

The 41st Election: A Polling Retrospective

Implications for Methodology and Democracy



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Outline

1.0 Evaluating Our Polls and Industry Overall

2.0 Understanding the Gap between Final Polls and Results

2.1 First Hypothesis: Flawed Poll

2.2 Second Hypothesis: Late Shift

2.3 Third Hypothesis: Turnout

3.0 Implications for Improving Polling Methodology and Reporting

4.0 Implications for Democracy, the Country, and Societal Engagement

1.0 Evaluating Our Polls and Overall Industry



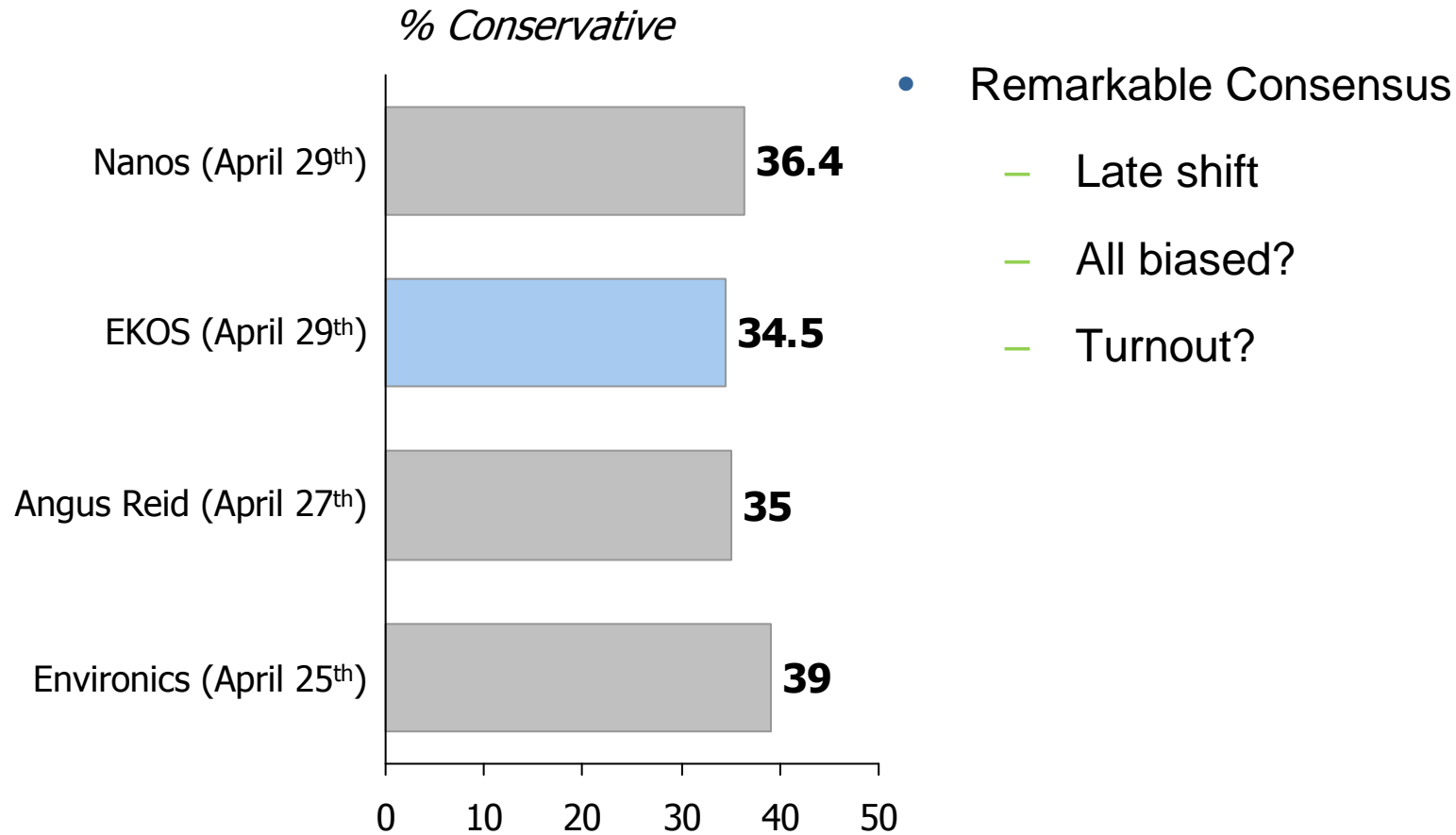
“...an unprecedented amount of polling (failed) to forecast accurately the key regional results that determined the shape of the House of Commons. For example, no company released results that were close to correct about Conservative support in Ontario, which provides a third of the seats in the House.”

-Jennifer Espey

Successes and Failures of EKOS Polling

- Successes:
 - Overall accurately / swiftly understands key themes of the electorate
 - First detected NDP surge / Bloc collapse
 - Accurately predicted Liberal Party decline / Green Party collapse
 - Correctly noted the new fault lines (generational, knowledge class)
- Failures:
 - Final Conservative majority outcome was unexpected (but this turns out to be a failure to forecast the voter turnout accurately)

Summary of Pre-Election Polls – Friday, April 29th

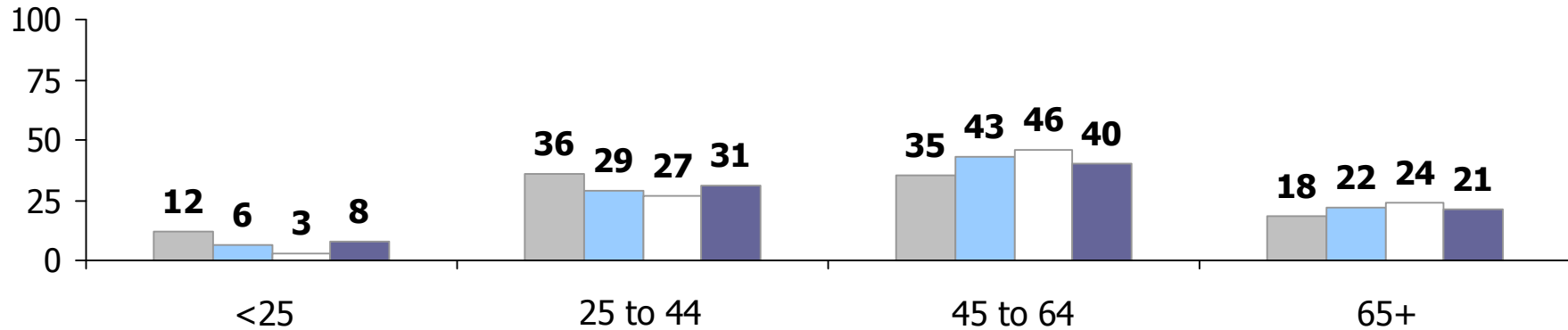


IVR versus Other Polling Methodologies

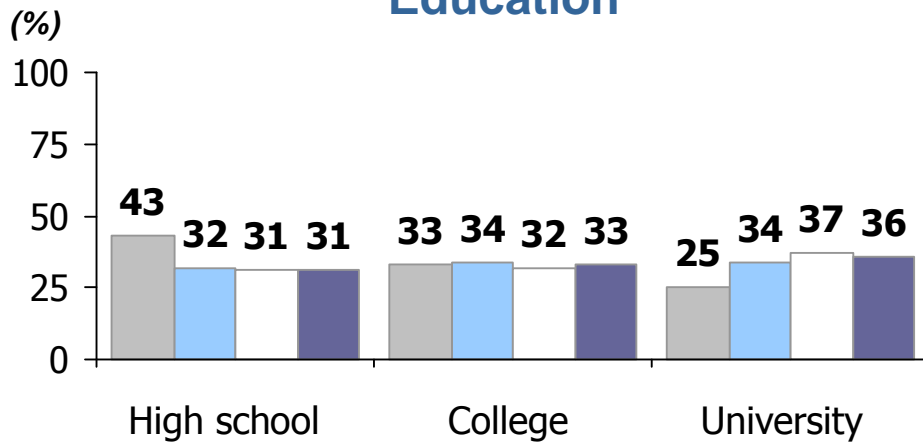
- EKOS' federal vote intention polls are conducted using Interactive Voice Response (IVR) technology, which allows respondents to enter their preferences by punching the keypad on their phone, rather than telling them to an operator
 - In an effort to reduce the coverage bias of landline only random digit dialing (RDD), we created a dual landline/cell phone RDD sampling frame
- Advantages
 - Perhaps closest to national population
 - Minimises social desirability
 - Cost-effective
 - Higher reliability due to large sample sizes
- Disadvantages
 - Higher non-response
 - Survey must be shorter
 - Some design limits
 - Intrusiveness
 - Reputation

