

CANADIAN POLITICS AFTER COVID

LORD ASHCROFT KCMG PC

JUNE 2022



Lord Ashcroft Polls

 @LordAshcroft

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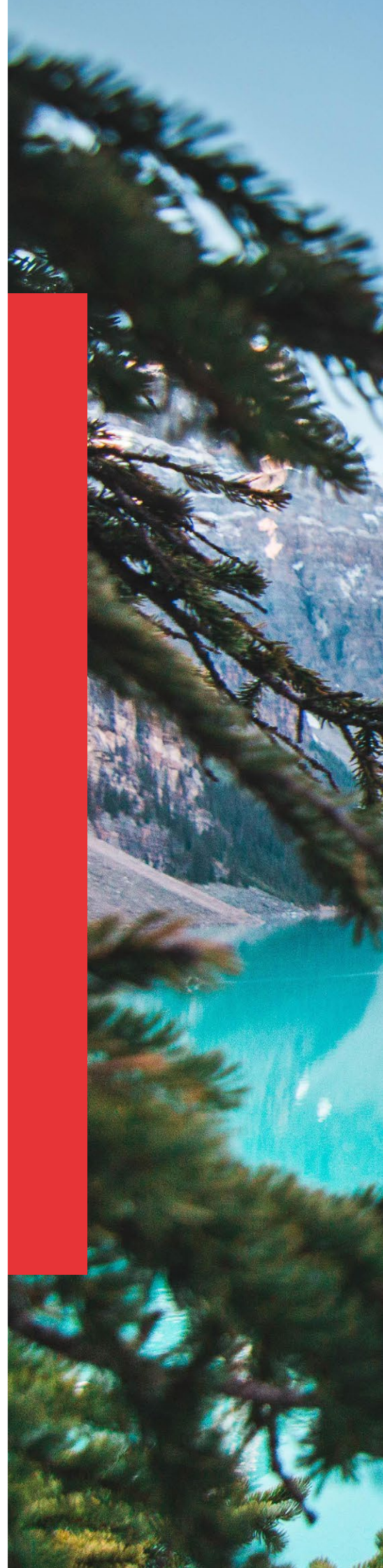
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INTRODUCTION BY LORD ASHCROFT



The reason the Ottawa truckers’ protest at the beginning of this year captured international attention was that political flashpoints in Canada are vanishingly rare in such a famously harmonious country. As one British commentator unfairly but affectionately wrote at the time, “you know that the world is in an especially perilous place when even Canada has become interesting.”

Was the blockade an isolated blot on Canada’s otherwise peaceful political landscape? Or was it a sign of emerging tensions in what many regard as an enviably united and easy-going society?

The research collected here – the results of a survey of 10,000 Canadians together with focus groups of voters of different backgrounds throughout the country – finds few signs of the polarisation that shapes politics in the US and parts of Europe. Questions that would be fiercely contested south of the border often produce a calm consensus among most Canadians. They largely agree that Canada is one of the best places in the world to live, that opportunities exist for those prepared to take them, that immigration has by and large been a force for good, that businesses need regulating, and that the rights of indigenous people have been neglected (but that the answer is practical equality not special

treatment). Even on the truckers, people on both sides of the debate tend to agree that neither the protesters nor the authorities covered themselves in glory.

There is also a widely-held view among voters of all stripes that in important respects – especially when it comes to protecting the environment, embracing diversity and the rights of minorities – Canadian life has improved in recent years. Equally, there is agreement on what has got worse: crime, the affordability of housing, and the ability to achieve a good standard of living on an average income. Some also feel that public discourse is becoming more scratchy, even ugly, though they disagree about the cause – the left lamenting Trumpian influence, the right blaming a creeping spread of identity politics.

Presiding over all this has been a Prime Minister who, for nearly a decade, has seemed to the outside world to embody Canadian liberal values. At home, he retains some of the appeal that propelled him to office. Many still see him as youthful, presentable, a good communicator, and a fitting representative for Canada on the international stage. Voters talk about his commitment to the environment and to rights for women and minorities. Despite being the epitome of wokeness for many conservatives outside Canada, domestically, his party is still largely seen as a centrist, moderate force.

But there is no doubt the sparkle is beginning to fade. Many complain that in many areas, as one voter put it, “there’s a lot of talk, but not a lot of walk”. People feel there is little to show for spiralling taxes and spending, other than an extra burden on their squeezed household budgets. Some complain that substance seems to take second place to appearance, or that Trudeau’s interest seldom reaches beyond the country’s metropolitan east. His decision to call an early election during the pandemic looked to many like the action of a cynical politician, not a principled public servant.

All of which should amount to a huge opportunity for the Conservative Party – except that many told us the main reason they stayed with the Liberals at the last election was the hopelessness of the opposition, which they found unable to offer any convincing alternative programme or leadership.

It would be stretching things to say that our focus groups looked back fondly on the era of Conservative government ending in 2015, but many at least recall an administration committed to getting the job done and, in Stephen Harper, a Prime Minister who saw his position as a job not a popularity contest. Indeed, some of the positions people still associate with the Tories at their best – fiscal responsibility, an aversion to high taxes and a pragmatic approach to the balance between conservation and the economy – largely go with the grain of mainstream opinion in Canada today. The problem is that they also play into two of the party’s brand weaknesses – the suspicion that they care more about money than people, and an indifference to the environment in general and climate change in particular.

At the same time, on some of the cultural questions on which there is a wider spread of opinion – such as structural racism, hate speech, gun ownership, and gender versus biological sex – potential Conservative voters are usually to be found very much closer to the middle of the spectrum than at the extremes. Yet the party has conveyed to some an impression that its centre of gravity is

shifting gradually to the right – and that when Erin O’Toole tried to shift the Tories back to a more centrist stance he was promptly “guillotined” by disgruntled colleagues for his trouble, making him the latest in what now seems like a long succession of failed leaders in a party in need of direction.

The upshot is that the Conservative Party has for some time been playing out its strategic dilemma for all the world to see. While this lasts, it can give the unfortunate impression that any new policy or line to take is merely being tried on for size. (“Those are my principles,” as Groucho Marx said, “and if you don’t like them... well, I have others.”)

But the quandaries are real enough and need to be grappled with. How far should the Conservatives go in trying to make themselves palatable to liberals who may never actually switch their vote? What is the electoral opportunity cost of reaching out to those who have already, for varying reasons, drifted to the People’s Party or the NDP? How can they enthuse their base without galvanising their opponents (a ploy that is known as the “reverse Hillary Clinton”, or ought to be)? Does a promise to scrap the Carbon Tax inevitably mean surrendering all credentials on the climate?

These are some of the questions at stake in the leadership contest which many, looking for a serious alternative government, are watching with an unusual degree of interest. It won’t be enough to wait for the public to tire of a charismatic leader losing his lustre. Whoever takes over, the task will be the same as it always is, both on the left and the right: to marry the imperatives of hard-headed competence with the evolving values of new generations, while recognising that a successful party is always a coalition, not a tribe – and to show that the compromises needed to build that coalition are not cynically tactical but part of a greater purpose.

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CULTURE AND SOCIETY

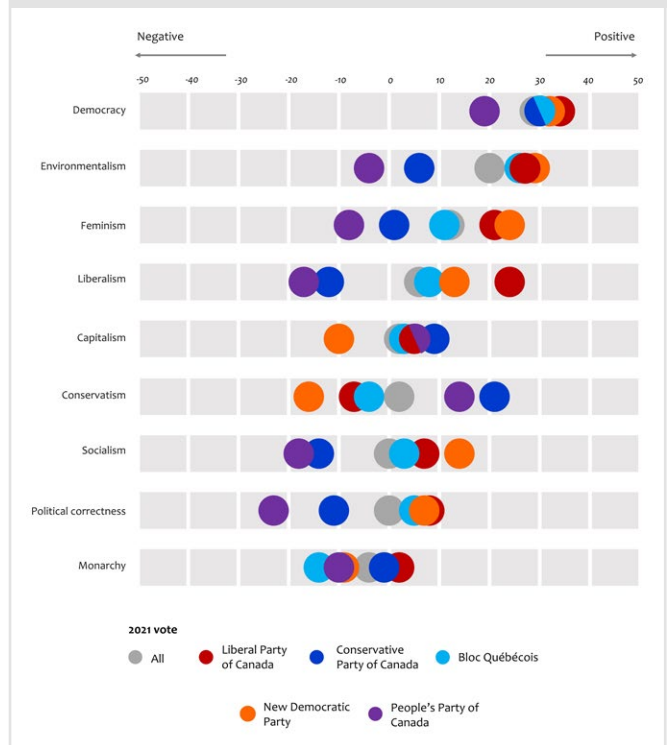
SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

We asked our poll respondents how they felt about various political ideas, on a scale from -50 (extremely negative) to +50 (extremely positive).

While democracy received the highest scores overall, 2021 People's Party voters were less positive than those of other parties (or indeed any demographic group). It was also notable that 18-24 year-olds gave a lower mean score (24.6/100) than those aged 65+ (36.1).

While Canadians as a whole were marginally negative about monarchy, Liberals were the only political group to return a positive mean score. Conservative voters were the most positive about capitalism, but not wildly so, with a mean score of 9.3.

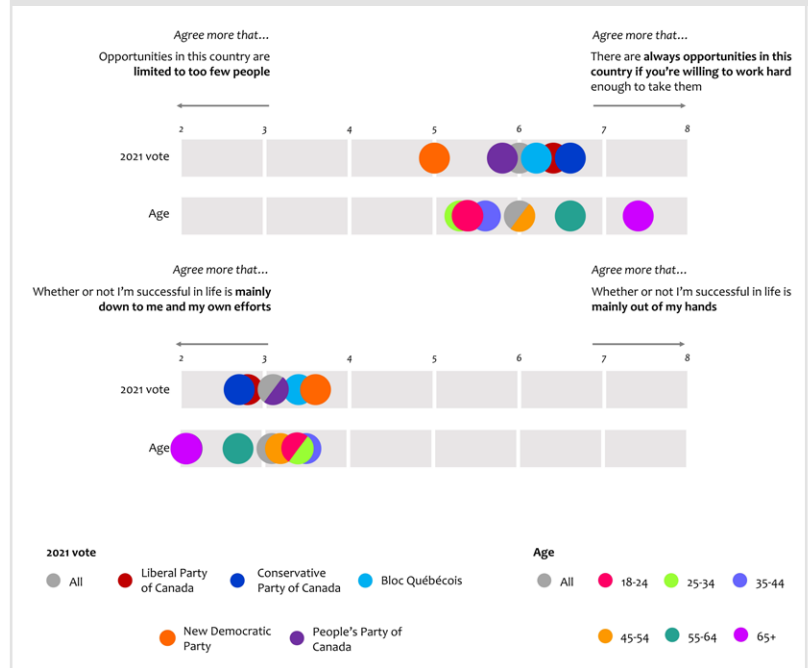
How positive or negative do you feel about each of the following where -50 means 'very negative indeed' and +50 means 'very positive indeed'?
[NB Mean scores]



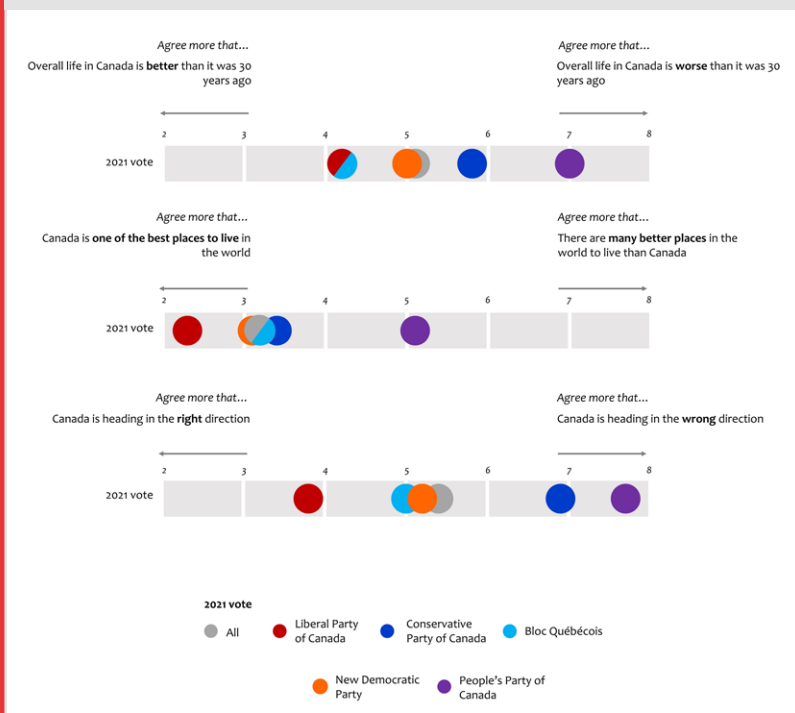
OPPORTUNITY AND SUCCESS

Older Canadians were notably more likely than younger people to think there are always opportunities in the country for those willing to work hard enough to take them, and men were slightly more likely to think this than women. There was relatively little difference between supporters of different parties – though Conservatives were the most likely to believe opportunities were available, and 2021 NDP voters divided between this view and the belief that opportunities in Canada were limited to too few people.

Here are several pairs of statements. In each case, please indicate where your own view lies on a 10-point scale, where 0 means you completely agree with the first statement and 10 means you completely agree with the second.
[NB Mean scores]



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[NB Mean scores]



Canadians of all ages were inclined to believe that whether or not they were successful in life was mainly down to themselves and their efforts, rather than that their success or otherwise was mainly out of their hands – though a quarter of those under 35 leaned towards the latter view. Liberal and Conservative voters were similarly likely to believe success would be down to their own efforts.

Asked whether they believed life in Canada overall was better or worse than it was 30 years ago, respondents' mean answer was almost precisely in the middle, with the sample dividing evenly between the two halves of the scale. There was little variation by age, but it was notable that the youngest (18-24) and oldest (65+) voters were the most likely to say life was better; those aged 45-54 were the only age group among whom a majority (52%) felt life was worse rather than better. Aboriginal and white respondents were the most likely ethnic groups to feel Canadian life had got worse.

There was more variation between political groups. PP voters were by far the most likely to say life in Canada was worse than it was 30 years ago: more than 7 in 10 leaned more towards that statement, and more than one in three felt strongly that this was the case. Just over half of 2021 Conservatives put themselves on the "worse" side of the scale, with just under 1 in 5 agreeing strongly.

Canadians as a whole were slightly more likely to think the country was heading in the wrong direction than the right one. Those aged 18-24 were the most evenly divided, with slightly more (45%) thinking things were going in the right direction than the opposite (43%). Those aged 45-54 were the most inclined to think things were heading the wrong way.

People's Party voters were the most likely to think things were heading the wrong way, with 81% putting themselves on that side of the scale and nearly half feeling strongly that this was the case. Just over a quarter (26%) of Conservatives felt strongly that Canada was heading in the wrong direction, with 7 in 10 leaning towards that view. Just under two thirds (64%) of 2021 Liberal voters said they thought things were going the right way. BQ and NDP voters were quite evenly divided on the question.

7 IN 10

agreed Canada is one of the best places to live in the world

More than 7 in 10 Canadians – including 85% of those aged 65 or over – agreed that Canada is one of the best places to live in the world. There was little variation in mean scores between regions and ethnic groups, with majorities agreeing in each case.

Among political groups, PP voters were the most inclined to dissent. They were evenly divided, with 44% leaning to some degree towards the statement that there are many better places in the world to live than Canada. One in three 2021 Liberals felt strongly that Canada is one of the best places to live, compared to just under one quarter of Conservatives. Focus group participants echoed this view and often said they felt fortunate to live in Canada. Despite its problems, described in more detail below, they considered it a peaceful, safe, diverse, welcoming and relatively harmonious country.

While some in our groups struggled to think of any aspects of Canadian life that had improved in recent years (“craft beer maybe? I can’t think of anything, to be honest”), a number of advances were identified. These included greater acceptance of diversity and multiculturalism, including LGBT+ rights and more understanding of the indigenous population. A more comprehensive social safety net, better understanding of mental health, the convenience of online shopping, greater awareness of environmental issues, legalisation of cannabis and a more distinctively independent stance from the US were all mentioned.

“ Our social acceptance of multiculturalism, gender diversity, same-sex marriage, people that are trans... Are we there yet? No. But are we in a better spot now? Yes we are.”

“ I feel we are not the lapdog to the US that we were years ago. We’ve kind of established ourselves. I’ve been proud to be a Canadian through the last 10 years.”

“

Socially it’s better than it’s ever been. Economically it’s not so good.”

However, participants also felt things had deteriorated in a number of important ways. The list included crime, the cost of housing, rising taxes, the job market and the cost of education, the ability to maintain a middle-class lifestyle, the encroaching of work into private and family time, diminishing security and a feeling that people were more on edge and less community-minded – which was also related to a view that public and political discourse was becoming less civil.

“

The common courtesies that we used to extend to each other... Sometimes I feel like we’ve lost a level of humanity and civility. I feel like people are just itching to fly off the handle and argue.”

“ It’s worse in terms of crime. When I was a kid, we didn’t even lock the car door or lock the car at night.”

“ The ability to attain the same level of societal accomplishment through the same level of work.”

“ The line between work and life has become completely blurred. Some employers expect people to put in 15-hour days and reply to emails and be online all the time.”

“ I don’t see how young people nowadays can attain home ownership without generational wealth. If your parents don’t give you a down payment, how do you ever do that?”

IMMIGRATION

Canadians as a whole were more inclined to think immigration had on balance improved their country than made it worse. This was true of both men and women, and of voters of all age groups.

Among different parties' supporters, though 2021 Conservatives were closer to neutral than Liberal, NDP or BQ voters, only one group – those who had voted for the People's Party – leaned more towards feeling immigration had made Canada worse than that it had made it better (but even then only marginally).

