

Canada's General Election

by [Bill Corden](#) (October 2019)



Scheer and Trudeau

Yes, we have a general election slated for Monday October 21st, a piece of news that rates quite a bit below the daily reports of the Kardashians' whirlwind life down in the States.

In terms of GDP, we in the frozen north would be about third in ranking behind California and New York if we were a state, but we only ever get a mention in the media because of people like Drake or because Alex Trebek was born here. Other than that, most Americans couldn't even pick out Province in Canada, never mind a city.

One Harvard professor was once buttonholed on TV with his views on the “seal hunt” in Saskatchewan and [ranted](#) that it must come to an end.

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It’s a strange thing, because the country of Canada is highly respected throughout the world. If you go to a foreign country with the Maple Leaf Flag on your backpack, people unfailingly treat you with hospitality and friendliness—especially in Europe where our troops played such a big part in the liberation at the end of World War Two.

That reputation comes from a track record of good social policies, the accommodation of two official languages, a relatively untroubled integration of huge influxes of Asian, Latin American and mid-European immigrants and a welcoming hand to refugees from troubled parts of the world.

We help when called upon by the U.N. but we speak our mind if we don’t agree with their actions, evidenced by the fact that we withheld approval for actions in the second Iraq war.

We don’t have a huge military presence, either at home or on the world stage, most of that stuff is looked after by our mighty neighbours to the south and, like most families, we don’t appreciate the protection offered by paternalistic

authority.

In fact, again like most families, there is a resentment towards the restrictions and influence imposed. I'm pretty sure that any poll of Canadians would reveal if not animosity, then certainly distaste towards most of the American policies.

In truth we are swamped by U.S. media and culture but, by some miracle of fate, our own quirky, polite ways shine above it all. In short, we have a country that is envied by most of the world.

So, what are the issues in this upcoming election and who are the people who want to run things for the next four years or so?

Well, the frontrunners are from two established parties on the national stage, they are Justin Trudeau, Liberal and the current Prime Minister, and Andrew Scheer, Progressive Conservative, leader of the opposition.

The others are already also-rans but they do have the chance of holding a balance of power which is a very significant possibility: the NDP and the Greens. I'll deal with them later.

As an aside, a minority government displays both the weaknesses and strengths of democracy, on the one hand it stops the Government from implementing any necessary radical

changes and on the other it can make the Government polish up its processes and think twice before they do anything stupid (at least in theory).

Liberals here would be considered rabid socialists in the American spectrum, while the Conservatives could be described as left wing capitalists. Let's take a look at the leaders.

Trudeau is the son of a former Liberal Prime Minister, Pierre Elliot Trudeau who was a man of unequalled intellect in the world of politics and a man who is quite fondly remembered as one of the best on the International Stage.

But his old man had some built in domestic faults. He surrounded himself with political henchmen and fixers, from the Quebec liberal machine, henchmen who made sure that Quebec's interests were first on the agenda.

He legislated bilingualism and enforced it across the country. You had to be (and still have to be) bilingual to get an executive job in the Civil Service and even today, some 30 years after he governed, the Francophone dominates the Public Service at the highest levels. Look at any organizational chart in any department and you'll see French names from the masthead on down.

Trudeau Senior was profligate with taxpayers' money and doled it out with socialist fervour, giving it to just about anyone who asked: foreign aid, the oil industry, and especially Quebec enterprises. If you could carry Quebec in an election,

then you were pretty much guaranteed to win.

With that family pedigree, it's fair to say that Justin got the job from the reflected light of his father. He came along at a time when the Liberal party was in the wilderness and brought them back to power on pure personality.

But it's also necessary to point out that he's nowhere near as sure-footed or as tough and wily as his Dad was. He is considered by his foes to be a political naïf.

Those same foes and now some of his supporters, after four years in power, say that he is privileged and inexperienced and too soft for the cut and thrust of reality politics.

He has appointed to his cabinet some equally inexperienced naïfs and has recently lost two of them due to some crepuscular backroom dealings.

The general tenor of discussions about his major policies is that he got whipsawed on the Trade Deal with the U.S. and that he has let the environmentalists and indigenous activists hijack our energy industry, and minority activists in general to dominate the agenda.

That being said, he ticks most of the boxes for the shallow internet world; he's well spoken and polite, he's a feminist, he's an environmentalist, he's a pin-up and his wife Sophie is smart and has movie star looks. That's all that a lot of

voters need.

He obtained an Arts degree from McGill in Montreal and went on to get a Bachelor of Education degree from UBC. He lived in British Columbia for his early adulthood and taught for a while at a private school, West Point Grey Academy, before returning to his home city of Montreal.

