

Pipelines, Paris and cross-border politics: US energy policies leave Canadians divided over how to respond

Most want Canada to maintain its climate commitments, even if U.S. pulls out of Paris Agreement

March 9, 2017 – With Alberta Premier Rachel Notley in Houston this week for North America’s largest energy industry conference, and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau [slated to join her](#), a new public opinion poll from the Angus Reid Institute finds Canadians largely supportive of renewed efforts to build the Keystone XL pipeline from Alberta to the U.S. Gulf Coast.

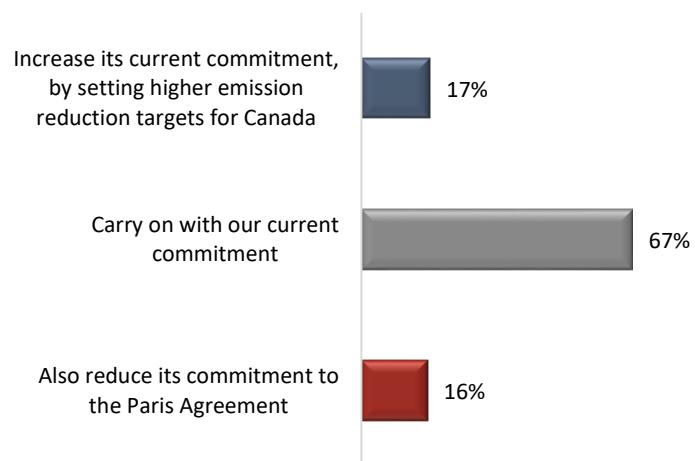
However, this study – the second installment of a three-part examination of the Canada-U.S. relationship in the Trump era – finds Canadians much less supportive of U.S. President Donald Trump’s stated intention to withdraw his country from the 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

Two-thirds of Canadians say they want their own country to carry on with its current commitment to Paris, even if the U.S. withdraws. This belief is considerably weaker in Notley’s Alberta, which is also the region that voices strongest support for building Keystone.

Key Findings:

- Half (48%) of Canadians say they support the Keystone XL pipeline while one-third (33%) oppose. Support reaches three-quarters (77%) in Alberta and drops to 36 per cent in Quebec.
- Canadians say the prospect of the U.S. leaving the Paris Accord is a “very bad idea” three-to-one over those who say it would be good (45% versus 16%). Overall, 67 per cent say it would be either a bad or very bad decision
- Two-thirds (67%) say Canada should continue with its current commitment to the Paris Accord, even if the U.S. reneges

Suppose the U.S. decides to reduce its commitment to the Paris Agreement or to withdraw altogether. If that were the case, what would you like to see Canada do?



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from February 16 - 22 among a representative randomized sample of 1515 Canadian adults who are members of the [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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In [part one](#) of this three-part series gauging public opinion regarding the Canadian approach to the new U.S. administration, the Angus Reid Institute found at least moderate confidence among six-in-ten Canadians that the Trudeau government will be able to effectively represent this country's national interests in Canada-U.S. dealings over the next few years. Many of the key issues these two governments will be negotiating in the coming years will involve energy policy and the environment – the focus of this second installment.

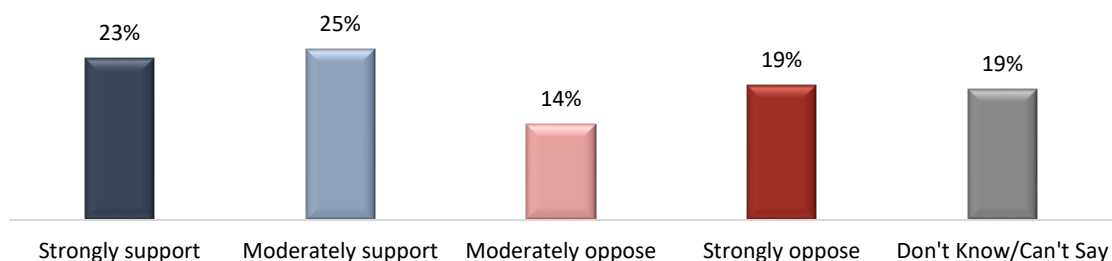
Keystone: Pipeline's supporters outnumber its opponents

In an executive order signed during his first week in office, Trump called for the reconsideration of the Keystone XL pipeline, which was first proposed nearly a decade ago, but was [rejected by the Obama administration](#) in late 2015.

