



Do Canadians Still Care About Climate Change?

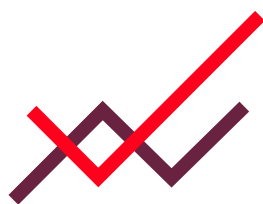


**Environics
Institute**
For Survey Research



*Confederation
of Tomorrow*

2026 SERIES



Environics Institute

For Survey Research

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.

Get in touch

environicsinstitute.org

info@environicsinstitute.org

701-33 Bloor Street East
Toronto, ON M4W 3H1



Authors

Jessica Singh

Andrew Parkin

Acknowledgement

This project benefits from the financial support of the Research Support Program of the Secrétariat du Québec aux relations canadiennes (SQRC) / Ce projet bénéficie de l'appui financier du Programme d'appui à la recherche du Secrétariat du Québec aux relations canadiennes (SQRC).

**Secrétariat aux
relations canadiennes**





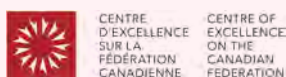
The Confederation of Tomorrow surveys give voice to Canadians about the major issues shaping the future of the federation and their political communities. They have been conducted annually since 2019 by an association of the country's leading public policy and socio-economic research organizations.

The 2026 study consists of a survey of 5,696 adults, conducted between February 14 and March 28, 2026 (92% of the responses were collected between February 19 and March 7); 91 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 survey is conducted on behalf of all the survey partners by the Environics Institute for Survey Research. The fieldwork is managed by Elemental DCI. The online portion of the survey drew respondents from the Leger LEO panel; the telephone interviews were conducted by Elemental DCI.

The survey data are weighted in three separate ways, depending on the population of interest. First, the complete survey data are weighted by region, gender, age, education, home language (separately for Quebec, New Brunswick and the rest of Canada) and Indigenous identity, so as to be representative of the Canadian population. Second, the territorial sample (when reported separately) is weighted by gender, age and education. Third, the Indigenous sample (when reported separately) is weighted by gender, age, region and education.

[View the Confederation of Tomorrow series on our website](#)



Contents

Introduction	<u>1</u>
Key findings	<u>2</u>
The most important problem facing Canadians	<u>3</u>
Protecting the environment vs. protecting jobs	<u>5</u>
Phasing out the use of fossil fuels	<u>7</u>
Meeting the Paris Agreement targets	<u>9</u>
Which level of government is more trusted?	<u>11</u>
Conclusion	<u>13</u>



Introduction

When Mark Carney joined the race to become leader of the federal Liberal Party, many Canadians expected him to push action on climate change to the forefront. Carney had built a reputation as an advocate for a greener economy through his writings and his work as the United Nations Special Envoy on Climate Action and Finance. Since then, some critics have expressed disappointment, arguing that the new prime minister has downplayed environmental policy in favour of a one-sided focus on economic growth based on natural resource and energy development. A typical comment is that Carney “seems to have easily turned his back on his principles under pressure from Trump.”

Citizens themselves are grappling with two competing realities. On one hand, the effects of climate change are becoming more evident through rising temperatures, extreme weather events and summer wildfires. On the other hand, Canadian workers and households are confronted with new economic uncertainties stemming from the imposition of U.S. tariffs, while still recovering from the post-pandemic spike in the cost of living. In this context, the prime minister’s efforts to rebalance concern about the environment with the need to respond to new pressures on the economy may not be that out of touch.

In fact, public opinion on these issues has undergone some gradual change in recent years. This change is evident in five separate measures:

- What is the most important problem facing Canadians today?
- Is protecting the environment more important than protecting jobs?
- How quickly (if at all) should Canada phase out the use of fossil fuels like oil and gas?
- What should Canada’s priorities be in developing a strategy to fight climate change?
- Which level of government is more trusted to make the right decisions in addressing climate change?

