



CANADA'S 43RD GENERAL ELECTION: ENSIGHT ANALYSIS

OCTOBER 2019

Election Analysis

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OVERVIEW

On October 21st, 2019 Canadians elected a minority Liberal government lead by Justin Trudeau with 157 seats. At 121 seats, Andrew Scheer’s Conservatives will form the Official Opposition, while Jagmeet Singh’s 24 NDP seats and Yves-François Blanchet’s 32 Bloc Québécois seats will hold the balance of power. That leaves 3 Green MPs and 1 Independent MP (Jody Wilson-Raybould) in the House of Commons.

Minority governments are certainly not out of the ordinary in Canada, but it will take time for parties and Canadians to remember that you still have to fundamentally govern differently. The following is Ensign’s analysis of what happened during the campaign, including commentary on the rise of the Bloc Québécois, a deeper dive into the election day numbers and how each party did and what this new government looks like for women. It will also include a primer on minority governments, what levers are available to pull and our thoughts on the stability of a Liberal/NDP progressive partnership.

Take a Bow Yves-François Blanchet - How the Bloc Québécois Changed Canada's Political Landscape: Don Newman



Take a bow Yves-François Blanchet. Two days ago you changed the political landscape in Canada by changing the political landscape in Quebec.

Almost singlehandedly you revived the Bloc Québécois, taking it from ten seats to thirty-two and making it the third largest party in the House of Commons. And by doing that, you blocked the Trudeau Liberals hope of gaining more seats in Quebec to make up for seats they knew they would lose in other parts of Canada. Today Justin Trudeau is still in power, but he is now in charge of a minority government that cannot alone control the House of Commons, having to search for at least one party to partner with on votes to get anything done.

The most likely partner for the Liberals going forward is the NDP. On the face of it, the NDP and its leader Jagmeet Singh should be furious with you Mr. Blanchet. First, you campaigned on the provincial legislation in your home province that bans wearing religious symbols when working in jobs in the public service in Quebec. Most Canadians in other provinces see this as a curb on religious freedom and contrary to the Charter of Rights. Some Quebec groups are challenging the law in the courts, but most Francophone Quebecers support the legislation and see it as a legitimate way of maintaining their culture. For Mr. Singh, a turban wearing Sikh, it should be a particular personal affront, although for political reasons and the hope of support in Quebec, he and all the party leaders have soft pedalled their opposition.

But there can be no soft-pedaling the political impact of the Blanchet resurgence of the Bloc Québécois. In the election of 2011, it was the sudden emergence of Jack Layton and the NDP in Quebec that overnight lead to the virtual oblivion of the Bloc. In that election support for the Bloc collapsed and it all went to the NDP. That year the party won fifty-nine seats in the province, propelling them into the rarefied atmosphere of the Official Opposition in the House of Commons.

By 2015 things were partially returning to normal. The Trudeau led liberals won forty-five Quebec seats in Quebec and the NDP were down to fifteen. Then came this Monday night. In addition to the thirty-two Bloc seats, the Liberals had thirty-four and the Conservatives ten. And the NDP? Just two elections after the “orange wave” and the fifty-nine seat break-through, the NDP managed to save only one seat in the province.

Now you might think the NDP and its leader would be livid at the Bloc and Mr. Blanchet, but they are not really. Although the party is almost wiped out in Quebec, finishing this election with twenty seats fewer than in 2015 and sitting in third place in the Commons to the resurgent Bloc, because of the results in Quebec, the Liberals are now in a minority and the NDP's remaining 24 seats are just what they need to get legislation through the Commons and to control Parliamentary committees.

That means that even in their diminished circumstances, the NDP will have more clout in the House of Commons than at any time since 1973 and 1974. That is the last time a Liberal Prime Minister named Trudeau found himself in a minority situation and had to turn to the NDP for support.

Now history is repeating itself. Jagmeet Singh isn't exactly steering the car, but he is in the front seat and he has brought his map.

