

Greenbelt Grief: Ford's personal approval drops to five-year low, but voters still prefer PCPO to opposition options

Three-quarters say Ontario PCs gave preferential treatment to certain developers

September 8, 2023 – As Ontario's government prepares to further review the Greenbelt, including the lands at the centre of the ongoing controversy, Premier Doug Ford's personal approval continues to sink.

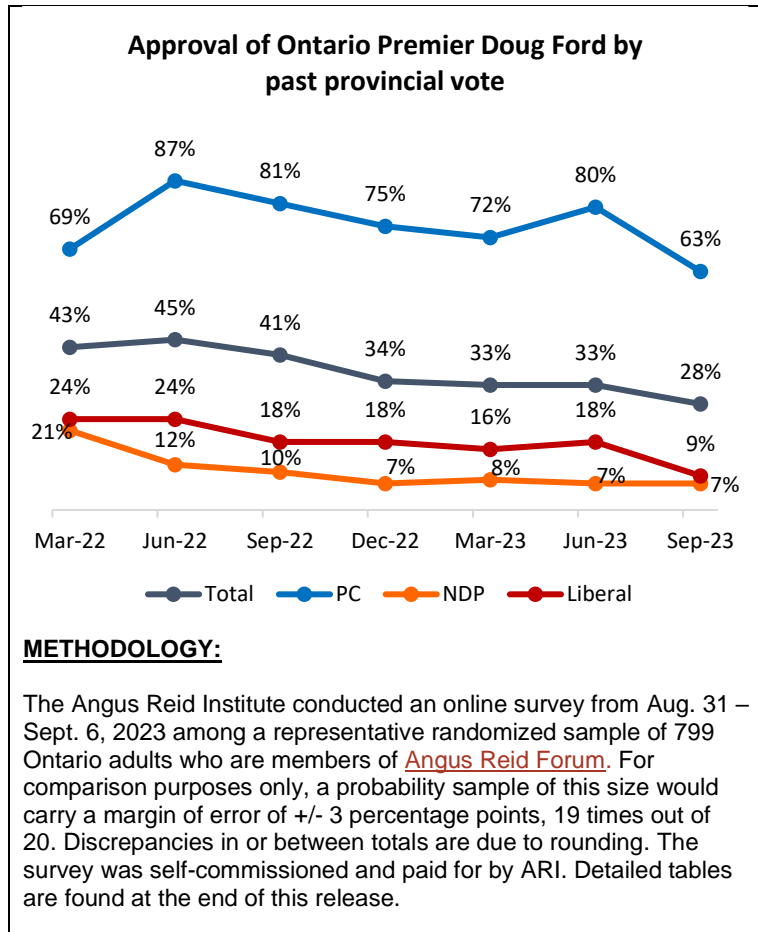
New data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds that amid ongoing criticism, fewer than three-in-ten (28%) approve of Ford. Two-thirds (67%) of constituents, including one-in-three (36%) who voted for his party just last year, hold negative opinions of the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario leader.

Much of this criticism is propelled by a widespread sense that land swaps in the Greenbelt were done iniquitously, offering preferential treatment to certain developers, rather than utilizing fair process. Ford, himself, [has resisted](#) much of this characterisation, but accepted that better process is needed, stating this week that his government [will re-evaluate](#) the land swaps themselves, and review how it handles these deals going forward.

While Ontarians await the results of this, Ford's rivals are attempting to capitalize and break through in the province, something both the Ontario Liberals and Ontario New Democrats have been unable to do over the past five years.

Among new Liberal leadership candidates, only Bonnie Crombie is recognizable to more than 30 per cent of those who say they would consider the Liberals in a future provincial election.

With the Liberal Party in flux, and the Ontario NDP failing thus far to resonate with many voters under opposition leader Marit Stiles, Ford's Progressive Conservatives appear to be weathering the proverbial storm. Indeed, two-in-five (38%) Ontario residents say they would vote for the PCPO if an election were held, a ten-point lead over the opposition NDP (28%) and a 16-point advantage over the Liberals (22%).



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More Key Findings:

- Despite its vote intention lead, four-in-five Ontarians feel the government has performed poorly on inflation (81%), health care (77%), and housing affordability (85%), the top three issues chosen by residents in the province.
- Seven-in-ten (71%) believe the Greenbelt was protected for a reason and there should be no development on its lands. One-in-five (22%) believe the province's affordable housing crisis requires considering development on the protected lands.
- Ford's approval falls to 63 per cent among 2022 PCPO voters, a 17-point drop compared to data recorded in June.

