

Ontario Election: Voter antipathy sets up strategic voting face-off between Conservatives & NDP

Ontario PCs retain strongest, most committed base as left-of-centre voters flee Liberal Party

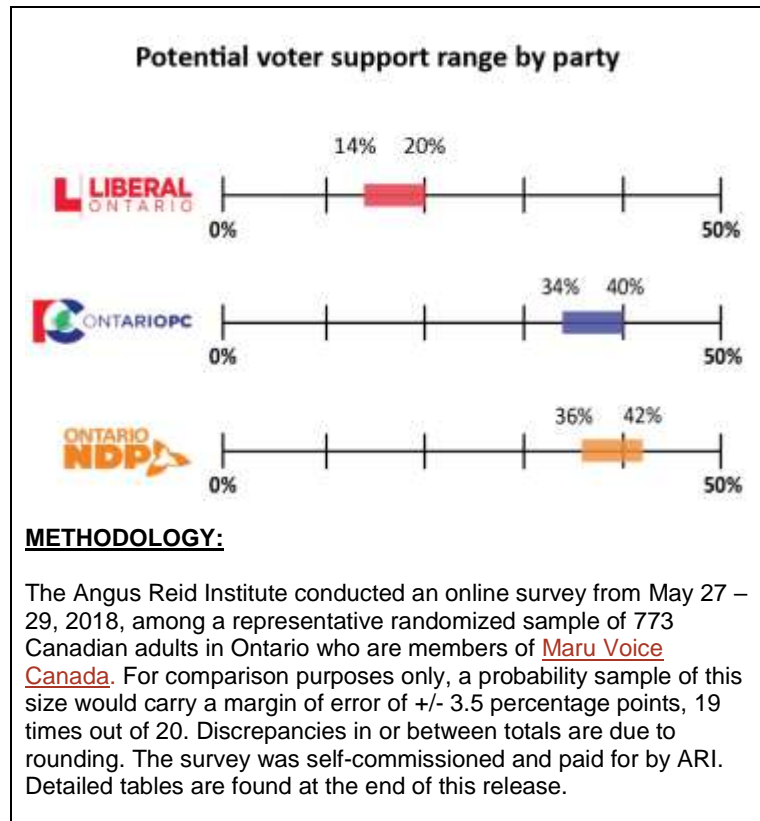
May 30, 2018 – As fully half (50%) of decided Ontario voters declare their choice is based not on the party they support, but the one they wish to block, this final week of the Ontario election campaign continues to underscore a collapse of Liberal support, while people look either to Andrea Horwath's NDP or Doug Ford's Progressive Conservatives as palatable, but not necessarily inspiring options.

The latest polling from the Angus Reid Institute shows the Ontario PCs and NDP in a statistical tie at 37 and 39 per cent respectively. But it is the NDP that appears to continue carrying the advantage into the home stretch. The party – and Horwath – are better positioned on key questions of which leader would make best premier, which party is the second choice of voters, and which party the electorate could never support.

That said, while Ford's own momentum trails his party's – the Conservatives retain a narrow advantage on best party to form government.

More Key Findings:

- Vote intention varies significantly by age, with those under 45 much more likely to favour the NDP (but historically less likely to actually turn out and vote) and those 45 and older preferring the PCs
- The strength of the NDP comes at the expense of the governing Ontario Liberal Party, which sees a whopping 45 per cent of those who supported it in the 2014 election now preferring the New Democrats
- The Progressive Conservatives have retained more of their 2014 voters than either the Liberals or NDP. They also enjoy the largest share of voters who are "absolutely certain" about which party they will support.



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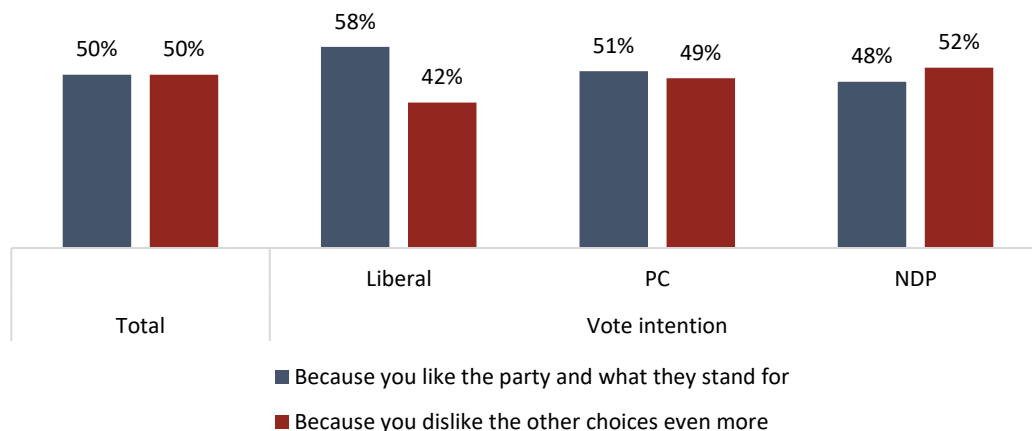
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- **Momentum favours NDP, but PCs seen as best government**
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Strategic voting a key consideration for many

