

Opinion polls indicate Canada's elections to end in hung parliament

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With the campaign for Canada's Monday, October 21 federal election in its final days, opinion polls strongly suggest that no party will win a parliamentary majority.

The governing Liberals and the Conservatives are neck and neck, each supported by slightly less than a third of the electorate. During the course of the campaign, the ruling class's traditional parties of national government have bled support to the NDP, the social democratic party supported by a wing of the trade union bureaucracy, and to the Bloc Québécois, the federal sister party of the pro-independence Parti Québécois.

The corporate media concedes there is little popular enthusiasm for Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his Liberals or for the Conservatives and their prospective prime minister, Andrew Scheer. Much of the electorate, pollsters claim, will cast their vote more to oppose a party than out of support for, and confidence in, their actual ballot choice.

The election campaign has been distinguished above all by its parochial and essentially fraudulent character, with the official policy debate revolving round the parties' rival plans for tax cuts and, in the case of some, modest social spending increases.

Excluded from the official campaign has been any substantive discussion, or for the most part even mention, of the multiple, interconnected crises roiling world capitalism—from trade war and the growing likelihood of a 2008-style financial implosion, to the surge in great-power tensions, and the unprecedented political crisis embroiling the United States, far and away Canada's most important economic and strategic partner.

In a silence that bespeaks consent, none of the parties has made an issue of the Trudeau government's plans to spend tens of billions of dollars on buying new fleets of naval vessels and warplanes, and to hike military spending by more than 70 percent by 2026. Similarly, discussion of Canada's ever deepening integration into Washington's military-strategic offensives against China and Russia, and in the oil-rich Middle East—any of which could ignite a global conflagration—has effectively been censored by all-party agreement.

The Liberals, NDP, Greens, and Bloc Québécois all claim urgent action is needed to deal with climate change. But their proposals, based as they are on the inviolability of production for profit and the capitalist nation-state system, are at best pathetically inadequate and pie in the sky.

With unions' backing, NDP prepares to ally with big business Liberals

For the past four years, the NDP was hard put to distinguish itself from the big business Liberals, even as the Trudeau government pursued rearmament, cut corporate taxes, further expanded the powers of the national security apparatus, and criminalized or threatened to criminalize job action by postal and other workers. When the election campaign began, the NDP with barely 10 percent support in the poll was facing an electoral debacle. But after a campaign in which the social democrats made a very calibrated and calculated appeal to popular anger over social inequality, precarious unemployment, student debt, an increasingly privatized health care system and an economy "rigged" against the "people," their support has apparently rebounded.

Buoyed by the prospect of the NDP holding the "balance of power" in a minority parliament, NDP leader Jagmeet Singh announced late last week his party's six "urgent priorities" for post-election negotiations with Trudeau and his Liberals. Not only are these priorities, which include such minimalist measures as a reduction in cellphone bills, vaguely worded and things that the Liberals have for the most indicated they favour. Singh stressed that the NDP would only insist on a discussion on how to advance them.

Then on Sunday, Singh proclaimed that in the name of preventing the Conservatives from returning to power, the social democrats would be ready to consider serving in a Liberal-led coalition government. In 2008, the NDP, with the full support of the trade unions, responded to the eruption of the greatest crisis of world capitalism since the Great Depression by entering into an abortive agreement with the Liberals to replace Stephen Harper's Conservatives with a coalition government committed to \$50 billion in corporate tax cuts, "fiscal responsibility," and waging war in Afghanistan through 2011.

Underscoring the NDP's continuing full-throated support for Canada's imperialist alliances, the NDP issued a statement Monday demanding Ottawa work "with our allies in the EU and NATO"—that is those principally responsible for the endless wars ravaging the Middle East—to end Turkey's reactionary invasion of northern Syria, targeting the country's Kurdish minority.

Prime Minister Trudeau has responded to the tightening of the

election race by amplifying his claims that voting Liberal is the only way to deliver a “progressive” government that will “stand up” to US President Donald Trump, and prevent the coming to power of a Conservative government, akin to that of Ontario’s hated rightwing populist premier Doug Ford, that will dramatically slash social spending.

