

UCP leadership race leaves Albertans largely uninspired by their options, worried about potential result

On the other hand, more than two-in-five (45%) say another Notley term would be terrible for province

September 30, 2022 – As the United Conservative Party prepares to name a new leader – and premier – Albertans look ahead to the near political future with much pessimism.

New data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds Albertans more likely to believe the impact of a win by any of three UCP leadership frontrunners – Danielle Smith, Travis Toews, and Brian Jean – will be bad than good for Alberta.

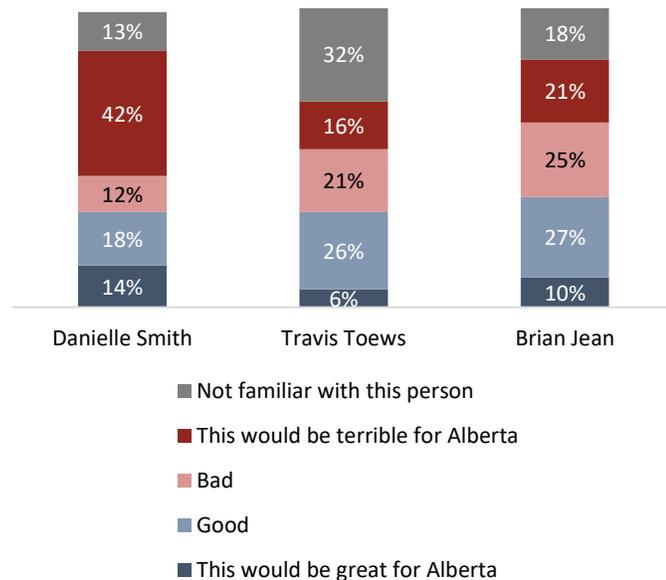
The negatives are highest for a potential Premier Smith. Two-in-five (42%) Albertans believe it would be “terrible” for the province if she won the UCP leadership race and became premier.

At issue, perhaps, is Smith's proposed Alberta Sovereignty Act, which she says will give the province the power to ignore federal law and court rulings. Half of Albertans (54%) oppose such a law; one-in-three (34%) support it. There is a sharp political divide on this matter: a majority (56%) of past UCP voters are in support, while nearly all past NDP voters (91%) are against it.

The outlook among Albertans is not much better when looking ahead to a potential NDP victory in the spring election. Half (52%) say a second term under a Premier Rachel Notley would be bad for the province, including 45 per cent who say it would be “terrible”.

Still, the potential of new blood at the helm of the UCP has sparked a rise in the political fortunes of the party. It now leads the NDP in vote intent by six points with approaching half (47%) of Albertans saying they would vote UCP if an election were held today. That marks the highest level of support for the party since before the pandemic.

Please tell us, in your opinion, whether it would be a good or a bad thing for Alberta if they were victorious and became premier. (Alberta, n=598)



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey Sept. 19 - 22, 2022 among a representative randomized sample of 598 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 +/- 3 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between n 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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The latter perhaps speaks to the unpopularity of outgoing UCP leader and Premier Jason Kenney, who departs with [approval from three-in-ten Albertans](#). When asked how his legacy as premier will be remembered, three-in-five (59%) Albertans say he will go down as a below average premier. Few (11%) disagree. This holds even among those who voted for Kenney and the UCP in 2018. Two-in-five (41%) in that group say he'll go down as a sub-par premier, while one-in-five (17%) say instead he rose above the crowd.

More Key Findings:

- Support for the UCP is highest among those over the age of 54 (61%). Meanwhile, the NDP garners the most support among those aged 18- to 34-years-old (55%).
- The UCP's climb in vote intent is seen as there is a fall in support for the Wildrose Independence Party. One-in-20 Albertans say they will now support the WIP; one year ago, that figure was 15 per cent.
- Albertans believe the top two issues facing the province are cost of living (63%) and health care (51%). Issues around oil and gas (30%), the economy more generally (28%) and education (22%) round out the top five most selected challenges.
- A majority (55%) living outside of Edmonton and Calgary believe a second Notley term would be "terrible" for Alberta.

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: The UCP race

The race to decide Premier Jason Kenney's replacement is nearing a conclusion. On Oct. 6, the United Conservative Party will announce the winner of its leadership race, who will immediately become premier. The seven approved candidates include former culture minister Leela Aheer; former Wildrose Party leader Brian Jean; independent MLA and former UCP caucus chair Todd Loewen; transportation minister Rajan Sawhney; children's services minister Rebecca Schulz; former Wildrose Party leader Danielle Smith; and former finance minister Travis Toews.

