

# DID THE POLLSTERS GET IT WRONG? IT DEPENDS ON THE REGIONAL NUMBERS

Geoffrey Hale

By virtue of not being in the field over the last three days of the campaign, the polls neither detected nor reflected the swing to the Liberals over the final weekend before the election on June 28. What was supposed to have been a dead heat, an election too close to call, instead produced what Paul Martin termed “a stable minority” Liberal government with 135 seats, to 99 for the Conservatives, 54 for the Bloc Québécois and 19 for the NDP, a higher Liberal result than any seat range projected from pre-election polls. Did the pollsters get it wrong? Geoffrey Hale of the University of Lethbridge looks at the numbers on a regional basis and concludes that while the polls obviously weren’t predictive of voter movement in the final days of the campaign, they did detect a swing back to the Liberals following the leadership debates, and most still finished “well within national margins of error.” However, some lessons are in order. Canada is a highly regionalized political market, which makes national polling figures “functionally irrelevant” to seat projections. A shifting campaign dynamic between the dominant Conservative emotion of anger and the dominant Liberal emotion of fear meant that as many as 25 percent of voters polled in the final week indicated they might change their mind at the last moment. Moreover, polling is becoming more difficult in a telemarketing age which features high “rejection rates” by voters refusing to be polled.

Pour avoir cessé leurs activités trois jours avant la fin de la campagne, les sondeurs n’ont pu détecter ou prévoir le revirement en faveur des libéraux intervenu au cours du week-end précédant le scrutin du 28 juin. Au lieu du résultat très serré auquel on s’attendait, nous avons assisté à l’élection d’un Paul Martin jouissant selon ses dires d’une « minorité stable », le Parti libéral raflant 135 sièges contre 99 pour le Parti conservateur, 54 pour le Bloc québécois et 19 pour le NPD. Les sondeurs ont-ils erré ? Geoffrey Hale, de l’Université de Lethbridge, a analysé les résultats par région et conclut que s’ils n’ont évidemment pas prévu un tel revirement, ils avaient détecté un mouvement en ce sens après les débats des chefs. De sorte que la plupart des sondages se sont inscrits dans les limites des marges d’erreur. On en tirera cependant quelques leçons. L’extrême régionalisation politique du Canada handicape la capacité des sondages nationaux à prévoir la répartition des sièges. En raison d’une dynamique de campagne qui a fait alterner deux émotions fortes — la colère nourrie par les conservateurs et la peur suscitée par les libéraux —, jusqu’à 25 p. 100 des personnes interrogées dans la dernière semaine de la campagne ont indiqué qu’elles pourraient changer d’avis à la dernière minute. Sans compter les difficultés rencontrées par les sondeurs en cette ère de télémarketing, qui entraîne l’augmentation des « refus de répondre ».

One of the snapshot verdicts on the 2004 federal election was that the major polling firms largely missed the end-of-campaign shift in voter preferences that boosted Liberal fortunes to 135 seats, from the

108 to 125 range projected by superimposing polling data on the regional distribution of seats from the 2000 contest.

A detailed analysis of polling data and electoral outcomes suggests that the technical models used to make

these projections are fairly reliable. However, the use of polling for purposes of electoral forecasting suffers from four inherent limitations:

- Canada is not a national political market but a highly regionalized one, reflecting differences in economic and social interests and, sometimes, values. Voter attitudes and trends do not move in a synchronized fashion in different parts of the country. As a result, national polling figures are functionally irrelevant to election forecasts.
- In some regions, there are significant internal cleavages among urban, suburban, and rural segments of a region which are largely ignored in published polling data. Moreover, the regional samples of individual polls are usually fairly small, with high margins of error.
- Elections are dynamic environments in which both parties and many voters adapt their respective strategies and actions (including voting decisions) to external stimulus and feedback — including polls. Regional polling data may hint at trends, but they generally provide little indication of differences between firmly and marginally committed voters, or the extent to which undecided voters (whose last minute decisions can shift a close election) are engaged with the political process. Polls conducted late in the campaign suggest that as many as 25 percent of voters were liable to change their minds at the last minute.
- The rapid growth of telephone marketing and solicitation in recent years is contributing to consumer fatigue and larger “rejection rates.” Although there are many techniques to test the statistical validity of survey samples, high rejection rates add an additional dimension of uncer-

tainty to survey results, especially during times of electoral volatility. These concerns are compounded by widely varying turnout levels among different demo-

This compares with statistical margins of error associated with typical survey sample sizes ranging from 5 to 6 percent in Ontario to more than 10 percent in Atlantic Canada,

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graphic groups, even though most Canadians tell pollsters they intend to vote.

