

The 2015 Provincial Election in Prince Edward Island

Don Desserud
Professor of Political Science
Department of Political Science
University of Prince Edward Island
ddesserud@upei.ca

Jeff Collins
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Political Science
Carleton University
jecollins@upei.ca

Abstract:

Prince Edward Island's 65th General Election was held 4 May 2015. The Prince Edward Island Liberal Party (Liberals) won 18 of the Island's 27 seats, capturing its third straight majority. The Progressive Conservative Party of Prince Edward Island (PCs) improved its standing to eight seats, once again forming the Official Opposition. The Green Party of Prince Edward Island (Greens) picked up a single seat - its party leader winning that party's first ever in a PEI election. The New Democratic Party of Prince Edward Island (NDP) did not win a seat, despite garnering slightly more votes island-wide than did the Greens. The surprise of the election may not have been the historic election of the leader of the Greens, but the fact that two candidates tied, resulting in a coin toss to determine the winner.

Keywords: PEI, election, Green Party, electoral reform

Introduction:

Prince Edward Island's 65th General Election was held 4 May 2015. The Prince Edward Island Liberal Party (Liberals) won 18 of the Island's 27 seats, capturing its third straight majority. The Progressive Conservative Party of Prince Edward Island (PCs) improved its standing to eight seats, once again forming the Official Opposition, but failed to elect its leader. The Green Party of Prince Edward Island (Greens) picked up a single seat – its party leader winning that party's first ever in a PEI election (Table 1). The New Democratic Party of Prince Edward Island (NDP) did not win a seat, despite garnering slightly more votes island-wide than did the Greens.² This result was all the more disappointing for that party, considering that at one point in 2012, the NDP were outpolling the PCs.³ The surprise of the election may not have been the historic election of the leader of the Greens, but the fact that in District 5 (Vernon River-Stratford), a judicial recount found that Liberal cabinet minister Alan McIsaac and PC candidate Mary Ellen McInnis had each received 1173 votes.⁴

The Liberals were led by Wade MacLauchlan, the PCs by Robert Lantz, the Greens by Peter Bevan-Baker, and the NDP by Michael Redmond. At the time of the election call, none of the leaders held seats in the Legislative Assembly. For that matter, none ever had. Except for Bevan-Baker, none had even run in a provincial or federal campaign (PC leader Lantz had been a city councillor in Charlottetown, and MacLauchlan served on the North Shore Community

² Prior to the 2015 election, five parties on PEI enjoyed official status. The fifth was the Island Party, but it did not field any candidates in 2015 and is no longer so recognized (*Election Act*, sec. 24 (9) and sec. 29(11)(b)).

³ A CRA poll published in March 2012 gave the NDP a respectable 26 percent support amongst decided voters, versus just 16 percent for the PCs.

⁴ Note that PEI's 27 electoral districts average about 3,500 voters apiece.

Council). All four had become party leaders since the 2011 election. Only two won their seats: Liberal premier MacLauchlan and Green Party leader Bevan-Baker.

One hundred and five candidates ran in 2015, up from 103 in 2011 and 89 in 2007. All parties except the Greens ran a full slate (27). For the NDP, this was almost double the number (14) they had fielded in 2011. The Greens ran 24 candidates, two more than sought office in 2011. Thirty-one women ran in 2015, but only five were elected (Table 5).

Overview:

This was an election that combined a number of firsts, together with a healthy dose of accusations and looming scandals. Perhaps hoping to distract voters from these issues, the Liberals chose, by acclamation, an untried academic as their leader. The gamble paid off, allowing the incumbent party to turn back what turned out to be a rather tepid (if not timid) attack by the PC opposition. The Liberals did see their popular vote drop precipitously, from 51.4 percent in 2011 to 40.8 percent in 2015. This represents a drop of 4837 votes from 2011 (about six percent of votes cast), and is 9727 fewer votes than the Liberals received in 2007. The Liberal's loss of votes did not benefit the PCs, or did so only marginally. The PC vote total increased by 714 votes; however, the party lost vote share, garnering only 37.4 percent in 2015 compared to 40.2 percent in 2011. Meanwhile, both the Greens and the NDP saw a significant increase in their overall votes, each registering around 11 percent (Tables 2, 3 and 4). Voting turnout increased from 76.5 percent in 2011 to 82.1 percent in 2015.⁵

⁵ In 2015, PEI had 100,343 registered voters. Total vote count was 82,338. PEI regularly posts voting turnout in the 80 percent range. The highest recorded voting turnout for a PEI general election was in 1986, when 87.6% of registered voters cast ballots. The voting turnout for 2011 (76.5%) was a record low. Elections PEI voting statistics

Green Party leader Bevan-Baker received 2,077 votes (54.8%) in District 17 (Kellys Cross-Cumberland), 1,031 votes more than his rival, Liberal cabinet minister Valerie Docherty (27.6%), and a considerable improvement on his 2011 showing, at which time he received just 306 votes (9.4%). Still, as impressive as these numbers were, Bevan-Baker did not receive the most votes in the 2015 election. That distinction goes to PC incumbent James Aylward in District 6 (Stratford-Kinlock), who received 2,155 votes (50.3% of the total votes cast). Aylward was also a PC leadership candidate. Neither did Bevan-Baker receive the highest percentage of votes cast. Liberal candidate Sonny Gallant in District 24 (Evangeline-Miscouche) received an impressive 62.6% of the vote.⁶ Including Bevan-Baker's result, six candidates received over 50 percent of the votes cast.

