

Coastal Gaslink Chaos: Two-in-five support protesters in natural gas project dispute; half support pipeline

Near-unanimous sentiment the pipeline will be built, regardless of protests and delays

February 13, 2020 – Disruptions, blockades and protests in cities [across the country](#) may have amplified the message of Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs opposed to a \$6.6 billion natural gas pipeline being built by Coastal Gaslink in their traditional territory in northern British Columbia, but how are they being received by the Canadian public?

From coast to coast railway access has been blocked and streets shut down [affecting thousands of travellers and threatening](#) to stop shipments of goods.

Now a new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds a country divided along political, regional and economic lines as they choose sides over the protests, the project itself, and how the company might proceed from here.

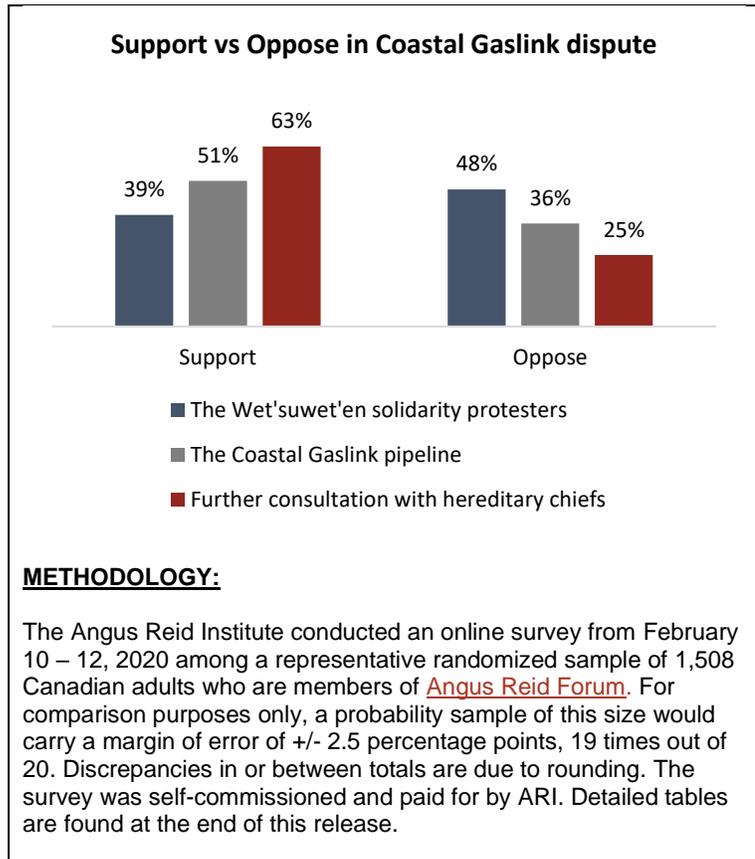
Two-in-five Canadians (39%) say they support the Wet'suwet'en solidarity protesters. These tend to be younger women, as well as those on the lower side of the income scale and those on the left of the political spectrum. Supporters of the protesters are also most likely to come from British Columbia and Quebec.

Meanwhile, a slight majority, 51 per cent, say that they support the Coastal Gaslink project itself. This includes majority support in every region of the country outside of Quebec. In each case, whether it's the protesters or the pipeline, Canadians are divided into two sizeable groups on each side of the issue.

TC Energy, the company that owns the pipeline, has agreements in place with all of the elected First Nation band councils, including Wet'suwet'en councils, along the pipeline route. Eight Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs, however, have not consented to use of their territory. Canadians are largely supportive of more discussions between the company and the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs.

More Key Findings:

- Canadians are relatively confident that the Coastal Gaslink pipeline will be completed. Just over half (57%) say that it will take longer because of the protests, but will probably still be completed, while 34 per cent have full confidence that it will go ahead regardless.



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- Awareness of the protests and the pipeline construction are high in British Columbia and Alberta, but drop to fewer than half of residents elsewhere in the country have been paying close attention

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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How many are following the protests?

The Coastal Gaslink pipeline was announced in October 2018 and, if completed, is anticipated to carry natural gas from an area around Dawson Creek to Kitimat on British Columbia's coast. While the project was subject to consultations with Indigenous groups and was approved by all 20 of the elected band councils along the pipeline route, it has given rise to tensions between legislated and traditional governance in Indigenous communities.

Several Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs, those whose titles are passed down through family across generations, are in disagreement with the band councils, in part because the councils are governance structures that were created with the Indian Act.

