

Ontario Politics: Tory lead likely safe with Elliott or Mulroney at the helm, more risk with Ford

Those considering – but not committed to – the PCPO would be more turned off by Doug Ford as leader

March 8, 2018 – The [chaos and scandal](#) that have rocked the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario over the last six weeks appear to have done little damage to the party's electoral fortunes, but a new public opinion poll from the Angus Reid Institute shows that could change, depending on the outcome of this weekend's leadership vote.

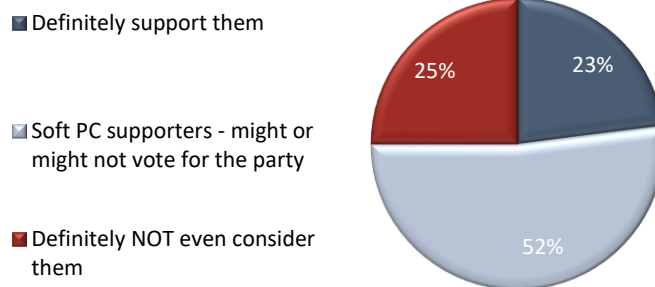
Two of the people running to replace former leader Patrick Brown – Christine Elliott and Caroline Mulroney – seem well-positioned to maintain the party's lead before the scheduled June election, but a third – Doug Ford – could send would-be Tory voters running for another party, or keep them on their couches come election day.

Ford is a polarizing figure, beloved by many in the party's base, but strongly disliked by many outside it. While Ontarians overall are more likely to have a favourable than unfavourable view of Elliott and Mulroney, nearly twice as many have an unfavourable view of Ford (51%) as have a favourable one (27%).

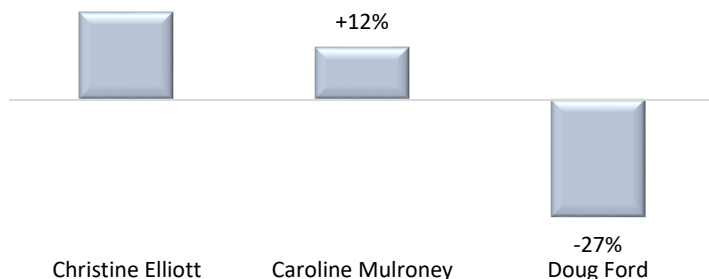
This dynamic could extend to vote intention as well. Both Elliott and Mulroney would inspire more Ontarians to vote for the party than they would drive away, while Ford would discourage double the number he would encourage to support the Progressive Conservatives if he became leader (42% versus 19%, respectively).

More Key Findings:

How likely is it that you yourself would consider supporting the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario in a future provincial election?



Total impact on soft-voter likelihood to support PCPO if each person were leader (more likely minus less likely)



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from March 6 - 7 among a representative randomized sample of 807 adult Ontario residents who are members of the [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 3.4 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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- Fully half (50%) of decided and leaning voters say they plan to support the Progressive Conservatives in June, compared to 24 per cent who favour the governing Liberals and 22 per cent who would cast their ballots for the Ontario New Democratic Party
- Among those on the fence about supporting the PCPO, Ford's influence is decidedly negative. Half (48%) of those who say they would "certainly consider" voting PC in the upcoming election say Ford would make them less likely to vote for the party
- Elliott and Mulroney fare better with those still making up their minds about whether to vote Progressive Conservative. Elliott is the candidate viewed most favourably by those ages 55 and older, while Mulroney is viewed most favourably by those ages 18-34.

INDEX:

- **The Progressive Conservative Universe**
- **Elliott appealing to party establishment**
- **Would Ford put the party's hold on soft voters at risk?**
- **Mulroney holds greater appeal to young Ontarians**

The Progressive Conservative Universe

Even after former leader Patrick Brown resigned in late January amid [allegations of sexual misconduct](#), polls have [consistently shown](#) the Ontario Progressive Conservatives poised to retake Queen's Park for the first time in 15 years.

Vote intention numbers don't tell the whole story, however. For one thing, more than a quarter of the electorate (27%) is undecided about how it will vote in June. For another, even those expressing a preference today could change their minds as the campaign unfolds.

