

## Half of Canadians call for patience; half support use of force to remove anti-CGL blockades

*Near-unanimous views that both Indigenous reconciliation & economy suffering due to blockade saga*

**February 27, 2020** – As mass arrests and burning tires along rail lines define the state of developments in a country-wide series of blockades in protest against a \$6.6 billion natural gas pipeline being built by Coastal Gaslink in northern BC, Canadians are profoundly divided over how to handle the situation.

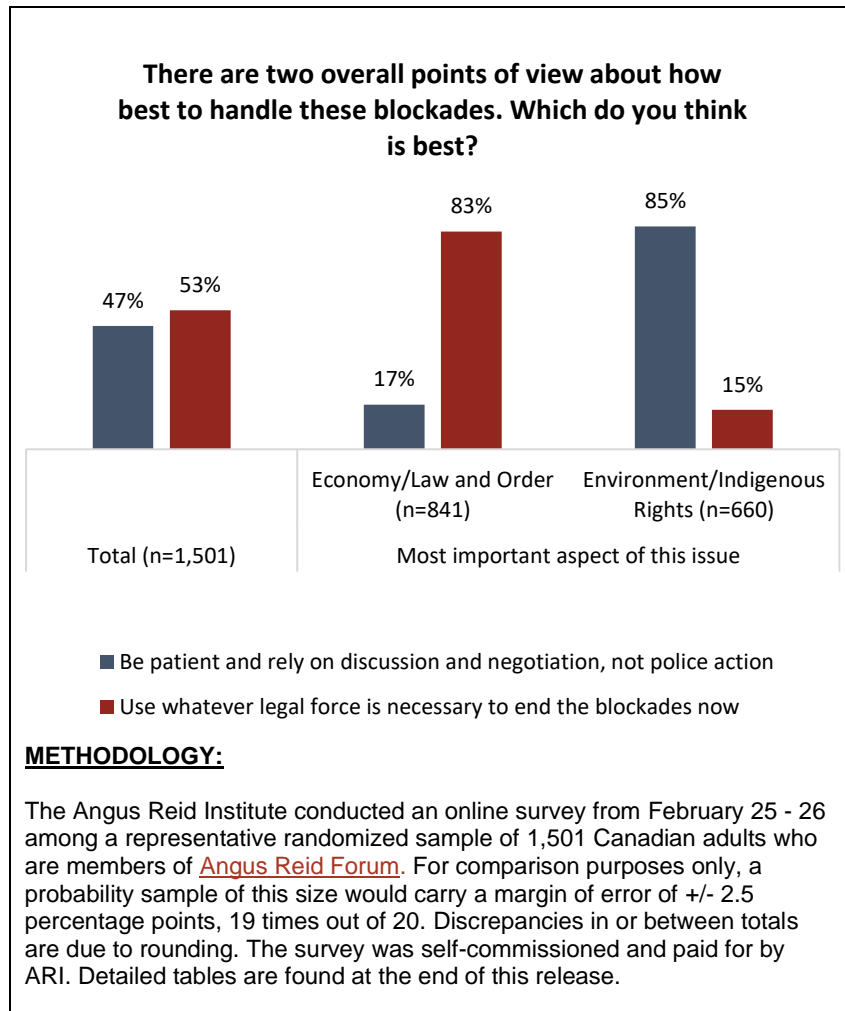
A new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute, conducted February 25-26, finds nearly half (47%) say patience and dialogue with those opposed to the project is the best way to resolution. The other half (53%), however, say that these blockades should be brought down using whatever force is necessary.

These two perspectives strongly correlate with lines of demarcation over what Canadians believe to be the most important aspect of the ongoing conflict. Just over half (56%) say it is economic issues or the rule of law. Just under half (44%) instead say the most important aspects are either Indigenous or environmental issues. Each takes a markedly different view of how the blockades should be handled.

Whatever side of the issue they are on, Canadians agree that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has not handled the crisis well. Just one-in-five Canadians (21%) say that the Prime Minister has done a good job (a mere three per cent say “very good”).

### More Key Findings:

- Canadians overwhelmingly feel that this saga has been a step backward for relations between Canada and Indigenous peoples. 80 per cent feel that reconciliation has been negatively affected by the ongoing events



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- There is also a sense that these blockades have done damage to Canada's reputation as a place for investment. 78 per cent of Canadians feel the blockades have hurt this aspect of the country
- Six-in-ten Canadians (62%) say that the blockades that have been erected in recent weeks are out of line, and not a legitimate way to protest. That said, nearly the same number of Canadians feel that protesters are genuine (56%)
- Support for the Coastal Gaslink project has grown over the past two weeks, rising from 51 per cent in early February to 61 per cent now

### **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.*

### **INDEX:**

#### **Part One: Coastal GasLink Crisis**

- **Split over what the situation is about**
- **Forceful eviction or patient dialogue?**
- **Most say the protesters are genuine**

