

Climate conference cynicism: Vast majority have little faith leaders will make meaningful progress at COP26

Most take pessimistic view of efforts to reverse warming, feel it's "probably" too late

November 9, 2021 – The COP26 climate change summit has been billed as “[make or break](#)” for the planet, with nations coming together to commit to reducing emissions and ultimately slowing the rate of global warming, hoping to mitigate environmental catastrophe. Most Canadians say it may already be too late.

A new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds Canadians voicing overwhelming climate pessimism, both for current COP26 efforts and for the future of the planet.

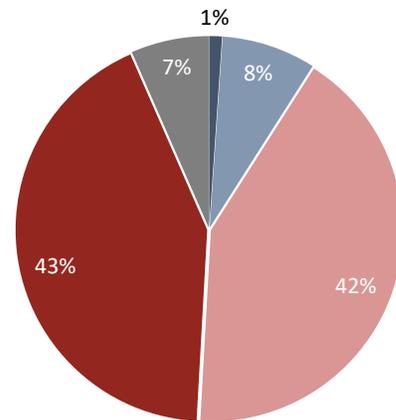
More than four-in-five (84%) say that they have little confidence that meaningful progress against climate change will emerge from the two-week summit. These levels of pessimism persist regardless of how serious Canadians perceive climate change to be.

Perhaps more disturbing, a majority of Canadians appear resigned to the fate of a warming planet and the ecological crisis unfolding. Half say global efforts will “probably not” help to reverse the effects already being felt – from severe weather events, to floods and forest fires – while one-in-five (19%) say it's either already too late or that they have no faith at all in mitigation efforts.

Notably, younger generations offer little more hope than their older peers. Only three-in-ten men (31%) and one-in-five women (18%) younger than 35 say that they believe the effects of climate change can be softened or reversed.

Amid these gloomy prognostications, the appetite for more efforts from the federal government on this file is significant. Fully half (52%) say the government is not doing enough to address climate change, while three-in-ten (30%) say it is going too far in its plans.

Based on what you have read, seen, or heard, how confident are you that the major global emitters will make meaningful progress on controlling/reducing their emissions during this COP26 conference?
(All respondents, n=1,611)



■ Totally confident ■ Confident
■ Not that confident ■ Not confident at all
■ Really not sure

METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from November 3 - 7, 2021 among a representative randomized sample of 1,611 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.

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More Key Findings:

- Seven-in-ten (71%) Canadians say that climate change is a fact, caused mostly by human activities, while (19%) support the theory but feel that natural changes are driving warming.
- Half of Canadians now say that climate change is a “very serious” threat, the highest mark since 2014.
- Residents in Alberta and Saskatchewan are most likely to say the federal government is too focused on climate change efforts, while those in Quebec (67%) and British Columbia (59%) are most likely to say it has not done enough.

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 convinced climate change is happening and serious

