

Tight race throwback: In 2015's closest ridings CPC makes gains, Liberals decline, NDP deflates

Study looks at 67 ridings decided by five or fewer points across the country in last federal election

October 1, 2019 – With just three weeks until the 43rd Canadian federal election, all eyes are on the leaders as they ready for the official debates on October 7 and 10. The attention of the party campaigns, however, is likely zeroed in on competitive ridings across the country. Every vote is important in what appears to be a close contest.

The latest study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute examines the 67 closest ridings (20% of all ridings) from the 2015 election. Each was decided by five percentage points or fewer four years ago. By identifying these ridings and sampling exclusively within them, trends emerge that have positive and negative implications for each of the parties.

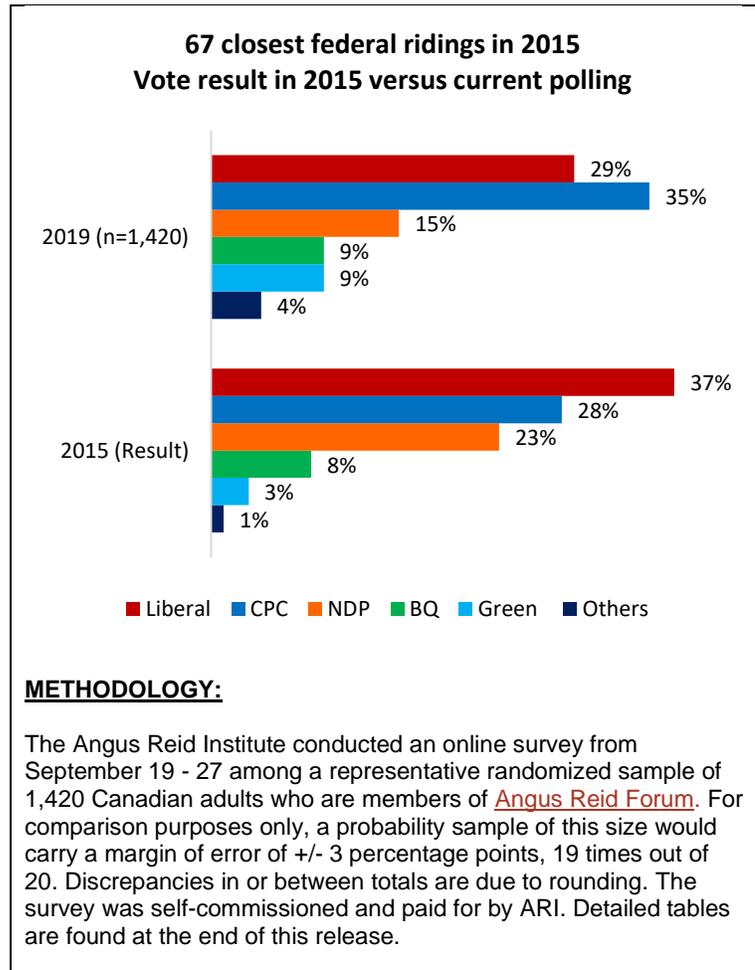
Overall, among these 67 ridings, the Liberal Party finished with an 9-point advantage in the 2015 election results. Currently, however, the Conservatives now lead vote intention in these ridings by six points.

For the Conservative Party, a marked shift overall, and significant gains in Western Canadian ridings, point to a closer national contest this time around.

That said, neither the CPC nor the Liberals can yet claim the upper hand in closely contested Ontario ridings.

For the Liberals, support levels in 20 Quebec swing ridings remain close to that of four years ago, dropping slightly from 29 to 24 per cent. Notably, however, the Bloc Quebecois hold a small lead within these districts, and the CPC are now more competitive, up seven points from 2015.

The trouble for the New Democratic Party is not concentrated in one region, as its support has dwindled most everywhere when it comes to tight 2015 ridings, but the negative trend is most prominent in Quebec. In 2015, the NDP garnered 29 per cent of the vote in the most competitive ridings within that province; the party's vote intention is now close to just one-third of that.



CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

More Key Findings:

- The Liberal Party won 33 ridings by five or fewer points in 2015, garnering 41 per cent of the aggregate vote in those districts. Current vote intention in these same ridings finds Liberal support down to 31 points, with the CPC garnering 35 per cent of the vote, up from the 30 per cent it received last election
- Importantly, the Liberals defeated the Conservatives by five or fewer points in 20 electoral districts in 2015, with an aggregate vote advantage of just three points overall. The Conservatives now lead vote intention in these 20 ridings by a massive 15 points
- In Western Canada, 17 ridings made for close races in 2015. Eight are currently held by the Liberals, five by the NDP and four by the CPC. The CPC advantage was one point in 2015 in these 17 ridings and now stands at 21 points

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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Methodological approach

The Angus Reid Institute identified ridings that were decided by five points or fewer in the 2015 federal election. 70 ridings total were found to fit this criterion, however three have since had byelections, and were thus, excluded.

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Using these 67 ridings and a location-based sampling technique, a survey ([view here](#)) was distributed to residents of each in order to ascertain how current vote intention compares to the 2015 result. For a full list of ridings, please [click here](#).

Current vote intention was gathered from these ridings and compared to the 2015 aggregate result. Note that the vote result numbers from 2015 were calculated by using the total vote of each individual riding as recorded by Elections Canada and aggregating for all of the ridings within each group examined. For example, the total vote in Western Canada is the percentage of votes that each party received when all 17 close Western Canadian ridings were combined.

What was measured and what was not

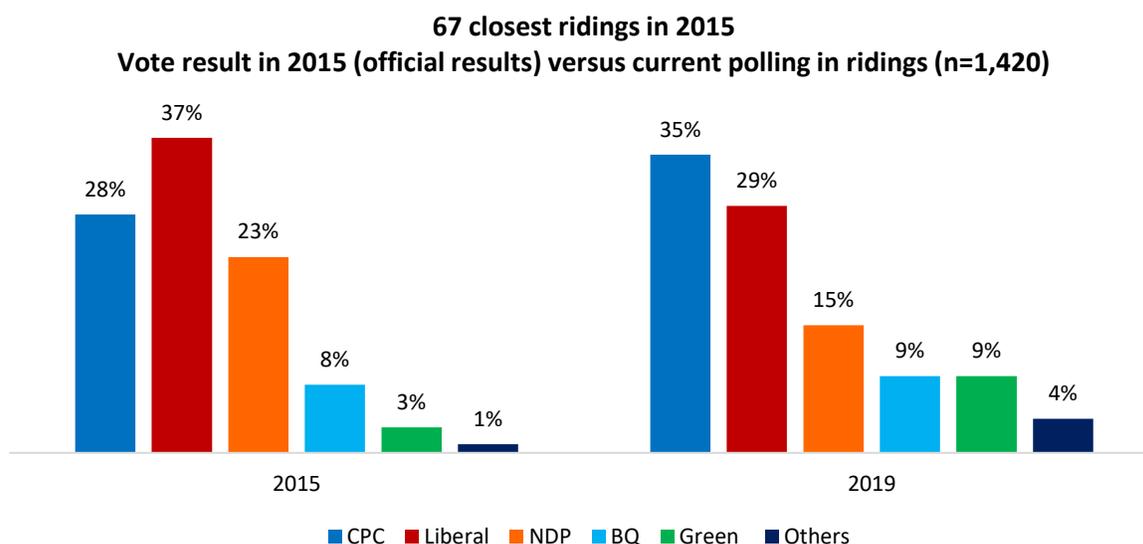
While each sample is too small to report on at the individual riding level, the aggregate data provide a window into the shifting voting winds. Close ridings in Ontario, for example, remain extremely close. The West, however, is another story, as the Liberal Party looks to have lost considerable group to the opposition Conservative Party.

