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SIZABLE MAJORITY OPPOSES EXPANDED COAL MINING IN THE EASTERN ROCKIES

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Sizable Majority Opposes Expanded Coal Mining in the Eastern Rockies



A UCP Government move to allow expanded coal mining operations in the Eastern Rockies of Southern Alberta is decidedly unpopular with voters according to a recent ThinkHQ Public Affairs, Inc. survey.

The early February poll finds that over three-quarters of Albertans are aware of this issue, and among this group nearly seven-in-ten (69%) oppose expanded development of formerly protected areas of the province (nearly one-half strongly oppose the new measures).

Albertans are divided on whether or not they feel balanced development is even possible in this instance, but a majority don't necessarily trust the current provincial government to find a reasonable balance between the economy and environment.

Detailed Findings

Public Awareness

There is a reasonably high degree of public awareness of this issue, with over three-quarters (76%) of those interviewed reporting they know at least something about it – 43% “definitely” aware, 33% “heard some things” and only 24% know nothing about it.

Public Support for Policy Changes

Disapproval for the move to open the Eastern Rockies/foothills to more coal mining is both wide and deep; Among those aware of the issue, almost seven-in-ten (69%) say they disapprove of the move, with nearly one-half (49%) strongly opposed. Meanwhile, only one-quarter (25%) of those familiar with the issue say they agree with expanding coal mining in these areas (9% strongly and 16% somewhat).

Disapproval is high across most demographic breaks, with some modest variation:

- Women are more likely to oppose the new policy than men, as are those living in Edmonton and Central Alberta, and those between 35 – 54 years of age
- Even a majority of UCP voters (56%) say they disapprove of expanded mining in formerly protected areas of the Rockies, while opposition is almost universal among NDP voters (92%)

Continued ... 

Detailed Findings ... *continued*

Finding Balance Between Economic Development & Environmental Protection

Is it possible to expand mining opportunities in the south-eastern Rockies without negatively impacting the environment? Albertans are divided and somewhat pessimistic. Almost one-half (47%) disagree with the view that “it is possible to open up new areas of the Eastern Rockies to mining without harming the environment”, while 37% believe that striking balance is possible.

- Provincial NDP voters overwhelmingly believe that expansion of coal mining in the eastern slopes is incompatible with protecting sensitive environmental areas (75% disagree), while only a bare majority (53%) of UCP voters feel there is a balanced solution in this instance

Lack of Public Trust in UCP Government on this Issue

A majority of Alberta voters (56%) say they do not trust the UCP Government to strike the right balance on economic and environmental concerns when it comes to coal mining in the southeastern Rockies, compared to only one-third (33%) who do.

- Among provincial NDP voters, the current provincial government is almost universally distrusted on this issue (90%), but even among UCP voters there is only a slim majority (52%) who are confident the Kenney government will find an appropriate balance. Indeed, almost four-in-ten (39%) UCP supporters say they do not trust the government they voted for to properly manage this issue

Commentary

Commenting on the most recent survey results, ThinkHQ Public Affairs Inc. President Marc Henry notes:

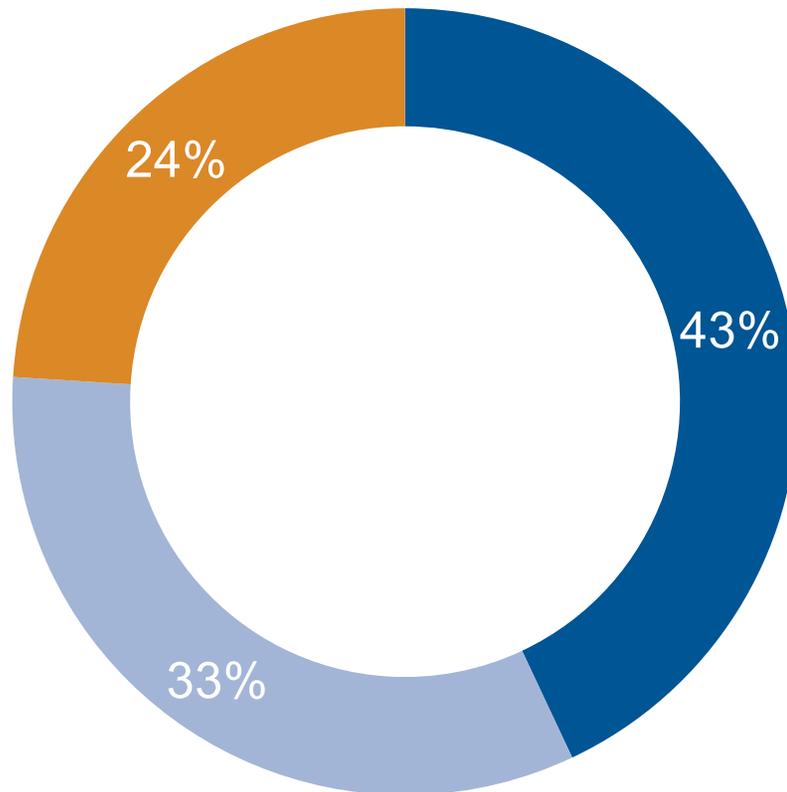
“This is another example of self-inflicted wounds by the Kenney Government, and it’s a dangerous one for them. Looking at the scope and depth of the opposition to this policy change, it reminds me of the previous NDP government’s introduction of the provincial carbon tax - the extent and intensity of opposition is very much on par.

Even in a province which is frankly starving for economic development opportunities, the notion of opening previously protected areas of the south-eastern Rockies and foothills to more intensive development like coal mining is way off target with most Albertans. Of greater concern for the Conservatives, it’s the type of policy which divides their own base of voter support, and if left unresolved can cost them dearly in an election.

The Energy Minister is expected to make a new announcement on the issue this week, but short of simply rescinding the new framework, it’s difficult to see how the Government effectively maneuvers around this. People are divided on whether or not it’s even possible to expand coal mining in this area without unduly harming the environment. But more notably, a majority of voters don’t trust this government to strike that balance.”

Awareness of Environmental Policy Changes re: Coal Mining in Alberta

"In the past few months, have you personally seen, heard or read anything about changes to Alberta's environmental policies in relation to coal mining?"



- Yes, I've definitely heard of it
- Yes, I think I've heard some things about it
- No, never heard anything about it

AWARE:
76%

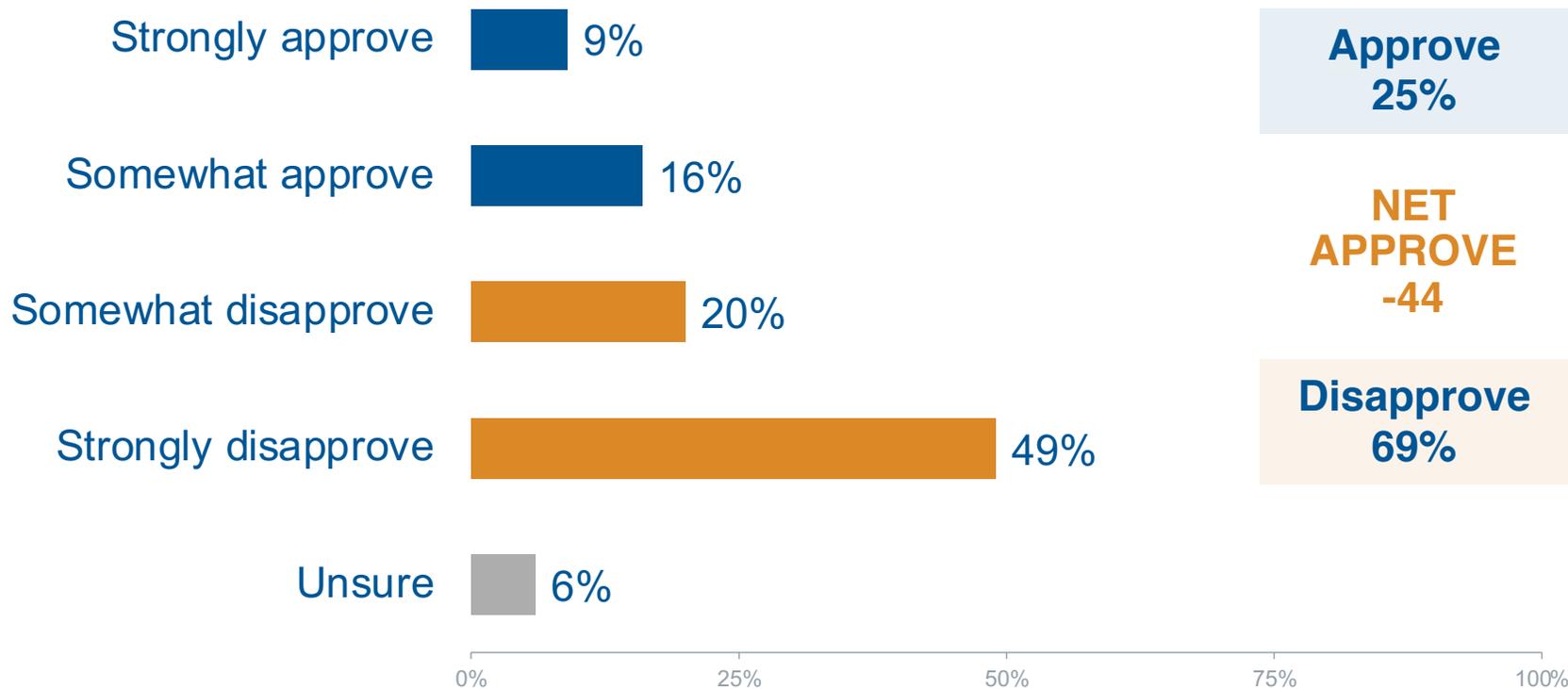
Base: All respondents (n=1,140)

