

# POLICY BRIEF: Poll shows Canadians want focus on COVID, not climate reset

Colin Craig | April 2021



## Executive summary

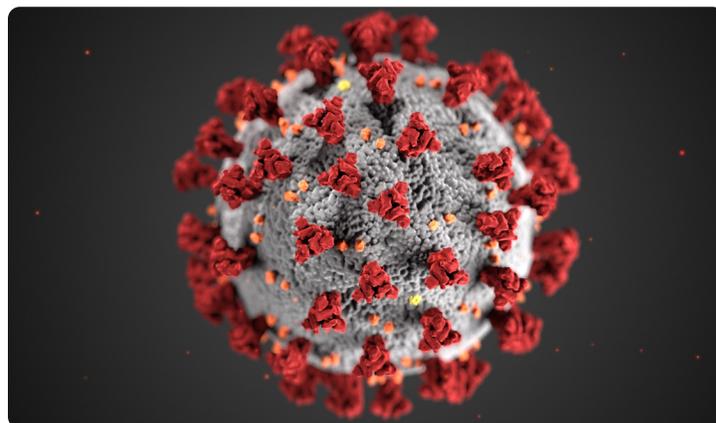
Since COVID-19 emerged in Canada, some elected officials and activists have argued the pandemic presents an “opportunity” to “build back better” by restructuring our economy to fight climate change.

Similarly, several municipalities have passed motions over the past year to phase out natural gas electricity and natural gas as a heating fuel.

SecondStreet.org hired market research firm Leger to learn more about how Canadians feel about these issues and related public policy matters. Highlights from our March 17-24 poll, include:

- 57% of Canadians want governments to focus on fighting COVID and returning to normal versus 34% who believe now is the time to restructure the economy to fight climate change through carbon tax increases, rebates, regulations and subsidies.
- 51% of respondents would be “disappointed” or “very disappointed” if their municipality passed a motion to phase out natural gas versus 20% who would be “pleased” or “very pleased.”
- 72% of Canadians with natural gas heated homes would not be willing to switch to electric heat if it meant a price increase while 13% would be willing to switch.
- 65% believe Canada should export more natural gas to create jobs and help reduce emissions in south east Asia while 17% opposed and 18% didn't know.

These poll results, and our recently released public opinion research on the federal government's carbon tax plan, suggest Canadians aren't looking for sweeping policy reform at the moment. The data suggests Canadians want governments to focus on fighting COVID-19 and policies that avoid significant cost increases for people.



## Methodology

The purpose of this research was to gain a sense of where Canadians stand on the notion of “building back better,” energy usage in Canada and natural resource development. The data represented in this report is from a national online survey conducted by Leger of 1,502 Canadian adults between March 17-24, 2021. The respondents to this survey were drawn from Leger's research panel, a representative sample of the broader Canadian population. Were this a probability sample, the margin of error of a survey of this size would be +/- 2.5 %, 19 times out of 20. The numbers have been rounded to the nearest whole number and as a result, may not add up to 100. Please see appendix for polling data.

## Background

The Government of Canada's 2020 Speech from the Throne described its pandemic response as an “opportunity” to “build back better.”<sup>1</sup> The latter refers to what the government describes as the “need” to focus on a “sustainable approach” as it spends billions of dollars in the months ahead to stimulate Canada's economy.

A few months after the Speech from the Throne, the government announced it would raise the country’s carbon tax from \$30 per ton to \$170 per ton over the next decade. Further, the government announced plans to spend \$15 billion for “climate initiatives.”<sup>2</sup>

In May 2020, British Columbia Premier John Horgan discussed his plan to respond to COVID-19 and the need to address climate change among other issues. He too discussed how “together we can build back BC better than ever”.<sup>3</sup> Many other politicians in Canada have expressed similar sentiments – using the pandemic as an opportunity to fight climate change.

Similarly, several municipalities in Canada have passed motions in opposition to using natural gas for heating and generating electricity. According to the Ontario Clean Air Alliance, 21 municipalities have now passed motions to phase out natural gas electricity in Ontario.<sup>4</sup> In Vancouver, the city passed a motion to phase out fossil fuels.<sup>5</sup> A city council committee in Winnipeg passed a motion to examine phasing out natural gas usage in the prairie capital.<sup>6</sup>

SecondStreet.org sought to gauge public support for restructuring our economy and phasing out natural gas. We also sought to re-examine what Canadians think about the notion of seeing natural gas as a solution to reducing global carbon dioxide emissions rather than as a problem.