Keystone underscores the realities of the resource dependent Canadian economy. Past ARI polling has found [the public divided](#) as to whether the environment (53%) or the economy (47%) should take precedence in conversations about Canada's energy policy. On Keystone, a 2015 ARI poll [found similar divisions](#) – along partisan lines – as to whether their government should support or oppose the pipeline (53% said government should support it; 47% said the opposite).

Asked a similar question today about whether they personally support or oppose the pipeline, which would carry crude oil from Alberta's oil sands to refineries on the U.S. Gulf Coast, roughly half of Canadians (48%) say they support it. One-in-three (33%) are opposed, and the rest – a substantial one-in-five (19%) – are unsure. Notably, the number of Canadians with hard-line opinions on this issue are not that far apart. Just over one-in-five (23%) say they strongly support the pipeline, while just under that number (19%) say they strongly oppose it:

A Trump executive order calls for the reconsideration of the Keystone XL pipeline. Based on whatever you have seen, read, or heard about the project, would you say you support or oppose the Keystone XL pipeline?



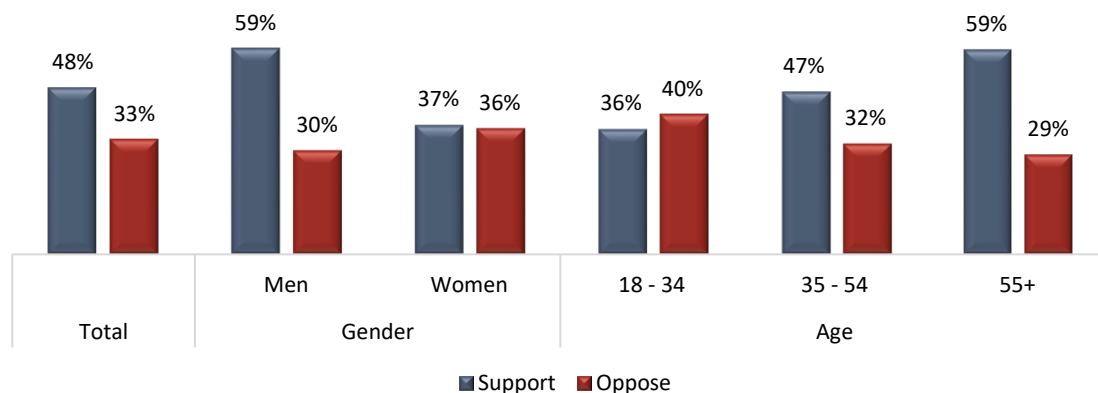
It's worth noting that support for other pipeline projects – specifically Northern Gateway and TransMountain – has hovered [closer to four-in-ten](#) in previous ARI polls.

Higher support for Keystone XL may reflect a growing desire to give Alberta an economic boost after Canadians have watched the province suffer in recent years, or an increasing acceptance of [the relative safety](#) of shipping oil by pipeline rather than by rail. Whatever the reason for it, public support for Keystone reflects the views of the current Canadian government. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau [welcomed Trump's decision](#) to reopen discussions about the pipeline.

On the other side of the border, American support for the Keystone Pipeline has been steadily declining [over the past five years](#). While two-thirds (66%) supported the project in 2013, that number dropped to 59 per cent in mid-2014, and to just four-in-ten (42%) by February of this year. More U.S. residents now stand in opposition to the project (48%) than support it.

Age and gender seem to play a role in shaping opinion on this question in Canada. Younger Canadians are more likely to oppose the project than to support it, and women are evenly split, while men and older age groups tilt more dramatically toward support for Keystone XL:

A Trump executive order calls for the reconsideration of the Keystone XL pipeline. Based on whatever you have seen or heard about the project, would you say you support or oppose it?



