

## As Conservative leader, Scheer must balance core voters' values with party's need for growth

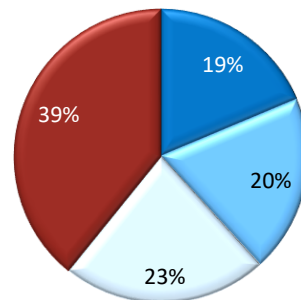
*Available CPC voters differ from the party's base on key issues, view of Canada's future*

**June 1, 2017** – As newly-elected Conservative leader Andrew Scheer cuts his teeth in his first week on the job and in Parliament, he may find pulling a coalition of right-leaning voters together easier than many think – provided he chooses to focus on the correct issues.

While many political analysts have defined Scheer's task as satisfying social conservatives – who have been described as [the constituency responsible for his leadership victory](#) – a new public opinion survey by the Angus Reid Institute reveals the Conservative core is, in fact, united by a strong mistrust of the media, deep dissatisfaction with the direction in which the country is headed, and a robust desire to see the Canadian government stay out of the free market.

These opinions set core Conservatives distinctly apart from those who say they are “likely” or “maybe” inclined to vote for the CPC, which in turn provides insight into the policy areas where Scheer and his caucus are more likely to find success building a broader coalition of voters, and where they are more likely to fail.

**The CPC vote universe: How likely are Canadians to vote Conservative?**



■ Core CPC ■ Likely CPC ■ Maybe CPC ■ Never CPC

### METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from May 28 – 31, 2017, among a representative randomized sample of 1,958 Canadian adults who are members of the [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

### Key Findings:

- Canadians hold four distinct voting relationships with the Conservative Party. They are either: Core CPC supporters (19% of the total population); Likely CPC supporters (20%); Maybe CPC supporters (23%); and Never CPC supporters (39%)
- Core CPC supporters differ from the other groups that would consider supporting the party on the following key issues:
  - They are more pessimistic about the country's future
  - They believe the economy should take precedence over environmental protection

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- They support a low tax agenda instead of investment in government programs
- Differences between Core CPC supporters and others on classic “social conservative” issues – such as debates around abortion and doctor-assisted dying – are generally less pronounced than differences on economic issues
- New Conservative leader Andrew Scheer begins his term in relative anonymity. Just under one-in-ten Canadians (8%) say they are familiar with him, while three-quarters (75%) had no knowledge of him other than his name before taking this survey, which went into field the morning after his victory

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## **Part 1 – Conservative Party values**

### **The Conservative Universe: Who are the core supporters? And who needs more convincing?**

This study divides Canadians into four groups when it comes to their relationship to the Conservative Party. At one extreme is the largest group – the 39 per cent of Canadians who say they could never vote for the CPC. At the other are the core CPC supporters – some 19 per cent who have voted for the CPC in the past, and say they will definitely do so in the future.

The rest of the country falls somewhere in between these two groups, couching their views on the Conservative Party in relative terms. Some 20 per cent of the population are Likely CPC supporters who say they will certainly consider voting Conservative in the future. The rest (23%) are better characterized as “Maybes” – people who don’t have much of a track record of Conservative support, but leave open the possibility of considering the party in the future.

The following table highlights some of the demographic differences between the three groups who make up the universe of votes available to the Conservatives. As might be expected, given conventional wisdom about the Canadian Conservative voter, Core supporters are older and more likely to be men. They are also more likely to be located in Alberta, less likely to be located in Quebec, and more likely to live in rural areas, overall.

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The Likely and Maybe groups, in contrast, are younger, include more women, and are more geographically dispersed than the Core:

Demographics of the CPC vote universe:				
	All Respondents	Propensity to vote Conservative		
		Core CPC	Likely CPC	Maybe CPC
Age				
18-34	29%	19%	27%	38%
35-54	35%	35%	37%	30%
55+	36%	46%	36%	32%
Gender				
Men	49%	55%	52%	47%
Women	51%	45%	48%	53%
Region				
British Columbia	13%	11%	12%	14%
Alberta	11%	22%	13%	9%
Saskatchewan	3%	5%	3%	3%
Manitoba	4%	4%	3%	3%
Ontario	37%	42%	38%	36%
Quebec	25%	10%	21%	25%
Atlantic Canada	8%	6%	8%	9%
Urban/Rural				
Urban	83%	79%	83%	87%
Rural	17%	21%	17%	13%

