

On CPC leadership, both non-Conservatives and party faithful say Rona Ambrose has the right stuff

Seven-in-ten say party needs to move toward the political centre on social issues

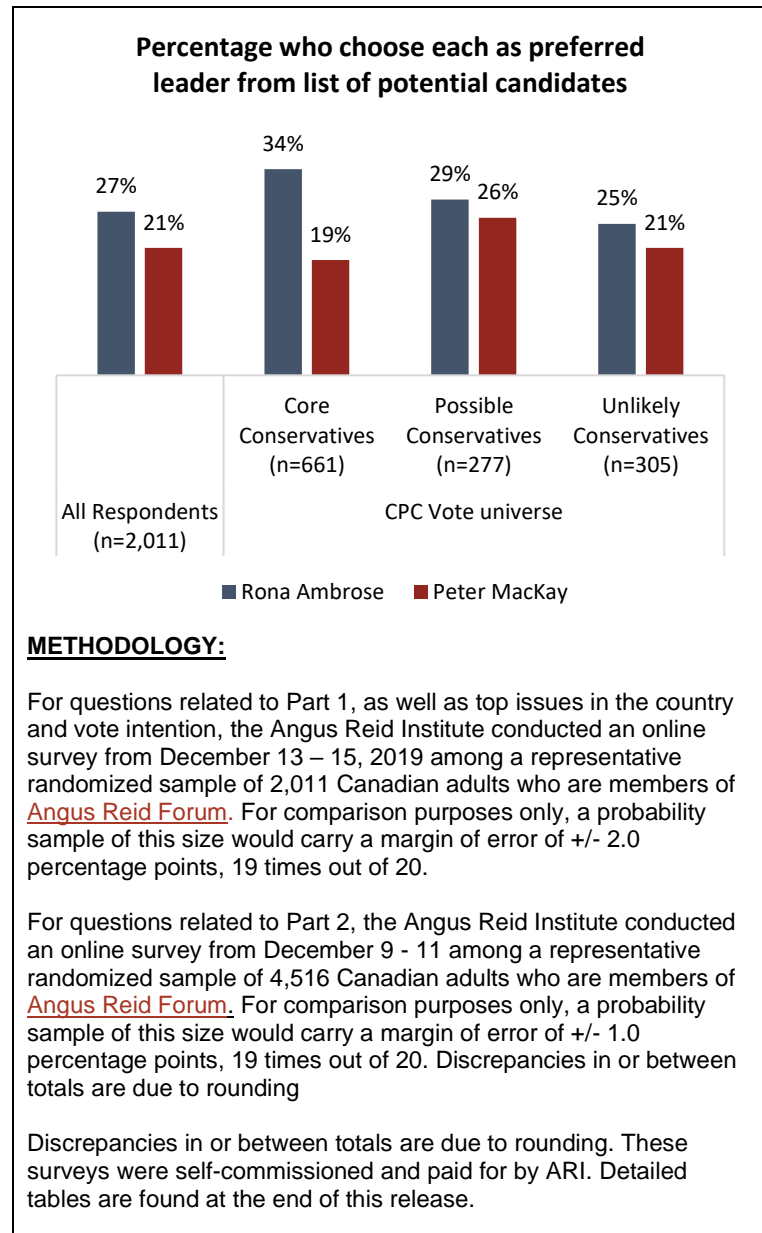
Dec 17, 2019 – Andrew Scheer's resignation as Conservative leader earlier this month may have closed the book on what – [compared to expectations](#) – was a disappointing chapter in the history of the CPC. A fresh narrative has yet to be written, but just what story will be told and who will tell it remains to be seen.

The latest study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute in the wake of Scheer's announcement shows Canadians – whether core Conservative voters or those who might vote CPC – want to see the party move closer to the political centre.

For six-in-ten Canadians overall (60%), that means taking climate change more seriously, and taking a more progressive stance on social values (57%). In each case, four-in-ten Core Conservatives agree.

Overall, Canadians are divided evenly over who was ultimately to blame for the party failing to form government. Exactly 50 per cent say that Andrew Scheer is primarily to blame, while 50 per cent say it was the party and its policies – not the outgoing leader – that bears responsibility.

As to who should shepherd the party into the next federal election, two names emerge from a cluttered field. Both former interim leader Rona Ambrose and former cabinet minister Peter MacKay are at the top. That said, Ambrose appears to be the top preference among both core Conservatives and those who aren't committed to the party. By contrast, MacKay is a less appealing choice among committed CPC voters.



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More Key Findings:

- Three-in-ten Canadians (30%) say that the Conservative Party reflects their region of the country. One-quarter of B.C. (27%) and Ontario (25%) residents, and fewer than one-in-five in Quebec (12%) and Atlantic Canada (16%) feel this way, while three-quarters in Alberta and Saskatchewan do
- Half of Canadians feel that the country is on the wrong track (49%), while three-in-ten (30%) say Canada is on the right track
- Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has an approval rating of 36 per cent to begin his second term. This is up from a low point of 31 per cent in August.

