

Issues and Party Best to Deal with Them

Ontario Politics



Field Dates: May 7 to 9, 2013

Methodology

The survey was conducted online with 1,185 Ontarians eligible to vote using an internet survey programmed and collected by Abacus Data. A random sample of panelists was invited to participate in the survey from a representative online panel of over 150,000 Canadians. The survey was completed from May 7 to 9, 2013.

Since the online survey was not a random, probability based sample, a margin of error could not be calculated. The Marketing Research and Intelligence Association prohibits statements about margins of sampling error or population estimates with regard to most online panels.

The margin of error for a probability-based random sample of 1,185 respondents using a probability sample is +/- 2.9%, 19 times out of 20.

The data was weighted according to census data to ensure that the sample matched Ontario's population according to age, gender, education level, and region.

For more information about the poll's methodology or the results, please contact David Coletto, CEO at david@abacusdata.ca or at 613-232-2806.

Economy rated as top issue in Ontario; PCs most trusted to manage the economy

*Please refer to the survey as: Abacus Data Poll
1,185 eligible Ontarian voters*

Ottawa, ON – According to a new Ontario provincial survey, job creation, the economy, and health care wait times are the issues rated most important by Ontarians. When asked which party was most trusted to manage the economy, the PC Party led by Tim Hudak had a four point advantage over the Ontario Liberal Party led by Kathleen Wynne.

Top Provincial Issues

Respondents were shown a list of 18 issues and were asked to select the top three that were most important to them personally. Overall, job creation (39%), economic development (32%), health care wait times (31%), and accountability in government (31%) were ranked in the top three by at least three in ten respondents.

For those issues ranked in the top three, respondents were then asked which political party was best able to deal with the issue.

The table below reports the results for all the issues tested.

Among the 39% of respondents who said that job creation was one of their top three issues, the OLP had a slight advantage of the PC Party with 24% picking the OLP as best able to handle the issue. Thirty-nine percent of respondents were unsure.

Although the PCs trailed the Liberals on job creation, they had a 10 point lead among those who ranked economic development in their top three issues with the Liberals at 25% and the NDP well back at 8%. Another one in three respondents who selected economic development were unsure about which party was best able to handle the issue.

On the perennially important issue of health care wait times, of the 31% of respondents who ranked the issue in their top three, 44% were unsure which party was best able to handle the issue while 21% selected the NDP and 17% selected the Liberals or the PC Party.

The PC Party was did best among those who ranked the provincial deficit and debt as one of their top three issues with 48% of those respondents thinking that the PC Party was best able to handle the issue followed by 16% for the OLP and 9% for the NDP. Another 27% were unsure.

Perhaps the most important finding of this exercise was the large number of respondents who were unsure about which party could best handle the issue. For those ranking health care wait times, accountability in government, retirement security and gas prices as one of three important issues, almost a majority did not know which party was best at handling them. On those issues there is an opportunity for parties to establish a link between their

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policy and the demands of large segments of the electorate who care about the issue but don't know which party they can trust to handle it.

These results also highlight a number of weaknesses for the three main parties.

For the incumbent Liberals, not surprisingly accountability in government is a weak area for the Liberals. Voters who care about this issue will not likely think the incumbent government can do any better because the issue is likely caused by something the incumbent government has done. But on other issues likely health care, and even education, the Liberals have done well on these issues in the past but have lost ground to other parties.

For the PCs, they do well on their core issues of economic development and fiscal management. The party's brand is built around these issues. But beyond these core fiscal issues, the Tories remain weak on health care, retirement security, education and public transit explaining their struggles with the 30 to 44 age demographic and those living in major urban centres who rely on public transit.

The NDP's fundamental weakness is on economic management and job creation. Only 8% of those voters who care about economic development believe the NDP is best to handle the issue while 15% of those who care about job creation picked the NDP. This perception on the two most important issues in the province is acting like an anchor on NDP support and will prevent it from challenging for government unless it can change those perceptions.

