

City of Vancouver tilting to the left?

Eight NDP MLAs returned in 2017

For much of the last century – at least from 1933 to the present – British Columbia’s largest city has been divided between political forces on the ‘left’ and those on the ‘right.’

‘Vancouver East’ – the eastern half of Vancouver, from Main Street to Boundary Road – generally has elected CCF and New Democratic Party representatives, while the other half of the city – stretching westward from Main Street to Point Grey – returned Liberals, Conservatives and Socreds.

Over the past several province-wide tilts, however, the City of Vancouver appears to have grown increasingly supportive of left-leaning politicians.

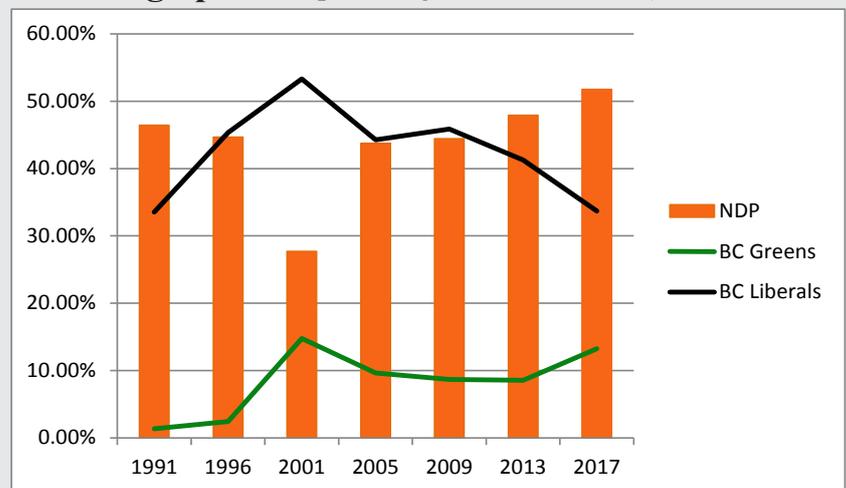
As recently as nine years ago, in 2009, local voters were almost evenly split in their support of the NDP and the BC Liberals, with the former capturing a total of 94,576 ballots, and the latter, 97,606.

Both parties – one with 44.4 per cent of all valid votes in Vancouver, the other with 45.9 per cent – were rewarded with five MLAs.

But the province’s 2013 general election saw a growing divide between the left and the right, with the BC Liberals remaining at a near-constant 97,602 ballots (just four shy of their total in 2009) while the New Democrats surged upward to 113,407 – a gain of nearly 19,000 ballots.

With 47.9 per cent of all valid votes cast in Vancouver five years ago, the NDP captured a total of seven ridings, while the BC Liberals – with just 41.3 per cent – slipped to four.

New Democratic Party’s vote-share in Vancouver marching upward (percentage of all valid votes)



SOURCE - Elections BC

(Redistribution gave the city a total of 11 seats in advance of the 2013 province-wide general election, an increase of one – Vancouver-False Creek.)

Interestingly, both of the seats taken from the BC Liberals by the NDP were on the west-side of the city: David Eby prevailed in Vancouver-Point Grey – upsetting Premier Christy Clark – while George Heyman topped the polls in Vancouver-Fairview.

The centre-left party’s success in Vancouver in 2013 was even more remarkable when the NDP’s disappointing province-wide results are considered.

Then led by Adrian Dix, the veteran MLA for Vancouver-Kingsway, the New Democrats stumbled badly in

the province’s 40th general election, letting a significant pre-election polling advantage dissipate as Clark and her BC Liberals won a surprising come-from-behind re-election victory.

So, even as the NDP won a majority of electoral districts in the City of Vancouver – and even defeated the incumbent Premier in her own district – the party fell well short of winning a majority of seats in the Legislative Assembly, and so remained stuck on the opposition benches for another four years.

Amends were made in 2017, after John Horgan, a long-time NDP MLA from Vancouver Island, succeeded Dix as party leader.

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The New Democrats last year incrementally increased their province-wide vote-share from 39.7 per cent under Dix to 40.3 per cent with Horgan, but in Vancouver the NDP's proportion of valid votes soared to 51.8 per cent – an increase of nearly four percentage points.

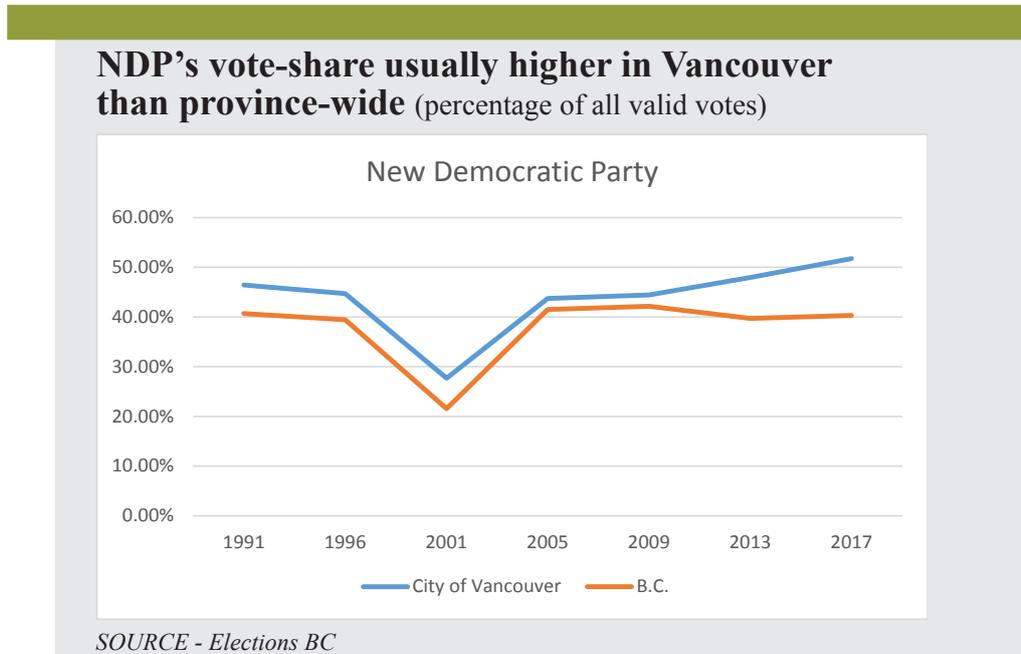
Horgan's NDP also upped its seat count to eight, in the province's biggest city as newcomer George Chow turfed the BC Liberal Attorney-General, Suzanne Anton, in Vancouver-Fraserview.

The BC Liberals slipped slightly in their province-wide vote-share in 2017, dropping from 44.1 per cent in 2013, to 40.3 per cent. In Vancouver, however, the centre-right party plunged to a mere 33.7 per cent – a loss of more than seven percentage points in just four years, and a remarkable 20 points below their tally in the city in 2001.

And with just three seats, the once-mighty BC Liberal Party was reduced to its lowest total in Vancouver since the mid-1990s.

The total number of votes won by each of the major parties in Vancouver tells the tale.

From 2001 to 2017, the number of valid votes counted in the city rose from 200,843 to 259,465 – an increase of more than 58,600 (which explains



why an additional seat was allocated to Vancouver for the last two elections).

But the number of votes cast for the BC Liberals over that same period fell from 107,049 to 87,462 – a loss of almost 20,000 ballots.

The New Democrats, on the other hand, saw their support grow between 2001 and 2017 from just 55,633 – a stunningly-low tally that reflected the party's deep unpopularity after nearly a decade in government – to a whopping 134,272.

Simply, the BC Liberals have lost votes in Vancouver in each of the last

four general elections, and in 2017 the party finished about 47,000 votes behind their main ideological rivals.

As for the New Democrats, the party last year won more than half of all Vancouver votes for the first time since 1972.

Not to be overlooked in Vancouver is the newfound success of the BC Green Party. While it is true that the Greens have yet to win a legislative seat in the city, they nonetheless appear to be increasingly popular with voters.

In 2001, as the New Democrats tumbled to their post-1990s nadir, the Greens racked up an impressive 29,680 votes in Vancouver – representing 14.8 per cent of all valid votes.

The party's strength then ebbed over the next three general elections, but in 2017 the Greens scored an impressive 34,373 ballots and came close – 13.3 per cent – to their historic vote-share.

Interestingly, whereas the 2001 leap in Green support in Vancouver clearly came from disenchanted NDP supporters, the 2017 spurt coincided with a sharp upward move by Horgan's party, which suggests that disaffected BC Liberal voters may have found a new home with the environmental party.

BC Liberals' vote-share in Vancouver on a downward trajectory (percentage of all valid votes)

