

## Report on the Provinces

### The 2020 Provincial Election in New Brunswick: The First Canadian COVID-19 Election

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#### Abstract

New Brunswick's 2020 election was Canada's first election during the COVID-19 pandemic. It produced a slim majority government for the Progressive Conservatives under Premier Blaine Higgs after all-party talks to create a quasi-coalition arrangement failed. The major parties continued to decline in voter support, and two newer parties, the Green Party and the People's Alliance, still have a presence in the Legislative Assembly. The Liberal Party failed to win seats in Anglophone New Brunswick, reducing their support to just the francophone areas of the province. Higgs is left to govern a province polarized along linguistic lines with French-speaking New Brunswickers distrustful and unsupportive of the premier.

#### Résumé

L'élection provinciale au Nouveau-Brunswick en 2020 a été la première élection provinciale au Canada pendant la pandémie du COVID-19. Elle a mené à l'élection d'un gouvernement avec une faible majorité pour le Parti progressiste-conservateur sous le premier ministre Blaine Higgs après l'échec des pourparlers entre tous les partis pour la création d'un arrangement de quasi-coalition. Les partis traditionnels continuent de voir leur soutien s'effriter au sein de l'électorat, et deux nouveaux partis, le Parti vert et l'Alliance des gens, ont toujours des représentantes à l'Assemblée législative. Le Parti libéral n'a pas réussi à remporter des sièges dans les régions anglophones de la province, réduisant son soutien aux seules régions francophones de la province. Les considérations linguistiques jouent un rôle de premier plan dans la polarisation politique dans la province. Higgs doit ainsi gouverner en tenant compte des citoyennes francophones qui sont méfiantes et peu favorables au premier ministre.

**Key words:** New Brunswick, Election, Election campaigns, polls, Majority government, Bilingualism

**Mots-clés :** Nouveau-Brunswick, Élections, Campagnes électorales, Sondages, Gouvernement majorité, Bilinguisme

#### Introduction

New Brunswick's 40<sup>th</sup> General Election took place on September 14, 2020. Held in the middle of the global COVID-19 pandemic, New Brunswickers went to the polls almost six months to the day since the first confirmed case of the coronavirus in the province. While this alone provided an historic background, the election itself followed two years of history making in New Brunswick politics. Following the 2018 result, the incumbent Liberal government spent a month attempting to secure its survival before giving way to the Progressive Conservatives (PC) under Blaine Higgs. Leading up to the 2020 election, the PC government spent six months in a quasi-coalition arrangement with an all-party cabinet COVID committee comprised of PC ministers and the leaders of the Liberal, People's Alliance, and Green parties. In the week leading up to the election call, Premier Blaine Higgs proposed an arrangement that could produce stable government for anywhere from two to ten years (Poitras 2020a). The campaign itself was as forgettable as 2020 was memorable, becoming little more than a referendum on Higgs' crisis leadership (Wright 2020). After a

snap election call, and a campaign conducted with dramatic health precautions during a short four weeks mostly spent by the parties finding their footing, election night produced little surprise with major networks calling the election within the first half hour. Blaine Higgs’ pandemic election call gamble paid off: the Progressive Conservatives won 27 seats and the Liberals (LIB) won 17 seats, with the Green Party holding onto its three seats and the People’s Alliance of New Brunswick (PANB) losing one of its seats and falling to two members in the legislature.

The result was the first party and premier since Bernard Lord in 2003 to retain government after an election. The historic minor party vote share in 2018 (30.3%) continued although at a slightly lower rate (26.2%), reflecting the downward trend for the Liberals and Progressive Conservatives from 2006 when their combined vote share was 94.6%. Going into the last week of the campaign the PCs and Liberals fielded a full slate of 49 candidates, but after each party disavowed candidates (it was too late in the campaign to get the party labels off the ballot) for previous offensive social media posts the most the parties could have won were 48 seats. The Green Party’s slate included 47 candidates (the same as 2018), the People’s Alliance ran 36 candidates (up from 30 in 2018) and the New Democratic Party ran only 33, down from a full slate in 2018. Two hundred and twenty-seven candidates stood for election, 14 fewer than in 2018, and 73 of these candidates were women or non-binary, down from 93 in 2018.

