

*“Open for Summer:” The Political Failure of Alberta’s COVID-19
Response*

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The Omicron variant has been hitting Canada and the rest of the world hard. Throughout December 2021 and January 2022, COVID-19’s fifth wave has resulted in cases dramatically jumping, which means that the lagging indicators of hospitalizations, ICUs, and death will soon occur. It is clear that the Omicron variant is substantially more transmissible than previous COVID-19 strains, even if the severity remains unknown. With the pandemic entering its third year, there is enough evidence to compare how different jurisdictions have responded. In the case of Canada, the federal government has been responsible for procuring vaccines and testing kits, establishing international border measures, providing financial supports to businesses and workers, and coordinating with other countries and international organizations. While the federal government can intervene into health care through its spending power, constitutional jurisdiction is in the hands of the provincial governments. This means that provincial governments have been in charge of developing/implementing the vaccine rollouts as well as determining any COVID-19 restrictions (e.g., limitations on social gatherings, in-person schooling, testing/tracing/ isolation protocols, etc). Canada’s thirteen territorial and provincial governments provide a large number of cases to compare under the same national parameters. Which provinces’ COVID-19

responses have succeeded or failed? Why have they succeeded or failed? Is it the restrictions themselves or the timing of the restrictions? What has been the impact of communications from provincial governments?

This paper assesses the response by the Alberta government. This case was chosen because Alberta, outside of the first wave, has been hit harder from a per capita basis (and sometimes in absolute terms) by COVID-19 than other provinces. Its approach, particularly the *Open for Summer* declaration, was often unique. Premier Jason Kenney has been very influential with other conservative premiers. This influence is due to Kenney's reputation as a shrewd politician. He has years of experience as a cabinet minister in the Harper government, and was instrumental in helping Harper win a majority in 2011. Returning to Alberta politics, he successfully merged the Progressive Conservative and Wild Rose parties and won a resounding victory in the 2019 provincial election. And yet, in the face of the COVID-19 crisis, he and his government have floundered. Kenney has had the lowest approval ratings of any provincial premier throughout most of the pandemic. Moreover, it has not gone up and down, like Ontario Premier Doug Ford, but a straight downward trajectory since March 2020. Lisa Young, in a forthcoming study on Alberta's COVID-19 response, has called it a twin failure: health and political. Alberta's poor response to the pandemic is a product of the interaction between these two failures. Caucus unrest contributed to unwise public health decisions, and a much more politicized response to the pandemic than seen in other provinces. And this politicized response and failed public health interventions made the Kenney government's political situation worse, thereby constraining its ability to respond to the crisis."¹ At almost every step of the pandemic, the Kenney government acts later than anybody else in the country, responds weaker than everybody else in the country, is defiant about what they're doing, and then gradually reverses course.

There are four parts to this paper. Part one is a statistical analysis of Alberta's COVID-19 response and shows its initial success followed by successive failures. Parts two and three offer an inter-related explanation for Alberta's policy failure. Part two

¹ Lisa Young, "'With Comorbidities': The Politics of COVID-19 and the Kenney Government," in Duane Bratt, Richard Sutherland, and David Taras, eds., *Blue Storm: The Politics of the Jason Kenney government* (University of Calgary Press: Calgary, forthcoming).

emphasizes the ideological basis of Premier Jason Kenney and many members of his United Conservative Party (UCP). Part three highlights Kenney's objective of keeping the UCP politically united through the COVID-19 crisis. Finally, there is a brief conclusion.

Statistical Analysis of Alberta's COVID-19 Response

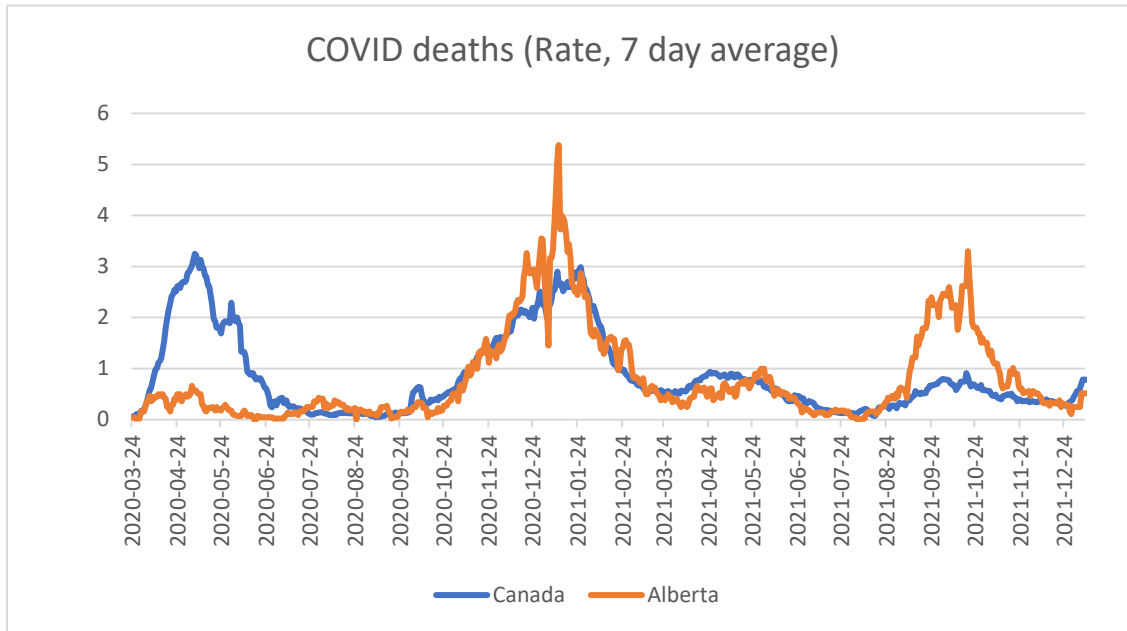
Canada's first reported COVID-19 case occurred on 25 January 2020, but it was not until March that the full enormity of COVID-19 really kicked in. The World Health Organization declared it a pandemic on 11 March. By 12 March, sports leagues had postponed their season and Alberta introduced its first set of COVID-19 restrictions. Canada closed its borders on 16 March. On 17 March, Alberta declared a state of emergency. Within days, much of Canadian society had been completely upended. Over the length of the pandemic, there have been five waves: first wave (March-May 2020), second wave (October 2020 – January 2021), third wave (March-June 2021), fourth wave (August-September 2021), and fifth wave (December 2021 – January 2022). See Appendix One for a timeline of key COVID-19 events in Alberta.

