

## Atlantic Spotlight: Soaring inflation, floundering health-care systems leave East Coasters critical of governments

*Only in Nova Scotia does the incumbent party currently lead in vote intent*

**July 13, 2022** – As legislatures rise for summer, politicians vacating their respective capitals on the east coast will have plenty to think about during the hottest months of the year.

Namely, how to tackle the day's most burning issues: health care and cost of living.

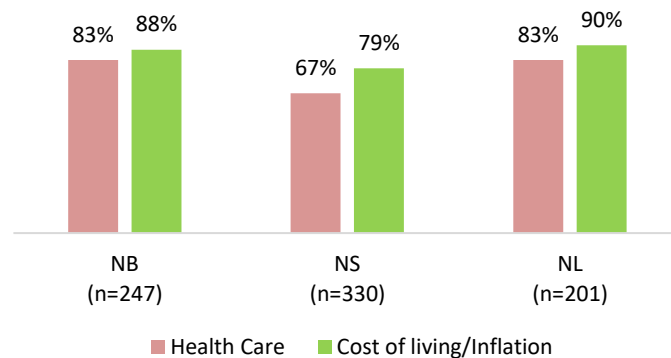
New data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds majorities in New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nova Scotia saying those two are the most pressing concerns in their province. At the same time, residents are more unimpressed than not at what they've seen from their governments on those key files.

Four-in-five in New Brunswick (83%) and Newfoundland and Labrador (83%) say their government has done poorly on health care. They are joined by two-thirds (67%) of Nova Scotians who are critical of their own government's performance on health.

Negativity is more pervasive when it comes to provincial governments' responses to inflation. Nine-in-ten in New Brunswick (88%) and Newfoundland and Labrador (90%), alongside four-in-five (79%) in Nova Scotia, are critical of what they've seen from their provincial government to help fight the rising cost of living.

While criticism of Nova Scotia Premier Tim Houston and the PC government on the day's key issues is high, it has yet to affect the political fortunes of the party. The PCs hold a 21-point lead over the Liberals and more than three years' worth of runway before the next election.

**Do you think the current provincial government is doing a good job or a poor job in each of the following areas?  
(Percent selecting 'poor' or 'very poor' job shown)**



### **METHODOLOGY:**

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from June 7-13, 2022 among a representative randomized sample of 247 New Brunswicker adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 6 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

A representative randomized sample of 330 Nova Scotian adults who are members of Angus Reid Forum was surveyed at the same time. For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

A representative randomized sample of 201 Newfoundlander and Labradorian adults who are members of Angus Reid Forum was surveyed at the same time. For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 7 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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In neither New Brunswick nor Newfoundland and Labrador is an election looming – scheduled in 2024 and 2025 at the latest respectively – but the incumbent governments are in more precarious positions than the enviable one held by the Nova Scotia PCs. In New Brunswick, the incumbent PCs are statistically tied with the Liberals. In Newfoundland and Labrador, the incumbent Liberals trail the rival PCs by nine points. In both cases, the opposition parties will hope to capitalize on government criticism by electing new leaders prior to the beginning of campaigning.

**Note: Because its small population precludes drawing discrete samples over multiple waves, data on Prince Edward Island is not released.**

### More Key Findings:

- Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are more likely to be concerned about health care (68%) and inflation (76%) than residents of any other province in the country.
- Praise outweighs criticism for all three governments on their handling of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. But that remains a top priority for few constituents – seven per cent in New Brunswick, eight per cent in Nova Scotia, and six per cent in Newfoundland and Labrador.
- The third most selected issue by residents is housing affordability in New Brunswick (33%) and Nova Scotia (38%) and the deficit in Newfoundland and Labrador (32%).

### About ARI

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

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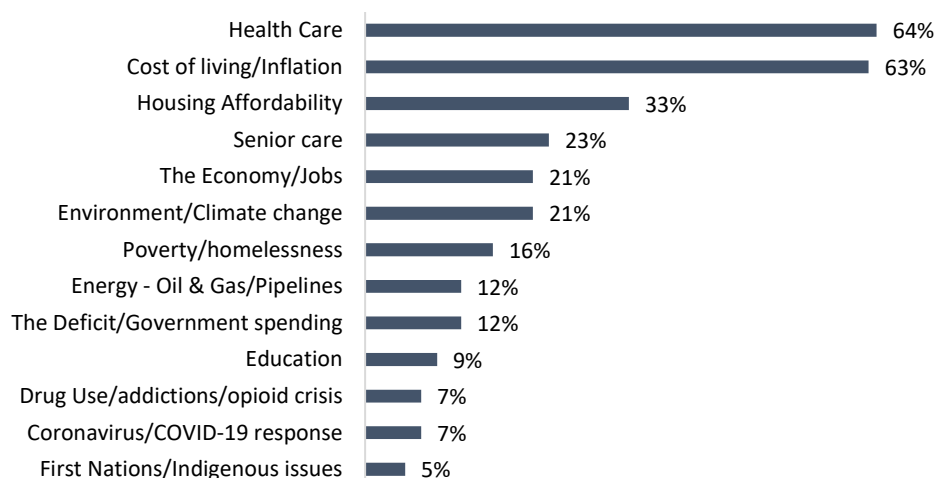
- **Vote intent**

