

## Trust in Government: Canadians wary of politicians and their intentions

*Federal candidates viewed more unfavourably than provincial or municipal candidates*

**June 24, 2019** – And so the summer political season begins across Canada. Residents from coast to coast will bear witness to the migration of MPs from Parliament Hill to local backyard barbecues, offering handshakes to grown-ups, kisses to babies, and belly rubs to dogs.

Elsewhere in communities - more ubiquitous than giant mosquitos and glowing fireflies – the summer political season will bring a proliferation of smiling candidates, offering pamphlets, and seeking engagement with the most elusive of species: the undecided voter.

But should such sought-after individuals be located, they are likely to display a significant skepticism towards these politicians.

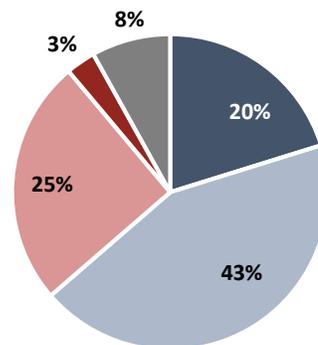
The latest public opinion survey from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds most Canadians remain suspicious of their intentions.

Nearly two-thirds (64%) say politicians cannot be trusted, and one-third (32%) believe they are primarily motivated by “personal gain” rather than a genuine desire to serve their communities.

Public dissatisfaction with elected officials is most prevalent when discussing federal government. Whereas those who view municipal candidates positively (42%) outnumber those who view them negatively (14%) by a three-to-one margin, the Canadian public is broadly split when it comes to federal candidates.

Moreover, four-in-ten Canadians (38%) feel the quality of federal candidates in their area has worsened in the past five to 10 years, considerably higher than the proportions who say the same of provincial (29%) and municipal (24%) candidates.

**"Most politicians can't be trusted"  
(All Respondents, n=1921)**



■ Agree Strongly   ■ Agree   ■ Disagree  
■ Disagree Strongly   ■ Not Sure/Can't Say

### METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from May 7 – 10, 2019, among a representative randomized sample of 1,921 Canadian adults, including 600 British Columbia residents, who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). The oversample in B.C. was then weighted back to provide a national snapshot. For comparison purposes only, probability samples of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.2 and +/- 4.0 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.

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## More Key Findings:

- Two-thirds (67%) of Canadians believe it is an advantage for candidates to have previous work experience outside of politics
- Across all questions canvassed in this survey, political preferences appear to be a strong driver of views. Potential Conservatives are twice as likely as potential New Democrats (40% vs. 21%) and three times more likely than potential Liberals (13%) to say politicians primarily run for office for “personal gain”
- Canadians are divided (44% agree vs. 47% disagree) on whether women and visible minorities are at a disadvantage when running for office, with gender and partisanship significant drivers of opinion on this issue

## About ARI

*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.*

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## Part 1: Views of Politicians

### Canadians generally mistrust politicians and their motivations

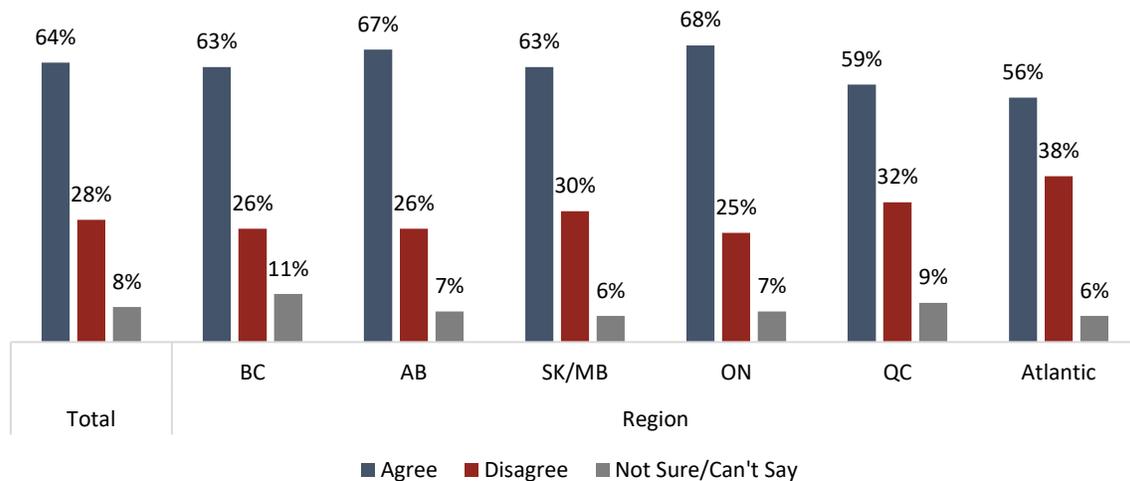
Canadians generally do not hold politicians in high regard. Indeed, two-thirds of Canadians (64%) believe most politicians cannot be trusted. Just under three-in-ten (28%) disagree with this sentiment, and evidently hold more faith in their elected officials:

