

PROFILES ON MANITOBA

THE 1984 FEDERAL ELECTION:
A RETROSPECTIVE POLL

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INTRODUCTION

This is the first Profile on Manitoba to be conducted during the academic year 1984-85. A random telephone interview of 858 Manitoba households was conducted between October 1 and October 4, 1984 to measure public perceptions of the role the media played in the recent Federal election, the attitudes toward the new political agenda, and also to examine the issue of "cross-over" voting. The survey also re-questioned the public on the French language issue, using the precise phrasing employed in the first "Profile" almost a year ago. As is customary with all surveys undertaken at the Institute, responses are analyzed and contrasted by age, education, income, and gender.

ATTITUDES TOWARD THE MEDIA'S ROLE IN THE 1984 FEDERAL
ELECTION

Considerable public discussion has occurred over the role of the media in the political process. Indeed, this debate is very much in evidence in the current U.S. election. Some feel that the media tends to distort political messages and can unduly sway the electorate. Others argue that the media is essential for the full functioning of our democracy. What does the Manitoba population think?

The first issue addressed in the poll was the public's perception about the sources of information on the federal election.

Table 1

"FROM WHAT SOURCE DID YOU GET MOST OF YOUR INFORMATION ABOUT THE ISSUES DURING THE FEDERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN?"

	(percent)
MEDIA	87.2
THE PARTIES	5.7
RELATIVES/FRIENDS	3.0
OTHER	1.6
DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE	2.5
	<hr/> 100.0

It seems clear from these responses that the media does play the crucial role in assisting the electorate with the political decision process. The fact that the parties directly have such a modest impact upon the information base as reported by respondents seems to indicate that in future elections, political parties may increasingly forego direct access to the voter and employ the media to contact and persuade.

Table 2

"IN GENERAL, HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE OVERALL MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE RECENT ELECTION CAMPAIGN?"

	(percent)
VERY GOOD	23.5
GOOD	45.9
MEDIOCRE	16.7
BAD	4.3
VERY BAD	1.6
DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE	7.9
	<hr/> 99.9*

* Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding

In general, the public's perception of the media's coverage was very favourable, with the majority indicating that the media's performance was good or better. However, there is also a tendency for the more educated respondent to feel less positively about the media's performance.

Table 3

"IN GENERAL, HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE OVERALL MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE RECENT ELECTION CAMPAIGN?"

EDUCATION	V.GOOD	GOOD	MEDIOCRE	BAD	V.BAD	DK/NR	TOTAL
	(percent)						
HIGH SCHOOL OR LESS	23.9	45.6	15.9	4.2	0.9	9.5	100
SOME POST-SECONDARY	24.4	50.0	16.9	1.7	2.8	4.6	100
UNIVERSITY	20.0	41.0	21.0	10.0	4.0	4.0	100

Interestingly, the strongest approval came from those with intermediate levels of education, but the reader is cautioned against reading too much into this, as other factors such as location, age, and gender may be influencing the responses.

A crucial question is whether the media was perceived as favouring one party. Here, the response is dramatic and clear.

Table 4

"DO YOU FEEL THE MEDIA FAVOURED ONE PARTY OVER ANOTHER?"

	(percent)
YES	37.3
NO	53.5
DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE	9.2
	<hr/> 100.0

While a slim majority report they feel that the media did not favour one party over another, almost 40 percent did perceive some degree of favouritism.

Table 5

"(IF YES) WHICH PARTY DO YOU THINK THE MEDIA FAVOURED?"

	(percent)
LIBERALS	8.3
PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVES	79.2
NEW DEMOCRATS	3.4
DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE	9.2
	<hr/>
	100.0 (N=327)

Of the 327 respondents who reported they perceived favouritism on the part of the media, the overwhelming proportion felt that the Progressive Conservatives were so favoured. It is important to note that since the PCs were strongly supported by the electorate, there is very likely an influence on the response reported after the fact. Ideally this question should have been asked throughout the campaign, but even there the personal preferences of the respondent would cloud the issue.

