

New Poll on Greenbelt and Housing

August 4, 2023

Introduction

The Alliance for a Liveable Ontario commissioned Environics Research to gauge public perceptions about: the cause of the housing crisis facing Ontario, the preferred solution and whose opinion people trust. A fourth question asked what party people voted for in the 2022 provincial election. The poll was part of an omnibus online panel survey and taken between July 12-17, 2023.

Whose Greenbelt and housing narrative resonates with Ontarians?

For well over two years, Premier Ford and the Ontario government have promoted the narrative that the shortage and high cost of “market” homes are caused by an inadequate supply of land set aside for housing. This claim has been the justification for removing land from the Greenbelt and rewriting land use planning laws to promote sprawl development on farmland and other natural areas.

In contrast, civil society organizations have been saying land supply cannot be the cause of Ontario’s housing challenges since more than enough land has already been set aside to build the housing we need.

Question 1

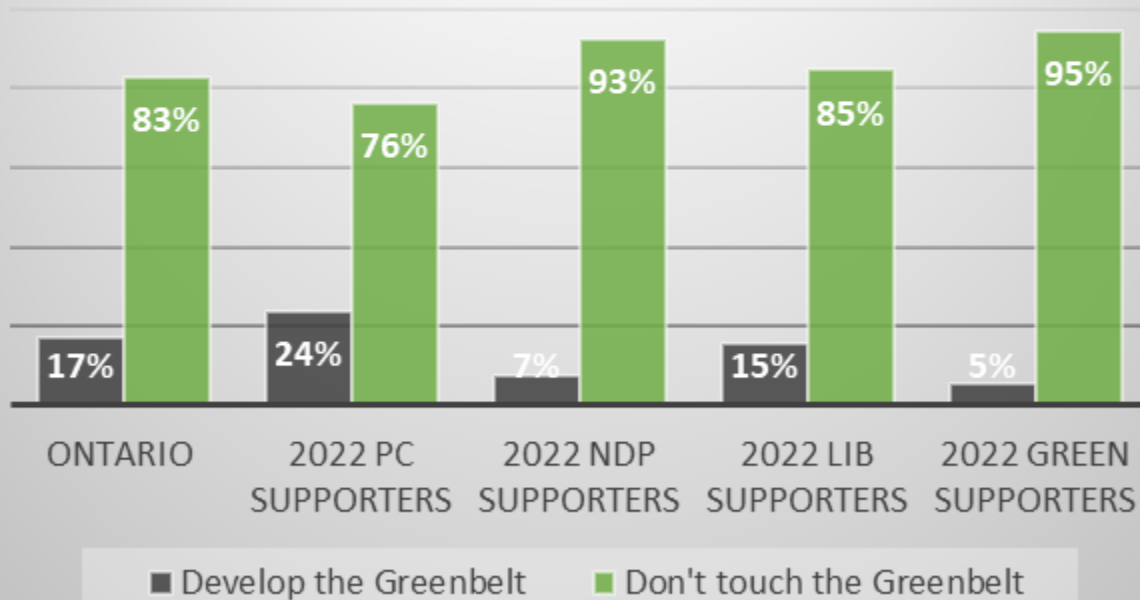
In Ontario, 1.5 million new homes need to be built over the next few years to accommodate our growing population. There is debate about allowing housing development within the Greenbelt, which is a protected area of green space, farmland, forests and wetlands. Which of the following best matches your view of the problem?

- a. We need to allow new housing within the Greenbelt and on farmland, because not enough land has been set aside to build the housing we need.
- b. We do not need to touch the Greenbelt and farmland, because enough land has been set aside within and on the outskirts of existing towns and cities to build the housing we need.

Results: A vast majority of Ontarians (83%) hold the view that there is no need to build housing on the Greenbelt and farmland to solve Ontario’s housing challenges because there is enough land already available in existing towns and cities.

By comparison, only 17% think we need to allow housing to be built on the Greenbelt and other farmland- and this low level is consistent across all demographic categories (gender, age, labour force, income, education, location) and holds even across party lines.

"Develop" vs. "Don't Touch" The Greenbelt



Whose narrative about housing solutions resonates with Ontarians?

