

Energy: Canadians tilt towards prioritizing renewables; one-third would split investments between green and oil

While green, renewable energy sources are most popular, half (51%) support nuclear energy generation

July 13, 2021 – As main federal party leaders embark on cross-country tours ahead of an all-but-certain election later this year, they are hoping to campaign at the intersection that marks a sweet spot for voter priority: where climate issues meet the economy.

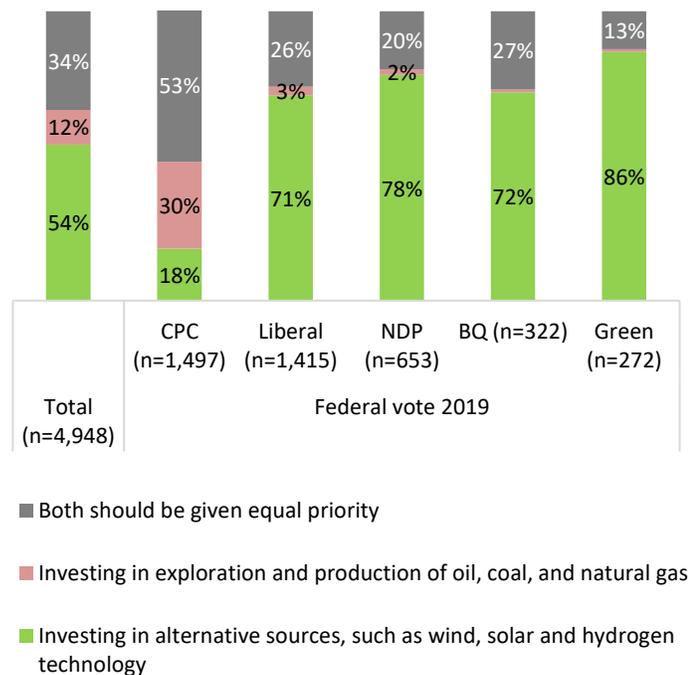
As climate change remains a key issue for swing voters on the left of centre – and as voters regardless of political stripe look expectantly to a much-needed economic rebound post-pandemic – this year's campaign may well be heavily contested on visions for the future of the energy industry.

The latest data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds just over half of Canadians (54%) say alternative energy sources such as wind, solar, and hydrogen, should be the most important priority for the federal government. Among all Canadians who did not vote for the Conservative Party in 2019, this proportion rises to more than seven-in-ten.

That said, recognition remains that Canada's traditional energy sector needs attention. One-in-three say the exploration and production of oil, coal, and natural gas, should receive equal priority alongside renewables. For those who supported the CPC in 2019, more than half (53%) say so.

Asked what they feel should be the top two goals of Canada's energy policy, 49 per cent say that renewable energy production should be at the top of the list. A similar number say that environmental protection should take precedence (47%). Despite holding a place as the third largest economic industry in the country, just 26 per cent of Canadians choose economic growth among their top two priorities.

Right now, which one of the following do you think should be the more important priority for addressing Canada's energy supply?



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from June 2 – 7, 2021 among a representative randomized sample of 4,948 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 +/- 2.0 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:

- Energy independence is chosen as a top priority by 46 per cent of Canadians, rising to 71 per cent among past CPC voters. This is the top priority in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.
- Albertans are more likely to support investing in renewable energy and oil and gas equally than they are to say that oil and gas should be the primary goal on its own
- Asked which type of specific energy production they support investment in, 84 per cent choose solar panels, 77 per cent support wind turbine farms, while just 19 per cent support coal
- Half of Canadians would invest more in nuclear energy (51%) while half oppose it (49%). Two-thirds in Ontario (64%), where most nuclear is situated, say they support the industry.

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: What should Canada's energy priorities be?

