

# **NDP LEADERSHIP RACE & BC POLITICS DECEMBER 1999**

- SIGNIFICANT 6-POINT DROP IN NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO WOULD CONSIDER VOTING NDP (48% TO 42%) WITH NEW LEADER**
- DOSANJH MAINTAINS OVERALL LEAD AMONG LEADERSHIP HOPEFULS (57%), BUT LOSES GROUND TO MACPHAIL IN FIRST CHOICE BALLOTING AS RACE TIGHTENS UP –**
- BC PUBLIC LESS INSPIRED BY ALL NDP LEADERSHIP CANDIDATES; GORDON CAMPBELL LIBERALS MAINTAIN SIGNIFICANT LEAD OVER NDP REGARDLESS OF WHO BECOMES LEADER –**
- GORDON CAMPBELL SEEN AS BEST PREMIER FOR BC (34%); NDP LEADERSHIP CANDIDATES DROP IN PUBLIC FAVOUR -**



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*This BC Angus Reid Group poll is based on a provincial telephone survey conducted between Dec 1<sup>st</sup> and Dec 15<sup>th</sup>, 1999 among a representative cross-section of 600 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 600, one can say with 95 percent certainty that the overall results are within  $\pm 4.0$  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.*

# **IMPACT OF NEW LEADER ON NDP FORTUNES**

## **NEW NDP LEADER LESS OF A FACTOR IN VOTING CHOICE FOR BC PUBLIC; 6-POINT DROP IN NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO WOULD CONSIDER VOTING NDP WITH NEW LEADER**

When asked to describe their current view of the NDP, 42 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 just over a third (35%) who might consider voting for the party depending on who the new leader is and what their policies are. Meanwhile, a strong majority of the BC public (57%) would never think about voting NDP, regardless of who the leader is.

There has been an overall 6-point drop since September in the number of people in the province who would be prepared to vote for the governing New Democrats under a new leader (48% to 42%). All of this drop has occurred among people who place considerable importance on the new leader and their policies (41% to 35%). Meanwhile, the number of British Columbians who would never consider voting NDP under any circumstance has increased 5 points over the past 3 months, from 52 to 57 percent.

These are some preliminary indications that the NDP leadership campaign to date has failed to catch fire in the BC public. And, because findings show that the potential size of the NDP universe is so closely tied to who becomes leader, this drop may reflect a decreasing sense of satisfaction with the current crop of leadership candidates. With just over a month to go before the leadership convention, the campaign and candidates will have to move into high gear if the NDP hopes to use the leadership to kick start its rebuilding efforts into the next election campaign.

Politically, the NDP is losing ground with key voter groups with whom it needs to build support:

- ◆ Topping the list are the uncommitted voters: currently, 50 percent of uncommitted voters would consider voting NDP depending upon who becomes leader; this is a very significant 15-point drop since September when two-thirds (65%) leaned towards the NDP.
- ◆ Next are people who currently reside with other parties: currently, the NDP has the eye of 20 percent of BC Reform voters, a 17-point drop in 3 months; 26 percent of Liberal party supporters now say they would consider voting NDP; this is unchanged from September (27%); and 64 percent of people supporting other parties (Green, PDA, etc.) could see themselves voting NDP with a new leader, a 2-point drop since September (66%).
- ◆ Then, there are the people who voted for the party in the 1996 election, a lone strength for the NDP at this point in time: currently 81 percent of the party's former supporters say they would consider supporting it, which is up 4 percentage points in the past 3 months, and 10 points since Glen Clark resigned (71%). For most of these New Democrats (59%), it is very much the new leader and his/her policies that will determine whether or not they will once again vote for the party.

Among British Columbians most likely to consider voting for the NDP, we find more people in the following regional and socio-demographic groups: Vancouver Island (46%) and Vancouver/Burnaby residents (49%); women (48%); young British Columbians (51%); university graduates (46%), and people living in low income households (59%).

# **THE LEADERSHIP RACE**

## **DOSANJH RETAINS LEAD AMONG NEW DEMOCRATS (57%), BUT LOSES GROUND TO MACPHAIL AS RACE TIGHTENS UP IN FIRST CHOICE BALLOTING**

In the 4 months since Glen Clark's resignation, Ujjal Dosanjh has established himself as the frontrunner in the race to take over the Premier's office from Glen Clark. However, the most recent Angus Reid poll reveals that the Attorney General's campaign may have stalled among his NDP audience, giving up some ground to former Finance minister Joy MacPhail in first choice balloting, and making for a potentially much tighter leadership race.

Currently, 57 percent of NDP supporters would select Dosanjh as their leader, placing him a comfortable 10 points ahead of Education minister, Gordon Wilson (47%) and 21 points ahead of former finance minister, Joy MacPhail (36%). Corky Evans (22%) is still well back in the race.

