

A Conservative Minority?

By Rod Fraser



The recently called Federal Election will be decided on September 20, 2021 (or shortly thereafter – if mail-in ballots delay the final counting). According to [338Canada.com](https://www.338Canada.com), the popular vote for the various parties is set out below (as at September 20, 2021). The Conservatives and the Liberals are running neck

in neck, though the polling momentum has bounced back and forth between these parties in recent days.

Conservative Party of Canada – 31.4%

Liberal Party of Canada – 31.9%

New Democratic Party – 19.3%

Bloc Quebecois – 7%

Peoples Party of Canada – 6%

Green Party of Canada – 3.4%

Rounding error – 1%

If these polling figures hold and reflect the final votes, 338Canada.com tells us there is a 71% chance of another Liberal minority government. In my riding in the GTA, the incumbent Liberal has a 57% chance of being returned to office (although the race is very close).

So sad – but there it is. When the Conservative Party stakes its future on running to the left (as a Liberal-lite party), this is what happens.

In the 2019 election, the Liberals won 155 seats – compared to 119 seats for the Conservatives. This

allowed the Liberals to govern with the support of any one of the two minor political parties, namely – the Bloc Quebecois (32 seats) or the New Democrats (24 seats). 170 votes were (and are) needed in the House of Commons to constitute a majority.

With such a stable minority government, it was a surprise to many of us that Trudeau called a new election in the middle of the Covid-19 endemic. Indeed, the necessity for an election was a major issue in the first days of the campaign.

If the popular vote shown in the above polls is reflected in the final election results, the seats likely to be won by each political party will be as follows (according to 338Canada.com).

Conservative Party of Canada – 125 seats

Liberal Party of Canada – 148 seats

New Democratic Party – 31 seats

Bloc Quebecois – 32 seats

Green Party of Canada – 2 seats

If the Liberals win a minority government, it is almost certain the NDP and/or the BQ will support

them in a vote of confidence. We will then struggle on for the next eighteen months, at which time Trudeau has promised to hold another election.

Minority government does offer certain benefits to the country. Opposition MPs will be in the majority on all parliamentary committees, so their oversight will help hold the government accountable.

If we turn our minds back to the 'SNC Lavalin' and 'WE' scandals, it was these committees that attempted (as best they could) to bring Trudeau's behaviour to the attention of the public. Worse behavior in the upcoming Parliament may well be prevented by these same MPs.

Legislation will also be vetted by opposition MPs and at least one of these parties will have to support the Liberal government to pass budgets and other parliamentary bills.

But the votes aren't counted yet, so it might be interesting to consider what a Conservative government (however unlikely) might look like.

It seems clear the Conservatives will require both the NDP and the BQ to support them. It requires 170 seats for a majority in Parliament, and the Conservatives (if present trends continue) would only have 125 seats of their own.

Since the largest party in Parliament is usually given the first chance to form a government, the Conservatives could assume power only after the NDP, CPC and BQ defeated the Liberals in a non-confidence motion. Then Trudeau would be required to submit his resignation to the Governor General.

At this point, she'd ask the Conservatives to negotiate with the other smaller parties to see if there was enough common ground to form a government with their support.

The two smaller opposition parties are said to be fed up with Trudeau and might like an opportunity to get rid of him. Here's why.

Erin O'Toole is a creature of the centre left (what Conservatives call a 'Red Tory'), and he's not very frightening. If he is clever, he will sound out the NDP and BQ to see if they are in the mood for an innovative minority government, one where opposition parties are respected and their input sought in all legislative initiatives.

Think this is crazy? Well, the premier of Quebec, Francois Legault, doesn't like Trudeau. He recently described him as 'dangerous.' If this is the case, the Bloc leadership might well agree to a Prime Minister Erin O'Toole, in place of Trudeau. Would the NDP be far behind? I don't think so. Strange things often happen behind closed doors in the world of politics.

O'Toole would need to dangle some carrots, but it might not take much for the two smaller parties to be persuaded. With an agreement setting out the basis for their co-operation, and the consent of the Governor-General, the new Conservative (or coalition) government would be sworn in. An approval of their first Throne Speech by a majority in the House of Commons would send them on their way to a successful minority government lasting the best part of two years.

It's worth noting this has an historical parallel. In 1985, after a minority Conservative government was elected in Ontario, the NDP party under Bob Rae, proposed a similar arrangement with Liberals.

Both parties were tired of the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario, who had been in power for 42 years and won 52 seats in the 1985 election. The Liberals won 48 seats and the NDP was third with 25 seats, holding the balance of power.

Normally the Conservatives should have formed the government, relying on the support of one of the other parties to pass legislation. This is typically what happens in Canada.

But through an imaginative power play by Bob Rae, the two minority parties agreed to a coalition, whereby David Peterson (having the most seats)

would be the Premier. But in all other matters, the two parties would co-operate.

It worked for two years, was fascinating to watch and I propose it as a model for the new Parliament in Ottawa. Let's try something new.

At the time of writing this article, it's not quite clear which way the election will turn. A Liberal minority government seems the most likely, and the scenario I describe above (a Conservative minority) would be a complete surprise.

As promised earlier, I have updated this article at 2:30 pm on election day, to take account of the most recent polling. I plan to offer a CODA in a few days, outlining the final seat counts and voting results, along with some concluding commentary.

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