In a sign of what could well be a “hold your nose and vote” election, many Ontarians say they will be making their ballot box decision based on which party they dislike the least, rather than the one whose policies and ideas most resonate with them.

Even a substantial block of people who plan to vote for Kathleen Wynne and the governing Liberals say they plan to do so not out of a belief in the existing government and what it stands for, but out of a distaste for the available alternatives:

Thinking about the party you are supporting in this election, overall, would you say you are supporting them ...



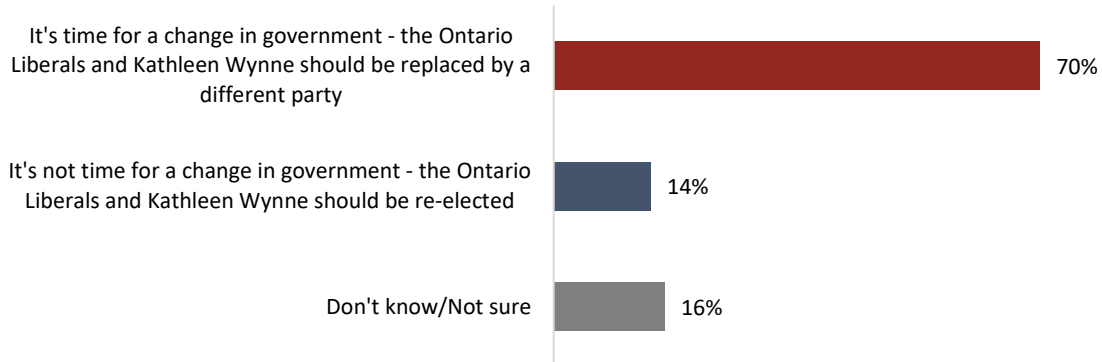
What’s behind this widespread intention to vote strategically? One key factor is the Ontario electorate’s desire for change.

After more than 14 years of government by the Ontario Liberal Party, residents of Canada’s largest province are looking for something new. More than twice as many say the province is on the wrong track (51%) as say it’s on the right one (21%), and an overwhelming seven-in-ten say “it’s time for a change in government.”

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Which of the following two statements best reflects how you feel today?



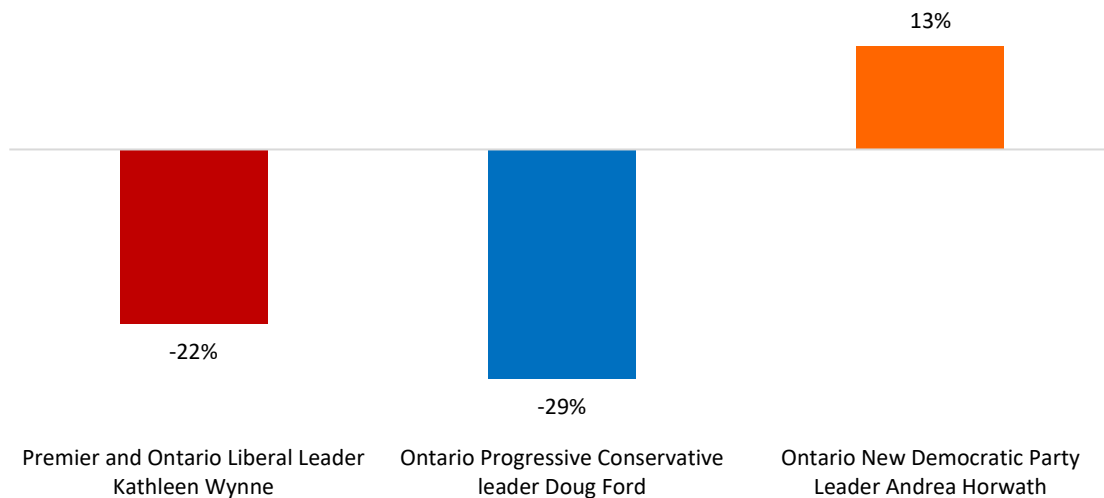
Frustration with the Liberal government has been apparent for months. Wynne has consistently been Canada's [least popular premier](#) in Angus Reid Institute polling, and not long ago [an ARI poll](#) found the (then-leaderless) Progressive Conservative Party was the preferred choice of fully half (50%) of Ontario residents.

