

Introduction

This study by Michael Geoghegan Consulting Ltd attempts to forecast how BC's four major parties will fare in the next provincial general election. Naturally, this is a speculative work, intended to show a variety of possible outcomes for the next election on a constituency-by-constituency basis.

Credits

This study has been authored by Stuart Parker, an associate of the government relations firm Michael Geoghegan Consulting (MGC) Ltd. It builds upon the work done in two previous studies authored by Malaspina University-College professor Julian West and MGC Associate Bernard Von Schulmann, respectively. The study by Mr. Von Schulmann was released in April of 1999 and was commissioned at that time by Barlee, Geoghegan and Associates, a division of Michael Geoghegan Consulting Ltd.

The method developed by Dr. West to re-map 1996 election results onto the 1999 electoral redistribution has been adopted for the purpose of this study without change. Although the author has utilized a different methodology for translating public opinion poll standings into constituency-by-constituency electoral results, the method is built upon that developed by Von Schulmann in his 1999 study.

The author also wishes to acknowledge and thank the polling firm McIntyre & Mustel and particular its partner Barb Justason for providing much of the regional polling data used to produce this model.

Methodology

2001 electoral results are forecast for this study using four spreadsheets:

In sheet #1, the poll-by-poll results of the 1996 election for BC's four main parties are recorded. Each poll (there are approximately 100 per constituency) is then assigned to one of the 79 provincial constituencies created by the 1999 Electoral Boundaries Commission report and enabling legislation. If a poll is divided among two or more constituencies, its vote totals are assigned as follows: (a) if more than 66% of the poll's population is in a particular constituency, the poll is treated as though its entire population is in that constituency; (b) if between 33% and 66% of a poll is in a constituency, the poll is split and half of the votes for each party are divided between the constituencies which share the poll.

In sheet #2, vote totals for the four main parties are listed for each of the 79 new constituencies as assigned in sheet #1. The 79 constituencies are then grouped into six groups corresponding as closely as possible to the six regions for which McIntyre & Musel track provincial voting intentions:

- Northern BC: 8 constituencies (North Coast, Skeena, Bulkley Valley-Stikine, Prince George-Omineca, Prince George North, Prince George-Mount Robson, Peace River South, Peace River North)
- Southern Interior: 15 constituencies (Columbia River-Revelstoke, East Kootenay, Nelson-Creston, West Kootenay-Boundary, Penticton-Okanagan Valley, Okanagan-Westside, Kelowna-Mission, Kelowna-Lake Country, Okanagan-Vernon, Shuswap, Kamloops-North Thompson, Kamloops, Yale-Lillooet, Cariboo South, Cariboo North)

- Capital Region: 7 constituencies (Victoria-Beacon Hill, Victoria-Hillside, Esquimalt-Metchosin, Oak Bay-Gordon Head, Saanich South, Saanich North & The Islands, Malahat-Juan de Fuca)
- South Coast: 7 constituencies (Powell River-Sunshine Coast, North Island, Comox Valley, Alberni-Qualicum, Nanaimo-Parksville, Nanaimo, Cowichan-Ladysmith)
- Vancouver: 10 constituencies (Vancouver-Point Grey, Vancouver-Quilchena, Vancouver-Langara, Vancouver-Fraserview, Vancouver-Kingsway, Vancouver-Kensington, Vancouver-Fairview, Vancouver-Burrard, Vancouver-Mount Pleasant, Vancouver-Hastings)
- Lower Mainland: 32 constituencies (Chilliwack-Kent, Chilliwack-Sumas, Abbotsford-Clayburn, Abbotsford-Mount Lehman, Fort Langley-Aldergrove, Langley, Surrey-Cloverdale, Surrey-Tynehead, Surrey-Whalley, Surrey-Green Timbers, Surrey-Newton, Surrey-Panorama Ridge, Surrey-White Rock, Delta North, Delta South, Richmond-Steveston, Richmond East, Richmond Centre, Burnaby-North, Burnaby-Willingdon, Burnaby-Edmonds, Burquitlam, Port Moody-Westwood, Port Coquitlam-Burke Mountain, Coquitlam-Mallardville, Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows, Maple Ridge-Mission, New Westminster, West Vancouver-Capilano, West Vancouver-Garibaldi, North Vancouver-Seymour, North Vancouver-Lonsdale)

The 1996 vote totals are taken for the parties in each region, yielding the percentage the party received in that region in 1996.

In sheet #3, the results of the last three McIntyre & Mustel polls are averaged, producing provincial and regional percentages. Conversion factors are then established to compare the parties' 1996 support in each of the six regions to their current support levels in those regions. Regional multipliers are then applied to each of the 79 constituencies, multiplying each riding-by-riding vote total by the ratio of current support to past support in each region. This improvement in our modeling of election results allows us to forecast how increases and decreases in party support are likely to be distributed around the province's regions.

