

Half of Canadians support concept of a shorter standard work week; one-in-five say it's a bad idea

CERB applicants more likely to say idea is a good one, three-in-five say so

June 26, 2020 – Canadian working lives have been altered in ways unimagined by most at the beginning of 2020. A new study from the Angus Reid Institute finds growing support for another fundamental change – a shorter work week.

Asked if they feel it would be a good idea to make a new 30-hour work week standard in Canada, 53 per cent of adults in this country say it would be a “good idea” – more than twice the number who say the opposite. This represents an increase in support compared to 2018 (+6 points).

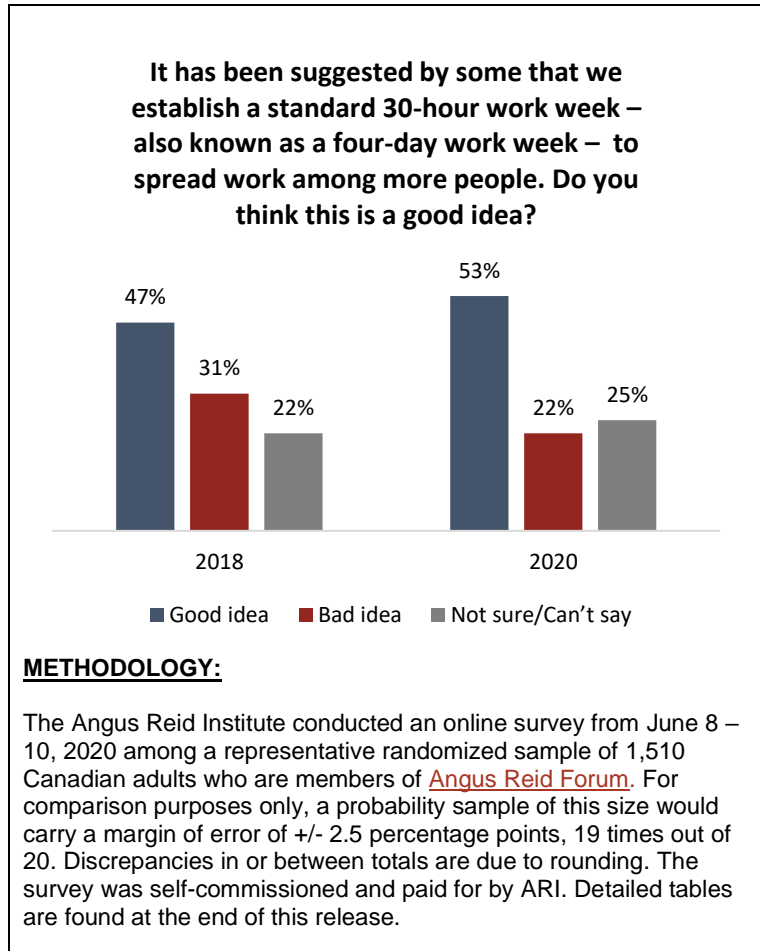
The increase in support is perhaps driven in part by the COVID-19 pandemic and difficulties it has presented for many out of work Canadians. Consider that among those who have applied for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit, enthusiasm for a shorter work week rises to 58 per cent. This is eight-points higher than those who have not applied for the program.

Canadians of all income levels, too, are more receptive of this idea than disdainful. Support is highest at the lowest levels of household income (64%) and lowest among those with incomes over \$150,000 per year (47%).

This idea runs into most of its opposition among past Conservative voters. This group is most likely to say that shortening the work week is an ill-conceived idea, 40 per cent feel this way, while past Liberal and NDP voters voice support at a proportion of two-thirds.

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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Half say a 30-hour work week a good idea

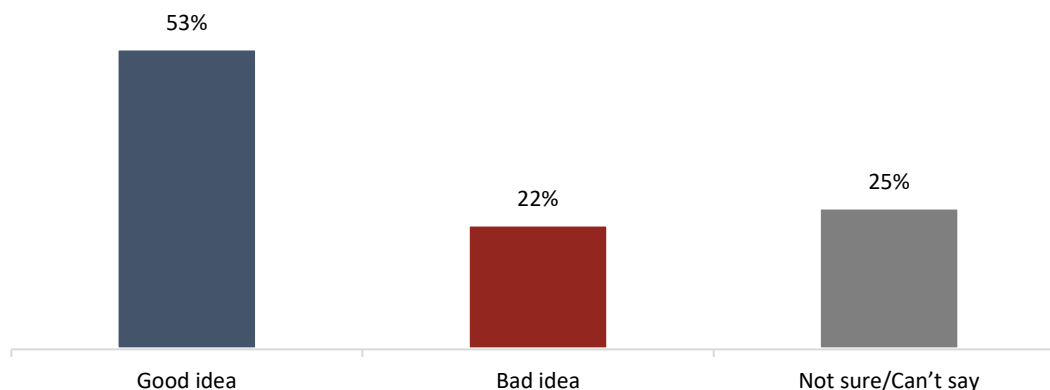
While Bank of Canada officials predict a “[prolonged and bumpy](#)” path to recovery following the COVID-19 shutdown, one idea that has been [proposed](#) to help the country along is shortening the work week. The concept of a shorter week recently gained traction after [New Zealand’s Prime Minister](#) promoted the four-day work week as a way to boost domestic tourism as the country’s borders remained closed to international visitors.

