



# Understanding the Manitoba Election

Campaigns, Participation, Issues, Place



**2016**

Edited by Karine Levasseur, Andrea Rounce, Barry Ferguson, and Royce Koop

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This project could not have proceeded without our twenty-seven contributors. Their stories provide much needed insight as to how and why this election matters. Their work reveals the complexities of elections in Manitoba and is a testament to the breadth and depth of the political science community in this province. Barry Ferguson thanks the Duff Roblin Foundation for its support of the Duff Roblin Chair in Government and the projects the chair pursues. All four editors are faculty members in the Department of Political Studies at the University of Manitoba, and have benefitted from an intellectual environment that is deeply conducive to both exploring and developing new knowledge regarding Manitoba politics and government. As editors, we extend a sincere thank you to UMP, our contributors, and our department for sharing these salient insights in this new, exciting format. We hope that you, our readers, enjoy these insights.

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# Introduction: Blue Manitoba 2016

*Andrea Rounce and Karine Levasseur*

For election observers, the key question going into the 2016 Manitoba election was how badly the New Democratic Party (NDP) would lose. The NDP was displaced after nearly seventeen years of majority rule in favour of the Progressive Conservative (PC) Party. The PCs won forty of fifty-seven seats in the Manitoba Legislative Assembly, which amounts to a historic and commanding win. In fact, this win provides the PCs and their leader, Brian Pallister, with the highest number of seats ever won in a Manitoba election. The NDP was reduced from thirty-five to just fourteen seats and will now form the Official Opposition, but without leader Greg Selinger, who resigned his position on election night.

From the outset, this election was clearly a referendum on the leadership provided by Greg Selinger and his NDP government. The downfall of the NDP was not entirely unexpected given their decision to forgo the referendum requirement and increase the provincial sales tax (PST) in April 2013, despite making promises not to do so. Even before instituting that tax increase, public opinion polls showed declining support for the NDP and for Selinger himself—the most unpopular of all Canadian premiers. This decline in popularity sparked a deep leadership crisis within the NDP, with five senior cabinet ministers (the “Rebel Five”) publicly resigning their positions due to Selinger’s allegedly

unilateral leadership approach. In response to these resignations, Selinger called a leadership convention (held 8 March 2015) where he narrowly retained his position as leader by just 51 percent on the second ballot over rival Theresa Oswald. After his narrow victory the NDP continued to sag in polls and, in the end, Selinger followed in the footsteps of Stephen Harper, where the incumbent First Minister is displaced—something not often seen in politics. As a referendum on leadership and change the election might have been exciting, characterized by competing visions for the province and heartfelt public policy discussions designed to capture the electorate’s imagination. This simply did not occur. To be sure, there were some clear policy statements made from the main political parties, such as the PC pledge to lower the controversial PST from 8 percent to 7 percent. There were also some high-profile candidates in key ridings who helped change the discussion at the local level. However, most policy statements were vague, particularly as Brian Pallister adopted a “play-it-safe frontrunner approach” that was big on goals but short on specifics. The election left many Manitobans uninspired about their political choices. Indeed, Probe Research polling done a week before the election found that Manitobans did not generally trust any of the party leaders. For many, the question going into the ballot box was

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not “which leader will do the best job as premier,” but “which leader can be tolerated.”

Despite this significant change, there is a strange feeling of familiarity. This election reinforced Manitoba’s continued oscillation between the NDP and PCs as the only real contenders to form government. In the early days of the election, the Liberal Party led by Rana Bokhari generated some much-needed excitement in the campaign. However, several missteps, including miscommunication with reporters and the disqualification of potential candidates, squandered opportunities for the Liberal Party to build public support for the federal Liberals, expand their base, and break the cycle of electoral competition between the two historically dominant parties.

Although the Liberal Party increased its number of seats from one to three, Bokhari did not win and the Liberals will not have official party status in the Legislative Assembly. While increasingly active in Manitoba elections, the Green Party came close to victory only in the inner-city Wolseley riding.

Every election is an important opportunity for citizens to choose the direction they want their government to take, including what issues and concerns they want the next government to address. Even when the outcome seems to be set in advance of election day, candidates, volunteers, political parties, elections workers, and citizens work together to support the democratic process. The

2016 Manitoba election is no different than others in that respect, but it also provides us with an opportunity to consider all the moving parts of an election and what the outcomes mean for us as Manitobans.

This e-book brings together twenty-seven contributors with different perspectives on how the election played out. Academics, journalists, pollsters, and elections officials offer their views on key components of the election: how the campaign was fought and ultimately won (by the parties and the organizations that handle the logistics); who participated in the election (comparing it with previous Manitoba and federal elections); key issues facing Manitobans; the election by region; and a look at Manitoba from outside the province. Understanding this pivotal election helps us all to better understand a critical part of democracy in Manitoba.

# The NDP and Election 2016

Rory Henry

The day after the 2016 provincial election, two views emerged from defeated NDP MLAs on the cause of the historic swing of seats. In the first view, nothing could be done in the face of the public's desire for change after years of NDP government; in the second, Premier Selinger's overwhelming unpopularity meant otherwise popular local candidates were dragged down at the ballot box. Throw in a party at odds with itself after a very public split over leadership and what could possibly have been done to avoid defeat?

All three of these factors were known far in advance of dropping the writ. Apart from the unsuccessful attempts to remove Selinger or to address his unpopularity and the desire for change in one fell swoop, why was little else done to prevent the NDP from fighting a referendum on Selinger's popularity or "time for a change?"

Like or loathe the techniques of modern campaigning, they are used for clear reasons. Voters are increasingly distracted by daily life, with little time for politics. Media influence on voting intention has decreased significantly in recent years as many people have stopped following local news. A decline in media impact changes how parties shape and promote policy. Paid media (advertising) grows increasingly diffuse. Twenty years ago, central advertising would reach most households, but that is a distant memory.

People are unwilling to answer their phones to talk to local campaigns. Volunteers who go door to door, by far the best means of reaching voters, are a dying breed. Even paid canvassers are difficult to find. Limited by how much money can be raised, and how much parties can spend under financing rules, techniques have evolved to address these issues. The most obvious ones are to embody the image and message of a party in its leader (who will receive the most coverage by far), and to simplify the message so that it can penetrate the public consciousness in the few moments that are permitted.

The NDP came from behind to win the previous election in part as a result of the use of these techniques. In 2011 the NDP was tied on decided voters, and behind after undecided voters were allocated to the three parties based on other indicators. These indicators made it clear a well-run campaign that targeted specific issues would result in undecideds shifting to the NDP. Heading into 2016, many NDP members simply assumed that the party would once again come from behind to win with the same strategies. Party research, however, revealed that Selinger's negatives were an impassable obstacle to such a strategy. Selinger's unpopularity meant the party leader could not be used to engage the public in a conversation about choices and change. Under

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these circumstances, the party faced a likely seat count of ten to twelve seats.

NDP organizers and strategists brought this information to Selinger and suggested various ways that he could adjust his approach. Two years of discussions eventually boiled down to a choice of running a highly challenging campaign with Selinger as leader, or a more viable campaign with someone else at the head of the party.

Selinger was unsettled by these discussions and by the discovery that an overwhelming majority of his own staff and party strategists believed he should step down. As a result, electoral planning ground to a halt. The Operations Committee (which should have been fully operational two years out from the election) was not struck, nor was anyone appointed to the position of campaign director. Selinger refused to commit to a campaign strategy that would target winning viable seats while writing off ones that could not be held under current circumstances.

Lacking the benefits of advance planning, experienced personnel, and the ability to push a message through a leader, the campaign unfolded as predicted. Money was tight and campaigns starved of volunteers, creating huge gaps in identifying potential support. The advertising strategy was counterintuitive—it reinforced the idea that the election was a referendum on Selinger by spending significant

resources putting Selinger into the public's living rooms.

The central campaign team coordinating the election was keen and dedicated, but their lack of experience was noticeable. Painful but critical decisions to collapse losing local campaigns to save others were not made. Scarce resources and volunteers were spread far too thin and, in some cases, pooled in the wrong places. With no way to focus a message, policy announcements seemed scattered, with no central theme. Daily announcements could not break through the “Greg Out” mentality.

The saving grace for the NDP was the surprising self-destruction of the Liberal Party, which resulted in the NDP preserving enough seats to claim the Official Opposition role, and the advantages that will bring in the next campaign as a base of incumbent seats.

The NDP pulled itself out of this situation in 1988, and it can do so again. But it will find conditions far more challenging due to major shifts in how elections are run, funded, and communicated.



# The Manitoba Liberal Party

Allen Mills

The Manitoba Liberal Party (MLP) has not held power in the province since 1958. Initially, the Liberals slipped to second place in the popular vote and in seats under the provincial Progressive Conservative (PC) ascendancy between 1958 and 1969. After 1966, its competition in Winnipeg increasingly came from the New Democratic Party (NDP), especially after Ed Schreyer became leader in 1969. In the 1973 election, the MLP elected only five MLAs. That number declined to one in 1977 and to zero in 1981. If the NDP is the “natural governing party of Manitoba,” then this has been decidedly at the expense of the Liberals.

A period of unpopularity by the NDP made a Liberal revival possible. Seizing on disenchantment with the NDP, Sharon Carstairs led the Liberals to Official Opposition status in 1988, winning twenty seats. But their success did not hold and by 1999 it elected only two MLAs. The Liberals languished thereafter. Some even predicted the final demise of the party.

Drawing impetus and resources, especially patronage, from the national section of the party, the MLP has hung on. The year 2013 was auspicious. In April, Justin Trudeau was elected leader of the federal Liberals. He promised the prospect of refurbishing the Liberal “brand” in the province. Throughout the summer there took place an energetic

campaign for the leadership of the MLP. At the convention in October 2013 Rana Bokhari, a lawyer, was victorious.

And so the MLP was in an advantageous position approaching the election of April 2016. By then, the federal party had achieved stellar success in Winnipeg during the federal election, the NDP had been further weakened by the rebellion of the “Gang of Five,” and the PCs were led by someone who was not altogether popular. In opinion polls, the MLP was registering levels of support in the mid-twenty percent range, with even higher levels in Winnipeg.

The election campaign brought low the heady prospects the party entertained. The leader, Rana Bokhari, was relatively inexperienced. In the context of Manitoba’s conservative political culture her image as a young woman of colour was a daring one. Her campaign sought to offer meaningful change and a new generation of leadership, and the promise of “transparency” in government was a consistent theme. But again the chronic weakness of the party, especially in the limited amount of money it had available, proved its undoing. Its policies were for the most part well-conceived and, in some cases, imaginative, arguing for a guaranteed annual income, proportional representation, and allocating 10 percent of seats in the Legislature to Indigenous

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peoples. It presented itself as a centrist manager of the economy, more generous than the PCs and more transparent than the NDP. But some of its more eccentric proposals were open to criticism, especially those to do with privatizing the Liquor Commission, building a grocery store in downtown Winnipeg, and removing the PST from haircuts over \$50.

Accidents and oversights haunted its campaign. The party failed to nominate candidates in six ridings, two candidates were dismissed for personal inadequacies, there were charges that its financial proposals had not been properly costed out, and the party's candidate in Brandon West somehow took it on himself to recommend the closing of hospitals.

The MLP tripled its number of elected candidates to three, in River Heights, Burrows, and Kewatinook. Overall, its share of the popular vote went from 7.53 percent to 14.04 percent. Its candidates came second in twelve other ridings but only in three of these—Interlake, Logan, and Tyndall Park—were they within hailing distance of the eventual winner. But starting from such low levels of success in 2011 three victories and twelve second places hardly represent great success.

Regionally, the MLP's support varied. In the rural southeast its support was 10.72 percent and in the southwest, including Brandon, 6.51 percent. Its popularity was higher in Winnipeg where it registered 13.82 percent in the eastern part of the city, 18.63 percent in the southwest, and 18.4 percent in the northwest. In the

four ridings of northern Manitoba—Flin Flon, The Pas, Thompson, and Kewatinook—there was a bright spot with the party winning 24.19 percent support overall, though these ridings had chronically low turnout compared to the provincial average.

The election of 2016 establishes that there is not an automatic swing to the Liberals when the NDP falters. NDP supporters decamped more to the PCs than to the Liberals and some went to the Greens, too (but, of course, some did come back to the Liberals). In a time of diminished electoral partisanship, voter preferences are increasingly flexible. Prospects are not bright for the MLP. Its three successfully elected MLAs represent a story of exceptional local success in their ridings that denotes little in general about the electoral condition of the party. But it lives to fight another day.

# Riding the Blue Wave: Brian Pallister and the Progressive Conservative Victory

Kelly Saunders

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Manitoba's forty-first election was a massive triumph for the Progressive Conservative (PC) Party. With forty seats and 53 percent of the popular vote, the PC win ended the New Democratic Party (NDP) reign that lasted an incredible sixteen and a half years.

With the PCs entering the race as the clear front-runner (enjoying a twenty point lead over the NDP) Pallister's decision to kick off the campaign in the heart of St. Boniface—the riding of Premier Greg Selinger—made it clear that this election was going to be framed as a referendum on the beleaguered NDP leader. The PCs' central campaign theme of “broken trust, broken government” was unequivocal in its message to voters. Not only had Greg Selinger broken his promise to Manitobans by raising the provincial sales tax (PST) by 1 percent after saying that he would not raise it and then refusing to put the issue to a public referendum (as demanded by legislation at the time), but this decision was symbolic of the many ways in which the NDP government was broken. As the voiceover for one PC ad intoned, against the backdrop of press conference footage of the “Gang of Five” cabinet ministers that had revolted against the premier, “if even the NDP can't trust Greg Selinger, how can Manitobans?”

