

# the Catalyst

Citizens for Public Justice Summer 2019

## 2019 ELECTION BULLETIN: SHAPING A JUST CANADA



The 2019 federal election will present a fresh opportunity for people across Canada to shape the kind of country we want to be.

As we prepare to cast our votes, it's essential we consider the collective interests of fellow citizens and non-citizens, as well as those beyond our nation's borders.

Coupled with the privilege of exercising our democratic rights is a duty to care for others. At Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ), we believe this is a responsibility particularly for people of faith, who are called to love those around us. We view public justice as the "political dimension of loving our neighbour."

As we engage with people across the country throughout the election period, we've prepared this election bulletin to help you participate in the political process in a meaningful way. We hope that in this time of increased division, voters will continue to keep in mind the common good.

Through informed and thoughtful political engagement, we will help to define the Canada of tomorrow.



# DEMOCRACY – LEVERAGING OUR OPPORTUNITIES AS CITIZENS

Democratic participation is highlighted around election time, yet the opportunity to engage in the democratic process exists year-round.

Citizens are entitled to voice their concerns and to have these concerns heard. As people of faith, we recognize that the tools of democracy allow us to care for the needs of our neighbours.

To be active and engaged citizens, we should remain informed about policy developments by staying up-to-date with news, contacting leaders in government about topics of concern, and engaging respectfully with those in our communities – especially with those who hold differing views from our own.

Along with our benefits as citizens is the responsibility to leverage our positions so that the interests of the marginalized are considered and upheld. It's also our responsibility to make sure we are tuned-in to current events throughout the year, so that we can discern fact from fiction and be informed voters come election day.

## Ensuring a Voice for All

Healthy democracies require strong participation alongside solid representation. In our current first-past-the-post system, not all the votes that are cast are reflected in the political breakdown of elected representatives.

Although the call for electoral reform created momentum for change in the 2015 federal election, little movement has been made to strengthen the integrity of Canada's democracy.

### ASK FEDERAL CANDIDATES:

If elected, are you prepared to move forward on proportional representation?

## Upholding Fair and Considered Policy Making

To develop public policies, adequate time, consideration, and public consultation must be undertaken to maintain democratic integrity.

Despite this, concurrent governments have continued to pass bills with multiple policy changes, known as omnibus bills. These changes often lack the necessary consideration of public interest. Elected officials must know that voters expect better.

We need thought-out policy making processes that implement true public dialogue.

### ASK FEDERAL CANDIDATES:

How do you plan to ensure that public policy changes receive adequate parliamentary consideration and study?

## LEARN MORE

To read more about electoral reform, visit: [samaracanada.com/samara-in-the-classroom/electoral-reform](http://samaracanada.com/samara-in-the-classroom/electoral-reform)



## ENDING POVERTY IN CANADA

As people of faith, we know that we are called to engage with our world in a way that recognizes and affirms the dignity of all people. We are also called to challenge structures and institutions that create barriers to full life and dignity by working for justice.

In Canada today, it is important that we ask what it means to follow the call to justice. Biblical justice is a call to feed the hungry and clothe the naked; to welcome the “stranger” and protect the vulnerable. It means we open our hearts, minds, and spirits to see where there is need, to learn about problems at their roots, and to respond in love and concrete action.

Urgent and strategic action is needed to end poverty in Canada. Fortunately, steps are being taken in the right direction.

### Current Poverty Trends

Right now, over 5 million people in Canada struggle everyday to get by. Poverty is a heavy burden to bear. It impacts people physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. It impacts their sense of identity in the world and their relationship with others, with creation, and with God.

We know, as well, that poverty impacts people differently, and some people experience multiple barriers that make it harder for them to live fully.

**Indigenous peoples** in Canada have experienced the pain of colonization, residential schools, forced displacement, inter-generational trauma, and ongoing discrimination. This has led to high rates of poverty in many Indigenous communities, along with related challenges. Access to healthcare, education, safe housing and drinking water, nutritious and culturally appropriate food, and other necessities is often lacking for many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities across Canada. It is a national shame.