The Premier and Ontario government have also used the narrative of inadequate land supply to promote a solution to Ontario's housing challenges best described as 'let developers build whatever they want where they want.' This approach has been reflected in a variety of legislative and policy changes introduced since fall 2022 that have scrapped or weakened laws that prohibit the construction of housing (especially sprawl development) in certain areas such as the Greenbelt and farmland.

In contrast, most civil society groups have argued that the government needs to be more actively involved in directing new housing construction to existing neighborhoods and built up areas (with established services) and in legalizing, funding, facilitating and helping build both affordable and "market" housing in those locations.

Question 2

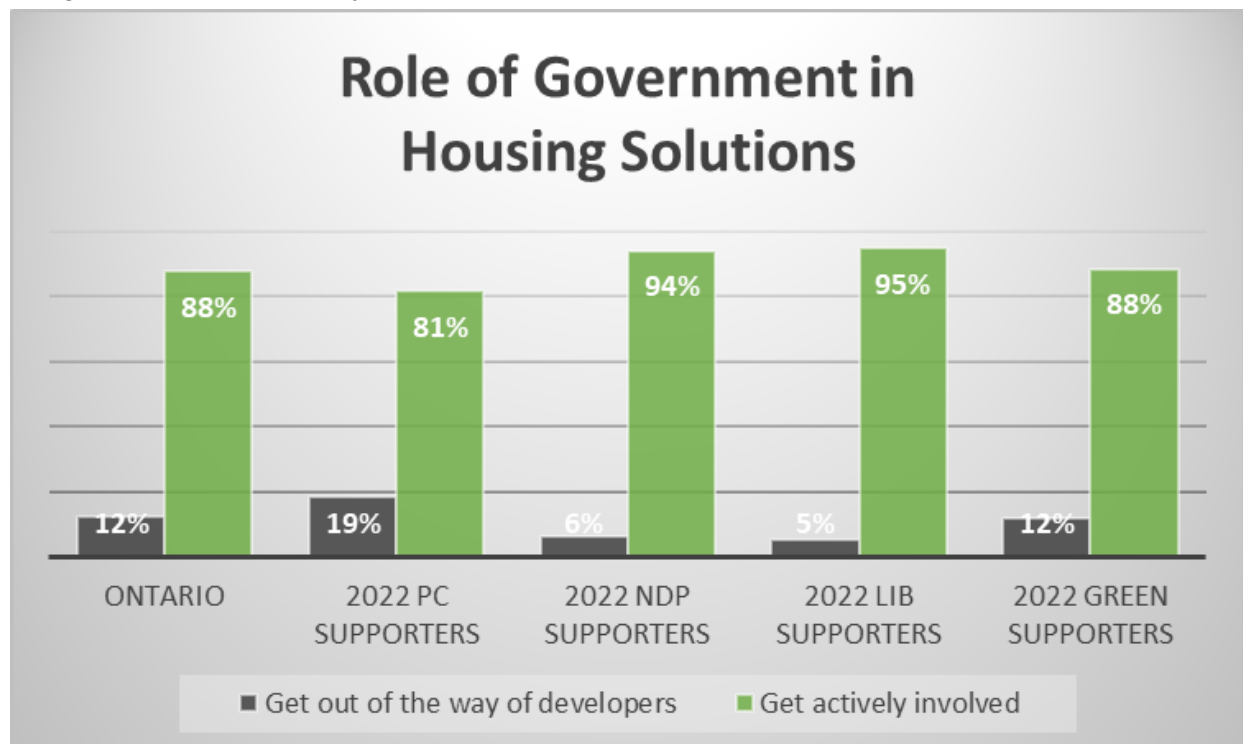
Which solution to the housing shortage facing Ontario makes more sense to you?

- a. Governments should make it easier for housing developers to build the housing they want, wherever they want, even if it's on the Greenbelt and farmland.
- b. Governments should work with housing developers and non-profit housing providers to build affordable housing and other diverse housing types in towns and cities where services already exist.

Results: Only 12% of Ontarians agree with the view reflecting the Premier's narrative that governments should make it easier for housing developers to build the housing they want, wherever they want, even if it's on the Greenbelt and farmland. 88% of Ontarians think the government should get actively involved in housing solutions, focusing on lands where services already exist.

