

COVID-19: Third wave drives surge of criticism for Kenney, Ford, and other premiers

One-in-five 18-to-34-year old's 'very concerned' about illness, highest level since pandemic began

April 9, 2021 – Early hope for a spring season that would have marked the beginning of the end of the COVID-19 pandemic has in many parts of the country given way to an all-out fight against rapidly spreading variants of the virus. So far, the variants appear to be winning as their virulence outpaces any reduction in spread from Canada's vaccination program.

This third wave of the pandemic has brought new rounds of restrictions on travel and businesses in some of Canada's most populous provinces and has spurred near equal intensity between those who want to see their communities lock down even harder, and those fatigued by an inability to resume their pre-pandemic lives.

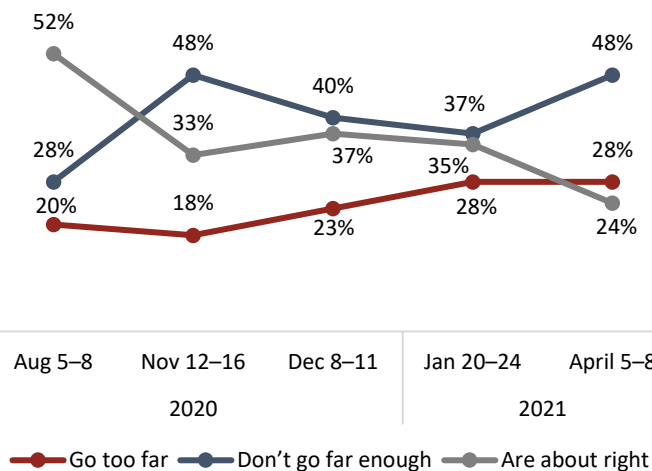
As provinces adjust to rising daily case counts and the logistical challenges of mass inoculation, new data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds Canadians increasingly disappointed in their provincial leaders. At least half in Saskatchewan (50%), Manitoba (59%), Ontario (65%), and Alberta (75%) now say that their premier is doing a poor job handling the pandemic.

The reasons for these opinions, however, are varied. In Ontario, the sense that the government took too long to implement new restrictions drives negative views. Indeed, 61 per cent of Ontarians called for tougher restrictions in their province while this public opinion survey was being conducted. Notably, the government introduced a new stay-at-home order on Thursday, just as fielding finished.

But Alberta Premier Jason Kenney has a different problem to solve. Nearly half (45%) of his constituents say the regulations in place already go too far – the highest number saying this in the country – while close to the same number (42%) say that they don't go far enough.

Overall, half of Canadians (48%) say that their communities need tighter restrictions to stem rising infections, while 28 per cent disagree. One-quarter (24%) say their community has found the right balance.

Overall, thinking about restrictions that have been put in place in the community where you live to prevent the coronavirus from spreading, do you think these restrictions...?



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from April 5 – 8, 2021 among a representative randomized sample of 1,577 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 +/- 2.5 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:

- Two-thirds of Canadians say they are concerned about becoming sick with COVID-19. This is a four-point increase from March. Four-in-five (81%) worry about a friend or family member.
- One-in-three Canadians (34%) say that their mental health is poor or terrible. This rises to half among those under the age of 35.
- Two-in-five Canadians (43%) say that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has done a good job of handling the pandemic, while 52 per cent say he has done a poor job.