He is a very popular figure with youth out in British Columbia, his mother Margaret Trudeau was born in Vancouver.

As for his time in power, in the big picture he hasn't done too much wrong in the past four years, although the press differs from my opinion.

He's maybe made mistakes in the headlong rush to get female representation in the cabinet rather than making appointments based on experience and ability.

He's dug himself a hole on the environmental front by supporting both sides of the Green argument and he has resorted to backroom skulduggery on the issue of Canadian companies bribing foreign agents to get lucrative contracts.

Bribing foreign agents for contracts is something that all businesses and governments around the world do on a regular basis. But legislation to prevent it in Canada has been perceived as a Don Quixote act by the pragmatists.

Justin's got himself in quite a jam straddling the moral fence by supporting a major Quebec industry (SNC-Lavalin) that's been accused and charged of using those same shady tactics.

SNC is a huge, highly competent, worldwide engineering company with annual revenues in excess of 10 billion dollars, so it's a jewel in the crown for the province and the country.

If they were found guilty, they would lose the right to bid on Canadian Government contracts for a while, ergo a very touchy issue.

The dirty laundry washed during hearings on this affair showed the same backroom Liberal tactics that were used in Pierre's day and led many people to say that a leopard can't change its spots.

That jam has led to the resignation of the two cabinet ministers I mentioned earlier, Judy Wilson Raybould, the Attorney General and Jane Philpott, the President of the Treasury Board who both said that they had lost confidence in the Prime Minister.

It also led to the resignation of a few of his senior advisors, although one of them has reappeared on the campaign trail a Mr Gerald Butts, who was the P.M.'s Principal Secretary.

The whole sordid affair has definitely cost Trudeau public support but he seems to be determined to ride the bronco until it settles down.

He's struggled to get his policies implemented, even with a healthy majority, and has come up against vested interests as regularly as his predecessors

He's pro-business, pro-family, pro-abortion, pretty much pro-everything and definitely pro-political correctness, although just recently it's been discovered he's been caught at least three times on camera in blackface.

There's been no major monetary scandals (and by this I mean, compared to the rest of the world) during Trudeau's term and most of his missteps, save for SNC, have been of the PR nature with the tabloids baying for blood.

His biggest stumbling blocks, apart from the perception of being bullied by U.S. trade negotiators, have been internal-dealing with the provinces, dealing with indigenous issues, trying to equalize the economic spoils and seemingly catering to the interest of minority groups throughout the country at the expense of the majority.

The main problem though, is that people in general now feel that they can't cash in on the economic opportunities that Canada offered in the past and they're blaming the Liberal policies for it

Our economy seems to be treading water and we are now a waystation in the containerized world of trade.

Mr Trudeau Jr. had an expression which carried him to victory in the last election, it was

“Sunny Ways, my friends, Sunny Ways,” but the clouds have drawn in on that sunshine and many voters are disillusioned at the abandonment of, or failure to, implement, many of his election promises.

Enter Mr Andrew Scheer, a leftish conservative (by Canadian standards) who wants to bring back the policies of the previous Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

He is a personable, cheerful looking 40-year-old, who has politics in his blood, having been elected as an MP when he was only 25. He has a BA from Regina University and worked in his youth as an Insurance Broker and a waiter.

He has worked on political campaigns for most of his adult life and knows his way around the hustings.

He was actually born in the capital, Ottawa, the son of a nurse and a Roman Catholic deacon. He has two sisters and his family has Romanian roots. He is married to Jill Ryan of Regina and, believe it or not, he has five kids so there's always a quorum in his home.

Not as glamorous a background as his opponent but a solid middle-class upbringing.

They can't pin the "inexperienced" label on Mr Scheer because he was elected as the youngest ever "Speaker of the House of Commons," a position he held from 2011 to 2015, so he also knows his way around that particular swamp.

Even so there weren't too many people who would have recognized his name until he was elected as leader of his party in 2017 and it was then that he came under the microscope

He has a ready smile (as does Justin) and is comfortable in fending off the jackals of the press. They've tried to discredit him for things he's said in the past, things which were acceptable then but sure as hell ain't now. But he's managed to float above them for the moment and seems to hold his own against the glamour of the Trudeau name.

He's not in favour of extreme environmentalist laws and wants to reap the benefits of Canada's oil reserves, he wants to put people in positions based on their abilities and not just because they are of a particular gender. He wants to repeal the carbon tax, he wants more social benefits for families with children. He is pro-life (obviously, with five kids) but has been quoted as saying:

“A Conservative government will not support any legislation to regulate abortion.”

He too is a feminist, although with reservations that will be pounced upon in the next few weeks.

His foreign policies are more in line with the current ones in the U.S. but he is careful to point out that we will make our own decisions as we see fit.

We haven't seen his position on any of the “eggshell issues” such as indigenous rights and crime and gun legislation solidify in these early stages of the race, but we're only just getting under way so we'll have to see how he handles or modifies them.

Every past government has promised progress and reconciliation but frankly it's going to take someone with a granite will to see radical change and the present system doesn't allow for granite wills.

So you see, there's not much between them and that's why they are dead-heated in most recent polls, giving the NDP and the Greens two coattails to grab at.

The NDP leader, Jagmeet Singh, has that wonderful calm Canadian likeability about him, too. But, realistically, they have no chance of forming a government. NDP's policies are tried and tested redistribution of wealth and, until they

figure out a way to do it without spending more to get it, they have no hope.

Elizabeth May for the Greens is equally pleasant but can only hope for a deserters from the NDP and Liberals to give her any chance of more seats (they currently have two).

The Greens would have us living by candlelight and riding your bike from Vancouver to Ottawa to attend a meeting. You can't even oil your chain to make the ride smoother.

We are atingle with what's going to happen. In all the years I have been in Canada, the West Coast has been not much more than a colony, in fact anything beyond the lakehead has been of little interest to the power brokers in Ontario and Quebec.

The Pacific Ocean could lap up against the foot of the Rockies for all that they care.

It's a question of numbers and centralism, there's a combined population of about 28 million in these two provinces out of a total Canadian population of 37 million so it's not difficult math.

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In past elections it was against the law to publish the results of a general election in the western provinces because it was felt that people wouldn't bother to vote if they knew the game was already over from the Quebec and Ontario results.

But times are changing and the last election really hung on the votes cast in the western wilderness. Vancouver is becoming a very prosperous city with a growing population and, although it doesn't have as much clout as Toronto, Montreal, or Ottawa, it is in the gym and getting ready to step up.

Pretty much all of the revenues from the Port of Vancouver and Vancouver Airport go back to the Federal Government as they are the owners of both facilities.

There are no tangible local economic benefits from either of these enterprises, all the voters see is increased user fees at the airport and restricted access to the waterfront. Those same voters aren't happy about that.

Alberta, with its almost total dependence on oil and gas has taken some body blows since the last election and the cities of Edmonton and Calgary are suffering almost recession-like difficulties.

Reeling from a just-kicked-out NDP provincial government and further reeling from the federal Government's inability to get a pipeline built for their oil sands, they are furious with

the Liberals. Heap this on top of low oil prices and you've got some very unhappy campers.

You have to face it though, even if they combine their strength, the Prairie and the Western Provinces aren't enough to swing the result. The Liberal party's usually a cinch for Quebec and it takes a really controversial issue to swing them to other parties.

Corruption or underhanded deals don't seem to faze the Quebecois, but if you are the opposition and you can get an issue where they feel they are being gypped, then you've got a chance of stealing quite a few seats.

Ontario is a different kettle of fish and can go any way in any election. They thrive on issues like trade, feminism, and immigration. Quebec has more flexibility on its own immigration policy due to the "notwithstanding" clause in the Canadian Constitution.

Toronto is the unchallenged centre for the arts and the media. This city, along with Ottawa, are where all the big decisions are made, so you have to craft your policies to trick the great unwashed into voting for you.

Manitoba and Saskatchewan? Well they're mostly farmers and miners and they vote for whoever's gonna do the most for them. Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan is a big corporation there with sales of around 32 billion per year.

They send in a lot of money to the Federal Treasury in payroll taxes and royalties so they have to be listened to and policies must be tailor-made to protect them.

Everywhere east of Quebec (the Maritimes, as they are called) is treated with much the same disdain as the West. The main difference being that the Federal Government has had to subsidize the fishing industry quite heavily and the economies are always hanging by a thread. For some reason, the Maritimers and the Maritime politicians are more militant and able to shout louder (maybe because of their predominantly Scottish and Irish heritage). As a result, they have considerably more influence in parliament than the population figures would have us surmise.

So, there you have the complete picture, nobody knows what will happen until shortly after 9pm on October 21st on the West Coast (Unless there's a sweep in Quebec and Ontario).

Make no mistake about it, even with a gaping chasm of differences, a coalition will be formed if it is deemed politically expedient.

I mentioned envy earlier on and that is what most leaders from other countries must be feeling when they look at the issues being debated on the front pages of Canada. The environment, gender equality, family allowances, forest fires and snow clearing.

How Donald Trump, Boris Johnson and Vlad must look wistfully at our headlines and wish they had such minor problems.

The fun thing about Canadian elections is that there is no viciousness in the process. They slag one another, of course, but they usually do it in most polite manner. You have to go to the press for nastiness!

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