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: Greenbelt Grief

The Greenbelt scandal in Ontario is far from settled, despite a pair of resignations from the housing ministry, including Housing Minister Steve Clark. To recap: the government [announced](#) last year in November it would remove 7,400 acres from the Greenbelt, an area of protected farmland and environmentally-sensitive areas around Toronto. The government did this to allow developers to build additional homes to help address the province's housing crisis but said it would replace the land lost

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elsewhere along the Greenbelt. Shortly after the announcement, [CBC reported](#) prominent developers would stand to benefit from the removals, including developers who purchased land [just months before](#) they became unprotected.

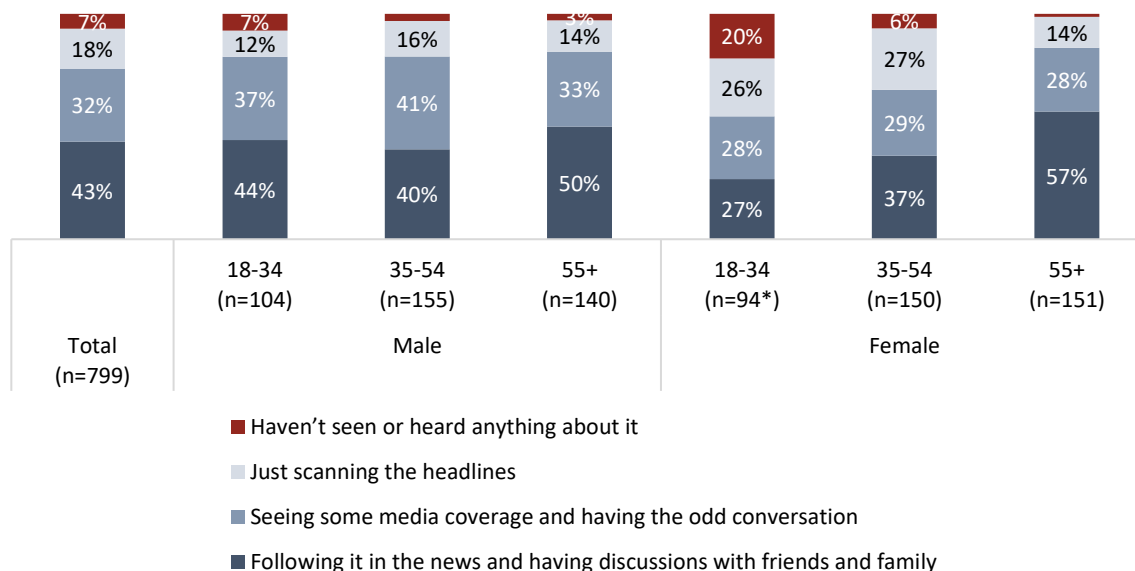
Fast forward to this year. [A report](#) by Ontario’s auditor general found that certain developers with connections to the housing ministry received preferential treatment in the process to open up development in the Greenbelt. Those developers could see the value of the land they own increased by [\\$8.3 billion, according to the AG’s report](#). Shortly after, [a report](#) released by the province’s integrity commissioner described the Greenbelt land swap as a “rushed and flawed process” with a “lack of oversight.” The integrity commissioner’s report heavily criticized Clark and his role in the process.

Ford [has denied](#) his government gave “preferential treatment” to developers in the Greenbelt land swap, while [deflecting questions](#) about his own role in the decisions. The premier said development would go ahead, but that the government would [“re-evaluate”](#) all Greenbelt lands and development applications.

Widespread awareness of the issue

Three-quarters (76%) of Ontarians say they’ve had discussions about the Greenbelt saga with friends and family. Few (7%) say they haven’t heard anything about the scandal:

How closely following have you been following this story? Would you say you are...?

