

Canadians call for heavy AI regulation, but three-quarters doubt any government can keep up with the technology

Two-thirds among both rural & urban Canadians say they would oppose a data centre where they live

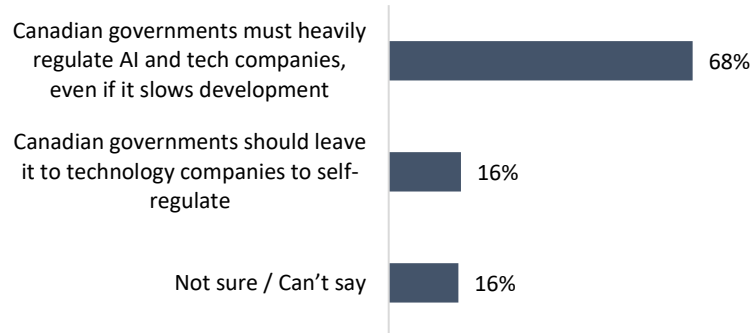
June 2, 2026 – As the federal government prepares to unveil its national artificial intelligence strategy this week, Canadians are asking governments to take a firm hand with the technology, while at the same time expressing profound doubt that public institutions are equipped to move quickly enough to keep up.

New data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds two-thirds of Canadians (68%) adamant that it is the place of government to heavily regulate AI and tech companies, even if doing so slows development. One-in-six (16%) disagree and say that the government should leave this up to tech companies to self-regulate.

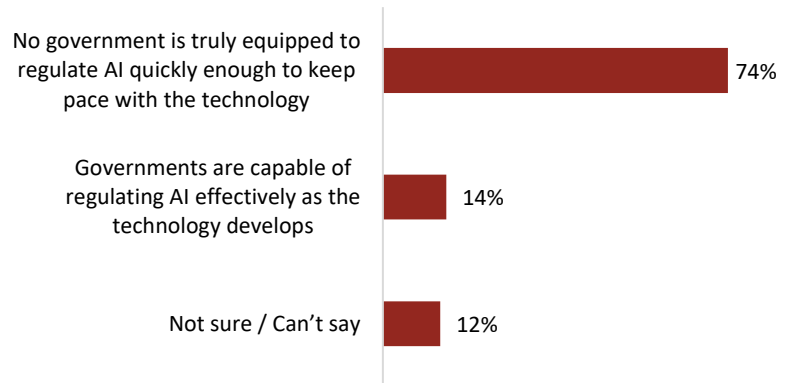
But with technology and implementation changing rapidly, many Canadians are even more skeptical of government's ability to both regulate and successfully utilize AI. Three-quarters (74%) say no government is truly equipped to regulate AI quickly enough to keep pace with the technology while just 14 per cent have faith that it can be done.

Alongside this, seven-in-10 (70%) say Ottawa should be cautious about adopting AI because of the risk of unintended consequences, rather than actively investing in it to streamline public services and operations. The federal government has already announced both private and public integration of AI, with scaling being a significant priority in the coming years.

Should Canadian governments heavily regulate AI?



Are governments capable of regulating AI effectively?



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from May 7 – 11, 2026, among a randomized sample of 1,803 Canadian adults. Respondents are drawn from the [Angus Reid Forum](#), a large-scale online panel developed to include Canadian residents in each of the 343 federal ridings in Canada and representative of the Canadian population by age, gender, family income, ethnic status and education. The sample was weighted to be representative of adults nationwide according to region, gender, age, household income, and education, based on the Canadian census. For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 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.

For more information on our polling methods, [click here.](#)

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, President: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

Canadians are also wary of the physical infrastructure required to power the AI boom. While nearly half (46%) say Canada needs domestic AI infrastructure to keep digital services under Canadian control, two-thirds (68%) would oppose a large AI data centre being built within a few blocks of where they live.

Majorities also say such facilities would be bad for energy and environmental sustainability (67%) and for neighbourhoods and surrounding communities (63%). With protests popping up in Vancouver after Telus announced two data centres in Metro Vancouver, these data underscore the forthcoming challenges facing governments and industry as they try to sell AI as both an economic opportunity and a public-interest project, while also reassuring wary populations their worst fears will be addressed.

