

## Gas Pain: Four-in-ten say rising prices at the pump are making it harder to afford necessities

*In B.C., where costs are the highest in North America, seven-in-ten support a cap on maximum gas prices*

**May 17, 2019** – As the price of gasoline **begins** its high summer season, painful increases at the pump are causing some road warriors enough heartburn to rethink trips to cottage country this Victoria Day long weekend.

According to a new survey conducted by the non-profit Angus Reid Institute, the vast majority of drivers have witnessed gas prices going up where they live, and fully one-in-three (33%) who have noticed an increase say they are struggling to keep up.

In B.C., where nine-in-ten drivers say they've noticed a "major increase" in prices, a sizeable majority of residents (59%) feel the provincial government isn't doing enough to address the issue.

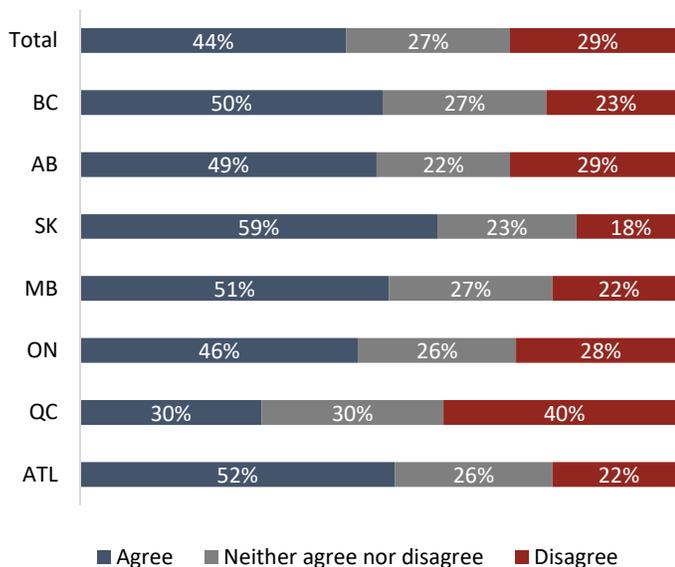
Most in that province (70%) say they would support their government introducing a maximum price cap on gasoline, as Quebec and the Atlantic provinces already do.

Across the country, there is considerable disagreement over the reasons for the increasing cost of filling up. Federally, Conservative-minded Canadians overwhelmingly blame government taxes, while supporters of other federal parties are more likely to point a finger at oil companies trying to maximize profits.

### More Key Findings:

- When gas prices rise, the vast majority of Canadians are affected. More than three-quarters of the population (76%) drives a car or other motor vehicle "most days" or "multiple times per week"
- Most of those who have been personally affected by rising gas prices have done something to try to mitigate these effects. One-in-three (35%) say they have been driving less, and another

**"Rising gas prices where I live have made it harder for me to afford necessities"  
(All respondents)**



### METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from May 7 – 10, 2019, among a representative randomized sample of 1,921 Canadian adults, including 600 British Columbia residents, who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). The oversample in B.C. was then weighted back to provide a national snapshot. For comparison purposes only, probability samples of this size would carry margins of error of +/- 2.2 and +/- 4.0 percentage points, respectively, 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.

### CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 [shachi.kurl@angusreid.org](mailto:shachi.kurl@angusreid.org) @shachikurl  
Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250.899.0821 [dave.korzinski@angusreid.org](mailto:dave.korzinski@angusreid.org)  
Ian Holliday, Research Associate: 604.442.3312 [ian.holliday@angusreid.org](mailto:ian.holliday@angusreid.org)

quarter (26%) say they have been filling up less. Still others have traveled to other towns (18%) or across the U.S. border to buy gas (7%)

- Drivers living in rural areas and small towns are more likely to say they have noticed a major increase in gas prices where they live (75% say this). They're also more likely to say they've been struggling as a result (44%)

### **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 1: Most Canadians feeling the impact of high gas prices**

- **Relative severity varies across the country**
- **Changes in commuting behaviour and spending**
- **Who's to blame?**

#### **Part 2: The ongoing B.C.-Alberta divide**

- **Quebec sides with B.C., Rest of Canada with Alberta**
- **What should the B.C. government do?**

#### **Part 1: Most Canadians feeling the impact of high gas prices**

Unlike with many economic goods, consumer demand for gas is relatively inelastic. Most people – and certainly people who depend on an automobile as their primary transportation method – have to buy a fairly consistent amount of gas, regardless of how much it costs.