The future of Canada's energy industry poses a complex challenge for federal parties as they prepare for a likely election in the coming months. The industry remains a powerhouse – generating more than 17 billion dollars in revenue for the federal government each year from 2012 to 2016. Oil and gas, combined with coal and quarrying, continues to represent the third largest industry in the country after real estate and manufacturing. That said, the Angus Reid Institute asked respondents what they feel is the most important aspect of Canada's energy policy and finds that the economic aspect of this equation is subordinated below others.

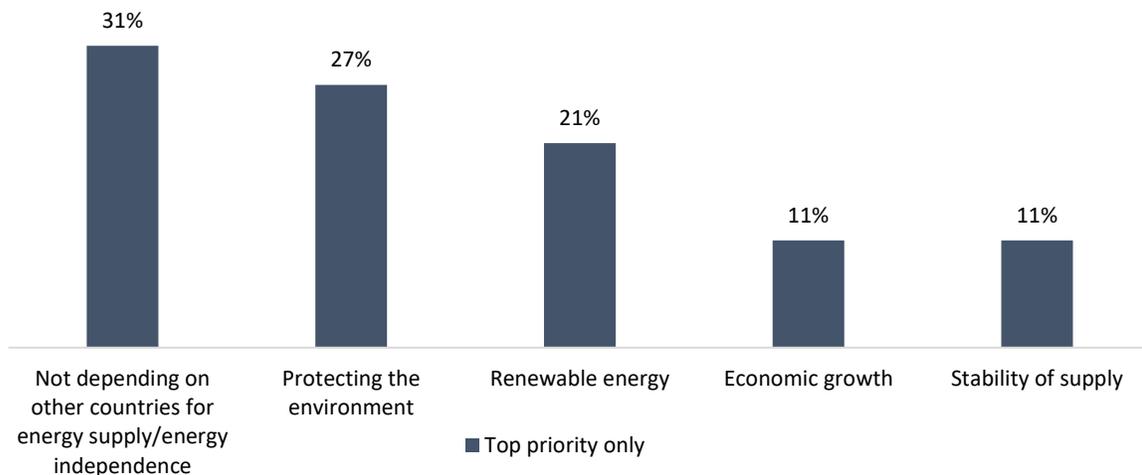
For three-in-ten (31%) creating energy independence is the top priority, while just 11 per cent say economic growth should be the key aim of energy policy. From 2016 to 2020, Canada imported more than \$81 billion in oil and gas products – though the nation continues to be a net exporter. Critics say that better infrastructure – including pipelines – is needed to supply the whole country with Canadian products if energy independence is to be achieved, though others say much of this could also be accomplished

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with renewable sources. That latter point gains more importance when considering Canadians second highest priority – protecting the environment:

**Which is most important to you?
(All respondents, n=4,948)**



Renewable energy (21%) and stability of supply (11%) are chosen as top priorities by three-in-ten combined. As Canada continues to invest in alternative energy sources such as wind, solar, and other renewables, stability remains a key aspect of supplying energy networks. Critics note that wind and solar depend on natural elements, and this [intermittence](#) will be difficult to overcome. Others say that improvements in storage and other strategies mean that this is by [no means an insurmountable](#) problem. Currently the country generates about 16 per cent of its energy from renewable sources.

