

## РЕЦЕНЗІЇ

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UPDATED SECOND EDITION! INCLUDES THE FIRST FULL ACCOUNT  
OF HOW JUSTIN TRUDEAU WON THE 2015 FEDERAL ELECTION



## SHOPPING FOR VOTES



HOW POLITICIANS CHOOSE US  
AND WE CHOOSE THEM



SUSAN DELACOURT

**Delacourt S.**  
**Shopping for Votes: How Politicians Choose Us and We Choose Them.** Douglas and McIntyre Limited, 2016. XIV, 362 p.

In the final week of Canada's 2015 election, Conservative leader Stephen Harper and Liberal leader Justin Trudeau were conducting two very different styles of campaigns. Harper, in keeping with his decade-long pitch to consumers' pocket-books, was talking 10 Canadians who voted with their wallets. At stop after stop, he tried to persuade his audiences that Trudeau and his Liberals would take hard-earned money out of the pockets of Canadian taxpayers. Standing in front of a bright red sign emblazoned with the warning "The Cost of Liberal Tax Hikes", Harper counted out dollar bills to the old-fashioned chime of a cash-register bell.

The first original edition of this reviewing book came out in 2013, once after Justin Trudeau won the leadership of the Liberal Party of Canada and around the same time that Stephen Harper's Conservative government was unveiling a Throne Speech dedicated to Canadians. Those two events helped set the stage for an important political shift

two years later – an election that Trudeau and his Liberals handily won. Many of the same Canadians who had been wooed for a decade with Harper's extremely effective, consumer-targeted politics flocked to a very different product in the political marketplace.

In a new paperback edition of 2016, featuring all-new materials and interviews from the 2015 election campaign, a few more mileposts have been recorded on the long journey that Canadian politics has taken in tandem with marketing and advertising trends.

"Shopping for Votes" was originally written by Susan Delacourt as a result of a search for a new metaphor. In over twenty years covering federal politics in Canada, she had run out of ways to tell readers how political life resembled the world outside the Ottawa "bubble". Once, it was easy one to tell her readers that politics was like a courtroom or a university classroom. The architectural edifices of their institutions, in all their solemn grandeur, are certainly similar. But as time wore on, it was increasingly difficult for Susan to argue that the political players were in pursuit of higher knowledge or a considered judgment.

For a while it worked to think of Parliament as one big workplace, or political parties as families. Then those metaphors fell short as well. Where, besides the most dysfunctional offices or families,

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could people yell past each other all the time? Sports and theatre comparisons ran their course, too. Enough with knockout punches and performance critiques.

“Shopping for Votes”, like many others’ books in this genre, started to recognize the creep of shopping language into the political marketplace: brands, products, selling and buying. It was also hard not to notice that the parties paying the most attention to marketing trends were more successful than those resisting marketing’s influence on politics. The politicians who were speaking in shopping language were clearly winning. So one could decide to try to unravel this comparison, to see where it started and yes, to see what price we were paying for mixing consumerism with democracy.

Like the original edition of “Shopping for Votes”, what readers will get in this book is more of a story than a study. As much as politicians love to use marketing language, they also love to talk about the need for a “narrative”. Here, then, is a new and updated narrative for how we look at political culture in Canada.

Delacourt’s book lays bare disturbing reality of modern politics. The obsession with marketing treating politicians and election promises as products, like tubes of toothpaste has hollowed out the soul of democratic discourse. No wonder increasing numbers of voters are staying home. When politicians treat citizens like gullible consumers, voters get turned off. Rescuing democracy from politics will start with reading this book. A revelation of how political marketing works with ace investigative research and insight, Susan Delacourt lays bare the history and machinations of the branding, niche market, intuition, and gut feeling approach to viewing voters as consumers. Her unfolding of this troubling evolution in Canadian politics is rendered in clear prose, and her judgments are based in reasoned argument. “Shopping for Votes” is a must for anyone concerned about informed consensus and a democratic national vision for Canada. Susan Delacourt’s “Shopping for Votes” is the most important book written on the changing nature of Canadian politics in the XXI’th century.

Inside the political backrooms of Ottawa, the making men of Canadian politics are planning their next consumer-friendly pitch. Where once politics was seen as a public service, increasingly it’s seen as a business, with citizens as the customers. But its unadvertised products can be voter apathy and gutless public policy.

Susan Delacourt takes readers into the world of Canada’s top political marketers from the 1950’s to the 2015 federal election, explaining how parties slice and dice their platforms for different audiences and how they manage the media. Provocative, incisive, entertaining and refreshingly non-partisan, “Shopping for Votes” offers a narrative for understanding political culture in Canada.

This revised edition includes the account of how Justin Trudeau and his Liberals played and won the marketing game of the 2015 election, featuring behind-the-scenes interviews with the new prime minister and his team.

Susan Delacourt has also pulled the themes together in an excellently researched book that widens our understanding and deepens the depression about contemporary politics – which offers, after all, a rough mirror of who Canadians are.