

As 24 months of pandemic restrictions lift, are Canadians ready – or reluctant – to let go?

Canadians still hesitant to withdraw proof of vaccination measures, masking in indoor spaces

March 15, 2022 – The winding down of COVID-19 restrictions has begun in most of the country, and it's being met with both confidence, and concern.

A new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute, in partnership with the [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation](#), finds Canadians divided about the swiftness of public health measure reduction, and open to keep key restrictions in place for longer if necessary.

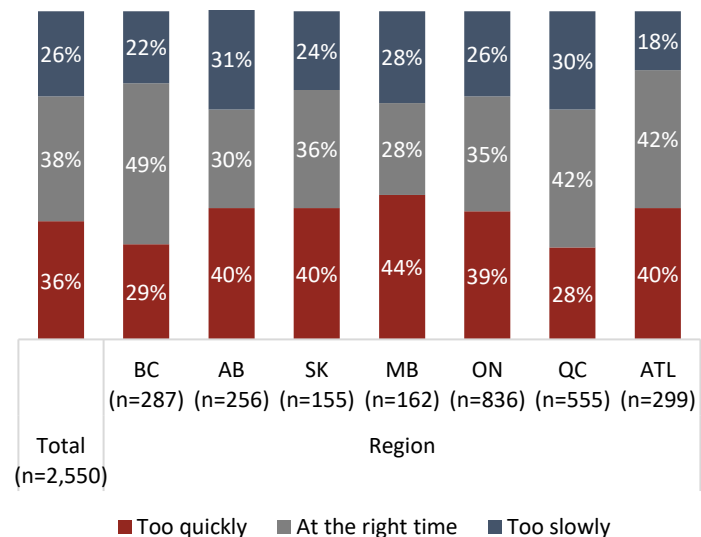
Indeed, large numbers say that removal is happening too quickly (36%), at the right pace (38%), or too slowly (22%). Significant regional differences define the overall findings, as people in various parts of the country react to the situation where they live and gauge the changes through the lenses of their own realities.

Nationally, 73 per cent say they would support continuing masking requirements in public spaces while 64 per cent support proof of vaccination at places like restaurants and theatres in their community.

These data help to underline an emerging trend as governments shift responsibility to Canadians to decide which health measures to continue to follow. While official requirements may soon no longer be in place, many are ready to continue with the habits they have formed over the past two years. Two-thirds (64%) will continue sanitizing their hands in addition to washing, three-in-five will maintain the practice of social distancing, and fully half say – at least for the time being – they will avoid large crowds (53%) and continue to wear a mask in public (50%).

As premiers and public health officials make announcements about the plan for spring, they do so with varied public opinion profiles. In Atlantic Canada, B.C., and Quebec, premiers are perceived as having handled the previous two years well. A majority also say that Canada's chief public health officer Dr. Theresa Tam has done a good job (56%). On the other end of the spectrum, residents in Manitoba and Alberta are overwhelmingly critical of what they have seen from their premiers since the pandemic began.

What best describes your own feelings about the removal of restrictions in your province?



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from March 1 - 4, 2022 among a representative randomized sample of 2,550 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 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding.

The survey was conducted in partnership with [CBC](#) and paid for jointly by ARI and CBC. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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More Key Findings:

- Canadians are equally likely to say that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has done a good job (48%) and a bad job (48%) of handling the pandemic over the past two years. Past Liberal voters are near unanimous in their praise (88%), while two-thirds of past NDP voters agree that Trudeau has acquitted himself well (67%). Conversely, 84 per cent of past CPC voters, and three-in-five past Bloc voters (62%) say he has done a bad job.
- Majorities in every region of the country say sanitizing will be part of their routine for the foreseeable future and at least half say so of keeping extra space between themselves and others.
- Awkward moments have been common in Canadian households over the past two years. More than half (56%) say that they have had a conflict with someone in their close friend circle or family about vaccination since the pandemic began, while 45 per cent have had awkward moments after they turned down invitations to events because of restrictions.

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: As restrictions lift, are Canadians ready or reluctant?

Pandemic precautions and conflict

This is part three in a series of studies ARI conducted in partnership with the CBC. In part one, four-in-five Canadians said the pandemic pulled people further apart (82%) and brought out the worst in people (79%). Part two explored Canadians' mental health and well being after two years of life with COVID-19.

Related:

[COVID at Two: Vast majorities say the pandemic has pulled Canadians apart, brought out the worst in people](#)

[Two Years of COVID-19: Half of Canadians say their mental health has worsened; women under 55 hit hardest](#)

Restrictions were designed to socially – and physically – keep people apart to reduce the spread of the virus. They may have also caused many of the friction points that led Canadians to feel social cohesion was weakening.

Canadians were asked if, since March 2020, they ever found themselves in conflict or awkward moments with family members or friends because of various public health restrictions. More than half (56%) say they experienced conflict related to being vaccinated. Approaching half (45%) say they ran into uncomfortable situations where they had to turn down invitations to get-togethers because of restrictions. Two-in-five (38%) say masking was a point of contention at times between them and people they know, while one-quarter (25%) say conflict arose because of other rules-breaking.

