

Similarities and differences abound in B.C. and Ontario election results

Sixteen-years of Liberal government sputtered to an end in British Columbia last summer following a provincial-general election that produced inconclusive results, with no party winning a majority of legislative seats.

Last week in Ontario, 15 years of Liberal government were put to a quick end following a provincial-general election that gave the Progressive Conservatives a massive legislative majority.

Interestingly, both the BC Liberals and the New Democrats took a near-identical share of the popular vote, 40.36 per cent and 40.28 per cent respectively, in British Columbia's May 2017 general election, but neither party was able to secure a majority of legislative seats.

On June 7, 2018, according to unofficial results posted by Elections Ontario, the Tories took 40.49 per cent of the vote – almost exactly the same proportion as the Liberals and NDP in B.C. – yet were able to capture 76 out of 124 seats.

Notwithstanding their commensurate lengthy tenures in office, the electoral fates of the BC Liberals and their Ontario cousins were markedly different.

The BC Liberals returned 43 MLAs in the 2017 general election, one shy of a majority in the province's 87-seat Legislative Assembly. The party briefly attempted to hold onto the reins of power, but was defeated in the House by the combined forces of the New Democratic Party and the fledgling Greens.

Soon afterward – and after a new, minority NDP government was sworn into office – the BC Liberal leader, Christy Clark, quit and was replaced by a former cabinet minister, Andrew Wilkinson. Clark also resigned her seat in Kelowna West, which was retaken in the resulting by-election by another BC Liberal, Ben Stewart.

Even after losing a legislative seat when Darryl Plecas offered his services to the House as Speaker – he quickly was expelled from the party's caucus as a result – the BC Liberals remain a viable political force in the province with 42 legislative seats.

It is a far different situation for the Ontario Grits who returned only seven MPPs to the Legislative Assembly, one shy of the number needed for official-party status.

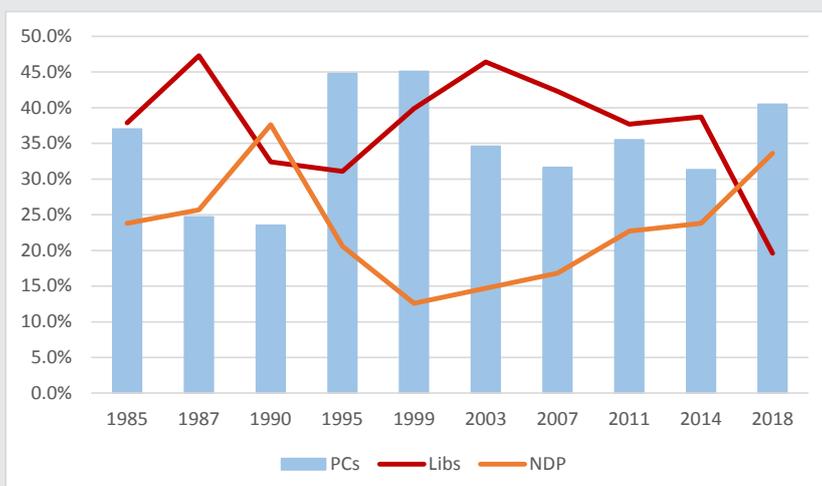
Former Premier Kathleen Wynne – who barely hung onto her Don Valley West seat with a margin of just 181 votes – tendered her resignation as leader soon after the polls had closed on election night.

It is certain that a number of contenders soon will enter the contest for the Liberal leadership, but it is almost as certain that the field will not be as stellar as it might have been had the Grits elected more representatives and achieved official-party status.

Ontario's 42nd provincial-general election saw the dramatic rejection of an incumbent Liberal government which previously had won four consecutive province-wide tilts (albeit with a minority in 2011)

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Ontario's Liberal government plunges in popularity after four consecutive victories (share of valid votes)



SOURCES - Elections Ontario.

under Dalton McGuinty and his successor, Kathleen Wynne.

The Progressive Conservatives, perennial runners-up since losing the reins of power in 2003, were elevated to government with 76 seats – thirteen above the number needed for a majority – while the New Democratic Party, relegated to six consecutive third-place finishes since being ejected from government in 1995, took 40 seats to become the official Opposition.

The Ontario Green Party recorded its first-ever electoral success in Canada's largest province, winning a single seat in Guelph.

After winning 58 of 107 seats in the 2014 provincial-general election – the legislature grew by 17 seats for the most-recent contest – the Grits were humbled with a mere seven in 2018. They even lost official-party status in the Legislative Assembly, where a minimum of eight seats is required.

British Columbia's 41st provincial-general election ended in a near-stalemate, with the BC Liberals and New Democrats winning 43 and 41 seats respectively, followed by the Greens with a record three.

