

'Climate action equals smaller energy bills' is the message every Canadian needs to hear

By [Trevor Melanson](#) & [David Coletto](#) | Opinion | August 31st 2022



Ontario Premier Doug Ford at the start of the Meeting of Canada's Premiers event in Toronto on Monday, Dec. 2, 2019. Ontarians say climate action has a short-term cost. Photo by Tijana Martin / Canada's National Observer

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There are perhaps no two forces more anxiety-inducing than the existential threat of climate change and the very personal threat of rising living costs.

But how do climate action and affordability overlap with each other?

This was an area of research we wished to better understand: the intersection of our greatest long-term threat and our most salient near-term one. Do people believe climate action would make life more affordable for them, or do they assume it would be yet another hefty bill atop a seemingly ever-growing stack?

While [research](#) shows climate action actually lowers energy bills, it was clear that people's perceptions might not align with reality — and that these perceptions could heavily impact the next few years of political discourse. Especially as the Conservative Party of Canada's leadership front-runner (whose fate will be confirmed on Sept. 10) sharpens his “[axe the carbon tax](#)” talking points.

Accordingly, [Clean Energy Canada](#) and [Abacus Data](#) conducted a series of Ontario-based surveys and focus groups this summer, given the political importance of Canada's biggest swing province along with our desire to understand how recent regional EV investments were resonating with residents. What we found was that while almost everyone we surveyed saw climate action as broadly beneficial, many felt climate efforts were likely to cost them more over the short term — even if such efforts might save them money in the long run.

While participants strongly supported climate action regardless of this cost, it was clear that if our current climate efforts had an Achilles heel, a belief that it might cost people more in the short term was it – regardless of whether that was true.

It would be hard to overstate just how critical affordability concerns are right now to people. Last year, [90 per cent of Canadians](#) ranked a pocketbook issue as a top concern likely to impact their vote in the 2021 election, while [a deeper analysis](#) revealed economic anxiety cuts across the political spectrum.

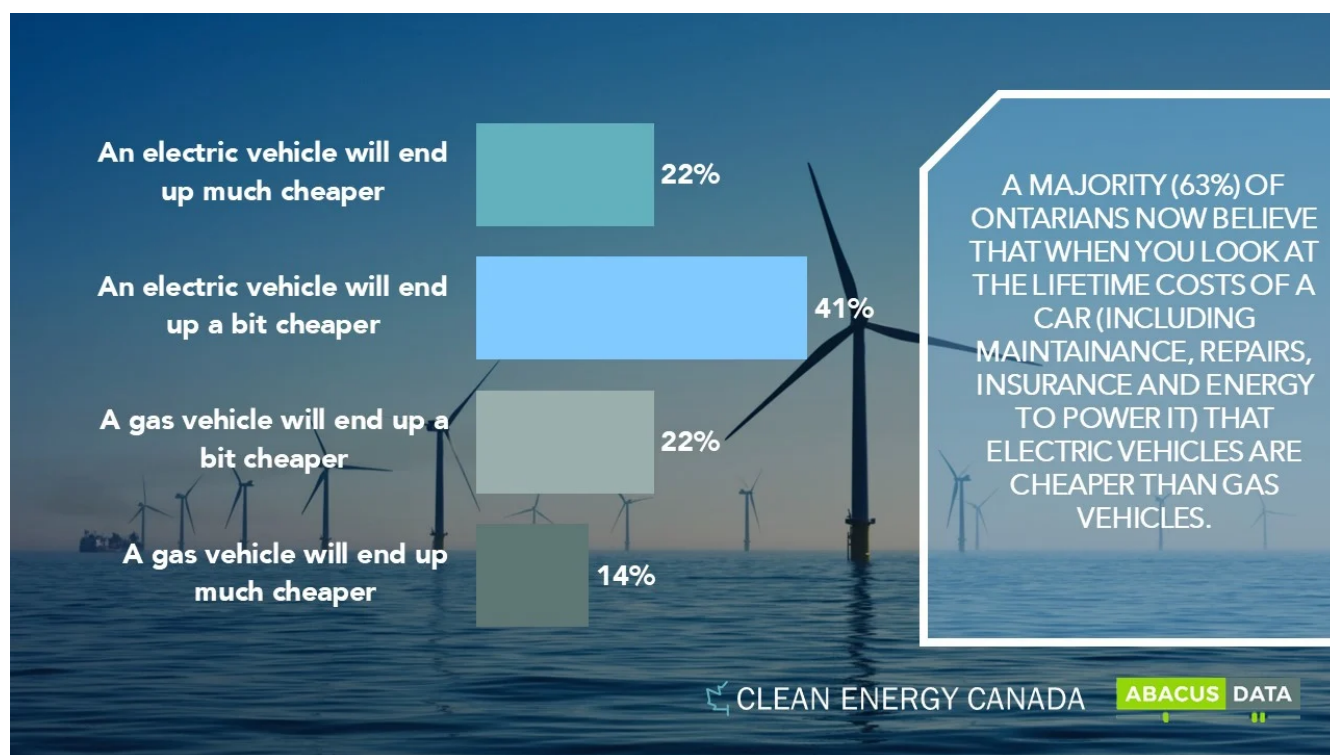
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That said, a number of arguments did resonate strongly with those we engaged in this research, encouraging them to see climate action as beneficial to their cost of living.

