



EKOS/Toronto Star Poll

Public Response to the Ontario Budget: Lights, camera, but no action

**Presentation to:
The Toronto Star**

April 3, 2003



EKOS RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

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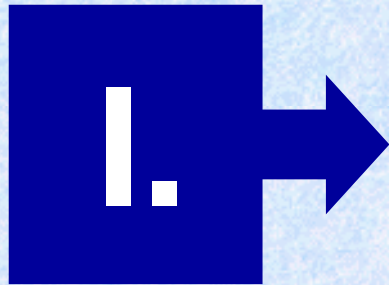
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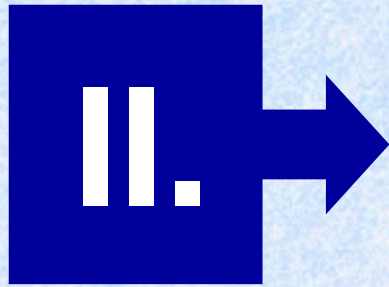
Methodology



Methodology

- Telephone survey of the general public
 - ❖ 703 completed interviews with a random sample of Ontario residents 18 years of age and over
 - ✓ Interview period: March 31 – April 2, 2003
 - ✓ National results valid within +/- 3.7 percentage points, 19 times out of 20
 - ❖ The margin of error increases when the results are sub-divided
 - ❖ It should also be noted that the refusal rate and other measurement errors could also increase the margin of error
- All the data were statistically weighted to ensure the sample's regional, gender and age composition reflects that of the actual population of Ontario according to Census data.





The Ontario Budget



Ontario's Budget produces mixed results and little excitement...

- Ontarians paying a high level of attention to the Ontario Budget
 - ❖ 70 per cent aware (40 per cent clearly recall, 30 per cent vaguely)
 - ✓ 2003 Federal Budget generated similar numbers at national level
 - ❖ Important generational gap, with majority of youth not able to recall having heard about the Budget
 - ❖ Budget awareness also linked to social class, but impact less dramatic than youth disconnect
- Budget receives mixed marks leaning to neutral
 - ❖ 21 per cent rated it as good, 21 per cent bad and 46 per cent as neither
 - ❖ Even the PC supporters not overwhelmingly positive with more than 80 per cent equally divided in the good and neither categories
 - ✓ "Divided" and "bored" characterizes the state of mind
 - ❖ Budget performance mirroring perceived personal budget impact
 - ✓ 56 per cent think the Budget will have no impact on them
 - ✓ Social class effect with self-rated upper class more likely to anticipate positive personal impacts



...but individual measure generates some support

- Ontarians support the property tax rebate for seniors
 - ❖ A strong majority endorses this measure with supporters more than three times the level of opponents
 - ❖ Age effect with support stronger as respondent approaches the retiring age
- Majority reject the reinstatement of the tax break measure for private school tuition
 - ❖ The level of opposition nearly twice that of the level of support (44 per cent vs. 27 per cent)
 - ❖ Even the likely beneficiaries (e.g. higher income households) are more likely to reject than support measure



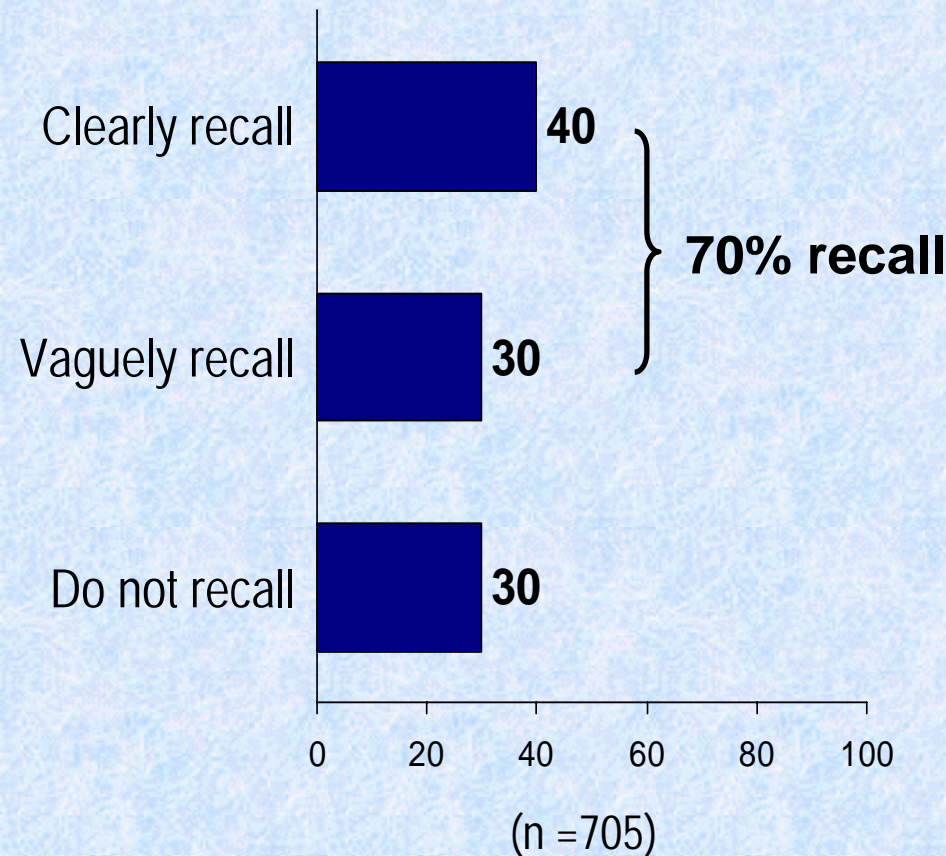
Budget location rejected with some evidence of media effect

- Most reject the delivery of the Budget in an auto-parts facility
 - ❖ 49 per cent oppose, 20 per cent support and 23 per cent neither support nor oppose
 - ❖ Even respondents rating the Budget positively reject the move
 - ❖ PC supporters divided on the issue with slim plurality leaning toward support
- Opposition for auto-part delivery linked to media attention
 - ❖ Respondents who have not heard about the Budget are significantly less critical toward Budget location issue

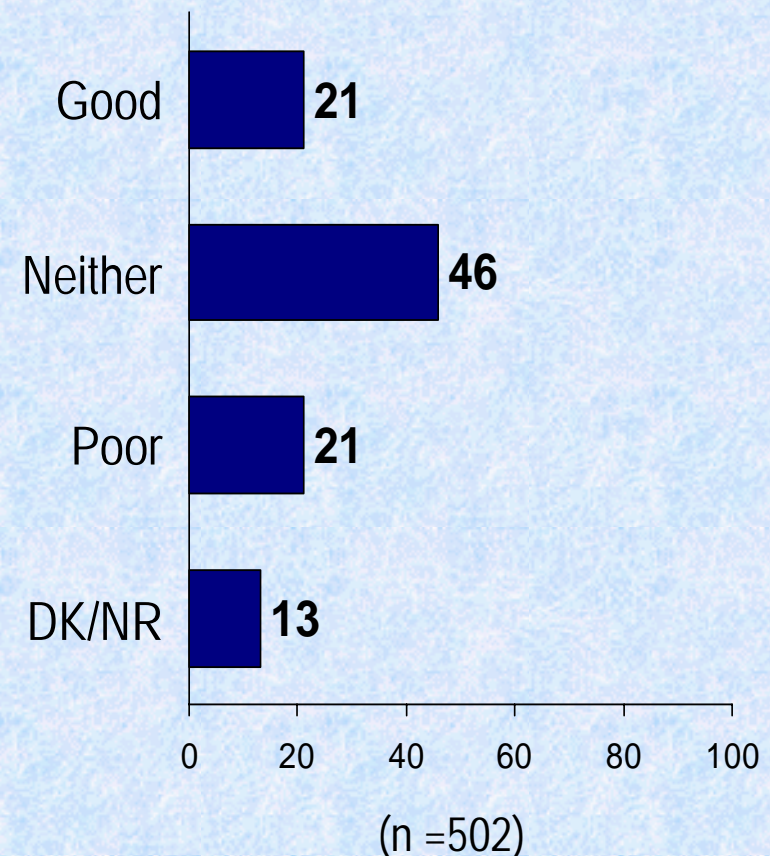


Majority recall budget, minority view it positively

Q: The Ontario government tabled its annual budget on March 27, 2003. Would you say that you clearly recall, vaguely recall or do not recall hearing about it?



