



The Numbers we Need to Know Before we Decide

Kevin Page

Former Parliamentary Budget Officer, Founding President and CEO of
the Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy, University of Ottawa

March 29, 2019

9:00am – 4:30pm

Summary (Abstract)

Political scientists have developed several theories to explain voter decision-making strategies. In this workshop, we will assume that voters (in this particular case study: workshop participants), use a classic rational choice strategy - i.e., we are rational. Ideally, in order to maximize outcomes, we want electorates to have the information and cognitive capacity to make informed decisions. In this way, people could rationally elect representatives who would do their best to carry out desired collective decisions and make legislatures able to hold governments to account.

In this workshop, we will examine the political platforms of all major political parties during the 2015 federal election. We will review party commitments on policy issues (e.g. balancing the budget over the medium term), examine information and cognitive demands on electorates, and assess performance objectives using SMART criteria (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time based).

The purpose of this 2015 retrospective will be to better position us (as rational voters) for the upcoming 2019 electoral platforms. As a former Parliamentary Budget Officer, Mr. Page will draw on his own experience in this workshop to assess electoral commitments-including budgetary balances, reduction in income disparities or greenhouse gas emissions, and the elimination of socioeconomic gaps for Indigenous peoples, to name a few. This workshop will also examine non-numerical party objectives such as electoral reform.

Outline

The day will begin with an overview of decision making strategies, party platform commitments, performance assessment tools (e.g. SMART), government mandate tracker and the role of the legislature to hold the government to account. The class will openly debate and assess 2015 party commitments in key policy areas (economic, fiscal, social, environment, etc). The outcome of these discussions will be used to inform the type of commitments required in the 2019 federal election.





Required Readings

Consult the following, to compare Canadian Political Parties:

I CAN Party. 2015. *I CAN Party: Where the parties at?* <http://www.icanparty.ca/en/>

Familiarize yourself with the following texts:

Trudeau, Justin. 2015. "Open and Accountable Government". *Office of the Prime Minister of Canada*. Ottawa: Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada. <https://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2015/11/27/open-and-accountable-government>

Smith, Alex. 2015. *The Parliamentary Financial Cycle*. Ottawa: Library of Parliament, Publication No. 2015-41-E. https://lop.parl.ca/sites/PublicWebsite/default/en_CA/ResearchPublications/201541E

McCann, Anthony. 2016. "Voting Choice and Rational Choice". *Oxford Research Encyclopedias*, August. <http://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-79>

Familiarize yourself with the following websites:

Privy Council Office. 2019. *Mandate Letter Tracker: Delivering Results for Canadians*, Government of Canada. <https://www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/campaigns/mandate-tracker-results-canadians.html>

Haughey, Duncan. 2014. "A Brief History of Smart Goals". *Project Smart*, Dec. 13. <https://www.projectsmart.co.uk/brief-history-of-smart-goals.php>

Additional Resources

Richard R Lau Mona S Kleinberg Tessa M Ditonto. 2018. "Measuring Voter Decision Strategies in Political Behavior and Public Opinion Research". *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 82 (S1): 325-350. <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfy004>

Workshops on Social Science Research (WSSR)
1455 de Maisonneuve W. – H1225.30
Montreal, Qc H3G 1M8
Telephone: 514-848-2424 x7854, x5473

