

July 22, 2019

The Right Honourable David Johnston
Commissioner
Leaders' Debates Commission
155 Queen St., Suite 301
Ottawa ON. K1P 6L1

Dear Mr. Johnston,

I am writing in response to your letter of July 12, 2019 soliciting our views on how I, as Leader of the People's Party of Canada (PPC) qualify for the debates as well as the interpretation of the criteria for participation in the debates.

The Schedule of Order in Council 2018-1322 establishes that the leader of each political party that meets two of the three criteria will be invited to participate in the leaders' debates.

While I do not fulfill criteria (i) due to the fact that I am not a Member of Parliament currently elected as a member of the People's Party of Canada (PPC), I would like to demonstrate how I, and the PPC, meet the other two criteria and as such, qualify for the debates.

Criterion (ii) – the Debates Commissioner considers that the party intends to endorse candidates in at least 90% of electoral districts in the general election in question

As of today, the PPC has 332 Electoral District Associations (EDAs) registered with Elections Canada (see Elections Canada website), which corresponds to 98.2% of all ridings.

With regards to candidates, the PPC ran nomination contests in ridings everywhere in Canada and, as of today, endorsed 305 candidates representing 90.2% of electoral districts (see https://www.peoplespartyofcanada.ca/our_candidates). The Party intends to choose candidates in the remaining ridings before the writ is dropped.

On Elections Canada's website, we have 274 nomination contest candidates (see <https://www.elections.ca/WPAPPS/WPR/EN/NC>). However, Elections Canada has a backlog to process nomination documents and informs us that they will be updating their website in the coming week to reflect the full complement of PPC nomination contest candidates.

We therefore currently meet the criterion of having candidates in at least 90% of electoral districts and will have candidates in more than 90% of ridings across Canada by September.

Criterion (iii) – the party's candidates for the most recent general election received at that election at least 4% of the number of valid votes cast or, based on the recent political context, public opinion polls and previous general election results, the Debates Commissioner considers that candidates endorsed by the party have a legitimate chance to be elected in the general election in question:

The third criterion in the schedule of Order in Council 2018-1322 is comprised of a series of qualifiers for which we provide you with an interpretation.

First clause of Criterion (iii)

The first clause of Criterion (iii) refers to the most recent general election. Of course, the People's Party did not exist in 2015 and so on the face of it, cannot qualify for the first clause of this criterion.

However, it is our view that the Commission should cast a wider net, beyond the 2015 general elections, and take into account the results of valid votes cast during the February 2019 by-elections. The key reason for this is that the by-elections are closer in time to the upcoming general elections and an election held four years ago can hardly be held as a proxy for a future one given the volatility of opinions by the electorate over time.

In the three February 25 by-elections, the PPC reached an overall score of 4.6%, in terms of percentage of all valid votes cast, (https://www.elections.ca/res/rep/off/ovr_2019/home.html) achieving 10.6% in the riding of Burnaby South where one of the other candidates was a Party Leader.

These results are impressive when you consider that the PPC came into existence as an officially registered Party only one month prior to the day Canadians cast their votes. It

should be noted that it took the Green Party 23 years to reach the 10% mark in a by-election, as its leader Elizabeth May told me.

Second clause of Criterion (iii)

The second clause of the criterion states that the Commission should base its decision on “the recent political context, public opinion polls and previous general elections results” to determine if “candidates endorsed by the party have a legitimate chance to be elected.”

Second clause of Criterion (iii): previous elections results

Once again, since the PPC did not exist during previous general elections, this particular qualifier does not apply.

Second clause of Criterion (iii): public opinion polls

The Order does not state what level of support in public opinion polls is sufficient for the Commission to conclude that candidates have a legitimate chance to be elected. It all depends of course not only on the overall level of support across the country, but also on the distribution of the vote across ridings.

However, in the first clause of Criterion (iii), the Order used the 4% threshold of total number of votes cast across the country in previous elections to determine that a party can legitimately fulfil the criterion. We therefore conclude that polls showing support above 4% indicate a similar level of legitimacy to fulfil the criterion.

In terms of polling results, here are three examples of recent polls that put the People's Party above the 4% mark, thus fulfilling the second clause of Criterion (iii).

