

End Game: As Supreme Court ruling removes another hurdle for TMX pipeline, opposition against it rises

Canadians divided between opinion that Liberals pushing too hard, not doing enough on pipeline capacity

January 28, 2020 – In the wake of a Supreme Court of Canada ruling regarding the TransMountain pipeline expansion (TMX), it would appear that another legal challenge against the project has come to an end. But in the court of public opinion, opposition to the twinning of the pipeline is heating up again.

The latest public opinion survey from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds opposition to the project has increased since June of last year.

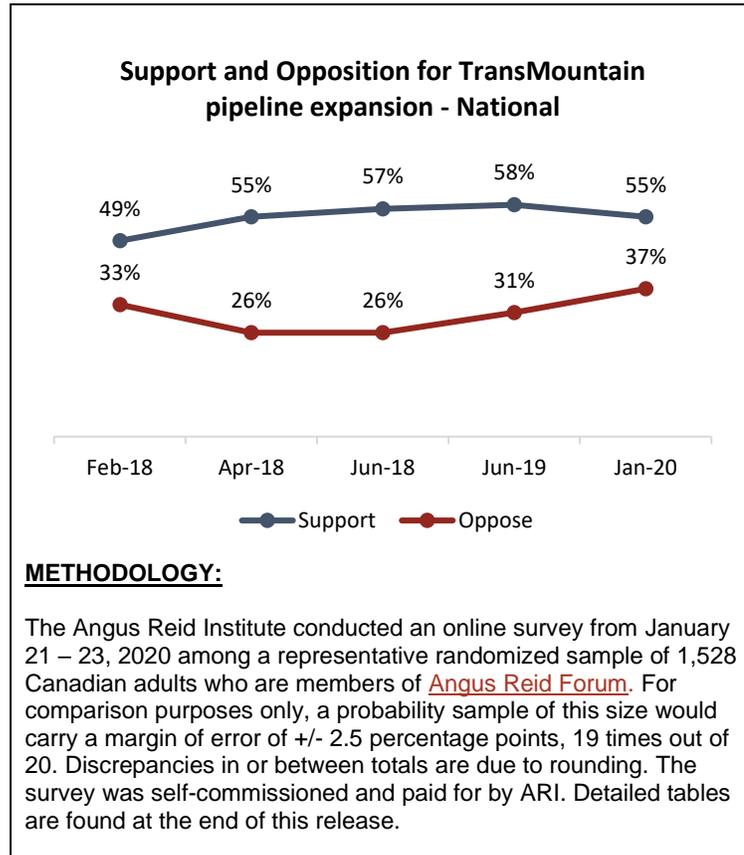
Indeed, over the past three periods of data collection since June 2018, shortly after the Liberal government purchased the TMX from Kinder Morgan, opposition has risen 11 percentage points while support has dropped.

That said, a slight majority overall continue to support the project (55%). Still, it is not enough for the Trudeau government to overcome its ongoing political challenge on this file.

While Canadians agree by a two-to-one ratio (53% to 27%) that the SCOC made the right decision in dismissing an appeal from the British Columbia government challenging federal jurisdiction of cross-border pipeline contents (in this case, [heavy oil and bitumen](#)), opposition to the project has spiked in Quebec (+18), Ontario (+13) and B.C. (+13) over the last 18 months. Notably, this hardening of opposition has occurred in regions where the minority Liberal government must lean hardest for support.

More Key Findings:

- While Albertans are near-unanimously in support of the expansion, they are joined increasingly by their fellow Prairie residents. Support is up 17 points in Saskatchewan and 22 points in Manitoba over the past 18 months.
- Canadians are now close to equally divided about how the Liberal government has handled the pipeline file. 38 per cent say that the government has not done enough to increase pipeline capacity while 35 per cent disagree, and say it has been pushing too hard on this file



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- Asked to choose between priorities, 58 per cent of Canadians say protecting the environment should be paramount while 42 per cent say promoting economic growth comes first.