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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CPC vote universe

Among the questions put to Canadians by Angus Reid Institute for the purposes of this report (view the [questionnaire here](#)) respondents were asked whether or not they would vote for any of the major federal parties. Each person was able to choose whether, in a future election, they would:

- Definitely support that party
- Certainly consider supporting that party
- Maybe consider supporting that party

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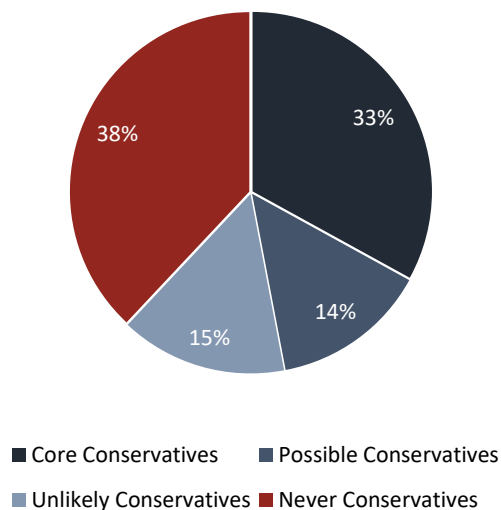
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- Not consider supporting that party

When it comes to the Conservative Party:

- One-in-three Canadians who would definitely support the party. For the purposes of this report, they are they “Core Conservatives”
- Another 14 per cent are Possible Conservatives, who will give the party strong consideration
- The same number (15%) are Unlikely Conservatives, who aren’t like to support them, but also aren’t willing to rule the party out entirely
- The largest group, nearly four-in-ten (38%) won’t consider the CPC and are the “Never Conservatives”

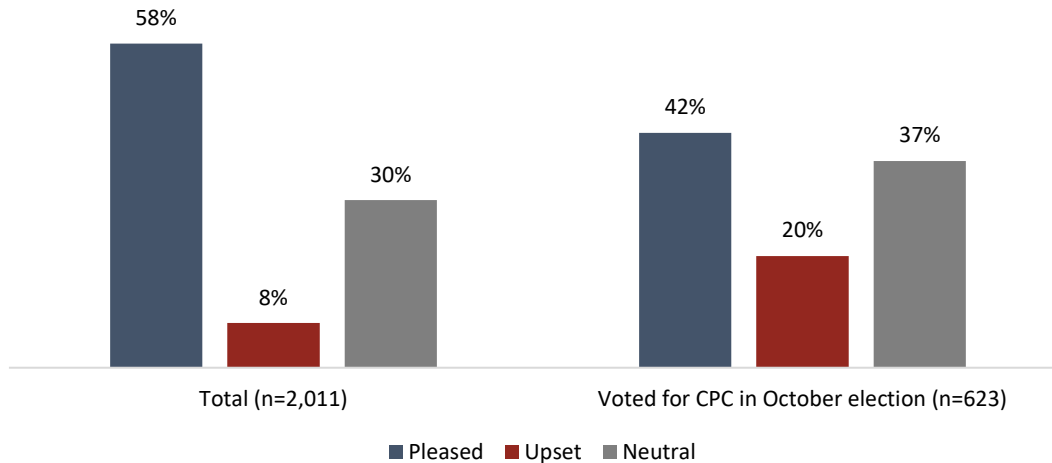
Conservative Vote Universe



Responsibility for election failure Scheer’s or party’s?

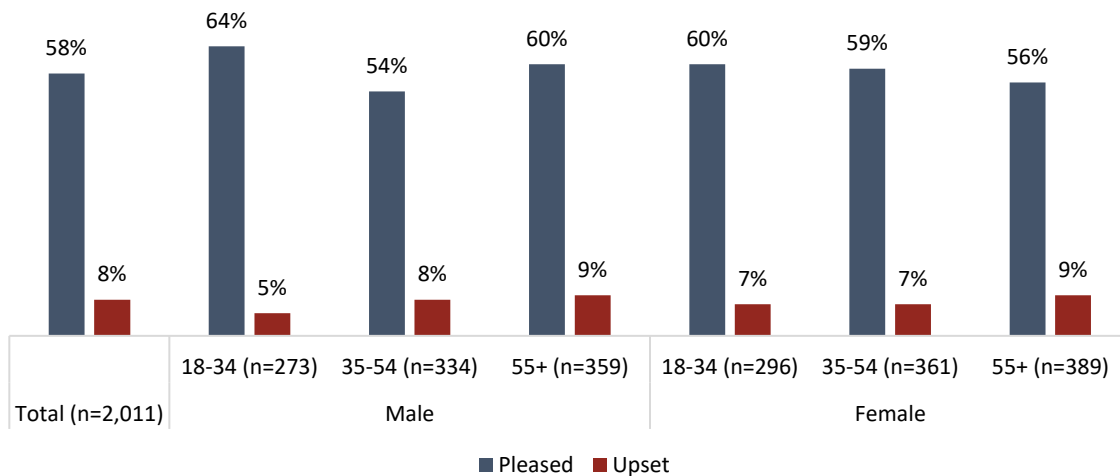
As Andrew Scheer is relegated to the status of interim leader while his party looks for a new chief and a winning direction, even recent supporters are pleased to see him replaced. Asked how they feel about his resignation, few say they are upset, and those who supported him just two months ago are twice as likely to say that they are pleased than unhappy:

Overall, would you say you are pleased or upset with Scheer resigning?