IVR versus CATI

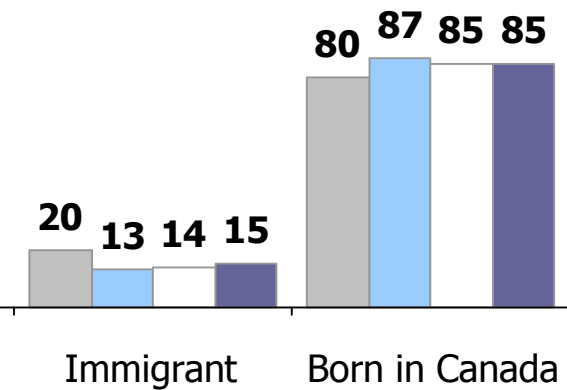
Age



Education



Immigrant Status



Actual Population
 IVR Landline
 CATI Land-line
 IVR Dual Frame Land-Mobile

BASE: IVR: Canadians; December 2010 (n=1,976) CATI: Canadians; January 2011 (n=3,009)

2.0 Understanding the Gap between Final Poll and Results



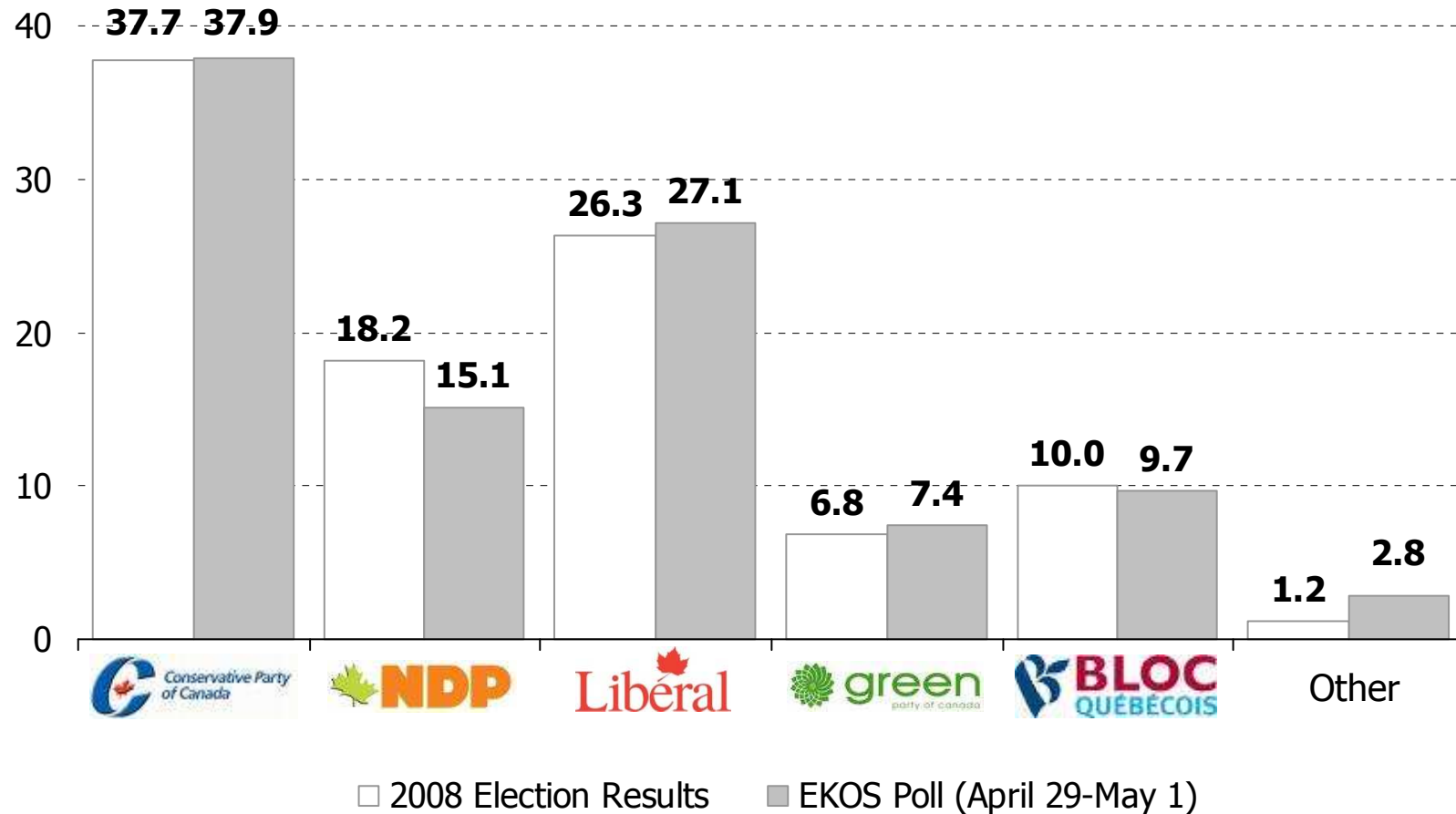
- Hypothesis & Test Results:
 - 1) Flawed poll (bias) – measurement / sample
 - 2) Late shift (“blue” Liberals in Ontario?)
 - 3) “Get-out-the-vote” / Turnout

2.1 - First Hypothesis: Flawed Poll

- Evidence shows polls were accurate in a number of key areas:
 1. Polls correctly captured 2008 vote throughout campaign
 2. Polls correctly captured 2011 vote post hoc (reproduced election result)
 3. Samples were close to census on all key parameters
- Question: Why would samples accurately give their 2008 and 2011 Conservative vote choices (behaviour) but erroneously give vote intentions? (makes no sense)
 - Conservative vote intention is lower in non-voters
- Prompting Green → mixed social desirability / turnout effect?
 - Evidence shows lingering Green Party effect in both intentions and behaviour

