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Referendum Leaves Premier Smith's Approval Bruised but not Broken



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Referendum Leaves Premier Smith's Approval Bruised but not Broken

(Calgary) The October referendum has damaged Premier Danielle Smith's reputation among Alberta voters, but the shift has been gradual rather than seismic, and she remains well liked among UCP voters. According to a recent ThinkHQ Public Affairs survey of Alberta voters, neither of the two main provincial party leaders is particularly popular (with disapproval outpacing approval for both), but Smith's scores have seen a slow but steady erosion since the introduction of the Election Statutes Amendment Act in spring of 2025, which paved the path to the recent provincial referendum vote.

Comparative Party Leader Evaluations

NDP leader Naheed Nenshi is currently the most popular, or rather least unpopular, provincial party leader in Alberta. A full 44% of Alberta voters approve of the NDP leader (16% strongly), compared with 48% who disapprove of him (39% strongly).

In comparison, Danielle Smith currently enjoys approval from only 39% of Albertans (21% strongly), and almost six in ten (59%) now disapprove of the premier (49% strongly).

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Referendum Leaves Premier Smith's Approval Bruised but not Broken

Comparative Party Leader Evaluations … continued

Before spring 2025, Smith's approval tended to hover in the mid-40% range, but since then has declined gradually but steadily by 6 percentage points. Meanwhile, Nenshi's approval has hovered in the mid-40s since he became NDP leader.

Politics in Alberta is highly polarized today, and this is reflected in the demographic differences in approval for the two provincial leaders, which are often almost mirror opposites.

Nenshi: Tends to receive higher approval in the biggest cities, among women, and among those with a university education. The NDP leader's approval also tends to be higher among those under 35 and declines with age.

Smith: Approval is higher outside of the two biggest cities, among men, and among those without a university degree. The premier's approval also tends to be higher among those 55+, and declines with age.

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Is Smith's UCP Leadership in Jeopardy?

Leading up to and since the referendum, there has been considerable public conjecture about Danielle Smith's leadership going into a UCP AGM later in November. Some have forecast a rough ride for the premier, even speculating a risk to her leadership of the party. However, given her current standing among UCP voters, this seems unlikely.

Presently, Smith enjoys approval from 73% of those who voted UCP in the last provincial election. This is not a "glowing" report card for the premier. A year ago, Smith's approval among UCP voters was 8 in 10, so events of the past year (dominated by public discourse about the referendum) have cost her some supporters. By comparison, Naheed Nenshi currently enjoys 87% approval among NDP voters.

That said, Smith still has the confidence of a large majority of her voters, and if AGM participants are even remotely representative of the UCP's voter base writ large, her leadership is unlikely to be in jeopardy.

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Commentary

Commenting on the survey results, ThinkHQ President Marc Henry notes:

“The whole referendum drama in Alberta has undoubtedly taken a toll on the premier’s reputation, but it’s neither as sudden nor as drastic as some may imagine. The erosion we’ve seen in Smith’s approval really seemed to begin as public attention and discourse about the referendum ramped up, but it’s been gradual and seems to have plateaued.

In terms of her leadership? She’s bruised but certainly not broken. By way of comparison, a month out from his own leadership review vote, Jason Kenney sat at only 50% approval among UCP voters. That forecast a downfall; Smith’s numbers today don’t seem to augur that.

Perhaps the highest cost for the premier in this referendum business has been lost opportunities. She’s inked a deal with Ottawa to build a new pipeline to the west coast; the province’s finances are awash in money; there have been some positive accomplishments over the past year which have been overshadowed by the public preoccupation with the referendum. So at a time when one might expect the premier’s numbers to ‘tick up’, instead they’ve ticked down.”