MacLauchlan won 47.7% of the votes in his district, above the Liberal party's overall mean of 41.5% and median of 41.1%. Three Liberal candidates performed better than MacLauchlan. Leader Rob Lantz did win more votes in his district than his party's mean and median but a dozen fellow PC candidates out performed him in their own districts, even with four of them losing. Although NDP leader Mike Redmond earned more than double the votes of his party's mean and median, he was still bested by one candidate, Gord McNeilly, in Charlottetown. Green party leader Bevan Baker outpolled his Green colleagues by a significant margin, winning 54.8% compared to a party mean of 10 and median of 8.5. Interestingly, the next five highest vote percentages for Green candidates were in Charlottetown or a Charlottetown suburb.

go back to 1966.

⁶ Mind you, Gallant won with 77.2% of the vote in 2011.

Table 1: Party standings and election results: 2000 to 2015

	2000	at diss.	2003	at diss.	2007	at diss.	2011	at diss.	2015
PC ⁷	26	26	23	23	4	2*	5	3**	8
LIB	1	1	4	4	23	24	22	20†	18
GRN									1
IND								1**	

* One seat was vacant.

** Hal Perry, MLA for District 27 (Tignish - Palmer Road), crossed the floor to sit with the Liberals. Former PC leader Olive Crane was expelled from her caucus and sat as an Independent.

† Three seats were vacant: Premier Robert Ghiz resigned his seat on 24 February 2015 (his resignation as premier was effective 23 February 2015, the day Wade MacLauchlan was sworn in as premier); Finance Minister Wes Sheridan and Transport Minister Robert Vessey resigned their seats on 23 February 2015. The latter, who lives in the riding now represented by Premier Wade MacLauchlan, was appointed MacLauchlan's Chief of Staff.

Table 2: Party popular vote (% of votes cast): 2000 to 2015

	2000	2003	2007	2011	2015
PC	57.6%	54.0%	41.2%	40.2%	37.4%
LIB	33.6%	42.4%	52.7%	51.4%	40.8%
NDP	8.4%	3.0%	2%	3.2%	11.0%
GRN	DNR	DNR	3.0%	4.4%	10.8%
IP	DNR	DNR	DNR	0.9%	DNR
IND	DNR	DNR	0.7%	0.0%	DNR

⁷ PC = Progressive Conservative; LIB = Liberal; NDP = New Democratic Party; GRN = Green Party; IP = Island Party; IND = Independent; DNR = did not run.

Table 3: Party popular vote (% of eligible voters): 2011 vs. 2015

	2011 total vote	% of elig. voters	2015 total vote	% of elig. voters
PC	29,950	30.6%	30664	32.1%
LIB	38,315	39.1%	33,478	35.1%
NDP	2,355	2.4%	8,997	9.4%
GRN	3,254	3.3%	8,850	9.3%
IP	682	0.7%	DNR	---
IND	15	0.0%	DNR	---
Total valid votes	74,576	76.5%	81989	85.9%
Eligible voters	97,967	100%	95,444	100%

Table 4: Gains and losses, Liberal and Progressive Conservatives compared to combined NDP / Green vote (percentage of eligible voters)

Year	2007	2011	2015
LIB	44.2%	39.1%	35.1%
PC	34.5%	30.6%	32.1%
NDP/GRN	6.2%	7.8%	20.85

The Players:

Liberal leader Wade MacLauchlan had spent his entire career in academia, culminating with a twelve-year (1999-2011) term as president of the University of Prince Edward Island. Before returning to the province of his birth, MacLauchlan had served as dean of the University Of New Brunswick School Of Law. Robert Lantz led the PCs in the 2015 election. A programmer and project manager for software company *DeltaWare*, Lantz previously served two terms as a councillor in Charlottetown. Peter Bevan-Baker, a popular dentist on Prince Edward Island, was acclaimed leader of the Greens in November, 2012. He was the only leader of any of the provincial parties who had run in an election above the municipal level.⁸ NDP leader Mike Redmond won the leadership of his party on 13 October 2012. Redmond, whose background is in coaching and physical education, works as a facility director for the Charlottetown Community Centre.