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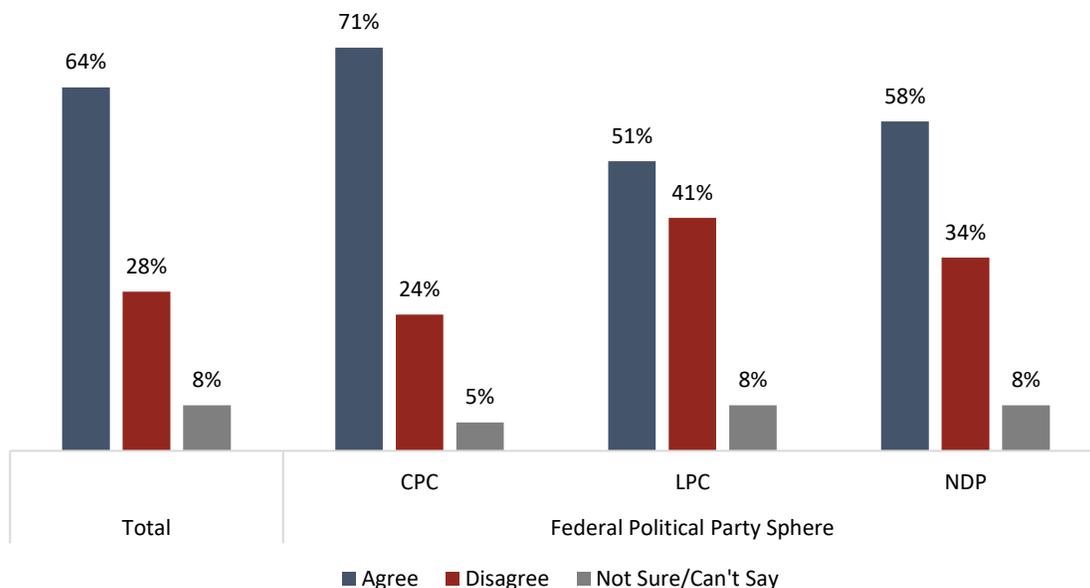
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**"Most politicians can't be trusted"**  
(All Respondents, n=1921)



This finding is fairly broad-based, with majorities of all demographic groups in agreement and significantly more people in each political party sphere agreeing than disagreeing (see methodology on political spheres at end of report). At the same time, those who would consider voting for the Conservative Party in a future federal election appear to be the most cynical towards politicians' intentions, with seven-in-ten (71%) from this group saying most cannot be trusted.

**"Most politicians can't be trusted"**



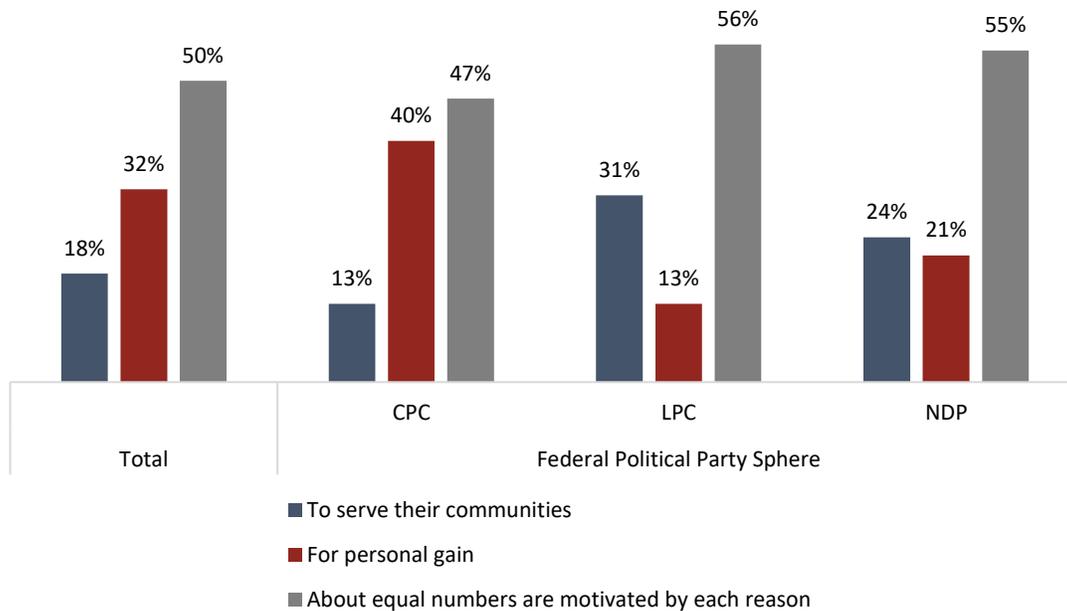
Many Canadians evidently think politicians are inherently self-serving. One-third of Canadians (32%) believe Canadian politicians run for office primarily for personal gain, while fewer than one-in-five (18%) believe politicians run for office primarily out of a desire to serve their communities. Young men (18-34-year-olds) are the only demographic group where a roughly equal number fall on each side of the issue.

