

## Ontario Spotlight: As COVID-19 cases climb, can the Ford government maintain the political goodwill it's earned?

*Ontario residents broadly approve of how their government is addressing COVID-19 and the economy*

**September 18, 2020** – Premier Doug Ford's marked change in tone has been a significant undercurrent in the story of the Ontario government's handling of the coronavirus pandemic.

The switch in approach from stridently partisan to universally comforting has not only elevated his own personal approval levels, but also the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario's electoral fortunes as it passes the mid-way point of its term.

New data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds that 45 per cent of Ontario residents say they would cast their ballot for Ford's party, an increase from the 36 per cent who said the same in February of this year.

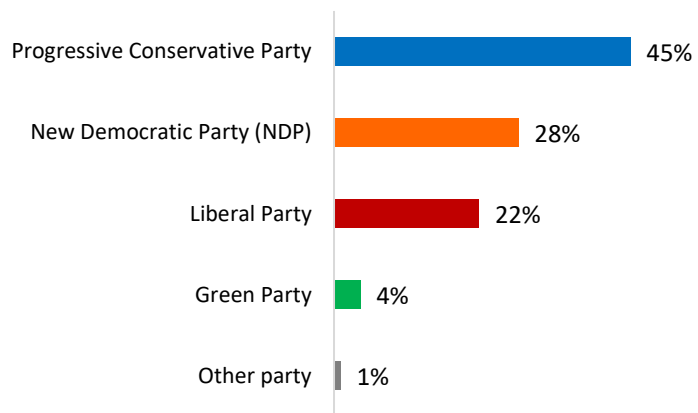
It is a change in political fortunes considering that only one year ago, then federal Conservative leader Andrew Scheer found it politically safer [to avoid campaigning alongside Ford](#) out of fear it would diminish his electoral hopes in Ontario.

Beyond Ford's personal popularity and response to the pandemic, his government is also boosted by strong performance reviews in two of the other areas of governance that matter most to Ontarians: the economy and health care.

### More Key Findings:

- Premier Ford's approval rating is solid even amongst those who voted for other parties in the last provincial election: 43 per cent of those who voted for the NDP approve of him, as do majorities of those who voted for the Liberal Party (59%) and the Green Party (54%).
- The PCPO maintains the support of half of residents outside the City of Toronto. The city itself, on the other hand, appears to be a potential battleground, with the same number saying they would vote for the PCPO (35%) and the NDP (34%) if an election were held tomorrow.

### Vote intention in Ontario (Decided voters, n=925)



### METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from August 26 – September 1, 2020 among a representative randomized sample of 1,026 Ontario adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 3 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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**About ARI**

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.

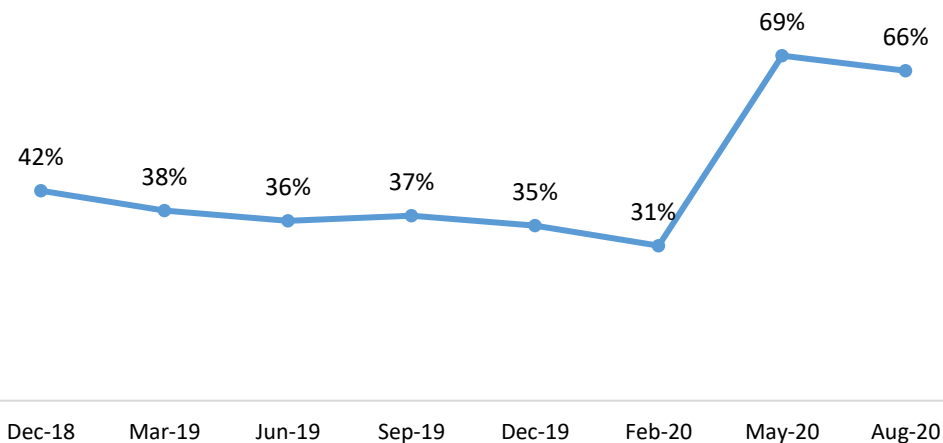
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**Vote Intention**

After the coronavirus outbreak in Canada in the beginning of March, nearly all provincial leaders and the prime minister received a boost in their job performance approval as they reacted to the pandemic. Notably, however, few have been able to sustain this increased popularity to the extent Doug Ford has:

**Approval of Ontario Premier Doug Ford**

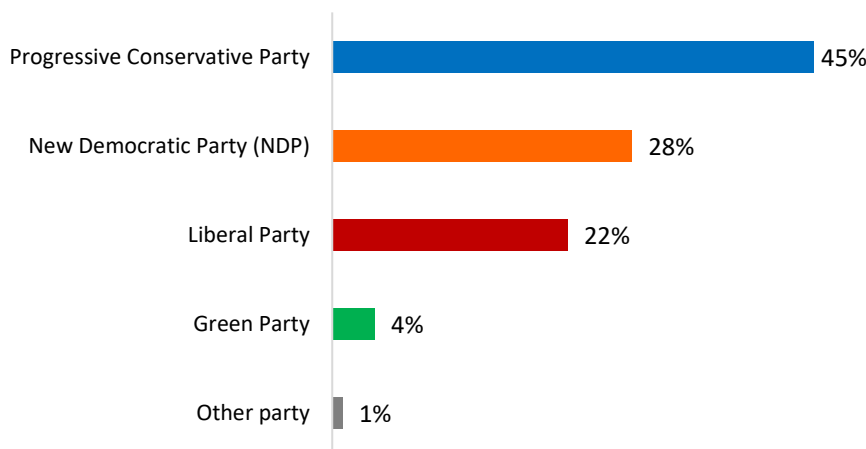


Not only has Ford found considerable popularity in his third year as premier – his party’s political fortunes have also improved. If an election were held today, 45 per cent of Ontario residents say they would vote for the incumbent party; this represents a 17-point advantage over the second place NDP:

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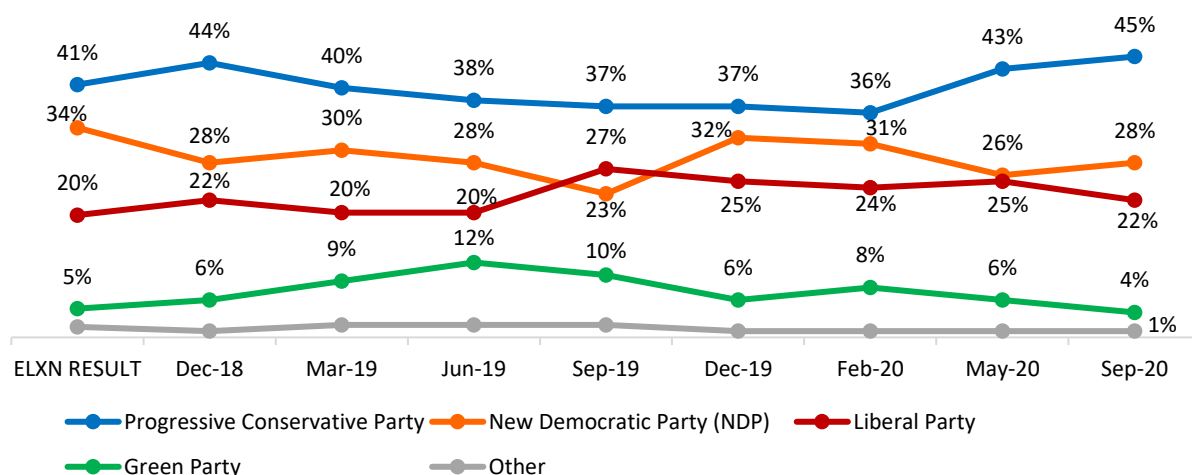
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### Vote intention in Ontario (Decided voters, n=925)



While not a dramatic improvement from the previous election, this reflects an upward trend in support since early 2020, when roughly one-in-three Ontario residents (36%) would have supported the PCPO in an election.

### Vote intent in Ontario over time (Decided voters)



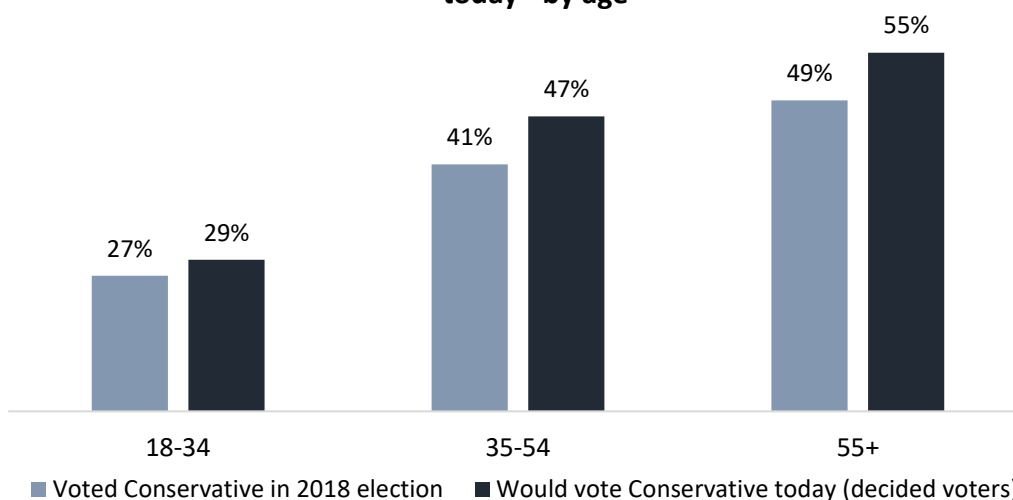
In addition to maintaining the vast majority of its base – 93 per cent of those who supported the PCPO in 2018 say they would do so again – the party has also won support from those that previously voted for other parties. Roughly one-in-ten of those who voted for the NDP (9%) or the Liberals (14%) in the 2018 provincial election say they would vote for the PCPO today ([see detailed tables](#)).