Q: Overall, how would you rate the budget?
(Filter: clearly/vaguely recall budget)



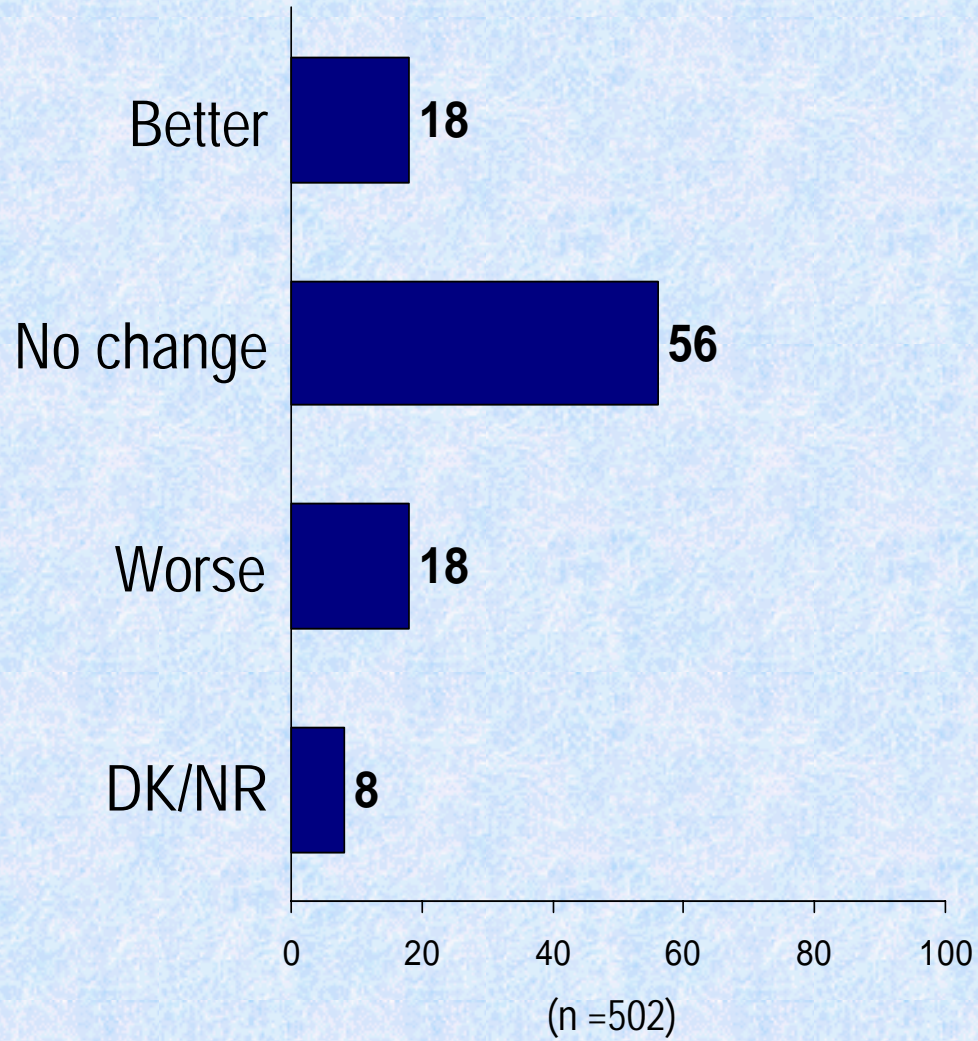
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Majority think budget will have no impact

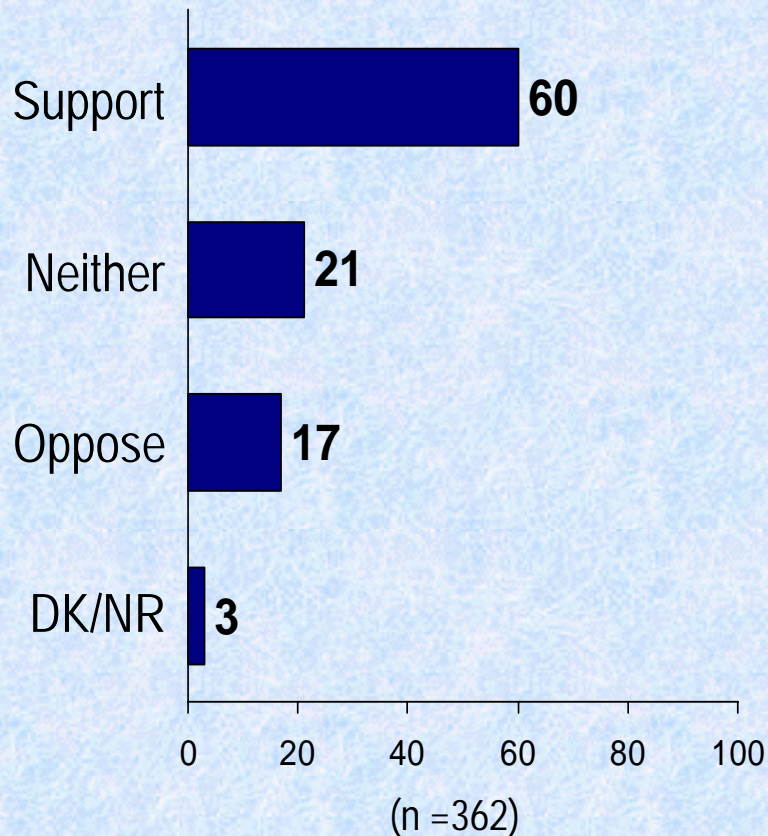
Q: What do you think will be the OVERALL impact of this budget for you and your family?
(Filter: clearly/vaguely recall budget)