The Bloc Québécois breakthrough on October 21st had some people worrying about a resurgence of separatism in Quebec. Those worries are overstated. For the most part, Quebecers realize they have the best of both worlds; a Canadian passport and access to the world as Canadians, and something close to Sovereignty Association at home. Besides, with the examples of Brexit and Catalonia in Spain, they have evidence of just how difficult leaving can be – particularly when any gains are either marginal or non-existent.

But the re-emergence of the Bloc Québécois means that going forward minority governments like the one created by this week's election are likely to become the norm rather than the exception. The implications for that are far reaching and as yet uncertain.

In the meantime, take a bow Mr. Blanchet.

Canada's 43rd Federal Election – By The Numbers

With the dust settling and results in, the endless news cycles around the federal election are already fading into the rear-view mirror. That said, the numbers and what they mean for each party still warrant further examination – so here are the most important numbers from the election, by party.

Liberal

157 – That's the number of seats the Liberals won, and they will, therefore, form a minority government. Of those elected MPs, 52 are women and 40 self-identify as people of colour. For a Liberal Party touting diversity, these are pretty good numbers. 33% of their elected MPs are women compared to 29% of elected MPs overall, and this is an increase from 2015 which saw 50 female Liberal candidates result in only 27% of women Liberal MPs elected. Keeping on the theme of diversity, the Liberals' group of elected, visible minorities make up 12% of the 16% of visible minorities elected to the house.

Conservative

The Conservatives gained a healthy increase in seats this election – 26 to be exact – yet it was not enough to carry them to government. The Conservatives gained ground in the Prairies and B.C. while losing ground in Québec and their expected breakthrough in Ontario just didn't happen. Conservatives got a mere 36 Ontario seats compared to the 73 they won in 2011. Conservatives also have the lowest gender balance out of any federal party, with only 18% of their elected MPs being women. Interestingly, the Conservatives won the popular vote at 6,150,177 votes (34.4%), beating the Liberals by approximately 240,000 votes, while still receiving 36 less seats.

New Democratic Party

The NDP formed the official opposition in 2011 with 103 seats, 59 of those coming from Quebec. This election, only eight years later, saw the NDP lose all but one of their seats in Quebec and win a mere 24 in total, down 18 from 2015's election result. This result came despite some rising poll numbers leading up to the election. The final count saw the NDP drop almost 600,000 votes and fall from 19.7% to 15.9% of the popular vote. A total of five people of colour were elected under the NDP banner, along with nine women – 33% of their MP's.

Green

The record-breaking Green campaign saw a 150% increase in seats won during a general election and almost a 200% increase in popular vote, bringing the total Green caucus to 3 members. They only elected 1 last time, Elizabeth May herself. Notably, they had won a by-election in the interim bringing them up to 2 elected before dissolution. It's worth noting that the Greens made waves in several ridings across the country, mainly in Atlantic Canada and B.C., while coming in second in seven ridings – including Kitchener Centre and Guelph.

Bloc Québécois

The Bloc is back, gaining 22 seats to bring their total count up to 32. The Bloc didn't rise to the heights of their 1993-2008 period elections, but they still gained enough seats to make a difference, along with increasing their share of Québec's popular vote from 19.3% to 32.5%. The Bloc remained entirely white but elected 12 female MP's – 37.5% of their caucus.

People's Party

The People's Party never really got off the ground. When all was said and done, the People's Party received just under 300,000 votes (1.6% nationally) and failed to win a single seat. Bernier himself lost his long-held seat by over 6,000 votes to Conservative candidate Richard Lehoux. Bernier vows that his party will return. He calls his party the "fastest growing political party." However, with his candidates barely making a dent in their ridings, it is difficult to see how they become a serious force. The other high-profile candidate for the PPC, Reneta Ford, only received 1,183 votes in her riding.

