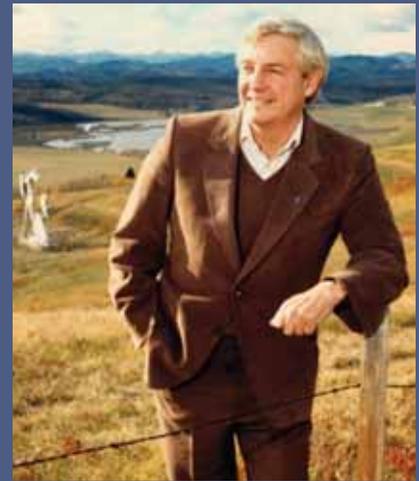


RANKING PROVINCIAL PREMIERS OF THE LAST 40 YEARS: THE NUMBERS SPEAK

Jeremy Leonard

As part of the IRPP's 40th anniversary, 30 eminent historians, political scientists, economists, journalists and policy advisers from across Canada were asked by *Policy Options* to pick their top 5 choices for best provincial premier since the Institute's founding in 1972, and their collective choice was emphatic: Peter Lougheed by a landslide. Not only did he receive 21 of 30 possible first-place votes, he also ran the table on nine questions related to leadership, fiscal and economic management, and intergovernmental relations. IRPP Research Director Jeremy Leonard, who collected and tabulated the results, dissects the numbers behind the rankings.

Pour souligner le 40^e anniversaire de l'IRPP, *Options politiques* a demandé à 30 éminents historiens, politologues, économistes, journalistes et conseillers politiques de tout le pays de déterminer les cinq meilleurs premiers ministres provinciaux des 40 dernières années. Et c'est de loin Peter Lougheed qu'ils ont collectivement désigné. Pas moins de 21 de nos 30 experts ont attribué le premier rang à l'ancien premier ministre de l'Alberta, qui arrive aussi en tête du classement dans neuf domaines liés au leadership, à l'économie, aux finances et aux relations intergouvernementales. Ayant compilé les résultats, le directeur de recherche de l'IRPP Jeremy Leonard décortique les différents aspects du classement.



The returns are in from the *Policy Options* panel of 30 jurors — eminent historians, political scientists, economists, journalists and policy advisers from across Canada — on the best provincial premiers to have held office since the founding of the IRPP 40 years ago. From a list of 18 potential candidates, they were asked to select their choices of the five best and rank them from 1 to 5. The ranking points are calculated as the weighted sum of all top-5 votes received by the premier in question, with a number 1 ranking counting for 5 points, a number 2 ranking counting for 4 points, and so on.

Table 1 shows the “long list” of potential choices and reveals a decisive winner: Peter Lougheed, who served as premier of Alberta from September 1971 to November 1985. With 130 total ranking points, he was far ahead of his nearest contender, William Davis of Ontario, who had 84.

A closer look at the ranking statistics for the Top 5 choices shows just how decisive the jury was. Lougheed was the only premier who was included in the top 5 picks of all 30 jurors, and 21 of those 30 picks were

for the number 1 position. It is also interesting that runner-up William Davis did not receive any first-place votes — he was a clear number 2 rather than a competitor with Lougheed for the number 1 spot. In fact, 11 of the 30 jurors chose Lougheed and Davis as winner and runner-up.

There was a close race for third place and fourth place, but Allan Blakeney edged Frank McKenna in both the percentage of jurors including them in the Top 5 and the distribution of those votes. It can be fairly said that Robert Bourassa squeaked into the top 5 by a nose. Nine of the 30 jurors (30 percent) included him in their top 5 choices, one less than for Roy Romanow and the same number as for Danny Williams. But the votes for the latter two were heavily skewed toward the number 4 and number 5 positions, whereas Bourassa received one each of first-, second- and third-place votes, making him the only other premier to receive more than 20 ranking points.

If one used the number of votes of any rank as the bar and ignored the distribution of those votes, then

Roy Romanow could legitimately lay claim to fifth place. Behind Bourassa were seven premiers with between 14 and 19 ranking points, which makes calculation of rankings six through 10 much less straightforward and objective than the top 5; hence they are not presented here.

