

## ***Ontario politics: Did the PCs really win union members' votes?***

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After Doug Ford's Progressive Conservatives won the June 2 provincial election in Ontario, campaign strategists and journalists agreed that union members in the private sector were critical to the Conservatives' victory.

During the campaign labour minister Monte McNaughton said the endorsements from six building trades unions proved the PC message was resonating. "The Liberals and NDP have abandoned working-class people in this province," he asserted. "The endorsements from private-sector unions demonstrate that."

In the Queen's Park Today newsletter, Alan S. Hale quoted an unnamed source saying, "McNaughton and Ford have completely reshaped the Ontario political landscape" with "the entire private-sector union movement shifting over to the Tories ... People will be very surprised... at how that vote comes out in droves for the PCs."

(Droves, in fact, boycotted the election. Turnout collapsed to 43.5% of eligible voters. The PCs got 433,000 fewer votes than in the previous election in 2018.)

On CBC Radio's "The House," host Chris Hall concluded "union votes" were key to "keeping the province blue." Conservative strategist Jaime Watt [wrote](#) in The Toronto Star, "Elements of organized labour have now divorced themselves from the left ... embracing Ford's PCs ... to fundamentally reshape the political landscape."

But something was missing from the praise for the PCs' strategy: evidence. None of the polls published to date found a surge in union members' support for Ford and his party. In a pre-

election Vector Poll™, conducted April 21 through 28, 26% of union members said they intended to vote for the PCs. In [a poll conducted May 30 through June 1 by EKOS Research](#), 35% of union members said they would vote PC. A week after the election, [27% of union members who voted told EKOS they had voted Conservative](#).

While union members throughout the province didn't turn to the PCs, did small upticks in support from private-sector union members help the Conservatives win a few ridings? To find out would require polling union members in ridings the PCs won, an expensive undertaking. There is, however, a less expensive way to evaluate the PCs' union strategy.

Statistics Canada counts employees covered by union contracts, separates them by their job sector — private or public — and sorts them into regional labour markets called census metropolitan areas (there are 16 CMAs in Ontario). Delphi Polling & Consulting analyzed the June election results by superimposing CMAs on all of the province's 124 ridings.

The analysis shows that it's unlikely private-sector union members helped propel the Tories to re-election.

1. There are 13 legislature seats in the CMAs that have the highest percentage of private-sector employees represented by unions
2. In these ridings, 22% of private-sector employees, or more, are in unions

Before the election, the PCs held four of the 13 seats. They won six in June, taking two from the NDP. The NDP won the other seven, holding six seats the party won in 2018 and flipping another from the Liberals.

The results in two ridings are examples of what happened in June in the most unionized CMAs:

1. In the CMA that includes the riding of Thunder Bay-Superior North, 26% of private-sector workers are in unions. The PC candidate captured 31% of the vote. The NDP candidate won the riding with 34%.
2. The riding of Algoma Manitoulin is in a CMA where 22% of private-sector employees are in unions. The PC candidate got 35% of the vote. The NDP candidate won the seat with 46%.

Perhaps their union strategy did help the Conservatives hold seats and win new ones. But winning a seat doesn't prove that private-sector union members pulled a PC candidate to victory.

There is, however, something about union members that can influence elections. They are more likely to vote than non-union workers. Some 52% of union members in Ontario say they voted in

June, 10 percentage points higher than non-union workers. That's evidence of a union impact that's good for democracy.

For the complete list of data tables used in this analysis, including election results as well as the public sector and private-sector unionization rates in Ontario's census metropolitan areas, please view the article at Delphi Polling & Consulting and the data tables at the bottom of the page: [Did the Progressive Conservatives really win union members' votes? An examination of union members' voting behaviour during the 2022 Ontario general election.](#)

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