

Alberta's 2023 Election: The Path to 44 Seats

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See [session slides \(with references\)](#).

Alberta Political Context / General Information:

- There are 87 ridings and a majority is 44 seats.

Unique Features of this Election:

- The path to 44 seats is significant in this election. There has never been a seat gap of less than 15 seats between the two parties. This is anticipated to be the closest election in Alberta's history.
- If the NDP win half of the seats in Alberta, they will lose the election. The NDP needs to win 18-20 of 26 seats to form government.
- In terms of party support, there is a three-legged stool in Alberta:
 - Edmonton (NDP likely to get all 20 seats here),
 - Calgary (battleground for seats this year), and
 - The rest of the province (UCP will win the 30-35 seats in the rest of Alberta)
- This is the first time we could see a re-election of the new UCP party. This is also a case where there is an election where it is between two Premiers the current premier and the returning Premier from NDP.
- This is also historic as there are two women leaders (this happened also in 2012 with Allison Redford beat Danielle Smith)

Blue Storm – The Rise and Fall of Jason Kenny

You cannot explain the UCP and Danielle Smith without understanding Jason Kenny. Smith is in the UCP leadership role because of the perceived failure on Kenny's part to defend Albertans' rights through covid and in relation to the perceived failure of the federal government with respect to Albertans' interests.



- The sovereignty act in Summer 2022 was a rebuke of Kenny who did not fight Ottawa hard enough. Smith is going to go further and has spoken of her plans to nullify federal legislation.
- Issues surrounding Covid and government policy:
 - Smith compared vaccinated Albertans to the followers of Hitler.
 - Smith also refused to wear a poppy in 2021 because of what she called the tyranny of the government.
 - She continues to get in controversy due to covid but she also got into her leadership role because of covid. "Take back Alberta" continues to contribute to her success.
- Conversely, Rachael Notley and the NDP are promising no drama and normalcy.

2019 Election Results

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	Seats	Seat Percentage	Vote Share
UCP	63	72.41%	54.88%
NDP	24	27.59%	32.67%
Alberta Party	0	0	9.08%
Liberal	0	0	0.98%
Others	0	0	2.39%

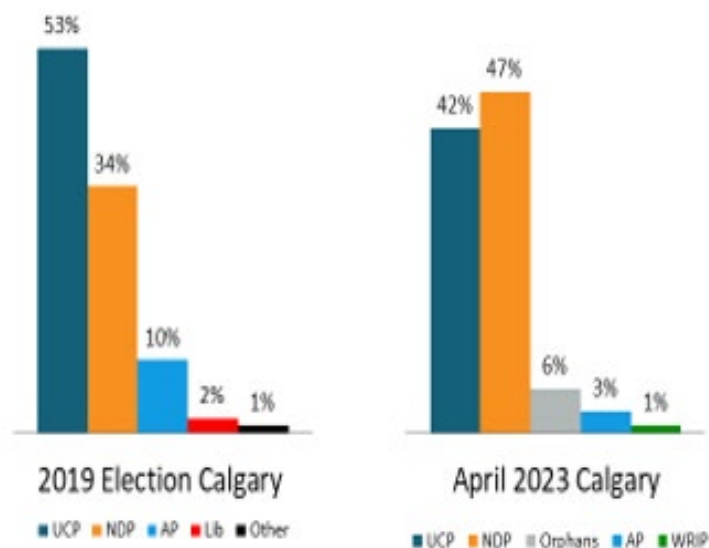
- Jason Kenny won a large majority and was still removed as party leader,
- The campaign for the UCP in 2019 did not really matter much (the NDP were not getting re-elected),
- The approval ratings of all other Canadian leaders went up as a result of responses to the pandemic where we see in Alberta a decrease in polling for Kenny.

Polling and Voting Intention (from Janet Brown)

In Fall 2022 there was an anticipated cap in votes of 5% with the NDP in the lead for the popular vote (this may not transfer into actual seats)

Calgary Polling:

- In 2019 – the NDP only had 3 ridings in Calgary
- In 2015 – NDP had 15 seats in Calgary (they won seats with less than the majority of the vote counts)
- 2023 – Voting intentions map shows that from Glenmore south is UCP and north of Glenmore is NDP. This map shows the NDP winning 18 seats (but some of these will be narrow)
- The race to watch is Calgary Glenmore (UCP cannot form government if they do not get Calgary Glenmore) in 2015 – Calgary Glenmore lost by 6 votes.



Why is Calgary in Play?

- Calgary is a default conservative city, federally and provincially.
- The economy has rebounded which allowed spending on health and education and a billion dollar tax cut promise and with refund cheques going out.
- ***The Conservatives should win Calgary, but they may not because of Danielle Smith***
- Approval Ratings of Kenny and Notley were very divergent and the same gap exists between Notley and Smith. People have significantly better impressions of Notley than Smith. The election will be decided by conservative voters who may not support Smith.

Calgary 2019 Election Results



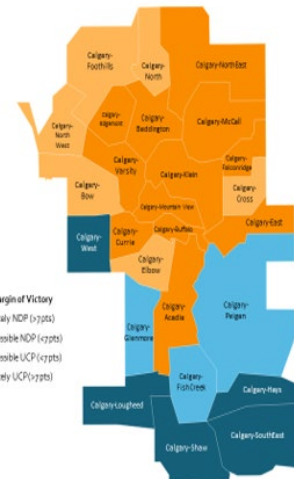
Source: Elections Alberta



Calgary 2023 Seat Projections

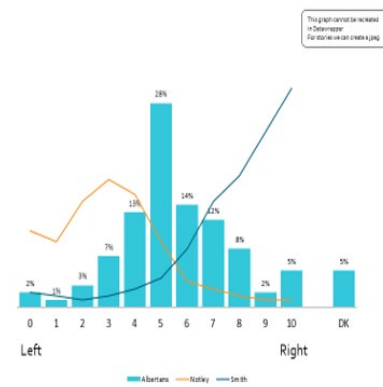
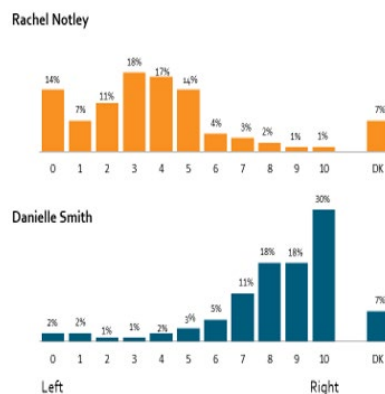


Source: CBC Calgary: Road Ahead (April 2023)



Political Ideology

Most people identify themselves as moderates and see themselves as centrist with extremists to the left and right: the 'middle finger' graph. Albertans are, in our political ideologies, slightly to the right, but we are not as radical as we are described outside of Alberta. Albertans were asked to place themselves on the political spectrum and to place Danielle Smith and Rachael Notley on the spectrum. Notley is seen as a central left politician whereas Smith is on the far right: Notley is 3.8 and Smith is 10. Significantly, Albertans see themselves at a 5.5. Therefore, Calgarians see themselves as in the middle but closer to the NDP leader than they see themselves to the UCP leader.



Most Important Issues Now:

- Healthcare
- Inflation
- Economy
- Alberta Government

Most important Issues in 2019

- Economy
- Oil and Gas

The issues now are high on the NDP agenda and the UCP issues were the priorities in 2019.

What this is going to come down to...

- Last Monday, May 1, 2023, the official election began,
- Day 1 announcements:
 - UCP announced a billion-dollar tax cut favouring economic issues
 - NDP raised healthcare and said you cannot trust Danielle Smith
- Day 1 Danielle Smith mentioned a public health guarantee but for 20 years has been a proponent of privatization.
- The UCP is also talking about crime and criticizing the NDP for defunding the police.
 - Crime is not one of the top issues, but UCP is dominating the law and order / crime issue. If people get this on their minds and vote based on this the UCP is carrying this.