## Findings

The following section includes the survey questions posed to Canadians, possible responses and related information. For a breakdown of the data by age, gender and geographic region, please see the appendix.

### Q1

*The Paris-based International Energy Agency projects the world will use more and more natural gas products for the next 20 years. Which statement best represents your view?*

<b>65%</b>	Canada should produce and export more natural gas. If we do, we can create jobs in our country while helping the environment as other countries switch from coal power to burning natural gas.
<b>17%</b>	Canada should not develop and sell more natural gas. We should not be concerned about creating such jobs or other countries’ emissions.
<b>18%</b>	Don’t know

According to the United States government’s Energy Information Agency, burning natural gas as a fuel results in 50% lower carbon dioxide emissions than coal power.<sup>7</sup>

China, Japan, India and many other south east Asian countries have been seeking to import natural gas from other nations, including Canada. Relying on natural gas for electricity generation could not only help those countries reduce their carbon dioxide emissions, they could also reduce their smog levels – a clear threat to public health. One study found that China sees 1.25 million citizens die prematurely each year due to air pollution while another found 1.7 million Indian citizens die prematurely due to air pollution each year.<sup>8,9</sup>

Thus, if Canada exported some of its ample supplies of natural gas to those nations, our country could not only benefit from job creation and economic activity, we could help reduce global emissions and reduce smog in those countries – potentially saving lives at the same time. People in areas like rural India could also be freed from the task of gathering wood and animal dung that are currently used as heat and cooking fuels.

Crews are currently working on a natural gas export terminal in B.C. (the LNG Canada project), however Canada’s foray into the \$130 billion (USD) global natural gas export market is quite limited and well below potential.<sup>10</sup>

Not only does this poll suggest public opinion supports this export option for our nation, a 2019 poll commissioned by SecondStreet.org came to a similar conclusion. The poll found 62% of Canadians either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: *“If Canada exports natural gas to China, it can help China reduce its dependence on coal and that’s a good thing for the global environment.”*<sup>11</sup>

Q2	
<p><i>After the COVID-19 health pandemic emerged in Canada, some have argued now is the time to significantly restructure Canada’s economy to address climate change. Which best represents your view?</i></p>	
34%	Yes, now is the time to restructure the economy through carbon taxes, rebates, regulations and subsidies for alternative energy.
57%	No, we should focus on fighting COVID-19 and getting things back to normal,
9%	Don’t know

A clear majority of Canadians are looking for governments to focus on fighting COVID-19 and getting things “back to normal” rather than attempting to restructure Canada’s economy. This sentiment held true from coast-to-coast, including both men and women. People in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba were most likely to want governments to focus on fighting COVID-19 (64%) while the lowest level of support was in Ontario and Quebec (54%). This finding is also consistent with SecondStreet.org’s recent examination into Canadians’ attitudes towards the federal government’s proposed carbon tax increase (a majority opposed the ambitious plan to raise the tax every year for nine years).

Q3	
<p><i>Some city councils in Canada have passed motions to phase out natural gas usage. How would you react if your government took away your ability to use natural gas?</i></p>	
26%	Very disappointed
25%	Disappointed
14%	Pleased
6%	Very pleased
30%	Don’t know

While a majority (51%) of Canadians indicated they would be disappointed or very disappointed if their municipality phased out natural gas use, opposition grows if you specifically look at those who heat their homes with natural gas (74% disappointed versus 11% who would be pleased).

Opposition also exceeded support in all other statistical categories: both men and women, as well as all age, education and income categories.

Q4	
<p><i>Would you give up your natural gas heating next winter and switch to an all-electric heating for your home even if it’s more expensive?*</i></p>	
13%	Yes
72%	No
15%	Don’t know

*\*Data from respondents who currently heat their homes with natural gas*

Strong opposition exists among natural gas users to the idea of heating their homes with higher cost electricity. In fact, opposition was higher than support among all age, education, gender and income categories. With the exception of Quebec, a province which depends heavily on hydroelectricity for its power, opposition exceeded support for such a move nation-wide.

## Conclusion

The data suggests Canadians want governments to focus on fighting COVID-19 right now. A majority of Canadians are opposed to restructuring our economy and phasing out natural gas. This research also shows Canadians continue to see natural gas exports as an opportunity to reduce global carbon dioxide emissions.

## About the Author

Colin Craig is the President of SecondStreet.org. He holds an MBA and a BA (Economics) from the University of Manitoba and is the author of *The Government Wears Prada*.

