

CANADA

# Canadian Election a Tossup as Trudeau Tries to Stay in Power

Liberal prime minister and his Conservative challenger seek to win over voters with tax-relief measures



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, with his family, votes in Monday's election in the Papineau area of Montreal. PHOTO: CARLO ALLEGRI/REUTERS

*By Paul Vieira and Kim Mackrael*

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OTTAWA—Early Canadian election results suggest Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Liberal Party lost some ground but retained the bulk of its support in Atlantic Canada, giving the incumbent Liberals an edge over their Conservative rivals.

Results in Atlantic Canada, which account for just under 10% of all the electoral districts up for grabs in Monday's election, showed the Liberals had either won or were leading in 25 of the 32 seats in the region. During the last Canadian election in 2015, the Liberals swept Atlantic Canada, setting the stage for Mr. Trudeau's resounding win.

Polls across the rest of Canada are set to close at 9:30 p.m. EDT, with the exception of the Pacific Coast province of British Columbia, where voting will continue until 10 p.m. EDT.

Several polls indicate the race remains too close to call, with the winner likely forced to seek the help of other parties to stay in power.

Regardless of the outcome, the result is expected to deliver a setback to Mr. Trudeau. A weakened mandate or outright loss would reflect widespread disappointment over the Liberal government's policy measures and Mr. Trudeau's personal judgment, including allegations he tried to interfere in the criminal prosecution of a Montreal engineering company. Images of his wearing blackface in his younger days further damaged his reputation.



Andrew Scheer, the Conservative Party challenger, has promised to overturn the country's national carbon tax if he wins office.  
PHOTO: WARREN TODA/EPA/SHUTTERSTOCK

Despite Mr. Trudeau's woes, his main political rival, Conservative Party leader Andrew Scheer, has failed to make notable gains. The two leaders tried to win over voters with tax-relief measures aimed at alleviating a squeeze on people's pocketbooks, while offering starkly different policies on dealing with climate change.

Canada's electoral system rewards parties seats in the legislature based on obtaining a plurality of votes in 338 individual electoral districts. If the election is close, Canada could face some short-term political uncertainty. The country's constitution dictates that the incumbent prime minister has the first opportunity to form government after an election.

In the event the Conservatives beat the Liberals by just a few seats, constitutional experts say a Liberal government is still a possibility, if Mr. Trudeau can obtain enough support from other parties to remain in power.

The Liberals and Conservatives spent much of their campaign time on the attack. Mr. Scheer said the justice scandal and blackface images revealed Mr. Trudeau to be "phony" and a "fake." Further, the Conservatives alleged, without evidence, that Mr. Trudeau would legalize drugs like

cocaine and consider increasing the national sales tax if he won a second term. Mr. Trudeau's party released past statements by Conservative Party candidates that the Liberals deemed offensive to immigrants and the gay, lesbian and transgender community. Mr. Trudeau repeatedly warned Mr. Scheer's socially conservative views posed a threat to women's access to a legal abortion—even though the Tory leader said he wouldn't change existing laws.

Support for the left-wing New Democratic Party and the regional Bloc Québécois grew during the campaign, setting them up as possible kingmakers in the next parliament.



Polls suggested that whoever wins Monday's vote will likely be forced to seek help from other parties to stay in power. People in Toronto lined up to vote. PHOTO: BRETT GUNDLOCK/GETTY IMAGES

Jenny Rodrigues, a Toronto communications professional, said Monday she voted for the New Democrats because she was impressed with party leader Jagmeet Singh and his support for diversity. She said she lost respect for Mr. Trudeau after what she said were clumsy apologies following the blackface revelations. "It was all just awful," she said.

Melvi Jouzy, a longtime Liberal supporter from Surrey, British Columbia, said she wasn't bothered by Mr. Trudeau's blackface images. "Everybody did stuff that was crazy in their past," she said.

Political watchers say the failure of Messrs. Trudeau and Scheer to galvanize support speaks to a discontent among Canadians over the political class and the direction of the country.

"Canadian voters aren't happy. That's the basic issue," said Darrell Bricker, head of Ipsos Public Affairs, a polling company. "People outside of Canada can't understand how Trudeau's not a shoo-in given his rock-star status. But in Canada, people feel quite a bit differently."

The winner of Monday's election is expected to produce a winner with the lowest share of the popular vote in Canada's 152-year history.



The New Democratic Party, headed by Jagmeet Singh, might be a possible kingmaker in Canada's next parliament. PHOTO: DON MACKINNON/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES

The final days of the campaign saw both the Liberals and Conservatives make their case for a majority mandate. The Liberals have warned a Tory government would usher in stark spending cuts to pay for promised tax relief; a rollback of environmental policies meant to tackle climate change; and a threat to women's access to legal abortion services.

Branislav Miokovic, an architect in Toronto's west end, said he voted Conservative after supporting Mr. Trudeau in 2015. "Last time, everyone was so enthusiastic about Justin Trudeau, but he proved to be incompetent," said Mr. Miokovic, 73 years old.

Mr. Miokovic added that he was most concerned about Canada's ballooning budget deficit. Mr. Scheer promised to return to a balanced budget in a half decade.

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Mr. Bricker, the pollster, said Mr. Trudeau came to power in 2015 in large part because he was able to unify progressive voters behind the Liberal Party as the best option to oust the previous prime minister, Conservative Stephen Harper. "Now, progressives are disappointed," he said. "Trudeau has become just another politician—and a flawed one at that."

—*Jacquie McNish and Vipal Monga in Toronto contributed to this article.*

**Write to** Paul Vieira at [paul.vieira@wsj.com](mailto:paul.vieira@wsj.com) and Kim Mackrael at [kim.mackrael@wsj.com](mailto:kim.mackrael@wsj.com)

## Corrections & Amplifications

Hélène Lefebvre is a retired bureaucrat who cast her ballot in Gatineau, Quebec, on Monday. An earlier version of this article incorrectly spelled her surname as Lefebre. (Oct. 21, 2019)

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