More Key Findings:

- Asked about the economic benefits of data centre construction and positioning, enthusiasm is muted. Three-in-10 (29%) say this would be good for the businesses and economy in those areas, while 36 per cent disagree. Many are uncertain (35%)
- The strongest case for data centres, according to Canadians, is Canada's ability to compete in AI and tech. Two-in-five (38%) say this would be a benefit of investing in data centres, while one-in-five disagree (20%). Again, a massive portion of the public is unsure (42%)
- Worry about jobs remains a huge obstacle to any government or company pushing for more AI integration. Asked about the impact of AI over the next decade, 45 per cent of Canadians say it will lead to significant job losses, while just three per cent say it will lead to significant gains. Another two-in-five (41%) expect mixed results with some added and some lost.

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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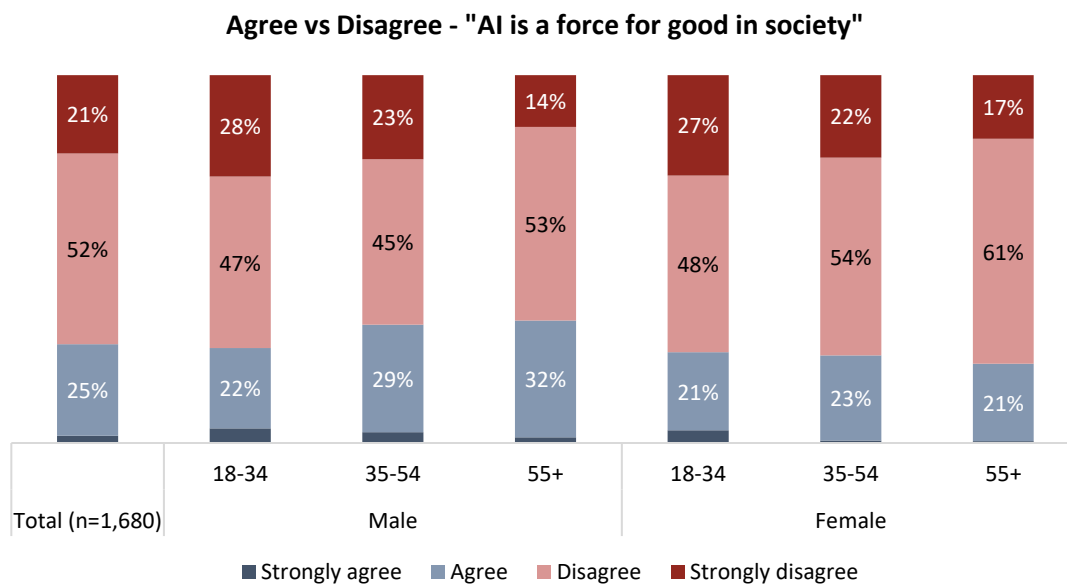
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Shachi Kurl, President: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

Part One: Canadians prioritize regulation over speed of adoption

The federal government will announce its national AI strategy this week (though a draft version of the document [has already leaked](#)), a consequential and challenging undertaking in an environment relentlessly shifting, spurred forth the biggest technological shift since the introduction of the internet to the masses.

