



REPORT

2026 Public Opinion When Climate Isn't the Only Crisis

ENVIRONICS
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Introduction

Public opinion and the next phase of climate engagement

Climate discourse has entered a new phase.

Five years ago, climate change briefly rose to the top of the public agenda. Global climate strikes, growing public concern, and increasingly visible impacts (floods, wildfires, extreme heat) created a sense of urgency around climate action. In 2026, the landscape looks very different. Climate impacts are just as concerning, but Canadians are navigating a more crowded issues environment shaped by affordability pressures, housing challenges, economic uncertainty, geopolitical instability, and rapid technological change.

Meanwhile, the mainstream climate conversation has evolved. Public debate has moved away from whether climate change exists or is caused by humans. Instead, discourse is increasingly focused on the pace of climate action, trade-offs, affordability, energy security, development, and who should bear the costs of the transition away from fossil fuels. This report draws on multiple sources to explore how public attitudes about climate are evolving within that changing context.

As the climate conversation has shifted, climate engagement feels more fragile.

Climate change remains highly consequential in public life. As climate impacts mount, Canadians continue to recognize climate change as a serious issue and support many forms of climate action. But climate occupies less public attention than it did five years ago and public confidence in momentum and progress on climate action is low.

Public engagement with climate issues today appears more pragmatic and economically conditioned than during the peak climate mobilization period of 2019–2020. For some, climate action has become a “nice to have” in a world of more critical imperatives. Understanding this shift matters for governments, cities, and civic institutions seeking to drive change. One key implication of our findings is that creating a sense of momentum and collective progress on climate action may now be as important as communicating the urgency of the problem.

Section 1

Climate has become **less central** to the public agenda





Section 1

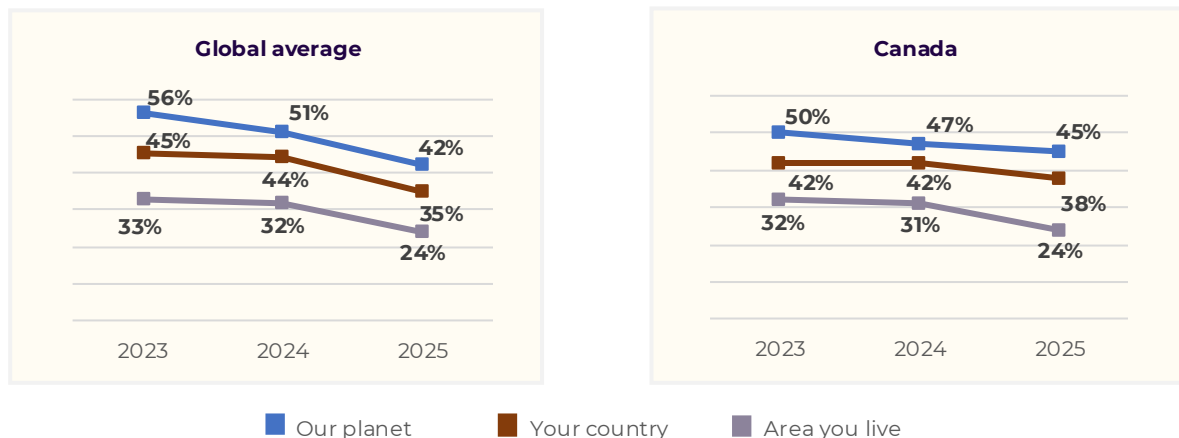
Climate concern remains widespread, but its intensity has softened

Concern about climate change remains widespread in Canada and internationally. Large majorities of Canadians continue to describe climate change as at least a somewhat serious problem for the planet (84%), the country (80%), and the area where they live (70%). However, the share of people describing climate change as a very serious problem at the global, national, and local levels has declined over the past three years. This is true both in Canada and globally.

