

As COVID-19 rewrites playbook on social safety net, majorities support idea of basic income of up to 30K

But who will pay? Two-thirds reject increase in their own taxes, most feel wealthy should be responsible

June 18, 2020 – As the federal government extends the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit, a program that has sustained [more than seven million](#) Canadians amid the COVID-19 pandemic, for [eight more weeks](#), some have wondered aloud if this is the time to test a universal basic income (UBI) in Canada.

While the Liberals rejected a call from New Democratic Party leader Jagmeet Singh to turn the [CERB into a universal benefit](#) in April, a new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds the concept of universal basic income popular among Canadians.

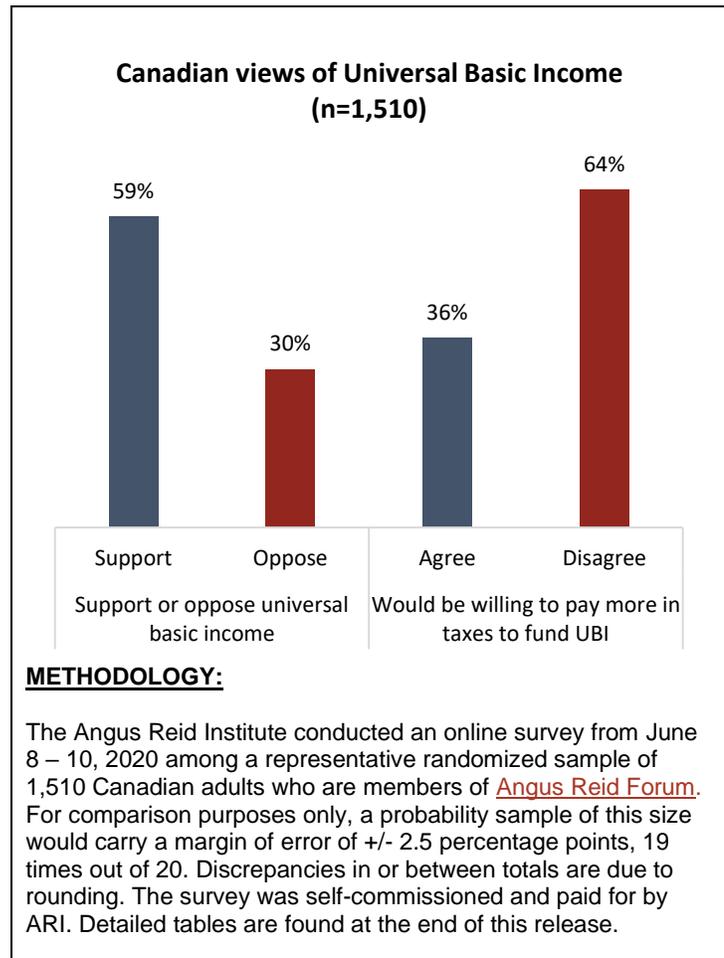
Indeed, at proposed levels of \$10,000, \$20,000 or \$30,000 annual income, the idea garners support from three-in-five.

And as estimates of the cost of such a program range from [15 to 90 billion dollars](#), Canadians have someone in mind to pay for it; the “wealthy”: more than 60 per cent say that they would support the funds coming from higher income Canadians. These higher income individuals are less enthused, however.

Two other items divide Canadians close to evenly on this issue. Close to half feel a UBI would make Canadians less inclined to work (55%) while a similar number disagree (45%). Further, Canadians are divided over whether a UBI is too expensive (54%) or if Canada can afford it (46%).

More Key Findings:

- Political preference drives opinion: three-quarters of those who supported the Liberal Party in the last federal election support a UBI. More than four-in-five New Democrat voters do as well. Past CPC voters are not in favour
- Women are more likely than men, and younger people more likely than those who are older, to support a UBI. That said, across age and gender groups, at least half in every category express support.



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- Despite support levels, at least 48 per cent of residents in every region of the country feel that a UBI would be too expensive for Canada. This rises to 66 per cent in Alberta and 58 per cent in Quebec

About ARI

*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.*

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Part One: A universal basic income

One of the proposed solutions to an unprecedented economic crisis that has gripped most of the globe in the first six months of 2020 is a basic income program.

Briefly, a basic income program is one where citizens, either all of them or groups targeted by income level or other conditions, are offered a "[minimum living stipend](#)". A person need not necessarily be unemployed to receive the benefit. Some argue that a basic income provides stability for Canadians to pursue work or education with less stress, knowing they have a baseline of income. Opponents are wary of the immense cost of such programs and argue that it may disincentivize work or that those who do not need it will receive it, which would be a waste of taxpayer funds. Estimates about the costs of such a program in Canada range from [\\$15 to \\$90 billion](#).