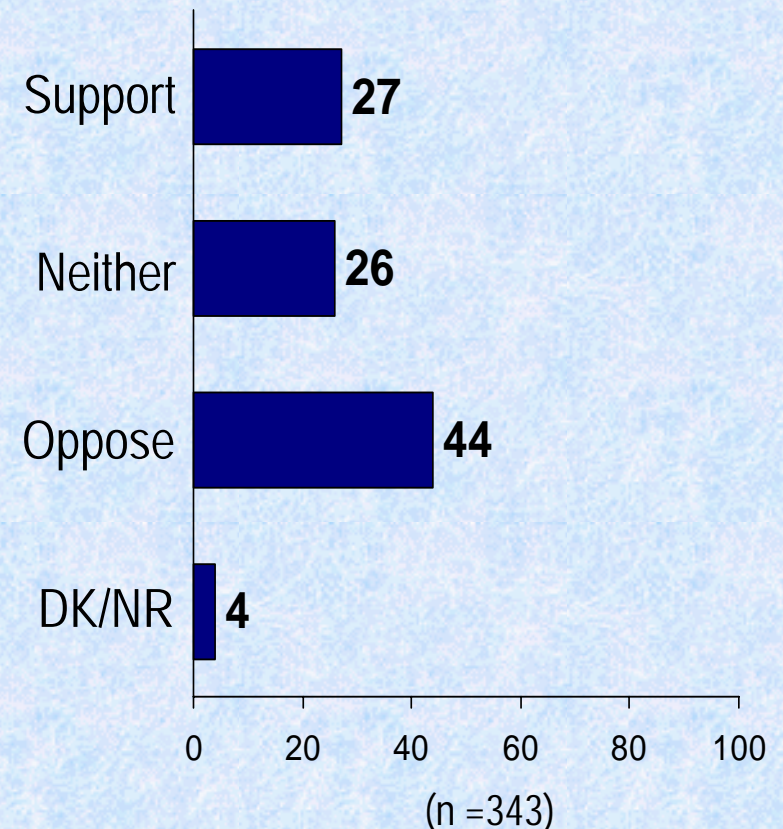
Most support tax rebate for seniors but oppose credit for private school tuition

Q: Do you support or oppose the following aspects of this budget?

An annual property tax rebate of \$475 on average for seniors



The restoration of the tax credit for private school tuition



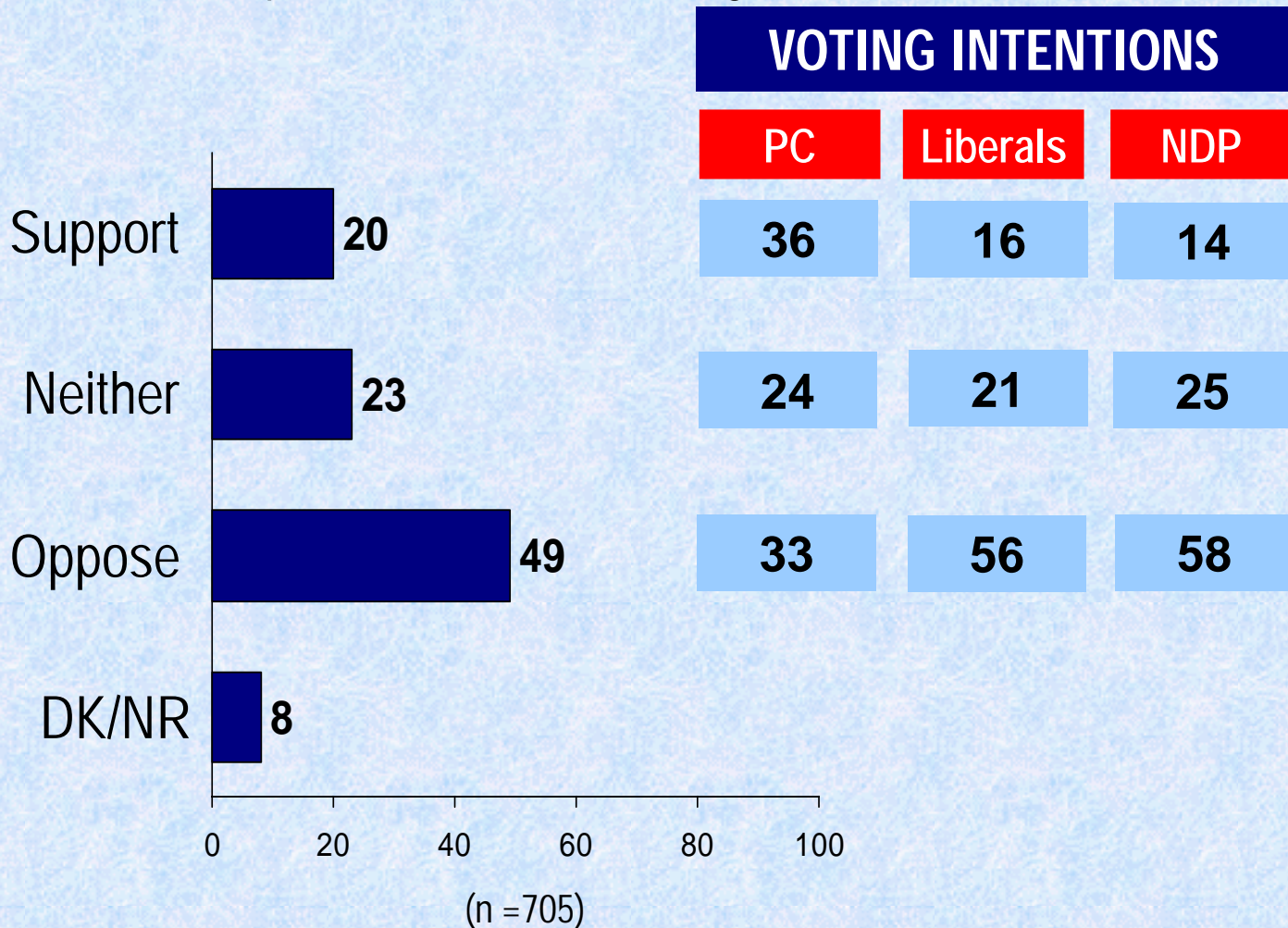
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Public rejects decision on budget location, even PC supporters divided

Q: Do you support or oppose the decision of Premier Ernie Eves to deliver the budget outside the legislature in an auto-parts research and training centre?



