

Clement Nocos and Jordan Lechnitz
March 2026

Defending Jobs in a Trade War

*Canadian Perspectives on Work, Security,
and Economic Trust*



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Key Findings

1. **The economic growth agenda isn't made for everyone.**

Most Canadians don't think that economic growth under Prime Minister Carney's plans will change their household's financial situation.

→ Nearly half (46%) of Canadians describe their personal economic situation as just fair or poor ("managing, with little room for extras", "falling behind" or "can't cover basic needs").

→ Only 24% of Canadians believe their household will be better off financially under the Prime Minister's growth plan – 42% think it will stay the same, and 15% think it will get worse.

2. **Generational divides matter.** Young workers are pessimistic but open to intervention; older voters see better times ahead but distrust government solutions.

→ Over half of 18–34-year-olds (52%) say Canada's best years are behind us, yet they're most likely to think Carney's plan will help them (35%) and would join a union if offered (43% somewhat likely).

→ Meanwhile, 55+ voters are optimistic about Canada's future (45% best ahead) but skeptical of government interventions like jobs guarantee programs.

3. **Jobs are about more than just money – but pay matters.** Canadians see jobs as about both earning and contributing, but right now, a "good job" is one that pays well.

→ While most people personally feel secure in their jobs, they sense insecurity in the labour market and struggle to afford everyday life.

→ 2 in 5 Canadians see self-employment or running your own business as the best way to get ahead in this economy.

4. **Unions are viewed as defenders of jobs – politicians are not.** Union membership is linked to a sense of economic security, while politicians are largely seen as absent in moments of local economic crisis.

→ Canadians in union households are twice as likely to expect their finances will improve (19% vs 10% non-union), and more likely to rate the economy positively.

→ More than a third (36%) say union representatives appear during factory closures or layoffs, compared to just 13% of federal politicians.

5. **Grounded policy resonates best right now.** Canadians generally support government involvement to promote job protection, creation and economic security, but doubt the government's ability to deliver.

→ While 34% of Canadians want the government to guarantee jobs, 47% say a don't trust the federal government to handle a jobs guarantee.

→ Views on universal basic income are divided, and the lowest income Canadians are the most uncertain about it.

→ Raising the minimum wage and improving work-life balance are tied as the top priorities for workers at 37% each.

→ AI anxiety is high: nearly 6 in 10 Canadians say AI will hurt workers, and a quarter want AI regulation as a top priority.

Introduction

In the wake of the economic war launched by the United States President Trump, the present economic outlook for Canada undoubtedly trends towards pessimism and uncertainty. The Bank of Canada's January 2026 headline outlook sees US tariffs and the unpredictability of future trade agreements as major disruptions to the US economy, leading to economic adjustments that are still incomplete while geopolitical risks remain elevated (Bank of Canada, January 2026). Ordinary Canadians, worried about this dire outlook and already feeling the effects of a cost-of-living crisis, are looking to the Government of Canada for a policy response to protect Canadian jobs and the economy.

At the World Economic Forum in Davos, Prime Minister Mark Carney proclaimed, "the old order is not coming back." For many observers, he laid out a new paradigm for Canada's economic approach, with a re-orientation away from ever-deepening economic interdependence with the United States. In the same speech, Prime Minister Carney touted his economic priorities: "Since my government took office, we have cut taxes on incomes, capital gains and business investment, we have removed all federal barriers to interprovincial trade, and we are fast-tracking a trillion dollars of investment in energy, AI, critical minerals, new trade corridors, and beyond. We are doubling our defence spending by 2030 and are doing so in ways that builds our domestic industries." These priorities are laid out in the Carney government's "nation-building" agenda; a list of priority projects for the "national interest" meant to create jobs and reinforce the Canadian economy against US unreliability and global uncertainty.

However, whole sectors of the economy do not appear on the Carney government's nation-building agenda. The government's upgraded Major Projects Office is organized to coordinate and streamline approvals for "national interest projects" including expanded fossil fuel infrastructure, mining projects, and other commodity supply chain infrastructure. New housing construction, though not within the purview of "national interest," is to be delivered under the government's new Build Canada Homes agency.

With a new Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation at the cabinet table, the Carney government is focusing on AI adoption and a new technology strategy to increase economic productivity. To advance these industries, the Carney government has offered tax deductions

to corporations and other incentives without tying them to promises of job creation. Meanwhile, jobs in health care, education and other social sectors, as well as Canadian manufacturing jobs, are not mentioned as priority interests (Government of Canada, 2026).

A year into the second Trump presidency, Canadians are feeling the effects of this economic turmoil. From January 2025 to January 2026, manufacturing employment across Canada has declined by -2.7% while private sector employment grew by 0.8% and self-employment declined by -1.6% at the same time. Through this first year of economic upheaval since US President Donald Trump's re-election, Canadian public sector employment growth (1.6%) has helped offset these losses (Statistics Canada, February 6, 2026). However, these public sector gains are unlikely to hold as the Carney government initiates significant workforce adjustments on the federal public service (PIPSC, January 16, 2026).

Though the government's approach to this economic crisis, on the surface, may resemble something of a "New Deal" Keynesian response and an industrial policy steer Canadian industry away from US reliance, these projects do not rely on new public investment; rather, they are mostly predicated on stimulating private sector investment (something that has historically been a challenge in Canada, where business investment per worker ranks among the lowest in the OECD).

The Carney government's recent announcements do little to put defending existing jobs at the forefront of their economic plan; rather, significant job cuts in the public service and the promise of future jobs tied to major projects forms the basis of this economic agenda. Notably, the current approach of the Carney government to defending Canada's economy appears to have different priorities from past responses to economic emergencies like the 2008 Financial Crisis or COVID-19 shutdown.

At this point, Canada's economy teeters between stagnation and recession indicators. While the US trade war has thrown in a substantial element of uncertainty into the Canadian economic outlook, other sources of uncertainty such as climate change, chronic underinvestment in health care, elder care, childcare, education, and other social sectors, influenced by all levels of government, and Canada's housing market certainly influence this outlook as well.

Only a few years removed from the economic shock of the COVID-19 pandemic, over the past year Canadians have been battered by tariff-related economic uncertainty, the high cost of living, and rising unemployment. Many expect a government response to the crisis, but do they believe that the Carney government's priorities meet this moment? Who do Canadians feel they can count on to protect their jobs, help their communities through tough times, and what is the household-level economic future they envision? This study seeks to answer these questions at a pivotal moment for the country.

Methodology

This survey was conducted by Viewpoints Research with respondents who live across Canada.

The survey included weighting to ensure responses reflect the actual distribution of the population by age, gender and region using Statistics Canada Census 2021 data. The survey was conducted in English only and was not fielded in Quebec. It was conducted online using a web survey with 1014 responses participating between January 16th to 26th, 2026. The margin of error for an equivalent random sample of the same size is +/- 3%.

Throughout this report, percentages presented have been rounded up, and sums presented used raw figures before rounding. Social classes, such as working-class, middle-class, and upper-class identities are self-identified by respondents.

To see the complete list of survey questions, please contact info@viewpoints.ca.

Overview of the survey as conducted by Viewpoints Research

Table 0

Sample Demographics	Weighted %	Weighted Count	Unweighted Count
Gender			
Woman	59%	516	525
Man	48%	488	479
Non-binary and other identities	1%	10	10
Age Group			
18-34	27%	278	239
35-54	33%	329	290
55+	40%	407	485
Region			
Atlantic Canada (NL, PEI, NS, NB)	9%	91	99
Ontario	50%	506	500
Prairie Provinces (MB, SK, AB)	23%	232	233
British Columbia	18%	506	182

Takeaway #1: The Economic Growth Agenda Isn't for Everyone

Given the US economic attacks on Canada, it's no surprise that Canadians are pessimistic about the economy and their personal finances. But there's important texture to these worries – how concerned Canadians are differs depending on demographic factors, and view of the future differ strongly by political inclination. Canadians are more optimistic about the trajectory of the economy in general than they are about their personal finances. And when it comes to Prime Minister Carney's proposed economic plan, less than a quarter of Canadians believe it will leave their household better off.

