



# The 42<sup>nd</sup> Election: A Polling Retrospective

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**Presentation to the MRIA Forum on Public Opinion Polls from the 2015 Federal Election**

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[www.ekos.com](http://www.ekos.com)

1. Overview of the 2015 Election

2. Notes on Polling

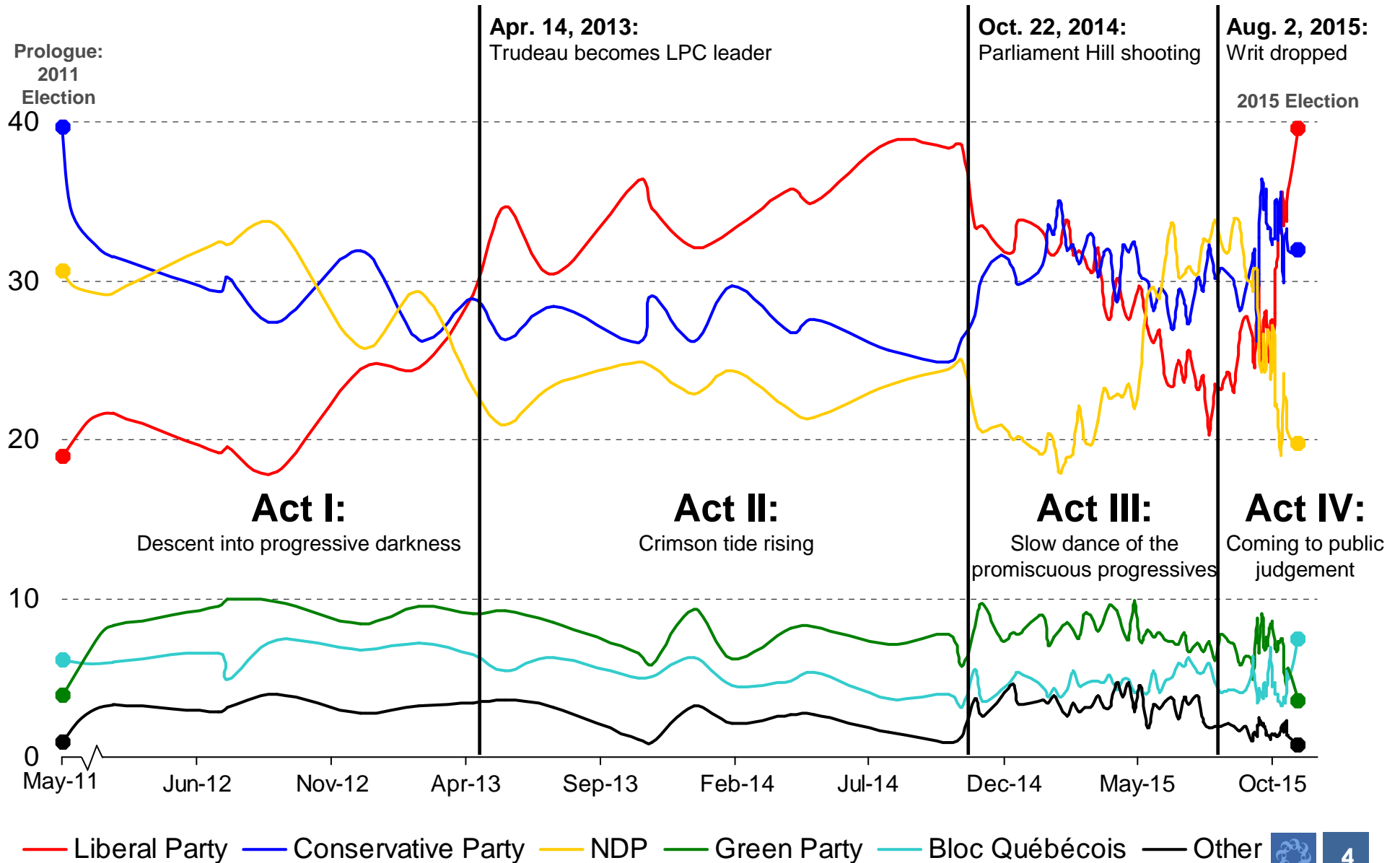
3. Conclusions

# Methodology

- » The Canadian Intelligent Voter Information System (CIVIS) is EKOS' innovative polling service
- » Features include:
  - Large sample sizes (130,000+ cases in 2015)
  - Probability-based sampling that covers the entire population
  - Unique fusion of:
    1. High Definition Interactive Voice Response (HD-IVR™)
    2. Live Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI)
    3. EKOS' unique hybrid online/phone panel, *Probit* (probability sampling)
  - Dual-mode sampling (i.e., both cellphone and landline)

