

Canadian voters' sensitivity to party stances on social values shows CPC has room to move to the centre

Left-leaning Canadians more likely to say social values stances of a party leader would affect their vote

February 6, 2020 – The handful of moderate would-be Conservative leadership hopefuls who ended their putative campaigns before they began may find themselves persuaded to reconsider their decisions.

This, as the latest study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds Canadians who self-describe as 'left-leaning' significantly more likely to say it would be impossible for them to support a party whose leader's stance on a number of social issues was opposite to theirs, than those who self describe as right of centre.

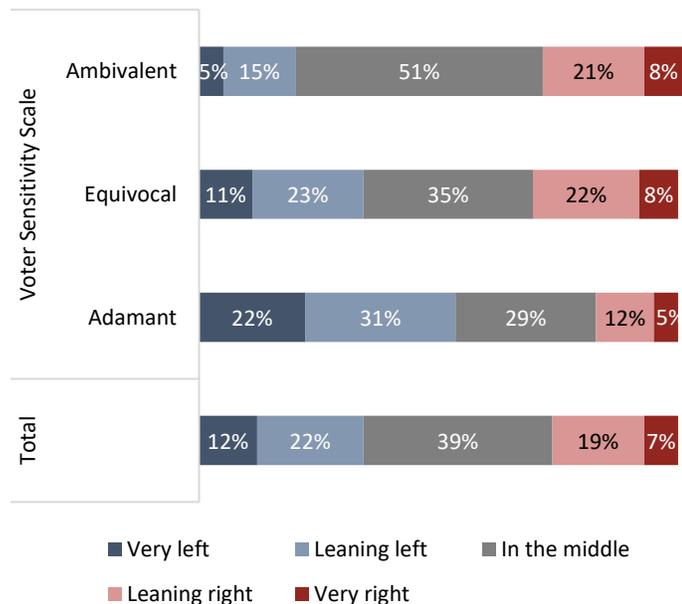
The study categorizes Canadians into one of three segments based on their social values convictions: The Adamant, the Equivocal and Ambivalent.

The Adamant take a hard line on whether they would vote for a party leader whose stances on social issues (such as abortion, LGBTQ acceptance, etc.) are in contrast to their own.

The Equivocal say a lack of alignment between their own and a party leader's stance on social values isn't necessarily a deal-breaker but would make it harder to vote for such a candidate. The Ambivalent are less concerned with a party leader's stance on social issues and place their voting priorities elsewhere.

Notably, those who identify on the left side of the political spectrum are more than twice as likely to be in the Adamant than the Ambivalent group (53% versus 20% respectively). By contrast, those who say they lean further right on the political spectrum are somewhat more likely to be in the Equivocal or Ambivalent segments.

Voter Sensitivity Scale - how likely you are to disqualify a party whose leader disagrees with your social views - by political spectrum



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from December 18 – 26, 2019 among a representative randomized sample of 2,308 Canadian adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.0 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:

- Within the Adamant group, 53 per cent of members identify as left leaning or very left. The Equivocal are divided evenly between left (34%), right (30%) and center (35%), while the Ambivalent are primarily Canadians who say they are “in the middle” politically (51%).
- Regionally, Quebec residents are most likely in the country to be Adamant (40%). Meanwhile, just 14 per cent of Albertans are categorized this way, suggesting their voting decisions are largely not made based on social issues.

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 One: Competing perspectives and willingness to support a party

Political partisanship has been well documented in recent years; the [Angus Reid Institute archive](#) is proof of that. A phenomenon less understood, however, is Canadians’ personal convictions relating to social issues, and the level of political attachment individuals have to these values.

In the first part of this series on social values in Canada [released January 24](#), ARI reported on areas of agreement and disagreement within the Canadian public on a variety of social issues. Canadians generally find consensus on assisted dying and on increasing acceptance of LGBTQ2 rights, for example, while disagreeing about the role of faith in public life, or whether the government should be more involved in regulating the economy. To read that study and explore the demographics governing that discussion, [please click here](#).

This analysis dives deeper to understand the extent to which personal conviction and political sensitivity on these issues drive voting behaviour.

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To briefly outline how this was done, consider as an example, a question about Pride parades.

