

Alberta Politics: Support tilts towards backing renewable moratorium, but worries over jobs, power prices linger

Three-in-five believe province is right to resist federal government's push to net zero

September 14, 2023 – As Alberta Premier Danielle Smith pushes back against the federal government's plans to decarbonize the power grid, Albertans lean towards supporting the recently implemented moratorium on large-scale solar and wind projects but remain concerned about potential ripple effects on jobs and power prices.

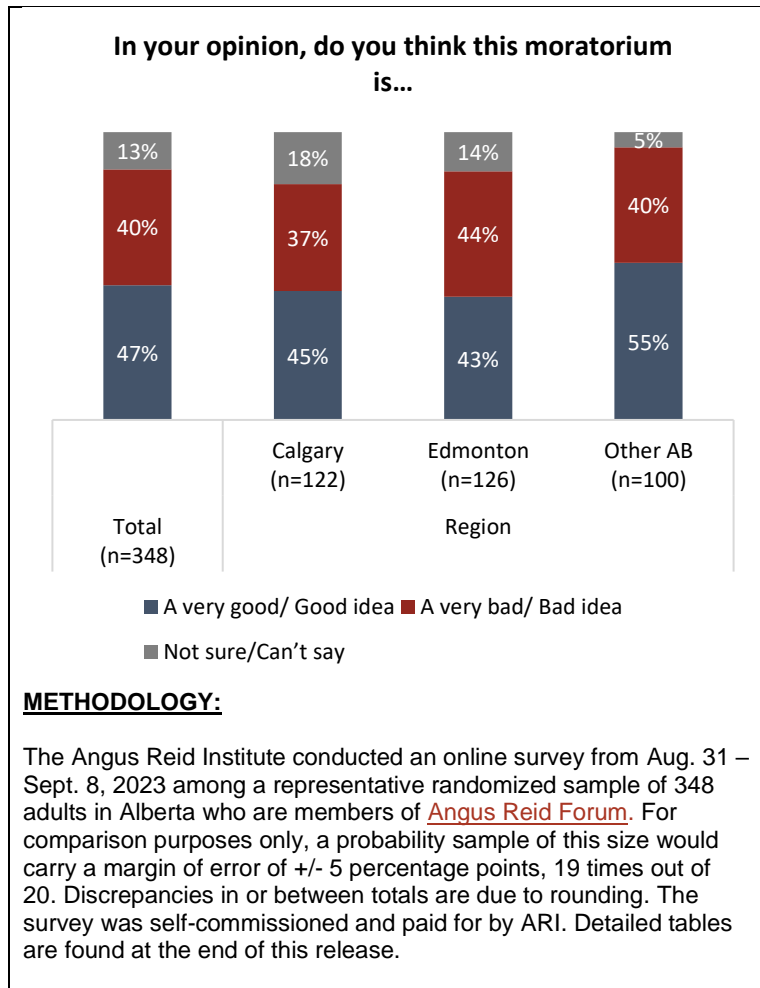
New data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds approaching half of Albertans (47%) feel the moratorium on renewable energy development to be a good idea.

However, there are many – two-in-five (40%) – who disagree. The green energy development pause is supported by a majority (55%) outside of Edmonton and Calgary. Opinions are more divided inside the province's two largest cities, though Calgarians are more inclined to say the moratorium is a good idea than not.

At issue for the dissenters are concerns over the moratorium's effect on [what was a booming sector of the economy](#) and the jobs it created, as well as [rapidly rising power prices](#) in the province. Half (50%) of Albertans say the government is "hurting jobs and the economy" with the green energy pause, while a similar number (46%) worry that it will only further increase electricity prices.

However, as Smith and the UCP prepare to battle Ottawa over its plans to institute a net-zero energy grid by 2035, there is plenty of support among Albertans to resist the federal government's policies. Three-in-five (59%) feel the provincial government is right to push back against the federal government's net zero plan.

Meanwhile, three months into its new mandate, the UCP government evidently has work to do on some key files. Three-in-five (60%) believe the Alberta government is performing poorly on health care, as it attempts to sort out the mess of lab testing in Calgary by undoing privatization it had implemented last year and it faces criticism for [responding too slowly](#) to an E. coli outbreak which has sickened more than 250, including many children.