Albertans and Saskatchewanians are more likely to report conflicts in general and specifically around vaccines and masking. Meanwhile, in Quebec and Atlantic Canada, one-third say they managed to avoid these sorts of unpleasant interactions altogether:

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Please tell us whether you found yourself in conflict or an awkward moment with family or friends over:								
	Total (n=2,550)	Region						
		BC (n=287)	AB (n=256)	SK (n=155)	MB (n=162)	ON (n=836)	QC (n=555)	ATL (n=299)
Getting vaccinated	56%	56%	68%	71%	58%	56%	50%	49%
Turning down invitations to gatherings because of restrictions	45%	46%	46%	46%	53%	47%	43%	37%
Masking	38%	37%	53%	54%	42%	38%	31%	29%
Breaking curfews/ not following the rules	25%	25%	32%	29%	29%	24%	23%	22%
No, no conflicts or awkward moments in these situations	26%	27%	18%	18%	22%	25%	32%	33%

Two-in-five (38%) men over the age of 54 say they didn't encounter any conflicts over masking, vaccinations or other restrictions, the most of any demographic. Canadians under 55 are more likely than those over that age to say conflict arose with friends and family over vaccinations, peaking at two-thirds (64%) of 35- to 54-year-old women who say so ([see detailed tables](#)).

Past NDP voters are the most likely (54%) to say they encountered uncomfortable situations when they turned down an invitation to a gathering because of restrictions. Those who voted for the People's Party of Canada in the September election report they encountered significantly more conflict over vaccines (78%), masking (65%) and other rule breaking (43%) than other partisans:

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	Total (n=2,550)	2021 Federal Vote				
		CPC (n=729)	Liberal (n=709)	NDP (n=385)	BQ (n=160)	PPC (n=109)
Getting vaccinated	56%	60%	51%	58%	46%	78%
Turning down invitations to gatherings because of restrictions	45%	46%	44%	54%	46%	39%
Masking	38%	44%	28%	42%	29%	65%
Breaking curfews/ not following the rules	25%	29%	19%	30%	19%	43%
No, no conflicts or awkward moments in these situations	26%	24%	30%	24%	30%	15%

Support for restrictions persists as provinces move forward

The route to spring reopenings has been plotted in many provinces across the country. Alberta and Saskatchewan have taken a head start: in those two provinces, nearly all public health restrictions have been lifted as of the [beginning of March](#). [Manitoba](#) is set to follow by March 15.

Other provinces have taken a more gradual approach. While [Quebec](#) removed nearly all other pandemic-related restrictions last Saturday, it plans to keep mandatory masking in place until at least mid-April. [Ontario](#) will remove most mask requirements by March 21, with the remaining public health orders removed by April 27. [In British Columbia](#), the mask mandate for low-risk indoor public spaces was lifted last week, while the province's vaccine passport system will end on April 8. The [Atlantic provinces](#) are each planning to lift restrictions in phases.

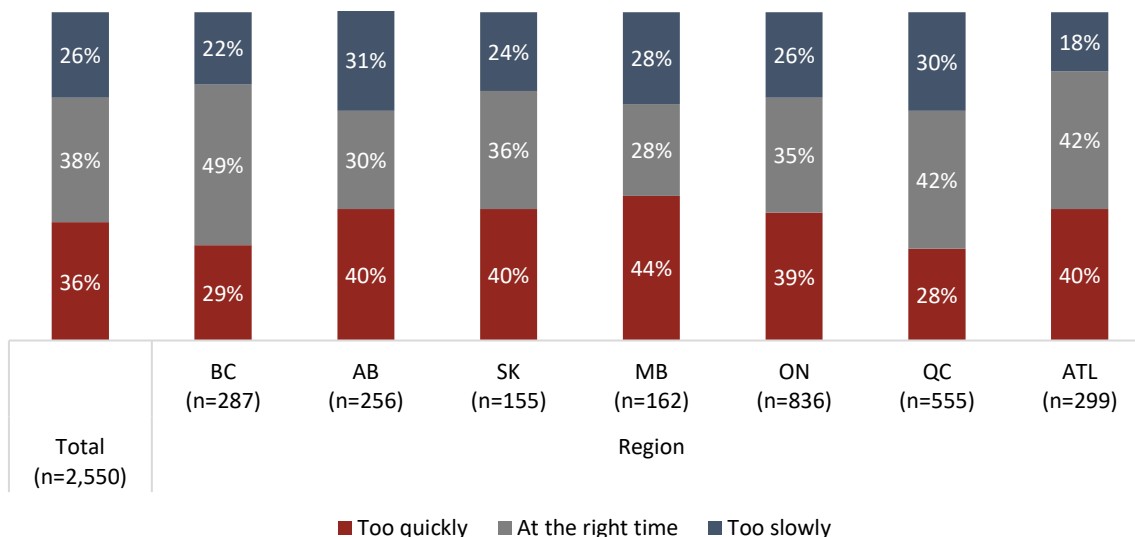
Canadians are by no means unified about what approach is best. Equal-sized groups say their province is reopening at the right time (38%) or too quickly (36%), while another one-quarter (26%) would like to speed up the pace.

Notably, at least two-in-five in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario and Atlantic Canada said at the time of fielding (March 1-4) that their province was moving 'too quickly':

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What best describes your own feelings about the removal of restrictions in your province?



Despite the lifting of these requirements, masking and vaccine passports are supported by the majority of Canadians. Approaching three-quarters (73%) say they support wearing a mask in a public indoor space, while two-thirds (64%) say the same of vaccine checks to enter restaurants and stores in their community.

There is regional variance for both measures. Though a majority support masking indoors in every region in the country, that support falls to three-in-five in Alberta, the lowest level in Canada. Albertans, too, are the least likely to support vaccine passports at 49 per cent, the only province where support doesn't reach three-in-five.

Canadians will still be required to be fully vaccinated to travel the United States for the foreseeable future. Seven-in-ten (70%) support that measure. Albertans, again, are the least likely to support the full vaccine requirement to travel internationally, though more than half still agree that restriction should remain in place.

Proof of a negative test – or evidence of COVID-19 recovery within 90 days – is still required to travel to the United States. Canadians are the least supportive of the requirement for testing, but still three-in-five (61%) are in favour of testing at the border. As with other measures, those in Alberta (49%) are the least likely to be on board with border testing.

