Ford Government Rebounds from Approvals Tumble

TORONTO, June 9, 2021—The findings of a survey released today by Maru Public Opinion conducted for TVO’s #onpoli podcast shows that Ontario Premier Doug Ford and his government has rebounded in approval ratings that had tumbled between mid-March and mid-April after it was assailed from all sides because of a series of decisions, missteps, and mixed messaging. It would appear that both a much more focused communications strategy and a lower profile use of the premier himself for media availability and public engagement has helped resuscitate the governments fortunes as it departs the legislature for a summer break.

The survey also addressed a wide range of topics—including an assessment of the pandemic performance of the retiring Doctor David Williams as Chief Medical Officer of Health to the awareness level of the Ontario Liberal party leader—some of the results of which found a majority of Ontarians approving of the decision of the government to punt in-class instruction for students until the next school year but split on how the government is managing the reopening of the province.

The Findings in Detail

Ford government recovers lost ground in perception of managing its response to the pandemic

The findings show the Ford government has restored a measure of confidence among the public as to how it is managing its response to the pandemic: in mid April 2021, just four in 10 (39%) Ontarians thought the government of Ontario was doing a good job whereas today that perception has increased by seven percentage points (46%).

For context, in the first week of January 2021, half (51%) of Ontarians believed the government was doing a good job in rolling out vaccines – a view that held steady into later public opinion views – one completed in early February (52%) and another a month later in March 2021 (48%).

However, between mid-March and mid-April, the government was assailed from all sides because of a series of decisions, missteps, and mixed messaging. The Maru Public Opinion poll of April 19, 2021, found the worst showing of public perception on how the government was managing its response to the pandemic (Approve 39%/Disapprove 61%).

The next day, Premier Ford was self-isolating after learning that a staff member had tested positive for COVID-19, and the following day he stood on the lawn of his mother’s house and made an emotional apology for introducing COVID-19 restrictions that sparked a furious backlash and confirmed his government would bring in paid sick-leave for workers after months of refusing to do so.
The premier then kept a very low profile for the next three weeks as the manner of public engagement and communications messaging tightened considerably on all aspects of the government’s pandemic response and managing the province overall. It would appear that this fresh approach and discipline has yielded a recovery in perception between April and the first week of June – up seven points to 46 per cent today believing the government is doing a good job versus 52 per cent who believe it is doing a bad job.

**Half approve of the job Doug Ford is doing as Premier of Ontario**

Beyond the specific measurement of how the government is managing the response to the pandemic is the more holistic evaluation of the kind of job the premier is doing overall. The results of the survey conducted this week put his approval rating at 48 per cent versus a disapproval rating at 52 per cent—which was where it was exactly in mid-March 2021.

For context, at the end of 2019, Premier Ford’s approval rating was 28 per cent and by mid March 2020, it hadn’t moved much at all, hovering at 30 per cent. However, with the subsequent actions taken by the government at the outset of the pandemic, the premiers’ approval rating more than doubled by June 2020 (62%). Since that time, his approval ratings have fallen – September 2020 at 56 per cent, December 2020 at 53 per cent, and March 2021 at 48 per cent.

Comparing the approval ratings for Premier Ford from last year at this time to now, the Premier has fallen from two-thirds (62%) of the Ontario public approving of his performance to just under half (48%)—a drop of 14 percentage points.

**No more student in-class instruction gets high marks**

Seven in 10 (69%) approve of the Ontario government’s decision to continue online learning for students and have no more in-class instruction for the remainder of the school year—with 31 per cent disapproving of the decision.

**Public splits on approval rating of managing the reopening of the province**

With the vaccine uptake rising and COVID related hospitalizations falling, the province has embarked on a three-step phase-in plan for re-opening the province from its long-endured pandemic restrictions. No doubt because of regional variations and the pace desired, the Ford Government has half (52%) of Ontarians who approve of how it is currently managing the reopening of Ontario versus another half (48%) who voice their disapproval.
Top Doc Gets a Good Grade

As Dr. David Williams soon exits for retirement from his job as Ontario’s Chief Medical Officer of Health, he can do so knowing he has achieved a relatively good approval rating for his leadership since the pandemic burst onto the scene in March 2020. Six in 10 (58%) Ontarians approve of the way in which he has done his job in making decisions about the pandemic—compared to the difference (42%) who disapprove of how he has done his job.

If Ontarians could turn the clock back to the start of the pandemic

Asked to turn back the clock in their own mind to the onset of COVID-19 over a year ago and getting to choose which political party in Ontario they believe would be best suited to govern and make all of the decisions in responding to the pandemic—being able to choose the incumbent government or any of the others, knowing what they know now—the most (42%) would choose the incumbent government:

- Ontario Progressive Conservative Party 42%
- The Ontario Liberal Party 24%
- The Ontario New Democratic Party 25%
- The Ontario Green Party 9%

Uncorking the name recognition of Ontario Liberal leader

The Ontario Liberal leader, former cabinet minister Steven Del Duca, has effectively been out in the wilderness since March 7, 2020, when he was chosen to lead the party forward—with no seat in the Ontario legislature, and with just handful of elected MPP’s that, so small, don’t even qualify for research funding from the legislature.

The survey put a prompted, randomized, list of apparent Liberal leaders to respondents and asked them to identify the current leader of the Ontario Liberal Party. The list contained former premier Kathleen Wynne, interim Liberal leader John Fraser, and Manuel De Sousa (to make the choice from a similar name to Mr. Del Duca more deliberative) who was a soldier from Braga, Portugal, who came to France to fight with the Allied army during World War I and eventually settled to found Champagne de Sousa which thrives today in Avize, Marne, France. From their given picks, Ontarians were very able to identify who they believe is the current Leader of the Ontario Liberal Party:

- Steven Del Duca 69%
- Kathleen Wynne 5%
- Manuel De Sousa 2%
- John Fraser 2%
- None of the above 23%
Methodology

These are some of the findings released by Maru Public Opinion from a survey undertaken between June 7-8, 2021, by the sample and data management experts at Maru/Blue of 1,156 randomly selected Ontario adults who are Maru Voice Canada online panelists. For comparison purposes, a probability sample of this size has an estimated margin of error (which measures sampling variability) of +/- 3.0%, 19 times out of 20. The results have been weighted by education, age, and gender to match the population according to Census data which ensures the sample is representative of the entire adult population of Ontario. Discrepancies in or between totals when compared to the data tables are due to rounding.

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