



LOOKING WEST 2008

Segment I. Hot Topics: Western Canadian Attitudes
Toward Climate Change



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Introduction

Protecting the environment has been a growing concern for western Canadians over the past five years, and large numbers of western Canadians consider reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to be a high or very high priority. The emphasis placed on reducing GHG emissions reflects public concern about climate change: almost 8 in 10 western Canadians feel that climate change is a serious problem for Canada. However, almost 6 in 10 feel that, while significant efforts should be made to reduce GHG emissions, it should **not** be done at the expense of the economy.

When asked who, between business/industry or individual consumers, can do more to address climate change, western Canadians are somewhat divided, with the greater number stating that business can do more. At the same time, western Canadians are open to a wide range of individual-level changes to reduce GHG emissions, including improving home energy efficiency, purchasing hybrid or energy efficient vehicles, and reducing automobile travel by walking, biking, carpooling and/or using public transit more often. Of those who say that they are willing to make individual changes, many report that they are already doing so. While strong numbers of western Canadians are open to making voluntary changes to reduce GHG emissions, a slim majority is unwilling to pay more for gasoline or home heating.

About Looking West 2008: The Looking West 2008 Survey is part of the Canada West Foundation's Going for Gold Project. The survey was administered by Probe Research between January 2 and February 8, 2008 from their Winnipeg call centre, DataProbe. A total of 4,000 residents were interviewed, with 1,000 from each of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. One can say with 95 percent certainty that the results are within +/- 1.55 percentage points of what they would have been if the entire adult population of western Canada had been interviewed; for individual provinces, results are within +/- 3.1 percentage points. Looking West 2008 Survey topics include economic perceptions, policy priorities, trade, government and the economy, human capital, and climate change. The survey results will be released in segments over the course of 2008. Visit the Canada West Foundation website (www.cwf.ca) for more information.

The Going for Gold Project has been made possible with the support of:



Western Economic
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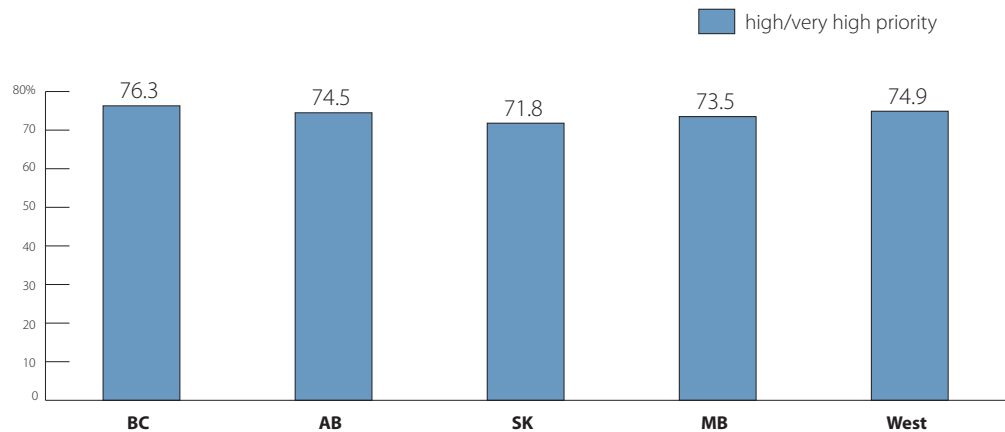
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Canada

Additional funding has been provided by the Provinces of British Columbia (Economic Development), Alberta (Employment, Immigration and Industry), Saskatchewan (Enterprise and Innovation), and Manitoba (Competitiveness, Training and Trade).

Environmental Protection

Figure 1: Priority of Environmental Protection



Priority of Environmental Protection

Environmental protection ranks high on the list of policy priorities in western Canada.