About ARI

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

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TMX Support

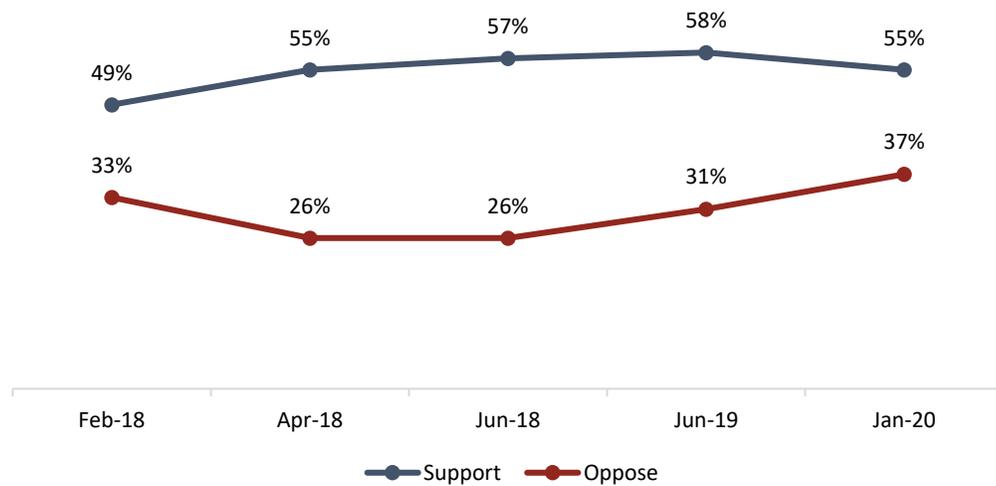
Majority support but rising opposition to TMX

Support for the TransMountain pipeline expansion (TMX), a project that would twin an existing pipeline that runs between Edmonton and Burnaby, has been and remains in majority territory for the better part of the past two years. That said, the gap between support and opposition has shrunk from its high point. In June 2018, shortly after a [divisive decision](#) by the federal government to purchase TMX, Canadians were at their most favourable about the project itself. At that time, one-quarter (26%) of Canadians opposed the project, compared to 57 per cent who supported it. Now, at the beginning of 2020, close to the same number of Canadians support the project (55%) but nearly two-in-five oppose it (37%):

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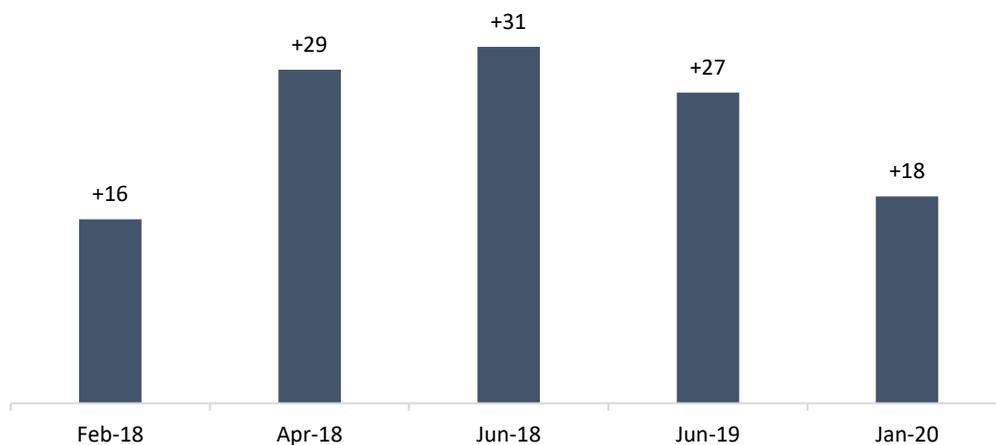
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Support and Opposition for TransMountain pipeline expansion - National



