

# Understanding the Manitoba Election

Campaigns, Participation, and Issues

2019

Edited by Royce Koop, Barry Ferguson, Karine Levasseur,  
Andrea Rounce, and Kiera L. Ladner



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Barry Ferguson thanks the Duff Roblin Foundation for its support of the Duff Roblin Chair in Government and the projects the chair pursues. All editors are faculty members in the Department of Political Studies at the University of Manitoba, and have benefitted from an intellectual environment there that is deeply supportive of the study of Manitoba government and politics.

As editors, we extend our thanks to UMP, our contributors, and our department. We hope that readers enjoy the insights in this volume.

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# Introduction: Snap Election, Uninspired Campaign?

*Karine Levasseur and Andrea Rounce*

## Understanding the Manitoba Election 2019

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While some refer to the 2019 Manitoba election as a legitimate “snap” election, others see it as a violation of the spirit of Section 49 of the province’s Elections Act. The Act provides for predictable fixed-date elections whereby general elections are held every four years, on the first Tuesday of October. Fixed-date elections ensure predictability of elections for citizens, political parties, and advocacy groups. They diminish the power that a sitting government has to call an election at a time that increases its probability of winning (known as a “snap” election). Three years into its mandate, the Pallister government began discussing an early election call instead of waiting until October 2020, as the fixed-date provisions specified. Since Manitoba’s 150th anniversary as a province occurs in 2020, Premier Pallister argued that citizens did not want their province’s birthday year to be negatively impacted by an election, and specifically by the mandatory government communications blackout period ninety days prior to an election. While nearly half of Manitobans wanted the premier to stick to the mandated election date, Pallister’s early election call was seen by most others as unimportant or not concerning, or within the premier’s mandate.<sup>1</sup>

The election call came after significant changes to Manitoba’s electoral boundaries, which were announced in December 2018 and recommended by a non-partisan commission. The

changes saw an increase in the number of seats in the City of Winnipeg and a decrease in the number of rural seats to reflect shifts in the population. The boundary changes were significant, with only one riding out of fifty-seven keeping the same boundaries it had in the 2016 election. With new boundaries came new battles, making for some unforeseen challenges and unpredictable outcomes. Combined with these changes was the fact that several long-serving politicians chose not to run again, such as Steven Fletcher (Progressive Conservative/Independent), James Allum (New Democratic Party), and Judy Klassen (Liberal). The absence of these incumbents produced even more unpredictability. Changes to electoral financing provisions also impacted the funds available for both political parties and advocacy groups to spend during the campaign.

## The Content of the Campaign

Although the 2019 election campaign contained many similarities to the 2016 campaign, the 2016 provincial election was, in our view, “clearly a referendum on the leadership provided by Greg Selinger and his NDP government.”<sup>2</sup> While the 2019 election could also be seen as a referendum on Pallister’s leadership and accomplishments over the past three years of governing, we also saw a reversion to historically entrenched voting patterns in Manitoba. Traditionally,

Manitobans give governments at least two terms, with the exception of the Sterling Lyon (PC) government which only enjoyed one term beginning in 1977. Given the public support for Pallister's government going into the election, we expected Manitobans to give it another term, albeit with a slightly reduced majority.

Pallister and his team had a significant record to defend during this election. This record included a major overhaul of health care, including the closure of several emergency rooms; cost containment to reduce the deficit that involved taking on the unions and reducing the size of the public sector; a promise to reduce education taxes (followed by a commitment to removing the education tax portion of the property tax); drafting a response to the opioid crisis; and reducing the provincial sales tax—all within the context of a promise to become the most improved province in Canada. While the Conservatives defended this record, public opinion polling saw the NDP resurging, notably in the City of Winnipeg, with the Liberals and Greens holding steady. The PCs launched significant attacks on NDP Leader Wab Kinew's past and his leadership abilities, which the NDP countered with questions about Pallister's lengthy vacations at his home in Costa Rica and the impact of health care cuts for average citizens. Despite these dynamics, the campaign was unusually dull in large part because it occurred in the summer, when Manitobans travel or head to cottage country to enjoy the warm weather.

This election did see a significant role for advocacy groups and their campaigns. The accessibility community's Disability Matters Vote campaign leveraged social media and grassroots mobilizing to highlight the challenges facing Manitobans with disabilities. Other groups focused on health care changes and poverty. Writers in this volume explore these campaigns and their impacts further.

### The Election Results

The uninspired nature of this campaign may have contributed to another majority PC government. The PCs won thirty-six seats, a decline of four seats from 2016. This outcome came at the cost of losing Colleen Mayer (St. Vital) who held a cabinet minister position prior to the election. The NDP fared better than expected with eighteen seats (up six seats from dissolution<sup>3</sup>), while the Liberal Party lost official party status by only securing three seats. There was considerable excitement for the Green Party in the riding of Wolseley given that it nearly captured this seat in 2016. With Rob Altemeyer (NDP) no longer running, there were high hopes for the Green Party, but it simply could not withstand the powerful NDP election machine, which resulted in Lisa Naylor winning the seat for the party.

Voter turnout was low at 54.99 percent, which compares to 57.57 percent in the last provincial election. This is likely because much of the campaigning occurred over the summer and advanced voting took place during the traditional back-to-school and harvest seasons.

There were some important wins for diversity and representation in this election. The main parties all had an increased number of candidates from diverse backgrounds. The three main parties ran a number of Indigenous candidates, with the Liberals and PCs running seven and the NDP running ten Indigenous candidates.<sup>4</sup> The PCs ran their first openly gay candidate in this election and, according to a CBC report, “at least seven candidates for each of the Liberals and NDP also identified as LGBTQ.”<sup>5</sup> Additionally, as Joan Grace indicates in her chapter on women and the election, more women stood for election across the province in 2019 than in the previous two elections. And while diversity in the campaign mattered, whether these candidates were in “winnable seats,” where they had a real chance of winning, was critical. In this case, three black MLAs—Uzoma Asagwara and Jamie Moses for the NDP and Audrey Gordon for the PCs—were elected for

the first time in Manitoba’s legislative history.

This publication includes thirteen chapters that focus on the activities and performance of the three main political parties; analysis of participants outside political parties in the 2019 election, including pollsters and unions; representation and diversity; the campaign itself, including turnout, campaigning, and voting; and key public policy issues, including health, poverty, and the impact of balanced budget legislation and rhetoric. All contributors focus on critical pieces of the election and how we as Manitobans understand and experience democracy in 2019. As part of the editorial team, we hope that you find this multi-faceted picture of the 2019 Manitoba election to be a helpful way of better understanding what happened during the election, and the foundation it lays for the Pallister government’s next term.

- 1 Probe Research, “Election 2019: Three Stories to Watch,” *The Sounding*, August 2019, <https://www.probe-research.com/news/sounding-august-2019>.
- 2 Andrea Rounce and Karine Levasseur, “Introduction: Blue Manitoba 2016,” in *Understanding the Manitoba Election 2016: Campaigns, Participation, Issues, and Place*, eds. Karine Levasseur, Andrea Rounce, Barry Ferguson, and Royce Koop (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2016), 5.
- 3 Although the NDP secured fourteen seats in the last provincial election, they lost two of those seats prior to the 2019 campaign.
- 4 Dana Hatherly, “Trio of Black MLAs Make History by Winning Seats in Manitoba Legislature,” CBC Manitoba, 10 September 2019, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/trio-of-black-mlas-make-history-by-winning-seats-in-manitoba-legislature-1.5278236>.
- 5 Hatherly, “Trio of Black MLAs Make History.”

# The Progressive Conservatives

*Kelly Saunders*

If the election of 2016 was a historic triumph for the Progressive Conservative (PC) Party, the 2019 election is a close second. Following the biggest majority win seen in this province in over a century, the Tories were returned to office three years later with their second largest seat total, equaling the Roblin Tories in 1959 and 1962. When the dust settled on election night, the Tories claimed thirty-six of the province's fifty-seven seats, just four seats shy of their 2016 record high.

In some ways, the outcome of Manitoba's forty-second election was a foregone conclusion. Over the previous three years the Conservatives had maintained a comfortable lead over their opponents. The New Democratic Party (NDP) struggled to recover from its devastating loss in 2016, and it appeared that their new leader, Wab Kinew, had not yet managed to solidify his support within the party. The premier's decision to call the election a full year earlier than scheduled under Manitoba's fixed-date election law did not seem to bother most voters, despite his rather flimsy excuse about not wanting to interfere with the province's 150th anniversary celebrations. Nonetheless, some saw Brian Pallister's decision to head to the polls early as a potentially risky move. The Conservatives' austerity agenda during their first mandate, in particular their substantial overhaul of the health care system and the controversial closures

of Winnipeg emergency rooms, had made them unpopular in some quarters and vulnerable to opposition attacks.

Then there was the leader himself. The man *Maclean's* magazine once dubbed Manitoba's "paradox premier" had the dubious achievement of being one of the country's most unpopular political leaders. Known for his irascible and sometimes difficult personality, Pallister seemed to spend a good deal of his time in office picking fights with everyone from the mayor of Winnipeg and the Manitoba Metis Federation to the prime minister. Even Manitobans did not seem to like their own premier much, with polls showing more than half of voters disapproving of Pallister and his leadership style. In contrast to the popular wisdom that political leaders should enjoy at least some measure of likeability amongst voters in order to ensure re-election, the premier seemed to take pride in his polarizing personality, preferring, as he described it, results over popularity.

