

WE Affair: Most Canadians say there's more to learn, but PM's testimony shifts opinion for neither better nor worse

Opinions of scandal unchanged from July; most say it's serious, won't do long-term damage to Liberals

August 10, 2020 – After unprecedented testimony in front of MPs from the Prime Minister, Finance Minister, Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister, and co-founding brothers of the WE organization, little has changed about the affair in the eyes of Canadians – even though they expect more revelations to come.

The latest data from non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds that 72 per cent of Canadians (including half of past Liberal voters), remain unconvinced they have all of the facts surrounding the scandal as they await the findings from an ongoing ethics investigation.

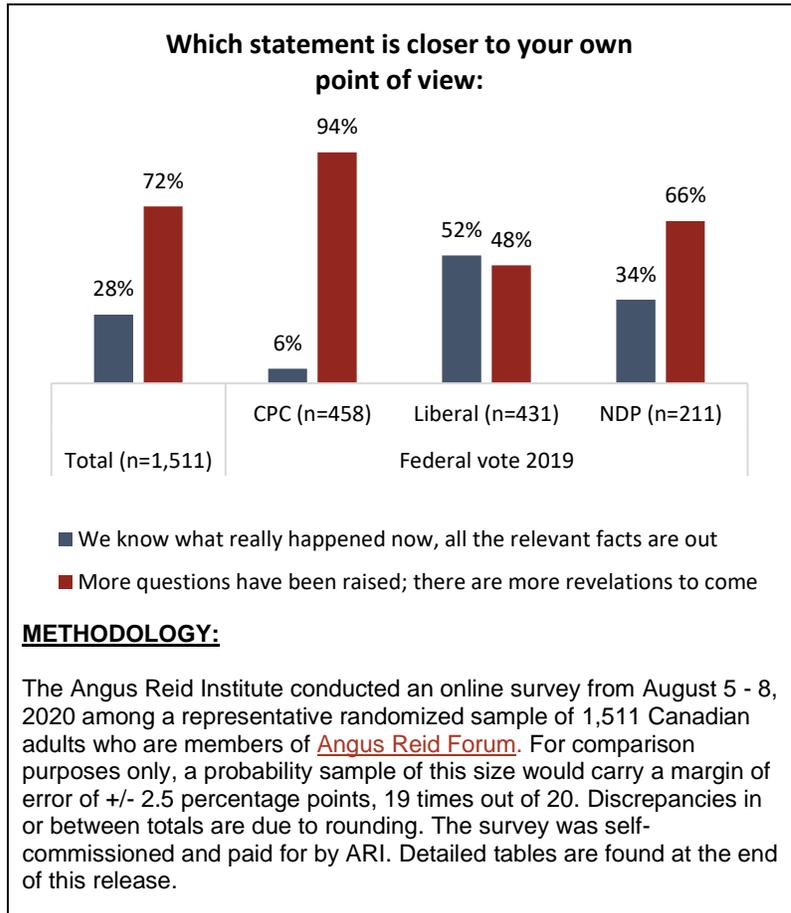
That said, opinions about what happened, and its gravity are unchanged from last month, when news of the issue was first being reported. Just as in July, 58 per cent of Canadians feel the scandal is serious, including 30 per cent of 2019 Liberal voters.

Two camps have formed when it comes to the scandal. Past Liberal and NDP voters and women are far more likely to say Trudeau's actions represented an ethics breach or a simple mistake, while expecting the government to survive long-term. Men, particularly those over the age of 34, and past Conservative voters see something more serious at play and say that a criminal investigation is necessary. This group is of the view the government may be ultimately brought down by the scandal.

It is notable that Justin Trudeau focused much of his testimony on making the case that the WE affair was a minor glitch in his government's overall handling of the coronavirus pandemic. On this particular metric, Canadian opinion has not substantially changed since the spring. A majority continues to say he is doing a good job overall.

More Key Findings:

- Three-quarters of past CPC voters say they are paying close attention to the WE scandal, compared to 53 per cent of past Liberals and 45 per cent of past New Democrats



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- Overall, an identical number of Canadians (32%) said in July and in this most recent survey that the government is facing significant consequences from this ordeal and may be brought down. Seven-in-ten (68%) disagree, just as they did last month before parliamentary hearings were held.
- Nine-in-ten past Liberals say Trudeau has done well in handling the COVID-19 response, while 72 per cent of New Democrats agree. Just one-in-five CPC voters (18%) offer praise for the Prime Minister on this file

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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The Testimony

Who was following testimony from Trudeau, Kielburgers?