Jean, Smith tied in appeal

As was the case [in the summer](#), Smith and Jean continue to lead the field in appeal. One-quarter of Albertans find each appealing. Both Smith and Jean are former leaders of the Wildrose Party and both were sitting out of caucus for most of Kenney's term as premier – though Jean made his way back into the UCP fold after winning the Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche byelection in March. Toews comes with strong support from current MLAs – 28 of them have endorsed him – but he finds himself third in appeal with 16 per cent.

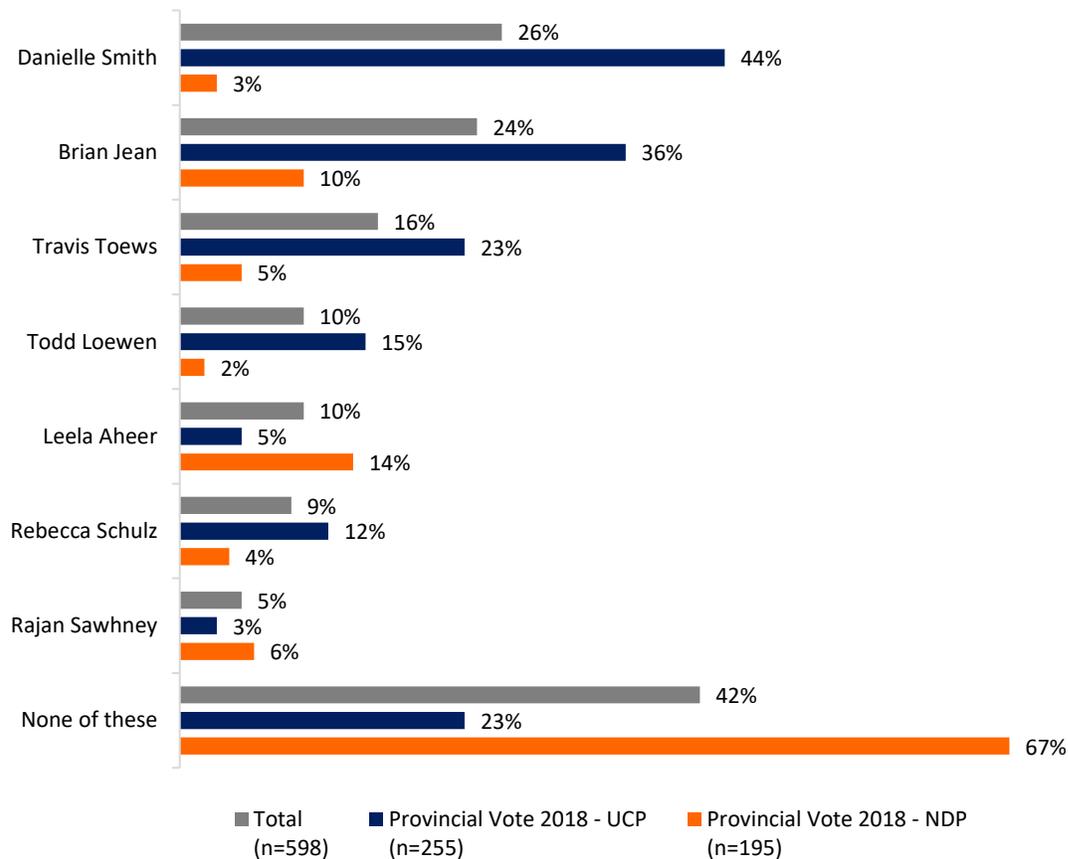
While Smith and Jean are tied in appeal among Albertans in general, there is a gap between the two when it comes to the perceptions of past UCP voters. Among that group, Smith leads Jean in appeal by eight points and Toews by 21 points.

Those who voted NDP in 2018 are most likely to find no appealing candidates in the UCP leadership race, though they are more drawn to Aheer (14%) and Jean (10%) than anyone else:

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Which UCP leadership candidates do you find appealing?