Aware of these possible pitfalls, the PCs hedged their bets and took nothing for granted heading into the election. Following months of speculation, the election was timed to ensure that the bulk of the campaign would occur during the dog days of August, when voters were least likely to devote much attention to the issues or the Conservative record in office. The election call came just weeks after a

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1 percent cut in the provincial sales tax came into effect, which had been a key (and widely popular) Conservative promise in the last election. In their election advertising, the PCs focused on two main themes. The first consisted of television ads targeting Wab Kinew, reminding everyone of the NDP leader's turbulent younger days and allegations of domestic violence by a former partner. The second series of ads attempted to portray Pallister in a softer light, describing his humble beginnings on the family farm in Portage la Prairie.

The Conservatives also chose to play it safe in their campaign promises. While the official campaign slogan was "Moving Manitoba Forward," the 2019 platform actually promised more of the same: to fix the province's finances and make life more affordable for Manitobans by cutting taxes on everything from home insurance to fifty-dollar haircuts. There were, however, signs that the party was beginning to heed criticisms that it had become too fixated on the bottom line at the expense of providing services. Sprinkled in their platform were promises to boost health care spending by \$2 billion, increase child care spaces, and tackle the province's growing methamphetamine crisis. The PCs' goal of securing a second mandate by playing it safe and avoiding mistakes also extended to campaign strategy. David McLaughlin, the party's campaign director from the 2016 campaign, returned to the helm to rev up the Conservatives' efficient and well-organized ground game, ensure that candidates stayed on message, and keep Pallister out of the media

spotlight. In a classic front-runner tactic, the premier appeared in only one leader's debate, preferring to travel to all of the province's fifty-seven constituencies and meet one-on-one with voters to sell his message.

Post-election, the PCs' fortunes appear to be on strong footing. While voter turnout was slightly down from the 2016 election and the party saw its majority drop by four seats, it was clear that Manitobans were not prepared to reject the Pallister government for its austerity agenda. With the exception of Colleen Mayer in St. Vital, all of the incumbent cabinet ministers were re-elected. This was no small feat given that many were running in newly redrawn ridings as a result of the 2018 electoral boundaries redistribution. At the same time, the Tories also managed to hold on to key urban and suburban ridings, winning fifteen seats in Winnipeg. Historically, the Conservatives' base of support has largely been centred in rural Manitoba, with the NDP tending to fare better in Winnipeg and in the North. Given that thirty-two of the province's fifty-seven seats are linked to Winnipeg, the party's growing urban strength bodes well for its future competitiveness.

In the end, the PCs retained power in the 2019 election by effectively selling the status quo. While Manitobans may be less than enamoured with their incumbent premier and some of his decisions, they are still fatigued by the seventeen years of NDP rule that preceded the Tories' return to power. Until the NDP is once again seen as ready for prime time in the eyes of voters, Manitoba's blue wave will continue for the foreseeable future.



# The New Democratic Party

*Rory Henry*

As the poll results came in on the evening of the 2019 provincial election, the media and pundits seemed surprised by the fact that the New Democratic Party (NDP) seemed happier and more energized by the results than the victors—despite having half the seats of the Progressive Conservative (PC) Party. This was no fake enthusiasm for the cameras, but it reflected the immense challenges the party had overcome in the campaign, and their immediate awareness of the potential future that the evening's results revealed.

Like all parties, the NDP's campaign focused on achieving success on E-Day, but the E-Day they had in mind was the one four years in the future. The party faced numerous challenges. The previous all-party consensus on the importance of fixed-date elections for fair campaigns was unilaterally dismissed by the premier, throwing all campaigns a major curveball in their preparations. The chosen date placed the campaign in the summer months, with the critical last week in the very busy beginning of September. The new date caused a major decline in public interest and attention in the election (which usually favours incumbent governments) and in the availability of volunteers. Per-vote political party funding, introduced to reduce the influence of money in democratic campaigns, was eliminated. Further, the election

rebate that had been in place for decades was reduced by half, and immediately after the election Premier Pallister announced he would be moving to eliminate it entirely. Both these changes gave a very significant financial advantage to the governing Conservatives that translated into a massive advantage in terms of paid advertising and research and polling opportunities. The PC Party also had the option to pay for positions from managers down to door knockers, while the other parties had to scramble to find volunteers. The early timing of the election gave the governing party an additional advantage in that it was called in close conjunction to a health care sector bargaining vote that the government triggered. The health care vote preoccupied and exhausted many of the volunteers that an NDP campaign seeks to attract. In the lead-up to the election, volunteers that the NDP depend upon for organizational positions had been snapped up by unions needing their campaigning abilities for the bargaining vote.

Not all of the NDP's challenges were caused by the actions of the incumbent government changing the rules to their advantage. The lingering impacts of the Selinger period remained a concern, both in terms of internal party cooperation and in terms of the public backlash that had emerged in reaction to the Selinger government. Running in his first

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campaign as leader, Wab Kinew came with particular challenges. Kinew's public early history of run-ins with the law and allegations of domestic violence featured prominently in PC attack advertisements in the election and the pre-election period. Further, Kinew faced the challenge of navigating Manitoba politics as an Indigenous person. Those that were inclined to vote for him were nevertheless concerned that he might be *too Indigenous* and allow Indigenous concerns to take too much of his focus as a leader. PC advertising made sure to feature him in pictures with Greg Selinger and in clothing that highlighted his Indigenous identity. Ironically, at the same time a whisper campaign from those not inclined to support him argued that he was not Indigenous *enough*, and that the mistakes and challenges of his past should not be seen in the context of the damage that settler colonialism has inflicted on Indigenous peoples.

For the NDP, safe seats lost in the 2016 electoral debacle needed to be retaken, and seats that had been held on to by a thread could not be taken for granted, especially in the face of attempts by the Liberals and the Greens to reinvent themselves as the progressive option in the province. Like other parties, the NDP faced the challenges of redistribution, but on top of that they were running with only half of their incumbents from the 2016 campaign. Furthermore, the NDP's funding for polling and research was less than half of what a modern campaign in Manitoba requires. The party was not able to fully

identify its vote and potential target seats as the campaign developed, nor would they likely have had any resources or volunteers to shift around had they been able to identify these seats. The PC Party's advertisements and mailers dwarfed that of the other parties. When the financial reports from the campaigns become available, we will likely see the largest difference in paid advertising among parties in the modern era of Manitoba politics.

These challenges dictated the nature of the shoestring NDP campaign. A strong focus on health care in the election allowed the NDP to match its biggest public strength against the PC party's biggest weakness. Moreover, a health care focus helped solidify the NDP vote in formerly safe seats (some of which were more directly impacted by emergency room closures), while allowing for potential growth in target seats that faced the indirect impacts of the health care changes. With few resources and little of the inter-constituency cooperation that the NDP historically relied upon, local campaigns were far more self-reliant. Central support for door-to-door engagement, still the best determinant of getting a voter to mark a ballot, was non-existent.

In the face of all these challenges the NDP's joy on the evening of the election seems far more understandable. With one exception, the NDP held its existing seat count and picked up four more from its 2016 tally.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the results showed that there is potential for future growth and a realistic path back to victory in the next election. The party is now in

a position to ensure that its existing seats are firmly in its camp before the next writ. The expanded and re-energized new NDP caucus will be able to compete with the governing caucus at attending public events in the coming years, further raising the party's profile as a government in waiting. The Green and Liberal push to cut into the NDP's vote failed, and early analysis of the results indicate that the NDP voting universe has returned to a size that will make them fully competitive once again.

In order to realise the potential that the 2019 election unlocks, the NDP will nevertheless have to follow a very difficult path. The party will have to find a solution to the new election financing model that is significantly advantageous to one party. The NDP

volunteer base must be expanded for the party to compete in enough seats to form government. Kinew will need to make sure his caucus works hard to hold its existing seats, and find the discipline and focus to reach out to voters that supported the last NDP government. These are not easy challenges, especially for a relatively new leader. Kinew will also need to continue his conversations with Manitobans about his past—negative advertising often suppresses voting, and it is not yet clear if future vote potential might still be limited by concerns over his past. Kinew will have to do all of this with the additional challenge of helping Manitobans come to terms with the possibility that their next premier may be an Indigenous one.

1 If counting from when the 2019 election was called, the NDP picked up six seats. This is due to the loss of two NDP seats between 2016 and 2019.



# The Manitoba Liberal Party

*Allen Mills*

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One outcome of the 2019 provincial election is that the long drought of the Manitoba Liberal Party (MLP) continues. It has been sixty-one years since the MLP formed a government in Manitoba. In the period since 1958, the MLP has only come close to power on one occasion, which was in 1988 when it won twenty seats and formed the official opposition. For the rest of this period it has been a third party with only a few seats in the provincial house, and on one occasion, in 1981, none at all. However, other political parties have endured similarly long purgatories in the political wilderness only to come back to office eventually. The Conservative Party of Manitoba was shut out of forming a government from 1915 to 1958, a period of forty-three years. The New Democratic Party (NDP) took slightly less time to eventually win power, but thirty-six years elapsed from the founding of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) in 1932 to the NDP coming to power in 1969.

In the period of Liberal provincial marginalization, its federal sibling has not been equally unpopular in the province. The federal Liberal Party has registered the general decline of support for official Liberalism in western Canada since the mid-1950s, but they have nonetheless gained substantial support in the province in several national elections in the last sixty years, notably

recently in its winning seven out of Manitoba's fourteen seats under Justin Trudeau in 2015.

