

Anatomy of a Liberal Victory: Making Sense of the Vote in the 2000 Canadian Election

André Blais, Elisabeth Gidengil, Richard Nadeau and Neil Nevitte
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In a desperate and vain attempt to prevent a breakdown in party discipline, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien threatened caucus members with a snap election if they voted with the Canadian Alliance on a November 2002 motion to choose committee chairs by secret ballot. The ploy failed, Chrétien begrudgingly allowed backbench MPs to vote as they wished, the Alliance motion passed, and the threat to call an election a mere two years into the term of his third majority government turned out to be little more than posturing. With continued high rankings in public opinion polls, the prime minister can wave the election warning flag with alacrity, but the authors of *Anatomy of a Liberal Victory* would advise caution. According to this study of voting behaviour, the opportunistic timing of the 2000 electoral contest cost the Liberals at the polls; not dearly, but the tendency of those who were angry about the early election call to mark their ballots for the Alliance robbed the government of two or three percentage points when the votes were tallied (162). Such analysis is the backbone of the latest volume by the Canadian Election Study team. The authors dissect the outcome of the 2000 national election, analyzing their survey results with a multi-variable, multi-stage analysis of voting choice. The impact of values, partisanship, issues, leadership, government party performance and strategic voting are assessed in turn, certain long-standing patterns in voting behaviour are confirmed, and a number of electoral myths are refuted.

The book features 13 short chapters, plus 5 appendices for statistics-addicts, and is informally divided into two sections. Chapters 1 through 4 explore a number of contextual factors, including party platforms, media spin, voter turnout, and the election outcome. Chapter 5 explains the methodology for assessing the impact of a wide variety of independent variables, and the relationships between these variables, on vote choice, and the remaining eight chapters explain why Canadians voted the way they did in 2000.

With the exception of the chapter on voter turnout, the first part of the book is not as compelling as the parts exploring the determinants of the vote. The media chapter, a nod to the increasing importance of electronic media in political communications, simply relates how television news outlets packaged party messages and counts the time allocated to each party and its leader. The reader will wonder why TV news gave the Alliance more attention than their standings suggested, at the expense of coverage of the New Democratic and Conservative parties, and why the media were so absorbed with party leaders generally and Stockwell Day's religious beliefs in particular. Students interested in mass media are likely to be disappointed with this brief look at television coverage of election 2000.

On the other hand, the explication of declining voter turnout in chapter 3 is considerably more comprehensive, and offers a persuasive and disturbing explanation for the lowest rate of federal electoral participation since Confederation. Voters who have come of age politically since 1988 simply are less attentive, less well-informed and less active than older Canadians. And the study found that young voters are not eschewing the ballot box in favour of social movement organizing, protests, street theatre and the like; they just aren't very interested in any of it. The authors note a relationship between interest, information and action, a connection that should be analyzed vis-à-vis media coverage of politics. Are voters receiving the information they need to understand that politics matter, and to make informed choices? Are the mainstream media contributing to the rising democratic deficit through superficial depictions of politics as a game that is barely worth watching, let alone participating in?

Overall, the book is clearly written in an accessible manner that students will find appealing. In particular, the conclusion offers a summary of key points in a question-and-answer format. However, multi-authorship is evident in inconsistencies in style.

Some parts of the book are written at a very introductory level (for example, chapter 4, "The Vote: Stability and Change"), while other sections are impenetrable to the average student and the academic not trained in advanced statistical techniques. Chapter 5, which introduces the methodology for analyzing the impact of various issues and factors on the vote, will surely be skimmed by most readers, as it refers to "multinomial logit," "multinomial estimations" and a "bloc recursive approach" without defining these techniques in any comprehensible way. Fortunately, it does not really matter; chapters 6-13, which explain the results of this technique, are lucidly written, straightforward, and offer persuasive analysis. In short, readers are told what mattered in 2000 and what had little impact on the overall outcome.

Certain socio-democratic characteristics, as well as values and beliefs, partisanship and leader evaluations, did count; for instance, Joe Clark's strong performance in the English-language leaders' debate boosted the party's fortunes sufficiently to secure official-party status in the House of Commons. Region, gender, urban/rural cleavages, religion and immigration status were important predictors of voting behaviour. General values and beliefs about capitalism, the market, and the role of the state shaped party affiliation and vote choice. On the other hand, issues, even the "hot" election issue of health care, surprisingly did not have much of an influence on the outcome. Neither did the ebbs and flows of the national economy or the Liberal record in office. So why did the Liberals win again, and why do they maintain a stranglehold on federal office? Simply put, the factors and issues that could have hurt them at the polls did not influence the vote. More importantly, perhaps, Liberal partisans, who comprise at least half of those Canadians who identify with a political party, remained loyal in 2000. The chances of unseating the "government party" seem dim, as the study confirms that the so-called "unite the right" movement lacks momentum at the grass-roots level. Indeed, the Conservative and Alliance parties are as incompatible to mass-level supporters as they are to party elites. Opposition party strategists would be wise to read this book carefully before developing tactics for appealing to the socio-demographic groups who form the core of Liberal support. In sum, those seeking a clear explanation of why the Liberals continue to dominate the federal scene will appreciate the careful and thorough account of the 2000 election provided by *Anatomy of a Liberal Victory*.

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Value Change and Governance in Canada

Neil Nevitte, ed.

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This volume is a product of the Trends Project, a collaborative enterprise involving the Government of Canada's Policy Research Initiative and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. It focuses on one of the most compelling issues of our time: the relationship between citizens and the state in the face of significant economic transformation, dramatic value change and increasing stress on political institutions.

Neil Nevitte begins with a review of the literature on value change in Canada, provides an introduction to analytical frameworks used by the other authors and summarizes their findings. He offers clear evidence of an emerging "efficacy gap." Since the mid-1980s Canadians have become less willing to believe that politicians pay attention to the views of voters while maintaining a strong sense of the ability of voters to understand and have an effect upon the policy process.

A central focus of the chapters by Richard Nadeau, Mebs Kanji and Neal Roeser is trends over time in the attitudes of Canadians towards their political institutions and personnel. Nadeau focuses mainly on the level of satisfaction with democracy in Canada. His central claim is that while the level of satisfaction may appear high (approximately 62% of Canadians claimed to be very or fairly satisfied in 1995), the