

Alberta Spotlight: Brian Jean, Danielle Smith claim early advantage in UCP leadership race to succeed Kenney

Few upset to see Jason Kenney resign, most UCP supporters pleased or neutral

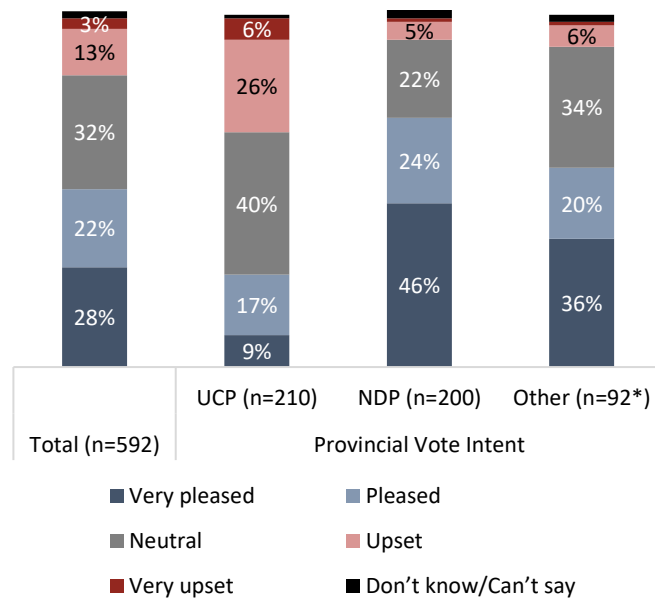
June 17, 2022 – The never-ending soap opera of Alberta politics plots a new sizzling summer storyline as UCP leadership hopefuls line up to win the hearts of Albertans after the jilting of soon-to-be former Premier Jason Kenney.

New data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds half of Albertans pleased to see Kenney join the [lengthy list of Alberta premiers this century](#) who did not see out a full term. One-in-six are more upset at his exit, including one-third of those who say they will vote for the UCP in an upcoming election.

That election is not scheduled to take place until May 2023 at the latest. In the interim, Kenney will be premier until the UCP select a new leader [on Oct. 6](#). The crowded field of leadership candidates includes some familiar faces re-entering the storyline who so far are preferred to their rivals: Brian Jean, a former leader of the Wildrose Party who finished second in the inaugural UCP leadership race to Kenney, and Danielle Smith, another former leader of the Wildrose Party who led a floor-crossing to the now defunct Progressive Conservative party that may have [sowed the seeds](#) for the latter party's defeat in the 2015 election. Both are selected as the most appealing Kenney replacement by one-quarter of Albertans (Smith, 24%; Jean, 23%). Kenney's Finance Minister Travis Toews (13%) is the only other candidate to be selected by more than 10 per cent of Albertans. Notably, Conservative MP Michelle Rempel Garner [has indicated](#) that she is considering throwing her proverbial hat in the ring, but has yet to formally do so. Rempel Garner's public comments occurred after this survey was completed and she is not included in this first look at the race.

While the UCP sorts out its top job, like many across the country, Albertans are preoccupied with inflation. Two-thirds say it's a top-three provincial issue, while two-in-five (44%) say the same of health care. For both those files, Albertans are much more negative than positive in their assessment of the UCP government's performance. Seven-in-ten say the government has done poorly on health (70%) and the rising cost of living (71%).

Overall, would you say you are pleased or upset with Kenney resigning?



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey June 7-13, 2022 among a representative randomized sample of 592 Albertan 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 +/- 4 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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Despite all this, support for the NDP and UCP has remained consistent. The two parties are statistically tied for the second quarter in a row with the support of two-in-five Albertans each (42% UCP, 40% NDP).

More Key Findings:

- For those currently supporting the NDP, health care is the top issue for three-in-five (63%). Comparatively, one-third (33%) of those who intend to vote UCP say the same. Likely NDP supporters are also three times as likely to pick education as a top issue (31%) as those who say they will support the UCP (8%)
- Those who say they will vote UCP are much more likely to be concerned about the economy. Three-quarters (73%) select cost of living as a top issue, while half pick jobs (46%) and pipelines (47%).
- 42 per cent of Albertans hold a favourable view of opposition NDP leader Rachel Notley. This, as 32 per cent approve of Jason Kenney's performance.

