

Six-in-ten Canadians say lack of new pipeline capacity represents a crisis in this country

Half say Trudeau government has been doing “too little” to build new capacity

January 16, 2019 – Against the backdrop of an election year, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is facing increasing pressure amid calls to move faster and more forcefully to complete a new oil pipeline in this country.

That pressure is underscored in new public opinion data from the Angus Reid Institute that shows six-in-ten Canadians say the lack of new pipeline capacity constitutes a “crisis”, while half say the Trudeau government has done “too little” to ensure new capacity is built.

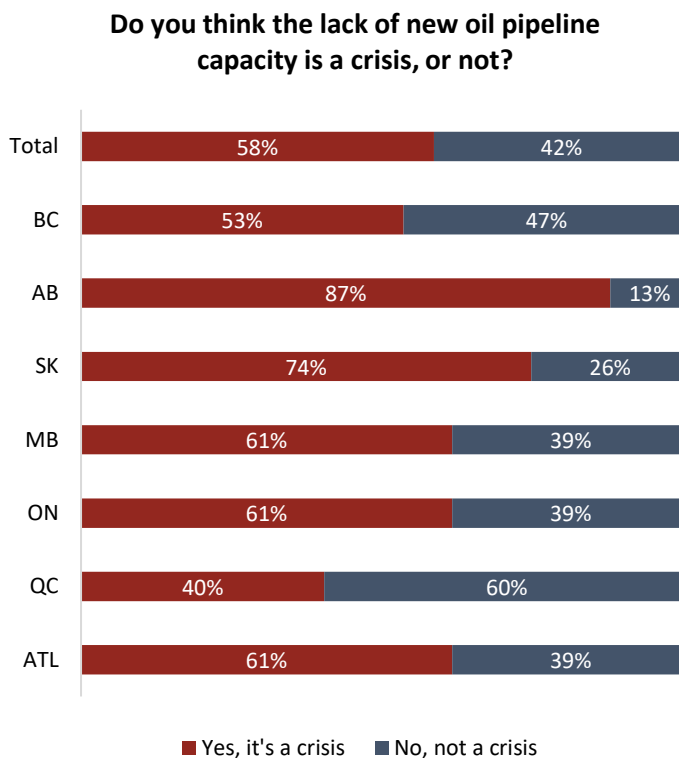
This latest polling finds Canadians polarized along regional lines, with residents of Alberta overwhelmingly taking the view that the situation is a crisis. Where British Columbians are divided, Quebecers take an opposite view.

Regional and provincial divisions are also evident on questions of whether provinces west of Ontario are seen to have an adequate amount of influence and power in confederation.

These questions – and more – are canvassed in a wide ranging, four-part study exploring and measuring the nature and dynamics of Western Canadian identity, the way people in different parts of the country view each other and their institutions, and the depth to which feelings of alienation in certain parts of Canada are felt.

More Key Findings:

- Oil and gas are chosen as a critical industry by two-thirds of Canadians (65%) – the highest total among seven industries canvassed



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from December 21, 2018 – January 3, 2019, among a representative randomized sample of 4,024 Canadian adults who are members of the [Angus Reid Forum](#). The sample plan included large oversamples in some regions that were then weighted back to provide a national snapshot. For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size with this sample frame 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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- Seven-in-ten (69%) say the country will face considerable impact if no new pipeline capacity is built. Canadians are less likely to say an impact will be felt at the provincial level (58%) or within their own households (35%)
- Half of Canadians (53%) say they support both the Energy East and TransMountain pipeline projects. One-in-five say they oppose both (19%), while a handful support one or the other in isolation
- The highest numbers of Canadians say agriculture (47%) and oil and gas (46%) are industries that should receive more federal attention, well ahead of the third priority: technology and IT (28%)

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Part 1: Petroleum and pipelines

Energy and resources viewed as a top national priority

The debate over resource and energy projects has unfolded differently in jurisdictions across the country. For Alberta, the conversation has been about getting the province's struggling economy moving by increasing its capacity to move product, whether east or west. For British Columbia, the discussion has hinged on the cost versus benefit in environmental protection and economic growth of both pipeline expansions and new liquified natural gas projects. In Quebec, Premier François Legault [recently stated](#) an unwillingness to entertain new pipelines at all, choosing instead to focus on hydro electric projects.

When Canadians are asked about provincial priorities, the eminence of the energy and resource file is not as clear. Provincial issues vary widely, and while energy and pipelines are atop the list in Alberta (with 63% choosing this as a top issue) and tied for top priority in Saskatchewan, the issue drops substantially

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in most other regions. In B.C., four-in-ten (41%) choose ‘cost of living’, while 17 per cent say energy, resource and pipeline issues. In Quebec and Atlantic Canada, health care rises over four-in-ten while the number choosing energy concerns drops to single digits.