Looking at this by age, the PCPO doesn't seem to have gained much ground with younger voters, instead, the party has built on its existing popularity with those aged 35-54 as well as those 55 and over.

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Share of votes in 2018 provincial election vs decided voters today - by age

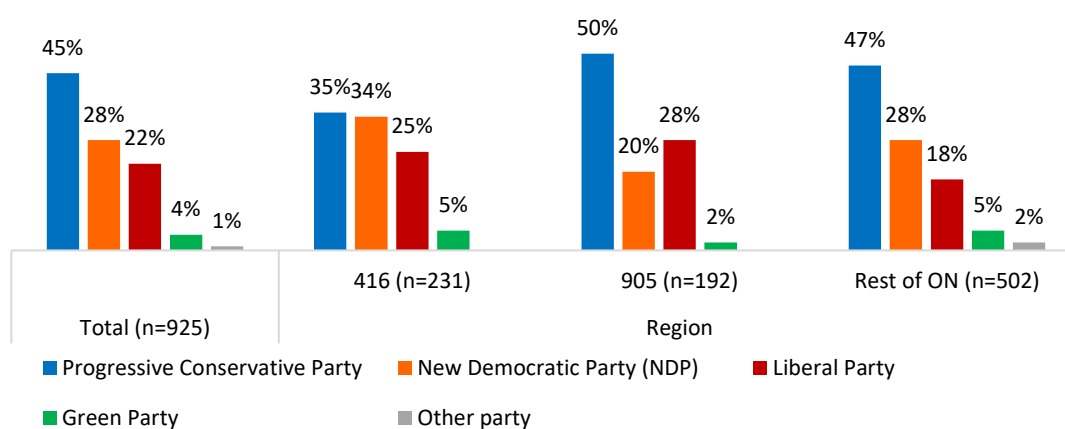


Though the improving popularity of the premier and his party is relatively recent, the PCPO is also benefitting from a longer-running phenomenon – vote splitting between its two main contenders. Both the NDP (28%) and the Liberal Party (22%) garner considerable support, dividing half of the population in the province. Andrea Horwath’s opposition New Democrats perform particularly well with younger voters:

Vote Intention in Ontario by age (Decided voters)						
	Total (n=925)	Age			Gender	
		18-34 (n=258)	35-54 (n=331)	55+ (n=336)	Male (n=448)	Female (n=473)
Progressive Conservative Party	45%	29%	47%	55%	48%	42%
New Democratic Party (NDP)	28%	43%	26%	18%	26%	29%
Liberal Party	22%	22%	22%	22%	21%	23%
Green Party	4%	5%	4%	4%	3%	6%
Other party	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	0%

Regionally, the PCPO maintains the support of half of residents outside the City of Toronto. Within the city, however, the party is locked in a statistical tie with the NDP:

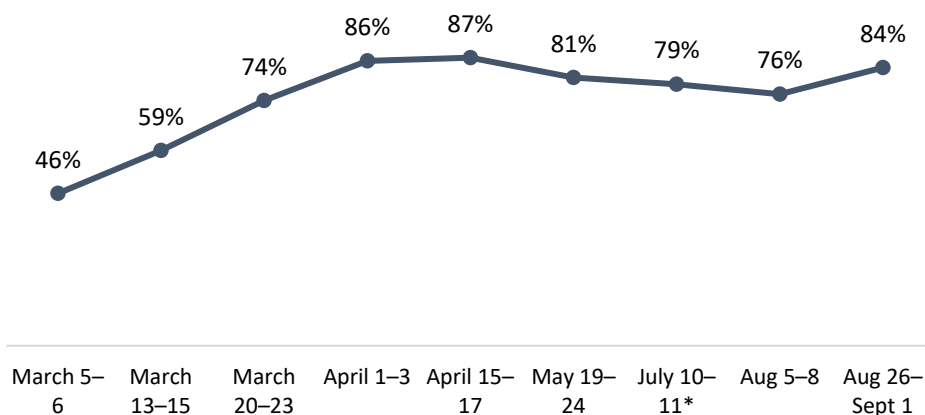
### Vote intention in Ontario by region (Decided voters)



### Government performance on key issues

What looks to be the single most important factor in the rising political fortunes of the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party is a very favourable perception regarding how the current government has handled the COVID-19 outbreak. Though Ontario was [among the most affected regions in Canada](#), Ford and his government were seen to be responding with competence and [providing honest yet reassuring messaging to the public](#). Media outlets repeatedly referred to the premier as the [‘new’ Doug Ford](#), noting his shift in attitude. Approval on this file has varied, but remained consistently among the highest in the country since late March:

### Percentage of Ontario residents saying their provincial government has done a 'good job' handling COVID-19



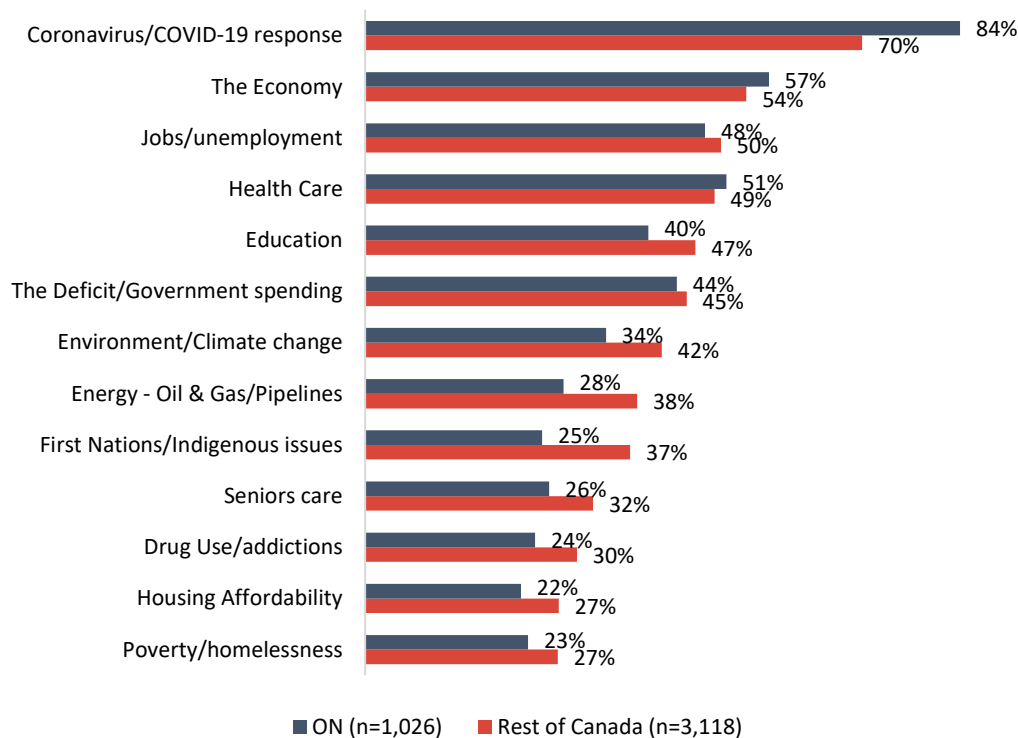
\*% represents response for “your provincial premier”

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Other areas of management receive more mixed reviews. Majorities say Ford's government has done a good job handling the economy and health care, but it falls below the national average on key items such as education (40%), climate change (34%), and seniors care (26%).

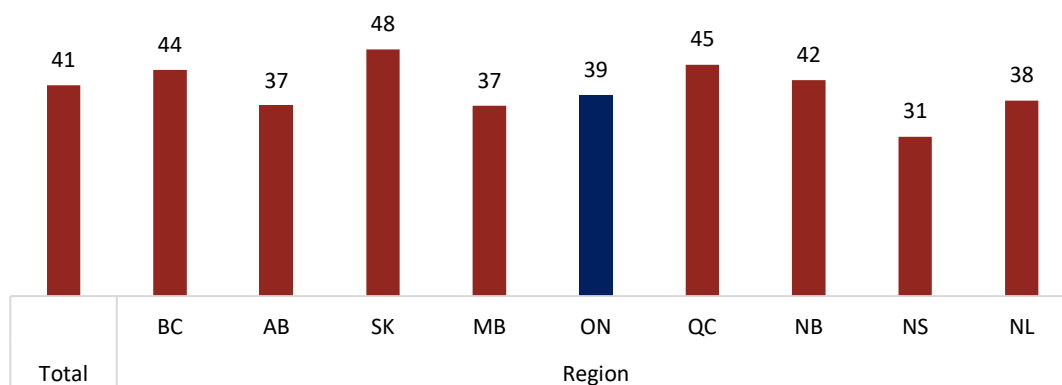
### Ontario government performance vs. Rest of Canada



### Overall government performance score

Using the Angus Reid Institute's 'Government Performance Index', one can see that the Ontario government falls just below the national average in overall satisfaction.

### Overall government performance rating



**Note on methodology: Provincial Government Performance Score**

This score is the average percentage of Canadians saying the government is doing a 'good job' or 'very good job' across 13 different issues.

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