

Data Centre Doubts: Two-thirds want them limited; fears over resource drains drive resistance

In Saskatchewan (70%) and Alberta (64%), majorities say data centre development should be limited

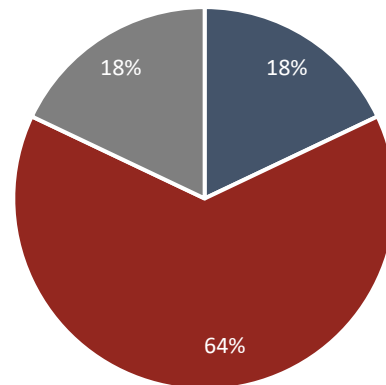
October 7, 2026 – As governments look to capitalize on the AI boom, new data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds Canadians are considerably more cautious about bringing the infrastructure required to support it into their own provinces.

Nearly two-thirds (64%) say their own respective provincial governments should limit the development of large data centres, while fewer than one-in-five (18%) would encourage more. Opposition reaches seven-in-10 in Saskatchewan (70%), Manitoba (72%) and Atlantic Canada (72%).

The scale of the projects under consideration has increasingly put questions about electricity, water and other infrastructure requirements alongside the potential economic benefits. In Saskatchewan, Bell is proposing an expansion that could add 900 megawatts of capacity, creating a 1.2-gigawatt AI infrastructure hub and representing as much as \$52.5 billion in investment. In Alberta, Meta has begun work on a \$13-billion, one-gigawatt data-centre campus north of Edmonton, paired with a dedicated natural-gas power plant. Earlier this month, the federal government responded to the broader debate by introducing national principles stating that new data centres should not shift electricity costs onto households and businesses and should minimize freshwater use and other environmental impacts.

Those principles closely mirror what Canadians themselves identify as reasons to restrain development. Among those who would limit data centres, half (51%) cite high water use, 38 per cent worry about higher

In many provinces, data centres are being built or proposed to support artificial intelligence, cloud computing and other digital services. When it comes to data centres, which of the following comes closer to your own view?
(All respondents, n=4,417)



- My provincial government should encourage the development of more large data centres
- My provincial government should limit the development of large data centres
- Not sure / Can't say

METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from September 8 - 16, 2026, among a randomized sample of 4,417 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 +/- 1.5 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.

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

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electricity costs for households and businesses and one-third (34%) say the benefits would flow mainly to large technology companies rather than local communities. Those who would encourage development see a different side of the equation. Nearly half (47%) cite new investment and economic growth, while one-third (33%) point to strengthening Canada's competitiveness in AI and other emerging technologies and 30 per cent cite job creation.

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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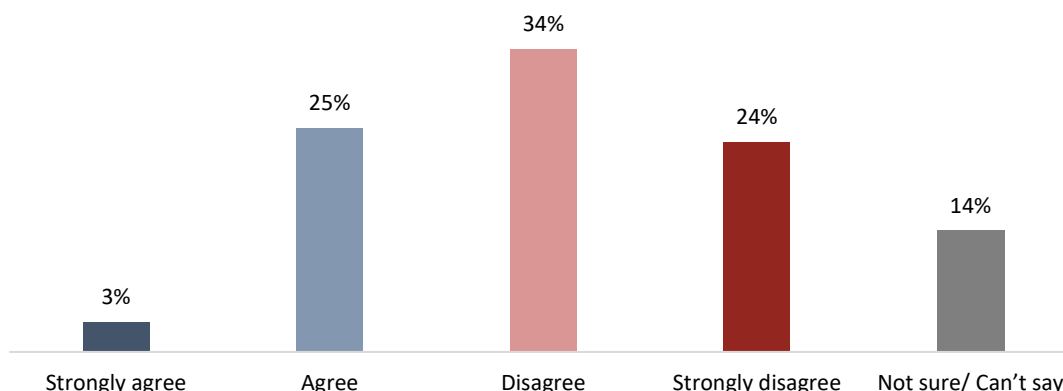
Part Two: Canadians aren't sold on the data centre boom

- **Reasons to support**
- **Reasons to oppose**

Part One: How many see AI as a force for good?