In a poll conducted by EKOS on June 29, 2019, the PPC scored 5.7% of the vote showing the most strength in Atlantic Canada at 12.7% and Manitoba at 10.6%. (We have a printed copy of the poll should you wish to have it, but no version is available online.

The results however appeared in this tweet:

<https://twitter.com/CanadianPolling/status/1145524356652707840>).

Mainstreet Research's most recent poll on July 10, 2019 (see <https://www.mainstreetresearch.ca/trudeau-liberals-regain-lead-lpc-35-cpc-33-ndp-10-green-10/>) revealed that the PPC is credited with 4.6% support from decided and leaning voters, being strongest in Alberta at 6.9%.

Poll results by Abacus Data (July 6, 2019) show that 7% of Canadians choose Maxime Bernier as their preferred Leader to be Prime Minister (<https://abacusdata.ca/tight-race-between-conservatives-and-liberals-continues-as-voter-fluidity-remains-high/>). Given that many Canadians know me as a public figure, but don't necessarily remember the name of our party because of its youth, this is indicative that the PPC may have higher support than what polls using the party's name show.

Moreover, although no public poll has been done recently in my own riding of Beauce, it is very likely that, given the large majorities I was elected with in the four previous general elections, polls would show that I have a legitimate chance of being re-elected. If that is the case, then that is in itself enough for the PPC to fulfil the second clause of Criterion (iii).

The PPC is a true, well-established party, and unlike the other smaller parties, it figures in the majority of the national polls released by reputable firms.

We also want to bring to your attention incidences of high volatility in voting intentions and the difference two months can make here in Canada as well as in other parts of the world.

The Abacus Data poll quoted above also showed "a high degree of potential volatility," with significant percentages of voters indicating they would vote for a party other than the Liberals, Conservatives, NDP and Green when asked which other party they were most likely to support. That was the case for 15% of Liberal supporters, 34% of Conservative supporters, 10% of NDP supporters, and 24% of Green supporters. The only other well-know "other party" in the race, apart from the Bloc Québécois in Quebec, is the People's Party.

This volatility can be seen in recent provincial elections. In the last year, five of the six governing parties were replaced by another party, with new parties appearing in several provinces.

Quebecers elected a new Party, the Coalition Avenir Québec, to power, in a race where the leading party was not discernable until ballots were revealed on election night. In New Brunswick, the electorate voted for three candidates from the newly formed People's Alliance Party allowing this new party to hold the balance of power under a newly elected Conservative government. As well, the Green Party elected a few candidates in New Brunswick for the first time and became the second party in PEI. Who could have predicted this four years ago?

Another remarkable example of this high volatility abroad was the Brexit Party in the United Kingdom, which, while they were polling at 10% on April 1st, rose to the top of

the pile at close to 35% two months later on May 23rd. This was at the expense of the two parties that were leading at the beginning of the contest.

Another example

Another factor to consider is that 35% of Canadians routinely choose not to vote, many because they consider that Canada's traditional parties do not represent their views. These voters will be the most likely to vote for a new party like the PPC when they start paying attention during the election campaign and discover it exists.

In the fall of 2018, an IPSOS poll (<https://www.ipsos.com/en/beyond-populism-two-years-after>) revealed that a growing number of Canadians are losing faith in traditional leaders and political parties. In fact, only 19% of Canadian respondents said that Canada should "stick to parties and leaders who have been in power before." The survey also found that 51% of Canadians support politicians who "say what's on their mind regardless of what anyone else thinks" while 74% lack confidence in political parties, 53% in media, 60% in government, and 55% believe politicians do not care about them.

There is a message here: a large proportion of Canadians are losing faith in the establishment and are looking for an alternative.

Second clause of Criterion (iii): the recent political context

Why is the People's Party best positioned to offer the alternative that Canadians are looking for?

It is our view that the Commission should again cast a wide net and consider the political context beyond Canada in making its decision as to which party takes the stage at the Leaders' Debates. And, in the PPC case, recognize that populism is the most important force currently reshaping our political and socio-economic environment and disrupting advanced democracies throughout the Western world.

Nascent populist anti-establishment parties are being increasingly represented in legislatures and even getting elected to power in different parts of the western world. Such parties are gaining traction due to the population's sentiment that the establishment refuses to address problems that really matter to them.

