

Alberta Election: Smith judged best choice on oil and gas, Notley best on health; leaders tied on best vision

Neither leader stands out on emergency and wildfire management – 37 per cent choose each

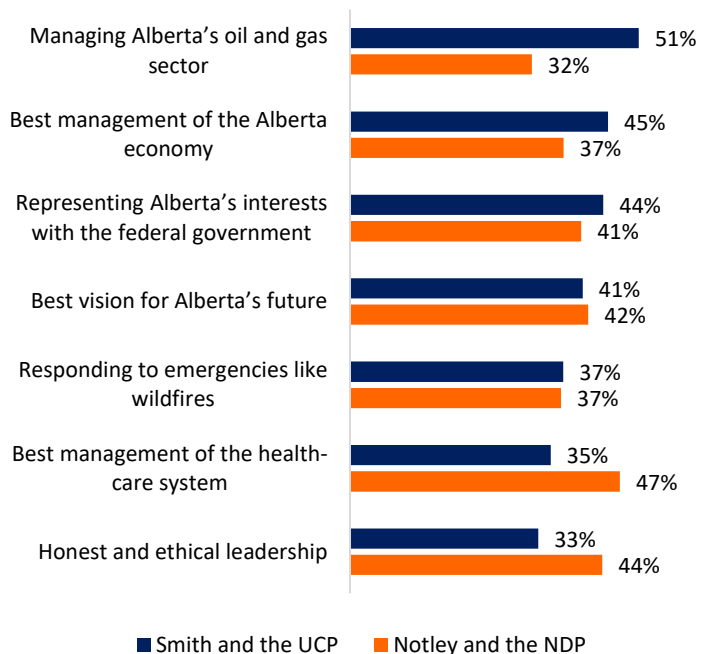
May 18, 2023 – With advance voting beginning on May 23 and Election Day set for May 29, Albertans will soon choose their next provincial government with no shortage of important issues on the docket. Whether it's the wildfires raging in the province, strengthening a post-COVID-19 health-care system, or protecting and building on a booming economy, voters are looking to party leaders for their vision and response.

With the economy, jobs, and inflation top of mind for potential voters, the latest data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds Albertans assessing United Conservative Party and leader Danielle Smith as the best choice to manage the economy and the oil and gas sector, while NDP and leader Rachel Notley are seen as the best choice for the health-care system, and for "honest and ethical leadership".

On the question of the overall vision each party offers, the parties and leaders are tied: 42 per cent say Notley has the right outlook for the province, with statistically the same number (41%) saying the same of Smith.

These are crucial undercurrents in a race that will largely be decided by how many younger voters turn up in the battleground of Calgary, as noted in the Angus Reid Institute's [previous release on current vote intentions](#). Consider that when asked which party – all issues considered – is best to form government, 40 per cent choose the UCP and 40 per cent choose the NDP.

Thinking of the main political parties and leaders running in this Alberta election, who do you think offers Alberta the overall best choice in each of the following areas: (Alberta, n=1,374)



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from May 12 - 16, 2023 among a representative randomized sample of 1,374 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 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:

- The top two issues for every age and gender grouping are either inflation/cost of living or health care. Crime and public safety are chosen as a top issue by approximately one-quarter of residents in each area of the province, making it the third highest provincial priority.
- UCP voters are twice as likely as NDP voters to say that their party leader would not make the best premier for Alberta (23% vs 11%). That said, the vast majorities of both camps back their own leaders.
- On the question of best premier, Notley holds a 12-point advantage in Calgary and a 21-point advantage in Edmonton. Outside of those urban centres, Smith is chosen by a wide margin (48% to 27%).

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: Key issues

As Albertans look ahead to the start of voting, there is one obvious and immediate concern – the wildfires burning across the province, threatening homes, lives and livelihoods. More than 694,000 hectares of land have already been destroyed and nearly 20,000 people remain evacuated as dozens of fires continue to burn in Alberta. And this may just be the start of what some are projecting to be a long, “challenging” summer for firefighters.

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The two parties likely to form government after the next election must balance this pressing issue with longstanding challenges the province faces, such as the rising cost of living, a [health-care system in crisis](#), and public safety in the wake of high profile violent crimes in [Calgary](#) and [Edmonton](#).

