
THE ANGUS REID/SOUTHAM NEWS POLL

– THE ONTARIO POLITICAL SCENE –



© Angus Reid Group, Inc.

Public Release Date: Tuesday, October 8th, 1996

This Ontario-wide poll was conducted by telephone between September 20th and 29th, 1996, among a representative cross-section of 526 Ontario adults as part of the September National Angus Reid Poll.

The data were statistically weighted to ensure the sample's age/sex composition reflects that of the actual Ontario population according to the 1991 Census data.

With the province-wide sample of 526, one can say with 95 percent certainty that the results are within ± 4.5 percentage points of what they would have been had the entire adult Ontario population been polled. The margin of error will be larger within the various sub-groupings of the survey population.

THE ONTARIO POLITICAL SCENE

The Harris Conservatives continue to lead in party popularity but their support has slipped from late-summer levels according to the latest Angus Reid/Southam News Poll. These are the highlights of the findings of the province-wide poll of 526 adult Ontario residents conducted between September 20th and 29th:

- This latest poll shows the Harris Conservatives holding the support of 44 percent of decided Ontario voters, while the Liberals are at 37 percent and the NDP are at 17 percent. All other parties are holding 1 percent of the decided vote. This represents an 8-point drop for the Conservatives since August, and puts them back at their June 1995 election levels. Both opposition parties' popular support has edged upwards since August – the Liberals up 2 points, the NDP up 5 points. These recent shifts have narrowed the gap between the Conservatives and Liberals, from 17 points in late August to 7 points in this late-September sounding. (Table 1) (The poll shows 26% of Ontario adults are currently undecided/refused or not sure they would vote in a provincial election.)
- The Ontario parties' support levels continue to vary across different socio-demographic segments of the electorate. The Conservatives maintain a lead among men (50% to the Liberals' 34%) but are edged out by the Liberals among women (37% versus 42%). There is a generation gap as well, with Conservative support increasing with age – from a 5-point deficit against the Liberals among younger voters to a 10-point Conservative lead among older Ontarians. Across socio-economic strata, the Conservatives' support is stronger among middle and higher income voters than it is among the least affluent. The gaps are not as wide as observed in earlier polls – but it will take another sounding to confirm whether or not this is a "blip" or a signal that Ontario's "class cleavages" are flattening out somewhat. (Table 1)
- In terms of the Harris Conservative government's approval ratings, 52 percent of those polled in late September expressed approval of their overall performance while 43 percent disapproved. This is consistent with the approval ratings recorded over the past few months, and better than the split opinion recorded earlier this year. Voters' assessment of the Harris

government's performance varies most markedly across socio-economic strata: whereas most middle (61%) and higher (55%) income voters surveyed said they approve of the Harris Conservatives' performance, most lower income voters (58%) disapprove. Likewise with gender: most men approve (61%) of the Harris government, while most women disapprove (52%). (Table 2)

For further information, contact:

John Wright
Senior Vice-President
Angus Reid Group
(416) 324-2900