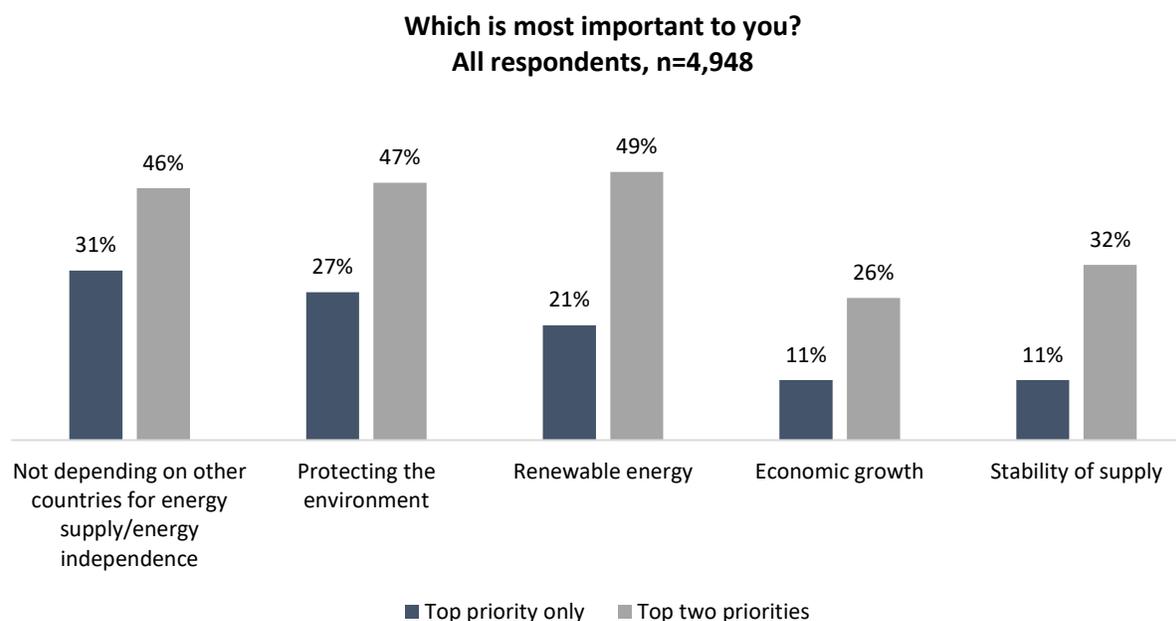
Some provinces, which rely on hydro electricity and nuclear for electricity demands, are in a better position currently than others when it comes to meeting demand with renewables. For [Ontario and Alberta in particular](#), immense challenges are ahead in order to meet demand without oil and gas products.

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Total Demand by Province and Energy Source, 2019									
Source: Canada's Energy Future Report									
	Canada	BC	AB	SK	MB	ON	QC	ATL	Territories
Natural Gas	37%	29%	59%	53%	25%	28%	13%	11%	9%
Refined Petroleum Products	35%	38%	30%	30%	40%	36%	39%	45%	86%
Hydro	10%	17%	0%	1%	30%	4%	36%	19%	4%
Nuclear	7%	0%	0%	0%	0%	25%	0%	6%	0%
Other Renewables and Landfill Gas	6%	16%	3%	2%	5%	5%	11%	10%	0%
Coal, Coke and Coke Oven Gas	5%	0%	8%	13%	0%	3%	1%	8%	0%

When analyzing responses based on Canadians top two priorities, a different picture emerges. Renewable energy jumps from third position to the top of the list, though it is close to equivalently valued alongside environmental protection and energy independence. One-quarter choose economic growth as one of their top two energy priorities (26%):



Priorities for each region

One of the key drivers of opinion with respect to energy priorities is regional. While economic growth is subordinate among most of the country, well behind renewable energy investment and protecting the environment, Albertans rank it as their second priority. In Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, focusing on achieving energy independence should be the key goal of government's energy policy. In British Columbia, renewable energy and environmental protection are paramount, similar to the views in Canada's largest provinces – Ontario and Quebec.

Top priority for Canada's energy industry – rank up to two options Top two highlighted								
	Total (n=4,948)	Region						
		BC (n=623)	AB (n=600)	SK (n=487)	MB (n=504)	ON (n=1,016)	QC (n=832)	ATL (n=886)
Renewable energy	49%	51%	32%	36%	44%	50%	57%	48%
Protecting the environment	47%	49%	31%	32%	40%	48%	55%	45%
Not depending on other countries for supply/ energy independence	46%	43%	60%	60%	51%	43%	43%	47%
Stability of supply	32%	32%	38%	39%	38%	35%	25%	30%
Economic growth	26%	25%	39%	33%	27%	25%	21%	30%