## About Leger

Leger is the largest Canadian-owned, market research and analytics company with more than 600 employees in eight Canadian and US offices. Leger has been working with prestigious clients since 1986. Please visit Leger.com to learn more.

## References

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# Report

## SecondStreet.org: Natural Resource Issues Canada: March 2021



DATE 2021-04-12 PROJECT NUMBER 45915-004

# Leger

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*We know Canadians*

# CONTEXT & METHODOLOGY

## Context and Methodology

### Context

This research study was designed to gain insights into the general populations' attitudes toward natural resource issues, including the use of natural gas, the debate around restructuring Canada's economy and how these issues relate to cost of living.

### Study Population

- Canadian residents, aged 18 and older.

### Data Collection

- A total of n=1502 online surveys were conducted via Leger's online LEO panel.
- Interviews were conducted from March 17 to 24, 2021.

### Statistical Analysis

- As a non-probability online survey, a margin of error is technically not to be reported.
- If the data were collected through a probability sample, the margin of error would be (n=1502)  $\pm 2.5\%$ , 19 times out of 20.
- Using data from the 2016 Census, results were weighted according to age, gender, and region in order to ensure a representative sample of the population.
- The numbers presented have been rounded to the nearest whole number. However, raw values were used to calculate the sums presented and therefore may not correspond to the manual addition of these numbers.

## Key Findings

## Key Findings

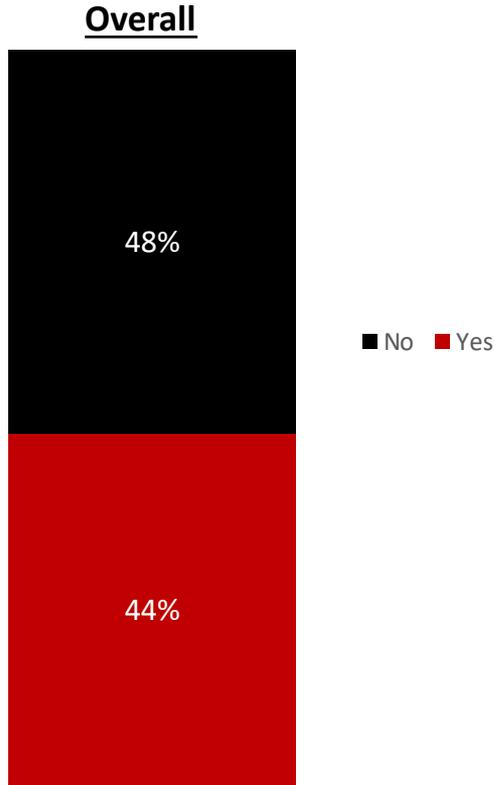
- **65% of Canadians feel Canada should produce and export more natural gas** to create Canadian jobs while helping the environment as other countries switch from coal power to burning natural gas.
- **Nearly 6 in 10 Canadians (57%) believe now is not the time to start restructuring the economy** and the focus should be on fighting COVID-19 and returning to normal.
- **Half of Canadians (50%) would be disappointed if the government took away their ability to use natural gas**, while 2 in 10 Canadians would be pleased.
- 50% of Canadians indicate they would not switch from natural gas to an alternative, electric and more expensive method of heating their home next winter. Over 70% of current users of natural gas for home heating say they will not switch to a different heating source.

