

Federal Politics: Liberals hold lead in vote intention as unfavourable views of CPC leader intensify

Half (51%) say top priority for federal government is getting COVID-19 under control

January 27, 2021 – As the prime minister hints at the probability of a 2021 election, the leaders of both front-running parties find themselves under ever-increasing scrutiny.

Justin Trudeau finds his conduct on COVID-19 management – especially vaccine rollout – under the microscope, but Canadians are also evaluating the performance of Conservative leader Erin O'Toole.

And while the Liberal leader sees neither significant improvement nor deterioration in the way Canadians perceive him, views of his main opponent are trending in a more negative direction.

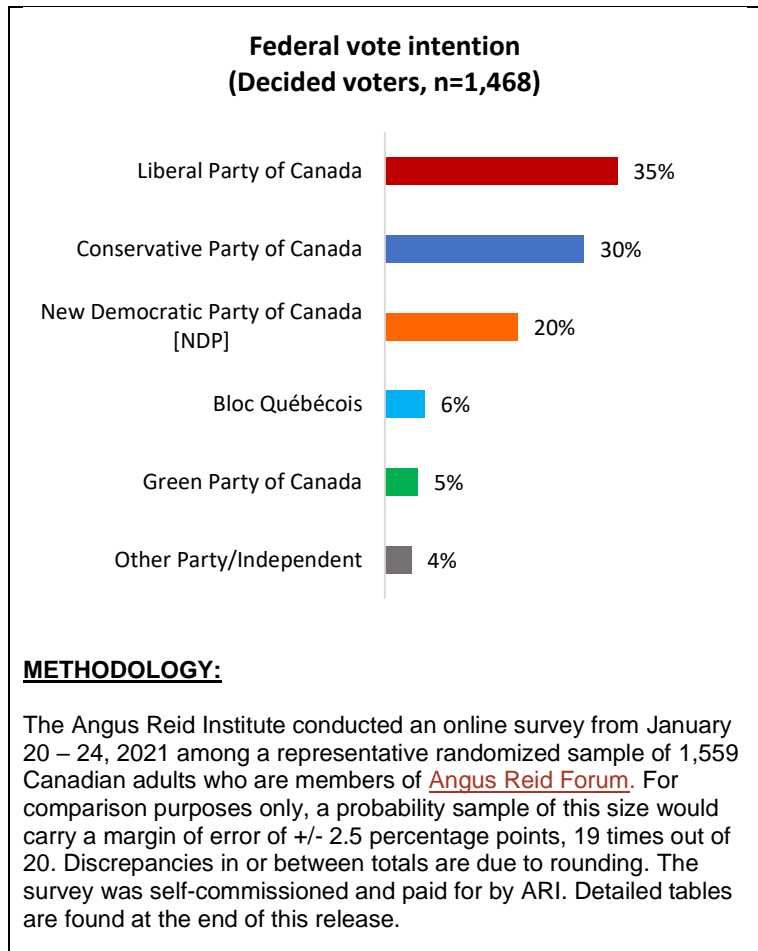
New public opinion polling data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds nearly half (47%) in this country have an unfavourable view of O'Toole – a 16-point increase since last September when fewer than one-third (31%) felt the same. One-in-five (22%) remain unsure about him.

These new data also find the incumbent Liberals holding a five-point advantage, 35 per cent to 30 per cent, over the Conservatives. The NDP receives support from one-in-five Canadians (20%).

The challenge for O'Toole and his Conservative Party is to reverse the current trend and attempt to pick up momentum in Canada's most populous provinces. While the CPC hold vote advantages in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, the party has fallen slightly behind in British Columbia, and now trails by a notable margin in Ontario and Quebec.

More Key Findings:

- Half of Canadians (51%) say that the COVID-19 response is the top issue for the federal government to address right now. This is the highest proportion holding this opinion since the pandemic began. Healthcare places second (38%), with economy third (29%) on the priority list.



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- If an election were called, Canadians are slightly more comfortable voting by mail (50% completely comfortable) than in person (44% completely comfortable). In each case, three-in-ten say they are not comfortable doing so.