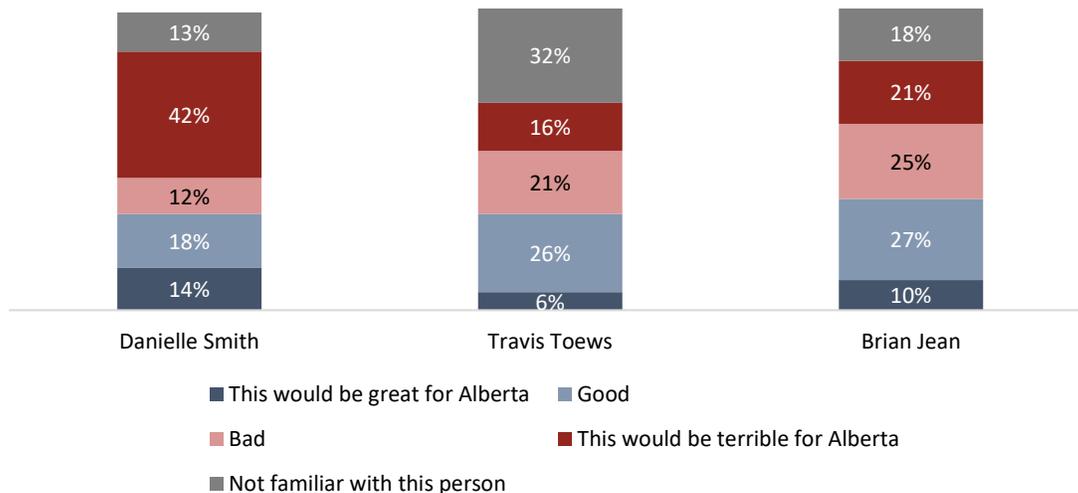
Frontrunners more likely to be seen as bad for the province than good

Albertans were asked to assess the effect on the province of the three frontrunners in the leadership race – Smith, Jean, and Toews – should they win and become premier. For each, one-third believe their victory would be good or great for Alberta. (Smith 32%, Toews 32%, Jean 37%). But, for each, more believe it would in fact be bad or terrible (Smith 55%, Toews 37%, Jean 45%). On the latter front, however, Smith outpaces her fellow contenders, with two-in-five (42%) saying a potential Premier Smith would be terrible for Alberta, double the rate of either Toews (16%) or Jean (21%):

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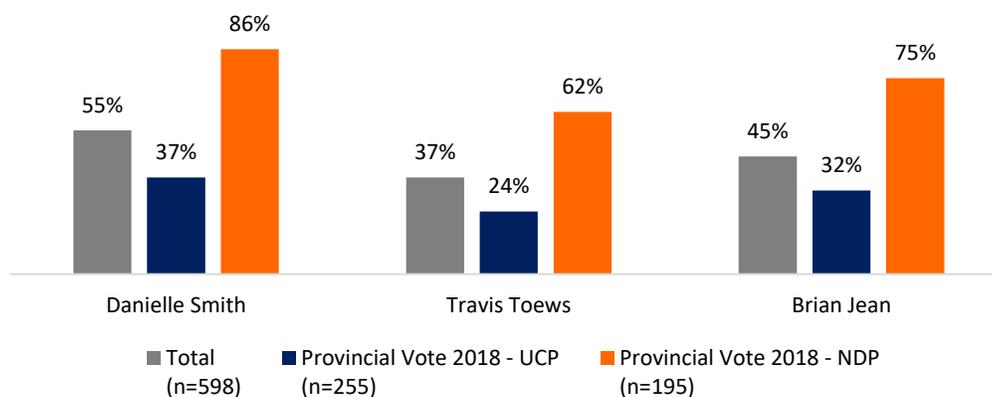
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Please tell us, in your opinion, whether it would be a good or a bad thing for Alberta if they were victorious and became premier.
(Alberta, n=598)



Smith draws far greater negatives from past NDP voters than her fellow candidates for UCP leader. More than four-in-five (86%) of those who voted for the NDP in 2018 say it would be bad for the province if Smith became premier. Majorities, albeit smaller ones, of past NDP voters say the same of Jean (75%) and Toews (62%):

Percent saying each of the following would be 'bad' or 'terrible' for Alberta if they became premier
(Alberta, n=598)



More than two-in-five believe another Notley term would be 'terrible' for province

The UCP is electing a new leader with a spring 2023 provincial election on the horizon. Whoever wins will face former premier and current NDP leader Rachel Notley as she attempts to win back government. Notley served as premier from 2015 until 2019, when she was defeated by Kenney and the UCP.