Exceptions

This study will only comment on 77 of the 79 constituencies in BC. We consider it outside the competence of our analysis to forecast the electoral results in the constituencies of Powell River-Sunshine Coast and Peace River North. This is because the incumbent candidates (Gordon Wilson and Richard Neufeld) were elected as MLAs for parties other than those they currently represent.

Scenarios

Using the methodology described above, a number of scenarios have been modeled. Each of the major scenarios is described below:

Angus Reid Scenario

In the most recent poll of provincial voting intentions by the Angus Reid, the following electoral results were forecast: BC Liberal 57%, NDP 16%, BC Reform 15%, Green Party 6%, other parties 6%. Inserting these numbers into the model, we find that if an election were held with that distribution of the popular vote, the BC Liberal Party would

win all 79 seats in the BC Legislature. This victory would be by a comfortable margin in every constituency except Vancouver-Mount Pleasant, where the BC Liberals would receive 37% of the vote to the NDP's 36%. Other second-place opposition candidates -- Green, Reform and NDP would be 10% to 70% of the vote behind their Liberal opponents.

Lone Opposition Scenarios

As the New Democrats were so close to winning Vancouver-Mount Pleasant in the Reid scenario, we modeled a series of outcomes with the NDP receiving between 17% and 22% of the popular vote to determine at what level of popularity the NDP would be capable of winning only one seat.

Some modifications were made to the Reid model, as even if 6% of British Columbians did go to the polls on election day intending to vote for parties other than the main four, it is unlikely that these smaller parties would have filed candidates in a sufficient number of constituencies for those voters to have that opportunity. We therefore reduced the fringe party vote in these scenarios to that received in 1996 by parties other than the four studied here and the PDA. This yields a more reasonable figure of 2%.

We have then divided this "other party" vote of 4% equally between the NDP (which is likely to be the principal recipient of voters indicating a preference for the PDA in current polling) and Reform which is in the process of merging with the main fringe parties of the 1996 election (the Family Coalition, Social Credit and BC Conservative parties).

This set of results and other "lone opposition" scenarios are summarized in the following table (note that the "seats" column gives totals out of 77 rather than 79 due to the exclusion of Powell River-Sunshine Coast and Peace River North from this forecast):

NDP	Reform	Liberal	Green	Seats
18%	17%	57%	6%	LIB 76; NDP 1
19%	17%	56%	6%	LIB 76; NDP 1
20%	17%	55%	6%	LIB 76; NDP 1
21%	17%	54%	6%	LIB 76; NDP 1
22%	17%	53%	6%	LIB 76; NDP 1

At 22%, the NDP is less than 1% away from winning the constituency of North Coast.

The Fight for Party Status

Continuing with the above-modeled scenario, we continued to increase the NDP vote at the expense of the BC Liberals, leaving Reform, the Greens and other parties with a combined 25% of the vote. As we model in the table below, once the NDP surpasses 22%, it rapidly becomes a viable contender in a number of coastal constituencies and with 24% passes the 4 MLA threshold and can retain official party status in the BC legislature:

NDP	Reform	Liberal	Green	Seats
23%	17%	52%	6%	LIB 75; NDP 2
24%	17%	51%	6%	LIB 73; NDP 4

25%	17%	50%	6%	LIB 70; NDP 7
26%	17%	49%	6%	LIB 70; NDP 7

The constituencies projected to be won by the New Democrats are in order: Vancouver-Mount Pleasant, North Coast, Vancouver-Hastings, Esquimalt-Metchosin, Nanaimo, Vancouver-Kingsway and Cowichan-Ladysmith.

A Renewed NDP

As can be seen in the previous table, once surpassing 25%, the NDP's projected gains begin to level off in the mid 20s. However, in the 26%-28% range, the NDP is projected to win the following additional constituencies: Victoria-Hillside and Vancouver-Burrard (at 27%); Vancouver-Burrard and Vancouver-Kensington (at 28%).

If the NDP is able to garner 29% or more of the vote, its fortunes significantly improve. In our model, the party shifts from 11 seats at 28% to 16 seats at 29%, gaining Alberni-Qualicum, Victoria-Beacon Hill, North Island, Surrey-Newton and Comox Valley. The party would also be less than a percentage point away from winning Surrey-Whalley.

The rate of forecast increase in seats is quite dramatic, suggesting that while the NDP is likely to win only one seat at 22%, the party would likely win 17 seats at 30%.

Best-Case NDP Scenario

We note that even at 30% of the vote, the NDP is not forecast to win a single seat in the interior of BC. In fact, it is not until the NDP is well into the 30s and the BC Liberals have dropped into the low 40s that the party is in serious contention for any interior constituencies. At 34%, our model forecasts narrow NDP victories in Bulkley Valley-Stikine and Prince George-Mount Robson with the party within 2% of winning Nelson-Creston, assuming the BC Liberal vote drops as low 41% and there is no decrease in Reform party support. In the event that any significant portion of Reform voters switched to backing the BC Liberals for strategic reasons, Nelson-Creston would likely be the only viable interior constituency for the NDP.