The value of the resource sector is more apparent when considering the economic priorities of the nation as a whole. Looking at the various sectors of the economy through this lens draws into stark relief the perceived importance of that industry alongside agriculture. Both have a majority of Canadians choosing them as critical to the country’s success, with oil and gas at the top of the list – propelled by nine-in-ten Albertans (91%) and significant majorities in both B.C. (65%) and Ontario (64%).

Canada’s oil reserves rank among the [top three globally](#), and the industry was responsible for approximately [11 per cent](#) of gross domestic product in 2017. Agriculture, meanwhile, represents a far smaller amount in the nation’s GDP, at about [1.5 per cent](#).

If you had to choose, what 2 or 3 of these would you say are most critical to Canada?								
	Respondents from Each Province							
	Total (4,024)	BC (706)	AB (719)	SK (523)	MB (544)	ON (519)	QC (502)	ATL (511)
Oil and gas	65%	65%	91%	82%	70%	64%	48%	76%
Agriculture	52%	44%	57%	67%	61%	46%	61%	46%
Forestry and Mining	37%	48%	35%	36%	28%	32%	39%	36%
Technology/IT	29%	29%	22%	16%	21%	31%	35%	24%
Banking and Finance	21%	16%	16%	13%	21%	25%	22%	20%
Auto manufacturing	18%	9%	13%	13%	12%	29%	10%	14%
Tourism	16%	29%	10%	9%	16%	10%	20%	25%

The priorities of Canadians are largely similar when asked which of these sectors they believe should be receiving more consideration from the federal government, but regional splits are notable:

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Are there any of these economic sectors that you think should be getting more attention and support from the federal government?								
	Respondents from Each Province							
	Total (4,024)	BC (706)	AB (719)	SK (523)	MB (544)	ON (519)	QC (502)	ATL (511)
Agriculture	47%	39%	38%	50%	47%	42%	63%	43%
Oil and gas	46%	44%	78%	65%	50%	47%	25%	49%
Technology/IT	28%	31%	19%	16%	26%	28%	33%	24%
Forestry and Mining	24%	27%	22%	24%	21%	21%	27%	27%
Tourism	18%	18%	10%	11%	17%	14%	27%	22%
Auto manufacturing	17%	10%	15%	9%	13%	27%	9%	15%
None should get more	12%	15%	7%	12%	13%	14%	12%	9%
Banking and Finance	9%	8%	7%	9%	10%	9%	9%	11%

Does Canada have a pipeline crisis?

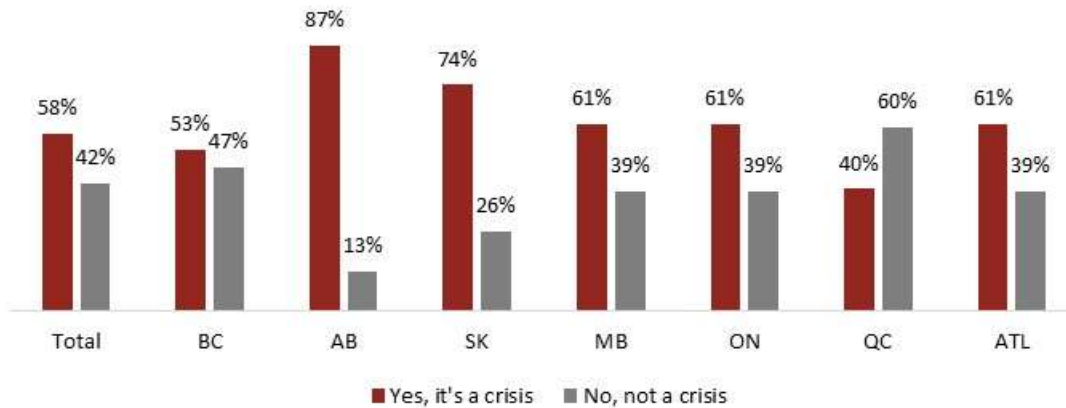
The theme that has dominated the news cycle in Canada over the past year when it comes to natural resources has been the cost and benefit of new pipeline construction. Proponents of construction argue the inability to build new capacity is hurting investment, production, and ultimately the Canadian economy. Many opponents argue Canada's economic development should not focus on increasing traditional oil production but focus instead on shifting priorities and expenditures to new industries.

