



Polling Canada's Climate

A background paper prepared in conjunction with the release of the Canada 2020 / University of Montreal **National Survey of Canadian Public Opinion on Climate Change** and the Canada 2020 event 'The politics of climate and the climate of politics'

November 2013

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About Canada 2020

Canada 2020 is a leading, independent, progressive think-tank. Our objective is to inform and influence debate, to identify progressive policy solutions and to help redefine federal government for a modern Canada. We do this by convening leading authorities from Canada and abroad, generating original policy thinking, and prioritizing effective communication.

Our orientation is:

- progressive and non-partisan
- long-term, with an emphasis on key structural issues facing Canada
- collaborative and outward focused
- activist: we aim to influence the policy agenda.

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About the paper

This paper was prepared as background material for the November 2013 series of events entitled: 'The Politics of Climate and the Climate of Politics'. These will showcase and interpret new data from a **National Survey of Canadian Public Opinion on Climate Change** produced by Canada 2020 and the University of Montreal.

The paper joins other research and commentary written for our Squaring the Carbon Circle policy stream, one of five areas of work that comprise the Canada We Want in 2020 project. Questions and comments can be directed to info@canada2020.ca.

Acknowledgements

The National Survey of Canadian Public Opinion on Climate Change was made possible through the generous support of the McCall MacBain Foundation.

Our November events are supported by the generosity of Bombardier Transportation, Teck, and individual donors, Laurie Thomson and Margaret Kelch. Evergreen, a national not-for-profit that inspires action to green cities, has been a partner and supporter throughout this project.

I also wish to thank Leela Steiner, currently studying for a PhD. at the University of British Columbia, for her early help on data collection and Erick Lachapelle for his input to this paper.

Introduction: Polling Canada's climate

This paper is written as a background paper for Canada 2020's November 2013 series of events in our 'Squaring the Carbon Circle' area of work. The events will showcase and interpret a new National Survey of Canadian Public Opinion on Climate Change¹ – produced by Canada 2020 and the University of Montreal – alongside comparative data from the U.S.²

The Canadian survey follows on from an extremely successful event on carbon pricing that Canada 2020 hosted in Ottawa in April 2013. This event represented a first attempt to move beyond the extreme partisanship and bitterness that has characterized the carbon debate in Canada. Our intention in continuing to work in this area is to produce data that can help facilitate a positive and collaborative dialogue on this pressing global issue, leading to meaningful action.

This paper explains the genesis of our poll and describes both the current Canadian and international climate context. It also summarizes those surveys on carbon and climate issues that have taken place in Canada since 2007. In so doing, it endeavors to situate our new findings (which are, at the time of writing, still in process) and leads to the final section that lays out the types of questions that we will be asking at our events.

1. Why we are polling on climate in Canada

Our April 2013 event underscored the extent of concern about carbon and climate issues amongst our Ottawa and on-line audience (this was the largest event Canada 2020 had hosted to that point). One of our goals in undertaking this poll with the University of Montreal has been to assess the degree to which this concern is shared by the broader Canadian population, as well as how concern varies according to geography and demographic characteristics. We are also keen to gauge knowledge of and support for climate-related policies, following decades in which successive Canadian governments have under-delivered on environmental commitments while projecting the impression that Canada (and individual Canadians) cannot afford the measures required to limit carbon emissions.

Our work will increase both the quality and depth of information available to policymakers as we head towards the 2015 federal election. The impartiality of our data has been assured through our partnership with the University of Montreal (which also enables us to draw on comparative Canadian data from 2011³). This partnership has also brought us links with Muhlenberg College and the University of Michigan in the U.S. which enable us to consider our data in a comparative

¹ The Canadian poll was made possible through the support of the McCall MacBain Foundation.

² Produced by Christopher Borick (Muhlenberg College) and Barry Rabe (University of Michigan).

³ Erick Lachapelle from the University of Montreal collaborated on a similar survey in 2011 with Sustainable Prosperity and the Public Policy Forum (see page 8-9 below).

context and understand the prospects for the U.S. and Canada continuing to work together on climate issues.

2. The context

Global climate issues and media

Our poll will be released in the week directly preceding the [Warsaw Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, \(COP19\)](#) and to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP09), which takes from 11-22 November, 2013. This meeting will seek to move towards a new international agreement to limit greenhouse gas emissions post 2020. The goal is that such an agreement should be signed at the Paris COP meetings in December 2015. While Canada is no longer a signatory to the Kyoto Protocol, it is part of the negotiations for a post-2020 agreement and climate issues should thus be a focus for the media and policymakers in our country in early November 2013.

Our polling took place early in October 2013, just weeks after the end September preliminary release of the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's fifth assessment report](#) (seven years after the sixth report). This concluded that global temperatures have increased significantly since the 1950s and that it is almost completely certain that man is the main cause of this change.