**Racialized communities** in Canada often face discrimination that leads to unsafe housing and social exclusion, low-paying and precarious work, and criminalization. **Refugees and those with precarious immigration status** are incredibly vulnerable to poverty, as they also have to overcome the many challenges of settlement and finding community.

**People with disabilities** find themselves without the supports that they need to fully participate in their communities. **Single mothers** often lack the services and supports that would allow them and their children to thrive. **Children** go to school hungry and find it hard to focus on their educations. **Single young adults** are often faced with precarious employment that provides little financial security and little relief from overwhelming debt from student loans.

Many others are living from paycheque-to-paycheque, not knowing how they will cover their bills, provide for themselves or their families, and in fear of how they could manage if they lost their job or fell ill. These are incredible burdens to bear, and they require a public justice response.

We know that strong policy impacts people’s lives and makes our communities stronger. As faithful citizens, we must pray and work for Canada to be a country where all can live in dignity.

### LEARN MORE

*Living Justice: A Gospel Response to Poverty* is a CPJ publication that explores worship and action on poverty in Canada. The book provides reflections and workshop activities that examine how faith communities can address issues of justice. It is available at [cpj.ca/living-justice-gospel-response-poverty](http://cpj.ca/living-justice-gospel-response-poverty)



## ENSURING CLIMATE JUSTICE

People of faith across Canada are increasingly speaking up about the urgent need for climate action. Christians and faith leaders are recognizing that the world as we know it is changing. Many are starting to take bold steps to restore a sense of shalom in creation as an indivisible part of their faith convictions.

The range of climate change impacts for Canada's far north and coastal regions is striking: glacial melt, flood risks, seasonal shifts, more snow and rain in winter, and hotter, dryer summers. Still, no part of the country is immune. Earlier this year, communities in several provinces and many First Nations experienced extensive flooding. An intense annual wildfire season in British Columbia is becoming the new normal. The March 2019 "Canada's Changing Climate Report" indicated that a warmer climate will "increase the severity of heatwaves and contribute to increased drought and wildfire risks." At the same time, "more intense rainfalls will increase urban flood risks." Around the world, famine and natural resource wars threaten food and water security and contribute to increases in migration.

Climate change is leading to crisis, after crisis, after crisis. Those who are already socially and economically marginalized are the most vulnerable.

Climate change is an issue that reaches to the core of who we are as people of faith and how we are to live in God's world. As people of faith, we are called to respect the dignity of every human being as image-bearers of God. We all have a rightful claim to live in dignity, be respected by others and have access to resources needed to live out God's calling. We also have a duty to act justly, care for creation and work for peaceful relations within society.

This must inform the way we live, work, and play. Future generations have a right to the abundance of creation; we cannot over-consume and deny our children's children a healthy and secure life. Indigenous peoples, leaders from low-lying island states, and youth around the world have stressed the moral imperative of taking far-reaching action. We must move away from a model that supports the devastation of the Earth and brings hardship upon the world's most marginalized.

In a statement at the 2018 UN climate conference in Katowice, Poland, the World Council of Churches declared, "our faiths demand that we act for the protection of the vulnerable and as caretakers of Mother Earth."

**Climate change** refers to the human-induced increase of atmospheric greenhouse gas (GHG) concentrations beyond normal levels of variation. Although earth's climate has always fluctuated, the average surface temperature has increased dramatically – by roughly 1°C – due to human activity since the industrial revolution.

### LEARN MORE

*Living Ecological Justice: A Biblical Response to the Environmental Crisis* is a faith-based learning tool for Canadian Christians trying to live out the justice mandate to care and advocate for creation. It is available at [cpj.ca/living-ecological-justice](http://cpj.ca/living-ecological-justice)



## UPHOLDING REFUGEE RIGHTS

CPJ envisions a world in which individuals, societal institutions and governments all contribute to and benefit from the common good. We strive to bring about public justice and promote human rights.

