

# Canadians Dead Split on Oil Sands

## *But Polarizing Opinions Pit Regions Against Each Other*

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**Ipsos Reid**

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# Canadians Dead Split on Oil Sands

## *But Polarizing Opinions Pit Regions Against Each Other*

**Toronto, ON** - The debate about oil-sands development in Alberta continues to build in Canada, and a new Ipsos Reid poll conducted on behalf of the CBC finds that Canadians are dead split on the issue.

Among the majority of Canadians who are aware of the oil sands debate and have an opinion on the matter, one half (51%) more closely believe that 'while there are some risks to the environment with this development the need for energy in Canada outweighs those risks'. Adopting the opposite stance, the other half (49%) of Canadians more closely agree with the sentiment that 'while there is a need for energy in Canada, it does not outweigh the environmental risks with this development'.

This controversial issue has polarized the nation, pitting certain regions of the country against others. Interestingly, though, the divide is not along east-west boundaries. Residents of Atlantic Canada (64%), Alberta (62%) and populous Ontario (58%) are most likely to believe that the environmental risks are outweighed by the need for energy and are driving the national numbers on the pro-development side of the equation. Conversely, residents of Quebec (71%) and Saskatchewan and Manitoba (60%) are most likely to believe that the need for energy does not outweigh the environmental risks associated with the oil-sands development, with opposing stances in Ontario and Quebec pitting Canada's two most-populous provinces against each other.

Interestingly, residents of British Columbia are most conflicted and divided on the matter: one half (52%) believes the environmental risks are outweighed by the need for energy; the other half (48%) does not.

While a majority (70%) of Canadians have seen, read or heard something about the oil sands development, whether it was through news coverage, articles advertisements or some other medium, three in ten (30%) say they have not. Among those that have heard something about it, nearly one half (46%) thinks it is a 'good thing' (12% very good/34% good), while one in three (32%) thinks it's a 'bad thing' (13% very bad/19% bad).

Still, nearly one quarter (22%) of Canadians who have heard about the oil sands development either don't know or don't care enough to determine whether or not it's a good thing or a bad thing. When coupled with the proportion who haven't heard about the development, this amounts to four in ten (42%) Canadians who are either in the dark or indifferent about the project, suggesting that further knowledge and awareness of the oil-sands project could tip the scales either way as the debate continues to build in intensity.

### ***Support for Oil-Sands Development by the Demos...***

Canadians were split 51% to 49% as to whether the energy needs outweigh the environmental risks of developing the oil sands. Opinions differed among more than regional lines:

- Men (56%) identified more closely with the notion that Canada's energy needs outweigh the environmental risks while women (44%) were less likely to agree with this statement. Conversely, women (56%) were more likely than men (44%) to believe that the environmental risk did **not** outweigh the need for energy.

- Marked differences exist based on age as well: over one half (55%) of those aged 55+ and 35 to 54 (53%) agreed that the need for energy outweighs the environmental risks, while just 40% of 18-34 year olds also agreed with that notion.

The majority (70%) of Canadians have heard, seen or read something about the oil sands, but three in ten (30%) have not.

- The highest proportion who have heard about the oil sands in Alberta were Albertans themselves (86%), followed by those living in British Columbia (72%), Atlantic Canada (70%), Saskatchewan and Manitoba (69%), Ontario (67%) and lastly, Quebec (66%).
- Men (76%) were more likely than women (64%) to have heard, read or seen any coverage.
- Eight in ten (80%) older Canadians over the age of 55 have heard, read or seen something about the oil-sands development, while fewer 35-54 year olds (68%) and 18-34 year olds (59%) are aware of the development.

### ***Americans on the Oil Sands: Little Awareness, a More Lopsided Verdict By Those Who are Compared to Canadians ...***

Despite a largely pictorial essay in National Geographic, environmental-group protests and duelling ad campaigns between those groups and the Government of Alberta, awareness of the oil-sands development in Alberta is much lower in the United States than it is in Canada.

In an identical comparison poll fielded in the United States, while seven in ten (70%) Canadians have seen, read or heard about the development, just 16% of Americans are aware of it. The vast majority (84%) are not.

Among those who are familiar with it, the issue appears to be much more lop-sided in the U.S. than it is in Canada: most (72%) aware Americans think it's a 'good thing' (26% very good/47% good) compared to just 46% of Canadians. Just two in ten (18%) of aware Americans think it's a 'bad thing' (4% very bad/14% bad), less than the 32% of Canadians who say the same. One in ten (10%) aware Americans is unsure compared to 22% of Canadians.

Further, three quarters (73%) of aware Americans more closely identify with the sentiment that 'while there are some risks to the environment with this development, the need for energy in Canada outweighs those risks'. Conversely, one quarter (27%) of Americans familiar with the project more closely believe that 'while there is a need for energy in Canada, it does not outweigh the environmental risks with this development'.

*These are some of the findings of an Ipsos Reid poll conducted between September 7 and 13, 2010, on behalf of the CBC. For this survey, a sample of 1,008 adults from Ipsos' Canadian online panel was interviewed online. Weighting was then employed to balance demographics and ensure that the sample's composition reflects that of the adult population according to Census data and to provide results intended to approximate the sample universe. A survey with an unweighted probability sample of this size and a 100% response rate would have an estimated margin of error of +/-3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, of what the results would have been had the entire population of adults in Canada been polled.*

*The American data was conducted between September 16 and 20, 2010. For these data, a sample of 1,016 adults from Ipsos' American online panel was interviewed online. Weighting was then employed to balance demographics and ensure that the sample's composition reflects that of the adult population according to Census data and to provide results intended to approximate the sample universe. A survey with an unweighted probability sample of this size and a 100% response rate would have an*

*estimated margin of error of +/-3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, of what the results would have been had the entire population of adults in the United States of America been polled.*

*All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error, and measurement error.*

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