

Climate Change: O'Toole's carbon pricing gamble draws mixed political reviews

More Canadians than ever now view climate change as human-caused, but one-in-four disagree

May 3, 2021 – Conservative Party leader Erin O'Toole's mid-April announcement of a new carbon pricing plan surprised many Canadians, including, reportedly, some [members of his own party](#).

The move was designed – among other things – to grow the party's vote base, especially among swing voters who consistently name climate change as a top political issue. Now, new data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute shows initial reaction is mixed.

One on hand, one-in-five 2019 CPC voters (19%) say his new policy plank will make them *less* likely to vote for the party again in a future election.

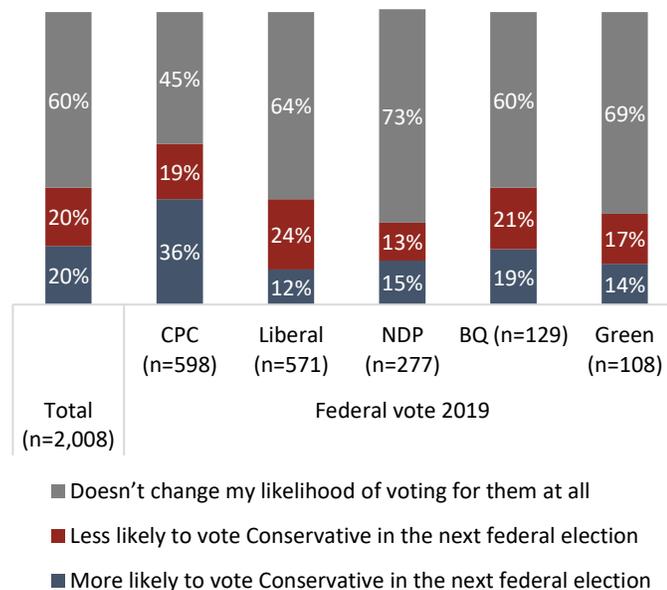
On the other, the data reveal small segments of voters to the left of the political spectrum more open to voting CPC now that it espouses a plan to price carbon emissions.

Perhaps most notably, 19 per cent of past Bloc Quebecois voters in battleground Quebec say the move makes them more likely to consider the Conservative party when the next election is held.

The broader question for the Conservatives may well come down to whether the segment of its 2019 voters who say they'll quit the party over carbon pricing actually follow through.

The issue remains a divisive one within the blue tent: CPC members [rejected](#) a proposal to formally recognize climate change at the party's policy convention in March. And while the voters for all other major federal parties are near unanimously in agreement that climate change is a fact that is caused by human activity, just one-in-three past CPC voters agree. A greater number (43%) say that it is happening as a natural cycle, while 17 per cent say it is not happening at all.

**Does [the CPC's new carbon pricing plan] change your likelihood of considering the CPC in a future election?
(All respondents)**



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from April 20 – 25, 2021 among a representative randomized sample of 2,008 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 +/- 2.2 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.

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More Key Findings:

- When presented with a synopsis of each carbon pricing plan, 45 per cent of Canadians say they support the CPC carbon pricing plan, while 56 per cent say they support the Liberal current plan
- 45 per cent of Canadians say the federal government needs to do more to tackle climate change, while 32 per cent take the opposite position. One-quarter (23%) say the government has found the right balance in its climate policy.
- Overall, seven-in-ten Canadians say climate change is happening and primarily caused by human activity. An additional one-in-five say they believe climate change is real, but it is primarily from the earth's natural cycles. Just seven per cent say climate change is not real.
- Fewer than half in Alberta (46%) and Saskatchewan (48%) believe in human caused climate change.

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: Canadians views of climate change

All-time high for those saying humans influence climate

Canadian attention has been laser-focused on one issue over the past year – the COVID-19 response. And while that continues to be the case, another impending crisis lingers. In the year before the pandemic broke, and throughout the 2019 election, climate change was viewed among the public as the top federal priority. Even now, after COVID-19 and health care, climate change ranks third in Canadians' concerns.

