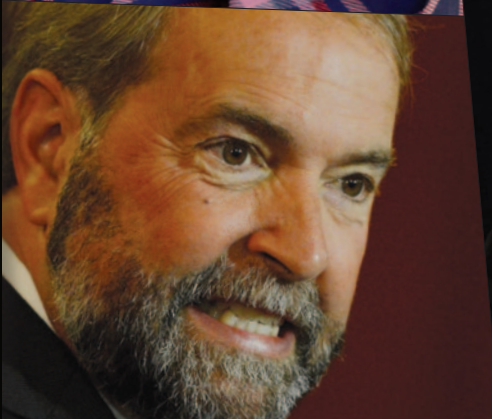
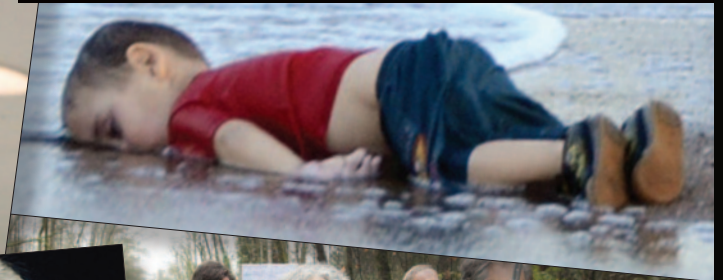


C2C JOURNAL

IDEAS THAT LEAD

VOL 9, ISSUE 3
FALL 2015



**Ready or Not,
Canada Chooses
Change**



Ready or not, Canada chooses change



There was some minor rumbling in Conservative circles in the fall of 2013 suggesting that Stephen Harper should consider making way for a new Conservative leader before the 2015 federal election. It was quickly squashed as Justin Trudeau's gaffes started piling up, the economy seemed to perk up, and Harper's government started polishing up some shiny pre-election baubles like income splitting for families and higher TFSA contribution limits. It seemed the stars were aligning for another Conservative victory under Harper's leadership.

At the outset of this year's extraordinarily long campaign, the Conservatives still seemed well-positioned for another win. The party was flush with money, the policy hopper was full of targeted benefits for a broad spectrum of voters, a campaign built around leadership, the economy and security seemed the right mix at the right time, and Harper himself had never looked so confident, calm and even cheerful on the hustings.

Yet seven weeks later, it all came to naught.

The fall edition of *C2C Journal* is a compendium of what happened in this turbulent campaign, and why. Most of the pieces were written as the campaign unfolded, beginning with a stage-setter by long time Sun Media editor Paul Stanway that examined the positioning narratives the parties developed over the last year or so and their success – or failure – in getting their messages out in the first month of the campaign.

Swirling around those tightly scripted narratives and improbably costed promises were all the stories the parties can't control – the Duffy trial, Syrian refugee crisis, candidate bozo eruptions, the niqab flap, and global financial market gyrations. Usually these are the true tests of campaigns, with victory often going to the nimblest.

In Campaign '15, however, most of these eruptions faded as quickly as they arose, influencing the central themes of leadership and change only at the margins.

C2C's election edition also provided a detailed look at the competition for ethnic votes and an assessment of the Air War, the television advertising and social media bombardment that wallpapered the electoral landscape. And we examined the importance of messy, oppositional ideology in modern politics and campaigns, contrasting it especially with Trudeau's utopian promise of non-partisan technocracy.

In the latter stages of the campaign we provided detailed analyses of the pre-vote electoral environment in each of Canada's six regions. Writers based in each region tracked polls, monitored swing ridings and tried to separate reality from spin in conversations with campaign insiders. These pieces collectively chart the evolution of the campaign, highlighting its many twists and turns.

Finally, we wrapped the Fall 2015 edition of *C2C Journal* with a campaign post-mortem by Colby Cosh. Political historians will be trying to sort out what happened for years, but they would do well to study Colby's first pass at this history-making election. Among his insights is an analysis of how the Conservatives' congenital hostility towards the "Media Party" exacerbated the anybody-but-Harper phenomenon and allowed Trudeau to sail through the campaign on a sunny message of hope and change, with little sustained scrutiny or criticism of his vague policies or often shallow, incoherent statements during the debates and scrums.

Many will say that Trudeau won big because he greatly exceeded the low expectations that he, and Conservative party attack ads, had set for him. But from his vow to grow the economy from "the heart outwards" at the start of the campaign to his "sunny ways" victory speech on election night, there was little discernible improvement in his policy depth, maturity, or

credibility as a leader.

What happened instead was a relentless focus on Harper's leadership. Ironically, this was exactly what Conservative election planners had scripted. The economy, security and leadership were the three pillars of their campaign. Ministers, MPs and candidates were all sidelined to keep the spotlight on Harper. The bet was that Harper would win a mano-a-mano showdown with Trudeau by convincing about 10 percent of the two-thirds of Canadians who wanted change that the devil they knew was better than the lightweight heir to the loathsome Trudeau legacy.

As things began to go sideways in the last half of the campaign, the Tory war room doubled down on security with hints of a barbaric cultural practices snitch line and a ban on the niqab in the public service. By the time Harper was coerced into campaigning alongside the notorious Ford brothers, way too many voters had concluded that he was, in fact, the devil.

It is truly a shame the Harper era ended on this surreal note. He ought to be remembered for lowering taxes, shrinking government, putting families back on the political agenda, the eclipse of Quebec nationalism, reviving pride in Canada's military and history, expanding international trade, and dismantling numerous nanny state artifacts like the gun registry and the wheat board.

In the long run, depending who writes it, history should judge him thus. In the short run, though, his party faces a steep climb back against an impressive Liberal majority, which might have been avoided with a less leadership-focused national campaign and less furniture burning at the end.

Paul Bunner is the editor of C2C Journal and a veteran of numerous federal, provincial and municipal elections as a journalist or campaign worker.

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Long before the writ dropped August 2, election planners for all the parties began drafting their messaging strategies and scripting the daily campaign events and policy announcements. At the very top of their agenda was the job of "framing the ballot" – the subtle and sophisticated art and science of trying to define the choice voters will make on election day. Over a long career of covering elections as a journalist and planning them as a senior political staffer, Paul Stanway has developed a deep understanding of how this process works. His analysis of where the Conservative, NDP and Liberal parties are currently positioned in their quest to frame the ballot kicks off *C2C Journal's* comprehensive coverage of Campaign '15.



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Perhaps befitting the leader of a party hunting middle-of-the-road votes, Justin Trudeau avoids ideology in his rhetoric and his platform. That's for the other guys, the "extremists" to his left and right, who are so driven by partisan dogma that it blinds them to the virtues of "evidence-based" public policy. Promising to rely on experts and "hard, scientific data" may help Trudeau overcome doubts about his competence to be prime minister. But most voters want to know what their leaders believe in, writes Patrick Keeney, and the risk for Trudeau is that they will conclude he believes in nothing.



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A decade ago Stephen Harper and Jason Kenney calculated that the old Liberal model for electoral success in Canada was broken. Economic and political power had shifted from Ontario and Quebec to the West and to the fast-growing populations of new immigrants in suburban ridings across the country. They developed a message aimed at those voters and it helped win three successive elections, culminating in the big 2011 majority where over 40 percent of new Canadians voted Conservative. No other centre-right party in the world has pulled this off. Can the Conservatives do it again in 2015, when the European refugee crisis has become a campaign issue, and the Tories are being cast as unsafe to immigrants? Candice Malcolm weighs the odds.



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Current election polling suggests Canadians could wake up to a very different Parliament on October 20, but in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and the northern territories there is little evidence of much hunger for either "real change" or being "ready for change". Paul Pryce went looking for both in federal and provincial polling, by-election results, riding redistributions, and the 2015 crop of candidates, but all he found was apparent contentment with the status quo.



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For over two years the Conservative government has been taking a pounding in Atlantic Canada over its modest reforms to Employment Insurance. Meanwhile, it got almost no political credit for awarding a \$25 billion shipbuilding contract to Halifax that will produce thousands of jobs. Whatever that says about the regional appetite for work vs poge, it spells disaster for Conservative candidates, and big election gains in the region for the Liberals under Justin Trudeau.

He has promised to roll back some of the Tory EI changes, and reduce impending cuts to premiums, which are disproportionately paid by workers and employers in high-employment regions of Canada. In a place where a quarter of the workforce collects EI every year, write Marco Navarro-Genie and Michael Kydd, that's good politics.



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The 2015 federal election campaign battle for the hearts and minds of British Columbians is, at bottom, a contest between environmental protection and economic security. If it plays out like the 2013 provincial election, the latter will trump the former and the Conservatives will retain their hegemony. But if fear of pipelines, fatigue with the Harper Tories, and full turnout of progressive voters rules the day, Paul Stanway predicts October 19 will be a good day for the NDP and B.C. may well decide who gets to form the next government..



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Ten of the 124 seats won by the Conservative party in the 2006 election were in Quebec. Most of those were in and around Quebec City. In the early days of Stephen Harper's reign PMO staffers joked that he was not just the prime minister, but also "the mayor of Quebec City." The joke died with the loss of half of the Conservatives' Quebec seats in the 2011 election. The new "mayor" of Quebec City and most of the province is NDP leader Thomas Mulcair. In this year's campaign, it seems certain his party will sweep the province once again. The only thing standing in their way, writes Tom Kott, is another eruption of fear and anger over *les autres* – this time wearing the Muslim niqab.



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The stunning NDP victory in last spring's provincial election marked a big leftward shift in Alberta politics. Yet polls consistently indicate another near-sweep of the province for the federal Conservatives this fall. How can this be? On policy and principles, the two parties are as different as night and day. Conservative leader Stephen Harper has made NDP Premier Rachel Notley his primary campaign target in Alberta, blaming her government for making the oil patch recession "much, much, worse". She coolly replies that Harper is out of touch with the province's new "values". Whatever happens October 19, writes Colman Byfield, it won't end this fight for the political soul of Alberta.



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Sorry other Canadians, but Ontarians will decide who gets to govern our country on October 19. They've got 121 (36 percent) of the 338 seats in the House of Commons. Through most of the campaign, the Liberals and Conservatives have been running dead even there, with the NDP a close third. Heading into the home stretch, the outcome is still far from certain, writes Leif Malling. Much depends on whether Ontarians hedge their bets, as they usually do, by balancing the Liberal government in Queen's Park with a Conservative one in Ottawa.



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A Trudeau's back in power and the House of Commons looks like it did when his poppa was running things. Turns out all that 2011 talk about a "Big Shift" of power from east to west, from the Laurentian liberal aristocracy to a Prairie conservative meritocracy, was a mirage. Colby Cosh provides a comprehensive post-mortem on one of the most rancorous – and perplexing – elections in Canadian history.



Framing the Ballot in Campaign '15

by Paul Stanway

At the end of the second week of the 2015 federal election campaign Stephen Harper became the first party leader to make a stop in Winnipeg. Speaking to an invited crowd of about 300 Conservative supporters, the prime minister gave the sort of focused and polished performance we've come to expect of him after so long in the political spotlight, nailing his theme of proven, dependable leadership in troubled times. The audience was enthused, the media was grumpy, and outside the oblivious residents of the Manitoba capital made plans for the upcoming weekend.

Welcome to Election 2015 – the first 'fixed-date' federal election and the longest official campaign in 142 years.

Conventional wisdom says you don't kick off an election in Canada in August, when most voters are tuned out and making the most of our short summer. So why do it? Harper contended that the unofficial campaign was underway well before the writ dropped August 2, so it was time to impose some order on the process. Happily for him, the early launch also effectively shut down third-party advertising, most of which had

been union-backed attack ads aimed at the Conservatives. Plus his party happens to have more money than their two major opponents, which should give them an edge over a longer campaign.

Naturally these strategic considerations went unmentioned in the Winnipeg stump speech – localized variations of which he'll deliver dozens of times at Tory rallies across Canada during the 78-day campaign. But the underlying

theme was clear – that the election would be, should be, a referendum on almost 10 years of Conservative economic management. Harper's main objective – and challenge – would lie in getting voters to look beyond the mountain of complaints that have built up over a decade in government and focus on that central issue.

It is hard to overlook all the political baggage the Tories have accumulated, including the recent millstones served up in testimony at the Mike Duffy trial. But it mercifully recessed August 28, and the Conservatives are banking on all that unpleasantness disappearing down the memory hole over the remaining seven weeks of the campaign. If the economy is in the center of the ballot frame on

“Harper’s stump speech theme was clear: the election would be, should be, a referendum on almost 10 years of Conservative economic management.”

October 19, they believe, Harper has a good shot at a fourth consecutive term – a feat last achieved by Sir Wilfred Laurier in 1908 – and a chance to vault past Jean Chretien to become Canada's fifth-longest serving prime minister.

“Change” vs “proven economic leadership”

Voter “fatigue” with the Tories is real and the argument for change is persuasive. At least two early polls indicated that some two-thirds of Canadians want the Conservatives gone. That's why both major opposition parties chose that theme for their primary election slogans: the NDP under Thomas Mulcair is Ready For Change while the Liberals under Justin Trudeau are promising Real Change.

Anything that highlights the similarities of their opponents is welcomed by the Tories, whose electoral calculus in many parts of the country is to come up the middle between a split centre-left vote. The same strategy kept the Liberals in power for 13 years when the Canadian right was split between the Reform-Canadian Alliance and Progressive Conservative parties. Early polling for the current election suggests, however, that the opposition parties are strong in separate fiefdoms: the Liberals in the Maritimes and Ontario, the NDP in Quebec and B.C. Everywhere the anybody-but-Conservative vote consolidates around one of the opposition parties, the Tories will be in trouble.

But those same polls indicate that no matter how weary many voters are of the Conservative government and its austere leader, they still trust them with the keys to the economy more than they do the opposition parties and their rookie leaders. Small wonder. Almost from the day they first took office – and likely well before then – the party has made a sustained effort to position itself as the *ne plus ultra* of fiscal rectitude and economic managerial competence. As a result, deservedly or not, the Conservative economic brand is solidly ahead of its competitors in the political marketplace.

It's a good thing they made that effort, for in 2015 the economy has not performed as they hoped or expected. As recently as last summer the government was still loudly boasting that Canada had weathered the 2008 global economic downturn better than any other major western economy. The Tories' economic credentials looked unassailable. But in case anyone had forgotten how much Canada's resource driven, export dependent economy depends on external economic conditions, the past year has been a salutary reminder: a precipitous drop in oil prices, depressed international demand for Canadian resources, lacklustre demand in the United States for our manufactured goods, and a falling loonie.

