

# **Should Public Opinion Polls Be Banned from Publication in all Canadian Elections?**

*By Larry Heather –Calgary Public School Board Candidate, October 2010*

## **Is Media Sponsorship & Domination of Polls In Calgary Mayor's Race in 2010 in danger of Conflict Of Interest In Our Most Important Exercise of Democracy?**

*Three Stage Release of Same Ipsos Reid  
Poll reveals interesting stage management.*

*Then the 'Kicker' Leger Marketing Poll Added to the  
Election mix – A true strategy worthy of the mystery theatre.  
(Did choice of Polling before and on Thanksgiving Weekend factor in on results?  
Could Insider 'Opinion' Trading be a factor among Media outlets in deciding  
which polls will be promoted and when? )*

### **Preliminary Considerations:**

**( See Attached Chart of Calgary Mayoralty Polls**

This analysis compares two major public opinion polls conducted during the mayoral race in Calgary in October, 2010. The first by Ipsos Reid for Global News and CTV News. The second by Leger Marketing for the Calgary Herald and QR77 radio news.

Global News was owned by the same entity which controlled the Calgary Herald Canwest –( it officially was bought out by Shaw Media about ten days (Oct. 28<sup>th</sup>, 2010) after the Mayor's Race in Calgary. and the Herald was also a Canwest Asset until July 13, 2010 when it was bought out by creditors under Paul Godfrey under the name Postmedia Network and was co-sponsor with CTV of the Leger Marketing Calgary Mayoralty Polls. It would be improbable to think communication and personnel links from the past did not contribute to a shared strategy on how polls were to be released and publicized in the Mayor's Race in Calgary. For instance, commissioning of the polls, when the results would be released and in what format they would appear.

And of course the dates when the polls would be publicized in the media outlets. Also unknown is whether the other Media sponsors paid an even 50% of the costs. The dominant say in the question formation, order and poll results release would go logically to the one paying a higher part of the cost. Also relevant is whether the money for these polls came out of a pre-existent budget process, or was added in by

special actions of the management or possible outside input. ( Only access to internal account records could verify this. ) Also to be kept in mind is the issue of reciprocal discounts between the Media sponsors and the Polling Company. A discount in the Poll company's bill could be made for prominent headline media space increasing the prestige of the polling company for other possible spin-off business, space which otherwise would cost a polling company major coin at regular rates the Media would normally demand. The tradeoff for Media moguls is a major sway of power over how people are perceiving the election due to their coverage and influence in the final outcome of the vote.

### **Analysis of Ipsos Reid Calgary Mayor's Race, Poll Divided Over Three Releases**

An Ipsos Reid Poll sponsored by Global News Calgary (CanWest at Election time / now Shaw Media) and QR 77 Radio (Chorus- owned by Shaw) shows a strategic pre-planned approach in releasing the results of a Calgary Mayoralty Poll taken on Tuesday Oct. 5<sup>th</sup> and Wednesday Oct. 6<sup>th</sup>, 2010. The disjointed issue of the poll results were staged in three separate press releases on October 8<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>. *This was at 2 days, 6 days, and 7 days after the poll was concluded.*

In an apparent strategy to provide more headlines out of one poll and thereby providing the media sponsors with more bang for the bucks, a few disturbing trends became apparent. In particular the Polling Company copy in red tell an interesting story. The inserts in blue provide 'observant commentary' added by myself.

Remember, part of the Mission Statement of Ipsos Reid is to provide the client with "actionable and relevant information." For the media you would think that this means headlines which can sell papers, or broadcasts that stand out from the competition. In tandem with these results are the inevitable interpretive comments given by the spokesman for the Polling Company. Then the way the release is written itself, perhaps written by the spokesperson themselves. An interview of yourself can be of a highly subjective nature. Are the comments made fully justified by the data or is conjecture a dominant ingredient?