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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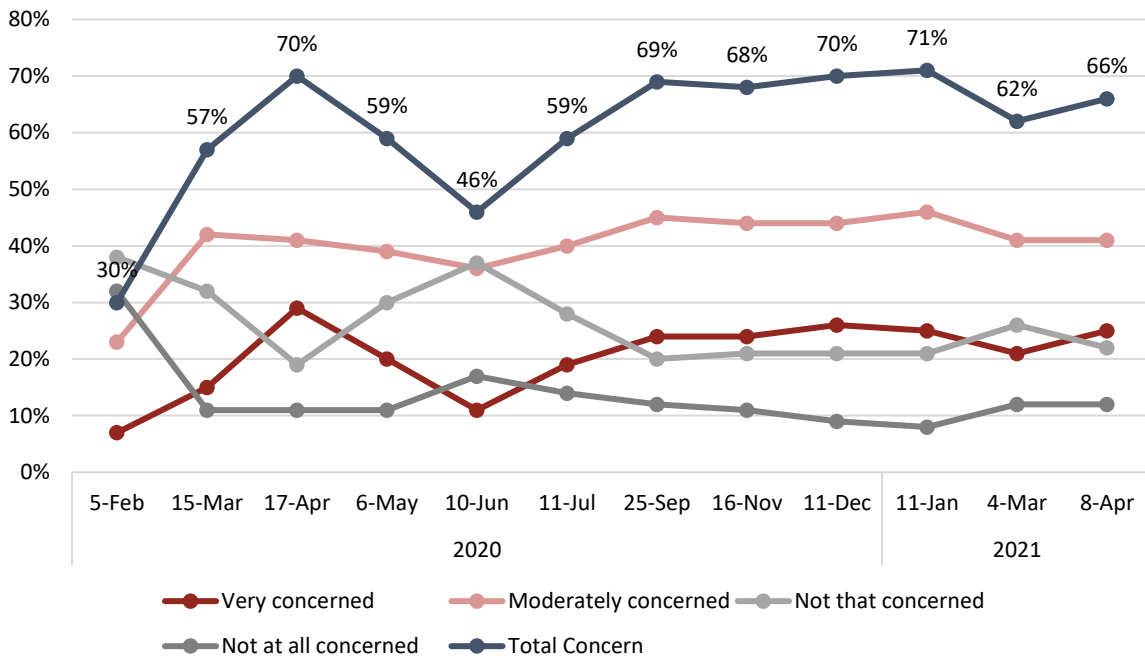
Part One: Concerns rebound as third-wave rolls

The first quarter of 2021 began with optimism on some fronts in the battle against COVID-19. Concern over becoming sick with the virus began to dissipate slightly within the Canadian public. Now, as multiple, and highly infectious variants of the virus – B117 originating in the UK, P1 from Brazil, and B1351 from South Africa – have begun to spread, concern has returned closer to peak levels. Two-thirds (66%) of Canadians now say that they are concerned about becoming sick themselves.

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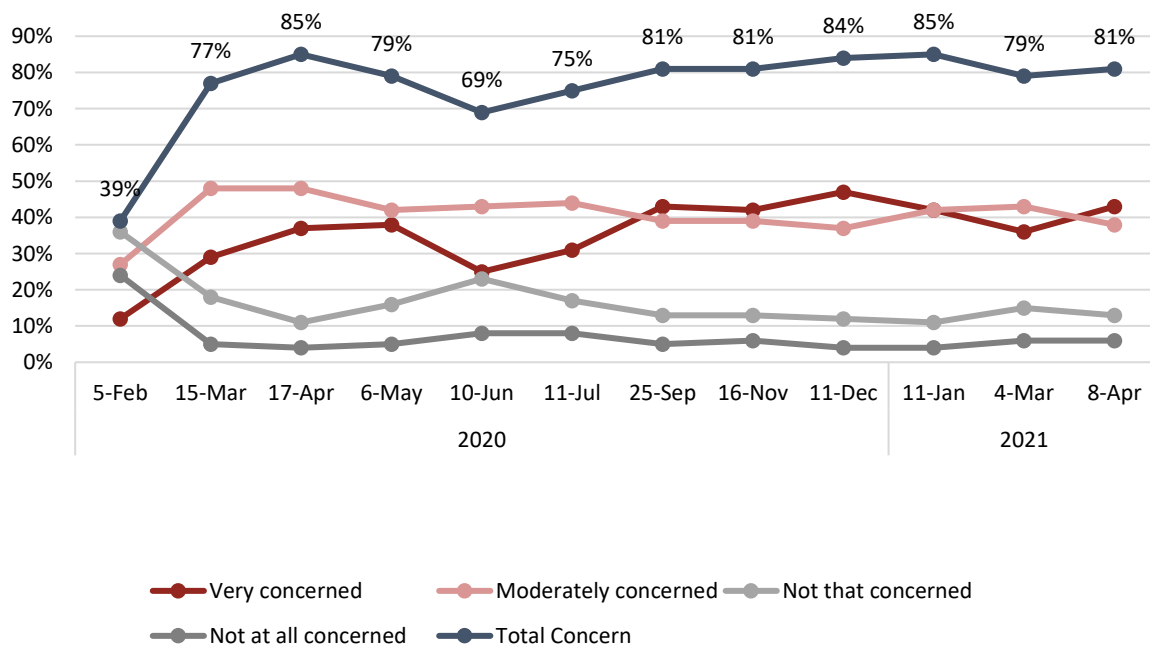
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Personal concern over contracting COVID-19