#### **Part Two: Indigenous authority, impact on reconciliation**

- **Who should have the final say?**
- **Most say reconciliation being hindered**

#### **Part Three: Trudeau perceived poorly**

- **PM not alone in negative assessment**
- **Economy, investment being hurt**

#### **Part Four: Support for Coastal Gaslink rises**

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**Part One: Coastal GasLink Crisis**

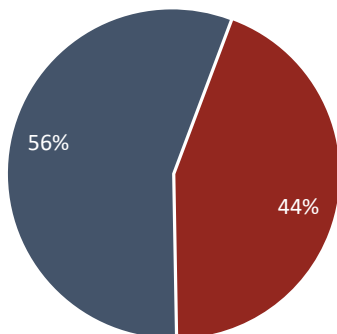
**Split over what the situation is about**

Disruptions, blockades and protests in cities across the country have amplified the message of Wet’suwet’en hereditary chiefs opposed to a \$6.6 billion natural gas pipeline being built by Coastal Gaslink and running through their traditional territory in northern British Columbia. 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.

As many blockades have persisted, and some have been torn down, Canadians, themselves have largely entered into their own camps in public opinion terms around the complex relationship in this country between provincial, federal and Indigenous governance.

The Angus Reid Institute asked Canadians which aspect of this discussion is most important for them and finds that just over half (56%) say that this is an issue that is either primarily centered on the economy or the rule of law, while fewer, but still close to half (44%), say that the most important aspects of the discussion are Indigenous rights or the environment:

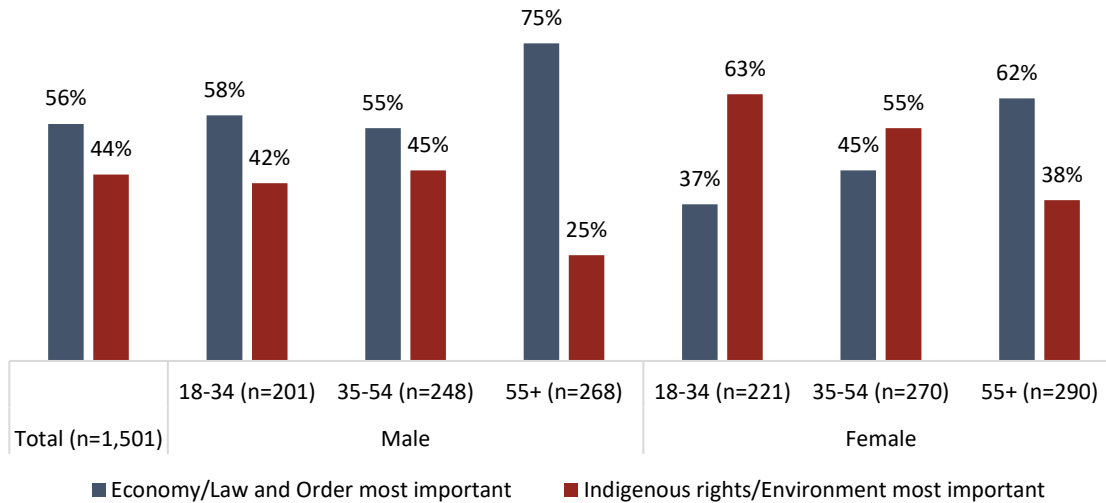
**In thinking about this whole topic we’ve been talking about, what for you is the MOST important issue involved?**



■ Net: Economy/Law and Order    ■ Net: Indigenous rights/Environment

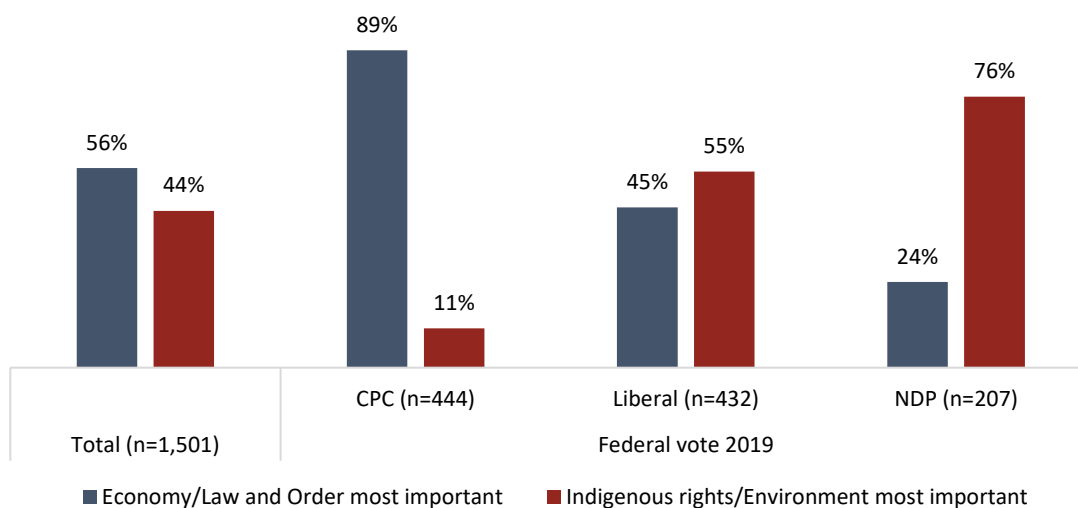
Each side is comprised of diverse demographic populations within the country such as age, gender, income and region. That said, men, particularly those 55 years of age and over, are most likely to view this debate through the lens of the economy or rule of law. By contrast, women under the age of 55 lean the other way, and view Indigenous rights or the environment as the key issues:

**In thinking about this whole topic we've been talking about, what for you is the MOST important issue involved?**



From a political standpoint, nearly all 2019 CPC supporters say that these are economic or rule of law issues, while past New Democrat supporters lean heavily the other way. For those who supported the Liberal Party, there is a near fifty-fifty split, suggesting that whichever way the government leans, they are likely to agitate a significant portion of their base:

**In thinking about this whole topic we've been talking about, what for you is the MOST important issue involved?**



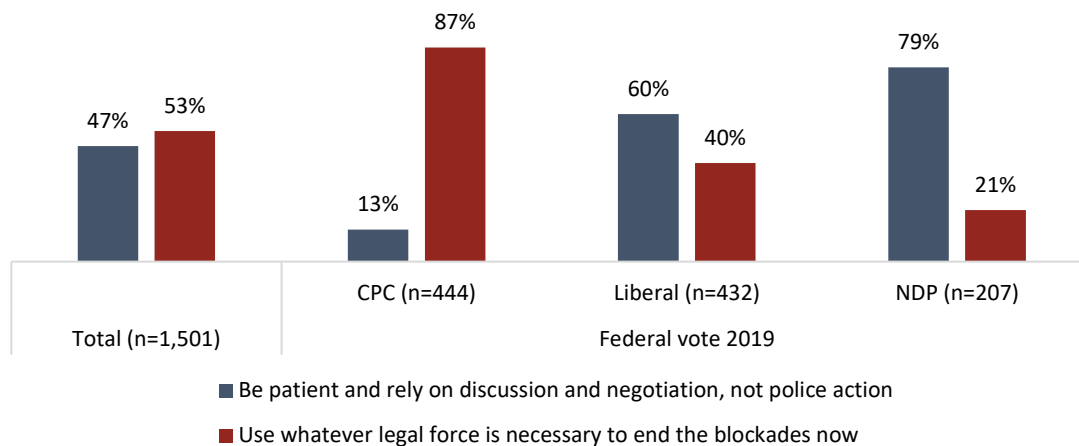
**Forceful eviction or patient dialogue?**

There has been no shortage of [commentary](#) in the public forum about how the Coastal Gaslink and Wet’suwet’en protests should be resolved. Wet’suwet’en members have [built blockades and camps](#) obstructing work crews from accessing parts of the pipeline route, while other blockades have been set up across the country to [disrupt transit and railway service](#).

The federal government has urged patience and dialogue in order to resolve the blockades, while some leaders, such as Alberta Premier Jason Kenney have chided the government for not pushing for more forceful resolution.

For their part, Canadians are almost as equally likely to take each side of this debate. Half say that patience should be promoted in dealing with the protests and the issues underpinning them, while half say that whatever force is necessary should be implemented to tear down blockades. Opinions on this are remarkably divergent based on political affiliation. Past Liberal voters lean slightly toward patience, while past Conservatives and NDP voters disagree by a wide margin on opposite sides of the debate:

**There are two overall points of view about how best to handle these blockades. Which do you think is best?**



There are considerable generational, gender and economic aspects to this debate. Consider the question of whether or not these blockades are a legitimate form of protest, even if they cause disruption to people and the economy, or if they are out of line. Two-in-five Canadians (38%) feel they are, indeed, legitimate, even if they cause disruption. This group is made up of younger people, who are more likely to be women than men, and Canadians on the lower end of the household income spectrum.

The three-in-five (62%) who say these protests are out of line tend to be older, more male than female, and wealthier.

