

BRITISH COLUMBIA POLITICAL SCENE

BC Liberals Lead, Voter Turnout Will Decide the BC Election

Low approval ratings for both Gordon Campbell (34%) and Carole James (29%) suggest problems for the main contending parties.

[VANCOUVER – Mar. 25, 2009] - The governing BC Liberals are ahead eight weeks before voters go to the polls in British Columbia, but the two main provincial party leaders are having a tough time connecting with voters, a new Angus Reid Strategies survey has found.

In the online survey of a representative provincial sample, the BC Liberals are first with 43 per cent (+4 points since November), followed by the New Democratic Party (NDP) with 37 per cent (-7), the Green Party with 13 per cent (+2), and the BC Conservative Party with four per cent. Three per cent of decided voters would support other parties or independent candidates in their constituency.

However, BC Liberal voters are less motivated to vote on May 12. Amongst people “absolutely certain to vote”, the governing party is only two points ahead of the NDP (41% to 39%), with the Greens in third place (13%), followed by the BC Conservatives (4%). The BC election may well be determined by the turnout levels of supporters for each party.

The issue landscape has changed dramatically in the past year. The most important issues facing BC are the economy (36%) and Crime/Public Safety (19%), while Health Care is a distant third (8%). In Metro Vancouver, one-in-four respondents (25%) cite crime and public safety as the most important issues facing British Columbia.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Voting Intention Among Decided Voters: BC Liberals 43%, BC NDP 37%, Green 13%, BC Con. 4%**
- **Voting Intention Among Absolutely Certain Voters: BC Liberals 41%, BC NDP 39%, Green 13%, BC Con. 4%**
- **Preferred Premier: Gordon Campbell 36%, Carole James 25%, Jane Sterk 5%, Not sure 33%**
- **Momentum Score: Gordon Campbell -30, Carole James -5, Jane Sterk -2**

Full topline results are at the end of this release

From March 20 to March 22, 2008 Angus Reid Strategies conducted an online survey among a randomly selected, representative sample of 800 adult residents of British Columbia who are Angus Reid Forum panelists. The margin of error—which measures sampling variability—is +/- 3.5%, 19 times out of 20. The results have been statistically weighted according to the most current education, age, gender and region Census data to ensure a sample representative of the entire adult population of British Columbia. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding.

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Time for a Change

Overall, 51 per cent of respondents across the province say it is “time for a change of government in British Columbia” while only 34 per cent feel that the current government should be returned to office. When Gordon Campbell’s name was added to the question, only 30 per cent of respondents thought “Gordon Campbell should be re-elected” while a majority (54%) said it was time for a different premier.

Leadership

Just a third of respondents in BC (34%) approve of the way Premier and BC Liberal leader Gordon Campbell is handling his duties, with a majority (51%) disapproving of his actions. BC NDP leader Carole James also has a paltry approval rating (29%), while three-in-five respondents (63%) cannot form an opinion on BC Green Party leader Jane Sterk. However, Sterk was seen as the leader best suited to deal with the environment (32%).

As was the case in the November 2008 survey, Campbell posted a high negative momentum score (-30), with 36 per cent of respondents saying their opinion of the Premier has worsened over the past two months, and only six per cent reporting an improvement. Still, the -30 score for Campbell is better than the -36 score he had late last year.

The momentum score for James stands at -5 (14% say their opinion of the BC NDP leader is better than two months ago, 19% say it is worse). Four months ago, when the NDP was ahead of the BC Liberals, James posted a rating of +5. James is seen as the most capable leader on Health Care (40%) and Education (39%), but neither of these issues are the top concerns of British Columbians at the moment.

While Campbell is certainly unpopular, James is failing to connect with voters on the issues that matter. When it comes to choosing who would be the best premier, Campbell (36%) holds an 11-point lead over James (25%). On the most important issue, the economy, Campbell is regarded as the best leader by 43 per cent of respondents, while only 19 per cent prefer James.

When respondents were asked which leader is best suited to deal with crime, Campbell (31%) is ahead of James (21%) by 10 points. However, 45 per cent of people thought that no leader is currently well prepared to tackle crime or were unsure, showing that the provincial party leaders have not connected on this important issue. This situation is even more pronounced in Metro Vancouver, which has been hit with a wave of gang violence in the last few months.

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Regional and Demographic Breakdowns

The regional breakdowns show the BC Liberals with a 16-point advantage over the NDP in Metro Vancouver, while the NDP remains dominant in Vancouver Island, with a 20-point lead over the BC Liberals. The governing party is also ahead in the Fraser Valley/Southern Interior (45% to 31%), while the official opposition is first in Northern BC (49% to 36%).

The highest level of support for the Greens is in Vancouver Island (16%), while seven per cent of voters in the Fraser Valley/Southern Interior are ready to cast a ballot for the BC Conservatives.

As was the case last year, the poll shows an evident gender gap for the BC Liberals, with almost half of male voters (49%) voicing support for the governing party, compared to only 37 per cent of female voters. Conversely, 33 per cent of men and 41 per cent of women would vote for the NDP.

