
NDP LEADERSHIP RACE & BC POLITICS

SEPTEMBER 1999

- 48% OF BC PUBLIC WOULD CONSIDER VOTING NDP NOW THAT CLARK HAS RESIGNED, BUT MOST ADOPT “WAIT AND SEE” ATTITUDE**
 - 60% OF NEW DEMOCRATS PREFER DONSANJH, GIVING HIM EARLY MOMENTUM IN BID TO REPLACE CLARK –**
 - CAMPBELL LIBERALS STILL WIN MAJORITY REGARDLESS OF WHO BECOMES NDP LEADER –**
 - GORDON CAMPBELL SEEN AS BEST PREMIER FOR BC (32%); STANDS OUT AS A SIGN OF CHANGE, BUT MANY SIMPLY SEE NO OTHER BETTER CHOICE AVAILABLE -**
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This BC Angus Reid Group poll is based on a provincial telephone survey conducted between Sept 1st and Sept 10th, 1999 among a representative cross-section of 620 British Columbian adults. These data are statistically weighted to ensure the sample's regional, age and sex composition reflects that of the actual BC according to 1996 Census data.

With a provincial sample of 620, one can say with 95 percent certainty that the overall results are within ± 4.0 percentage points of what they would have been had the entire adult BC population been polled. The margin of error will be larger for other sub-groupings of the survey population.

PARTY PREFERENCE IN THE POST-CLARK ERA

BC PUBLIC MORE OPEN TO SUPPORTING NDP WITH GLEN CLARK NO LONGER PARTY LEADER

A quarter of British Columbians – 25 percent – say they are *more likely* to support the NDP in a provincial election now that Glen Clark has resigned. This is up 2 percentage points from an Angus Reid Group poll conducted 3 days following Clark’s announcement in late August that he was stepping aside as Premier and party leader. By comparison, 33 percent of people surveyed this month said they would be less likely to support the NDP with Clark gone; this is down 4 points over the past four weeks, indicating less resistance to voting for the party as it distances itself from the Clark reign. Meanwhile, one-in-five (22%) say it makes no difference to them that Clark has left (up 6 points), and another 18 percent say they would never vote for the party anyway (down 2 points).

This general pattern in BC public opinion holds true across all regional and socio-demographic population groups, with very little variation. Politically, however, we note some interesting trends which suggest the Clark resignation has acted as somewhat of a catalyst to re-activate the NDP voter base. For example, among people who voted for the NDP in the last provincial election (1996), fully 40 percent are more apt to vote for the party now that Clark has stepped down; this is up 4 points from the 36 percent who felt this way a month ago.

And, with Clark no longer at the helm, a significant number of supporters from all other parties are prepared to vote for the NDP. This includes 16 percent of Liberals (up 1 point from August), 16 percent of those now residing in the BC Reform camp (down 4 points), 38 percent of those supporting other parties (up 2 points), and, 27 percent of the undecided vote (up 9 points). Combined, these potential “party switchers” represent 17 percent of the voting population (up 1 points since August), and their presence hints at the strength of a return to

the fold of the disaffected NDP support base, people who have walked away from the party during the Clark administration.

CLOSE TO HALF THE BC POPULATION WOULD CONSIDER VOTING NDP

When asked to describe their current view of the NDP, a full 48 percent of British Columbians say they would at least consider voting for the party. This includes a small core – 7 percent – who say they would vote NDP regardless of who leads the party, and over four-in-ten (41%) who might consider voting for the party depending on who the new leader is and what their policies are. Meanwhile, a slim majority of the BC public (52%) would never think about voting NDP, regardless of who the leader is.

Overall, since late August, there has been a marginal 2 percentage point increase in the proportion of people in BC who could see themselves voting NDP under a new leader (46% to 48%).

