

Clean Energy Canada Language Guide

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Context: Informed by public opinion and communications research conducted by us and others, we believe that to secure and sustain support for clean energy solutions and an accelerated transition, we must convince Canadians that:

- An accelerated energy transition is far safer than the status quo. It’s how we safeguard your way of life and the things you love.
- The transition is rational, not radical.
- The opportunities and benefits outweigh the challenges and costs.

Described in this frame, and using the word choices below, we think a strong majority of Canadians will find it easier to support the transition and stay onside. Sources and explanations are provided in the Appendix. You can also read the full results from our recent language polling with Abacus Data at the bottom of this PDF.

DO USE	DON'T USE
Sustainable economy	Green economy, circular economy, low-carbon economy ¹
Clean energy sector	green energy sector ²
Transition. Consider using diversification for Alberta/Saskatchewan only	Revolution “or language that implies rapid or abrupt change” ³
Careers/jobs in clean energy, careers/jobs in a sustainable economy	Good jobs, green jobs, gigs ⁴
Climate change, climate crisis, climate threat, climate emergency, climate disruption. Use local examples.	International examples of climate impacts. Use Canadian examples, especially provincially relevant ones. ⁵
Public health threat	Public health emergency ⁶
Carbon pollution, pollution, wasteful energy, emissions (use sparingly)	Greenhouse gases, GHGs ⁷
Price on pollution, pollution pricing, carbon pricing	Carbon tax ⁸
Clean fuels, cleaner fuels, renewable fuels,	Biofuels (avoid food-to-fuel examples; focus

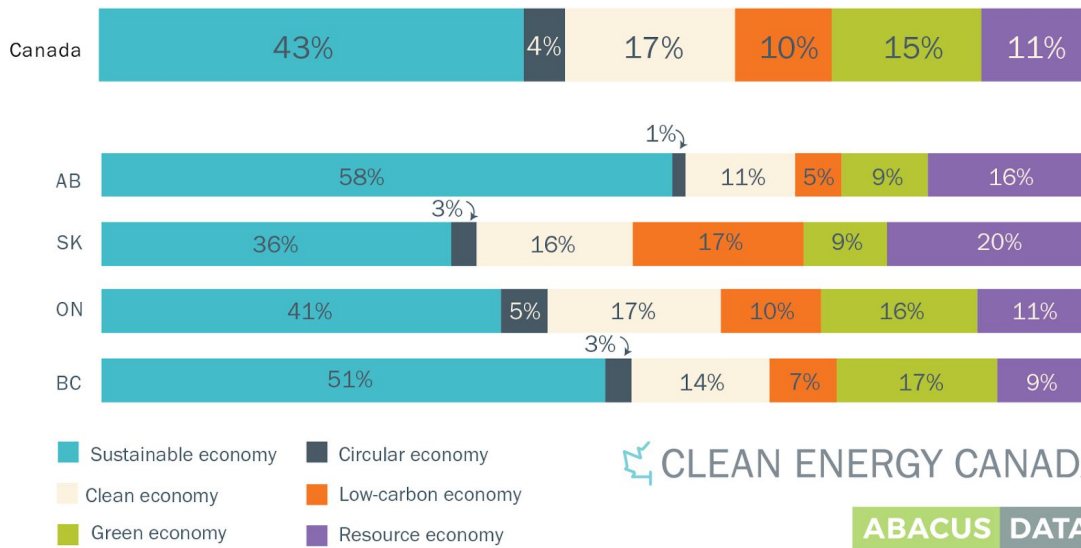
waste-to-fuel, turning waste into fuel	on waste-to-fuel where possible) ⁹
Oilsands	Tar sands
Fossil fuels, oil and gas	Energy sector, natural resources ¹⁰
Clean energy, renewable energy	Green energy, alternative energy
Electric vehicles or electric cars (zero-emission vehicles only if necessary, e.g. when referencing hydrogen vehicles)	Clean vehicles, cleaner vehicles ¹¹
Trucks and buses, commercial vehicles	Medium- and heavy-duty transport
Wasting less energy	<i>Energy efficiency needs more testing</i>
A responsible transition (preferred). A smart transition is also popular	A just transition ¹²
A climate and energy transition plan (preferred), climate action	A green new deal, climate leadership ¹³
Peace of mind, secure, protect, safeguard	Bold, radical, ambitious
Reliable, dependable	Groundbreaking, state of the art, new, alternative ¹⁴