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: Top Federal Priorities

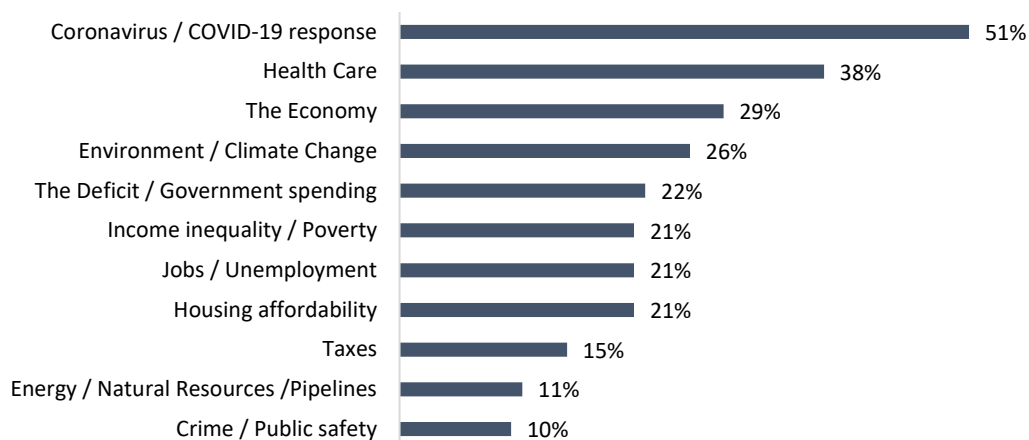
COVID-19 response and health care continue to dwarf economic concerns

Canadians continue to endure a near year-long pandemic, with lockdowns and pending travel restrictions weighing on the minds of many. Indeed, when asked what their top concerns are for the country, the COVID-19 response is the clear choice for top issue, with 51 per cent choosing it among their top three. Two other interrelated issues, health care (38%) and the economy (29%), follow in second and third spot:

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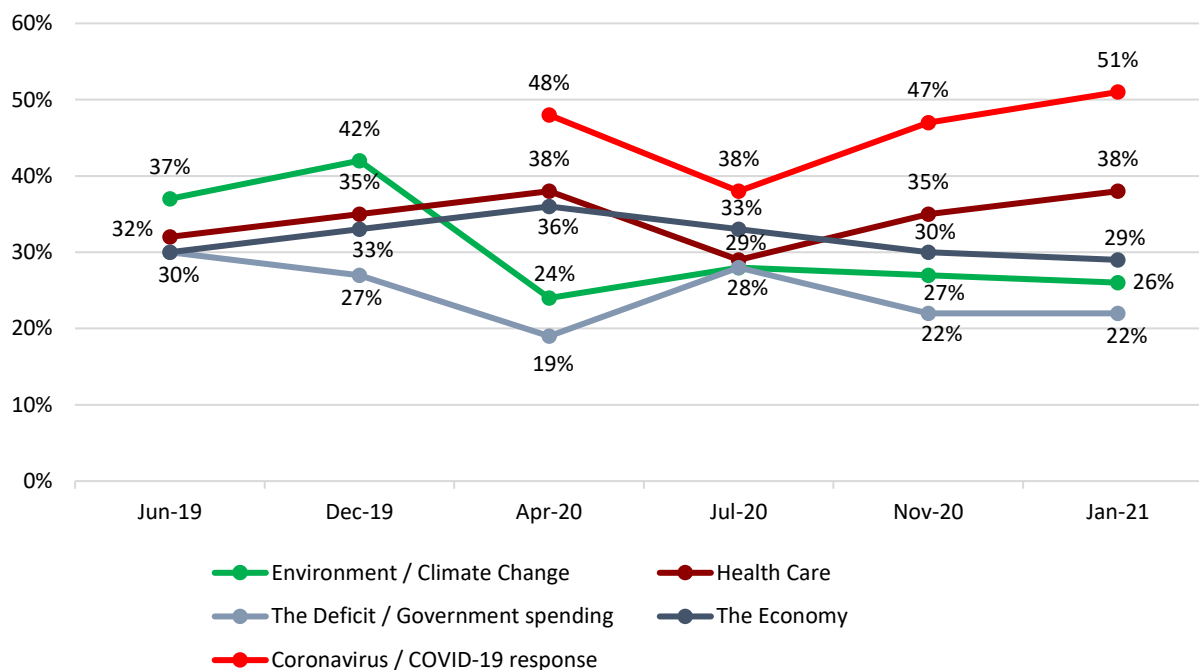
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**Please rank the issues facing Canada that you care about most:
(Up to three selected, items with 10% or greater shown)
(All respondents, n=1,559)**