Herein lies a tale: the Liberal Party in Manitoba is strong federally, but weak provincially. Unsurprisingly, in a country like Canada, with its engrained regionalism and federalism, political party support in a province can vary depending on the level of the contest. Liberal national popularity in 2015 helped little in the provincial election the following year. That provincial election saw the MLP gain 14.04 percent of the popular vote and win only three seats.

The election of September 2019 took place on the terms of the incumbent Progressive Conservative (PC) government. Premier Pallister found a loophole in the fixed-date election legislation and went to the province not just one year early, but at the end of summer. It was a dead time of year when few were attentive to politics, something that was not encouraging for a small party seeking to win attention for its message. Pallister stood for fiscal rectitude, reform of the health care system, and a plethora of small-scale initiatives. In the event, the middle class of Winnipeg and the rural community thought that this was good enough and the PCs were re-elected with a comfortable but reduced majority.

The Liberals were led by Dougald Lamont, a policy consultant and

university lecturer who had won a by-election in St. Boniface in July 2018, thus giving the party four seats and official party status in the Legislature. In 2019, the MLP ran a full slate of candidates. Lamont performed well on the election stump and the party avoided embarrassing incidents. A fully formed platform was presented, well-conceived, and bold in its aspirations in some respects. Lamont talked especially intelligently about the ecological predicament of Lake Winnipeg and offered a bold Green Plan of environmental policy. He advocated a minimum wage of fifteen dollars in two years and a Fair Tax commission. He talked systematically about health care reform, addictions treatment, an infrastructure bank, and support for a Pharmacare program bruited by the federal Liberal Party. By most accounts Lamont was well-regarded by the public. In general, he positioned his party to the left of the NDP.

But the MLP was financially strapped by its third-party status and by changes to the Election Financing Act made by the Pallister government, which cut in half the public subsidy of eligible election expenses by political parties. The MLP failed to make itself the main voice of opposition to the incumbent government and slipped to electing MLAs in just three seats: Jon Gerrard in River Heights, Cindy Lamoureux in Tyndall Park, and Dougald Lamont himself in St. Boniface. The party fared particularly poorly in the northern constituencies and in the countryside, although outside Winnipeg, with good candidates, it was locally competitive as its

finishing in second place in Borderland and Dawson Trail attested. Only in five other constituencies did its candidates finish second (Fort Richmond, Keewatinook, The Maples, Tuxedo, and Union Station). A measure of its electoral marginality was the fact that its candidates finished behind Green Party candidates in fifteen constituencies.

So the MLP once again confronts the predicament of its third-party status. It is locked in a historically entrenched structuralist dilemma of co-existing with two other political parties in the province: the PCs and the NDP. These two parties have alternated in power since 1958. In the process they have built a political culture of two-party dominance, and with it a series of institutions that provide them with a foundation for ongoing political success: financial contributions, extensive membership lists, civil society supporters, media attention, attractive candidates, and competent advisers. Only once in the last sixty-one years has the MLP figured centrally in Manitoba elections. This was in 1988, at the time of the Meech Lake constitutional crisis, when both the NDP and PCs were in a state of relative unpopularity. When the two dominant parties are in difficulty, the MLP has an opportunity to succeed. In the absence of such a contingency, Manitobans find relief from an incumbent government by supporting the other party in the NDP/PC duality system.

# Political Leaders and the Media

*Mary Agnes Welch*

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Ask Manitoba journalists what they will remember from the 2019 campaign and the answer might be a kitchen table. At nearly every campaign announcement, stump speech, debate, and media interview, Premier Pallister talked about “leaving more money on the kitchen tables” of Manitobans. The ubiquity of this folksy talking point prompted endless eyerolls among reporters and even a debate night drinking game. But it might also be the most memorable nugget in a campaign that was otherwise one of the most conventional and tightly scripted in recent Manitoba memory. In many ways, when it comes to media coverage and party public relations strategies, the 2019 election was most notable not for what happened, but for what did *not* happen:

## **No one veered off message.**

As he did in 2016, Pallister ran a tightly focused, classical front-runner campaign built around reminding voters of the risk of returning to the bad old New Democratic Party (NDP) days of uncontrolled spending. But even Pallister’s ability to stay on script was no match for NDP Leader Wab Kinew, who pivoted to health care as an answer to almost every media question—in scrums, in debates, or on social media. This was undoubtedly smart political strategy for Kinew. Health care was genuinely the top issue for voters and the NDP’s almost

maniacal focus on it helped the party exceed expectations on election night. But this single-minded message track from both Pallister and Kinew made for repetitive news coverage and prevented other issues from catching fire on the campaign trail.

## **No one got to know the team.**

The 2019 campaign was almost exclusively focused on the leaders, and although they were often flanked by other candidates at photo ops, we heard next to nothing from anyone other than Kinew, Pallister, and Liberal Leader Dougald Lamont. This was somewhat surprising since all parties had decent bench strength from which to draw, especially women candidates who might appeal to a critical voting bloc. Progressive Conservative cabinet ministers Rochelle Squires and Heather Stefanson got little airtime, as did strong NDP candidates such as former school trustee Lisa Naylor and young community leader Uzoma Asagwara. Here again, the singular focus on four men made for somewhat monotonous coverage.

## **Accessibility was curtailed.**

More and more, modern Canadian campaigns keep leaders cloistered and access very tightly controlled. This was true in the 2019 election, even for the NDP whose public relations machine has traditionally been a little more relaxed. All party leaders were



generally available daily during announcements or campaign stops, but Pallister's staff, and to a lesser degree Kinew's, frequently curtailed questions—especially those unrelated to the promise of the day. One journalist noted her recordings of Pallister's daily scrums were often only about four minutes long.

Pallister avoided nearly all debates and media interviews that have become political tradition in Manitoba, such as CBC reporter Bartley Kives's "Stupid Questions for Smart Candidates." Similarly, Pallister visited all fifty-seven ridings, but reporters accompanied him to virtually none of them. The days of tagging along with a leader in the back of a minivan to Melita appear to be over. Similarly, Kinew's communications team made their leader less accessible than in the past and pushed back more aggressively against coverage they deemed less than ideal. The exceptions were Lamont and Green Party Leader James Beddome—who had slightly more campaign staff in his orbit than in 2016 but still handled most media requests himself. Both were accessible, and often more colourful and unpredictable, than Kinew and Pallister.

### **There was not much drama.**

There was likely never going to be the kind of horse-race drama sparked by a genuinely close race or a visceral "time for change" feeling among the electorate. But the kinds of micro-dramas that help get voters talking about a campaign largely failed to materialize. There were almost no "bozo eruptions" of the kinds that force leaders to turf candidates

for racist or sexist pronouncements. No one, including Kinew himself, made much of Kinew's Anishinaabe identity, even when Pallister obtusely suggested he knew plenty about life on reserve because he grew up next to one and claimed Kinew was "handed more benefits than any premier in the last sixty years." Similarly, despite a reasonable number of negative ads on the airwaves, the leaders themselves waged a fairly civil race. This lack of drama allowed for a bit more focus on policy, but it also meant voters did not benefit from the kinds of "talker" stories that can serve as entry points into a campaign.

### **Media coverage was somewhat unimaginative.**

If this was a paint-by-numbers campaign, so too was the media coverage. Print, online, and broadcast news reverted to the traditional pattern of rounding up daily party announcements and squeezing in the occasional riding profile. There were few attempts to gather deep insights from voters, almost no insider looks at party war rooms, and few deep dives on issues. A worthy exception to this gentle criticism was the creation of at least two new political podcasts, one produced by the *Winnipeg Free Press* and one by Global/CJOB. Just like voters, it seems even Manitoba journalists had a hard time getting excited about a pretty conventional campaign.

# Polling in the 2019 Manitoba Election: An Assessment

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*Christopher Adams*

## Christopher Adams

holds a PhD from Carleton University and was a pollster from 1995 to 2012. He is the author of *Politics in Manitoba: Parties, Leaders, and Voters* (University of Manitoba Press, 2008) and a frequent media commentator on social and political issues. He currently serves as the Rector of St. Paul's College at the University of Manitoba.

This brief chapter provides an overview of the polls released to the media during the 2019 Manitoba provincial election, and the extent to which the results were a reliable gauge of the electorate's preferences. Compared to the 2016 campaign—in which I counted ten publicly released polls with two additional polls just prior to the writ being dropped—only six polls were released by four firms during the 2019 campaign. Toronto-based Mainstreet Research released two polls using Interactive Voice Response (IVR) survey technologies to conduct their interviews, Vancouver-based Research Co. released two online polls, Toronto-based Forum Research had one IVR poll, and Winnipeg's Probe Research released one online poll. Notably, there were no polls conducted using live interviewers.

Three factors were behind this drop, with the first being that few expected the election to produce a change in government. Brian Pallister's Progressive Conservatives were widely expected to have a renewed majority. The second factor was that the election was what political scientist Paul Thomas described in the *Winnipeg Free Press* (14 September 2019) as a “sleepy summer campaign” in which few followed the day-by-day events of the campaign. The third factor was the overlap between this election and the pre-writ period of the 2019 federal

campaign. Three firms that polled the provincial electorate during the 2016 Manitoba campaign did not participate in the 2019 campaign. Oddly, all three of the absent firms shared similar names: Vancouver-based Insights West, Saskatoon-based Insightrix, and Insight Manitoba (an organization said to be linked to the Liberals and which appears to be no longer in operation).