For Albertans, cost of living is far-and-away the top concern. Three-in-five (60%) say it is an issue they care about the most. Health care trails closely behind, selected by half of Albertans (49%). Public safety (26%) and jobs (25%) are chosen by one-quarter each, while energy policy is selected by one-in-five (18%). The ongoing wildfires, while a significant concern for many under threat, is down the list of province-wide priorities, selected by one-in-12 (8%).

By age and gender

Across demographics, there is agreement on the top two issues – cost of living and health care – but less consensus beyond those. Albertans under 35 are more likely to worry about housing affordability than older residents. Education is a higher priority for women under 55 than others. Men over 35 are more likely to fret over energy policy:

First, thinking of the various issues and challenges facing Alberta, which ones do you personally care about the most? (Up to three chosen, top five issues shown)						
Total (n=1,374)	Male			Female		
	18-34 (n=208)	35-54 (n=251)	55+ (n=227)	18-34 (n=198)	35-54 (n=245)	55+ (n=244)
Cost of living/ Inflation 60%	Cost of living/ Inflation 58%	Cost of living/ Inflation 61%	Cost of living/ Inflation 55%	Cost of living/ Inflation 66%	Cost of living/ Inflation 66%	Health Care 61%
Health Care 49%	Health Care 36%	Health Care 38%	Health Care 49%	Health Care 50%	Health Care 56%	Cost of living/ Inflation 55%
Crime/ Public Safety 26%	The Economy/ Jobs 31%	The Economy/ Jobs 33%	Crime/ Public Safety 36%	Housing Affordability 28%	Education 25%	Crime/ Public safety 32%
The Economy/ Jobs 25%	Housing Affordability 27%	Crime/ Public Safety 26%	The Economy/ Jobs 26%	Environment/ Climate change 19%	Crime/ Public safety 24%	The Economy/ Jobs 21%
Energy Policy 18%	Crime/ Public Safety 22%	Energy Policy 22%	Energy Policy 26%	Education 18%	The Economy/ Jobs 21%	Energy Policy 19%

By region

Cost of living and health care are the top two issues in all regions in the province. Housing affordability ranks as a higher concern in Calgary than Edmonton or outside of those two cities. Though not nearly as unaffordable as other major Canadian metros, housing prices and rents [have begun to creep up](#) in Alberta's largest city. Meanwhile, energy policy is a top concern for one-quarter (26%) living outside of the province's two urban cores:

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First, thinking of the various issues and challenges facing Alberta, which ones do you personally care about the most?
(Up to three chosen, top five issues shown)

Total (n=1,374)	Region		
	Calgary (n=491)	Edmonton (n=464)	Other Alberta (n=419)
Cost of living/ Inflation 60%	Cost of living/ Inflation 60%	Cost of living/ Inflation 60%	Cost of living/ Inflation 61%
Health Care 49%	Health Care 52%	Health Care 47%	Health Care 47%
Crime/ Public Safety 26%	Crime/ Public Safety 27%	Crime/ Public Safety 28%	The Economy/ Jobs 27%
The Economy/ Jobs 25%	The Economy/ Jobs 25%	The Economy/ Jobs 24%	Energy Policy 26%
Energy Policy 18%	Housing Affordability 24%	Education 18%	Crime/ Public Safety 23%

