

CANADA VOTES: A LIBERAL MINORITY


Introduction

Focus

This *News in Review* story focuses on the federal election of 2004, examining the parties, leaders, main issues, results, and their implications for Canadian politics.

Quote

"Politics is a strange game. You *stand* for nomination, so you can *run* for election, in order to *sit* in Parliament." — *Canada — The Twentieth Century*, 1982

 Sections marked with this symbol indicate content suitable for younger viewers.

On June 28, 2004, Canadians went to the polls to elect a new federal government. Three new party leaders were appealing for their votes in a campaign that many observers viewed as the most competitive and exciting in over a decade. The Liberals, under Jean Chrétien's successor Paul Martin, were seeking a fourth straight term in office, hoping to extend their hold on power for yet another mandate. The newly formed Conservatives, led by Stephen Harper, were optimistic that their recently united party, a merger of the former Canadian Alliance and Progressive Conservatives, would finally be able to mount a serious right-wing challenge to the Liberals. For their part, the reinvigorated New Democrats and their ebullient new leader Jack Layton were counting on a real breakthrough that would end over a decade in the electoral doldrums for their left-of-centre party. The Quebec-based sovereigntist Bloc Québécois of Gilles Duceppe, the only federal leader who was not a first-timer in the campaign, anticipated big gains in the province to compensate for the rather disappointing showing against their federalist Liberal rivals in the 2000 vote.

When Prime Minister Martin called the election, most analysts expected a tough, close, and possibly nasty campaign. When Martin replaced Chrétien as Liberal leader in late 2003, opinion polls had predicted an easy victory for him. But the revelations of the Auditor-General's scathing report on government financial mismanagement in early 2004 and in particular the embarrassing sponsorship scandal damaged the Liberals' credibility severely. To make

matters even worse, Martin's rather clumsy handling of the post-Chrétien transition left many long-time Liberal stalwarts, like former MP Sheila Copps, angry and resentful. At the outset of the campaign, the Liberals appeared to be in serious disarray and possibly vulnerable to an electoral upset.

As the campaign progressed, the Liberals faltered, and Martin found himself increasingly on the defensive over the party's record and his leadership style. The Conservatives were running a controlled campaign. They highlighted Harper's abilities and attempted to downplay the party's more extreme policies, especially on social issues like abortion, gun control, bilingualism, and same-sex marriage. Layton's NDP hammered both the Liberals and Conservatives as right-wing parties whose positions scarcely differed, and portrayed itself as the defender of medicare, the environment, and Canada's independence from the United States. Meanwhile, the Bloc castigated the Liberals over the sponsorship scandal in Quebec, and appealed to voters there to send more of its MPs to Ottawa to protect that province's interests at the federal level. In the final phase of the campaign Martin seemed to regain his confidence. The Liberals unleashed a series of negative advertisements warning Canadians of the dire consequences of a Conservative victory and appealed to potential NDP supporters to vote Liberal to stave off the challenge from the right.

When the votes were counted on the evening of June 28, all of the parties could find some comfort in them, as

Quote

"Canadians . . . expected more from us, and as a party and as a government we must do better, and we will. I pledge that to you tonight." — Prime Minister Paul Martin, *Toronto Star*, June 29, 2004

well as some grounds for disappointment. Martin's Liberals had held on to power. However, they had been reduced to a minority position in the new Parliament, with 135 seats. Canadians had elected their first minority government since Joe Clark became prime minister in 1979. Harper's Conservatives, with 99 seats, had emerged as a solid opposition, significantly making gains in the key province of Ontario, where the former Canadian Alliance had never enjoyed much success. Layton's NDP won 19 seats, including his own in Toronto. They had doubled their vote total from the election in 2000 and were in a position to leverage the Liberals to adopt some of their policies in return for their voting support in a minority Parliament. Duceppe's Bloc, with 54 seats, enjoyed its best showing since Lucien Bouchard first led the party in 1993. They were restored to the position of dominance in Quebec politics that they had lost to the Liberals in 2000. But their showing was short of the massive sweep of Quebec that most observers had anticipated they would achieve.

