

# THE LOST 'GREEN CONSERVATIVE' VOTER

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A study of voter opinions and choices in the 2011 and 2015 elections, produced by Canadians for Clean Prosperity based on analysis from Vox Pop Labs.

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By Mark Cameron and Tom Chervinsky

CANADIANS FOR  
**CLEAN**   
**PROSPERITY**



# HIGHLIGHTS

A substantial majority of the Canadian electorate (56.4%) cares about climate issues, wants to see action to reduce GHGs and supports pricing carbon emissions. Any political party would find it difficult to form a majority government without appealing to some share of these voters.

Of this important electorate (FOOTNOTE 1), 26% percent voted for Conservatives in 2011, but only 15% of them voted Conservative in 2015, representing a substantial loss of votes.

While 33% of 2011 Conservative voters would be categorized today as climate voters, more than half of them (53%) voted for another party in 2015. This underscores both the massive impact of vote-switching among this demographic and the substantial segment of the Conservative voting coalition that continues to support climate action.

53% of voters the Conservative Party lost between the 2011 and 2015 elections support climate action, and 8% of those lost rated the environment as their top issue.

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that this study was able to measure support for action to reduce GHGs and price carbon in 2015, but cannot accurately determine what position voters held on these issues in 2011. All references to "climate voters" represent currently held attitudes rather than historic beliefs. That said, other polling has long recognized a large and growing segment of the Canadian electorate that supports these policies. These issues are explored in full later in the article.



# VALIDATION OF FINDINGS

Vox Pop Labs has reviewed the findings presented in this report and affirms that they are a true and accurate representation of the findings derived from its study commissioned by Canadians for Clean Prosperity investigating the correlation between Conservative vote intention and support for progressive environmental policies (i.e. greenhouse gas emission reductions and carbon pricing) during the 2015 Canadian federal election campaign.

Clifton van der Linden  
CEO & Founder, Vox Pop Labs

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# INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Contrary to recent stereotypes, there is a long tradition of conservatives being ardent supporters of conservation and the environment. Conservative political leaders have long been linked to efforts to steward our ecological heritage and to underline our shared responsibilities to one another and to future generations. Both in the US and in Canada, conservative politicians have been at the genesis of many important environmental programs, from the establishment of national parks by Sir John A. Macdonald and Teddy Roosevelt to the effort to tackle acid rain under Brian Mulroney and Ronald Reagan. While many conservatives remain committed to environmental causes, recent years have seen sharp debate over climate policies, with political conservatives often portrayed as resistant to action.

As the 2015 election neared, we sought to understand how these issues were viewed by the conservative voter coalition, how support for climate action was interacting with party choices, and whether conservatives can construct a winning voter coalition in the absence of climate action supporters. To that end, Vox Pop Labs were asked to analyze their extensive and unique data set to provide in depth analysis of these issues.

Vox Pop Labs operate a national voluntary survey via the popular “Vote Compass” application. With a sample size of 108,932, and substantial demographic and psychographic data, they are able to accurately weight their sample to reflect Canada’s geography, gender, age, education level, language, religion, religiosity, and civic engagement to reflect the population of Canada according to census data and other population estimates. By segmenting and weighing this data, Vox Pop Labs are able to accurately describe the shifting patterns of the electorate between the 2011 and 2015 election, and inform our conversations.



# DEFINING SUPPORT FOR CLIMATE ACTION

As a part of Vox Pop Lab's survey, participants were asked to (1) rate their support for action to reduce greenhouse gases (GHGs) and (2) rate their support for pricing carbon emissions in particular. Climate action supporters were defined as those having somewhat or strong support for both measures.

It is important to note that this survey, while taking into account past voting behaviour, does not have data on environmental views in 2011. As such, we must be cautious about determining causal relationships relating to these data. It should however be noted that the annual Focus Canada report by the Environics Institute has demonstrated that Canadian support for climate action has been relatively consistent since 2011<sup>2</sup>.

That said, whether climate voters held pro-climate action views in 2011 or developed them between the 2011 and 2015 election, the importance of these voters remains relevant to our understanding of how the Conservative vote evolved in that time.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.environicsinstitute.org/uploads/institute-projects/environicsinstitute-dsf%20focus%20canada%202015%20-%20climate%20change%20survey%20-%20final%20report%20-%20english.pdf>



# FINDINGS

## VOTE SWITCHING AND SUPPORT FOR CLIMATE ACTION

These data demonstrate that during the 2015 election a substantial 56.4% of Canadian voters were pro climate-action voters (i.e. supported action to reduce greenhouse gases and the implementation of carbon pricing). Given this massive support, it would be very difficult for Conservatives, or any party, to form a majority government without securing the support of a sizable portion of this group. Even if climate questions are not “ballot questions” (the defining issue which upon which voters make their choice), voters’ confidence and support for a party is sure to be impacted by its stance on climate action.