Nationally, three-in-four Canadians (76%) drive a car or other motor vehicle “most days” or “multiple times per week.” Despite the increasing popularity of electric vehicles, 96 per cent of drivers surveyed say they still rely on a vehicle with a gas tank. In fact, only 1 per cent of Canadian drivers say they use a fully electric vehicle (see [comprehensive tables](#) for greater detail).

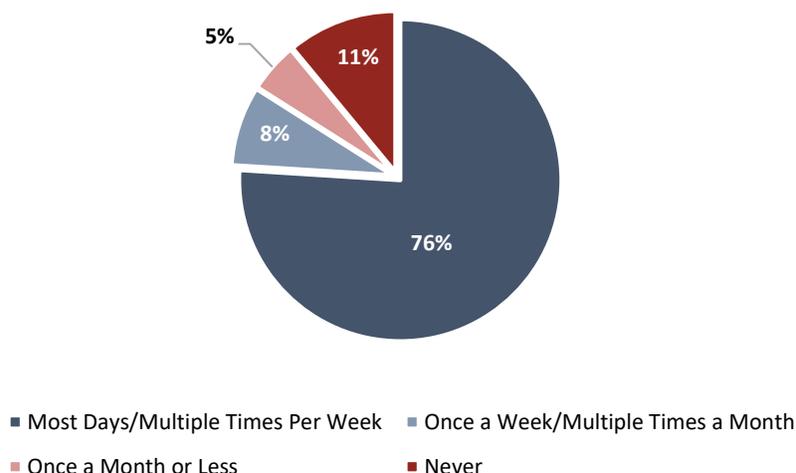
**[Related – Canadians charged up about electric vehicle incentives, but price point still causes buyers to lose the spark](#)**

---

#### **CONTACT:**

Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 [shachi.kurl@angusreid.org](mailto:shachi.kurl@angusreid.org) @shachikurl  
Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250.899.0821 [dave.korzinski@angusreid.org](mailto:dave.korzinski@angusreid.org)  
Ian Holliday, Research Associate: 604.442.3312 [ian.holliday@angusreid.org](mailto:ian.holliday@angusreid.org)

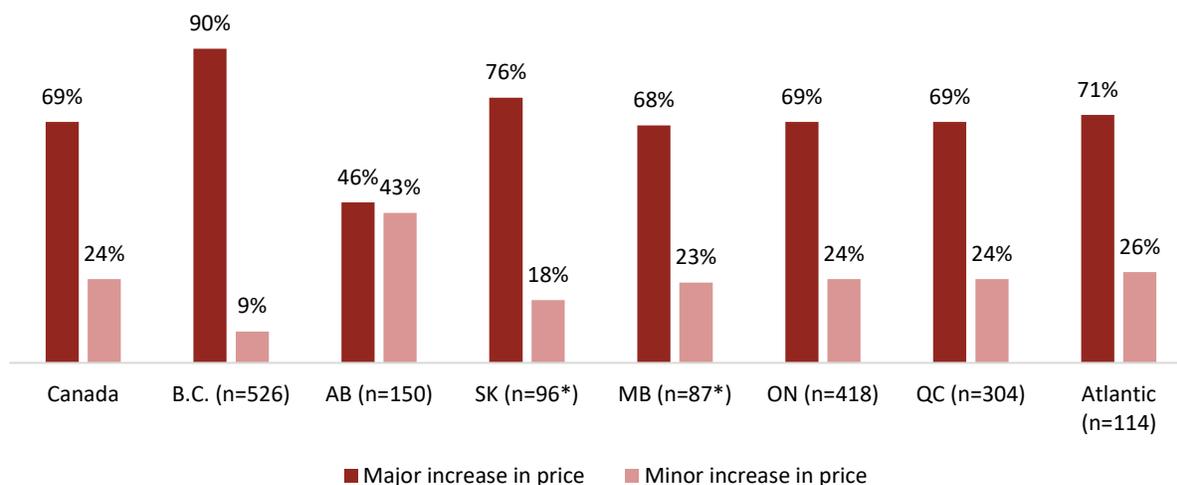
**How often, if at all, do you drive a car or other motor vehicle (e.g. truck, motorcycle, etc.)? [All Respondents, n = 1921]**