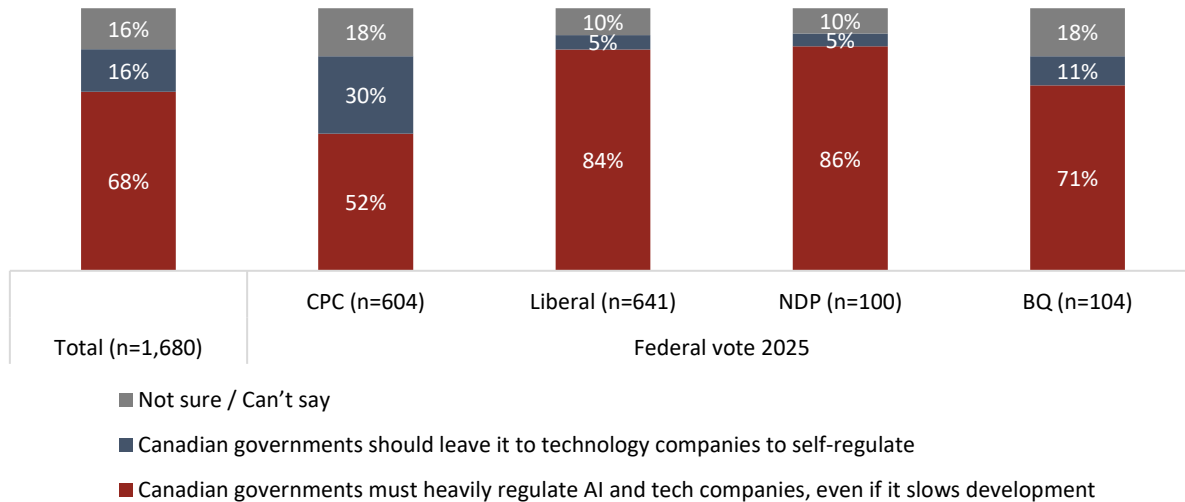
The strategy itself will evidently [be based on six pillars](#): styled by Ottawa as, protecting Canadians; empowering Canadians; powering AI adoption; building sovereign AI; scaling Canadian AI business and building trusted partnerships. The lift itself appears heavy, not only because of the scale of adoption, but also due to the significant uncertainty, concern, and skepticism among the public. Indeed, the first thing governments may have to do is convince Canadians that AI is good for the country:



Canadians want heavy regulation, even if it slows down development

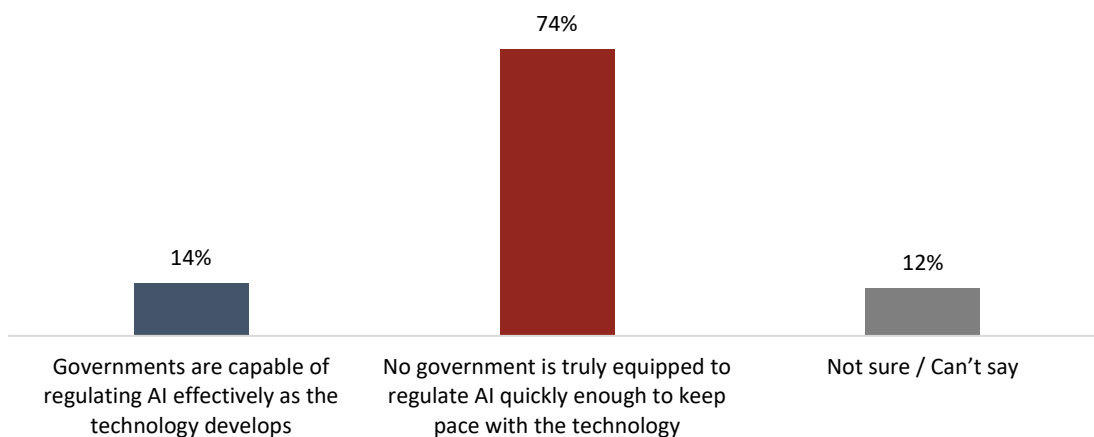
From the annals of “things you probably couldn’t have imagined a decade ago”, Prime Minister Mark Carney recently discussed artificial intelligence with the Pope. Pope Leo XIV himself has recently called for [“robust regulation”](#) of AI as it swarms and subsumes sectors of public and private life, and Carney noted that his desire is for Canada to be a [global leader in responsible development](#) of the technology. This particular goal is widely aligned with what the Canadian public would like to see. Indeed, two-thirds (68%) say that heavy regulation should be prioritized, even at the risk of slowing down development. One-in-six Canadians (16%) say that the government should stay out of this and leave it to tech companies, a proportion that doubles among past CPC voters (30%):

Which of the following comes closer to your own view about artificial intelligence and regulation in Canada?



Easier said than done. While the desire to regulate this burgeoning technology is broad-based, the sense that governments are capable of accomplishing this in such a fast-paced environment is not. Three-quarters of Canadians are doubtful that governments are equipped to keep pace, while 14 per cent have confidence in their capabilities:

Thinking about governments around the world, which statement comes closer to your own opinion?