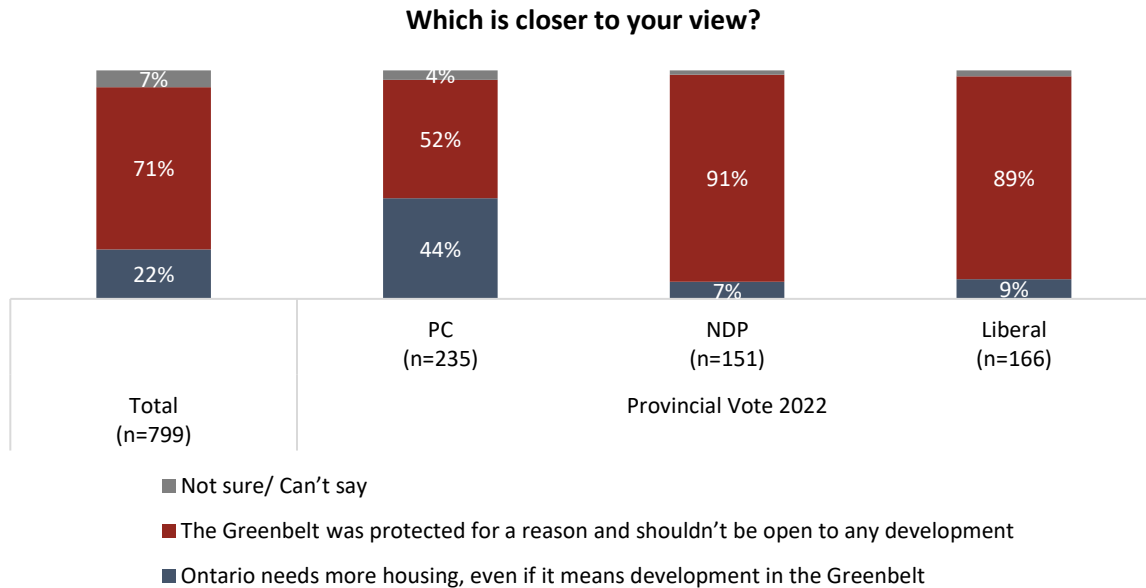


**Smaller sample size, interpret with caution*

Seven-in-ten say leave the land alone

Those who believe the Greenbelt should be opened for development are in the minority. One-in-five (22%) believe Ontario needs to look at everything to help addressing the housing affordability crisis, including developing in the Greenbelt. Two-in-five (44%) of those who voted for Ford and PCs in the 2022 election hold this view.

However, more past PC voters (52%), in fact a slight majority, believe the Greenbelt shouldn't be open to any development. They join nearly all NDP (91%) and Liberal (89%) supporters who say this:



Overwhelming majority feel preferential treatment was given

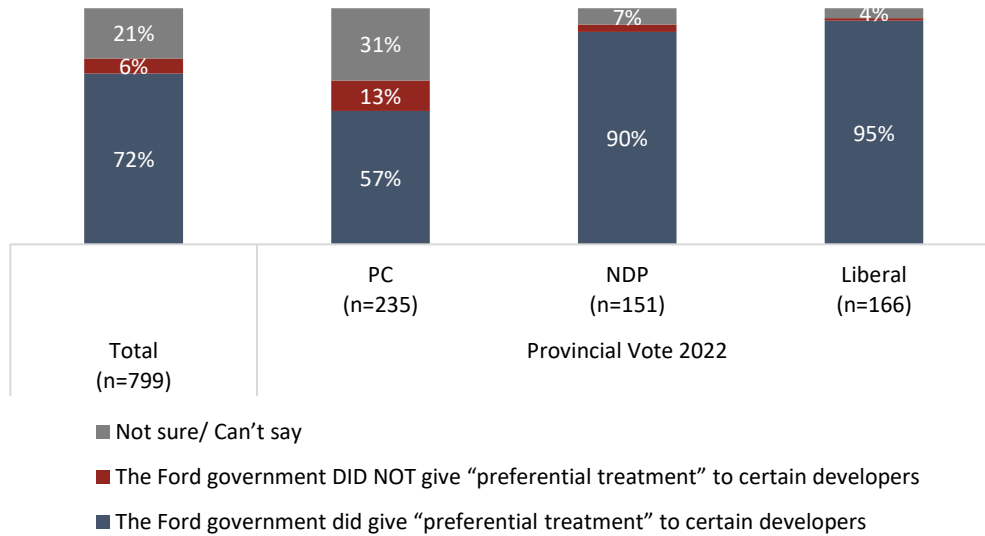
Even prior to the reports by the AG and integrity commissioner, Ford and his government denied they tipped off developers of the pending land swaps. "No one had preferential treatment," Ford insisted days after the auditor general report.

Ontarians are much more inclined to believe the findings of the AG's report than Ford. Three-quarters (72%), including a majority of past PC voters (57%), believe certain developers received "preferential treatment" from the government in the Greenbelt affair:

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Based on what you've read or heard about this issue, what do you believe?

