

## B.C. Election: Parties hustle for advantage on key issues, leader momentum and credibility

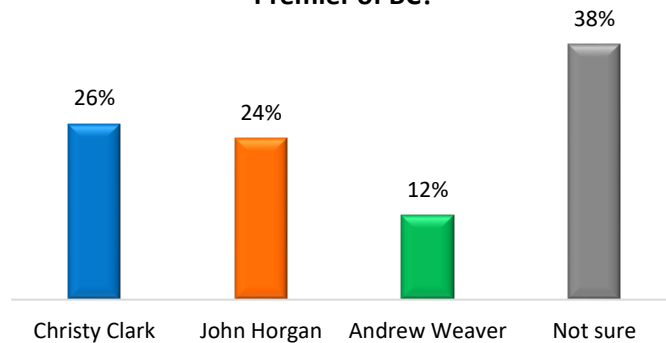
*Clark, Horgan in statistical tie on question of who would make best premier*

**April 12, 2017** – The earliest days of the 2017 provincial election campaign in British Columbia are revealing a political landscape in which the incumbent faces a steep climb back into the good favour of the electorate, and in which the challenger must define himself before he is defined by others.

And as the BC Liberals and New Democrats battle to form government, both face the risk of their ambitions being spoiled in key regions by the Greens of BC as they battle for the 45 seats out of 87 required to form majority government.

A new public opinion poll of more than 800 British Columbians from the Angus Reid Institute finds the two main leaders beginning the race in a statistical tie over who would make best premier, with each side poised to exploit the other's weaknesses in order to motivate turnout among their bases, and bring undecided voters and small-party supporters into their tents.

**Setting aside your party preference for a moment, which of the major BC party leaders do you think would be the best Premier of BC?**



### **METHODOLOGY:**

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey among a representative randomized sample of 804 adult British Columbians who are members of the [Angus Reid Forum](#), March 27 – 30, 2017,. For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 3.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

The poll finds most British Columbians holding unfavourable views of BC Liberal leader Christy Clark. That said, with just four weeks until election day, New Democratic Party leader John Horgan remains unknown to a significant number, and risks being defined by opponents whose campaign is better funded than his own. Moreover, Horgan is no more likely to be viewed “very favourably,” than Clark.

### **Key Findings:**

- Regional and age differences are significant factors in how British Columbians view each of the parties. The Interior remains a Liberal stronghold, while the Lower Mainland shows a slight preference for the NDP on most issues. Young people are firmly in the New Democrats’ camp, while the older generation tilts towards the BC Liberals.
- Health care, housing prices and affordability, and the economy loom large in the minds of voters as the campaign begins

- The NDP holds slight advantages on health care and housing, while the governing BC Liberals are seen as best on the economy

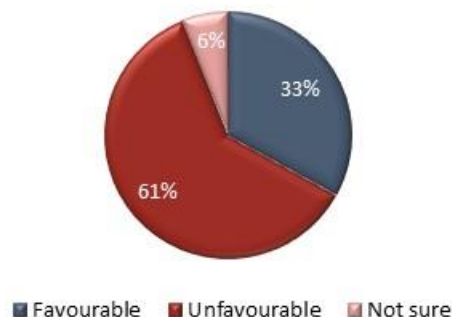
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### Favourability and Momentum of the Leaders

Incumbent B.C. Premier Christy Clark enters the campaign with a deficit in favourability to overcome. While this is nothing new for the Premier – she entered the 2013 election with just 25 per cent approval – it is, nonetheless, likely a concern for the party that six-in-ten (61%) B.C. residents view her unfavourably:

**Please indicate whether you have an overall  
favourable or unfavourable opinion of Premier and BC  
Liberal leader Christy Clark:**