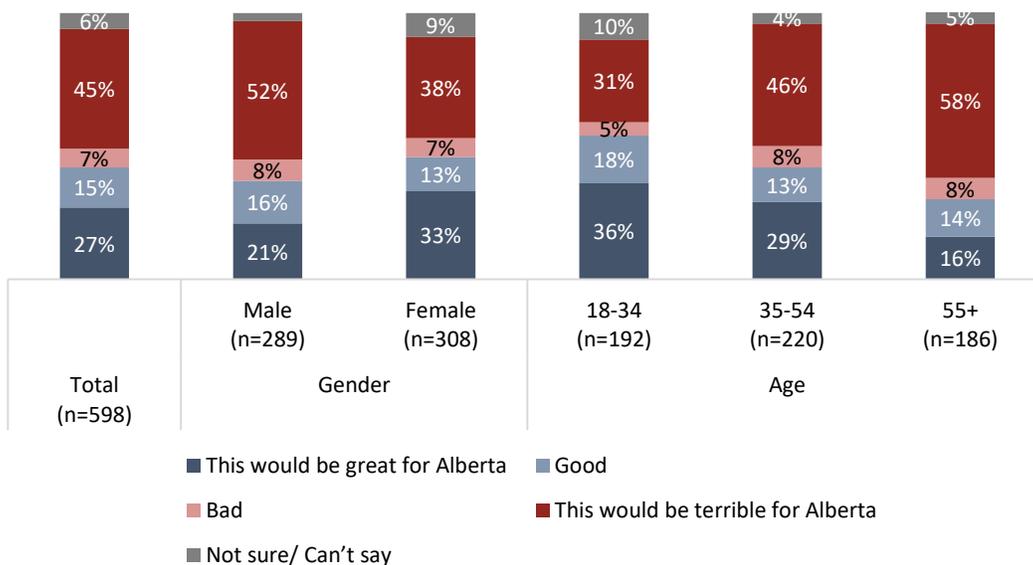
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Notley enters a third campaign as leader with a more negative than positive impression of her potential effect on the province. Half of Albertans (52%) say a second Notley term would be bad for the province, including more than two-in-five (45%) who say it will be terrible. Two-in-five (42%) disagree.

Notley's potential return as premier is viewed more positively by women than men, and by younger Albertans than older ones:

Would it be a good or a bad thing for Alberta if the NDP led by Rachel Notley secured enough seats to form government after the next election?



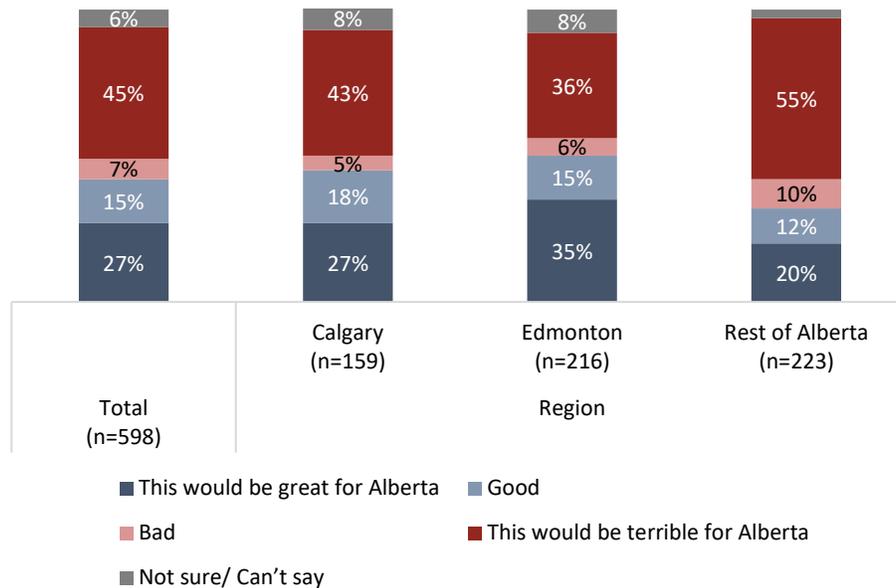
Edmontonians are more optimistic about a second Notley term than in other parts of the province. Half in that city say an NDP victory in the spring would be good or great for the province. Notably, the NDP secured 19 of the 24 seats they won in the 2019 election in Edmonton.

Negative sentiment towards a potential NDP government is much more common outside of Edmonton and Calgary, where there are 41 seats in the Alberta legislature. In the 2019 election, the NDP won two seats outside of the province's two most populous cities.