# Detailed Results

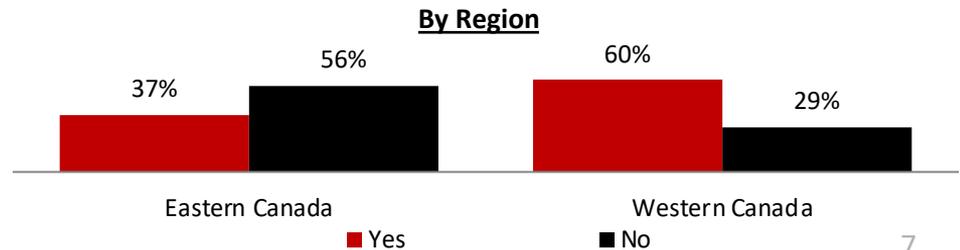
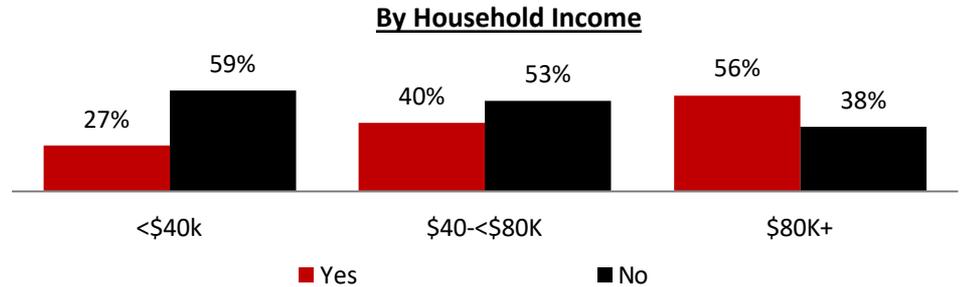
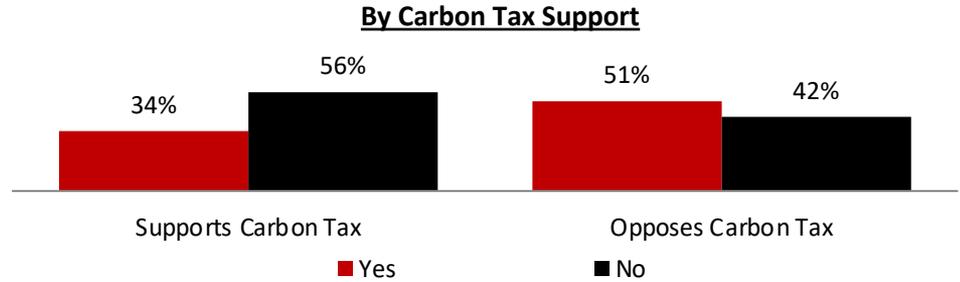
## Natural Resources

# A plurality of Canadians (48%) do not use natural gas to heat their homes

Q]: Is your home heated with natural gas?



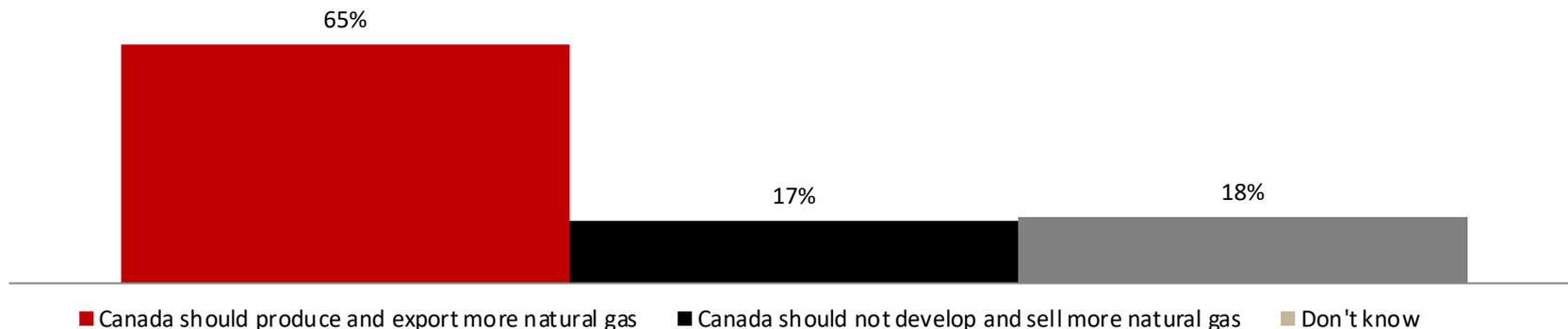
Base : Canada Residents (n=1502)



# Over two thirds of Canadians believe Canada should produce and export more natural gas

Q1N: The Paris-based International Energy Agency projects the world will use more and more natural gas products for the next 20 years. **Which statement best represents your view?**

- Canada should produce and export more natural gas. If we do, we can create jobs in our country while helping the environment as other countries switch from coal power to burning natural gas
- Canada should not develop and sell more natural gas. We should not be concerned about creating such jobs or other countries' emissions



Anti-development is highest in Quebec (26%)

Pro-development is highest Alberta (81%)

Those with a university education are **most likely** to support development (70% support)