Opinions on Scheer’s resignation are near uniform across age and gender. This is notable, as the Conservative Party itself often receives higher support from men over the age of 35:

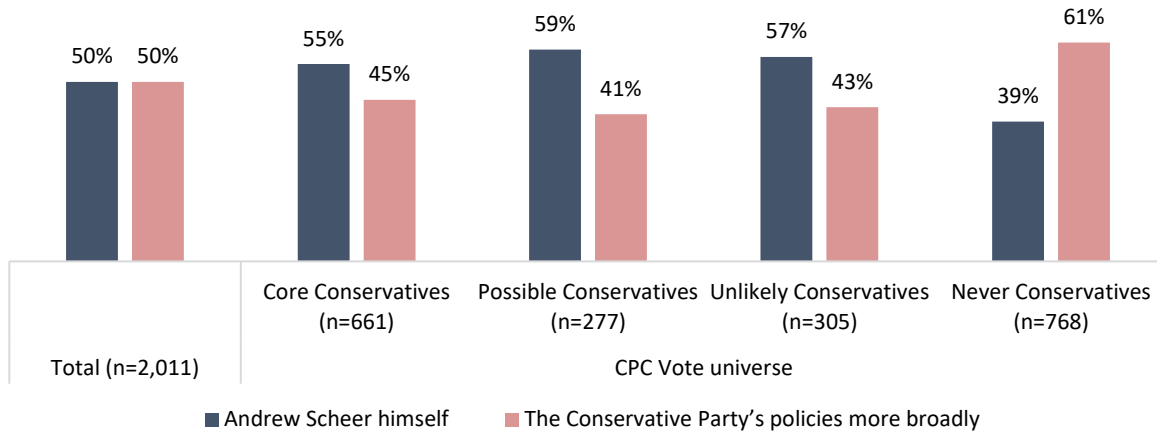
Overall, would you say you are pleased or upset with Scheer resigning?



That said, there is equal blame to go around when it comes to the party’s result on election night. Asked whether they believe Scheer shoulders the blame or whether the party is responsible more broadly, equal numbers say that each was the primary problem.

Notably, those who are more inclined to support the party are more likely to say that it was Scheer who caused the CPC to fall short, while those who say they would never support the party lean the other way, suggesting that the CPC’s policies need to change. That said, a significant segment of Core and Possible Conservatives take issue with the party’s policies:

Thinking specifically about the Conservative campaign, if you had to single out their biggest weakness in this 2019 election, would you say it was:



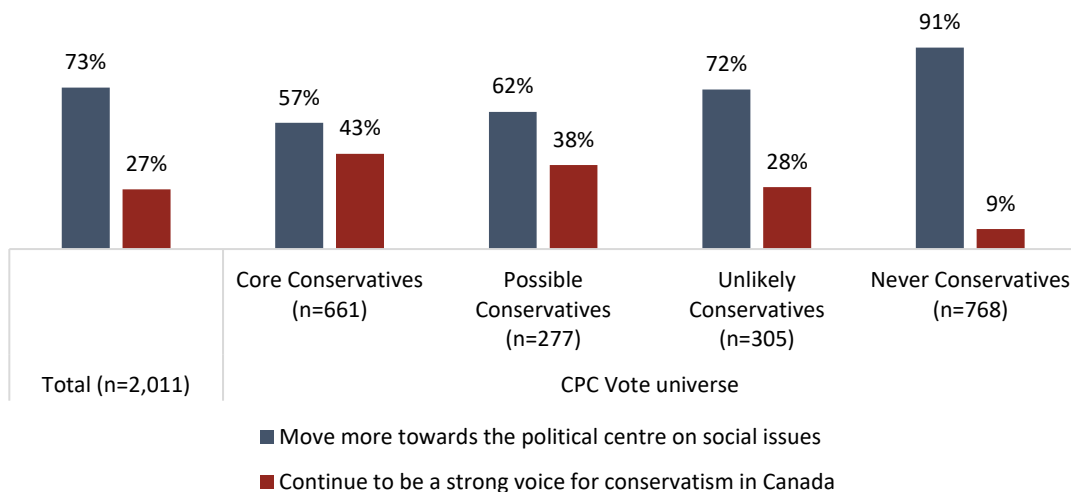
Most agree the party needs to move toward the centre

The idea that the Conservative Party needs to change direction has picked up momentum in recent months. Some have suggested that Conservative positions on [climate change](#) and [social values](#), in particular, are holding the party back. Angus Reid Institute polling finds [considerable support](#) for climate change action, for example, among those who prefer the CPC to other parties.