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More Key Findings:

- The top issues in the province as selected by Albertans are the rising cost of living (65%) and health care (49%). Environment and climate change (17%) fall behind public safety (29%), housing affordability (29%), the economy generally (24%) and energy policy (24%).
- At least half in all regions in the province believe the government is right to resist the federal government's push to net-zero emissions. Support is highest, however, in areas outside of the province's two largest cities, at seven-in-ten (70%).
- After a record summer wildfire season, Albertans are split in their assessments of the provincial government's performance on emergency management. Two-in-five (43%) say it has done well on that file, while two-in-five (38%) disagree.

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: Top provincial issues

Health care, cost of living, public safety rank high; climate change further down the list

Two issues remain persistent concerns across the country – health care and the rising cost of living. In Alberta, the latter is viewed as more pressing – two-thirds (65%) select it as a top issue facing the province – while half worry about health care. Lower priorities in the eyes of Albertans, but still selected by three-in-ten, are concerns over street crime (29%) and housing affordability (29%). [Despite the effects of a summer of smoke and flame](#) widely viewed by climate scientists as [exacerbated by the changing climate](#), fewer than one-in-five (17%) feel the environment is a top concern for the province.

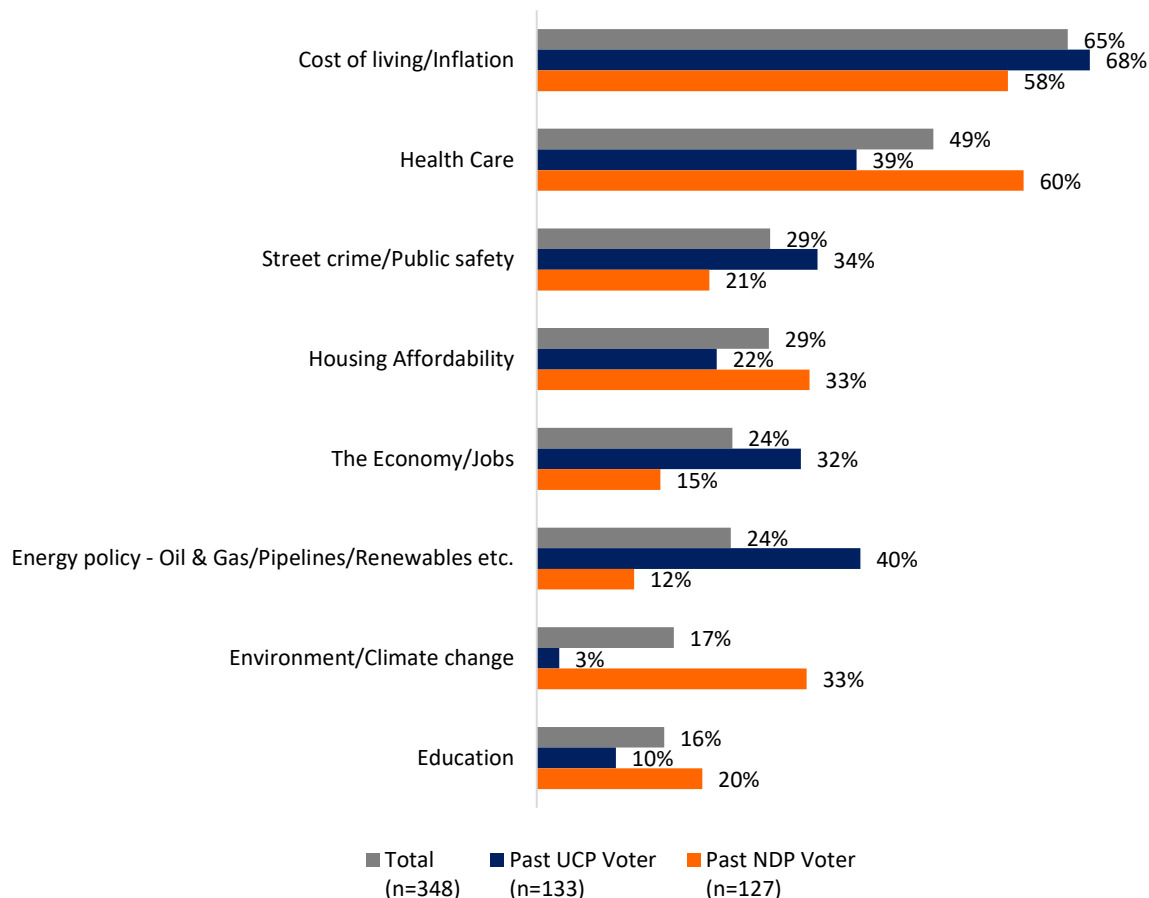
[Related: One-quarter of young adults affected by smoke and fumes from recent wildfires say they'd think of moving](#)