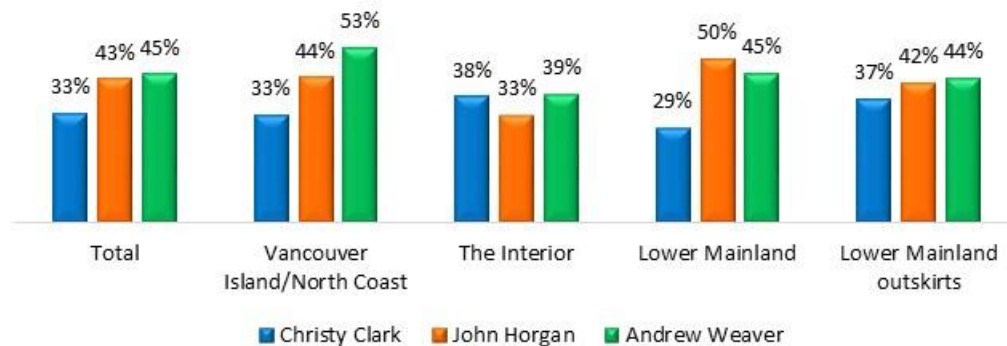
Both NDP leader John Horgan and Green Party leader Andrew Weaver do better on this measure. Horgan holds a favourable rating among 43 per cent of residents and Weaver among 45 per cent. For Weaver, who represents the Oak Bay-Gordon Head constituency in and adjacent to Victoria, much of his support comes from Vancouver Island/North Coast residents. Here his favourability jumps to 53 per cent – higher than Horgan, for whom the Island is also home turf. The Liberals appear to be trying to build their own goodwill in this region, releasing a [Vancouver Island specific platform](#) as a part of their campaign portfolio.

John Horgan carries the most positive energy in the Lower Mainland region, where 30 of the 87 seats up for grabs in the legislature are situated, and where the NDP leader's favourability is as high as 50 per cent. Christy Clark's high watermark on favourability comes in the party stronghold of the Interior – where the BC Liberals won all available seats in 2013 – at 38 per cent:

## CONTACT:

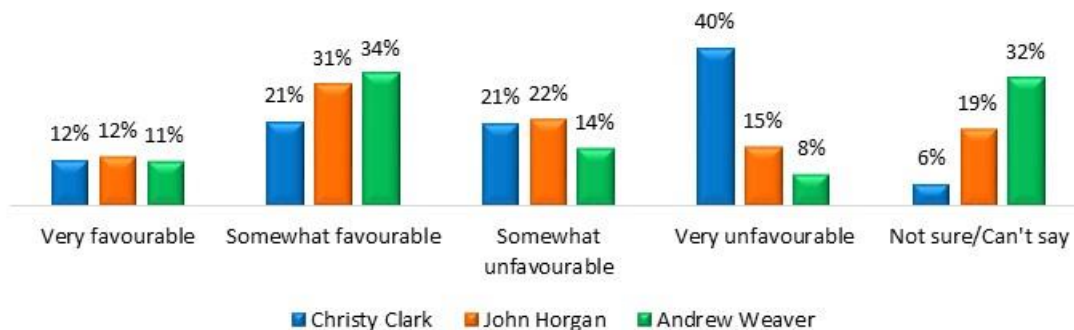
Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 [shachi.kurl@angusreid.org](mailto:shachi.kurl@angusreid.org) @shachikurl

Please indicate whether you have an overall favourable or unfavourable opinion of each of the following people?



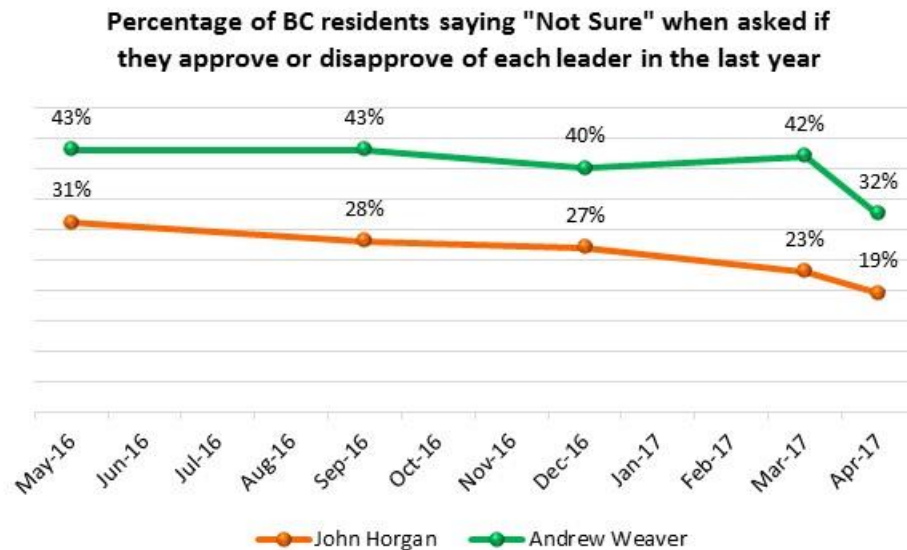
It must be noted that British Columbians refrain from voicing *strong* favourability of any one leader:

Please indicate whether you have an overall favourable or unfavourable opinion of each of the following people?