Bias Test 1 – 2008 Vote Behaviour in Final Poll

Q. How did you vote in the federal election held in 2008?

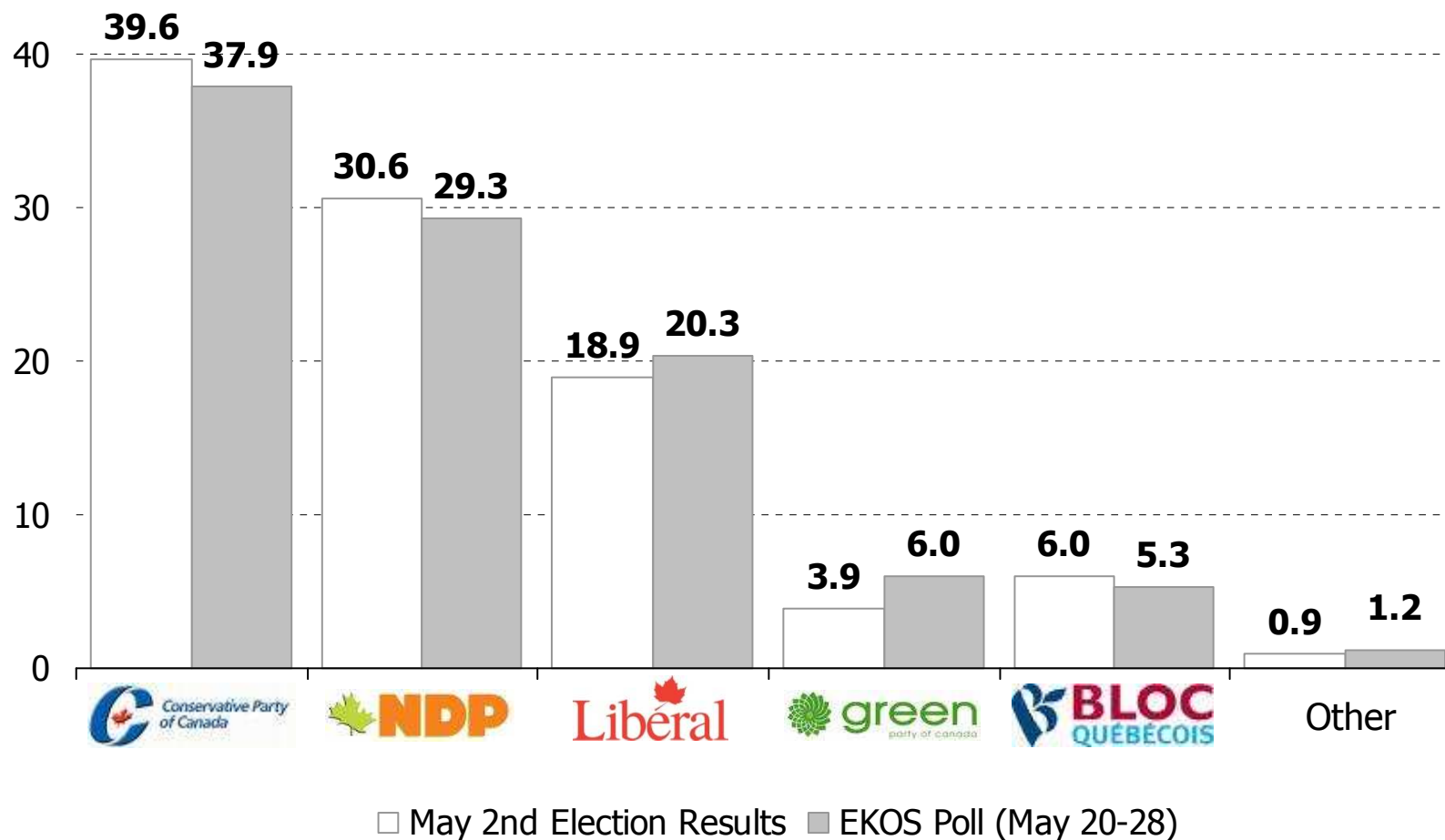


Note: The data is based on those who say they voted in 2008. Our survey also finds that 11.7% of respondents did not vote.

BASE: Those who voted in 2008; April 29-May 1, 2011 (n=2,789)

Bias Test 2 – 2011 Vote Using Same Method 3 Weeks Later

Q. How did you vote in the most recent federal election, held on May 2nd?



Note: The data is based on those who say they voted on May 2nd. Our survey also finds that 20.9% of respondents either did not respond or did not vote.

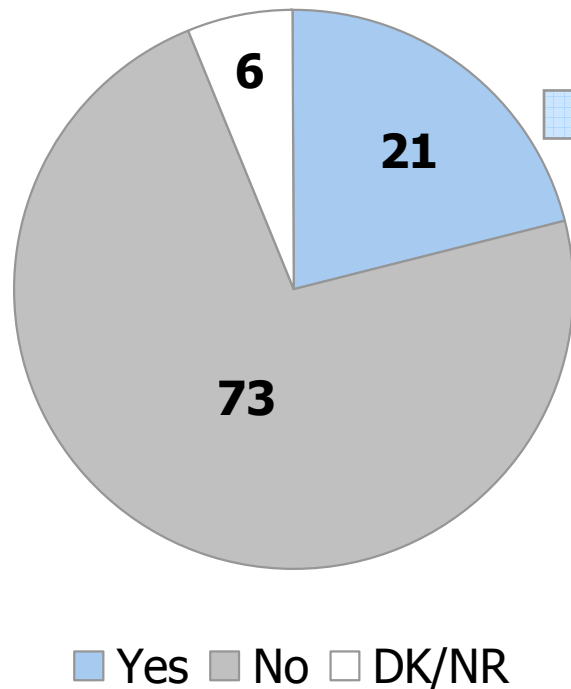
BASE: Those who voted on May 2nd; May 20-28, 2011 (n=2,209)

2.2 - Second Hypothesis: Late Shift

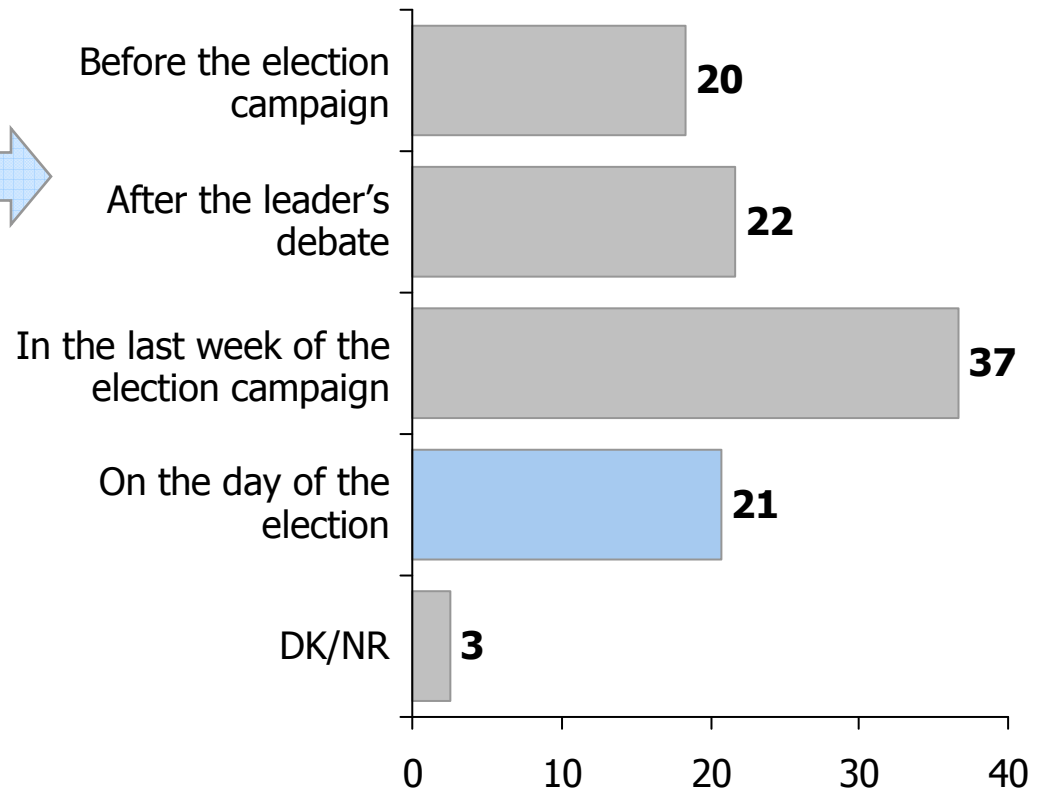
- Did Liberal Party supporters (particularly in Ontario) move to the Conservative Party in fear of an NDP-led coalition?
 - For this to be the case, there had to be a feedback loop to the polls
 - For this to be the case, late shifters had to move overwhelmingly to the Conservative Party (particularly in Ontario)
- Evidence / Questions:
 - 1) Was your final choice your original choice?
 - 2) When did you make your final decision?
 - 3) What was the reason for this shift?
 - 4) Did you follow the polls?
 - 5) Did the polls influence your choice?

