

Pipe(line) dream? Albertans want Ottawa to keep fighting for Keystone XL; but most Canadians say it's time to "move on"

Most Canadians under no illusion regarding impact on Alberta, two-thirds say it will be "bad"

January 26, 2021 – U.S. President Joe Biden's early executive order to scrap Keystone XL, an eight-billion-dollar pipeline project to move oil from Alberta to Nebraska, represents an early test for Canada-U.S. relations, and an even more critical test domestically.

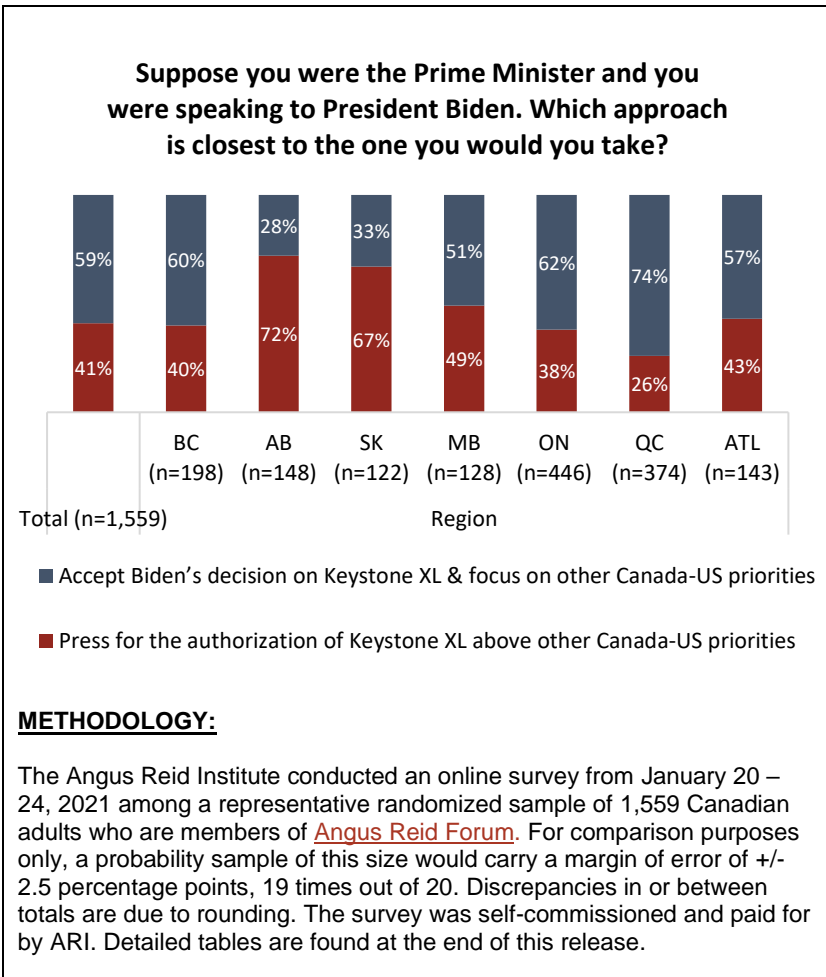
The decision has once again plunged Alberta into crisis mode economically. The province has already invested roughly \$1.5 billion in the project, plus \$6 billion in loan guarantees, leading Premier Jason Kenney to apply maximum pressure on Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to fight to revive [the on-again off-again](#) proposed pipeline.

Trudeau, however, must balance support for Alberta against public sentiment - deeply divided along regional lines - while also considering competing issues that also require attention and resolution from the United States.

Against this backdrop, new data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute shows Canadians fully comprehend the blow this decision represents to Albertans. As Keystone joins the [Northern Gateway](#), [Teck Frontier Mine](#), and many [others](#) in a long line of cancelled or defunct energy operations, two-thirds (65%) of Canadians say Biden's decision is a "bad thing" for the province. But what should happen next? This question reveals profound regional divides, with majorities in Alberta and Saskatchewan saying if it were up to them, they would press the Biden administration to reverse course. Majorities in BC, Ontario, Quebec, and Atlantic Canada, however, are of the view that it is time to accept the decision and focus instead on other Canada-U.S. priorities.