Not surprisingly, MacLauchlan won his seat easily. MacLauchlan ran in District 9 (York-Oyster Bed), which includes Stanhope where he was born and where the MacLauchlan family has deep roots. MacLauchlan won the seat with 48 percent of the vote, 600 votes more than PC candidate, Jim Carragher. Lantz did not win his seat, although he came close. He lost to Liberal candidate Jordan Brown, but only by 22 votes (after judicial recount). Although Lantz ran in his home riding, District 13 (Charlottetown-Brighton) had been represented by Robert Ghiz, PEI's Liberal premier from 2007 to 2015. On the other hand, the riding (with slightly different boundaries) had been represented by Lantz's brother in 2000. Mike Redmond did not fare as well

⁸ Before moving to PEI, Bevan-Baker had run several times in Ontario (Leeds-Grenville). In PEI, he had run provincially in 2007 – the first year the Greens fielded candidates in a PEI provincial election – and again in 2011. He also ran federally in 2008 and 2011 (Malpeque).

as the other leaders, finishing third behind PC candidate Andrew Daggett in District 3 (Montague-Kilmuir) with 585 votes (23.1%). Liberal incumbent and cabinet minister Allen Roach won District 3 with 42% of the vote. The best showing for the NDP was in District 14 (Charlottetown-Lewis Point), where Gord McNeilly came second to Liberal incumbent Kathleen Casey. McNeilly received 31 percent of the vote to Casey's 34 percent. Green Party leader Peter Bevan-Baker's victory is described above.

Women in PEI Politics:

Thirty-one women ran in 2015, one more than ran in 2011 (Table 5). The Greens and NDP ran nine female candidates each, while the Liberals ran seven and the PCs six. Five women were elected: four Liberals and one PC. Twenty ridings had at least one female candidate. Women received 31 percent of the votes cast in ridings with female candidates and 23 percent overall.

Table 5: Female candidates 2011-2015

# candidates		# female candidates		% female candidates		# successful female candidates		% successful female candidates	
2011	2015	2011	2015	2011	2015	2011	2015	2011	2015
22	22	13	9	59%	41%	0	0	0	0
27	27	6	7	22%	26%	5	4	83%	57%
12	DN R	0	DN R	0	DN R	0	DN R	0	DN R
14	24	6	9	43%	38%	0	0	0	0
27	27	7	5	26%	19%	1	1	14%	20%
103	105	32	31	31%	30%	6	5	19%	16%

Background:

The Liberals and the PCs entered the 2015 election campaign carrying heavy and familiar baggage, which had been laid on both parties back in the previous campaign. During the 2011 campaign, allegations were made that the Liberal government, or people close to the Liberal government, had manipulated the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) – specifically one of its

sub-programs, the Immigrant Partner Program – for personal gain.⁹ The Liberals managed to fend off the attacks in 2011, primarily because the PCs overplayed their hand.¹⁰ Yet the story did not die, and over the next few years rumours persisted that a financial scandal of considerable proportions was being covered up. Then new allegations surfaced, claiming that the investment branch of the government, Finance PEI, was lending money to friends and supporters of the Liberal government, and that these loans were then being “written off” (that is, not required to be repaid).¹¹ Finally, the surprise resignation of Premier Robert Ghiz on 13 November 2014, the day after the Speech from the Throne, was followed by a series of accusations that the Liberal government was complicit in a questionable scheme to set up a server farm on a First Nation’s reserve in order to operate an “e-Gaming” (online gambling) enterprise.¹² The idea was to circumvent Federal anti-gambling laws, which prohibit provinces from operating gambling operations accessible to customers outside the province. Such laws do not apply to First Nations reserves (or such was the contested claim). Particularly damaging was a scathing attack on the Ghiz government by *Globe and Mail* journalists Robyn Doolittle and Jane Taber, which appeared the Friday the PC Party met to choose its new leader (27 February 2015). No one

⁹ According to the Auditor General’s report (AG PEI 2009 Report to Legislative Assembly), the PNP provided \$120 million to the PEI economy over a two-year period. The AG reported that: “There were a number of elected officials and senior government officials who had ownership in corporations that received investment capital under the Program. The question of conflict of interest in these situations has been raised” (15).

¹⁰ See Peter McKenna and Don Desserud, “The 2011 Provincial Election in Prince Edward Island,” *Canadian Political Science Review*, 7 (2013): 65-71 . “Primarily” might be too strong a word. The PCs had been rejected in 2007, and their popularity had not improved by 2011.

¹¹ See Teresa Wright, “Ending with a bang: Concern raised over bill aimed at increasing transparency over loan write-offs,” *The Guardian*, 3 December 2015, A1.