This softening of people's sense of the seriousness of the problem may reflect a relative (not absolute) decline. Climate competes with a range of other issues – affordability pressures, economic uncertainty, and geopolitical instability – that may cause Canadians more direct worry in everyday life. Rather than signaling a collapse of concern, the findings point to a more crowded and fragmented issues environment than existed in 2019–2020, when climate concern peaked.

% saying “very serious problem”

Q. How serious a problem, or not, do you consider climate change for...?.



Data source: IRIS 2025 Global Public Confidence Study: Climate. Survey of nearly 15,000 respondents across 20 countries; Environics collected the Canadian data (n=1,026).



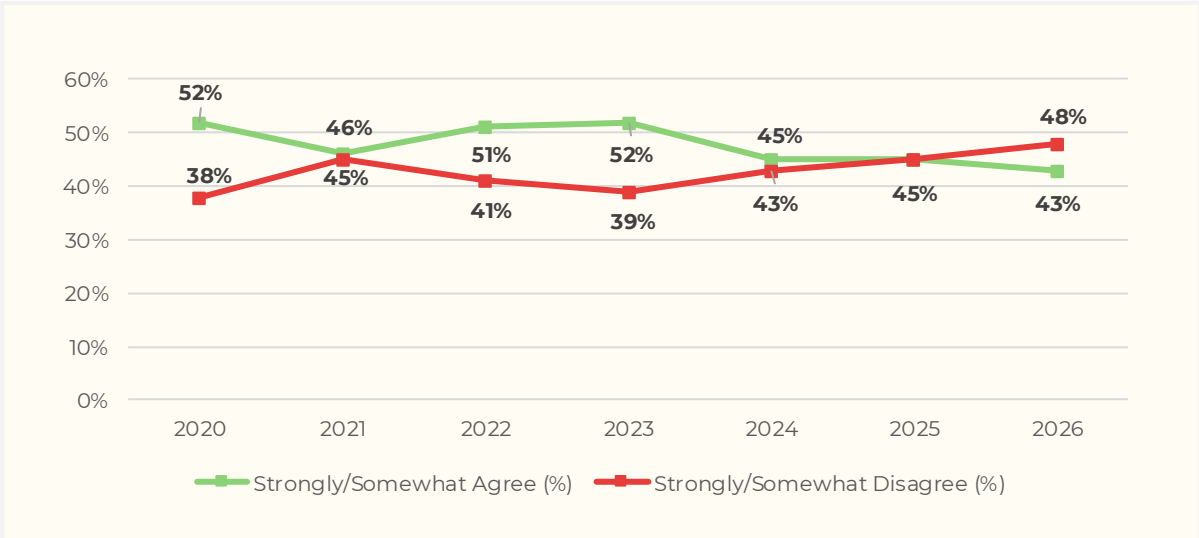
Section 1

In Canada, economic pressures are reshaping public priorities

Canadians are less likely today than they were five years ago to prioritize environmental protection over jobs and economic growth. This shift reflects a broader change in public mood as affordability concerns, economic uncertainty, and cost-of-living pressures become more central in daily life for more people. At the same time, Canadians remain closely divided on this question, suggesting that environmental protection remains a central public priority even in a more economically anxious environment.

Agree or disagree? Protecting the environment is more important than protecting jobs

Q. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? Protecting the environment is more important than protecting jobs.



Data source: The Environics Institute for Survey Research Confederation of Tomorrow study (based on a survey of 5,696 Canadians, conducted February 14 to March 28, 2026).