As the dust settled from the election over the summer of 2004, it appeared likely that Martin's new minority government might last somewhat longer than the previous Joe Clark Conservative minority regime of 1979. None of the parties appeared to be in any mood

for a new election anytime soon. The Liberals were humbled by their loss of a majority, but grateful that they had been able to hang on to power, despite the damage the scandals had inflicted on them. For their part, the Conservatives were pleased with their gains, but disappointed they had not been able to win the most seats, as some polls had predicted they would. The NDP could take comfort in its greatly increased popular vote, but was frustrated that this boost had not translated into more seats, especially in the Toronto area and British Columbia, where the party had confidently predicted major gains.

In the aftermath of the election, Prime Minister Martin assured Canadians that the Liberals had heard their message of displeasure, and would try to "do better" in the new minority situation in which they found themselves. As the party leaders met in late August 2004 to set the groundwork for the new parliamentary session, there were indications that all of them were committed to making the minority government work, at least for the immediate future. But the fundamental differences over major domestic and foreign policy issues that had been so hotly debated during the campaign were not far from the surface. It was anyone's guess when one of them would emerge to plunge the country into yet another federal election race.

To Consider

1. In what ways did this federal election present Canadians with new choices of parties and leaders?
2. Why did the Liberals appear to be struggling during the campaign?
3. In what respects could the results be viewed as encouraging for each of the parties and their leaders? In what ways could they be viewed as disappointing?

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Video Review

Watch the video and record the answers to the questions on this page and the next.

Did you know . . .

Kids Voting Canada ran a student-based election during the 2004 campaign? Students voting in their schools elected 102 Liberals, 85 Conservatives, 50 New Democrats, 25 BQ, 3 Green Party, 1 Marijuana Party, and 1 Independent.

Viewing for Information

1. Whom did Paul Martin replace as leader of the Liberals? _____
2. Whom does the prime minister visit in order to receive approval for the calling of a new federal election?

3. Name the federal leaders of these political parties:
a) Liberal _____ b) Conservative _____
c) NDP _____ d) Bloc Québécois _____
e) Green Party _____
4. What two political parties merged to form the new Conservative Party?
_____ and _____
5. Name two of the "star candidates" who ran for the Liberals in the federal election.
_____ and _____
6. What former Conservative MP switched to the Liberals in this election?

7. What former Liberal cabinet minister quit politics after running against Paul Martin for the Liberal leadership?

8. What action of the Ontario provincial Liberal government caused the federal Liberals to lose some support in that province?

9. What was the major issue concerning Quebecers during the election?

10. According to the opinion polls, which party appeared to be on its way to victory at the mid-point in the election campaign?

11. What issues emerged during the campaign that probably cost the Conservatives support among some voters?

Did you know . . .

390 of 1685 candidates in this election were women? Only 56 were elected—down from 63 in the 2000 federal election. Canada presently is 36th in the world in terms of the percentage of women in its national legislature. Rwanda is first with 48.8 per cent.

12. What is a minority government? When was the last time Canada had one?

13. In what ways were the election results a “mixed bag” for all five main federal parties?

Viewing and Reflecting

Form groups with your classmates to discuss the following quotations from the video. Indicate which political leader is responsible for each of them by filling in the blank that follows the quote.

Explain how you think the quote relates to the campaign of the leader and his party during the election, and provide your analysis of it as an effective example of election-campaign rhetoric.

1. “I believe that the question that will define this election campaign is this . . . what kind of a Canada do you want? Do you want a Canada that builds on its historic strengths and values such as medicare, generosity, and an unflinching commitment to equality of opportunity? Or do you want a Canada that departs from much of its history, a Canada that rejects its valued tradition of collective responsibility?”

2. “My Canada will be as Canadian as any other. You know, in this country you can be a Canadian without being a Liberal; the government seems to forget that, that’s why they need to be defeated. That kind of arrogance leads to the waste, mismanagement, and corruption we’ve seen.”

3. “There are many reasons to disagree with Stephen Harper: he supports private, for-profit health-care delivery, he supports Star Wars missile defence, he’s got no Kyoto plan, and he’s a reckless tax-cutter. Just like Paul Martin. Instead of attacking Stephen Harper, Paul Martin should explain why so many Martin Liberals agree with Mr. Harper on so many issues.”

