

# Canadians' Opinions on the Clean Energy Transition

October 2016

## BACKGROUND

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## Overview

Later this year, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau will be meeting with provincial and territorial premiers to discuss a new national plan to address climate change. In anticipation of that meeting, Clean Energy Canada commissioned Nanos Research to conduct a survey of Canadians' opinions on energy and climate issues, including specific policies that Canada's leaders could adopt to cut carbon pollution and the federal government's role in implementing a national plan.

## Survey Questions and Results

The results for seven survey questions are presented below, along with the exact question wording that was used. A previous set of seven results from the same survey was published on October 3, 2016.<sup>1</sup>

A total of 1,000 Canadians were surveyed, and the margin of error for the full sample is  $\pm 3.1$  percentage points, 19 times out of 20. More details about the survey methodology are available at the end of this document. The percentages in descriptions and figures may not always add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

## COAL-FIRED AND RENEWABLE ELECTRICITY

Based on current federal and provincial policies, the last coal-fired power plant in Canada will shut down in 2043. However, some provinces have opted to move away from burning coal for electricity well ahead of that date.

Ontario has already transitioned off coal-fired power, and Alberta has committed to do the same by 2030. This is part of a global trend: many other jurisdictions—ranging from the United Kingdom and the Netherlands to New York state and Oregon—have committed to phase out coal by 2030 or even sooner.

Economic modelling done for Clean Energy Canada by Navius Research<sup>2</sup> found that phasing out all coal power by 2030—and ensuring that any new power that comes online is clean—would cut Canada's emissions by nearly 12 million tonnes in 2030, roughly equivalent to the emissions produced by two million cars in a year. Thus, adopting a national coal-phase out on Alberta's

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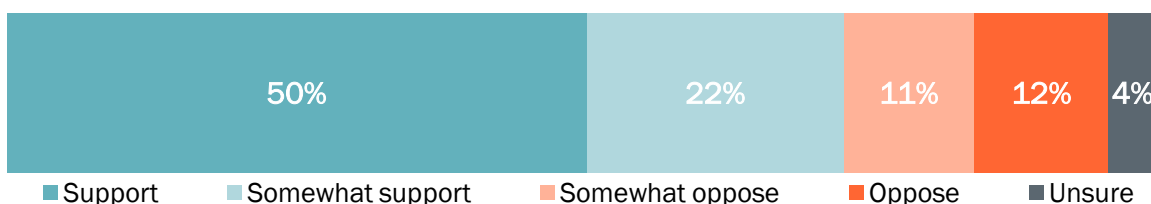
<sup>1</sup> Available at: <http://cleanenergycanada.org/poll-canadians-want-federal-leadership-climate-change/>

<sup>2</sup> Summary report and detailed modelling results are available at: <http://cleanenergycanada.org/work/building-on-the-best/>

schedule would make a significant reduction in emissions in time for Canada's international 2030 climate commitment.

When asked, a majority (73%) of respondents support or somewhat support a 2030 coal phase-out for Canada, with 23% opposed or somewhat opposed.

***Do you support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or oppose the following? Stopping the burning of coal for electricity in Canada by 2030, ahead of the current 2043 end date, as a way to reduce carbon emissions.***



In the case of an accelerated coal phase-out, provinces would have the opportunity to bring on additional renewable energy capacity, such as wind and solar power. The survey asked respondents about having the federal government provide technology or infrastructure support to enable a larger deployment of renewables in Canada's provinces. A large majority (82%) support or somewhat support this idea, with 16% opposed or somewhat opposed.

***Do you support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or oppose the following? Having the federal government provide technology and infrastructure support that enables provinces to use more renewable electricity such as solar and wind power.***



## CLEAN FUEL STANDARDS AND FUEL SWITCHING

The main source of carbon emissions from diesel or gasoline comes from burning those fuels in vehicle engines. However, significant carbon emissions are also generated by the production and transportation of these fuels.