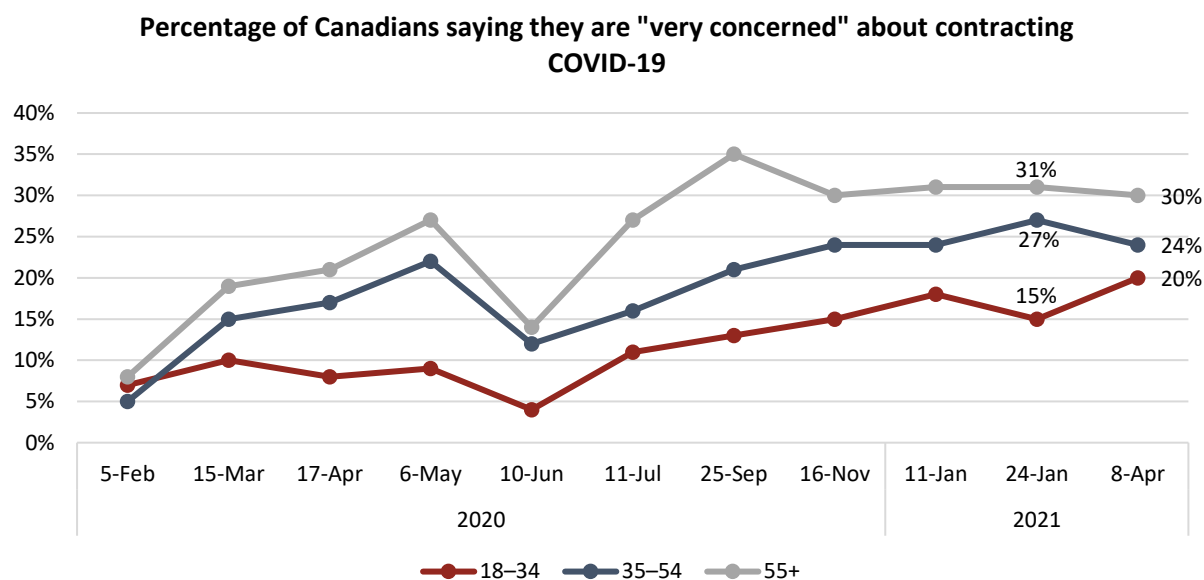


Meanwhile, 81 per cent say that they worry about a friend or close family member potentially contracting COVID-19:

Concern about friends or family becoming sick with COVID-19



Notably, the proportion of the population that is very concerned for themselves has increased. This is driven in large part by a spike in anxiety levels among typically more chill, younger Canadians. This group, 18 to 34 years of age, have been far less likely to have had access to vaccination and are far more at risk from COVID variants of concern. Their personal concern levels now reach one-in-five for the first time, contrasted against a low of less than five per cent last summer:

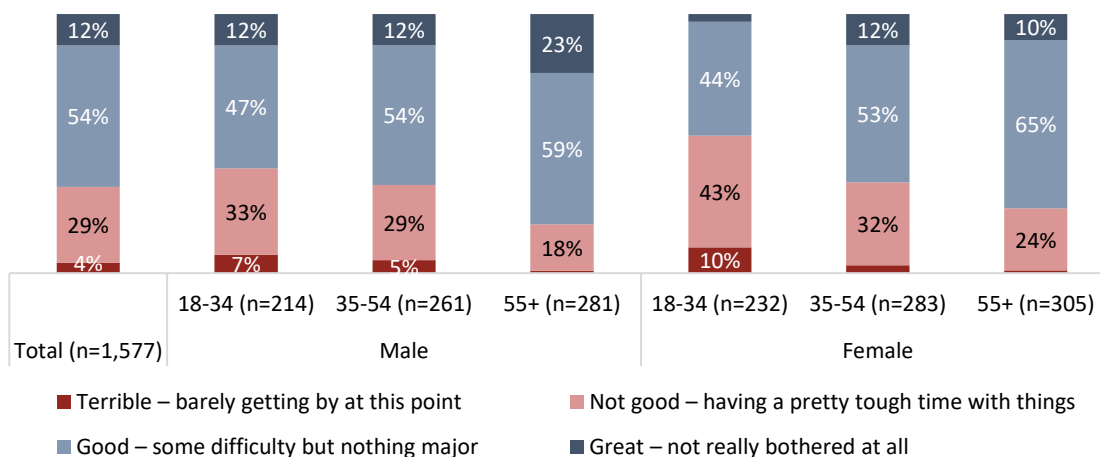


Mental health worsening

Thirteen months of sickness, death, job insecurity, an inability to plan for the future, and the stop-and-start nature of restrictions are taking a toll on Canadians' mental health.