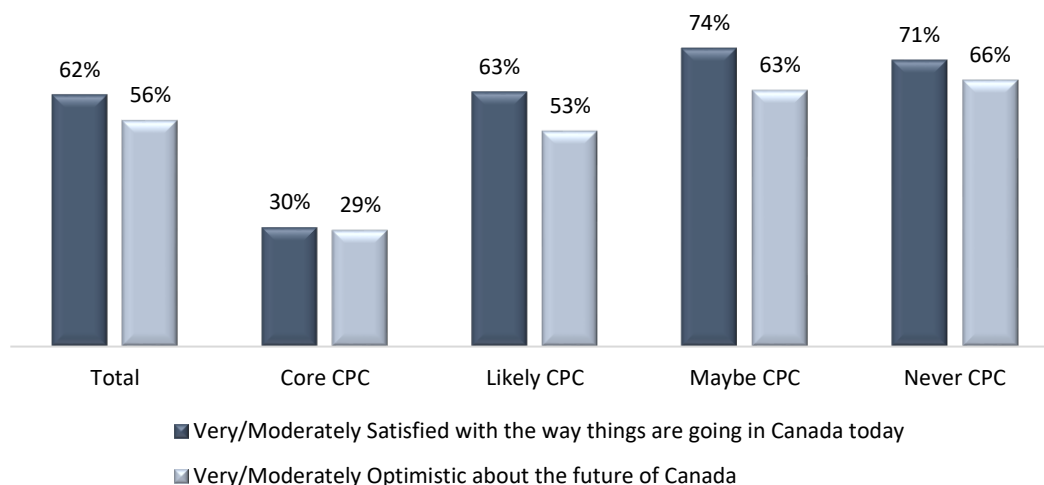
To win a federal election, the Conservative Party will need to capture votes from outside their Core of support. Even capturing all of their Likely supporters may not be enough, as it would give them roughly 39 per cent of the vote – enough for a majority of seats under certain circumstances, but hardly a guarantee. Therein lies the challenge for Andrew Scheer as he takes the reins.

### Where Core Conservatives are contrary

The Core Conservative base in Canada is often offset from those with a less intimate relationship with the federal party. This starts with a broad outlook on the country and works its way down to more niche public policy issues. Consider the mindset of the Core when they think about the way things are going in Canada today. While at least 60 per cent in each of the three other groups say that they are satisfied with the way the country is progressing, just one-third (30%) of those in the Core say that they feel this way.

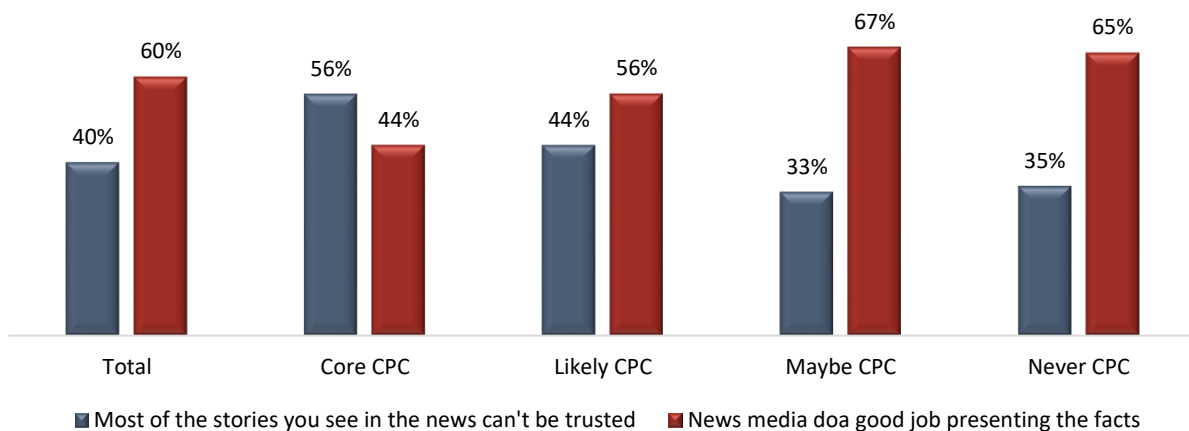
The same relationship holds for opinions about the future of the country. Core Conservatives are half as likely to say that they have an optimistic attitude when they consider Canada in the coming years compared to the average Canadian.