Scheer May Have Been Right About One Thing – The Future of a Liberal/NDP Partnership: Shane Mackenzie



"The Liberal-NDP coalition you can't afford", warned Andrew Scheer. This may have been a wedge, but also served as an unintentional sales pitch. Innovative Research put out a poll on October 17 that showed 40% of Canadians hoped their votes would result in a minority Parliament. Canadians consistently say they support the idea of more cooperation among parties.

Andrew Scheer pointed to his win of “the popular vote” (34%) repeatedly. This number is ultimately meaningless in the Canadian parliamentary context, which only relies upon the confidence of the majority of those in the House of Commons to decide its government. Governments, whether in a minority or majority Parliament, are still legitimate, despite partisan protests to the contrary.

In this case, 55% of Canadians in total voted for progressive parties, federalist ones at least, thereby excluding the Bloc.

This concept of progressives as a collective being the majority has put wind in the sails of switch-voters who believe in more NDP-style approaches to policy issues but want a Liberal government to inject some reality into implementation.

While the Prime Minister today formally denounced a coalition, where cabinet posts could have gone to NDP caucus members, the Singh and Trudeau-led parties are still the most natural dancing partners on offer.

Singh, recognizing this, laid out his conditions or priorities for negotiations with a future government during the campaign:

- A national, single-payer universal pharmacare plan and a national dental care plan;
- Investments in housing;
- A plan to waive interest on student loans;
- A commitment to reduce carbon emissions, to end subsidies for oil companies and to deliver aid to oilpatch workers to transition them out of fossil fuel industries;
- The introduction of a "super wealth" tax and a commitment to closing tax loopholes;
- Reducing cellphone bills.

Of those, there are natural dovetails from the Liberal platform on affordable housing to make it a top priority. From there, climate action is a natural connection that Liberals could move more quickly on. Both are easy, political wins for both sides.

Liberals would also say they have plans that achieve similarly aimed goals on student debt, reducing cellphone bills, closing tax loopholes, ending fossil fuels subsidies, clean job retraining, and national pharmacare.

The NDP suggested universal, single-payer pharmacare could be done in 1-year under their leadership through a combination of threats to uncooperative provinces and public shaming. The Liberals compared it more to the implementation of medicare, a ten-year track, phased in, cost shared with the provinces and territories, and keeping public opinion onside around deficit management.

This is a difference, but they do share the goal of universal in principle. The differentiation points are not easily litigated during a fractious election campaign.

Giving credit to the NDP for any of these listed above will add to their narrative of promoting good policy, riding along in the sidecar. This may help the NDP long-term, but there are also risks to ideological junior partners to more centrist governments.

More hardened partisans hold strong to their principles and do not like seeing their party be conciliatory. Nobody likes the taste of water in their wine, and Liberals are going to have to ground some fiscal and logistical reality into the NDP's "super wealth tax" panacea that would, clearly, fail to work.

Measuring the Trudeau Liberals against Singh's priority list of absolutist policies is folly. Trudeau wants to uphold a brand of solid management and stickhandling divergent interests. Plus, Jagmeet Singh has no leverage to threaten Liberals to go back into a campaign where his party would be underfunded and disorganized.

Liberals can likely govern with an effective majority by pulling on NDP and Green support for things that all those parties naturally agree upon. Trudeau could even be able to wedge a few pipelines or increasing CBSA funding into the mix by shaming the Conservatives, although they seem to be chomping at the bit for a redo of the 2019 campaign already. Conservatives have more money in the bank than other parties at present.

The story of this election may have on the surface seemed like the 'Revenge of the Regions', specifically Québec and the Prairies. However, it may be truly a story of progressive policies getting a double down.

For progressive-minded voters struggling with Liberal pragmatism, the Liberals now have NDP-partnership excuses to move in an interventionist, social policy-focused direction if they choose to.