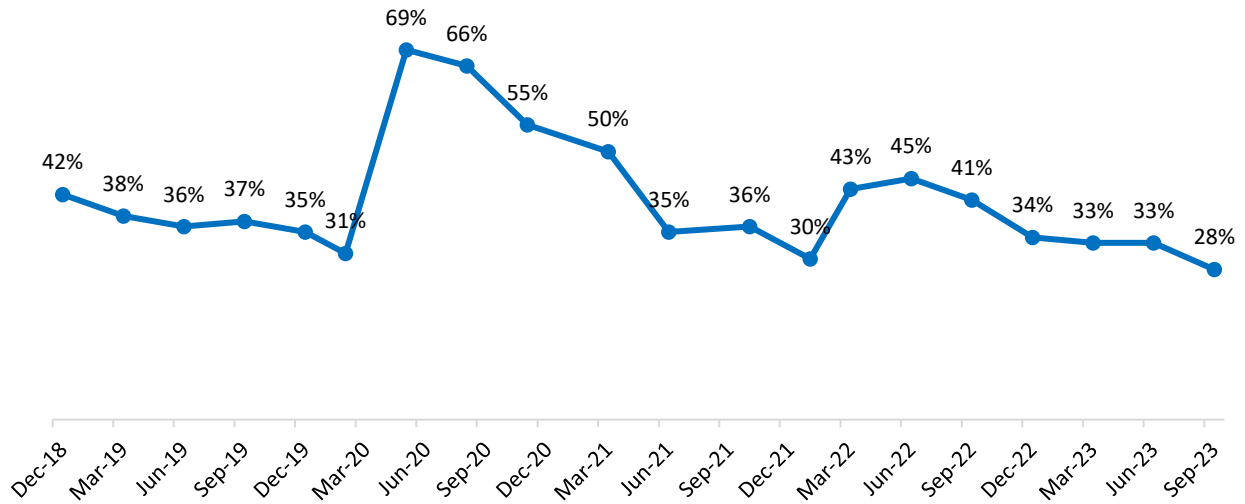


Part Two: Political fallout

Ford's approval drops to lowest recorded level

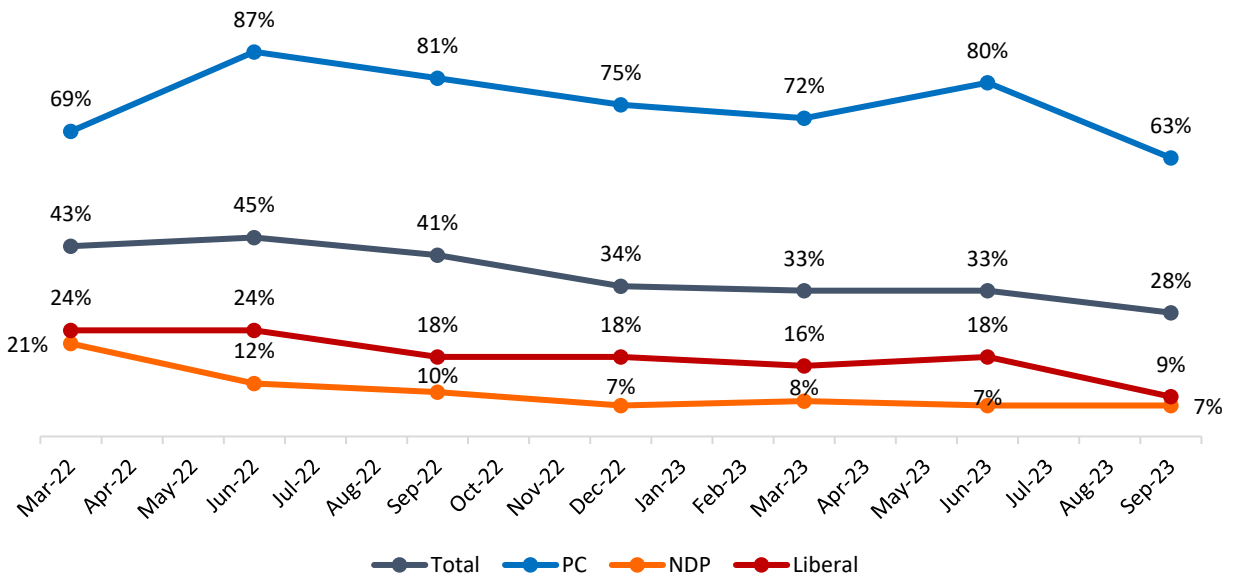
The Greenbelt scandal has dragged approval of Ford to its lowest level since he was first elected at the head of a majority government in 2018. Fewer than three-in-ten (28%) of Ontarians approve of their premier:

Approval of Ontario Premier Doug Ford



Ford has enjoyed consistently high approval from past PC voters over the past 18 months. However, recent developments in the Greenbelt issue appear to have soured a significant segment of his own base:

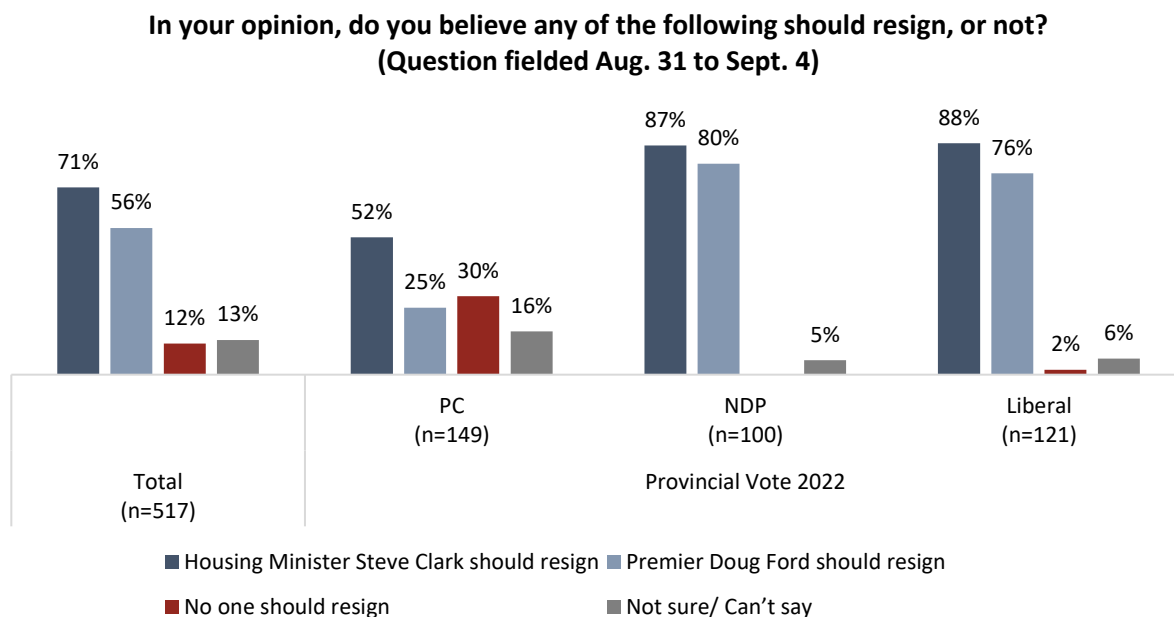
Approval of Ontario Premier Doug Ford by past provincial vote



Majority feel Ford should resign

As noted above, Clark resigned as housing minister [over the Labour Day long weekend](#). Prior to that resignation, the Angus Reid Institute canvassed Ontarians on whether they felt Clark, Ford, both or neither should resign in the wake of the Greenbelt controversy.

One-quarter (25%) of past PC voters believe Ford should resign over the controversy, but more (30%) believe no one should have to step down over the Greenbelt land swap:



Stiles, Liberal leadership hopefuls not gaining traction

Ontario's opposition parties [have hammered](#) the PC government over the Greenbelt, calling for more accountability and investigations into the land swap process. However, the increased media exposure and attention on the Greenbelt saga have not resulted in significant gains in recognition for opposition and NDP leader Marit Stiles or the candidates in the Liberal leadership race. Two-in-five (43%) Ontarians say they don't have an opinion of Stiles, including 37 per cent of those who voted NDP in 2022 ([see detailed tables](#)).

