

Canada and the Arctic: True North Strong and Ours?

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Toronto, ON – A new Ipsos Reid poll conducted exclusively on behalf of CanWest News Service and Global Television has found that Canadians are split on whether the Canadian North should be left relatively untouched or whether we should push ahead with exploration and development.

Six in ten (57%) Canadians are closer to the opinion that ‘the arctic ecosystem is too fragile for the extraction of natural resources that threatens to destroy the sustainability of the ecosystem so we should leave it relatively untouched’. On the other hand, four in ten (40%) Canadians believe that ‘the potential of uncovering vast reserves of natural resources is too great to pass up for Canada, and that the ecosystem can be protected through careful regulation and supervision, so we should push ahead’. Only 3% don’t know with which sentiment they more closely identify.

Thinking about arctic sovereignty as a matter of public policy for the government to deal with, only three in ten (28%) believe that enforcing arctic sovereignty should be a ‘major priority’ for the government. This places it well behind healthcare (86%), poverty (71%), the economy (69%), gas prices (67%), crime (66%), climate change (63%), and Afghanistan (46%) as major priorities for the government to tackle. In fact, a majority (51%) believes that arctic sovereignty should be a ‘minor priority’ for the government, while 15% believe that it is ‘really not a priority’. Seven percent (7%) do not know how much of a priority enforcing sovereignty in the arctic should be.

Focusing on what the Canadian government should be doing in the arctic going forward, four in ten (39%) believe the government should ‘invest serious resources in asserting

Canada's sovereignty in the North, such as by building new Coast Guard icebreakers, buying new surveillance equipment and expanding the number of troops stationed there'.

Adopting a more multi-lateral policy, one in three (32%) Canadians think that the government should 'try to work out an arrangement with the other nations to see if there is a way to accommodate everyone, even if it means Canada giving up some of its own sovereignty in the North'.

One quarter (26%) of Canadians would have the government adopt a more passive stance still, agreeing that the government should 'really concentrate on other more pressing issues because we only have limited resources to deal with this, and now is not the time'. Three percent (3%) don't know what the government should do going forward.

Reflecting on what the Harper government is doing to enforce arctic sovereignty, four in ten (42%) believe that the government should be doing 'more' than it is currently doing, while a similar proportion (43%) believes that they should continue doing 'about as much as its currently doing'. Just 12% believe the government should be doing 'less' to enforce Canadians sovereignty in the Canadian North.

These are the findings of an Ipsos Reid poll conducted on behalf of CanWest News Service and Global Television from July 29 to July 31, 2008. For the survey, a representative randomly selected sample of 1001 adult Canadians was interviewed by telephone. With a sample of this size, the results are considered accurate to within ± 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, of what they would have been had the entire adult population of Canada been polled. The margin of error will be larger within regions and for other sub-groupings of the survey population. These data were weighted to ensure that the sample's regional and age/sex composition reflects that of the actual Canadian population according to Census data.



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