

WE Scandal: Trudeau's approval drops six more points, but Canadians doubt issue will bring down government

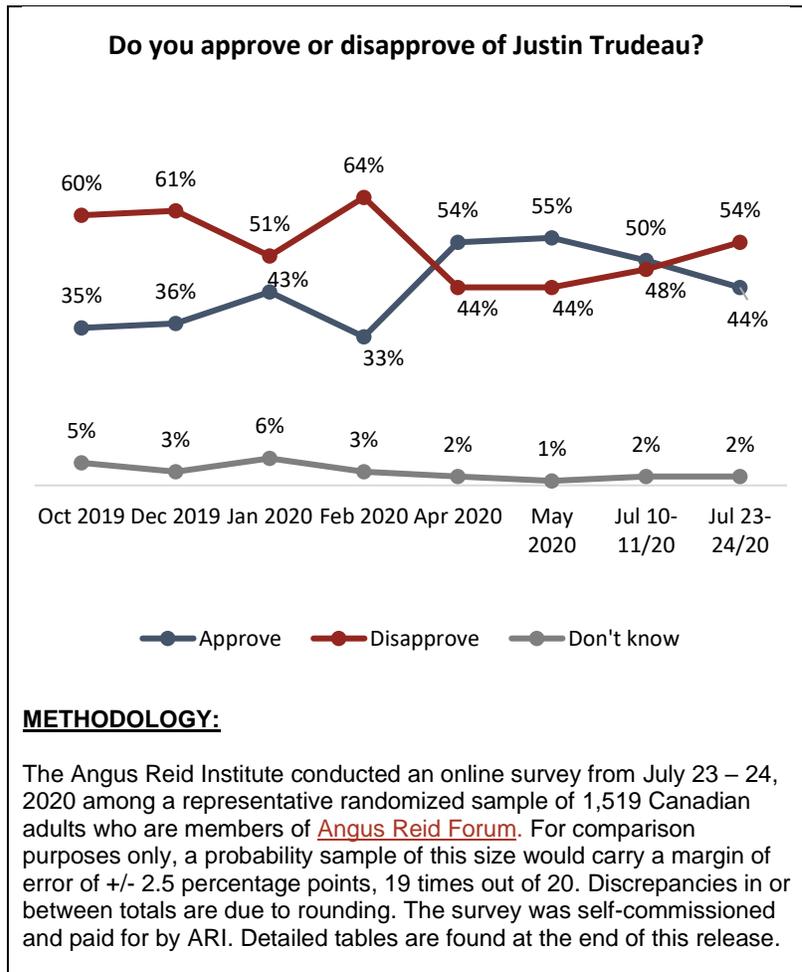
Half (53%) say their opinion of the PM has worsened in the last month

July 27, 2020 – The WE Charity affair may be stoking another summer of discontent among Canadians but ultimately, they do not believe this latest ethics scandal will prove fatal to the Liberal minority government.

Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic response, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's own approval numbers, and those of his government, had rebounded in recent months. Then came WE.

Now, the latest data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute shows three-in-five (59%) feel the issue is a serious and significant one, twice the number who say it has been overblown by the media and opposition politicians.

A plurality (43%) say the Trudeau government knowingly committed an unethical act, while almost as many (37%) feel the government's decisions in regard to the charity constitute a possibly criminal act that warrants investigation by police.



But what – if any – implications do these opinions have for the government's long-term survival?

Indeed, more than half (56%) say the scandal will ultimately not be the issue that threatens the viability of Trudeau's minority. However, one-in-three (32%), say it may bring down the government.

More Key Findings:

- 16 per cent of Canadians choose ethics and corruption as one of their top three issues facing the country. This equals the number who said this during the SNC-Lavalin scandal in 2019. Canadians' core priorities continue to be the COVID-19 response, economy, and health care.

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- Three-quarters of past Conservative voters (77%) view the actions of the government in regard to WE Charity as possibly criminal and in need of investigation by police. In contrast, 19 per cent of 2019 New Democrat voters say the same, and six per cent of past Liberals.
- Quebec residents are most likely to say they feel the government is at risk of falling over the scandal (43%). Alberta and Saskatchewan residents are also more likely to say this, compared to the rest of the country.

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 – Opinions of the Scandal

Ethics and Accountability an increasing priority

Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner Mario Dion continues an investigation into the conduct of the Prime Minister, who was [reportedly involved](#) in discussions that led to the Canadian charity earning a now-cancelled [\\$19.5 million no-bid contract](#) to oversee a new government funded student-volunteer program worth more than \$900 million. Trudeau's mother and brother have both previously been paid speaking fees totaling more than \$350 thousand to appear at WE Charity events.