By vote intent

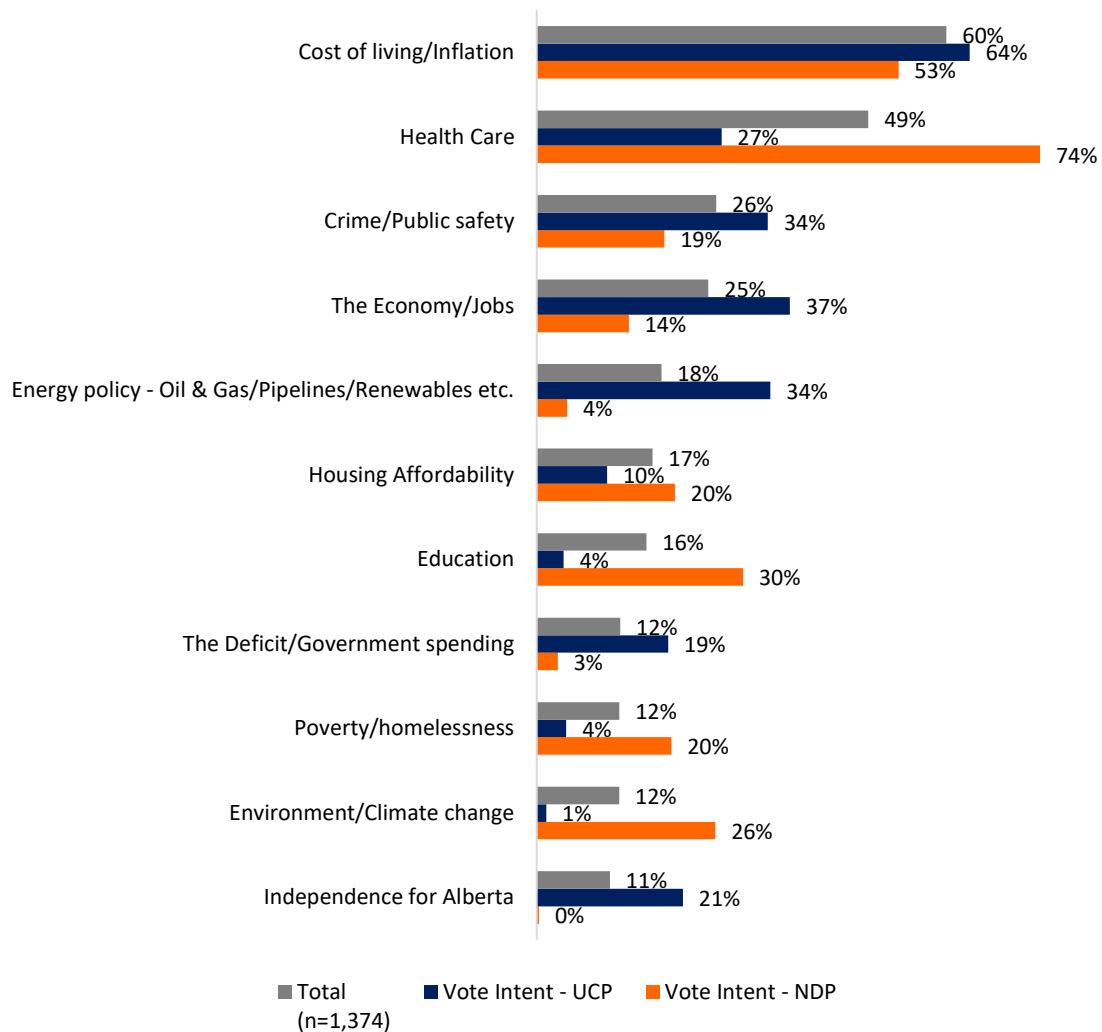
Likely voters for the two leading parties in the provincial election have disparate priorities. Three times as many Albertans who say they will vote NDP (74%) on May 29 as UCP (27%) believe health care is a pressing concern for the province. Likely NDP voters believe education (30%), climate change (26%) and poverty (20%) are top issues more so than those who say they will vote UCP. Instead, likely UCP voters are more concerned about the economy and jobs (37%), energy policy (34%) and crime (34%).

Also, one-in-five (21%) who say they will vote UCP on election day believe independence for Alberta is a top issue. No prospective NDP voters say this:

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**First, thinking of the various issues and challenges facing Alberta, which ones do you personally care about the most?
(Up to three chosen, issues with more than 10% overall shown)**



