

fragmented and fractured world of media consumption, that is easier to do than ever. We also know that swing voters will generally listen only long enough to make up their minds and then tune politics out again. Once that happens, something pretty big needs to happen to get them to reconsider.

So, what matters now before the campaign has even begun?

Campaign count seats, not votes

As *Hill Times* readers know well, Canada has a first past the post plurality electoral system. Whichever candidate has the most votes in a specific riding wins that riding. Often this will allow a candidate with support below 40 per cent to win a seat contested by three or four parties.

There are 338 seats in the 2015 election. They don't really care how many voters they have across Canada. They care if they have more voters than any other party in 170 or more seats.

All else being equal, ridings have a tendency to stay with the same party. This is particularly true of ridings that were won by large margins. This is not always true as we saw in Quebec in the last election, but major swings are the exception, not the rule.

We have grouped Canada's seats by region and vote results from the last election to identify nine types of seats in this election. Five of these groups provide a strong base of support for the Conservatives and the NDP:

66 seats are Rural Conservative Blowouts, seats they won by 25 points or more over the second-place finisher.

36 seats are Suburban or Urban Conservatives Blowouts, again seats they won by 25 points or more over the second place finisher.

Another 33 were Strong Conservative Wins with margins of 15 to 25 per cent.

22 seats are NDP Blowouts, seats they won by 25 points or more over the second place finisher.

Another 42 are Strong NDP Wins with margin between 15 to 25 per cent.

Altogether, 199 of the 338 seats in this election would require a major change to move away from the NDP or the Conservatives.

The remaining 139 are quite diverse, but we have combined them into four groups for analysis:

45 seats are Liberal two-way races or strong wins.

38 seats are three-way between the Liberals, NDP and Conservatives

33 seats are Conservative-NDP races

21 seats are Bloc competitive races.

Looking at the riding clusters and comparing the vote today to the vote in 2011 gives us some sense of how the battle is shaping up. Seven of the riding clusters look fairly stable:

The three groups of Conservative base seats looks solid. They are positioned to hold most if not all their 102 base seats.

The two NDP base groups also looks quite good although their strong wins are now looking stronger than their blow outs where the Liberals appear to be gaining. Still, like the Conservatives, the NDP appear poised to hold most if not all their 102 base seats.

There is no significant change in the Liberal two-way race seats. The results are well within the margin of error of the last campaign and remain a battleground.

The NDP are gaining at the expense of the Bloc in the BQ Competitive seats, suggesting the NDP are well-positioned to retain their 2011 gains in Quebec.

Decided vote by riding clusters

Riding Clusters	Data Source	Conservative	Liberal	NDP	Bloc Quebecois	Green Party	Other	Total
Rural CPC Blowouts	2015 IRG 29 Poll	44.3%	23.3%	23.3%		8.4%	0.4%	100%
	2011 Election Results	62.9%	11.4%	19.9%	0.0%	4.6%	1.2%	
Urban/Suburban CPC Blowouts	2015 IRG 29 Poll	42.1%	24.4%	28.2%		3.8%	1.4%	100%
	2011 Election Results	59.9%	16.4%	18.0%	0.0%	5.1%	0.7%	
CPC Strong Wins	2015 IRG 29 Poll	35.1%	21.4%	32.1%	1.8%	8.3%	1.2%	100%
	2011 Election Results	50.1%	20.5%	23.7%	0.7%	3.5%	1.4%	
NDP Strong Wins	2015 IRG 29 Poll	20.6%	18.2%	44.4%	12.1%	3.7%	0.9%	100%
	2011 Election Results	18.0%	12.8%	48.5%	17.6%	2.4%	0.7%	
NDP Blowouts	2015 IRG 29 Poll	18.2%	29.9%	41.6%	6.6%	3.6%		100%
	2011 Election Results	17.5%	15.3%	55.7%	7.7%	3.3%	0.5%	
CPC NDP Races	2015 IRG 29 Poll	26.3%	22.2%	40.4%	4.7%	4.7%	1.2%	100%
	2011 Election Results	42.8%	9.0%	40.9%	3.1%	3.7%	0.6%	
LPC 2-way races or strong wins	2015 IRG 29 Poll	22.7%	35.9%	30.5%	2.3%	7.0%	1.9%	100%
	2011 Election Results	35.0%	39.2%	21.0%	1.5%	2.9%	0.5%	
BQ Competitive	2015 IRG 29 Poll	14.5%	17.3%	42.7%	22.7%	2.7%		100%
	2011 Election Results	15.1%	12.4%	39.0%	31.0%	2.1%	0.3%	
NDP-LPC-CPC 3 way races	2015 IRG 29 Poll	27.4%	34.3%	31.7%	1.7%	3.9%	0.9%	100%
	2011 Election Results	31.9%	34.8%	27.8%	1.1%	3.9%	0.4%	
Total	2015 IRG 29 Poll	29.3%	25.8%	33.7%	4.6%	5.6%	1.0%	100%
	2011 Election Results	40.4%	19.4%	30.2%	5.4%	3.8%	0.8%	



The two remaining clusters show potential for NDP gains:

The NDP are up and the Conservatives down in the three-way races, showing some potential for NDP gains and Conservative losses.