	Very high priority	High priority	Moderate priority	Low priority	Very low priority
BC	50.2%	26.1%	17.3%	3.6%	2.3%
AB	44.4	30.1	19.0	4.5	1.7
SK	44.5	27.3	21.0	4.8	2.3
MB	47.6	25.9	20.2	3.8	2.3
West	47.4	27.5	18.6	4.0	2.1

On a scale of one (very low priority) to five (very high priority), Looking West 2008 Survey respondents were asked to rate the priority of “doing more to protect Canada’s environment.” Fully three-quarters of western Canadians rate protecting the environment as a high or very high priority, and in British Columbia a majority rates environmental protection as a *very high* priority. Environmental protection is a consensus issue in the West, and differences between the provinces are insignificant. Of the 15 priority areas included in the survey, protecting the environment came in second in terms of very high and high priority ratings, behind only health care.



Environmental Protection

Figure 2: Growth in the Priority of Protecting the Environment

	2003 high priority	2004 high priority	2006 high priority	2008 very high + high priority
BC	66.1%	65.5%	73.8%	76.3%
AB	63.6	67.4	68.6	74.5
SK	57.7	63.8	64.1	71.8
MB	63.5	62.9	67.6	73.5
West	64.1	65.6	70.3	74.9

NOTE: 2003, 2004 and 2006 question wording "protecting the environment"; options high priority, medium priority, low priority, not a priority. 2008 question wording "doing more to protect Canada's environment"; options scale of one (very low priority) to five (very high priority).

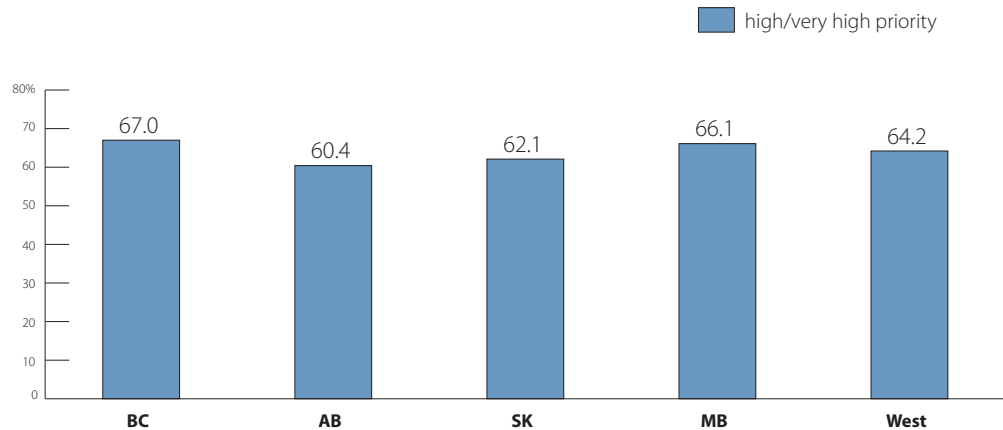
When compared to data from previous Looking West Surveys, the Looking West 2008 findings suggest that western Canadians are placing increased priority on protecting the environment. For the West as a whole, the number of high priority ratings rose by over 10 percentage points over the past five years. Differences between the provinces have also dissipated; while in 2003 Saskatchewan residents were considerably less likely than British Columbians to rate protecting the environment as a high priority, by 2008 the gap between the two provinces narrowed.

Environmental Protection

*Western
Canadians are
increasingly
placing priority
on environmental
protection.*

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Figure 3: Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions is a Priority



	Very high priority	High priority	Moderate priority	Low priority	Very low priority
BC	44.1%	22.9%	22.5%	5.1%	4.8%
AB	37.8	22.6	23.6	9.4	5.7
SK	35.8	26.3	23.8	7.5	5.8
MB	42.7	23.4	19.6	6.9	5.9
West	41.0	23.2	22.7	7.0	5.3

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Over 6 in 10 western Canadians state that reducing GHG emissions is a very high or high priority, with Albertans being least likely and British Columbians most likely to rate this as a very high or high priority.

