

## Canadians charged up about electric vehicle incentives, but price point still causes buyers to lose the spark

*More than half say governments should do more to incentivize the public to purchase electric vehicles*

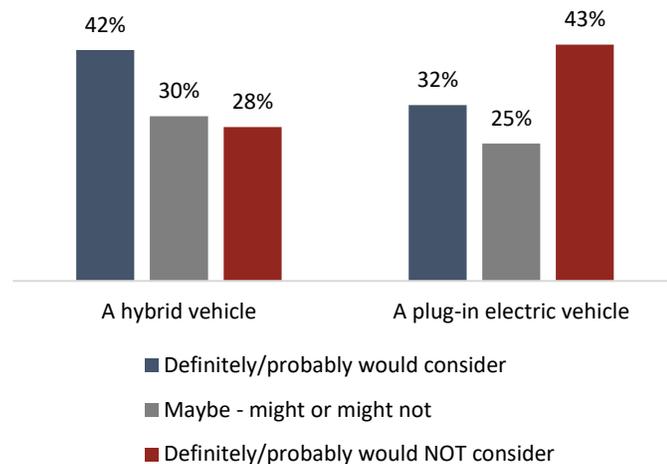
**September 20, 2018** – As the Ontario provincial government [winds down](#) its rebate program for residents purchasing electric vehicles, a new public opinion poll from the Angus Reid Institute finds relatively few Canadians taking advantage of such programs.

More than nine-in-ten Canadians (91%) have never owned an electric vehicle, whether plug-in or hybrid. Indeed, nearly eight-in-ten (79%) have never even driven such a vehicle.

After more than half a decade of purchase incentives in the country's three most-populous provinces, Canadians continue to harbour significant reservations about the affordability and ease of charging plug-in electric vehicles. Indeed, it is those who have made the switch to either a hybrid or fully electric vehicle who are among the most likely to voice these concerns.

The price factor is particularly salient. Roughly six-in-ten Canadians (59%) say price is one of their two most important considerations when buying a new car.

Suppose you were in the market for a new car. If that were the case, how likely would you be to consider ...



### **METHODOLOGY:**

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from August 14 – 17, 2018 among a representative randomized sample of 1,500 Canadian adults who are members of [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.

### **More Key Findings:**

- Just over half of Canadians (56%) say governments should do more to get people to buy electric cars, rather than leaving the price and popularity of such vehicles completely to the free market
- More Canadians would either “definitely” or “probably” consider a hybrid if they were in the market for a new vehicle than say they would definitely or probably *not* consider one (42% versus 28%). This ratio is roughly reversed for plug-ins (43% would not consider; 32% would)
- Three-quarters of Canadians (75%) agree with the statement “I’m less inclined to buy an electric vehicle because they’re too expensive,” and more than six-in-ten (62%) say they would be “more likely to buy a plug-in electric vehicle if there were more public charging stations”

### **CONTACT:**

Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 [shachi.kurl@angusreid.org](mailto:shachi.kurl@angusreid.org) @shachikurl  
Ian Holliday, Research Associate: 604.442.3312 [ian.holliday@angusreid.org](mailto:ian.holliday@angusreid.org)

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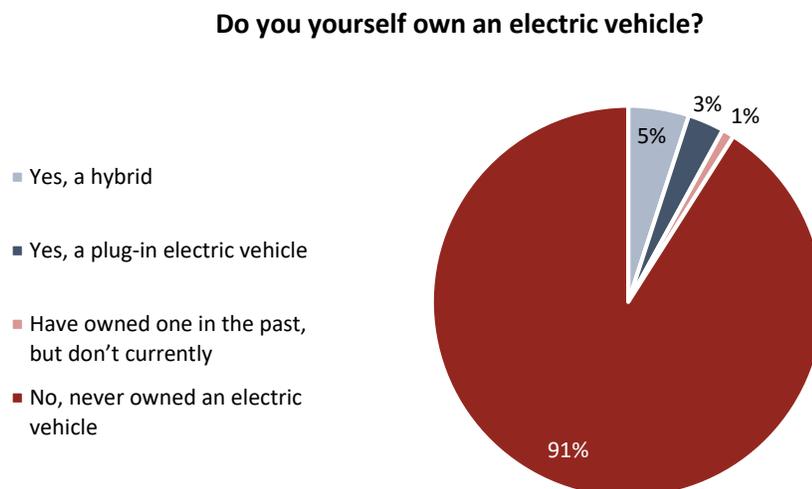
- Plug-ins seen as too expensive, too difficult to charge
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**Part 1: Interest in electric vehicles**

**Most have never driven an electric vehicle**

All over the world, the sale of electric vehicles has grown substantially in recent years. In Canada, first-quarter sales of plug-in electric vehicles grew by 114 per cent compared to the first quarter of 2017, [according to the industry tracking site EVVolumes.com](#).

Overall, electric vehicles still make up [a tiny fraction](#) of both the global and Canadian markets, however. More than nine-in-ten Canadians (91%) have never owned an electric vehicle, whether plug-in or hybrid. Among those few who currently own one, the latter category is more common than the former (5% own hybrids; 3% plug-ins):



These numbers are roughly in line with available data on the sale of plug-in electric vehicles. Such vehicles made up [1.5 per cent](#) of all cars sold in Canada in the first quarter of this year, an all-time high. Extrapolating from these volumes, the finding that 3 per cent of all Canadians have ever owned a plug-in car appears reasonable, as does the finding that 9 per cent have ever owned either a plug-in vehicle or a traditional (non-plug-in) hybrid, such as a Toyota Prius.