Related: Majorities say both climate action, oil & gas growth should be top priorities for govt.

These data suggest that political observers may be on to something. Six-in-ten Core Conservatives (57%) say that the party needs to move toward the political centre on social issues:

As the Conservatives consider look to the future, which overall direction do you think the party should take?



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Perceptions of the party

Overall, six-in-ten Canadians say that the party needs to take climate change more seriously. This sentiment is held by 37 per cent of Core Conservatives, and close to half of those who are Possible Conservatives (46%).

At least 38 per cent of all groups in the CPC sphere say the party is too socially conservative on issues such as gay rights. This suggests that the party has room for growth if it does indeed move to the centre on some issues:

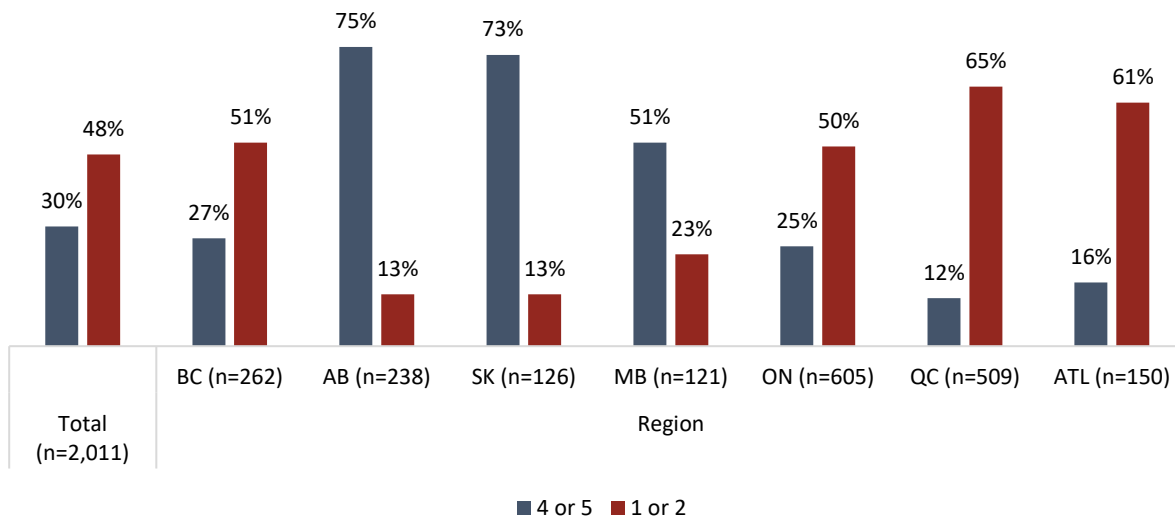
Percentage who say this describes the CPC (scores a four or five on five-point scale)					
	Total (n=2,011)	CPC vote universe			
		Core (n=661)	Possible (n=277)	Unlikely (n=305)	Never (n=768)
Needs to take Climate Change more seriously	60%	37%	46%	60%	84%
Is too socially conservative on issues like gay rights	57%	43%	38%	53%	78%
Is too much for the rich, and doesn't care about the poor	53%	29%	31%	49%	83%
Is a party of the past, not the future	50%	32%	24%	38%	78%
Hasn't done a good job communicating what it really stands for	50%	45%	54%	49%	54%
Does not represent people like me	49%	38%	23%	39%	74%
Is very solid on fiscal and economic management	39%	61%	55%	33%	17%
Has been moving more to the fringes and away from the mainstream	38%	22%	23%	36%	58%
Has made very important contributions to this country	38%	59%	58%	37%	12%
Reflects my region of Canada	30%	47%	41%	24%	12%
Is welcoming of people from different cultures and backgrounds	26%	48%	36%	22%	6%

When it comes to asking respondents whether they feel the CPC does a good job of reflecting their part of the country, the disparities are staggering. Three-quarters of residents in Alberta and Saskatchewan feel well-represented, while just one-quarter of B.C. and Ontario residents, and fewer than one-in-five in Quebec and Atlantic Canada say the same:

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The Conservative Party reflects my region of Canada (Respondents choose on a five-point scale how closely they feel this describes them)



Who should be leader?

The focus of the Conservative Party now turns to its forthcoming leadership race. The Angus Reid Institute showed respondents a list of known and high-profile members of the conservative community and asked them to choose which would be most appealing – or write in a name of their own. In the aftermath of Scheer’s resignation, two prominent conservatives are preferred above others.