### **Comparisons Revealing:**

NOTE: All three releases have an identical formula which is quite interesting to compare:

1<sup>st</sup> Release(Oct 8<sup>th</sup>) : **"With the municipal election ten days away....Calgarians *are* saying.."**

2<sup>nd</sup> Release(Oct. 12<sup>th</sup>) : **"With only a week left until election day... *A new Ipsos-Reid...poll..*"**

3<sup>rd</sup> Release(Oct 13<sup>th</sup>) : **"With only six days left until Calgary's municipal election *a new Ipsos Reid....poll*"**

Now in each of the releases, if you read at the bottom of page three you will find that the 'new' polls are actually the *same old poll* of Oct. 5 & 6. So the meaning of the word new is increasingly stretched from the first ( 2 days old ) second ( 6 days old ) and third ( 7 days old ) releases. Moreover, the formula informing the reader of the day countdown till the election subtly conveys that Calgarians are thinking these things on the date of the poll company release. The now, the present.

On top of this, for the print media, add at least one extra day on to each of this stale dates, before the readers see it published. The radio and tv also have the option of *holding the 'news.'* till the next day thus resulting in *a united front* and saturation of the public. Only an extensive review of the news could reveal which patterns actually converge.

And a further study to see which media reported in lockstep what polls, and which concurrent polls may have been done but not reported on, by any or just some of the media outlets.

### To Continue the analysis:

**In Red** - Poll Company Language as given in releases.

**In Blue** - Amplified Language filling out real implications by Larry Heather

The three questions asked by the telephone poll of 500 Calgarians 18 or over. Note Margin of error is 4.4 up or down on each percentage is noted.

### First Release of 1st Question of Poll on Oct. 8<sup>th</sup>, 2010

Title Chosen by Ipsos:

**Calgarians** ( on basis of 500 adults in a City of one Million thought to be) **In The Mood For Change on Council.**(had the entire adult population of Calgary been polled, of course excluding non-qualified voters, incapacitated, people with a bias against democracy, unknowledgeable people who make up an opinion solely not to be embarrassed by the pollster, and the practical impossibility to reach those away, those uninterested, those who are rushed by family meal prep, etd , and those hostile to polls because they have no control on the final way their opinion is used in the aggregate.)

Subtitle: **70%** (within 66.6%-74.4%) **of Calgarians Say it's Time for a Major Change on Council.**( but could be wrong 1 time out of 20 but no one really knows when that time is, and it's only an election at stake, so let's forgetta'bout it!)

1. Generally speaking, do you believe that Calgary's City Council deserves to be re-elected or do you believe that it's time for major change? (Released Friday, Oct. 8<sup>th</sup>, 2010)

Ipsos Release: With the municipal election ten days away ( on Oct. 18<sup>th</sup>.), (350 polled decided) Calgarians are (were) saying (some 3 & some 2 days ago) that it's time for a shakeup on City Council. A (recently) new Ipsos Reid / Global News Calgary(CanWest Conglomerate until Oct. 28, 2010 then Shaw)/ QR77(Corus Entertainment – owned by Shaw) telephone poll (Completed Two days ago and partially released today) finds that seven-in-ten (70%)( or within 65.6% to 74.4%) Calgarians believe “it's time for a major change” on City Council. Only two-in-ten (21%)( or within 17% to 25%) believe that Calgary City Council “deserves to be re-elected”, while one in ten (9%)(between 5% to 13%) are undecided.”

Notes 1. The questions is biased against Incumbents on Council and favorable to Non council candidates.

2. The language is overly broad, saying major change but not specifying those who are unlike the dominant whole of council. (ie. Big spenders vs. Prudent money watchers ) Anyone with just a rudimentary knowledge of Calgary Council would have picked a more honest question covering both spectrums, thus asking a balanced question not tarring all incumbents with the same brush.

3. The question is released first in isolation from rest of poll, cultivating in the readers-viewers an expectation of major change which is slightly downplayed by Ipsos spokesman (ie. Name recog factor ), but that is unlikely to be reported due to lack of space for story, deadline time approaching, and lessening of the dramatic impact of ‘story.’

4. Overall effect is to culture a visceral, indiscriminate ‘throw the bums out’ momentum in the public. ( After earlier September Leger Poll - Herald-Canwest - CTV building up an incumbent mayor candidate as head of the pack. ie. Early Buildup –dramatic reversal scenario.)

## **Second Release of next Question on *same* Ipsos Reid Poll on Oct. 12<sup>th</sup>, 2010**

### **Title of Release:**

**Calgary Mayoral Race (was) Too Close To Call ( six days ago )**

**Subtitle: Higgins (37%)(33.6 – 41.4 ) and McIver (34%)(29.6 – 38.4) In A Statistical Tie;**  
**(according to 405 Calgarian adults , 95 or 19% were undecided.)**

**Nenshi (21%)(16.6 – 25.4) the only other contender ( six days ago, assuming that no other factors or ‘cornflakes’ comments will enter picture and suddenly take one out. )**

**2. Thinking of how you feel right now, (Asked on Oct. 5 & 6) If the election were held tomorrow ( ie Oct 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup>,2010 with 11 or 12 days of the campaign to go), which of the following candidates for Mayor would you be most likely to vote for, or lean towards? ( Only 8 candidates are named of the 15, forget about the other 7 cause they are considered fringe by media sponsors and unworthy of mention, without even an option of ‘others’ included in question cause it just muddies the waters and detracts from ‘actionable’ results. )**

**( Released Tuesday, Oct. 12<sup>th</sup>, 2010)**

**A New Ipsos Reid / Global News Calgary/QR77 telephone poll finds there is a statistical tie between frontrunners Barb Higgins (37%)(32.6-41.4) and Ric McIver (34%)(30.6-38.4) among decided voters. Naheed Nenshi is the only other contender in the race. (21%)(16.6-25.4) (By the way 1 out of 20 times these wobbly percentage variations are unreliable and wrong, but it’s only an election so forgetta ‘bout it.)**

**Notes: 1. See how selective titles on polls can crowd out all thoughts of other candidates, particularly those who have or will bow out and throw their support to the top three effectively disenfranchising those who voted for them in advance polls already. This undermines the democratic process by branding anyone thinking of voting for the ‘others’ a unreflective thinker on their way to wasting their vote for a loser.**

2. Reflect on the mixed question asked above, which combines both decided voters for a candidate, with the far fuzzier and essentially useless information of those who are 'leaning' toward a candidate. Is there a real commitment from anyone who is a mere 'lean towards.' Not really, since these people have not sufficiently thought out the issues and could change at the drop of a hat. "Why deliberately muddy the waters by including leaners?", a clear thinking person would ask. This indicates that just reporting the real decided percentages would produce numbers that would not be decisive enough to produce 'actionable results.' Insert Here *"Big Horse Race Headlines with an Underdog Secretariat coming swiftly from behind."* Now that's News that sells papers and broadcast breaking news headliners!!

| <b>What Happens When You Take Out 'The Leaners'<br/>in the Ipsos Reid Poll</b><br>19% had no preference ( 95 of 500 total polled )<br>Subtract from 405 'Decided Mixed' polled Calgarians<br>the total 'leaners' of 33% and you have 271. Then subtract 'Other' Leaners and you<br>have just 249 'real' decided among top three. |  |  |   |                           |
|--|--|--|---|---------------------------|
|  | % of 405<br>mixed decided<br>and leaners | % of 134<br>Leaners<br>to subtract<br>from mixed | Actual People<br>Number of 271<br>Decided Polled<br>(249 for top 3) | Percentage of<br>271 each |
| Barb Higgins   | 37% -149.85                              | 36% - 53.94                                      | 95.91   | 35%                       |
| Ric McIver   | 34% -137.70                              | 30% - 41.31                                      | 96.39   | 36%                       |
| Naheed Nenshi  | 21% -85.05                               | 38% - 32.32                                      | 52.73   | 19%                       |
| Other 5<br>named<br>Mayoral<br>Cand. Totaled   | 8 % - 32.4                               | Est. 33 % - 8                                    | Est, - 24.40  | 9%                        |
| Unmentioned<br>Candidates (7)  | 0 ???<br>Enforced<br>Zeros               | 0 ???'   | 0 ???   | 0 % enforced              |

**Given the ABOVE considerations would not a revised Accurate Headline  
come out looking as thus:**

**Poll Six & Seven Days Old ( 7 if you are reading this in print )  
finds Toprunners in Mayoral Candidates Deemed By  
Media Sponsors Worthy of Consideration**  
 ( 53 % of total 15, just forgetta 'bout the fringe losers, misfits, ignorable  
conservative valuers, etc. )