Vote intention (and comparison with 2015 popular vote)

The 2015 election was a remarkably successful one for Justin Trudeau and his Liberal Party. On the strength of the highest voter turnout for a federal election since 1993, Trudeau's Liberals won nearly double the seats of Stephen Harper's Conservatives, 184 to 99, and 81 more seats than they had won in any of the three previous elections. There were, however, a large number of extremely competitive ridings which helped to shape the outcome of that campaign. Indeed, four years ago, 67 ridings were decided by five percentage points or fewer.

That was then, this is now, and the landscape has changed dramatically.

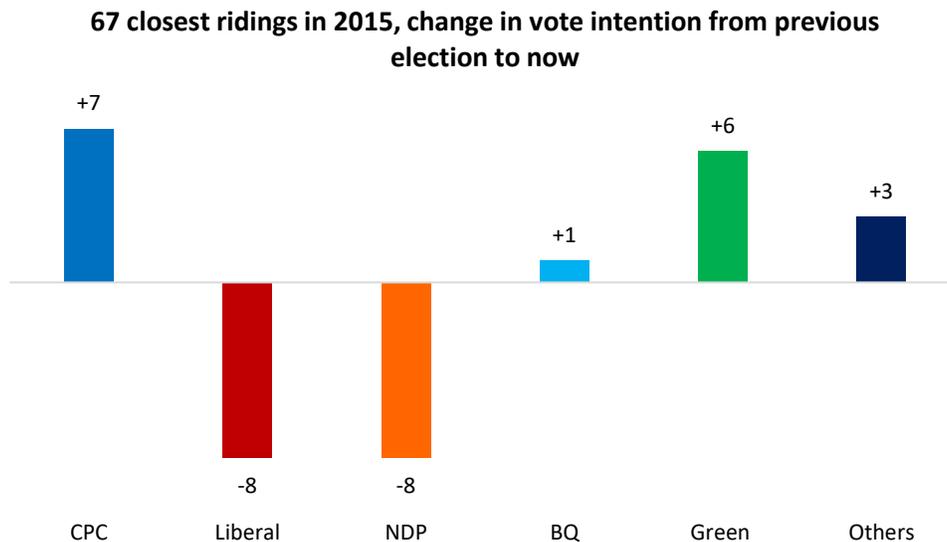
Consider first the vote intention among these 67 close ridings from across the country in 2015. That year, the aggregate voting result among these ridings resulted in a nine-point advantage for the Liberal Party over the Conservatives (37% to 28%). However, the polling within these ridings currently has swung to a six-point advantage for the Conservatives (35% to 29%).



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There are notable gains for the Green Party within these ridings, while the New Democratic Party has seen a considerable drop:



What this potentially means is that the Liberal Party faces a much tougher road to a majority government this time around. While vote intention can certainly shift over the last three weeks of the campaign, many of these close ridings that helped to push the party over the majority line in 2015 are less reliable now. The Conservative Party has been boosted in close ridings, while much of the centre-left vote previously held by the Liberals and New Democrats has transferred to the Green Party as well as Maxime Bernier's People's Party. In a first-past-the-post electoral system, Canadians will face considerable pressure to stand up for their preferred party, or potentially forego their favourite to support their preference between a CPC versus Liberal contest.