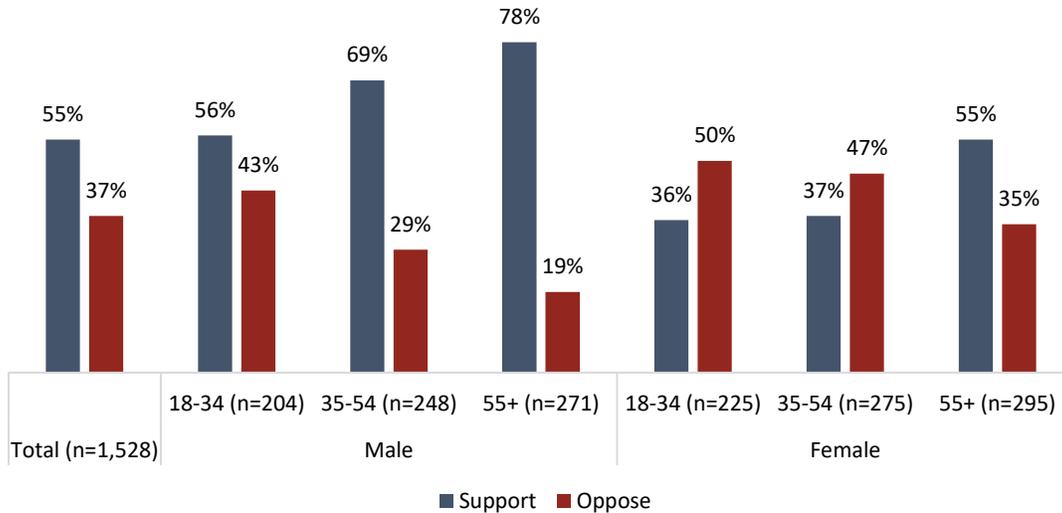
At its most supported, the TMX garnered a plus 31 net score, the score that results when subtracting opposition from support. That score has dropped to plus 18 now:

**Net Support for TMX
Support minus Oppose
National**



Men are overwhelmingly in favour of the project while women under the age of 55 are more likely to oppose rather than support it:

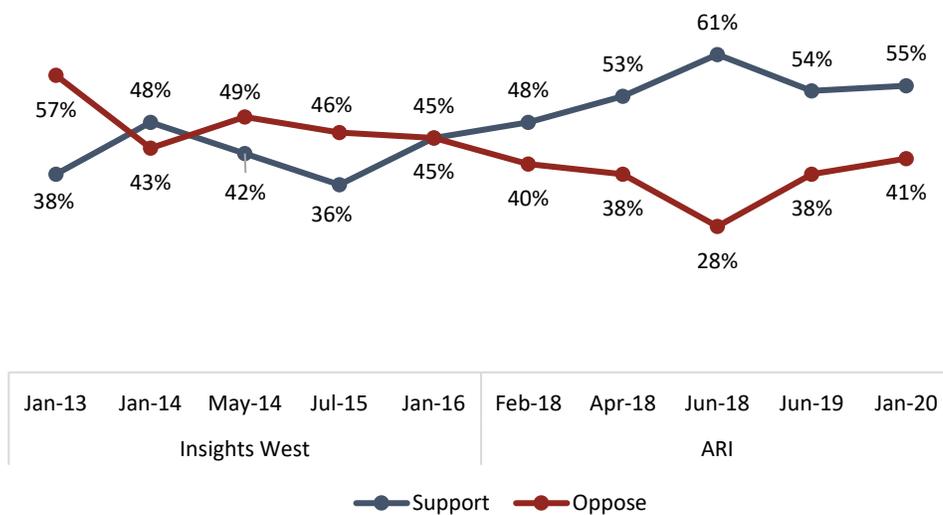
Support and Opposition for TransMountain pipeline expansion



Reservations in BC, frustrations in Alberta

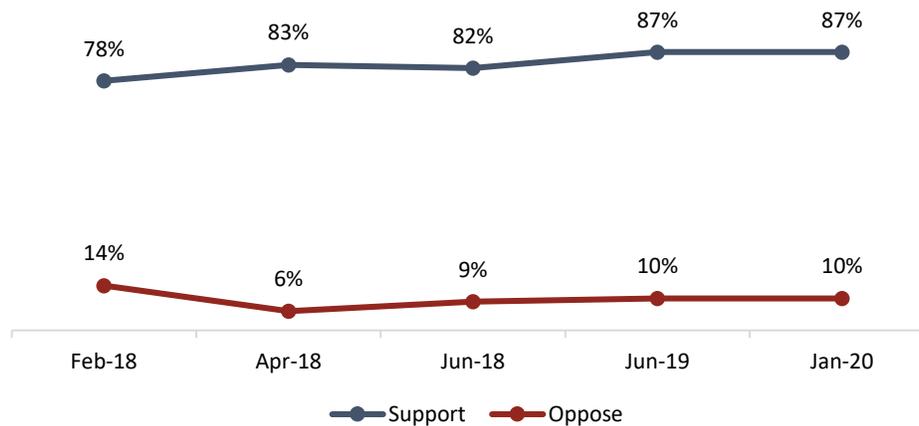
The two provinces at the heart of this ongoing saga have widely differing views over whether the project should proceed. In British Columbia, where the provincial NDP government has been opposed to the project since taking power in 2017, support still outweighs opposition. That said, opposition has risen since June of 2018 as [construction has begun](#) and court challenges have been [heard and resolved](#):