## Part One: New Brunswick

### Top issues

Similar to most of the country, health care and cost of living are front of mind issues for New Brunswickers. Nearing two-thirds say inflation (63%) and health (64%) are top three issues for the province. Half as many (33%) say so of housing affordability, while more than one-in-five select senior care (23%), the economy (21%), and climate change (21%).

#### Top provincial issues (Up to three chosen; New Brunswick, n=247)



### Government performance

Health care has been a significant issue for Premier Blaine Higgs and his Progressive Conservative government in his four years as premier. But there is much frustration in the province over a lack of progress on the file. The government released a health plan in November, but opposition MLAs were quick to point out [it lacked details](#) on how to address significant shortages in human resources in the system. One doctor went as far to say the system was ["sinking faster than the Titanic."](#) [Wait times are long](#), and [staff say they are burnt out](#).

Few New Brunswickers offer the Higgs government praise on the health file. Most (83%) say it is doing a poor job managing health care.

Elsewhere, the government is facing criticism for its handling of inflation, which is soaring [higher in New Brunswick](#) than the national average. The PC government [has taken steps](#) to help constituents with rising cost of living, including a one-time payment to social assistance recipients, a temporary 3.8 per cent cap on rent increases, and a property tax spike protection program for commercial landlords. However, opposition parties [have been critical](#) of the measures, believing they don't go far enough.

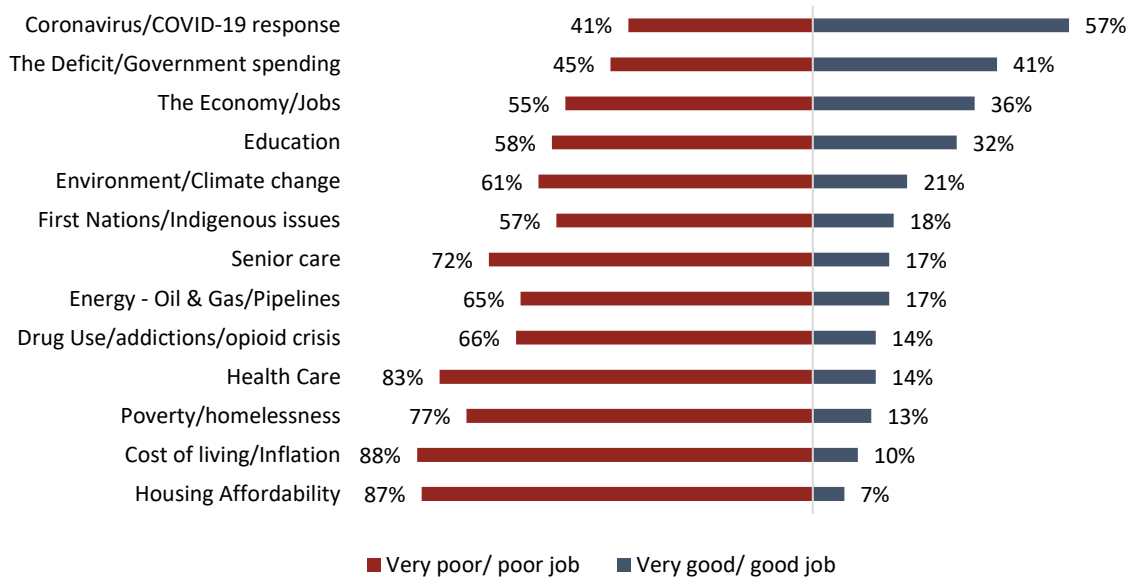
Residents are more likely to side with opposition parties on this matter. Nearly nine-in-ten (88%) believe the government has done a poor job on inflation. Few (10%) offer praise.