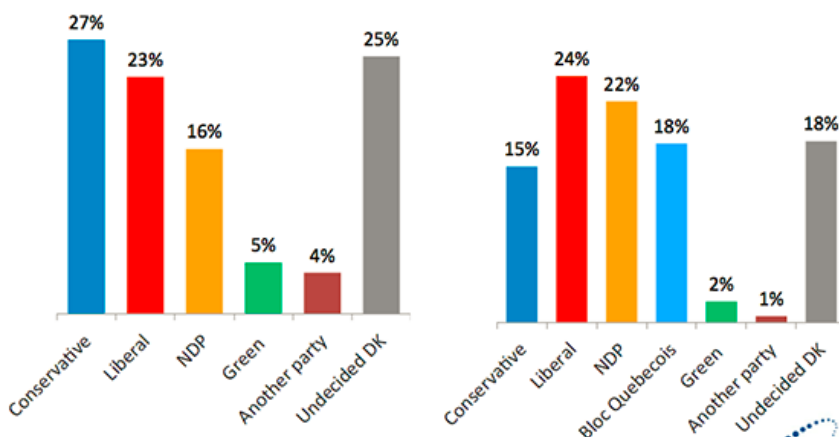
The Liberals are up and the Conservatives down in the Conservative-NDP races which leaves the NDP positioned for strong gains as their plurality over the Conservatives grows while the Liberals are not sufficient to make them competitive.

Party loyalty

Most Canadians, and particularly most Canadians who are likely to vote, start out feeling closer to one party than the others. This matters a great deal because we are biased in how we consume information. We look for information that re-enforces our current feelings and try to disregard information that conflicts with our world view. This gives parties with high levels of party identification an edge over parties with less party identification.

Party ID: Conservatives have strong ID in ROC, Liberals strongest in Quebec despite NDP vote

Thinking about federal politics, generally speaking do you think of yourself as a...



Note: 'Would not vote' (3%) not shown



The Conservatives and Liberals start the campaign with between 23 and 24 percent of Canadians saying they feel closer to those parties than any other. The NDP have only 17 percent party identification. Roughly eight per cent identify with the Greens or another smaller party, four per cent identify as Bloc (17.7 per cent in Quebec) while 23.7 per cent are not aligned with any party.

What this means is for the NDP to overtake the Liberals and Conservatives, they must do some combination of winning more of their base than the

others, winning more of the unaligned than the others and winning defectors from other parties.

The NDP are ahead because they are doing all three of these things.

The NDP have 87 per cent support from their identifiers. The Conservatives have 80 per cent support while the Liberals have 69 per cent support.

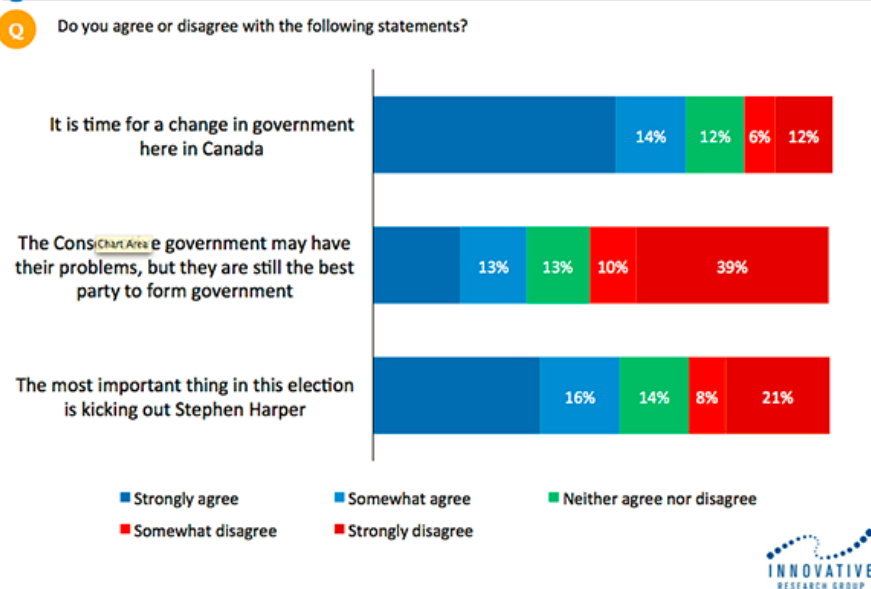
At 23 per cent support, the NDP are winning more of the unaligned than the Conservatives (16 per cent) or Liberals (14 per cent).