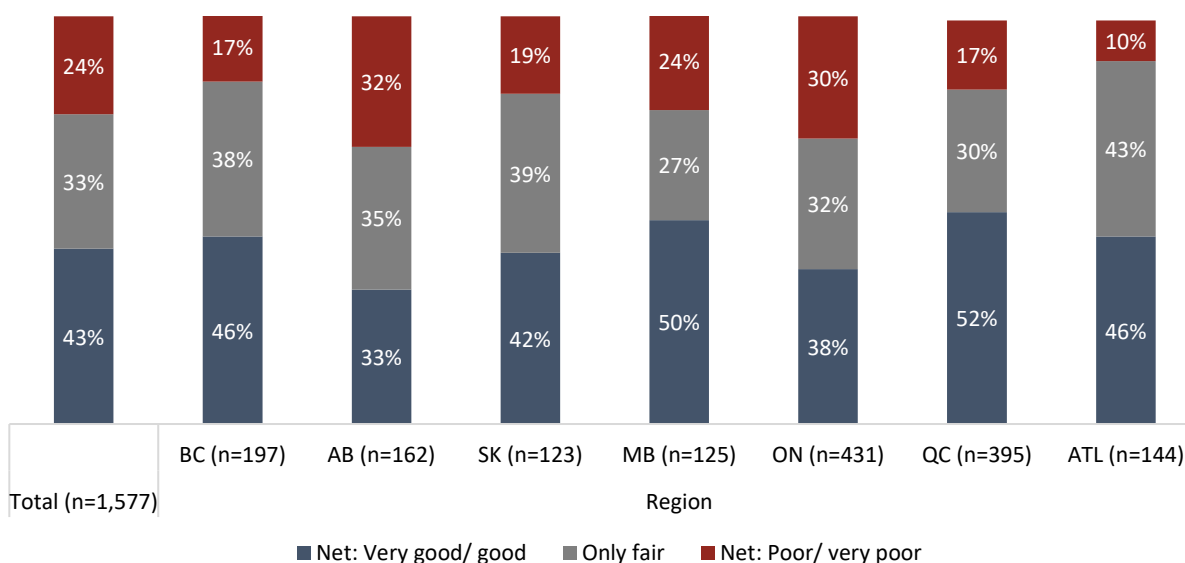
Asked to assess their own mental health, one-in-three Canadians say that their mental health is not good or terrible. A staggering 47 per cent of those under the age of 35 feel this way, with one-in-ten (9%) saying they are barely getting by. The most profound negative effects are being felt by young women, as seen in the following graph:

Now thinking about how you feel personally when it comes to your mental health in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. How would you say you are feeling over the past few weeks...? (All respondents)



Another measure finds Canadians showing more signs of fatigue. Asked to rate their own sense of optimism, just two-in-five (43%) say that they feel good about the near future. One-quarter (24%) overall, rising to three-in-ten in Alberta (32%) and Ontario (30%), say they feel poor or very poor. On this question too, young women fare worst ([see detailed tables](#)):

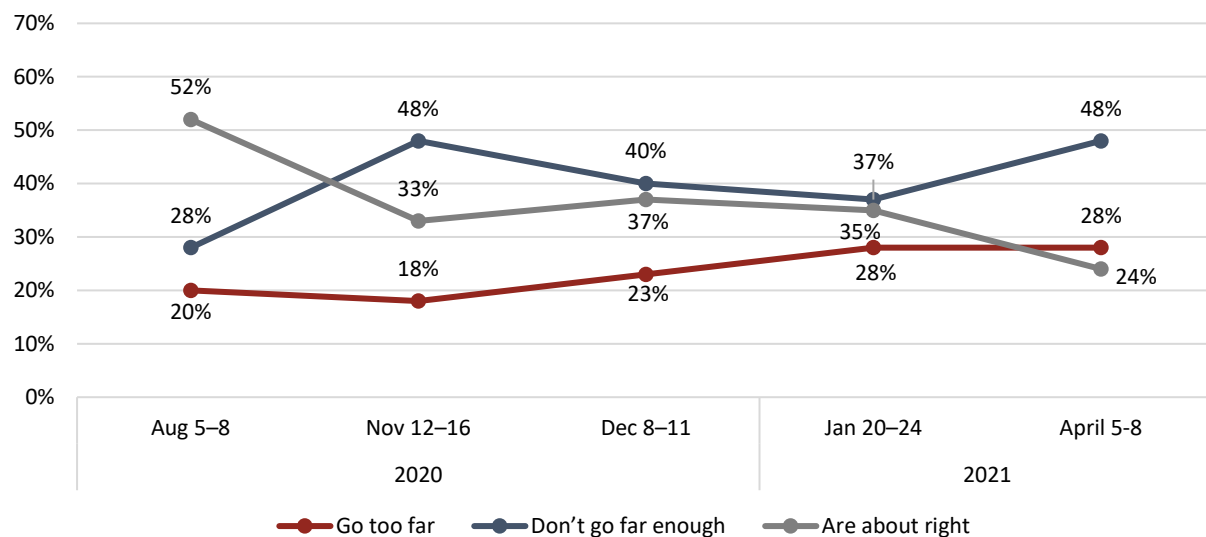
**How would you describe each of the following aspects of your life these days?
"Your sense of optimism"**