Of the different ethnic groups, only Aboriginal respondents were (again very marginally) more likely to see immigration in a negative rather than a positive light.

We also asked whether new Canadians coming from countries with different cultures have improved the country by making it more diverse, or if they need to do more to integrate themselves into Canadian life. The population as a whole was quite evenly balanced between the two propositions, though with a bias towards the first statement. However, there was a clear progression between younger voters (who saw more benefits from greater diversity) and older respondents (who were slightly more inclined to wish for more integration).

Both Conservative and PP voters from 2021 leaned very slightly towards “integration” than “diversity”, but again with only just over half of each group saying those from different cultures should do more to integrate into Canada.

Here are several pairs of statements. In each case, please indicate where your own view lies on a 10-point scale, where 0 means you completely agree with the first statement and 10 means you completely agree with the second. [NB Mean scores]



RACE, IDENTITY, INDIGENOUS RIGHTS AND OTHER CONTROVERSIES

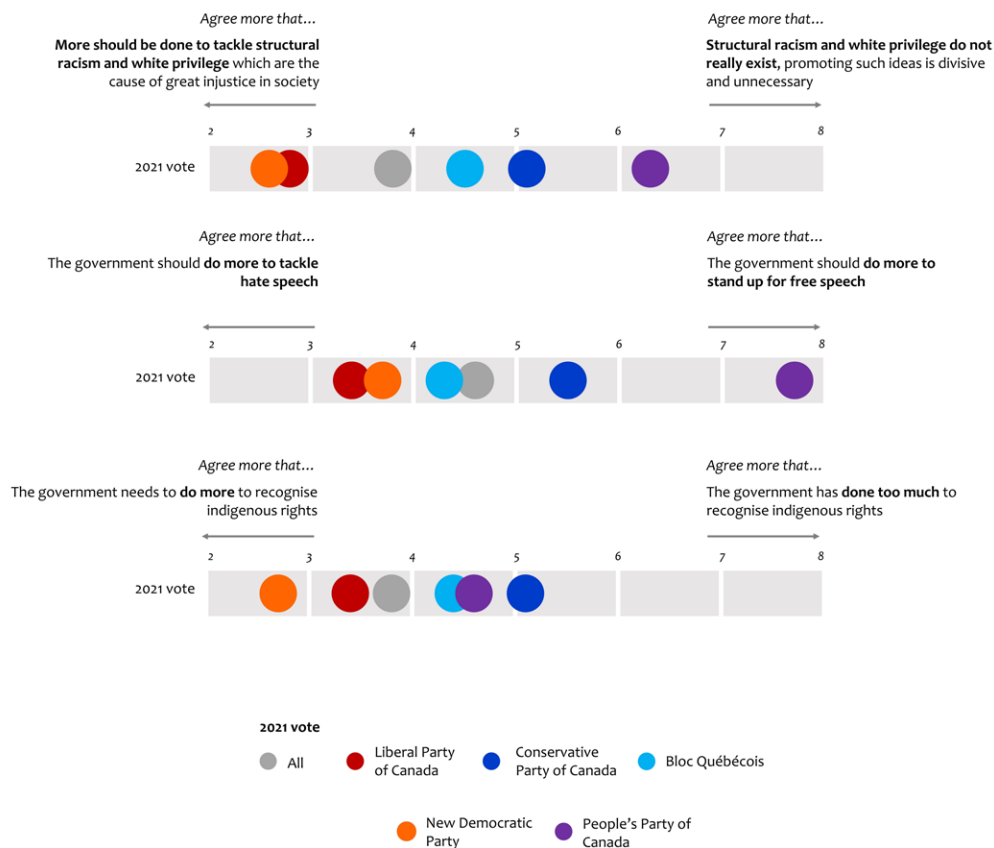
Most Canadians were more inclined to think more should be done to tackle structural racism and white privilege than to reject these ideas as divisive and unnecessary. Majorities in all age groups felt more should be done, from 59% of 45-54s to 69% of those aged 18-24. Though white voters were less likely to take this view than other ethnic groups, 62% still did so.

PP voters were by far the most sceptical, with 61% thinking (and 28% agreeing strongly) that structural racism and white privilege do not really exist. Conservatives were evenly divided on the question, with a neutral position between the two propositions overall. Nearly 8 in 10 Liberal and NDP voters from 2021 felt more needed to be done on the issue, with 1 in 4 and 1 in 3 respectively thinking strongly that this was the case.

Asked whether the government should do more to tackle hate speech or stand up for free speech, Canadians as a whole took a fairly neutral position, though with a slight bias to tackling hate speech. Notably, 18-24s were among the most likely to feel strongly that the government should stand up for free speech (while being divided overall), while those aged 65+ were the age group that leaned furthest towards the opposite proposition. Each ethnic group gave fairly similar responses, with mean scores towards the middle of the scale.

Again, differences of opinion were most closely related to political persuasion. While around two thirds of NDP and Liberal voters leaned towards tackling hate speech, half of Conservatives and 8 in 10 PP voters felt that standing up for free speech was the more important priority.

Here are several pairs of statements. In each case, please indicate where your own view lies on a 10-point scale, where 0 means you completely agree with the first statement and 10 means you completely agree with the second. [NB Mean scores]



Some in the groups felt that discussion of some issues had gone beyond the pursuit of equality or opportunity, or had become unnecessarily divisive and judgmental. This was not confined to those voting for centre-right parties – the following comments were made by Liberal and NDP voters in Toronto and Vancouver.

“ I feel like this woke culture has good intentions but it’s overstepping a boundary where you’re entitled to things just because. And that doesn’t sit well with me because I’m a minority and I think everyone deserves to earn their keep. And when it comes to politics I feel it’s the battle of who can be the most virtuous and socially correct. It’s more like a performance than any authenticity.”

“ In terms of free speech things have gone wrong a bit. There was the bill making it a crime if you misidentify someone’s pronouns – that sort of stuff. It seems like there are these perfect people out there who can’t possibly make any transgressions. But no-one’s perfect. Like Trudeau with blackface, he was lucky he didn’t get cancelled.”



In our poll, majorities in most groups were more likely to think the Canadian government should do more to recognise indigenous rights than to think it had already done too much – though this declined by age group, from 69% of 18-24s to 55% of those aged 65 or over. 82% of Aboriginal voters thought more needed to be done (including 46% who did so strongly) compared to 60% of white voters.

By party support, NDP voters were most likely to think more should be done on indigenous rights, while Conservatives were the most ambivalent, dividing almost exactly evenly on the question.

“

I don’t feel comfortable saying my views on some things. I think the pendulum has gone from one extreme to the other rather than coming to more of a common middle ground.”

In our focus groups, people from all political backgrounds raised the matter spontaneously. Many welcomed the prominence the issue now had, and that there seemed to be more understanding of the issue, though a few ventured that discussion of it could quickly become divisive. Many also felt it was shocking and inexcusable that more progress had not been made on basic practicalities like clean water provision.

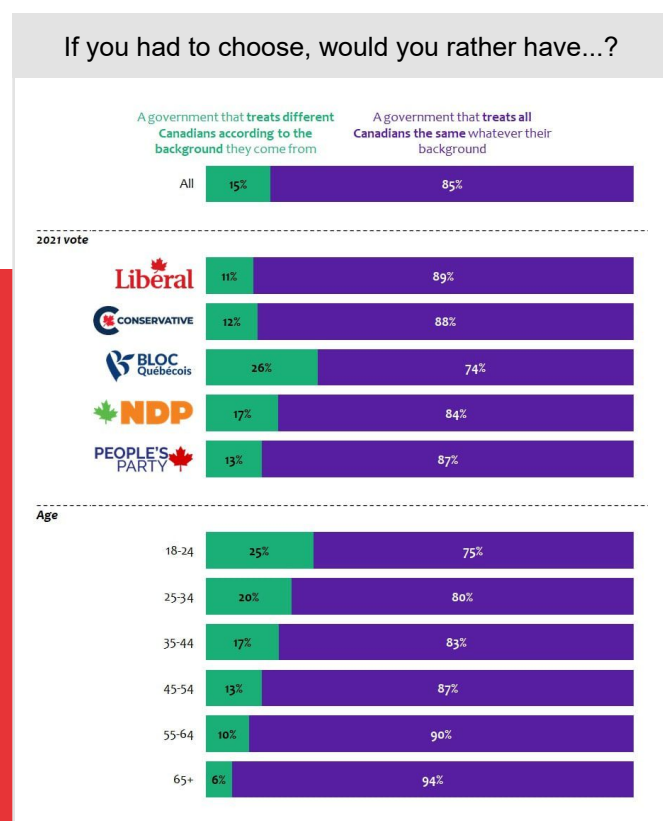
“We used to think we were open and welcoming but there have been these horrifying discoveries, which shouldn’t be new to us, of what’s been done to our indigenous peoples, the residential schools and the mass graves. We can’t hide from the fact that these things have existed in Canada.”

“If the promises were followed through there would be less of an issue. In northern Ontario the government was supposed to fix the water decades ago, but they’re still trucking in water because they haven’t fixed the system. So it’s just lip service. They don’t actually do anything.”

“At least now there are voices, seats at the table. People are sharing their stories because they’ve been given this platform. And organisations are looking at their structures, processes. It’s good that that is at the forefront.”

“As soon as we start talking about First Nations, you can enter into that thing where you’re either for us or against us.”

“Most indigenous people want to be able to develop their natural resources and not just sell birch bark canoes. As soon as that voice gets heard, it’s going to be significant.”



A clear majority in all groups said they wanted a government that would treat all Canadians the same whatever their background, though a quarter of those aged 18-24 leaned towards the opposing proposition that the government should treat different Canadians according to the background they come from – as did 22% of Aboriginal and 24% of black respondents. More than a quarter (26%) of 2021 BQ voters also felt this – a notably higher proportion than among those who had voted Liberal (11%) or Conservative (12%).

2 IN 3

Bloc Québécois voters said public sector workers should not be allowed to wear religious symbols.

We also asked about a number of other potentially controversial issues. Following the debate over Quebec's Laicity Act, we found majorities in all demographic groups (including a small majority in Quebec itself) leaning towards the view that people working in the public sector should be free to wear religious symbols. Only one group – Bloc Québécois voters – were more inclined to think that they should not be allowed to do so. 68% leaned towards this view, including 1 in 3 who did so strongly.

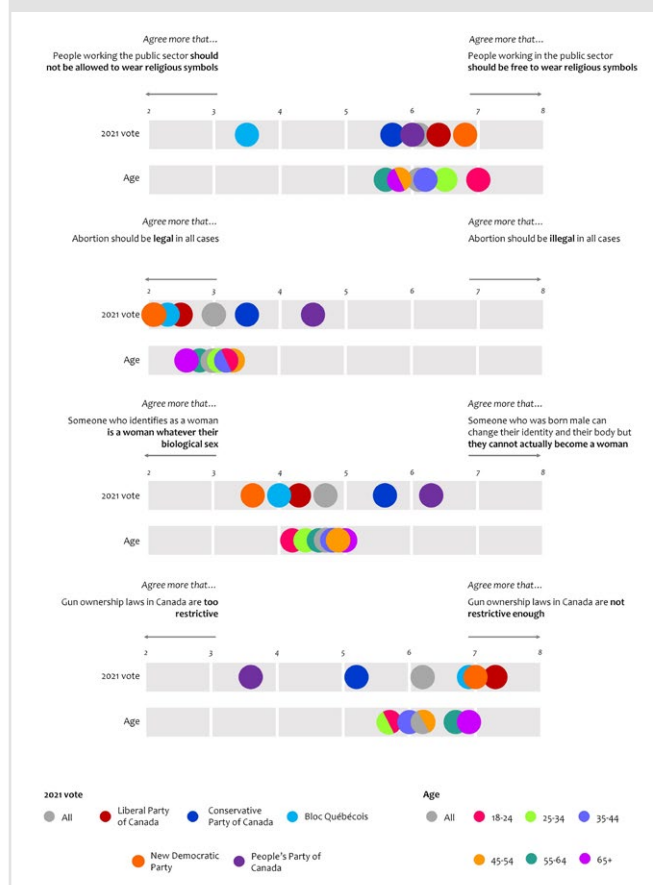
There was little variation between groups on the legality of abortion, though NDP, BQ and Liberal voters were more inclined than Conservatives and PP supporters to lean towards the view that it should be legal in all cases.

Men were slightly more likely to agree with the proposition that someone who was born male cannot actually become a woman, while a small majority of women leaned towards the view that someone who identifies as a woman is a woman whatever their biological sex. In terms of mean scores there was little variation between age groups, but 18-24s were the most likely to feel that anyone who identifies as a woman is a woman. Black respondents were the only ethnic group to lean more towards the belief that someone born male cannot become a woman.

2021 Conservatives (53%) and PP voters (62%) were the only political groups to lean more towards the sceptical proposition, with 22% and 38% respectively agreeing strongly that a male cannot become a woman even if they change their identity and their body.

Majorities in nearly all groups were more inclined to think Canada's gun ownership laws were not restrictive enough than to think they were too restrictive – the exceptions being Aboriginal respondents, 2021 Conservatives (who were quite closely divided) and PP voters, 62% of whom thought the current laws were too restrictive. Older respondents were more likely than their younger counterparts to think Canada's gun laws were insufficiently restrictive.

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[NB Mean scores]



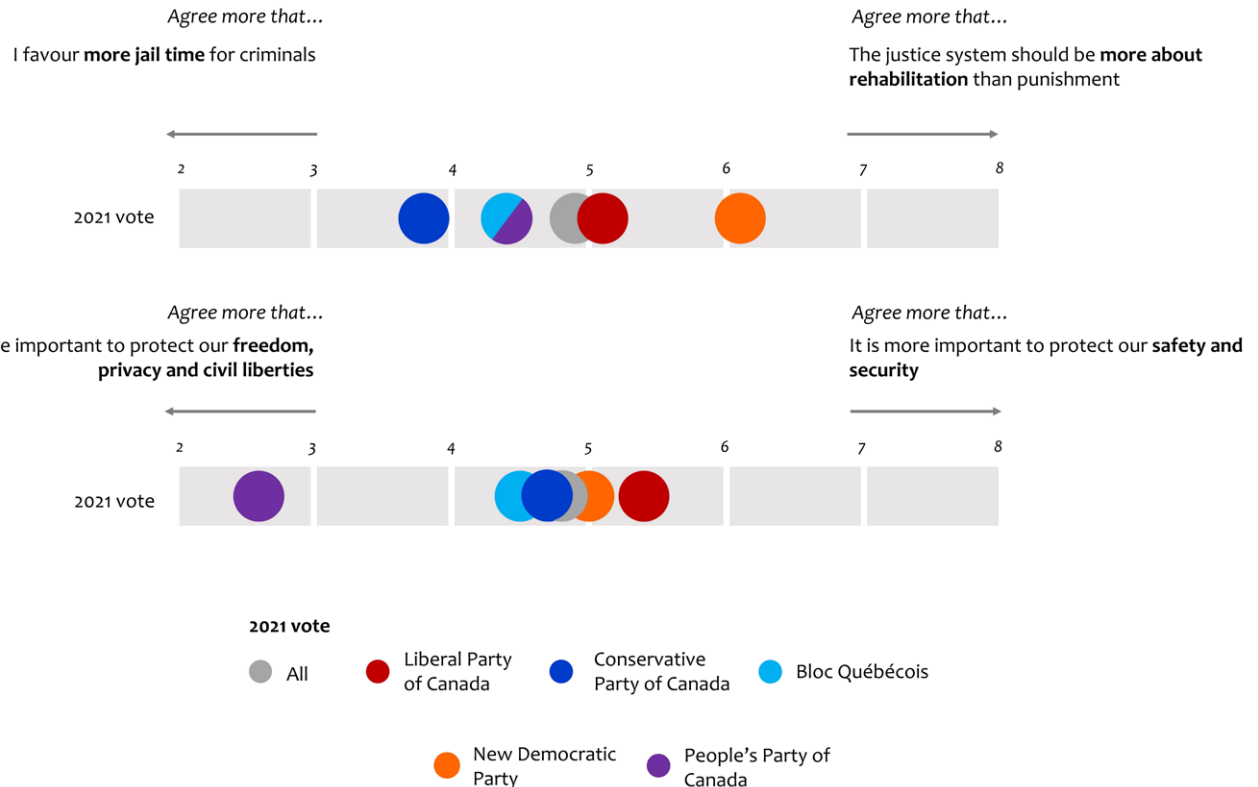
FREEDOM, SECURITY, CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Asked where they stood between favouring more jail time for criminals and believing the justice system should focus more on rehabilitation, Canadians as a whole once again put themselves almost equidistant between the two – though younger participants were slightly closer to the “rehabilitation” end of the spectrum and older voters slightly more inclined to favour more jail time.

There were somewhat sharper differences when it came to party support, with Conservative voters clearly the most likely to support more jail time.

Similarly, Canadians overall took a fairly neutral position between wanting to protect freedom, privacy and civil liberties on the one hand, and safety and security on the other. The differences of opinion by party support were by far the most striking. While a small majority of 2021 Liberals inclined towards “safety and security” and NDP voters as a whole were precisely neutral on the question, Conservative, BQ and especially PP voters prioritised freedom, privacy and civil liberties (with more than three quarters of the latter taking that position).

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ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT



ECONOMIC ATTITUDES

In our poll we asked a number of questions to identify how different parts of the population viewed various questions about economic policy. Canadians as a whole were more likely to lean towards lower taxes and less spending on public services and increased tax and more public spending. There was little variation between age, gender or other demographic groups.

Politically, the picture was more diverse. While 2021 Liberal voters were very evenly split, three quarters of Conservatives and PP voters were more inclined towards lower taxes and less spending. NDP voters, meanwhile, were more likely to favour tax rises and higher spending than the reverse.

