

ONTARIO POLITICS AND THE SUMMER OF 2003: TORIES BUMP (35%), GRITS GRIND (48%), NDP STAND (14%)



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Toronto, ONTARIO (June 19, 2003) – A new Globe and Mail / CFTO / CFRB poll conducted by Ipsos-Reid and released today shows that Premier Ernie Eves' ruling Tories have bounced up modestly since the last sounding in the province in April. As well, those who view Ernie Eves as the leader who would make the best Premier for the province is also up modestly from April. And, the PCs are getting a good bounce in the 905 beltway—49% support up from 36% support only two months ago and necessary to hold onto if the Tories are to win a third majority government. But the numbers don't appear buoyant enough yet to suggest any major momentum for the Tories as they ponder either a fall or spring vote. This may change depending upon how successful their new party ads are that were launched this week and if they can catch a "ballot box" issue that gives them a campaign edge.

Where are the Parties at compared to the 1999 election campaign that swept Mike Harris back into a majority in June of that year? The vote numbers are exactly where they were on April 21, 1999. And the "Best Premier" choice this time has Premier Ernie Eves only 3 points back of where his predecessor was at that time. What is different is the mood for change in the Province—6 points higher than where it was at that time—and the "Positive Momentum" based on impressions is worse today for the Tories compared to then. But Mike Harris waited another couple of months after that poll before going to the people – when his government had momentum, moved into the 38% support range and unleashed their campaign barrage aimed squarely at Liberal Leader Dalton McGuinty. In order to achieve a majority government in the province, recent elections have identified that a party must receive approximately 43% of the vote—so getting close to 40% of the decided vote in the lead up to an election call, with momentum, was clearly part of the PC strategy last time out.

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Today, the Ontario Liberals (48%) continue to hold a significant lead over the governing Conservatives (35%) among decided voters. The Liberals have held their vote at 48% from April while the Conservatives are up 4 points. The NDP (14% and down 2 points from April) meanwhile, remains mired in third spot, while the Green Party (1%--down 3 points from April) continues on the fringe of Ontario's political parties. Two in ten (19%) indicate that they are either undecided or do not intend to vote—up 10 points from April.

Asked if Ernie Eves and the ruling Progressive Conservatives have improved, worsened or stayed the same over the past few months, one-third (32%) of Ontarians say it has worsened during this time frame compared to 15% who indicate their opinion has improved for a net “negative momentum” of 17 points. In comparison, Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals record a net “positive momentum” of 8 points (improved 20% - worsened 12%) and Howard Hampton and the NDP record a net “positive momentum” increase of 5 points (improved 13% - worsened 8%).

While momentum may not be on their side, the current perception of the party leaders may yield more optimism for the governing Tories: Premier Eves (39%, up 4 points from April) is now viewed by a plurality of Ontarians as the leader that would make the “Best Premier” of Ontario compared with Dalton McGuinty (28%, down 4 points from April, 2003) who now trails the incumbent on this measure (he was at 22% in April, 1999), while Howard Hampton is the choice of 15%, a decline of four points.

Alternately, while a plurality give a nod to Premier Eves as “Best Premier”, Opposition leader Dalton McGuinty still leads, albeit less than our last sounding (55%, down 9 points), as the leader who Ontarians feel would do a good job as Premier, compared to Ernie Eves (49%, down 9 points) and Howard Hampton (40%, down 8 points).

Further, six in ten (59%, down 4 points from April) Ontarians indicate that they feel that it is time for a change in government, compared to just one in three (36%, up 2 points from April) who feel that the Conservatives deserve to be re-elected.

These are the findings of an Ipsos-Reid/CFTO/CFRB/Globe and Mail poll conducted between June 5th and June 11th, 2003. The poll is based on a randomly selected sample of 1,002 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 2001 Census data.