A good deal of publicity was afforded to the IPCC's assessment of why the pace of global warming has slowed over the past 15 years (more heat being taken up by the oceans, changes in the solar cycle and increased volcanic activity being the main reasons cited). It will be interesting to consider whether discussion of this (possibly temporary) slowing in the trend has had a negative effect on belief in climate change, leading to the view that global warming is less of a concern (though this is not what the report itself says⁴).

Another significant development of recent weeks has been the publication of an OECD report [Climate and Carbon: aligning prices and policies](#) that calls for carbon pricing as the cornerstone of climate policy globally. In presenting this report, the OECD Secretary General Angel Gurría noted that the OECD would add a climate scorecard to its regular assessment of member countries' economies. Canada will be the first country to be assessed.⁵

⁴ Indeed, just prior to the report's release a number of very eminent scientists released a far more aggressive statement about warming, noting that, without action, we could be headed to a future that is 4C warmer:

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/sep/16/climate-change-case-overwhelming-scientists>

⁵ <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/334c9bba-30ec-11e3-b991-00144feab7de.html?siteedition=uk>

Canadian climate policy

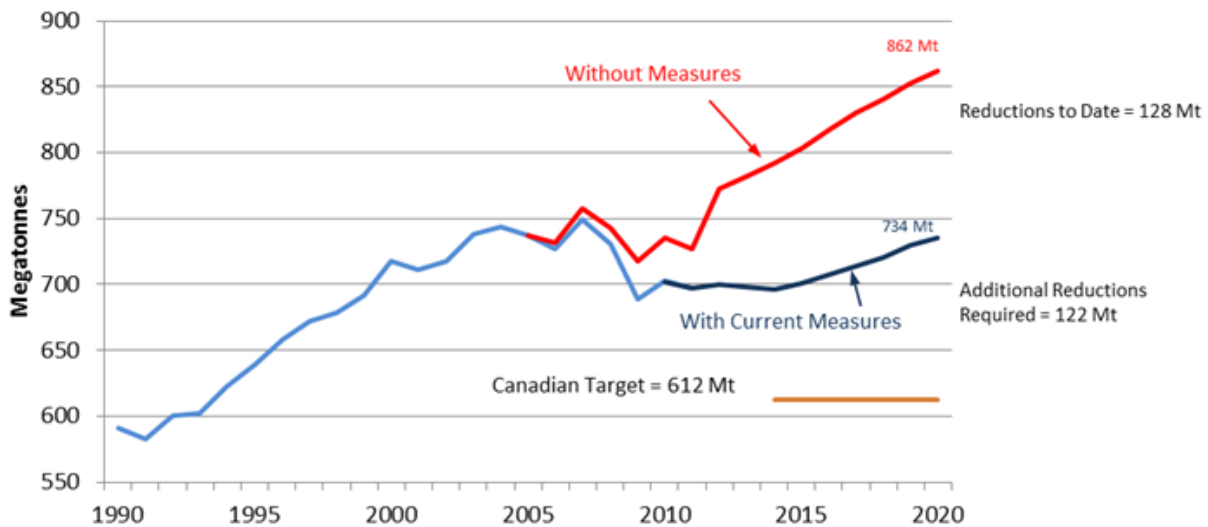
Canada's global commitments and performance in achieving these were analyzed in the [background paper](#) to our April 2013 event.⁶

There have been few developments at a federal level since that time. The focus of energy policy has stayed on pipelines and to a lesser extent on the rail transport of petroleum products – all ways of facilitating increases in production and thus greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

The federal government has continued to over-promise and under-deliver: it has still not placed any regulations on oil and gas sector emissions despite successive commitments do so and it still has no achievable plan for fulfilling Canada's Copenhagen commitments.

The following chart which appears in Environment Canada's October 2013 publication *Canada's Emissions Trends*⁷(p.4), shows the extent of the unaddressed problem:

Scenarios of Canadian Emissions to 2020 (Mt CO₂e)



The Pembina Institute succinctly summarizes the situation with respect to the oil and gas sector, as follows:

‘The federal government has long promised GHG limits in the oil and gas sector, and has made a variety of commitments to enact policies over the years. At present, however, there are no federal GHG limits of any kind on the oil and gas sector in Canada. Specific consultations with the oil and gas industry and the province of Alberta about a sectoral regulation began in 2011, but no announcements — of either political commitments or draft regulations — have been

⁶ D. Carney (2013) [Why would Canadians Buy Carbon Pricing?](#) Canada 2020.

⁷ http://www.ec.gc.ca/ges-ghg/985F05FB-4744-4269-8C1A-D443F8A86814/1001-Canada%27s%20Emissions%20Trends%202013_e.pdf

*made. The federal government recently missed a commitment to publish information about its approach to limiting oil and gas regulations in the first half of 2013, and has yet to provide any updated information about the timing of enacting an oil and gas sector GHG regulation.*⁸

When the regulations do finally emerge virtually nobody expects them to be sufficiently stringent to put Canada back on track to meet its Copenhagen commitments.

