

CPC Contenders: Poilievre rallies Conservative, PPC base, Charest has more room to grow across the centre

Supporters of each potential leader hold differing views on policy, optimism for the country's future

March 22, 2022 – In choosing their third leader in five years, Conservative Party of Canada members face a weighty decision: pick the candidate that most reflects the values and image of the party today, even if it means limiting the size of its overall electoral base, or choose a person who moves the party away from its current north star on the hopes of broadening its appeal.

A new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute takes a deep look at the conservative universe in 2022, and in particular, the strengths and weaknesses of the two leaders considered current front-runners to challenge the Liberal Party in a future election.

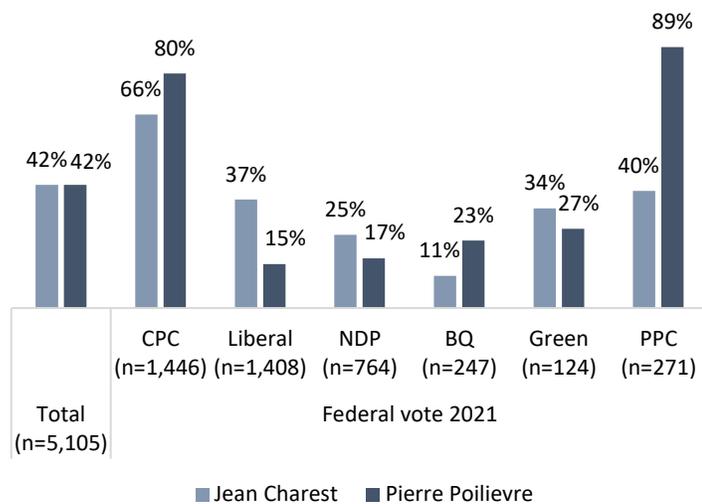
These data also offer insight into broader areas of agreement and tension in the Conservative universe, whomever ultimately emerges as party steward.

Parliamentary veteran Pierre Poilievre and former Quebec Premier and deputy Prime Minister Jean Charest appear to have the early advantage in a long race.

Each appear capable of growing CPC support to approximately 42 per cent in a federal election. Poilievre gets there by inspiring and rallying the current core Conservative base, along with voters who turned to the PPC in the last election. For Charest, the route depends on convincing past centrist voters to look at a more moderate Conservative party under his leadership.

The latter group holds key potential benefits for a Charest leadership, as he earns higher levels of support in Ontario and draws interest from 37 per cent of those who supported the Liberal Party in 2021. Poilievre is of interest to 15 per cent of those who supported Justin Trudeau's party six months ago and finds his more ardent supporters in Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Percentage who would consider each candidate by federal vote 2021



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from March 10-15, 2022 among a representative randomized sample of 5,105 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 self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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More Key Findings:

- Three-quarters of People's Party supporters choose Poilievre as their most appealing of CPC leadership candidates; by contrast, just three per cent of this group choose Charest.
- Potential CPC supporters in the Prairies are divided about the direction of the party; just over half say it should continue to stand for conservative values rather than move to the political centre. In B.C., Ontario, Quebec, and Atlantic Canada, potential CPC voters call for a shift away from traditional values.
- Half who would consider voting Conservative with Poilievre as leader (53%) say the CPC should take a stand for conservative values going forward; by contrast more than three-in-five (63%) who would consider the CPC under Charest say the party should move to the centre on social issues.
- One-third (32%) of those who would consider the CPC under Poilievre have optimism for the future of Canada, notably lower than the half (48%) who'd consider backing the party under Charest who say the same.
- Three-in-five potential Charest supporters (58%) would accept a continuance of the federal carbon tax in search of electoral support. Poilievre supporters are far less likely (38%) to be willing to adopt this policy.

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 Three: Policies and trade-offs**Introduction**

For the third time in five years, the Conservative Party of Canada finds itself in a leadership race. Months after the party once again won the popular vote but failed to win enough seats to form government in a federal election, former leader Erin O'Toole was ousted Feb. 2. O'Toole's reign as CPC leader lasted less than 17 months.

Candidates must declare by April 19 for an election scheduled for Sept. 10. So far, the contest has attracted an ever-growing number of would-be leaders. That said, two front-runners are emerging early. Pierre Poilievre, a member of parliament since 2004, was the first out of the gate to declare his candidacy, three days after the caucus revolt forced O'Toole out. Former Quebec premier, Mulroney-era cabinet minister and Progressive Conservative leader Jean Charest entered the fray a month later. Brampton mayor and former Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario leader Patrick Brown is also in the mix, along with federal Conservative MP Leslyn Lewis, having established her political bona fides during the last CPC leadership race.

The field also includes lesser nationally known candidates including Conservative MP Scott Aitchison; Ontario independent MPP Roman Baber; Joseph Bourgault, CEO of Bourgault Tillage Tools; and Marc Dalton, a Conservative MP from British Columbia.

In canvassing Canadians over which would-be candidates they found most appealing, the Angus Reid Institute presented respondents with a list of people that satisfied two core criteria at time of fielding: they had either already declared their intentions or were on the record actively considering a run at the CPC's top job, and they carried enough name recognition or early organizational support to be considered a serious contender. As the race evolves, so too will ARI's candidate list.

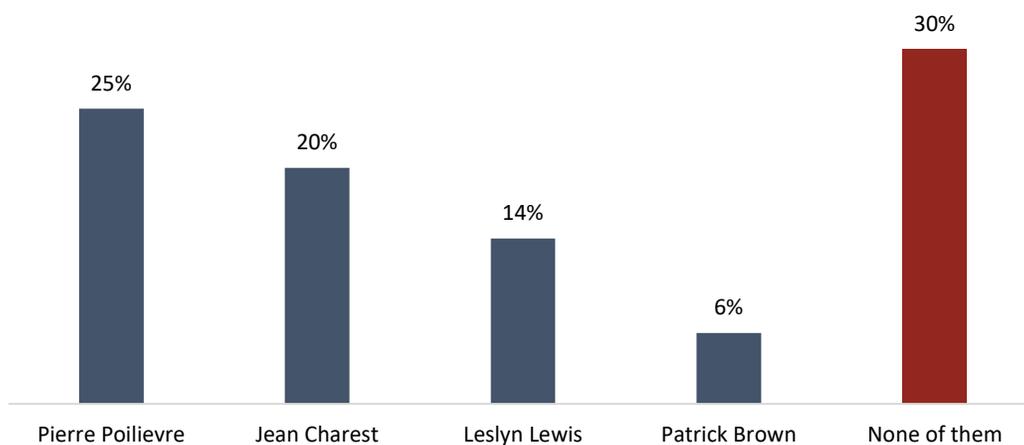
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Part One: Candidate appeal and the CPC vote universe

