



PROFILE ON WESTERN CANADA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Institute for Social and Economic Research polled 3113 western Canadians between Sept. 23 and Oct. 3 1985 on their attitudes toward federal and provincial politics.

Sample sizes for each of the provinces are indicated in the following table. Theoretical error rates for each province are less than 3.7%, 19 times out of 20.

Table 1: Sample Sizes for the Provinces

Manitoba	798
Saskatchewan	744
Alberta	824
British Columbia	747
TOTAL	3113

The poll was conducted by telephone and the sample was selected randomly. The following are the main results for each province

1. Manitoba.

Of decided voters, 44.8% would vote NDP, 40.0% would vote Progressive Conservative and 13.0% would vote Liberal.

2. Saskatchewan

Of decided voters, 46.3% would vote NDP, 43.8% would vote Progressive Conservative and 9.3% would vote Liberal.

3. Alberta

Of decided voters, 74.1% would vote Progressive Conservative, 14.3% would vote NDP and 9.1% would vote Liberal.

4. British Columbia

Of decided voters, 46.3% would vote NDP, 39% would vote Social Credit and 8.8% would vote Liberal.

Western separatist parties did not figure prominently in the responses (open-ended and recorded verbatim).

With respect to federal politics, the Mulroney government has dropped in popularity since April '85 by an average of 10%, except for Alberta. There, some evidence exists that popularity has waned. In addition, the rating of its performance tends to be skewed negatively in all provinces, except for Alberta. Each province has a theoretical error rate of less than 3.7%, 19 times out of 20.

The overall sample provides a theoretical error rate of less than 1.9%, 19 times out of 20.

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INTRODUCTION

From Sept. 23 to Oct 3, 1985, the Institute for Social and Economic Research contacted 3113 western Canadians on the subject of current political preferences, with emphasis on provincial politics. This report presents a province-by-province summary of the main results. A detailed report will be available shortly.

The overall sample provides a theoretical error rate of less than 1.9%, 19 times out of 20. Each province has a theoretical error rate of less than 3.7%, 19 times out of 20.

MANITOBA

The basic issue is simply how the population views the imminent provincial election. On this matter there has been a steady change over the past two years since polling was first done on this issue in April '84.¹

Not much change is apparent in the overall approval rating. It should be noted that this type of question usually produces responses which are clustered toward the middle position. Sentiment for or against a government is shown by a "skewing" in the response categories.

Table 3 presents the overall results on political preference in Manitoba. If the "Don't Know" and "No Response" categories are added then overall undecided may be 31.9% but it is important to stress that the 8.4% who replied "No Response" may have firm preferences but care not to reveal them.

About half the respondents (in western Canada) also indicated that voting for the candidate is more important than voting for the party, suggesting that the undecided are composed of a large number of voters who make their mind up as they learn more about the candidates, usually during the election campaign.

¹ These polls have used identical techniques, same questionnaire format, positioning of question within the interview and same phrasing to ensure comparability over time.

Table 2: Approval Rating for the Manitoba Government

"As you know, in Manitoba the New Democratic Party has been in power since 1981. Overall, has the provincial government been doing a good job, and average job or a bad job of governing the province?"

	Percent	
	Sept. '85	April '85
Good Job	18.7	17.1
Avg. Job	61.6	59.2
Bad Job	16.5	16.4
DK/NR	3.1	7.2

(Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding)

(Note: An approval question was not asked in April 1984)

Table 3: Political Preferences in Manitoba (Provincial)

"If a provincial election were held today, what party would you vote for?"

	Percent
	Sept. '85
Liberal	8.5
NDP	29.2
PC	26.1
Other	1.3
Would Not Vote	3.0
Don't Know	23.5
No response	8.4

(Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding)

Table 4: Political Preferences in Manitobans (Provincial)

"If a provincial election were held today, what party would you vote for?"

	Percent of Decided Voters		
	Sept '85	April '85	April '84
Lib.	13.0	10.8	14.6
NDP	44.8	36.7	23.6
PC	40.0	50.8	58.9
Other	2.0	1.8	2.9
n =	506		

(Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding)

SASKATCHEWAN

The provincial government has been in power since 1982, when the Conservatives defeated the NDP. In terms of overall rating, the incumbent government has slipped; this represents an ebbing in the confidence the public has in the provincial government of Grant Devine.

Table 5: Approval Rating for the Saskatchewan Government

"As you know the Progressive Conservative party has been in power since 1982. Overall, has the provincial government been doing a good job, an average job or a bad job of governing the province?"

	Percent	
	Sept. '85	April '85
Good Job	16.0	19.7
Avg. Job	57.1	56.1
Bad Job	23.9	19.0
DK/NR	3.1	5.2

(Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding)

This lowered approval has translated in to reduced support as shown in Tables 6 and 7.

