Premiers’ Performance: Kinew on top as honeymoon continues; Eby slides as B.C. election approaches

Slight recovery keeps Legault above bottom as Quebec premier still struggles with approval

June 26, 2024 – As the country’s provincial legislatures break for summer, there appears to be an outbreak of election fever. Three provinces have elections this fall, but statements from premiers in two others have ramped up speculation that elections could be coming sooner than scheduled in those provinces as well.

New premier approval data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute brings good news for Manitoba Premier Wab Kinew, who continues his term at the top of the rankings with approval of two-thirds (66%) in the province, and Newfoundland and Labrador’s Andrew Furey, who is reviewed positively by a majority (55%) of his residents after an eight-point bump from last quarter.

But it’s perhaps an election year trio – Saskatchewan’s Scott Moe, B.C.’s David Eby and New Brunswick’s Blaine Higgs – who are watching assessments most closely. Moe’s approval remains statistically unchanged from last quarter at 49 per cent but continues to be down from highs seen earlier in his term. Eby has consistently garnered appraisal from at least two-in-five constituents since replacing John Horgan, but his approval has declined by five points to 43 per cent. Approval of Higgs remains low, with just three-in-ten (31%) saying they approve of the New Brunswick premier.

Premiers in Ontario and Nova Scotia have fueled early election speculation. Nova Scotia’s Tim Houston holds the enviable approval position to Ontario’s Doug Ford. More than two-in-five (44%) approve of Houston; three-in-ten (31%) in Ontario offer Ford a thumb’s up.

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.
Election year evaluations

British Columbia

The relationship between the BC NDP and the federal Liberal government has historically been amicable, but with the federal politics landscape shifting in the province, Premier and BC NDP leader David Eby is trying a new tact. Eby criticized the federal government for uneven funding on immigration, and a lack of infrastructure funding for the province, in what’s seen as a shift in tone.

This comes as the province changes course on its drug decriminalization pilot project, which began in January 2023 and is scheduled to last three years. It was heavily criticized by both BC United and the BC Conservatives. The federal government agreed to the B.C. government’s request to re-criminalize both the possession and use of illegal drugs in public areas and hospitals, following a backlash against widespread public drug use. Use of illegal drugs in private residences, shelters and overdose-prevention sites remains legal as part of the pilot project.

Eby’s personal approval declines this quarter to 43 per cent. Near-equal numbers say they approve (43%) of the B.C. premier as disapprove (45%).
New Brunswick

Natural Resources Minister Mike Holland left his post early this month, highlighting the exodus of MLAs from the Progressive Conservatives in advance of this year’s election. Holland said he is leaving on good terms with PC leader and Premier Blaine Higgs, but some of the other dozen MLAs who won’t seek election this fall have blamed Higgs leadership style for their departure. The ripples of a near-caucus revolt over the government’s controversial school LGBTQ policy are still being felt.

Last year’s row over school policy is not the only issue looming over Higgs and the PCs prior to the election campaign. The government has faced calls for a public inquiry from the opposition Liberals over more than $100 million awarded to contract nurses to help address a health care staffing crisis in 2022. The former PC health minister, who is not seeking re-election, has also said there may be “more investigation” needed into the contracts.

Higgs remains at the bottom of the premier approval rankings in the country, with three-in-ten (31%) in the province saying they approve of his performance.
Approval of Saskatchewan Premier Scott Moe is statistically similar to that seen last quarter, though off four percentage points, with half (49%) of constituents saying they approve of the Saskatchewan Party leader. It has been a quarter not without controversy for Moe. The premier had to clarify his stance on so-called “chemtrails” after attending an event organized by conspiracy theorists, saying he had misinterpreted the question posed to him.

On the positive side of the ledger, a lingering contract dispute between the government and the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation is nearing a conclusion after the two sides found enough common ground to agree to go to binding arbitration. The federation represents 13,000 teachers across the province and had been without a contract since August of last year. As negotiations stalled, teachers had been in and out of job action since January.

