Canadians' Views on Energy East

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1 Introduction

This survey was conducted in April 2015 by Leger Marketing. It is a random sample of Leger's online panel of roughly 300,000 Canadians. As an online panel it is not a true random sample of the population. That said, the shift to cell phones and growing survey fatigue has also meant that traditional random digit dialing surveys have their own forms of bias (e.g.non-response). All public opinion surveys are biased.

I would call this sample a high quality sample, but it does overestimate educated members of the population and – likely – older members of the electorate, although I haven't had time to check that latter one. This is common in online panel surveys. The following results are *unweighted* because an initial analysis showed virtually no difference in a key variable between a weighted and an unweighted sample.

2 Summary of Relevant Questions

We asked two questions I'm presenting to you today. Both were introduced with the following text:

> Perhaps you are aware of plans to build pipelines in Canada, including the Energy East pipeline, which will transport oil from Alberta to Qubec and New Brunswick.

Then, respondents were asked the following question:

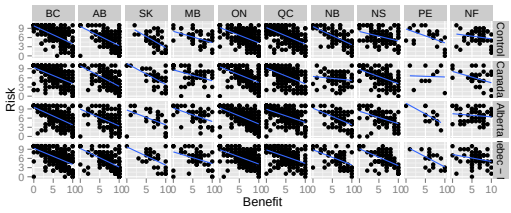

Figure 1: People's perceptions of risks and benefits are strongly inversely correlated, because people's feelings toward the project determine both evaluations.

> On a scale of 0 to 10, where zero means not beneficial at all and 10 means extremely beneficial, to what extent do you consider that this pipeline could be beneficial?

Following this, respondents were randomly assigned into one of four experimental groups that received one of the four following prompts:

1. No prompt (Control Groups)
2. Some people say this pipeline is essential for creating jobs in Alberta because it will open up new markets for its oil
3. Some people say this pipeline could create jobs at refineries in places like New Brunswick and Quebec
4. Some people say this pipeline will create jobs across Canada

Then, respondents were asked the following question:

> On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 indicates no risk and 10 indicates extreme risk, how much risk do you believe this pipeline poses to the environment?

3 Results

The importance of feelings

People's responses to these two questions are negatively correlated, (see Figure 1) regardless of province and regardless of experimental treatment because people do not evaluate the benefits and risks of a pipeline like this in a rational way. Rather, they have an initial base feeling towards things like this. If they like them, they rate the benefits as high and the risks low, and if they don't like them they rate the risks high and the benefits low. If we replaced "pipelines" with suntanning, the correlation between benefits and risks would be the same.

Figure 2 shows the average benefit and rating for the control group by province. You can think of this as the raw measure of people's feelings toward Energy East in the different provinces. *I'll draw your eye to Alberta,*

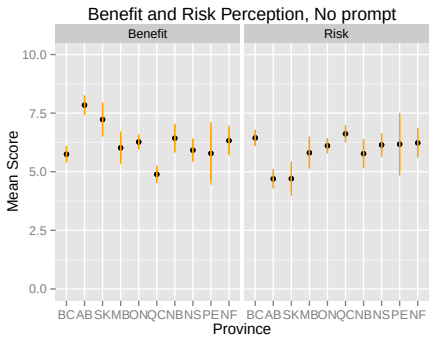

Figure 2: Raw mean ratings of risks and benefits of Energy East by province

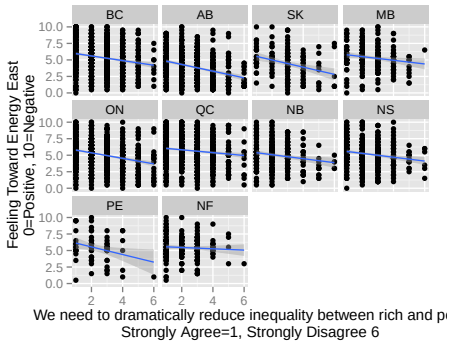

Figure 3: The relationship between ideology and people's gut feelings toward Energy East. this shows a measure of egalitarianism on the x-axis and the combined risk and benefit rating on the y-axis (with the benefit rating reversed). The more people are committed to reducing inequality, the more negative their feelings to Energy East

Saskatchewan and Quebec. People in the first two are predisposed to Energy East, the latter less so.

Feelings as a product of ideology

This feeling is strongly related to ideology. Feelings toward Energy East are negatively correlated with egalitarianism. Figure 3 shows responses to a measure of egalitarianism on the x-axis and combined risk and benefit ratings to Energy East on the y axis. The benefit variable has been reversed so that high numbers indicate a negative feeling, low numbers a positive feeling. *The more egalitarian a person is, the less benefits and the greater risks they perceive from Energy East.*

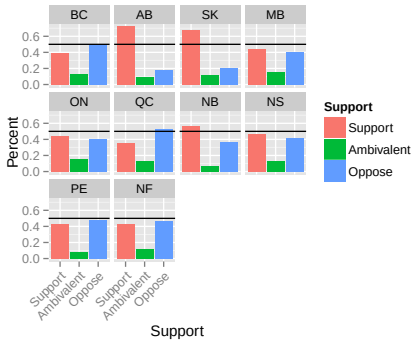

Figure 4: Percentage of respondents expressing net support or opposition to Energey East by Province. Support means they assigned a higher benefit rating than a risk rating; Opposition means they assigned a lower benefit rating than a risk rating. Ambivalent means they had a tied score.

