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Election 2011

Blattberg, Charles; HARELL, ALLISON; BDARD, RIC; Bilodeau, Antoine; Johnston, David. **The Gazette** [Montreal, Que] 22 Apr 2011: A.19.

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Abstract (summary)

Never underestimate the power a sense of efficacy can have in politics. [...] recently, many Canadians sympathetic to NDP policies have voted for other parties out of a fear that otherwise their vote would be wasted.

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A CROP pollster said this week the Liberal Party of Canada is in danger of becoming "the party of the English" in Montreal. What do you think it will take for the anglophone community in Montreal to consider other party options?

Polls keep showing rising support for the NDP, especially in Quebec. Although party support is still not high enough for the NDP to realistically hope to form the next government, growing NDP popularity is the story of the campaign so far.

What's behind the NDP rise? Is it just leader Jack Layton's personal appeal, or is there something more?

Anglophone voting patterns, like those throughout Quebec, tend to be distorted by the spectre of sovereignty. This has meant inordinate support for the Liberals, but that should not be exaggerated. Regardless, only once the Quebec question is finally settled will the federalist anglophone voter have the luxury to judge parties on grounds other than which will be most effective at keeping Quebec in Canada.

Never underestimate the power a sense of efficacy can have in politics. Until recently, many Canadians sympathetic to NDP policies have voted for other parties out of a fear that otherwise their vote would be wasted. That, for example, is why many progressive soft-nationalist Bloquistes have felt that there was no other party to turn to. But recent changes in NDP support have burst a psychological dam. They may never go back.

The Liberal Party has always been very strong among anglophones in Montreal, so there is nothing new to that story. While I do not expect any massive switch in party allegiance, the NDP has been polling well across Quebec. Clearly, some Montrealers are looking toward the NDP, but this seems to be primarily due (at least in Montreal) to left-leaning Bloc Quebecois voters.

There are two things behind the NDP's relative success this campaign. The story is partly about Jack Layton. He's a charismatic guy and has finally got noticed in Quebec. Second, I think most people think this election won't actually change the outcome of the vote in their riding. So voting NDP in some ways may be a protest vote.

They know it won't matter, but they like what Layton's been saying and figure: "Why not?"

By promising not to reopen the constitutional debate, the Conservatives have some chance of attracting certain Montreal anglophone voters.

But conservative values don't seem to suit anglo Montrealers, who have a more urban multicultural outlook. For Quebec francophones, the Liberals today, because of the patriation of the Constitution in 1982 without Quebec's consent, are sort of like the Conservatives were after the First World War, because of conscription.

The NDP's success is a product of the ideological polarization orchestrated by the Harper Conservatives. The Conservative strategy has been to strike at the heart of traditional Canadian liberal consensus politics and push those who have a very moral vision of Canada -a country that mediates between nations, and is a guardian of peace -more toward the political left.

The consequence: the more progressive wing of the Liberals is jumping ship and joining Jack Layton's party.

Ethnic minorities also massively support the Liberals. So it's not "the party of the English" in Quebec yet.

To answer the question, one must ask why anglophones support the Liberals now. Are they "true liberals" or what? At the moment, the connection to the Liberals seems strong like an old oak.

How do you uproot such a tree? I don't know, but it seems everything is possible in Canadian politics these days.

Layton's charisma is certainly the "Trojan horse" to get people to pay attention, but maybe Layton is right when he says Quebecers have had enough of "tourner en rond" in Ottawa. The Liberals and the Conservatives are simply not an option for many Quebecers. So if they want something new, what are they going to do? Maybe go for the "good guy!" This looks a lot like the Action democratique du Quebec rise in the 2007 Quebec general election.

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