By January 2022, over 2.4 million Canadians and almost 400,000 Albertans have contracted COVID-19. In addition, over 30,000 Canadians and over 3,300 Albertans have died of COVID-19. Converting those absolute numbers into per capita data reveals almost 6500 cases and over 80 deaths per 100,000 in Canada, and over 8700 cases and 75 deaths in Alberta. Alberta has the highest per capita COVID-19 provincial case counts, and the fourth highest per capita death toll from COVID-19 (exceeded by Quebec, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan). However, Alberta's record is masked by its relatively strong performance in the first wave. When you examine subsequent waves (especially the second and fourth), Alberta has the highest per capita death count of any Canadian province.² It is well established that vaccinations are the surest way to limit the health impact of COVID-19. Unfortunately, Alberta has the lowest vaccination rate in Canada. As of 1 January 2022, 82.56 percent of the entire population of Canadians have received at least one dose, but only 77.79 percent of Albertans. For fully vaccinated, it is 76.3 percent of the entire population of Canadians, but only 72.02 percent of Albertans

² COVID-19 Tracker, Accessed on 7 January 2022 at <https://covid19tracker.ca/index.html>

(second last, slightly ahead of Saskatchewan).³ See Chart One which compares the death toll from COVID-19 between Alberta and all of Canada over the course of the pandemic.

CHART ONE: Alberta and Canada COVID-19 Deaths (per 100,000)



Source: Canada, “COVID-19 daily epidemiology update,” (2022). Accessed on 8 January 2022, at <https://health-infobase.canada.ca/covid-19/epidemiological-summary-covid-19-cases.html>

Kenney’s Ideology

Premier Jason Kenney's political ideology provides the first part of the explanation for Alberta's comparatively poor response to COVID-19. Ideologies can often predict public policy. That has been the case with the Kenney government and its response to COVID-19. All political parties, and politicians, come equipped with an ideology. “An ideology is a value system or belief system accepted as fact or truth by some group. It is composed of sets of attitudes toward the various institutions and processes of society. An ideology provides the believer with a picture of the world both

³ Canada, “COVID-19 vaccination in Canada,” (2022). Accessed on 8 January 2022 at <https://health-infobase.canada.ca/covid-19/vaccination-coverage/>

as it is and as it should be, and, in doing so, organizes the tremendous complexity of the world into something fairly simple and understandable.”⁴ Thus, ideology is not a negative term — rather, it is a set of interrelated values or beliefs composed of attitudes toward various institutions and societal processes. It helps us understand where our politicians are coming from and what they might do.

Jason Kenney has been a political figure in Alberta and Ottawa for 30 years: Alberta Director of the Canadian Taxpayer’s Federation in the mid-1990s, a Reform/Canadian Alliance/Conservative Party of Canada MP from 1997-2016, and a senior cabinet minister in the government of Stephen Harper (2006-2015). Throughout this time, he has articulated a clear political ideology through his words and actions. As a small-c conservative, Kenney attempts to either preserve the status quo or revive certain aspects of the past. His ideology sees the state as a promoter and protector of morality, social responsibility, personal responsibility, and traditional institutions and practices. He advocates smaller government through decentralization of authority and maximizing individual freedom. Smaller government also extends to the economic realm by reducing social spending, cutting taxes, balancing budgets, deregulation and privatization. Nevertheless, the ideology allows for government intervention in order to protect the *traditional* family through supporting religious institutions, parental rights and challenging certain abortion and LGBTQ+ rights.

Kenney has not hidden his political ideology but embraced and promoted it. He has also surrounded himself with many like-minded individuals in his cabinet, caucus, and political staff. Albertans know what Kenney believes, and in 2019, they elected the UCP with a strong majority government. The strongest UCP supporters, in fact, wanted to punt the NDP for, in their view, imposing what some called Notley's socialist ideology on Alberta. They wanted to replace her ideology with Kenney's.

However, what happens when political ideology confronts a once-in-a-century pandemic? Initially, Kenney's response was to downgrade his ideological principles and adopt a more pragmatic approach. Big government, making big decisions. Collective action over individual liberties. In his response to the first wave, starting in March 2020,

⁴ Lyman Tower Sargent, *Contemporary Political Ideologies: A Comparative Analysis*. 11th Edition (Harcourt Brace: Fort Worth, Texas, 1999), p. 3.

Kenney declared a public emergency, placed restrictions on large gatherings (sporting events, concerts, restaurants, theatres, etc.), and shut down in-person classes in schools, colleges, universities, and childcare facilities. Employers were encouraged to have their employees work from home. A testing/tracing/isolation protocol was also put in effect. In an April 7, 2020, televised address, Kenney encouraged collective action and asked Albertans to act like buffalo, and, “herd closely together and face the storm head on, coming out of it strong and united.”⁵

Kenney's response to the first wave was effective. Compared to other provinces, Alberta saw fewer cases, hospitalizations, ICU admissions and deaths. But some of the original ideological values still arose and caused problems — most notably the decision to continue with trying to reduce doctors' compensation in the midst of a pandemic. This backfired and explained why Kenney, unlike other premiers, did not receive a COVID-19 bump in approval.⁶ This was despite the fact that in a May 2020 survey of Albertans, many thought that their governments - municipal, provincial, and federal - handled the COVID-19 pandemic well. Of these, though, the provincial government gets the highest rating at 70 percent.⁷ You would think that this would correspond to a boost in Albertans' approval of the Kenney Government. However, it was not to be. Support for the UCP rose up marginally from just before COVID-19 hit, though down significantly from 2019. Albertans were also asked to rate their approval of the premier on a 0 (low) to 10 (high) scale. In March 2020, before the impact of COVID became evident, Kenney was at 4.1, but by May 2020 he had risen to only 4.4.⁸

Why did Kenney, unlike Prime Minister Trudeau and other premiers, not get an initial bump?⁹ In a contrast from other provincial governments during the first wave,

⁵ Alberta, “Protecting lives and livelihoods: Premier Kenney address,” *News Release* (7 April 2020). <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=7003168647E46-E91D-4945-E9517ABC712B807E>

⁶ Duane Bratt and Melanee Thomas, “Province's pandemic response gets support, so where is Kenney's COVID bump?” *CBC News* (20 July 2020). <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/opinion-alberta-jason-kenney-covid-19-poll-1.5614975>

⁷ Robson Fletcher, “Most Albertans approve of government responses to COVID-19, but 'political lens' skews our views,” *CBC News* (15 June 2020). <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-poll-covid-government-handling-pandemic-approval-1.5608611>

⁸ Brooks DeCillia, “CBC News Poll: Kenney, UCP would handily win election if held now,” *CBC News* (10 June 2020). <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/cbc-news-road-ahead-poll-kenney-ucp-1.5605087>

⁹ Angus Reid Institute, “Premiers' Performance: COVID-19 responses prompt massive increases in approval for most, but not all,” (28 May 2020). <https://angusreid.org/premier-approval-may2020/>

Alberta's chose to barrel ahead with the Kenney government's legislative plan, despite COVID-19. When other legislatures were moving to a skeleton crew and slowing non-pandemic-related legislation until after the initial crisis had passed,¹⁰ much of what passed through the Alberta legislature was not related to the pandemic.¹¹ For example, controversially delisting of several provincial parks and allowing strip mining for coal along the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains.¹²

More significantly, the Kenney government decided to continue and implement the recommendations from the McKinnon Report to address Alberta's finances.¹³ In particular, it sought to cut doctor's compensation in the midst of a pandemic,¹⁴ including curtailing rural fees.¹⁵ They launched an app that paid doctors outside of Alberta more for their services.¹⁶ The premier staunchly defended the Minister of Health despite obviously problematic issues with his conduct.¹⁷ This explosively politicized health care during the COVID-19 crisis, pitting the government against the physicians on the pandemic's front line.