Part Two: Restrictions: A tale of two solitudes

While the timeline for vaccinations is being accelerated across the country, the more immediate challenge for public health officials is the rise in cases of COVID-19. After dropping precipitously between early January and early March, cases have more than doubled from their early March nadir. This has prompted several provinces to re-initiate lockdowns and restrictions. For many, this is the right policy approach. Half (48%) say that current restrictions do not go far enough:

Overall, thinking about restrictions that have been put in place in the community where you live to prevent the coronavirus from spreading, do you think these restrictions...?



There are two populations most polarized on this question. In Alberta, where Premier Jason Kenney is facing a de-facto caucus revolt – 16 of his own UCP MLAs are publicly opposing the recent re-implementation of restrictions – nearly half the province (45%) say measures go too far. That said, nearly the same number (42%) disagree and say that restrictions should go further.

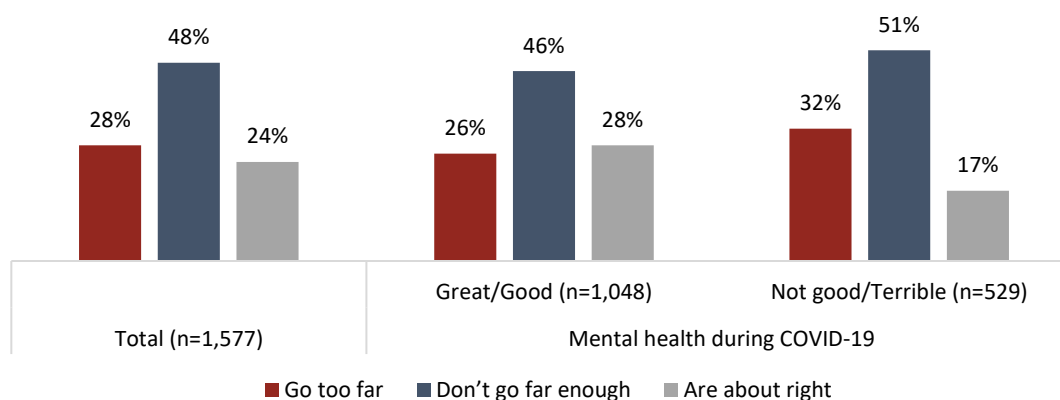
In Ontario, where a new stay-at-home order took effect Thursday, three-in-five said restrictions needed to be tighter. This suggests a high level of frustration with the provincial government’s timing in implementing new measures.

The same sentiment is felt in British Columbia – but without Ontario’s late-breaking announcement of tightened restrictions. In Canada’s westernmost province, twice as many people say restrictions have been too lax (55%) as say they are about right (27%). BC broke an all-time record in new infections Thursday, with 1,293 new cases in a single day. BC shut down in person dining, indoor exercise classes and other activities March 30, but for now, further restrictions are being publicly signaled.

Overall, thinking about restrictions that have been put in place in the community where you live to prevent the coronavirus from spreading, do you think these restrictions...?								
Unweighted sample sizes	Total (1,577)	Region						
		BC (n=197)	AB (n=162)	SK (n=123)	MB (n=125)	ON (n=431)	QC (n=395)	ATL (n=144)
Go too far	28%	18%	45%	31%	34%	26%	30%	18%
Don't go far enough	48%	55%	42%	44%	22%	61%	38%	23%
Are about right	24%	27%	12%	26%	44%	13%	32%	59%

Notably, Canadians' opinions on current restrictions remain fairly consistent regardless of whether they have been struggling with their mental health during to the pandemic. While those that report poor mental health are slightly more likely to say restrictions go too far (32% compared to 26% among those with good mental health), fully half of this group say restrictions do not go far enough:

Do you think these restrictions go too far, don't go far enough, or are about right?
(All respondents)



Part Three: Leader and government performance

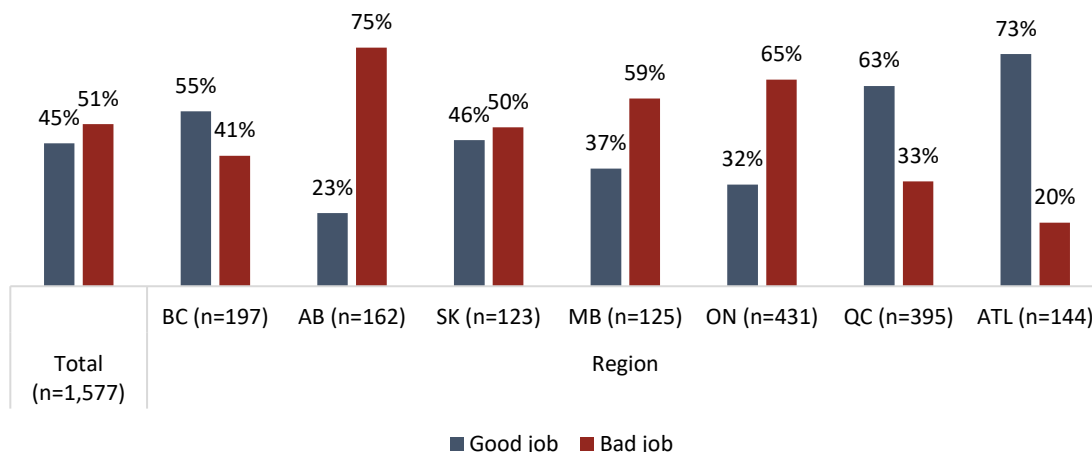
Premiers

Assessments of the performance of provincial governments vary from coast to coast. As has been the case for most of the pandemic, the Atlantic Canadian provinces are seen by people in their region as handling the pandemic best. In Quebec and British Columbia, Premiers Francois Legault and John Horgan each earn majority praise too. But Ontario's Doug Ford and Alberta's Jason Kenney are now seen to be doing a poor job by at least two-thirds of their constituents respectively:

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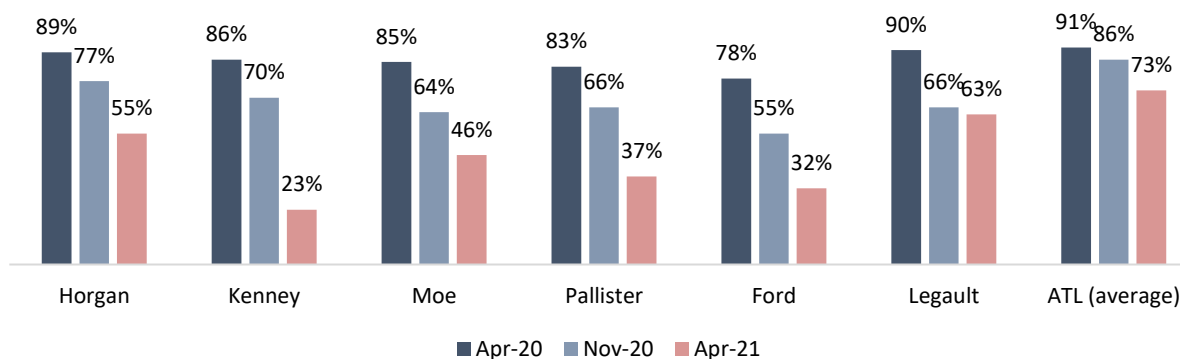
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Do you think [your provincial premier is] doing a good or bad job handling the Covid-19 pandemic overall? (All respondents)



Trendline data for this question is significant across all regions, with most of the country growing far more critical of their provincial leaders as the pandemic wears on. The negative trend is particularly profound in Alberta. Last April 86 per cent of Albertans said Premier Kenney was doing a good job handling the pandemic. In November, 70 per cent felt this way. Now, just 23 per cent feel Kenney is performing well on this file, a near four-fold decline from a year ago. Positive assessments of Ford’s performance are at less than one-third, a 46-point plunge in 12 months. Similarly dramatic decreases are also noted everywhere but in Atlantic Canada.

