

Triple Play: The Ontario 2014 General Election

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Introduction

The result of the June 2014 general election in Ontario was to some quite a surprise. The incumbent Liberal government was expected to lose, yet it reversed its fortunes and was re-elected. Furthermore, the narrow 53-seat Liberal minority government resulting from the October 2011 general election was converted into a 58-seat majority (see Table 1). Perhaps the two-and-a-half-year interim was filled with many political moves and events, some of which may have contributed to the Liberals' 2014 win. Alternatively, the election result may reflect the inability of the opposition parties to secure a winning strategy. In particular, 2014 can be regarded as the third-straight election that the Progressive Conservatives squandered. Since 2007, the PCs had three elections to replace an embattled Liberal government. In 2014, it once again found itself on the losing end, and losing nine seats since 2011, arguably due to some ill-considered campaign announcements. The New Democratic Party, too, failed to leverage its key role in supporting the minority Liberals. The NDP did not lose seats, and in fact gained a handful, but failed to resonate with enough discontented voters to stop another Liberal government.

Table 1: Vote and seat results in 2011 and 2014

	2011		2014	
	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats
Liberal	37.7%	53	38.7%	58
PC	35.5%	37	31.2%	28
NDP	22.7%	17	23.8%	21
Other	4.10%	0	6.3%	0

The purpose here is to shed some light to the dynamics of the 2014 election in order to draw some conclusions, even if only tentative, as to the factors that help explain the outcome of the general election. Our review begins by going back a few years to shortly after the 2011 election, which produced a razor-thin Liberal minority government. The party then pursued a change in leadership and, consequently, a change to the head of government. We take a brief look at the leadership campaign and the subsequent style of leadership of the new leader and premier, Kathleen Wynne.

Our analysis of the 2014 election results then take into account several empirical dimensions. This includes a look at party platforms and the narrative that each party pursued. It also includes the analysis of an Ipsos survey data conducted on the day of the election. The survey data allows us to look at which issues were considered important among voters, and whether these, among other factors, help explain their vote choice.

Pre-Campaign Context

The 2011 general election returned the Liberals to government with 52 seats, one seat short of a majority. As described in our review of the 2011 election (Kiss, Perrella and Kay 2014), the Liberals had an opportunity to tilt the balance in their favour with some by-elections. In April 2012, long-standing MPP Elizabeth Witmer, who represented the

Progressive Conservatives in the seat of Kitchener-Waterloo, was offered – by Premier McGuinty – to become the chair of the Workplace Safety Insurance Board. This led to her resignation as a member, forcing a by-election for June. It seemed like a good bet since the Liberals in the riding normally place second behind the PCs. Alas, the by-election did not go as the Liberals had hoped, with the NDP candidate Catherine Fife winning the seat with 37 per cent of votes cast, comfortably ahead of the second-placed Liberal candidate, who won 32 per cent of the votes. This result obviously failed to change the balance of power in the provincial parliament. In July, one month after the by-election, McGuinty announced his resignation, ending a nearly 10-year run as premier.

McGuinty's resignation was not met with much public sadness, as polls showed he and his Liberal government to be very unpopular. His final years in office were marked with the stench of scandals. Two prominent issues that dogged McGuinty are the financial mismanagement of the province's air ambulance service, ORNGE, and the decision to cancel the construction of gas plants in Mississauga and Oakville.

The leadership race to succeed him as leader and, automatically, as premier of Ontario, attracted six candidates, most of whom had held cabinet positions. Three were from Toronto: Eric Hoskins, Gerard Kennedy and Kathleen Wynne. Two were from Mississauga: Harinder S. Takhar and Charles Sousa. The final candidate, Sandra Pupatello, represented a Windsor riding.

The January 2013 convention ran through three ballots, in which the top two candidates were Pupatello and Wynne. The third, and final, ballot carried Wynne to the leadership with 57 per cent of the votes, anointing her as Ontario's 26th premier, its first female premier, and the first openly gay first minister in Canada.

Kathleen Wynne also formed part of another historical phenomenon in Canada. Her ascendancy to the premiership formed part of a growing list of female provincial premiers in power at that time, comprising Pauline Marois of Quebec, Alison Redford of Alberta, Christy Clark of British Columbia, Kathy Dunderdale of Newfoundland and Labrador, and Eva Aariak of Nunavut. She also joined a league of incumbent provincial governments likely to lose their next election. Many of the provincial premiers who assumed their high office through an internal party leadership race assumed control of a government increasingly unpopular with their voters. As noted above, the Ontario Liberals were also unpopular and facing unrelenting public criticism over some scandals and a perception of the party as “playing politics.” Even Wynne acknowledged this prospect, to a degree, and prepared for another Liberal minority government (at best!), going so far as to suggest that a future Liberal minority government might consider working with the NDP, with some suggesting a coalition.

A coalition was not necessary, as it turns out. She led her party to a majority win. What we explore here are some reasons why the Liberals succeeded. As will be shown, the polls were not in their favour, yet they managed to turn things around. We begin our exploration by looking at party platforms.