The Ontario Liberals (48%) continue to hold a significant lead over the governing Conservatives (35%) among decided voters in the province while the NDP (14%) remains mired in third spot, with less than half the support of the second place Tories. The Green Party (1%) continues on the fringe of Ontario's political parties. One in five (19%) voters indicate they are undecided or would not vote.

- When only looking at the expressed support of the 81% of Ontarians who indicate they are *absolutely certain* (61%) or *very likely* (20%) to vote in the next election, the overall support levels do not budge. Among this group, the Liberals (48%) continue to lead the Conservatives (35%) and the NDP (14%).
- Among decided voters, Liberal support is strongest in Eastern Ontario (52%) and the City of Toronto (50%), while it is lowest in the Hamilton/Niagara region (44%) and the '905' Belt (41%). Among socio-demographic groups, the Liberals are stronger with young adults (54% versus 44% of middle aged and 45% of older) Ontarians, those with at least

some post-secondary education or a university degree (51% versus 40% with lower levels of education) and among women (51% versus 44% of men).

- Tory support is highest in the '905' Belt (49%) and lowest in Northern Ontario (26%) where they are tied with the NDP in second spot, and in the City of Toronto (25%). Among socio-demographic groups, older (39%) and middle-aged (38%) voters are more likely to support the Conservatives than are young adult voters (29%). Further support is higher among men (40%) than among women (30%), as well as among those from upper income households (39%) compared to lower income households (29%).
- Regionally, the NDP receives its highest level of support among voters in Northern Ontario (26%) where as noted above they are in a second place tie with the Conservatives, and the City of Toronto (21%). Their lowest levels of support are recorded among those in the '905' Belt (8%) and in Eastern Ontario (6%). Support for the NDP is consistent across socio-demographic groups.
- As noted above, one in five (19%) Ontarians say they are undecided or would not vote. The highest level of undecided voters is found in Eastern Ontario (21%), among women (21%), those in lower income households (21%), and among Ontarians with a high school or less education (20%).

When asked if their view of Ernie Eves and the Progressive Conservatives has improved, worsened or stayed the same over the past few months, one-third (32%) of Ontarians say it has worsened during this time frame. This compares to 15% who indicate their opinion has improved for a net “negative momentum” of 17 points.

- The largest net decrease in impression of the Conservatives occurs with in the City of Toronto (net -31 points; improved 14% - worsened 45%), while there lowest net

change (-7 points) occurs among residents of the '905' Belt (improved 18% - worsened 25%).

- Among socio-demographic groups the lowest net change is among Ontarians with a high school or less education (net – nil; improved 22% - worsened 22%), lower income households (net –10; improved 15% - worsened 25%) and younger adults (net –14; improved 14% - worsened 28%). The highest net impression change is found among university graduates (net –35; improved 10% - worsened 45%), Ontarians in upper income households (net –23; improved 14% - worsened 37%) and middle aged Ontarians (net –21; improved 12% - worsened 33%).

In comparison, Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals record a net “positive momentum” impression increase of 8 points (improved 20% - worsened 12%). The Liberals record a net positive impression among all regions and socio-demographic groups.

- Regionally, Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals receive their highest net impression increase in Eastern Ontario (net +18; improved 27% - worsened 9%), while the lowest net impression increase is found among residents of Southwestern Ontario (net +4; improved 15% - worsened 11%), the '905' Belt (net +3; improved 18% - worsened 15%) and in Hamilton / Niagara (net +1; improved 17% - worsened 16%).
- Among socio-demographic groups, the largest net impression increase is among those in middle (net +12; improved 23% - worsened 11%) and lower (net +10; improved 19% - worsened 9%) income households and among young adult Ontarians (net +11; improved 21% - worsened 10%). The smallest net increase is among upper income household (net +4; improved 18% - worsened 14%) and middle aged Ontarians (net +5; improved 18% - worsened 12%).

Howard Hampton and the NDP record a net “positive momentum” impression increase of 5 points (improved 13% - worsened 8%). The NDP record a net positive impression among all regions and socio-demographic groups.