Politically, it is quite significant that 77 percent of British Columbians who voted NDP in the 1996 provincial election would consider voting for the party with Clark out of the picture; this is up 6 percentage points over the past four weeks (71%). Further, 69 percent of people in BC who have voted for the NDP at some time in the past still have the party in their consideration set, a 5 point jump since our August poll. Equally important, a full 65 percent of the BC public who currently do not express a preference for any political party would consider voting for the NDP; this is up 8 points in the past few weeks (57% to 65%). And, 66 percent of people now with “other” parties (e.g. PDA, Green) have put the NDP into their consideration set. Moreover, over a quarter of current Liberal voters (27%, same as in August), and more than a third of those now supporting BC Reform (37%, up 8 points) say they would consider voting for the NDP in a provincial election.

Among those most likely to consider voting for the NDP, we find more people in the following regional and socio-demographic groups: Vancouver/Burnaby residents (57%); young (51%) and middle-aged (55%) British Columbians; people living in union households (62%).

CHOICE OF NEW LEADER WILL HAVE IMPORTANT IMPACT ON WHETHER NDP CAN ATTRACT PEOPLE TO THE PARTY

Findings show that many people in the potential NDP universe are waiting to see who replaces Glen Clark, and where they wish to take the party, before deciding whether or not they would vote NDP in a provincial election. When asked the main reason they would consider voting NDP, most people tied their intention directly to the party's choice for new leader and the policies that person would adopt. Fully 37 percent of those surveyed who described themselves as potential NDP supporters took this stand; 29 percent of 1996 NDP voters share the same view.

Many people in the current NDP voter base - about one-in-ten – would vote for the party because they feel “there’s really no choice”, or that they’ve “always voted NDP”. A good number also mentioned various specific policies (social programs, environment), and the party’s general progressive approaches to governance (13% combined mentions).

Interestingly, the apparent “wait and see” attitude goes somewhat beyond the current NDP voter base, overlapping into other parties. It is particularly strong, for example, among some current Liberal party supporters thinking about switching to the NDP, and among those in BC who express no real preference at this time. Fully 50 percent of Liberal voters who might consider voting NDP say their support for the party will be very much dependent upon who the new leader is and what their policies are; 45 percent of the uncommitted electorate feels the same way.

NDP PAST PERFORMANCE DRIVES PEOPLE AWAY FROM THE PARTY

Among those who now say they would never vote for the NDP, 26 percent say the party’s past performance has turned them off ever voting for it again. Another 19 percent criticize the government’s mismanagement of the economy and public finances, and 10 percent feel the party has not lived up to its promises. Fourteen percent simply don’t share the party’s particular approach to governing or its policies.

Disaffected New Democrats – British Columbians who have voted NDP at some time in the past, but are no longer willing to support the party – are particularly adamant about how the party's performance has soured them; 38 percent blame its past performance for driving them away, while another 21 percent talk of its economic and fiscal mismanagement; 10 percent feel the party has not fulfilled its promises. And, among 1996 NDP voters, fully 42 percent will not vote for the party because of what the party has done over the past few years; 23 percent mention the economy and finances specifically.

THE LEADERSHIP RACE

DOSANJH HAS EARLY MOMENTUM IN BID TO REPLACE CLARK; ATTORNEY GENERAL IS MOST POPULAR CANDIDATE AMONG BOTH BC PUBLIC AND NEW DEMOCRATS

In the race to replace Glen Clark, Attorney General Ujjal Dosanjh has opened up a sizeable gap between himself and other potential candidates, increasing his support among both the BC public and NDP supporters. Gordon Wilson's support, meanwhile, has slipped over the past month.

With no official candidates to choose from, a majority of British Columbians – 54 percent – nonetheless prefer Ujjal Donsanjh as their pick to replace Glen Clark as party leader and Premier. Recent Finance, now Education Minister Gordon Wilson is solidly in second place, with first and second choice support of 41 percent of the BC public, trailing Dosanjh by 13 full points. Further back still are Joy MacPhail (33%) and Svend Robinson (24%).

Among New Democrats, Dosanjh has taken the lead away from Gordon Wilson over the past month. With 60 percent of New Democrats picking him as their first or second choice, Dosanjh has a 12 point lead over Wilson (48%); this widens to 17 points over MacPhail (43%), and 31 points over Robinson (29%).

