



# The NDP

## ENSIGHT'S ELECTION SPOTLIGHT SERIES

Welcome to Enight's Election Spotlight Series. As the election grows more distant and the new cabinet is announced, what's next? Who has the best leverage in a minority situation? What leaders are safe? What policies are likely? These are the kind of questions we'll seek to answer in the weeks to come. Last time, it was a spotlight on the environment. Now, a spotlight on the NDP.

### SPOTLIGHT ON LEADERS: JAGMEET SINGH

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Thanks to Elizabeth May stepping down, we know there'll be at least one leadership race. Could the New Democrats provide a second? In short, probably not.

After a decidedly lacklustre start to his leadership, Jagmeet Singh began the election with expectations that couldn't be lower. He likely owes them his job because he couldn't help but beat them. As the campaign progressed, Singh developed some momentum that gave the NDP a rare fundraising spike. And while there are fewer NDP MPs than the party hoped shortly before election day, it also wasn't wiped out. Given that seemed a real possibility before the election began—many predicted the Greens would get more votes—it, too, counts as a victory for Singh.

Yet all is not well for the orange team. In the 2015 election, it lost more than half its seats from Jack Layton's orange wave. In this election, it lost almost half of what remained. From Layton's last election until today, the NDP has gone from official opposition to fourth place, lost 79 seats, and seen its popular vote basically halved. Indeed, its electoral map is reminiscent of Alexa McDonough's from 1997—except the regional strength has moved from Nova Scotia to Vancouver Island. This sad state is another reason Singh's job is safe. Toss in financial difficulties and few will see leading the federal NDP to be a plum gig.

### SPOT THE DIFFERENCE: "THE" vs "A"

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In a press conference in mid-November, Jagmeet Singh claimed the balance of power in this Parliament. His logic was that if Justin Trudeau wanted to do anything progressive on a national scale, he'd be forced to work with the NDP. But in reality, the NDP does not have the balance of power. It only has a balance of power. One of three to be exact along with the Conservatives and Bloc Québécois.

Singh's argument aside, there is nothing that prevents the Bloc from voting on bills that affect people beyond Quebec. It did so during the minority governments of Paul Martin (2004-06) and Stephen Harper (2006-08 and 2008-11). It will almost certainly do so again, which for Singh is a nightmarish scenario.

On things the NDP wants to get done, such as universal pharmacare, the Bloc is likely to be the Liberals' go-to partner. On things the NDP wants to stop, such as the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion, the Conservatives are likely to render it irrelevant. And on things neither the Bloc nor Conservatives will do, the NDP's poor financial situation will likely make its bark about triggering an election if Liberals don't bend much worse than any eventual bite.

## SPOTLIGHT ON ISSUES: NDP PRIORITIES

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After the election, the NDP outlined three priorities: a universal pharmacare program, Liberal openness to dental care coverage, and the government dropping an appeal it launched mid-campaign against a human right ruling forcing it to compensate Indigenous children for being wrongly placed in foster care. Unless this is the subject of a non-confidence motion, it will not be voted on by Parliament; and it seems unlikely the Liberals will move on dental care, which they did not promise.



### 1. PHARMACARE

The Liberals likely will do something on pharmacare, but whether they will do what the NDP wants is very much in doubt. There are two kinds of pharmacare that will cover every Canadian. The NDP's model of a single-payer, universal system that would replace plans people currently have from their employer. Or a version that would cover people without workplace coverage with a public plan while leaving existing plans untouched. Given everyone would be covered either way, it's hard to imagine the NDP triggering an election if it didn't get its way—especially as the Bloc's support for a hybrid version could likely be won by exempting Quebec from a national plan.



### 2. ENVIRONMENT & ENERGY

Along with the Greens, the NDP would like to see greenhouse gas emission targets strengthened and the Trans Mountain pipeline project scuttled. While setting new emission targets may anger the energy sector, Canadian habit is to honour them more in the breach than observance. Which is to say, it makes for a symbolic but still empty compromise should Liberals choose to make it. And if the pipeline expansion came to a vote, it's all but certain the Conservatives would vote with the Liberals.



### 3. AFFORDABILITY

It is strange the NDP did not make affordability a priority given the similarities between its election promise to lower cell phone rates and Liberals' promise to do the same thing. As consumer debt and insolvencies rise and the economy possibly slows, it's likely there will be movement on populist pocket book issues like this.

## WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE...

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Another consideration for Jagmeet Singh should be whether progressive organizations would support him if he pushed for an election. Traditional allies such as unions have become less pro-NDP in recent years and more muscularly anti-Conservative. And the Liberals have traditionally stronger ties with the environmental movement than the NDP. As progressives increasingly see elections as times to stop Conservatives from winning as opposed to helping New Democrats or Greens defeat Liberals, whether New Democrats could find support for helping topple the Liberals no matter what they did is a strategic consideration that should weigh heavily on Singh's mind.