### Core CPC supporters are less satisfied, less optimistic about the future:



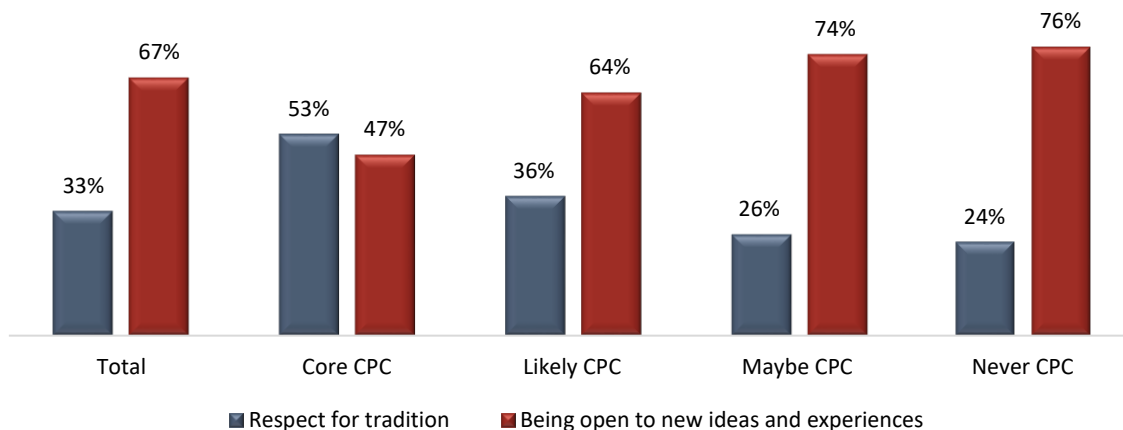
In addition to being deeply dissatisfied and pessimistic about Canada today, Core Conservatives are largely distrusting of the country's media. A majority (56%) say "most of the stories you see in the news can't be trusted," while members of other groups tend to believe Canadian news media "do a good job presenting the facts:"

## In your view:



These findings paint a picture of a group of voters who feel very much under siege. They see their country slipping away, and they see the media as either ignoring or hastening that perceived decline. It's perhaps little wonder, then, that this group also prioritizes teaching children "respect for tradition" in a way that other groups do not:

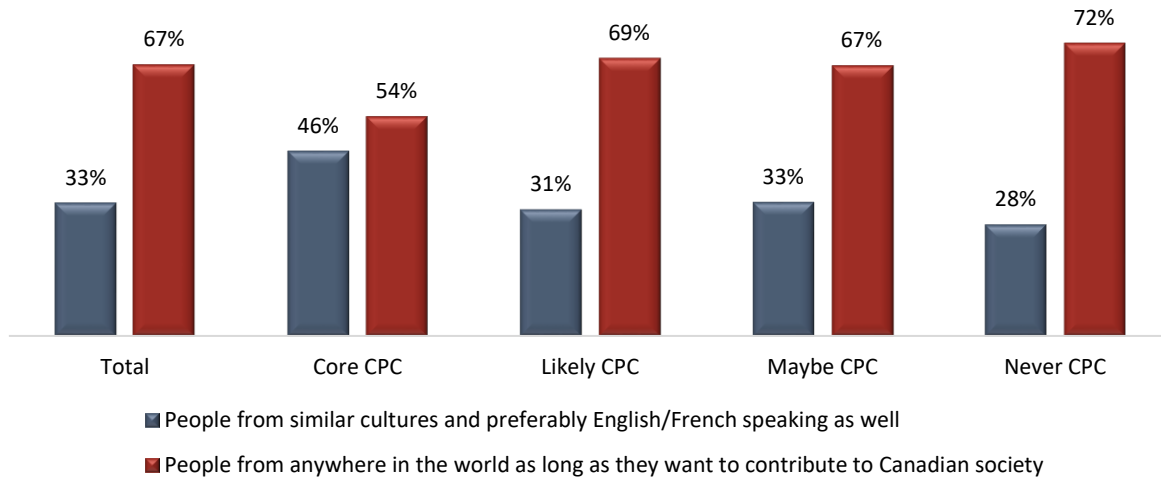
## It is most important for children to learn:



This embattled mentality feeds into many of the other views this group espouses, including on key questions about immigration and refugee policy, as well as societal integration, more broadly.

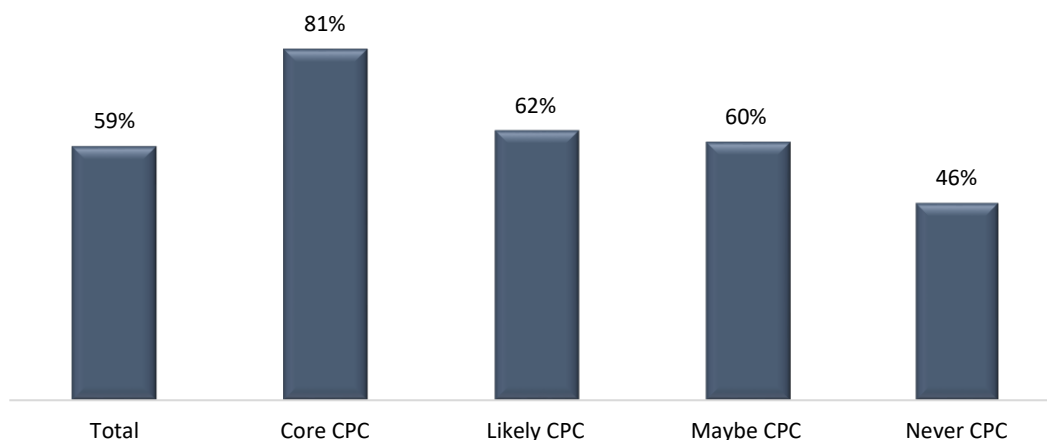
More than eight-in-ten Core Conservatives (81%) agree with the statement "Canada should accept fewer immigrants and refugees," and this group is most likely to say immigration policies should give priority to English and French-speaking people – though this is still a minority view, as seen in the following graph:

## Canada's immigration policies should give preference to:

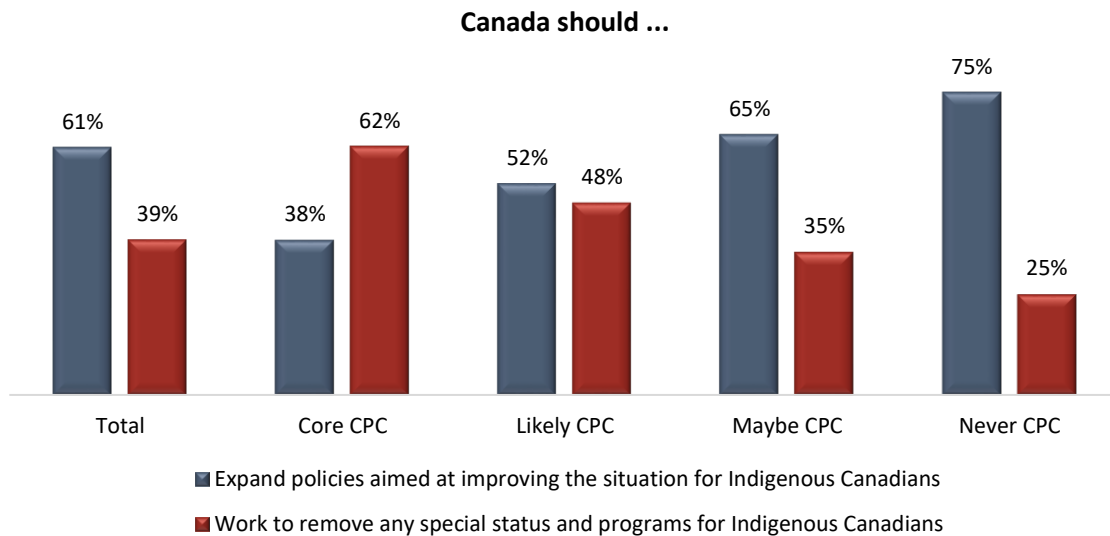


Notably, on these immigration issues, Likely and Maybe Conservative voters tend to fall on the same side of the issue as the party's Core supporters. Most members of those two groups also agree with the notion that Canada should accept fewer newcomers:

## "Canada should accept fewer immigrants and refugees" (Percentage saying 'agree' shown)



One social cohesion question where Core Conservatives differ from less-staunch supporters, however, is on the orientation of the government toward Indigenous Canadians. Nearly two-thirds of Core CPC supporters (62%) say Canada should "work to remove any special status and programs" for Indigenous people, while those in the Likely and Maybe camps lean the other way:



The challenge for the Conservative party within this environment of pessimism among their base is to either present a better alternative to the majority of Canadians who are less willing to vote CPC, or to convince them that their positive outlook is ill-conceived. If Andrew Scheer's first session in [Question Period](#) as opposition leader is a sign of things to come, attacks characterizing the government as "irresponsible" and "out of touch" will be routine.

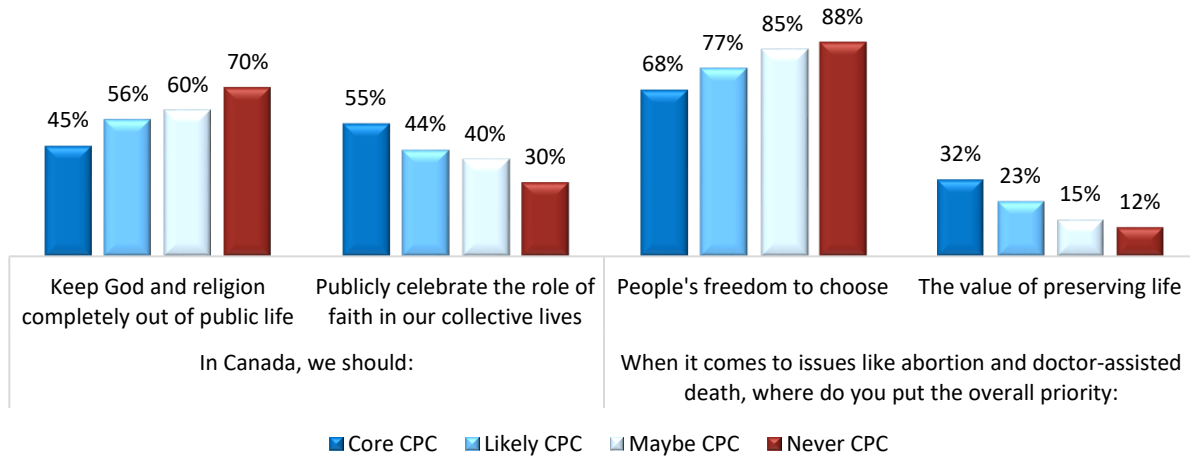
One pitfall the Conservative party will likely need to avoid is focusing too heavily on its Core. As will be seen, there are issues that unite these supporters but are likely to alienate the much broader population – which for the party leader, holds the key to 24 Sussex Drive.