Liberal-held ridings

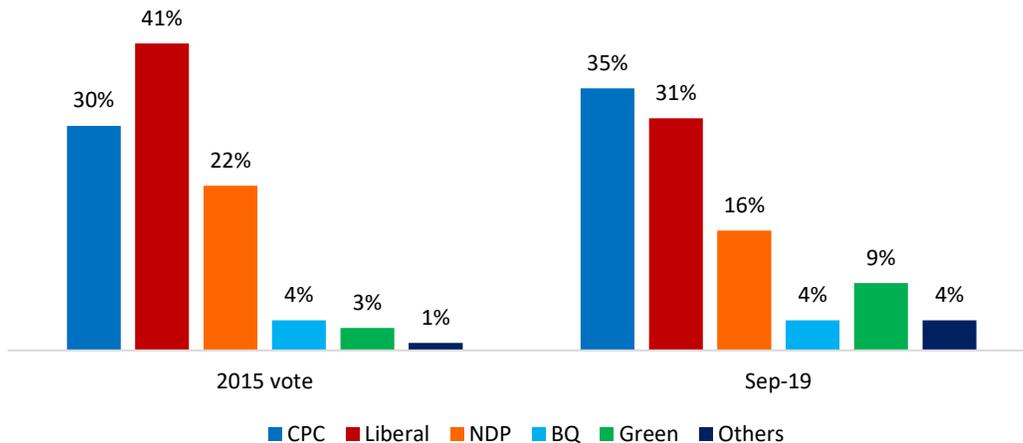
Among the 184 Liberal-held ridings, 33 were won by fewer than 5 percentage points in 2015. These ridings cover varying parts of the country, from Pitt Meadows-Maple Ridge in British Columbia, to key Ontario ridings such as Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill and Kenora and to St. Johns East in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Among these Liberal-held swing ridings, the incumbent party held a considerable 11-point advantage in the last election, allowing it to pull out these close races. Unfortunately for the party and its seat total projections, that advantage appears now to be a slight deficit, with the CPC leading by four points:

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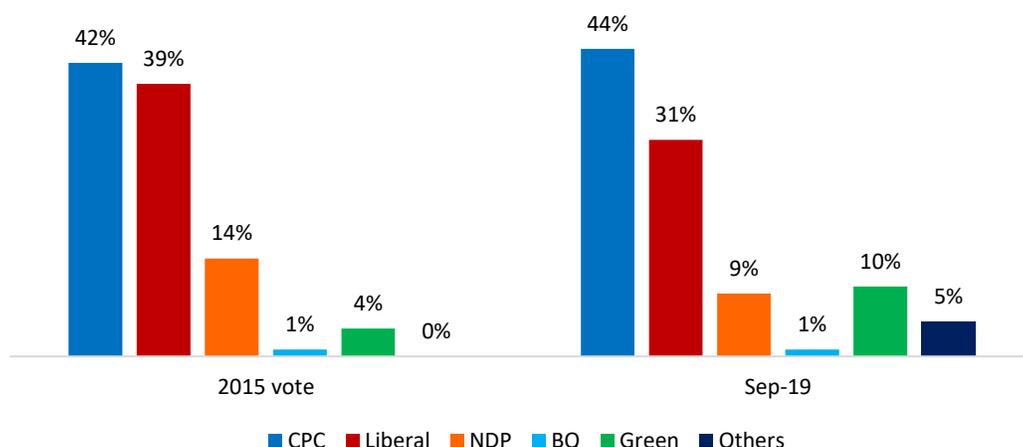
2015 vote result vs current vote intention
Canadians in 33 ridings won by LPC in 2015 by 5 points or fewer
(n=697 respondents)



Conservative-held ridings

The Conservative Party won fewer, but still a significant number of close ridings in 2015. Thirteen ridings were won by fewer than five percentage points of the popular vote, including eight in Ontario. Combining vote totals for those 13 ridings, the Conservatives-held just a three-point advantage in 2015. No doubt to the CPC's delight, that margin appears to have increased across these ridings to double digits (now 13 points). Notably, considerable support for the Liberals has declined, alongside support for the NDP, and evidently helped to boost the Green Party and the People's Party:

2015 vote result vs current vote intention
Canadians in 13 ridings won by CPC in 2015 by 5 points or fewer
(n=292 respondents)



