

Premiers' Performance: The year of COVID-19 draws to a close with most, but not all holding majority approval

Amid worsening situations in their provinces, Jason Kenney, Brian Pallister receive worst approval ratings

December 1, 2020 – Canada's second wave of the coronavirus continues to challenge Canadians – and their premiers – from coast to coast. With infections on the rise, more deaths are recorded daily, restrictions continue to hamper the economy and families are making difficult choices over how they'll spend the holidays.

Against this backdrop, the latest data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds Canadians generally continue to hold positive views of their respective premiers' job performance. But the trend line also indicates the days of provincial leaders appearing incapable of doing wrong politically – as they did in the spring and summer – are long gone.

Horgan maintains

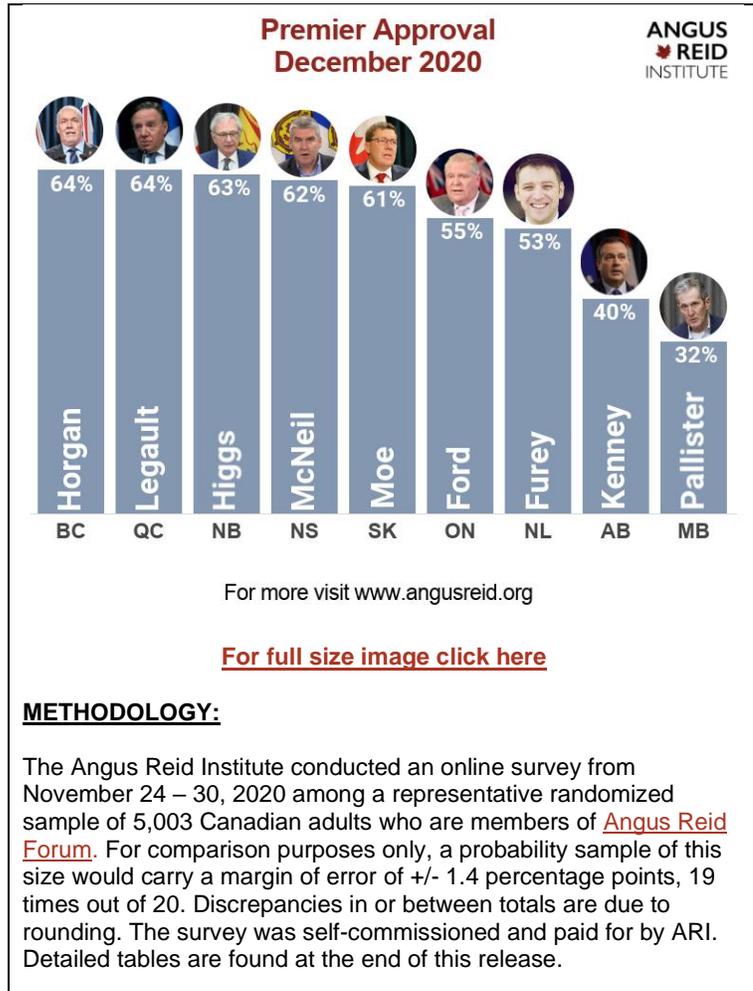
British Columbia Premier John Horgan and his New Democrats gambled with an early election call in October and – amid record low voter turnout – won a majority mandate.

For many, the move was a cynical attempt at concentrating power in a time of turmoil. For others, it made the case for the full decision-making authority that comes with a majority government, which eluded the party in 2017.

Now, despite skyrocketing cases of COVID-19 in and around Metro Vancouver, Horgan maintains a high level of approval. Nearly two-thirds (64%) say they approve of his performance, five points lower than last quarter. His approval is tied for highest in the country despite the new wave of physical-distancing and social restrictions in B.C., something residents have shown a willingness to absorb into their lives over the past nine months.

Despite travails, Legault approval sustains

In Quebec, the COVID-19 pandemic has taken more lives and infected more people per capita than anywhere in the country. Despite this, Premier Francois Legault continues to be perceived as a fixture of strength, his approval statistically unchanged at 64 per cent. Legault and his party implemented an indoor



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mask mandate over the summer and have recently elevated [alert levels](#) in much of the province, which come with closures of public spaces and restrictions on group sizes.

