

# Canadians Conflicted on Canada as an Energy Superpower

Greg Lyle

As this edition of *Policy* demonstrates, energy has become a central issue in Canada's national political debate. The Harper government sees energy exports as critical to Canada's economic well-being, and is determined to improve access to the global market. The leader of the Official Opposition, Thomas Mulcair, has focused more on Canadian energy security, minimizing our environmental footprint and increasing domestic value-added. Somewhere in the middle there is Justin Trudeau's Liberal Party. While it is still the early days in Trudeau's leadership, he has come out opposing Enbridge's proposed Northern Gateway pipeline, he expressed interest in possibilities of shipping bitumen to refineries in Eastern Canada and, more recently, he has indicated support of the Keystone XL pipeline.

Where do Canadians stand and how is that changing over time? In May, Innovative Research Group tracked a series of energy questions we first asked Canadians in 2007 on behalf of the Canadian Defense and Foreign Affairs Institute. Both studies were completed on our Canada 20/20 online panel. Survey details can be found

here <http://www.innovativeresearch.ca/public-polls.htm>.

A majority of Canadians in 2007 (56 percent) and today (52 percent) say becoming an energy superpower is a good idea. However, opposition is growing as the number saying it's a bad idea has grown from 9 percent to 20 percent over the past six years.

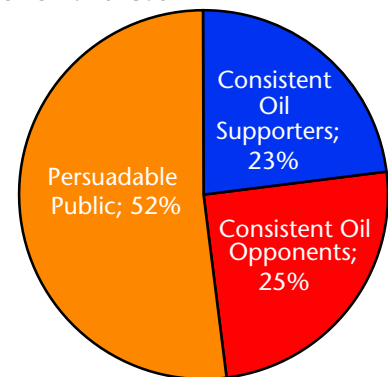
Canadians agree (58 percent) that it is our turn to reap the economic benefits of our natural resources. They also agree (66 percent) with the idea of using our own oil and gas resources to keep the domestic cost low.

Canadians are evenly divided (37 percent agree, 37 percent disagree) on whether we have a responsibility as a good neighbor to provide the US with reasonable access to our natural resources once our own needs are met. A majority (58 percent) say they are not interested in being an energy superpower if it just means becoming a really big supplier to the US. An even larger majority (64 percent) agree that we need to protect Canadian natural resources from the insatiable appetite of American consumers.

Canadians have concerns about our levels of energy exports in general. A majority (53 percent) say we are already too dependent on money from energy exports. A majority (58 percent) also believe we should save our oil and gas for future generations. However, when asked if they are willing to make sacrifices today to save reserves for the future, agreement drops down to 44 percent.

Finally, Canadians are also divided on which is more important, the state of your provincial economy (47 percent) or the state of the global environment (47 percent). Similarly, while 41 percent disagree that we should not develop oil and gas resources because of the environmental harm they cause, 38 percent agree, up 5 points over the past 6 years.

## ENERGY AS A BATTLEGROUND Grouping Canadians by Shared Views of Oil and Gas



Looking across all of the conflicting responses, the bottom line is that proponents of oil and gas projects can only count on about one-in-four (23 percent) Canadians as consistent supporters while another one-in-four (25 percent) Canadians are consistent opponents of oil. Half (52 percent) of our respondents fall into the "Persuadable Public" category. They are open to arguments but their support cannot be taken for granted. Proponents must earn it. **P**

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### MAJORITY SUPPORT IDEA OF CANADA AS AN ENERGY SUPERPOWER