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Appendix

1. Abacus Data and Clean Energy Canada, December 2019. “Sustainable economy” was by far the most popular term among all regions, ages and genders, while “circular economy” was the least well-liked. “Low-carbon economy” and “green economy” were also largely unpopular.

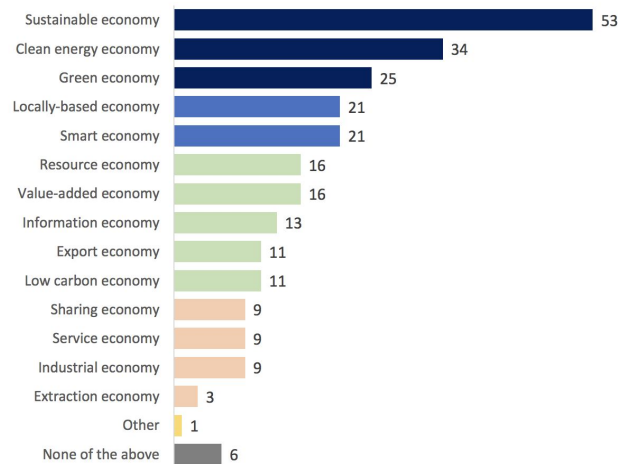
Which best describes the economy you want to see for Canada in the future?



Also: McAllister Opinion Research, [Sustainable Land Use \(2018\)](#) public opinion survey (and others). From McAllister: “We’ve tested it numerous times and sustainable economy always outperforms any other descriptor by a substantial margin.” Furthermore, the sustainable economy phrase evokes our central theme: security. A sustainable economy is the opposite of a volatile one. Canadians should associate a faster energy transition with security: security for their way of life and their economy. “Sustainable economy” makes that argument in two words.

McAllister on the problem with “green” (via focus groups): “It works with the usual suspects and alienates everyone else. Even swing/sympathetic people say things like ‘nice to have but we can’t afford it.’” And “it is also a hippy economy for many—people imagine short-term service jobs like smoothie-maker.”

Preferred Economic Future (%)