The Current State of the Economy

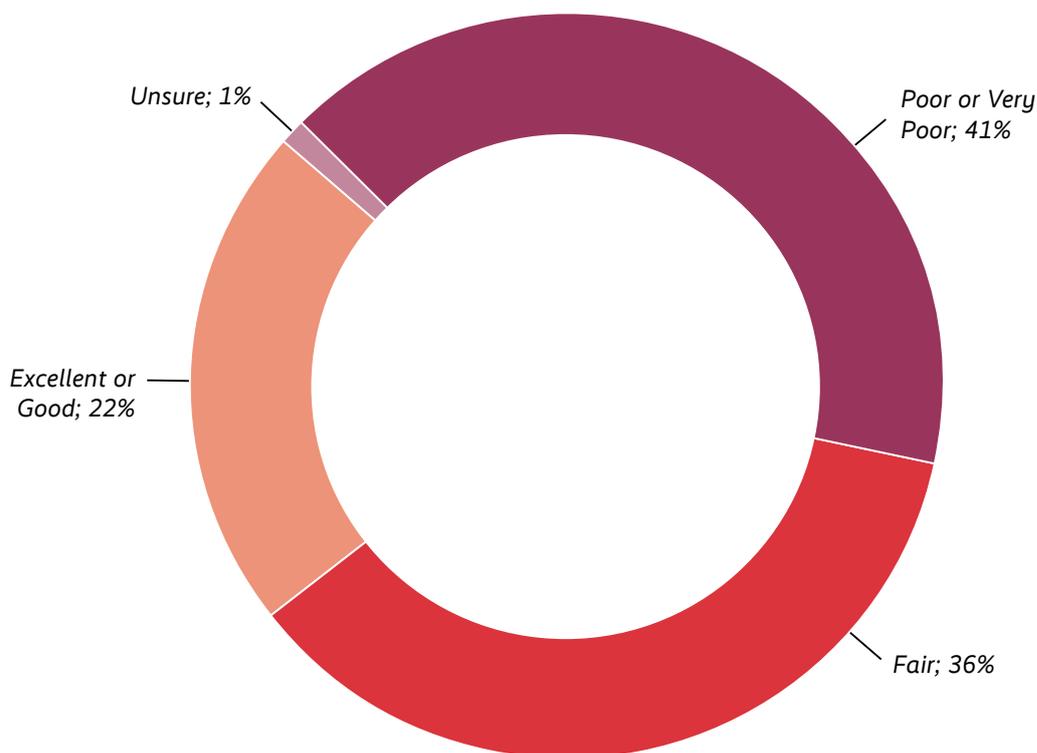
Among respondents to questions regarding sentiments on the state of the present economy, and future expectations, there are noTable significant differences in attitudes and

outlooks between age groups and social classes. On the current and future economy, core-working age and working/lower middle-class respondents feel pessimism about the current and future economy while older and upper-middle class respondents are more likely to feel content.

When asked, "how would you rate the current state of the Canadian economy overall?" among respondents, 41% rate it as poor or very poor, compared to 22% who would rate it good or excellent. 36% rate it as fair overall. This pessimistic view is shared strongly among 35 to 54 year olds, 48% of whom feel the current state of the economy as poor or very poor, compared to 35% of 55+ respondents. Pessimism about the current economy is also significantly stronger among working and lower middle-class respondents, who are likely more acutely affected by recent economic attacks.

How would you rate the current state of the Canadian economy overall?

Figure 1



How would you rate the current state of the Canadian economy overall?

Table 1

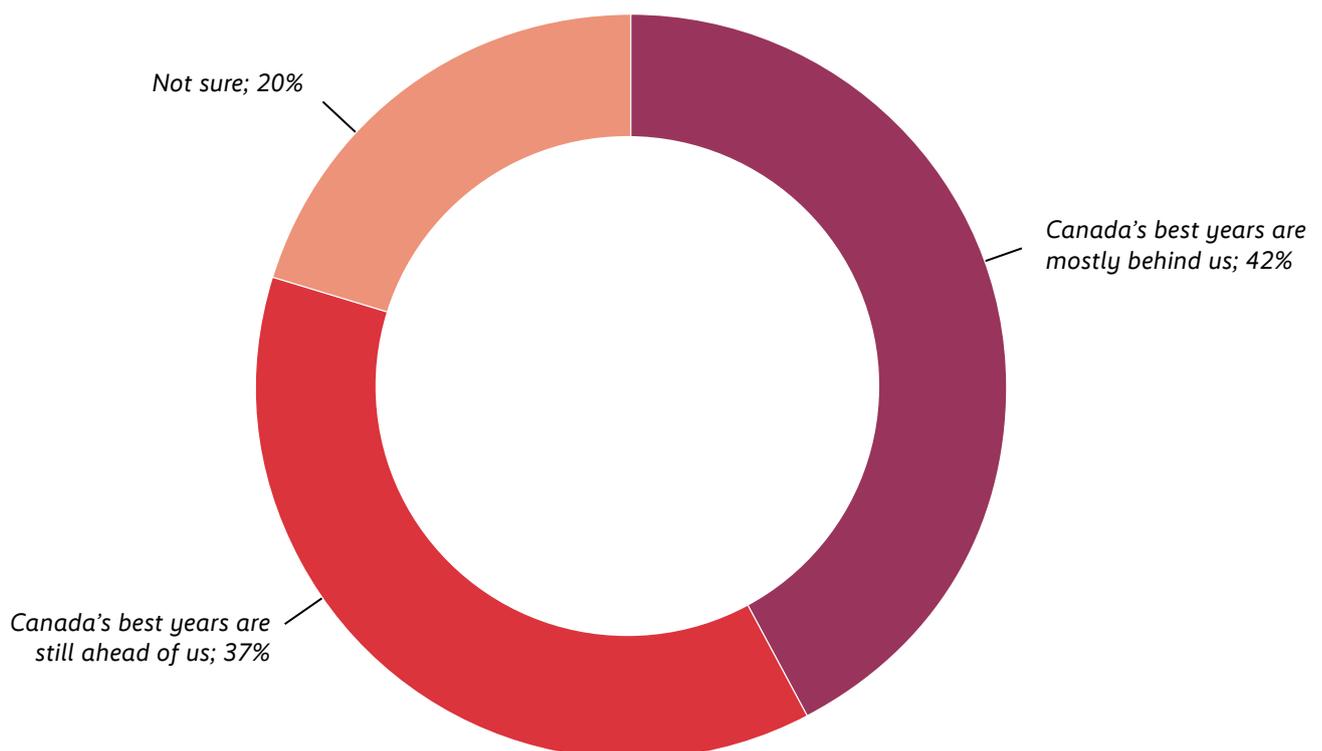
n=1014	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor	Unsure
Total	5%	17%	36%	26%	15%	1%
Age						
18-34	10%	17%	30%	25%	15%	2%
35-54	7%	11%	34%	31%	16%	0%
55+	1%	21%	42%	22%	13%	2%
Social Class						
Working/lower middle class	6%	14%	32%	31%	18%	1%
Middle class	3%	19%	43%	22%	13%	0%
Upper middle class	8%	27%	31%	21%	11%	2%
Upper class*	26%	12%	21%	30%	5%	7%

Bold % = significance at or above 98% level. Statistical testing not performed when n < 30 since statistical assumptions are not met.

* n=15 for "upper class" respondents. Percentages presented have been rounded up, and sums presented used raw figures before rounding.

When you think about Canada's future which comes closer to your view?

Figure 2



n=1014	Canada's best years are mostly behind us	Canada's best years are still ahead of us	Unsure
Total	42%	37%	21%
Age			
18-34	52%	30%	18%
35-54	48%	34%	18%
55+	32%	45%	24%
Social Class			
Working / lower middle class	47%	34%	19%
Middle class	38%	41%	21%
Upper middle class	34%	49%	17%
Upper class*	76%	17%	7%

Bold % = significance at or above 98% level. Statistical testing not performed when n < 30 since statistical assumptions are not met.
 * n=15 for "upper class" respondents. Percentages presented have been rounded up, and sums presented used raw figures before rounding.