Part Two: Best on issues

Health care and ethics for Notley; economy, oil and gas for Smith

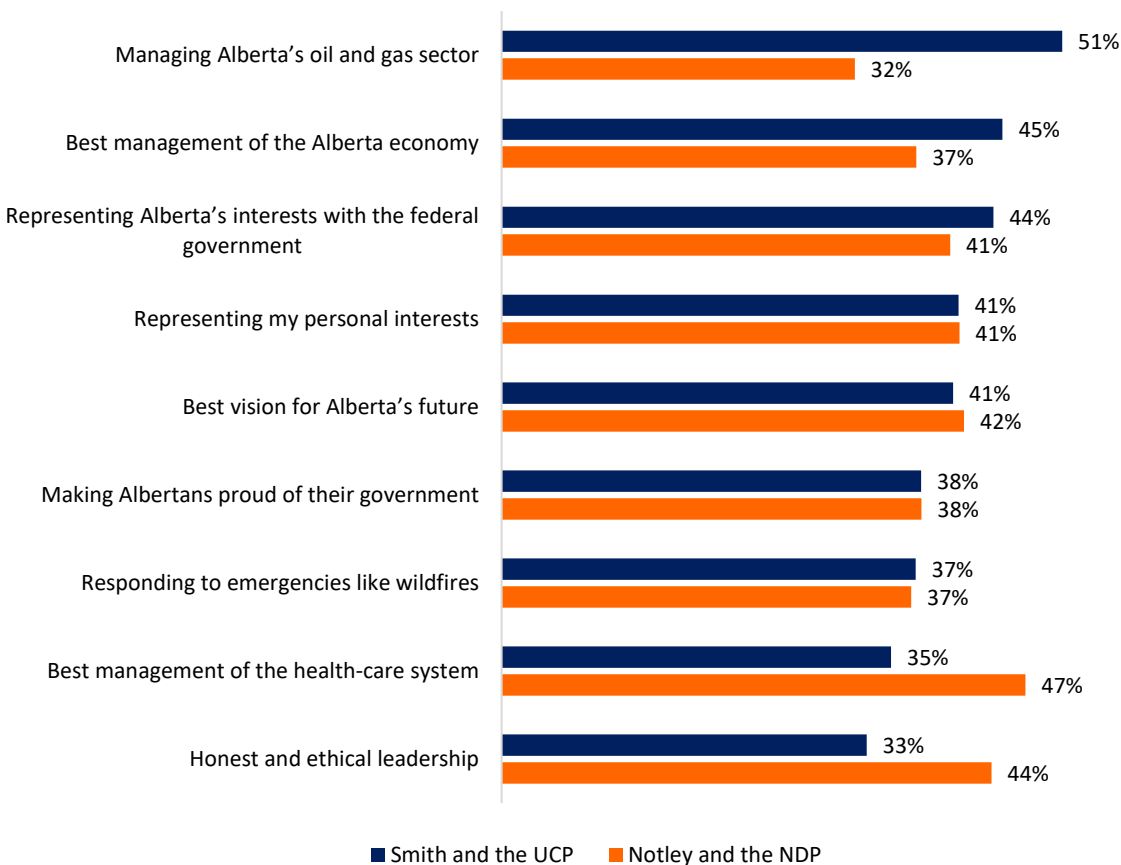
The NDP and UCP have used the campaign period to try and gain separation from each other on the top issues in the province, though each clearly have their strengths and weaknesses. Half (51%) of Albertans believe Smith and the UCP offer the best choice on managing oil and gas. One-third (32%) instead select Notley and the NDP. Perhaps relatedly, more Albertans are likely to believe Smith and her party would manage the economy overall better (45%) than Notley and hers (37%).

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On health care, more Albertans give Notley and the NDP the nod (47%) than Smith and the UCP (35%). With [an ongoing ethics investigation](#) into Smith and her alleged contact with crown prosecutors in cases stemming from the Coutts border blockade, Albertans are more likely to believe Notley and the NDP will provide honest and ethical leadership (44%) than Smith and the UCP (33%):

**Thinking of the main political parties and leaders running in this Alberta election, who do you think offers Alberta the overall best choice in each of the following areas:
(Alberta, n=1,374)**



No clear leader for wildfire and emergency management

The province's state of emergency in response to the ongoing wildfires has spurred some [NDP and UCP cooperation](#). Smith's management of the situation in her continuing role as premier has not been without hiccups – she disclosed the pending state of emergency [at a campaign event for UCP supporters](#) prior to the province-wide announcement. Notley, meanwhile, [was praised widely](#) for her performance when she was premier during the 2016 Fort McMurray fire.