**Relative severity varies across the country**

Over the last three months, seven-in-ten (69%) drivers report having witnessed a major increase in the price they pay at the pump. In B.C., nine-in-ten (90%) drivers report experiencing a major increase, while Albertans are split between those noticing a “major” (46%) and “minor” (43%) increase. The rest of the country, meanwhile, largely reflects national averages, with most drivers noticing a major price increase:

**Thinking specifically about the community or city where you live, which statement best describes the price you have paid for gasoline over the last three months? [Drives a vehicle with a gas tank/hybrid, n=1686]**



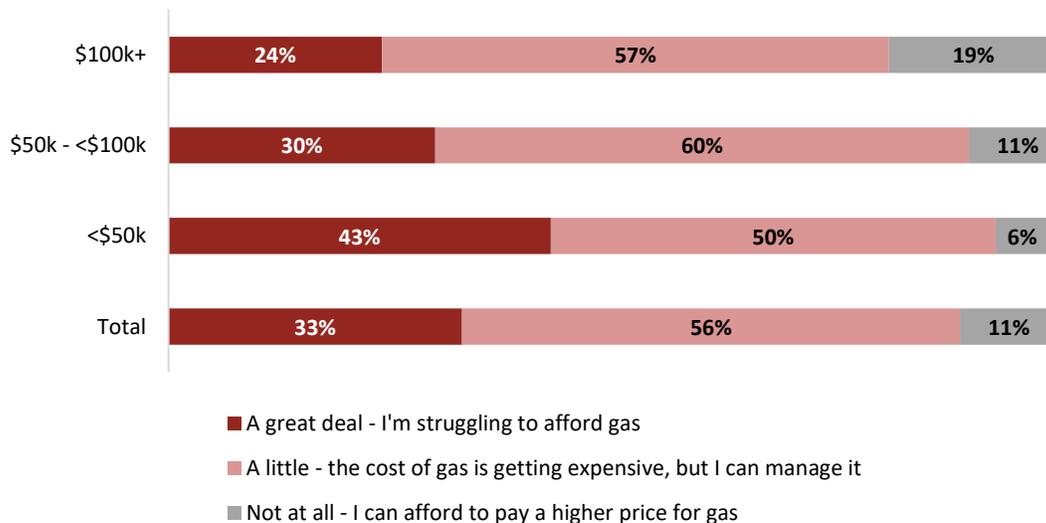
\*Small sample size

**CONTACT:**

Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 [shachi.kurl@angusreid.org](mailto:shachi.kurl@angusreid.org) @shachikurl  
 Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250.899.0821 [dave.korzinski@angusreid.org](mailto:dave.korzinski@angusreid.org)  
 Ian Holliday, Research Associate: 604.442.3312 [ian.holliday@angusreid.org](mailto:ian.holliday@angusreid.org)

