

Alberta Election: 2023 race hinges significantly on Battleground Calgary and turnout of younger voters

Vote efficiency likely to play crucial role in result, with UCP, NDP fighting for seats in CGY, EDM

May 17, 2023 – With fewer than two weeks left in Alberta's election campaign, the spotlight shines on the province's largest city.

While the opposition NDP holds sway in Edmonton, and the UCP commands the loyalty of voters outside the province's two urban cores, it is Calgary that remains in play.

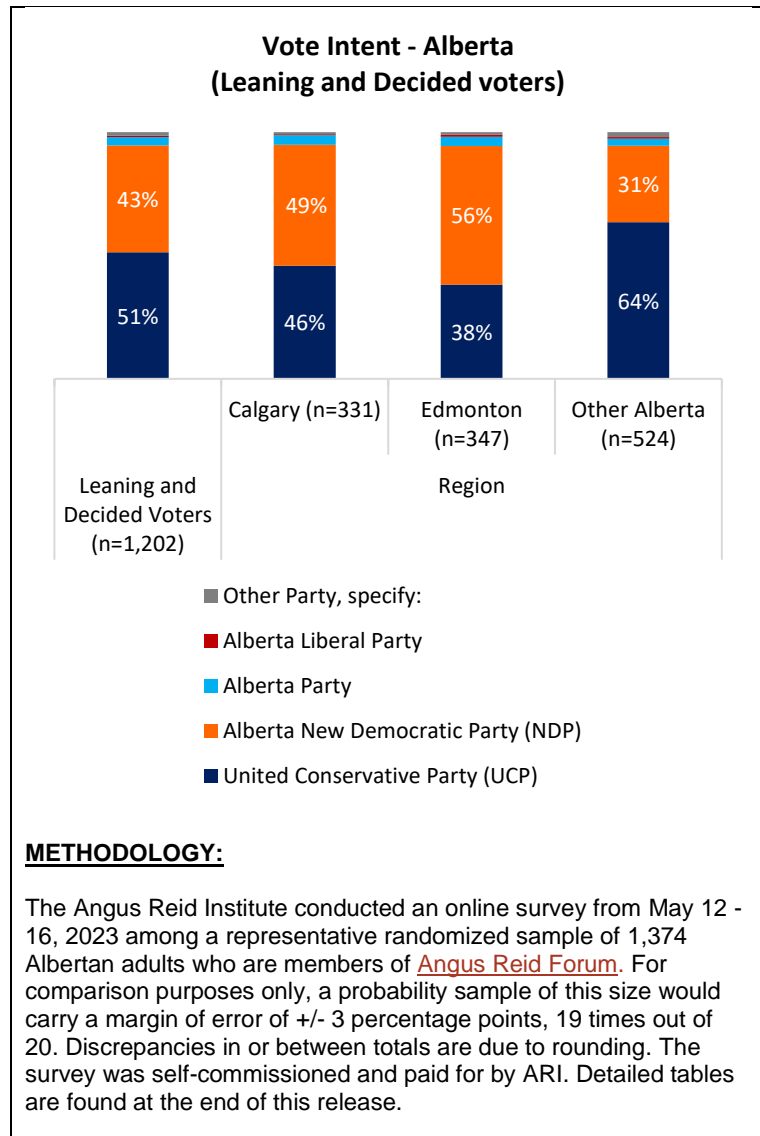
A new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds the United Conservative Party holding an eight-point lead in vote intent overall but in a statistical tie with the NDP in, as its nickname goes, 'Cowtown'.

The UCP holds a distinct demographic advantage. Its support is concentrated among those over the age of 54, a group historically more likely to vote than younger Albertans. The NDP risks being all hat no cattle should its supporters – concentrated among those under the age of 35 – fail to turn out to vote.

In the 2019 election, the UCP's majority was formed on the back of winning nearly all seats in Calgary (23 of 26) and outside of the province's two largest metro areas (35 of 36), while losing 20 of the 25 seats in and around Edmonton. The NDP's path to government likely lies in flipping seats in Calgary.

More Key Findings:

- NDP leader Rachel Notley has a 10-point favourability advantage over UCP leader and Premier Danielle Smith in Calgary (48% to 38%).
- A majority (56%) of men say they have a negative view of Notley, including 62 per cent of those aged 35 to 54 and two-thirds (67%) older than that.



