

# CANADIANS OVERWHELMINGLY CHOOSE WATER AS OUR MOST IMPORTANT NATURAL RESOURCE



Nik Nanos

In our latest Nanos-*Policy Options* poll for this special summer issue on water, contributing Writer Nik Nanos finds that Canadians regard fresh water as the resource that is most important for the country's future — by a surprisingly wide 3-1 margin over oil and gas. Furthermore, "from the point of view of self-identification, water is at the very top of the list." Canadians don't mind being seen as "drawers of water," he writes, for that's how they see themselves.

Dans le dernier sondage *Nanos-Options politiques*, Nik Nanos a découvert que les Canadiens considèrent l'eau douce comme la ressource naturelle la plus importante pour l'avenir du pays, par une étonnante marge de 3 contre 1 relativement au pétrole et au gaz. De surcroît, l'eau arrive au tout premier rang du point de vue de l'auto-identification, observe Nik Nanos, les Canadiens ne se formalisant pas d'être considérés comme des « porteurs d'eau » étant donné qu'eux-mêmes se perçoivent ainsi.

**B**y an overwhelming margin, Canadians consider fresh water to be the most important natural resource to Canada's future. By a margin of 3-1, they chose water over oil and gas as the key natural resource for Canada's future.

In a Nanos Research poll sponsored by the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation for *Policy Options*, 61.6 percent of Canadians chose fresh water as the most important natural resource for the country's future, while 21.7 percent chose oil and gas, 11.2 percent chose forestry and 3.8 percent chose the fisheries.

The poll of 1,001 Canadians was conducted by telephone between May 26 and June 1, and has a margin of error of 3.1 percent, 19 times out of 20.

In the past, Canadians have been seen by others as hewers of wood and drawers of water. But from the point of view of self-identification, water is at the very top of the list. Prime Minister Stephen Harper has positioned Canada as "an energy superpower," but looking at these numbers, we can think of Canada as a water super-power.

Canadians clearly see water as an advantage for the Canadian economy. And if our abundance of water has almost been taken for granted, Canadians today regard it as a strategic resource, much more so than oil and gas. This finding is startling.

Thinking of our economic future, oil and gas are obviously a critical resource. But Canadians clearly regard water as their most important resource, even in the Atlantic and the West, where oil and gas are huge in the economy.

In the Atlantic, 31.3 percent saw oil and gas as the most important resource for the future, while 45.1 percent thought fresh water was most important. The fisheries came in third in the Atlantic at 12.7 percent, the only region of the country where they didn't rank last among the four resources listed in our interviews.

In the West, 26.7 percent saw oil and gas as our most important resource for the future, while 60.9 percent chose water. These western numbers are closely in line with the national average.

**N**ot only do Canadians regard water as their most important natural resource, they know we have it in abundance and expect governments to look after it.

When we asked Canadians who they thought should take the greatest responsibility for fresh water, half of them, 49.1 percent, said all levels of government — federal, provincial and municipal.

But among the other half, nearly three times as many respondents, 29.4 percent, thought the federal government should be primarily responsible, as chose

## Canadians overwhelmingly choose water as our most important natural resource

QUESTION 1. FROM THE FOLLOWING LIST OF CANADA'S NATURAL RESOURCES, WHICH IS THE MOST IMPORTANT TO CANADA'S FUTURE?

		N	Oil and gas %	Forestry %	Fisheries %	Fresh water %	Unsure %
Region	Canada	1,001	21.7	11.2	3.8	61.6	1.7
	Atlantic	105	31.3	10.3	12.7	45.1	0.7
	Quebec	244	15.6	18.9	1.0	62.6	2.0
	Ontario	300	17.4	8.9	4.3	67.4	2.0
	West	352	26.7	8.2	2.8	60.9	1.4
Gender	Male	468	22.4	9.2	4.3	62.9	1.2
	Female	532	21.0	13.0	3.5	60.4	2.1
Age	18 to 29	197	16.9	15.3	3.2	63.7	0.8
	30 to 39	193	21.1	14.3	3.1	59.6	1.9
	40 to 49	218	25.1	4.2	5.8	63.4	1.6
	50 to 59	171	24.4	11.1	3.2	60.4	0.9
	60 plus	221	20.8	12.1	3.6	60.6	2.9

QUESTION 2. FROM THE FOLLOWING LIST WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST CONCERN REGARDING FRESH WATER IN CANADA?

		N	Drinking water quality %	Water pollution from industry, agriculture and/or household %	Waste and over-consumption %	Bulk water exports %	Unsure %
Region	Canada	1,001	18.5	39.8	22.1	17.2	2.4
	Atlantic	105	19.4	47.4	20.8	10.2	2.2
	Quebec	244	13.0	38.5	30.3	17.3	0.9
	Ontario	300	19.6	45.2	18.5	15.1	1.6
	West	352	21.1	33.8	19.9	21.0	4.2
Gender	Male	468	17.6	40.2	19.9	20.8	1.6
	Female	532	19.3	39.5	24.0	14.0	3.2
Age	18 to 29	197	22.6	37.1	25.0	13.7	1.6
	30 to 39	193	16.8	41.6	25.5	14.3	1.9
	40 to 49	218	14.1	34.6	24.6	25.1	1.6
	50 to 59	171	16.1	44.2	18.9	18.0	2.8
	60 plus	221	22.5	42.3	16.6	14.3	4.2

QUESTION 3. WHO DO YOU THINK SHOULD TAKE THE GREATEST RESPONSIBILITY FOR FRESH WATER IN CANADA?