Platforms

Much of the Liberal platform was telegraphed months in advance, and certainly seemed deliberately designed to set the party apart from the PCs, and perhaps even to capture part of the NDP’s electoral base. Wynne’s open conflict with Stephen Harper and his Conservative regime in Ottawa, particularly as it relates to certain issues such as

Ontario's demand that the Canadian Pension Plan be enhanced to provide Ontarians with greater pension security, certainly set her apart from Conservative partisans. Her government's announcement of going ahead with an Ontario pension plan, independently of the CPP, and her continued scuffles with the federal government, could have helped her party regain some respect among voters, particularly among those who did not support Stephen Harper.

What is curious about Wynne's positions is that it may be perceived as taking the Liberals to the left. The Liberal policy platform heavily emphasized an activist government. It promised a jobs and prosperity fund of \$10-billion that would essentially provide subsidies to business to invest in Ontario. In addition, it promised a 10-year, \$130 billion, plan to support infrastructure projects. Much of this was to be dedicated strictly to transit infrastructure. Lastly, it promised a new mandatory and public pension scheme that would imitate and supplement the Canada Pension Plan. This strategy had two distinct advantages.

First, it gave Liberal politicians the opportunity to do what they love to do: travel through the province making promises of investment in the local areas. In Kitchener-Waterloo, a swing riding, the Transportation Minister Glen Murray promised two-way all-day GO Train service to Toronto within five years (Bellemare 2014). The Minister also felt quite comfortable promising a high-speed rail line connecting Toronto, Kitchener-Waterloo and London within 10 years (Bellemare and Grant 2014). The Liberals were also careful to ensure their transportation plan invested funds in highway transportation, not just in urban districts, enabling ministers to promise the goods in other areas of the province as well. For example, Minister Murray promised to expand the

twinning of Highway 417 in the Ottawa Valley to ease traffic commutes (Arnprior Chronicle – Guide 2014)

Second, it helped the party make an appeal to waffling and non-committal NDP voters who were both nervous of the prospect of a reenergized right-wing government under Tim Hudak and the Progressive Conservatives and attracted to the prospect of an activist government. The NDP was hit by disaster in the middle of the campaign by a group of prominent party notables, including the feminist writer and activist Michelle Landsberg, whose husband, Stephen Lewis, was a former leader of the Ontario NDP. The group published an open letter to party leader Andrea Horwath arguing that: “From what we can see you are running to the right of the Liberals in an attempt to win Conservative votes” (Bickerton et al. 2014).

Third, and lastly, the Liberals had the convenient effect of moving the agenda away from the messy business of the party’s sordid record on gas plants and other costly scandals such as the E-Health record and ORNGE scandals.

By contrast, the Ontario PCs appeared, again, to be fighting the 1995 and 1999 election campaigns. Namely, Hudak made fairly bold promises offering a fundamental shift in the provincial economy, limiting public sector activity to increase private sector activity. Whereas in 2011, Hudak promised to take action against foreign workers, Hudak raised eyebrows in 2014 by promising to eliminate 100,000 public-sector jobs. While this was framed in the policy platform in the context of a broader approach to fiscal policy, whereby reducing public sector workforce was a necessary step to reducing the deficit, allowing for tax cuts and thence an economic expansion, the policy was announced on its own. Hudak got into additional trouble with a platform promise – echoing the general

theme of restricting public sector activity – to end subsidies for businesses. His problem was that he made this promise at a number of campaign stops at businesses whose owners were happily taking government subsidies (Morrow 2014).

What led the Progressive Conservative Party to make such disastrous promises? Perhaps it was a calculation that there was so much antipathy to the Liberals that the primary goal of the campaign had to be not to chase the median voter, but to mobilize enough of the PC base to win. Or, perhaps, the people around Hudak were so ideologically committed to the mission of small government that making a bold policy commitment to shift the discursive terrain of provincial politics to the right must always be the top priority. Perhaps both interpretations are intertwined. Regardless, post-election, the rest of the Progressive Conservative Party was not happy with the results with many MPPs publicly expressing frustration at the platform, saying they were not consulted and rejecting Hudak from even serving as interim leader after he announced his election-night resignation (Leslie 2014).

The NDP's platform reflected, as often, the difficult balancing act of a third-party with dispersed geographical support in a single-member plurality system. This alone is challenging enough, but in addition, the NDP faced the challenge of bridging some ideological divides within the party between moderate and more radical wings. Horwath delivered a mixed result in this campaign. Prior to the election, she mystified many and angered some with her position on the minimum wage, waiting until the Liberals committed to raising the minimum wage to \$11 per hour to advocate a minimum wage of \$14 per hour. To properly understand the political difficulty of this position, one has to note that this was in the context of a broad campaign by unions and anti-poverty activists

to raise the minimum wage to \$14 per hour. Ultimately, the NDP outbid the Liberals and urged a \$12 an hour minimum wage, indexed to inflation. But her delay angered many in the NDP universe. It is not new for NDP leaders to strive to reassure centrist voters to build a majority electoral coalition. But doing so successfully requires the artistic ability first to reassure the party base that the party is still on an ideological mission. At the federal level, Jack Layton was able to do this successfully. Andrea Horwath was not.