Conservatives reminded voters that the NDP had already misled

Manitobans once and could not be trusted again. They also proposed a cautious policy platform purposefully designed to keep voter expectations low. They offered little in the way of new promises that they felt they wouldn't be able to fully deliver on and provided few details on the ideas that were announced. Their central campaign promise, a commitment to roll back the PST by 1 percent, was a case in point. Less important was the actual content of this promise—polls showed that most Manitobans were okay with leaving the tax where it was—than the opportunity it presented to constantly remind voters of how the NDP had lied about raising the PST in the first place. The intended meaning was clear: in contrast to the NDP, voters could trust the PCs to deliver responsible government.

While the PC platform was not particularly awe-inspiring, it didn't need to be. Attempts by the NDP to paint Pallister as a homophobic, out-of-touch elitist that would put funding for things like cancer drugs at risk failed to put a dent in the polling numbers. On the face of it the attacks on Pallister should have been able to garner more traction for the NDP. Although he is a veteran politician, Manitobans seemed unsure of the PC leader who was known for putting his foot in his mouth at times. Indeed, opinion polls showed that Pallister lagged behind that of his party in

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popular support, with only a third of Manitobans saying they trusted the would-be premier. Despite apparent missteps—his statement that there would be no “sacred cows” in terms of possible funding cuts, a proposed cap on infrastructure spending, and the surfacing of misleading comments made to the press in 2014 regarding his whereabouts during the Manitoba floods—Pallister managed to avoid any serious controversy.

Underpinning the effectiveness of the PCs’ trust message was an efficient and well-organized ground game. The PCs arguably ran their best campaign ever, under the deft guidance of campaign manager David McLaughlin. Despite their front-runner status, the party did not take a win for granted, as they seemingly had done in the 2011 election. Since their last campaign the PCs had clearly done some heavy lifting in terms of building up their constituency organizations, raising funds, and rallying support around their leader. This was quite an achievement for a party that, in the words of one long-time supporter, has a history of “eating our own.” The PCs were the first party to have nominated candidates in place in all fifty-seven constituencies (including a record number of women candidates) that all stayed on message. The well-executed PC campaign stood in stark contrast to that of the Liberals, which seemed to veer from one blunder to another. For an electorate looking for change from the incumbent NDP, the Liberals posed little real threat to Brian Pallister and the PC Party.

Ultimately, the 2016 provincial election was about trust in leadership. While Manitobans were ambivalent about Brian Pallister, they were clear on their feelings towards NDP leader Greg Selinger (and increasingly, as the campaign wore on, towards Liberal leader Rana Bokhari). The PC message of “broken trust, broken government,” coupled with a smart and efficient campaign, resonated with voters because it tapped into the visceral emotions that many Manitobans felt towards their incumbent premier. With few tools to effectively counter this message, there was little the NDP could do to hold back the blue wave of change that would sweep across the province.

# The Rise of “Third Parties” in Manitoba Elections?

*Karine Levasseur*

If elections are about the expression of what society needs, then Manitoba is witnessing a rise in this expression from third parties, notably, I argue, from non-profit organizations, which includes registered charities. Third parties are diverse and can include any entity that is not a political party, candidate, or constituency association. Prime examples include unions, professional/business associations, and non-profits. Third parties do not compete in elections directly, but attempt to influence elections either in a non-partisan (e.g., focusing on a specific issue or cause) or partisan manner (e.g., providing directives to voters).

True to form, the 2016 election saw its share of “usual suspects” as far as third parties. The Manitoba Teachers’ Society, which represents 15,000 educators, launched TV, billboard, and online advertisements. The Manitoba Government and General Employees’ Union (MGEU), which represents 40,000 provincial government employees, launched a campaign with the slogan “Cutting is easy.”

What is new about this provincial election is the significant non-partisan involvement of non-profits to advance certain causes. A few examples of campaigns were led by the Right to Housing Coalition, Manitoba Association for Rights and Liberties, Make Poverty History (Manitoba), Canadian CED Network, and the

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society.

Perhaps one of the most successful campaigns launched by non-profits is the Disability Matters: Vote (DMV) 2016. Formed as a non-partisan partnership between Abilities Manitoba and Barrier Free Manitoba, this initiative included some seventy-seven partnering agencies and was designed to advance five disabilities issues in the election:

- full accessibility
- fair wages for staff working with persons with intellectual disabilities
- reduced wait times for services
- greater employment opportunities for persons with disabilities
- liveable incomes for persons with disabilities who face barriers to employment

DMV kicked off its campaign on 3 December 2015 at the Manitoba Legislature with over 1,600 supporters in attendance. It developed a series of tools to help spread the word including lawn signs, buttons, media reports, town hall meetings, and rallies. DMV also sponsored an all-candidate debate held in Winnipeg.

DMV distributed a series of questions to the four main political parties and secured position pieces from each party based on the five priorities. These position pieces were

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an important strategy for the DMV campaign because they culminated in political commitments. With the commitments made by the new PC government, this allows DMV to work with them to advance priority areas. Moreover, DMV also posed questions to individual candidates that went beyond asking questions about the party platform. Rather, these candidate-specific questions asked about personal and public policy views related to disability issues (e.g., “What do you see as being the greatest accessibility challenges within your constituency and what will you do to address these challenges?”). This approach required candidates to think about disability-related issues, and better positions DMV to work with individual candidates once elected.

What is also particularly impressive about the DMV campaign is its effective use of social media. DMV recruited a social media volunteer who astutely developed Twitter feeds, Facebook entries, and video rants similar to those popularized by comedian Rick Mercer to spread the word and create a sense of urgency about the group’s five priority areas. Another particularly insightful strategy was the identification of sixteen ridings where the vote between the first- and second-place candidate was less than 15 percent in the 2011 provincial election. DMV concentrated its efforts on these ridings—in a non-partisan manner—with constituency captains in place to advance the five priorities to all candidates and illustrate the support behind this initiative.

Non-profits, unlike many other third parties, generally lack the resources necessary to launch expensive campaigns. DMV, however, nicely illustrates that even modest investments into advocacy campaigns can and do matter. By seeking position pieces from all four parties on the priority areas, DMV now has a transparent foundation to hold the winning party—in this instance the Progressive Conservative Party—to account for its pledges.

The DMV 2016 campaign raises several questions about the role of third parties in the political process. For example: with the rise of more and more third parties seeking political commitments during elections, there is a need to assess to what degree, if any, this narrows the opportunity for an incoming government to set its own public policy agenda. Moreover, this election instituted new rules for third-party “advertisements” that were not in place in the 2011 provincial election. How effective were these rules in allowing third parties to advance their views, while simultaneously restraining them to ensure a fair election where no one voice dominates electoral discourse?

# Party Leaders and the Media: A Tale of Two (or Three?) Campaigns

Mary Agnes Welch

It was a small moment at the edge of a scrum, one of dozens Progressive Conservative leader Brian Pallister held with journalists during the 2016 campaign. Minutes earlier, Canadian Press reporter Chinta Puxley had asked Pallister about his plan to improve the province's troubled child welfare system. Pallister bristled, and refused to answer questions unrelated to that day's economic announcement. Pallister later doubled back to Puxley, apologizing for rejecting her question and offering an answer. As the scrum broke up, an emotional Pallister took Puxley aside to again beg pardon for his brusqueness, saying the funeral of an old friend that day had him upset.

It wasn't the aloof, occasionally testy Pallister most Manitobans, and most reporters, had come to know. Instead, it was a humble and open Pallister, one reporters saw more and more during a masterful campaign that humanized their leader just a little, built respectful relationships with reporters and was, from a public relations perspective, nearly flawless.

The ability to craft an effective media relations strategy and stick to it during the messiness of a campaign is vital. Depleted newsrooms mean there are far fewer experienced reporters able to dig beneath the daily spin, which gives that spin more power. Meanwhile, social media offers immediate and often eviscerating critiques of missteps, blowing them out of

proportion and making modern campaigns more about image than policy, more about discipline than depth. And, perhaps more than recent races, Manitoba's campaign focused almost exclusively on the three major leaders and their image—their trustworthiness, likability, and freshness.

Liberal leader Rana Bokhari, a young lawyer, tried to play up her freshness. However, we will remember the flubs instead. In scrums Bokhari was often ill-prepared, unable to offer basic facts about her policies, unable to account for the cost of promises, and missing entire years in her budget forecasts. She lost her chief of staff days before the writ was dropped. The party failed to run a full slate of candidates for the first time in nearly two decades. Bokhari's message was frequently derailed by poor candidate vetting.

Bokhari and Liberal communications director Mike Brown often responded aggressively to stories they didn't like, accusing reporters of political bias or sexism. After several stories critical of Bokhari's performance, Brown blacklisted *Winnipeg Free Press* reporter Nick Martin. In a testy, post-scrum exchange with the CBC's Chris Glover, Bokhari accused the media of unfairness. Brown had to intervene and pull Bokhari away. Later in the campaign, Brown sent an email to candidates accusing CBC Manitoba of "actively seeking out negative

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## Mary Agnes Welch

joined Probe Research in 2016. Before that, she spent fourteen years as an award-winning reporter at the *Winnipeg Free Press*, covering local politics and public policy. She is a graduate of Columbia University's Journalism School and she was a Southam Journalism Fellow at the University of Toronto's Massey College in 2012–13.

comments” about Bokhari. The email also went to most local reporters, a move Brown later said was deliberate. Ultimately, the media’s contempt for Bokhari and the Liberal campaign was palpable, in private and in the tone of coverage.

The NDP’s public relations strategy was fairly unremarkable: make the leader very accessible, cast him as the worried father figure, and keep the message focused on the damage Pallister would do if elected.

Meanwhile, relations were excellent among those covering the Tories. Fears of Harper-style media restrictions never materialized. Pallister almost never ducked scrums. When asked for comment, communications staff were generally quick and helpful. Candidates were accessible, as were a bevy of senior MLAs. Backroomers were reasonably chatty and insightful.

Behind the scenes, Progressive Conservatives say decisions about media strategy were made by consensus among several experienced communications staffers. On the front lines much of the daily media interaction was handled by “the Olivias”—Olivia Baldwin-Valainis, recently a senior aide to Heritage Minister Shelly Glover, and Olivia Billson, radio producer turned communications officer in Pallister’s office. If the advice given to Pallister was to be more human, he clearly listened. Though physically and verbally intense by nature, he toned himself down. He was respectful and controlled in debates, friendly and statesmanlike with reporters, warm and smiling with voters.

Granted, Pallister’s team had the easy job—play it safe and don’t blow the lead. And there was significant frustration among reporters with Pallister’s stubbornly vague promises. But even the party’s handling of the Costa Rica issue—revelations by CBC Manitoba that Pallister spent 20 percent of his time in Costa Rica and had been less than truthful about it—was a masterstroke. In a speedy press conference, Pallister apologized for misrepresenting his whereabouts during the 2014 flood and cast himself as a workaholic who struggled to balance his public role and his family’s privacy.

Now, we’ll see which Pallister dominates the next four years—the soft and fuzzy one who’s accessible and open, or the guarded autocrat. And we’ll watch to see whether the Liberals can learn some lessons from 2016 and rebuild their credibility among journalists and voters.



# Rules of the Game: The State of Manitoba Election Laws in 2016

*Richard Balasko*

In 2016, qualified Manitoba voters once again determined their political representation in accordance with the rule of law. The legal framework for elections in Manitoba establishes the “rules of the game” and the structure within which free and fair elections are conducted amidst intense partisan competition. Today’s election rules are more inclusive than ever and better restrict the disproportional impact of money in politics. In recent years both the Elections Act and the Election Financing Act have been completely rewritten in plain language and reorganized for easy reference so that these rules are more accessible.

The legal framework for elections provides Manitobans with exceptional access to voting. Regular advance voting in Manitoba has grown to eight days (compared to four days federally) and, unlike in federal elections, Manitoba voters may vote at any advance location in the province, including such high-traffic locations as shopping malls, universities and colleges, and the Winnipeg airport. Manitobans seem to appreciate these opportunities and, in 2016, 40 percent more people voted in the advance polls than in 2011. On election day, regular polling hours are now extended from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Other voters access the system through more tailored provisions such as homebound and absentee voting. Additional accessibility options are in

place for voters with disabilities. Yet, only 58.9 percent of registered voters voted in 2016—not much different from 2011. Further, in 2016, more than nine times as many voters as in 2011 “declined” their ballot, choosing not to vote for any of the candidates. Going forward, the anticipated permanent register of voters may further ensure voter accessibility to the process, but the concerning issue of voter engagement goes well beyond the “rules of the game.”

The 1980 proclamation of the Elections Finances Act levelled the financial playing field by introducing advertising spending limits, a tax credit system for contributions, and enhanced provisions for financial disclosure. Building upon that base, candidates and political parties in 2016 now work within broader disclosure, comprehensive spending limits, and contribution limits under which only individuals normally residing in Manitoba may contribute. Looking ahead, technology may enhance timely disclosure through real-time reporting.