As it [has done previously](#), the Angus Reid Institute asked Ontario residents to describe their willingness to consider each party as a way of approximating the upper and lower limits of each party's support.

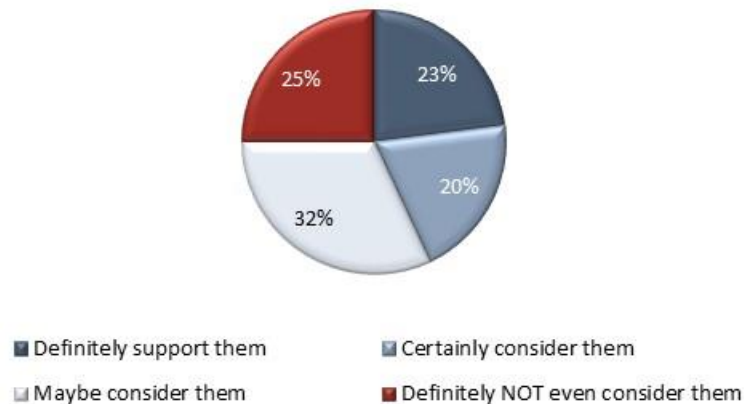
By this measure, three-quarters of Ontarians (75%) say they are open to considering the Progressive Conservative Party in the upcoming election. The rest (25%), say they will definitely not consider the party.

That said, fewer than one-in-four (23%) say they will "definitely support" the PCs, while the rest will either "certainly consider" or "maybe consider" them, as seen in the graph that follows:

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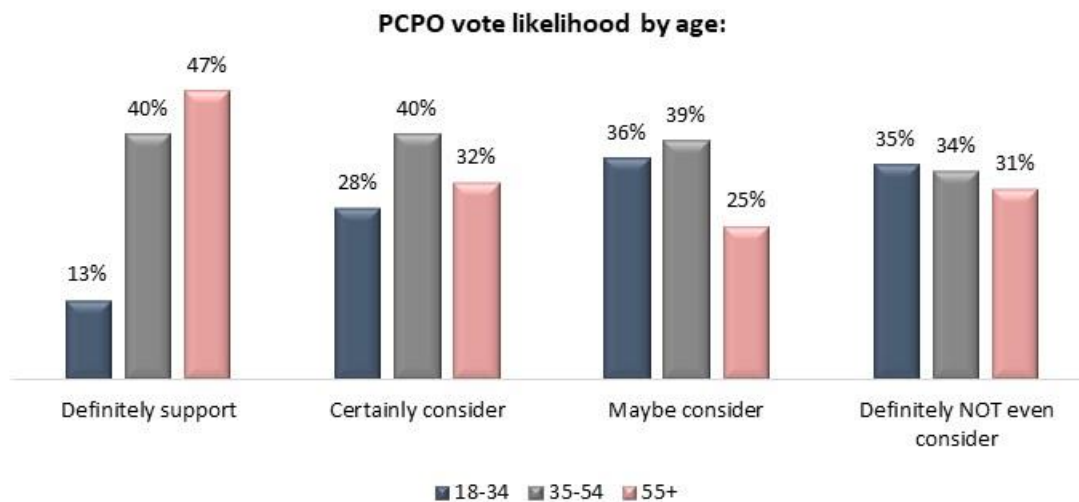
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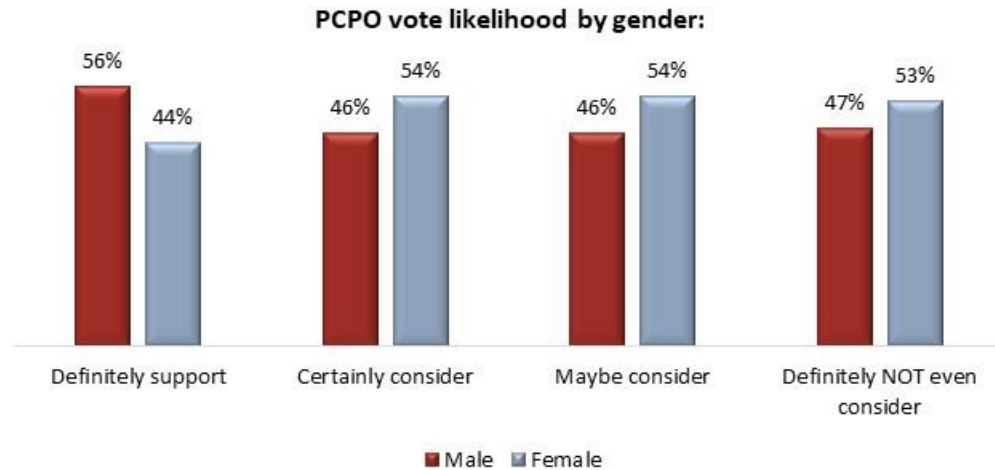
How likely is it that you yourself would consider supporting each of these parties in a future provincial election?



