

Polarization over energy and climate in Canada

September 17 2020



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Positive Energy today released new survey results examining Canadians' views on the role of oil and gas in Canada's current and future economy, and the respective roles of federal and provincial governments in the

country's energy and climate future. This novel survey explores how party affiliation, ideology, region, gender, and age may influence opinions on these topics. The survey, conducted by Positive Energy researchers Stephen Bird and Erick Lachapelle prior to the onset of COVID-19, provides a valuable benchmark for Canadians' views on oil, gas and government leadership.

The research offers new insights into polarization by drawing the distinction between polarized opinion and fragmented opinion. Polarized opinion refers to opinions grouped at the extreme ends of a spectrum. People don't just agree or disagree, they do so strongly. Fragmented opinion refers to differences of opinion that aren't necessarily hardened at either end of the spectrum. This distinction is vital for decision-makers looking to chart a path forward for Canada's energy and [climate future](#). Polarized opinions are difficult for governments to deal with because peoples' opinions may become less malleable and less amenable to compromise. Fragmented opinions are more open to change.

The [survey results](#) reveal that [opinion](#) on these energy and climate issues are polarized by party affiliation far more than any other factor, while opinions are less likely to be polarized by ideology, age group, gender or region. This suggests that cues and rhetoric from political parties and other actors may be exacerbating the extent of ideological differences among Canadians.

Overall, Canadians appear optimistic that Canada can reconcile ambitious climate policies, a growing and environmentally responsible oil and gas sector and a strong export market that can displace more polluting forms of energy abroad. Canadians also want a long-term vision for the country's energy and climate future from the [federal government](#) and they believe that provinces should have flexibility to develop their own climate strategies.

"The results suggest that a multi-generational, pan-Canadian approach to energy and climate may be possible. Conflict is inevitable, but leaders have an opportunity to craft policies that build on views shared by many Canadians," said Professor Monica Gattinger, Chair of Positive Energy and Director, Institute for Science, Society and Policy, University of Ottawa.

"Canadians are not quite as polarized as many might believe, but [political parties](#) appear to be tapping into ideological differences to drive their narrative. That is cause for concern in a policy space as emotionally charged as climate and [energy](#), where Canada needs a clear long-term path," said Stephen Bird, Associate Professor of Political Science at Clarkson University and Positive Energy Faculty Member.

More information: [www.uottawa.ca/positive-energy ... e-canada-oil-and-gas](http://www.uottawa.ca/positive-energy...e-canada-oil-and-gas)

Provided by University of Ottawa

Citation: Polarization over energy and climate in Canada (2020, September 17) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-09-polarization-energy-climate-canada.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.