Third-party election communication spending is an area of the law worthy of further attention, particularly since the advent of set date elections, which have impacted other election financing regulations. For example, restrictions on government advertising have been extended to include ninety days before the set date.

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**Richard Balasko** was the Manitoba Chief Electoral Officer from 1990 to 2010. He also served as the Electoral Boundaries Redistribution Commissioner twice. His previous service includes Elections Canada, Royal Commission on Electoral Reform, and numerous international missions. He is the co-editor of *The Informed Citizens’ Guide to Elections: Electioneering Based on the Rule of Law* (Carswell, 2015).

Political parties (including constituency associations) and candidates now face an annual limit on advertising expenses in the year of a set-date election. These limits include where an expense is incurred by an individual on behalf of a party or candidate and with knowledge and consent. However, in 2016, third parties do not have any spending limitations prior to the formal commencement of the election period. This may put political parties and candidates at a disadvantage. The legality of reasonable limits on third-party election communication expenses in the months leading up to the issue of writs for a set-date election should be explored.

So, how did the legal framework evolve in Manitoba to accomplish such broad and important gains? For the most part, since at least the 1990s, changes to the rules followed a process that rested upon broad consultation and often consensus among all registered political parties and recommendations made in public reports of the Chief Electoral Officer. Over this period, both Progressive Conservative (PC) and New Democratic Party (NDP) governments undertook major changes in a similar consultative and inclusive process.

However, political parties have their own perspectives and priorities when it comes to the rules of the game and sometimes these views are at odds. For example, when the separate limit on election advertising expenses was first introduced by an NDP government, that amendment was later repealed by a PC government and then reintroduced following an

NDP return to power. This particular story may not be over yet. A further example is PC opposition to annual subsidies paid to political parties as established by the NDP. However, when considering electoral reform in Manitoba over recent decades, such stark divergence is not the norm.

Given a change in government, further revisions to the rules of the game should be expected—particularly in the area of election finances. Public pronouncements indicate that the annual political party subsidy is certainly gone. Individual contribution limits may increase and third-party advertising regulations may be reviewed.

While the regulations that underpin elections in Manitoba are not perfect and will continue to evolve, the overall regime as it exists in 2016 is robust and exemplary, in no small part because of the conventional process by which the rules of the game are changed. When amending such rules, process matters as well as content. It is encouraging that Premier-designate Pallister reportedly has indicated that any changes would follow consultation with other political parties. Regard for consultation, and consensus where possible, should remain important when revising Manitoba election laws.

# Pollsters and the 2016 Manitoba Election: A Flurry of Activity

*Christopher Adams*

Pollsters have had a mixed record in recent provincial elections. They were off the mark in the 2012 Alberta and 2013 BC provincial elections, but accurate in the 2014 Quebec, 2015 Alberta, and 2016 Saskatchewan elections. An extraordinary number of polls were conducted during the 2016 Manitoba election, possibly due to a widespread sense that there would be a change of government, as well as the reduced costs of deploying Interactive Voice Response (IVR) and online methodologies rather than more costly telephone interviews. In the 2016 Manitoba election all three methods were used.

Three firms released polling data prior to the election. Probe Research provided quarterly results regarding party preferences. Using random samples of 1,000 telephone interviews, from 2012 to the end of 2015, Probe showed New Democratic Party (NDP) support dropping from over 40 percent to 22 percent, while during the same period the Progressive Conservatives (PCs) hovered mostly in the low to mid-40s. In the meantime, the Liberal Party (LP) surged from 10 percent in 2012 to 29 percent.

Saskatchewan-based Insightrix Research conducted two polls (7 February 2014 and 22 December 2015). Its first poll used telephone interviews and pegged the PCs at 49 percent, the NDP at 24 percent, and LP at 18 percent. Its December 2015

online poll had the PCs at 39 percent, NDP at 19 percent, and the LP at 36 percent. The high LP support might have been linked to the ongoing honeymoon between voters and Justin Trudeau's federal Liberals.

During this same period, Mainstreet Research released one IVR poll (3 November 2014) and revealed the PCs at 53 percent, a figure higher than any other poll conducted in this period, the NDP at 27 percent, and the LP at 20 percent.

From 1 January to 16 March 2016, six polls were released, with five of these conducted by Mainstreet Research for Postmedia. Using IVR, their sample sizes regularly exceeded 1,500. Forum Research was the only other firm to release a poll during this pre-election phase. Based on a sample of 930 using IVR, Forum's results showed that the PCs at 46 percent with the NDP trailing at 22 percent and the LP at 23 percent.

During the formal election period, by my count twelve polls were released from 15 March to 18 April, many of which used IVR. Mainstreet's final IVR poll, completed on 14 April, was based on 1,809 interviews and showed the PCs at 55 percent to the NDP at 26 percent. Forum's only election poll, completed on 17 April, showed the PCs leading at 52 percent with the NDP at 21 percent. Insight Manitoba released results using IVR for two polls, one of which was based

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on a whopping 4,592 interviews released on 4 April, and another on 18 April based on 2,148 interviews. Contrary to industry standards when providing results to the media, this firm reported their results without excluding undecided voters; with both polls pegging the PCs at 42 percent.

Three online polls were released during the election, one by Insightrix with 600 online surveys collected up to 18 April, and two by Insights West with respective samples of 505 and 518, with respective final fielding dates being 7 April and 18 April. The PCs were at 49 percent in their first poll and at 53 percent in the second poll.

Only two polls were conducted during the election campaign using traditional telephone interviewing methods. Probe Research completed its regular quarterly 1,000 interview survey showing the PCs leading at 46 percent to the NDP's 28 percent. Insightrix completed a telephone survey with 800 respondents, revealing the PCs at 49 percent to the NDP's 24 percent.

Were the polls accurate? The results provided by each firm just prior to the 19 April election date are provided in the accompanying table. The second column on the left provides the final date in which a survey was conducted, with the third column providing the methodology and number of respondents. While there are variations in accuracy, perhaps due to some results being more distant than others from the day of voting, every firm revealed that the PCs were leading by a large margin, with the NDP placing second and ahead of the flagging LP. Four firms were within two points of correctly assessing the PCs' final support while Insights West, using an online methodology with a relatively small sample, was the most accurate, predicting a 53 percent vote share for the party.

Campaigns matter, yet polls done prior to 2015 showed that a change in government in 2016 was highly likely. The PCs compounded the NDP's problems by running a good campaign with few mistakes. Meanwhile, the polls captured the unravelling of the LP campaign as it dropped in popularity.

### Manitoba Election Polls, 2016

Polling Firm and Media Outlet	Fielding Dates	Method and Sample Sizes (N)	PC %	NDP %	LP %	GP %
<b>Actual Vote</b>	<b>April 19</b>	<b>Vote</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>5</b>
Insights West	April 18	N = 518 online	53	28	10	7
Insight Manitoba*	April 18	N = 2,148 IVR	47	27	12	11
Insightrix	April 18	N = 600 Online	49	22	19	9
Forum Research	April 17	N = 1083 IVR	52	21	18	9
Mainstreet Research	April 14	N = 1809 IVR	55	26	11	9
Probe Research	April 4	N = 1,000 Telephone	46	28	20	6

\*Figures adjusted by author to remove responses of "do not know."

# Nominations and Candidates in the 2016 Manitoba Elections

Royce Koop

Party leaders play a special role in election campaigns. Nevertheless, campaigning is a team sport, with the two most important roles occupied by leaders and the party's candidates in the ridings. The relationship between leaders and candidates is one of interdependence: although they speak to distinct audiences and function largely independently from one another during election campaigns, both leaders and candidates benefit from one another's strengths and suffer from one another's missteps.

Campaigning as a team sport occurs in two stages: the nomination stage and the campaign stage.

The team is formed at the nomination stage. Party leaders cannot always choose the players they want. This is because in Manitoba's parties, as in Canada's, the right to select candidates rests with local party members who do so in nomination contests organized by their constituency associations. Party leaders may interfere in these contests—from exercising influence to disallowing candidates or “parachuting” in favourites—but they do so at the risk of generating negative media coverage and alienating local party volunteers.

The campaign stage is where the team must work cohesively to win. For the leader, this means conducting an effective provincial campaign focused largely on provincial issues. For candidates, the imperative is to focus

on local concerns, carefully tailoring their leaders' campaign promises to local tastes and priorities. The leader's hope is that no individual candidate will attract media attention to a mistake, thereby detracting attention from provincial campaign themes and forcing the leader to commit precious time to addressing the mistake.

At the nomination stage prior to the 2016 election, Manitoba's parties faced different challenges. For the New Democratic Party (NDP), the challenge at the nomination stage was to attract quality candidates, given the widespread perception that the party would have a difficult time being re-elected. Few prospective candidates wish to be “sacrificial lambs” in unwinnable ridings. This helps, in part, to explain leader Greg Selinger's enthusiastic embrace of Wab Kinew, seemingly a star candidate for the party.

For Progressive Conservative (PC) leader Brian Pallister, the primary goal at the nomination stage was to attract quality candidates who could both win in their ridings and potentially serve in cabinet, as well as to recruit women and members of ethnic minority communities in order to head off anticipated NDP attacks that the PCs were the party of white, rural Manitoba. Pallister's allies worked quietly to achieve these goals while trying to avoid the perception that the leader was interfering. In some cases,

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Pallister got the candidate he wanted; in others, he had to accept the wishes of local members.

For the Liberal Party, early clues in nomination processes pointed to problems that would emerge in the campaign. As a small party, the Liberals often had uncontested nominations, and the party lacked the resources to effectively vet nomination candidates. Like Pallister, Liberal leader Rana Bokhari hoped to influence the outcome of some nomination contests. Lacking Pallister's experience, however, Bokhari bluntly intervened by appointing some candidates and attracting negative media attention as a result.

Problems associated with candidates and the resulting pressure on leaders constituted some of the most dramatic moments of the campaign.

The first wave of candidate troubles was directly associated with candidates' past comments on social media platforms. The NDP campaign first released previous sexist tweets by Liberal candidate Jamie Hall. The Liberals returned fire by sharing sexist tweets and song lyrics composed by NDP star candidate Wab Kinew. The comments of these candidates drew both Bokhari and Selinger into several days where these were the primary issues of the campaign, robbing both leaders of time to focus on the campaign themes they hoped to focus on.

The second wave of candidate troubles occurred largely for the Liberal Party. In the space of several days, six Liberal candidates were removed for various reasons. These

difficulties revealed the Liberals' seeming inability to properly vet candidates—which is perhaps understandable for a small party. They caused a firestorm of media attention when both Bokhari and her advisors expressed frustration with the media's preoccupation with the candidates, and with Bokhari herself when she fumbled the handling of one candidate, Kurt Berger, by first defending and then removing him as a candidate. Campaign polling tracked a sharp decline in those intending to vote for the Liberals after this period.

Modern election campaigning in Manitoba and Canada is likely to include difficulties with candidates that leaders will be forced to contend with. This reminds us that electioneering is necessarily a team sport and that, for better or worse, candidates remain central to the process.

# Fair-to-Middling: Voter Turnout in the 2016 Manitoba Provincial Election

*Emmet Collins*

In the aftermath of the 2015 federal election, commentators noted with approval the 68.3 percent voter turnout rate, which represented a reversal of the twenty-five-year decline in federal voter turnout. Given this increase, some wondered if the trend would repeat itself in Manitoba. Provincial voter turnout, however, cannot be easily predicted or summarized by relying on federal trends, nor by comparing the provinces to one another.

The story that emerged in Manitoba on election night 2016 was, unsurprisingly, one of change. As expected, the Progressive Conservatives ended the NDP's seventeen-year run and won a convincing majority, the largest ever for the party. Yet while the results of the election marked a major shift in Manitoba politics, voter turnout did not.

The following day, Elections Manitoba reported a 58.9 percent turnout rate, a 3 percent increase over the 2011 results. Although nearly one in four Manitobans cast their ballots in advance polls (a 38 percent increase over 2011), the overall turnout rate is entirely consistent with post-1999 voter turnout in the Keystone Province, which has rested between 55 and 60 percent. This trend was also visible at the constituency level: in thirty-five of the fifty-seven ridings, turnout in 2016 was within 5 percent of the 2011 rate. In contrast to the federal situation of declining turnout since 1993, turnout in Manitoba has followed its own

trends. There was an important drop in turnout between 1999 and 2003, but this can also be seen as a return to pre-1973 levels: from the end of the Second World War until 1973, turnout in Manitoba was consistently between 55 and 65 percent (see graph). Voter turnout in 2016 is around where it has been for the past three elections. Ultimately, turnout in the 2016 Manitoba election was middling (if uninspiring), which may be an apt description for the campaign as a whole.

Understanding voter turnout (and *non*-turnout) is an ongoing quest for political scientists. Although we know the characteristics of the average voter, there is no single way of explaining turnout. The 2016 Manitoba provincial election will need to be carefully interpreted, but a few major issues can be highlighted.

Research demonstrates that voter turnout increases in “competitive” elections. In other words, people are more likely to vote if they think the results may be close. In this case, polls conducted for over a year before the election consistently supported the idea that a Conservative majority was inevitable. Since the outcome seemed predetermined, some voters may have chosen to stay home. Interestingly, the link between turnout and competitiveness was not always apparent: of the twelve ridings which were won by fewer than 500 votes, nine had turnout lower than the provincial average.