4. “Now they’re telling us don’t quit, don’t quit. *Ne lâchez pas*. I hear that everywhere I go because there is a lot of indignation among the population of Quebec and at the same time a deep feeling of confidence towards the members of the Bloc Québécois being able to defend what they think, what they hope, what they feel.”

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Central Issues of the Election

Further Research

To stay informed about party policies, consider visiting their official Web sites:
www.bloc.org
www.conservative.ca
www.greenparty.ca
www.liberal.ca
www.ndp.ca

Did you know . . .

The 2004 federal election resulted in the election of the first husband-wife team in Canadian history? Conservatives Nina and Gurmant Grewal both won ridings in British Columbia to sit as Canada's first elected couple.

Here is a summary of the positions of the three main national political parties on the most significant issues that emerged during the federal election of 2004.

Overall Economic Plan

Liberals: \$27-billion in new spending over five years, while keeping budgets balanced and maintaining a \$3-billion annual financial reserve fund

Conservatives: \$58-billion split evenly between tax cuts and new spending over five years

NDP: \$61-billion in new spending over five years without federal budget deficits

Health Care

Liberals: \$3-billion over two years for general improvements in health-care system, \$4-billion for a national fund to reduce hospital wait times, \$2-billion for a national home-care program, and \$2-billion for specific priorities like intensive care and mental illness

Conservatives: \$13-billion into extra health-care funding, including up to \$800-million for a national catastrophic prescription-drug program, develop performance indicators on access, quality, and sustainability of health care

NDP: \$30-billion in new health-care spending over five years, reduce the cost of drugs with a national bulk-buying program, strengthen the Canada Health Act to prevent public money supporting private, for-profit health care facilities

Families, Child Care, and Seniors

Liberals: \$5-billion for 250 000 new daycare spaces by 2009, \$1-billion to help families caring for seniors or

disabled relatives, increase guaranteed income supplement for low-income seniors, double claims for medical or disability-related expenses by family caregiver, new secretariat for seniors

Conservatives: Tax credit of \$2 000 per child, double tax credit for caregivers to cover allowable expenses, end to mandatory retirement in federal public service, complete review of veterans' hospitals

NDP: 200 000 affordable daycare spaces over four years, ensure women have access to safe therapeutic abortions

Tax Cuts and Fiscal Policy

Liberals: No plans either to raise or cut taxes, taxes already cut by \$100-billion under five-year plan introduced in 2000, further tax cuts when federal government has more money after spending on social priorities and paying down national debt

Conservatives: \$37-billion in income tax cuts for middle class, eliminate \$12 airport security tax, reduce EI premiums, cut capital gains tax, cut business security income tax rates, expand GST tax credit for low- and fixed-income earners, more funding for auditor-general's tax audits

NDP: No federal income tax for people earning under \$15 000 per year, GST scrapped on family essentials, some tax increases for high-income earners, higher corporate and capital gains taxes, double child tax credit

Canada-U.S. Relations

Liberals: Co-operation with U.S. on security and cross-border issues, closer

Did you know . . .

The 2004 campaign resulted in the election of Canada's first quadriplegic MP, Conservative Steve Fletcher? Fletcher survived a terrible car accident in 1996, continued his education, earned a master's degree in business, and defeated a Liberal "star" candidate to win election to the House of Commons. He pledged to create awareness and work to improve the lives of disabled Canadians.

Did you know . . .

Although, they won no seats, there was a host of so-called fringe parties that contested the 2004 federal election? These included: Christian Heritage Party (www.chcp.ca), Communist Party of Canada (www.comunist-party.ca), Freedom Party (www.freedom-party.ca), Marijuana Party (www.marijuana-party.com) and Progressive Canadian Party (www.pcparty.org).

ties with U.S. Congress and not just president in policy negotiations, maintain Canadian independence vis-a-vis U.S.