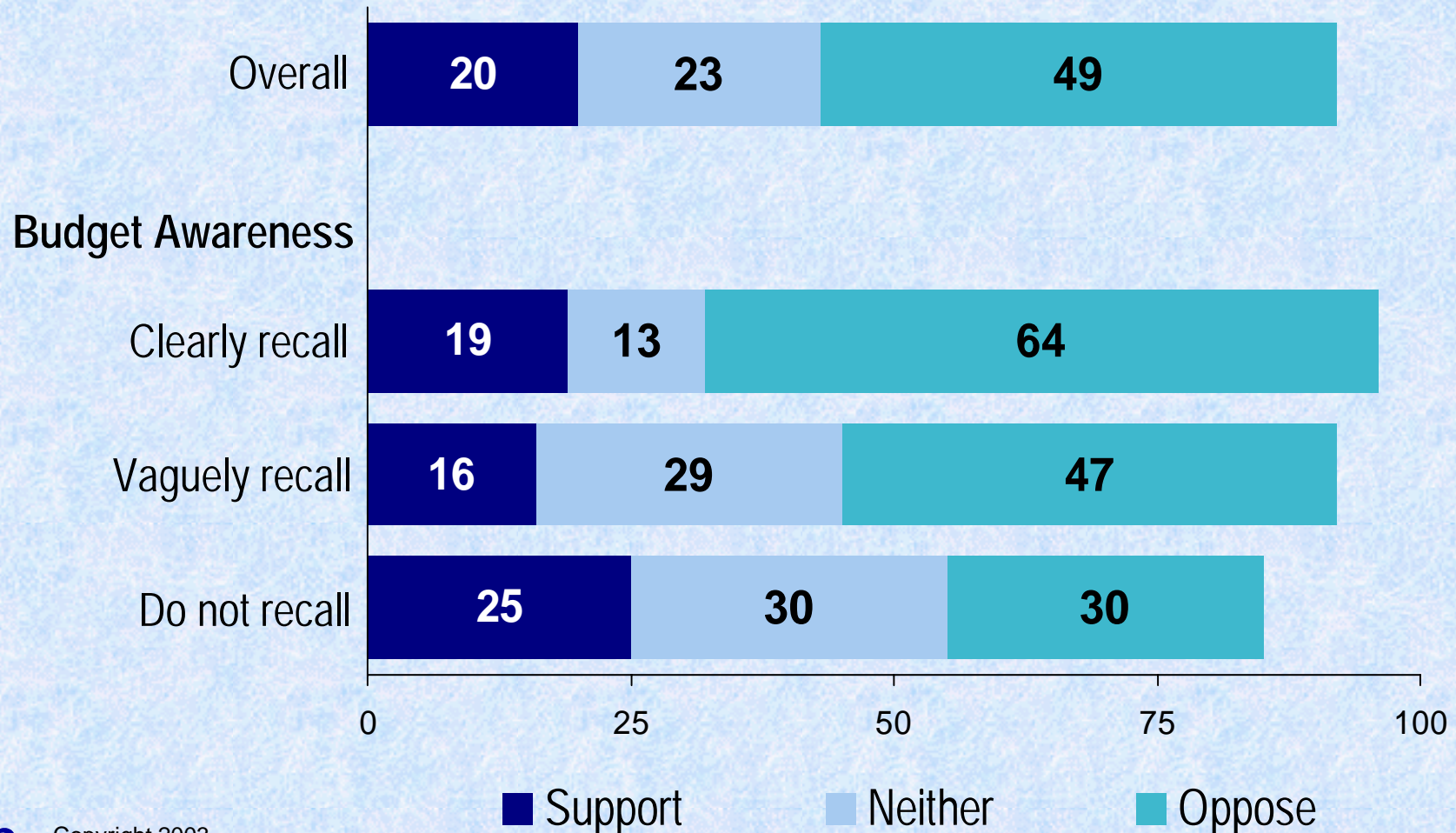
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Budget awareness linked to budget location: Media effect?

Q: Do you support or oppose the decision of Premier Ernie Eves to deliver the budget outside the legislature in an auto-parts research and training centre?



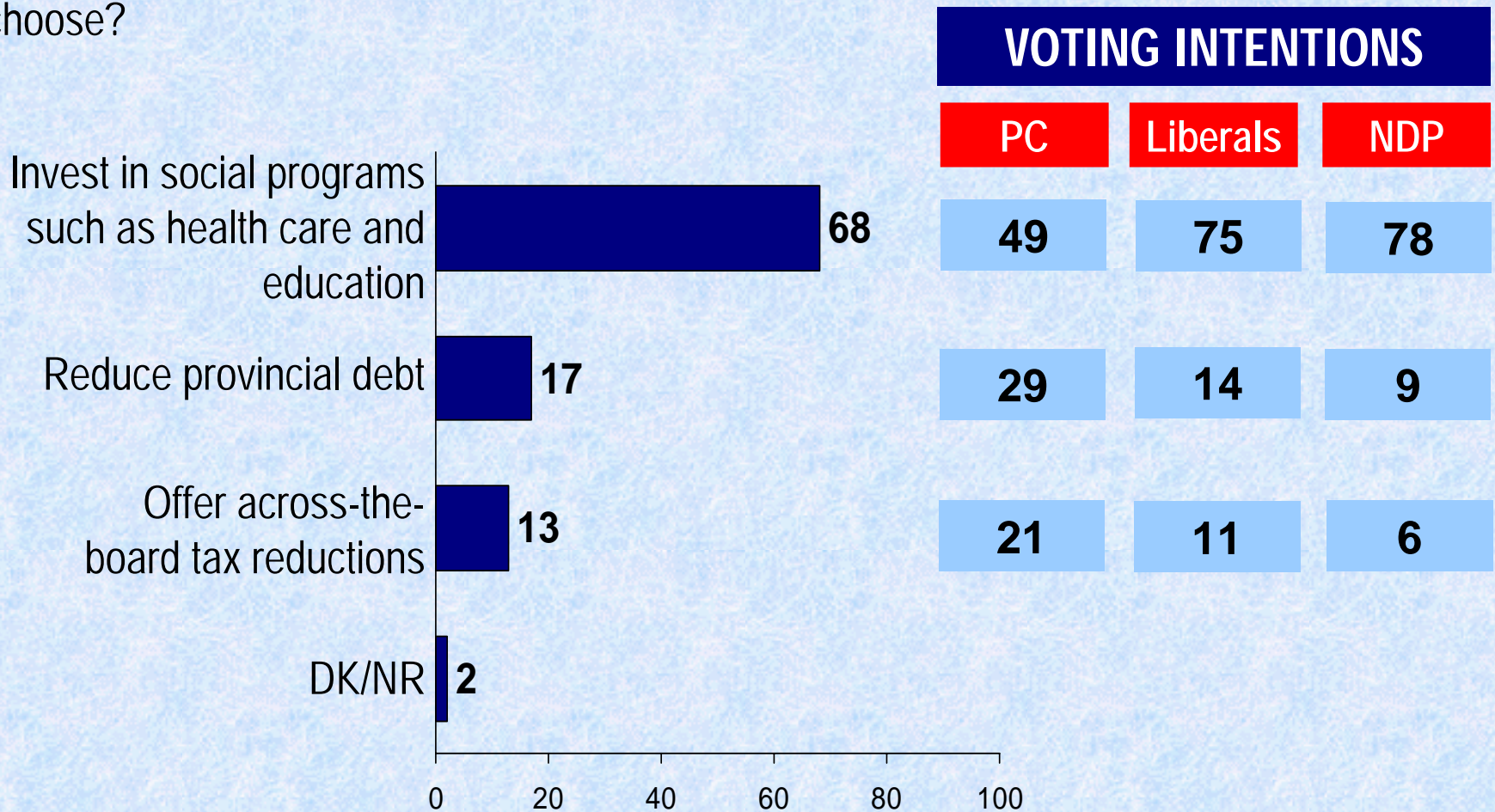
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Public maintains focus on social spending, tax cuts are losing traction

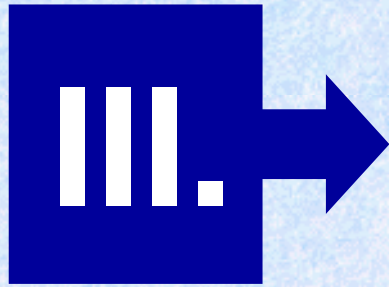
Q: Suppose that you were the Premier of Ontario for a day and you had to decide how to allocate the budget of the province, which of the following three options would you choose?