Momentum favours NDP, but PCs seen as best government

The surging popularity of Andrea Horwath and the Ontario NDP is a fairly recent phenomenon, however. Asked whether their opinion of each of the party leaders has improved or worsened over the last few weeks, Ontarians are more likely to say worsened than improved for Ford and Wynne.

Horwath's advantage on this question becomes readily apparent when looking at "momentum scores" – a metric arrived at by subtracting the percentage who say their opinion of a leader has worsened from the percentage who say it has improved.

Momentum score (improved minus worsened)

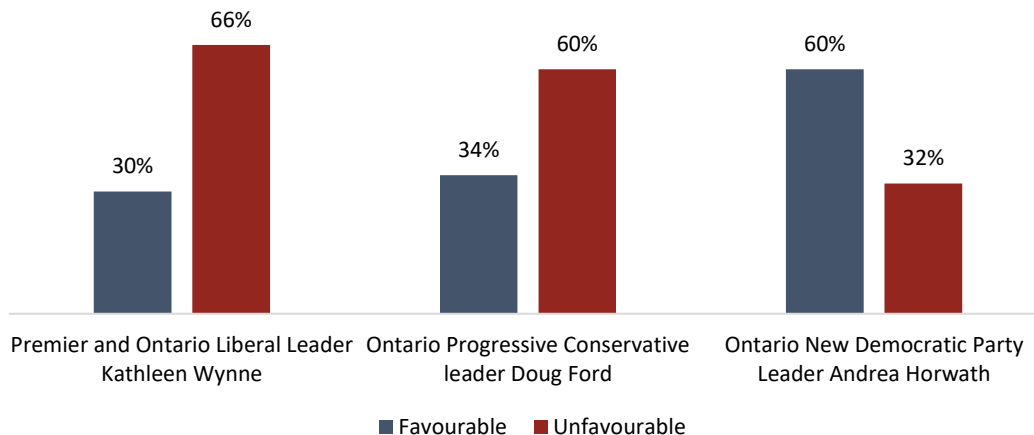


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But beyond Horwath's increasing momentum is another telling sign: Ford is seen almost as unfavourably as Kathleen Wynne, whose approval levels as premier cratered to near single digits in the last year of her term, and who is viewed unfavourably by two-thirds of respondents in this poll.

Regardless of how you intend to vote in this election, please indicate whether you have an overall favourable or unfavourable opinion of each of the following people:

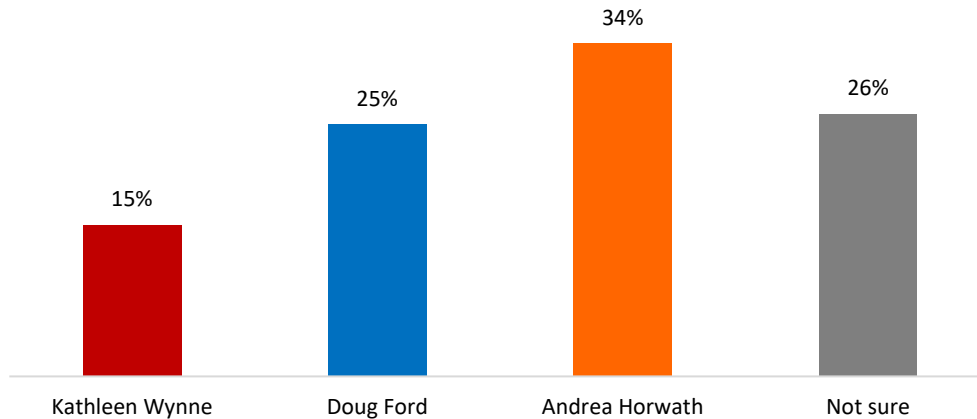


This liability is not news to the Ford campaign. The first signs of this were visible in Angus Reid Institute polling even before the Ontario Conservative leadership race following the surprise resignation of Patrick Brown. At the time, soft and leaning Conservative voters expressed far more doubt about their ability to vote Conservative with Ford at the helm than main rival Christine Elliott.