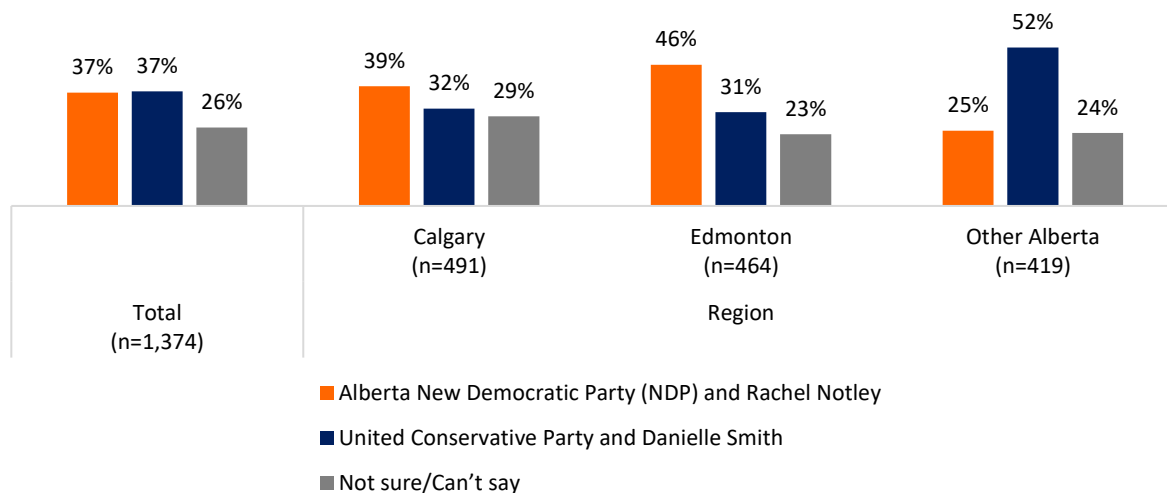
Albertans are split as to who offers the best choice to lead in such emergency situations. As many pick the NDP and Notley (37%) as do Smith and the UCP (37%). However, in the area outside of Calgary and

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Edmonton, [where the wildfires have burned](#), half (52%) select the UCP. That also may be a reflection of [a clear party preference in that region](#) as well.

Thinking of the main political parties and leaders running in this Alberta election, who do you think offers Alberta the overall best choice in responding to emergencies like wildfires



Handling the economy

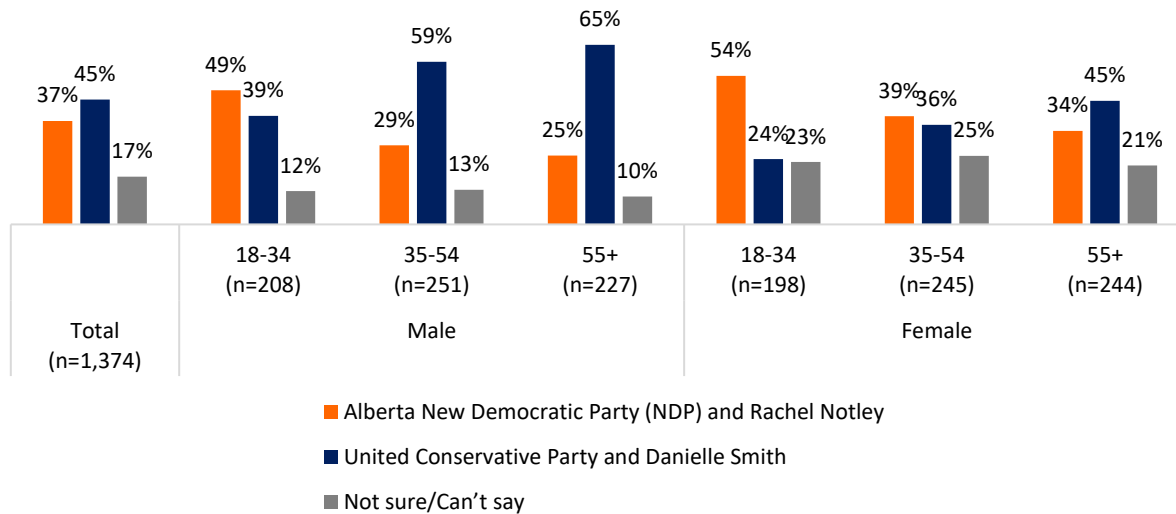
Alberta's economy is in strong shape thanks to high oil prices, which fueled [a \\$2.4-billion surplus](#) in the UCP government's spring budget. ATB Financial projected Alberta's GDP growth to be the highest in the country in 2023 at [2.8 per cent](#), outpacing the expectation for Canada nationally. Still, a [potential national recession](#) looms and much lies outside of the province's control. Lower oil prices would have [immediate negative effects](#) on Alberta's biggest industry, [an issue which plagued](#) Notley in her previous time as premier.

