

Public opinion on Canada's new clean growth and climate change plan

December 2016

BACKGROUND

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Overview

Last week in Ottawa, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his provincial and territorial counterparts negotiated a national climate plan that commits to achieving Canada's emission-reduction targets. The *Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change* was announced December 9, 2016, and was agreed to by all but two premiers, the leaders of Saskatchewan and Manitoba.¹

Following this announcement, Clean Energy Canada commissioned Abacus Data to conduct a survey of Canadians' opinions on the new climate plan, including specific policies it includes to cut carbon pollution and encourage the shift to clean energy.

Survey Questions and Results

The results for eleven survey questions are presented below, along with the exact question wording that was used.

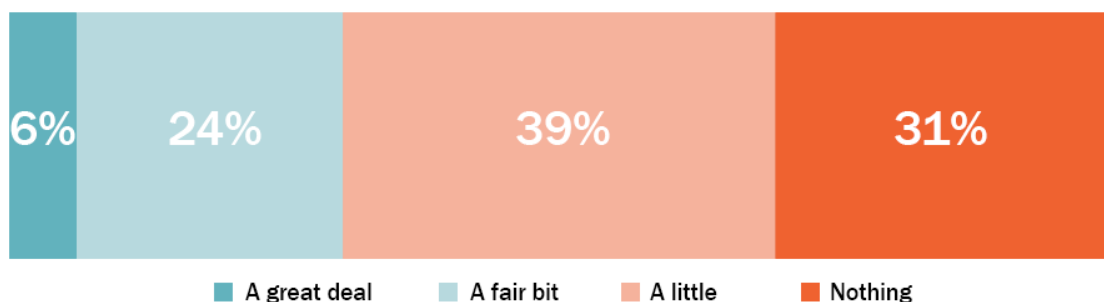
A total of 1,848 Canadians were surveyed December 12 to 14, 2016. Further details about the survey methodology are available at the end of this document. The percentages in descriptions and figures may not always add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

SUPPORT FOR THE NEW NATIONAL CLIMATE PLAN

To select a pool of informed respondents, the survey first asked whether Canadians had heard about the first ministers' meeting, where the national climate plan was adopted. A total of 69 per cent of those surveyed had heard at least "a little" about the meeting, with 24 per cent having heard "a fair bit." That translates to roughly 20 million Canadian adults who heard something about the meeting—including 9 million who heard either a lot or a fair bit about it.

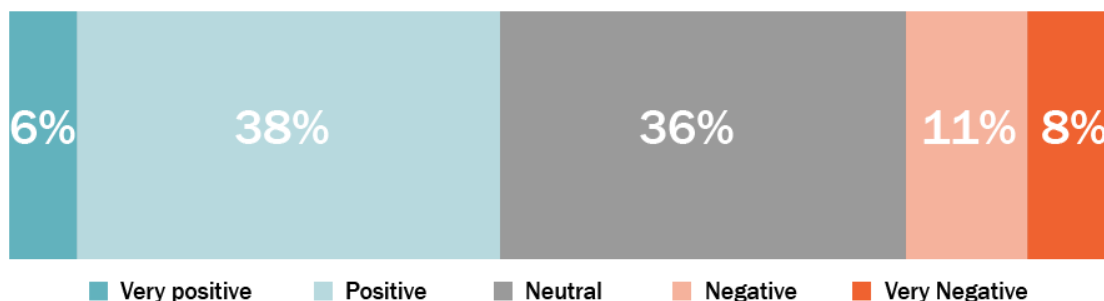
¹ Available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/environment/weather/climatechange/pan-canadian-framework.html>

“Have you seen read or heard a great deal, a fair bit, a little or nothing about the meeting the Prime Minister and the Premiers had last week to discuss climate change, energy and the environment?”