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

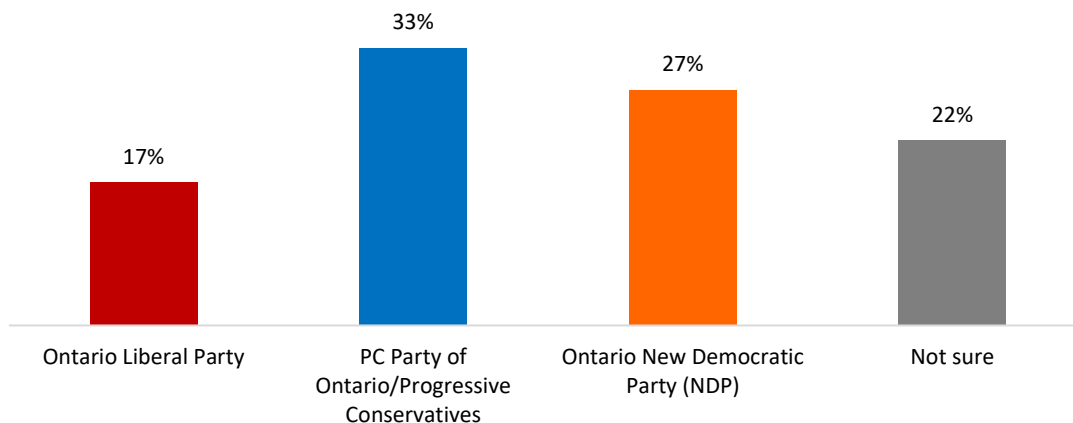
The NDP leader also has the advantage on the question of which party leader would make the best premier. One-in-three respondents choose Horwath on this measure, while one-in-four choose Ford (25%). Perhaps tellingly, an additional one-in-four (26%) are unsure:

Setting aside your party preference for a moment, which of the major Ontario party leaders do you think would be the best Premier of Ontario?



Notably, when asked which party would provide the best government, Ontarians are more likely to favour the PCs than the New Democrats.

Regardless of your views of the individual party leaders, which of the major political parties do you think would be able to provide the best overall government for Ontario?

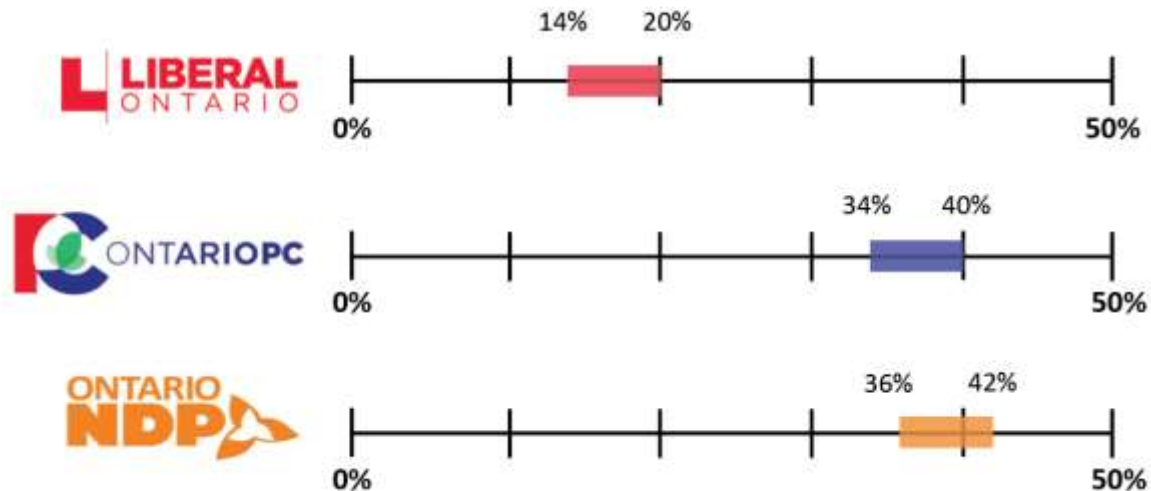


The choice: Liberal collapse sets up tight race

When ballots are counted in Ontario on the evening of June 7, one thing looks increasingly certain: The Ontario Liberals will not be the party with the most votes.

