



FOR TORIES, ENERGY DEBATE ISN'T POWERING UP VOTERS IN CAMPAIGN

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This could be an election where Canadians have a serious discussion about energy and natural resource issues.

The Conservatives have tried to make that happen but have - so far - failed.

And that's been to the benefit of the Liberals.

In one of his first addresses as Prime Minister, Mark Carney declared his goal for Canada to be a conventional and clean energy superpower.

Yes, the Liberals will continue to balance growth in energy and resources with environmental responsibility, but his remarks suggested a distinct shift in tone from the Trudeau government. A new direction for the Liberals might include an east-west oil pipeline, along with investments in hydro, transmission infrastructure, nuclear, wind, hydrogen, battery storage and carbon capture. Carney also proposed to better streamline the approval process for energy and resource projects, including a "one project, one review" system.

Like Carney, Poilievre has also said he will speed up approvals for pipelines and other critical infrastructure. He has promised to eliminate the carbon levy on industrial emitters, end the emission cap on oil and gas, repeal Bill C-69 (the so called "no more pipelines" bill), and remove the ban on oil tankers on BC's north and central coasts. In addition, the Conservatives have promised to fast-track the development of critical mineral projects, such as those in the Ring of Fire region of Ontario.

The promises of the two leading parties reflect the changing mood of Canadians in the light of Canada's trade and sovereignty disputes with the United States. Ipsos polling in April shows that 7-in-10 Canadians (69%) believe Canada needs to move with more haste on developing energy and resource projects. About one-quarter (26%) say "we need to act fast on these opportunities and push obstacles out of the way." Another 43% are a little less enthusiastic and say, "we need to move faster than we have before, but with some caution." Fewer than two-in-ten (18%) Canadians want Canada to continue as before, slow down or stop the development of energy and resource projects.

The appetite for moving faster on projects is well above majority levels in all regions of the country, although higher in BC (78%) and Alberta (77%) than in Quebec (64%) or Manitoba/Saskatchewan (63%).

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Canadians also agree on several specific energy and resource projects they would like to see the federal government speed up or expand. As usual, there is widespread support for investing more in renewable energy projects such as solar and wind (83% support). Most Canadians also support building more east-west electricity power distribution lines (78%) and building more hydroelectric power projects, i.e. dams (77%). But it's not just clean energy. Most Canadians support an east-west oil pipeline (67%, but lower in Quebec at 50%) as well as investing in more oil refineries so we can refine our own oil into gasoline (66%, but lower in Quebec at 52%).

However, the two major parties and the Canadian public are not as neatly aligned on these issues as suggested above. In particular, the Conservatives have aggressively pushed back on the idea that a Carney government will - in practice - be any more friendly toward new energy and resource projects than the Trudeau government of the last decade was. As evidence, Conservatives point out that Carney has either said, or at least not denied, that he will retain C-69, retain the emissions production cap, and retain the existing BC tanker ban.

If Canadians want to see progress on energy and resources, and the Carney Liberals are putting up barriers to that progress, this should represent an opportunity for the Conservatives to gain some ground in an election campaign where little has gone their way so far.

Our recent Ipsos polling, however, reveals the public is tending to side with Mark Carney and the Liberals over Pierre Poilievre and the Conservatives on these issues. Not surprisingly, the Carney Liberals lead the Poilievre Conservatives by 9-points on the question of who is best to manage Canada's energy and resources "to ensure we proceed in an environmentally responsible and sustainable manner" (Liberals 32% vs. Conservatives 23%). But it *will* come as a surprise, at least to most Conservatives, that the Carney Liberals also lead the Poilievre Conservatives by nine-points on the question of who is best to manage Canada's energy and resources "to create jobs and grow the economy" (Liberals 38% vs. Conservatives 29%). The Liberal advantage grows to 13-points when these two items are combined as who is best to manage Canada's energy and resources "to balance both economic opportunities and environmental concerns" (Liberals 38% vs. Conservatives 25%).

The Liberals currently lead in every region of the country except Alberta on the question of who is best to manage Canada's energy and resources "to balance both economic opportunities and environmental concerns". And even in Alberta, the Conservatives only have a statistically insignificant 4-point advantage over the Liberals (Conservatives 41% vs. Liberals 37%).

This raises a question as to whether energy and resource issues really matter in this campaign. Just because Canadians have opinions on this topic doesn't mean those opinions determine votes.

If we look at the issues Canadians tell Ipsos they care about this election, energy barely registers at just 4%. That's nowhere near issues like affordability, health care and relations with the United States. But the 4% figure does hide that energy and resources are also integrated into other big issues such as the economy, the environment, and US trade and relations.



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Even if energy and resources are not yet drivers of vote, we know these issues matter to Pierre Poilievre and the Conservatives. They continue to take every opportunity they can to highlight the differences in approach between themselves and the Liberals in order to make the case that they, not the Liberals, are best to manage energy and resources to create jobs and grow the economy. So far it hasn't worked, but the Conservatives need to win on an issue like this in order to gain lost ground in this campaign. We should expect to see Pierre Poilievre and his party highlighting these issues over the rest of the campaign and especially during the upcoming debates.