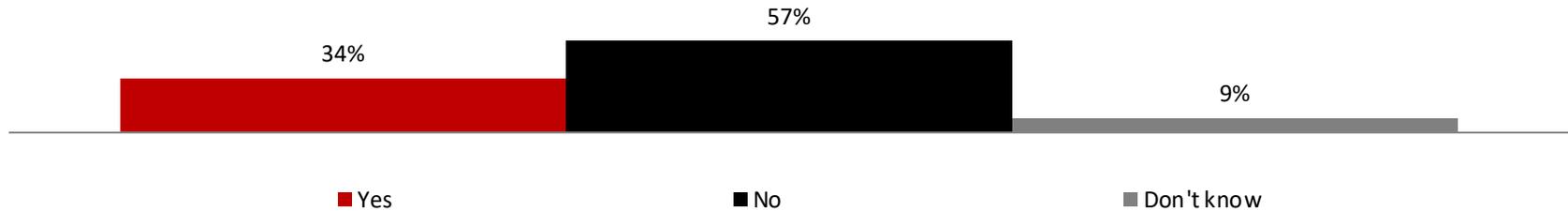
Those with a high school education or less are **least likely** to support development (58% support)

# Nearly 6 in 10 Canadians (57%) believe now is not the time to start restructuring the economy; focus should be returning to normal

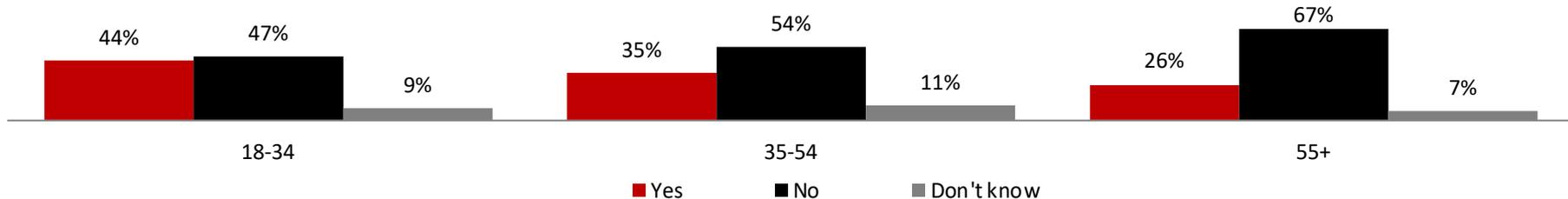
Q2N: After the COVID-19 health pandemic emerged in Canada, some have argued now is the time to significantly restructure Canada's economy to address climate change. **Which best represents your view?**

- Yes, now is the time to restructure the economy through carbon taxes, rebates, regulations and subsidies for alternative energy
- No, we should focus on fighting COVID-19 and getting things back to normal

## Overall



## Age



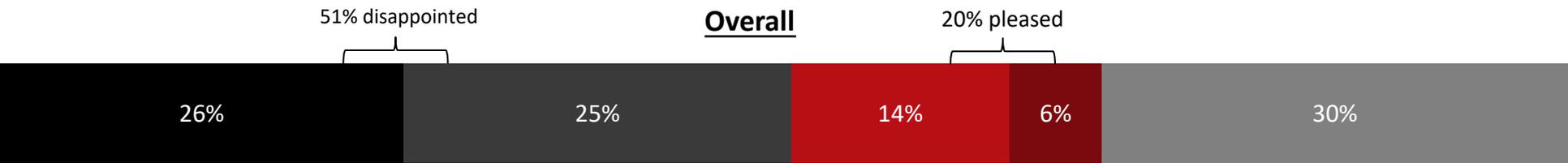
Residents of MB+SK are least likely to say yes to restructuring the economy (25%)

Those with a university education are most likely to say yes (38%)

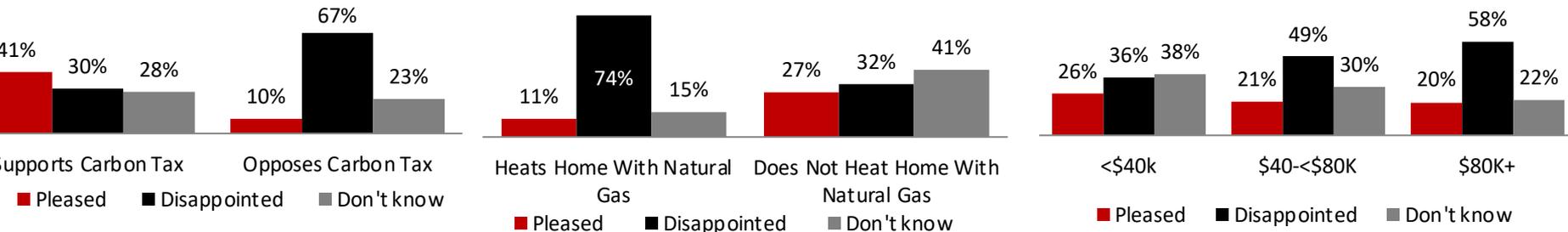
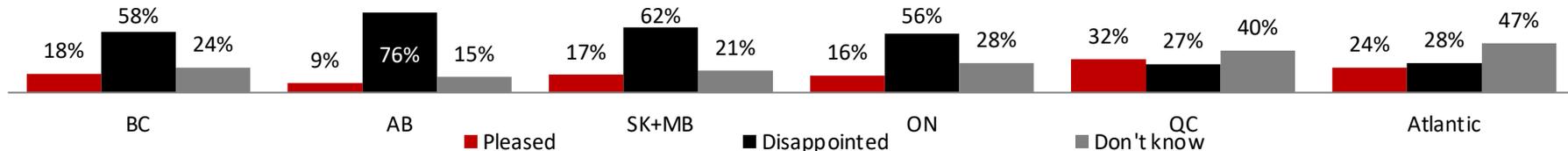
# 50% of Canadians would be disappointed if governments phased out natural gas