Issues

Data from the 2014 Ipsos election-day poll shows that nearly 30 percent of voters mentioned the economy and jobs as their top campaign issue (see Table 2a). This is followed, somewhat distantly, by a cluster of three other issues: healthcare; public finances (i.e., government debt and budget); and integrity of political/government leaders.

Table 2a: Most important issue among voters

Issue	Party supported			Total
	Lib.	PC	NDP	
Jobs/Economy	32.6%	31.2%	27.3%	30.8%
Healthcare	17.2%	5.9%	16.5%	13.0%
Public finances	6.8%	24.6%	4.5%	12.5%
Integrity/corruption	10.4%	18.4%	17.6%	15.0%
Education	9.9%	0.8%	7.8%	6.1%
Taxes	3.3%	8.2%	6.1%	5.7%
Energy	3.2%	7.0%	7.0%	5.5%
Transit, Roads, Transport	7.2%	1.4%	3.1%	4.1%
Social Assistance/Pensions	6.1%	1.6%	7.1%	4.7%
Environment	2.1%	0.5%	1.9%	1.5%
Other	1.2%	0.6%	1.2%	1.0%
Total	2991	2659	1826	7476

Source: Ipsos Ontario 2014 Election Day Survey.

Across the parties, there is not a whole lot of distance with regards to the salience of economic concerns. The Liberals and PCs are practically tied, with a bit more than 30 per cent of their voters indicating economy or jobs as their top election concern. It was also a top concern among 27 percent of NDP voters. With regards to healthcare, the parties are distinguished. While 17 percent of Liberals and NDP voters cite healthcare as their top election issue, this was true only among 6 percent of PC voters. Even when considering the second-most important election issue (see Table 2b), PC voters seemed more pre-occupied with integrity/corruption (20 percent), and another quarter are split between public finances (18 percent) and jobs/economy (17 percent).

Table 2b: Second-most important issues among voters

Issue	Party supported			Total
	Lib.	PC	NDP	
Jobs/Econ	13.4%	17.2%	13.1%	14.7%
Healthcare	17.1%	10.3%	16.5%	14.5%
Public finances	11.4%	17.9%	7.6%	12.8%
Integrity/corruption	10.4%	20.1%	15.6%	15.1%
Education	10.0%	2.0%	8.7%	6.8%
Taxes	5.0%	10.8%	8.2%	7.8%
Energy	6.2%	10.9%	10.4%	8.9%
Transit, Roads, Transport	10.8%	4.3%	5.3%	7.1%
Social Assist/pensions	9.8%	3.5%	9.4%	7.5%
Environment	4.2%	1.3%	3.9%	3.1%
Other	1.8%	1.7%	1.3%	1.7%
	2991	2569	1826	7476

Source: Ipsos Ontario 2014 Election Day Survey.

Integrity and corruption was also a top issue for the NDP. Given that the NDP and the PC are in opposition, it not surprising for this issue to rank relatively high, since the target of this issue is the incumbent Liberal party. However, even 10 percent of Liberal

voters cited this issue is a top concern, and another 10 percent cited as the second-most important issue. It cannot, therefore, be considered strictly an issue for the opposition.

Media coverage

We now focus our attention on the media's role during the campaign. To a large extent, the outcome of an election depends heavily on how parties and candidates manage the narrative, and this directly implies media coverage. Here, we look at how the media covers the parties, leaders and issues.

To conduct our analysis, we gathered news articles from six daily newspapers representing different regions of Ontario, and drawn from three different media conglomerates. The database Lexis-Nexis was searched for newspaper articles relevant to the campaign from the day the campaign began (May 2, 2014) to election day (June 12, 2014). The number of stories that were in each newspaper are reported in Table 3.

Table 3: Media coverage

<u>Newspapers</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
Globe and Mail	35
Hamilton Spectator	102
National Post	57
Ottawa Citizen	50
The Toronto Star	205
Waterloo Region Record	91
Windsor Star	34

One useful way of understanding how the news media covered a campaign relates to the differential way in which newspapers treated each leader, and in particular to the prominence given to each leader. The attention that is accorded to leaders can be a powerful resource in an election campaign. In the United States, candidates in

presidential primaries often go through what is known as a discovery phase (Sides and Vavreck 2014) where their share of the media coverage starts to rise as journalists begin to look into their record, issues and personality. The attention this produces leads to a rise in poll results.

In the left panel of Figure 1, the number of articles per day in which the party leaders were mentioned *first* in is plotted. The right panel plots the raw number of mentions per day. There are a number of interesting patterns. First, throughout the entire campaign, the Liberal leader was mentioned first in news articles far more frequently than Hudak or Horwath. However, Hudak received just as many and, on quite a few days, more mentions than the other two leaders. The first finding is not surprising given the Liberals' status as the incumbent party, but the second is more counterintuitive. One clue as to why it happened is in the dramatic increase in attention paid to Hudak at the end of the first week of the campaign, around May 10 to 12. The PCs announced their commitment to cut 100,000 public sector jobs May 9, and stories appeared immediately, provoking a strong reaction from union leaders and opposition parties. After this initial burst of attention, Hudak and Wynne were winning equal mentions until the final week of the campaign when Hudak again began receiving slightly more mentions than Wynne.

