Premiers’ Performance: Legault ends year at all-time low, Kinew enjoys post-election honeymoon

Moe, Kinew approved by a majority; Furey, Houston, Smith and Eby by approaching half of constituents

December 4, 2023 – As provincial legislatures wind down for the year, the holiday season offers a chance to reassess and regroup for the province’s leaders.

Neighbouring Premiers Scott Moe and Wab Kinew enjoy majority approval, perhaps bringing more joy to their holidays. Further east, there are more dour assessments for Premiers Doug Ford and Blaine Higgs, who are in familiar low-approval territory as 2023 comes to an end. However, they are joined by an unfamiliar face: Quebec Premier François Legault, whose approval has declined 16 points from last quarter.

Here are the non-profit Angus Reid Institute’s quarterly premier approval ratings.

Legault’s approval plummets; Ford, Higgs linger near bottom

The fall winds have blown bitter and cold for Premier Legault in Quebec. More than 60,000 teachers have been on strike in the province since Nov. 23, closing 800 schools, while the Front Commun, a collection of four other unions representing 420,000 public employees, including health, education and social services, is threatening a province-wide general strike as it too seeks a new agreement for its members. The labour action isn’t the only biting headwind Legault is facing, as he deals with backlash over new out-of-province tuition fees at Quebec post-secondary schools, criticism over government subsidies for pre-season NHL games in Quebec City, and headaches surrounding the ballooning cost of a light rail system for Quebec City, which Legault’s government put on pause right as construction began. All this adds to flagging approval for the once-popular premier. Currently, 31 per cent say they approve of Legault, an enormous 16-point decline over a three-month period.

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METHODOLOGY:
The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from Nov. 24 – Dec. 1, 2023, among a representative randomized sample of 3,749 Canadian adults who are members of Angus Reid Forum. Provincial margin of error estimates are found at the end of this report. 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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Doug Ford

The RCMP continues its investigation into the Ford government’s Greenbelt development deal, with Ford announcing last week that he will waive cabinet confidentiality and offer full access to documents. Ford also met with Toronto Mayor Olivia Chow on Nov. 27 to announce a “game-changing” multi-billion-dollar deal between the province and the city. The province will reportedly take over responsibility for two highways and increase housing funding, leaving the city in a much better financial position. Through all this, Ford’s personal approval remains low, at 34 per cent:

Approval of Ontario Premier Doug Ford

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Blaine Higgs

New Brunswick Premier and Progressive Conservative Party leader Blaine Higgs continues to rank near the bottom of the premier approval list. One-in-three (33%) approve of him this quarter, as his party continues to face “internal division” based on its vision and agenda. Some of Higgs’ socially conservative policies have rankled members, with more than 20 of the party’s riding associations calling for a leadership review earlier this year. Higgs and his government face an expected election next October.

Approval of New Brunswick Premier Blaine Higgs

Four near half approval

In Newfoundland and Labrador, Premier Andrew Furey is approved of by 48 per cent of constituents this quarter. Furey reached all the way out west in November to sign a co-operation on clean energy with B.C. leader David Eby, in the hopes of accelerating alternative energy projects on both of Canada’s coasts. Last week, Furey announced a task force on homelessness, in the wake of criticism that the province is failing to adequately address the problem. Downtown St. John’s has become home to a tent city of unhoused individuals.
Housing affordability is an important issue across the country and Nova Scotia is no exception, as the province deals with the highest rental inflation rate in the country. Premier Tim Houston and the Progressive Conservative government has maintained the province’s rent cap, despite campaigning against it when his party unseated the former Liberal government. The cap, however, does not apply to new leases. The province is taking longer-term action to address the housing shortage, with a five-year plan to create 41,200 new housing units at an estimated cost of $1.7 billion. Spending on housing and health care may have driven positive assessments of Houston from residents in the province, but have also generated fiscal storm clouds that may prove difficult to navigate in the future. Approximately half of Nova Scotians approve of Houston (48%).

British Columbia Premier David Eby and his government face a looming election in 2024, and all signs point to housing and affordability being the dominant issues. Eby’s BCNDP introduced five separate housing-related bills this fall. Among the changes are restrictions to short-term rentals and changes to

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single-family zoning to allow the province to approve multi-family complexes. Eby’s approval rating remains consistent at 46 per cent.

Approval of British Columbia Premier David Eby

Danielle Smith’s term as Alberta premier has been an eventful one so far. As her government explores withdrawing from the Canada Pension Plan, it is also restructuring the province’s health-care system. Both moves have drawn criticism, the former on a national level given the implication for Canadians everywhere except Quebec. While pushing forward on those two initiatives, Smith and the UCP activated the province’s “nuclear option” in response to federal government policies on net zero electricity, the Sovereignty Within a United Canada Act. Ostensibly, the act allows the province to ignore federal laws or programs that Alberta’s government believes would hurt the province. Practically, it remains to be seen how the Sovereignty Act will affect the federal government’s net zero regulations, which have yet to be finalized. Politically, the events of the recent quarter have had little impact on assessments of Smith in Alberta, who draws the approval of 47 per cent, identical to the number registered in September.
Kinew enters on a high, neighbour Moe rebounds

Canada’s newest premier is also Canada’s most approved of provincial leader (57%). In his first throne speech, Wab Kinew promised to cut health care wait times and convert thousands of homes to geothermal energy, among other priorities. He also lamented that the province may be in a worse financial position than formally stated by the previous Progressive Conservative government.

Meanwhile, Saskatchewan’s Scott Moe is setting up a showdown with the federal government over a decision to stop collecting the federally mandated carbon levy on both natural gas and electric heating. Moe stated that the decision was in response to perceived unfairness from the federal government, which exempted heating oil from the carbon tax in October. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said he “expect(s) all
Canadians to follow the law”, but the federal government has yet to take any measures to prevent Moe’s actions. The Saskatchewan Party leaders sees his approval rebound four points to 54 per cent.

Approval of Saskatchewan Premier Scott Moe

Provincial margins of error

<table>
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<th>Province</th>
<th>Margin of Error</th>
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<td>BC (487)</td>
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<td>AB (392)</td>
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<td>+/- 7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>NL (178)</td>
<td>+/- 7%</td>
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Note: Because its small population precludes drawing discrete samples over multiple waves, data on Prince Edward Island is not released.
### Approve/disapprove by province

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<th>Province</th>
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<th>SK (350)</th>
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<td>28%</td>
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<td>21%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>11%</td>
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<td>19%</td>
<td>29%</td>
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