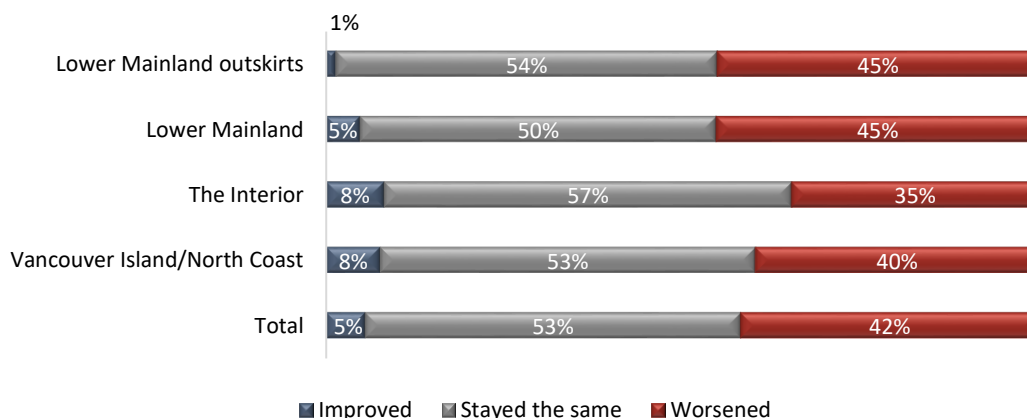
The previous graph also underscores an issue the New Democrats and Greens must overcome in the weeks ahead: a substantial number of B.C. residents aren't sure what to make of them at all. One-in-five residents (19%) say they're not sure how they feel about John Horgan, while one-in-three (32%) say this of Andrew Weaver.

The good news for both men, is that this proportion has dropped over the past year, including a dramatic drop over the last month for the Green Party leader. As voters further familiarize themselves, and as the leaders participate in upcoming debates on April 20 and 26, voter impressions, be they good, bad or indifferent – will crystallize.



Momentum also tells an important story. Asked to consider change in opinion towards Clark in recent months, British Columbians are seemingly torn between stasis and decline. One-half (53%) say their opinion of her has remained the same in the last few months but four-in-ten (42%) say it has worsened. Some of this may owe to [recent criticisms](#) of her party's campaign financing practices.

**Over the past few months or so, would you say your opinion of each of the following has improved, stayed the same, or worsened?**  
**'Premier Christy Clark'**



Comparing each leader's momentum score on this question, the number of respondents saying their view has improved minus those saying worsened, Andrew Weaver comes out on top. NDP leader John Horgan is down 3 points, while Clark has lost a significant amount of favour.