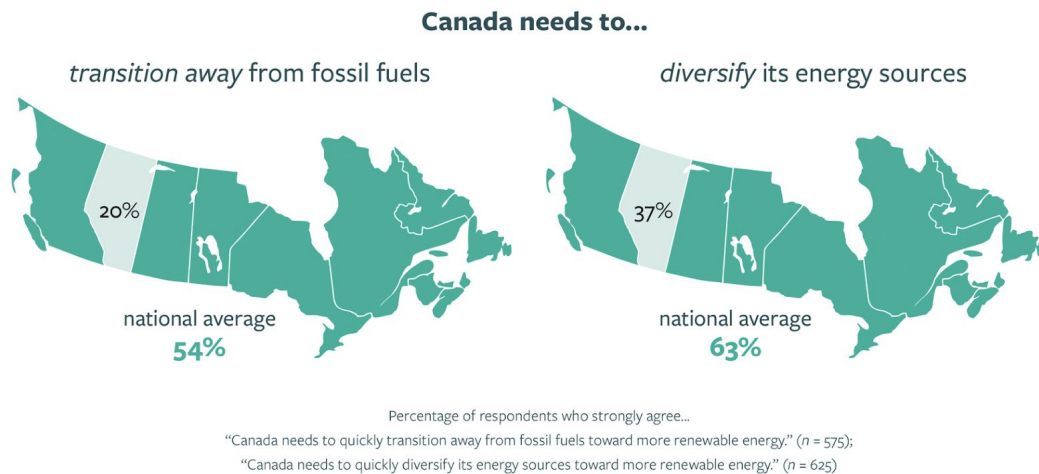


2. “Clean energy” polls well (see chart above) and is responded to positively in focus groups along with “renewable energy,” which is well-understood and liked (from McAllister: “Renewable energy / renewable energy jobs - also widely understood and supported”). Having said that, the word is limited to renewables. The clean energy sector, as Clean Energy Canada defines it, includes jobs in electrifying transportation, energy efficiency, etc. “Clean” better captures those things, and we should be consistent with our terminology.

3. McAllister Opinion Research and Clean Energy Canada, [Clean Energy Canada B.C. Focus Groups \(2019\)](#). From the summary report: *Framing the clean energy ask as “transition” works for most, even if simply a move toward “diversification”. Evolution works too for many, few dispute that clean energy is about moving forward. However, talk of clean energy “revolution” or language that implies rapid or abrupt change makes a large segment of this audience nervous and potentially shuts them down.*

Anderson Insight and Clean Energy Canada, [Canadians’ Views on the Clean Energy Transition \(2016\)](#): *When asked to choose from a series of words to describe the approach Canada should take (e.g. caution, prudence, ambition, transition, transformation, race to the front, middle of the pack) the broad tendency was to prefer transition and transformation. Words like “caution” also outranked words like “ambition” and “race to the front”.*

Regarding “Diversification”: EcoAnalytics 2019: their research shows that diversification polls significantly better than transition in the prairies (though not across Canada, as the terms tie in B.C.). That said, diversification does not mean the same thing as transition. Consider the cost of using the term and limit use to prairie audiences.



4. In our February 2019 focus groups with Abacus, the phrase “good jobs” was criticized by one group for being meaningless. Gigs obviously invokes the gig economy: we want to imply careers that are stable (see note 14 below).

5. In our May 2019 focus groups with McAllister, we tried various pitches to see which could best withstand a counter-pitch. Our day-two pitch, which focused on the global impacts of climate change, was by far our worst-performing. The best-performing, our day-three pitch, focused on the hyper-local impacts of climate change (ie. wildfires impacting Kamloops). Our February Abacus focus group (GTA suburbs) saw a similar result when people started talking about their personal experiences with climate change (“riding a motorcycle in Toronto in December”). When the conversation is localized, people pick it up and start framing their own experiences in it.

6. EcoAnalytics 2019, research summary shared with Clean Energy Canada: *Make the link to health effects. But experiments show less agreement with the statement “more intense heat waves, floods, and wildfires make climate change a public health emergency” than descriptions of climate change as a threat to human health.*”

7. “Wasteful energy” was suggested as a useful low-info proxy by McAllister. We observed strong reactions to the word “waste” in all of our focus groups. The word was often introduced by the individuals themselves.

8. Abacus has polled “price on pollution” a number of times. [In one of our 2019 polls](#), “price on pollution” has 78% hard and soft support, versus only 21% opposition. By comparison, in other polls, support and opposition to the “carbon tax” is usually about evenly split. In our February 2019 focus group with Abacus on carbon pricing, it was difficult for people to understand how a carbon price worked (their confusion increased with the introduction of the rebate). It’s likely better to use language people find more appealing (ie. “price on pollution”) and to talk about climate action broadly—rather than trying to explain price signals.

9. This conclusion is drawn from our 2019 McAllister focus group, for which we dedicated a portion to renewable natural gas, and also from our experience talking about the clean fuel standard and biofuels on social media over the past three years. In the focus group, there was pretty much no awareness of renewable natural gas and people didn’t really believe it until it was explained to them—as turning waste into fuel. People responded mostly positively to the concept of turning waste into fuel. On social media, we’ve seen biofuel messaging generally fall flat, and the word “biofuel” often triggers people worried about land use or who don’t like the idea of food being turned into fuel. However, when we told the story of Enerkem’s waste-to-fuel facility in Edmonton, it performed far better than any other biofuel-related post we’ve tried. “Waste” is the commonality here: no one wants to waste food, but transforming waste into something clean and productive? That’s a winner.

