

Federal politics: As concern over COVID-19 dissipates, other policy issues may dominate election debates

For first time in more than a year, COVID-19 not top issue for Canadians; priority for Indigenous issues doubles

June 11, 2021 – As more than a year's worth of national concern about the COVID-19 pandemic begins to ease, the country's attention appears to be pivoting hard to other issues, raising questions over the extent to which the ballot question in a much-speculated-about 2021 election will be Justin Trudeau's pandemic management, after all.

A new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds that one-in-five Canadians (20%) now say Indigenous issues are among their top three federal concerns they care most about.

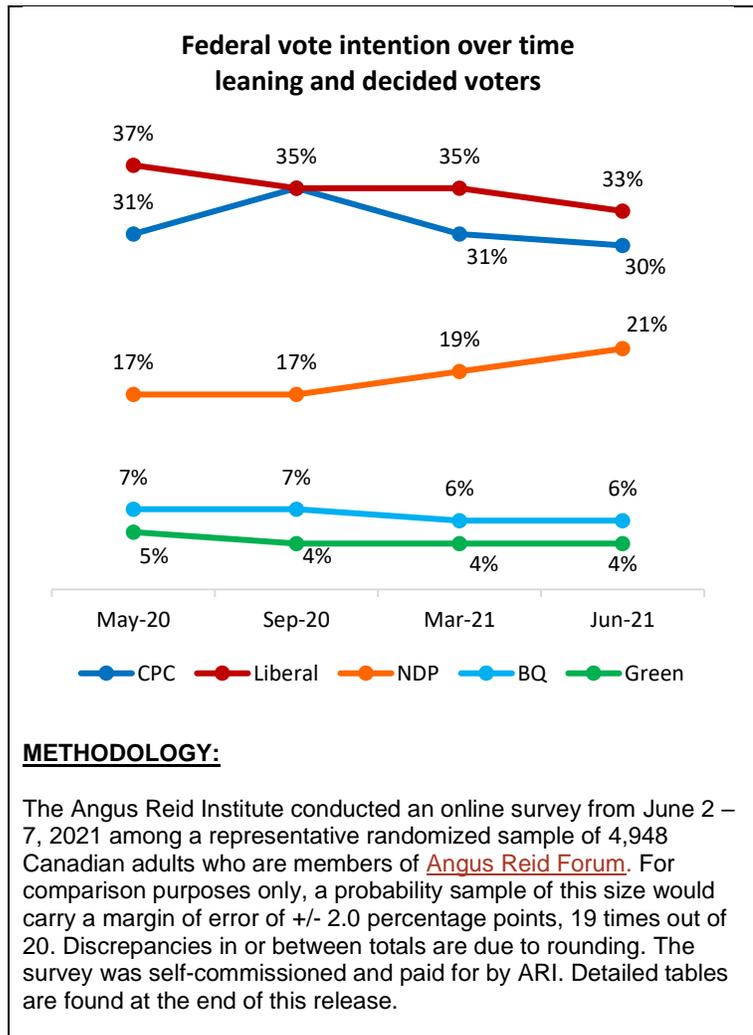
This is more than double the number who said so in March (9%), or at any time over the past year and a half. It comes in the wake of the [discovery](#) in late May of the remains of 215 children buried on the grounds of a former residential school in Kamloops, B.C.

A cross-country run in the housing market has sent the cost of buying a home ever higher and the issue of housing affordability is similarly skyrocketing in priority (29%), up seven points this quarter and 12 points compared to this time last year.

Meanwhile, Canadians are significantly less likely to identify COVID-19 as a top issue in the country. 45 per cent did so in March, compared to 31 per cent that do now. That said, health care issues are still identified as the ones they care most about in the country today.

As to the impacts on the individual fortunes of Canada's party leaders, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau finds his approval up four points over the last three months to 45 per cent, though the number of Canadians who strongly approve (8%) of him is four times less than those who strongly disapprove (34%). Conservative leader Erin O'Toole is viewed unfavourably by 56 per cent of Canadians, a decline of four more points from March.

The national vote picture continues to look competitive, with the Liberal Party holding a slim three-point advantage (33% to 30%) over the opposition CPC. Particularly notable are gender splits. While men



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prefer the CPC by a 10-point margin over the Liberals – 38% to 28% respectively – the opposite is true of women, who support the Liberals (38%) at a much higher rate than the CPC (24%). The NDP are preferred by 21 per cent of Canadians, including 28 per cent in British Columbia and 25 per cent in Ontario and Manitoba.

More Key Findings:

- Canadians are largely against the idea of having an election before the fall. Three-quarters (74%) say an election before September would be inappropriate, but three-in-five (61%) say holding one between September and December would be fine.
- The Liberal Party holds a considerable advantage in Canada's largest urban areas: Metro Vancouver, the Greater Toronto area, and Montreal.
- NDP leader Jagmeet Singh continues to hold the most favourable personal ratings of any of the main party leaders; the New Democrats pick up a couple of points in vote intention since March
- In Ontario and British Columbia, housing affordability and the COVID-19 response are both top federal priorities. Meanwhile, the economy and the deficit top the list in Alberta, versus health care and climate change in Quebec.