Predictably, the NDP and Liberals have been working very hard to make the Conservatives wear this year's barrage of bad economic news, including recent gyrations in stock markets and the September 1 announcement from Statistics Canada that the economy shrunk marginally during the first two quarters of 2015 – which

meets the technical definition of a recession.

Thus in the first month of the campaign what should have been the Conservatives' sturdiest asset looked pretty limp, and Harper had to fall back on some of his 2008 rhetoric, blaming external factors beyond the government's control and warning that electing an untested leader committed to increased taxes and spending would make a difficult situation worse. (His stump speech invokes the specter of Greece, where a new socialist government took over a faltering economy and made things “much, much worse”.) Of course that narrative proved effective in 2008, and still had legs in the 2011 election campaign. But one wonders, how many times can a government cry wolf?

Do ISIS and Putin matter?

In case stoking fear of economic calamity might not be enough to return the Conservatives to power, the party has another frightful narrative that runs second only to the economic nightmare in its messaging: global insecurity.

When Conservative election planners started drafting the campaign script last fall, Canadians were reeling from the murders of two Canadian soldiers in Ottawa and Quebec by two aspiring Canadian jihadis. It's difficult to imagine a more explicit challenge to our collective security than an attack on Parliament, or a more emotional one than the killing of an unarmed volunteer soldier on the steps of Canada's national war memorial. At the time, our elected representatives were suitably united in their sorrow and outrage, but the fundamental disagreements between the major parties on how Canada should respond to terrorism and other international security threats soon re-emerged.

On this file Stephen Harper has arguably been Canada's most outspoken leader since... well, ever. He has ditched the



“honest broker” diplomacy long favoured by the Liberals and NDP for a more pugnacious, unambiguous approach: opposing Russian expansionism in Ukraine, staunchly upholding Israel’s right to self-defence, committing Canadian Forces to the campaign against ISIS, and presiding over Canada’s long war in Afghanistan.

In short, Harper has led Canadian foreign policy to a place where the NDP and the Liberals will not follow, which once again leaves them competing against each other for more dovish voters. NDP leader Mulcair has muted his party’s traditionally strong pacifism, couching his opposition to the Harper doctrine in legalistic terms and emphasizing that he opposes Canadian military involvement in the fight against ISIS in Iraq and Syria because it is not sanctioned by the UN or NATO.

Justin Trudeau’s Liberals are, if anything, now to the left of the NDP on foreign policy. He has been unambiguous in opposing the ISIS missions and loud in his calls for Canada to return to its role the world’s peacekeeper. It may have been a mistake, but it was probably no accident when he slammed Harper for “whipping out his CF-18s” to show the world how big they are. His evident goal on the campaign trail is to portray Harper as a warmonger, and himself as heir to late 20th century Canadian Liberal pacifism.

The Conservatives’ domestic anti-terrorism legislation, Bill C-51, also cleaved a sharp divide between the governing and opposition parties. Mulcair’s NDP opted to oppose it outright, while Trudeau’s Liberals tried to have it both ways, voting for the bill while promising to gut it if they form government.

All of this has allowed the PM to forcefully argue that an NDP or Liberal government would compromise the security of Canadians with their wishy-washy approach to external threats. Many Canadian voters, particularly among the 1.2 million of Ukrainian descent, likely find it hard to imagine Mulcair or Trudeau publicly snubbing Vladimir Putin and telling him to “get out of Ukraine”.

But will any of this significantly influence votes in October? An Angus Reid poll published August 28 pegged terrorism and security as the top issue for just six percent of Canadians, far below the economy, health care, jobs and several other issues. It appears it would take a Russian invasion of the Arctic or an ISIS beheading on Bay Street for security to materially affect the ballot frame.

Chickens for every pot

In the first weeks of the campaign all the parties rolled out initiatives they hope will bolster their core support and attract swing voters, with the CPC making an early attempt to set the agenda (10 significant Conservative campaign



announcements by mid-August, compared with four each from the NDP and Liberals, and just one from the Greens).

As befits a party stressing fiscal responsibility, most of the Conservatives’ announcements so far have been modest in scope and cost: bolstering the ranks of the Canadian Forces reserve, improving benefits for disabled veterans, improved apprentice tax credits, banning “terror tourism” to extremist-controlled countries, and increased aid for persecuted religious minorities.

Some have been more substantive: the promise to raise the amount that first-time home buyers can withdraw tax free from RRSPs should appeal to some younger voters; a permanent home renovation tax credit, although modest, will help satisfy Canadians’ prodigious appetite for upgrading and improving their homes; and pledging to resurrect “life means life” sentencing for the most heinous murderers signals that the Conservatives are still pursuing a “tough on crime” agenda – another popular stance that sets them apart from the Liberals and NDP. Their resolute stance on marijuana prohibition is part of that, and although it defies a seemingly inexorable trend towards decriminalization and legalization in Canada and elsewhere, it is said to play well among many ethnic communities – particularly Asian and South Asian – which are an essential part of the Tory electoral coalition.

Perhaps in an effort to neutralize the opposition “change” narrative, many Conservative announcements have been future-focused. Harper’s promise to halt Senate appointments is clearly an attempt to address widespread public unhappiness with the upper house (and a tacit admission that the appointments of Senators Duffy, Wallin, Brazeau et al were a mistake). Likewise the promise to pass legislation committing any future government to a national referendum on changes to the electoral process forces the Liberals, in particular, to explain why they wouldn’t want Canadians to vote on, say, a move to proportional representation.

All of this builds on springtime pledges to deliver family income splitting, raise TFSA thresholds, and hike the Universal Child Care Benefit. The opposition parties have worked very hard to portray all these as disproportionately

benefitting the rich. But the fat UCCB cheques that arrived in the mail this summer were undoubtedly welcomed by rich and poor households alike.

This aggressive agenda has largely sidelined opposition attempts to portray the government as old, tired and out of ideas. The opposition parties have been forced to spend much time reacting to Conservative announcements, which was surely the CPC's goal. The first national televised leaders' debate in August was largely fought on preferred Conservative ground and the remaining ones – including one on the economy and one on foreign policy – should reinforce this strategy.

For their part, both major opposition parties also laid out their main planks in advance of the writ: Mulcair with his \$15 daycare and \$15 federal minimum wage plans and tax hikes for large businesses, and Trudeau stressing increased taxes on "the wealthiest Canadians" to fund a new tax-free Canada Child Benefit and lower taxes for "middle class families". This bidding war for parents' votes is probably unprecedented in Canadian electoral history, and a measure of how far the Conservatives have set and moved the agenda.

Where the Tories are manifestly not setting the agenda is on environmental policy, ranked as the top issue by 14 percent of Canadians in the Reid poll. Both major opposition parties have promised to "kickstart" renewable energy production, drive down "climate-changing emissions" and generally bolster Canada's green credentials. Their cause may soon get a boost if, as expected, U.S. President Barack Obama vetoes the Keystone XL pipeline, which will likely be portrayed as punishment for Conservative foot-dragging on carbon regulation.

On, off, and back on message

So how is all of this playing to a distracted electorate? From a Conservative perspective, in the early going you would have had to say "not well".

The malodorous and overtly political Duffy trial allowed the opposition parties to characterize the Prime Minister as devious and undeserving of public trust. The only thing missing from the courtroom was a likeness of Harper in the dock.

But then something remarkable happened. The Duffy trial went into hiatus and the disappointing economic indicators morphed into a dramatic, if temporary, stock market panic. In the space of 24 hours, all anyone was talking about was the economy – and which leader and party was best qualified to weather the turmoil.

The response from the NDP and Liberals may ultimately define the election campaign of 2015, with both Justin Trudeau and Thomas Mulcair forced to address the

“Everywhere the anybody-but-Conservative vote consolidates around one of the opposition parties, the Tories will be in trouble.”

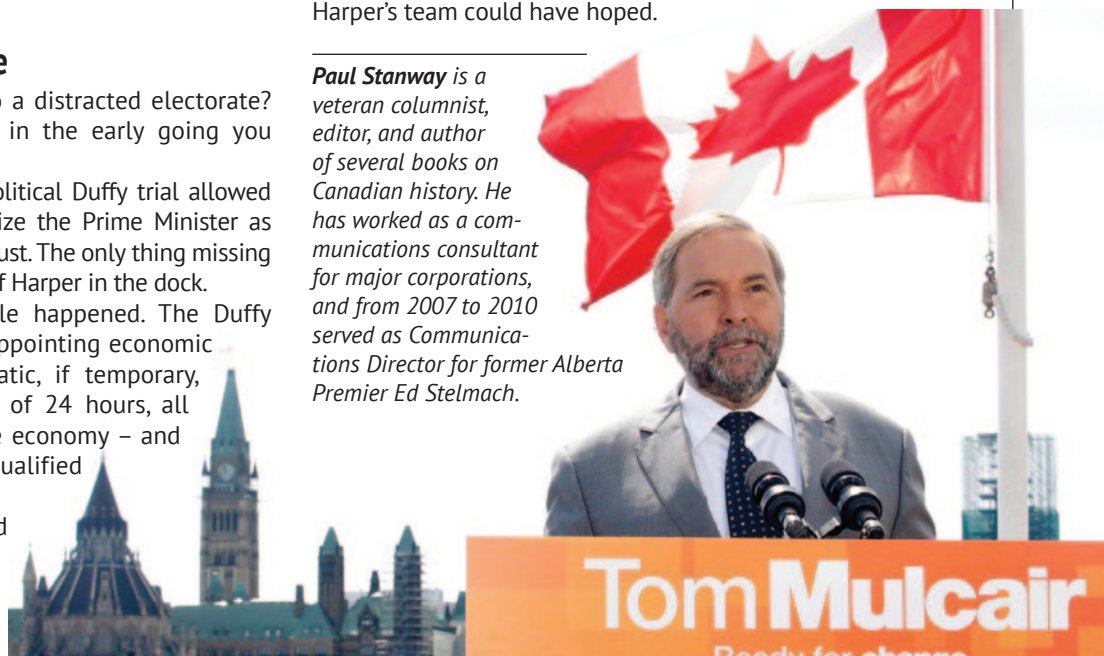
issue of federal deficits.

Trudeau was first out of the gate, with an explanation that a Liberal government would run deficits of up to \$10 billion a year for at least two years to prime the economic pump and finance increased infrastructure spending. Harper giddily responded that Trudeau has finally figured out that deficits “don’t take care of themselves,” and in a remarkably animated, apparently unscripted moment, he mocked the Liberal leader’s “modest deficit, a tiny deficit, so small you can hardly see the deficit”.

Mulcair’s response was as uncharacteristic as Harper’s glee, vowing that come hell or high water an NDP government would not run a deficit. His opponents immediately toted up the cost of NDP promises and proclaimed them unaffordable without a massive tax increase.

The Conservative gamble that the campaign focus would eventually settle on the economy appears to be working. The sweet spot for them is economic news that is bad enough to underscore their message that a change of government is risky, but not so bad that a change seems necessary. As luck would have it, the day after Trudeau promised deficits the federal Finance department announced a \$5 billion budget surplus for the second quarter of the 2015. This may have hurt Trudeau’s bold attempt to outflank the NDP on the left, but if it peels off NDP votes for the Liberals in enough tight three-way races, that probably augers well for the Conservatives too. All the parties and leaders will face bumps and blow-ups over the next seven weeks, and there will be more conflicting economic data. But as the campaign begins in earnest, the ballot frame setting up as well as Harper’s team could have hoped.

Paul Stanway is a veteran columnist, editor, and author of several books on Canadian history. He has worked as a communications consultant for major corporations, and from 2007 to 2010 served as Communications Director for former Alberta Premier Ed Stelmach.



Science vs Ideology in Campaign '15

by Patrick Keeney

Democratic politics is, at bottom, a competition of beliefs about how we should govern ourselves. Political parties espouse various values, principles and ideals which inform the voter of a party's inclinations, temperament and priorities. Such philosophical statements are crucial; for just as no politician can conceivably be conversant with the details of innumerable government programmes, neither is it reasonable to expect that voters can be familiar with any but a small number of governmental policies. What is reasonable, however, is for the voter to scrutinize the theoretical positions underlying a party's practical proposals.

The Conservative platform is anchored in conservative values: smaller government, less tax, individual responsibility, fiscal prudence, free markets, pro-family, pro-energy, tough-on-crime, and a well-armed military. The Conservative government of Stephen Harper is a well-known quantity, and the voter can safely predict how it is likely to respond to a wide range of issues.

The New Democratic Party, reflecting its agrarian, populist and socialist roots, advances an unabashedly progressivist package: expansion of public health care and public education, affordable daycare, a rise in the minimum wage, gender equity, an emphasis on environmentalism, and a foreign policy which favours humanitarian aid and peace-keeping over military intervention. Should the NDP form the next government, leader Thomas Mulcair has provided the electorate with a reasonable understanding of his priorities and how he is likely to govern.

In sum, the CPC and the NDP have adopted platforms which offer the voter stark and opposing alternatives. They propose ideologically-driven and predictable agendas which present two clear choices.

But in a democracy, where the art of compromise is a practical necessity, there is also a pervasive view that parties should avoid ideology. Public policies and programmes, it is argued, should be guided not by ideology, but by science. Decision-making based on empirical evidence will not only deliver more enlightened and efficient government, but also eliminate the ideological impasses of partisan politics.

The plea for evidence-based politics is hardly new. 500 years ago Francis Bacon, the father of empiricism, argued

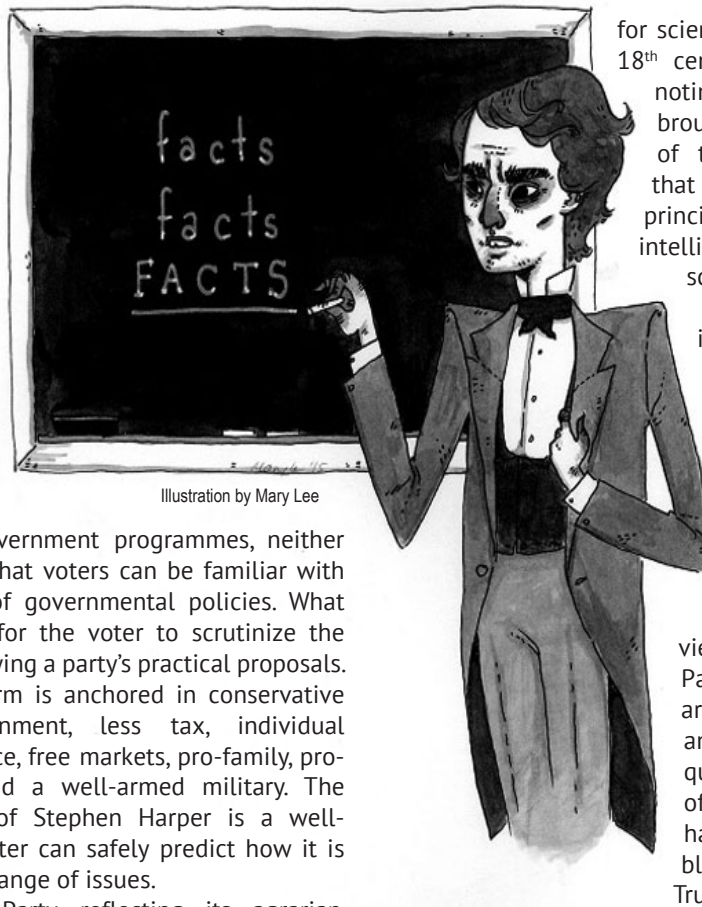


Illustration by Mary Lee

for science to guide the secular state. 18th century Enlightenment thinkers, noting the advances science had brought to our understanding of the natural world, theorized that political problems are, in principle, similarly solvable through intelligent application of appropriate science.