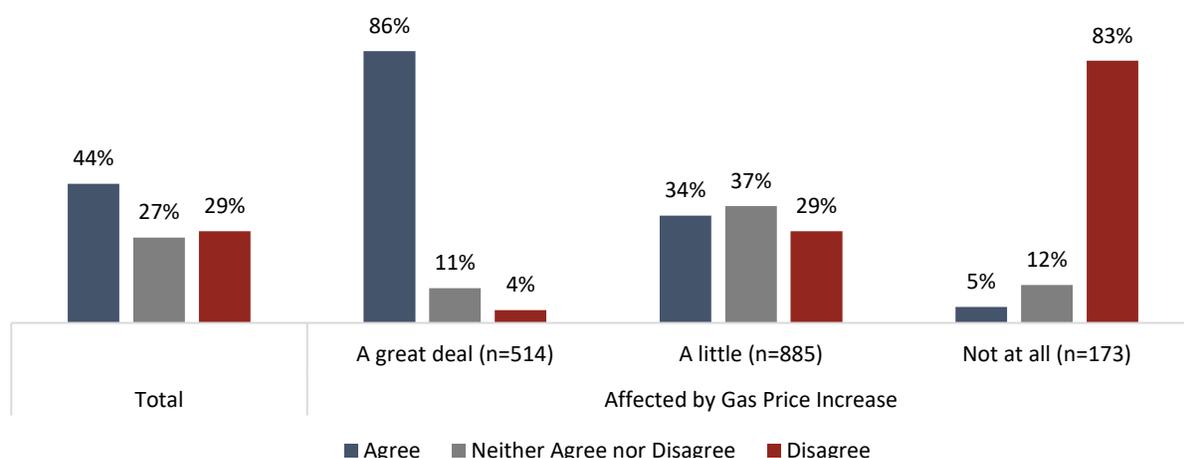
Those who have noticed increases are also nearly unanimous in saying it has had an impact on their own wallets (89% say this), with about one-in-three (33%) explicitly saying they are struggling to afford gas. This sentiment is most pronounced among lower-income drivers and among those living in rural areas or small towns (see [comprehensive tables](#) for greater detail).

**How has this price increase affected you personally, if at all? [Drives vehicle and mentions increase, n=1572]**



When it comes to juggling expenses, there's a massive divide between those struggling to afford gas and those less affected. More than two-in-five (44%) Canadians say rising gas prices have made it harder for them to afford necessities. This jumps to 86 per cent among those struggling to afford gas:

**Rising gas prices where I live have made it harder for me to afford necessities... [All Respondents, n=1921]**



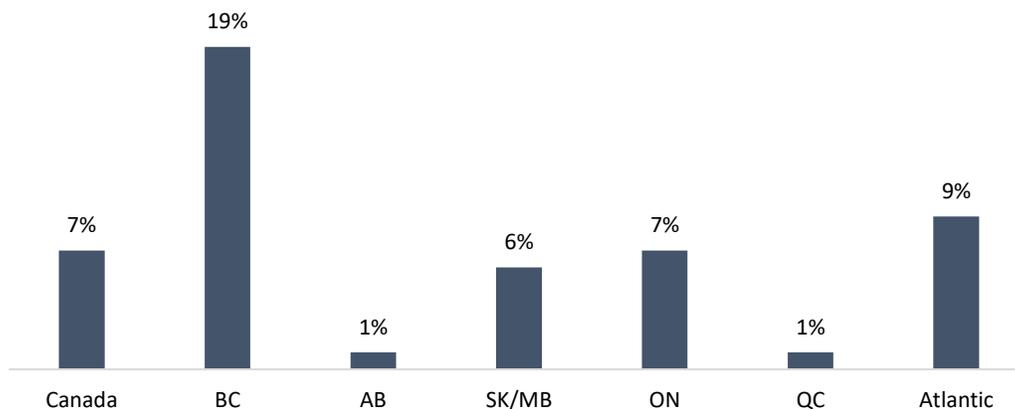
**CONTACT:**  
 Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 [shachi.kurl@angusreid.org](mailto:shachi.kurl@angusreid.org) @shachikurl  
 Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250.899.0821 [dave.korzinski@angusreid.org](mailto:dave.korzinski@angusreid.org)  
 Ian Holliday, Research Associate: 604.442.3312 [ian.holliday@angusreid.org](mailto:ian.holliday@angusreid.org)

**Changes in commuting behaviour and spending**

Most drivers personally affected by rising gas prices (59%) say they've changed their behaviour as a result. For more than one-in-three (35%), it's meant reducing their daily driving, while one-in-four (26%) report purchasing less gas. Smaller proportions have taken more significant measures, such as using public transit more often or travelling elsewhere to fill up (see [comprehensive tables](#) for greater detail).