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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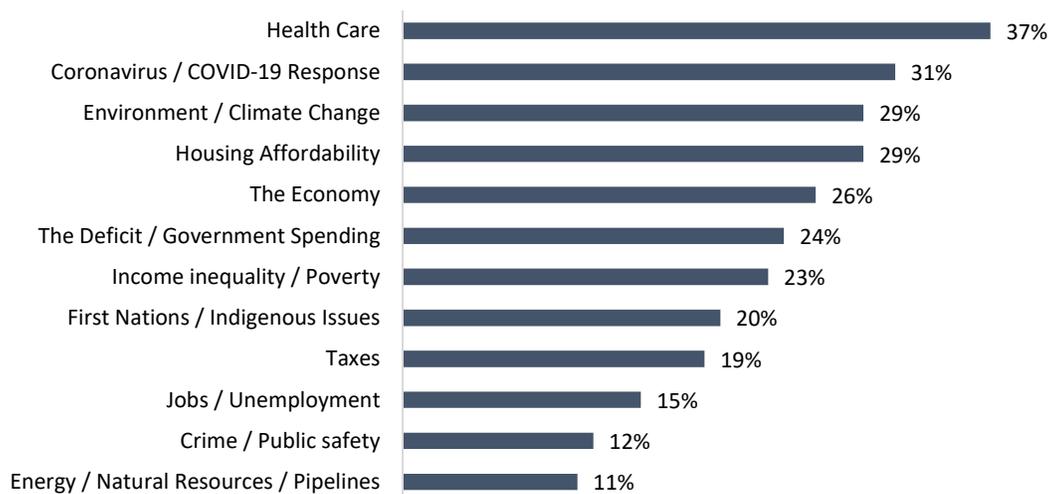
Part One: Top Issues

COVID-19 drops from top spot as health care, Indigenous issues gain priority

Canadians continue to be vaccinated by the hundreds of thousands per day. With more than 70 per cent of those eligible (aged 12+) now vaccinated, there is a notable drop in the number of Canadians identifying the federal government’s response to COVID-19 as an issue they care most about. In fact, the issue is no longer a top priority for the first time since March 2020.

As Canadians learn just how much pressure and weight has been applied to the health care system overall in the past 16 months, it now occupies the minds and concerns of the nation. Other top issues include the environment, housing affordability, and the economy:

**Please rank the issues facing Canada that you care about most:
(Up to three selected, items with 10% or greater shown)
(All respondents, n=4,948)**



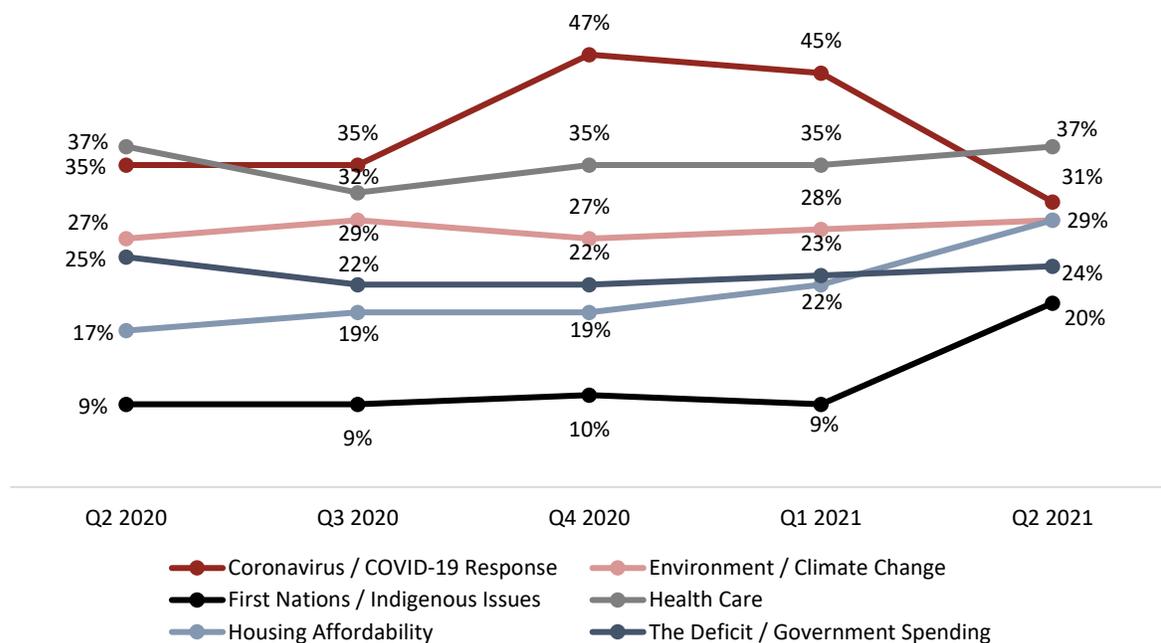
Twice as many Canadians say Indigenous issues are a top concern now compared to the previous year. This comes as the country grapples with and debates the historic roles of the federal government and religious institutions at residential schools.

Housing affordability is also up 12 points compared to last year, as real estate bidding wars continue to frustrate many buyers and put the aspiration of adequate housing for millions further out of reach. [Recent data](#) from ARI suggests two-in-five Canadians are hoping for a considerable market correction in the future.