COVID-19 has hit the country hardest this winter, with case and death counts rising to levels far surpassing the earlier wave of the virus. For that reason, the lower concern levels of the summer have been replaced with greater anxiety, as concern reaches the majority mark nationally for the first time ([see detailed tables](#)). Worry about the economy and the nation's budget deficit are both stable now, and will likely replace health concerns at the top of the list of priorities when the pandemic subsides:

Federal priorities over time



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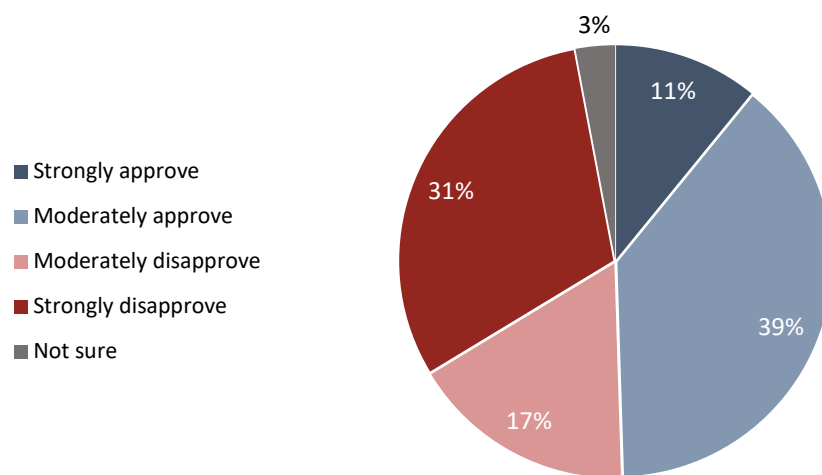
Part Two: Leadership

Half continue to approve of Trudeau

Canadians continue to look to the federal government for guidance on health measures and procurement of urgently needed vaccines. The supply of said vaccines has been disrupted temporarily with shipments delayed and potential restrictions on further supply from Europe causing more headaches for Ottawa.

Opinions of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau remain unchanged from their pre-holiday mark, with half approving of his performance (50%) and half feeling the opposite (48%):

**Do you approve or disapprove of the performance of Prime Minister and Liberal Party leader Justin Trudeau?
(All respondents, n=1,559)**