Meanwhile, at a provincial level, efforts continue, but with setbacks too. It is too early to pass any judgments on Quebec's new cap and trade system (which has received very little attention in the English press in Canada). But in B.C. the Liberal victory was achieved on the back of a promise to freeze the carbon tax rate, despite positive endorsements of this tax from various quarters⁹ and polls showing widespread support for the tax.

3. What does previous polling tell us?

Unlike our colleagues in the U.S. we do not have consistent time series data on attitudes to global warming, or belief in different policy options for addressing climate change.

Nonetheless there have been a number of polls in related areas over the past six years. In this section I outline the main polls and their findings, by year, before discussing trends and conjecturing about overall takeaways.

Main polls and key findings

2007

Ekos

In 2007, before the global financial crisis hit, polling showed significant concern for the environment in Canada. An Ekos poll released in January 2007 found that 72% of Canadians felt that protection of the environment and public health should be the top priority for governments in Canada. 81% favored stricter laws and regulation to ensure that Canadians act in an environmentally-friendly manner. At this time only 13% felt that Canadian efforts to protect the environment had been effective (down from 35% in 2003).

Canadians also expressed a strong preference for protection of the environment over uninterrupted supply of energy or low energy prices. Concern about climate change, specifically, was up on 2004 data, but air pollution and toxic waste were still found to be the top environmental concerns for Canadians.

⁸ P.J. Partington and C. Demerse (2013) [Context for Climate Action in Canada](#). Pembina Institute.

⁹ See Sustainable Prosperity (2012) [British Columbia Carbon Tax Review](#).

Nevertheless 73% (down from 77% in 2004) said that they would pay more for clean energy (though three quarters of these would pay only 10% more). Happily, though, the poll found almost complete agreement (90% support) amongst respondents that taking action to improve the environment would help Canada remain economically strong, with 57% believing that this would also be good for job creation.

Environics

In 2007 Environics kicked off its Canadian Environmental Barometer. This survey is conducted every quarter and thus provides the best time series data on key environmental issues in Canada (though the results are not always publicly reported).

In its inaugural year, the survey found that 66% of respondents believed that science conclusively proves that global warming is happening and is mostly caused by human activity (10% did not believe in global warming while 23% believed in it but were unsure about its cause). 55% of those who were not sure about the cause felt that it was nonetheless appropriate to take strong actions to address it (42% believed we should wait until we had greater certainty).

46% of respondents felt that government standards and regulations were most essential to making progress on climate change (22% felt that consumers adjusting their lifestyles to reduce impact was the most important thing, 15% felt that industry and business reducing impact was the most important and 13% felt that all three were equally important).

Key takeaways from the year

Environment was a top priority for Canadians in 2007. Nine out of 10 Canadians surveyed believed that climate change was happening, though even with this high level of belief, climate change appeared to be of relatively less importance to respondents than more immediate issues such as toxic waste and air pollution. The feeling that Canada had not been effective in its environmental efforts was already in evidence in 2007, but there was still a sense of optimism about the possibility of win/win environmental/economic outcomes.

2008

2008 was the year that the economic crisis began to hit. Key environmental developments included Stéphane Dion's 'Green Shift' platform in the October federal election and the introduction of the carbon tax in B.C.. It was understandably a busy year for polling on environmental issues.

Pembina

In April – May, before the June unveiling of the Green Shift, Pembina found that 72% of Canadians felt somewhat or very positive about B.C.'s newly-announced carbon tax (though note that this was a cross-country rather than a B.C. poll) while 47% felt that if the federal government were to introduce a carbon tax, the revenues should be earmarked for promoting renewable energy. Only 11% of respondents favored using the revenues to offset tax cuts.

Toronto Star/Angus Reid

This poll was commissioned on the heels of the Green Shift manifesto announcement. A week after the policy was laid out, 26% of survey respondents felt that they fully understood what the carbon tax was, 46% had a vague idea and 28% had no idea at all. That said, 66% of respondents believed that the carbon tax would raise the price of gasoline – not true, under Dion’s plan – suggesting that those who had only a vague idea of the tax had certainly not grasped its key features. Only 15% understood that Dion’s plan would be fully revenue neutral.

At the time of the poll, 62% of respondents were fully convinced global warming was occurring (44% of conservative voters) with only 5% being completely skeptical. 47% were in favour of putting a price on emissions (a key feature of the Green Shift) while 39% were willing to pay higher taxes on fossil fuels if they also saw an income tax cut (again, this is what the Green Shift promised). Nonetheless, only 28% believed that Dion’s carbon tax was the best way to curb climate change (68% felt it would hurt low income families).

