

Canada-Wide Public Opinion Poll

Immense Public Frustration with Politicians over the Global Warming and Climate Change Debate



**A Report to the Frontier Centre for Public Policy from
COMPAS Inc.
Public Opinion and Customer Research
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1.0. Introduction

Canadians are deeply frustrated by the quality of politicians' discussions of climate change and global warming according to a nationally representative poll carried out for the Frontier Centre for Public Policy by COMPAS Research and completed September 29, 2008. Such frustrations cut across regions and party groupings.

Most Canadians tend to subscribe to the anthropogenic viewpoint that human activity is responsible for global warming and climate change. An overwhelming majority of the public nonetheless does not believe that the causes of climate change have been fully identified or that the debate has been settled. By a more than 4:1 margin, the public calls upon the media to provide more multi-sided reporting on the issue.

The national poll shows that almost all Canadians have seen media reports portraying reasons why human activity should be considered the cause of global warming and climate change. By contrast, fewer than half of Canadians have seen reports espousing the point of view of the climate change skeptics, those who attribute climate change to non-human factors.

Analysis of the poll results shows that media reports are the key driver of what the public believes. The data show that those members of the public who have seen media reports expressing the climate change sceptics' viewpoints evaluate these viewpoints far more sympathetically than those who have not.



2.0. Public Frustration with the Quality of Climate Debate

2.1. Politicians Condemned for Poor Quality Discussion of the Issue

Canadian voters are immensely frustrated with the quality of politicians' discussions of global warming and climate change, according to a national poll completed September 29th.¹

Two-thirds (66%) of Canadians condemn politicians for providing poor-to-bad explanations of the global warming and climate change issues, as shown in table 2A. Fewer than one in five (19%) believe that politicians have done a good or better than good job of explaining how and why money should be spent to fight carbon gases, according to the COMPAS Research poll carried out among a representative national sample of Canadians. Frustration with the quality of politicians' statements on climate and global warming is relatively uniform across the country, as shown in table 2A, and frustration is relatively uniform by voter grouping, as shown in the Appendix in table A-1.

¹ The nationally representative survey was conducted by professional interviewers using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) technology and completed September 29, 2008. The poll involved a split sample with a representative sample of 1000 being asked some of the questions, including the responses displayed in table 1, and a randomly chosen subsample of 500 being asked the remainder of questions. By convention, responses to the n=1000 sample are deemed accurate to within approximately 3 percentage points 19 times out of 20 while responses to the n=500 are deemed accurate to within 4.5 percentage points 19 times out of 20. The principal investigators on this study are Dr. Conrad Winn and Tamara Gottlieb.



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Table 2A: Politicians talk about spending billions to fight carbon gases and also about higher taxes on gasoline and heating oil. How good a job have politicians done in providing evidence to justify their proposals? (N>1000)²

	ALL	BC	PRAIRIES	ON	QC	ATL
Bad job	16	10	13	19	17	19
Very poor	11	12	10	12	9	16
Poor	39	42	48	40	30	37
UNPROMPTED middling	7	8	9	4	9	7
Good	16	20	9	13	23	15
Very good	2	2	2	4	2	0
Excellent job	1	1	1	1	1	0
Don't know	8	6	9	8	10	7

2.2. Huge Majority Calls on Media for More Multi-Sided Reporting

Perturbed by the quality of political debate on the issue, the public wants more information from the media, particularly more information from all sides in the debate, as shown in table 2B. The overwhelming majority of Canadians calls on the media for more balance in its reporting. Almost four-fifths believe that the media should be providing more reporting from all sides—less than a fifth believe that the debate has been settled and that there is no longer a need for multi-sided information.

² This item was asked of a representative sample of n=1000 and, by convention, its answers are deemed accurate to within approximately 3 percentage points 19 times out of 20.



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Table 2B: Turning to the issue of debating climate change, global warming, and their causes, which of the following opinions is closest to you own? RANDOMIZE [For All Voters and by Voter Grouping According to Stated Voting Intention in this Election; N>500]

	ALL	CONS ³	LIBS	NDP	BLOC	GREEN	ANTHROPOGENIC ADHERENTS ⁴
The public has a right to more, fair and objective information from the media on the professional and scientific opinions of all sides in the debate	78	81	72	84	70	81	75
UNPROMPTED in between	4	5	3	2	7	3	4
The public needs no more information from the media on the opinions of all sides in the debate because car driving and other human activity are definitely the key climate problem	17	14	23	14	22	13	19
UNPROMPTED Don't know/Refuse to answer	1	1	3	0	0	3	2

Huge majority support for more, multi-sided media reporting cuts across all voter groups, as shown in table 2B. For example, the proportions who favour more media reporting from “all sides in the debate” are 81, 72, 84, 70, and 81, respectively, among Conservative, Liberal, NDP, Bloc, and Green voters. Adherents of the anthropogenic perspective, that human activity causes climate

³ Respondents who indicated that they would vote Conservative in the current federal election.

