October 6, 2017 – Days after Jagmeet Singh’s decisive first-ballot victory in the contest for NDP leadership, seven-in-ten Canadians are saying they themselves would consider voting for a national party leader who wears a turban and carries a kirpan, while the same number are hailing his historic win as good for the country.

But according to the latest public opinion survey from the Angus Reid Institute, when asked about their own friends and family, half of Canadians say “some” or “most” could not vote for a politician who fits Singh’s demographic profile.

The greatest reservations are found in Quebec, a province where opposition to visible, non-Christian religious garb and clothing is well-documented, and where support for the proposed Bill 62 – legislation that would prohibit the administering and receiving of public services for those who cover their face – cuts across political divides. In that province, nearly half say voting for a politician who looks – and prays – as Singh does, is a non-starter.

Notwithstanding the significant challenge Singh and the NDP will face in trying to re-conquer ground won in Quebec during the 2011 “Orange Wave” and lost to the Liberals four years later, the results of this survey also give reason for the party of Justin Trudeau to be concerned. Two-thirds of those who backed the Liberals in 2015 say they’d be prepared to give the NDP a look in the next federal election.

More Key Findings:

- Despite Singh’s dominance of media coverage related to the NDP leadership race – including video from one of his rallies that was viewed more than 35 million times – just one-in-ten...
Canadians (9%) claim to be “very” or “fairly” familiar with him. Seven-in-ten (69%) say they’ve either never heard of him, or have heard his name, but know nothing else about him.

- Notwithstanding Singh’s leadership, two-in-five (43%) across the country say the NDP has a “real vision” for the future; and about the same number (40%) say the party can be trusted to “competently manage” government.

- Canadians appear quite comfortable with the NDP filling a role as the party of national conscience. Two-thirds (65%) agree that it should “remain committed to its principles, even if that means not getting elected”. This agreement cuts across political lines.

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PART 1: Is Canada ready for a Sikh PM?

While most say yes, three-in-ten ‘could not vote’ for a turban-wearing Sikh man

Jagmeet Singh’s first-ballot victory in the NDP leadership race makes him the first member of a visible minority to lead one of Canada’s three largest political parties. This in turn, makes tangible a possibility that had always previously been hypothetical: That Canada could elect a non-white Prime Minister.

Singh’s triumph will continue to be celebrated – rightly – as a significant achievement for diversity in Canada, but winning a leadership race isn’t the same as winning an election. Like it or not, Singh’s Sikh identity will continue to play a role in the public’s perception of him and its willingness to consider voting for his party.

Past Angus Reid Institute polling has found substantial numbers of Canadians who say they could not vote for a party led by a Sikh (37%) or a man who wears a head-covering for religious reasons (44%).

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Singh is both. Now that a real person embodies those identities, it seems that Canadians have softened somewhat.

Asked whether they would personally consider voting for a political party led by a Sikh man who wears a turban and carries a kirpan, as Singh does, seven-in-ten Canadians (69%) say “yes,” while the rest (31%) say they could not.

The pushback is strongest in Quebec, where debates over public officials wearing religious symbols and accommodating religious minorities are part of both recent history and an ongoing political process:

Leaving aside your opinion on Jagmeet Singh himself, and on the NDP as a party, would you, yourself, consider voting for a political party led by a Sikh man who wears a turban and carries a kirpan?

The greater hesitancy of Quebecers to vote for a party led by an observant Sikh man is likely troubling for the NDP, which once viewed Quebec as its base, after the province provided a majority of the seats that led the party to official opposition status in the 2011 election.

Other demographic groups more likely to say they could not support someone like Jagmeet Singh include those in the 55-plus age group (39% of whom say they could not vote for a party led by an observant Sikh man) and those who voted for the Conservative Party in the 2015 election (43%).