In British Columbia, where gas prices in Metro Vancouver recently hit and exceeded \$1.70 per litre – the [highest in North America](#) – drivers are more likely than most Canadians to have changed their commuting behaviour and spending in the past three months. This is especially true of travelling across the U.S. border to buy gas, an option readily available to much of the province's population:

**Percentage who have travelled Across the U.S. Border in the last three months to buy gas  
[Personally affected by gas price increase, n=1513]**



Again, British Columbians are more likely to have made changes to their behaviour in response to rising gas prices. Seven-in-ten (71%) who report feeling the pain of increasing gas prices say they have made at least one of the changes canvassed in this survey. In some ways, this follows the logic of carbon pricing: that is, if it's expensive to burn carbon, people will be more likely to find ways to avoid doing so:

Have you done any of the following in the last 3 months? (Asked of those who say they have been affected by rising gas prices, n=1513)							
	Total (1513)	Region					
		BC (488)	AB (130)	SK/MB (165)	ON (372)	QC (281)	ATL (105)
Reduced your daily driving	35%	45%	31%	30%	33%	33%	48%
Bought less gas	26%	32%	16%	22%	26%	28%	34%
Travelled to a different town/city to buy gas	18%	25%	10%	7%	20%	22%	12%
Used public transit more often	9%	13%	7%	5%	10%	11%	5%
Travelled across the U.S. border to buy gas	7%	19%	1%	6%	7%	1%	9%
<b>Any of the above</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>68%</b>

### **Who's to Blame?**

Nationally, Canadians are split between blaming government taxes (43%) and oil companies (39%) most for the current rise in gas prices, with a smaller proportion (18%) attributing the increase primarily to economic market forces.

Resentment towards oil companies is driven largely by people in Quebec, where a full majority (55%) say corporate interests are to blame. The only other province where those blaming oil companies outnumber those blaming government is B.C., though respondents there are more divided than Quebecers, overall.

Meanwhile, resentment towards government taxes is most concentrated in Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario – all provinces where conservative premiers have launched [legal challenges](#) against Ottawa's recently implemented federal carbon tax.

### **Related – Carbon Pricing: Rebate announcement tips opinion in favour of federal plan, slim majority now support it**

This sentiment is also relatively high in Alberta, where Premier Jason Kenney has vowed to scrap the provincial carbon tax introduced by his predecessor. That said, Albertans are also more likely than residents of any other province to select the third option – economic market forces – as the main cause of rising gas prices.

---

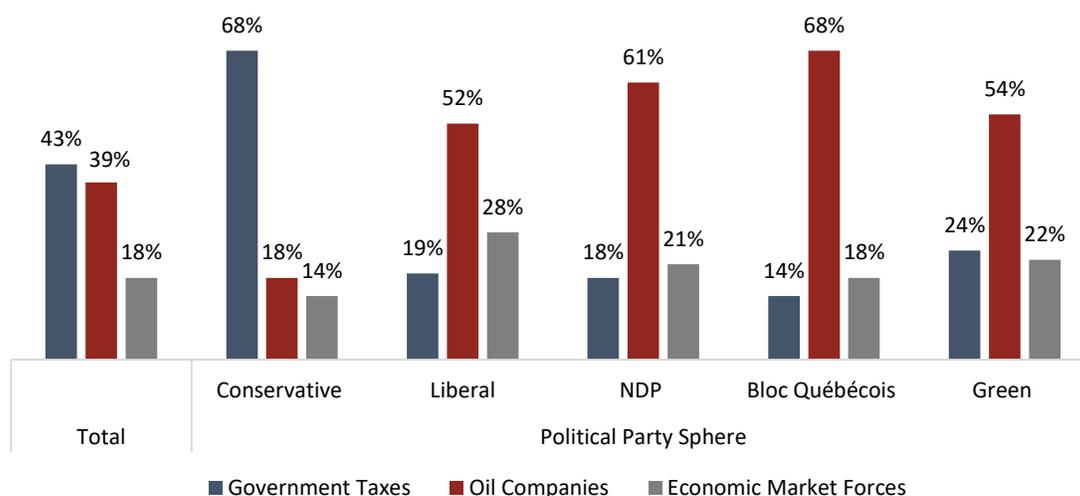
#### **CONTACT:**

Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 [shachi.kurl@angusreid.org](mailto:shachi.kurl@angusreid.org) @shachikurl  
 Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250.899.0821 [dave.korzinski@angusreid.org](mailto:dave.korzinski@angusreid.org)  
 Ian Holliday, Research Associate: 604.442.3312 [ian.holliday@angusreid.org](mailto:ian.holliday@angusreid.org)

