

NAVIGATOR

ELECTION 2018

WHAT IT ALL MEANS

POST-ELECTION STUDY



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ON JUNE 7, 2018, Doug Ford's Progressive Conservatives won a strong majority government after the party spent 15 years in the political wilderness.

It was an election with fierce ideological differences and debate, but, at the end, the voters' calculation was remarkably simple. Ford won because voters were in a selfish mood.

Worn out after a decade and a half of Liberal rule, weary of grand plans to build a better society, and tired of being talked at instead of listened to, voters made a decisive choice. They voted in their own, and in their families', self-interests.

For years, Kathleen Wynne and the Liberals led as an activist government, focused on what, to them, were province-building policies.

From greening energy to fair wages to championing equality, the Liberals positioned themselves as visionaries focused on the long term.

Doug Ford had a different idea and promised a different approach.

Far from the sweeping rhetoric of the Liberals, Ford's Progressive Conservatives focused relentlessly on the day-to-day struggles of Ontarians, struggles made worse by a Liberal government that seemed far removed from the everyday priorities of average Ontarians.

Focused not on the big picture as championed by policy experts and insiders, but on the pocketbook and stresses of daily life, Ford's campaign promised a return to basics and a return of government to regular Ontarians.

And it worked.

It's important to understand why it worked and why voters made the choices they did.

What do voters expect now? What mandate have they handed Ford? What does it mean for your business or organization?

Understanding these motivations rests on a simple premise: success in politics depends on what is essentially a co-dependent relationship between the voters and political parties.

Consequently, parties can be counted upon to govern according to the expectations of those who put them in office. So, if we understand why voters made the choices they did, we can be well on our way to both predicting how new governments will act and what it will mean for you.

To find out, Navigator undertook a comprehensive province-wide research project after the election. Researchers held a total of eight focus groups in Oakville, Sault Ste. Marie, North York and London, and held in-depth interviews with voters in eastern Ontario, with a focus on rural and smaller communities.

The results of that research are as follows.



LEADERSHIP

IT WAS COMMONLY ACCEPTED WISDOM during the campaign that Ford's reputation would be a challenge for the Ontario PCs. Pundits and pollsters said negative impressions of Ford far outweighed positive ones, and that his personality would cost the PCs valuable support.

Our research revealed something starkly different. While it was true some voters were wary of his brash personality, many Ford supporters liked his blunt style and down-to-earth approach. In fact, several voters remarked on his approachability compared to Wynne's.

People viewed Wynne as out of touch and not siding with Ontarians. But voters supporting Ford seemed to identify closely with him, referring to him in endearing and familiar terms.

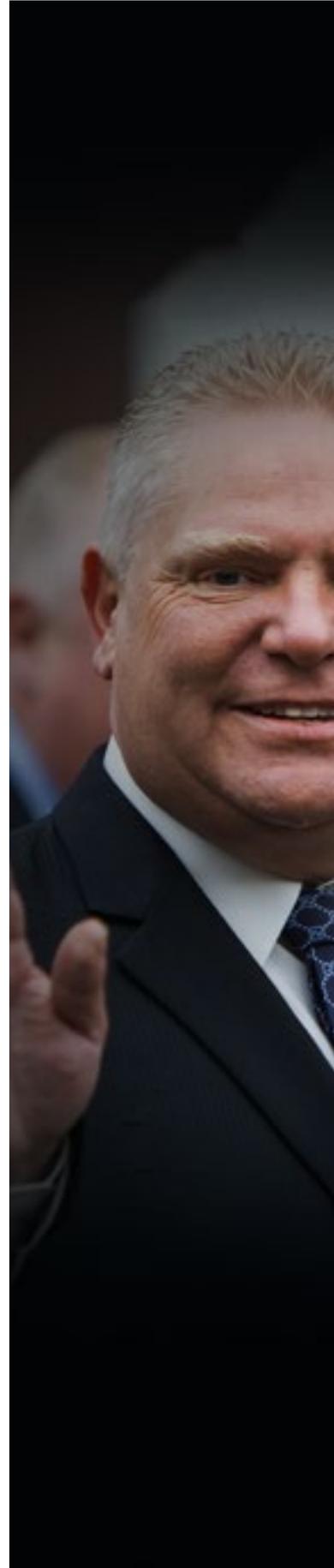
Voters described Ford as

“No-nonsense, non-political, trustworthy, genuine, a fighter and not a pushover.”