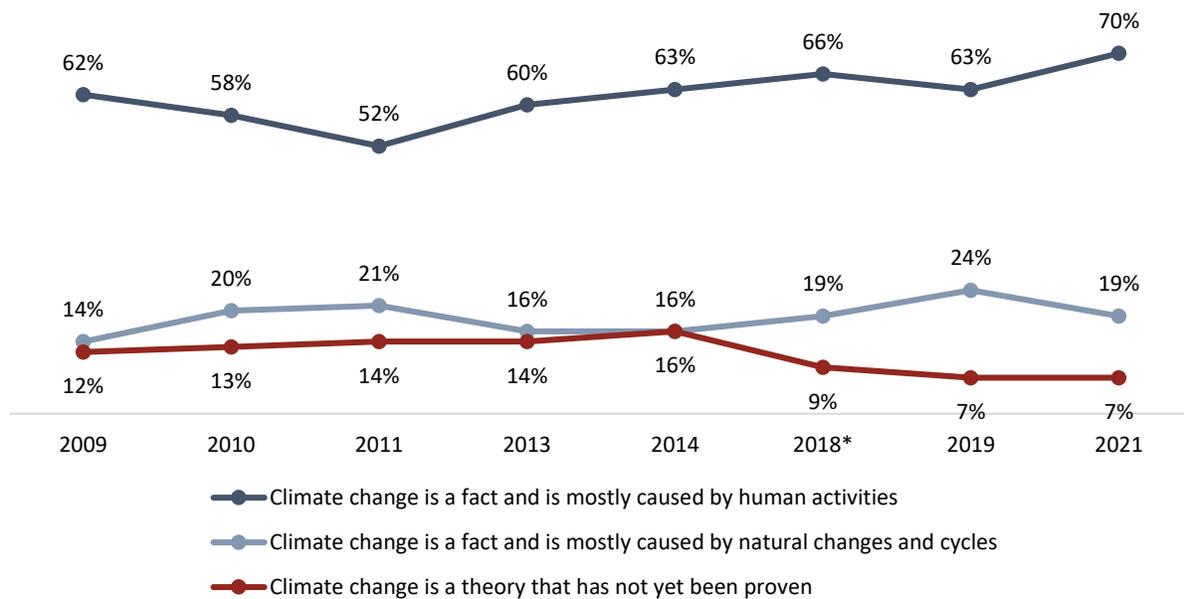
This, as the Angus Reid Institute now finds seven-in-ten Canadians (70%) saying climate change is real and heavily influenced by human activity. Another 19 per cent say they are aware of the reality of climate

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change but feel it is primarily caused by natural changes. Fewer than ten per cent say it is an unproven theory:

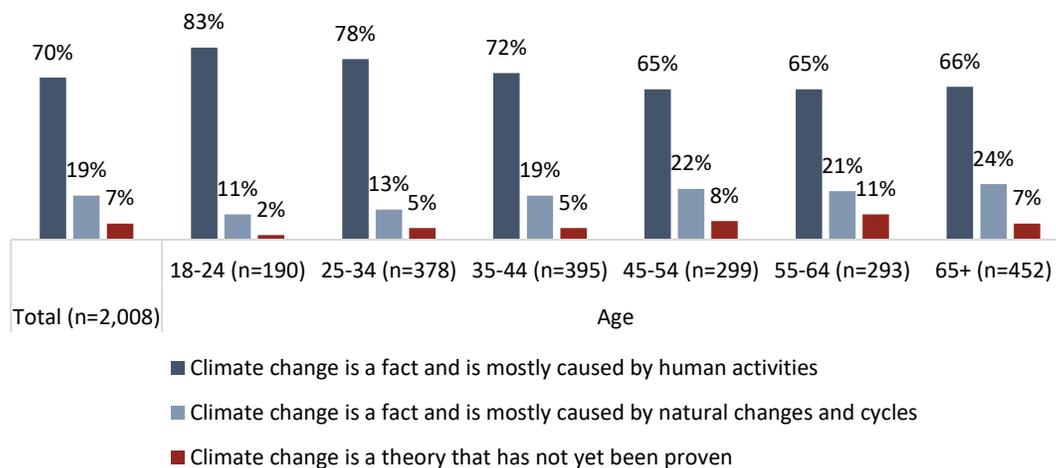
Which of the following statements comes closest to your view of climate change?



*Please note in 2018 the verbiage was changed from “global warming” to “climate change”

The generational aspect of opinion on this issue is clearly evident. The younger Canadians are, the more likely they are to believe in human influence on climate: 83 per cent of 18- to 24-year-olds believe this, compared to two-thirds among those over the age of 44.

