

Climate Change: Canadians optimistic about first ministers' meeting, pessimistic about Paris talks

Two-thirds of Canadians back emissions reduction commitment as COP21 meeting looms

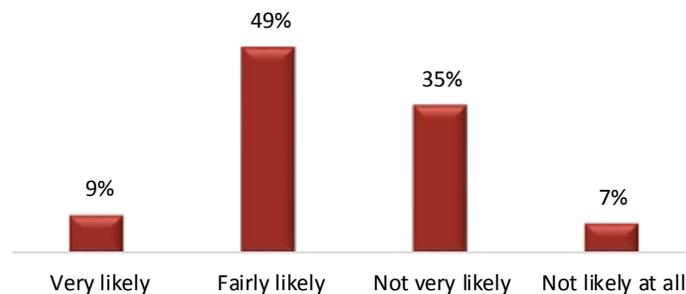
November 23, 2015 – With climate change talks on the agenda at the first meeting since 2009 between the Prime Minister, premiers and territorial leaders, Canadians are mildly optimistic their leaders will get on the same page heading into COP21 talks in Paris, but doubtful anything concrete will happen once there.

This according to a new public opinion poll by the Angus Reid Institute, which also finds respondents supportive of their country stepping up efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, even if it means higher individual energy costs.

Key Findings:

- Nearly two-in-three Canadians (63%) say they would support their country signing an agreement to reduce emissions even if it meant a ten per cent increase in their annual household energy costs
- Seven-in-ten (69%) support Canada signing such an agreement even if major polluters like China and India do not.
- The majority (57%) see Monday's first ministers' meeting as likely to yield an overall agreement on how emissions reduction targets should work in Canada, but also say (59%) they're not confident the COP21 talks will achieve broad international agreement

How likely do you think it is that this meeting will see the PM and the Premiers reach an agreement on how emissions reduction targets should work in Canada?



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from November 16 - 18 among a representative randomized sample of 1508 Canadian adults who are members of the [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

MEDIA CONTACT:

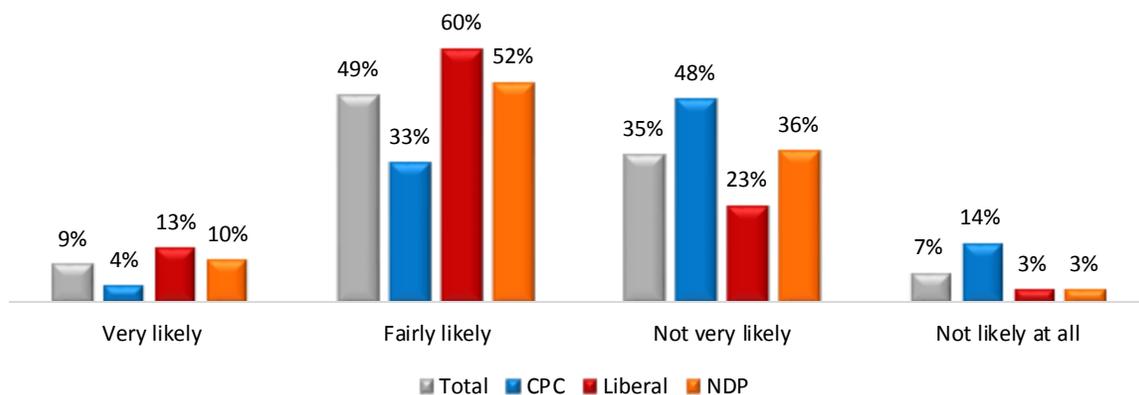
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Optimism for first ministers meeting; support for carbon pricing

As mentioned above, more than half of Canadians (57%) are confident in the abilities of federal, provincial and territorial leaders to come to an agreement on how emissions reduction targets should work in Canada. That said, it should be noted less than ten per cent see this outcome as “very likely”.

Responses are particularly likely to follow political lines, with Conservative voters much less likely to anticipate agreement at the first ministers meeting than Liberals and New Democrats, as seen in the following graph:

How likely do you think it is that this meeting will see the PM and the Premiers reach an agreement on how emissions reduction targets should work in Canada?



One of the key purposes of Monday’s meeting is to discuss approaches to “carbon pricing” – the financial disincentive to emitting greenhouse gasses. Generally, this means either implementing:

- A “carbon tax” on everyone who buys fossil fuels (as British Columbia did in 2008)
- A “cap and trade” system that sets a limit on greenhouse gas emissions and then sells the rights to emit those gasses to corporations, who in turn reduce their emissions in order to avoid having to buy more permits (Quebec adopted such a system in 2013, and Ontario is soon to follow suit).