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- Two-in-five (41%) Albertans say their view of Smith has worsened in recent weeks. Comparatively, 32 per cent say the same of Notley. Instead, half of Albertans (52%) say their opinion of Notley has neither improved nor worsened during the campaign.
- More than two-in-five (44%) in Calgary say their opinion of Smith has declined since the dropping of the writ. Outside of Calgary and Edmonton, one-third (32%) say the opposite and that their opinion of Smith has improved.

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: Leader favourability

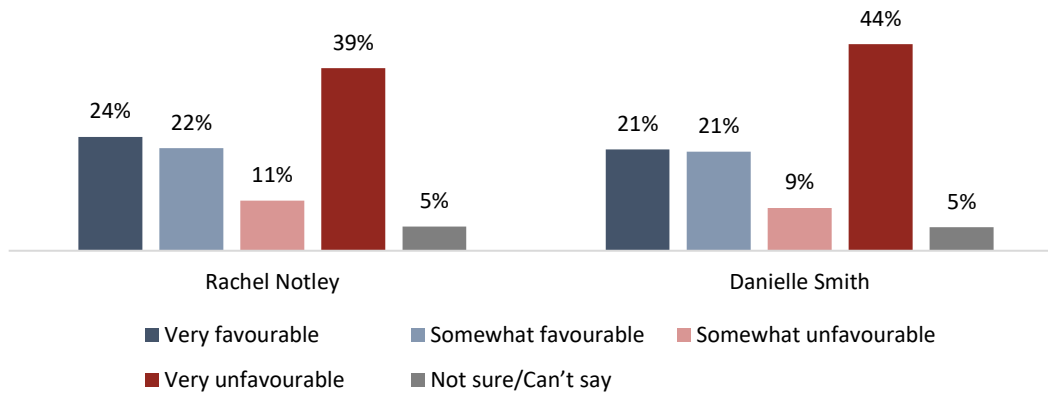
Alberta's state of emergency caused by [dozens of active wildfires](#) burning across the province offered a chance for the two frontrunners for the premier's office to stand together in the middle of a divisive election campaign. In a show of solidarity, UCP leader Danielle Smith and NDP leader Rachel Notley [met jointly](#) with evacuees in Edmonton. Though campaigning [has stopped in some affected ridings](#), the broader race continues as Notley and Smith keep one eye on the fires and another on a closely contested election.

Halfway through the campaign, the two stand together in at least one other area – Albertans are more likely to view both Notley and Smith more negatively than positively. More than two-in-five Albertans (46%) have a positive impression of Notley, near equal to the number who say they view Smith favourably (42%):

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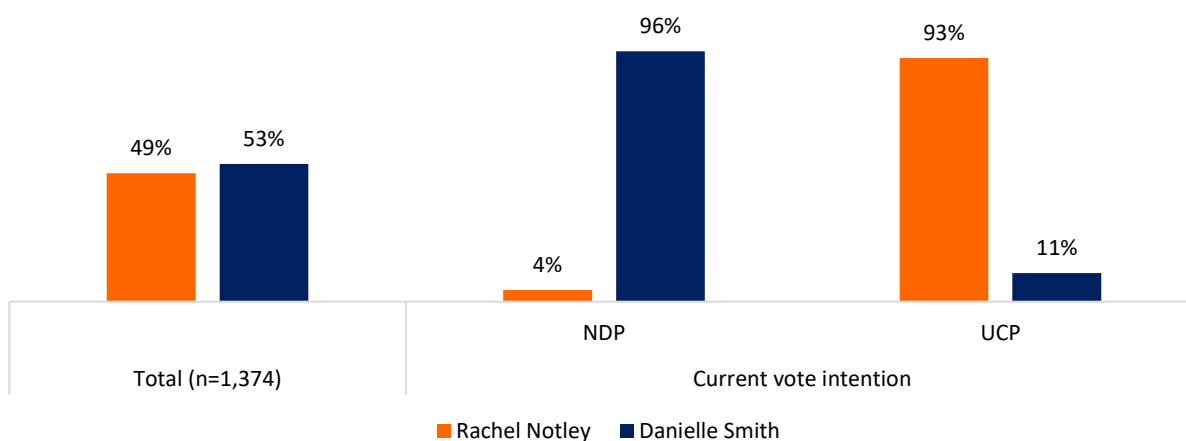
**Do you have an overall favourable or unfavourable opinion of each of the following:
(Alberta, n=1,374)**