The first poll carried out by Mainstreet Research consisted of 808 interviews, conducted from 17 to 19 August 2019.<sup>1</sup> Its second poll was conducted from 3 to 4 September and consisted of 797 interviews. Research Co.'s first poll was based on 586 responses and fielded from 27 to 29 August.<sup>2</sup> Its second poll was fielded from 6 to 9 September, with 536 completed responses.<sup>3</sup> Forum Research's poll was conducted from 6 to 9 September and was based on 1,910 interviews.<sup>4</sup> Probe Research's poll was the only commissioned poll. With results collected for the *Winnipeg Free Press* and CTV, the firm collected 1,200 responses from 13 to 24 August.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to the six polls discussed above, the first poll to appear in the campaign was conducted by Converso, a relatively unknown Toronto firm. In its press release on 16 August 2019, the firm proclaimed this poll to be its “inaugural public opinion research survey.” The IVR

poll, based on 1,127 interviews conducted between 28 July and 7 August, raised eyebrows by showing that the New Democratic Party (NDP) had caught up to the Progressive Conservatives (PCs), with figures indicating a virtual tie across the province. Apart from the CBC, none of the other major media outlets, including the *Winnipeg Free Press*, *Winnipeg Sun*, CTV, and Global TV (and its Corus Radio affiliates), deemed the results or the polling firm to be sufficiently credible for their attention. On 17 August, a day after its initial coverage of the poll, the CBC reported the firm was retracting its initial results. The firm's director, Carl Mavromichalis, issued a statement explaining that the poll had a weighting issue and promised to reissue the results after correcting the problem.<sup>6</sup> The CBC then released the updated report on 19 August, which showed the PCs with a strong lead. A critique of the CBC's handling of this poll subsequently appeared in an

online article by Paul Adams in *Policy Options* titled "How can we be smarter about horse-race polls?"<sup>7</sup> Due to the issues surrounding the Converso poll, I have excluded it from this analysis of the overall polling results.

Were the polls conducted by Mainstreet Research, Forum Research, Research Co., and Probe Research good predictors of the election outcome? For comparison, the following table provides in the top row the actual vote percentage each party received, with the polling results provided by each firm arranged in the order of their fielding dates. The second column on the left provides the fielding dates of the survey, and the third column provides the interview mode (i.e., online versus IVR) and number of survey completions (N). The column to the far right shows the difference between each poll's percent for the leading PC's and the victorious PC's actual vote percent.

**Table 5.1. 2019 Manitoba Election Polls – Decided Voters.**

Polling Firm and Media Outlet	Fielding Dates	Mode and Sample Sizes (N)	PC %	NDP %	LP %	GP %	Other %	Poll % Diff to PC
<b>Actual Vote</b>	<b>10 Sept.</b>	<b>Vote</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>&lt;1</b>	<b>-</b>
Forum Research	6–9 Sept.	N = 1,910 IVR	43	29	17	10	1	-4
Research Co.	6–9 Sept.	N = 536 Online	44	31	16	7	1	-3
Mainstreet Research	3–4 Sept.	N = 797 IVR	43	34	15	6	1	-4
Research Co.	27–29 Aug.	N = 586 Online	46	30	14	8	1	-1
Mainstreet Research	17–19 Aug.	N = 808 IVR	43	35	13	10	1	-4
Probe Research	13–24 Aug.	N = 1,200 Online	40	29	18	10	3	-7



A challenge for pollsters is that a significant proportion of the electorate did not cast a ballot in 2019, with the turnout reported by Elections Manitoba to be at 55.5 percent, a decline from 57 percent in 2016. The impact is that while many respondents say they *intended* to vote, many of these same respondents decided to stay away from the voting stations. Despite this issue, the polls were consistent with the results, comparing generally well to the final outcome for each party. All the firms reported that the PCs were ahead by a large margin, ranging from 40 to 46 percent, compared to the actual outcome of 47 percent. All the firms also placed the NDP at a strong second, with figures

ranging from 29 to 35 percent, with the actual NDP vote at 31 percent. The range of support for the Liberals was 13 to 18 percent compared to the actual 14 percent. Finally, the polls had the Greens ranging from 6 to 10 percent, with their actual vote at 6 percent. Only one firm ventured to produce seat projections. On the eve of the election, Forum Research predicted the PCs to win twenty-nine seats, which would have put them as winning only a bare majority of the fifty-seven seats in the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba. In the end, the PCs took thirty-six seats, down by four from 2016, but remaining a sizable majority government.

- 1 Mainstreet Research, “Manitoba PCs Have the Lead, But Kinew Is the Most Popular Leader,” 22 August 2019, <https://www.mainstreetresearch.ca/manitoba-pcs-have-the-lead-but-kinew-is-the-most-popular-leader/>.
- 2 Research Co., “Progressive Conservatives Have Sizeable Advantage in Manitoba,” 30 August 2019, <https://researchco.ca/2019/08/30/travel-down-the-long-and-divided-road/>.
- 3 Research Co., “Progressive Conservatives Remain Ahead of NDP in Manitoba,” 9 September 2019, <https://researchco.ca/2019/09/09/its-my-turn-the-circle-game-has-brought-me-here/>.
- 4 Forum Research, “Manitoba Election,” 10 September 2019, <http://poll.forumresearch.com/post/3027/manitoba-election/>.
- 5 Probe Research, “Manitoba 2019 Election Survey Results,” August 2019, <https://www.probe-research.com/sites/default/files/2019-08/190830%20WFP%20CTV%20Wpg%20Pre-Election%20Politics%20-%20THE%20VOTE.pdf>.
- 6 See <https://twitter.com/conversoinc/status/1162874422652522496>.
- 7 Paul Adams, “How Can We Be Smarter About Horse-race Polls?” *Policy Options*, 26 August 2019, <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/fr/magazines/august-2019/how-can-we-be-smarter-about-horse-race-polls/>.

# Billboards and Racial Tension: The 2019 Election

*Kiera L. Ladner and Dane E.H. Monkman*

As many have noted both within this text and in the media, the 2019 Manitoba election was a campaign devoid of substance. Outside of the debates, there was little attention paid to major issues. Therefore, it is not surprising that issues of importance for Indigenous peoples were all but missing from the campaign trail. For instance, while candidates raised the issues of hospitals and emergency rooms, their interventions were largely focused on urban issues and not issues of accessibility outside of city limits and in remote communities. This is particularly significant given that recent changes to the air ambulance and other health care services have negatively affected the supposed universality of health care for rural and northern communities. These changes were never a substantive part of any 2019 election platforms.

The election proceeded without meaningfully addressing issues of significance for Indigenous peoples. These include matters of health care, affordable housing, clean water, education, poverty, child care, children in care, and reconciliation.

Instead of focusing on substantive issues, the election campaign was dominated by attack ads directed at party leadership. While electoral politics often struggle to move beyond negative messaging, and healthy criticism of leadership is the norm, there was something different about

this campaign. That difference was the presence of an Indigenous leader in a mainstream political party.

Wab Kinew's face was more present in this campaign than any other candidate. This was because he featured prominently in Liberal and Conservative campaign materials. Conservative billboards scrutinized Kinew's viability as a political leader and arguably (re)presented a culture of distrust towards Indigenous peoples. By our observation, appearing mainly in predominantly white communities within Manitoba, these billboards spoke to existing racial tension within what *Maclean's* has called "the most racist city in Canada."<sup>1</sup> While Conservative pundits explain these billboards as a critique of previous NDP governments—given that Kinew was neither a part of these governments nor in a leadership position—such attribution makes one uncomfortable. Rather than attacking previous policies, the campaign focused on associating poor decisions, criminality, and distrust with the face of Wab Kinew. This may seem like politics-as-usual, but when read against the recent billboards of Winnipeg artist KC Adams,<sup>2</sup> it is hard to ignore the centrality of racist stereotypes in the conservative campaign.

The evoking of racist stereotypes was not limited to billboards and TV ads. Public statements and comments to donors behind closed doors

## Understanding the Manitoba Election 2019

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sustained these stereotypes by insisting that Kinew had been “handed” benefits and “privilege.”<sup>3</sup> While the racial tensions were strongest between the Conservatives and New Democrats, the Liberal Party failed to change the conversation or challenge the race-baiting banter. In so doing, the Liberal campaign normalized the racializing nature of the election. Not all parties chose to engage in the same nature of commentary, however, as the Green Party and its leader James Beddome refused to campaign on racial tensions.

While we find that the campaign evoked anti-Indigenous sentiments, we choose to end this chapter on a more positive note. We choose to celebrate the fact that Manitoba has elected the most racially diverse legislative assembly that it has ever seen: an Indigenous man was elected as the leader of the opposition; seven Indigenous candidates were elected (although this is down one from the last election); and three black MLAs were elected, including the first openly queer MLA.

- 1 Nancy Macdonald, “Welcome to Winnipeg: Where Canada’s Racism Problem Is at Its Worst,” *Maclean’s*, 22 January 2015, <https://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/welcome-to-winnipeg-where-canadas-racism-problem-is-at-its-worst/>.
- 2 Nancy Macdonald, “Winnipeg’s New Art Project Stares Down Racism in the Face” *Maclean’s*, 8 March 2015, <https://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/winnipegs-new-art-project-stares-down-racism-in-the-face/>.
- 3 Austin Grabish, “‘Offensive’: Brian Pallister Under Fire For Saying Wab Kinew Was ‘Handed More Benefits Than Any Premier,’” CBC Manitoba, 23 August 2019, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/pallister-kinew-benefits-comment-1.5258179>.