Between March 10 and 15, respondents were asked who – if any – appealed to them among the four now-declared candidates and one who was thinking about it at the time but later withdrew himself from consideration (Michael Chong). Among this group, Poilievre leads in appeal, with one-quarter of Canadians saying they find him most appealing. Charest is close behind with one-in-five who find his candidacy enticing. Meanwhile, 14 per cent of the general population say they find Lewis the most appealing leadership candidate:

**Most appealing candidate among early main contenders
(All respondents, n=5,105)**



CPC voters like Poilievre, Charest holds broader appeal

This report will focus on the front-runners for the leadership position: Charest, [who despite looking to shed the “Red Tory” label is expected to be a more centrist candidate](#), and Poilievre, who has been dubbed the [“spiritual leader”](#) of Canada’s right wing movement. All data for the other candidates surveyed is available [here](#).

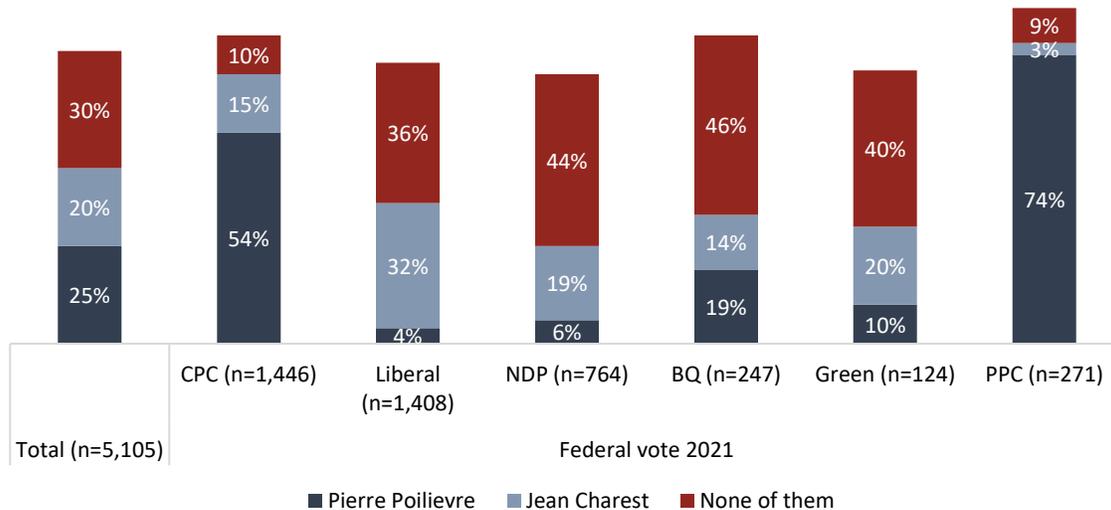
In asking Canadians – regardless of how they voted in the last federal election in September 2021 – about the appeal of this early cohort of declared and higher-profile candidates, past CPC and PPC voters are the most likely to find Poilievre politically attractive.

More than half (54%) of those who voted Conservative last fall, and three-quarters (74%) of those who voted for Maxime Bernier’s PPC, say Poilievre’s candidacy appeals to them. Charest’s allure is broader and touches significant segments of centre-left supporters. One-third (32%) of past Liberal voters say Charest is the most appealing candidate, and they’re joined by one-in-five past NDP (19%) voters:

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Most appealing candidate by federal vote 2021



The CPC vote universe: Charest vs. Poilievre

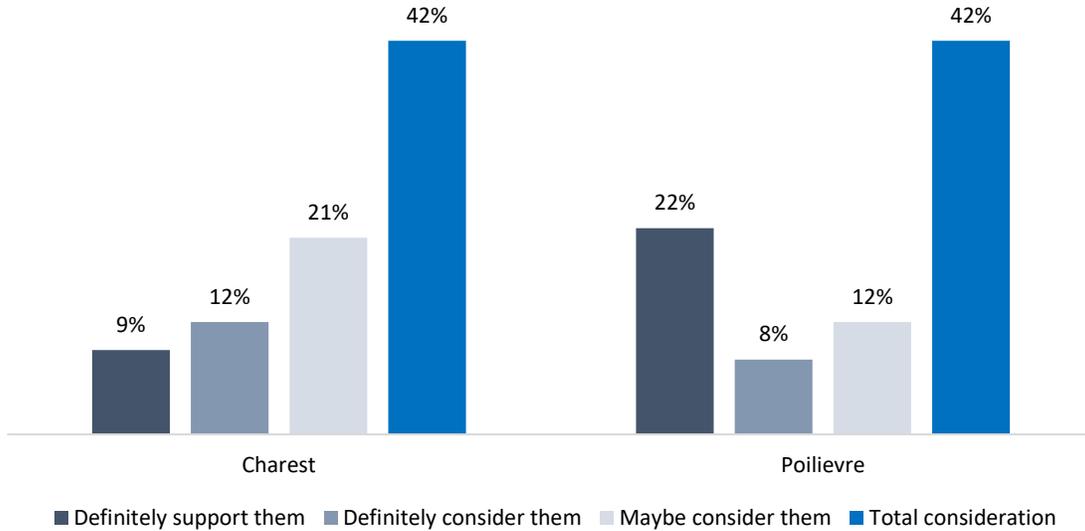
Casting a glad eye upon a candidate from across a crowded political field is one thing. Making the commitment to cast a vote for them is quite another. Thus, respondents who found any CPC leader about which they were canvassed to be appealing are considered by ARI researchers to comprise the outer ring of the Conservative universe. To better understand core voters, Canadians who expressed any sense of attraction to the candidates were then asked *how likely* they would be to choose Poilievre, Charest, and the others in an upcoming federal election ([see questionnaire here](#)).

