

Ontario Spotlight: Ford government frozen out over key issues of inflation, health care, education

Parents of school-aged children equally likely to blame Ford, Lecce, and union for education dispute

December 15, 2022 – Ontarians' relationship with their provincial government these days is much like the weather – frosty.

The latest data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds Premier Doug Ford's government criticized heavily by Ontarians on all but one of the issues they deem most important.

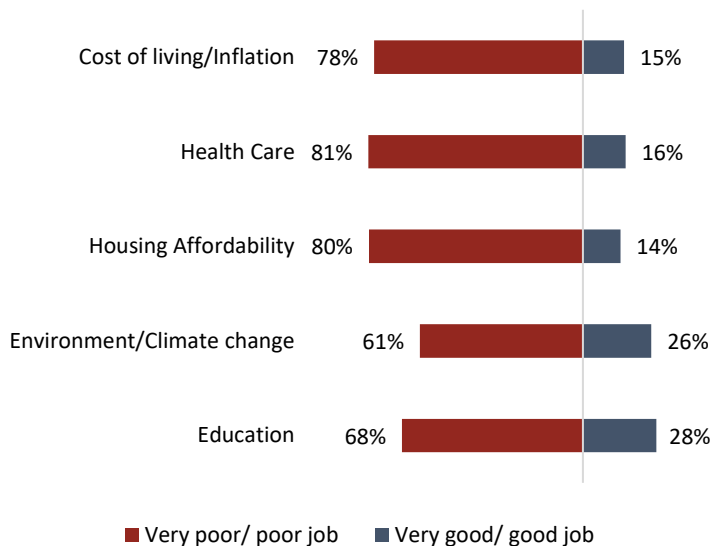
On cost of living, health care, and housing affordability, four-in-five say the government has performed poorly.

The only issue for which the government receives more praise than condemnation is its ongoing handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, chosen as a top priority for just eight per cent of Ontarians.

This holiday ill-will extends to Ford himself. Alongside [tumbling approval levels](#), he is also the most likely figure to be blamed for a recent dispute between the government and education workers. More than two-in-five (45%) primarily blame Ford, while 41 per cent say Education Minister Stephen Lecce is most responsible. One-in-three (32%) say the education union bears most of the blame, while 14 per cent say all parties share it equally. Importantly, those with children between the ages of five and 17 at home are equally likely to blame Ford (44%), Lecce (44%), and the union representing education workers (44%) for the whole ordeal.

While criticism of the government is significant, a fractured opposition means a continued comfortable vote intention lead for the governing Progressive Conservatives. When asked "if an election were held today", nearing two-in-five (37%) would support Ford's party, while one-quarter would vote for either the Ontario Liberals (25%) or official opposition NDP (27%).

Do you think the current government of Ontario is doing a good job or a poor job in each of the following areas? (Top five issues shown; Ontario, n=1,058)



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from Nov. 28 to Dec. 3, 2022 among a representative randomized sample of 1,058 Ontarian 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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More Key Findings:

- Three-in-five Ontario residents choose cost of living/inflation (63%) and health care (61%) as their top concerns for the province. Both priorities well outpace housing affordability, the third most chosen issue, selected by one-in-three (34%).
- Three-in-ten (28%) feel the Ontario government is performing well with respect to education in the province, while seven-in-ten (68%) say Ford and company have done a poor job. Parents of children aged five- to 17-years-old are slightly more positive, with 36 per cent saying the government has done well on this file.

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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Part One: Issues and performance

Two issues continue to dominate Ontarians' concerns in 2022. Three-in-five (63%) believe inflation to be a top-three provincial issue, as many say the same of health care (61%). Runaway inflation has seen signs of abating in recent months in the province – year over year growth of the Consumer Price Index [has declined](#) from 8.8 per cent in July to 6.5 per cent in October – but residents are still left with increased [grocery bills](#) and higher costs for holiday preparations.

[Related: Holiday hurt: Inflation realities deflate Christmas shopping plans, two-in-five cut back on charitable giving](#)

One-third of Ontarians (34%) believe housing to be a top challenge for the province. Climate change (23%) and education (21%) round out the top five most selected issues.