Majorities support basic income of 10, 20 or 30 thousand dollars per person

The Angus Reid Institute asked about this concept in 2016 and finds support relatively unchanged since then. Today, six-in-ten Canadians support such a program at the \$10 thousand, \$20 thousand, and \$30 thousand level:

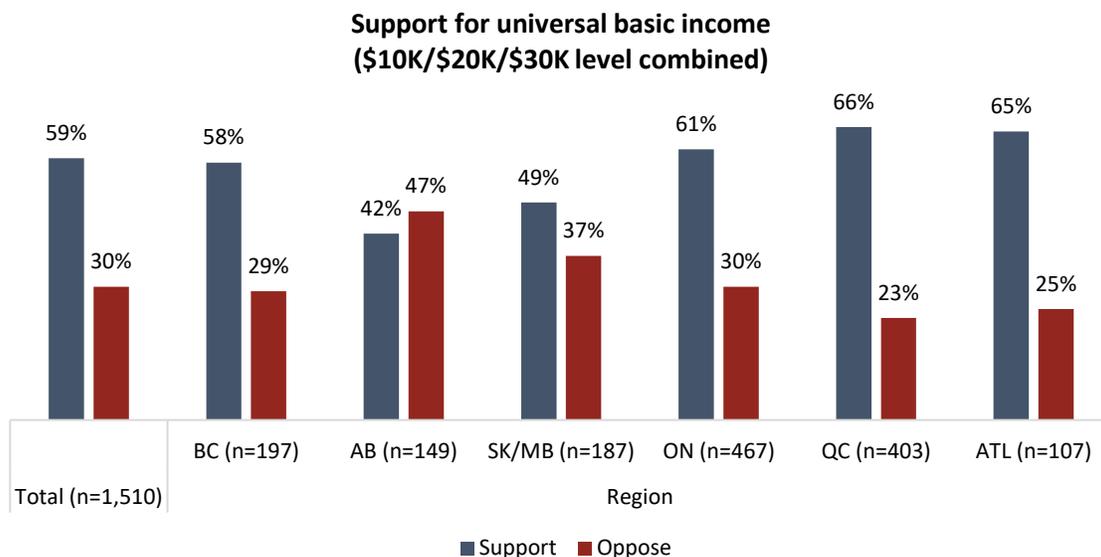
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Comparison of support: 2016 vs 2020						
	Support for basic income at each funding level					
	\$10,000		\$20,000		\$30,000	
	2016	2020	2016	2020	2016	2020
Support	57%	59%	65%	60%	67%	59%
Oppose	28%	28%	23%	31%	23%	32%
Not sure/Can't say	15%	14%	12%	9%	10%	9%

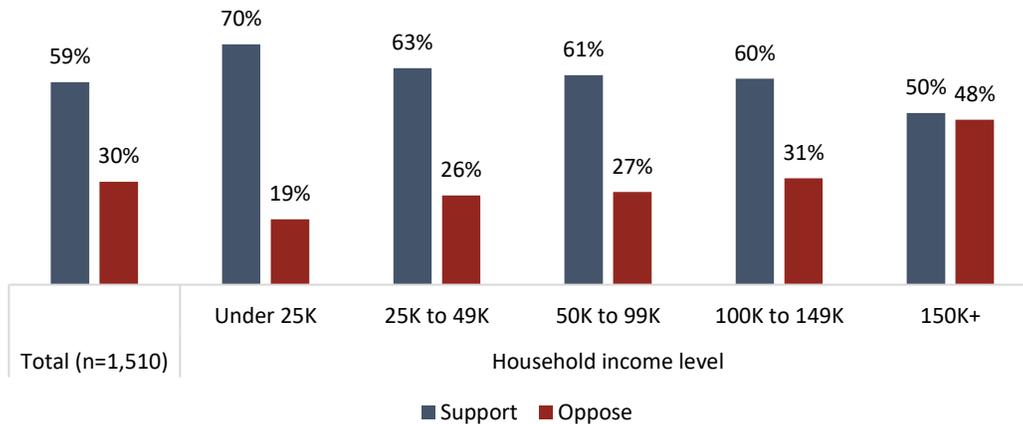
Demographic datapoints

In order to understand regional and demographic trends, support and oppose responses across the three levels of the proposed programs (\$10K, \$20K, \$30K) were grouped together for this segment of analysis. This aggregation finds residents in Quebec and Atlantic Canada most supportive of a UBI, while residents in Alberta are the only group who oppose such an idea more than they support it.