**T**his article examines polling data for each region during the campaign, and compares it with actual outcomes by region. It concludes that although most pollsters missed the extent of last minute vote swings in Ontario, regional vote projections for three of four major polling firms that publishing regular polls during the campaign were well within national margins of error.

Based on five national and one regional election surveys carried out between June 20 and 24, 2004, 64 percent of final week polling projections assessed regional levels of major party support within margins of error of 3 percent (see table 1).

Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Major pollsters’ forecasts were most accurate in Alberta and British Columbia, with 80 and 72 percent of projections accurate within 3 percentage points, and most vulnerable to last minute vote shifts in Ontario.

These findings suggest that published media polls are useful for conveying information on election trends to the voting public that would otherwise be available only to party professionals. However, the news media and other analysts could usefully make some adjustments in the ways that polling data is reported.

**T**he 2004 federal election — and the sweepstakes for polling credibility — were won and lost in Ontario. Not only did the province’s 106 seats include the largest number

TABLE 1. SUMMARY BY REGION (%)

	Party vote projections accurate to within:			
	+/- 1%	+/- 2%	+/- 3%	Outside 3%
British Columbia	33	28	11	28
Alberta	27	27	27	20
Man.-Sask.	27	20	7	47
Ontario	0	27	20	53
Quebec	30	5	35	30
Atlantic	27	13	20	40
Total	24	19	20	36

Source: National polls conducted by Compas, Ekos Research, Ipsos-Reid, Leger Marketing, and SES Research between 21 and 24 June, 2004; Elections Canada (2004), “Election Night Results” ([www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca)); and author’s calculations from data published on company Web sites.  
 Note: Based on national polls published between June 24 and 26, 2004. Figures rounded to nearest percentage point.

of competitive seats, particularly following the merger of the Canadian Alliance and Progressive Conservative parties, but the combined effects of federal scandals and an unpopular provincial Liberal budget greatly increased the percentage of the electorate willing to consider shifting their votes. Larger polling samples in Ontario reduced margins of error compared with other parts of the country — particularly during the last two weeks of the campaign, when some polling firms significantly increased the size of their samples.

Most published polls indicated a surge in Conservative and, to a lesser extent, NDP support during the first two weeks of the election campaign. Liberal support dropped from the 45-49 percent range in polls conducted in late April, to the 36-40 percent range in polls conducted at the end of May, to a nadir of 33 to 38 percent in polls conducted around the time of the leaders' debate in mid-June (see table 2). Conservative support during this period increased from the 25-33 percent range in late April, to the 35-39 percent range by the end of May — a level at which it stabilized until mid-June. Assessments of NDP support ranged from 18 to 22 percent in late April, to 20 to 25 percent in late May, and 18 to 26 percent in mid-June. As in several regions, the presence of the Green Party as an increasingly visible centre-left alternative to the Liberals and NDP contributed to both the volatility and uncertainty of the race.

During the last 10 days of the campaign, most pollsters discerned the trend in public opinion back to the Liberals and away from the Conservatives and NDP (see table 3). Liberal support increased to the range of 38 to 43 percent, with the Conservatives dropping back to 30 to 35 percent, and the NDP remaining fairly stable, but within the wide range of 17 to 25 percent. Two of the six polls conducted in the final stretch of the

campaign, Ipsos-Reid (18-20 June) and Compas (23-24 June; 28 June) clearly caught the outlines of the final results, although Ipsos-Reid's last poll (21-23 June) suggested a slight Conservative recovery. These trends were magnified by urban-rural dynamics in which the Liberals were returned with strong majorities in most of their urban seats, and Conservative support was concentrated primarily in rural eastern and southwestern Ontario and the fringes of the greater Toronto area.