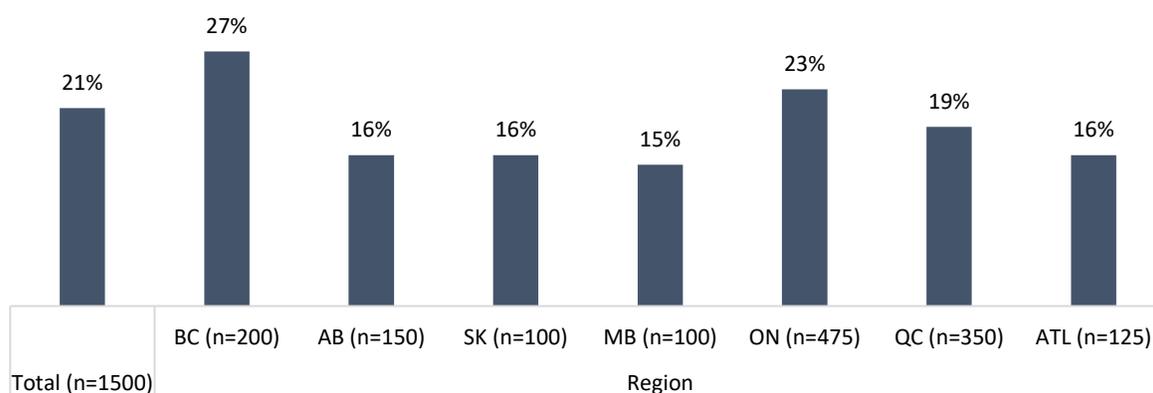
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 Ian Holliday, Research Associate: 604.442.3312 [ian.holliday@angusreid.org](mailto:ian.holliday@angusreid.org)

Beyond the small proportion who have owned such vehicles, nearly eight-in-ten Canadians (79%) say they have also never taken an electric vehicle for a test drive. This means that the 21 per cent of Canadians *have* driven either a plug-in or a traditional hybrid vehicle at some point in their lives.

This percentage is highest in British Columbia, where 27 per cent have ever driven an electric vehicle. Ontario comes in second, with slightly fewer than one-in-four (23%) having experience driving an electric vehicle. Note that the three provinces with the highest percentage of people who have driven an electric vehicle are the three whose governments have – at least in the past – offered incentives to people who purchase them:

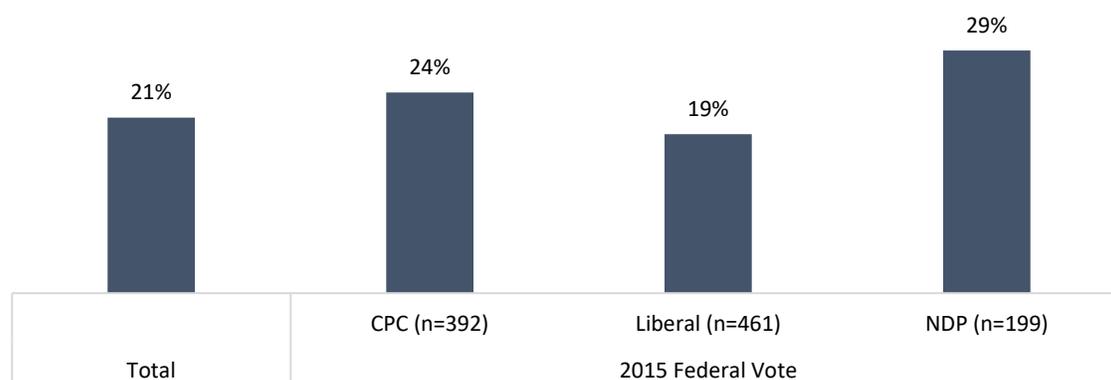
**Percentage who have driven an electric vehicle (either hybrid or plug-in)**



Age, income and education are also correlated with whether or not Canadians have driven an electric vehicle, but – perhaps surprisingly – political partisanship is not.

Past supporters of each of the three main federal parties – despite significant differences on issues relating to climate change and resource extraction – are all similarly likely to have driven an electric vehicle in their lives. Those who voted for the Liberal Party in 2015 are the least likely to have driven one (19% have), while one-quarter (24%) of those who voted for the Conservative Party and three-in-ten who voted for the New Democratic Party (29%) have done so:

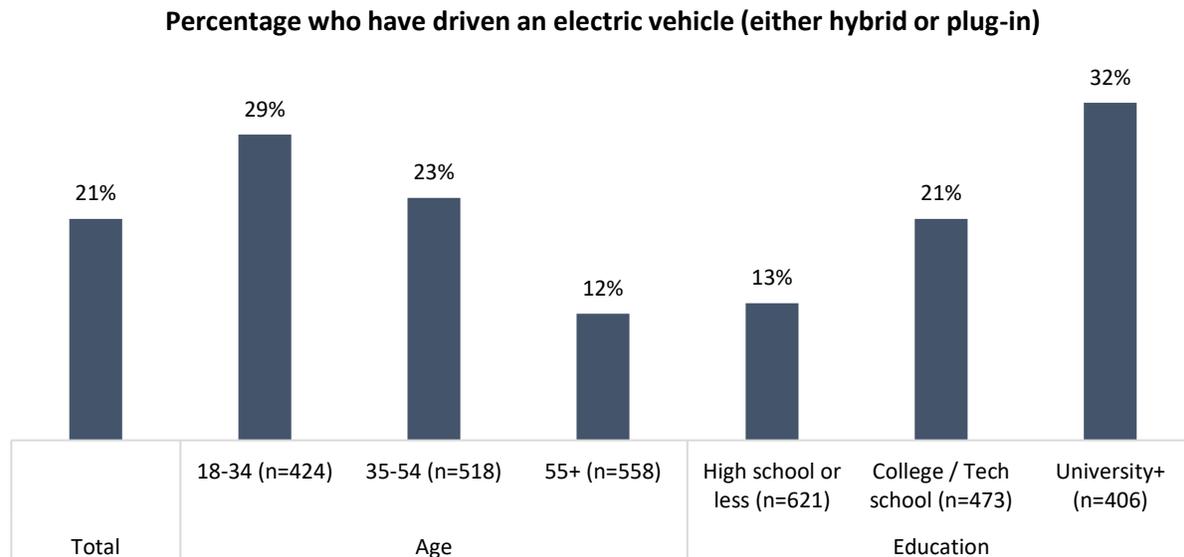
**Percentage who have driven an electric vehicle (either hybrid or plug-in)**



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 Ian Holliday, Research Associate: 604.442.3312 [ian.holliday@angusreid.org](mailto:ian.holliday@angusreid.org)

The gap between age groups is larger. Nearly three-in-ten Canadians under age 35 (29%) have driven either a plug-in or a hybrid car in their lives, compared to just 12 per cent of those ages 55 and older. Education produces a similar divide, with almost one-third of those who have attended university (32%) saying they have driven an electric vehicle, while those with lower levels of formal education are considerably less likely to have done so, as seen in the following graph:



Those with higher household incomes are also more likely to have driven an electric vehicle in their lives, a fact likely attributable to the higher upfront cost of purchasing a plug-in electric or even a hybrid car, rather than one that runs solely on gasoline ([see comprehensive tables for greater detail](#)).

### Price is the most important factor

While electric vehicles are [cheaper to run over the long term](#) than those that run on gasoline, they tend to cost thousands more to buy. And price is far and away the most important consideration for Canadians when purchasing a new car.

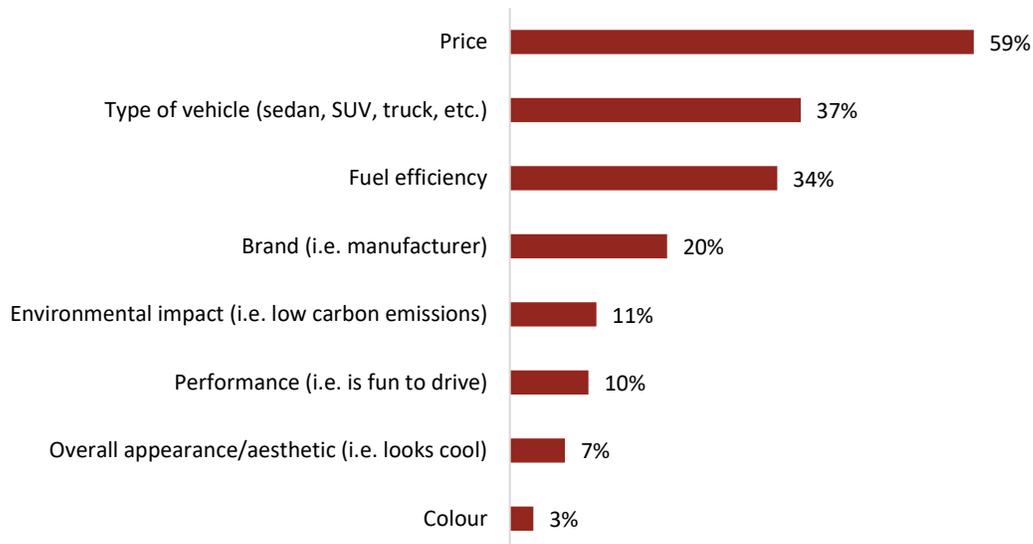
Asked to name the two most important factors they would consider if they were looking to buy a car, nearly six-in-ten Canadians (59%) say price would be at the top of the list. No other consideration registers this high with more than four-in-ten Canadians, as seen in the following graph:

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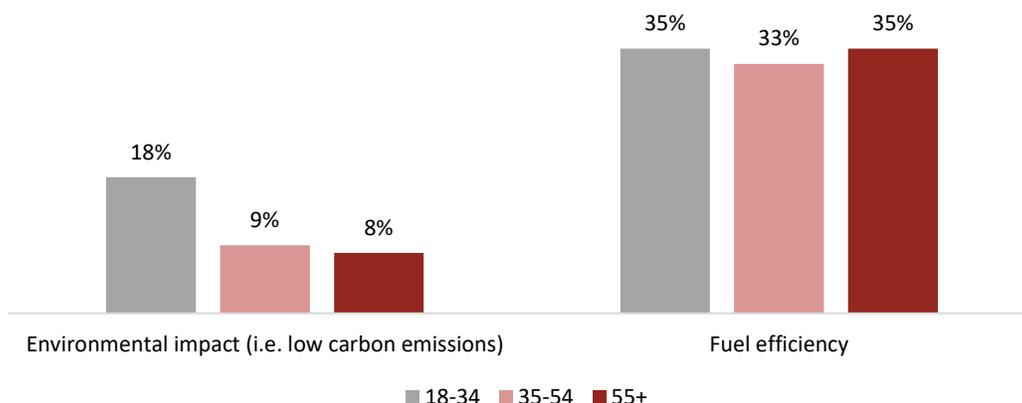
**Most important things Canadians look for when purchasing a new car  
(choose up to two)**



Explicitly environmental concerns are a top consideration for roughly one-in-ten Canadians (11%), though it's worth noting that one-in-three (34%) say "fuel efficiency" – a factor that relates to both price and carbon emissions – is of high importance to them when buying a new car.