In November 2008, the NDP had a 12-point advantage over the BC Liberals among middle-aged voters (aged 35-54). The lead has completely vanished, and the two main parties are now in a statistical tie (40% for BC Libs, 38% for the NDP). The BC Liberals also have an 11-point lead among those aged 18-34 (47% to 36%), and a six-point advantage with people over 55 (42% to 36%).

Qualities and Characteristics

Respondents were provided with a list of seven qualities and characteristics and asked whether each of them applied to the two main provincial party leaders. Campbell holds the upper hand in having a vision for British Columbia (53% to 42%), being a strong and decisive leader (45% to 23%), and understanding complex issues (43% to 29%).

James is more likely to be regarded as a politician who understands the problems of BC residents (45% to 31%), who is honest and trustworthy (41% to 19%), and who generally agrees with voters on issues they care about (34% to 28%).

The two party leaders continue to post dismal ratings on the issue of trust: fewer than three-in-ten respondents say either Campbell (27%) or James (23%) inspires confidence.

State of the Province

BC residents are clearly divided in their assessment of the province, with 32 per cent saying things are on the right track, and 35 per cent believing they are on the wrong track. The proportions suggest that two camps have been established as the electoral campaign is set to begin.

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Analysis

It is clear that neither of the two people running to become BC's Premier is connecting with the electorate in a meaningful way. Gordon Campbell remains a divisive figure, with a disapproval rating that defies logic for a person who is seeking a third straight majority mandate, and a momentum score that would normally spell danger for an incumbent administration. The Premier is not particularly liked, and his presence is one of the main factors that drive the sentiment for a change of government in Victoria.

However, Carole James continues to have problems getting her message across. She trails the sitting Premier on the two topics that are regarded as the most important issues facing the province at this time—the economy and public safety—and her approval numbers suggest a problem with the base. While 72 per cent of respondents who would vote for the BC Liberals approve of the way Campbell is performing, only 64 per cent of those who would back the NDP are satisfied with the way James is doing her job. A similar scenario ensues in the preferred premier question, where 84 per cent of BC Liberal voters pick Campbell, and only 64 per cent of NDP voters select James. A third of NDP voters are not yet sold on James as the person who should head the provincial government.

When looking at the views of respondents who voted in the May 2005 provincial election, the two main parties preserve high retention rates (88% for the BC Liberals, 82% for the NDP). However, support for the BC Liberals appears softer and contingent on voter turnout. A comfortable six-point lead becomes a statistical tie when the views of absolutely certain voters are assessed. This finding suggests that the ruling party must work to get the vote out on May 12, or risk a close outcome.

Another interesting finding of this survey is the emergence of crime and public safety as a key issue for BC residents. While Campbell leads James in being better suited for this topic, almost half of respondents (45%) are not ready to endorse any of the three main leaders on this particular topic. The first leader to really connect on crime, particularly in urban ridings, could change the dynamic of the election.

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British Columbia Political Scene

If a provincial election were held tomorrow in British Columbia, which one of the following parties would you be most likely to support in your constituency?

	Decided Voters	Respondents who are absolutely certain to vote on May 12
BC Liberals	43%	41%
New Democratic Party (NDP)	37%	39%
Green Party	13%	13%
BC Conservative Party	4%	4%
Other	3%	3%

British Columbia Political Scene - TREND

If a provincial election were held tomorrow in British Columbia, which one of the following parties would you be most likely to support in your constituency? – **Decided Voters**

	August 2008	November 2008	March 2009
BC Liberals	38%	39%	43%
New Democratic Party (NDP)	41%	44%	37%
Green Party	14%	11%	13%
BC Conservative Party	n.a.	n.a.	4%
Other	7%	5%	3%

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British Columbia Political Scene

If a provincial election were held tomorrow in British Columbia, which one of the following parties would you be most likely to support in your constituency? – **Decided Voters**

	Region				
	BC	Metro Vancouver	Vancouver Island	Fraser Valley/ Southern Interior	North
BC Liberals	43%	49%	29%	45%	36%
New Democratic Party (NDP)	37%	33%	49%	31%	49%
Green Party	13%	13%	16%	14%	8%
BC Conservative Party	4%	2%	5%	7%	5%
Other	3%	3%	2%	3%	3%

British Columbia Political Scene

If a provincial election were held tomorrow in British Columbia, which one of the following parties would you be most likely to support in your constituency? – **Decided Voters**

	Gender		Age			Income			Education		
	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	<\$50K	\$50-99K	>\$100K	HS or less	Coll/ Tech	Univ+
BC Liberals	49%	37%	47%	40%	42%	29%	48%	63%	35%	44%	55%
New Democratic Party (NDP)	33%	41%	36%	38%	36%	48%	32%	21%	41%	36%	30%
Green Party	12%	15%	13%	14%	13%	18%	12%	10%	14%	13%	12%
BC Conservative Party	3%	4%	3%	5%	4%	1%	3%	5%	7%	3%	0%
Other	3%	3%	1%	2%	5%	3%	4%	1%	3%	3%	2%

