

Book Reviews

People vs. Politics, by Jean A. Laponce. University of Toronto Press, 1969. 219 pp. \$10.00.

Additional systematic examinations of the opinions and attitudes of the Canadian electorate must be welcomed, for existing studies have done little more than chart the major demographic correlates of party preference and certain other issues. Professor Laponce's long awaited analysis of voters in the Federal Riding of Vancouver-Burrard (which disappeared in the 1967 redistribution) will be welcomed primarily for his novel attempts to find more deep-seated relationships in the electorate, even though he does replicate many of the methods of earlier studies.

This is an exciting book to read, as readers who are familiar with the snippet on non-voting already published¹ will appreciate. Yet it is a curiously difficult book to review. The author asserts that his aim is "simply to obtain a more precise picture of Canadian electors than we have at present,"² yet he fortunately does not hesitate to move beyond mere description and to make and test sundry hypotheses. He whets the intellectual appetite by posing a conceptual framework in which parties and politicians, on the one hand, and the public, on the other, interact together in a periodic stressful symbiosis at election time (hence the title of the book), but the book jumps fitfully from one chapter to the next with only casual and occasional references to the purported theme. In short, the reader gets the impression, fairly or unfairly, that the author ran some surveys, included some unusual variables, and analyzed the data with a perceptive and discerning eye. If this impression is correct, then it is a sad commentary on academic respectability, that such a strategy of inquiry cannot be baldly stated, without recourse to the conventional expository paradigm of introductory theory, research design, findings and conclusions. Intellectual breakthroughs rarely follow such a neat path.

¹ Jean A. Laponce, "Non-Voting and Non-Voters: A Typology," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. 33, 1967, pp. 75-87.

² *People vs. Politics*, p. x.

The author uses three sets of variables. The first set, which constitute the basis for the originality of the analysis, tap subjective orientations to politics. It includes some measures used previously in surveys, such as party preference (reported vote at prior federal election), political knowledge (of the names of the federal and provincial leaders of the four major parties plus the Communists), party image (perceived linkage between 16 sociological groups such as 'rich people' and 'young people' and the five political parties), and also various political and campaign issues. But the set also includes some new measures of party and party leadership orientation, particularly a "liking-disliking" scale and five other dimensions of "new ideas-old ideas," "socialist-anti-socialist," "friendly-cold," "active-slow," and "powerful-weak" perceptions of the leaders. One wishes that a measure of strength of party preference had been included in the light of its success in the U.S. in predicting electoral migrations and issue salience, two topics close to the author's heart. Also, readers should be aware that his multiple measures of cross pressure (shifted party allegiance since the last election, or equal preference for at least two parties, or intention to vote for a party different from that preferred) would have been highly esoteric, to say the least, even if he had used them as mere proxies!

The other two sets of variables in the study have been used frequently in voting research. One is the psychological concept of authoritarianism, which the author measures with slightly modified items taken from Adorno *et al.*³ The other is a battery of objective sociological variables including sex, age, education, occupation, religion and ethnicity. One may question the author's choice here. If psychological predispositions are to be tapped, as they necessarily must be in any study of public opinion, then why was only authoritarianism chosen? If resources for the study were limited, then why authoritarianism rather than any other psychological variable? Again, if sociological variables are necessary, then why use objective rather than subjective measures, when the former can often be extrapolated from census data leaving room for additional items in the questionnaire? Besides, have not subjective measures, of class for example, proved more valuable in voting studies?

The study uses data drawn primarily from two random samples of the electorate made at the time of the Federal Elections of 1963 (N=465) and 1965 (N not given). A reinterview of a subsample of the 1963 sample was made in 1964 (N=140), while another survey was also made at the time of the 1963 Provincial Election (N not given). The

³ Theodore W. Adorno *et al.*, *The Authoritarian Personality*, Harper, 1950.

author also makes use of a number of nationwide CIPO polls on party preference and on some of the sociological correlates of party preference. He, thirdly, uses a content analysis of the relative weight of campaign issues presented in the two Vancouver newspapers at the time of the 1963 Federal Election.

The major finding in the study is that, in terms of the variables used, the party electorates are remarkably homogeneous. "Repeatedly, I found that expected correlations did not obtain, selected variables did not discriminate, or working-hypotheses turned out to be blind alleys."⁴ There appears to be a trace of a social cleavage between Liberals and Conservatives, in that trade unionists, Catholics and younger people tend more to the Liberal Party, while Anglicans and older people tend more to the Progressive Conservatives. There is also a trace of a cleavage between the NDP electorate and those of other parties in that supporters of the NDP rarely stray in their voting habits, and see themselves and are seen by others as being politically distinctive. Professor Laponce speculates that this homogeneity may be accounted for in the peculiarities of Vancouver-Burrard; "the dominant impression was that the population studied lived in a political melting pot."⁵ But this reviewer has also confronted similar conclusions in data drawn from the Provincial Riding of Victoria. We appear to be some way from determining precisely what makes the B.C. voter "tick."

But a way out of the apparent abyss may possibly be found through some of the other findings in the study. Professor Laponce orders the parties on most of the variables tapping subjective orientations to politics, as well as on a scale designed to minimize party jumping (so that electoral migrations flow to the closest party on the scale rather than "jump over" to more distant parties). Had the scales been related in a perceptually set multi-dimensional issue space, then possibly the traditional cognitive measures could have been synthesized with rationality postulates about party preference and change currently coming into vogue in electoral research under the inspiration of the late V. O. Key.⁶

In general, this is one of the better pieces of research on electoral behavior yet to be made in Canada. The findings are carefully and accurately presented, and the author only makes some unwarranted conclusions in the absence of supporting evidence. It is, moreover, written and

⁴ *People vs. Politics*, p. 177.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

⁶ In his posthumously published, *The Responsible Electorate*, Harvard University Press, 1966.

illustrated with a verve that should appeal to the occasional student of politics. Incidentally, it contains one of the most cogent summaries of the validity and reliability problems of survey research that will be found in the literature of social science. It will possibly become required reading in courses on Canadian politics; it will not, and for this we may be grateful, become a source of tactical inspiration for the politician.

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People vs. Politics, by Jean Laponce. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969. 219 pp. \$10.00.

This is a book at once fascinating and formidable. Fascinating to the psephologist, but formidable to just about anyone else.

Professor Laponce has made a study of voting behaviour in Vancouver-Burrard. The study began with the federal election of April, 1963. Political science students, under Professor Laponce's supervision, questioned 300 respondents about the way they voted, and why. The same respondents were questioned again after the provincial election in September, 1963. The opportunity presented itself to find out the reasons for the massive shift in support from the Liberals and Conservatives in the federal campaign in the spring, to Social Credit in the fall of the same year, is obvious. The study also includes the federal election held in November, 1965. Thus Professor Laponce was able to determine how all those same voters found their way back to the Liberal and Conservative ranks for that campaign.

The answers obtained from these voters were fed into a computer, and *People vs. Politics* is the result.

The book is largely a collection of graphs and statistics that are really quite formidable. In fact, so many technical terms are used throughout the book that they make it heavy going for anyone who studied political science in the days when no one ever thought of going out to actually find out why people vote the way they do.

Politicians will be fascinated, however, with a lot of the material. Some of the findings bear out theories about voting behaviour that have become generally accepted: there is a tendency for trade unionists to support the New Democratic Party, for older people to support the Conservatives, and for young people to support the Liberals.