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More than three months after Alberta’s election, past NDP and UCP voters hold divergent views over the province’s top concerns. Street crime and public safety, energy policy, and the economy broadly rank higher for those who voted in the UCP majority government, while those who supported the NDP opposition are more concerned with housing affordability and climate change:

**Top provincial issues - Alberta
(Up to three chosen; issues selected by more than 15% overall shown)**



Fewer than one-in-ten (9%) Albertans older than 54 feel climate change is a top issue facing the province. Albertans that age are more worried about energy policy (34%) and health care (57%) than younger ones. Young Albertan adults say they are concerned about the environment (27%) and housing affordability (43%) at higher rates than older ones.

Meanwhile, women (63%) are nearly twice as likely as men (34%) to select health care as a pressing concern:

Top provincial issues - Alberta (Up to three chosen; issues selected by more than 15% overall shown)						
	Total (n=348)	Gender		Age		
		Male (n=177)	Female (n=170)	18-34 (n=107)	35-54 (n=122)	55+ (n=119)
Cost of living/ Inflation	65%	62%	68%	63%	69%	63%
Health Care	49%	34%	63%	48%	42%	57%
Street crime/ Public safety	29%	32%	25%	34%	25%	27%
Housing Affordability	29%	30%	27%	43%	25%	17%
The Economy/ Jobs	24%	28%	20%	21%	26%	24%
Energy policy – Oil & Gas/ Pipelines/ Renewables etc.	24%	30%	19%	12%	25%	34%
Environment/ Climate change	17%	18%	16%	27%	14%	9%
Education	16%	12%	18%	19%	18%	10%

Part Two: Government performance

The good: energy policy, the economy; the bad: public safety, health care, affordability

The UCP government is three months into its new majority mandate under Premier Danielle Smith. Albertans are more likely to offer praise on some matters than others. More than half (54%) believe Smith and the UCP have performed well on energy policy – the biggest move on that front perhaps being the renewable energy development moratorium, more on that later. A slim majority also praise the government’s performance on the economy (51%).

After a summer of intense wildfires, Albertans are split on how the UCP have performed on emergency management – 43 per cent say well, 38 per cent say poorly.

