



For Pollsters, an Alberta-sized Mess

But maybe one way to look at it is that polls don't drive democracy.

By: By Tom Barrett, 15 May 2013, TheTyee.ca

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It was a lousy night to be a pollster and a great night to be someone who thinks polls undermine democracy.

The pollsters got it wrong Tuesday: spectacularly, Alberta-sized wrong.

Not one published poll in the months before the election gave the BC Liberals a lead over the New Democratic Party. Instead of the six-to-nine percentage point NDP victory suggested by the province's big political pollsters, voters appear to have given the Liberals a comfortable five-point victory.

It was eerily similar to the result in Alberta a year ago, when the *last polls* put the Wildrose party ahead of the incumbent Progressive Conservatives by six to eight points. On election night, the PCs won by a *10-point margin*.

B.C. pollsters were well aware that Alberta voters appear to have changed their minds at the last minute and were polling up until the day before the vote. It didn't help.

The closest late-stage B.C. election poll was produced by *Forum Research*, which still had the NDP in the lead and overestimated the NDP share of the vote by more than the poll's margin of error.

Pollster Greg Lyle, managing director of the *Innovative Research Group*, said online polling -- used by Ipsos and Angus Reid, B.C.'s two best-known pollsters -- appears to have failed.

"There's no doubt in my mind that the online polls overestimated the NDP," Lyle said. "They're going to have to tear their panels apart and figure out what they got wrong."

Lyle, who was Gordon Campbell's campaign director in the 1996 B.C. election, said his firm did some private polling during the campaign and found a narrow gap between the Liberals and NDP.

"We thought our poll was wrong because all these other online polls were saying that there was this big gap," he said. "But I think, hindsight being 20/20, that it's pretty clear that it was never as bad as they said."

There appear to be biases in the makeup of the panels of respondents to online polls that will need to be addressed, Lyle said.

"Everyone got burned," he said.

Hamish Telford, head of the political science department at the University of the Fraser Valley, said there was a large undecided vote in the polls until the last week.

"Clearly, that undecided vote broke one way rather than the other," he said. 🗳️

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