The argument that the inability to build new pipelines is a serious problem, even a crisis, is one that resonates most Canadians in the current climate. Indeed, every region other than Quebec agrees with this sentiment, though B.C. residents are divided close to evenly:

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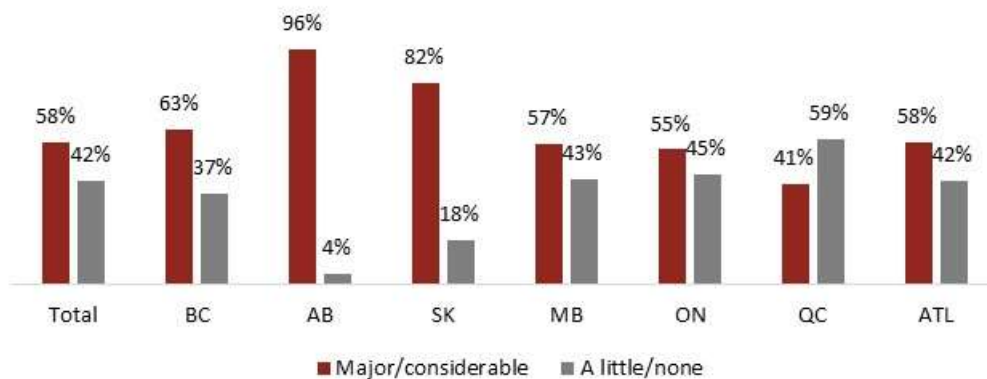
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Do you think the lack of new oil pipeline capacity is a crisis, or not?



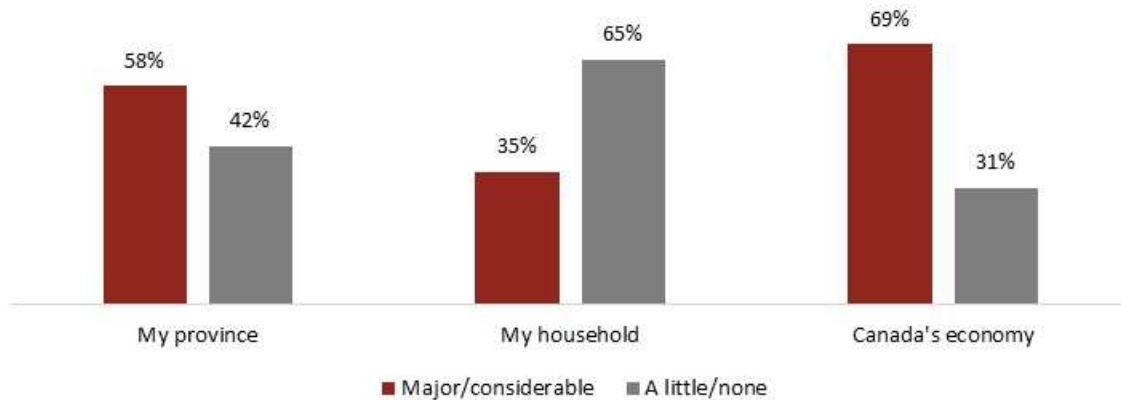
For the motivating factors behind such a strong level of agreement, one need only look at the perceived impact of the industry. As noted above, Canadians regard the oil and gas industry very highly in terms of its important to the Canadian economy. Thus, a majority of residents in all provinces outside of Quebec say that the restriction of new pipeline capacity would have either a major or considerable impact on their own province's economy. Nearly all Albertans say this (96%), while majorities agree everywhere else:

What kind of impact, if any, would no new oil pipeline capacity have on: You own province's economy ?



And while fewer Canadians say their *household* will be directly affected, they are more likely to say that their concern extends past their province to the national level, in terms of the potential impact that the resolution of this conflict could have:

What kind of impact, if any, would no new oil pipeline capacity have on:



Energy East and TransMountain

The two projects at the centre of the pipeline turmoil in recent years have been the TransMountain pipeline expansion that carries crude and refined oil from Edmonton to Burnaby, B.C., and the Energy East pipeline, which has been proposed to carry oil products from Alberta east, as far as New Brunswick.

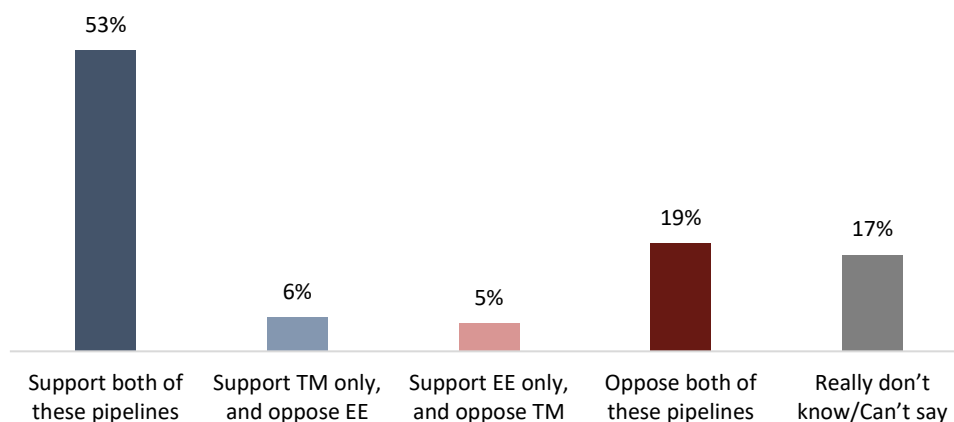
The \$15.7 billion Energy East project was [cancelled by TransCanada in 2017](#) largely due to delays in the approval process. Some now [hope to revive it](#).