Pride parades

Canadians were first asked to pick one side of a faceoff question that most closely resembles their view when it comes to this issue. Either:

- I believe in gay Pride parades – they help make society more accepting of LGBTQ2 people; or
- Gay Pride parades are not for me, they reflect values and attitudes I find offensive

Seven-in-ten Canadians (69%) say they accept Pride parades as positive, while 31 per cent say Pride is not for them, personally. Both of these groups were then asked how they would feel if a political leader believed in the opposite side of the debate. How would that affect their likelihood to vote for such a leader’s party?

For those who support Pride parades, one-in-three (35%) say it would be impossible for them to support a party whose leader makes a point of not attending them. Meanwhile, on the other side of the faceoff, those who oppose Pride, half as many (17%) say that they would not be able to support a leader who *did* make a point of attending Pride.

Many Canadians on both sides are of the opinion that competing views being held by political leaders about Pride would have a *smaller* affect on their vote likelihood, or no affect at all. These data are laid out in the table that follows:

On Pride events, would you say...					
I believe in gay Pride parades – they help make society more accepting of LGBTQ2 people			Gay Pride parades are not for me, they reflect values and attitudes I find offensive		
69% (n=1,597)			31% (n=711)		
↓			↓		
A party leader who makes a point of NOT attending gay Pride parades would make it...			A party leader who makes a point of attending gay Pride parades would make it...		
(n=1,597)			(n=711)		
Impossible for you to support that party	Less likely you would support that party	No difference/You wouldn't care	Impossible for you to support that party	Less likely you would support that party	No difference/You wouldn't care
35%	35%	30%	17%	40%	43%

Data on other social values issues canvassed in this research series are presented as follows:

LGBTQ2 acceptance

Canadians were asked if Canadian society should work towards:

- Greater acceptance of people who are LGBTQ2; or
- More recognition of the importance of traditional families where a man is married to a woman

Those who lean toward acceptance were asked about a hypothetical party leader who was against same sex marriage but willing to offer equal spousal benefits. One-in-three (33%) say this position would make it impossible to support that party, while one-quarter (23%) say it would not matter.

For the more traditional side of the faceoff, respondents were asked how they would react if a leader *did not* emphasize the traditional marriage values that they prefer. Only 16 per cent said this would eliminate that party from potentially receiving their vote, while two-in-five (38%) said it would not affect their vote.

On LGBTQ acceptance, Canadian society should work towards...					
Greater acceptance of people who are LGBTQ2			More recognition of the importance of traditional families where a man is married to a woman		
70% (n=1,613)			30% (n=695)		
↓			↓		
A party leader who is okay with spousal benefits for same-sex couples but opposes fully equal marriage rights would make it...			A party leader who does not emphasize the primacy of family-oriented values such as traditional marriage would make it...		
(n=1,613)			(n=695)		
Impossible for you to support that party	Less likely you would support that party	No difference/You wouldn't care	Impossible for you to support that party	Less likely you would support that party	No difference/You wouldn't care
33%	44%	23%	16%	47%	38%

Doctor-assisted dying

The social issue that generated the most consensus among Canadians of all of those discussed in the previous study was doctor-assisted dying. Four-in-five Canadians (80%) say they would prefer it be easier for individuals to make their own end-of-life decisions, as opposed to having more safeguards in place to restrict this procedure. One-in-five (20%) held this opposing view.

Canadians are again in some form of agreement on this issue when asked about a party leader whose views were the opposite of theirs. In each case, one-in-five say that this disagreement would make them unwilling to support that person's party, while close to half said it would worsen that party's chances, but not eliminate them from consideration completely. The following table portrays this data:

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When it comes to doctor assisted dying...					
It should be easier for individual Canadians to make their own end-of-life decisions			There should be lots of safeguards restricting access to doctor-assisted death		
80% (n=1,838)			20% (n=470)		
↓			↓		
A party leader who wants lots of safeguards kept in place to limit doctor-assisted death would make it... (n=1,838)			A party leader who wants to make doctor-assisted death much more readily available would make it... (n=470)		
Impossible for you to support that party	Less likely you would support that party	No difference/You wouldn't care	Impossible for you to support that party	Less likely you would support that party	No difference/You wouldn't care
22%	54%	24%	21%	46%	33%

Abortion access

Arguably the most divisive issue in the research series was the debate over legislation governing abortion (for greater detail in this discussion view the [first part](#) of the series). Consider that 51 per cent of Canadians said that women should have unrestricted access to legal abortion, while 49 per cent are of the opinion that Canada needs to codify regulations in the third trimester.