- Regionally, the NDP receive their largest net impression increase within the City of Toronto (net +9; improved 15% - worsened 6%) and in Northern Ontario (net +8; improved 16% - worsened 8%), while their lowest increase is recorded among the residents of Southwestern Ontario (net +3; improved 11% - worsened 8%) and the ‘905’ Belt (net +2; improved 10% - worsened 7%).
- Among socio-demographic groups, the largest net increase is recorded among university graduates (net +11; improved 17% - worsened 6%), while the smallest increase is recorded among those with a high school or less education (net +1; improved 12% - worsened 11%).

As to who would make the Best Premier of Ontario, Premier Eves (39%, up 4 points from April) leads Dalton McGuinty (28%, down 4 points from April) on this measure, while Howard Hampton is the choice of 15%, which is a decline of four points. In total, one in five (18%) indicate that they ‘don’t know’ which leader would make the best Premier.

- Support for Ernie Eves as best Premier is highest in the ‘905’ Belt (51%), and among middle aged (41%) and older (40%) Ontarians, men (44% versus 34% of women), those with a high school or less education (44% versus 36% of university graduates) and residents of upper income households (43% versus 36% of middle income households).
- Support for Dalton McGuinty as the best leader for Premier is highest in Hamilton/Niagara (35%), Southwestern Ontario (32%), Eastern Ontario (32%), and the City of Toronto (30%), while it is lowest in Northern Ontario (19%) and the ‘905’ Belt

(19%). Ontarians with some post-secondary education or a university degree (31%) are more likely than are those with a high school or less education (23%) to hold this position.

- Howard Hampton support as best leader for Premier is highest in his home region of Northern Ontario (29%) while it is lowest in the Southwest (12%), the '905' Belt (12%) and Eastern Ontario (11%). Mr. Hampton receives higher support among university graduates (20%) than among those with less education (13%).
- Mr. Eves retains a much higher proportion of his party's supporters (83% of PC voters), than do Howard Hampton (56% of NDP voters) or Dalton McGuinty (55% of Liberal voters) for the leader that would make the best Premier.

As to how many think each leader would do "a good job" as Premier if their party wins the next election, Dalton McGuinty (55%, down 9 points) leads Ernie Eves (49%, down 9 points) and Howard Hampton (40%, down 8 points).

A majority in each region of the province and socio-demographic group believes that Mr. McGuinty would do a good job as Premier if elected.

- Regionally, Mr. Eves is viewed as able to do a good job as Premier by 62% of those in the '905' Belt compared to just 40% in the City of Toronto. Older (53%) and middle aged (52%) Ontarians are more likely to feel that Mr. Eves would do a good job than do young adult Ontarians (45%). This view is also more likely to be held by men (55%) and by women (44%) and by those from upper (52%) and middle (51%) income households than by those in lower income households (45%).
- As for the view of Mr. Hampton, six in ten (60%) of those in Northern Ontario feel he would do a good job as Premier if elected. This compares to one-third in the '905' Belt (33%) and in Eastern (32%) Ontario.

Six in ten (59%, down 4 points from April) Ontarians indicate that they feel that it is time for a change in government, compared to just one in three (36%, up 2 points from April) who feel that the Conservatives deserve to be re-elected.

- Regionally, residents of the City of Toronto (73%) and Northern Ontario (70%) are the most likely to indicate that it is time for a change, while residents of the '905' Belt (47%) are the least likely. In fact, residents of the '905' Belt are evenly split on this topic with 47%, the highest in the province, who feel the Tories deserve to be re-elected.
- University graduates (64%) and those with some university or other post-secondary education (61%) are more likely than are their counterparts with lower levels of education (52%) to indicate that it is time for a change.
- Women (63%) are also more likely than are men (55%) to hold this position.

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For more information on this news release, please contact:

***John Wright
Senior Vice-President
Ipsos-Reid Public Affairs
(416) 324-2900***

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