THE DEBATES

It now appears that debates among the leaders have become an enduring feature of election campaigns. What role do Manitobans perceive these play in their choice of party or leader?

Table 6

"AS YOU KNOW, DURING THE FEDERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN, THERE WERE THREE (3) TELEVISED DEBATES AMONG THE LEADERS OF THE MAJOR PARTIES. DID YOU SEE ANY OF THESE DEBATES?"

	(percent)
YES	55.4
NO	43.9
DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE	0.7
	<hr/>
	100.0

The debates were watched more frequently by those with more education.

Table 7

"DID YOU SEE ANY OF THESE DEBATES?"

EDUCATION	YES	NO	DK/NR	TOTAL
	(percent)			
HIGH SCHOOL OR LESS	49.9	49.4	0.7	100
SOME POST-SECONDARY	64.8	34.7	0.5	100
UNIVERSITY	70.0	30.0	-	100

Now the key issue is whether respondents felt that the debate assisted them in forming an opinion, either which way to vote, or whether to vote at all.

Table 8

"DO YOU FEEL THAT THESE DEBATES WERE HELPFUL IN DECIDING HOW TO VOTE?"

	(percent)
YES	40.6
NO	56.9
DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE	2.5
	100.0

"DO YOU FEEL THAT THESE DEBATES WERE HELPFUL IN DECIDING HOW TO VOTE?"

GENDER	YES	NO	DE/NR	TOTAL
	(percent)			
FEMALE	36.7	61.0	2.2	100
MALE	45.7	51.4	2.9	100

It is interesting to note that men tended to find the debates more helpful than women. Also, those with more education found the debates less helpful.

Table 9

"DO YOU FEEL THAT THESE DEBATES WERE HELPFUL IN DECIDING HOW TO VOTE?"

EDUCATION	YES	NO	DK/NR	TOTAL
	(percent)			
HIGH SCHOOL OR LESS	45.1	51.5	3.4	100
SOME POST-SECONDARY	36.8	63.2	0	100
UNIVERSITY	30.4	68.1	1.5	100

There were no significant relationships between the degree to which the debates were reported as having been helpful and factors such as location; however, age plays a very important role in determining the response to this question.

Table 10

"DO YOU FEEL THAT THESE DEBATES WERE HELPFUL IN DECIDING HOW TO VOTE?"

AGE	YES	NO	DK/NR	TOTAL
	(percent)			
18 - 24	57.7	40.4	1.9	100
25 - 44	43.7	55.3	1.0	100
45 - 64	35.3	60.8	3.9	100
65+	34.2	63.2	2.6	100

VOTING BEHAVIOUR

Retrospective voting studies are always fascinating. There is a tendency for respondents to over-report their participation, and also a tendency for the self-report data from a questionnaire to be influenced in the direction of the actual outcome. Here, the responses were as follows.

Table 11

"DID YOU VOTE IN THE SEPTEMBER 4, 1984 FEDERAL ELECTION?"

RESPONSE	POLL	ACTUAL TURNOUT
		(percent)
YES	82.9	73.45
NO	16.9	26.55
DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE	0.2	-
	100.0	100.00

Note that actual turnout will include only those eligible. Some respondents on the survey may be ineligible to vote simply because of visa or residency status.

It also appears from the data that those with more education tended to vote more than those with less education, and also as we interviewed older residents, they reported an increased tendency to have voted. (These tables are not reported here, but can be reproduced on request.) Location and gender played no role in the reported incidence of voting.

With respect to the issues of concern, most surprising is that patronage appears to play no role at all in determining voting patterns.

Table 12

"WHAT ONE ISSUE WAS OF MOST CONCERN TO YOU WHEN CHOOSING THIS PARTY?"

