

Politics and the Fourth Wave: As concern over COVID rises, are the Liberals poised to benefit?

Two-in-five 2019 Green voters jump ship to the Liberals, CPC base remains the most loyal

August 12, 2021 – As members of the fifth estate speculate about the exact date the prime minister is expected to call a general election, Canadians are more occupied by fears of a fourth wave of COVID-19 than politics.

Amid [a surge in new infections](#), anxiety among parents over [the safety of unvaccinated children](#) returning to school in person, and other worries, the latest data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds that the number of people in this country expressing concern about personally contracting COVID-19 increased five points from July to 52 per cent.

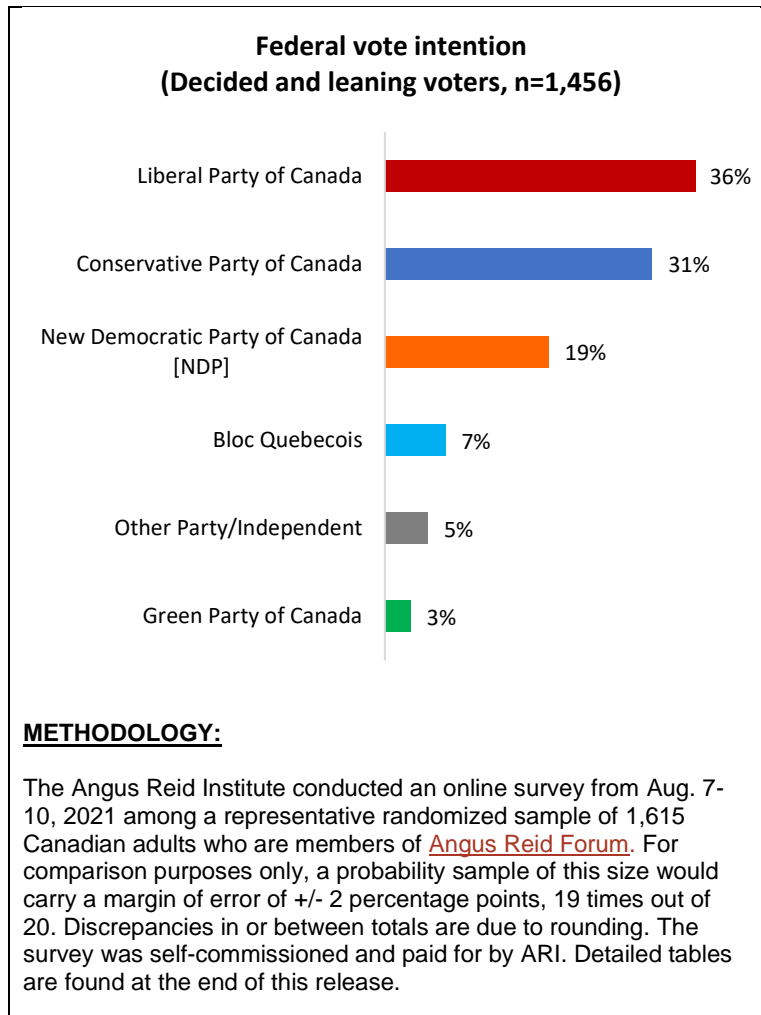
As much as this nation and its leaders may wish for nothing else but a permanent end to the pandemic, politically speaking, this situation represents a great risk – and a potential opportunity – for the governing Liberals.

Nearly half (45%) of those who are personally concerned about falling ill with COVID-19 also say they intend to support the Liberal Party in the next election.

Further, just over half of Canadians (51%) are of the view the PM has done a “good job” managing the COVID-19 pandemic, the highest mark Justin Trudeau has received in 2021 and 11 points higher than his personal favourability (40%). A similar, but slightly higher number (55%) say his government has done well on the same file.

In terms of vote intention, the incumbent party continues to hold a five-point advantage over the opposition Conservatives – both parties up one point each, but statistically unchanged in the last week. The NDP (19%), Bloc Quebecois (7%), and Green (3%) parties have also seen little movement over the last seven days.

Beneath the surface, however, a concerning revelation lurks for the already [troubled Greens](#). While all of the other major national parties are generally succeeding in holding onto their 2019 voters, fully 43 per cent of those who cast a ballot for the Greens two years ago have moved to the Liberals, nearly double the number (22%) who say they will vote Green again in the upcoming election.



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Meanwhile, the Conservatives are not only holding onto past voters, but the party's base is also home to those who are most certain about their vote. Half (48%) of those who intend to vote for the CPC are absolutely committed, compared to just 28 per cent for the incumbent Liberals and 29 per cent for Jagmeet Singh's New Democrats.

More Key Findings:

- While COVID-19 concern rises, it is still outpaced nationally by concern over health care (36%), the environment (36%), housing affordability (27%), and the economy (27%).
- At least three-quarters of supporters for each of the four largest federal parties say they will support the same party they voted for in 2019.
- Erin O'Toole (27%) continues to place last in favourability when compared with Jagmeet Singh (47%), Yves-Francois Blanchet (46%) and Justin Trudeau (40%) ([see detailed tables](#)).