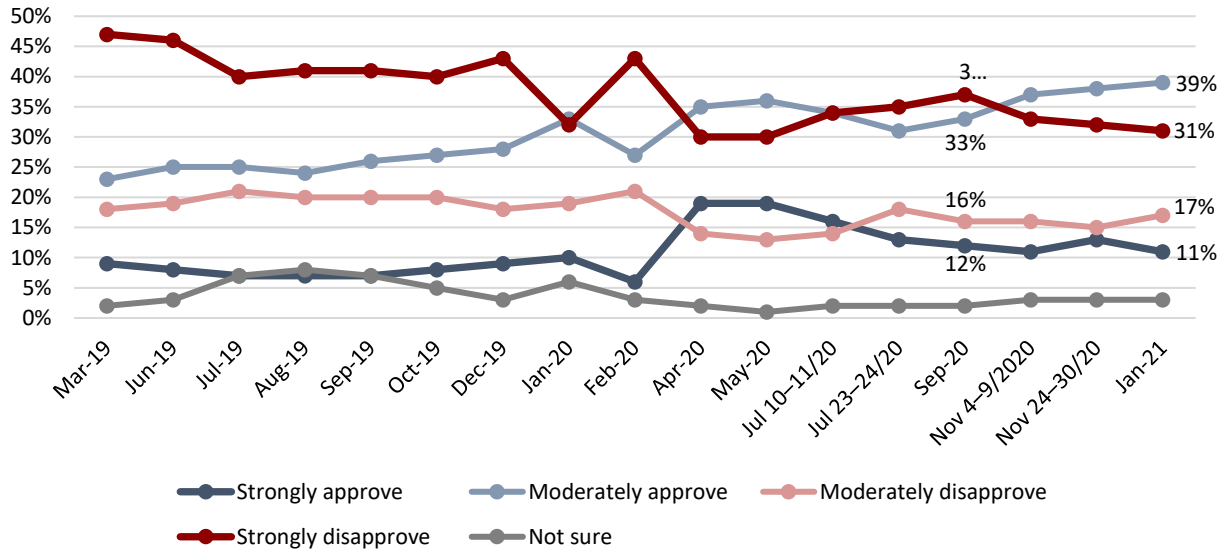


One-in-three Canadians view Trudeau with strong disapproval, while the largest group offer him moderate commendation. The latter has dropped six points since September while the former has risen by that much, as seen in the trendline graph below:

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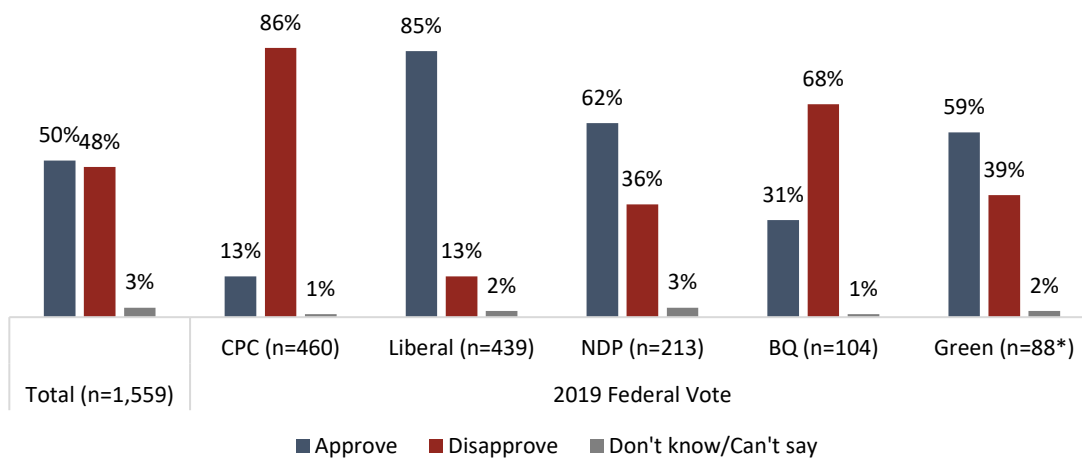
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Do you approve or disapprove of the performance of Prime Minister and Liberal Party leader Justin Trudeau?



Trudeau continues to garner strong approval from his party's 2019 voters and majority approval among past NDP and past Green voters.

Approval of Justin Trudeau by federal vote



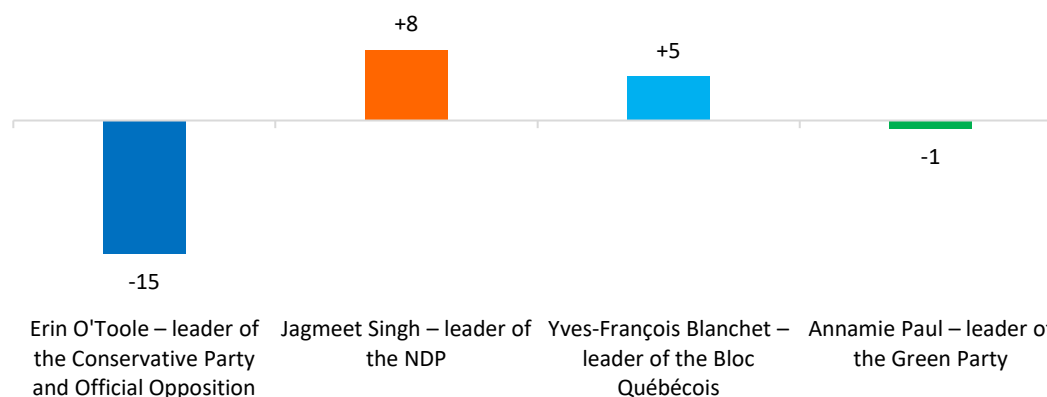
Unfavourable views of O'Toole rise

Trudeau's main opponent, Conservative Party leader Erin O'Toole, is in a less favourable place with Canadians. Asked for their views, favourable or unfavourable, of the other major federal party leaders, Jagmeet Singh leads at 48 per cent, while just 32 per cent view O'Toole positively. Worse for the CPC leader is that nearly half of Canadians view him unfavourably (47%):