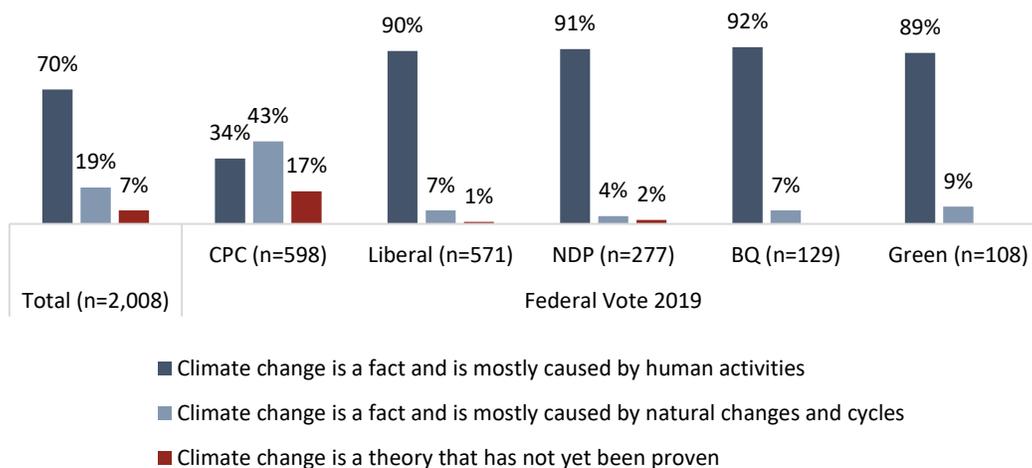
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Politics, Ideology and Belief

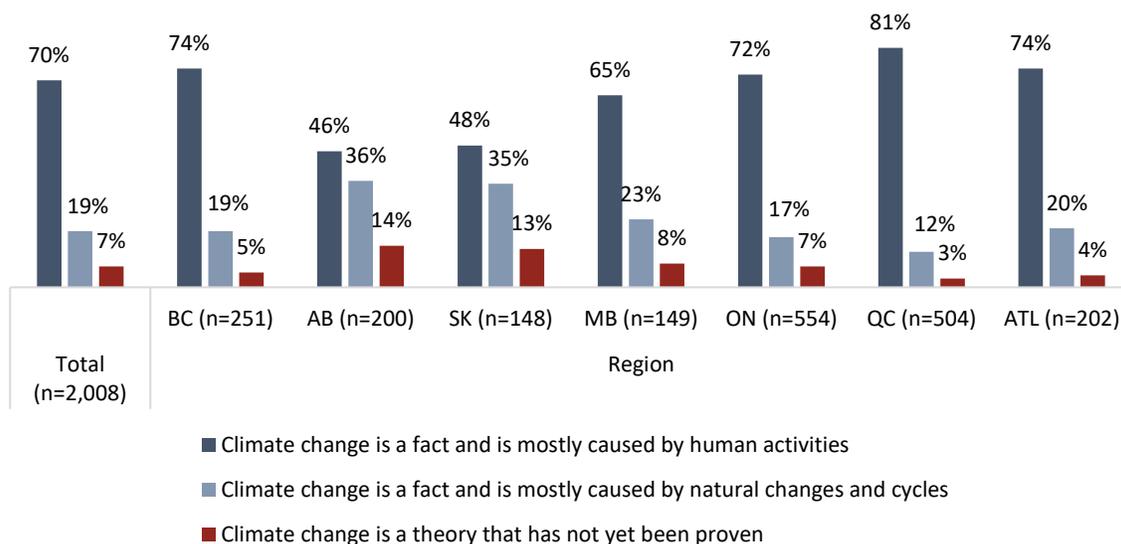
There is also a clear ideological element to this discussion. Past Conservative voters are in a silo of their own when it comes to climate change, with close to one-in-five (17%) saying it is an unproven theory and 43 per cent saying it is owing to the earth’s natural cycles. Both of these opinions are held by far tinier (in some cases near-invisible) segments of other Canadian voters:

Which of the following statements comes closest to your view of climate change?