It's important to note that the options available to respondents were not symmetrical. Option A did not mention that services don't exist on farmland and the Greenbelt (although this was implied by the wording in Option B). By excluding this information, people choosing Option A were not explicitly reminded of the cost and length of time it would take to build new housing there.

Support for the view for an active role by the government is strong across all demographic categories and across party lines.



Whose Housing Opinions Do People Trust?

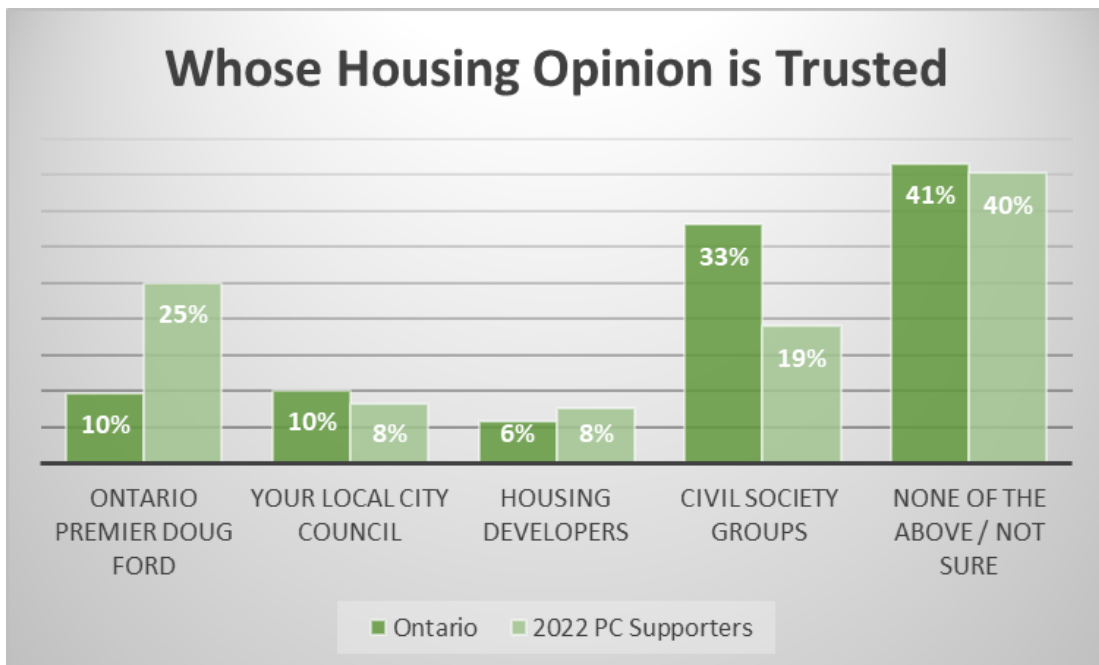
The key commentators on Ontario's housing challenges include the Premier and his Ministers, municipal leaders (Mayors, Councillors), developers and civil society groups. Provincial government leaders have dominated the conversation since they control legislation and policy and have access to a large number of communications resources. Developers have also used their substantial communications resources to promote their perspectives.

Question 3

Lots of people and groups are commenting on the housing shortage in Ontario. Generally speaking, whose opinion do you trust the most:

- Ontario Premier Doug Ford
- Your local City Council (Mayor and Councillors)
- Housing Developers
- Civil society groups made up of farmers, housing advocates, environmentalists, planners.
- None of the above / not sure

Results: The largest slice of Ontarians (41%) either trust no one or are not sure about who to trust. The Premier is trusted by 10%, local Councils by 10%, and housing developers by 6%. Civil society groups are trusted by 33%. In short, there is no consensus amongst Ontarians about who to trust on housing issues. However, civil society groups have the greatest trust of the key players.