More Key Findings:

- Overall, 59 per cent of Canadians say it's time to move on from Keystone XL, an opinion driven by respondents in the country's most populous provinces, especially Quebec



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- While majorities across the political spectrum acknowledge the economic damage that the Keystone XL cancellation may cause to Alberta, this sentiment is lowest among past NDP voters (52%) and highest among past CPC voters (87%), a concentration of whom are from Alberta
- The Keystone XL issue is viewed through a different lens across the country. Overall, 51 per cent say this is about the economy and jobs – a view held by a majority of those in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Atlantic Canada. For 49 per cent, including at least half in B.C., Ontario and Quebec, the project is about environmental concerns and climate change

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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Part One: Cancellation bad for Canada, worse for Alberta

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was the first on the list of international leaders for new U.S. President Joe Biden to call. While a readout from the Office of the Prime Minister noted that Trudeau expressed his [disappointment](#) over the recent cancellation of the Keystone XL pipeline, one of the first actions taken by Biden after his inauguration, apparently little else was said about the project.

This has enraged many in Canada's energy sector, given [that thousands of jobs](#) may be on the line as a result of the decision to scrap the pipeline that has been under construction in Southern Alberta since [last July](#).

Alberta Premier Jason Kenney [called on the federal government](#) to press Washington to review its decision and potentially utilize trade sanctions to overturn it. For its own part, the Alberta government has [retained legal counsel](#) in both the U.S. and Canada to advise on seeking compensation.

Much of the opposition to the pipeline stems from environmental concern, with activists arguing – among other things – the bitumen the pipeline would have transported is more acidic, corrosive, and carbon-intensive to extract.

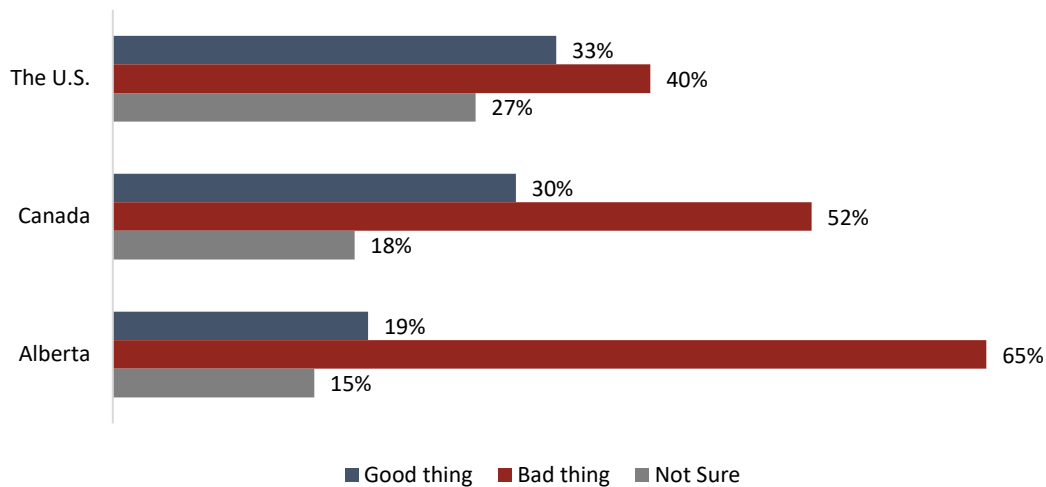
Just over half (52%) of Canadians say its cancellation is a “bad thing” for Canada. There is stronger agreement (65%) that Alberta will be worse off with the pipeline blocked. By contrast, just two-in-five

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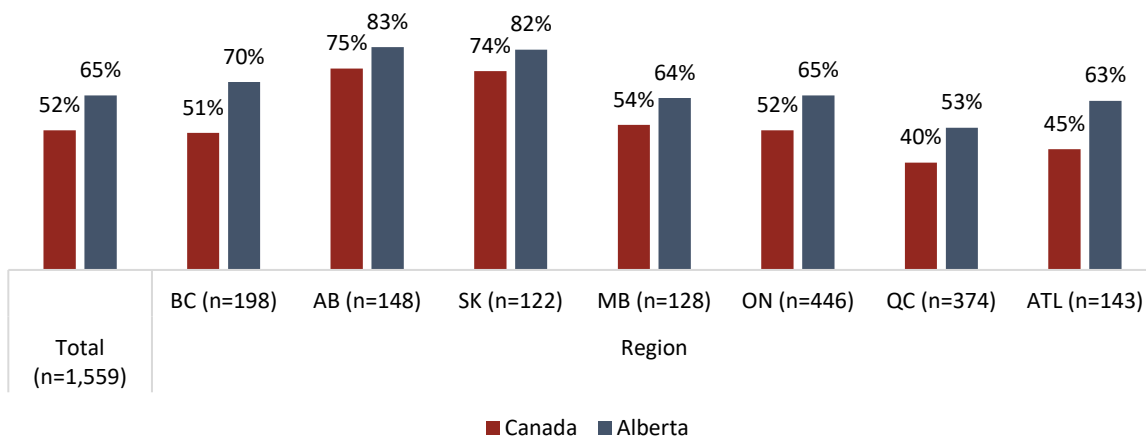
(40%) believe that overall this is a negative for the U.S. (where domestic oil output has boomed in recent years).