Support and Opposition for TransMountain pipeline expansion - British Columbia



In Alberta, meanwhile, support has been unwavering and in fact, rising. Nearly nine-in-ten Alberta residents (87%) want the pipeline expansion to be built and just one-in-ten disagree:

**Support and Opposition for TransMountain pipeline expansion
- Alberta**



Support rising in prairies, opposition rising in BC, ON, QC

Opposition has evidently been rising in British Columbia, but other regions, further removed from this specific project but increasingly concerned about climate change, are also voicing more protest.

Related: Three-quarters of Canadians concerned over threat of climate change

Over the past three series of data collected by the Angus Reid Institute, opposition has risen considerably in B.C., Ontario and Quebec. In Quebec, opposition is up 23 percentage points since April of 2018, and is now a majority opinion (55%). In Ontario, opposition has risen 13 points since June 2018. Those three regions now represent the highest opposition levels in the country, with Alberta and Saskatchewan the lowest.

Opposition to the TransMountain pipeline expansion across Canada								
	Total	Region						
		BC	AB	SK	MB	ON	QC	ATL
February 2018	33%	40%	14%	18%	38%	29%	44%	32%
April 2018	26%	38%	6%	8%	21%	27%	32%	16%
June 2018	26%	28%	9%	23%	21%	23%	37%	29%
June 2019	31%	38%	10%	11%	32%	26%	47%	28%
January 2020	37%	41%	10%	12%	32%	36%	55%	30%

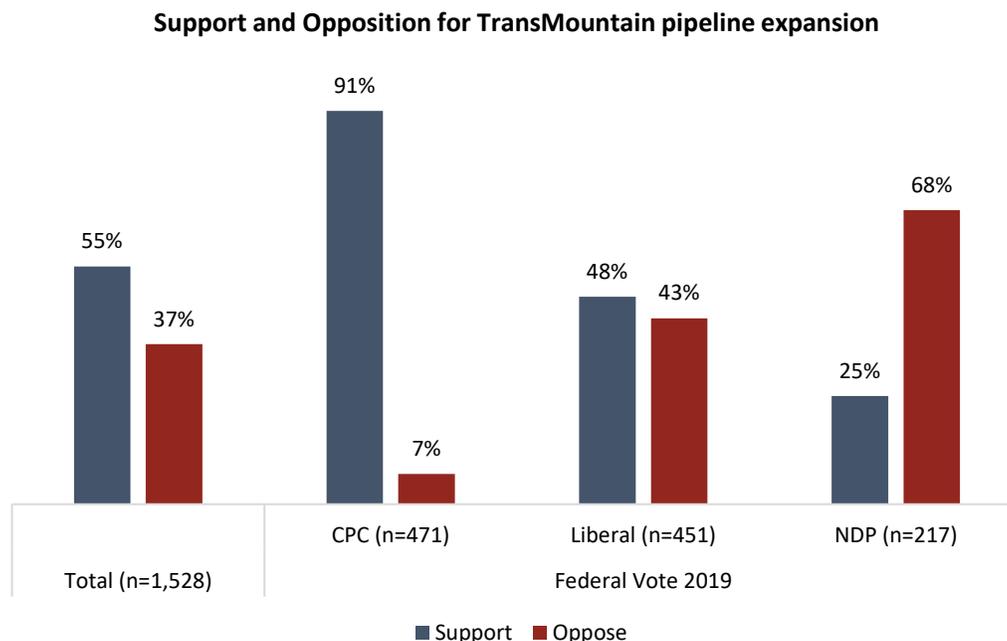
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Conversely, support at the national level has been sustained by rising levels in the Prairies. In both Saskatchewan and Manitoba, support has risen over the last three waves of data. Support in Atlantic Canada, meanwhile, is up 11 points since mid-2018.