On the other hand, men 35-and-older are more likely to believe politicians' motivations are primarily selfish, with four-in-ten from this group saying this. Women, especially those under 55, tend to be more nuanced in their assessment of politicians' motivations, with more than half saying similar numbers of politicians are motivated by personal gain and a desire to serve their communities.

Would you say Canadian politicians generally run for office...?							
(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1921)	Male			Female		
		18-34 (261)	35-54 (319)	55+ (343)	18-34 (282)	35-54 (345)	55+ (371)
To serve their communities	18%	27%	15%	18%	19%	14%	17%
For personal gain	32%	26%	39%	40%	24%	30%	30%
About equal numbers are motivated by each reason	50%	47%	47%	43%	57%	56%	53%

Potential Conservative voters are twice as likely as potential NDP voters and three times more likely than potential Liberal voters to say Canadian politicians generally run for office for personal gain, rather than to serve their communities. In fact, potential Liberals are the only major party sphere where significantly more people view politicians' motivations as altruistic rather than selfish:

**Would you say Canadian politicians generally run for office...?**



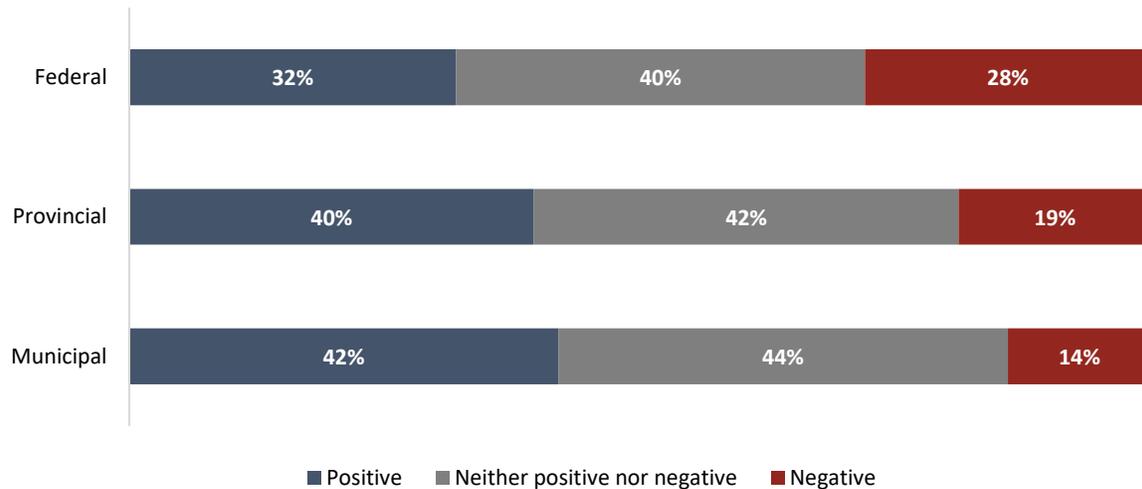
**Running for office not necessarily seen as a negative**

Canadians' underlying mistrust of politicians is not entirely reflected in their opinions of individuals in their communities who choose to run for elected office.

Might there be other underlying factors that better explain mistrust toward politicians, such as party label, candidate personality or stances on particular issues? Regardless, the act of running for office does not inherently make a person untrustworthy in the eyes of most Canadians.

Canadians are more likely to view people who run for federal office negatively, relative to municipal or provincial office. In all three cases, most Canadians have either a positive or neutral view of candidates, but whereas respondents are almost evenly divided on federal candidates, those who view municipal candidates positively (42%) outnumber those who view them negatively (14%) by a three-to-one margin.

**In general, would you say you have a positive or negative opinion of people who choose to run for office in each of these types of elections?  
(All respondents, n=1921)**



While this pattern of provincial and especially municipal candidates being viewed more favourably than federal candidates holds across almost all demographic groups (see [comprehensive tables](#) for more detail), age and gender appear to be significant drivers of opinion on this issue. Men as a whole view people who run for office more favourably than women do, but this difference can be largely attributed to young men.