10. Using “energy sector” to mean just fossil fuel energy undermines the existence and significance of the clean energy sector. “Natural resources,” meanwhile, includes industries like mining and forestry and, when used as a proxy for oil and gas, makes the fossil fuel energy sector feel far bigger than it actually is.

11. Abacus Data and Clean Energy Canada, December 2019. When talking about electric vehicles, Canadians find the term “electric vehicles” preferable (35%), followed by zero-emission vehicles (27%). Interestingly, different age groups are split on the less preferred terms, with 23% of 18-25-year-olds finding “clean vehicles” most appealing, compared to 13% of those aged 60 and over.

When it comes to vehicles that run on electricity instead of fossil fuels, which term do you prefer or find most appealing?

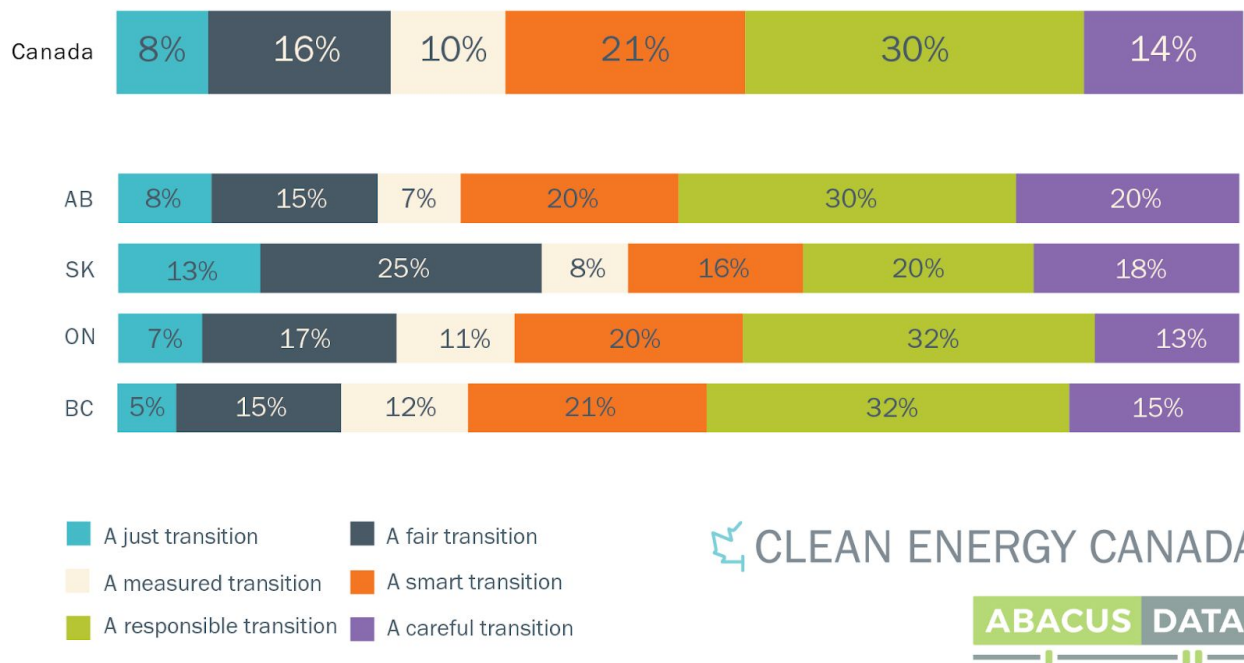


- Clean vehicles
- Cleaner vehicles
- Zero-emission vehicles
- Electric vehicles

12. Abacus Data and Clean Energy Canada, December 2019. “A just transition”—the term most widely used—is by far the least liked in all provinces. “A responsible transition” is most preferred and liked by all age groups (especially older Canadians). See chart below. Asked in isolation, “a smart transition” and “a responsible transition” scored best, with 30% and 29% respectively believing they fit “perfectly” and only 9% thinking they “don’t fit well.” They also won in Alberta. “A just transition” was least well-liked in all provinces, with 11% of Canadians believing it did not fit well and 24% in Alberta. Responsibility as a value likely appeals to Canadians across the political spectrum. Even among Conservatives, “a responsible transition” outperformed “a careful transition.”