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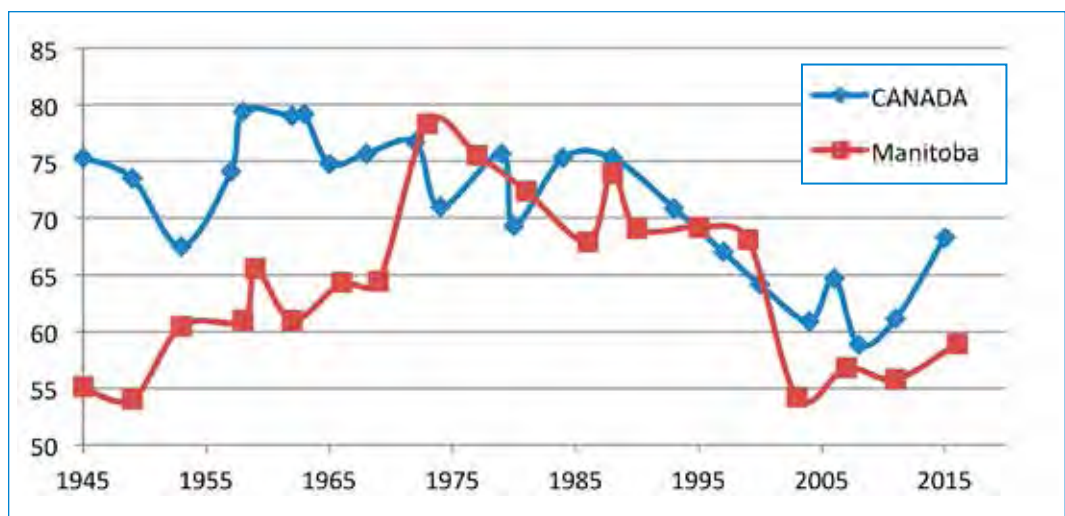
Voters in Canada often use their ballots as a referendum on the various party leaders. Although the PCs led the polls all through the election, voters never seemed to warm to leader Brian Pallister, and NDP leader Greg Selinger's unpopularity was an established fact by the time the writ was dropped. Liberal leader Rana Bokhari may initially have provided an alternative, but gaffes during the campaign made it unlikely the Liberals would be a significant force in the legislature after 19 April (see Allen Mills's piece above). If a popular leader can inspire citizens to vote, the reverse is likely also true.

The 2016 election also saw a major increase in the number of declined ballots (4,022, up from 440 in 2011). Unlike rejected ballots, which are not counted in turnout, declined ballots are an official way of expressing dissatisfaction. In the grand scheme of the election, declined ballots

accounted for less than 1 percent of total turnout, but the sharp increase in these ballots supports the idea that Manitobans were not enamoured with the slate of candidates and leaders they had to choose from.

The 2015 federal election was notable for an apparent increase in Aboriginal voter turnout. Historically, Aboriginal people have had among the lowest turnout of any other group of voters. Using ridings in northern Manitoba as an imperfect proxy, we can see that this trend did not repeat itself. None of the four northern ridings (The Pas, Flin Flon, Thompson, and Keewatinook) saw turnout higher than 38 percent, and Keewatinook saw one of the steepest declines in turnout, dropping to 24 percent from 35 percent in 2011. Clearly, more needs to be done to understand non-voting in northern communities and among Aboriginal populations.

### Voter Turnout, 1945–2016 (%)



Source: Elections Manitoba, Elections Canada historical data



# Women and the 2016 Manitoba Election

Joan Grace

An elected Manitoba government is responsible for a wide array of policies and programs which dramatically affect women's lives. With jurisdiction over municipalities, child care, health, labour, education, and legal aid the political ideas and electoral promises offered during campaigns matter to women for addressing issues such as child poverty, the need for potable water and safe communities, and ending domestic violence. As well, it is argued by social scientists that women's engagement in electoral politics presents diverse perspectives to the public agenda by representing women's unique experiences and encouraging open electoral processes. While I refer here to "women's issues," I adhere to the idea that all policy issues espoused by political parties are important to women, and that not all elected women are necessarily expected to represent a particular "women's agenda."

What was important for women during election 2016? First, it has been nineteen years since a woman was at the helm of a political party during a general election. Rana Bokhari, leader of the Manitoba Liberals, was the first woman leader spearheading an election since Sharon Carstairs did so in 1990. Second, according to my calculations based on data from the Elections Manitoba website (as of 7 April) analyzing all registered parties and four independents, women running for elected office represented 32 percent of all candidates.

Of the three major parties, twenty-four women ran under the New Democratic Party (NDP) banner (42 percent of candidates). The Progressive Conservatives (PCs) were not too far behind with twenty women running for office (35 percent of candidates), and, as for the Liberal Party, fourteen women (27 percent) were nominated candidates. In total, there was a slight increase from the 2011 election. Ten more women were nominated for election in 2016 with the NDP and PC leading the way as follows:

	2011	2016	+ / -
Liberal Party	14	14	0
New Democratic Party	22	24	+2
Progressive Conservative Party	12	20	+8

To my mind, this is a healthy indication of political engagement in the province not only for women who wish to run for office, but for women voters. There is work yet to be done, however, to increase the nomination and electoral success of women from newcomer, visible minority, and Indigenous communities.

In many ways, the 2016 election was a contest between the NDP and PC Party. Both were out of the electoral gate early, debating differences

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between their political stances on appropriate government spending, the provincial sales tax, and debt levels, which sidetracked a sustained focus on key issues for women—at least in the mainstream media.

The electoral platforms of the three major parties, however, made some promises to women of Manitoba. I reviewed the platforms provided on each of the major parties' websites, reading each for keywords such as "women" and "gender" to capture whether their electoral promises were specifically framed for women voters or for those who are concerned about "women's issues."

The NDP platform was the most gendered, even feminist in a sense, promising to undertake gender-based analysis of women and violence, provide more support to women's and family resource centres, improve health care, expand affordable child care, and close the gender wage gap. The platform even provided a costing of supports for women.

The Liberal platform made minimal mention of women, and no use of the term gender. There was no mention of women's poverty, or even child poverty, which has historically plagued Manitoba. Women were specifically mentioned, promising government support for in vitro fertilization, although a tax credit for hair salons came across as a rather superficial political ploy, particularly given the dire situations many women experience in the province.

Not entirely unexpected, the PC platform adhered to a "common sense" financial constraint agenda,

framing promises around protecting families and children. There were potentially appealing phrases for some women voters, framing electoral issues in terms of compassion, trust, and inclusion—particularly referencing the need for quality health care for families and home-based day care.

Fourteen women were successfully elected; eight women are part of the new PC caucus (with six new MLAs) representing just over 24 percent of all MLAs—a disappointing outcome in terms of women's presence in the Legislative Assembly. The new premier's statements about getting the province back on a healthier fiscal track might not bode well for women given potential cuts to social programs.

# Do Star Indigenous Candidates and Party Platforms Translate Into Votes?

*Kiera L. Ladner*

Indigenous peoples' participation in mainstream (non-Indigenous) elections tends to be incredibly low in comparison to the general population. Rates of Indigenous participation range between 20 and 50 percent in Manitoba. The literature accounts for this lack of participation by referencing standard demographic indicators (poorer, less educated, and more mobile), all of which correspond with lower participation rates. Moreover, the prevalence of Indigenous nationhood (expressed as a collective disengagement and the prioritization of nation-to-nation relations) and the continuing effects of colonialism—including a history of exclusion, oppression, racism, and a lack of engagement by Indigenous peoples with electoral politics—amplify historic disengagement.

Was this election any different? Were parties and candidates more engaged? Were nationhood and colonialism addressed as mitigating factors? Were demographic factors addressed?

Though Indigenous voter participation surged in recent elections (for example, the 2014 Winnipeg municipal election and the 2015 federal election), participation in the provincial election remained consistently low, with some fluctuation. Despite massive recent efforts to increase Indigenous participation (including campaigns such as Rock the Vote), the overall rate of registered voter participation in ridings

with significant Indigenous populations spanned from a low of 24.18 percent in Keewatinook, to 31.18 percent in The Pas, and 64.59 percent in the Interlake. Within Winnipeg, the overall rate of registered voter participation in ridings with significant Indigenous populations ranged from 43.26 percent in Point Douglas, to 52.31 percent in St. Johns, and 66.99 percent in Fort Rouge.

While Indigenous peoples failed to rate as a topic of discussion in the leadership debates and as the leading party, the Progressive Conservatives (PCs) had no meaningful Indigenous platform, there was a noticeable effort to engage with Indigenous peoples and issues. For instance, the Liberals' platform contained promises of electoral reform with guaranteed representation (10 percent of seats) for Indigenous peoples and meaningful changes within Child and Family Services. Likewise, the NDP ran on the agenda of a renewed relationship based on reconciliation, a commitment to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and improved road access to Indigenous communities. The NDP's commitment to UNDRIP and the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recent report signifies a marked attempt to engage with Indigenous nationhood and colonialism within the context of a provincial campaign.

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Did this attempt to engage with Indigenous peoples affect participation? The results suggest not.

Further to this, at least twenty Indigenous candidates ran in the election (six NDP, six Liberals, six PCs, two Greens) in ridings across the province. This represents significant candidate participation—especially considering the “star quality” of several of the candidates within their respective parties and within their communities. This engagement, however, did not result in significant changes in voter participation. For instance, the overall rate of participation in Fort Rouge only rose by sixty-five voters, despite the presence of the NDP’s star candidate, Wab Kinew. Worse, the rate of participation dropped by 486 voters in Point Douglas, despite the presence of two star Indigenous candidates—Kevin Chief and Althea Guiboche (the “Bannock Lady”).

With the possible exception of the PCs, the party machines truly did attempt to engage Indigenous peoples through their platforms and their strategic candidates. Parties were engaged (PCs significantly less so), issues of colonialism and nationhood were raised, and demographic considerations were taken up by several candidates—most notably by the Liberal Party. Unlike the federal election, there was no surge in Indigenous voter participation. Having an Indigenous candidate does not translate into Indigenous votes. Raising issues of concern to Indigenous peoples such as murdered and missing Indigenous women and

girls, or a road north, does not translate into Indigenous votes. How do we explain this?

The machines behind the surge in the last federal election—Idle No More, Red Rising, Meet Me at the Bell Tower, and Rock the Vote—were not in play in any meaningful way. The Indigenous community was not rallying in unity either for or against a party, or mobilizing in defence of their treaty and Aboriginal rights, as they were in the last federal election. The community was simply not engaged. This disengagement, however, should not be read as apathy, but should be understood from the vantage of Indigenous voters who continue to see Canadian governments as those of a colonial power. Clearly, Indigenous peoples continue to feel marginalized and oppressed by mainstream governments, often feel disrespected by candidates and party machines, and typically see themselves as outside the purview of provincial governments, given that Indigenous peoples are a federal responsibility.

# Reflections of an Academic Pundit on Covering His Last Election

*Paul G. Thomas*

For over forty years, I played the role of an academic pundit who regularly provided comments to the media on national, provincial, and municipal politics.

Most academics decline to play the pundit role. Preparing for and talking to the media takes time that they believe is better spent on research and engaging with students. Others will talk to the media only about their own research, believing that their opinions on other subjects are worth no more than those of any informed citizen.

My view was different. Being paid to teach Canadian politics, I felt a responsibility to extend my knowledge and to generate interest in the topic beyond the classroom. I never naïvely assumed my opinions had a wide impact, but the media offered a much larger audience than the handful of academics and students who read my books and journal articles. No doubt vanity was another factor behind my easy availability to the media. A former colleague once labelled me—mostly with good-natured humour—“the quote-for-rent pundit.”

In fact, there was almost never any “rent” paid for my academic commentary. The exception was for election night coverage on CBC. My first election night appearance on CBC TV was for the national election back in 1972, at a time when the national network still allowed local stations ten minutes at the bottom and the top of

the clock to provide provincial results and analysis. My first full election night role was in 1973 for the provincial election. My last election coverage role on CBC TV took place on 19 April 2016.

To supplement my academic knowledge, I sought to gather additional first-hand information that would provide for more vivid commentary. So I arranged to have a contact person at the centre of each party who provided off-the-record intelligence. I made visits to campaign offices in swing constituencies in Winnipeg and for non-Winnipeg constituencies

I read community newspapers. I participated in a seminar with producers and on-air reporters at CBC to share intelligence, identify storylines, and develop a list of potential swing constituencies to produce the predictive model the decision desk uses to call the election.

The CBC has always taken election coverage seriously, with a significant amount of advanced planning and organization involved. A briefing book covering the histories of the parties, the issues of the campaign, and each of the fifty-seven constituencies is typically prepared prior to each campaign. Reporters are assigned to cover each party.

Few academics are naturally gifted broadcasters, so every four years I have returned to learn from the

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professionals at the CBC. There have always been at least three rehearsals at which I was expected to provide analysis of mock results. Then it was off to a dark studio to watch the playback and to receive coaching on how to be a better broadcaster.

The main broadcast site has usually been the CBC building, but on two occasions the magnificent foyer at the Legislature provided a spectacular set for the show. The election night program has become an elaborate production with panels of retired politicians, streaming social media reports, and satellite feeds from victory celebrations or wakes.

Many top-notch hosts have helped me remain poised when the storyline was changing fast and several voices in my earpiece were telling me to wrap it up. Being cut off in mid-sentence is a price of so-called fame.

