

Why do people vote strategically, and for whom?

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Strategic voting is an important factor in Canadian electoral campaigns. "People vote strategically when they think neither their first nor their second choice has any chance of winning in their electorate. They vote for their third choice party in the hopes of blocking an outcome that would be even worse," said Jean-François Daoust, a researcher at the University of Montreal's Department of Political Science who studied the phenomenon as part of his doctoral work. He was directed by André Blais, who holds the university's Research Chair for Electoral Studies, and his findings, which drew on Quebec's 2012 provincial elections, were recently published in *Politiques et sociétés*.

In the lead up to Canada's federal elections, the media regularly covers the phenomenon, and Thomas Mulcair, leader of Canada's New Democratic Party, often brings it up in his speeches. However, Daoust points out that this is a risky strategy considering constant fluctuations in the polling. "Mulcair's rhetoric may work as long the NDP is leading the polls. But if they drop, which seems to be the case lately, the strategic voting game could favour the Liberals, who would find themselves in the best position to take power."

In any event, the current campaign offers researchers an excellent opportunity to observe the phenomenon, considering the neck-to-neck three-way race between the major parties. "No study had ever been undertaken on strategic voting in Quebec, despite the fact that it is a particularly interesting case as it is the only province in Canada where doubled partisan dynamics are found, i.e. federalist versus sovereigntist and left versus right," Daoust said. His work shows that people with political beliefs are more likely to vote strategically or if there is a singular, crystalizing issue, such as in 1988 when, provoked by the concept of free trade with the United States, Canadians voted strategically en masse for the first time. On the flip side, Daoust found

that formal education, greater political knowledge, and gender have no effect on a person's likelihood to vote strategically. Amongst Quebec voters, he places the number of strategic voters at 8.3% - low, in his opinion, as one in two voters fits the profile.

The next step in Daoust's work will be studying the vote of 6,000 Canadians who will have participated in the upcoming elections. His results will be studied against data currently held in an international database that cover 30 elections having taken place in 6 countries since 2010. Preliminary results show that strategic voting is relatively stable across countries, regardless of whether the elections are presidential or parliamentary, or if the system of representation is proportional or not.

Provided by University of Montreal

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