Trudeau will reportedly testify in front of the Commons Ethics Committee. Finance Minister Bill Morneau testified last week after it was revealed he accepted more than \$40,000 in hospitality from WE – an organization that employs his daughter – in 2017. Those monies were recently repaid.

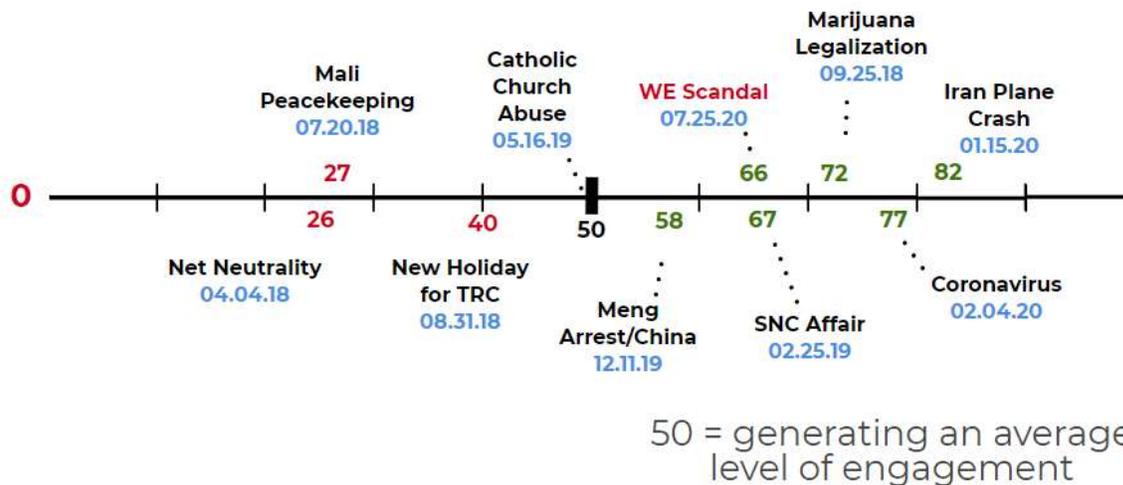
How much is this story resonating in the middle of summer during a year when Canadians continue to be galvanized and personally affected by the COVID-19 pandemic? Engagement with the WE scandal ranks on par with the attention to the first weeks of the SNC-Lavalin scandal in 2019, though below other major

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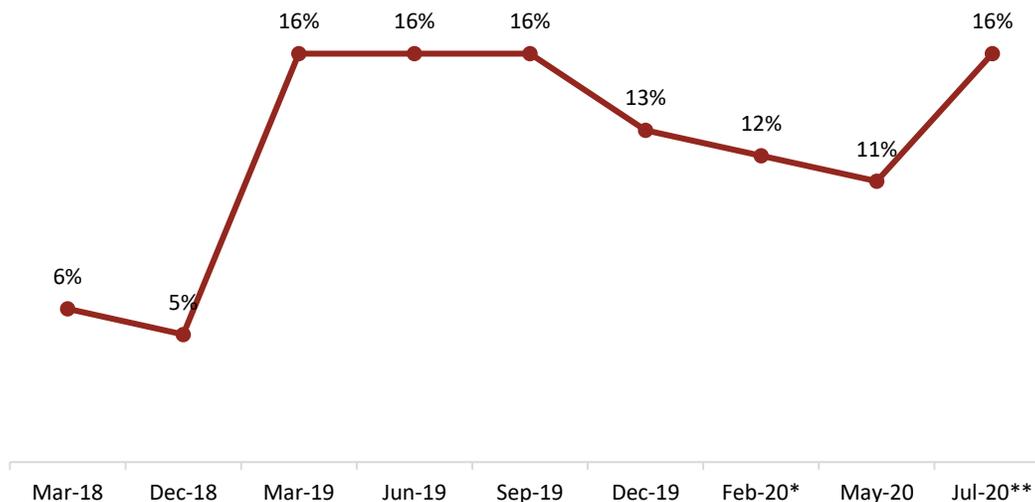
issues and events that have dominated headlines in past months and years (See Engagement Index methodology at the end of this report):

Scores on Angus Reid Institute Engagement Index



More broadly, the issue of ethics has risen in priority among Canadians in the past weeks. The proportion of rating this as a top issue is at the same level it was during the first quarter of 2019, at the height of the SNC-Lavalin scandal. Ethics concerns had dropped since the Liberals won re-election.