Overall, three-in-five Canadians say they would consider supporting any of the candidates listed by the Angus Reid Institute ([see detailed tables](#)), with an equal number saying they would consider the party led by either Poilievre or Charest.

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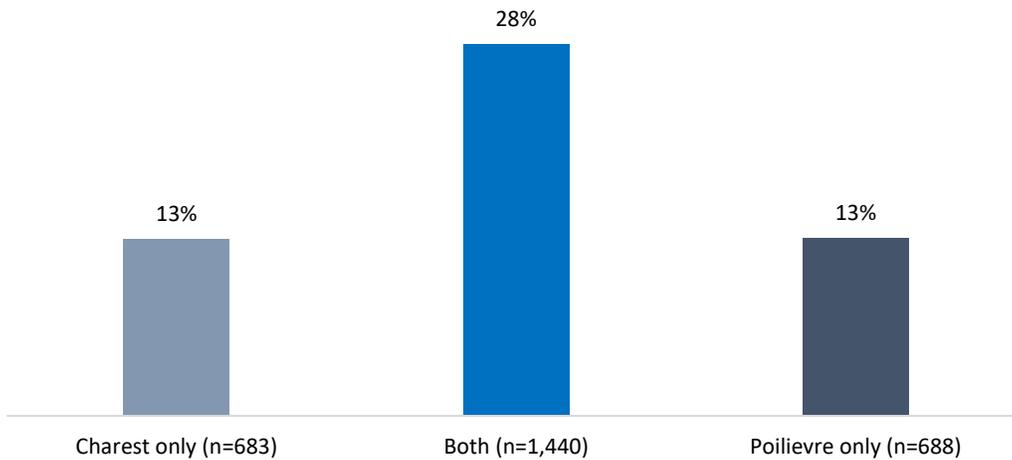
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**CPC consideration universe - likelihood of support
(All respondents, n=5,105)**



There is, however, some overlap within these two groups. A significant number say they would consider supporting both Charest and Poilievre. This, again, puts an approximate cap of around 40 per cent for the party led by either individual:

**CPC consideration universe - would consider support each, either
All respondents, n=5,105**

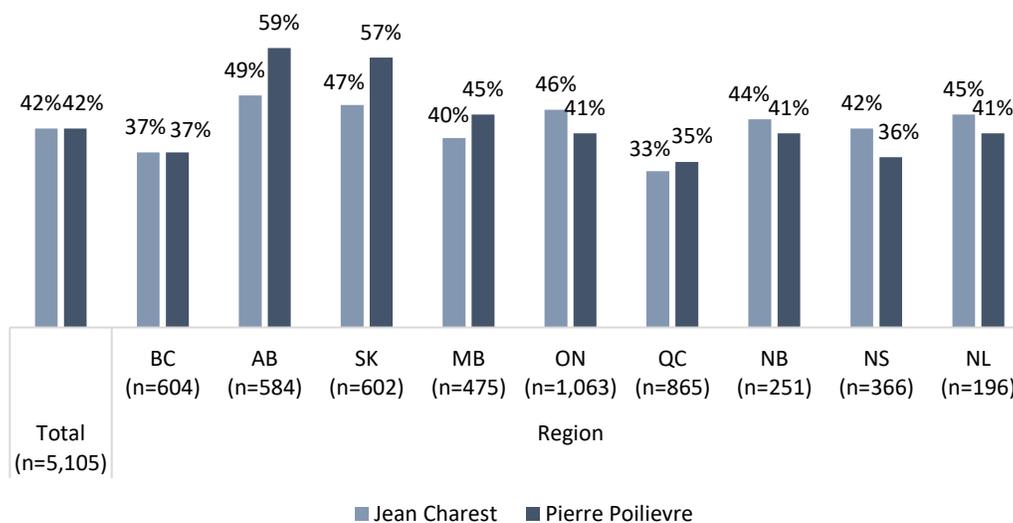


Prairies prefer Poilievre; B.C., Ontario, Quebec divided

The regional picture is especially significant in understanding not only the Conservative Party’s leadership race, but also its electoral prospects overall. The recent story of the CPC is a regional one, for better or worse. The party has dominated Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, en route to besting all other parties in total votes for two federal elections consecutively.

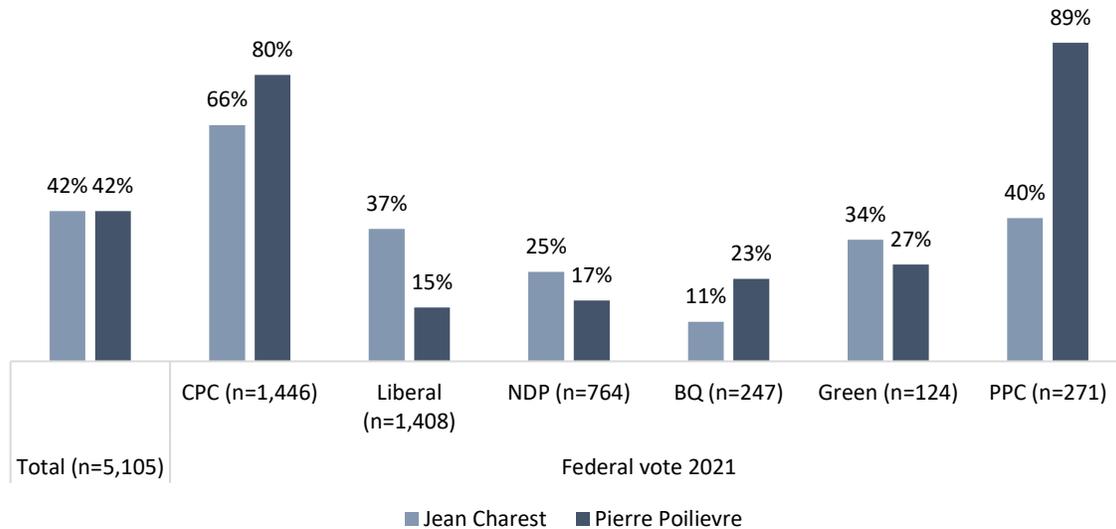
That inefficient vote, however, could be a challenge for the Poilievre team. His support is highest in Alberta and Saskatchewan. Meanwhile, while he is competitive in all regions, Charest holds slightly broader appeal in Ontario. This five-point advantage, and Charest’s appeal to soft Liberals, are key elements in terms of increasing Conservative vote efficiency in future elections:

Percentage who would consider each candidate by region



Charest appeals to a broader set of Canadians who did not support the Conservative Party in last September’s election. Nearly two-in-five past Liberals would consider the party if it were led by him, only 15 per cent say the same of Poilievre. That said, Poilievre appeals heavily to those who supported the PPC – about five per cent of the voting population last year:

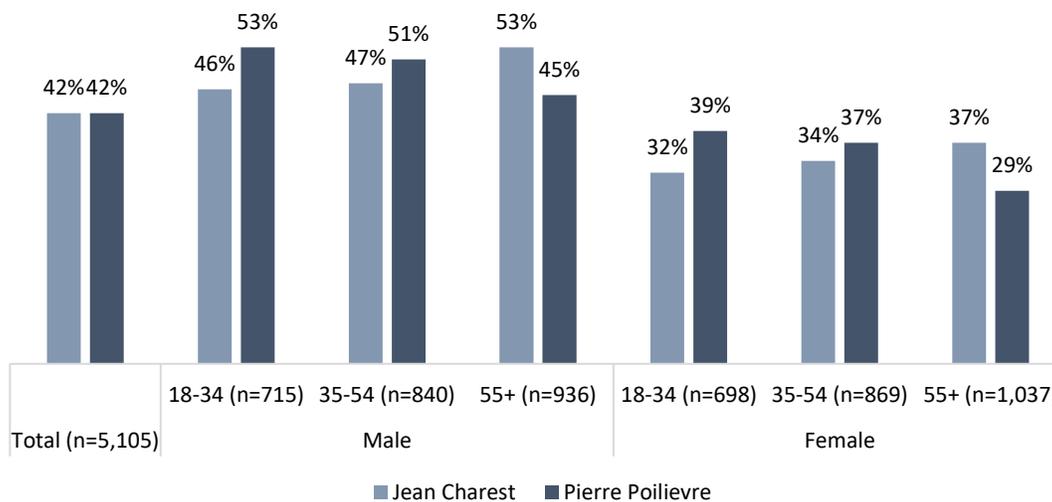
Percentage who would consider each candidate by federal vote 2021



Older voters favour Charest

Age must also be included in the election calculus. Simply put – older voters show up on Election Day. Poilievre garners an advantage in support among Canadians younger than 55, those older tend to favour Charest:

Percentage who would consider each candidate by age and gender



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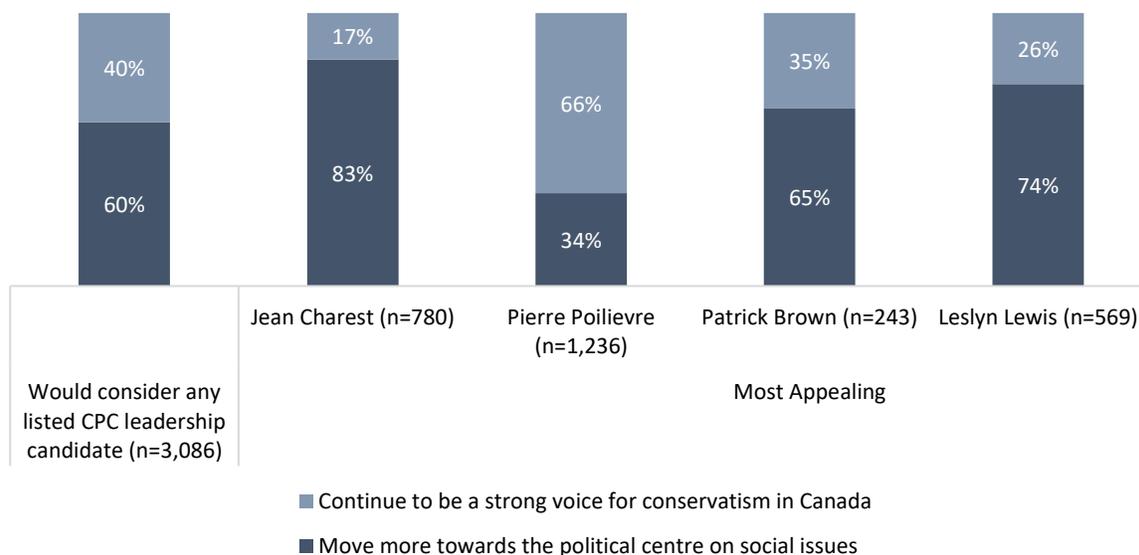
Part Two: Quo Vadis, Conservatives? Issues and values

Ultimately, this race may come down to which direction the Conservative Party of Canada wishes to pursue for the next federal election.

Overall, among the those who would consider any of the early CPC front-runners, three-in-five (60%) would prefer the party “move more towards the political centre on social issues.” Two-in-five (40%) instead say the party should “continue to be a strong voice for conservatism in Canada.”

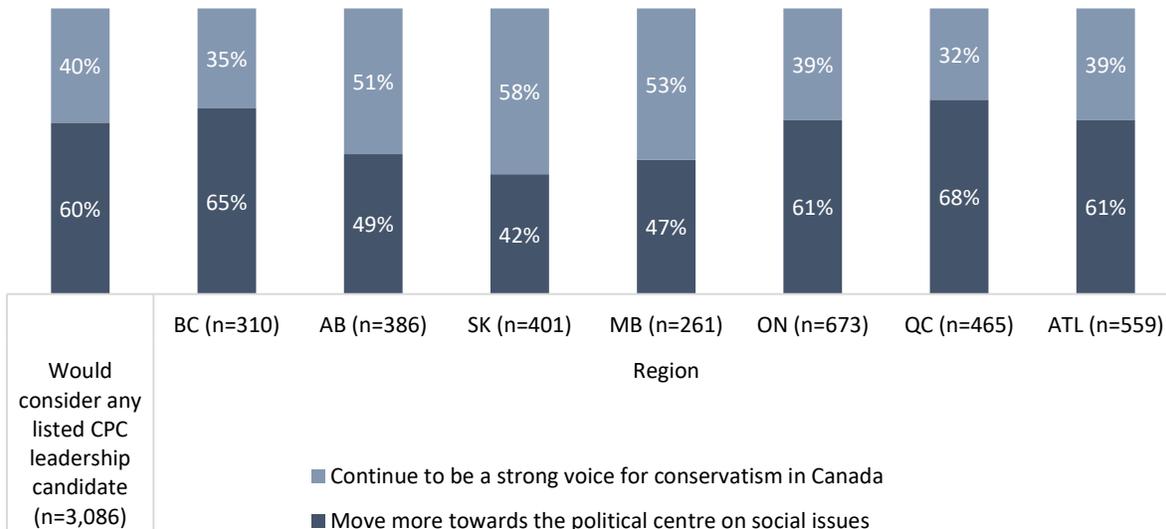
Poillievre’s social media reach has expanded to hundreds of thousands of accounts on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [YouTube](#) because of his aggressive – and meme-able – defence of conservative values, often in direct confrontation with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Little surprise, then, that two-thirds of those who find him to be the most appealing CPC leadership candidate want the party to stay true to conservative values. Among those who find Charest’s candidacy most enticing, the vast majority say the party should move to the centre on social issues (83%):

