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**Results of the 44th Federal Elections**

**Declining Voter Turnout Gives Evidence of  
Government Legitimacy Crisis**

- *Anna Di Carlo* -



Elections Canada has released validated results for the September 20 Federal Election. With mail-in ballots having been counted, the seat count stands at Liberals, 159; Conservatives, 119; Bloc Québécois, 33; NDP, 25 and Green Party, 2.

The Liberals have served notice for a judicial recount in the Quebec riding of Chateauguy-Lacolle, where the Bloc Québécois candidate beat the Liberal incumbent by 286 votes.

In rounded figures, out of 27.4 million voters on the Final List of Electors, 17 million cast ballots, amounting to 62.25 per cent of registered electors. This is referred to as the “popular vote.” The

percentage will fluctuate down slightly once the number of people who registered on polling day is added. However, any way you put it, the fact is that more than 10 million registered electors chose to not cast a ballot at all. The electoral body does not inform how many spoiled their ballots but those who did not cast a ballot constitute more than one third of eligible voters.

The Liberals will now form another minority government on the basis of 5.5 million votes out of 17 million votes cast. This means they will form their government with the lowest-ever share of the popular vote, 32.6 per cent. This, in turn, constitutes 20.3 per cent of the eligible vote which the leader of the Liberal Party who becomes the Prime Minister of the country claimed is a “clear mandate.” With this result, the Liberals have surpassed their own low record of 33.1 per cent of the popular vote in 2019. Prior to that, in recent elections, Stephen Harper’s Conservatives formed a minority government in 2006 with what used to be called the “slimmest popular vote” ever with 36.3 per cent of the valid votes.[1]

Furthermore, the Liberals will form the government even though the Conservatives won the popular vote, beating the Liberal count by about 160,000 votes. Their 119 seats were won with 33.7 per cent of the valid votes, or 20.9 per cent of the registered voters. The NDP’s 25 seats are the result of approximately 3 million votes, or 17.8 per cent of the valid votes; 11.1 per cent of registered voters. The Greens won 2 seats with 397,565 votes cast across the country, 2.3 per cent of the ballots cast; 1.5 per cent of those registered.

According to the Canadian Press (CP) report on the election results: “Voter turnout in federal election [was] about average despite pandemic challenges.” This clearly belittles the serious crisis of legitimacy party governments and the liberal democratic institutions which serve the rule of the financial oligarchy face.

The fact is that voter turnout has seen a precipitous decline throughout the past thirty years since the November 1988 election which brought Brian Mulroney to power. Voter turnout in that election was 75.3 per cent as people got involved to oppose the ratification of the free trade agreement with the United States and oppose the GST. Since then, and especially since the Liberal Party of Jean Chrétien reneged on its electoral promises, the declaration that representative democracy works and provides party governments with the consent of the governed is not warranted. In the 1993 election, Jean Chrétien famously declared about GST, “We hate it and we will kill it.” He also promised that his government would not ratify the Free Trade Agreement with the U.S. The Conservatives were reduced to three seats, Jean Chretien kept the GST, ratified the free trade deal, went on to hold so-called Team Canada junkets all over the world to make Canadian monopolies Number One in the world and embroiled the country in corruption scandals unmatched since the Pacific Scandal in 1873 soon after Confederation.[2] Since then, the declaration that representative democracy works and provides party governments with the consent of the governed is unwarranted.

Since the 1993 election when the reputation of political parties and party government plummeted to single digits, instead of renewing the political process to eliminate the role of power and privilege in the hands of private interests, the parties with seats in the House of Commons formed a cartel which makes deals behind the backs of the people to keep themselves in power and the people disempowered. The low percentage of the eligible vote the parties which form the government receive and the fact that votes do not translate into representation is evidence of the legitimacy crisis in which the system of representative democracy is mired.

Keep in mind that the national picture also does not take into account constituencies and entire regions where the turnout is almost equal to, or less than, the number of electors choosing not to vote. How can governments claim to represent people in these locations? For instance, the Ontario riding of Ajax had a turnout of 53.5 per cent of eligible voters; Markham–Unionville, 51.4 per cent; and Brampton South of 54.5 per cent. In Nunavut, voter turnout was 34.11 per cent of eligible voters; in the North West Territories it was 46.7 per cent.

The democratic institutions require renewal. Attempts to say they are vibrant and worthy of defending are falling on deaf ears.

## Notes

1. Figures prepared by Simon Fraser University show the ten lowest government shares of the popular vote, ranging from 32.6 in this election to 39.0 per cent in the 1957 and 39.5 per cent in the 2015 election. The percentage of historically low votes received by the party which formed the government by year of federal election is as follows: 2021: 32.6 per cent; 2019: 33.1; 2015: 39.5; 2008: 37.6; 2006: 36.3; 2004: 36.7; 1997: 38.5; 1979: 35.9; 1972: 38.5; 1962: 37.3; 1957: 39.0.

2. In April 1873, Sir John A. Macdonald who was Prime Minister, and senior members of his cabinet, were accused of accepting election funds from shipping magnate Sir High Allan in exchange for the contract to build the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR). Known as the Pacific Scandal, it was revealed that bribes were accepted by 150 members of the Conservative government in the attempts of private interests to influence the bidding for the national rail contract.

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## Official Complaint Says Media Failed to Provide "Equitable" Coverage

Canada's election and broadcasting laws do not uphold the right of Canadians to an informed vote. A major reason is that registered parties and candidates are not treated equally. A concept of "equitable" treatment was introduced to displace the fundamental democratic principle of equality. The suggestion is that all parties and participants in an election are all treated "fairly" but there is no discussion of the criteria used to determine what constitutes fairness.

In this vein, on September 20, a complaint was filed with the Canadian Radio and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), arguing that the 2021 election coverage does not even meet the requirement for equitable treatment. The complaint was also filed with the Commissioner of Canada Elections.

The complaint was filed by Greg Vezina, the leader of the None-of-the-Above Party — a party registered in Ontario. The complaint argues that "none of the licenced radio or television broadcasters" have met the conditions of their licence as outlined in the Broadcasting Act, Section 3. This Section states, among other things, that Canadian broadcasting should "provide a reasonable opportunity for the public to be exposed to the expression of differing views on matters of public concern."

The complaint also charges that "not a single licenced broadcaster" respected the Election Guidelines issued by the CRTC on August 17 that stipulated programming should be conducted "on an equitable basis to political parties and candidates." When coverage of small parties did occur, the complaint states, "in most cases the editorial slant was very negative or dismissive," not only of the parties, but "more importantly of their supporters, and also of the viewers and listeners and voters seeking to learn more on the public airwaves in order to make an informed decision..."

The complaint notes the false character of advertising by media outlets claiming to provide "all the election news" viewers need. It alleges that "Not a single licenced broadcaster ... even informed the public that there were 22 registered parties with officially nominated candidates on the ballot ... on more than one occasion during the entire campaign."

“We can see no circumstance where a legitimate definition of ‘equitable’ coverage includes providing hundreds of minutes if not hours of coverage to the major parties, their leaders and candidates, and a few minutes or seconds, or in most cases not a single second, to the 16 other parties during the entire campaign,” the complaint states.

As an overall description, the complaint states coverage was “biased in favour of the major parties and mislead viewers of facts regarding their actual voting options, from the daily news to the public affairs and highly partisan political panel coverage, to all aspects of the campaign including biased and unscientific polling.”

The complaint acknowledges that while the CRTC does not require debates to be inclusive of all party and independent candidates, the media is not excused from its obligation to provide equitable coverage in news, commentary and other programming. Political panels, it says, only included individuals from the parties in the House of Commons. The polling, it states, also only included the leaders of these parties, “with occasionally the Bloc and Peoples Party leader added, but with no other leader or a none of the above option.” The complaint argues that furthermore, the inequitable coverage should be treated as a contribution in kind by those the stations favoured. Such contributions would be illegal given that they come from a prohibited source (corporations).

Vezina filed a similar complaint following the 2019 federal election, particularly citing the CBC’s regular feature entitled “where the leaders are today” which did not inform about all the party leaders. Vezina notes in his complaint that this merely resulted in a change in some cases of reporting titles, such as “where the leaders of the major parties are today.”

It remains to be seen what attention this complaint will receive. It is nonetheless certain that the failure of elections in Canada to uphold the right of Canadians to an informed vote is a serious flaw in the democracy which merits serious attention. Taking this complaint seriously would be a good place to start. Dismissing it under the hoax that the electoral law permits such an egregious democratic deficit will not restore credibility or legitimacy to the crisis-ridden democratic institutions.

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### Letter to the Editor

## The Ability to Plan is What Raises Human Beings Above Mere Survival

“Trudeau’s ‘Gamble’” in *Renewal Update* is a very good article which goes right to the heart of the problem as to why the various factions of the ruling class are unable to make accurate predictions in the current political and economic situation which this same ruling class has fostered.

The ability to plan is what has separated human beings from the animal world (which at best only possess it to a rudimentary level). The great breakthroughs that humans made in developing agriculture and animal husbandry are all based on prediction. Similarly, the great advances in science and technology have served that purpose. Yet, in this era, it is precisely this power of prediction which has been so disdained by the ruling class and its pundits and intellectuals who deride what they derisively call social engineering, central planning, socialism, etc. and worship at the feet of the “market economy” and the anarchy of production. Any attempt to overall plan in a serious way, they say, will end up in disaster. Instead, let market forces,



private interests and neo-liberal principles rule.

So, with a few exceptions, they have by and large succeeded throughout the world in entrenching neo-liberal thinking. The result is economic and political chaos and a profound feeling of anxiety and unease amongst the people. People worry about climate change and other looming environmental problems, job security, retirement living standards, health care, etc. They feel that the future is not in their hands at all.

Predictability and the mechanisms and systems to bring that predictability about lie at the centre of the solutions. As the article points out, the key element is to be able to participate in arriving at the decisions which affect our lives and have control over our futures. The power of prediction is directly related to that control.

The issue of prediction and its implications is very important in the fields of politics and the economy. And it is very important in the fields of theory and ideology. The neo-liberal ideological offensive has been very important for the “victory” of neo-liberalism in the world and has been one of its strongest points, permeating economics, politics, culture, philosophy, etc. But, paradoxically, it is also its weakest point, especially as this neo-liberal world descends into more chaos and nightmare and its depraved and anti-human essence emerges. In these uncertain, anxious times, people want more predictability, certainty and planning in their lives and society and need new forms to empower them.

The article “Trudeau’s Gamble” is an excellent opening up of the topic of “predictability” and clearly explains why the ruling class is having such difficulty in this sphere.

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