

ONTARIO POLITICS MAY 2001

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Despite Majority (52%) Who Approve of Harris Government Performance, Only 37% Say Tories "Deserve to be Re-elected" While 60% Say "It's Time for a Change"

Healthcare (59%) and Education (58%) Now Neck and Neck as Top Issues for Ontarians

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Toronto, ON – An Ipsos-Reid/Globe and Mail/CFRB poll conducted on the heels of the Harris government's Throne Speech which unveiled its plans via a "21 steps for the 21st Century" initiative framework, shows that support for the Harris Tories (34%) continues near their six year low. Conversely, support for Dalton McGuinty's Liberals (50%) continues around their all-time high — with Howard Hampton's NDP mired at 14 percent. This poll marks an important benchmark for the next 18 months of the Tory mandate as the government tries to reinvigorate its leadership of the province. The results suggest that the government will have their work cut out for them. Despite a majority (52%) saying they approve of the government's performance, the percentage who say that the government "deserves to be re-elected" (37%) has continued on its downward slide and has dropped to a new all-time low – 2 points lower than the previous low of 39 percent reached in March 2001. Meanwhile, a full six in ten (60%) now say "it's time for a change". Healthcare (59%) continues its long streak at the top of Ontarians' issue agenda but with recent labour trouble involving support staff in the Toronto School Board, as well as ongoing skirmishes over extra-curricular activities, it is now in a virtual tie with education (58%) as the percentage of

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Ontarians who say that education is the most important issue has jumped 14 points since March 2001.

These are the findings of an Ipsos-Reid/Globe and Mail/CFRB poll conducted between April 16th and April 25th, 2001. The poll is based on a randomly selected sample of 1,000 adult Ontarians. With a sample of this size, the results are considered accurate to within ± 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, 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. 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.

Ontario Grits (50%) Continue to Hold Large Lead Over Harris Tories (34%)

The Ontario Liberals continue to outpace the governing Progressive Conservatives for popular support among Ontarians. If a provincial election were held tomorrow, 50 percent of decided voters say they would support the Liberals — essentially unchanged since March 2001. As Liberal support continues around its all-time high, the support for the Tories is hovering near six year lows. Support for the Progressive Conservatives (34%) has bounced back slightly (3 points) since March when it hit its lowest level (31%) since before the 1995 (March 1995 - 24%) provincial election. Meanwhile, support for the NDP is holding steady at 14 percent.

- PC support continues to be higher in the 905 region (46%) and much lower in the 416 region (27%).
- Support for the Liberals is higher in 416 (56%) as opposed to 905 (47%).
- The NDP has much stronger support in 416 (16%) as opposed to 905 (7%).

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- Men (39%) are more likely than women (29%) to say they would vote for the Tories, while women (50%) and men (49%) are equally likely to say they would vote for the Liberals.

Despite Majority (52%) Who Approve of Harris Government Performance, Only 37% Say Tories "Deserve to be Re-elected" While 60% Say "It's Time for a Change"