EnviroNics Environmental Barometer

Before the election, in August 2008, this regular survey found an even split between those who felt that it was reasonable for consumers to pay \$100/year for climate change action (47%) and those who felt it was unreasonable (48%). Slightly more than half (54%) of British Columbians in the survey either strongly or somewhat supported the carbon tax.

Greenpeace/Pembina

The federal election was fought in October 2008. Whether Dion’s failure was due to his espousal of a carbon tax or other factors is still a matter for conjecture.¹⁰ However the fact that a month after the election 83% of Canadians polled agreed (either strongly or somewhat) that ‘Canada should commit to strong action on global warming without waiting for other countries’ suggests that Dion lost in spite of people’s concern for the environment, and climate change in particular, rather than because this was not a concern.

Despite the growing economic malaise in Canada, and globally, at this time, the poll also found that only 36% of Canadians agreed (whether strongly or somewhat) that ‘Governments in Canada should cutback on efforts to tackle global warming because of the economic crisis’. On the contrary, nearly four out of five (78%) felt that Canada’s global warming targets should be scientifically based, even if meeting them were to entail ‘some cost to the economy’.

Key takeaways from the year

We will never know exactly why Stéphane Dion did so poorly in the 2008 election, but it is clear from the polling that took place in 2008 that it was not because people did not care about the environment. Certainly his Green Shift commitment to revenue neutrality seems to have been both poorly understood and, perhaps, not strongly supported, at least at a conceptual level.

¹⁰ See D. Carney (2013) [Why would Canadians Buy Carbon Pricing?](#) Canada 2020. p.3

On specifics, it is interesting that the Toronto Star/Angus Reid poll showed only 62% being fully convinced that global warming was happening, as this is well below the Environics figure from the previous year. The ‘middle ground’ is perhaps hard to define: a similar number of people in both polls were either not completely convinced of global warming (31% in the 2008 Toronto Star/Angus Reid poll) or were convinced but not sure of the cause (23% in the 2007 Environics poll). Firm belief in climate change and feeling a duty to support action to reduce it are clearly closely related: a sizeable chunk of the population was in 2008 – and perhaps still is in 2013 – not yet ready to put themselves in the ‘fully convinced and committed to action’ camp.

2009

Harris/Decima

Harris/Decima polling in July 2009 focused on ‘the environment’ fairly broadly and found this to be a major concern amongst Canadians. 71% felt that environmental conservation was something that was becoming more important to them (as compared to a ‘few years ago’), with 73% making more personal efforts to be environmentally conscious. A similar percentage (74%) felt that ‘the current focus on environment in our society’ is ‘not enough’ and that environmental initiatives should remain as high a priority as the economy, despite the ‘economy weakening’ (67%).

Munk debates/Harris Decima/Canadian Press

On December 1, 2009 a Munk debate was held on the climate in the run up to the 7–18 December Copenhagen Climate Summit.¹¹ The poll to inform the debate was conducted in late November.

25% of respondents felt that climate change and environment were an ‘extremely important’ issue, with 87% being of the view that this was of some significant importance (giving it over 5 on a 0 to 10 scale). Equivalent figures for the economy were 28%/98% and healthcare 39%/97%. Reduced environmental concern, relative to economic concern, seems to have been taking hold since July when Harris/Decima polled. Indeed the Munk debate poll asked the very same question on the relative importance of environment and economy and the proportion of people who felt that environmental initiatives should remain as high a priority as the economy had fallen by 3% over the five month period.

When polled on issues directly relating to the then forthcoming Copenhagen talks, 55% expressed support for a binding treaty (as Kyoto) while 46% wanted Canada to play a lead role in Copenhagen (40% a secondary role in which Canada would ‘try to find a middle-ground compromise between countries that want hard targets and those who don’t’, with a further 10% advocating a ‘passive role’).

On this question there was a good deal of regional and political variation: as many as 20% of Albertans felt that a passive role was desirable. When it came to political allegiance, 23% of Conservatives, 62% of Liberals, 66% of Greens and 48% of NDP voters were looking for Canada to

¹¹ The motion under debate was: *Climate Change is Mankind's Defining Crisis, and Demands a Commensurate Response.*

play a lead role in which it 'presses for and commits to a signed treaty that binds all countries to hard targets that reduce their carbon emissions'.

Overall only 16% felt that Canada should harmonize its climate change policies with the U.S., while 81% favoured a 'made-in-Canada' approach.

Perception of Canada's climate leadership remained dismal: 16% saw their country as a leader internationally (compare the 46% who wanted a leading role for Canada) with fully 40% viewing Canada as a laggard (compare 10% who wanted to see Canada play a passive role). 64% took the bullish option of saying that Canada should commit to higher and harder targets for greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions even if 'fast growing countries like India and China' had not done so.

Key takeaways from the year

The main message from 2009 seems to be that people were committed to the environment: they wanted to see more action, in principle, and saw Canada as a laggard in this area. However, as an everyday concern, growing economic insecurity had begun to displace climate. On the international stage, people were still desirous of seeing Canadian leadership, with nearly two thirds supporting the idea that Canada should sign new treaties ahead of developing countries (despite the federal government's stated reluctance to do this).

