

A BRIEF POST MORTEM ON POLLING ELECTION 41

EKOS VS. THE ACTUAL RESULTS

[OTTAWA – May 3, 2011] Canada's 41st election was extremely interesting and surprising. While we believe EKOS did a very good job in charting the direction of the election and some of the historical shifts that occurred, we were caught flat footed in capturing the majority victory for the Conservative Party. We correctly predicted a Conservative victory but we failed to predict the outright majority. Our final estimate of Conservative support fell well outside of the margin of error and, while it was not that far off the industry average, we were unfortunately on the low side of this crucial prediction. Having acknowledged this serious error, we believe that we did a good job in being the first to clearly identify three crucial new developments which have reshaped the Canadian political landscape:

1. EKOS correctly noted early in the campaign an important shift to the NDP which we correctly estimated would see the NDP as Official Opposition with over one hundred seats. We were roundly pilloried for this prediction from those who claimed nothing was happening in the campaign and that the NDP vote would collapse.¹
2. We correctly noted the death spiral of the Bloc Quebecois in Quebec early in the campaign which was also greeted with near universal scepticism. Our final prediction of a virtual sweep of the Bloc and a 60 plus seat performance by the NDP was borne out.²
3. We also correctly documented and commented upon the collapse of the Liberal Party although we failed to predict the final denouement which saw a crucial switch of some of the residual Liberal vote go to the Conservatives. This miss was most of the source of missing the Conservative majority.³
4. Less crucially, but of interest, we were the only pollster to correctly predict the victory of Elizabeth May in British Columbia.⁴

As noted, we seriously underestimated the final Conservative majority victory but in fairness, the aggregate of all polling firms final numbers did not point to such an outcome. Some can say they clearly saw it but most of the hard numbers leaned to a Conservative minority (as estimated on Three Hundred and Eight). Our numbers were on the lower boundaries but within the margin of error of the industry aggregate estimate for the Conservative Party. We were off by an unacceptably large 5.7 points, although we were much closer on all other party estimates. This

¹ *"The other main story of this poll is that the claimed demise of the NDP is clearly premature. The New Democrats are showing important new strength, particularly in Quebec and British Columbia where they now lead."* –Pre-debate report released on April 13, 2011.

² *"Bloc support declined during the two days after the debates. Less than a month ago, the party commanded the support of two-fifths of Quebec voters. Its support has since eroded to its lowest levels since 2003 (7.1 per cent post-debate). The numbers have been in decline for several weeks, suggesting the trend is not a statistical anomaly."* –Post-debate report released on April 15, 2011.

³ *"The hapless Liberal Party, meanwhile, is in full collapse having achieved yet another historical nadir at 20.0%."* –Report released on April 29, 2011.

⁴ See "Our Final Words and a Few More Numbers", released on May 1, 2011.

error did, however, put us in the bottom half of the industry performance this time. This is also the first time ever that we have failed to accurately predict the final outcome of a federal election.

We believe that beyond random errors due to sampling and measurement error that our underestimate was rooted in two factors:

- A. There was a late movement of Liberal supporters to the Conservative Party which shifted about three points to the Conservatives (half of our shortfall).
- B. The actual voters had a heavier concentration of Conservative voters who were more committed and enthusiastic and hence came out and voted in greater numbers than other parties. We included an adjusted estimate of final vote which we ran on Sunday but regrettably decided not to run with. This model combined firmness and enthusiasm measures and if we had used it we would have quite accurately called the race. Frankly, we failed to believe our own results and the fact that the gap on those who said they were "certain to vote" had largely disappeared. We therefore didn't apply the correction that we had developed which showed the CPC advantage which was clearly revealed on Monday. We aren't claiming vindication as it's not okay to root in the bin after and find the right answer. Rather, we want to share the finding that the commitment factor is crucial and that it includes enthusiasm, where the Conservatives had a clear, measurable advantage. Next time we will use the index.

In closing, we would like to thank the tens of thousands of Canadians who generously responded to our surveys. We would also like to acknowledge sincere appreciation of our partners at iPolitics who did a great job in covering this election. We would also like to thank those who have provided advice, comments, and feedback throughout the election, particularly in the world of social media. We congratulate some of our competitors that came closer to the final result and commiserate with those who missed. We do, however, feel that our research was second to none in charting the evolution of the campaign even if it fell short in the match to final outcomes. Finally, we congratulate all those who participated in the political process and recognize the passion and effort that they bring to Canadian democracy. Prime Minister Stephen Harper and his Conservative Party are to be congratulated on having won a clear and decisive mandate to lead the country.

POPULAR VOTE

						Other
Actual	39.6	30.6	18.9	6.0	3.9	0.9
EKOS	33.9	31.2	21.0	6.4	6.0	1.5

PARTY STANDING

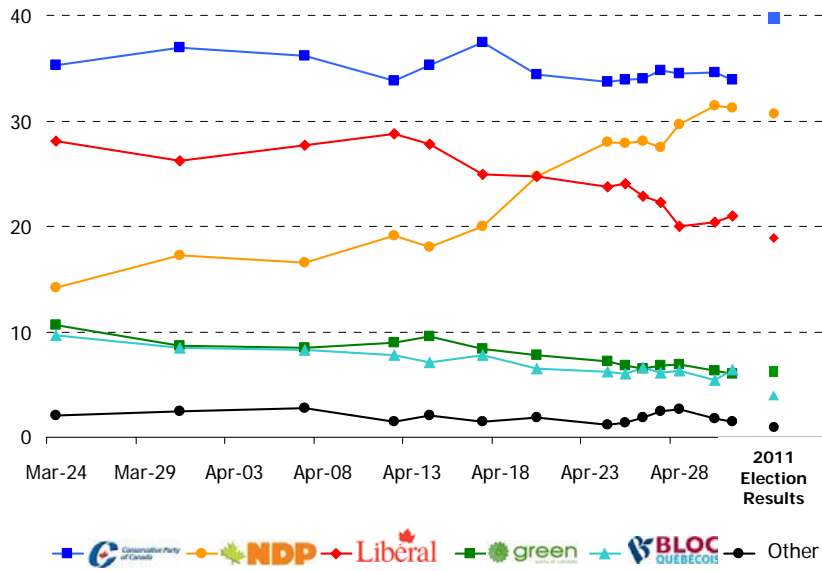
						Independent
Actual	167	102	34	4	1	0
EKOS	130 to 146	103 to 123	36 to 46	10 to 20	1	0

POPULAR VOTE (REVISED COMMITMENT INDEX – NOT PUBLICLY RELEASED)

						Other
Actual	39.6	30.6	18.9	6.0	3.9	0.9
EKOS	38.7	31.9	18.1	5.5	5.0	0.8

Federal vote intention

Q. If a federal election were held tomorrow, which party would you vote for?



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