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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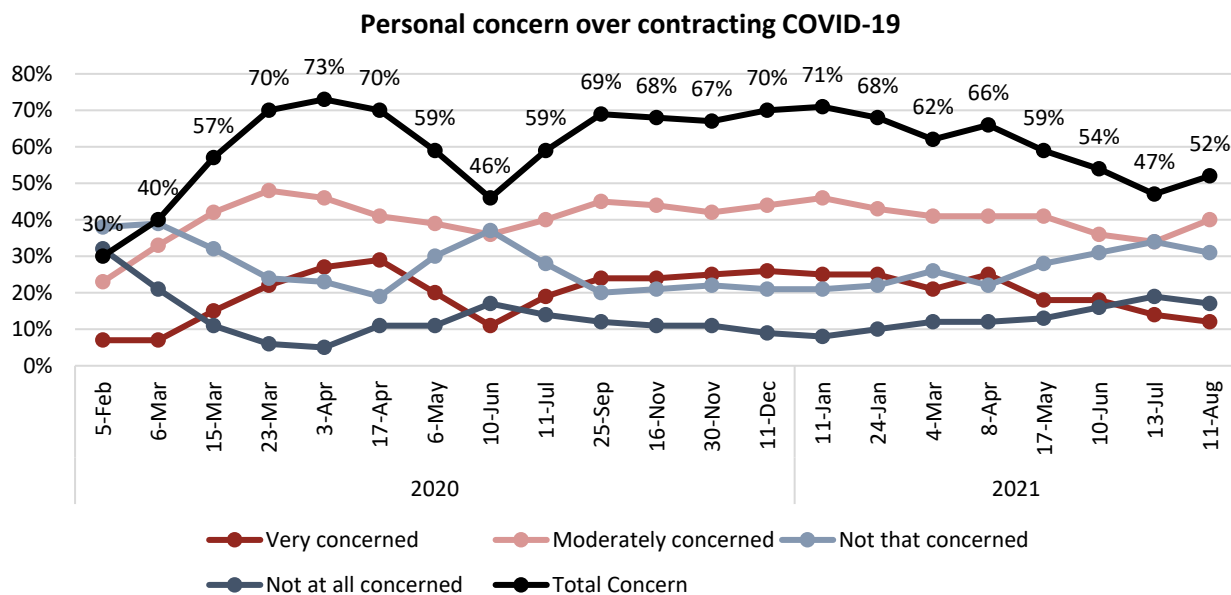
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Part One: COVID concern and government performance

A fourth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada appears to be in its early stages, fueled thus far by [rising cases west of Manitoba](#), but showing signs of escalating in the more populous provinces of [Ontario](#) and [Quebec](#) this week. This surge provides a potentially ominous backdrop to an expected federal election and has public health officials and political leaders urging Canadians to vaccinate themselves as soon as possible.

Personal concern over illness rebounds to half

As levels of the virus vacillate in their communities, so too does Canadians' level of professed concern about becoming sick. Despite [nearly seven-in-ten](#) eligible Canadians being fully immunized, personal concern over COVID-19 infection still remains for 52 per cent. This reality may portend challenges for Elections Canada, which will likely have a [historically high](#) demand for mail-in balloting if an election is held:

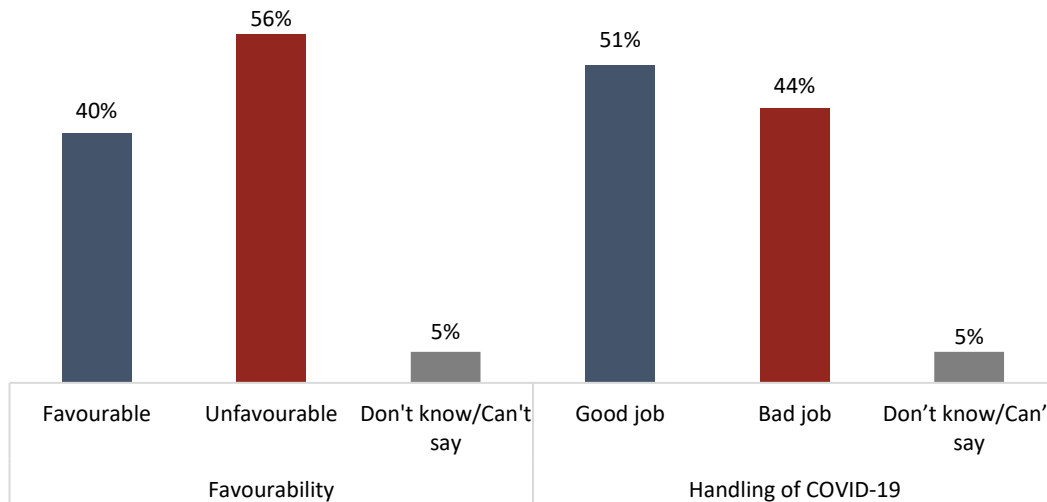


Slight majority of Canadians praise Trudeau's performance

NDP leader Jagmeet Singh has accused Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of [political opportunism](#) as rumours of a pandemic election have swirled in recent weeks. And while the prime minister has responded by lambasting the opposition for [holding up](#) his minority government's agenda, he may benefit from perceptions of his handling of the ongoing national crisis.

