

For vs. Against and the Undecided Voter

BROCK'S BANTER

By Brock Weir

The undecided voter has always been an intriguing specimen to me.

We encounter them every time an election is called, whether it is at the federal level, the provincial level, and, perhaps most dramatically, whenever an election is called below our southern border.

They are the ones to whom pundits often turn when trying to gauge the momentum of a particular campaign or candidate, or even the public's reaction to a potential platform plank whenever the proverbial "trial balloon" is released above the voters as a whole.

Over the course of the last U.S. Presidential Election, we were bombarded with opinions from apparently "undecided" voters who were pooled together by any number of news outlets on both sides of the border (in the latter case, eligible U.S. voters who now call Canada home) to weigh in on speeches, debates, and that seemingly never-ending Election Night. Err, the Election Week that was.

The fact that the networks kept finding more and more people claiming to be "undecided" in that go-round never ceased to amaze me.

In a country which is, at the end of the day, basically a two-party system, a system where the two dominating parties had very clear battle lines drawn, very different visions for which direction they wanted to take their country, and two extremely different leaders to execute the vision of their choice, that anyone could be "undecided" on where to throw their support seemed as unlikely as the two candidates finding common ground on just about anything.

Yet, there they were, hands on their dials, turning them according to whether or not the words out of the mouths of each leader was coming close to turning their respective cranks, their opinions given significant weight and airtime.

That is not to say that their opinions weren't of value. Don't get me wrong. It just seemed highly unlikely that their decision hadn't actually been made right at the outset, several months before, and even less likely by the end of October 2020.

We in Canada are fortunate for many reasons, not the least of which is we're not beholden to a two-party system, no matter what the Liberals and Conservatives try to tell you. And we're fortunate as well that there are no official party lines at the municipal level.

Federally and Provincially, we have parties that lean left, parties that lean right, and, in between, are several political parties, even those who don't have official "party" status in this country, that have nuanced differences and nuanced visions for the future of this country, all of which are worth a second "or even a first" look.

But it seems, in my view, that some engaged voters who are already sharing what their September 20 decision might be, are voting more out of habit or even anger than anything else.

Just a few days ago, I had a conversation with a family member who I would usually put in the column of an informed and engaged voter.

Referencing a conversation we had two or three months ago on how the Provincial Progressive Conservatives, New Democrats and Liberals had handled the pandemic up until that point, we exchanged views on who would ultimately get our vote if Queen's Park was in a minority government situation and we were hit with a snap election.

Our views on that hypothetical scenario were slightly different, but we were able to articulate our reasons why and had a respectful ? and even enlightening ? discussion on the subject.

Last week's conversation was markedly different.

?We've got to vote Trudeau out!? he exclaimed with hardly any time left for pleasantries.

Not quite sure whether he was using the ?Royal We?, speaking of his own household, or trying to rope me into some sort of vague voting bloc, I asked the next obvious question: ?Why??

?I'm voting Conservative,? he replied, as I left a bit of silence on the other end hoping my actual question would receive an answer sooner rather than later.

Unfortunately, the answer came later rather than sooner, and with a bit of prodding, it was revealed he was voting Conservative out of anger at Justin Trudeau sending this country into an election campaign that will likely end in the middle of the pandemic's fourth wave.

It's certainly a valid criticism. I don't think anybody was hoping for an election at a time when we're mired in so much uncertainty, but casting a vote out of anger seemed to me like such a missed opportunity.

Just a few days later, another acquaintance said they had already made up their mind to vote Liberal.

While they qualified their answer by saying that while they did indeed think their riding's Liberal candidate was the best person to represent their own interests in Ottawa, that tidbit was only thrown out after their statement that they essentially boiled down to voting out of habit was met with silence.

?My parents always voted Liberal,? they said. ?That's how I was raised.?

Fair enough, but is that reason enough to decide how to cast your ballot in the most important exercise of our democratic rights?

Some of you might think so, but I personally do not.

Whether your political allegiances lie with the Liberals, Conservatives, the NDP, the Greens, or any other parties that might appear on the final ballot, wouldn't it be much better to vote for something rather than against something? Or to vote for the person you believe will best represent your interests in Ottawa rather than marking your ?X? simply out of reflex?

I think so, and it is through this lens that I cast my ballot every time I am asked to do so.

By the time you read this on Thursday, August 26, there will be 25 days until Election Day on September 20. That is not an insignificant amount of time. Use it wisely, read up not only on your party leaders but the local candidates looking to represent your interests in the House of Commons and brush up on each party's platform.

Whether you are casting your vote by mail or in the ballot box, do so sure in the knowledge you are making an informed decision not only for yourself, but for your community and country.