Regionally, those in Alberta and Saskatchewan are less likely to believe in the human influence on the climate change. The opposing view is more prominent in Quebec, B.C., Atlantic Canada, and Ontario:

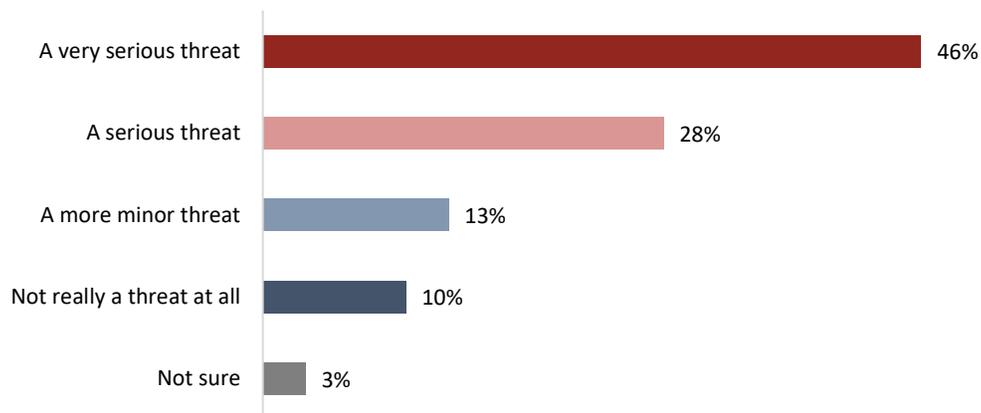
Which of the following statements comes closest to your view of climate change?



Three-quarters perceive a serious threat from climate change

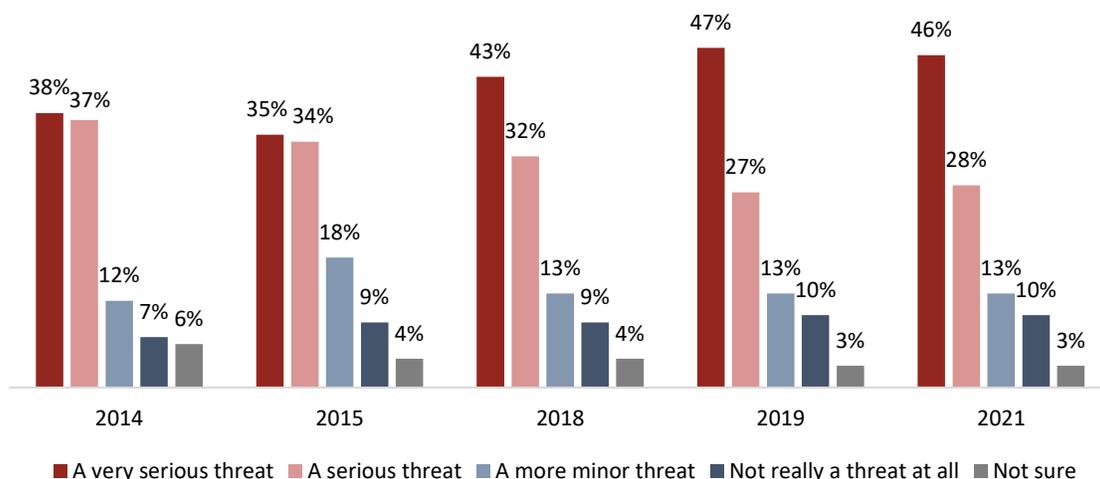
The impacts of climate change have already begun to be felt over the past decade. Glaciers have shrunk, sea levels have risen, and more intense and frequent severe weather events have been observed. In Canada, longer and more intense wildfire seasons have been endured, and the risk of flooding has grown. The vast majority of Canadians now say climate change poses a serious threat to the planet:

**How much of a threat, if any, do you think climate change poses for planet Earth?
(All respondents, n=2,008)**



This proportion is relatively unchanged since 2018, after a considerable increase compared to prior years:

How much of a threat, if any, do you think climate change poses for planet Earth?