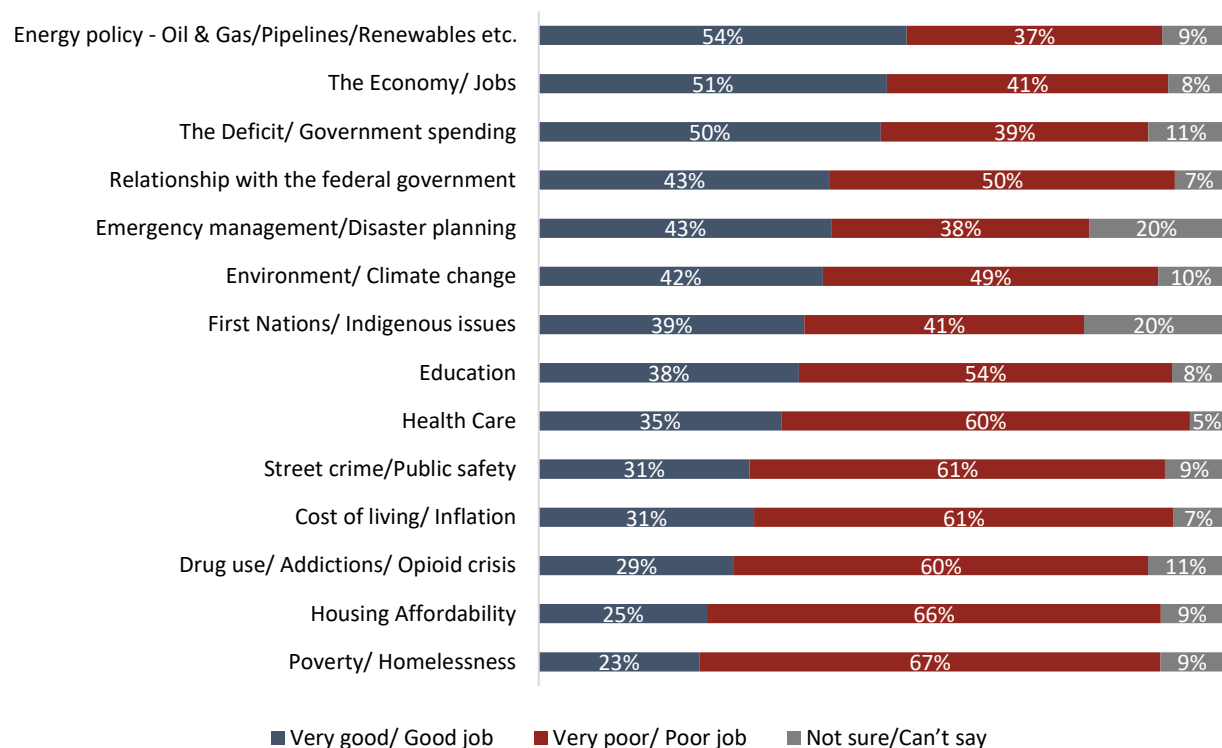
Elsewhere, Albertans are more critical. Three-in-five say the government has done a poor job on health care. The slow response to the E. coli outbreak isn’t the only recent misstep on the health file. In August, the government announced it was [taking back control](#) of health testing in Calgary after it had previously privatized the operation in a cost-saving measure a year earlier. The UCP reversed course after waitlists grew to months for routine appointments shortly after Dynalife took over lab testing in Calgary.

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There are also three-in-five (61%) who believe the Alberta government has performed poorly on public safety. On that front, the government [recently announced changes](#) to bail practices as well as creating “targeted prosecution units” to address concerns over violent crime. It remains to be seen how this will affect Albertans’ perception of the government’s efficacy on this file.

**Do you think the current government of Alberta is doing a good job or a poor job in each of the following areas?
(Alberta, n=348)**



Part Three: Renewable moratorium

Nearly half believe it is a good idea; two-in-five disagree

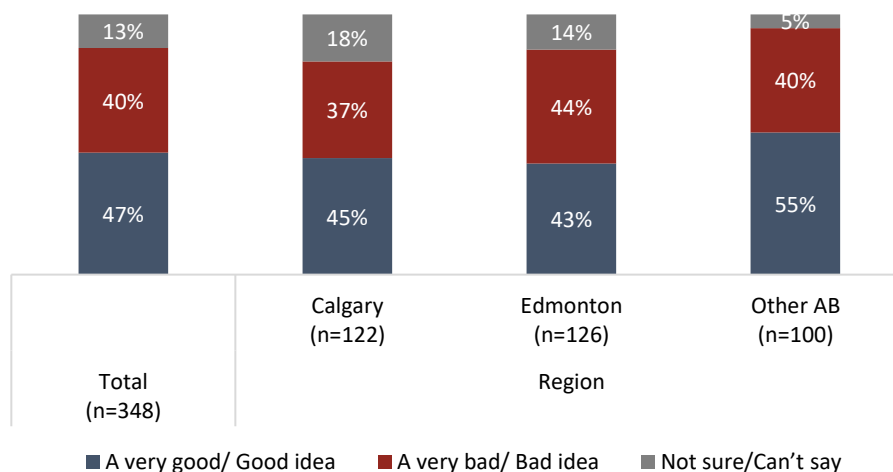
Controversy came for the UCP and Smith early in their renewed mandate. Alberta announced on Aug. 3 that it would be instituting a six-month moratorium on large solar and wind projects, [citing concerns](#) over the rapid pace of development, the loss of important agricultural land, and future reclamation of the projects at the end of their lifecycle. Members of the renewable energy industry [felt blindsided](#) by the pause, which affects an estimated [118 projects worth \\$33 billion](#). Economists and environmentalists [also criticized](#) the moratorium.