Related: Canadians unwilling to travel to the United States if border opens

The idea has received considerable media attention in Canada in recent weeks. This, as one municipality in Nova Scotia announced it’s currently running a [9-month pilot project](#) to test the feasibility of such a proposal. The concept of shorter work week is by no means new and has been discussed before the pandemic as a potential measure to [reduce unemployment](#) by spreading the same amount of work among more employees.

Canadians are more supportive of the idea than less. Half (53%) say the concept has merit, well over double those who feel it is ill-conceived (22%). Fully one-quarter say they don’t know what to make of the idea (25%):

**It has been suggested by some that we establish a standard 30-hour work week – also known as a four-day work week – to spread work among more people. Do you think this is a good idea?
(n=1,510)**



Experts are already predicting [multiple changes](#) to traditional work arrangements in the post-COVID-19 era. Chief among these is the shift to more permanent work from home situations, studied recently by the Angus Reid Institute [here](#).

In addition to its potential benefits to free time for Canadians, shortening the work week is often cited as a way to improve employee productivity and wellbeing. [Numerous studies](#) have shown shortening the work week to be associated with increased productivity and improved work life balance.

Critics of shorter work weeks, however, emphasize the need to distinguish between full-time employees (i.e. working regular 40-hour work weeks) and other types of employees. Many have [concerns](#) about ensuring sufficient income for employees operating outside of the traditional structure: part-time workers,

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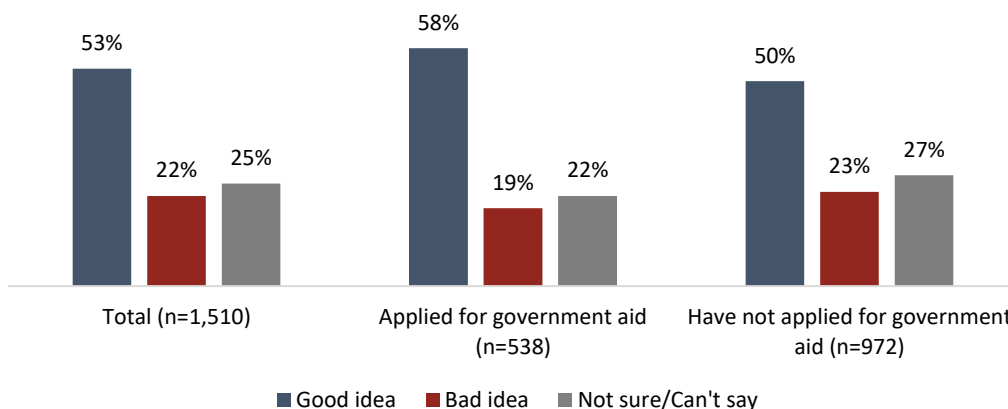
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minimum wage earners, zero contract workers, and professions that require frequent over-time hours such as teachers, medical staff and other essential services. Some proponents suggest that accommodating these concerns could be done by either [increasing the minimum wage, not reducing salaries](#) or by [introducing a universal basic income](#).

[Related: As COVID-19 rewrites playbook on social safety net, majorities support idea of basic income of up to 30K](#)