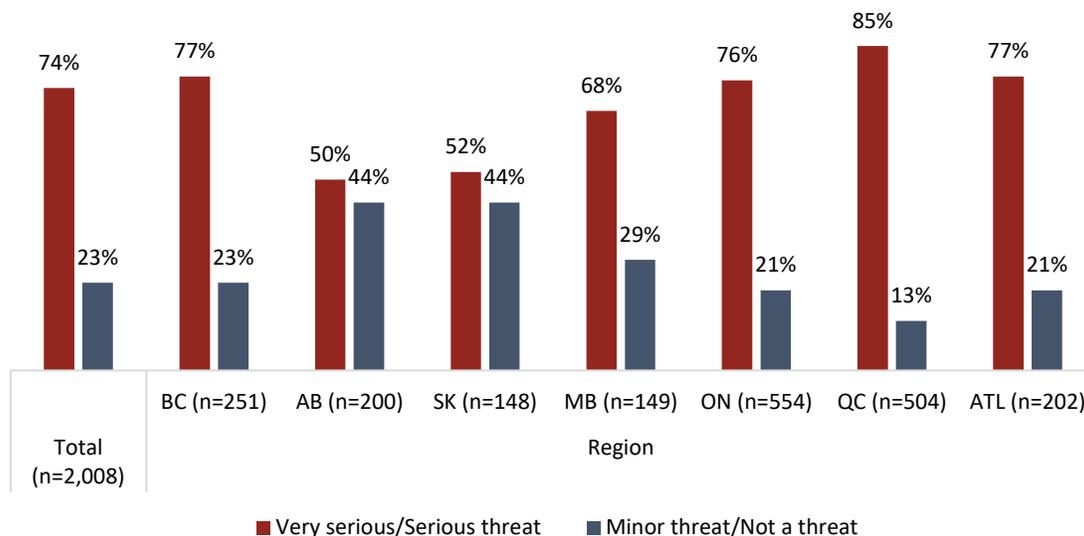


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Responses to this question too have similar generational elements, with younger people being more concerned than those older ([see detailed tables](#)). Notably, while they may disagree on the root cause of climate change, at least half in every region say it is a serious issue:

How much of a threat, if any, do you think climate change poses for planet Earth?



Part Two: Climate approach and Carbon Pricing

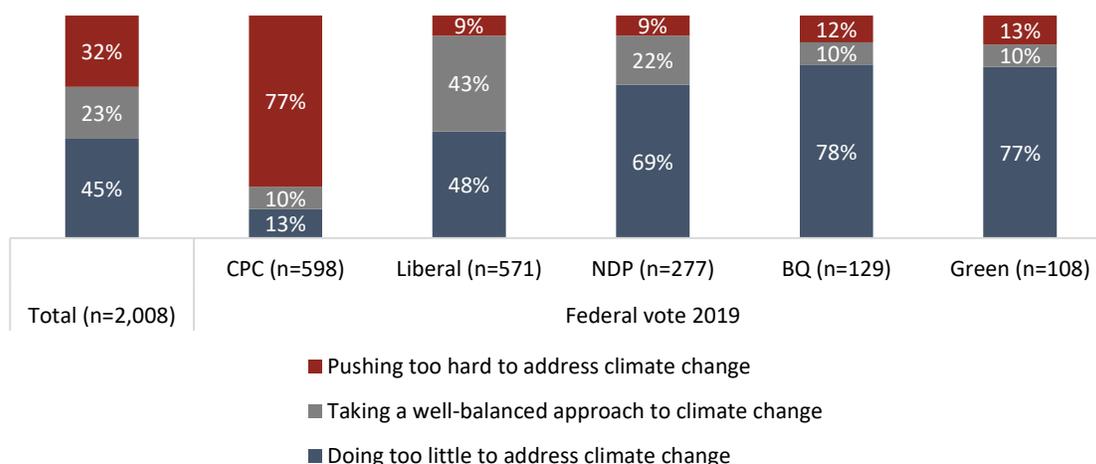
The Trudeau government’s budget, released on April 19, included a [number of policies](#) and spending, including tax benefits and investment funds for carbon reducing projects. The government has [been criticized](#) for slow progress on Canada’s carbon targets, committed to at the 2015 Paris Climate Accord.

For their part, a plurality of Canadians say this government has been doing too little (45%) on this file. A firm majority of past NDP, Bloc Quebecois and Green voters say this. Past Liberal voters are divided between saying the government has done too little (48%) or has struck the right balance (43%). Three-quarters of those who supported the opposition CPC in 2019 say the Liberals go too far:

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**When you think about the Liberal government’s record under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on climate change, would you say it has been:
(All respondents)**



Young people are most likely to say government should do more. That said, men of all ages are nearly twice as likely than women of their same age group to say the government is pushing too hard to mitigate climate change, though no more than 50 per cent say this across any age demographic:

When you think about the Liberal government’s record under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on climate change, would you say it has been: (All respondents)							
	Total (n=2,008)	Age and Gender					
		Male			Female		
		18-34 (n=273)	35-54 (n=333)	55+ (n=357)	18-34 (n=295)	35-54 (n=361)	55+ (n=388)
Doing too little to address climate change	45%	50%	34%	33%	65%	49%	42%
Pushing too hard to address climate change	32%	29%	46%	50%	15%	23%	29%
Taking a well-balanced approach to climate change	23%	21%	20%	18%	20%	29%	29%