Women more than men are concerned about health care, while those over the age of 54 are more likely to believe health care to be a top issue than younger Ontarians:

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And which of those issues would you say are the most important to you, personally. Please select up to three: (Those with more than 10% shown)						
	Total (n=1,058)	Gender		Age		
		Male (n=525)	Female (n=531)	18-34 (n=305)	35-54 (n=365)	55+ (n=388)
Cost of living/Inflation	63%	63%	63%	62%	69%	59%
Health Care	61%	51%	71%	48%	61%	72%
Housing Affordability	34%	30%	38%	37%	35%	30%
Environment/Climate change	23%	18%	28%	28%	17%	25%
Education	21%	19%	24%	19%	28%	17%
The Economy/Jobs	19%	24%	14%	22%	20%	16%
Poverty/homelessness	15%	14%	16%	13%	13%	18%
Street crime/Public safety	13%	18%	9%	11%	11%	18%
The Deficit/Government spending	13%	20%	6%	11%	15%	12%

Six months after a low turnout election that saw Doug Ford and Progressive Conservatives return to government with a majority, Ontarians are more dissatisfied than not with the performance of Ford's regime.

For all matters except the response to COVID-19, Ontarians are more likely to say the government has done a poor job than a good one. That includes on the top three issues of the day: cost of living (15% good job, 78% poor job), health care (16% good, 81% poor), and housing affordability (14% good, 80% poor).

A majority of Ontarians are also critical of the government's performance on the environment – in the wake of [the controversial sale of Greenbelt land](#) – and education – after the government [narrowly avoided](#) strike action from education workers over a dispute over pay, more on that later in the report.

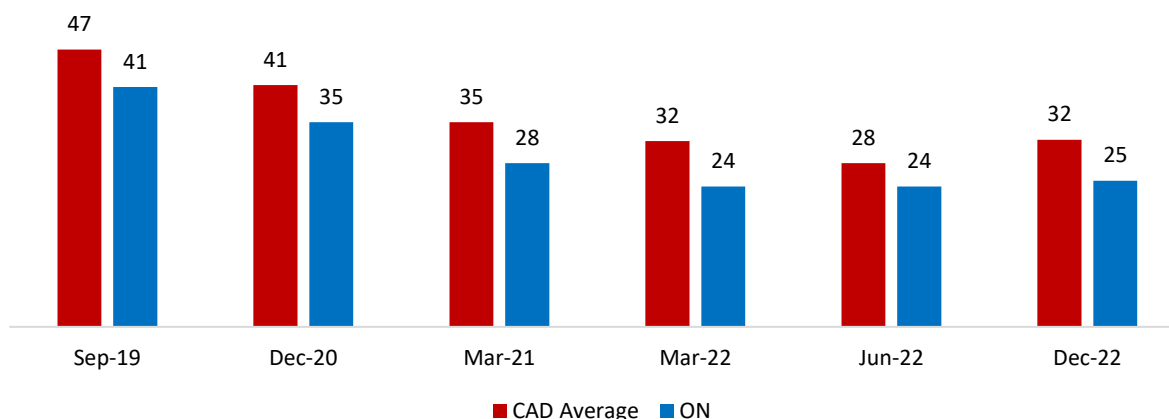
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Is the provincial government doing a good job or poor job in each of these areas: (Ontario, n=1,058)			
	Good job	Poor job	Not sure
Coronavirus/COVID-19 response	49%	46%	4%
The Economy/Jobs	35%	56%	9%
Relationship with the federal government	35%	52%	13%
The Deficit/Government spending	32%	54%	14%
Education	28%	68%	4%
Street crime/Public safety	26%	59%	15%
Environment/Climate change	26%	61%	13%
First Nations/Indigenous issues	25%	52%	23%
Energy policy – Oil & Gas/Pipelines/Renewables etc.	22%	55%	23%
Drug Use/addictions/opioid crisis	16%	67%	17%
Health Care	16%	81%	3%
Cost of living/inflation	15%	78%	6%
Housing Affordability	14%	80%	5%
Poverty/homelessness	14%	77%	9%

Ontario's government ranks as below average on Angus Reid Institute's Government Performance Index, which averages the number of constituents who say the government is doing a good job on the issues surveyed. This has been the case throughout Ford's tenure as premier, even in times when the government earned more praise from Ontarians:

Government Performance Index - Ontario
(Average number of respondents saying provincial government has done a "good job" across all issues)



Though men are more willing to praise Ford's government than women, no demographic offers majority praise on the top five issues as selected by Ontarians. Women are especially critical of the government's performance on cost of living (10% good job), health care (9%), and housing affordability (7%).

