

Hoggan

Shared Values, Canadians, and Sustainability General Population Study Hoggan and Associates 2009

Between April and June of this year, James Hoggan and Associates surveyed 4,368 Canadians for their views on social, environmental, and economic sustainability. The findings—accurate to within 3 percentage points at 90 percent confidence—offer insight into Canadian attitudes toward a range of environmental issues such as climate change, and other aspects of sustainability.

Should We Make Sustainability a Priority?

Canadians overwhelmingly believe that we should make sustainability a national goal. Of those surveyed, 93 percent felt we should make it a priority.

Is Sustainability Just for Show?

More than three-quarters (83 percent) of those surveyed believe that most companies' sustainability claims are more for public relations purposes than actual results. Meanwhile, just 17 percent of respondents felt that most businesses that talk about sustainability are truly committed to achieving results.

"Sustainability" Spells Uncertainty

Few were able to clearly define the term "sustainability." When given a range of choices, 12 percent of respondents equated the term with "Ability to last/continue for the long term." That said, just over half (56 percent) of those surveyed were familiar with the definition "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

What Would It Mean For Us?

What would happen if Canada adopted sustainability as a top priority? Only 48 percent of respondents felt that the move would yield a positive impact on the **cost of living**. Meanwhile, many Canadians (79 percent) felt that the move would have a positive impact on **quality of life**, 66 percent felt it would have a positive impact of **employment**, and 56 percent felt it would have a positive impact on **international competitiveness**.

Impacts of Climate Change Very Serious

Just under three-quarters (72 percent) of Canadians believe that the impacts of climate change will be very serious. Only 28 percent felt those impacts were exaggerated.

Human Activity is the Primary Cause

About 62 percent of Canadian residents believe that most scientists agree that human activity is the primary cause of climate change. Meanwhile, 38 percent say there is still much debate among scientists about whether human activity is causing global warming.

Economy and Environment are Not Mutually Exclusive

Even in these challenging economic times, 67 percent of Canadians felt that government and business should make both economic and environmental challenges, such as climate change, a top priority. In contrast, 33 percent of Canadians felt government and industry should focus on fixing the economy before addressing environmental issues such as climate change.

Is Canada Doing Enough?

Three-quarters (75 percent) of Canadians feel their leaders are not doing enough to address climate change. Just under three-quarters (72 percent) are convinced that climate change is happening now. And about 70 percent say Canada should lead the world on solving global warming.

"Canada's International Record is Embarrassing"

In an either-or question, more than three-quarters (77 percent) of respondents agree with the statement "Canada should take a leadership position to reduce Greenhouse Gas emissions. It's embarrassing that we are not doing more to curb emissions." Meanwhile, 23 percent of respondents feel that "Canada has a resource-based economy and we have to accept that we will have high per-capita Greenhouse Gas emissions." Even respondents in oil-rich Alberta support Canadian climate leadership. Given the same either-or question, almost two-thirds (65 percent) of Albertans think Canada should demonstrate climate leadership, while 35 percent feel higher emissions are justifiable given our resource-based economy.

Why Don't Canadians Behave More Sustainably? Why don't you?

For this question, we offered half of survey respondents a range of possible reasons why they believe Canadians do not behave more sustainably. We presented the second half of the sample with the same list of reasons, but asked them why they do not personally behave more sustainably. The first group believed Canadians do not behave more sustainably because they "feel it costs too much" (43 percent), they "feel there is a lack of government leadership" (36 percent), and because they "need to know more about solutions" (34 percent). Further, 31 percent of this first group said that they believe Canadians do not act more sustainably because they "are not really concerned." The second group, when asked why they don't personally behave more sustainably, cited "a lack of government leadership" (43 percent), "need to know more about solutions" (39 percent), and "are challenged by poorly designed cities and workplaces" (37 percent). Of this second group, only 7 percent cited "not really concerned" when asked why they do not behave more sustainably.

Canadians Know What the Solutions Are

Canadians overwhelmingly agreed that a variety of progressive policy solutions will help the country achieve a higher degree of sustainability. Of 19 different government policies described in our survey, the three scoring the highest are: “develop clean energy sources such as wind, solar, hydro, and tidal,” (92 percent), “develop renewable energy sources such as wind, solar, hydro, and tidal,” (90 percent), and “require the construction of all new homes to meet high energy efficiency and other environmental standards” (86 percent).

Willing To Pay More for Clean, Green Energy

Half of all respondents (50 percent) would pay an additional 10 percent for clean, green, renewable energy.

Attitudes Toward Sustainability Issues

Most Canadians (88 percent) feel that companies that violate environmental laws should be severely punished. Most (83 percent) also believe that investments in new, renewable energy and technologies represent a powerful engine for economic growth.

The Most Credible Sources on Sustainability

Out of a list of 23 companies, energy utilities, politicians, groups, celebrities, and organizations, the top three most credible information sources on sustainability are the David Suzuki Foundation (73 percent), alternative/green energy companies (69 percent), and university professors (65 percent). The three least credible sources are Stephen Harper (31 percent), The Pembina Institute (22 percent), and oil and gas companies” (17 percent).

Sustainable Behavior: What Will You Make a Point Of Doing?

Our survey asked Canadians which of a wide range of suggested behaviors they would embrace in the year ahead. The three most likely moves were: “take your own bags to the grocery store,” (83 percent), “buy local or organic food” (67 percent), and “use your own travel cup when you buy take-out coffee” (62 percent). The three behaviors that our influencers were least likely to embrace in the coming year were: “Take public transit to reduce your carbon footprint,” (45 percent), “cycle to work to reduce your carbon footprint” (39 percent), and “pay 20 percent more for products that are certified as sustainable or environmentally responsible,” (25 percent).