Ford falls

From a public opinion perspective, the early days of the pandemic were a strongpoint for Premier Doug Ford in Ontario. Ford's shift in persona enabled him to earn the approval of Ontarians previously entrenched along party lines. While Ford's approval remains at a majority level, it has fallen 11 points in the last three months, now sitting at 55 per cent. COVID-19 hospitalizations have climbed to [second wave highs](#) in the province, and the Peel region and City of Toronto have entered the lockdown level of the province's protocols. Ford recently lambasted those protesting restrictions, calling them "[buffoons](#)", and encouraged residents to do their part to turn the situation around.

Kenney criticized

Alberta is the only province in Canada without an indoor mask mandate and Premier Jason Kenney continues to resist such a policy, suggesting it would [create a backlash](#) from residents. Most of the province is under such a mandate due to municipal rules, but Kenney's actions appear to be generating criticism from some Albertans. Last week the Premier cast a light on the South Asians in the province, saying that new cases within that community were a "[wakeup call](#)" for the group to reduce social contacts. Opposition politicians condemned the premier for singling out that community in particular but evidently deciding not to mention others who have been defying group-size restrictions to [protest](#) in Edmonton, Calgary and Red Deer. Just 40 per cent of Albertans approve of Kenney's performance as Alberta currently faces the [worst outbreak](#) in the country.

Pallister panned

The only provincial leader generating an approval rating lower than Jason Kenney is Manitoba's Brian Pallister. Just 32 per cent of residents approve of the Progressive Conservative leader, representing a 12-point drop from last quarter. Manitoba is currently under some of the strictest lockdown measures in the country, with the province asking people to only leave their homes for essentials and restricting private and public gatherings. Manitoba health officials, alongside Alberta, are dealing with the fastest spread of the virus in the country over the past two weeks on a per capita basis.

Majority approval for Moe

Scott Moe and his Saskatchewan Party were elected to a new term on October 26, though mail-in ballots were counted in the days after. 61 per cent of residents approve of the job done by the premier. A Canadian Forces ranger patrol was recently deployed to a Northern First Nation in the province in order to prepare for and prevent the spread of COVID-19 to the community. This, after adjacent communities have begun to experience outbreaks. The rural nature of the province has posed challenges for remote communities but also helped the province avoid the large outbreaks seen in urban centres across the country.

Atlantic Canadians satisfied

In Atlantic Canada, buoyed by low population density and the early adoption of a "bubble" comprising only Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, residents have enjoyed the [lowest](#) COVID-19 case numbers in the country. Complications, however, continue to strain the region, as the Atlantic bubble has gone on a temporary hiatus in the face of an uptick in cases.

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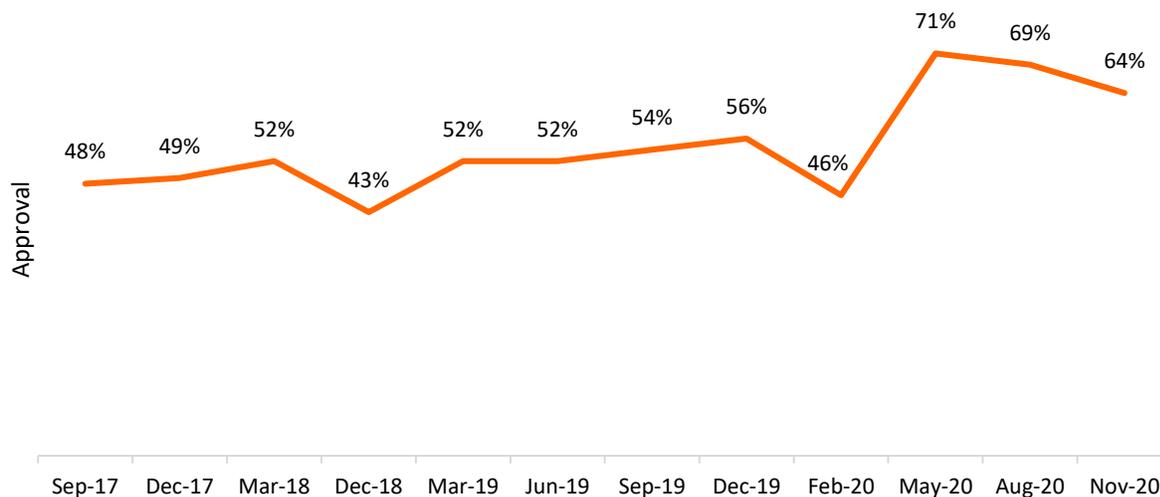
Despite this, a jump in cases in the Halifax area prompted Nova Scotia Premier Stephen McNeil to recently implement restrictions on group sizes, in-room dining and other social activities last week. McNeil, who resigned last August but has stayed on during the pandemic, is approved of by 62 per cent of Nova Scotians.