### **The economy, not faith, divides**

While many commentators often portray social issues as the key differentiating factor between Core Conservatives and those who sit on the fence when it comes to the party, the data disputes this argument.

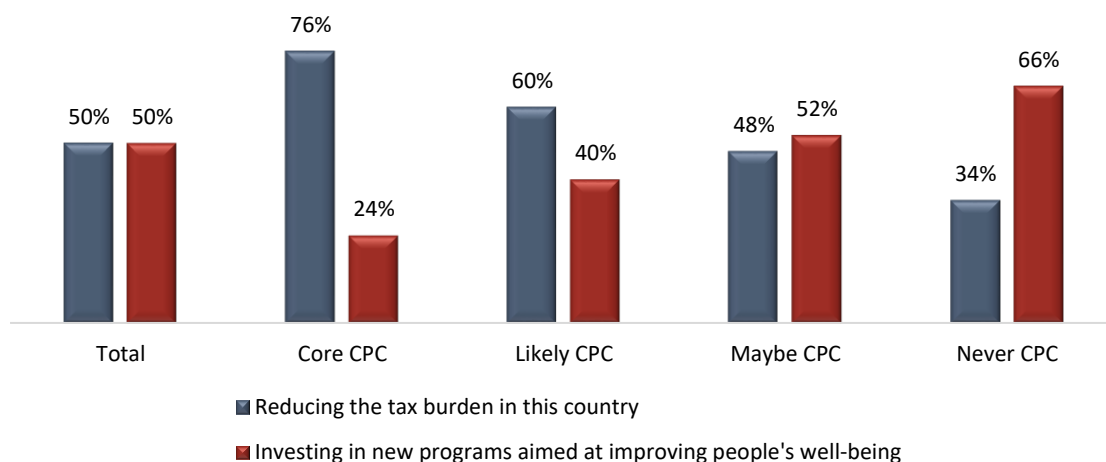
For example, while the Core are more likely to say that society should celebrate the role of religion in Canadians' collective lives, roughly half of them still agree with the Canadian majority that church and state should be separated. And on the issues of abortion and doctor-assisted death, the Core align themselves with the rest of Canadian society in prioritizing choice over the value of preserving life.

## On social issues:



What more accurately defines the split between Core and Likely Conservative voters and the rest are economic issues. An unwavering support for a low tax environment was one of the keys of Stephen Harper's government for almost 10 years. His government ran seven straight years with revenues less than 15 per cent of GDP – the first time that any such year had happened since before World War Two. Three-quarters of the Core (76%) long for these days, while a solid majority of Likely Conservative supporters (60%) say the same. The Maybe and Never groups lean in the opposite direction, prioritizing investment in new government programs to improve well-being for Canadians.

