



Canadians cool to Harper's climate change stand

BY MIKE DE SOUZA, CANWEST NEWS SERVICE DECEMBER 22, 2009



Prime Minister Stephen Harper arrives at the morning session of United Nations Climate Change Conference 2009 in Copenhagen, Dec. 18, 2009.

Photograph by: Ints Kalnins/Reuters,

OTTAWA — The Harper government might not lose many votes over its controversial stance on climate change even though half of Canadians disapprove of its policies, says a new poll.

The survey, conducted over the past few days by Innovative Research Group for Canwest News Service, found 49 per cent of respondents disapproved of the government's position at the Copenhagen climate conference, but 44 per cent said it would not make a difference on whether they were more or less likely to vote for the Conservatives.

The poll found that 43 per cent would be less likely to vote for the Conservatives because of the government's position and 13 per cent would be more likely to support them. But Greg Lyle, the polling firm's managing director, said those who already supported the Tories were not likely to change their minds.

"Basically, it's something that's rallying the Conservatives' opponents, but it's leaving Conservatives

fairly untouched," said Lyle. "It's not pulling the Tories down, so it's something that they got through. It will be good for Liberal fundraising, but it isn't going to be good for the Liberal party to close the gap with the Tories."

The online poll surveyed 1,065 Canadians from Dec. 17-21 — at the climax of last week's international climate change summit and for two days following. It is considered accurate within three percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

Lyle said the extensive media coverage of the conference raised awareness about government policies when compared to a similar survey in October. While only 35 per cent of Canadians had a general or detailed understanding of Canada's climate change position in the fall, that percentage rose to 60 per cent in the last survey.

The approval rating of the government's position also dropped to 19 per cent from 32 per cent in the same period, while the disapproval rating rose to 49 per cent from 22 per cent as Canadians saw numerous provincial and municipal leaders, along with environmental groups, openly attack Canada in Copenhagen for having weak climate change goals and inadequate policies to crack down on industrial pollution in the country.

"You've got premiers coming after the prime minister and it hasn't been looking good for the government in the newspaper, and this reflects that," said Lyle. "But what it's showing is that most of the people who have been upset over their handling of the issue are the people who weren't going to vote for them anyhow."

Countries agreed to a non-binding accord at the conference to lower concentrations of heat-trapping greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere and prevent average temperatures from rising by more than two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. There was also an agreement to establish a new multibillion-dollar fund to help the least developed countries cope with the impacts of climate change — but no specific targets for any of the nations.

Environment Minister Jim Prentice has said the government is taking the issue of climate change seriously, but took a tough position at the negotiating table to protect Canada's economy and national interests.

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