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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Half pleased to see Kenney go, few displeased

While Jason Kenney remains premier and Alberta UCP leader, his days are now numbered. After receiving a slim majority of votes (51.4%) in his party's leadership review, the less-than-one-term premier announced his resignation on May 20. Kenney will stay on until a new leader is elected in October.

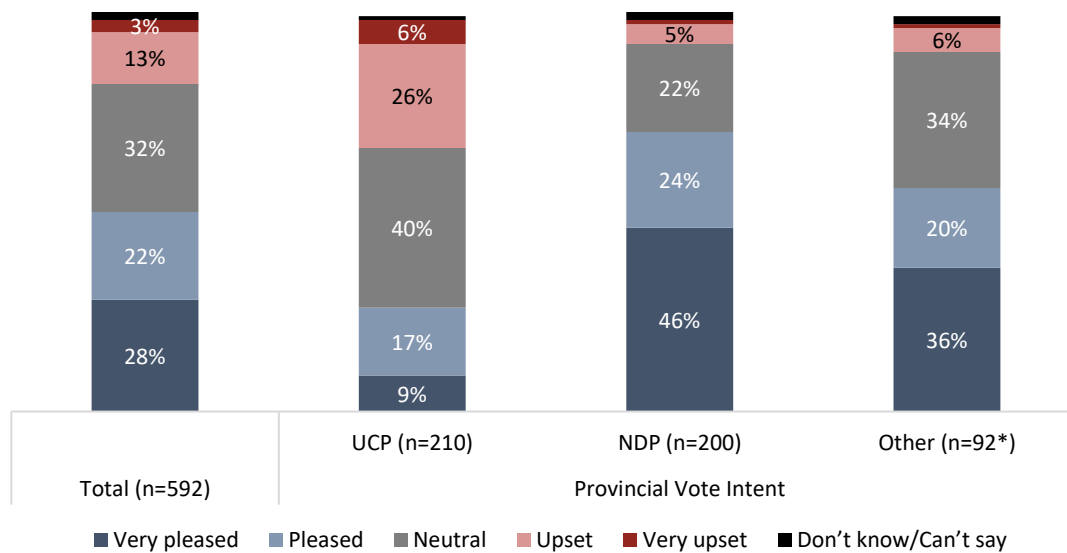
His legacy will likely be complicated and written in the months and years after he relinquishes his leadership position. Kenney had been a [unifying force](#) for a fractured conservative movement in Alberta, and a galvanizing force in facing off against the unpopular Liberal federal government. Ultimately, however, a crash in oil prices and pandemic management hampered his time as leader. His government lost [\\$1.3 billion in a gamble](#) on the Keystone XL pipeline. He was panned during the COVID-19 pandemic, [quarrelling with the province's doctors](#), and even [apologizing for removing public health measures](#) too quickly ahead of the fourth wave last fall. His own caucus ultimately led the push to replace him [after criticism](#) that he and a selected group of party insiders were overly concentrating the decision-making process and punishing dissent.

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Kenney's departure leaves few Albertans disconsolate. Indeed, 16 per cent of residents, and just one-in-three of those who currently support the UCP (32%) say they are upset to see him go. For Alberta's New Democrats, while the ultimate goal is regaining the government in 2023, most are pleased to see Kenney leave office before then:

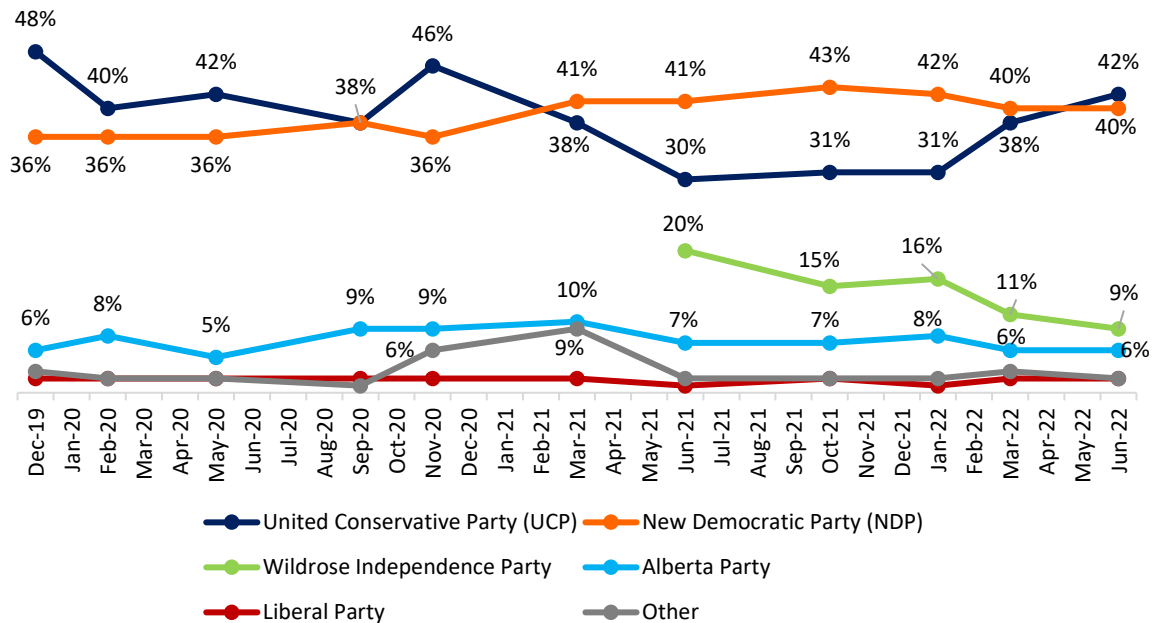
Overall, would you say you are pleased or upset with Kenney resigning?



**Smaller sample size, interpret with caution*

While the party leadership remains uncertain, the vote intention picture suggests that a lot is riding on the new UCP leader. Currently, a near-equal number of Albertans say they would support the UCP (42%) and Alberta NDP (40%) if an election were held today. Kenney's departure has notably put his party on the positive side of the two-point gap separating the parties in each of the last two surveys:

**Vote Intent - Alberta
(Decided voters)**

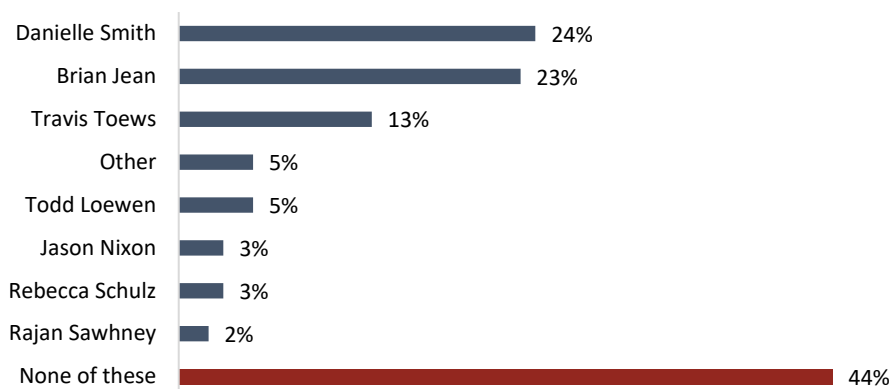


Jean and Smith early stand outs in a long race

The obvious next question is: who should replace Kenney as premier? Whomever is chosen as leader of the UCP will be sworn in immediately in that position and lead the party into an election scheduled for next spring at the latest.

A number of contenders have already confirmed their participation in the leadership race, including former Wildrose Party leaders Danielle Smith and Brian Jean – the latter of whom co-founded the UCP with Kenney in a 2017 merger, and lost the party’s inaugural leadership vote in a de facto face-off between the two. Those two individuals are the top two choices so far, with one-quarter of Albertans saying each is an appealing leader for the party. Former Finance Minister and UCP member Travis Toews is intriguing to 13 per cent. More than two-in-five Albertans see no one on the list that they find appealing:

**Which of the following people would you find appealing as the next leader of the UCP?
(Alberta, n=592)**



Perhaps most importantly for those jockeying for leadership are the views of those who intend to vote for the UCP or another non-NDP party. Both Smith and Jean have an evident advantage among these groups:

Which of the following people would you find appealing as the next leader of the UCP?				
	Total (n=592)	Provincial Vote Intent		
		UCP (n=210)	NDP (n=200)	Other (n=92*)
Danielle Smith	24%	34%	11%	35%
Brian Jean	23%	33%	12%	33%
Travis Toews	13%	25%	6%	6%
Todd Loewen	5%	8%	0%	11%
Rebecca Schulz	3%	7%	2%	0%
Jason Nixon	3%	7%	0%	2%
Rajan Sawhney	2%	2%	3%	1%
Other	5%	7%	4%	4%
None of these	44%	15%	71%	31%

**Smaller sample size, interpret with caution*

Albertans priorities lean heavily to economic agenda

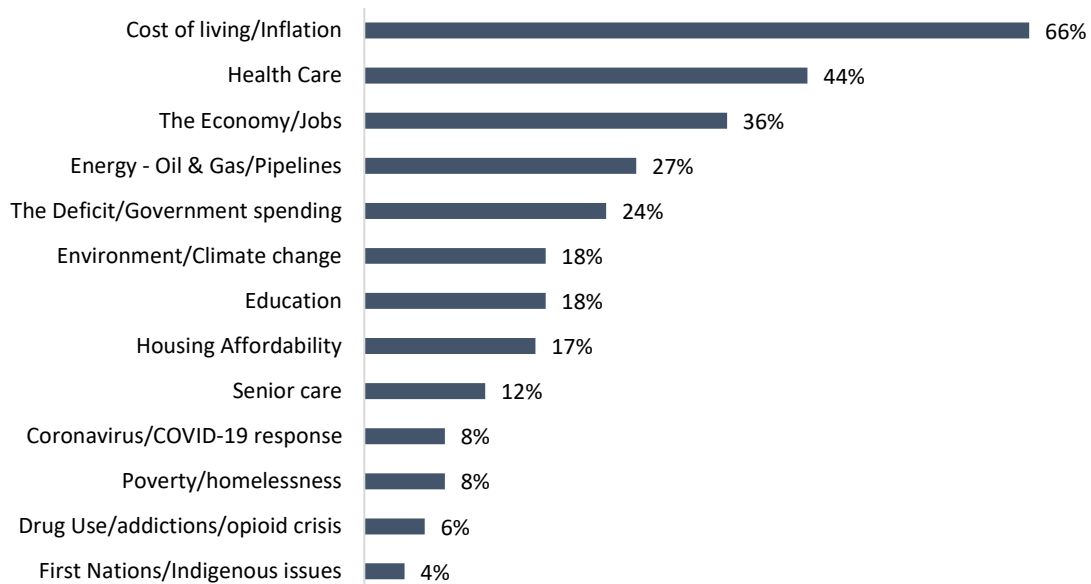
As with most provinces in the federation currently, challenges for government are not hard to find, and the new UCP leader will jump straight into the fire. [Cost of living increases](#), tension between [Alberta and the federal government](#), and [“disastrous overcrowding”](#) in the health-care system are just a few of those items.

For Albertans themselves, cost of living and inflation are the primary concern. That said, health care and a host of economic issues are also highly prioritized as needing attention:

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**And which of those issues would you say are the most important to you, personally. Please select up to three:
(Alberta, n=592)**



For the 40 per cent of Albertans who currently say they would vote for Rachel Notley's NDP, health care, education and climate change are items of much greater import. Those who say they will support the UCP or another party point primarily to the aforementioned economic concerns facing the province, including a much higher point of concern placed on the provincial deficit and government spending:

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And which of those issues would you say are the most important to you, personally. Please select up to three:

	Total (n=592)	Provincial Vote Intent		
		UCP (n=210)	NDP (n=200)	Other (n=92*)
Cost of living/Inflation	66%	73%	58%	67%
Health Care	44%	33%	63%	34%
The Economy/Jobs	36%	46%	20%	46%
Energy - Oil & Gas/Pipelines	27%	47%	5%	32%
The Deficit/Government spending	24%	40%	3%	33%
Education	18%	8%	31%	13%
Environment/Climate change	18%	2%	38%	15%
Housing Affordability	17%	14%	22%	13%
Senior care	12%	15%	10%	9%
Poverty/homelessness	8%	2%	14%	5%
Coronavirus/COVID-19 response	8%	1%	10%	14%
Drug Use/addictions/opioid crisis	6%	5%	7%	4%
First Nations/Indigenous issues	4%	1%	7%	3%