While anything is possible in BC politics, this study has not considered NDP results in excess of 34%. Given the party's current poll standing at 16%, we are defining the most optimistic credible scenario for the NDP as receiving 32% in the general election. Assuming that the party does receive this share of the vote, we can reasonably forecast the party winning a maximum of 20 seats in the next legislature, all west of the Coast Mountains. Even at support levels in the high twenties, Reform, not the New Democrats appears to be the main competition for the BC Liberals in the interior.

Opposition from the Interior

Given that it is unlikely that any NDP MLAs will come from east of the Coast Mountains, we have attempted to determine at what level of popular support Reform BC could begin winning seats in the next legislature. We have been somewhat hampered in this as by far the highest Reform vote was cast in Peace River North in the last election, electing the now-Liberal MLA Richard Neufeld. Leaving aside the North Peace, however, there are constituencies in which Reform MLAs could be elected if the party receives in excess of 20% of the vote:

NDP	Reform	Liberal	Green	Seats
18%	20%	54%	6%	LIB 75; NDP 1 REF 1
18%	21%	53%	6%	LIB 75; NDP 1 REF 1
18%	22%	52%	6%	LIB 72; NDP 1 REF 4

At the 20-21% range, our model shows Reform winning only the constituency of Peace River South. Given that this constituency is also somewhat exceptional, given that its MLA, Jack Weisgerber, was elected as a Reform candidate, sits as an independent and has just endorsed the BC Liberals, this results is highly speculative at best. However, at 22%, we see Reform winning the East Kootenay, Shuswap and Bulkley Valley-Stikine, while being less than a percentage point away from winning Yale-Lillooet. However, scenarios that show Reform winning more than 4 seats would require that the party's support increase to 25% or more to be in contention for even one more seat.

We note that Reform BC has not polled in excess of 21% since Wilf Hanni was deposed as party leader; we also note that Mr. Hanni's constituency (East Kootenay) is one of the party's best chances of electing an MLA, given his strong showing there in 1996. Reformers would do well to mend fences before the next election; otherwise, BC's interior may be deprived of any opposition voices.

Greens in the Legislature

The author is particularly happy to comment publicly on this area for the first time without a partisan agenda. The party's vote share would need to increase to 11% of the popular vote. Only one recognized polling firm has ever measured the party's vote share in excess of 10%. Compas Research measured the party's vote share at 11% in the fall of 1998; however, Compas also found the Greens to be tied with Reform, Social Credit and the NDP at this level of support.

However, should the Greens build to 11%, they are likely to win the constituency of Nelson-Creston. With between 11% and 18% of the vote, the Greens are in contention in only one other constituency: Vancouver-Mount Pleasant. However, although the party could win that constituency with as little as 12% of the vote province-wide, the provincial Green vote would have to exceed the NDP vote in order for the Greens to win a second seat.

Conclusions

Liberal Fortunes

It is our view that the BC Liberal Party will form the next provincial government with a very comfortable majority of the seats in the BC legislature. Given the support the Liberals enjoy across all regions, we can reasonably anticipate that all of the ideological tendencies within the party (Conservatives, Canadian Alliance, ex-Socreds, federal Liberals) will have a presence in the governing caucus.

NDP Fortunes

From 1991 to the present, BC New Democrats have been a regionally-balanced party with some of their strongest cabinet ministers coming from traditional "swing" constituencies such as Paul Ramsey, David Zirnhelt, Harry Lali, Corky Evans and Andrew Petter. After the next election we will likely see a significantly different character of New Democrat in the legislature. For instance, a seven-member caucus would likely comprise Jenny Kwan, Moe Sihota, Joy MacPhail, Dale Lovick, Jan Pullinger and Glen Clark plus whoever is nominated to stand in North Coast; with the exception of Joy MacPhail, the NDP's post-election presence would be dominated by old-left style partisans.

The party and government's "third way" style associated with the Harcourt and Dosanjh administrations in which environmental and other issues important to a white collar, middle-income constituency would likely be replaced with a more ideological and traditional leftist style of opposition. Also, given that the North Coast constituency is one of the party's strongest, the candidate who secures the party nomination there will have a profound impact on the caucus charged with rebuilding the New Democrats after the election. Given that 10% of the constituency's population is Nisga'a and over 20% is native, there is a bedrock of support for resolution of treaties in the area which is unlikely to erode.

As the BC Green Party is likely to receive a significant share of the popular vote but is unlikely to elect members to the legislature, a more combative, radical and strident NDP caucus may be well positioned to recover votes lost to the Greens.

Reform Party Fortunes

Although Reformers have gained in the polls province-wide since 1996, the party's support, especially under Bill Vander Zalm has continued to shift from the interior to the Lower Mainland. This may be a result of the party focusing on social issues such as abortion, native rights and same-sex marriages, alienating its more socially liberal interior supporters, while picking up significant support from social conservatives in other regions of the province. Under a first-past-the-post electoral system, this may result in a complete wipeout at the polls; Reform organizers would do well to concentrate on institutional reform (such as referenda, recall, balanced budget legislation, etc.) rather than policy reform if they wish to regain a presence in the legislature.