Newfoundland and Labrador Premier Andrew Furey reported last week that his province would be taking a [two-week break](#) from the Atlantic Bubble, not offering free passage to other regional travellers without a two-week isolation period. The province has had just over 300 total confirmed cases of the virus since the outbreak began. Furey is approved of by 53 per cent of his constituency. This is up 19 points from last quarter, as more people have become acquainted with the new premier.

New Brunswick, too, has dealt with fewer than 500 cases of coronavirus. Premier Blaine Higgs also announced that his province would be temporarily renouncing its participation in the Atlantic bubble. Fredericton moved into the “orange phase” in late November, which asks residents to limit their interactions to household members. 63 per cent of residents say they approve of Higgs’ performance this quarter.

Because its small population precludes drawing discrete samples over multiple waves, data on Prince Edward Island is not released.

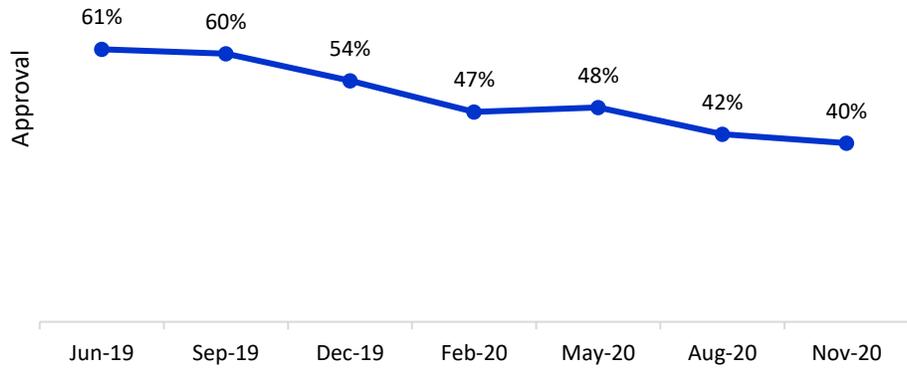
British Columbia Premier John Horgan (NDP)