Views by current vote intent

Neither Notley nor Smith has a real advantage in favourability, largely due to the silos within which they operate. Voters for one party near-unanimously dislike the other party's leader. Notably, those supporting the UCP are three-times more likely than those supporting the NDP to have an unfavourable view of their own party's leader:

Those who say they have an "unfavourable" view of Notley and Smith by current vote intention



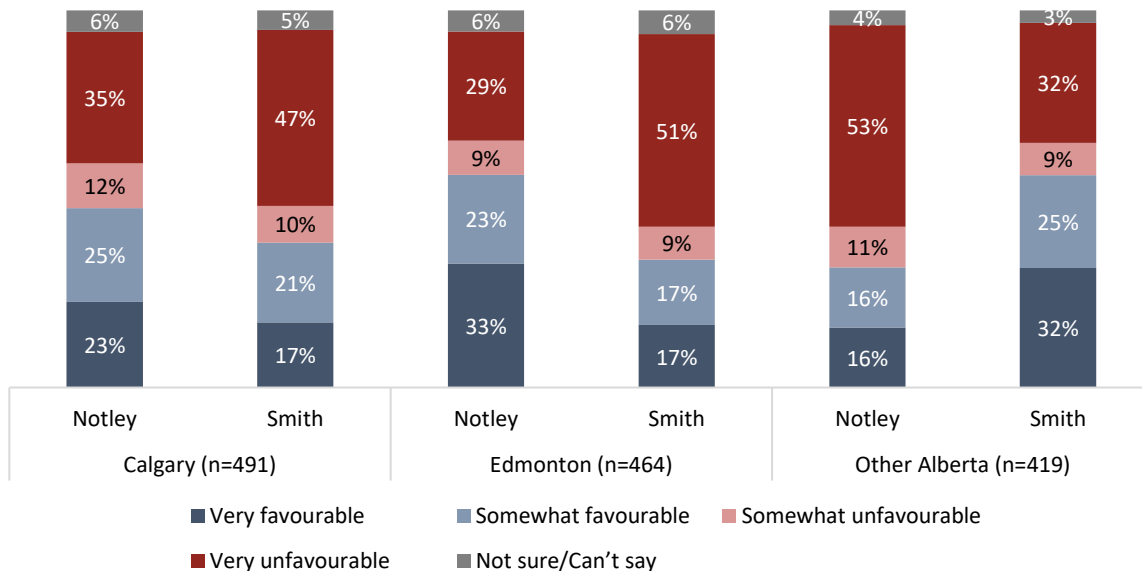
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Views by region

There are significant regional dynamics at work. Smith is viewed much more positively outside of the province's two largest cities. Notley fares better than Smith in both Calgary and Edmonton by this metric, but the favourability gap between the two is much wider in Edmonton than Calgary:

Favourable vs. unfavourable by region



Views by age and gender

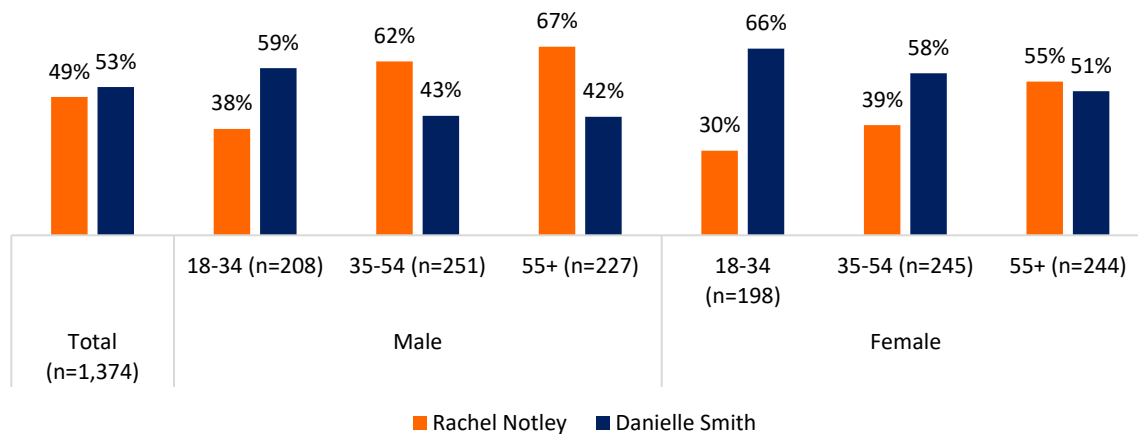
Negative impressions of Notley are much more common among men, and especially those older than 34 years old. As well, more than half (55%) of women over 54 say they have an unfavourable view of the NDP leader.

