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Poll: Kathleen Wynne puts Liberals in dead heat with NDP, Tories

Rookie Liberal Leader Kathleen Wynne has given the governing party a boost with voters.



TARA WALTON / TORONTO STAR

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath has presented Liberal leader Kathleen Wynne, above, with a list of demands for supporting the minority government.

By: Rob Ferguson Richard J. Brennan and Robert Benzie, Published on Thu Jan 31 2013

Rookie Liberal Leader [Kathleen Wynne](#) has given the governing party a much-needed boost in popularity, a new poll suggests.

In the first public opinion survey since the incoming premier took over the Grit helm from Dalton McGuinty, Wynne is ahead of both Progressive Conservative Leader Tim Hudak and NDP Leader Andrea Horwath.

“One thing Dalton McGuinty did very effectively when he left is he took the anger with him,” Greg Lyle, managing director of Innovative Research Group, said Wednesday.

“More people like Kathleen Wynne already than liked Dalton McGuinty when he left,” said Lyle.

Wynne’s Liberals led with 24 per cent to 23 per cent for Hudak’s Tories, 20 per cent for Horwath’s New Democrats and 7 per cent for Mike Schreiner’s Greens. There were 14 per cent undecided, 11 per cent who refused to respond or would not vote, and 2 per cent who supported other parties.

That’s a statistical dead heat among the three major parties given the sample size of 446 people. The telephone survey, conducted Sunday to Tuesday, is considered accurate to within 4.6 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

“It’s wide open so it’s the Liberals’ game to lose.”

Gender seems to be a huge plus for Wynne, Ontario’s first woman premier. Some 70 per cent of respondents agreed it was “exciting” to have a female at the helm.

“If I was running the Tory or NDP campaign, that’s the thing that would scare me. The view that this new leader, because of her gender, because of her personality, because, because, because, is exciting,” said Lyle.

“And if people get excited about this new premier, that’s really good news for the Liberals and really bad news for everybody else.”

When it came to who would be the best premier, Wynne, who hasn’t even been sworn in yet, was at 24 per cent, ahead of Hudak at 18 per cent, with Horwath trailing at 13 per cent.

Innovative also asked whether sexual orientation would play a role in voters’ decision-making because Wynne is the first lesbian premier in Canadian history.

“It’s not a problem for her,” said Lyle, noting more than four in five respondents agree “it’s a good thing” or don’t really care, with just 16 per cent expressing concern about that.

“At the most, it’s a consideration for people who already have a lot of other considerations about who they would vote for,” he said.

Wynne, meanwhile, met Wednesday with Alberta Premier Alison Redford, who was the first provincial leader to congratulate her when she won the Liberal leadership Saturday.

“It is pretty exciting that premier Wynne is going to come in at a time in Canada that really is important for our national development,” Redford, who worked closely with McGuinty, said after their meeting at Queen’s Park.

While Wynne is yet to name a cabinet, Horwath said she wants the upcoming spring budget to close \$1 billion in corporate tax loopholes, establish an on-the-job training program for youth, and allow people on welfare who find jobs to keep more of their pay before clawing it back.

The welfare change, recommended in a major report on social assistance reform last year, is something Hudak also supports.

Wynne has indicated she likes that idea as well and has declared youth unemployment as a priority issue.

“We have a real opportunity to get things done here,” Horwath said, noting she will raise more demands in the coming days.