An Inside Look At Gender in Canada's 43rd Parliament: Kait LaForce



The results of the gruelling 40-day federal election campaign have not granted an absolute win for any of Canada's political parties, with the exception of the Bloc Québécois. Canadians demoted Liberals down to a minority government. Conservatives lost and lost big in the Ontario and Québec regions they were fiercely pushing to win. The NDP didn't gain ground, instead dropping down to 24 seats. The Greens in no way capitalized on the growing environmental concerns among Canadians with a 'historic' win of only 3 seats. However, small wins can be gleaned from the outcome of Election 43, including a record number of women being elected into the House of Commons.

Ninety-eight women will be coming to Ottawa, an all-time high. Although, this means only 29% of elected officials in total are women. On the plus side, Canada elected more women in total, considering 2015's federal election brought the last Parliament only 88 women MPs.

Some of the challenges that parties face include putting women in 'winnable' ridings as well as the percentage of women who are putting their name forward that are unsuccessful. While the Liberals will have 52 women sitting in Parliament, a total of 116 women ran for the Liberals in this election. The Conservatives will have 22 women sitting on their side of the House of Commons, which jars against the record number of women the Conservatives nominated as candidates at 106. The party that fell behind throughout the election in naming candidates in a timely way was the NDP. Their Leader Jagmeet Singh said this was largely due to his party ensuring that enough women and minorities were putting their name on the ballot. The NDP eventually nominated 104 women to run for the party, which resulted in only nine winning a seat. The Greens picked up one additional seat in Atlantic Canada, resulting in now having two Green women MPs out of three – however, their party had the highest number of women candidates, running 129 women in total across the country. Lastly, the Bloc Québécois nominated 20 women out of 78 seats, culminating in a win for 12 women BQ MPs.

With the highest number of women MPs elected under the minority Parliament-leading Liberals, what does this mean for the shape of their government? Although only 33% of the new Liberal caucus is women, like the last Liberal mandate, these women will continue to fill at least half of the roles in cabinet, committees and key special advisory roles for the Prime Minister. During their campaign, the Liberals promised to continue to have a gender-balanced cabinet and maintain using a "Gender-based Analysis Plus" lens when working at all policy, decisions and government programs. They recommitted to that today during the Prime Minister's first press conference. This will mean that all policy in each Department across government will be put through the GBA+ lens, federal budgets, and fiscal updates will be vetted by this standard.

Women's caucus traditionally meets as a group within each party and are expected to once again form when Parliament returns. Those spaces will be used to talk about the topics that matter most to women across Canada, while bringing in experts across various sectors to further educate and challenge parliamentarians on gender and social issues. Returning big-name women Liberal MPs include previous Liberal Ministers: Chrystia Freeland, Catherine McKenna and Dr. Carolyn Bennett – and are all expected to again receive cabinet positions. On the Opposition fronts, Conservative MPs Candice Bergen and Michelle Rempel, NDP MP Niki Ashton, and, of course, the Leader of the Greens Elizabeth May will also be returning to Ottawa.

Along with those strong women voices, it's now a waiting game on which newly elected women MPs across parties will be the trailblazers in the 43rd Parliament. However, when looking at the resumes of the 98 women elected to the House of Commons, the expectations and excitement are high from Canadians watching this, and in particular for the roughly 18.5 million Canadian women. All eyes will be on this group of women parliamentarians, and the new Liberal government to find out what their plan is on the issues the majority of Canadian women care about most, including healthcare, equal employment, childcare and the environment.

A Primer on Minority Governments

Minority governments such as the one Canadians elected on Monday are different. How they work is different and how you work with them should be different, too. Here's a primer on what to expect.