Q3N: Some city councils in Canada have passed motions to phase out natural gas usage. How would you react if your government took away your ability to use natural gas?



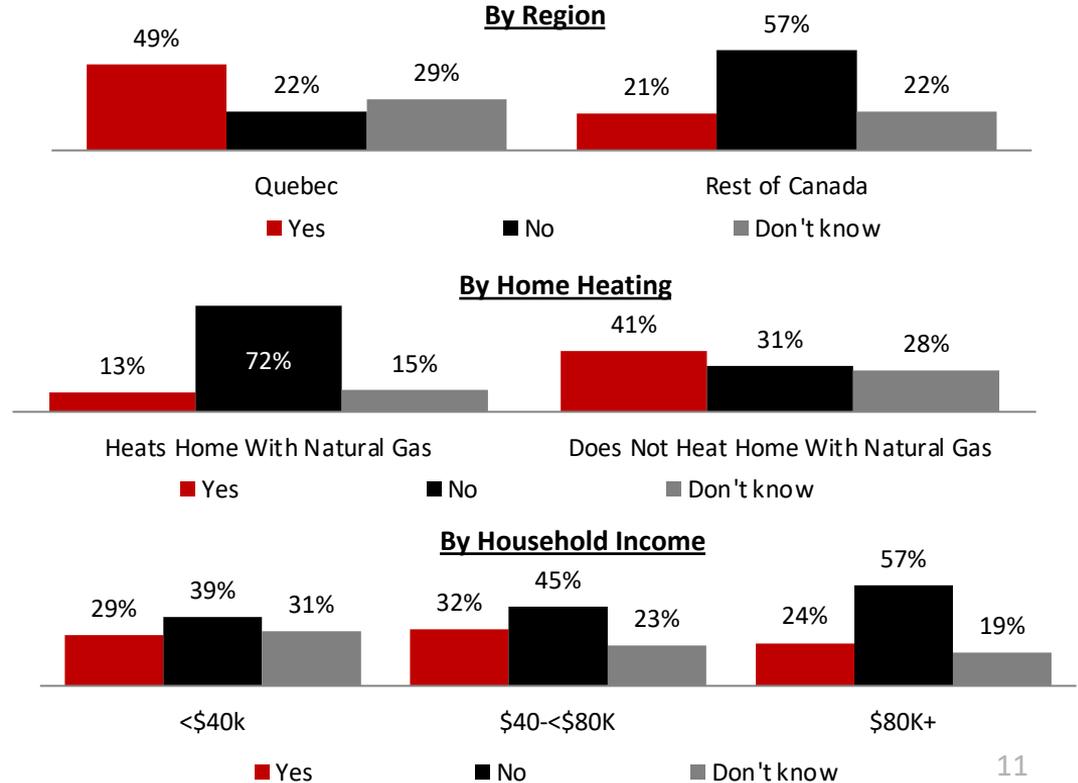
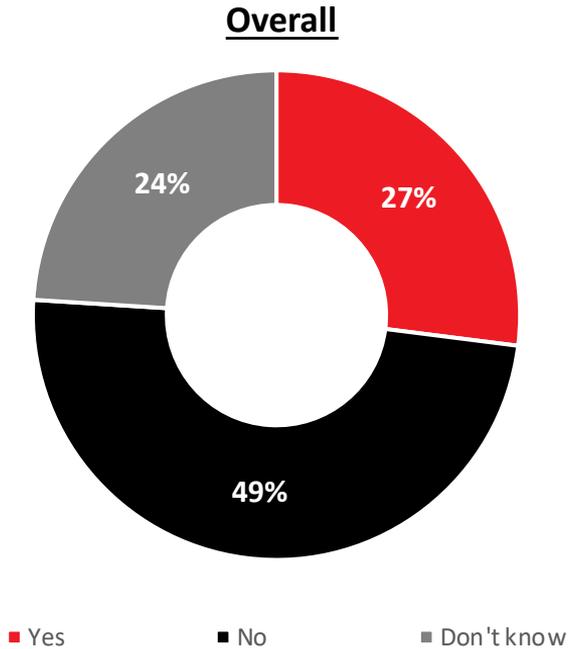
■ Very disappointed   
 ■ Disappointed   
 ■ Pleased   
 ■ Very Pleased   
 ■ Don't know