While each project has its own bureaucratic hurdles and challenges, a majority of Canadians (53%) say they support both. This, compared to one-in-five (19%) nationwide who say they oppose both. A handful of Canadians support one or the other, while another one-in-five (17%) say they remain unsure:

What is your overall view on these two pipelines?

TransMountain = TM

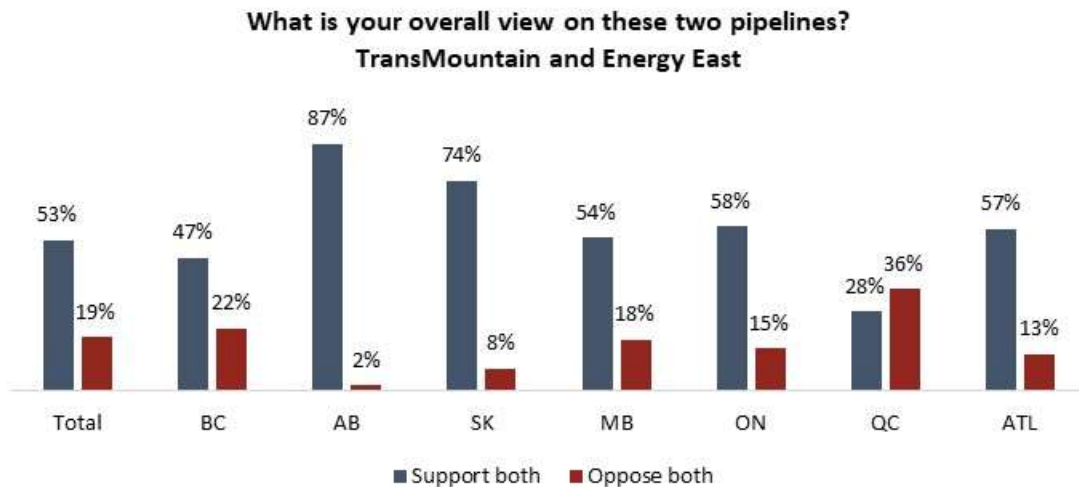
Energy East = EE



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As has already been shown, the outlier on this issue is Quebec. Support leans heavily in the direction of building both pipelines in every region outside of that province. Inside, a plurality oppose both projects (36%).



Assessing the federal government's performance on pipelines

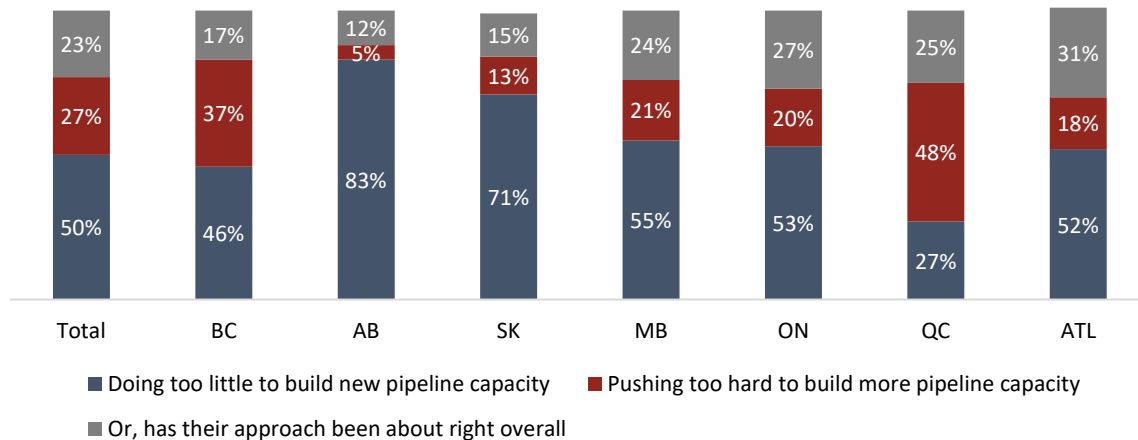
Divisions emerge when looking at the role of the federal government in the ongoing pipeline saga. A significant proportion of the population – about half – say that the government has not done enough in order to procure these projects and ensure their completion. TransMountain, in particular, has been a source of difficulty for Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, after the federal government stepped in to [purchase the pipeline](#) to ensure its expansion. The project has since re-entered the National Energy Board review process.