¹⁰ Janet French, "Social distancing under the dome: Alberta legislature grapples with when and how to sit," *CBC News* (25 March 2020). <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/covid-19-keeping-distance-at-the-alberta-legislature-1.5508969>

¹¹ Janet French, "Bills would grant new emergency powers, help victims of human trafficking," *CBC News* (7 April 2020). <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/jason-nixon-new-legislation-covid-19-1.5524688>

¹² Robson Fletcher and Jordan Omstead, "Alberta rescinds decades-old policy that banned open-pit coal mines in Rockies and Foothills," *CBC News* (22 May 2020). <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-coal-policy-rescinded-mine-development-environmental-concern-1.5578902>

¹³ Government of Alberta, *Blue Ribbon Panel on Alberta's Finances* (August 2019), p. 2. <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/081ba74d-95c8-43ab-9097-cef17a9fb59c/resource/257f040a-2645-49e7-b40b-462e4b5c059c/download/blue-ribbon-panel-report.pdf>

¹⁴ CBC News, "More than 800 doctors sign letter urging Alberta government to postpone health-care revamp," *CBC News* (30 March 2020). <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/doctors-letter-government-alberta-health-care-cuts-pause-covid-1.5514573>

¹⁵ Juliet Guichon and Ian Mitchell, "During a pandemic, Alberta imposes a needless burden on doctors," *CBC News* (15 April 2020). <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-doctors-billing-codes-covid-19-1.5531974>

¹⁶ CBC News, "Telus virtual health-care app touted by Alberta government sparks outcry from physicians," *CBC News* (20 March 2020). <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/ahs-app-covid-babylon-telus-doctor-phone-conference-reaction-1.5504317>

¹⁷ Charles Rusnell, "Alberta health minister accused of berating Calgary physician, 'intimidating' citizens," *CBC News* (27 March 2020). <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/alberta-minister-tyler-shandro-behaviour-vital-partners-1.5511288>

Still, this ideological bending to the overwhelming needs of a pandemic worked and worked relatively well. Unfortunately, Kenney's response to the first wave — even though it was successful — was an outlier. Not only did he adopt a much more ideological approach to the second, third, fourth, and fifth waves, but he apologized for some of the ideological actions that made the first wave less severe.¹⁸ When the second wave started to arrive in Alberta in October 2020, the Kenney government initially refused to re-impose the previous COVID-19 restrictions. Instead, Kenney emphasized personal responsibility and personal choice. In a foreshadowing of his response to the fourth wave, Kenney was publicly absent for 10 days at the beginning of the second wave. When action was finally taken (well after other Canadian provinces), it was much less restrictive than other provinces and Alberta's first wave response. Even when Kenney announced the COVID restrictions, he went out of his way to explain that this went against his core values. "[B]ehind every one of these restrictions lie crushed dreams and terrible adversity. Life savings, years of work, hopes and dreams that are suddenly undone due to no fault of brave Albertans who have taken the risk to start businesses, to create jobs."¹⁹

The response to the third wave in Spring 2021 was similar. The lighter restrictions imposed during the third wave were removed much quicker to allow for the "best summer ever" to start on 1 July. In late May, Premier Kenney unveiled his "Open for Summer" re-opening plan. Alberta would eliminate all of its COVID-19 restrictions when 70 percent of eligible Albertans received their first vaccine dose. The removal of restrictions also allowed, in a major symbolic move, for the Calgary Stampede to be held in July. At the time, Kenney promised that not only would Alberta be "Open for Summer" it would be "open for good."²⁰ The Premier's then-Issues Manager Matt Wolf, in a response to critics that believed the dropping of restrictions was premature,

¹⁸ Graham Thomson, "Kenney's COVID-19 apology a calculated political move," *CBC News* (26 November 2020). <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/alberta-covid-coronavirus-jason-kenney-1.5816786>

¹⁹ Alberta, "COVID-19 in Alberta: Premier Jason Kenney announces new provincewide restrictions – 8 December 2020," *Youtube* (8 December 2020). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ePG3bivLLkk>

²⁰ Global News, "'This is open for good': Jason Kenney says province will continue to monitor localized outbreaks," *Global News* (18 June 2021). <https://globalnews.ca/video/7963041/this-is-open-for-good-jason-kenney-says-province-will-continue-to-monitor-localized-outbreaks>

tweeted out “[t]he pandemic is ending. Accept it.”²¹ The promise of “Open for Summer” would be catastrophically wrong, as Alberta suffered more cases, hospitalizations, critical care, and deaths during the fourth wave than at any time during the pandemic.²² Even Kenney, with some rare self-reflection, has apologized for the “Open for Summer” announcement. “I and the government oversold the prospects of the need for no future restrictions and that we could be definitively open for good...clearly in terms of our tone and ambition at that time, and that I regret.”²³ By prematurely declaring the pandemic over, Kenney created an incentive for vaccine-hesitant Albertans to avoid the jab.

The vaccination plan itself also revealed the ideological approach of the Kenney government. Even as Kenney emphasized the critical importance of vaccines (those in hospitals and ICUs are overwhelmingly not vaccinated) and implemented a decentralized system to get shots into arms, he also maintained vaccines were an individual choice and would not be mandatory. Decades-old provincial legislation was even repealed that previously allowed the government to require vaccines, even though that power had never been used. The Kenney government, unlike most other provincial governments, refuted the concept of a vaccine passport or to mandate vaccinations in schools, large gatherings, and private businesses. When this pledge was reversed in September 2021, it was through a convoluted Restrictions Exemption Program (REP) whereby businesses would avoid harsh capacity restrictions if they required proof of vaccination.²⁴ The REP was, for all intents and purposes, a vaccine mandate, but the Kenney government would not use the phrase and instead claimed that showing proof of vaccination were decisions made by private businesses, and not a government mandate.

²¹ @MattWolfAB, “The pandemic is ending. Accept it.” (2 June 2021). <https://twitter.com/mattwolfab/status/1400182922427043840?lang=en>

²² Ian Austin, “Alberta’s ‘Best Summer Ever’ Ends With an Overwhelmed Medical System,” *New York Times* (24 September 2021). <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/24/world/canada/canada-alberta-covid-cases.html>

²³ Tyler Dawson, “‘Excruciating, overwhelming’: Jason Kenney reflects on leading Alberta through COVID in 2021,” *National Post* (10 December 2021). https://nationalpost.com/news/politics/jason-kenney-reflects-on-leading-alberta-through-covid-in-2021?utm_term=Autofeed&utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Twitter

²⁴ Alberta, “Restrictions Exemption Program,” (2022). <https://www.alberta.ca/covid-19-public-health-actions.aspx>

The problem is that this ideological approach has not worked. Alberta was hit hard by the second, third, fourth, and fifth waves. In the fourth wave, which picked up steam in mid-August 2021, Alberta saw the province have the highest number of cases, hospitalizations and deaths in the country, not just in per capita terms but also in absolute terms. As with the second wave, Kenney was on vacation for three weeks and no one else in the government could publicly speak. When the response finally came on 3 September, a province-wide mask mandate was reintroduced (churches exempted) and a curfew for alcohol sales was established (rodeos exempted). But the major policy response was to plead with unvaccinated Albertans to get the jab including, remarkably, an inducement of \$100 to do so.²⁵ A free market bribe rather than a vaccine passport (although that would be introduced two weeks later when the financial incentive was shown not to be working). Completely in keeping with Kenney's ideology. Individual choice, not government mandate, remained the primary policy tool.

