

# The Vector Poll™

Vector Research + Development Inc.

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## ***Defeating Doug Ford...***

By Marc Zwelling  
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In horse racing terms the Ontario Liberal Party is a closer, running best in the home stretch.

In 2003 the Liberals and Progressive Conservatives were tied as the election campaign opened; the Liberals won a majority with Dalton McGuinty as leader.

In 2007 the two parties were tied in the polls in June, but the Liberals won a huge majority in the October election with 42% of the votes, 10 points ahead of the Conservatives.

Two months before election day in 2011, a *Globe and Mail* columnist reported “speculation among pollsters and political insiders about Dalton McGuinty’s governing party being relegated to third-place status.” In October McGuinty won again — but one seat short of a majority government — with 38% to 36% for the PCs.

In 2014 the PCs and Liberals were tied at 35% in May in the polls, but in June new Liberal leader Kathleen Wynne beat the PCs again, 39% to 32%.

This year, not even a photo finish seems possible for Wynne, the province’s unpopular premier. In an Angus Reid Institute poll (conducted March 6 to 15) only 19% of the cross-section of Ontario adults said they approve of her job performance. She ranked behind every other premier. The top performers, Saskatchewan’s Scott Moe, and B.C.’s John Horgan, got 52%.

The Progressive Conservatives’ support has been north of 40% for two years, and with four parties competing, even 37.6% will win a majority government — what the NDP got in 1990.

The PCs even changed leaders in March, 13 weeks before the June 7 election. Doug Ford’s surprise takeover from the disgraced Patrick Brown barely changed the PCs’ poll numbers.

In a March 12-to-24 Léger poll, 42% among voters who were decided or leaned toward a party said they’ll vote PC, 26% Liberal, 24% NDP, and 8% for other parties. And 42% told Léger they expect the Conservatives to win.

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A poll by Mainstreet Research conducted March 17 and 18 found the PCs had 47% of the decided and leaning voters, the Liberals 26%, the NDP 19% and the Greens 6%.

There is scant good news for Wynne.

- An Angus Reid Institute survey (conducted March 6 and 7) that found 51% of the public had an unfavourable opinion of Ford, including 34% who had a very unfavourable opinion.
- In a Vector Poll™ in January 34% of PC voters said they might change their mind, and 41% of NDP supporters said so. The bad news for Wynne is that 49% of those supporting or leaning toward the Liberals also said they might switch.

The Liberals' biggest obstacle is that the voters want change, not policy. In the Léger poll 63% said they want a change of government, only 20% want "to continue with the team that is in place."

To win, the other parties need to turn the election from a debate about change to a referendum on Ford.

Instead the NDP seems intent to fight Wynne while it should fight Ford. The Liberals are selling "a fairer Ontario," an uninspiring call to arms. The NDP banner is another sedative, the party's usual "progressive change."

Change is the wrong motto for the NDP. It could even serve to drive voters to Ford because the more voters want change the more they want the PCs. A plurality of "change" voters already are with the Conservatives. Léger asked which party "represents change the most." Some 31% picked "Doug Ford's Ontario Progressive Conservative Party," 20% the NDP and 10% the Liberals.

Like NDP leader Andrea Horwath, Wynne is promising more stuff to people who aren't looking for it. This election's not about who will give voters more. It's about whether Ford's fit to rule.

To win a ballot choice about Ford requires coupling him to the one politician Ontario voters like less than Wynne: Donald Trump. Only 10% of Ontarians had a positive impression of Trump in an Angus Reid Institute poll in December, "based on the Trump administration's performance since the inauguration on January 20."

Like Trump, Ford's messages are short and easy to understand: I'll cut taxes and red tape and run the government better by reducing waste. Ford's "respect for taxpayers" is a battle cry nearly as powerful as "Make America Great Again." Ford's tirades against "elites" are another aphrodisiac for voters who don't want to think much about policy.

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Since Ford wants to play a Trump game Ford's opponents have to beat him on his home field. The more voters associate Ford with Trump the more likely they will keep their minds open to Liberal and NDP offers (it probably helps that the PC leader bears a slight resemblance to Trump).

Open every speech with, "Like Donald Trump, Doug Ford..." For example, "Like Donald Trump, Ford doesn't believe in a higher minimum wage."

Tactically Wynne and Horwath need to do two things to undercut Ford.

- 1) Gently ridicule him (but not his supporters) — "an outstanding Conservative leader for the 19th Century."
- 2) Relentlessly recite stories reminding voters about the failings of the last Conservative government in Ontario.

Remember the last time the PCs ran the province when the lights went out? There were vast blackouts in 2003 after the Conservatives tried to run the hydro system on the cheap, dangerously under-investing in the grid.

Like Donald Trump, Ford says Ontario will be "open for business," a wink to PC donors signaling a PC government would tear up rules for polluters. The last time the Conservatives ran Ontario seven people died in Walkerton from bacteria in their drinking water. More than 2,000 got sick after the PCs rolled back regulations and contracted out water testing.

Along with ridiculing Ford and reminding voters what PC governments do, Ford's opponents should close the sale by asking voters to "fight for what you've got — don't let him take it away." Fight to protect smaller classes in public schools, free college tuition for low-income families, and no-cost prescription drugs for kids.

Blocking the PCs means Wynne or Horwath has to become the anti-Ford.

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Marc Zwelling is the founder of the Vector Poll™ ([www.vectorresearch.com](http://www.vectorresearch.com)) and author of Public Opinion and Polling For Dummies (Wiley, 2012).