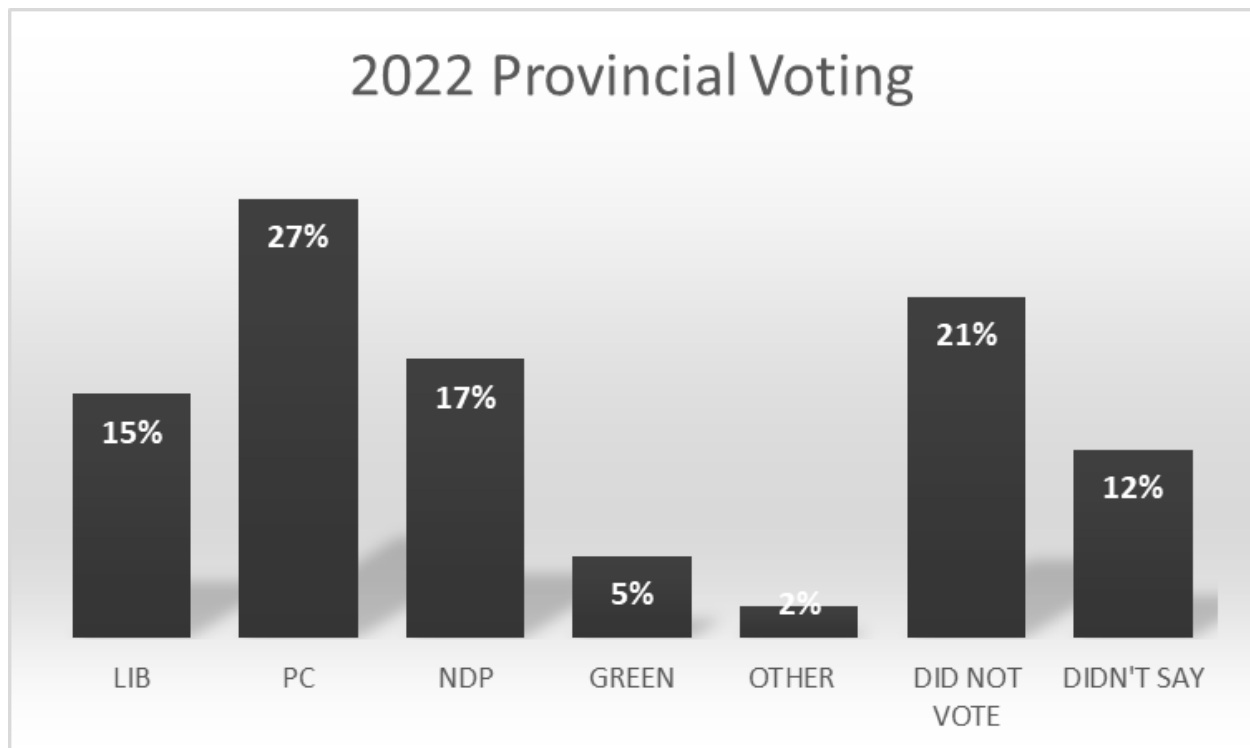


What party did people vote for in the 2022 Provincial Election?

Respondents were asked which political party they voted for in the 2022 provincial election.

The last Ontario provincial election was held in June 2022. Which party did you vote for in that election?

- Ontario Liberals led by Steven Del Duca
- Ontario PCs (Progressive Conservatives) led by Doug Ford
- Ontario NDP (New Democrats) led by Andrea Horwath
- Green Party of Ontario led by Mike Schreiner
- New Blue Party of Ontario led by Jim Karahalios
- Other party or an independent candidate
- I did not vote in the election
- Prefer not to say



About the Poll

The results are based on an online survey of 1,000 Ontarians conducted by Environics Research between July 12-17, 2023. The sample was drawn from an online panel and was weighted to be representative of the Ontario population by age, gender and region within Ontario. Because online panel-based surveys use non-probability samples, no margin of sampling error is calculated, per market research industry standards. Nonetheless, this is a widely accepted survey methodology and has been shown to produce results comparable to an RDD telephone survey when a large and well-maintained opt-in panel is employed.

About the Alliance for a Liveable Ontario

We are a non-partisan Alliance of people and groups representing hundreds of thousands of Ontarians from many different sectors. We want to build a liveable Ontario and stop the Provincial Government policies that worsen the housing issues facing us, harm our communities and undermine the protection of our farmland, natural areas and democratic institutions.

Learn more at: www.liveableontario.ca

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