Conservatives: "Made in Canada" foreign policy that strengthens relationship with U.S. and other allies, enhance North American trade relations, stronger support for U.S. war on terrorism

NDP: Opposition to Canada's participation in proposed U.S. national missile defence program, maintenance of independent foreign policy

Environment

Liberals: \$400-million to develop wind power and other alternative energy sources over five years

Conservatives: Scrap the Kyoto Protocol on global warming and redirect spending to "concrete" programs to promote a cleaner environment

NDP: Support for Kyoto Protocol, \$10-billion program to build and install 10 000 wind turbines, retrofit program to enhance energy efficiency in buildings, mandatory emission targets for all Canadian auto makers, tax incentives and funding for developing and producing more energy-efficient vehicles

Cities and Housing

Liberals: \$2-billion annually from the federal gasoline tax for local government after five years, extra \$1.5-billion for affordable housing

Conservatives: Three-cents-a-litre gas tax rebates for cities for infrastructure programs with ceiling of \$1.5-billion per year

NDP: Give half of federal gas tax to cities for public transit and start a permanent national infrastructure program for cities, restart 10-year program to build 200 000 affordable and co-op housing units

Military and Foreign Policy

Liberals: More money for international peacekeeping missions, 5 000 more troops, 3 000 more reserves

Conservatives: \$7-billion in increased military spending, including 20 000 more troops, new tanks, transport planes, helicopters, upgrading CF-18 fighter-bombers

NDP: Ban bulk export of Canadian water, boost international development aid to 0.7 per cent of GDP by 2015

Other Promises

Liberals: Increase venture capital resources to help commercialize and turn profit from high-tech research at universities

Conservatives: Scrap federal gun registry, hire more RCMP officers, pay for sex-offenders' registry, tighten child pornography laws, end statutory release of criminals serving two-thirds of their sentences, mandatory minimum penalties for criminal use of firearms, more federal disaster-relief aid for farmers

NDP: Two new national holidays, require chartered banks to maintain branches in small communities, referendum on proportional representation, reduce tuition fees by 10 per cent and then freeze them, legalization of marijuana

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The Leaders, the Campaign, and the Aftermath

For three of Canada's federal party leaders, the election of 2004 was their first test of leadership. How well did they perform during the campaign? Did the results of the election match their expectations? What does the political future hold for them as Canadians confront the reality of a minority government and the possibility of yet another visit to the polls within the next year or two?

Quote

"We will not be a part of the weaponization of space." — Paul Martin, English-language leaders' debate

Paul Martin and the Liberals

Of all the leaders, Paul Martin probably felt most relieved yet also disappointed and frustrated by the campaign and its aftermath. When he assumed control of the Liberal Party, it was widely expected that he would lead it to yet another sweeping majority victory. Martin had wanted the prime ministership for his entire political life, and had made no secret of coveting it while waiting anxiously for Jean Chrétien's departure. However, a few months after assuming office, both his own and his party's credibility had been severely damaged as a result of the Auditor-General's report and the ensuing sponsorship scandal. The party's unity had also been strained by Martin's appointment of Liberal candidates in some ridings, sidelining former Chrétien supporters like long-time Ontario MP and cabinet minister Sheila Copps.

As the election campaign began, the Liberals were dipping seriously in the polls. Martin frequently appeared haggard, nervous, and on the defensive. It was only at about the mid-point in the election that he seemed to regain his composure and launch a vigorous, aggressive attack on his main rival, Conservative leader Stephen Harper. Framing the key issue of the election as "What kind of Canada do you want?" Martin contrasted his own party's commitment to core values such as public health care, strong social programs, tolerance of minorities and an independent foreign policy with the Conservatives' right-wing stance, including tax and spending cuts, opposition to abortion and same-sex mar-

riage, openness to private medicare, and support for the U.S. war in Iraq. Liberal television ads were merciless in their attacks on Harper and their warnings of what a Conservative victory would mean for Canada. During the last week of the campaign, this strategy, which included a direct appeal to potential NDP and Bloc Québécois voters to switch to the Liberals in order to block the Conservatives, finally appeared to be working.