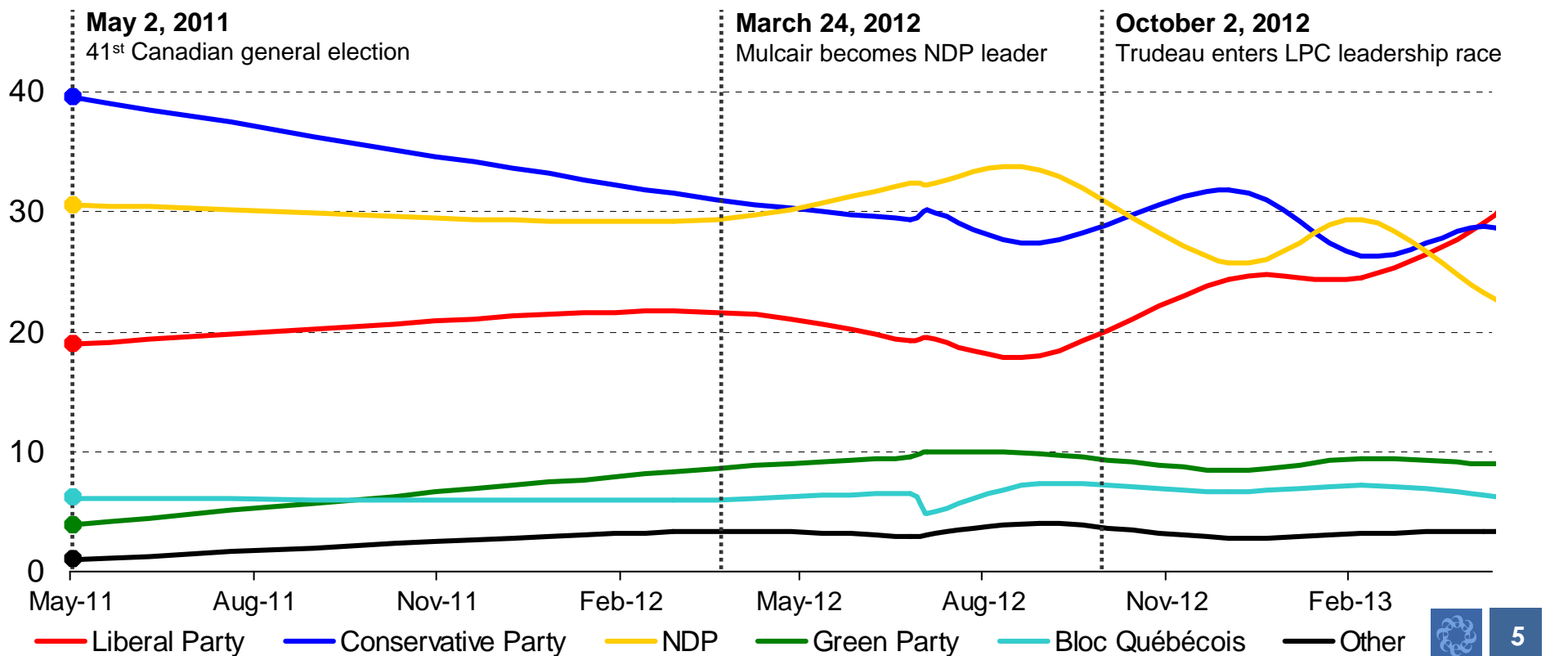


# A four-part play: the reinstatement of progressive Canada



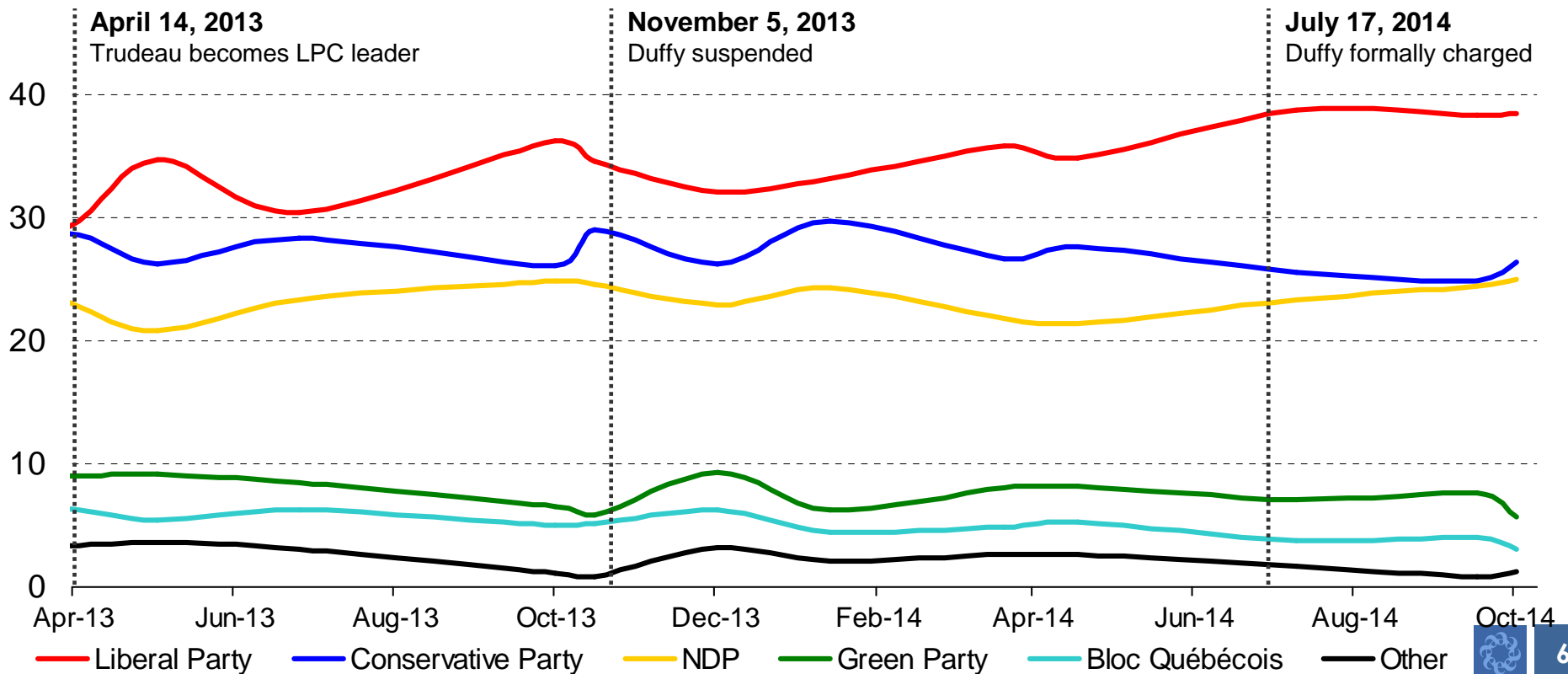
# Prologue & Act I: Descent into progressive darkness

- » The play begins on Election Night 2011 when Harper secures a majority
  - Shocking in light of clear disconnect with values and interests of most Canadians
  - Fashioned from uneven turnout across generational lines
- » A sense of buyer's remorse was evident almost immediately as barometers of trust, approval, and confidence in national direction plumbed new lows