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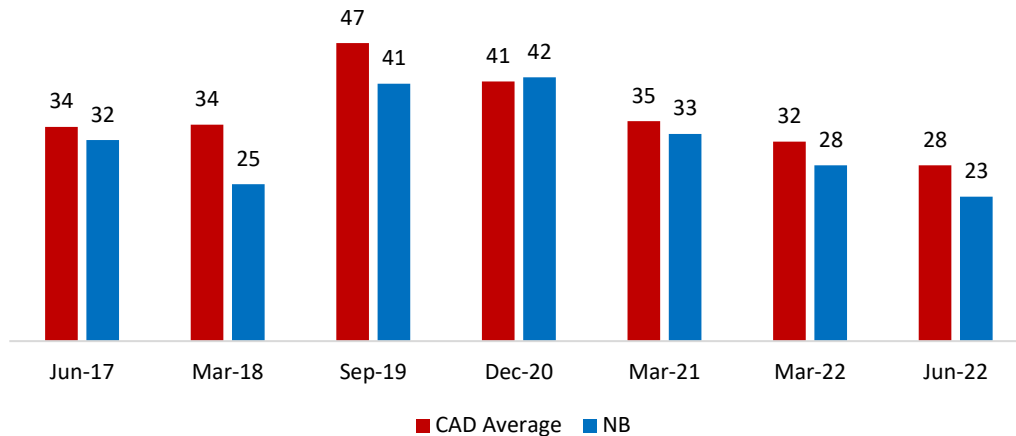
A majority (57%) of residents laud Higgs and the PC government for its response to COVID-19, but otherwise, criticism is more likely than not on every key file:

**Do you think the current provincial government is doing a good job or a poor job in each of the following areas?  
(New Brunswick, n=247)**



On ARI's Government Performance Index, which averages the percentage of respondents who say a government is doing a 'good' job on the issues surveyed, New Brunswick is below average and graded the second worst in the country behind only Manitoba:

**Government Performance Index**  
(Average number of respondents saying provincial government has done a "good job" across all issues)



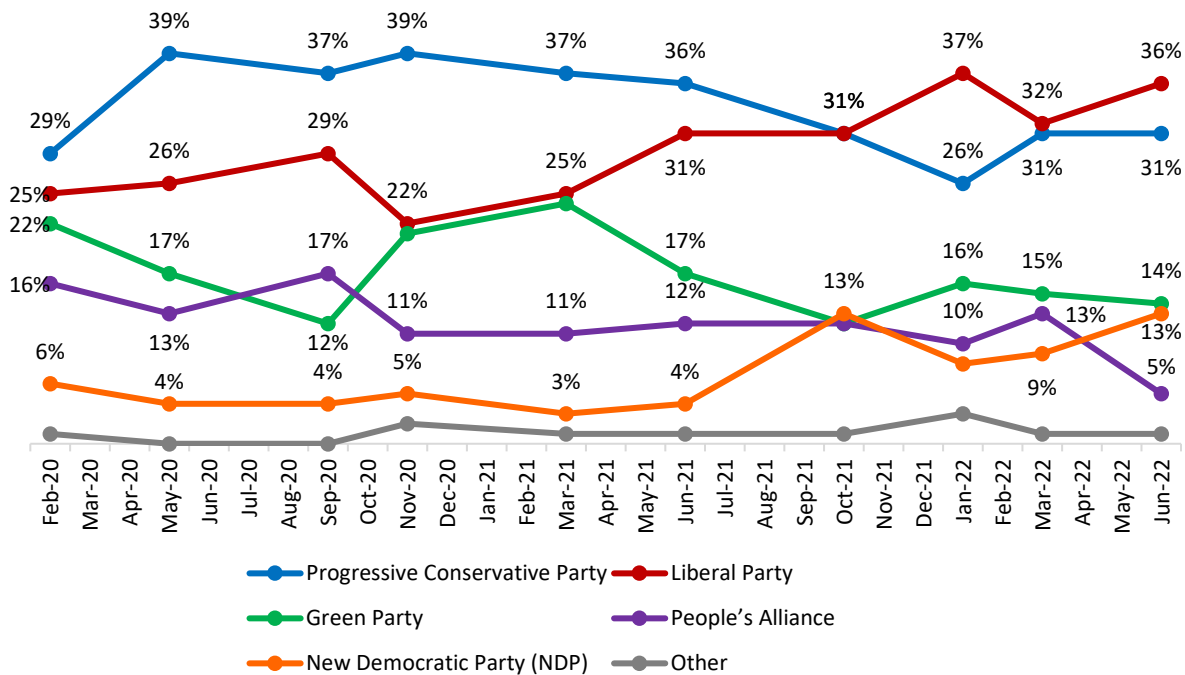
**Vote intent**

At the moment, the Progressive Conservative party and Liberals are statistically tied in vote intent. The Liberals have been under an interim leader since 2020, when Kevin Vickers stepped down. Vickers was acclaimed as leader in 2019 as [his only opponent dropped out](#), which means the party hasn't had a true leadership race since 2012, when it elected Brian Gallant. In the interim, interest in the party has declined significantly – [half the number of people](#) have signed up to cast ballots in this leadership election compared to 2012. The next election is scheduled for 2024.