	(percent)
PATRONAGE	0.4
NEED FOR A CHANGE	15.1
LEADERSHIP	6.0
ECONOMIC POLICIES	22.5
ALWAYS VOTE THIS WAY	7.5
LOCAL CANDIDATE	7.3
WESTERN ISSUES	5.0
FRENCH-LANGUAGE RIGHTS	2.5
OTHER	21.4
DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE	12.3
	100.0

Clearly the large proportion of "other" indicates a broad spectrum of reasons, which proved very difficult to capture within the resources available for the survey. Additional research in the whole area of issue identification, which is one of the more difficult facets of voting behaviour to define, might reveal that local candidates played important roles, and that rather than one single issue, a complex of factors is important. Also, the issue of patronage might also be confounded with factors such as leadership and a desire for change. Respondents may not report that something like patronage influenced their preferences, but may factor this into their perception of leadership.

THE FRENCH-LANGUAGE ISSUE

Interestingly, the French-language issue was rarely volunteered as a response to the question regarding issues influencing voting behaviour. However, it is wrong to assume that the issue has receded in importance or political volatility. We asked respondents directly whether the French-language issue had any bearing on their preferences.

Table 13

"WAS YOUR CHOICE OF PARTY AFFECTED BY THE ISSUE OF FRENCH-LANGUAGE RIGHTS IN THE PROVINCE OF MANITOBA?"

(percent)

YES	21.3
NO	74.7
DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE	4.0

Table 14

"WAS YOUR CHOICE OF PARTY AFFECTED BY THE ISSUE OF FRENCH-LANGUAGE RIGHTS IN THE PROVINCE OF MANITOBA?"

RESPONDENT VOTE IN 1984	YES	NO	DK/NR	TOTAL
	(percent)			

LIBERAL	20	79	1	100
PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE	19	78	3	100
NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY	18	79	3	100
CONFEDERATION OF REGIONS	57	43	0	100

Respondents were also asked directly about their support of French-language rights in Manitoba using the precise phrasing employed by the first Profile last year.

Table 15

"IN GENERAL, ARE YOU FOR OR AGAINST THE SECURING OF FRENCH-LANGUAGE RIGHTS IN THIS PROVINCE?"

	PROFILE 1984	PROFILE 1983
	(percent)	

FOR	30.0	26.2
AGAINST	49.2	55.9
NEUTRAL	13.3	10.8
DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE	7.4	7.0

There appears to be a slight tendency toward greater acceptance of French-language rights; however, the reader is cautioned against imputing too much to these results. The theoretical accuracy for a poll of this sample size is about 3.5 percent, 19 times out of 20, placing these differences close to the margin of statistical significance. In all likelihood, there has been some diminution in active concern, but by any measure there remains significant opposition to the proposed policy.

Table 16

FRENCH-LANGUAGE RIGHTS IN MANITOBA

RESPONDENT VOTE IN 1984	FOR	NEUTRAL	AGAINST	DK/NR	TOTAL*
	(percent)				

LIBERAL	46.5	15.0	37.0	1.6	100.2
PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE	23.7	11.5	59.0	5.9	100.1
NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY	44.8	8.6	42.2	4.3	99.9
CONFEDERATION OF REGIONS	15.2	6.5	69.6	8.7	100.0

* Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

CROSSOVER VOTING AND CONFEDERATION OF REGIONS

One of the surprises of the Manitoba electoral results was the strength of the Confederation of Regions party, which in some ridings placed second in terms of popular support. Repeating the crossover voting technique employed in the April 1984 Profile, respondents were questioned about their voting behaviour in 1980. As usual, the reader should be aware that such recall data can be somewhat "variable."

Table 17

"WHAT PARTY DID YOU VOTE FOR?" (1984) ✓

PARTY	1984 Actual***			
	(percent)			
LIBERAL	14.6	17.6*	22.4**	21.5
PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE	31.5	37.9	48.4	43.0
NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY	13.2	15.9	20.2	27.0
CONFEDERATION OF REGIONS	5.4	6.5	8.2	8.0
DK/NR/OTHER	17.9	21.6	-	-
DID NOT VOTE	17.0	-	-	-

* Did not vote excluded.