Based on what you've seen read or heard about this, would you say the cancellation of the Keystone XL pipeline is a good or bad thing for:



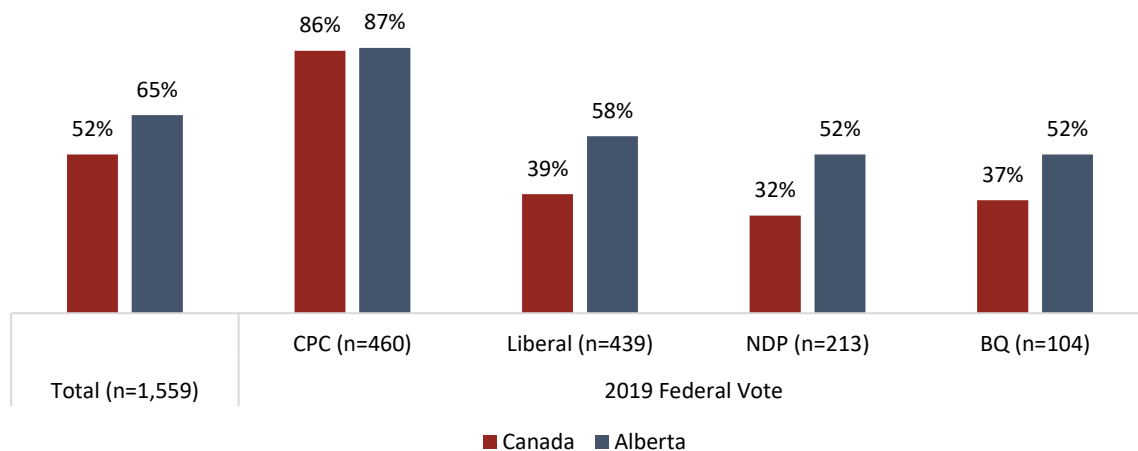
Canadians from coast to coast have sympathy for the province. While those in oil-rich Alberta and Saskatchewan are the likeliest to say the cancellation is to Alberta's detriment, more than half in every region of the country agree.

Percentage saying the cancellation of the Keystone XL Pipeline is a 'bad thing' for Canada vs. Alberta



The story is similar across the political spectrum. More than four-in-five (87%) of those who voted for the Conservative Party in the last federal election say this is a bad turn of events for Alberta. Among the backers of each of the other parties, a majority agrees with this assessment, though with less consensus.

Percentage saying the cancellation of the Keystone XL Pipeline is a 'bad thing' for Canada vs. Alberta

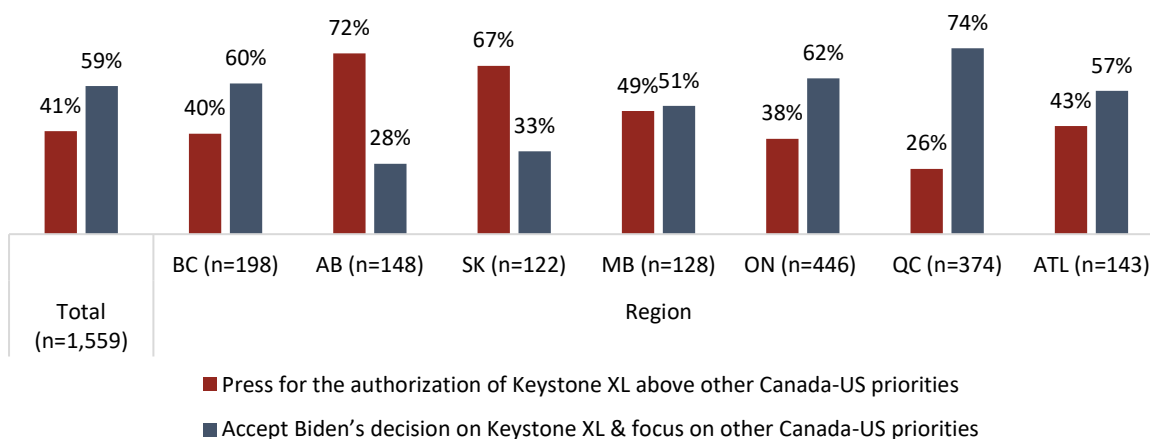


Part Two: Majority want Canada to accept decision, focus on broader U.S. relationship