2010

There were no notable climate change polls reported during this year.

2011

The federal election was held May 2, 2011.

Sustainable Prosperity/Public Policy Forum/University of Montreal

The precursor poll to that which we are reporting at our November 2013 events was conducted in January – February 2011 (comparable U.S. polling took place during November to December 2010).

At the time, 80% of Canadians agreed that there was 'solid evidence' of global warming (only 68% of Americans agreed, similar to the number of Canadian conservatives who agreed: 64%). Interestingly, amongst those who concurred, only 57% felt this was a very serious problem with 34% characterizing it as 'somewhat serious'.

A much higher proportion of Canadians than U.S. respondents felt that governments had a strong role to play in addressing global warming with the federal government being seen as the most important player, though not by any great margin. 89% of Canadian respondents felt that the federal government had 'a great deal of' or 'some' responsibility for addressing global warming (88% provincial and 84% local).

When it came to managing the economic costs of addressing climate change, only 21% of respondents were unwilling to pay anything for renewable energy production (42% of American respondents), though 28% would pay only up to \$49 per annum (24% in the US). 26% said they

would pay over \$100/year. So only one in four respondents would have been willing to pay an extra \$10 per month on their fuel bills for renewable energy (in the U.S. only one in 8, or 13%, down dramatically from 30% in fall 2008, revealing, most probably, the extent of economic pain in the U.S.).

When it came to particular policy instruments, support for cap and trade was consistently close to 60% in Canada (regardless of additional personal costs, up to a significant \$50/month) while in the U.S. this figure was below 40%, falling to 18% at \$50/month. Support for carbon tax was lower in both countries by about 10% across the cost options.

Environics Barometer

Environics reported on its ongoing environmental data collection in November 2011. It found that the Canadian public's level of concern about environmental issues had remained resilient over the past few years. Indeed, in answer to an unprompted question in the November poll, 28% of respondents said that environment/global warming/pollution was the most important world issue for the future (22% said this was economy/recession/unemployment, up from 11% 7 months previously). Ironically, this poll was conducted just a month before the federal government announced its intention to pull out of the Kyoto agreement.

By contrast, just 6% saw it as Canada's most pressing issue (vs. economy/employment at 43%) suggesting that the environment is viewed as a global, not a local, challenge. Nonetheless, 74% either strongly or somewhat favored placing limits on carbon dioxide emissions even if this might lead to higher energy prices (down from 80% in late 2010 but similar to January 2010).

More than half of respondents (56%) believed that Canada should sign on for a new international treaty to reduce GHG emissions 'even if this might result in some Canadian industries losing jobs and Canadians paying a bit more for some goods and services'. However, this was a drop from November 2010 when the figure was 59% and September 2009 when it was 68%.

The survey also found that support in B.C. for the carbon tax was at an all time high (57%) with 58% of other Canadians supporting a similar tax in their provinces (up from 42% in Feb 2008).

Key takeaways from the year

Concern about the economy was clearly still close to the surface in 2011. At the same time, belief in global warming had rebounded, reaching 80% again. A solid majority (around 55–60%) of Canadians were found to be consistently concerned about environmental issues, willing to pay more and willing to make certain sacrifices to safeguard the economy (thus favoring B.C.-style carbon taxes across the land). Rather oddly, cap and trade was a clear winner in terms of opinion of different policy instruments, regardless of the fact that people had much less upon which to base their support than they did for a carbon tax (given that one had now been in existence in B.C. for three years). This is probably due to the frequent supposition that, within cap and trade, it is businesses, rather than consumers, that bear the pain.

Generally the data around support for different policy instruments at given costs and willingness to pay for different mitigation measures is far more variable and internally inconsistent than data around beliefs in warming and the role of government. This is no surprise as it gets to people's willingness to take personal measures to address the climate problem, rather than simply supporting government or industry action which are frequently perceived – usually erroneously – as cost-free to the consumer.

2012

2012 was another bumper year for polling.

Pacific Climate Trust/Ipsos Reid

In April 2012, Ipsos Reid polled British Columbians on behalf of the Pacific Climate Trust and found that 72% agreed that 'the B.C. government should continue to take an active role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and fighting climate change'. An even higher number (79%) agreed that 'the B.C. government should be working to stimulate jobs and investment in the clean tech sector'.

Nearly two thirds (63%) went further than this, agreeing that 'the B.C. government should work towards making British Columbia one of the greenest jurisdictions in the world' (9% disagreed).