Younger Canadians (those ages 18-34) are more likely to say mention environmental impact, while respondents of all ages are roughly equally likely to choose fuel efficiency:

**Percentage saying each is among the two "most important" considerations when buying a new car:**



The barrier that up-front costs pose to Canadians buying electric vehicles can also be seen in responses to a question directly about such costs. Fully three-in-four Canadians (75%) agree with the statement “I’m less inclined to buy an electric vehicle because they’re too expensive.”

## **Part 2: Perceptions of electric vehicles**

### **Plug-ins seen as too expensive, too difficult to charge**

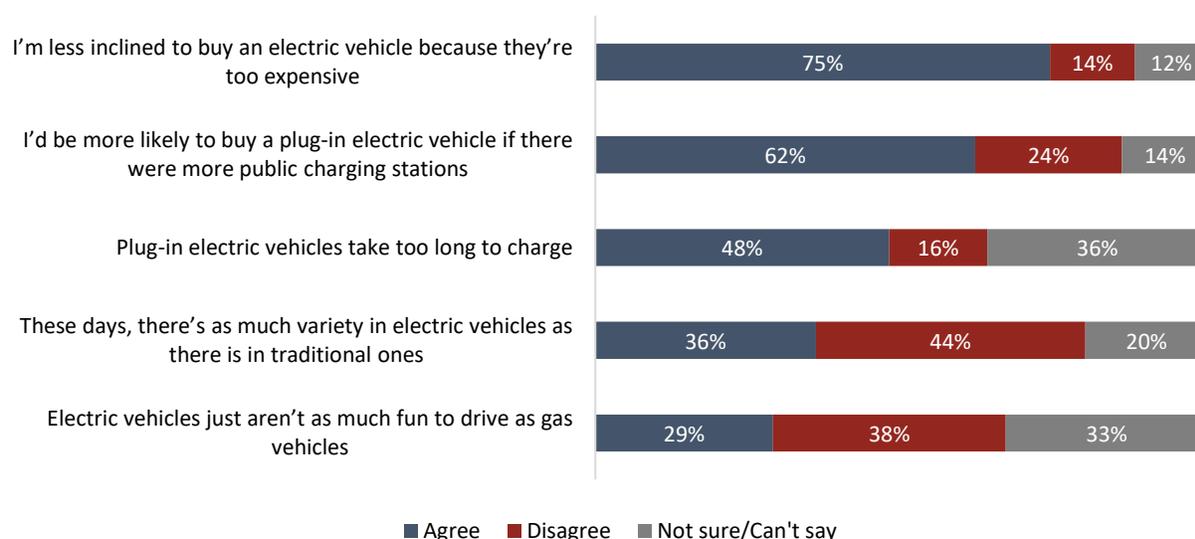
While initial purchase price appears to be the biggest factor holding Canadians back from more fully embracing electric cars, it’s not the only factor.

Canadians also express considerable trepidation about the availability of charging stations for plug-in electric vehicles, with more than six-in-ten (62%) agreeing that they would “be more likely to buy a plug-in electric vehicle if there were more public charging stations.”

Nearly half (48%) also agree that plug-in electric vehicles take too long to charge, and more *disagree* than agree that “there’s as much variety in electric vehicles as there is in traditional ones” today.

As might be expected, given the large number of Canadians who have no personal experience with electric vehicles, significant portions of the population are unsure how to respond to each of these statements:

#### **Do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?**



These concerns echo those [identified in a poll](#) commissioned by the United Kingdom’s Automotive Association. The AA [described these concerns](#) as “myths,” arguing that there is a wide variety of electric vehicles available, that charging stations are becoming much more common, and that charging times can be shortened by choosing to only partially charge the vehicle.

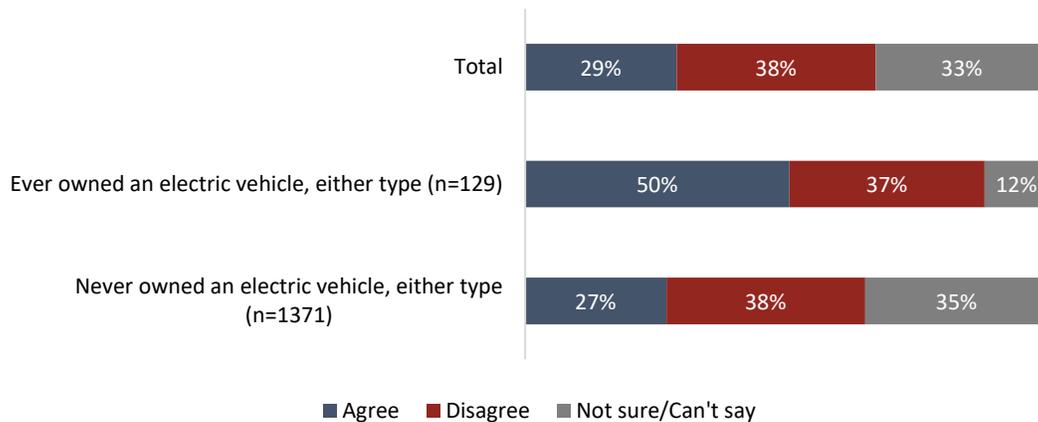
Myths or not, these perspectives on electric cars are widely held in Canada, including – especially – by those who have the most experience with such vehicles.

