

Canada needs a Liberal-NDP-Green Coalition

By [Prof. John Ryan](#)

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Canada's last two elections are proof positive that we have a flawed electoral system. Does it make any sense that it's impossible to get a government that reflects the views of the majority of our population? How is it that a little more than a third of the electorate can determine who forms Canada's government?

There is no question that Canada has a dysfunctional political system in which the views of the majority of Canadians cannot be represented by a single political party. Although almost two-thirds of Canada's voters in the last two elections opposed the platform, policies, and philosophy of the Conservative party, it is the Conservatives who have formed the government. The majority vote was split amongst four parties, thereby thwarting the predominant will of the people and making a mockery of democracy. And this may very well continue into the future. If the NDP and the Greens keep getting progressively stronger, it will guarantee a split vote, resulting in an unending series of Conservative governments. Moreover, if Gilles Duceppe should retire it would weaken the Bloc Quebecois and we would then get majority Conservative governments.

So what do we do? How do we get out of a system that seems to ensure an unending regime of Conservative governments – governments that do not have the support of the bulk of our population? In the best interests of Canada, it's up to progressive-minded citizens to urge the Liberals, the NDP, and the Greens to form a coalition. It will then be up to these parties to act responsibly, to set aside narrow partisan politics, and to establish a formal coalition. It's only then that the majority of Canadians would be in a position to vote for a political entity that would reflect their views, values, and interests.

Coalitions are commonly formed after an election, but in Canada, at the present time, an agreement to form a coalition by the Liberals, the NDP and the Greens would have to be made before the next election. Because of the nature of the Bloc Quebecois, it would be difficult to include them in a coalition, and without them, after another election, the Conservatives would probably once again outnumber the Liberals and the NDP, as they did in 2006 and 2008. However, if a coalition of these parties could be established before the next election, a unique election strategy could be used that would have dramatically different results.

In a coalition, the three parties would retain their individual identities, but would have to agree on a common platform or agenda, not on all matters, but only on some basic, fundamental issues. They would also have to agree on an election strategy, whenever an election might be called. The strategy should be a straightforward matter, and once agreed upon, it could be the driving force to hammer out a platform, and thereby create a coalition.

A meaningful election strategy, equally in the interest of all three parties, would be an

agreement to run all the incumbent candidates, Liberal and NDP, without opposition from the other members of the coalition. Although the Greens have no elected members, it would nevertheless be in their interests to agree to this. Such a strategy would guarantee the reelection of every currently elected member. As for the seats held by the Conservatives and the Bloc Quebecois, it is my suggestion that the coalition should run a single candidate in each of these constituencies from the party that had the largest vote in the 2008 election.

From Elections Canada data I have compiled a set of tables that provide the factual basis for a winning election strategy. Table 1 shows that in the next election the Liberals would be entitled to run 207 candidates, the NDP 96, and the Green Party 5. However, Table 2 is of greater consequence since it shows that in the 2008 election there were 60 constituencies where the combined Liberal-NDP-Green vote exceeded the Conservative or the Bloc Quebecois vote. In the next election, a coalition candidate, from the party with the greatest vote, would have a strong likelihood of winning the seat. In this manner the Liberals could possibly win an extra 49 seats, the NDP 9, and the Green party 2.

Table 3 shows that in the next election, with this procedure, the Liberals could win up to 125 seats, the NDP 46, and the Green Party 2 – for a majority coalition government of 173 seats. In such a coalition it would seem reasonable that cabinet seats would be determined by the proportionate share of members in the government, with 72 percent going to the Liberals, 27 percent to the NDP, and 1 percent to the Green Party. It would also seem reasonable if the leader of the NDP became the deputy prime minister.

Given this situation, in the next election the Conservatives could be reduced to 94 seats and the Bloc Quebecois to 41 – in both cases, roughly proportionate to their share of the vote. But the biggest winner of all would be the Canadian people – it would be democracy in action where the majority of the population would have a government that would reflect the beliefs, values and interests of the bulk of Canada's people.

To put the coalition proposal in perspective, for years the minority of Canadians on the political right languished in the wilderness because of a split in their political movement. However, after a series of misadventures, they finally coalesced into a single party–albeit with some alienation and disaffection in their ranks. Basically, their strategy worked—and although they continue to receive only a bit more than a third of the vote, this is now the second minority government that they have formed.