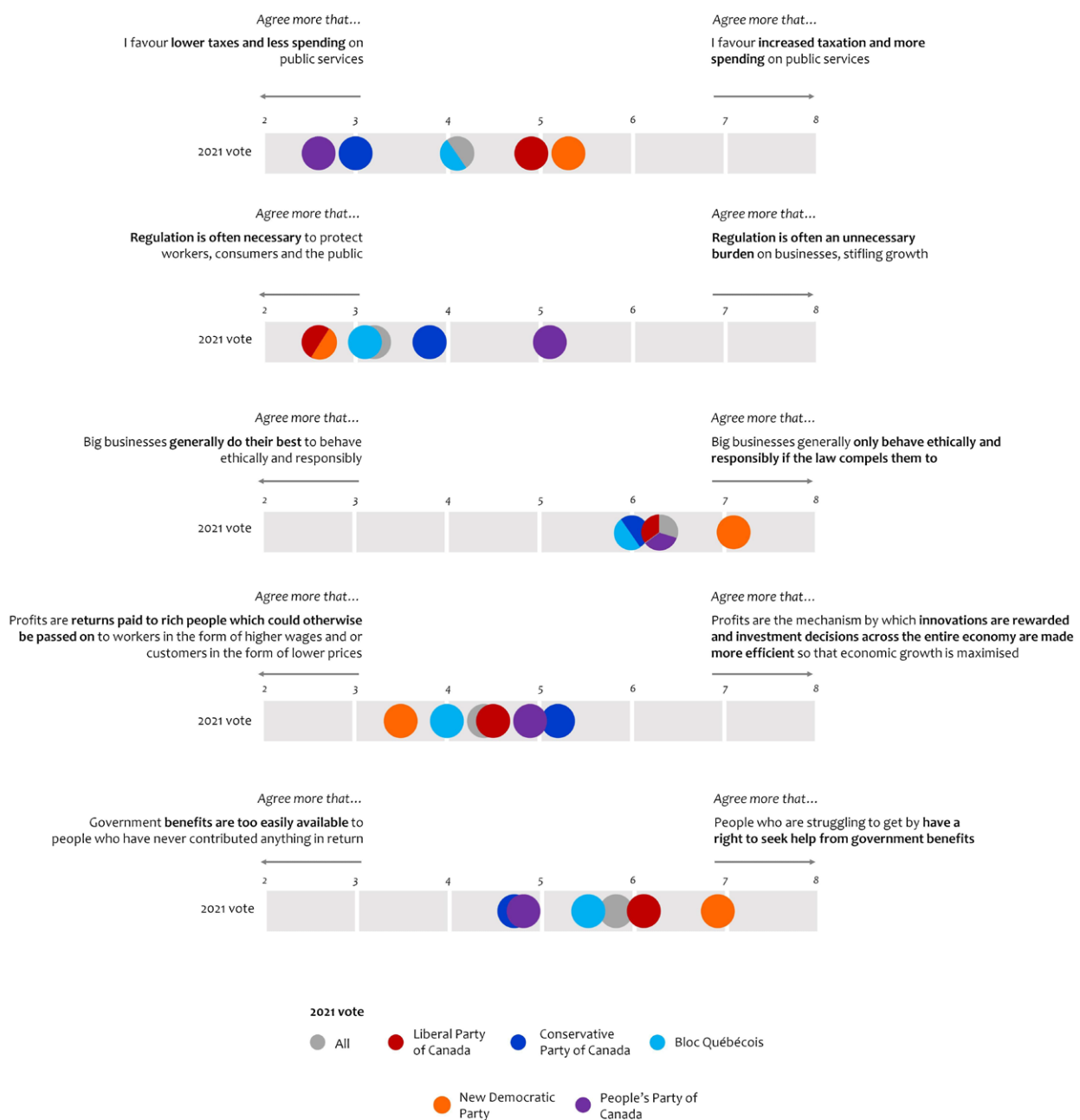
Conservatives were more likely than most to feel that government benefits were too easily available to people who have never contributed, but relatively few felt strongly on the question. PP voters were evenly split, while 63% of 2021 Liberals and 72% of NDP voters leaned towards seeing benefits as a right for those who are struggling.

Nearly three quarters of Canadians were more inclined to see regulation as necessary to protect workers, consumers and the public than as an often-unnecessary burden on business, and clear majorities in nearly all groups took the same view. However, agreement on the benefits of regulation was much higher among Liberal and NDP voters (82%) than 2021 Conservatives (66%) and PP voters (47%, making them the only group with less than half leaning towards the proposition.

Similarly, nearly two thirds of Canadians – rising to three quarters of Aboriginal participants and NDP voters – were inclined to think that big businesses generally only behave ethically and responsibly if the law compels them to. Conservative voters from 2021 were more likely than other groups to think big businesses behave ethically and responsibly of their own accord, but still only one third of them said this.

Canadians as a whole were slightly more inclined to see profits as returns paid to rich people that could otherwise be passed on to workers or customers than as the mechanism that guides investment decisions and helps maximise economic growth. Conservative voters were the only group to lean more towards the latter view, but were close to neutral on the question in aggregate.

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LIVING COSTS, ENERGY POLICY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

People in our focus groups felt the Canadian economy was recovering reasonably well from the pandemic, though some feared trouble ahead when government covid subsidies come to an end. Most believed there were plenty of jobs available for those who wanted them – indeed many firms were struggling to recruit, especially in retail and hospitality.

7 IN 10

were conscious
all the time of how
much money they
were spending.

In our poll, however, 7 in 10 respondents said they were conscious all the time of how much money they were spending and whether they could afford things. Focus group participants spontaneously mentioned the rising cost of living (see also ‘Most Important Issues’ in Chapter 4, below), particularly since the beginning of the year. Home fuel and gas prices were mentioned most often, along with building materials, transport, groceries and everyday necessities (“toilet paper. Almond milk!”) Recent interest rates rises had also affected household budgets.

People had noticed upward pressure on wages, or employees saying it was not worth their while to work at existing rates. Some participants admitted to being baffled as to why prices were rising. Most saw multiple causes, of which the Ukraine war was only the latest.

“It just seems the cost of living is rising and rising in Canada. Nothing ever goes down. More than ever before, I’ve had to start budgeting. What’s going on in Ukraine is affecting us and it’s not fair. We’re paying for something that’s completely out of our hands.”

“It’s probably the US and all the money printing. And shutting down the economy and all our supply chains messed up from covid, so they had to find more expensive alternatives. And then the trucker convoy. There’s a whole bunch of stuff that’s impacted it.”

“I hear a lot from my team where people say ‘I can’t come to work for that. I can’t pay for childcare, I can’t pay for my busing and I can’t pay for everything I need so I’m better off to stay at home and be on unemployment.’”

Though most accepted that there was little the Canadian government could do about rising prices in global markets, there was considerable debate in our groups over energy policy, especially the costs entailed in pursuing net zero and, more specifically, the carbon tax. Some felt that the drive to move away from fossil fuels was moving faster than was sensible and having a disproportionate impact on people's living costs, especially at a time of rising prices. Notably, this view was not confined to centre-right voters – some NDP and BQ supporters were among the most vocal in arguing that priorities needed to be adjusted. There were also complaints that the practicalities of achieving net zero were not keeping up with the political rhetoric, for example in infrastructure for electric vehicles. There was also a view that Canada ought to be doing more to exploit its own energy resources, especially when it came to refining.

“The carbon tax should be scrapped. If you want to move away from fossil fuels, then give me a reliable vehicle that I'm not going to get electrocuted if I go to charge it when it's raining.”

“If I live in an apartment, how can I connect my car through the window? They say 'in 2030 we can turn green', but there's no plan in place.”

“I'm pro-environment, but thinking about Quebec now, right now, things are going from bad to worse socioeconomically. People will end up on the street.”

“Getting rid of fossil fuels is a nice long-term goal, but in the meantime we need to develop our own natural resources like liquid natural gas and help the rest of the world rely less on Russia and the Middle East.”



“

I drive from Maple Ridge to Burnaby for my job. It's too soon for a nice, lofty, long-term goal. I'm opposed to the carbon tax at this point. It should be suspended, people need a break. ”

For others, the current global situation and rising energy costs only confirmed the need to reduce reliance on fossil fuels in general and foreign energy suppliers in particular. Some also argued that there would always be short-term excuses for not pursuing environmental goals, and these should be resisted. By the same token, this attitude was not exclusive to left-leaning voters. A number of 2021 Conservatives also argued that the drive for alternative energy should remain a priority, or at least that there was a balance to be struck.

“We have to roll up our sleeves now, not ten years from now. If not, we’ll postpone it to 2060 or 2070.”

“The climate crisis is probably the single biggest issue we are facing, so we can’t conveniently park it. What’s happening with these rising gas prices shows even further how we need to come up with some renewable energy sources, and quickly.”

“We’re seeing the impact of some of the choices we’ve made on the environment. And the tax allows us to make different choices. Once people start to think about the choices they make, changes can occur.”

“Our economy is dependent on fossil fuels, and changing that is not simply saying the automakers should pump out electric cars. It’s a fundamental shift of our society and economic structure. But we have to make those changes.”

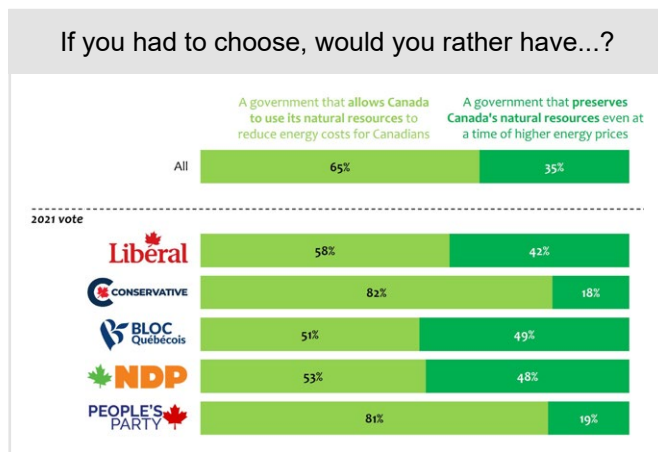
“

I’d like the government to be doing more, but with the Liberals there seems to be a lot of smoke but no strong plan. With the Liberals it’s ‘let’s do the actions and figure out the economic impact later,’ and with the Conservatives it’s ‘let’s look at the economic impact first and then we’ll deal with the environmental stuff’. Honestly, for me, I would be somewhere in the middle.”



Asked to choose between a government that allows Canada to use its natural resources to reduce energy costs and a government that preserves such resources even at a time of high prices, Canadians as a whole chose the former by almost two to one. Though support for using resources to reduce energy costs increased with age, even the youngest voters (18-24) preferred this option by 56% to 44%. Nearly three quarters of respondents in Alberta, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Saskatchewan took this view.

With the exception of Green Party voters, majorities in all political groups favoured using resources to reduce costs – though ranging from 51% of BQ voters and 53% of NDP supporters to 58% of Liberals, 81% of PP voters and 82% of Conservatives.



However, Canadians were exactly evenly divided when asked whether the country should protect its natural environment even at the cost of its resource extraction industries, or use its natural resources to support economic growth. Again, Alberta and Saskatchewan were most inclined to favour using resources to maximise growth, with those in Quebec leaning slightly towards protecting the environment. Notably, black respondents were the only ethnic group among which a majority leaned towards growth maximisation.

Two thirds of 2021 Conservatives and 7 in 10 PP voters favoured using resources to maximise growth, while a majority of Liberal, BQ and NDP voters inclined to the opposing view.

On the more specific question of the carbon tax, a majority of Canadians were more inclined to think it should be scrapped than increased, with 22% feeling strongly that the tax should be abolished. Those aged 18-24 and voters in Quebec (both of which were very closely divided) were the only demographic groups more inclined to take the opposite view.

While a small plurality of 2021 Liberal and BQ voters indicated that they would rather see the tax increased than abolished, 78% of Conservatives and 83% of PP voters leaned towards wanting it scrapped; 39% and 53% respectively felt strongly that this should be done.



Here are several pairs of statements. In each case, please indicate where your own view lies on a 10-point scale, where 0 means you completely agree with the first statement and 10 means you completely agree with the second. [NB Mean scores]



CANADA IN THE WORLD

UKRAINE

Participants of all political persuasions in our focus groups were generally content with Canada's response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Some disliked the idea using military force, seeing the pursuit of peace as an important part of Canada's identity, and many others wanted to avoid escalating the crisis. Only a few thought the country should take a more aggressive stance.

“I am rather conservative in my view of using force. A very typical Canadian response.”

“Canada should be doing more only because we don't meet the NATO requirement for spending 2% of GDP on defence. We're not even close.”

While most welcomed moves to admit large numbers of Ukrainian refugees, there were some complaints that the scheme was too bureaucratic. A number of Asian-background voters also noted what they felt was a contrast between attitudes to Ukrainians and those fleeing conflicts in other parts of the world.

“So many people want to take families but there are stumbling blocks because there is too much paperwork. They should alleviate the red tape.”

“I think Ukraine gets more attention because it's kind of a western country. There have been other countries like Palestine and Syria but the sentiment has never been the same.”

“

Putin has promised nukes if people don't play nicely with him, so I understand it's not just a matter of right and wrong in this situation. We've often been known as a peace-making nation, and I do think we need to continue in that manner.”

GLOBALISATION, NATIONAL INTERESTS AND DEFENCE

Canadians as a whole were more inclined to think globalisation had generally had more upsides than downsides for Canada, with no significant variations between demographic groups.

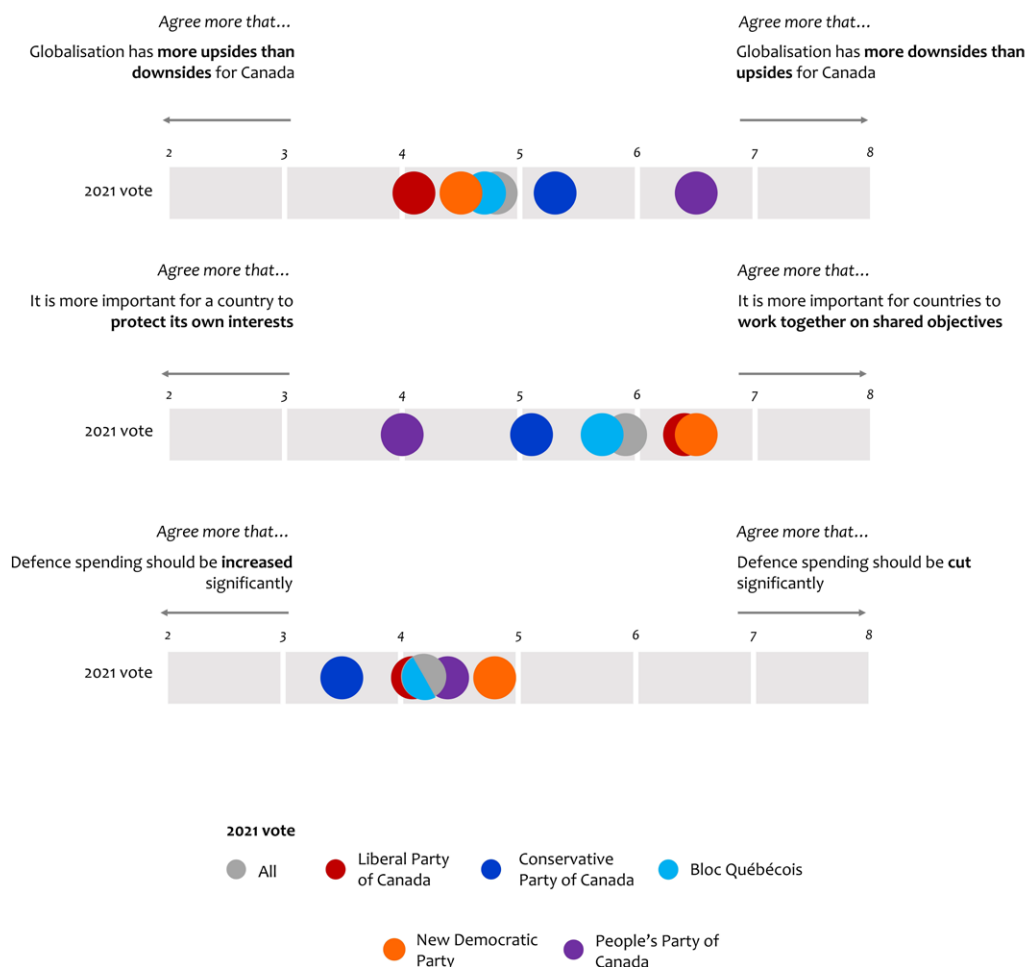
Politically, 2021 Liberal voters (59%) leaned the most heavily to this view, while 60% of PP voters thought the drawbacks had outweighed the benefits. Conservatives were evenly divided on the question.

There was also little variation from the consensus that it was more important for countries to work together on shared objectives than to protect their own interests – though Liberals (69%) and

NDP voters (70%) were significantly more likely to think this than Conservatives (48%) and – the only exception to the general pattern – 2021 PP voters (34%).

Despite this, Canadians were also more likely to think defence spending should be increased significantly than to think it should be cut. This was particularly true for older respondents (73% of those aged 65+, compared to 44% of 25-34s). Conservative voters (67%) were more likely to lean towards significantly higher defence spending than Liberals (58%), PP and BQ voters (both 55%) or 2021 NDP supporters (45%).

Here are several pairs of statements. In each case, please indicate where your own view lies on a 10-point scale, where 0 means you completely agree with the first statement and 10 means you completely agree with the second. [NB Mean scores]



THREATS

A question on how people see various threats reveals considerable differences in outlook between groups. Mental health issues topped the list for Canadians as a whole, appearing in the top three for all parties' voters. However, while climate change was seen as the single biggest threat by Liberal, BQ and NDP voters, it was not among the top six for 2021 Conservatives or PP

voters – both of which were most worried about a new economic and financial crisis.

Each of these issues – along with opioid abuse, division, polarisation and inequality in society – were seen by Canadians as a whole as a more serious threat to the country than terrorism or military conflict.