We measured the media's issue agenda by taking the issue dictionaries developed as part of the Lexicoder automated coding software project.¹

In this case, they have been modified somewhat to capture unique dynamics of the 2014 campaign. Moreover, we only used the dictionaries that purport to measure macroeconomics, healthcare, energy, government operations, transportation and social

welfare. Macroeconomics and healthcare are included because of their consistently general importance in election campaigns.

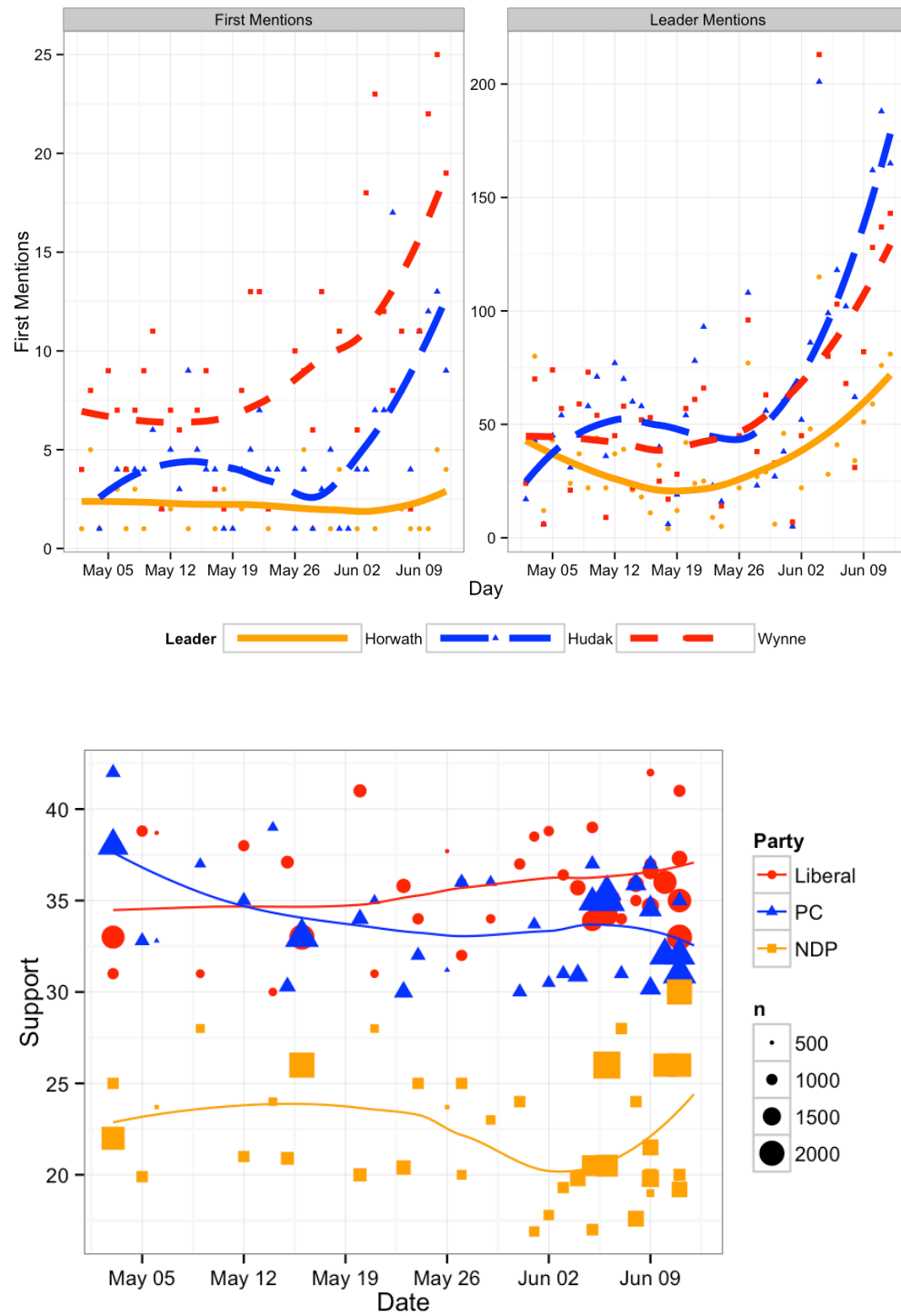


Figure 1: Party and leader mentions in media coverage

As shown in Figure 2, in the pre-campaign period, transportation issues were at the top of the media's agenda reflecting the incumbent party's ability to use the tools of government to set the agenda with various announcements. Knowing an election was imminent, the Liberals were able to set the agenda with announcements about transit projects, committing \$29 billion to transit funding over 10 years in April, including commitments for new subway and rail lines in the Greater Toronto Area. This had the dual effect of overshadowing media coverage about the lingering concerns about how the Liberals had managed (or mismanaged) the cancellation of contracts to construct two gas plants in Oakville and Mississauga. Note that newspaper stories dedicated far greater attention to transportation issues prior to the campaign's start than they did to energy issues (i.e., gas plants). However, media attention to transportation issues faded in the first few days of the election campaign, while the general issue of government operations – which we defined with the terms public sector, civil service and public service – increased in importance, largely