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Positioning on War in Iraq



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Eves' positioning on Iraq produces polarized reaction

- Ontarians express decisive views with virtually no respondents sitting on the fence
 - ❖ Level of undecided less than 10 per cent – unusual on public policy issues
 - ❖ Other polls have shown that Ontarians and other Canadians are paying exceptionally close attention to Iraq conflict
- Ontarians not as dovish as one may think
 - ❖ Past EKOS/TS polls have shown that Alberta and Ontario were regionally the most hawkish
- Ontarians divided along the left and right of the political spectrum
 - ❖ Strong majority of PC favour
 - ❖ NDP's strongly reject and Liberal's divided on Eves' declaration
 - ❖ Will the NDP's clearer anti-war position draw dovish votes away from the Liberals?
- Most Ontarians also support the Government of Canada's positioning on Iraq
 - ❖ Last EKOS/TS Poll conducted in the first days of the war shows that 71 per cent supported the Government of Canada's positioning on the Iraq crisis

✓ Confusion, shifting landscape or pragmatism?

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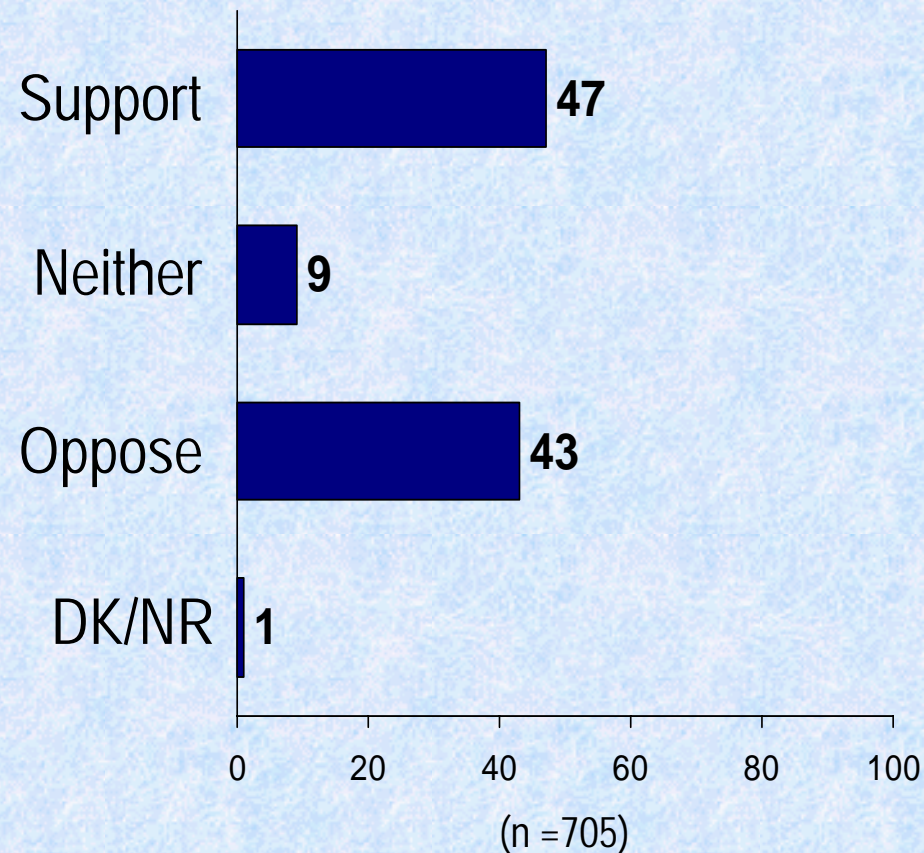
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Eves' positioning on Iraq produces highly divided response with plurality supporting

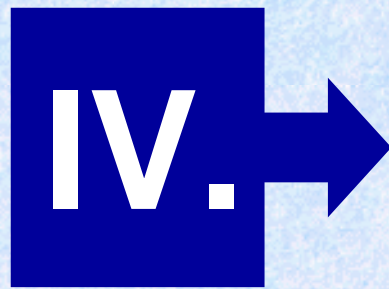
Q: Premier Ernie Eves recently announced that he opposed the Government of Canada's decision not to be a part of the U.S. led military action against Iraq. Personally, would you support or oppose Canadian participation in the US led military action against Iraq.



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The Ontario Political Landscape



Liberals well positioned in pre-electoral campaign

- Two-way race with the Liberals maintaining/solidifying already huge lead
 - ❖ The gap separating the Liberals and the PC widened to 19 points (53% vs. 34% compared to 50% vs. 38% in January 2002)
 - ❖ Liberal's advantage stronger among youth and low-income Ontarians
 - ❖ PC's advantage stronger among men, seniors and upper-income
 - ✓ Weaker/declining gender gap compared to 1999 polling
 - ❖ But ballot effect and voters' loyalty favour PC
 - ✓ Youth and lower-income less likely to vote than seniors and upper-income
 - ✓ PC supporters most committed with about 1 in 5 likely to change vote compared to 1 in 3 for Liberals and NDP

- Liberals preferred second choice
 - ❖ 35 per cent of those "likely" to change support the Liberals, 21 per cent PC and 20 per cent NDP
 - ❖ Liberal and PC more likely to convert toward each other, NDP more likely to convert to Liberal



PC's behind with declining leadership advantage on Tory topics

- Evidence that the PC's are losing traditional advantage on economic issues
 - ❖ PC Leader slightly more trusted than Liberal/NDP leaders on taxation, employment, and public finance and debt issues, but 1999-2003 polling comparison show enormous decline and some progress for Liberal and NDP leaders respectively
 - ❖ Expected 2003 election may not be déjà vu
- Evidence that the Budget had some negative impact on PC voting intention
 - ❖ Worth noting is the positive and strengthening Liberal trajectory in voting intentions