Percentage of Canadians that selected "Ethics/Corruption" as a top issue in Canada (up to three selected)



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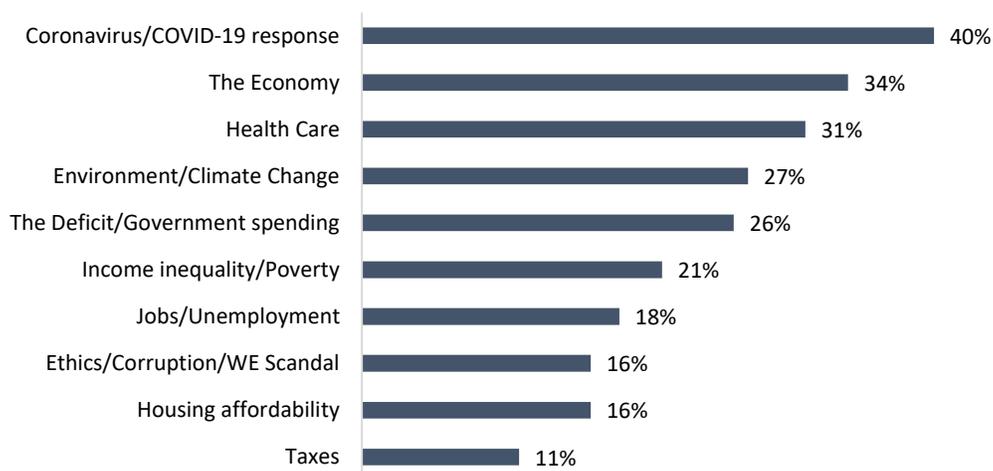
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*Response read “Ethics/Accountability” in 2018 and 2019, changed to “Ethics/Corruption” in 2020

**Sample was split: half of respondents saw “Ethics/Corruption” as an answer choice, the other half saw “Ethics/Corruption/WE Scandal. Response percentage is the average of the two respondent groups

That said, Canadians’ core concerns continue to be the country’s COVID-19 response, the economy and health care:

**Please rank the issues facing Canada that you care about most:
(Up to three selected, items with 10% or greater shown)
(All respondents, n=1,519)**



Majority see WE issue as serious

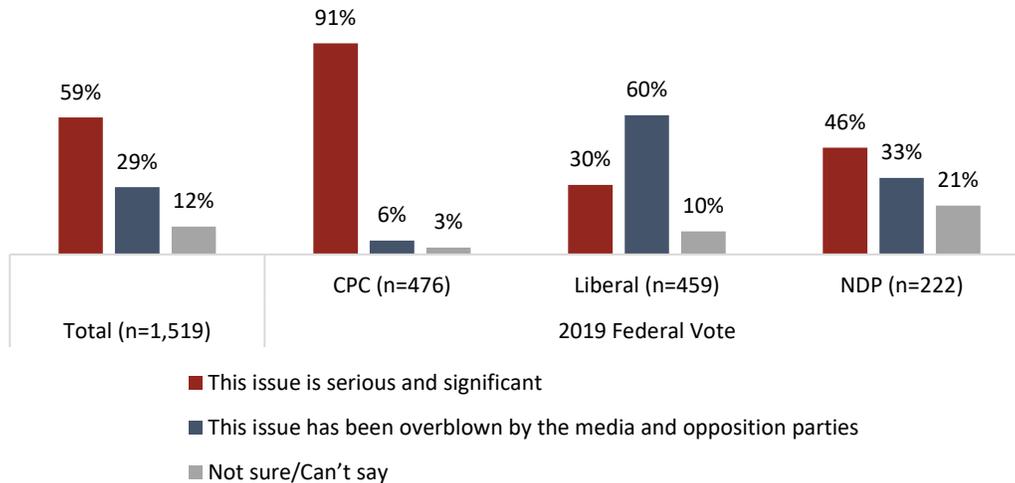
Most Canadians view the WE affair with gravity. Politics – perhaps unsurprisingly – is a major driver of opinion, but significant segments of voters who cast ballots for each of the three major national parties in last year’s election are of the view that it is “serious and significant”:

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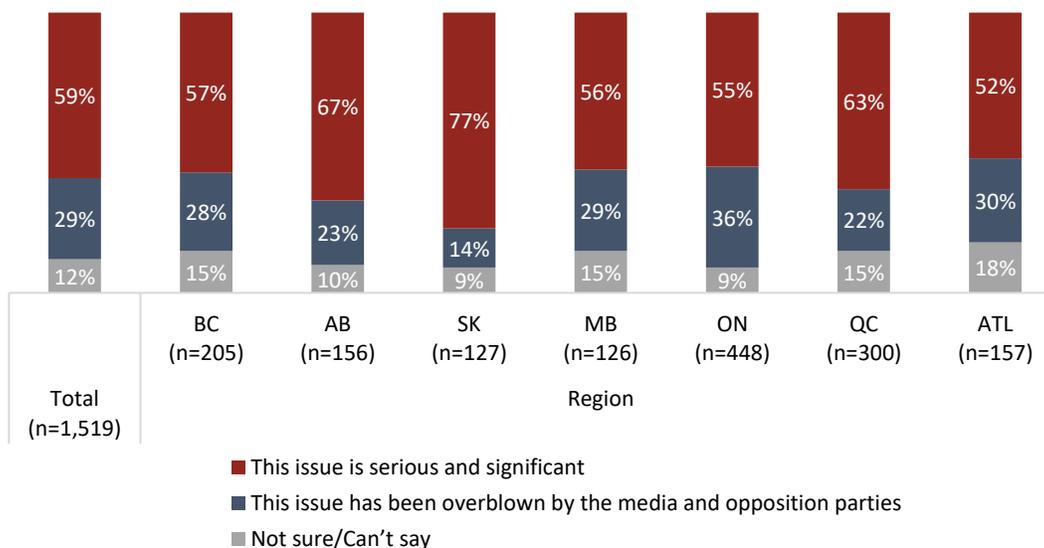
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Thinking about this situation, which view is closest to your own:



This issue is seen as serious by at least half of residents in each region of the country, while Ontario residents and Atlantic Canadians are most likely to disagree and say it is overblown:

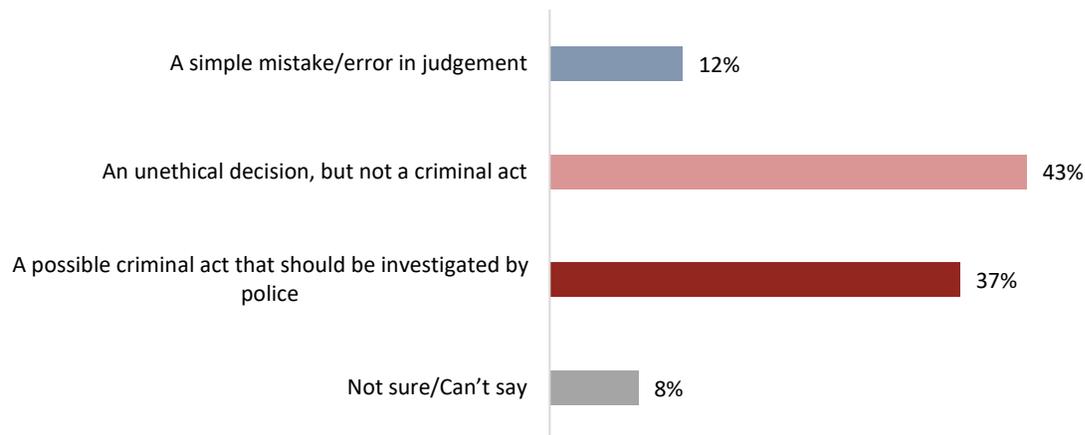
Thinking about this situation, which view is closest to your own:



Criminal or Unethical? Canadians divided

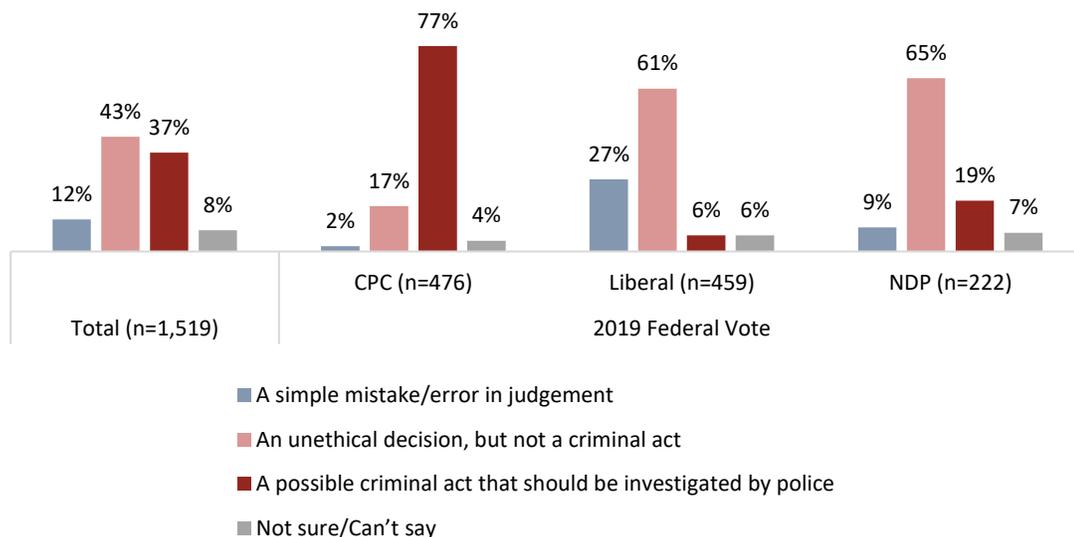
As the investigation by Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner Mario Dion continues, Canadians are divided over just how to assess the actions of the PM, his Finance Minister, and cabinet. The minority view is that in failing to recuse themselves from discussions over the contract, Trudeau and Morneau simply made an error in judgement. The rest are split between classifying it as unethical, and possibly criminal:

**And thinking about your feelings and views on this issue, how would you assess what has come to light so far?
(All respondents, n=1,519)**



Conservative MPs [have led calls](#) to investigate this issue criminally, and it is that party's supporters who overwhelmingly wish to see this avenue taken, while majorities among Liberal and New Democrat voters see the actions of the Prime Minister largely as an act that Trudeau knew was unethical, but not criminal, at the time:

And thinking about your feelings and views on this issue, how would you assess what has come to light so far?



Men of all ages are far more likely than women to say that this issue deserves a criminal investigation, with those 35 years of age and older voicing this view at a majority level. Whether or not this option will be explored remains to be seen, but Trudeau has [agreed to testify](#) in front of a parliamentary committee on the issue:

And thinking about your feelings and views on this issue, how would you assess what has come to light so far?							
	Total (1,519)	Age and Gender					
		Male			Female		
		18-34 (206)	35-54 (252)	55+ (271)	18-34 (223)	35-54 (273)	55+ (293)
A simple mistake/error in judgement	12%	9%	7%	9%	12%	13%	18%
An unethical decision, but not a criminal act	43%	43%	34%	38%	55%	48%	43%
A possible criminal act that should be investigated by police	37%	40%	52%	51%	18%	27%	34%
Not sure/Can't say	8%	7%	7%	3%	15%	11%	4%