And broadly, which overall direction do you think the party should take?



Would-be CPC voters in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba are most likely to want the party to hold fast to Canadian conservatism. In the country’s three largest provinces, and therefore, the provinces with the most seats to win in a potential election, at least three-in-five want the party to move more towards the political centre:

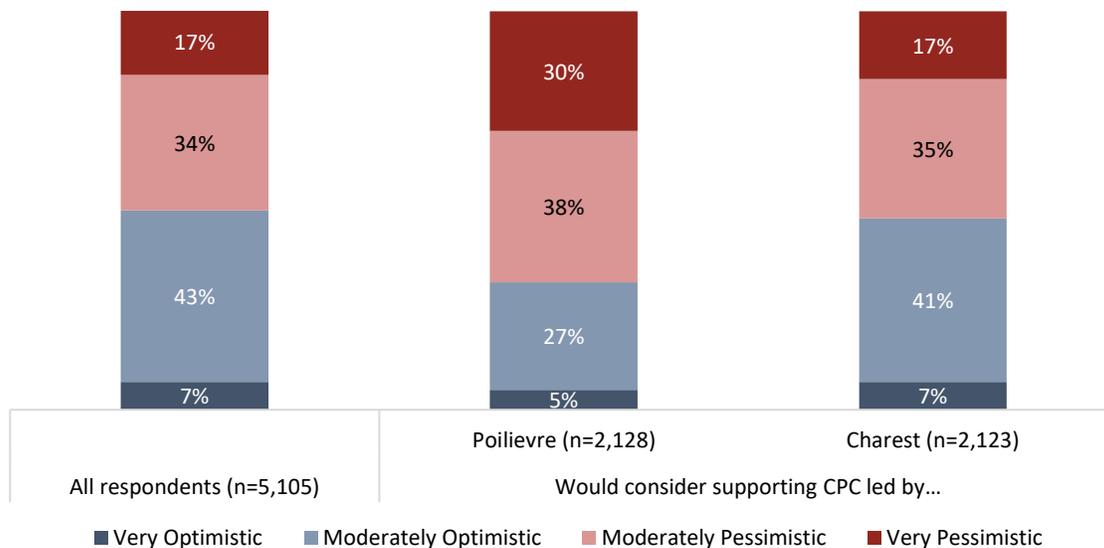
And broadly, which overall direction do you think the party should take?



Optimism for Canada separates supporters, may set tone for campaigns

Anti-Trudeau sentiment will likely play a significant role in the next federal election, if indeed Trudeau leads the Liberal Party in search of another term. Poilievre has been called the “[champion of the anti-Trudeau](#)” movement, and it may thus be less surprising that his potential supporters are less rosy when they consider the future of Canada. One-in-three (32%) say they have optimism for Canada, compared to half (48%) of those who say they would consider supporting the CPC under Charest:

Optimism or pessimism for the future of Canada?



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Top issues

Tone and personality aside, campaigns are – at least supposed to be – about issues. For those considering the Conservative Party, priorities differ from the general population. The economy has elevated importance for both the Charest and Poilievre universes. The same is true of the deficit, though Poilievre’s potential supporters put a premium on this issue. That group also shows an elevated level of concern about ethics in the federal government. After the economy, the second most important issue to the Charest universe is health care:

Top Issues facing Canada (choose up to three)			
	All Respondents (n=5,105)	Would consider supporting CPC lead by each	
		Poilievre (n=2,128)	Charest (n=2,123)
Health Care	37%	27%	34%
Housing affordability	32%	25%	29%
The Economy	31%	41%	37%
Environment / Climate Change	30%	12%	22%
Income inequality / Poverty	23%	12%	15%
The Deficit / Government spending	21%	38%	29%
Taxes	18%	28%	24%
Coronavirus / COVID-19 response	16%	11%	13%
Energy / Natural Resources / Pipelines	15%	25%	20%
Ethics / Corruption	14%	24%	15%
International affairs	12%	9%	14%

Values faceoffs

With each front-runner for the leadership drawing in a unique group of potential supporters, the fundamental values of each showcase a different vision for Canada. The Conservative Party of Canada and its members will need to consider which vision it will craft in its pursuit of the reins of the federal government.