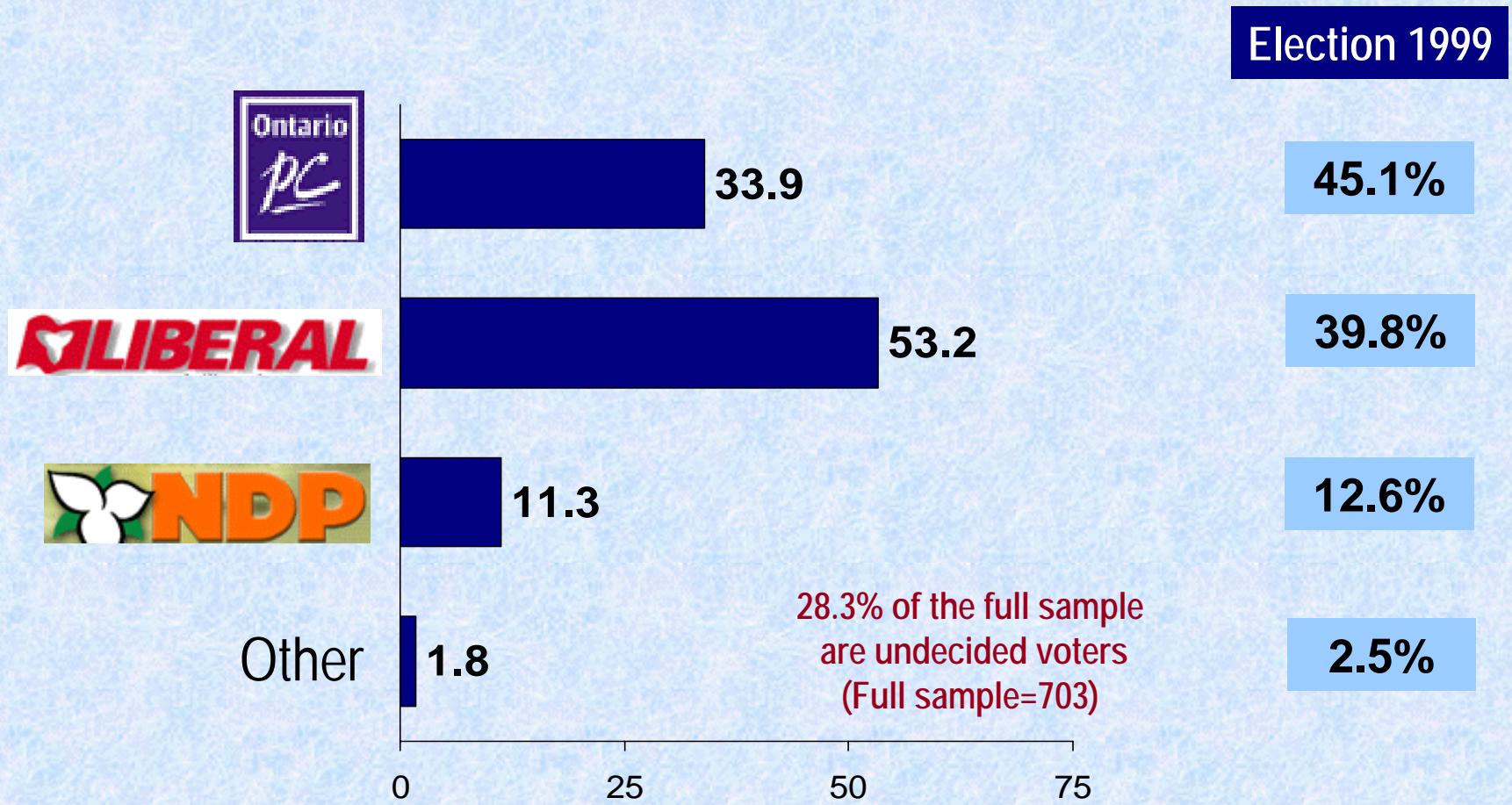
NDP will remain third party

- The NDP's fortunes down slightly but below party's traditional floor
 - ❖ NDP support stable over the past four years at 10-14 per cent despite recent doubling of membership in the province
 - ❖ NDP's advantage slightly stronger among youth
- NDP leadership advantage on environmental front
 - ❖ Mr. Hampton seen as the most credible on environmental issues, followed by Premier Eves and Mr. McGuinty



A two-way race with the Liberals dominating

Q: If a provincial election were held tomorrow, which party would you vote for?



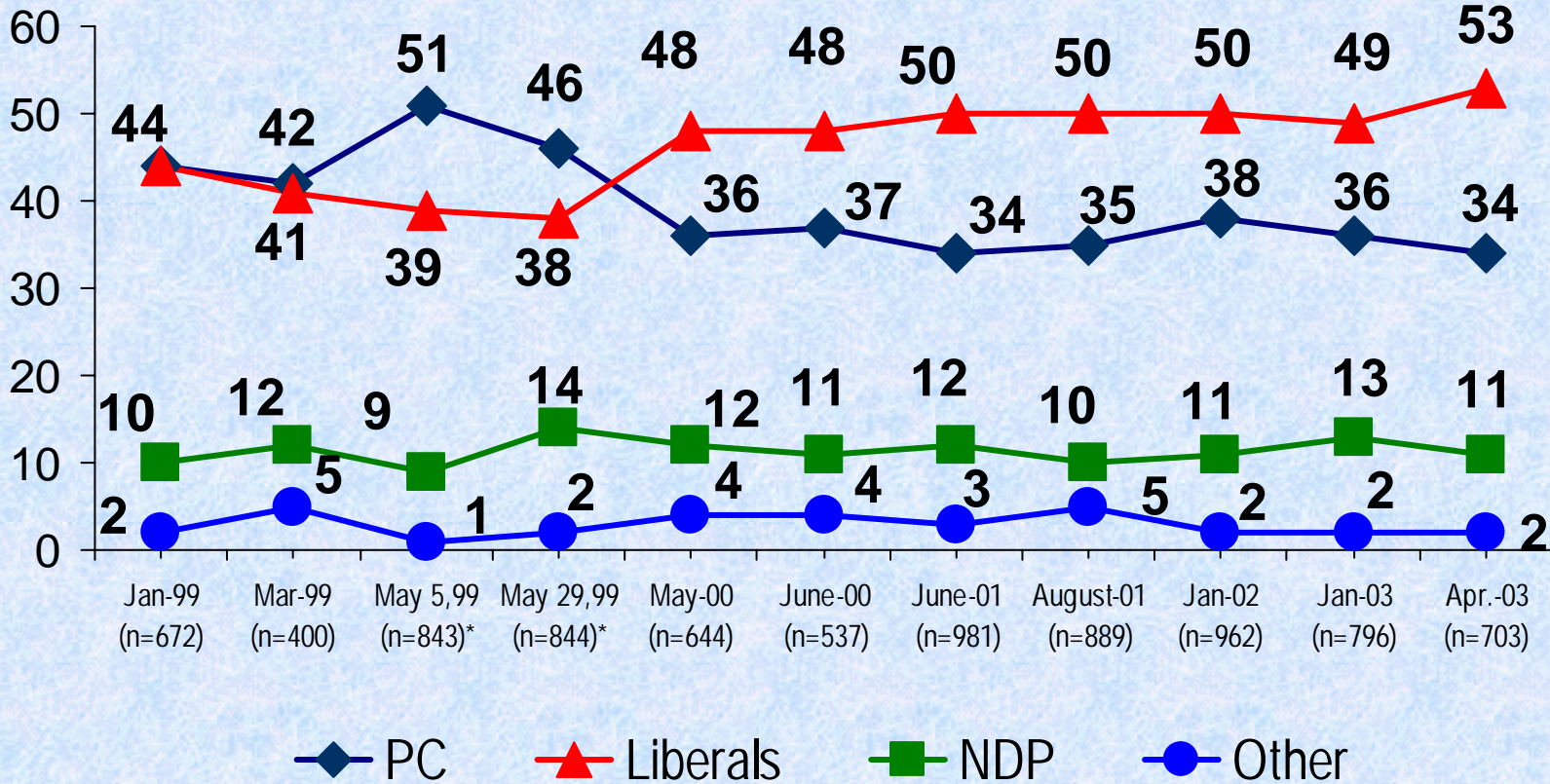
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Stability over a turbulent landscape