Key findings

- Twenty-eight percent now say the cost of living and inflation is the most important problem facing Canadians today, compared to only two percent who name the environment or climate change (the lowest proportion recorded since this series of surveys began in 2019).
- Forty-three percent now agree that protecting the environment is more important than protecting jobs (down 9 points since 2020) and 48 percent disagree (up 10 points). This marks the first time since 2020, when the question was first asked in this series of surveys, that a higher proportion disagrees.
- While support for prioritizing the environment over jobs was lower among Albertans than among residents of the Maritimes, Quebec and British Columbia in the early 2020s, today these regional differences have narrowed, making opinions more consistent across the country.
- A plurality of Canadians (45%) think that fossil fuels should be gradually phased out, to protect those who work in the gas and oil industry; but 28 percent think that Canada should not worry about phasing out fossil fuels and instead focus on protecting the jobs of those in the industry. This latter proportion has increased over the past several years.
- The proportion of Canadians who consider meeting the Paris Agreement targets to be a high priority in developing a strategy to fight climate change decreased by 14 percentage points between 2020 and 2026, making it one of the few priorities to experience a substantial drop in public support.
- Asked which government is trusted more to address climate change, responses are fairly divided, with about one in four choosing the federal government (27%), both their provincial (or territorial) government and federal government equally (27%), or neither government (25%). A much smaller proportion trusts their provincial government more (10%).
- In 2026, Liberal Party supporters remain the most likely to trust the federal government more to address climate change (47% in 2026, compared to 38% in 2025), while a plurality of Conservative Party supporters trusts neither government (38% in 2026, compared to 31% in 2025).

The most important problem facing Canadians

Environmental concerns are typically overshadowed by economic ones. But unusually, in early 2020, the proportion of Canadians saying that the environment or climate change is the country's most important problem reached 12 percent – identical to the proportion identifying the economy or unemployment.

The issue of climate change was then overshadowed by a successive series of crises: the pandemic, inflation and the imposition of tariffs on Canadian exports by the U.S. government. In 2026, only two percent of Canadians identify the environment or climate change as the most important problem facing the country, unchanged from 2025 and continuing to be the lowest proportion recorded since this series of surveys began in 2019. Twenty-eight percent now say the cost of living and inflation is the most important problem (20 percentage points higher than in 2019) and nine percent identify the trade dispute with the U.S.



Canadians who say the environment or climate change is the **most important problem facing the country**

12%

2020



2%

2026

Table 1**Most important problem facing Canadians today**

Top mentions, 2019 – 2026

Issue	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Cost of living / inflation	8	8	1	8	33	33	26	28
Economy / unemployment	17	12	13	9	9	8	11	10
Trump / U.S. tariffs / trade war	–	–	–	–	–	–	17	9
Affordable housing	–	–	–	–	5	12	9	7
Health care / mental health	7	9	5	6	10	8	5	5
Immigration	7	5	1	1	1	4	5	5
Poor government leadership / Trudeau	9	7	9	6	7	6	4	5
Environment / climate change	8	12	3	5	4	5	2	2
Poverty / inequality / homelessness	8	9	6	6	4	3	2	2
COVID-19	–	1	52	34	–	–	–	–

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

The format of this question is important: only one answer is allowed. The drop in the proportion saying the environment or climate change is the most important problem facing us doesn't mean that fewer Canadians think that climate change needs to be addressed at all. Rather, it indicates that, in terms of priorities, economic concerns – including the cost living and the fall-out from U.S. tariffs – currently take precedence.