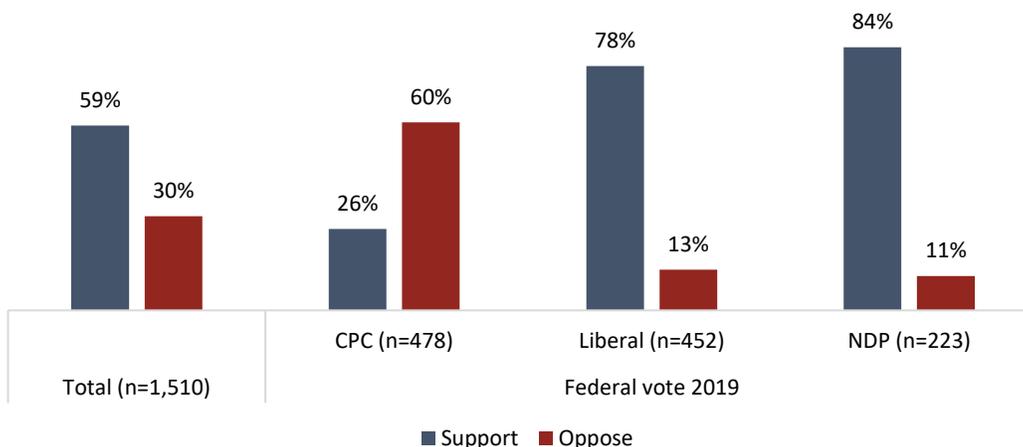
The idea of a universal basic income is most popular with those who would benefit most – Canadians from low income households. Meanwhile, in households where income exceeds \$150 thousand, the proposal is divisive:

**Support for universal basic income
(\$10K/\$20K/\$30K level combined)**



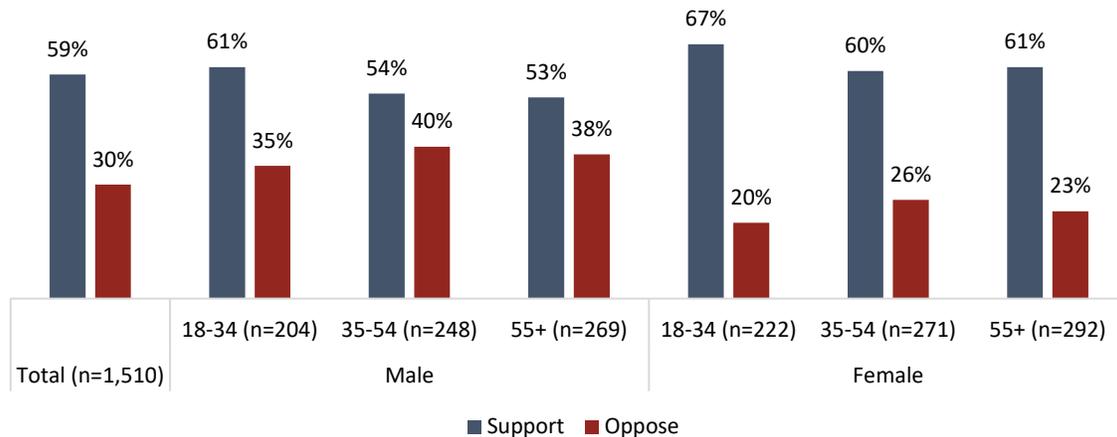
Both Liberal and New Democrat voters from the 2019 federal election are overwhelmingly in favour of a UBI. At least three-quarters in each group support the idea. One-quarter of past Conservative voters favour a basic income program (26%) while three-in-five oppose it (60%):

**Support for universal basic income
(\$10K/\$20K/\$30K level combined)**



Notably, a majority of all age and gender combinations support a UBI. Opposition is highest among men over the age of 34 but peaks at 40 per cent:

**Support for universal basic income
(\$10K/\$20K/\$30K level combined)**

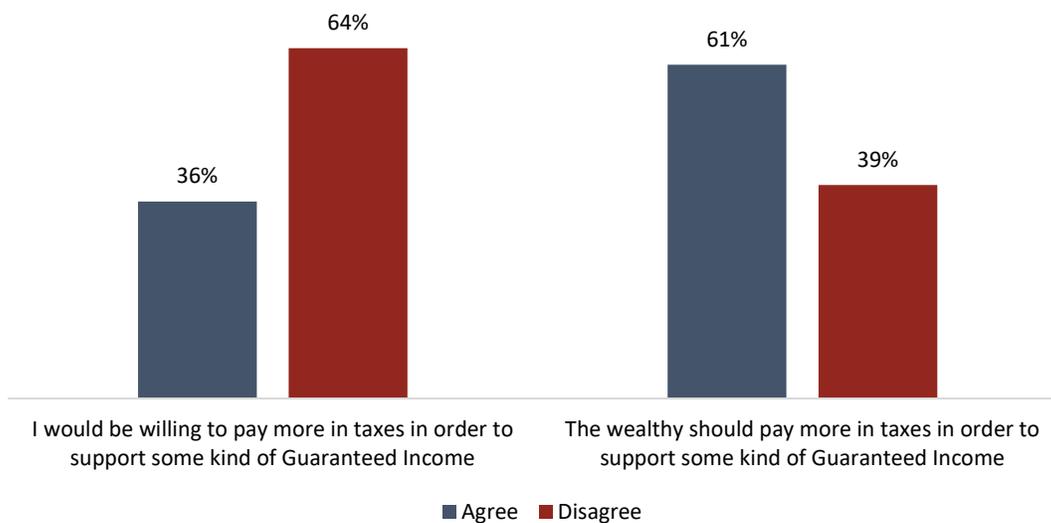


Part Two: How to pay for it

Majority agrees wealth tax should fund program

Funding for a program as large as this is one of the most obvious sticking points for opponents. For most Canadians, the wealthy are a much more popular source of funding than their own taxes. Consider that just 36 per cent of Canadians say they would be willing to pay more in taxes to create a basic income for everyone, while 61 per cent say they agree that the wealthy should pay more in taxes to support it:

**Agree vs disagree:
(All respondents, n=1,510)**



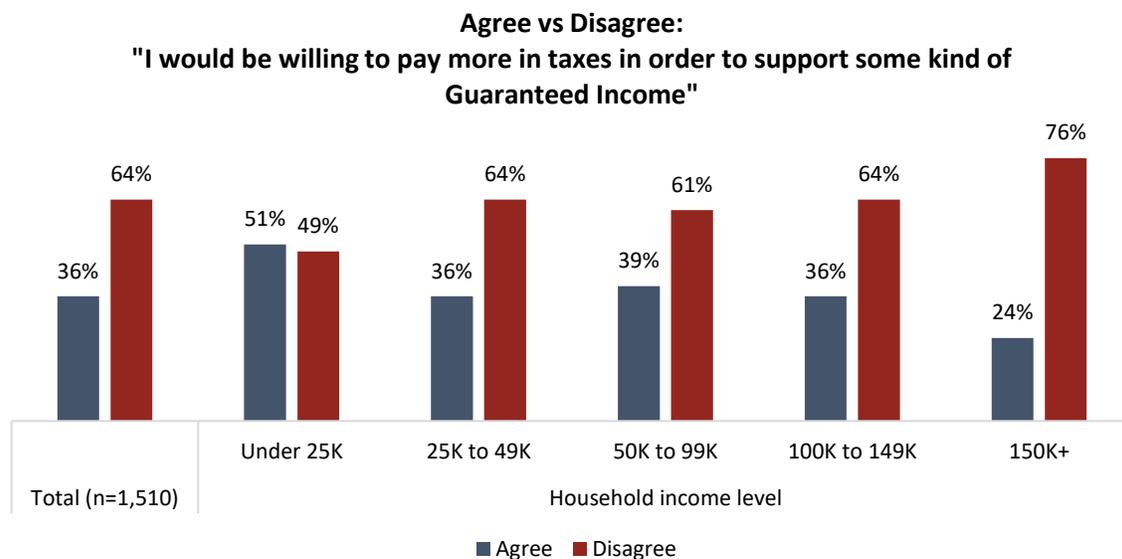
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Just one-quarter of those with highest household incomes willing to pay more

In 2019, the [federal NDP proposed](#) a super-wealth tax that would charge one per cent each year “[on the value of household assets above \\$20 million](#)”. This would collect more than \$5.6 billion in the first year from around 2,000 Canadian families, rising to more than \$9 billion a year in the near future. That proposal is [incredibly popular](#), even across partisan lines, and likely what Canadians have in mind to pay for a universal basic income. This, given that few would like to pay for it themselves.

