
THE ONTARIO POLITICAL SCENE

- **THE PUBLIC AGENDA -**
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This CFRB/Globe and Mail/Angus Reid Poll was conducted by telephone between September 30th and October 8th, 1998 among a representative cross-section of 1,000 Ontarians.

These data were statistically weighted to ensure the sample's regional and age/sex composition reflects that of the actual Ontario population according to the 1996 Census data.

With an Ontario-wide sample of 1,000, one can say with 95 percent certainty that the results are within +/-3.2 percentage points of what they would have been had the entire adult Ontario population been polled. The margin of error will be larger within regions and for other sub-groupings of the survey population.

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Education skyrockets to the top of public agenda

This poll included the Angus Reid Group's on-going monitor of Ontarians' public policy priorities by asking Ontarians to name, 'top-of-mind', the two most important issues facing Ontario today. This analysis is based on the total number of mentions that each item received (consequently, totals exceed 100%).

- On the heels of recent teachers' strikes in the province, **education** captured the attention of respondents. Two-thirds (65%) indicate that it is the most important issue facing Ontario today. Education has climbed 25 percent since August to overtake healthcare as the number one issue on the public agenda. Those with household incomes of at least \$60,000 (71%), women (69%) and Ontarians with a university degree (71%) are more likely than others to indicate that education is among the most important issues facing the province.
- Capturing 52% of total mentions (up 3 percent since August), **healthcare** holds the number two spot on the public agenda. Older Ontarians (59% among those over 55) are more likely to indicate that healthcare is among the most important issues facing the province than younger Ontarians (42% among those between 18 and 34).
- **Jobs and unemployment** is mentioned by one-quarter (24%) of Ontarians as the most important matter facing the government.
- In addition, 12 percent mention **taxes**, 12 percent mention the **economy** and 11 percent mention **poverty/the poor/welfare**.

Tory/Liberal Vote split continues

If an election were held tomorrow, respondents indicate that the Liberals (40%) and Tories (42%) would split the vote.

- After bottoming out at 33 percent earlier this year (February 1998), the Tories have improved their lot and now hold 42 percent of the vote among decided voters (41% in August). The Tories' support is strongest among men (51%) and those with household incomes of at least \$60,000 (47%). Notably, one-third (34%) of women and three in ten (29%) of those with household incomes under \$30,000 indicate that they would cast a ballot for the Tories.
- After climbing to 46 percent of popular support in February, the Liberals' support has subsequently softened and is now at 40 percent (41% in August). The Liberals support is stronger among women (45%) than it is among men (35%).
- The NDP sits at 12% – down 1 point since August.

Indicators point to room for growth for Tories

Two critical benchmark numbers to watch are the governments overall approval rating and the proportion of Ontarians who believe the Party deserves re-election.

Similar to the results reported in June 1998, 58 percent (up one percent since June) approve of the overall performance of the PC government. Two in five (40%) disapprove of its performance.

In addition, in order to gauge whether Ontarians think the Tories deserve re-election, respondents were presented with two position statements about the governments' record and asked to indicate which is closest to their own perspective. They were told that "some people say that the Harris government has accomplished a lot of good in the province – they have stayed true to their word and deserve to be re-elected" while "other people say that the Harris government has done all it can do and it is time for another provincial political party to take over and run the province". Forty-seven percent say they deserve to be re-elected (down two percent since August) and 50 percent indicate that it's time for another party to take over.

In concert, these two benchmarks suggest that the Tories have a well of good faith amassed among Ontarians that they may be able to mobilize into support in the coming months.

Premier's personal approval rating continues to rise

Respondents were asked to think about the Premier and the leaders of the Liberal Party and NDP and asked to indicate if they generally approve or disapprove of their performances.

- The Premier continues to build on the improved approval rating that he captured in June. In this latest sounding of public opinion, Harris receives an approval rating of 58 percent (up two points since June). An additional 42% disapprove of his performance as Premier. Notably, the Premier has improved his standing since February 1998, when his approval rating was only 49 percent. Harris' approval rating is highest among men (67%).
- Comparatively, Liberal leader Dalton McGuinty has an approval rating of 40% (up two points since June). Twenty-three percent disapprove of his performance as Leader of the Ontario Liberal Party. A critical factor for the Liberal Leader is that 37 do not offer an opinion on his performance.
- NDP leader Howard Hampton has an approval rating of 29% (up two points since June). An additional 26 percent disapprove of Hampton's performance as Leader of the Ontario New Democratic Party. Similar to McGuinty, an additional 45 percent do not provide an opinion of Hampton's performance.

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