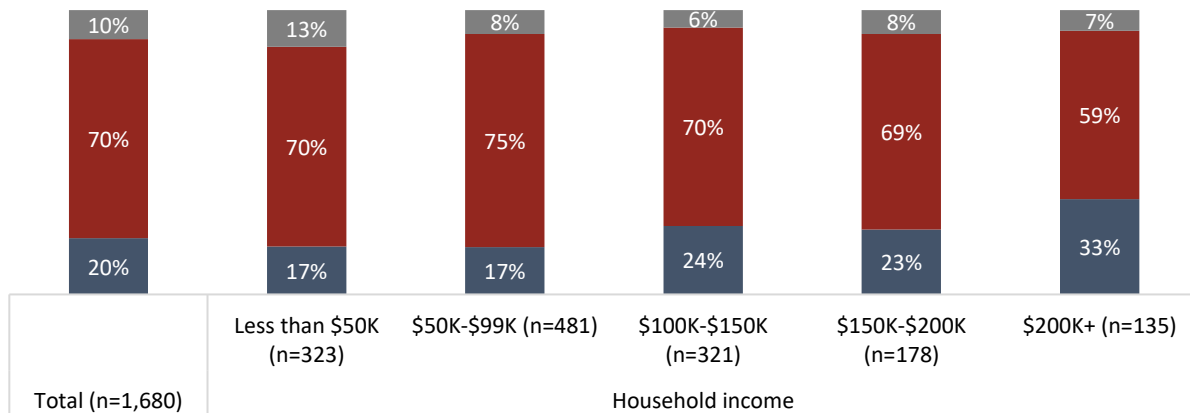
The federal government says it has already begun incorporating AI into its own operations. In 2025, Ottawa launched its first [AI Strategy for the Federal Public Service](#), aimed at scaling “trusted AI” to improve service and support government workers. The government has also begun utilizing internal platforms including CANChat and GCtranslate, an AI-assisted translation tool for routine government use. Public-facing applications are also being tested, including AI Answers, a Canada.ca tool designed to provide plain-language responses based on official government information.

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Canadians, who have voiced [mixed satisfaction with government services](#) in recent years, are hesitant to have the government jump into full AI adoption too quickly. While one-in-five (20%) say that this should happen quickly, more than three times as many prioritize caution (70%), again signalling the deep skepticism most Canadians maintain toward AI:

Which comes closer to your own view?



- Not sure / Can't say
- The government should be cautious about adopting AI because of risks and unintended consequences
- The Canadian government should actively invest in and adopt AI to streamline public services and operations

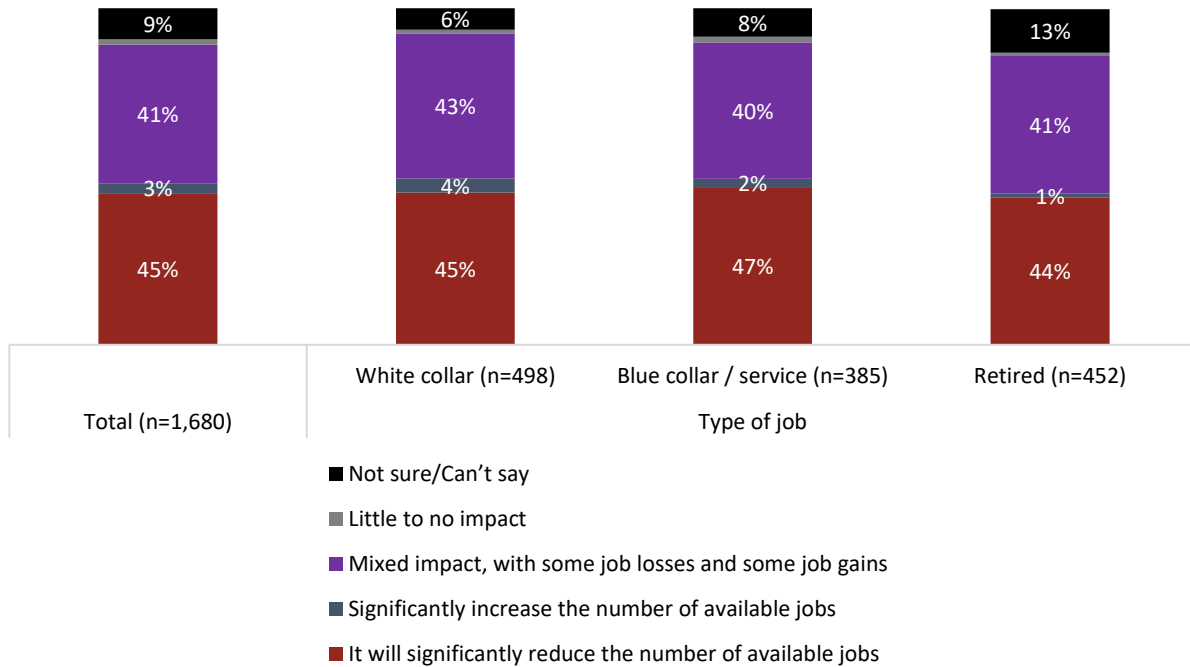
Massive job loss concerns, most want companies who replace workers with AI to be taxed