**Momentum Score: Percentage of BC residents saying opinion of each leader has improved minus worsened**

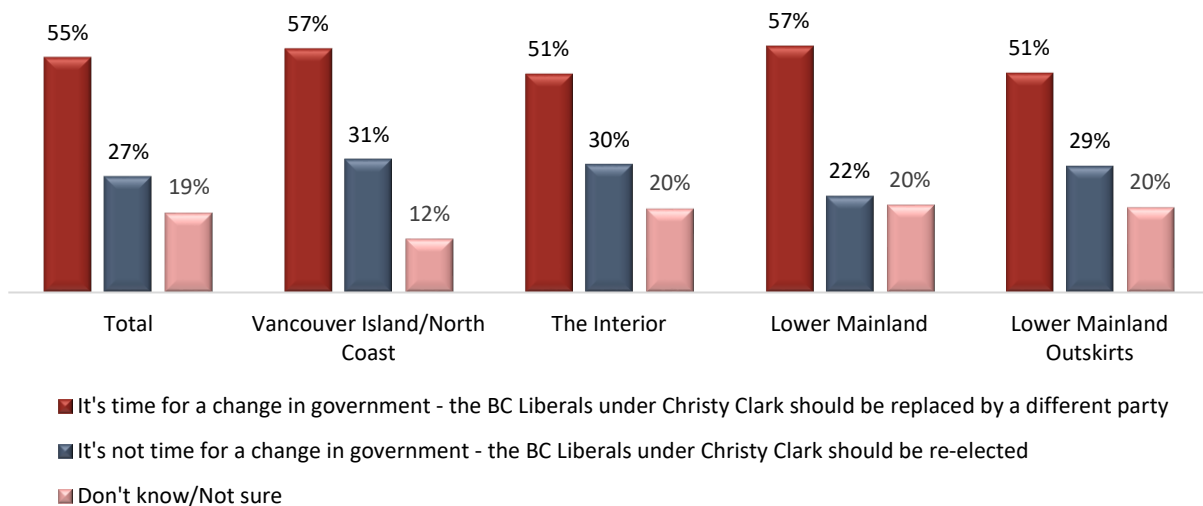


**Time for a change?**

Perhaps reflecting their unfavourable views of Clark, a majority of British Columbians (55%) say “it’s time for a change in government” when asked to choose between that statement and an opposing one.

This perspective holds true across all regions of the province, as seen in the following graph:

**Which of the following two statements best reflects how you feel today?**

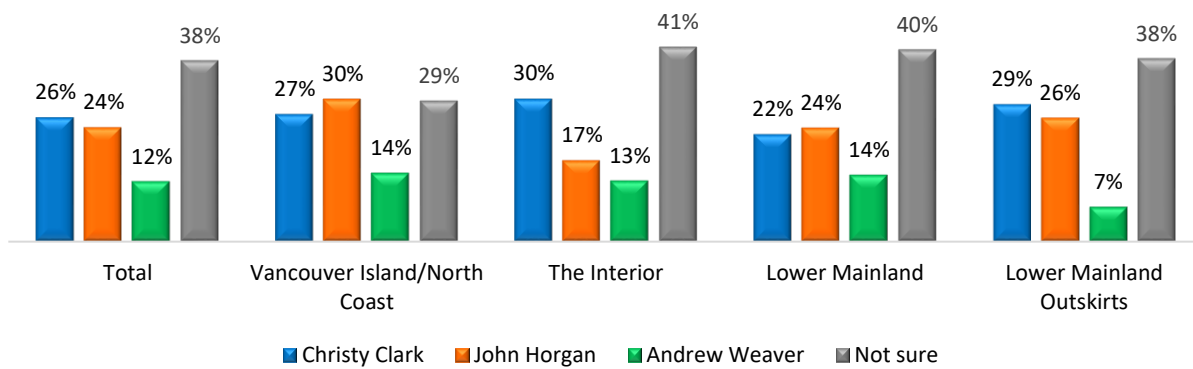


That said, there’s a difference between British Columbians believing the Liberals should be replaced by a different party, and them believing the alternative parties are worthy of being that replacement. As will be

discussed later in this release, the NDP and the Green Party are hardly consensus picks on many key issues facing B.C. today.

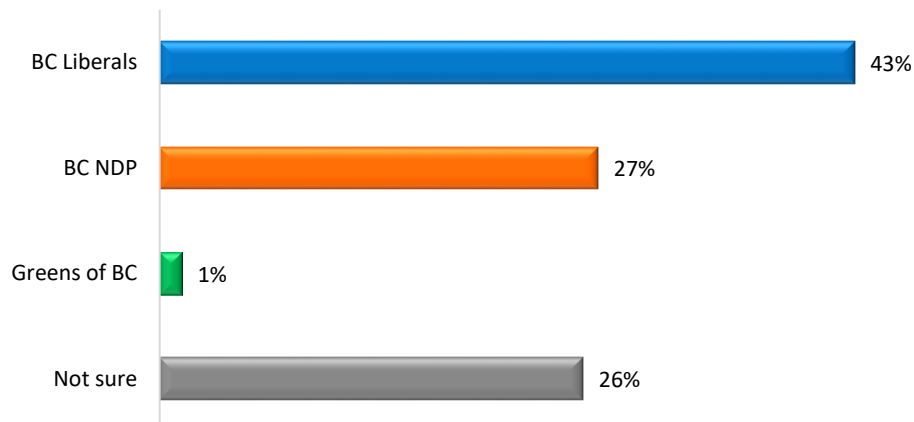
Indeed, when asked which party leader would make the best premier of British Columbia, respondents very narrowly choose Clark over Horgan, though uncertainty is generally the most common response:

**Setting aside your party preference for a moment, which of the major B.C. party leaders do you think would be the best premier of B.C.?**



Further, relatively few British Columbians express confidence that one of the opposition parties will ultimately be victorious in this election. The largest group (43%) expects the BC Liberals to form government for the fifth straight term. Fewer than three-in-ten (27%) expect the NDP to emerge victorious:

**Regardless of who you might be supporting, who do you think will win this election and for the next government of B.C.?**



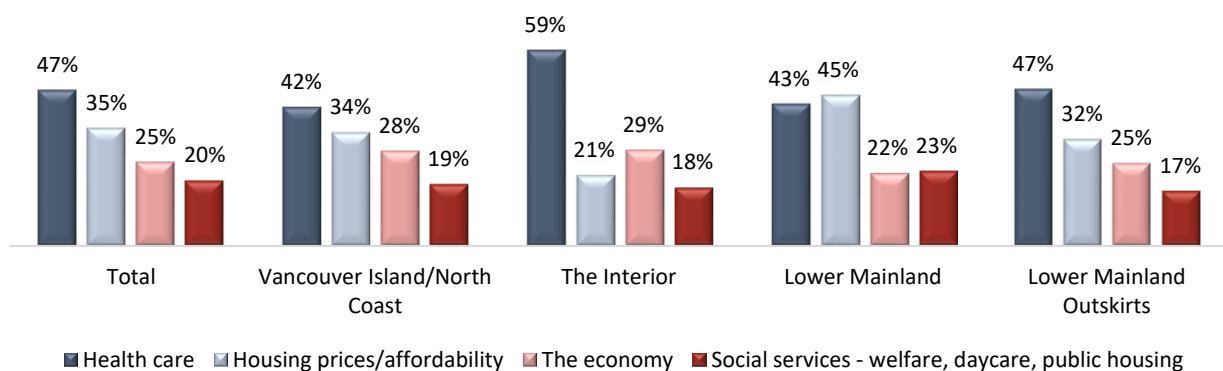
## Key Issues in this race

When British Columbians were asked in a [recent Angus Reid Institute poll](#) to choose the single most important issue facing the province today, housing, health care, and the economy – in that order – take the top three spots.

Asked a slightly different question, the most common responses remain the same, though in a different order. Health care tops the list, registering as a concern for almost half (47%) of B.C. residents. Housing prices/affordability is next, with 35 per cent, and the economy is third, mentioned by 25 per cent of respondents.

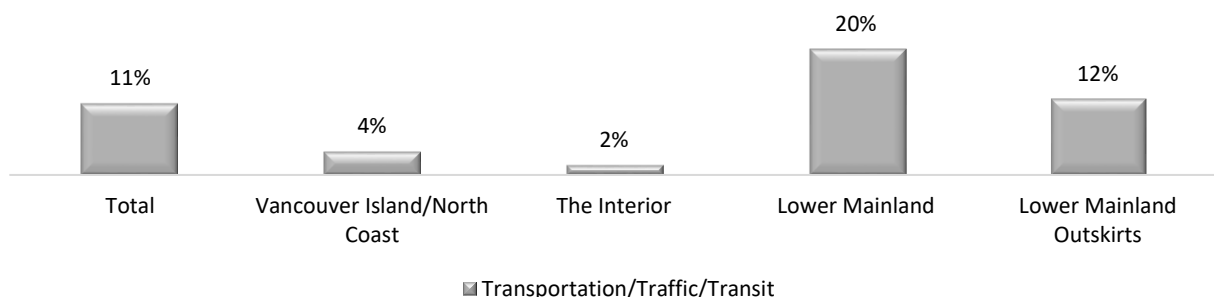
As seen in the following graph, where one lives in the province tends to be correlated with the issues one finds most important:

**As far as you are concerned, what would you say are the most important issues in this election? (Choose up to 3)**



The regions differ on some lower priorities as well, with the transit- and traffic-heavy Lower Mainland regions much more likely to name transportation issues as most important than other parts of the province.