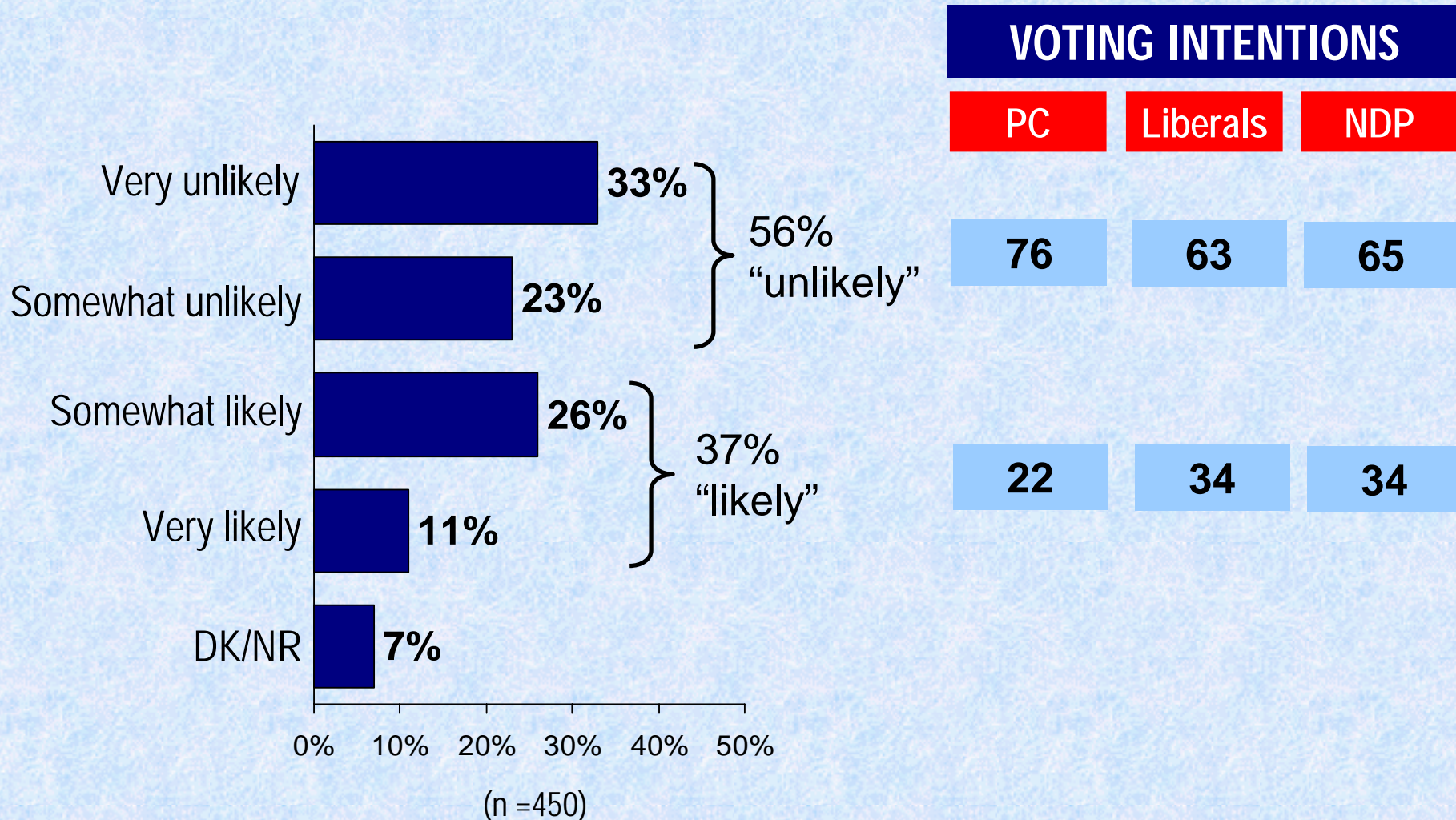
Q: If a provincial election were held tomorrow, which party would you vote for? [Decided voters only]



* During 1999 election campaign

PC support strongest

Q: Would you say it is very likely, somewhat likely or not very likely that you would change your voting intention before the Ontario election expected for 2003?



0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50%

(n =450)



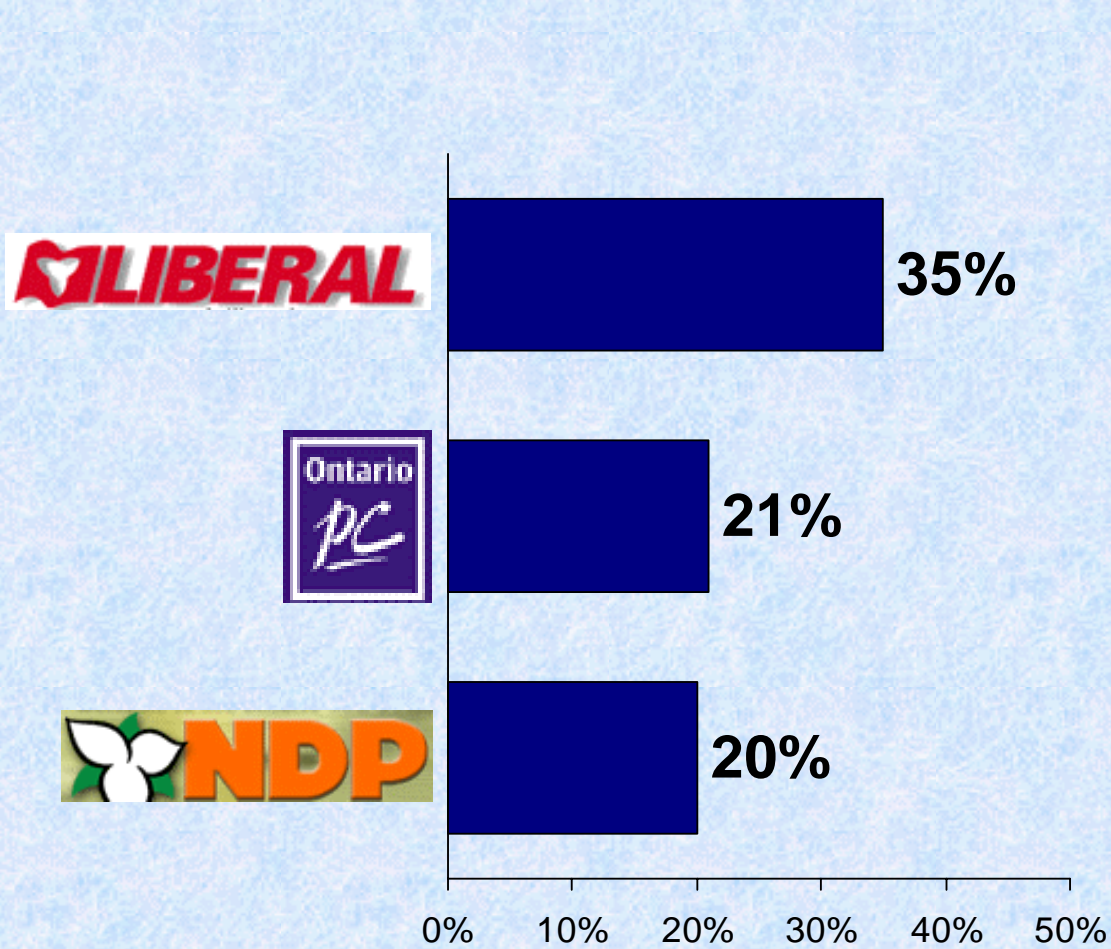
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Even second thought favor Liberal

Q: If you were to change your mind, which party would be your second best choice?"