**Poll of decided Calgarian voters for top 3 Reveals 96 adults for**

**Higgins, 97 for McIver, and 53 for Nenshi.  
Or Using the more collective magical aura of Percentiles to  
produce ‘Actionable Headlines’**

**Higgins - 35% McIver – 36% Nenshi – 19%**

( Written responses surveys are more democratic and full, but who has time or budget for that when media sponsors are breathing down your neck for ‘actionable’ results and effective poll release headlining strategy.)

Notes continued...

3. What is the effect of having almost half of the mayoral candidates left out of the poll? Could it be that a telephone poll naming all 15 candidates is too long for people to grasp by the ear alone? Is this in fact not an alteration of the democratic process, the choosing of some names above others, thus producing an ‘altered’ ballot in the responders minds. (The other seven are crowded out of virtual existence and placed in the trash bin of memory. ) Is telephone polling unsuitable and undemocratic in it’s coverage from the word go?
4. Is deliberate mixing of ‘decided’ headliners that includes leaners a form of stuffing the pre-electoral ballot box?
5. With Election Day just six (five in print) days away a critical impression is formed in the minds of the voters that will be hard to erase with other unreported polls that are not favored by the media who are in ‘lockstep affirmative mode.’

**Third Release of next Question on *same* Ipsos Reid Poll  
on Oct. 13<sup>th</sup>, 2010**

**( this poll segment not included on attached chart for space reasons )**

**Title of Release: Municipal Spending Top Issue (Seven and Eight days ago) Driving Calgarians’ ( 395 (21%) of 500 polled) Pick For Mayor**

3. “How likely is it that you will go the polls and vote on Election Day? Asked (seven or eight days ago) , unprompted, to provide the most important issue that will determine which mayoral candidate they will vote for on October 18<sup>th</sup>?” (Released Wednesday, Oct. 13<sup>th</sup>, 2010)

Calgary, AB – With only six days left (phrase needed to add a ‘presentism’ to old data) until Calgary’s municipal election (no time left to do a new poll so pay attention to this one we paid good coin to get!), a new (seven or eight days ago) Ipsos Reid / Global

News(CanWest) Calgary/QR77(Corus-Shaw Media)  
 telephone(cheaper,faster) poll shows that Municipal Spending  
 continues(mix in previous anti incumbent momentum and stir) to  
 be the top issue determining who (30% of 395 ie. 119)residents  
 will vote into the Mayor's office.( seven of 15 who were not  
 mentioned thus not sparking memory of their unique issues...ie out  
 of sight, out of mind.)

**Notes:**

1. Had this question been the first part released on October 8<sup>th</sup>, it would have produced a momentum more favorable to fiscal conservatives on council. Since it was chosen to release the anti- incumbent question on City Council first, this question order released last, creates a momentum on Oct. 13<sup>th</sup> of favoring a non incumbent candidate frontrunner who at least appears as a fiscal conservative (if you didn't read the utopian Imagine Calgary 100 year plan and realize Nenshi was a principal writer of said document.) Order and sculpturing of 'public' opinion very much depends on order of questions asked in the initial survey, being sure of what to leave out, and then a scheme of how the data is released in sequence.
2. This question is asked the day after public perception of the front runners has been altered, with the effective removal from current consciousness of 12 of the candidates on the ballot. ( Seven by not mentioning them on the poll period, and five by collecting there names under the statement – No other candidate has more than 3% of decided Calgary voters. Only a survey of the actual data sheet would reveal the 5 other names, something never published in the media for space reasons.
3. The real KiCKER Poll has yet to be released under another polling companies name: Leger Marketing. ( See Below for Oct, 14<sup>th</sup>. )

## **Publishing of 'Recent' Poll by Leger Marketing on October 14<sup>th</sup> Proclaims 3 Way HorseRace.**

Title: 3 Way Race ( Race Track Analogy more dramatic than staid  
 election terms – to focus attention on Frontrunners) in Calgary:  
 Too Close To Call

