

## News Women &amp; Election 2019

# Women splitting their vote more among various progressive options, says Bricker

Female and millennial voters were two key voting blocs in Justin Trudeau's 2015 majority coalition. After nearly four years in power, recent polling and statements from women's groups suggests these groups could again prove decisive in a tight 2019 race.

BY AIDAN CHAMANDY

A recent Ipsos poll showed Conservatives with a 10-point lead over the Liberals among female voters, 39 per cent to 29 per cent, respectively, but Ipsos CEO Darrell Bricker, cautions not to view this as a female surge towards Conservatives.

"The Conservatives are not surging among women. What's happening is that women are splitting their vote more among the various progressive options," Mr. Bricker said in a July 25 email statement to *The Hill Times*. The poll shows the NDP taking 20 per cent of the female vote, and the Greens taking nine per cent. "This is a question of the Liberals losing some appeal with this specific group who are looking at progressive options, as opposed to the CPC being attractive."

The Ipsos poll, released on July 17, also showed a Conservative lead over the Liberals among voters aged 18-34, or millennials. Among millennials, the Conservatives were at 30 per cent, the Liberals 28 per cent, the NDP 24 per cent, and the Greens 11 per cent. The People's Party, Bloc Québécois, and others take the remaining eight per cent.

Overall, the poll found the Conservative Party support of decided voters at 37 per cent, the Liberals at 31 per cent, the NDP at 18 per cent, the Bloc Québécois at five per cent nationally and 22 per cent in Quebec, the Greens at seven per cent, and the People's Party at one per cent.

Mr. Bricker said that within the millennial cohort, female millennials "tend to be more focused on progressive options than males."

A July 22 Abacus poll suggested a similar conclusion. It showed that women in all age groups are seven points more likely to support the NDP than men, and six points more likely to support the Greens.

The Ipsos poll was conducted between July 12-15 on behalf of Global News. It sampled 1,000



A protester, pictured Jan. 20, 2017, advocating for women's rights at the 2017 Women's March on the Hill. Female voters were a key bloc in the Liberals' 2015 majority win. Recent polling and statements from women's groups suggests they may again be decisive in 2019. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Canadians and is accurate to within  $\pm 3.5$  percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

"We are in a pre-election phase which means voters are sniffing around the various options. The decline for the Liberals has been matched by an increase in support for the Greens as well as the CPC," Mr. Bricker said. "But, as fast as they have moved away from the Liberals they could move back. It's a volatile environment."

Both groups, female and millennial voters, were essential to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) and his Liberal Party's 2015 majority win. Millennials, those voters under 35, turned out at just over 57 per cent, nearly 20 points higher than the 2011 numbers. Female voters in every age group turned out at over 60 per cent.

Despite the Ipsos poll, or the conclusions of any single poll, other recent polling and statements from some women's groups suggest the Liberals could be decent shape among female and millennial voters.

As the SNC-Lavalin affair engulfed national politics, the Liberals' and Prime Minister Trudeau's, polling numbers dropped. The high-profile resignations of two female cabinet ministers, Jody Wilson-Raybould (Vancouver Granville, B.C.) and Jane Philpott (Markham-Stouffville, Ont.), were a "cloud that hung over the prime minister," said Nik Nanos, chairman of Nanos Research.

According to Nanos Research's weekly national ballot tracker, in mid-May there was a 1.5-point gap in female support separating the Liberals and Conservatives. At the time of writing and according to the same metric, however, the Liberals have climbed to a 16-point advantage.

Nearly six months after the initial story broke in *The Globe and Mail* on Feb. 7, 2019, "what it looks like is the greater distance we get from that episode, the more likely women are to realize they are very unlikely to get a federal party leader as committed to women's issues as Justin

Trudeau," Mr. Nanos said, citing reproductive rights, a gender-balanced cabinet, and other initiatives.

"Although they know he isn't perfect, and has been disappointing in certain issues, there's a significant proportion of women that realize if women's or gender issues are important to you, you're unlikely to get a stronger champion from a mainstream party than Justin Trudeau," Mr. Nanos said.

and need to be closed," said Ms. Dugal.

"The gender budgeting is fantastic, but it needs to deepen, it needs to get stronger," Ms. Dugal said. "All the new surveys related to gender-based violence are wonderful, but they need to get better. We need to be able to measure these things more equally from province to province, not just on a federal level."

Bonnie Brayton, director of the Disabled Women's Network of



#MeToo movement supporters, pictured Jan. 20, 2017, on the Hill. Women and millennials helped the Liberals win the last election and are key voting blocs for the 2019 election. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Anuradha Dugal, director of violence prevention programs at the Canadian Women's Foundation, said initiatives like Bill C-65, which overhauls how federally regulated industries respond to sexual assault allegations, and the Pay Equity Act, which tries to ensure equal pay in federally regulated industries, were significant steps towards equality for women in Canada.

"Those are all things that have made a significant change to equality in Canada," Ms. Dugal said.

Like Mr. Nanos, though, Ms. Dugal expressed some caution.

"We still have a ways to go, though. We still have policy gaps about women that are significant

way they should've," Ms. Brayton said. "But they [the Liberals] have a track record, so the bar is set high. I tend to keep pushing for a higher bar, because that's what I have to do."

"All the parties better have a platform [on women with disabilities] because we are becoming an important voting bloc. Twenty-four per cent is not nothing. That's big," Ms. Brayton said.

In mid-June, the millennial vote was split between the three major parties, with all hovering within two points of 25 per cent.

Since then, the Liberals have been trending up, the Conservatives down, and the NDP have remained largely flat. According to Nanos Research's weekly tracker, the Liberals are in the lead at 34 per cent with voters aged 18-29, the NDP are at 26 per cent, and the Conservatives are trailing with 25 per cent. The Ipsos poll shows the Conservatives with 30 per cent of millennial support, and the Liberals at 28 per cent. The two-point difference between the parties is within the poll's margin of error.

Supporting a party when a pollster calls is one thing, but turning that professed support into votes is the "critical issue," according to Frank Graves, president of EKOS Research.

"Right now, I would give the [turnout] advantage to the Conservatives," Mr. Graves said. Conservative supporters, particularly what Mr. Graves calls "authoritarian populists" are "highly engaged. They describe themselves as being hopeful for change," he said. "We don't see that corresponding level of engagement in some of the key Liberal constituencies."

In 2015, millennials turned out in record numbers, "largely on account of the legalization of marijuana," said Eli Yufest, CEO of Campaign Research. "There is no hook that Justin Trudeau has yet announced to ensure millennials come out and vote for him. That could be a risk for the Liberals."

One issue of major importance to both female and millennial voters, and to Canadians more generally, is climate change. A July 15 poll by Abacus Data shows climate change as one of the top three issues. The Liberals have a sizeable advantage over other parties in dealing with climate change. Forty-one per cent of voters who say climate policy will impact their vote favour the Liberals. The Greens come in second at 21 per cent, the NDP at 18 per cent, and the Conservatives at 13 per cent.

According to Quito Maggi, CEO of Mainstreet Research, an election where climate change plays a central role "can't help but favour the progressive parties among those two sets of voters."

As the 2019 election cycle intensifies, appealing to female and millennial voters will be essential if the Liberals hope to be returned to power.

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