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Measuring the Appetite for Climate Action in B.C.

British Columbians' perspectives on climate change and carbon taxes

by Matt Horne

At a Glance

British Columbians:

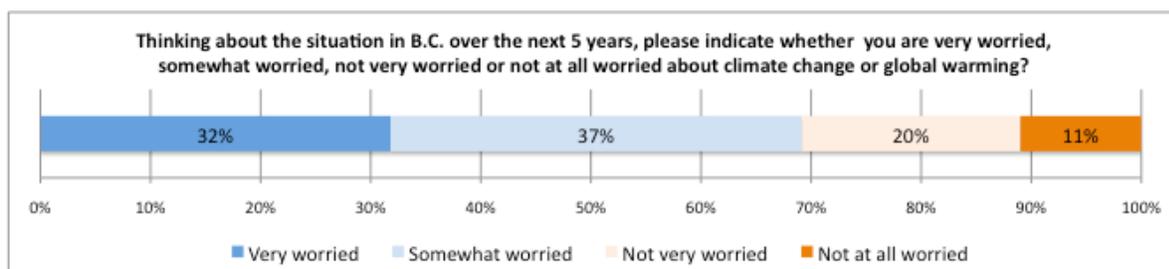
- Are worried (69%) about global warming and support (70%) the province being a leader in taking action to solve the problem.
- Believe that reducing greenhouse gas pollution helps grow (36%), or has little impact (44%) on, British Columbia's economy.
- Feel the carbon tax has had positive (33%) or neutral (41%) consequences for B.C.
- Support (69%) a carbon tax that is applied to all sources of pollution that cause global warming, instead of only to fossil fuel combustion (as is now the case).
- Want to see at least some carbon tax revenue being invested in clean energy projects (49%) and other priorities like health care and education (56%).
- Support (71%) carbon taxes as one of their top three ways for government to collect tax revenue (second in popularity to corporate taxes) and have some support (29%) for post-2012 carbon tax increases.

Methodology

The poll was based on a representative sample of 830 British Columbians, conducted online from April 14th to 18th, by the national research firm Strategic Communications, Inc. The poll's sample is reflective of B.C.'s actual regional, gender and age composition based on the 2006 Census. A probabilistic sample of this size would yield a margin of error of 3.4 per cent, 19 times out of 20.

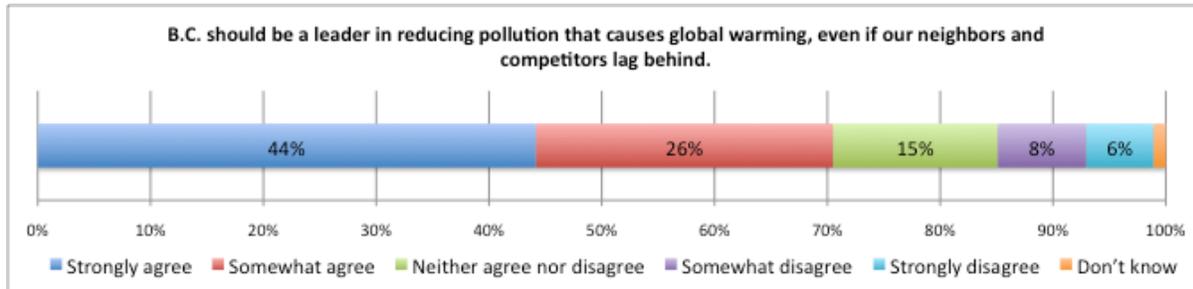
Concern about Global Warming

In total, 69 per cent of British Columbians are either very worried or somewhat worried about global warming. Concern is highest amongst respondents when asked about species facing direct threats from climate change. For example, 84 per cent of British Columbians are very worried or somewhat worried about the loss or extinction of B.C. wild salmon.



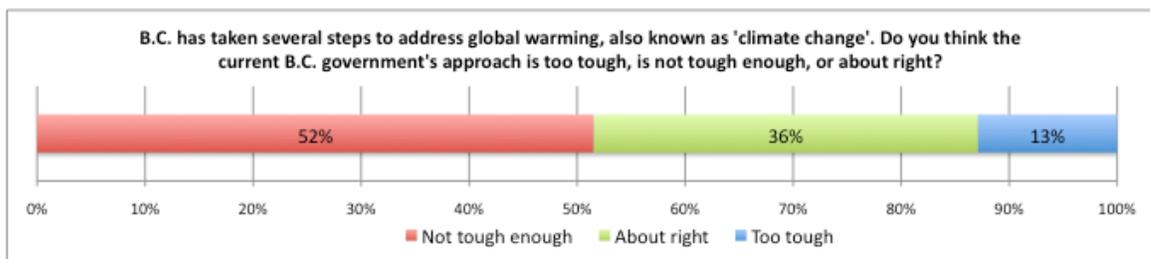
Support for B.C. as a climate policy leader and confidence in the clean energy economy

A combined 70 per cent of British Columbians either strongly or somewhat agree with the statement that “B.C. should be a leader in reducing pollution that causes global warming, even if our neighbors and competitors lag behind”. British Columbians do not appear to buy arguments that the province should wait for other jurisdictions before taking action.