The process for gathering and reporting results has changed dramatically. In my first couple of elections results came in by fax, and CBC “celebrities” such as sportscasters and arts reporters passed notes to me. Now, laptop computers sit on the desk and the almost instantaneous graphic displays of results are impressive. A request to the backroom wizards to call up data makes the on-air pundit look good.

Early in a broadcast, there is a deluge of results to be reported and little time for analysis. The crescendo is reached with the declaration of a winner by the decision desk. The decision is a judgment call based on more than simply the number of seats

and the popular vote obtained by the leading party. On occasion, the CBC has slightly trailed other networks in making the call, mainly because being right in declaring a winner has always been more important than being first.

# The Provincial Sales Tax and the 2016 Manitoba Election: A Pivotal Issue with Lessons for Future Governments

Understanding the  
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2016

*Wayne Simpson*

There can be little doubt that the provincial sales tax (PST) was a pivotal issue in the 2016 Manitoba election. First, the New Democratic Party (NDP) government's decision to raise the provincial sales tax (PST) from 7 percent to 8 percent in its April 2013 budget is inescapably linked to a sharp slide in the opinion polls that continued into the election campaign. Probe Research shows only a mild erosion of NDP support after the tight 2011 election until the release of the 2013 budget, after which a significant gap quickly emerged across the province—including in seat-rich Winnipeg where the NDP lost command of the urban electorate critical to its 2011 success.

Second, declining NDP fortunes in the aftermath of the PST decision were at the heart of the revolt against Premier Greg Selinger's leadership and the fiercely contested leadership vote in March 2015. Selinger's decision to raise the PST and the subsequent sharp fall in NDP support were key issues prompting demands for him to step down as leader or call a leadership review. His narrow victory in the leadership contest over "Rebel Five" member Theresa Oswald did little to satisfy party dissidents, and NDP support slid below that of the Liberals for the first time in decades. At the outset of the election, polls

indicated a Progressive Conservative (PC) majority government with the NDP and Liberals fighting for Official Opposition status.

Third, election campaign strategies were clearly linked to the PST debate. Greg Selinger and the NDP maintained that the PST increase was needed as an important component of enhanced infrastructure spending and continued delivery of essential public services. Brian Pallister and the PCs promised to roll back the PST increase during their term of government while maintaining front line public services through expenditure moderation. The NDP responded that Pallister would have to cut valued public services without the \$300 million provided by the PST increase.

As the election campaign unfolded, the contrast between the NDP position to maintain the PST increase, expand infrastructure, and continue deficit spending and the PC position to roll back the PST and personal income taxes, maintain infrastructure spending (as far as resources would permit) and make inroads on the deficit did not appear to sway the electorate. Indeed, even as the Liberal campaign stumbled amid confusion and controversy, the gap between the PCs and NDP in the polls continued to widen, suggesting that fear of loss of public services fostered by NDP

## **Wayne Simpson**

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advertising had little traction. Voters awarded the PCs more than 50 per cent of the popular vote and a resounding majority, although the NDP managed to retain Official Opposition status.

While the slide in NDP fortunes seems clearly linked to the PST increase in the 2013 budget, it is less clear what motivated dissatisfaction with this decision. It may be that the seeds of voter dissatisfaction had already been planted and coalesced around this unexpected decision. There are at least two underlying fiscal issues with important lessons for politicians in Manitoba and elsewhere.

One issue is the role of balanced budget legislation as a guiding fiscal principle. Manitoba was a leader in the establishment and development of balanced budget legislation in Canada, and promises to be fiscally prudent were prominent in the election platforms of the NDP and opposition parties over two decades. While the suspension of the legislation in the face of the global recession in 2009 seemed a reasonable temporary measure, the failure of the NDP government to restore any semblance of fiscal order undoubtedly caused concern and allowed the PCs to use the legislation to challenge the government in the courts and legislature and on the hustings. While it is noteworthy that the PCs did not emphasize a return to the legislation any time soon, they were able to use the government's record on this issue to question the NDP's qualifications to continue governing.

The other fiscal issue is the growing imbalance between the revenues and responsibilities of municipal and provincial governments. Successive Winnipeg mayors since Glen Murray have promoted the idea of a new deal between the province and the city that would give Winnipeg new provincial revenue to fund infrastructure and other services and alleviate the city's reliance on property taxes and other slow-growing revenue sources. Prominent among these provincial revenue sources has been the request for 1 percent of the PST. The belated attempt by the Selinger government to link the PST increase to infrastructure spending did not amount to the new deal Winnipeg and other municipalities had been requesting and may have thwarted subsequent attempts to associate the PST increase with new infrastructure spending, however popular and badly needed. A new PC government heavily represented outside Winnipeg may find it prudent to pay attention to this concern of municipal officials and, especially, urban voters.



# The Economy and the 2016 Manitoba Election

*Todd Scarth*

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a strong economy helps incumbent governments win re-election. Manitoba has outperformed most provinces economically since the crisis of 2008–9, and economic growth remains steady and unemployment low. Yet a strong economy did nothing to halt the New Democratic Party's (NDP) slide. To understand this irony, we must remember that governments face both economic challenges (how to help keep people working, businesses expanding, and consumers spending) and fiscal ones (how to balance revenues against spending). Generally, parties on the political left benefit when the public is focused on economic concerns like jobs. Right-wing parties would rather campaign on fiscal issues like deficits and taxes.

The NDP found it hard publicly to reconcile its fiscal shortcomings in government with its economic successes. If the economy was so healthy, why did it repeatedly miss its own deadlines to return to a balanced budget? The truth is, balancing the budget during the downturn would have required massive spending cuts, stalling any economic recovery. New Democrats may have achieved better results by hammering away at this issue, emphasizing that they had kept the economy humming, while the PCs would pull the plug. Such a message would have recognized that governments are not entitled to re-election

merely as a reward for past performance. And it might have echoed the successful federal Liberal strategy, which contrasted a plan to run deficits with the cuts and austerity offered by Stephen Harper. But it seemed a change-hungry electorate was unwilling to accept the Manitoba NDP's line on very much of anything.

That skepticism was not hard to explain. In this election all roads led back to the NDP's central political liability, the provincial sales tax (PST). The PST is a surprisingly complex issue, since polls show infrastructure is a top concern for pothole-weary Manitobans, to the point where most still oppose reversing the PST increase. Indeed, Greg Selinger's decision to raise the PST was prescient. He intuited public support for stimulus spending, and made a bold move to create jobs by fixing roads several years before many other governments started to do the same. But by springing the increase on Manitobans without warning, and then failing to acknowledge why that might be upsetting, the NDP conveyed an arrogance and complacency that proved fatal for a government first elected before the turn of the century.

Manitobans' accumulated grievances with the NDP and their distrust of Premier Selinger left the PCs free to run on a relatively thin economic platform based on dubious costing. The platform only priced out

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commitments for the second year of a four-year mandate. (Admittedly, only including one year is better than missing an entire fiscal year, as the Liberals did in their forecast.) And it failed to explain how the Pallister government would pay for a number of big-time commitments. For example, indexing personal income tax brackets to inflation is fairly cheap now, when inflation is low, but represents an annual cost of tens of millions of dollars, a cost that will only grow. More significant is the pledge to cut the PST by one point, which will cost another \$300 million. The PCs promised to fill these holes by finding undefined “efficiencies.” While PC bean counters relied heavily on magic beans, their opponents were unable to seize the opportunity to connect promised PC tax reductions with consequent cuts to jobs, infrastructure, and core services. The PCs’ disciplined and effective campaign boiled down to a powerful, emotional appeal: Greg Selinger lied about the PST. It was a trump card.

Given the PST, could the election ever have turned out differently? NDP strategists were dealt a tough hand to play, but it did not help that the party’s daily campaign announcements never really gelled into a coherent, persuasive economic narrative. Pricey commitments to convert student loans to grants and build more health clinics and personal care homes came and went, unsupported by advertising and largely lost in a froth of micro-targeting. Craft beer and yurts displaced jobs and

roads in the party’s message. Other commitments to retain longstanding government programs, intended to highlight what was at risk of being cut by a Pallister government, merely reinforced the impression of a senescent government offering more of the same.

In backroom parlance, New Democrats failed to put something shiny in the store window to distract from their unpopular incumbent premier. Perhaps more pocketbook populism would have helped: something bold and ambitious around job training for young adults, a major middle-class tax cut, or a provincial pension plan? An economic commitment along these lines, combined with the focus needed to drive it as an issue, may have helped frame the election more around the economy and less around taxes and deficits, which proved unfriendly territory for a centre-left party.

# Child Care and the Manitoba Election

*Susan Prentice*

Although child care is often a wedge issue, wielded to separate social from economic policy or to appeal to a “women’s” vote, it did not play this role in the 2016 provincial election. Every major party made a diverse range of child care commitments.

The New Democratic Party (NDP) framed child care as a measure of work-family reconciliation and family support, and promised to implement the far-reaching recommendations of the recent Early Learning and Child Care Commission. This included 12,000 new child care spaces, \$25 million of new capital funding, moving child care programs for children aged 6–12 into schools, and the introduction of public governance through regional Children’s Councils. At a public child care forum hosted by the scrupulously non-partisan Manitoba Child Care Association, then Family Services Minister Kerri Irvin-Ross further promised to implement a provincial wage scale for the field.

Like the NDP, the Liberals evoked work-family reconciliation as they promised to eliminate the waiting list, noting on their website that “we have a partner at the federal level that is also committed to a robust child care.” Specifically, they promised to invest an additional \$30 million in the training and retention of early childhood educators. They also floated the idea of a parent fee increase, noting on their website that “We will

also take a hard look at fees and those who can afford a little more will pay a little more while those with less will pay less. For the system to work it must be self-sustaining.” Finally, the Liberals proposed rolling out full-day kindergarten as a child care solution. “Half-day kindergarten puts a strain on parents and the child care system,” explained the party’s website.

The Progressive Conservatives, by contrast, simply promised “more child care options” in its policy platform. Without committing to eliminating the waiting list, they stressed on their website that their interest is ensuring that “Manitobans can choose the type of child care that best meets their needs.” To this end, they focussed on family home child care. Licensed family child care operators in Manitoba are independent entrepreneurs who can care for a total of up to eight children, and who do not require any formal training in early childhood education. In the preference for family home care, many observers saw a Conservative fondness for services that are less professionalized, and more cozy and privatized. The implication in the party’s defense of parental choice was that parents want more neighbourly homes instead of centres, but this is not borne out in most studies of parental preference. Moreover, as licensed family child care supplies just under 10 percent of Manitoba’s spaces, Conservative policy focuses

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on the smallest tranche of the child care sector, entirely disregarding the needs of the over 600 centres supplying the other 90 percent of the province's spaces.

In 2001, relatively early in their first term, the NDP introduced significant new policy changes, including a new funding model that generated quality improvements and saw wages rise. Since then, progress has been somewhat halting. After more than a decade, however, the NDP established an Early Learning and Child Care Commission in 2015. The Commission's 2016 report proposed an ambitious action plan, renewing hope that the NDP would again act decisively on the file. With the election of the Conservatives, there is a widespread demand that the meaningful change recommended in the Commission's report not be snatched away.

The Pallister government can anticipate that the child care community will mobilize on behalf of the recommendations of the recent Commission. Having campaigned to overturn what they labelled a "cumbersome regulatory regime," the new government can expect pushback from those who see regulations as a necessary protection of quality and safety. Low wages, estimated at about 25 percent below market value, are also likely to emerge as a flashpoint for a female-dominated field increasingly unwilling to subsidize a key public service with their low salaries.

As well, the issue of privatization under a Conservative government was raised, in anticipation that Manitoba's

long-standing and laudable prioritization of not-for-profit child care delivery may come under scrutiny. The much-anticipated national framework for early learning and care currently being developed by the Trudeau Liberals may moderate Conservative preferences for market-based reforms. In return for federal funds, the Pallister government may be willing to accept terms and conditions it would, under other circumstances, find less appealing.

# Why is Immigration an Issue in the Provincial Election?

*Lori Wilkinson*

Immigration is federally mandated and newcomers cannot vote, so why would immigration be an issue in the provincial election? Demographics, future settlement intentions, family reunification, and business and labour interests all make it clear that immigration is an important issue for political parties in our province.

Immigrants don't stay immigrants forever. In 2014, 16,222 people immigrated to Manitoba. In total, 20 percent of the provincial population was born outside of Canada and almost all of these individuals will eventually become citizens and therefore eligible to vote in the future. According to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 87 percent of all immigrants eventually become citizens. Once they become citizens, the rate at which they vote is high; indeed, among industrialized nations, naturalized immigrants in Canada are among the most likely citizens to vote. So while they may not be able to vote in this election, non-Canadian born citizens are very likely to vote in future elections, and political parties that include immigration issues in their election platforms are likely to receive attention from this group.

Demographic characteristics at the riding level can influence electoral outcomes. This is one reason why we hear about the "immigrant vote" in elections. The New Democratic Party (NDP) was the only party in this

election that had a political platform that contained promises regarding immigration. According to their website, if elected the NDP would have provided additional funding for language training, increase the number of refugee placements and funding for settlement, and would restore the family reunification stream to the provincial nominee program. These are very attractive policies to former immigrants as many of them are hoping to bring their extended families to Canada. Prior to 2013, the family reunification stream of the provincial nominee program was widely successful at bringing in and keeping people in Manitoba. In 2014, one in four provincial nominees to Canada lives in Manitoba, the highest rate of all provinces and a record that is consistent since the introduction of the program.

