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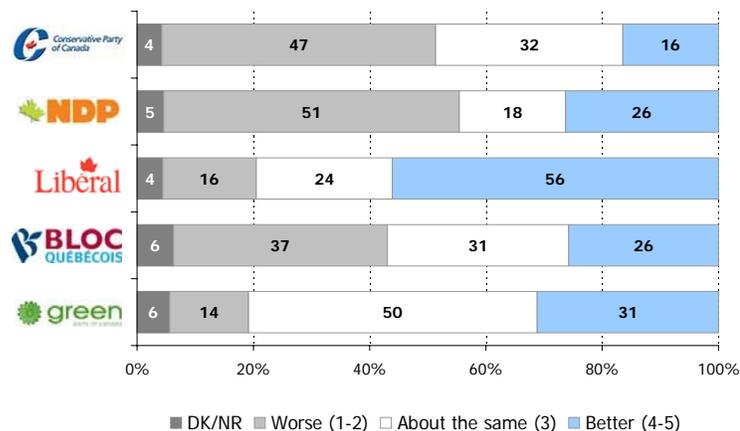
5.0 THE FUTURE THROUGH A PUBLIC LENS

[Ottawa – January 13, 2012] Predictions are indeed hard, especially about the future as Yogi Berra once opined. Yet the public seem to have little difficulty offering their speculations about the next election, however distant it might appear now. Is this the wisdom of crowds, mob psychology, or just wishful thinking? Who knows, but there are some surprising areas of consensus in the Canadian public about 2015, and they don't look much like the received wisdom in the chattering classes and fifth estate.

Using two different methods, we arrived at basically the same conclusions about the public prognostication for that now distant 2015 election. One method asked about popular hypotheses regarding the political future. Another asked the dryer question of who will do better and who will do worse in the next election. Both approaches provide a surprising consensus. While it is clearly premature to speculate on such a distant event, it is at least as interesting as poking the ashes of current vote intention to pretend that has any possible significance to anything.

Chart 5.1 – Public conjectures on future party fortunes 

Q. If you were to make your best guess on how each of the major political parties will fare in the a federal election four years from now, how well do you think each one would do?



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BASE: Canadians; December 14-21, 2011 (n=2,005)

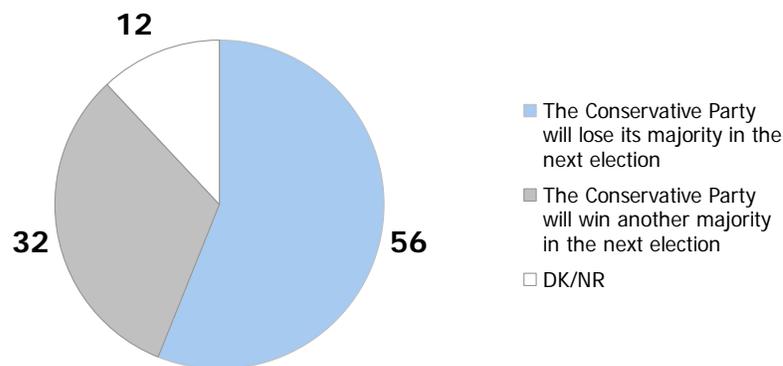
The answers to this future quiz are very consistent regardless of how we ask. Notwithstanding the media consensus that we have entered a new Conservative dynasty, the public decidedly disagree. With remarkable unanimity the public do not believe that the Conservatives have tilted the long term game in their favour to the point that the next election will be another pro forma drubbing of the hapless Liberals and the upstart NDP opposition. The punditocracy forget that despite this new consensus about the inevitability of Conservative hegemony the final weekend

of the last campaign saw the overall outcome in considerable doubt. If younger Canada had voted in even at fifty percent (well below their voting rate in the past), Jack Layton's successor would have been presiding over a coalition government. So the newfound obviousness and inevitability of the Conservative juggernaut is quite inconsistent with the vagaries of the last race where literally no body seriously predicted the majority outcome. Yet in herd-like fashion, this is now the new normal and the incipient period of an uninterrupted Conservative dynasty as Canada's new natural governing party is upon us. The public, however, decidedly disagree. Perhaps all of the insiders should read Preston Manning's reminder that governments come and go and that prudent parties understand and anticipate this political promiscuity. Mr. Manning's statesmanship would preclude such a colourful descriptor but the hard evidence shows that Canadian voters are indeed a pretty fickle bunch.

Chart 5.2 – Conservative dynasty?



Q. As you may know, in the May 2nd federal election, The Conservative Party of Canada won a majority of the seats in the House of Commons. Some people say that the Conservatives are holding all the cards and are a safe bet for another majority win in the next election. Others say that the victory was a one time deal and after four years more years, the Conservative Party will return to minority status or even lose power. Which of these statements comes closest to your own point of view?