Current Impacts:

- Massive wildfires with 30,000 displaced and federal support coming in.
- Lisa Young foreshadowed this – *who do you want to be premiere when a natural disaster strikes?*
 - Redford was Premiere during the Calgary Flood
 - Redford and the UCP mismanaged the flood response/recovery
 - Notley was the MLA in the High River floods and managed that really well.
 - Fort MacMurray Fires were managed well by Rachael Notley.
 - Brian Jean was the leader of the opposition (UCP) and praised Notley for the management of the emergency situation.
 - Covid hit and Kenny was the leader and mismanaged it....
- Smith has a huge benefit here because she is the current premiere managing the current situation, but if it is messed up then all the doubts of her competency and trustworthiness will coalesce.
 - So far, her messaging has been on brand,
 - She has worked well with Mike Ellis and with Alberta Wildfires,
 - She has brought Notley into briefings,
 - She declared a state of emergency,
 - She has brought in the federal government...(wait what...?)
 - She ran on a sovereignty act but has now invited in federal assistance
 - She has messaged that people need to listen to the experts, adhere to fire bans, stop using ATVs and drones – this will not ring well with the followers who do not want to follow expert advice
 - Between a press conference and an emergency management conference and a second conference she took time out to go to a fundraiser with shrimp and prime rib (this was a misstep)
 - The NDP does not have much they can do with the current wildfire situation, but Notley has a history of managing emergency situations very well.

Post Election

- The post-election environment will be exceptional and dramatic.
- This election could be a difference of between 1-10 seats
- What will happen with the Speaker?
- MLA turnover will be a matter of concern
- There will be ongoing speculation of whether the government will fall or not. Neither party will likely get more than 5 seats more than the other.
- If UCP wins
 - They will have no seats in Edmonton,
 - They will be a rural based party with only 6-8 seats in south Calgary,
 - Most of the existing cabinet will be lost,
 - The UCP may lose the popular vote,
 - Does Smith survive? Kenny got removed with 60 seats,
 - What is the role of *Take Back Alberta*? How does this continue in a narrow election,
 - Will Notley stay? If the UCP cannot stabilize in the first two years, Notley will likely leave and this will make a leadership vacuum in the NDP and NDP may lose foothold in Calgary.
- If NDP wins
 - They will be an urban based Party,
 - They may lose the popular vote,
 - Cabinet selection will be easier as most of their contenders are in safe seats,
 - How long does Notley stay? She has been leader since 2014 – this will be her third election. If she wins how long will she wait till a replacement come in,
 - What happens to UCP? There will be internal problems if they lose as well.

Discussion Period:

Q: What hope is there if Danielle Smith is elected? She is impetuous, incompetent, and ignorant of constitutional issues? What can be done to ensure an outcome that is less precarious and more reasonable than this one?

A: This election is way too close to call right now, but it is likely that UCP will pull through.

- Smith can be charming, but she can go down a rabbit hole. She is also a contrarian and makes for great radio.
- The most influential person in Smith's political life is Ron Anderson. He is not charming and he is an ideologue. This is worrisome should Smith get elected.
- Because of the party brand and the state of the economy the UCP will likely get in.

Q: is it harming the NDP in this case that there are suggested alignments between the Alberta NDP and the Federal NDP?

A: There are more attacks against Notley based on Trudeau and Singh. They are tying Notley to Trudeau and Singh in any way they can. However, This is a difficult card to play while also taking aid from Ottawa

Q: Is there any movement within the UCP governance to muzzle Smith in terms of her interactions with the press?

A: Yes, that is why there are limitations on the number of questions and possible follow ups

- This changes with the wildfire situation as you cannot hide her in the current emergency situation. Notley is not very good with prepared statements, but she is good off the cuff. This is the opposite with Smith – she does not do well when not scripted. There will likely be a moment in the coming weeks where Smith will say something unscripted and unreasonable.

Q: Smith is changing positions on the healthcare issue – why? The Alberta Sovereignty thing is a serious thing that affects us personally as Canadians? What is her track record on governance? As voters we should be educated: the fear is that Albertans will not be educated on the facts. There are too many sources of information and misinformation that will impact voters.

A: People's views can change over time but you need to be able to explain why they changed – her change on healthcare is difficult to tie to anything other than the election. Smith is not campaigning on certain things that got her the UCP leadership (i.e. she got into the leadership position with the sovereignty act but isn't saying anything about it now as it is less popular broadly speaking that it is within her base).