Age, gender, and politics drive differences

Younger Canadians are much more likely than others to be [concerned about climate change](#) and the environment, and it follows that this group heavily prefers to focus on environmental protection and renewables. Notably, however, this is also largely the case with 35-to-54-year-olds. Economic growth itself is the lowest priority for nearly all age and gender combinations, save young men, suggesting that messaging absent an environmental aspect in an election campaign could be received with limited resonance, despite the immense economic value of the industry:

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Top priority for Canada's energy industry – rank up to two options Top two highlighted							
	Total (n=4,948)	Age and Gender					
		Male			Female		
		18-34 (n=522)	35-54 (n=829)	55+ (n=989)	18-34 (n=588)	35-54 (n=913)	55+ (n=1,072)
Renewable energy	49%	55%	46%	36%	62%	54%	47%
Protecting the environment	47%	51%	41%	33%	66%	57%	43%
Not depending on other countries for supply/ energy independence	46%	33%	45%	59%	26%	42%	55%
Stability of supply	32%	29%	34%	42%	25%	27%	34%
Economic growth	26%	32%	35%	30%	21%	20%	21%

Herein lies a challenge for the modern Conservative Party as it seeks to reach more centrist voters and increase its vote share in urban spaces in order to form government: it risks doing so at the cost of alienating its own past voters. Fewer 2019 CPC supporters prioritize environmental protection or renewable energy and are far more likely to want to pursue energy independence, a stable supply of energy, and economic growth:

Top priority for Canada's energy industry – rank up to two options Top two highlighted						
	Total (n=4,948)	Federal vote 2019				
		CPC (n=1,497)	Liberal (n=1,415)	NDP (n=653)	BQ (n=322)	Green (n=272)
Renewable energy	49%	21%	65%	67%	58%	74%
Protecting the environment	47%	17%	60%	69%	53%	73%
Not depending on other countries for supply/ energy independence	46%	71%	31%	28%	43%	26%
Stability of supply	32%	48%	26%	24%	24%	19%
Economic growth	26%	43%	17%	12%	22%	8%

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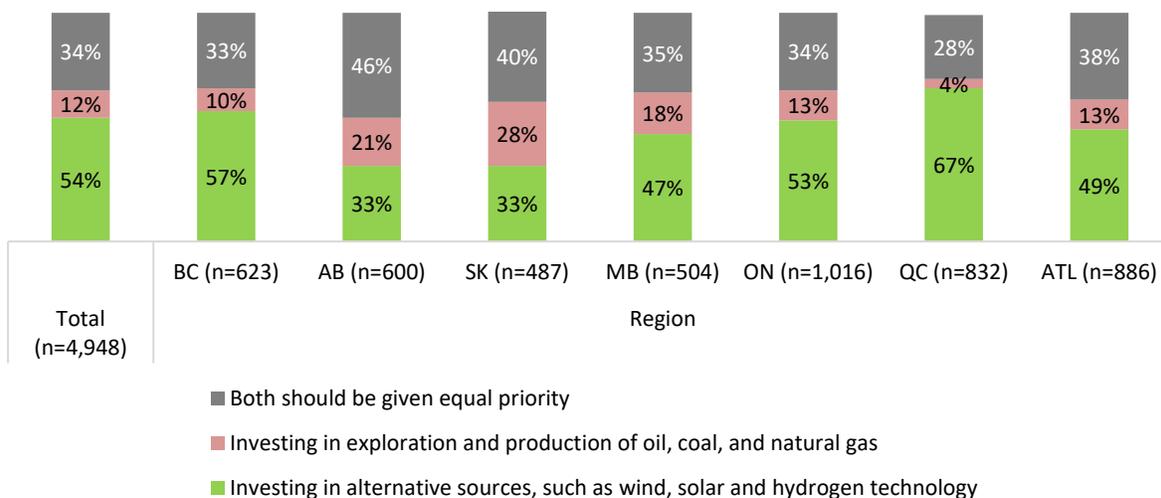
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Part Two: Alternative energy versus oil and gas (or both?)