As the Omicron variant spread across the globe, Alberta was hit by the fifth wave in December 2021. The Kenney government's response has been straight out of its personal responsibility ideological playbook. In mid-December, while other provinces were enacting tighter restrictions, the initial response to Omicron was to do the opposite and reduce slightly its COVID-19 restrictions. Kenney explained that the government could only impose rules that Albertans would follow. "How do we ensure that there's widespread public buy-in to the measures? In my own family, I'll be gathering with three family members... We're all fully vaccinated, come from three households – only four people – but we wouldn't be able to do that Christmas based on the current rules."²⁶ However, within two weeks, in another example of delaying the implementation of restrictions, the Kenney government was forced to introduce capacity limits on restaurants, bars, and sporting events. There was also a plea by both Kenney and Chief Medical Officer of Health Dr. Deena Hinshaw for Albertans to take

²⁵ CBC News, "I wish we didn't have to do this': Alberta to offer \$100 incentive to get vaccinated against COVID-19," *CBC News* (3 September 2021). <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/alberta-covid-kenney-hinshaw-1.6163826>

²⁶ Emily Mertz, "COVID-19: Alberta could see 'modest, common-sense relaxation of measures for Christmas,'" *Global News* (10 December 2021). <https://globalnews.ca/news/8440993/alberta-health-coronavirus-covid-christmas-rules/>

personal responsibility by reducing their social gatherings over the holiday season.²⁷ That evening, the UCP held a Christmas party for its supporters in Edmonton, explicitly ignoring the pleas from Kenney and Hinshaw from only a couple of hours before.

Another problem is that the pandemic, and the public outrage, reveals the ideological lens through which Jason Kenney views the province, and which he uses to create government policy, no longer reflects modern Alberta. In a time of crisis — war, depression, natural disaster, health pandemic — an ideology that emphasizes the individual, the market and small government does not work. The ideological approach to COVID-19 so far tries to appeal to the mythology of Alberta's frontier past — of settlers taming a harsh environment and harnessing its natural resources through hard work, ingenuity, and free from the shackles of government.²⁸ This vision of Alberta has a long history in its grassroots political movements of the United Farmers of Alberta in the 1920s, Social Credit in the 1930s, the Reform Party in the 1980s, Wildrose Party in the late 2000s/early 2010s, and the UCP today. It may work well as a rhetorical flourish (few would argue against empowering the individual), but it is an ideology that presupposes everyone works toward some shared notion of the common good. And, this common good, I think we have learned in the pandemic, is not a mutually agreed-upon path.

Herein we find one of the great ideological dilemmas in Alberta. These political ideological notions Kenney has of *who we are*, and *how we act*, are outmoded. Moreover, given the diversity of values held by individuals across the province, applying this flawed all-inclusive vision puts the government out of step with the people. Evidence for this comes from many sources including the 2018, 2020, and 2021 Road Ahead Surveys conducted by Janet Brown for CBC Calgary that found that Albertans consistently placed themselves in the centre of the political spectrum.²⁹ The 2018 survey — pre-COVID-19 — showed a large majority of Albertans did not want cuts to social programs and believed the government should take steps to reduce the gap between

²⁷ CBC News, "Alberta opens COVID-19 booster shots to all Albertans 18 and over as Omicron wave builds," *CBC News* (21 December 2021). <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/covid-kenney-alberta-1.6293881>

²⁸ Jared J. Wesley, *Code Politics: Campaigns and Culture on the Canadian Prairies* (UBC Press: Vancouver, 2012).

²⁹ Janet Brown Opinion Research, "Special Projects," (2022). <http://planetjanet.ca/special-projects/>

rich and poor, and men and women. Half of Albertans believed that there was a role for the government in job creation, not just private business.³⁰ In short, the survey data, I would argue, explains the current emotional eruptions over the government's handling of COVID. It reveals a major disconnect between Kenney's political ideology of government staying small and out of sight and the values of a majority of Albertans.

UCP Party Unity

The second explanation for Alberta's poor response to COVID-19 are the efforts by Premier Kenney to keep the UCP united. The UCP is a relatively new party; the result of a merger of the old Progressive Conservative and Wildrose parties in 2017. What united these two legacy parties was the animosity towards then-Premier Rachel Notley and her NDP government and a desire to return to power (PCs had governed Alberta from 1971-2015). However, once the conservatives returned to power with their 2019 election victory, ideological tensions existed within the UCP.³¹ These internal tensions have been greatly exacerbated by COVID-19. Kenney is being attacked from the far right of the UCP (MLAs and supporters) claiming that the COVID-19 restrictions have been too severe and lasting too long, and by more centrist UCP MLAs and supporters that there are gaps in COVID-19 restrictions and the enforcement of them. For example, the delay in reacting forcefully over 2020 Christmas holidays when some of his own cabinet ministers, MLAs, and chief of staff, flouted COVID-19 travel rules during peak holiday travel periods when most Albertans responsibly stayed home.

This balancing act came to a breaking point when shortly after midnight on 13 May 2021, UCP caucus chair Todd Loewen released a scathing letter of resignation to the rest of the caucus and posted it on facebook. Loewen's letter laid out a series of complaints about some of Premier Kenney's policies and especially his leadership style. It argued that the UCP formed around "shared principles, integrity, and common-sense

³⁰ Drew Anderson, "Albertans aren't as conservative as you might think, poll suggests," *CBC News* (30 April 2018). <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/albertans-not-conservative-road-ahead-survey-1.4639232>

³¹ David K. Stewart and Anthony M. Sayers, "Divisions among Alberta's 'conservatives,'" in Duane Bratt, Richard Sutherland, and David Taras, eds., *Blue Storm: The politics of the Jason Kenney government* (University of Calgary Press: Calgary, forthcoming).

approaches to governing,” not “blind loyalty to one man.” It concluded by requesting that Kenney resign as premier.³² A regular UCP caucus meeting scheduled for Thursday morning had been cancelled the day before. However, an emergency caucus meeting was quickly rescheduled for later in the day at which both Loewen and Drew Barnes (another Kenney critic within the UCP caucus) were expelled from the party. The length of the meeting (seven hours!), the fact that a confidential meeting was live tweeted by the Western Standard (a right-wing online media organization founded by Derek Fildebrandt, an ex-Wildrose MLA who was prevented from joining the UCP)³³, the absence of a secret ballot, and a failure to release the results, are strong evidence that the decision to expel Loewen and Barnes was quite contentious.³⁴ There are an unknown number of UCP MLAs who also lack confidence in Kenney. Even though Kenney put down this caucus revolt (at least temporarily), he was badly wounded by the process. Not only did he need to exert political capital putting down a revolt, but had to spend a day addressing internal UCP politics in the midst of a health pandemic where Alberta was the worst hit province in the country. It was an incredible comedown from April 2019, when Kenney, as he frequently boasts, won the “largest democratic mandate in Alberta’s history.”