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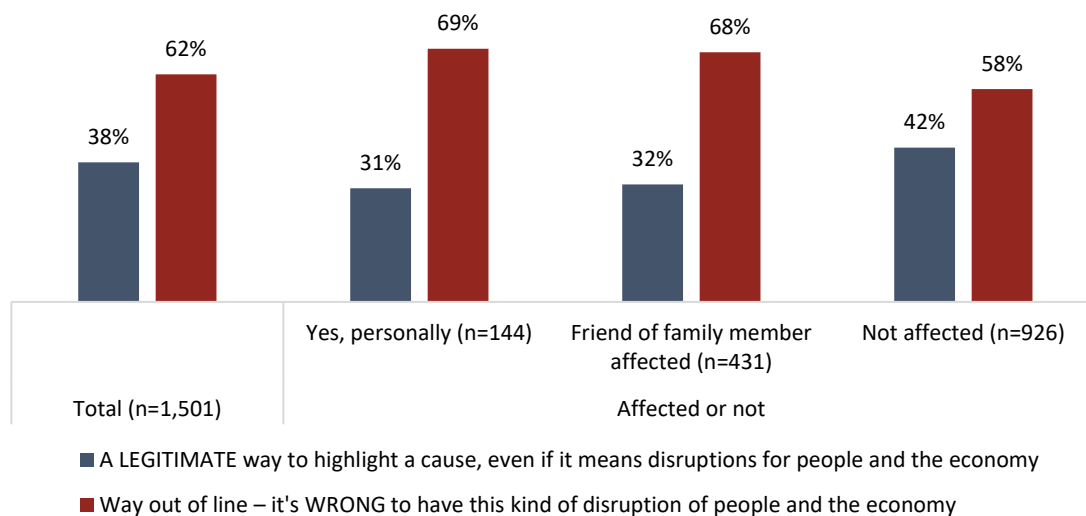
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**Which of the following best describes your own view? (Even if neither is exactly how you feel, which is closer to your view?). These blockades are:**

	Total (1,501)	Male			Female		
		18-34	35-54	55+	18-34	35-54	55+
A legitimate way to highlight a cause	38%	41%	41%	21%	59%	45%	27%
Way out of line	62%	59%	59%	79%	41%	55%	73%
	Total (1,501)	Household Income level					
		Less than \$25K	\$25K-49K	\$50K-\$99K	\$100K-\$149K	More than \$150K	
A legitimate way to highlight a cause	38%	54%	45%	40%	33%	34%	
Way out of line	62%	46%	55%	60%	67%	66%	

About one-in-ten people (10%) say they have been personally affected in some way by the disruptions, while three-in-ten (29%) say a friend or family member has been. Those who have been affected, or know someone who has, are more likely to say that they feel these protests are out of line. Meanwhile, two-in-five (42%) of those who have not been affected say they feel the protests are legitimate:

**These blockades are:**



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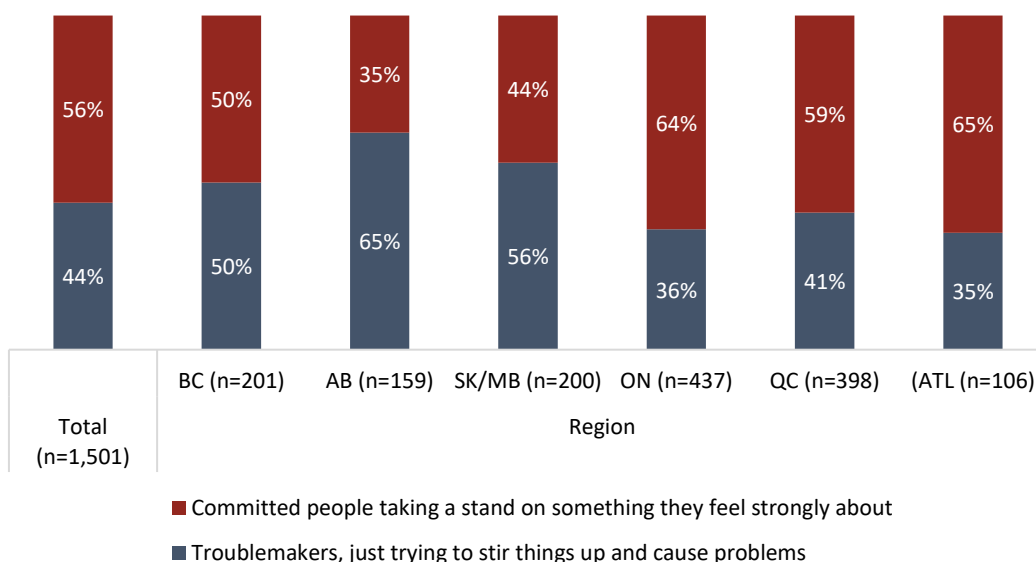
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**Most say the protesters are genuine**

The age, gender and income splits seen on the previous question are similar with respect to another question about the motivation of protesters. Young people and women are more likely to say that these protesters are genuine, while older and wealthier respondents lean toward saying that they are just trying to cause trouble ([see detailed tables](#)).

Regionally, residents in the eastern portion of the country, those in Ontario, Quebec and Atlantic Canada, are considerably more likely to believe that the protesters are committed and taking a stand on something they feel strongly about:

**Thinking of the people participating in these blockades, would you say they are mostly:**



**Part Two: Indigenous authority, impact on reconciliation**

While the Coastal Gaslink 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. As such, some people say that authority should fall to hereditary chiefs rather than the elected councils.

