



Poll Commentary

August 18, 2016

Vancouver

Overview

On May 9th, 2017, BC's political parties have a date with destiny. As that date approaches over the next 9 months, INNOVATIVE will conduct a series of polls to understand where the parties stand and what matters to key voters.

Our first poll uses a "gold standard" randomly selected cell and landline, live-caller survey. Between August 12th to 14th, 2016, we placed live calls to landline and cell telephones among 600 randomly-selected British Columbia residents, 18 years of age and older. The sample has been weighted by age, gender and region using the 2011 Census to reflect the actual demographic composition of the population. Using this technique means that almost every British Columbian has a known probability of being reached which allows us to apply traditional margins of error to the results. The margin of error is approximately $\pm 4.0\%$, 19 times out of 20.

The focus of this poll is to understand the issues the parties must address as the election approaches. Follow-up polls will look at specific issues more closely. Of course, not all voters matter the same to the parties. Parties need to focus on mobilising their core supporters and rallying their swing voters so we highlight the views of those groups in our charts.

Voter Pools

When we ask people how likely they are to vote for the four main parties in this election, we find the BC Liberals enjoy the largest pool of potential support. One in 10 (10%) say they are definitely voting Liberal, 16% are very likely to do so and 29% are somewhat likely. Grouping the definite and very likely voters together we find 26% are core Liberal supporters and 29% are swing voters.

The NDP have 19% in their base (6% definitely and 13% very) with 27% somewhat likely. Comparing the Liberals and the NDP we see the Liberal base is 7 points higher than the NDP, although they both have a similar-sized group of swing voters.

At this stage, the Green party pool is not far behind the NDP. The Green's have 14% in their base (5% definitely and 9% very) and like the NDP, have 27% somewhat likely. In later surveys, we will pursue whether this potential will translate into tangible support, or if this is just a safe harbour for alienated voters until the election nears.

The Conservatives have 11% in their base (4% definitely and 7% very) with 21% somewhat likely. The Conservatives are currently in the midst of a leadership campaign. They need to generate interest in the race or in the new leader to become more competitive.

Issue Agenda

We look at issues three ways in this survey.

- We ask an open-ended question on the most important top-of-mind issue.
- We ask people to indicate whether the government should do more or less on issues that have been coming up in our surveys or where there have been political initiatives.
- We ask respondents to pick their top three issues from that list.

Within a fairly crowded agenda, affordable housing is first or a close second all three ways among all key voter segments. The government has no choice but to address this issue or face a significant voter backlash among their base and swing voters.

Three other issues also score a consistently high rating across all three ways of asking about issues:

- Adding up concerns about the economy, jobs and unemployment makes economic concerns a clear second place issue on the top-of-mind issue but it drops to fourth on the stand alone list and number five as a first, second or third priority. Many pundits see the Liberal's job agenda as critical to their success in the last election, but the issue is only one of several important priorities coming into this campaign.
- Education is among a group of four issues in a close third-place grouping on top-of-mind, is number two on the stand alone list, and number one as a first, second or third priority. The government has been managing down a series of brushfires over budget deficits, school closings and bus cuts. This looks like an area of opportunity for the NDP.
- Health is a second issue that is in a close third-place grouping on top-of-mind, is number five on the stand alone list and number three as a first, second or third priority. While in the past health has been a strong issue for the NDP, in more recent years voters have not had much hope that any party can make a difference on this issue. Health is relatively more important among Liberal swing voters, which makes it more significant as a potential make or break campaign issue.

Two other issues stand out in important ways. While affordable housing is the specific cost of living issue within the top-of-mind issues, the general concern of cost of living rates highly on its own in terms of both standalone interest and as an issue priority. It is particularly of concern to swing BC Liberals.

The environment is another issue in that tight group of third place issues in the top-of-mind responses. While the specific issue of climate change ranks relatively low on the stand alone rating and as a top priority, it is relatively more important to the NDP base.

Environment vs. Pocketbook Trade-Offs

With an impending major announcement from the government on its climate change strategy, we also looked at value trade-offs on the environment. We asked respondents which goal was more important; protecting the environment or keeping the cost of living down AND protecting the environment or creating jobs. In both cases, the pocketbook concern edged out the environment. Looking at core and swing NDP and Liberal voters, in every case we find voters were divided. While core Liberals have a strong plurality that chose cost of living over jobs, even in that group 25% always chose the environment. The bottom line is that the environmental debate divides both core and potential voters for both the Liberals and the NDP, and neither party looks to benefit from an environmental debate.