VOTING INTENTIONS

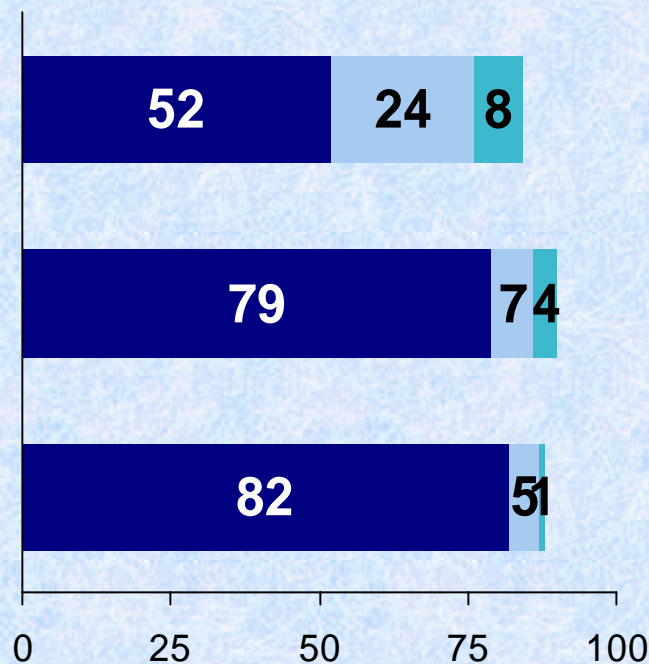
	PC	Liberals	NDP
LIBERAL	55	--	100
Ontario PC	--	49	0
NDP	24	33	--

(n = 164)

PC's declining leadership advantage on Tory topics

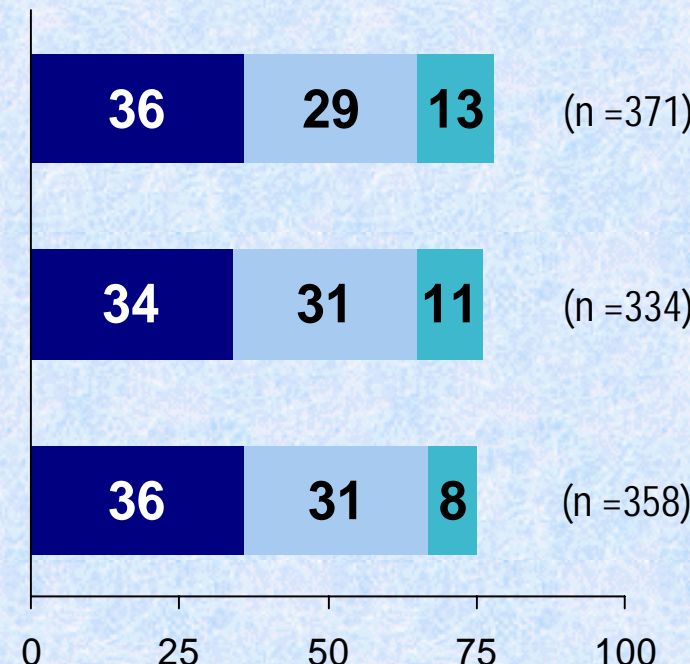
Q: Among the three Ontario provincial leaders, which one do you have the most confidence in for their ability to deal with...?

May 27-29, 1999



■ Mike Harris
 ■ Dalton McGuinty
 ■ Howard Hampton

March 31-April 2, 2003



■ Ernie Eves
 ■ Dalton McGuinty
 ■ Howard Hampton

*"Tax-Cuts" in 1999

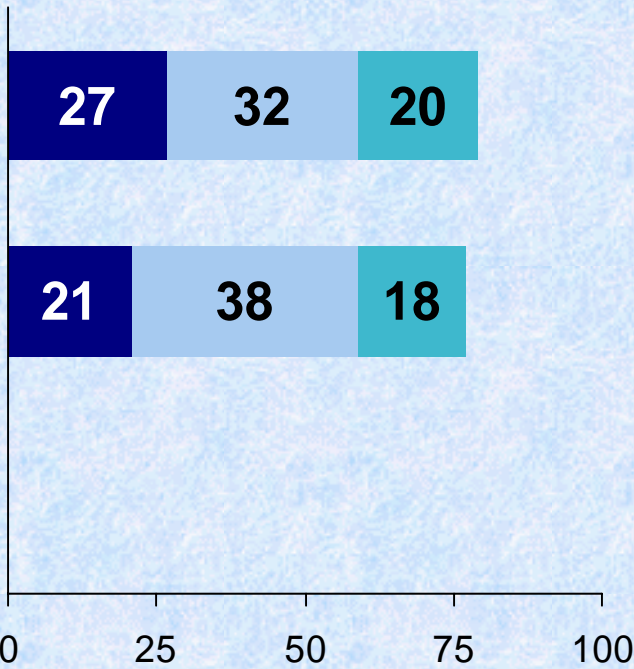
Note: Split samples used on both years



Less turbulence on the social agenda

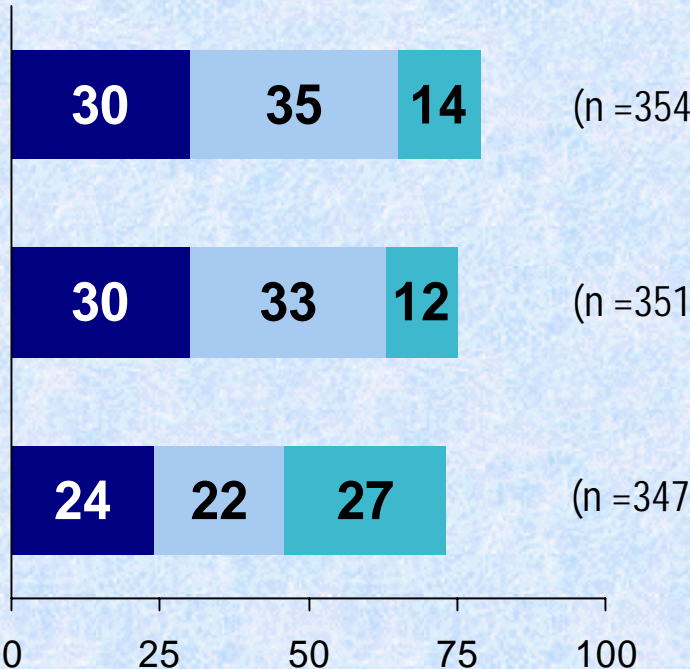
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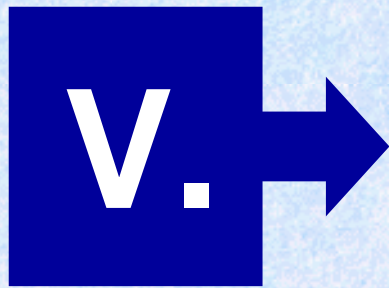


- Mike Harris
- Dalton McGuinty
- Howard Hampton

March 31-April 2, 2003



- Ernie Eves
- Dalton McGuinty
- Howard Hampton



Conclusions



Bottom Line (a)

- Public response to the Budget relatively negative both with respect to style and content – perhaps worst of PC era
 - ❖ Plurality rejects the decision on budget location (more negative among those exposed to media coverage)
 - ❖ Most see the Budget as having no/little personal impact

- Disconnect between budget focus and public interest
 - ❖ Public priorities remain quite stable with health and education dominating
 - ❖ Evidence of declining appetite for tax-cuts
 - ❖ More appetite for economic agenda among PC supporters but more appeal for debt reduction than tax-cuts



Bottom Line (b)

- Premier Eves' positioning on Iraq produces polarized reaction with lean supporting
 - ❖ Strong PC support
 - ❖ Will Eves' positioning on Iraq turn into a wedge issue splitting votes between opposition parties?
- Liberals reinforce/maintain already large lead
 - ❖ More troubling for the PC is the loss of their dominant competitive advantage on economic/fiscal fronts – the PC leader slightly ahead but no longer enjoys a dominant advantage over the Liberal leader
 - ❖ NDP down slightly since 1999 election and below traditional level of support





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