As global society continues to reckon with the expansion of artificial intelligence in their lives, there is an emerging split over the value it can provide to society. Asked for the second year if they believe AI is a force for good, 28 per cent say it is, compared to 29 per cent last November.

Agree vs. disagree - "Artificial Intelligence is a force for good in society"
(All respondents, n=4,417)



Quebecers stand apart from the rest of the country in their assessment of artificial intelligence. Nearly half (46%) describe AI as a force for good in society, the only region where agreement with this sentiment

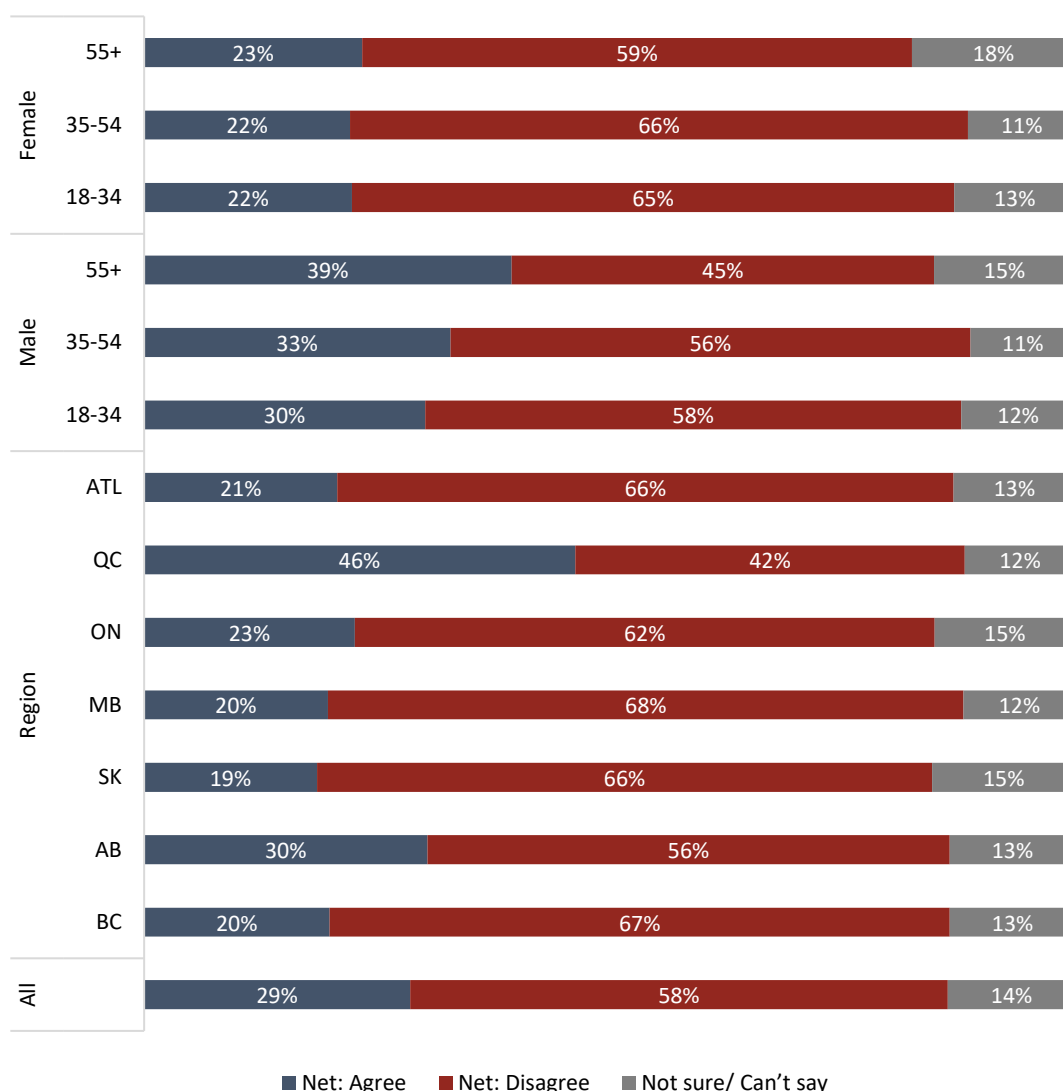
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outweighs disagreement (42%). This relative bullishness comes in a province with one of Canada's most established AI research and technology sectors, although other research suggests Quebecers continue to harbour considerable concerns about the technology's implications for privacy, misinformation and employment.