Perhaps with the rosy economic picture under the current UCP government in mind, Albertans are more likely to believe Smith offers the best choice on managing the province's economy (45%) than Notley (37%). This belief is especially high among men over the age of 34:

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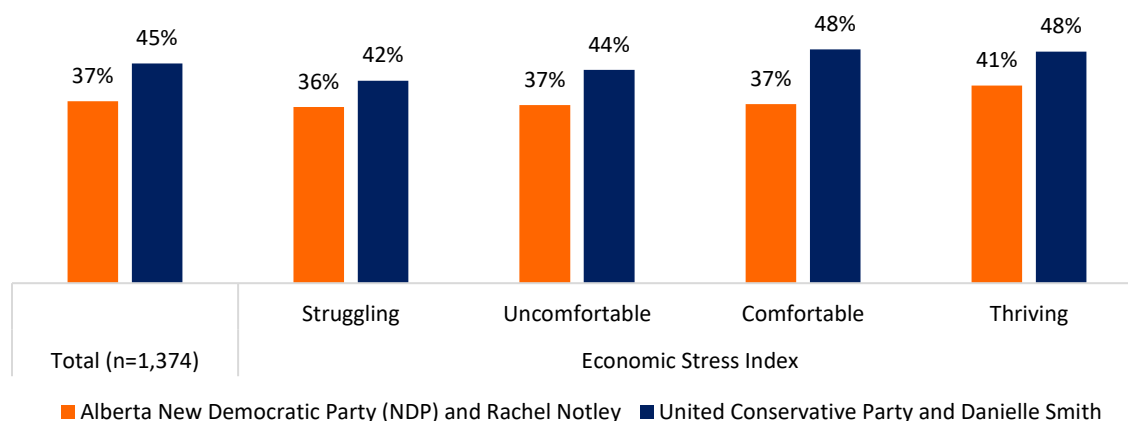
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Thinking of the main political parties and leaders running in this Alberta election, who do you think offers Alberta the overall best choice in managing the province's economy



While more than one-in-three Albertans (37%) say that they would most trust the NDP to manage the economy, this rises to 41 per cent among those who are experiencing the lowest levels of economic stress. What is perhaps most notable here is that the UCP, however, holds an advantage among all groups, from those who are Struggling to get by, to those who are Thriving (for more on the Angus Reid Institute's Economic Stress Index, [click here](#)).

Thinking of the main political parties and leaders running in this Alberta election, who do you think offers Alberta the overall best choice in managing the province's economy

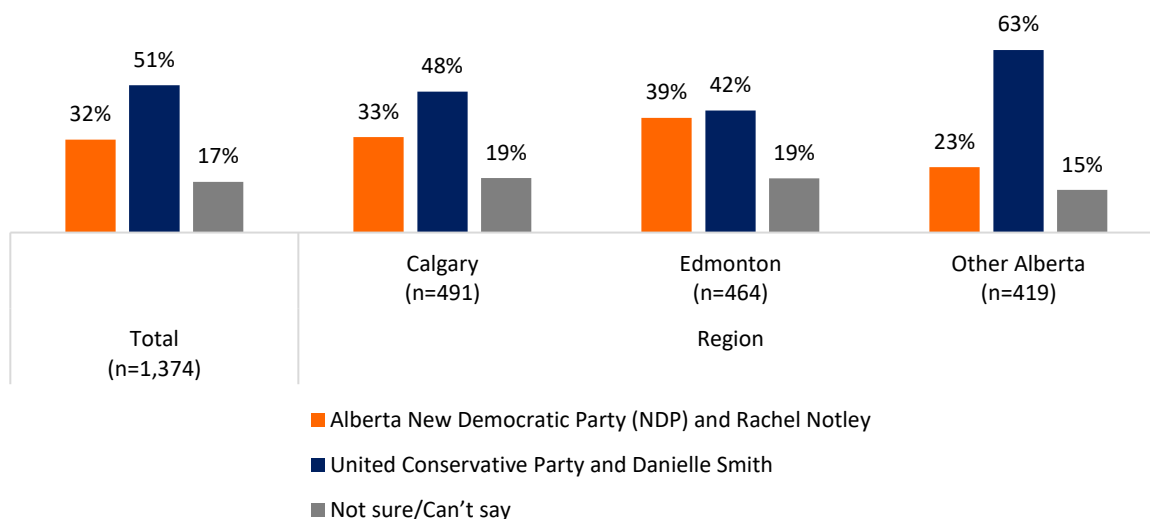


Oil and gas remains Alberta’s economic engine, [powering the province to a surplus](#) in the UCP government’s spring budget. Smith and the UCP are more trusted by Albertans to lead on this file, with half (51%) saying they are the best choice to manage the sector.