The latter group is unlikely to be of particular concern to Singh and his team, given their position on the opposite side of the political spectrum. Rather, New Democrats may worry about the one-in-four past Liberal voters and the nearly as many past NDP voters who rule out supporting a party led by someone like Singh in the future:
Further, the four-in-ten older Canadians who say they could not vote for an turban-wearing Sikh man could prove to be less problematic for Singh than the 23 per cent of 18-34-year-olds – the age group his leadership campaign promised to energize and mobilize – who say the same thing:

While he has embraced the challenge of winning people over, Singh’s identity – at least for now – limits the pool of potential supporters he could woo, and Canadians themselves recognize this. Asked to think about their close friends and family members, half (50%) say either “most” or “some” of the people in their lives would feel that they could not vote for a party led by an observant Sikh man:
When respondents are asked to consider Canadian society as a whole, the percentage saying “most” or “some” people feel this way rises to eight-in-ten (80%):

**Now, let's think about society as a whole. How many people in Canada do you think feel that they could not vote for a party led by an observant Sikh man?**

- Most people: 16%
- Some: 21%
- Only a few: 4%
- None - no one really thinks this way: 59%

Of course, Singh doesn’t need to convince everyone to vote for his party, only a plurality in each riding. The question, then, is whether Singh can convince enough people to vote for the NDP in 2019 to make his prime ministerial dreams a reality. Singh himself is only one part of this equation. A detailed discussion of Canadians’ perceptions of the NDP and their willingness to consider the party in future elections follows in parts two and three of this report.
What’s working for Singh, what’s working against him

Though his leadership victory is historic, and has generated a great deal of media coverage, most Canadians are still largely unfamiliar with Jagmeet Singh. Roughly one-in-three respondents (33%) say they had never heard of him until taking this survey, and another 36 per cent say they know his name, but nothing else about him.

That said, Singh’s name recognition is somewhat higher than Conservative Party leader Andrew Scheer’s was shortly after his party’s leadership election. More than four-in-ten (44%) had never heard of Scheer when asked the same question in the Angus Reid Institute’s CPC leadership poll from May of this year.

Those who know Singh even a little, like him. Of those who know something about him other than his name, some six-in-ten (61%) say that they have a “very” or “moderately” favourable view of the new NDP leader:
Canadians are even more enthusiastic about what Singh represents. More than seven-in-ten (71%) agree with the statement, "Having a member of a visible minority leading a major political party is good for Canada overall," and an even greater number (77%) agree that "ultimately, a politician's religious or cultural identity shouldn't matter – only their policies should."

That said, more than half of Canadians lean toward the view that Singh’s religion will hurt the NDP’s electoral chances:

- **Ultimately, a politician's religious or cultural identity shouldn't matter - only their policies should**
  - Agree: 77%
  - Disagree: 23%

- **Having a member of a visible minority leading a major political party is good for Canada overall**
  - Agree: 71%
  - Disagree: 29%

- **Overall, Jagmeet Singh's religion will hurt the NDP's electoral chances**
  - Agree: 54%
  - Disagree: 46%
This view is especially strong in Quebec. Two-thirds in that province (69%) agree with the statement about Singh's religion hurting his party’s electoral standing. Atlantic Canada is the only other region where more than 50 per cent agree:

**Percentage who agree with the statement:**
"Overall, Jagmeet Singh’s religion will hurt the NDP’s electoral chances"

In order to avoid this finding becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy, Singh will need to find other common ground between himself and Canadians – especially Quebecers. Indeed, Bloc Quebecois leader Martine Ouellet criticized his religious identity last month, raising concerns about the separation of church and state. In turn, Singh has said Quebecers are more interested in leaders that care about the issues. Time will tell.

**PART 2: The NDP base and voter mobility**

**Is Jagmeet the new Justin?**

It is important to remember that the majority mandate delivered to Justin Trudeau on October 19, 2015, was, in part, the result of soft NDP voters stampeding away from their own party towards Justin Trudeau in one of the longest, and most volatile campaigns in recent memory.

Can Jagmeet Singh bring them back with promises of policy more left leaning than his more centrist predecessor?

The good news for Singh and the NDP is that it is drawing from a pool close to the same size as both the Federal Liberals and Conservatives. The Angus Reid Institute created a voter consideration set based on responses to the question of who Canadians say they would consider voting for and who they have supported in the past. Canadians are divided into four categories with respect to the parties – Core, Maybe and Likely supporters, as well as those would Never support a party. The data finds all three major parties are likely to be considered by about six-in-ten Canadians, with four-in-ten saying they would never support – and have never supported – each one.
Where the problem arises for New Democrats is the ‘core’ designation. Just under ten per cent of Canadians (9%) represent the Core of the NDP base, while much larger numbers are considered Likely supporters (21%) or Maybes (30%).