How serious a threat is each of the following to Canada today, where 0 means it is not a threat at all and 100 means it is an extremely serious threat? [NB Mean, 2021 vote]

Biggest perceived threats facing Canada






All voters

	Mental health issues	74.0
	The risk of a new economic and financial crisis	72.6
	Climate change	69.3
	Opioid abuse	68.5
	Division and polarisation in society	66.1
	Inequality in society	64.9







Liberal Party of Canada voters

	Climate change	78.9
	Mental health issues	74.3
	The coronavirus	71.0
	The risk of a new economic and financial crisis	70.8
	Opioid abuse	70.3
	Inequality in society	69.5

Conservative Party of Canada voters

	The risk of a new economic and financial crisis	75.6
	Mental health issues	70.6
	Opioid abuse	67.4
	Division and polarisation in society	66.3
	Obesity	64.1
	Loss of jobs to robotics, AI & machine learning	57.3







Bloc Québécois voters

	Climate change	76.6
	The risk of a new economic and financial crisis	70.0
	Mental health issues	68.6
	Division and polarisation in society	66.4
	Inequality in society	63.7
	The coronavirus	62.9

New Democratic Party voters

	Climate change	80.1
	Mental health issues	76.8
	Inequality in society	73.8
	The risk of a new economic and financial crisis	72.5
	Opioid abuse	71.5
	Division and polarisation in society	68.1

People's Party of Canada voters

	The risk of a new economic and financial crisis	79.2
	Mental health issues	74.3
	Division and polarisation in society	73.4
	Obesity	65.5
	Opioid abuse	65.4
	Loss of jobs to robotics, AI & machine learning	62.1

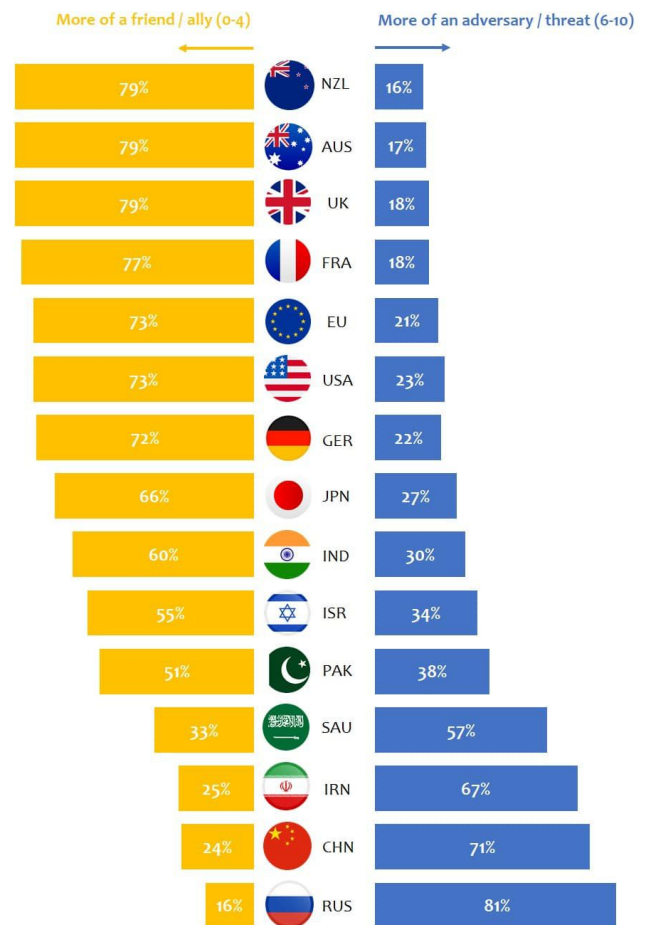
ALLIES AND ADVERSARIES

Asked whether they saw a series of countries more as allies or adversaries, our poll respondents felt the top three alliances were with New Zealand, Australia and the UK. Both the EU and France were more likely to be seen as allies to Canada than the US, which 23% of Canadians said they considered more of an adversary.

Though a majority of Chinese-background participants (59%) said they saw China as more of an adversary than an ally, they were less likely to do so than Canadians as a whole (71%). There was little difference in the perceptions of Liberal and Conservative voters, but 2021 PP voters were more likely to see each country as an adversary than voters in general.

In a separate question, respondents as a whole thought they had more in common with fellow Canadians who had a different educational and occupational background, rather than people with similar backgrounds in other countries. However, while 59% of those aged 65+ thought they had more in common with fellow Canadians, 18-24s were marginally more likely to feel more in common with people in other countries with similar backgrounds. There was little difference between voting groups on this question, though 2021 Conservatives were the most likely to feel more in common with fellow Canadians.

Please say whether you see each of the following more as a friend and ally of Canada, or as an adversary or threat to Canada – where 0 means a close friend or ally and 10 means very much an adversary or threat, and 5 means neither.

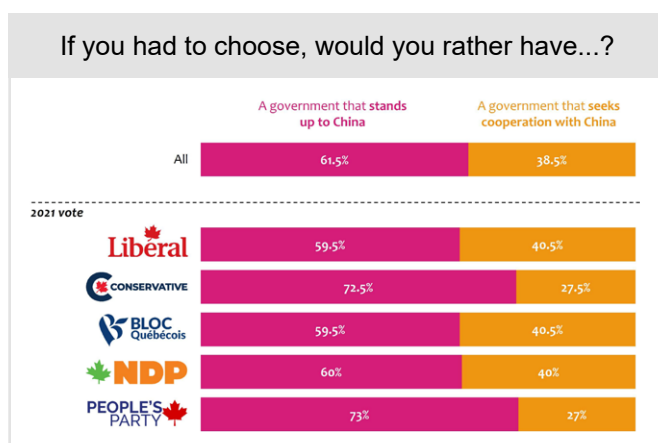


CHINA

More than 6 in 10 Canadians said they would rather have a government that stands up to China than one that seeks cooperation with the country. While 18-24s were almost exactly divided on the question, more than 7 in 10 older voters chose the first option. Chinese-background respondents were more likely than voters as a whole to say they would rather seek cooperation but were also very closely divided – 49% of them said they would rather have a government that stands up to China. Though the sample sizes are smaller, it is also notable that Korean- and Japanese-background Canadians were the keenest of the various ethnic groups to see a government standing up to China.

The different political groups took a similar view, though Conservative and PP voters (73%) broke more decisively in favour of a government that stands up to China than Liberal, BQ and NDP voters (all 60%).

This was reflected in our focus groups, where there was some concern about China's behaviour and growing influence. However, some observed that hardening attitudes to the country were being felt by Canadians of Chinese descent.



“It’s becoming an issue but they call you a racist if you bring it up. You can follow all the scandals but we’ve got our hands tied. Look at the thing with the two Michaels, and all the former Liberals now working for the Chinese government. But I don’t know that any party would be better for that.”

“They are the superpower in the world now. They have the population, the money, the military, and there’s really not much anyone can do about that. But we can stop supporting an economy that’s based on slavery. But that’s impossible because they’re happy to buy all the lobster and pigs and cows and aluminium that we can sell them, and if they’re willing to buy it, we’re going to sell it to them.”

“Taking a harder line on China is like a dog whistle, right? They use phrases and terms that aren’t blatantly crossing the line, but they have a secondary message and that’s something I’m concerned about.”

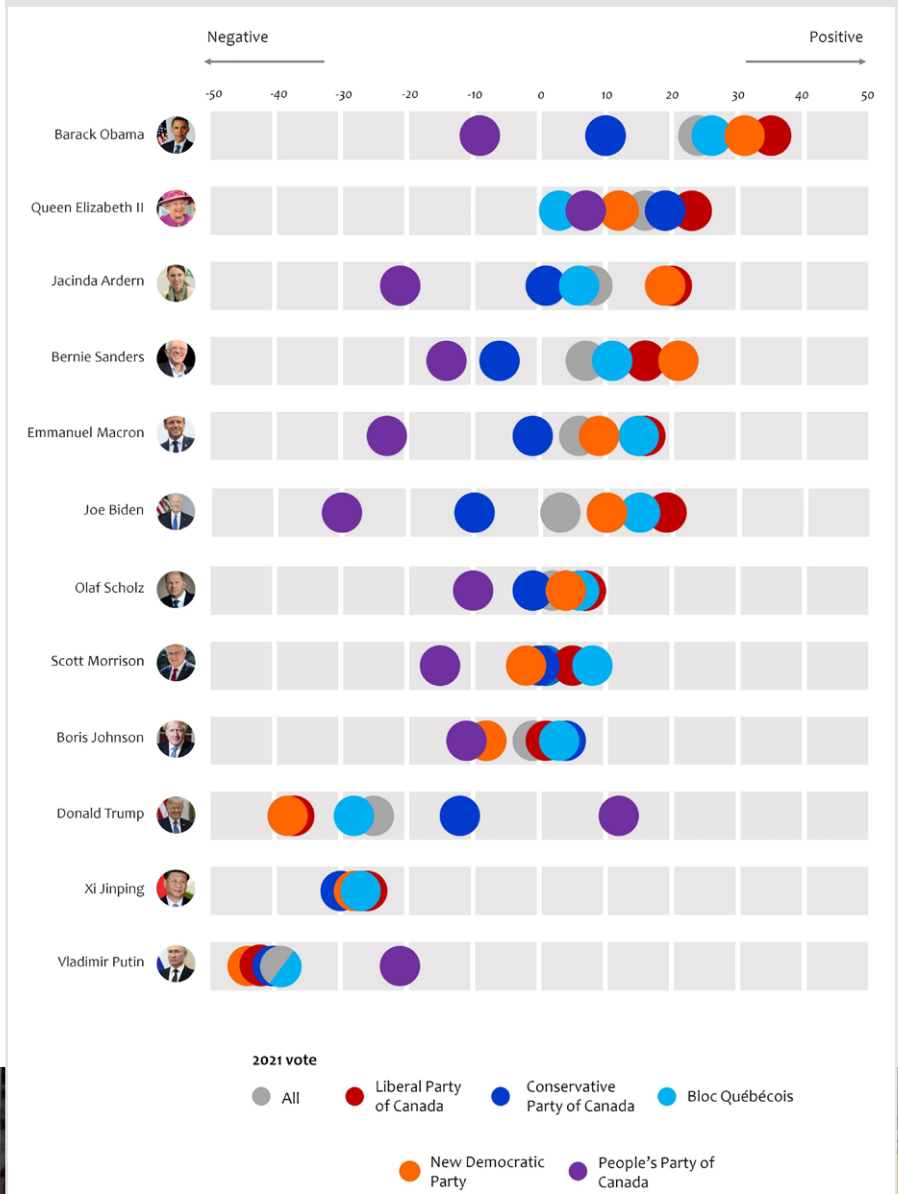
“I was born in Toronto, my parents are from Hong Kong, there’s literally no connection, but people just assume that all of us know each other or something. It’s like, what’s that got to do with me?”

INTERNATIONAL FIGURES

We asked our poll respondents how positive or negative they felt about various international figures. Barack Obama topped the league, followed by Queen Elizabeth II, who received positive mean scores among every demographic and political group. Jacinda Ardern, prime minister of New Zealand, was rated third overall ahead of Bernie Sanders, Emmanuel Macron and Joe Biden.

2021 PP voters gave negative mean scores to every figure except Donald Trump and the Queen.

How positive or negative do you feel about each of the following, where -50 means 'very negative indeed' and +50 means 'very positive indeed'?
[NB Mean scores]



POLITICS, PARTIES AND LEADERS



THE CANADIAN SYSTEM

Canadians took a balanced view as to whether national or provincial or territorial government ought to have more responsibilities. There was little difference of opinion by province or demographic group. There were some variations by political support, however: PP voters leaned furthest towards more power for provinces and territories, with more than one in five feeling strongly that this should be the case, followed by BQ voters. In aggregate, 2021 Conservative voters leaned only marginally towards more provincial power, while Liberal and NDP voters leaned slightly towards more responsibilities at the centre.

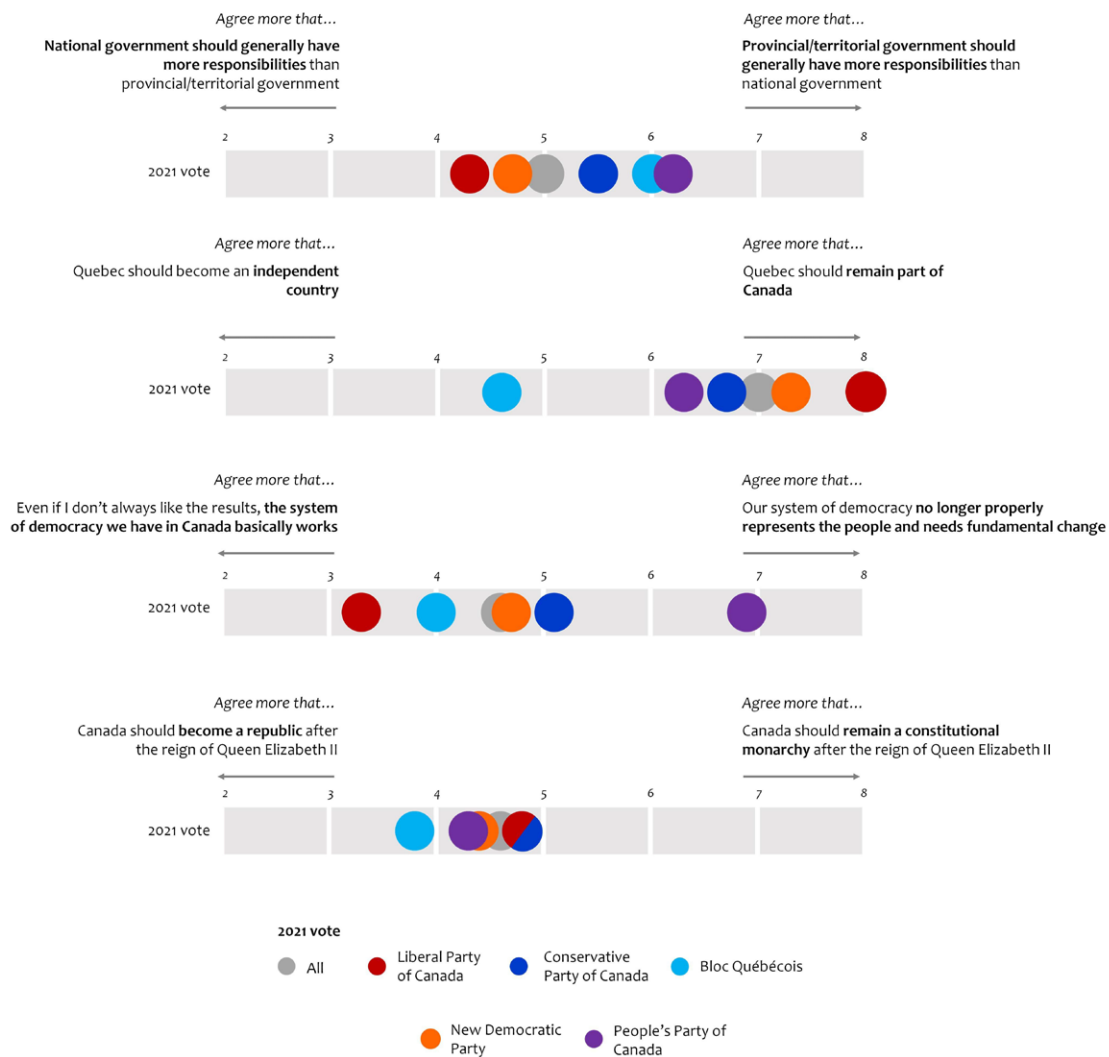
Majorities in nearly all groups opposed the proposition that Quebec should become an independent country – the one exception being BQ voters, 52% of whom leaned towards this statement, though only just under a quarter did so strongly. Notably, support for Quebec independence was higher in Alberta (32%), Manitoba (23%), Newfoundland (24%) and Saskatchewan (24%) than in Quebec itself (22%)

Aside from the BQ, support for an independent Quebec was higher among 2021 PP voters (29%) and Conservatives (25%) than Liberals (13%) and NDP voters (15%).

Overall opinion was finely balanced between the propositions that “even if I don’t always like the results, the system of democracy we have in Canada basically works” and that “our system of democracy no longer properly represents the people and needs fundamental change,” though with a slight bias to the former. Two notable exceptions stood out, however: Aboriginal and (especially) PP voters, majorities of whom leaned towards wanting change (1 in 3 doing so strongly in the latter case) and Liberal voters, 71% of whom were more inclined to say the current system works.

In a separate question, three quarters of Canadians leaned towards thinking politicians should pay more attention to voters’ views, rather than that politicians should lead the way and not be swayed too easily by public opinion. BQ voters were the most resistant to the consensus, with 3 in 10 saying politicians should lead the way.