Data show the issue to be more of a dealbreaker for those on the progressive than traditional side of the debate. Among those who support access to legal abortion throughout pregnancy, 39 per cent say a party leader holding the opposing view would make their party impossible to support. Meanwhile, those in favour of a law are close to half as likely (22%) to say someone who opposes legislation would lose their support completely. They are nearly twice as likely to say this would have no affect on their vote, as seen in the table below:

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In Canada...					
Women should have access to legal abortion at any time during a pregnancy			There should be a law prohibiting abortion during the third trimester of a pregnancy unless the health of the mother is in danger		
51% (n=1,166)			49% (n=1,142)		
↓			↓		
A party leader who is in favour of prohibiting abortions in the third trimester of a pregnancy except when the mother's health is in danger would make it...			A party leader who is in favour of ensuring women are able to access an abortion whenever they want one would make it...		
(n=1,166)			(n=1,142)		
Impossible for you to support that party	Less likely you would support that party	No difference/You wouldn't care	Impossible for you to support that party	Less likely you would support that party	No difference/You wouldn't care
39%	40%	21%	22%	42%	37%

God in public life

For three-in-five Canadians (60%), Canada should remain completely secular, while two-in-five (40%) say the country should celebrate faith in public life. Among those who would keep God and faith out of public life, 21 per cent say that a leader holding the opposite view would make them completely unwilling to support that person's party, while half (49%) say they would be less willing.

Among those who prefer to publicly celebrate faith, just 12 per cent say that they would not support a party if their leader held the opposite view, though again, a large number (42%) say they would be less willing to consider that party:

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In Canada we should...					
Keep God and religion completely out of public life			Publicly celebrate the role of faith in our collective lives		
60% (n=1,373)			40% (n=934)		
↓			↓		
A party leader who believes in celebrating the role of faith in public life would make it... (n=1,373)			A party leader who believes God and religion should be kept completely out of public life would make it... (n=934)		
Impossible for you to support that party	Less likely you would support that party	No difference/You wouldn't care	Impossible for you to support that party	Less likely you would support that party	No difference/You wouldn't care
21%	49%	29%	12%	42%	46%

Public Prayer

One of the ways in which faith has permeated public life in recent years has been the practice of starting public meetings with prayer. Seven-in-ten Canadians say there is no place for any prayer at a public meeting. Three-in-ten (29%), however, say that a non-denominational prayer to God at the start of a meeting is fine.

For those who have no issue with prayer in public meetings, few (15%) say that they would not support a party whose leader held the opposite view, and felt the prayer was not appropriate. Those who oppose prayer in public meeting are twice as likely (32%) to say it would be impossible for them to support a party whose leader did not agree:

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In Canada...					
There is no place for any prayer at a public meeting			Public meetings (such as at a municipal council meeting) should open with a non-denominational prayer to God for good guidance		
71% (n=1,641)			29% (n=667)		
↓			↓		
A party leader who supports having public meetings begin with a prayer would make it... (n=1,641)			A party leader who objects to having public meetings begin with a prayer: would make it... (n=667)		
Impossible for you to support that party	Less likely you would support that party	No difference/You wouldn't care	Impossible for you to support that party	Less likely you would support that party	No difference/You wouldn't care
32%	43%	25%	15%	43%	41%

Religious symbols in public

While there is majority agreement on keeping religion out of public meetings, Canadians are less likely to say that religious symbols or clothing should be banned, as has been done in Quebec with the passage of Bill 21 [last year](#). Three-in-five (58%) say that public sector employees should be allowed to wear religious symbols or clothing while they are on the job, while 42 per cent disagree.

The number of Canadians saying that they would not support a party whose leader disagreed with them on this issue is close to even between the two groups, but it should be noted that most of those who say they would not support a party whose leader opposes restricting religious symbols in public come from Quebec, where views with respect to restricting religious symbols are [much stronger](#).