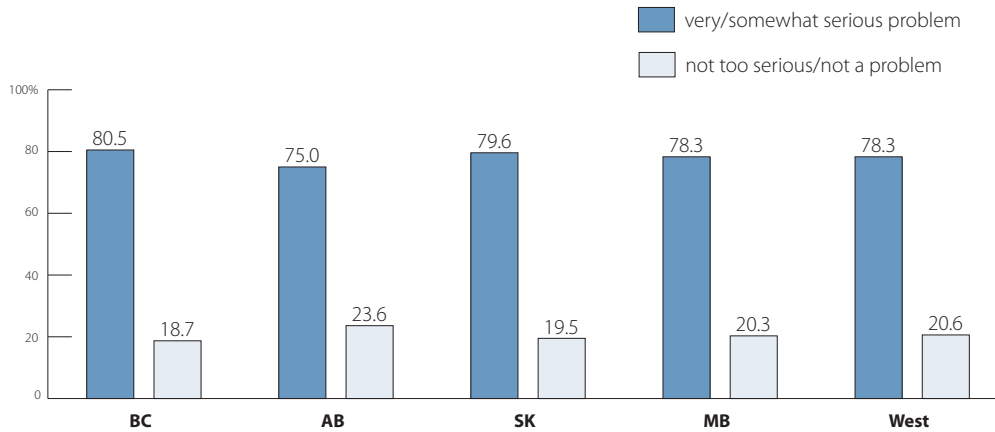
On a scale of one (very low priority) to five (very high priority), Looking West 2008 Survey respondents were asked to rate the priority of “reducing Canada’s green house gas emissions.” In every province, over 6 in 10 residents consider reducing GHG emissions to be a very high or high priority. The difference between British Columbia and Alberta respondents is of note, with Albertans being less likely to rate GHG emission reductions as a very high priority.

Of the 15 priority areas included in the survey, reducing GHG emissions came in fourth in terms of very high and high priority ratings, well ahead of policy areas such as tax cuts, post-secondary education, and transportation infrastructure.



Climate Change

Figure 4: Seriousness of Climate Change



	Very serious	Somewhat serious	Not too serious	Not a problem
BC	48.1%	32.4%	13.2%	5.5%
AB	38.0	37.0	15.0	8.6
SK	39.2	40.4	13.0	6.5
MB	44.5	33.8	11.1	9.2
West	43.4	34.9	13.5	7.1

Looking West 2008 Survey respondents were asked, “In your opinion, how serious a problem is climate change for Canada: very serious, somewhat serious, not too serious or not a problem?” Almost 8 in 10 western Canadians feel that climate change is a very or somewhat serious problem for Canada. British Columbians are the most likely, and Alberta and Saskatchewan residents are less likely, to state that climate change is a very serious problem.

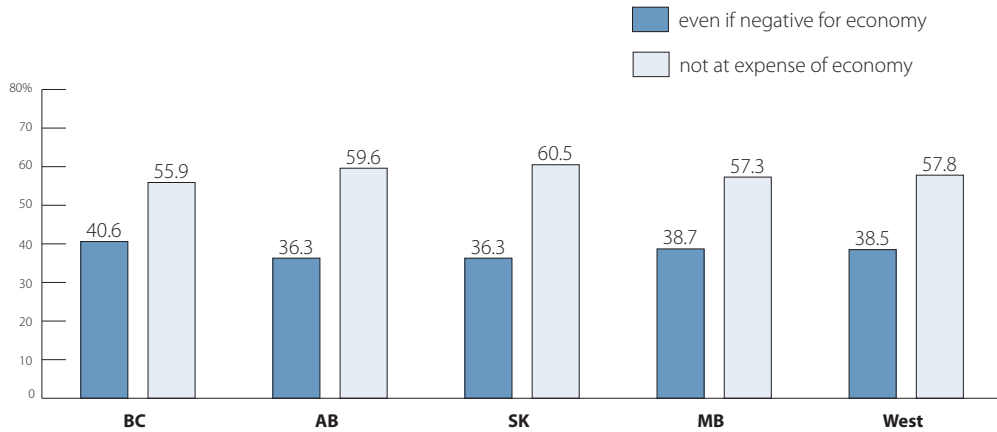


Climate Change

Almost 8 in 10 western Canadians see climate change as a serious problem for Canada.

GHG Reductions and the Economy

Figure 5: Balancing GHG Reductions and the Economy



GHG Reductions and the Economy

The majority of western Canadians does not feel that reducing greenhouse gas emissions should come at expense of economy.