Shifts in candidate support suggest that Ujjal Dosanjh has the early momentum in the NDP leadership race. Over the past month, he has increased his support among the BC public,

moving from 47 percent (combined first and second choices) to 54 percent; and he has enjoyed similar good fortune among NDP supporters (47% to 60%). Importantly, his first choice support among party supporters has jumped 9 points (28% to 37%), suggesting his support is solidifying among the people who may well end up choosing the next party leader and Premier.

While Gordon Wilson has maintained his support among the BC public over the past month (39% to 41%), he has lost some ground among NDP supporters (52% vs. 48%), leaving the door open for people to go elsewhere. The dip in Wilson's support among New Democrats is particularly acute on first choice preferences, where he has lost 15 points (37% to 22%) in four weeks. Both Dosanjh and MacPhail have benefited from this movement.

Support for former Finance Minister Joy MacPhail has remained static among both the BC public (33% in both August and September), and BC New Democrats (43% both). Interestingly, however, the number of first choice ballots she receives from NDP supporters has jumped an important 6 points since Clark's resignation, keeping pace somewhat with Dosanjh.

The strength of Dosanjh's support among party supporters is further confirmed by the fact that 57 percent of people who have voted for the NDP at sometime in the past choose the Attorney General over all others. This compares quite favourably to the number who pick Gordon Wilson (48%), Joy MacPhail (38%), or Svend Robinson (24%).

And, among those who say they would consider voting NDP, depending upon who is party leader, 52 percent choose Donsanjh, 45 percent opt for Wilson, 35 percent want MacPhail, and 29 percent prefer Robinson.

Ujjal Donsanjh's popularity is strong across all regions and population segments; his strongest support is among people in the following groups:

- ◆ Lower Mainland residents (58%)
- ◆ People with a post-secondary education (59%)
- ◆ Middle and upper income households (61%)

Gordon Wilson generates greater public support among:

- ◆ Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island residents (43%)
- ◆ Men (46%)
- ◆ Lower income households (45%)

Joy MacPhail appeals much more strongly to:

- ◆ Women (39%)

Svend Robinson's strongest support emerges among:

- ◆ Vancouver/Burnaby residents (30%)
- ◆ 18-34 year olds (28%)

NEW NDP LEADER WOULD BOOST PARTY FORTUNES, BUT CAMPBELL LIBERALS HOLD COMMANDING LEAD REGARDLESS OF WHO LEADS THE NDP

Gordon Campbell and the BC Liberals retain majority support among the BC public regardless of who might win the NDP leadership race. Still, the NDP would improve its current standing among British Columbians from the current 15 percent to just over a quarter of decided voters with either Ujjal Dosanjh (26%), Gordon Wilson (25%) or Joy MacPhail (25%) as their new leader. A majority of decided British Columbians – about 53 percent – would support the provincial Liberals in either of these two scenarios. Svend Robinson (21%) would have less of an impact on party fortunes, and Campbell still wins majority support with Robinson at the helm.

With the sole exception of an increase in MacPhail's popular support over the past month (20% to 25%), very little has changed in the party race or the various leaders' contribution to improving NDP fortunes.

WHO WOULD MAKE THE BEST PREMIER OF BC?

GORDON CAMPBELL TOP CHOICE AS BC PREMIER

British Columbians choose Liberal leader Gordon Campbell as the person they feel would make the best Premier for BC. One-third of people surveyed (32%) picked Campbell from a list of six other individuals, including potential NDP leadership candidates and acting BC Reform leader Bill Vander Zalm. The Liberal leader has a strong 13 point lead over his nearest contender, current Attorney General Ujjal Dosanjh who garners 19 percent of support for the top political job in the province. Further back are NDP leadership hopefuls, Gordon Wilson (14%), Svend Robinson (9%), and Joy MacPhail (7%). One-in-ten people in BC (11%) believe former Premier, and acting BC Reform party leader, Bill Vander Zalm, is the best person for the job. Eight percent of those surveyed were unsure.