At least two-in-five in all age and gender demographics express negativity towards Smith, but those under the age of 35 are the most likely to be critical of the UCP leader and current premier:

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Those who say they have an "unfavourable" view of Notley and Smith by age and gender



Part Two: Mid-campaign momentum

Though there have been numerous policy announcements, it may feel as though there have been nearly as many headlines if not more about a growing library of controversial statements made by Smith in her past role as a radio host and commentator. Perhaps the most notable remark came from a 2021 video podcast, in which Smith [compared Albertans who were vaccinated against COVID-19 to supporters of Adolf Hitler](#). Later in the podcast, she also said she didn't wear a Remembrance Day poppy that year to protest pandemic health measures. [Smith apologized](#), but drew rebukes from Jewish human rights group B'nai Brith Canada, the Canadian Anti-Hate Network, and the Royal Canadian Legion.

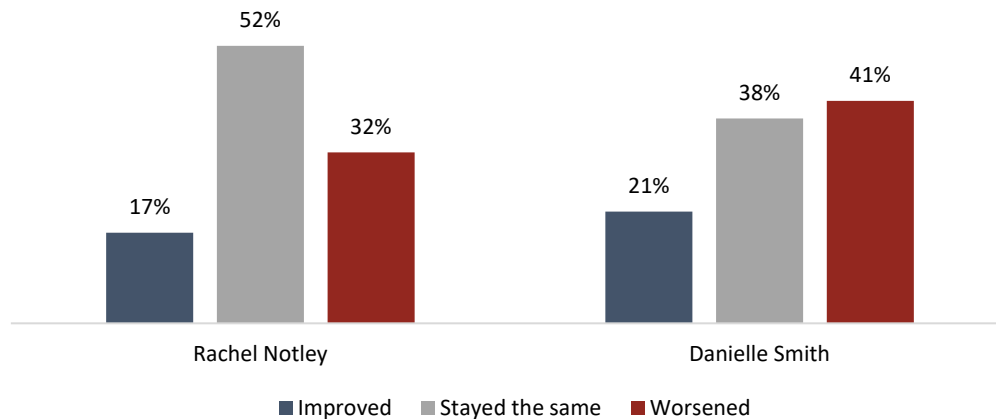
In the wake of these comments, two-in-five (41%) Albertans say their opinion of Smith has worsened in recent weeks. As many say it has stayed the same (38%), while one-in-five (21%) have a more positive impression of Smith than they did several weeks ago.

The needle has not moved as much on Notley – half of Albertans (52%) say their opinion of the NDP leader has not changed in recent weeks. However, momentum for Notley is also more negative than positive. One-third (32%) of Albertans say their impression of Notley has worsened in recent weeks, nearly twice as many as those who say it has headed in the opposite direction (17%):

