

# GABRIOLA VOTES

Election Day is Monday, April 28<sup>th</sup>  
You may vote from 7:00am to 7:00pm  
Gabriola Island Community Hall  
2200 South Road



**Signs from four of the Nanaimo-Ladysmith candidates** at the top of ferry hill on Gabriola. as islanders continue to make decisions on who for in the April 28 Federal Election. *Sarah Holmes photo*

## To be strategic or not to be? That’s the voters’ question

**Dr. Stewart Prest**

We are so accustomed to hearing that a given election is “the most important of our lives,” that the words seem like boilerplate. And yet, with democracy under pressure around the world, and Canada under pressure from what we used to think of as our closest ally, the stakes really do seem higher this time. At the same time, local politics, issues, and representation matters more than ever. What then is a voter to do? How should one cast a ballot in this election?

There’s no one right way to cast a ballot, but there are a number of things to keep in mind as you do. First, the rules shape the choice. Canada has a First Past the Post system, which means that the country is divided into 343 separate mini elections, one for each riding in the country. (The country added five districts during the most recent redistricting, conducted in accordance with the constitution following the 2021 census.) Each riding election produces one representative, who will work with others to support a government.

Second, because of this electoral system, as it’s called, the vote you cast will decide both who represents your own corner of Canada, and who governs the country as a whole. Depending on what you care about, you may want to focus on either implication, but both will follow from the choice.

Surveys suggest that most Canadians are more focused on the implications for the leader of the country more than usual this time around. This make sense given the unprecedented situation the country finds itself in, with our neighbour and most important ally suddenly acting more like a threat. For those focused on this implication, the vote



**Dr. Stewart Prest**  
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for the local representative is, in some sense, a vote for the party, and by extension, the leader you prefer to guide Canada through these unprecedented times.

Third, because only one person represents each riding, you may want to think about the vote not just in terms of who you would like to see win, but who you want to see lose. Put differently, some voters vote strategically, voting for a candidate they think has a chance to win, not because they are their favourite candidate, but that candidate has the best chance to defeat a candidate from a party they particularly dislike. Simply put, under First Past the Post, sometimes it makes sense to vote against a candidate, rather than for one.

So, when does it make sense to vote strategically in this way? Generally, when two conditions hold: first, there has to be a candidate or party you particularly want to see lose. If not, it doesn’t really make sense to do so. Second, there has to be a clear alternative that has a strong chance to win in that particular riding. National polls aren’t enough of a guide in many cases, though of course they matter.

Accordingly, it doesn’t make sense to vote strategically in every riding. Sometimes, there are three candidates with a real chance to win. Barring some local coordination signal — say, one candidate informally endorses another, or a growing locally organized non-partisan movement or endorsement convincingly tips the balance in one direction or another — in such cases, voters are best advised to “vote their conscience”, as it’s called. In other words, vote for the candidate you like best, and hope they win—or even volunteer to help them win!

In other cases, one candidate is so far ahead

of the others that it doesn’t make sense to vote for a second best option. If the party you dislike is going to win regardless, you might as well support the party you like most.

But if there’s a clear two horse race in a given riding, and you dislike one option and don’t mind the other, then if you want to affect the outcome of the election it makes sense to hold your nose and vote for that tolerable option.

So how does all that shake out in a specific riding? We almost never have accurate polling information at the local level—the population is just too small to get a representative sample from (much less to get 343 representative samples, from each riding in the country!) Polling aggregators like 338Canada.ca can offer some guidance, but always to be taken with a hefty grain of salt. Such guides are NOT based on local polls, but rather mathematical models that transpose national polling to local circumstances, taking into account some regional and local factors (but not all!) Put differently, they give an approximation that will be reliable in the aggregate, but in any given riding might end up quite wide of the mark.

Note too that they represent a particular point in time, and in an election like this, with such different issues shaping voters’ choice—above all, whether to think of it as a chance to look back and evaluate the record of the Liberals, or look forward and choose which party is best positioned to steer the country through the choppy waters ahead—things could still move in the polls between now and election day.

To bring it home, then, what are the implications for voters in Nanaimo–Ladysmith? Some voters will doubtless vote for the party or candidate they like best, regardless of the context. If you like the Conservative candidate, fill your boots!

Based on prior results and current polls, 338Canada.com <https://338canada.com/59019e.htm> suggests that the Conser-

vative candidate, Tamara Kronis, is in the catbird seat. This conforms to recent history in the middle and north island districts, as conservative candidates have done better in recent years both provincially and federally, as part of a larger realignment in the country. More rural districts, particularly areas strongly affected by resource economy, increasingly lean right.

At the same time, both the Green candidate, former MP Paul Manly, and Liberal Michelle Corfield, have a chance to win. This too conforms with recent history of the riding, one where the Greens have done well, and the current election, in which Liberals have captured much of the more centre-left progressive vote across the country, and clearly still have political momentum.

What then, is a strategically-minded progressive voter to do? It’s a situation that confronts many on the centre and left of the political spectrum who view the Conservative approach to government politics as quite distinct from what the Greens, Liberals, and NDP offer. The best advice for such voters is to use such information to decide for yourself who has the best chance to win. And for those with concerns about abandoning a party they usually support in favour of a strategically chosen alternative, there remain other ways to show love—one could vote one way and donate another, to give an example.

Again, ultimately there’s no one right way to get involved. One thing is for certain, however: this election matters. It’s worth taking the time to vote, and doing so with care and purpose.

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# Choice and Consequence: An overview of the 2025 election and its implications for voters



With the absence of an All Candidates Meeting on Gabriola this year, the *Gabriola Sounder* and Gabriola Talks are hosting an event with Dr. Stewart Prest. This is open to all members of the public, on Thursday, April 24, from 6:30pm to 8pm, at the Rollo Centre, 685 North Rd. Details on page 8.

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