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NEWS NATIONAL

Leaders take poll hit

Sun, December 17, 2006

**The results show none of Ontario's
major party leaders is turning on the
voting public.**

 By **ANTONELLA ARTUSO**, FREE PRESS QUEEN'S
PARK BUREAU

TORONTO -- All three of Ontario's major political party leaders -- Premier Dalton McGuinty, the Conservatives' John Tory and the NDP's Howard Hampton -- are trailing their parties in popularity, a new SES Research poll has found.

The survey, provided to Sun Media, shows the Ontario Liberals are holding firm with 42 per cent of decided voters, the Conservatives are sitting at 35 per cent, the NDP have slipped to 16 per cent and the Green party is at seven per cent.

SES asked voters who they thought would make the best premier -- "unsure" was the second most popular response, less than a percentage point behind McGuinty, who had the support of 30.6 per cent of people polled.

Tory would make the best premier for 23.5 per cent, while 13.4




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per cent believe Hampton is the man for the job.

"None of the leaders really turned on voters," SES pollster Nikita Nanos said.

"They don't project onto the public sphere and they don't have a lot of definition.

"We're looking at different shades of beige," he said.

Nanos also said he expects each party will begin focusing on the personality of its leader come January, the unofficial start of what promises to be a nine-month election campaign.

The poll looked at voters' preferences in depth, breaking them down by gender and age.

McGuinty's Liberals had strong support with women, and with voters in general age 18 to 49 years old.

The Grits should take considerable comfort from knowing they dominate in much-sought-after voting constituencies like those age 30-39 -- "the so-called 'working families' cohort," Nanos said.

Voters also appear less inclined to identify the Liberals with broken promises, he said.

"My sense is this is a bit of a latent issue; it could be brought back," Nanos said.

The Conservatives were tops with men and voters 40-59 years old, but were 14 points behind the Liberals with female voters.

"They need a platform, style and tone that can potentially appeal to more women," Nanos said.

"It's too much of a handicap to form a majority government."

Nanos said the NDP is down in support and the rise of the Green party may be to blame.

The poll found NDP support highest among those voters age 18-29.

"That's got to be very worrisome for the New Democrats," Nanos said.

"The only group they do the best in are the least likely to vote."

SES also asked voters about McGuinty's performance as premier and found most voters --50.9 per cent judged him to



be "average."

Even the majority of voters who identified themselves as Liberals gave him the same rating.

Asked if the McGuinty government is heading in the right direction, 38.1 per cent said yes and 38.5 per cent said no.

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