		N	Federal government %	Provincial government %	Municipalities %	All %	Unsure %
Region	Canada	1,001	29.4	11.9	7.1	49.1	2.5
	Atlantic	105	38.3	15.5	8.0	34.6	3.6
	Quebec	244	5.6	11.9	5.1	77.1	0.3
	Ontario	300	41.9	9.7	10.0	34.0	4.4
	West	352	32.6	12.8	5.8	46.7	2.1
Gender	Male	468	32.3	13.5	7.8	44.2	2.2
	Female	532	26.8	10.5	6.5	53.3	2.8
Age	18 to 29	197	30.6	11.3	8.1	46.8	3.2
	30 to 39	193	24.8	14.9	6.8	51.6	1.9
	40 to 49	218	34.0	11.0	7.3	45.0	2.6
	50 to 59	171	28.6	11.1	6.0	53.0	1.4
	60 plus	221	28.3	11.4	7.2	49.8	3.3

the provinces, at only 11.9 percent, and just 7.1 percent chose municipalities.

On this question, there were some striking, but not surprising, regional variations. In Quebec, only 5.6 percent thought the federal government should be responsible, while 11.9 percent saw water as a provincial responsibility, only 5.1 percent saw it as a municipal responsibility, and an overwhelming 77.1 percent thought all levels of government should be responsible.

But in Ontario, only 9.7 percent thought of water as a provincial responsibility, while 41.9 percent thought it was a federal responsibility, 10 percent saw it as a municipal responsibility, and 34 percent thought all levels of government should be responsible.

With the notable exception of Quebec, Canadians are prepared to accept federal leadership on this issue, but would clearly prefer everyone to work together. And even Quebecers

think this is bigger than Quebec. Three Quebecers in four, as opposed to the national average of one in two, want all governments to cooperate on this issue. Quebecers clearly understand that even within the federation, they have shared boundary water issues with Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick and Ontario.

When we asked Canadians their “greatest concern regarding fresh water in Canada,” water pollu-

**QUESTION 4. FROM THE FOLLOWING LIST, WHAT IS YOUR TOP GOVERNMENT PRIORITY FOR ADDRESSING CANADA'S FRESH WATER CHALLENGES**

		N	Having public awareness and education programs %	Adopting a national water strategy %	Increasing investments in drinking water and waste-water infrastructure %	Preserving river flows, lakes for fish and other aquatic ecosystems %	Forbidding bulk water export %	Unsure %
Region	Canada	1,001	16.3	28.9	11.9	15.5	20.2	7.2
	Atlantic	105	17.1	32.9	8.9	15.3	20.3	5.5
	Quebec	244	21.4	25.9	18.6	13.7	16.3	4.1
	Ontario	300	17.1	28.3	11.1	19.1	15.0	9.3
	West	352	11.7	30.2	8.8	13.8	27.4	8.1
Gender	Male	468	15.4	28.5	10.0	13.4	26.2	6.5
	Female	532	17.0	29.2	13.6	17.4	15.0	7.8
Age	18 to 29	197	19.4	25.8	11.3	17.7	18.5	7.3
	30 to 39	193	16.1	29.8	14.9	14.3	13.7	11.2
	40 to 49	218	13.1	29.3	13.1	13.1	24.6	6.8
	50 to 59	171	14.3	32.3	10.1	15.2	24.0	4.1
	60 plus	221	18.2	27.7	10.1	17.3	20.2	6.5

**QUESTION 5. ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 5, WHERE 1 WAS NOT AT ALL WILLING AND 5 WAS VERY WILLING, HOW WILLING WOULD YOU BE TO PAY MORE FOR WATER IF IT IMPROVED THE SUPPLY OF CLEAN WATER FOR CANADIANS AND THE ENVIRONMENT?**

		N	1 = Not at all willing	2 = Somewhat unwilling	3 = Neither willing nor unwilling	4 = Somewhat willing	5 = Very willing	Unsure
Region	Canada	1,001	13.5	11.1	25.7	20.4	25.4	3.9
	Atlantic	105	14.7	7.1	21.7	21.5	25.1	9.9
	Quebec	244	22.1	11.4	25.0	20.7	18.7	2.1
	Ontario	300	9.4	12.1	28.4	19.9	26.6	3.7
	West	352	10.7	11.3	25.2	20.2	29.1	3.5
Gender	Male	468	13.9	10.5	25.2	21.4	26.3	2.6
	Female	532	13.1	11.7	26.2	19.4	24.5	5.0
Age	18 to 29	197	8.9	12.1	26.6	16.1	32.3	4.0
	30 to 39	193	9.3	11.2	24.8	29.8	19.9	5.0
	40 to 49	218	15.2	11.0	27.2	21.5	21.5	3.7
	50 to 59	171	17.1	15.7	23.5	18.9	24.0	0.9
	60 plus	221	16.9	6.8	26.1	16.0	29.0	5.2