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Consider, for example, the final statement on the list: “Electric vehicles just aren’t as much fun to drive as gas vehicles.” Among the general population, more people disagree with this statement than agree with it. Among those who have owned such a vehicle, however, fully half (50%) *agree*.

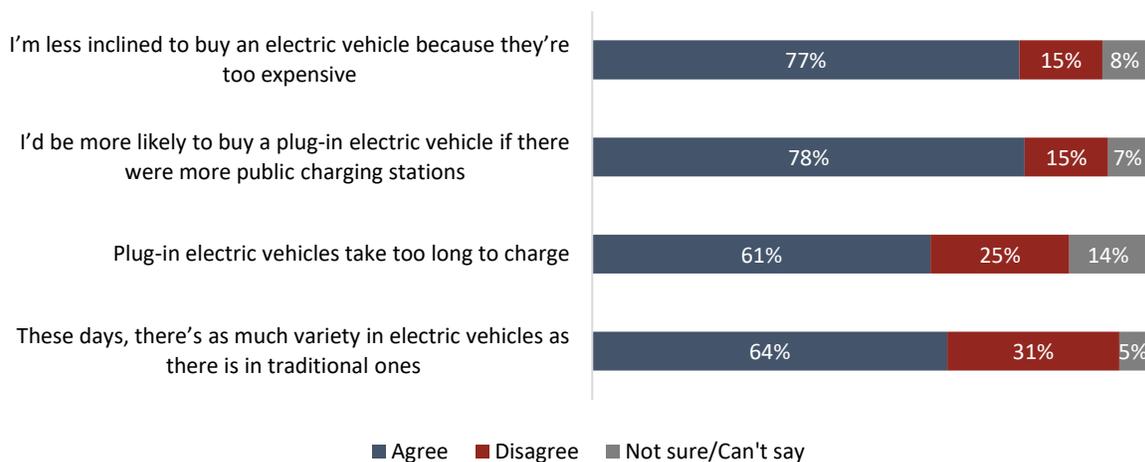
**"Electric vehicles just aren't as much fun to drive as gas vehicles"**



This pattern can be seen in responses to other statements as well. Canadians who have owned electric vehicles are more likely than those who have never owned them to agree with criticisms about the availability of charging stations, the time it takes to charge, and the cost of purchasing.

The only critique of electric vehicles that current or past owners are *not* generally onside with is the notion that there is a lack of variety among electric vehicle offerings. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of those who have owned either a hybrid or a plug-in electric vehicle in their lives agree with the statement, “These days, there is as much variety in electric vehicles as there is in traditional ones.”

**Do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?  
(Responses from those who have owned an electric vehicle, n=129)**



### More willing to consider hybrids than plug-ins

The importance of price may be reflected in Canadians' willingness to consider an electric vehicle if they were in the market for a new car today.

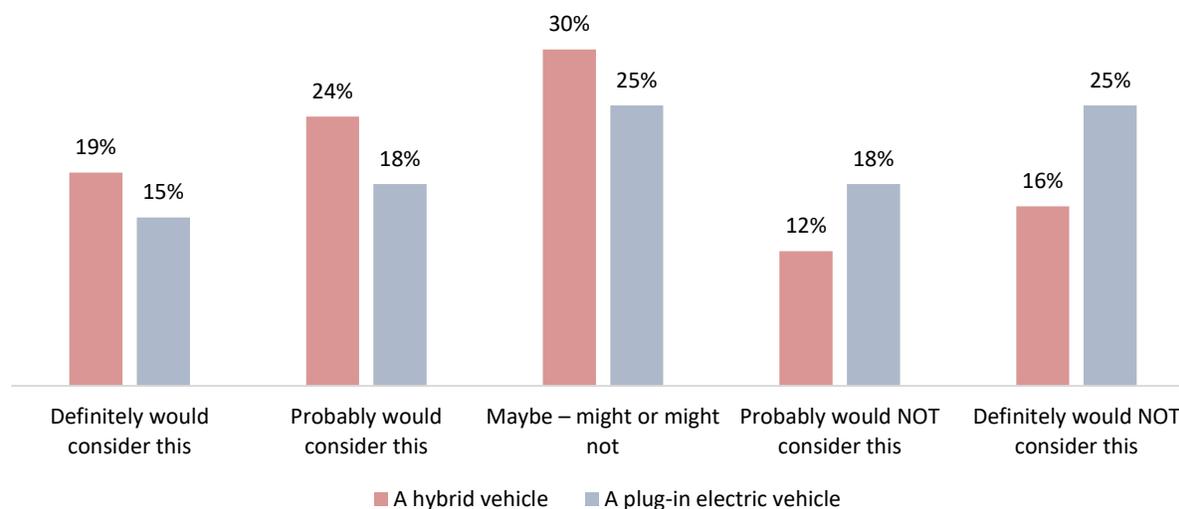
More people are willing to entertain the possibility of buying a traditional hybrid – that is, one that runs on both battery and gasoline, and does not need to be plugged in, such as a Toyota Prius – than to consider buying a vehicle with an electrical charging port (such vehicles are known as plug-in hybrids if they have a gas tank and battery electric vehicles if they do not).