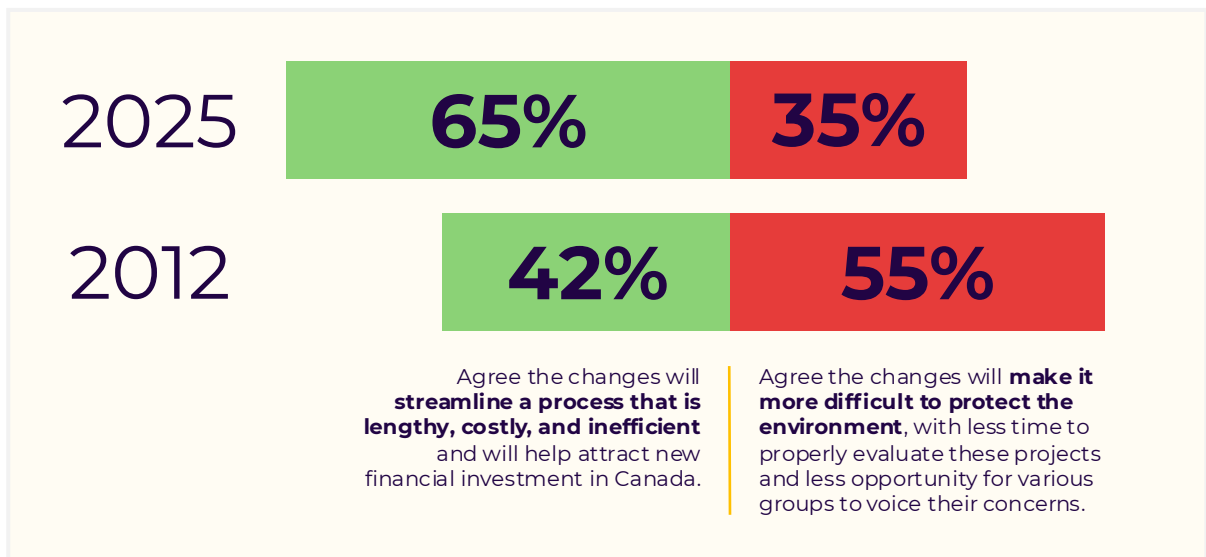
Section 1

A new openness to building and development has emerged

Canadians appear more open to faster development of energy infrastructure than they were a decade ago. Support for streamlining approvals processes and accelerating major projects has increased significantly, reflecting a growing public appetite for economic movement, energy security, and visible action. However, support for faster development does not necessarily mean environmental concerns have disappeared. Many Canadians continue to expect governments to balance economic and environmental priorities.

Views about changes to major development approvals process

Q. The federal government is planning changes to Canada's approval process for major development projects. For projects designated as being in the national interest, the approval timeline will be reduced from the current 5-10 years down to 2 years. Which of the following statements is closest to your own opinion?



Data source: Environics Research Energy Superpower report (survey of 2,072 Canadians, conducted June 2025).