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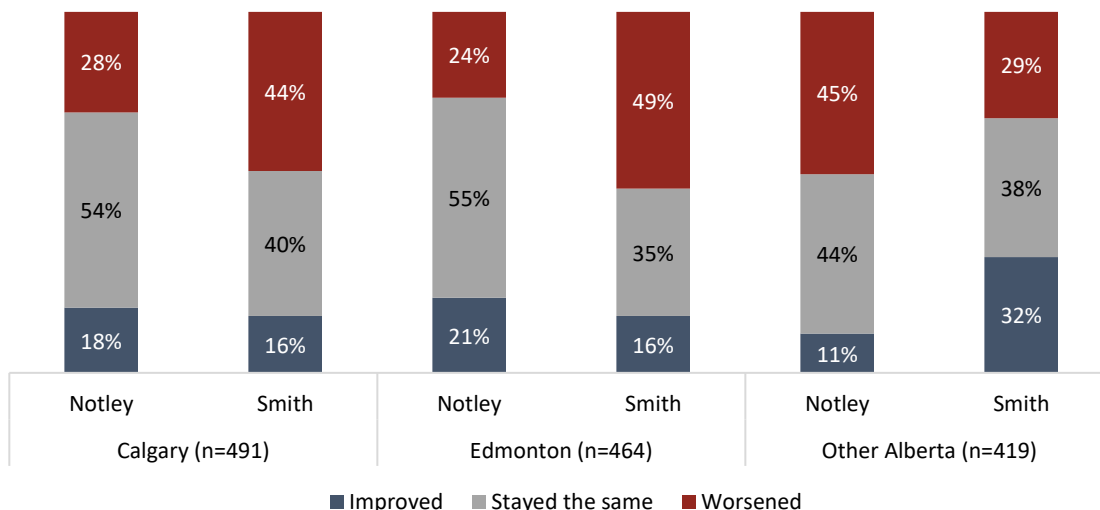
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**Over the last couple of weeks, would you say your opinion of each of the following has improved, stayed the same, or worsened?
(Alberta, n=1,374)**



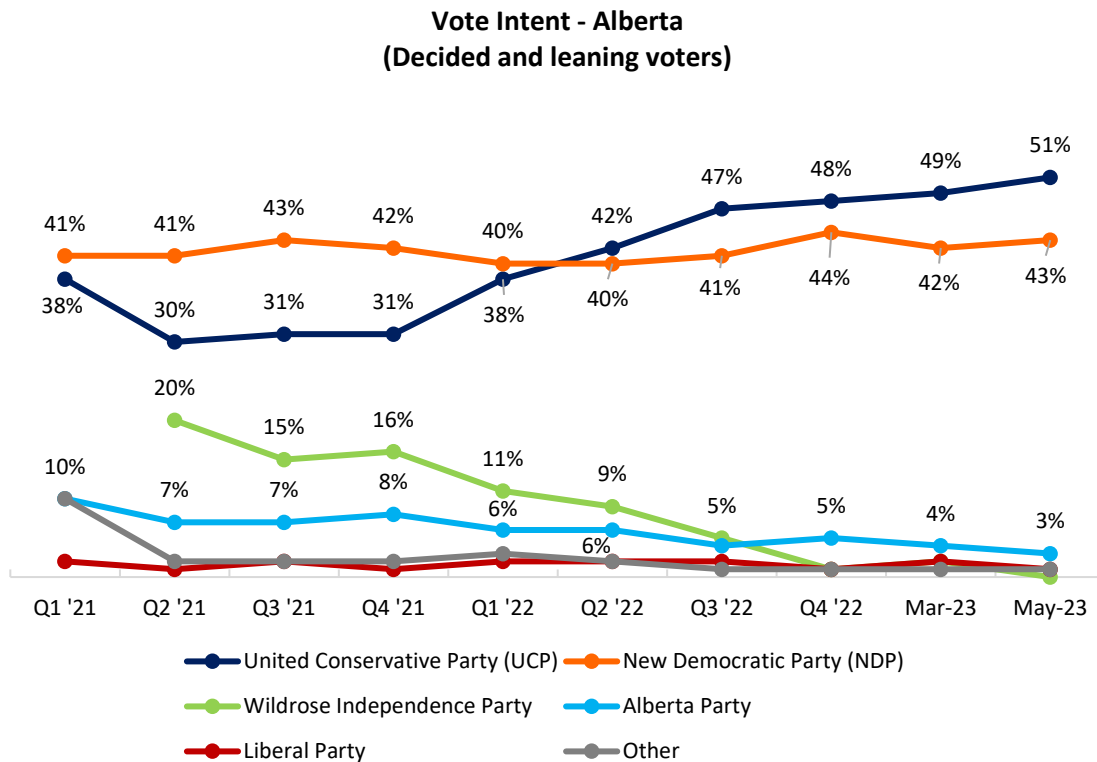
Outside of Calgary and Edmonton, as many Albertans say their opinion of Smith has improved (32%) as worsened (29%). In all other regions for Smith, and in all regions for Notley, more Albertans say they have a worsening than improving impression of the two leading candidates for premier. However, there are many more Albertans in the province’s two largest cities who say they have a deteriorating opinion of Smith (44% Calgary, 49% Edmonton) than Notley (28% Calgary, 24% Edmonton):

Over the last couple of weeks, would you say your opinion of each of the following has improved, stayed the same, or worsened?