In April 1985 the Conservatives held about a 6 percentage point lead over the NDP, but in the last six months that seems to have reversed. The lead that the NDP holds is at the margin of statistical significance. It should be noted that the rural/urban split is very close to Statistics Canada data (see Sample Quality in Appendix 2), so that it is unlikely that sampling has produced this reversal.

Table 6: Political Preferences in Saskatchewan (Provincial)

"If a provincial election were held today, what party would you vote for?"

	Percent
	Sept. '85
Liberal	5.6
NDP	27.7
PC	26.2
Other	.4
Would Not Vote	2.4
Don't Know	24.1
No Response	13.6

(Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding)

Table 7: Political Preferences in Saskatchewan (Provincial)

"If a provincial election were held today, what party would you vote for?"

	Percent of Decided Voters	
	Sept. '85	April '85
Liberal	9.3	9.7
NDP	46.3	42.2
PC	43.8	48.0
Other	.6	-

n = 446

(Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding)

ALBERTA

The Progressive Conservatives continue to dominate provincial (and federal) politics. Approval ratings are very high, and so is the support for the provincial Progressive Conservatives. This is readily apparent in Tables 8, 9, and 10.

Table 8: Approval Rating for the Provincial Government (Alberta)

As you know the Progressive Conservatives have been in power since 1981. Overall, has the provincial government been doing a good job, an average job or bad job of governing the province?"

	Percent	
	Sept. '85	April '85
Good Job	38.0	31.4
Avg. Job	51.4	53.5
Bad Job	8.3	11.5
DK/NR	2.3	4.4

(Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding)

The approval rating of the provincial government in Alberta continues to increase, and suprisingly it has shifted to a point where almost 40% of the population feels that the government is doing a good job. This is a very strong showing on this type of question.

The decline in NDP fortunes may reflect the loss of Grant Notley and that no high profile replacement exists as yet. Also, the current leadership campaign in the PC party is very conducive to high recognition and by itself can be expected to provide a boost in popularity.

Table 9: Political Preferences in Alberta (Provincial)

"If a provincial election were held today, what party would you vote for?"

	Percent
	Sept. '85
Liberal	6.6
NDP	10.2
PC	53.2
Other	1.8
Would Not Vote	2.5
Don't Know	19.3
No Response	6.4

(Total may not add to 100 due to rounding)

Table 10: Political Preferences in Alberta (Provincial)

"If a provincial election were held today, what party would you vote for?"

	Percent of Decided Voters	
	Sept. '85	April '85
Liberal	9.1	8.4
NDP	14.2	21.5
PC	74.1	67.8
Other	2.5	2.3

n = 592

(Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding)

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Last April, the low rating coupled with a strong showing by the NDP and the fact that many of the undecided would definitely not vote for the Social Credit Party indicated that the government of William Bennett may face difficulty in the next election. These trends continue today.

Table 11: Approval Rating for the Provincial Government (British Columbia)

"As you know, in British Columbia the Social Credit Party has been in power since 1982. Overall, has the provincial government been doing a good job, an average job or a bad job of governing the province?"

	Percent	
	Sept. '85	April '85
Good Job	13.7	14.0
Avg. Job	41.7	36.0
Bad Job	42.4	45.7
DK/NR	2.1	4.3
(Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding)		

It seems that there is a marginal reduction in negative ratings, but readers are cautioned that these changes are slight and lie within the error rate of the poll. In effect, the situation remains unchanged.

The noteworthy aspect of Table 13 is the recovery of the Liberal party, apparently at the expense of the New Democrats and possibly the Conservatives. This is a surprising result, which may indicate some weakness in the NDP, genuine recovery in the Liberal Party or it may be a statistical artifact. The rural/urban split is virtually identical to Statistics Canada data, and the tables have been weighted for gender imbalance. Thus the chance of sampling producing this reversal is not particularly high.

Table 12: Political Preferences in British Columbia (Provincial)

"If a provincial election were held today, what party would you vote for?"

	Percent
	Sept. '85
Liberal	5.6
NDP	29.9
Soc. Cred.	25.0
Other	3.8
Would Not Vote	4.0
Don't Know	24.1
No Response	7.6

(Total may not add to 100 due to rounding)

Table 13: Political Preferences in British Columbia (Provincial)

"If a provincial election were called today, what party would you vote for?"

	Percent of Decided Voters	
	Sept. '85	April '85
Liberal	8.8	3.9
NDP	46.3	50.3
Soc. Cred.	39.0	39.3
Other	5.8	6.5

n = 480
(Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding)

FEDERAL POLITICS

The recent events in the House of Commons may have had an impact on the rating of the federal government. In addition, this has translated into voting intentions. Indeed, when data from April 1985 are compared to September 1985, it appears that the Federal Progressive Conservatives have lost about 10 percent.