Recently, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was called to testify in front of the House of Commons standing committee on finance to discuss his role in the decision-making process that led to the Canadian WE Charity earning a now-cancelled [\\$19.5 million no-bid contract](#) to oversee a government funded student-volunteer program worth more than \$900 million. Trudeau's family ties to the charity later came to light, his mother and brother both previously having been paid fees to speak at WE events.

Over the course of his 90-minute appearance Trudeau attempted to make the case that while he should have recused himself from discussions of contracting WE, he did not act in favour of the organization. Opponents accused Trudeau and other members of his government of having operated [corruptly](#), or at best, [carelessly](#). The Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner continues an investigation into the conduct of the Prime Minister.

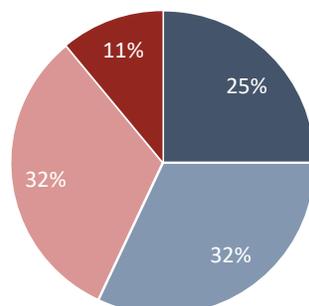
Just over half of Canadians (57%) say they followed the multi-day affair that saw Finance Minister Bill Morneau, Trudeau's Chief of Staff Katie Telford and WE founders Craig and Marc Kielburger all testify. One-quarter of Canadians (25%) say they have been following the story closely:

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Last week, both the co-founders of WE Charity, the Prime Minister, and his Chief of Staff answered questions from MPs who belong to a parliamentary committee looking into the issue.

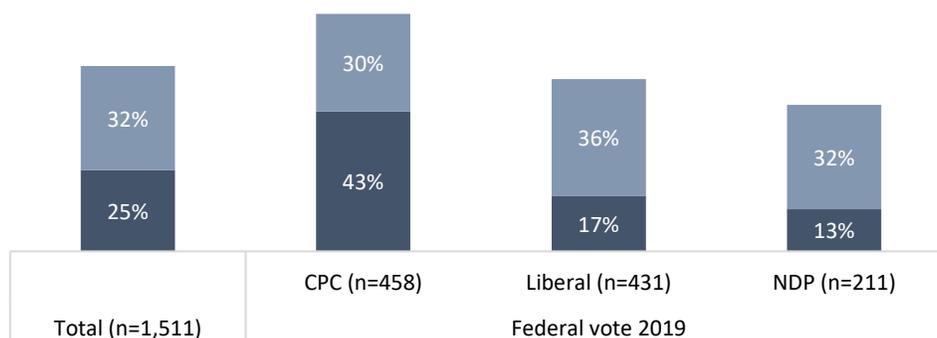
How closely did you follow these proceedings?



- Followed it and discussed it with friends and family
- Saw some media coverage and had the odd conversation about it
- Just scanning the headlines
- Hadn't heard anything about it until now

The most engaged segment include men 55 years of age and older ([see detailed tables](#)) and those who supported the Conservative Party in last year's federal election:

How closely did you follow these proceedings?

