

Getting from the  
Canada we've got to  
**The Canada We  
Want**

A primer to shape the  
**Council of Canadians'**  
**kitchen table**  
**conversations**

# THE MESS WE'RE IN

**Recently**, we've watched wildfires destroy unimaginable swaths of forest along with cities and towns like Jasper, Yellowknife, and Los Angeles. Each time, we're reminded of the months of incredible fires and smoke that have shaped the last few summers, and the alternating floods and droughts that have hurt so many of us. Every trip to the grocery store is a shock, with the prices of essentials going through the roof. Rents are surging, and the idea of owning a home is completely out of reach for most of us. We see similar headlines, and worse, coming from around the globe as global instability and wealth inequality grows at the hands of billionaires. A federal election is coming and there are no real compelling or powerful options to vote for.

Far-right politicians are using people's legitimate anger and frustration about these issues to position themselves as the only agents of change, rising to the top of the polls, and pulling every other major party further to the right, too.

## THE STAKES OF THIS POLITICAL MOMENT

If Canadians vote as present polls predict they will, Pierre Poilievre will be Canada's next Prime Minister, and the Conservatives could wind up with the largest parliamentary majority in Canadian history.

Pierre Poilievre has positioned himself as a working-class hero, but in reality, he's got a track record of championing hard right policies that grow corporate power and profits at our expense. If he becomes Prime Minister, he will worsen the cost-of-living and housing crises while stoking xenophobia and emboldening the far right.

A Conservative majority government would slash social programs, attack workers' rights, abandon any meaningful climate action, privatize what remains of our public services – including, potentially, health care – and pursue an unquestioning alignment with the U.S. and its allies internationally.

If we are going to build a movement to fight Poilievre's Conservatives, we need to understand them - and the corporate agenda they represent.

## WHY ARE RIGHT WING POLITICIANS GAINING POPULARITY SO RAPIDLY?

In Canada, the US, and around the world, right wing politicians like Poilievre and Trump are winning in the polls and at the ballot box. But it has little to do with a real growth in right wing sentiments, and more to do with incredible disillusionment, particularly with those in the centre and on the left.

A primary driver of this disillusionment is the lack of substantial progressive policy options on the table – policy solutions that serve all of us, no matter where we come from or the amount of money in our bank accounts. Millions of people across Canada are simply not voting in recent provincial, local, and federal elections. If you ask Conservative politicians, pundits, or news outlets, the reason for the rise in right-wing sentiment is because the reigning Liberal party is too 'socialist'. However, given that the majority of disengagement is coming from folks who have typically been among progressive voters, the

Council of Canadians' assessment is that this disengagement is driven by federal and provincial governments have not meaningfully addressed, or even acknowledged, the crushing economic and ecological pressures people are under. The problem is not apparent 'socialism', but rampant disillusionment.<sup>1</sup>

In Canada, all major party leaders are facing what pollsters call "historic" levels of unpopularity. Over the last 50 years, the Angus Reid Institute found that "Canada's national party leaders have never been less popular." This includes Poilievre, who is viewed unfavourably by 55% of Canadians, a disapproval rating that has been consistent throughout his tenure as Conservative leader.<sup>3</sup>

For all his promises of 'sunny ways', electoral reform, and a host of climate and economic policy changes, the progressive wins we've seen throughout the past decade of Trudeau's government have been the fruit of hard-fought social movement efforts, not because of his good will.

The problem is not simply that Justin Trudeau didn't follow through on much of what he promised to do; it is that he never aspired to do more than tinker around the edges of the corporate agenda. Behind his transformative vision, Trudeau represented the status quo. As Ricardo Tranjan argues:

Underneath the Liberal government's progressive gestures, tepid policies, and piecemeal funding of non-market solutions, there is a deep-seated commitment to market approaches. It's the same ideology that has weakened the Canadian state since the 1990s.

... A genuinely alternative economic agenda would focus on increasing taxes on the wealthy to pay for better-quality and universal public services; actively regulating markets to stop profiteering in basic-need sectors like nutrition, health, education, and housing, and

renationalizing natural resources and public infrastructure.

That alternative is not currently on offer in Canada.<sup>4</sup>

The depth of social crises affecting Canada and the absence of any genuine alternatives are the key to Poilievre's current strength. In that absence, it is deeply concerning - but not surprising - that people are turning to a leader offering sympathy and action, regardless of the quality of his offerings.



1. *Nearly half (48%) of Canadians say they don't have an option to vote for that "really represents" their views, a feeling that is strongest among NDP voters (58%) and those who identify as left-leaning (50%). Political disaffection is lowest among those who say their views are right-wing (38%) or very right-wing (16%).* <https://angusreid.org/canada-centrism-extremism-political-spectrum-left-wing-right-wing-poilievre-trudeau/>
2. <https://angusreid.org/canada-party-leaders-historically-unpopular/>
3. *Young people (aged 18-34), which Poilievre has claimed are flocking to his rallies in droves, are actually the least likely to approve of his leadership. As of December 2024, according to polling by Angus Reid.* <https://angusreid.org/poilievre-monitor/>
4. <https://canadiandimension.com/articles/view/the-end-of-progressive-neoliberalism-in-canada>



## THE CANADA WE WANT

The good news is that things don't have to be this way. The incredible centralization of power into corporate hands is not the only way to organize our society, and in fact this untenable degree of centralization is quite new.