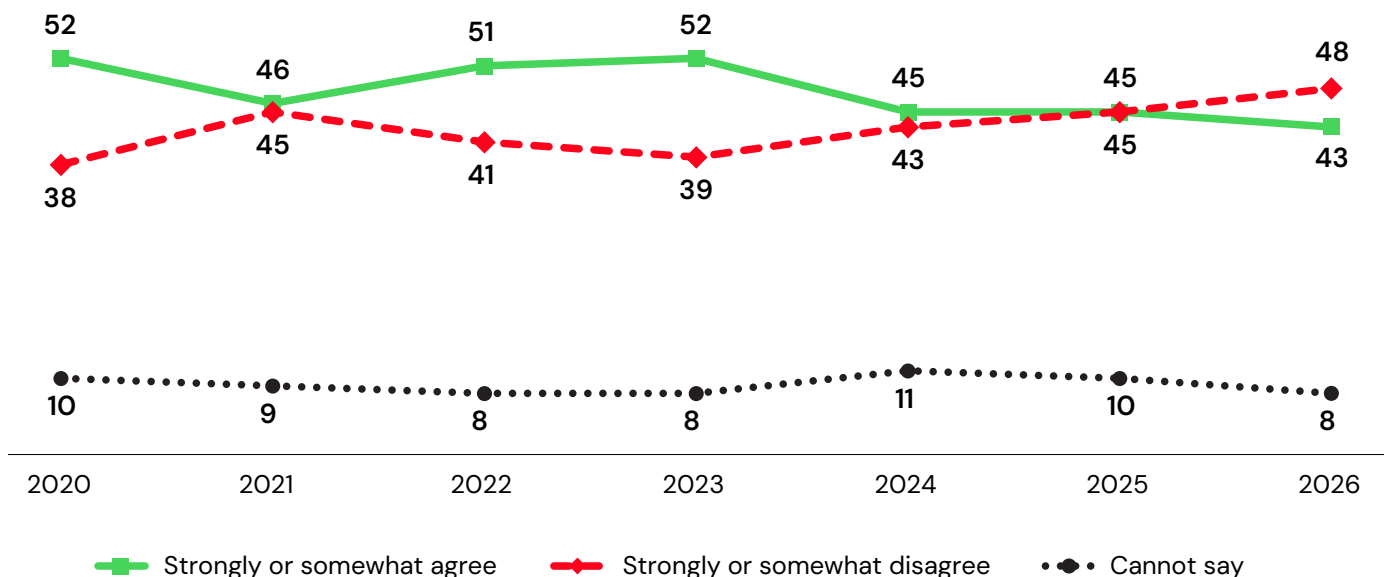
Protecting the environment vs. protecting jobs

A more gradual change appears when Canadians are asked whether protecting the environment is more important than protecting jobs. In early 2020, 52 percent of Canadians agreed that protecting the environment is more important than protecting jobs, while 38 percent disagreed – a 14-point difference in favour of the environment.

Figure 1

Agree or disagree: Protecting the environment is more important than protecting jobs

2020 – 2026

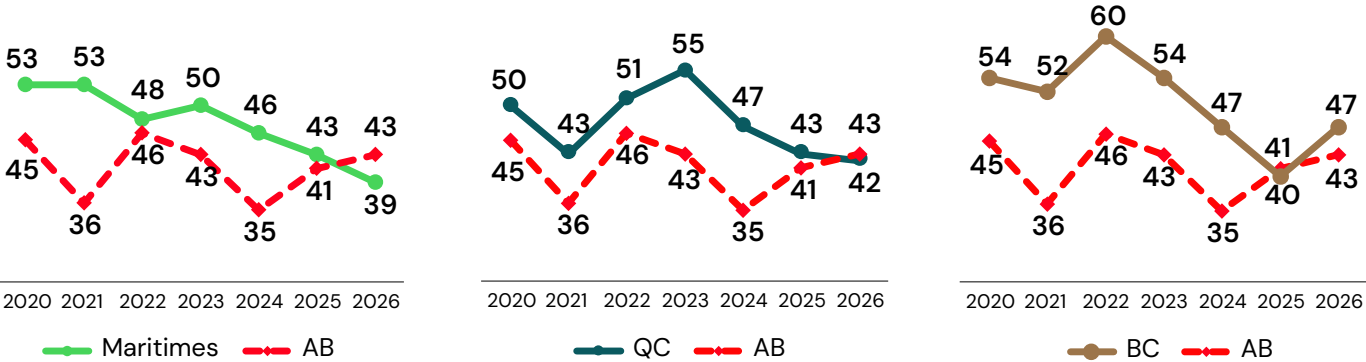


How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? Protecting the environment is more important than protecting jobs.

In 2026, the difference is five points in the other direction. Forty-three percent now agree that protecting the environment is more important than protecting jobs (down 9 points since 2020) and 48 percent disagree (up 10 points). This marks the first time since 2020, when the question was first asked in this series of surveys, that a higher proportion disagrees.

In the early 2020s, support for prioritizing the environment was lower among Albertans than among residents of the Maritimes, Quebec and British Columbia – today, these regional differences have narrowed, making opinions more consistent across the country. This change in opinion signals less regional variation – the gap between the national average (excluding Alberta) and the Albertan average for the proportion prioritizing jobs was 11 percentage points in 2020, compared to only three points in 2026.

Figure 2
Agree: Protecting the environment is more important than protecting jobs
2020 – 2026, Alberta & other regions



How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? Protecting the environment is more important than protecting jobs.