On election night, Martin and the Liberals breathed a sigh of relief as the damage the party suffered proved to be far less serious than most polls and observers had predicted. Although in a minority situation, they found themselves with more seats than expected, especially in Ontario. They were not dependent on any single opposition party to stay in power. Many Liberal strategists thought it might be possible for the party to govern for some time in this position, looking to different parties for support on specific issues. Martin said he was committed to listening to the opposition leaders and to working co-operatively with them to make the minority government work. But this was surely not at all what he had expected or wanted when he became prime minister in December 2003.

Stephen Harper and the Conservatives

At the mid-point in the federal campaign of 2004, Conservative leader Stephen Harper was contemplating the possibility that his party might actually win the election, and even gain a majority of seats. Harper was so confident that he had even begun to assemble a

Quote

'I intend to have a free vote . . . in order to determine the definition of marriage . . .' — Stephen Harper, French-language leaders' debate

Did you know . . .

The origins of the terms *right wing* and *left wing* are in the French Revolution? In the seating plan of the French National Assembly, those who wanted greater democracy and change tended to sit on the left while those who preferred to maintain a strong monarch and less change sat on the right. Those in the centre were more willing to compromise.

transition team to assist in the transfer of power from the governing Liberals. The polls showed the Conservatives with a clear and growing lead. Harper's cool image, controlled campaign, and carefully crafted policy statements appeared to be resonating with the public. Anger with the Liberals, in the wake of the sponsorship scandal, was spreading across the country. With both the Bloc Québécois and the NDP poised to gain at the Liberals' expense, the now-united Conservatives believed that their moment had finally come, after years of division and vote splitting between the Canadian Alliance and Progressive Conservatives.

The party merger had been Harper's masterstroke, the culmination of his long struggle to reunite the right in Canadian politics in order to challenge the Liberals. He had succeeded in joining fiscal conservatives, social conservatives, and even some former moderate "Red Tories" into a single party with significant voter support outside the old Canadian Alliance heartland of Western Canada. Harper tried to project a moderate, thoughtful persona to the voters. He wanted to reassure them that the party he led was not composed of right-wing extremists bent on destroying the Canadian social welfare state, limiting the rights of minority groups, and allying Canada unquestioningly with the foreign policies of U.S. President George W. Bush. For the first half of the campaign, Harper's strategy seemed to be working.

But then the problems began to emerge. In addition to the Liberals' negative television ads, Harper also had to deal with the backlash over his controversial charge that Paul Martin supported child pornography, and reckless statements by his own MPs

about changes to laws concerning official bilingualism and abortion. Alberta Conservative Premier Ralph Klein's ill-timed speculations about a greater role for the private sector in the delivery of health-care services cast doubt over Harper's own claim to support public medicare. In the end, this proved enough to drive many hesitant voters back to the Liberals and frustrate Conservative hopes for victory. With 99 seats, the party had done much better than the Canadian Alliance ever had, but its percentage of the total vote fell far short of the combined Alliance-PC total from 2000. Harper somewhat bitterly reflected that next time his party had to run a much more polished, professional campaign if it was ever to form the federal government.

Jack Layton and the NDP

Jack Layton's re-energized New Democrats entered the election campaign anticipating major gains and the party's return to its former position as a key player in federal politics. After three disappointing elections, NDP supporters were banking on Layton's media savvy, charisma, experience in municipal government, and intelligence to woo back voters who had become disillusioned with Canada's main left-wing party. The NDP believed it was well positioned to gain support from former Liberals unhappy with the right-wing tilt of the party's new leader, Paul Martin, and even from former Progressive Conservatives who opposed their party's merger with the Canadian Alliance. With policies designed to appeal to voters concerned about the future of public health care, Canada's independence from the United States in foreign policy, protection of the environment, and more investment in cities, and a dynamic leader able to articulate

Quote

"We had 20 years of Liberal and conservative governments that have left us with scandals and cronyism in government. It's got to change." — Jack Layton, English-language leaders' debate

them effectively, many in the NDP believed that the party might make its best electoral showing ever.