The campaign began in the absence of public opinion polls, the most recent polling data coming from a May 24, 2020 Angus Reid poll that found: PC 39%, LIB 26%, Greens 17%, PANB 13% and NDP 4%. Almost two weeks into the campaign, the first poll taken during the period after the writs dropped still had the incumbent government in majority territory: PC 44%, LIB 33%, Greens 14%, PANB 2% and NDP 7%. On the eve of the election a Forum Research Poll showed the PC lead remained with the PCs 36.7%, LIB 29.9%, Greens 20.8%, PANB 7.7% and NDP 4%. On election night, the popular vote for the PC was 39.3%, Liberal 34.4%, Greens 15.2%, PANB 9.2%.

While election night lacked 2018’s historic breakthroughs for the Greens and PANB, the Progressive Conservative Party did elect its highest number of female candidates with nine. Challenges to the dominant two-party system continued in 2020. The Green Party finished second in a record twelve ridings compared to two in 2018, largely at the expense of the Liberals. In 2006, 93.9% voted for either the Liberal and Progressive Conservative parties; this number in 2018 was 69.3% and only slightly increased in 2020 to 73.8%. The party system remains in flux as the People’s Alliance and Green parties continue to combine for almost a quarter of the province’s vote while the NDP fell deeper into existential crisis. Table 1 presents changes in popular vote by party from 1999 to 2020.

Table 1: Popular Vote 1999-2020

Party/Election	1999	2003	2006	2010	2014	2018	2020
Liberal	37.0%	44.0%	46.8%	34.2%	42.5%	37.4%	34.4%
PC	52.6%	45.0%	47.1%	48.4%	34.6%	31.9%	39.4%
NDP	8.7%	9.6%	5.1%	10.3%	12.9%	5.0%	1.7%
Green	DNR	DNR	DNR	4.5%	6.6%	11.9%	15.2%
PANB	DNR	DNR	DNR	1.2%	2.1%	12.6%	9.2%

Heading into election night, observers expected a number of very close races again in ridings such as Memramcook-Tantramar (decided by 11 votes in 2018), Saint John Harbour (10 in 2018), Southwest Miramichi-Bay-du-Vin (35 in 2018) and Oromocto-Lincoln-Fredericton (93 in 2018). However, 2020 lacked such riding-level drama. In those four ridings mentioned the margins of victory were close to landslides – Memramcook-Tantramar (523), Saint John Harbour (974), Southwest Miramichi-Bay-du-Vin (1619) and Oromocto-Lincoln-Fredericton (1302). In fact, in 2020, only one candidate won their riding (Rob McKee – Moncton Centre) with less than 40% of the vote share compared to ten such candidates in 2018. Simply put, in 2020, local races were much less competitive.

One electoral trend that clearly continued was the division of party support by linguistic and regional lines as the PCs continued to dominate the southern, Anglophone area of the province while the Liberals found similar or even higher levels of support in the northern, Francophone area of the province. The so-called battleground ridings and pathway to majority government for both Liberal and Progressive Conservatives ran through the three major municipalities – Fredericton, Moncton and Saint John. Due to the strong regional voting trends most observers identified only a handful of competitive ridings (Poitras 2020c) Blaine Higgs' gamble of going to the polls early and in the middle of the pandemic would be tested in this short list. The linguistic polarization of the province had produced a staunchly divided blue and red map with ridings such as Saint John Harbour, Fredericton North and Moncton East as the only constituencies where key electoral battles were taking place.

In this first COVID-era election in Canada there was much speculation about how public health measures including masks, social distancing and the inability to congregate in large groups would affect voter turnout. Surprisingly, turnout was within a percentage point of 2018. Table 2 presents voter turnout in New Brunswick provincial elections since 1967.

Table 2: Voter Turnout in New Brunswick Provincial Elections

<i>Year</i>	<i>Net total</i>	<i>Valid</i>	<i>Rejected</i>	<i>Votes cast</i>	<i>% voted</i>
1967	313,685	257,671	-	257,671	82.14%
1970	331,643	265,891	3,415	269,306	81.20%
1974	408,182	310,098	2,485	312,583	76.58%
1978	441,454	330,492	3,269	333,761	75.60%
1982	471,798	384,557	2,694	387,251	82.08%
1987	501,646	408,516	2,620	411,136	81.96%
1991	517,613	411,590	3,138	414,728	80.12%
1995	525,132	389,562	3,688	393,250	74.89%
1999	525,465	394,237	2,942	397,179	75.59%
2003	563,080	383,074	3,583	386,657	68.67%
2006	558,688	374,156	3,091	377,247	67.52%
2010	538,965	371,742	3,160	374,902	69.56%
2014	577,529	371,739	1,622	373,361	64.65%
2018	568,671	381,775	1,412	383,187	67.13%
2020	569,862	376,903	1,266	378,169	66.14%