There is a division within Canada over which path to pursue when it comes to new energy investment. That said, the preference is clearly toward focusing more on renewables versus oil and gas. Just over half of Canadians (54%) say that should be the more important priority. This proportion rises to 57 per cent in British Columbia and 67 per cent in Quebec, while remaining a majority in Ontario (53%).

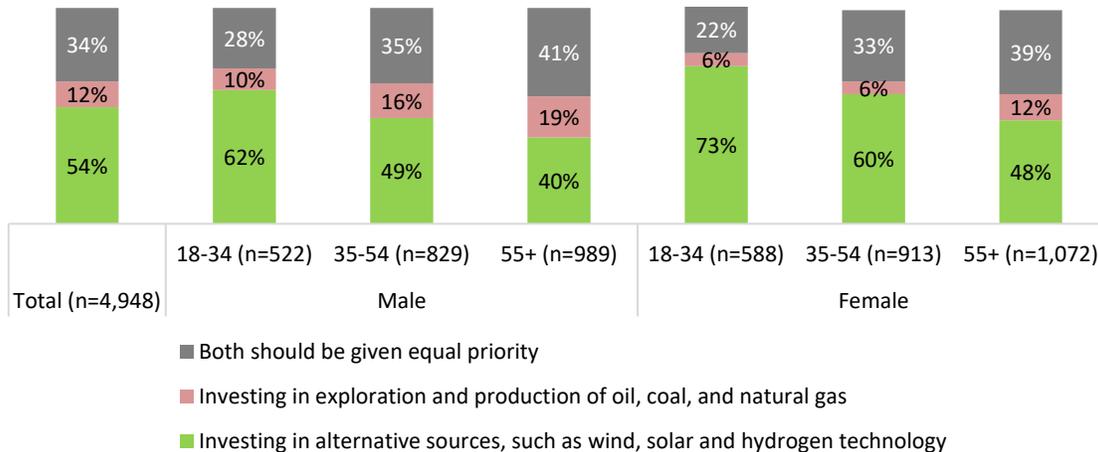
That said, there is a recognition of the need for oil and gas throughout the transition. One-in-three (34%) say that both types of energy should be invested in. Perhaps most notable, in energy-rich Alberta, residents are more than twice as likely to say that there should be a dual priority than to say that oil and gas should be the main focus:

Right now, which one of the following do you think should be the more important priority for addressing Canada's energy supply?



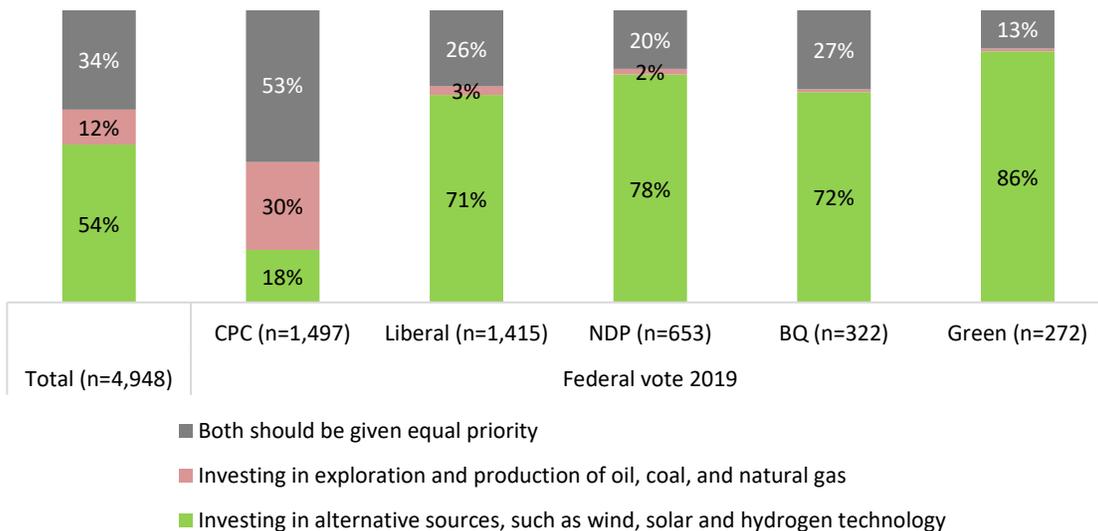
While alternative sources are the preference for younger demographics, among those 55 years of age and older, the preference is split between investing in alternative energy and investing in both types of energy equally:

Right now, which one of the following do you think should be the more important priority for addressing Canada's energy supply?



Among those who voted for a party other than the CPC in the last federal election, at least seven-in-ten say that investment in alternative energy should be the primary focus for the country. For half of past Conservatives however, a balance is needed (53%), while three-in-ten (30%) would double down on oil and gas:

Right now, which one of the following do you think should be the more important priority for addressing Canada's energy supply?



Part Three: High levels of support for solar, wind; half interested in more nuclear

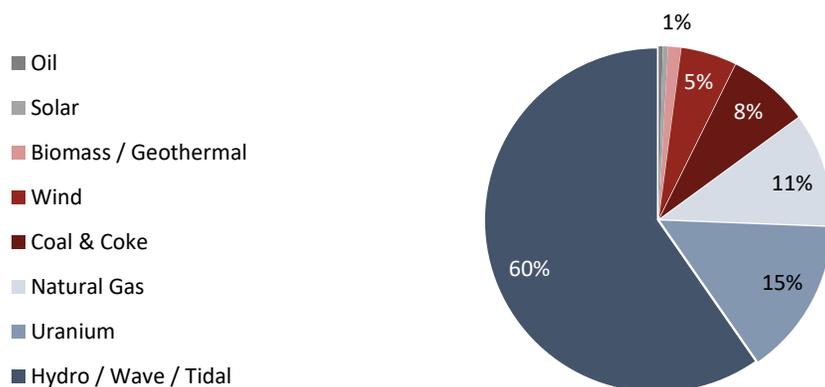
Importantly, energy and electricity are two different considerations. While Canada relies heavily on oil and gas products for manufacturing and transportation, electricity – which is only approximately 16 per cent of

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end-use energy consumption – is produced largely by renewables and non-greenhouse gas emitting processes already.

Canada electricity generation by primary fuel, 2019 (percentage)

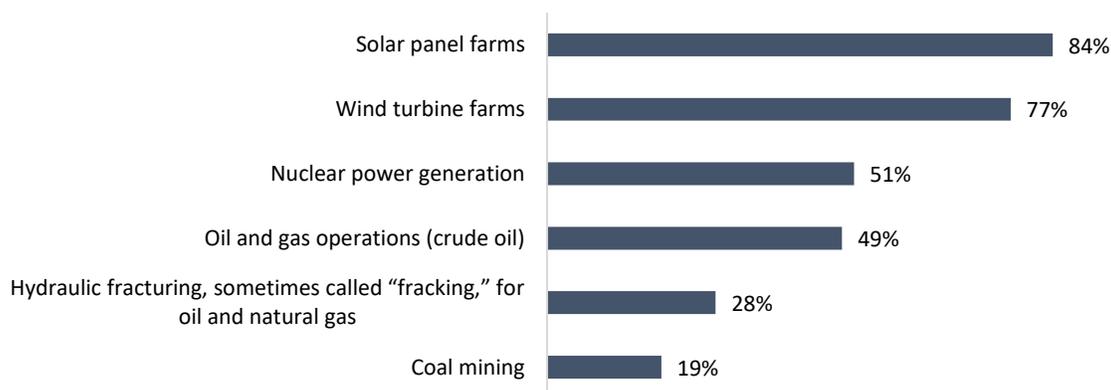


Canadians, evidently, would like to see significant resources put into wind and solar power, to increase their low levels of production. Asked which types of power generation they support, these two options are by far the most popular. That said, each has a long way to go in catching up to the strength and capacity of other sources.