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Regardless of whether these measures are still in place where you live, do you support or oppose each of the following:
(Percent who select 'support' or 'strongly support' shown)

	Total (n=2,550)	Region						
		BC (n=287)	AB (n=256)	SK (n=155)	MB (n=162)	ON (n=836)	QC (n=555)	ATL (n=299)
Wearing a mask in public indoor spaces	73%	81%	60%	67%	70%	75%	72%	81%
Mandatory vaccination to travel internationally/ cross the border with the U.S.	70%	73%	53%	63%	67%	70%	72%	78%
Vaccine passports to enter restaurants/ stores/etc. in your community	64%	71%	49%	60%	61%	67%	62%	71%
Mandatory COVID testing to travel internationally/ cross the border with the U.S.	61%	63%	49%	56%	58%	61%	62%	73%

Support for all four measures is weaker among men, especially those under the age of 55. Women over that age, conversely, are the most likely to support masking, vaccination requirements and testing at the border. Still, at least half of all demographics are in favour of all four measures ([see detailed tables](#)).

Politics appears to play a significant role in whether or not a person supports masking, vaccine passports or border testing. Past CPC voters are much less likely to support masking requirements, mandatory vaccination to cross the border, vaccine passports to enter restaurants, and mandatory COVID testing at the border than past Liberal, NDP and Bloc voters. Among those who voted for the People's Party of Canada in the fall, support for the measures peaks at the one-in-eight in favour of masking policies and COVID testing at the border:

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		CPC (n=729)	Liberal (n=709)	NDP (n=385)	BQ (n=160)	PPC (n=109)
Wearing a mask in public indoor spaces	73%	56%	92%	92%	79%	12%
Mandatory vaccination to travel internationally/ cross the border with the U.S.	70%	50%	90%	90%	82%	7%
Vaccine passports to enter restaurants/ stores/etc. in your community	64%	43%	89%	85%	72%	5%
Mandatory COVID testing to travel internationally/ cross the border with the U.S.	61%	43%	76%	81%	73%	12%

What will Canadians continue, regardless of requirement?

Regardless of whether or not they're mandated or recommended by provincial or federal authorities, many Canadians say they will continue to take precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Two-thirds (64%) say they plan to keep sanitizing their hands, while three-in-five plan to keep social distancing.

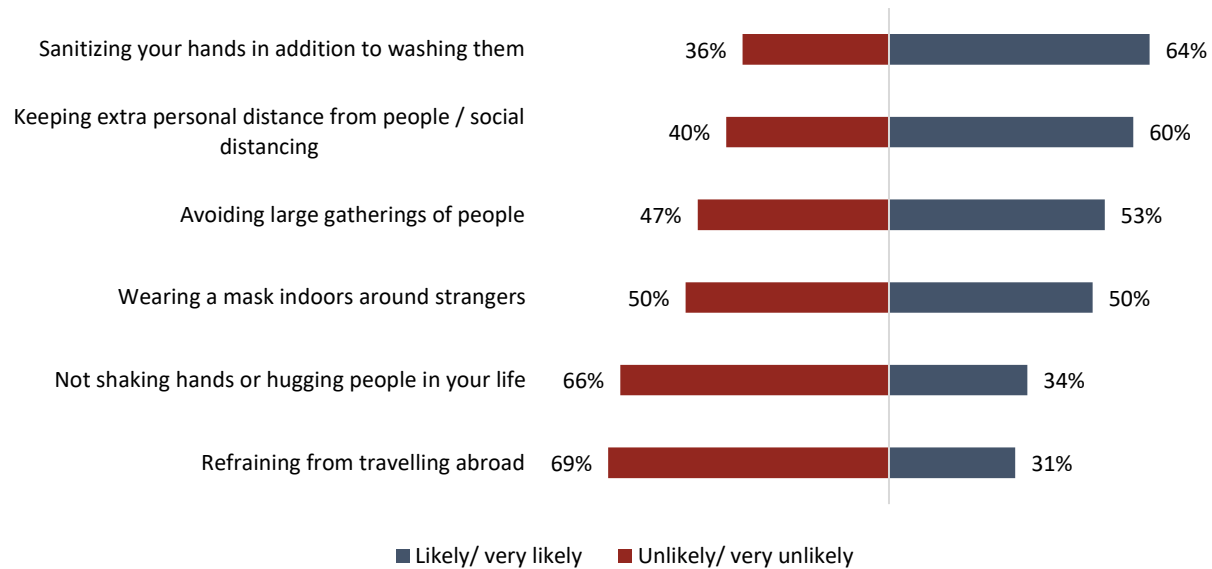
On other measures, Canadians are more split. Half (53%) say they will avoid large gatherings, half (47%) won't. Same with wearing a mask indoors around strangers.

As to avoiding shaking hands or hugging, more Canadians are unlikely to continue with that practice (66%) than to avoid physical contact. Those who say they will refrain from travelling abroad (31%) are in the minority.