Canadian Chamber of Commerce/Ipsos Reid

Also in April, Ipsos Reid polled specifically on oil and gas on behalf of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce. This poll identified strong support for the oil and gas sector with 65% believing it possible to increase production in the sector while 'protecting the environment'. Those at the coalface (or those with the greatest vested interests?) believed this most strongly: 80% of Albertans held this view while only 55% of Quebeckers did. Older people were more likely to believe this than their younger counterparts: 80% of the 55+ age group but only 49% of the 18-34 age group.

57% of respondents felt that the positive aspects of oil sands development outweighed the negative, while 29% disagreed with this statement. The poll also showed support for increasing domestic oil refineries and diversifying oil and gas exports away from the U.S. (the Keystone XL debate was already gaining pace in Canada).

Environment Canada/Ipsos Reid

A third Ipsos Reid poll was conducted on behalf of Environment Canada in July 2012. This poll asked about government priorities, about a carbon tax, about alignment of environmental policy with the U.S., and about issues such as pipelines and export diversification. Although the [full data are available](#) on the Government of Canada (GoC) archive website, no narrative commentary on this poll was ever issued.

9% of poll respondents felt the environment should be the biggest focus for the GoC, relative to 17% for the economy/recession and 13% for healthcare. Amongst environmental issues, climate change was the dominant concern (12% said it should be the biggest focus while the next contender was oil sands at 7%: 'don't know' achieved a score of 26%). Of those who felt that the environment

should be the primary focus of the GoC, 24% felt that climate change was the key concern. That said, when prompted with various options, drinking water quality and the health of rivers and lakes proved to be a greater concern than climate change.

When asked about whether the GoC strikes the right balance between ‘addressing environmental issue and economic priorities’, 40% of respondents were on the positive side (6–10 on a scale of 0–10), 36% were negative (1–4), while 22% were equivocal.¹²

Based on the same weightings, 53% felt that the GoC should continue to align with the U.S. on GHG reductions. 50% were in favor of expanding infrastructure to increase Canadian energy exports.

The question on the carbon tax was far from neutral in the way it was framed.¹³ Respondents were asked the degree to which they agreed with the statement: ‘Canada needs to implement a federal carbon tax to promote energy efficiency and protect the environment, even though it means increasing the cost of things like gas and groceries for consumers’.

Unsurprisingly fully 29% of respondents strongly disagreed with this statement (scoring it 1 out of 10) while only 7% strongly agreed (10 out of 10). 34% were overall positive (6–10) while 14% were neutral (5) and 50% were negative (1–4).

Pembina/Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions

In their July 2012 poll, conducted on the Angus Reid forum, these two organizations found that 79% of British Columbians were concerned or very concerned about climate change, while – consistent with the Pacific Climate Trust poll – 73% felt that the B.C. government should be doing more to help reduce ‘the pollution’ that causes global warming (even if other provinces are not doing as much). Over 50% also felt that taking action to reduce global warming would either help grow the economy or at least be neutral.

The poll also investigated the level of support for increasing the rate of B.C.’s carbon tax above \$30/tonne (reached in July 2012: no increases since). Support for increases were consistently above 50%, except were the revenues to be used for corporate tax cuts. If revenues were to be used to pay for other government priorities, such as healthcare and education, strong or moderate support reached 71%, nearly 10% points higher than when it was suggested that revenues would be used to reduce personal income taxes (62%).

Interestingly, though, when asked if the carbon tax and accompanying tax cuts had been positive or negative for B.C., the poll showed only 21% in the positive camp (down 12% from 2011). 40% felt it had been negative (up 13% on 2011). The sponsoring organizations’ conclusions on this rather contradictory polling was that despite quite wide support, there was frustration with the current design of the carbon tax and that more research was required to fully understand the issues.

¹² on a 1-10 scale there is no middle point. Arguable both 5 and 6 should be considered equivocal, in which case 33% felt this way. However, a score of 6 is more likely to be considered mildly positive by respondents.

¹³ See reference to this in Carney 2013.

Tides

Tides Canada also polled in July and found that 67% of respondents felt that reducing ‘carbon pollution to slow down climate change’ was a top or high priority. A similar number felt that Canada should reduce reliance on fossil fuels while a correspondingly low number (33%) felt that Canada should prioritize exporting more of its oil and gas resources.

The things to which people responded positively in this survey were increasing energy efficiency (82% support), creating more jobs in clean energy (74%) and setting aside a proportion of oil wealth to ‘help prepare the nation for a clean and renewable future’ (83%).

EnviroNics Barometer

Towards the end of the year, EnviroNics found that concern about the environment had edged up as compared to 2011. A clear majority of Canadians expressed a belief that science is conclusive on the existence of global warming and its cause, human activity (57%). 28% believed that science was conclusive on existence but not yet on cause. Only 12% did not believe in global warming at all. Interestingly, although belief was up on 2011 it was still not as high as in 2007 when tracking started (in that year 66% believed global warming was happening and was man made).