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Research Methodology

- **Approach**: Online survey of Adult Albertans
- **Region**: Alberta
- **Field dates**: October 21 – 27, 2026
- **Sample size**: n=1,160
- **Sampling**: A random stratified sample of panelists was invited to complete the survey from panel partners
- **Weighting**: Weighted to reflect gender, age, education, and region of the Alberta population according to Stats Canada
- **Margin of error**: The margin of error for a comparable probability-based random sample of this size is **+/- 2.9 percentage points, 19 times out of 20**

Sample sizes:	Unweighted	Weighted	MOE*
Alberta total	**n=1,160**	**n=1,160**	**+/- 2.9**
Calgary	n=411	n=415	+/- 4.8
Edmonton	n=387	n=373	+/- 5.0
Northern Alberta	n=136	n=130	+/- 8.4
Central Alberta	n=114	n=123	+/- 9.2
Southern Alberta	n=112	n=118	+/- 9.3

**Margin of error: Percentage points 19 times out of 20.*

The margin of error is associated with a probability sample of this size.

Accuracy of sub-samples of the data decline based on sample sizes

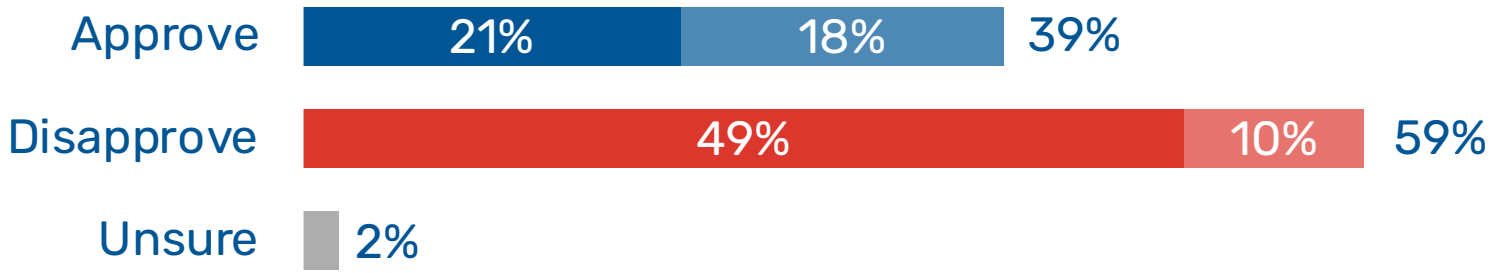
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Provincial Leadership Evaluations

Would you generally say you approve or disapprove of the performance of the following provincial party leaders?