Glossary

- **Coalition:** Prime Minister Trudeau confirmed today that the Liberals would not form a coalition during this Parliament, but coalitions are an arrangement in which two or more parties share power, usually involving Cabinet positions for each party involved. These are commonplace in many European countries and New Zealand with proportional voting systems. Canada's most recent coalition government was during World War One.
- **Formal arrangement:** These can take different forms, but they generally mean a larger party is supported by one or more smaller parties for a set period of time. The current British Columbia government is a good example. The Greens have agreed to support the governing NDP for four years on any vote, like a budget, that would trigger an election if lost by the government. But they are not obliged to support everything the government does. Ontario was governed by something similar between 1985-87 with Premier David Peterson.
- **Ad hoc or vote-by-vote:** In some cases, minority governments have no agreement among any parties. The government operates on a vote-by-vote basis. Stephen Harper's two minority governments, 2006-08 and 2008-11, worked this way. It's the most unpredictable form of minority government and usually leads to the most frequent elections. This will be the scenario for the new Parliament.
- **Balance of power:** If a smaller party is able to help a larger party control a majority of MPs, the smaller party has what's known as a balance of power. In some cases, such as this Parliament, more than one party can hold a balance of power as both the Bloc Québécois and New Democrats do now.

Key Points

In Canada, minority governments are almost always more left-leaning than majority Conservative or Liberal governments would be. This is because the smaller parties likely hold a balance of power—most commonly the NDP, but in some circumstances the Bloc Québécois or the Greens—all to the left of the two larger parties. In this Parliament, all of the parties likely to support the Liberals on major pieces of legislation—the Bloc, NDP, and Greens—are found to the Liberals' left.

1. Minority governments think in shorter timeframes

Almost all minority governments throw four-year election cycles out the window. Especially in ad hoc situations, these are replaced by short-term thinking often driven by public opinion. Market research (polling), media profile, and digital presence become more important in minority situations than they are in majority situations. Sometimes, legislation can proceed much faster. Given the Liberals' large seat count and the internal needs of both the Bloc—which won official party status for the first time in three elections and the NDP—which is heavily in debt—this minority Parliament may last for longer than usual.

2. More voices matter

In minority situations, less is taken for granted. Votes aren't always guaranteed to pass and so the votes of government backbench MPs and opposition MPs often taken for granted during majorities become much more important. Even independent MPs can be vital. The more involved in a governing arrangement opposition or independent MPs are, the more their voices count. In addition, the Senate often plays a larger role during minorities than at other times.

3. Traditional power structures get weaker

If some voices matter more, the corollary is that other voices matter less. This is most true for a highly centralized Prime Minister's Office. But it also affects other traditionally powerful voices, such as the public service which can become paralyzed and confused as more cooks enter the kitchen. As a consequence, government relations become broader with more points of entry.

4. Process rules

Things often given short shrift during majority situations matter more when there's a minority, such as committees. No longer dancing to the PMO's tune, their outcomes become more unpredictable, and therefore more open to change. First drafts of legislation are more likely not to be the last; in 2005, a minority Parliament changed the budget after it had passed. And scandals become more likely to erupt as majority governments lose their ability to keep investigations in-check.

5. Allegiances change

It's said politics make for strange bedfellows. If that's true, minorities often become a swingers' club. Parties can vote with the government one day only to vote against the next. And sometimes, the two parties that get things passed are the two largest parties—this was the case in British Columbia recently on a natural gas development vote. In Ottawa, the Conservatives and Liberals voted together to pass corporate tax cuts during Paul Martin's minority government of 2004-06, and on issues such as USMCA or pipelines, it's quite conceivable they could again.

Take Away

Minority governments, including the one the 2019 election produced, change government relations. They make speaking to more parties crucial and they make influencing policy in public more important—in the media, in the digital world, and with stakeholders. They also make being nimble essential as dynamics and circumstances change, especially where the government is living vote-by-vote and could fall almost any day. But while they complicate how things are often done, they have also led to some of Canada's most enduring policy changes.

Learning What Levers to Pull in a Minority Government: Matt Triemstra



We've already looked at the mechanics of how a minority government could operate. We also know the players and can guess at the expected length of a Liberal government supported by the NDP, perhaps occasionally others. But how do stakeholders newly interact with government now? What levers can be pulled? And how do stakeholders get heard?