Impressions of Canada's Economic Future

On future economic prospects among all respondents, when asked "when you think about Canada's future, which comes closer to your view?" 42% say Canada's best years are behind us, with 37% saying the best years are ahead; 21% are unsure. This negative outlook leans pessimistic, especially among respondents in the core working-age and respondents who identify as working-class or lower-middle class. This is particularly notable among younger Canadians age 18-34, where more than half (52%) feel that Canada's best years are mostly behind us while less than one-third (30%) feel that the best years are ahead.

There is some concurrence to this view among core-age working respondents, while more of those 55+ have a positive view (45%) compared to a negative view (32%) of the future. Nearly half of working/lower middle-class respondents have a pessimistic economic outlook (47%) while on the other side, nearly half (49%) of upper middle-class Canadians maintain a positive outlook.

Canadians' perceptions of the future are defined by a significant partisan divide. 25% of Liberal voters think that the best years are mostly behind us, while 57% think that the best years are still ahead; among Conservative voters, 62% think that the best years are mostly behind us, while

22% think that the best years are ahead. NDP voters are divided: 43% think that the best years are behind us, while 40% believe that the best is still ahead.

Canadians' Personal Economic Outlook

The material reality for working age and working-class Canadians reflects these perceptions. On their personal economic situation, overall, 44% feel their situation is excellent or good, with 36% feeling like they are "just managing, little room for extras." 18% of respondents feel a poor or very poor financial situation, "falling behind on bills" or "can't cover basic needs." Significantly more core working-age and working/lower middle-class respondents report feeling behind economically.

There are notable differences between age groups and social classes as well. Just over a third of 35 to 54 year old respondents (35%) would describe their situation as excellent or good compared to half (50%) of 55+ respondents. Furthermore, nearly a quarter (23%) of core working-age respondents would describe their present financial situation as poor or very poor, compared to 13% of those 55+. Among the working classes, nearly as many respondents see their current situation as poor or very poor (28%) as good or excellent (29%).

n=1014	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor	No Answer
Total	13%	31%	36%	10%	7%	3%
Age						
18–34	15%	31%	32%	12%	6%	5%
35–54	12%	23%	38%	12%	11%	3%
55+	12%	38%	37%	8%	5%	1%
Social Class						
Working / lower middle class	7%	22%	42%	15%	13%	1%
Middle class	11%	43%	37%	7%	1%	1%
Upper middle class	42%	36%	16%	3%	3%	0%
Upper class*	58%	12%	17%	6%	0%	7%

Bold % = significance at or above 98% level. Statistical testing not performed when n < 30 since statistical assumptions are not met.
 * n=15 for "upper class" respondents. Percentages presented have been rounded up, and sums presented used raw figures before rounding.

On the expectations for the future of their material reality, respondents were asked, "how do you think your personal financial situation might change over the next 12 months?" Overall, 37% see their situation improving while 36% see it staying the same. 21% feel their situation worsening.

Among different age groups there is a confounding, slightly more optimistic view of a changing personal financial situation. While this outlook in personal outcomes could be a result of relative current financial position, 58% of 18 to 24 year olds believe their situation will improve significantly or somewhat while 47% of those 55+ believe their financial situation will stay about the same. Furthermore, between the age groups, 15% of 18 to 34 year olds, 23% of 35 to 54 year olds, and 25% of those 55+ believe their situation will become somewhat or significantly worse.

Meanwhile, among social classes, there is significant skepticism that conditions would improve in the next year among the working/lower middle-class, though more believe there would be improvement from their current position (34%) than believe it will worsen (27%). For the upper classes, there is much more confidence that personal finances will improve, relative to their current position, with very little expectation that things will worsen. More than half (55%) of upper middle-class respondents believe their financial position will improve in the next year, versus 14% who believe it will worsen.

This outlook on Canadians' personal financial situation is also somewhat reflected across age and class when respondents were asked directly about the Carney gov-

ernment's agenda. However, this reflection is obscured by a high degree of uncertainty.

Views on Prime Minister Carney's Economic Growth Plan

Responding to, "Prime Minister Mark Carney says he plans to grow Canada's economy by making major investments in clean energy, infrastructure, and innovation. Do you think that economic growth under his leadership will improve your households' financial situation?" Overall, 24% believe their household will be better off financially, compared to 15% who believe it will be worse off, and 42% believe it will be the same. Nearly 1 in 5 respondents (19%) are unsure.

Like the previous question regarding personal financial situation over the next year, 35% of 18 to 24 year olds believe it will improve, compared to 20% of working core-age respondents, and 19% of those 55+. 19% of core-age respondents, on the other hand, believe their household will be worse off financially, and 23% were unsure. This is also reflected in social class: for working-class respondents, 19% believe they will be better off under the government's plan while 18% believe they will be worse off, and a statistically significant 22% are uncertain. Meanwhile, 43% of upper middle-class respondents feel they will be better off, compared to 11% who feel they will be worse off.

Core-age, working-class Canadians who are most at risk in Trump's trade war and are feeling the most pessimistic in

Table 4

How do you think your personal financial situation might change over the next 12 months?

n=1014	Improve Significantly	Improve Somewhat	Stay the Same	Worsen Somewhat	Worsen Significantly	Unsure / No Answer
Total	13%	24%	36%	14%	8%	6%
Age						
18-34	24%	34%	22%	9%	5%	6%
35-54	12%	25%	35%	12%	11%	5%
55+	6%	17%	47%	18%	7%	6%
Social Class						
Working / lower middle class	12%	22%	35%	15%	12%	5%
Middle class	10%	27%	41%	14%	4%	4%
Upper middle class	26%	29%	30%	9%	5%	2%
Upper class*	47%	16%	19%	11%	0%	7%

Bold % = significance at or above 98% level. Statistical testing not performed when n < 30 since statistical assumptions are not met.

* n=15 for "upper class" respondents. Percentages presented have been rounded up, and sums presented used raw figures before rounding.

Table 5

Prime Minister Mark Carney says he plans to grow Canada's economy by making major investments in clean energy, infrastructure, and innovation.

Do you think that economic growth under his leadership will improve your households' financial situation?

n=1014	Better Off	About the Same	Worse Off	Unsure
Total	24%	42%	15%	19%
Age				
18-34	35%	39%	10%	16%
35-54	20%	39%	19%	23%
55+	19%	47%	15%	19%
Social Class				
Working / lower middle class	19%	41%	18%	22%
Middle class	23%	47%	12%	17%
Upper middle class	43%	38%	11%	8%
Upper class*	38%	51%	11%	0%

Bold % = significance at or above 98% level. Statistical testing not performed when n < 30 since statistical assumptions are not met.

* n=15 for "upper class" respondents. Percentages presented have been rounded up, and sums presented used raw figures before rounding.

their outlook on the economy are also the least certain about the impact of Prime Minister Carney's plan: only one in five believe that these measures will improve their personal economic situation. Nearly half of middle-class Canadians believe that the plan won't impact their household's financial outlook.

Takeaway #2: Generational Divides Matter

Young workers are pessimistic about the state of the economy. For the youngest age cohort of 18 to 34 year old respondents, the older end of this group has lived their entire adult lives through economic crises beginning with the 2008 Financial Crisis, when most of today's Canadian 34-year-olds were graduating high school.

Through the oil price collapse of the mid-2010s that shocked youth employment, the COVID-19 economic shut down, the housing affordability crisis, and now the US trade war, younger Canadians have never experienced a prolonged optimistic period of growth for the Canadian economy.

