



On October 19, voters will decide who should sit in Canada's 42nd Parliament.

So far, it's been a tight three-way race between the major parties. Who will get the most seats? Stephen Harper's Conservatives? Thomas Mulcair's New Democrats? Justin Trudeau's Liberals?

And how many seats will the Green Party, the Bloc Quebecois, and Strength in Democracy win?

DISSOLVING PARLIAMENT

Prime Minister Harper visited Governor General David Johnston on August 2 and asked him to call the election.

At **dissolution**, the Conservatives held a majority of the seats: 159. The **Official Opposition**, the NDP, had 95. The Liberals had 36. The Bloc Quebecois, Greens, and Strength in Democracy each had two. **Independents** held eight seats. Four seats were vacant.

THE RACE BEGINS

The 11-week election campaign is longer than the previous two campaigns combined. That makes it the longest campaign since 1872. It's also the most costly one in Canadian history.

Stephen Harper, Canada's Prime Minister since 2006, is seeking to become only the fifth

prime minister to earn a fourth **mandate**.

In August, polls showed that he could succeed. The New Democrats were in first place with 33 percent, followed by the Conservatives at 31 percent and the Liberals at 27 percent.

THE ECONOMY

A key issue in this election is the economy. Canada did better during the 2008 **recession** than many countries. But now we're on the verge of another economic downturn.

Many ordinary families are struggling to make ends meet. Incomes are down, but food,

DEFINITIONS

DISSOLUTION: the dissolving of Parliament before an election

INDEPENDENT: an MP who doesn't belong to any political party

MANDATE: the authority of an elected government or official to do the things that they promised to do before an election

OFFICIAL OPPOSITION: the party with the second-most seats in the House of Commons

PARLIAMENT: an assembly of the representatives of a political nation or people, often the supreme law-making authority

RECESSION: six months of negative economic growth as measured by a country's gross domestic product (GDP)

SEAT: position in the House of Commons

housing and household debt keep going up.

Many people can't get full-time jobs – even with university degrees. Unemployment is especially high for young people. Yet only 40 percent of unemployed Canadians are eligible for Employment Insurance. Some people have even given up looking for work.

In general, the Conservative approach to helping the economy has been to cut spending, but Mr. Trudeau says he has a better plan. He wants to increase taxes on the very wealthy and provide financial benefits to the middle class.

“When the middle class does well, so does the entire country,” he said.

Meanwhile, Mr. Mulcair believes investing in “affordable, quality child care” so both parents can work would help the economy the most.

FACE TO FACE

On August 7, Mr. Harper, Mr. Mulcair, Mr. Trudeau and the Green Party's Elizabeth May took part in a televised leadership debate.

Debates give Canadians a chance to hear politicians discuss how they plan to handle the country's problems. However, just 1.5

CANADA'S ELECTORAL PROCESS

Canada is divided into political regions known as constituencies, or ridings. Each riding elects one Member of Parliament (MP).

The number of ridings changes to reflect Canada's population shifts. In 2011, there were 308 ridings. In the upcoming election, there will be 338.

The three major parties will run a candidate in most ridings. Canadians 18 years and older vote for the candidate of their choice.

They show identification at a neighbourhood polling station, and get a ballot listing the candidates. With a screen for privacy, voters mark an X beside their choice, and put their folded ballot in the ballot box.

The ballots from every poll in the riding are counted at the end of the day. The candidate with the most votes becomes the MP, and speaks for the people of the riding in the House of Commons.

The party with the most MPs forms the new government. Its leader becomes prime minister. The other MPs form the opposition. If the government wins more than half the seats, it has a majority government and can pass laws without the help of other parties. If not, it needs support from some opposition MPs to govern. This is called a minority government.

Federal elections must be held every four years in October.

million Canadians tuned in – 40 percent less than during the last election campaign.

GET OUT AND VOTE!

Observers hope that this doesn't mean that fewer people will turn out to vote in October.

The average **voter turnout** for Canada's general elections since 1867 has been 70.7 percent. The lowest voter turnout on record was in 2008. That year, just 58.8 percent of eligible voters cast a ballot. Last election, voter

turnout was 61.4 percent – the third lowest in Canadian history.

Yet a strong voter turnout is the key to a healthy democracy. The more Canadians know about the parties and issues and cast a ballot, the more their views are represented in government.

“This is an election... on the big issues that affect us all, our economy and our nation's security,” said Mr. Harper after calling the vote.

Stay tuned for the results! ★

DEFINITIONS

VOTER TURNOUT: the percentage of eligible voters who cast a ballot in an election