A growing majority of Canadians felt that the most essential progress on addressing climate change must come from government standards or regulations (59%, up from 57% in 2011 and 46% back in 2007), while only 10% placed the onus on consumers adjusting their lifestyles ((down from 15% in 2011 and 22% in 2007). Concern about the business role has stayed fairly steady at 15–19% over the 5 years of this survey.

57% of respondents (up 2% on the previous year) felt that it was reasonable for consumers to pay \$100/year for climate action (38% felt this was unreasonable, down from 48% in 2007). In B.C. 64% either strongly or somewhat supported the carbon tax (54% in 2007, but down to a low of 43% in June 2011), while in the rest of the country 59% strongly or somewhat support a B.C.-style carbon tax in their own province (an all-time high). Support for a carbon tax varied from 67% in Quebec to 43% in Alberta.

Ipsos Reid/Global TV/Post Media

Late in December 2012 Ipsos Reid polled again and found that 61% of Canadians disagreed with the statement that ‘the Harper government is doing a good job at protecting Canada’s environment’, while 63% disagreed that ‘the Harper government has struck the right balance between economic growth and environmental protection and management’.

Key takeaways from the year:

2012 was a year of contradictions in polling results, suggesting that environmental concern grew throughout the year, possibly as a result of an extremely hot and dry summer.¹⁴

¹⁴ <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/drought-in-central-eastern-canada-baking-crops-1.1184619>

- Chamber of Commerce polling showed a majority of Canadians to be happy with the oil and gas sector and firm in their belief that there were no contradictions between supporting increased production and protecting the environment. By the time Tides polled in July 2012 there was much more limited support for the oil and gas sector with three quarters or more looking to a dynamic renewable future (with associated job benefits). Even the Environment Canada poll found only 50% support for increasing the energy infrastructure to increase exports.
- Mid-year Environment Canada polling showed that 40% held a positive view on the Harper government's handling of environment/economy dichotomy (to the extent that this exists, which is arguable), with a large number of people (22%) unsure as to what they felt. By the end of the year media outlet poll, the government performance was definitely found to be lacking (by over 60%).

On a regional basis, the east, and Quebec in particular, continued to be much more in favour of measures to limit GHG emissions. Support within the province of B.C. for the carbon tax was robust, in principle, though more shaky when it came to specifics. Consistent with the 2008 Pembina polling, revenue neutrality was found to be unimportant at best, despite the fact that this is a much-heralded strength of B.C.'s tax.

2013

Think HQ Public Affairs Calgary

This 'Eye on Alberta' April survey showed that 31% of Albertans are aware of the province's carbon levy, though only 21% of these could correctly say how much it was (so about 6% of the sample total). 73% approve of the levy, either strongly or somewhat, with the only concern (where positive sentiment was outstripped by negative sentiment) being about potential impact on consumer prices (other things such as Alberta's reputation, jobs growth, economy, etc. were felt to benefit from the levy).

Clean Energy Canada/ Tides Canada

Clean Energy Canada's April 2013 poll focused on coal power in Alberta, finding that 49% believed that coal power should be phased out and replaced with natural gas/renewable generation (19% believed that plants should be shut down and replaced, rather than being phased out, while 14% felt no need for action on coal plants at all and 15% were keen on carbon capture measures as the best way to reduce emissions from coal plants).

Nanos

Nick Nanos also polled in April 2013 to feed into a wider Wilson Center policy report on '[Entering the Energy and Environment Policy Frontier](#)'. The poll found that 38% of Canadians (30% of Americans) felt that reducing GHG emissions was more important than reducing imports from outside north America. 55% of Canadians and 63% of Americans believed the reverse. Only in Quebec were people less concerned about continental energy self-sufficiency than GHG emissions.

The research also found high levels of support for getting people to reduce GHG emissions but low levels of support for taxes to make them do so.

There is not space here to go into extensive details on this exhaustive research, but key conclusions of the report were that:

- although reducing greenhouse gases is important for both Americans and Canadians, it is overshadowed by energy security;
- reducing greenhouse gases was important to a majority of both Americans and Canadians when tested individually;
- both Americans and Canadians recognize the importance of greater co-operation on both energy and environmental issues;
- the American public has a fixation on ensuring a stable supply of energy; and,
- Keystone XL pipeline approval is favored by comfortable majorities in both the U.S. and Canada.

Bullfrog Barometer

This new survey was conducted in conjunction with Environics in September 2013.

59% of those surveyed did not believe that there were tradeoffs to be made between the environment and the economy (36% did find tradeoffs). 68% felt that protecting the environment improves economic growth and provides new jobs (26% felt it reduces these things).

When it came to government action, 28% felt that supporting renewable energy was the most important thing a government could do to protect the environment. 20% were concerned with direct reduction of GHGs by governments.