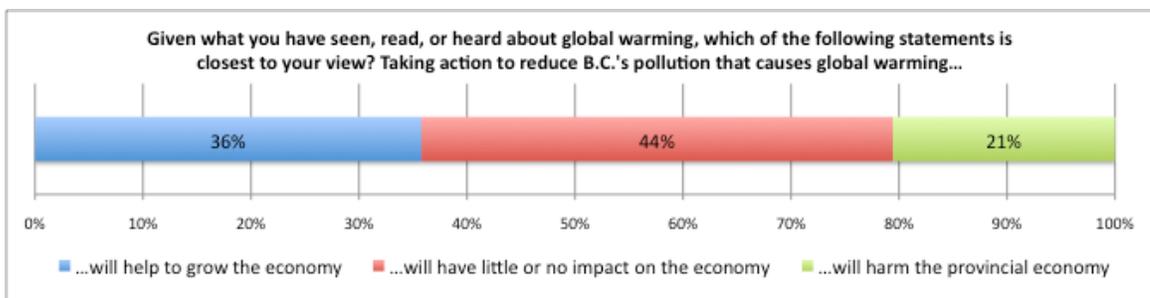


The poll results point to two possible reasons why British Columbians support forging ahead:

- When asked about the B.C. government’s response to global warming, just over half feel that current actions are “Not tough enough”, while 36 per cent feel that they are “About Right”, and 13 per cent feel they are “Too Tough”. Looking forward, there appears to be considerable latitude for the B.C. government to build upon its initial climate actions.



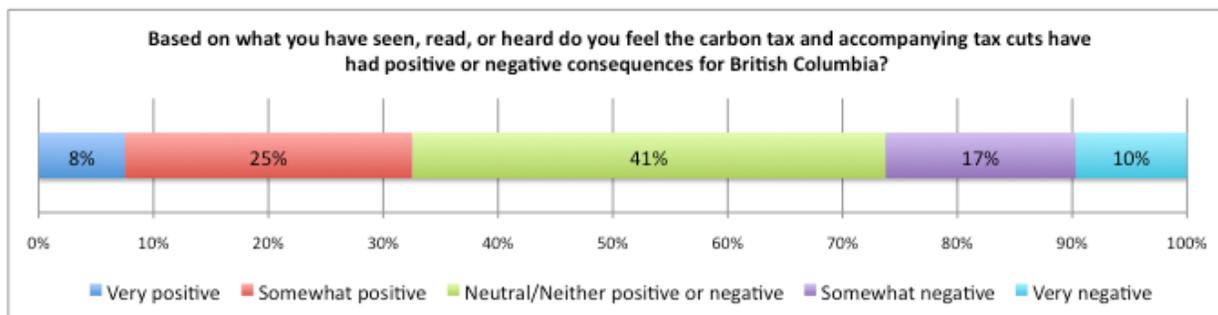
- British Columbians also express a high degree of confidence that taking action on climate change will either help grow the economy (36%) or will have little or no impact on the economy (44%). Only 21 per cent feel that taking action to reduce global warming pollution would harm the economy.



Support for the carbon tax

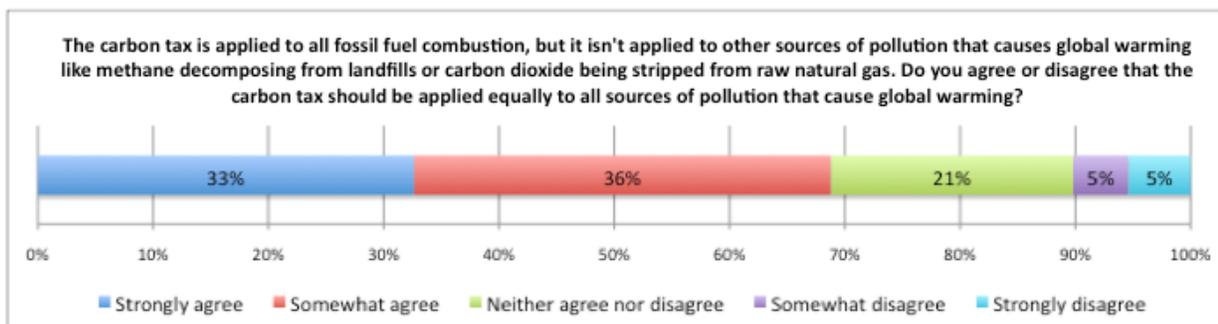
When asked about the consequences of the carbon tax for the province, more British Columbians believe it to be very or somewhat positive (33%) compared to those who believe it to be very or somewhat negative (27%).¹ The degree to which environmental or economic considerations are motivating responses to these questions is not known, but on balance, more British Columbians see reasons to support the carbon tax than they see reasons to oppose it.