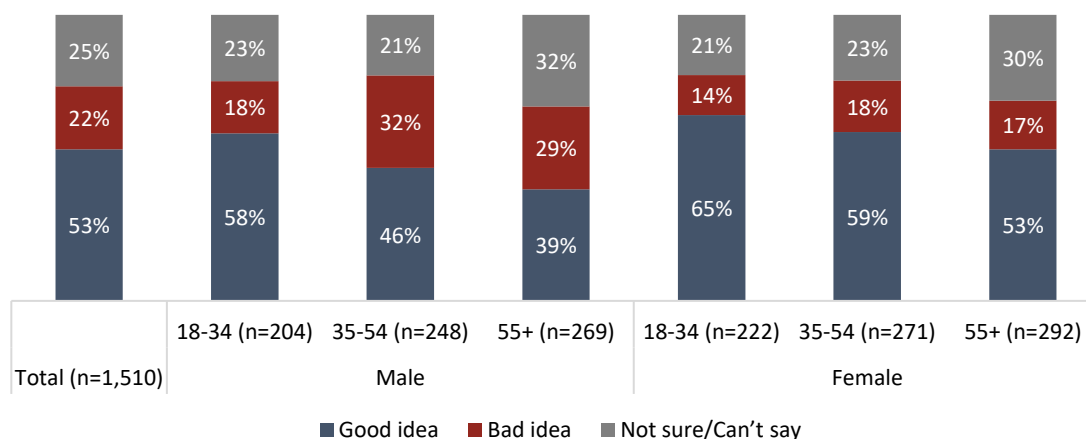
Those who may be having a more difficult time during the pandemic – the group that has applied for government assistance programs like the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit – are more likely to support the idea of shortening the work week and less likely to oppose it. Close to three-in-five (58%) government aid applicants say a four-day work week is a good idea, compared to half of those who have not applied (50%):

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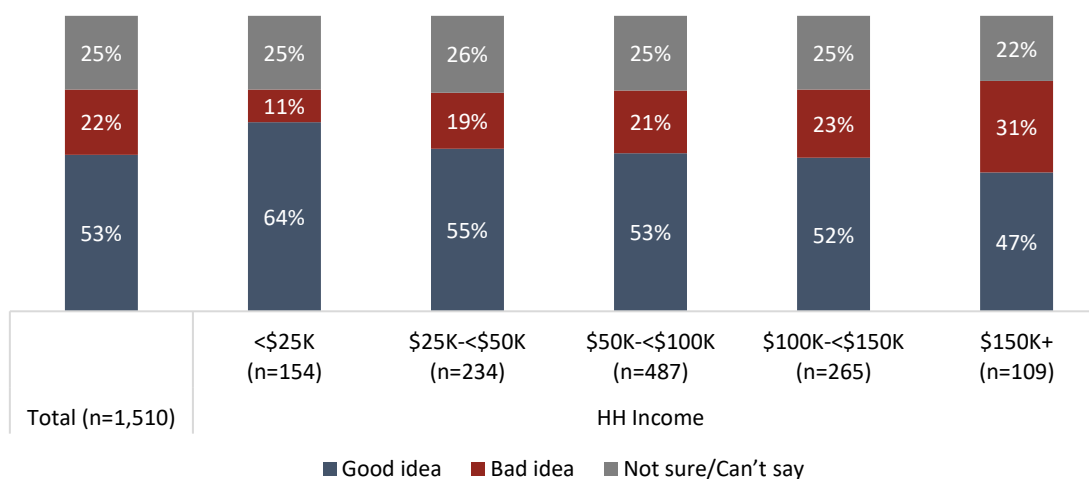
The concept of a shorter work week, much like that of the universal basic income, finds its highest levels of support among younger Canadians, with six-in-ten of those ages 18-34 saying a four-day work week would be a good idea.

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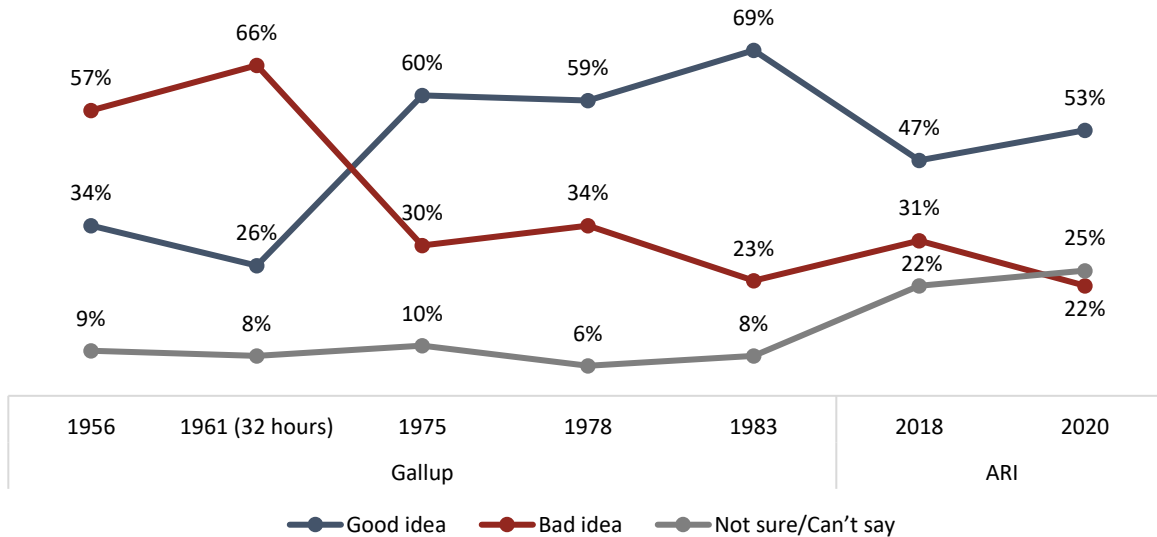
Canadians across all income levels are more likely to see the idea as a good one than a bad one. That said, those with higher household incomes are least likely to feel this way, while those with lower household incomes are most likely:

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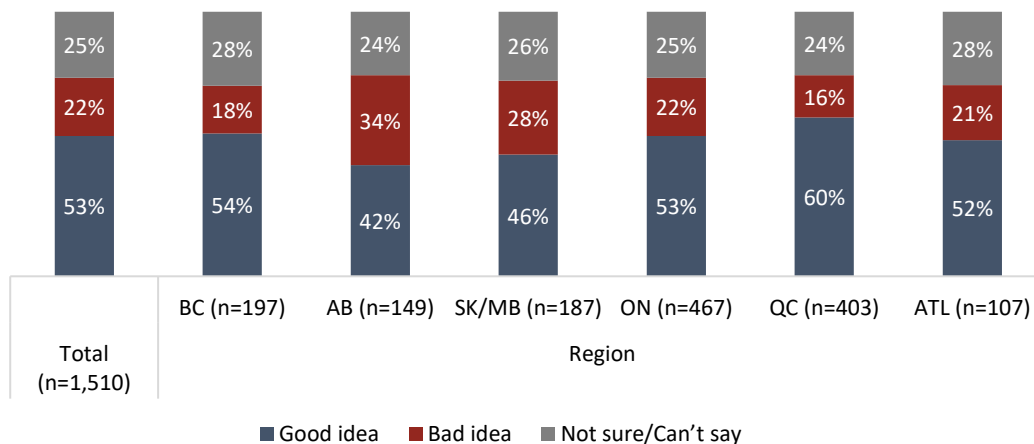
Asked if Canada would consider a four-day work week after the pandemic is over, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau did not rule it out. Previous polling may suggest that the public's opinion won't waiver substantially in a non-COVID-19 context, with support for the concept maintaining higher than opposition since 1975:

**Support for the concept of a shorter week over time
(Sources: ARI and Gallup Canada)**



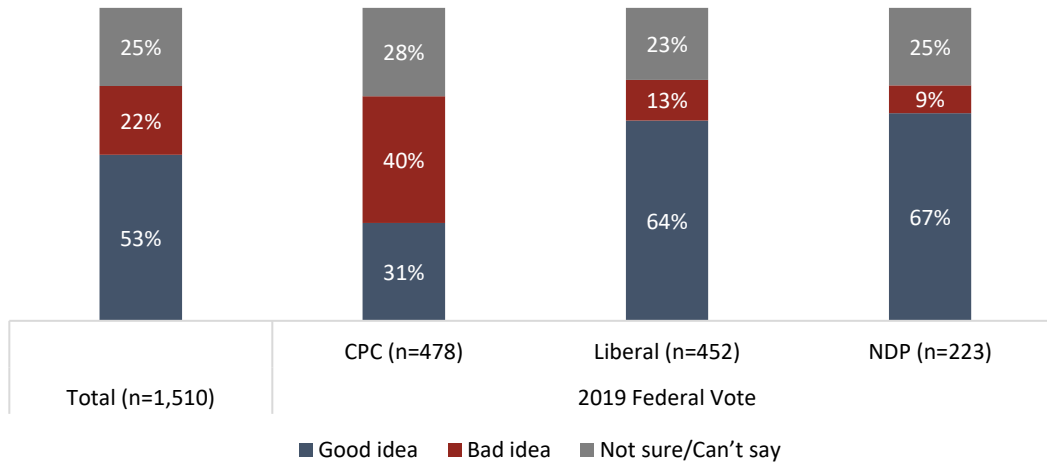
Looking country-wide, at least four-in-ten residents in each region support the idea, rising to three-in-five in Quebec (60%). The strongest opposition comes from Alberta, where one-in-three residents (34%) say shortening the work week would be a bad idea.

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Partisan differences affect opinions to the greatest extent. Six-in-ten past Liberal and NDP voters say a 30-hour work week would be good for Canada, twice the number of past CPC voters who say the same. Meanwhile, two-in-five past CPC voters are against the idea:

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