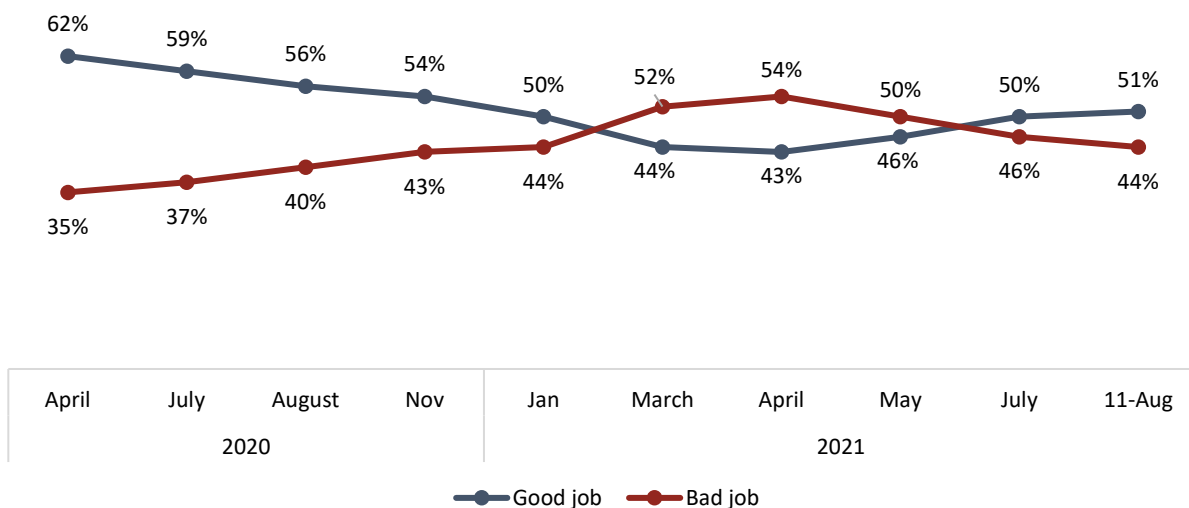
Indeed, 51 per cent say Trudeau has done a good job of handling the pandemic – 11 points higher than the number who say they view him favourably overall.

**Favourability vs Pandemic Handling
Justin Trudeau (All respondents, n=1,615)**



Trudeau's net score on the pandemic (the percentage saying he has done well minus those who say he has done poorly), is at its highest mark of the year at plus seven:

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

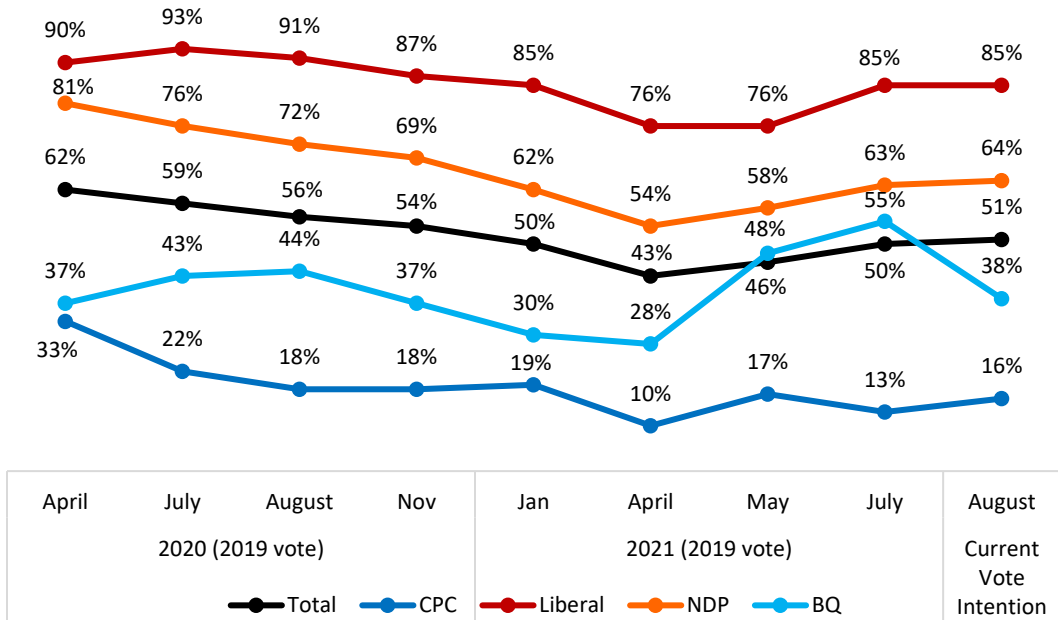


That said, the political implications of COVID-19 continue to be unclear. Trudeau performs very well among those who say they will support the Liberals in a future election. More than four-in-five (85%) of leaning and decided Liberals say he has done a good job. Two-thirds of those who say they will support the NDP in the coming election say that he has done well, and notably, there has been a slight uptick in the number of CPC supporters who say the same. In Quebec however, there has been a significant, 17-point drop in the number of BQ voters who praise Trudeau's performance:

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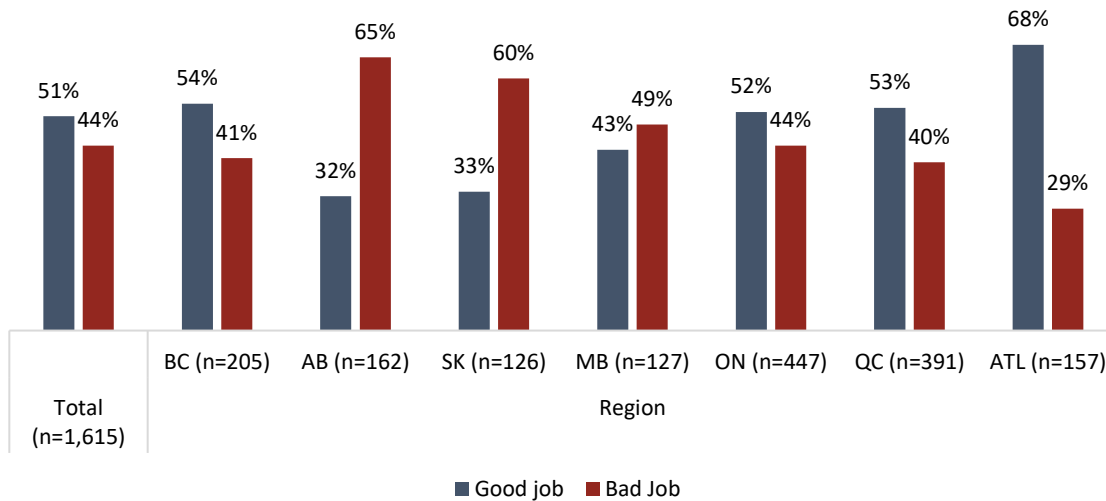
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Percentage saying Justin Trudeau is doing a 'good job' in handling the COVID-19 pandemic by federal vote



As noted above, while Bloc Quebecois supporters are more critical – just 38 per cent say Trudeau has done well on the pandemic file – the province of Quebec is, overall, a source of majority commendation for Trudeau. A slight majority (53%) say he has performed well on pandemic management, a mark near-identical to that received in B.C. and Ontario. Atlantic Canada stands out on the positive end of public opinion while Alberta and Saskatchewan continue to be sources of criticism:

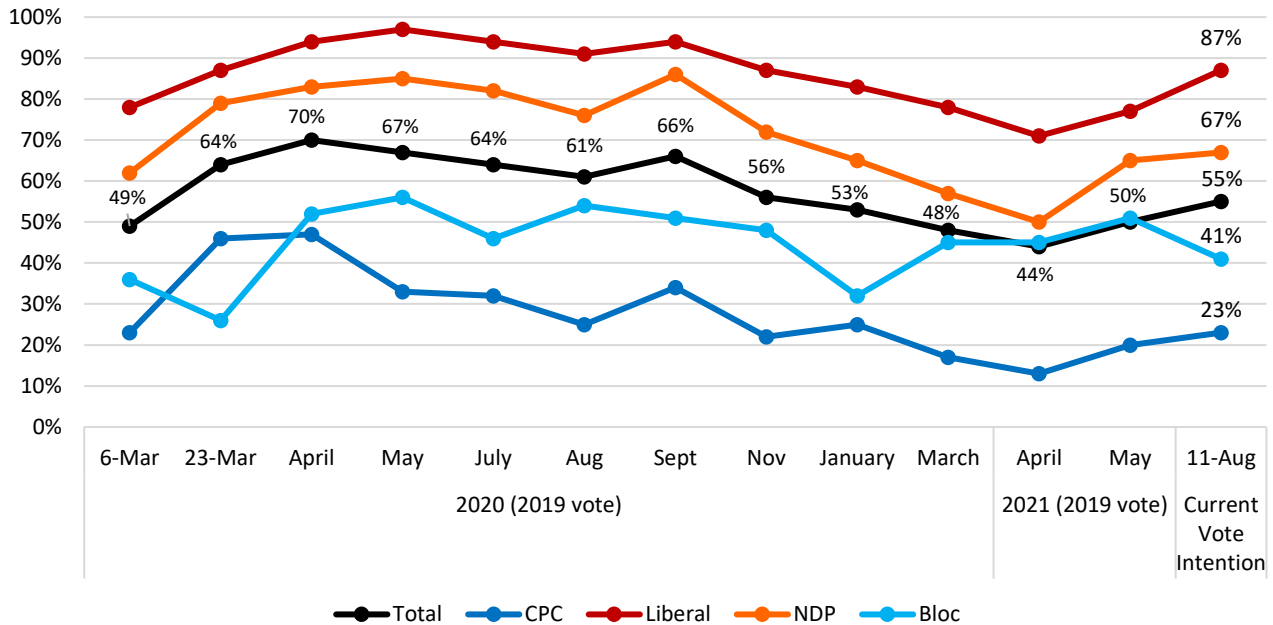
Justin Trudeau handling of COVID-19



Government outpaces PM on pandemic handling

The government itself receives slightly higher levels of approval on COVID-19 than its leader. A slight majority (55%) say that the Liberal Party has handled the pandemic well, including a seven-point boost among those who will support the CPC compared to the reviews given by that group for the prime minister:

Percentage saying federal government has done a 'good job' in handling COVID-19 outbreak by federal vote

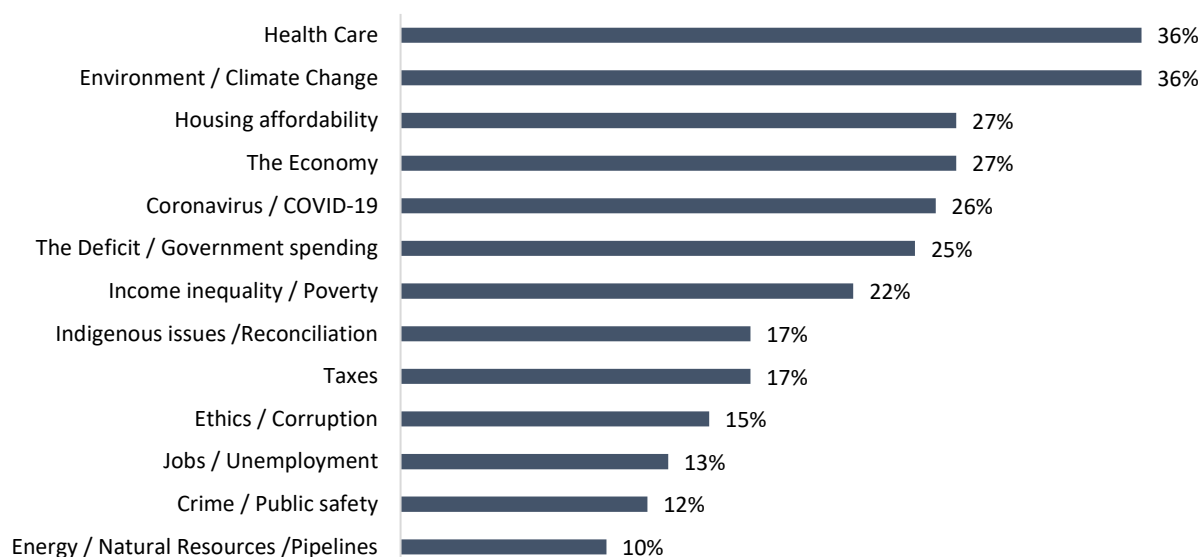


Part Two: Top issues ahead of expected election call

COVID a concern, but being outpaced by climate change and other issues

While pandemic performance will be important, a look at Canadians' top priorities for the federal government finds it isn't the only thing voters will be considering. Two other issues top the list of concerns – health care and climate change. In each case, 36 per cent of Canadians place the issue within their top three. An important second tier finds a number of economic and cost concerns surrounding COVID-19:

**Please rank the issues facing Canada that you care most about
(Up to three selected, items with 10% or greater shown)
(All respondents, n=1,615)**



Despite the surge in COVID-19 cases in the West, that issue does not crack the top three in B.C., Alberta, or Saskatchewan. Wildfires in [British Columbia](#) and [Ontario](#) have likely helped to concretize climate change at the top of those regions' priorities. Also notable is the prominence of the federal deficit as a high priority in the Prairies and Quebec:

Top three issues by region (Unweighted sample sizes)						
BC (n=205)	AB (n=162)	SK (n=126)	MB (n=127)	ON (n=447)	QC (n=391)	ATL (n=157)
Environment / Climate Change 39%	The Economy 36%	The Deficit / Government spending 40%	The Deficit/ Government spending 38%	Environment / Climate Change 35%	Health Care 46%	Health Care 47%
Housing Affordability 39%	Energy/ Natural Resources/ Pipelines 33%	The Economy 34%	Health Care 36%	Health Care 34%	Environment / Climate Change 43%	Environment / Climate Change 33%
Health Care 27%	The Deficit/ Government spending 31%	Health Care 30%	Environment / Climate Change 35%	Coronavirus / COVID-19 32%	The Deficit / Government spending 26%	Housing affordability 30%

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Climate change is a clear priority for those who intend to support the Liberals or New Democrats. In each case at least half choose it as a top concern. This places pressure on CPC leader Erin O’Toole to communicate his vision on the climate file if his party is to sway uncommitted voters from either camp.

Top three issues by current federal vote intention (Weighted sample sizes)			
Liberal (n=522)	CPC (n=449)	NDP (n=272)	Bloc Québécois (n=97*)
Environment / Climate Change 50%	The Deficit / Government spending 53%	Environment / Climate Change 56%	Health Care 50%
Health Care 46%	The Economy 45%	Income inequality / Poverty 44%	Environment / Climate Change 40%
Coronavirus / COVID-19 40%	Taxes 31%	Housing affordability 43%	Income inequality / Poverty 30%