Part 2 – Impact on Trudeau and his government

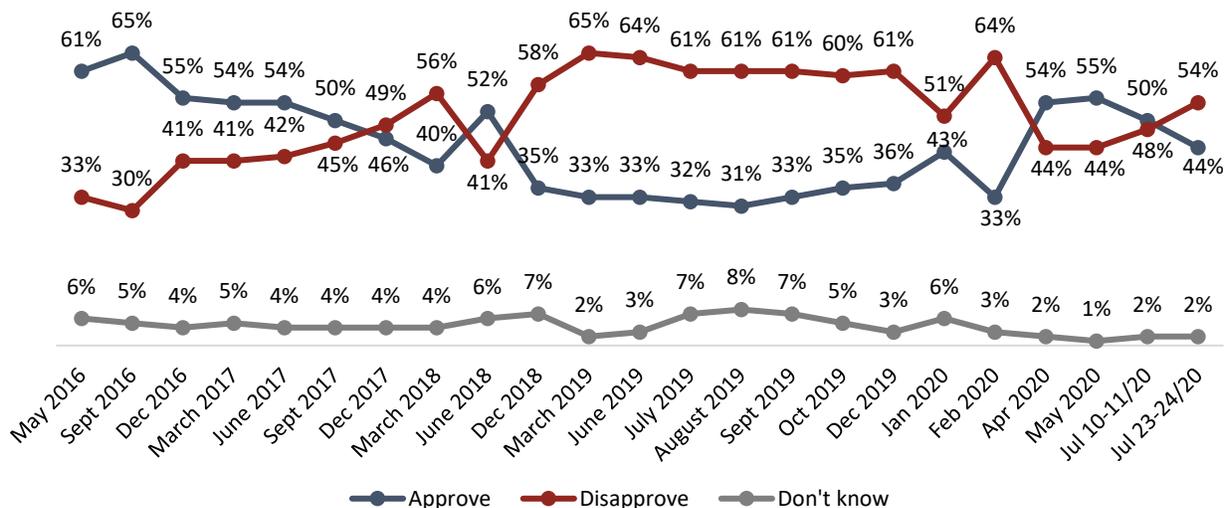
Trudeau approval drops six more points

Prime Minister Trudeau is facing [the third](#) ethics investigation of his five years in office. The swirling questions around the WE Charity scandal are having an effect on his approval. Despite [strong grades](#) from Canadians for his handling of the COVID-19 outbreak, Trudeau's approval has now fallen 11 points since May. More than two-in-five (44%) approve of his performance while 54 per cent now disapprove.

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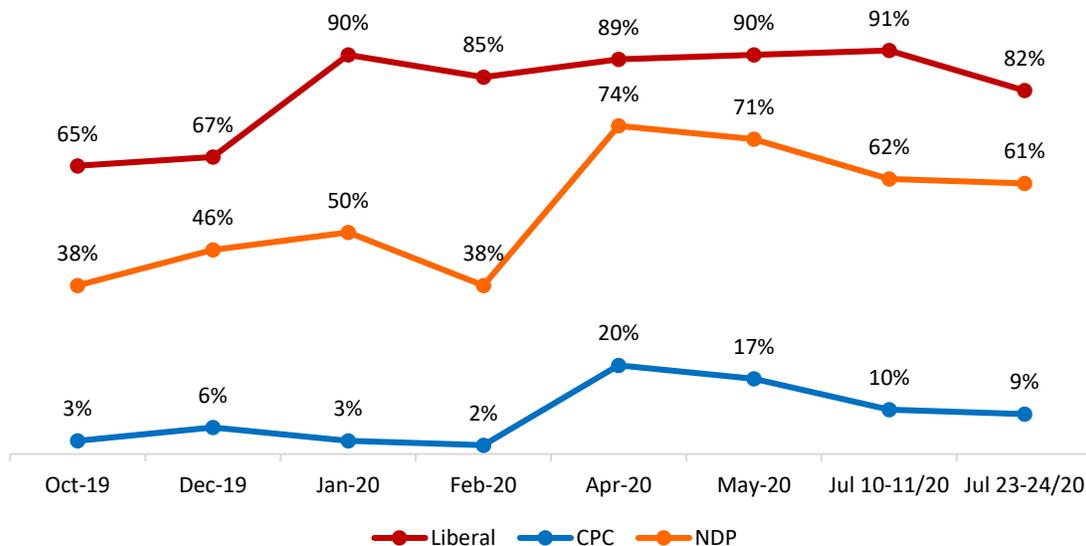
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Do you approve or disapprove of Justin Trudeau?



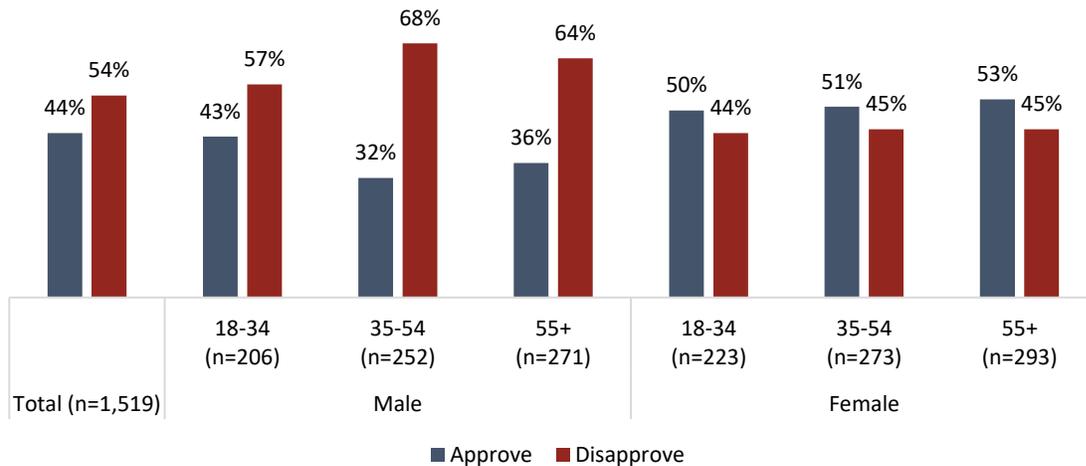
Troublingly for Trudeau, this lost approval comes primarily from those who voted Liberal in the last election. Four-in-five among this group still approve of the Prime Minister, however, this represents a nine-point drop from just two weeks ago.

