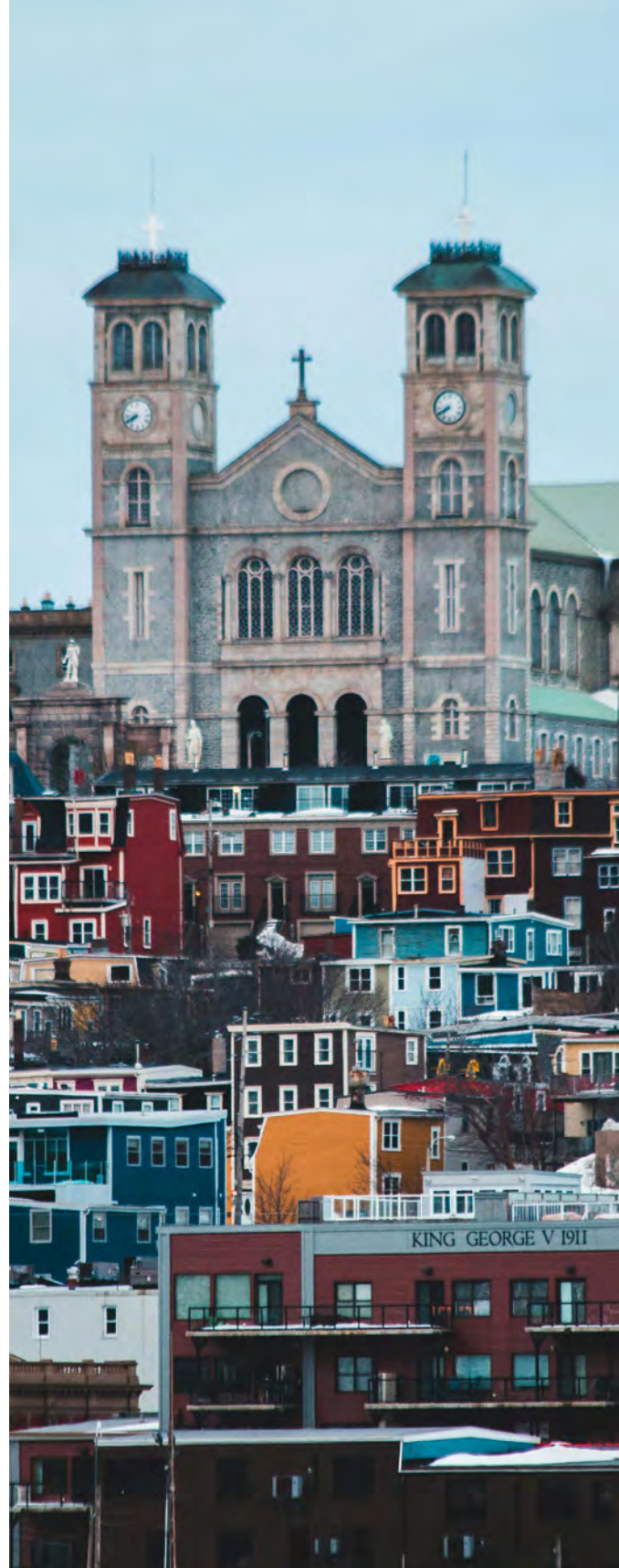
The 2025 survey included new questions relating to moving into and out of the region. The results show that Atlantic Canadians (54%) are less likely than Canadians in other parts of the country (62%) to have lived in the province they were born in for all of their lives. Conversely, they are more likely to have moved away from their province for a while and then returned; this is the case for 15 percent of the region’s residents but only five percent of other Canadians. Not surprisingly, older Atlantic Canadians are much more likely than their younger counterparts to have returned to their province after living elsewhere, suggesting that many leave for employment before choosing to return.