Electric vehicles were widely understood as cheaper to fuel than gas cars, and participants viewed EV rebates (federal and provincial) along with government investments in charging infrastructure as effective ways to improve affordability.



Modelling from the Canadian Climate Institute found Canadians will spend a smaller percentage of their incomes on energy en route to net-zero.

This was consistent with a poll of 1,500 Ontarians we did in May, which found 63 per cent of Ontarians believe EVs are cheaper than gas cars when one considers the full cost of ownership, like fuel and maintenance.

They're not wrong. Clean Energy Canada analyzed a number of popular electric and gas car models earlier this year and compared ownership costs over eight years. With just one exception, the electric version of every car looked at was cheaper – usually significantly so.

Another highly persuasive argument for participants was around energy security. While oil and gas prices are driven by factors outside our control — geopolitics and the manoeuvring of countries like Russia and Saudi Arabia — clean electricity is produced and priced in Canada.

These arguments were not only effective but **grounded in reality**.

Here in Canada, for example, provinces such as Quebec, Manitoba and BC with the cleanest electricity grids tend to have the **lowest electricity costs** in the country, while provinces such as Saskatchewan and Alberta highly dependent on fossil fuels charge ratepayers the most.

Meanwhile, the International Energy Agency **expects** average household energy bills in advanced economies to decline between 2020 and 2050 — with even steeper declines if governments achieve their net-zero ambitions by 2050.

Modelling from the Canadian Climate Institute similarly found that Canadians will spend a smaller percentage of their incomes on energy en route to net-zero.

These trends aren't hard to explain: even if you're spending more on electricity, a lack of fossil-fuel costs and improvements in energy efficiency add up to net savings.

Still, other climate action benefits were more obvious to people, from cleaner air to improved economic prosperity.

Nearly everyone we spoke to knew EV manufacturing was a major economic opportunity for Ontario. This wasn't particularly surprising, considering Ford, General Motors and Stellantis have all made [recent investments](#) to manufacture EVs or EV batteries in the province — with plenty of political photo-ops, to boot.

But while Canadians now generally understand the link between economic growth and climate action, climate-ambitious governments would be wise to better communicate the cost-of-living benefits of their climate efforts while, at the same time, ensuring greater access to these long-term cost-saving solutions today.

And that includes Ontario Premier Doug Ford. The province has made big investments to manufacture EVs, while Ford now has his eye on a [100 per cent clean electricity grid](#). The premier has always expressed concern over Ontarians' cost of living. He now has a critical opportunity to merge his oldest message with his government's new, more climate-friendly vision.

In our current inflation crisis, it's more important than ever that Canadians see a light at the end of the tunnel — and that climate action will take them there.

Those who paint climate action as an expensive luxury are out of step with reality, and yet, there remains a real gap between evidence and perception.

The climate reason is clear. The economic argument is strong. With a compelling cost-of-living case on its side, climate action will be that much more durable in the face of politicians who still wish to “axe the carbon tax.”

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this is a fluff piece by clearly uninformed or deliberately biased journalists. DOIG FORD HAS HIS EYE ON ONE HUNDRED PERCENT CLEAN ENERGY. really? he cancelled all green projects and bought three gas plants that will use fracked LNG.

He plans to run new gas lines to places rather than hydro transmission, no rebates on anything green , killed improved insulation and construction code changes. anything here look remotely like Renewable future focussed to you?

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