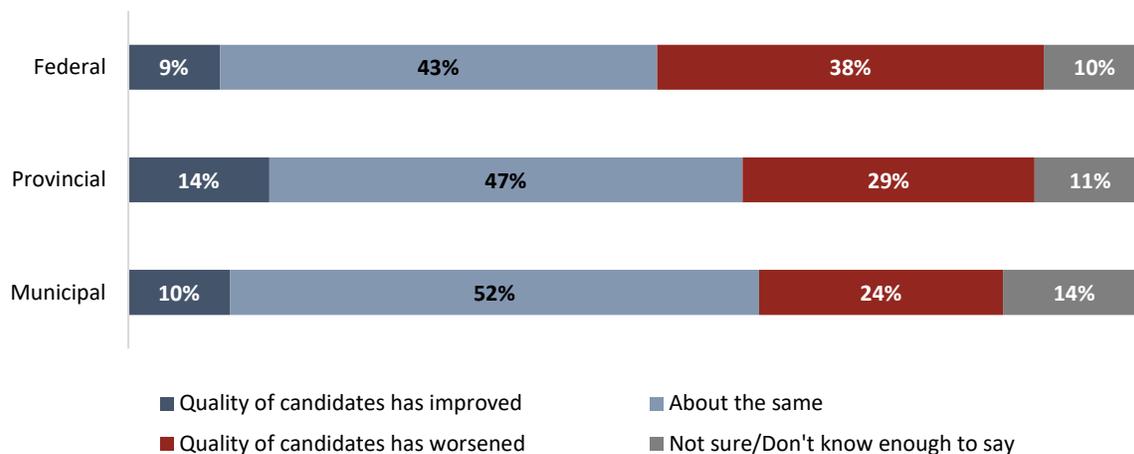
Indeed, regardless of the level of government canvassed, young men are substantially more likely than the general population to view candidates in a positive light. Even for people running for federal office, where most Canadians express at least some degree of ambivalence, young men's net favourability rating of candidates (see table below) is nearly eight times higher than the national average:

Net favourability of people who run for office in each type of election (percentage saying 'positive' minus percentage saying 'negative')							
	Total (1921)	Male			Female		
		18-34 (261)	35-54 (319)	55+ (343)	18-34 (282)	35-54 (345)	55+ (371)
Federal	+4	+30	-6	-2	0	0	+8
Provincial	+21	+43	+14	+26	+13	+9	+24
Municipal	+28	+42	+17	+30	+29	+27	+25

When it comes to recent elections, at least a plurality of respondents says the quality of candidates in their area, for all three levels of government, has not changed noticeably in the last five to 10 years. At the same time, very few say their quality has improved.

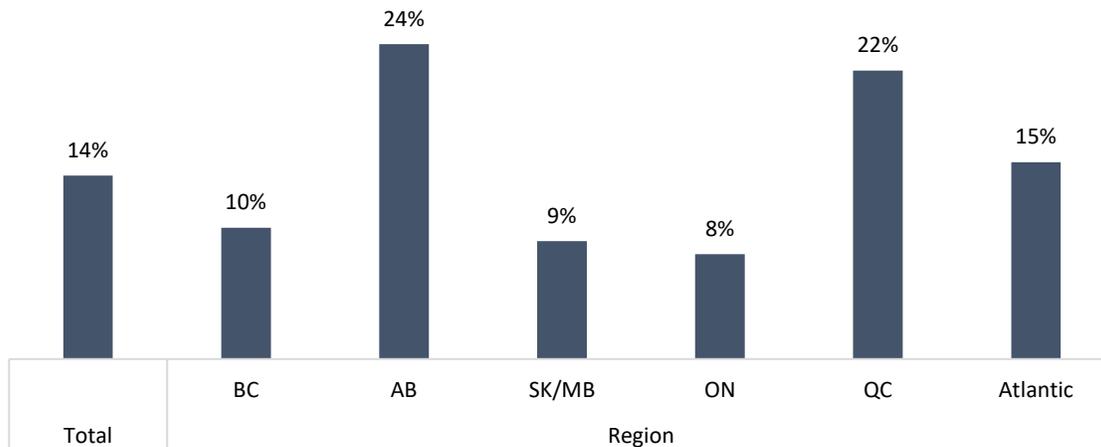
Federal candidates are again evaluated the most negatively. In this case, those who think the quality of candidates has worsened outnumber those who think their quality has improved by a four-to-one margin:

**Over the last 5-10 years, would you say the quality of candidates in each of these elections in your area has been improving or worsening?  
(All Respondents, n=1921)**