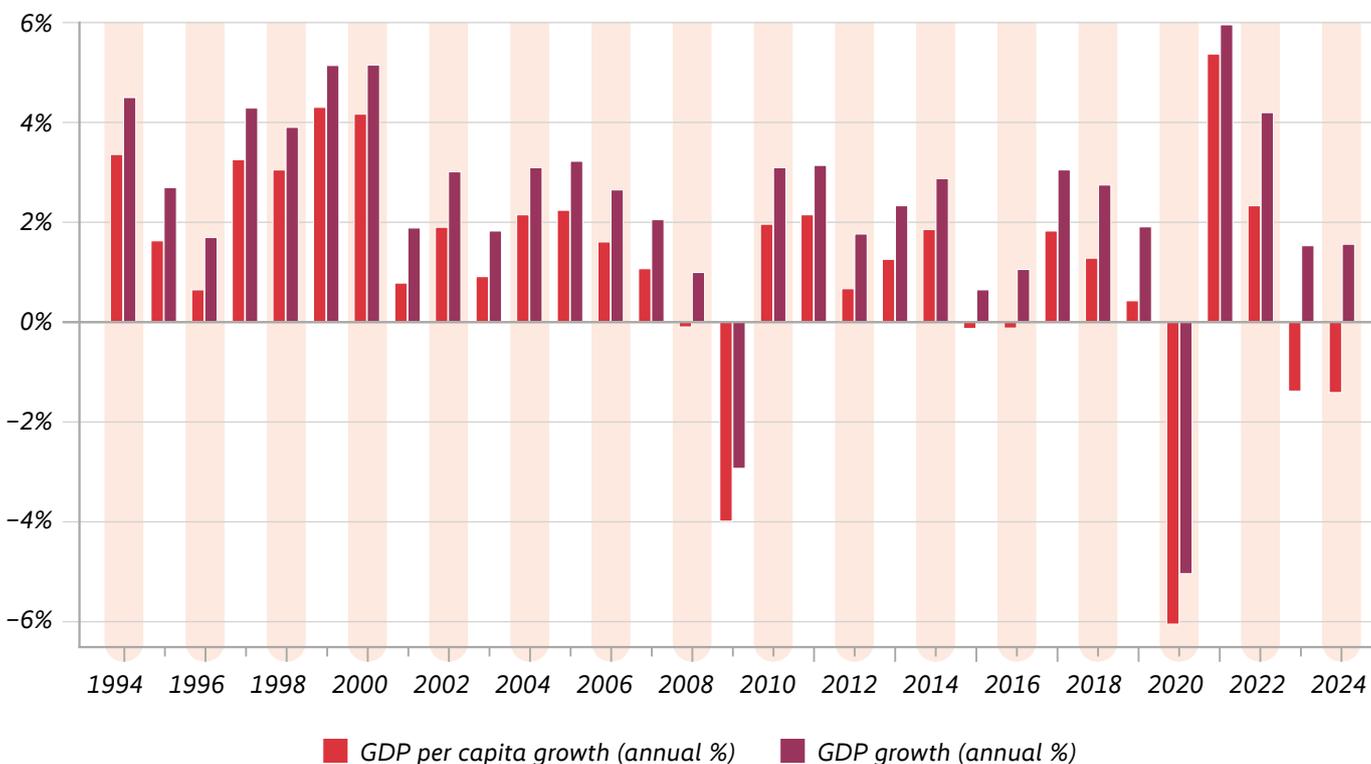
They are, however, accustomed to economic disruption, and direct government interventions in the economy – such as financial assistance to households during the COVID-19 pandemic – in moments of economic crisis.

Core working age respondents, ages 35 to 54, have also experienced these economic hardships of the last two decades and share similar, yet weaker, sentiments to youth than with the older 55+ generation on the outlook for the whole economy. The core working age group may also feel stronger negative sentiments when it comes personal well-being, because social and economic expectations that held for older generations don't match their own experiences – for example, not being able to afford to own a home even in their peak earning years.

The older 55+ group respondents mostly see better times ahead but are distrustful of government solutions. This may be tied to having experienced the relative economic stability of the 1990s and early 2000s where governments largely relinquished intervention in the economy.

Canada's GDP per capita has not kept up with overall GDP growth, and sustained growth has not been experienced since the 2008 Financial Crisis

Figure 3



Source: Country official statistics, National Statistical Organizations and/or Central Banks; National Accounts data files, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); Staff estimates, World Bank (WB)

Generational Splits

As previously described on the present economic situation and future outlook, younger and middle-aged Canadians are feeling pessimistic about the future and the economy (Table 2). Over half of 18–34-year-olds (52%) and 48% of those aged 35–54 say Canada’s best years are behind us. Among core working-aged Canadians (35–54), a third (31%) rate the economy as poor. These present material divisions between generations make these difference in outlook clear, as demonstrated by Table 3. Only a third of core working aged Canadians (35–54) respondents (35%) would describe their personal economic situation as excellent or good, compared to nearly half (49%) of 55+ respondents. (Table 5) When it comes to solutions, younger Canadians (18–34) are the most likely to think that Prime Minister Carney’s economic plan will help them (35%).

These generational splits are also evident in other take-aways regarding values around work, labour unions, and policy responses to economic issues. Statistically significant differences in views between age groups throughout this analysis should be noted for policymakers and policy communicators.

While union representatives are believed to be the best defender of jobs versus other groups and actors (36%, Table 9), there is no significant difference between the age groups in this view. However, age is a key factor when it comes to openness to unions. Most young people 18 to 34 (61%) believe that unions play a positive role in society compared to 48% of 55+ respondents (Table 10), and 64% of younger respondents would join a union if given the chance compared to 38% of those 55+ (Table 11). They are markedly more open to unions than

Canada’s generational divide on economic security and outlook

Table 6

n=1014	Total	18–34	35–54	55+
When you think about Canada’s future, which comes closer to your view?				
Canada’s best years are mostly behind us	42%	52%	48%	32%
Canada’s best years are still ahead of us	37%	30%	34%	45%
How would you describe your current personal financial situation?				
Excellent – Comfortable and saving	13%	15%	12%	12%
Good – Covering bills with some room to spare	31%	31%	23%	38%
Fair – Just managing, little room for extras	36%	32%	38%	37%
Poor – Falling behind on bills	10%	12%	12%	8%
Very poor – Can’t cover basic needs	7%	6%	11%	5%
Prefer not to say	3%	5%	3%	1%
Prime Minister Mark Carney says he plans to grow Canada’s economy by making major investments in clean energy, infrastructure, and innovation. Do you think that economic growth under his leadership will improve your households’ financial situation?				
My household will likely be better off financially	24%	35%	20%	19%
My household will likely be about the same financially	42%	39%	39%	47%
My household will likely be worse off financially	15%	10%	19%	15%
Not sure	19%	16%	23%	19%

Bold % = significance at or above 98% level. Statistical testing not performed when n < 30 since statistical assumptions are not met.

* n=15 for “upper class” respondents. Percentages presented have been rounded up, and sums presented used raw figures before rounding.

older cohorts, no doubt in part because unionized young workers (aged 15 to 24 years) make \$5.48 more an hour—33.2% more—than their non-unionized counterparts (Canadian Labour Congress, 2023).

Young people are also most open to the idea that self-employment and owning their own business is the best path forward in an uncertain economy. More than half (53%) of 18 to 34 year olds agree that “becoming self-employed and running your own business is the best way to get ahead in this economy,” compared to 47% of core-age respondents and only 30% of those 55+ (Table 8). For older Canadians, the picture is different. Canadians 55+ are optimistic about Canada’s future (45% believe that the best years are ahead) but are skeptical of government interventions like jobs guarantee programs (Table 12).

When it comes to policy responses to support job creation, younger Canadians want a more active role government role in guaranteeing good jobs while they remain positive on individual solutions like self-employment. Older Canadians prioritize skilled trades while younger voters are more evenly spread across sectors. Notably, the economic divide between younger and older Canadians isn’t just about their current circumstance – it’s about confidence in the future, and the solutions they think are credible.

Takeaway #3: Jobs are about more than just money – but pay matters

Jobs are always about more than just income. Work is also about identity, dignity, and autonomy. But in a moment of economic insecurity, how are Canadians thinking about what makes a good job, and the prospects of keeping theirs?

Employment insecurity is an important part of the current economic picture in Canada. In 2025, Canada’s unemployment rate neared 7%, the highest in a decade outside the pandemic era. Tens of thousands of jobs have been lost in tariff-exposed sectors such as steel and aluminum, auto manufacturing, transportation and warehousing.