Part Three: Vote intention

After three weeks of official campaigning, and months more of pre-election posturing, there has been little change in vote intention in Alberta. Half (51%) of likely voters say they will vote UCP on May 29, while more than two-in-five (43%) say they will vote NDP, closely consistent with voting trends since Smith was elected UCP leader in October last year:



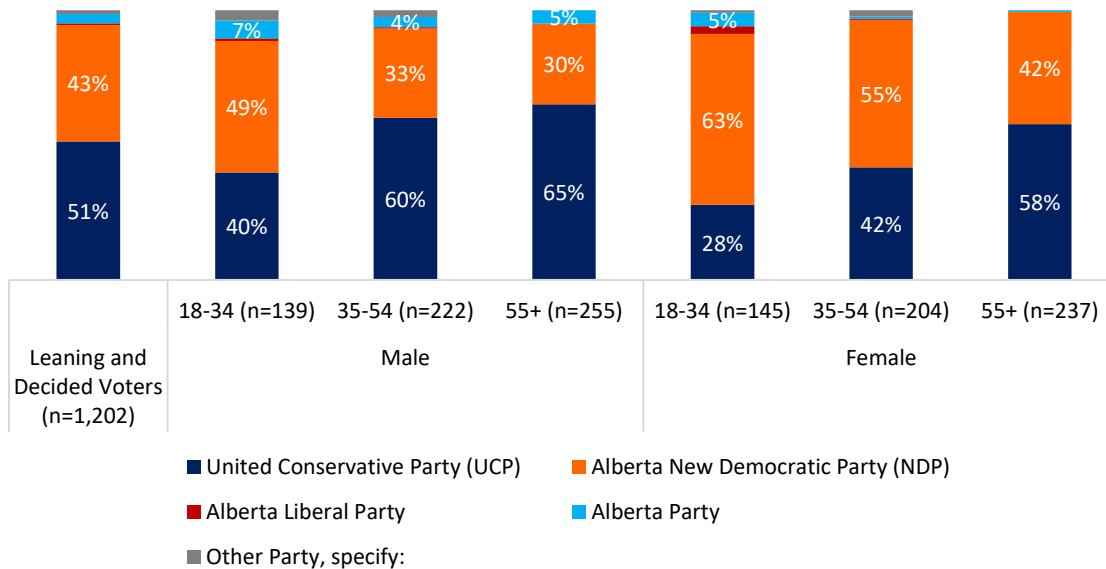
Age and gender

The UCP hold a key demographic advantage among older Albertans, who historically have had high turnout in past elections. The NDP is the favoured party among 18- to 34-year-olds and 35- to 54-year-old women, the former of which especially have not been reliable in previous Canadian elections at turning up at the polls:

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**Vote Intent - Alberta
(Leaning and decided voters)**



While the 10,000-foot view has remained relatively consistent, important regional shifts are emerging. Since March, support for the NDP in Calgary has grown by six points, from 43 to 49 per cent. UCP vote intention in that region remains at 46 per cent now, as it was two months ago.

This gain for the NDP has been offset by an eight-point growth in support for the UCP outside of the province's two largest cities, though these two trends have unequal impact. Voter turnout outside of Edmonton and Calgary has historically been higher and provides a solid electoral base to the UCP. That said, this dominance can contribute to an "inefficient" vote, given the number of seats outside the urban centres relative to those within them.