It should come as no surprise then, that when the Conservative Party secured a majority government in 2011, it managed to secure the support of 26% of climate action voters . However, in the 2015 election, the number of climate action voters who supported Conservatives fell to 15%.

Framed another way - 33% of 2011 Conservative voters would be categorized today as climate voters. In 2015, more than half of those voters (53%) voted for another party. These numbers tell an important story about the real impact of vote-switching within this demographic, and the importance they play in electing Conservative governments. At the same time, these numbers can obscure a second important storyline: A substantial segment of the Conservative voting coalition – more than 1 in every 4 Conservative voters (27.6%) - support climate action and expect government action on this file.

Given the overall results of the election, one might be tempted to attribute the loss of voters concerned about climate change to a more overall loss of support. To understand the degree to which a change in vote was affiliated with support for climate action we conducted a regression analysis and found that among all 2011 Conservative voters, support for greenhouse gas reductions and for carbon pricing had a statistically significant association with voting for another party in 2015, even after controlling for demographic variables like age and gender. Specifically, we found that support for carbon pricing was associated, among 2011 Conservatives, with a 23% greater likelihood of voting for another party, and support for government action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions was associated with a 30% greater likelihood of supporting another party.





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Another way of understanding the role of climate action in the election is to specifically focus on the people who switched their votes away from the Conservative party. These data shows that fully 53% of voters the Conservatives lost between the 2011 and 2015 elections support climate action, and 8% of those lost voters rated the environment as their top issue

There are multiple possible explanations for this shift. These voters may have become stronger proponents of climate action between elections; they may have interpreted government actions as hostile to their personal beliefs; or they may have supported the changed positions of rival parties. That said, the data suggest that support for climate action had a substantial influence on the loss of these voters and undoubtedly dealt a substantial blow to the government's reelection campaign.

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<sup>3</sup> Climate action voters were defined base on their 2015 responses. Please see the "Defining support for climate action" above to understand how this group was defined.



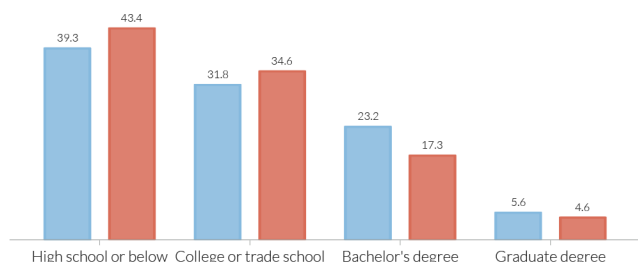
# WHO ARE “CLIMATE CONSERVATIVES”?

It is helpful to consider the difference between conservative voters who support climate action and those who don't. These data show that a greater proportion of climate Conservatives are women (48%) than among non-climate Conservatives (35%). Climate Conservatives also tend to be younger (18-29 years old) than non-climate Conservatives. A greater proportion of climate Conservatives have a university degree vs. a college degree or no post-secondary diploma than do non-climate Conservatives.

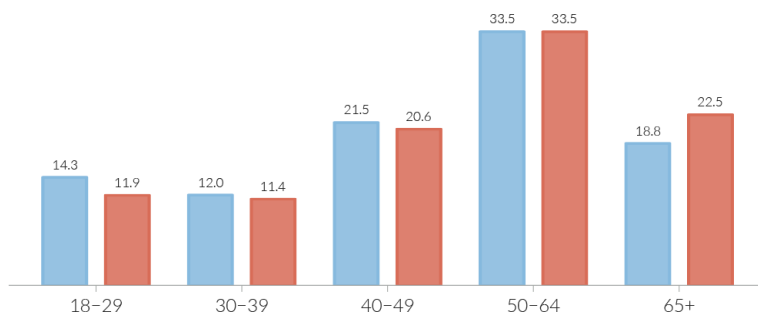
Discrepancies in income are nearly non-existent, while the greatest regional variation is observed in Quebec, where 13% of climate Conservatives reside vs. 10% of non-climate Conservatives.

Thus, while we can say that generally speaking climate Conservatives tend to be younger, more highly educated, and more likely to be female when compared with their non-green counterparts, these differences are relatively minor. This suggests that climate Conservatism is primarily attitudinal rather than a demographic trend within the general Conservative population.