The Carney government’s approach to job protection, creation and unemployment support has been mixed. Job creation is on the government’s radar: a stated objective of the Carney government’s nation-building approach to the US trade war is job creation. In the Prime Minister’s announcement of the first projects bound for expedited Major Projects Office review, it states, “together, these projects represent investments of more than \$60 billion in our economy and will create thousands of well-paying jobs for Canadians.” (Prime Minister of Canada, September 11, 2025)

Yet the Carney government is also overseeing the reduction of thousands of public sector jobs as part of its workforce reduction: the government aims to reduce spending on public sector jobs – which tend to be well-paid and unionized – by \$13 billion annually by 2028-29 (Government of Canada, 2026). Workers facing unemployment in the private sector have also fallen through the cracks: companies like Algoma Steel and Stellantis received millions in government support, only to cut jobs (Gollom, 2025), and government efforts to improve access to employment insurance for the unemployed have so far been extremely modest (Government of Canada, December 2025).

Canadians’ Views on Their Personal Job Situation

Overall, more than one-third (36%) of respondents who are employed presently do feel secure in their jobs, but the sense of security is felt unevenly across age groups, classes, and among union/non-union households. 46% of core working-age respondents and 41% of working-class respondents do

Thinking about your personal job situation, how secure do you feel?

Table 7

n=573	Strongly Secure	Somewhat Secure	Neither Secure/Insecure	Somewhat Insecure	Strongly Insecure	Prefer Not to Say
Total	27%	37%	19%	11%	5%	1%
Age						
18–34	29%	42%	13%	9%	6%	2%
35–54	20%	35%	23%	17%	6%	0%
55+	36%	34%	22%	5%	4%	0%
Social Class						
Working/ lower middle class	21%	37%	20%	12%	10%	0%
Middle class	25%	39%	21%	14%	2%	0%
Upper middle class	48%	32%	15%	3%	2%	0%
Upper class*	78%	12%	9%	0%	0%	0%
Union Household						
Union Household	29%	40%	15%	11%	4%	0%
Not a Union Household	24%	35%	23%	12%	6%	0%

Bold % = significance at or above 98% level. Statistical testing not performed when n < 30 since statistical assumptions are not met.
* n=15 for “upper class” respondents. Percentages presented have been rounded up, and sums presented used raw figures before rounding.

Figure 4

What are your top three priorities for governments when it comes to improving working conditions in Canada?

(combined selection of 1st, 2nd, and 3rd choices, n=1014)

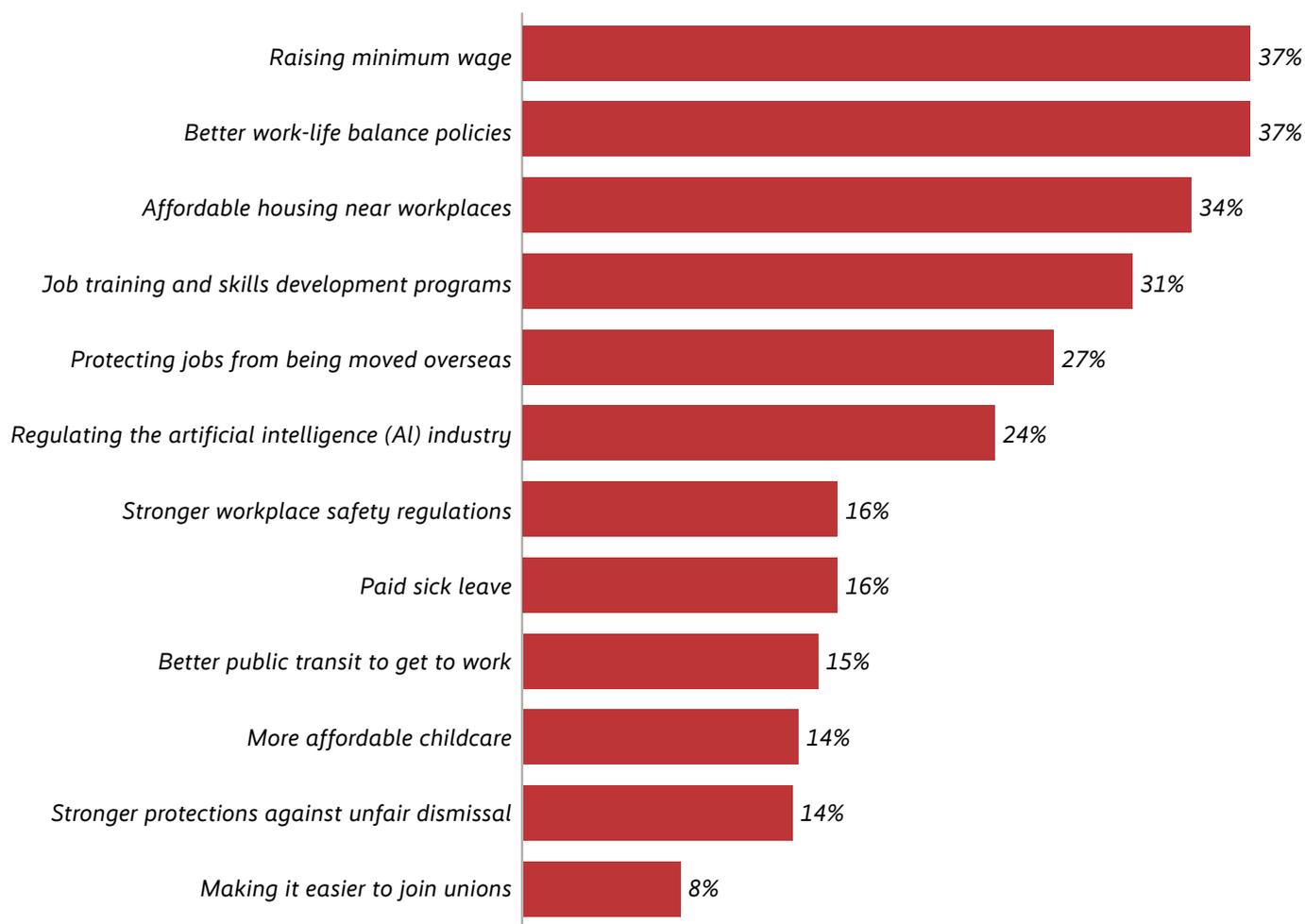


Table 8

Becoming self-employed and running your own business is the best way to get ahead in this economy

n=1014	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree/Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Unsure
Total	14%	28%	34%	10%	4%	11%
Age						
18-34	20%	33%	31%	6%	1%	9%
35-54	16%	31%	29%	11%	5%	8%
55+	8%	22%	39%	13%	4%	13%

Bold % = significance at or above 98% level. Statistical testing not performed when n < 30 since statistical assumptions are not met. Percentages presented have been rounded up, and sums presented used raw figures before rounding.

not feel secure. Among workers who are unionized or living in union households, however, 70% of respondents do feel security, compared to jobs security felt by 60% of respondents in non-union households.

What Makes a Good Job

When asked what jobs are mainly about, almost half of Canadians (48%) agree that jobs are equally about earning a living and contributing to society. 41% say that they are mainly about earning a living. Canadians see jobs as about both earning and contributing – but a good job is one that pays well enough to live and allows for some work-life balance.

In response to an open-ended question about what matters most when they think about a good job, respondents mostly define it in terms of compensation, benefits and perks, and security and job stability. What's striking is how modest most of these hopes are:

- “Making enough to pay for the necessities...a living wage that allows you to actually live, not just survive.”
- “Good health coverage for me and my family, and decent vacation time.”
- “Permanent position, not contract. A secure job with consistent hours.”

When asked about what government should prioritize to improve working conditions in Canada, raising the minimum wage (37%), better work-life balance policies (37%), and affordable housing near workplaces (34%) were top concerns.

Self-Employment

Two in five Canadians see self-employment or running your own business as the best way to get ahead in this economy, with younger people being more likely to agree with that idea. This may also have to do with the perception that self-employed workers have more autonomy and control people over their work, an appealing prospect in a soft labour market.

Takeaway #4: Unions are viewed as defenders of jobs – politicians are not

When it comes to confronting the job instability in Canada's current economic environment, it pays to be in a union. Canadians in union households are twice as likely to expect their finances will improve (19% vs 10% non-union), and more likely to rate the economy positively. This survey found that union membership is strongly linked to a sense of economic security, while politicians of all stripes are largely seen as absent in moments of local economic crisis.

Notably, Canadians don't really make partisan distinctions when it comes to politicians showing up to protect jobs. When asked which political parties show up when jobs are under threat, 36% were unsure. Conservatives (27%), Liberals (26%) and NDP (25%) were statistically tied among respondents who named a party.