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**How likely is it that you'll keep doing these things
after public health restrictions are lifted?
(All respondents, n=2,550)**



Three-in-five in B.C. (58%) and Atlantic Canada (61%) say they'll continue to avoid large gatherings; less than half in Alberta (45%), Saskatchewan (47%) and Quebec (47%) say the same. Overall, Atlantic Canadians are the most likely to continue with precautions, with one exception: one-third (33%) say they will refrain from hugging or shaking hands, approximately the national average:

How likely is it that you'll keep doing them after public health restrictions are lifted? (Percent who select 'likely' or 'very likely' shown)								
	Total (n=2,550)	Region						
		BC (n=287)	AB (n=256)	SK (n=155)	MB (n=162)	ON (n=836)	QC (n=555)	ATL (n=299)
Sanitizing your hands in addition to washing them	64%	63%	62%	69%	68%	65%	62%	71%
Keeping extra personal distance from people / social distancing	60%	66%	51%	60%	59%	61%	57%	69%
Avoiding large gatherings of people	53%	58%	45%	47%	50%	56%	47%	61%
Wearing a mask indoors around strangers	50%	53%	41%	43%	59%	56%	38%	63%
Not shaking hands or hugging people in your life	34%	37%	24%	33%	35%	32%	40%	33%
Refraining from travelling abroad	31%	34%	29%	30%	37%	30%	27%	47%

Women are more likely than men – and older Canadians more so than younger ones of the same gender – to say they'll stick to pandemic-era habits in the absence of restrictions ([see detailed tables](#)).

Across the political spectrum, too, there is variance as to who are likely to continue precautions after public health orders are rescinded. Past Liberal voters are the most likely to continue sanitizing, distancing, masking and avoiding travel, followed closely by past NDP voters. Three-in-five (57%) of those who voted Conservative in the last federal election say they'll keep sanitizing their hands. For other measures, more than half are unlikely to continue them. An overwhelming majority of past PPC voters say it's unlikely they'll be keeping up any of these pandemic practices:

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Sanitizing your hands in addition to washing them	64%	57%	75%	69%	63%	24%
Keeping extra personal distance from people / social distancing	60%	45%	75%	72%	58%	15%
Avoiding large gatherings of people	53%	36%	69%	66%	50%	12%
Wearing a mask indoors around strangers	50%	32%	70%	69%	40%	6%
Not shaking hands or hugging people in your life	34%	26%	42%	34%	44%	14%
Refraining from travelling abroad	31%	24%	37%	37%	34%	17%

Part Two: Managing the pandemic – Assessments of leaders and governments

Canadians have had two years' worth of COVID-19 restrictions, policies, words and actions from their political leaders to evaluate them on. Respondents were asked how they assessed what they saw overall since the pandemic was officially declared by the World Health Organization in March 2020.

Federal performance: Prime Minister Justin Trudeau

Canadians are evenly divided on the man holding the top job in Canada: 48 per cent say Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has done a 'good' or 'very good' job and 48 per cent say he's done a 'bad' or 'very bad' job. However, of those who believe Trudeau's performed poorly, 31 per cent say he's very badly handled the COVID-19 pandemic, twice as many who believe instead he's done a 'very good' job.

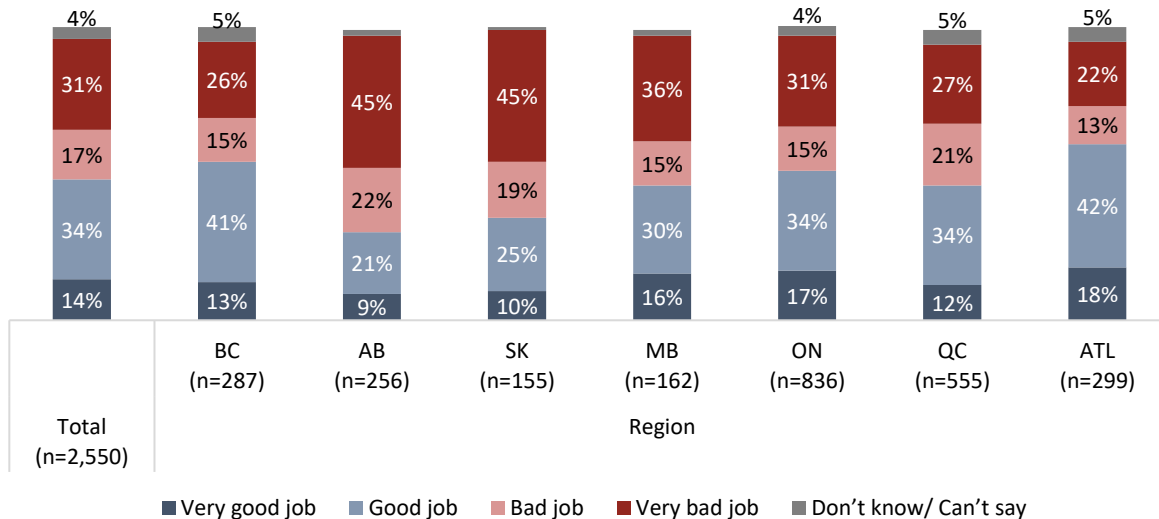
At least one-in-five in all regions in the country assign Trudeau the lowest assessment on his pandemic handling. Albertans and Saskatchewanians are the most negative: two-in-five (45%) in each province believe he's done a 'very bad' job on the COVID-19 file:

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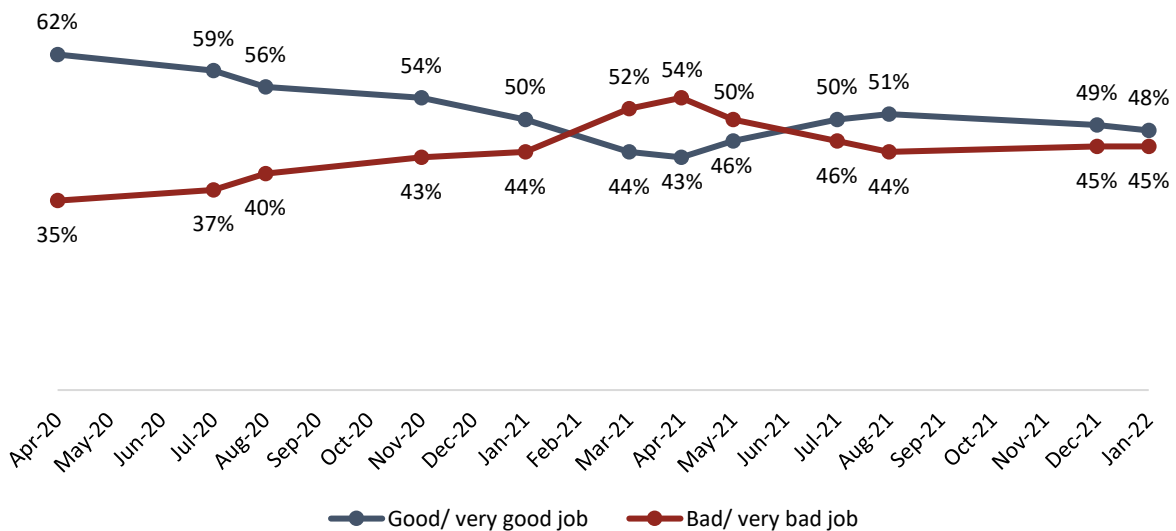
Considering the whole of the last two years overall, do you think the following have done a good job or bad job of handling the COVID-19 pandemic?

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau



The two-year report card for Trudeau aligns with recent assessments of his performance navigating the country through the pandemic. Only during the initial vaccine rollout – [amid concerns doses were arriving too slowly](#) – did the number of Canadians who offered criticism outnumbered those who offered praise.

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

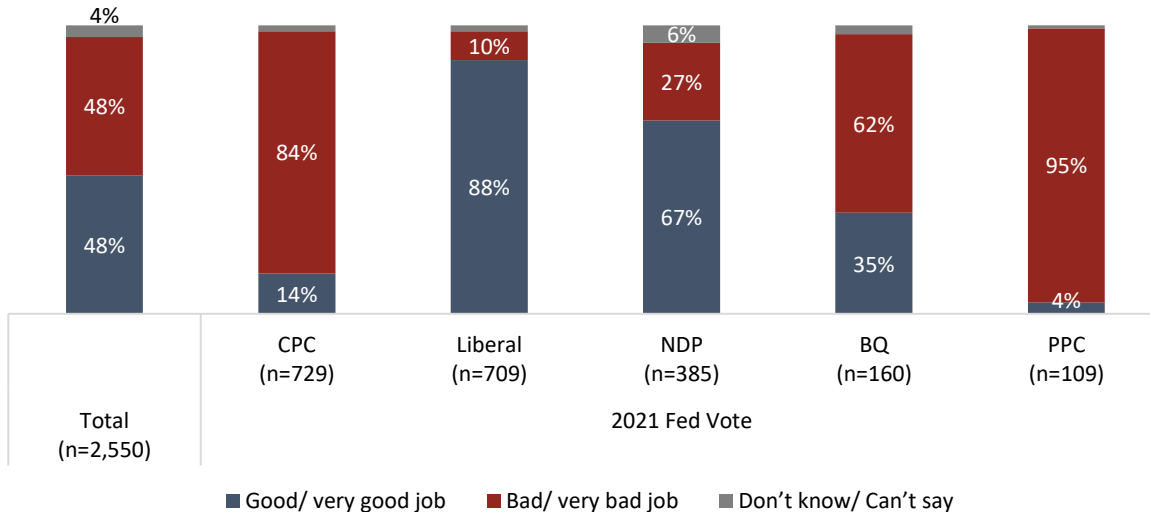


Women, led by those over the age of 54, are more positive in their assessment of Trudeau. At least half of women of all ages say he's done well traversing the pandemic. Three-in-five men aged 18- to 34-years-old disagree ([see detailed tables](#)). An overwhelming majority of past Liberal voters applaud their leader for his efforts over the last two years. They are joined by two-thirds of past NDP voters. For

supporters of other parties, a majority instead give Trudeau a thumbs down, including nearly all of those who voted for the PPC (95%) and CPC (84%) in September:

Considering the whole of the last two years overall, do you think the following have done a good job or bad job of handling the COVID-19 pandemic?

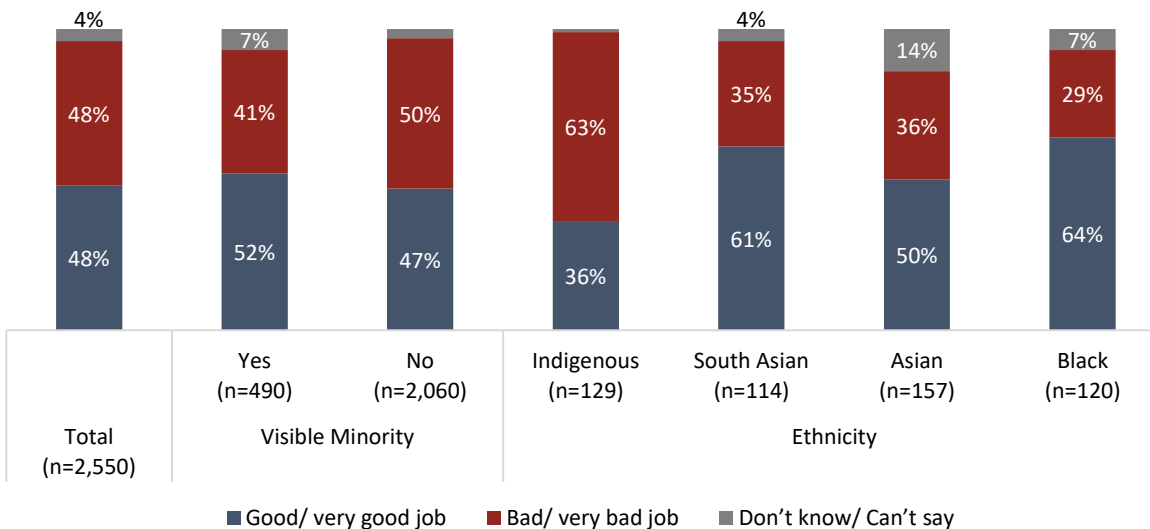
Prime Minister Justin Trudeau



Canadians who identify as visible minorities are slightly more likely to say Trudeau has handled the pandemic well than those who do not. However, there are significant differences between Indigenous and South Asian respondents on this matter:

Considering the whole of the last two years overall, do you think the following have done a good job or bad job of handling the COVID-19 pandemic?