¹² See Teresa Wright, “E-gaming accusations hurled,” *The Guardian*, 2 December 2015, A3, and Editorial, “Egaming fallout keeps piling up on government,” *The Guardian*, 21 November 2015, A6.

believed that the timing was coincidental. The following is a representative quotation:

Even those close to power got in on the gold rush. A Charlottetown lawyer – one of then-premier Robert Ghiz’s close confidants – invested \$10,000, then later advised the government during a phase of the proposed deal. PEI’s conflict of interest commissioner put in \$15,000. The premier’s chief of staff also had an interest: Records show his wife invested in a dormant shell company that CMT was trying to buy.¹³

Meanwhile, the PC Party struggled with its own baggage. Olive Crane’s tenure as leader had been anything but a happy one, and some party members blamed her for the party’s poor showing in 2011. They believed she mismanaged the campaign, and more to the point, misfired the “weapon” the party had been handed with the PNP accusations. Crane responded by arguing that the 2011 defeat was hardly her fault: governments in PEI are not defeated after just one term. Besides, under her leadership the party had gained a seat. Nevertheless, pressure to resign mounted, which she eventually did. However, she did not go quietly. First, she offered to resign as party leader, but said she would keep her position as Leader of the Official Opposition. When this failed to satisfy her critics, she resigned both positions, but not before ensuring that Hal Perry (MLA for District 27) took her place as Opposition Leader, a position he assumed on 30 January 2013. This would not in itself been unusual, except that Steve Myers (MLA for District 2; Georgetown-St.Peters) was declared interim leader of the PC Party the next day. For the next week and a half, the PCs had both a party leader and the Leader of the Opposition sitting as

¹³Robyn Doolittle and Jane Taber, “Small island, big bet: How PEI lost its online gambling gamble,” *The Globe and Mail*, Friday, Feb. 27 2015 (www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/small-island-big-bet-how-pei-lost-its-online-gambling-gamble/article23237214/). Capital Markets Technologies is a U.S.-based e-commerce company allegedly involved in the scheme. None of these allegations have been proven. See “Allegations in \$25M e-gaming lawsuit denied by P.E.I. government: Capital Market Technologies claims P.E.I.’s breach of good faith cost it millions,” *CBC News*, 9 Apr 2015 (www.cbc.ca/news/canada/prince-edward-island/allegations-in-25m-e-gaming-lawsuit-denied-by-p-e-i-government-1.302684); Kerry Campbell, “P.E.I. Supreme Court tosses out \$25M e-gaming lawsuit against province,” *CBC News*, 4 February 2016 (www.cbc.ca/news/canada/prince-edward-island/pei-egaming-lawsuit-tossed-out-1.3433640).

MLAs.

Perry did step aside from his position as Opposition Leader (11 February 2013), which allowed Myers to consolidate both roles. The internal difficulties this conflict created did not become apparent until later that year, when Perry crossed the floor (13 October 2013) to sit with the Liberals. Shortly after, Crane was ousted from her caucus, ostensibly because she publically criticized her party for the manner in which it handled Perry and his complaints. However, rumours circulated that Crane had also offered to cross the floor, but had been rebuffed by the Liberals.

This is the context into which both Wade MacLauchlan and Robert Lantz entered their respective leadership contests. Wade MacLauchlan positioned himself as a disinterested academic with an impressive track record as a former university president. That he had no “political experience” was presented as a plus. This meant that he had no political baggage either, and so owed favours to no one. He was not present when the various scandals directed against the previous Liberal administration were to have taken place; he wasn’t even involved in politics then. MacLauchlan was also fond of repeating the line “Obviously, I don’t need the job.” By this he did not mean that he wasn’t interested in the job (one assumes), but that as an independently wealthy and retired university president, he was not in the campaign for personal gain. Needless to say, this was a risky strategy, because implicit in that statement was the assumption that his Liberal predecessors were indeed “in it for themselves.” Indeed, the crux of the accusations made against the previous Liberal administration was that key members of the government, or people close to the government, profited personally from such schemes as the PNP or the e-Gambling fiasco. It was telling that the entire cabinet immediately fell in line

behind MacLauchlan when he announced he was seeking the Liberal leadership. Apparently, no minister wanted to run on the Liberal government record; all thought (or hoped) that MacLauchlan would convince voters that this was a “new” Liberal party.

Robert Lantz also offered himself as a new leader capable of making a fresh start. The PCs had slated their leadership convention for the end of May 2015, counting on PEI’s fixed election date to be respected (the election was supposed to be held on 5 October 2015). But they did not count on Robert Ghiz resigning in November, nor did they expect MacLauchlan to be crowned leader. When MacLauchlan made it clear that he would not wait until the autumn to hold an election,¹⁴ the PCs had to scramble to organize a convention. Under the circumstances, the party did extremely well with three highly credible candidates contesting the position. So unlike MacLauchlan, Lantz faced two opponents for the PC leadership: James Aylward, the MLA for District 6, and Darlene Compton. Compton was not a sitting MLA, but she had come just eight votes shy of winning her riding in 2011 (District 4: Belfast - Murray River).

Compton was seen as the outsider, someone untainted by the problems that had bedeviled the party since 2011. Aylward was stigmatized (at least by his opponents) as too close to the infighting that had led to Crane’s resignation and Perry’s floor crossing. On the other hand, he was the only sitting member of the three, and obviously had the most legislative experience. Like Compton, Lantz was also positioned as an outsider, but his opponents quickly characterized him as a “Brighton boy,” which in PEI is the equivalent of calling a Montreal politician a Westmount candidate, or criticizing a Toronto politician because she was from Rosedale. As well, Lantz’s

¹⁴ Understandable, given that MacLauchlan did not hold a seat.

opponents (including interested Liberals closely watching the race) claimed that he was anything but an outsider, and was in fact beholden to the “backroom boys,” that mysterious group of PC power brokers attributed with, among other things, the ousting of Olive Crane.

