



Executive Summary:

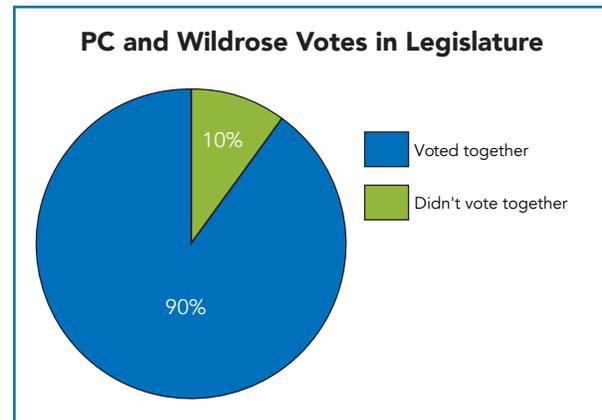
Since the 2015 Alberta election there has been significant discussion about the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta and the Wildrose Party coming together to form a new political party.

Naturally, this has sparked considerable debate about just how much unites the two parties and areas where they differ. New analysis by the Manning Centre shows the two parties may have more in common than some critics have suggested:

After analyzing over 120 votes in the provincial legislature since the NDP were elected in May 2015, including 71 money votes (matters concerning the expenditure of public funds) and 62 amendments put forward by the two parties, we learned the following¹:

- **Legislative Votes:** The majority of Progressive Conservative MLAs and Wildrose Party MLAs voted together 90.2% of the time.
- **Money Votes:** The majority of Progressive Conservative MLAs and Wildrose Party MLAs voted together 95.8% of the time on government spending decisions (not including one PC MLA who regularly voted with the NDP).
- **Wildrose/PC Proposed Amendments:** The two parties resoundingly support each other's amendments. The PCs supported 91% of Wildrose amendments and the Wildrose voted in favour of 100% of PC amendments.

Since the NDP were elected in May 2015, changes in seven policy areas have led to recorded votes in the legislature: agriculture, accountability measures, economic development, education, environment,



finance, and labour. Consensus occurred most

frequently on votes pertaining to economic development (100%) and finance (96%). There were not enough divided votes on education matters to draw conclusions.

Regarding disagreements, there was no consistent pattern in the votes where the PCs and Wildrose opposed one another. Some examples include disagreement over the appropriate amount of consultation undertaken, disagreement over long-term saving vs. debt repayment, etc.

While there may be differences in the perceptions of both parties by Albertans, and on policy matters which have not yet come up, since the 2015 election, the legislative record of both parties has been nearly identical.

Introduction:

Alberta is unique in having two provincial political parties with small 'c' conservative leanings. Each occupy a distinct geographical base (the Wildrose is largely a rural party whereas the Progressive Conservatives are distinctly more urban in their support) and their views of conservatism are believed to be quite different by some observers.

¹Note: Some votes can be categorized as "money votes" and "amendments."

Since their ascension to official opposition in 2012 – the Wildrose certainly offered a different, more fiscally conservative, more democratically-centred conservatism, in contrast to the long-ruling PCs. However, since the May 2015 election, the principled differences between the two parties, under close inspection, may be less pronounced than ever.

Additionally, with 85% percent turnover in elected MLAs in the Legislature since the 2015 election, referencing behaviour of the two parties prior to that election has limits for comparison purposes. Included in such turnover is a new leader for the Wildrose Party (Brian Jean) and a soon to be determined new leader for the Progressive Conservative Party.

Looking at the voting record of each party in the first two legislative sessions of the new government provides an opportunity for quantitative analysis that is able to delve beyond any superficial political differences.

Methodology:

In order to be accurate, this analysis is limited to divided votes – meaning votes where each MLA's vote was recorded. The following category of votes are included in the analysis: second reading, committee of the whole and third readings of bills, government and private members motions, amendments and subamendments, and votes pertaining to 'supply.' In total, 122 divided votes were analyzed.

When comparing PC and Wildrose votes – this analysis highlights times when the majority of the PC and Wildrose caucuses voted together, as well as times when each caucus's vote was unanimous. Dissenting votes are important particularly when singling out money votes (as indicated by the Legislative assembly's classification of "\$").

In the section comparing policy areas, the classification is based upon this author's best assessment of the broad policy area to which a bill, motion, or amendment pertains.

Further, this analysis is meant to be an objective analysis based purely on voting statistics with minimal subjective analysis.

Key Findings:

The analysis finds that of the 122 divided votes in the 1st and 2nd session of the 29th Legislature (May 2015 – Sept 2016) the majority of the PC and Wildrose caucuses voted together 90.2% of the time. A sceptic could argue this perceived near-consensus is due to the reality that opposition parties in Canada tend to vote against the government regardless of differences between them. However, when looking at support for amendments made by either opposition party, the PCs supported 91% of Wildrose amendments and the Wildrose supported 100% of PC amendments. This is indicative of principled consensus beyond pragmatic opposition to the government.

Further, when voting on issues related to spending money, the majority of the Wildrose and PC caucuses voted together 95.8% of the time – both parties have been pushing to constrain public expenses. However, when looking specifically at votes pertaining to the government's budgets a trend appears within the PC party.

Out of 23 votes to amend the government's main estimates (proposed budget in different program areas) the majority of Wildrose and PC MLAs were unanimous in their support of reducing spending. However, within the PC caucus there were 12 instances where a PC MLA voted with the NDP government to not reduce spending (11 times by MLA Sandra Jansen and once by MLA Rick Fraser).

While the majority of PCs and Wildrose voted together on 100% of government budget votes, that number drops to only 52% of votes where PC and Wildrose support was unanimous because of Jansen's 11 votes (and Frasers' single vote) with the government.

In terms of policy areas covered by recorded votes' the following graph identifies the broad subject areas as well as the percentage of agreement. Areas which saw the most agreement include votes pertaining to finance (96%) followed by labour (94%). There were not enough divided votes on education to draw conclusions.

Regarding disagreements, there was no consistent pattern in votes where the PCs and Wildrose opposed one another. Some examples include disagreement over the appropriate amount of consultation undertaken, disagreement over long-term saving vs. debt repayment, etc.



Table 1: Voting Record by Policy Area

Policy Area	Total number of recorded votes	Number of votes where PC & WR voted together	Percentage Agreement
Accountability	12	9	75%
Agriculture	13	12	92%
Economic Development	5	5	100%
Education	2	1	50% (Sample size too small to draw conclusion)
Environment	30	26	87%
Finance	72	69	96%
Labour	18	17	94%

Conclusion:

This empirical analysis has found that, based off of the voting record of the PCs and Wildrose since the 2015 election, there is a much greater degree of consensus between the parties than some critics have charged.

Political observers and pundits who have argued against unity should take note that the PCs and Wildrose vote together 90.2% of the time on legislative votes and their near consensus on money votes (95.8% of the time). The fact that the government’s agenda has been robust over this period, touching on a wide array of policy areas, has provided both parties with a venue to demonstrate their similar viewpoints.



John Whittaker is a policy analyst at the Manning Centre where he focuses on municipal fiscal issues in Canada and City of Calgary council activities. John's work has been published in newspapers across Canada, including the Calgary Herald, Vancouver Sun and Ottawa Citizen.

Prior to working with the Manning Centre, John interned with the Canadian Taxpayers Federation.

He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Economics (Hon.) from Queen's University and enjoys hiking, playing hockey and reading in his spare time.

For more information, please visit:
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