It is not just Winnipeg, but Brandon, Neepawa, Winkler, Thompson, Steinbach, and Morden all host sizable numbers of immigrants and former immigrants. Although these constituents may seem small in number, once they become naturalized their vote has a significant influence on politicians' chances of becoming elected. Neepawa, for instance, has a population of 3,629 residents of which over one in four was not born in Canada. Although some eventually leave for other opportunities, many do stay, become citizens, vote, and raise their families in the area. This makes

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them an important part of the electorate in these areas.

Even non-immigrants have a vested interest in immigration policy. Manitoba has one of the lowest unemployment rates in Canada and there are sectors of the economy that are experiencing shortages in skilled and non-skilled workers. These workers enter the country under a variety of different programs including the Provincial Nominee Program, Skilled Worker Program, and other economic and business streams. Provincial nominees make up the biggest portion of permanent workers in Manitoba at over 12,000 per year. The federal government has prevented Manitoba and the other provinces from increasing their intake of provincial nominees, which has greatly angered the provincial government and many local businesses who depend on this labour to keep their businesses healthy. When the provincial government saw its share of provincial nominees cut by the Conservative government, many business owners complained and the province has been lobbying to restore these numbers ever since.

In addition to permanent labour, Manitoba hosts a large number of temporary foreign workers. These individuals come to Canada on short two- or four-year contracts or may come as seasonal workers. In 2014, over 6,000 workers came to our province to work. Another 4,876 were international students. Manitoba is one of the few provinces in Canada that has a path to permanent citizenship for these groups.

Eligible persons can apply within the province to stay permanently and most of those who are eligible to do so apply to stay. A national study suggests that over 90 percent of international students intend to stay as do over 80 percent of temporary workers in Manitoba. Together they represent yet another pool of potential future voters.

In summary, although immigration tends to be ignored in provincial elections, it is an important issue for many employers, former immigrants, and would-be future voters. Provincial parties that are attentive to their interests may find loyal voters in the future.

# Education and the Manitoba Election 2016: Issues and Non-Issues, Value and Values

Jon Young

Manitoba's public school system is rarely far from public scrutiny. In its last term, the New Democratic Party (NDP) government undertook a number of initiatives related to funding and delivery of K–12 education that had the potential to become focal points of this election campaign. Yet, a brief discussion of four of those issues—Aboriginal education, education funding, safe schools legislation, and international test results—suggests that rather than taking centre stage, educational issues were effectively sidelined during the election.

Manitoba's Auditor General's January 2016 report, *Improving Educational Outcomes for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve Aboriginal Students*, documented the large gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student provincial graduation rates and was critical of the Department of Education and Advanced Learning's lack of leadership in this area. Notwithstanding the federal government's responsibilities, it is possible to argue that this is the most important educational issue facing the province. The Liberal Party raised this issue in the election campaign, calling for the development of a comprehensive plan for Aboriginal education. However, none of the parties presented a clear platform for improving the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students.

Another contentious debate has been the way in which budgets are

established by school boards—in particular the ability of individual boards to set mill rates and collect property taxes for education. While other Canadian provinces have moved to full provincial funding, local property taxes continue to make more than one third of the operating budget for Manitoba schools. Only the Green Party included a move to full provincial funding in its platform. Both the Progressive Conservative (PC) Party and the NDP supported school board autonomy and local taxing authority early on in the campaign, and provincial funding never became an issue.

One of the most controversial initiatives passed by the NDP in 2013 was Bill 18: The Public Schools Amendment Act (Safe and Inclusive Schools). This act required all school boards to enact a human diversity policy to allow for activities promoting respect for all sexual orientations and gender identities and the organization of gay-straight alliances in all schools. Initial opposition to this legislation among the traditional PC electoral base in rural communities contrasted with greater support from within Winnipeg. This issue had the potential to be a wedge in the election. However, Brian Pallister stated that, if elected, he would not rescind this legislation and by doing so effectively kept Bill 18 from becoming a significant topic.

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Comparisons of standardized test scores in math, reading, and science constituted a fourth area of public debate. While Canadian students overall do well on international comparisons such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Manitoba students have fallen to the bottom in all three subject areas compared to all other Canadian provinces. This issue achieved some attention in election debates with the NDP defending the quality of Manitoba schools and pointing to significant increases in high school graduation rates during their time in office, while the PCs announced a plan to boost early literacy among Manitoba children with a \$7-million “Read to Succeed” initiative. Rather than making inter-provincial and international test scores a significant election focus (and thereby taking on the responsibility for improving them) Brian Pallister chose not to focus too much attention on these results, stating that he was “not yet convinced” of the value of more standardized tests, while PC education critic Kelvin Goertzen returned to a “value-for-money” election mantra, and emphasized during the Manitoba School Boards Association Election Forum that in education as elsewhere, “investment must have results.”

Before the election, the Manitoba Teachers’ Society (MTS) embarked on an extensive media campaign designed to make support for public education one of the main election issues. The MTS used the phrase: “Our kids need more support, not less.” If making education an issue meant

encouraging all parties to articulate a distinctive and comprehensive education platform, it is easy to argue that education played only a supporting role in how the election would be won and lost.

The new PC government has come out of the election with few specific promises to keep beyond its major commitments related to taxation, waste, and debt. What will constitute “waste” and “inefficiencies” remains to be seen, as will discussions of “value-for-money” in the education of Manitoba children. What is critical here is that school success is heavily dependent on a variety of factors and supports such as affordable child care, housing, employment, and community health. When MTS says “Our kids need more support, not less” it is talking about more than the funding and delivery of schooling and more than individual teachers in individual classrooms can provide.



# Post-Secondary Education: An Issue (but not *The Issue*) in 2016

Andrea Rounce

Over 60,000 people study in Manitoba's private vocational schools, colleges, university-colleges, private religious schools, and universities each year. Many students are eligible to vote in the provincial election and have families who are also eligible. Thousands of staff and faculty are employed by post-secondary institutions in the province, adding to the number of people directly impacted by changes to education funding and organization. While post-secondary education is often not *the* election issue for provincial voters, it is always *an* issue in provincial elections.

The New Democratic Party (NDP) made its mark on post-secondary education policy in the province over the course of the nearly seventeen years it was in power. The NDP government introduced a university tuition fee freeze in 1999, replacing it after ten years with a government-controlled limit on increases. As a result, most Manitoba university students pay some of the lowest tuition fees in Canada. The NDP increased grants and bursaries for low-income students while providing measures to help manage student loan repayment. They created a strategy for coordination and collaboration among institutions in the province. Additionally, the NDP changed the way institutions make changes to the programming they offer by eliminating the Council on Post-Secondary

Education and streamlining these activities within government. The NDP government also made significant financial contributions to educational infrastructure and research by introducing the International Education Act—a first in Canada—that demonstrated commitment to foreign students studying in Manitoba.

Debates continue throughout the province about who should pay for post-secondary education and what kinds of education should be available to students. Post-secondary institutions have argued that current government grants are insufficient to address the rising costs associated with teaching, research, and providing service to communities. Students (including the Canadian Federation of Students Manitoba) make a strong case for minimizing the up-front costs of education in order to ensure greater accessibility.

Election 2016 showed that Manitoba's political parties have significantly different approaches to post-secondary issues. The Progressive Conservatives' (PC) key announcement on access and affordability was a commitment to change the way the Manitoba Scholarships and Bursaries Initiative is funded, by decreasing the government's contribution to the fund and encouraging additional private-sector investment—similar to a program introduced by the PCs in the 1990s. The NDP emphasized the

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contributions it made while in government, and announced free tuition for students in the child welfare system until age twenty-five (an increase from age twenty-one). The Liberals committed to converting all Manitoba student loans into grants for students who complete their programs and to removing the cap on the number of hours that students could work while receiving student loans, all while lobbying the federal government to do the same for federal loans.

With a new PC government in power, stakeholders will be watching the next actions very closely. There are a number of programs, policies, and funding announcements that the new government is likely to revisit once it takes office. One such issue is the cost of tuition fees, particularly for university students. Other provincial governments have allowed tuition fees to increase at levels higher than inflation, arguing that students benefit from “investing” in post-secondary education and so should pay more. Institutions have requested more funding, and tuition fee increases would allow government to respond without providing additional public money. Other provinces have introduced free tuition for lower-income students, and we will likely see pressure on the new PC government to do the same. If tuition fee levels are allowed to increase, we can expect to see parallel demands for increases in available student loan and bursary/grant funds. The PC Party has signalled that it sees an important role for private support of students, rather than increased government investment. Additionally, the recent Supreme

Court decision specifying the expansion of rights to encompass Métis and non-status Indian people will be critical for the province if it is determined to affect access to post-secondary education.

The PC government may well revisit NDP funding commitments, including the \$150-million contribution to the University of Manitoba’s “Front and Centre” campaign. Other provinces have cancelled their post-graduate tax credit programs, arguing that the credits do not encourage graduates to stay in the province, and we may see the PCs taking this approach despite the program’s political popularity. The new government is also likely to focus on coordination and elimination of duplication within the system.

Although post-secondary education wasn’t the key issue in the 2016 election, it is clear that a new PC government will be making its mark on the sector over the next four years. Students, faculty, staff, families, and employers will be among those waiting to see what that mark will be.

# Raising the Profile of Poverty in the 2016 Election

*Sid Frankel and Jim Mulvale*

Poverty was not the issue that decided the 2016 Manitoba election, but its level of importance to the campaigns of the New Democratic Party (NDP) and Progressive Conservative (PC) Party was much greater than in recent elections. This is likely due to the election environment being softened through action in two contexts. The first context was political. In spring, 2011 shortly before the fall election, the Selinger government passed the Poverty Reduction Strategy Act, which required the government to report annually on progress toward its long-term poverty reduction strategy. These reports and their review in legislative committees provided a forum for opposition critique, which put poverty on the agenda regularly. In addition, in the March 2015 leadership convention for the NDP, Theresa Oswald featured anti-poverty measures prominently in her campaign. The election of the Trudeau federal government in October 2015 also helped raise poverty's profile because of its commitment to the Canada Child Benefit and to a federal Poverty Reduction Strategy.

The second was action by civil society organizations that significantly raised the profile of poverty. Most importantly, the coalition Make Poverty History Manitoba developed and implemented an effective public relations strategy that not only raised awareness of poverty but proposed a concise, clear, and accessible set of solutions. In

addition, in November 2014, the public education movement Campaign 2000 to End Child Poverty issued the 2015 Manitoba Child Poverty Report Card, which received broad media coverage for its key findings that Manitoba had the highest child-poverty rate of any province (second only to Nunavut among the territories) and that the government's All Aboard Poverty Reduction Strategy had been ineffective in reducing child poverty. This was balanced by the 2015 State of the Inner City Report issued by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, which claimed that provincial government investment in community-led initiatives was responsible for improvements in some inner-city poverty indicators between 1996 and 2011. In addition, Winnipeg Harvest and the newly emergent Basic Income Manitoba held an event in March 2016 to challenge party leaders to respond to poverty by adopting a basic income.

Poverty was clearly on the 2016 election agenda, but the responses of the two principal parties (PC and NDP) were quite different. The PC platform, "Better Manitoba," mentions the word poverty only when citing the 2015 Manitoba Child Poverty Report Card to attack the Selinger record. Elsewhere, the PCs stated that child poverty will be ameliorated by raising the personal tax exemption, improving educational outcomes,

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and supporting Urban Aboriginal Economic Development Zones. This is a limited platform not only because it focuses only on children, but because most of the beneficiaries of the increased personal exemption will not be poor.

As the long-time incumbent, the NDP was in the position of being judged not only on the basis of its promises, but also on the basis of its track record. The PC platform was more focused on exposing the NDP's problematic track record than on matching their promises. Since the All Aboard Poverty Reduction Strategy was introduced in 2009 there have been three significant critiques made of the NDP government's actions. These included the refusal to commit to poverty-reduction targets and timelines, evidence that Manitoba has had a worse poverty-reduction record than Canada as a whole since the introduction of the strategy, and a reluctance to improve transfer payments to poor households. In fact, the PCs supported improving the welfare rental benefit (to 75 percent of median market rent) before the Selinger government did.

The NDP tried to respond to these critiques by committing to developing targets and timelines for the implementation of changes and to improving transfer payments in a limited way through completing the study of creating a disability pension to replace social assistance for people with disabilities who are unable to work, working with the federal government to improve the Manitoba Child Benefit, and introducing a new basic

needs benefit for poor single-person households. However, this may have been too little, too late for progressive voters, including those in the NDP base.

In his victory speech, Premier-designate Pallister mentioned child poverty as a problem that his government will address through improved educational skill outcomes. Poverty is in the stream of problems facing the new government, but the range of necessary solutions as presented by Pallister is much too limited. Effective poverty reduction policy will depend on whether the NDP as Official Opposition, the three Liberal members, and civil society organizations are able to introduce more comprehensive solutions and keep poverty prominently in the stream of political issues that the new government must manage.