Which do you think is most responsible for the current rise in gas prices?								
	Total (1921)	Region						
		BC (600)	AB (157)	SK (101)	MB (100)	ON (479)	QC (357)	Atlantic (127)
Government Taxes (e.g. transit tax, carbon tax, etc.)	43%	37%	47%	63%	54%	51%	27%	44%
Oil Companies' Desire to Maximize Profit	39%	47%	24%	20%	39%	33%	55%	34%
Economic Market Forces	18%	16%	29%	17%	7%	16%	18%	22%

Political identity is also a significant driver of opinion on gas price issues. Canadians who would consider voting federally for the Conservative Party of Canada in a future election are at least three times more likely than those in any other federal party's sphere to say government taxes are most responsible for the current rise in gas prices (see political sphere methodology at the end of this report):

Which do you think is most responsible for the current rise in gas prices?  
[All Respondents, n = 1921]



**CONTACT:**

Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 [shachi.kurl@angusreid.org](mailto:shachi.kurl@angusreid.org) @shachikurl  
 Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250.899.0821 [dave.korzinski@angusreid.org](mailto:dave.korzinski@angusreid.org)  
 Ian Holliday, Research Associate: 604.442.3312 [ian.holliday@angusreid.org](mailto:ian.holliday@angusreid.org)

**Part 2: The ongoing B.C.-Alberta divide**

**Quebec sides with B.C., Most other provinces with Alberta**

As gas prices rose in recent months, Kenney was quick to point out that B.C. gets much of its supply of gasoline via the Trans Mountain pipeline. Kenney suggested that B.C. should drop its longstanding opposition to the pending expansion of the pipeline in order to reduce gas prices in the long term (though some analysts say the expansion project wouldn't necessarily affect prices in B.C.), and his government recently proclaimed a new law allowing it to restrict oil and gas shipments to other provinces.

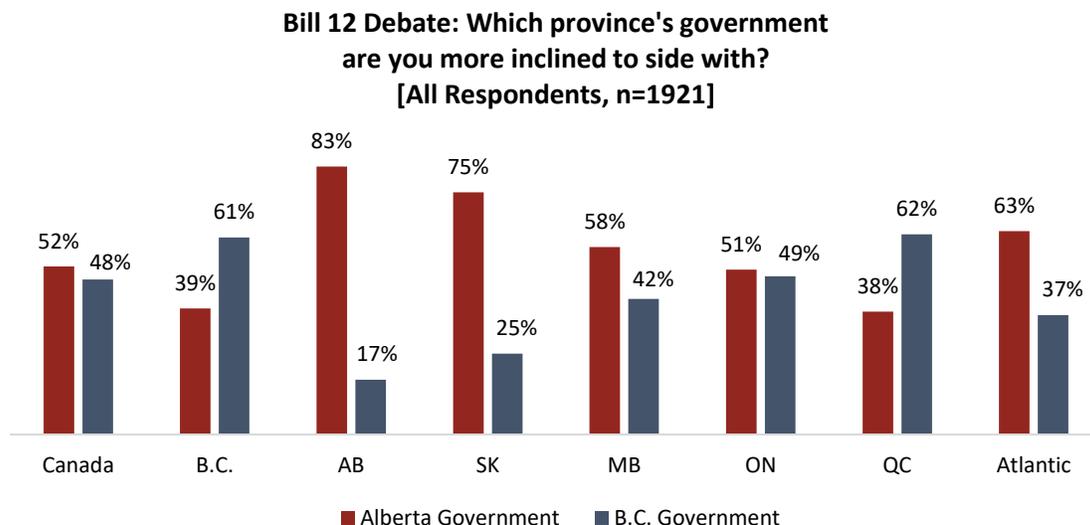
Respondents to this poll were given the following description of the debate over this legislation:

*On April 30, the new Alberta government under [Premier] Jason Kenney proclaimed law that allows the province to restrict its oil and gas shipments to other provinces.*

*Kenney argues this law is necessary to protect Alberta's economic interests and that the government of B.C. under [Premier] John Horgan has kept gas prices high by blocking oil projects.*

*The B.C. government is challenging the law in court, arguing that it is unconstitutional. Horgan argues his government is protecting British Columbians and the coastline.*