Both former interim CPC leader Rona Ambrose and former Conservative cabinet minister Peter MacKay generate interest from at least one-in-five Canadians. Perhaps more importantly, Ambrose is the top choice for both Core and Possible Conservatives:

**Here is a list of prominent Conservatives in Canada. Please choose which would be the most appealing to you as the next party leader.
(Up to three responses allowed)**

	Total (n=2,011)	CPC vote universe			
		Core (n=661)	Possible (n=277)	Unlikely (n=305)	Never (n=768)
Rona Ambrose	27%	34%	29%	25%	21%
Peter MacKay	21%	19%	26%	21%	20%
Caroline Mulroney	9%	11%	11%	7%	9%
Michelle Rempel	9%	15%	12%	8%	3%
Lisa Raitt	8%	7%	7%	10%	8%
Pierre Poilievre	8%	16%	8%	4%	1%
Kevin O'Leary	7%	9%	9%	10%	4%
Jason Kenney	7%	10%	9%	5%	3%
Brad Wall	6%	12%	6%	5%	1%
Michael Chong	5%	2%	4%	8%	8%
Bernard Lord	5%	6%	4%	4%	4%

But after an election campaign that revealed deep and festering regional rifts, finding a leader who can resonate with Canadians coast-to-coast may be key in a Conservative returning the government. In is notable then, that while Ontario residents are split between Ambrose (28%) and MacKay (25%), it Ambrose who holds a distinct advantage in key CPC strongholds of Alberta and Saskatchewan and, to a lesser extent, B.C.:

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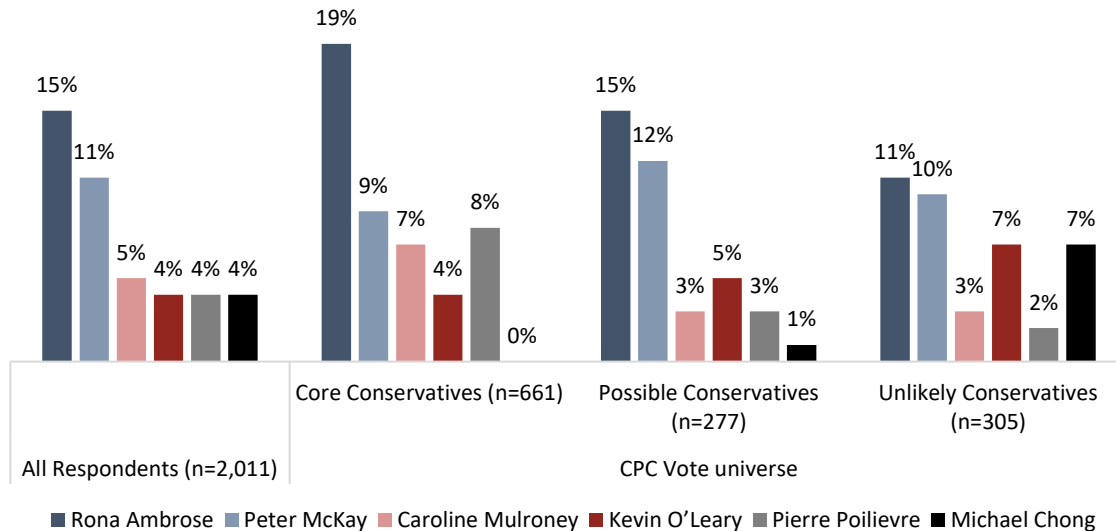
	Total (n=2,011)	Region						
		BC (n=262)	AB (n=238)	SK (n=126)	MB (n=121)	ON (n=605)	QC (n=509)	ATL (n=150)
Rona Ambrose	27%	28%	48%	35%	24%	28%	14%	29%
Peter MacKay	21%	18%	18%	18%	27%	25%	12%	37%
Caroline Mulroney	9%	4%	2%	3%	5%	8%	19%	7%
Michelle Rempel	9%	10%	25%	16%	15%	8%	2%	10%
Lisa Raitt	8%	7%	8%	10%	4%	11%	4%	10%
Pierre Poilievre	8%	9%	10%	18%	6%	10%	2%	8%
Kevin O'Leary	7%	11%	10%	10%	10%	8%	2%	6%
Jason Kenney	7%	6%	10%	5%	4%	7%	7%	3%
Brad Wall	6%	5%	20%	38%	11%	3%	1%	4%
Michael Chong	5%	5%	4%	4%	4%	8%	1%	5%
Bernard Lord	5%	0%	1%	1%	2%	3%	12%	12%

But in a race that seems – for now – as wide open as it is fluid – what happens when Canadians are asked to narrow in on their *most* appealing choice? Here, Ambrose claims top spot:

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And of these, which would you most prefer to be the new leader of the Conservative Party, if you had to choose one?