“The thing I like about Ford is he's for everybody. Not just the upper class.”

“I see a man who has an understanding of the everyday problems that I face.”

“He's the kind of guy I'd invite to a barbeque. But I'd never invite Kathleen Wynne to one.”



TAXES

A KEY ISSUE that separated the Progressive Conservatives from the other two parties was taxes. Voters expressed dismay with the high level of taxation in Ontario, saying they were having trouble making ends meet and needed relief.

Again and again, voters identified a reduction in taxation as a priority, one the Ford government should act on quickly. Many said the growth of taxes over the past 15 years had acutely damaged their ability to get by, and that current levels were unsustainable. There was suspicion that the funds raised from increased taxes had not been used to support regular Ontarians and their needs, but rather to help special interest groups far removed from their lives.

In particular, voters felt reducing gas prices by 10 cents per litre was crucial; several participants expressed frustration and confusion over the cause of continued rising prices.

This frustration with taxation levels existed across regions and demographics. When pressed on the issue, voters consistently ranked lowering the tax burden as a primary concern.

One thing was made clear: tax relief will be a core focus of the Ford government.

“Life here needs to be affordable.”

“I’m hoping that he’ll be able to balance it out.”

“There is just cash grab after cash grab.”

“We’re just over-taxed.”

SPENDING

OUR RESEARCH found a widespread belief that government spending had grown wasteful, and that there were significant savings to be found. In particular, the PC promise to undertake a government-wide audit to find waste excited voters, who believed such an audit would identify significant amounts of misspent money.

Further, there was a general belief the deficit had grown by too much and was unsustainable. Voters felt much of the growth in the deficit could be identified in savings from the audit; this could prove challenging to a government that will need to find billions of dollars in spending to cut. But even when voters identified the deficit and government overspending as major problems, they did not support government job cuts that would affect people close to them, such as family members or friends.

The challenge for the Ford government will be to find a balance between being seen to slash waste while ensuring cuts do not attack Ontarians' security.

“There’s a lot of waste and there’s a lot of abuse.”

“The Liberals can give you all these things, but it has to come from somewhere.”

“There’s a lot of fat out there. Government employees make good money, have great pensions.”

“If he has to trim the fat, government is the first place to start.”



ENERGY

IT WILL COME AS LITTLE SURPRISE that energy emerged as a major point of weakness for the Liberals. Voters overwhelmingly expressed distress with current energy prices, saying they desperately needed relief from skyrocketing prices.

Many voter complaints about the energy sector were framed in starkly personal terms. People described their personal struggles with paying bills, or talked about challenges people close to them had faced. Participants used evocative, angry language that demonstrated a deep frustration with the current system.

With this in mind, it is perhaps unsurprising that voters broadly supported the firing of energy organizations' executive teams. Voters were deeply dissatisfied with the performance of these executives, but when pressed about the potentially high costs of dismissing them, voters were significantly less supportive.

There was an understanding that the energy system is complex, with significant logistical challenges, and voters said they did not expect Ford to be a miracle worker. However, they believe action must be taken.

Voters felt Ford recognized and understood the struggles they face with electricity bills, and believed he wants to bring relief. More than anything, they felt Ford's understanding meant his decision-making process would be framed with their needs in mind. That is something they did not believe of the Wynne government.

**“I’m not sure what he can or will do.
But he needs to do something.”**

“People just want logic.”

**“I don’t know what she did, but I think it had an effect.
Prices went up. Nothing she did had a positive effect.”**



HEALTH CARE

HEALTH CARE has traditionally been an important issue in politics, and all the parties put significant focus on it during their campaigns. However, our research found that voters found other issues to be more compelling. For instance, when asked for the definition of “hallway health care,” most voters did not understand the term and could not recognize hearing it.

Perhaps surprisingly, few voters said hallway health care was an important part of their voting decision; even fewer had heard of the parties’ promises on the subject, or their commitments on pharmacare.