Movements of people across the country have already named what a Canada we want to live in really looks like:

1. ***Good jobs and decent housing for all***
2. ***Groceries everyone can afford***
3. ***Public health care for everyone, and public services in every community***
4. ***Fair taxes across income levels***
5. ***Respect for the human right to water***
6. ***Real climate action now***
7. ***Peace with justice, not increased military spending***
8. ***Respect for all, without prejudice or intolerance***

These demands have been shaped by numerous movement leaders – read the full description of the Canada we want at [thecanadawewant.ca](http://thecanadawewant.ca)

## WHAT WE NEED TO DO TO GET THERE

A Poilievre majority is not inevitable. We cannot sit back and wait for a politician to come along and save us. We need to gather our forces and go out into our communities to sound the alarm now about the dangers of a Poilievre government.

Our fight against the corporate agenda, however, will not end on election day. While organizing to turn the tide and blunt the “blue wave” of

Conservative popularity, we need to lay the groundwork for fighting back against the terrible assaults that we could face under Poilievre.

Post-election, we need to convene with allies to debate how best to resist the radicalized corporate agenda we are up against and to envision together what a bold, popular alternative vision of Canada should be.

.....> Build our Base

In this perilous political moment, there is a tremendous hunger for a “political home,” a place where people can gather to get to know each other, make sense of the current situation, and take action collectively. The Council is organizing a series of regional webinars, town halls, and kitchen table conversations to bring greater numbers of people into this campaign.

The purpose of these events is to engage a large number of people in meaningful dialogue about the corporate agenda dominating Canadian life, and to align our actions around the need to rapidly expand the size and power of our organizations. To do this, we need to build the structures and relationships that enable us to recruit and organize more people in towns and cities across the country.

### ***Question for consideration:***

Can you think of 5-8 people that you know with whom you'd like to have a kitchen table conversation? Would you be willing to host a discussion, with training?

## .....> Rally our Allies

Turning the tide against Poilievre is a bigger task than one organization or group of people alone can achieve. The Council of Canadians is already working with other national organizations to align our efforts, and this outreach needs to be replicated at provincial, regional and local levels.

There are likely many other organizations in your area that share our concerns and feel threatened by the ever-spreading corporate agenda and the prospect of a Conservative majority headed by a hardened ideologue like Poilievre.

### **Question for consideration:**

What people and organizations are most threatened by the prospect of a Poilievre majority government and deepening corporate power?

Are there local organizations (unions, community organizations) that might join the effort to build a common front against Poilievre?

Who is already mobilizing against Poilievre and the corporate agenda?

## .....> Resist the Rise of Poilievre's Conservatives

The fast-approaching federal election, more than any other in recent memory, is about "choosing our opposition," as [migrant rights organizer Syed Hussan puts it](#). "A humbled Conservative minority is better than an emboldened Poilievre majority."

We know that nearly a third of Canadians are already "very fearful" of what a Poilievre government could bring, and we are certain that

many more would be if they knew what was coming. We must expose the corporate agenda dominating Canadian politics, and Poilievre's alignment with it.

By organizing and uniting the motivated progressive forces in our communities, we will have the numbers necessary to reach out to people beyond our ranks and blunt the blue wave. We will organize phone banking, door knocking, flyering, posterizing or other ways to sound the alarm about the threat.

The Council of Canadians is also developing a "voters pledge," where we ask people who share our hopes a progressive future that respects and supports people, not corporate profits, to join us in preparing for a fight back after the election against the radicalized corporate agenda that he is pushing.

### **Question for consideration:**

Have you ever done door-to-door canvassing?

Have you ever done phone banking?

Have you joined in any efforts to connect with people outside of your existing political sphere?

Have you ever participated in an electoral campaign, either in a partisan or non-partisan effort?

## .....> Fight Back Against the Corporate Agenda

We're not just building power to influence this election, but to help rebuild a popular movement that can wield real power now and in the future. We need to carry the momentum and new movement participants from the upcoming electoral period into the fightback against the

corporate agenda after the election – regardless of who is the Prime Minister.

Anti-poverty organizer John Clarke underlines the importance of contesting the mandate of what is likely to be “one of the most reactionary and dangerous governments in Canadian history”:

I well remember the period of shocked passivity in Ontario that marked the first months of the harshly right-wing Mike Harris Conservative government in the 1990s, when some of the most detrimental measures were enacted with scant opposition. There seem to be some lessons to be learned from this, particularly since, in line with the Trump playbook, the Conservatives will put a premium on making dramatic moves during their very first days in office. Poilievre proclaims that he will not retreat or compromise, but this is all the more reason to deny him any grace period to inflict harm on workers and communities unchallenged.

We know that the corporate agenda can be defeated in the streets, even when it is (seemingly) victorious at the ballot box. The Council has played a key role in previous such victories, such as the defeat of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment in 1998, the Elsipogtog uprising against fracking in New Brunswick in 2013, and winning public pharmacare legislation in 2024. More recently, we’ve seen glimmers of what effective resistance can look like in Ontario’s 2022 strike by education workers, rent strikes by tenants and university encampments in solidarity with Palestine.