⁴ These are respondents who adhere to the view that human activity causes global warming and/or climate change. See Appendix table A-1 for the wording of the question and response options. Anthropogenic respondents are those who chose the following option in the question reported in table A-1: “Global warming and/or climate change is taking place and they are caused by human actions.”



change, are just as convinced as Canadians as a whole that the media need to be more multi-sided on the issue, as shown in the table. Three-fourths of this anthropogenic segment of public opinion want the media to provide more multisided reporting even though they themselves do not accept the perspective advocated by climate change skeptics.⁵

3.0. One-Sided Media Reporting the Main Apparent Driver of Public Opinion on Global Warming and Climate Change

3.1. Almost All Canadians Have Seen Media Reports Supporting the Anthropogenic Viewpoint—Fewer than Half of Canadians Have Seen Media Reports Supporting the *Climate Change Sceptics'* Viewpoint

The media have done a better job of conveying the views of adherents to the anthropogenic perspective than the views of climate change sceptics. More than twice as many Canadians saw media reports on the anthropogenic viewpoints that the survey asked about than on the climate change sceptics' viewpoints that the survey asked about.

Respondents in the national poll were asked if they had heard media reports on three pro-anthropogenic perspectives and three pro-climate change sceptic perspectives, as detailed in table 3A. Almost all Canadians (an average of 91%) report having seen or heard media reports on key anthropogenic reasons, as shown in table 3A. By contrast, fewer than half (average of 42%) have seen or heard reports that these same climate changes may be caused by factors other than human activity, as shown in the same table.

⁵ A majority of Canadians themselves believe that global warming and climate change are being caused by the production of carbon gases through human activity, as shown in table A-1 in the Appendix. Their belief that human activity causes climate changes does not appear to diminish their wish for the media to provide more fairness or multi-sidedness in reporting.



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Table 3A: Whether Heard Various Views in the Media (N>500)

	YES, HEARD IN MEDIA	NO, DID NOT HEAR	DNK
Some people believe that humans cause global warming or climate change			
It's said that global warming has reduced the amount of Arctic ice and snow cover. ⁶ Have you heard this point of view in the media?	94	6	#
It's said that cars and other human activities cause global warming or climate change. ⁷	95	5	1
It's said that carbon dioxide is the main greenhouse gas that causes global warming or climate unpredictability.	84	14	2
Mean percentages	91	8	1
Some people do not believe that humans cause global warming or climate change			
It's said that changes in the sun can cause climate changes. ⁸	51	47	2
Some say it's right to believe that there are more carbon gases when the earth is warmer but this is because the earth produces more carbon gases when warmed by the sun or nature. It's not that the earth is warmed by carbon gases from car driving and other human activity. ⁹ Have you heard this point of view in the media that the earth when warmed by nature produces more carbon gases?	40	57	3
It's said that changes in the earth's rotation can cause climate changes. ¹⁰	36	62	2
Mean percentages	42	55	2

⁶ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). "Climate Change and Water: IPCC Technical Paper VI". June 2008. pp. 3-4. <http://www.ipcc.ch/>

⁷ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). "Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report". p37. November 2007. <http://www.ipcc.ch/>

⁸ Douglas V. Hoyt et al. *The Role of the Sun in Climate Change*. Oxford University Press, 1997. John Houghton et al., *Climate Change 2001: The Scientific Basis*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.

⁹ A Rorsch R S Courtney & D Thoenes, (2005). "The interaction of climate change and the carbon dioxide cycle". *Energy & Environment* V, 16, pp. 217-238

¹⁰ Hoyt et al. *op. cit.*. John Houghton et al., *Climate Change 2001: The Scientific Basis*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.



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Given the preceding evidence that Canadians have heard the anthropogenic perspectives and have largely not heard the climate change sceptics' perspectives, one might expect the public to subscribe to the former perspectives and not the latter. Indeed, most Canadians agree with the anthropogenic perspectives. Meanwhile they are of two minds or are sceptical about the climate sceptics' perspectives, as shown in table 3B.

*Table 3B: Agreement with the Perspectives of Pro-Anthropogenic
Global Warming and Climate Sceptic Perspectives
(1=Disagree Strongly, 7=Agree Strongly; N>500)*

	Mean	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	DNK
Some people believe that humans cause global warming or climate change [i.e. the Pro-Anthropogenic Perspective]									
It's said that global warming has reduced the amount of Arctic ice and snow cover. ¹¹	5.8	46	20	15	6	7	1	3	3
It's said that cars and other human activities cause global warming or climate change. ¹²	5.5	39	18	18	8	7	3	4	2
It's said that carbon dioxide is the main greenhouse gas that causes global warming or climate unpredictability. ¹³	5.0	24	16	20	15	11	3	4	7
Some people do not believe that humans cause global warming or climate change [i.e. the Climate Sceptic Perspective]									
It's said that changes in the sun can cause climate changes. ^{14,15,16}	4.2	16	9	16	15	10	7	15	11

¹¹ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). "Climate Change and Water: IPCC Technical Paper VI". June 2008. p3-4. <http://www.ipcc.ch/>

¹² Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). "Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report". p37. November 2007. <http://www.ipcc.ch/>

¹³ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). "Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report". November 2007. p36. <http://www.ipcc.ch/>

¹⁴ Douglas V. Hoyt et al. *The Role of the Sun in Climate Change*. Oxford University Press, 1997.