## The main priority for Canada today should be:

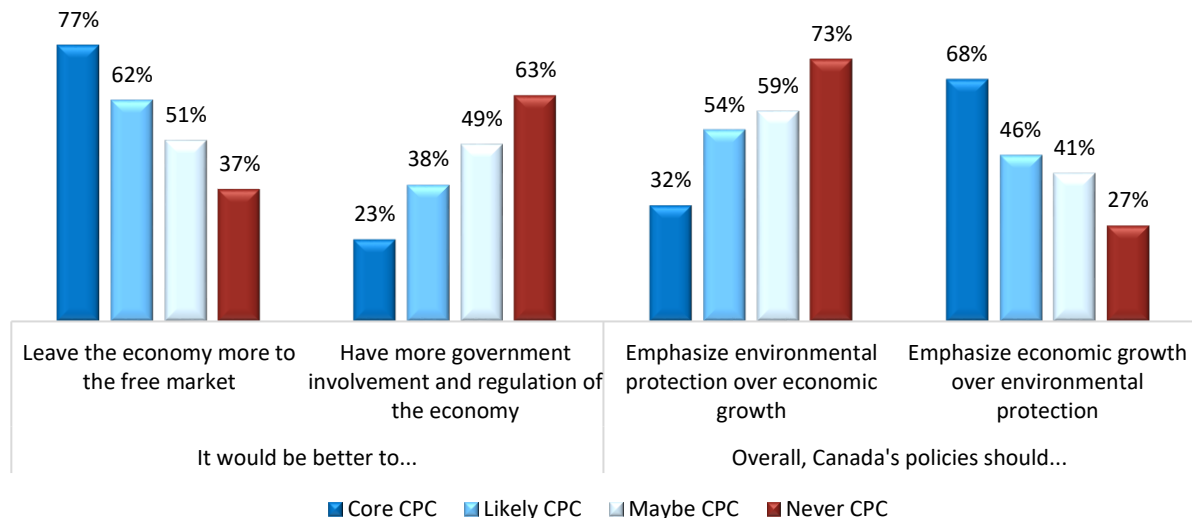


On the more philosophical question of the free market, a similar split is noted. Close to four-in-five (77%) Core supporters say the economy should be left more to the free market, while three-in-five (63%) who



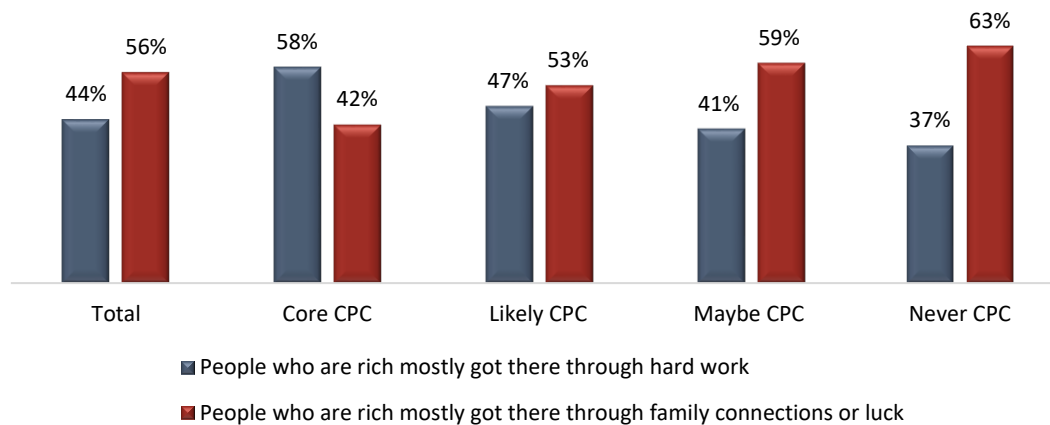
would never support the party say the government should be more involved. This position is likely motivated in part by each group's concern about the environment. The Never group are more than twice as likely as the Core to prioritize environmental protection over economic growth:

## On economic policy



Conservative leaners take this free-market, personal responsibility view and apply it to the individual level as well. Asked to weigh in on the factors that contribute to economic success in this country, six-in-ten Core (58%) and half of Likely Conservative (47%) supporters say people who are wealthy got their primarily through hard work, while a solid majority in the subsequent groups say that family connections and luck played a substantial role in their success.

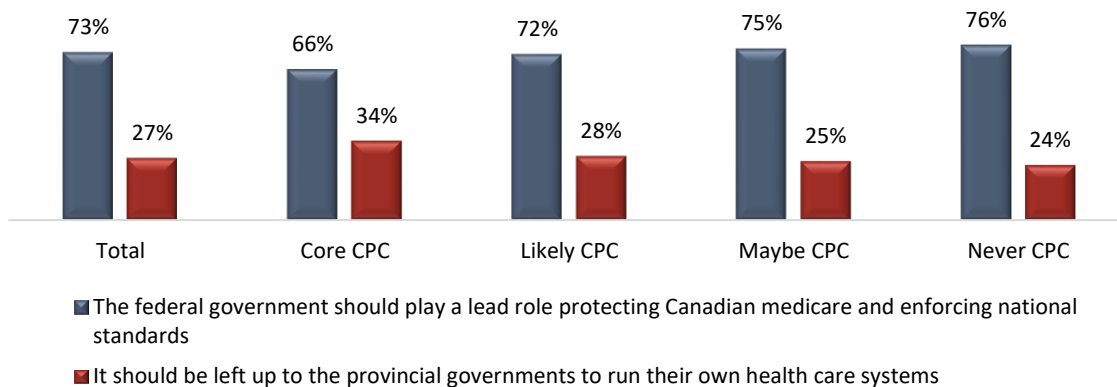
## In terms of individual success:



## Agreement among all on health care

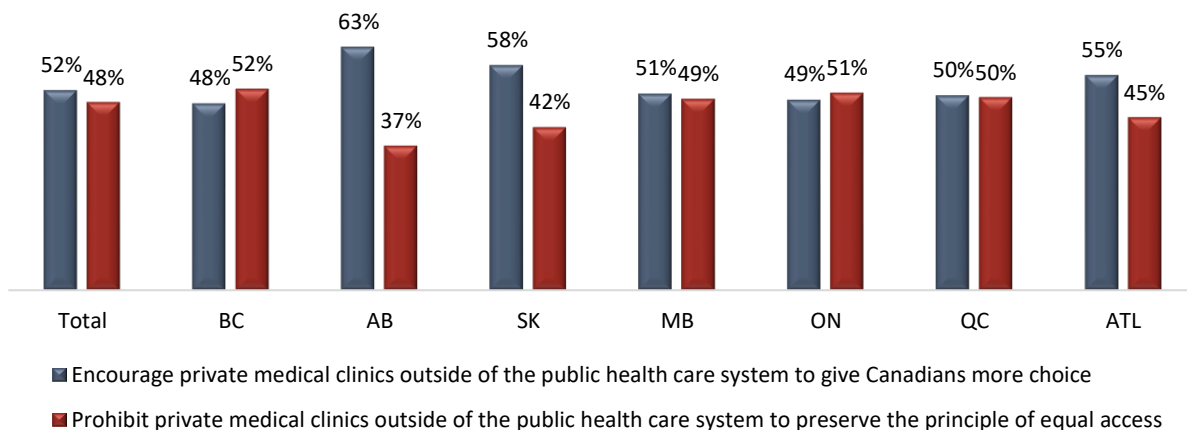
If the Conservative party is searching for unity and base expansion, one issue to explore would be health care. Always a major source of pride for Canadians, at least two-thirds from every cohort say that the federal government should play a lead role in protecting Canadian medicare and enforcing a set of national standards.

### When it comes to Canada's health care system:



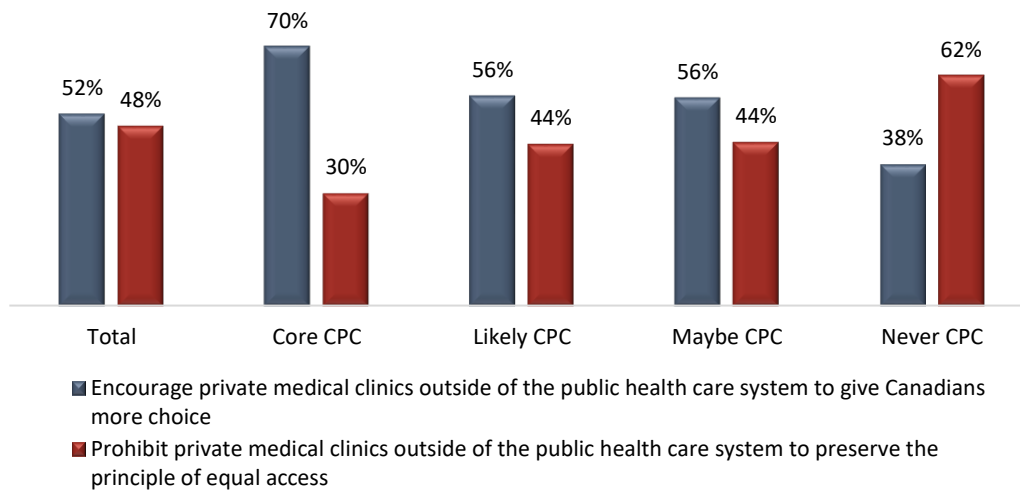
Alberta, Saskatchewan and Quebec are least likely to support this position, though in each a majority still do ([see comprehensive tables](#)). That isn't to say they don't desire more access to health care. A majority of residents in Alberta and Saskatchewan say that Canada should be encouraging private medical clinics outside of the standard public system in order to give Canadians more choice.

### Regarding health care, we should...



This proposal is relatively popular with three of the four groups concerning Conservative vote propensity. Only those who fall into the Never category say that we should prohibit private clinics due to concerns that the principle of equal access would be compromised.