The rest of the population is divided into two groups – those who say the government has been too aggressive in pushing pipeline development (27%) and those who say the approach has been hitting the right marks (23%). Notably, the proportion of Canadians saying the government has not done enough is considerably higher in Alberta, and lower in other regions. In Quebec, half (48%) say that Trudeau and the Liberals have been doing too much on this issue:

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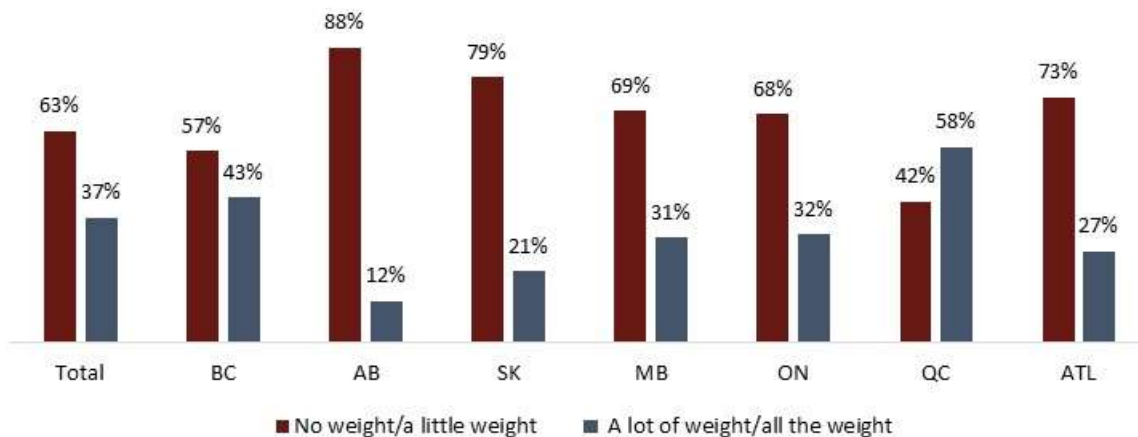
Thinking about the actions and approach to the pipeline issue taken by the federal government under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, would you say it has been:



The question of local opposition is one always close to conversations about these issues. That has recently been highlighted by recent events in Houston, B.C., where 14 people were arrested from a blockade designed to prevent access to a different pipeline project operated by Coastal GasLink. The pipeline is to carry natural gas through Wet'suwet'en First Nation territory on its route from Dawson Creek to Kitimat.

Views about the weight and importance of local opposition to projects of this nature are again most different in Quebec. Notably, a majority of B.C. residents (57%) disagree that local opposition should carry most of the weight in these debates.

As far as you're concerned, should this kind of local opposition carry:



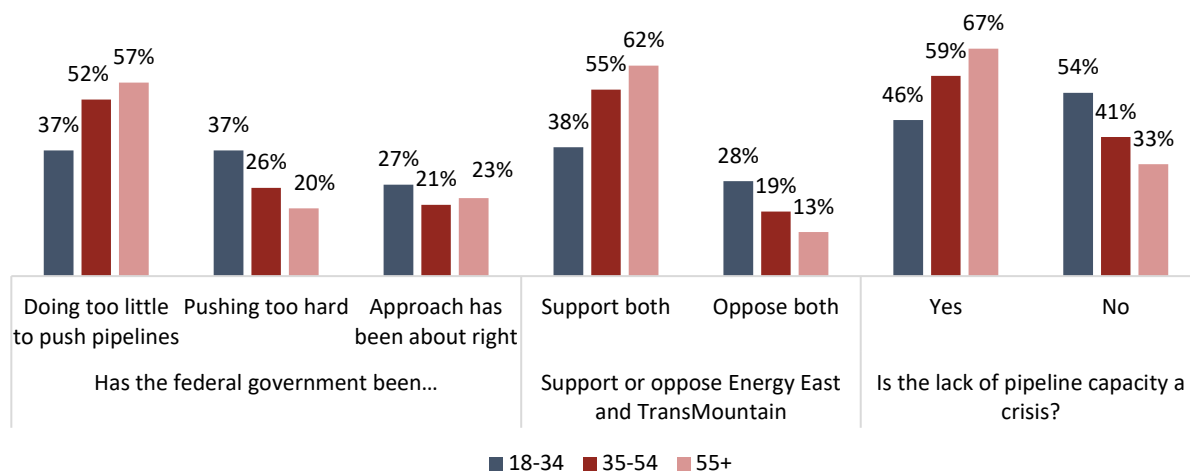
Part 2: Demographic contours of the divide

Age and gender

One of the largest drivers of opposition or ambivalence on this issue is age. For example, younger Canadians, those in the 18 to 34 age cohort, are not convinced that the current pipeline quagmire constitutes a crisis. A slight majority say it is not, leaving them out of step with Canadians over the age of 35.