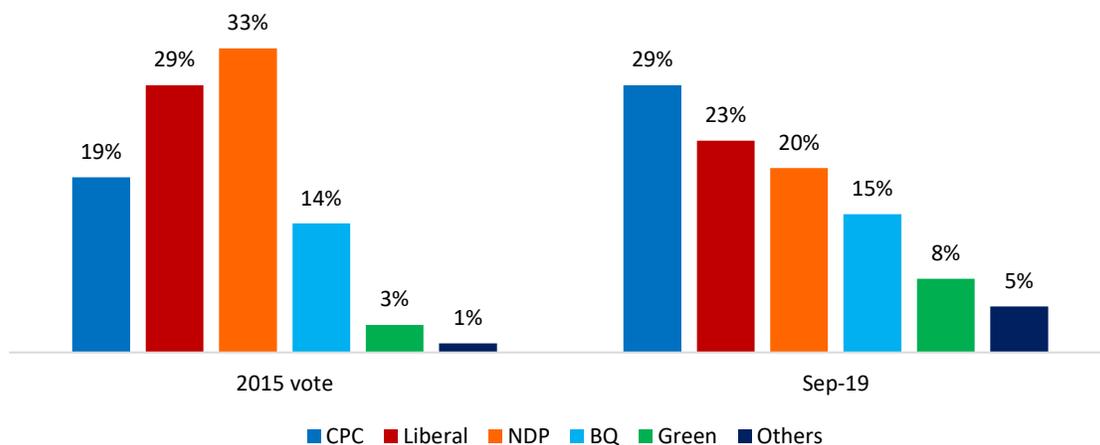
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NDP-held ridings

To say the 2015 election was disastrous for the NDP would be an understatement. After [polls suggested](#) Thomas Mulcair had been leading the party to its best result ever early in the campaign, the party collapsed, losing 51 seats to end up with a 44 member caucus. One-third (15) of those 44 seats were won by five points or less. Four years later, the picture looks even worse for the party led by Jagmeet Singh. Among these 15 ridings, the NDP won by a margin of four points over the Liberal Party. Now, it is the Conservatives who lead in these ridings, suggesting that voters who weren't warm to the Liberals four years ago would rather swing all the way across the political spectrum than choose the left-leaning incumbents:

2015 vote result vs current vote intention
Canadians in 15 ridings won by NDP decided by 5 points or fewer in 2015
(n=312 respondents)



How competitive CPC vs Liberal ridings have swung

Much of the Liberal's success in 2015 was predicated on flipping 87 Conservative ridings in their favour. This included 20 razor-thin races where the LPC edged out the Conservatives by five or fewer percentage points of the popular vote. Many of these close ridings will be imperative for the Liberals to hold or the CPC to flip back, in order to form government after October 21. To see which ridings these were, [click here](#).

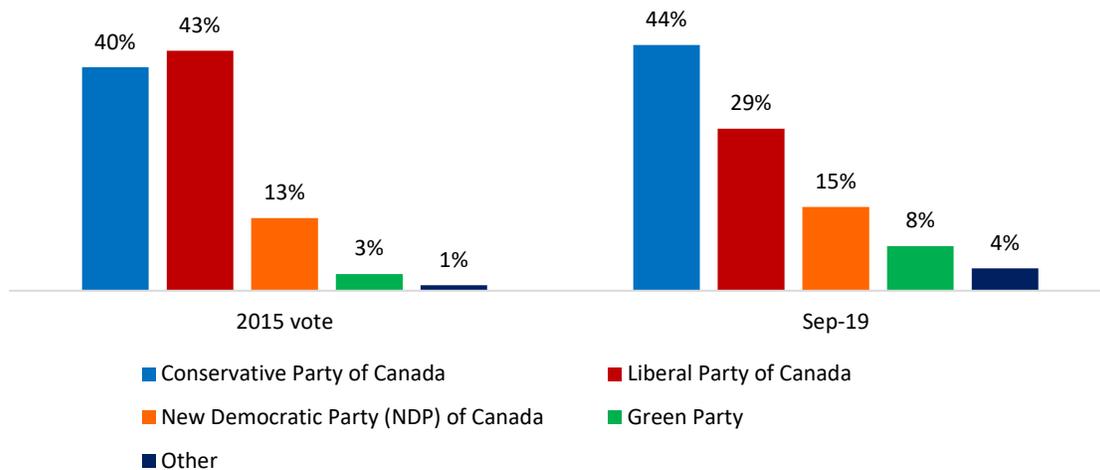
The total vote in these 20 ridings where the Liberals placed first and the CPC second favoured the Liberals by just three points.

