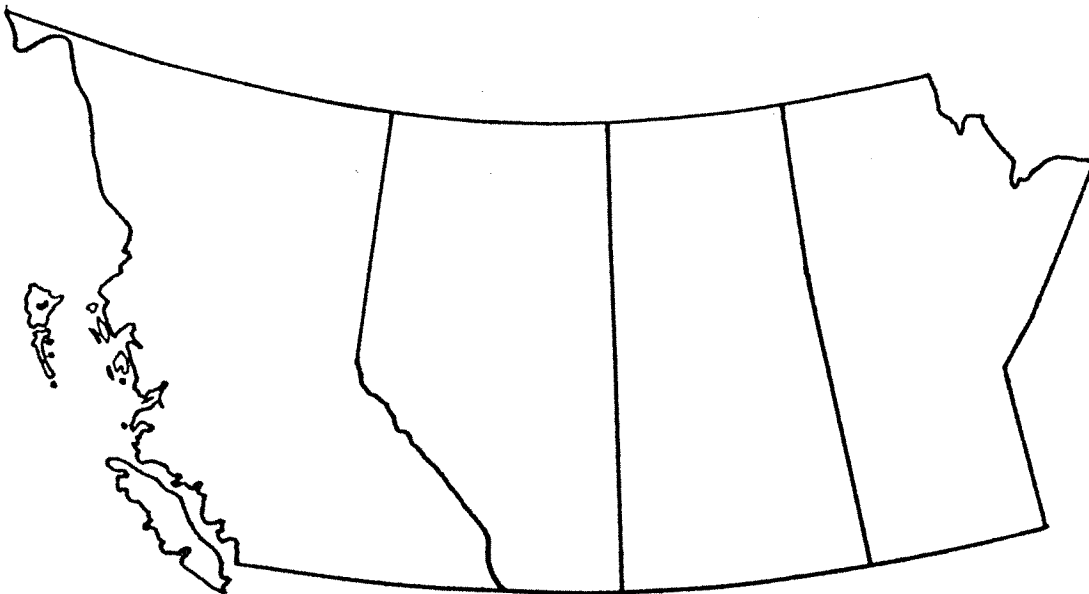


# RESEARCH BULLETIN

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PROFILE ON WESTERN CANADA

POLITICAL ATTITUDES OF WESTERN CANADIANS

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Interview dates: March 11 to 21, 1985. (n = 2,339)
- At the federal level, support for and approval of the Progressive Conservatives is strong. The New Democratic Party typically runs a distant second, with the Liberals third.
- In Manitoba, the incumbent provincial New Democratic Party trails the Progressive Conservatives by about 15 percent (of decided voters).
- In Saskatchewan, the incumbent Progressive Conservatives lead the New Democratic Party by about 10 percent of decided voters (weighted data).
- In Alberta, the Progressive Conservatives lead the New Democratic Party and Liberals by a very wide margin (46 percent of decided voters).
- In British Columbia, the incumbent Social Credit Party trails the New Democratic Party by about 11 percent, and 45 percent of respondents felt the government was doing a bad job.
- Western alienation, as reflected by the expectations about the "deal" the west would get now that the Progressive Conservatives are in power federally, is difficult to ascertain. In Alberta, expectations are much higher than elsewhere in the west, and generally only a minority (30 percent) felt that the west would not get a good deal from the federal government.
- Western separation parties did not figure significantly in the responses (open-ended and verbatim) provided.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Institute for Social and Economic Research contacted 2,339 western Canadians from March 11 to 21, 1985, on the subject of provincial and federal politics. This report presents a province-by-province analysis of the main results. The entire sample provides an overall error rate of less than 2.5 percent 19 times out of 20, and each provincial sample has an error rate of less than 5 percent 19 times out of 20. The undecided component is subjected to a number of adjustments which, to the best of our knowledge, are unique, and provide interesting insights into the structure of public opinion.

## 2.0 MANITOBA

### 2.1 PROVINCIAL POLITICS

The first issue is a basic question on the performance of the current New Democratic Party government, as shown in Table 2.1.

<u>Table 2.1*</u>	
"AS YOU KNOW, IN MANITOBA THE NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY HAS BEEN IN POWER SINCE 1981. OVERALL, IS THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT DOING A GOOD JOB, AN AVERAGE JOB, OR A BAD JOB OF GOVERNING THE PROVINCE?"	
	(percent)
GOOD JOB	17.1
AVERAGE JOB	59.2
BAD JOB	16.4
DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE	7.2
n=584	

\*Note that totals in all tables may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Next, the question of political preference was addressed.

<u>Table 2.2</u>		
"IF A PROVINCIAL ELECTION WERE HELD TODAY, WHAT PARTY WOULD YOU VOTE FOR?"		
	(percent)	PERCENT OF DECIDED VOTERS
PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE	33.9	50.8
LIBERAL	7.2	10.8
NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY	24.5	36.7
OTHER	1.2	1.8
DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE	33.2	
n=584		

The comparatively high undecided component characterizes most polls taken well before any election. One perspective on this problem is to ask the undecided voters which party they definitely would not vote for. The results of this question are shown below.

Table 2.3  
"WELL, WHICH ONE OF THE MAJOR PROVINCIAL PARTIES WOULD YOU DEFINITELY NOT VOTE FOR?"

---

	PERCENT OF UNDECIDED VOTERS
PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE	6.2
LIBERAL	10.2
NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY	19.8
DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE	63.0

n=584

There is some evidence that the undecided component is least unfavourable for the Progressive Conservatives and most unfavourable for the New Democratic Party, but care must be taken in interpreting such a table. What can be said is that three times the number of undecided voters would not vote New Democratic Party as would not vote Progressive Conservative. This suggests that the Progressive Conservatives have greater opportunities among the undecided than the New Democratic Party. The Liberals also have more scope among the undecided than the New Democratic Party.

In any event, the results here indicate that although the New Democratic Party has significantly closed the gap between itself and the Progressive Conservatives in the last Institute for Social and Economic Research poll (when the New Democratic Party had slipped to 23.6 percent of decided voters, Progressive Conservatives were at 58.9 percent, and Liberals were at 14.6 percent), a gap of about 14 to 15 percent persists.

## 2.2 FEDERAL POLITICS

At the federal level, the Progressive Conservative party still holds the lead. Also, most Manitobans feel the federal government is doing an average or good job. It is worth stressing that the phrasing used in the question about government performance is conservative in that it will typically produce a pattern where most respondents "mass" at the center, with equal proportions in the "good" and "bad" categories. In the event that this pattern shifts, as shall be seen in some results below, the value of such a "rigid" question is simply that such shifts are very significant.

Table 2.4

"IF A FEDERAL ELECTION WERE HELD TODAY, WHAT PARTY WOULD YOU VOTE FOR?"

	(percent)	PERCENT OF DECIDED VOTERS	NOT VOTE*
PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE	38.9	54.8	7.2
LIBERAL	13.5	19.1	13.2
NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY	16.3	22.9	17.8
OTHER	2.2	3.1	1.3
DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE/ NOT ELIGIBLE	29.1	---	60.5

n=584

\*"Well, which one of the major federal parties would you not vote for?"

Table 2.5

"....SINCE IT WAS ELECTED LAST SEPTEMBER, WHAT KIND OF JOB HAS THE (FEDERAL) GOVERNMENT BEEN DOING? HAS IT BEEN DOING A GOOD JOB, AVERAGE JOB, OR BAD JOB OF GOVERNING THE COUNTRY?"

	(percent)
GOOD JOB	18.5
AVERAGE JOB	50.2
BAD JOB	13.7
TOO SOON TO TELL	12.2
DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE	5.4

n=584

### 3.0 SASKATCHEWAN

#### 3.1 PROVINCIAL POLITICS

Table 3.1

"AS YOU KNOW, IN SASKATCHEWAN THE PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE PARTY HAS BEEN IN POWER SINCE 1982. OVERALL, IS THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT DOING A GOOD JOB, AN AVERAGE JOB, OR A BAD JOB OF GOVERNING THE PROVINCE?"

	(percent)
GOOD JOB	19.7
AVERAGE JOB	56.1
BAD JOB	19.0
DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE	5.2

n=585

Table 3.2

"IF A PROVINCIAL ELECTION WERE HELD TODAY, WHAT PARTY WOULD YOU VOTE FOR?"

	(percent)	PERCENT OF DECIDED VOTERS	NOT VOTE*
PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE	30.8	48.0	11.1
LIBERAL	6.2	9.7	18.6
NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY	27.0	42.2	13.1
OTHER	.2	---	4.5
DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE			
NOT ELIGIBLE	35.9	---	52.8
	n=585		

\*"Well, which one of the major provincial parties would you not vote for?"

Based on these results, the Progressive Conservatives have a very slight lead over the New Democratic Party, and hold a very small, but statistically not significant, lead in terms of the negative vote question. In summary, both the Progressive Conservatives and New Democratic Party appear to be neck-and-neck in terms of political popularity. But, as can be seen in the sample quality (Appendix B), the rural component is under-represented, and the Conservatives are stronger in the country than the cities in Saskatchewan. When the data are weighted to account for this distortion, the results are a significant 10 percent margin held by the Progressive Conservatives among decided voters.

Table 3.2a

"IF A PROVINCIAL ELECTION WERE HELD TODAY, WHAT PARTY WOULD YOU VOTE FOR?"

	PERCENT OF DECIDED VOTERS (Weighted Data)
PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE	50.4
LIBERAL	9.0
NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY	40.5
	n=585

3.2 FEDERAL POLITICS

Table 3.3

"....SINCE IT WAS ELECTED LAST SEPTEMBER, WHAT KIND OF JOB HAS THE (FEDERAL) GOVERNMENT BEEN DOING? HAS IT BEEN DOING A GOOD JOB, AVERAGE JOB, OR BAD JOB OF GOVERNING THE COUNTRY?"

	(percent)
GOOD JOB	16.8
AVERAGE JOB	60.5
BAD JOB	9.6
TOO SOON TO TELL	8.7
DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE	4.4

n=585

Table 3.4

"IF A FEDERAL ELECTION WERE HELD TODAY, WHAT PARTY WOULD YOU VOTE FOR?"

	(percent)	PERCENT OF DECIDED VOTERS	NOT VOTE*
PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE	35.4	52.8	9.6
LIBERAL	12.0	17.9	10.2
NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY	19.7	29.3	10.2
OTHER	1.9		
DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE			
NOT ELIGIBLE	31.0		69.9

n=585

\*"Well, which one of the major federal parties would you not vote for?"

4.0 ALBERTA  
PROVINCIAL POLITICS

Table 4.1

"AS YOU KNOW, IN ALBERTA THE PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE PARTY HAS BEEN IN POWER SINCE 1982. OVERALL, IS THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT DOING A GOOD JOB, AN AVERAGE JOB, OR A BAD JOB OF GOVERNING THE PROVINCE?"

	(percent)
GOOD JOB	31.4
AVERAGE JOB	53.5
BAD JOB	11.5
DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE	3.5



Table 4.2

"IF A PROVINCIAL ELECTION WERE HELD TODAY, WHAT PARTY WOULD YOU VOTE FOR?"

	(percent)	PERCENT OF DECIDED VOTERS	NOT VOTE*
PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE	46.9	67.8	13.2
LIBERAL	5.9	8.4	15.1
NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY	14.9	21.5	16.4
OTHER	1.6	2.3	9.3
DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE			
NOT ELIGIBLE	30.8		46.1

n=564

\*"Well, which one of the major provincial parties would you not vote for?"

The Progressive Conservatives remain in a very strong position at the provincial level.

4.2 FEDERAL POLITICS

Table 4.3

"....SINCE IT WAS ELECTED LAST SEPTEMBER, WHAT KIND OF JOB HAS THE (FEDERAL) GOVERNMENT BEEN DOING? HAS IT BEEN DOING A GOOD JOB, AVERAGE JOB, OR BAD JOB OF GOVERNING THE COUNTRY?"

	(percent)
GOOD JOB	30.9
AVERAGE JOB	50.2
BAD JOB	7.1
TOO SOON TO TELL	9.6
DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE	2.3

n=564

Table 4.4

"IF A FEDERAL ELECTION WERE HELD TODAY, WHAT PARTY WOULD YOU VOTE FOR?"

---

	(percent)	PERCENT OF DECIDED VOTERS	NOT VOTE*
PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE	58.3	75.3	6.8
LIBERAL	8.2	10.5	16.5
NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY	10.3	13.3	17.5
OTHER	0.7	0.9	3.9
DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE			
NOT ELIGIBLE	22.6		55.4
	n=564		

\*"Well, which one of the major federal parties would you not vote for?"

5.0 BRITISH COLUMBIA

5.1 PROVINCIAL POLITICS

Table 5.1

"AS YOU KNOW, IN BRITISH COLUMBIA THE SOCIAL CREDIT PARTY HAS BEEN IN POWER SINCE 1983. OVERALL, IS THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT DOING A GOOD JOB, AN AVERAGE JOB, OR A BAD JOB OF GOVERNING THE PROVINCE?"

---

	(percent)
GOOD JOB	14.0
AVERAGE JOB	36.0
BAD JOB	45.7
DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE	4.3
	n=606

The level of dissatisfaction with the Social Credit Party is very high, and given the nature of the question phrasing, the fact that 45.7 percent of British Columbia respondents were dissatisfied with the job the provincial government is doing is very significant.

Table 5.2

"IF A PROVINCIAL ELECTION WERE HELD TODAY, WHAT PARTY WOULD YOU VOTE FOR?"

	(percent)	PERCENT OF DECIDED VOTERS	NOT VOTE*
SOCIAL CREDIT	24.9	39.3	31.3
LIBERAL	2.5	3.9	5.2
NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY	31.8	50.3	15.6
OTHER	4.1	6.5	4.7
DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE			
NOT ELIGIBLE	36.7		43.6
	n=606		

\*"Well, which one of the major provincial parties would you not vote for?"

These results are highly significant, not just with respect to the distribution of the "votes," but also with respect to the fact that many of the undecided would definitely not vote for the Social Credit Party (30.9 percent).

5.2 FEDERAL POLITICS

Table 5.3

"....SINCE IT WAS ELECTED LAST SEPTEMBER, WHAT KIND OF JOB HAS THE (FEDERAL) GOVERNMENT BEEN DOING? HAS IT BEEN DOING A GOOD JOB, AVERAGE JOB, OR BAD JOB OF GOVERNING THE COUNTRY?"

	(percent)
GOOD JOB	17.7
AVERAGE JOB	54.3
BAD JOB	11.7
TOO SOON TO TELL	12.7
DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE	3.5

n=606

Table 5.4

"IF A FEDERAL ELECTION WERE HELD TODAY, WHAT PARTY WOULD YOU VOTE FOR?"

	(percent)	PERCENT OF DECIDED VOTERS	NOT VOTE*
PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE	38.4	53.6	7.2
LIBERAL	12.9	17.9	7.9
NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY	18.8	26.2	13.0
OTHER	1.7	2.3	3.6
DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE	28.2		68.3
NOT ELIGIBLE			

n=606

\*"Well, which one of the major federal parties would you not vote for?"

The strong support for federal Progressive Conservatives in British Columbia is in accord with the results for the other provinces.

#### 6.0 WESTERN ALIENATION

The issue of western alienation is felt by some to have been resolved by the election of the Progressive Conservatives to federal office. Others point to the relative success of the Western Canada Concept and Confederation of Regions parties in the last federal election as demonstrating the existence of western disaffection.

First, this poll does not record much interest in "other" parties, either at the federal or provincial levels. The question is completely open, and interviewers did not read a list of potential responses. This has the advantage of not biasing the response with respect to the main parties which appear regularly in the news and have a high profile in the media. However, in an election, the "other" parties gain in prominence. Thus, the results presented here with respect to "other" parties probably understates their performance in an actual election. To the extent that western "separation" parties comprise this group, there is a small understatement of their current position. Also, a certain proportion of the refusals could be expected to support these parties.

A question was administered to test expectations concerning the "deal" the west would get from the federal Progressive Conservatives now they are in office.

"DO YOU THINK THAT WESTERN CANADA WILL GET A BETTER DEAL NOW THAT THE PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVES ARE IN POWER FEDERALLY?"					
	ALL WESTERN PROVINCES	MANITOBA	SASKATCHEWAN	ALBERTA	BRITISH COLUMBIA
YES	36.9	30.8	33.3	50.0	34.2
MAYBE	20.9	22.3	22.4	19.1	19.6
NO	28.9	31.5	29.9	22.0	32.0
DON'T KNOW/ NO RESPONSE	13.2	15.4	14.3	8.9	14.2
	n=2,339	n=584	n=585	n=564	n=606

While there is a moderate level of agreement with this question, these data show some degree of ambivalence. Half the respondents in Alberta replied positively, but in the other areas, some still feel that the west will suffer. Unfortunately, there is no historical data upon which to make comparisons.

## 7.0 DISCUSSION

First, with respect to federal politics, in all provinces the Progressive Conservatives maintain a significant lead. The Liberals run third in all areas, and the New Democratic Party is not in a significantly stronger position. Approval and support for the federal Progressive Conservatives is significantly higher in Alberta.

With respect to provincial politics, Alberta provides no surprises--the Progressive Conservative Party is in clear control.

In Manitoba, the Conservatives also seem to have a sizable lead. To be sure, the New Democratic Party has significantly improved its position since last April, and the polling was done prior to the formal approval of the Limestone project by the National Energy Board (although most will have considered the project as all but approved for some months). The polling was also completed prior to the budget address. Both of these events may produce some advantage, although it is doubtful that they alone can close the gap.

In Saskatchewan, the Progressive Conservatives remain in control by a statistically significant margin. Commentary by some observers does suggest a narrowing of this gap, perhaps due to recent problems in the finance community; however, a 10 percent gap (on the weighted data) does indicate a significant margin.

In British Columbia, the disaffection with the current provincial government is clear, both with respect to the opinion regarding performance, voting preferences, and who the undecided would not vote for.

APPENDIX A

METHODOLOGY

From March 11 to 21, 1985, 2,339 households in Western Canada were interviewed by telephone. Telephone numbers were drawn randomly from telephone directories, and the last digit randomized to provide access to unlisted numbers. The sample sizes for each province were between 564 and 606, and they provide an error level of less than 5 percent, 19 times out of 20 for each province.

Refusals were relatively low (about 21 to 28 percent). This refusal performance is toward the lower range of rates typical of those experienced in the industry (20 to 30 percent).

See previous Institute for Social and Economic Research Profiles for more detail on methodology.

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE QUALITY

Sample Size and Error Rates

	Sample Size	Refusals (percent)	Approximate Error Rate (19 times out of 20)
All Provinces	2,339	21.0	2.1
Manitoba	584	23.4	4.1
Saskatchewan	585	22.8	4.1
Alberta	564	17.5	4.2
British Columbia	606	23.5	4.1

To assess representativeness, gender, income, location, and age are compared to what is known about provincial populations from secondary sources such as the 1981 Census.

Distribution by Gender

(percent)

Gender	British Columbia		Alberta		Saskatchewan		Manitoba	
	ISER Poll '85	Stats. Canada	ISER Poll '85	Stats. Canada	ISER Poll '85	Stats. Canada	ISER Poll '85	Stats. Canada
Male	46	49	42	51	45	50	48	48
Female	54	51	58	49	55	50	52	52

Females tend to be over-represented in this survey; however, this is comparatively slight. Since none of the responses to questions reported here varied by gender, no weighting was undertaken.

Distribution by Income

(percent)

Income	British Columbia		Alberta		Saskatchewan		Manitoba	
	ISER Poll '85	Stats. Canada	ISER Poll '85	Stats. Canada	ISER Poll '85	Stats. Canada	ISER Poll '85	Stats. Canada
< \$10,000	16	8	12	6	15	9	16	9
\$10,000 - \$21,000	19	23	17	19	22	27	23	29
\$21,000 - \$35,000	32	27	29	25	27	28	27	29
> \$35,000	26	42	35	50	27	36	26	33



There is a systematic under-representation of higher-income groups, essentially because about 10 percent of respondents typically refuse to reply to the income question in the format used. Also, the comparison data are two years old. For this reason, the discrepancy between the poll and actual was not judged to be serious, and no weighting was undertaken.

Location	<u>Location</u> (percent)							
	British Columbia		Alberta		Saskatchewan		Manitoba	
	ISER Poll '85	Stats. Canada	ISER Poll '85	Stats. Canada	ISER Poll '85	Stats. Canada	ISER Poll '85	Stats. Canada
Urban	45	43	53	50	47	33	49	55
Rural	55	57	47	50	53	67	51	45

The rural/urban ratios were reasonably close, except for Saskatchewan, where the source of the distortion remains unknown. Since political attitudes do vary significantly by location in Saskatchewan, these data are weighted where applicable by a simple proportionality factor.

Age	<u>Age Distribution</u> (percent)							
	British Columbia		Alberta		Saskatchewan		Manitoba	
	ISER Poll '85	Stats. Canada	ISER Poll '85	Stats. Canada	ISER Poll '85	Stats. Canada	ISER Poll '85	Stats. Canada
18 - 19	2	--	2	--	2	--	1	--
20 - 24	9	13	10	18	13	14	11	13
25 - 44	48	43	51	47	43	39	46	40
45 - 64	25	28	25	24	26	29	24	29
65+	16	16	12	11	16	18	18	18

The age pattern reported by the poll and Statistics Canada are within theoretical error rates for the most part, and no adjustments were deemed necessary. Again, the comparison data from Statistics Canada are now about four years old.

In general, the sample is very representative of what is known about the general population over 18. Weighting was deemed necessary only in one instance.

Refusals

(percent)

	British Columbia	Alberta	Saskatchewan	Manitoba
Male	32.3	30.8	32.3	33
Female	<u>67.7</u>	<u>69.2</u>	<u>67.7</u>	<u>67</u>
	100	100	100	100
Rural	40.3	38.3	51.5	38
Urban	<u>59.7</u>	<u>61.7</u>	<u>48.5</u>	<u>62</u>
	100	100	100	100

This pattern is typical, with women tending to refuse participation about twice as frequently as men. Urban respondents also refuse more frequently than rural respondents, except for Saskatchewan.

In general, the poll produces a broadly representative sample. Where differences were observed, cross-tabulations were conducted to ascertain whether these could be expected to upset the main results. Any caveats are noted in the text, and for some analysis the data are weighted using a simple proportionality factor.