Despite majorities in each province recognizing the negative consequences the cancellation has for Alberta, and to a lesser extent, Canada as whole, the will to push back and try to reverse this decision is more milquetoast. If it were up to them, three-in-five Canadians (59%) say they would accept the cancellation and focus on other priorities in Canada-U.S. relations. The number that share this view is highest in Quebec, where three-quarters would do so.

Here again, however, those on the Prairies take a different approach. A strong majority in Alberta (72%) and Saskatchewan (67%) would press the Biden Administration to undo the cancellation, while residents in Manitoba are split on the decision:

Suppose you were the Prime Minister of Canada and you were speaking to President Joe Biden. Which approach is closest to the one you would you take?

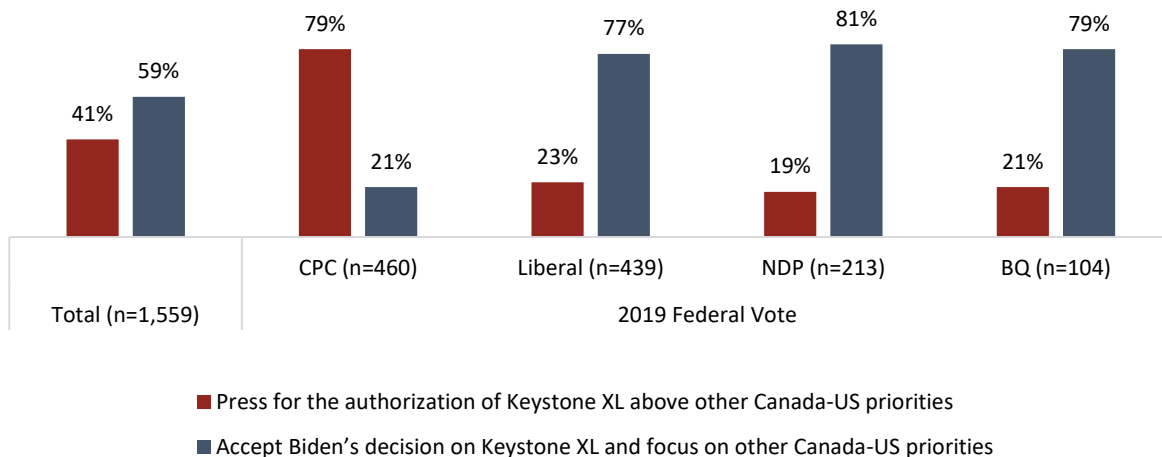


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Given the strong support the federal Conservatives have in Alberta and Saskatchewan, it is unsurprising that four-in-five past Conservative voters would apply pressure to re-authorize Keystone XL. Roughly the same proportion of Liberal, NDP, and Bloc Quebecois supporters say the opposite:

Suppose you were the Prime Minister of Canada and you were speaking to President Joe Biden. Which approach is closest to the one you would you take?



Balance between economic and environmental concerns

The Angus Reid Institute also asked respondents to indicate which consideration carries more weight in their perception of this issue: jobs and the economy or climate change and the environment. Divisions between economic and environmental considerations have been a persistent issue in this country, well-documented in a two-part ARI study during the 2019 federal election campaign.