Minority governments tend to get a bad rap and are viewed as inherently fractious, but in reality, using the right levers, minority governments force parties to work together. That can be advantageous for stakeholders depending on the issue. Here are a few levers for stakeholders to consider as they plan their government outreach to Canada's new government:

1. Opposition MPs Matter – It goes without saying that your public affairs activities need to keep Liberal MPs front and centre, but with the Bloc and NDP each carrying enough weight to act as the balance of power, you need to make sure that you have some agreement on both sides of the aisles. Although the Conservatives and Liberals often have an us vs. them mentality, the Conservatives can't simply vote against everything in a minority government. Simply, relationships matter. Today's backbencher is tomorrow's Cabinet Minister. Get to know the critics from all parties and read all the party platforms and look for points of intersection to move your agenda forward.

2. Committees as Masters of their own Domain – At the dissolution of the last Parliament, there were 30 parliamentary committees. All had Liberal majorities, which effectively meant that committees were controlled by one party's MPs. Committees reflect the same makeup as Parliament, which means for this upcoming government, the party with the most seats, the Liberals, will no longer carry the majority on committees. This means that committees can truly be the 'masters of their own domains' and set their own agendas. It leaves rooms for stakeholders to directly engage with committee's MPs from all sides, whether that be requesting specific studies, appearing as a witness or just educating MPs. Most importantly though, all government legislation goes through a committee process, which means that changes are more likely to be made at the committee level.

3. Speech from the Throne – Any new government kicks off the beginning of the parliamentary session with a Speech from the Throne. It's a speech delivered by the Governor General that outlines the priorities of the government. The Liberals will be focusing their first speech on their campaign commitments, but they also need to be cognizant, as this is a confidence measure, they will need the support of other parties, which means the speech will have to be designed to appeal to at minimum the NDP or Bloc. Stakeholders should be reviewing the party platforms for items they can immediately support to show that they can be seen as trusted partners. Generating goodwill now will help you achieve your goals later.

4. Stakeholder Relations – Every Minister, and every party in Parliament for that matter, will have a team of people dedicated to stakeholder relations. These are the staffers that you need to get to know. Meeting with Members of Parliament directly is key, however, so is meeting with the staff who can often arrange meetings with MPs, provide helpful advice, and work to champion your asks.

5. Private Members' Bills – In a majority government it is exceedingly rare for a Private Members' Bills to pass that are not sponsored by an MP from the governing party. This no longer holds true in a minority government. Backbenchers, those MPs not in cabinet or Parliamentary Secretaries, will have more freedom to introduce legislation. At the beginning of Parliament, a lottery will be held to hand out spots to MPs to introduce legislation (simply so you don't have 300 MPs introducing bills all at once!). Stakeholders should work to identify supportive MPs that could sponsor a bill that achieves your goals. Note that Private Members' Bill can't spend money but can still serve to move your issues forward.

6. Engaging with the Executive – Despite being a minority government, Canada's executive level of government, the Prime Minister and Cabinet, remains controlled by the Liberals. Now that the Prime Minister has discounted the notion of a formal coalition government, all Cabinet Ministers will in fact be liberal. Liberal Cabinet Ministers and the full Cabinet itself, will still have their full constitutional powers to make administrative decisions and regulate. Cabinet Ministers will obviously need to make sure that any legislation they sponsor for their departments will garner support from other parties, but that's a political calculation and one that will be borne out at the legislative level. Stakeholders will still want to meet with Cabinet Minister directly to champion their goals. And as was done in the past, we expect the Prime Minister to release the mandate letters for each Minister, which outline the objectives they need to achieve. These are helpful documents for stakeholders to review as it spells where the government is headed and where you can align your goals.

What Does a Minority Government Mean for #CdnPoli? ([Video](#)): Dennis Matthews, Katie Heelis, Jamey Heath



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For a custom plan on how to engage with Canada's newest Minority Government please contact:

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