Here are several pairs of statements. In each case, please indicate where your own view lies on a 10-point scale, where 0 means you completely agree with the first statement and 10 means you completely agree with the second. [NB Mean scores]



Canadians as a whole were closely divided as to whether the country should become a republic after the reign of Queen Elizabeth II or remain a constitutional monarchy. 47% leaned towards favouring a republic (though only 17% strongly) while 40% leaned towards retaining the monarchy (only 12% strongly), and 13% put themselves at the very centre of the scale. Men were slightly more pro-republic than women, who were more likely to take a neutral position. Though there was little variation by age, republican support was also higher among 35–44-year-olds than it was among the oldest and youngest voters. Regionally, preference for a republic was highest in Quebec (54%) and lowest in Prince Edward

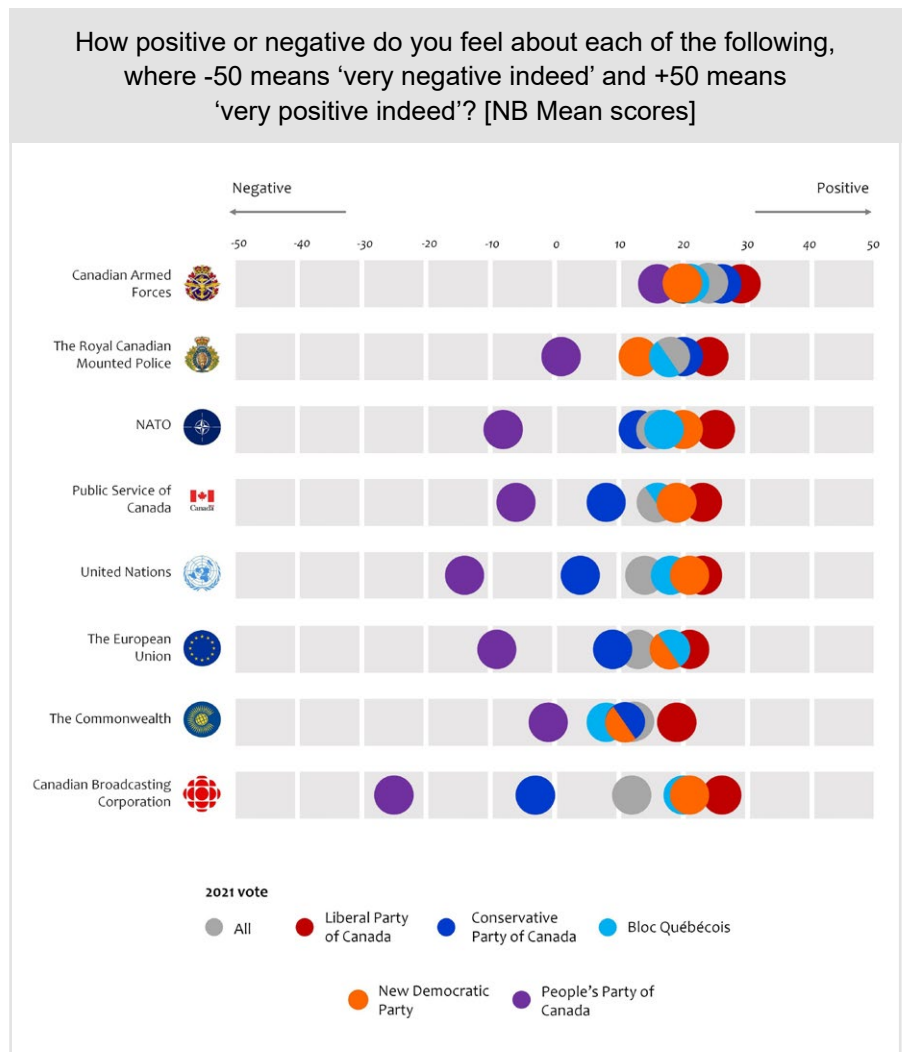
Island (34%) and Nova Scotia (37%). All ethnic groups were more likely to prefer a republic than to retain a constitutional monarchy, with the biggest margins among South Asian- and Latin American-background voters.

Politically, there was very little difference between the positions of Conservative and Liberal voters, both of which were quite evenly divided on the question, and NDP voters were very slightly more pro-republic than Canadians as a whole. Margins were somewhat higher among PP voters (53% of whom leaned towards a republic) and those who had voted BQ, 61% of whom favoured a republic, including 26% who did so strongly.

CANADIAN INSTITUTIONS

Asked how positive or negative they felt about various institutions, Canada's armed forces received the most positive scores from all political groups. This was followed by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police with generally high ratings (except for 2021 PP voters, with a score just above neutral).

It was notable that Liberal voters were the most positive – and PP voters the least positive – about every institution on the list. Conservative voters gave net positive mean scores for all of them except the CBC.



Which three of the following do you think are the most important issues facing Canada today? [NB % naming in top three, 2021 vote]

All voters	Liberal Party of Canada voters	Conservative Party of Canada voters
Cost of living 55%	Cost of living 48%	Cost of living 59%
Healthcare 33%	Healthcare 41%	The economy and jobs 39%
The economy and jobs 28%	Environmental issues and climate change 32%	Government borrowing and debt 32%
Housing 25%	The economy and jobs 27%	Healthcare 31%
Taxes 21%	Housing 25%	Taxes 30%
Environmental issues and climate change 21%	Dealing with Covid-19 24%	Housing 19%
Bloc Québécois voters	New Democratic Party voters	People's Party of Canada voters
Cost of living 44%	Cost of living 55%	Cost of living 60%
Healthcare 39%	Environmental issues and climate change 35%	Government borrowing and debt 35%
Environmental issues and climate change 32%	Healthcare 34%	Taxes 32%
The economy and jobs 25%	Housing 29%	The economy and jobs 32%
Social care / care for the elderly 24%	Indigenous peoples' rights 21%	Healthcare 26%
Housing 20%	The economy and jobs 19%	Housing 19%

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES

The cost of living was easily the most important issue currently facing Canada both for the population as a whole, and for each voter group. While healthcare and the environment were next on the list for Liberal, BQ and NDP voters, 2021 Conservatives were more preoccupied with the economy, jobs and government borrowing.

Those aged under 35 rated housing the second most important issue facing the country, after the cost of living.

PANDEMIC PERFORMANCE

We found people more inclined to say that the Canadian government had underreacted to the pandemic than that it had overreacted, with those aged 65+ (60%) and 2021 NDP voters and Liberals (both 61%) the most likely to think more restrictions should have been put in place. PP voters were by far the most inclined to say the government overreacted (83%), with more than half feeling strongly that too many restrictions were put on normal daily life.

This was largely reflected in our focus groups, where most thought the government had done a reasonable job in responding to the pandemic given the absence of information or precedent – though some worried about the long-term costs, both financially and in terms of the side-effects of lockdowns. However, some (by no means all) thought restrictions were being eased too soon, or complained about inconsistent or constantly changing rules, which were often thought to have been driven by politics rather than science.

“I think the government handled it pretty well, given that there was no playbook. I think they were trying their best.”

“I don’t know where all the money came from, but I really think we did the best we could to keep businesses going and to help people who were out of work.”

“In the first year or so, what the experts said carried a lot of weight. But in the last year our leaders have completely lost sight of what’s going on. Justin Trudeau saying that people who have other opinions are misogynists and racists. I don’t know how that’s acceptable.”

“If you’re that afraid, stay at home. Why should the rest of us be inconvenienced? Especially now we have vaccines. Why can’t I play basketball? Because some people might be worried. Well, if you’re worried, don’t play basketball.”

“

“The constant flipping in and out of quarantine was horrible for everyone’s mental health. I’ve seen tons of younger students who don’t have the emotional maturity or social skills because they’ve been forced into isolation. Then right when they’re forming connections, they get thrown back into isolation.”

In our poll, PP voters were also by far the most likely to say they supported the truckers in their Ottawa protest. 80% of them leaned towards saying they backed the truckers (including 52% doing so strongly), compared to 35% of the population as a whole. A majority of Canadians (57%), including 77% of 2021 Liberals, 72% of NDP voters and 68% of BQ voters, leaned more towards supporting the government's use of emergency powers in response. 2021 Conservative were evenly divided, with as

many saying they strongly supported the use of emergency powers as saying they strongly backed the protests.

Our focus group participants of various political backgrounds tended to think that neither side had distinguished itself in the dispute. Some felt the truckers had had a point but had made an unnecessary nuisance of themselves, while others thought the government had done too little to keep order in the early stages and then been too heavy handed in its use of emergency powers.

“I’m all for protest and we have freedom of speech, but blocking bridges, breaking supply chains... I think the government waited too long.”

“In certain positions you had to get double jabbed or lose your job, at a time when jobs were pretty scarce. I felt that was wrong and they had to get their point across. But you’re going to have those small groups who take it that one step too far.”

“The way Trudeau and the federal government handled it was disgusting. To freeze bank accounts when it was a peaceful protest – this is not the country that I immigrated to. There’s a lot worse that they’ve done nothing about.”

“Those powers were not actually required. The truckers were breaking a lot of laws. The laws exist, the police exist to enforce those laws. We didn’t need additional measures to control that.”

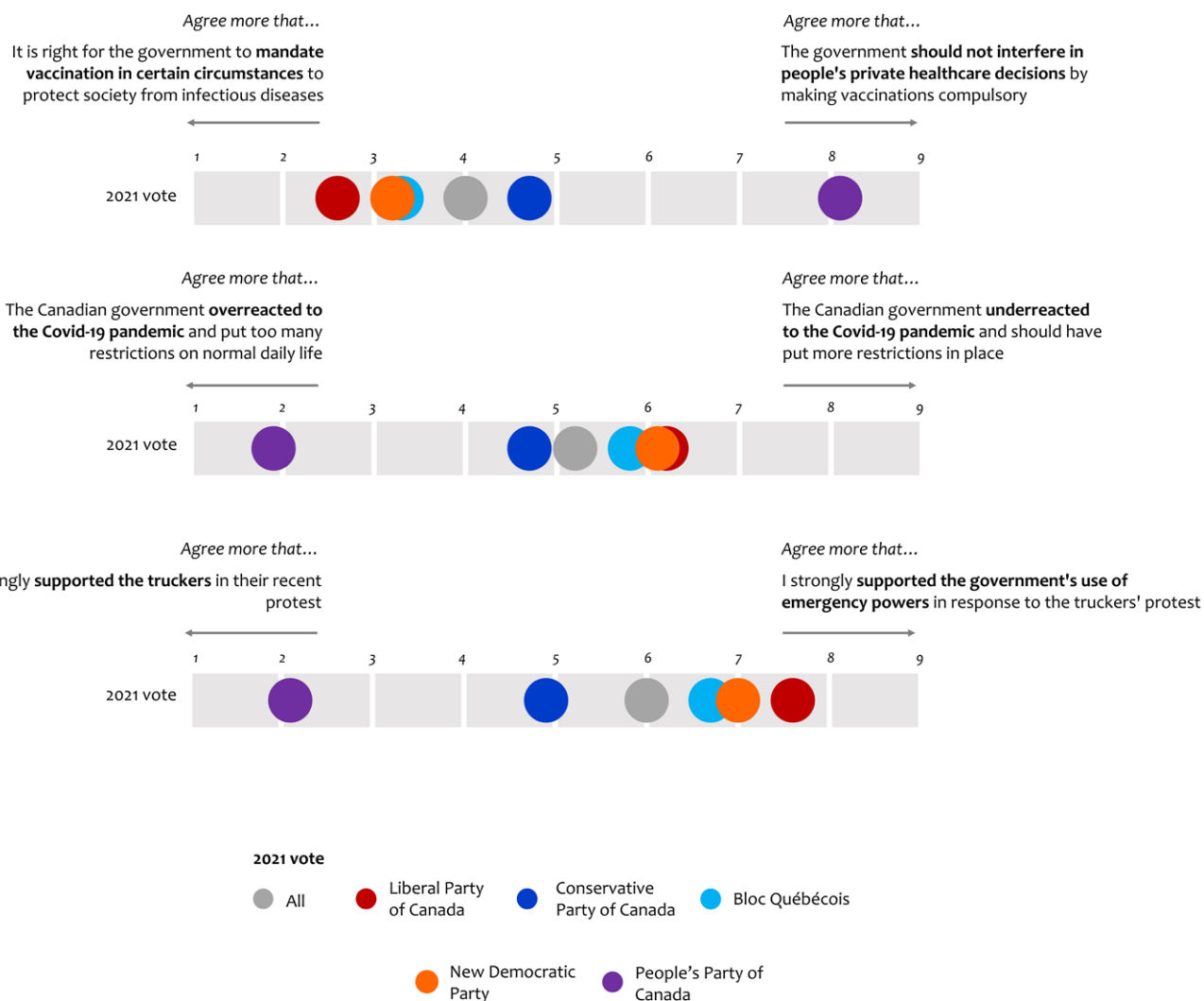
“

All levels of government should have jumped in right away. They were in private neighbourhoods honking, they took out barbecues and were on people’s lawns in front of their houses and nothing was done. They should have cracked down earlier.”

Asked whether it was right for the government to mandate vaccination in some circumstances or if the government should not interfere in private healthcare decisions, most Canadians (61%) leaned more towards accepting vaccine mandates. Those aged 65+ (75%) and those who had voted Liberal (77%), NDP (71%) or BQ (69%) were the most likely to do so. Aboriginal respondents were the demographic group most likely to oppose government interference in private healthcare decisions (46%), along with those who had voted Conservative (41%) and – especially – the People's Party (82%).

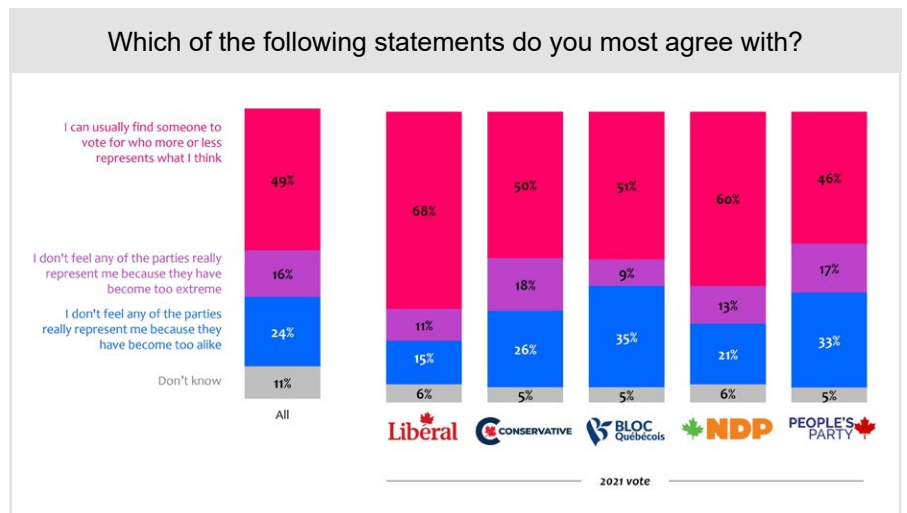
In a separate question, Canadians were evenly divided as to whether people can generally be trusted to do the right thing without being forced to, or if they will only do so if the rules say they have to. Those aged 65+ and 2021 PP voters were the only groups more likely than not to feel that people could be trusted to do the right thing of their own accord.

Here are several pairs of statements. In each case, please indicate where your own view lies on a 10-point scale, where 0 means you completely agree with the first statement and 10 means you completely agree with the second. [NB Mean scores]



REPRESENTATION

Just under half of respondents (49%) said that when it comes to elections, they can usually find someone to vote for who more or less represents what they think – though older Canadians (60% of those aged 65+) were more likely to say this than younger voters (44% of 18-24s). It was also notable that Aboriginal voters (39%) were somewhat less likely to say this than the population as a whole.



Those who disagreed were more likely to complain that the parties had become too alike (24%) than that they had become too extreme (16%).

Focus group participants tended to agree that they had at least as much choice as they needed, and that there seemed to be a good deal of overlap between one party and another.

49%

of Canadians could usually find someone to represent their views.

By party support, 2021 Liberals were the most likely to say they could usually find someone to represent their views (68%), followed by NDP voters (60%). Around half of other parties' voters said the same, with BQ and PP voters the most likely to complain that the parties were too much alike.

“I think there are enough parties, although only two of them seem to be viable for actually forming governments. But I guess it's less the talking, more the action that we're lacking.”

“If you have too many choices out there you'll have too many parties and you'll never get things done. Things are already slow to happen. I'm fine with it the way it is.”

UNITED OR DIVIDED?

Most in our focus groups felt that Canada was still a fairly united country, certainly more so than their neighbour to the south. However, there was a widespread feeling that divisions were beginning to creep in. The perceived reasons included a coarsening of political rhetoric imported from the US, lingering tensions from the pandemic, and a growing focus on identity politics.

“If you say something, you get pounced on. You’re either with me or against me. Nobody can reach in the middle and say ‘that’s a good point, but have you thought about this?’ I had this in my family yesterday. Somebody exploded because I said I support vaccine mandates – they just got mad and left the room. It was quite funny.”

“We’re starting to see a lot of the dangerous alt-right rhetoric make its way into Canadian life. We saw that with the freedom protest, for example.”

“The focus on identity issues adds to it. It’s easier to find people who think like you, so you just talk to those people and get stronger and stronger in your opinions. There’s less capacity to empathise and come together.”

“I wonder if we’re suffering a bit from multiculturalism. We use the ‘we’ less and less and form smaller communities. You go into districts in Montreal and everything is Mandarin. I ask what they’re selling, and they don’t understand me in French.”

“

Because of the grey areas and the flexibility within the parties, you definitely identify as Canadian first and your political party down the road. Not like in the states where it’s almost ‘I’m a Democrat, you’re a Republican, you’re not an American to me’. I’m very happy that in Canada I can live next door to someone with a different political perspective than me.”

Many also felt that local provincial loyalties had taken on a new importance in recent years. A number of western participants felt their provinces were neglected (symbolised for some by the fact that the results of national elections were often effectively decided before polls had closed in the west). The different priorities of rural and urban voters, and tension between energy-intensive industry and the environment-focused metropolitan population was also thought to be a factor. French-speaking participants also felt language and culture was often a barrier between themselves and other Canadians.