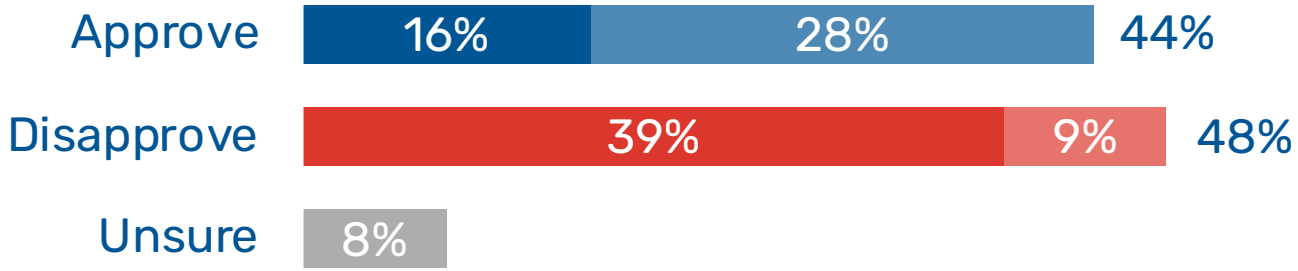


Danielle Smith: United Conservative Party



NET Approve of Danielle Smith: -20

Naheed Nenshi: NDP



NET Approve of Naheed Nenshi: -4

Base: All respondents (n=1,160) | NET: Approve minus disapprove

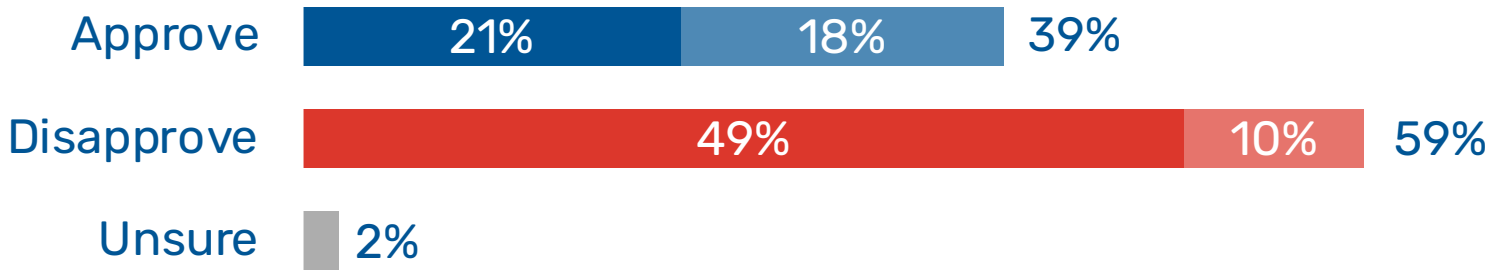
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Provincial Leadership Evaluations
By Last Provincial Vote