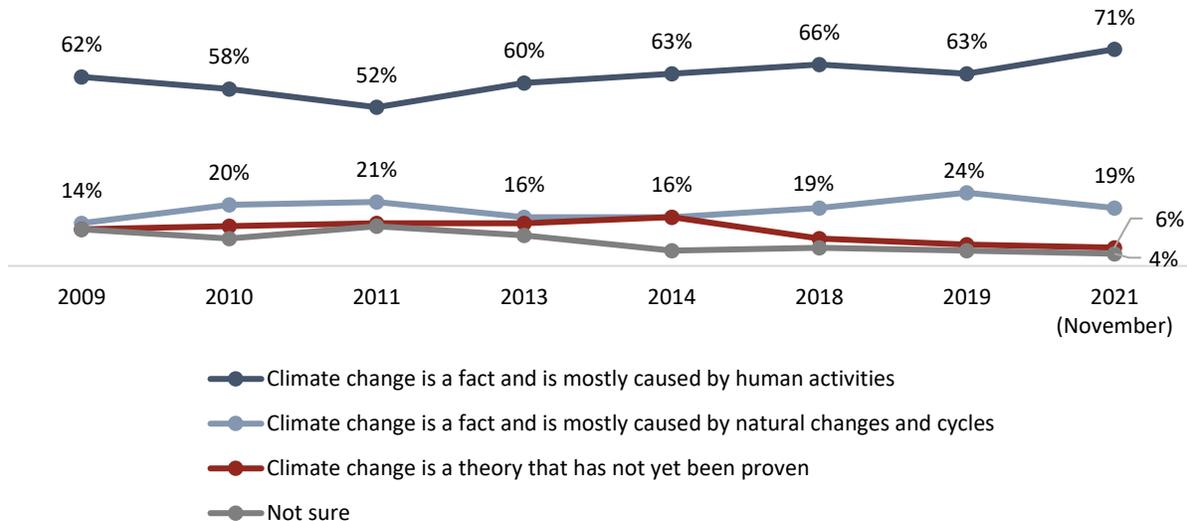
The consensus on the cause of climate change from the academic community has been overwhelming. A [survey](#) of nearly 90,000 peer-reviewed papers published since 2012 found 99.9 per cent agreed that human activities are altering the Earth's climate.

While not nearly as overwhelming, a majority of Canadians believe the same. Seven-in-ten say climate change is a fact and is mostly caused by human activities, the highest number of Canadians since Angus Reid began tracking these data in 2009. One-in-five (19%) believe climate change is part of a natural cycle, an increase from 2009, but a decrease from a high of one-quarter (24%) who believed that two years ago. Just six per cent believe climate change is an unproven theory:

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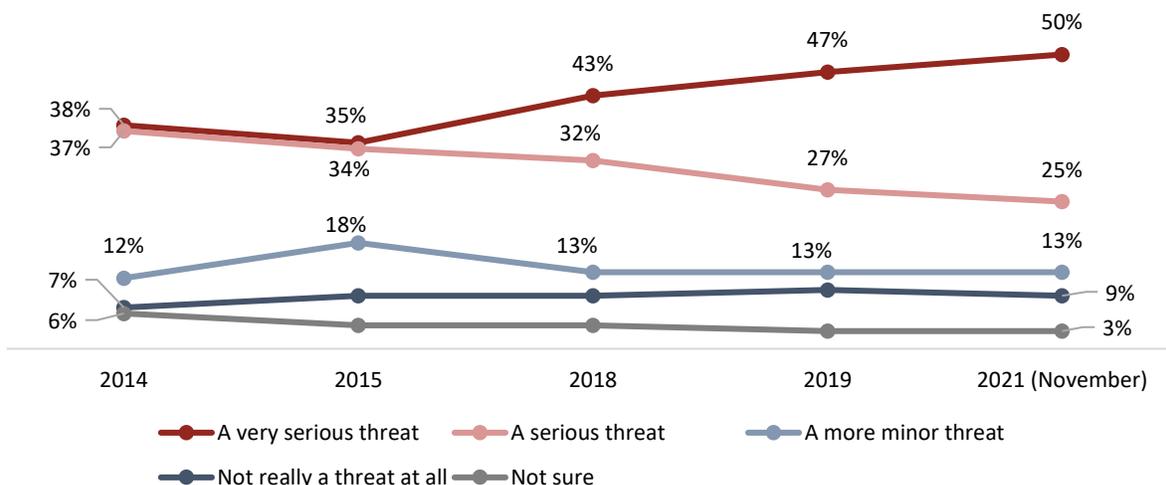
Which of the following statements comes closest to your view of climate change?



Following a summer in which wildfires raged across large swathes of the country, air quality in major metropolitan areas in Canada was among the worst in the world, and a heat dome is believed to have killed over 500 people and one billion marine animals on the West Coast, half of all Canadians qualified climate change as a very serious threat to the planet – a jump of 15 points since 2015.