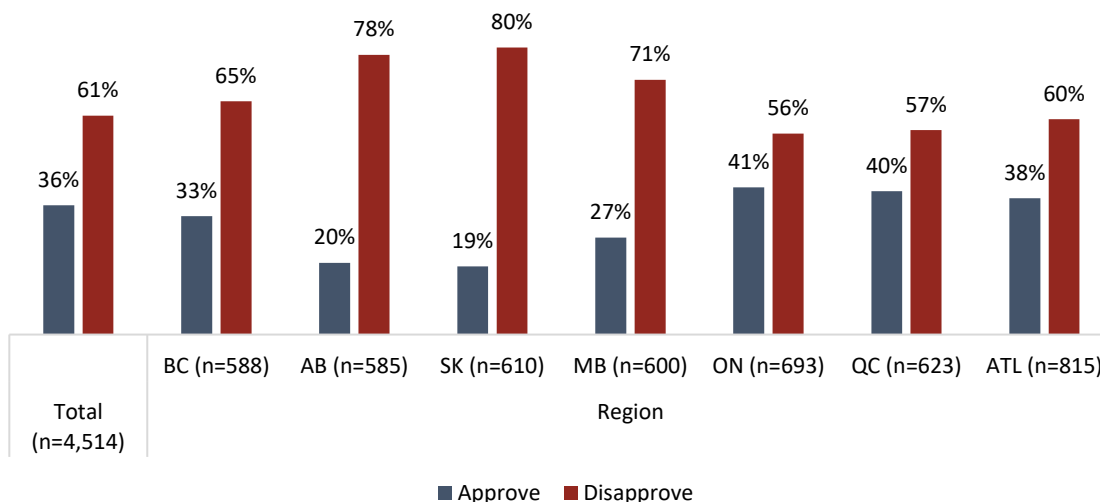


Part 2: Checking in on the Liberal Party

36% approve of PM

As Justin Trudeau surveys the political fallout of an election that saw him holding onto his job by his fingernails, he does so with a less-than-optimal approval rating from his constituents. Currently, 36 per cent of Canadians say they approve of the job he has done to this point. His approval drops to one-in-five in Alberta and Saskatchewan, and jumps to two-in-five in regions east of Manitoba, as seen in the following regional graph:

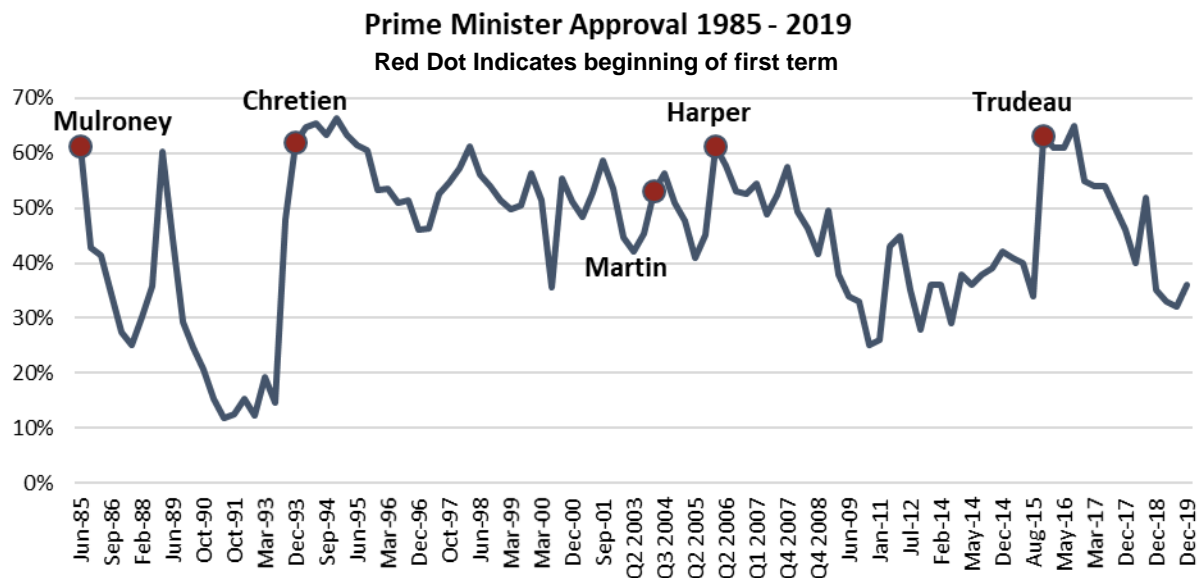
Do you approve or disapprove of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau?