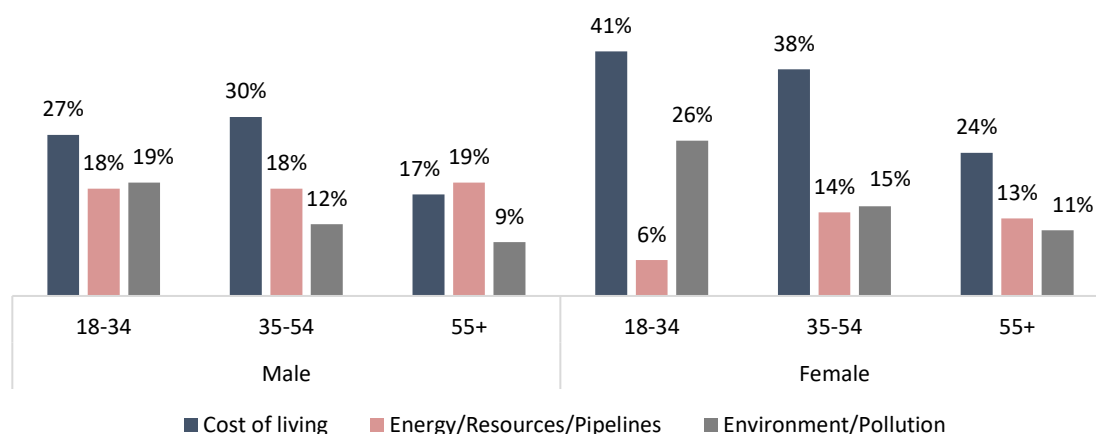
Further, while older Canadians are largely critical of how the federal government has handled the issue, this 18 to 34 group is just as likely to say the government has been doing too much as they are to say too little to get more pipelines moving. This leads to significantly lower levels of support for TransMountain and Energy East overall (38% support both).

Comparing age groups on pipeline issues



On the question of which issue should be a top priority for their province, one-quarter of young women choose environmental concerns compared to just 6 per cent who say energy, resource and pipeline issues. Young and middle-aged women are also far more likely to say that cost of living should be the focus in their province:

Top Issue by age and gender - all of Canada



Politics

Perhaps the best indicator of where someone in Canada will fall in this debate is based on their political affiliation. Canadians who are most likely to support the Conservative Party in the forthcoming 2019 election are more than twice as likely to believe that oil and gas should receive more support from the federal government. Meanwhile, those who lean toward the other two major federal parties are twice as likely to value the technology sector receiving further attention and investment:

Are there any of these economic sectors that you think should be getting more attention and support from the federal government?				
	Respondents by Federal Vote Intention			
	Total	CPC	Liberal	NDP
Agriculture	47%	42%	45%	55%
Oil and gas	46%	76%	29%	22%
Technology/IT	28%	17%	38%	40%
Forestry and Mining	24%	28%	18%	22%
Tourism	18%	8%	21%	32%
Auto manufacturing	17%	23%	16%	17%
None should get more	12%	8%	14%	12%
Banking and Finance	9%	8%	9%	9%

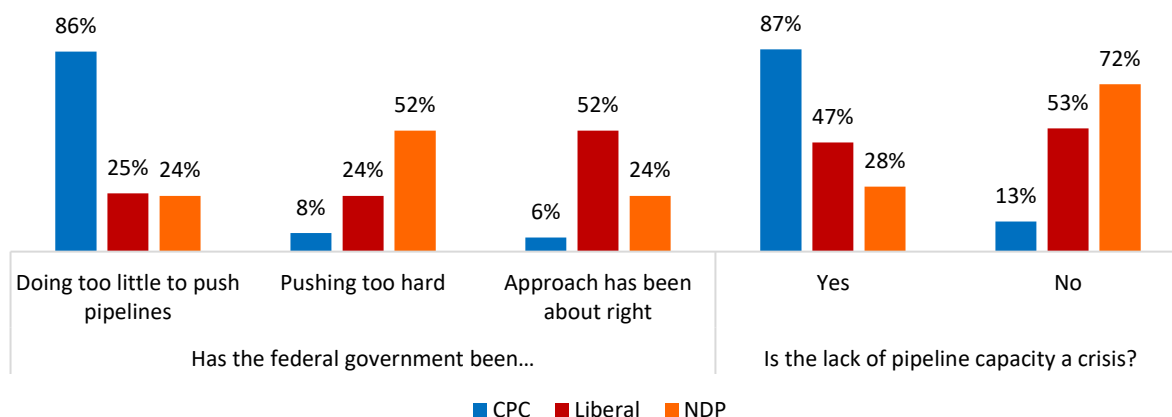
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The divide in opinion extends to the government's current approach on pipelines and the perceived seriousness of any problem involving pipeline capacity.

Half of those who would support the Liberals if an election were held today (52%) say that the government has taken the right approach and a group of the same size say they do not believe the lack of pipeline capacity is a crisis (53%). Indicative of a possible emerging vulnerability for Trudeau however, about half are indeed sounding the alarm (47%). Would-be Conservatives, meantime, are overwhelmingly likely to say Trudeau and the Liberals have not done enough (86%) and that it is indeed a crisis (87%).