Although it is easy to point to the bank failures, high-level resignations and tuna as factors in this decline, other forces may also be at work. For example, it would be surprising if the federal PCs did not decline in popularity from the heady days of August '84. In addition, there is the conventional explanation in Canadian politics that there is a reaction to governments which dominate the political scene. This latter explanation is not all that convincing, especially in view of the major counter example - Alberta.

Table 14: Approval of the Federal Government: Manitoba

"Overall, what kind of job has the federal government been doing in its first year in government. Has it been doing a good job, an average job or a bad job of running the country?"

	Percent	
	Sept. '85	April '85
Good Job	9.5	18.5
Avg. Job	54.8	50.2
Bad Job	31.1	13.7
DK/NR	4.6	17.6

(Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding)

(Note: In April 1985 many respondents volunteered that it was too early to judge the federal PCs. This did not come up in September 1985. The April data combine "Too early to tell", "Don't Know" and "No Response" categories).

Table 15: Approval of the Federal Government: Saskatchewan

"Overall, what kind of job has the federal government been doing in its first year in government. Has it been doing a good job, an average job or a bad job of running the country?"

	Percent	
	Sept. 85	April '85
Good Job	8.4	16.8
Avg. Job	59.5	60.5
Bad Job	28.3	9.6
DK/NR	3.8	13.1

(Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding)

(Note: See Table 14 for explanation of DK/NR)

Table 16: Approval of the Federal Government: Alberta

"Overall, what kind of job has the federal government been doing in its first year in government. Has it been doing a good job, an average job or a bad job of running the country?"

	Percent	
	Sept. '85	April '85
Good Job	15.0	30.9
Avg. Job	64.9	50.2
Bad Job	17.8	7.1
DK/NR	2.3	11.9

(Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding)

(Note: See Table 14 for explanation of DK/NR)

Table 17: Approval of the Federal Government: British Columbia

"Overall, what kind of job has the federal government been doing in its first year in government. Has it been doing a good job, an average job or a bad job of running the country?"

	Sept.'85	Percent April '85
Good Job	11.9	17.7
Avg. Job	58.2	54.3
Bad Job	26.6	11.7
DK/NR	3.3	16.2

(Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding)

(Note: See Table 14 above for explanation of DK/NR)

From these data, it appears that only in Alberta is the approval rating of the government being "maintained" in the sense that the pattern is not skewed. But, the change in all provinces in the last six months is dramatic and sharp. Interviewer debriefing after the polling was completed. indicated that respondents, especially PC supporters, were qualifying their responses, and while they were still willing to indicate that the government was doing a good job, they also mentioned that the "PCs had inherited a mess", or that "a good government can look bad in bad times." Throughout the west, the support of the government remains firm, but again, interviewers reported some disappointment among those indicating they would vote PC if a federal election were held today.

The data in Table 18 clearly show that the disaffection with the federal government has translated into stated voting intentions.

Table 18: Political Preferences of Western Canadians: Federal Government

"If a federal election were held today, what party would you vote for?"

	Percent Decided Voters (Sept.'85) Numbers in Brackets are April '85			
	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	B.C.
Liberal	29.1(19.1)	23.3(17.9)	14.6(10.5)	27.1(17.9)
NDP	26.8(22.9)	34.8(29.3)	13.9(13.3)	27.9(26.2)
PC	43.0(54.8)	41.3(52.8)	71.0(75.3)	43.6(53.6)
Other	.9(3.1)	.8(-)	.3(.9)	1.5(2.3)
	Undecided (percent)			
	25.6	34	21	24.6
n- (Sept.'85)	567	480	588	545
p-	4.1	4.6	4.1	4.3

(Note: The "p" refers to the margin of error as if the decided respondents were a random sample. They are not and this use of error rates is, strictly speaking, not valid. It does provide a rough measure of by how much the entries in a column (September 1985) must vary in order to state that there is a statistical difference).

Appendix A
METHODOLOGY

Between September 23 and October 4, 1985, 3113 households in western Canada were contacted by phone. Telephone numbers were generated by random digit dialing with last digit replacement. Overall refusals were 21 - 28 percent - typical of political polls undertaken by ISER in the past.

A systematic random sample was drawn from the telephone directories in western Canada, and the last digit was randomly altered for the urban areas. This is to gain access to unlisted numbers. Rural areas have a low frequency of unlisted numbers, but the increased frequency of party lines may produce some problems with respondents who wish complete anonymity. All numbers were attempted, and "busy" or "not at home" were reintroduced into the sample frame after the first pass. Business, disconnected or institutional numbers were discarded.

All questions reported here used either a simple semantic differential type response scale (e.g., good job, average job or bad job) in which case the categories were read, or were open. Thus for questions which involved the respondent making a choice on a preferred party, no list was read. The respondent was completely free to state his or her choice. In this way minority parties were not excluded and the order of a list would not produce non-random effects.