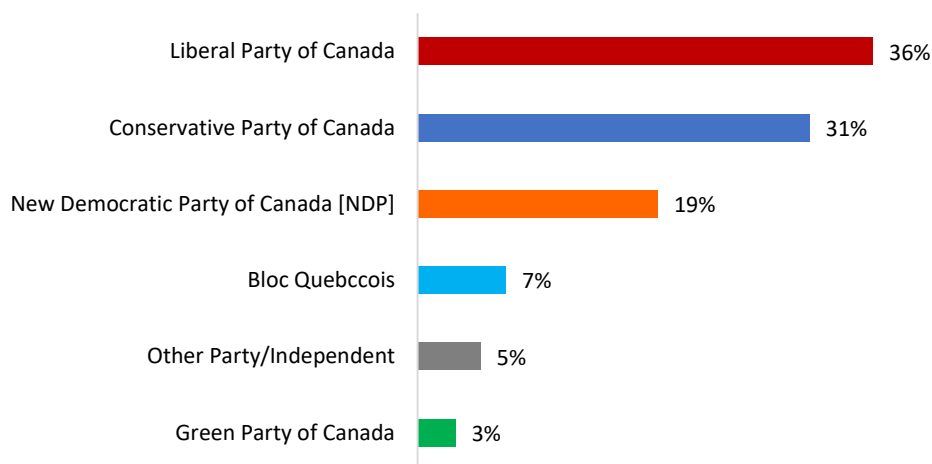
**Small sample size, interpret caution. Note: data for the Green party omitted due to too small of a sample size*

Part Three: Vote intention and potential for movement

Liberals lead by five points

The Liberals maintain a five-point advantage over their Conservative challengers. Justin Trudeau’s party is preferred by 36 per cent of decided and leaning voters, compared to the 31 per cent who prefer Erin O’Toole’s Conservatives. Jagmeet Singh and the NDP are also holding as the choice for one-fifth of voters:

Federal vote intention (Decided and leaning voters, n=1,456)

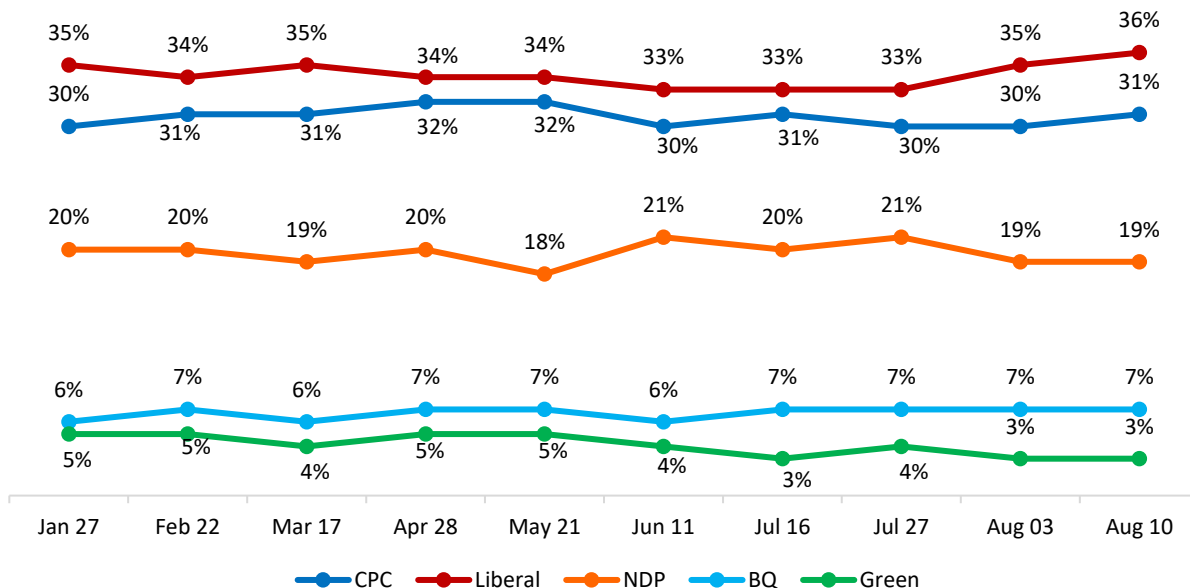


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While these data represent no statistically significant change over previous waves, it is notable that 36 per cent is the highest level of vote intention for the Liberals seen by ARI since the beginning of 2021:

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



Vote by age and gender

Political support along gender lines remains very clear: the Liberals enjoy a plurality of support among women, except among those aged 18 to 34 who lean towards the NDP, while the Conservatives enjoy a plurality of support among men of all ages. Singh and the NDP find their most support in younger groups of both genders:

Federal vote intention, including leaners, decided voters only:							
(Weighted sample sizes)	Total (n=1,456)	Age and Gender					
		Male			Female		
		18-34 (n=161)	35-54 (n=259)	55+ (n=294)	18-34 (n=167)	35-54 (n=261)	55+ (n=313)
Liberal Party	36%	23%	30%	34%	29%	41%	49%
Conservative Party	31%	34%	41%	41%	17%	21%	26%
NDP	19%	24%	12%	10%	43%	23%	12%
Bloc Québécois	7%	5%	6%	9%	2%	6%	9%
Green Party	3%	3%	4%	1%	6%	3%	2%
Other Party	5%	10%	7%	5%	3%	5%	3%