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Part Two: Top issues

Cost of living, health care top issues

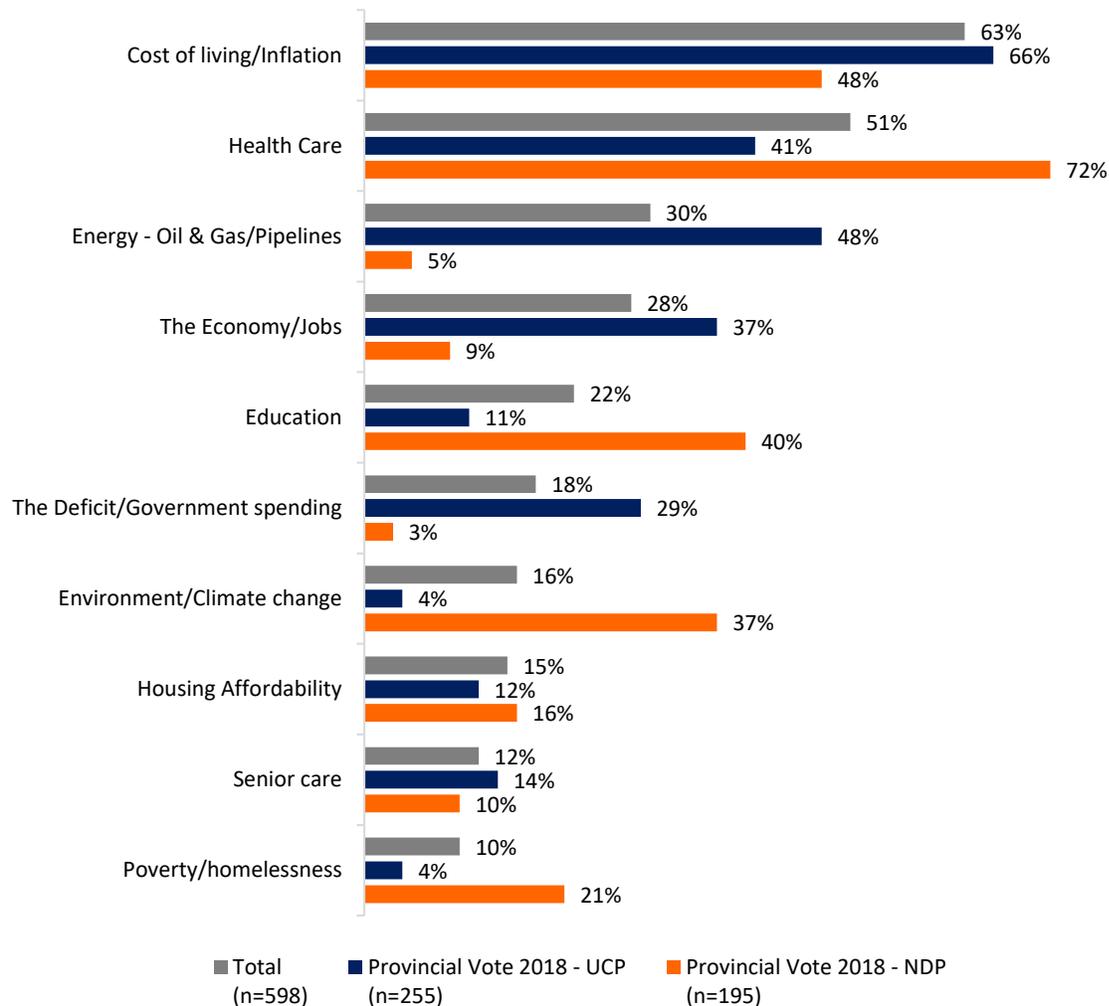
As inflation continues to plague the country, and the health-care system ails, there is some consensus regarding the top two challenges Alberta faces. Three-in-five (63%) Albertans say cost of living, and half (51%) say health care. For past NDP voters, those issues rank two and one, respectively. Those who voted UCP in 2018 view them as the first- (cost of living, 66%) and third-most pressing concerns (health care 41%)

On other issues, there is more division. Two-in-five past NDP voters say education (40%) and climate change (37%), are most important, but few past UCP supporters say the same (11% education, 4% climate change). By contrast, half of those who voted UCP in 2018 say it's oil and gas (48%) and three-in-ten say it's government spending (29%). This, as the province deals with [a windfall surplus](#) driven by record levels of [non-renewable resource revenue](#).

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Top Provincial Issues
(Up to three chosen, issues with more than 10% shown)



