

Canada's standing in the world highlighted in final heat of election

Depending on who you ask, Canada's standing in the world has either flourished or diminished over the last few years.

In this, our final topic to Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill and Newmarket-Aurora candidates of the 2021 Federal Election, we invited individuals hoping to be Aurora's next Members of Parliament to look at the current state of Canada's place on the international stage.

AURORA-OAK RIDGES-RICHMOND HILL

From the perspective of NDP candidate Janice Hagen, Canada has been consistently praised for its quality of life (affordability, education, jobs, income equality, safety and health care) and has consistently ranked at or near the top of all the nations in the world.

That being said, however, while "social programs are obviously making a big difference" and we're "privileged to live in a large, resource-rich country", Canada is also "number one in the production of waste, number five in electricity use and number seven for carbon emissions."

"Yes, we are privileged but we are squandering that privilege," says Hagen. "We must do more to keep Earth as #1 for the best planet to live on. We need to keep our emission reduction promises to the rest of the world and start sooner. More than most countries, we have the money and technology to be innovative and do better. This will create jobs and secure a future for generations to come.

"We also need a strong and [principled] foreign policy based on human rights, global peace and security. As climate change advances, more land will become uninhabitable and this will be even more important. We will need to increase international aid, alleviating poverty and food insecurity, developing Canada and other countries with green infrastructure. Canada is not an island. Our survival and standard of life is tied to all other countries, whether we like it or not."

Conservative candidate Leona Alleslev, however, has a very different perspective, stating "Canada has never been more alone."

"The outcome of Canada's bid for a seat on the UN Security Council must serve as a wake-up call," she says. "Canada's quick and decisive loss is a reflection of the world's report card on Canada's current place and standing under this Liberal government. The world needs more Canada, so why did the world say, 'no thanks'?"

Canada's economy, she says, "may soon fall out of the Top 10", and she notes "that the renegotiation of NAFTA left Canada worse off with "managed" trade rather than "free" trade.

"At the same time, Canadians are proud to be a nation that defends the rule of law and human rights including LGBTQ+ rights, but Trudeau compromised these core Canadian values by failing to condemn anti-gay laws in Senegal and Uganda or challenge authoritarian regimes for their blatant disregard for the rule of law.

"Canada has been known for "punching above our weight" but since 2015 the number of Canadian peacekeepers and peace-keeping missions has fallen to its lowest number in 60 years. Canada is among the lowest NATO defence contributors and our allies have threatened to stop sharing critical intelligence since Trudeau has failed to ban Huawei."

Canada's "declining international status is of grave concern" and Canada must change with a changing world, she says.

"The Conservative Canada's Recovery Plan will advance the national interests of Canada, with every decision on the world stage prioritizing: security and sovereignty of Canadians; prosperity of our people and our partners; and the democratic values that define us. Canada's Conservatives will adopt a foreign policy that seeks new and strengthened alliances with democratic allies and

economic partners who share our values. We will establish a Canadian National Interest Council to implement our long-term security and economic priorities and grow Canadian strategic and economic influence. We will take a principle-based approach with the Chinese Communist Party, standing with the Chinese people and promoting greater freedom for them. We will be unwavering champions for human rights, dignity, and transparency. In cooperation with our Five Eyes allies, we will build Canadian capabilities to contribute to foreign intelligence focusing on closing current gaps in understanding international threats of economic coercion, digital threats, and foreign interference. Canada's Conservatives will make capacity building, economic reconciliation, and sovereignty expression core priorities of our approach to the North.?

Liberal candidate Leah Taylor Roy says her party's government has "worked hard" over the last six years to establish Canada as a world leader "and that status was elevated over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic."

"We weathered this storm better than most, and that's no accident," she says. "We rolled out one of the most successful vaccination campaigns in the world, with almost 85% of eligible people vaccinated with their first dose and over 75% fully vaccinated - ahead of schedule. We took a leading role in galvanizing the international response to the pandemic, including mobilizing over \$2.5 billion in international assistance and facilitating the donation of 40 million doses to vulnerable populations through COVAX. We also made investments in international assistance to help trusted partners on the ground working to fight COVID-19 across the globe, helping to ensure equitable access to vaccines, as the Liberal government continues working to build a better and more resilient world."

The world's eyes, she says, are on Canada now and "We need to continue leveraging that."

"Our Liberal government will continue to advance Canada's interests abroad, including to further sustainable development and address the impacts of climate change, and to promote the Canadian values of peace, freedom, democracy, and human rights as we move forward in a time of global uncertainty. More than ever, Canada believes that multilateralism is the way forward and the Liberal government will continue to be actively engaged on the world stage in order to address the global challenges that we face."