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**Vote Intent - New Brunswick  
(Decided voters)**

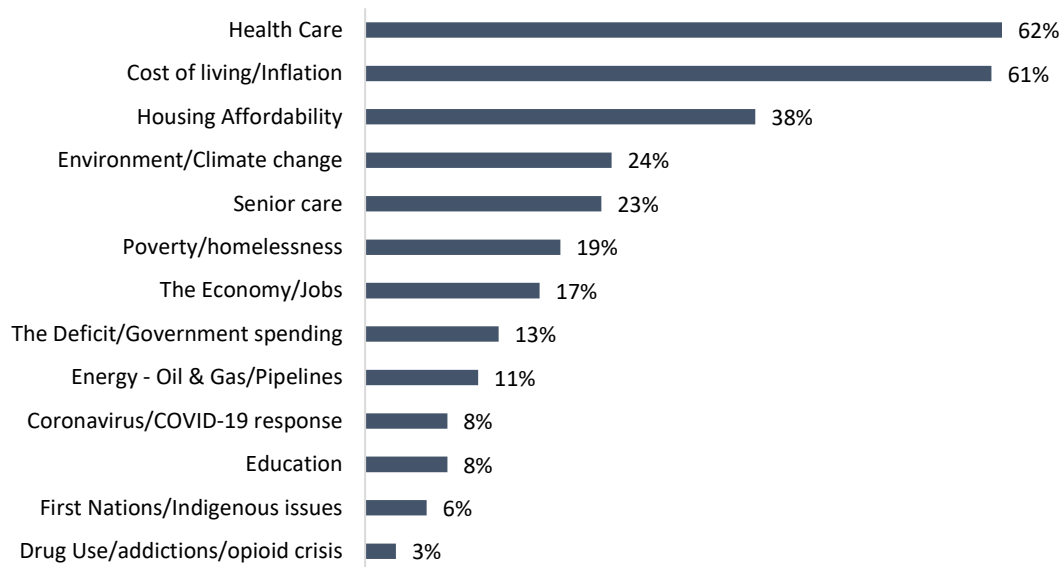


**Part Two: Nova Scotia**

**Top issues**

As in neighbouring New Brunswick, the two most pressing issues for Nova Scotians are health care and inflation. Three-in-five pick each as a top-three issue for the province, eclipsing the two-in-five who say housing affordability (38%), the one-quarter (24%) who say climate change and the one-quarter who say senior care (23%):

**Top provincial issues  
(Up to three chosen; Nova Scotia, n=330)**



**Government performance**

While Progressive Conservative Premier Tim Houston continues to be the [most approved-of premier in the country](#), Nova Scotians are critical when it comes to his government’s performance on the top issues. Two-thirds (67%) say the Nova Scotian government has handled health care poorly, and greater numbers say the same of cost of living (79%) and housing affordability (82%). Perhaps that’s why the shine is coming off Houston’s apple in the eyes of Nova Scotians – his country-leading approval [dropped by double digits](#) this quarter.

**Related:**

- [Premiers’ Performance: Good and bad for Houston. Horgan, Legault see their approval slide](#)
- [Health check: Provinces’ performance on key file in massive decline](#)

Nova Scotia’s health-care system is [under considerable pressure](#). Houston didn’t sugar-coat his recent assessment, saying the system [will get worse before it gets better](#). Problems include [a lack of doctors, overcapacity hospitals, and a 25,000 patient surgery backlog](#). Houston’s government released a [33-page Action for Health plan](#) in April, but critics were quick to point out that the plan [lacked targets and benchmarks](#).

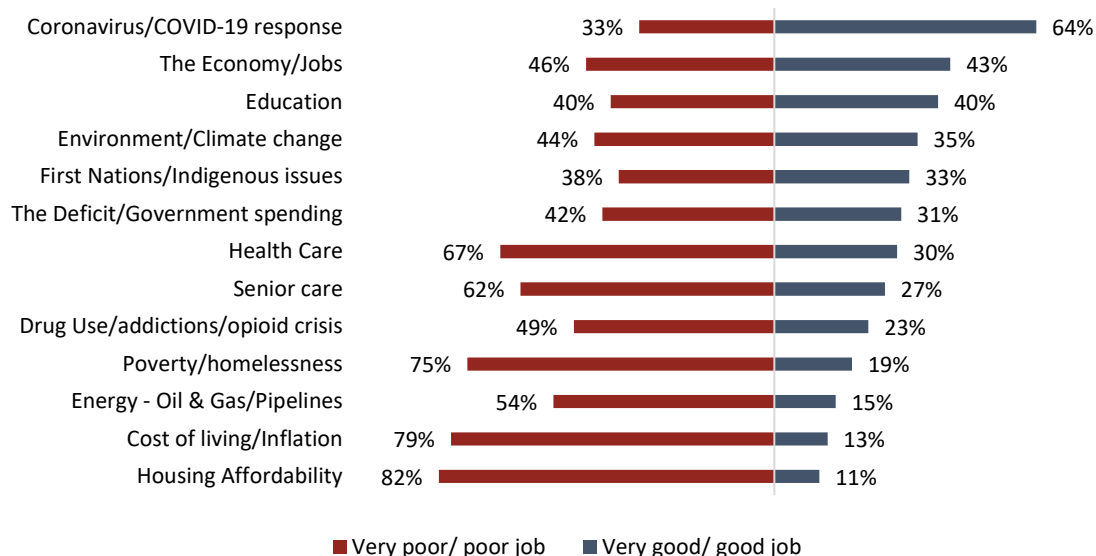
Houston was also on the defensive about his government’s approach to helping Nova Scotians with inflation, which is [rising faster in that province](#) than the national average. Houston said his government is looking for long-term solutions over short-term fixes as he [refused to touch the provincial gas tax](#), as some other provinces have done to offer a temporary reprieve from high gasoline prices.

Residents’ appraisal of its handling of COVID-19 is one bright spot for the Nova Scotia government. Two-thirds (64%) believe Houston and the PCs have handled that well. On other issues, evaluation is at best split:

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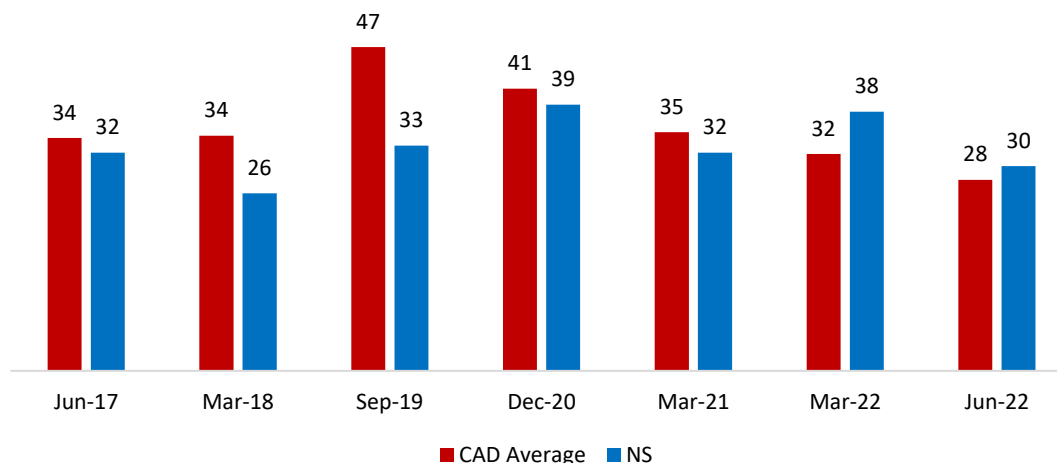
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**Do you think the current provincial government is doing a good job or a poor job in each of the following areas?  
(Nova Scotia, n=330)**



For two quarters, the government is graded higher than the national average according to ARI's Government Performance Index. That hadn't been the case in recent years:

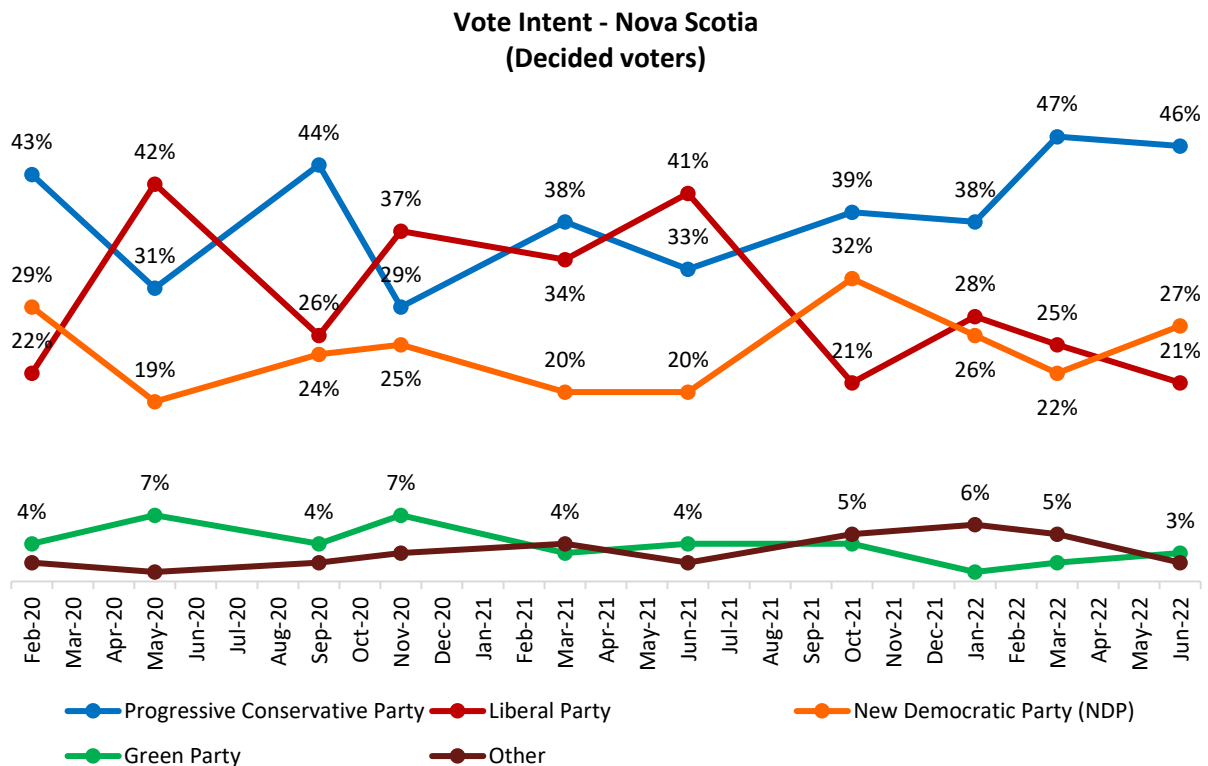
**Government Performance Index  
(Average number of respondents saying provincial government has done a "good job" across all issues)**





**Vote intent**

Nearly a year into its majority government, the Nova Scotia Progressive Conservative party enjoys a significant advantage in vote intent. Approaching half (46%) of Nova Scotians would vote for the PCs if an election were held today, while one-quarter (27%) would vote NDP, and one-in-five (21%) would vote Liberal. The next election is scheduled for 2025.



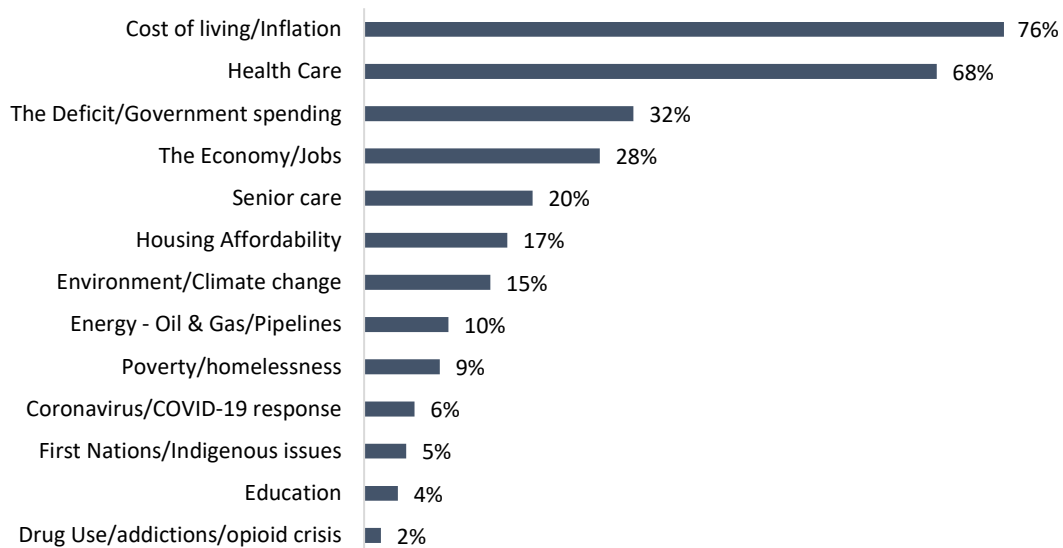
**Part Three: Newfoundland and Labrador**

**Top issues**

The top two issues in Newfoundland and Labrador are inflation (76%) and health care (68%). However, residents in Canada’s eastern-most province are more concerned about the rising cost of living and health care than anywhere else in the country. Inflation is rising faster in Newfoundland and Labrador than the national average, and those price increases are making life more difficult in Canada’s third most expensive province (behind P.E.I. and Alberta). All this in a province which experienced some of the lowest GDP growth in the country last year, and is forecasted to lag behind again in 2022.

The deficit (32%) and the economy and jobs (28%) are the only other concerns to draw a selection from more than one-quarter of residents. The government has steadily brought the deficit down from \$1.5 billion in 2020-21 to a projected \$351 million in 2022-23.

**Top provincial issues  
(Up to three chosen; Newfoundland and Labrador, n=201)**



**Government performance**

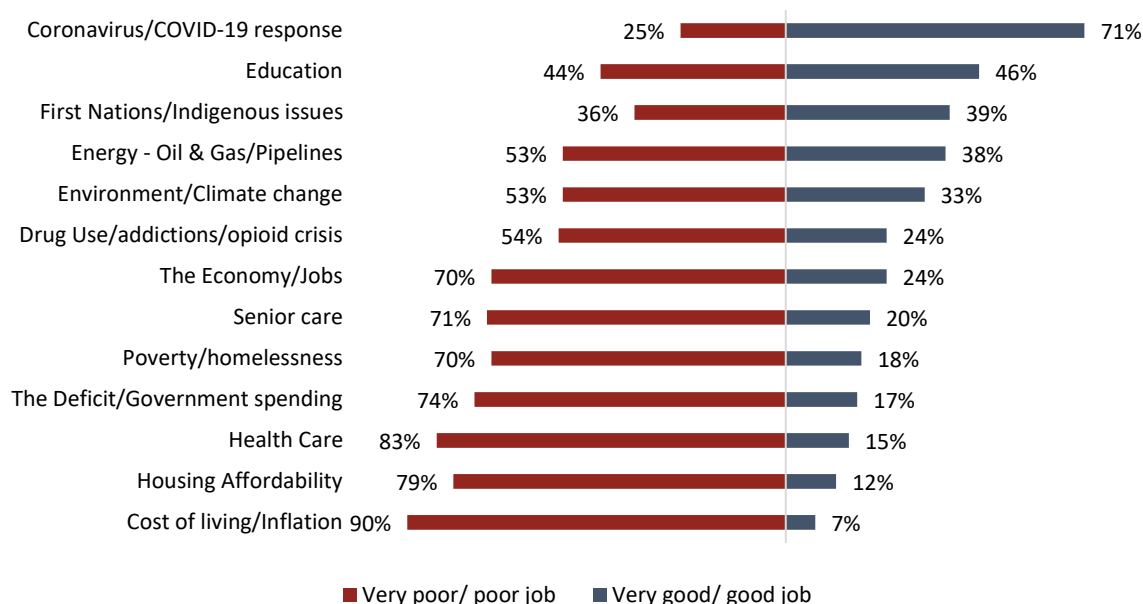
Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, however, are not impressed by the government’s attempts at deficit tapering. Three-quarters (74%) believe the Liberal government under Premier Andrew Furey has done a poor job managing government spending. Even more believe the government has mishandled health care (83%) and inflation (90%). Residents are more positive on the response to COVID-19, but on most issues, they are more critical than not.

Furey and his government have attempted to provide relief to residents from rising prices through an increase to an income supplement and seniors benefit that, combined, more than 200,000 in the province receive. The government has also cut a provincial gas excise tax by seven cents per litre until at least December. Still, there appears to be widespread belief that the government could be doing more to help.