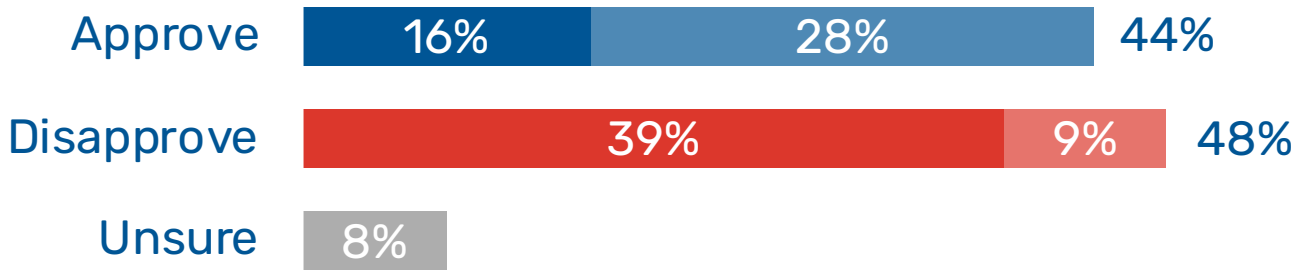
Would you generally say you approve or disapprove of the performance of the following provincial party leaders?



Danielle Smith: United Conservative Party



Naheed Nenshi: NDP



Last Provincial Vote	
UCP	NDP
(n=534)	(n=413)
73%	3%
26%	97%
0%	0%
11%	87%
86%	10%
3%	2%

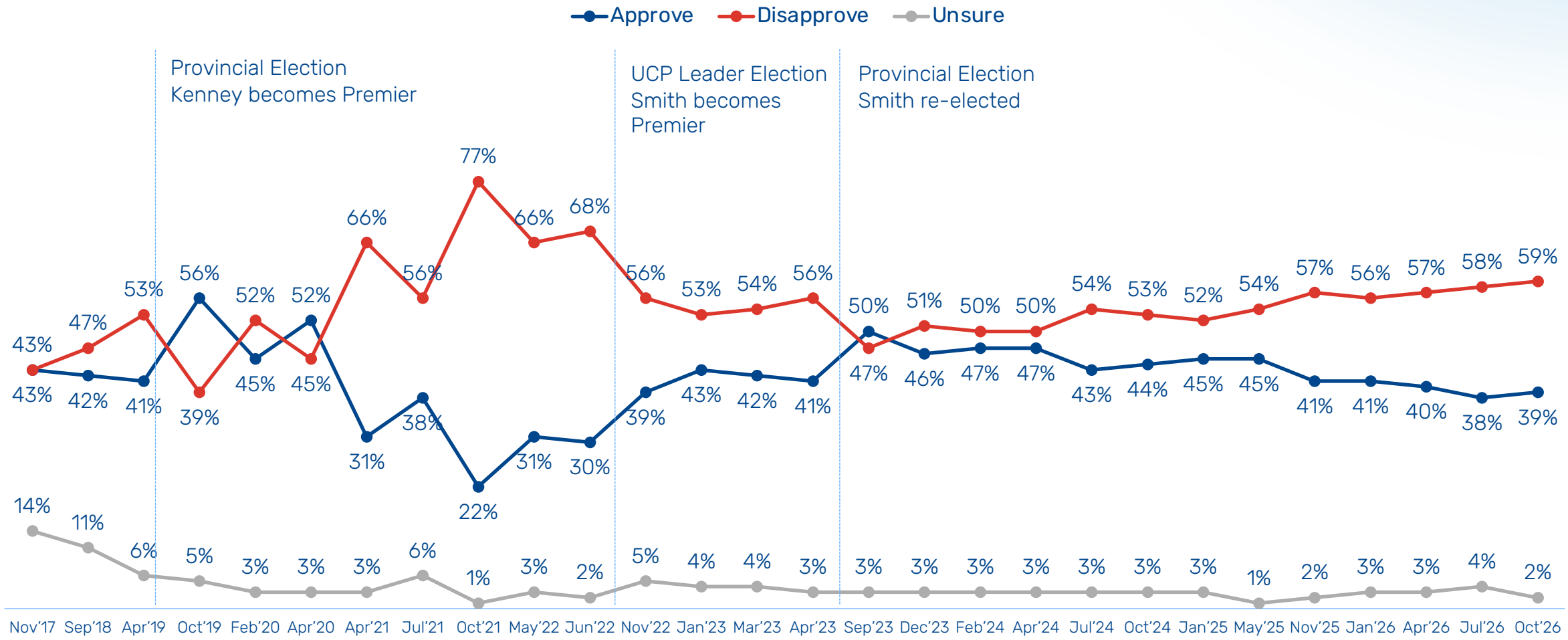
Base: All respondents (n=1,160)