In 2015, the Liberals won these close electoral districts with just a three-point advantage overall. Currently, among the 415 Canadians asked in these ridings, vote intention for the CPC has inched up to 44 per cent, while Liberal vote intent has dropped considerably, as residents have moved their support to other centre-left options:

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2015 vote result vs current vote intention - Canadians in 20 ridings won by LPC in 2015 over CPC decided by five points or fewer (n=415 respondents)



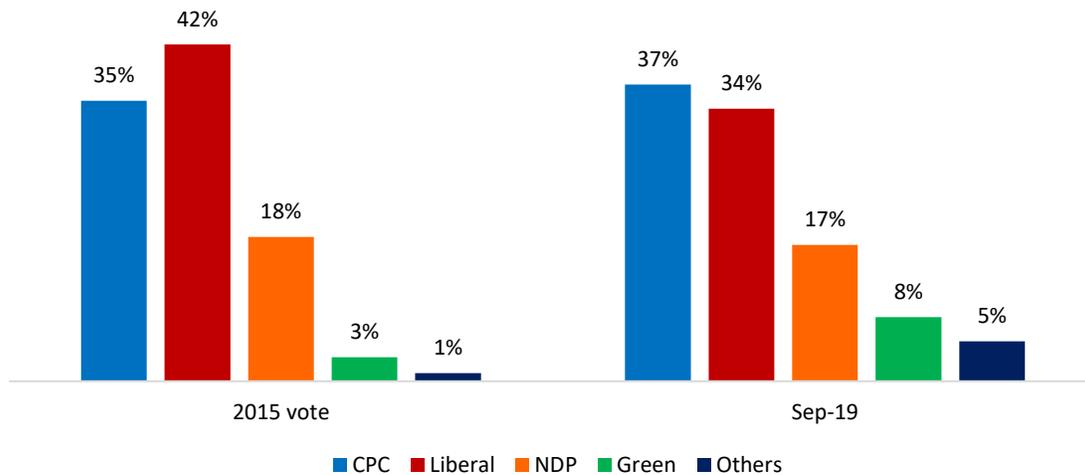
Battleground Ontario

As noted previously, these 67 close ridings from 2015 are distributed across the country. A significant number will be hotly contested in Ontario. Indeed, 28 of the closest ridings from 2015 were within Canada’s most populous province. Vote intention in the province is extremely close overall, with the Conservatives garnering a mere three-point advantage over the Liberals (37% to 34%). Thus, any movement in swing ridings is of the utmost import for the two parties vying for leadership.

Within those 28 close Ontario ridings from 2015, just eight were Conservative-held, while 18 were held by the Liberal Party, though Whitby MP Celina Caesar-Chavannes now sits as an Independent. The NDP held Hamilton Mountain.

Looking at the current data, support for the CPC remains relatively unchanged, while Liberal support has dropped. Notably, the Green Party has seen fortunes improve slightly. Overall, Battleground Ontario remains highly competitive, and is likely to hold the keys to success on October 21:

2015 vote result vs current vote intention
Canadians in 28 Ontario ridings decided by 5 points or fewer
(n=588 respondents)



How will the West be Won?

In Western Canada, that is, east of Ontario, 17 ridings made for close races in 2015. Eight are currently held by the Liberals, five by the NDP and four by the CPC.