Close to two-thirds of those earning between \$100,000 and \$150,000 per year are opposed (64%) and three-quarters of those earning more than \$150,000 per year say the same (76%). Notably, support is highest among those in the lowest income level, whose gain would likely be much greater than any increase to their taxes:



Part Three: Division and debate

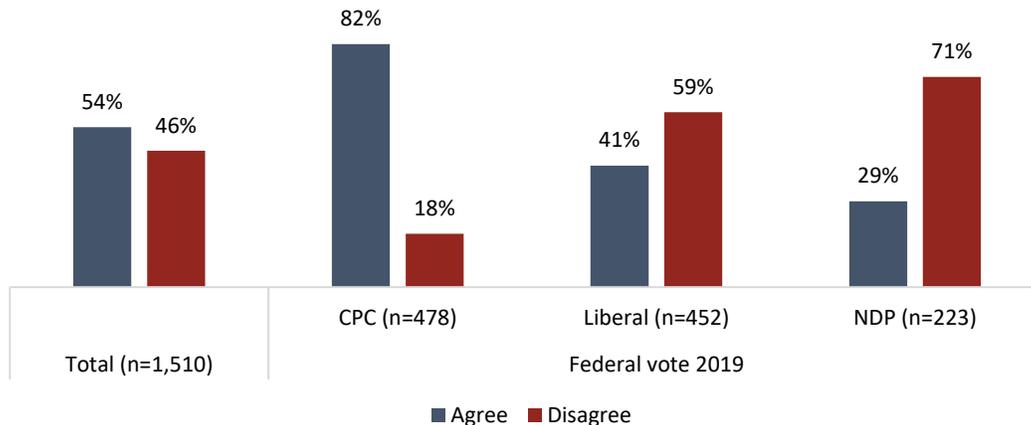
As with any potential transformative public policy proposal, there are proponents and skeptics debating the issue. The fundamental criticism from opponents is that the program is simply too expensive. This is an argument that finds purchase with half of Canadians.

Half say Canada could afford a UBI, half disagree

Fully half of Canadians (54%) say that they do not feel Canada can afford a universal basic income. The projections for necessary funding range widely, depending on how targeted the benefit is. Nonetheless, the estimates are all immense. Still, 46 per cent of Canadians disagree with the notion that the cost would preclude Canada from launching a UBI.

While there are smaller demographic disagreements within the population ([see detailed tables](#)) the biggest division is ideological. Four-in-five past Conservative voters (82%) do not think Canada can afford to invest in a UBI, while three-in-five past Liberals (59%) and 71 per cent of past New Democrats disagree:

**Agree vs Disagree:
"A guaranteed income program would be too expensive for Canada's government to afford"**

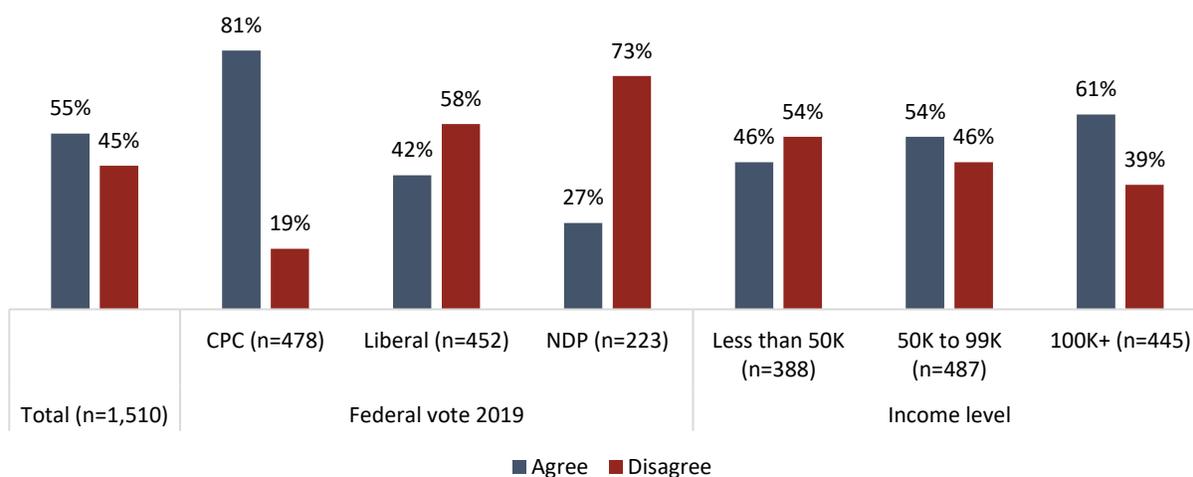


Canadians divided over incentive to work under UBI

Another concern that critics have of universal basic income programs is that it will create a disincentive for people to work. Proponents point to research that suggests this concern is misplaced. Canadians are again a house divided. Just over half (55%) say Canadians would find ways to work less if a UBI were in place, while 45 per cent disagree.

The same partisan differences in opinion are evident on this question as the last and the perception that Canadians would work less with a guaranteed income rises alongside wealth:

**Agree vs Disagree:
"Guaranteed Income programs discourage people from working"**



***For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).
For results with total support for UBI at 10K,20K,30K level, [click here](#).***

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