### Regarding health care, we should...



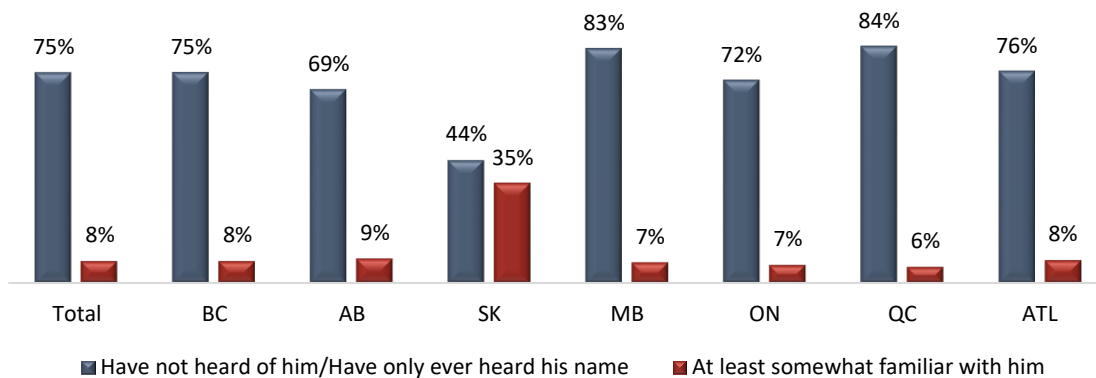
## **Part 2 – Most Canadians unfamiliar with Scheer**

From the time that frontrunner and reality television personality Kevin O’Leary dropped from the Conservative leadership race and threw his support behind Maxime Bernier, the libertarian Quebecer appeared to be the presumptive federal Conservative leader. That narrative held for 12 of the 13 rounds of balloting on the final day of the campaign.

But as the last count was announced, underdog Andrew Scheer emerged as the victor by the slightest of margins 51 per cent to 49. The party moves forward now, hopeful to reignite the successes of the Harper years. For its new leader, there is much work to be done.

For more than a few Canadians, last week’s convention in Toronto served as an introduction to the Ottawa-born but Regina-representing Member of Parliament. Just 32 per cent said they followed the leadership race closely. Asked specifically about the new leader, an overwhelming majority of Canadians had either never heard of him (44%) or had just heard the name, but knew little of substance about him (31%).

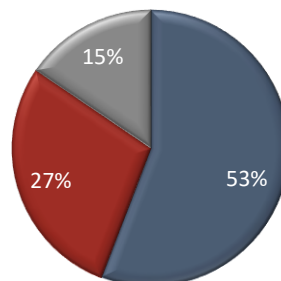
**How familiar are you with the new national Conservative leader Andrew Scheer? Would you say you:**



In some ways, the relative anonymity of Scheer is an enviable starting point. He possesses the freedom to craft his and his parties message from scratch. To this point, the Trudeau government has been relatively unchallenged by either of the other major federal parties, as each has been searching for their newfound answer to 2015 election failures. The clean slate is an opportunity for Scheer and Conservatives to take stock of their position in Canada and begin building for 2019.

The other benefit for Andrew Scheer is that the people who know him seem to like him. Among those who said they were familiar with the 38-year-old leader, 53 per cent said they view him favourably while just 27 per cent said the opposite.

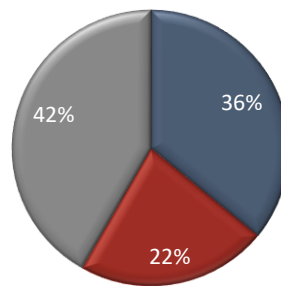
**Would you say you have a generally favourable or unfavourable view of the new Conservative Party leader Andrew Scheer?  
(Asked of those who are familiar with him; N=490)**



■ Very/Moderately Favourable ■ Very/Moderately Unfavourable ■ Really can't say

Whether this translates into Prime Ministerial preparedness is less evident. Fewer Canadians (36%) say that at this point they believe Scheer would do a good job with the country's top job, while one-in-five take the opposing view. A substantial proportion of Canadians aren't ready to make a prognostication this early in the process.

**And, overall, do you think Andrew Scheer would do a good job or a bad job as Prime Minister of Canada? (Asked of those who are familiar with him; N=490)**



■ Good job ■ Bad job ■ Really can't say/Too soon to tell

## **Conclusion**

After a long and sometimes fractious campaign, the message at the end of the Conservative Party leadership convention was “unity.”

Party unity is the goal every new leader strives to achieve, but this data suggests an important question Andrew Scheer will have to answer as he seeks that goal: Unity among whom?

The party's Core supporters are – on many issues – at odds with the broader collection of Canadians who have the CPC in their party-consideration-set. Should Scheer focus on energizing his base and keeping them in the fold? Or should he risk being seen as ignoring the base as he makes his case to Canadians who are on the fence about his party?

This is the balancing act any Conservative leader was bound to face. Whether Scheer is able to strike the right balance remains to be seen, but he begins his tenure as the CPC's first permanent post-Stephen-Harper leader with a few advantages over the former PM.

First, he has the opportunity to introduce himself to a public that has relatively few preconceived notions about him. Second, he is well-liked by those who do know who he is – especially among the Conservative Core. Could that combination win him enough votes from both the Core and the other groups to lead the Tories back to power in Ottawa?

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Public Interest Research

For Immediate Release  
Canadian Public Opinion Poll

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*For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here.](#)*