



How Breaking the 2011 Vote Pattern Bends 2015 Seat Models

An increasing trend in Canadian election news coverage is to focus less on individual polls and more on seat projection models that combine survey responses. Because we count seats, not votes, to determine who wins the election, this new feature of media coverage makes sense and will be particularly valuable in future elections. But this election might be different.

Last election was one of the most unusual election in Canadian history. The NDP have never been higher and the Liberals have never been lower. The seat projection models are using the distribution of votes at the riding level from that unusual campaign to predict who will win in this more traditional election. Many pundits have talked about the inefficiency of the Liberal vote. It is true that in 2011, each Liberal vote delivered fewer seats than each NDP or CPC vote. But why should we assume the pattern from the exceptional 2011 election will apply to the more traditional 2015 election?

Our polls say the 2011 pattern is broken, and so are the seat models that depend on it. To see how changing voting patterns may change seat results, we have run our own seat models using our 3,417 person online poll from last week. The horserace in that poll was Liberals 35%, CPC 30% and NDP 24%.

First, we grouped the ridings together by regions and then ran 10,000 seat simulations using a proportionate regional swing model where if the Liberals double their vote in BC we double their vote in each seat. While every seat projection model is unique in its assumptions and algorithms, this is the general approach used by many seat projection models. In this approach the median estimate of Liberals seats is 121, the CPC median is 112 and the NDP is 99.

Second, we grouped the ridings together based on which parties won and how close the race was in 2011 and use the current voting preferences of our 3,417 respondents from those seat clusters to run another 10,000 seat simulations. Again the vote is adjusted proportionately, but this time within groups of seats that shared similar outcomes. Because our research shows that the pattern of safe and swing seats has changed in this election, in this approach the median estimate of Liberals seats rises 24 seats to 145, the CPC median drops to 99 and the NDP estimate drops to 89. A 9 seat margin grows to a 46 margin with the same number of votes when you project the results grouping seats by past election results rather than region.

So, when you make your bets, feel free to adjust the CPC count up if you think there are shy Tories or 10-second Tories or if you think Conservatives supporters are more likely to vote than others or if you think they are winning in third party language groups that charter language polls miss. But don't forget to give the Liberals a boost as well because the patterns the seat models are based on have changed to the Liberals' benefit.