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Top issues over the last year



Regional priorities

Regionally, if there is an issue that draws consensus, it is health care, with people in six provinces rating it as one of their two issues. In Alberta and Saskatchewan, residents choose an identical triumvirate of priorities: the deficit, the economy, and the energy sector. In both Ontario and B.C., it is the COVID-19 response and housing affordability in the top three:

Top three federal issues by region								
BC	AB	SK	MB	ON	QC	NB	NS	NL
Housing affordability 40%	The Deficit 37%	The Deficit 44%	COVID-19 response 41%	COVID-19 response 36%	Health Care 46%	Health Care 48%	Health Care 48%	Health Care 43%
Enviro / Climate change 33%	Economy 37%	Economy 36%	Health Care 40%	Health Care 36%	Enviro / Climate Change 37%	COVID-19 response 33%	Enviro / Climate Change 33%	Economy 35%
COVID-19 response 30%	Energy / Natural Resources / Pipelines 29%	Energy / Natural Resources / Pipelines 29%	The Economy 29%	Housing affordability 33%	Income inequality / Poverty 29%	Housing affordability 29%	COVID-19 response 30%	The Deficit 32%

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

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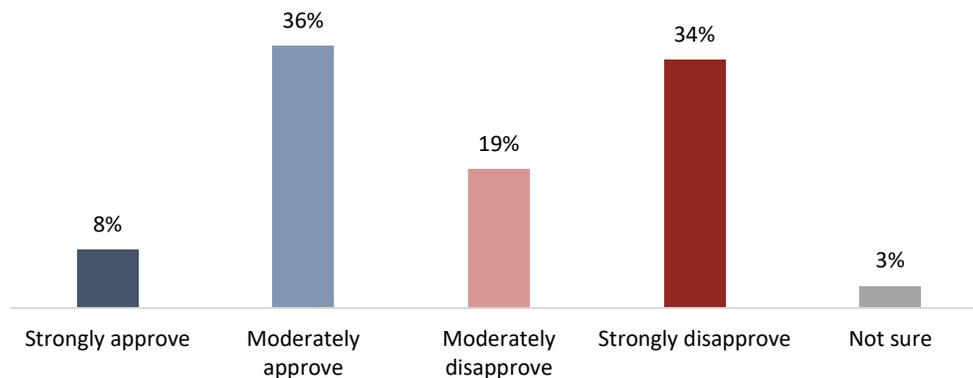
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Part Two: Federal leaders

Trudeau approval up four points

The past three months have been defined largely by a continued rollout of the COVID-19 vaccination program. Despite the [resignation](#) of the top general in charge of the vaccination delivery program in May, vaccination appears to be [running smoothly](#) and shortages of vaccine that defined the first three months of this year are no longer a problem. Prime Minister Trudeau’s approval is at 45 per cent this quarter. Notably, those with strong negative views outweigh those with strongly positive ones by a margin of four to one:

**Do you approve or disapprove of the performance of Prime Minister and Liberal Party leader Justin Trudeau?
(All respondents, n=4,948)**

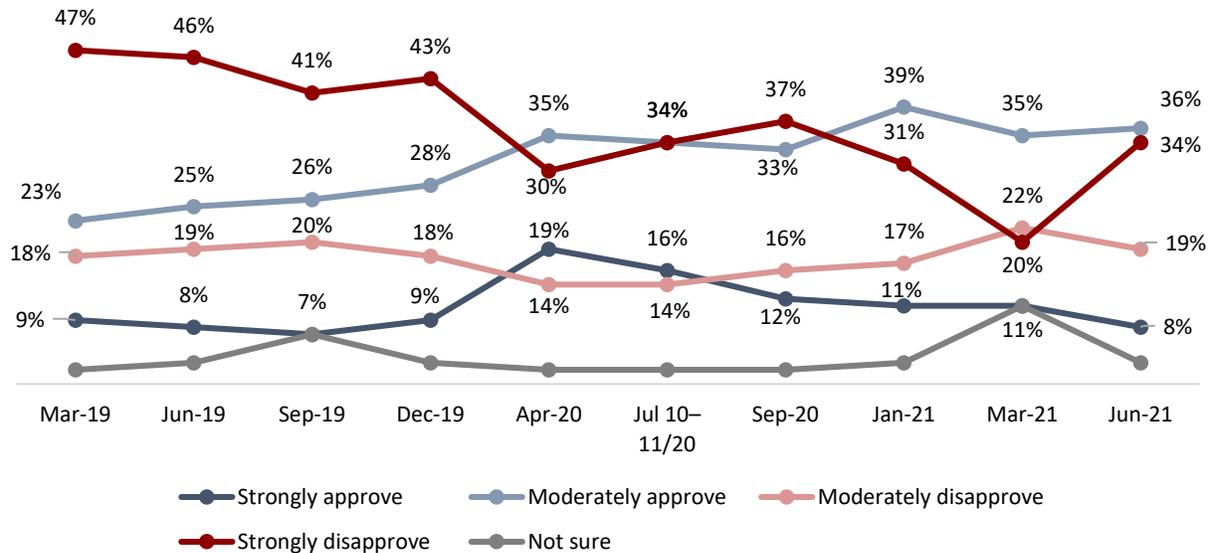


After a brief dip in strong disapproval in March, the proportion of Canadians holding that view has increased back to the one-in-three mark. Meanwhile, moderate approval has remained close to the current 36 per cent level over the past year:

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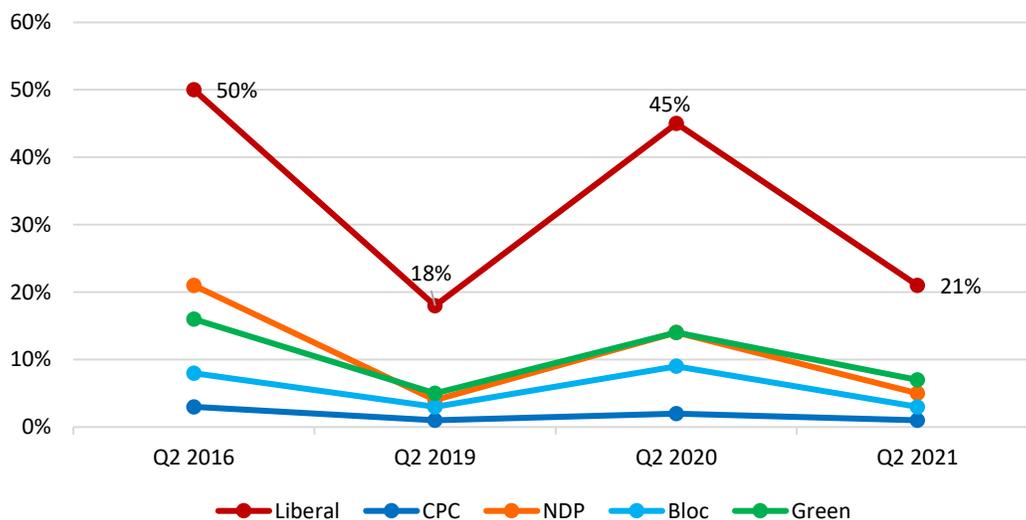
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Do you approve or disapprove of the performance of Prime Minister and Liberal Party leader Justin Trudeau?



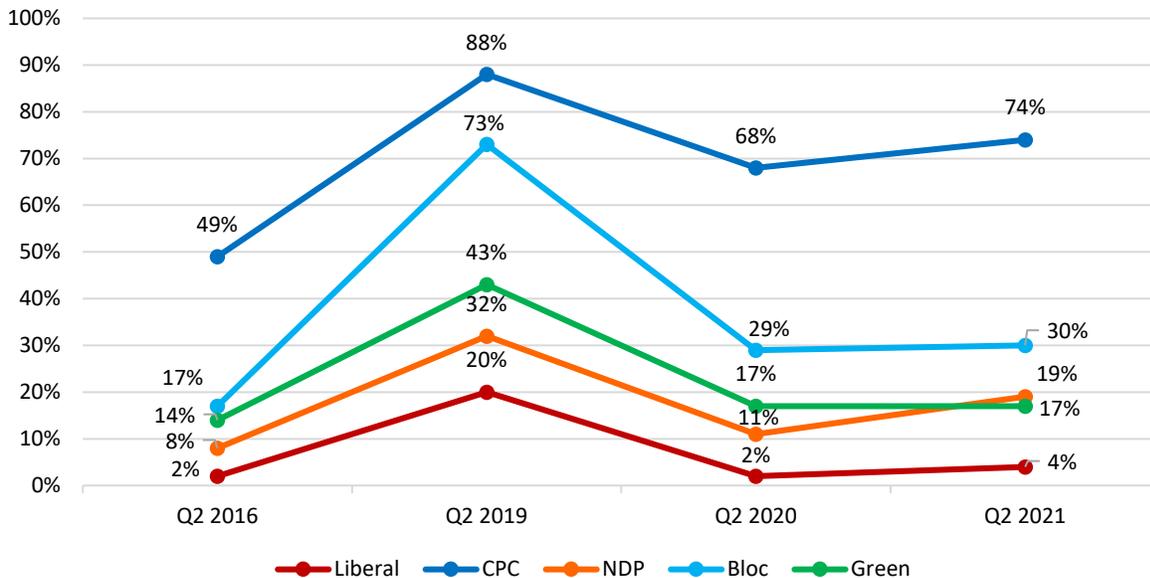
Trudeau's strong approval has diminished considerably among his own past support base. Those who voted for the Liberal Party in 2019 are half as likely now as they were at this time last year to hold a strongly positive view of the PM and their approval has dropped to where it was in [the fallout of the SNC-Lavalin affair](#) in 2019:

Strong Approval of Justin Trudeau by 2019 Federal vote



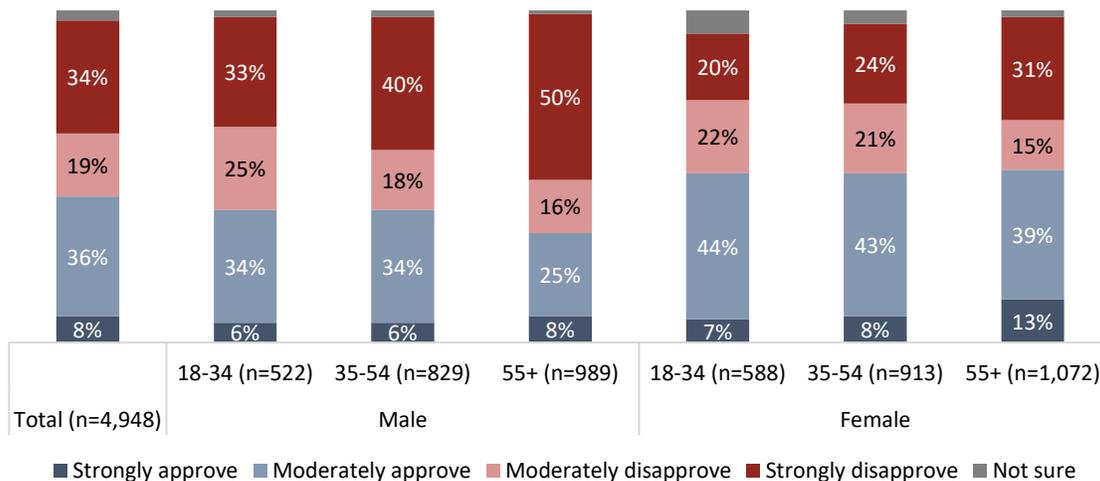
That said, strong disapproval for the Prime Minister is most concentrated among those who did not vote for his party in the last election: three-quarters of 2019 CPC voters strongly disapprove of him:

Strong Disapproval of Justin Trudeau by 2019 Federal vote



Age and gender continue to play a significant role in how Canadians feel about Trudeau. Gone are the days of blanket approval from 18 to 34-year-olds, although he continues to fare better with women:

Approval of Prime Minister Trudeau (All respondents)



The Leader of the Opposition

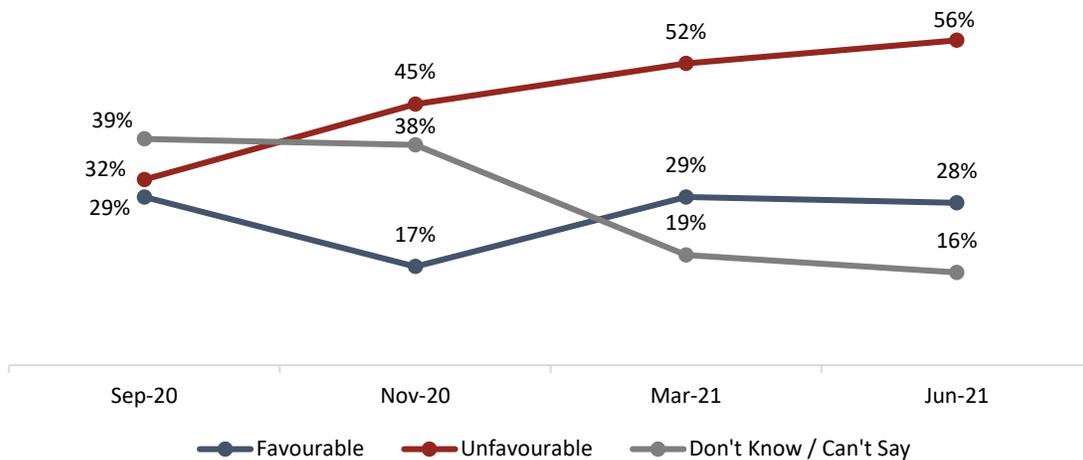
A troubling trend continues for the Leader of the Opposition. Erin O’Toole’s unfavourability deepens to 56 per cent this quarter. The CPC leader has faced criticism from both ends of the political spectrum, taking heat from his own ranks for the Conservative’s new carbon pricing plan while those to the left of centre dismissed it. O’Toole has taken a more progressive approach to social issues, having recently made

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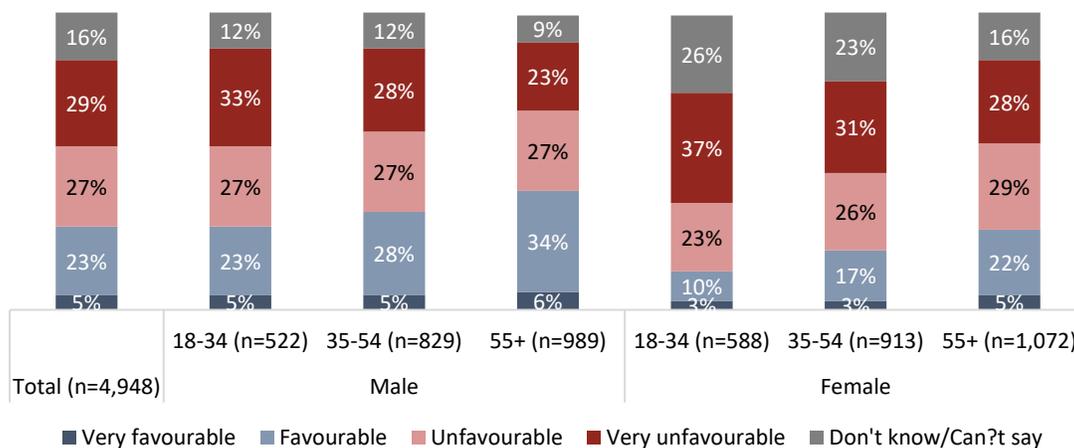
statements about LGBTQ2 rights. That said, he received a cold reception in London this past week, standing with other leaders in solidarity with the Muslim community. Critics have pointed to O’Toole voting against a motion condemning Islamophobia and his “Take Canada Back” campaign, which they say exacerbated tensions in the country.