This same set of convictions is very much operative today. And in the 2015 election, Justin Trudeau is its foremost champion. He first voiced his commitment to "evidence-based decision making" when announcing his bid for the leadership of the Liberal Party more than two years ago. In his view, both the New Democratic Party and the Conservatives are driven by "tidy ideological answers to complex and difficult questions." The Liberal Party of Canada, by contrast, will have nothing to do with such blinkered ideology. According to Trudeau,

"... the only ideology that must guide us is evidence. Hard, scientific facts and data. It may seem revolutionary in today's Ottawa, but instead of inventing the facts to justify the policies, we will create policy based on facts. Solutions can come from the left or the right, all that matters is that they work."

Such a data-driven view of politics has an intuitive appeal. Liberals, henceforth guided only by the authority of science, would set aside partisan politics to craft pristine legislation that always accords with the relevant evidence. A Liberal government under Prime Minister Trudeau would bring scientific neatness and precision to the disorderliness of the political arena.

Yet neither politics nor science are quite so straightforward. Mr. Trudeau's insistence on "hard scientific facts and data" brings to mind Thomas Gradgrind, the scientifically inclined school master in Charles Dickens' *Hard Times*. Gradgrind thought that education should be concerned exclusively with "the facts." In his estimation, the "one thing needful" was for teachers to fill the empty minds of their young charges with "facts, facts, and more facts." As

the novel unfolds, he discovers that scientific facts are insufficient for both life and education.

The view that politics should be guided by “facts, facts, and more facts” is equally mistaken. Science and politics occupy logically distinct spheres, and attempts to make politics answerable to science generally results in a gross injustice to both. Numerous malignant episodes from the last century should make us wary about political appeals to science. For example, one thinks of the “scientific” racial theories of Nazi Germany, the murderous Stalinist “science” of Lysenkoism, or, closer to home, the enforced sterilization of mental defectives in the name of scientific eugenics (advocated by, among others, Liberal feminist icon Nellie McClung). It is salutary to keep in mind that such sinister policies were all based on hard-headed appeals to “scientific facts and data.”

It would be convenient for politicians (and indeed for all of us) if science invariably supplied clear-cut and infallible answers. But it rarely does. Science is by definition oppositional and argumentative; it is defeasible rather than absolute; and it is frequently marked by radically divergent views, methodologies and conclusions. “Consensus” is a useful word for politics, but translates poorly into the world of science, where “experts” on any given matter frequently hold competing, if not irreconcilable, positions. As Nobel-winning physicist Richard Feynman quipped, “Science is the belief in the ignorance of the experts.”

In short, scientific facts tend to be contentious and prone to revision: Is the earth warming or cooling? Is day care better for children than home care? Does stimulus spending shorten recessions or handicap future economic growth? Politicians must, at a minimum, sort out which scientists to believe (in itself this is no small task); they must assess the validity of contradictory studies; and crucially, they must determine how much confidence they are willing to invest in any putative scientific expert.

Even when the facts are not in dispute, translating facts into policy requires an evaluative framework. For example, it is an undisputed fact that the consumption of excessive calories in a given population leads to increased rates of obesity, which in turn leads to a rise in health care costs and

“A Liberal government under Justin Trudeau promises to bring scientific neatness and precision to the disorderliness of the political arena.”

increased rates of morbidity. But what policy implications follow? Should the government attempt to regulate the diet of its citizens, say, by taxing junk food and soda pop? Should our schools make nutrition and physical education priorities? Or do the dietary choices of the citizenry lie outside the purview of government?

Such policy questions abound. But they can only be answered by appeal to some set of underlying beliefs. There is simply no scientific way of solving them. Whatever our answers, they will arise from an appeal to one or more principles. And such principles, when articulated systematically and comprehensively, form an ideology.

Former British Prime Minister Harold Wilson famously observed that “a week is a long time in politics”, meaning only

that a great many unforeseen concerns can arise in a very short time. No one can predict what these issues might be. However, by articulating a clear and coherent set of principles, a political party signals to voters how, in general, that party will likely respond to a broad array of concerns; what will guide a party’s decisions, and what its goals and aspirations are. An ideology provides a blueprint for a way of governing, so that on almost any public issue voters can more or less predict where a party will stand.

None of this is to suggest that politicians can ignore the facts. It is only to suggest that any political party requires a comprehensive vision; a systematic articulation of ideals and principles which will guide the formation of practical policies. We can avoid calling this an “ideology” if that word offends. But unless and until the Liberal Party of Canada is willing to articulate a fundamental vision, then Canadians might reasonably view the Liberals as a patched-together coalition of political opportunists whose only “ideal” is the



exercise of power for its own sake.

For Justin Trudeau and the Liberal Party to be competitive in the 2015 election, they need to offer the Canadian people something more than a slavish commitment to technocracy. They need a fundamental vision, a set of ideas and principles explaining how the Liberals would govern. To borrow a phrase from Dickens, it

is “the one thing needful.”

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by Candice Malcolm

In the summer of 2011 I was working in my Ottawa office one Saturday afternoon, as is typical of a political staffer, when the phone rang. It was a friend from Washington D.C. who worked in the American conservative movement; he was calling to congratulate me on my new job as Jason Kenney's press secretary. The Harper Conservative “strong, stable, national majority government” was only a few weeks old, and my friend was also trying to get the scoop on how the Conservatives had managed to pull off their big electoral victory.

“We’re big fans of Jason Kenney and the work he’s done with conservative outreach,” my friend said. He was looking for someone to help recount the successes of the Canadian Conservative experience and share it was an American audience. “American conservatives can really learn a lot from Harper and Kenney.”

That was the first of many phone calls from journalists, activists, and conservative staffers from around the world looking to understand the outreach strategy of the Conservatives. The party's success drew attention from the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, every corner of the U.S., and just about every other Western liberal democracy. Everyone wanted to learn more about the Canadian brand of conservatism that had capped three successive electoral victories with the big 2011 majority.

The story of the Conservative Party of Canada's success is actually fairly straightforward; Stephen Harper and his team won the election because they built a broad coalition and appealed to both native-born and new Canadians alike.

To understand their success one has to look no further than Canada's largest city, Toronto. The casual observer of Canadian political culture could be forgiven for assuming Toronto is a bastion of limousine liberals and social justice warriors. Its flagship newspaper is the *Toronto Star*, known in conservative circles as the ‘Red Star,’ and its left-wing intelligentsia includes prominent politicians such as Olivia Chow, Bob Rae, and Kathleen Wynne, and activists and journalists like Naomi Klein, Avi Lewis, and Linda McQuig.

Yet in the 2011 election the Conservative party won ridings in every corner of Toronto proper, not to mention the vast GTA suburbs of Thornhill, Richmond Hill, Vaughan, plus all the ridings west of Mississauga, everything east of Pickering, and all the seats north of Markham. In total, the CPC captured 24 of the 25 seats in the 905 – the area code used in the suburbs and as shorthand to describe the region. The 905 is one of the most multicultural regions in one of the most multicultural countries in the world, and polls suggest that the Conservatives captured 42 percent of the ethnic vote across the country in 2011 election, representing significant gains over previous years.

Tory-onto, On-Tory-o. Upper Canada was painted Tory

Blue. Harper's decisive victory in Canada's largest metropolis was a microcosm of his party's electoral success across the country. At a time when centre-right parties all over the world were losing votes in urban regions, the Harper Conservatives managed to buck the trend.

How did they do it? The party primarily appealed to the economic sensibilities of middle class voters – championing lower taxes and cutting red tape, promoting entrepreneurship and skills training, and encouraging savings and more economic freedom. They also won favour by promoting family values, religious freedom, safe communities, and delivering policies that empower individuals and parents over unions and bureaucrats.

These types of policies appealed to the values held by traditionally conservative Canadians across the country. They also just happened to be the same values held by many new Canadians living in Toronto and other big Canadian cities. After all, many newcomers fled big, overreaching, and sometimes oppressive government in their home countries in pursuit of Canadian freedoms and opportunities.

But it wasn't as simple as that. Many in the US make the same argument: that Hispanic and Chinese immigrants possess values that align with the Republican Party, and yet, those two groups overwhelmingly backed Barack Obama in both 2008 and 2012. Having similar values isn't enough. Conservatives need a method and a strategy to demonstrate the shared values and make sure immigrants feel welcome in their party.

Canada's Conservative shift

In their much-lauded book *The Big Shift*, pollster Darrell Bricker and *Globe and Mail* columnist John Ibbotson recount the 2011 election and argue that Canada has changed profoundly over the past few decades. The elites in Montreal, Ottawa, and Toronto who dominated Canada's political culture for more than century – referred to in the *Big Shift* as the “Laurentian consensus” – had lost touch with the values and feelings of the rest of the country. These Laurentian elites see Canada as a frail and collectivist society, a Canada that frankly no longer exists.

Economic and political power has shifted westwards, away from the Laurentian elites and towards boomtowns like Saskatoon, Calgary, and Fort McMurray, which attracted opportunity-seeking migrants from across the country and around the world. To these energetic, ambitious “strivers”, the old 20th century Canadian welfare state was a relic of an era whose time had passed.

They have been relentlessly courted in Conservative messaging as people “who work hard to get ahead” and “look after their families” and “play by the rules” and succeed “because of what they do, not who they know or where they came from.” It's a message that resonates particularly with new immigrants. And each decade Canada welcomes enough immigrants to create a new Toronto-sized city. In fact, if all the Canadians of South Asian descent gathered together, they would form the third

largest city in the country.

Canada is increasingly a country of the suburban middle class; folks who care more about low taxes and economic opportunities than solving every real or imagined social problem through ever-bigger government. This long-established Western Canadian sentiment struck a chord in Toronto's suburbs, where large numbers of new Canadians have settled down in search of affordable communities and good job prospects.

The Harper Conservatives were not responsible for this shift; they were merely the first to recognize and then capitalize on it, capturing the imagination – and then the votes – of millions of new Canadians.

As far back as the early 1990s, Jason Kenney and Stephen Harper had discussed Canada's shifting demographics and the need to build a coalition between small “c” conservatives in Western Canada and new Canadians living in the suburbs of Canada's cities. The mission was twofold. First, they needed to reach out to new Canadians and convince them the Conservatives party does, in fact, represent their values and interests.

Kenney led this outreach effort; he worked tirelessly and across the country to understand, engage, and attract ethnic communities to the Conservative Party, and made important symbolic gestures to demonstrate how conservatives embrace pluralism and diversity.

These efforts first started to pay off in the 2006 election victory. Once in power, Prime Minister Harper began sending out greetings and news releases to highlight different cultural holidays. The new government officially recognized historic wrongs such as the Chinese head tax, and provided compensation for those affected. They were among the first in the world to provide official recognition of the Armenian and Ukrainian genocides, incredibly important gestures to members of those communities. The government also granted honorary Canadian citizenship to human rights champions and freedom fighters in contentious regions such as Burma, Tibet, and South Africa. And they won support among Jewish voters by calling out anti-Semitism in all its guises and unfailingly backing Israel's right to self-defence.





These actions went a long way in demonstrating that the Conservatives were serious not only about welcoming newcomers into their party, but also shared their convictions about freedom and justice.

The Conservative party spent millions on reaching out and winning over new Canadians and ethnic cultural communities. It advertised heavily in Punjabi and Mandarin language media leading up to the 2011 election, and also translated the message into Polish, Filipino, Cantonese, Hindi, Ukrainian and Vietnamese. Invariably, the objective was to highlight the links between the community's values and core Canadian and Conservative values.

The second part of the strategy was to change the culture of the Conservative party itself. This included purging the party of racists and outspoken critics of immigration and vetting would-be candidates to ensure they held a pro-immigration vision for Canada. It also involved developing new immigration policy cleansed of any hint that Conservatives viewed newcomers as a threat to Canada or its social assistance programs.

The Harper government had its work cut out for it; immigration reforms were needed to reduce the decade-long backlog of applications and clamp down on a lax process that allowed bogus asylum claimants to stay for years, sometimes decades, as they moved through repeated appeals. There were setbacks, including controversies over the Temporary Foreign Workers program and litigation over limits to some entitlements for non-citizens. But by emphasizing that immigration must serve Canada's economic objectives above all else – to address labour shortages and fuel economic growth – the sweeping reforms brought in by

the Conservatives during the last several years have been widely embraced by both native-born and new Canadians.

The rise of cultural pluralism

Alongside immigration reforms, the Harper government has also subtly but substantially re-shaped "official multiculturalism" as it was championed for decades by Liberal administrations. Unlike the failed multiculturalism of Europe – a hands-off approach that tiptoes around intolerance and tells newcomers they needn't change a thing; they can bring their own norms and laws to often supersede local customs – Canadian "pluralism" as practiced by the Harper government focuses on integration. The immigration system accordingly favours immigrants who will likely succeed in Canada, in terms of language skills, economic prospects, and compatibility, while also ensuring religious rights and freedoms are protected. In short, immigrants who will say yes to both the Magna Carta and Masala Chai.

A perfect example of the shift from multiculturalism to cultural pluralism is the revised Citizenship Guide for newcomers to Canada. The original guide was an ode to the Laurentian vision of Canada; it included multiple pages on the CBC and the importance of recycling, but never once mentioned Canada's military. The Harper government, led by former Immigration minister Kenney, revamped the guide to include and celebrate Canadian history – including its military history – and to emphasize traditional community and family values. The guide doesn't mince words; it unequivocally denounces ethnocultural practices such as female genital mutilation as "barbaric", and stresses the need

to abide by Canadian laws.