Gordon Campbell's image as the best Premier has moved up slightly over the past few years, since his 1996 election defeat. At the end of the last provincial election campaign, 26 percent of British Columbians saw Campbell as the best person to be BC Premier; he is now 6 percentage points ahead of that score. Interestingly, however, the last time the provincial New Democrats were in the throes of a leadership change, perceptions of Campbell as Premier suffered an 11 point drop once the NDP dust had settled. In September 1995, for example, just prior to then Premier Mike Harcourt's resignation, 37 percent of British Columbians chose Campbell as best Premier; by March of 1996, with Glen Clark installed as NDP leader, the number of people who saw Campbell in the Premier's chair had dropped to 26 percent.

Meanwhile, public perceptions of Gordon Wilson as best Premier have remained about the same over the past few years, and at lower levels than Campbell. At the end of the 1996

election, for example, 17 percent of British Columbians chose Wilson, then PDA leader, as the best person to lead the province; his current score is 3 points lower. In the period leading up to Mike Harcourt's November 1995 resignation, 14 percent chose Wilson as best Premier; by March of 1996, with a Clark-led NDP, only 11 percent of the BC public saw Wilson in the top job.

British Columbians from all regions and all walks of life pick Gordon Campbell as their top choice for Premier of BC. He has a greater number of fans, however, among the following groups:

- ◆ Suburban Lower Mainland residents (39%)
- ◆ University graduates (36%)
- ◆ Upper income households (37%)
- ◆ Non-union households (36%)

Among the various potential NDP candidates, there is very little variation in the level of support they receive from the different regions or population groups in the province. Of note, however, Gordon Wilson, has stronger support for the Premier's chair among men (18% vs. 10% women).

Bill Vander Zalm enjoys stronger support as the best person to be Premier from people living outside of the southwestern corner of the province (21%), and individuals who have not completed their high school education (26%).

Politically, Ujjal Dosanjh garners more kudos as best Premier from NDP followers than all other leadership candidates. A full 38 percent of current decided NDP voters choose Dosanjh; Wilson trails with 26 percent, followed by MacPhail (16%), and Robinson (14%). Dosanjh is also ahead of all other leadership hopefuls among the larger potential NDP universe; he has at least a 10-point lead among people who voted NDP in the 1996 election, and is 12 points ahead among those who might consider voting for the party depending upon who the new leader is.

CAMPBELL STANDS OUT AS A SIGN OF CHANGE, BUT MANY SIMPLY SEE NO BETTER CHOICE AVAILABLE; DOSANJH SHINES FOR HIS PERSONAL CREDIBILITY

The BC public believes Liberal leader Gordon Campbell is the best person to occupy the Premier's chair, because he brings something to the table that no other NDP candidate possesses: a sign of change. Twenty percent of people note this as the main reason for choosing Campbell, which is double the number who feel this way about any of the other leadership hopefuls or even the BC Reform leader. Still, there is some indication that British Columbians are not really embracing Campbell so much as accepting that he is the best person from the available set of choices; 19 percent say that they chose the Liberal leader, because he's the "lesser of the evils", and there's "no one better to choose from".

People are, however, more likely to choose Campbell as Premier for his policies than most of the other NDP leadership hopefuls; 29 percent mention his policies, second only to Svend Robinson (44%). By comparison, the BC public does not see Campbell standing out from other individuals for his leadership or personal qualities.

Attorney General Ujjal Dosanjh is singled out as the best person to be Premier of BC, because of his personal qualities. Fully 95 percent of all mentions touch on some personal attribute when explaining why they would choose Dosanjh. This is more than double any other individual. The single most important personal quality attached to Dosanjh is his "honesty and integrity" (50% total mentions).

Dosanjh is not identified, however, with any particularly strong policy stances (only 10% of mentions, the lowest of all individuals tested), nor are his leadership qualities taken to be what makes him better qualified to occupy the Premier's chair (32%).

What makes Gordon Wilson stand out as a good candidate for Premier of BC are his leadership qualities; 37 percent of all mentions from people who choose Wilson touch on this. However, this characteristic does not really define Wilson; he does not outdistance all others by any wide margin on this score as others do in different regards. In fact, among NDP

hopefuls, he is only slightly ahead of Ujjal Dosanjh (32% mentions); and he trails BC Reform leader, Bill Vander Zalm on this front (43%).