The growing concern appears to be driven by those who were already convinced that climate change represented a serious threat growing even more concerned. In contrast, the number of respondents who say that climate change is only a more minor threat, or not really a threat at all, has remained relatively flat since 2018:

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



Part Two: Will COP26 make a difference?

While there is much concern that world leaders are still [moving too slow](#) to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius – the so-called [Paris Agreement](#) adopted at COP21 in the French capital in 2015 – there have already been some notable deals signed in Glasgow during the first week of COP26.

More than 100 countries signed an agreement to end and reverse deforestation by 2030, backed by \$12 billion of public funds from 12 governments and \$7.2 billion of private investment. The signatories importantly include Brazil, which has been under [intense scrutiny](#) for cutting down huge stretches of the Amazon rainforest.

Nearly two dozen more countries, including ones that currently heavily rely on coal, signed an agreement to [end coal use](#) in the next two decades. Canada had already agreed to [phase-out coal](#) electricity generation by 2030.

There have also been deals cut on reducing methane emissions and ending the financing of [fossil fuel projects abroad](#) that do not capture greenhouse gas emissions at the source. Canada signed on to both of those deals, but the methane agreement has yet to receive signatures from China, Russia, and India, three of the world's [biggest methane emitters](#).

Despite these deals, many remain skeptical that much if anything will be accomplished at COP26. Environmental activist Greta Thunberg recently lambasted world leaders for being all talk and no action – just a lot of [“blah, blah, blah.”](#) This critique was echoed by many of the over [100,000 protesters](#) who crowded Glasgow's streets this week.

But have the previous COPs made a difference? Modelling from 2019 suggests that by [implementing the Paris Agreement commitments](#), the gigatons of emissions released each year could fall from 64 under a “business as usual scenario” to between 54 and 56 by 2030. While this is an improvement, best estimates suggest that to limit temperatures to below 2C would require only emitting 38 gigatons by 2030.

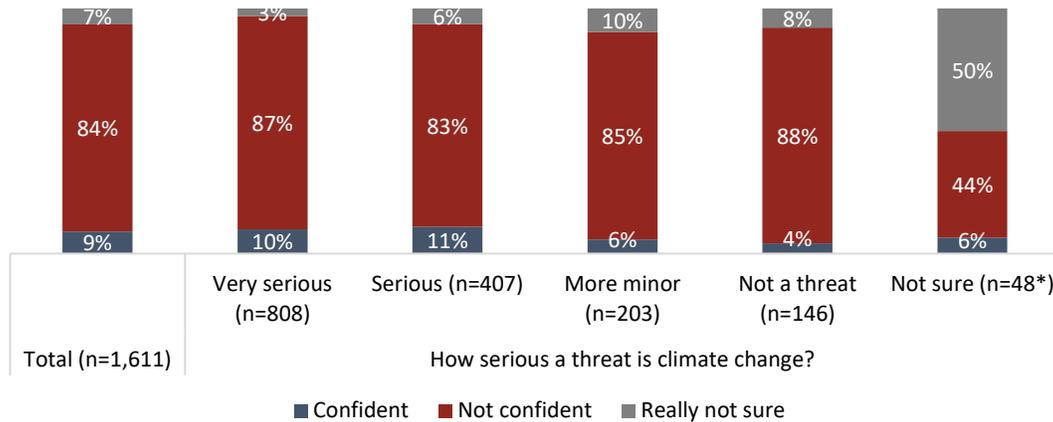
More recently, the 2021 [United Nations Emissions Gap Report](#) highlighted that, while previous commitments would successfully reduce emissions by 7.5% by 2030 if all countries were to meet them, to achieve only a 2C rise in temperatures would require a 30% reduction.