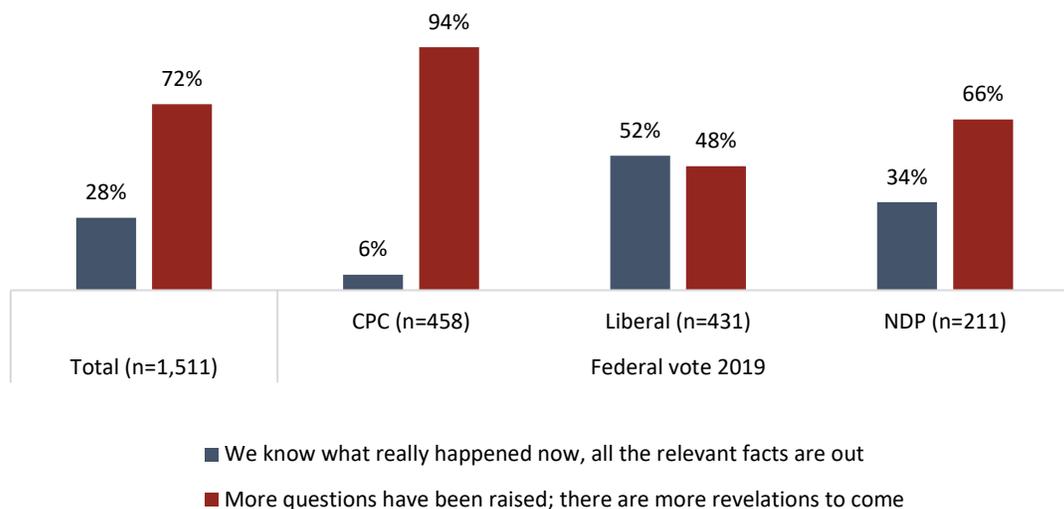


- Saw some media coverage and had the odd conversation about it
- Followed it and discussed it with friends and family

Canadians say more information to come, issue not settled

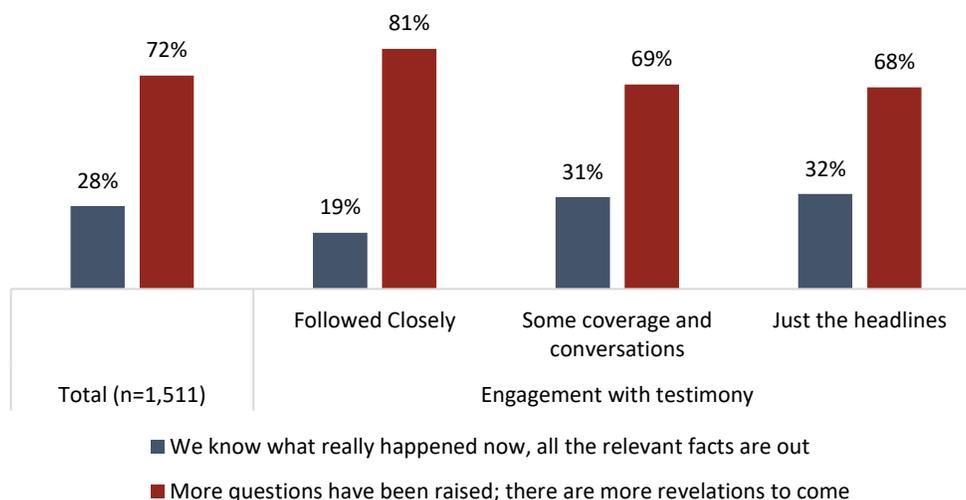
Now that Canadians have had time to digest the committee hearings and the subsequent media that followed, one thing is clear; few believe that the whole story has been told. With an ethics investigation ongoing, seven-in-ten Canadians (72%) say more information is to come. Perhaps most troublingly for Trudeau and the Liberals, only half of his party's 2019 supporters say they are satisfied that all the relevant facts are out:

Which statement is closer to your own point of view:



Notably, Canadians across different levels of engagement with the scandal and testimony come to the same conclusion:

Which statement is closer to your own point of view:



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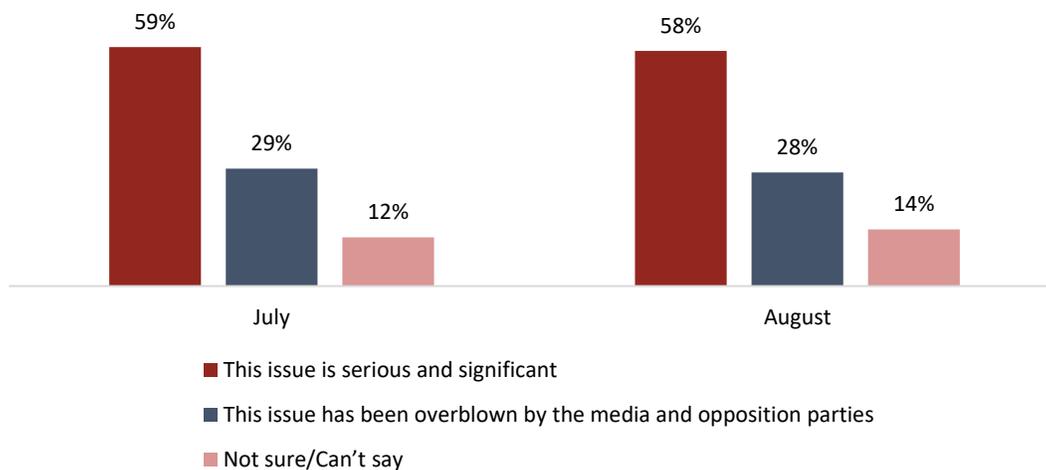
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The Impact:

Testimony appears to have changed few minds either way

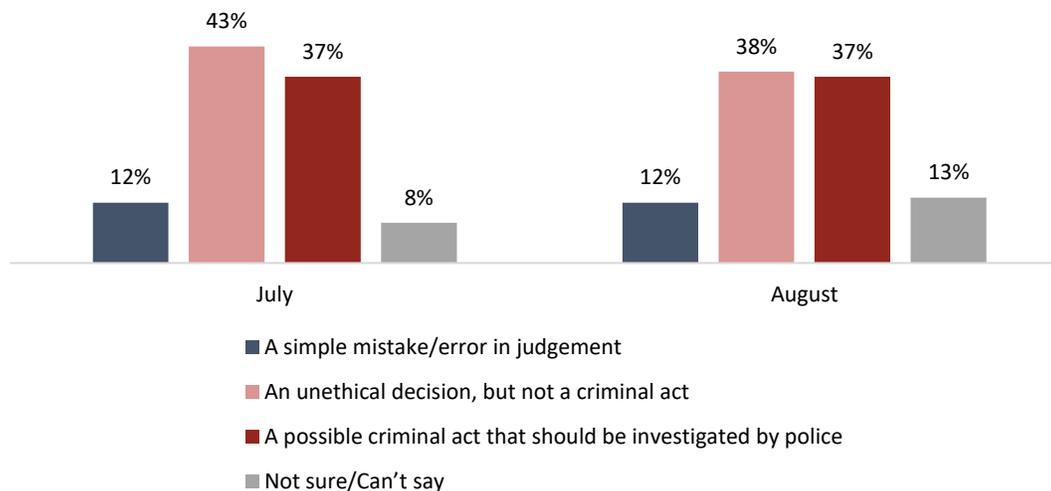
The initial outcome of the testimony from government officials and the Kielburger brothers is that little has changed. Things have not worsened for the Prime Minister nor have they improved. This, as most felt the issue was serious before and still do. Three-in-five say this is a serious scandal, while half that many disagree:

Based on what you've seen, read or heard, about this situation which view is closest to your own:



Asked specifically about the actions of Justin Trudeau in the decision to award WE a sole-source contract, half still believe it was either a simple mistake or an unethical but non-criminal act, while 37 per cent feel these actions warrant a criminal investigation:

And again, based on what you've seen, read or heard, how would you assess what has come to light so far?

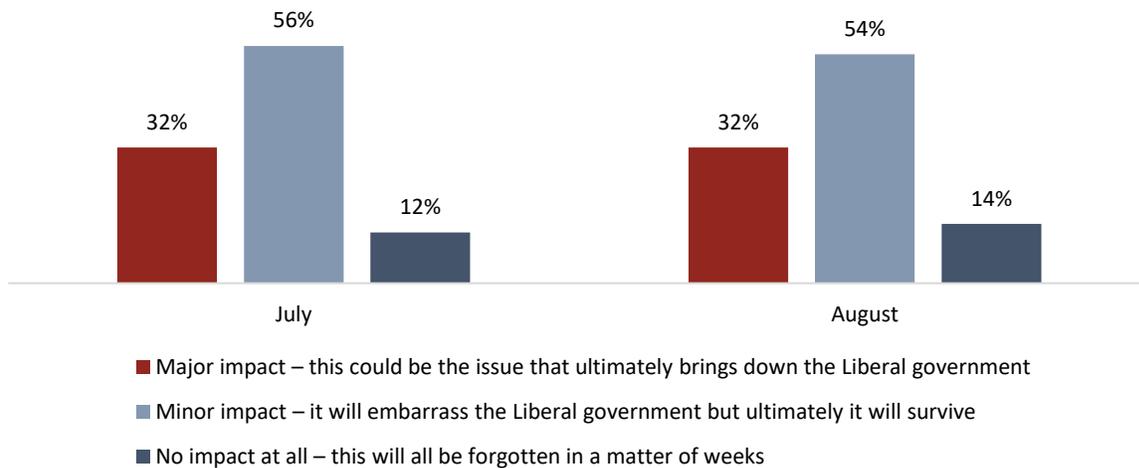


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Assessing the longer-term effects of this affair on the Liberal government, one-in-three Canadians (32%) continue to say that this is a major issue that could threaten the government's future, while most feel it will have little impact past some embarrassment for those involved:

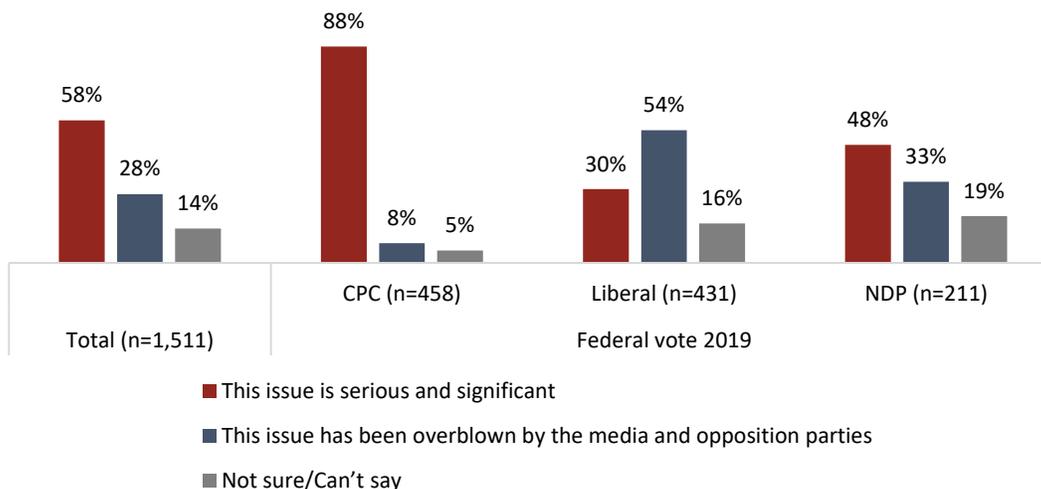
Ultimately, what sort of impact do you think this will have on the Liberal government?



Politics drives opinion but many Liberals still have concerns

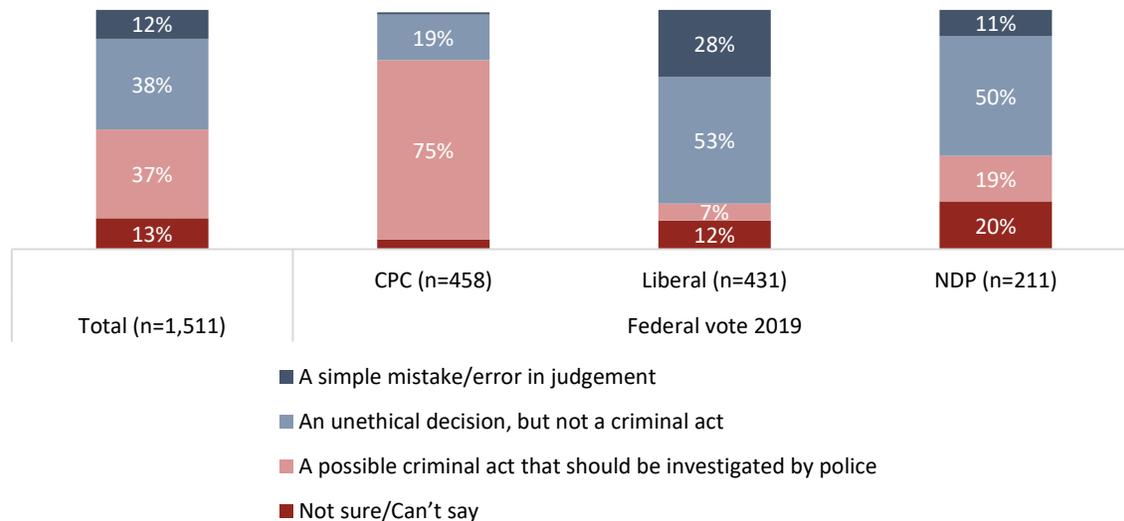
Perceptions of both the intent of the Prime Minister and the seriousness of this issue are driven to a great extent by partisanship. Those who supported the CPC in the last federal election are near-unanimous in their negative appraisal of the situation. Nine-in-ten say that this is a serious and significant issue. That said, they are not alone. Half of New Democrats (48%) and 30 per cent of Liberals agree. That said, half of past Liberals (54%) do feel that this issue has been overblown:

Based on what you've seen, read or heard, about this situation which view is closest to your own:



As was the case before the late July testimony of the Prime Minister, Conservatives feel that Trudeau potentially committed a criminal act while centre-left partisans are more apt to say that the decision was knowingly unethical, but nothing further:

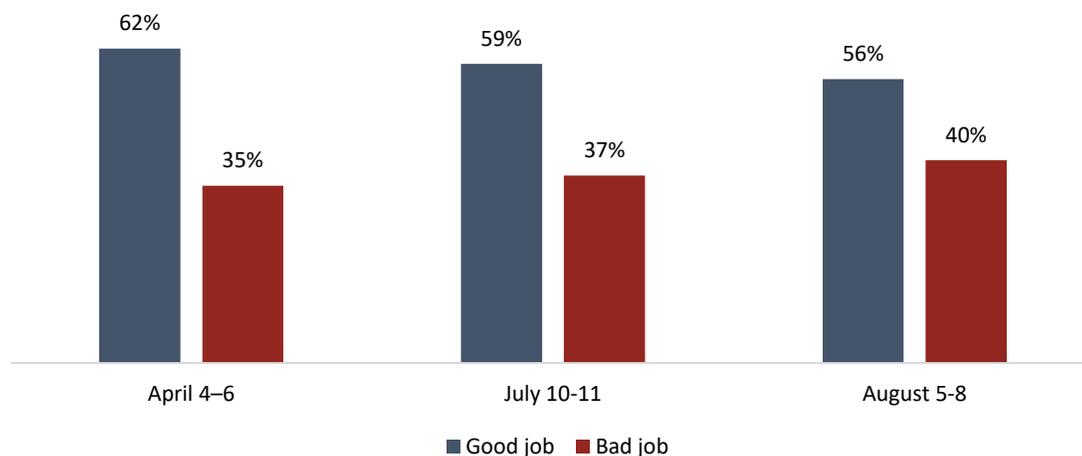
And again, based on what you've seen, read or heard, how would you assess what has come to light so far?



Trudeau still performs well on COVID-19 response

The Prime Minister's personal popularity has taken a hit in recent weeks but has not plummeted to where it was during the SNC-Lavalin scandal or during the days after revelations that he had previously worn blackface. Trudeau continues to perform to a level of majority approval on the issue Canadians care about most: COVID-19:

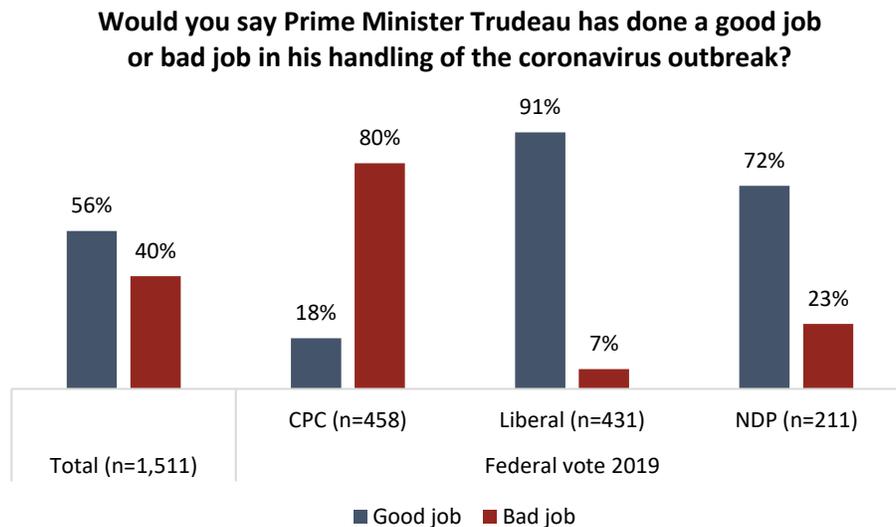
Would you say Prime Minister Trudeau has done a good job or bad job in his handling of the coronavirus outbreak?



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On this measure, Trudeau's past supporters are in lockstep. Nine-in-ten say he has done well in stewarding the nation, while a significant 72 per cent of New Democrats agree. Just one-in-five CPC voters offer praise for the Prime Minister on this file:



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