

DATA DIVE WITH NIK NANOS

# ARE CANADIANS WILLING TO HELP THE TRANSITION TO A GREENER WORLD?

The percentage who are confident that we will reach our net-zero goal is just 2%, a recent study shows

OPINION

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Zap. You're electrified! Welcome to the mantra of major economies around the world. The fight against climate change demands action. That means more electric vehicles, more carbon capture and global initiatives such as the Green Climate Fund, launched to help developing countries accelerate their energy transition.

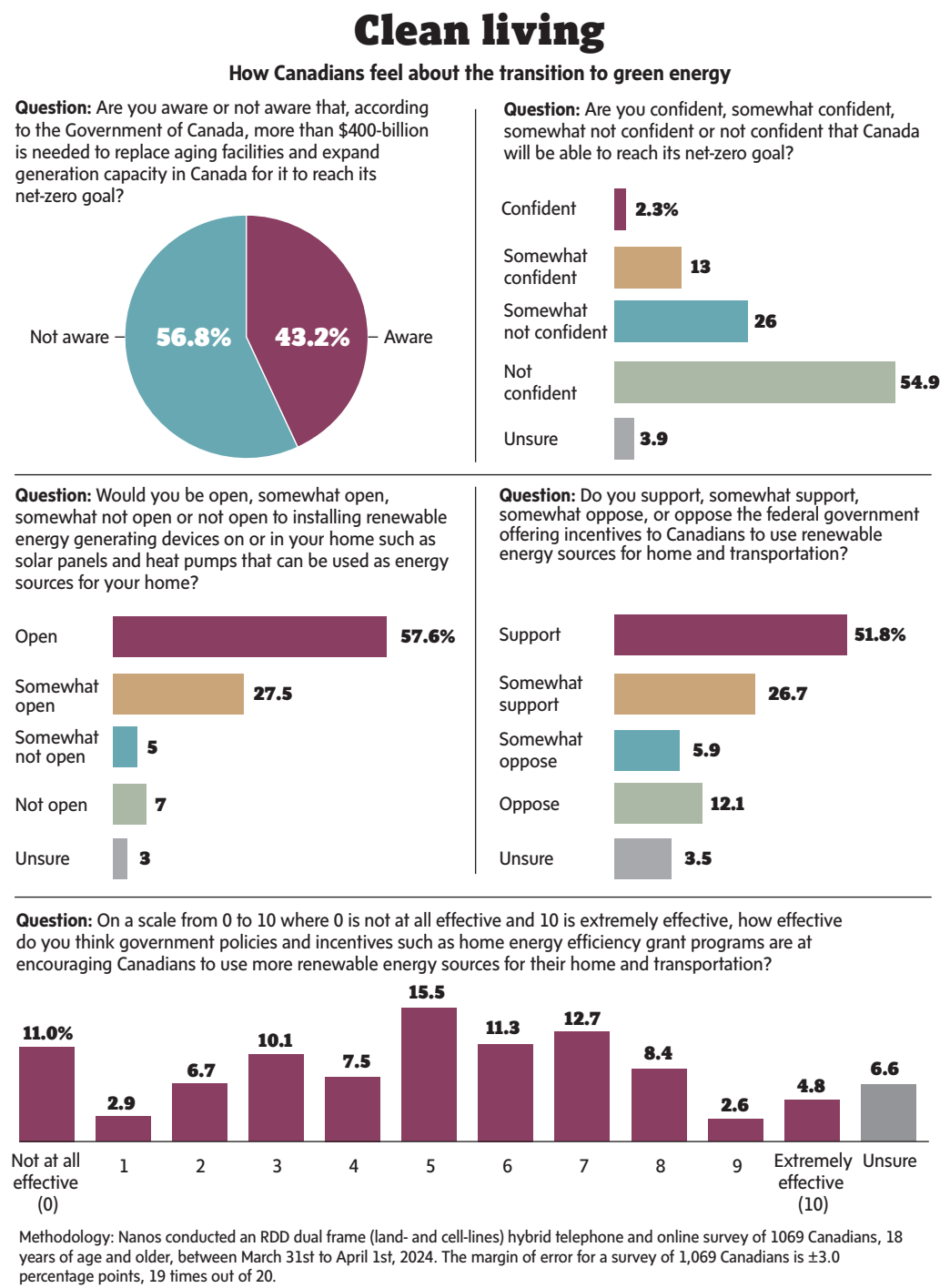
Here at home, Canada's action on climate change has focused on carbon pricing, clean electricity, public transportation, energy-efficient buildings and innovation. The Liberal government has also committed billions of dollars to electric-vehicle (EV) projects.