because of Hudak's promise to eliminate 100,000 public sector positions. It is important to note that the promise to eliminate these jobs was not associated with a lot of positive coverage. We computed a few simple correlation scores between an article's overall sentiment with the frequency of issue mentions.² The more an article dealt with transportation, the more positive its sentiment ($r=.13$, $p<.001$), but results were less convincing when an article dealt with government operations (i.e. Hudak's promise to eliminate public-sector positions). Here, the correlation was much weaker ($r=.07$), and only marginally significant ($p\approx.09$).

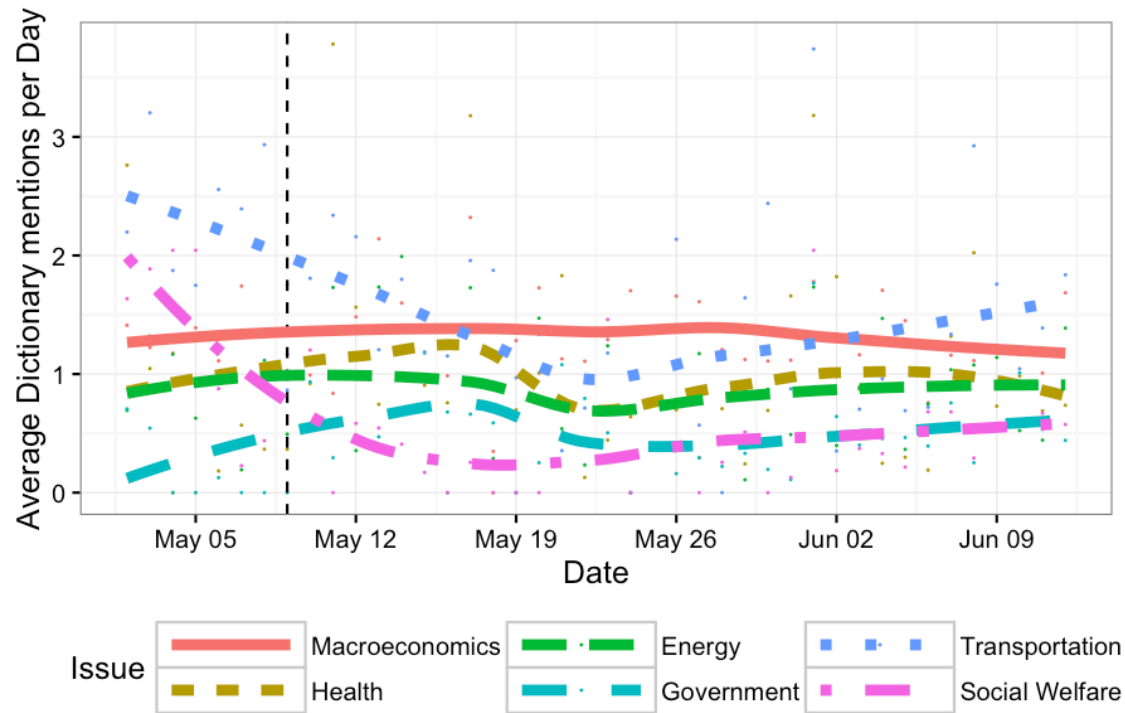


Figure 2: Issues in media coverage

The consequences of these decisions cannot be overestimated. In order to shift discussion away from lingering concerns about the gas plants, the Liberals promised massive amounts of investment in transit. This pushed the gas plant scandal off the pages of the newspapers. Then, rather than trying to focus the agenda back onto a troubling scandal about Liberal behaviour, the Conservatives opened up a new front in the campaign with a dramatic announcement to eliminate massive numbers of public sector positions. Not surprisingly, such an announcement did not deliver any positive media coverage.

Campaign dynamics

Our look at voter sentiments towards the parties takes into account the period before the actual campaign. Figure 3 shows the parties' poll numbers from January, 2014, until the

end of the campaign. Also on the graph are three vertical lines to indicate key events, namely: 1) dissolution of the provincial parliament on May 2; Tim Hudak's job-cuts announcement on May 9; and the televised leaders' debate on June 2.