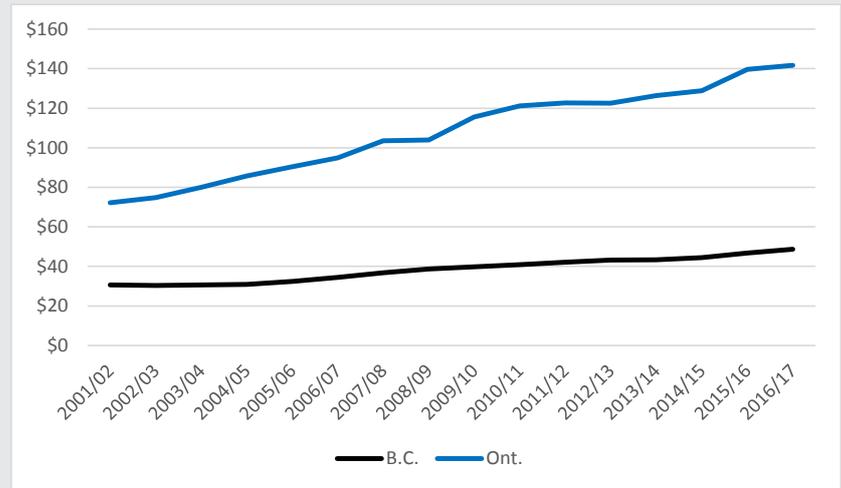
Whereas the Ontario Liberals lost 51 seats in their fall from power, the BC Liberal caucus saw their ranks cut by just six seats. So, while the Grit caucus in Ontario has been reduced to a shell of its former self, their B.C. counterparts remain a formidable legislative – and, therefore, political – force.

Why did such different fates befall the Ontario and B.C. Grits, both of whom were in power for nearly a generation?

Part of the answer may lie in the viability of third parties in the two provinces. B.C. long has been 'polarized' between a single party on the left – historically the NDP – and the right – Social Credit from the 1950s to 1990s, the BC Liberals more recently. A third option for disaffected voters eventually may lie with the nascent Greens, but for now a significant majority of the electorate appears to prefer one of the Big Two.

Ontario, however, has three compet-

Ontario's total expenditures have been growing nearly twice as fast as B.C.'s (\$ billions)



SOURCE - Fiscal Reference Tables, 2017.

itive parties – and the New Democrats have been on an upward trajectory over the last two decades. Last week, disaffected Liberal supporters could opt either for the Tories or the NDP, or stay at home, rather than hold their noses and continue backing the Grits.

It also is likely that the two province's much-different fiscal pictures created a stronger desire for 'change' in Ontario than in B.C.

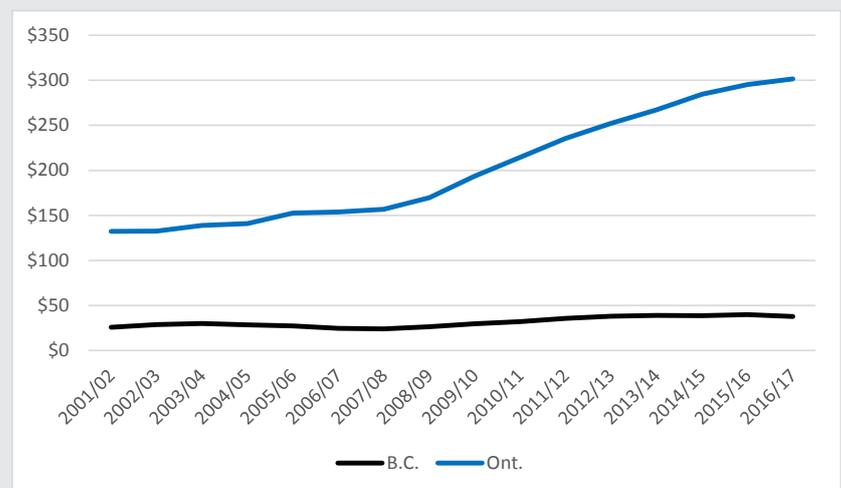
Between 2001 and 2016, both provinces' population grew by a similar proportion – Ontario's expanded by

17.5 per cent (to 14.0 million), while B.C.'s increased by 16.7 per cent (to 4.8 million).

Yet B.C.'s total spending over the same time period rose at a rate just over half that of Ontario's: 59.3 per cent versus 96.4 per cent.

Much of the increased spending, unfortunately, was directed to interest payments on Ontario's skyrocketing net debt, which rose by 128.3 per cent between 2001/02 and 2016/17. B.C.'s net debt over the same period increased by just 47.5 per cent.

B.C.'s net debt relatively static while Ontario's heads for the stratosphere (\$ billions)



SOURCE - Fiscal Reference Tables, 2017.