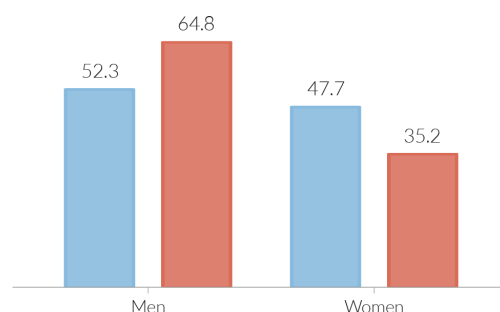
## EDUCATION



## AGE



## GENDER





# CONCLUSION

For years, Canadian conservatism and environmental action were not just compatible, but deeply intertwined, but over recent past that relationship has eroded, and has caused a significant part of the electorate and the conservative coalition to abandon their support for conservative parties.

Given the importance of climate action for past and current Conservative voters, it is critical for the Conservative party to address these issues in a way that both engages this significant swath of the electorate and respects the ideological roots and principles of the party. This is not an issue that can be simply ignored. Across the world, and here in Canada, there are conservative governments and parties that are leading with smart, market-based policies to tackle the growing threat of climate change, while ensuring economic prosperity and smaller government.

The challenge to Canadian Conservatives is whether or not they will re-embrace their long history of environmental action and give Canadians a credible, conservative action plan to address the threat of climate change. Failure to do so could mean the continued decline of the Conservative vote share; however, meaningful plans for action could be the turning-point that lays the foundation for Canada's next strong, stable, Conservative majority government.





# ABOUT CLEAN PROSPERITY

Canadians for Clean Prosperity seeks to build enduring political support for market-based policies that generate growth while conserving our environment. We educate and influence governments, legislators, political, business and other thought leaders, and give Canadians who share our vision the tools to influence their leaders and representatives.

## Mark Cameron

Mark Cameron is the Executive Director of Canadians for Clean Prosperity. He has worked in public policy roles in government, business and consulting for over 20 years, including five years with Prime Minister Stephen Harper as Senior Policy Advisor and Director of Policy and Research. He has also worked for Ontario Power Generation, BlackBerry, and as a consultant on energy and environmental issues.

## Tom Chervinsky

Tom Chervinsky is the Vice-President Operations of Canadians for Clean Prosperity. He is a marketing, strategy and political professional with over 10 years' experience working with parties, campaigns, elected officials, and issue groups. He holds degrees in social psychology and business with a focus on strategy and marketing.

# ABOUT VOX POP LABS

Vox Pop Labs is a civic tech and data initiative founded and operated by a team of statisticians and social scientists. Its digital products have engaged millions of users worldwide. Its analytics services draw on unique data and methods to generate exceptional insights for media, government, commercial, and non-profit institutions.



# APPENDIX A

Probability of vote switching, political activity and demographics breakdown of 2011 Conservative voters across climate action supporters (“Green”) and non-climate action supporters (“Non-Green”).

Group	Green	Non-Green
Consistent	0.469 (0.005)	0.758 (0.003)
Crossover	0.531 (0.005)	0.242 (0.003)
Left	0.043 (0.002)	0.022 (0.001)
Centre-left	0.153 (0.004)	0.069 (0.002)
Centre	0.368 (0.005)	0.27 (0.004)
Centre-right	0.295 (0.005)	0.304 (0.004)
Right	0.14 (0.004)	0.336 (0.004)
Signed paper petition	0.226 (0.004)	0.208 (0.003)
Did not sign paper petition	0.774 (0.004)	0.792 (0.003)
Signed online petition	0.344 (0.005)	0.336 (0.004)
Did not sign online petition	0.656 (0.005)	0.664 (0.004)
Demonstrated	0.04 (0.002)	0.033 (0.001)
Did not demonstrate	0.96 (0.002)	0.967 (0.001)
Boycotted product	0.275 (0.005)	0.221 (0.003)
Did not product	0.725 (0.005)	0.779 (0.003)
Union member	0.2 (0.004)	0.177 (0.003)
Not a union member	0.8 (0.004)	0.823 (0.003)
Volunteered	0.454 (0.005)	0.436 (0.004)
Did not	0.546 (0.005)	0.564 (0.004)
Donated to party	0.073 (0.003)	0.141 (0.003)
Did not	0.927 (0.003)	0.859 (0.003)
Belonged to party	0.061 (0.002)	0.114 (0.003)
Did not belong to party	0.939 (0.002)	0.886 (0.003)
Politically activite	0.739 (0.005)	0.726 (0.004)
Not politically active	0.261 (0.005)	0.274 (0.004)
Twitter users	0.176 (0.004)	0.162 (0.003)
Gender Men	0.523 (0.005)	0.648 (0.004)
Gender Women	0.477 (0.005)	0.352 (0.004)
Age 18-29	0.143 (0.004)	0.119 (0.002)
Age 30-39	0.12 (0.003)	0.114 (0.002)
Age 40-49	0.215 (0.004)	0.206 (0.003)
Age 50-64	0.335 (0.005)	0.335 (0.004)
Age 65+	0.188 (0.004)	0.225 (0.004)
Income \$0-40k	0.096 (0.003)	0.096 (0.002)
Income \$100-150k	0.289 (0.005)	0.267 (0.004)
Income \$150k+	0.206 (0.004)	0.198 (0.003)
Income \$40-60k	0.121 (0.004)	0.138 (0.003)
Income \$60-100k	0.289 (0.005)	0.3 (0.004)
No children	0.722 (0.005)	0.721 (0.003)
One or more children	0.278 (0.005)	0.279 (0.003)
High school or below	0.393 (0.005)	0.434 (0.004)
College or trade school	0.318 (0.005)	0.346 (0.004)
Bachelor's degree	0.232 (0.004)	0.173 (0.003)
Graduate degree	0.056 (0.002)	0.046 (0.001)
Rural area	0.648 (0.005)	0.679 (0.004)
Urban area	0.352 (0.005)	0.321 (0.004)
College or trade school	0.318 (0.005)	0.346 (0.004)
Alberta	0.145 (0.003)	0.173 (0.003)
Atlantic	0.078 (0.003)	0.074 (0.002)
British Columbia	0.153 (0.003)	0.141 (0.002)
Ontario	0.425 (0.005)	0.427 (0.004)
Prairies	0.065 (0.003)	0.086 (0.003)
Quebec	0.132 (0.003)	0.095 (0.002)
Territories	0.003 (0.001)	0.003 (0)
Sample size	101,636	