Though there is little trust for political representatives to show up for job security in a time of economic downturn, unionized households have higher trust in other institutions and actors than the general population and non-union households, such as unions themselves, community organizations, the media, and even business leaders. Respondents

from non-unionized households, however, are significantly more unsure about who acts to defend jobs and have a more pessimistic view, with nearly a quarter (24%) feeling that "no one really shows up" to support workers and fight for jobs.

Attitudes Towards Labour Unions

Canadians generally have a positive view of the role unions play in Canadian society. Overall, more than half of respondents (51%) agree that labour unions play a positive role in Canadian society, versus 15% who would disagree. This agreement is most pronounced by the youngest workers, age 18 to 34, who mostly (61%) see unions playing a positive role in Canada. Most union households that likely benefit from the labour movement's wins agree (71%) that they do play a positive role in Canadian society. Meanwhile, respondents from non-union households still agree (44%) that labour unions play a positive role in Canadian society than disagree (17%), however, there is a stronger likelihood for non-union household respondents to neither agree/disagree (26%) or to be unsure (14%).

When jobs are at risk, such as a factory closure or major layoffs, who typically shows up to support workers and fight for those jobs?

Table 9

n=1014	Total	Union Household	Not a Union Household
Federal politicians (MPs)	13%	16%	12%
Provincial politicians (MPPs/MLAs)	18%	19%	18%
Municipal politicians	16%	16%	16%
Union representatives	36%	45%	33%
Community organizations	21%	27%	19%
Business leaders	11%	16%	10%
Media/journalists	15%	21%	13%
No one really shows up	22%	16%	24%
Not sure	20%	13%	22%

Bold % = significance at or above 98% level. Statistical testing not performed when n < 30 since statistical assumptions are not met. Percentages presented have been rounded up, and sums presented used raw figures before rounding.

Table 10

*To what extent do you agree or disagree:
Labour unions play a positive role in Canadian society?*

n=1014	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree/Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Unsure
Total	20%	32%	23%	9%	5%	12%
Age						
18–34	24%	37%	18%	6%	3%	13%
35–54	21%	27%	26%	9%	5%	12%
55+	16%	32%	24%	12%	6%	10%
Union Household						
Union Household	34%	37%	16%	5%	3%	5%
Not a Union Household	14%	30%	26%	11%	6%	14%

Bold % = significance at or above 98% level. Statistical testing not performed when n < 30 since statistical assumptions are not met. Percentages presented have been rounded up, and sums presented used raw figures before rounding.

Table 11

*If you were offered the option to join a union at your workplace
or in your next job, how likely would you be to do so?*

n=797	Very Likely	Somewhat Likely	Not Very Likely	Not at All Likely	Unsure	Not Applicable
Total	20%	28%	11%	12%	13%	18%
Age						
18–34	21%	43%	10%	4%	12%	10%
35–54	20%	28%	12%	12%	18%	10%
55+	18%	20%	10%	15%	10%	27%
Union Household						
Union Household	30%	38%	5%	6%	9%	12%
Not a Union Household	18%	26%	12%	12%	13%	19%

Bold % = significance at or above 98% level. Statistical testing not performed when n < 30 since statistical assumptions are not met. Percentages presented have been rounded up, and sums presented used raw figures before rounding.

With this largely positive outlook on unions, especially among young people, it's no surprise that when respondents who are not currently a union member were asked whether they would join a union at their workplace if given the chance, there is a stronger likelihood (47%) than unlikelihood (22%). This likelihood is particularly strong among 18 to 34 year olds (64%) and for respondents who live in households with union members (68%). This positive view of labour unions, even among non-members, is indicative of the important role they play in defending jobs and advocating for workers, especially in a moment where

there is less confidence that the federal government can step up to support workers.

While Canadians may be skeptical of the benefits they will get from the federal government's efforts to defend jobs, Canadians see the labour movement as the frontline of defence for jobs in moments of crisis. With economic indicators pointing towards more hardship, Canada's unions have earned the position as the most credible institutional actor defending for workers and jobs by showing up time and again when workers and communities are under threat.

Takeaway #5: Grounded policy resonates best right now

In this moment of economic crisis, Canadians generally support government involvement to promote job protection, creation and economic security, but doubt the government's ability to deliver. There are important class and generational divides in how potential policy responses are understood by Canadians.

Creating and Guaranteeing Jobs

Most Canadians (65%) believe that the federal government needs to act on Canadian jobs through programs that create jobs. Younger and working-class Canadians are most open to the idea of a jobs guarantee: 41% of 18 to 34 year old respondents and 39% of working-class respondents believe the federal government should do more to guarantee jobs for Canadians.

While there is support for the idea of a jobs guarantee, Canadians seriously doubt the government's ability to deliver on it. When asked how believable it would be for the Canadian gov-

ernment to implement a jobs guarantee program, 40% of respondents view it as very or somewhat credible while 47% do not believe the federal government could credibly pull this off.

Younger (18 to 34 year olds) and respondents from union households have a more positive view on whether the federal government could implement such a program, but that skepticism grows among older generations and is greater among non-union households. Among working/lower-middle class respondents, there is greater skepticism towards the federal government's capability for this program than there is among higher social classes, who trust the federal government to successfully carry out a job guarantee.

Sectors with Jobs of the Future

When it comes to what a job creation program ought to look like, respondents prioritize jobs in the care economy, skilled trades, and housing sector. In ranking of the top 3 sectors that the government could invest in for jobs, 18%

Which of these statements on federal government action on jobs best describes your overall view

Table 12

n=1014	The federal government should do more to guarantee jobs for Canadians	The federal government should focus on creating the right conditions for businesses to create jobs	The federal government is already doing enough on jobs	The private sector should handle job creation without government involvement	Unsure
Total	34%	31%	7%	12%	16%
Age					
18-34	41%	25%	10%	13%	11%
35-54	36%	26%	7%	15%	17%
55+	28%	39%	4%	10%	18%
Social Class					
Working / lower middle class	39%	28%	6%	10%	17%
Middle class	33%	36%	6%	11%	14%
Upper middle class	24%	36%	9%	20%	10%
Upper class*	11%	30%	15%	33%	11%

Bold % = significance at or above 98% level. Statistical testing not performed when n < 30 since statistical assumptions are not met.
* n=15 for "upper class" respondents. Percentages presented have been rounded up, and sums presented used raw figures before rounding.

Table 13

Some governments are considering a “jobs guarantee” program that would ensure everyone who wants to work has access to a job.

How credible or believable is it that the Canadian government could successfully implement such a program?