Support for the TransMountain pipeline expansion across Canada								
	Total	Region						
		BC	AB	SK	MB	ON	QC	ATL
February 2018	49%	48%	78%	65%	45%	50%	34%	54%
April 2018	55%	53%	83%	82%	57%	49%	46%	60%
June 2018	57%	61%	82%	68%	40%	56%	46%	50%
June 2019	58%	54%	87%	80%	59%	63%	35%	59%
January 2020	55%	55%	87%	85%	62%	56%	33%	61%

Political dynamics on this issue are interesting. Support is near-unanimous among those who supported a Conservative candidate in the October federal election. Division is near even past Liberal Party voters, while past NDP voters skew heavily towards opposing it:



Supreme Court Decision

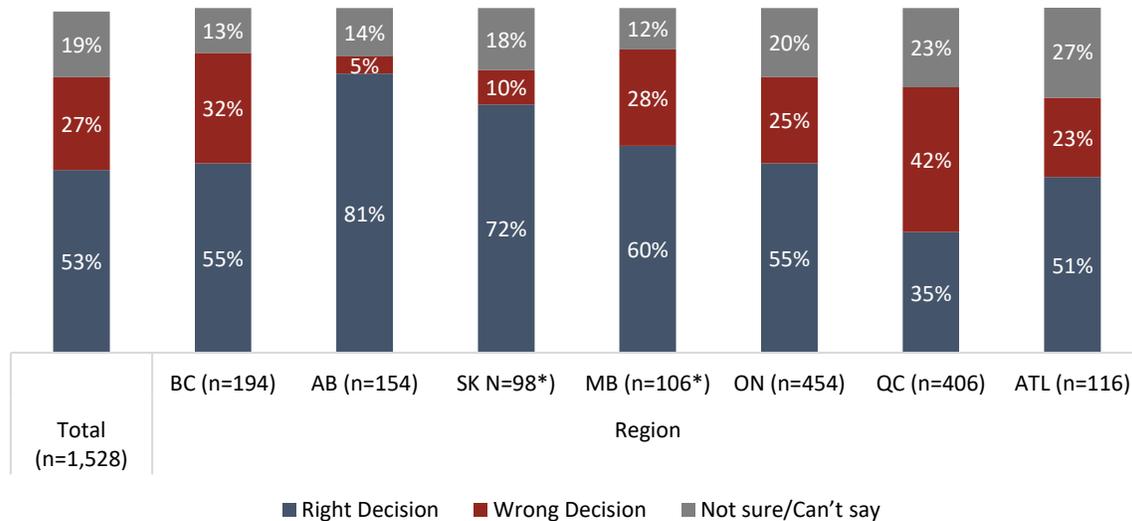
Two-to-one support for Supreme Court decision

On January 16 the Supreme Court of Canada unanimously rejected an appeal from the B.C. government which sought to allow the province to regulate the flow of heavy oil and bitumen through the province. The B.C. government had previously received the same ruling from the Court of Appeal of British Columbia and sought to overturn it through Canada's highest court.

The B.C. Court of Appeal ruled in March of 2019 that the province cannot restrict oil and gas products through pipelines that transcend provincial borders because those projects are under federal jurisdiction and subject to the regulation of the National Energy Board.

Just over half of Canadians (53%) say that they feel the SCOC made the right call, a margin of 2:1 over those who say it was the wrong one:

In your view, did the Supreme Court make the right decision or wrong decision in not allowing B.C. to regulate the flow of energy resources through its territory?