[Throughout the election, and prior to](#), the UCP have painted the NDP as “anti-oil and gas”, which perhaps plays into Albertans’ evaluation of the party’s future performance on this file. Negative perceptions of the NDP’s handling of the industry [also dogged them](#) throughout Notley’s term as premier. One-third (32%) say the NDP and Notley are the best choice to manage oil and gas.

Half (48%) in Calgary, where [many energy companies are headquartered](#), say the UCP are the best choice to manage oil and gas. In Edmonton, respondents are divided choosing the NDP (39%) and UCP (42%) on this matter. Outside of the two big cities, a strong majority (63%) say the UCP are the best stewards of the industry:

Thinking of the main political parties and leaders running in this Alberta election, who do you think offers Alberta the overall best choice in managing the province's oil and gas sector



Health care

Smith and the UCP [have touted the headway](#) they’ve made in addressing the problems in a health-care system which has been described as in “[crisis](#)”. After firing the Alberta Health Services board when Smith took over as premier and adding frontline health-care staff, the UCP government [said in February](#) ambulance wait times have dropped from highs seen in 2022. However, there are lingering concerns, [based on Smith’s past comments](#), that the UCP will move towards further privatization of the health-care system. Smith attempted to head off these concerns with a “[public health guarantee](#)” prior to the election.

Related: [Public Purists, Privatization Proponents and the Curious: Canada’s three health-care mindsets](#)

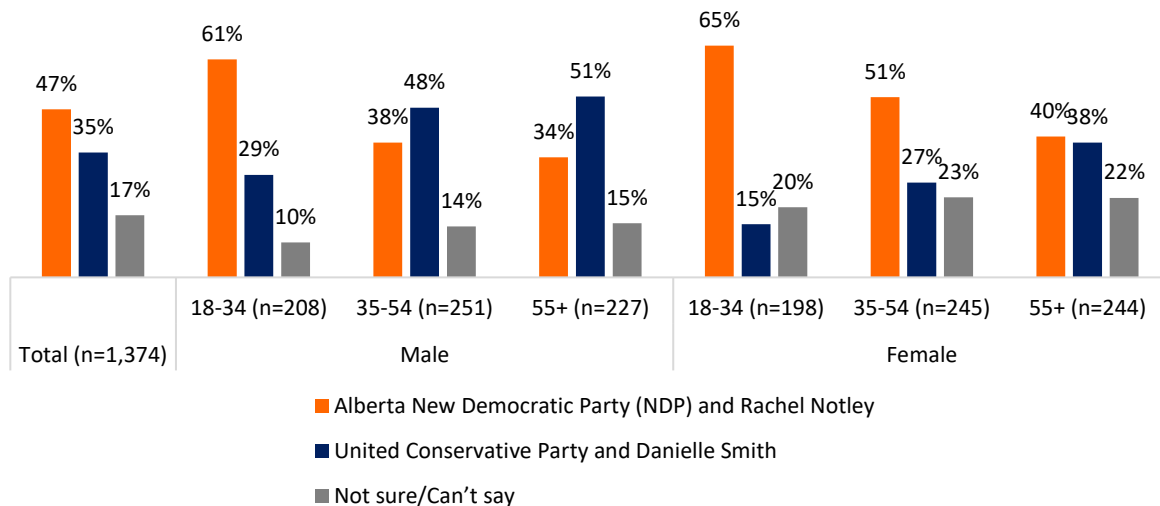
Meanwhile, the NDP and Notley have made commitments to health care a key part of their platform, [promising to recruit more health-care professionals](#), as well as funding commitments for [health-care centres](#) and [hospitals](#).