When we look at first choice preferences alone, however, Dosanjh's frontrunner status is somewhat less assured. Overall, 29 percent of current New Democrats pick the Attorney General as their first choice; this is only 5 points ahead of Wilson (24%) and 8 points ahead of MacPhail (21%). Importantly, Dosanjh's first choice numbers have dropped a significant 8 points since September (37% to 29%), losing ground to MacPhail (+4 points). First ballot momentum also appears to have shifted to MacPhail, the only leadership candidate whose first choice support has grown consistently over the past four months (11% in August, 16% in September, 21% in December). Both Wilson and Dosanjh have experienced some setbacks in support since Glen Clark's resignation sparked the leadership contest.

Further, overall support for Dosanjh (first and second choice) has slipped 3 percentage points over the past 3 months (60% in September to 57% currently), confirming that he has slowed somewhat since his quick jump out of the gates. This is less troublesome for Dosanjh since none of his main rivals have improved their overall showing during the same time period; in fact, Wilson's support has stayed virtually the same (48% in September to 47% in

December), while MacPhail has lost significant ground (43% to 36%). And, Evans remains a long shot (22%).

Clearly, Dosanjh's top concern will be to stall first ballot growth for Wilson and MacPhail. MacPhail's chance to steal the leadership, or play kingmaker, may lie in doing just this, because her growth potential on a second ballot appears more limited than others. Wilson, meanwhile, needs to improve his second ballot performance if he hopes to win a head-to-head battle with Dosanjh for the Premiership.

Dosanjh's biggest advantage may well be his standing with 1996 party supporters; here, the 65 percent support he currently enjoys among this NDP audience represents a commanding 27 point lead over both Wilson (38%) and MacPhail (38%). Further, his support among this particular NDP audience has grown consistently over the past 4 months (56% in August, 60% in September, 65% in December). Meanwhile, Wilson's backing within the party's 1996 supporters has dropped off during the same period (45% in August, 47% in September, 38% in December). MacPhail's status has gone up 5 points during the same time (33% in August, 35% in September, 38% in December).

## **BC PUBLIC LESS ENAMoured WITH ALL NDP LEADERSHIP HOPEFULS; CAMPAIGN NOT CREATING ANY ENTHUSIASM FOR THE PARTY**

The BC public is showing signs of turning its back on the NDP leadership campaign, with weaker support given to all current leadership hopefuls. With the convention just over a month away, there are some indications that British Columbians will react to its new Premier with more of a shrug than a round of applause. Should this "ho-hum" attitude persist, the party is much less likely to benefit from any boost in popularity once the new Premier is in office.

Among the four official candidates to choose from, most British Columbians – 44 percent – prefer Ujjal Dosanjh as the person they'd like to see replace Glen Clark as NDP leader and Premier. This is significantly more than the number who would pick Gordon Wilson (31%),

Joy MacPhail (26%), or Corky Evans (20%). And, 22 percent would not choose any of the current contenders; 10 percent are undecided at the current time.

There has, however, been an overall drop since September in the number of British Columbians would pick any of the current leadership hopefuls, and an increase in the number of people in the province who reject all candidates. Preferences for Ujjal Dosanjh have slid 10 points (54% to 44% currently); Gordon Wilson's popularity has also witnessed a 10-point slide (41% to 31%); and Joy MacPhail garners only 26 percent support among the BC public, 7 points fewer than 3 months ago (33%). Further, the number of people who say "none of the above" has gone up a dramatic 9 points since September; and the undecideds are also up 4 points.

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

- ◆ Lower Mainland (48%) and Vancouver Island (50%)
- ◆ 35-54 years of age (51%) and 55+ years (50%)
- ◆ People with a post-secondary education (52%)
- ◆ Middle and upper income households (46%)

Gordon Wilson generates greater public support among:

- ◆ Vancouver Island residents (39%)
- ◆ 18-34 years old (38%)
- ◆ Lower income households (38%)

Joy MacPhail appeals much more strongly to:

- ◆ Vancouver/Burnaby residents (32%)
- ◆ Women (30%)

Corky Evans' strongest support emerges among:

- ◆ Vancouver Island residents (30%)
- ◆ Men (24%)
- ◆ People with less formal education (36%)

## **NEW NDP LEADER WOULD BOOST CURRENT PARTY FORTUNES, BUT NOT NEARLY ENOUGH TO THREATEN CAMPBELL LIBERALS**

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 17 percent to between a fifth and a quarter of decided voters with either Ujjal Dosanjh (26%), Gordon Wilson (24%), Joy MacPhail (22%), or Corky Evans (18%) as their new leader. A solid majority of decided British Columbians – between 57 and 65 percent – would support the provincial Liberals against any of the current NDP leadership hopefuls.

As an important sign of just how little impact the current leadership campaign has had on NDP fortunes, we find no perceptible improvement in the party's standings versus the Liberals under any leadership scenario since the unofficial campaign began in September. If anything, the picture has taken on a more sombre tone; the 26 percent support the party would enjoy under Dosanjh is identical to NDP support in our August and September polls; under Wilson, party fortunes have fluctuated only slightly (24% in December, from 27% in August and 25% in September); MacPhail's presence creates more fluctuating support for the party (22% from 20% and 25%).