Percentage saying their provincial premier is doing a good job handling the coronavirus



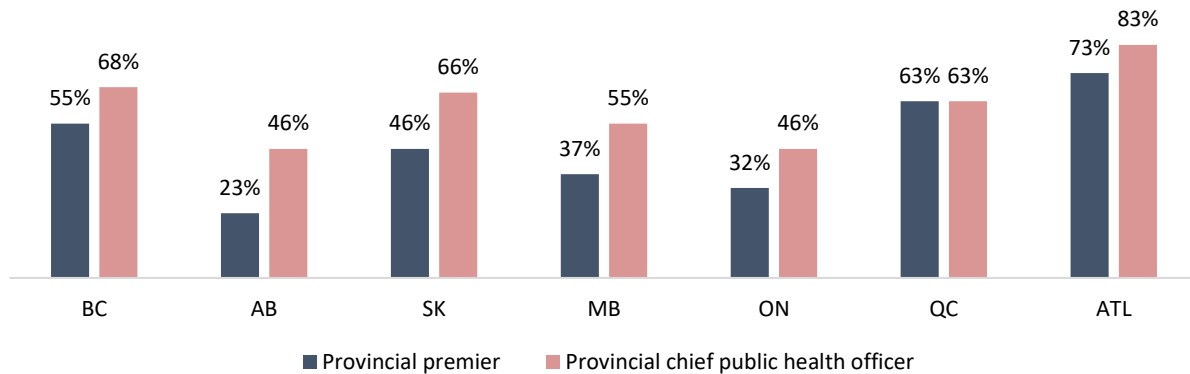
Public health officers

The good news for public health officials is that the top doctors in each province continue to outpace their respective premiers in terms of public approval. In Alberta, Dr. Deena Hinshaw receives twice the level of praise as Jason Kenney, though she, alongside Ontario’s Dr. David Williams, receive lower levels than their peers elsewhere in the country.

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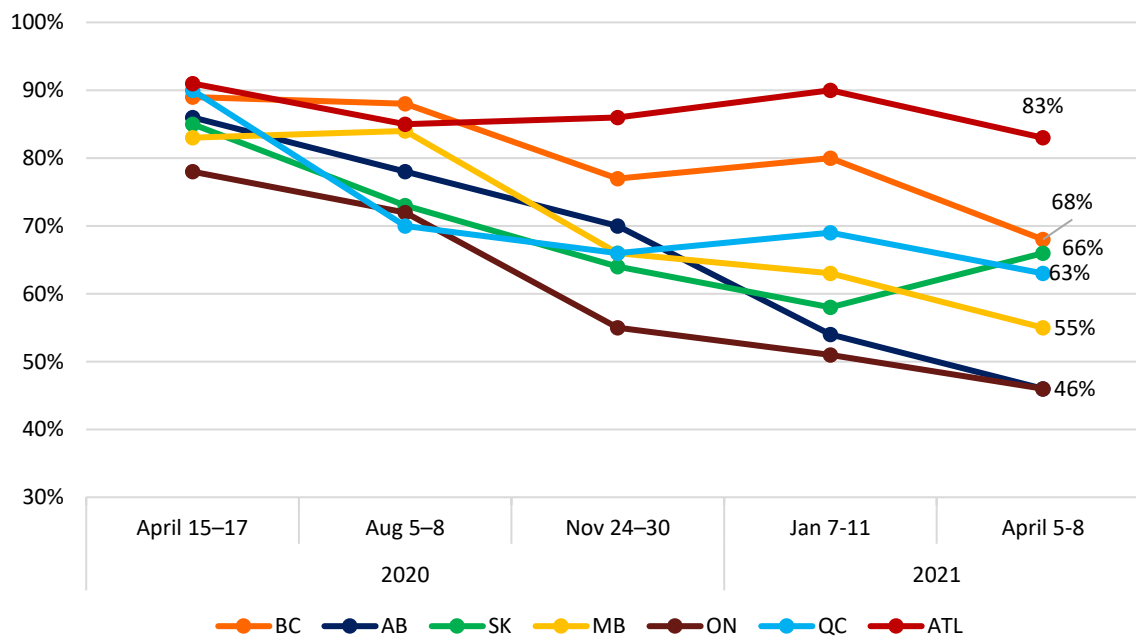
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Percentage saying their premier vs. the chief public health officer in their province is doing a good job handling the coronavirus



Nonetheless, here too public opinion has become more critical as Canadians have grown weary of COVID-19 protocols and the decisions made by authorities:

Percentage saying their provincial health officer has done a good job handling the pandemic