In general, new plug-in electric vehicles are more expensive to buy than new hybrid vehicles, which are, in turn, more expensive than new gasoline-only vehicles.

Some four-in-ten (42%) say they would either “definitely consider” or “probably consider” a hybrid vehicle if they were looking for a new car. Fewer than three-in-ten would either “definitely not” or “probably not” consider such a vehicle.

For plug-ins, this ratio is reversed, with four-in-ten (43%) in the “not consider” camp and three-in-ten (32%) willing to consider them, as seen in the graph that follows.

**Suppose you were in the market to buy a new car. If that were the case, how likely do you think you would be to consider ...**



Notably, enthusiasm for both hybrid and plug-in electric vehicles is highest in British Columbia, where a full majority of respondents (57%) say they would consider a hybrid if they were in the market for a new car. No other region sees more than 42 per cent of its residents expressing a willingness to buy a hybrid, and B.C. is also the only province in which those who would consider a plug-in outnumber those who would not, as seen in the following table:

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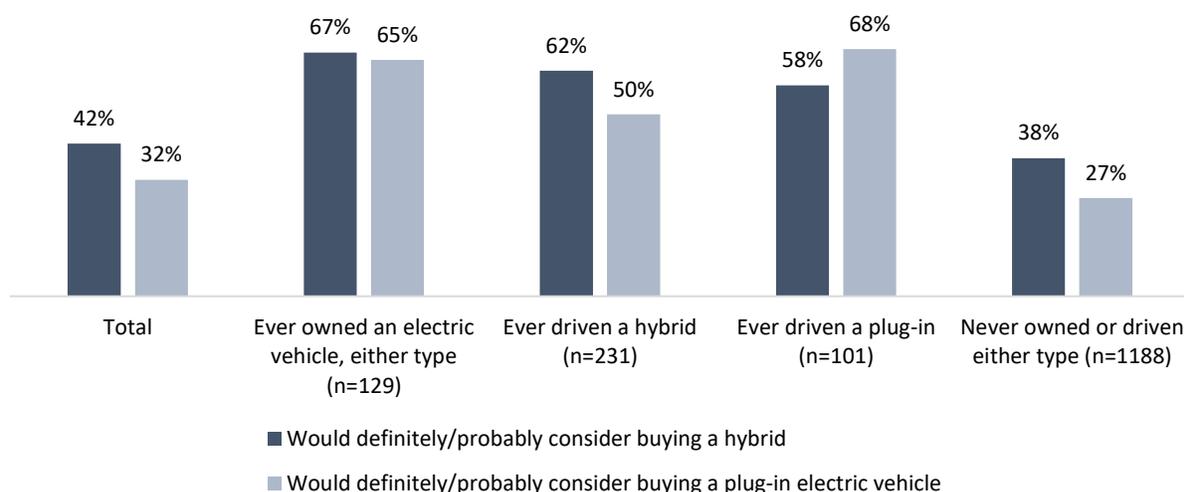
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**Suppose you were in the market to buy a new car. If that were the case, how likely do you think you would be to consider ...**

(unweighted sample sizes)	Total (1500)	Region						
		BC (200)	AB (150)	SK (100)	MB (100)	ON (475)	QC (350)	ATL (125)
<b>A hybrid vehicle</b>								
Definitely/probably would consider	42%	57%	35%	33%	37%	41%	42%	41%
Maybe – might or might not	30%	26%	33%	29%	30%	30%	31%	32%
Definitely/probably would NOT consider	28%	17%	32%	38%	33%	30%	27%	27%
<b>A plug-in electric vehicle</b>								
Definitely/probably would consider	32%	42%	23%	20%	26%	32%	37%	26%
Maybe – might or might not	25%	21%	25%	19%	23%	25%	26%	27%
Definitely/probably would NOT consider	43%	36%	52%	61%	51%	43%	37%	46%

Perhaps unsurprisingly, those with more experience with electric vehicles are more likely to consider buying one in the future. Roughly two-thirds of those who have owned either a hybrid or a plug-in in the past say they would definitely or probably consider such a vehicle if they were looking for one today, and similarly large numbers of those with experience driving either type of vehicle would consider buying one, as seen in the following graph:

**Suppose you were in the market to buy a new car. If that were the case, how likely do you think you would be to consider ...**



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## Greater government incentives needed?

Many jurisdictions [around the world](#) offer rebates and other incentives aimed at getting more people to switch to electric vehicles. In Canada, the governments of [British Columbia](#) and [Quebec](#) – and, [until recently](#), Ontario – have offered thousands of dollars off the purchase price of electric vehicles, as well as additional monetary incentives aimed at improving the availability of public charging stations.