Net Support

Although we didn't ask a question that directly asked for respondents' support or opposition, this can be plausibly inferred by subtracting the risk rating from the benefit rating. A net positive suggests support for the project, a net negative indicates opposition. Figure 4 shows the percentage of people supporting and opposing Energy East by province. *There is majority support only in Alberta, Saskatchewan and New Brunswick. Opposition to Energy East is greatest in Quebec, where 53% of respondents oppose the project. In the other provinces, opinion is split, roughly 50-50.*

Persuasive Effects Of The "Jobs" Argument

I'll close by pointing out the effects of the experiment, which tried to test if including an argument that jobs could be created in a particular province (or across Canada) would impact the risk rating people assigned to Energy East. Note that people in each province were assigned to all three prompts, meaning we were able to test whether people's risk rating would increase or decrease depending, for example, if Albertans were told that Energy East would be created in Quebec, Alberta or Canada.

Effectively, this experiment tested whether the concentrated nature of the economic benefits of Energy East (Alberta, QC and NB) might change people's risk evaluations.

Figure 5 shows there is minimal change in the average risk ratings depending on the experimental prompt they were provided.

That said, Figure 6 shows the slope of the regression line between the benefit and risk ratings by experimental prompt and province. Recall that there is a negative relationship between risk and beneefit rating, meaning there is a negative slope to the line. If people take notice of the argument that jobs might

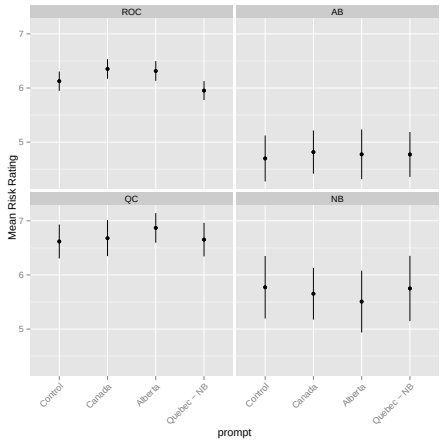

Figure 5: This shows the average risk rating by experimental prompt and province. The fact that there is no difference suggests that the experimental prompt that the pipeline would create jobs in a province does not alter a respondent's risk perception.

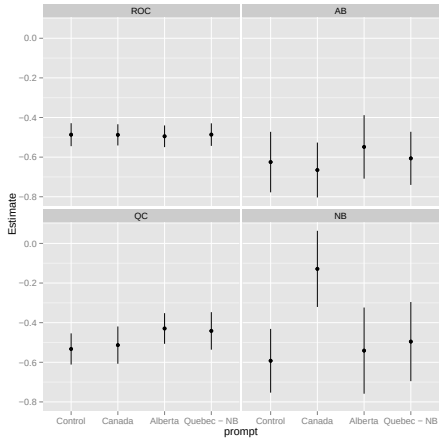

Figure 6: This shows the effecs of the jobs prompt on the regression slope between benefit and risk rating. Without a prompt, there is a strong negative slope between risks and benefits. With prompts that jobs would be created, people in AB, QC and NB reduce their risk ratings slightly, leading to a slope closer to zero.

be created in their home province, and it modifies their risk rating, we would expect the slope of the line to be closer to zero. That is in fact what happens in Quebec, Alberta and New Brunswick. Respondents in Quebec, Alberta and New Brunswick do take note of argument that Energy East might create jobs. But the effect is so small it does not change the overall *average* ratings.

4 Conclusion

1. People assign risks and benefit ratings to the pipeline jointly, as a product of feelings and ideology.
2. Majority support for Energy East exists in Alberta and Saskatchewan.
3. there is majority opposition in QC.
4. opinion is split down the middle in other provinces.
5. a single experimental prompt that jobs might be created in a particular province has a *tiny* effect, slightly reducing the risk ratings for people of EE in Quebec, Alberta and New Brunswick. But this is not large enough to change the average risk ratings.

This summary has not presented any demographic correlates of people's attitudes toward Energy East and it has only correlated one attitudinal variable (see 3). *That said, our dataset includes a variety of demographic variables including gender, age, educational standing, union status, income, political interest, partisan identification. Attitudinal variables in this data set include attitudes toward minorities, authority, the Alberta oil sands, Quebec separatism, and government spending and taxing.*

At your request, we would be happy to share further in-depth analyses with you, although it would be most productive to have a conversation with you or your delegate to find out precisely what you might wish to know.

Lastly, our contract with Leger includes one more field study which we have scheduled for the fall, ideally during the federal election campaign. My two colleagues at the Universit e de Montréal ahve a great deal of experience examining public opinion toward climate change and pipelines in Quebec. If your department has specific needs in terms of public opinion research, please give us some consideration