Note: Shading [blue] denotes significant differences between sub-samples

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Provincial Leadership Evaluations
Danielle Smith's Approval

Would you generally say you approve or disapprove of the performance of Premier Danielle Smith?

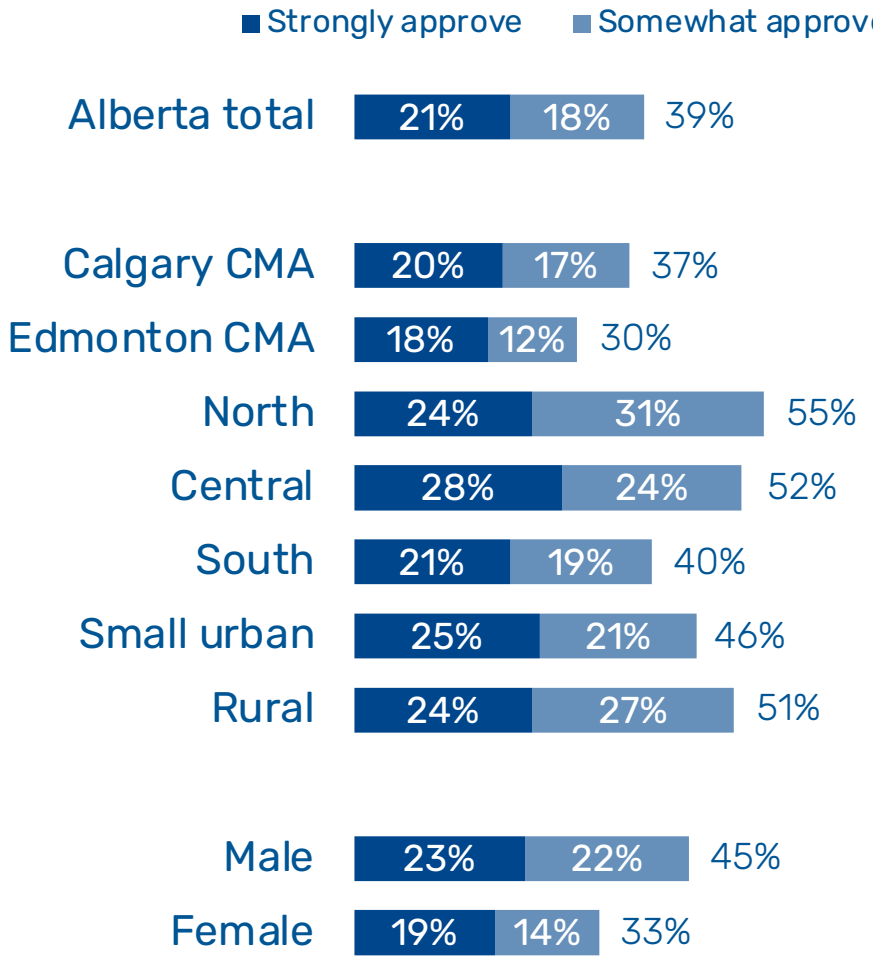


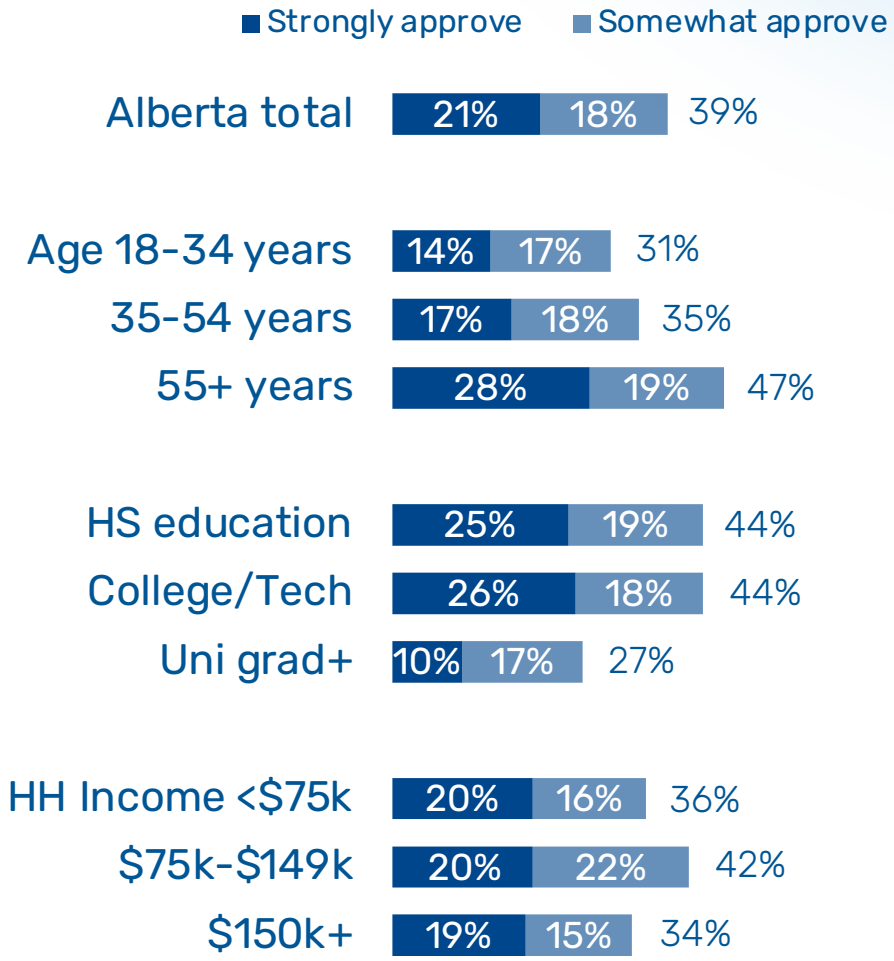
Base: All respondents

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Provincial Leadership Evaluations
Danielle Smith's Approval by Key Demographics

Would you generally say you approve or disapprove of the performance of Premier Danielle Smith?