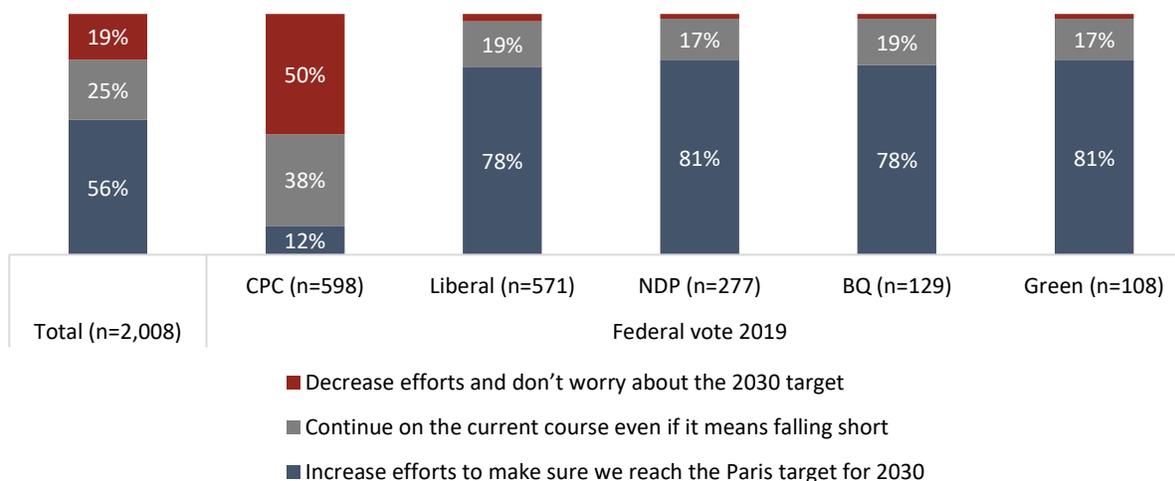
Does Ottawa need to do more or less?

Canadians are largely supportive of efforts to reduce this country’s carbon emissions to 30 per cent below 2005 levels. More than half (56%) say Canada should do what it takes to get there. Another one-quarter (25%) say staying the course would be fine even if it means falling short. One-fifth say Canada should ignore these targets:

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**What would you say Canada should do:
(All respondents)**



The bulk of opposition to climate targets comes from men over the age of 34.

What would you say Canada should do: (All respondents)							
	Total (n=2,008)	Age and Gender					
		Male			Female		
		18-34 (n=273)	35-54 (n=333)	55+ (n=357)	18-34 (n=295)	35-54 (n=361)	55+ (n=388)
Increase efforts to make sure we reach the Paris target for 2030	56%	60%	46%	34%	78%	64%	57%
Continue on the current course even if it means falling short	25%	23%	28%	34%	13%	25%	25%
Decrease efforts and don't worry about the 2030 target	19%	17%	27%	32%	9%	11%	18%

Comparing the Liberal and Conservative plans

A key aspect of the Liberal government's climate plan is taxing carbon emissions. The federal tax rose to \$40 per tonne on April 1 this year and is in place in Ontario, Manitoba, Yukon, and Nunavut. Nearly all of the revenue from the tax in these jurisdictions is returned via refund cheques while approximately 10 per cent is invested in green projects. Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba each challenged the constitutionality of the carbon tax; the Supreme Court ultimately ruled in favour of the federal government's plan this spring.

