

## ***NY Times: Trudeau Re-election Reveals Intensified Divisions in Canada***

An urban vs. rural split, along with increasing regionalism, has taken hold in a country celebrated for social cohesion.

By [Dan Bilefsky](#) and [Ian Austen](#)

- Oct. 22, 2019

MONTREAL — Canada is often viewed as a model of harmony. Monday’s election suggests a more divided country.

On much of the east coast, the Conservative Party struggled. In the western prairies, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his Liberal Party were shut out. A Quebec party that advocates independence from Canada surged.

The [results of Canada’s national election](#) on Monday have echoes of divisions in other countries across the world where regionalism is intensifying and the urban-rural divide is growing. Britain has Brexit. The United States has [Trump Country](#). And, after Canada’s election, separatists in the western prairie provinces are calling again for #Wexit.

“Regionalism is one of the defining characteristics of the country and we saw that come out last night,” said Andrew McDougall, a political scientist at the University of Toronto. “Political leaders can try to bridge that but very often there’s nothing they can do about it.”

Shachi Kurl, the executive director of the Angus Reid Institute, a nonprofit polling firm, said the results showed that both Mr. Trudeau’s Liberal Party and the Conservatives, which both once drew supporters from across the country, could no longer do so.

The Conservatives and their leader Andrew Scheer, a career politician who is anti-abortion and has made disparaging comments about same-sex marriage, were disproportionately backed by voters in Canada’s western Prairie Provinces. Mr. Trudeau’s Liberals were returned largely by voters from the provinces to the east.

Still, even though the election underscored Canada’s polarizations, Mr. Trudeau eked out a second term and a victory for his liberal agenda on issues like climate change and women’s and minority rights.

His slim win, with the Conservatives taking slightly more of the popular vote, was a vindication after a bruising campaign. He was relentlessly attacked over accusations that he had [bullied](#) his former justice minister, an Indigenous woman, and his image was tainted by the publication of old photos of him dressing up as [racist caricatures](#).

But the loss of the majority he won in 2015, a chastening result, shows that he personally, and not just his liberal platform, is divisive, with much of his support emanating from urban areas. His Liberals did not win a majority and he will have to govern with the support of smaller parties.

Many educated eastern, urban inhabitants have delighted in Mr. Trudeau’s public persona of feel-good progressivism and his talent for projecting a positive image of Canada on the global stage. But he is a hated figure among many western conservatives, who view him as sanctimonious and trying to impose public morality.

Expressing the extent of the divide, Nicole Henson, a self-described “country dweller” and “mom” in Alberta, took to Twitter early Tuesday morning and suggested that [“this is time for Wexit”](#) — an allusion to the idea of Alberta and other western provinces separating from Canada.

While talk of western separation from Canada has ebbed and flowed for decades, no serious movement has ever coalesced around it. But after the election, the hashtag #Wexit proliferated on Twitter while self-described separatists from Canada’s western prairie provinces took to Facebook to vent their frustration.

“The two Canadas are now eyeing each other from cliffs on opposite sides, and they’ve got very little common ground on the key issues,” said Frank Graves, the president of Ekos Research, a polling firm in Ottawa.

“The side that lost,” he said, “particularly in light of the fact they actually won the popular vote, are going to be even angrier and more unhappy with the fact that they don’t see their voice being expressed in government.”

Scott Moe, the premier of Saskatchewan, the prairie province that voted out its last Liberal member of Parliament, posted a call for a “new deal with Canada” in an open letter.

“The path our federal government has been on the last four years has divided our nation,” he wrote before demanding an end to carbon taxes, more oil pipelines and other measures. “Last night’s election results showed the sense of frustration and alienation in Saskatchewan is now greater than it has been at any point in my lifetime.”

Few issues demonstrated the regional rift more starkly than that of climate change, which galvanized voters.

Mr. Trudeau, intent on burnishing his environmental credentials, introduced a national carbon tax in his first term. In a bid to satisfy voters in oil-rich Alberta, though, he also spent billions of dollars of government money to expand an oil pipeline from Alberta to the Pacific Coast.

But in the end, that did him little good politically. His party was wiped out in Alberta and Saskatchewan, where the conservatives’ anti-carbon tax platform resonated and he lost support in British Columbia, where the pipeline expansion met fierce opposition.

Andrea Perrella, a professor of political science at Wilfred Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario, said Canada’s regional divisions were mostly based on practical concerns rather than ideology.

“It’s not that people move to Fort McMurray because they like the oil and gas industry and they believe that climate change is a hoax, you move there for work,” he said of the Alberta town in the heart of the oil sands. “If you took the oil and gas industry and plunked it down in downtown Montreal, people there would support it.”

The regionalism of the election was especially prominent in Quebec, a majority French-speaking province where the Bloc Québécois, an expressly regional party which supports Quebec’s sovereignty, won a remarkable 32 seats.

Only months ago, the party was in shambles. But its leader, [Yves-François Blanchet](#), staged a dramatic rebound by tapping into identity politics and pledging to uphold the rights of Quebecers and the French language in Ottawa.

During the political campaign, Mr. Blanchet railed against interference from the federal government in Quebec's affairs, and warned it not to challenge a contentious Quebec law that bans judges, teachers and police officers from wearing religious symbols like head scarves and turbans while at work.

The law has infuriated advocates of human rights elsewhere in the country, including Mr. Trudeau, who has signaled he could challenge it in court. Yet the election also showed that unlike in other countries, anti-immigrant populism has limited appeal as a national platform in Canada, a vast and sparsely populated country that has relied on immigration.

The election's biggest loser was Maxime Bernier, a populist leader who embraces his nickname "Mad Max" and has pushed against immigration and what he calls "extreme multiculturalism" and "[climate change hysteria](#)." His People's Party was shut out of Parliament with not a single candidate, including Mr. Bernier, winning a seat.

Despite the evident divisions in the electorate, and Mr. Trudeau's victory by the slimmest of margins, experts saw the night as a win for him.

"A victory is a victory," said Jean-Marc Léger, the chief executive of the Montreal-based Léger polling firm.

"His brand has been dented," he said. But he added, "Canadians wanted to teach him a lesson but they also wanted him back."

Mr. Trudeau himself took a characteristically optimistic view, saying on election night, "From coast to coast to coast, Canadians rejected division and negativity."

But speaking to voters in Alberta and Saskatchewan — who rejected him — he said, "I've heard your frustration," and promised he would still govern for them. "Let us all work hard to bring our country together."

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