# Voter Turnout

Curtis Brown

At first blush, the voter turnout story for Manitoba's 2019 provincial election appears straightforward and somewhat gloomy. The voter turnout rate dropped again, with only slightly more than half of eligible Manitoba voters bothering to cast ballots on 10 September 2019.

But even with all the factors pointing to the potential for the further erosion of voter engagement—a summer election, little expectation that another party would win government, and no obvious “ballot box question” engaging the electorate—the number of people casting ballots actually increased in 2019. Even in areas where there was little to no doubt of the election outcome, relatively high numbers of Manitobans marked an X on their ballots and, in so doing, defied expectations that voter turnout would drop even further than it had within the past twenty years.

The 2019 election was the first Manitoba campaign where a permanent voter list replaced door-to-door enumeration. This meant that Manitobans could be registered to vote via records of other government documents, such as driver's licences and health cards. This shift to a permanent voter list by Elections Manitoba led to a higher proportion of the population being able to vote. The number of eligible electors increased by 80,501 between 2016 and 2019, surpassing the estimated

65,000-person increase in the adult population during this time period.<sup>1</sup> When all was said and done, 473,249 Manitobans cast a ballot in the 2019 election—an increase of nearly 30,000 people compared to the previous campaign.

Why did the total number of Manitobans casting ballots increase in this election? In this case, the tale of voter turnout was a story about demography, not voter motivation. Turnout was especially high in rural and suburban areas of south Winnipeg, which helps account for the fact that the Progressive Conservative (PC) Party's vote total (46.7 percent) ended up being slightly higher than pre-election surveys anticipated. Of the ten constituencies with the highest turnout rates in the province, the top seven were rural and exurban seats won handily by PC incumbents. Barely cracking the top ten were two suburban seats regained by the New Democratic Party (NDP): Fort Garry-Riverview, with 63.8 percent turnout, and St. Vital with 63.7 percent. The tenth-highest turnout was in Southdale, which was narrowly held by the PCs, with a 63.6 percent turnout rate.

Relatively high turnout in these areas contrasted significantly with turnout remaining low in long-time NDP strongholds. In inner-city Winnipeg, as well as in northern regions, the NDP recaptured this

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election after losing those seats in 2016. For instance, the NDP recaptured Kewatinook from the Liberals (where just 17.6 percent of eligible voters cast ballots), and took the nearby Thompson constituency back from the PCs in a race where just slightly more than one-third of voters (37.1 percent) showed up to cast ballots.

in suburban Winnipeg constituencies that had higher-than-average turnout. The extent to which the PCs redrew the electoral map in their landslide 2016 victory meant that there would be a weaker relationship between voter turnout and competitive races, as the NDP sought to regain former

**Table 7.1. Top Ten Constituencies by Voter Turnout, 2019 Election.**

Top Ten Constituencies by Voter Turnout, 2019 Election			
Constituency	Turnout (%)	Plurality	Outcome
Interlake-Gimli	70.3	2,727	PC hold
Red River North	67.9	3,179	PC hold
Lac du Bonnet	65.8	4,377	PC hold
Springfield-Ritchot	65.1	3,685	PC hold
Lagimodière	64.7	2,393	PC hold
Dawson Trail	64.2	2,674	PC hold
Borderland	63.9	3,659	PC hold
Fort Garry	63.8	996	NDP gain
St Vital	63.7	870	NDP gain
Southdale	63.6	531	PC hold

Even in some closely contested races, voter turnout was not especially high, running counter to the expectation that competitive races will lead to higher turnout rates. For instance, in Transcona, which the NDP narrowly recaptured by 115 votes after losing it to the PCs three years earlier, turnout was only 52.9 percent.

For many years, the closest-fought races in the province happened to be

strongholds that historically had lower rates of voter participation.

The overall take-away, however, is that despite whatever fears existed prior to election day regarding voter turnout reaching a new floor, a significant proportion of Manitobans defied expectations and still showed up to engage in the democratic process.

1 The increase in Manitoba's adult population was estimated by taking the current Census estimates for the total population (1,362,789 as of Q2 2019), subtracting the total population from the 2016 Census (1,278,365), and then dividing the proportion of the 2016 population aged 18 and over (77.05 percent) into the difference between these two figures.

# Winnipeg and the Election: A City in Limbo

*Aaron A. Moore*

The 2016 Manitoba Election marked the end of one political era and the start of a new one for Winnipeg. After a sustained period of direct provincial involvement in municipal affairs under the former New Democratic Party (NDP) government, Winnipeggers have now experienced three years of provincial cuts to municipal transfers and an increasingly fraught relationship between city and provincial governments. What will another, albeit reduced, Progressive Conservative (PC) majority mean for the City of Winnipeg and Winnipeggers? The re-election of the PCs in 2019 is unlikely to ease tensions between province and city and, in fact, might worsen intergovernmental relations as the election results provide little reason for the PCs to change their tack with the City of Winnipeg.

The term “fraught” understates the fractured relations between the city and provincial governments. The dispute between the two levels of government began with municipal complaints about cuts to transit and infrastructure funding, and Mayor Bowman’s complaints regarding lack of face time with the premier. The provincial government responded by escalating the dispute, accusing the municipality of lying about cuts to infrastructure, and having provincial cabinet ministers attack city administrators as incompetent spend-thrifts. While some comments from the provincial government may well

have been off-the-cuff rebukes to city complaints, it has clearly adopted an antagonistic approach to dealing with the city.

Going into the 2019 election, the PCs’ biggest worry was a loss of seats in Winnipeg. Although the PCs’ base of support is in the rural areas of the province, in Manitoba a party must win some of the thirty-two seats within the city in order to form a majority. Pallister’s massive victory in 2016 was driven in part by his party’s seventeen-seat breakthrough in Winnipeg. However, the PCs had every reason to expect a decline in voter support in the city in 2019. Aside from disputes with the city’s administration, the Pallister government began their restructuring of provincial health care in Winnipeg. Along with broader cuts, the province reduced the number of emergency rooms in the city, upsetting a sizable portion of city residents. With polls showing health care as the number one issue for voters leading up to the 2019 election, Pallister and his team must have been worried about PC ridings in the city.

In the end, the PCs lost voter support throughout Winnipeg, losing three of their seventeen seats in the city, and winning a few seats by razor-thin margins. However, they held on to thirty-six seats in the province overall, giving them a sizable majority once again. Had they lost some of the closer races in the city,

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the PCs would likely still have a majority government. Given the result of the election and continued strong support in many of the city's suburban ridings, there is little reason to believe that the Conservatives will see the outcome of this election as a repudiation of their approach to dealing with Winnipeg. There is also little evidence that their caustic relationship with city administration influenced the outcome of the election.

Given the Pallister government's continued commitment to austerity measures, the City of Winnipeg cannot expect a return to past levels of

provincial transfers for the foreseeable future. In fact, Winnipeggers can expect further cuts to municipal transfers and related expenditures. As for the relationship between the city and provincial government, the lack of future provincial funds and an increasingly dire financial outlook will likely do nothing to stem the city's attacks on the provincial government, while the PCs have every reason to continue attacking the city's administration as a way to deflect attention away from the impact of provincial cuts on city infrastructure and services.



# Women and the 2019 Manitoba Election

*Joan Grace*

Women's participation in electoral politics in Manitoba was and remains a goal to fight for. Just think of Nellie McClung and the Political Equality League's Mock Parliament, held in January 1914 at the Walker Theatre in downtown Winnipeg. While the right to vote for women has long since been achieved, consecutive provincial governments remain unresponsive to calls to effectively address women's high levels of poverty (especially for single mothers and Indigenous women), low wages and precarious employment, and their almost daily concerns about safety and personal security. Given this reality, knowing how, where, and to what outcome women participate during elections continues to be a crucial focus for the study of gender and politics.

In this article, I look at women's participation in the 2019 election and how women's policy issues were articulated and represented by the three main political parties. I assess how women participated during the campaign and investigate party platforms and electoral promises typically understood as "women's issues." By doing so, we can capture a sense of what women might expect from the

successful party and how issues important to their lives are represented by the newly elected government.

Women's participation as candidates can be categorized as "strongly satisfactory" in terms of numbers. Of the three most recent provincial elections, the 2019 election had the best showing ever of women standing for election across the province, with fifteen of these women elected to the legislature. Based on data collected from the Elections Manitoba website (as of 10 September), the New Democratic Party (NDP) maintained their number of twenty-four women, while both the Liberals and the Progressive Conservatives (PCs) increased their number of female candidates (see Table 9.1). Overall, women represented 38 percent of the major party candidates during the 2019 election. These numbers indicate a more diverse election campaign in comparison to 2016, especially when we consider that a few candidates also self-identified as LGBTQ. These numbers are stubbornly low, however, if one hopes to achieve parity during election campaigns and see a more diversely composed legislature.