For much of the pandemic, internal opposition came from the UCP’s rural right-wing, but as the fourth wave flourished, it was the urban/suburban centrist wing of the UCP that started to rebel against Kenney’s COVID-19 leadership. Leela Aheer was removed as Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism, and Status of Women in July 2021 after she had publicly criticized Kenney and other senior cabinet ministers and staffers for flouting COVID-19 health restrictions with a boozy rooftop patio dinner on 2 June . Two months later, at the peak of the fourth wave, Aheer wrote that Kenney had botched the response to COVID-19 and “must show some humility and admit he was

³² Dean Bennett, “Internal dissent boils over into open call for Alberta Premier Jason Kenney to resign,” *CBC News* (13 May 2021). <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/alta-kenney-caucus-todd-loewen-1.6024857>

³³ James Wood, “‘A very fiery and short political career’: Derek Fildebrandt barred from rejoining UCP,” *Calgary Herald* (2 February 2018). <https://calgaryherald.com/news/politics/a-very-fiery-and-short-political-career-derek-fildebrandt-wont-be-allowed-back-into-ucp>

³⁴ Michelle Bellefontaine, “Alberta MLAs Todd Loewen, Drew Barnes booted from UCP caucus,” *CBC News* (13 May 2021). <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/barnes-loewen-removed-ucp-caucus-1.6025897>

wrong and tell us how he will make it right.”³⁵ Richard Gotfried, a Calgary UCP MLA, similarly claimed that Kenney’s COVID-19 response was negligent. “I am frustrated, embarrassed and angry that such defensible measures weren’t taken 30 days ago, but I will have to live with the solace that my outspoken internal advocacy finally bore fruit, albeit a day late and a few hundred ICU beds short.”³⁶

This led to a late September showdown in the UCP caucus, as critics of Kenney, from both the right and the centre, demanded a resignation or at least a leadership review. However, while the critics of Kenney were unified in their desire to replace him, they were at odds with how and why. Some of them, such as Angela Pitt and Peter Guthrie (both Airdrie MLAs) were upset about the COVID-19 restrictions, while others, such as Aheer and Gotfried, believed that the restrictions were delayed and too weak. This allowed Kenney to divide his opposition and delay a leadership review to April 2022. There was a group of 22 UCP constituency associations who signed a petition to expedite the leadership review, but a UCP Executive Board that is controlled by Kenney ignored it.³⁷ The UCP held its AGM in late November 2021, but it was carefully stage managed by Kenney, who has been organizing in the backrooms to protect his leadership.³⁸ However, an old rival Brian Jean, the former Wildrose leader who Kenney defeated in the UCP leadership race in 2017, has won the UCP nomination for a by-election in Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche (Jean represented the riding as a federal MP

³⁵ Dean Bennett, “UCP backbencher Leela Aheer urges Kenney to admit he botched COVID-19 response, take action,” *Global News* (15 September 2021). <https://globalnews.ca/news/8193096/leela-aheer-jason-kenney-alberta-covid-19/>

³⁶ Michelle Bellefontaine, “Calgary UCP MLA says Alberta’s COVID-19 inaction will ‘cost us lives,’” *CBC News* (16 September 2021). <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/calgary-ucp-mla-says-alberta-s-covid-19-inaction-will-cost-us-lives-1.6178529>

³⁷ Ashley Joannou, “UCP executive rejects call for earlier leadership review of Jason Kenney,” *Edmonton Journal* (9 December 2021). <https://edmontonjournal.com/news/politics/ucp-executive-rejects-call-for-an-early-leadership-review>

³⁸ Don Braid, “Braid: Kenney’s forces start the counterattack on party rebels,” *Calgary Herald* (10 November 2021) and Don Braid, “Braid: Kenney has control of convention as pressure builds for early leadership review,” *Calgary Herald* (12 November 2021).

and provincial MLA). More remarkably, Jean, who represents the rural right wing part of the UCP, is explicitly campaigning on the resignation of Kenney.³⁹

So, what has gone wrong? Why did Jason Kenney, the architect of the formation of the UCP, need to confront periodic caucus revolts from the party that he built? There are three interrelated causes: 1) COVID-19 restrictions; 2) dropping poll numbers; and 3) the structural fault lines within Alberta's conservative movement. On COVID-19 restrictions, Kenney often portrays himself as a man stuck between those who want tighter restrictions implemented more quickly and those who strongly resist restrictions. However, this depiction is incorrect. A majority of Albertans sought tougher restrictions, but the small minority who resisted them were part of the UCP base.⁴⁰ Although Loewen's resignation letter did not reference COVID-19, he was among the 15 rural backbench UCP MLAs who signed a public letter in early April 2021 that said, "after 13 painstaking months of COVID-19 public health restrictions, we do not support the additional restrictions imposed on Albertans."⁴¹ Notably, this letter came after a mild delay in reopening society and businesses, not after the imposition of much tougher restrictions and beefed up enforcement in early May 2021.

COVID-19 has revealed some of the fissures within the UCP, especially a rural-urban divide. As pollster Janet Brown has documented for the CBC, Kenney's poll numbers have been on a downward slide for two years.⁴² As charts two and three show, if an election were held today, Rachel Notley's NDP would form a majority government. You do not see caucus revolts against a popular premier. Instead, they occur when an unpopular premier might cause you to lose your seat. This was the fate of previous Alberta PC Premiers Ed Stelmach and Alison Redford, who were pushed out by caucus because of low public opinion polling numbers.

³⁹ Thandiwe Konguavi, "Brian Jean claims victory in race to represent UCP in Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche byelection," *CBC News* (12 December 2021). <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/brian-jean-wins-race-ucp-fort-mcmurray-lac-la-biche-1.6283429>

⁴⁰ Pamela Downe and Jared Wesley, "The Politics of COVID-19 in Alberta and Saskatchewan," *Common Ground Research Brief* (6 April 2021). <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1WScxwDO9Pwm97waG-b4KPoGl3-R1egHC/view>

⁴¹ Lisa Johnson, "Quarter of UCP MLAs speak out against Alberta's latest COVID-19 restrictions," *Edmonton Journal* (7 April 2021). <https://edmontonjournal.com/news/politics/fifteen-ucp-mlas-say-kenneys-latest-covid-19-restrictions-move-alberta-backwards>

⁴² Janet Brown Opinion Research, "Special Projects," (2022). <http://planetjanet.ca/special-projects/>

