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Export date: Thu Mar 28 23:41:36 2024 / +0000 GMT

FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: Federal Election

By Stephen Somerville

It seemed like a federal election was held not that long ago.
Four years does go by in a hurry.
According to Wikipedia, ?a general election is to be held on the third Monday of October in the fourth calendar year following the polling day for the preceding general election. As such, the election for the 43rd Canadian parliament is to take place on or before October 21, 2019.
?The Canada Elections Act, however, does not affect the power of the Governor General of Canada to call an election at any time prior to that date. Such an act of the royal prerogative is carried out on the advice of the Prime Minister, which, by convention, the Governor General must almost always follow.?
There will 338 seats up for the grabs this October.
The Liberals currently hold 181 seats, the Conservatives 96, NDP 4, Bloc Quebecois 10, Green 1, Cooperative Commonwealth 1, and the People's Party 1, with four vacant.
The most recent popular opinion polls are showing a close race between the Liberals and the Conservatives.
While you have a seasoned campaigner in Prime Minister Trudeau, you have two rookie leaders in Conservative Andrew Scheer and Jagmeet Singh for the NDP.
Mr. Singh has not had a seat in the House of Commons and has had a low profile. He is trying to gain a seat in British Columbia through one of the upcoming by-elections.
Conventional wisdom is the Tories need Mr. Singh to do well so that the NDP will syphon votes from the governing Liberals.
The Tories will be fighting their own rear guard action against former Conservative Cabinet Minister Maxime Bernier, who is leading the newly formed People's Party.
This mix of personalities will ultimately lead to some interesting policy pronouncements as each of the parties attempt to put together a winning coalition of different voting groups.
I envision a campaign partly fought on the carbon tax, with the Prime Minister in favour while the Conservatives (and a number of provincial Premiers) against.
The GTA will be a key battleground and another issue could be housing affordability.
There are also two very interesting local storylines to watch during the race. First, former Newmarket-Aurora Conservative MP, Lois Brown is running against Liberal incumbent Kyle Peterson who defeated her last time out and in the southern part of Aurora, you have former Liberal MP turned Conservative MP, Leona Alleslev trying to retain the seat for the Tories.
Although I will review and handicap the local election races in a future column, one item has continued to both intrigue and perplex me.
All the respective campaigns do their best to showcase their candidate and to get them known in the community.
This is done through the use of lawn signs, brochures, newspaper ads and the like.
And with the base of election volunteers slowly declining - meaning a heavier burden is placed on the existing volunteers - those who manage campaigns would love to know when most of you actually make up your mind and decide to vote for a particular candidate.
I saw a study recently that suggested 18% of voters make up their mind in the last two or three days of an election, 20% in the last day and 16% when an individual is actually in the voting booth.
If these numbers are in any way true, they are truly scary. This would mean that just over 50% of voters make up their mind in the last 72 hours of the campaign.
So, maybe Elections Canada should replace a 36-day writ period with one that lasts a week.
Based upon the above, one might be asking if the campaign teams are wasting a lot of their time and resources trying to get through to voters before the electors are really ready to listen.
But then again, although 16% of individuals may be making their decision while in the voting booth, what are the key things that will influence that decision?
Do the quality and number of brochures sway their decision in any way? How much does the quantity of lawn signs have anything to do with it?
And the key question: how much of their decision is based on the local candidate versus the Party versus the Party Leader?

As someone who has volunteered on many different political campaigns over the years, I would love to have the answer to those questions.
One thing is for sure; there are lots of intriguing issues and storylines to watch in the lead up the fall election.

Stephen can be contacted at stephengsomerville@yahoo.com