# WHO WOULD MAKE THE BEST PREMIER OF BC?

## GORDON CAMPBELL REMAINS TOP CHOICE AS BC PREMIER

British Columbians continue to prefer Liberal leader Gordon Campbell over all other potential contenders for the Premier's chair. Currently, 34 percent of people surveyed pick Campbell as the best Premier. This is twice the number of people in the province who prefer Ujjal Dosanjh, his closest competitor (17%). Further back are NDP leadership hopefuls Gordon Wilson (10%), Joy MacPhail (7%), and Corky Evans (5%). Over one-in-ten people in BC (13%) believe former Premier, and current BC Reform party leader, Bill Vander Zalm, is the best person for the job. Fourteen percent of those surveyed are unsure.

Campbell's standing as best Premier among the BC public has improved slightly over the fall months, moving from 32 to 34 percent. Meanwhile, slightly fewer people pick Ujjal Dosanjh (17% from 19%), and Gordon Wilson (10% from 14%); Joy MacPhail garners the same 7 percent support as last quarter. Interestingly, a marginally larger number of British Columbians place their vote with Bill Vander Zalm this time around (13% from 11%).

The proportion of people in the province who are unsure about which person would make the best Premier has jumped 6 percentage points since September (14% from 8%). This may well indicate a growing degree of dissatisfaction with the choices before them.

British Columbians from all regions and all walks of life pick Gordon Campbell as their top choice for Premier of BC. He has a proportionately greater number of fans, however, among older (55+) British Columbians (42%), and people living in upper income households (41%)

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, Ujjal Dosanjh has stronger support among Vancouver/Burnaby residents (23%), women (21%), and university graduates (26%).



Bill Vander Zalm enjoys stronger support as the best person to be Premier from people living outside of the southwestern corner of the province (18%), or in suburban Vancouver (17%).

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**TABLE 1**

<b>LIKELIHOOD OF VOTING NDP</b>			
	August %	September %	December %
Regardless of who leads the party, I'll probably still vote NDP in the next provincial election	8	7	7
Depending on who the new leader is and what their policies are, I might consider voting NDP	37	41	35
Regardless of who leads the party, I would never consider voting NDP in the next provincial election	53	52	57
<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 %	Dec %	Aug %	Sep %	Dec %	Aug %	Sep %	Dec %	Aug %	Sep %	Dec %
Ujjal Dosanjh	31	34	31	47	54	44	28	37	29	47	60	57
Gordon Wilson	23	22	17	39	41	31	37	25	24	52	48	47
Joy MacPhail	14	14	12	33	33	26	11	16	21	43	43	36
Corky Evans**	10	10	8	24	21	20	10	15	12	24	29	22
None of above	15	13	22	15	13	22	9	1	5	9	1	5
Don't know	8	6	10	8	6	10	6	6	9	6	6	9
<p><i>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?</i></p> <p><i>And, who would be your second choice?</i></p> <p><i>**The August poll included Nelson Riis in place of Svend Robinson; our September poll included Svend Robinson in place of Corky Evans</i></p>												

**TABLE 3**

<b>PARTY SUPPORT UNDER DIFFERENT NDP LEADERSHIP SCENARIOS</b> <b>(Decided Voters Only)</b>															
	NDP today			NDP under Ujjal Dosanjh			NDP under Gordon Wilson			NDP under Joy MacPhail			NDP under Corky Evans**		
	Aug %	Sep %	Dec %	Aug %	Sep %	Dec %	Aug %	Sep %	Dec %	Aug %	Sep %	Dec %	Aug %	Sep %	Dec %
NDP	16	15	17	26	26	26	27	25	24	20	25	22	20	21	18
Liberal	56	57	55	53	53	57	53	54	59	57	54	62	57	56	65
BC Reform	17	16	18	17	16	16	15	15	18	17	16	16	17	18	17
Other	11	11	10	7	4	-***	5	5	-***	6	6	-***	6	5	-***
Undecided*	23	21	18	17	11	20	17	16	24	19	15	22	18	16	24
<i>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?</i>															
<i>* Not included in the party support numbers, which explains why the total is greater than 100%</i>															
<i>**August poll included Nelson Riis; September poll included Svend Robinson; December poll included Corky Evans</i>															
<i>*** No other party name was mentioned in December poll</i>															

**TABLE 4**

<b>WHO WOULD MAKE BEST PREMIER?</b>		
	September %	December %
Gordon Campbell	32	34
Ujjal Dosanjh	19	17
Bill Vander Zalm	11	13
Gordon Wilson	14	10
Joy MacPhail	7	7
Corky Evans	-	5
Svend Robinson	9	-
Unsure	8	14
<i>Question: Of the following, which person do you believe would be the best Premier form British Columbia?</i>		