

A Compass That Points Only Left

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I would like to register my complaint—in the strongest possible terms—to the CBC’s “Vote Compass” page, which I viewed recently during the Alberta provincial election. It is unconscionable that the taxpayer-funded CBC should purport to be serving voters while using its image of “unbiased” election coverage to herd voters into its own narrow selection of choices.

Firstly and most importantly, in the Alberta election just concluded, CBC offered voters only choices and information related to six of the registered parties and leaders involved in the election. There were nine registered parties running candidates but you’d never have known it by visiting “Vote Compass”. To pretend to be giving voters reliable information while leaving one third of the registered parties out of the discussion was nothing short of deceptive. For voters who actually accepted CBC’s advice and gave their vote to one of the six parties without even being aware of the other parties or the candidates running for them, this so-called “compass” actually may have led them away from choices they might otherwise have made. In this way, of course, it constituted a political contribution to each of the six parties which it did include.

Secondly, by asking a series of leading questions, biased in their wording, this “compass” subtly encouraged those who answered the simplistic multiple-choice questions to identify with parties on the so-called left wing of the spectrum. This is the kind of ploy used by advertisers and perhaps by the marketing gurus of various political stripes. It should not be the modus operandi of a news service paid for by all taxpayers of every political persuasion.

Thirdly, it is a clumsy political tool. The questions themselves revealed more about the collaborators behind “Vote Compass” than about the character and integrity of the party leaders. Of course, it didn’t even touch on the personal values, skills or ideas of local candidates, nor could it. However, intelligent voters have always weighed the personality, experience and passion of local candidates and—in a free society—should continue to do so. Voters who expected the CBC “Vote Compass” to tell them how to vote may have gotten more than they bargained for and, but the distortion of the political process, hurt all Albertans and, in the end, will work against the best interests of all Canadians.

Candidates, voters and political parties need to be protected from charlatans who—entrusted with power and influence—use that power to control information. We need a media ombudsman who will hold press and broadcast entities accountable for deceptive and misleading reporting, polling and gimmicks like “Vote Compass”. If purporting to report on candidates, all candidates and all parties should be represented. To exclude smaller parties and less-well-known candidates is to assume that small things can never get big or that ideas once scorned can never gain acceptance. The NDP in Alberta are evidence to the contrary.

Today, I write because of this distortion of process that was at work during the Alberta election; but in a few short months Canadians across the country, including Albertans, will be voting in a federal election. CBC's simplistic, cookie-cutter, "one size fits all" approach must not be allowed to narrow the field to its own small selection of chosen parties. There are 17 registered federal political parties and the CBC has not been given a mandate to pick winners and losers. Let the voters do that and give them all the information they need so that they can do so intelligently. The CHP believes there should be a level playing field for all candidates and political parties. Ideas should not be blocked by the electoral process. News agencies—especially those funded by the taxpayer—must not selectively cover elections and twist the process to suit themselves. We need a media ombudsman during elections, who is required to respond within 48 hours to unfair electoral practices. This would ensure that unfair practices are stopped quickly and therefore level the playing field for all parties and for Canadians.

The Christian Heritage Party has ideas to offer Canadians. For more of our ideas visit www.chp.ca

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