

canadians-increasingly-want-government-to-meet-climate-targets-even-if-it-means-higher-energy-prices-polls-suggest

## OPINION

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# Canadians increasingly want government to meet climate targets, even if it means higher energy prices, polls suggest

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By MONICA GATTINGER AND NIK NANOS (/AUTHOR/MONICA-GATTINGER-AND-NIK-NANOS) MARCH 23, 2022

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The worsening war in Ukraine and rapidly rising fuel costs may put peoples' climate ambition and acceptance of price increases to the test.



Climate change and energy are global issues all countries are dealing with. Canadians' perceptions of our credibility on the international stage can only be described as tepid, albeit improved compared to 2015, write Monica Gattinger and Nik Nanos. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia



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Canadians increasingly want government to meet climate targets, even if it means higher energy prices, polls suggest

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Faced with the fall out of a pandemic, concern about the rising cost of living, and emergence of the war in Ukraine, how are Canadians thinking about our climate and energy policies?

polls suggest a focus on energy and environment would take a back seat or even be stowed away in the public policy trunk these days. Usually there are only one or two major crises to occupy Canadians. Not so today.

The University of Ottawa's Positive Energy program has partnered with Nanos over the past number of years to monitor and track opinions on the intersection of environment and energy policies. The latest wave of tracking reveals some interesting trends.

Against the backdrop of the big issues dominating the mindset of Canadians today, our tracking over the past four years suggests that people are increasingly supportive of the nation meeting its climate commitments even if it means an increase in energy prices. Back in 2018, a little more than one in two agreed (25 per cent) or somewhat agreed (27 per cent) with this proposition. This has increased to more than six in 10 agreeing (34 per cent) or somewhat agreeing (29 per cent) since then.

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A closer look at the numbers suggests the intensity of support has noticeably increased: from 25 to 34 per cent who agreed. Regionally, Quebec has the highest and the Prairies the lowest level of agreement (75 per cent agreed/somewhat agreed compared to 44 per cent). Ideology is also a key dividing line, with self-identified left-leaning voters much more likely to embrace meeting targets even if energy prices increase (88 per cent agreed/somewhat agreed) compared to self-identified right leaning voters (38 per cent).

This might look like good news for those who want ambitious climate action, but support to meet long-term commitments in the face of rising energy prices is tempered by a short-term tentativeness.

In this latest round of tracking, climate ambition remains strong, but for the first time in five waves of tracking public opinion since 2020, it slid: from 64 per cent of Canadians saying last August that now is the best time to be ambitious in addressing climate change even if there are costs to the economy to 54 per cent saying that now. Although the general trend has been upwards since we first asked this question two years ago, it could be that people see things as being in a transitory state, still emerging from the pandemic. Add the worsening war in Ukraine and rapidly rising fuel costs, and peoples' climate ambition and acceptance of price increases may be put to the test.

Governments will also be tested. Climate change and energy are global issues all countries are dealing with. Canadians' perceptions of our credibility on the international stage can only be described as tepid, albeit improved compared to 2015. Back then, at the tail end of the Harper Conservative government, respondents were almost four times more likely to describe Canada's international credibility on climate policies as negative than as positive. The latest research shows the negativity has dropped to only 2.5 times that of positive views—an improvement, but still pretty dismal. A paltry three per cent of respondents describe our international credibility on climate policies as high while another 12 per cent as somewhat high. Factoring in the margin of error, these figures haven't budged since 2015. Fourteen per cent score Canada's credibility as low and another 22 per cent as somewhat low, compared to 46 and 18 per cent in 2015. The percentage of those saying our credibility is “average” is up from 21 per cent in 2015 to 45 per cent today.

Interestingly, both right- and left-leaning voters give Canada similar international credibility scores (16 and 14 per cent responding high/somewhat high, respectively). This suggests that even with the improvement, many Canadians think the country is more laggard than leader on managing the intersection of environment and energy.

Clearly, governments have work to do both at home and abroad. The good news is that Canadians remain committed to climate action, albeit tempered by the current context. They are also open to energy prices increasing in order to meet the country's climate commitments. This creates some space for governments at the intersection of energy and climate policies. But in the face of today's rapidly rising energy prices, just how much leeway remains to be seen.

What's more, if credibility on climate were a swimming pool, back in 2015 we were four feet underwater. In 2022 we are two feet under water—better, but still drowning.

All of this speaks to the need for more integrated energy and climate policymaking, something that governments have struggled with in Canada. Let's hope they can get themselves above water.

*Prof. Monica Gattinger leads the Positive Energy program at the University of Ottawa. Nik Nanos is the chief data scientist at Nanos Research and chair of the Positive Energy Advisory Council.*

*The Hill Times*

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(<https://www.hilltimes.com/2022/03/22/faced-with-deluge-of-misinformation-mps-senators-say-theyre-doing-what-they-can-to-fight-the-spread/351378>)'We have to be very careful when we read something,' says Conservative MP Gérard Deltell, noting he's been receiving misinformation for years. 'If your mother tells you she loves you, double check.'



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(https://www.hilltimes.com/2022/03/21/poilievre-and-brown-playing-with-dynamite-in-divisive-conservative-leadership-election-say-politicos/350678)The Conservative leadership election is a contest between the Mulroney and Harper visions of the party, says Ipsos CEO Darrell Bricker.

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(https://www.hilltimes.com/2022/03/21/increased-military-presence-in-the-north-could-provide-much-needed-infrastructure-to-the-region-mps-experts/350803)Northern MPs open to increased military presence in the Arctic to protect the region's sovereignty against Russia, but stress the importance of community consultation.

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(<https://www.hilltimes.com/2022/03/21/nav-canada-defends-actions-in-airspace-breach-as-humanitarian-flights-added-to-russian-ban/351322>) Between Feb. 27, when the airspace ban came into effect, and March 7, 55 flights were diverted around Canadian airspace at Nav Canada's request.

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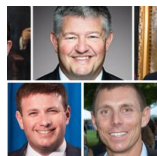
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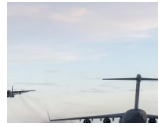
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