CHART TWO: Provincial Voting Intention

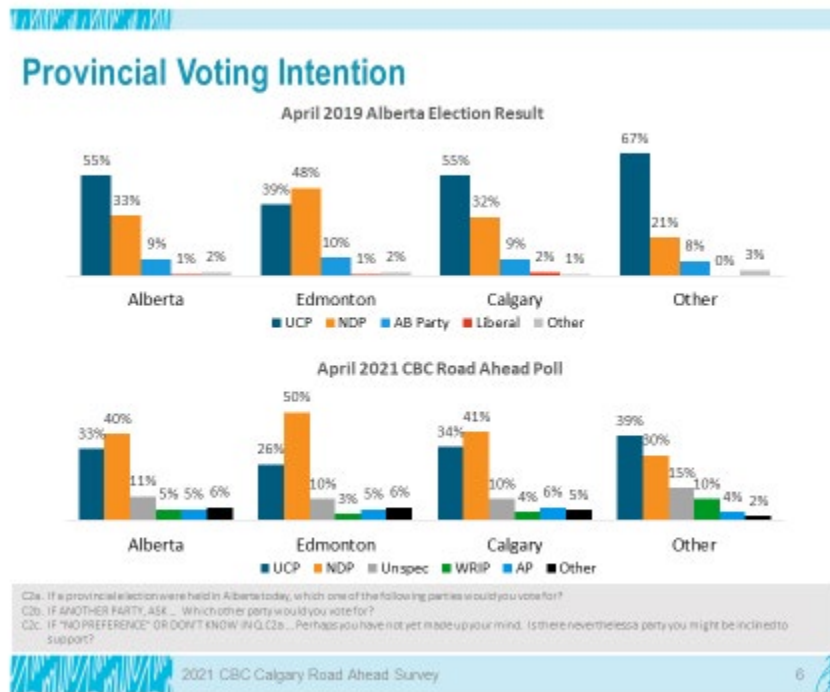
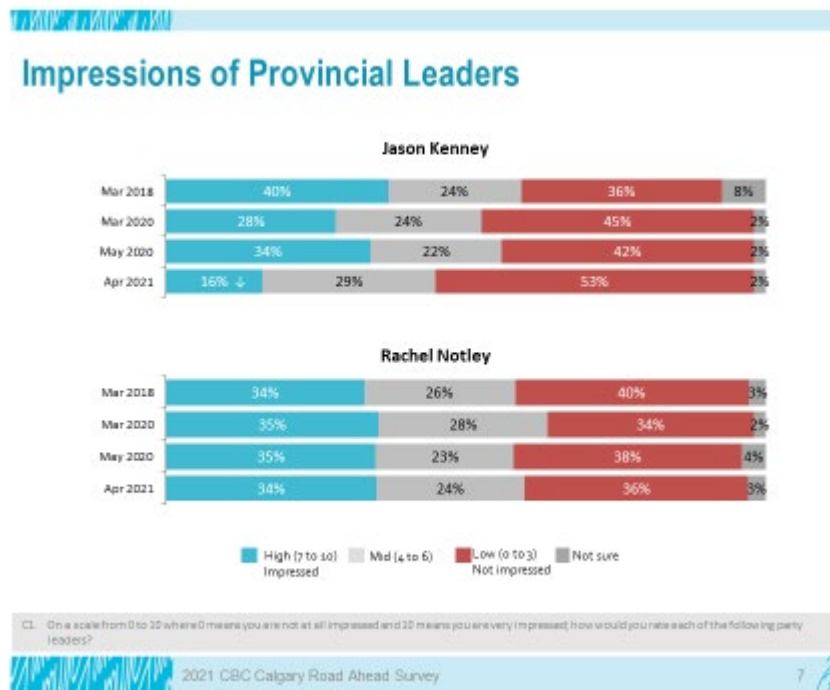


CHART THREE: Impressions of Provincial Leaders

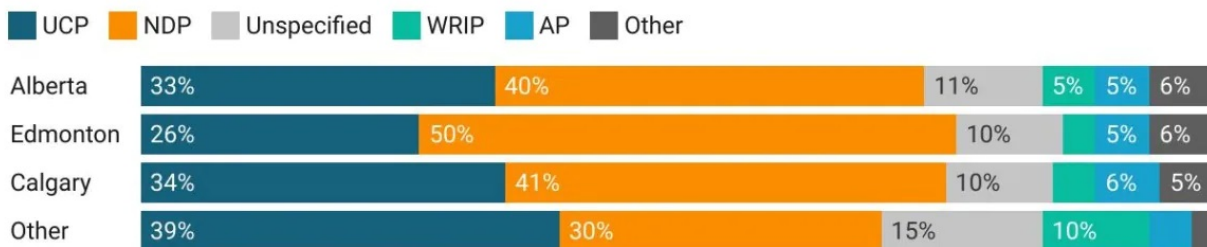


The fear of a UCP electoral defeat is driven by several electoral mathematical realities. First, is the breakdown of the province’s 87 seats. The rule of thumb is that the Alberta electorate is a three-prong stool and a party needs to win two out of the three: Calgary (26 seats), Edmonton (20 seats), and the rest of Alberta (41 seats). However, the rest of Alberta is not a monolith, it includes the small cities (Lethbridge, Red Deer, Fort McMurry, Medicine Hat, and Grand Prairie), suburban constituencies that ring Edmonton and Calgary (Sherwood Park, St. Albert, Airdrie, Cochrane, etc), and rural Alberta. In 2019, the UCP won Calgary and the rest of Alberta, in 2015 the NDP won Edmonton and Calgary, and in 2012 the Progressive Conservatives won Edmonton and Calgary. Polling shows that the UCP will continue to lose the vast majority of Edmonton seats, but will retain much of the rest of Alberta, therefore the battleground will be Calgary. Whichever party wins a majority of Calgary seats in 2023 will form government. However, due primarily to the UCP’s handling of COVID-19, polling throughout 2021 shows that the NDP will win a majority of Calgary seats (see Chart Three).

CHART FOUR: Vote Choice in April 2021

Vote Choice in April 2021

If a provincial election were held in Alberta today, which one of the following parties would you vote for? / Which other party would you vote for? / Perhaps you have not yet made up your mind. Is there nevertheless a party you might be inclined to support?



Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

Chart: Janet Brown • Source: Trend Research / Janet Brown Opinion Research • Created with Datawrapper

The second electoral reality is the fear of a split among right-wing parties. In the 2015 election, the NDP received 40.6 percent of the popular vote, but the combined

Progressive Conservative (27.8 percent) and Wildrose (24.2 percent) was 52 percent. This allowed the NDP to capitalize on a vote split among conservative voters in parts of the province. For example, in 12/15 seats that the NDP won in Calgary, they received less than 40 percent of the popular vote. In the aftermath of the 2015 election, it was this belief that a conservative vote split was responsible for the NDP's victory that created the momentum within both the PCs and Wildrose for the merger into the UCP.

It is also apparent that Alberta's conservatives may be ungovernable. As I have written in the past with my colleague Bruce Foster, there is a history of Alberta conservative parties (both federally and provincially) splintering and merging.⁴³ The UCP currently contains numerous fault lines: previous party affiliation (PC versus Wildrose), ideology (centre-right versus far-right), forms of conservatism (economic conservatives versus social conservatives), geographic (rural versus urban), government (cabinet versus backbench), and structure (premier's political staff versus elected MLAs). These cleavages often overlap, which exacerbates the tensions within the party. Kenney, so far, has been able to successfully put down these caucus revolts. It is also possible that removing Loewen and Barnes, demoting Aheer, as well as sending a strong message to other MLAs that dissent to his leadership will no longer be tolerated, will stop the internal discontent. However, until the COVID-19 pandemic has been brought under control, he improves his polling, and mitigates the internal fissures within the UCP, Kenney will remain susceptible to further caucus revolts or defeat at the April 2022 leadership review.