# Brian Pallister's Progressive Conservatives and Indigenous Policy: Is Manitoba on the Path to Reconciliation?

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*Derek Kornelsen*

According to Statistics Canada, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit populations make up 17 percent of the population living within Manitoba's borders. On average, these Indigenous populations are the fastest-growing demographic, are younger than non-Indigenous populations, and experience much poorer standards of living and health outcomes than non-Indigenous people. Couple these facts with recent media attention to the alarming number of suicides in Indigenous communities, the numbers of Indigenous children that are removed from their families by Child and Family Services, and Winnipeg's unflattering distinction as "the most racist city in Canada," and it is clear that public policy related to Indigenous peoples ought to be a high priority for Manitoba's government.

Any Indigenous policy approach must be aimed at reconciliation and rooted in an understanding of colonialism, including the negative impacts of past colonial policies and the current ongoing colonial practices that undermine Indigenous self-determination and well-being. We already have a number of key guideposts in place to help as we undertake this transition: our Constitution explicitly protects "Aboriginal and Treaty Rights," the federal government has publicly committed to enacting the calls to action of the Truth

and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)—including a commitment to the principles set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)—and, during the final days of the previous administration, Manitoba's legislature passed the Path to Reconciliation Act which echoes the federal commitments to the TRC and the UNDRIP. This overarching policy context brings to the fore key issues like "Indigenous sovereignty," nationhood, and even citizenship, all of which urge us to face the fact, uncomfortable for some, that Indigenous peoples are not like other Canadians and hold rights that typical Canadian citizens do not.

It is not easy to assess a new government with no track record of governing. Official platforms and previous public statements must suffice. In this regard, it is not clear that the new Progressive Conservative government led by Brian Pallister demonstrates an understanding of the relevance of the current context. The Progressive Conservatives' conspicuous silence on this is troubling. Indeed, the official platform does not mention reconciliation at all. Further, the fact that Pallister's party has given the Path to Reconciliation Act a cool reception, even blocking the vote temporarily, exacerbates this concern. As we know, new governments are often eager to undo the work of

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their predecessors. If Manitoba is to maintain a provincial commitment to a meaningful approach to reconciliation, it may be up to the citizens of Manitoba to maintain pressure on our new government to ensure the Act remains in force.

Where the Progressive Conservatives' platform does mention Indigenous peoples, there is a clear emphasis on "inclusion" and "economic development." Of course, no one would dispute that these are worthy aims. But if these are pursued out of context—that is, without the parameters set by the TRC and the UNDRIP that recognize Indigenous peoples' rights to choose their political affiliation and identity, to their traditional territories, and to govern themselves through their own institutions—we undermine reconciliation and reinforce damaging colonial practices that lead to marginalization and poverty to begin with. We have a long history of past and ongoing promises of economic prosperity that result in the destruction of Indigenous lands and communities. Similarly, the promise of inclusion has long been a colonial tool to assimilate Indigenous peoples into the mainstream body politic, extinguishing Indigenous legal, political, and cultural distinctiveness. If we fail to appreciate how colonialism functions and how Indigenous people continue to resist it, the solutions simply become colonialism in different clothes.

It has been said that those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. We are at the beginning of a new Progressive

Conservative majority government in Manitoba. One of the most pressing issues for our province and our country is reconciliation with the Indigenous nations that have shared this land with us. Indeed, the world is watching as we attempt to move forward. Although it is early, it is not clear that this new government knows of or wishes to learn from our colonial past and present. However, as this is our government, it is up to us to hold our elected officials' feet to the fire, as it were, to educate them when necessary, and to push for meaningful reconciliation. Insisting that we remain committed to the TRC calls to action and the UNDRIP as outlined in the Path to Reconciliation Act, is only a start.

# A New Political Prescription for Manitoba's Sick Health Care System: It's Time to Put Care Back into Health Care

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Colleen Bytheway

After four terms of NDP governance in Manitoba, the 2016 provincial election was all about change. In regard to health policy, the campaign can be remembered as one which lacked meaningful discussion. Since health care costs eat up more than 40 percent of the provincial budget, and considering the Federal/Provincial Health Accord is due to be renegotiated, one might have expected more thoughtful debate on health. Yet, it was nearly a non-issue.

The parties proposed shallow fixes to common complaints. The Progressive Conservatives (PCs) promised to cut ambulance fees for low-income seniors. The New Democratic Party (NDP) promised to cut ambulance fees for *all* low-income people. Then they suddenly realized that parking fees at city hospitals were “criminal,” so they promised to cut those, too. The Liberals promised funding to woo specific voters—those affected by autism, by strokes, and those needing new hips. The Greens had the most original proposal: to implement a new tax on junk food. This could be a great idea, given our obesity rates and the eventual related costs.

Even when the heartbreaking story broke mid-campaign about the woman who deteriorated into a coma on the floor of an emergency room while her husband pleaded for some compassion and assistance, hardly a

word was said. Selinger merely offered to speed up the results of the Critical Incident Review, which were long overdue. Have our leaders become so used to hearing stories of how our health care system has failed people that they have become complacent? Here was a real opportunity for all of the leaders to question what kind of organizational culture produces such a lack of humanity. We need to do better, and we can do better!

We heard the same rhetoric about long emergency room (ER) wait times, the dire need for more long-term care (LTC) beds, and the urgent requirement for improved mental health services. What we didn't hear were any genuine solutions. ER wait times, which seemed to be the ongoing focus, are simply one symptom of a dangerously unhealthy system.

Last year there were hundreds of people in hospital waiting for LTC beds. Some waited up to half a year. Patients waiting in acute care are routinely shipped from one hospital to another to await a LTC bed. Not only are acute care beds far more costly, this situation creates great hardship. In rural communities this often means patients are placed in facilities hundreds of kilometres away from their families.

The Regional Health Authority (RHA) system has created disparities between Winnipeg and the rural

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health agencies. These disparities have resulted in a system of “haves” and “have-nots,” and created animosity between the RHAs when rural clients need to access specialist services only available in Winnipeg. In fact, some unique programs in Winnipeg limit their intake to clients within their catchment area and are not accessible to rural clients, even with a referral from their physician.

Basic services are lacking in rural areas. Several communities are facing a critical shortage of physicians. People who neither need nor want to be in hospitals end up there because home care, long-term care, and palliative care services are woefully underfunded and inadequate.

The current RHA regime was created by the Filmon PC government in 1996. The thinking behind this was to save money through economies of scale and through less bureaucracy, but the opposite has occurred. To counter this, the NDP amalgamated the original eleven RHAs into five. This has solved little, and created challenges of its own.

Not all provinces adopted the RHA model. Alberta has recently examined best practices and abandoned the model. With their expansive bureaucracies, RHAs have lost touch with patients, families, and even the political leaders who started them. Board governance has also become less personal and more politicized as board members are now strategically appointed by the health minister.

Politicians promise citizens that they will try to fix the system when it discharges people unsafely and with

no compassion; they tell citizens they will try to get the information they're seeking when there has been an adverse event, but the truth is they can't. By creating this middle layer of bureaucracy, the government of the day has no direct control over health care, and no direct accountability to its citizens.

It's time for a new discussion. The concepts of health equity and population health are helping other governments reframe their health care systems to provide optimal care for *all* citizens.

The PCs were the best prepared for the recent campaign. They have the largest number of seats in the history of our province. They've promised better. Let us hope that they have the political will to ensure that their words translate into *real* thinking about our health care system. Our lives depend on it.



# Winnipeg and the Election: Vote Shifts, Development, and Deferred Maintenance

Aaron A. Moore

In 2016, voters in Winnipeg elected a majority of Progressive Conservative (PC) MLAs in the city's ridings for the first time since the creation of Unicity in 1972. For over forty years, the New Democratic Party (NDP) could rely on winning the bulk of the ridings in the province's most populous city. In this election, however, the shift of seats in Winnipeg from the NDP to the PCs was enough to give Brian Pallister his majority. The PCs went from winning only four out of thirty possible Winnipeg ridings in 2011 to a stunning seventeen out of thirty in 2016. But what does this shift in provincial party support mean for residents in Winnipeg?

PC support in Winnipeg mirrored that of Mayor Brian Bowman's 2013 election victory in many ways. Both Bowman and the PCs received the bulk of their support in the city's west, east, and south ends. And as with the mayor, the PC's support was much weaker in the city centre and north end. What, if any, impact this divide has on provincial policy regarding the city will be interesting to see.

In the past few years, the NDP government seemed to be purposefully consolidating government offices in Winnipeg's downtown (e.g., Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries' purchase of the Medical Arts Building). Shortly before the start of the campaign, then-Premier Selinger again promised to develop government-owned

parking lots in the downtown area—actions in keeping with their support for downtown renewal. Despite such gestures, the NDP's campaign included few promises directed specifically at the city's centre and north end. In fact, most of the NDP's promises for the city seemed targeted at the city as a whole—six new QuickCare clinics, road repairs, urban rail relocation—and the suburbs in particular: completing an inner ring road, extending and expanding rapid transit in the city, renewal and construction of new libraries and fitness centres.

From the content of the NDP's election promises, shoring up their support in Winnipeg's suburban ridings seemed to be their primary goal. Had they remained in power, they likely would not have abandoned their base in the city centre and north end, but the necessity of the suburban vote demands catering to suburban interests. A PC government will be less likely to focus on the interests of central and north end Winnipeg residents, given their limited support among the electorate there. Whether voters' support in the east, west, and south will translate into favourable policies directed at those areas remains to be seen, given the dearth of Winnipeg-specific policies in the PC campaign. Much like the federal Harper Conservatives who relied on suburban and rural voters to form their majority, the new Pallister government will have to find a way to

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maintain the support of their new suburban Winnipeg supporters without alienating their traditional base in the rest of the province. This is no easy task.

One outcome of the election that seems to be clear is that Winnipeg will continue to receive insufficient funding for infrastructure maintenance and renewal from the provincial government. While the decade-long property tax freeze contributed to the current state of the city's infrastructure, Winnipeg, like most cities in Canada, has repeatedly put off needed repair and maintenance of infrastructure in order to balance operating budgets, as mandated by provincial law, and maintain service levels. Despite NDP investment in infrastructure, Winnipeg's infrastructure deficit continues to grow.

An infrastructure deficit is the amount of money necessary to bring existing infrastructure up to a reasonable standard. When maintenance is repeatedly deferred or postponed, the cost of that maintenance increases as the state of infrastructure further declines. As a result, the infrastructure deficit increases. The Association of Manitoba Municipalities estimates Winnipeg's infrastructure deficit at \$3.8 billion. That number is growing, which means maintenance is being deferred despite the billions being spent by the province already. This number does not include another \$3.6 billion required for "new strategic infrastructure." The state of Winnipeg's roads is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the city's infrastructure deficit and, when it comes down

to it, potholes are far less worrisome in the long-term than potential breakdowns in vital infrastructure like water and sewage.

With politicians' preference for funding the shiny and new, coupled with the new PC government's tepid promises for infrastructure investment, the continuing decline of Winnipeg's infrastructure seems assured.

# The North and Manitoba's 2016 Provincial Election

*Dan Smith*

Defined geographically as the land mass between the fifty-third parallel and the Nunavut border, northern Manitoba is some 560,000 square kilometres, an area roughly the size of France. For the north's approximately 81,000 residents, isolation is the norm. Most northern communities are small and located far apart, with more than a few locales accessible only by air and/or by boat in warm seasons and by winter roads in cold seasons. In terms of demographics, two-thirds of Manitoba's northerners are Aboriginal peoples, with a much higher youth population than Manitoba's non-Aboriginal population. Since 1969, Manitoba's north has been divided electorally into four constituencies: Flin Flon, The Pas, Thompson, and Keewatinook (formerly Rupertsland). In the forty-seven years before the 2016 election, each constituency has been won by a New Democratic Party (NDP) Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) with the single exception in Thompson of Progressive Conservative MLA Ken MacMaster for one term, from 1977 to 1981. These geographic, demographic and political, realities help to frame elections in Manitoba's north.

While they were not ignored, northern issues were not a principal focus of the general campaign of 2016. Northern candidates addressed local issues, but relied heavily on party campaign platforms to

stay on message. General pronouncements focusing on northern economic development were often put in the context of the value of those industries in the south, and reiterated support for existing northern industries such as mining, forestry, and tourism. Important policy issues in the north, such as food security, communications, housing, and other social issues received some attention, but not in proportion to those issues to northerners. For instance, the media focus on the youth suicide crisis in Pimicikamak Cree Nation prior to the writ period and again in Attawapiskat First Nation in Ontario just days before voting failed to elicit broad discussion on the subject. Indeed, despite issues pertaining to Aboriginal peoples being generally ascendant in society, little attention was paid to specific issues affecting this important constituency, with scant few references to Aboriginal policy options incorporating language invoking the federal-provincial jurisdictional tangle that blurs lines of responsibility and hampers real solutions.