Did the pollsters get it “wrong” in Ontario? With the two exceptions noted earlier, there is no doubt that, at 13.2 percent, the Liberals' winning margin in the popular vote was sub-

stantially larger than that predicted by most pollsters. Fewer than half of the party vote projections made during the last week proved to be within three percentage points of the final outcome — the lowest of any region. The “horserace” syndrome in media coverage was reinforced by pollsters' “seat projections” that projected province-wide trends on to the results of the 2000 federal election without taking into consideration Ontario's widely varying local and sub-regional dynamics, or the spurious correlation of past Alliance and PC support in projecting constituency outcomes. As these projections were widely touted by major newspapers and television outlets that spon-

TABLE 2. THE BATTLE FOR ONTARIO

	Liberal	Conservative	NDP	Green	NDP + Green
26 April-2 May (3)	45-49	25-33	18-22	na-4	24 (2 polls)
25-30 May (3)	36-40	35-39	20-25	na-6	30 (1 poll)
15-17 June (4)	33-38	35-40	18-26	na-6	24-26 (3 polls)
17-24 June (6)	38-43	30-35	17-25	na-6	22-29 (6 polls)
Average 17-24 June <sup>1</sup>	39%	34%	20%		

Source: National polls conducted by Compas, Ekos Research, Environics, Ipsos-Reid, Leger Marketing, SES Research between 26 April and 24 June; author's calculations; significant outliers removed.

<sup>1</sup> Polling averages calculated by Dr. Barry Kay, “The 2004 National Election Seat Projection: A Postmortem,” at [www.wlu.ca/lispop/main.htm](http://www.wlu.ca/lispop/main.htm) (June 30, 2004).

TABLE 3. POLL RESULTS AND FINAL OUTCOMES, ONTARIO (%)

	Sample (N)	LPC	CPC	NDP	BQ	Green (other)
Compas, 28 June	–	42	32	19	–	6
Compas, 22-23 June	–	43	34	17	–	5
SES, 20-24 June	393	39	32	25	1	4
Ekos, 21-24 June	–	38	35	21	–	5
Ipsos-Reid, 21-23 June	700	38	34	20	–	6
Leger Marketing, 21-23 June	800	40	35	20	–	(6)
Ipsos-Reid, 18-20 June	330	42	30	20	–	6
Environics, 17-22 June	–	40	35	19	–	(5)
<b>Election night</b>	<b>Number of voters</b>	<b>LPC</b>	<b>CPC</b>	<b>NDP</b>	<b>BQ</b>	<b>Green (other)</b>
Ontario	5,060,308	44.7	31.5	18.1	–	4.5

Source: National polls conducted by Compas, Ekos Research, Ipsos-Reid, Leger Marketing, and SES Research between 21 and 24 June, 2004; Elections Canada (2004), “Election Night Results” ([www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca)); author's calculations from data published on company Web sites; Environics poll; and Ipsos-Reid June 18-20 poll, Compas June 28 poll added to sample.

sored the polls, the result did little to enhance pollsters' credibility.

The second major battleground of the 2004 election was British Columbia. A combination of open seats, caucus defections, and three-way contests made at least one-third of the province's 36 seats highly competitive, in sharp contrast to most other provinces. In sharp contrast to Ontario, the pollsters got it largely right in projecting BC vote results, despite considerable volatility during the election campaign.

British Columbia is characterized by four major sub-regions — Vancouver/Burnaby/New Westminster, Vancouver Island, the rest of the Lower Mainland, and the BC interior. All these sub-regions have distinctive voting patterns, as noted by Ipsos-Reid, the one national polling firm to survey a large enough sample of voters to measure voter outlooks in different segments of the province.

The final result placed the Conservatives at 36.2 percent of the vote, down from 49.4 percent from Alliance totals in the 2000 election, the Liberals at 28.6 percent (up 0.9 percent), the NDP at 26.6 percent (up 15.3 percent), and the Greens at 6.4 percent. Although this result is close to voter loyalties reported in a March 25-27 Ipsos-Reid poll (28/38/18/12), except for a drift of Green voters toward the NDP, poll results reported during the following three months indicated a highly volatile electorate. Most pollsters observed the late campaign swing from the Liberals to the Conservatives and the NDP.