It is also interesting to note that there is geographic and linguistic

diversity in the top 5 choices, though this is not primarily due to the jurors “voting for the home team.” The sheer magnitude of support for Lougheed spanned the country, with first-place votes in all regions. Interestingly, 10 of the 13 Ontario-based jurors ranked him first, and 2 of the other 3 also

chose non-Ontario premiers. Taking the case of Blakeney as another example, he received a lone fifth-place vote from the Saskatchewan-based jurors; his strongest support was from BC and Ontario.

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In addition to choosing and ranking the top 5 provincial premiers, jury members were asked to respond to nine questions pertaining to various aspects of their leadership, such as vision and communications, fiscal and economic management, intergovernmental relations and other important files. For each question, the jurors were asked to rate each of the 18 premiers on the “long list” of candidates on a

scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent.

The summary results, shown in table 3, show that Lougheed ran the table, with the highest average score on all nine questions. His average rating was significantly higher than all other top 5 contenders, and ranged from 4.23 (interprovincial relations) to 4.77 (winnability).

In order to connect the results of the nine questions on leadership aspects with the top 5 rankings discussed earlier, the top 5 premiers of that exercise are shown in bold in the table. There is clearly not a perfect correlation, but four of the top 5 premiers — Lougheed, Davis, Blakeney and McKenna — figure prominently on all nine questions, and their rankings in table 3 generally track the results of the rankings shown in table 2.

The missing premier in table 3 is Robert Bourassa, who ranked fifth in ranking points but who did not place in the Top 5 in any of the nine other questions (he was, however, a close sixth on the economy, infrastructure and legacy). One potential reason for this is the fact that two of the jurors did not express an opinion about the leadership of Bourassa on any of the nine questions, due to self-reported insufficient knowledge on which to judge. But another more likely one is that the major feat of Bourassa (and unique among the top 5) — reclaiming the leadership of the Quebec Liberal Party and returning to a second term as premier after nine years in the political wilderness — was not directly addressed by any of the nine questions.

A final observation about the results in table 3 is that several names are not among the top 5 overall rankings. Danny Williams is a notable example. He appears in five of the nine leadership questions — including three second-place finishes — despite garnering only 18 total

TABLE 1. CANDIDATES FOR BEST PROVINCIAL PREMIERS

Name	Province	Years in office	Ranking points
Brian Peckford	Newfoundland	1979-89	9
Danny Williams	Newfoundland and Labrador	2003-10	18
Joe Ghiz	Prince Edward Island	1986-93	15
John Buchanan	Nova Scotia	1978-90	0
Richard Hatfield	New Brunswick	1970-87	10
Frank McKenna (4)	New Brunswick	1987-97	37
Robert Bourassa (5)	Quebec	1970-76; 1985-94	22
René Lévesque	Quebec	1976-85	19
William Davis (2)	Ontario	1971-85	84
Mike Harris	Ontario	1995-2002	7
Sterling Lyon	Manitoba	1977-81	0
Gary Doer	Manitoba	1999-2009	16
Allan Blakeney (3)	Saskatchewan	1971-82	44
Roy Romanow	Saskatchewan	1991-2001	18
Peter Lougheed (1)	Alberta	1971-85	130
Ralph Klein	Alberta	1992-2006	7
Bill Bennett	British Columbia	1975-86	14
Gordon Campbell	British Columbia	2001-11	15

TABLE 2. DETAILED RANKING STATISTICS FOR TOP 5 PROVINCIAL PREMIERS

Premier	Percent of jurors voting for (any rank)	#1 votes	#2 votes	#3 votes	#4 votes	#5 votes	Total points
1. Peter Lougheed	100.0	21	3	3	1	2	130
2. William Davis	86.7	0	11	12	1	2	84
3. Allan Blakeney	50.0	3	3	2	4	3	44
4. Frank McKenna	46.7	1	3	3	4	3	37
5. Robert Bourassa	30.0	1	1	1	4	2	22