Joy MacPhail is in the same position as Wilson; while a good number of people identify her personal qualities as the main reason they would choose her as Premier of BC (50% mentions), this does not really differentiate her from other people in her own party or from other party leaders. Of note, however, the most frequently mentioned reason MacPhail would make the best Premier is her gender (22% total mentions).

Svend Robinson stands out from all other individuals for his policy stands and his personal qualities; 44 percent of mentions include references to “what he stands for”. A full 57 percent single out Robinson’s personal qualities, second to Dosanjh, with honesty and integrity at the top of the list.

British Columbians who pick acting BC Reform leader, Bill Vander Zalm, as best Premier, do so for his leadership qualities; 43 percent of mentions given by people who choose Vander Zalm include references to his track record and experience, placing him ahead of all other individuals. This seems to define Vander Zalm as different from other aspirants to the top job.

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TABLE 1

LIKELIHOOD OF VOTING NDP		
	August %	September %
Regardless of who leads the party, I'll probably still vote NDP in the next provincial election	8	7
Depending on who the new leader is and what their policies are, I might consider voting NDP	37	41
Regardless of who leads the party, I would never consider voting NDP in the next provincial election	53	52
<i>Question: And, which one of the following views best describes your current views of the NDP here in BC?</i>		

TABLE 2

LEADERSHIP PREFERENCE								
	Overall				New Democrats			
	First Choice		First & Second Choices		First Choice		First & Second Choices	
	Aug %	Sep %	Aug %	Sep %	Aug %	Sep %	Aug %	Sep %
Ujjal Dosanjh	31	34	47	54	28	37	47	60
Gordon Wilson	23	22	39	41	37	22	52	48
Joy MacPhail	14	14	33	33	11	17	43	43
Svend Robinson**	10	10	24	21	10	12	24	29

Question: As you are likely aware, the NDP is expected to choose a new leader sometime this fall, the new leader will become Premier of BC. Of the following people, who would be your first choice as new NDP leader and Premier?

And, who would be your second choice?

**The August poll included Nelson Riis in place of Svend Robinson

TABLE 3

PARTY SUPPORT UNDER DIFFERENT NDP LEADERSHIP SCENARIOS (Decided Voters Only)										
	NDP today		NDP under Ujjal Dosanjh		NDP under Gordon Wilson		NDP under Joy MacPhail		NDP under Svend Robinson*	
	Aug %	Sep %	Aug %	Sep %	Aug %	Sep %	Aug %	Sep %	Aug %	Sep %
NDP	16	15	26	26	27	25	20	25	20	21
Liberal	56	57	53	53	53	54	57	54	57	56
BC Reform	17	16	17	16	15	15	17	16	17	18
Other	11	11	7	4	5	5	6	6	6	5
Undecided*	23	21	17	11	17	16	19	15	18	16

Question: If a provincial election were held here in BC tomorrow, and you were voting for candidates under the following party headings, which one would you be most likely to vote for?

* Not included in the party support numbers, which explains why the total is greater than 100%

**The August poll included Nelson Riis in place of Svend Robinson

TABLE 4

	Main Reasons For Choosing As Best Premier					
(Base)	Campbell (197)	Dosanjh (116)	Wilson (85)	Vander Zalm (70)	Robinson (55)	MacPhail (44)
<i>Reasons</i>						
Policies	29%	10%	21%	27%	44%	15%
Leadership qualities	24%	32%	37%	43%	31%	19%
Need a Change	20%	4%	4%	6%	5%	11%
No other choice	19%	4%	11%	6%	--	4%
Personal qualities	15%	95%	46%	27%	57%	50%

	Campbell	Dosanjh	Wilson	Vander Zalm	Robinson	MacPhail*
<i>Top Leadership Quality: Experienced / good track record</i>	15%	15%	16%	31%	15%	16%
<i>Top Personal Quality: Honesty and integrity</i>	5%	50%	15%	10%	14%	7%

*MacPhail's gender is the most frequently mentioned reason she would make the best premier (22%).