Timing of Final Decision

Q. Were you originally leaning towards voting for a different party at the beginning of the election campaign?



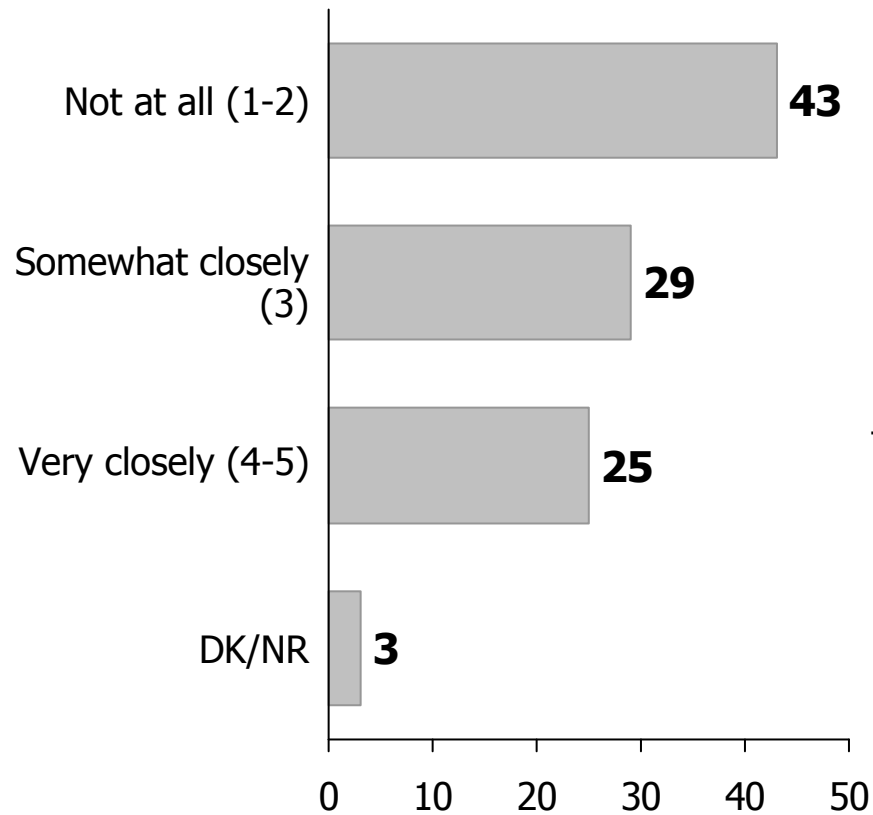
Q. [IF YES] When did you make your final decision regarding how you were going to vote?



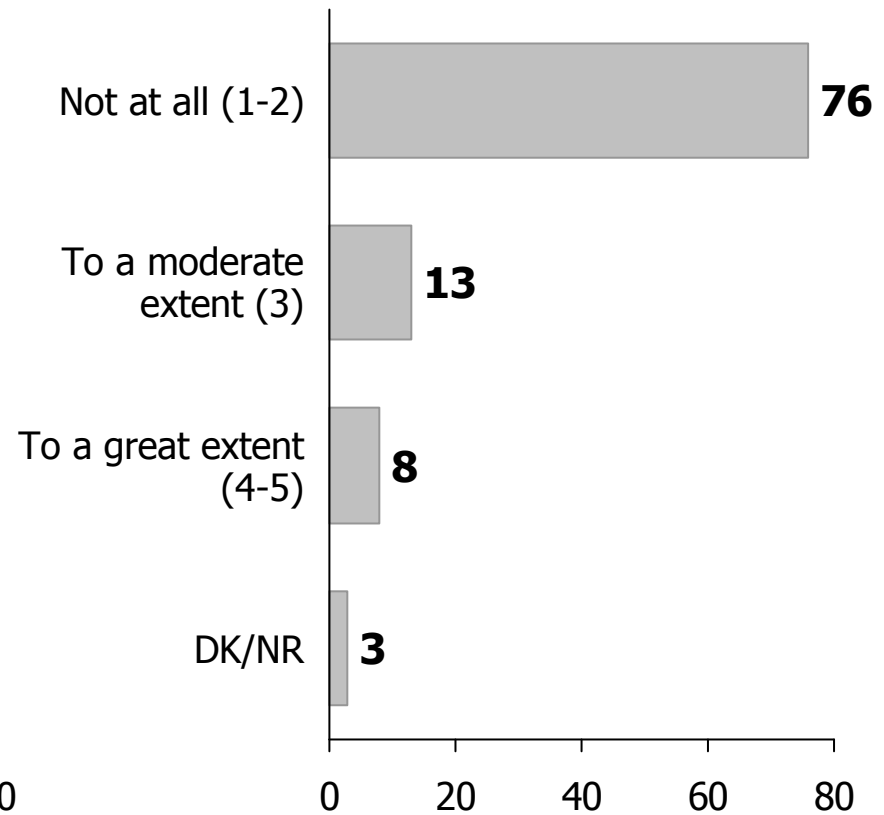
Of the 21% who changed their minds, 21% did so on the day of the election. Therefore, **just 4.2%** (21% of 21%) made their decision on election day.

Impact of Public Opinion Polls

Q. Throughout the election campaign, how closely did you follow public opinion polls?



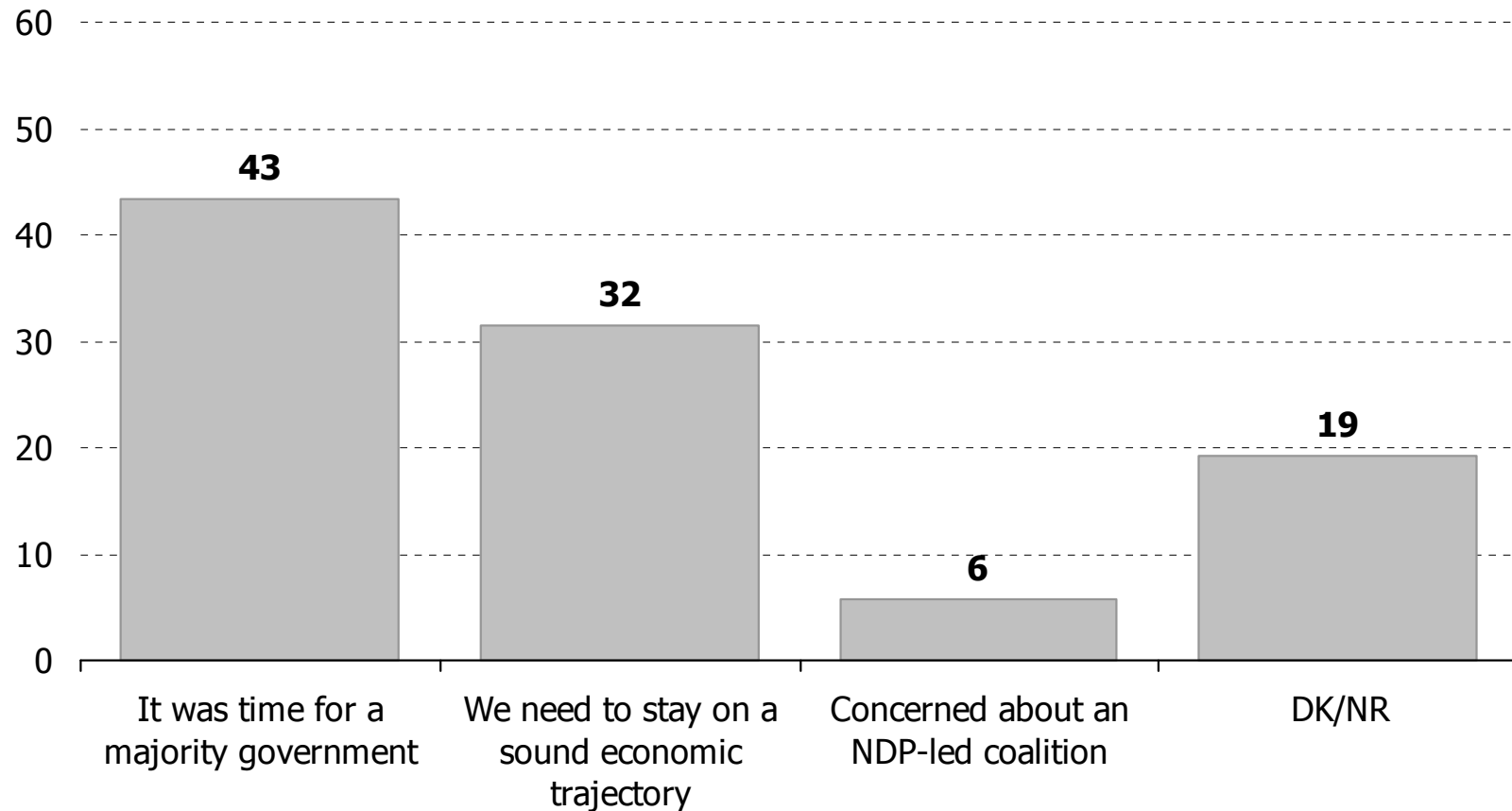
Q. To what extent did public opinion polls affect your final decision on Election Day?