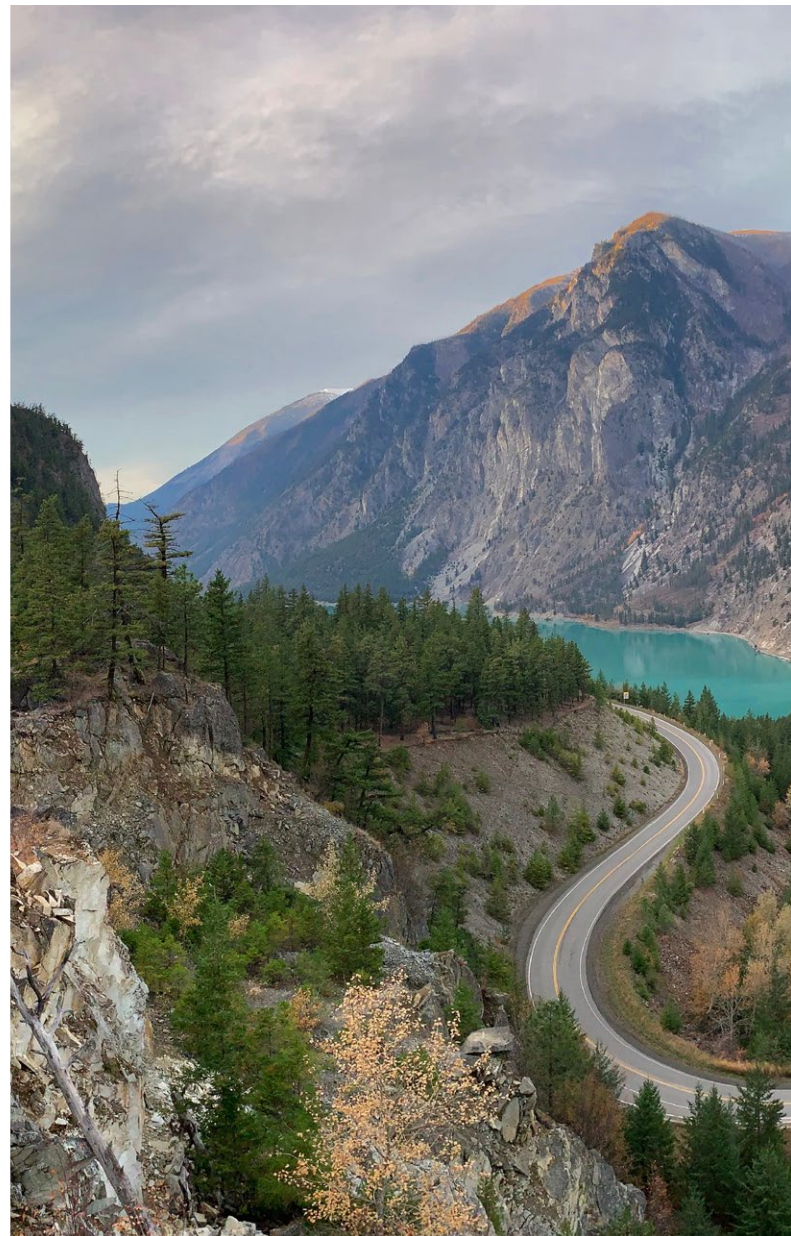
“When we had the Olympics, I felt we were still a united country. But since then I feel things have really slipped. Your provincial identity has become more important, what it means to be an Albertan or a maritime or a Quebecer.”

“Before the votes are counted in Saskatchewan, Alberta and BC, the election’s already done. The Liberals have won because they have all those seats in the Greater Toronto area.”

“If you take a Quebecer who travels to Ontario, it’s tense. It’s not the big hug and the chummy handshake. We’re still frogs pretty much everywhere, French frogs.”

“

The rest of Canada has basically forgotten about Saskatchewan, Alberta and BC. We have roads, we have a bunch of native reserves out here who haven’t had clean drinking water in God knows how long. They’re focused on the bigger cities and leaving the smaller ones behind.”



Quebec participants spoke about the cultural and political differences they felt between their province and the rest of Canada.

“ We are a more progressive type of place than other Canadian provinces, especially compared to Alberta or BC. We’re not afraid of moving forward.”

“ The French language, the culture, the mentality are completely different. It is more European-based. During the pandemic, everything Europe was doing Mr Legault would copycat.”

“ I consider us to be a separate nation with different aspirations. I’ve lived elsewhere in Canada and it’s like a neighbouring country. I have nothing against Canadians, but we don’t have much in common.”

Despite their focus on liberal or progressive values, a number of French-speaking Quebec participants, who had voted BQ in the 2021 election, felt the Conservatives had more respect for provinces’ political rights and the cultural nuances between Quebec and the rest of Canada than did the Liberals.



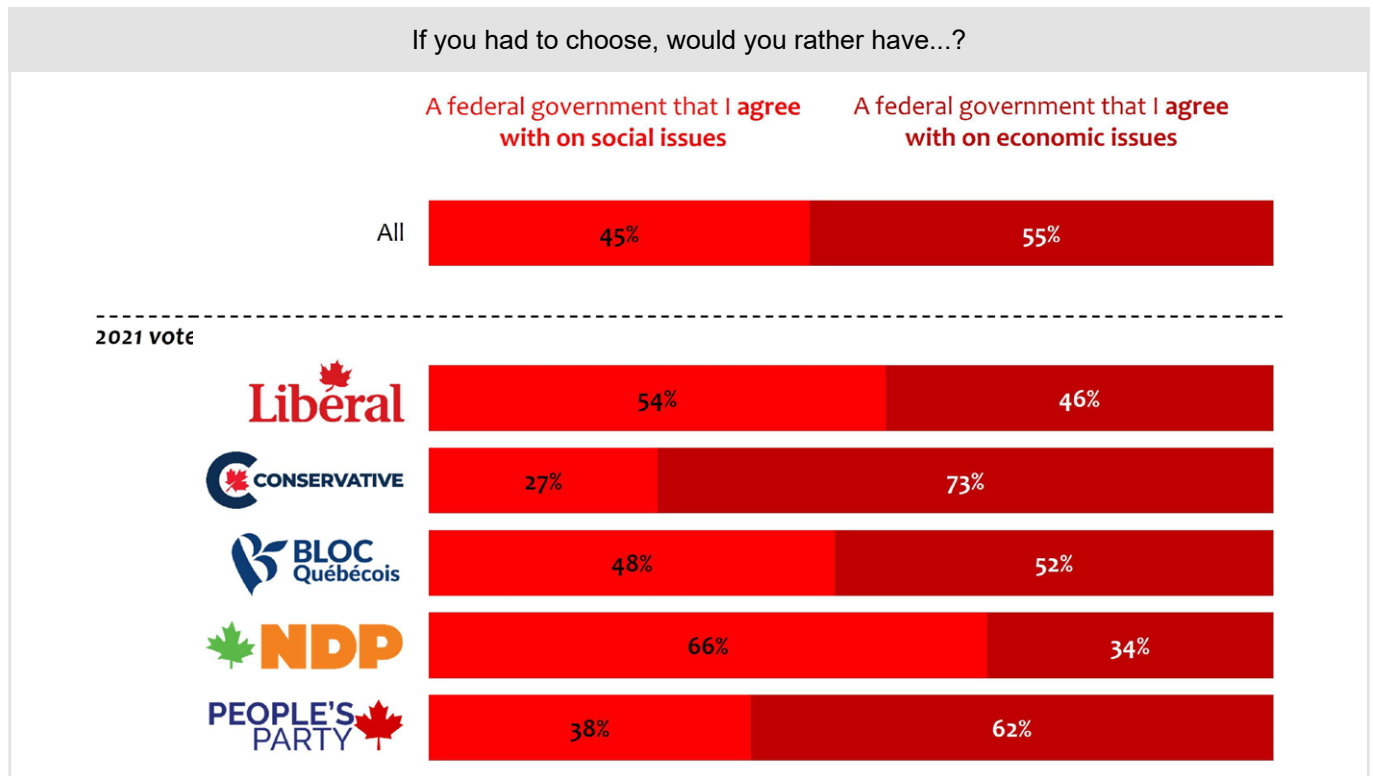
“

I side with the Liberals for social involvement, but I think the Conservatives respect provincial jurisdiction far more than the Liberal party. I think they understand Quebec is a different culture to the rest of Canada.”

SOCIAL OR ECONOMIC ISSUES

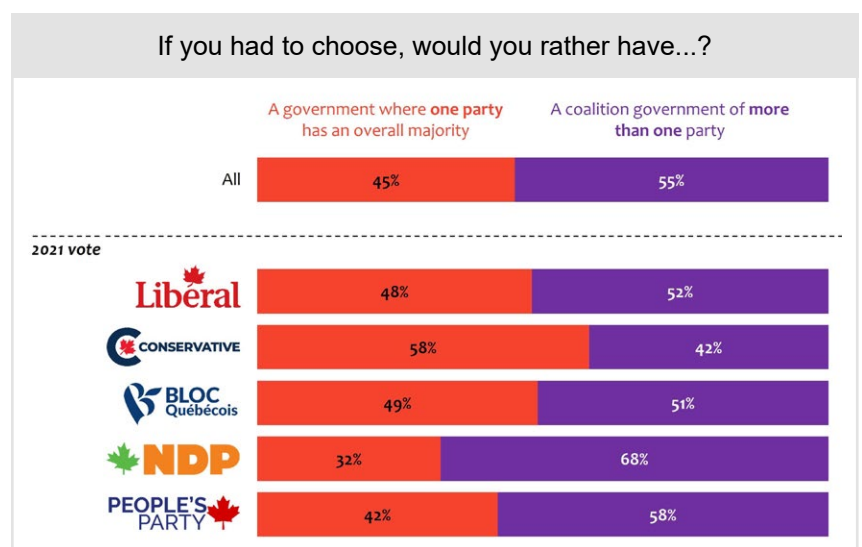
For Canadians as a whole, it was more important to have a government they agreed with on economic issues (55%) than on social issues (45%), but there some sharp variations within this picture. Men prioritised economic issues by 60% to 40%, while women were divided evenly. And while 18-24 year-olds split 50-50, those aged 65+ prioritised economic issues by 62% to 38%.

Liberal and (especially) NDP voters defied the national picture by prioritising social issues (by 54-46% and 66-34% respectively). Conservative voters were more likely than any other group to say economic issues were more important to them, doing so by 73% to 27%.

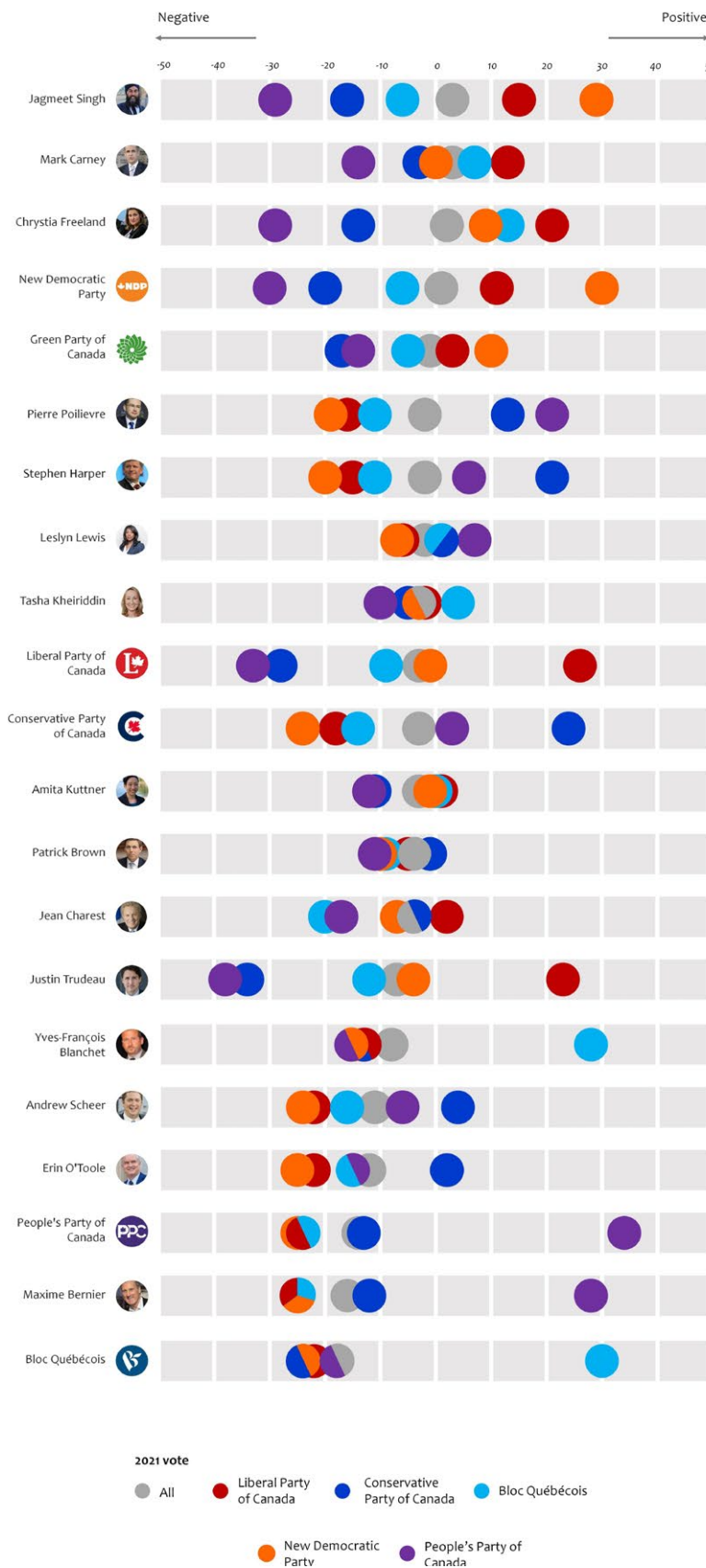


MAJORITY/COALITION

Canadians as a whole said they preferred a coalition government to one party with an overall majority, as did 2021 Liberals (by 52% to 48%) and NDP voters (by 68% to 32%). 2021 Conservatives were the only political group to favour a one-party majority over coalition (by 58% to 42%).



How positive or negative do you feel about each of the following,
where -50 means 'very negative indeed'
and +50 means 'very positive indeed'?
[NB Mean scores]



CANADIAN POLITICAL FIGURES

When we asked how positive or negative Canadians felt about various political parties and public figures, the most positive overall net score went to Jagmeet Singh of the NDP, just ahead of Mark Carney and Chrystia Freeland.

The survey was conducted before the list of candidates for the Conservative leadership election was confirmed. Of the candidates who appeared in the survey, by far the most popular among 2021 Conservatives was Pierre Poilievre – though his score among voters as a whole (as for other prominent Conservative politicians and indeed the party as a whole) was just below neutral.



Those who had voted Liberal in recent elections often said they saw the party as a moderate, balanced, centrist force (“they don’t ruffle too many feathers”). They spontaneously mentioned the party’s stance towards women’s and LGBT rights, indigenous people, childcare and the environment as part of the attraction of the Liberals in general and Justin Trudeau in particular. They saw Trudeau himself as likeable and presentable, a good communicator, and someone who represented Canada well on the international stage – something that also drew praise from non-Liberal voters who did not necessarily like his policies.

“I actually have a little crush on him. He’s very easy on the eye and soft spoken, and the way he put Trump in his place a few times. And he’s huge on women’s rights and LGBT issues.”

“In terms of him as a person and how he projects himself, minus the political stance, I’ve not had a problem. As he presents himself on the world stage and represents Canada, and connected with a lot of younger Canadians, I’m good with that.”

“I like young and cool. I’m glad we don’t have a Biden or Trump.”

“He looks sensible and works for every community regardless. One of the main reasons he keeps winning is that he shows interest in every community he can get votes from.”

“I think the way he speaks and can hold a conversation, when he’s talking to the community or to Canadian citizens as a whole, I think that is what attracts people.”

However, many said the attraction had started to wane. Regular complaints included lack of delivery, an apparent preoccupation with image over substance, cockiness or arrogance, evasiveness or absence of firm principle, lack of interest in the west of the country, and a tendency to tax, borrow and spend too much. The decision to hold an early general election was also widely criticised. Many also said they did not expect him to fight, or at least not win, another general election.

“ There’s a lot of talk, but not a lot of walk.”

“ He did some good things, legalised marijuana, increased childcare benefit, but the shine has started to wear off. We’ve had a couple of scandals, his sunny ways have largely gone by the wayside and it’s all mudslinging.”

“ OK, he’s attractive and charismatic, but is that going to help my tax situation or my fuel bill or the cost of living? He’s got the beautiful hair, the look, but dude, at the end of the day, what are you doing for our country?”

“ He can’t answer a question. You ask him, ‘what colour is the sky?’ and it’s ‘well, we need to have more women in politics and we need to mow the grass over here’, but he can’t tell you what colour the sky is.”

“ He’s very eastern-centric. I don’t think he represents western Canada.”

“ For him, it’s about how he looks delivering his message versus what that message is. What lacks for me is the confidence that he will follow through.”

“ He’s a chameleon. He takes the colour of the rug he’s standing on. He’s somebody who wishes to be re-elected. And that’s one of the characteristics of the Liberal Party, to work towards being re-elected.”

“ I was disappointed when he called an early election just two years into his role and in the middle of a pandemic. Trying to capitalise on winning a majority. It was like, you’re kidding. You’re wasting money and just worrying about yourself.”

“

With all this spending, taxes will have to increase obviously, and we’re going to have to pay the bill. Or our kids will.”

There was also a widespread view that Trudeau's recent victories had had at least as much to do with the state of the Conservative opposition as with anything he or the Liberals had offered.

“After Stephen Harper stepped down the Conservative Party was a complete shambles. Trudeau took advantage of a party that was divided east-west and came right down the middle and cleaned house.”

“The Conservatives just had the worst run of political contenders. Just like embarrassing, farcical figures. Harper shot himself in the foot, Scheer was a joke, and O'Toole was possibly worse than Scheer.”

THE LIBERAL HOUSE

As a way of further exploring people's underlying perceptions, we asked the groups to think about the question: if each political party were a house, what kind of house would it be? The 'Liberal house' was often imagined as a normal, lived-in family home, but with some tell-tale features.

“It's an old building that's got good bones but could use some work.”

“There would be a lot of activists. Rainbows everywhere.”

“How many mortgages have they taken out on it? They've spent a lot of money on decorating.”

“Justin lives there. And the teachers' union.”

“It's all neutral colours so as not to offend anybody.”

