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Liberals widen lead ahead of Ontario vote: poll

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TORONTO (Reuters) - Ontario's incumbent Liberals are set to return to power, thanks to an ill-conceived pledge by the rival Conservative leader to fund faith-based schools in the province, opinion polls showed on Tuesday.

Premier Dalton McGuinty's Liberals increased their lead over the right-leaning Progressive Conservatives to between 12 and 15 percentage points, according to voter surveys by SES Research and the Strategic Counsel over an extended holiday weekend.

Canadian markets were closed on Monday for Thanksgiving.

About 42 percent of voters back the Liberals ahead of the October 10 vote, just enough for a majority of seats in the legislature of the country's most populous province.

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Conservative Leader John Tory has been dogged by his initial campaign promise to publicly fund all religious schools.

Support for Tory dwindled further when he backed off from the pledge last week, promising instead to hold a free vote on the issue if he is elected premier.

Ontario currently pays for a Catholic school system alongside the public system.

The survey of 501 Ontarians by SES -- historically one of the most accurate polling firms in Canada -- gave the Liberals 42.6 percent support, the Conservatives 30.5 percent, the left-leaning New Democrats 17.5 percent, and the Greens 9.4 percent.

Throughout the campaign, opinion polls have shown the Liberals leading the Conservatives by about 8 to 10 points.

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