Although the people on the political right coalesced into a single party, this would be impractical and highly inadvisable for the Liberals, the NDP and the Greens – each have their unique strengths and distinct identities which could be preserved in a dynamic coalition. Coalitions occur on a regular basis in Europe and in other parts of the world — but so far, never in Canada, although the NDP and the Liberals did cooperate in the past. And it was at those times that some progressive legislation was passed.

Undoubtedly, there will be opposition in each of the parties to a coalition suggestion. However, it should be possible to present convincing arguments that this would be in the best interests of both our country and these parties. For the NDP, being the smaller entity, there's still the vivid memory of how the Progressive Conservatives were subsumed by the Reform/Alliance zealots. There's also the practical worry that such a political realignment might result in a horse and rabbit stew, strongly smelling of Liberal horse. But we are not talking about merger; we are talking about a coalition, so there would be no threat to a

smaller party. Furthermore, at this stage, for these three political parties to be an effective political force, they need one another. And stemming from this, the three parties are in a position to exact compromises.

Through good faith negotiations they should be able to agree that when they form a coalition government they would enact some form of proportional representation or a system of preferential voting – there are several to choose from. This should be the most crucial provision for both the NDP and the Green Party. Another key feature for the NDP should be for the coalition government to abandon any on-going commitments for Canada's further integration into the U.S.A. and to withdraw from the Security and Prosperity Partnership which endangers Canada's sovereignty. There should be no problem for them to agree to enact a national child care program (ideally it should be modelled on Quebec's system) and a national policy to work with First Nations to resolve their crucial problems.

On matters of taxation, environment policies, and other issues on which the parties disagree, there would have to be compromise, and because of necessity, an agreement of some type could be worked out.

The public should urge the parties to agree to put a halt to the obsession of lowering taxes, which reduces the quality of our social services. "Taxes are what we pay for a civilized society" (U.S. Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes). It's taxes collected by governments that provide us with the wide array of social services and infrastructure, such as schools, medical services, libraries and parks, safe streets and livable cities.

As for NAFTA, we should welcome Obama's stated intention to renegotiate the pact. In fact, if we had the courage, it would be highly advisable to abrogate NAFTA. Only then could Canada once again have an independent energy policy. When it's in their interests, the U.S. simply ignores NAFTA rulings, e.g., softwood lumber. We would be far better off with the rules of the World Trade Organization – and this should not affect our trade relationship with the USA whatsoever. After all, the USA trades with the rest of the world – without NAFTA.

Aside from agreeing to enact progressive legislation, a Liberal-NDP-Green coalition would put an end to the possibility of a future Harper majority government – something we were lucky to escape in 2008. The grim fact is that a Conservative majority in just one term of office could enable them to carry out most of their underlying agenda and do irreparable harm to Canada's social and economic fabric.

Because of Harper's tight control over all communication from his party, he has been able to present a rather benign and innocent image. However, there is no reason to believe that the party has actually turned its back on its original *raison d'être*. In fact, the Reform-Alliance agenda is still the basis of the current Conservative Party. As such, a Conservative majority would pose an unprecedented danger to our country – and only a Liberal-NDP-Green coalition could prevent this from happening.

As it now stands, with the Liberals in disarray, Harper may proceed to govern by making almost every piece of government business a confidence matter. If the opposition parties should remain paralyzed with the fear of causing another election, through this procedure Harper could kill off the Canadian Wheat Board, dismantle and sell off the CBC, legitimize Canadian and American private clinics to undermine Canada's health care system, and wind down the federal government to be in charge of little more than the military and to represent Canada as a "community of provinces" at the United Nations.

To remain as an impotent opposition, the Liberals and the NDP would be accessories to the fact in allowing the Harper government to do irreparable harm to Canada. This would be a cowardly and shameful thing for them to do. However, if they act intelligently, they are in a position to get Harper and his party out of office.

Given the dangers that lie ahead of us, the Liberals, the NDP and the Green Party should quickly proceed to form a coalition – this would stop Harper dead in his tracks. Once a coalition is established, the Liberals and the NDP should welcome the opportunity to defeat the Harper government, and following another election we could get a government that would indeed reflect the wishes of the majority of Canada’s population.

The fact that the Liberals are now faced with the procedure for selecting a new leader should not stop them from taking part in negotiations with the NDP and the Green Party to form a coalition. They should see this as a long term policy and the sooner they begin on this the better it will be for them. The candidates for the leadership should participate in the negotiations and in this manner help to work out a unified long term policy and strategy for the party.