“It's empty, because it's owned by someone who lives in China.”

“Lots of social gatherings. They have a good time and let someone else clear up the mess.”

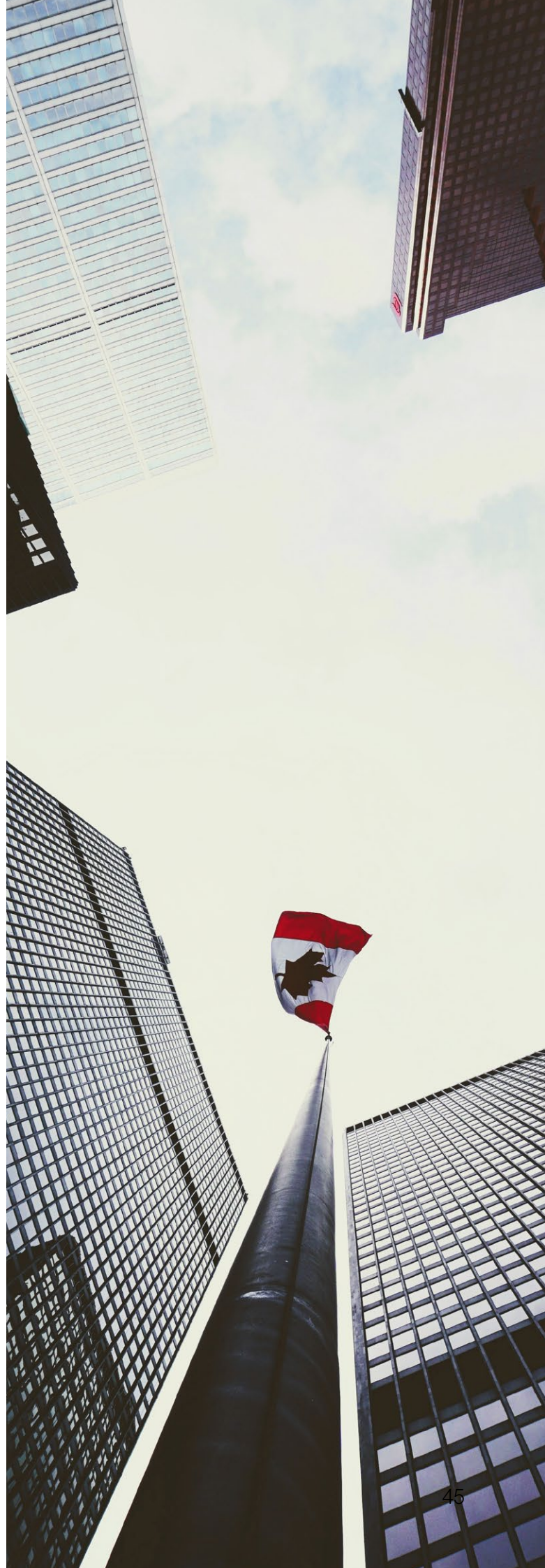
In our focus groups, the positive attribute most often associated with the Conservative Party was sound economic management, including fiscal responsibility and a reluctance to tax and spend too much. Some also felt Conservative governments had focused on getting the job done rather than image and presentation, and believed the party was more aligned with people and families rather than the state.

“Harper ran the country in a way that was fiscally correct. When the Liberals took over, their bank accounts were full. And now we’re looking at a deficit of trillions.”

“At least with Harper, when he said something, he followed through. He got the job done. You have to look at people who can run the country like a business and not a popularity contest.”

“I voted for them because I didn’t want the Liberals reaching into my pocket anymore.”

“I think the Conservatives are closer to the citizen, closer to families. And they don’t spend outrageously like the Liberals are doing.”



However, these views were outweighed in our groups by more negative associations, including by those who did not rule out voting Conservative in future elections. Foremost among these were the perception that the party was too close to big business and focused on finances at the expense of wider society, that it was indifferent to environmental matters, and that it had outdated attitudes to social issues. For many, the biggest problem in recent years had been what they regarded as a chronic lack of stable leadership.

“

The Conservative Party, which is largely supported by the rich, the corporate business owners and so-forth, is not in favour of the carbon tax. They're historically disinterested and often deny climate change.”



“ The Conservative party has always had good points, but the leaders have sucked. They've been sleazy and Trump-esque.”

“ Liberals are adaptable and focus on the inclusion of individuals, whereas the Conservatives just focus on the big corporations and how to spend the money wisely, but not necessarily taking into consideration the impact on people.”

“ I'm fiscally conservative, but socially really not. And there is an element of charisma that drives you away from the Conservatives, as well as all their social stuff, which drives me and my friend groups towards the Liberals.”

“ One of the things that was lacking was understanding of multiculturalism, the diversity of the country, and a lot of the voter base didn't recognise themselves with that hardcore philosophy. Some of their policies about women's rights, gay rights, marriage, even denying climate change – there are some wonky viewpoints there.”

A number of participants, including those who had voted Conservative in the past, observed that the party seemed to have changed since it was last in government. This was often seen as a shift to the right, especially on social issues, or a move towards a more Trump-like approach.

“They’ve gone to bed with the Trump people. But I think they were already on their way there. And given what’s gone on in the States, it given people here who believe the same things green light and allowed them to be more vocal. And most of them have found their home in the Conservatives.”

“The Conservatives have changed, and their platform has changed. The prejudiced part, that platform has taken over. They have become so much less tolerant.”

Many also commented that the Conservatives were struggling with a strategic dilemma (“they’re lost without a GPS,” as one put it). The “guillotining” of Erin O’Toole was widely seen as a response to his attempts to moderate the party’s stance on some policy issues, prompting a pushback from the party’s core. At the same time, some Conservative voters complained that the party had begun to neglect its true supporters in a doomed attempt to win over liberal voters in the metropolitan east. Some said they could not be sure where the party stood since it did not seem sure itself.

“They’ve become so fragmented. No-one’s figured out how Harper got that balance right between the social side and the fiscal conservatism all under the same umbrella, all being able to tolerate one another for better or worse.”

“They ditched O’Toole for being too moderate. What does that tell you? He confused the Conservatives, and they didn’t know what to do.”

“It represents the right wing, but Mr O’Toole was more centrist, trying to smooth things out. And unfortunately, he stated it too loudly and was guillotined by the party.”

“

Their supporters do support them on social issues, so they risk alienating them if they pivot away. They’re kind of stuck between not knowing what to do and how to pivot. They don’t know if they should go full Trumpian or be more fiscally conservative.”



“ Instead of trying to look out for Alberta, they think ‘Oh, we need to get Quebec’. But they’re never going to beat the Bloc. And they go over to Ontario to try get the votes there and promise them stuff that they can’t deliver.”

“ I think they are trying to broaden their appeal. They’re just not very good at it.”

“ Where the Conservatives went wrong in the last few elections was trying to go into this middle ground where they were trying to please everybody. It really just became a bad look.”

THE CONSERVATIVE HOUSE

Our focus groups imagined the ‘Conservative house’ to be rather grander and less accessible than its Liberal equivalent.

“ It would be like an old boys’ club. Stuffed deer heads and guns mounted on the wall.”

“ People in suits. Maybe a butler.”

“ High-end furniture, a grand piano at the entrance, a tennis court. And a dog.”

“ Very exclusive. A gated community. You have to have an appointment to get through security. ‘You’re not coming in here’.”

“ They keep themselves to themselves. But within budget.”

“ It’s prestigious and looks good. But there’s some deferred maintenance going on, like maybe a roof problem.”

THE NDP

In our poll, the word most often spontaneously associated with the NDP was “socialist”.



Focus group participants who had voted for the NDP said Jagmeet Singh had been a large part of the attraction. Those who were broadly sympathetic to the party but did not vote for it often said its platform was unrealistic, or was too small an electoral force to risk voting for if their main aim was to stop the Conservatives.

“I was left of centre and I also really liked Jagmeet. He was cool. It was neat finally to have a visible minority in Canada, and he resonated with me as a person. I thought, who would I be proud to have representing our country? And he came out on top for me.”

“I pay attention to them and potentially in the future I could vote for them. But I don’t think they’re strong enough right now to win over the Conservatives. I would rather give my vote to the Liberals as a safer bet.”

“Jagmeet seems like a nice guy and is pretty down to earth, but what they want to do seems a little bit out of reach. A little bit unrealistic and overambitious.”

“I have cousins in their early twenties who are very, very left wing and woke. I’m glad they want to change the world and that’s what the NDP has. But they also need to cater to everyone else, not just the newest generation.”

There were mixed views about the NDP's decision to enter a formal coalition government with the Liberals. While some hoped this would lead to more of its policies being enacted, most felt it would simply help to entrench the larger party and would come at a cost to the NDP.

“The NDP don't have enough seats to make a big difference so this is their way of purchasing their goals and objectives. They are pushing forward a couple of points they wouldn't get any other way. I'm just suspicious what the cost is.”

“I thought our NDP candidate was great. But I chickened out and voted Liberal at the last minute and felt like a coward.”

“Are these promises going to be fulfilled? Because the Liberals have not met the promises they've already made.”

“The negative part is that no matter what the Liberal government does, the NDP will support them. For another three years.”

“I'm not sure what they'll actually be able to accomplish. Will they push back and try to implement what the NDP is striving for, or is he just going to be amenable to the Liberal party? I'm getting the sense that it's going to be more or less like a Liberal platform.”

THE NDP HOUSE

Conceptions of the 'NDP house' generally fell into one of two categories – either a modest, friendly home for young people on lower incomes, or a large, smart house for a rich family.

“It would be a bunch of roommates renting. Blue collar, trades.”

“People who want free money from the government.”

“An eco-friendly new-build on Vancouver Island.”

“Five acres with a barn at the back. A sustainable farmhouse with solar panels and compost.”

“A log cabin on the west coast for upper class people. A nice interior with land out to the forest or the ocean.”

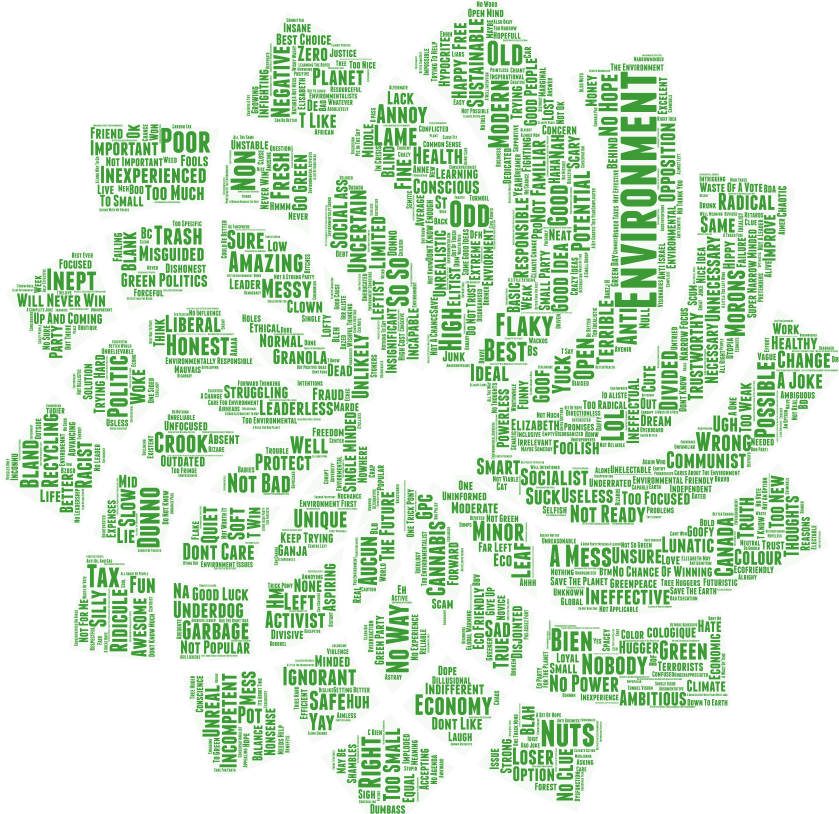


“It’s to put forward Quebec values and the interests of Quebec. Who else is going to do it? If we want to be heard, we have to scream louder than everybody else.”

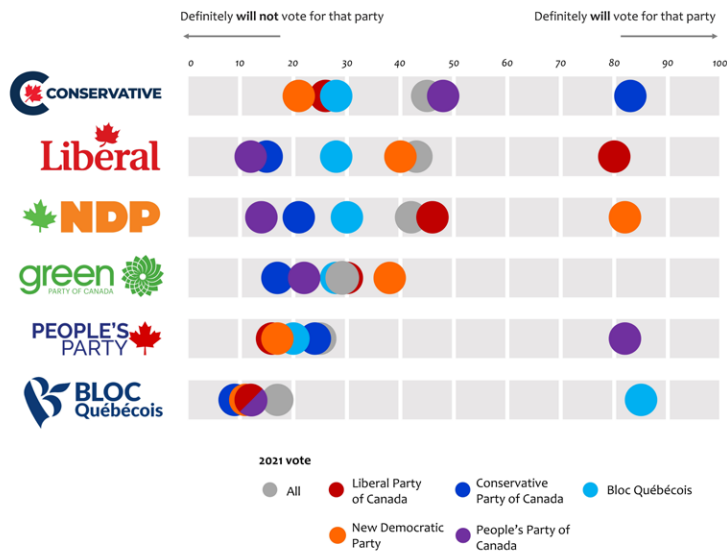
“Solidarity and sustainability seem to be the key, which rather described Quebec. A common goal, something unified.”

“ Our culture. To have the Quebec voice heard at the federal level and to represent Quebec sovereignty in parliament.”





When it comes to the general election, to be held by 2023, how likely would you say it is that you will end up giving each of the following your party vote at the next election – where 0 means ‘there is no chance I will vote for that party’, and 100 means ‘I will definitely vote for that party’?
[NB Mean scores, 2021 vote]



THE NEXT ELECTION

We asked people how likely they were to vote for each party at the next election on a scale from zero (no chance) and 100 (definitely will). 2021 Conservatives gave themselves a slightly higher mean likelihood of repeating their vote (83.2/100) than 2021 Liberals (79.6).

48% of 2021 Conservatives put their chances of voting Tory again at the next election at more than 90/100, compared to 37% of Liberals who gave an equally high chance of repeating their vote. BQ voters were the most likely to indicate that they would vote the same way next time as they did in 2021.

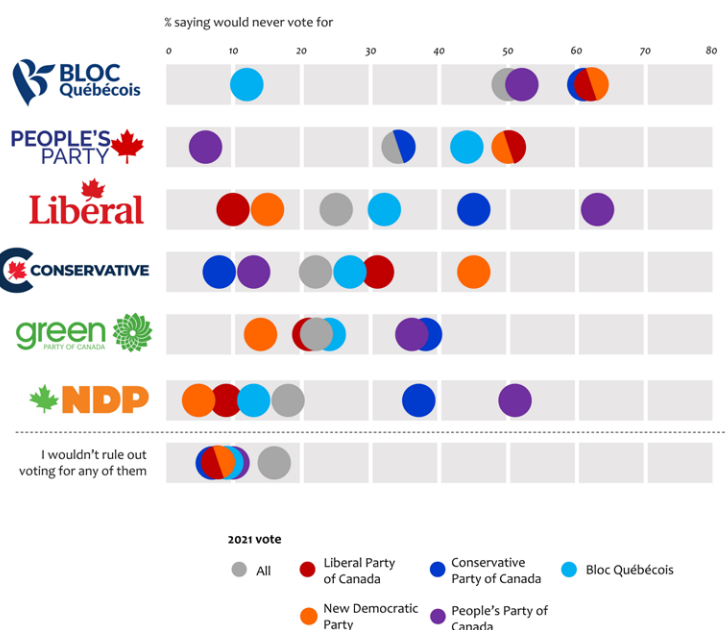
OUT OF THE QUESTION?

When we asked respondents if there was a party they would never vote for, similar proportions ruled out the Liberals (25%) and the Conservatives (23%), while slightly more said they would never vote for the PP (34%). The NDP (18%) was the party least likely to be ruled out. Only 16% of voters said they would not rule out voting for any of the parties.

2021 Conservatives were more likely to say they would never vote Liberal (45%) than vice versa (31%). One in three Conservatives ruled out voting for the PP, while just 13% of PP voters said they would never vote Conservative.

Just under half of 2021 NDP voters (45%) said they would never vote Conservative, while 37% of Conservatives ruled out the NDP.

Is there a party that you would **never** vote for at a general election? Please tick all that apply.



WHAT IS BEHIND EACH PARTY'S SUPPORT?

We applied regression analysis to our poll data to work out how strongly related each of six key controversies were to the likelihood of voting for each party among likely voters who had yet to commit themselves at the next election – and how those relationships between opinion and potential party support varied from province to province. (Provinces and territories with smaller populations are excluded because of the relatively small sample sizes in those areas).

For the **Conservative Party**, we found that potential support in Canada as a whole – and in Alberta, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Ontario, Quebec and Saskatchewan – was most closely related to whether people wanted to see a stronger federal government, or more autonomy for provincial governments. This chimes with what we heard in the groups, particularly from western voters who often felt neglected in national politics, and in Quebec, where some felt the Conservatives had more respect than other parties for provincial jurisdiction and local culture. Second most closely related overall (and most closely related in British Columbia), was a preference for using Canada's natural resources to reduce energy costs rather than preserving resources even at a time of high prices. The most closely correlated question in Newfoundland and Nova Scotia – and third in Canada as a whole – was that if they had to choose, they would prefer a federal government they agreed with on economic issues than one they agreed with on social issues.

For the **Liberal Party** in Canada as a whole – and in Manitoba, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Ontario and Quebec – the most closely correlated issue with potential support among likely but uncommitted voters was preference was for a government they agreed with on social issues rather than economic ones. Liberals were one of the few groups to express this preference in the poll, and the reasons they gave for their 2021 vote – especially women's and minority rights – complement this finding (as does their complaint that the Conservatives seem too preoccupied with the economy).