Approval of Environmental Policy Changes re: Coal Mining in Alberta



"In May 2020, the UCP provincial government changed an environmental policy which had been in place since 1976. Under the old policy, substantial portions of the eastern Rockies and foothills were protected from many types of industrial development. With the changes introduced in 2020, these areas were now available for significant coal mining operations, and the government had sold several leases and began the permitting process for these new coal mines."

"Based upon your impressions, would you say that you approve or disapprove of the Provincial Government's decision to allow coal mining in areas of the Eastern Rockies and foothills that had been previously set aside for environmental reasons?"



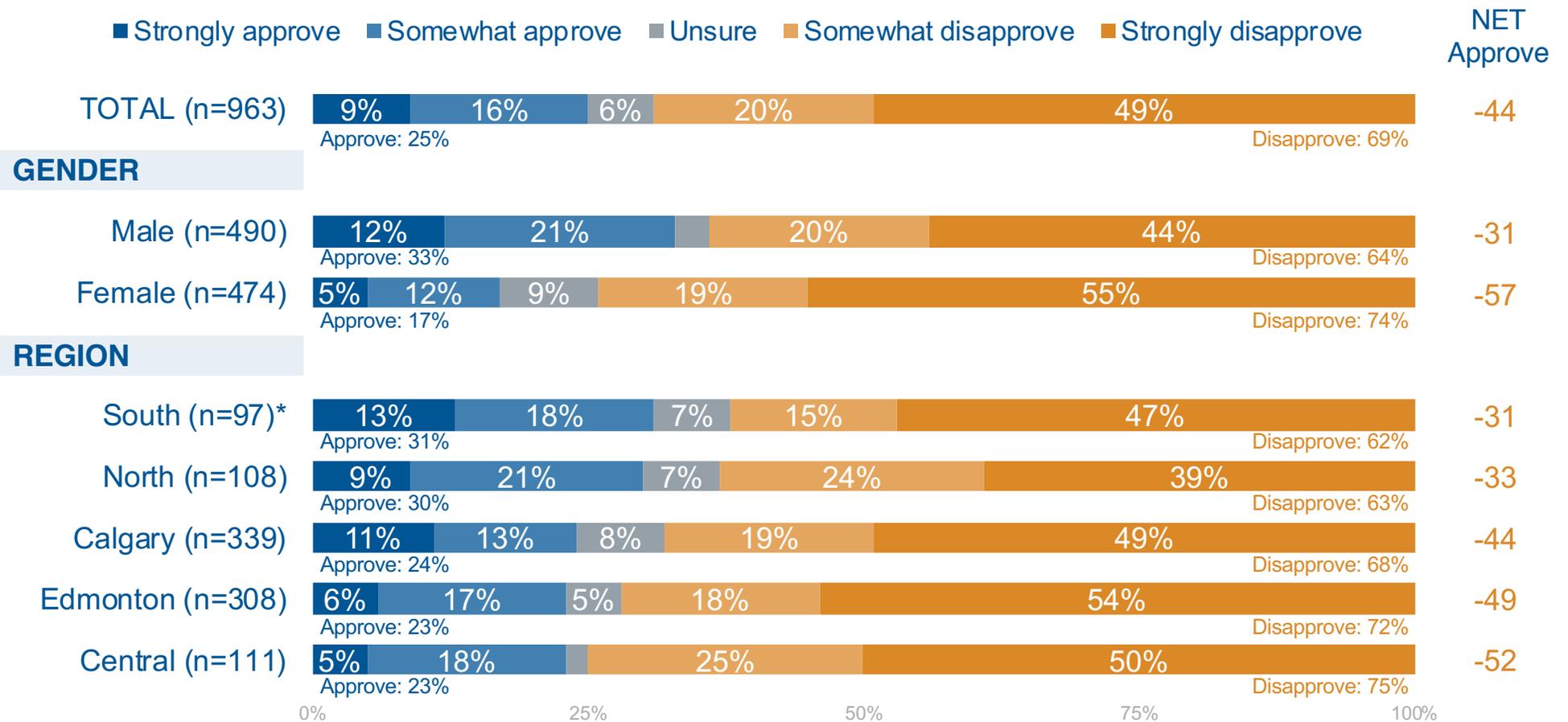
NET Approve: Approve minus disapprove | Base: Aware of coal mining policy changes (n=963)