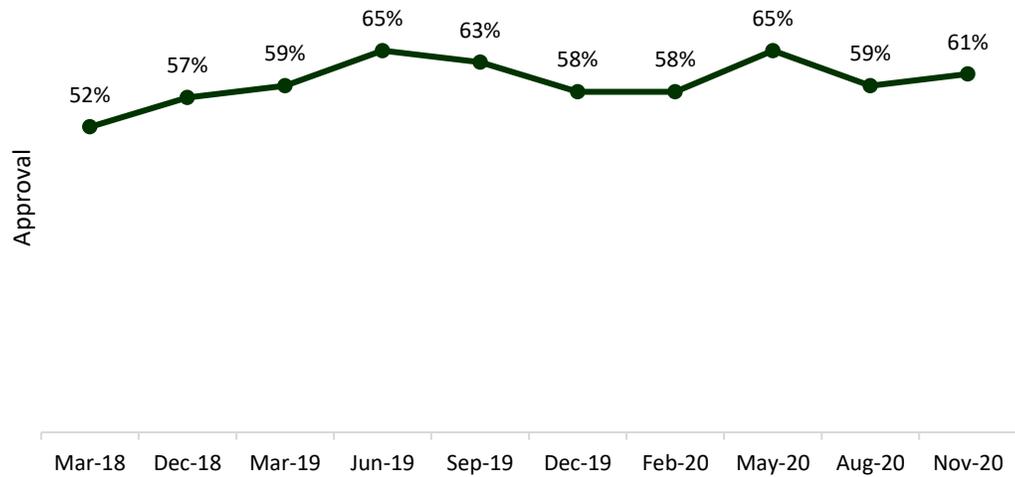
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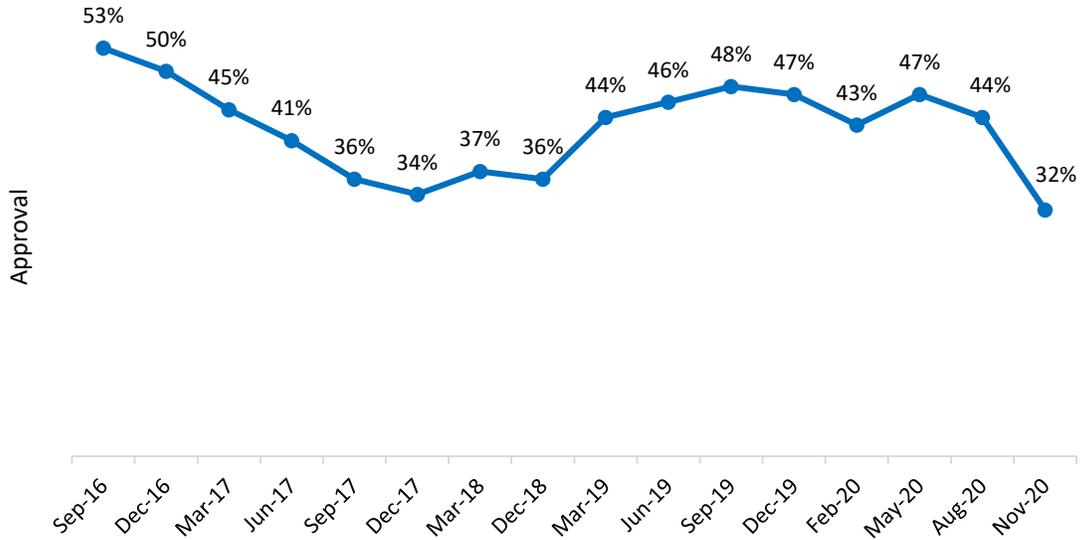
Alberta Premier Jason Kenney (UCP)



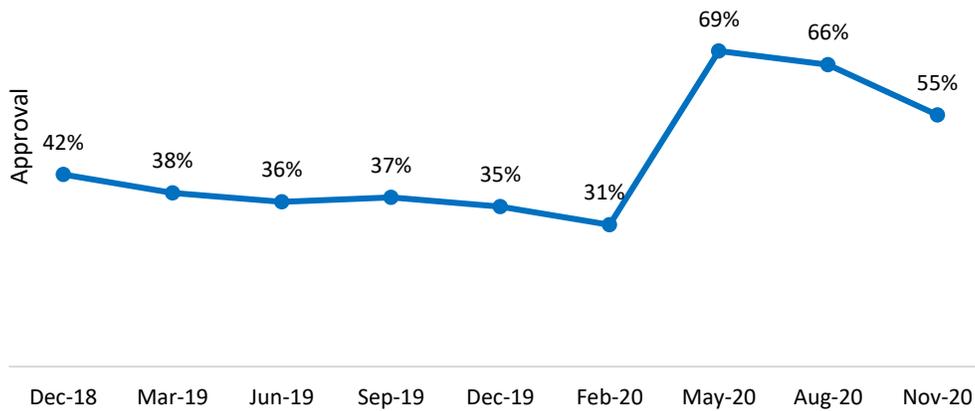
Saskatchewan Premier Scott Moe (Saskatchewan Party)