Potential **NDP** support was also most closely related to the prioritising of social issues, both in Canada as a whole and in BC, New Brunswick, Ontario and Quebec. Next was the trade-off between reducing energy costs and preserving resources (the poll also showing NDP voters to be more likely than Canadians as a whole to prefer the latter option even at a time of high prices). Potential NDP support was also more closely correlated than for other parties with a preference between a federal government with an overall majority and one comprising a coalition of parties. NDP voters were significantly more likely than Canadians as a whole to prefer coalition (perhaps not surprisingly as current participants in such a government).

The preference for more provincial autonomy over a stronger federal government was clearly the most closely related of the six issues to likely support for the **Bloc Québécois** among likely but uncommitted voters. More than three quarters chose this option, while Canadians as a whole were evenly divided on the question. Second was the question of whether government should treat Canadians all the same, or differently according to their background – this is also supported by the qualitative evidence that French-speaking BQ supporters in particular value respect for the cultural distinctiveness of their province.

The issue of whether or not Canadians should be treated differently according to their background was the question most closely correlated with likely support for the **People's Party**, though from a different perspective from that of BQ supporters. The other polling evidence supports the idea that PP voters feel strongly that no Canadians should receive differential treatment: they were the most likely to say that new Canadians from different cultures should do more to integrate themselves into Canadian culture and that protecting free speech was more important than tackling hate speech, and were the most likely to say that promoting ideas like structural racism and white privilege was unnecessary and divisive. Potential PP support was next most closely related to preference for more provincial autonomy over a stronger federal government, and for using Canada's natural resources to reduce energy costs.

Party binaries



Conservative

	Majority or coalition?	Federal or provincial?	China: confront or cooperate?	Energy: cut costs or preserve resources?	Social or economic issues?	Treat Canadians according to background or all the same?
Canada	6	1	4	2	3	5
Alberta	6	1	4	5	2	3
British Columbia	5	2	3	1	4	6
Manitoba	4	1	6	2	5	3
New Brunswick	6	1	5	2	4	3
Newfoundland	2	3	5	6	1	4
Nova Scotia	3	5	6	2	1	4
Ontario	6	1	4	3	2	5
Quebec	6	1	3	5	2	4
Saskatchewan	4	1	5	2	6	3



Liberal

	Majority or coalition?	Federal or provincial?	China: confront or cooperate?	Energy: cut costs or preserve resources?	Social or economic issues?	Treat Canadians according to background or all the same?
Canada	4	3	6	2	1	5
Alberta	4	2	6	1	3	5
British Columbia	3	4	6	1	2	5
Manitoba	4	2	3	5	1	6
New Brunswick	6	3	5	4	2	1
Newfoundland	6	5	4	3	1	2
Nova Scotia	6	5	2	4	1	3
Ontario	4	3	6	2	1	5
Quebec	4	6	5	3	1	2
Saskatchewan	3	1	4	2	5	6



NDP

	Majority or coalition?	Federal or provincial?	China: confront or cooperate?	Energy: cut costs or preserve resources?	Social or economic issues?	Treat Canadians according to background or all the same?
Canada	3	4	5	2	1	6
Alberta	4	1	6	3	2	5
British Columbia	4	5	3	2	1	6
Manitoba	4	1	5	2	3	6
New Brunswick	2	3	6	5	1	4
Newfoundland	5	2	3	1	4	6
Nova Scotia	3	1	4	6	2	5
Ontario	3	5	4	2	1	6
Quebec	2	3	6	5	1	4
Saskatchewan	1	2	6	4	3	5



Bloc Quebecois

	Majority or coalition?	Federal or provincial?	China: confront or cooperate?	Energy: cut costs or preserve resources?	Social or economic issues?	Treat Canadians according to background or all the same?
Quebec	5	1	4	3	6	2



	Majority or coalition?	Federal or provincial?	China: confront or cooperate?	Energy: cut costs or preserve resources?	Social or economic issues?	Treat Canadians according to background or all the same?
Canada	6	2	4	3	5	1
Alberta	5	2	6	3	4	1
British Columbia	2	4	5	3	6	1
Manitoba	6	1	3	4	5	2
New Brunswick	3	4	5	6	2	1
Newfoundland	3	5	2	6	4	1
Nova Scotia	5	6	1	2	3	4
Ontario	5	2	4	3	6	1
Quebec	6	4	2	3	5	1
Saskatchewan	6	3	4	1	5	2

THE POLITICAL MAP

Our political maps show how different attributes and opinions interact with one another. The closer the plot points are to each other the more closely related they are. Here we can clearly see the relationship between different parties' voters, their views of various public figures, the issues they think are the most important facing the country, and their agreement with various statements about life in Canada.

For example, peak agreement that climate change, indigenous rights and race relations are among the most important issues facing Canada, that anyone who identifies as a woman is a woman, that the government should do more to tackle hate speech and that the environment should take precedence over resource extraction industries is to be found in Liberal-voting territory. Peak agreement that opportunities exist in Canada for anyone prepared to work hard enough to take them is found close to peak support for capitalism in Conservative-voting territory.

The Political Map



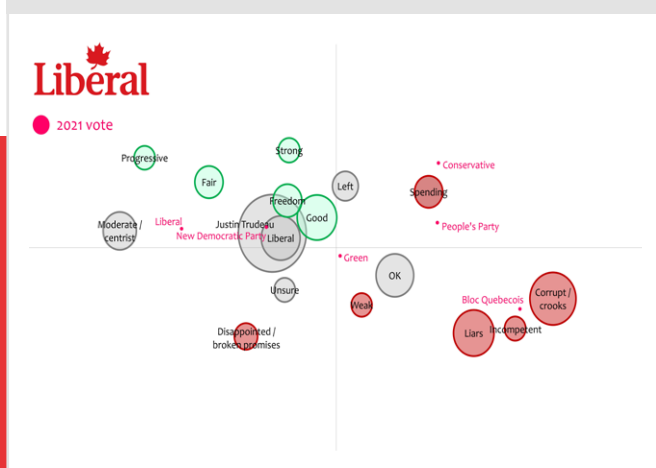
The idea that life in Canada is better than it was 30 years ago is most likely to be found in the Liberal/NDP-leaning “top left” quadrant, while the opposite view is to be found in the “bottom right” alongside more traditional or socially conservative views, such as that standing up for free speech is a more important government priority than tackling hate speech, and that someone born male can change their identity but cannot actually become a woman. These were also most likely to be found close to peak support for the idea that immigration is among the most important issues facing Canada.

The spread of positive views about various Conservative leadership candidates is also notable. Peak approval for Pierre Poilievre is to be found in the bottom right quadrant, close to that for PP leader Maxime Bernier. Peak approval for Leslyn Lewis is to be found closer to that for former PM Stephen Harper, while peak support for Jean Charest and Patrick Brown appears further round towards the border with the liberal-leaning top left quadrant.

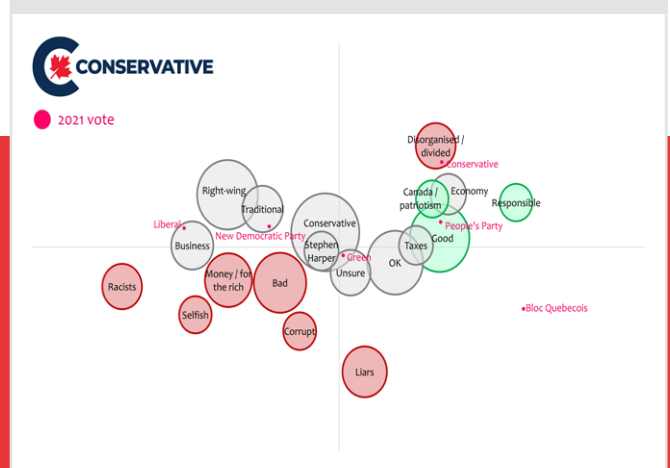
Below we see where on the political map we are most likely to find various views about the Liberal Party, based on the answers to our poll question on the first word or phrase that comes to mind. Those most likely to associate the party with excessive spending are found in the traditionally Conservative-leaning top right quadrant, while the complaint that the party is corrupt or incompetent is most likely to be found elsewhere, in the bottom right (where, as we saw above, we are also most likely to find those who think life in Canada has got worse over the last 30 years). Those who associate the Liberals with disappointment and broken promises are most likely to appear in the generally less affluent bottom left quadrant (where we find peak support for the view that opportunities in Canada are limited to too few people, and that income inequality is among the most important issues facing the country).

On a similar map for the Conservatives, we see the peak incidence of most negative views in the more diverse, less affluent (and generally non-Conservative-voting) bottom left, but the view that the party is disorganised or divided is most likely to be found close to where we are also the most likely to find 2021 Conservative voters.

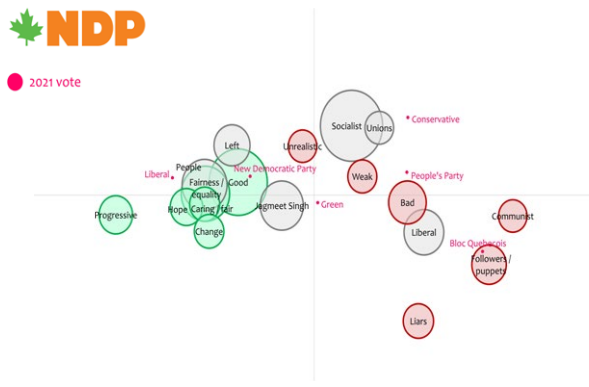
What is the first word or phrase that comes to mind when you think of the Liberal Party of Canada?



What is the first word or phrase that comes to mind when you think of the Conservative Party of Canada?

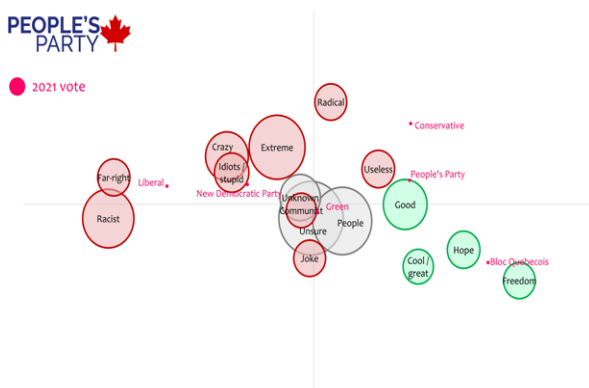


What is the first word or phrase that comes to mind when you think of The New Democratic Party?



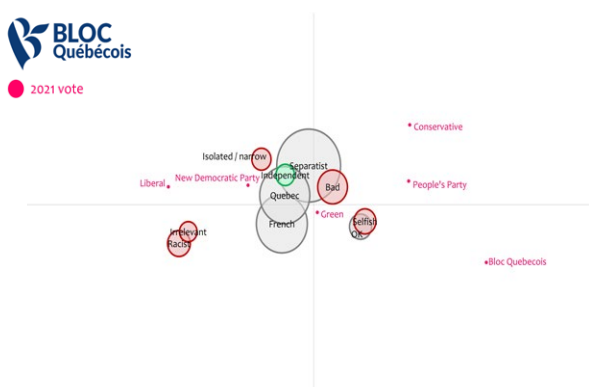
The opinion map for the NDP reinforces the idea that the biggest barrier to the party consolidating its support among people who might otherwise back it is the perception that the party's policies are unrealistic. Those most likely to associate the party with socialism or trade unions are to be found in Conservative-voting territory, while those further round to the bottom right are the most likely to see them as followers or puppets of the Liberal-led government, or even as communists.

What is the first word or phrase that comes to mind when you think of The People's Party of Canada?



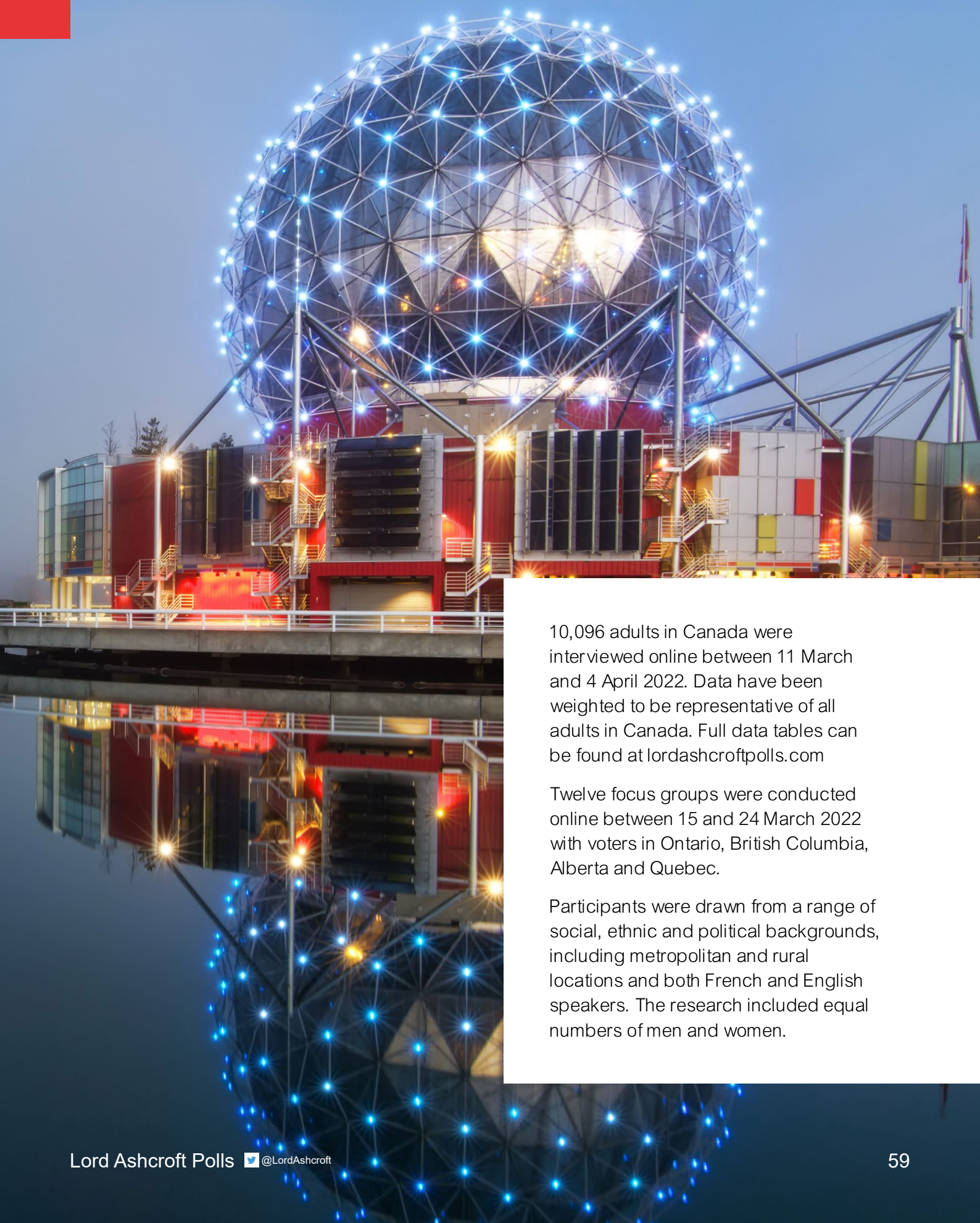
The bottom right quadrant (home of peak approval for Maxime Bernier, concern about immigration and the view that Canadian life has deteriorated) is where those associating the People's Party with hope and freedom are most likely to be found. While those thinking the party "useless" are most likely to appear close to Conservative-voting territory, the Liberal/NDP-inclined top left is where we are most likely to find those describing the PP as extreme, crazy or racist.

What is the first word or phrase that comes to mind when you think of the Bloc Québécois?



The clustering of views about the Bloc Québécois towards the centre of the map suggests relatively little variation between different types of voter. Canadians as a whole tend to associate the party with separatism and French language and culture. The view that the Bloc is too narrow or isolated was most likely to be found in the liberal top left.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE



10,096 adults in Canada were interviewed online between 11 March and 4 April 2022. Data have been weighted to be representative of all adults in Canada. Full data tables can be found at lordashcroftpolls.com

Twelve focus groups were conducted online between 15 and 24 March 2022 with voters in Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta and Quebec.

Participants were drawn from a range of social, ethnic and political backgrounds, including metropolitan and rural locations and both French and English speakers. The research included equal numbers of men and women.

ABOUT LORD ASHCROFT

LORD ASHCROFT KCMG PC is an international businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. He is a former treasurer and deputy chairman of the UK Conservative Party. He is also honorary chairman and a former treasurer of the International Democrat Union. He is founder and chairman of the board of trustees of Crimestoppers, vice-patron of the Intelligence Corps Museum, chairman of the trustees of Ashcroft Technology Academy, a senior fellow of the International Strategic Studies Association, former chancellor of Anglia Ruskin University and a former trustee of Imperial War Museums.

HIS POLITICAL BOOKS INCLUDE:

- Smell the Coffee: A Wake-Up Call for the Conservative Party
- Call Me Dave: The Unauthorised Biography of David Cameron
- Hopes and Fears: Trump, Clinton, the Voters and the Future
- Well, You Did Ask: Why the UK Voted to Leave the EU
- The Lost Majority: The 2017 Election, the Conservative Party, the Voters and the Future
- Jacob's Ladder: The Unauthorised Biography of Jacob Rees-Mogg
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- First Lady: Intrigue at the Court of Carrie and Boris Johnson
- Life Support: The State of the NHS in an Age of Pandemics

HIS OTHER BOOKS INCLUDE:

- Victoria Cross Heroes, Volumes I and II
- Special Forces Heroes
- George Cross Heroes
- Special Ops Heroes
- Heroes of the Skies
- White Flag? An Examination of the UK's Defence Capability
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