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau

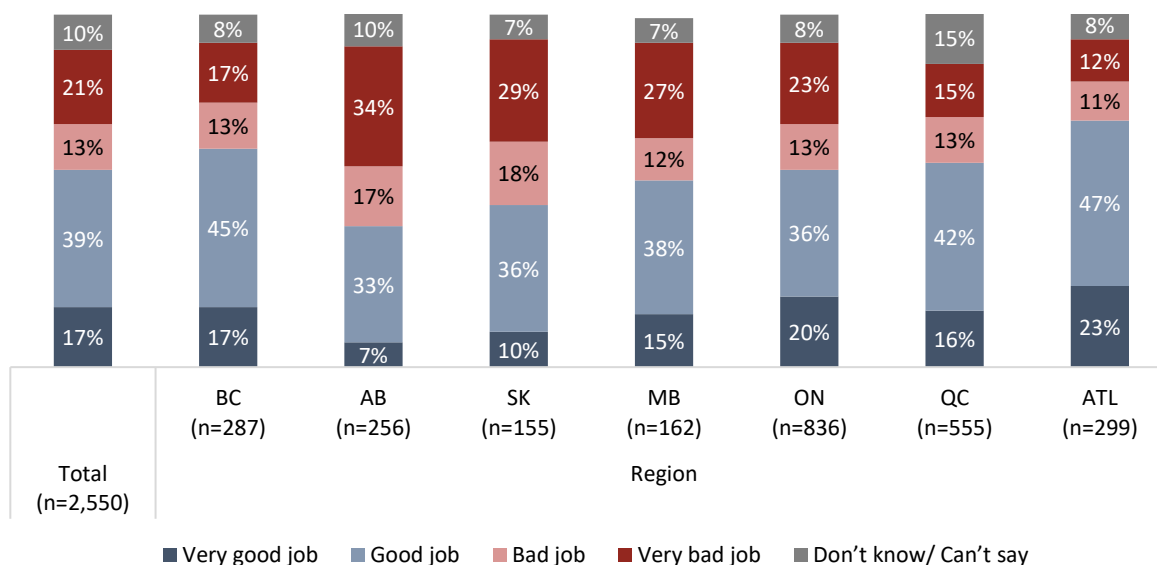


Chief public health officer Dr. Theresa Tam

Overall, Canadians say they are more pleased than dissatisfied when it comes to the country’s top doctor. More than half (56%) say chief public health officer Dr. Theresa Tam has handled the pandemic well, while one-third (34%) say the opposite, including one-fifth (21%) who say she’s done a ‘very bad’ job.

The regional assessment varies. Half in Alberta and Saskatchewan say she’s done poorly over the last two years while seven-in-ten in the Atlantic provinces offer praise:

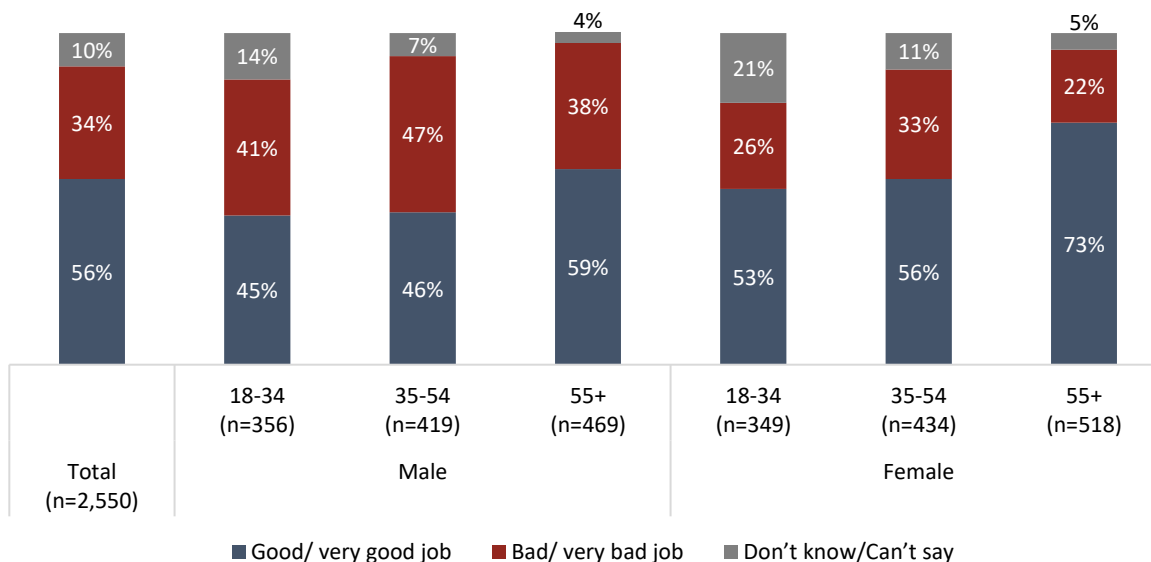
**Considering the whole of the last two years overall, do you think the following have done a good job or bad job of handling the COVID-19 pandemic?
Canada’s Chief Public Health Officer Theresa Tam**



Women are more likely than men to say Tam’s done well in her role since March 2020. Women older than the age of 54 are the most likely to offer a positive assessment: three-quarters (73%) applaud her efforts:

Considering the whole of the last two years overall, do you think the following have done a good job or bad job of handling the COVID-19 pandemic?