Approaching half (47%) of Albertans feel the moratorium is a good idea, while two-in-five disagree. The concept is more popular outside of the provinces two largest cities, where a majority (55%) feel it is a good move. Those in Edmonton are near evenly split (43% good idea, 44% bad idea), while Calgarians lean towards supporting the renewable energy pause:

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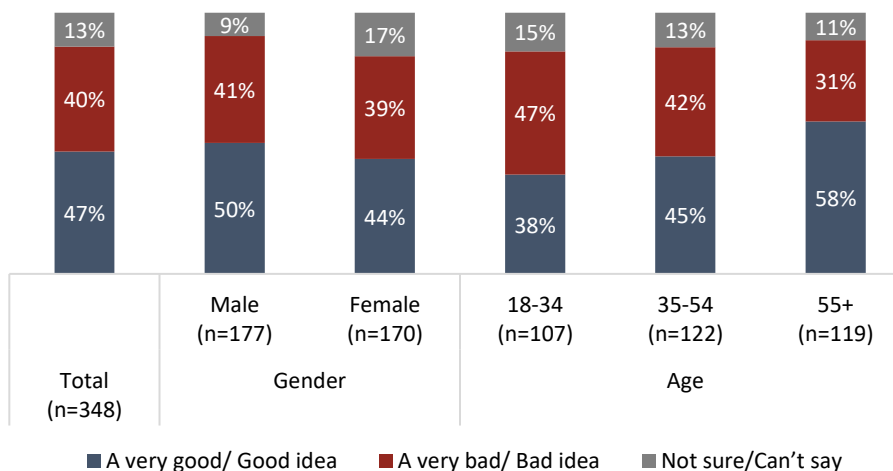
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In your opinion, do you think this moratorium is...



Older Albertans are more supportive of the moratorium than younger ones. Approaching half (47%) of 18- to 34-year-old Albertans say the moratorium is a bad idea; a majority (58%) of those older than 54 believe it is a good one:

In your opinion, do you think this moratorium is...



Albertans worry over effect of moratorium on jobs, power prices

The Alberta government has [expressed concerns](#) about the federal government’s plan for a net-zero power grid by 2035. Smith [said federal government policies](#) were part of the reason for the moratorium, arguing that wind and solar projects needed national gas plants to “secure the reliability” of the power grid. But the federal government is creating “uncertainty” in the natural gas market, so “no one is proposing any new natural gas plants,” [Smith added](#). She said that Alberta needs natural gas to “keep the lights on” in -30 weather. Approaching three-in-five (59%) Albertans believe the province is “right to resist

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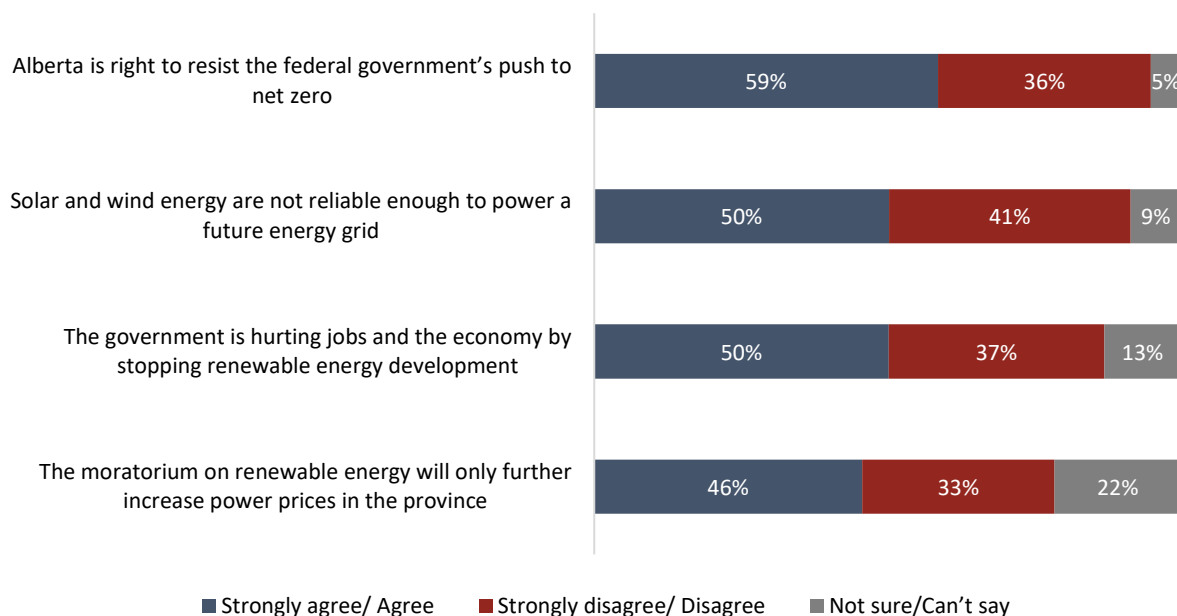
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the federal government’s push to net zero”, while half (50%) agree that “solar and wind are not reliable enough to power a future energy grid”.

