



Public Opinion and Polling: Is Western alienation for real?

Janet Brown

Pollster and Political Commentator

February 14, 2020

9:00am – 4:30pm

Summary

In spring 2019, Alberta experienced the second change in government in just as many elections—something that has never happened before in its history. Later that fall, Albertans shut the federal Liberals out of the province, even as the Liberals won a minority government. Today, there is increased talk of western alienation—a term that has not been in widespread use since the 1990s—and the separatist “Wexit Party” has just registered with Elections Canada. How did we get to this point, and what does this mean for Alberta’s relations with other provinces and the federal government going into the future?

Using publicly-available survey data and her own proprietary database of polls, Ms. Brown will provide an in-depth understanding of the following:

- How the NDP were able to defeat the Progressive Conservatives in 2015, after 44 years in power,
- How the UCP were able to defeat the NDP despite the popularity of NDP premier Rachel Notley and a string of controversies in the UCP campaign,
- The current values and attitudes of Albertans, and whether traditional stereotypes still hold,
- The nature of “conservatism” in Alberta, and
- Regional alienation and the Wexit separatist movement.

Ms. Brown will also discuss the performance of polls and lessons for interpreting polls in Canada.





Outline

Morning (9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.)

- Introduction: context and definitions
- Polling methodology and the unique issues of polling in Alberta
- An historical overview of Alberta public opinion

Afternoon (1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.)

- The public attitudes underlying voting behaviour: leader evaluations, economic evaluations, and policy preferences.
- The values and beliefs behind public opinion: does the stereotype of a “conservative” Alberta hold?
- The state of western alienation today and the Wexit movement.

Required Readings*

EnviroNics Institute. 2019. “Confederation of Tomorrow 2019 Survey of Canadians: Pulling Together or Drifting Apart?” Available online: https://www.environicsinstitute.org/docs/default-source/project-documents/confederation-of-tomorrow-2019-survey---report-1/confederation-of-tomorrow-survey-2019---report-1-pulling-together-or-drifting-apart---final-report.pdf?sfvrsn=9abc2e3e_2

DeCillia, Brooks. 2019. “The underestimated conservative voter in Alberta polls.” *Policy Options*. June 25, 2019. Available online: <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/june-2019/underestimated-conservative-voter-alberta-polls/>

Brown, Janet and John Santos. 2019. “Chapter 4 - Marginally Better: Polling in the 2015 Alberta Election.” In *Orange Chinook: The Politics of the New Alberta*, edited by Duane Bratt, Keith Brownsey, Richard Sutherland, and David Taras. Calgary: Calgary University of Calgary Press. 79-101. Available online [select Free PDF and proceed to chapter]: <https://press.ucalgary.ca/books/9781773850276/>

Sayers, Anthony M. and David K. Stewart. 2019. “Chapter 17 - Out of the Blue: Goodbye Tories, Hello Jason Kenney.” In *Orange Chinook: The Politics of the New Alberta*, edited by Duane Bratt, Keith Brownsey, Richard Sutherland, and David Taras. Calgary: University of Calgary Press. 399-423. Available online [select Free PDF and proceed to chapter]: <https://press.ucalgary.ca/books/9781773850276/>

Anderson, Drew. “Albertans aren’t as conservative as you might think, poll suggests.” *CBC News*, April 30, 2018. Available online: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/albertans-not-conservative-road-ahead-survey-1.4639232>

Thomas, Melanee. “What we mean when we talk about Alberta conservatism.” *CBC News*, December 12, 2018. Available online: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-populism-melanee-thomas-polling-data-1.4939893>