Canada's Chief Public Health Officer Theresa Tam



Provincial performance: Premiers

While the federal government sets COVID-19 policy on matters relating to travel and borders, it has been Canada's premiers and provincial governments that instituted the bulk of restrictions to counter the spread of the virus. Approaches varied across the country, and so do assessments offered by residents, depending on where they live.

On average, Atlantic Canadians are most satisfied with the pandemic performance of their premiers. Seven-in-ten in the Maritimes say their own respective premier has done well handling COVID-19. The Atlantic Bubble restricted interprovincial travel from outside of those provinces and [was heralded as a success](#) in keeping the virus out. [Cases in those provinces](#) have been consistently lower than others across the country.

B.C. has had [fewer officially confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths](#) than any Canadian province outside of Atlantic Canada. Perhaps that's why Premier John Horgan enjoys the broad approval for his COVID-19 handling. Three-in-five (62%) British Columbians believe Horgan has done a good job handling the pandemic, double the number (31%) who disagree.

Quebec suffered some of the worst rates of deaths in [long-term care homes](#) during the initial wave of the pandemic. Later waves saw Quebec impose curfews [at two different times](#), the only province in Canada to do so. While one-quarter (23%) say Premier François Legault did a 'very bad' job over the last two years of handling COVID-19, as many (25%) say instead he's done very well.

More than two-in-five Ontarians (44%) say Ontario Premier Doug Ford has done a good job on the COVID-19 file, but they are outnumbered by those who disagree. The government's handling of schools has been a frequent source of criticism, as the province has closed them for in-person learning [more](#)

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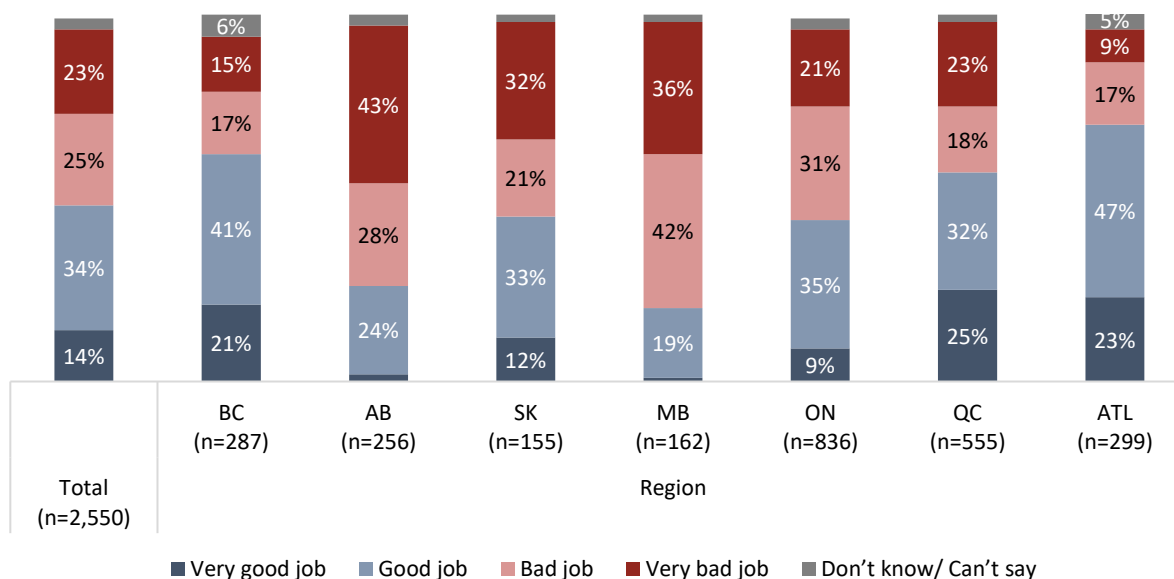
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often than anywhere in Canada. Ontarians also [blamed Ford's government for a "preventable" third wave](#) earlier in the pandemic.

Still, Ford fares better than other premiers to the west. Half (52%) in Saskatchewan say Premier Scott Moe has done a bad job handling the pandemic, including three-in-ten (32%) who say he's done very poorly. That amounts to a bright spot of positivity for the prairie provinces. In Alberta, seven-in-ten say Premier Jason Kenney has mishandled the pandemic. In Manitoba, now-former premier Brian Pallister and current leader Heather Stefanson have received a passing grade from the fewest constituents of any provincial leader – one-in-five (20%). [Manitoba is second only to Quebec](#) in per capita deaths from COVID-19.

Alberta and Saskatchewan [have had high rates of COVID-19 cases when compared to other provinces](#), while both trailing the pack in [first dose vaccination percentage](#). Criticism of Moe's pandemic handling has been higher in recent months, while Kenney has received mostly negative grades on the matter in the last 12 months (to see the history of appraisal of the premiers' handling of the pandemic, [click here](#)).

**Considering the whole of the last two years overall, do you think the following
have done a good job or bad job of handling the COVID-19 pandemic?
Your provincial premier**



Provincial chief public health officers

Chief medical officers across the country were thrust into the spotlight from bureaucratic obscurity as they became the face of daily COVID-19 updates during the initial phases of the pandemic. [Adulation](#) eventually gave way to [abuse](#) as the pandemic wore on.