Saskatchewan
Early election speculation

Ontario

Will it be a snap election year in Ontario? It certainly appears as if there is a possibility of one occurring prior to the scheduled June 2026 date, which Premier and PC leader Doug Ford declined to commit to in interviews last month. Ford later ruled out a potential election this summer or fall, but opposition parties have jumpstarted election machinery to not be caught off guard.

Ford has struggled with low approval throughout his second term – currently three-in-ten (31%) say they approve of the premier – and invited further derision with the surprise decision last Friday to shutter the Ontario Science Centre due to risk of “roof collapse”, rationale that has been second guessed using the engineering report released by the government.
**Nova Scotia**

Nova Scotia Premier Tim Houston holds steady with approval of more than two-in-five (44%) in the province. The next election in the province is scheduled for 2025, but Houston increased speculation that the vote might happen sooner when he said “The election will be when the election is,” adding it “could be” before the fixed July 2025 date his government set when it first took office. This quarter he managed to avert a strike from the province’s teachers after the government reached an agreement with the teachers union.

**Approval of Nova Scotia Premier Tim Houston**

![Graph showing approval ratings for Nova Scotia Premier Tim Houston from Oct-21 to Jun-24.](attachment:image)
Top of the class

Manitoba

The honeymoon continues for Manitoba Premier Wab Kinew, who tops the country in approval with two-thirds (66%) of Manitobans commending the work he’s performed as premier so far. In drawing a thicker line between the new NDP mandate and the previous PC government, Kinew and the government has begun to detail what will be a multiyear operation to search the Prairie Green landfill, where the bodies of at least two First Nations women were disposed of by a serial killer. Former Premier Heather Stefanson had made refusing to search the landfill one of the pillars of last fall’s campaign for the PC party.

![Graph showing approval of Manitoba Premier Wab Kinew]

Newfoundland and Labrador

The country’s only Liberal premier has apparently found some favour by separating himself from Liberal Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Newfoundland and Labrador Premier Andrew Furey is approved of by a majority (55%) of his constituents, though his party has seen political setbacks in recent months, including a byelection loss in April. Furey pointed to the federal carbon tax as one of several potential factors that saw the Liberals lose the seat to the rival Progressive Conservatives. He’s also embraced the province’s economically important oil and gas industry, saying Newfoundland and Labrador was "all in on oil and gas for decades and decades to come."
The rest

**Alberta**

Approval of Alberta Premier Danielle Smith has been remarkably consistent since she took the helm of the party in the fall of 2022 – just more than two-in-five (45%) Albertans say they approve of her work as premier. Still, that does not mean she’s immune to criticism both from outside and within her own party. Changes to municipal governance brought in by Bill 20 has been controversial even among the United Conservative Party’s rural constituencies, a source of strong support which helped propel Smith to her majority government last spring. There are already rumblings of discontent that could surface at a November party leadership vote. Half (50%) of Albertans say they disapprove of Smith’s performance, including two-in-five (39%) who strongly do so. Note that these data were collected prior to former Calgary Mayor Naheed Nenshi winning the Alberta NDP leadership race.
Quebec

For the third consecutive quarter, Quebec Premier François Legault’s approval is among the lowest in the country. Fewer than two-in-five (36%) in the province say they approve of his performance as premier. The so-called “third link” project has proven a persistent bugaboo for Legault and the Coalition Avenir Quebec government. CAQ made a third link for cars between Quebec City and Lévis across the St. Lawrence River was a key campaign promise in 2018 and 2022. But the plan was transformed significantly when the government announced that the project would be a connection for public transportation only in 2023, to much frustration from members of his own caucus and residents. Following a byelection defeat in the Quebec City riding of Jean-Talon, the CAQ altered course again, now promising it will move ahead as originally proposed — with a river crossing for cars involved.

The ever-changing stance on the Quebec City project comes as Legault faces increasing questions as to whether the coalition of interests that helped him win the previous two elections is holding. In perhaps a nod to growing support for the sovereigntist Parti Québécois in the province, Legault is pushing for more autonomy for Quebec from the federal government, especially when it comes to immigration.

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Approval of Quebec Premier François Legault

Provincial margins of error

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## Summary table

### Approve/disapprove by province

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