This poll finds just under one-in-five decided and leaning voters (17%) in Ontario saying they plan to vote for the party that has been in power for more than a decade. Twice that many choose either the PCs (37%) or the NDP (39%), for the overall vote intention landscape seen in the following graph:

Potential voter support range by party

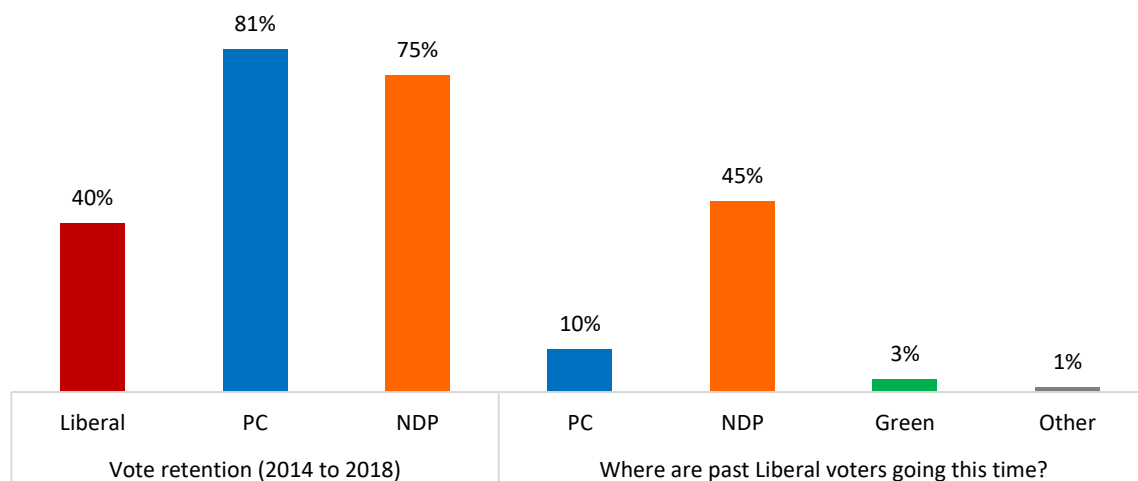


In 2014, the Ontario Liberals received roughly 39 per cent of the vote, so where has their support gone this time around?

Some four-in-ten who cast ballots for the party in 2014 plan to do so again. The rest are planning to vote for some other party, with 45 per cent of past Ontario Liberal voters planning to support the New Democrats this time. Another one-in-ten plan to vote for the PCs.

As seen in the following graph, the Ontario Liberals' voter retention is roughly half that of the other two major parties:

Past Ontario Liberal supporters are leaving *en masse*, mostly for the NDP:

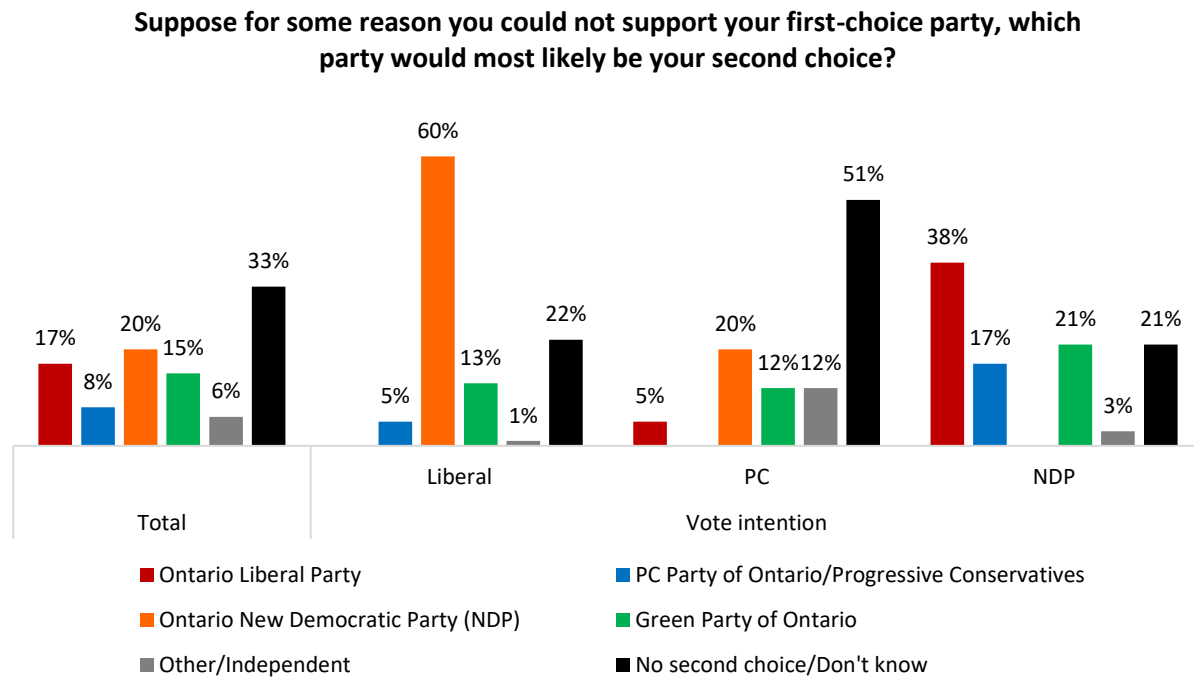


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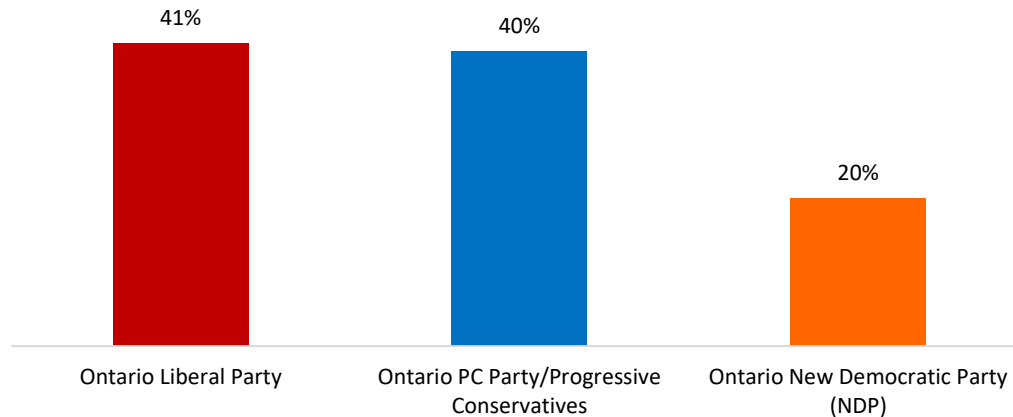
This trend toward the NDP can also be seen in voters' second choices. More people list the NDP as a second choice than any other party, including 20 per cent of all decided and leaning voters, and fully six-in-ten (60%) who say they're currently planning on voting for Wynne and the Liberals.

Indeed, even one-in-five PC supporters list the NDP as their second choice. That's four times as many as choose the Liberals, though it should be noted that would-be PC voters are less likely than supporters of other parties to have a second choice, as seen in the following graph:



Similarly, the NDP is the party with the largest number of voters available to it. Some four-in-ten Ontarians say they could never vote for the Liberals in this election, and a similar number say they could never vote for the Progressive Conservatives. The group who could never support the NDP is considerably smaller, as seen in the graph that follows.

Is there a party you feel you could never support in this upcoming Ontario election?



The regional story: PCs hold advantage in suburban Toronto

While the NDP may have a slight advantage in overall vote intention, elections are decided at the riding level, not by the popular vote.

This poll finds the Progressive Conservatives leading slightly in the riding-rich 905 area code of the Greater Toronto Area, and leading by a large margin in Eastern Ontario.

The NDP's support is higher in central Toronto, the Hamilton-Niagara region, and in Northern Ontario. The following table shows vote intention by region. (Note the small sample sizes in many areas.)

| Vote intention by region | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------------------|-------------|-----------------|
| Party | Total (660) | Region | | | | | |
| | | 416 (128) | 905 (164) | East (102) | Hamilton/Niagara (83*) | North (35*) | Southwest (149) |
| Ontario Liberal Party | 17% | 24% | 20% | 21% | 11% | 9% | 10% |
| PC Party of Ontario | 37% | 28% | 38% | 43% | 35% | 29% | 41% |
| Ontario NDP | 39% | 40% | 36% | 30% | 50% | 54% | 40% |
| Green Party of Ontario | 5% | 7% | 3% | 5% | 4% | 5% | 7% |
| Other | 2% | -- | 2% | 2% | -- | 3% | 3% |

*small sample size

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Another potential advantage for the PC party? Their base is more committed than the NDP's. Looking at vote intention by a respondent's self-described propensity to vote shows a full majority (55%) of those who say they are "absolutely certain" about which party they will choose plan to vote for the PCs.