Approval of Environmental Policy Changes re: Coal Mining in Alberta

By Gender and Region



"Based upon your impressions, would you say that you approve or disapprove of the Provincial Government's decision to allow coal mining in areas of the Eastern Rockies and foothills that had been previously set aside for environmental reasons?"



*Caution: Small base size

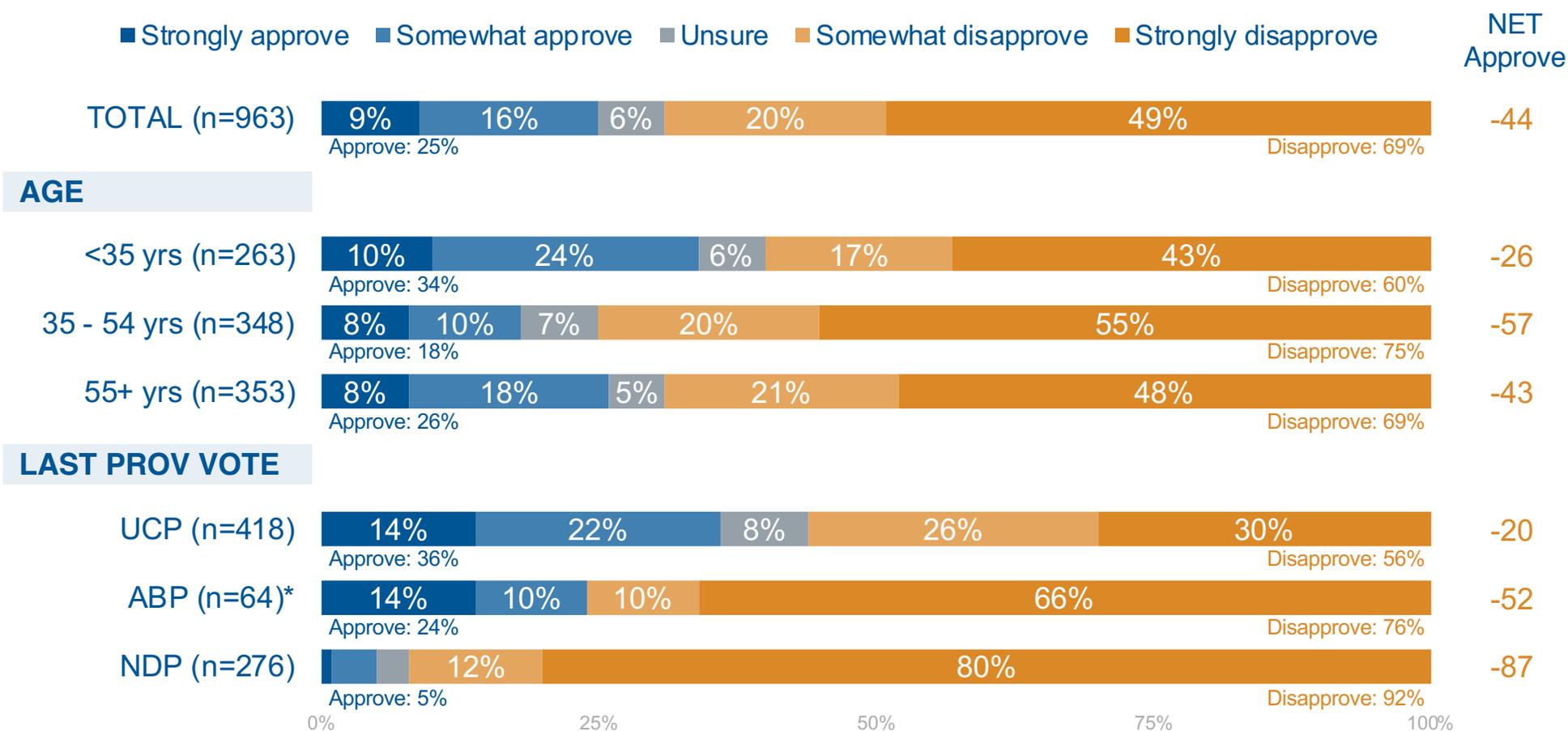
NET Approve: Approve minus disapprove | Base: Aware of coal mining policy changes