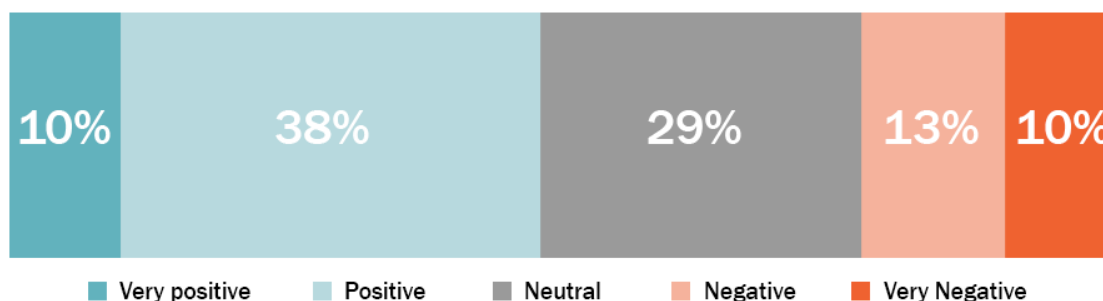
The survey asked those respondents who were aware of the first ministers’ meeting about their views of the “climate change emissions reduction plan” that premiers and the prime minister negotiated. The majority of Canadians who were aware of the meeting were also on board with the results: 44 per cent of those respondents had either a positive or a very positive view of the outcome, and 36 per cent a neutral view.

“Do you have a very positive, positive, neutral, negative, or very negative view of the climate change emissions reduction plan that was agreed to by the majority of participants?”



In Canada, climate change policy has traditionally been the domain of environment ministers—but last week’s negotiations, led by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, placed the issue firmly onto the agendas of our governments’ leaders. The survey found that 48 per cent of respondents aware of the meeting had a positive or very positive view of “the way the Prime Minister handled his responsibilities” related to the first ministers’ meeting. With 29 per cent holding a neutral view, a total of 77 per cent of Canadians aware of the meeting were onside with the Prime Minister’s role in negotiating the climate framework.

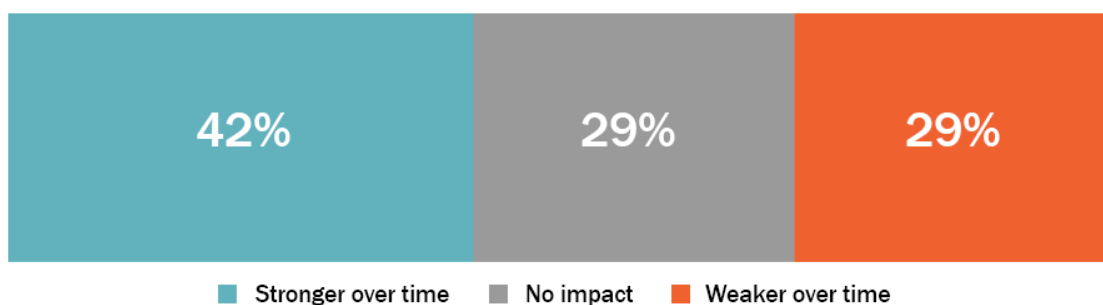
“Do you have a very positive, positive, neutral, negative, or very negative view of the way the Prime Minister handled his responsibilities?”



Much of the commentary about the new national climate framework—both in the media and from leaders participating in the negotiations²—focused on the consequences it could have for Canada’s economy. Some premiers raised concerns about the economic impacts of taking action to cut carbon pollution, but the survey found that a strong majority of Canadians did not share those concerns.

Instead, 42 per cent of respondents aware of the first ministers' meeting said they expect the new framework will make Canada’s economy stronger over time, and 29 per cent believe it will have no impact on the economy. Fewer than one in three—a total of 29 per cent of those aware of the meeting—said they believe the climate plan will make Canada’s economy weaker over time.

“Do you believe that the climate change emissions reduction plan, if it is adhered to, will make the Canadian economy stronger over time, weaker over time, or have no impact on the Canadian economy?”