**Smaller sample size, interpret with caution*

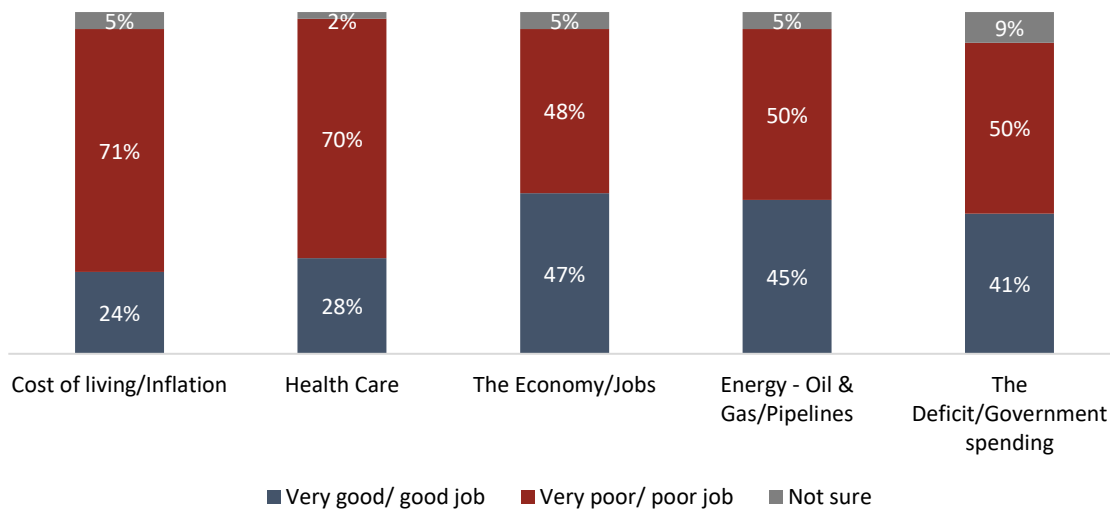
Asked how the current UCP government is handling each of these issues, the responses are mostly negative. That said, perceptions of performance on some key economic files are much closer to a split between good and bad, while criticisms of the UCP's handling of health care and cost of living are much more pronounced:

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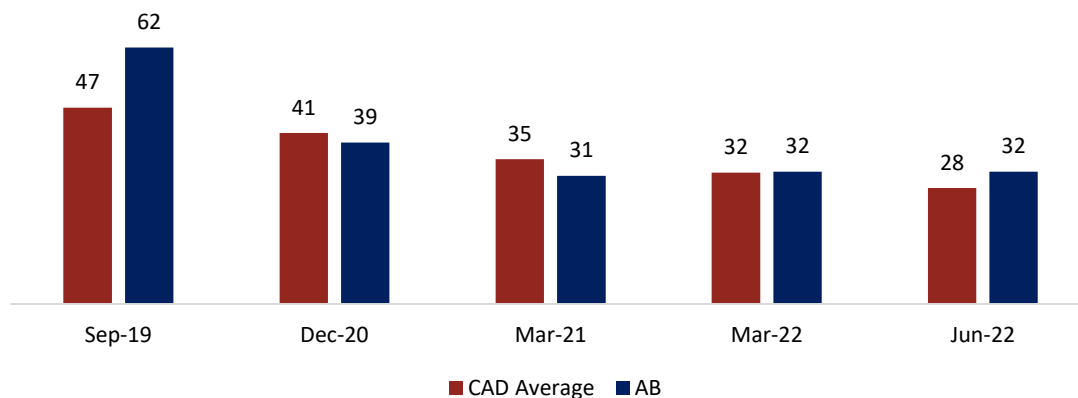
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**Do you think the current government of Alberta is doing a good job or a poor job in each of the following areas?
(Alberta, n=592; top five issues shown)**



The Angus Reid Institute's Government Performance Index compiles an average score across all issues presented in the survey. As seen in the graphic below, the overall performance of the UCP has been consistently poor after an initial enthusiasm boom post-election. What is perhaps most notable is the diminishing of the national average to now trail the Albertan score:

**Government Performance Index
(Average number of respondents saying provincial government has done a "good job" across all issues)**



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