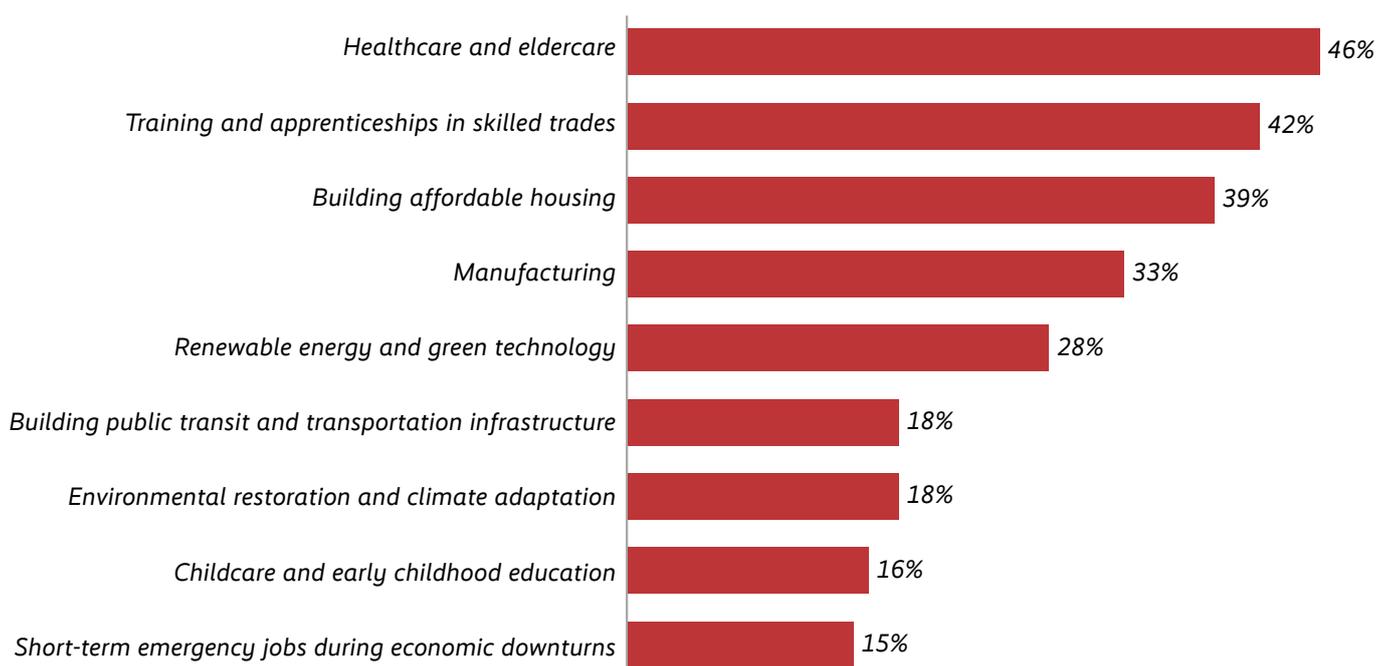
n=1014	Very Credible	Somewhat Credible	Not Very Credible	Not at All Credible	Unsure
Total	10%	30%	30%	17%	13%
Age					
18–34	19%	37%	25%	10%	9%
35–54	9%	30%	30%	17%	15%
55+	6%	24%	34%	22%	14%
Social Class					
Working/ lower middle class	9%	10%	30%	20%	14%
Middle class	10%	31%	32%	16%	11%
Upper middle class	16%	39%	31%	9%	5%
Upper class*	22%	44%	9%	15%	11%
Union Household					
Union Household	17%	44%	31%	12%	7%
Non-union Household	8%	28%	30%	20%	15%

Bold % = significance at or above 98% level. Statistical testing not performed when n < 30 since statistical assumptions are not met.
 * n=15 for “upper class” respondents. Percentages presented have been rounded up, and sums presented used raw figures before rounding.

Figure 5

Among several economic sectors the government could invest in for jobs, rank the top three you think would benefit Canadian workers

(combined selection of 1st, 2nd, and 3rd choices, n=1014)



of respondents ranked “jobs in healthcare and elder care” first and another 18% of respondents ranked “jobs and apprenticeships in skilled trades” first as well. 13% of respondents ranked “jobs building affordable housing” first. When combining all top 3 rankings, 46% of respondents prioritize healthcare and elder care, 42% prioritize skilled trades, and 39% prioritize housing construction.

In this survey, housing affordability appears as both a crisis and a solution – it’s the top concern when Canadians are asked what feels most unfair in the economy right now, and also ranks in the top three as a way to improve working conditions in Canada (affordable housing near workplaces), and the types of jobs programs the government should invest in (housing construction).

Where respondents would like to see investments go, however, differs somewhat from their outlook on where they think most good-paying jobs in Canada will be in the next decade. While respondents see job growth (32%) in healthcare and social services and (30%) in construction and skilled trades as areas where the government ought to be making investment for jobs, 42% see the technology and IT sector as the place for most good-paying future jobs.

Basic Income Proposals

A “Universal Basic Income” (UBI) is often considered as a potential government support for workers during economic crisis. The Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) program during the height of the COVID-19 Pandemic is an

example of such a program and the way that it can help people through a crisis like a widespread economic shut-down. UBI has also been talked about as part of the transition to AI, to support workers who lose jobs due to automation. (Jiaying Zhao, June 26, 2023)

However, views on UBI in Canada are mixed. Although there is more acceptance among young workers and respondents from unionized households, older generations and higher social classes are more skeptical or opposed to UBI as a program. Overall, nearly 1 in 4 (23%) of all respondents are unsure about UBI, with working- and lower-class respondents showing the greatest uncertainty. Working- and lower-class respondents were equally likely to say that UBI could be too costly and reduce incentive to work as they are to support the proposal.

Artificial Intelligence Worries

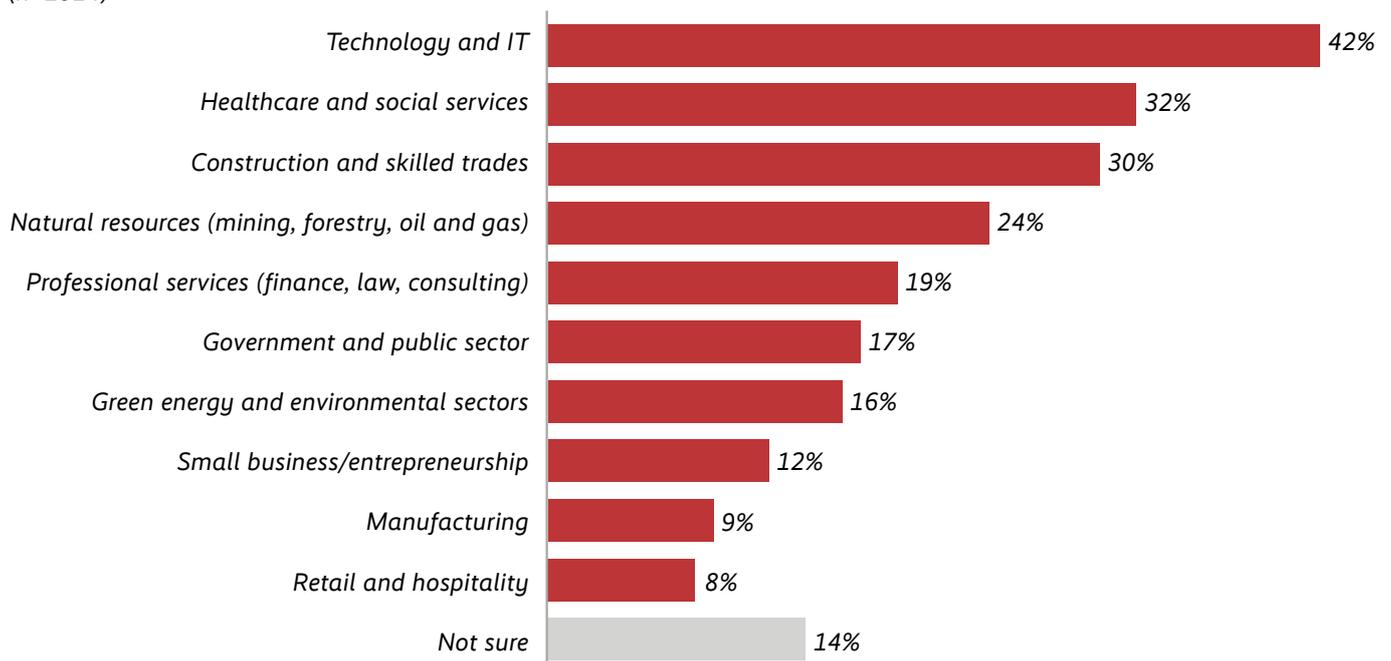
AI anxiety is high: nearly 6 in 10 Canadians say AI will hurt workers, and a quarter want AI regulation as a top priority. This is no surprise - early evidence suggests that AI adoption is hitting young workers in Canada first, as entry-level jobs disappear due to AI adoption (Macklem, February 2026).

Despite this skepticism, the Carney government is pursuing AI policies that prioritize innovation over regulation (Karađeglija, June 2025), as well as coupling cuts to federal public service jobs with the introduction of AI. To date, the federal government’s investments in private sector AI projects express little consideration for expected job losses.

Where do you think most good-paying jobs in Canada will be 10 years from now?