On education, one-in-five (19%) women believe the Ontario government is handling that file well, half the rate of men who say the same (36%):

Percentage who say the government is doing a 'good' or 'very good' job on each (Top five issues shown)						
	Total (n=1,058)	Gender		Age		
		Male (n=525)	Female (n=531)	18-34 (n=305)	35-54 (n=365)	55+ (n=388)
Cost of living/Inflation	15%	21%	10%	17%	13%	17%
Health Care	16%	24%	9%	20%	14%	15%
Housing Affordability	14%	21%	7%	19%	12%	12%
Environment/Climate change	26%	36%	16%	27%	26%	25%
Education	28%	36%	19%	30%	25%	28%

Parents (slightly less) critical of government on education

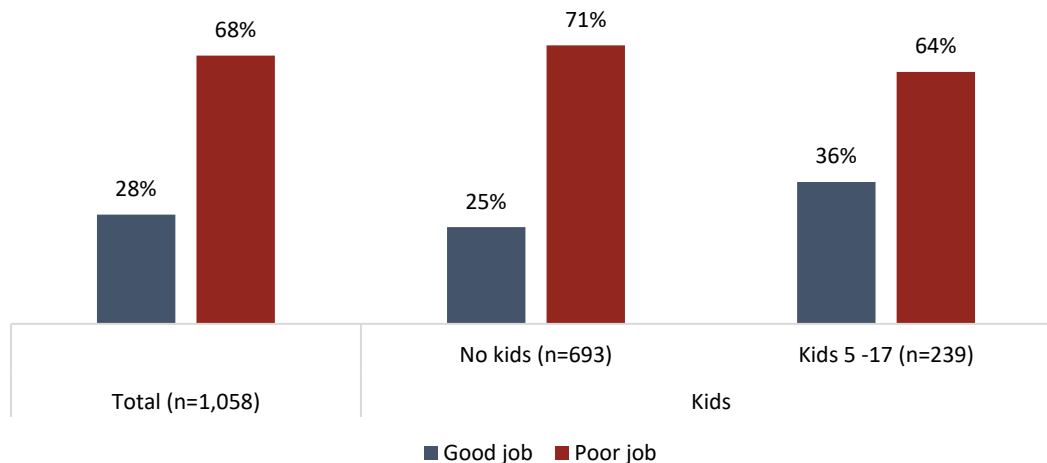
In November, the Ontario government [imposed](#) a four-year contract on education support workers with Bill 28, which used the constitution's [notwithstanding clause](#) to prevent workers from striking. Workers walked off the job anyway, and more unions threatened a potential province-wide general strike in response to the controversial bill. Ford and his government balked, repealing Bill 28, returning to the bargaining table and eventually [signing a new contract](#) with education support workers.

While a solid majority of Ontario residents say the government has done a poor job of handling education, those with children in school are more likely to say that the Progressive Conservatives have done a good job on this file (36%) than those without children (25%):

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Do you think the current government of Ontario is doing a good job or a poor job in Education?



Who do Ontarians blame for dispute with education workers?

Overall, Ontarians blame Ford and Education Minister Stephen Lecce for the dispute with education support workers more than the other parties involved. More than two-in-five say Ford (45%) and Lecce (41%) deserve most of the blame. Fewer blame the union (32%) and the support workers (8%). Approaching one-in-six (14%) blame all the parties involved.

Men are more likely than women to blame the union for the dispute. Women are much more likely to point the finger at Ford and Lecce ([see detailed tables](#)).