Section 2

Climate action still retains **broad** public legitimacy





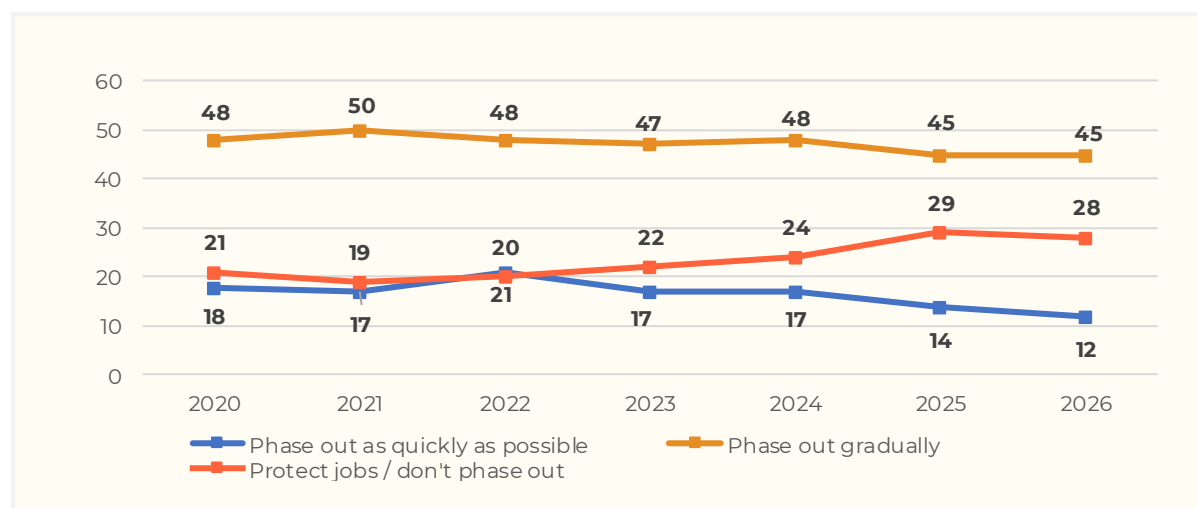
Section 2

Canadians still support a gradual transition away from fossil fuels

Most Canadians continue to support phasing out fossil fuels. However, support is concentrated around a gradual transition approach that avoids sudden economic disruption and job loss. This finding is consistent with the public's diminished sense of urgency on the issue. Our data suggest that Canadians remain open to climate transition, but are looking for pathways that feel practical, stable, and manageable within a broader context of economic uncertainty.

How quickly should Canada phase out fossil fuels?

Q. Some people say that in order to fight climate change, countries like Canada should phase out the use of fossil fuels like oil and gas, and should replace them with more renewable sources of energy. Thinking about this, which of the following three options do you prefer?



Data source: the Environics Institute for Survey Research Confederation of Tomorrow study (based on a survey of 5,696 Canadians, conducted February 14 to March 28, 2026).



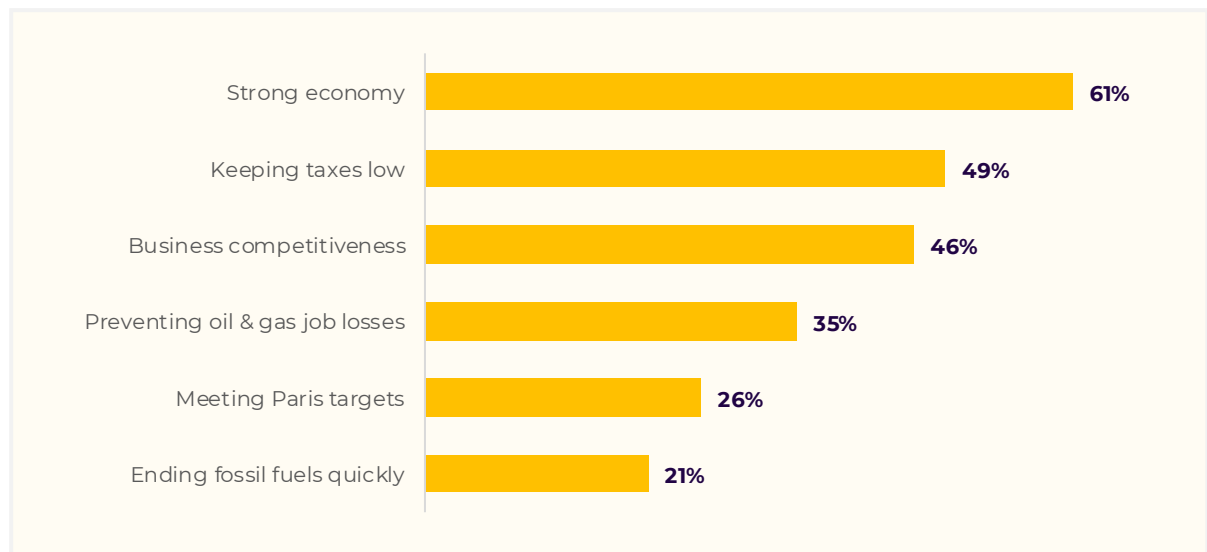
Section 2

Canadians view climate action through an economic lens

When asked about priorities for Canada's climate strategy, respondents place the strongest emphasis on economic resilience and protecting jobs, while fewer prioritize rapid fossil fuel phaseout or meeting international emissions targets. The findings suggest that economic resilience, affordability, and competitiveness shape how Canadians think about climate strategy.

% of Canadians saying "high priority"

Q. In developing a strategy to fight climate change, do you think that each of the following should be a high priority, a medium priority, a low priority, or not a priority at all for Canada?