According to a study for the University of Ottawa's Positive Energy Initiative by Nanos, a majority of Canadians are interested in transitioning away from gasoline for cars and natural gas for their furnace. Three of 10 people are interested in making this transition but have not started (29 per cent) while another 29 per cent who are interested have started their own transition. Another 10 per cent are interested and have already done all they plan to do.

The remaining one-third (32 per cent) flat out said they are not interested in making a transition – a number that hits a high in the Prairie provinces (44 per cent) and a low in Quebec (18 per cent).

The bad news is that, overall, the appetite to transition away from carbon has weakened. In 2023, 66 per cent of Canadians reported interest or had taken action to transition away from carbon. This has dropped to around six in 10 in 2024.

As more and more Canadians feel crushed by the rising cost of things such as housing, groceries and energy, interest in greening their lives is weakening. Reasons like affordability (32 per cent), not being ready or needing change (13 per cent) or saying there is not enough infrastructure (11 per cent) are consistently mentioned to explain a lack of



interest in transitioning to less carbon.

According to a study for Schneider Electric by Nanos, the percentage of Canadians who are confident that we will reach our net-zero goal is a paltry 2 per cent. Another 13 per cent are somewhat confident the goal will be reached. The same study showed that 57 per cent of Canadians were not aware that \$400-billion was needed to replace aging facilities and expand electricity generating capacity for the

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country to achieve the current net-zero goals.

The good news is that some specific renewable options do have appeal. For example, 85 per cent of Canadians are open or somewhat open to installing solar panels or heat pumps at home. The No. 1 barrier preventing Canadians from making the transition is the cost or the view that there was no return on investment (53 per cent). As a result, almost eight in 10 would support, to one extent or another,

incentives to encourage Canadians to use renewable energy sources for home and transportation.

What does this all mean?

We need an energy strategy where Canadians feel they can participate, exercise control and have an impact. Although not perfect, Canadians can take some lessons from countries such as Germany which have focused, in the wake of the war between Ukraine and Russia, on transitioning to less carbon-intensive energy and using less energy, period.

We also need a greater focus on individual action and responsibility. Although carbon taxes and industrial investments in a greener economy have a role to play, consuming less energy is good for the pocketbooks of average Canadians, and very good for the environment.

To achieve any sort of greener economy will require sacrifices. It does not help for a government to introduce a carbon tax and then paper over the impact. The purpose of a carbon tax is to change behaviour. What we do know is that for average Canadians, the impact is being minimized by a government rebate while at the same time adding to inflationary pressures on our economy. Canada, like all major economies, is fuelled by carbon-based energy. Food and goods don't get to market without trucks, trains and ships powered by gas or diesel. Canadians are sophisticated enough to be told the true cost and to decide on the sacrifices they must make in order to help the environment.

The elephant in the room is power generation. To be competitive and to prepare for a less carbon-intensive economy, we will need major investments in power generation immediately. Even if Canadians get smarter on energy consumption, our growth will demand more power.

Right now, people have little confidence in our ability to meet the current net-zero targets. Likewise, our national energy transition needs to generally align with that of our neighbour and most important trading partner, the United States.

We can be smarter, more energy efficient and ambitious, but our strategy needs to be grounded in economic and environmental realities. Everyone must make sacrifices, but we still need to invest in our energy sector. It will take more than a zap to transition to a greener, cleaner world.