Wet'suwet'en members have built blockades and camps obstructing work crews from accessing parts of the pipeline route. Last December, the Supreme Court of British Columbia ruled that "while Wet'suwet'en customary laws clearly exist on their own independent footing, they are not recognized as being an effectual part of Canadian law".

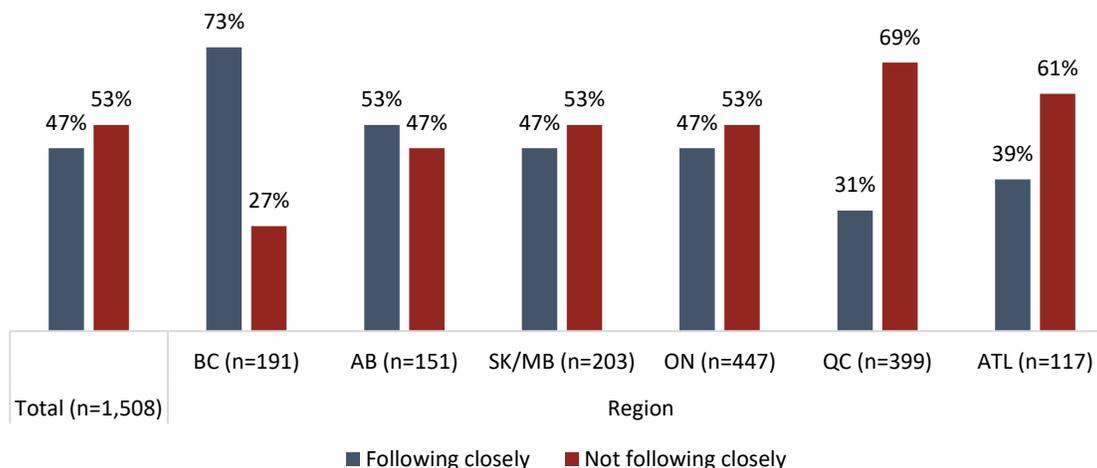
Subsequent talks between the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs and the B.C. government aimed to de-escalate the dispute ended February 5, and the RCMP moved forward with a court injunction to remove the blockade in days that followed, which included several arrests.

Awareness of these events appears regionally concentrated, with B.C. residents far outpacing the rest of the country. That said, close to half in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario have also been following closely:

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How closely have you been following these protests against the Coastal Gas Link pipeline?



Two-in-five support protesters

Before weighing in on their support or opposition with respect these events, respondents were given the following information about the dispute:

“The project has received approval from the B.C. government. 20 First Nations band councils support the project. Part of the pipeline route crosses the Wet’suwet’en First Nation’s traditional territory. Five of six band councils in the Wet’suwet’en nation are also in support. However, Wet’suwet’en hereditary chiefs oppose it. People across the country have blocked highways, ports and rail lines to protest the project and to support the hereditary chiefs.”

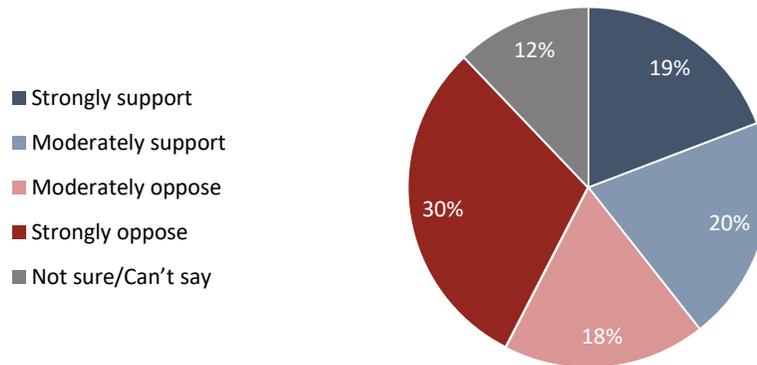
The protests have captured much of the nation’s attention, having [shut down](#) the provincial legislature in Victoria, B.C., and [blocked passenger trains along VIA rail lines](#) in major cities.