Canadian immigration policy under the Conservative government unexpectedly vaulted to the forefront of the current federal election campaign with the publication of a photograph of a dead Syrian boy washed up on a Mediterranean beach. The picture symbolized the tidal wave of refugees from war-torn Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere that is crashing on Europe's shores.

Initial reports suggesting the boy was part of a family that had applied for asylum in Canada turned out to be false, but that didn't stop the opposition parties and some in the media from laying his death at the government's doorstep. Despite facing enormous pressure to throw open the country's doors to tens of thousands of Syrian refugees, as was done for the Vietnamese boat people in the 1970s, as of this writing the Conservatives were sticking to their existing plan to take 10,000 over four years. Harper has repeatedly emphasized that a sustained international military effort to quell terrorism and civil war in Syria must be part of the solution to the refugee crisis.

Ironically, before the emotionally-charged picture surfaced, the Conservatives had been working hard to make foreign policy a prominent election issue, but with little success. Their objective had been to highlight the split between the government's support for a strong military response to various global security challenges including ISIS in Syria and Iraq, and the relatively pacifist, non-interventionist positions of the Liberals and New Democrats.

After the picture broke, the Conservatives found themselves cast as warmongers, unsympathetic to the refugees. In the heat of the campaign, no one recalled that in the last session of Parliament, minister Kenney alone expressed concern over the plight of Syrian Kurdish, Yazidi, and Assyrian populations more times than all the opposition leaders combined.

On the same day the opposition politicians were attacking the Conservative government for being insensitive to needs of refugees, Kenney appeared at an event with hundreds of smiling Iraqi families in Toronto – some of the 22,000 Iraqi refugees the Harper government has brought to Canada since 2009. There are obviously not enough eligible voters within this group to materially affect the outcome of the election. But they are representative of a much larger newcomer constituency across Canada that sees the Conservative party as the party of pro-immigration, integration, and inclusion.

This is truly a Canadian anomaly. In Europe, a chorus

of politicians – mostly on the right but also on the left – have declared multiculturalism a failed policy; many blame immigrants for the political and economic woes of their countries. In Germany, a recent string of arson attacks against housing projects designated for asylum seekers is just the most recent example of what happens when a host society revolts against its government's immigration policies. Around the world, conservative politicians are feeding this frenzy by demonizing immigrants.

Perhaps the worst example is just south of the border. The only thing more surprising than Donald Trump's recent incendiary comments about Mexico – he characterized Mexicans as rapists and criminals – is that he actually leads the polls as the preferred Republican candidate for president in 2016. Though few consider him a credible contender, there is no doubt he resonates with conservative voters. Rather than learning from Canadian Conservative model of pluralism and openness, it seems the American right is following Europe down the path of social exclusion.

Meanwhile, in Canada, all parties are competing to appeal to new Canadians and ethnic communities. But their pitches are very different. While the Liberals and New Democrats are offering to throw open the doors to the current wave of refugees and promising them a conventional no-strings-attached multicultural welcome, the Conservatives are being more circumspect about refugee numbers and insistent on

ensuring the integrity of Canada's security.

It used to be said that no political party could achieve a majority government in Canada without a strong base in Quebec. As the Harper Conservatives demonstrated in the last election, this is no longer true. The political and economic heart of the country has shifted. It now belongs in the 905, the prairies, and in Greater Vancouver. With 30 new electoral districts added mostly to these regions for the 2015 election, it's now more accurate to say that no political party can win a national majority without winning seats in Brampton and Burnaby; Richmond and Richmond Hill; and Surrey and Scarborough. In many of those ridings, the outcome will be determined by the votes of new Canadians, and the Conservatives will learn if the work they've done to build support in ethnic communities over the last decade has won them another election.

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“The 905 is one of the most multicultural regions in one of the most multicultural countries in the world, and in 2011 the Conservatives captured 42 percent of the ethnic vote.”

Where the Revolution Isn't

by Paul Pryce

Compared to the upheavals that have occurred in federal and provincial politics in other parts of Canada since the 2011 election, voters in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and the northern territories seem relatively content with the political status quo and they are expected to mostly uphold it on October 19. Certainly there is little evidence of an impending earthquake like the NDP shockwave that rocked Alberta in the spring provincial election. Altogether, the Prairies-North region only accounts for 31 of the 338 seats in Parliament, but in a tight three-way national race, they could be the difference between a minority or majority government.

If there is going to be a big shift, it's not foreshadowed at the sub-national level in the region. Premier Brad Wall's Saskatchewan Party remains the dominant brand in its namesake province and the New Democrat government in Manitoba, while shaky, is in its 16th year. The Yukon Party has been in power since 2002. The Northwest Territories could see some changes in a general election set for this November, but consensus politics are the rule in both NWT and Nunavut, and the consensus rarely changes much.

Most polling in the region has indicated little erosion of Conservative support in

Saskatchewan and Manitoba, where the party won just over 50 percent of the popular vote in the 2011 election. A Nanos poll released September 11 pegged Tory support in the two provinces at 54 percent, with the Liberals and NDP at 22 percent and 18 percent respectively. But another post-Labour Day poll, by Forum Research, had the Conservatives tied with the NDP, with the Liberals well behind.

Neither Saskatchewan nor Manitoba nor the territories got any new ridings in the redistribution that created more seats for British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario and Quebec. But the two provinces did see significant redrawing of electoral boundaries that will affect vote distribution. Local economic and political concerns will also undoubtedly influence the vote, as will the departures of many familiar faces and the arrival of many new, unknown ones.

Manitoba

The Conservative Party has held the majority of Manitoba's seats in the House of Commons over the past several elections. In 2011, the CPC took 11 of 14, the NDP two, and the LPC one. In a pair of by-elections in late 2013, the CPC secured another strong mandate in the southeastern rural riding of Provencher following the resignation of Public Safety Minister Vic Toews, but only narrowly eked out a victory in the southwestern riding of Brandon-Souris. Liberal leader Justin Trudeau was riding high in national polls at the time, and his candidate came within a whisker of beating the Conservative.

This year Trudeau got tangled up in a local nomination contest. Winnipeg South Centre was a long time Liberal bastion held by Lloyd Axworthy, among others, until the CPC's Joyce Bateman won a squeaker there in 2011.

So it's winnable for the Liberals – or it



was until the leader was accused of interfering in the riding's nomination battle, supporting Jim Carr, the former President of the Business Council of Manitoba, against Karen Taraska-Alcock, a long-time party activist and co-chair of Trudeau's own leadership campaign in the province. If that's seen as a top-down betrayal, it could be demotivating for grassroots Liberals in South Centre and beyond.

The NDP has its own problems in Manitoba – chiefly the embattled provincial NDP government. This summer Moody's Investors Service downgraded Manitoba's credit rating for the first time in 20 years, and the Dominion Bond Rating Service chastised the government for its "weak fiscal discipline." A balanced provincial budget is not projected until 2018 at the earliest, which undercuts Thomas Mulcair's key message that NDP governments are invariably pillars of fiscal rectitude. This probably explains why Premier Greg Selinger was conspicuously absent from Mulcair's Manitoba campaign launch on August 20.

There has been a significant turnover among CPC candidates in Manitoba.

Shelly Glover, Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, is not seeking re-election in Saint Boniface while other long-time parliamentarians, like Joy Smith in Kildonan-St. Paul, are also sitting out this election. But, rather than a weakness, this might be a strength for the CPC campaign, which is battling a strong desire for change. Manitoba voters could appreciate some fresh faces, like Jim Bell, the Winnipeg Blue Bombers vice-president now running for the Tories in Kildonan-St. Paul.

Aside from the re-match in Brandon-Souris between the CPC and the LPC, the ridings to watch in Manitoba will be the urban areas of Winnipeg North, Winnipeg South Centre, and Elmwood-Transcona. In 2011, only 44 votes separated LPC MP Kevin Lamoureux from his NDP challenger in Winnipeg North, and the CPC's Lawrence Toet beat the NDP incumbent by just one percentage point. Boundary redistributions



may give the NDP a slight edge in Winnipeg North but are unlikely to tip the balance of Winnipeg's other close races.

Saskatchewan

Once the storied homeland of the CCF-NDP, Saskatchewan was a great bastion of the CPC in the 2011 general election. It won 13 of 14 seats, losing only to Liberal warhorse Ralph Goodale in Regina-Wascana. Unlike Manitoba, there have been no by-elections held in Saskatchewan since 2011 from which to divine public opinion. Also unlike Manitoba, none of the national parties are particularly disadvantaged in Saskatchewan by association with unloved provincial counterparts. Aside from a public spat over equalization, the CPC and the Saskatchewan Party are two sides of the same conservative coin, and Premier Wall's stratospheric popularity probably lifts all Conservative boats. Saskatchewan NDP leader Cam Broten has been rebuilding his party for two years, and should have at least some election infrastructure to lend to his federal cousins. Apart from Goodale's fiefdom, the federal and provincial wings of the Liberal party are weak almost everywhere. Numerous federal candidacies remained unfilled even after the writ drop.

So far, the challenges facing the CPC are mostly self-inflicted. Lynne Yelich, Minister of State for Foreign and Consular Affairs in the last government, became only the second CPC incumbent in Canada to fail to secure a nomination (radioactive Calgary MP Rob Anders was the other), when veteran sports broadcaster Kevin Waugh supplanted her as the CPC candidate for Saskatoon-Grasswood. Ominously for the Conservatives, Yelich lost because her power base was in the rural part of a "rurban" riding. Redistribution did away with several of those, creating new all-urban ridings with high concentrations of Liberal and NDP voters. Also causing some discomfort for the Tories is the lingering odour of the Senate scandals, which locally is most pungently embodied in the person of Senator Pamela Wallin. The RCMP handed the results of their 18-month investigation into her expense claims to crown prosecutors on August 31. If charges are laid before election day, it may be harder for soft CPC supporters to hold their noses and vote Tory.

The most hotly contested Saskatchewan ridings will be Regina-Lewvan and Desnethé-Missinippi-Churchill River.

Although the LPC is polling well in Regina, the newly constituted riding of Regina-Lewvan draws upon areas of Regina-Lumsden-Lake Centre and Palliser that slightly favoured the NDP over the CPC in the last election. Sensing the opportunity for a breakthrough here, the NDP has fielded Erin Weir, a former Saskatchewan NDP leadership contender and a high-profile left wing economist, as its candidate. In Desnethé-Missinippi-Churchill River, only three percent of the vote separated CPC incumbent Rob Clarke from his NDP challenger in 2011. Clarke has held it for two terms but the riding has a long history of swinging back and forth between the three main parties. More than two thirds of voters are of aboriginal descent, as are the three major candidates, but Perry Bellegarde, National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, has been lobbying hard for ridings like this to vote 'anybody but Conservative'.

The Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Yukon

No prime minister has courted the North more diligently than Stephen Harper, visiting every summer he's been in power, salting it with infrastructure spending, and glorifying it in his rhetoric. The political return on his investment has been two of the three territorial seats – Yukon and Nunavut – but the Northwest Territories have resisted his charms and stuck with the NDP. This year's trip north, which occurred early in the campaign, included some more infrastructure lolly, including a port facility for Iqaluit and asphalt for Highway 5 running through Wood Buffalo National Park into Fort Smith.

Harper's strong support for northern resource development resonates with many people across the region who would like to see the territories develop their own economies and wean themselves off federal transfers. But the debate over development and environmental protection is still ongoing in the North, and the NWT government is currently preparing an Oil & Gas Strategy which is expected to be released prior to the end of the year and which will also likely address the controversial issue of hydraulic fracturing. A proposed moratorium on fracking was rejected by the territorial legislature in June 2015, but the release of this important document may return this issue to public debate before October 19. Thomas Mulcair has loudly supported moratoriums on fracking in other parts of the country, such as New Brunswick, and the re-emergence of this issue could aid the NDP incumbent in the NWT.

In Yukon, the territorial parties are not perfect proxies for the federal ones, but they're at least somewhat indicative. Current polling suggests the more-or-less conservative Yukon Party and the Yukon NDP are running neck-in-neck, but that's what the polls said prior to the 2011 territorial election when the Yukon Party won 10 of the legislature's

19 seats and more than 40 percent of the vote. The federal Conservative incumbent, former RCMP officer and mixed martial arts fighter Ryan Leef, made headlines in the current campaign when he ambushed a woman who was destroying his lawn signs, leaping out of the darkness in camo gear, handcuffing her, and making a citizen's arrest. She told a reporter that she vandalized his signs "so I could see the trees". It is thought that Leef's actions in this incident may be admired by enough Yukon voters to ensure his re-election, although his best bet is a three-way split of the centre-left vote between the Liberals, NDP and Green Party.

In Nunavut, two-term Conservative MP Leona Aglukkaq substantially increased her share of the vote in 2011 even when faced with her toughest opponent yet, LPC candidate and Nunavut's founding Premier Paul Okalik. This year her Liberal opponent is former territorial MLA Hunter Tootoo, who publicly griped that Harper's \$63 million port announcement wasn't enough. The NDP was a latecomer to the race, only nominating Jack Anawak as its candidate on August 23. Anawak had previously served as the LPC MP for Nunatsiag, as the region was known before it became a territory in 1999. Previously, the NDP had been mulling the nomination bid of Jerry Natanine, Mayor of the community of Clyde River, but he was nixed because of his close relationship with Greenpeace, which is locally reviled for its opposition to traditional seal hunting and whaling. It remains to be seen whether Anawak's baggage (including a 2013 impaired driving conviction) will prove any lighter

than Natanine's.

If it ain't broke...

All in all, it would seem prairie and northern voters are content with the status quo. While major campaign developments such as bombshell testimony at the Duffy trial and the Syrian refugee crisis may have influenced polling patterns elsewhere, levels of support in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and the territories appear to have remained fairly consistent with 2011. Boundary revisions on the prairies haven't been favourable to the CPC, but it is still very likely that the region will elect far more Conservative parliamentarians than New Democrats or Liberals.

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“The federal NDP has problems in Manitoba – chiefly the embattled provincial NDP government.”



Atlantic Canada, Trudeau's New Liberal Base

by *Marco Navarro-Genie and Michael Kydd*

The electoral influence of Atlantic Canada has been diluted with the addition of 30 seats to the House of Commons because none of them will be in the Atlantic region. But the region's 32 seats still matter in a close three-way, country-wide race between the Conservatives, New Democrats and Liberals. In this part of Canada, however, the race appears anything but close.