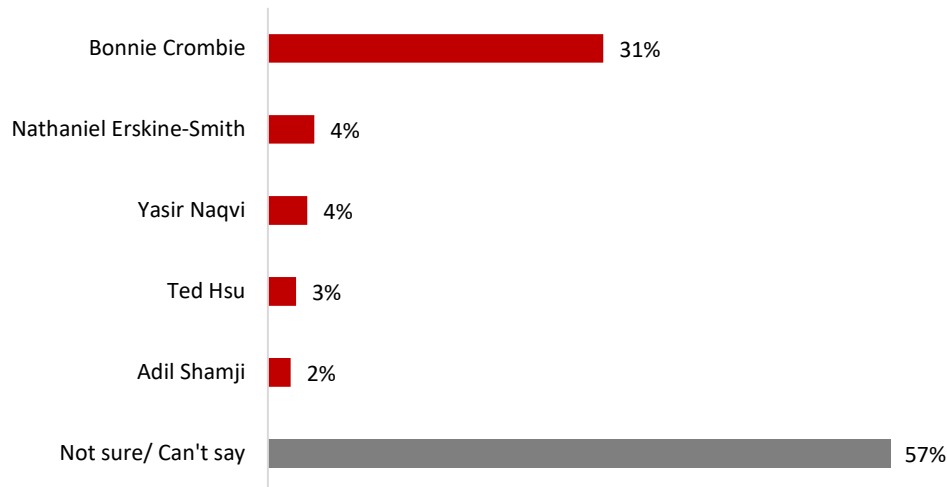
Meanwhile, the Ontario Liberal Party is amid a leadership race to replace Steven Del Duca, who resigned after a dismal performance in the 2022 election. Former Liberal MP and current mayor of Mississauga Bonnie Crombie is the most recognized candidate among Ontarians who would consider voting Liberal in an upcoming election. Two-thirds (63%) say they've heard of Crombie. The other candidates – Nathaniel Erskine-Smith, Ted Hsu, Yasir Naqvi, and Adil Shamji – are unknown to more than seven-in-ten potential Liberal voters ([see detailed tables](#)).

This recognition has apparently given Crombie an early advantage in the race. Three-in-ten (31%) potential Liberal voters say the Mississauga mayor is the most appealing candidate for party leadership. Crombie is also the preferred candidate of 38 per cent past Liberal voters ([see detailed tables](#)). Voting starts at the end of November with the results announced on Dec. 2.

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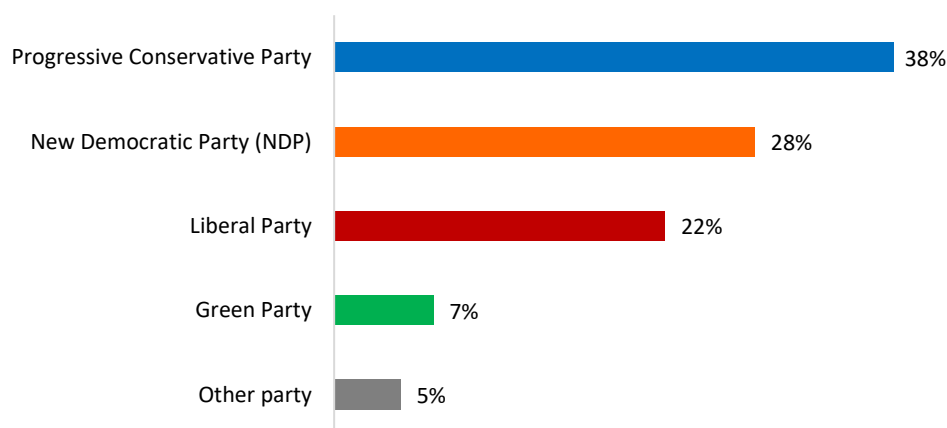
**And which candidate do you find most appealing as the next leader of the Ontario Liberal Party?
(Among those who would consider voting Liberal in an upcoming election, n=582)**



PCPO support unchanged, significant lead remains

Despite the intense criticism and political fallout, Ford's PCPO continue to hold a double-digit lead in vote intention. Two-in-five (38%) Ontarians say they would support his party if an election were held, while half of Ontarians are split between the ONDP (28%) and the Ontario Liberals (22%).