Vote by region

The Liberals continue to garner plurality support from the eastern regions of the country, including vote-rich Quebec and Ontario. The Conservatives find the most support in the Prairies, including a majority in Alberta and Saskatchewan. On the west coast, B.C. remains a competitive battleground between all three of the major parties:

Federal vote intention, including leaners, decided voters only:								
(Unweighted sample sizes)	Total (n=1,456)	Region						
		BC (n=179)	AB (n=150)	SK (n=109)	MB (n=116)	ON (n=407)	QC (n=345)	ATL (n=143)
Liberal Party	36%	33%	25%	14%	32%	41%	34%	46%
Conservative Party	31%	32%	50%	57%	41%	31%	17%	27%
NDP	19%	30%	14%	18%	21%	20%	12%	17%
Bloc Québécois	7%	-	-	-	-	-	28%	-
Green Party	3%	2%	*%	-	2%	2%	6%	4%
Other Party	5%	4%	11%	11%	4%	5%	3%	5%

Cells containing “*%” are statistically zero, though at least one response was received

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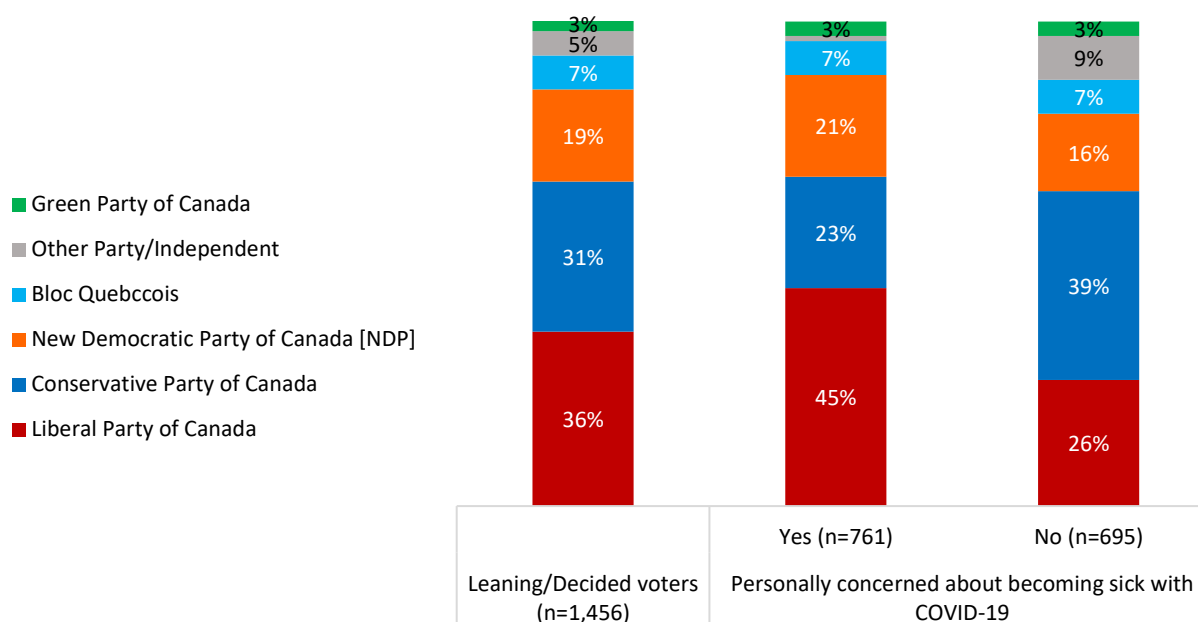
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COVID concern and vote intention

Earlier, this report outlined how Liberal supporters rank COVID-19 much higher as an issue than the prospective voters of other parties. Those who are most worried about getting sick themselves are more likely to vote Liberal as well.

A plurality of those who are personally concerned with getting sick with COVID-19 say they intend to vote Liberal in an upcoming election (45%), while that's true of only one-quarter (26%) of those who say they aren't worried about getting COVID-19. Inversely, a plurality of those who aren't worried about getting sick from COVID-19 intend to vote Conservative (39%), compared to less than one-quarter (23%) who are worried about COVID-19 infection who say the same:

Vote Intention and COVID-19 concern



Part Four: Who's locked in?