Do you have an overall favourable or unfavourable view of the following people? Note, differences in total approval or disapproval in release is due to rounding. (All respondents, n=1,559)				
	Erin O'Toole – leader of the Conservative Party and Official Opposition	Jagmeet Singh – leader of the NDP	Yves-François Blanchet – leader of the Bloc Québécois (QC only, n=374)	Annamie Paul – leader of the Green Party
Very favourable	6%	11%	13%	4%
Favourable	26%	36%	31%	21%
Unfavourable	23%	22%	20%	13%
Very unfavourable	23%	18%	20%	14%
Don't know/Can't say	22%	13%	16%	49%

Looking at this with a net favourability rating, O'Toole scores a negative 15, while Singh boasts a plus eight. Green Party leader Annamie Paul continues to be an unknown to half of the country:

**Net favourability (Favourability minus unfavourability)
(All respondents, n=1,559)**



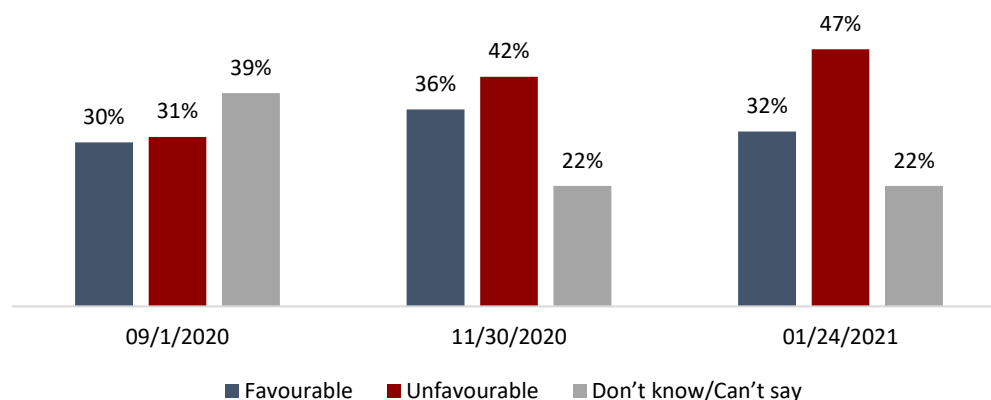
O'Toole has defended [against accusations](#) that he has modeled himself as Canada's version of Donald Trump, after his party utilized [Trump-style language](#) at various points in 2020. The CPC leader released a statement recently pushing back against this narrative, condemning white supremacy and outlining his views for a [“moderate, pragmatic, mainstream”](#) Conservative Party.

Unfortunately for O'Toole, Canadians this message has not yet begun to resonate or gain traction among Canadians. Nearly half (47%) now view him unfavourably, up from 31 per cent in September, shortly after the leadership race:

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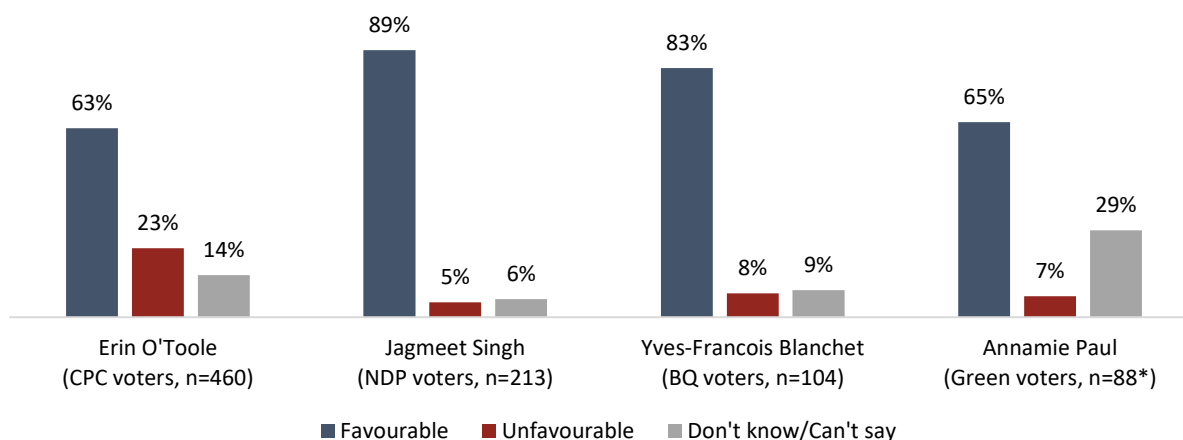
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Favourability of Erin Toole – leader of the Conservative Party and Official Opposition (September 1/20 to January 24/21)