## Players

Three of the five leaders had led parties in campaigns before 2020, with Liberal leader Kevin Vickers and NDP leader Mackenzie Thomason the newcomers. Incumbent premier Blaine Higgs won the New Brunswick Progressive Conservative leadership in 2016. Prior to winning the PC leadership, Higgs had been an MLA since 2010 and finance minister in the David Alward government from 2010 to 2014.

After a month of attempting to hold onto government following an election that gave the PCs a plurality of one seat, Brian Gallant lost the legislature's confidence and soon after resigned the leadership. The Liberals found a new leader in Kevin Vickers, a political unknown to New Brunswickers, but definitely a well known public figure due to his role as Sergeant-at-Arms of the House of Commons during the 2014 shootings at Parliament Hill. Vickers was acclaimed leader of the New Brunswick Liberal Party in April 2019 after the only other candidate, René Ephetion, left the race. Vickers's tenure was relatively quiet until February 2020 when the Liberals threatened to try to force an election over the emergency room issue (see below). Most of the political focus on his leadership before COVID and the eventual election campaign was speculation about which riding he would run in. With by-elections looming it appeared Vickers would be running to fill Brian Gallant's former (and very safe Liberal) seat in the riding of Shediac-Bay Dieppe. But he gambled on a win in a competitive riding including his home town of Miramichi and lost badly. His decision produced speculation about his own judgment and about the confidence in which he was held by his own party.

By 2020, New Brunswick's two upstart parties were consistent political players. The Greens first won a Fredericton seat in a squeaker in 2014; now they defended three seats. As well, the People's Alliance defended three seats. Even though these parties' caucuses were small, the tentative performance of Vickers and the minority government situation allowed leaders David Coon (Green) and Kris Austin (People's Alliance) to play outsized roles. Meanwhile, the NDP continued its slow march into political oblivion. Without being able to field candidates for a leadership race to replace Jennifer McKenzie, 23-year-old interim leader Mackenzie Thomason filled the role as permanent leader (Poitras 2020b).

The Greens and NDP worked towards gender parity in candidates but the two major parties did not, with recruitment efforts to engage more women candidates either failing as a result of the pandemic and quick election call or not being a priority (Jones 2020). The Liberals in particular did not recruit women to run and the party's numbers decreased in both nominations and wins for female MLAs. The PCs did elect nine women and that increased the total number of women in the New Brunswick legislature. But overall, the number of women participating in the election declined (see Table 3).

## Lead-up to the Election

One month before the first presumptive case of COVID-19 in New Brunswick was identified, the relative calm of sixteen months of Progressive Conservative minority government came to an end. The early story of Blaine Higgs' time as premier was defined by the close collaboration with the People's Alliance; reforms to paramedic hiring; prolonged disputes with nursing home employees' representatives; and working with other Conservative-led provinces against a federal carbon tax.

In February 2020, Higgs made a potentially disastrous political mistake. The government was met with swift backlash after proposing changing opening hours to six rural emergency rooms. Higgs' major political problem with only 21 seats in the 49 seat-legislature was that some of that backlash came from within – Robert Gauvin, the deputy premier and sole northern PC MLA and francophone voice, resigned from cabinet and caucus before Higgs could reverse course on the proposal only days later. The province appeared to be on the brink of an election and his tenure became even more uncertain due to several bad pieces of legislation, most notably Education Minister Dominic Cardy's plan for mandatory vaccinations in schools. But Higgs was able to rely on the PANB's support throughout via an informal agreement.

Table 3: Women in New Brunswick Elections 2010-2020

	2010	2014	2018	2020
Liberal candidates	12	13	19	10
Liberal candidates elected	0	4	5	3
PC candidates	14	14	14	17
PC candidates elected	8	4	4	9
Green Party candidates	23	22	23	25
Green Party candidates elected	0	0	1	1
NDP candidates	17	15	25	12
NDP candidates elected	0	0	0	0
PANB candidates	5	5	9	10
PANB candidates elected	0	0	1	1
IND and other party candidates	0	2	3	1
IND and other party candidates elected	0	0	0	0
Total female candidates	71	72	93	75
Total elected	8	8	11	14

Even after the PC government avoided a spring election and was consumed with the initial response to COVID-19, speculation still hung in the air as three by-elections loomed on the horizon. Two of the by-election seats were considered safe (Shediac for the Liberals and Sussex for the PCs), but the southwestern riding of Saint Croix had changed hands in consecutive elections. A Tory loss there would have imperiled the government.