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**Table 9.1. Female Candidates in Manitoba Elections, 2011–2019.**

	2011	2016	2019
Liberal Party	14	14	19
NDP	22	24	24
PC Party	12	20	22

There is another important issue to consider about the gender breakdown of electoral candidates. The political science literature stresses the importance of assessing whether women run in ridings with a serious chance of electoral success in order to gauge a party's commitment to women's substantive participation. In Fort Rouge, for example, the female PC candidate ran against the party leaders of the NDP and the Green Party. We can characterize the candidate, then, as a "sacrificial lamb," meaning that she was campaigning in a riding that she really had no chance of winning. The lesson is that parties tend to nominate men in ridings that are safe party seats. This seems to have been the case during this election.

Another important aspect of women's participation and representation during the 2019 election was the organizing and holding of a dedicated women's debate called Up For Debate. The Up For Debate organizers, a collective of over twenty community-based organizations, held the debate to highlight gender equality and its place in electoral debates and campaigns. While it is not clear to what degree Up For Debate influenced voters' decisions, holding a women's policy debate is a sign of a healthy, engaged civil society. It brings to the public's attention why women's equality issues must be debated during an

election. However, the event suffered from a lack of media coverage, and many were disappointed with who attended to represent each party and their responses to questions from the moderator and the audience. It appears the debate about women's policy priorities did not dramatically influence the broader public discourse.

Still, representation of women's policy issues offers insight into what voters can expect from elected officials and the degree of their support for advancing women's equality. From an assessment of campaign promises and party platforms, all the major parties made specific references to women and targeted key policy and programs important to improving women's lives. This policy focus was quite different from the last election. For example, the PC Party made special announcements about supporting women's health initiatives and providing better protections for women against domestic violence. The NDP campaigned on developing a public child care system and advocating for a national Pharmacare program. The Liberal Party noted the importance of good child care availability to facilitate women's entrance into the paid labour market. Admittedly, attention to women is a smart campaign strategy in Manitoba, particularly given the PC government's cuts to health care and the fact that elections in the

province have become a two-party competition between the NDP and the PC Party in recent decades. In other words, the PCs paid attention to women voters because of the party's record on health care, and because the NDP typically has had greater success among women voters.

My final thought is about political leadership—who wins and who makes decisions once in power. While the increase in the number of female candidates indicates that there was a diversity of views expressed during the election, none of the parties were led by a woman. Of course, there are

no guarantees that, if elected, a female premier would work to implement a women's equality agenda. Having no women at the table during inter-governmental negotiations with the federal government, however, is troubling. It is particularly troubling for Manitoba, as we depend on federal funding to mount an array of programs that matter to women and their families. Good democratic practice is not just about numbers, it is about which ridings women contest, what offices they hold, and the types of influence they can exert as members of the legislative assembly.

# Health Policy in the Context of the Manitoba Election

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*Alan Katz*

Health care is widely accepted as the most important election issue to Canadians, and the 2019 provincial election demonstrated that Manitoba's political parties understand its significance to voters. However, election cycles are not particularly helpful in supporting the health care system. Elections are about attracting votes through specific micro-level promises that are often at odds with the need for a comprehensive long-term strategy that supports the growth and development of the complex health care system. The state of health care is also of public concern because the health budget consumes the lion's share of the provincial budget. The importance of health care as an election issue places pressure on politicians to promote simple short-term solutions, often without adequate information available.

In an effort to attract votes, politicians often seem to focus on addressing the perceived current priorities of the electorate rather than investing in the long-term well-being of the population. Just as we need to provide preventive maintenance to our cars, furnaces, and roads so that they are able to function when we need them to, so too is the case when dealing with the well-being of the population. It is widely accepted that prevention is more cost-effective than treating illness and that health is strongly related to social well-being. Poverty is

the most impactful determinant of the health of the population and subsequent costs to the health care system.

This electoral cycle has occurred in the midst of profound health care system changes, particularly in Winnipeg. Change is always difficult, especially because we do not know what the new reality will look like. As consumers of health care services, we are concerned that the change will impact our ability to access the services we believe we need. The reality is that Manitoba's health care system was designed more than two generations ago, and many services that are highly valued by Manitobans have been shown to be either non-urgent or in many cases even unnecessary. While individual services such as surgeries, tests, and cancer treatments continue to evolve at the micro-level, the system within which they are delivered has stalled at the meso- and macro-level due to lack of evidence addressing unique local circumstances and a lack of investment in data and research. It will take both political courage and strategic investment to address these necessary changes, but we all stand to benefit if we get it right.

Modernization of the system requires expertise in change management, which is not a skill one expects to find within a stagnating system. As the changes in our tax structure have put pressure on provincial spending

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over the past three decades, the health care system has struggled to maintain the capacity to invest strategically while introducing new and expensive technologies. This has resulted in a lack of capacity to address the growth of complex multi-system illnesses, which are a product of longer life expectancy. We have also seen a profound increase in the incidence of dementia in Manitoba. These challenges place a burden on our ability to care for seniors in the community. We have not kept up with innovative approaches to care for the elderly in ways that are more respectful to individual needs and potentially more cost-effective.

Societal changes have also spawned increased health challenges, as demonstrated by the growth of anxiety, depression, and addiction. These are symptoms of societal dysfunction that are starting to affect the health care system. We cannot afford to view health care in isolation from the contexts in which people work and live. We need to understand the importance of policies that impact the availability of affordable housing, meaningful employment, and affordable food on the health (and subsequent health care needs) of the population.

A highly functioning Manitoba health care system will need to look to the future. Investments in modern analytics can drive strategic planning that will ultimately support a more cost-effective system. The infrastructure to support virtual care would include investment in currently available technologies and mechanisms to support their use by providers—who are often responsible for the implementation costs—and patients.

Little has been done so far in Canada to exploit the opportunities presented by the natural experiments of each of our provincial health care systems attempting to address the same challenges in different ways. Successive provincial governments have demonstrated a remarkable reluctance to learn from the experiences of others. While the Manitoba context is unique, there are more similarities than differences between provinces, and there is an opportunity to utilize well-established analytical techniques to take those differences into account. Finally, an engaged and stable workforce is crucial to the development of a highly functioning health care system. The next four years provide the opportunity to rebuild trust between the health care workforce and the provincial government, which will benefit all Manitobans.

## Income Security and the 2019 Manitoba Election: Shifting Rhetoric, But Still Waiting for Real Change

*James P. Mulvale*

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In the 2019 Manitoba election, only one aspect of social welfare policy (broadly defined to include income security, social supports, health care, and education) featured prominently in the back-and-forth debate and campaign rhetoric of the two major parties, the Progressive Conservatives (PCs) and the New Democratic Party (NDP). This issue was health care. The NDP attacked the incumbent PC government for closing hospital emergency rooms and laying off nurses. For their part, the PCs defended their health care record and promised new investment in nursing, addiction programs, and other aspects of health care.

The NDP seat count as a result of the election increased from twelve to eighteen, with gains made inside the perimeter of Winnipeg and in the North. On the one hand, it would appear that concerns about health care cuts resonated with voters, at least to some extent, in these two areas of the province. On the other hand, the Conservatives coasted to another majority victory with 47 percent of the popular vote. It seems clear that social issues other than health care, including the need for poverty reduction and income security for all Manitobans, were not very much on the campaign radar of the two main parties or the electorate.

During the campaign, as was the case in previous elections, community groups advocating for poverty reduction and more generous social programs pressed their concerns. Two all-party forums were held in Winnipeg on social issues, hosted by Make Poverty History Manitoba (MPHM) and by the Disability Matters coalition. At both forums the NDP and the Green Party were represented, respectively, by leaders Wab Kinew and James Beddome. The Liberals participated in both forums, and leader Dougald Lamont participated in the Disability Matters event. At the MPHM forum the PCs were entirely absent. PC leader Brian Pallister chose not to attend the Disability Matters forum, sending instead Families Minister Heather Stefanson as a representative. The lack of importance placed on these forums by the PCs no doubt reflects the relatively low priority this party places on most “non-health” social policy questions. The PC general campaign strategy in 2019 was focused on cutting overall government spending and lowering the provincial deficit.

To be sure, the Conservatives did pay some attention to social policy questions in their platform document.<sup>1</sup> They promised to institute a new income support program for persons with disabilities who currently

must depend on Employment and Income Assistance (EIA), Manitoba's version of "last resort" social assistance. The Conservatives also promised to improve the prospects for persons with disabilities in the paid labour market. However, there were no details or spending commitments attached to either one of these campaign commitments found in the Conservative platform.

At the election forums hosted by MPHM and Disability Matters, interesting proposals were made by the Liberal Party<sup>2</sup> and the Green Party<sup>3</sup> to institute a version of basic income as a replacement for EIA. The proposal of the Green Party in particular was quite detailed and costed out. Basic income guarantees an income floor for all at a level that ensures a modest but dignified standard of living. There are many different models and proposals for basic income. Most basic income proposals in Canada are for a negative income tax that can top up any earned income, or provide a full benefit at or above the poverty line to those with no earnings in the labour market. This approach is often thought to be less expensive than a basic income paid out "up front" to all, which may or may not be taxed back from high-income earners.

During the 2019 Manitoba election campaign, both the Liberals and the Greens proposed a basic income paid as a negative income tax. The Liberal plan was costed at \$1.3 billion; the Green plan was costed at \$1.58 billion, with a detailed proposal for financing it through the cancellation of refundable and

non-refundable tax credits, increasing the income tax rate for earners above \$70,610, and levying a higher carbon tax.