Favourable vs. Unfavourable views of CPC leader Erin O’Toole over time



O’Toole’s strengths and weaknesses along age and gender lines contrast those of Trudeau. The latter is viewed more favourably by older men and struggles with younger women:

Views of CPC leader Erin O’Toole (All respondents)



Other opposition leaders

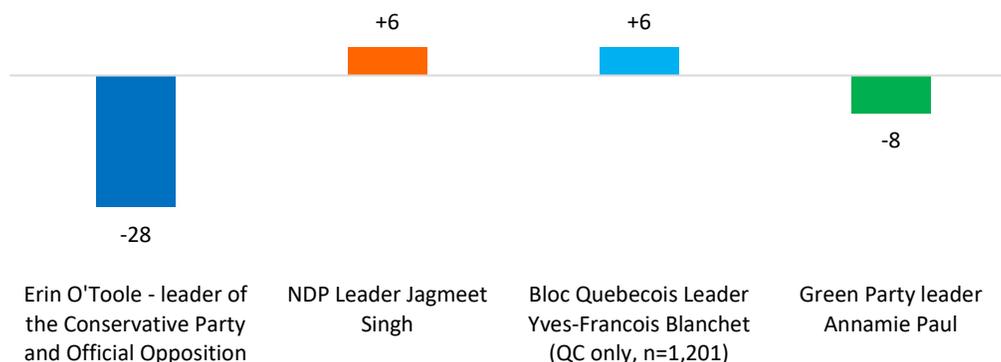
The other major party leaders fair much better in the eyes of Canadians than O’Toole: 47 per cent have a favourable view of NDP leader Jagmeet Singh – though this continues to do little to make an impact on his party’s prospects of winning more seats in the House of Commons. About the same number in

Quebec (46%) have a favourable view of Bloc Québécois leader Yves-Francois Blanchet. Green Party leader Annamie Paul remains an unknown to Canadians, and recent headlines generated have not exactly been positive, with internal party tensions spilling into the public and an embarrassing defection of a sitting Green MP to the Liberal caucus.

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=4,948)				
	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=1,201)	Annamie Paul – leader of the Green Party
Very favourable	5%	11%	16%	3%
Favourable	23%	37%	30%	20%
Unfavourable	27%	20%	20%	17%
Very unfavourable	29%	22%	20%	14%
Don't know/Can't say	16%	10%	14%	46%

Both Jagmeet Singh and Yves-Francois Blanchet garner a plus six in net favourability, while Erin O'Toole is well under water on this measure at minus 28.

**Net favourability (Favourability minus unfavourability)
(All respondents, n=4,948)**



Part Three: Vote intention

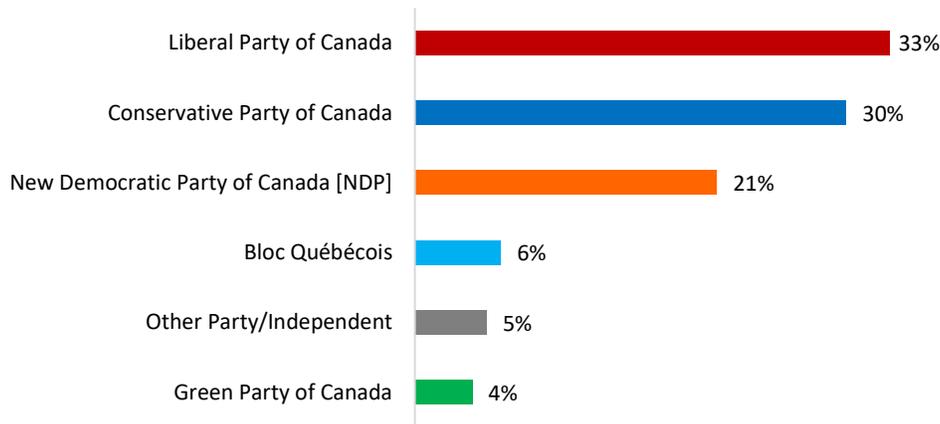
Competitive picture sees Liberals lead by three points

The vote intention landscape continues to be competitive. Currently, one-in-three Canadians (33%) say that they would support the Liberal Party if an election were held in the near future. Slightly fewer (30%) say this of the CPC, while one-in-five (21%) would support the NDP:

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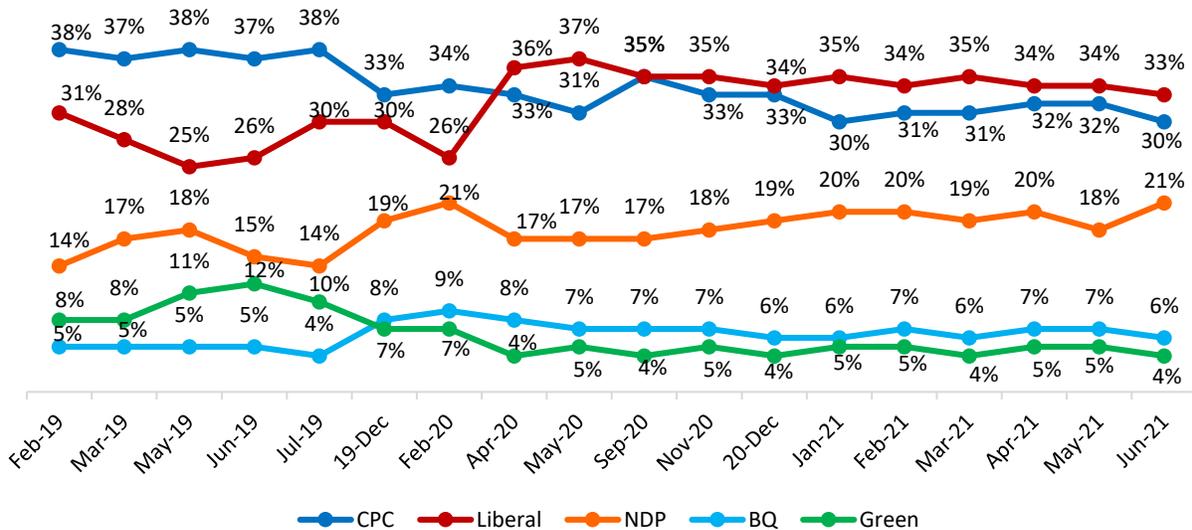
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**Federal vote intention
(Decided voters, n=4,429)**



While there is little movement this quarter among the two parties most likely to form government in the next election, the NDP makes a slight gain since last month of three points to 21 per cent. Comparing these data to this time last year, the Liberal Party is down four points while the NDP is up four. The CPC continues to hold onto a solid base of three-in-ten, with little movement throughout the pandemic:

**Federal vote intention over time
leaning and decided voters**



Regional vote intent

With a federal election potentially occurring within the next year, it is notable that there are key regional races emerging. All three parties are competitive in British Columbia and Ontario, in each province they all garner at least 25 per cent support. In Quebec, the Liberal Party holds an important advantage over the Bloc Québécois and generates its highest levels of support at 38 per cent. The CPC continues to

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dominate the prairies, holding a distinct advantage over other contenders in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba:

Federal vote intention, including leaners, decided voters only:								
(unweighted sample sizes)	Total (4,429)	Region						
		BC (570)	AB (546)	SK (447)	MB (467)	ON (890)	QC (743)	ATL (790)
Liberal Party	33%	35%	18%	16%	27%	33%	38%	44%
Conservative Party	30%	26%	50%	53%	40%	32%	17%	30%
NDP	21%	28%	19%	18%	25%	25%	13%	16%
Bloc Québécois	6%	-	-	-	-	-	25%	-
Green Party	4%	7%	1%	1%	3%	5%	4%	4%
Other Party	5%	4%	12%	12%	5%	5%	2%	5%

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

Age and gender

Differences in vote intention along age and gender lines are another crucial factor. The NDP is buoyed by young women, who tend to vote at far lower rates than their older peers.

Men and women are also at odds more broadly. All male age groups lean toward support for the CPC, while all female age groups support the Liberals at a much higher rate than Erin O'Toole's party:

Federal vote intention, including leaners, decided voters only:							
(weighted sample sizes)	Total (4,429)	Age and Gender					
		Male			Female		
		18-34 (471)	35-54 (753)	55+ (899)	18-34 (507)	35-54 (808)	55+ (960)
Liberal Party	33%	25%	30%	28%	30%	38%	42%
Conservative Party	30%	32%	34%	44%	17%	23%	29%
NDP	21%	27%	18%	8%	41%	28%	14%
Bloc Québécois	6%	5%	6%	11%	2%	4%	7%
Green Party	4%	6%	3%	4%	8%	4%	4%