On August 12, 2020, five months after the first presumed case of COVID-19 in New Brunswick, the parties began negotiations to avoid an election. While the central proposal was a traditional confidence-and-supply agreement that would keep a stable government in place until 2022, Higgs had more ambitious goals that reflected Newfoundland and Labrador's Commission Government from the 1940s: "an economic recovery plan requires stability, it requires foresight and a plan that goes beyond six months, a year or two years, actually many years...in a way that's never been done in the past...groundbreaking" (Awde 2020). To that end, he claimed to be open to including ministers from each of the other parties in the cabinet (Poitras 2020a).

The Greens and PANB were willing to make a deal with Higgs and provide some stability through the pandemic, and while Kevin Vickers may have been open to some sort of all-party coalition arrangement, his caucus clearly was not. By the second day of formal discussions, the Liberals had walked away from the table. Unable to get a broad coalition-

style pandemic government and unwilling to continue with the support of one or two of the smaller parties, Higgs decided to roll the dice and call a pandemic election by visiting the Lieutenant Governor on August 17<sup>th</sup> and asking for the dissolution of the legislature. While there was much concern about holding an election in the middle of a global pandemic, Higgs believed that with a “lull” in cases in New Brunswick there was a window for a safe campaign (Huras 2020). At dissolution, the two large parties had 20 seat each, with Gauvin as an Independent, three open seats, and the PANB and Greens with three each (see Table 4).

It is reasonable to speculate that the unusual long-term financial plan gambit was merely a pretext to trigger an election. Propose a policy the opposition cannot accept (especially on-the-spot); watch them reject it; then blame the opposition for forcing an election. It worked perfectly.

Table 4: Party standings and election results 2006 to 2020

	2006	At diss.	2010	At diss.	2014	At diss.	2018	At diss.	2020
PC	26	23	42	41	21	21	22	20	27
Lib	29	32	13	13	27	24	21	20	17
NDP	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
PANB	*	*	0	0	0	0	3	3	2
Green	*	*	0	0	1	1	3	3	3
IND	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Vacant	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0
Total	55	55	55	55	49	49	49	49	49

\*did not run candidates

### Polls

In the one poll taken after the Progressive Conservatives formed government in November 2019 the party was five points behind the Liberals (35LIB to 30PC) indicating little difference from the 2018 election, but from that point on until the election call in August 2020 the government was leading in every poll but one, sitting at between 36 and 48 percent support with a margin of between 6 and 17 percent ahead of the Liberal Party. The Liberal Party’s popularity did not change beyond the margin of error after Kevin Vickers became leader in April 2019 (see Table 5). Throughout the campaign, the PCs held a substantial lead on the Liberals suggesting that the PCs might win a comfortable majority. But New Brunswick has become more linguistically polarized and as the campaign wore on, it was becoming clearer that the Liberals were not losing support in Francophone ridings and were in fact gaining more support. Further, support for smaller parties remained, posing the question of how this support would impact two parties vying for government.

### Issues

Not surprisingly, during the short four-week campaign no issues were able to overtake the story of COVID-19, and the calling of the snap election dominated the otherwise muted debate. For example, the PC’s platform titled “Up to the Job” highlighted their “COVID Response” before detailing policy positions on issues such as the economy, health care, education and the environment. On the campaign trail, PC leader Higgs leaned more on the message of “we’ll continue with the plan we started” than new initiatives (Waugh 2020,

A1). By running on their record more than anything else, the incumbent PCs sucked a lot of oxygen out of anything resembling a robust policy debate.