## The Paris you haven't seen at the Olympic Games

VIVIAN SONG

OPINION

Writer based in Paris

Over the past two weeks, amid the euphoria and exuberance of the Olympic Games here in Paris, I haven't been able to shake an unsettling, nagging feeling that lodged itself firmly in the pit of my stomach.

I couldn't quite put a finger on it at first. Unlike the many Parisians who had been moaning bitterly for years about the arrival of the Games and beat a hasty and haughty retreat (and later regretted it), I understood early that by virtue of being a Paris resident, I had the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience a shining moment in French history. I was so enthusiastic, in fact, that a year earlier, I applied to become a Paris volunteer and am, proudly, one of the 45,000 people who have donated their time and labour to make the Games a success.

Last week, I attended my first Olympic sporting event, women's basketball, as a spectator and cheered loudly for any and all athletes, whatever the country.

But in the days after the furor of the opening ceremonies, and with the unbridled enthusiasm of the French crowds, I began to understand what I was feeling.

It was my inability as a Korean-Canadian immigrant who has lived in Paris for 14 years to

reconcile the portrayal of France as a beacon of diversity, inclusivity and tolerance to the world, with the truth that lurks beneath.

Just weeks before, in snap parliamentary elections that plunged the country into political chaos, France was on the brink of voting in a far-right government.

In the first round of voting, the country's anti-immigration party, the National Rally, took the early lead and captured 33 per cent of the vote. Though they were blocked from an absolute majority in the second round thanks to tactical manoeuvring from the other parties, this means that one in three voters in France look at people like me, a visible minority immigrant, with some measure of suspicion, bitterness and disdain and have no qualms about aligning themselves with a party that casts Blacks, Muslims and migrants as second-class humans.

Case in point: When news broke earlier this year that French-Malian singer Aya Nakamura, the most streamed female Francophone artist in the world, was tapped to perform an Edith Piaf song in the opening ceremonies, a tide of angry, racist vitriol flooded social media. In one poll, 63 per cent of respondents were opposed to her singing at the opening ceremonies.

Some claimed the artist's use of slang and her propensity to make up new words was the reason for their opposition. But as

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many pundits point out, some of France's most beloved singer-songwriters, including Serge Gainsbourg and France Gall, have done the same, playing with words and language as part of their art. But when a Black woman from a colonial African country does it, it's considered linguistic blasphemy? Or is it that for some French people, Ms. Nakamura, does not represent France because she is not the right colour, or not French enough?

Ms. Nakamura did not perform an Edith Piaf song. Instead, against the backdrop of the Académie Française, an institution established in 1635 as the guardian and protector of the French language, she performed her own hits with the support of the Republican Guard. The performance was rich in symbolism and a defiant middle finger to the far-right.

So, too, were scenes of the controversial great banquet featuring drag queens and the infamous nearly nude blue man. In response to the outrage of Christian conservatives who misinterpreted the scene as a mockery of *The Last Supper*, artistic director Thomas Jolly said the tableau was meant to convey "inclusion, kindness, generosity and solidarity." One of the recurring reactions among international viewers was that the celebration of inclusion was just delightfully French.

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ance and inclusion, in reality, these values apply to some, and not to others. As part of the country's stand on secularism, French sprinter Sounkamba Sylla was nearly forced to bow out of the Games owing to a hijab ban on Muslim athletes competing for France during the Olympics.

Throughout the past two weeks, the running joke among the French is that the uncharacteristically raucous and joyful ambience is because many of the most cynical, grumpiest Parisian doomsayers who warned of havoc and bedlam (which never came) have left the city. Of the estimated 15 million tourists, more than 80 per cent are French attendees, most of whom have travelled from around the country to attend the Games.

And while the atmosphere in the city has been feverishly festive with thunderous cheers for their athletes, I can't quiet the thought that some of the exhilaration among the French fans around me is rooted in a love for France that comes at the exclusion and contempt of others.

That while it's been all fun and good for two weeks, the Games are nothing more than a short intermission. And that once the last of the Olympic venues come down and the crescendo of excitement subsides, the suspicions, bickering and finger-pointing will resume.

Too cynical a take? You could say that in some ways, that makes me more French than ever.