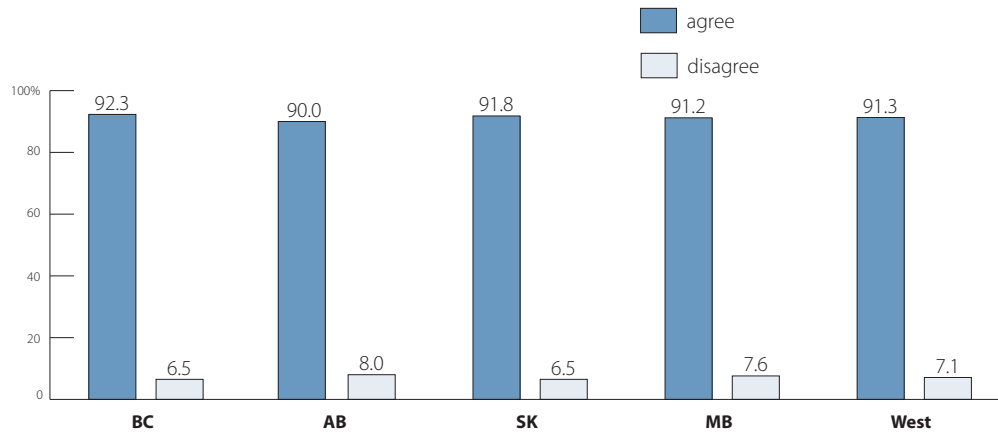
Looking West 2007 Survey respondents were asked, “Which of the following two perspectives best represents your views about climate change? Canada should reduce its greenhouse gas emissions significantly, even if it has negative effects on the economy, or Canada should try to reduce its green house gas emissions significantly, but not at the expense of the economy.” Almost 6 in 10 western Canadians responded that GHG emission reduction efforts should not be made at the expense of the economy. Interestingly, almost 4 in 10 responded that significant efforts should be made, *even if doing so hurts the economy*. Differences between the four western provinces on this question are not significant.





Renewable Energy Production

Figure 6: Governments Should Subsidize Renewable Energy Production



Renewable Energy Production

Western Canadians support subsidies for renewable energy production.

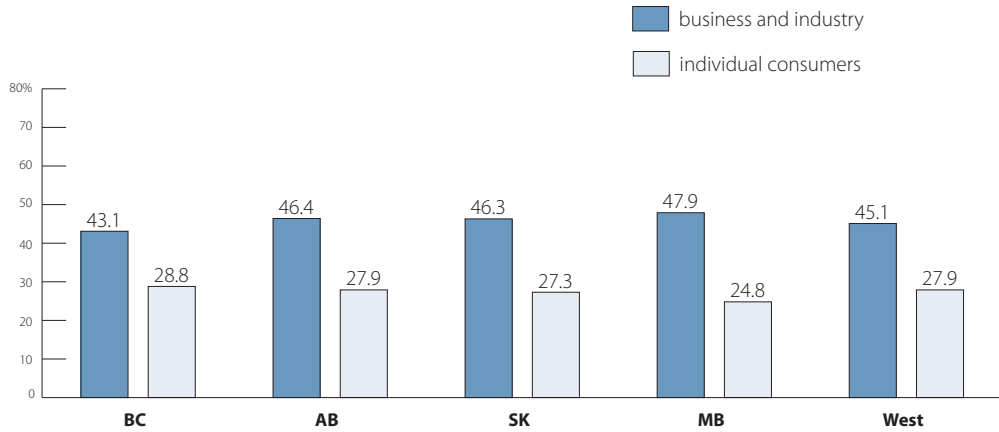
	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
BC	62.2%	30.1%	4.3%	2.2%
AB	58.8	31.2	4.5	3.5
SK	54.8	37.0	4.5	2.0
MB	58.0	33.2	5.3	2.3
West	59.8	31.5	4.5	2.6

When asked to rate their agreement (strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree) with the statement, “Canadian governments should subsidize renewable energy production, such as wind power, solar power, and biofuels,” Looking West 2008 Survey respondents reported very high levels of agreement: 9 in 10 western Canadians agreed, and a majority in each province *strongly* agreed.