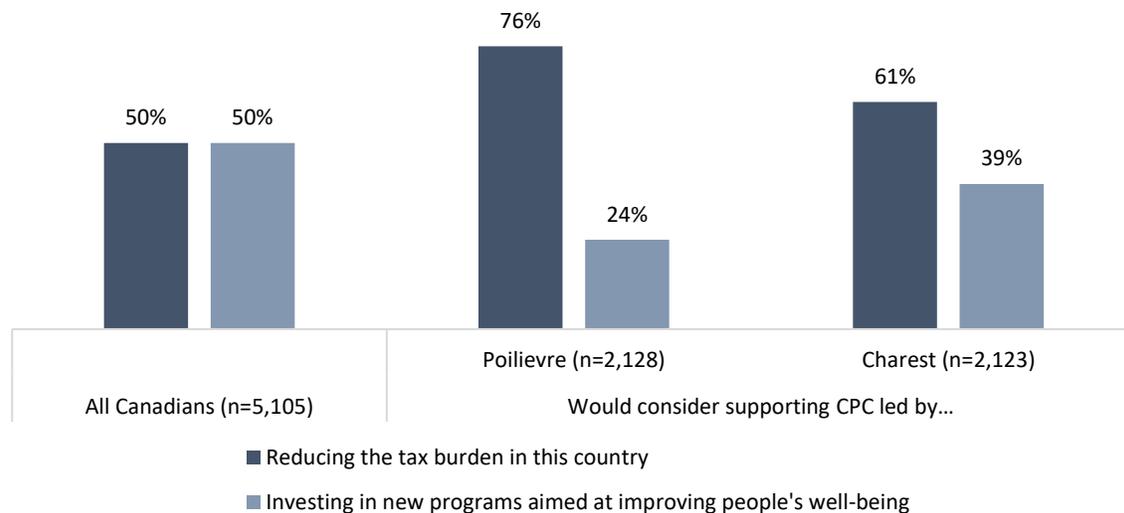
On the economy

Economically, potential supporters of both Poilievre and Charest are more likely to take a centre-right view on the question of investment in social programs. Both groups prefer a reduction of taxation in lieu of greater investment, while the population overall in Canada is divided on this question. Supporters of other parties tend to lean considerably in the other direction ([see detailed tables](#)):

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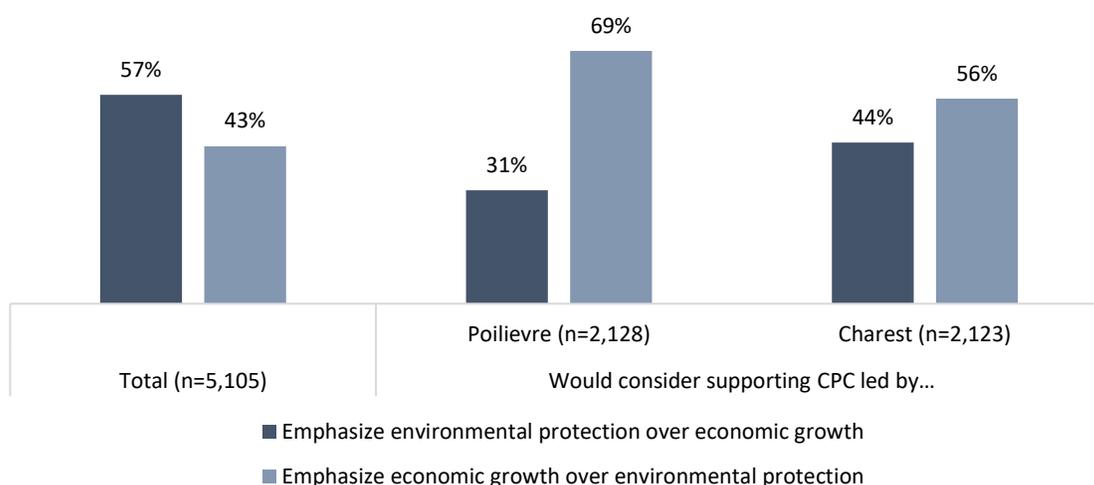
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The main priority for Canada today should be:



Discussions of domestic energy production are never far away during Canadian elections. With Russia’s attack on Ukraine and global supply issues exacerbating high gas prices, attention will be heightened in the coming months. For those inclined to consider the Conservatives, the economic side of the economy-versus-environment debate holds more weight, though both groups feature a significant segment – in the case of would-be Charest voters approaching almost half – who are more worried about environmental issues:

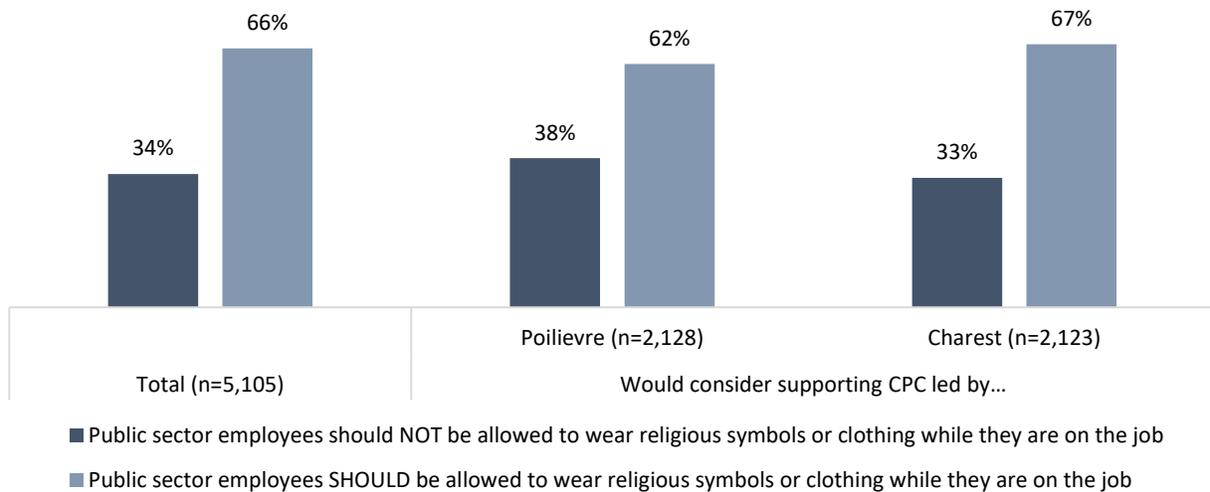
Overall, Canada's policies should...