In some provinces, recent elections may be influencing people's perceptions of candidates. Residents of Alberta and Quebec, where voters elected centre-right governments by comfortable margins within the past year, are considerably more likely than other regions of the country to say the quality of provincial candidates in their area has been improving:

**Percentage saying quality of provincial election candidates in their area has improved in the last 5-10 years  
(All respondents, n=1921)**



**Previous jobs outside of politics widely seen as an advantage for candidates**

Public perception of candidates may also be affected by whether or not Canadians view them as being part of the ‘establishment’. This label, which is often applied to career politicians, connotes a disconnect from everyday constituents’ concerns. Indeed, candidates often go to great lengths to set themselves apart from political “elites” and appear “down-to-earth.”

Fully two-thirds of Canadians (67%) believe it is an advantage for people running for office to have work experience outside of politics, and even among the other third, almost no one believes experience in another line of work would hurt a candidate’s chances.

This finding is fairly broad-based, although Quebec appears more skeptical than other provinces that a previous career outside of politics necessarily makes a candidate more desirable.

For people running for office, do you think it is an advantage or disadvantage to have had jobs or careers previously outside of politics?							
(unweighted sample sizes)	Total (1921)	Region					
		BC (600)	AB (157)	SK/MB (201)	ON (479)	QC (357)	ATL (127)
Advantage	67%	72%	76%	72%	71%	53%	71%
Makes no difference	18%	14%	17%	15%	15%	27%	17%
Disadvantage	4%	3%	4%	2%	4%	6%	3%
Not Sure/Can't Say	11%	10%	3%	11%	11%	14%	9%

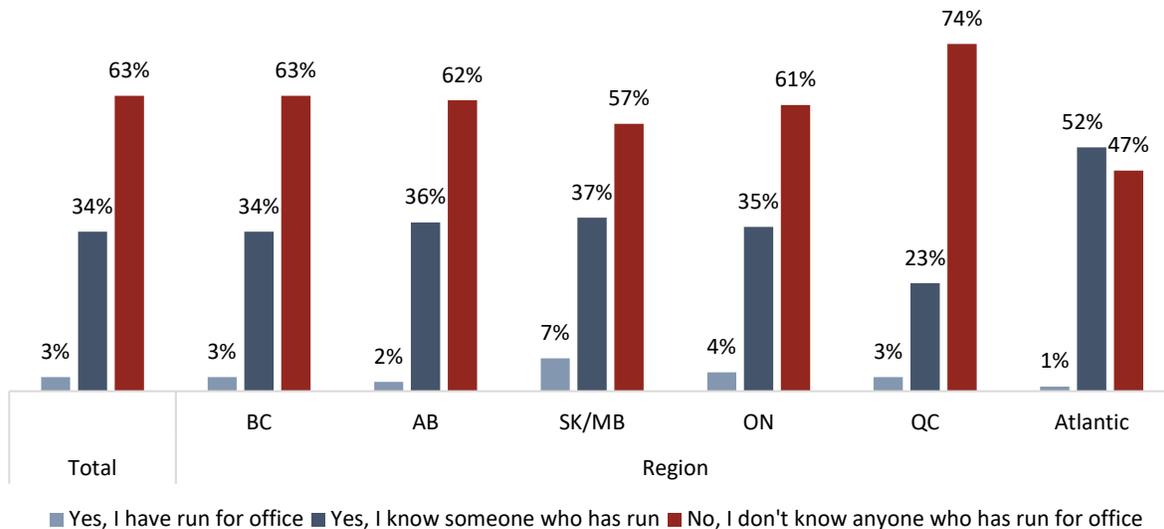
Of course, people's opinions on this subject might vary based on specific occupations. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, for example, previously held [numerous jobs](#) outside of politics, including as a nightclub bouncer, camp counselor and drama teacher at a Vancouver secondary school.

In the lead up to the 2015 election, the Conservative Party sought to use these jobs as evidence of Trudeau's [unworthiness](#) to be Prime Minister, implicitly contrasted against Stephen Harper's experience as an economist. Both men, interestingly enough, are among a handful of Prime Ministers in Canadian history without a background in law.

## Part 2: Canadians' Personal Experience with Public Office

While extremely few Canadians say they have actually run for public office themselves, one-in-three (34%) know someone who has. This is most common in Atlantic Canada, where more than half (52%) the population knows someone who has run for office. Smaller, older-skewing populations in these provinces, as well as the tight-knit nature of many Atlantic communities, may help to explain this finding.