The NDP have 19 per cent support among Liberal identifiers, 21 per cent support from Bloc supporters and 25 per cent of Green and other identifiers.

Friends Come and Go, But Enemies Accumulate

Increasing politics is being defined by anger towards government. But it doesn't stop there. Again and again in provincial politics, we see elections that start with voters mad at the government but by the end of the campaign those same voters end up more afraid of the opposition. Examples include Christy Clark in BC, Alison Redford in Alberta, Greg Selinger in Manitoba, and Dalton McGuinty in Ontario.

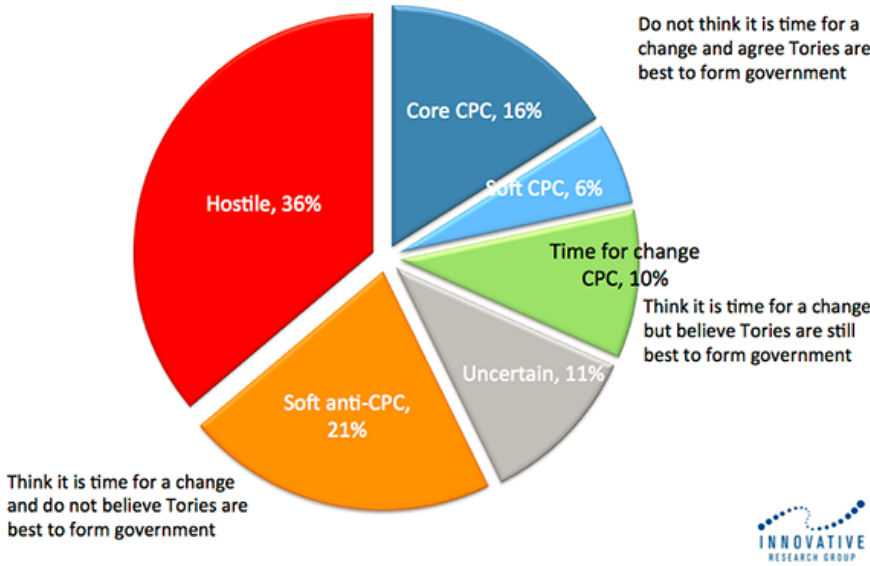
Time for change: 63% say it is time for a change in government



How much time for a change there is depends on how we ask the questions. Almost two thirds agree it is time for a change with almost half strongly agreeing with the statement. However, agreement drops to 50 per cent with the statement “The most important thing in this election is to kick Harper out” with just over a third strongly agreeing with the statement.

What gets interesting is when we group voters by what they say on time for a change AND whether they agree or disagree that “The Conservatives may have their problems, but they are still best able to form government.”

Time for Change Segmentation



One in four Canadians take consistent Tory views on those two statements. Another one-in-10 are uncertain where they stand. Just under one-in-10 believe it is time for a change but still feel the Conservatives are best able to form government.

40% of Time for a change Tories are voting CPC

Time for a change segmentations

	Core CPC	Soft CPC	Time-for-change	Uncertain	Soft anti-CPC	Core anti-CPC
CPC	95%	68%	40%	13%	4%	0%
Liberal	2%	12%	23%	12%	32%	33%
NDP	1%	7%	21%	14%	35%	52%
Bloc Quebecois	1%	2%	5%	4%	7%	4%
Green Party	1%		4%	4%	7%	7%
Undecided/ Would not vote	1%	8%	6%	54%	15%	4%

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Almost all the Core Tories and two-thirds are the soft Tories are voting Conservative now. Currently the Conservatives have just under 40 per cent of the Time for a Change Tories. The Uncertain voters are also generally uncertain about who they will vote for and many may not vote at all. While no Hostile voters are voting Conservative, four per cent of the Soft Anti-Conservatives are voting Conservative. Typically in provincial races we see 50 per cent of the Time for a Change voters and 10 per cent of the Soft Anti-Government voters vote for the government by the end of the election.

Pulling It All Together

The NDP start in a strong position. Their vote is growing in seats where it makes a difference. They are the most effective at rallying their base and they are pulling significant numbers of defectors from other opposition parties. If this trend continues, the NDP federally could mirror the success of their Alberta cousins in uniting the centre left vote. The risk for the NDP is that so many of their voters identify with other parties. They need to keep those voters from slipping back over the campaign.

The Liberals are struggling. Their vote is growing in areas where it is unlikely to turn into seats while they are stable in competitive areas. The

Liberals are the least effectively at rallying core supporters and at attracting unaligned voters. The Liberals need to shake things up to avoid another third place finish.

The Conservatives have a narrow path to victory. Their core is safe for now, but they are losing support in battleground seats and they have a very small pool of potential supporters. That said, they have the potential to gain support among conflicted voters if they can raise unease over the alternatives. Increasingly, that means the NDP rather than the Liberals.

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