Conclusion

When compared to the rest of the world, Canada and Alberta have managed the health care aspects of COVID-19 relatively well. Despite a slow start on vaccinations, an examination of international data puts Canada in a good light (see Table One). As of 7

⁴³ Duane Bratt and Bruce Foster, "The fragility of a 'big tent' conservative party," *CBC News* (25 July 2019). <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/conservative-party-splitting-merging-western-canada-1.5220417> and Duane Bratt and Bruce Foster, "UCP caucus revolt latest in a long history of splintering conservative parties in Alberta," *CBC News* (13 April 2021). <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/road-ahead-alberta-conservative-parties-splinter-history-1.5984055>

January 2022, Canada has 807.27 deaths per million. This is substantially lower than many largely populated industrialized countries in North America and Western Europe. For example, it is about a third of the United States and United Kingdom and about half of France, Sweden, and Germany. However, Canada is substantially higher than some of the real international success stories in Asia and Oceania such as New Zealand, Australia, South Korea, and Japan. Turning to vaccination status, as of 7 January 2022, Canada has administered 185.69 doses per 100 people. This is substantially higher than the average for the world and the United States. It is also higher than the average for the European Union and High Income states.

TABLE ONE: Comparing Selected Countries

COUNTRY	DEATHS (per million)	VACCINATIONS (per 100 people)
Canada	807.27	185.69
World	697.85	119.38
European Union	2, 050	169.69
High Income	1, 620	170.79
United States	2, 510	155.6
United Kingdom	2, 200	197.29
France	1, 860	187.97
Sweden	1, 510	176.05
Germany	1, 360	181.76
New Zealand	9.96	162.03
Australia	90.62	169.94
South Korea	116.67	206.03
Japan	145.94	159.67

Source: Our World in Data, *Coronavirus (COVID-19) Deaths* (2022). Accessed on 8 January 2022 at <https://ourworldindata.org/covid-deaths>

However, when we compare Alberta to the rest of Canada, the situation is not nearly as good. Alberta, despite a good performance in the first wave, has been harder hit in terms of cases, hospitalizations, those in intensive care, and deaths than other

provinces (especially the disastrous fourth wave). This paper argues that this performance can be traced to two inter-related factors: 1) the ideology of Premier Jason Kenney (and many of his UCP MLAs, cabinet ministers, and political staffers) and 2) the desire of Kenney to keep the UCP united and himself as leader. Ultimately then, it is politics that best explains why Alberta, despite its wealth and education levels, has done worse responding to the health aspects of COVID-19.

APPENDIX ONE

Timeline of Key COVID-19 Events in Alberta

Date	Event
22 July 2017	Merger of Progressive Conservative and Wildrose Parties into the United Conservative Party
28 October 2017	Jason Kenney becomes the first leader of the UCP defeating, among others, Brian Jean
16 April 2019	UCP wins Alberta election and Jason Kenney becomes Premier
3 September 2019	McKinnon Report on Alberta's finances is released
March 2020	First wave starts to build
5 March 2020	First confirmed case of COVID-19 in Alberta
11 March 2020	World Health Organization officially declared COVID-19 as a pandemic
12 March 2020	NHL and NBA suspend their seasons due to COVID-19 outbreaks.
12 March 2020	Chief Medical Officer of Health Dr. Deena Hinshaw introduced the first COVID-19 restrictions: restricted all gatherings to a maximum of 250 people, recommended against international travel, and recommended that anyone returning from international travel self-isolate for 14 days on return.
15 March 2020	Alberta's K-12 and post-secondary schools go to online classes for the rest of the semester.
16 March 2020	Canada closes its international borders.
17 March 2020	Kenney declared a provincial state of emergency.
18 March 2020	Kenney announced a series of provincial financial measures, including deferral of utility payments, ceasing of collection of corporate income taxes, a six-month moratorium on student loans, and an emergency isolation support package
22 March 2020	Health Minister Tyler Shandro publicly berates a neighbor (a doctor) at his house over allegations of conflict of interest. There are calls for Shandro's resignation, but Kenney defends his behavior.
28 March 2020	Restrictions are tightened: limited social gatherings to 15 people, suspended vehicle access to provincial parks and ordered the closure of all personal care services, dine-in restaurants, and non-essential retail stores. Economic protection for renters was also

	introduced.
30 March 2020	Health Minister Shandro unilaterally terminates the master agreement with the Alberta Medical Association (AMA) and introduced a new fee structure for doctors.
7 April 2020	Kenney gives a televised address to Albertans on COVID-19
11 April 2020	Health Minister Shandro announced that Alberta had sufficient beds and personal protective equipment (PPE) to meet the province's projected demand and that it would provide shipments of personal protective equipment to British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec, as well as 50 ventilators for Ontario.
20 April 2020	Cargill temporarily closed its beef processing facility in High River due to skyrocketing COVID-19 cases among its employees.
23 April 2020	Calgary Stampede and other summer festivals were cancelled for 2020.
30 April 2020	Alberta government announced a plan to lift restrictions in several phases. Some medical services and outdoor recreational activities reopen in early May, while daycare centres, restaurants and some retail outlets would reopen at reduced capacity on May 14.
Early May 2020	First wave starts to crest.
28 May 2020	Health Minister Shandro announced that 40 million masks would be distributed to Albertans through fast food outlets.
15 June 2020	Provincial state of emergency is lifted.
29 July 2020	In a survey of Alberta doctors, 98% of respondents said that they had lost confidence in Health Minister Shandro.
August – September 2020	Stanley Cup playoffs in Edmonton and Toronto within a COVID-19 bubble.
Late October 2020	Second wave starts to build.
6 November 2020	Premier Kenney called on Albertans to take personal responsibility but did not institute any new restrictions.
9 November 2020	A group of 70 physicians issued a joint letter to the Kenney government, calling for a two-week lockdown to help control and trace the present surge of cases and criticized the government's lack of leadership and direction
24 November 2020	Premier Kenney re-declared a provincial public health emergency and introduced new restrictions on social gatherings and retail capacity. He also apologized for the measures that he