Issue	Ranked in Top 3	Party Best Able to Deal with the Issue			
		OLP	PC	NDP	Unsure
Job creation	39%	24%	21%	15%	39%
Economic development	32%	25%	35%	8%	32%
Health care wait times	31%	17%	17%	21%	44%
Accountability in government	31%	8%	22%	21%	45%
Deficit and debt	25%	16%	48%	9%	27%
Retirement security	19%	12%	15%	22%	50%
Gas prices	15%	8%	14%	17%	58%
Electricity prices	15%	9%	27%	21%	40%
Elementary and secondary education	13%	29%	17%	17%	34%
Public transit	12%	33%	11%	19%	30%
Crime and safer communities	12%	11%	27%	17%	55%
Poverty	12%	11%	11%	33%	41%
Car insurance rates	12%	21%	9%	32%	38%
Post-secondary education	11%	27%	9%	26%	38%
Affordable housing	11%	14%	8%	28%	50%

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Homecare	6%	17%	12%	19%	52%
Traffic	4%	13%	15%	8%	58%
Real estate market	2%	21%	14%	6%	59%

More evidence of the NDP's weakness on economic management is seen when respondents are asked which party they trust the most to manage the province's economy. The PCs have a small advantage over the Liberals (27% to 23%) with the NDP well back at 15%. But one third of respondents were unsure presenting all three parties an opportunity to define and position themselves as trusted economic managers with many voters.

Economic Evaluations

Respondents were also asked to rate the current and future state of the Ontario economy.

Overall, Ontarians are not overly optimistic nor pessimistic about the economy. A slight majority of survey respondents rated the Ontario economy as Ok while another 13% rated it as either very good or good. In contrast, 28% of respondents said the Ontario economy was poor while another 8% said it was very poor.

Supporters of the OLP were slightly more likely to believe the Ontario economy was in good shape than those who support one of the opposition parties.

How would you rate the current state of the economy in Ontario now?

	All Respondents (n=1,185)	OLP Supporters (n=349)	PC Supporters (n=345)	NDP Supporters (n=261)	Undecided (n=166)
Very good	1%	1%	1%	-	1%
Good	12%	18%	10%	9%	11%
Ok	51%	58%	44%	52%	50%
Poor	28%	22%	32%	32%	26%
Very poor	8%	2%	14%	7%	12%

Most Ontarians think the economy is doing ok now and most think it will stay the same over the next six month. Fifty-seven percent of respondents said that in the next six months, the Ontario will stay the same while 20% said it will get much or somewhat better while 23% were less optimistic predicting that the provincial economy will get much or somewhat worse.

Once again, OLP supporters were more optimistic that supporters from other parties.

In the next six months, will the Ontario economy...

	All Respondents (n=1,185)	OLP Supporters (n=349)	PC Supporters (n=345)	NDP Supporters (n=261)	Undecided (n=166)
Get much better	1%	2%	1%	1%	1%

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Get somewhat better	19%	34%	13%	16%	10%
Stay the same	57%	55%	55%	58%	61%
Get somewhat worse	18%	9%	23%	24%	18%
Get much worse	5%	1%	8%	2%	11%

Finally, respondents were asked which political party in Ontario they trust the most to manage the provincial economy. Overall, 33% of respondents were unsure about which party they trusted the most to manage the economy, higher than the percentage picking any one party. The PC Party was selected by 27% of respondents, followed by the Ontario Liberal Party (23%) and the NDP (15%).

Which political party do you trust the most to manage Ontario's economy

	All Respondents (n=1,185)	OLP Supporters (n=349)	PC Supporters (n=345)	NDP Supporters (n=261)	Undecided (n=166)
Progressive Conservative	27%	4%	82%	8%	6%
Ontario Liberal	23%	68%	2%	7%	1%
NDP	15%	2%	2%	59%	1%
Green	2%	-	-	1%	1%
Unsure	33%	26%	15%	26%	92%

Bottom Line

Our research finds that few Ontarians have a clear sense of which party is best at managing the issues they care about. For most issues we tested, "unsure" beats out all the political parties when respondents are asked which party is best able to manage the particular issue.

Among those who can select a party that can best handle the issue they care about, the Progressive Conservatives have an advantage among those who care about economic development while the Liberals have an advantage on job creation. The NDP has a slight advantage on health care waiting times.

On other issues, no party has a significant advantage. For example, 31% of voters care about accountability in government but 45% of those respondents are not sure which party is best to deal with the issue. Another 19% rated retirement security in their top three issues but 50% of those respondents were not sure which party they could trust to deal with it.

On a range of issues that voters care about, there is no policy leadership or brand differentiation between any of the political parties in Ontario.

The fact that Ontario's political parties are so weakly defined from a policy perspective (except for the PC advantage on debt and deficits) provides more evidence of volatility in the electorate and the importance that an election campaign can play in defining the key issues and gaining attention from the electorate.