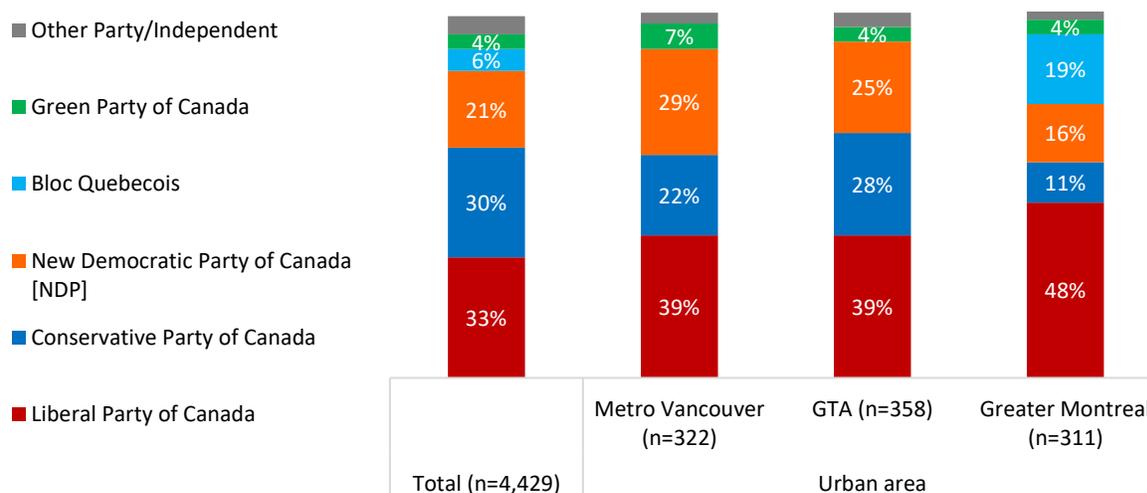
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Other Party	5%	6%	10%	5%	2%	3%	4%
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It is said that no party can win a majority mandate without doing well in Canada's three largest urban centres: Metro Vancouver, the GTA, and Greater Montreal. On this front, it is the Liberal's advantage. The incumbent party leads the others by no fewer than 10 points in any of these vote-rich, and seat-heavy regions.

Decided voters in major urban centres



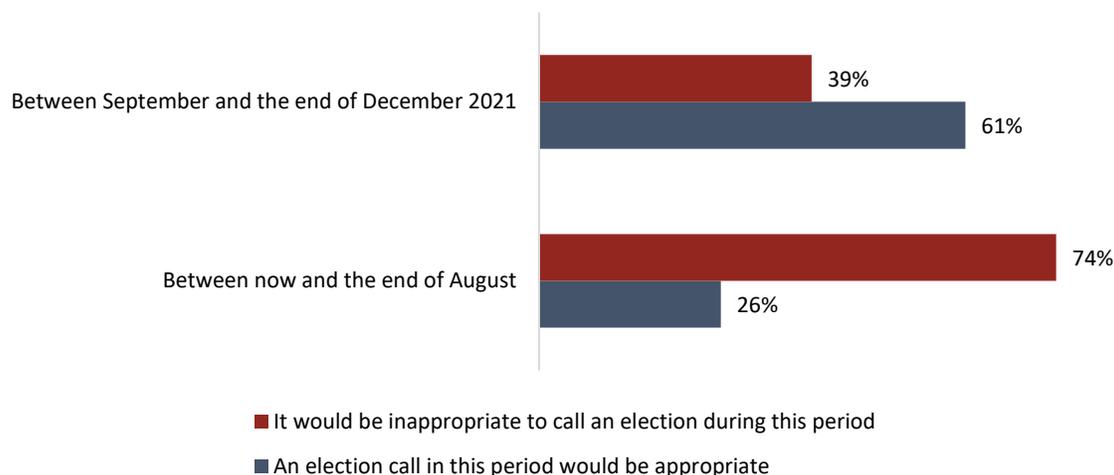
Part Four: What about a 2021 election?

Election speculation has been common throughout 2021. Many expect that as the COVID-19 threat subsides, the Liberal government may seek to call Canadians to the polls. If, indeed, that does happen, timing will be important. But three-quarters of Canadians say they have little interest in a federal election before September. Meanwhile, when the timeline shifts to the fall, three-in-five express support:

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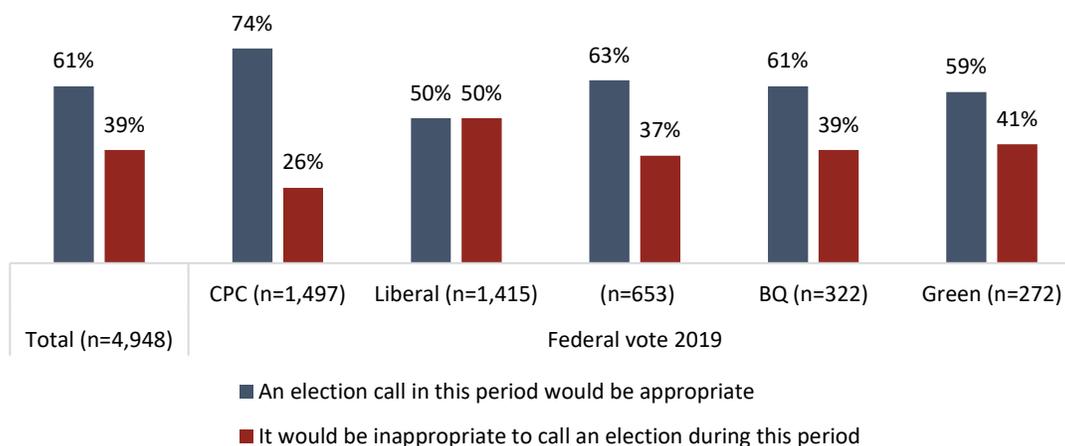
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Please tell us what you think about the timing of an election campaign:



Despite Trudeau’s desire to seek a majority mandate, notably, it is past Liberal voters that are least inclined to go to the polls this year. This group is split 50/50 regarding the later election period, while those who voted for all other opposition parties are more eager to see the writs dropped.

**An election call between September and the end of December would be:
(All respondents)**



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