

May 2022

## RANDOM ELECTION MUSINGS

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The Ontario General Election is a little more than a week away so I thought I would fill this edition of COCA's GR Report with some personal observations and thoughts about the upcoming contest. So here goes:

- Polling has indicated that slightly more than 50% of Ontarians have been paying attention to the election campaign. Let's hope that picks up and voters get well informed before exercising their franchise
- Despite ever increasing ways to make voting more convenient and accessible for everyone, voter turnout has been low over the last twenty years or so and only 56.7% of eligible voters turned out in 2018; have politics and elections become irrelevant to the lives of many Ontarians? Is democracy failing us? Is it because in our current multi-party parliamentary system fewer than 40% of those who vote can elect a majority government which is akin to a four-year dictatorship? Both the Libs and the NDP have promised to explore election reform and consider such methods as the mixed member proportional representation system that was recommended by the Citizens Assembly on Electoral Reform in 2007
- This election isn't a contest of competing ideas, it's all about the branding, the marketing, the feel good, which party and which leader are you most comfortable (or least uncomfortable) with
- The party leaders seem to serve the role of a company logo or a team mascot, they are the party's brand
- What Doug Ford lacks in his interest in and understanding of public policy, he more than makes up for as a big cheerleader with his common enthusiastic refrains "I've got your back", "I've got the best minister of (fill in the blanks) ever", "no other government has ever done more to help (fill in the blanks)" etc. etc. rah rah rah
- There doesn't appear to be a traditional small "c" conservative party in the race, not one that is advancing ideas like smaller government, fewer regulations, fiscal responsibility
- The election appears to be almost like a bidding war for a highly desirable Toronto home with each major party doing everything they can to buy votes with taxpayers' money and treating voters like consumers and not like thoughtful and responsible citizens

- The debate was a non-event, a lot of blah blah blah, no knock-out punches; Ford didn't sparkle but neither did he stumble so as the incumbent, he was the winner; Del Duca was well prepared and articulate but came across a bit geekish; Schreiner was impressive, genuine and authentic; and well Horwath was Horwath, same old, same old; according to post-debate media reports, whenever Ford was off camera, he had his nose in his briefing book
- The Tories are using the classic leaders' playbook, limit media scrutiny; it's been reported in the media (and borne out in reality) that PC candidates have been instructed not to participate in all-candidates events. Avoid mistakes at all costs
- The PC's disastrous first year in government following their natural instincts to focus on populist ideas and knee jerk policy initiatives (remember Buck a Beer and the blue license plates) is all but forgotten in the minds of the opposition parties; the PC's have evolved from their pro small business, reduce red tape, smaller government roots to one that will do whatever it takes to stay in power
- The polls seem to be converging with most predicting another PC majority government with a few less seats or a few more than the 76 seats they won in 2018
- The big contest seems to be for second place with the Liberals trying to unseat the NDP as the Official Opposition; the polls are mixed on this count with some even predicting the Libs with a greater percentage of the overall vote but winning fewer seats than the NDP
- The Liberals held 55 seats in the Ontario legislature prior to the 2018 election when they were reduced to below official party status, winning only seven seats. Voters had grown tired of fifteen years of Liberal rule with its multiple scandals and progressive policy overreach and were ready for a change; so they took a risk and marked their ballots for Doug Ford and his PC team
- In the 2018 election, PC strategists considered Ford to be a negative feature in their campaign and he was pushed into the background and emphasis was focused on the team of more experienced PC MPPs; this time around, Ford is a prominent feature of the PC campaign; the Doug Ford brand is believed to bring an additional 10% -15% of voters to the Tory camp who do not identify themselves as PCs
- The margins of victory were narrow in many ridings in 2018 including: Brampton Centre (NDP), Brampton North (NDP), Brampton West (PC), Cambridge (PC), Don Valley East (Lib), Don Valley West (Lib), Eglinton Lawrence (PC), Kitchener Conestoga (PC), Kitchener South-Hespler (PC), Ottawa West-Nepean (PC), Sault Ste Marie (PC), Scarborough Guildwood (Lib), Scarborough Rouge Park (PC), Thunder Bay-Atikokan (NDP), Thunder Bay-North Superior (Lib), Toronto St Paul's (NDP), York South-Weston (NDP); some of these ridings will likely flip one way or the other
- Sometimes the voters in a riding have a stronger affinity towards their MPP than they do to that MPP's party. So, when that MPP decides to retire, the riding can be up for grabs. By my count there are 26

individuals who were elected in 2018 who are not seeking re-election in 2022 including 18 that were elected as PCs (at least ten of these 18 PC ridings are what might be characterized as rural so it's unlikely they are vulnerable to a change); among the six ridings won by the NDP in 2018 where there is no incumbent, the party could be vulnerable in Essex, Windsor-Tecumseh and Kingston and the Islands;

- Another interesting sub-plot is how Liberal leader Steven Del Duca will fare against PC incumbent PC Michael Tibollo who bested him in 2018 in Vaughan-Woodbridge in the election that swept the Grits from power; Del Duca had been elected previously in a riding then called Vaughan, first in a by-election in 2012 and then again in Vaughan in the general election in 2014
- A race that I find particularly interesting is a battle between two popular, competent and experienced politicians in Barrie-Springwater-Oro-Medonte where PC Doug Downey who served as Ford's Attorney General in the last provincial parliament faces off against the current three-term mayor of Barrie Jeff Lehman
- Another is Kingston and the Islands when in 2018 the smart and hardworking Liberal incumbent, Sophie Kiwala, was turfed in favour of NDP newbie Ian Angus. The riding tends to be Liberal (no PC has been elected provincially in the riding since 1981 or federally since 1984) but goes NDP in times that call for change. The Grits have a good chance to win this one with a strong campaign
- There will likely be one or two surprising upsets that none of the pundits or pollsters foresaw

Be sure to attend COCA's upcoming meetings in Niagara Falls and hear our friends from Earnscliffe Strategies, Charles Bird, Shakir Chambers and Rahul Bedi break it all down and explain the results.