The PCs used a modified primary system to choose their new leader. PC party members were able to cast preferential ballots in advance polls on the two Saturdays leading up to the February 28th leadership convention. Mail-in ballots were also used.¹⁵ The results of these ballots, around 2300, were then added to those cast by the 700 delegates who attended the convention, held at the UPEI gymnasium over the last weekend in February (2015). Although the party declined to release the actual vote tallies, local media reported that Compton finished third, and was therefore eliminated. After calculating the preferences indicated on Compton’s ballots, Lantz was declared the winner, narrowly beating Aylward. The PCs then quickly moved into election campaign mode.¹⁶

The Campaign:

The unusual number of “unknowns” preceding this election campaign should have meant that all bets were off as to which party would win, or more precisely, which of the Liberals or the PCs would win. But pre-election polls gave the Liberals a commanding lead. Of course, these polls were taken before the PCs chose their new leader, but even after that event, the PCs still trailed. The polls taken over the course of the campaign suggest that while the Liberals did indeed lose support, that loss of support was distributed among the other three parties, with the PCs and

¹⁵ PC Party of PEI, *Advance Polls* (13 February 2015) <http://www.peipc.ca/news/ADVANCE-POLLS/no/10>

¹⁶ Unsigned editorial, “Vote secrecy unnecessary in PC Party leadership convention,” *The Guardian*, 6 March 2015, A6.

Greens making the biggest gains in the final two weeks of the campaign (Table 6).

Table 6: Opinion polls (percentage of decided voters)

		Liberal	PC	Green	NDP
Polling Firm	Date				
<i>Election</i>	4 May	41	37	11	11
<i>CRA</i>	23 April ¹	44	35	6	15
<i>Abingdon</i>	20 April ¹	43	27	12	18
<i>CRA</i>	28 February ²	58	26	4	12
<i>CRA</i>	25 Nov 2014 ³	50	23	11	15

¹The election was called on 6 April 2015.

²Wade MacLauchlan was acclaimed leader of the Liberal Party 21 February 2015, and formally sworn in as premier 23 February 2015; Rob Lantz was elected PC leader February 28 (hence respondents to this poll would not have known the final result of the PC leadership contest).

³On 13 November 2014, Robert Ghiz announced that he would resign as soon as a new leader was chosen.

Leaders' Debates: Two all-party leaders' debates were held, both televised. The first, sponsored by the *CBC*, was held April 27th, while the second, sponsored by *The Guardian* and *Eastlink*, was held April 30th. Both the Green and NDP leaders were invited to participate in the debate, even though neither party had a seat, and in the case of the Green party, had never held a seat. However, lessons learned from the 2011 campaign were in place. Then, the PC leader refused to participate in a debate if the other parties (including the Island Party) were not

Canadian Political Science Review Vol. 10 No. 1 2016 July-December: 31-57.

included.¹⁷ This time around, the question did not arise. Bevan-Baker, who was roundly praised for his strong performance during the debates, was able to use this opportunity to his advantage. Polls taken prior to the debate had the Greens at just 6%, up from 4% on February 28th, but their final vote tally put them at 11%, a significant increase.

Advance polling: Three advance polls were held. The first on April 25th (a Saturday), the second on April 27th (a Monday), and the third on May 1st (the Friday immediately before the regular polling day). Given their organizational advantages, both the Liberals and the PCs took full advantage of these polls by ensuring that their supporters were identified and ensured easy access to the polling stations as needed. Remarkably, the Liberals achieved 40.9% of their overall vote count in the advance polls. The PCs were close behind, garnering 38.8% of their overall vote count. The Greens and NDP did well, but were far behind with just 22.0% and 29.3% respectively.

Advertising: Campaign advertising is a low-key affair on Prince Edward Island.¹⁸ Fliers, lawn signs, and billboards constitute most of election advertising, and parties tend to be reluctant to exploit radio or television, much less social media, to deliver their message. There are some signs that this is changing; nevertheless, those 2015 advertisements that did embrace modern technology proved to be ineffective.

Liberal campaign ads: The Liberal advertisements stressed MacLauchlan's leadership

¹⁷ **Error! Main Document Only.**Kevin Bissett, "PEI Tory leader boycotts CBC debate on principle, is it a lost opportunity?" *Globe and Mail*, 18 Sep 2011 (www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/pei-tory-leader-boycotts-cbc-debate-on-principle-is-it-a-lost-opportunity/article600776).