We posit that Canada is not immune to what is happening in the United States, Europe and Australia, and we believe that the forces of populism will be a significant presence in the forthcoming federal election. Many pollsters and political observers also agree (see https://www.hilltimes.com/2019/07/22/canadas-upcoming-election-could-expose-deepening-societal-rifts-says-graves/208896?utm_source=Subscriber++++Hill+Times+Publishing&utm_campaign=dbd8380b70-

EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_07_22_08_00&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_8edecd9364-dbd8380b70-90945189&mc_cid=dbd8380b70&mc_eid=b0117f4352 and <https://nationalpost.com/news/i-dont-think-canada-will-be-the-great-exception-to-populist-disruption-expert-says>).

The rise of the People's Party since I announced its launch on September 14, 2018, has been nothing short of spectacular. We have been successful in mobilizing thousands of Canadians across the country to sign up as members, volunteers and candidates. Six months after its registration as an official Party on January 17, 2019, the PPC counts just a few figures shy of 40,000 members living in every corner of the country.

The Party has also been able to fundraise amounts comparable to at least another party represented in Parliament, the Green Party, that has been in existence for decades. The PPC raised \$762,000 in the first quarter of 2019. By contrast, the Green Party raised only slightly more at \$783,279 (see <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canada-political-fundraising-federal-election-1.5116430>). This again demonstrates the eagerness of thousands of Canadians to support the policies, message, and principles we represent.

The People's Party of Canada is, on several policy issues of crucial importance, the only party representing widely held views that are analogous to those of other populist parties in the West. We are therefore well positioned to increase our support even more among voters in the coming weeks and months, as these positions get more widely known.

For example, the issue of free speech has received wide attention in recent months. The People's Party is the only party that has made this a central part of its appeal and issued a strong platform proposing measures to guarantee free speech and repeal government decisions that curtail it.

Similarly, the PPC is the only one among the major parties proposing to fundamentally reform Canada's equalization program and health care funding, and to abolish corporate welfare, foreign aid, and the supply management system.

One issue that has occupied a central place in political debates in other Western countries, and that has been put forward by populist parties, is the issue of immigration. The PPC is the only party proposing to substantially lower immigration levels. All the other parties favour the currently high or even higher levels of immigration. This means that we are the only party that offers an option to the 49% of Canadians who would like Canada to accept fewer immigrants, as reported in a recent Angus-Reid survey (see <http://angusreid.org/canadian-immigration-trend-data/>).

The same is true for the issue of climate change. All the other parties are offering plans to reduce CO2 emissions, whether through taxes, regulations and/or subsidies. The PPC is the only party that does not accept the theory that man-made climate change is an

emergency, and that has promised not to implement any new measure to reduce CO2 emission. A recent Angus Reid survey shows that our platform could potentially appeal to 30% of Canadians who either believe climate change is a theory that hasn't been proven, or believe it's caused by natural causes, and not human activity (see <https://www.citynews1130.com/2018/11/30/poll-canadians-climate-change/>).

All these Canadians who hold views that are not reflected in any of the other party's platforms deserve to be politically represented. These views are, in some cases, widely shared by a substantial proportion of voters. The fact that a political party that could potentially represent them was only launched less than a year ago, and has therefore not had a lot of time to organize itself and publicize its platform, should not be used as a justification to shut it out of debates. On the contrary, everything, from its fast growth to the impact of similar parties in other countries, points to its relevance as the political alternative that many Canadians are looking for.

Conclusion

To protect our democracy, we require an informed citizenry. The PPC clearly fills a gap and responds to needs expressed by Canadians in every corner of this nation. Canadians must be given the right to hear views other than those of traditional parties.

This is why the Commission must allow the PPC to express and showcase its ideas and platform publicly at the Leaders' Debates. Let us be the country that ensures that all choices are presented to Canadians.

I thank you for the opportunity to provide you with our views on how the People's Party of Canada qualifies for the debate as well as the interpretation and application of the participation criteria to the debates. I trust our points will be taken into consideration and I welcome an opportunity to discuss this further with you and members of your Advisory Board.

Warm regards,



The Honourable Maxime Bernier, P.C., M.P.
Leader
People's Party of Canada