When asked to choose a side in this debate, Canadians are virtually split. Just over half (52%) side with Alberta nationally. Quebec is the only province, outside of B.C. itself, to side with Horgan's government. Ontarians are almost evenly divided:



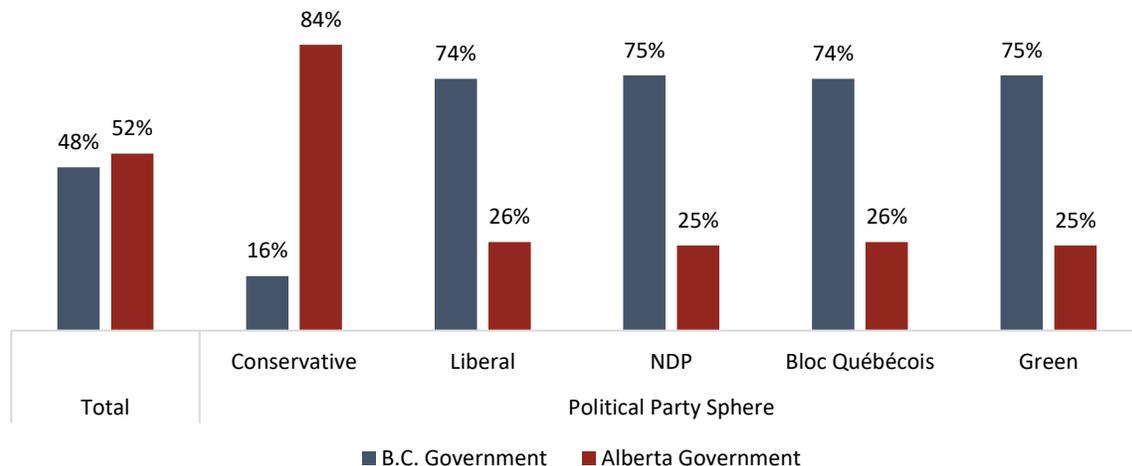
This finding highlights some broader divides between British Columbian and Albertans in terms of environmental issues. Albertans are more than twice as likely as the general Canadian public to consider “Energy – Oil & Gas/Pipelines” a high political priority, with more than half (54%) citing it as one of the top three issues facing their province.

Conversely, British Columbians (29%) are second only to Quebecers (40%) in identifying “Environment/Climate Change” as a top issue. At the same time, they are almost equally likely (31%) to cite “Energy – Oil & Gas/Pipelines,” though possibly for different reasons than Albertans do.

**Related – Trans Mountain troubles: Alberta-B.C. pipeline battle splits Canadians down the middle**

There is also a partisan divide on this issue. Those who are considering the federal Conservatives in a future election overwhelmingly side with Alberta, whereas three-in-four members of other parties’ spheres side with British Columbia:

**Bill 12: Suppose you had to choose a side in this debate. Which province's government would you be more inclined to side with? [All Respondents, n=1921]**

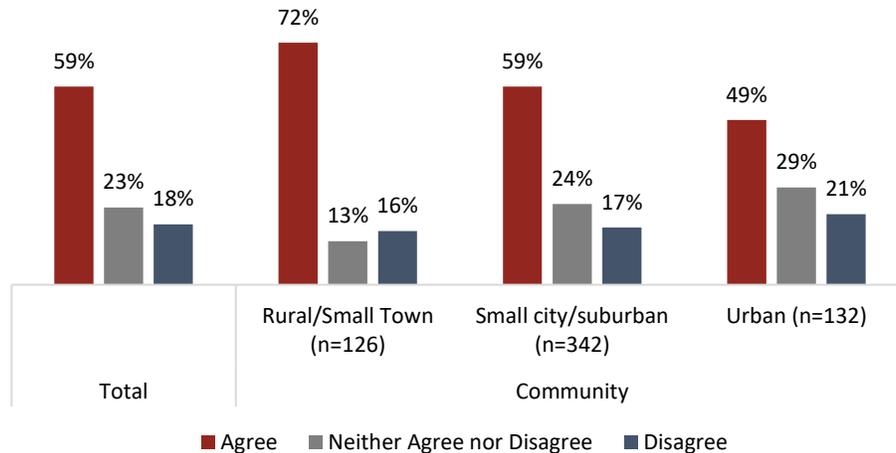


**What should the B.C. government do?**

Generally speaking, provincial governments have limited control over gas prices, as these are largely determined by the global market for crude oil. Nevertheless, [public pressure](#) has mounted on the NDP government in B.C. to directly involve itself in regulating the price of gas, as [Quebec and the Atlantic provinces already do](#).