Those who say they are "fairly certain" or less so skew overwhelmingly toward the NDP, as seen in the following table:

| Vote intention by certainty | | | | |
|------------------------------------|-------|--------------------|----------------|---------------------------------|
| Party | Total | Certainty | | |
| | | Absolutely certain | Fairly certain | Less certain/Not at all certain |
| Ontario Liberal Party | 17% | 16% | 18% | 19% |
| PC Party of Ontario | 37% | 55% | 25% | 21% |
| Ontario NDP | 39% | 27% | 49% | 45% |
| Green Party of Ontario | 5% | 1% | 5% | 13% |
| Other | 2% | 0% | 2% | 2% |

Likewise, the PC base tends to be older than the NDP's, a fact that works to the PCs' advantage, given the well-documented propensity of older generations to vote in higher numbers than younger ones.

As seen in the following table, the New Democrats lead among Ontarians under age 45, while the Progressive Conservatives lead among those ages 45 and older:

| Vote intention by age | | | | | | |
|------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|
| Party | Total | Age | | | | |
| | | 18-34 | 35-44 | 45-54 | 55-64 | 65+ |
| Ontario Liberal Party | 17% | 19% | 10% | 11% | 19% | 24% |
| PC Party of Ontario | 37% | 28% | 30% | 44% | 39% | 41% |
| Ontario NDP | 39% | 46% | 49% | 36% | 36% | 30% |
| Green Party of Ontario | 5% | 6% | 6% | 7% | 4% | 4% |
| Other | 2% | 1% | 5% | 2% | 2% | -- |

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.

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

| Thinking of the party you are supporting in this election, overall, would you say you are mainly supporting them ... (Question asked of those who chose a party, N=660) | | | | |
|---|-------------|----------------|----------|-----------|
| (weighted sample sizes) | Total (660) | Vote intention | | |
| | | Liberal (112) | PC (242) | NDP (259) |
| Because you like the party and what they stand for | 50% | 58% | 51% | 48% |
| Because you dislike the other choices even more | 50% | 42% | 49% | 52% |

Suppose for some reason you couldn't vote for your first-choice party, which party would most likely be your second choice? (Question asked of those who chose a party, N=660)

| (weighted sample sizes) | Total (660) | Vote intention | | |
|---|-------------|----------------|----------|-----------|
| | | Liberal (112) | PC (242) | NDP (259) |
| Ontario Liberal Party | 17% | -- | 5% | 38% |
| PC Party of Ontario/Progressive Conservatives | 8% | 5% | -- | 17% |
| Ontario New Democratic Party (NDP) | 20% | 60% | 20% | -- |
| Green Party of Ontario | 15% | 13% | 12% | 21% |
| Other/Independent | 6% | 1% | 12% | 3% |
| No second choice/Don't know | 33% | 22% | 51% | 21% |

Vote intention (Including leaners, excluding not sure)

| (weighted sample sizes) | Total (660) | Certainty about 2018 provincial vote | | |
|---|-------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| | | Absolutely certain (260) | Fairly certain (215) | Less certain/Not at all certain (149) |
| Ontario Liberal Party | 17% | 16% | 18% | 19% |
| PC Party of Ontario/Progressive Conservatives | 37% | 55% | 25% | 21% |
| Ontario New Democratic Party (NDP) | 39% | 27% | 49% | 45% |
| Green Party of Ontario | 5% | 1% | 5% | 13% |
| Other/Independent | 2% | 0% | 2% | 2% |

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| Vote intention (Including leaners, excluding not sure) | | | | |
|---|------------------------|---|---------------------|----------------------|
| (weighted sample sizes) | Total (660) | Vote in 2014 provincial election | | |
| | | Liberal (206) | PC (209) | NDP (101) |
| Ontario Liberal Party | 17% | 40% | 2% | 6% |
| PC Party of Ontario/Progressive Conservatives | 37% | 10% | 81% | 13% |
| Ontario New Democratic Party (NDP) | 39% | 45% | 13% | 75% |
| Green Party of Ontario | 5% | 3% | 1% | 3% |
| Other/Independent | 2% | 1% | 3% | 2% |