Canadians, for their part, are skeptical that COP26 will amount to any real change. Based on what they know about COP26, four-in-five (84%) say they are not confident that any meaningful progress to control or reduce emissions will be made by the major global emitters:

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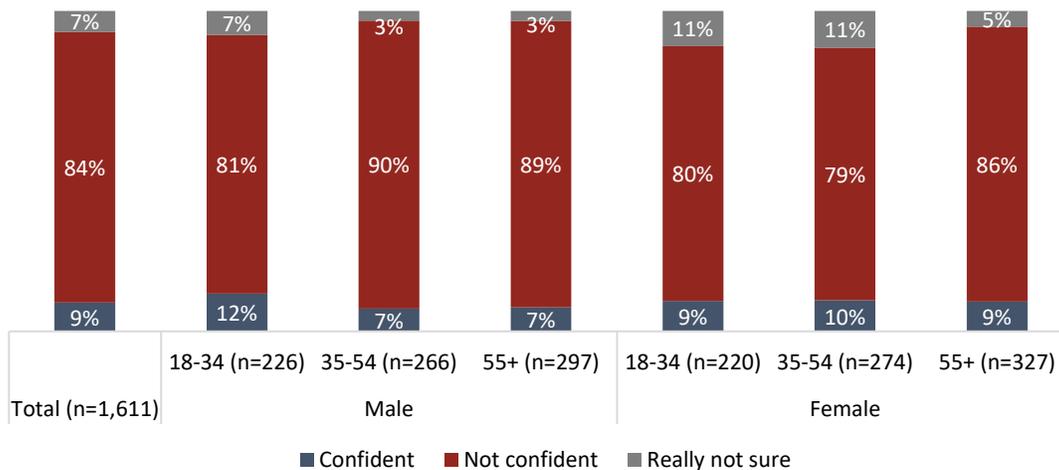
Based on what you have read, seen, or heard, how confident are you that the major global emitters will make meaningful progress on controlling/reducing their emissions during this conference?



**Small sample size, interpret with caution*

This skepticism is shared by the vast majority of all Canadians, but peaks at nine-in-ten (90%) of men aged 35 to 54 years old:

Based on what you have read, seen, or heard, how confident are you that the major global emitters will make meaningful progress on controlling/reducing their emissions during this conference?



Only one-quarter have faith that effects can be reversed

The headlines have been **dire** and the prognostications **mostly negative**. But climate scientists also believe **there's still time** to prevent some of the worst effects of climate change.

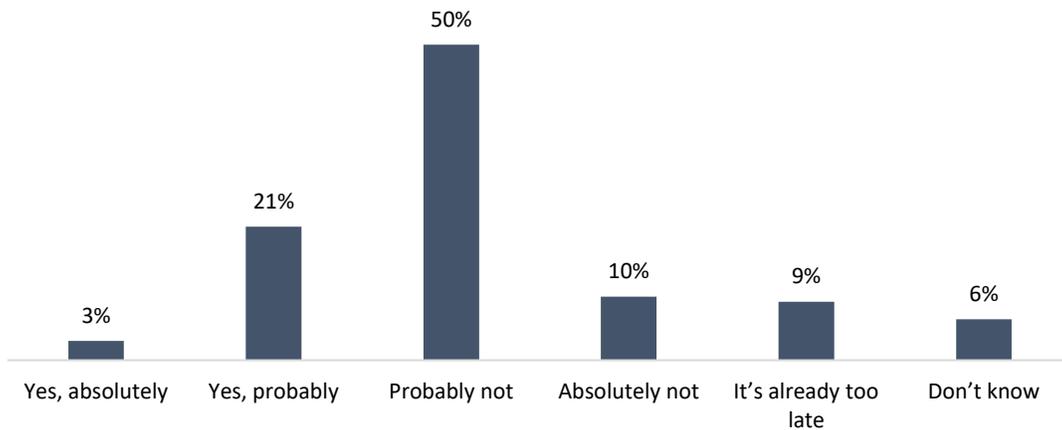
Canadians who believe in climate change are not as optimistic. Half believe humans probably won't be able to reverse the effects of climate change before it's too late. One-in-ten say we absolutely won't be