The interview team received intensive training in general survey methodology (to assist them in understanding the protocols used), general interviewing techniques and trial runs through the instrument.

Appendix B
SAMPLE QUALITY

The representativeness of the collected data is evaluated in comparison to Statistics Canada data. In some cases, recourse must be made to 1981 Census data, and this may mean that the standard of comparison is a bit dated.

Distribution by Gender

Telephone polls typically produce a female/male ratio of 60/40 unless there is preselection (by asking for the person over 18 whose birthday is next). Such preselection is cumbersome, prone to increasing overall refusals and takes longer (i.e., costs more). ISER polls post-stratify by a simple proportionality factor. If there is no difference in the pattern of response between men and women, then this weighting has no effect on the overall response. If there are differences, then the pattern of response for men is weighted "up" to adjust for their smaller numbers.

The data reported above are all weighted to adjust for gender imbalances.

Distribution by Location (Urban vs. Rural)

Table 19: Poll Data on Location Compared to Statistics Canada (in Brackets)

	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	B.C.
	Percent			
Urban	55 (55)	34 (33)	51 (50)	42 (43)
Rural	45 (45)	66 (67)	49 (50)	58 (57)

This table reveals close correspondence between the poll data and Statistics Canada information. No adjustments are necessary.

Distribution by Income

The observed pattern of response by income category is shown below.

Table 20: Poll Data on Income Compared to Statistics Canada (in Brackets)

Income	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	B.C.
(\$000)	Percent			
<21	40(38)	41(36)	27(25)	34(31)
21 - 35	28(29)	23(28)	29(25)	29(27)
>35	25(33)	24(36)	35(50)	28(42)
Refused	7	12	8	8

Item refusals for income are usual. The format used in asking this information is the least threatening approach possible. There is a tendency for high income respondents to not give such information. Also, it was apparent from interviewer feedback that due to adverse agricultural conditions, especially in Saskatchewan, the income question was especially sensitive.

Some adjustment may be warranted, if it could be ascertained that the refusals were random, but this is very unlikely. The reader is cautioned that some disturbance to the pattern of response may exist. No adjustment was made to reconcile differences between Statistics Canada information and the poll data.

Distribution by Age

There are some small distortions between the poll data and Statistics Canada information for the population. If the pattern of response were significantly different among age groups, this could become a serious distortion in the overall pattern of response. In fact, and contrary to common belief, the age related differences in political preferences are not that great. In Manitoba, the age distribution of support for PC is similar to that of the NDP. There is some suggestion that younger

Table 21: Poll Data on Age Compared to Statistics Canada (in Brackets)

	Man	Sask	Alta	B.C.
18 - 24	12 (13)	11 (14)	13 (18)	9 (13)
25 - 44	45 (40)	38 (39)	53 (47)	47 (43)
45 - 64	25 (29)	31 (29)	23 (24)	27 (28)
65+	18 (18)	20 (18)	9 (11)	16 (16)

(Note: Statistics Canada provides no convenient breakdown of the 18 - 19 group. It is likely that the poll understates this group.)

respondents (< 44) support the NDP and older respondents support the PC party, but the clearest relationship is that young residents tend to support the Liberals. It does not appear that age distribution effects have distorted the main results for the two major parties in Manitoba.

Similarly in Saskatchewan and Alberta, the age distribution appears not to have induced the basic pattern of response. The major qualification is that the "Don't Know" response is tends to be provided by the youngest category.

In B.C. there is a greater tendency for the under 44 to support the NDP and the over 65 to support the Social Credit, but these relationships are not especially strong. In terms of the overall pattern, there seems no pressing need to adjust the data to reflect differences in the collected data and what is known about the population.

One final point is useful. Sampling to produce a representative sample is very difficult and requires that background questions be collected at the beginning of the interview. Such directed samples, have a place, but they are also often not random.

In this poll, care was taken to ensure an accurate rural/urban split since that frequently plays the greatest role in political preferences.

Summary

Overall the collected data represents the population in major dimensions. In those respects which there are discrepancies, cross-tabulations reveals that the pattern of response to the main question (i.e., political preferences) are not different for that dimension. Accordingly, aside from the correction for the gender inequality (standard in all ISER polls) no further adjustment to the data was required.

Refusals

The refusal rate for this poll was about 24%, representative of other political polls undertaken by the Institute.

Table 22: Refusals by Province (Percent)

	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	B.C.
Rural	19.1	19.7	19.9	21.2
Urban	29.1	29.7	22.8	27.0
Overall	25.3	26.5	21.6	24.2
<hr/>				
Male	18.6	24.8	18.1	23.3
Female	29.2	29.8	25.3	26.5

The higher refusals in urban areas and among women is also a common feature of telephone polls. The reader should be aware of these non-random influences in the data.

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