Compas, SES, Ekos, and Ipsos-Reid-Reid (BC poll) all projected the final BC results accurately within a 3 percent margin of error for the three major parties. Two of Compas' last week projections (together with its prediction of a 7 point Conservative margin over the Liberals) were accurate within one percentage point. Interestingly, all four major polling firms which published regular polls during the election projected the

combined NDP/Green vote at 34 percent — compared with the actual outcome of 33 percent.

The "distinctness" of Quebec society extends not only to its polarized federal electoral contests, pitting the Bloc Québécois as the

dominant party of Quebec francophones since 1993 against the Liberals as the principal opposition, but also to its polling dynamics. Veteran academic Maurice Pinard noted years ago that the ranks of "undecided" voters tend to disguise a disproportionate number of Liberal votes on

TABLE 4. POLL RESULTS AND FINAL OUTCOMES, BRITISH COLUMBIA (%)

	Sample (N)	LPC	CPC	NDP	BQ	Green (other)
Compas, 28 June	–	19	44	26	–	9
Compas, 22-23 June	–	29	36	29	–	5
SES, 20-24 June	192	28	38	28	–	6
Ekos, 21-24 June	–	30	34	27	–	7
Ipsos-Reid, 21-23 June (National)	264	24	44	22	–	8
Ipsos-Reid, 21-23 June (BC)	756	25	38	26	–	8
Leger Marketing, 21-24 June	–	26	40	27	–	(6)
Environics, 17-22 June	–	31	34	31	–	(4)
<b>Election night</b>	<b>Number of voters</b>	<b>LPC</b>	<b>CPC</b>	<b>NDP</b>	<b>BQ</b>	<b>Green (other)</b>
British Columbia	1,724,618	28.6	36.2	26.6	–	6.4

Source: National polls conducted by Compas, Ekos Research, Ipsos-Reid, Leger Marketing, SES Research between 21 and 24 June, 2004; Elections Canada (2004), "Election Night Results" ([www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca)); author's calculations from data published on company Web sites; Envionics poll; Ipsos-Reid BC poll, Compas June 28 poll added to sample; and Ipsos-Reid BC poll added to sample.

TABLE 5. POLL RESULTS AND FINAL OUTCOMES, QUEBEC (%)

	Sample	LPC	CPC	NDP	BQ	Green/ (other)
Compas, 28 June	–	36	8	7	47	1
Compas, 22-23 June	–	25	12	5	58	–
SES, 20-24 June	286	28	11	7	51	3
Ekos, 21-24 June	–	28	11	7	51	3
Ipsos-Reid, 21-23 June	460	29	9	5	48	5
Leger Marketing, 21-24 June	–	32	11	5	48	(4)
CROP (Quebec only), 16-21 June	606	26	13	6	50	(5)
Envionics, 17-22 June	–	21	10	10	50	4
<b>Election night</b>	<b>Number of voters</b>	<b>LPC</b>	<b>CPC</b>	<b>NDP</b>	<b>BQ</b>	<b>Green/ (other)</b>
Quebec	3,424,713	33.9	8.8	4.6	48.9	3.2

Source: National polls conducted by Compas, Ekos Research, Ipsos-Reid, Leger Marketing, SES Research between 21 and 24 June, 2004; Elections Canada (2004), "Election Night Results" ([www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca)); author's calculations from data published on company Web sites; Envionics poll, CROP poll, Compas June 28 poll added to sample.

election day. This phenomenon was on display once again in the 2004 federal election.

Despite initial fallout from the Liberal sponsorship scandal in Quebec, the Liberals appeared to be gaining ground on the Bloc in the days before the election call on May 23. However, the consensus of the polls by mid-campaign was that the Bloc had opened a 20-point lead, and that Gilles Duceppe performed more effectively than Paul Martin in both the French and English language leaders' debates. As a result, out-of-province pollsters placed Liberal support in the range of 21 to 23 percent, compared to 50 to 58 percent for the Bloc during the week following the debate. Quebec-based Leger Marketing discerned a much closer race (48 to 30).