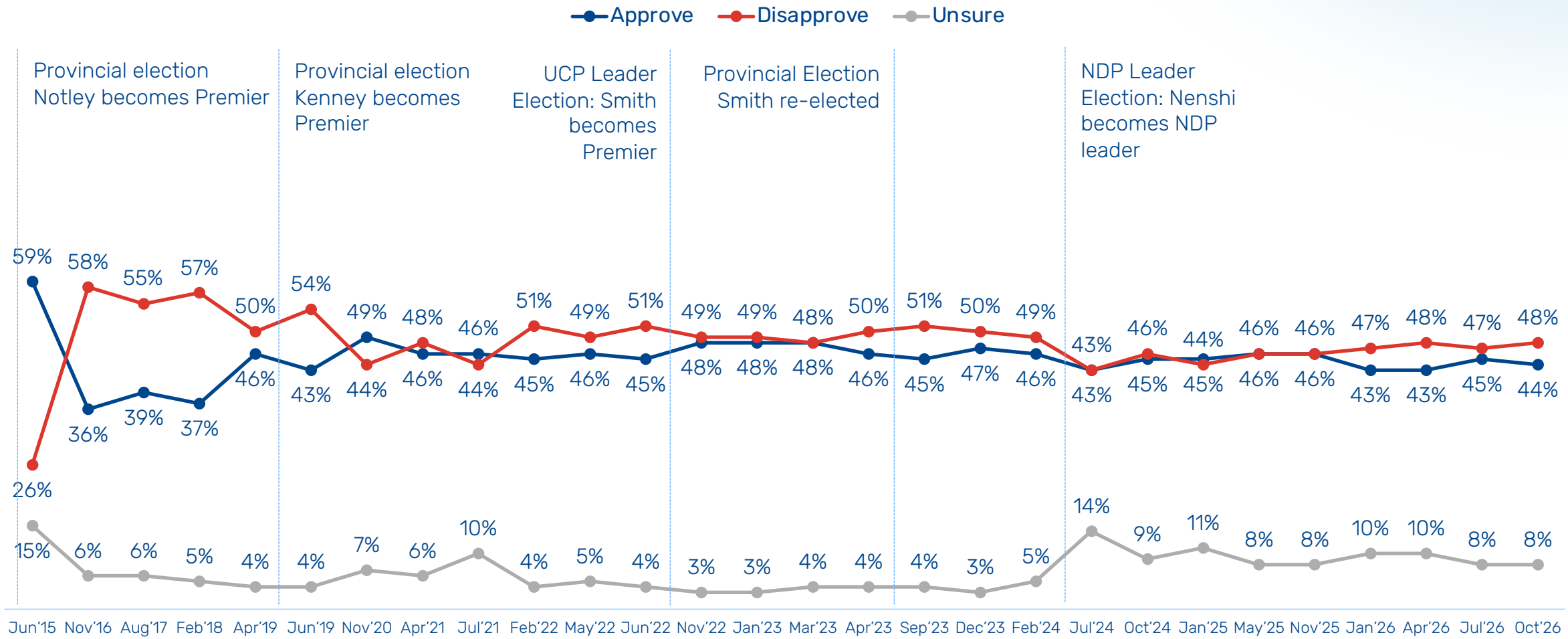


Base: All respondents (n=1,160)

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Provincial Leadership Evaluations
Naheed Nenshi's Approval

Would you generally say you approve or disapprove of the performance of Naheed Nenshi?