From McAllister (based on focus groups): “Emphasis should be placed on providing support to families and funds for retraining and skills development for good renewable/clean energy/sustainable jobs—transition needs to feel safe, secure, especially compared to boom and bust economy.”

Which do you feel is the single best description of the transition you would like to see happen?



13. Abacus Data and Clean Energy Canada, December 2019. “A climate and energy transition plan” was by far the most popular term to describe what Canadians would like the government to offer, with 54% of the vote. “Climate action” is the second most popular term, with 15%. The results are fairly consistent across all provinces, although more Albertans (69%) have a preference for “a climate and energy transition plan,” with the other options being almost equally unpopular.

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Which best describes what you would like the new federal government to offer?



- Climate leadership
- Climate action
- A climate plan
- A climate and energy transition plan
- A green new deal

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ABACUS DATA

14. Comeau, Louise. Based on 2019 focus group work. From Louise: *I did find in focus groups with women, especially for women from immigrant families, that the terms in the [slide shown below] were much preferred. Same on green jobs: turns out talking about careers is considered so much more than a job. Instead of renewables/new tech and our focus on "new" or groundbreaking, why not reliable, dependable.*

**Focus groups:
Bridging
language:
Women and
ideological
divides**

All age cohorts:

- New careers
- Peace of mind
- Working together

Older women (35 years old and older)

- Cleaner, safer, healthier
- Reliable
- Consequences
- (18 to 34: Sustainable, as well as ground-breaking)

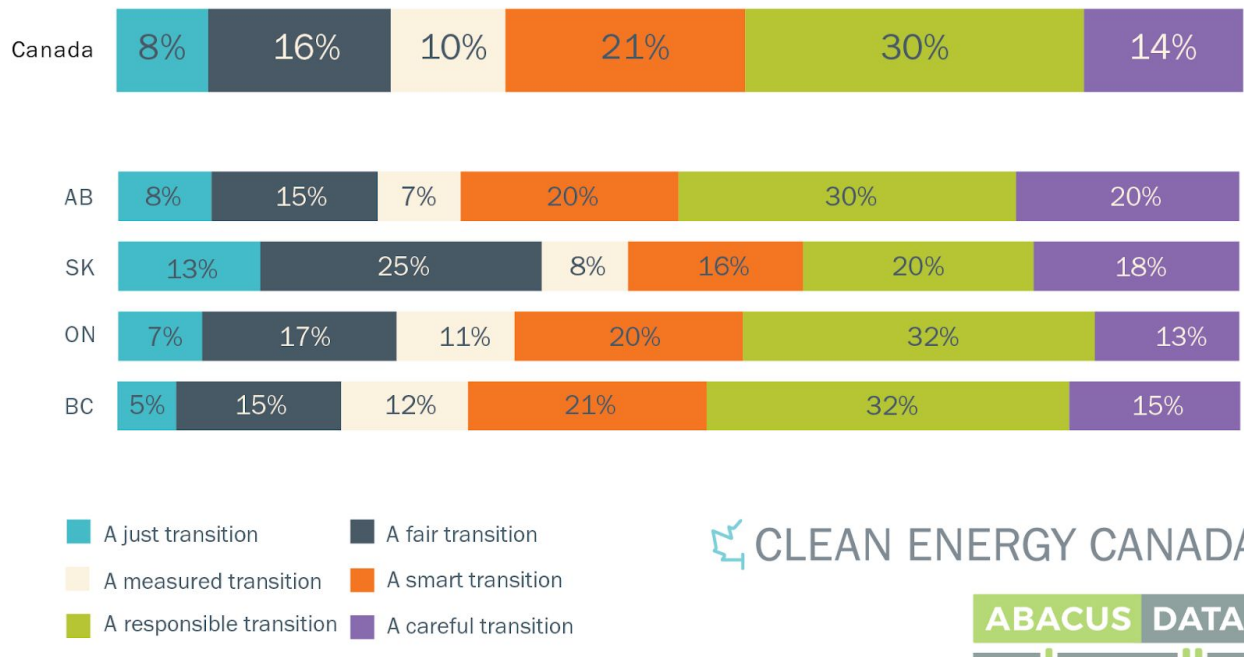
Abacus Data and Clean Energy Canada polling: Language testing