A number of jurisdictions have therefore adopted clean fuel standards to reduce carbon pollution from fuels. Such standards account for the full lifecycle of emissions from extracting, refining and distributing a given fuel, along with its combustion in vehicle engines. California introduced a Low Carbon Fuel Standard in 2009,<sup>3</sup> and British Columbia implemented a similar standard in 2010.<sup>4</sup>

The Government of British Columbia projects that its clean fuel standard will reduce carbon emissions by more than 3 million tonnes in 2030. If a similar clean fuel policy like B.C.'s was

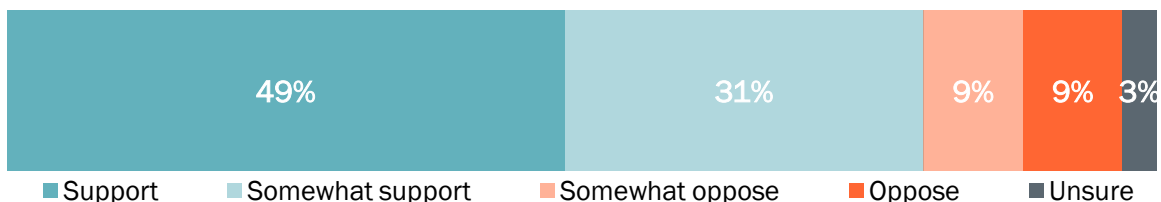
<sup>3</sup> California Environmental Protection Agency, Air Resources Board. "Low Carbon Fuel Standard," October 17, 2016. <https://www.arb.ca.gov/fuels/lcfs/lcfs.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Government of British Columbia. "Renewable and Low-Carbon Fuel Requirements Regulation." <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/electricity-alternative-energy/transportation-energies/renewable-low-carbon-fuels>

adopted nationally, an initial economic modelling estimate suggests that it could cut Canada's emissions by 30 million tonnes in 2030—the equivalent of taking more than 6 million cars off the road that year.<sup>5</sup>

When asked about a clean fuel standard that would reduce emissions from the production and consumption of transportation fuel, 80% of survey respondents say they support or somewhat support the policy. Fewer than one-fifth (17%) oppose or somewhat oppose adopting a standard.

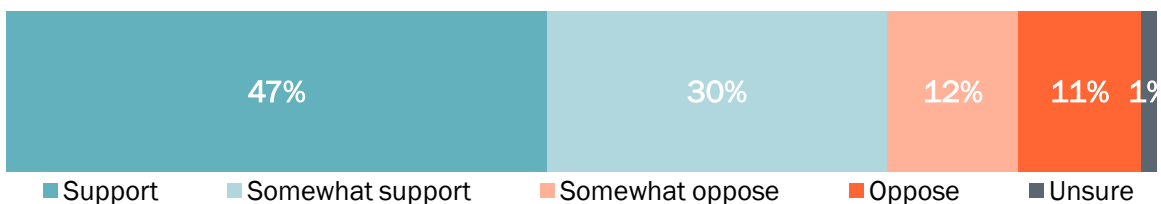
***Do you support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or oppose the following? Adopting a new clean fuel standard to reduce the total carbon emissions from the production and use of gasoline and diesel fuel.***



Over time, making significant cuts to Canada's carbon pollution will require a shift from fossil fuels to clean electricity as a source of power across the economy. For example, we could cut transportation emissions by switching from gasoline-powered cars to electric vehicles that run on clean power.

When asked about making this shift from fossil fuels to clean electricity, 77% of respondents say they support or somewhat support encouraging this kind of transition, with 22% opposed or somewhat opposed.

***Do you support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or oppose the following? Encouraging Canadians and Canadian businesses to switch from using fossil fuels in vehicles and buildings to using clean electricity.***



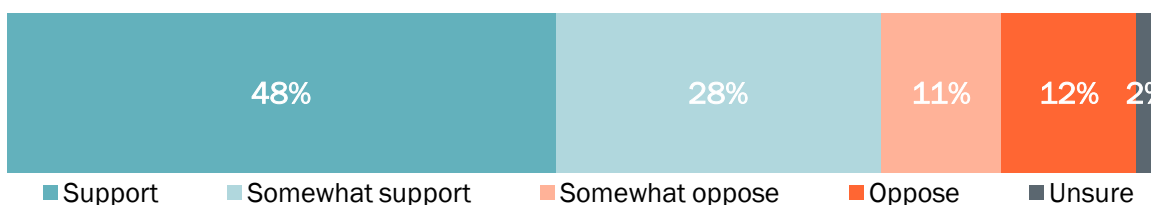
## INVESTMENT PRIORITIES AND THE ECONOMY

Along with specific climate and energy policies, the survey also included more general questions about the economy and federal budget priorities. Most respondents (76%) support or somewhat support making clean energy and clean technology a top priority for federal investment, while 22% are opposed or somewhat opposed.

<sup>5</sup> Navius Research. "Mitigating Climate Change through Electrification," Sept. 20, 2016. Commissioned by Clean Energy Canada. Available at: <http://cleanenergycanada.org/work/building-on-the-best/>



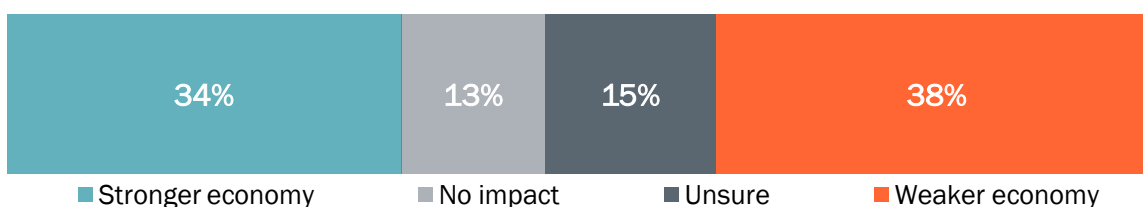
**Do you support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or oppose the following? Having the federal government make investing in clean energy and clean technology a top priority.**



The survey also asked respondents how they think acting on Canada's climate change targets will affect the economy. The responses were mixed: roughly one-third (34%) think it will strengthen the economy, roughly one-third (38%) think it will weaken the economy, and just under one-third (28%) are either unsure or think there will be no impact.

Of all the questions included in this survey, respondents were most likely to be unsure about this one—suggesting that many Canadians do not yet have a clear sense of how climate policy could impact the economy. Despite this uncertainty, the answers respondents gave to the other questions in the survey show significant support for meeting Canada's climate targets and introducing stronger climate policies.

***If Canada takes action to meet its climate change targets to reduce emissions from burning fossil fuels such as coal, oil and natural gas, do you think that this action will make Canada's economy stronger, weaker or that it will have no impact on the strength of the Canadian economy?***



## Methodology

Nanos Research conducted a random-digit-dialling, dual-frame (land- and cell-lines) hybrid telephone and online survey of 1,000 Canadians, 18 years of age or older. The survey was conducted between September 24 and 27, 2016. Participants were randomly recruited by telephone using live agents and administered a survey online. The results were statistically checked and weighted by age and gender using the latest Census information and the sample is geographically stratified to be representative of Canada. The margin of error is  $\pm 3.1$  percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

Questions about support for or opposition to policies were asked in randomized order, and the battery of questions was introduced with the following preamble: "This fall the provincial and territorial governments and the Prime Minister are getting together to discuss a plan to meet Canada's climate change targets. Do you support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or oppose the following?"

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### ABOUT CLEAN ENERGY CANADA

Clean Energy Canada works to accelerate Canada's transition to a clean and renewable energy system. Clean Energy Canada is an initiative of the Centre for Dialogue at Simon Fraser University.