**Leger Marketing**

**For Release October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2010**

**( On Thursday, Four Days before Monday Election )**



**There is now( well actually...Wednesday to Monday, eight to three days ago) a three candidate race for mayor in Calgary, according to a recent Calgary Herald(CanWest, soon to be Shaw Media) – CTV ( Network for which Barb Higgins was Star Anchor)poll conducted by Leger Marketing.**

**The decided vote is too close to predict a winner, statistically a three way tie between Ric McIvor at 33%(28.6-37.4) of the decided vote, Barb Higgins at 30% ( 25.6 – 34.4) and Naheed Nenshi at 30%. ( 25.6 – 34.4 )**

**Notes: 1. Observe that the Poll is conducted around and during the Thanksgiving Weekend Holiday. (Oct. 6<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup>, 2010 ) Not a normal time when polling would or should be most accurate. How many of the 500 were polled on what day of this period (ie. Sunday conservative type people out at church, younger people more at home for family events, Moms out shopping for the big meal ) is not stated. The decision on the timing of poll considerably stretches the scope of the ‘snapshot’ of There is now.**

**2. How many of the 37% ‘undecided’ a high 185 people of the 500 were more interested in Turkey and Football, and entertaining guests at that time, than in answering an intrusive poll on the election?**

**3. Does the CTV sponsorship of this poll produce a possible conflict of interest in the type of mayor they would like to promote – ie. Their former employee who had their values in mind and had worked loyally for them. AND could follow in the train of Ralph Klein’s journey from reporter to Mayor.**

**4. The unique thing about this press release, is that the questions and order asked by Leger is not stated in the release itself. But there are plenty of leading summary statements by Ian Large, Vice President Alberta for Leger Marketing.**

**5. Is there any way in knowing why Thursday ( in print seen on Friday at earliest ) was set for the release of this poll, and was it influenced by Tuesday release of Ipsos Reid results.**

**Were the results of the polls all known by media elites before release date? ( ie. Insider Trading )**

**Ie. Imagine Scenario of Nenshi going from 30% down to 21% in public perception could have been done by a further delay of the Ipsos results or the Leger one being released one day before Ipsos? After all, the Ipsos poll was started just one day ahead of the Leger.**

How is the public really to know which firm or sponsor had been pre-cast into role of Good cop or Bad cop. Or the collusion that could take place?

6. Can Media Outlets resist reporting dramatic results, even though they were not one of the Media sponsors of a Particular poll? Is there a implicit penalty in status or access, audience or sales for resisting a lockstep publication of poll results?

7. Could a pro-Higgins polling release Strategy have actually backfired into laying the foundation for an unexpected Nenshi win, when the unknown factor of social media swarming was added into the mix?

8. For what Leger gains in a bit more realistic reporting 'a recent poll' they lose by not stating actual form of the questions and for the long fuzzy time over which the poll was conducted.

9. Question to Ask: Who are the pollsters hired by any polling company?

Is this a regular or part-time job for them or do they do they phoning on their spare times of their own choice. Does the selection of more housewives with more daytime leisure as pollsters change the type of people they reach in a telephone survey? If there are more students phoning on off-hours from their studies, they will reach a different and likely more youthful audience? Or is the methodology require them to do only a certain percentage of calls at particular times to spread out the variables. Does youth or maturity and tone of voice in the pollster bring out a different response in the age group they are talking too. All of these variables and more, cannot possibility be revealed in a mere press release, let alone what the media actually say or print.

## Conclusion:

One could conclude that by the vast gaps and holes in the Opinion Polling Process, this business of election polls is far too fraught with potential for abuse and inaccuracy to be allowed to continue to interfere with the conduct of free elections in a democratic society.

While polling for businesses selling a product is kept much more accountable because successful results are much easier to discern, polling for Political Races is much more problematic.

In Public Democratic Elections, faulty or worst yet, manipulative strategies can lead to unforeseen results which may take decades to manifest and unravel. By then, the major movers may have receded out of the public eye, into an undisturbed and insolated environment, far from the wreckage that they may have left behind. Calgarians, Albertans, and Canadian deserve better.