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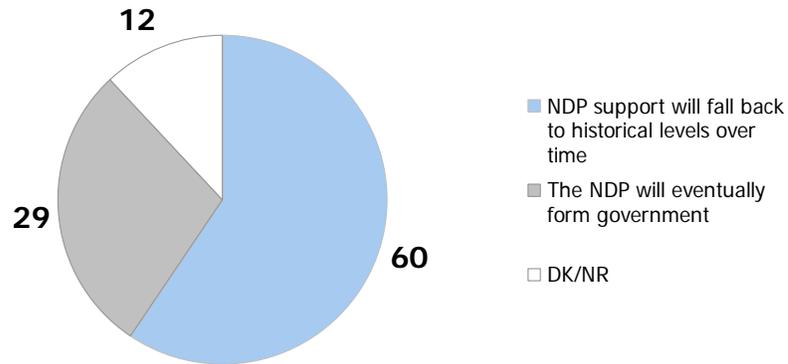
The tests all converge with consistency and simplicity. First of all, the public don't think Stephen Harper will retain his majority. They are also very convinced of this view which is certainly offside the current expert consensus. Whether this is a product of the perception of longer term economic gloom and stagnation, or whether it is the result of mounting discomfort with the state of democracy in Canada is hard to say. But for whatever reasons that is what the public predict.



Chart 5.3 – NDP government?



Q. As you may know, in the May 2nd federal election, The New Democratic Party won the largest number of seats in their history, enabling them to form the Official Opposition for the first time. Some people say that NDP support will continue to grow and they will one day form government. Others say that this surge in NDP support is merely a “blip” and it will soon fall back to historical levels. Which of these statements comes closest to your own point of view?



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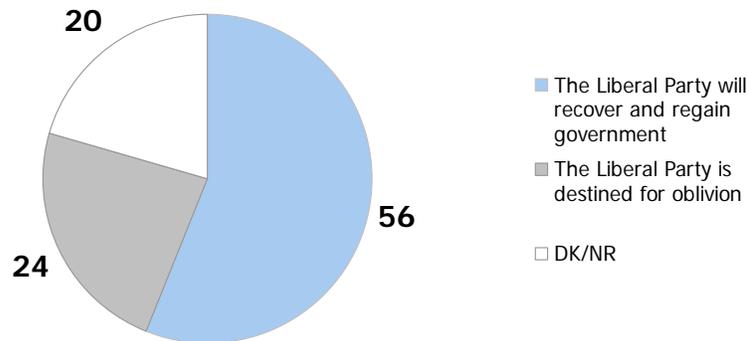
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As for the newly numerous but now leaderless NDP, the public outlook is equally grim. The public do not believe the NDP success was a segue to forming government and whatever their discontent with the state of the economy and democracy, they don't see a future period of NDP rule. Rightly or wrongly, the public see the NDP success on May 2nd as more of a blip than a breakthrough. The lacuna left in post-Jack Layton NDP may be reinforcing the view and things could definitely turn around, but that is what the public now think about their future prospects.

Chart 5.4 – Liberals on track to oblivion?



Q. As you may know, in the May 2nd federal election, the Liberal Party of Canada had its worst showing in history, winning just 34 seats. Some people say this is a sign that support for the Liberal party is declining and that the party is ultimately destined for oblivion. Others say that the party has faced major defeats in the past and it will recover and will one day regain power. Which of these statements comes closest to your own point of view?



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And what about the newly hapless, erstwhile natural governing party of Canada? As they chewed through four leaders in the last decade in search of redemption with a fickle public, the Liberals may well be heartened to hear that the public don't agree with Peter Newman's consignment to the historical dustbin and believe that the party will rebound and eventually form government. This is pretty heady stuff and if the public are to be believed then this will raise the stakes on discussions of leadership and policy from arid theory to the pregnant possibility of being restored to power. The long term conditions seem to be in place for a remarkable recovery but the Liberals have shown that their political antenna and sense of strategy had been displaced by a spurious sense of entitlement and inevitable return. Perhaps a newly humbled and more energetic Liberal party will find a path to turn this public forecast to their advantage. Or maybe Newman was right.

One thing is relatively clear: if any party (or parties) is going to turn these impressions of the future into reality and displace the Conservatives, they are going to have to hear the voices of the public more clearly and set their targets on that great sea of younger Canada who are increasingly content to avoid elections and politics. There is no path to success which is carved out through recapturing older Canada. Older Canada is very happy with the current government and is not likely to change. The path to disrupting the current gerontocracy lies through convincing under 45 Canada to abandon click democracy and join the real fray. Whether this can happen is a very open question and will determine whether these views become reality or just wishful thinking.