Sovereignty act opposed by majority of Albertans

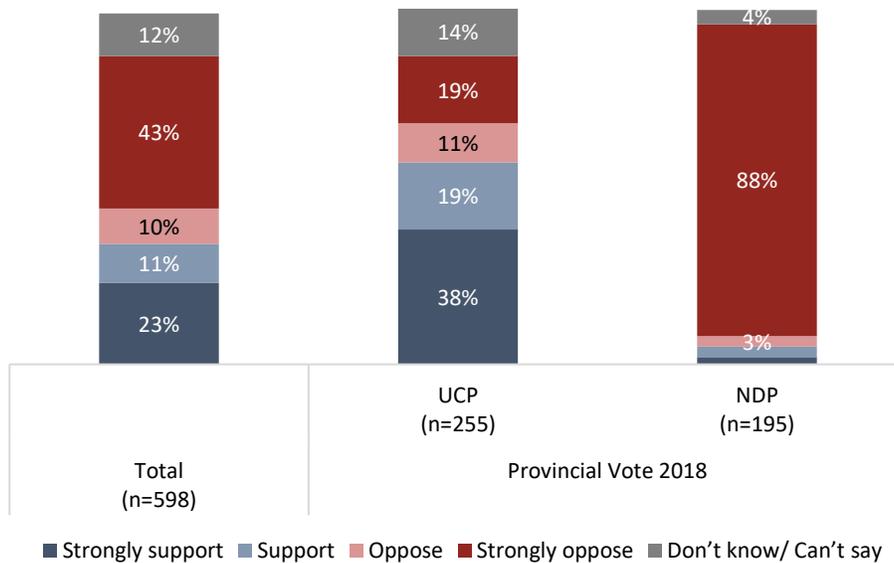
A central issue of the UCP leadership campaign has been a controversial Smith platform pillar – the Alberta Sovereignty Act. A Smith government would pass day one legislation that, [according to her](#), would allow Alberta to ignore federal law or court orders that weren't in the province's interests. The Sovereignty Act has been [denounced by four](#) of Smith's fellow leadership candidates, and called "[catastrophically stupid](#)" by Kenney.

More in Alberta strongly oppose the act (43%) than support it (34%). However, there is division along political lines. A majority of past UCP voters (56%) say they support the act while nearly all of those who voted NDP in 2018 (91%) do not:

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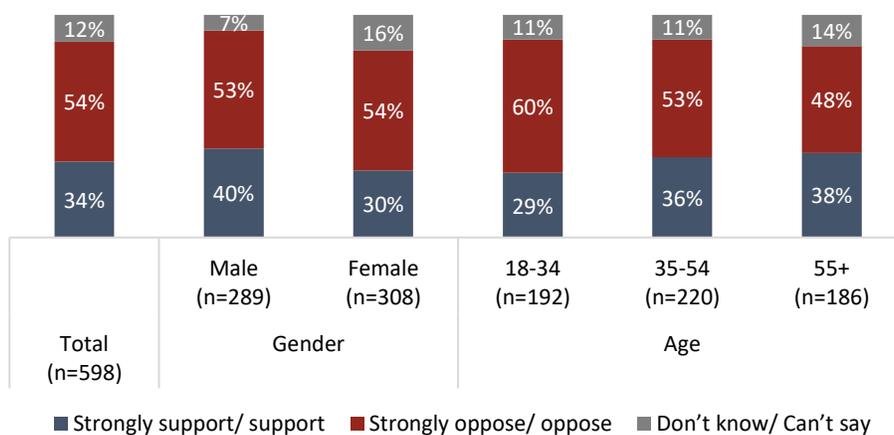
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Do you support or oppose the passing of a so-called Alberta Sovereignty Act?



While support is stronger among men than women, and among older Albertans than younger ones, a potential Alberta Sovereignty Act is opposed by a majority of men and women, and all age groups:

Do you support or oppose the passing of a so-called Alberta Sovereignty Act?