Those who say they will definitely support the party could be described as the Progressive Conservative base, while those who say they would consider the party – but are less-than-certain that they will support it – could be described as “soft” Progressive Conservatives.

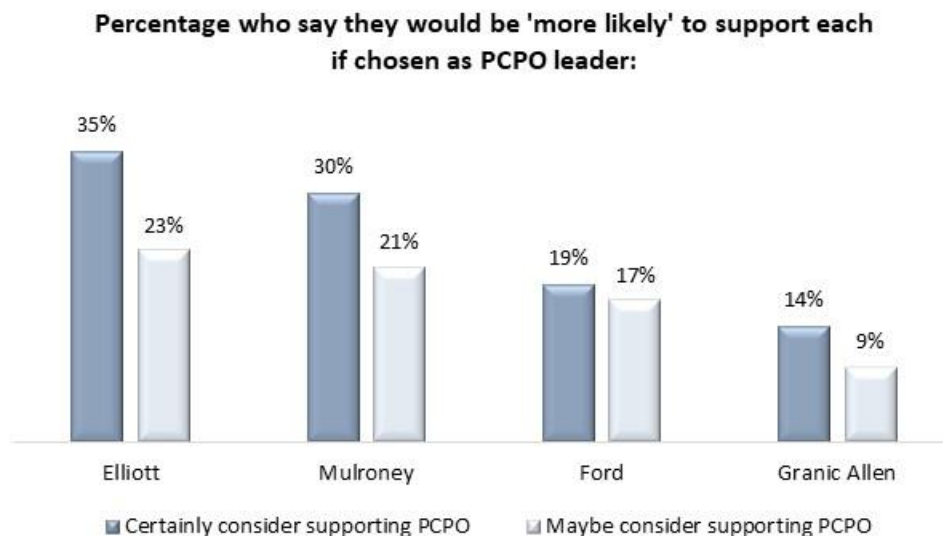
As seen in the following graphs, the base includes more men and older Ontarians, while the party’s soft support groups include more women and younger respondents:





So, which of the leadership candidates is most likely to appeal to those soft Progressive Conservatives who are still making up their minds about whether to vote for the party in June?

Elliott and Mulroney lead the way, while Ford and longshot candidate Tanya Granic Allen are less inspiring to those on the fence:

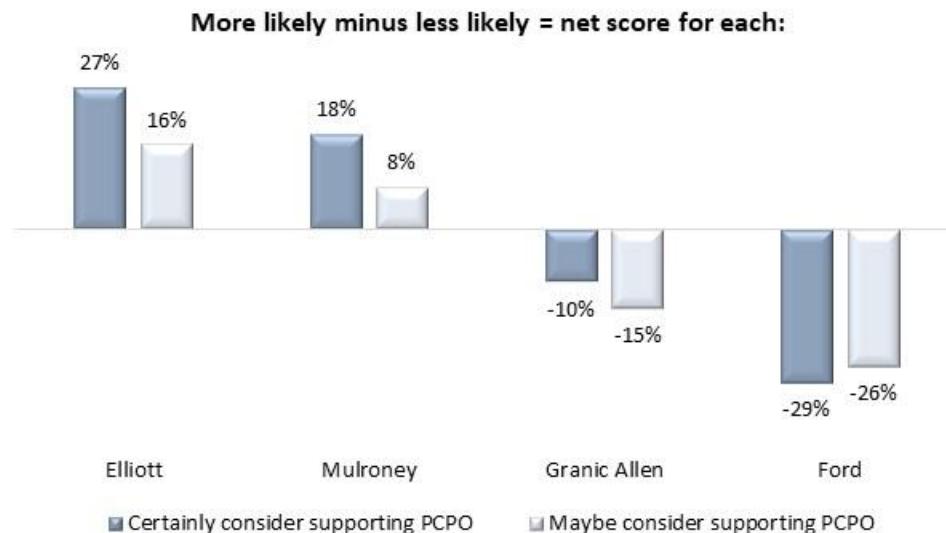


The differences between candidates become even more pronounced when those who say a given candidate would make them less likely to vote for the party are factored in. Subtracting the percentage who say “less likely” from the percentage who say “more likely” yields a net likelihood score. Positive scores suggest a candidate would move more people into the Tory camp than he or she would move out of it, while negative scores suggest the opposite.

While Elliott and Mulroney post positive – if relatively low – scores, Ford’s is overwhelmingly negative, suggesting that he would pose a challenge to the party maintaining a large tent if he became leader.

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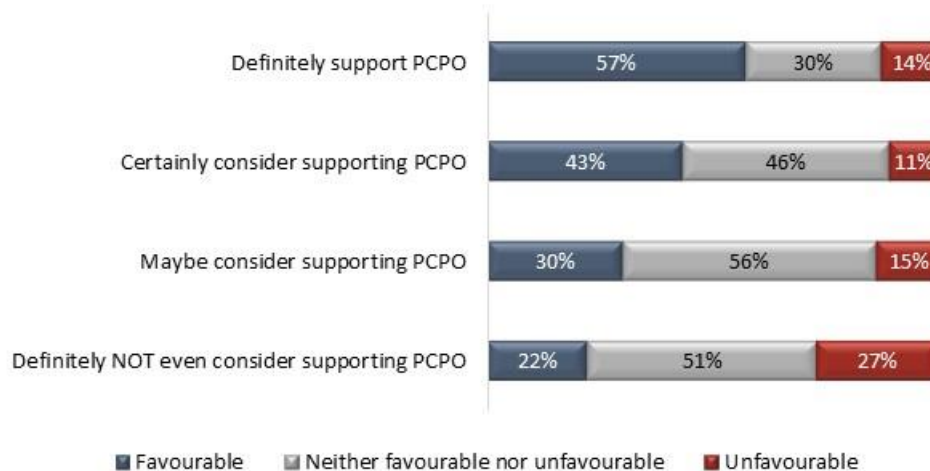
Elliott appealing to party establishment

A former MLA and two-time PCPO leadership candidate, Christine Elliott is easily the most experienced person running to replace Brown. She is a familiar face in the world of Ontario politics and the PCPO.

Whether or not this makes her the frontrunner, it certainly seems to endear her to the PC base. Asked whether they have a favourable or unfavourable opinion of each leadership candidate, 57 per cent of those who will “definitely support” the Tories in June have a favourable opinion of Elliott, including one-in-three (32%) who have a “very favourable” opinion of her. These numbers are better than those of any other candidate.

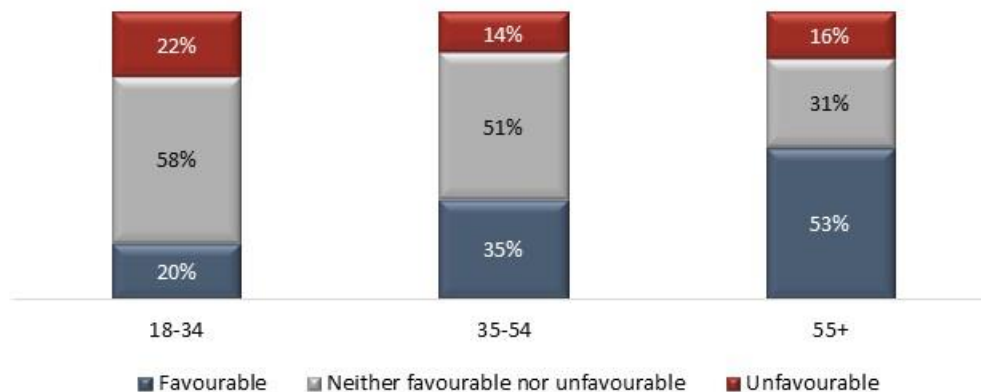
Elliott’s appeal extends to soft Progressive Conservatives, as well, with at least three-in-ten of the certainly and maybe groups expressing a favourable opinion of her, as seen in the graph that follows.