The majority of (59%) British Columbians say their government isn’t doing enough to address gas prices, with this sentiment most intensely felt in rural areas and small towns:

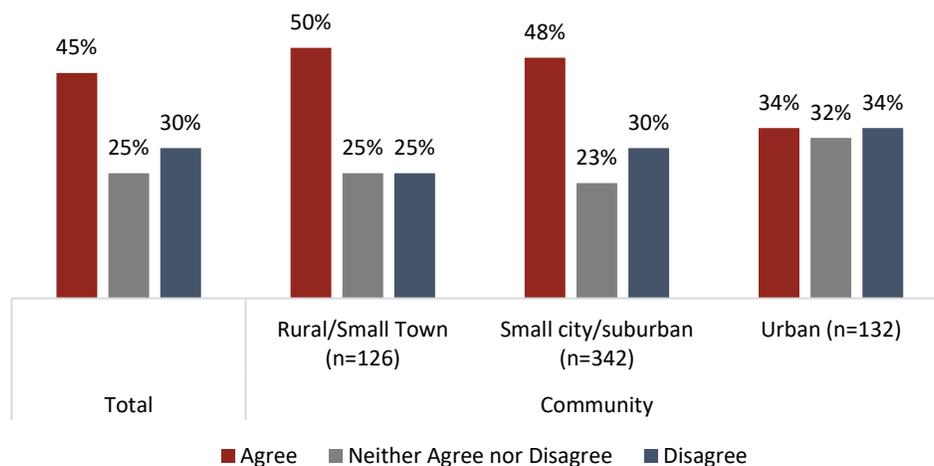
**The NDP government in B.C. under John Horgan isn't doing enough to address high gas prices (BC Respondents, n=600)**



Notably, support for a maximum price cap on gas is broad based. Seven-in-ten British Columbians across virtually all demographic groups and geographic communities back the idea (see [comprehensive tables](#) for greater detail).

Another option suggested to the Horgan government has been dropping its opposition to the Trans Mountain Pipeline expansion. British Columbians are less sure if twinning the pipeline would actually help lower gas prices in the province, although more agree than disagree (45% vs. 30%) that it would. Those who live in rural or suburban areas agree by a 2:1 margin, whereas urbanites are evenly split:

**Expanding the Trans Mountain Pipeline would help lower gas prices in B.C. (BC Respondents, n=600)**



---

## **Political Sphere Methodology**

Rather than rely on respondents' potentially faded memories regarding their vote in the 2015 federal election, ARI researchers constructed a measure of political partisanship based on willingness to vote for the main federal parties in a future election under their current leaders.

The question specifically asked respondents how likely they would be to vote for "The Liberal Party led by Justin Trudeau," "The Conservative Party led by Andrew Scheer," and "The New Democratic Party led by Jagmeet Singh" in a future election. The response options were "definitely support" the party and leader in question, "certainly consider" them, "maybe consider" them, and "definitely not even consider" them.

Respondents choosing either of the first two options (definitely support or certainly consider) are considered to be a party's "sphere." They represent potential supporters of that party, not necessarily decided voters.

It should be noted that the categories are not mutually exclusive. Respondents were asked to give an opinion on each of the main parties and had the option to say they would "certainly consider" each one. Thus, many respondents may appear in the spheres of multiple parties.

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

*For detailed results by community type, federal political spheres and other crosstabs, click [here](#).*

---

### **CONTACT:**

Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 [shachi.kurl@angusreid.org](mailto:shachi.kurl@angusreid.org) @shachikurl  
Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250.899.0821 [dave.korzinski@angusreid.org](mailto:dave.korzinski@angusreid.org)  
Ian Holliday, Research Associate: 604.442.3312 [ian.holliday@angusreid.org](mailto:ian.holliday@angusreid.org)