**Have you or anyone you know ever run for an elected office in Canada?  
(All Respondents, n=1921)**



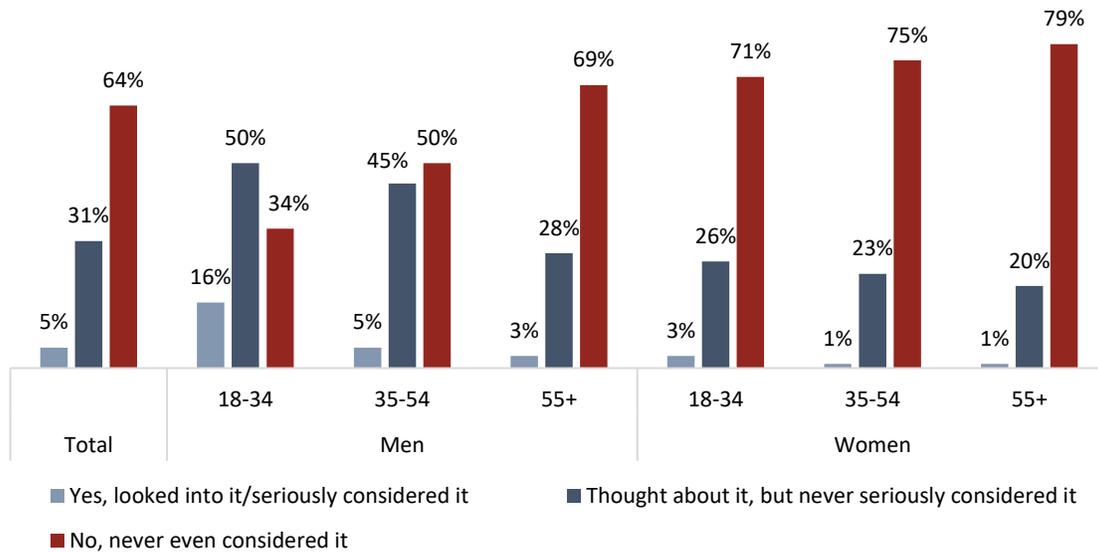
**Men under 55 and party members more likely to consider running**

Not only is running for office rare in Canada, but nearly two-thirds (64%) of those who have never run say they have never even considered it. This is especially true of women and older generations. Indeed, women 55-and-older are the least likely of any demographic to consider running for office.

On the other side of the spectrum, men under 55 are the most likely demographic to say they have considered running. Two-thirds (66%) of young men (18-34 years-old) and one half (50%) of men between the ages of 35 and 54 have either “seriously considered” running or “thought about it”.

Granted, there may be a huge difference between serious consideration and mere interest. In that sense, young men stand out as being three times more likely than the general population (16% vs. 5%) and five times more likely than young women (3%) to seriously consider running for public office.

**Is running for office something you have considered doing?  
(Have not personally run for office, n=1857)**



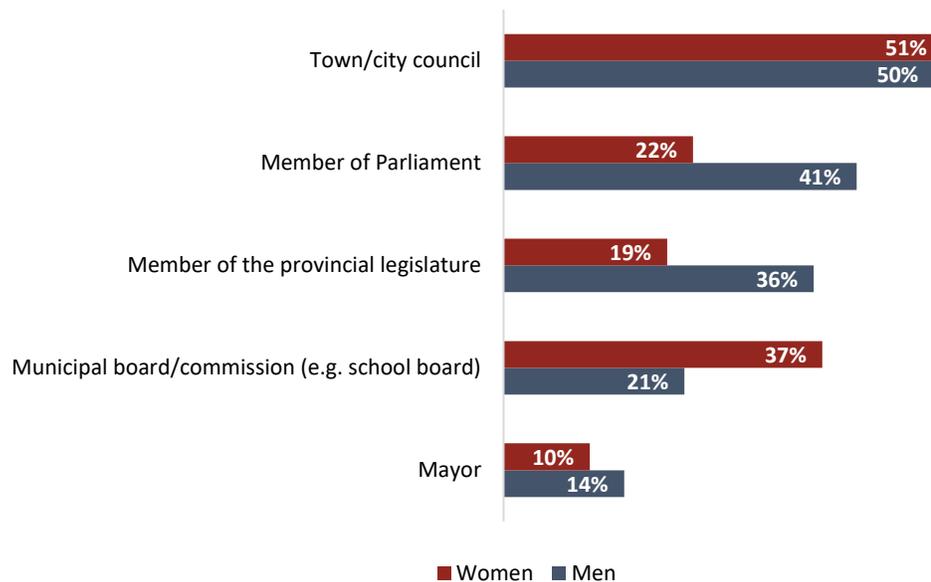
This finding fits with a 2014 [Abacus study](#) demonstrating an observable gender gap in young Canadians' political ambitions. Interestingly though, this gap has not been borne out by recent election results, at least not at the federal level. Following the 2015 federal election, women [accounted for more than half](#) of MPs under 40.