Data source: the Environics Institute for Survey Research Confederation of Tomorrow study (based on a survey of 5,696 Canadians, conducted February 14 to March 28, 2026).

Section 3

“Think globally, act locally”?





Section 3

People believe their own actions matter – but are less sure broader efforts are advancing

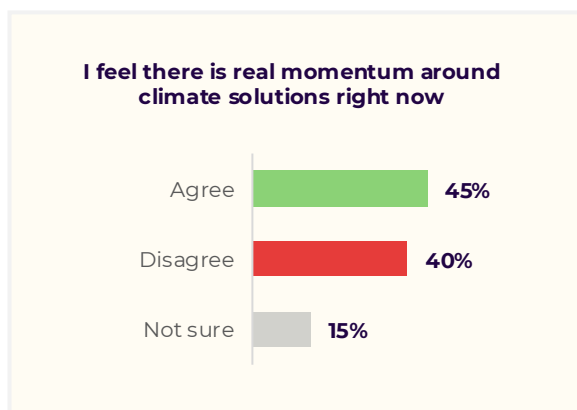
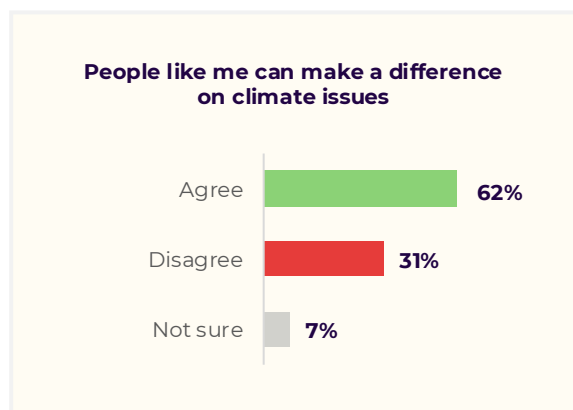
The old saying “think globally, act locally” suggests that individuals and communities can help address large-scale challenges with local participation and resources. Residents of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) are more likely than not to believe that people like themselves can make a difference on climate change.

Indeed, some may see this as the only way to make a difference on climate change: few perceive strong momentum around climate solutions more broadly.

These findings point to an important tension in the current climate conversation: people may continue to care about climate change and believe action matters, while feeling uncertain about whether meaningful collective progress is happening.

Perceptions of efficacy and momentum

Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



Source: Environics' Focus GTA, Online survey of 500 GTA residents, May 2026



Conclusion

Climate engagement may depend increasingly on whether people can see progress

People have not abandoned climate action.

Canadians continue to recognize climate change as a serious issue and support many forms of climate transition and environmental protection. But the public sense of urgency has softened, and many are unconvinced that meaningful progress is happening.

Years of messages about the urgency of climate action have moved the issue into accepted, mainstream discussion, but may have hit their limit in a context where other issues of consequence continue to proliferate.



Against this backdrop, organizations seeking to maintain or build support for climate action may be better off reminding people who care about climate action that they remain **in the majority**, that **work is ongoing** across many sectors of society, and that – despite the continued challenges – **progress is more rapid and widespread than many might realize.**

In a context where so many things (wars, AI, affordability, the U.S.) appear to be competing for the top of the fear agenda, the best approach for climate may be to lean into progress and a hopeful vision of our future.



Conclusion

How can organizations use this research?

Climate change and energy are complex issues and the solutions landscape is very dynamic. Environics Research can help your organization:



Ensure decisions are anchored in a coherent and accurate picture of Canadian public opinion and how it is evolving over time (avoiding the swings and distortion of day-to-day social and traditional media coverage).



Inform communication and engagement strategies that account for the perception gap between experts and the public, and shape messages and language that people understand.



Identify and understand regional nuances and how to address them.



Guide ESG strategies by identifying where the public feels organizations and sectors are lagging or leading.

To learn more about how we can support your team with custom insights, contact our experts:



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