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Articles & Blogs

## Liberals not in 'majority territory'

Posted By James Wallace and Antonella Artuso , Osprey Media

Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty will likely need NDP support to hang onto a second-term minority government, shows an SES Research/Osprey Media poll.

Forty per cent of Ontario's voters polled say they'll vote Liberal in the fall election, compared to 34 per cent who back John Tory's Conservatives, 19 per cent for Howard Hampton's NDP and eight per cent for Frank de Jong's Green Party.

McGuinty, who won 72 of 103 seats and a majority government in the Ontario legislature with his "Choose Change" campaign in 2003, will fail to win a second majority unless his political fortunes improve over the next five weeks, the poll shows.

"The Liberals right now are not in majority territory," said Nik Nanos, president of SES Research. But, he added, all three major political parties have challenges to overcome before the Oct. 10 vote.

McGuinty, without a surge in support, likely will be forced to seek an accord with the NDP, as did former Liberal Premier David Peterson, who adopted NDP priorities in exchange for political power in 1985.

However, the prospect of a Liberal/NDP alliance could undermine McGuinty's campaign if voters perceive that could shift Ontario's political landscape to the left or lead to bigger, more expensive government.

"One of the strategic things that could unfold during the campaign is that if it looks like a Liberal minority government, then the Conservatives are going to be able to dredge up memories of Liberal/NDP government's past and what they meant for the government and government spending," Nanos said.

"They'll be able to bring up that bogeyman, which probably will be quite effective among voters over 40 years of age who still remember that particular government," he said.

On the positive side, despite the fact McGuinty's government currently lacks sufficient support to repeat its 2003 majority victory, the SES poll also showed a growing number of Ontario voters, even core Conservatives, believe the government is heading in the right direction.

Slightly more than half of Ontario voters polled — 52 per cent — believe McGuinty's government is on the right track, compared to 30 per cent who think the Grits are on the wrong track and 18 per cent who are undecided.

"I think that's the one piece of good news for the Liberals in this particular poll," Nanos said. "Of concern to John Tory is that 49 per cent of committed Conservative voters think Dalton McGuinty is moving in the right direction."

For his part, Tory has failed to gain ground on the Liberals over the past year and with just more than five weeks left until the vote shows no sign of gaining momentum.

Tory has thus far failed to convince voters the Liberal broken promises or scandals, such as the immigration slush fund debacle, are grounds for voters to replace the government.

He's also been hampered by a controversial policy decision to extend public education funding to faith-based schools.

What Tory needs, Nanos suggested, is for the Liberals to make a major mistake in the campaign.

"If the opposition parties do not create an atmosphere where there's appetite for change, then there will be no change," he said.

"And right now, what we're seeing is an electorate that really isn't in a mood for change yet," Nanos said. "There's not

  
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what I'll say is the 'Kick-the-bums-out-feeling' in the electorate at this point in time."

For Hampton's NDP, the fall election presents major opportunity for a party that has been out of power since 1995 and even struggled to maintain official party status.

On the other hand, both the Liberals and an emerging Green party are likely to aggressively target core NDP voters, posing a grave threat to Hampton's aspirations.

Although history and conventional political wisdom suggests the NDP would align itself with the Liberals should Ontario voters elect a minority government, it is also possible that Hampton could forge a pact with Tory in the same way the federal NDP has kept the federal minority Conservative party in power.

Meanwhile, the SES/Sun Media poll found that that none of Ontario's party leaders stood out as the best choice for Premier in the minds of voters.



A quarter of those polled said McGuinty would make the best premier, 24 per cent said Tory, 19 per cent saw Hampton as the best choice and three per cent said de Jong.

The poll of 501 Ontario voters conducted between Aug. 24 and Aug. 26 is considered accurate to within 4.4 percent, 19 times out of 20.

Details on the poll are available at [www.sesresearch.com](http://www.sesresearch.com).

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