Men of all ages are more enthusiastic than women about the positive impacts of AI, though in most cases across most demographics, a majority disagree that the technology is necessarily a force for good (see detailed tables):

Agree vs. disagree - "Artificial Intelligence is a force for good in society"



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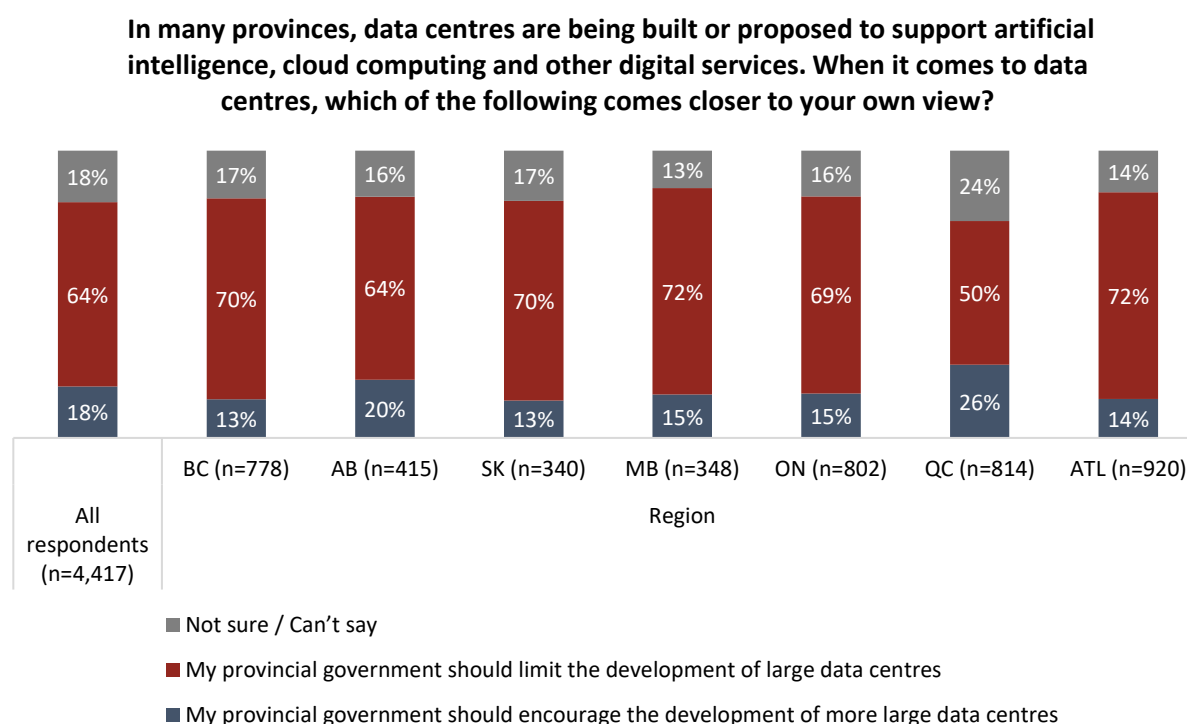
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Part Two: Canadians aren't sold on the data centre boom

Canada is amid a major push to build the infrastructure needed to power artificial intelligence, with governments and technology companies proposing billions of dollars in new data centres and computing capacity across the country. Ottawa says it is exploring opportunities that could support as much as six gigawatts of new data-centre capacity and more than \$100 billion in investment, while projects ranging from large AI facilities in British Columbia to major developments in Alberta and Saskatchewan move forward.