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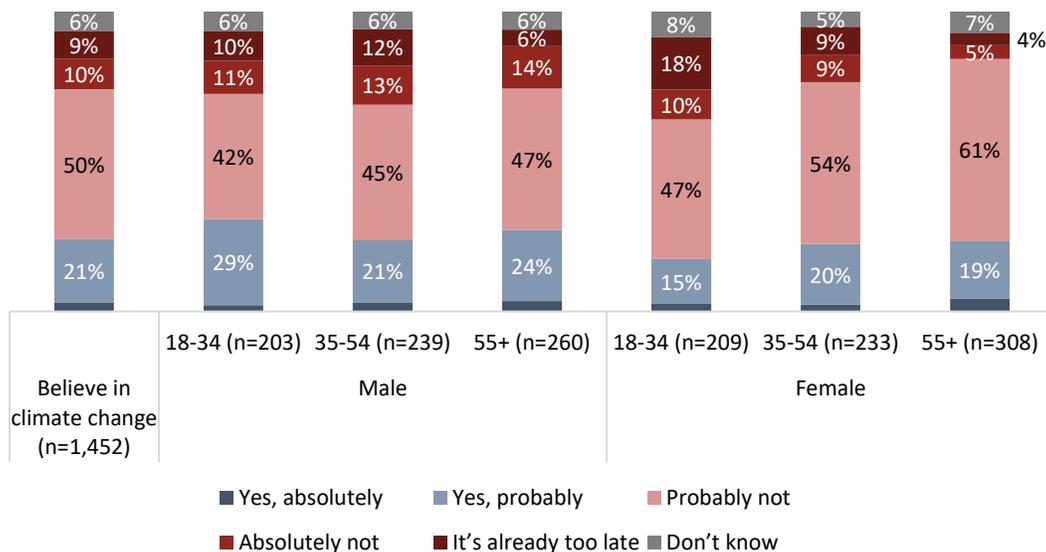
able to do it, and a further one-in-ten (9%) believe it's already too late. One-quarter (24%) are more optimistic:

**Overall, do you think humans will actually be able to reverse the effects of climate change before it's too late?
(Among those who believe climate change is real, n=1,452)**



Though the majority of all age groups are pessimistic, young men are the most optimistic humanity will be able to reverse course. Three-in-ten (29%) men aged 18-to-34 believe we will probably be able to reverse the effects of climate change, a rate double of the most pessimistic group, 18- to 34-year-old women (15%):

Overall, do you think humans will actually be able to reverse the effects of climate change before it's too late?



Part Three: Half want government to do more

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s record on climate change came under fire during the federal election campaign when NDP leader Jagmeet Singh pointed out that since Trudeau took power – and signed on to the Paris Agreement – Canada’s emissions have risen. Critics also highlight that Trudeau’s green credentials are compromised by the government’s decision to buy the Trans Mountain pipeline in 2018 to ensure its construction, as well as its support for the now defunct Keystone XL pipeline and Enbridge’s controversial Line 5 pipeline.

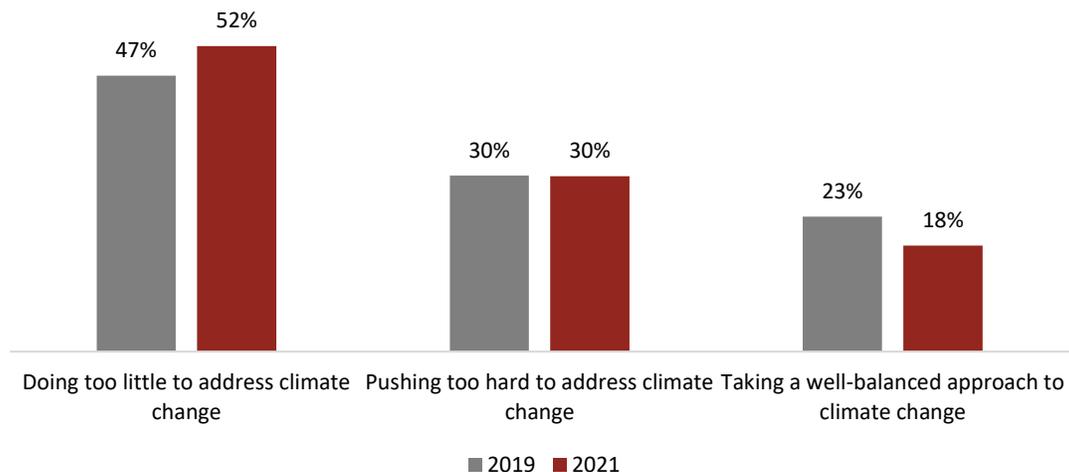
Canada’s record is poor; Ottawa has a history of making and missing its climate change targets. Every pledge to slash emissions – beginning with the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit in 1992 – has not been met.