On a relative scale, this level of support is weaker than the other two major parties. The Liberals and Conservatives both boast a Core group closer to one-in-five, to go along with a solid cohort of Likely supporters. This goes to show just how important messaging will be for the NDP over the next two years if the party hopes to gain traction with fence sitters.
Who are the NDP’s most likely supporters?

The following table highlights some of the demographic differences between the three groups who make up the universe of votes available to the NDP. As might be expected, given conventional wisdom about the Canadian NDP voter, Core supporters are younger and those who say they could never support the party are older. Women are also more likely than men to consider or to outright support the party. Core supporters are more likely to be urban dwellers and have a stronger presence in BC and Ontario.

### Demographics of the NDP vote universe:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Respondents</th>
<th>Propensity to vote NDP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Core NDP</td>
<td>Likely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-34</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-54</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55+</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Columbia</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberta</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saskatchewan</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manitoba</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quebec</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlantic Canada</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban/Rural</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Trudeau-verlap? Most past Liberal voters willing to consider NDP next time

What the above data shows is a substantial amount of fluidity among Canadians when it comes to their political preferences. With relatively small Core bases across each party, both Andrew Scheer and Jagmeet Singh have the potential to shape national ballots in 2019, provided each can tap into any potential disappointment held by those who supported the Prime Minister in 2015, while securing their own core base.

While taking on Trudeau may appear difficult, given his high personal approval, more Canadians are saying it’s “time for a change” in government now than at any point since the election. The data also displays willingness for past Liberal supporters (many of them, NDP leaners to begin with) to give Jagmeet Singh a good hard look.

Only one-in-three Trudeau voters say they aren’t willing to consider the NDP led by Singh in the coming election. One-quarter (23%) say they will certainly consider the party, while four-in-ten (42%) consider themselves a “maybe” at this point:

How likely is it that you yourself would consider supporting the NDP and their new party leader Jagmeet Singh in a future election?

![Graph showing support for NDP and Jagmeet Singh](image)

This may very well be music to Andrew Scheer’s ears. His party will be hopeful that a push by Singh may diminish Liberal support, splitting the vote and paving the way for a new Conservative government. It is worth wryly noting that had the Liberal government implemented its campaign promise to move to a proportionally representative electoral system in time for the next election, a potential split in the left-of-centre vote would not necessarily create a path to victory for the CPC.

Comparing strength of potential support just over two years out from the next election, Trudeau and his Liberal Party hold a significant but not overwhelming advantage, while an additional three-in-ten Canadians say they will ‘maybe consider’ each:

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Quebec: Is Orange Crushed?

The success of the NDP in 2019 will likely hinge on the same three provinces it hinged upon in 2015 – BC, Ontario and Quebec.

Indeed, of the 44 parliamentary seats the party gained in that election, just six came from outside of those three provinces. Asked whether they would consider supporting the NDP, only Alberta tops Quebec in the proportion of residents who say they are ruling that out. Six-in-ten in Alberta (60%) and half of Quebecers (50%) say they will not consider the party going forward under Singh.

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Any potential losses in Quebec would need to be made up for elsewhere. A positive sign for the party is that residents in both BC and Ontario continue to voice an openness to the NDP – just one-in-three within each say they definitely won’t consider voting for the party in the future.

**PART 3: Socialist policies appeal, but little consensus around NDP identity**

Some planks of a potential NDP platform for 2019 find support among the Canadian public. Consider a few of the policies put forth by Jagmeet Singh as a candidate for leadership and the responses to some agree/disagree statements put to respondents:

- The Working Canadian Guarantee – an *income-tested wage subsidy* for workers, to ensure that each Canadian earns guaranteed level of income.
  - Seven-in-ten Canadians (70%) including half of past Conservative voters say that Canada should guarantee a basic level of income to all of its citizens.