In the United States, more than \$80 billion had been invested in data centre construction in the first seven months of the year.

This push faces resistance. Asked whether they feel data centres are something that should be encouraged or limited by their province, a strong majority of Canadians are not interested in embracing this surge:



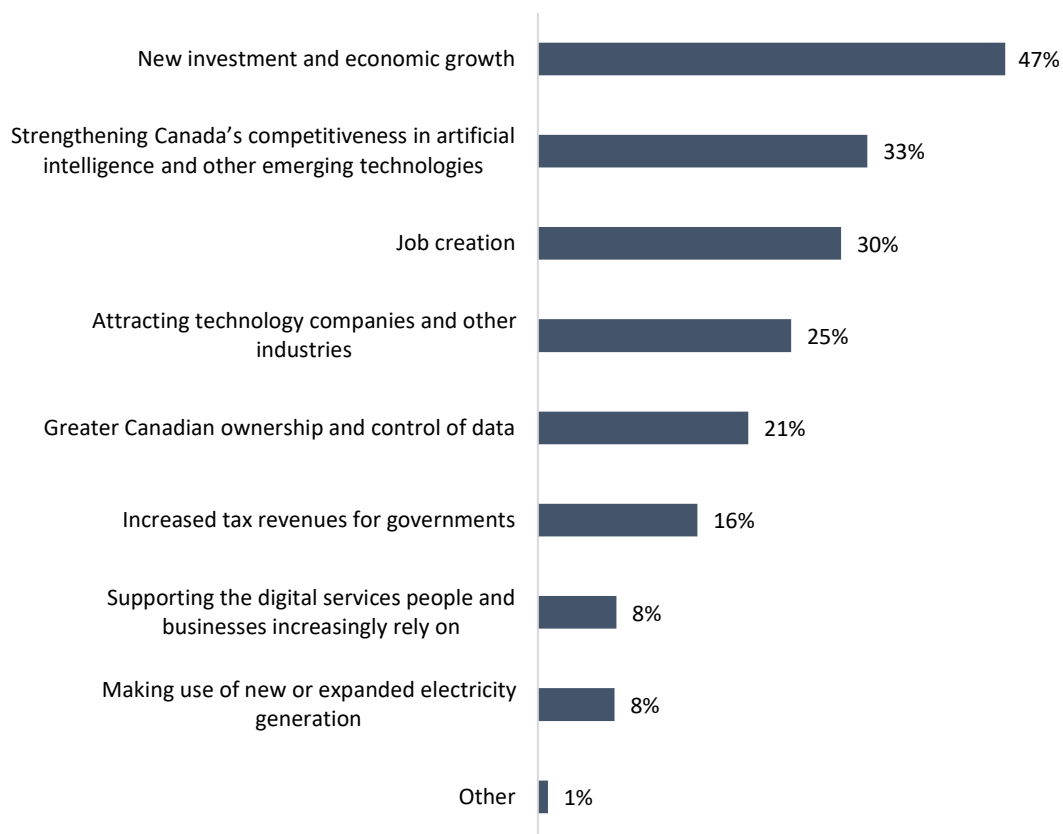
Reasons to support

The largest driver of support among those who offer it are the potential economic benefits that could bolster areas involved in construction. Half (47%) choose this as the core reason they see to support datacentres. One-in-three (33%) say that this could boost Canada's competitiveness in AI, while three-in-10 are compelled by the jobs involved (30%):

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Which of the following are the main reasons you think your provincial government should encourage the development of more large data centres? (Among those who would encourage development, 18% of Canadians)