When health-care initiatives were mentioned, several voters referred to the cost of the program, bringing up their frustration with high taxes and government spending.

“Health care was only a small factor.”

“It was there in the back of my mind.”

“Hopefully, the PCs will make better choices with money better allocated.”





ENVIRONMENT

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES have been at the top of the public policy agenda for a number of years, but that newfound prominence may be short-lived. While the Liberal government trumpeted its achievements on the environment, voters were less than impressed. Voters were skeptical about carbon pricing and green energy, believing environmental issues had cost them significantly and that progress Ontario made regarding the environment made little difference in the greater scheme of things.

Voters felt environmental programs were not aimed at helping them, and simply cost them more money while helping far-off special interests. Environmental policies were seen as being burdensome with little reward.

“I don’t buy **the climate change thing**, and, even if I did, Ontario can’t accomplish anything.”

“**It’s just a cash grab. They didn’t use any of that money for the environment.**”

“I think these are shell games. I don’t think anything positive comes out of it.”

“It’s just a way to raise more funds — like taxes.”

JOBS

ON THE CRUCIAL ISSUE OF JOBS, the PCs were viewed more favourably than either the Liberals or NDP. In spite of campaign attacks on Ford's business acumen, voters felt optimistic that Ford was an example of a successful businessman whose instincts and approach would attract investment to Ontario and protect jobs.

Simply put, attacks did not stick to Ford. Across focus groups and regions, there was a widespread belief that Ford had a strong grasp of business and would do what he needed to do in order to generate growth in Ontario.

Voters viewed the other parties as being against business and potentially hampering growth in the province.

Voters found the minimum wage to be another important issue. Many were skeptical that raising the minimum wage was appropriate. Small business owners, in particular, believed the minimum wage hike represented yet another way the Liberals failed to understand how business worked and that their party had harmed the province.

"I am a business guy, taxation is part of it. I wanted to develop our economy more — **more growth, more business, more jobs."**

"I believe he's going to keep jobs here in Ontario, they're not going to go south of the border."

"Not only will he keep jobs, but he'll actually attract jobs to our province."

"Hiking minimum wage needs to be based on inflation."



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WHAT THE FINDINGS MEAN FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION



THERE ARE MANY LESSONS for businesses and organizations to be gleaned from this research.

It is important to understand that Ford's government is going to approach issues very differently than Wynne's. The PC government will focus relentlessly on helping Ontarians who are struggling.

Much of the way organizations dealt with the government for the last 15 years must now be thrown out the window.

Gone are the days when policy experts and think-tanks were a critical part of making the case to government.

Now organizations need to frame their case in a manner that demonstrates how it will help everyday Ontarians. Organizations should understand this is a government that will be extremely sensitive to undertaking any projects that harm the pocketbook or voter perception they are there for the so-called "little guy."

It won't be simple.

Many members of the Ford voter coalition currently view big business as unaligned with their priorities.

They have a deep-seated suspicion that big business has gotten an easy ride for the last 15 years and that things have not been fair.

Ford's government will work hard to change that perception. It will be going back to basics — providing tax relief for Ontarians, focusing on reducing the debt and sticking to its knitting.

Indeed, voters want and, crucially, expect it to be a government for the people.

We hope you found this research illuminating, and that it will help your organization navigate this new government.

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METHODOLOGY



ON WEDNESDAY, JUNE 13, 2018, Navigator presented the results of Canada's only genuine post-election research study, conducted by Navigator, which compiled the findings from eight focus groups in Ontario (North York, London, Sault Ste. Marie and Oakville), and in-depth interviews with voters in eastern Ontario, with a focus on rural and smaller communities.

With the deeply emotional observations and strong perspectives gathered from millennials, baby boomers, parents and professionals, Navigator compiled unique insights into why Ontarians voted the way they did, what they expect from their new government and what it means for advocacy activities in the years to come.

In addition to voters, Navigator canvassed some of Ontario's most prominent business leaders before the election. We completed a series of interviews with leaders in health care, retail, labour, financial services, development and other sectors to explore their expectations and concerns about a new government — whichever party won.

Navigator's research has yielded results that are absent so far from election analyses and discussions about what the results mean for the next four years.

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