- A plan to not only meet the 2030 Paris Accord climate targets, but to *exceed them*, reaching the targets by 2025.
  - Seven-in-ten Canadians (69%), including close to eight-in-ten Trudeau voters (77%), and four-in-ten past CPC voters (42%) say this country should set more ambitious targets to combat climate change.

And what about fiscal policy issues? Nine-in-ten Core supporters of the party say the rich should pay more in taxes to fund social programs, a core NDP principle, while 85 per cent agree with Singh’s promise to *immediately implement* a federal minimum wage of $15 an hour. How does that view align – or not – with “never-NDPers”? Seven-in-ten (69%) agree with this statement on taxing the rich.

**Percentage of Canadians who Agree with each statement:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NDP Vote Propensity</th>
<th>Core</th>
<th>Likely</th>
<th>Maybe</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Never</strong></td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Likely</strong></td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Core</strong></td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- There should be a federal minimum wage of at least $15
- The rich should pay more in taxes in order to fund social programs in Canada.
Canadians show similar levels of support for affordable daycare for all Canadians and tuition-free post-secondary education. Given the current Prime Minister ran a campaign tapping into these progressive values, this suggests that the NDP has space to gain ground. Indeed, those gains could be based on the perception in some circles that Trudeau has failed to deliver on some of his promises.

However, while the party has a foothold in the broad policy realm, that doesn’t necessarily translate into a clear place for the party in the federal government.

The NDP ‘stands up for ordinary Canadians,’ but what else?

Asked to consider a variety of statements about the identity of the NDP as a party, only two elicit the agreement of a majority of Canadians.

First, that the NDP “stands up for ordinary Canadians” (60% agree with this), and second, that the NDP “should remain committed to its principles, even if that means not getting elected” (65% agree).

On most measures of the NDP’s party personality, Canadians are divided, with roughly one-in-five expressing uncertainty about each statement canvassed. Responses to each statement are summarized in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly/Moderately Agree</th>
<th>Strongly/Moderately Disagree</th>
<th>Don’t know/Can’t say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Should remain committed to its principles, even if that means not getting elected</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stands up for ordinary Canadians</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has made major contributions to making Canada what it is today</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shares my values about what kind of society Canada should be</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a real vision for Canada’s future</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is way too influenced by organized labour and its agenda</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot be trusted to competently manage the national government</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is too left-wing and unrealistic</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflects my region of Canada</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is just not relevant in Canada today</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Looking at these statements by NDP vote propensity yields predictable results: Core NDP supporters overwhelmingly agree with positively framed statements about the party (87% agree that it has a real vision for Canada’s future, for example, and 85% say it shares their values) and overwhelmingly disagree with negatively framed statements (75% disagree that the NDP is just not relevant in Canada today).

Likely NDP supporters follow a similar pattern, offering only slightly less overwhelming agreement or disagreement with each statement.

Responses among Maybe NDP supporters present other challenges for party strategists.

Consider, for example, the Maybe group’s views on union influence over the party and the notion that the NDP is “too left-wing.” While neither statement reaches majority agreement among Maybes, each one is more represented among this group:

![Bar Chart]

Similarly, Maybe NDP supporters are considerably less likely to say the party shares their values, has a real vision for Canada’s future, or reflects their region of Canada:
So what should the New Democrats do? Majorities across all four groups say they should remain committed to their principles, even if it means not getting elected, but getting elected is – on some level – the point of politics. In order to accomplish that goal, they need to attract voters beyond their base.

Should they moderate their most left-wing tendencies to expand their tent? And would doing so even have the desired effect? Or would it serve only to alienate the core – and others, potentially – as it did in 2015?

The answers to these questions will arise over the next two years, but when Canadians look ahead and try to answer the ultimate question – will the NDP ever form government – little optimism emerges:

If you had to look into the future and make a prediction, when do you think the New Democratic Party will most likely be elected to form the government of Canada?

- Next election (2019) they will defeat the Liberals: 5%
- Probably the election after that (2023): 11%
- Not for 3 more elections (10 years from now): 12%
- Longer than that: 17%
- Never - the NDP will never form government: 18%
- No idea/Cannot guess: 37%
The Angus Reid Institute (ARI) was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.

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

For additional results by vote propensity, past vote, vote intention, [click here.](#)