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Approval for Party Leaders			
Do you approve or disapprove of the performance of...?			
	Approve	Disapprove	Not sure
Premier and BC Liberals leader Gordon Campbell	34%	51%	15%
BC New Democratic Party (NDP) leader Carole James	29%	43%	28%
Green Party leader Jane Sterk	17%	21%	63%

Momentum for Party Leaders				
Over the course of the past two months, would you say your opinion of the following party leaders and parties has improved, stayed the same or worsened?				
	Improved	Stayed the same	Worsened	Not sure
Gordon Campbell	6% (-2)	51% (+9)	36% (-8)	6% (=)
Carole James	14% (-8)	56% (+6)	19% (=)	11% (+2)
Jane Sterk	6% (-7)	49% (+5)	8% (-3)	40% (+5)

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Preferred Premier

Of the following provincial party leaders, which one do you think would be the best Premier of British Columbia?

Gordon Campbell	36%
Carole James	25%
Jane Sterk	5%
Not sure	33%

State of the Province

Overall, do you think British Columbia is on the right track, or the wrong track?

Right track	32%
Wrong track	35%
Not sure	32%

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Time for Change	
Half Sample - Thinking about British Columbia, which one of these two statements comes closest to your own point of view?	
It is time for a change in government in British Columbia—a different provincial party should be elected into power	48%
It is not time for a change in government in British Columbia—the BC Liberals should be re-elected	39%
Not sure	14%

Time for Change	
Half Sample - Thinking about British Columbia, which one of these two statements comes closest to your own point of view?	
It is time for a change in government in British Columbia—a different premier should be elected into power	54%
It is not time for a change in government in British Columbia—Gordon Campbell should be re-elected	30%
Not sure	16%

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The Leaders and the Issues

Which of these leaders is best suited to deal with each of the following issues?

	Gordon Campbell	Carole James	Jane Sterk	None of these / Not sure
Economy	43%	19%	3%	35%
Environment	18%	19%	32%	30%
Health Care	26%	40%	5%	30%
Education	24%	39%	5%	33%
Crime	31%	21%	3%	45%

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Qualities and Characteristics

Thinking about the following qualities and characteristics, please say whether you think they apply to Gordon Campbell / Carole James? – Apply listed

	Gordon Campbell	Carole James
Has a vision for the future of British Columbia	53%	42%
Is a strong and decisive leader	45%	23%
Understands complex issues	43%	29%
Understands the problems of BC residents	31%	45%
Generally agrees with you on issues you care about	28%	34%
Inspires confidence	27%	23%
Is honest and trustworthy	19%	41%

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Most Important Issue Facing BC	
What do you think is the most important issue facing British Columbia today?	
The Economy	36%
Crime / Public Safety	19%
Health Care	8%
Leadership	6%
Homelessness	5%
Drug Traffic / Drug Use	5%
Environment	5%
Poverty	4%
Tax relief	3%
Housing	3%
Education	2%
Aboriginal affairs	1%
Municipal Funding, Services, & Powers	1%
Day Care / Child Care	1%
Other	3%

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Angus Reid Strategies is a full-service polling and market research firm which is a leader in the use of the Internet and rich media technology to collect high-quality, in-depth insights for a wide array of clients. Dr. Angus Reid and the Angus Reid Strategies team are pioneers in online research methodologies, and have been conducting online surveys since 1995.

Angus Reid Strategies, along with its sister company, Vision Critical, is now the largest Canadian-owned market research enterprise. In addition to its five offices in Canada—located in Vancouver, Calgary, Regina, Toronto, and Montreal—the firm also has offices in San Francisco, Chicago, New York, London, Paris and Sydney. Its team of specialists provides solutions across every type and sector of research, and currently serves over 200 international clients.

Angus Reid Strategies polls are conducted using the Angus Reid Forum online panel (www.angusreidforum.com), which is recruited via an industry-leading process that incorporates a randomized, widespread invitation approach and a triple opt-in screening procedure. The panel is maintained through state-of-the-art sampling techniques and frequent verifications of personal identity, contact information, and demographic characteristics. This premier online survey platform presents respondents with highly visual, interactive, and engaging surveys, ensuring that panel members provide thoughtful and reliable responses.

Angus Reid Strategies, the only public opinion firm to exclusively use online methods to follow the views of the electorate during the 2008 federal campaign, offered the most accurate prediction of the results of Canada's 40th election.

<http://www.angusreidstrategies.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=news&newsid=349>

Since 2006, Angus Reid Strategies has covered six provincial elections in Canada—more than any other pollster in the country—and the results have accurately predicted the outcome of each of these democratic processes.

<http://www.angusreidstrategies.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=news&newsid=194>

More information on the way Angus Reid Strategies conducts public opinion research can be found at <http://www.angusreidstrategies.com/uploads/pages/pdfs/ARS.ARF.WP.pdf>

- 30 -

**For more information, please contact
our spokesperson listed in the footnote.**

**Copies of this poll are available on our website:
www.angusreidstrategies.com**

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