

August 13, 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 August 12, 2019 letter informing me that you are not satisfied that the People's Party of Canada fulfils two of the participation criteria so as to be invited to the debates. I am very disappointed in your decision and I believe you err in your interpretation of criterion (iii)(b) on which you base this decision.

Criterion (iii)(b) states that:

based on the recent political context, public opinion polls and previous general election results, the Commissioner considers that candidates endorsed by the party have a legitimate chance to be elected in the general election in question.

There are three qualifications in this criterion. The third one ("the previous general election results") is obviously not applicable since my party did not exist at the time.

You base your decision entirely on your assessment of the second one ("public opinion polls") and completely ignore the first one ("the recent political context"). Moreover, you add that you made your assessment about our chance to elect candidates "at this time in the electoral cycle."

However, criterion (iii)(b) makes no mention of timing. It simply states that our candidates must have a legitimate change to be elected in the general election, and not at this time in the election cycle. It is obvious that the election campaign could have a huge impact on this legitimate chance.

This is why the first qualification in criterion (iii)(b), the recent political context, is crucial in how you must interpret it. And why you necessarily err in your decision if you ignore it.

The document published yesterday on the Commission's website ("Interpretation of Participation Criteria for the Leaders' Debates") supports our argument that you did not take every relevant point into consideration when making your preliminary assessment. This document presents ten different types of evidence (from a. to j.) that the Commission has considered and intends to consider.

Your preliminary assessment, as explained in your August 12 letter, focuses entirely on an assessment of part of point b., "current standing... in national public opinion polls."

It ignores the other part, the "trends" in these polls – the fact that we went from 0% to 5% nationally in some polls in less than a year, and even more in certain regions.

It ignores point f., "Media presence and visibility of the party and/or its leader nationwide." Although I do not have data to illustrate it now, I believe it can be demonstrated that our national media presence has been superior to that of the NDP and the Green Party, and far superior to that of the Bloc Québécois.

It also ignores point g., "Whether a party is responsive to or represents a contemporary political trend or movement;" point i., "Party membership;" and point j., "Party fundraising." These matters relate directly to your ignoring the recent political context.

As I explained in my July 22 letter to you, polls indicate that there is a very high degree of potential volatility among the electorate. Also, one third of Canadians did not vote in the last election, and many are disaffected because of a lack of real political choice.

The recent political context shows that in various provincial elections in Canada, and national elections in other Western countries, populist parties have rapidly emerged and become significant players in these conditions. The most spectacular example of this is the victory of the Brexit Party in the UK only a few months after its launch this year.

The People's Party is a perfect example of this rapid emergence of a populist political alternative. After ten months, we have set up associations in almost all ridings (332 out of 338). We have attracted about 40,000 members, which is more than double the number the Green Party has attracted in 35 years. And we have selected more candidates at this time, 310, than all the other parties apart from the Conservative Party.

Moreover, as stated again in my July 22 letter, the People's Party of Canada is the only party that offers policies clearly distinct from those of all other parties on issues that are at the heart of political debates, including immigration, multiculturalism, climate change, free speech, foreign aid, deficits, corporate welfare, etc.

These positions are shared by large minorities, or even majorities of Canadians, according to opinion polls. This means that the potential for growth, when Canadian voters start focusing on the alternatives and the People's Party becomes better known during the election campaign, is very high.

These facts must necessarily be taken into account when examining the political context.

The PPC is quickly becoming an alternative to the other parties and has a legitimate chance to elect candidates on October 21. An objective analysis based on the recent political context, as criterion (iii)(b) demands that you do, and not just on current polls and our overall chance to elect candidates at this time in the election cycle, would have led you to this conclusion.

I ask the Commission to review its analysis, admit that it erred in omitting to apply some of the elements of interpretation that it unveiled yesterday, and that it correctly interpret criterion (iii)(b) before making its final decision on September 16. In the spirit of following an open and transparent process, I would also expect you to publicly explain to Canadians why you have ignored the recent political context in your interpretation so far and only focused on current polling numbers.

As you wrote in your letter, debates are a fundamental and essential feature of Canadian democracy. Canadians deserve a clear answer.

Warm regards,



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