

Climate change and oilsands development among top issues as election campaign begins

A recent Angus Reid Institute poll reveals Canadians want to have their cake and eat it too when it comes to preventing climate change and producing oil and gas.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was in Ottawa Sept. 11 asking the Governor General to dissolve Parliament, launching the country's 43rd general election. Canadians will go to the polls Oct. 21.

In a Sept. 5 poll, Angus Reid revealed nearly 70 per cent of Canadians see dealing with climate change as a top priority. Yet that same poll shows 58 per cent place a top priority on oil and gas development.

"While different Canadians may lean further to one side of the 'economy-versus-environment' discussion, in most cases this does not mean they'd ignore the other side completely," according to the Angus Reid poll.

"Among those who said the next federal government should prioritize climate change efforts, three-quarters (75 per cent) want at least some investment in the oil and gas sector. And among those who say the energy industry should have the next government's main focus, four-in-five (80 per cent) would still wish to see at least some investment in climate change efforts."

The poll revealed 25 per cent view the Conservative Party as the best to lead on the climate issue, while an almost similar number 23 per cent said the Green Party would be best. Eighteen per cent of respondents named the governing Liberals while 10 per cent chose the NDP.

"One of the most unfortunate things about the upcoming election is we may see another big divide in the country," said Joe Gunn, executive director of the Oblate Centre at St. Paul University in Ottawa.

In speaking with Oblates from Saskatchewan and Alberta, Gunn said he has heard about the hardship families are experiencing after job losses in the oil and gas sector.

"Places like Saskatchewan and Alberta are concerned about fossil fuel development," Gunn said. "I would be surprised if Liberals win a seat in either of those provinces."

“We’ve had these kinds of divisions in Canada in the past, and they make it a hard country to govern,” he said.

Gunn said the Oblate Centre will also be keeping an eye on issues such as the welcoming of refugees and migrants; poverty reduction; and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

While Canadians are divided over the Liberal government’s new carbon tax, with opposition highest among those who plan to vote conservative, 54 per cent of Canadians say Canada should do more to meet the targets agreed to in the 2015 Paris Climate Accord.

Canada remains unlikely to meet these targets set by the previous Harper Conservative government.

Polls show the election tightening, with the Liberals gaining on the Conservatives after dipping in the polls in the wake of the SNC-Lavalin scandal that led to the resignation of former Attorney General Jody Wilson-Raybould over pressure from the Prime Minister’s Office to grant the company a deferred prosecution on corruption charges.



Alyssa Golob

While life issues such as abortion and euthanasia may not be top of mind for national pollsters, for Catholics like Alyssa Golob, co-founder of It Starts Right Now, ensuring pro-life candidates are elected is a key priority.

“It’s going to be a very tight election,” Golob said. “The polls have the Conservatives and Liberals neck and neck. Catholic voters should first and foremost, not only vote for, but also volunteer for the prolife candidates who have the greatest chance of winning, so we can tip the scale in their favour.”

While the Liberal and the NDP parties do not allow pro-life candidates or free votes on life issues, Green Party Leader Elizabeth May, while pro-choice herself, has said she would not prevent a Green Party MP from re-opening the abortion debate.

Peoples Party Leader Maxime Bernier has said he would allow free votes, but also that he supports abortion until the last trimester.

Conservative Leader Andrew Scheer has disappointed some pro-life advocates because he has promised his government will not bring forward legislation on abortion.

"The government means the 30 or so cabinet ministers and not back bench MPs," said Golob, noting Scheer has defended "freedom of expression, and the right to bring forward bills that are important to them as well as free votes."

Golob said she recognizes that no party has a majority of pro-life MPs, so consequently no Prime Minister could bring in legislation to defend life.

"That's why it's important to elect as many prolife MPs as possible. The Liberals did have a free vote policy but if Justin Trudeau is defeated, hopefully that policy will return," Golob said.

Prior to 2016, the Liberal Party had a minority of prolife MPs who traditionally were allowed to vote their consciences on non-government bills.

It Starts Right Now has identified 50 swing ridings where they are actively supporting pro-life candidates.

"A lot of people are nervous, and excited, but know it's crunch time, because how we act in the next 40 days will impact the results of the election," Golob said.

Another Angus Reid poll conducted at the end of August, revealed 52 per cent of respondents were uncommitted to voting for any particular party. Some of those uncommitted voters had supported the Liberals or other parties; others had not voted at all in the previous election.

"Chief among the core issues for uncommitted voters: improving health care access and the transparency and honesty that they expect from a federal government," Angus Reid said on its website.

"On both of these issues, seven-in-ten uncommitted voters allotted a score of six or seven on a seven-point scale."

The Institute predicted both health care and ethics related to the SNC-Lavalin scandal will play a big role in the election, as will discussions of a proposed national pharmacare program.

Cardus Family will be watching for any party platforms calling for a national

daycare program, an issue that has been raised by several political parties over the years.

“I haven’t seen it raised in a substantial way,” said Peter Jon Mitchell, acting director of Cardus Family. “It could emerge as an issue.”

A new Statistics Canada study shows Canadians rely on a variety of types of non-parental childcare: 51.9 per cent use daycare centres or pre-school; 25.6 have a relative look after their child; five per cent have a non-relative look after their child; and 20.4 per cent leave their child with a family child care home. Slightly more than nine per cent use before or after school programs and the rest find other arrangements.

Despite child care policy being a provincial responsibility, the federal government has allocated a \$7.5 billion transfer over 11 years to the provinces to fund only one type of centre-based daycare.

“If you’re going to spend that money, put it in the hands of parents so they can choose the option that’s best for them,” Mitchell said. “We say that child care is the care of a child, no matter who does it. Our previous research has found most parents would prefer to have one parent care for their kids.”

Mitchell said he sees some advantages to the Liberals’ Canada Child Benefit that puts non-taxable money into the hands of parents to “spend as they see fit.”

“It’s been linked to a drop in child poverty,” Mitchell said. “When it was introduced in 2016, it was seen as a step away from universal daycare.”