	implemented during the first wave.
26 November 2020	CBC News obtained recordings from COVID-19 strategy meetings at the Alberta Emergency Operations Centre, revealing evidence of political tensions between health officials and the Kenney government that may have impacted Alberta's response to the pandemic.
8 December 2020	Alberta announced new public health measures which restricted dine-in food service, closed personal services such as hairdressers and tattoo parlors, closed gyms and fitness studios, prohibited social gatherings, reduced retail and places of worship capacity from 25 percent to 15 percent, provided for a province-wide mask mandate, and strongly suggested work-from-home measures.
16 December 2020	Alberta began distribution of vaccines to frontline health care workers in Calgary and Edmonton.
Late December 2020	Alohagate: Premier's Chief of Staff Jamie Huckabay, Minister Tracy Allard, several UCP MLAs and political staffers all travelled outside of Canada for the holidays.
1 January 2021	Premier Kenney gives a press conference scolding the Alohagate offenders, but says that none of them will be punished.
4 January 2021	Premier Kenney announces that all Alohagate offenders have been punished.
Late January 2021	Second wave starts to crest.
8 February 2021	Alberta moved to Step 1 of "The Path Forward," allowing restaurants to reopen at a reduced capacity, one-on-one fitness instruction, and children's sport and performance activities to be allowed under certain circumstances
19 February 2021	Vaccinations were expanded to include all seniors 75+ living in seniors lodges and other congregated care facilities.
24 February 2021	Vaccinations were extended to all seniors 75+ and all First Nations, Metis, and Inuit seniors 65+.
8 March 2021	Alberta moved to Step 2 of "The Path Forward," allowing collegiate sport and adult performance activities under certain circumstances, an increase in capacity for retail, low-intensity group fitness appointments, and allowing libraries and event halls to reopen with restrictions.
15 March 2021	Vaccinations were extended to all seniors 65+ and First Nations, Metis, and Inuit 50+. Alberta Health Services partnered with

	certain pharmacies around the province to increase capacity for vaccination.
Mid-March 2021	Third wave starts to build
22 March 2021	Due to a major surge of cases brought upon by COVID-19 variants, Health Minister Tyler Shandro stated that the province had no plans to move to "Step 3" at that time.
30 March 2021	Alberta doctors vote to reject a negotiated contract settlement due in part, to past mistrust of Health Minister Shandro.
7 April 2021	Due to the increasing caseload and hospitalizations, Premier Kenney announced an immediate rollback to "Step 1" restrictions.
7 April 2021	AHS officials physically restricted access to GraceLife Church in Parkland County for repeated violations of public health orders.
7 April 2021	15 UCP MLAs sign a public letter criticizing COVID-19 restrictions.
4 May 2021	Premier Kenney announced new restrictions: all schools and post-secondary institutions were moved to online classes from 7 May to at least 25 May, all in-person dining at restaurants was prohibited beginning 10 May, and all indoor recreation activities were prohibited. In regions with at least 50 active cases per-100,000, gatherings were further limited to 5 people, personal care services were ordered closed, retail stores were limited to 10 percent capacity, outdoor recreation with individuals from outside of the immediate household was prohibited, and any non-critical business that is the subject of a COVID-19 outbreak will be ordered closed for 10 days.
13 May 2021	UCP MLAs Todd Loewen and Drew Barnes are expelled from caucus for their criticism of Premier Kenney
Late May 2021	Third wave starts to crest
26 May 2021	Premier Kenney announced the replacement of "The Path Forward" with the "Open for Summer Plan", a new framework that would be based on vaccination progress and hospitalization metrics.
2 June 2021	Matt Wolf, Premier Kenney's then-Issues Manager, responds to criticism of the Open for Summer Plan by tweeting out: "The pandemic is ending. Accept it."
7 June 2021	Premier Kenney apologized for hosting a dinner on 2 June for senior ministers and staffers on the rooftop patio of a government building in violation of COVID-19 rules.

7 June 2021	Richard Gotfried resigns as UCP Calgary-Caucus chair over the behavior of Premier Kenney.
18 June 2021	Premier Kenney announced that Step 3 of the “Open for Summer Plan” would be implemented on 1 July, as the province had met the 70 percent threshold of first doses.
1 July 2021	Premier Kenney held a large Canada Day celebration and almost all COVID-19 restrictions are lifted.
8 July 2021	Leela Aheer, Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women, is removed from cabinet for her criticism of Premier Kenney.
9 -18 July 2021	Calgary Stampede
28 July 2021	CMOH Hinshaw announced that COVID-19 would be treated as an endemic respiratory virus, and therefore Alberta would be scaling back testing/tracing/isolation measures.
August 2021	Premier Kenney takes a three week holiday
Mid-August 2021	Fourth wave starts to build
13 August 2021	CMOH Hinshaw reverses her 28 July decision on testing/tracing/isolation measures.
3 September 2021	Premier Kenney announced a \$100 incentive program for people to get vaccinated. He also reinstated a mask mandate for all indoor public spaces and a curfew on the sales/consumption of alcohol
9 September 2021	CMOH Hinshaw, amid strained ICU capacity and the cancellations of elective surgeries province-wide, admitted that it was premature to treat COVID-19 as an endemic disease.
15 September 2021	Premier Kenney declared a new public health emergency. He also admitted that the previous push towards treating COVID-19 as endemic was premature. He stated that the province needed to maximize health care capacity, reduce transmission, and increase vaccination in order to overcome the crisis in its health care system. He also reversed an earlier pronouncement and introduced a proof of vaccination requirement (termed as the "Restrictions Exemption Program") for businesses. Health Minister Shandro announced new public health orders to take effect 16 September and 20 September, including reinstating restrictions on gatherings and businesses. Chief Executive Officer of AHS Dr. Verna Yiu stated Alberta was

	on track to exceed the province's hospitalization and ICU capacity, and would begin training health care staff on triage protocols and halting non-critical surgeries. It was also reaching out to other provinces for additional health care staff and to transfer ICU patients out of province for treatment.
15 September 2021	UCP MLAs Leela Aheer and Richard Gotfried publicly criticize Premier Kenney's handling of the fourth wave.
16 September 2021	Alberta Children's Hospital announced the closure of 75 percent of the facility's operating rooms to transfer staff capacity to ICUs, the Children's Hospital was elevated to the highest alert level and reduced capacity to complete life and limb procedures only.
21 September 2021	Jason Copping is appointed Minister of Health, replacing Tyler Shandro (who is shuffled to Labour and Immigration).
22 September 2021	After a long and contentious UCP caucus meeting, Premier Kenney agrees to hold a leadership review in April 2022.
Late September 2021	Fourth wave starts to crest
15 November 2021	22 UCP Constituency Associations present a petition calling for an early UCP leadership review of Kenney.
19-21 November 2021	UCP holds its AGM
December 2021	Fifth wave starts to build
9 December 2021	UCP Executive reaffirms that a leadership review of Kenney will be held on 9 April 2022; ignoring the petition from the 22 UCP Constituency Associations.
10 December 2021	Premier Kenney indicates that social gathering restrictions might be loosened for the holidays.
12 December 2021	Brian Jean, former Wildrose leader, wins the UCP nomination for a by-election in Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche on an explicit pledge to force Jason Kenney to resign as UCP leader.
21 December 2021	As the Omicron variant spreads, Premier Kenney urged people to reduce their social gatherings and announced that new restrictions would take effect on 24 December. That evening the UCP held a Christmas party for its supporters in Edmonton.
29 December 2021	World junior hockey championship that was being played in Red Deer and Edmonton was cancelled because of rising COVID-19 infections.
30 December	Education Minister Adriana LaGrange announced that K-12

2021	school re-opening would be delayed until 10 January 2022.
5 January 2022	Education Minister LaGrange announced that K-12 schools would re-open with in-person classes.