Would you say you have a favourable or unfavourable opinion of Christine Elliott?



Likewise, more than half of all Ontarians in the 55-plus age group have a favourable opinion of Elliott (53% do). Given this demographic's propensity to turn out at a higher rate than other age groups, Elliott's appeal to them could prove to be an advantage.

Opinion of Christine Elliott by age:

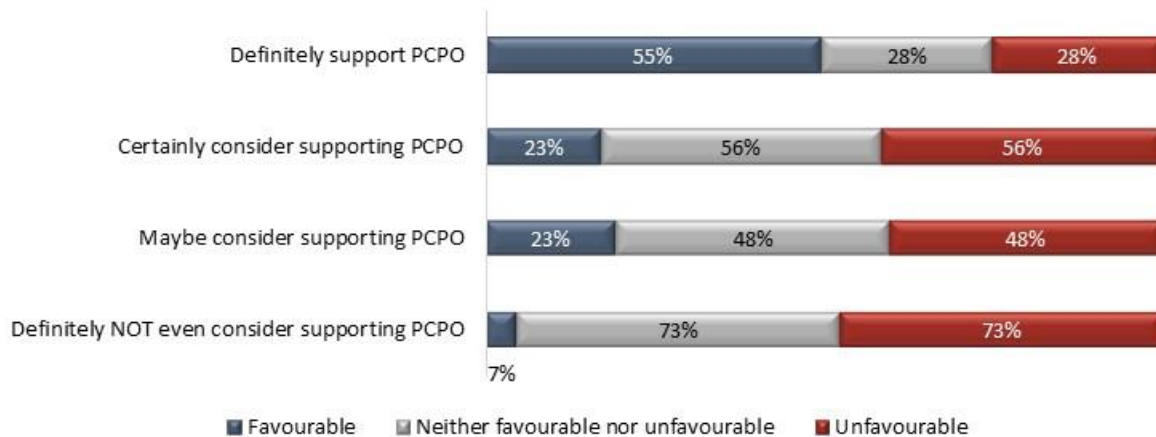


Would Ford put the party's hold on soft voters at risk?

The brother of the late Toronto mayor Rob Ford and a former mayoral candidate himself, Doug Ford is hardly a political neophyte. Like Elliott, he is viewed favourably by a majority of the Progressive Conservative base, though roughly twice as many in this group have an unfavourable opinion of him as have an unfavourable opinion of her.

Where Ford's polarizing nature becomes a disadvantage is among those still deciding whether to support the PCPO in the upcoming election. A full majority of those who say they will "certainly consider" the party have a negative impression of Ford, and nearly as many in the "maybe consider" group say the same.

Would you say you have a favourable or unfavourable opinion of Doug Ford?