Bill 21

Quebec’s Bill 21 restricts public employees in positions of authority from wearing religious symbols while on the job. Both [Charest](#) and [Poilievre](#) have publicly opposed the law. Each of their groups of potential supporters are more likely to disagree with the premise of the law:

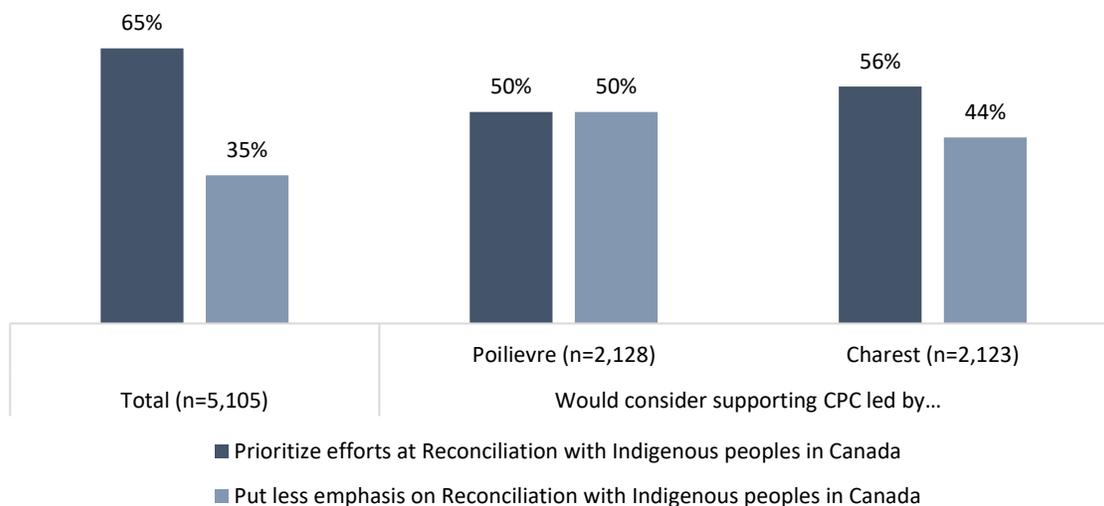
Would you say....



Reconciliation

Canada’s journey towards reconciliation continues, as disturbing confirmations of hundreds of unmarked graves containing the remains of Indigenous children at former residential school sites across the country continue. Two-thirds of Canadians (65%) support continuing to focus on reconciliation, though this issue evenly divides those who would consider the CPC if led by Poilievre:

Canada should:

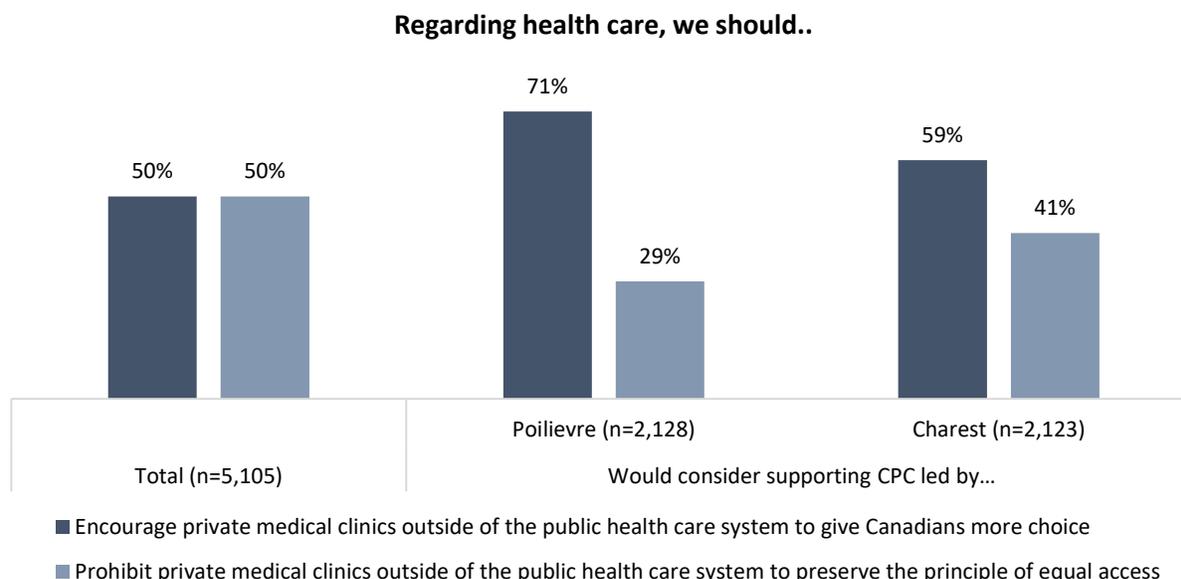


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Health care privatization

As the country recovers from two years of COVID-19 and watches warily for signs of another wave of the virus, concerns about health care are front and centre in Canadian minds. Discussions of privatization of elements of the health-care system are popular among would-be Poilievre and Charest supporters, while evenly dividing the country overall. Some [suggest](#) this debate is [just beginning](#) to heat up as the pandemic wanes:



Part Three: Policies and trade-offs

Ultimately, politicians, and those who would vote for them, must balance core values against the broad political palatability required to win. With these calculations in mind, respondents who said they would consider supporting the CPC under any listed leadership candidate ([see questionnaire here](#)) were then asked about some non-Conservative policies either already in place or championed by other parties.

Some policies would move the party to the left of the political spectrum, some further to the right. One thing is clear, many Conservatives are open to a number of different options if it means winning on election day.

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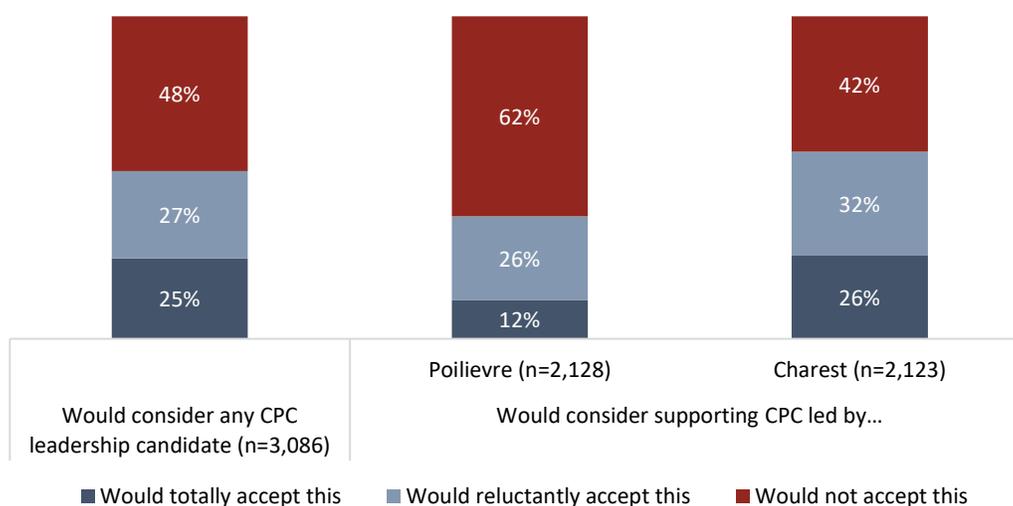
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Which of these, if any, could you accept the party adopting while still maintaining your interest or support? Percentage who would 'totally accept'			
	Would consider any listed CPC leadership candidate (n=3,086)	Would consider supporting CPC led by...	
		Poilievre (n=2,128)	Charest (n=2,123)
Commit to a national pharmacare program	63%	54%	65%
Embracing the LGBTQ2 movement	56%	45%	59%
Defund the CBC completely	46%	62%	43%
Promote more private delivery of healthcare	42%	51%	41%
Increase immigration targets	38%	29%	42%
End the supply management system for poultry and dairy	34%	40%	33%
End Canada's policy of official multiculturalism	27%	35%	24%
Keep the federal carbon tax in place	25%	12%	26%
Phase out oil and gas production in Canada	17%	10%	17%