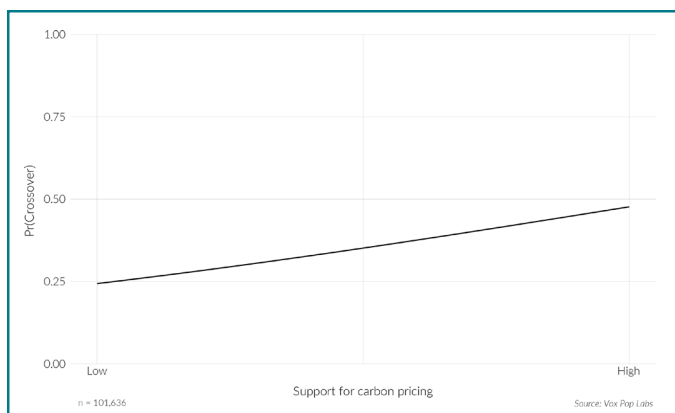
## APPENDIX B

Multivariate regression measuring the effect of support for greenhouse gas reduction and carbon pricing on the likelihood of a 2011 Conservative voter supporting another party in the 2015 election.

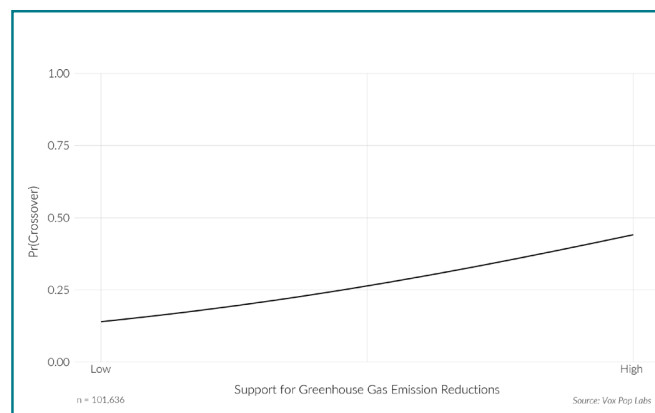
	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Switching from CPC to another party	
	(1)	(2)
Support for GHG reduction	0.790*** (0.015)	0.623*** (0.016)
Support for carbon taxing	0.520*** (0.009)	0.419*** (0.010)
Self placement		-0.920*** (0.009)
Women		-0.146*** (0.016)
Age		-0.009*** (0.001)
Income		-0.083*** (0.007)
Number of children		-0.112*** (0.008)
College or trade school		-0.093*** (0.018)
Graduate degree		0.070*** (0.022)
High school or below		-0.204*** (0.025)
Urban area		0.076*** (0.016)
Atlantic		0.655*** (0.035)
British Columbia		0.533*** (0.027)
Ontario		0.282*** (0.022)
Prairies		0.312*** (0.036)
Quebec		0.441*** (0.024)
Territories		0.475*** (0.126)
Constant	-3.707*** (0.038)	-2.605*** (0.058)
Observations	101,636	101,636
Akaike Inf. Crit.	123,455.400	109,230.400

Note: \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

### CO<sub>2</sub> SUPPORT FOR CARBON PRICING



### SUPPORT FOR GAS EMISSION REDUCTIONS



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