Key takeaways from the year

The two Alberta surveys showed good awareness of environmental issues amongst respondents but limited numbers of people really wishing to change the status quo in any radical way (by, for example, shutting coal plants). The carbon levy appears to be a good compromise in that it burnishes Alberta's reputation without causing any notable pain to consumers. Arguably this is

because it is not sufficiently high,¹⁵ although the Alberta government did muse about raising it considerably during the course of 2013.

It will be interesting to see, in our poll, whether climate opinion has changed at all in Alberta since the catastrophic floods which occurred in the province in late June 2013.

The Nanos poll shows quite considerably greater concern for energy self-sufficiency than environmental concerns, amongst Canadians and Americans alike, which is quite at odds with previous findings (especially thinking back to the 2007 Ekos poll). Likewise, a year previously, investing in more energy infrastructure had received the support of only half of respondents while Nanos found a 'comfortable majority' in favour of Keystone XL. We will be watching to see if this bullishness on resource exploitation is a blip or whether it is borne out by our own polling.

Overall takeaways from polling 2007 – 2013

As described in this section, climate/environment polling over the past seven years in Canada has shown a good deal of consistency of concern, with some ups and downs on particular topics. Much of the polling has been instigated by organizations with a clear interest in particular outcomes. Whether or not this affects the answers (because of the way questions are framed) is a moot point, but it could have something to do with the variability of responses.

Overall conclusions, to the extent that these are possible, seem to be that:

- A large majority of Canadians are convinced that climate change is happening
- Around 50-60% of Canadians seem to be fairly committed on environmental issues, at least at the level of rhetoric. When asked about personal sacrifices they might make for the environment this committed group shrinks. Fewer than this number would therefore be expected to consider environment as a criterion in electoral choice (this is something we will be getting at in our survey).
- There is inconsistency of opinion as to whether tradeoffs exist between the economy and the environment (though this is a recognizable narrative of the present federal government). Certainly the economy became a greater concern during peak recession years, but there was not a very marked or lasting swing away from the environment.
- Having said that, there is a consistently high degree of optimism about a new, green economy and the job creation and other economic benefits that this will bring. This is

¹⁵ See Horne, M, C. Demerse and P.J. Partington (2013) *Getting on Track for 2020*. Pembina Institute. <http://www.pembina.org/pub/2427>

despite really very little attention being paid to the clean tech/green economy by the current government and media. Perhaps then, this is largely wishful thinking!

- More challenging is the relatively high levels of acceptance of the proposition that increased resource exploitation is compatible with environmental protection. This is a debate that has scarcely been opened in Canada.
- People are aware that the federal government since 2007 (and before, but we have not covered those years) has not done a good job on protecting the environment and most seem to support more action internationally on climate. Possibly, this suggests that people recognize the need for action but wish to shift the responsibility for this action as far away from themselves as possible.
- Given the consistent degree of public concern about environment, it is surprising both that: (a) this has not been a more constructive area of political engagement for all the political parties and (b) that greater public concern and personal commitment to action has not been evident, given low levels of approval for government policies in this area.

It will be interesting to see whether a year of extreme weather events in Canada, coupled with evident lack of progress on climate issues (especially as compared to the U.S. where the President gave a landmark speech on climate change in June 2013), will have an effect on the opinions expressed in our own October 2013 polling.

4. Issues for discussion at our November events

Having not seen the results of our National Survey of Canadian Public Opinion on Climate Change, it is difficult to identify exactly what the key discussion points will be.

Our polling covers a broad range of issues including belief in: the phenomenon of climate change; whose responsibility it is to address climate change; the performance of our current government in doing so; Canadian leadership at an international level; and different types of policy options for addressing climate change.

Over the course of our series of three events in early November, it will be our intention to think about the following types of questions:

- How is public opinion on climate and environmental issues changing over time?
- Why is there such a mismatch between apparent public support for environmental leadership and the actions of the past several Canadian governments.

- Why does the Canadian public seem to be so disengaged from action on climate issues, even though a majority express moderate to considerable concern? Do they feel helpless/disenfranchised or are there other reasons?
- Why have parties that have run on environmental platforms (the Dion Liberals and the B.C. NDP in the 2013 provincial election) fared poorly. How much does this have to do with their environmental platforms?
- What is the best way to reframe the environmental debate in Canada in a positive light? Is there scope for genuine cross-party agreement on the importance of taking steps to protect future generations? What other actions might help unleash citizen engagement on climate issues?
- To what extent will carbon and climate issues feature in the 2015 federal election?
- Canada now has both carbon tax and cap and trade systems in place at a provincial level. What is the best way for the federal government to build on these, especially given that most people look to the federal government first on environmental issues and many people purport to support their provincial efforts at GHG reduction?
- How can businesses lead on environmental issues? What regulations, standards, protocols or facilities would help them to do so? How might shareholder or consumer action make a difference?
- How is it that our U.S. neighbours are generally less convinced and concerned on climate issues but they have a government that is publicly far more supportive of efforts to limit GHGs?

We look forward to a far reaching and constructive debate at all our events.