**Vote intent - Ontario
(Leaning and decided voters, n=656)**

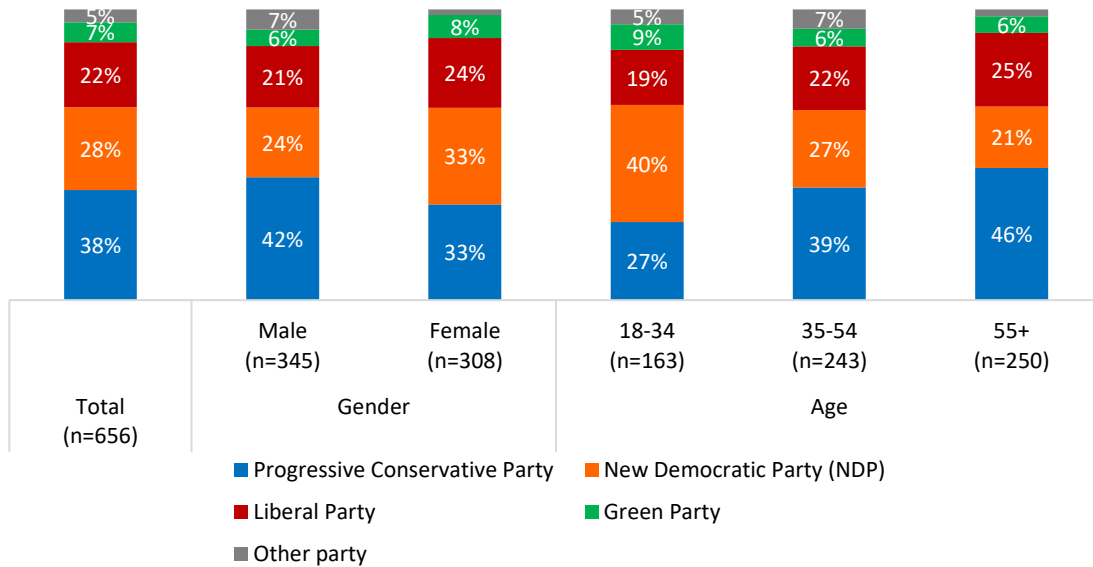


The Conservatives garner significant support from men and those over the age of 55, allowing them to maintain this advantageous position, just over a year after the last provincial election. Young people show an affinity for the NDP, while women are divided in large part between all three of the major provincial parties:

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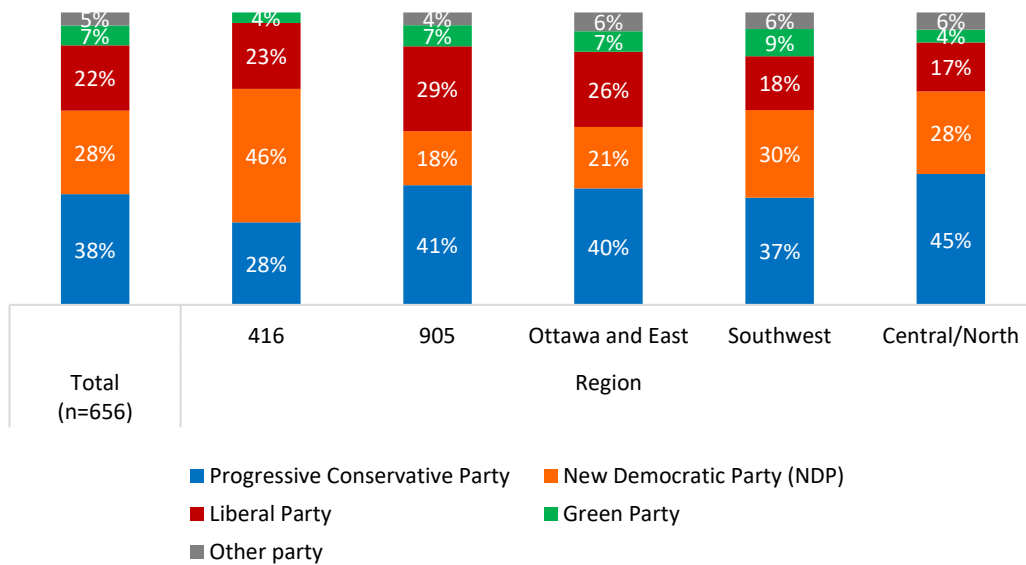
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**Vote intent - Ontario
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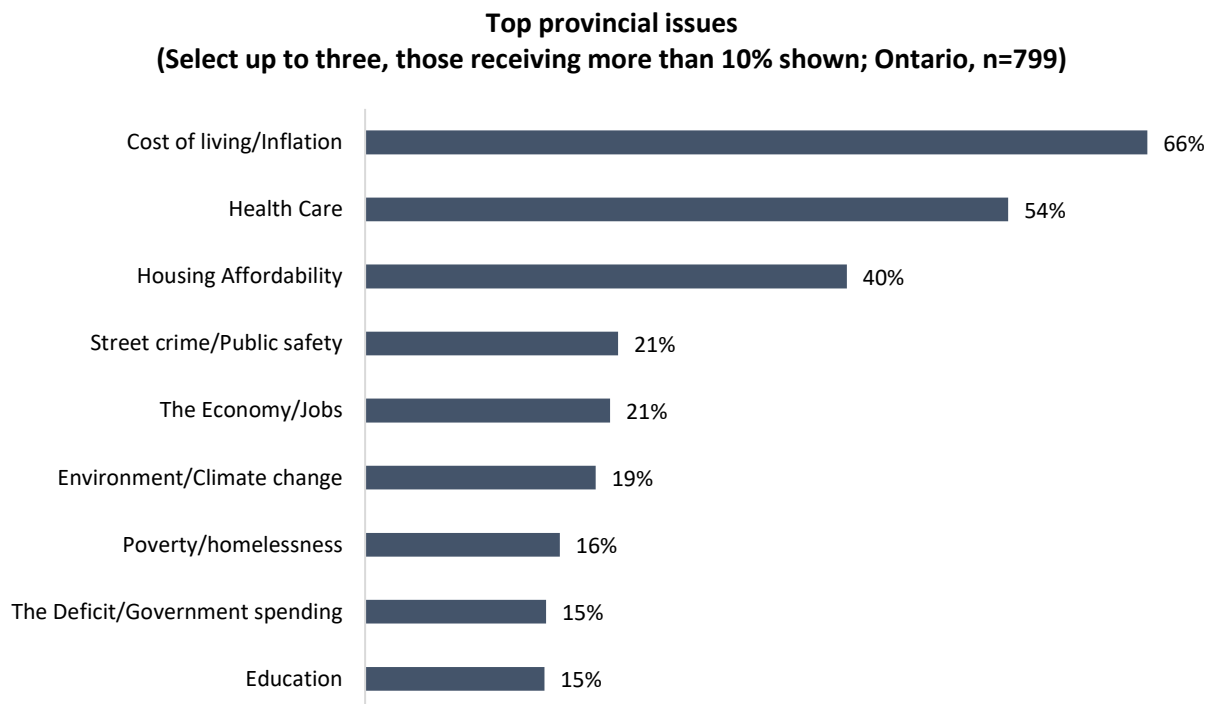
The PC hold an advantage in most regions of the country. The exception to this is in the 416 area code of Toronto, where the NDP are preferred by approaching half (46%):

