

Opinion Poll: Canada's climate change consensus confronts Keystone

November 21 2014, by William Raillant-Clark



Credit: Thinkstock

Despite the fact that 81% of Canadians accept that temperature on Earth is increasing, Université de Montréal researchers have revealed that Canadians are generally misinformed about the science of climate change and are divided over the construction of new oil pipelines. The researchers' study also found that 70% of Canadians perceive significant changes in weather where they live; 60% believe that weather in Canada has been getting more extreme; and 87% believe these changes are somewhat or very likely the consequence of a warming planet.

The nationally representative telephone survey interviewed 1401 adult Canadians during the month of October, yielding a margin of error of +/- 2.6% in 19 of 20 samples. The study, run concurrently with

researchers at the University of Michigan and Muhlenberg College in the US, highlights a stark contrast between the views of Canadians and Americans on the existence of [climate change](#) and support for pipelines, yet remarkable convergence on perceptions of weather and climate-related knowledge.

Hardly opinions based in fact

80% of Canadians, versus 60% of Americans, believe there is solid evidence that the average temperature on Earth has increased over the past four decades. This figure was significantly lower in Alberta (72%) and the Prairies (Manitoba and Saskatchewan, 60%.)

Of those who perceive an increase in temperature, 61% attribute the warming to human causes, compared to only 45% in the US. The figure was significantly higher in Quebec, at 71%, and significantly lower in Alberta, at 41%.

70% of Canadians perceive significant changes in weather patterns where they live, with 60% of Canadians perceive national weather is becoming more extreme, with highest figures in Ontario and on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts. These figures were 58% and 68% respectively for Americans.

Extreme weather is either somewhat (40%) or very (47%) likely the result of global warming, according to 87% of Canadians (and 68% of Americans.) Moreover, 59% of Canadians believe climate change will begin to harm people living in Canada within the next 10 to 25 years. A plurality of Canadians (35%) believe it already is.

Finally, two out of three Canadians (67%) believe the government is either not too prepared (34%) or not at all prepared (33%) for the consequences of a warming planet

Despite all this, more Americans (35%) than Canadians (30%) know that methane is a more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide, while 60% of Canadians (and 45% of Americans) believe that carbon dioxide emissions are responsible for the hole in the ozone layer.

Pipelines and politics

Canadians are more likely to oppose (44%) than support (36%) the Keystone XL energy pipeline, while 20% have a neutral opinion. The opposite is true on the other side of the border: the figures are 34%, 52% and 14%, respectively. However, support is highest among self-identified supporters of the federal Conservative Party of Canada (55%), mirroring the polarized situation in the United States, where 72% of Republicans support the project against 39% of Democrats.

Within Canada, support for Keystone XL was highest in Alberta (58%). At 50%, Trans Canada's Energy East project has greater support than Keystone XL, but opinions vary substantially across regions. At the high end, 68% of citizens in Alberta support the project, compared to a low of 33% of citizens in Quebec.

Finally, [support](#) for a system of cap and trade in Canada has increased to 60% in 2014, and continues to be more popular among Canadians than a carbon tax (48%).

"When you dig into the data, you see that Canadians are beginning to connect the dots between the notion of 'climate change' and observable changes in weather where they live. However, Canadians lack a certain degree of climate literacy, and it would be a mistake to assume that all Canadians are on the same page when it comes to fundamental climate science," explained Erick Lachapelle, Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Montreal and principal investigator for the Canadian portion of the study. "The public is not as informed as perhaps

they should be about this important issue, and there continues to be wide variation across the country, in terms of perceptions, beliefs, and preferences. The division over pipelines is a case in point."

About the poll:

The National Survey of Canadian Public Opinion on Climate Change was designed by Erick Lachapelle (Université de Montréal), Chris Borick (Muhlenberg College) and Barry Rabe (University of Michigan). The survey was administered to a nationally representative sample of 1,401 Canadians aged 18 and over. All interviews were conducted via telephone in English and French from 6 October 2014 to 27 October 2014. Calls were made using both landline and mobile phone listings. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is plus or minus 2.6% in 19 of 20 samples. Regional margins of error vary according to subsample size. Results reported here are weighted according to gender, age, language and region to reflect the latest population estimates from Statistics Canada (Census 2011).

Provided by University of Montreal

Citation: Opinion Poll: Canada's climate change consensus confronts Keystone (2014, November 21) retrieved 23 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-11-opinion-poll-canada-climate-consensus.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.