Paris: Canadians want to stay in, even if the U.S. leaves

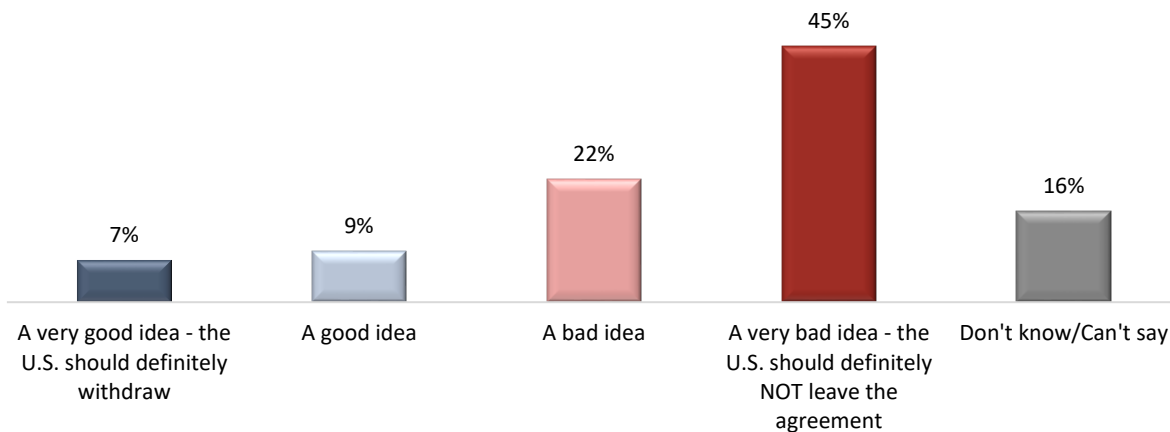
While the Obama administration made fighting climate change a lynchpin of its policy portfolio, the Trump administration has in many ways made a U-turn. The new leadership removed the section on climate change from the Environmental Protection Agency website, introduced an executive order to remove what Trump calls [onerous clean water regulations](#), and signaled that it intends to [pull out of the Paris agreement](#).

Previous Angus Reid Institute polling has [found](#) nearly seven-in-ten Canadians support their country's participation in the Paris agreement, and this poll finds a similar number of Canadians (67%) saying it would be a bad idea for the United States to withdraw from the climate pact.

U.S. withdrawal would hamper the deal, though it would not defeat it entirely. The [accord requires](#) a minimum of 55 nations representing at least 55 per cent of global emissions. Without the U.S. (17 per cent of [total global emissions](#)) both bars would still be cleared. And while some may suggest other nations [would not comply](#) with the U.S. out of the fold, others say the deal would continue, with China – which is heavily invested in the renewable energy industry – [taking over](#) the American leadership role.

Twice as many Canadians say it would be “a very bad idea” for the U.S. to leave (45%) as say it would be merely a “bad idea” (22%), and nearly seven times as many as those who say it would be a “very good idea” (7%):

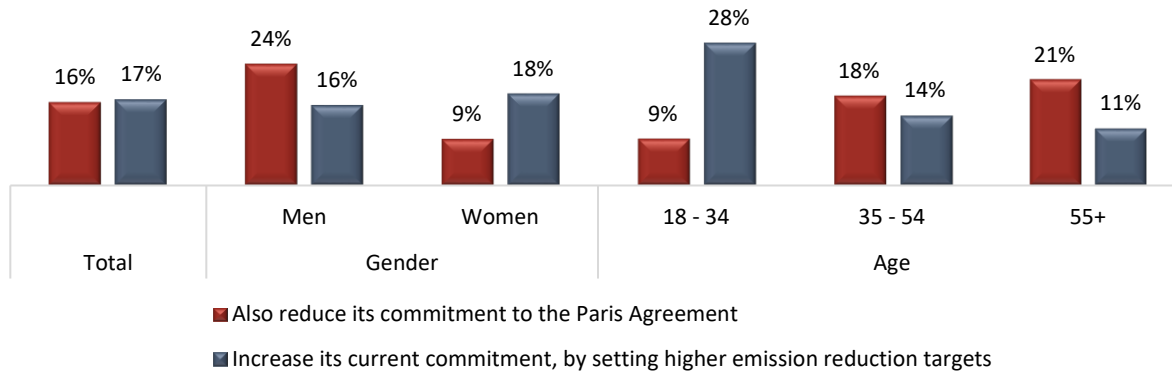
The new U.S. government may not follow through on the reduced emissions targets set in the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Do you think the U.S. withdrawing from the Paris Agreement is:



If the U.S. *does* end up withdrawing from the Paris Accord, a clear majority of Canadians agree as to how their own government should respond. Fully two-thirds (67%) say Canada should carry on with its current commitment to the agreement if the U.S. reduces its own. The rest are evenly split between believing Canada should also pull back from the deal (16%) and believing it should commit to more ambitious targets for reducing carbon emissions (17%).

Again, there are some significant age and gender differences on this question, with men almost three times as likely as women to say Canada should follow suit if the U.S. reduces its commitment to Paris. Respondents ages 18 – 34, meanwhile, are twice as likely as those in other age groups to favour an increased commitment:

Suppose the U.S. does decide to reduce its commitment to the Paris Agreement or to withdraw from it altogether. If that were the case, what would you like to see Canada do? Would you say Canada should:



Canada already faces a “[herculean challenge](#)” in meeting its greenhouse gas reduction targets, and some observers – including interim Conservative Party leader [Rona Ambrose](#) and the [Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers](#) – note the disadvantage this country may face if U.S. producers are playing by a more forgiving set of rules. With the new President looking [to dismantle the Environmental Protection Agency](#) and leave the Paris Accord, lower regulatory costs in the U.S. may create more burdensome conditions for energy producers in Canada. On the other hand, proponents will point to the environmental benefit that regulation engenders. Either way, potential economic challenges are front-of-mind for many within the energy industry.