** Did not vote and DK/NR/Other excluded.

*** As reported by The Globe and Mail, September 6, 1984.

There is some evidence that men and women voted differently.

Table 18

"WHAT PARTY DID YOU VOTE FOR?" (1984)

	LIBERAL	PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE	NEW DEMOCRAT	COR	TOTAL
	(percent)				
FEMALE	23.2	46.5	23.9	6.4	100
MALE	21.7	51.6	16.0	10.7	100

Note: Other and DK/NR have not been included. These tabulations can be produced on request.

From this there is evidence that women tended to vote less often than men for the Progressive Conservatives and Confederation of Regions, and somewhat more often for the New Democratic Party. Again, the reader is cautioned that the differences, while statistically significant, are not particularly striking.

Where did the support for the Confederation of Regions originate? By comparing reported voting in 1980 with reported voting in 1984, some important clues to this may be discovered.

Table 19

(percent)

VOTE IN 1980

LIBERAL PROGRESSIVE NEW DEMOCRAT
CONSERVATIVE

VOTE IN 1984

LIBERAL	54.9	6.1	5.9
PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE	32.9	75.3	24.5
NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY	12.0	3.5	63.7
CONFEDERATION OF REGIONS	0.7	15.2	5.9
	100.0	100.0	100.0

This table represents responses of those who voted in both 1980 and 1984, and who also responded with a distinct preference (i.e., did not refuse the question, or who did not vote for some "other" party).

The table is read as follows. Starting down in column 1, of 100 people who report they voted for the Liberals in 1980, 55 (54.9) report they voted Liberal in 1984; 32 (32.4) report they voted Progressive Conservative in 1984; 12 now report they voted for the NDP; and 1 (0.7) voted for COR. In the second column, of 100 respondents who report voting for the Progressive Conservatives in 1980, 6 (6.1) report they voted for the Liberals in 1984; 75 remained with the PCs; 4 (3.5) voted NDP; and 15 voted for COR. Finally, of 100 who voted for the NDP in 1980, 6 recently voted for the Liberals; 25 voted for the PCs; 64 for the NDP; and 6 for COR.

In other words, the Confederation of Regions party drew most of its strength from the PCs and secondarily from the NDP. This reflects that this particular group does pose some threat to the PCs, possibly with respect to the French-language issue, but more probably with respect to western issues and agriculture.

Two other trends are interesting. First, of those who voted Liberal in 1980, some 32 percent "leaked" to the PCs and 12 percent "leaked" to the NDP. Second, for the NDP, some 25 percent "leaked" to the PCs.

SUMMARY AND INTERPRETATION

Several observations seem to follow from this study. First and foremost, the media is considered by the typical Manitoban as the critical link in providing political information. Furthermore, direct contact by the parties rates a very distant second in terms of contacting and informing the electorate, implying that much of the "legwork" undertaken by the parties during the campaign has comparatively little impact upon the information base used by the typical voter. What is not so clear is whether brief contact at the front door has a role in persuading voters, but from these results this is probably unlikely.

Second, the debates, while not influencing voters in general, clearly serve to assist those with less education and who are younger (in many cases these two categories overlap). Therefore, the televised debates may serve an important political and social role in the electoral process. On the other hand, some might argue that the debates are stylized and tend to sway the uncritical and less informed. It seems likely that televised debates will increase in importance, and that rather than fewer, future election campaigns will feature more debates.

Third, in terms of the basis for choosing a party or leader, patronage by itself appears to have not been a factor. Yet the two categories of leadership and need for change (arguably intertwined) still only counted for about 20 percent of the reported reasons. This type of question always causes difficulty in polling. The only recourse is to read a prepared list (in general, lists of options are not read to the respondent in our polling), but this produces many biases in the response pattern.

Fourth, the French-language issue remains basic to Manitoba politics, and is unlikely to recede much with time. This issue may well continue to trouble Manitoba politics for the next generation. While there is some evidence of a movement toward more acceptance of the proposal, this shift is slight and at the margin of statistical significance. Furthermore, were the issue to arise with the vigour of last year, it is entirely likely that public opinion would again shift back.

Finally, many were surprised at the relative strength of the Confederation of Regions party. The data presented here indicate quite clearly that their support comes from those who voted in the 1980 election for the Progressive Conservatives, and to a lesser extent from those who voted NDP. At the present, with its emphasis on anti-bilingual policies and other things such as metrification, it is unlikely to pose a long-term threat. If it does incorporate elements in its political platform to appeal to a broader constituency and shift somewhat to the centre of the political spectrum, this new group may be a significant factor in provincial politics, at least to the extent of acting as "spoilers." On the other hand, the federal political landscape has changed, at least in the short-term, and western alienation may

attenuate in the next few years. If long-standing frustrations perceived by many in the west are eased, then COR may have passed its zenith.

Appendix A

METHODOLOGY

A systematic random sample of 1,700 numbers was drawn directly from the Manitoba Telephone System data base. Households were contacted between 5:00 and 9:30 p.m. from October 1 to 4, 1984. Any number which generated a "no answer" or busy signal was re-introduced back into the pool. Refusals were discarded. The sample size for this survey is 858, and a total of 1,136 households were contacted, for a refusal rate of 24 percent.

Appendix B

SAMPLE QUALITY

A sample size of 858 for a population of 1.1 million provides an error level of less than 4 percent, 19 times out of 20. This level of precision is comparable to the Gallup Poll, and is the standard of scientific precision common in survey research. Refusals were about 24 percent.

To assess representativeness, Gender, Income, Location, and Age are compared to what is known about the population of Manitoba from secondary sources such as the 1981 Census and 1982 tax files.

1. GENDER	INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL & ECONOMIC RESEARCH	STATISTICS CANADA
	Poll #1 (1984)	
FEMALE	58%	51%
MALE	42%	49%

Females tend to be over-represented in the survey just conducted. Therefore, estimates of response are weighted by a simple proportionality factor. This has only a very slight effect on results and is unimportant in viewing the survey as a whole.

2. MEDIAN INCOME	INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL & ECONOMIC RESEARCH	STATISTICS CANADA
	Poll #1 (1984)	
LESS THAN \$21,000	40%	38%
\$21,000 TO \$35,000	32%	29%
GREATER THAN \$35,000	28%	34%

3. LOCATION	INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL & ECONOMIC RESEARCH	STATISTICS CANADA
	Poll #1 (1984)	
WINNIPEG	58%	55%
NON-WINNIPEG	41%	45%

4. AGE	INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL & ECONOMIC RESEARCH	STATISTICS CANADA*
	Poll #1 (1984)	
18 - 24	14.7%	16%
25 - 44	44.3%	39%
45 - 64	26.6%	28%
65+	14.4%	10%
NO ANSWER	2.0%	
* These percentages are derived from the population of Manitoba age 18 and over.		

There is a tendency for this sample to over-represent the 65+ and 25 to 44 year-old-age group and under-represent the 18 to 24 and 45 to 64 group. This is most likely the effect of a differential refusal rate between two age groups, as opposed to an artifact of the sampling procedure. Since age is a relatively unimportant variable in the context of this survey, estimates of responses for the age groups mentioned are not weighted by a simple proportionality factor as has been done in other surveys.

In summary, the sample drawn is very representative of the Manitoba population. The slight misrepresentation of gender (a standard problem in telephone surveys) is resolved by weighting the estimates.

5. REFUSALS

WINNIPEG	78.8%
NON-WINNIPEG	21.2%
FEMALE	28.4%
MALE	71.6%

These data show significantly higher refusals for Winnipeg respondents and for men. A thorough analysis of all interrelationships between location and each variable obtained in the survey showed no significant associations. There are some gender-related associations in the responses obtained, but these generally did not pertain to the key variables such as political preference, or recalled support. In summary, while refusals are non-random, this disturbance probably has not invalidated any of the results reported in this report.