The NDP for its part committed, in the words of leader Wab Kinew at the MPHM forum, to work toward a "basic income model." However, the specific measures Kinew mentioned at the forum do not line up with the basic income principles of unconditionality and universality of the benefit. Kinew committed the NDP to raising EIA rates, reducing the clawback of earned income from EIA recipients, and raising the minimum wage to fifteen dollars per hour (this last measure was in line with the Liberal and Green parties). The NDP platform document also mentioned reversing cuts to the Rent Assist program made by the PC government, and "striking a task force on a basic income and a dignified income for people with severe and prolonged disabilities."<sup>4</sup>

Like the Conservatives, the NDP seemed to embrace the idea of separating out benefits for those labelled disabled from benefits for those not labelled disabled. Such a move could, in the minds of politicians and members of the public, further strengthen the unfortunate distinction between the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor, with disabled persons being seen as deserving and others being further stigmatized.

Over the course of the Manitoba election campaign of 2019, three of the four parties contending for power were at least speaking the language of basic income as a new model of universal economic security. Granted, the

NDP commitment was quite tentative and timid. The Greens had the most progressive and detailed proposal for basic income, but failed to win a single seat. The Liberals also committed to the idea of basic income but lost ground in the election, going from four seats to three. And, of course, the party that was *not* seeing basic income as a direction in which they wanted to go, the Conservatives, won the election handily to form another majority government.

We face a range of daunting challenges regarding economic security for all Manitobans, and indeed all Canadians. These challenges include stubbornly high poverty rates affecting groups such as Indigenous peoples, new immigrants, single-parent families, and persons with disabilities;

the need to provide an economic floor for those doing precarious work, especially young people; and the need to halt economic growth and decrease consumption in wealthy countries such as Canada as we face ecological calamity on a global scale. Basic income that is universal, unconditional, and paid at an adequate level could provide an essential piece in solving these complex puzzles.

The 2019 Manitoba election campaign injected basic income into political discourse to a greater extent than in any previous election, provincial or federal, in Canada. May the conversation continue, and may it lead to practical steps toward a guaranteed and dependable economic floor under all of us.

- 1 “Moving Manitoba Forward: Our Guarantee to Manitobans: Platform Commitments,” <http://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/themes/59383b474d992c9319000000/attachments/original/1567522224/Platform-Final.pdf?1567522224> (accessed 17 September 2019).
- 2 “Lifting People out of Poverty: The Manitoba Liberal Plan for Jobs & Fair Incomes,” <https://www.manitobaliberals.ca/post/lifting-people-out-of-poverty-the-manitoba-liberal-plan-for-jobs-fair-incomes> (accessed 17 September 2019).
- 3 “Backgrounder: Greens Propose a Basic Income and a More Progressive Tax System for Manitoba,” <https://greenparty.mb.ca/platform/ending-poverty/> (accessed 17 September 2019).
- 4 “Manitoba’s NDP: A Plan for All of Us,” 5, <https://www.mbnep.ca/forallofus> (accessed 17 September 2019).



# Unions and the 2019 Manitoba Election

*Jesse Hajer*

Unions have long been a force in Manitoba politics. Labour unions were founding partners of the New Democratic Party (NDP), and several unions spanning various sectors continue affiliation with the party. As affiliates, these unions receive delegate allotments at NDP conventions, shaping policy and leadership selection. Labour has also been well-represented in board, commission, and advisory appointments under NDP governments. Unions publicly advocate and campaign for policies that benefit workers, such as a higher minimum wage, paid leave, workplace health and safety standards, and investment in quality public services. During and in the lead-up to elections, unions are important actors, engaging in issue-based campaigns, and mobilizing their members to vote and engage in public policy advocacy. Their membership is also an important source of NDP volunteers, from campaign management down to canvassing.

However, the role and visibility of unions in Manitoba politics varies and has evolved over time. One fundamental factor shaping this is whether the NDP or Progressive Conservatives (PCs) are the governing party. With NDP governments, disputes are generally managed and negotiated within a joint commitment to the rights of organized labour and a view of unions as legitimate representatives and stakeholders. This approach has allowed NDP governments to navigate and

negotiate unwelcome policies such as wage freezes, the privatization of the property registry, and bargaining-unit amalgamations, with labour disaffection usually voiced in meetings at the legislature or at NDP party conventions, as opposed to through the media or protests. PC governments have faced militant resistance and public criticism from unions due to the unwillingness of the PCs to meaningfully engage labour and negotiate through the collective bargaining process. Given this unwillingness, union relations with the PC Party are typically antagonistic.

A number of initiatives of the Pallister government have targeted and negatively impacted organized labour. These include repealing card-check certification, annual expenditure and staffing reductions, wage-freeze legislation, and ending project labour agreements. The government also privatized or began contracting out services such as highway maintenance, air ambulance, wild-fire suppression, and home care, with work being moved to non-unionized workplaces. A government-imposed consolidation of health care bargaining units, requiring representation votes, generated a prolonged campaign with intense union competition to represent members. PC health care reforms, including emergency room closures, produced union-led accusations of increasingly stressful working conditions, staffing shortages, and

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mandatory overtime for health care workers, as well as longer wait times and overall disorder within the health care system.

These measures targeting workers led to union leaders becoming the lead public voice of opposition to the Pallister government, particularly in the years after the 2016 election, when the NDP was leaderless and in disarray. Several unions organized to raise public awareness and opposition, often with well-resourced advertising campaigns and a significant media presence. These included campaigns against public service cuts and privatization (MGEU), health care reforms (MGEU, Manitoba Nurses Union, and CUPE), the ending of project labour agreements (Manitoba Building Trades), and education cuts and growing class sizes (Manitoba Teachers' Society). During the 2019 election, several additional campaigns emerged, including a health care campaign (Unifor), an anti-hydro-privatization campaign (IBEW and CUPE), and large-scale direct mailing campaigns on the minimum wage, child care, and fairness at work (MFL). This scaling-up of public labour activism led to an enhanced role for unions to shape public opinion in the lead-up to and during the campaign compared to previous recent elections.

The visibility of unions also increased, in relative significance, due to the weakness of the NDP. The loss of government and many seats in the 2016 election led to the forfeiture of benefits associated with incumbency, including name recognition, the fundraising advantage, and political staff.

In previous recent elections, NDP party infrastructure was well-resourced through public party and election financing, as well as political staff who saved vacation time to work full-time on NDP election campaigns. Very little of this was available in 2019. The increased relative significance of unions was tempered by the need to respond to the Pallister government's actions. This diverted union resources that may have been otherwise available for proactive issue-based campaigns and electing more labour-friendly MLAs. Of particular significance, the Tories scheduled the election to coincide with the health care representation votes, which had enveloped many key labour activists and campaign managers who were then not available to use vacation time to volunteer on NDP campaigns.

Another important factor shaping the role of unions in Manitoba politics is legislative restrictions. Prior to 2003, unions played a direct and active role in supporting NDP campaigns through funding and in-kind contributions, including union staff to work on and manage campaigns, printing election materials, and providing office space. The ban on union and corporate donations introduced by the Doer government made this type of support illegal, drastically reducing the role of labour in elections, with the impact on the NDP only fully and most acutely being realized in 2019. This election was also the first to be fought under PC legislation limiting third parties to \$25,000 when undertaking issue-specific advertising campaigns during the election (although the legislation did

not include direct-mail campaigns, an apparent oversight which at least two labour organizations, Unifor and the MFL, took advantage of). All this, combined with the PCs halving the election rebate and eliminating the per-vote annual subsidy to political parties, left the NDP struggling both financially and organizationally.

Unions continue to be an important force in Manitoba elections; a force relatively more important in the 2019 campaign due to PC incumbency and the NDP's resource deficit, but also hindered by playing defense

against anti-worker PC policy. Despite the NDP's relatively modest platform commitment to labour, union activists continue to loyally back the party. This is motivated by opposition to the PC agenda, as opposed to optimism for any radical pro-labour NDP policy or any particular attraction to Wab Kinew, who has no historical association with labour. While the role of labour is likely to continue to evolve, given the outcome of the 2019 election and a resurgent NDP as the lead alternative to the PCs, its influence is likely to persist.

# The Unbalanced Rhetoric of Balanced Budgets

*Shreya Ghimire*

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A spectre has been haunting Manitoba politics—the spectre of deficit reduction. This election cycle, both of Manitoba’s leading political parties campaigned on a promise to balance the provincial budget by 2024 or earlier. Though balancing the budget may seem like an uncontroversial, common-sense campaign promise, it necessarily reduces the space for ambitious campaign promises in the name of fiscal restraint. I posit that even though politicians frame a balanced budget as a politically neutral action, this policy is the foundation of a right-wing agenda which has been embraced by the Progressive Conservative (PC) Party and the New Democratic Party (NDP), despite the otherwise progressive rhetoric of the latter. To their credit, the federal Liberal Party ran a successful campaign in 2015 in part by committing to *not* balance the budget, but instead promising deficit spending to spur economic growth. I do not argue here that financial realities do not, nor should not, matter to Manitobans and their elected representatives. Rather, I hope to question the political rhetoric that is often posed as so obvious that it is beyond debate.