**Recommended Reading: Margin Of Error: Pollsters and the Manipulation of Canadian Politics by Claire Hoy, Key Porter Books, 1989.**

**SCRUTINY OF POLL RESULTS  
IN CALGARY'S MAYORAL RACE 2010  
MCIVER, HIGGINS, NENSHI**

| <b>Polling Company<br/>Poll Spokesman<br/>Sponsor<br/>and Release Date</b>  | <b>Poll Size/<br/>Method</b>                      | <b>Date Polling<br/>was done</b>  | <b>Undecided<br/>Voters</b> | <b>Decided Voters<br/>for which<br/>Candidates<br/><br/>Special<br/>Qualifiers<br/>Title of Release</b>  |
|---|---|---|-----------------------------|--|
| <b>NRG<br/>Research<br/>Group<br/>for<br/>Global TV<br/>News<br/>July 30th,<br/>2010</b>                              | <b>500 by<br/>telephone</b>                       | <b>July 29th &amp;<br/>30th, 2010</b>   | <b>51 %<br/>Undecided</b>   | <b>McIver - 15 %<br/>Higgin - 16 %<br/>Nenshi - 1 %<br/>ie. 5 out of 500<br/>Others - 1% or<br/>less for each of<br/>declared.<br/>Note: Question<br/>Candidate<br/>Intending to Vote<br/>for<br/>2nd Question<br/>who are<br/>you leaning<br/>toward.</b> |
| <b>Leger<br/>Marketing<br/>for Calgary<br/>Herald &amp;<br/>CTV<br/>September<br/>17th, 2010</b>                      | <b>500 Adults<br/>telephone</b>                   | <b>September<br/>13th - 16th,<br/>2010</b>  | <b>44 %<br/>undecided</b>   | <b>McIver - 42 %<br/>Higgins - 28 %<br/>Nenshi - 8 %</b>   |
| <b>Return On<br/>Insight<br/>Bruce<br/>Cameron<br/>for Fall 2010<br/>Report</b>                                       | <b>501 adults</b>                                 | <b>October<br/>2nd to 4th,<br/>2010</b>   | <b>16 %<br/>undecided</b>   | <b>McIver - 37%<br/>Higgins - 33 %<br/>Nenshi - 19 %</b>   |
| <b>Ipsos Reid<br/>for<br/>Global News<br/>Calgary &amp;<br/>QR 77 Radio<br/>Oct 8 -2010</b>                           | <b>500<br/>random<br/>adults by<br/>telephone</b> | <b>October 5 &amp; 6,<br/>2010</b>  | <b>9 %<br/>Undecided</b>    | <b>It's Time For A<br/>Major Change On<br/>Council - 70 %<br/><br/>"Calgary's City<br/>Council Deserves<br/>To Be Re-<br/>elected"<br/>- 21 %<br/><br/>Title - Calgarians<br/>In The Mood For<br/>Change On<br/>Council</b>                                |
| <b>Ipsos Reid<br/>Ian Large<br/>VP<br/>done for<br/>Global News<br/>Calgary &amp;<br/>QR 77 Radio<br/>Oct 12-2010</b> | <b>500<br/>random<br/>adults by<br/>telephone</b> | <b>October 5 &amp; 6,<br/>2010</b>  | <b>19 %</b>                 | <b>McIver -34 %<br/>Higgins -37 %<br/>Nenshi - 21 %<br/><br/>33 % of Decided?<br/>described as just<br/>leaning towards a<br/>candidate.<br/>Titled - Calgary<br/>Mayoral Race<br/>Too Close To<br/>Call</b>   |
| <b>Leger<br/>Marketing<br/>for Calgary<br/>Herald &amp;<br/>CTV<br/>Oct14-2010</b>                                    | <b>500<br/>random<br/>adults by<br/>telephone</b> | <b>October<br/>6 - 11, 2010<br/>Thanks giving<br/>Weekend was<br/>4 of the six<br/>days here.</b> | <b>37 %</b>                 | <b>McIver - 33 %<br/>Higgins - 31%<br/>Nenshi - 28 %<br/><br/>Titled - 3 Way<br/>Race In Calgary:<br/>Too Close To<br/>Call</b>  |