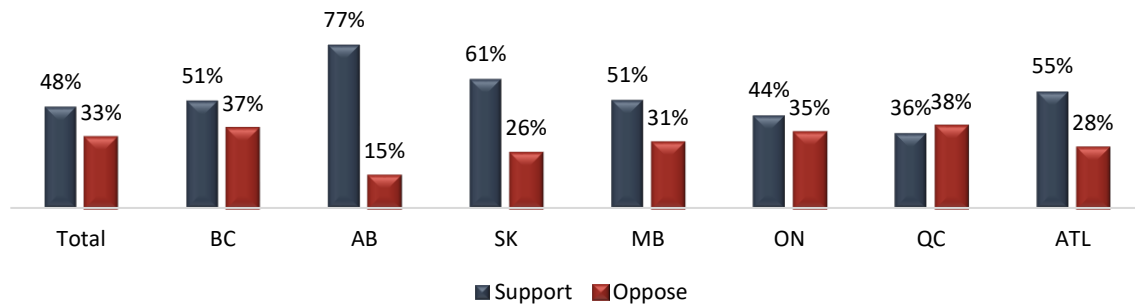
The Regional Story: Albertans keen on Keystone, less so on climate agreement

As is frequently the case regarding issues relating to the energy sector and climate change, residents of Alberta and Saskatchewan are more united in their opinions than residents of other regions.

These two oil-producing provinces are strongly supportive of Keystone. Albertans are fully five times as likely to support its construction as they are to oppose it (77% versus 15%, respectively).

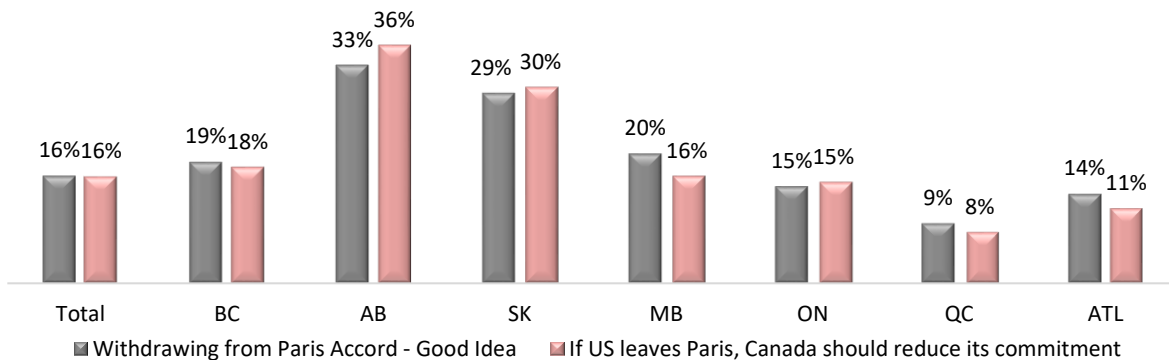
As seen in the following graph, residents of other provinces tend to be more divided on the proposal, though it’s worth noting that more than half say they support it in every region outside of Ontario and Quebec. That province is the only one more likely to oppose Keystone than to support it, although the margin of opposition is slight:

Based on whatever you have seen, read, or heard about the project, would you say you support or oppose the Keystone XL pipeline?



In a similar vein, Alberta and Saskatchewan are the provinces most likely to say withdrawing from the Paris Agreement would be a “good idea” for the United States, and to say that Canada should pull back from the accord if the U.S. does, though in both instances this is still the minority view.

Regional views on Paris Accord



It should be noted, however, that residents of these two provinces are still more likely to say U.S. withdrawal would be a bad idea than a good one, and to say Canada should carry on with its own commitment to the Paris Accord ([see comprehensive tables for greater detail](#)).

Coming Up Next:

In the final installment of this special report, the Angus Reid Institute will look at Canadians’ views on other international issues Trump’s presidency has brought to the fore. Should Canada increase its defense spending in line with the U.S. government’s request? How will Canada fare if NAFTA is renegotiated? That and more in the coming days.

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Public Interest Research

For Immediate Release
Canadian Public Opinion Poll

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*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 organization 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.*

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

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