Prime Minister Trudeau

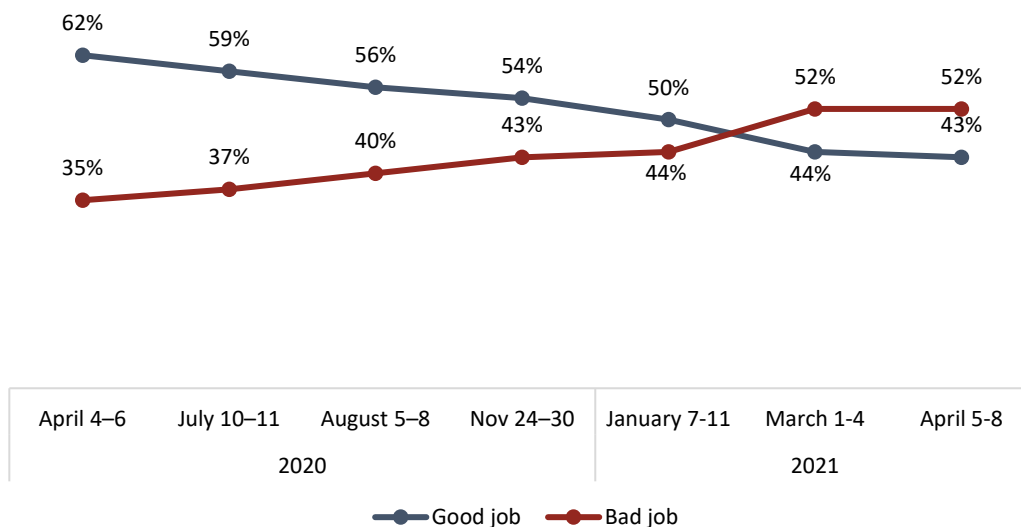
Meantime, as Prime Minister Justin Trudeau reinforces to Canadians that the country is facing a 'very serious' third wave of the virus, Canadians continue to reinforce that they do not perceive an

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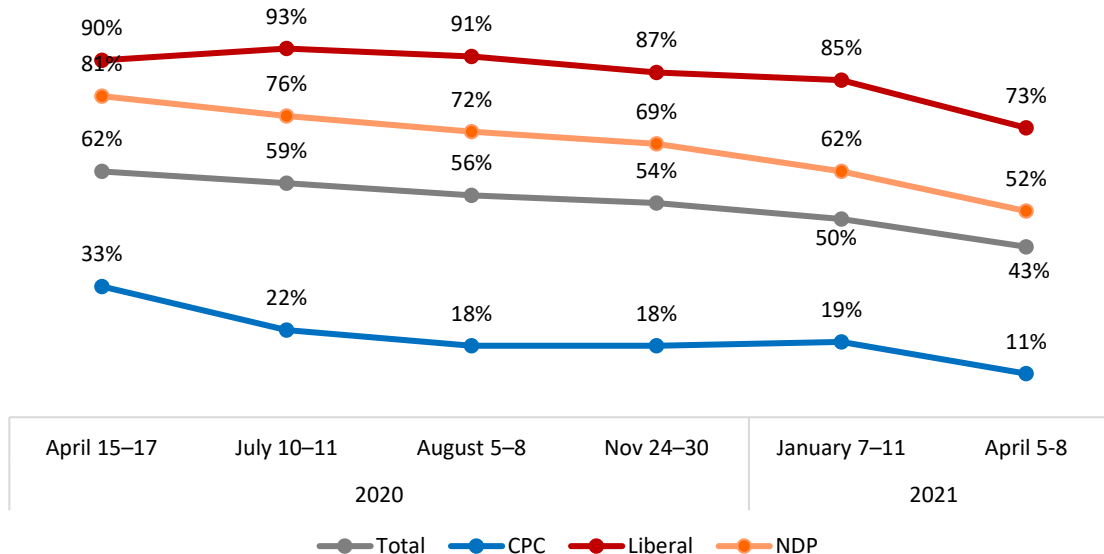
improvement in his handling of this file. Opinions of Trudeau's performance on COVID-19 are unchanged from last month. Fewer than half (43%) say he is doing a good job while 52 per cent disagree:

Do you think [Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is] doing a good or bad job handling the Covid-19 pandemic overall?



Seven-in-ten past Liberal voters are happy with how Trudeau has performed throughout the pandemic, while a majority of past NDP voters agree. Past Conservative voters are overwhelmingly critical:

Percentage saying Justin Trudeau is doing a 'good job' in handling the COVID-19 pandemic by 2019 federal vote



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

For detailed results by mental health during the pandemic, [click here.](#)

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