The Purple Wave Issue 177

And They're Off!

The Purple Wave

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Introduction

For the month of April 2025, we are doing something different. We are going to publish eight articles leading up to the Canadian Federal Election, scheduled for April 28th. The articles will be a mix of commentary and random candidate profiles. The latter will be People Party of Canada candidates across the country describing, typically, who they are and why they chose to represent the Peoples Party in this election. Our first article though is a timely one in that, while we have dealt with the topic before, the matter of “splitting the vote”, this one takes a more in depth look at that topic.

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Feature Article

The Fallacy of 'Splitting the Vote'

A Closer Look at a Misleading Political Narrative

In every election cycle, the specter of the "split vote" looms large. Political strategists, media pundits, and party loyalists invoke it as a warning: if you vote for a smaller or alternative party, you risk allowing the opposition to win. This logic, although widespread, is based on a series of questionable assumptions and subtle fallacies that deserve exposure.

The standard narrative is an argument that typically runs as follows: when two parties with similar ideologies both field candidates, they divide the support base, allowing a third, less desirable party to win with a mere plurality. Voters are then persuaded to avoid this outcome by voting strategically—not necessarily for the party they believe in, but for the one most likely to prevent a worse alternative from winning. This is commonly described as voting for the "lesser evil."

At the heart of the "split the vote" argument lies the fallacy of false causality. The presence of two ideologically similar candidates is assumed to be the *cause* of the third party's victory. But this overlooks the most basic democratic reality: the winning candidate prevailed because they received the most votes. That outcome cannot be pinned solely on the presence of additional candidates. In other words, someone is compelling you to vote in a way that does not align with your political preferences, i.e., what you want in this election.

Closely tied to this is the fallacy of the false dichotomy, also known as the false dilemma. The voter is told there are only two viable options—"our side" and "the enemy"—with no room for nuance, reform, or emerging voices. This binary framing distorts the actual political landscape. When there are many voices, there are more ideas to choose from. Specifically, do the Conservatives know that deep in their political hearts, they have nothing? The hubris to think that the disaffected Liberal voters will vote for them? Could even a Liberal not see the folly of their previous political ways and recognize the problems with broken promises, and appreciate the idea of having a political party driven by principles? I think therein lies the real problem. When people examine their thoughts, they finally realize that the People's Party of Canada (PPC) has the authentic platform.

One of the key errors in the "split the vote" narrative is the assumption that votes for Party A and Party B would naturally consolidate under one banner if the other didn’t exist. This is empirically false. Voters are complex and motivated by a range of values, policies, and personalities. Many would stay home or spoil their ballots rather than support a party they see as corrupt, compromised, or uninspiring. In passing, PPC supporters must identify those voters and allow them to see the PPC as the principle-driven party that can help Canada emerge from the incredible mess it has found itself in.

To blame a third party for an undesired outcome is to presume that voters lack agency—that they are chess pieces to be manipulated by strategists, rather than individuals with convictions. If you

want to test my conclusion here, ask a Conservative why they are voting the way they are doing. You will typically experience all or some of the following:

1. The voice of the "defensive" conservative will grow louder.

2. Everything that is said will sound incredulous, e.g., how can you ask such an obvious question?

3. They may critique Liberal policies, but does that automatically position Conservatives as fundamentally different? Such a binary perspective oversimplifies the reality and doesn't hold up to scrutiny. As PPC supporters, we've observed significant overlaps, such as shared stances on globalism and the erosion of freedoms.

4. They will use the logical fallacy of Appeal to Tradition. "I've always voted Conservative; therefore, I should keep voting Conservative." This implies that longstanding behavior itself is a valid justification, without evaluating whether the party's current platform still aligns with their principles or addresses current issues effectively. Again, who is not thinking here? Who is not being strategic?

5. Another Appeal to a different Tradition is that my family has always supported the Conservatives. This means that the first person in your family worked out all the issues Canada has faced, is facing, and will face in the future. That person worked it all out for all friends and family. Does this not sound rather goofy? But that is what is happening.

As an experiment, I would like to illustrate the above in a Socratic-style conversation. I know that this is made up, but it does capture the essence of many non-thinkers who are loud talkers. It is not entirely fictional, but rather a composite of three different conversations I have experienced:

Me: You mentioned you've always voted Conservative—has that always been because of the party's policies, or more out of habit?

Them: Well, it's what I've always done. My parents voted Conservative too. It just feels right.

Me: I completely understand that. Most of us inherit political leanings from our upbringing. But tell me—if a party changes over time, does it still deserve your loyalty simply because of its name?

Them: I suppose parties do change. But I still think they represent my values.

Me: That's important! Values matter! But what if the party began to ignore your core concerns or adopted policies that go against your principles? Would you still vote for them, just out of tradition?