Nearly two-thirds (63%) of 2019 Conservative Party voters view O’Toole favourably. For NDP leader Jagmeet Singh, favourability sits at 89 per cent among its 2019 base, while 83 per cent of past Bloc Quebecois voters view Yves-Francois Blanchet positively:

Do you have an overall favourable or unfavourable view of the following people? (Among those that voted for their party in 2019)



**Please note small sample size should be interpreted with caution*

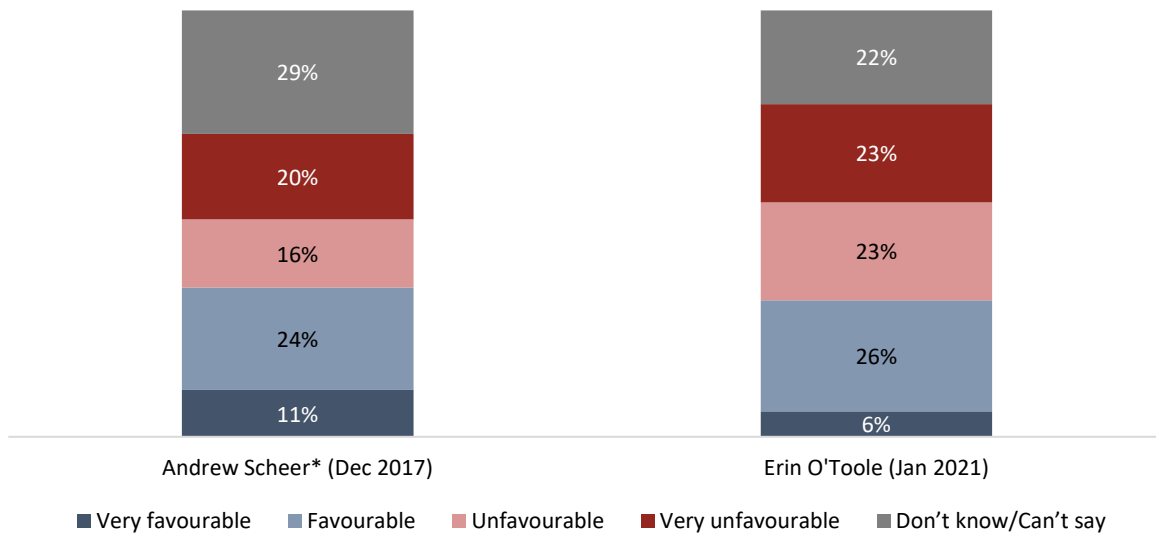
O’Toole versus Scheer at six-month mark

When Canadians were asked how they viewed then-leader Andrew Scheer just six months into his leadership run, they were evenly divided. Just over one-in-three approved (35%) of him and the same proportion disapproved (36%) at that point. Negative views of Erin O’Toole are 11 points higher at a similar mark in his term, at 47 per cent:

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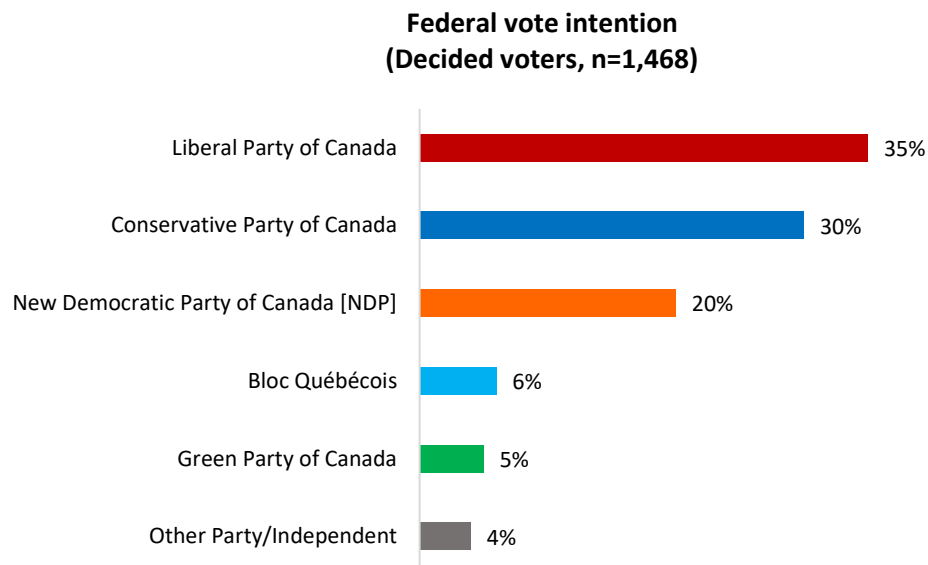
Favourability of Andrew Scheer & Erin O'Toole 5-6 months into CPC leadership



*Note respondents were asked to indicate their approval of Scheer, not favourability ([see full report here](#))

Part Three: Vote Intention

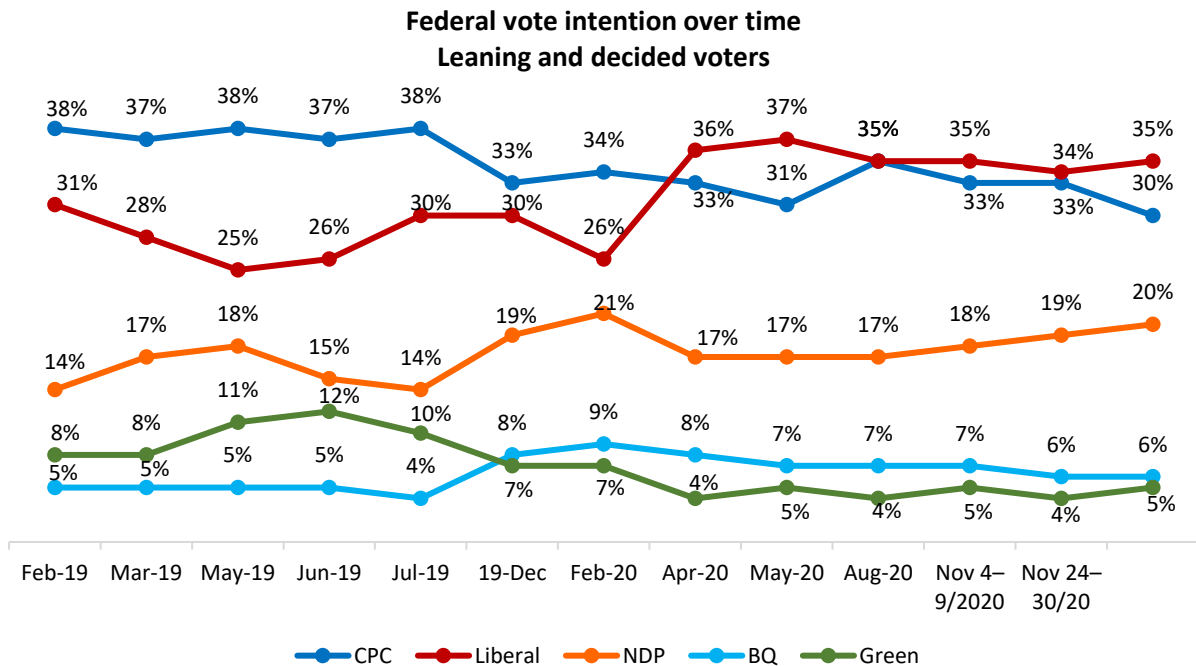
Asked at the time of fielding if an election were held now, 35 per cent of Canadians say they would support the Liberal Party, compared to 30 per cent for the CPC and 20 per cent for the NDP:



This five-point margin represents one of the Liberal's largest leads in data going back to the beginning of 2019. The SNC-Lavalin scandal and WE Charity affair both hindered the Liberals at various points, but the government's management of the pandemic has evidently led to an increase in support at this time:

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Regional picture

The key to the Liberal advantage currently lies in its strong performance in British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec, the nation’s most populous provinces, all of which show a strong preference for the incumbent party. The CPC is strong in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, whose smaller populations contribute to poor returns nationally. Notably, the NDP is now a preferred choice for at least one-in-five residents in every region other than Quebec:

Federal vote intention, including leaners, decided voters only:								
(unweighted sample sizes)	Total (1,468)	Region						
		BC (187)	AB (138)	SK (113)	MB (114)	ON (423)	QC (355)	ATL (130)
Liberal Party	35%	32%	16%	14%	22%	43%	36%	43%
Conservative Party	30%	27%	47%	56%	45%	30%	18%	26%
NDP	20%	27%	21%	20%	23%	21%	14%	21%
Bloc Québécois	6%	-	-	-	-	-	26%	-
Green Party	5%	7%	2%	2%	4%	4%	4%	9%

Other Party	4%	7%	13%	10%	6%	3%	1%	2%
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Age and gender dynamics

The Liberal Party is bolstered by strong support from women. Trudeau's party holds a 20-point advantage over the CPC among women ages 18 to 34, a 28-point advantage among women 35 to 54 and a 15-point lead among women 55 and older. The Conservative Party holds a corresponding advantage among men of all ages, but it is far smaller in each case. Notably, the NDP is in second place among both young men and young women:

Federal vote intention, including leaners, decided voters only:							
(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1,468)	Age and Gender					
		Male			Female		
		18-34 (205)	35-54 (247)	55+ (262)	18-34 (217)	35-54 (255)	55+ (282)
Liberal Party	35%	23%	27%	30%	37%	46%	44%
Conservative Party	30%	32%	37%	44%	17%	18%	29%
NDP	20%	28%	17%	8%	34%	24%	15%
Bloc Québécois	6%	5%	6%	9%	3%	5%	8%
Green Party	5%	6%	5%	3%	7%	5%	3%
Other Party	4%	6%	8%	6%	2%	1%	2%

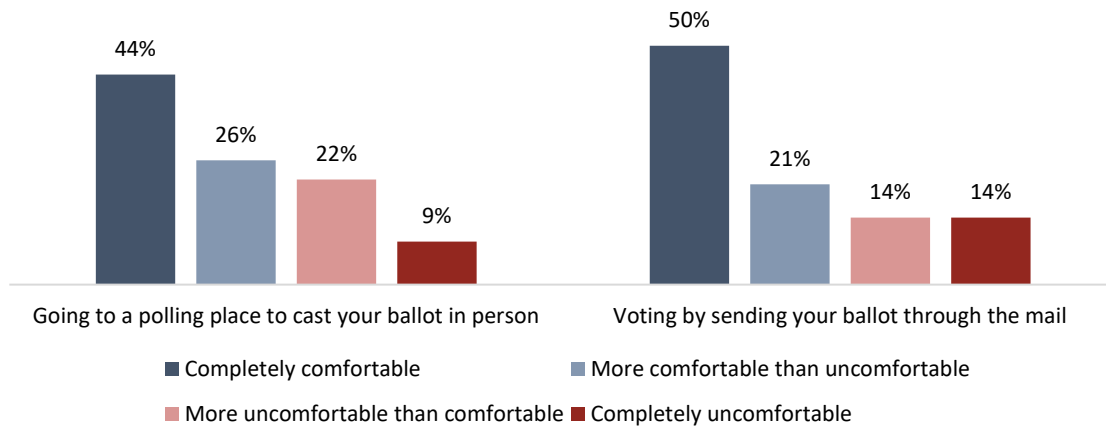
Comfortable voting during a pandemic?

With election speculation never quite disappearing completely from political discussions during a minority government, it is worth considering how comfortable Canadians would be voting in a pandemic. If an election were held soon, 70 per cent of Canadians say they would be comfortable voting in person, while the same number would be comfortable voting by mail. In each case, approximately three-in-ten say they would not be comfortable doing so. Thus far, Prime Minister Trudeau has not committed publicly to holding an election this year, but sources have indicated that the topic has been discussed internally among the party:

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Given the COVID-19 pandemic, how comfortable would you be doing each of the following:
(All respondents, n=1,559)



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