Tables 1, 2 and 3 graphically support the argument for a coalition and make such a conclusion almost self-evident. Surely a government of this type would be in the best interests of Canada and its people. But can the leadership of these parties rise above short-term partisan politics? At a time when our country desperately needs this, are they capable of becoming statesmen?

By acting responsibly these parties could carve out an honourable place for themselves in Canada’s history. Most importantly, they could alter the course of Canada’s future – for the better.

John Ryan, Ph.D., is a retired professor of geography and senior scholar at the University of Winnipeg. He can be reached at jryan13@mts.net.

Table 1

Number of Liberal-NDP-Green Coalition candidates for the next election

All Liberal and NDP Incumbents to be unopposed

Candidates in constituencies won by Conservatives or Bloc Quebecois

to be from the Party that got the largest vote in 2008

Province	Liberal Party			NDP			Green Party		
	Col. 1*	Col. 2**	Total	Col. 1*	Col. 2**	Total	Col. 1*	Col.2**	Total

B. C.	5	8	13	9	14	23	0	0	0
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Alberta	0	8	8	1	16	17	0	3	3
Saskatchewan	1	1	2	0	12	12	0	0	0
Manitoba	1	4	5	4	5	9	0	0	0
Ontario	38	47	85	17	3	20	0	1	1
Quebec	14	54	68	1	6	7	0	0	0
N. Brunswick	3	5	8	1	1	2	0	0	0
Nova Scotia	5	1	6	2	2	4	0	1	1
P. E. I.	3	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nfld & Lab	6	0	6	1	0	1	0	0	0
NWT	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
Nunavut	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Yukon	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0

Totals 77 130 207 37 59 96 0 0
5

*Column 1 = Incumbents, to run unopposed by other coalition members

**Column 2 = New candidates to be from the Party that got the largest vote in constituencies won by Conservatives or Bloc Quebecois in 2008

Source: Compiled from Elections Canada data by John Ryan.

Table 2

Constituencies where the combined Liberal-NDP-Green vote exceeded the Conservative or Bloc Quebecois vote in 2008

Provinces	No. of constituencies	Party with largest vote		
		Liberal	NDP	Green
British Columbia	8	4	4	0
Alberta	0	0	0	0
Saskatchewan	3	1	2	0
Manitoba	2	2	0	0

Ontario	29	27	1	1
Quebec	9	8	1	0
New Brunswick	4	4	0	0
Nova Scotia	2	0	1	1
Prince Edward Island	1	1	0	0
Newfoundland & Lab	0	0	0	0
NWT	0	0	0	0
Nunavut	1	1	0	0
Yukon	0	0	0	0
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Total	59	48	9	2

Source: Compiled from Elections Canada data by John Ryan.

Table 3

Potential number of seats that could be won by a
Liberal-NDP-Green Coalition in the next election

Province	Liberal Party			NDP			Green Party		
	Col. 1*	Col. 2**	Total	Col. 1*	Col. 2**	Total	Col. 1*	Col.2**	Total
B. C.	5	4	9	9	4	13	0	0	0
Alberta	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
Saskatchewan	1	1	2	0	2	2	0	0	0
Manitoba	1	2	3	4	0	4	0	0	0
Ontario	38	27	65	17	1	18	0	1	1
Quebec	14	8	22	1	1	2	0	0	0
N. Brunswick	3	4	7	1	0	1	0	0	0

Nova Scotia	5	0	5	2	1	3	0	1	1
P.E.I.	3	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nfld. & Lab.	6	0	6	1	0	1	0	0	0
NWT	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
Nunavut	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Yukon	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
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Totals	77	48	125	37	9	46	0	0	2

- Total potential seats for a Liberal-NDP-Green Coalition - 173.

- In such a coalition it would seem reasonable that the Cabinet would be composed of 72 percent Liberals, 27 percent NDP and 1 percent from the Green Party.

*Column 1 = Incumbents, to run unopposed by the other coalition members.

** Column 2 = Candidates in constituencies where the combined Liberal-NDP-Green vote exceeded the Conservative or Bloc Quebecois vote in 2008. The candidate would be from the Party that received the largest vote. A coalition candidate in such a constituency would have a strong likelihood of winning the seat.

Source: Compiled from Elections Canada data by John Ryan.

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