Political perspectives, based on federal vote intention



Part 3: Economic tensions, geographic divisions

Majority feel federal government has hurt their province

The pipeline divide is a potent example of the geographic segmentation prevalent across many facets of Canadian life today. On a host of issues – which will be discussed at length in future installments of this four-part study – Canadian society is fragmented. Alberta, and to an extent its neighbour Saskatchewan, represents a distinct voice within Canada; one in which not only politics and policy, but values, differ significantly from those of the rest of the country.

It's worth noting, however, that while the current contours of the divide have emerged in the last decade or so, questions about western alienation from the rest of Canada are not new.

Residents of Alberta and other western provinces have long felt hard-done-by when it comes to federal policies, including – but not limited to – economic policies and management of the oil and gas industry.

In 1991, 58 per cent of Canadians living in the four western-most provinces told the Angus Reid Group that they believed Ottawa's policies had hurt their province's economy over the preceding years. Only 5 per cent felt their province had been helped economically by the federal government.

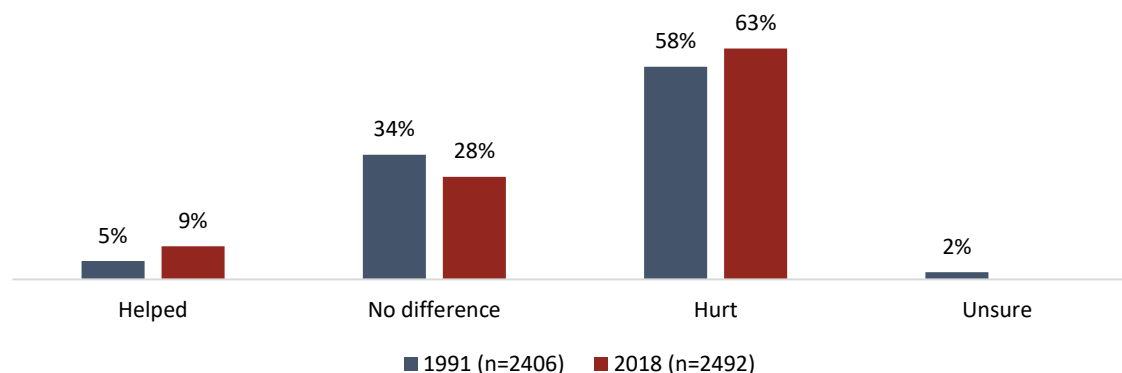
Today, little has changed. If anything, those in the four westernmost provinces are more aggravated by the current federal government than they were back then:

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Over the past couple of years, do you think the policies of the federal government have helped your province's economy, hurt it, or not made much of a difference?

(Asked in BC, AB, SK and MB only)



That said, not every province in Western Canada has moved in the same direction on this question over the years. In 1991, Manitoba was much more likely to say the federal government had hurt its provincial economy, and Saskatchewan was less so. Today, the reverse is true.

Likewise, Alberta and B.C. shared similar perspectives on this issue in the early 1990s, but have moved in opposite directions – B.C. slightly and Alberta greatly – since:

Over the past couple of years, do you think the policies of the federal government have helped your province's economy, hurt your province's economy, or have not made much of a difference to the overall health of your province's economy?

	Western Canada		BC		AB		SK		MB	
	1991	2018	1991	2018	1991	2018	1991	2018	1991	2018
Helped	5%	9%	4%	10%	6%	6%	11%	7%	3%	16%
No difference	34%	28%	39%	40%	33%	12%	36%	23%	19%	38%
Hurt	58%	63%	54%	50%	58%	82%	51%	71%	77%	46%
Unsure	2%	0%	3%	0%	3%	0%	2%	0%	1%	0%

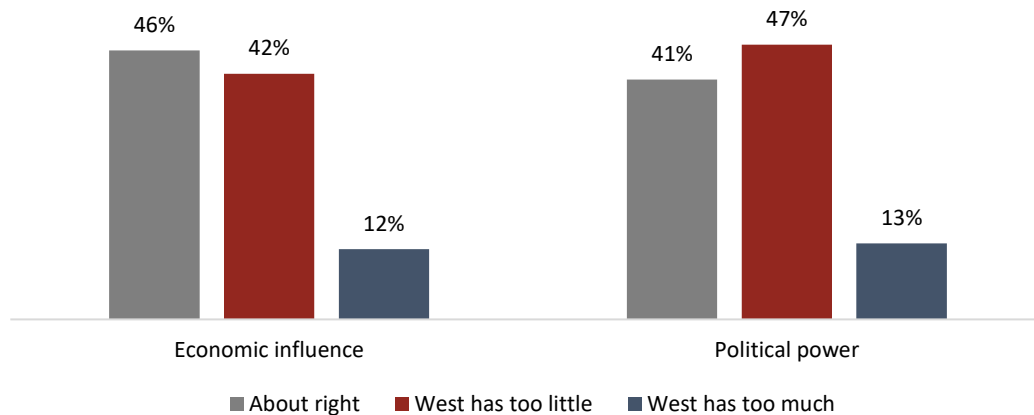
Does the west have enough influence?