Public opinion, in fact, is quite fractured. 39 per cent side with the protesters, though they’re divided evenly on just how intense their support is, while 48 per cent oppose their actions:

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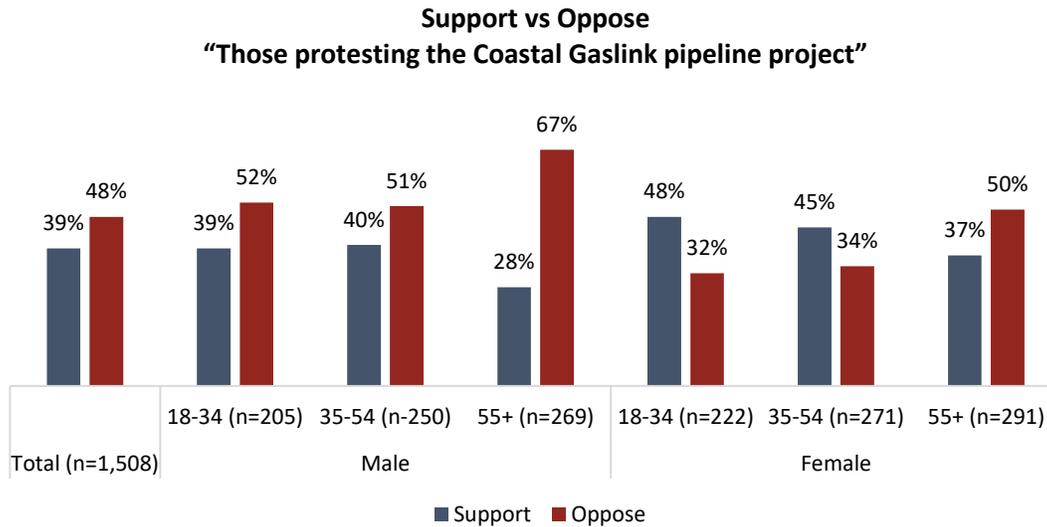
**Support vs Oppose
"Those protesting the Coastal Gaslink pipeline"**



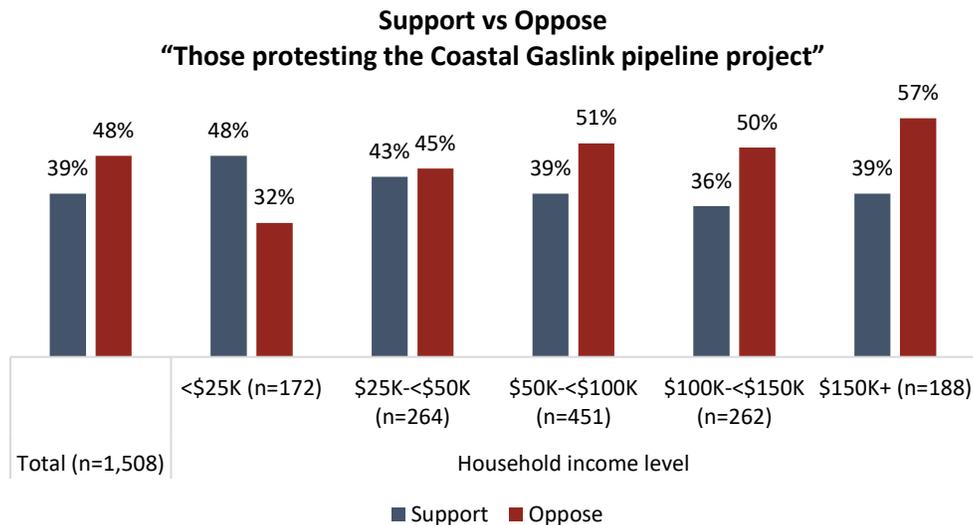
In the province at the heart of this dispute, British Columbia, residents are divided. Nearly half take each side of the debate, either supporting (46%) or opposing (49%) the actions of protesters standing with the Wet'suwet'en. A large number of B.C. residents are strongly opposed to the protests (36%). Ontario (40%) and Quebec (47%) residents are also more likely to sympathize with the protests while Albertans and prairie residents are largely opposed:

Support vs Oppose "Those protesting the Coastal Gaslink pipeline project" (Strong opinions over 20% are highlighted)							
	Total (1,508)	Region					
		BC (n=191)	AB (n=151)	SK/MB (n=203)	ON (n=447)	QC (n=399)	ATL (n=117)
Strongly support	19%	24%	11%	15%	19%	24%	18%
Moderately support	20%	22%	8%	16%	21%	23%	22%
Moderately oppose	18%	13%	15%	20%	20%	19%	21%
Strongly oppose	30%	36%	59%	38%	26%	18%	24%
Not sure/Can't say	12%	6%	6%	11%	14%	17%	15%

Gender appears to play more of a factor than age in supporting the actions of protesters than age. In each age category women are more likely than men to say that they support this group:



Income level also plays a role in public opinion. Lower-income residents are more likely to support the protesters than those with higher levels of household wealth:



Greater number support the pipeline

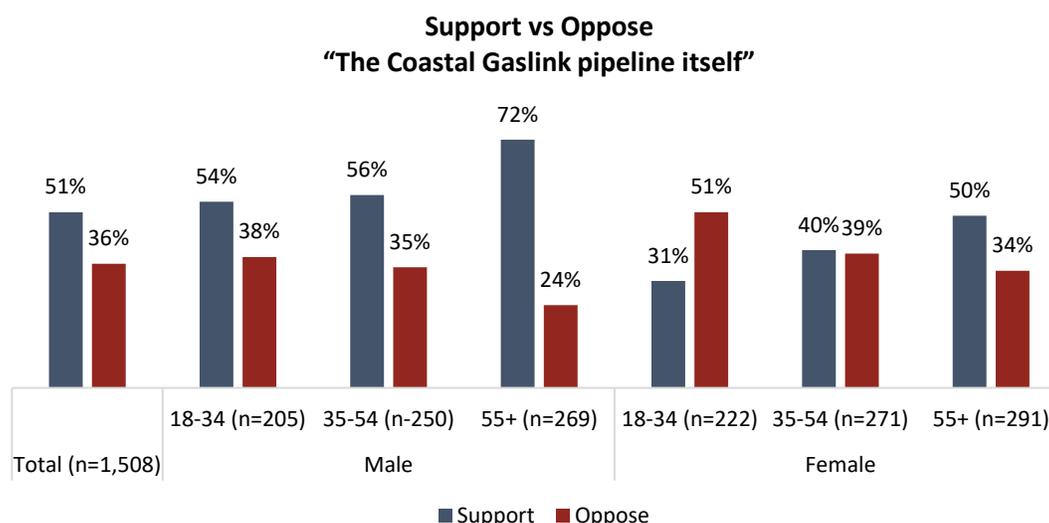
The project at the centre of the controversy is the Coastal Gaslink pipeline which would transfer natural gas from an area close to Dawson Creek to the B.C. coast at Kitimat. The project is a part of the B.C. governments liquified natural gas program, which includes the construction of a [\\$40 billion LNG plant](#) in Kitimat which would liquefy the gas for export.

Support for the pipeline project is significantly higher than support for the protesters and reaches a slight majority (51%), including 52 per cent of B.C. residents. Majorities in all regions outside of Quebec support the project, with Albertans and prairie residents particularly vehement.

The most significant opposition are found in British Columbia (43%) and Quebec (48%).

Support vs Oppose “The Coastal Gaslink pipeline itself” (Strong opinions over 20% are highlighted)							
	Total (1,508)	Region					
		BC (n=191)	AB (n=151)	SK/MB (n=203)	ON (n=447)	QC (n=399)	ATL (n=117)
Strongly support	24%	31%	51%	36%	20%	10%	27%
Moderately support	27%	21%	27%	27%	33%	22%	27%
Moderately oppose	17%	17%	8%	15%	19%	18%	17%
Strongly oppose	19%	26%	7%	11%	16%	30%	15%
Not sure/Can't say	13%	5%	7%	11%	13%	20%	14%

Age and gender splits are again illuminating. Fully half of younger women oppose the project (51%), while support rises with age. Men 55 years of age and older are most likely to support the project – seven-in-ten (72%) do.



Political parameters

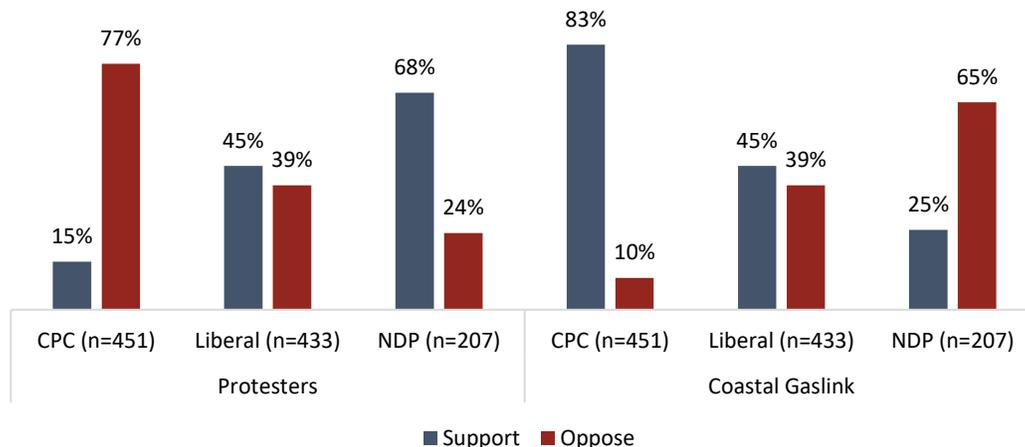
Notably, those who cast ballots in 2019 for Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s Liberals are close to equally likely to support both the protesters and the pipeline, 45 per cent support each and 39 per cent oppose each. His supporters are largely at odds with those who voted for the CPC in the October election, who