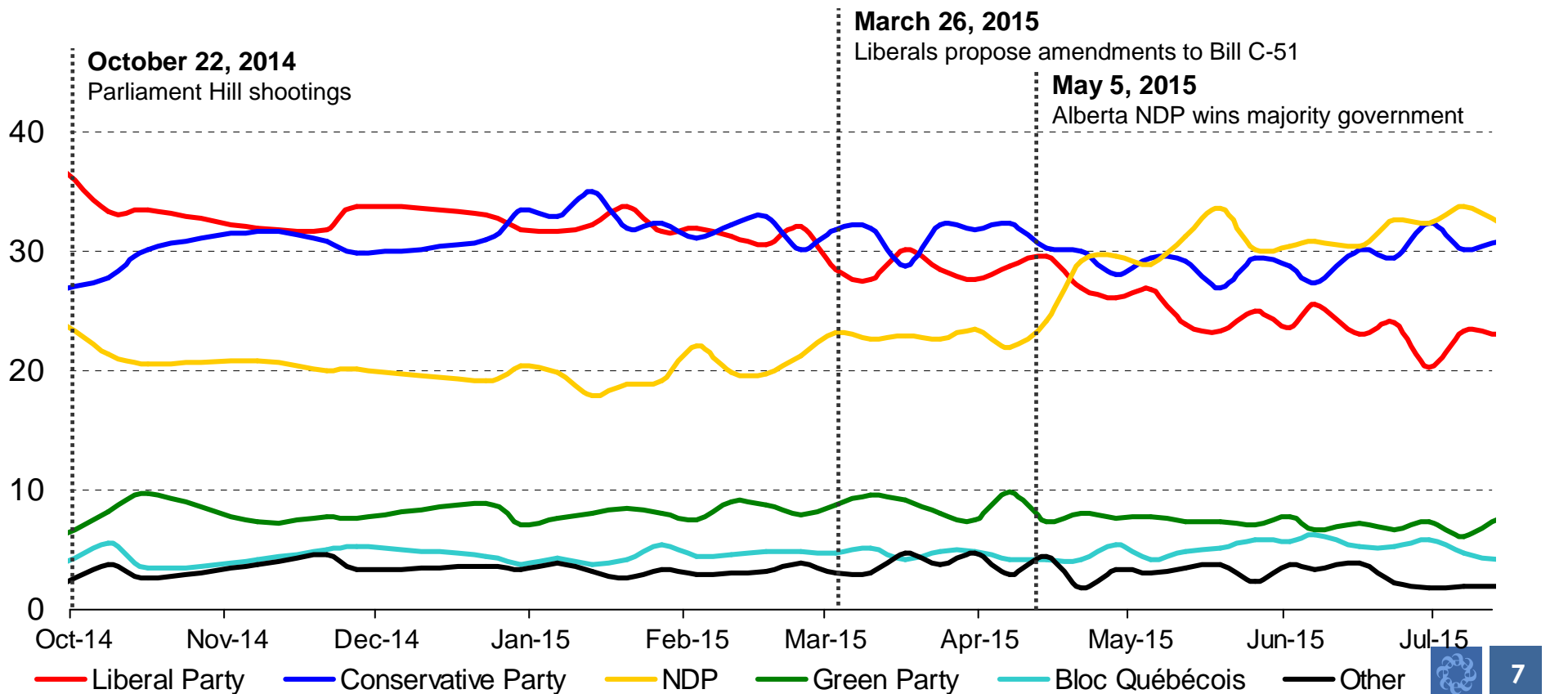
# Act II: Crimson tide rising

- » A year after assuming power, Trudeau seemed to be on an unstoppable path to victory
  - In a poll one year out, the Liberals found themselves almost exactly where they were on Election Night 2015
  - Success forged from focus on middle class renewal and a more optimistic and progressive tone linked to appetite for change



# Act III: Slow dance of the promiscuous progressives

- » The shooting on the Hill reignited concerns with security and terror
  - These concerns were shrewdly exploited by Harper
- » As Harper began to rise, Trudeau began to sink
- » Trudeau's Liberals went from 12-point lead to third place in three-way contest
- » Contrary positions on C-51 were linked to NDP rise and Liberal decline, particularly with university educated
- » Notably, the NDP rise predates the Notley effect, which amplified it