In the context of fractious battles over pipeline construction, the question of the west's economic and political influence within Canada is a contentious one. Generally, Canadians feel Western Canada's influence on the country's economy and politics is either about right or too small.

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Would you say Western Canada has too much, too little, or about the right amount of ...
(Responses from all Canadians, n=4024)

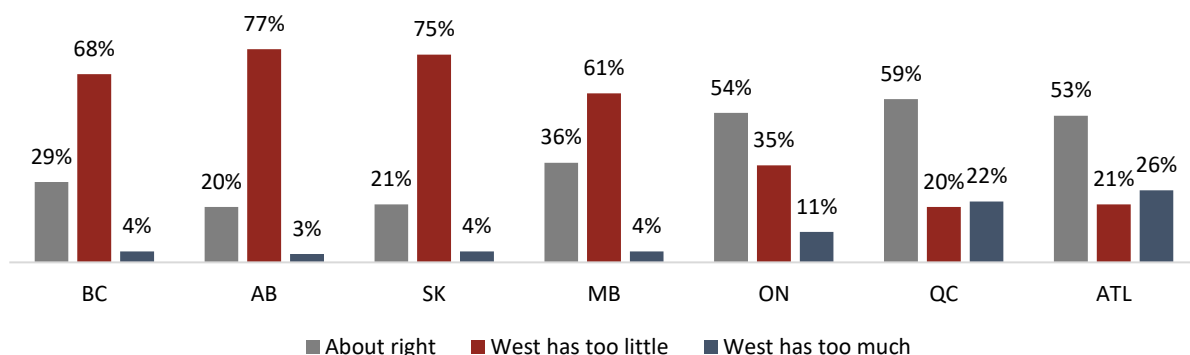


That said, there are big divides on these questions between those living in Ontario and points east, and those living in the four western-most provinces.

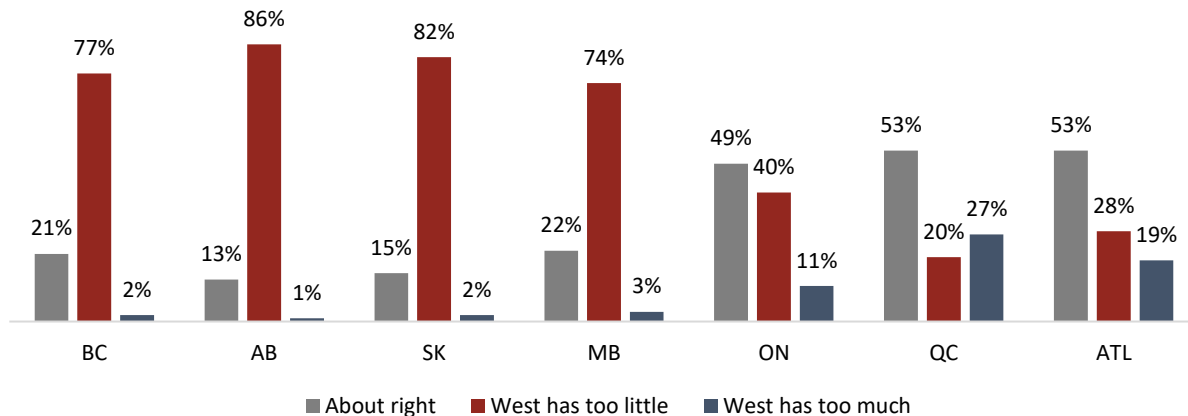
As seen in the graphs that follow, residents of western provinces – led by Alberta and Saskatchewan – tend to feel their region has too little economic influence and political power.

Residents of more easterly regions, meanwhile, are inclined to say the west has the right amount of influence on these two spheres. Easterners are also several times more likely than westerners to say the west has “too much” influence on Canada’s economy and politics.

Would you say Western Canada has too much, too little, or about the right amount of economic influence in Canada today?



Would you say Western Canada has too much, too little, or about the right amount of political power in Canada today?



Coming up Next:

These current energy and resource-related issues underscore a longer simmering tension between the populations west of Ontario, and the rest of Canada. In the subsequent chapters of this series, we will examine the relationships that bond – and tear at – the Canadian federation. Coming soon, an examination of the friendships and tensions between provinces that further reveal a close relationship between Alberta and Saskatchewan and the relative isolation of Quebec.

*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.*

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

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