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Half (47%) of Albertans say Notley and the NDP are the best choice to manage the province's health-care system. One-third (35%) instead choose Smith and the UCP. Majorities of Albertans aged 18- to 34-years-old, and half of women 35 to 54, choose the NDP. Support for the UCP is stronger on this issue among men over the age of 34:

Thinking of the main political parties and leaders running in this Alberta election, who do you think offers Alberta the overall best choice in management of health care



Best overall choice for premier

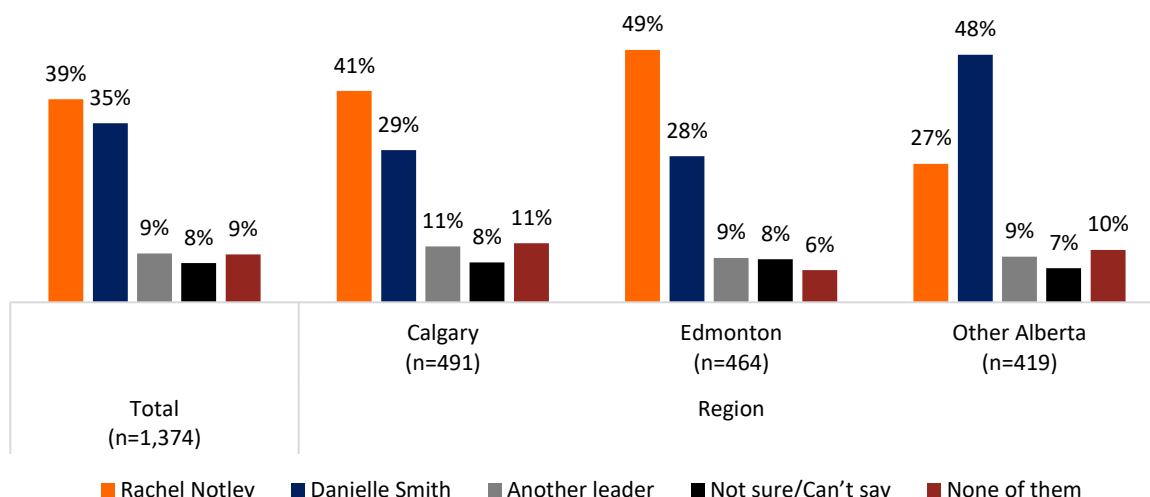
With all these issues in mind, one-third of Albertans (35%) say Smith is the best choice to lead the province, notably five points less than the number of Albertans who say the UCP is the best choice to form government (40%, [see detailed tables](#)). The proportion of Albertans who believe the NDP are the top party to run government (40%) and who say Notley would make the best premier (39%) is near equal.

Smith is viewed as the best choice to be premier by half (48%) outside of the province's two urban cores. Notley leads the UCP leader on this metric in Calgary (+12) and Edmonton (+21):

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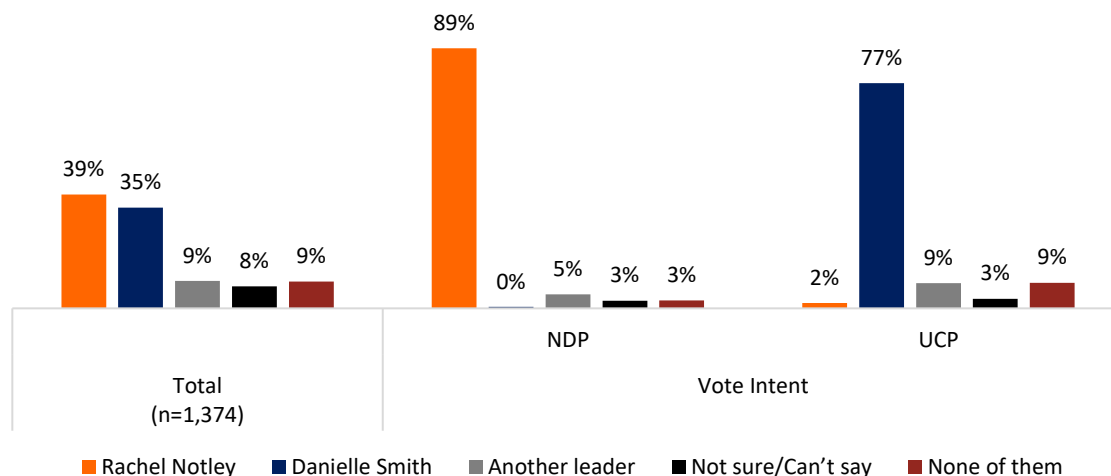
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And who do you think, overall, would make the best premier of Alberta?



While clear majorities of those who intend to vote NDP and UCP say their party leader is the best choice to lead the province, there is more dissent in the ranks among likely UCP voters. One-in-ten (9%) who say they will vote UCP on May 29 say a party leader other than Smith or Notley is the best choice. As many (9%) say none of the above:

And who do you think, overall, would make the best premier of Alberta?



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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