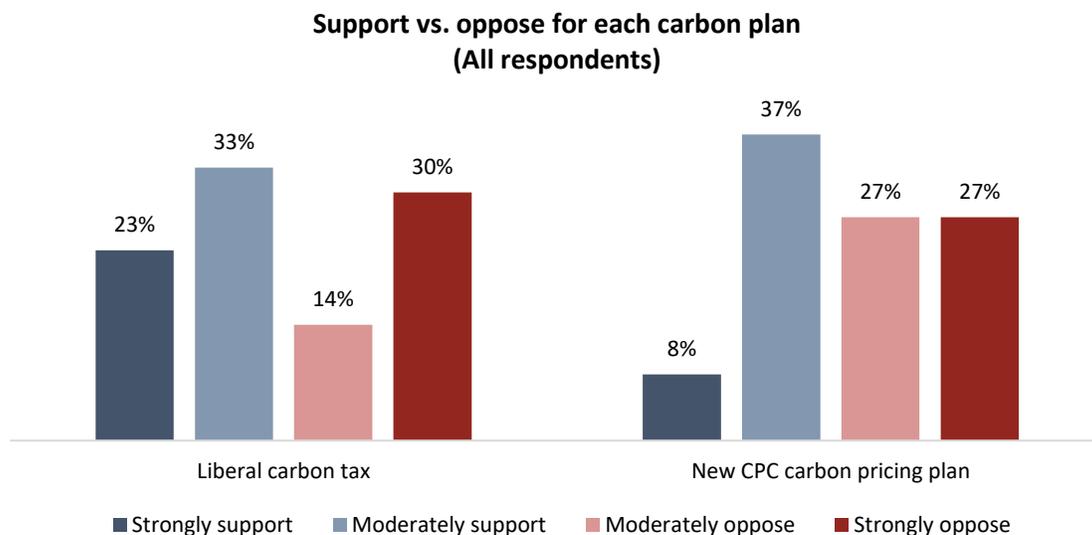
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After years of resisting any carbon pricing scheme and promising to repeal the Liberal plan, the Conservative Party released its own plan in April. This proposal would create a carbon levy paid whenever Canadians buy gasoline or other hydrocarbon-based product. It would start at \$20 per tonne and rise over an unspecified period to a maximum of \$50 per tonne compared to the Liberals plan to tax to an eventual maximum of \$170 per tonne.

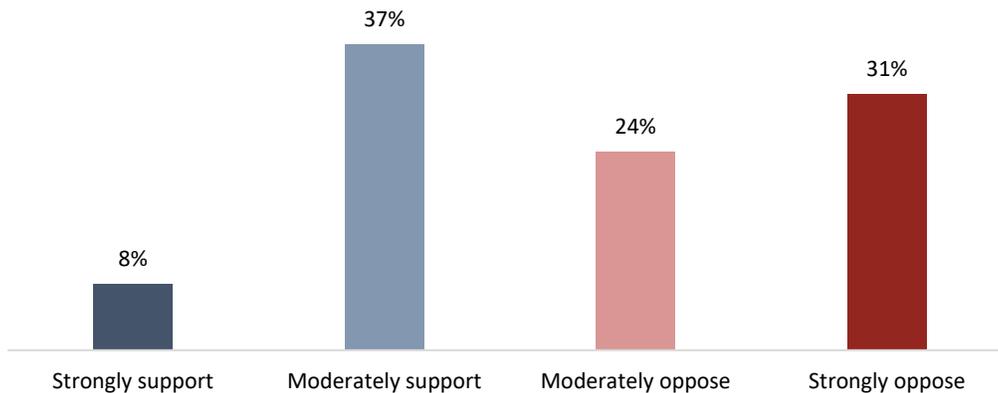
The CPC plan would divert that money into "personal low carbon savings accounts", so when a person buys fuel, a portion of their purchase would be saved for purchasing specific green or energy efficient products.

When presented with basic information about the each of the Liberal and Conservative party's carbon pricing plans ([see survey questionnaire](#)), just over half say they preferred the one in place, while just under half backed the Conservative plan:



The biggest challenge for the Conservative Party may be within its own ranks. Many members were [reportedly](#) surprised and upset about the announcement and evidently, a majority of 2019 CPC voters area against the proposal:

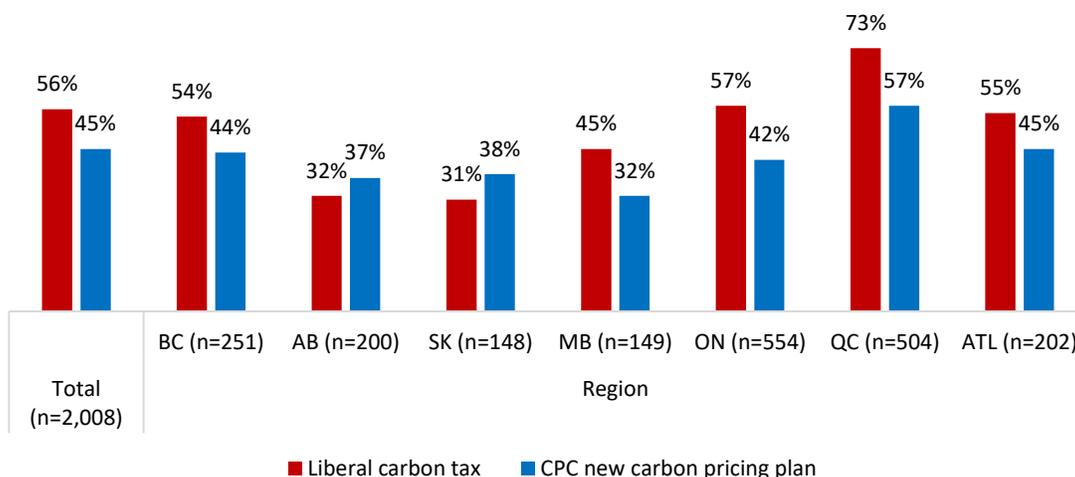
**Based on what you've read, seen, or heard about this plan, including in this survey, would you say you support or oppose it?
Past CPC voters asked about Conservative carbon pricing plan
(n=598)**