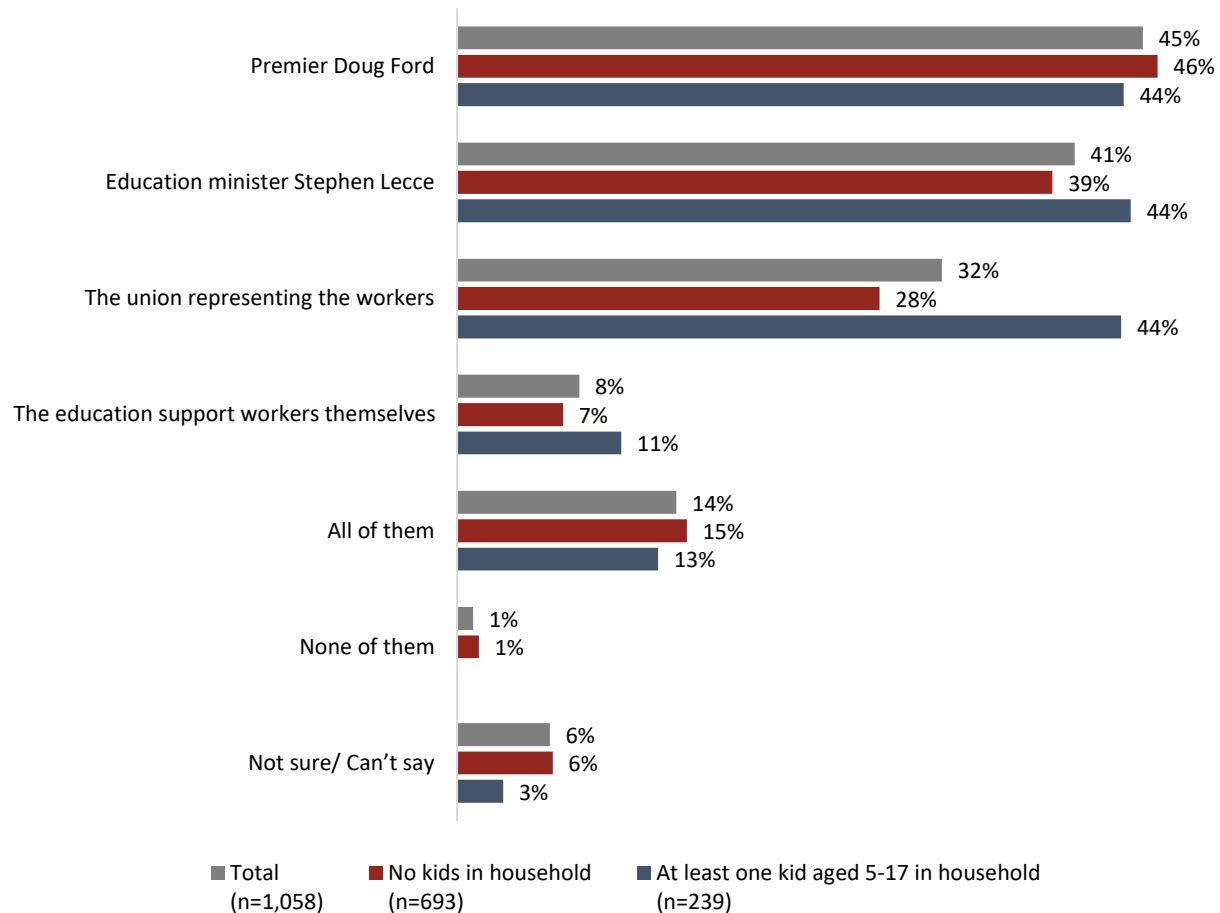
Prior to the contract settlement, the push-and-pull between the government and the education support workers brought a return to the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, when Ontarian parents were forced to accommodate [extended, and sudden, periods of at-home learning](#). Before the contract was settled, there were two days of closed schools, as well as numerous starts and stops to potential job action that would've kept kids out of schools, likely a source of frustration for parents.

Indeed, those living with a school-aged child in their household spread the blame widely. As many parents point the finger at Ford (44%), Lecce (44%) and the union (44%):

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Thinking about this whole issue over recent weeks/months, who do you believe is most responsible for this dispute?



Three-in-five past PCPO voters (58%) blame the union for the dispute, a rate much higher than past NDP or Liberal voters. However, one-in-five past PCPO voters blame Ford (18%) and a similar number fault Lecce (19%).

Lecce and Ford attract much more finger pointing on this matter from past NDP and Liberal voters:

Thinking about this whole issue over recent weeks/months, who do you believe is most responsible for this dispute?				
	Total (n=1,058)	2022 Provincial Vote		
		PCPO (n=341)	NDP (n=239)	Liberal (n=219)
Premier Doug Ford	45%	18%	77%	69%
Education Minister Stephen Lecce	41%	19%	68%	57%
The union representing the workers	32%	58%	11%	11%
The education support workers themselves	8%	16%	2%	1%
All of them	14%	17%	7%	14%
None of them	1%	1%	1%	1%
Not sure/ Can't say	6%	4%	3%	2%

Part Two: Vote intent

The first half year of Ford's second term has done little to the voting intentions of Ontarians. Approaching two-in-five (37%) say they would vote for the PCPO if an election were held today. The official opposition NDP (27%) and [lacking official party status](#) Liberals (25%) receive prospective votes from one-quarter each. All three figures are statistically identical to those seen prior to the June election, when Ford won a majority government with 41 per cent of the vote.