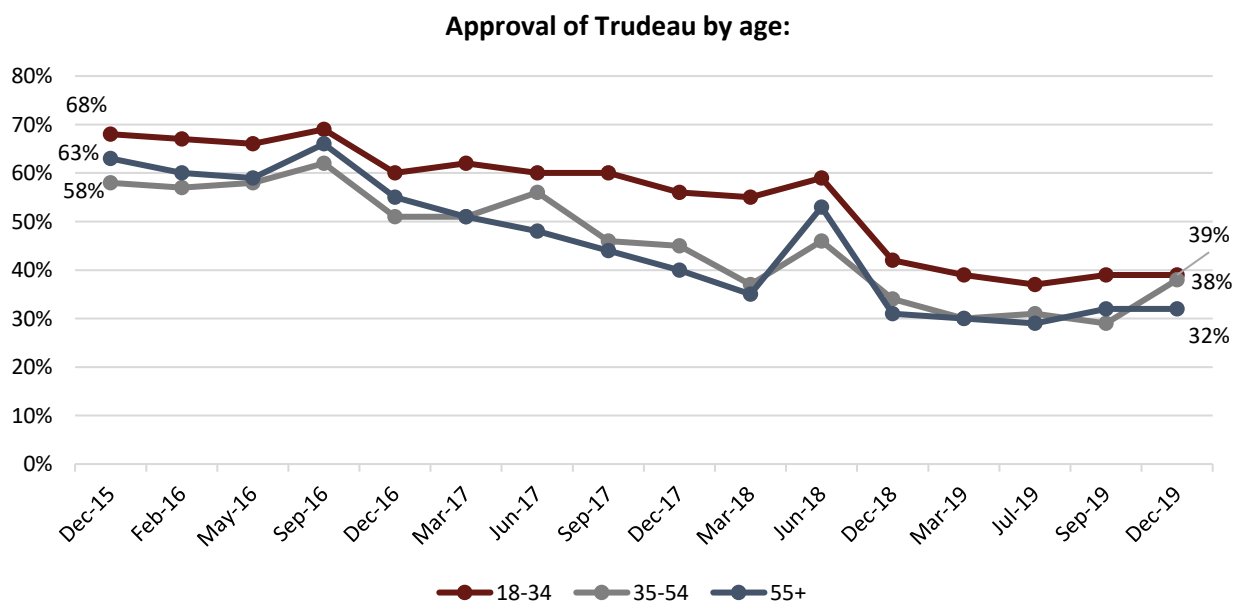
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That said, the picture is arguably no bleaker than it has been for some of his more recent predecessors. Just after the four-year mark of their times as Prime Minister, both Brian Mulroney (29%) and Stephen Harper (33%) had lower approval, while Jean Chretien continued to garner majority support (57%):



Trudeau's approval doldrums are attributable near-equally to all age categories. His personal brand has yet to recover with young Canadians who approved of him at majority levels until June of 2018.



Top issues – Climate, healthcare, taxes, housing

Throughout the federal election campaign, climate change held the top position among important issues facing the country. That continues to be the case as the Liberals begin to tackle legislative priorities for this term. Climate change and health care emerge as clear priorities, while personal taxation, affordable housing and government transparency are all chosen by approximately one-in-five Canadians:

Top issue facing Canada (Respondents allowed up to two choices)								
	Total (n=2,011)	Region						
		BC (n=262)	AB (n=238)	SK (n=126)	MB (n=121)	ON (n=605)	QC (n=509)	ATL (n=150)
Climate change	36%	37%	19%	16%	30%	39%	42%	35%
Improving access to healthcare	29%	22%	19%	25%	22%	28%	36%	42%
The amount of taxes I pay	21%	21%	24%	26%	25%	21%	19%	18%
Access to affordable housing	20%	25%	9%	11%	12%	23%	20%	15%
Transparency and honesty in the federal government	18%	22%	25%	20%	19%	15%	16%	20%

Right track or wrong track?

Justin Trudeau's government has some hard work ahead, given that half of Canadians (49%) say the country is headed in the wrong direction. Major priorities such as [health care](#), [Canada-China relations](#) and pushing NAFTA 2.0 [across the finish line](#) await the government in 2020. Success could go a long way to bringing skeptical Canadians over to the optimistic side of this equation, Failure, towards losing them even more.

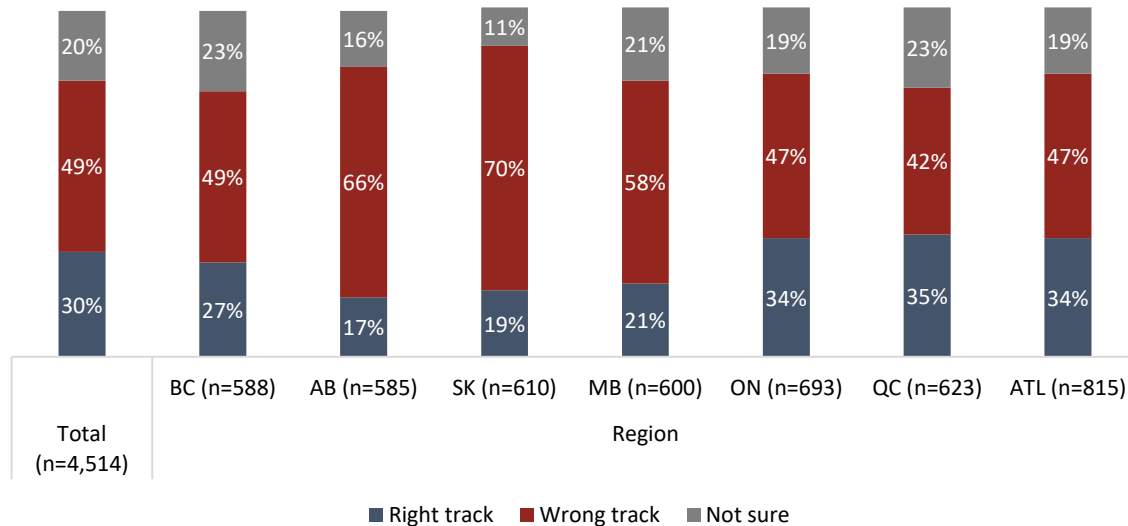
Related: As unfavourable views of China rise, Canadians are split over wisdom of Meng arrest