Leaked details from federal government's AI strategy [boast lofty goals](#) about employment. Specifically, the draft strategy notes that the government aims to:

- Create up to 90,000 AI-related jobs and work opportunities for young Canadians
- Support creating up to 250,000 new jobs through AI adoption.

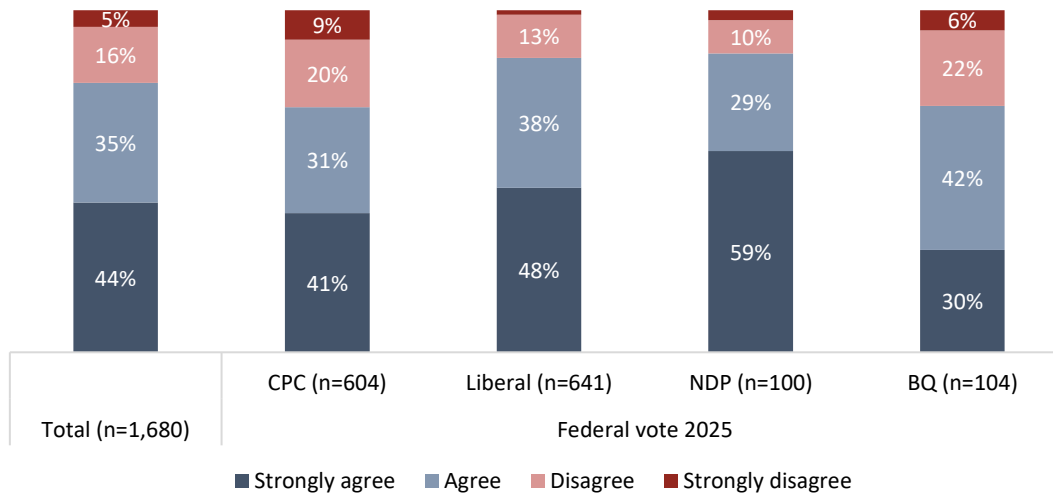
Not included in the document are analyses of the net impact on jobs from a firmer embrace of AI, which, for many, is a huge concern. Asked how they feel AI will impact the Canadian job market over the next decade, few are optimistic, regardless of whether they're employed in a white- or blue-collar field, or retired.

How do you think AI will change the Canadian job market in the next 10 years or so?