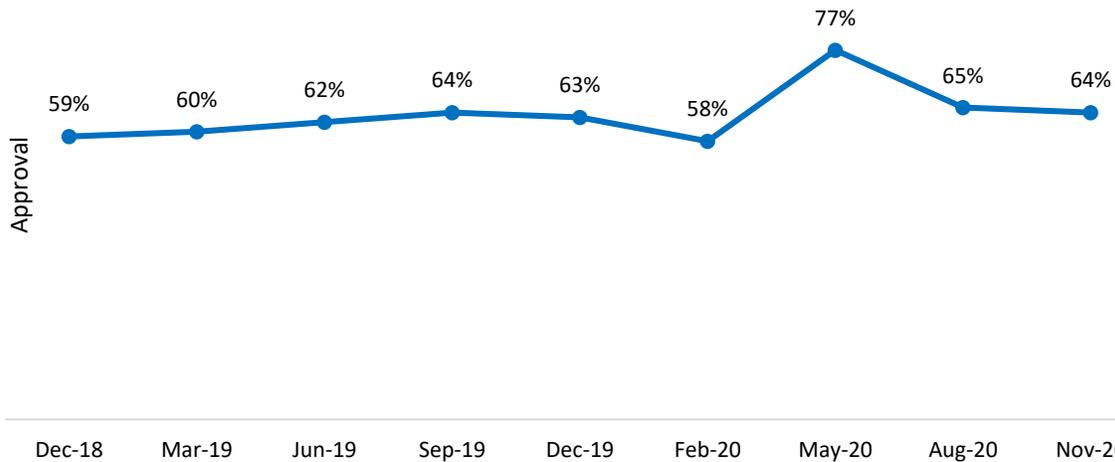
Manitoba Premier Brian Pallister (Progressive Conservative)



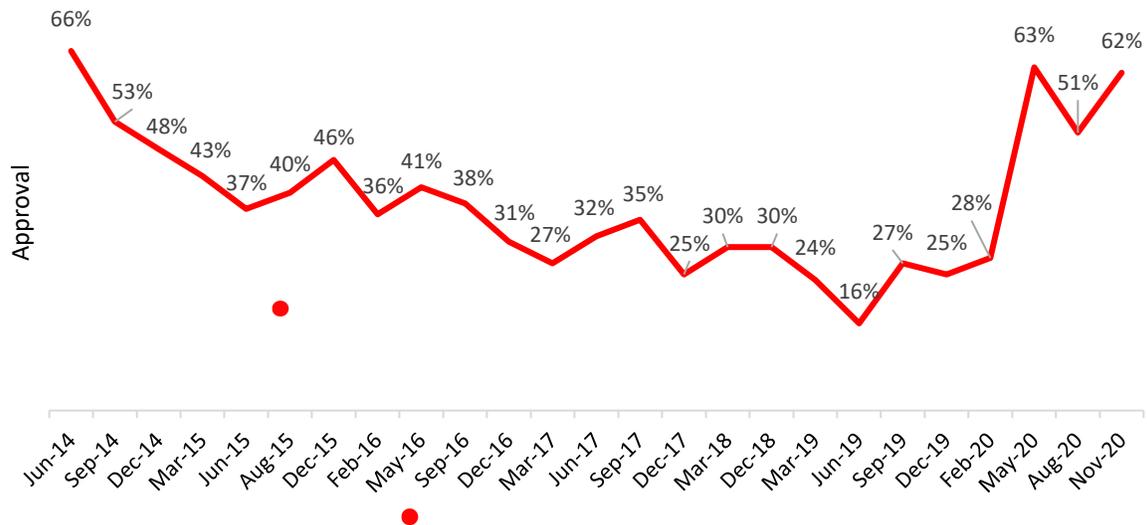
Ontario Premier Doug Ford (Progressive Conservative)



Quebec Premier François Legault (Coalition Avenir Quebec)