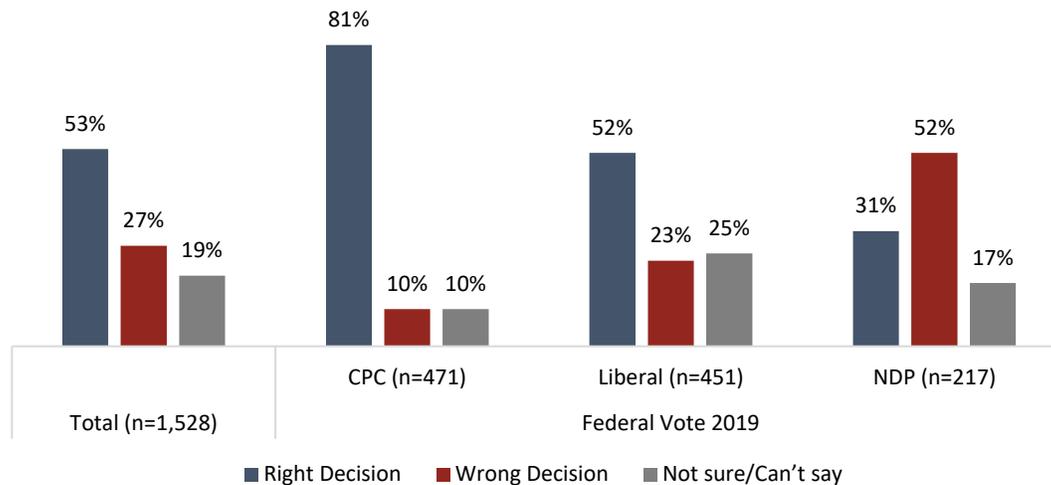


Of particular interest in the data are the political perspectives. While Liberal Party voters are nearly divided about the pipeline expansion overall, they are overwhelmingly of the opinion that the court made the right decision about jurisdiction. Twice as many Liberals hold this view (52%) compared to those who disagree (23%). CPC voters are vastly more likely than other partisans to say this was the right decision, while NDP voters are most likely to feel the opposite:

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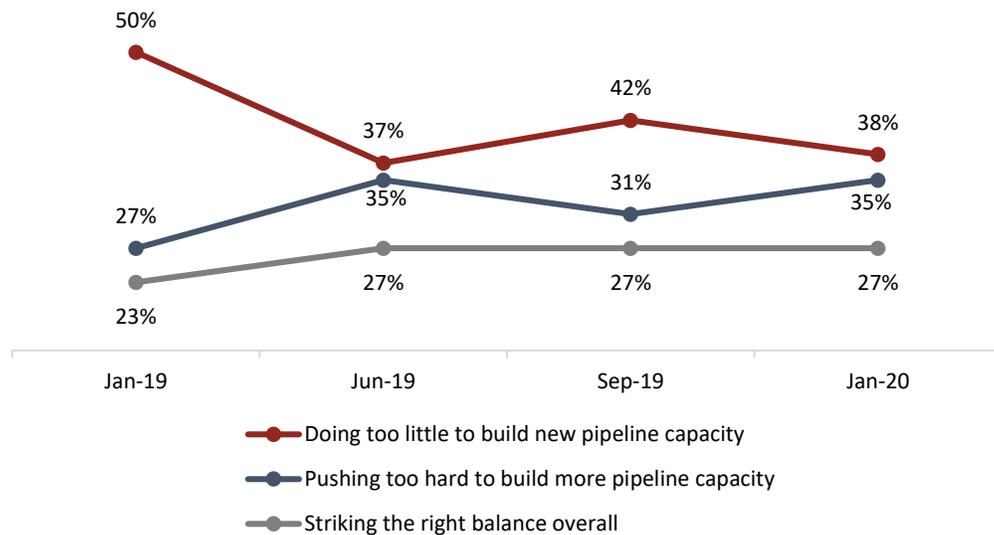


Government handling

Canadians remain divided about Liberal pipeline strategy

At the beginning of last year, half of Canadians felt that the government was not doing enough to build new pipeline capacity. Since then, opinion has softened, with Canadians falling more closely into three equally sized camps. While 38 per cent still feel that the Liberals need to do more, nearly the same number say the government is actually doing too much on this file and should focus elsewhere:

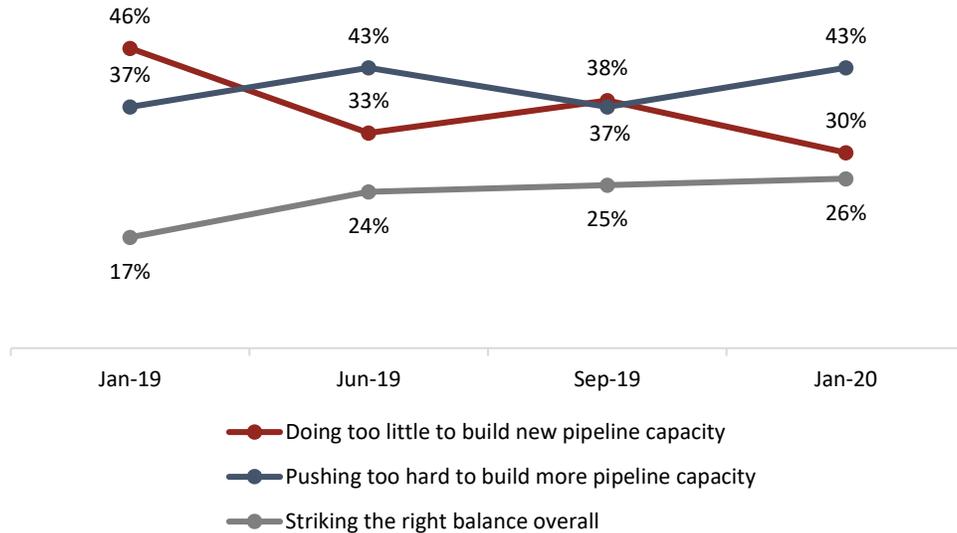
Thinking about the actions and approach to the pipeline issue taken by the federal government under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, would you say it has been:



Comparing BC and AB perspectives

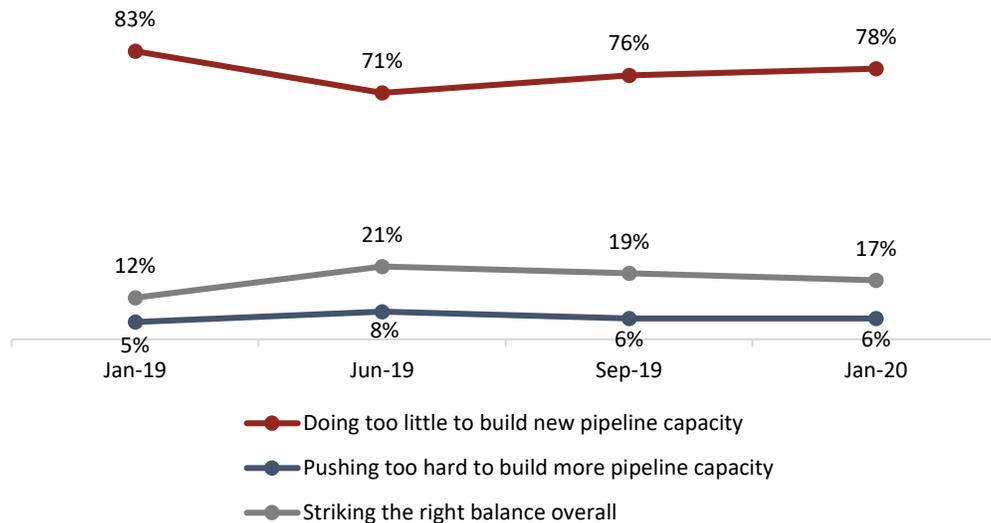
The two provinces at the heart of this ongoing saga have wildly divergent views about how the federal government is managing it. In British Columbia, the number of residents expressing that the government has been doing too little to build more pipeline capacity has dropped considerably and now sits at three-in-ten (30%). That group is now outpaced by those who say the government is pushing too hard on this file (43%). Fully one-quarter (26%) say that the Liberals have struck the right balance:

Thinking about the actions and approach to the pipeline issue taken by the federal government under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, would you say it has been:
British Columbia



In Alberta, frustrations continue. Four-in-five residents in Canada’s most [economically pessimistic](#) province continue to say that the federal government must do more to increase pipeline capacity. This number remains unchanged compared to last year:

Thinking about the actions and approach to the pipeline issue taken by the federal government under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, would you say it has been:
Alberta