That said, the plan announced by O'Toole is considerably more popular with past CPC voters than the Liberal plan. The reverse is true, however, for all other Canadians. Some critics have suggested that the Conservative plan would be insufficient to make real progress on emission reduction, which may help to explain lower support levels.

Notably, the Conservative plan is opposed at majority levels in every region of the country other than Quebec. It is slightly more popular in Alberta and Saskatchewan than the current Liberal plan:

Percentage saying they support each carbon plan by region



Impact on CPC vote likelihood

Asked how this program announcement may affect their voting likelihood, 36 per cent of 2019 CPC voters say it makes them more likely to support the party again, but one-in-five say it may cause them to look elsewhere. That said, there is an opportunity to draw in voters from other parties. Smaller groups of those

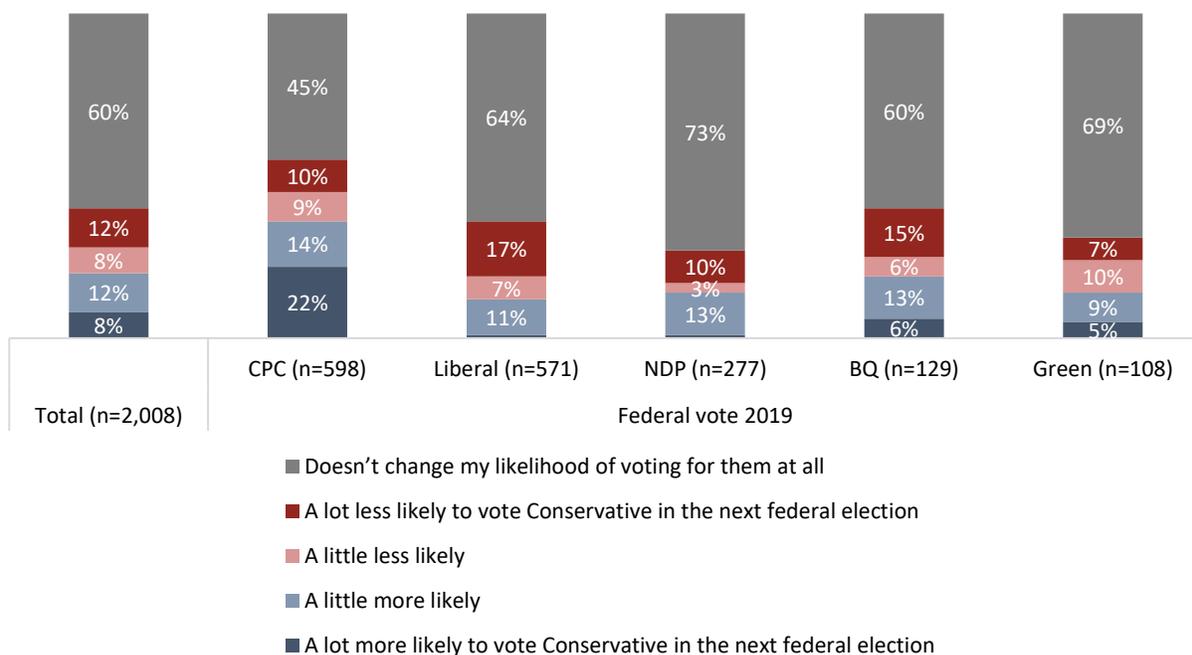
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that supported another party or did not vote in the last election, 14 per cent overall, say they would now consider the CPC more seriously than before.

Considering the [razor-thin margins](#) on which the 2019 election was decided, it will be of importance to how, and whether, these political undercurrents move:

**Does [the CPC's new carbon pricing plan] make you change your likelihood of considering the CPC in a future election?
(All respondents)**



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

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