BASE: Those who voted on May 2nd; May 20-28, 2011 (n=2,203)

Biggest Factor in Switching (Conservative Shifters Only)

Q. What was the biggest factor in your final decision?



BASE: Those who switched to the Conservative Party during the campaign; May 20-28, 2011 (n=99)

2.3 - Third Hypothesis: Get-Out-the-Vote

- With the endemic bias and late shift hypotheses failing tests, we turn to turnout / get-out-the-vote
- Evidence:
 - Analysis of demographic patterns of non-voters
 - Regression / Log-linear analysis of voter preferences of these groups
 - Analysis of the cell-only population
 - mirrors these overall patterns

Results / Patterns of Non-Voting

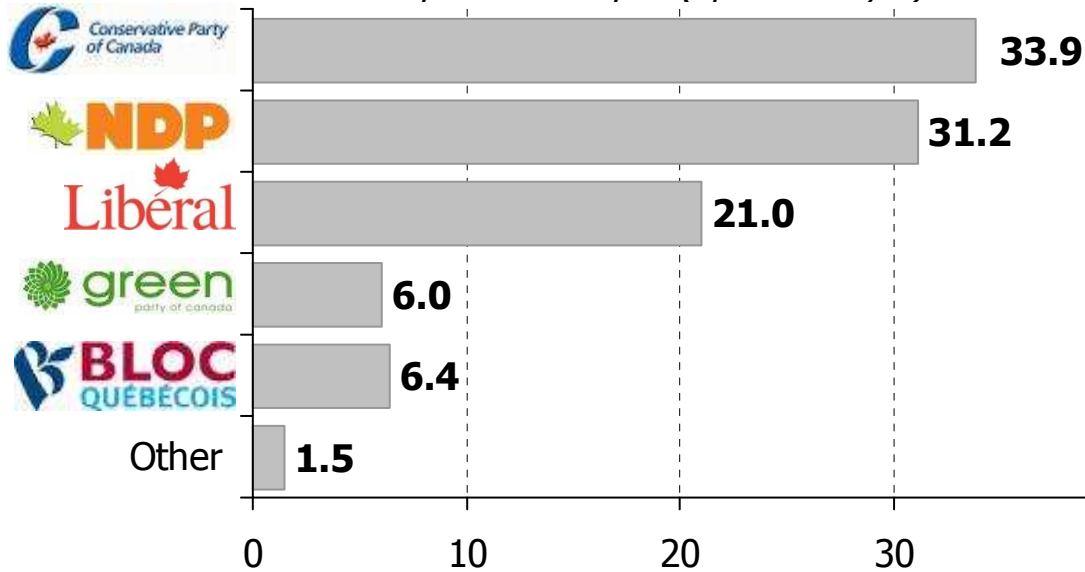
- While both sample and measurement biases inflate voting intention and reported behaviour, the relative patterns are revealing
- Age is crucial with non-voters (those under 25 are six times more likely to not vote than those over 65)
- Even Gen X voters (i.e., 25-44) were twice as likely not to vote as boomers
- Virtually all seniors claim to vote and vast majority actually do
- Age interacts with gender – young women even less likely to vote

Estimated Non-Voter Support

EKOS final pre-election poll (April 29-May 1)

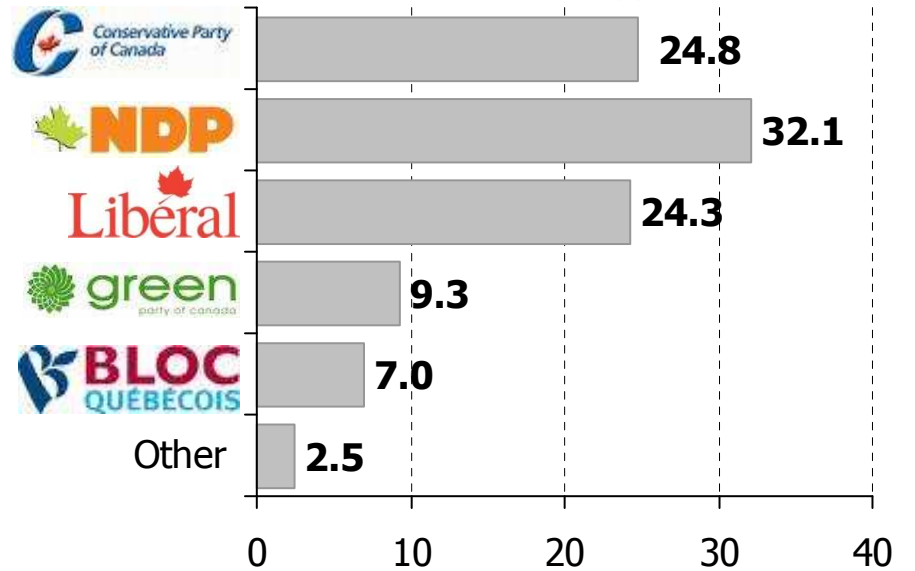
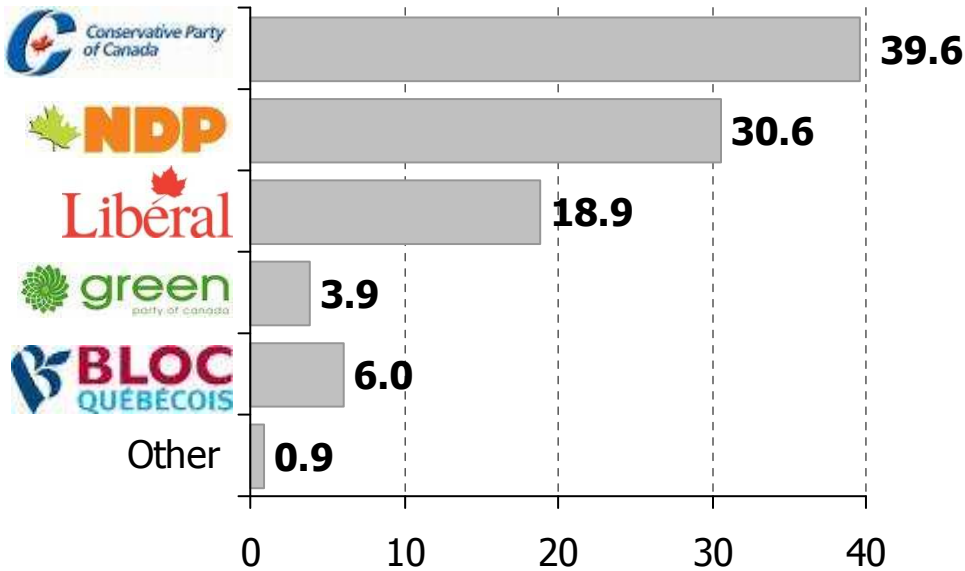
**Voters
(61.4%)**