When asked how the government should handle some large employers who choose to lay off staff and replace workers with AI, the preference would be for some sort of punitive taxation, with four-in-five (79%) saying they support this:

Agree vs Disagree - "Companies that replace employees with AI should be more heavily taxed by governments"

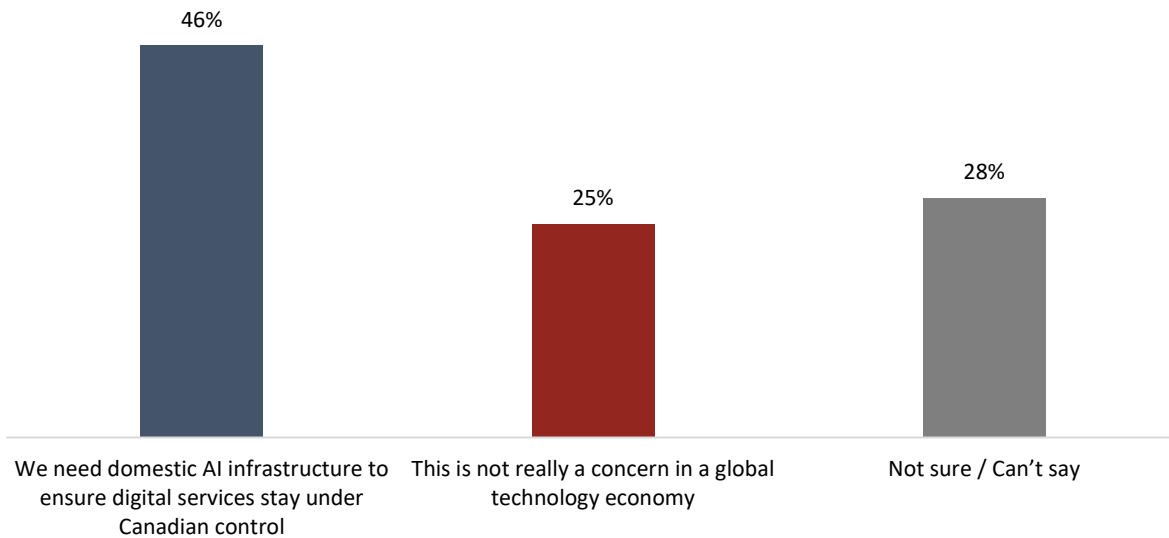


Part Two: Data centres a hard sell

The push to build the infrastructure behind artificial intelligence is on in Canada. Ottawa has sought proposals for large-scale “sovereign” AI data centres, and project announcements have been made in Vancouver, Kamloops, and Merritt in British Columbia, in Olds and Grande Prairie, Alberta, in Regina, and in the GTA. Those plans are already meeting resistance in some communities, including Vancouver, where hundreds marched against proposed AI data centres in May, citing environmental and neighbourhood impacts.

These projects fulfil part of the federal government’s plan for establishing data sovereignty, and that argument on its face appears to have merit. Canadians are twice as likely to say that Canada needs domestic AI infrastructure to ensure more control, as they are to disagree:

Which comes closer to your own view?