Figure 6

(n=1014)



A Universal Basic Income is a policy where the government provides all adults with a regular, guaranteed payment to help cover basic living costs

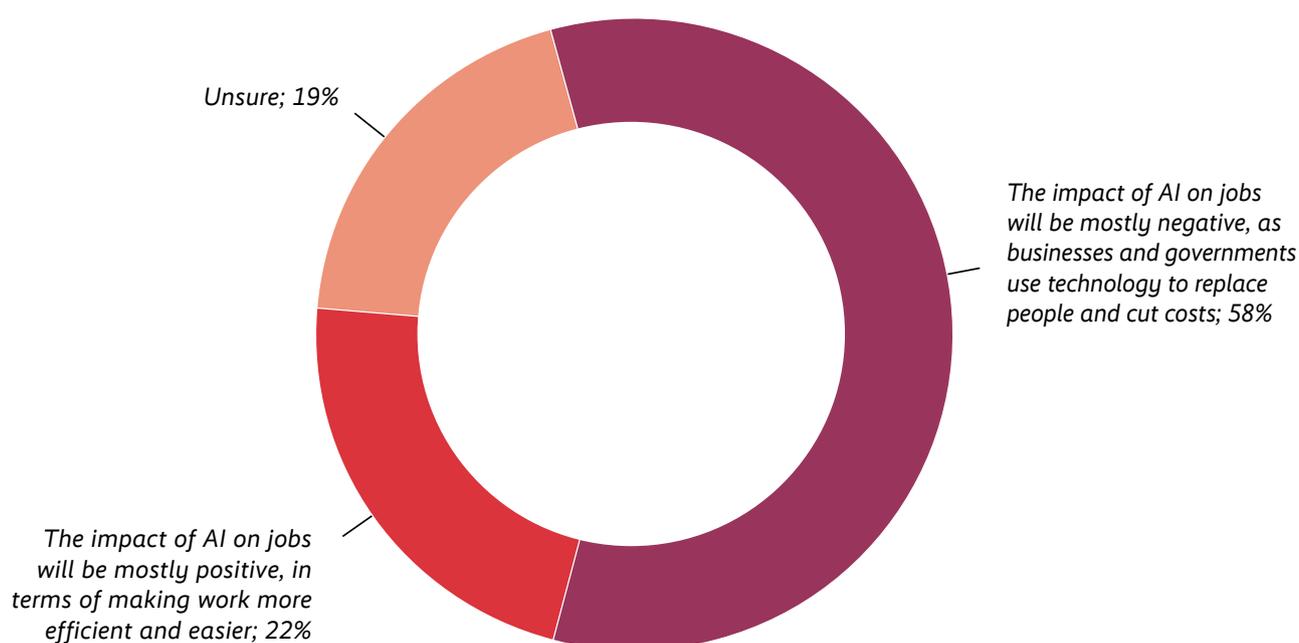
Which statement comes closest to your view of a UBI?

n=1014	A UBI could give financial security to pursue the work that they want to do	A UBI could support those who want to improve their education, pursue creative work, or allow more time for caregiving	A UBI sounds appealing, but it could reduce motivation to work and it might be too costly for governments	We don't need a UBI – jobs and the existing social supports are enough	I don't have a clear view / need more information
Total	23%	18%	28%	8%	23%
Age					
18–34	32%	19%	24%	5%	20%
35–54	24%	17%	30%	8%	22%
55+	16%	18%	30%	11%	26%
Social Class					
Working/lower middle class	25%	19%	25%	6%	25%
Middle class	22%	17%	33%	9%	20%
Upper middle class	22%	16%	33%	16%	13%
Upper class*	26%	14%	34%	7%	20%
Union Household					
Union Household	29%	20%	29%	5%	17%
Non-union Household	21%	17%	28%	10%	25%

Bold % = significance at or above 98% level. Statistical testing not performed when n < 30 since statistical assumptions are not met.
 * n=15 for "upper class" respondents. Percentages presented have been rounded up, and sums presented used raw figures before rounding.

Figure 7

Which statement on the impact of AI on jobs is closest to your own view?



Which statement on the impact of AI on jobs is closest to your own view?

Table 15

n=573	The impact of AI on jobs will be mostly negative, as businesses and governments use technology to replace people and cut costs	The impact of AI on jobs will be mostly positive, in terms of making work more efficient and easier	Unsure
Total	56%	22%	19%
Social Class			
Working/lower middle class	62%	17%	20%
Middle class	56%	27%	18%
Upper middle class	54%	35%	11%
Upper class*	55%	15%	31%

Bold % = significance at or above 98% level. Statistical testing not performed when n < 30 since statistical assumptions are not met.

* n=15 for "upper class" respondents. Percentages presented have been rounded up, and sums presented used raw figures before rounding.

The data suggests that the Carney government's approach to AI may face strong public opinion headwinds. More than half of Canadians (59%) agree that "the impact of AI on jobs will be mostly negative, as businesses and governments use technology to replace people and cut costs." Only 22% see the impact of AI on jobs as mostly positive. While these sentiments are widely shared across different segments of respondents surveyed, among social classes, middle class respondents and higher are more likely to see AI bringing a positive impact, while working-class respondents are substantially more skeptical.

Conclusion: Between Jobs and the Economy

Canadians are caught – squeezed by cost of living while the Canadian economy is forced to re-tool in the face of President Trump’s tariff war. While Canadians are supportive of the Carney government’s nation-building economic plan, most don’t believe it will benefit them personally. Nearly half describe their personal economic situation as only fair or poor, and just one in four expect to be better off under the government’s growth plan. At a moment when job losses are mounting in tariff-exposed sectors and public service cuts are set to accelerate, the promise of long-term growth feels distant from the immediate pressures Canadians face.

This disconnect is generational. Younger workers are the most economically pessimistic, yet they remain the most open to intervention, from union membership to stronger labour protections. Older Canadians, by contrast, are more optimistic about the country’s future but more skeptical of large-scale government programs. Across generations, there is support for grounded measures like raising the minimum wage, improving work-life balance, and protecting good jobs – but there is also widespread doubt that Ottawa can deliver.

Without a clear plan to strengthen the sectors Canadians see as essential – including health care and social services – and without visible action to protect workers from the fallout of the trade war, trust in the federal government’s economic stewardship risks further erosion. Growth alone is not enough; Canadians need to see how that growth translates into security.

In this environment, there is real political and economic space for active labour market policies that protect union jobs, create new employment in critical sectors, and invest in long-term resilience.

Canadians are not rejecting government action – they are demanding that it be practical, credible, and rooted in their everyday realities. The opportunity now is to close the gap between macroeconomic ambition and household security, and to demonstrate that defending Canada’s economy means defending the people who power it.

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About the project

Defending Jobs in a Trade War: Canadian Perspectives on Work, Security, and Economic Trust is a joint research project between the **Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Canada** and the **Broadbent Institute**. The survey was conducted in the field by **Viewpoints Research**.

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Jordan Lechnitz is the Canada Director for the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

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About the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is the oldest political foundation in Germany with a rich tradition in social democracy dating back to its foundation in 1925. The foundation owes its formation and its mission to the political legacy of its namesake Friedrich Ebert, the first democratically elected German President. FES is mandated to strengthen, protect and promote democracy in over 100 countries around the world.

About the Broadbent Institute

The Broadbent Institute is Canada's preeminent social democratic think-tank. Founded in 2011 by Ed Broadbent and guided by the *Broadbent Principles for Canadian Social Democracy*, the Institute produces original research, convenes progressive dialogues, and trains organizers and leaders to equip social movements working to advance justice and equality.

Defending Jobs in a Trade War

In the shadow of a renewed U.S. trade war and rising economic insecurity, *Defending Jobs in a Trade War* offers a timely portrait of how Canadians understand their economic situation, their views on jobs and work, and hopes for the future. Based on original national survey research conducted by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Canada and the Broadbent Institute, this report reveals a country divided by generation and class: younger workers are pessimistic but open to bold intervention, while older Canadians are more optimistic yet skeptical of government solutions.

Canadians want job protection, better wages, and investment in care, housing, and skilled trades — but doubt that current economic growth strategies will make a difference in their lives. Unions are widely seen as the most credible defenders of jobs; politicians, far less so. For social democratic policymakers, unions, and civil society leaders, this research maps the gap between macroeconomic ambition and household security — and points toward grounded, worker-centred policies that can rebuild trust and defend good jobs in uncertain times.

Further information on the topic can be found here:

➤ fes.de