Still, after two years, approval outweighs criticism for most of the province's top doctors with one exception: Dr. Deena Hinshaw in Alberta. There half (52%) say she's done a bad job handling the COVID-19 pandemic, while two-in-five (42%) disagree. Atlantic Canadians are the most satisfied with

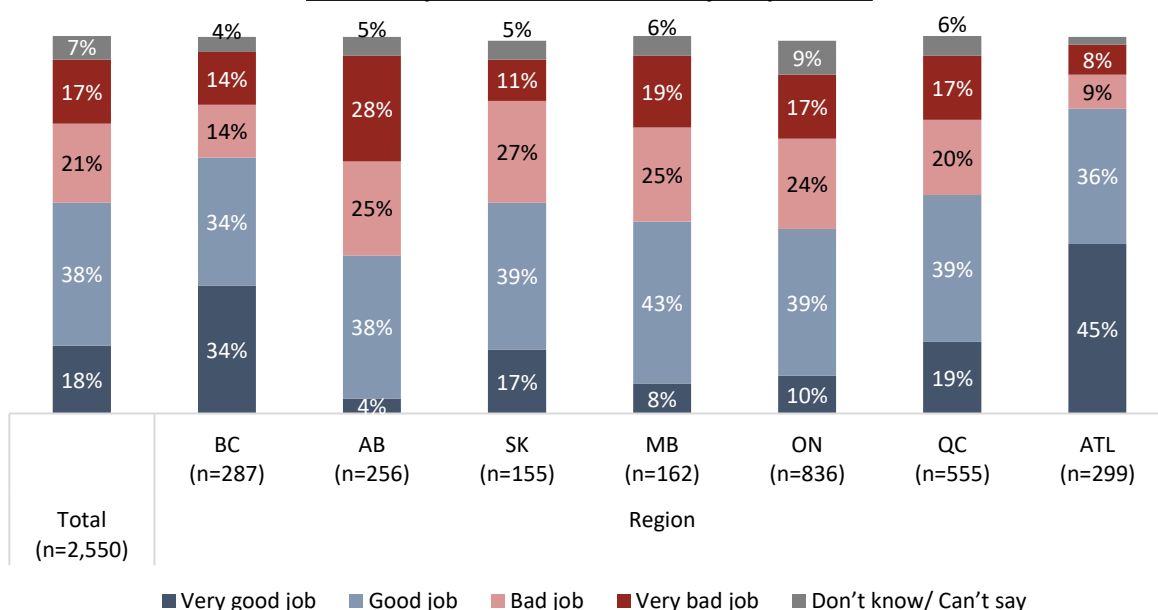
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what they've seen from their chief public health officers – four-in-five (81%) say they've done well overall since March 2020:

Considering the whole of the last two years overall, do you think the following have done a good job or bad job of handling the COVID-19 pandemic?

The chief public health officer in your province



The trend for all chief public health officers however heads in one direction: down. Top doctors received nearly universal praise across the country during the initial months of the pandemic – with the approval of at least seven-in-ten in August 2020. Now only the Atlantic Canadian officers and Dr. Bonnie Henry in B.C. reach this mark.

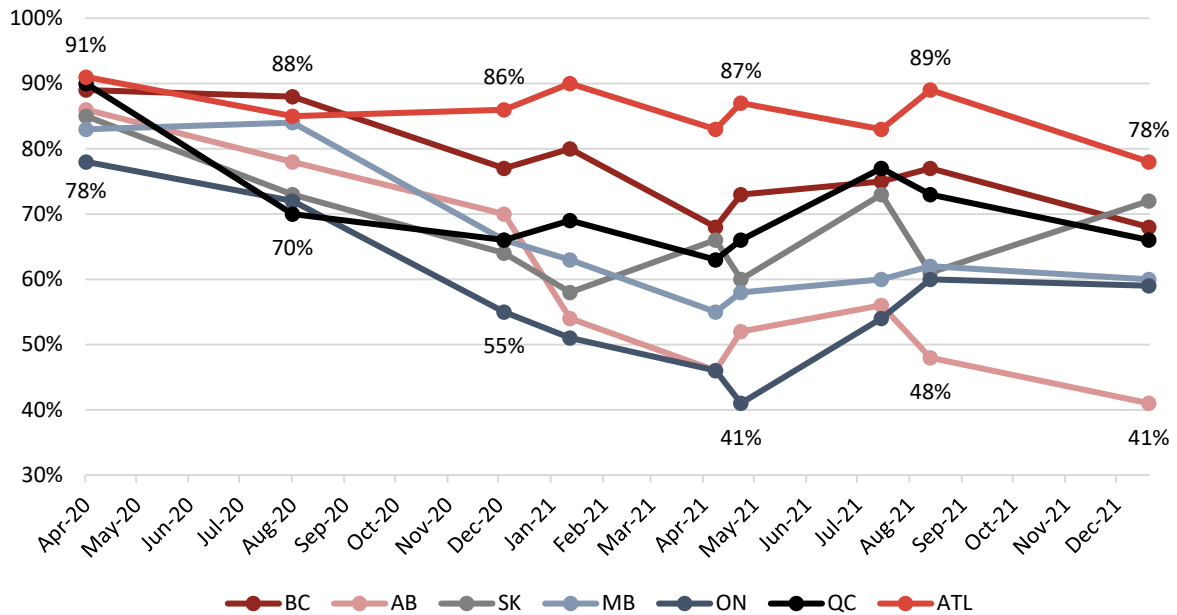
For Hinshaw, the decline has been steep from the peak of 86 per cent approval that inspired Albertans to put [her face](#) on [charitable T-shirts](#).

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**Provincial chief public health officers' handling of COVID-19 pandemic
(Percent who select 'good' or 'very good' job shown)**



Up Next: The ARI-CBC series continues with a look at Canadians' views of the health-care system after two years of pandemic trials.

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

For detailed results by ethnicity, [click here](#).