Figure 13
Mobility: which of the following best describes your situation?
2025



Among Atlantic Canadians who have lived away from their province for a time, the largest proportions say they have lived in Ontario (47%), another Atlantic province (17%), Alberta (14%) or outside of Canada (15%). A main difference between Atlantic Canadians and residents of other provinces is that fewer of those who have lived outside the province for a time lived outside of Canada. While only 15 percent of “mobile” Atlantic Canadians lived outside the country, the proportion in Ontario reaches 59 percent – an indication of the greater role that immigration plays in that province.

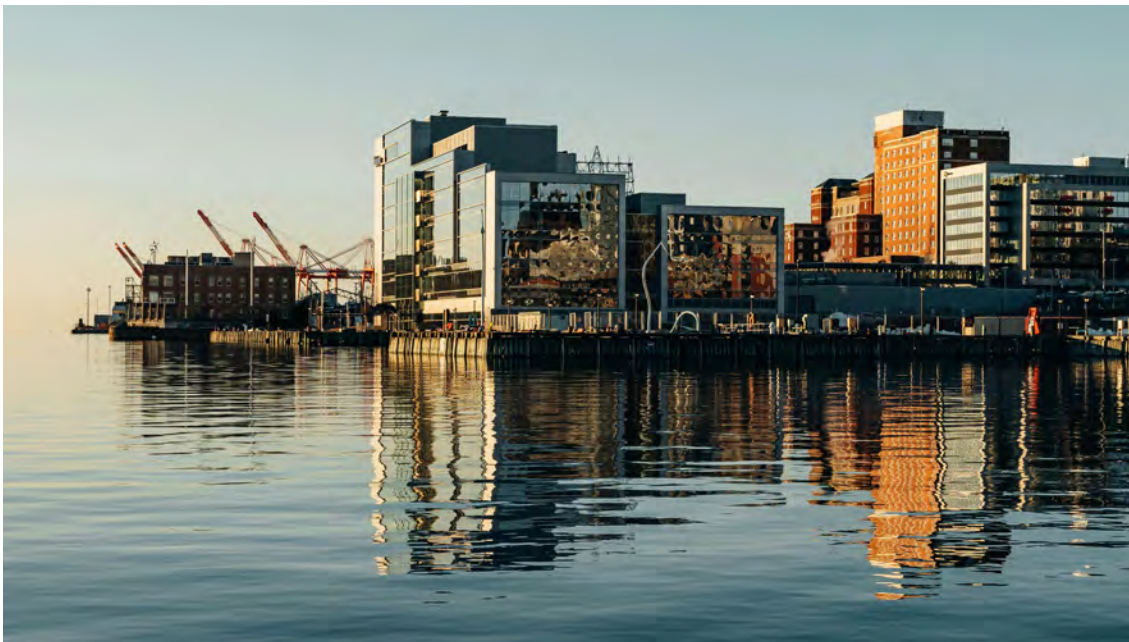
Atlantic Canadians are less likely than Canadians in other parts of the country to have lived in the province they were born in for all of their lives. Conversely, they are more likely to have moved away from their province for a while and then returned.



Conclusion

In 2025, Atlantic Canadians responded to political changes at the international, federal and provincial levels with more positive assessments of government performance and their place in the federation. These positive changes in opinion can be attributed to a combination of welcome changes in federal and (in New Brunswick) provincial leadership; the growing national profile of Nova Scotia's Premier; and the coordinated efforts of all governments to respond to the destabilizing economic and security threats emanating from the White House.

None of the major challenges the country faced in 2025 – whether internal (such as the need to balance regional economic and environmental priorities) or external (such as the imposition of U.S. tariffs) – can be expected to be easily resolved in 2026. We can never exclude a scenario where failed responses exacerbate frustration that, in turn, spark a crisis of Canadian unity. Even if one might expect discontent to boil over first in provinces such as Alberta or Quebec, a crisis would be felt very keenly in Atlantic Canada as well. If our Canadian union is to survive and prosper, Canadians will have to muster extra efforts of good will, conflict management, solidarity and compromise. At least to this point, opinion in the Atlantic provinces suggests that they are still on board.





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