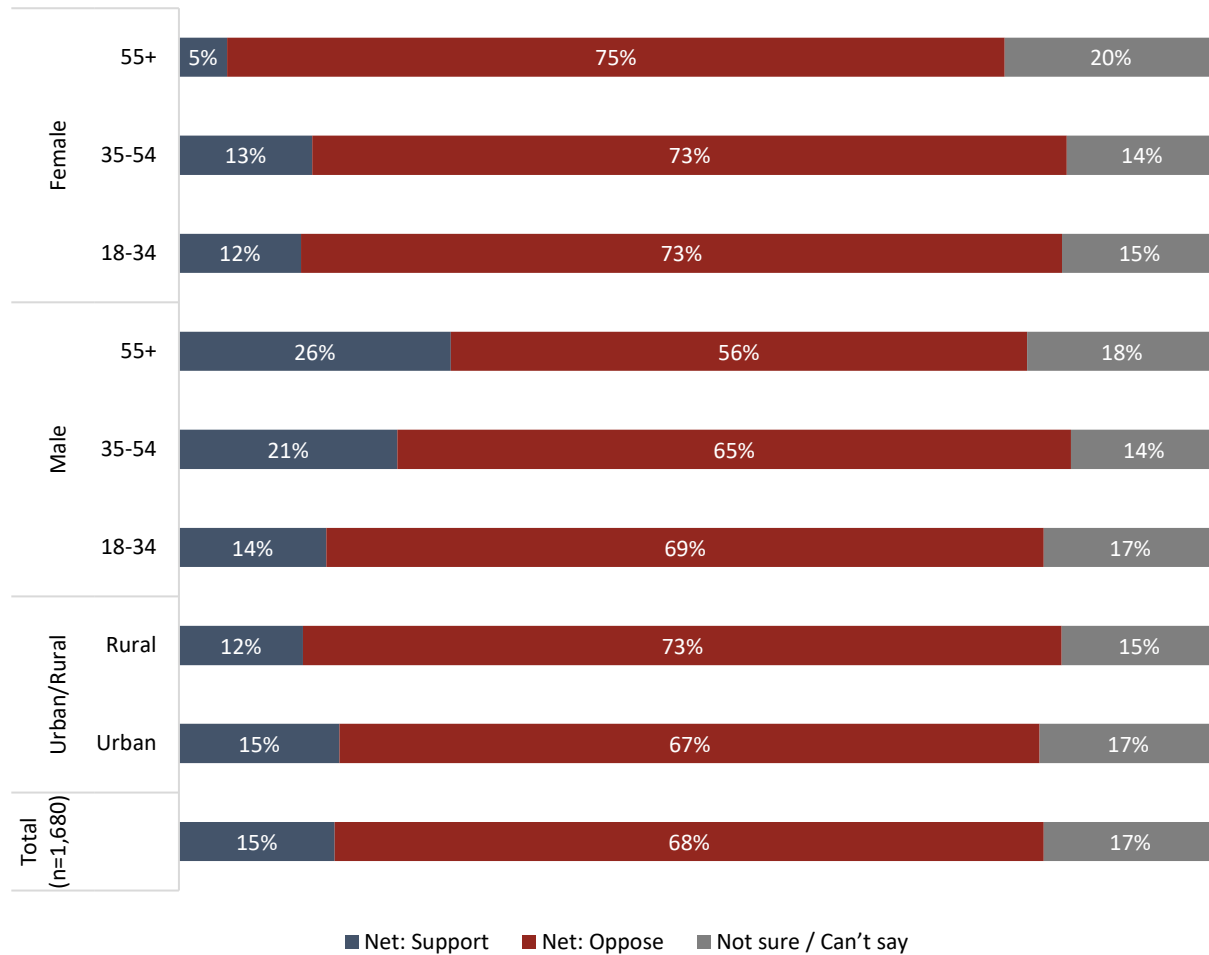
Two-thirds oppose in urban and rural Canada

That said, the local reaction when putting a data centre close to home is decidedly negative. Asked whether they would support or oppose a large AI data centre being built within a few blocks of where they live, two-thirds of Canadians oppose the idea, while just 15 per cent support it and 17 per cent are unsure. Urban (67% opposition) and rural (73%) residents are aligned on significant opposition.

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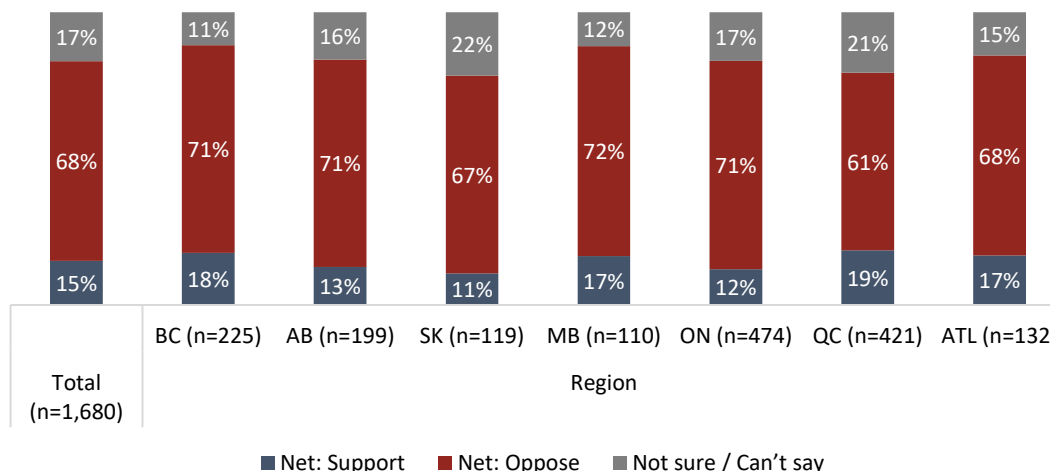
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If a large AI data centre was proposed within a few blocks of where you live, would you support or oppose it being built there?