**Municipal office holds more appeal**

If they were to run for elected office, half of Canadians (50%) say they would be interested in a town or city council position, while approximately three-in-ten say they would be interested in becoming a Member of Parliament (31%), member of their provincial legislature (27%) or member of a municipal board or commission (29%).

Men are nearly twice as likely to be interested in federal and provincial legislative seats, whereas women tend to prefer local roles.

**Suppose you were going to run for elected office. Which of these offices, if any, would you be interested in running for?  
(All Respondents, n=1921)**



The comparative appeal of municipal office is interesting, given that this level of government is often ignored by Canadians, at least when it comes to [election turnout](#).

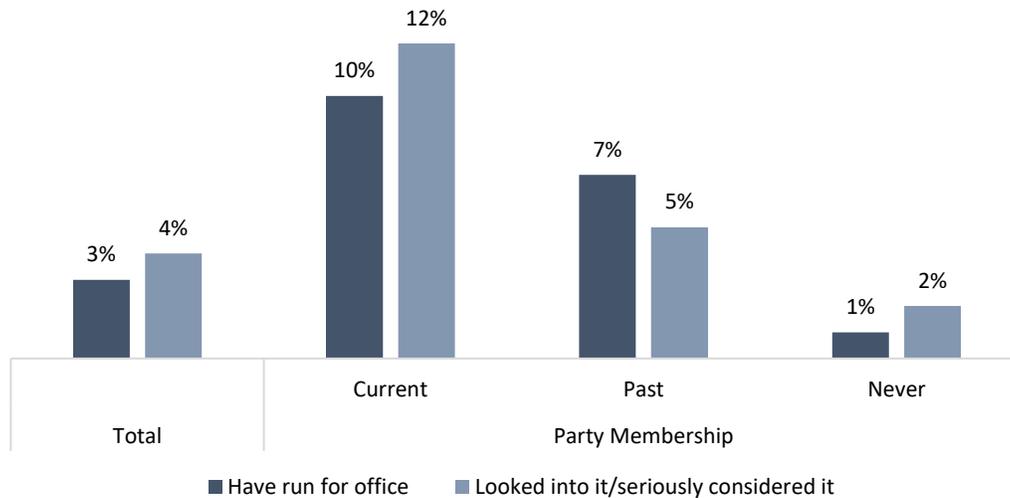
That being said, Canadians consistently [put more trust](#) in municipal government than in their provincial and federal representatives, both in terms of understanding constituents' concerns and developing solutions to problems in their community. Evidently, more Canadians can see themselves participating at the local government level, rather than pursuing a position provincially or federally.

**Part 3: Barriers to office**

**Party Power**

In Canada, as in virtually all democracies around the world, political parties largely control the slate of candidates fielded in any major race. Current party members are substantially more likely than past and non-members to have run or seriously considered running for office. Among the two-thirds (67%) of respondents who have never been a member of a political party, just 1 per cent have run for office.

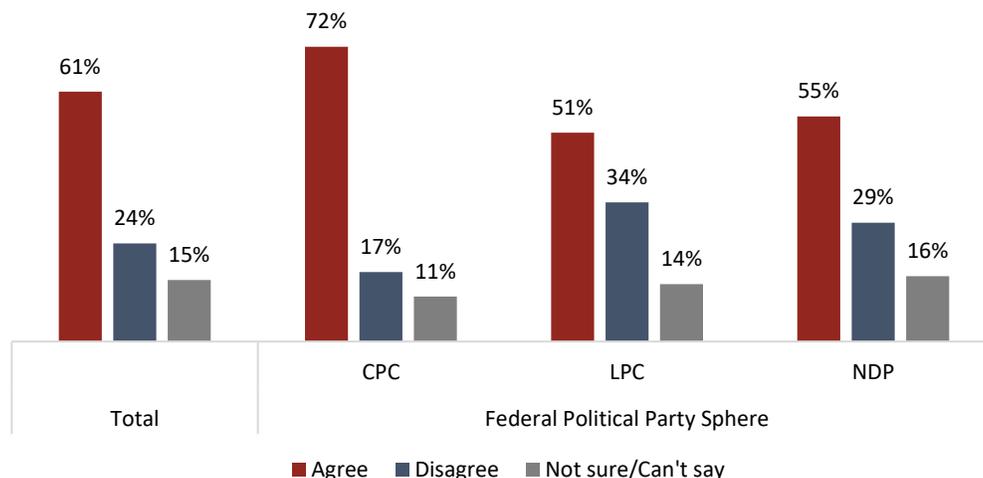
**Run for Office or Seriously Considered Running - By Political Party Membership (All Respondents, n=1921)**



Thus, with the notable exception of some municipal races, political party membership appears to be a prerequisite for elected office in Canada, which can present a barrier for those unwilling or unable to gain the nomination of a credible party.