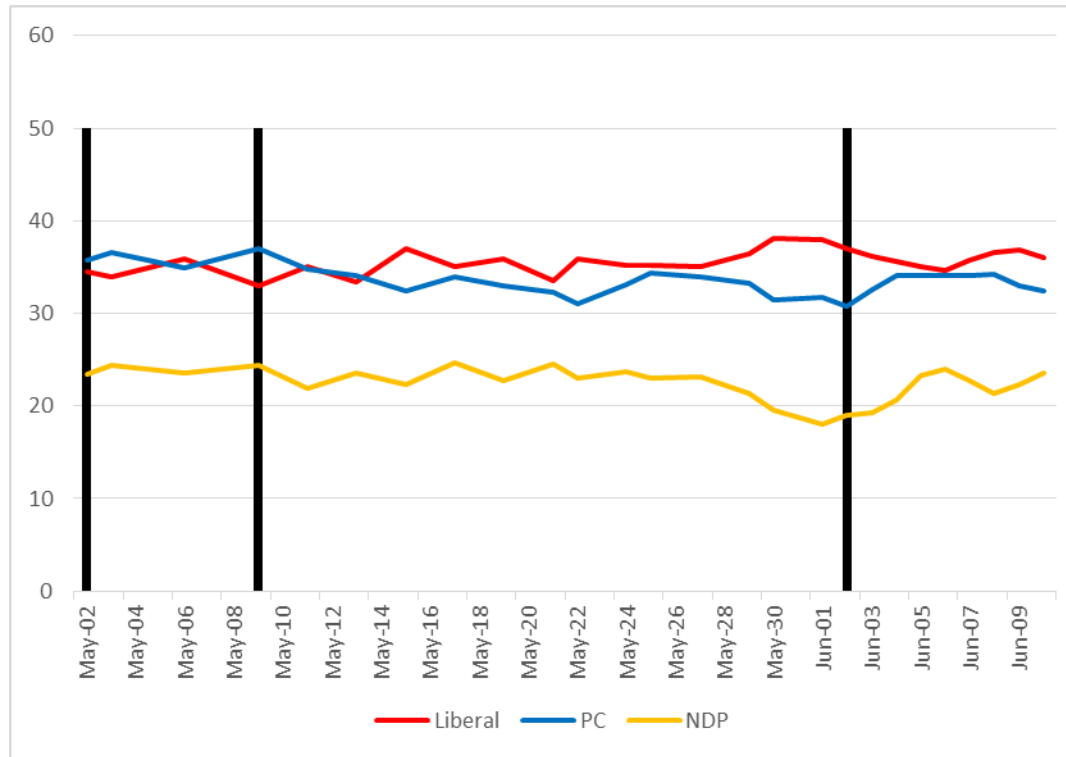


Figure 3: Voting intentions, May to June, 2014

Pre-campaign period polls show little movement in public support for the major parties. Overall, the Liberals and Progressive Conservatives took turns at the lead, but never was either in the lead by a wide margin. In addition, the New Democratic Party also found itself close in popularity to the other two parties, although over the months the NDP's poll numbers continued to weaken.

The NDP, which held the balance of power for the minority Liberals, did not seem to benefit from this role. The NDP announced its intent to not support the Liberal's budget, tabled for June. This would have forced a vote of non-confidence. Premier

Wynne, instead, proactively had the legislature dissolved on May 2, thereby kicking off the election campaign and controlling its timing to some degree. This announcement by the NDP to oppose the budget seemed to have done little to reverse the NDP's fortunes.

The PCs, too, failed to exploit the campaign period effectively. Over time, its support declined. One possible reason may be Hudak's announcement to eliminate 100,000 public-sector jobs. It was an announcement that backfired and forced Hudak to issue revised statements. He did not retract that announcement, as public sector cuts fall within the general orientations of right-of-centre parties. But the manner in which this announcement was handled may have forced the PCs into a position of managing a communications crisis, while the Liberals were able to get their message out more consistently.

The other key event was the televised leaders' debate. Following this event, the two opposition parties saw an improvement in their poll numbers. The NDP's had support from 19 percent of voters prior to the debate, rising upward to the mid-20s afterwards. The PCs, too, saw modest gains, from the low 30s to the mid-30s. The Liberals, on the other hand, showed a slight decline. Their pre-debate poll numbers hovered from 36 to 38 percent, dipping to 34 percent in the following days. None of this mattered as the campaign ended with the Liberals capturing 39 percent of the popular vote, enough to win a majority of seats. The PCs and NDP captured 31 and 24 percent of the vote, respectively.

However, the election victory is based on fairly modest shifts among the electorate. The improvement in popular vote for the victorious Liberals was no greater than for the NDP. Both gained a bare one percentage point compared to their 2011

performance. The perspective is a little different in absolute terms. First, turnout was higher in 2015, 52.1 percent compared to 49.2 percent in 2011. Within this shift, it appears the net loser was the PC. The Liberals gained almost 239,000 more votes compared to 2011, the NDP gained 163,300. The PC's loss of 21,000 votes in an election with far more voters translated to the party's four percentage points decline. These shifts in support levels account for the seat shifts that cost the Conservatives nine members, and transformed the legislature into a majority for Kathleen Wynne.

Voter dynamics and partisan support

Despite the Liberals' modest gains, it is worthy to look at where the party drew much of its support. Table 4 presents a multinomial logistic regression model to examine the relationship of a battery socio-demographic factors and issue priorities against the three main parties. Vote for the Liberal Party is set as the base category. Table 5 converts these models into vote probabilities using the Stata module Clarify (Tomz, Wittenberg and King 2003). Here are some notable observations.