**Who should have the final say?**

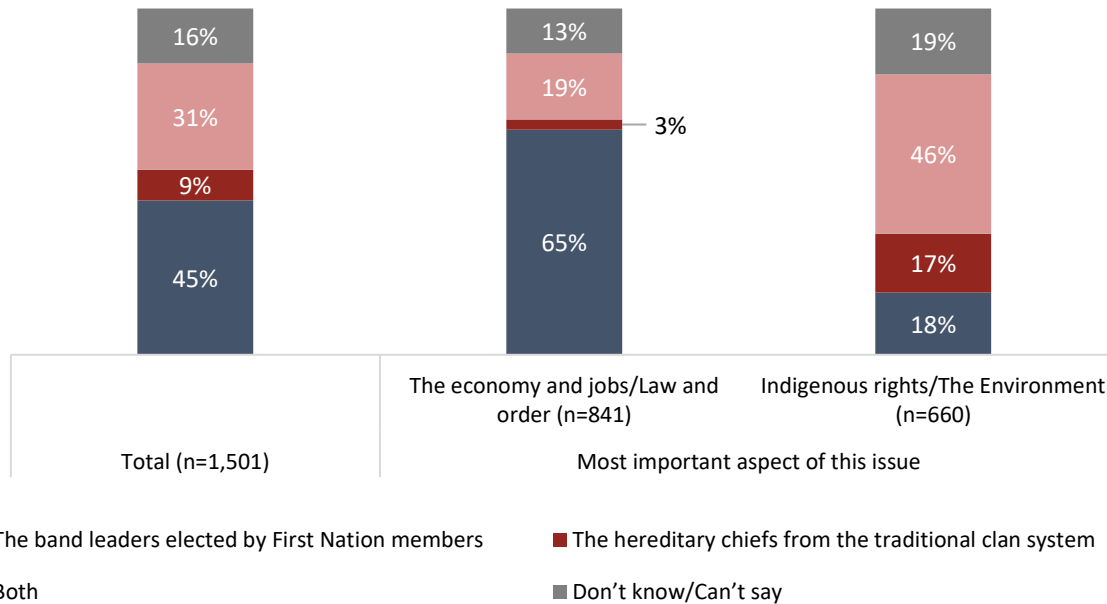
Canadians, again, are divided on this issue. Asked who they’d consider most authorized to speak for the Wet’suwet’en, based on what they know of the situation, most lean toward the elected councils of band leaders (45%). One-in-ten (9%) say that the hereditary chiefs should have the final say, while three-in-ten (31%) say they should play an equal role in discussion alongside the elected leaders.

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That said, a person’s opinion on this question depends heavily on what they believe this saga is about. Those who say these are environmental or Indigenous issues to resolve lean heavily toward including all voices, while those concerned about the economy and rule of law would leave this decision up to the elected band leaders:

**If it was your call to make, who would you consider most authorized to speak for the Wet’suwet’en people on this issue?**



Men of all ages and women 55 years of age and over, as well as those on the higher end of the household income spectrum, tend to lean toward considering elected band leaders as having the most authority. Lower income Canadians are most likely to say that the decision should be up to either the hereditary chiefs, or both groups:



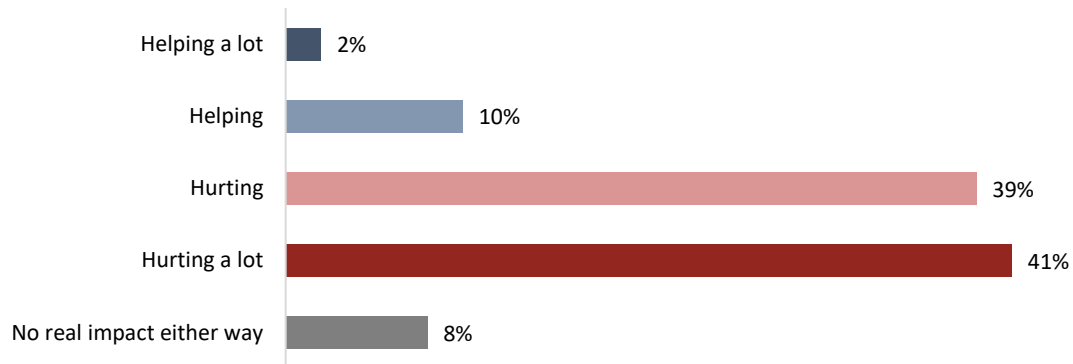
**If it was your call to make, who would you consider most authorized to speak for the Wet'suwet'en people on this issue?**

	Total (1,501)	Male			Female		
		18-34	35-54	55+	18-34	35-54	55+
The band leaders elected by First Nation members	45%	48%	49%	59%	29%	33%	49%
The hereditary chiefs from the traditional clan system	9%	7%	10%	8%	13%	12%	5%
Both	31%	28%	30%	25%	33%	33%	35%
Not sure/Can't say	16%	16%	11%	9%	25%	22%	11%
		Household Income level					
	Total (1,501)	Less than \$25K	\$25K-49K	\$50K-\$99K	\$100K-\$149K	More than \$150K	
The band leaders elected by First Nation members	45%	30%	36%	46%	49%	65%	
The hereditary chiefs from the traditional clan system	9%	18%	10%	10%	7%	6%	
Both	31%	36%	36%	29%	32%	18%	
Not sure/Can't say	16%	15%	18%	15%	13%	11%	