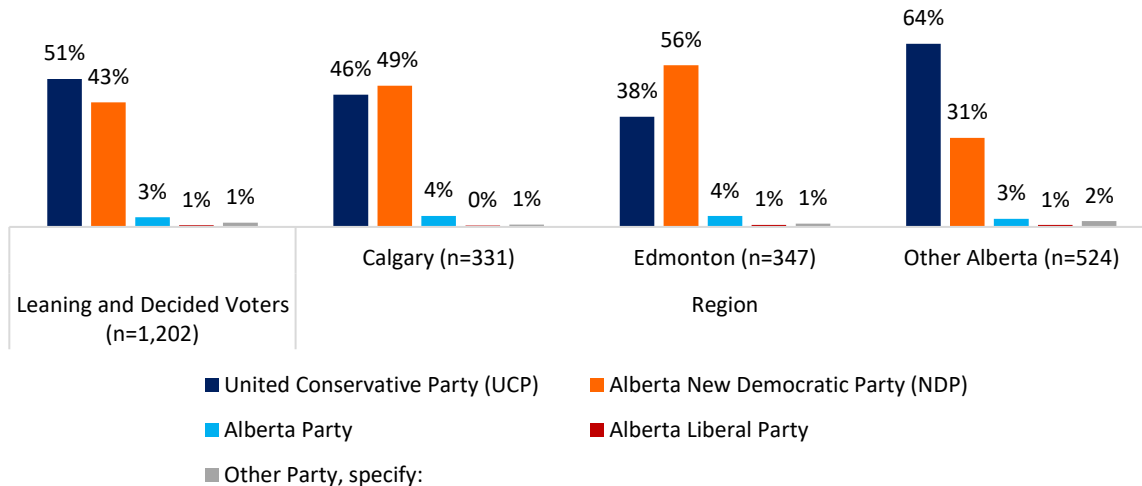
While a path to victory for the UCP could be carved through rural Alberta and winning enough seats in Calgary, the NDP must plot its course through both Calgary and Edmonton, the former of which was a UCP stronghold in 2019.

For Alberta's New Democrats, success rests heavily on the shoulders of younger urban voters, who must turn up in large numbers to boost their party. While the UCP sits just behind the NDP in Calgary, its more reliable voting base may well prove an advantage.

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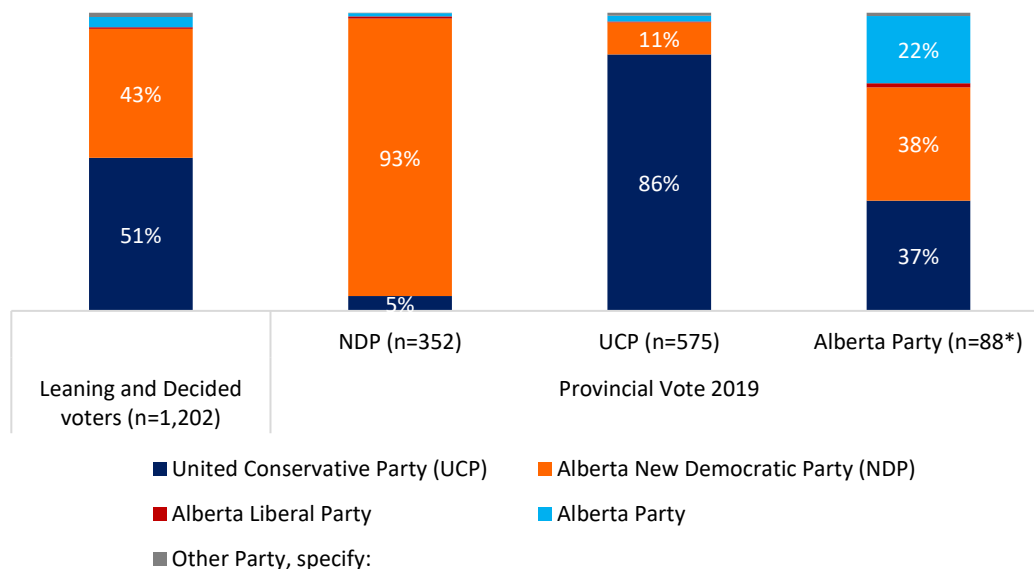
**Vote Intent - Alberta
(Leaning and decided voters)**



Vote retention

Bringing back the voters who pushed the UCP to a majority in 2019 is one of the key challenges for Smith. In an election where many ridings are likely to be hotly contested, 14 per cent of past UCP voters say they are going elsewhere. Twice as many previous UCP voters say they will support the NDP (11%) as past NDP supporters say they will do the opposite (5%).

Vote intention compared to 2019 vote



**Smaller sample size, interpret with caution*

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

For detailed results by past provincial and federal vote, [click here](#).

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