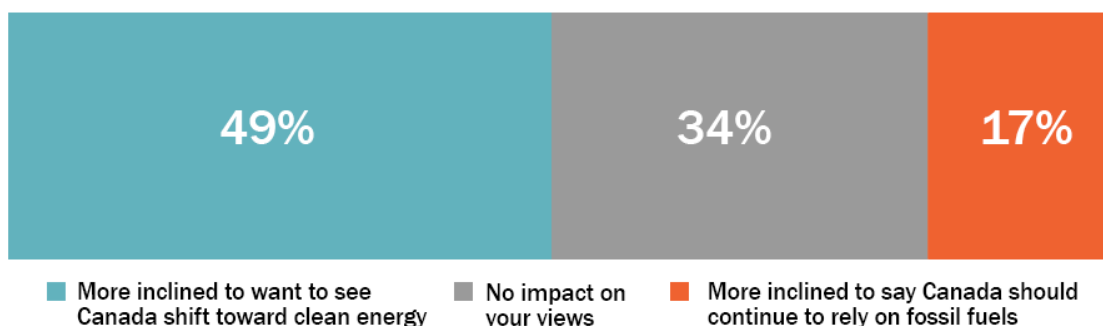
COMPARING CANADIAN AND U.S. ENERGY PRIORITIES

Canada's recent efforts to reduce carbon pollution and transition to clean energy contrast with U.S. president-elect Donald Trump's approach, which includes plans to undo much of the Obama Administration’s climate and clean energy policy as well as new support for fossil fuel production. Critics of the Canadian federal government's climate plans have pointed to Trump's energy agenda as a risk to Canada's objectives, and as a reason to slow the transition to clean energy.

² See, for example, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/national-climate-deal-reached-trudeau-provinces/article33281195/>.

Our survey found that Canadians' response to Trump's energy agenda is very different. Fully 49 per cent of respondents said that Donald Trump's election makes them more inclined to want a clean energy transition for Canada. Another 34 per cent said the future U.S. president has no effect on their views. Just 17 per cent say that having Trump in the White House makes them more inclined to think Canada should continue to rely on fossil fuels.

“Do each of the following make you more inclined to want to see Canada shift towards cleaner energy, more inclined to say Canada should continue to rely on fossil fuels, or have no impact on your views: President elect Donald Trump says he will be reversing many of President Obama’s policies on energy and will encourage the development of fossil fuels.”



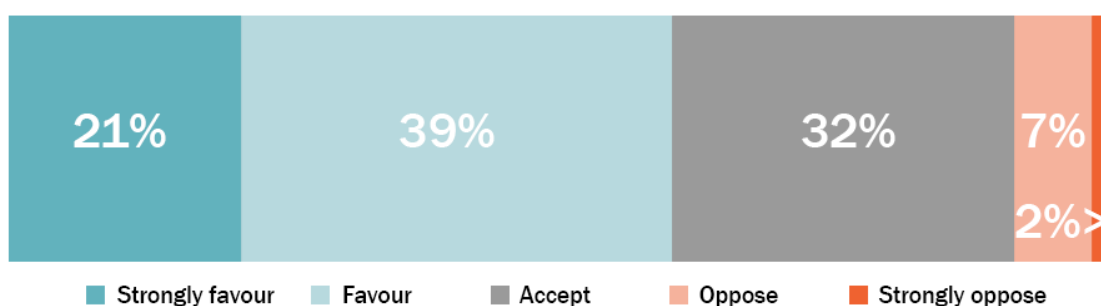
SUPPORT FOR CLEAN ENERGY INVESTMENT

Canada's new climate framework includes commitments to build clean energy infrastructure, including transmission lines, electric vehicle charging stations, and ultra-efficient buildings. To deliver on those commitments, provincial, territorial and the federal government will need to dedicate funding to these priorities in their budgets.

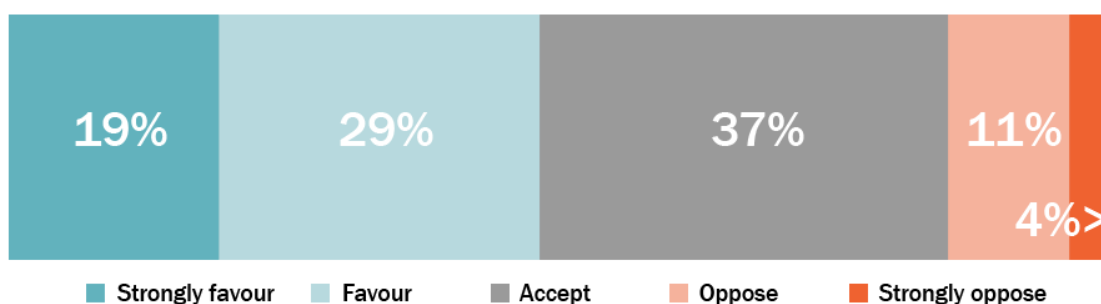
We surveyed Canadians about a number of potential clean energy investments that the federal government could make, and found the overwhelming majority of respondents either support or would accept having these investments included in the next federal budget.