**Most say reconciliation being hindered**

Most Canadians feel that the way this ordeal has been handled has hindered the process of reconciliation. Four-in-five (80%) say that overall, the relationship between Indigenous peoples and Canada has come out worse after the events of the last several weeks, while just 12 per cent see this positively:

**Overall, are the blockades helping or hurting: Reconciliation and the overall relationship between Indigenous and other Canadians?  
(All respondents, n=1,501)**

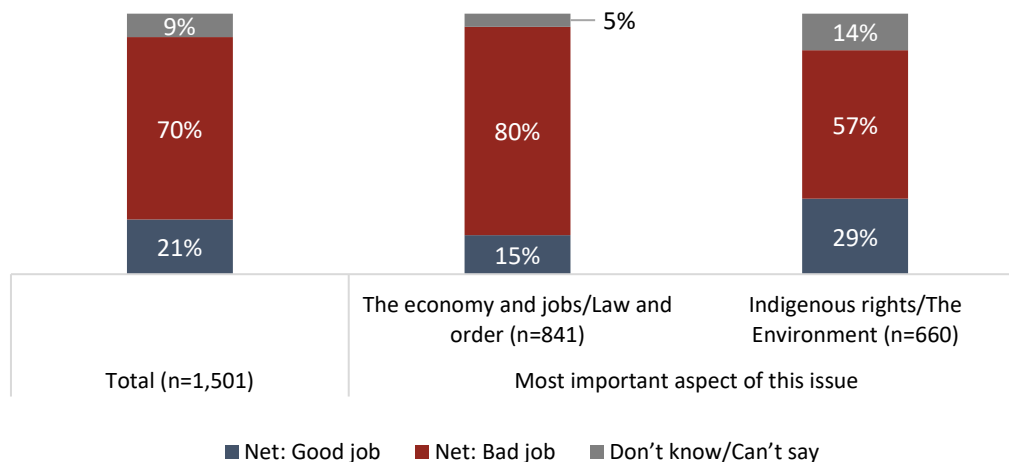


**Part Three: Trudeau perceived poorly**

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has stated that he is ready to talk to the hereditary leadership, but he has also said that the blockades must come down. Trudeau has faced an onslaught of criticism from Conservative leaders, both provincial and federal about his leadership during the protests, and it appears that Canadians are inclined to agree that he has not performed well.

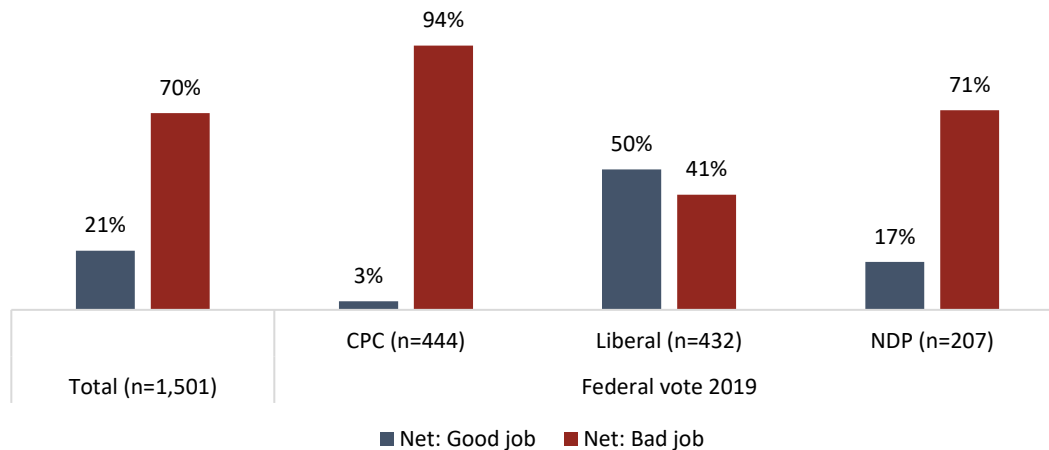
Just one-in-five Canadians overall (21%) say that the Prime Minister has handled this situation well, and it appears that he is losing on both sides of the debate. Among those who say this issue is about the economy and rule of law, 15 per cent say he has handled it well. Among those who say this issue is about the environment and Indigenous rights, a greater number, but still just 29 per cent, say that he has done a good job.