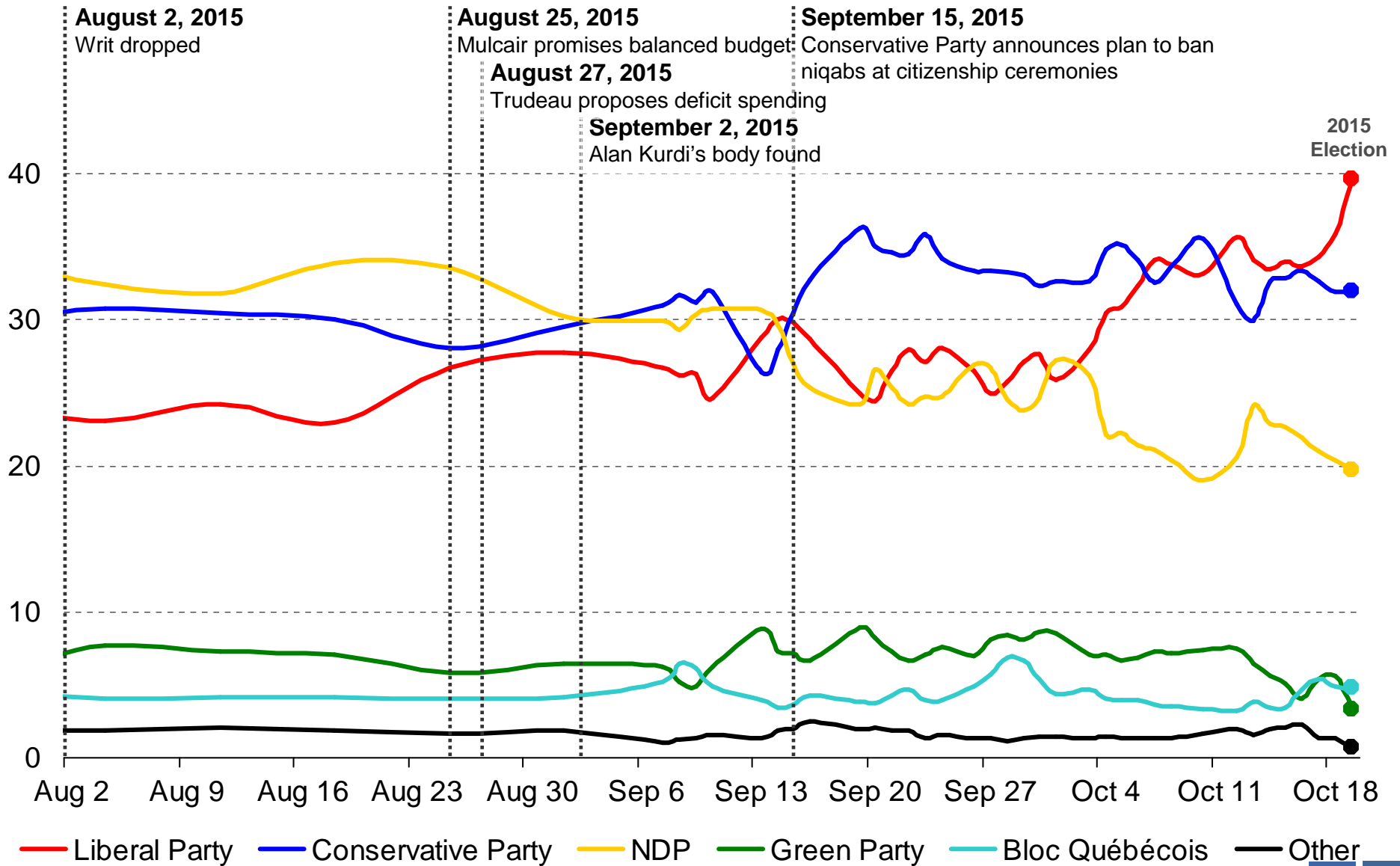


# Act IV: Coming to public judgement

- » At the outset of the 42<sup>nd</sup> election campaign, NDP in 1<sup>st</sup>, Conservatives 2<sup>nd</sup>, Liberals 3<sup>rd</sup>
- » Two critical events altered the course of the election:
  1. Mulcair committed to balanced budget, Trudeau took vividly different position
  2. The image of the drowned Syrian child ignited a broader contest about values; temporary boost to Harper, but advantage shifted as Canadians reflected on which values should define Canada in the future
- » An important election about the economy morphed into an historical election about values



# Act IV: Coming to public judgement



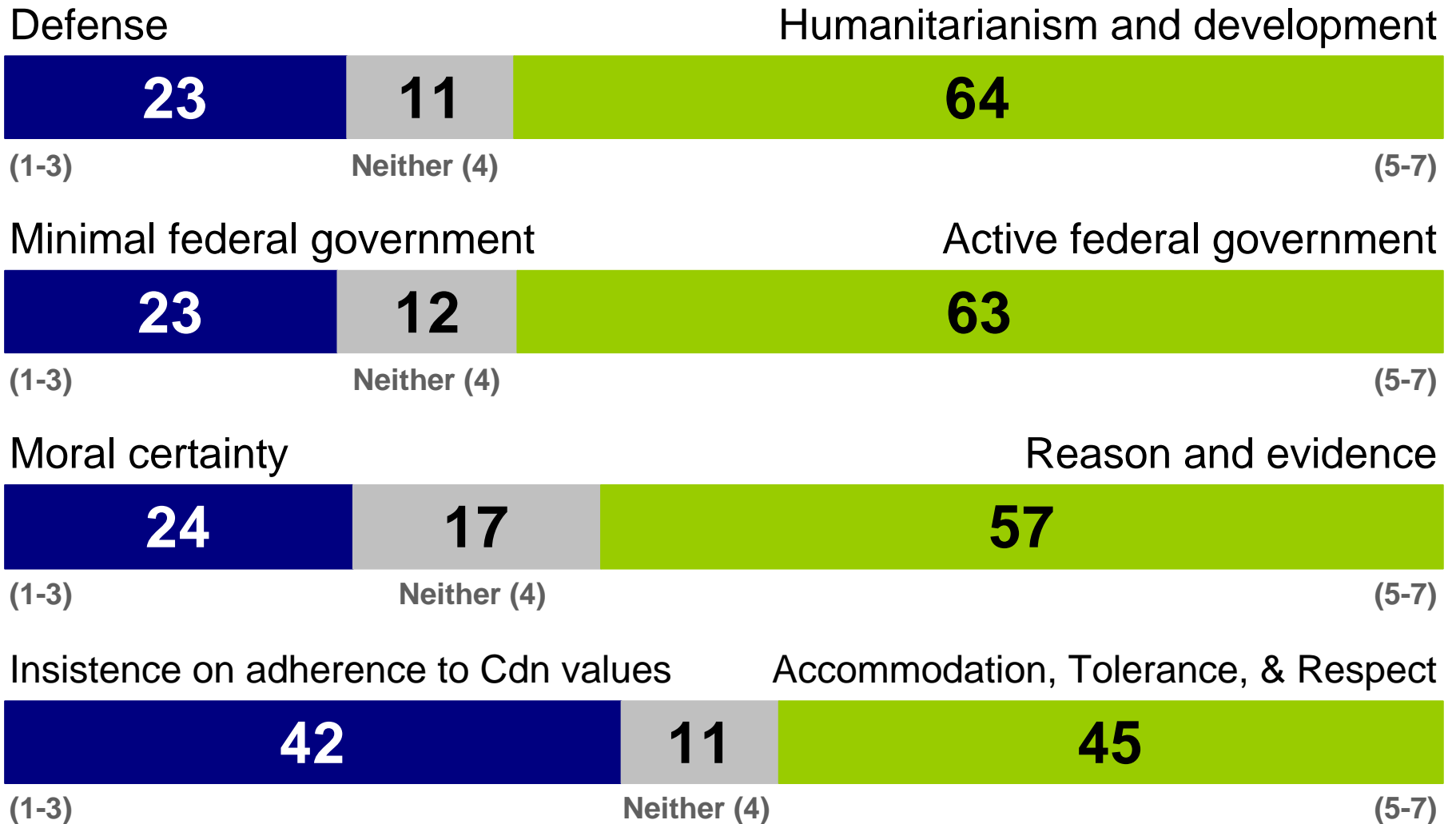
# Meaning of the 2015 Election

- » Harper enjoyed high ground on niqab, but inferior position on the broader values contest
- » Election reflects public judgement rooted in the growing normative tension between Harper and dominant societal values
- » Also reflects rising discomfort with the withering of middle class progress and a rejection of minimal government, austerity, and trickle-down economics



# Preferred vision for Canada

Q. Which of the following choices best describes your ideal vision of Canada?



# Other factors

- » Engagement very high, which bolstered turnout
  - Turnout advantage of 2011 was erased for the Conservatives
- » 2011 was about inertia, this election was about motion
  - Major shifts throughout the campaign which continued to final days
- » Final shifts reflected a public judgement that Justin Trudeau represented best bet for achieving **two** dominant objectives:
  1. To retire Mr. Harper
  2. To install a clearly progressive government



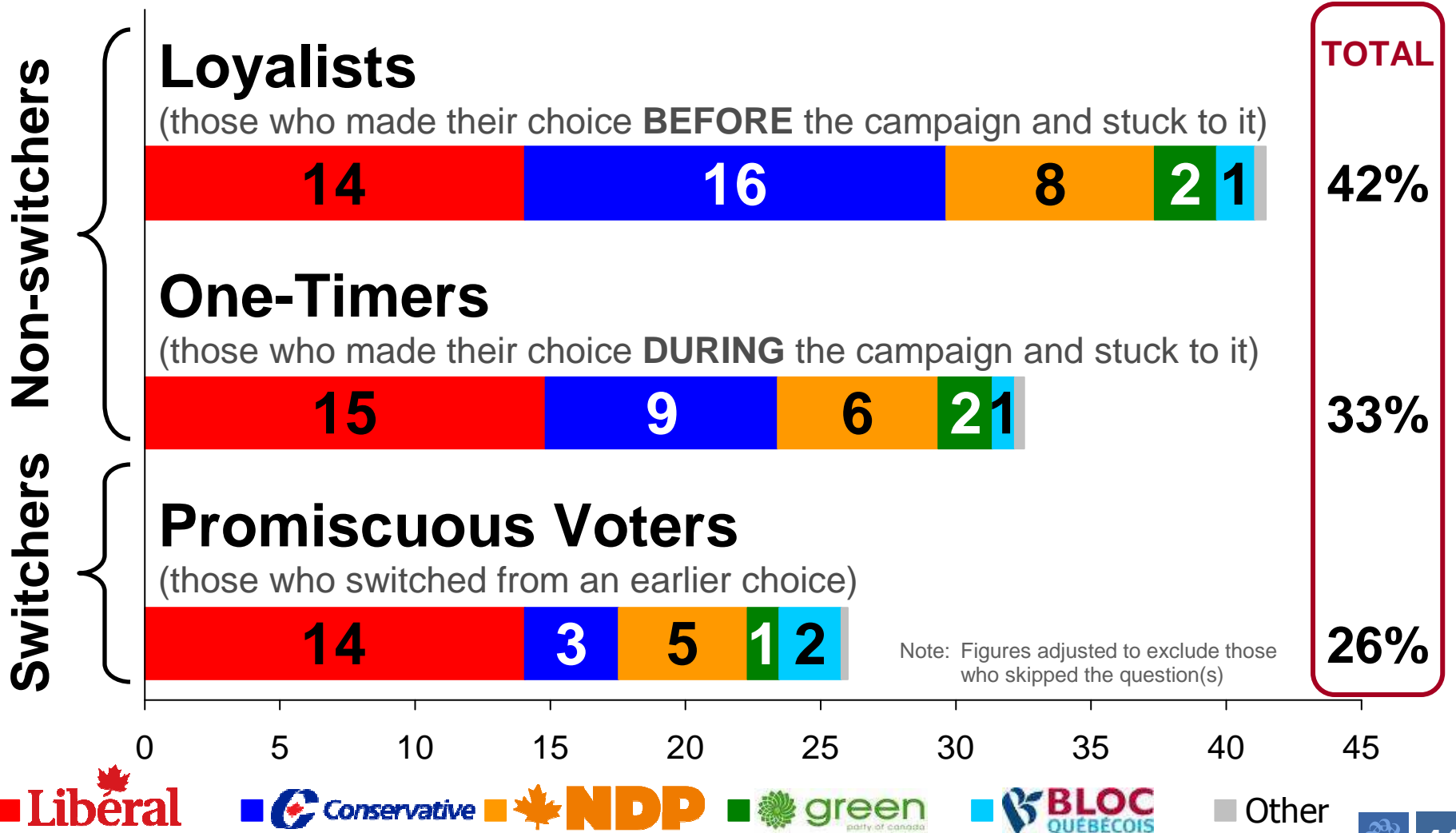
# Critical ingredients of the late majority

- » Quebec
- » Younger voters and cellphone-only households
- » Seniors' defection from Conservatives
- » New Canadians
- » University educated
- » Liberal ground game
- » The polls



# Three-way division of voters

Q. Did you vote in the most recent federal election, either in an advance poll or on Election Day on Monday, October 19th?  
 [If Yes] How did you vote in this election?



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# Impact of final Liberal surge

Q. Thinking about the upcoming federal election on October 19th, have you already voted either at an advance poll or by special ballot?

[If Yes] How did you vote in this election?

[If No] How do you plan to vote in the upcoming federal election on October 19th?

## 3-day roll-up



BASE: Canadians; October 16-18, 2015, n=2,122, MOE +/- 2.1%, 19 times out of 20

## 2-day roll-up



BASE: Canadians; October 17-18, 2015, n=1,260, MOE +/- 2.8%, 19 times out of 20

## 2015 Election Results



■ Liberal Party ■ Conservative Party ■ NDP ■ Green Party ■ Bloc Québécois ■ Other



# Impact of interview mode (final 2-day roll-up)

Q. Thinking about the upcoming federal election on October 19th, have you already voted either at an advance poll or by special ballot?

[If Yes] How did you vote in this election?

[If No] How do you plan to vote in the upcoming federal election on October 19th?

## HD-IVR™



n=896, MOE +/- 3.3%, 19 times out of 20

## Live CATI



n=364, MOE +/- 5.1%, 19 times out of 20

## Merged



n=1,260, MOE +/- 2.8%, 19 times out of 20

■ Liberal Party  
 ■ Conservative Party  
 ■ NDP  
 ■ Green Party  
 ■ Bloc Québécois  
 ■ Other

*Note: Figures adjusted to exclude undecided voters, those not eligible to vote, and those who skipped the question.*

# Impact of ballot question

## Version 1

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



n=589, MOE +/- 4.0%, 19 times out of 20

## Version 2

Q. *If a federal election were held tomorrow, please tell me what your first and second preferences would be in your riding.*



n=639, MOE +/- 3.9%, 19 times out of 20

■ Liberal Party ■ Conservative Party ■ NDP ■ Green Party ■ Bloc Québécois ■ Other

*Note: Figures adjusted to exclude undecided voters, those not eligible to vote, and those who skipped the question.*

# Impact of cellphones

- » In 2011, sampling CPO increased our prediction error
- » In 2015, omitting CPO would have produced an even more significant error
- » If we had had a larger sample of CPOs, we would have been somewhat closer



## Overall



## Cellphone-only households



## Households w/ both a cellphone & landline



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# Likely voter models

- » The idea that there is some kind of likely voter model that will work consistently across elections is something of a chimera; there is no unified theory of voter turnout
- » The need for likely voter diminishes as turnout increases
- » The dynamics of turnout were dramatically different in this election than in last election and this problem will afflict any turnout models



# Seat projections

- » EKOS most accurate of all main seat projections
- » Discrepancies are almost entirely due to highly unusual late shift

Party	EKOS Projection (October 19, 2015)	2015 Election Results
 Liberal	151	184
 Conservative	116	99
 NDP	54	44
 BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS	16	10
 green party of canada	1	1

**Correct: 276**

**Incorrect: 62**

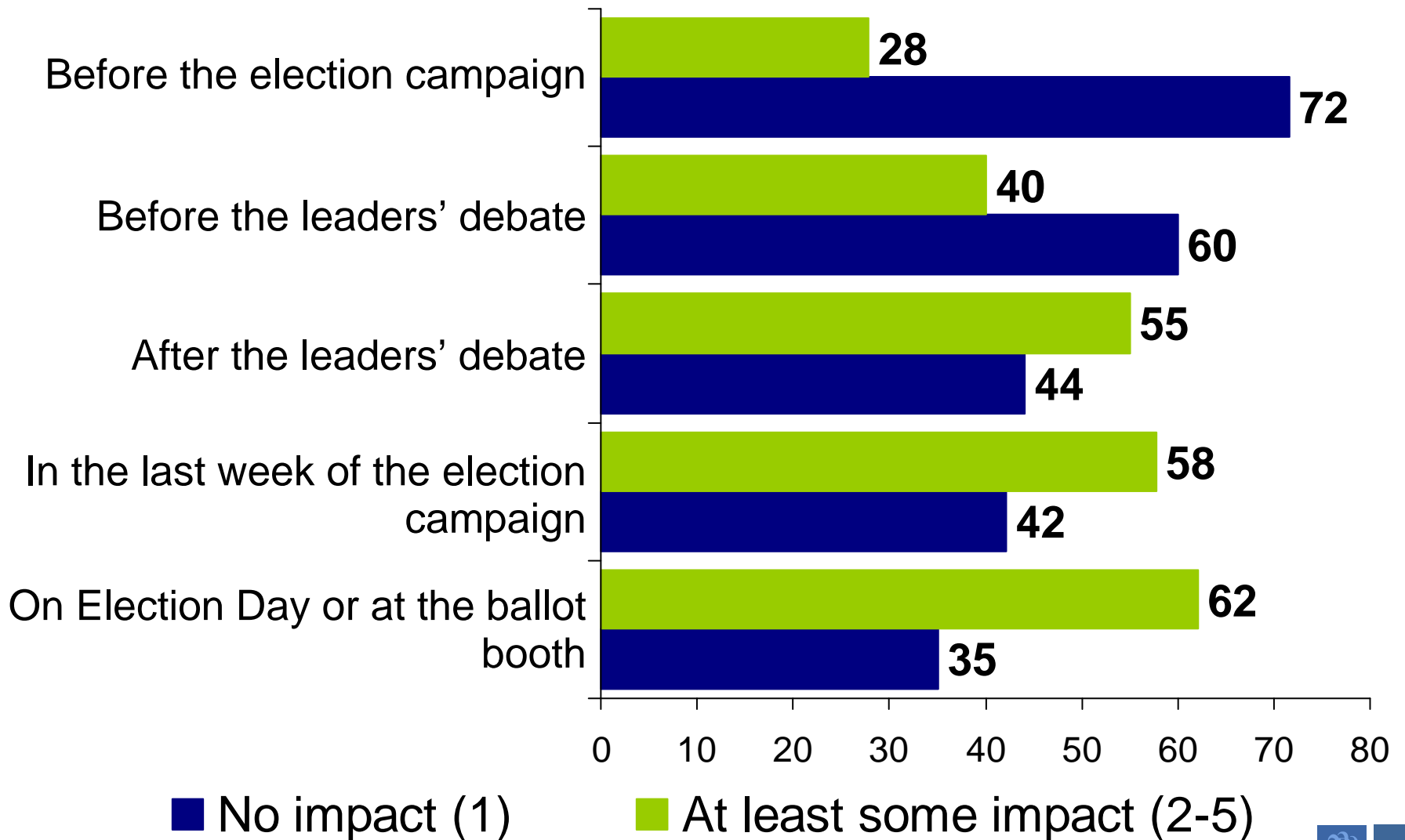
**Accuracy = 82%**

# Conclusions (i)

- » In some respects, capturing the election result is less important than accurately revealing the state of voter intention earlier
- » The real impact of polls reported the night before the election is probably modest (and we'll know the right answer less than 24 hours later)
- » As the polls *did* influence late shifting, it's actually more important to be providing voters with valid data in the final stages rather than what's going to happen on Election Day
- » For the first time, we see clear evidence of the polls at a macro level influencing voter behaviour

# Impact of political polls

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





## Conclusions (ii)

- » This means there is a co-agency and slippage across subject matter and the process of scientific observation
- » If polling is to be instrumental in shaping voter behaviour, it is critical that voters have access to reliable and valid estimates in the final *stages*, not just the final *day*
- » We would posit that the campaign did not begin in a tie, that the Conservatives clearly led for a considerable period, and that the majority was only clear in the final weekend

# New yardsticks for polling?

- » A fairer yardstick would include nearness of one's final poll to the election, but also other factors:
  - Did the polling show the major shifts in the electorate over the campaign and why they occurred?
  - Did the polling accurately identify the forces at work and the range of options that might occur on Election Day?
  - How accurate was the late (but not final) polling?
  - What is the level of transparency and disclosure?
  - What are the quality of the indicators used to diagnose and track the election?
  - What was the total number of observations drawn to allow more accurate estimates of the above?
  - Did the polls use accepted methods for achieving scientific accuracy?<sup>1</sup>
  - Did the pollsters conduct an immediate post-election survey to assess what happened?

1. American Association for Public Opinion Research, “*Report of the AAPOR Task Force on Non-Probability Sampling*”, June 2013. Available online at: <https://goo.gl/VHHyPy>



## For more information:

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