Base : Canada Residents (n=1502)

# About half of Canadians would not switch from natural gas to electric for the winter; 7 in 10 current users of natural gas would not switch

Q4N: Would you give up your natural gas heating next winter and switch to an all-electric heating for your home even if it's more expensive?



# Appendix Data Tables

Q5: Is your home heated with natural gas?

		Region					Gender		Age		
	<b>Total</b> -----	QC	ON	MB/SK	AB	BC	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+
Total 'N'	1502	353	577	98	168	204	730	773	410	512	581
Yes	44%	7%	60%	62%	79%	44%	47%	41%	37%	47%	46%
No	48%	89%	30%	28%	9%	46%	46%	49%	43%	47%	51%
Don't know	9%	4%	10%	10%	12%	10%	7%	10%	19%	6%	3%

		Carbon Tax		Use Natural Gas		Education			Income		
	<b>Total</b> -----	Support	Oppose	Yes	No	<=HS	College	University	<\$40K	\$40K- <\$80K	\$80K+
Total 'N'	1502	486	782	660	714	344	475	669	291	453	587
Yes	44%	34%	51%	100%	-	34%	44%	50%	27%	40%	56%
No	48%	56%	42%	-	100%	52%	52%	42%	59%	53%	38%
Don't know	9%	10%	6%	-	-	14%	5%	8%	14%	7%	6%

Q1N: The Paris-based International Energy Agency projects the world will use more and more natural gas products for the next 20 years. Which statement best represents your view?

		Region					Gender		Age		
	Total -----	QC	ON	MB/SK	AB	BC	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+
Total 'N'	1502	353	577	98	168	204	730	773	410	512	581
Canada should produce and export more natural gas. If we do, we can create jobs in our country while helping the environment as other countries do	65%	52%	69%	70%	81%	62%	71%	59%	58%	67%	68%
Canada should not develop and sell more natural gas. We should not be concerned about creating such jobs or other countries' emissions	17%	26%	15%	12%	8%	16%	17%	16%	23%	13%	15%
Don't know	18%	22%	17%	18%	11%	22%	11%	25%	19%	20%	17%

		Carbon Tax		Use Natural Gas		Education			Income		
	Total -----	Support	Oppose	Yes	No	<=HS	College	University	<\$40K	\$40K-<\$80K	\$80K+
Total 'N'	1502	486	782	660	714	344	475	669	291	453	587
Unweighted Total	1501	497	776	649	738	334	478	675	284	455	594
Canada should produce and export more natural gas. If we do, we can create jobs in our country while helping the environment as other countries do	65%	59%	74%	76%	56%	58%	64%	70%	56%	67%	71%
Canada should not develop and sell more natural gas. We should not be concerned about creating such jobs or other countries' emissions	17%	28%	13%	12%	22%	19%	18%	15%	18%	17%	16%
Don't know	18%	14%	13%	12%	22%	23%	18%	15%	26%	16%	13%

Q2N: After the COVID-19 health pandemic emerged in Canada, some have argued now is the time to significantly restructure Canada's economy to address climate change. Which best represents your view?