GHG Reductions and Business

Figure 7: Who Can Do More to Reduce GHG Emissions



GHG Reductions and Business

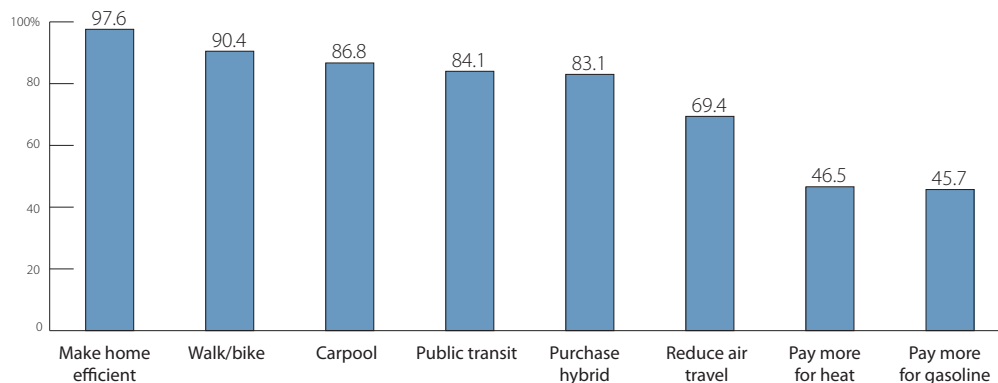
Western Canadians think business can do the most to reduce GHG emissions.

Looking West 2007 Survey respondents were asked, “Which of these two groups do you think can do the *most* to reduce Canada’s greenhouse gas emissions: business and industry by changing their practices, or individual consumers by changing their daily habits?” Over 4 in 10 western Canadians state that business can do the most to reduce GHG emissions, while less than 3 in 10 state that individual consumers can do the most. Differences between the provinces were not significant. It should be noted that roughly one-quarter of respondents in each province volunteered that both business and individual consumers can reduce GHG emissions.



GHG Reductions and Individuals

Figure 8: Willingness to Make Changes to Reduce GHG Emissions (Western Canada)



Looking West 2008 Survey respondents were asked, “Reducing greenhouse gas emissions may require Canadians to change their day-to-day habits, or to pay more for certain things. How willing are you to do each of the following actions—very willing, somewhat willing, somewhat unwilling, or very unwilling?” (Respondents were also asked to indicate if a particular action did not apply to them.) Respondents were asked about eight actions:

- pay significantly more for gasoline
- pay significantly more to heat your home
- participate in a carpool for more trips
- use public transit for more trips
- walk or bike for more trips
- reduce air travel
- make your home more energy efficient
- purchase a hybrid or energy efficient vehicle.

Support is considerably higher for voluntary individual actions than for user pay options. The most popular action—by a large margin—is increasing home energy efficiency, with almost all western Canadians willing to take this action. Large numbers of western Canadians are also willing to walk or bike, carpool, or take public transit more, and to purchase a hybrid or energy efficient vehicle. Almost 7 in 10 are willing to reduce air travel. Of the six voluntary actions, provincial differences are only found with respect to reducing air travel, with Albertans somewhat less willing than Saskatchewan and British Columbia residents to cut their air travel in an effort to reduce GHG emissions.

GHG Reductions and Individuals

Western Canadians are willing to make a number of individual-level changes to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, including increasing home energy efficiency, and increasing walking, biking, carpooling, and public transit use. A slim majority, however, is unwilling to pay more for gasoline or home heating, while over 4 in 10 are willing to pay more.