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In Canada...					
Public sector employees SHOULD be allowed to wear religious symbols or clothing while they are on the job			Public sector employees should NOT be allowed to wear religious symbols or clothing while they are on the job		
58% (n=1,333)			42% (n=974)		
↓			↓		
A party leader who supports new restrictions on public sector employees wearing religious symbols or clothing on the job would make it... (n=1,333)			A party leader who opposes restrictions on public sector employees wearing religious symbols or clothing on the job would make it... (n=974)		
Impossible for you to support that party	Less likely you would support that party	No difference/You wouldn't care	Impossible for you to support that party	Less likely you would support that party	No difference/You wouldn't care
34%	42%	24%	27%	34%	39%

Regulating women in senior management

Another near 50-50 split is evident when it comes to increasing requirements to ensure that more women are offered positions in senior management. Overall, about one-quarter of senior managers in the private sector in Canada were women as of July 2018. Asked if companies should be required to make efforts to change this, Canadians are divided, with 47 per cent wanting regulations to help increase the presence of women in leadership roles, and 53 per cent saying it should be up to public companies to make their own decision.

Those who would like public companies to be able to make their own hiring decisions are, however, far more likely to say that they would not respond negatively if a party leader held the opposite view, 47 per cent say this. Comparatively, those who support regulation are considerably more likely to say they would not support, or be less likely to support a party whose leader opposed these requirements:

In the Canadian workplace...					
Large public companies should be required to recruit and hire women, so they're equally represented in senior management			Leave it up to large public companies to make their own hiring decisions, even if it means fewer women in senior management		
47% (n=1,096)			53% (n=1,212)		
↓			↓		
A party leader who opposes placing requirements on large corporations to recruit more women into senior management roles would make it... (n=1,096)			A party leader who would support legislation requiring large companies to recruit and hire women to senior management would make it... (n=1,212)		
Impossible for you to support that party	Less likely you would support that party	No difference/You wouldn't care	Impossible for you to support that party	Less likely you would support that party	No difference/You wouldn't care
28%	51%	21%	12%	40%	47%

Part Two: Voter Sensitivity Scores: Who takes social issues most seriously when voting?

In order to further understand the ideological conviction of Canadians on each side of these issues, the Angus Reid Institute developed a Voter Sensitivity Score for each respondent. This score was composed in the following way:

- Each time a respondent said it would be “impossible” for them to support a party if their leader held a position opposed to their own on an issue, that person received **four** points. These points count toward their level of conviction, or the sensitivity of their vote. It would be fully affected by this competing position.
- Each time a respondent said it would make them “less likely” to support a party if their leader held a position opposed to their own on an issue, that person received **two** points. This means their vote could be affected by this competing position, but this is not guaranteed.
- Each time a respondent said it would make “no difference” to their potential support of a party if their leader held a position opposed to their own on an issue, that person received **zero** points. Though they disagree with the leader, this would not affect their vote.

The **maximum score** a person could receive for a Voter Sensitivity Score (VSS) is thus, **32 points**, if they said it would be impossible to support someone who disagreed with them on all of the **eight social issues** they were asked about. The lowest score a person could receive is zero points, if nothing affected their vote.

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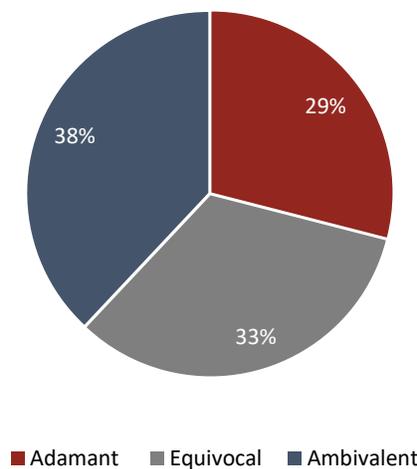
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Canadians fell into three groups based on their scores:

- The **Adamant** are those who score a 19 or higher. They have a number of issues that they consider to be non-starters when it comes to politics. This group is the most attached to their personal beliefs on social values when making voting decisions.
- The **Equivocal** are those who score from 13 to 18. This group has at least two social issues that they consider to be imperative in deciding whom to vote for but are more willing to consider opposing perspectives on most.
- The **Ambivalent** score a 12 or lower. They are the least likely to say that a party leader's position on social issues will have an impact on their vote, even if that person disagrees with their own perspective. It's not that they do not have their own personal views, they are just less likely to alter their vote based on opposition to them.