¹⁸ Alex Marland, "Going Negative: Campaigning in Canadian Provinces," *Canadian Political Science Review*, 9 (2007): 14-27 (22-23).

skills and his personal integrity, and were linked to the hashtag “ibelieveinwade.” “Non-partisan” Islanders testified that, because of MacLauchlan’s leadership, they once again believed in PEI and were once again engaged in the political process. The advertisements did not mention the previous Liberal government. Some did not even mention the Liberal Party, not until the end when they provided the obligatory statement as to the advertisement’s authorization.¹⁹

PC campaign ads: The PC advertisements were innovative, effective, and even funny, at least at the start. Oddly, the party seemed to lose its nerve, and soon backed away from their strategy for the rest of their campaign. Two examples stand out, both using digital media. One was a cheesy, but nevertheless clever attempt to capitalize on the fact that neighbouring Nova Scotia had announced the end to its film subsidy program.²⁰ Could PEI attract displaced Nova Scotian film companies were it to bring in a film and digital media tax credit program of its own? Capitalizing on the fact that the election was scheduled for May the Fourth, the iconic Star Wars appreciation day, this video showed an enterprising PEI film company attempting to film a Star Wars episode (no doubt to the dismay of the Disney corporation), only to have its poorly-paid actors leave the set in frustration. Rob Lantz and his tax credit proposal arrives in the nick of time to save the day. Originally, the advertisement obscured the official PC authorization, which drew a rebuke from Elections PEI. This was quickly changed.

The second PC advertisement comprised an integrated attack on what the PCs claimed was serious financial impropriety on behalf of the incumbent Liberals. A series of radio, television and newspaper advertisements, all anchored by a website that carefully documented

¹⁹ A typical example can be found at www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Ovk9SZ5qJo.

²⁰ www.youtube.com/watch?v=8JNIEyFR2io

these charges, accused the Liberals of a number of scandals, ranging from the previously mentioned e-gaming and PNP issues, to ministers charging airplane headphones on their government credit cards. The anchoring website, titled “Where did your money go,”²¹ sported a stark red banner with categories such as e-gaming, write-offs, debt, HST, PNP, and so on. At the bottom of the page, in faint purple text, was the attribution: Authorized by the Official Agent, PC Party of PEI.

The Liberals quickly labeled these advertisements as examples of “bullying” and “attack ads.”²² A *Guardian* editorial agreed, warning the PCs that they “must be careful not to disillusion voters any more than necessary. Mud tends to stick on all politicians.”²³ The PCs quickly retreated.

Other parties: The Greens and NDP employed a much more modest campaign strategy. Smaller parties in PEI are seriously disadvantaged by voter subsidy provisions, not to mention general difficulties facing small parties in a small province trying to raise funds. For the most part, these two parties stuck to traditional campaign techniques: fliers, some signage, and a lot of door-to-door campaigning.

²¹ www.wheredidyourmoneygo.ca/

²² Teresa Wright, “MacLauchlan calls on PCs to stop using attack ads,” *The Guardian*, 15 April 2015, www.theguardian.pe.ca/Decision-15/2015-04-15/article-4112584/MacLauchlan-calls-on-PCs-to-stop-using-attack-ads/1

²³ “Negative political ads can be effective in right measure,” *The Guardian*, 15 April 2015, <http://www.theguardian.pe.ca/Opinion/Editorials/2015-04-15/article-4112341/Negative-political-ads-can-be-effective-in-right-measure/1>. The unnamed political scientist mentioned in the editorial was Desserud, co-author of this article. Interviewed on the question, Desserud acknowledged that the PCs’ advertisements did fall under the definition of an attack ad: they did, after all, attack the government. However, they were not personal, negative attack ads, such as have become common place in US politics, or like those which were being used against Justin Trudeau by the Conservative Party of Canada leading up to the 2015 federal election. This nuance was not included in the editorial.

Canadian Political Science Review Vol. 10 No. 1 2016 July-December: 31-57.

Campaign spending: Campaign spending is now limited to \$1.17 million per party. Only the Liberals came close to that number, spending a total of \$918,891. Indeed, the Liberals spent more money than all the other parties combined. Eighty-six percent (\$797,023) of its budget was spent on advertising. In contrast, the PCs spent a total of \$559,256, half of which was devoted to advertising.

The NDP and the Greens had rather modest campaign budgets, although in relative terms, the NDP's budget of \$67,847 represented a whopping 256 percent increase over their 2011 expenditures. The NDP now accept corporate donations, and this added considerably to their campaign coffers. The Greens spent the least amount of money: just \$26,128. Most of this landed in leader Peter Bevan-Baker's riding, a gamble that obviously paid off.²⁴

Parties in Prince Edward Island do receive a voter-based subsidy. For the 2015 election, this resulted in the Liberals and PCs receiving the maximum of \$80,986 each, while the NDP received \$11,357 and the Greens \$11,474.