		Region					Gender		Age		
	<b>Total</b> -----	QC	ON	MB/SK	AB	BC	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+
Total 'N'	1502	353	577	98	168	204	730	773	410	512	581
No, we should focus on fighting COVID-19 and getting things back to normal.	57%	54%	54%	64%	64%	59%	57%	57%	47%	54%	67%
Yes, now is the time to restructure the economy through carbon taxes, rebates, regulations and subsidies for alternative	34%	38%	35%	25%	28%	33%	37%	31%	44%	35%	26%
Don't know	9%	8%	10%	12%	7%	8%	6%	12%	9%	11%	7%

		Carbon Tax		Use Natural Gas		Education			Income		
	<b>Total</b> -----	Support	Oppose	Yes	No	<=HS	College	University	<\$40K	\$40K-<\$80K	\$80K+
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No, we should focus on fighting COVID-19 and getting things back to normal.	57%	30%	76%	62%	56%	63%	57%	54%	53%	56%	58%
Yes, now is the time to restructure the economy through carbon taxes, rebates, regulations and subsidies for alternative	34%	66%	17%	31%	35%	26%	35%	38%	34%	35%	36%
Don't know	9%	4%	7%	8%	9%	11%	9%	8%	12%	9%	6%

Q3N: Some city councils in Canada have passed motions to phase out natural gas usage. How would you react if your government took away your ability to use natural gas

		Region					Gender		Age		
	<b>Total</b> -----	QC	ON	MB/SK	AB	BC	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+
Total 'N'	1502	353	577	98	168	204	730	773	410	512	581
Very disappointed	26%	9%	29%	35%	52%	28%	30%	22%	15%	27%	33%
Disappointed	25%	18%	27%	28%	24%	30%	25%	24%	27%	24%	23%
Pleased	14%	22%	11%	10%	8%	11%	14%	13%	18%	12%	12%
Very pleased	6%	10%	5%	6%	1%	7%	7%	5%	11%	4%	5%
Don't know	30%	40%	28%	21%	15%	24%	23%	36%	29%	33%	27%
NET: DISAPPOINTED	50%	27%	56%	62%	76%	58%	55%	46%	42%	51%	56%
NET: PLEASSED	20%	32%	16%	17%	9%	18%	22%	18%	29%	16%	17%

		Carbon Tax		Use Natural Gas		Education			Income		
	<b>Total</b> -----	Support	Oppose	Yes	No	<=HS	College	University	<\$40K	\$40K- <\$80K	\$80K+
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Disappointed	25%	23%	26%	28%	21%	24%	25%	25%	21%	24%	26%
Pleased	14%	26%	8%	8%	18%	14%	14%	13%	18%	14%	14%
Very pleased	6%	15%	2%	3%	9%	8%	5%	7%	8%	7%	6%
Don't know	30%	28%	23%	15%	41%	35%	28%	28%	38%	30%	22%
NET: DISAPPOINTED	50%	30%	67%	74%	32%	44%	53%	52%	36%	49%	58%
NET: PLEASSED	20%	41%	10%	11%	27%	22%	19%	20%	26%	21%	20%

Q4N: Would you give up your natural gas heating next winter and switch to an all-electric heating for your home even if it's more expensive?

		Region					Gender		Age		
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Yes	27%	49%	21%	24%	8%	28%	28%	27%	38%	21%	26%
No	49%	22%	59%	62%	69%	50%	52%	46%	39%	52%	53%
Don't know	24%	29%	21%	14%	23%	23%	20%	27%	24%	27%	21%

		Carbon Tax		Use Natural Gas		Education			Income		
	<b>Total</b> -----	Support	Oppose	Yes	No	<=HS	College	University	<\$40K	\$40K- <\$80K	\$80K+
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Yes	27%	50%	17%	13%	41%	29%	28%	27%	29%	32%	24%
No	49%	26%	66%	72%	31%	42%	53%	49%	39%	45%	57%
Don't know	24%	25%	17%	15%	28%	29%	19%	24%	31%	23%	19%

# RESPONDENTS PROFILE

# RESPONDENT PROFILE - *Canada*

	Weighted
n=	1502
<b>Gender</b>	(%)
Male	49
Female	51
<b>Age</b>	
18 to 34	27
35 to 54	34
55 years of age or older	39
<b>Household Income</b>	
Less than \$40,000	19
\$40,000 to less than \$80,000	30
\$80,000 or more	39

	Weighted
n=	1502
<b>Gender</b>	(%)
British Columbia	14
Alberta	11
Saskatchewan	3
Manitoba	3
Ontario	38
Quebec	23
Atlantic Canada	6

## OUR SERVICES

- **Leger**  
Marketing research and polling
- **Leger Metrics**  
Real-time VOC satisfaction measurement
- **Leger Analytics**  
Data modeling and analysis
- **Legerweb**  
Panel management
- **Leger Communities**  
Online community management
- **Leger Digital**  
Digital strategy and user experience
- **International Research**  
Worldwide Independent Network (WIN)

**600**

**EMPLOYEES**



**185**

**CONSULTANTS**



**8**

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