“In the next few months the federal government will bring forward a new budget. Would you strongly favour, favour, accept, oppose or strongly oppose seeing each of the following measures if they were contained in that budget?”

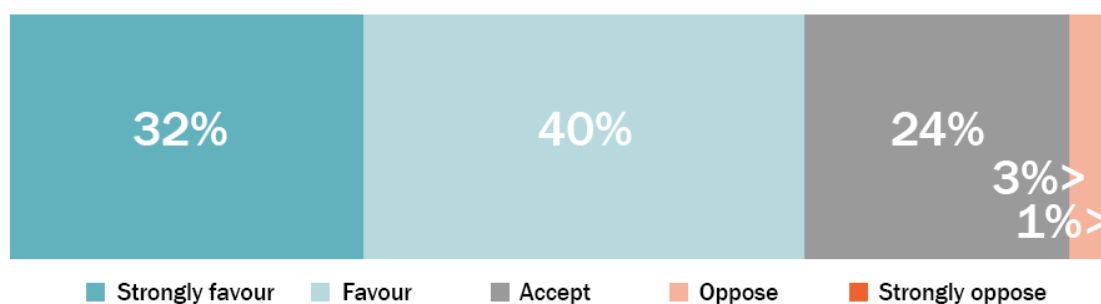
Funding to build more power lines between provinces in order to increase use of renewable energy sources:



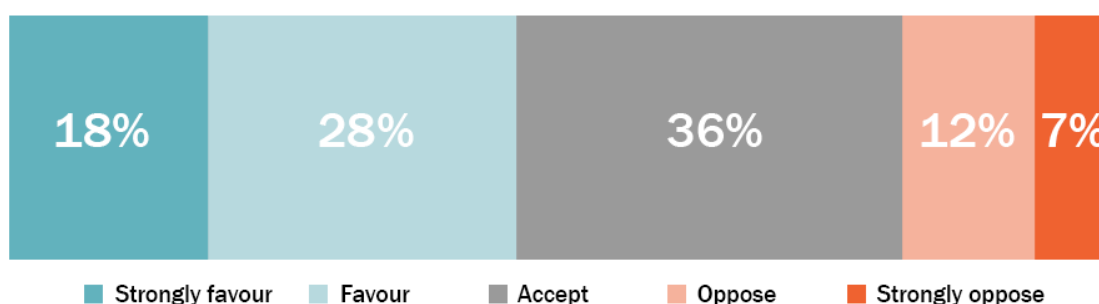
Funding to increase the number of charging stations for electric vehicles on Canadian highways and in cities and towns:



Incentives to encourage people to make their homes more energy efficient



Incentives to encourage people to purchase electric vehicles



Support for these potential budget measures crosses all regions of the country, age groups, and partisan affiliations. For example,

- At least two-thirds of respondents favour incentives that encourage people to make their homes more energy efficient in every region of the country. Few oppose this idea outright.
- Funding to build more power lines between provinces in order to increase the use of renewable electricity finds majority support in every region. Only three per cent are opposed to it.
- There is also broad support for incentives to encourage people to purchase electric vehicles and for funding to increase the number of electric vehicles charging stations. A majority of Canadians in every region favour or can accept the proposals, as do voters of every major political party.