NEWMARKET-AURORA

Liberal candidate Tony Van Bynen says Canada is "generally viewed as a leader on issues like climate change, economic equality and other issues that impact anyone." While Canada is the smallest member of the G7, he says Canada plays an "important role in the world."

"We've led global efforts to phase out coal and end the use of child soldiers, for example," he says. "Leaders like Presidents Obama and Biden, President Macron, and Chancellor Merkel have all spoken about how important it is to have Canada's voice at the table, and about how much they value Mr. Trudeau's leadership, in particular. The suggestion from some of the folks on the blue team that Canada's standing in the world has been diminished is nonsense, in my view."

"It's important that we continue to use our voice to speak up about things like environmental protection, inequality, protecting refugees, and other issues that we can play an outsized role on. We'll obviously never carry the same weight as countries like the United States or the United Kingdom, but when Canada speaks, people listen, and it's important that we use that voice as often as we can."

Conservative candidate Harold Kim, on the other hand, offers a different viewpoint, stating that under the leadership of Justin Trudeau, Canada has "lost the respect of international allies."

"Our country has a wealth of natural resources but our tax rates drive investment out of the country and jobs flock south," said Kim. "When other countries decide to pull out of agreements, provinces are decimated and the effects are felt across the country. And when our citizens travel abroad to do business or help our troops, we are powerless to help them get out, fawning behind others and they are left to languish either in prison or hiding in fear of their lives."

"We need to restore a strong, credible, principled leadership with a reputation for delivering on its promises. Canada needs to get its

own house in order - have an emergency plan, restore provincial relationships, get the economy back on track and invest in Canada and Canadians. When the world sees a rapid recovery plan enacted and Canada, revitalized, refusing to deal with corrupt regimes, we will be able to hold our heads high again at G7 meetings and on the world stage. Because the world will know Canada is a country that puts its people first, understands the wealth of natural resources, including its talented people, has integrity in its decision-making and a plan for our future.?

NDP candidate Yvonne Kelly says Canadians are 'proud of our role in the world and want a government that will make the right choices to help people, particularly the most vulnerable.?

At the same time, however, she says that under successive Conservative and Liberal governments, Canada is 'often on the wrong side of important global issues.?

'Under the current government, even as we face unprecedented global challenges, Canadian international assistance spending has fallen to the lowest levels in 50 years, and this threatens our credibility as a global leader on humanitarian issues,' she says. 'As a nation, we also have a number of things in our own house to get in order such as our failure to enact honest truth and reconciliation efforts with our Indigenous Peoples and our inadequate commitments to Canadians on issues of income inequality, food security, housing and homelessness.?

In addition to addressing ongoing issues for Indigenous peoples, the NDP will look at 'how we as a country have failed on meeting our UN commitments to food security and housing for Canadians.

'We will restore Canada's commitment to international aid by increasing our international development assistance contribution to 0.7 per cent of our Gross National Income,' she says. 'We must stand up to China with a strong and coherent strategy to defend Canadian interests at home and abroad. New Democrats will call out human rights abuses by China, stand with Hong Kong pro-democracy asylum seekers, and provide support for those facing threats by Chinese entities here in Canada.

'Under an NDP government, Canada will be a force for peace. We will support nuclear disarmament, recommit to peacekeeping, and make sure that Canadian-made weapons are not fuelling conflict and human rights abuses abroad. Recognizing the right to live in safety and security, we will work towards a just and lasting two-state solution between Israel and Palestine that respects human rights and upholds international law. Canada must also take a global leadership role in helping low-income countries deal with the impacts of climate change. This should include climate financing to help protect the people who are most vulnerable as well as living up to new, robust emissions reductions targets at home.?

From the perspective of Green Party candidate Tim Flemming, Canada has a role 'to demonstrate the strength of a representative democracy that can be admired the world over.?

'This government can be dually attentive to the needs of their own citizens and demands throughout the planet with responsible planning and care,' he says. 'Regrettably, partisan decision-making and a significant leadership void has damaged our position relative to many of our fellow global citizens. Our actions, through a series of mandates, has led to an erosion in faith that Canada can be a country to count on.

'Canada can return and exceed their prior lofty-perceived position through a number of acts. However, first and foremost, in any theatre, we must think deeply what we say we can do, 'and then simply do it.' This comes down to leadership: the will and insight to reasoned decision, the bold will to act, and, most important, leaders that apply an integrity lens to all of their work. Citizens do not expect perfection, but intent, thought and truisms. Specifically, with our natural resources like fresh water, unparalleled diverse human force and a democratic engaging spirit, Canada, including York Region can make a huge difference well into the next century.?

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter