

# Demagogy, half-truths and lies dominate Canada's pandemic election

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Demagogy, half-truths and lies are invariably the stuff of bourgeois election campaigns. Invariably, because the political representatives of the ruling class, whether nominally “left” or “right,” have a dual task. They need to muster votes from workers and middle-class people, which compels them to make appeals, however convoluted or distorted, to popular sentiment and grievances, and demonstrate to the ruling class that their party is the best instrument for defending and advancing its mercenary interests.

In 1974, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, the father of the current prime minister, Justin Trudeau, returned his Liberals to power with a majority by campaigning against a Conservative plan to implement a 90-day wage and price freeze—only the next year to impose a three-year, wage-cutting wage-and-price control program. During the 1993 election campaign, Jean Chrétien ridiculed the Conservative government for its “fixation on the deficit,” then as prime minister implemented the greatest social spending cuts in Canadian history.

Nonetheless, the sheer breadth and brazenness of the demagogy and lies in the current campaign for Canada's September 20 federal election are unprecedented.

Justin Trudeau, whose six-year-old Liberal government lost its parliamentary majority in the regularly-scheduled October 2019 election, called a snap election on August 15 even though public health officials had conceded, in the preceding days, that Canada was in the initial stages of a Delta variant-driven fourth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. As of Monday, August 30, Canada's seven-day average of daily new COVID-19 infections stood at 3,214, more than four-and-a-half times the average recorded on August 1. And this is before the reopening of most of the country's schools over the next ten days. With a quarter of the Canadian population having yet to receive a single vaccination dose—including close to five million children aged 11 or under—medical experts warn that the highly contagious and more lethal Delta variant risks spreading like wildfire, resulting in hospitals being overwhelmed and a new wave of mass death.

Yet Trudeau and his Liberals, using the disastrous state of the pandemic in the US and Britain as a convenient foil, continue to point to Canada's “high vaccination” numbers to claim that Canada has weathered the pandemic better than most Western countries and that, in any event, “the worst is behind us.”

The reality is that Canadian capitalism's response to the pandemic, overseen by Trudeau and his federal Liberal government, has been and continues to be ruinous, as attested by the more than 26,900 officially-recognized COVID-19 deaths. Throughout the pandemic, Canada's governments have prioritized corporate profits over saving lives, with public health measures systematically diluted and sabotaged so as to keep non-essential businesses and schools open. As a result, Canada has been ravaged by successive pandemic waves, with workplaces and schools serving as the most important vectors of transmission in both the second and third waves.

Trudeau has forced a pandemic election upon the country, in the process cavalierly throwing aside a proposed government bill to mitigate the risks by expanding mail-in-voting and extending voting over multiple days. Yet he and his Liberals have not refrained from cynically seeking to exploit as a “wedge issue” the Conservative official opposition's refusal to support mandatory vaccinations for federal workers for fear of alienating their far-right anti-vax and anti-mask supporters.

For their part, the Conservatives, and all the other parties currently represented in parliament—the social-democratic New Democratic Party (NDP), the “Quebec First” Bloc Québécois (BQ) and the Greens—have feigned outrage over the government's triggering an election amid Canada's fourth wave. However, they all support the ruling class' back-to-work/back-to-school drive, are close allies of provincial governments that have implemented it, and oppose a science-based strategy aimed at eradicating the virus in Canada and globally.

The other issue that dominated the initial stages of the federal election campaign was the collapse of the US puppet regime in Afghanistan, just days after US troops had ended their 20-year occupation of the impoverished Central Asian country. The official launch of Trudeau's reelection bid was upended by the Taliban's entry into Kabul the very same day.

Washington's Afghan debacle—the collapse of a regime it expended \$2 trillion on installing and sustaining in power, along with the lives of more than 2,370 US military personnel and hundreds of thousands of Afghans—is a major blow to Canadian imperialism. Any serious reversal for US imperialism is a blow to the Canadian ruling class, for it is highly dependent on its close economic and military-security partnership with Washington and Wall Street to uphold and advance its own predatory interests on the world stage. But in this case the blow is all the greater, because the Canadian ruling class was itself heavily invested—politically and militarily—in the neocolonial occupation of Afghanistan.

For thirteen years, beginning soon after the US invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001 and ending only in 2014, Canada played a major role in Washington's dirty counter-insurgency war, with Canadian Armed Forces' personnel implicated in torture and war crimes. First under the Chrétien-Martin Liberal governments and then under Stephen Harper and his Conservatives, Ottawa spent at least \$18 billion on waging war in Afghanistan and deployed 40,000 troops there. Moreover, the war became the cutting edge of a concerted ruling-class push that continues to this day for a more aggressive foreign policy. It was used to rewrite the officially promoted narrative surrounding the Canadian Armed Forces, putting paid to the myth that it has a special vocation for “peacekeeping,” and recasting it as a “peacemaker” that wages war to uphold democracy and “protect” the victims of human rights abuses.

The opposition parties have all joined Trudeau in voicing dismay over the collapse of the corrupt, warlord-riven, neocolonial Kabul regime and making shrill pronouncements about their concerns for the fate of “Afghan women and children.” Aided by the corporate media,

government and opposition alike have scrupulously avoided raising, let alone attempting to provide any coherent answer, as to how it is that Afghanistan's ostensible "democratic" government could collapse overnight, and why it was so manifestly deserted by the Afghan people.

Instead, Conservative leader Erin O'Toole, the NDP's Jagmeet Singh and the other opposition leaders have sought to score points against Trudeau by pointing to the desperate, disorganized effort to evacuate Afghans who had worked with the Canadian military and government. This line of attack echoes the vitriolic denunciations of Biden from within the US political and military-security establishment for mismanaging imperialist affairs by not reversing Trump's deal to withdraw US forces until the puppet regime could be strengthened, i.e., indefinitely. It is premised upon and serves to bolster all the lies about upholding "human rights" that Canadian imperialism uses to cloak its aggression, whether in Afghanistan or Haiti, or against China and Russia.

Underscoring the NDP's character as a pro-imperialist, pro-war party, Jagmeet Singh issued a statement calling on Canada to work with "our allies," that is Washington, London, Paris and the other NATO powers, "to help" Afghans.

The lies and half-truths about the Afghan war go hand-in-hand with a conspiracy of silence that unites all five parties over the Trudeau government's 10-year plan to raise military spending by more than 70 percent, to \$33 billion by 2026, and Canada's ever-deeper integration into the US military-strategic offensives against China and Russia. Similarly, as indicated by their unanimous silence, all the opposition parties are on board with the agreement the Trudeau government announced with Washington on the eve of the election call to expand and strengthen NORAD. This includes equipping it to counter so-called "beyond the horizon" threats.

The posturing and lying over social issues is no less shameless.

The parties that have presided over decades of austerity and slashed taxation rates for big business, the rich and super-rich suddenly concede that Canada is beset by multiple crises—a health care crisis, a housing crisis, an opioid crisis, a climate crisis—and are making competing promises of measures that they claim will plug gaping holes in the social safety net.

This is all far less than meets the eye. Big business is already pushing back, declaring the promises of increased social spending threaten Canada's "competitive position." Moreover, even if a significant number of these measures are adopted—a very big if—they would do little to address a social crisis arising from decades of cuts, privatization and de-industrialization that has been further exacerbated by the pandemic.

Take the promise, much touted in the media, that Conservative leader O'Toole has made to increase federal transfers to the provinces by \$60 billion over ten years. This would only partially restore the tens of billions that O'Toole as a member of Harper's cabinet cut from health care under the health care funding "accord" Harper imposed on the provinces in 2014, and Trudeau subsequently upheld. And this under conditions where the pandemic has demonstrated that the public health system and the workers who staff it on the verge of collapse. Moreover, O'Toole has served notice he intends to use his "reinvestment" in health care to provide political cover for a Conservative government greenlighting the provinces expanding for-profit health care.

The various pledges to make big business and the rich "pay their fair share" are similarly bogus. With the Liberal poll numbers tanking, Trudeau suddenly discovered last week that the banks and financial companies have made massive profits during the pandemic. He is now vowing to introduce a temporary pandemic levy and a tiny tax increase. If the tax increase were enacted, the big banks would still pay far less proportionately than they did little more than a decade ago.

The reality is the soaring profits of the banks and corporate Canada are the deliberate outcome of the bailout measures taken by the Trudeau

government and the Bank of Canada with the support of all the parties. Jagmeet Singh routinely derides the Trudeau Liberal government for siding with those in "luxury yachts" rather than those in "leaky lifeboats" during the pandemic storm. What he omits to mention is that the minority Liberal government survived in office to do the bidding of Canada's corporate elite only because the NDP, acting with the full-throated support of the unions, kept it in power. The NDP ensured it had the votes to pass its budget, throne speech and other key measures. Indeed, Singh sent a letter in late July to the Governor-General, pleading with her to use her arbitrary powers to reject Trudeau's request for an election, on the grounds the NDP had and would continue to make parliament "work" by propping up the Liberal government.

Canadian capitalism's ruinous response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its debacle in Afghanistan speak, albeit in different ways, to the crisis of Canadian imperialism. The ever-intensifying inter-capitalist struggle for markets, profits and geopolitical advantage compels Canada's capitalist elite to lash out against the working class at home and pursue aggression abroad. Whatever party or coalition of parties forms Canada's government after September 20, it will be a big business government intent on making the working class pay for the pandemic, its economic fallout, and the further expansion of Canada's military prowess, by restructuring Canadian capitalism at the expense of the jobs, living standards and social rights of the working class.

This class war agenda will sooner rather than later confront mass opposition from the working class, which has engaged in an expanding series of militant strikes and job actions over recent months in mining, food processing, health care and manufacturing for better wages and working conditions. The election campaign is unfolding against the backdrop of mounting anger among parents and teachers over the reckless reopening of schools to in-person learning across the country with virtually no mitigation measures. It goes without saying that the upsurge of the working class, which has increasingly taken the form of an open rebellion against the pro-corporate unions that have been complicit in imposing decades of job, wage and benefit cuts, has been entirely absent from the official election campaign. Only the Socialist Equality Party, the Canadian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, seeks to mobilize the working class independently of all capitalist parties in struggle for a science-based strategy to eradicate COVID-19, and a socialist program to put an end to militarism and war and establish social equality.



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