The logics of deficit reduction and fiscal responsibility have been entrenched in Manitoba politics through both concrete legislation and political rhetoric. Manitoba was one of the first provinces to introduce strong balanced-budget legislation

in 1995 under Filmon’s PC government. Though it was later relaxed by the NDP, and then suspended following the Great Recession in 2008, balanced-budget legislation was re-introduced by Pallister’s PC government as the Fiscal Responsibility and Taxpayer Protection Act in 2017. Coupled with legislation, the legitimization of deficit reduction can also be explained as a product of the centrist nature of Manitoba party politics, as identified by Jared Wesley.<sup>1</sup> The neo-liberal tide sweeping Western governments captured political space in the electoral centre, and by the late 1980s and 1990s PC and NDP policies in Manitoba had converged on the values of government transparency, efficiency, tax reductions, and balanced budgets. The NDP’s acceptance of these values represents a rightward shift away from the progressive centre, despite their positioning as Manitoba’s centre-left party.

Prioritizing balanced budgets lends credence to the concern created by the PCs of a province with unsustainable debt, looming credit downgrades, and an economy in decay and decline. The Pallister government successfully ran on an austerity platform in 2016 by misrepresenting the health of Manitoba’s economy and trying to frighten Manitobans about the future of the province’s finances. Manitoba’s economy had, in fact, grown every year between 2000 and 2015, except in 2008 (due to the recession), although



even then Manitoba's GDP shrank the least out of all the provinces due to our generally diversified economy.<sup>2</sup> Early into the Pallister government's first mandate, researcher Lynne Fernandez observed that the rhetoric that Manitoba's finances needed "fixing" and "repairing" was working as a cover to justify impending funding cuts to municipalities and the public sector.<sup>3</sup> The PCs ran a similar campaign this election cycle, stressing that the province is getting its finances on track so long as the government continues to exercise fiscal restraint (coupled with the promise of tax cuts and the elimination of certain taxes).

Ideologically, it makes sense for a conservative party to pursue an election campaign based on deficit reduction and tax cuts. However, the NDP's prioritization of a balanced budget above any more socially responsible campaign promises demonstrates that, despite their differences, there is a fundamental similarity between Manitoba's two major political parties. When PC leader Brian Pallister promised to balance the budget by 2022 during a televised leader's debate, modifying the PCs' earlier promise of balancing the budget by 2024, the NDP response was tepid. NDP leader Wab Kinew raised concerns about what the PCs would cut to meet their

new timeline, but he did not call the goal of deficit reduction into question, instead framing the NDP's plan to balance the budget in four years as the more realistic option.

The lack of political pushback to the goal of balanced budgets is especially troubling at a time when Manitobans want, and would greatly benefit from, increased public spending. According to polling done by Probe Research, 62 percent of Manitobans support increased government spending on services even if it means running a deficit for longer.<sup>4</sup> Climate change strategies, especially upgrades to municipal infrastructure and the expansion of public transit, will require ambitious government spending. Reversing the unacceptably high rate of child poverty and Indigenous child poverty in Manitoba will require government spending. Protecting and expanding existing public services such as health care and education will require government spending. Improving income assistance so that those who require it can meet their needs and maintain a good quality of life will require government spending. As this election cycle demonstrated, the dogma of deficit reduction and fiscal restraint works to limit the political possibilities available to us all.

- 1 Jared J. Wesley, "Staking the Progressive Centre: An Ideational Analysis of Manitoba Party Politics," *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'études Canadiennes* 45, no. 1 (2011): 143.
- 2 Lynne Fernandez, "Manitoba's 2016 Speech from the Throne: Austerity Darkens Manitoba's Door," Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives – Manitoba Office, 25 November 2016, <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/commentary/fast-facts-manitobas-2016-speech-throne>.
- 3 Fernandez, "Manitoba's 2016 Speech."
- 4 Probe Research Inc., "Manitobans on the Major Election Issues," 2019, <http://www.probe-research.com/polls/manitobans-major-election-issues>.

# Conclusion: Snap Election, Flat Campaign, Clear Results

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*Royce Koop and Barry Ferguson*

The 2019 snap election was neither the result of governmental crisis, nor of political or economic threat. It did not lead to a decisive break with the pattern of politics. But, with the vote behind us, perhaps the one-decade era of fixed elections will have come to an end.

The election call suited the Progressive Conservatives (PCs). Rumours, starting in the spring, may have caught the New Democratic Party (NDP) and other parties off guard. However, the rumblings gave the opposition several weeks to prepare prior to the twenty-eight-day campaign that began on 12 August 2019. Like the election call itself, provincial campaigns are snappy.

As suggested by the reviews of the Liberals by Allen Mills, the NDP by Rory Henry, and the PCs by Kelly Saunders, the party campaigns were developed in the all-too-familiar style of opaque slogans, carefully phrased policies, and some specific policy commitments. As Mills and Henry point out, new campaign finance legislation did limit opposition campaigning. The PCs and NDP certainly shaded their broad policies and specific platforms with sufficient criticisms of each other to make it clear that electing their competitor was as much about preventing the disasters they had and would wreak upon Manitoba as it was about positive direction.

As for their positive goals, ad agency slogans were more risible than ever. This year the PCs announced the choice was “forward or backward” while the Liberals promised “a new way forward.” The Greens promised “bold vision/real solutions” while the NDP pledged a government “for all of us,” promising a commitment to move away from rude competition to “co-operation,” just like the old CCF.

The parties’ statements of principles seemed to share the commitment to education, health care, economic growth, and environmental protection to reassure the citizenry. If the parties expected voters to find clear meaning in their platforms, they did not make it easy. The Liberals had nine themes and the Greens twelve points, with many overlapping on the environmental theme. The PCs had a seven-point platform, with a framed guarantee of five of them. The NDP, with a well-earned reputation for detailed policy goals, used a three-point set of commitments starting with health care, which blossomed into dozens of specific policies. The three main contenders dutifully costed their promises and all pledged to end the deficit within a few years, with the PCs even putting that pledge into their guarantee certificate.

The broad themes and coordinated platforms were lost in the noise of debate, the welter of press releases, and the barrage of media. Much of

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the campaign focused on the leaders and therefore their key messages prevailed. One might have been left with a sense each party and its leader had limited concerns. Brian Pallister's PCs stressed tax cuts and balanced budgets. Wab Kinew's NDP had one key agenda and that pertained to rebuilding the health care system. Dougald Lamont's Liberals argued they alone had a detailed "new way forward." James Beddome's Greens awaited the promised green wave while offering environmental reform and a green economy based on state regulation and incentives. The others pledged similar environmentalist commitments: a "new green deal" (Liberals), "quality of life" including "solving the climate crisis" (New Democrats), and "environmental leadership" (Conservatives).

The essays in this collection show that the strengths and limitations of each of the parties were clear enough going into the election and the campaign was bereft of shocks and surprises. The results are decisive and offer some joy for most of the parties. The results also reiterate long-standing lessons about Manitoba politics.

Two or three points stand out. The first is that the 2019 election does not indicate any great shifts in the contemporary pattern of party politics. Manitoba has two major parties that vie for government. They have done so for half a century, with the 1988 Liberal exception an anomaly in the long-standing pattern of Conservative/New Democratic rivalry. Seen as a two-party system, Manitoba has the stable politics once associated

with provinces like Ontario, Alberta, and the notoriously conservative Atlantic provinces.

The second is that each party may face this reality with something like good cheer. As long as the two small parties do not expect an electoral breakthrough, their policy goals have been heard. The Greens have a clear environmental protection agenda and they might well take comfort from the way the other parties, even the current PCs, adopt environmental promises in their own platforms. They might also note that their vote grew by one-third, even if only 30,000 people voted for them.

The Manitoba Liberals are often undercut by the actions of their federal counterparts. In this case their promising 2016 breakthrough in northern Manitoba has been lost, partly due to federal poaching of one Liberal MLA. It may have been affected by the havoc created by the federal Liberals' cabinet upheaval that led to the departure of two champions of Indigenous issues. No longer an official party, the three-person caucus has an energetic leader in the legislature, many clear policy goals (e.g., day care and immigration), and it increased its total vote. Although it is still the minority party it was in 2016, there has been a revival since a decade ago.

The NDP can take great solace from its improved showing. After the debacle of 2016, its new leader, Wab Kinew, withstood an unpleasant undercurrent in PC attack ads, focused on NDP strengths in social policy—above all health care—and not only solidified his own role as a popular

MLA but led the party to a significant bounce-back in seats and votes. Four more MLAs than in 2016 and an increase to over 30 percent of the popular vote means the NDP is a potential government. It has recovered well in Winnipeg, retaken most of the North, and has a clear “way forward.”

The PCs, of course, are well-entrenched. No party in Canada would balk at winning nearly half of the popular vote (47 percent) and a majority strong enough to drop a few bad apples along the way. Brian Pallister may not poll well as a popular leader, but he is in a strong position as party leader and premier. Losing 30,000 votes, mostly in the Winnipeg area, is a caution, as is the lack of enthusiasm for both Pallister and the PCs outside of its traditional redoubts of rural southern Manitoba and Winnipeg’s wealthiest suburbs. To

adapt a formula favoured by Canada’s most ruthless electoral machine, the Liberal Party of Canada, Manitoba PCs may be tempted to lean right, but they may be advised to govern from the centre.

A third point about Manitoba politics is that the province remains divided along ethnocultural, socio-economic, and ideological lines, and these are strongly shown by the geographical divisions of the province: the North, the Rural South, and Metropolitan Winnipeg. The province is and long has been balanced between two strong parties with defined interests, goals, and areas of political strength and weakness. Governments that do not manoeuvre carefully through the polarized electoral environment learn that lesson the hard way.