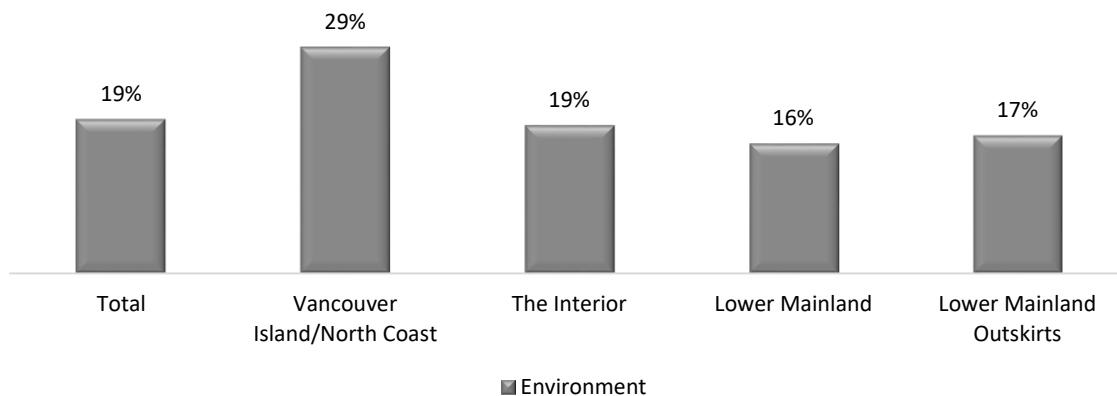
**As far as you are concerned, what would you say are the most important issues in this election? (Choose up to 3)**



Both parties have already attempted to curry favour with commuting voters: while the BC Liberals have proposed a \$500 cap on annual Port Mann and Golden Ears bridge tolls, the BC NDP has gone further, promising to eliminating tolls altogether. Neither party has done much to explain how they'll pay for their goodies, however.

Comparatively, residents of Green Party-friendly Vancouver Island and the province's North Coast are notably more likely than other regions to list the environment among their top issues:

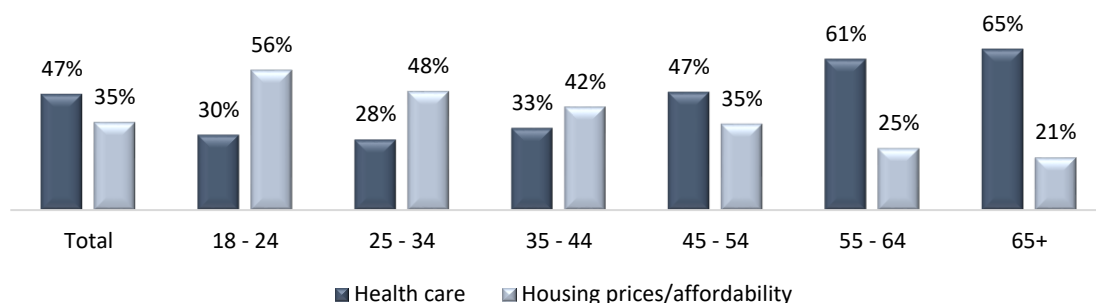
**As far as you are concerned, what would you say are the most important issues in this election? (Choose up to 3)**



This suggests that, as with most BC elections, a key portion of the electorate will be weighing energy and pipeline policies before casting their ballot. In particular, the recently approved Trans-Mountain pipeline twinning looms. For Clark, the project exemplifies the provinces economic growth and relative strength compared to the rest of the country. Horgan however, has stated that it is "not in the interest of British Columbia".

Large divides are also seen between younger and older generations, particularly on the top issues of health care and housing affordability:

**As far as you are concerned, what would you say are the most important issues in this election?**



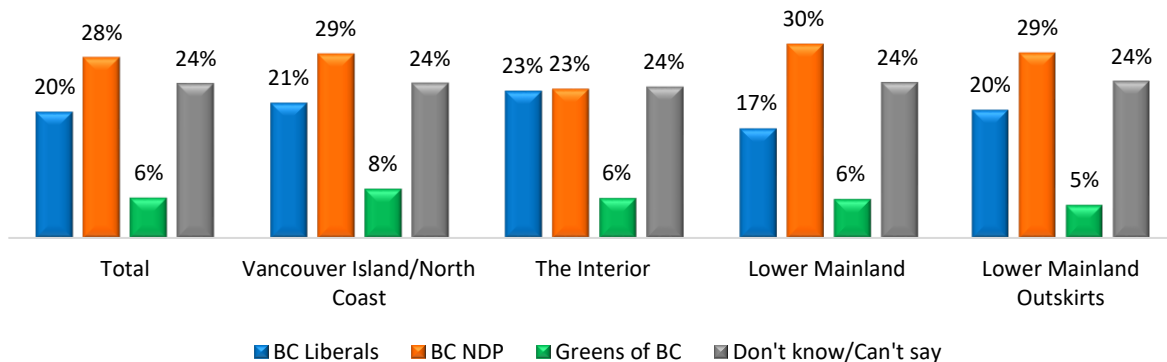


This Angus Reid Institute survey also asked respondents which parties they view as best-equipped to handle a whole suite of issues.

On health care, the New Democrats hold a slight edge. Roughly three-in-ten (28%) say the NDP offers the best choice on “providing the best management of the health care system,” compared to one-in-five (20%) who choose the Liberals. A sizeable portion (24%) say they are unsure.

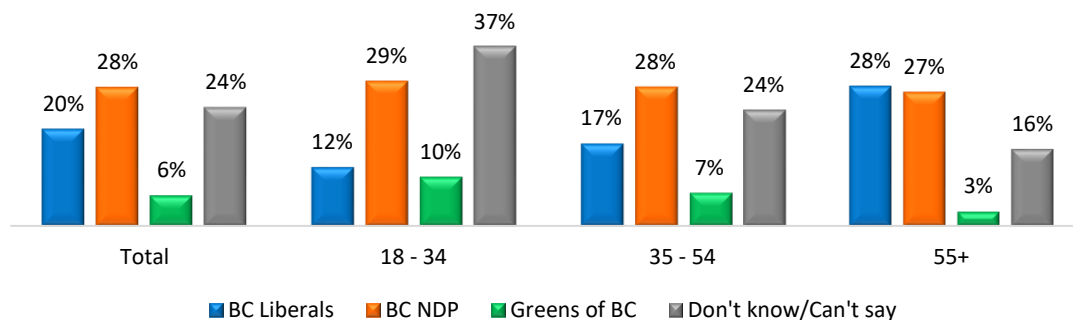
The NDP advantage varies by region, with the province’s interior believing the two main parties are equally well-equipped to deal with the issue. This is perhaps not surprising, given the reputation of the interior as a BC Liberal stronghold, but it’s worth noting again that residents of the interior are the people most likely to say health care is a key issue. In the Lower Mainland, the New Democrats are nearly twice as likely to be chosen as the Liberals:

**Who do you think offers B.C. the best overall choice in each of the following areas? ('Providing the best management of the healthcare system' shown)**



By age, older British Columbians give the Liberals a slight edge on health care, while those under age 35 are more likely to choose the NDP or to be unsure:

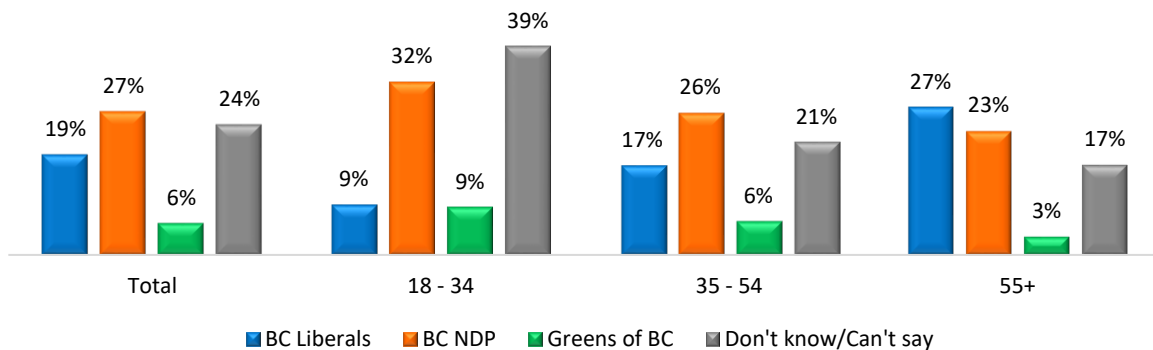
**Who do you think offers B.C. the best overall choice in the best management of the healthcare system**



On housing, the NDP again holds an overall advantage, with 27 per cent saying the party offers the best choice managing real estate prices and housing affordability. One-in-five (19%) choose the BC Liberals.