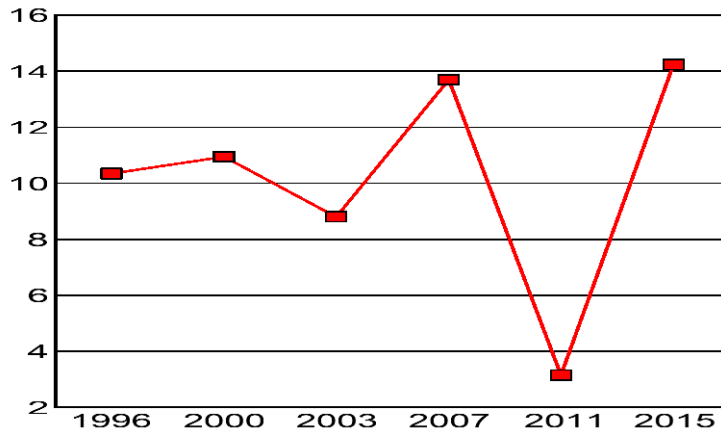
Analysis of the Vote:

Volatility: The 2015 election was the most volatile in the last ten years, primarily on the strength of the drop in votes experienced by the Liberals, and the modest success of the Greens and NDP. Note that the previous volatility high mark was reached in 2007, when the Liberals defeated the incumbent PCs. That the high level of volatility in 2015 coincided with a victory should be regarded by the incumbent Liberals with some concern (Chart 1). It suggests that, despite the party's success, PEI voters are reconsidering their support of the Liberal party.

²⁴ Elections PEI, *Political Party Expenses for 2015 Provincial General Election*. www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/elec_partyexp15.pdf.

Chart 1: Electoral volatility, 1996-2015

Rural and urban vote: There was little significant difference between rural and urban voting preferences.²⁵ Rural Islanders backed the Greens and NDP with 9.2% and 10.1% respectively while the Liberals garnered 42.3% and the PCs 38.4%. Urban voters supported the non-mainstream parties more than their rural counterparts – but not by much. The Greens picked up 12.1% of all urban votes and the NDP 13.1%; this is in contrast to the Liberals with 40.1% and the PCs 34.7%. The support for the Greens across rural districts can likely be explained by the prominence of new, small-scale organic farmers in recent years; thus giving the Greens small pockets of support in areas that in the past would not likely have entertained supporting a party



perceived to be more urban, or perhaps suburban, rather than rural.

Recounts: An unusual result took place in District 5. For only the second time in PEI electoral history, one riding contest ended in a tie.²⁶ On election night, Liberal Minister Alan McIsaac

²⁵ It is useful to keep in mind that PEI does not have any large urban centres. Its largest city is the capital, Charlottetown, which has a population of just 35,000. The Greater Charlottetown Area has a population of about 60,000.

²⁶ The first was in 1904. In that election, Liberal premier Arthur Peters tied with Conservative Harvey McEwan for

believed he had won his riding, but by just two votes over PC candidate Mary Ellen McInnis. Not surprisingly, McInnis requested a judicial recount.²⁷ The recount found that one ballot was wrongly credited to McIsaac and should have been counted for McInnis. This meant the official result was a tie. Under the PEI Election Act, a tie is broken by the District Returning Officer, who decides by flipping a coin under the supervision of the judge. The fact that this regulation, although rarely used, is basically the same system used in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario, or for that matter in the United Kingdom, was lost by the national media who jumped on the story as yet another example of PEI's archaic quaintness.²⁸ Nevertheless, the Chief Electoral Officer is recommending that the province adopt a by-election procedure to deal with such contingencies in the future.²⁹

A recount was also held in District 13, the seat contested by Robert Lantz. This recount confirmed Liberal Jordan Brown as victor, by 22 votes rather than the original 24.

an Assemblyman seat in 2nd Kings. A by-election was called to resolve the tie, but McEwan declined to run, so Peters won by acclamation. In 1959, two candidates in 5th Kings were thought to be tied on election night, but the recount rejected one ballot (it had been filled out in pen, not with the supplied and required pencil), resulting in a one-vote margin for the victor.

²⁷ There are no provisions for automatic recounts in PEI: only candidates can request recounts. However, the Chief Electoral Officer is recommending that the District Returning Officer be empowered to request a recount if s/he deems the results close enough to warrant such a review. As well, the CEO is recommending that the amount of deposit required for a candidate to initiate a challenge be revised from the current amount of \$600 to \$2000. The \$600 amount was set in 1910.

²⁸ The headline for *National Post* reporter Tristin Hopper's article on the coin toss read: "Most provinces hold a by-election when voting ends in a tie. Not P.E.I. — they flip a coin!" (*National Post*, 19 May 2015). A headline reading "Just over half of provinces hold a by-election when voting ends in a tie" would not have been as attention grabbing.

²⁹ See Recommendation number 31, *Report of the Chief Electoral Officer for the Provincial General Election May 4 2015*.

Aftermath:

The failure of its leader to win his seat was a severe blow to the PCs, who had great expectations coming into this election. Lantz did not resign immediately, and in fact claimed he would stay on as leader and fight the next election. This claim may not have been a serious one. In all likelihood, the party simply wanted time to reconsider their options before the predictable mayhem of a contested leadership took place. In any case, Lantz did resign four months later (23 September 2015) and Jamie Fox, MLA for District 19 (Borden-Kinkora), was appointed interim leader 15 October 2015. The party has yet to set a date for a leadership convention.