First, there is an apparent gender gap in voting, in a direction consistent with other findings in Canadian voting research (e.g., Gidengil et al., 2012). The probability of females voting for the Liberals was .45, compared to .37 among males. An even bigger gender gap is evident for the PC vote model. The probability of voting PC among females was .29, compared to .42 among males, a 13-point difference. The gender gap for the NDP points to the opposite direction, and is of a smaller magnitude. The probability of voting NDP was .26 and females, .20 among men.

Table 4: Multinomial logistic regression model for vote choice

	Conservative			New Democratic Party		
	Coef.	S.E.	Sig.	Coef.	S.E.	Sig.
Female	-.394	.068	.000	.095	.073	.195
Immigrant	.146	.086	.091	-.066	.096	.491
Religion						
Catholic	-.201	.125	.109	-.133	.129	.303
Mainstream protestant	.156	.122	.201	-.076	.129	.560
Evangelical protestant	.636	.139	.000	.029	.152	.848
No religion	-.335	.128	.009	.058	.128	.652
Urban	-.188	.077	.015	-.040	.083	.630
Age						
18 to 34	-.094	.138	.493	.037	.124	.768
54 and up	-.042	.082	.605	-.443	.084	.000
Union member	-.602	.093	.000	.487	.084	.000
Education						
Low	.371	.212	.080	-.025	.226	.912
High	-.668	.100	.000	-.605	.103	.000
Income						
Low	-.014	.087	.870	.322	.087	.000
High	-.092	.081	.257	-.563	.090	.000
Region						
Toronto	-.580	.112	.000	-.163	.118	.167
GTA/"905"	-.163	.094	.082	-.322	.111	.004
Southwestern Ontario	-.033	.087	.703	.682	.091	.000
Issue priorities						
Jobs/Economy	.328	.071	.000	-.164	.075	.029
Healthcare	-.555	.088	.000	-.047	.082	.568
Public finances	1.133	.078	.000	-.353	.104	.001
Integrity/corruption	.799	.074	.000	.561	.079	.000
Intercept	.391	.185	.035	.134	.194	.491
N	5842					
Log likelihood	-5512.250					
Pseudo R-sq.	.126					

Note: Vote for the Liberal Party is the base category.

Source: Ipsos Ontario 2014 Election Day Survey.

Table 5: Vote probabilities

	Liberals	PC	NDP		Liberals	PC	NDP
Male	.40	.39	.21	Low income	.37	.31	.32
Female	.45	.30	.26	Middle income	.41	.34	.25
				High income	.47	.36	.17
Canadian born	.43	.33	.24				
Immigrant	.41	.37	.22	Urban	.44	.32	.24
				Rural/smaller urban	.40	.36	.23
Catholic	.46	.30	.23				
Main. Prot.	.41	.38	.22	Toronto	.51	.27	.22
Evangelical Prot.	.32	.48	.19	GTA/"905"	.46	.37	.17
No relig.	.46	.26	.28	SWO	.34	.31	.34
Other rel.	.42	.33	.24	Other	.41	.38	.21
Aged 18 to 34	.40	.30	.30	Jobs/economy	.47	.31	.22
Aged 35 to 50	.44	.35	.21	Healthcare	.55	.15	.30
Aged 54+	.39	.32	.29	Public finances	.35	.51	.14
				Integrity/corruption	.33	.35	.32
Union membership	.43	.21	.36	Other	.49	.23	.28
Non-union	.41	.37	.21				
Low education	.26	.51	.23				
Mid-level education	.30	.42	.28				
Highly educated	.46	.32	.23				

Second, religion shows some influence. The probability of voting Liberal among Catholics and those who practice no religion reached .46. Mainstream Protestants split their vote between the two major parties, although the PCs seems to have drawn far more support among Evangelical Protestants ($p=.50$).³

Third, education is an important driver. Education in the models is measured as a set of dummies. The first assigns a score of 1 to those with less than a high school education. The second dummy variable assigns a 1 to those with post-secondary education. The more one is educated, the higher the probability of voting Liberal, by a

fairly wide margin. An even larger margin is evident among those with less than a high school education, which overwhelmingly favours the PC. What explains this is unclear. Education and vote choice in Canada does not form clear and consistent patterns (Gidengil et al., 2012), although there is some European research that shows an inverse relationship between educational attainment and support for right-wing parties, particularly those in the far-right (see, for example, Lubbers and Tolsma 2011; Lucassen and Lubbers 2012; Mayer 2013). While the PC party is no example of a far-right party, some policy positions taken by the party over the years resonate with rhetoric familiar to that end of the ideological spectrum, such as in 2011 when Hudak's criticism of a proposed Liberal tax credit to encourage hiring new Canadians as a policy to advantage "foreign workers" (Brennan 2011).