**Non-Voters
(38.6%)**



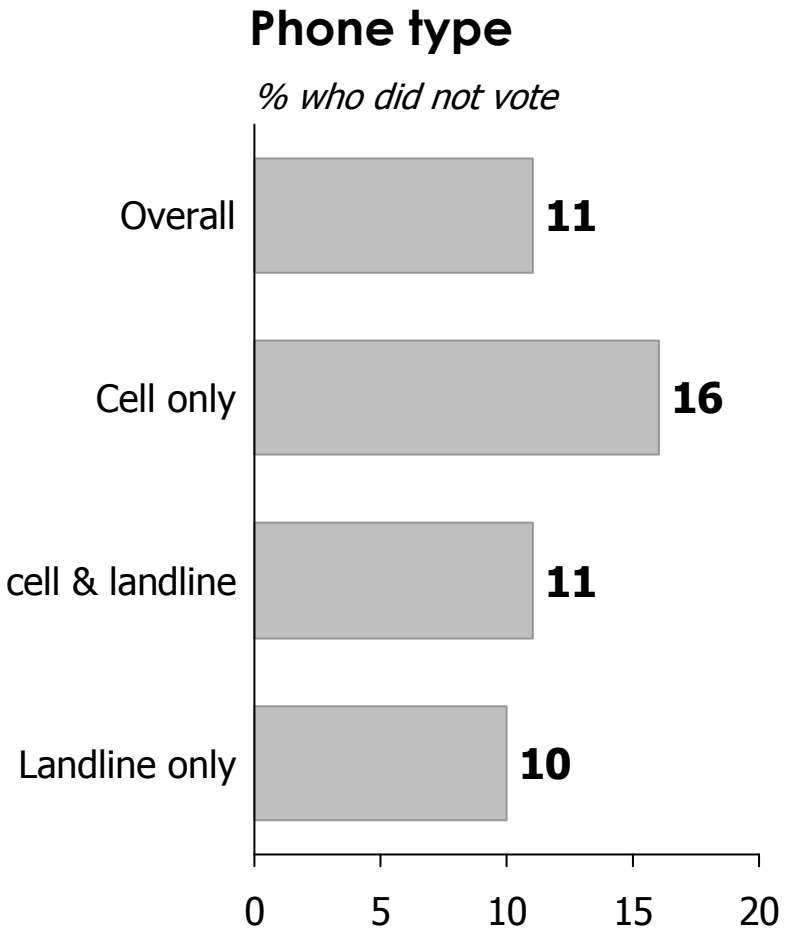
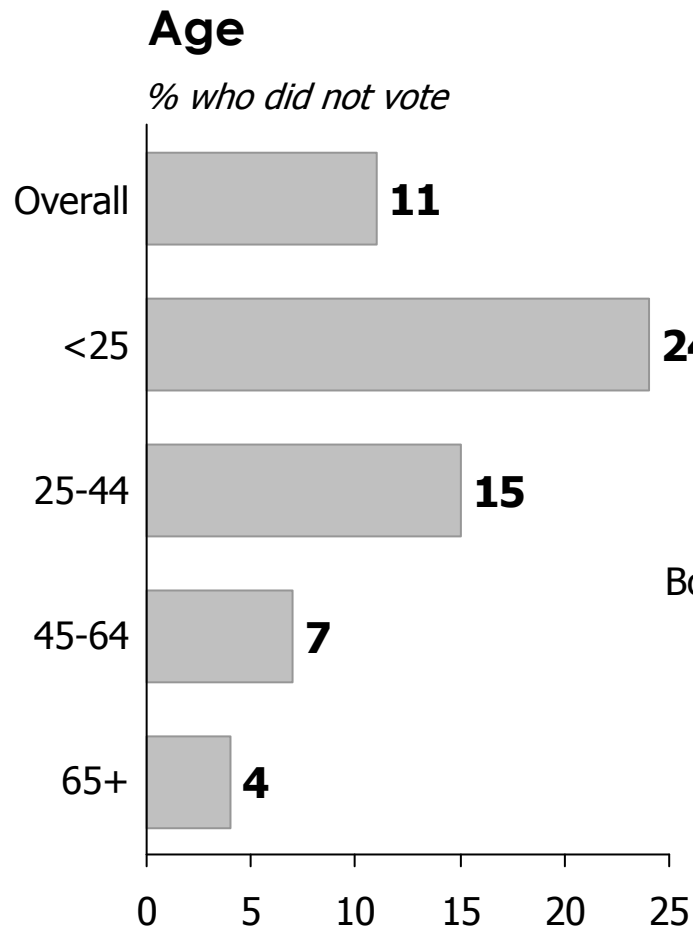
Actual results

Estimated non-voter support



Non-Voters by Key Demographics

Q. How did you vote in the most recent federal election, held on May 2nd?

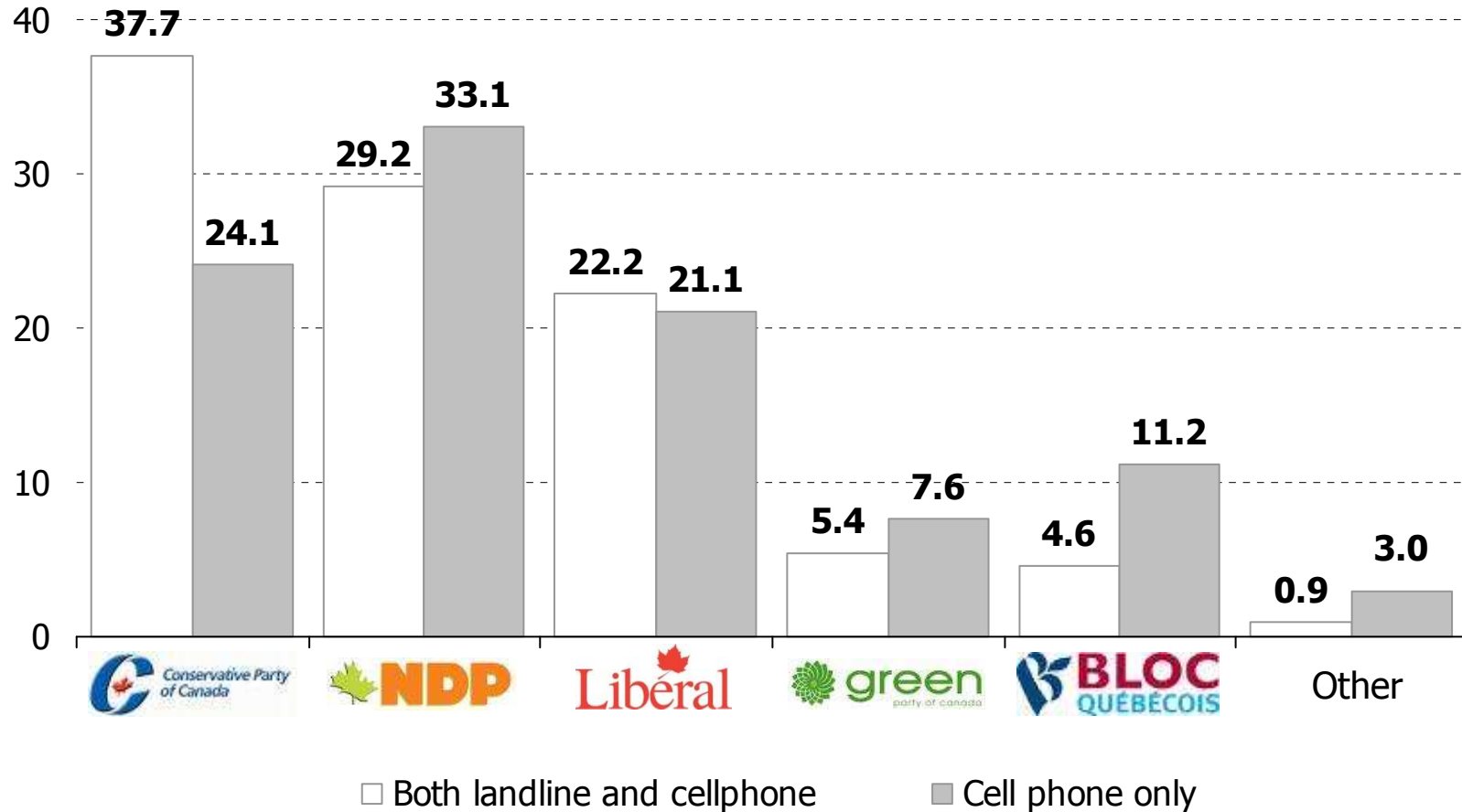


Impact of Cell Phone-Only Respondents

- Non-voting is strongly linked to age
- Support for Conservative Party is strongly linked to age
- Cell-only use is strongly linked to age *and* non-support for Conservative Party
- Cell-only use mirrors broader pattern of linkage of non-voting and non-Conservative support
- Therefore, including cell phone-only in the sample produced the larger gap
- Indeed, with the cell-only users out, our results are within the margin of error of the election results

Cell Phone Only versus Cell/Landline Households

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



Note: The data on federal vote intention are based on decided and leaning voters only.

BASE: Decided voters; April 29-May 1, 2011 (n=1,836)

3.0 Implications for Improving Polling Methodology and Reporting



What Does This Mean?

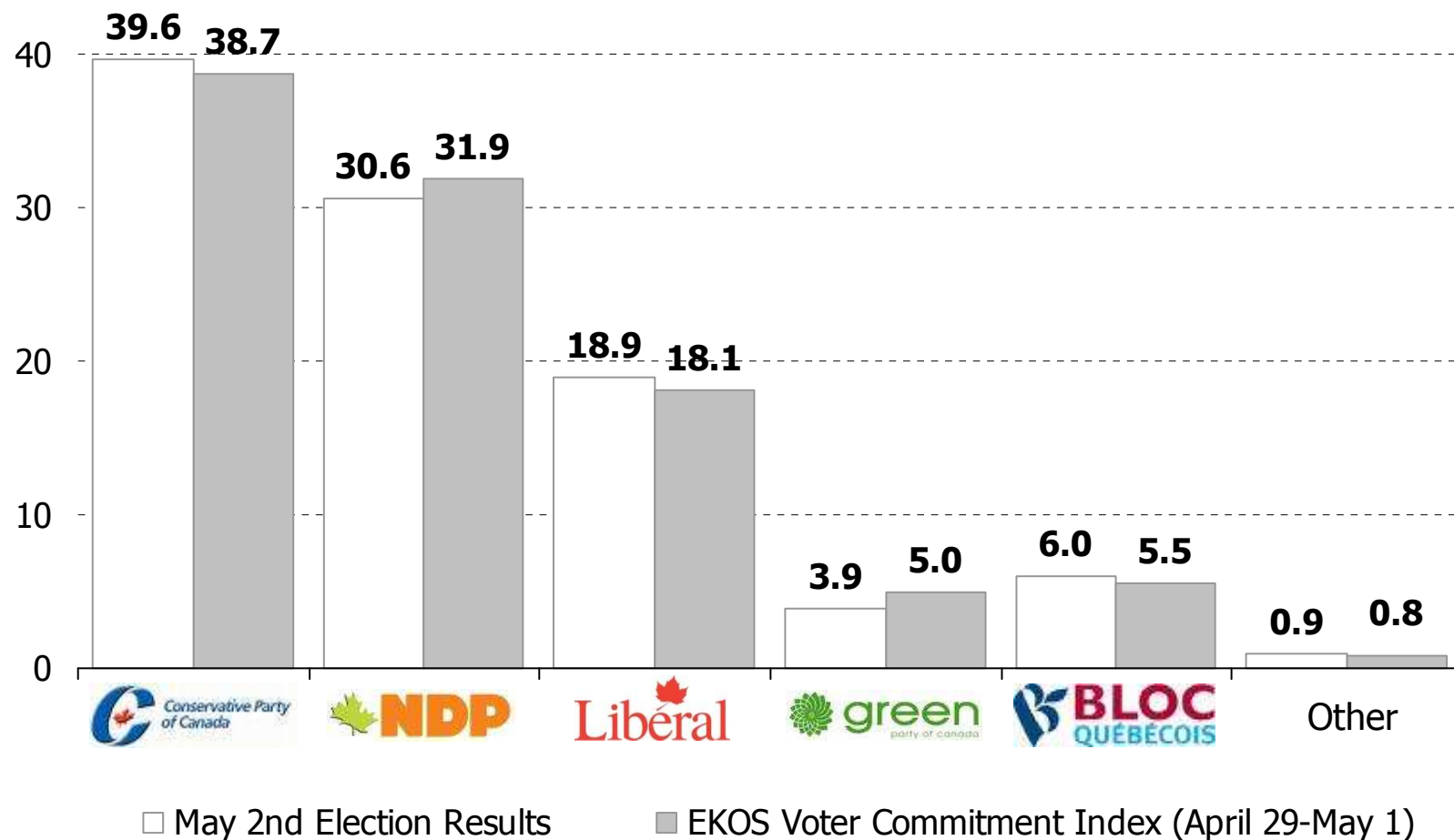
- Is the link between election outcome and final polls a good yardstick of polling quality?
 - Increasingly, no. Why not?
 - growth of non-voters (now over 50% of those under 45)
 - strong correlation between non-voting and non-support of incumbent
- How to “fix” the forecast:
 - Commitment index
 - Remove <45
 - Remove new voters / Eliminate non-voters

Commitment Index

- Our commitment index is an aggregation of five factors:
 - the ease with which a respondent revealed/declared their voting preference
 - the self-rated level of enthusiasm with current voting choice
 - the expressed intensity of attachment to current voting choice
 - the self-expressed likelihood of actually voting on May 2nd
 - the respondent's willingness to consider other parties

EKOS Commitment Index versus Actual Results

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



Note: The data on federal vote intention are based on decided and leaning voters only.

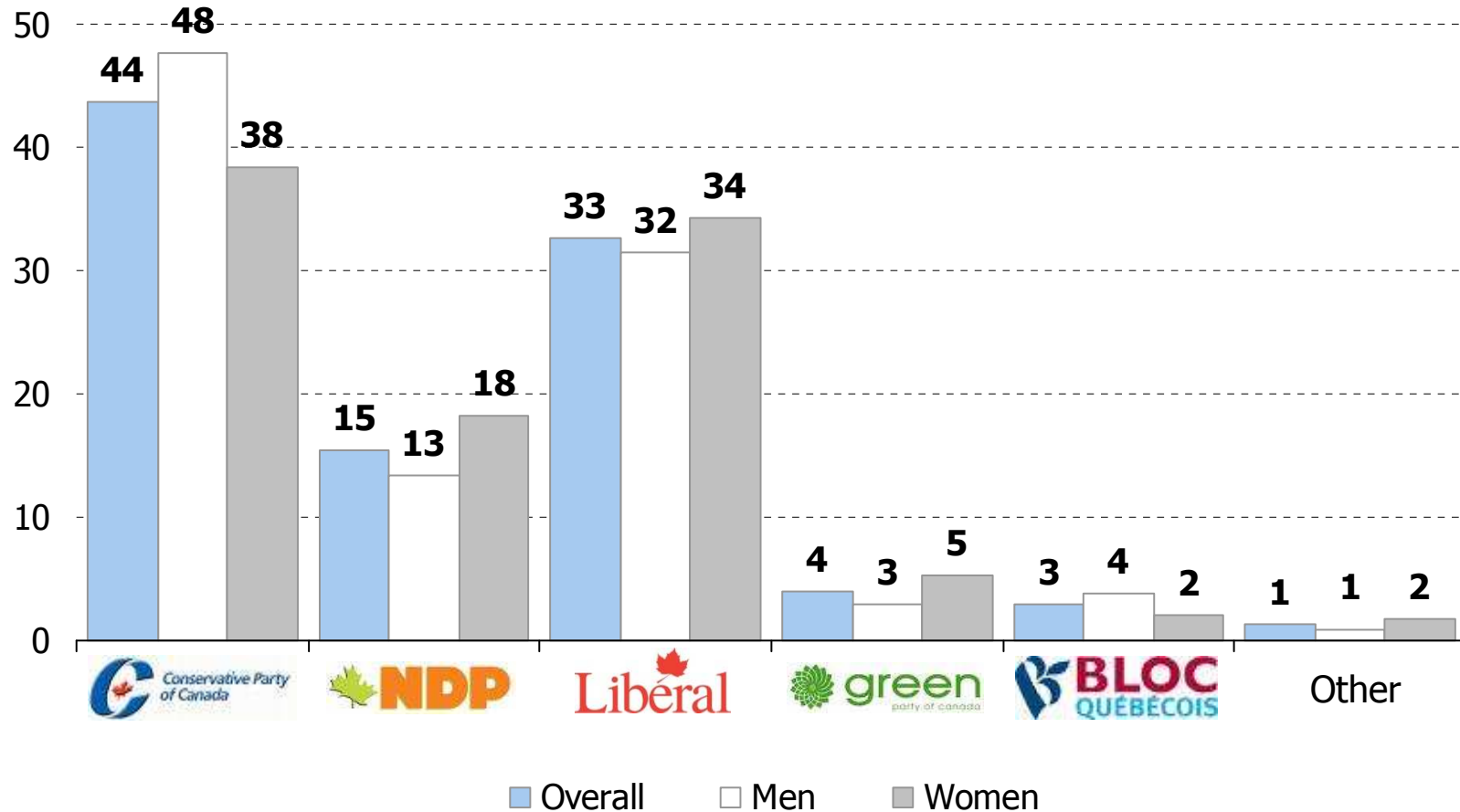
BASE: Decided voters; April 29-May 1, 2011 (n=2,876)

What Does This Mean?

- We have no assurances these adjustments would work again (e.g., they would have blown up in US 2008 election)
- Commitment / Enthusiasm may be crucial (taps the emotional domain)
 - In particular, older, conservative voters are more enthusiastic / committed than older, non-conservative voters
- Self-rated likelihood to vote means nothing
- No one would seriously argue that ignoring the younger half of the population or new market entrants is a sound research method for any other area of the private or public centre

Interaction of Enthusiasm, Gender, and Party Support

Q. *If a federal election were held tomorrow, which party would you vote for? (highly enthusiastic voters only)*



Note: Results are delimited to those who say they are “highly” enthusiastic regarding their current choice (i.e., 6 or 7 on a 7-point scale)

Recommendations

- More circumspect final forecast
- Greater awareness that nearness of final poll to electoral outcome is an increasingly flawed indicator of polling quality (it was a good test in the past)
- Shift media focus away from vanity sweepstakes of final prediction to deeper understanding of campaign dynamics and implications for future
- Better understanding of turnout
 - Can't assume future will resemble the past

4.0 Implications for Democracy, the Country, and Societal Engagement



Implications for Democracy and Societal Engagement (1/2)

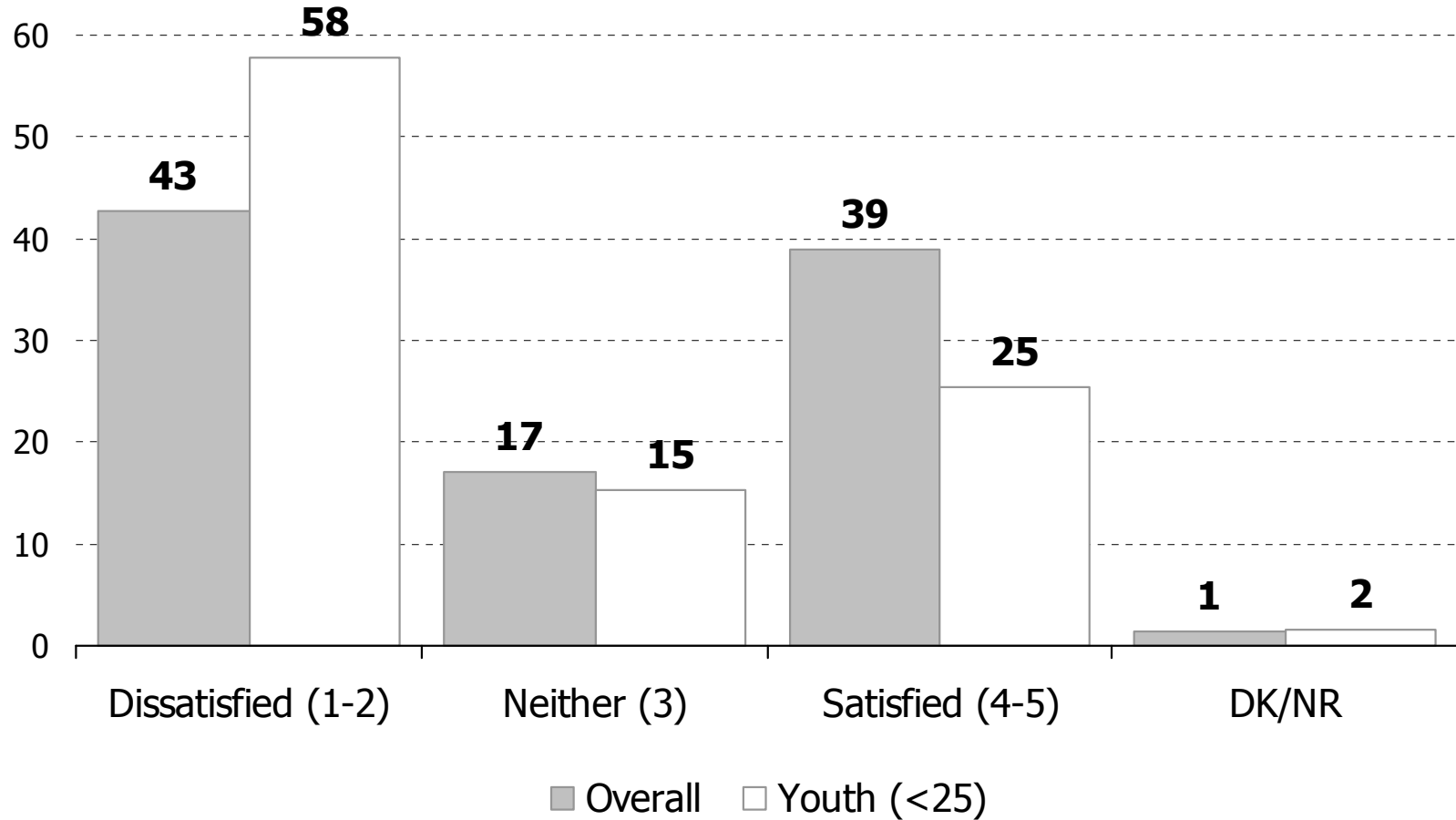
- The new generational chasm
- Most of those under 45 aren't voting (more so than in the past)
- This may be in part a product of conscious political strategy (suppression)
- Profound questions about implications for a societal "succession" strategy
- Profound differences between older and younger Canada
 - Composition
 - Diversity
 - Education
 - Digital world view/ horizontality
 - Values and Interests (younger Canada tilt)
 - Knowledge and skills
 - Climate and post Carbon economy
 - Cosmopolitan
 - Less security-focussed

Implications for Democracy and Societal Engagement (2/2)

- Unusual demographic skew today. Median age is 42, up from 26 at our centennial.
 - Gerontocracy? Political agenda reflecting imagined / exaggerated fears of older Canada? Good politics but good policy?
 - Healthy economies balance grace and enthusiasm; prudence and exuberance
 - Brewing generational storm?
 - Lesson of election polling should not be to ignore those voices which weren't registered – if anything, this heightens need to include “unheard” voices
 - Shift from obsessive focus on non-existent horse race to informed, reflective, and representative national conversations on key issues

Satisfaction with Election Results

Q. Overall, how satisfied were you with the results to the last election?



BASE: Those who voted on May 2nd; May 20-28, 2011 (n=2,203)

For Further Reading

- Frank Graves. *Accurate Polling, Flawed Forecast: An Empirical Retrospective on Election 41* (June 2011)
http://www.ekospolitics.com/wp-content/uploads/accurate_polling_flawed_forecast.pdf
- Frank Graves. *The Great Canadian Poll-Off* (March 2011)
http://www.ekospolitics.com/wp-content/uploads/the_great_canadian_poll_off.pdf
- EKOS Research Associates. *Interactive Voice Response: The Past, Present, and Into the Future* (January 2011)
<http://www.ekos.com/admin/articles/2011-01-21-MRIA.pdf>
- EKOS Research Associates. *EKOS' Observations on MRIA Study – Canadian Online Panels: Similar or Different?* (January 2010)
<http://ekos.com/admin/articles/MRIA-Comparison-Panel-Study-2010-01-27.pdf>

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