Polls in the last week of the election indicated some shift of support toward the Liberals, and a high percentage of undecided voters — with Leger Marketing and Ipsos-Reid catching the public mood most precisely (see table 5). However, other published polls significantly underestimated the Liberal vote and overestimated the vote of the other parties so that only 60 percent of vote projections for individual parties in Quebec during the last week of the campaign were within three percentage points of the actual outcome.

**I**n Atlantic Canada, pre-election polls between late April and mid-May 2004 forecast a Liberal lead averaging 22 percentage points over the Conservatives, and an even larger lead over the NDP. However, small polling samples (ranging from 60 to 90 for most polls released during the campaign) contributed to high levels of volatility and high margins of error — making it difficult to determine the extent to which Atlantic Canada was bucking the national trend.

Most polls published during the last week of the campaign projected

major NDP gains, a slight growth in the Liberal vote, and a sharp decline in the combined PC/Alliance vote (see table 6). Election night results confirmed this trend with the Liberals gaining an average of 3 per-

cent of the popular vote across Atlantic Canada, the NDP gaining 6 percent, and the Conservatives dropping 10.5 percent from their predecessors' combined vote. Most polling projections caught the broad direc-

TABLE 6. POLL RESULTS AND FINAL OUTCOMES, ATLANTIC CANADA (%)

	Sample (N)	LPC	CPC	NDP	BQ	Green (other)
Compas, 28 June	–	50	19	25	–	5
Compas, 22-23 June	–	47	31	22	–	0
SES, 20-24 June	86	45	24	25	2	4
Ekos, 21-24 June	–	39	33	28	–	–
Ipsos-Reid, 21-23 June	134	44	23	26	–	7
Leger Marketing, 21-24 June	–	41	32	22	–	(4)
Environics, 17-22 June	–	41	37	19	–	(5)
Average, 17-24 June <sup>1</sup>	–	41	29	26	–	–
Election night	Number of voters	LPC	CPC	NDP	BQ	Green (other)
Newfoundland	198,366	48.0	32.3	17.5	–	1.6
Prince Edward Island	76,421	52.7	30.7	12.5	–	4.2
Nova Scotia	433,577	39.6	28.0	28.5	–	3.3
New Brunswick	369,407	44.6	31.1	20.6	–	3.4
Atlantic	1,077,771	43.8	30.0	22.6	–	3.1

Source: National polls conducted by Compas, Ekos Research, Ipsos-Reid, Leger Marketing, SES Research between 21 and 24 June, 2004; Elections Canada (2004), "Election Night Results" ([www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca)); author's calculations from data published on company Web sites; and Envionics poll, Compas June 28 poll added to sample.

<sup>1</sup> Polling averages calculated by Dr. Barry Kay, "The 2004 National Election Seat Projection: A Postmortem," at <http://www.wlu.ca/lispop/main.htm> (30 June 2004).

TABLE 7. POLL RESULTS AND FINAL OUTCOMES, MANITOBA-SASKATCHEWAN (%)

	Sample (N)	LPC	CPC	NDP	BQ	Green (other)
Compas, 28 June	–	28	56	15	–	0
Compas, 22-23 June	–	31	45	18	–	2
SES, 20-24 June	137	39	34	24	1	2
Ekos, 21-24 June	–	29	37	30	–	5
Ipsos-Reid, 21-23 June	118	32	36	25	–	5
Leger Marketing, 21-24 June	–	30	40	26	–	(4)
Election night	Number of voters	LPC	CPC	NDP	BQ	Green (other)
Manitoba	472,796	33.2	39.1	23.5	–	2.7
Saskatchewan	425,946	27.2	41.8	23.4	–	2.7
Manitoba-Saskatchewan	898,742	30.4	40.4	23.5	–	2.7

Source: National polls conducted by Compas, Ekos Research, Ipsos-Reid, Leger Marketing, SES Research between 21 and 24 June, 2004; Elections Canada (2004), "Election Night Results" ([www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca)); author's calculations from data published on company Web sites; and Compas June 28 poll added to sample.

tion of these trends, while tending to exaggerate them somewhat.