Fourth, region is a major factor, about as impactful as education. Torontonians were more likely to vote Liberal ($p = .51$) than PC ($p=.27$) or NDP ($p=.22$). Actually, urban voters (measured here as respondents who lived in a city with a population of at least 1 million), overall, were more likely to vote Liberal ($p =.44$), while those who live in smaller communities split between the Liberals and PC. However, Liberal support in the Greater Toronto "905" region also edged out the PCs, an important finding if one assumes the "905" region identifies as mainly suburban. The result suggests that the suburban vote is not a guaranteed block of support for the PCs, challenging some previous findings (see, for example, Roy, Perrella and Borden 2015).⁴

These regional findings are supported in Table 6, which shows actual vote shares for the parties in the various regions for both the 2011 and 2014 elections. The PCs, which in 2011 had won 36 percent of the vote in the mostly suburban Greater Toronto

Area, saw their vote proportions drop five points to 31 in 2014. These votes split fairly evenly among the Liberals, NDP and other parties. But the Liberals' most secure base is in Toronto. The PCs, on the other hand, rely mainly on voters in Eastern and Southwestern Ontario, while the NDP does well in the North, as well as Southwestern Ontario.

Table 6: Party vote shares among Ontario regions, 2014

Region	Liberal	PC	NDP	Other
East	38.2%	38.2%	16.9%	6.8%
GTA	45.0%	31.3%	18.6%	5.2%
Hamilton-Niagara	34.4%	31.0%	28.7%	5.9%
North	34.9%	18.2%	42.4%	4.5%
Southwestern	28.6%	34.8%	28.6%	8.0%
Toronto	49.1%	23.0%	22.4%	5.5%

Perhaps the largest overall set of factors is issues. The largest coefficient in Table 4, and the largest probability score in Table 5, concern two issues that favoured the PC party. The PC's "issue base" was mainly centred on public finances, an issue traditionally pursued by conservatives (e.g., low taxes, cuts to government expenditures), and integrity, given the party's incessant criticism of the Liberals on a number of scandals. However, those for whom healthcare was a top issue – and this was a top issue, overall – were far more likely to have voted Liberal. No issues on this list was favourable to the NDP. It should be noted that, as previously mentioned, the list of issues offered in the Ipsos survey is much longer, but, as noted, these were not selected by a large proportion of the sample.

Conclusion

It is natural for winning parties to make various self-serving claims in interpreting their triumph, about how it was a mandate for this or that. However, there should not be any misunderstanding that this election was more Hudak's loss than a victory for Wynne. Indeed, it is difficult to remember any Liberal theme pitched in their television ads, apart from the 100,000 job cuts. What makes the outcome particularly compelling and ironic is that it was the third consecutive Ontario election where the Conservatives have blown a lead with some half-baked policy idea that blew up in their faces. Preceding examples include John Tory's proposal to extend the denominational school system in 2007 (Perrella et al. 2008), and Hudak's ruminations criticizing programs for foreign-born workers in 2011 (Kiss, Perrella and Kay 2014).

This election has also marked the evolution and extension of a curious trend of distinctive regional voting patterns in the province that is not fully understood. For some time we have observed a cleavage between large urban centres where the PCs do poorly, and the rural and smaller communities where they do very well. However, this election uncovered new regional effects such as the NDP underperforming in the city of Toronto, when they were modestly improving province wide. Also a similar dramatic decline for the Liberals in southwestern Ontario (it got worse the closer one got to Windsor) even while they were gaining in most other places.

Kathleen Wynne now leading a majority government has her future secure for the next four years. NDP leader Andrea Horwath also survived a leadership review shortly after the election, and will likely face another election campaign. The PCs, however, have chosen a new leader, Patrick Brown, who hopes to steer the party to success in the next

general election. However, the next election will be fought along new battle lines. An impending seat redistribution will likely add another 15 constituencies adjacent to the largest urban centres, where the PCs typically perform poorly. They must now appeal to 416 and 905 voters.

One lesson the Tories should have gleaned from this election is not to stray too far from the moderate centre in pushing austerity proposals. The ghost of Mike Harris still lingers. Ironically, the NDP, while losing their policy leverage in the new Liberal majority legislature, will be able to adopt a more comfortable posture on the left, and return to opposing rather than making excuses for sustaining the Wynne government. This comfort level will also allow them to heal differences with the party's ideological purists like Judy Rebick and Gerry Caplan, who nostalgically long for the days when it was more of a fringe movement with half the current complement of seats.

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Endnotes

¹ Lexicoder topic dictionaries were based on Albugh et al. (2013).

² To calculate each article's sentiment, we used the NRC Emotion Lexicon prepared by Mohammad and Turney (2013) to calculate a net sentiment score for each article.

³ Three Protestant denominations are considered "mainstream:" United Church of Canada, Anglican, Presbyterian. Most other Protestant sects are Evangelicals. A small number (e.g., Mennonites, Jehovah Witness) are excluded. For more details on this conceptualization, see Kay, Perrella and Brown (2009).

⁴ It should be noted that the Roy, Perrella and Borden's study is based on a survey that has a more direct question that identifies where a respondents lives: "Do you live in an urban, suburban, or rural environment?" In contrast, Ipsos election-day poll asks respondents to identify their community from four choices, based on population: rural (population less than 50,000), small town (50,000 to under 250,000 people), large city (250,000 to 1 million people), or metropolitan (at least 1 million people).