It's not easy being Green – and Liberals benefit

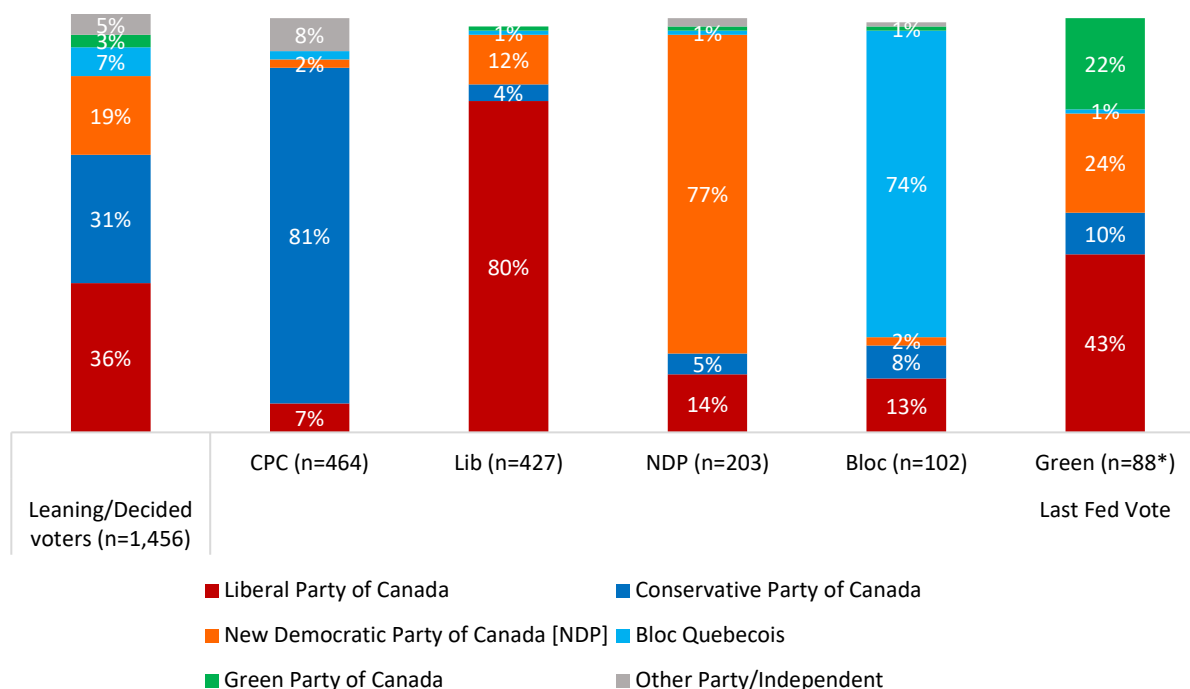
The Green Party of Canada won three seats in the 2019 election — the party's most ever — while picking up their second highest percentage — 6.6 per cent — of the popular vote (they garnered 6.8 per cent of the popular vote in 2008 but won no seats). This year, however, has been defined by continuous internal upheaval between Elizabeth May-era party stalwarts and embattled leader Annamie Paul.

The Liberals appear to be the landing spot for Green Party refugees. Over two-in-five (43%) people who said they voted Green in 2019 say they intend to vote Liberal in an upcoming election. Only one-in-five say they'll stick with the Greens despite their recent troubles. For the other major parties, at least three quarters of leaning and decided voters say they're sticking with the party they voted for in 2019:

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Vote intention by last federal vote



**Small sample size, interpret with caution*

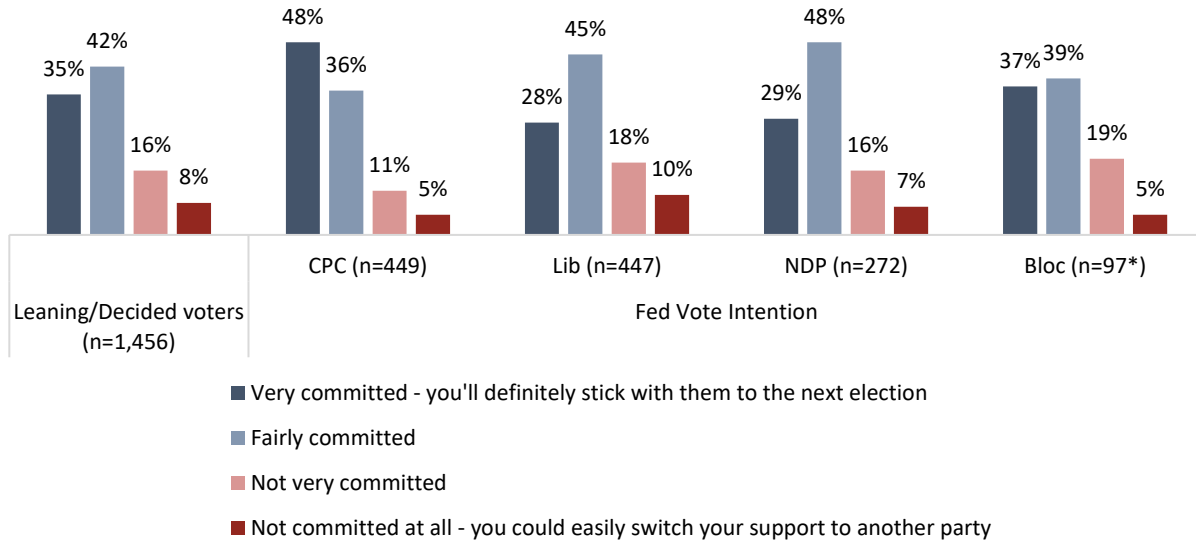
CPC voters most committed, others not ready yet

The above voter continuity lines up well with commitment. Over three-quarters (77%) of leaning and decided voters say they are “very” or “fairly” committed to their party choice. Conservative voters are the most committed; nearly half (48%) say they will definitely vote for Erin O’Toole and his party in the upcoming election:

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How committed are you to that party choice?



**Small sample size, interpret caution. Note: data for the Green party omitted due to too small of a sample size*

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