7℃ (javascript:void(0);)

May 22, 2013

Victoria

5-Day Forecast

- Today

9℃ / 12℃

Chance of showers

- Thursday

- / 15℃

Showers

- Friday

7℃ / 16℃

A mix of sun and cloud

- Saturday

9℃ / 14℃

Chance of showers

- Sunday

9℃ / 17℃

Chance of showers

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L. Ian MacDonald: Why the NDP lost and the polls were wrong

L. Ian MacDonald (/authors?author=L. Ian MacDonald) / Times Colonist
May 22, 2013

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In the B.C. election campaign, NDP Leader Adrian Dix was in trouble from the time of the leaders' debate, when he may have won the argument against B.C. Liberal Premier Christy Clark, but lost on body language.

If you were watching in a gym with the volume turned down, he looked like a computer nerd, while she looked like the winsome girl next door.

Then, the NDP ran a classic front-runner's campaign, with their leader lightly scheduled. Clark was a whirlwind.

Like Alison Redford in Alberta last year, she clearly wanted it, and the voters always notice that.

The turning point in the B.C. campaign was clearly Dix's announcement that he would veto the proposed twinning of the Kinder Morgan pipeline from Alberta to Vancouver Harbour. This is a route that already exists, but was built in a time before pipelines became politically sensitive.

Dix and the NDP were clearly playing for swing voters, and trying to motivate their own base, in the Lower Mainland around Vancouver.

But the message they sent to independent and Conservative voters was very different — that an NDP government would oppose any and all new energy transport in a province whose economy is built on exports, and whose future prosperity lies across the Pacific. Shutting down the West Coast is not an option. But moving to the Liberals became the only option for stopping the NDP, which is exactly what happened.

For good measure, the NDP promised a tax hike to pay for its promises, always a big winner with voters.

Finally, the NDP took a collateral hit on its brand from the slumping poll numbers of the federal party, now mired in third place under Tom Mulcair's leadership.

It's no mystery — Mulcair has taken a big hit everywhere in English-speaking Canada for his "50 plus one" position on revising the Clarity Act so that "the side that wins, wins." Not to mention his more recent musings on revisiting the 1980-81 patriation process because Supreme Court judges may or may not have discussed the case with politicians.

Nobody cares about that, except separatists in Quebec, a bad place for the NDP.

And then there were the polls, which were wrong. Again. Dead wrong.

As for the pundits, the same people who get it wrong keep analyzing why they were wrong, when they should be looking for other work.

This is the third election in a row that the polls have been out to lunch; actually the fourth if you want to start with the 2011 federal election.

That was where hardly anyone saw a Conservative majority in the making, right there in vote-rich Ontario, where the Tories swept the 905 in suburban Toronto, winning 21 out of 22 seats, and 30 out of 45 seats in the Greater Toronto Area, previously an impregnable Liberal fortress.

In Alberta last year, all the public polls had Danielle Smith and the Wild Rose cruising to a majority. On election night, one columnist even filed a piece on how she won.

Meanwhile, in the last 10 days of the campaign, Redford was growing by as much as two points a day. Who knew? Her pollster, Greg Lyle, who saw her majority coming.

Even when she was clearly surging in Calgary and Edmonton in the closing days of the campaign, no one else saw it, least of all the journalists who were supposedly covering the campaign.

In Quebec last September, polls put Jean Charest's Liberals at 25 per cent, when in the end he won 31 per cent, depriving the Parti Québécois of a majority. Had only two seats voted the other way, he would have formed a government.

In B.C., only Clark's pollster, Dimitri Pantazopoulos, saw it coming, privately projecting she would win a majority with 48 seats — she won 50.

The polling industry in this country needs to have a meeting. They have this problem with online polling, in that it's unrepresentative, and excludes older voters with landlines who answer the phone and actually vote.

Garbage in, garbage out.

As for the pundit class, they spend far too much time talking to each other all day on Twitter. It isn't journalism, it's just opinion reinforcement.

L. Ian MacDonald is editor of Policy magazine.

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