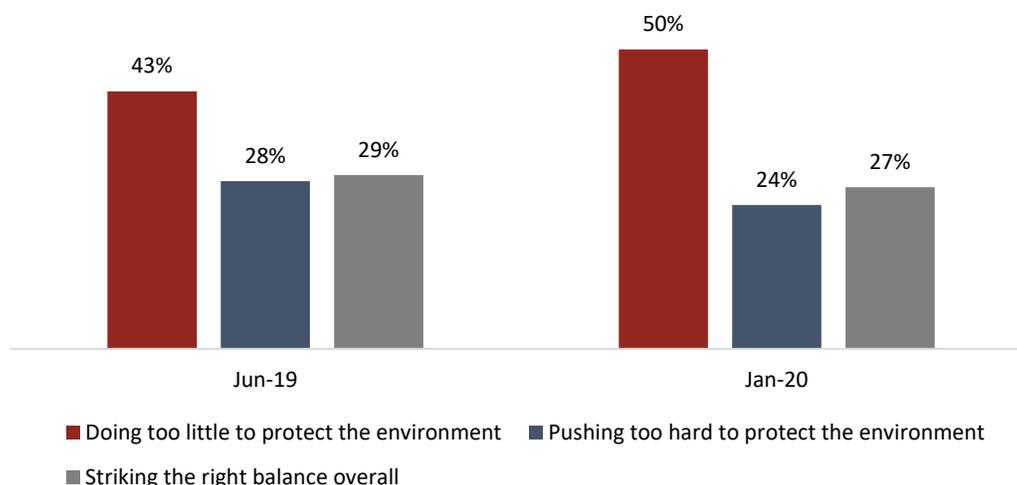
Concern over environment grows

One of the driving forces against the TMX is the sense that Canada needs to do more to combat climate change. Throughout 2019 Canadians consistently voiced that this was the [number one issue](#) facing the country, though it is worth noting that both climate change and oil and gas development, as incompatible as they may seem, were both high priorities during the election campaign.

Related: Majorities say both climate action, oil & gas growth should be top priorities

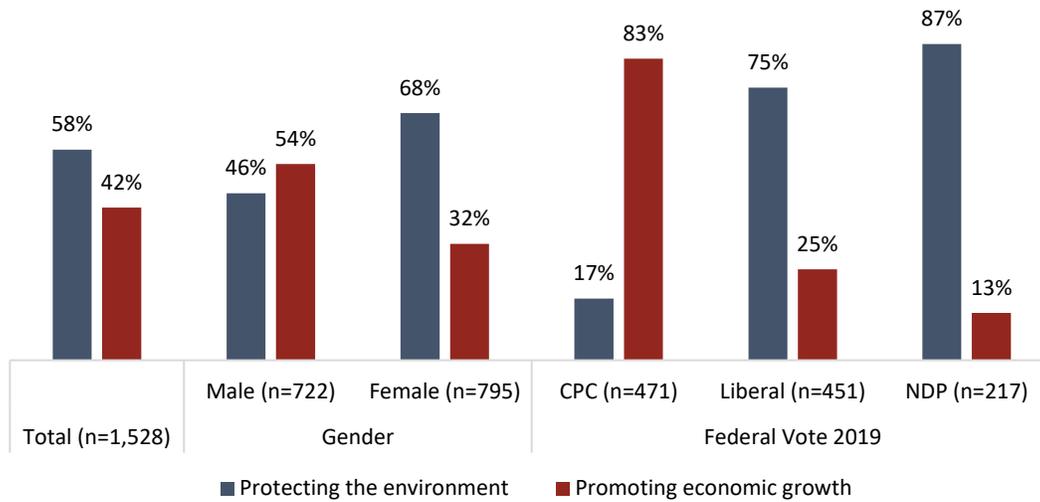
Underscoring the tension for the Liberal government in trying to balance these two files, half of Canadians now say that they are doing too little to protect the environment. The rest are divided between the view that the government is doing too much, or has struck the right balance:

And thinking about the approach the federal government has taken to environmental protection when it comes to pipelines and tankers, would you say it has been:



Overall, when asked to pick between the two policy areas of protecting the environment or promoting economic growth, six-in-ten Canadians (58%) lean toward the economic side of the debate. Views are distinct when comparing men and women as well as the political spectrum, as seen in the graph below:

And, in shaping Canada's energy policy, what do you see as the biggest priority?



For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).