**M**anitoba and Saskatchewan are lumped together for polling purposes more for the sake of convenience, because of their individually small sample sizes, than for the similarity of their electoral markets. More than half of Manitoba's votes are cast in Winnipeg, while electoral map-makers have designed "pie-shaped" ridings in both Regina and Saskatoon

The 2004 federal election — and the sweepstakes for polling credibility — were won and lost in Ontario. Not only did the province's 106 seats include the largest number of competitive seats, particularly following the merger of the Canadian Alliance and Progressive Conservative parties, but the combined effects of federal scandals and an unpopular provincial Liberal budget greatly increased the percentage of the electorate willing to consider shifting their votes.

which result in large rural votes in seven of the eight notionally urban ridings. As in its provincial politics, rural Manitoba is divided between a largely conservative south and a largely NDP north. The resulting fragmentation of political outlooks within a small market ensures that pollsters' typical sample sizes are far too small to inspire much confidence. Margins of error for federal election polls in "Man./Sask." are usually in the range of 10 percent.

The effect of this electoral dynamic was particularly visible in 2004, as noted in table 7. The Conservatives won 13 of 14 Saskatchewan seats with 41.8 percent of the vote. The new party also entrenched its support in rural southern Manitoba while dividing Winnipeg's seats with the Liberals and New Democrats (2/3/3). One pollster, Quebec's Leger Marketing, accurately projected the Conservative and Liberal votes in the region.

Two of the four pollsters (Compas/Ipsos-Reid) were close in their estimates of the eventual Liberal vote. Two (SES/Ipsos-Reid) were

close in their projection of the NDP vote. Compas consistently overestimated the Conservative vote, with the others failing to catch the extent or durability of the party's support in the region. However, the inherent limitations of polling in such a small, diverse, and sparsely populated market were clearly on display.

**P**rojecting the outcomes of elections in Alberta rarely requires great psephological skill. Baseline polls

in late March projected a wide Conservative lead over the Liberals, which gradually increased during the course of the campaign. Turnout differentials do not appear to have made a significant difference in election results, with only a marginal difference between turnout in Edmonton (60.6

percent), Calgary (59.4 percent), and the province as a whole (59.4 percent), according to preliminary Elections Canada reports.

Three of the four major polling firms (Compas/Ipsos-Reid/SES) projected the final Alberta results accurately within 3 percentage points for at least two of the three major parties — although most forecast a higher NDP vote than actually materialized.

**D**id the pollsters "miss" the outcome of the 2004 federal election? Technically, no. Most results were within their statistical margins of error, even though few pollsters or their media clients bothered to qualify their regional data in this way in their published reports. Honourable mention to SES Research, which regularly did so in its daily tracking poll and weekly regional breakouts for CPAC.

It is often as misleading and unfair to talk generically of "the pollsters" as it is of "politicians." Breaking down the accuracy of final projections by party and region of national polls published during the final week of the campaign, Leger Marketing (distributed through

TABLE 8. POLL RESULTS AND FINAL OUTCOMES, ALBERTA (%)

	Sample (N)	LPC	CPC	NDP	BQ	Green (other)
Compas, 28 June	–	28	55	16	–	2
Compas, 22-23 June	–	24	61	7	–	8
SES, 20-24 June	145	23	62	13	–	2
Ekos, 21-24 June	–	23	58	12	–	7
Ipsos-Reid, 21-23 June	184	20	59	11	–	6
Leger Marketing, 21-24 June	–	21	60	12	–	(7)
Environics, 17-22 June	–	21	62	13	–	(4)
<b>Election night</b>	<b>Number of voters</b>	<b>LPC</b>	<b>CPC</b>	<b>NDP</b>	<b>BQ</b>	<b>Green (other)</b>
Alberta	1,270,815	22.0	61.6	9.5	–	6.2

Source: National polls conducted by Compas, Ekos Research, Ipsos-Reid, Leger Marketing, SES Research between 21 and 24 June, 2004; Elections Canada (2004), "Election Night Results" ([www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca)); author's calculations from data published on company Web sites; and Environics poll, Compas June 28 poll added to sample.

Quebecor/Sun Media) provided the most accurate snapshot of regional vote totals, followed by Compas (National Post/Canwest Global) and SES Research (CPAC). Trailing were Ipsos-Reid (Globe and Mail/CTV) and Ekos Research (Toronto Star/LaPresse). Table 9 summarizes the percentage of regional party votes accurately projected within one, two and three percentage points.

Media outlets tend to depend heavily on their proprietary polls, rarely bothering to compare polling data to place results in a broader context or to offset the effects of small regional sample sizes. Some pollsters were more transparent. For example,

Ekos and Compas went to some lengths to test the stability of voter intentions and publish their findings, noting the degree to which poll

many years and used by Wilfrid Laurier political scientist Barry Kay in his regional seat projection model. Kay's model, superimposed on surveys

Did the pollsters get it "wrong" in Ontario?...there is no doubt that, at 13.2 percent, the Liberals' winning margin in the popular vote was substantially larger than that predicted by most pollsters. Fewer than half of the party vote projections made during the last week proved to be within three percentage points of the final outcome — the lowest of any region.

respondents indicated the likelihood of changing their vote intentions before election day.

One way of offsetting the effects of small regional poll samples would be to conduct a "poll of polls," a technique adopted by the British media for

conducted during the final 10 days of the campaign, accurately predicted regional seat outcomes (plus or minus one seat) in all regions except Quebec and Ontario.

The most accurate projections from Kay's aggregation of polling data come in regions where individual polling samples are too small to have more than minimal statistical validity (see table 10). However, aggregating polling data would not have allowed the media to forecast the Liberal landslide in Ontario or the modest Liberal recovery in Quebec, although the latter appears to have become a structural feature of pre-election polling in that province.

Pollsters (and their media clients) could also enhance truth in polling by disclosing both the size of regional samples in their published materials (a regular feature of reports published on Ipsos-Reid and SES Research Web sites), and the regional margin of error for regional surveys.

On balance, published opinion polls remain useful ways for the voting public to observe political trends during elections to obtain some context for evaluating the organized manipulation inherent in major party campaigns. However, with an increasingly disengaged electorate, much of which is reluctant to answer pollsters' phone calls, the best advice is still *caveat lector* — don't believe everything you read.

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TABLE 9. POLL WINNERS AND LOSERS: SUMMARY BY MAJOR POLLSTER (%)

	Party vote projections accurate to within			
	+/- 1%	+/- 2%	+/- 3%	Outside 3%
Leger Marketing, 21-24 June	37	21	21	21
Compas, 22-23 June	32	21	16	32
Ipsos-Reid, 21-23 June	23	23	9	45
SES, 20-24 June	21	21	21	37
Ekos, 21-24 June	11	11	37	42
Compas, 28 June <sup>1</sup>	21	5	16	58

Source: National polls conducted by Compas, Ekos Research, Ipsos-Reid, Leger Marketing, SES Research between 21 and 24 June, 2004; Elections Canada (2004), "Election Night Results" ([www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca)); author's calculations from data published on company Web sites; and Compas June 28 poll added to sample. Note: Numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding.

<sup>1</sup> Released 10 p.m., election night, June 28.

TABLE 10. DOES AGGREGATING POLLS HELP INCREASE ACCURACY (%)?

	"Poll of polls" (17-25 June)				Actual			
	LPC	CPC	NDP	BQ	LPC	CPC	NDP	BQ
Atlantic	41	32	24	–	43	30	22	–
Quebec	28	–	–	50	33.9	8.8	4.6	48.9
Ontario	39	34	20	–	44	31	18	–
"Prairies"	30	39	25	–	30	40	23	–
Alberta	22	57	–	–	21	61	–	–
British Columbia	29	41	26	–	28	36	22	–

Source: Barry Kay, "The 2004 National Election Seat Projection: A Postmortem," at [www.wlu.ca/lispop/main.htm](http://www.wlu.ca/lispop/main.htm) (30 June 2004)

Note: Bold type – aggregate projections accurate within two percentage points.