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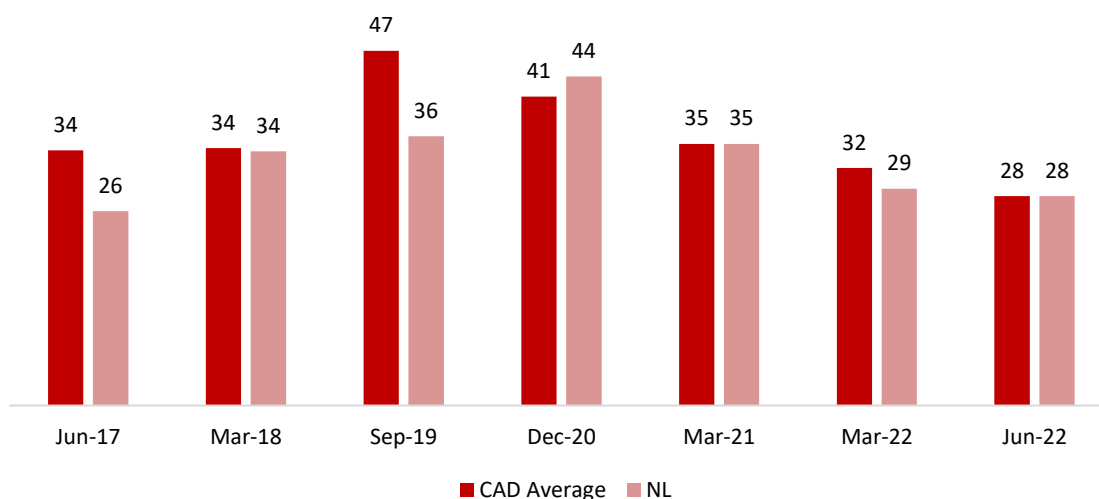
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**Do you think the current provincial government is doing a good job or a poor job in each of the following areas?  
(Newfoundland and Labrador, n=201)**



Appraisal of Newfoundland and Labrador’s government falls in line with the national average on ARI’s Government Performance Index, at an average of three-in-ten saying it is doing a good job handling key issues:

**Government Performance Index  
(Average number of respondents saying provincial government has done a "good job" across all issues)**



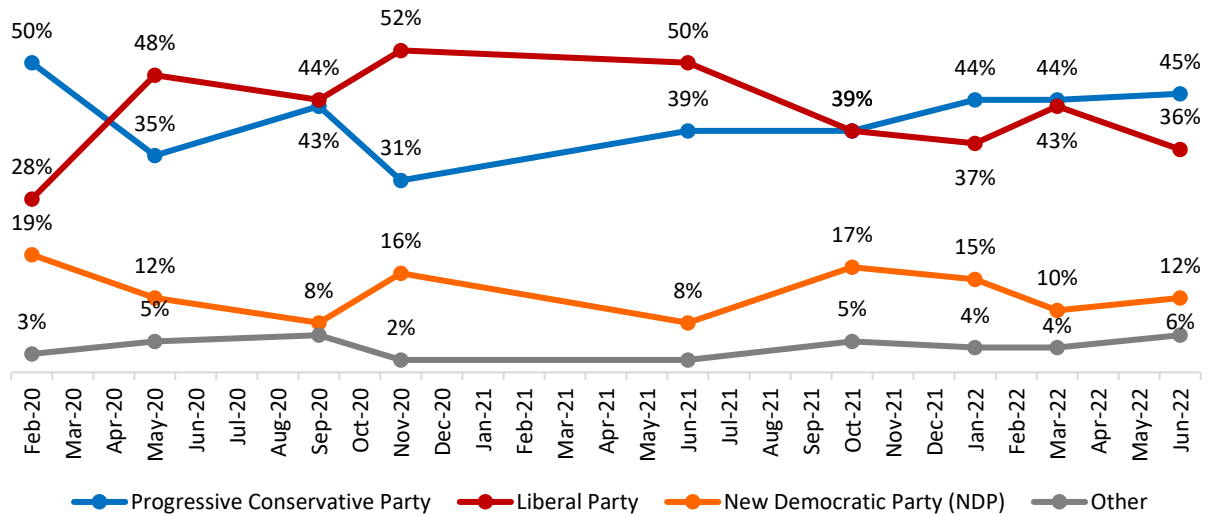
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**Vote intent**

The Liberals have fallen behind by nine points to the rival Progressive Conservative party. Approaching half (45%) in Newfoundland and Labrador say they would vote PC if an election were held today, while more than one-in-three (36%) would instead vote Liberal. The PC party will elect a new leader in October 2023. The next election is scheduled for 2025.

**Vote Intent - Newfoundland and Labrador  
(Decided voters)**



**Note: Because its small population precludes drawing discrete samples over multiple waves, data on Prince Edward Island is not released.**

*For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).*

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