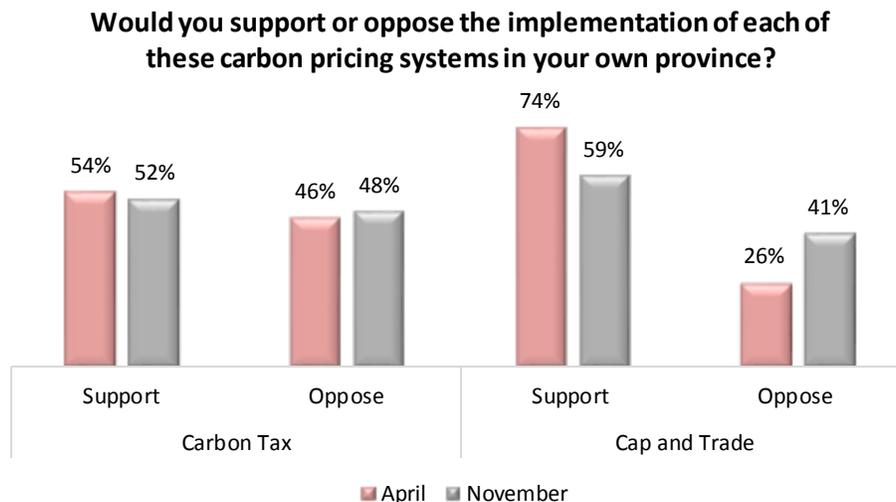
As the Angus Reid Institute found [in April](#), majorities of Canadians support both carbon tax and cap and trade systems at the provincial level, though they’re more enthusiastic about the latter: 59 per cent support for cap and trade in their own province versus 52 per cent for carbon taxation.

Support for cap and trade is highest in Atlantic Canada (70%) and Quebec (63%), and lowest in Alberta (45%). British Columbia is the only province in which support for a carbon tax is higher than support for a cap and trade system (62% carbon tax; 59% cap and trade).

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Though the question was asked slightly differently this time than it was in April, it's worth noting that the support for provincial cap and trade has visibly decreased:



When ARI asked about carbon pricing options in April, we found majorities of Canadians supporting both “carbon tax” and “cap and trade” systems for their own provinces, though opinion toward cap and trade was much more favourable. Regionally, support ranged from a low of 68 per cent in Ontario to a high of 83 per cent in Quebec, where such a system is already in place.

What are Canadians prepared to do?

Whether an international agreement on reducing greenhouse gas emissions like the 1997 [Kyoto Protocol](#) comes out of the Paris talks remains to be seen, but most Canadians say they would favour their country signing one, even under less-than-ideal circumstances.

Rather than asking about a hypothetical agreement in the abstract, the Angus Reid Institute asked respondents to say whether they’d support Canada signing an emissions reduction agreement under certain specific circumstances, namely if it meant higher energy costs or developing economies with high emissions – such as China or India – did not sign.

In each situation, roughly two-thirds of Canadians support joining such an agreement:

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Would you support or oppose Canada signing an international agreement to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions even if:



As might be expected, the groups that see climate change as a “very serious” threat (noted later in this report) are among the groups that are most likely to support Canada signing an international agreement resulting from the Paris meetings.

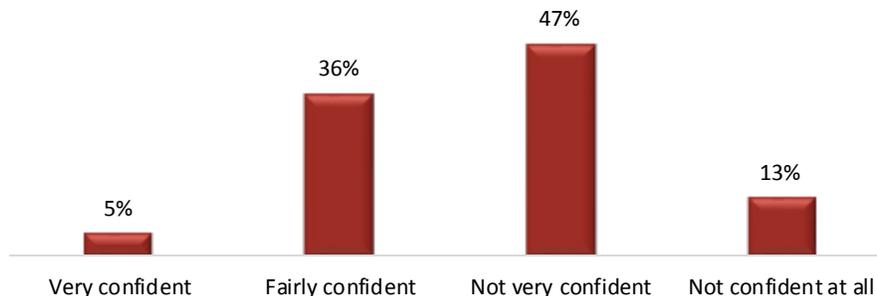
Other segments of the population that are more likely to support Canada committing to reduced emissions under both scenarios outlined above include:

- British Columbians, Atlantic Canadians, Quebecers
- Respondents under age 35 or over age 55
- Those with a university education
- Liberal and NDP supporters

But will the Paris talks be successful?

In spite of their general willingness to sign onto a global pact on climate change, Canadians are fairly skeptical that the COP21 talks in Paris at the end of this month will actually result in a deal:

How confident are you that COP21 will achieve international agreement on reducing greenhouse gas emissions?



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As noted in the preceding graph, three-in-five Canadians (59%) say they're either "not very confident" (47%) or "not confident at all" (13%) that Paris result in a deal an agreement.

One Canadian who has expressed this pessimistic view is Canada's own Foreign Affairs Minister Stephane Dion, who [said last week](#) it's "very unlikely" that the Paris talks will end with a deal aggressive enough to prevent global temperatures from rising by more than two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

Dion, who chaired the COP11 talks in Montreal when he was environment minister in 2005, said he still sees value in the meetings, because the agreements that are reached are better than having no international accord on carbon emissions.

How much of a threat is climate change?

Given that debate continues on this very question, the Angus Reid Institute put it to Canadians. Most see climate change as either "a very serious threat to the planet" (35%) or "a serious threat" (34%). Another one-in-five (18%) see it as "a more minor threat," while fewer than one-in-ten (9%) say it's "not really a threat at all."

Fully half (50%) of British Columbians choose the most extreme "very serious threat" option, as do large numbers of younger Canadians (44% of those aged 18 – 34), those with university educations (46%), and those who voted for the LPC or NDP in 2015 (46% and 50%, respectively).

Conversely, fewer than one-quarter of Albertans (22%) and just 12 per cent of CPC voters see climate change as "a very serious threat to the planet."

For additional detail on this and the other questions asked in this survey, [see the comprehensive data tables available at angusreid.org](#).

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research organization established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

Comprehensive tables including results by age, gender, income, education, and 2015 vote can be found [by clicking here](#).