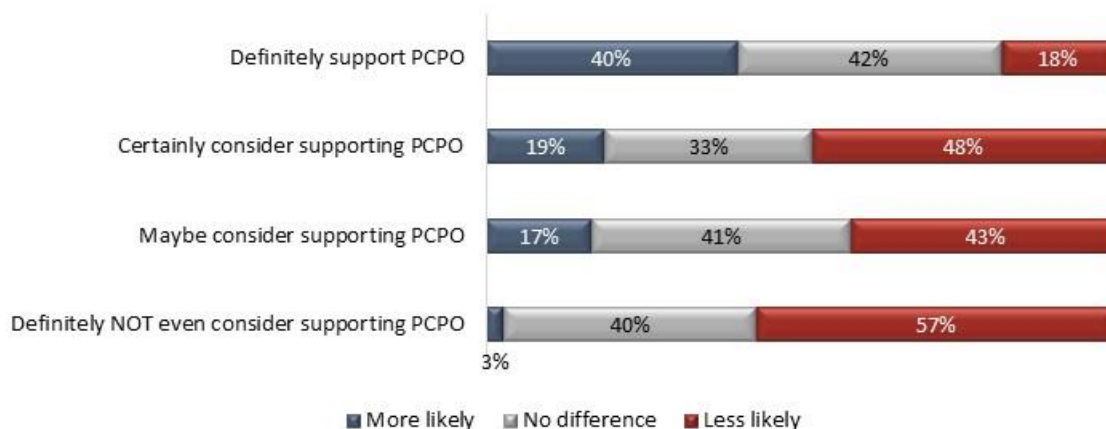


The same pattern can be seen in respondents' likelihood to vote for the party with Ford as leader. Four-in-ten of those who are already in the party fold say his leadership would make them more likely to vote for the party – suggesting that he would energize the base.

Ford would also energize those outside the base, however, and not in the Tories' favour. Just as those already planning to vote for the party say they'd be more likely to do so if Ford were leader, those who will definitely not even consider the party say they'd be even less likely to do so with Ford at the helm.

The middle groups, as previously mentioned, are much more likely to be driven away from the party by Ford than to be driven toward it.

Would Doug Ford as PCPO leader make you more or less likely to support the party?

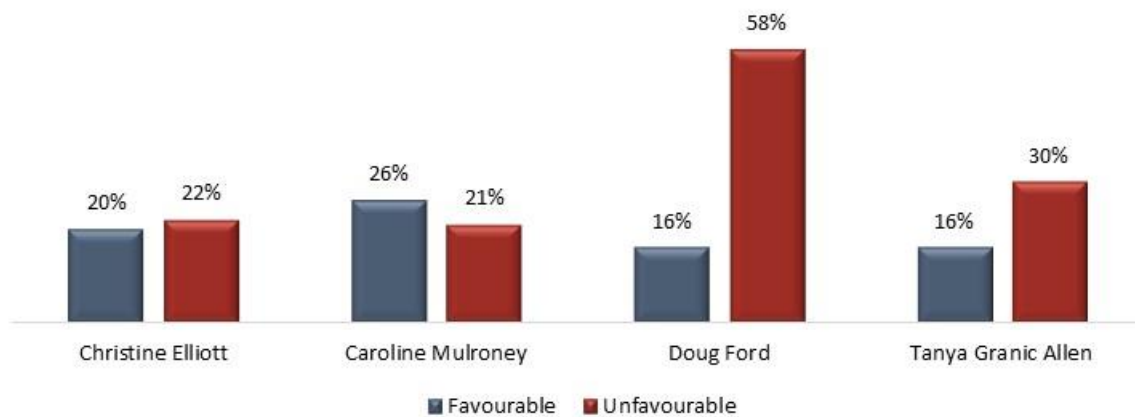


Mulroney holds greater appeal to young Ontarians

While both Elliott and Ford fare better with older Ontario residents than younger ones, first-time MLA-candidate Caroline Mulroney – daughter of former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney – is more popular with those under age 35 than her rivals.