At mid-campaign, and for many months leading up to it, the resurgent Liberal party under Justin Trudeau has been putting up polling numbers around 50 percent, up 20 points from the 2011 election. These gains come almost entirely at the expense of the Conservatives, whose 2011 support has been halved to around 20 percent. That puts them in third place, 10 points back of the New Democrats, who are pretty much exactly where they were four years ago. According to poll aggregator ThreeHundredEight.com, the Liberals are currently projected to win 22 seats in the region, the NDP 6 and the Conservatives 4. In 2011, the score was LPC 12, NDP 6 and CPC 14.

Numerous factors have contributed to the Tory collapse, but perhaps the single most damaging issue has been their relatively minor reforms to employment insurance qualification criteria. In a region where seasonal work is woven into the fabric of the economy and EI income dependence rates are higher than anywhere else in Canada, those 2013 reforms have sparked sustained public protests and fierce criticism by local politicians and other stakeholders.

New Brunswick

The Conservatives currently hold eight of New Brunswick's

10 ridings – their highest total since Brian Mulroney's 1984 landslide. If current levels of support hold to election day, the Tories may salvage three seats: Rob Moore in Fundy Royal, Keith Ashfield in Fredericton, and John Williamson in New Brunswick Southwest.

All three MPs are highly respected in their ridings, especially Ashfield, a long-time cabinet minister who has been battling cancer for two years but is currently in remission. Williamson's seat is in the province's Anglophone conservative heartland that was formerly the base of the provincial Confederation of Regions Party, once the Official Opposition to Frank McKenna's Liberals. Williamson's cause was not helped by a clumsy comment he made last March about "whities" and "brown people" – in an apparent criticism of the Temporary Foreign Workers Program – but he apologized profusely and seems to have put the controversy behind him.

Other prominent Conservative candidates, including Indian Affairs Minister Bernard Valcourt, Robert Goguen, Rodney Weston, Mike Allen, and Tilly O'Neill-Gordon, are hoping to get a boost from a recent backlash against the provincial Liberal government over nursing home fees and a moratorium on hydraulic fracturing. The provincial Grits are also saddled with a growing deficit, 11 percent unemployment and negative economic growth. If some of that rubs off on the Trudeau Liberals, the Conservatives may do better in New Brunswick than anywhere else in the region – which isn't saying much.

Nova Scotia

With three of Nova Scotia's four incumbent Conservative MPs not seeking re-election this year – including former

Defence Minister and regional chieftain Peter MacKay – party insiders are fearing the worst, a complete shut-out in the 11-seat province. Here too the Liberals are benefitting from the exaggerated complaints about the Employment Insurance reforms, particularly in rural ridings like Cape Breton-Canso and Sydney-Victoria. The whopping \$25 billion contract awarded to Irving Shipbuilding in Halifax to rebuild Canada's navy has apparently procured few votes in Nova Scotia, or anywhere in Atlantic Canada.

Likely gains for the Liberals and NDP will be in West Nova, South Shore-St. Margaret's, Cumberland-Colchester, and Central Nova. The NDP is competitive in all those ridings, particularly Central Nova, where former provincial NDP Justice Minister Ross Landry is running against former Conservative Party staffer Fred DeLorey. The Tories takes some hope from the fact that three seats in the region turned blue in the 2013 provincial election, which saw the end of a one-term NDP government that had rung up a \$4 billion debt on a \$9 billion-a-year budget (and thus became a prominent exception to NDP leader Thomas Mulcair's claim that NDP governments are invariably models of fiscal prudence). The Liberals, meanwhile, suffered a setback in Central Nova when their candidate David MacLeod resigned over Justin Trudeau's support for the Harper government's anti-terrorism law, Bill C-51.

Scarcely two years removed from the disastrous provincial campaign that saw the party reduced from a majority government to a paltry five seats, the NDP will be hard pressed to make large gains in the province. But they should hold on to at least two of the three they've got. Six months ago, even star incumbents like Megan Leslie and Robert Chisholm looked to be in trouble. They are still facing strong Liberal challenges, but the durability of NDP support nationally (including last spring's provincial conquest of Alberta), may keep them afloat in their ridings.

Conservatives believe their best shot is Central Nova, but they are also hoping for a miracle in Cumberland-Colchester, where former Conservative-turned-Independent-turned Liberal Bill Casey is trying to unseat Tory incumbent Scott Armstrong. The mercurial Casey actually helped Armstrong win the seat in 2009, before he soured completely on Stephen Harper and took up with Justin Trudeau. But Armstrong, a constant campaigner and vigorous local advocate who has delivered plenty for his riding, may not be easy to beat.



Prince Edward Island

The four seats in the smallest province in confederation will likely be as red as Anne Shirley's pigtails by night's end on October 19, but not if popular Conservative cabinet minister Gail Shea has anything to say about it. A quirk of the Conservative EI reforms saw five more weeks of additional benefits provided to rural and seasonal workers outside of Charlottetown. As it happens, Shea represents a rural riding. The scandal over Senator Mike Duffy's ephemeral residency on the island doesn't seem to provoke the same level of outrage locally it does elsewhere, but Liberals are still hoping for a clean sweep. Whatever happens to Shea, PEI seems destined to become the only orange-free province in the country, a distinction once held by Alberta.

Newfoundland & Labrador

The Conservatives have nothing to lose in Newfoundland and Labrador, and if they had any chance of winning any of its seven seats, it vanished the second they denied the nomination in the riding of Avalon to Ches Crosbie, son of iconic NL Progressive Conservative John Crosbie. As Tory volunteers and donors sit at home and on their wallets, the Crosbie affair has driven a deep divide between Newfoundlanders and the Harper Conservatives. While Crosbie was not blessed with his father's political genius and wasn't expected to win Avalon, the snub may poison the well on the Rock for Conservatives through this election and beyond.

With the Conservatives out of the picture in Avalon, it's a two-horse race between the Liberal candidate and the former Liberal MP Scott Andrews, whom Trudeau busted out of the

party after a female NDP MP anonymously accused Andrews of sexual misconduct. As with those unsubstantiated charges, Andrews hasn't got a chance.

Outside of Avalon, the Liberal surge threatens the two St. John's ridings currently held by the NDP. The incumbent in St. John's East, Jack Harris, is the NDP's best bet to maintain a toehold in the province. In St. John's South-Mount Pearl, New Democrat MP Ryan Cleary is thought to be running a close second to the Liberal candidate, former CTV broadcaster Seamus O'Regan.

Summary

With just under five weeks to go until Election Day,

the outcome of the national election is still entirely up in the air. The campaign may yet be buffeted by unexpected developments that could change or determine its course, but in Atlantic Canada, barring a monumental reversal of Liberal fortunes, it seems clear a red tide is going to engulf the region. Expect modest gains for the NDP, significant losses for the Conservatives including the possibility of a shutout in three of the four provinces, and up to two-thirds of the region's seats going to the Liberals.

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by Paul Stanway

On September 14th Peter Mansbridge and crew descended on Vancouver for a special edition of the CBC's *The National* to inform Canadians that British Columbia voters would likely hold the key to success for whichever party comes out on top in the 2015 federal election.

We seem to reach this point in almost every federal election, with somebody enthusiastically postulating that, this time, Canada's Pacific province may decide which party forms the government. That's not exactly sticking your neck out. Being the country's most westerly time-zone, strictly speaking B.C. voters always have the final say.

The last time those votes actually determined the

outcome was 1979, when B.C. handed Joe Clark a short-lived minority government. Yet despite being as rare as a blizzard in Victoria, it might be about to happen again.

On October 19th polling stations in B.C. (and the Yukon) will be open later than anywhere else in the country, and if the 2015 election remains as tightly contested as it appears heading into the final month of campaigning – B.C. voters could well decide who gets the keys to 24 Sussex Drive.

Of course, with its maze of regional and ethnic differences, chronic sense of alienation from Ottawa, and singular focus on environmental issues, there is never anything straightforward about elections in B.C. And this one – with a lengthy campaign, a dozen ridings without incumbents, plus an additional six seats in play (the result of seat

redistribution) is more competitive and complex than most.

The Portentous Polls

As of mid-September, the ThreeHundredEight.com poll-tracker (which aggregates results from most Canadian political surveys) had the NDP in position to win 18 of B.C.'s 42 seats, with the Conservatives close behind at 16, the Liberals at seven, and Green Party leader Elizabeth May retaining her seat in Saanich-Gulf Islands.

That's a markedly different outcome than the last federal election in B.C., when the Conservatives comfortably topped the polls at 21 seats and the NDP finished second with 12, while the Liberals got just two seats, and the Greens one.

That 2011 victory for the Conservatives capped more than decade of impressive results for right-of-centre parties in B.C. In that period the CPC, Alliance or Reform never did worse than 17 seats (2006) and managed as many as 27 (2000). Those results were possible because, beginning with Reform in the 1990s, the various conservative incarnations were able to tap into B.C.'s traditional antipathy to far-distant Ottawa.

It's a given among British Columbians that the folks on the other side of the Rockies don't understand their province and federal governments neglect B.C. issues. Yet it's often forgotten that before the Reform phenomenon it was a populist NDP that was best able to turn this regional alienation into votes.

That's clearly a tougher proposition with a more centrist NDP whose leader, and power base, are rooted in Quebec. But on the ground in B.C., NDP MPs such as Nathan Cullen, Murray Rankin and others have been very adept at uniting the eco/union/anti-establishment vote (what we might now call the Leap Manifesto coalition), and after almost a decade of Conservative government in Ottawa it's easier to sell the NDP as the populist, anti-Ottawa choice for disgruntled British Columbians.

The party has been steadily clawing its way back to contention following the disaster of the 2000 election – when the combination of provincial NDP government scandals and lingering resentment over the federal party's endorsement of the Charlottetown Accord all but destroyed its populist credentials and reduced it to just two seats. But as Innovative Research pollster Greg Lyle points out, “in terms of organizational strength, B.C. has always been a regional stronghold for the NDP, and they remain competitive almost everywhere.”

The Liberals, on the other hand, have long struggled to attract what one might assume is their fair share of B.C.'s “progressive” voters. In the aforementioned 1979 election, the party managed just a single seat in B.C. – and even that wasn't its worst performance. When Trudeau *le père* roared back to office in 1980 with a majority government, the comeback



was marred by a complete shut-out in B.C.

“Over the past few years the Liberals have done a lot to repair their organization in B.C.,” says pollster Lyle, who has been closely following B.C. politics since the early ‘80s. He believes the party has closed the “organizational gap” with the Conservatives and NDP, and has mostly recovered from the internal wars that were a major reason for the party's poor performance in 2011. So seven seats this time out might not seem a stretch (they got nine in 2006), yet there's a problem is identifying where those seats might actually come from.

Sources within the Liberal campaign believe there are 15 to 20 three-way contests “in play” across B.C. They enthuse about five “almost certain” wins, including the two seats they currently hold – Vancouver Centre and Vancouver Quadra.

They claim their internal numbers show strong support on Vancouver's north shore as well as in Surrey and Burnaby.

“In terms of organizational strength, B.C. has always been a regional stronghold for the NDP.”

Yet recent polls show the party running a distant third across the province (22 percent of the decided vote), compared to the NDP (36 percent) and the Conservatives (31 percent). And much of the Liberals' apparent improvement in the Lower Mainland could be explained by better numbers in ridings where they finished with less than 10 percent of the vote in the 2011 debacle.

Former Prince George mayor Colin Kinsley, one of the most astute politicians on the right in recent decades in B.C., doesn't see the Liberals doing much in the B.C. Interior.

around.

One toké over the line

A good case in point is South Surrey-White Rock, where Liberal candidate Joy Davies' outspoken enthusiasm for marijuana – she suggested smoking dope while pregnant results in smarter, more socially developed kids – collided with the reality of politics in a multi-ethnic riding. Her comments were clearly one toké over the line, even for a party that supports legalization of marijuana, and Davies was forced to resign.

(There will be a Liberal replacement, not that it may make much difference. Davies was up against Conservative Dianne Watts, the politically gifted former mayor of Surrey, in a seat where the Tories got 53 percent of the vote in 2011.)

So although there's no question that polling numbers suggest a retreat in Conservative support from 2011 levels, conversely a relatively small uptick in those numbers could nudge the party past the NDP and into first place in B.C. It's that close.

As several senior Tories have noted, including B.C. strategist and former cabinet minister Stockwell Day, a split in the "progressive" vote between the NDP and Liberals would give the CPC 15 to 20 seats in the province. In a



"There's a lot of vote-chasing around all sorts of issues, and the media are overwhelmingly against the PM, but the guy on the street is concerned with the economy and still inclined towards the Conservatives. There's support for the NDP, but the Liberals seem nowhere in this region."

Simply put, many of the allegedly three-way contests in B.C. are realistically two-way contests between the NDP and Conservatives (the suburban Lower Mainland and the B.C. Interior) or the NDP and the Greens (Victoria and south Vancouver Island).

In addition, there's a tendency, particularly in the media, to focus on B.C.'s "progressive" votes, while paying less attention to the more conservative ethnic communities that predominate in so many Lower Mainland constituencies. The Conservatives' concerted efforts to woo these influential voters worked well in 2011, and there's no reason to expect all that effort will just evaporate this time



tight, three-way national contest, that might be enough to give the party a legitimate shot at a fourth consecutive mandate.

It is widely suggested that Stephen Harper is the Tories' biggest liability in B.C. And indeed, after almost a decade as prime minister, many British Columbians have soured on the Conservative leader, and those who don't like him really

don't like him. A recent in-depth Innovative Research poll had Harper's personal popularity languishing in the province, with all the other leaders trending upwards.

But here's the thing: when asked who would make the best prime minister, the same polls give Harper a slight edge over Mulcair (28 to 26 percent), with Trudeau way back at 15 percent.

In Elizabeth May's dreams

And the Greens, will they really be a factor in B.C.? According to Elizabeth May the party is knocking at the door in constituencies all over what she calls "the Green Coast". The party has two well-known CBC personalities running on Vancouver Island who are, perhaps predictably, getting lots of media coverage, and May recently told the Huffington Post to expect "way, way, way more" Green seats in B.C.

Not likely, says Greg Lyle. "The Greens do have strong support in Victoria and south Vancouver Island, but that doesn't encompass a lot of seats." And on the mainland, Lyle doesn't see the Greens being a major factor. "British Columbians are concerned in a general way about the environment, but apart from the southern end of Vancouver Island they're not riled up – and there's no doubt May's blow up at the Parliamentary Press Gallery dinner in Ottawa has not been forgotten."