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	Mean	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	DNK
It's said that changes in the earth's rotation can cause climate changes. ¹⁷	3.7	11	8	11	15	8	9	21	18
Some say it's right to believe that there are more carbon gases when the earth is warmer but this is because the earth produces more carbon gases when warmed by the sun or nature. It's not that the earth is warmed by carbon gases from car driving and other human activity. ¹⁸	3.2	7	6	12	10	14	10	27	13

3.2. Unequal Media Reporting as a Key Driver of Public Opinion

Statistical analysis reveals that media reports are key drivers of what the public believes about the causes of global warming or climate change. Among Canadians who have heard, for example, that changes in the earth's rotation can cause climate changes, 59% believe this to be true, scoring their agreement 5-7 on the 7 point agreement scale. By contrast, among the majority of Canadians who have not been exposed to such a report, 61% believe that this view is without foundation, scoring their agreement 1-3 on the 7 point scale.

¹⁵ John Houghton et al., *Climate Change 2001: The Scientific Basis*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Douglas V. Hoyt et al. *The Role of the Sun in Climate Change*. Oxford University Press, 1997. John Houghton et al., *Climate Change 2001: The Scientific Basis*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.

¹⁸ A Rorsch R S Courtney & D Thoenes, (2005). "The interaction of climate change and the carbon dioxide cycle". *Energy & Environment V*, 16, p. 217-238



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The influence of media reporting becomes very apparent when the views of Canadians who have seen reports on all three sceptics' perspectives are compared with the views of Canadians who have seen none. Those who have seen reports on all three views are more sympathetic. They are much more likely to agree with these views than those who have seen none, as shown in table 3B. Those who have seen media reports on all three skeptics' viewpoints are 7 times more likely to agree with all three viewpoints and 5 times more likely to agree with two out of three than those who have seen no such media reports.

Table 3B: Comparing Agreement with Climate Change Sceptics' Viewpoints According to Media Exposure to These Viewpoints (N>500)

	RESPONDENTS WHO SAW ALL THREE CLIMATE CHANGE SCEPTICS' VIEWPOINTS IN THE MEDIA ¹⁹	RESPONDENTS WHO DID NOT SEE ANY OF THE THREE CLIMATE CHANGE SCEPTICS' VIEWS IN THE MEDIA ²⁰
Percent agreeing ²¹ with all three climate change sceptics' viewpoints	22	3
Percent agreeing with at least two climate change sceptics' perspectives	51	9
Percent agreeing with none of the climate change sceptics' perspectives	25	52

¹⁹ n=93.

²⁰ n=111.

²¹ Respondents are considered to have agreed if they score 5-7 on the 7 point agreement scale described in table 3B: 1=disagree strongly, 7=agree strongly.



4.0. Conclusion

The evidence shows that Canadians are deeply frustrated by the quality of politicians' discussions of climate change and global warming. Such frustrations cut across regions and party groupings.

Most Canadians tend to the view that human activity is responsible for global warming and climate change but they do not believe that the debate has been resolved or settled. An overwhelming majority of the public does not believe that the causes of climate change have been sufficiently identified for the debate to be considered over.

By a more than 4:1 margin, the public calls upon the media to provide more multi-sided reporting on the issue.

The national poll shows that almost all Canadians have seen media reports outlining reasons why human activity should be considered the cause of global warming and climate change. By contrast, fewer than half of Canadians have seen reports espousing the point of view of the climate change skeptics.

Analysis of the poll results shows that media reports are the key driver of what the public believes. The data show that those members of the public who have seen reports expressing the climate change sceptics' viewpoints evaluate these viewpoints much more sympathetically than those who have not.



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Appendix

Table A-1: Politicians talk about spending billions to fight carbon gases and also about higher taxes on gasoline and heating oil. How good a job have politicians done in providing evidence to justify their proposals?... ROTATE POLES²² (Vertical Percentages, N=1000)

	ALL	CONS	LIBS	NDP	BLOC	GREEN
Bad job	14	15	13	14	14	16
Very poor	13	15	13	12	7	13
Poor	40	42	40	37	34	40
UNPROMPTED middling	7	8	6	4	9	11
Good	18	15	17	24	30	11
Very good	5	2	8	6	2	4
Excellent job	#	0	1	0	0	0
Don't know	4	5	3	4	5	6

²² This item was asked of a representative sample of n=1000 and, by convention, its answers are deemed accurate to within approximately 3 percentage points 19 times out of 20.



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*Table A-2: (Q3) Turning to global warming and climate change,
which of the following five opinions is closest to your own?
RANDOMIZE (N=1000)*

	%
Global warming and/or climate change is taking place and they are caused by human actions ²³	62
Global warming and/or climate change is taking place and that's natural	15
Global warming and/or climate change is taking place but it is not clear why	12
It's legitimate to debate whether there is global warming or climate change	8
There is almost definitely no global warming or climate change	2
UNPROMPTED Don't know or no opinion	2

²³ Anthropogenic perspective.