The largest segment (41%) feels that the carbon tax has been neither positive or negative to date. That means that almost three-quarters of British Columbians have a positive or neutral perspective of the carbon tax. That 41 per cent could be an indication that the respondents do not know how the carbon tax has affected B.C., or that its too early for them to decide given that the carbon tax has only been in place for three years and at relatively low rates.



Support for applying the carbon tax as broadly and fairly as possible

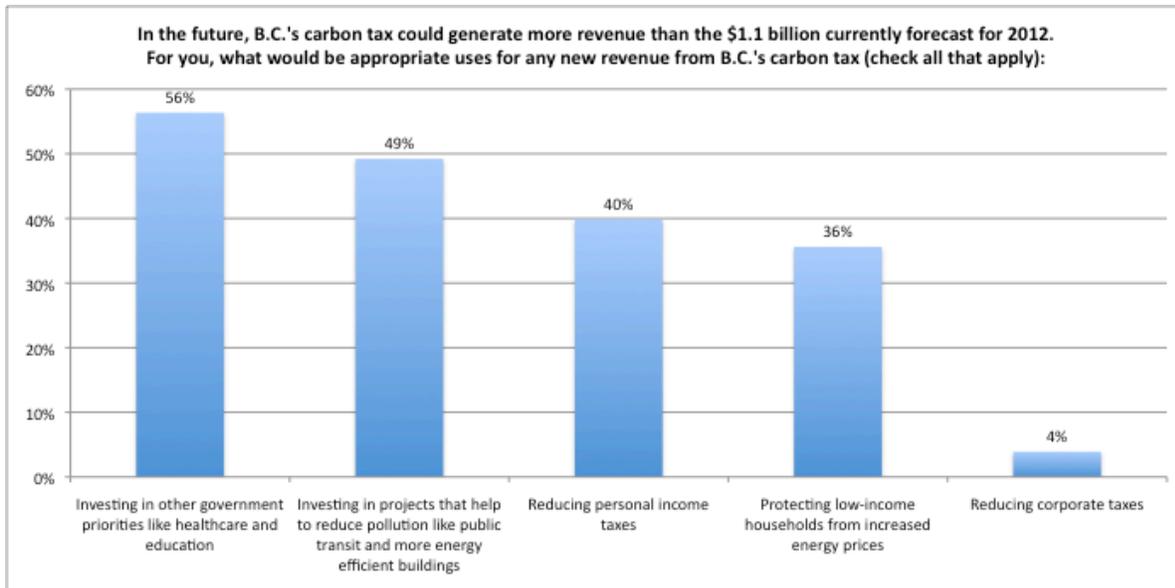
British Columbia's carbon tax applies to all fossil fuel combustion in B.C., but it does not apply to non-combustion sources such as methane released from landfills or the carbon dioxide that needs to be stripped from raw natural gas before the gas can be shipped in pipelines. When asked if B.C.'s carbon tax should be applied equally to all sources, 69 per cent of British Columbians either strongly or somewhat agree. Only 10 per cent strongly or somewhat disagree with the desirability of equal treatment for all sources of greenhouse gas pollution.



¹ Prior to asking questions about the carbon tax, all participants were provided with following pre-amble: "In 2008, the Government of British Columbia introduced a carbon tax on fossil fuels in an effort to reduce the pollution that causes global warming. By 2012, the carbon tax will be collecting \$1.1 billion per year (about 3% of government revenue). B.C. has used that revenue to lower income tax and corporate tax rates, and give tax credits to low-income British Columbians."

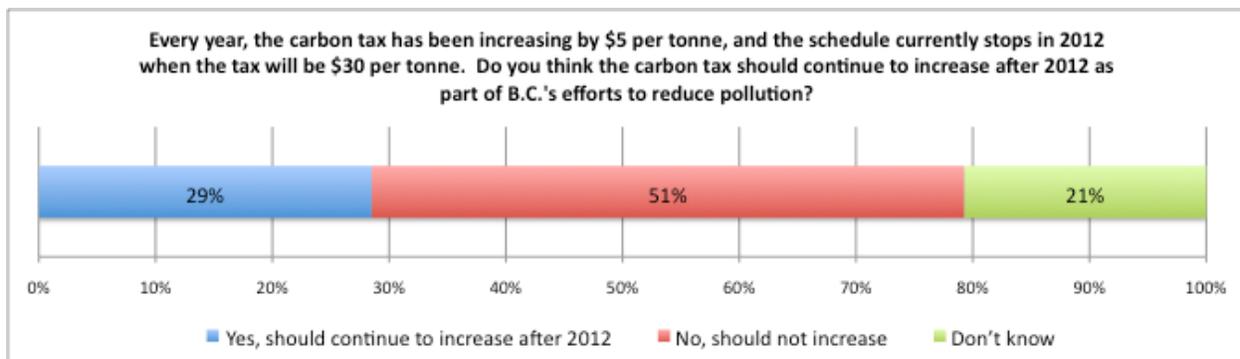
Support for investing carbon tax revenue in priorities other than tax cuts