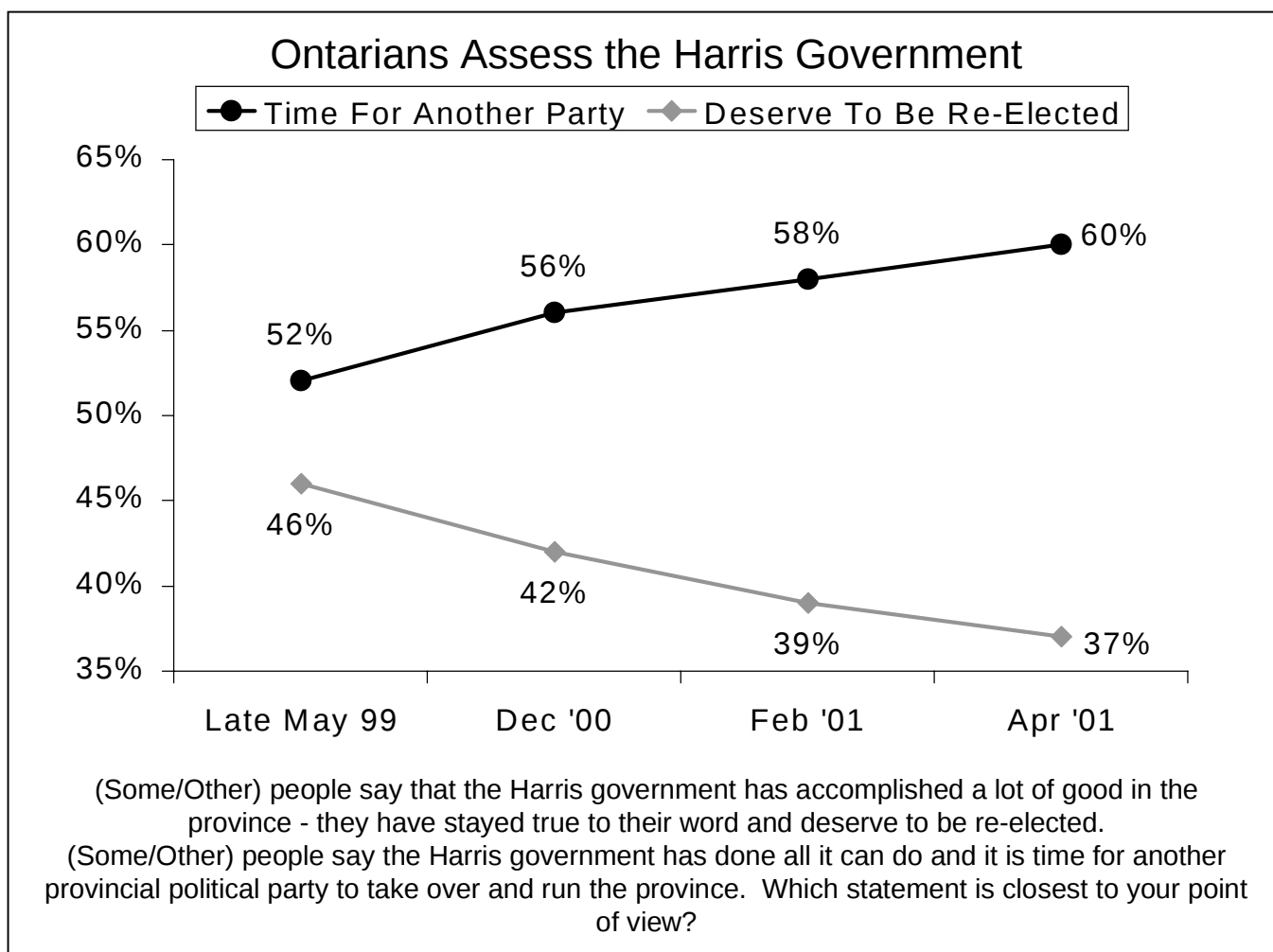
As the government articulates its plans for the next part of its mandate, the polling data suggests a more fundamental underlying erosion in support. The government still receives the approval of a majority (52%) of Ontarians but their approval has dropped 3 points since the last sounding in December 2000 (55%). In addition, the bulk of the government's approval is soft. Of the 52 percent who approve of the government's performance, only one in five (18%) "strongly approve" while the rest (34%) "somewhat approve". This compares with 29 percent who "strongly disapprove" and 17 percent who "somewhat disapprove" of the government's performance.

- Residents of the 905 region (59%) are more likely to approve of the government than residents of the 416 area (44%).
- Men (60%) are much more likely than women (44%) to say they approve of the Harris government.

In addition to softening approval for the government, the percentage of Ontarians who believe the Tories "deserve to be re-elected" continues on its downward slide. The percentage of Ontarians who say the government "has accomplished a lot of good for the province - have stayed true to their word and deserve to be re-elected" has dropped 10 points from 47 percent in June 1999 through to 37 percent today – a new all-time low. Correspondingly, the percentage who say "the Harris government has done all it can do and it is time for another

provincial party to take over and run the province" has risen 9 points from 51 percent in June 1999 to 60 percent today. More than the regular vote numbers or approval ratings in the off season this is perhaps the critical number to follow in the months ahead which will determine whether the government can truly make up lost ground with voters.

- 905 residents (46%) are more likely than 416 residents (34%) to say the Tories "deserve to be re-elected".
- Consistent with the trends in party support and approval, men (47%) are more likely than women (29%) to say the government "deserves to be re-elected".





Healthcare (59%) and Education (58%) Now Neck and Neck as Top Issues for Ontarians

Healthcare (59%) has long dominated as the issue which Ontarians feel should receive the greatest attention from Ontario's leaders. However, with the month-long job action by support staff at the Toronto School Board, the percentage of Ontarians saying education is the most important issue has risen 14 points since March 2001 thereby putting education (58%) and healthcare (59%) in a dead heat for most important issue.

- In the 416 area code, education (63%) is 11 points higher than healthcare (52%) and in the 905 area code they are tied at 60%.

The environment (17%) continues to move up the issue agenda, rising another 3 points since March 2001. Since December 2000, the percentage of Ontarians who mention the environment as one of the province's most important issues has nearly doubled from 9 percent to 17 percent. Taxes (11%) and poverty (10%) continue to jostle with each other for fourth and fifth place on the issue agenda.

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