



POLICY BRIEF

January 2025 - Election

DOUG FORD CHALLENGES THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM



Photo credit – Justin Tang/The Canadian Press

Ever since David Peterson gambled on an early election in 1990, the conventional wisdom in Ontario has been that early elections are an extraordinarily risky prospect. But, true to form, Doug Ford is set to test that conventional wisdom. It is now confirmed that the provincial election will be called January 29 for an election date on February 27th.

Some of us recall the last time we had a winter election, and the great difficulty encountered in trying to pound signs into the frozen ground. In 2006, that election saw Stephen Harper win a minority government against Paul Martin. That election is perhaps less instructive than a previous one where Jean Chrétien called and won a snap election against Stockwell Day bucking the conventional wisdom in at least Ontario.

That the Ford team also anticipates that an election will result in a strong(er?) mandate bucks a larger trend of late, that has seen incumbent governments at home - and around the world - struggle with their re-election prospects (Tim Houston's re-election in Nova Scotia notwithstanding).

The core narrative being used by the Premier to justify an early election is the need for a clear mandate to promote and protect Ontario's interests with the Federal government and with the Trump administration in the face of uncertainty, if not outright [chaos](#). Indeed, the one-off threat of tariffs on inauguration day has now become an ongoing trade dispute and negotiation without end.

The Premier further argues for a new mandate to address or mitigate the impact of Tariffs (or other pressure tactics) on the Ontario economy, business and jobs with reference to the potential need for direct support payments or other similar extraordinary responses such as those seen during COVID.

Even if the opposition parties are successful in changing that ballot question to focus more on the governing party's deficiencies in government (particularly around healthcare and governing competence), the uncertainty around the economy and the chaos emerging out of the US will feature prominently in the election. It is worth noting that the opposition has stuck to the conventional critique of the Premier's early election call labeling the election both unnecessary and expensive. It will be worth observing the speed at which those positions adapt to the decidedly unconventional electoral context.

It's no secret that the Premier and his campaign team have been strategizing for an early election for many months now – primarily to take political advantage of the abysmal favourability of the Prime Minister (who effectively absorbed the electorates anger with everything that feels wrong regardless of the constitutional separation of powers and responsibilities).

The existential threat from the Trump administration is a serendipitous development for the Premier in creating a reasonable justification for an early election. It's somewhat ironic too, that the Premier's pitch for an early election and the equally serendipitous role he now plays as Chair of the Council of the Federation, have starkly contrasted his "country-first" positioning to that of the inwardly facing Liberal Party of Canada.

If the election does yield another strong mandate for the Premier, it will solidify him as an extraordinary and enigmatic political figure in the political history of Ontario and Canada. He has re-written the rules of electoral and governing politics. Perhaps more accurately, he – unlike any other politician of the moment – intuitively navigates the current governing landscape and this new political era of uncertainty and rising geopolitical insecurity.

This is going to be a quick and narrowly focused election. Stakeholders take note.

Off we go, then, into a rare winter election – don't put your long-underwear away anytime soon.