Table 5: Polls

<i>Polling Company</i>	<i>Date Conducted</i>	<i>PC</i>	<i>Liberal</i>	<i>NDP</i>	<i>Green</i>	<i>PANB</i>
Narrative	5-23 Aug	44	33	7	14	2
Leger	21-26 Aug	40	32	6	13	7
Mainstreet	27 Aug	38	33	4	19	7
Oraclepoll	1-3 Sep	42	33	6	18	2
EKOS	8-12 Sep	32	32	4	18	10
Mainstreet	11-12 Sep	37	30	4	21	7
Forum	9-13 Sep	37	30	4	21	8
<i>Election</i>	<i>24 Sep</i>	<i>39.3</i>	<i>34.4</i>	<i>1.7</i>	<i>15.2</i>	<i>9.2</i>

For their part, the Liberals and Greens led more traditional campaigns with daily announcements. But the challenge in 2020 was that the campaign really only had one major salient issue and that was management of the pandemic. Higgs and the PCs already had high marks on this, with polls suggesting that Higgs was amongst the most popular premiers in Canada. That said, Higgs had lingering problems with parts of New Brunswick. Francophone New Brunswickers distrusted him, citing his 1990s support for the Confederation of Regions Party and his unwillingness to talk flatteringly about language and culture or fully engage in and commit to learning and using French. Consequently, the PCs focused on winnable ridings in the campaign.

A handful of local issues played a role in the campaign. Saint John was reeling from large municipal deficits and concerns about future service delivery, prompting municipal politicians once again to demand changes in both property tax allocation and new ways of restructuring municipal entities. Fredericton's lone abortion and LGBTQ+ health clinic, Clinic 554, a legacy of the Henry Morgentaler years, closed its doors, leaving many without access to reproductive health services and health care such as gender confirmation surgery and counselling. In rural New Brunswick and in Indigenous communities, the Higgs government was distrusted because of concerns over municipal reform and perceived disengagement, in particular the government's refusal to support calls for a public inquiry into the deaths of two Indigenous people by local and RCMP detachments. So while the pandemic response was the main focus, Higgs's leadership of the province was being questioned.

The other challenge for Higgs was that a feature of his 2018 campaign was the lack of campaign promises. This worked to his advantage against Gallant and perceptions of policy incompetence. But in 2020, a lack of vision for the post-pandemic economy might have disappointed voters.

### **The Campaign and Leaders' Debates**

The 2020 campaign was historic – not for any notable activity during the four-week lead up to the election; it was quite sleepy by comparative standards – but for being the first Canadian election during the COVID-19 pandemic. While New Brunswick (and all of Atlantic Canada) had fared remarkably better than the rest of the country, even with very

few confirmed cases of COVID, the province was still under public health orders to avoid large groups, socially distance and wear masks when around individuals outside of their “bubble”. Needless to say the campaign would be like no other. On the eve of the election Higgs announced that PC candidates would not be campaigning door-to-door.

The PC’s slogan “Up to the Job” emphasized entirely the pandemic response in keeping New Brunswick as one of the safest places in North America. The other party leaders crisscrossed the province as best they could but failed to attack the Higgs government in meaningful ways. This likely had to do with the lack of grass roots campaigning and voter outreach. Instead, the smaller parties had challenges in getting organized and in a couple of ridings, in particular Fredericton North and Moncton Centre, third party candidates likely would have challenged even more if there was an ability to hold rallies and go door-to-door.

The three leaders’ debates in the first two weeks of September were perhaps the surprise in that they were so sedate and middling that they reinforced the impressions which existed in the public. No one was able to directly challenge Higgs or move past the pandemic as the salient topic and Higgs benefitted from his competent manager persona. Vickers really needed a knockout punch in one of these debates but his style was not as a political brawler. He never resonated with the public and so in presenting a competing vision, the Liberals could not differentiate themselves much. Vickers did do well with Acadian voters who for generations constituted the Liberals base. As the campaign wore on, Liberal support outside the north and northeastern parts of the province flagged. In the major cities, the Liberals were squeezed out on election night. Fredericton North and Saint John Harbour, where the Liberals held seats, were lost in 2020. In the upper river valley northwest of Fredericton the Liberals lost the Carleton seat, and in Moncton East they lost a close race to the PCs. Those four ridings constituted the bulk of Liberal support in Anglophone New Brunswick. Combined with the People’s Alliance holds and Greens retaining three traditional Liberal seats, the Liberals were squeezed from all sides.

In the end, the election was not the nailbiter some had predicted. The PCs managed to win 27 seats which, counting the speaker, was just barely a majority. The gains came in the aforementioned seats held by the Liberals and flipping back a traditional PC seat in Fredericton. But despite an advantage with respect to the pandemic, the results left Higgs with barely a mandate and a huge portion of the province that had turned their back on the PCs. In fact, the least competitive riding in 2020 was Shippagan-Lamèque-Miscou, which had selected Robert Gauvin as a PC MLA in 2018 by 99 votes. In 2020, the Liberal Eric Mallet won by over 6,000. This was indicative of the collapse of the PC vote in Francophone New Brunswick.