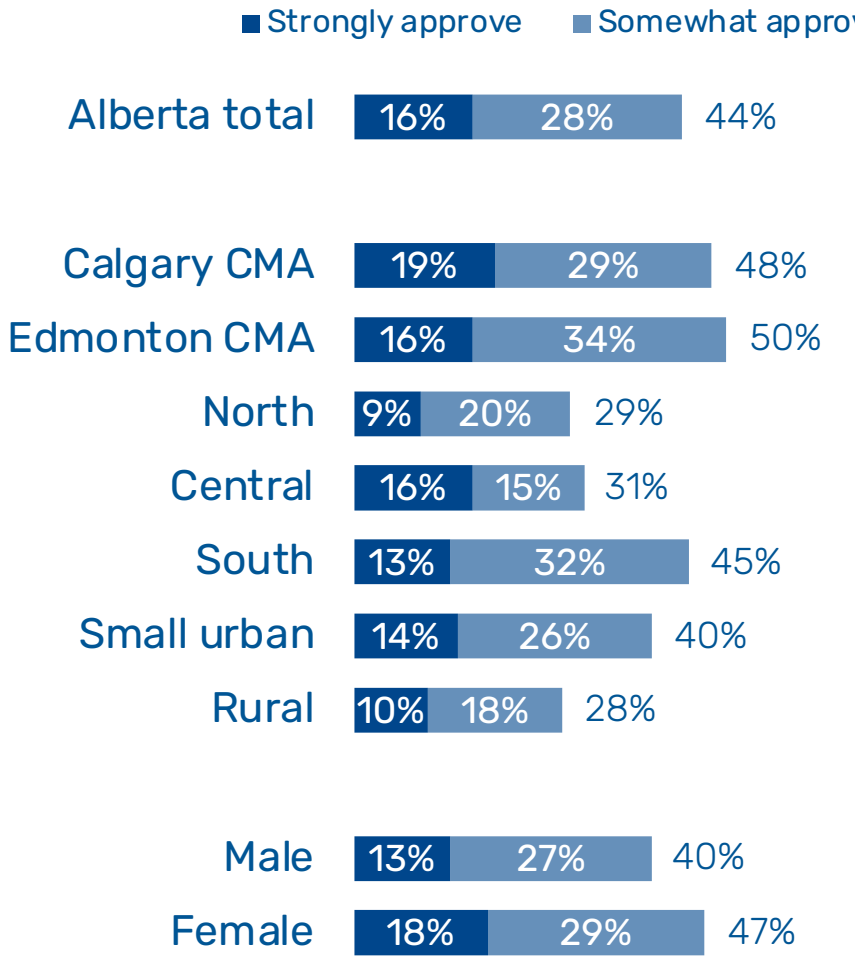


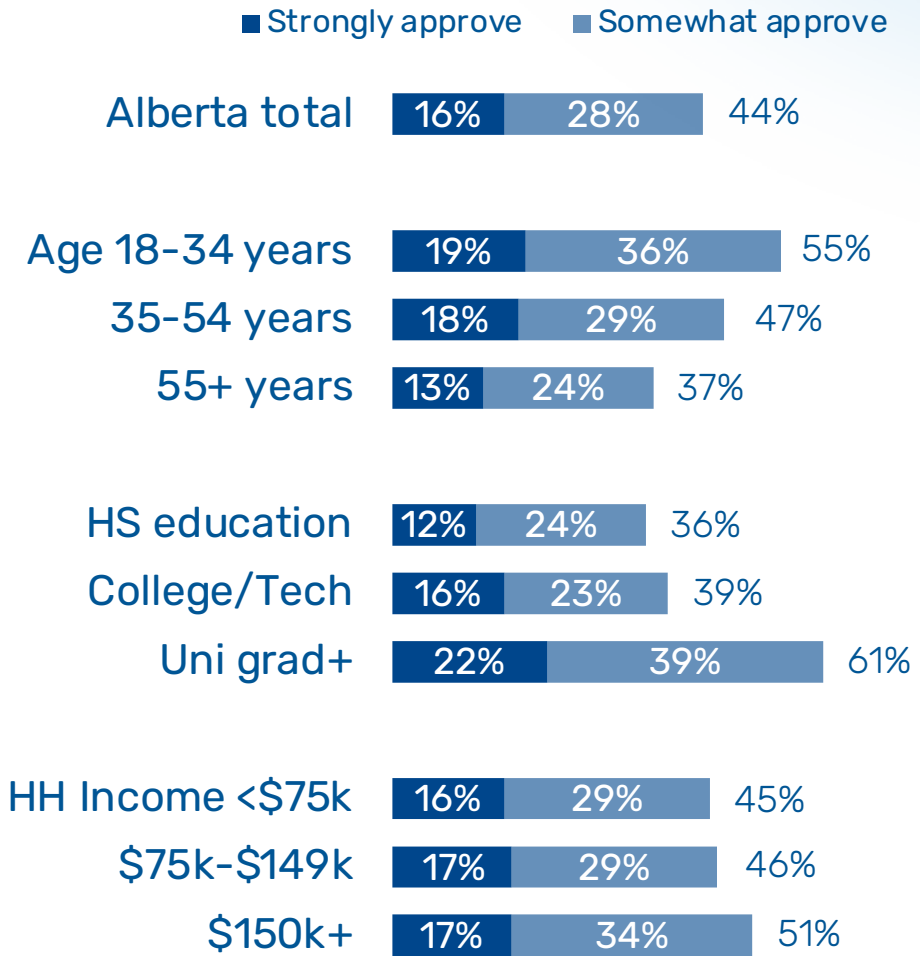
Base: All respondents

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Provincial Leadership Evaluations
Nenshi Approval by Key Demographics

Would you generally say you approve or disapprove of the performance of Naheed Nenshi?





Base: All respondents (n=1,160)

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