While the north did not figure largely in policy discussion during the election, it was clear that the NDP's leadership woes resonated in the region. Shortly after the election was called former Flin Flon NDP MLA Clarence Petterson, running as an independent after losing his party's nomination, publicly accused

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Thompson NDP MLA Steve Ashton of double-dealing in his support of Theresa Oswald during the leadership race. This added to challenges faced by Ashton, who himself faced dissatisfaction in Thompson for various reasons—not the least of which being the rumblings within his own constituency association caused by his alleged strong-arming of the nomination process prior to the election. In The Pas, a contentious constituency battle ensued for the 2015 NDP nomination that was decided by a coin toss after the two candidates—Amanda Lathlin and Florence Duncan tied with the same number of votes on the second round of voting. Lathlin won the coin toss and there was a feeling that use of a coin toss to determine a winner was unfair, but controversy continued indirectly through the spectacle of Tyler Duncan, the son of Florence Duncan, emerging as the Liberal candidate for the seat. Tyler Duncan was himself a former candidate for president of the Manitoba NDP. In Keewatinook, allegations that Eric Robinson offered public works jobs to Opaskwayak Cree Nation in return for support of Selinger's leadership bid were made both before and during the election campaign. Finally, while its specific influence remains unclear, the national NDP's division over the Leap Manifesto, and the rejection of Tom Mulcair as leader, failed to provide soothing background music for provincial NDP candidates. Rightly or wrongly, these events reinforced the general perception among northerners of a political party with a unity problem. This helped contribute to the

NDP losses to the PCs and Liberals in Thompson and Keewatinook on 19 April 2016.

Whether the north is punishing the NDP temporarily remains to be seen. This is a situation that will likely depend on whether or not the new Progressive Conservative government can convince northerners that it genuinely has northern interests at heart. Northern Manitoba has not been a region where provincial policy issues are defined nor the balance of power decided, and the 2016 election did not change these dynamics. Nevertheless, the 2016 provincial election demonstrated that the north is not insensitive to the larger political trends that play out in Manitoba politics.

# End of an Era in Brandon

*Jillian Austin*

The 2016 provincial election marked the end of an era in Brandon East. For the first time in its history, the constituency elected a Progressive Conservative (PC) MLA—Len Isleifson—ousting New Democratic Party (NDP) incumbent Drew Caldwell from the seat he held since 1999. Since the modern riding was created in 1968, it has always been represented by an NDP MLA. Prior to Caldwell, the late Len Evans spent thirty years as MLA for Brandon East (1969–1999).

The controversy surrounding the NDP, beginning with the PST increase in 2013 and followed by the so-called “Rebel Five” revolt and lingering leadership questions, proved to be too much for the party to overcome in Brandon East. Even in this stronghold constituency, Caldwell couldn’t hang on for a fifth term. There was a defensive feeling throughout the campaign period, with Caldwell frequently listing off projects and accomplishments and attempting to justify the 1 percent PST increase, all while standing by former premier Greg Selinger. Caldwell often spoke out against the PC Party, calling PC leader Brian Pallister an “extremist” and warning voters of major cuts if the PC Party was elected. The NDP was accused of fear mongering in their campaign messaging and ads.

Political pundits predicted that winds of change were coming and,

as it turns out, that forecast proved accurate. “This is a government that really did transform this community over the course of the last sixteen years,” Caldwell said from his campaign headquarters on election night. “But we have had a good run—the second longest-serving government in provincial history. I think there was obviously a mood for change across the province.”

Caldwell told the media that no government in a democracy is entitled to hold office forever and that there needs to be “an ebb and flow in politics that keeps everybody fresh and on their toes.” “People were motivated to get out and change the government, and sometimes it’s hard to resist that,” he said. “Obviously tonight, I’m one of the victims of that call for change.”

Len Isleifson won 3,651 votes to Caldwell’s 2,513. Liberal candidate Vanessa Hamilton came in third with 809 votes. “It feels really good, I ran municipally before and I won by one vote, so to win by this many, it just shows that the platform the party has, my ideas that I bring to the table... go a long way,” Isleifson said on election night.

An interesting dynamic in the Brandon East race was the fact that all three candidates are former Brandon city councillors. Caldwell served two-and-a-half terms as Rosser Ward councillor from 1992 to 1999, while Isleifson served one term as

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Riverview councilor from 2010 to 2014. Hamilton was elected Riverview Ward councillor in 2014, after several unsuccessful runs at municipal politics. She stepped down in March to run provincially.

Hamilton faced criticism about her decision to switch to the Liberal Party after being a vocal NDP supporter, even serving as president of the Brandon-Souris Federal NDP Riding Association. “[NDP Leader] Greg Selinger was not resonating with me,” Hamilton said. “I just felt like the NDP lost its way under his leadership, and I quietly left and went my own way.”

Meanwhile, in Brandon West, Progressive Conservative incumbent Reg Helwer easily snagged a second term with 5,603 votes over NDP candidate Linda Ross’s 1,875 and Liberal candidate Billy Moore’s 618.

Helwer’s message throughout the campaign focused on the PST increase and public dissatisfaction with Selinger. “We kind of see this as a referendum on Greg Selinger and his abilities—or inabilities—as a premier,” Helwer said during the campaign. “The last election, he was fairly new to that game as being premier, and I think now what we’re hearing at the doors are people being very upset with his government and they want a change.”

As the results came in on election night, Caldwell couldn’t pinpoint the word to describe the feeling of losing his seat after sixteen years. “I don’t know if disappointing is the right

word, I’m not even sure what the right word is right now,” he said. “When you suffer a defeat, it’s motivation to do better the next time, frankly.”

He took the opportunity to tell his supporters: “Let this all be a lesson to all of us. Let’s redouble our efforts to continue to build this community each and every day. Thanks very much for all of your support.”

# The Manitoba Election in Context: Comparing Provincial and Federal Results

Curtis Brown

The 2016 Manitoba election wasn't about "change that's ready" or "real change." If there was a theme for the campaign, it was that change is inevitable.

In October 2015, Manitobans joined the massive wave of Canadians that swept out Stephen Harper's Conservative government after a decade in power. In that election, Winnipeg turned Liberal red as non-Conservative voters coalesced around the party of Justin Trudeau and his promise of "real change." In the process, they rejected Tom Mulcair and the New Democratic Party's (NDP) call to choose "change that's ready." The New Democrats were trounced throughout the province and just two of the party's candidates, veteran MP Niki Ashton and newcomer Daniel Blaikie, survived the red tide.

Seven months later, the provincial New Democrats suffered the worst defeat of a governing party in a century. But even if Manitoba's 2016 election was a "change" campaign, it was a very different type of change that Manitobans embraced—the "Change For The Better" offered by Brian Pallister and the Progressive Conservatives.

Going into the campaign, it appeared extremely likely that the Progressive Conservatives (PCs) would clinch victory easily. For nearly three years they led opinion polls,

and the suddenly resurgent provincial Liberals steadily eroded NDP support. After nearly seventeen years in office—in which time the party's leader, Greg Selinger, barely survived a challenge to his leadership from his own party members—it appeared inevitable that Manitobans would move on from the NDP and return the PCs to power almost by default.

In fact, the federal NDP's poor showing in Manitoba in October 2015 was blamed in part on the fact that the provincial party's unpopularity had crippled the overall NDP "brand" in Manitoba. Conversely, the pre-writ surge in popularity for Rana Bokhari's Manitoba Liberals was largely attributed to the popularity of the federal party.

The only thing that seemed odd was that Manitobans appeared poised to elect a right-wing party led by a former federal Conservative MP in Brian Pallister just as other Canadians had parted ways with a long-lasting Conservative government. In 2014 and 2015, electors had also thrown out Progressive Conservative regimes in Alberta, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland and Labrador while also rejecting the right-of-centre option in elections held in Ontario and Prince Edward Island. (Indeed, in the leader's debate seven days before election day, NDP leader Greg Selinger's plea for Manitobans was "Don't let Harper happen here.")

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With Ottawa and many provincial legislatures now under Liberal or NDP control, why did Manitoba, which had ousted many of its federal Conservative MPs just a few months earlier, turn around and install the only Progressive Conservative government in the country?

The notion that Manitoba has bucked a trend away from national conservatism ignores the reality in the province and glosses over the distorted impact that shifts in voter support have in our first-past-the-post voting system.

All governments have an expiration date—something even the long-lasting Alberta PC dynasty proved when it was swept from office in May 2015 by Rachel Notley's NDP. The dynamics in that province most closely parallel those of Manitoba, but in reverse. In Alberta, the NDP benefitted from their Progressive Conservative and Wildrose opponents splitting the right-of-centre vote while it managed to consolidate left-of-centre voters, as well as gaining support from voters yearning for change after forty-four years of uninterrupted PC rule.

The harbinger of the impending PC victory was that the Liberals eroded enough NDP support to reduce the margins the NDP had relied on to win seats in suburban Winnipeg and a handful of strategic rural constituencies, such as Selkirk and Brandon East. The PCs built upon their rock-solid base of support in rural Manitoba and added additional rural, suburban, and northern voters seeking change. Neither the NDP nor the Liberals were able to consolidate the non-PC

vote and prevent those voters desiring change from choosing the Conservatives.

NDP victories in 2003, 2007, and 2011 appeared more dominant than they actually were because Liberal support had collapsed to single digits and the NDP was able to consolidate and win suburban Winnipeg areas that often shift between NDP and Liberal at both federal and provincial levels. Although the Liberals did not achieve the level of support in 2016 that their pre-writ polling figures suggested they might, they did increase their support enough to gain additional seats and, more importantly, to challenge the NDP's argument as the only party capable of stopping the PCs.

Brian Pallister will now be the only conservative premier in the federation, notwithstanding the presence of BC's Christy Clark and Saskatchewan's Brad Wall. During the next four years, it remains to be seen if his "change for the better" will endure for more than one term, or if Manitobans will choose change again in 2020.



# Conclusion: Into the Wild Blue Yonder

*Barry Ferguson and Royce Koop*

The contributors to this project have offered succinct and well-informed reports on important topics that emerged in the 2016 Manitoba election. Collectively, our authors hoped to contribute not just to a post-election review, but also to the major discussions that will permeate provincial life over the next four years. Whether it is regarding the political parties, social, economic, and cultural organizations, public institutions, or key policy areas, these essays contribute to a strengthened understanding of the province.

The 2016 Manitoba election was most remarkable for maintaining trends identified by informed observers and opinion polls in the previous three years. Premier Greg Selinger struggled for popular support for virtually the entirety of his term as premier—indeed, he was generally ranked as the least-popular premier in Canada. Both the internal conflicts in the New Democratic Party (NDP) and the sustained popularity of the Progressive Conservative (PC) Party in the lead-up to the campaign contributed to a sense that the 2016 election was a foregone conclusion. This situation contrasts with many, if not most election campaigns in Canada, in which there typically are dramatic oscillations in party support among the major contenders. Campaigns matter, but this campaign seems not to have mattered a great deal to the final outcome.

The governing NDP, however weakened by internal conflicts and a sense of policy weariness, fought hard to avoid utter collapse. Following a last-ditch onslaught of attacks on PC leader Brian Pallister, the NDP succeeded in avoiding obliteration, electing a respectable core of MLAs to form the Official Opposition.

The opposition PCs, who in 2011 lost an election they thought was sewn up, contested the 2016 election under a new yet seemingly prickly leader. Brian Pallister returned to provincial politics after a lengthy foray into federal politics. The party sought to maintain the considerable lead it held heading into the campaign, buoyed by their impregnable southern Manitoba town-and-country base and their renewed competitiveness in suburban Winnipeg. Their majority of seats and high number of votes are among the most impressive in Manitoba electoral history.

The decline of the Liberals was the one notable shift during the campaign. Under a truly new leader, Rana Bokhari—several generations younger than the other leaders—the Liberals were in a competitive position in the Winnipeg area going into the election, but fell back to a merely visible status. The Greens were marginal in all but two or three urban ridings. They represented a novel approach thanks to a sharp platform and a youthful leader, James Beddome, who turned heads in

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a leaders' debate—but the Greens did not win any seats.

The voters may have been engaged, but not much more so than in recent elections. Furthermore, as essay after essay in this e-book shows, the important themes and issues, and the regional concerns that are so critical to Manitoba public life, were not the subject of passionate, sustained debate during this election campaign. Rather than serious discussion or debate over Manitoba's ailing health care system, the campaign centred instead on the abolition of ambulance fees. The same was true of a wide range of policy themes that were given short shrift during the campaign: education, Indigenous issues, infrastructure, fiscal policy, municipal affairs, transportation, environment, and on and on. Our contributors identify and lament this failure on all sides to engage in sustained discussions of any of the major issues that should demand attention in the next policy cycle. Instead, the focus of the campaign—as has often been the case in Canada and its provinces—was on the leaders' likeability, honesty, charisma, and commitment. The one leader who seemed intent on discussing substantive issues in the campaign, Selinger, was the least able to do so effectively. Meanwhile, voters had shifted their preferences since the last election, particularly in northern and central regions, and in Winnipeg—three areas that reconsider their political affiliations from time to time.

Does the 2016 election mark a realignment in Manitoba's system of party competition? This is difficult to

answer with the results of only one election as guidance. However, we suspect not. The fundamental characteristics of Manitoba's enduring polarized party system—two viable parties of the left and the right, with a resilient minor centrist presence—have not changed. The story of Manitoba's political history in recent decades has been that of relentless alteration between orange and blue, and we have just entered a blue period.

But this should not distract us from the fact that this election was noteworthy and carries with it some substantial consequences. An entire generation of NDP politicians was defeated or retired. A corporal's guard of Liberals was elected. The PCs were returned to power for the first time in a generation, but they made few specific policy commitments and key groups, notably Indigenous peoples, went virtually ignored and uncourted. The PCs will govern with a very comfortable majority elected from each corner of the province. The next four years must seem very much like a blank slate to Premier-designate Pallister.