## **Election Aftermath and Conclusion**

New Brunswick’s 2020 election confirms two adages. The first is that in emergencies, public support rallies to the government. Blaine Higgs’s bet on an early election in a pandemic to win a majority turned out to be well-informed. Voters’ decisions were almost entirely retrospective, particularly since the Conservatives ran simply on their spring budget rather than a platform of promises. New Brunswick had weathered the COVID storm comparatively well and voters rewarded the government for it. It appears also that the government benefitted from its decision early on to convene a continuing cabinet

committee including all the party leaders to manage the pandemic response. This deft move made it difficult for the opposition parties later to criticize the government's COVID-related policies and actions. Higgs lifted the pandemic response out of the theatre of partisan politics.

The second adage is that, in Canadian politics, minority governments are largely considered -- by both politicians and voters -- to be temporary political arrangements, endured for a time but ended at the first convenient moment. Minority governments generally last about two years and in this sense New Brunswick played to type. There are good reasons for preferring minority to majority government. It is just that not many people are moved by them.

On election night, a tired and dispirited Liberal leader Kevin Vickers appeared on television to admit to a dismal showing and resigned his leadership. His statement had the air of a *fait accompli*. In the days following the election, a quiet, even subdued mood washed over the province. It was back to work to keep the COVID numbers low and the economy functioning. Higgs assumed his usual low-key persona. What did attract comment was the fractured character of the electoral map. The Liberals deepened their hold on the northeast, francophone part of the province and suffered a drubbing elsewhere. The Progressive Conservatives were a mirror image. Premier Higgs agreed this was an unfortunate development and pledged to ensure that the new government would gain the trust of the whole of the province.

Higgs' new cabinet was part of that effort to appeal to all regions of the province. Rookie Moncton francophone MLA Daniel Allain, a long-time party insider and organizer, was propelled into cabinet, in part to replace Robert Gauvin, Higgs's previous star francophone cabinet member. Allain was given responsibility for local government and municipal reform, one of the chief policy initiatives singled out for government attention in the new Legislature. Higgs dropped six ministers from the previous government, added five rookie MLAs, and shifted several others. Only four cabinet ministers going into the election retained their portfolios (Poitras 2020d).

New Brunswick was the first Canadian jurisdiction to experience a general election during the COVID-19 pandemic. Opposition politicians half-heartedly criticized the government for endangering people's lives in an unnecessary exercise, but then went gamely on to campaign in new, somewhat cramped ways. By almost all accounts, the pandemic election went off successfully with very few cases of COVID-19 in the province over the election cycle. Chief Electoral Officer Kim Poffenroth later complained that the 28-day campaign was too short a time for an unscheduled general election -- particularly during a pandemic -- and noted, without giving hard numbers, that some of the 13,000 mail-in ballots sent to voters did not come back in time to be counted (Urquhart 2020; Harding 2020). Her concerns were heard. Changes to legislation in 2021 provide for more efficient mail-in balloting and empower the Chief Electoral Officer to modify election processes to accommodate pandemic-related challenges -- all this despite record mail-in voting and an increase in voter turnout over 2018. But neither she nor anyone else suggested that this affected the outcome of the election. In any case, New Brunswick's example undoubtedly influenced premiers in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Newfoundland and Labrador to call pandemic elections, and they too enjoyed success. The thought of a autumn 2020 election undoubtedly crossed the mind of Justin Trudeau.

Canada's first COVID-19 pandemic election was a success in terms of voter turnout. But Blaine Higgs may be the dog that caught the bus in holding together a narrow majority government into a post-pandemic reality. Few provinces have a list of policy areas where the can has been kicked down the road as long as New Brunswick. Revitalization of a stagnant economy, crumbling infrastructure, health care and education systems badly in need of new thinking, and archaic policy subsystems that have built up piecemeal over time all need to be addressed. Higgs wants to be seen as the problem solver for this province and provide some stable management that has been sorely lacking since the 1990s. But management may not be enough. The province needs political leadership and inspiration too, like a Frank McKenna or a Danny Williams, and it remains to be seen if Higgs can provide that.

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