

# Ryan Affaires publiques

555 Boul. René-Lévesque O.  
Bureau 1120, Montréal (Québec)  
H2Z 1B1

T.: 514.874-1925  
F.: 514.874-0953  
pryan@ryanap.com  
www.ryanap.com

---

**DATE** December 9, 2008  
**TO** Distribution  
**FROM** Patrice Ryan  
**SUBJECT** Quebec Election Analysis

---

## Introduction

In the context of a worldwide financial crisis and the aftermath of a serious political crisis in Ottawa, Quebec voters decided to give Liberal Premier Jean Charest a majority mandate, albeit a shorter majority than anyone expected. The results are remarkable in a number of regards, which we will discuss in more detail below, including:

- A third mandate for Premier Jean Charest, a very rare feat in Quebec politics
- The rise of Pauline Marois: the new Opposition Leader and the first woman to lead a major party in Quebec appears solidly in charge of a re-energized Parti Québécois
- A record-low participation rate of 56.5%, well below the previous low of 70% (2007)
- The spectacular collapse of the Action Démocratique, which had taken the Official Opposition in 2007, and the resignation of its leader, Mario Dumont
- The inability of pollsters to accurately predict the results of this election
- An unusually large number of very tight races in many regions
- The contrast between Montreal, which is very Liberal, and its immediate suburbs, which voted heavily in favour of the PQ
- The return, in the very last days of the campaign, of talk about independence, which had been conspicuously absent from the PQ's discourse for many years
- The arrival in the National Assembly of a first MNA from Quebec Solidaire, a very left-wing group that was created in 2006

December 8 <sup>th</sup> , 2008	Quebec Liberal Party	Parti Québécois	Action Démocratique
Number of Votes	1,362,801	1,139,185	529,925
Percentage of Votes	42%	35%	17%
Number of Seats *	66	51	7
<i>*One seat was won by a third-party candidate from Quebec Solidaire, a left-wing group</i>			
March 2007 Results	Quebec Liberal Party	Parti Québécois	Action Démocratique
Number of Votes	1,313,664	1,125,546	1,224,412
Percentage of Votes	33%	28%	31%
Number of Seats	48	41	36

**Quebec Liberal Party:** Premier Charest has won his gamble. He faced heavy criticism for calling a snap election just as the economy is slowing down. He and his team were able to keep their focus on the economy for the duration. Faced with a choice between punishing the government for a cynical election call and a temptation to trust the tested hand of a sitting Premier in difficult economic times, a surprising number of voters decided to stay home. Yet for all this, the Premier won a third straight election, something no one has done in Quebec since Maurice Duplessis in the 1950s.

The Liberals will be comforted by the fact that ALL the MNAs that were elected as Liberals in 2007 who were running again retained their seats, a clear indication that the 2007 election was the bottom of the barrel for them. The Liberals made gains at the expense of both the PQ and the ADQ, which is also encouraging. They finished second in almost every riding they did not win, demonstrating the strength of their organization everywhere in Quebec.

But the scene on election night was undeniable: the celebrating was much more enthusiastic at the PQ headquarters than the Liberals'. The Liberals will probably choose to govern with an attitude of cooperation with the opposition. They will have to take good care of Caucus given the small majority they hold. They will also need to reach out to the millions of voters who decided not to vote.

**Parti Quebecois:** Pauline Marois appeared tired and discouraged at mid-campaign. She was the victim in the first week of damaging leaks from inside her own team and the polls put the PQ neat its disastrous result of 2007. But she had a good evening at the leaders' debate and never relented, even increasing the cadence of her campaign as it progressed.

The PQ, which is still very far from its objective of creating an independent Quebec, saw many positive signs in the results. They gained 15 seats over their result of 2007, enough to put them in as Official Opposition. This will have a significant impact on their ability to hire research and communications staff in the offices of their MNAs. For a party still carrying debt from the previous election, this will provide much-needed oxygen. The new PQ also has a few new stars in its Caucus, including some that are prominent in the media.

**Action Démocratique:** the previous Opposition Leader, Mario Dumont, surprised everyone in 2007 with the election of 41 MNAs. The party could not live up to the expectations it had set and disappointed voters. In light of a net loss of nearly 35 seats, Mr. Dumont wasted no time and announced his immediate resignation from political life.

The other ADQ survivors will have to make some serious decisions in the coming weeks, chief among them whether the party will survive. ADQ members tempted to join one of the other two parties will be wise to look at their two former colleagues who switched to the Liberal side a few weeks before the vote: both of them ran as Liberals and were defeated. They will need to choose a new leader among a decimated team used to being totally dominated by its founder. After a year and a half of relative comfort as the official opposition, they will also need to adjust to the simple life of a fringe party with a limited budget and few resources.

## How could the polls get it so wrong? And the one who got it right...

It became clear early on that this election was not drawing as much interest as previous ones. Voters were feeling political fatigue and may have been angry at having to go through yet another vote. They expressed this anger by staying home, resulting in the lowest turnout in modern history. Even polling companies and the media showed how little they cared by supplying us with many less polls than we usually see.

In spite of this, throughout the campaign, opinion polls consistently put the Liberal lead between 12 and 15% over the PQ. In the end, as the table on page 1 shows, the actual lead was only 7%. Pollsters and commentators have attributed this disaster for the polling industry to two factors:

1. **The low turnout** – it is clear from the overall number of votes that neither the Liberals nor the PQ were able to draw support from disaffected ADQ voters from the previous election. Their support remained remarkably flat in absolute terms. Those voters who did not come out were ADQ voters. This one-sided apathy was not captured by polls. Bad weather did not seem to affect the vote;
2. **The political crisis in Ottawa** – for those pollsters who cannot accept that they got it wrong, the theory goes like this: the Conservatives whipped up anti-separatist sentiment (some even say anti-Quebec) to destroy the Liberal-NDP-Bloc coalition and did this at a great price, the resurgence of Quebec nationalism. This would, according to the theory, explain how PQ support surged in the final two days;

Yet, one pollster, Angus Reid, got the results almost perfectly in a late poll. This particular poll was completely ignored by Quebec media because it had been conducted through the Internet (which would fail to include seniors and therefore favour the PQ, with its younger voter base). The Reid polls also counted only those voters who were “absolutely certain” they would vote. They may have found a way to poll in the context of a disinterested electorate (full results of this Angus Reid poll and its methodology at: <http://www.angusreidstrategies.com/polls-analysis/opinion-polls/angus-reid-poll-liberals-lead-parti-québécois-close-behind-quebec-race> .

## Conclusion

Throughout the campaign, Premier Charest and his team repeated a simple mantra: difficult economic times require a “government of stability”, a pure invention by the same people who in the 18 months of the Liberals’ minority government had coined another expression: a “gouvernement de cohabition”. This term refers, in France, to situations where the President and the government are from different parties, where different parties actually end up governing together, which was not the case in Quebec. The hope is that the “government of stability” will actually bring some much-desired stability to Quebec politics, at least for the next four years.