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overwhelmingly support the pipeline but not the protests, and NDP voters, who take an opposing stance, as seen in the graph below:

Support levels for each by federal vote 2019

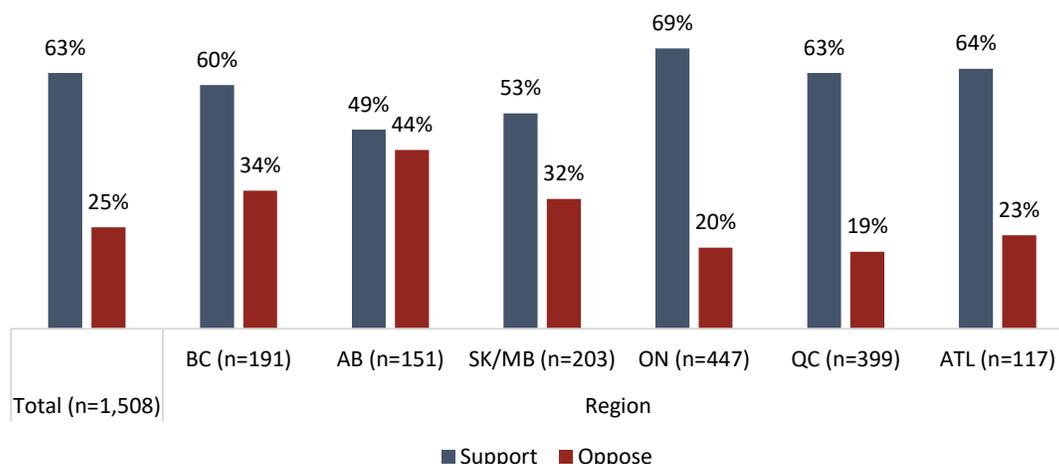


Two-thirds support more consultation with hereditary chiefs

As noted previously, consultations with Wet’suwet’en hereditary chiefs aimed to de-escalate the dispute ended on February 5, leading the RCMP to move forward with the court injunction in days that followed. Some have called for the Prime Minister to sit with the hereditary chiefs but Justin Trudeau has maintained that this is a provincial issue and should be resolved by the provincial government. If indeed there are more discussions to be had, most Canadians feel this is an appropriate avenue to follow.

Six-in-ten (63%) support more discussions on a path to resolution, while just one-quarter say they oppose this (25%). Support outpaces opposition in every region, but is particularly strong in Ontario:

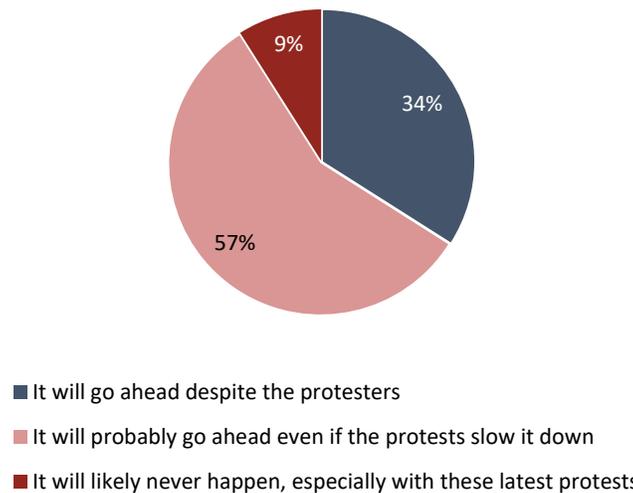
**Support vs Oppose
"Further consultation with hereditary chiefs"**



Few expect project to be stopped

Most Canadians say they anticipate this pipeline project being completed, however long that takes. One-in-three are confident it will move forward (34%) while the majority say it will “probably” happen, even if these protests slow it down. Just one-in-ten Canadians (9%) feel the project will be blocked and never built:

And, what do you think will ultimately happen with the Coastal Gas Link pipeline?



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

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