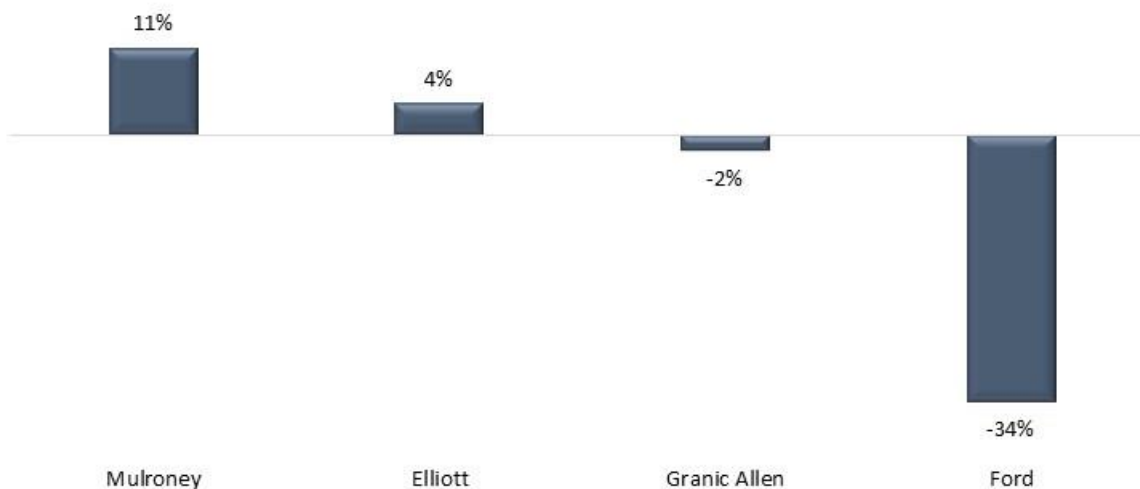
Mulroney is the only leadership candidate more 18-34-year-olds view favourably than unfavourably, as seen in the graph that follows.

**Would you say you have a favourable or unfavourable opinion of each one?
(responses from those ages 18-34 shown)**



Likewise, Mulroney has a higher net likelihood score among 18-34-year-olds than the other candidates:

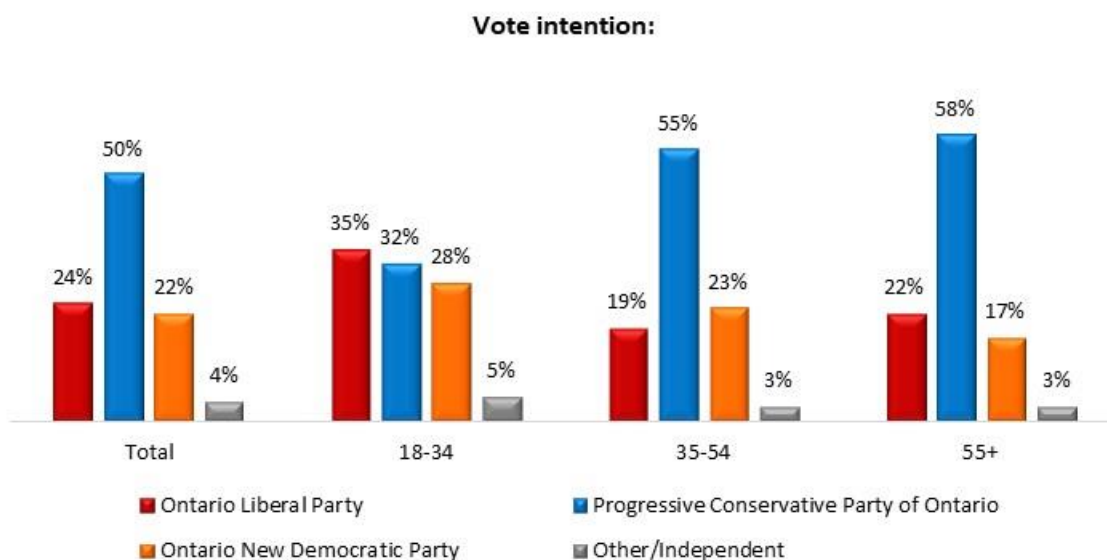
More likely minus less likely = net score for each among 18 - 34 group:



It's unclear what sort of advantage, if any, this strength among younger Ontarians might provide for Mulroney.

On one hand, it could signal an ability to draw in new supporters not typically inclined to vote for the Progressive Conservative Party. On the other, it could merely reflect that Mulroney is more palatable to a group that isn't likely to vote for the PCs in significant numbers anyway.

Consider the vote intention numbers recorded in this poll. While the Tories are running away with decided and leaning voters ages 35 and over, the race is nearly a three-way tie among 18-34-year-olds:



Would choosing Mulroney as leader move these numbers in the PCPO's favour? Maybe. Maybe not. Given the size of the PC lead, it likely wouldn't make much difference in the outcome of the election, either way.

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here.](#)

For detailed results by likelihood of conservative support, [click here.](#)

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