As in every other part of the country, the economy is a primary concern in B.C. Recent polls show almost two-thirds of British Columbians believe the country has slipped into recession. Yet in B.C. as elsewhere, the Conservatives are still polling well on economic issues. On the other hand, the closure of the Coast Guard base at Kitsilano (in metro Vancouver) has given the opposition parties a way to attack the Federal Budget that resonates locally. It also allows them to question the Conservatives' commitment to marine safety, which is a big concern in the province.

The astronomical cost of housing in Greater Vancouver is a top concern of younger voters and families, and the Conservatives have tried to address that with promises to raise the amount that first-time home buyers can withdraw tax free from RRSPs and bring back the home renovation tax credit. But here again, with a month to go that hasn't translated into a clear advantage.

Ugly Alberta oil

Oil pipelines may be the single most influential issue in the B.C. campaign. Plans for piping more Alberta oil to the West Coast, to increase Canada's export capacity and provide access to global markets, have been contentious all over the province over in recent years. The 18 months of public hearings into Enbridge's Northern Gateway project (a pipeline from the Edmonton area to Kitimat on B.C.'s North Coast) became an outlet for emotional opposition to

pipelines and anti-Alberta sentiment. It effectively ended an era of increasing political co-operation between the two provinces.

A proposal to increase the capacity of the existing Trans-Mountain oil pipeline between Edmonton and Burnaby, which has been operating safely for half a century, was set for public hearings in B.C. in September. This would surely have ramped up an already emotional debate and made the project a hot campaign issue, particularly in the Lower Mainland. But those hearings have been delayed, and may not now be held during the campaign.

All the parties are treating the pipeline issue with elaborate care. Harper has taken a step back from Finance Minister Joe Oliver's outspoken support for pipelines and now focusses on the economic necessity of resource development and the strength of Canada's regulatory system. The NDP and the Liberals are unequivocally opposed to Northern Gateway but couch their opposition to Trans-Mountain and other pipelines in criticisms of the regulatory process.

Overall, there's no question the NDP are making a strong showing in B.C. They seem on track to do as well as the party's 1988 election performance when they took 19 seats in the province. Yet Greg Lyle sees some similarities with the 2013 provincial election, when voters retreated from the NDP late in the campaign and gave the incumbent Liberals a fourth consecutive majority. "People were disappointed or angry with the government and open to change, but still dubious about the NDP

on economic issues. The (provincial) NDP's rejection of the Trans-Mountain pipeline (before any hearings) served to remind voters of those doubts and changed the outcome."

It's clear from his adamant commitment to balanced budgets that Thomas Mulcair recognizes that concern over economic management is his party's biggest obstacle to victory – a task made more difficult in B.C. (and elsewhere) by the dubious record of NDP provincial governments, at least among voters old enough to remember them.

In the volatile B.C. election environment a serious misstep by Mulcair, or consistently better news on the economy, could dampen desire for "change" and make the Conservatives look to be the safer bet – which will matter in a province where the NDP and Conservatives are going head-to-head in a majority of ridings.

So despite the cliché, this could very well be one of those rare occasions when, on election night, other Canadians will have to stay up late to find out how British Columbians have decided our country will be governed.

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“Oil pipelines may be the single most influential issue in the B.C. campaign.”

A Veiled Threat to the NDP in Quebec

by Tom Kott

If any province is likely to confound the pundits and embarrass the pollsters on October 19, it is Quebec.

At the outset of the 2011 federal election most predicted the separatist Bloc Québécois would take a majority of the province's seats, as they had in every election since their creation in 1993. Instead, the BQ was decimated by the NDP, a party that had previously held just one seat in Quebec. Political historians are still trying to fathom the Orange Wave, as it was called, but most agree it had much to do with NDP leader Jack Layton, who wowed Quebecers with his performances in the national leaders' debates and a popular Francophone talk show – even as he was fighting the cancer that would kill him within a few months of the election. Many thought the NDP win was a fluke; with “Le bon Jack” gone, surely the Wave would recede.

Instead, eight weeks into the 2015 campaign, polls are promising a repeat performance from the NDP. Leader Thomas Mulcair, the holder of that lone Quebec seat in 2011, has apparently consolidated his party's hold on the province. His 58 rookie MPs there have far exceeded the very low expectations that accompanied their arrival in office, and despite running to the right of all his competitors except the Conservatives on fiscal policy, Mulcair appears to have constructed a sturdy bond between his party and the province's dominant constituencies of leftists and nationalists.

In some ways Mulcair's success in Quebec is even more mystifying than Layton's. His conviction that Quebec should be able to secede from Canada through a 50 percent plus one vote in a referendum is presumably a winner, as are his generally dirigiste economic policies, pacifist foreign policy, commitment to roll back Conservative anti-terror legislation, and promise of a cap-and-trade regime to reduce carbon emissions.

But on a wide range of other issues, he seems offside with Quebecers. On Senate abolition, for example, conventional wisdom holds that Quebecers see their 24 seats in the Upper House as guarantor of their influence in Ottawa. Yet polls suggest a slim majority of Quebecers support abolition. Maybe that's because the Senate is so scandal-wracked, or maybe it's because



Mulcair has branded it a silly English anachronism. “[It] is so passé,” he sneered in the French language leaders’ debate on September 24, “it’s part of our British traditions”.

Mulcair should also be hurting in Quebec from his on-again, off-again teetering on the Energy East pipeline, his promises of new national health and daycare programs that intrude on provincial jurisdiction, his early political history as an anglophone rights crusader, his commitment to balanced budgets, his once-fulsome support for bulk water exports to the United States, and his oft-quoted admiration for Margaret Thatcher. But so far, at least, he’s not.

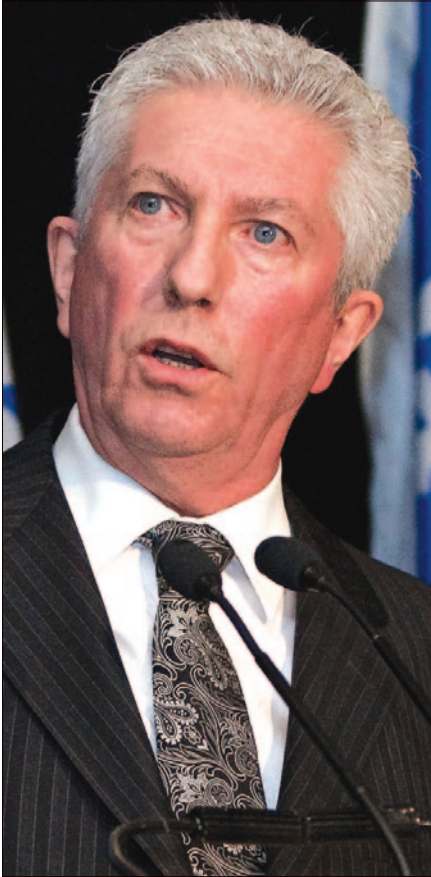
With just three weeks remaining to election day, polling aggregator ThreeHundredEight.com predicts the NDP could win 53 seats (six less than the last election), the Conservative Party nine (+4), and the Liberal Party 16 (+9). The Bloc Québécois won four seats in the last election, ended the parliamentary session with two, and are expected to win none this year, including resurrected leader Gilles Duceppe’s once impregnable fortress in Montreal’s Laurier-Sainte-Marie riding.

Hold the NDP champagne

But hold the NDP champagne, for it was right around this time in the 2011 campaign when Quebecers started to change their minds. That time, the catalyst was a charismatic man with a limp. This time, it might be a Muslim woman with a covered face.

On September 15 a Federal Court of Appeal panel issued its decision in the case of a Muslim woman who had successfully challenged the Conservative government’s policy prohibiting people from covering their faces while taking the public oath of citizenship. The panel rejected the government’s appeal of an earlier Federal Court ruling, enabling the woman to wear a niqab while taking the oath – which she is expected to do in time to vote as a Canadian citizen on October 19.

The auspiciously-timed ruling instantly rekindled the long-simmering debate in Quebec over “reasonable accommodation” of ethnic and religious minorities. In last year’s provincial election, it was focused on the Parti Québécois’ proposed Charter of Quebec Values, which sought to ban public servants from wearing “ostentatious” religious symbols, including the niqab, or wearing face coverings when receiving government services. The debate gave the PQ campaign a boost, although it was not enough to overcome public misgivings about the party’s aggressive posture on sovereignty, and the Liberals came from behind to win a big majority.



This year, the Bloc Québécois was first to push the emotional hot button with an anti-NDP attack ad incongruously linking Mulcair’s alleged support of the Canada East pipeline to his argument that face coverings are fine during the public citizenship oath, as long as they come off during a private swearing-in beforehand. In the BQ ad, oil leaking out of a pipe slowly transforms into a facsimile of a face covering, while a narrator warns that if the NDP is elected, pipelines will be built even if Quebecers don’t want them, and niqabs will be allowed at citizenship ceremonies even if Quebecers disagree with them.

But if this issue does take hold of the Quebec campaign, it is less likely to benefit the BQ than the Conservatives, who actually authored the policy. Leader Stephen Harper vigorously defended the ban on face coverings during the Quebec leaders’ debate, saying “Never will I say to my daughter that a woman has to cover her face because she is a woman.” Stoking this mash-up of gender- and ethno-politics may be “dangerous”, as

Mulcair warned, but according to a Léger poll conducted for Harper’s Privy Council Office last spring and curiously released on the day of the debate, 82 percent of Canadians and 93 percent of Quebecers support the Conservative edict.

Ridings to watch

As it happens, Conservative fortunes may be rebounding in Quebec. From the spring until early in the campaign, the party was doing well in the polls, but it began slumping once electioneering was underway. For a while it looked like they might have difficulty just holding the five seats they currently have. But more recent forecasts suggested they may now be competitive in as many as nine.

Beyond solidly ensconced incumbents Maxime Bernier, Denis Lebel, and Steven Blaney, a handful of star candidates are fueling Tory hopes. They include longtime anglophone rights activist Robert Libman, former television news reporter Pascale Déry, popular Victoriaville mayor Alain Rayes, and ex-provincial MNA Gérard Deltell, who once led the defunct Action démocratique du Québec.

Libman is running in the Montreal riding of Mount Royal, where Prime Minister Stephen Harper launched his national campaign on August 2. Harper chose this riding, in a city that has been historically hostile to him and his party, for its symbolism. The seat was long held by Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau and has been solidly Liberal since 1940. The riding is so red, according to an old local political joke, a

mailbox could win there.

Respected Grit lawyer and human rights activist Irwin Cotler first won Mount Royal in a 1999 by-election with 92 percent of the vote. In 2011, he only won with 41 percent, and the Tories finished a strong second. With Cotler now retired from politics, the Conservatives believe they have a real chance of taking the riding, not least because it has a large Jewish population, a constituency the Tories have courted successfully in recent years. Nevertheless, at this writing Libman appears to be in a steep uphill battle against Liberal opponent Anthony Housefather.

Pascale Déry is running for the Tories in Drummond, halfway between Montreal and Quebec City. The former TVA journalist was parachuted into the riding after losing the Mount Royal nomination to Libman. She's in a tough fight against the incumbent New Democrat François Choquette, who was part of the Orange Wave in 2011.

Alain Rayes is running against incumbent former BQ MP turned Independent André Bellavance in Richmond-Arthabaska, while Gérard Deltell is trying to reclaim the Quebec City riding of Louis-Saint-Laurent – held from 2006-11 by former Tory cabinet minister Josée Verner – from young Orange Wave-surfer Alexandrine Latendresse. The Conservative candidates are thought to be very competitive in both ridings.

Overall in Quebec, polls indicate the Liberals are running at around 30 percent, which is double the Conservatives' standing and at least 10 points back of the NDP. But Liberal support is heavily concentrated in certain areas on the island of Montreal. The Liberal Party has given its Quebec wing a lot of leeway in how the campaign is directed in the province, right down to a different style of poster than the rest of Canada, and is hoping the localized approach will pay off. They're also hoping the niqab wedge issue works in their favour by hiving NDP votes off to the Bloc and Conservatives, which could allow Liberal candidates to come up the middle

in some ridings.

That's probably what needs to happen for the Liberals to win in the Montreal borough of Ahuntsic-Cartierville, where the Grits have risked a lot of political capital. Their candidate is former Montreal mayoral contender Mélanie Joly, pitted against incumbent Maria Mourani, who defected from the Bloc to the NDP.

Joly, a close friend of party leader Justin Trudeau, beat six other candidates to win the nomination, but only after the deadline of the "open" nomination process was pushed to the end of August, apparently to ensure she had enough time to sell plenty of memberships. It still took three rounds of voting to produce the winner, who was promptly accused of cheating by a losing candidate on the grounds that 285 more ballots were cast than there were voters accounted for. The party dismissed the challenge, but it may have hurt Joly. The latest riding polls have her trailing Mourani by about five points.

Trudeau himself is no shoe-in in his ethnic, working-class Montreal riding of Papineau. An NDP-sponsored poll ranked him second to their candidate, former journalist Anne Lagacé Dowson, but others put him ahead, though not by much. In the last election, Trudeau benefitted from Bloc-NDP vote splitting and got in with 38 percent of the vote. If Bloc support craters, that won't be enough to win a two-horse race.

As tight as the national election race in many parts of Canada, in Quebec it's the NDP's to lose. It will probably take more than the niqab flap to seriously reduce the party's hold on the province. But unlike, say, Alberta, where voters change political allegiances only once every few decades, in Quebec they can change on a whim. Just ask Gilles Duceppe and the BQ.

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Harper vs Notley for the Soul of Alberta

by Colman Byfield

In the battle for the federal Conservative heartland of Alberta, opposition leaders Thomas Mulcair and Justin Trudeau have been largely relegated to the sidelines. The main event has featured Prime Minister Stephen Harper blaming new NDP Premier Rachel Notley for the province's increasingly shaky economy. While the PM concedes the collapse of global oil prices wasn't entirely the New Democrats' fault, he insists their policies – corporate and personal tax hikes, a coming oil royalty review, and a serious push to curb carbon emissions – are making a bad situation much worse. “An NDP government at both levels will destroy the economy in this province for a very long time,” Harper warned in a recent Calgary speech.

Notley initially stayed out of the fray but, seeming increasingly defensive as the province hemorrhages jobs and investment, she is now saying Albertans have embraced “a new set of values,” and Harper is yesterday's man and plan. “This sort of mantra of, you know, government is evil, and everyone should be doing things on their own,” Notley said in a September 22 CBC interview, “I think that's shifting. The younger generation wants to be part of a community where people look out for each other.”