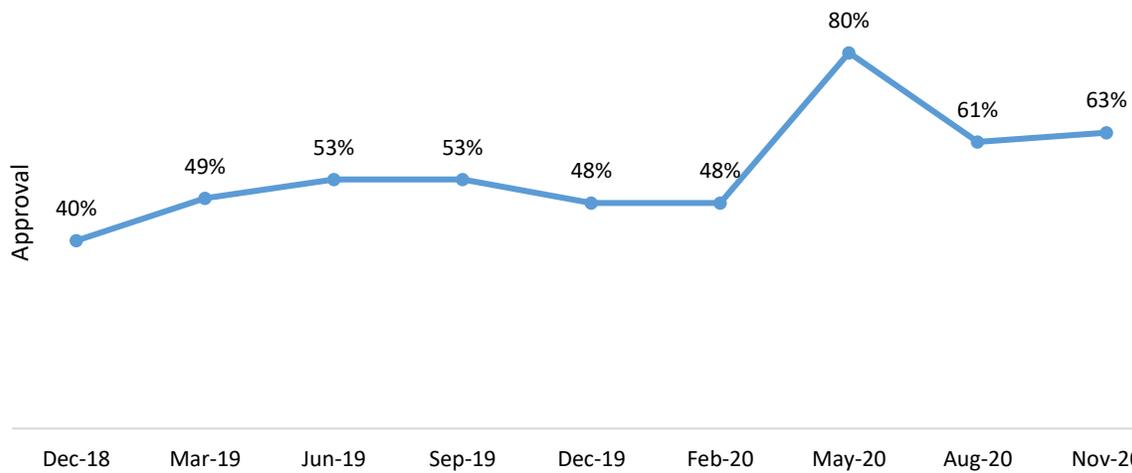
Nova Scotia Premier Stephen McNeil (Liberal)



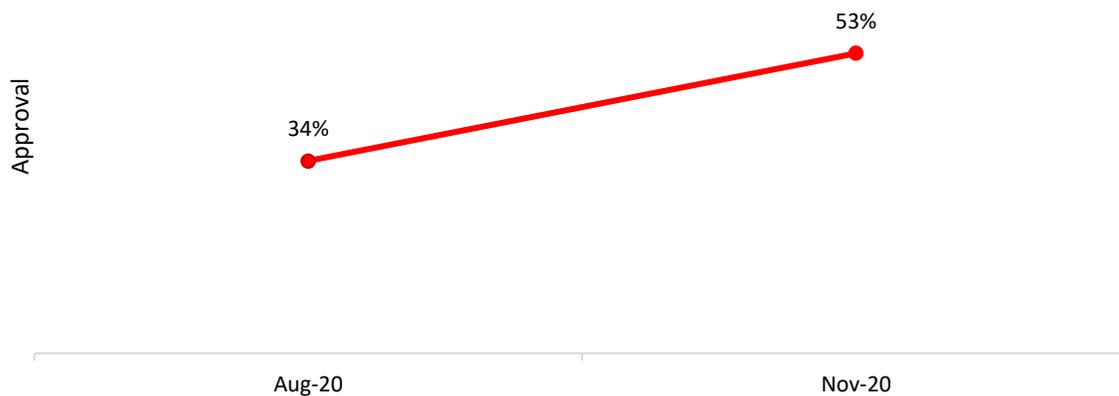
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New Brunswick Premier Blaine Higgs (Progressive Conservative)



Newfoundland and Labrador Premier Andrew Furey (Liberal)



Margins of error

BC (603)	AB (602)	SK (497)	MB (499)	ON (1049)	QC (855)	NB (260)	NS (336)	NL (242)
+/- 4%	+/- 4%	+/- 4%	+/- 4%	+/- 3%	+/- 3%	+/- 6%	+/- 5%	+/- 6%

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Do you approve or disapprove of each of the following people?			
(unweighted sample sizes)	Approve	Disapprove	Not sure
British Columbia (n=603): Premier and New Democratic Party leader John Horgan	64%	30%	6%
Alberta (n=602): Premier and United Conservative Party leader Jason Kenney	40%	58%	2%
Saskatchewan (n=497) Premier and Saskatchewan Party leader Scott Moe	61%	37%	2%
Manitoba (n=499) Premier and Progressive Conservative leader Brian Pallister	32%	64%	4%
Ontario (n=1049) Premier and Progressive Conservative leader Doug Ford	55%	43%	3%
Québec (n=855) Premier and Coalition Avenir Québec leader François Legault	64%	32%	4%
New Brunswick (n=260) Premier and Progressive Conservative leader Blaine Higgs	63%	30%	7%
Nova Scotia (n=336) Premier and Liberal Party leader Stephen McNeil	62%	35%	2%
Newfoundland and Labrador (n=242) Premier and Liberal Party leader Andrew Furey	53%	27%	19%

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