Approval of Justin Trudeau by 2019 federal vote



Women of all ages continue to approve of Trudeau at a majority level, but he is hanging onto that endorsement by a thread:

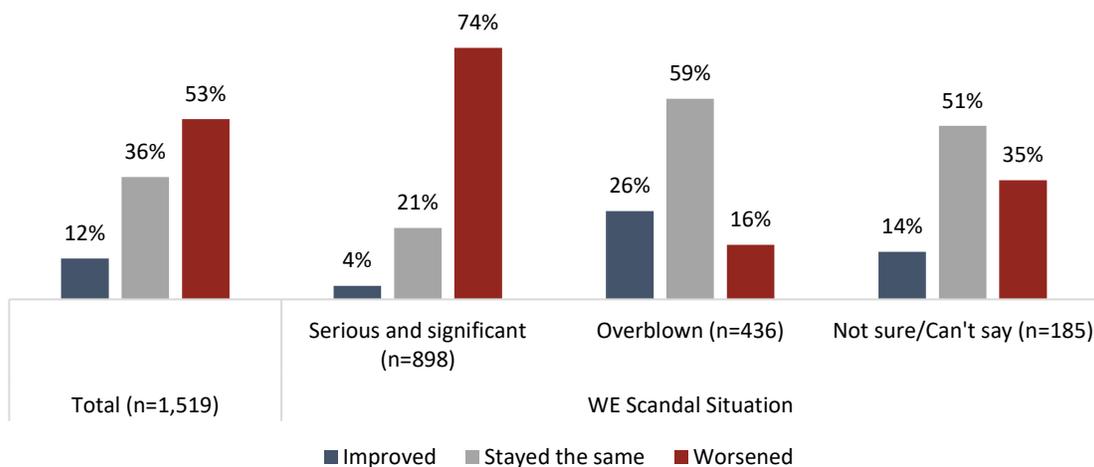
Do you approve or disapprove of Justin Trudeau?



Worsening perceptions of the PM

More troublingly, half of Canadians (53%) say that their opinion of the Prime Minister has worsened in the past month or so. This decline is driven heavily by those who feel the WE scandal is a serious issue, while those who feel it is overblown are actually more likely to say their opinion of him has improved:

And over the past month or so, would you say your opinion of Prime Minister and Liberal Party leader Justin Trudeau has improved, worsened or stayed the same?



While men and past Conservative voters are again most likely to say their opinions of Trudeau have changed for the worse recently, it is perhaps more worrisome for the Prime Minister that 31 per cent of his own supporters also say this:

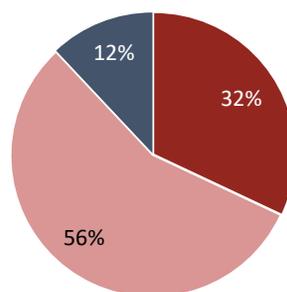
And over the past month or so, would you say your opinion of Prime Minister and Liberal Party leader Justin Trudeau has improved, worsened, or stayed the same?

	Total (1,519)	Age and Gender						2019 Federal Vote		
		Male			Female			CPC (476)	Liberal (459)	NDP (222)
		18-34 (206)	35-54 (252)	55+ (271)	18-34 (223)	35-54 (273)	55+ (293)			
Improved	12%	10%	9%	8%	20%	9%	14%	3%	21%	11%
Stayed the Same	36%	37%	28%	28%	40%	45%	36%	13%	49%	51%
Worsened	53%	53%	62%	64%	39%	46%	50%	83%	31%	39%

Majority say ultimately, Liberal government will survive

With annoyance however comes a cynicism, or resignation, regarding the impacts of the scandal on the Trudeau government’s long-term prospects. Most Canadians (56%) expect little to come of it, while one-in-three (32%) say that this will be a major issue that could threaten the future of the minority government:

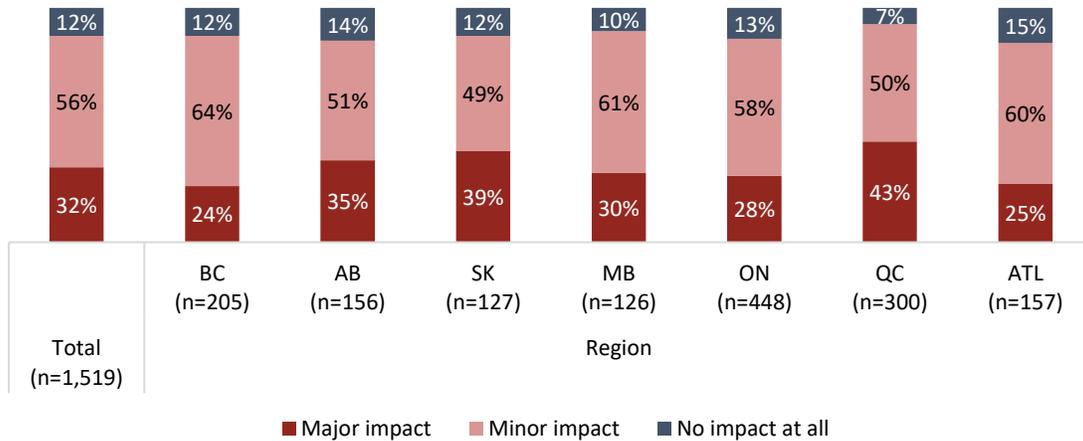
**What impact – if any – do you think this will have on the current minority Liberal government?
(All respondents, n=1,519)**



- Major impact – this could be the issue that ultimately brings down the Liberal government
- Minor impact – it will embarrass the Liberal government but ultimately it will survive
- No impact at all – this will all be forgotten in a matter of weeks

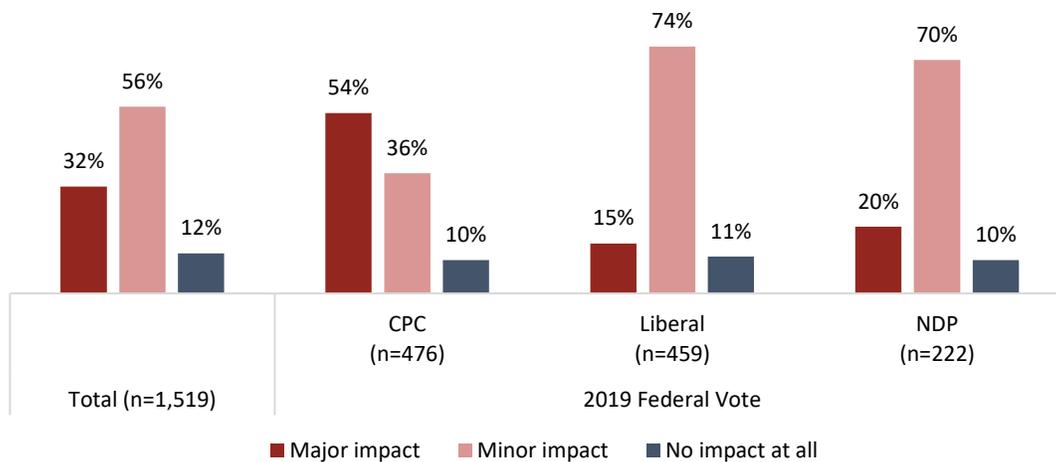
Notably, Quebec residents are most likely to say they feel the government is at risk of falling over the scandal (43%). Alberta and Saskatchewan residents are also more likely than those in other provinces to say this:

What impact – if any – do you think this will have on the current minority Liberal government?



Meanwhile, half of Conservatives say this scandal will have a major impact on the Liberal government going forward, while past Liberal and NDP supporters largely feel the impact will be minimal, if at all existent:

What impact – if any – do you think this will have on the current minority Liberal government?



Notes on Methodology

Since early 2015, the Angus Reid Institute has been asking Canadians a standardized question about how closely they are following the topics of ARI polls. To facilitate easy comparisons across disparate topics, ARI researchers have developed an Engagement Index based on respondents' answers.

For each issue, respondents are asked to say whether they are "following it in the news and discussing it with friends and family," "seeing some media coverage and having the odd conversation," "just scanning the headlines," or not seeing or hearing anything about the issue.

The index is based on the average response to this question over the years, with greater weight given to the highest level of engagement on the scale, and lesser weight given to the "having the odd conversation" and "just scanning headlines" responses. An "average" issue scores a 50 on the index, with scores higher than 50 representing above-average engagement and scores lower than 50 representing below-average engagement.

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

For detailed results by perceptions of the WE Charity scandal, [click here](#).

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