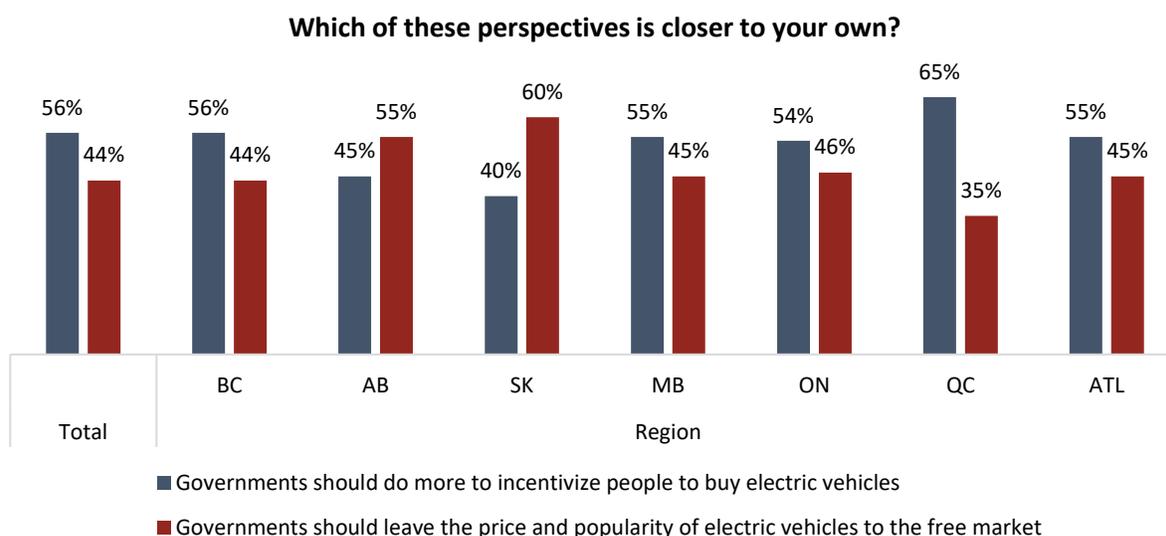
Such policies exist to attempt to address the concerns that keep people from buying plug-in electric vehicles, with the underlying assumption that greater adoption of such vehicles – and the reduction in fossil fuel consumption such adoption would entail – is a worthwhile investment of public funds.

In Ontario, Premier Doug Ford's government has taken a different approach, cancelling the province's existing incentive program – and its participation in a cap-and-trade carbon pricing system set up by Quebec and California.

For their part, Canadians are rather divided on the need for electric vehicle incentives. A small majority (56%) say "governments should do more to incentivize people to buy electric vehicles," rather than "governments should leave the price and popularity of electric vehicles to the free market" (44%).

The "governments should do more" perspective is most widely held in Quebec, where 65 per cent choose this option. Majorities in Ontario and B.C. also take this side, as do two other regions – Atlantic Canada and Manitoba – where there are no provincial government incentives for electric vehicle purchases.

Residents of Alberta and Saskatchewan, meanwhile, are more inclined to choose the free market side of this face-off:

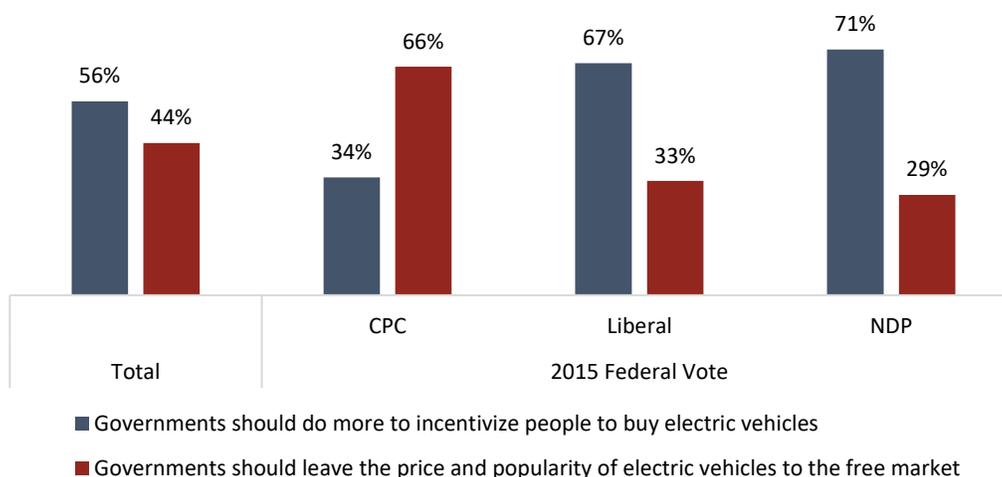


This regional divergence is likely influenced, in part, by the dominance of the Conservative Party of Canada in Alberta and Saskatchewan. Those who cast ballots for the CPC in 2015 choose the free-market response to this question by a two-to-one margin (66% to 34%), while those who voted for the Liberal or New Democratic parties lean just as heavily the other way, as seen in the following graph:

## CONTACT:

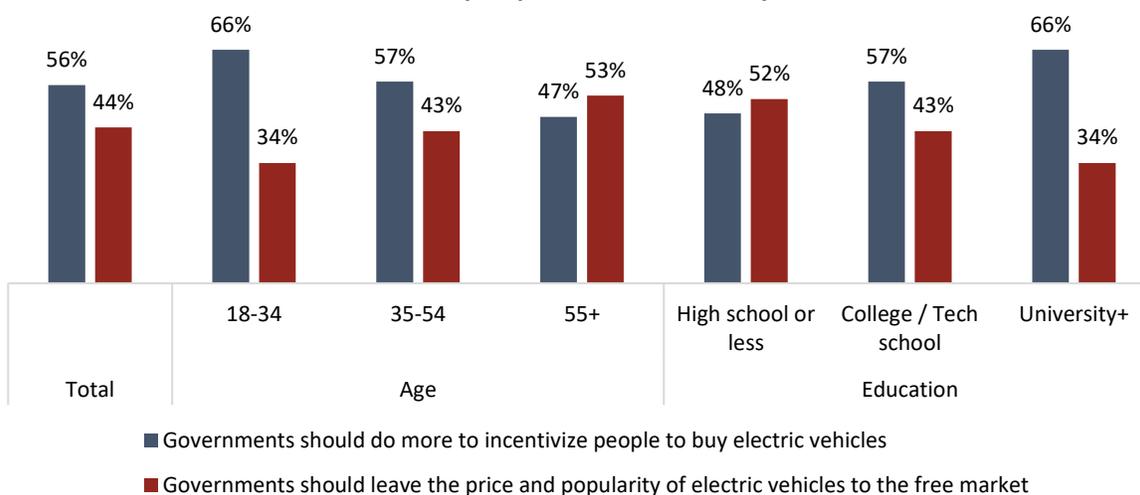
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**Which of these perspectives is closer to your own?**



The public is also divided along age and education lines on this question, with younger respondents and those who attended university more likely to favour government incentives, while older respondents and those with lower levels of formal education are less so:

**Which of these perspectives is closer to your own?**



*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 foundation 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.*

Summary tables follow. For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

<b>Suppose you were in the market to buy a new car. If that were the case, how likely do you think you would be to consider a hybrid vehicle?</b>					
(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1500)	Experience with electric vehicles			
		Ever owned one – hybrid or plug-in (129)	Ever driven a hybrid (231)	Ever driven a plug-in (101)	Never owned or driven either type (1188)
Definitely would consider this	19%	32%	35%	26%	15%
Probably would consider this	24%	35%	27%	32%	22%
Maybe – might or might not	30%	18%	19%	19%	32%
Probably would NOT consider this	12%	6%	10%	11%	12%
Definitely would NOT consider this	16%	9%	9%	13%	17%

<b>Suppose you were in the market to buy a new car. If that were the case, how likely do you think you would be to consider a plug-in electric vehicle?</b>					
(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1500)	Experience with electric vehicles			
		Ever owned one – hybrid or plug-in (129)	Ever driven a hybrid (231)	Ever driven a plug-in (101)	Never owned or driven either type (1188)
Definitely would consider this	15%	32%	27%	34%	12%
Probably would consider this	18%	33%	23%	34%	16%
Maybe – might or might not	25%	18%	18%	12%	26%
Probably would NOT consider this	18%	11%	18%	12%	18%
Definitely would NOT consider this	25%	5%	14%	8%	28%

<b>Do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?</b>			
<b>(weighted sample sizes)</b>	<b>Total (1500)</b>	<b>Electric vehicle ownership experience</b>	
		<b>Ever owned one – hybrid or plug-in (129)</b>	<b>Never owned one of either type (1371)</b>
<b>I'd be more likely to buy a plug-in electric vehicle if there were more public charging stations</b>			
<b>Agree strongly</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>28%</b>
<b>Agree moderately</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>33%</b>
<b>Disagree moderately</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>13%</b>
<b>Disagree strongly</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>12%</b>
<b>Not sure/Can't say</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>Plug-in electric vehicles take too long to charge</b>			
<b>Agree strongly</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>18%</b>
<b>Agree moderately</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>29%</b>
<b>Disagree moderately</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>11%</b>
<b>Disagree strongly</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>4%</b>
<b>Not sure/Can't say</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>38%</b>
<b>I'm less inclined to buy an electric vehicle because they're too expensive</b>			
<b>Agree strongly</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>44%</b>
<b>Agree moderately</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>31%</b>
<b>Disagree moderately</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>9%</b>
<b>Disagree strongly</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>4%</b>
<b>Not sure/Can't say</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>12%</b>

**CONTACT:**

Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 [shachi.kurl@angusreid.org](mailto:shachi.kurl@angusreid.org) @shachikurl  
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<b>Do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?</b>			
(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1500)	Electric vehicle ownership experience	
		Ever owned one – hybrid or plug-in (129)	Never owned one of either type (1371)
<b>These days, there's as much variety in electric vehicles as there is in traditional ones</b>			
Agree strongly	12%	24%	11%
Agree moderately	24%	41%	22%
Disagree moderately	26%	22%	27%
Disagree strongly	18%	9%	18%
Not sure/Can't say	20%	5%	21%
<b>Electric vehicles just aren't as much fun to drive as gas vehicles</b>			
Agree strongly	11%	22%	10%
Agree moderately	17%	28%	16%
Disagree moderately	20%	16%	20%
Disagree strongly	18%	22%	18%
Not sure/Can't say	33%	12%	35%

<b>Which of these perspectives is closer to your own?</b>					
(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1500)	Experience with electric vehicles			
		Ever owned one – hybrid or plug-in (129)	Ever driven a hybrid (231)	Ever driven a plug-in (101)	Never owned or driven either type (1188)
Governments should do more to incentivize people to buy electric vehicles	56%	69%	57%	60%	55%
Governments should leave the price and popularity of electric vehicles to the free market	44%	31%	43%	40%	45%

**CONTACT:**

Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 [shachi.kurl@angusreid.org](mailto:shachi.kurl@angusreid.org) @shachikurl  
 Ian Holliday, Research Associate: 604.442.3312 [ian.holliday@angusreid.org](mailto:ian.holliday@angusreid.org)