However, there are some reservations on the potential ripple effects of the solar and wind moratorium. The clean-energy think tank Pembina Institute [believes the 118 projects](#) it says are affected by the moratorium would create a year’s worth of work for 24,000 people. Half (50%) of Albertans say “the government is hurting jobs and the economy by stopping renewable energy development”.

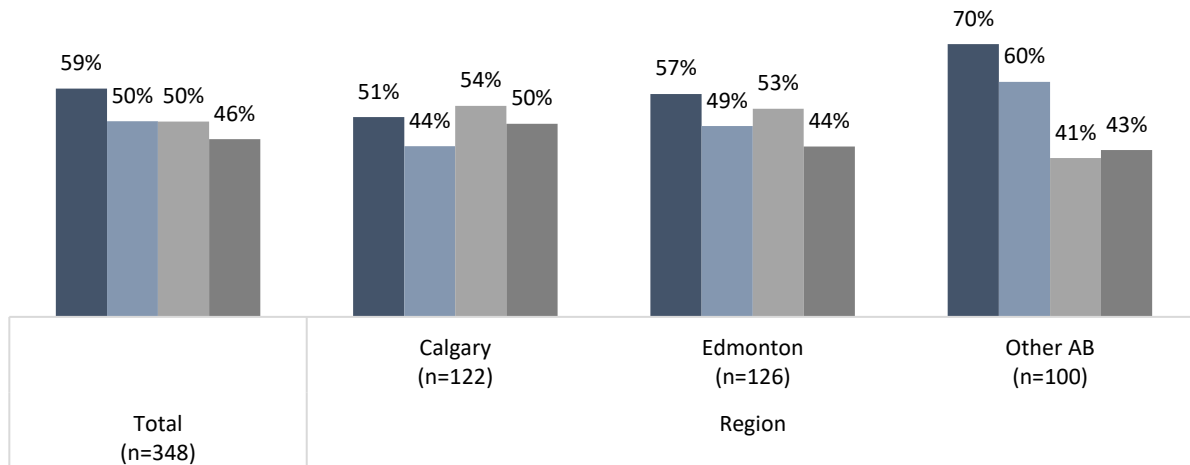
Meanwhile, electricity prices have soared in Alberta, [doubling from last year while climbing to a record high in the summer](#). The Alberta NDP [have argued](#) that the moratorium risks putting more pressure on prices by blocking future energy supply from the market. Approaching half (46%) in Alberta worry there will be further increases to power prices in the province because of the renewable energy moratorium:

**Agree vs. disagree
(Alberta, n=348)**



Those living outside of Calgary and Edmonton are more supportive (70%) of the Alberta government’s pushback against federal government net-zero policies, while also being more likely to express doubt (60%) about the reliability of wind and solar power. However, two-in-five outside of Alberta’s major cities also worry over the moratorium’s effect on power prices and jobs:

Percentage who agree with the following statements



- Alberta is right to resist the federal government's push to net zero
- Solar and wind energy are not reliable enough to power a future energy grid
- The government is hurting jobs and the economy by stopping renewable energy development
- The moratorium on renewable energy will only further increase power prices in the province

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