Currently (as required by the *Carbon Tax Act*), all revenue collected by the carbon tax is used to lower personal and corporate income taxes and provide low-income tax cuts. When asked to select their priorities for any new carbon tax revenues, British Columbians rank “investing in projects that help to reduce pollution like public transit and more energy efficient buildings” (49%) and “investing in other government priorities like healthcare and education” (56%) higher than any of the existing uses. “Reducing personal income taxes” (40%) and “protecting low-income households from increased energy prices” (36%) are also relatively popular, while “reducing corporate taxes” (4%) receive little support from British Columbians.



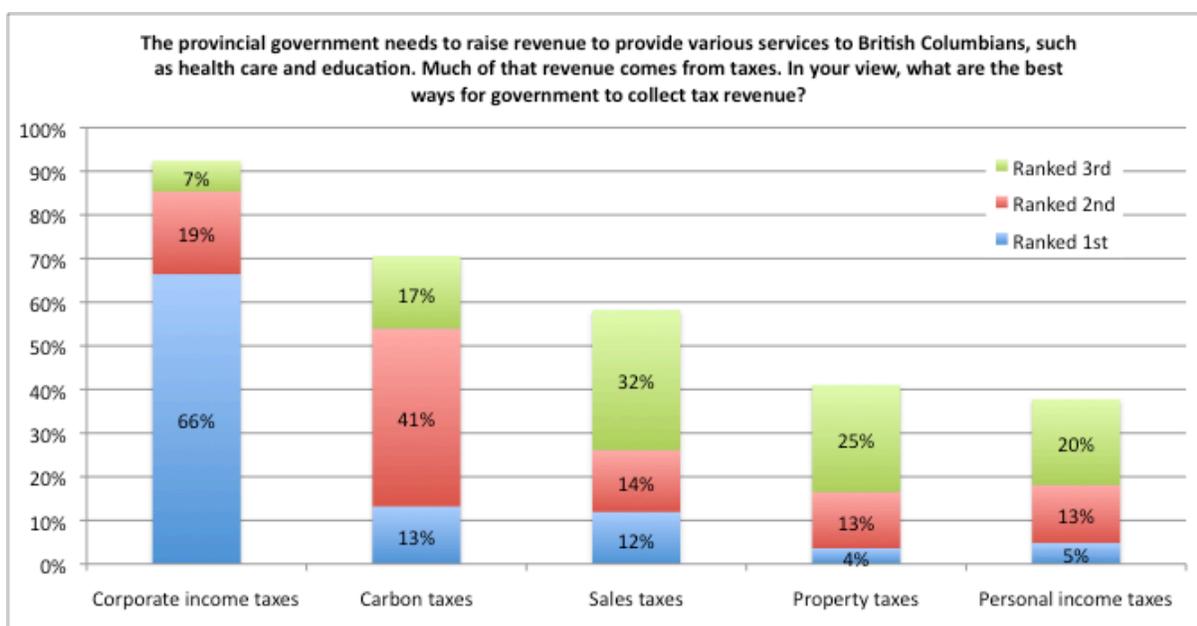
Support for continued increases in the carbon tax after 2012

When asked if the carbon tax should continue to increase after 2012, there was some support for the idea (29%), but a larger percentage (51%) are opposed to it. The relatively large percentage that say they do not know (21%) is possibly due to the fact that the question did not say how fast the rate would increase or what the additional revenue would be used for.



The poll also asked them to select their top three methods of raising government revenue. In other words, given the government’s need to collect taxes, what are the best ways to collect that revenue. The possible answers included the five largest sources of tax revenue currently in the B.C. budget, with the most popular option being corporate income taxes (92%). The second most popular option is carbon taxes (71%), followed by sales taxes (58%), property taxes (41%) and personal income taxes (38%). Although carbon taxes are not British Columbians first choice for government tax revenue, given that the government needs more than one source of tax revenue, they are a more popular choice overall than sales taxes, property taxes and personal income taxes.

To the extent that the B.C. government is interested in using continued increases in the carbon tax to lower other taxes, there appears to be public support for carbon tax revenues that are used to lower sales taxes, property taxes and personal income taxes.



Additional results

The numerical results for each question, including breakdowns by gender, region, income and age are available here: <http://pubs.pembina.org/reports/carbon-tax-polling-results.pdf>.

Acknowledgements

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