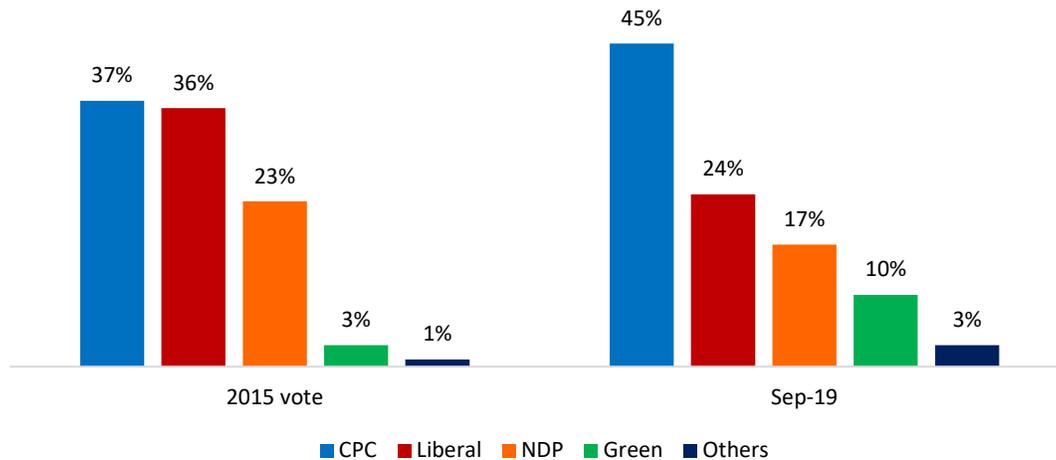
Some, such as Calgary-Centre, were won by Liberals in traditionally Conservative ridings and are expected to swing back, while others may once again lead to a preponderance of nail biting on election night. The overall trend appears to suggest the Liberal Party will see its seat count diminished considerably, while New Democrats risk being left on the outside looking in.

Vote results in 2015 were extremely close in these Western districts, with the Conservatives and Liberals separated by just one point. The CPC advantage has increased significantly to 21-points:

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2015 vote result vs current vote intention
Canadians in 17 Western ridings decided by five points or fewer
(n=392 respondents)

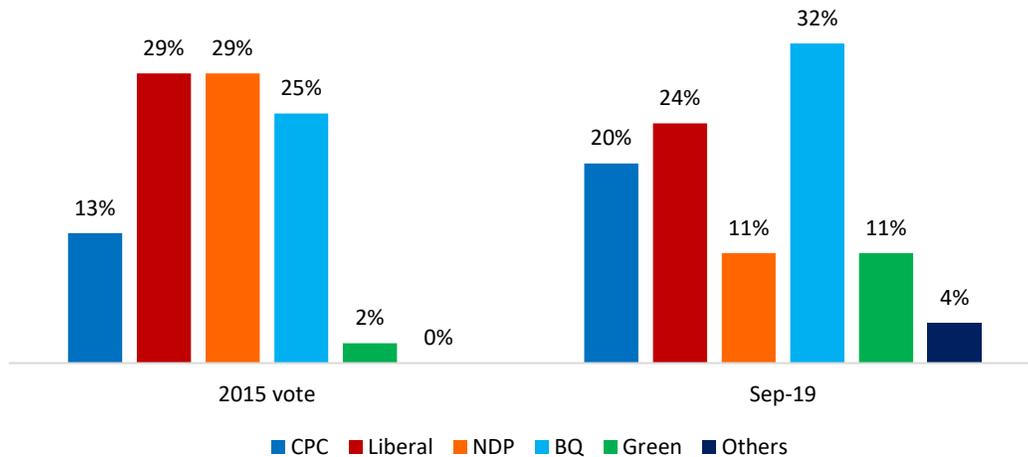


Bloc surge in Quebec, NDP in freefall

One of the biggest stories with respect to vote dynamics in this 2019 election is the NDP fortunes – or lack thereof - in Quebec. In 2015, the party won 16 seats in that province, its largest share in any region. Within the closest 20 Quebec ridings, all won by 5 percentage points or fewer, the NDP secured nine seats. The Liberals took five, the Bloc Quebecois five, and the CPC one.

In 2019, the news is not good for NDP supporters within Quebec. Current vote intention trends have both the CPC and the Bloc resurgent and competitive with the Liberal Party, while the NDP has receded, losing nearly two-thirds of its 2015 support, down to just 11 per cent:

**2015 vote result vs current vote intention
Canadians in Quebec ridings decided by five points or fewer
(n=393 respondents)**



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

For Liberal-held ridings, [click here](#).

For Conservative-held ridings, [click here](#).

For NDP-held ridings, [click here](#).

For Liberal-held ridings with CPC second, [click here](#).

For Ontario ridings, [click here](#).

For Quebec ridings, [click here](#).

For Western Canadian ridings, [click here](#).

For questionnaire, [click here](#).

For a list of the 67 ridings used, [click here](#).

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