Notably, some of the government’s strongest actions against emissions, including a growing carbon price plan, didn’t take effect until 2019, the last year from which emissions data is currently available. Trudeau’s government has also since set a loftier target than the Paris Agreement – reducing emissions by 40 to 45 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030.

During the campaign, Trudeau promised to make Canada’s electricity grid net zero by 2035. He followed that up by promising to put a cap on oil and gas sector emissions at the start of COP26, while also signing previously noted agreements on reversing deforestation and ending the funding of foreign fossil fuel projects.

Canadians remain unconvinced Trudeau and his government has done enough. Half (52%) say the Liberals are doing too little to address climate change, while just one-in-five (18%) believe they are taking the right approach. Those numbers represent a slight increase and decrease, respectively, from when ARI asked the same question in 2019. The number of Canadians who believe the Liberal government is doing too much has stayed static:

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

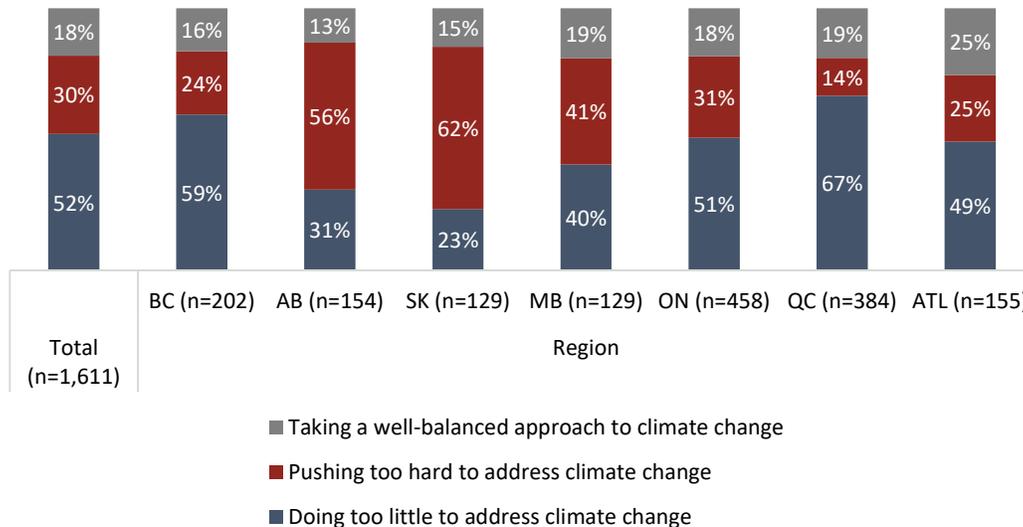


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On the Prairies, where some feel [unfairly targeted](#) by the federal government's actions on the environment, the prevailing sentiment is Trudeau is pushing too hard on the climate change file. A majority of Albertans and Saskatchewanians say this, while Manitobans are split between saying the prime minister is doing too much and doing too little. For every other province, at least half say the Liberal government needs to do much more:

When you think about the Liberal government's record under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on climate change, would you say it has been:



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

For detailed results by how serious of a threat respondents believe climate change to be, [click here](#).

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