**Vote intent - Ontario
(Leaning and decided voters)**



Part Three: Top issues and performance

While the Greenbelt has received most of the attention in recent weeks, the top issues facing Ontario residents – as with the rest of the country – remain centred on personal finances and health care. Two-thirds of Ontarians say the cost of living and inflation are their primary concern, while fully half (54%) choose health care. Housing affordability, cited by the provincial government as the cause for Greenbelt land deals, is chosen by two-in-five (40%):



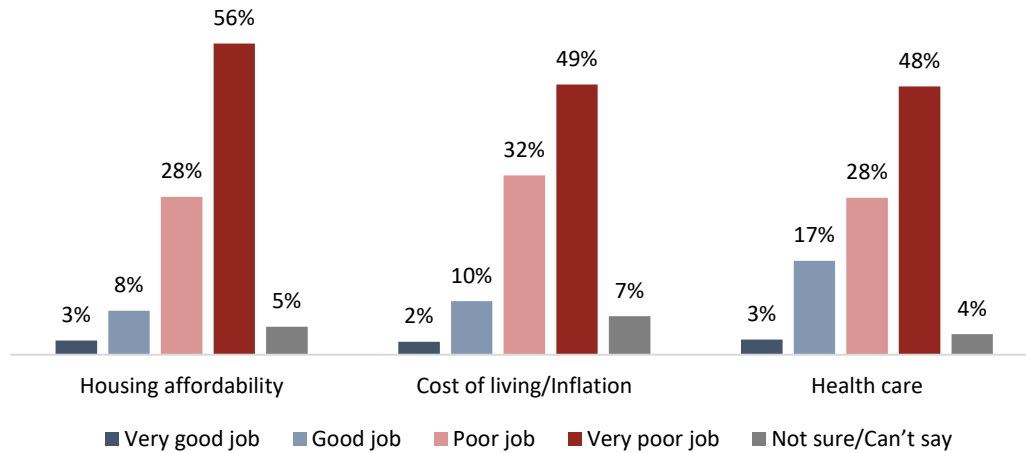
Little solace for government as performance panned

Perceived handling of these core issues is likely compounding the challenges the PCPO are currently facing. In addition to criticism about the Greenbelt, the Ford government is seen as doing a poor job on these top provincial priorities as well. One-in-ten say the government is doing a good job in dealing with housing affordability (11%), and the cost of living (12%), while one-in-five offer praise of health care management (20%):

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**Do you think the current government of Ontario is doing a good job or a poor job in each of the following areas?
(Ontario, n=799)**



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