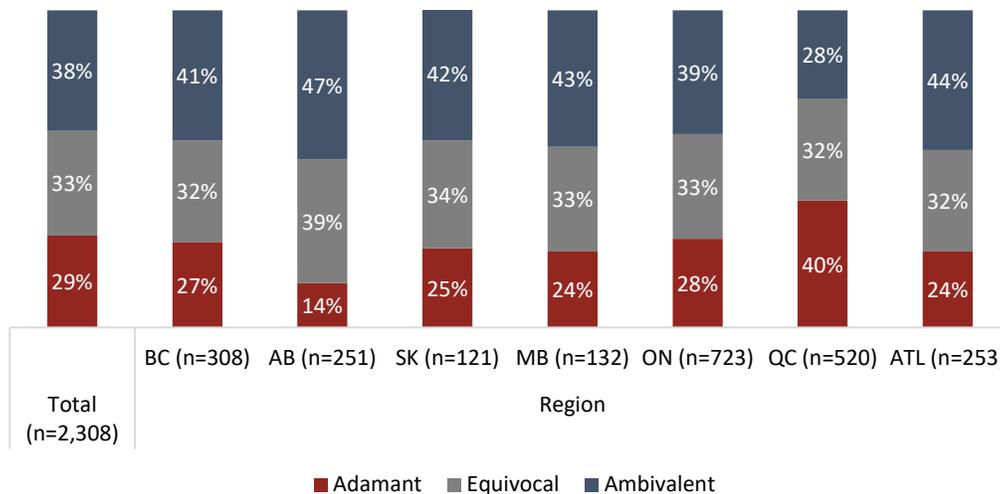
Thus, the Canadian population delineates as follows:

Voter Sensitivity Scale



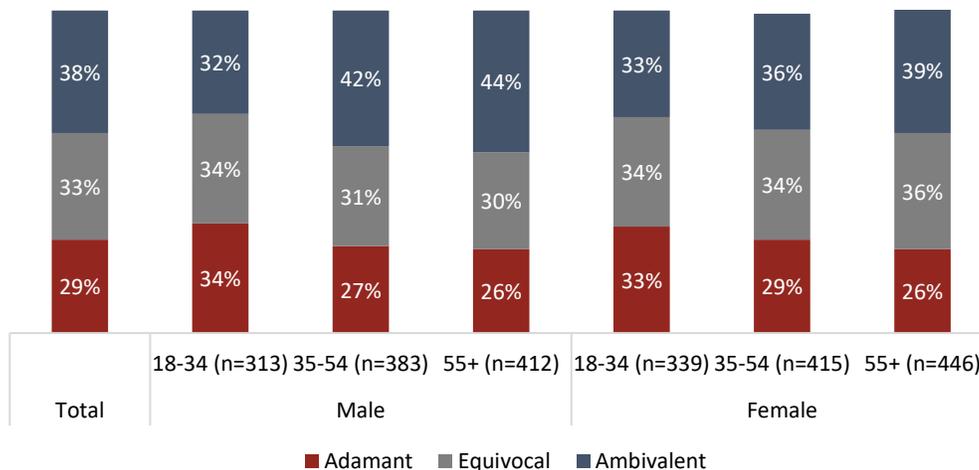
Each region is represented by members of each group, but social issues sway elections at much higher rates in some areas. For example, 40 per cent of Quebecers are Adamant, compared to just 14 per cent of Albertans. It is likely that Alberta residents are primarily concerned with economic issues when it comes to political choice, based on [recent available data](#). Most other regions show a composition close to the national average:

Voter Sensitivity Scale by Region



Each of the three groups is also represented across age and gender demographics, but it is worth noting that young men and women, those under the age of 35, are most likely to be in the Adamant category:

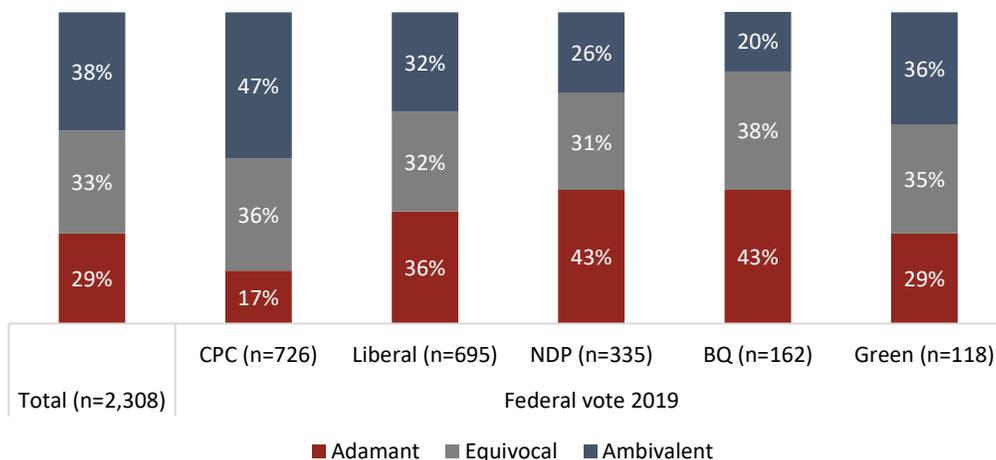
Voter Sensitivity Scale by Age



The most significant factor in where a person fits within these groups appears to be political affiliation. Conservatives, though they are often cast as most concerned about social issues like gay marriage and abortion rights, are least likely to say that opposing views affect their vote.

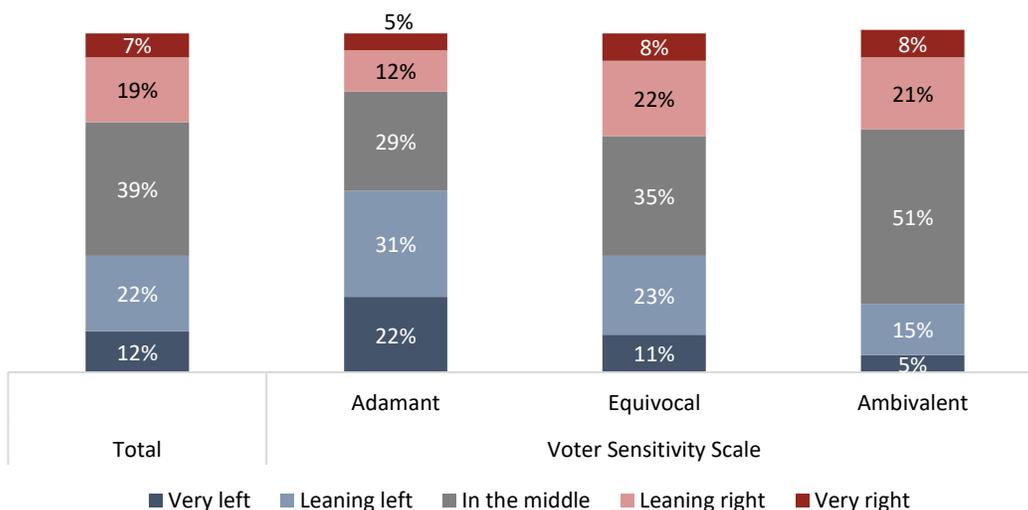
Only one-in-five past-CPC voters are among the Adamant. Meanwhile, 43 per cent of both past NDP and Bloc Quebecois voters are in that group. Past Liberal voters are divided close to evenly between the Adamant, Equivocal and Ambivalent:

Voter Sensitivity Scale by Federal Vote 2019



Another way of looking at this is to ask Canadians themselves where they align on the political spectrum. Among those who are Adamant on the Voter Sensitivity Score, just over half say they are either 'left leaning' or 'very left' on the political spectrum. The Equivocal are distributed evenly between left, centre and right, while the Ambivalent are far more likely to self-describe as being "in the middle" on the political spectrum:

Overall, where would you put yourself on that political spectrum? by Voter Sensitivity Scale



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

For detailed results by voter sensitivity, [click here](#).

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