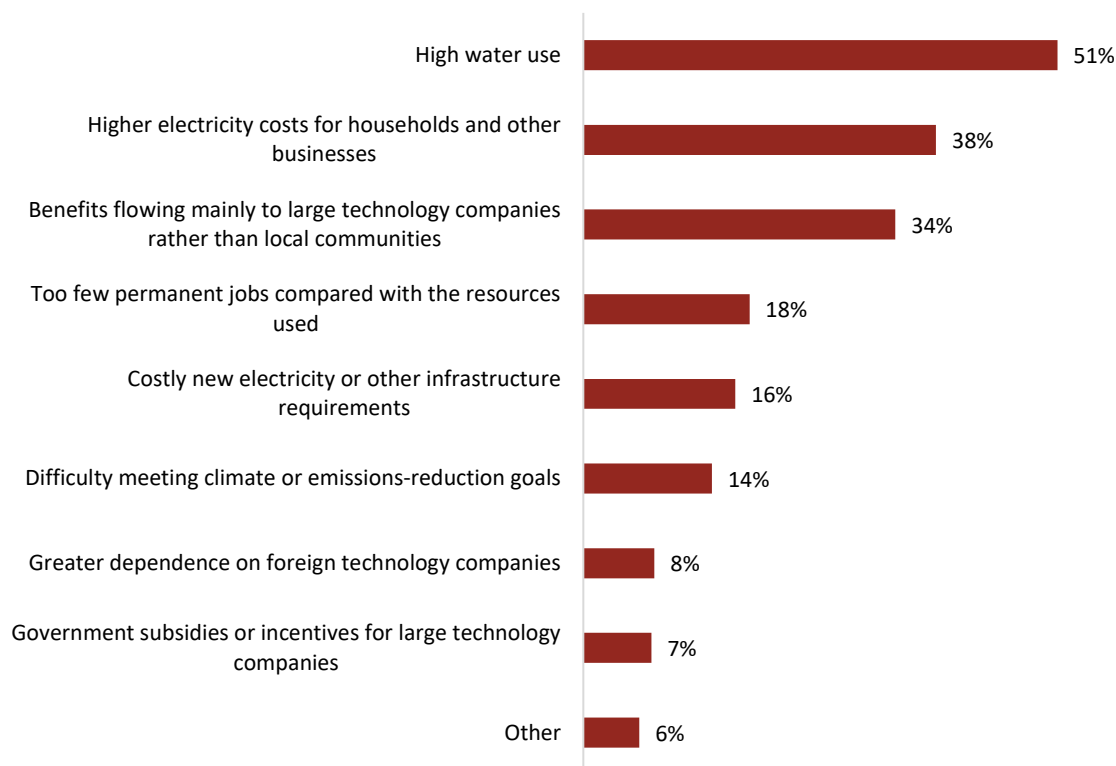
Reasons to oppose

The most common drivers of opposition are surrounding the resources needed to power and sustain these projects. High water use (51%) and electricity costs (38%) are the most chosen reasons, with [research suggesting](#) that water use is a real and growing issue, though usually concentrated in power generation rather than at the data centre itself.

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Which of the following are the main reasons you think your provincial government should limit or discourage the development of more large data centres? (Among those who would discourage development, 64% of Canadians)



Motivations differ across generations. Older Canadians show more concern over the new infrastructure needed to power these projects, while women younger than 55 are much more likely than others to say that Canada's climate goals are going by the wayside:

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Which of the following are the main reasons you think your provincial government should limit or discourage the development of more large data centres? (Would discourage development, 64% of Canadians)							
	All	Male			Female		
		18-34	35-54	55+	18-34	35-54	55+
High water use	51%	53%	47%	45%	56%	60%	47%
Higher electricity costs for households and other businesses	38%	40%	44%	42%	30%	34%	39%
Benefits flowing mainly to large technology companies rather than local communities	34%	37%	38%	27%	38%	34%	31%
Too few permanent jobs compared with the resources used	18%	12%	23%	23%	14%	14%	20%
Costly new electricity or other infrastructure requirements	16%	11%	16%	24%	10%	10%	24%
Difficulty meeting climate or emissions-reduction goals	14%	15%	9%	7%	27%	20%	8%

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

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