GHG Reductions and Individuals

	Very willing	Somewhat willing	Somewhat unwilling	Very unwilling
Pay more for gasoline N = 3,792	11.6%	34.1%	20.7%	32.8%
Pay more for heat N = 3,853	8.6	37.9	23.0	29.5
Carpool N = 3,212	52.9	33.9	5.3	6.9
Public transit N = 3,142	51.7	32.4	7.3	7.9
Walk/bike N = 3,467	59.2	31.2	4.0	5.2
Reduce air travel N = 3,085	32.2	37.2	14.7	13.8
Make home efficient N = 3,883	75.1	22.5	1.2	1.0
Purchase hybrid N = 3,761	46.7	36.4	7.8	8.3

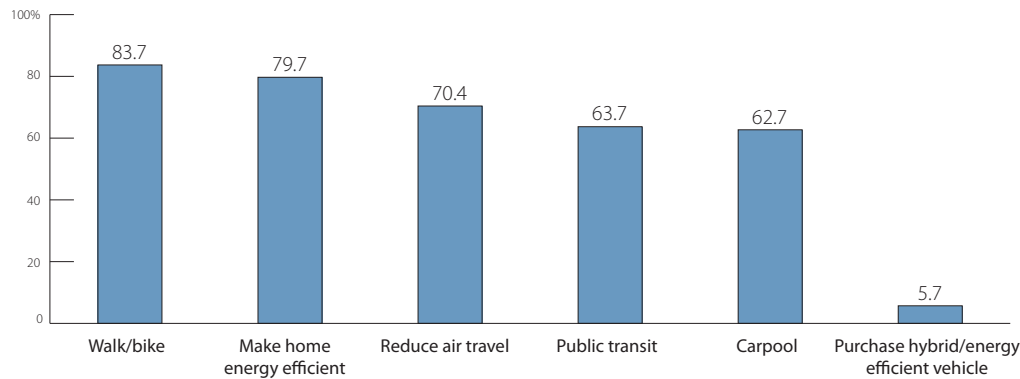
NOTE: excludes respondents who stated that an option was not applicable to them due to their lifestyle, location, or for other reasons. The percentage of "not applicable" responses for each action are: pay more for gasoline 5.2%; pay more for home heating 3.7%; carpool 19.7%; public transit 21.5%; walk/bike 13.3%; reduce air travel 22.9%; make home more energy efficient 2.9%; purchase hybrid/energy efficient vehicle 6.0%.

Support is lower for the two user pay options—paying significantly more for gasoline and paying significantly more for home heating. However, given that research generally shows rather high public opposition to increased user fees and taxes, it is notable that only a slim majority (less than 55%) are unwilling to pay *significantly* more. Provincial differences are found with respect to increased gasoline and home heating prices: British Columbia and Alberta residents are more willing than Saskatchewan and Manitoba residents to pay significantly more for gasoline, and British Columbia residents are more willing than prairie residents to pay significantly more for home heating.



GHG Reductions and Individuals

Figure 9: Have Begun to Make Changes to Reduce GHG Emissions (Western Canada)



NOTE: question was only asked of individuals who stated that they were very or somewhat willing to take a particular action. Walk/bike N = 3,136; Home energy efficient N = 3,791; Air travel N = 2,141; Public transit N = 2,641; Carpool N = 2,785; Hybrid/energy efficient vehicle N = 3,120.

Respondents who indicated that they were very or somewhat willing to make a personal change—carpooling, using public transit, walking/biking, reducing air travel, increasing home energy efficiency, and/or purchasing a hybrid or energy efficient vehicle—were also asked if they have already begun to make the change. Over 8 in 10 western Canadians who were willing to walk or bike for more trips claim to have already begun to do so, while almost 8 in 10 claim to have made their home more energy efficient. Seven in 10 western Canadians who were willing to reduce air travel report having already done so, and over 6 in 10 report increasing public transit use and using carpools for more trips. Numbers are considerably lower for vehicle purchase: just over 5% of those willing to purchase a hybrid or energy efficient vehicle report having already done so.

Provincial differences were only found with respect to public transit: Saskatchewan residents (51.7%) were much less likely than British Columbia (65.7%), Alberta (64.6%) or Manitoba (61.9%) residents to state that they have already begun to take public transit for more trips.

GHG Reductions and Individuals

Many western Canadians who are willing to make changes claim to have already begun to do so.

While western Canadians are concerned about climate change and willing to take a number of steps to reduce GHG emissions, protecting the economy remains the priority for many.

Conclusion

Almost 8 in 10 western Canadians believe climate change to be a serious problem; even in oil-rich Alberta, often portrayed as North America's climate change pariah, three-quarters of the public sees climate change as a serious problem.