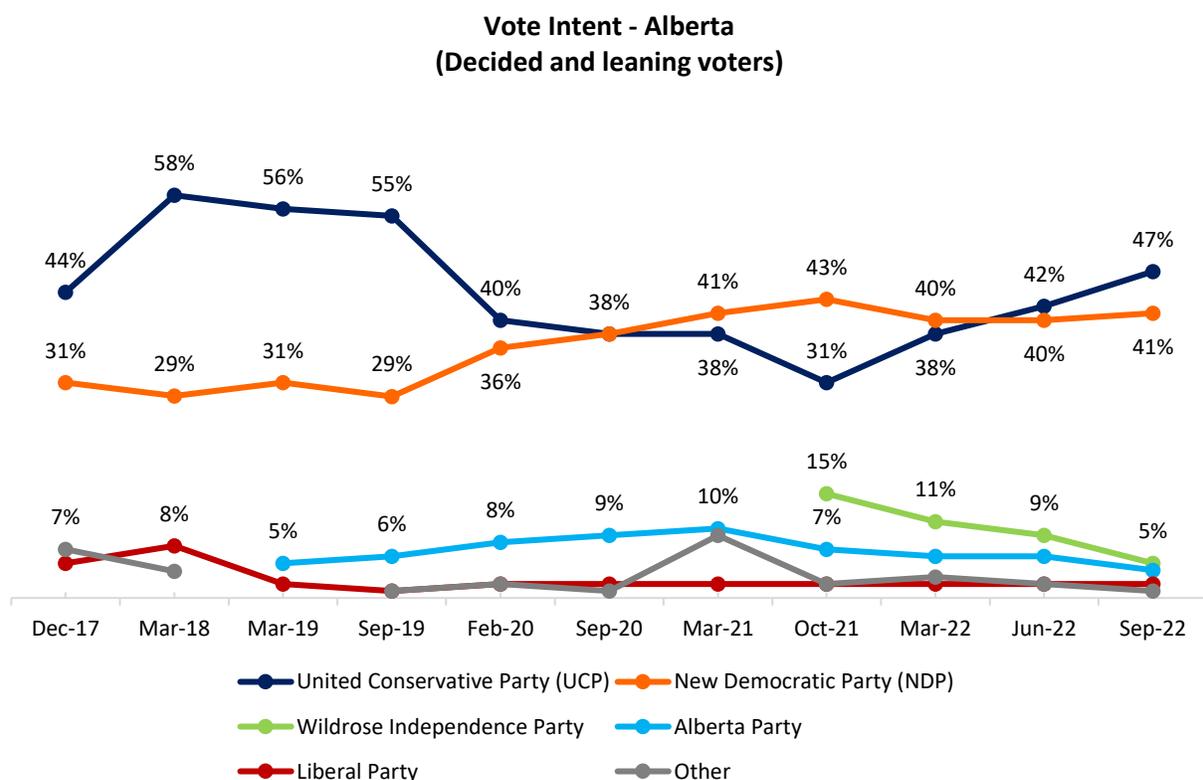


Part Three: Vote intent

UCP lead NDP by six points

The UCP's political fortunes have been rising as the party prepares to move on from Kenney. Since the beginning of the year, the party's share of vote intent in the province has risen steadily. Now, it leads by six points over the NDP, reaching a high not seen in Angus Reid Institute tracking since 2019. Approaching half (47%) of Albertans say they would vote for the UCP if an election were held today, while two-in-five (41%) say they would support Notley and the NDP.

Notably, the UCP's rise has coincided with a fall for the Wildrose Independence Party. Support for that party has fallen to one-third the levels seen last year:

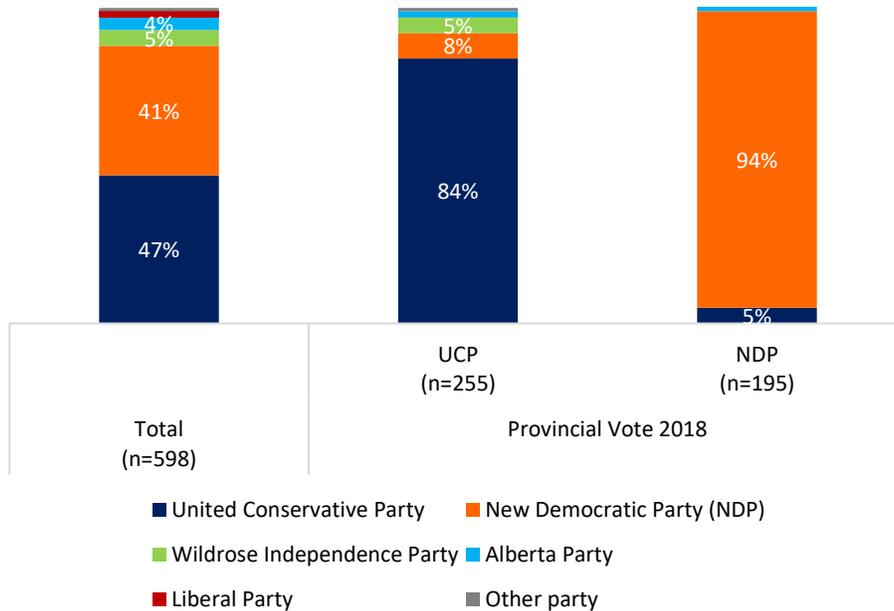


Indeed, the UCP is now seeing higher vote retention than earlier this year. As recently as March, one-in-five (18%) past UCP voters said they intended to vote Wildrose as seven-in-ten said they would repeat their vote for the UCP. Now more than four-in-five (84%) of those who voted in 2018 say they will vote again for that party if an election were held today. Meanwhile, vote retention for the NDP remains high:

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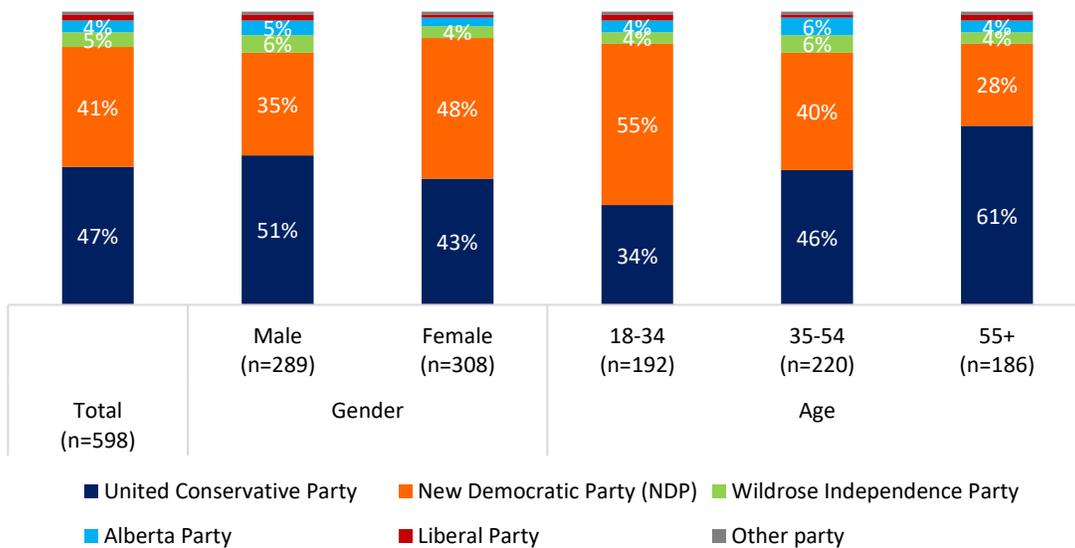
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**Vote Intent - Alberta
(Decided and leaning voters)**



Support for the UCP is strongest among those over the age of 54, while the NDP draws more support from 18- to 34-year-olds. Men are much less likely to support the NDP than women:

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



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Part Four: Kenney’s legacy

Few believe he’ll be remembered as a good premier

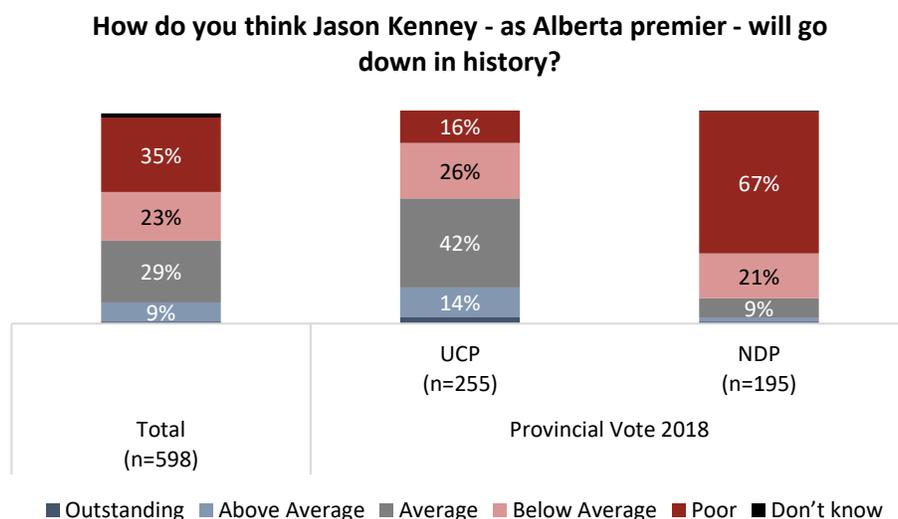
As Alberta prepares to turn the page to its next premier, Kenney’s chapter closes – at least for now. Kenney left Parliament Hill after a successful run, holding several key cabinet positions in Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s government. He came to Alberta to unite the province’s right-wing parties after many believed the Progressive Conservative-Wildrose fracture opened up the path to government for Notley and the NDP.

Kenney was successful in bringing the Wildrose and PC factions together long enough to see the newly formed United Conservative Party win a majority government in 2019. But the COVID-19 pandemic changed the political environment everywhere, and old fractures returned as the province, often reluctantly, enacted public health measures. The measures put Kenney at odds with some in his caucus, and perhaps ultimately led to his ouster.

There was no shortage of scandals during Kenney’s reign, including an RCMP investigation into the inaugural UCP leadership race he won. The investigation has yet to reach a conclusion as Kenney heads to the exit.

Kenney and his cabinet drew ire when they were pictured having dinner in apparent contravention of COVID-19 public health rules on a terrace of the notorious former “Sky Palace”. Later that year, he had to pull an embarrassing about-face after the province declared itself “Open for Summer”. Kenney apologized in the fall as he reinstated COVID-19 restrictions, and requested military assistance to fly COVID patients out of the province.

A majority (59%) of Albertans feel Kenney will be remembered as a below average premier, while three-in-ten (29%) say instead he will be remembered as an average one at best. Few (11%) disagree. The differences on this by political affiliation are stark:



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

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