**Doing a good or bad job handling this whole issue regarding the Coastal GasLink project and the protest blockades against it? - "Prime Minister Justin Trudeau"**



Trudeau's own recent supporters, those who voted for the Liberals in the 2019 federal election, are more positive in their assessment of his actions. Half (50%) say he has done a good job, but still two-in-five (41%) disagree. Negative appraisal is rampant among past CPC and NDP voters:

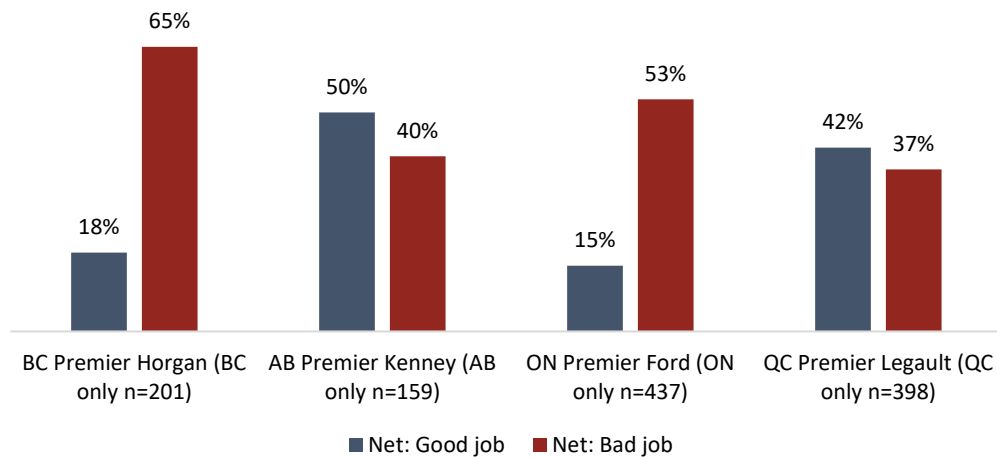
**Doing a good or bad job handling this whole issue regarding the Coastal GasLink project and the protest blockades against it? - "Prime Minister Justin Trudeau"**



**PM not alone in negative assessment**

Trudeau is not alone, however, in garnering negative reviews from the public. Few British Columbians feel that their Premier John Horgan has done a good job (18%). The same can be said of Doug Ford in Ontario (15% of Ontarians say he has done a good job). One leader who does stand out as receiving more praise from his constituents is Alberta's Jason Kenney. Half of residents in Alberta (50%) give him positive reviews compared to 40 per cent who say he has done poorly. In Quebec, residents are divided about how Francois Legault has performed. Legault drew condemnation from Mohawk leadership this week for suggesting that there are dangerous assault rifles among the protesters at the rail blockade in Kahnawake in Quebec:

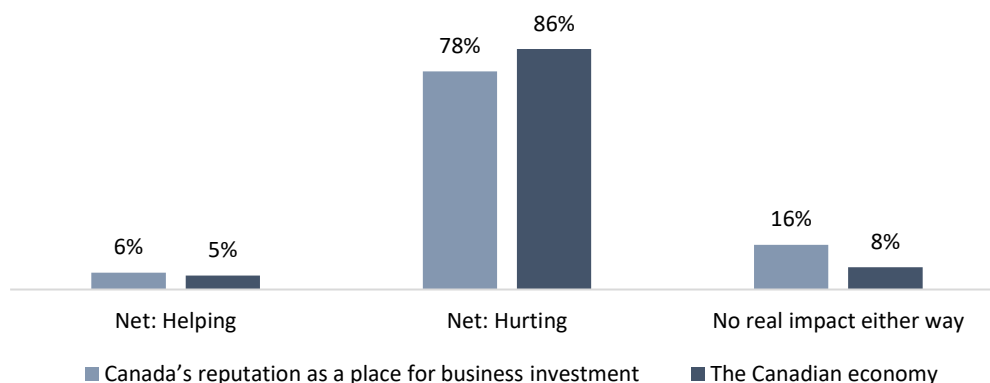
**Is your Premier doing a good or bad job handling this whole issue regarding the Coastal GasLink project and the protest blockades against it?**



**Economy, investment being hurt**

As previously noted, the sense among Canadians is that reconciliation efforts have been hurt by this affair. That negative sentiment extends to the economic aspects of this debate as well. Minister of Transport Marc Garneau stated that it will be weeks before the economic impact of the blockade will truly be known but nearly nine-in-ten (86%) Canadians say they feel the economy has been hurt. The longer-term aspect of this, Canada’s reputation as a place for investment, is also perceived as being hurt by the prolonged blockades.