Western Canadians not only see climate change as a serious problem, but also consider reducing GHG emissions to be a top priority. Indeed, westerners are more likely to rate GHG emission reductions a very high or high priority than they are to give that rating to policy areas such as tax cuts, post-secondary education, and transportation infrastructure.

Clearly, the climate change issue has caught the attention of western Canadians. But are Canadians willing to walk the climate change talk? Are they willing to make changes to reduce GHG emissions? The answer is an unambiguous "sort of"—depending on the degree to which the change will affect their lifestyles and, more importantly, their pocketbooks.

Western Canadians are extremely supportive of government subsidies for renewable energy production, such as wind power, solar power, and biofuels. And western Canadians are quite willing to change many of their day-to-day habits in an effort to reduce GHG emissions. The most popular action—by a large margin—is increasing home energy efficiency, with almost all western Canadians willing to take this action. Large numbers of western Canadians are also willing to walk, bike, carpool, or take public transit more, to purchase a hybrid or energy efficient vehicle, and to reduce air travel.

But enthusiasm drops sharply when western Canadians are asked about user pay options, with the majority unwilling to pay significantly more for gasoline and for home heating. While enthusiasm may be low, it is important to recognize that it is only a small majority (less than 55%) that is unwilling to endure significant cost hikes. It is notable that over 40% of western Canadians are willing to significantly pay more for heat and gasoline in an effort to reduce GHG emissions.

But while western Canadians are concerned about climate change and willing to take a number of steps to reduce GHG emissions, protecting the economy remains the priority for many: almost 6 in 10 western Canadians feel that efforts to reduce GHG emissions should not be made at the expense of the economy.



Given the highly politicized nature of the climate change issue, and given the potential role that individual consumers have in reducing GHG emissions, public opinion on climate change is politically relevant, as it suggests the degree to which the public might accept, or chafe against, various public policy options.

The survey results suggest that the public would be highly supportive of incentive programs for increasing home energy efficiency and for reducing car travel by carpooling, walking, biking, or using public transit for more trips. The findings also suggest that the public would be supportive of government investments in public transit systems and in alternative energy production.

When it comes to the more challenging issues such as carbon taxes or hard caps on emissions that will hit Canadians in their pocketbooks one way or another, the survey finds greater opposition than support to increased gasoline and energy prices. The slimness of the opposition is, however, remarkable. This may mean that policy efforts that employ price increases as a means to promote conservation and alternatives to fossil fuels may be palatable to the general public if they are properly constructed and communicated.

Similarly, while a majority of western Canadians place protecting the economy above reducing GHG emissions, it is striking that almost 4 in 10 feel that significant efforts to reduce emissions should be made even if doing so will hurt the economy. If Canadian political leaders were to follow the lead of California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and focus on the potential economic opportunities to be found in developing and marketing new technologies to address climate change, public concerns about negative impacts on the economy might diminish somewhat.

It is no surprise that the popularity of addressing climate change drops when doing so is linked to economic distress and less money in our wallets. What is surprising is how many of us are willing to at least consider accepting these costs. ■



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About the Canada West Foundation

Our Vision

A dynamic and prosperous West in a strong Canada.

Our Mission

A leading source of strategic insight, conducting and communicating non-partisan economic and public policy research of importance to the four western provinces and all Canadians.

Canada West Foundation is a registered Canadian charitable organization incorporated under federal charter (#11882 8698 RR 0001).

In 1970, the One Prairie Province Conference was held in Lethbridge, Alberta. Sponsored by the University of Lethbridge and the Lethbridge Herald, the conference received considerable attention from concerned citizens and community leaders. The consensus at the time was that research on the West (including BC and the Canadian North) should be expanded by a new organization. To fill this need, the Canada West Foundation was created under letters patent on December 31, 1970. Since that time, the Canada West Foundation has established itself as one of Canada's premier research institutes. Non-partisan, accessible research and active citizen engagement are hallmarks of the Foundation's past, present and future endeavours. These efforts are rooted in the belief that a strong West makes for a strong Canada.

More information can be found at www.cwf.ca.

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