As the campaign progressed, though, the NDP appeared stalled at approximately 15 per cent voter support nationally. While the party was on the rebound in Ontario and holding its own in other regions, it did not appear to be making major inroads with undecided voters. Layton's lack of federal political experience and tendency to speak impulsively were both demonstrated in his controversial attack on Paul Martin. He accused Martin of personal responsibility for the deaths of homeless people in Toronto as a result of cuts to government-assisted housing while he was finance minister. In addition, the NDP leader's statement that he might consider scrapping the Clarity Act setting out the terms and conditions for Quebec's secession from Canada and his announcement of an unpopular inheritance tax did little to enhance the party's fortunes and cast doubt on his leadership abilities. Layton's insistence that there were few substantial policy differences between Martin and Stephen Harper puzzled many voters, especially after Liberal attack ads

portrayed the Conservative leader as a dangerous right-winger.

In the dying days of the campaign, it seemed that many potential NDP voters, especially in Ontario and British Columbia, were having serious second thoughts. Fearing an unwanted Conservative victory, a number of these people decided, however reluctantly, to give the Liberals another chance. The NDP doubled its national vote and increased its standing in the House of Commons from 14 to 19 seats, but was shut out in its old Prairie heartland of Saskatchewan, and made only paltry gains elsewhere. Most frustratingly, the party failed to win the balance of power in a Liberal minority government by a single seat. Thus it was unable to use its support for Martin as a bargaining chip to advance its policy goals. After the election, Layton publicly pressed Martin on issues such as keeping medicare public, refusing to participate in the U.S.'s proposed national missile defence program, and considering reforms to Canada's electoral system. However, it was unclear just how much real influence he and his party would be able to exert in the next Parliament.

Activities

1. Form groups with your classmates to discuss the role of political leadership during an election campaign. Use the following headings to assess how well you think the three national party leaders performed during the recent federal campaign: a) personal strengths and abilities of the leader, b) objectives at the beginning of the campaign, c) effectiveness of the leader's campaign, d) results of the election, and e) future prospects after the election.
2. Prepare and present a post-election analysis of the performance of each leader and his party during the recent campaign, including specific suggestions for how it could be improved in the next federal election.

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Web Search Activity

Further Research

To better understand proportional representation, see "Rep by Pop: Making Votes Really Count?" beginning on page 18 in this issue of *New in Review*.

Comparing the Results of the 2004 and 2000 Federal Elections

For this activity, you will need to log on to the following Web sites in order to obtain the election result data necessary to complete it: www.cbc.ca/canadavotes (the CBC election information site for the 2004 federal election) and www.elections.ca (the official Web site of Elections Canada).

Federal Election of 2004: Data Analysis: National

Source: CBC Web site

Log on to the main Web page for "Results."

1. How many seats did each of the following parties win in the election?
a) Liberals, b) Conservatives, c) Bloc Québécois, d) NDP, e) Independent, f) others
2. What percentage of the overall vote did each of the parties obtain?
3. What percentage of the seats did each of the parties obtain (note: there are 308 seats in Parliament)?
4. a) Which parties' percentage of seats was greater than their percentage of overall votes? b) Which parties' was less?
5. If Canada were to have a system of proportional representation, where the number of seats each party won corresponded to its overall percentage of the vote, what would the results of the federal election have been? Which party or parties would have benefitted from such a system? Which party or parties would have suffered? (Note: In order to make this calculation, determine what each party's number of seats out of 308 would have been based on its overall percentage of the vote, e.g. 10% = 31 seats.)

Federal Election of 2004: Data Analysis: Provincial

Source: CBC Web site

Click the box entitled "Find your riding" under "Riding Profiles" on the main Web page for the province-by-province election results.

1. a) What percentage of the vote did the Bloc Québécois win in Quebec?
b) What percentage of seats did it win? (Note: There are 75 seats in Quebec.)
2. In which provinces did each of the following parties win the most seats?
a) Liberals, b) Conservatives, c) Bloc Québécois.
3. In which provinces did each of the following parties win the largest percentage of overall votes? a) Liberals, b) Conservatives, c) Bloc Québécois
4. In which provinces did the NDP place second in a) percentage of overall votes, and b) number of seats won?
5. In how many provinces did the party winning the most seats also win over 50 per cent of the overall votes?