Phasing out the use of fossil fuels

While Canadians are placing more emphasis on the economy, the survey shows that almost one in two continue to prefer that Canada gradually phases out the use of fossil fuels. This proportion has changed very little over the past few years.

The survey asks Canadians to indicate which of three options they prefer in the context of Canada's response to climate change:

- phase out the use of fossil fuels as quickly as possible, even if that means putting people who work in industries like oil and gas out of work;
- phase out the use of fossil fuels gradually, so that people who work in industries like oil and gas are not suddenly put out of work; or
- 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.

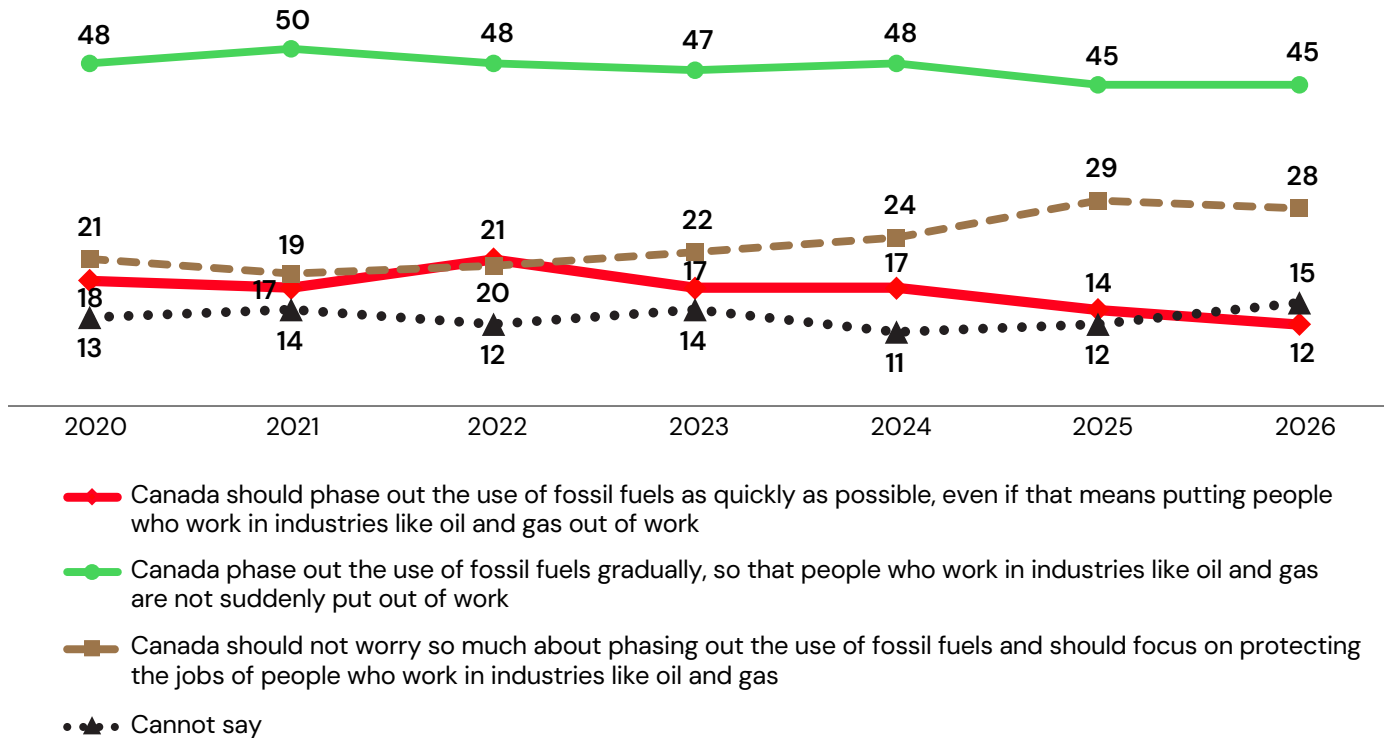


A plurality of Canadians (45%) think that fossil fuels should be gradually phased out, to protect those who work in the gas and oil industry; but 28 percent think that Canada should not worry about phasing out fossil fuels, and instead focus on protecting the jobs of those in the industry. A smaller proportion (12%) prefer that fossil fuels be phased out as quickly as possible, even if those who work in the industry would lose their jobs; and 15 percent cannot say.