Data centre construction projects are unlikely to be an easy sell anywhere in the country. The highest level of support is seen in Quebec, at 19 per cent, though it is tripled by opposition (61%). In B.C., with numerous projects announced, opposition is at 71 per cent:

If a large AI data centre was proposed within a few blocks of where you live, would you support or oppose it being built there?



Weighing the pros and cons

This broader cost-benefit calculation suggests Canadians see some upside to large AI data centres but are more skeptical when the impacts move closer to daily life. The most positive assessment is on Canada's ability to compete globally in AI and technology, where 38 per cent say large data centres are a good thing and 20 per cent say they are bad, though a plurality are unsure. That plurality likely represents a key group in achieving at least majority buy-in for projects.

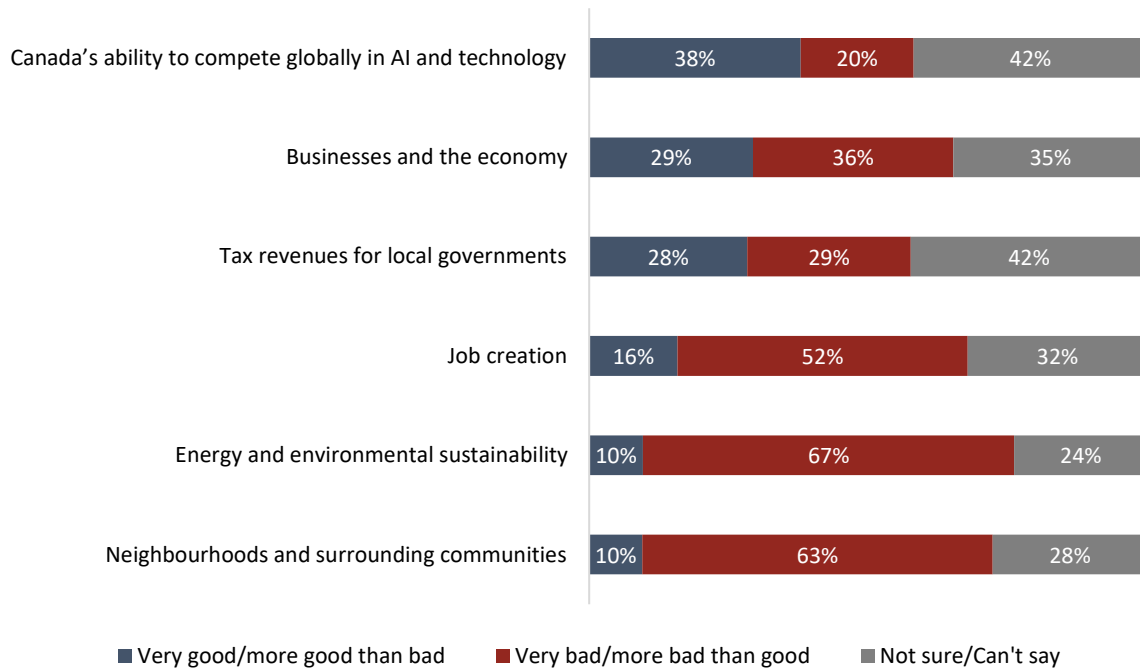
Canadians are more divided on the economic case. Views are close to even on whether these facilities are good or bad for businesses and the economy and tax revenues for local governments, with, again, considerable uncertainty adding to the equation.

Perceived negatives become much clearer on local and environmental questions. Half say data centres are bad for job creation (52%) compared to just one-in-six (16%) who see them as good. Two-thirds (67%) say they are bad for energy and environmental sustainability. A similar number say they are bad for neighbourhoods and surrounding communities, underscoring the challenge for governments and industry as they try to sell AI infrastructure as a national economic priority while addressing concerns about its local footprint.

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Overall, do you think large AI data centres and computing facilities are a good thing or bad thing for each of the following?



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