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## Survey finds Canadians overwhelmingly support building Arctic infrastructure

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The Canadian Arctic's vast landscape has always been a challenge when it comes to implementing and developing reliable Arctic infrastructure. [Home to 150,000 people](#), with four of every 10 identifying as Indigenous, the Canadian Arctic's infrastructure deficit has been the most persistent issue affecting northern Arctic communities. This is not a newly identified problem: the lack of access to reliable and capable infrastructure in the Canadian Arctic [has historically been a lingering and unresolved issue](#) for territorial and federal governments in Canada.

### The impact of climate change

This state of affairs has only been exacerbated as [the effects of climate change have become more severe](#). The climate emergency is making the Canadian Arctic's ongoing infrastructure deficit more difficult to resolve in an already complex geographical area.

The largest impediment to Arctic infrastructure development is global warming, coastal erosion and permafrost thawing. This affects accessibility, navigability and access to goods and services on a daily basis in all three Canadian Arctic territories.

These transportation routes continue to be affected by warming temperature and rainfall, limiting and reducing the amount of time winter roads can be accessed. This hinders the transportation of fuel, building materials and other goods communities are reliant upon, leading to greater financial expenses.

In addition, the Canadian Arctic's sparse and isolated communities [inhibit and obstruct infrastructure development](#). That's due to the high costs of developing infrastructure within the Canadian North as a whole, its limited building season and its engineering challenges. As a result, infrastructure such as roads, runways, airports, deep seaports, telecommunication lines, fuel terminals and power plants are limited.

## The impact of climate change

Nevertheless, the importance of Arctic infrastructure in the Canadian Arctic cannot be understated since it's tied to a better quality of life and greater access to health care and education.

Infrastructure enables the movement of commodities, people and ideas, and is the foundation of economic development. It stimulates job creation and business activity, and can have a minimal impact on the Arctic environment if created sustainably.

Furthermore, Arctic infrastructure is a strategic endeavour for Canadians due to ongoing geopolitical instability around the world, [which many fear could spill over into the circumpolar north](#).

It was once believed that [southern Canada lacked sufficient knowledge](#) about northern Canada, particularly in relation to infrastructure and its overall importance to northern Canada. However, a [public opinion analysis by the Gordon Foundation](#) in 2015 found that 78 per cent of southern Canadians placed a high level of importance on access to basic public infrastructure in the Arctic.

## Canadian sentiment on Arctic infrastructure

Fast forward to 2024, and Canadians still believe that Arctic infrastructure is important.

A more recent public opinion poll, this one conducted by the [Observatory on Politics and Security in the Arctic](#), surveyed more than 2,000 Canadians from July 30 to Aug. 12, 2024. One of us, Mathieu Landriault, is the director of the organization.

The main takeaway of the survey is that Canadians are highly supportive of Arctic infrastructure. They perceive it as strategic and part of nation-building, with 42 per cent considering it to be of national importance.

Respondents said there was a need to build additional infrastructure in the Arctic, even if other countries are involved in its development.

Partnerships with other countries to build Arctic infrastructure are seen as desirable by a majority of respondents, casting doubt on suggestions that the [defence of Canada's Arctic sovereignty must exclude other countries](#).

On this point, building Arctic infrastructure is perceived as more important than any desire for national autonomy.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Canada should partner up with other countries to build infrastructures in the Canadian Arctic."



Should Canada partner with other countries to build infrastructure? (Mathieu Landriault)

This urgency is also present when respondents were asked about whether the federal government should partner with private companies to build Arctic infrastructure. The message is clear on this note: more is needed, by any means possible.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The Canadian government and private corporations should share the use of their infrastructures (airstrip, port, hangar) in the Canadian Arctic."



Should private companies help Canada build Arctic infrastructure? (Mathieu Landriault)

## Support spans regions and politics

On this last question, support was high across all regions and political affiliations. Levels of support vary from 70 per cent in the Prairies to 79 per cent in the Maritimes. In terms of political affiliation, 80 per cent of Liberal voters supported the idea, followed by 76 per cent of Conservatives and 72 per cent of New Democrats.

However, some infrastructure projects had more public support than others. Water, including treatment plants, and transportation infrastructure, including ports, received the greatest amount of support. Connectivity infrastructure, meantime, such as broadcasting systems, ended up at the bottom of the list of four different types of critical infrastructure.

These numbers paint a clear picture of support for Arctic infrastructure in Canada. The political cost of investing in this infrastructure is relatively low: Canadians want more Arctic infrastructure built, and they perceive these investments as strategic ones that benefit all of Canada.

The naval facility in Nanisivik, Nunavut, is an example. First announced in 2007, [the facility is set to open in 2025](#), 10 years behind schedule and well over budget. Yet very little public and media attention have been devoted to these issues, and the political ramifications for successive governments have been non-existent.

## A popular issue

The inclusion of Arctic infrastructure in Canada's [newest Arctic foreign policy](#) shows the infrastructure gap is now being recognized as a serious concern, and resources are being mobilized to remedy these shortcomings.

It remains to be seen if all infrastructure will be improved as a result; some might be a harder sell for Canadians. More needs to be done to explain how, for example, connectivity infrastructure, including satellites and undersea cables, are crucial to living in the North, both as an economic lever and as a means of ensuring the safety of Northerners living on the land.

But the survey makes clear that prioritizing building Arctic infrastructure is a winning cause, politically speaking.

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