Figure 3

How quickly should Canada phase out fossil fuels?

2020 – 2026



Some people say that in order to fight climate change, countries like Canada should phase out the use of fossil fuels like oil and gas, and should replace them with more renewable sources of energy. Thinking about this, which of the following three options do you prefer?

Over time, however, the proportion of Canadians prioritizing a quick phase-out of fossil fuel usage over jobs has declined, from a high of 21 percent in 2022 to 12 percent in 2026 (a drop of 9 percentage points). Conversely, support for a focus on protecting jobs is up by eight points (from 20% to 28%). This change has occurred in every region of the country, once again narrowing the gap in opinions between Albertans and other Canadians.

Meeting the Paris Agreement targets

Public opinion on the priorities for Canada's climate change strategy has remained largely stable since 2020. The extent of support for the top three highest-ranking priorities (ensuring that all regions of Canada benefit from a strong economy, keeping taxes low and making sure our businesses stay competitive with those in the U.S.) have changed very little over that time.

However, there is a notable exception: the Paris Agreement targets. The proportion of Canadians who consider meeting these targets to be a high priority decreased by 14 percentage points between 2020 and 2026, making it one of the few priorities to experience a substantial drop in public support.

This decline occurred across the country, with several regions experiencing decreases of more than 10 percentage points, including Ontario (down 20 percentage points). As a result, the gap between the proportions within Alberta and in the rest of Canada saying that meeting the Paris Agreement targets should be a high priority has narrowed.



Table 2**Priorities in developing a strategy to fight climate change**

High priority, 2020 – 2026

Item	2020	2021	2025	2026
Ensuring that all regions of Canada benefit from a strong economy	60	62	60	61
Keeping taxes low	50	46	51	49
Making sure our businesses stay competitive with businesses in the United States	46	45	47	46
Making sure that the premiers of all the provinces and territories are in agreement with Canada's climate change strategy	43	38	39	36
Preventing job losses in the oil and gas industry	33	31	37	35
Increasing Canadian exports of resources like natural gas to other countries so they can phase out their use of less clean energy sources like coal	32	34	36	35
Setting a good example for other countries around the world	40	35	32	31
Meeting the greenhouse gas reduction targets that Canada agreed to in international agreements like the Paris Agreement on Climate Change	40	41	31	26
Minimizing government interference in the free market economy	22	19	25	22
Ending our reliance on fossil fuels like oil and gas as quickly as possible	28	27	21	21

In developing a strategy to fight climate change, do you think that each of the following should be a high priority, a medium priority, a low priority or not a priority at all for Canada?



Which level of government is more trusted?

The policy response to climate change in Canada involves both the federal and provincial governments – sometimes working in collaboration, and sometimes mired in conflict. Which of these two governments do Canadians trust more to address climate change?

In 2026, responses are fairly divided, with about one in four choosing the federal government (27%), both their provincial (or territorial) government and federal government equally (27%), or neither government (25%). A much smaller proportion trusts their provincial government more (10%).

Opinions have not changed very much since the question was first asked in 2019, though the proportion trusting both levels of government equally has declined somewhat (34% to 27%); and the proportion trusting neither government has edged up slightly (from 19% to 25%).

This absence of change suggests that the change of prime minister in the spring of 2025 had only a modest effect on opinions on this question.¹ The overall proportion trusting the federal government more to address climate change increased only slightly, from 23 percent in 2024 to 27 percent today. But, while the change is small, it is in a positive direction – from the federal government’s perspective.