Critically, the NDP's support on the housing file comes from those who view the issue as a top priority. Lower Mainland residents are again twice as likely to opt for the NDP on this file as they are to choose the Liberals (30% versus 14%, [see comprehensive tables for greater detail](#)); younger respondents are even stronger in their preferences:

**Who do you think offers B.C. the best overall choice in managing issues related to housing prices and affordability?**

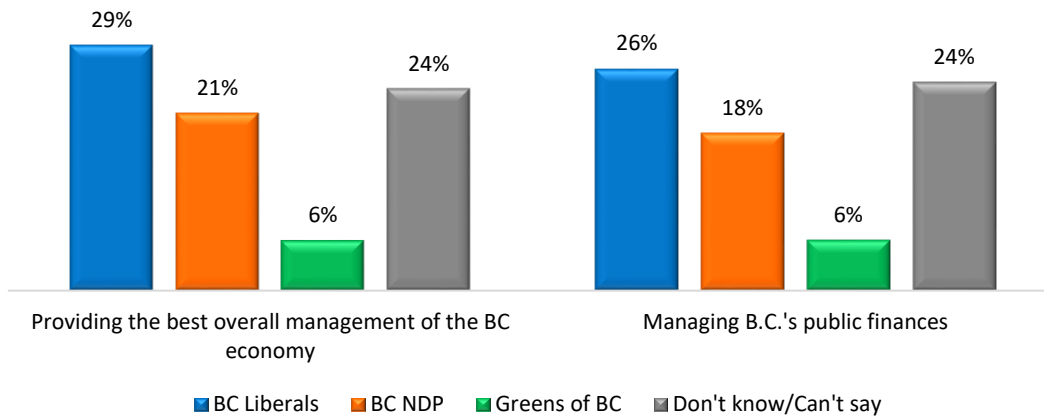


The advantage the New Democrats enjoy among younger British Columbians on these and other issues has the potential to swing the election in their favour, but only if they successfully mobilize this notably fickle voting bloc.

For context, in 2013, overall turnout was 57.1 per cent of registered voters, [according to Elections BC](#). Turnout was highest among those ages 65 – 74, nearly three-quarters of whom (74.2%) cast ballots. Among the 25-34-year-olds who make up much of the NDP base, turnout was just 39.8 per cent.

On the economy, it's advantage BC Liberals. Respondents across all regions choose the governing party on their ability to manage B.C.'s public finances, and providing the best overall management of the provincial economy:

**Who do you think offers B.C. the best overall choice in each of the following areas?**



The parties are notably closer to one another on each of these economic questions among residents of the Lower Mainland, and among younger respondents ([see comprehensive tables](#)).

Andrew Weaver and the Green Party of British Columbia hold a commanding lead on the environmental issues that give their party its name. Some 44 per cent of respondents say the Greens are best suited to protect the province's natural environment.

**A note on methodology: Defining sub-regions**

For this analysis, the Angus Reid Institute divided British Columbia into four regions – Vancouver Island/North Coast, the Interior, the Lower Mainland, and Lower Mainland Outskirts. Below is a quick synopsis of which areas fall into these regional groupings.

The **Lower Mainland** region is made up of Vancouver, Burnaby, New Westminster, Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam, Richmond, and the Central and Northern portions of Surrey.

**Lower Mainland Outskirts** is comprised of South Surrey, Langley, Abbotsford, Mission, Pitt Meadows, Maple Ridge, Chilliwack, Hope, White Rock, Delta, West Vancouver, and the southern portion of the Sunshine Coast.

**The Interior** includes the Thompson-Okanagan region, the Kootenays, the Cariboo region, and Northern B.C. aside from some coastal areas included in the following group.

**Vancouver Island/North Coast** encompasses all of Vancouver Island, the Gulf Islands, Powell River and the northern portion of the Sunshine Coast, and much of the central and north coast, including the Bulkley Valley and Skeena regions.

# ANGUS REID INSTITUTE

Public Interest Research

For Immediate Release  
Canadian Public Opinion Poll

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*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research organization established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

*For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).*