The rout of the provincial Progressive Conservative dynasty last spring suggest she may be on to something. But federally, is Alberta really in play? The lone existing NDP seat in Edmonton Strathcona, held since 2008 by MP Linda Duncan but by conservatives for the preceding 36 years, has always looked less like a beachhead than a desert island. But in the wake of the province's latest electoral U-turn last spring, many wonder if Notley's Orange Chinook can fill the

sails of Mulcair and the federal New Democrats. Some even think the province has changed so profoundly as to put a couple seats within the reach of Trudeau's Liberals, who are fishing for votes in a well that was poisoned by his father nearly half a century ago.

What killed the PC dynasty

Few people have a finger on the pulse of Alberta politics like Dave Cournoyer. The Edmonton-based blogger and commentator is the proprietor of the endlessly informative daveberta.ca website and one of the province's more influential progressive voices. He says a number of factors set the stage for the New Democrats' historic provincial victory.

“There was a lot of anti-Conservative sentiment,” he explains. “There was a real feeling that it was time for change and that these guys needed to be thrown out. It was kind of the perfect storm for the NDP. Rachel Notley came in as leader and she was very charismatic during the campaign. The New Democrats ran a near perfect election.”

Lethbridge College political scientist Faron Ellis thinks an unstoppable demand for change, far more than Notley's electoral genius, ended the Tories' reign. “Notley could do what she did for a variety of reasons that were unique to that election. The Conservatives had clearly worn out their welcome,” he says. “I was convinced they'd worn out their welcome in 2012, and had Wildrose not blown it so thoroughly the change would've happened then.”

But Notley did run a strong, positive campaign, and her party deployed its resources efficiently, taking every winnable riding and then some en route to a 54-seat majority in an 85-seat Legislature. Their GOTV effort was particularly

impressive, especially in coaxing millennials off the couch. That boosted overall turnout to levels not seen since 1993, and they won every age demographic below pensioners.

The Wildrosers, still reeling from former leader Danielle Smith's attempt to unite the right by delivering more than half her caucus to the Tories, were also breaking in a new, unknown leader in former Fort McMurray Conservative MP Brian Jean. New PC leader Jim Prentice, meanwhile, campaigned to the right long enough to seduce the Wildrose floor-crossers, then veered sharply left to take on the NDP. Albertans concluded he was too shiftily and too Bay Street for them, not to mention too PC, and responded accordingly. "If the opposition had conceived and executed Prentice's campaign looking to their own advantage, they couldn't have done a better job than Prentice did," says Ellis, "He did everything to feed into the narrative that he was aloof, out of touch, and elitist."

Federally, a whole different ballgame

Since all these conditions were unique to the provincial election, they don't presage any similarly broad shift in the federal vote, although the opposition parties do appear to be competitive in a handful of once-unwinnable ridings. Poll aggregator ThreeHundredEight.com shows a sea of Tory blue lapping against dots of orange and red in Edmonton, Calgary, and Lethbridge.

University of Calgary political scientist Tom Flanagan, who was a key player in the early electoral successes of Harper's Conservative party, also sees some cracks in Alberta's blue monolith. "It wouldn't be totally surprising to see one or two Liberal victories in Calgary and maybe a couple of NDP victories in Edmonton," he says.

Cournoyer doesn't expect the provincial earthquake to repeat itself, but says "there may be two or three or five seats that are actually competitive in Alberta, and if you're looking at a minority government in Ottawa, every seat is going to count."

Strathcona and Griesbach represent the opposition's best chances in Edmonton, but there are others. In Edmonton Centre, once the fiefdom of Liberal cabinet minister Anne McLellan during the Chretien era, popular Conservative incumbent Laurie Hawn has retired. His replacement is former Edmonton Chamber of Commerce president James Cummings, running against provincial union boss Gil McGowan of the NDP and Liberal Randy Boissonnault. All three are impressively articulate, accomplished, and organized. Cummings needs to hold most of Hawn's support (48 percent in 2011) and get his competitors to evenly split the centre-left vote.

Calgary, for the first time in almost fifty years, may also offer some fertile ground for Conservative apostasy. In Calgary Skyview ThreeHundredEight currently pegs former

Liberal MLA Darshan Kang as the frontrunner. The aggregator also puts the Liberals ahead in Calgary Centre, where former Liberal MLA Kent Hehr is trying to unseat Tory incumbent Joan Crockatt, but a mid-August Environics poll had her up 12 points.

“Notley says Albertans have embraced ‘a new set of values’, and Harper is yesterday’s man and plan.”

Most Calgary ridings will be easy wins for the Conservatives. Even in the tight races, Tory candidates hold an inherent edge over their rivals. Flanagan cites the example of Calgary Confederation, where a recent Mainstreet poll has the Tories and Liberals in a dead heat, to illustrate the Tories' inbuilt Election Day advantage.

"The Liberal support is heavily among younger voters, who generally are less likely to vote, whereas (Tory candidate Len) Webber's support is from voters 40 to 50 years and older, who are much, much more likely voters," Flanagan says. "What counts is

who turns out on election day."

Then there is the curious case of Lethbridge. The nominal buckle of Alberta's southern Bible Belt, the university town of 90,000 is surrounded by old Mormon settlements and Hutterite colonies with a healthy sprinkling of Evangelicals and Mennonites in between. The spring election saw the godless NDP convincingly sweep both Lethbridge ridings, though, and until this week ThreeHundredEight had been projecting that the federal seat would go Orange.

Ellis is doubtful, pointing out that such riding projections are based mostly on national polls and historic regional data (which site founder Eric Grenier frequently stresses). In the case of Lethbridge and most other ridings, no current local polling is available. "The NDP would have to overcome a 30 percent gap (from the last federal election)," Ellis explains. "If we're going to talk about the Conservatives losing a large number of seats in Alberta, and that includes even Lethbridge, we'd be talking about them being wiped off the map or getting reduced to ten or fifteen seats nationally. Even if they're reduced to ten or fifteen seats, you'd bet most of those would be in Alberta. I just don't see that in the cards... In no way is there that type of widespread disaffection with the federal Conservatives."

It depends what you mean by Conservative

Lethbridge College has been tracking Albertans' attitudes on contentious social issues for 20 years, and their findings might surprise Vancouverites, Montrealers, and Torontonians who subscribe to the stereotype of Albertans as Bible-thumping redneck bigots. In fact, on issues like gay marriage, abortion, and marijuana legalization, Albertans tend to be as progressive as the rest of the country, if not more so.

Thus in the provincial election the NDP was, if anything, more attractive to a majority of Albertans than the Tories on social policy. And their fiscal platform was not profoundly different from the PCs. So the leap from one to the other

was smaller than one might imagine, and it was fuelled almost entirely by disgust with the Tories.

The federal Conservatives are nowhere near in such bad odour in Alberta. And the NDP's province-wide support is shallow, at best. A poll last spring suggested that the acute hunger for change was the primary motive for 93 percent of those who voted NDP. Notley certainly enjoyed a pleasant honeymoon with voters through the rest of the spring and much of the summer but, after a barrage of bad economic news and weeks of Harper needling, the joy may be seeping out of the marriage.

At a premiers' conference earlier this year she was accused of giving Quebec a veto over the proposed Canada East pipeline. The appointments of ten of 12 cabinet chiefs of staff from outside the province, including a couple with long histories of lobbying against the oilsands and pipelines, went down very badly. This month she was forced to climb down from comments regarding Alberta's environmental record, where she likened her home province to "the embarrassing cousin" at climate confabs. Couple all this with the province's disastrous economic outlook, soon to be reflected in her government's first budget, and many of the same voters who backed the provincial NDP may now see Harper's federal Conservatives as a safe place to hedge their bets.

Flanagan acknowledges it was the NDP's misfortune to take power amid a rapidly deteriorating provincial economy. "You can't really blame the NDP for things being bad because they weren't in government, but people may not trust the NDP in difficult times," he says.

Voters' first chance to assess the new government's handling of the downturn came in the September 5th Calgary-Foothills by-election to replace the ill-fated Jim Prentice. Wildrose won it handily, despite a star NDP candidate and multiple campaign visits by the premier. The NDP only got 25 percent of the vote, down seven points from the May election.

Albertans may be flexible on ideology and party affiliations, but the province does have a strong streak of parochialism, rooted in a deep suspicion of *les autres* that rivals even that of Quebec. Thus Harper, the Calgarian who is prime minister of Canada, is working hard to present himself



as the protector of Albertans from outsiders like Trudeau and Mulcair, while casting Notley as their Trojan Horse in Edmonton. "They do not support fairness for Alberta, for western Canada," he said of his opponents at an Edmonton campaign stop where he went so far as to compare the provincial and federal NDP to the infamous economic record of the Greek socialist party. "But thanks to our Conservative government, gone are the days when Canadian elections are over before westerners have even voted."

Faron Ellis suspects that message will uphold the Conservative fortress in Alberta: "When push comes to shove, even when they're not happy with the government, Albertans can say it's led by one of ours. And that holds a great deal of sway with voters."

Still, Notley may be on to something when she says Albertan's attitudes and values are changing. Edmonton and Calgary are the youngest cities in the country, and they are largely populated by immigrants from other parts of Canada and around the world. This has been true for many decades, yet Alberta "exceptionalism", embodied in its parochialism and Conservative political hegemony, has endured. The election of a majority NDP provincial government could mark the beginning of the end of that phenomenon, but it's not likely to gain much momentum on October 19.

“It wouldn’t be surprising to see one or two Liberal victories in Calgary and maybe a couple of NDP victories in Edmonton.”

Colman Byfield is an Alberta writer and columnist with the Sun newspapers.

Breaking the Ontario Deadlock

by Leif Malling

As the 2015 federal election campaign enters the home stretch, the Ontario storyline is the national narrative: Conservatives and Liberals vying for the lead, and the New Democrats running a close third. "In most elections, Ontario follows the national campaign," says Michele Austin, a Tory insider and Senior Advisor at Summa Strategies. "In 2015, Ontario is the national campaign."

Ontario has 121 ridings, 15 more than in 2011 when the Conservatives won 73 seats with 44 percent of the popular vote, the NDP won 22 with 26 percent of the vote, and the Liberals won 11 with 25 percent of the vote.

Again this year the Conservatives are competitive across the province except in downtown Toronto. The Tories are safest in their rural and exurban ridings across eastern, central and southwestern Ontario. They are also defending 30 seats in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), which is mostly a traditional Liberal stronghold that evolved from reliably red to basically blue between 2006 and 2011.

Liberals are looking for a rebound this year. At the end of September, most polls put both the Tories and Liberals in the mid-30s, a big shift from the 19-point spread in 2011. If the

numbers hold, the election could return dozens of seats to the Liberals, mainly in the swing ridings of the GTA.

The NDP is still waiting for the Orange Wave to roll across the Ottawa River. The party has been stuck in the mid-20s for most of the Ontario campaign. That should allow it to keep its clusters of seats in urban centres and northern Ontario, but if there's going to be an NDP breakthrough, it will likely appear in the southwest and Brampton, two nodes of recent provincial party strength.

The Ontario battleground resembles trench warfare, a stalemate where the NDP has not caught a wave, the Liberals have not fully united the anybody-but-Conservative vote, and the Tories have not recaptured the ground lost since 2011.

Bob Rae haunts the NDP still

There is some evidence that the NDP campaign in Ontario is better organized than it ever has been. New Democrats are powerfully motivated by their abhorrence of Stephen Harper's government and the possibility of a national victory for the first time ever.

Even some Conservatives admirably acknowledge a 'stepped up' NDP campaign combining greater ethnic





outreach, a better ground game and a smarter media buy. NDP lawn signs are appearing in parts of the province, according to Austin, “where we haven’t seen them before.” Geoff Owen, Vice-President at Hill & Knowlton says of the federal NDP’s strategy in Ontario that “they have one, which differentiates them from their provincial counterparts in 2014.”

Downtown Toronto is still an NDP bastion. Their incumbents appear safe, and they may gain a couple more urban seats at the expense of high-profile Liberal MPs Adam Vaughan (Fort York-Spadina) and Chrystia Freeland (University-Rosedale).

Yet there is still no sign of a major NDP breakthrough, which must remind partisans of the 2014 provincial election, when Premier Kathleen Wynne’s Liberals won a surprise majority by tacking to the left and aggressively contrasting with the PC’s austerity platform. The Liberals routed the NDP in Toronto and overwhelmed the PCs in the suburban 905 region.

This fall is the 25th anniversary of Bob Rae’s victory, the only election where the NDP ever won the most seats in Ontario. Until New Democrats win again, it’s a fair assumption that the ghost of the Rae government still haunts the NDP brand, which may explain leader Thomas Mulcair’s strenuous efforts to present a fiscally centrist program promising balanced budgets.

Federal Liberals are hoping for a repeat of 2014 when “a centre-left Liberal agenda defeated a play-it-safe NDP agenda,” according to Charles Bird, an active Liberal strategist and Principal at Earncliffe Strategy Group.

If Trudeau fails to reconstitute the Wynne coalition, it will not be for lack of left-leaning policy. His commitments to deficit spending for infrastructure, tax hikes on higher

income earners, and greater retirement income security, all mirror Wynne government policies.

For Trudeau, the challenge in converting Ontario’s urban elites may have more to do with personality than policy. “Kathleen Wynne is authentically downtown Toronto – Justin isn’t,” says Geoff Owen.

Harper vs Wynne (and Trudeau)

But the main event in Ontario is between the Conservatives and the Liberals in the suburbs. From their many joint campaign appearances, it’s clear the Liberals think the Wynne-Trudeau combination is a winner. She kicked off the campaign by endorsing a change in Ottawa that would bring forward “policies that make sense for the people of Ontario.”

She also attacked Harper on infrastructure spending: “If we had Stephen Harper as the prime minister when Canada needed a national railroad or a health care system or the CPP or the (St. Lawrence) Seaway, where would we be as a nation?” Furthermore, the prime minister’s unequivocal rejection of her planned Ontario Retirement Pension Plan was, she said, “mean-spirited in a pretty big way.”

The Wynne-Trudeau alliance runs deep. Many of Trudeau’s key staff worked at Queen’s Park in the McGuinty and Wynne governments. High-profile Liberals, including pollster David Herle and former Prime Minister Paul Martin, have been associated with both Wynne and Trudeau. According to Chris Collette, a Liberal insider and Senior Associate at Hill & Knowlton, “All Liberals are engaged. Period. Everyone is pumping for Justin.” Federal Liberals undoubtedly benefit from sharing volunteers, organization and voter identification tools with their provincial cousins.