SUPPORT FOR CANADA'S TRANSITION TO CLEAN ENERGY

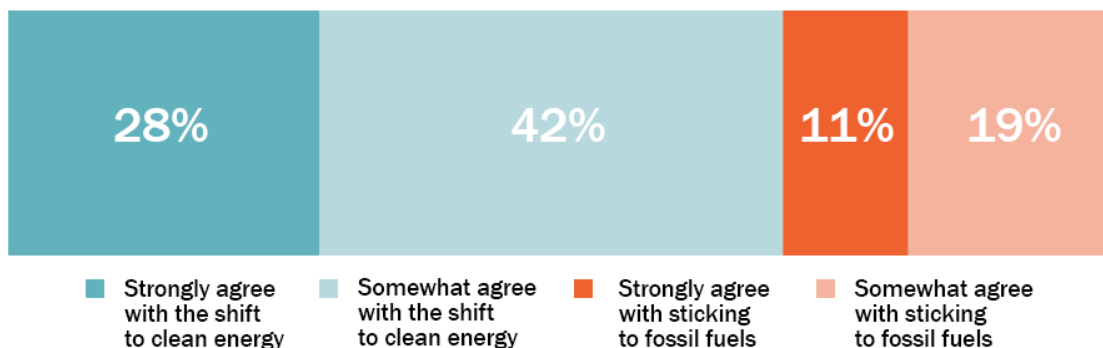
Over the longer term, achieving the climate goals that Canada has committed to means moving from fossil fuels to clean energy as a source of power across the economy.³ In the transportation sector, for example, we'll need to shift from cars fuelled with gasoline to those that run on clean electricity. In the building sector, more efficient construction means that homes can be heated and cooled with clean power.

The survey found a strong majority of Canadians support a rapid shift away from fossil fuels. Seventy per cent of respondents either strongly or somewhat agree with the premise that "Canada should shift its energy use as quickly as possible to cleaner, lower carbon sources of energy and away from fossil fuels." Just 30 per cent said they felt it was "better for Canada to stick with mostly fossil fuel energy for a long time to come."

In fact, in every region but Alberta, a majority favours a transition from fossil fuels. In Alberta, opinion is evenly divided. The overwhelming majority (82 per cent) of Canadians under 35 favour a shift as quickly as possible.

³ The Government of Canada described this transition, often referred to as "electrification," in its Mid-Century Strategy for Long-Term Low-Greenhouse Gas Development Strategy, which is available here: http://unfccc.int/files/focus/long-term_strategies/application/pdf/canadas_mid-century_long-term_strategy.pdf.

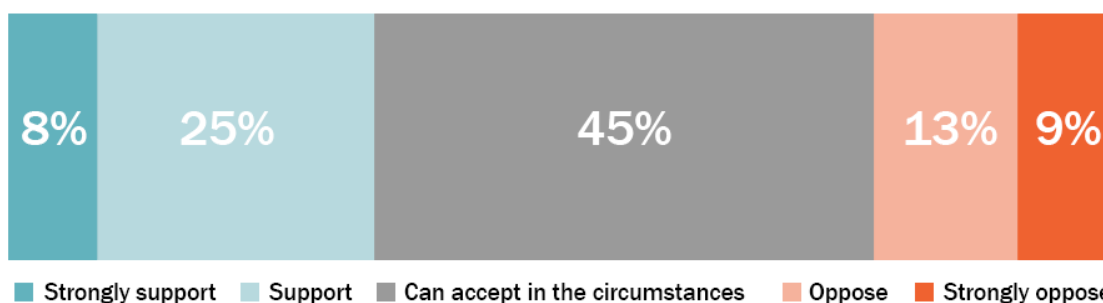
“Some people say that Canada should shift its energy use as quickly as possible to cleaner, lower carbon sources of energy and away from fossil fuels. Others say that it’s better for Canada to stick with mostly fossil fuel energy for a long time to come. Please indicate whether you strongly or somewhat agree with the first point of view or the second?”



For much of the previous decade, Canada’s federal government put very little emphasis on tackling climate change and supporting clean energy. Prime Minister Trudeau’s government has made climate action a much higher priority, championing the pan-Canadian framework as the centrepiece of renewed federal leadership on curbing carbon pollution and supporting clean growth.

Over three-quarters of Canadians are comfortable with Ottawa’s orientation toward climate action: a total of 78 per cent either support or “can accept” the federal government’s current approach.

“Generally speaking, how do you feel about the approach that the federal government is taking when it comes to energy and climate change. Would you say that you strongly support, support, can accept in the circumstances, oppose or strongly oppose?”



Methodology

The Abacus Data survey was conducted online with 1,848 Canadian adults from December 12 to 14, 2016. A random sample of panelists was invited to complete the survey from a large representative panel of over 500,000 Canadians. The Marketing Research and Intelligence Association policy limits statements about margins of sampling error for most online surveys. The margin of error for a comparable probability-based random sample of 1,848 is +/- 2.3%, 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 per cent due to rounding.