Keep the carbon tax?

Poilievre has been clear about his plan to “[axe the carbon tax](#)”. Meanwhile, Charest has committed to having his own version of such a plan, which would be “[smart](#)”. Overall, half of potential CPC supporters say they would accept keeping the federal carbon tax in place. This figure increases to 58 per cent among Charest supporters, while most Poilievre supporters oppose this:

Keep the federal carbon tax in place



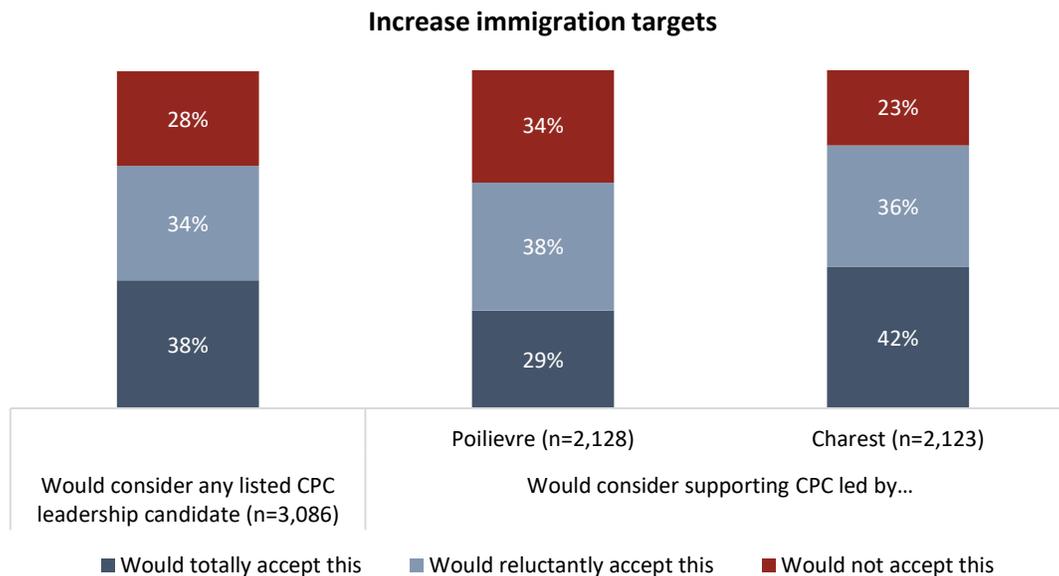
Immigration targets

With Canada accepting [unlimited numbers](#) of Ukrainian refugees in the coming months, immigration has been on the minds of many people in this country. And while Conservatives have been [critical](#) of higher

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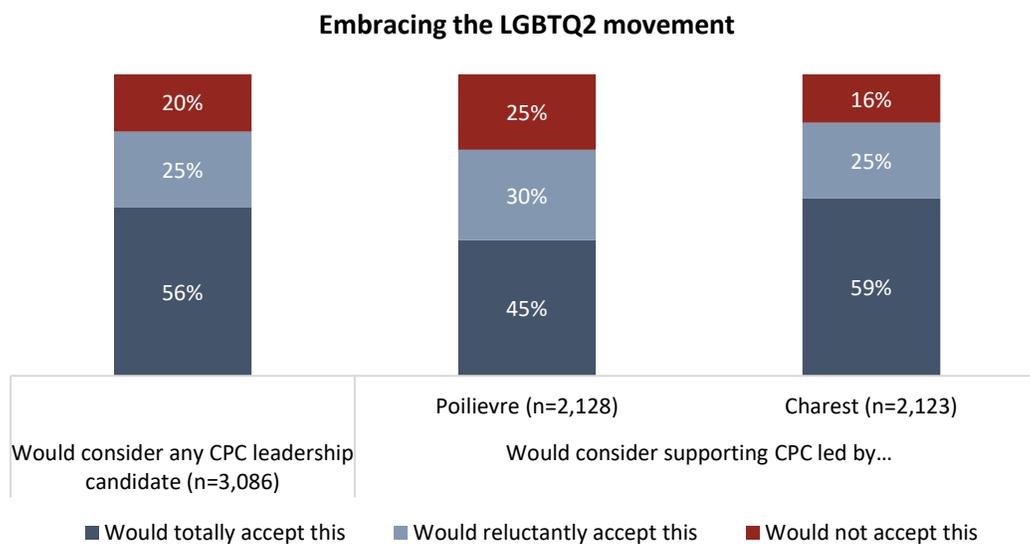
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immigration levels in recent years under the Trudeau government, at least two-thirds who would support the party under both Charest and Poilievre would be willing to keep targets high, though supporters of each front-runner delineate over the extent to which they would “reluctantly” accept it:



Embracing the LGBTQ2+ community

The CPC has made efforts in recent years to reach out to the LGBTQ2+ community, with former leader Erin O’Toole releasing a video in [celebration of Pride](#) last June. But tension continues in the CPC universe. Poilievre’s supporters are less willing to commit to embracing this community, as 45 per cent say they would do so willingly. That said, just one-in-five potential CPC supporters are outright opposed:



All the statements are viewable in the detailed tables below.

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

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

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