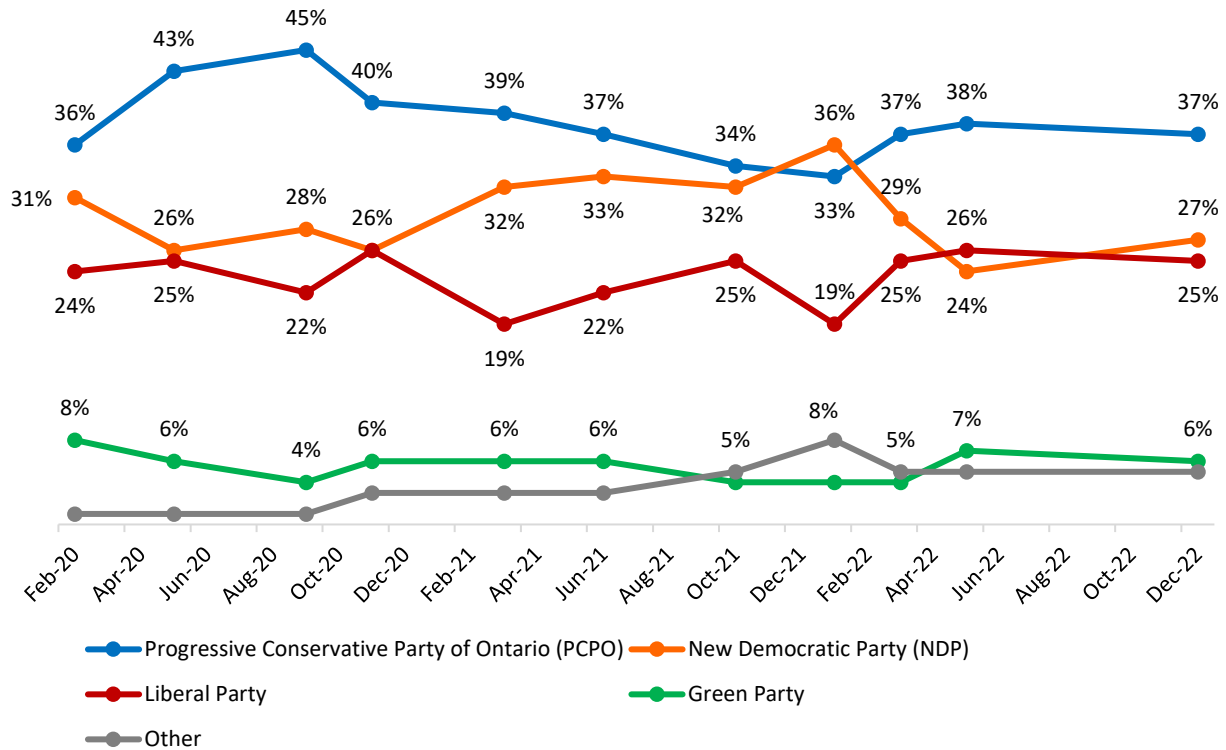
Both the NDP and the Liberals are in the midst of selecting new leaders for their parties after their election defeats. There will be little intrigue in the NDP race, as Davenport [MPP Marit Stiles](#) was the only candidate. She will formally take the helm of the party after a confirmation vote in March 2023.

There is a much more [crowded field of potential Liberal leadership candidates](#), including former MPs, mayors, business leaders and at least one current political party leader – [Green Party leader Mike Schreiner](#). The Liberals are courting Schreiner, who [impressed during the election debate](#) while again winning his riding of Guelph – the only seat the Greens won in the election. However, Schreiner said he has ["no plans"](#) to run for the Liberal leadership. Six per cent of Ontarians say they would vote Green if an election were held today:

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**Vote Intent - Ontario
(Decided and leaning voters)**



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

For detailed results by age of kids in household, [click here](#).