Approval of Environmental Policy Changes re: Coal Mining in Alberta

By Age and Last Provincial Vote



"Based upon your impressions, would you say that you approve or disapprove of the Provincial Government's decision to allow coal mining in areas of the Eastern Rockies and foothills that had been previously set aside for environmental reasons?"



*Caution: Small base size

NET Approve: Approve minus disapprove | Base: Aware of coal mining policy changes

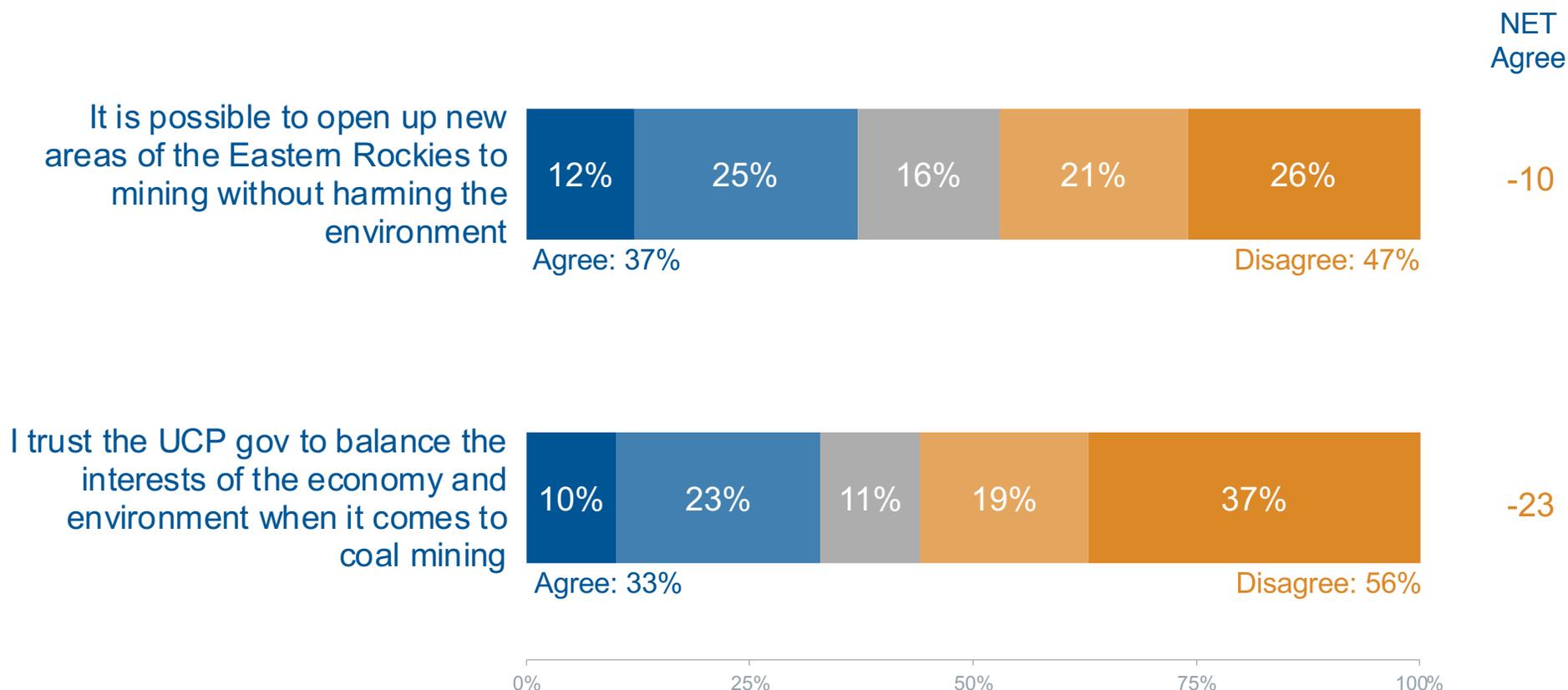
Coal Mining and the Environment

Attitudinals



“The following is a list of statements that some people might say about coal mining and the environment. To what extent do you personally agree or disagree with each?”

■ Strongly agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Unsure ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Strongly disagree



NET: Agree minus disagree | Base: All respondents (n=1,140)

Coal Mining and the Environment

Attitudinals by Last Provincial Vote