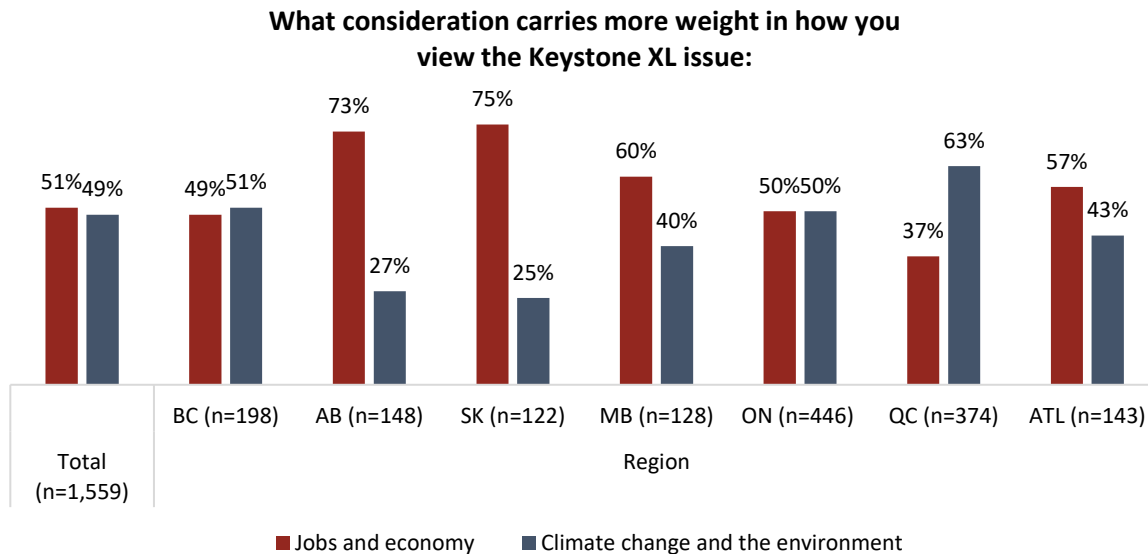
Related: [Balancing act: Majorities say both climate action, oil & gas growth should be top priorities for next government](#)

'Goldilocks zone': Canadians divided on whether Trudeau's pipeline approach is too much, too little or just right

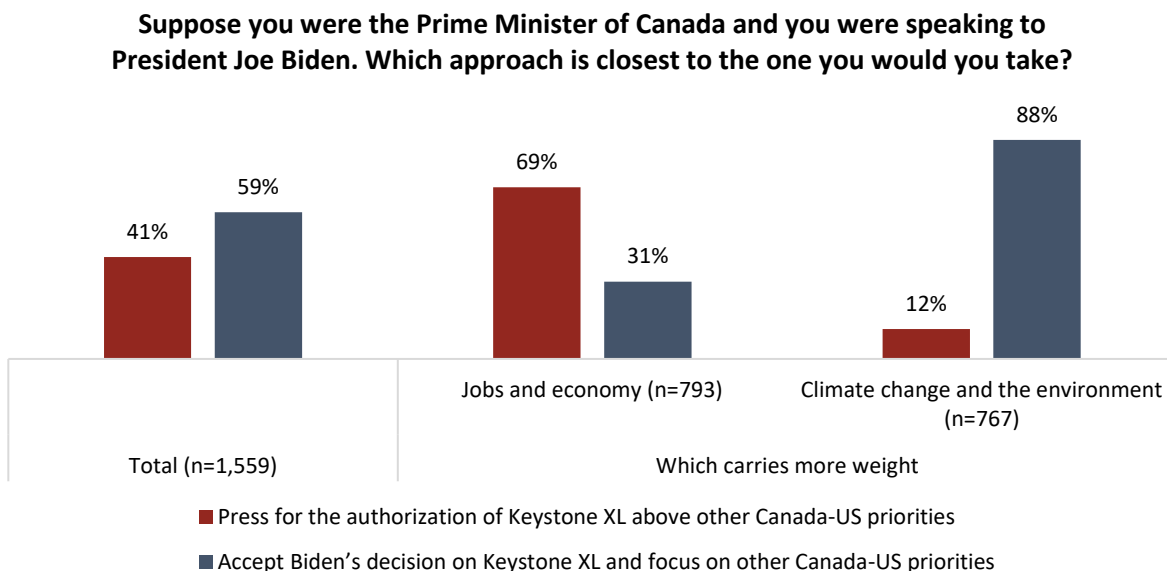
When it comes to weighing these priorities in terms of Keystone XL, Canadians remain split. Priority diverges significantly across the country, leading to an overall split:

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Moreover, the lens through which Canadians view these priorities highly correlates with how they would handle Keystone’s cancellation. Seven-in-ten (69%) who say economic considerations come first would push for authorization, while nine-in-ten (88%) of those that prioritize environmental considerations would accept Keystone’s cancellation and move on.



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

For detailed results by economic vs. environmental prioritization, [click here](#).