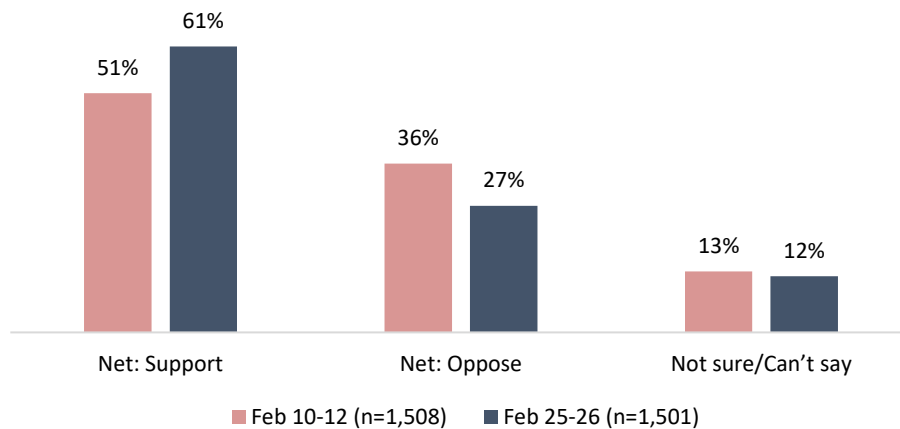
**Overall, are the blockades helping or hurting:  
(All respondents, n=1,501)**



**Part Four: Support for Coastal Gaslink rises**

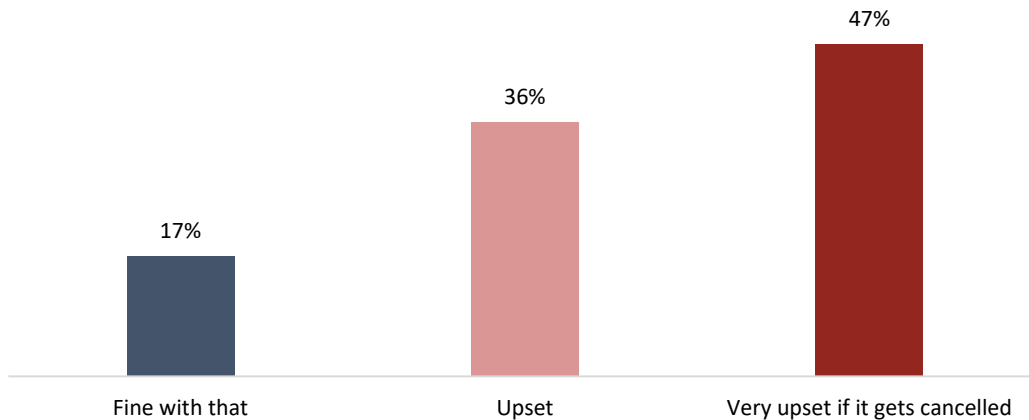
So, what does this all mean for the project at the heart of the dispute? Support for the Coastal Gaslink pipeline has risen. Two weeks ago, half of Canadians supported the project. Now, that support has risen 10 points to 61 per cent.

**Based on what you have seen, read or heard, do you support or oppose the Coastal GasLink project itself?**



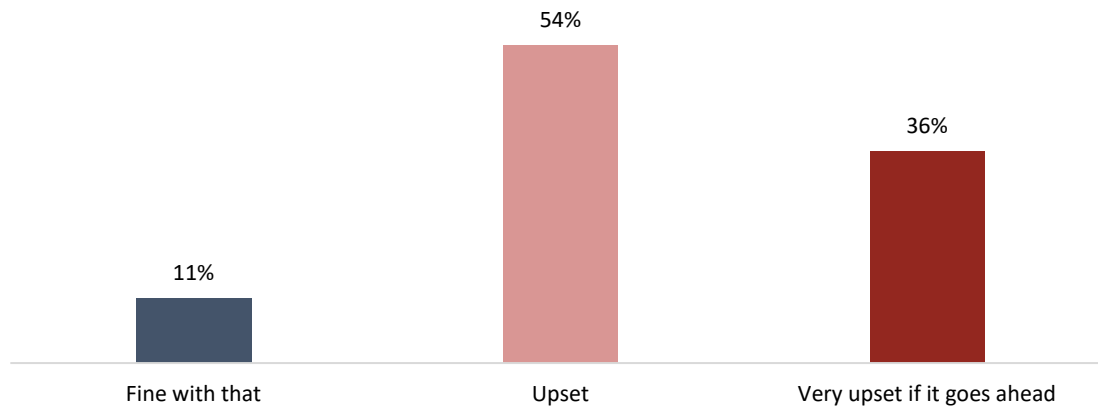
The Angus Reid Institute asked both supporters and opponents how they would feel if their preferred path for the project did not materialize. That is, how would supporters feel if it was scrapped, and how would opponents feel if it was completed? Interestingly, close to one-in-five supporters (17%) say they would be fine with the project not going forward, though half (47%) would be very upset.

**Suppose the whole Coastal GasLink project is eventually cancelled and never happens. What would be your reaction to that outcome? (Among supporters of the project, n=919)**



Meanwhile, opponents are less likely to be very upset if the project is completed, but more likely to be disappointed.

Suppose the whole Coastal GasLink project does go ahead and gets built and becomes operational. What would be your reaction to that outcome?  
(Among opponents of the project, n=409)



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

*For detailed results by those personally affected by the blockade, [click here](#).*

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