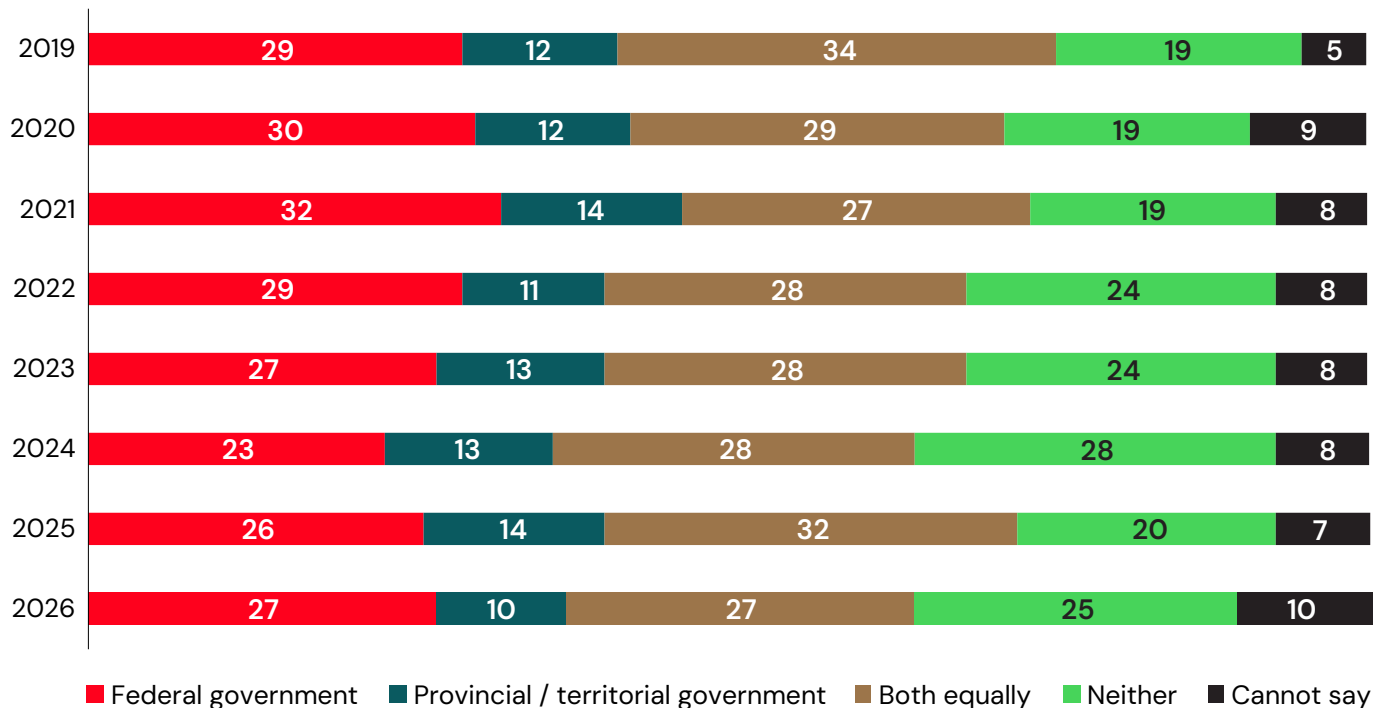
The change of prime minister in the spring of 2025 had only a modest effect on opinions on this question. But, while the change is small, it is in a positive direction – from the federal government’s perspective.

¹ While the annual survey is typically conducted in the early months of each calendar year, the 2025 survey was delayed until May, following the April federal election.

Figure 4

Which government do you trust more to address climate change?

2019 – 2026



*Which government do you trust more to make the right decisions in the following areas:
Addressing climate change?*

In 2026, Liberal Party supporters remain the most likely to trust the federal government more to address climate change (47% in 2026, compared to 38% in 2025), while a plurality of Conservative Party supporters trusts neither government (38% in 2026, compared to 31% in 2025). NDP Party supporters are the second most likely to trust the federal government more when addressing climate change, with 26 percent holding this view. Bloc Quebecois supporters are third most likely, with 18 percent; while Conservative and Green Party supporters are the least likely to trust the federal government more, with 15 percent in each case.

Conclusion

Overall, research shows that, while many Canadians continue to be concerned about climate change, public priorities overall have shifted over time. Across the five measures analyzed, opinions have moved toward an emphasis on job protection and economic development, as opposed to a more single-minded focus on addressing climate change. At the same time, regional differences have narrowed, with public opinion becoming more consistent across regions today compared to the early 2020s.

The bottom line is that Canadians, on average, are moving more toward balancing environmental goals with economic realities, rather than rejecting action on climate change altogether – suggesting perhaps that the prime minister’s own balancing act may, for the moment at least, be in sync with the public’s mood.

Across the five measures analyzed, opinions have moved toward an emphasis on job protection and economic development.





**Environics
Institute**
For Survey Research



*Confederation
of Tomorrow*