This is all demagoguery and lies.

It was the Chretien-Martin Liberal government, elected on the basis of denunciations of the Conservatives’ “fixation” with the deficit, that implemented the greatest social spending cuts and the biggest tax cuts for big business and the rich in Canadian history.

And while Trudeau, following the advice of the IMF, somewhat eased austerity at the federal level on coming to power in 2015, his closest provincial allies, the Philippe Couillard-led Quebec Liberal government and Kathleen Wynne’s Ontario Liberal government, implemented sweeping social spending cuts.

As for “opposing Trump,” the Trudeau government has closely collaborated with him and his administration, including in refashioning NAFTA to make it a more expressly trade-war bloc, abetting Washington’s in its as of yet unsuccessful regime-change coup in Venezuela, and moving forward with the “modernization” of NORAD, the joint US-Canada aerospace command.

In so far as Trudeau has differed and disagreed with Trump, it is entirely from the standpoint of the interests of Canadian ruling class. For example, Trudeau and his foreign affairs minister, the war-hawk Chrystia Freeland, share the concerns of the US intelligence agencies, the Democrats and a faction of the Republican Party that Trump has been too accommodating to Russia.

Conservatives double-down on their reactionary appeals

The Conservatives, for their part, have doubled down on their right-wing appeals in the final days of the election campaign. Their aim is two-fold: to rally the support of big business, which through the corporate media, has been complaining that their policies are “too wish washy” under conditions where Canada’s share of world trade and investment is declining; and to mobilize their popular base, in an election where turnout may prove decisive in determining the outcome in close two, three and even four-way races.

The Conservative platform released last Friday calls for massive cuts, including a 25 percent cut in the foreign aid budget and a public sector hiring freeze. It also reiterates Conservative pledges to align Canada’s foreign policy even more closely with Washington, by taking a more hardline stance against China and integrating Canada into the US ballistic missile defence shield, the ultimate aim of which is to render the Washington capable of waging a “winnable” nuclear war.

Earlier last week, Scheer renewed the Conservatives’ Trump-style attacks on the Liberals for purportedly losing control over the country’s borders, taking reporters to Roxham Road, in Huntingdon, Quebec, where tens of thousands of refugees fleeing

Trump’s anti-immigrant witch-hunt have crossed into Canada.

From the outset of the campaign, a key concern of Scheer and Hamish Marshall, the Conservative campaign manager and a former director of the far-right Rebel Media website, has been to prevent the newly-founded People’s Party of Canada (PPC) from gaining an electoral foothold. Led by Maxime Bernier, who finished second to Scheer in the 2017 Conservative Party leadership race, the PPC is modelling itself after the AfD and other European far-right parties. It denounces “mass immigration” and “multi-culturalism” as threats to “western civilization.”

The Conservatives have been colluding with far-right elements in spreading salacious #MeToo rumours and innuendo against Trudeau, following on from their hypocritical attempt to weaponize the “Blackface” pseudo-scandal to skewer the Liberal prime minister.

In the event of a minority parliament, the Conservatives most likely path to power would be through a deal with the Bloc Québécois, which repeatedly lent support to the Harper Conservative government when it lacked a parliamentary majority between 2006 and 2011. The campaign has championed Bill 21, legislation adopted by the provincial “Quebec First” CAQ government that attacks religious minorities. This has been supplemented with hypocritical denunciations of Canada’s “petro-economy” and insincere calls for increased social spending

Whatever the outcome of the election, the policies of the next government will be determined not by their campaign promises but by the needs of the Canadian ruling class under conditions of economic crisis, intensifying great-power conflict and mounting opposition from an increasingly militant working class in Canada and around the world.

A specific warning must be made about a trade union-backed NDP-Liberal governmental alliance, whether in the form of a formal coalition, a “confidence and supply” accord, or a more informal agreement. Like the current Liberal government, such a government alliance would use progressive rhetoric, identity politics, and a phony corporatist partnership with the unions as a smokescreen for pursuing the agenda of the bourgeoisie: rearmament, the aggressive assertion of Canadian imperialist interests around the world, and a never-ending assault on the social position and rights of the working class.



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