Accordingly, six-in-ten Canadians (61%) believe political parties in Canada have too much influence. Majorities from all three major party spheres agree with this, although those who would consider voting for the federal Conservative Party in a future election are once again the most dissatisfied with the current state of affairs: 72 per cent among this group believe political parties in Canada today have too much influence.

**"Political parties in Canada have too much influence"**



**Are women and visible minorities at a disadvantage?**

While Canadians across all demographic groups and political stripes widely agree that men and women in general make equally good political leaders (see [comprehensive tables](#) for more detail), the population is split on whether or not women and visible minorities face discrimination at the ballot box.

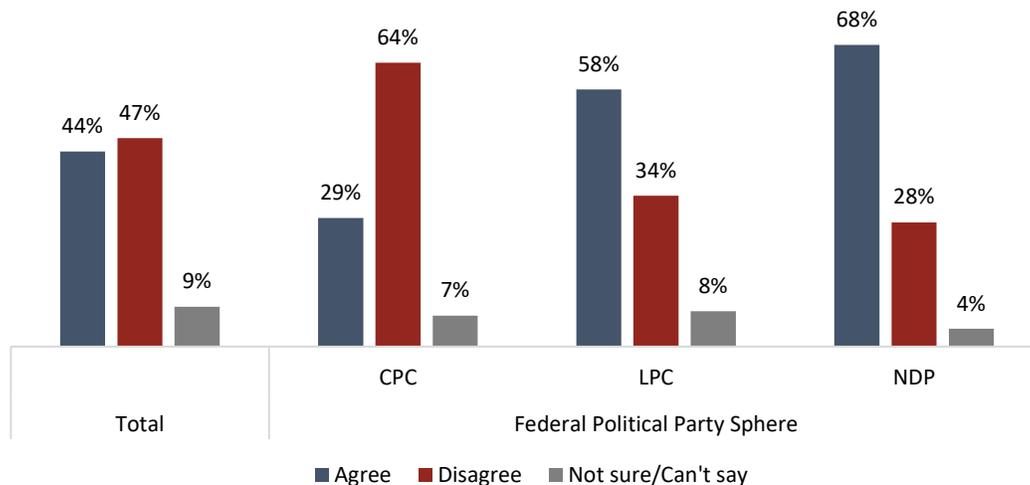
Men tend to disagree with the contention that being a woman or a visible minority makes you less likely to get elected, although younger men are more divided than older generations.

Women under 55, on the other hand, tend to agree these groups are at a disadvantage as political candidates, and two-thirds (65%) of young women in particular hold this opinion.

<b>“You’re less likely to get elected in Canada if you’re a woman or a visible minority”</b>							
(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1921)	Male			Female		
		18-34 (261)	35-54 (319)	55+ (343)	18-34 (282)	35-54 (345)	55+ (371)
Agree	44%	44%	30%	33%	65%	51%	44%
Disagree	47%	50%	60%	61%	23%	39%	45%
Not Sure/Can’t Say	9%	6%	10%	6%	11%	10%	11%

Partisanship is also a significant driver of opinion on this issue. Whereas a majority of those who would consider supporting the Liberal Party or the NDP in a future federal election agree that women and visible minorities are less likely to get elected in Canada, nearly two-thirds (64%) of those in the Conservatives’ political sphere disagree with this statement.

**"You're less likely to get elected in Canada if you're a woman or a visible minority"**



**Political Sphere Methodology**

Rather than rely on respondents' potentially faded memories regarding their vote in the 2015 federal election, ARI researchers constructed a measure of political partisanship based on willingness to vote for the main federal parties in a future election under their current leaders.

The question specifically asked respondents how likely they would be to vote for "The Liberal Party led by Justin Trudeau," "The Conservative Party led by Andrew Scheer," "The New Democratic Party led by Jagmeet Singh," etc. in a future election. The response options were "definitely support" the party and leader in question, "certainly consider" them, "maybe consider" them, and "definitely not even consider" them.

Respondents choosing either of the first two options (definitely support or certainly consider) are considered to be a party's "sphere." They represent potential supporters of that party, not necessarily decided voters.

It should be noted that the categories are not mutually exclusive. Respondents were asked to give an opinion on each of the main parties and had the option to say they would "certainly consider" each one. Thus, many respondents may appear in the spheres of multiple parties.

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

*For detailed results by party spheres, party membership and other crosstabs, click [here](#).*

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