“The following is a list of statements that some people might say about coal mining and the environment. To what extent do you personally agree or disagree with each?”

Last Provincial Vote

Base size:		Total (n=1,140)	UCP (n=475)	NDP (n=297)	ABP (n=82)*
It is possible to open up new areas of the Eastern Rockies to mining without harming the environment	Agree	37%	53%	16%	30%
	Disagree	47%	33%	75%	57%
	Unsure	16%	15%	9%	13%
I trust the UCP gov to balance the interests of the economy and environment when it comes to coal mining	Agree	33%	52%	6%	25%
	Disagree	56%	39%	90%	72%
	Unsure	11%	9%	4%	3%

□ Significantly higher ○ Significantly lower

Base: All respondents | *Caution: Small base size

Opposition to Current Coal Mining Policy on Par with Public Sentiment Toward NDP Government's Carbon Tax

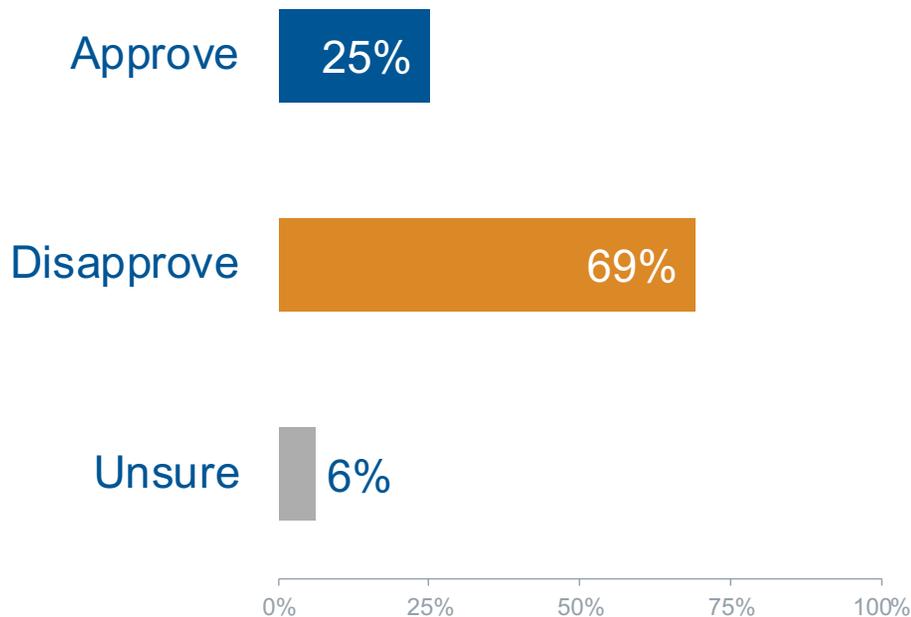
Public Approval Comparison



Public Approval of UCP Government's Environmental Policy Changes

February 2021 (n=1,140)