Them: No… probably not, if it went against what I believe. (typically, there is much more stammering involved at this step of realization)

Me: Exactly. So maybe the better question isn't, "Who have I always voted for?" but "Who best reflects my values *today*, in this new political landscape?" Because the world changes—and

responsible citizens don't just preserve old allegiances; they re-evaluate them in the light of new realities. (We have written about active citizenry and responsible citizens before: Issue 77, Issue 80, Issue 92, Issue 103, Issue 164, and Issue 173.)

Them: That's fair. I suppose I haven't examined the platforms closely in a while.

Me: I think many people are in the same position. But maybe the authentic tradition we need to uphold isn't party loyalty, but thoughtful engagement with the issues. Otherwise, habit can masquerade as virtue.

Thus, this Socratic style of questioning can reveal the folly of unexamined political beliefs. I know that my three conversations did not follow this exactly, because there are some people who do not understand that political discussions are not about winning, but about learning. We covered that in an article about "Crucial Conversations". I encourage you strongly to look back or even check out other resources that would help you engage meaningfully for all facets of your life.

However, let's return to the main point of this article. Consider the Blame Game perspective which we have written about previously. To say a party lost because another party "split the vote" is like blaming a mirror for reflecting what is there. If a political movement cannot command a majority, it should not blame others for its failure to persuade. The presence of other candidates is not a betrayal of democracy; it is its fulfillment.

On a personal note, and potentially a change inspired by PPC, the real culprit behind this dynamic is not the multiplicity of parties, but the electoral system itself. First-past-the-post (FPTP) systems are notoriously bad at reflecting the full range of political opinion. They encourage tactical voting and penalize honesty. In contrast, ranked-choice voting or proportional representation would allow voters to express genuine preferences without fear of wasting their vote or enabling their least-preferred outcome. I discovered this again when writing this article about Australian elections being mandatory. Options such as this are worthy of discussion, but they do favour the political scenarios that involve more than two parties.

Under a more representative system, the concept of a "split vote" loses its meaning. Voters could rank their choices or vote for a party knowing their support contributes to proportional outcomes. In such systems, cooperation between like-minded parties is encouraged through coalitions, not discouraged through fearmongering.

But for all actions there are consequences. Consequences can not be ignored. When citizens are told to vote strategically rather than authentically, democracy suffers. Parties become indistinguishable, and political responsibility fades. Voter turnout declines as cynicism grows. Worse still, fresh ideas are stifled before they can take root, and dissenting voices are silenced for the sake of short-term political expediency. This is the opposite of democracy!

The argument that third parties "split the vote" has been repeatedly invoked in Canadian political history; however, a closer examination reveals deeper ideological and systemic forces at play.

In 1993, the once-dominant Progressive Conservative Party plummeted from 156 seats to just 2. Many pointed fingers at the rise of the Reform Party in the West and the Bloc Québécois in Quebec for fracturing the conservative vote. However, this wasn't a simple case of vote splitting. It was a profound ideological rupture—Western populists no longer felt represented by Red Toryism, and Quebec nationalists felt alienated from federalist compromises. The resulting fragmentation led to over a decade of Liberal dominance, not due to arithmetic misfortune, but because the conservative coalition had already splintered. Those conservatives had to look deep within themselves to see that they were not serving most Canadians. Word just got out and changes were made to the potential parties that would do so. Maybe this is why the "split the vote" is a strong political slogan for the gun shy (pardon the strained pun) Conservatives of today.

During the 2004–2011 Federal Elections, the Liberal Party was often accused of benefiting from vote splitting between the NDP and the Conservatives. Yet this period revealed not a failure of electoral strategy, but the volatility of a centrist electorate. Voters wavered between progressive ideals and economic pragmatism. The Liberals' ability to straddle both sides attracted swing voters. The vote was not split—it was fluid. I don't think that this is the case today but is yet another example of the slogan "splitting the vote" being tossed around in a nonsensical way.

Since 2015, critics have accused Maxime Bernier's People's Party of Canada of spoiling key ridings for the Conservatives. However, detailed electoral analysis showed that even if all PPC voters had chosen the CPC (a questionable assumption), the outcomes in most ridings would not have changed. The PPC vote was essentially a protest vote from individuals disillusioned with mainstream parties across the board. Rather than blame PPC supporters, the real question for the Conservatives should be: *why did these voters leave in the first place*?

Therefore, the next time you hear someone warn of "splitting the vote," consider what is being asked. Are you being encouraged to compromise your values? To suppress your voice for the sake of political math? Democracy is not about betting on winners. It's about honest expression, civic responsibility, and the courage to imagine something better.

The vote is not split. It is expressed. And that is something to be celebrated, not feared.
According to the latest polls and statistical models, the PPC is expected to secure a minimum of 10 seats. The only question is, will those seats be a real opposition? Vote PPC!

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