The largest wind farm in Canada, Gros-Morne in Quebec, produces on average 650 GWh per year, while the largest solar farm in Canada, the Claresholm Solar Project northwest of Lethbridge, Alberta, was just completed this year and is hoped to produce 330 GWh annually based on average sunlight in the area.

That output pales in comparison to the output of Canada's more conventional producers. Ontario's largest — and at one time, the world's — nuclear power plant Bruce Power output 46,080 GWh in 2019, for example. Canada has 19 nuclear reactors spread across four power plants currently, but most are in Ontario, and none are currently under construction to join them.

Percentage that support each form of energy production: All respondents, n=4,948



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Regionally, there is considerable variation in support for sources of energy. Wind and solar receive high support in most of the country. Meanwhile, nuclear is significantly more popular in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Ontario compared to elsewhere. Oil and gas receives support from three-quarters in Alberta and Saskatchewan but drops to just one-in-three in Quebec.

Percentage that support each form of energy production:								
	Total (n=4,948)	Region						
		BC (n=623)	AB (n=600)	SK (n=487)	MB (n=504)	ON (n=1,016)	QC (n=832)	ATL (n=886)
Solar panel farms	84%	88%	69%	71%	85%	84%	91%	89%
Wind turbine farms	77%	83%	60%	65%	77%	72%	88%	87%
Nuclear power generation	51%	46%	62%	71%	47%	64%	28%	50%
Oil and gas operations (crude oil)	49%	43%	75%	74%	58%	48%	33%	59%
Hydraulic fracturing, sometimes called "fracking," for oil and natural gas	28%	24%	51%	49%	34%	25%	22%	24%
Coal mining	19%	17%	35%	42%	23%	17%	11%	20%

It is primarily men who are supportive of nuclear power generation. Across all three age groups at least 62 per cent of men support this type of energy production, while a plurality of women aged 18 to 54 oppose nuclear power ([see detailed tables](#)).

Preference for oil and gas is driven by generational sensitivities. Men and women over the age of 54 from each gender are far more likely than their younger counterparts to support expanding it:

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Percentage that support each form of energy production:							
	Total (n=4,948)	Age and Gender					
		Male			Female		
		18-34 (n=522)	35-54 (n=829)	55+ (n=989)	18-34 (n=588)	35-54 (n=913)	55+ (n=1,072)
Solar panel farms	84%	83%	83%	78%	91%	87%	86%
Wind turbine farms	77%	83%	75%	70%	85%	79%	76%
Nuclear power generation	51%	70%	62%	63%	37%	37%	43%
Oil and gas operations (crude oil)	49%	42%	53%	66%	26%	38%	56%
Hydraulic fracturing, sometimes called "fracking," for oil and natural gas	28%	30%	36%	36%	22%	23%	22%
Coal mining	19%	18%	21%	21%	16%	20%	15%

Interestingly, among non-Conservative past voters, there is little enthusiasm for any form of energy production beyond wind and solar. Meanwhile, at least half of those who supported the CPC in 2019 say that they would expand all of these options, aside from coal:

Percentage that support each form of energy production:						
	Total (n=4,948)	Federal vote 2019				
		CPC (n=1,497)	Liberal (n=1,415)	NDP (n=653)	BQ (n=322)	Green (n=272)
Solar panel farms	84%	66%	96%	95%	93%	96%
Wind turbine farms	77%	53%	91%	91%	92%	93%
Nuclear power generation	51%	68%	50%	46%	24%	44%
Oil and gas operations (crude oil)	49%	86%	34%	25%	29%	14%
Hydraulic fracturing, sometimes called "fracking," for oil and natural gas	28%	57%	13%	12%	15%	5%
Coal mining	19%	38%	7%	7%	9%	4%

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

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