

Greetings from Ontario, Canada

By the time you read this article our Canadian federal election held on October 19<sup>th</sup> will be history. The outcome will be important for our firearm heritage and the laws that govern our ownership, possession and use of the instruments of our sport. I wrote this article less than 30 days in advance of the election and a few days following the first French language debate. One national poll puts the Liberals at 32.5% of decided voters, the incumbent Conservatives at 31.5% and the NDP at 27.6%. The NDP are actually trending a little lower than they have been which is remarkable for a social democratic party. Since Confederation in 1867, Canada has had either a Liberal or Conservative government. And, the other of them was Her Majesty's Official Opposition, until recently, that is. In the early 1990's the Bloc Québécois ran candidates in Quebec only with a pledge to represent Quebec interests first – then national interests (if it was convenient). They dominated the Quebec political landscape, the Conservatives were reduced to two sitting members nation wise, the Liberals began what appeared to be an unstoppable dynasty and the Bloc, if one can imagine, became Her Majesty's Official Opposition. Of course they wouldn't occupy the Official Opposition leader's residence in Ottawa. Our political system was ripe for the anti-gun movement fueled by a few high profile shootings. That is how we got our oppressive gun laws including gun registration, confiscation, prohibited firearms and victimization of the lawful firearm owning community.

With the merging of the Progressive Conservative Party and the Canadian Alliance (formerly the Reform Party) under a new banner Conservative Party of Canada (they dropped the "Progressive"), we firearm owners finally had some reprieve in Ottawa with the Conservatives finally forming a majority government and rolling back some of the gun laws such as abolishing the long gun registry and destroying the records. They have done some tinkering with some of the other gun legislation which helps, but what we need is a thorough overhaul and that takes strong political will – for which even the Conservatives appear to be lacking. With the creation and success of the re-invigorated Conservative Party, the last ten years have given Canadian firearm owners some badly needed breathing room. The honeymoon I fear is about to end. Let me explain.

For the last four years we have enjoyed a Conservative majority. During this time and for the first time in history the once invincible Liberal Party was relegated to third party status. Once again, Quebec voters voted strategically – this time for the NDP, thrusting them into the role of Official Opposition. The NDP will pander to the anti-gun movement. The Liberals have been its champion. Firearm law sanity in Ottawa appears to me to be increasingly fragile. If the polls remain relatively unchanged in the next 25 days the best the Conservatives may hope for is a minority but they may not be given the opportunity to govern especially if the Liberals and NDP have strong showings. Why? Because both the NDP and the Liberals are unlikely to support the Conservatives on any initiatives especially "confidence" votes (such as financial bills, budgets, etc.). If so, the minority government would fall and Canada would immediately be back to the voting polls for another federal election. Canada has never had three parties with an almost equally shared voter support. We are (I predict) in uncharted territory. So, even as you read this article in November after our federal election, it may be unclear who will actually form the next government. Perhaps it will be Liberal, propped up by the NDP or vice versa (and you know how that works – give us support on our anti-gun bill and we'll give you support on your budget). Or, it is possible the Liberals and

NDP would form a governing coalition (that happened in Ontario two decades ago and Ontario is still suffering the impact). Canada's political system of "first past the post" is still better than countries with multiple fractious parties that must govern by alliances and coalitions like in Italy. The U.S. system is unlikely to change anytime soon with a two party system. Ross Perot tried a run for the Presidency years ago. Donald Trump initially kept that option open. But the U.S. system with its checks and balances for many doesn't work. There is often grid lock in Washington between the House of Representatives, the Senate and of course with the Executive "veto" and ever increasing and often overreaching "executive orders". By the time the Supreme Court adjudicates on one issue, dozens of other issues have arisen and they are always playing catch-up. Who sits on the Supreme Court is always important both in U.S. and in Canada. Firearm owners in the States have a Constitutional ally in the Second Amendment (right to bear arms). We have no such protection and are at the mercy of our legislators.

While this article may give the reader the impression that firearm owners are subject to the whims of politicians and therefore all is beyond our control – this is only true if you are fatalistic. We have ways of influencing outcomes that protect our firearm heritage. In the U.S., the NRA is a formidable ally. [I have been a member for years and recommend that Canadians join to lend our moral and financial support.] We have numerous firearm organizations in Canada that help protect our rights – all are helpful, with some being more effective in some areas [these organizations include but are not restricted to C.S.S.A. (C.I.L.A.), N.F.A, O.F.A.H., C.F.I]. While shooting organizations must be careful not to jeopardize their tax exempt status by doing things like political lobbying, firearm activism etc., there is nothing wrong with its members joining other organizations that are proactive. Far too many enjoy the firearm sports yet do little to assist those organizations that protect our right to do so.

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