How to describe the energy transition

Six terms were polled: “a just transition,” “a fair transition,” “a measured transition,” “a smart transition,” “a responsible transition,” and “a careful transition.” The key findings are as follows:

- When asked which term best describes the transition respondents would like to see, “a responsible transition” was the clear favourite (30%), while “a smart transition” (21%) was the runner up. This observation was consistent in Albertan respondents, although in Saskatchewan “a fair transition” was also popular.
- “A just transition”—the term most widely used—is by far the least liked in all provinces.
- “A responsible transition” was liked by all age groups, although it was most popular with those 65 and over (39%) and least popular with those 18-29 (26%). The latter age group marginally preferred “a smart transition” (28%).

Which do you feel is the single best description of the transition you would like to see happen?

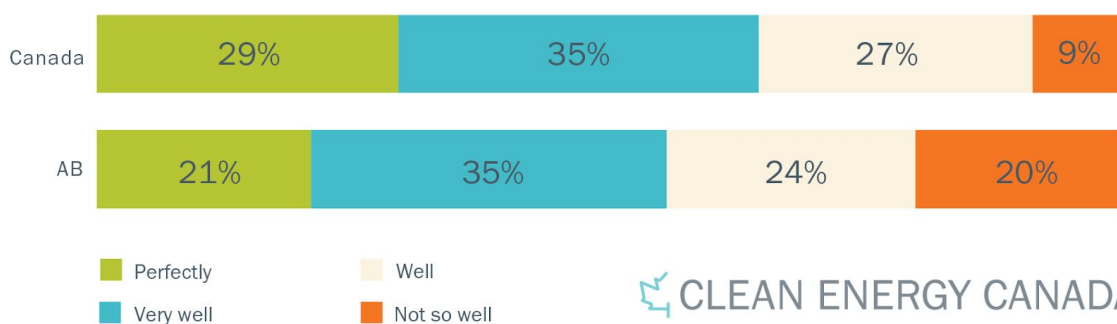


Each term was also asked in isolation, and respondents were asked to describe how well each term applied to Albertans.

- In this frame, “a smart transition” and “a responsible transition” were preferred, with 30% and 29% respectively believing they fit “perfectly” and 9% thinking they “don’t fit well.”
- In Alberta, “a smart transition” and “a responsible transition” were also most liked, although all terms polled a higher proportion of dissatisfaction than other provinces.
- “A just transition” was least well-liked in all provinces, with 11% of Canadians believing it did not fit well, and 24% of Albertans.

When you think about the idea of an energy transition which of the following describes the kind of transition you would like to see in terms of the impact on Albertans?

A responsible transition:

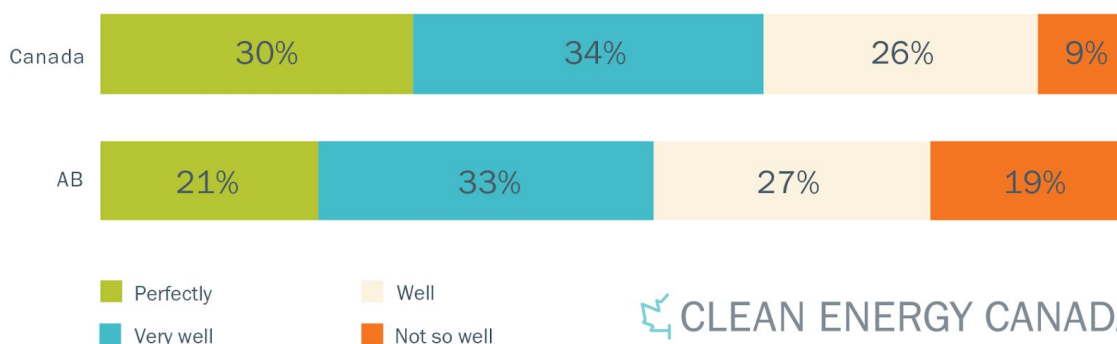


CLEAN ENERGY CANADA

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When you think about the idea of an energy transition which of the following describes the kind of transition you would like to see in terms of the impact on Albertans?

A smart transition:

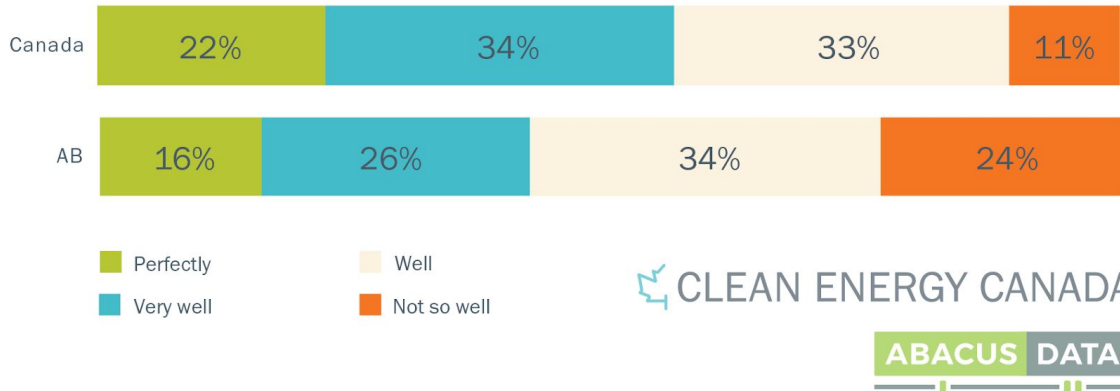


CLEAN ENERGY CANADA

ABACUS DATA

When you think about the idea of an energy transition which of the following describes the kind of transition you would like to see in terms of the impact on Albertans?

A just transition:

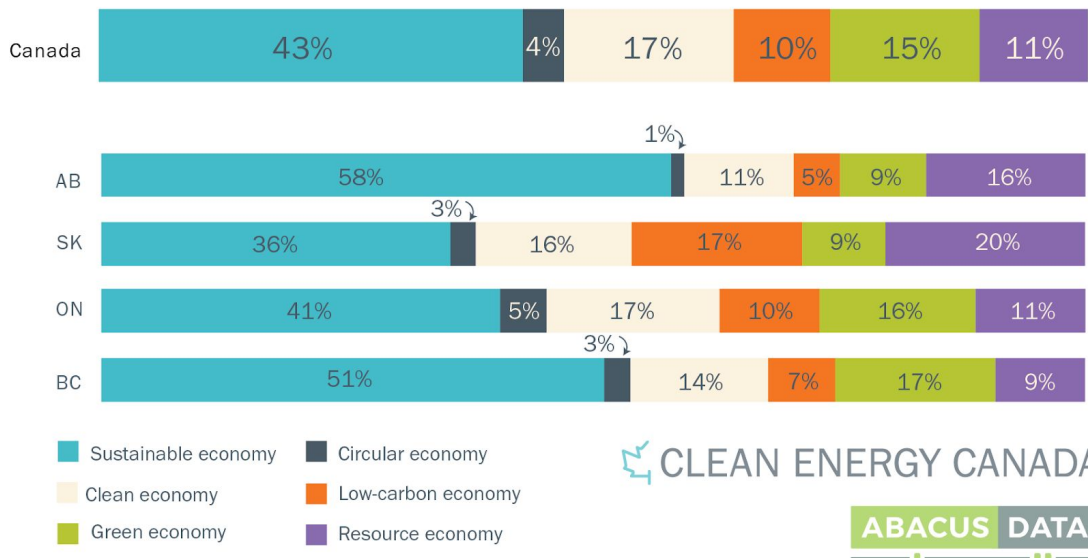


How to describe the clean energy economy

Six terms were polled: “sustainable economy,” “circular economy,” “low-carbon economy,” “green economy” and “resource economy.”

- “Sustainable economy” was by far the most popular term amongst all regions, ages and genders, while “circular economy” was the least well-liked. “Low-carbon economy” and “green economy” were also largely unpopular.

Which best describes the economy you want to see for Canada in the future?



How to talk about government action on climate

“A climate and energy transition plan” was by far the most popular term to describe what Canadians would like the government to offer, with 54% of the vote. “Climate action” is the second-most popular, with 15%. The results are fairly consistent across all provinces, although more Albertans (69%) have a preference for “a climate and energy transition plan,” with the other options almost equally unpopular.

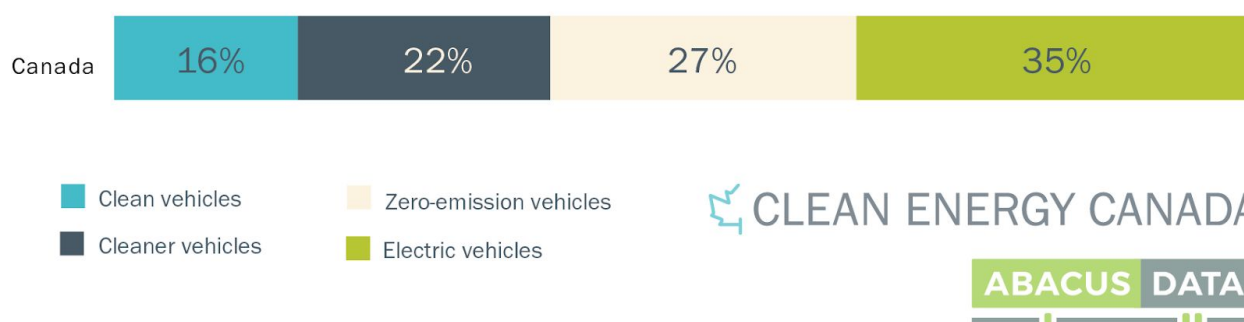
Which best describes what you would like the new federal government to offer?



How to talk about electric vehicles

When talking about electric vehicles, Canadians find the term “electric vehicles” preferable (35%), followed by zero-emission vehicles (27%). Interestingly, different age groups are split on the less preferred terms, with 23% of 18-25 year olds finding “clean vehicles” most appealing, compared to 13% of those aged 60 and over.

When it comes to vehicles that run on electricity instead of fossil fuels, which term do you prefer or find most appealing?



Methodology: The survey was conducted online with 1,848 Canadian adults from December 12th to 19th, 2019. A random sample of panelists were invited to complete the survey from a set of partner panels based on the Lucid exchange platform. These partners are typically double opt-in survey panels, blended to manage out potential skews in the data from a single source. The margin of error for a comparable probability-based random sample of the same size is +/- 2.28%, 19 times out of 20. The data were weighted according to census data to ensure that the sample matched Canada’s population according to age, gender, educational attainment, and region. Totals may not add up to 100 due to rounding.