As it stands now, Canadians in the eastern part of the country, Ontario (34%), Quebec (35%) and Atlantic Canada (34%), are most optimistic. In each case, these regions are twice as likely as Alberta to say the country is moving the right way (17%). Approximately seven-in-ten in Alberta and Saskatchewan say that the country is going in the wrong direction:

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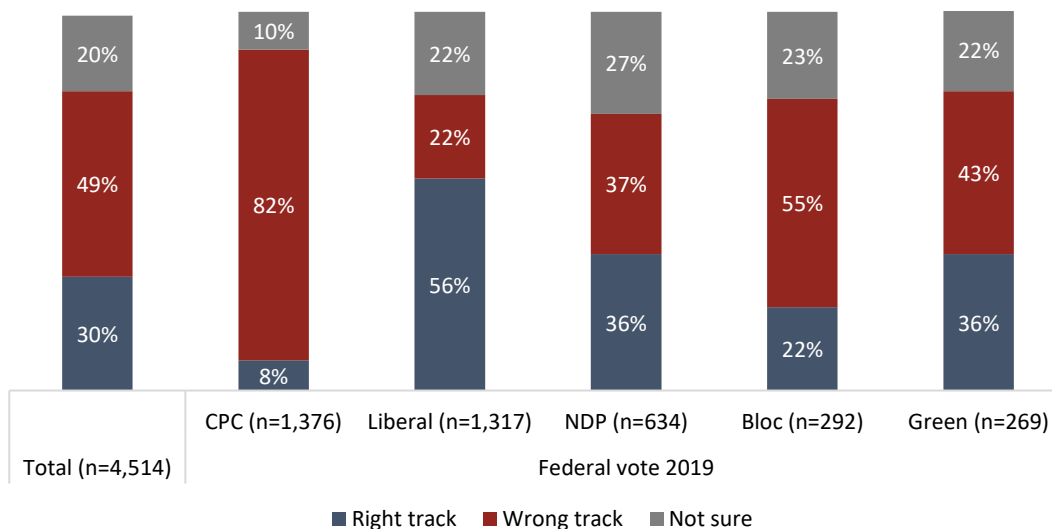
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Is Canada on the right or wrong track?



Politics plays a role in this sentiment: past Liberal voters like the direction in which the country is going generally, while past NDP voters are divided and perhaps waiting to see how this new minority government operates across party lines. Conservatives, meanwhile, are overwhelmingly negative – four-in-five (82%) say Canada is on the wrong track:

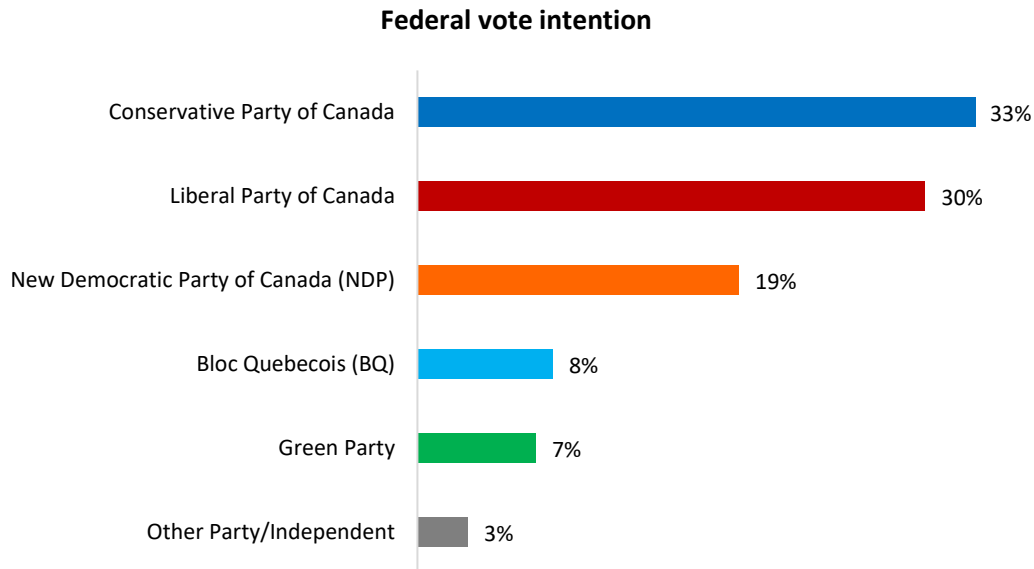
Is Canada on the right or wrong track?



CPC, Liberals neck and neck in vote intention:

While parliamentarians adjust to the new minority government landscape, Canadians remain just as divided as they were when they voted October 21. Currently, 33 per cent say they would vote for the CPC

if an election were called immediately, while 30 per cent would support the Liberals. The coming months will reveal how CPC leadership frontrunners could impact these numbers:



Part 1, Top Issues and Vote Intention: For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

Part 2: For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

For detailed results by Conservative vote universe, [click here](#).

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