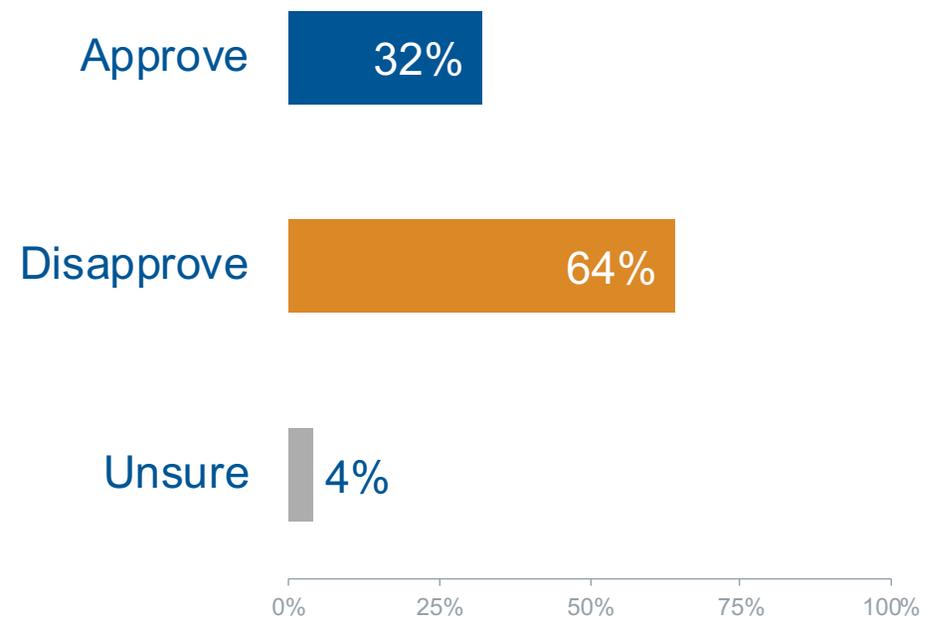
"Based upon your impressions, would you say that you approve or disapprove of the Provincial Government's decision to allow coal mining in areas of the Eastern Rockies and foothills that had been previously set aside for environmental reasons?"



Public Approval of NDP Government's Expanded Carbon Tax

February 2017 (n=1,357)

"The new provincial climate change plan includes an expanded carbon tax or levy on all carbon emissions - phased in over the next two years...Overall, would you say you personally approve or disapprove of the plan to expand Alberta's carbon tax?"



Base: All respondents

Research Methodology

- Study fielded with Adult Albertans, via online research panel
 - Field dates: February 2 - 6, 2021
 - Panel source: MARU Voice Canada
- n=1,140
- Weighted to reflect gender, age and region of Alberta population according to Stats Canada
- A random stratified sample of panelists was invited to complete the survey from the MARU Voice Canada panel. The margin of error for a comparable probability-based random sample of this size is +/- 2.9 percentage points, 19 times out of 20
- Accuracy of sub-samples of the data decline based on sample sizes

Regional Sample Sizes and Margins of Error

Region	Total Interviews		Margin of Error*
	Unweighted	Weighted	
ALBERTA TOTAL	n=1,140	n=1,140	+/- 2.9 percentage points
Calgary	n=412	n=398	+/- 4.8 percentage points
Edmonton	n=387	n=360	+/- 5.0 percentage points
Northern Alberta	n=109	n=138	+/- 9.4 percentage points
Central Alberta	n=106	n=127	+/- 9.5 percentage points
Southern Alberta	n=126	n=118	+/- 8.7 percentage points

*NOTE: The margin of error is associated with a probability sample of this size



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