The NDP were bitterly disappointed by the election results, especially given that their party actually received more votes than the Greens, yet failed to win a seat. At the time of writing (June 2016) party leader Mike Redmond has not indicated whether he will stay on. Clearly, the success of Bevan-Baker means that the Green Party will not be looking to change its leadership. Bevan-Baker's challenge is to translate his personal popularity into support for his party and candidates across PEI.

The Liberal government has already undertaken a Cabinet shuffle, and did so just eight months into their new term. In January 2016, Education Minister (and former PC floor crosser) Hal Perry was removed from Cabinet over what was widely seen as his poor handling, in the media and the Legislature, over the government's decisions to cut teaching positions.³⁰ A big question mark for the Liberals is Wade MacLauchlan's plans to reoffer in 2019. The Liberal leader has already indicated that he wants a second term in government in what would be a

³⁰ The decision to cut teaching positions was eventually rescinded in the face of public backlash. See: www.cbc.ca/news/canada/prince-edward-island/pei-premier-announcement-1.3393240.

fourth attempt by that party to form a consecutive, majority government – if successful, the first in nearly four decades. The challenge will be for MacLauchlan to convince both his caucus and voters that he still represents a fresh approach to government.

Finally, the much-anticipated Auditor-General's report on the e-gaming controversy was released on 5 October 2016. The report highlighted the previous government's "lack of due regard for transparency and accountability." The report provided 15 recommendations, all of which the MacLauchlan government says it will implement.³¹

Conclusion:

The Liberals have some cause for concern. This is the second election in a row that the party has seen its overall vote total drop. The incremental increase in voter support for non-traditional parties like the Greens and the NDP indicate a growing voter volatility that stands to lessen the Liberal's chances at another majority government. There is a sense that voters in PEI are choosing the lesser of evils: they are not enthusiastic about either of the two main parties, the Liberals or the PCs. While they are not yet willing to fully embrace the alternative parties, a significant number of them are having a look.

In November (2016), the province held a non-binding plebiscite on electoral reform. Using a preferential ballot, Islanders were able to choose from five electoral models.³² Two aspects of this plebiscite are of particular interest. First, sixteen and seventeen-year-old Islanders

³¹ **Error! Main Document Only.** *Report of the Auditor General of Prince Edward Island*, Special Assignment: Government Involvement with the E-gaming Initiative and Financial Services Platform, 2016.

³² Special Committee on Democratic Renewal. Recommendations in Response to the White Paper on Democratic Renewal. See: www.assembly.pe.ca/sittings/2016spring/reports/23_1_2016-15-04-report.pdf.

were eligible to vote.³³ Second, one option, labeled "plus leaders," would have assigned a seat to a party leader, but not a constituency, if that leader's party received at least 10% of the popular vote, thus expanding the legislature. Outside of the current single-member plurality ("first-past-the-post") system, each of the other models carried with it a different electoral calculation on the part of both voters and parties.³⁴

Although the Mixed Member Proportional option won (52.4%, after four rounds of calculating the preferential vote), the MacLauchlan government immediately declared the results "unclear." The turnout was only 37%, less than half of what would be a normal turnout for a provincial election in PEI.³⁵ However, the Government has said that it would include a "binding referendum" question on the ballot for the next provincial election (2019), in which Islanders would be asked to choose between the MMP system and a second choice, to be determined (but likely the status quo).

Economic challenges remain. The 2016 Budget was tabled 19 April, and it revealed that the province will continue to run a deficit, meaning the province has done so now for nine consecutive budgets. Spending was increased by 3.3%, primarily in health and education.³⁶ In tandem with the economy are demographic challenges; while PEI's population has grown overall, it has largely been the result of immigration. Nevertheless, immigration has not been able to reverse the trend towards an increasingly aged population. More and more young people

³³ It is hoped that this way young Islanders, who will be eligible to vote in 2019 election, will be engaged in the electoral process now.

³⁴ Kevin Yarr, "Electoral reform: What the P.E.I. legislature might have looked like," *CBC News*, 26 April 2016. See: www.cbc.ca/news/canada/prince-edward-island/pei-electoral-reform-projections

³⁵ The 2005 plebiscite, which rejected the Mixed Member Proportional option, had a 33% turnout. See Peter **Error! Main Document Only**. McKenna, "Opting out of Electoral Reform: Why PEI Chose the Status Quo," *Policy Options*, June (2006): 58-61.

³⁶ Kevin Yarr, "P.E.I budget misses balanced target in 2016-17," *CBC News*, 19 April 2016. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/prince-edward-island/pei-budget-deficit-1.3543243>

Canadian Political Science Review Vol. 10 No. 1 2016 July-December: 31-57.

are leaving for work elsewhere in the country, which is putting a severe strain on the health services. The Liberal government has now increased the province's HST tax rate from 14% to 15% to align with changes in the other Maritime provinces, a move that the opposition parties immediately declared as an example of yet another broken campaign promise.