The Conservatives appear equally comfortable making

Kathleen Wynne a focus of their campaign. Early on, Harper zeroed in on the four in 10 Ontarians who are not part of the progressive coalition and promised to protect them from new payroll taxes attached to Wynne's pension scheme. "The Conservative government is not going to help bring in that kind of tax," he said. "I find it appalling that people who have demonstrated they cannot run the finances of the government think they are going to better run our own retirement finances for us."

Picking fights with provincial premiers is an unconventional federal election strategy. But Harper has also criticized Alberta Premier Rachel Notley and her new NDP government for allegedly making that province's energy sector recession "much, much worse." The Tories have evidently calculated they can help defeat their federal opponents by highlighting the real (or invented) shortcomings of their provincial cousins.

The Wynne government's popularity has been trending downward since the June 2014 provincial election. Among its burdens is a controversial new sex-ed curriculum that triggered a backlash among some new Canadians, a key Tory constituency. A move to privatize electricity distribution has not gone smoothly, and elementary teachers are threatening to start rotating strikes this month. If the latter happens, the Liberal brand could be facing both angry teachers and frustrated parents on election day. As one Conservative insider observes, "Wynne has a lot of enemies right now."

The centre of Canada's political universe

At the end of the day, the battle for Ontario – and perhaps for Canada – will be won or lost in the GTA. It includes 25 ridings in Toronto (up three from 2011), and 29 ridings in the 905 belt (up seven from 2011).

According to the *Hill Times*, 23 of the GTA's ridings have visible minority populations of more than 50 percent. These ridings will test each party's appeal to new Canadians and, perhaps, the strength of the provincial sex-ed imbroglio as a ballot-box issue.

To preserve the nine seats they won in Toronto (ending a drought that dated back to 1988) and the 21 seats they won in 905 back in 2011, the Conservatives need to mobilize a solid turnout of their 30 percent base, and win back the swing voters who deserted them over the last four years. They stand a reasonable chance of doing so

“Harper’s picking fights with provincial premiers is an unconventional federal election strategy.”

according to the latest polls, including a September 25-28 Ipsos-Reid survey for Global News which put the Tories at 43 percent in the 905, seven points ahead of the Liberals and 22 ahead of the NDP.

However, at this writing, Conservative upward mobility was still inhibited by the powerful demand for change sought by some two-thirds of Ontarians in poll after poll. For many of those voters, the primary calculus is whether the Liberals or New Democrats represent the best choice for change.

But with 15 new seats and 11 retiring incumbents, plus defeated incumbents, Ontarians will see a lot of change no matter how they vote. Notes Michele

Austin, "Election 2015 will be a generational change for Ontario's representation in Ottawa."

In all likelihood, the Ontario race will go to the wire. If one of the opposition parties was going to break out of the deadlock, historical campaign patterns suggest it should have happened by now. Those patterns ought to favour the Conservatives, who have seen modest late-campaign surges of support before from so-called "shy Tories", who don't put up lawn signs or tell pollsters how they're going to vote.

History favours the Conservatives in another way too. Since the late 1950s, Ontarians have reliably alternated their federal and provincial support between progressive and conservative options. With the Liberals in charge at Queen's Park, the Conservatives might get to hold Ottawa.

And there's one more positive augury for the Tories: in October, everyone in Ontario will be cheering for the Blue team.

Leif Malling is a Toronto-based management consultant and co-founder of Blue Skies Ontario.



The Dauphin Beats the Devil



by Colby Cosh

Against all odds, what was once the “natural” order of the Canadian House of Commons has been restored. Stephen Harper’s historic mission as our Prime Minister was to detach Canada from its Liberal identity. He recedes into the background now, knowing that, although he leaves the leadership with his own party in much better order than most recent PMs have, he has failed to extirpate the Laurentian-empire DNA from the Canadian genome. It will be a bittersweet fate for him to appear as a humble backbencher in a House that looks so much like those of

the 20th century: a Liberal majority with tendrils in every province, a hundred or so Conservatives anchored in the West, and few dozen rabble-rousing NDPers.

On election night the Conservative Party rammed hard against the firm upper limit of voter support some analysts had warned they were facing. It had seemed all along that somewhere between 60 and 70 percent of Canadians were, after the Harper Decade, determined to vote for change. If it was more like 60, the CPC could count on its data-driven turnout machine and on its ability to operate, to borrow a military strategy metaphor, on interior lines. If the figure

were closer to 70 well... they were in trouble no matter what.

But the Conservatives could choose which front to fight on with their fixed resources. If Tom Mulcair or Justin Trudeau seemed especially vulnerable, they could plan attacks to hit the stronger of the opponents. A historian might say they were able to pursue Britain's traditional offshore grand strategy in Europe: consistently assisting the second biggest power.

The shape of the election, in retrospect, does look something like that. When the writs went out, there seemed every chance that Thomas Mulcair would have to find a plug-in for his beard-trimmer in the master bathroom of 24 Sussex. The NDP surged in the August polls as the Tories suffered through Mike Duffy doldrums and the Liberals endured the quite effective "Just not ready" ad campaign.

For a year the Conservatives had treated Justin Trudeau and the Liberals as the chief adversary, and it soon started to become clear why. Mulcair's transitory strength concealed obvious weaknesses. The New Democrats had built a Quebec stronghold under Jack Layton, then switched to an ex-Liberal who had once been at the forefront of the province's fierce anglo-rights movement. Mulcair's strong stance against deficits – at a time of sluggish economic growth and low borrowing costs – cut against the culture of his own party, raised questions about whether he was opportunist (much less a smart one), and let the Liberals contrast themselves to everyone else. The return of Gilles Duceppe as the authentic voice of hard Quebec nationalism came at the right moment: CPC tacticians could be confident Duceppe would get his usual boost from French-language television debates.

The niqab blow up

And then the niqab card turned up. Stephen Harper always seems to have appreciated, in a way Conservative and Liberal politicians mostly don't, that Quebec sees itself as the indigenous home of a nation – a distinctive variety of humankind with its own language and its own way of life. Melting-pot politics are never going to work there, at

least until Quebec passes some undefinable demographic tipping point and adopts the same GDP-driven civilizational aspirations as everyone else.

Quebec is the ideal place to deploy a narrative built on ideas of security and preservation – in one French word, *survivance*. That term has receded from its prominence in the life of those who analyze Quebec, from inside and outside. But the concept lingers. It is the ghostly presence that explains why Quebecers refuse to see what liberals elsewhere regard as "reason" on issues of immigrant accommodation.

The niqab grenade went off when the pin was pulled, and it sent New Democrat voter support into Quebec crashing. It probably even succeeded in hurting the NDP with anglo-Canadian voters who find a decorum issue like the niqab not at all clear-cut. (News flash: it's not!) But the tactic allowed change voters to flock to Justin Trudeau with confidence. Trudeau's position on the niqab in citizenship ceremonies, and his willingness to chide the Conservatives for opposing

it, was indistinguishable from the New Democrats'. But he had less to lose in Quebec, and more to gain from change voters in Greater Toronto or B.C. who had been thinking about latching onto the Orange Wave.

Right now you can go anywhere else in the land of media to hear people talking about how Justin Trudeau was underrated, particularly by the Conservatives. Everyone expected that in a long election campaign he would have many opportunities to replay gaffes like "Too many Albertans" or his off-the-cuff praise for the Chinese government. That is an important reason the campaign was made so long.

But Trudeau not only proved that he was capable of being trained to an adequate standard of coherence for a politician; he showed that there was unanticipated merit in his oft-derided experience as a drama teacher. It turns out the high-pressure environment of a campaign puts a premium on showmanship as well as articulacy. The Liberal ads featuring Trudeau were literal show-stoppers, capable of bringing chit-chat in a pub to a total halt.

What civilians may not understand is that the



press and electronic media had underestimated Justin at least as much as the Tories did. The Conservatives have made themselves personally unpopular with the press, but that is something Conservatives accept and welcome. If their relations with the reporting corps are terrible, that makes their master narrative of central Canadian liberal conspiracy – recall Ezra Levant's "Media Party" coinage – all the more convincing.

But it is natural to underestimate the degree to which national politics reporters have been skeptical, even contemptuous of Justin, too. In private they have always spoken of him as a lightweight, an unsound, dubious flake. They are congenitally suspicious of his charisma, and perhaps envious of his origins. His record of scholarship is so humble that some reporters might potentially be justified in feeling intellectual superiority – an opportunity so rare for them, it would take a saint to overlook it. One does not fully appreciate these feelings until one sees Justin Trudeau at a press conference, stepping around crude verbal traps laid by journalists who stop just short of jeering.

Trudeau was readier than expected

When it turned out that Justin Trudeau's campaign style was not, after all, going to resemble a muskrat zigzagging through a minefield – and when, moreover, the Liberals turned out to have a relatively defensible economic platform and competent people making their ads – the vulnerability of the national press was naturally just as great as its skepticism once was. It fell for the underdog. And what is true of the press may well be true of a big part of the Canadian general public.

In an odd way the 2015 election seems to represent a reassertion of power by what we call "the media". From the inside, of course, the media isn't some sort of featureless monolith. It's a hierarchy, with an undifferentiated class of left-wing worker bees at the bottom; a politically diverse layer of editorialists, columnists, correspondents, pundit-managers, and stars above them; and, at the top, where the money resides, a mostly conservative (and actively pro-Conservative) elite.

The ordinary reporters, produced by a homogenizing university system, impart a left-wing colour to the news pages. (There is obviously some truth to the idea that news reporting is always in opposition to whomever is in power.) The brass will pull strings for a conservative party as far as they are able. In this campaign they broke new ground in ordering up queasy endorsements from harassed editorial boards and permitting aggressive Conservative advertising down the stretch. It probably did more harm than good.

The Conservatives could have made a stronger effort to keep the tone-setting middle class in the media on side. Non-

partisans in the press have continued to respect Harper even as his tacticians put the boots to them. This remorselessness lost or discouraged natural allies who, it turns out, still have some vestige of control over ballot framing.

Editors saw, in the Duffy trial, the chance of an all-hands-on-deck effort to create a Canadian Watergate. This initially seemed like a failure, even a waste of resources. After the trial adjourned, the name "Mike Duffy" was all but forgotten in a matter of days. But if the trial proceedings had failed to establish any easily described instance of active wrongdoing, the evidence did tend to suggest that the Prime Minister's Office wields enormous concentrated power that is unelected and, almost by definition, irresponsible.

This picture of an out-of-control PMO harmonized with the critiques Michael Chong and Brent Rathgeber had been making, in their different ways, for years.

The retirements of other high-quality Conservative MPs like John Baird and James Rajotte started to seem like implied recriminations. And the latent danger to the Conservative electoral cause became obvious when the topics of Syrian refugees and the niqab were force-fed into the electoral narrative.

Stephen Harper had welded together two parties into an amazingly successful centrist electoral force; he had neutralized wild Old Reformers and restless pro-lifers, and run a substantially clean, efficient federal government. The explicit "scandals" of Harper's government – things like Bev Oda's orange juice – were paltry by Mulroney and Chretien standards. Even the misadventures of the Senate do not add up to much in money terms, and we simply do not know how bad the Senate used to be before accountants were turned loose in the Red Chamber like a sack full of ferrets.

So Canada, to the degree it remembers what Chretien and Mulroney were like, might well trust Harper personally to carry on. And that was the bargain Harper tried to offer on the campaign trail. But events quickly began to hint that Conservative Canada was governed, not so much by Stephen Harper, but by a gang of callow, spin-obsessed freelancers surrounding his person and carrying out his unspoken wishes.

Perhaps it is ever thus. But Harper's octopus of a PMO appears to contrast with an older Canadian system of powerful regional bagmen. It would be natural for the Liberals to revive that way of doing things, and it might be advisable. They have certainly got enough geographic breadth in the new caucus to do it; there are Liberal MPs to choose from everywhere on the map.

Too many hot buttons

Tight, data-driven central PMO control of the operations of government is a natural corollary of image politics, but

“Jabbing the fear button is fine, but a lab rat can tell you that any repeatedly applied stimulus eventually loses force.”

it turns out to have limits. Readers familiar with American economics gadfly Nassim Taleb will notice that PMO hirelings do not have “skin in the game” the way leading MPs and ministers in a caucus do. There can be no substitute for the intelligence that comes from people whose careers will capsize if the CEO makes a mistake.

Over-dependence on fine data with a scientific patina helps to explain the mysteriously diffuse quality of Conservative messaging in this election. It might have been right to see the Duffy trial, in isolation, as a transitory dud of an issue. It might have been right to see the niqab as a winner. It might have been right to see the Canadian public as being suspicious and fearful of a possible mass refugee airlift from Middle Eastern countries wracked with clan hatred and cousin marriage. It might have been right to keep applying the horsewhip to the media. But no one, until it was too late, seems to have seen the fatal interaction that all these seeming vote-winners might have with one another.

Jabbing the fear button is fine, but a lab rat can tell you that any repeatedly applied stimulus eventually loses force. Canadians started to whine about the long campaign less than halfway through it, and perhaps that was because no party was really telling an optimistic, feel-good story in a world in which, after all, there is much to feel good about.

Even the Liberal program was predicated on middle-class angst about the economic future. They hammered economic security as hard as the Conservatives hammered political security. How, one wonders, were they allowed to get away with this? Just a year ago, the *New York Times* had a headline announcing that Canada’s median household income was the world’s highest, give or take Norway’s. For an incumbent government to lose under such circumstances seems awfully careless.

The Conservatives stickhandled their late-arriving Trans-Pacific Partnership in such a way as to perform very well in Quebec, holding up their vote share there in the face of a surprising *Vague Rouge*. Holding onto a kernel of Quebec MPs might be the most important



Conservative electoral accomplishment of the night. But the Tories’ demi-protectionist approach, their need to show excessive care for privileged industry sectors, meant that they could not sell free trade to the whole country as a grand ideal.

The Canadian public is probably not exactly panting for free trade, but free trade was one possible way for the Conservatives to appear positive and buoyant about the future, not to mention open to the wider world, conscious of the evolution of global markets, and socially concerned. (We can probably take or leave the TPP, but it will do an awful lot of good, and not just for the economy, in Vietnam.) Instead, the enduring memory of the election is likely to be a contrived squabble about niqabs. The bad taste will be a while washing away.

“The enduring memory of the election is likely to be a contrived squabble about niqabs. The bad taste will be a while washing away.”

Colby Cosh is a columnist for the National Post.

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What : Manning Centre Conference

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