This framework is particularly imperative when working on issues that surround the treatment of refugees. All refugees are immigrants, but not all immigrants are refugees. As some of the world's most vulnerable people, refugees require compassion and support, rather than the condemnation, xenophobia, and racism that have surfaced more openly in Canada as of late.

Over the years, Canada has maintained a relatively generous immigration policy and a reasonable refugee policy. Our refugee determination system is considered the global gold standard, which is why, in 1986, the people of Canada were awarded the Nansen Medal by the United Nations in recognition of their contribution to refugee resettlement. Canada currently accepts about 300,000 new immigrants annually, making us a multicultural hub. Refugees and Protected Persons only make up a small fraction of this total, however, with government target projections welcoming between 45,000 and 50,000 of these newcomers yearly, across all sponsorship streams, over the next three years.

In April 2019, Canada celebrated the 40th anniversary of the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program, through which it has resettled a total of 327,000 refugees. In 1985, the Supreme Court of Canada declared that the legal guarantees of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms applied to "everyone" physically present in Canada, including foreign asylum seekers. On April 4, Canadians mark Refugee Rights Day, celebrated annually for this landmark declaration.

### Why Canada needs immigrants

Canada needs immigrants to meet its labour force needs. The Conference Board of Canada reports that Canada's fertility rate stands at 1.6, well below the population replacement rate of 2.1. Immigrants currently make up 65% of Canada's net annual population growth. This implies that if immigration was stopped now, deaths would exceed births by the year 2034. By 2035, 5 million Canadians will reach retirement age, at which time it is estimated that 350,000 immigrants will be needed annually by 2035 in order to meet Canada's workforce demands.

### The Syrian crisis and travel loan repayments

When the Syrian crisis was brought to the world's attention by the drowning of three-year-old Alan Kurdi, whose family has connections to Canada, Canada pledged to give sanctuary to 25,000 Syrians within one year. Canadians welcomed refugees at our airports with open arms, and the government promoted Syrian resettlement as a victory for Canadians and refugees alike.

The government gave these specific Syrian refugees a soft landing by exempting them from the financial stresses associated with repaying travel loans. A debt that can cost up to \$10,000 upon arrival for other refugees. This was seen as a double standard, and critics, including CPJ, called on government to extend similar consideration to all refugees resettled in Canada. 98% of the Immigration Loans Program users are refugees whose ability to settle in Canada is burdened by the requirement to repay these loans. As such, the government must eliminate repayment of travel loans for refugees and absorb the costs as part of the resettlement process.

### LEARN MORE

For further information on our advocacy, and to read real stories about the impact this debt has on refugees, check out our [#WaiveRepayment](https://cpj.ca/waiverpayment) campaign at [cpj.ca/waiverpayment](https://cpj.ca/waiverpayment)

## Debunking the Myths

### MYTH

Refugees just want to take advantage of Canadians' generous social programs.

Refugees might pose a security risk to Canada.

Refugees jump the queue over other, more deserving immigrants.

For more common misconceptions and accompanying facts, visit [cpj.ca/refugee-myths](http://cpj.ca/refugee-myths)

### FACT

Refugees are forced to flee their homes, with some leaving behind good jobs. Most are eager to work but may first have to learn a new language and wait to process their work permit, this can take many months.

Refugees flee from violence in search of safety. They go through very rigorous security checks before entering Canada.

Refugees are forced to flee their homes while economic immigrants have the ability to choose where and when to move. Canada recognizes this by having completely separate programs for refugees and economic immigrants. There is no queue.



## Visit [cpj.ca/election2019](http://cpj.ca/election2019)

As the 2019 election campaign unfolds, you'll find more in-depth analysis including:

- Additional articles on the issues covered in this bulletin
- Election resources from partner organizations
- Information on how to vote
- Tools on hosting a public debate

## Support CPJ

For more than 50 years, we've been a strong voice for public justice in Canada, and your support is critical to help us continue our work. Whether it's an annual, quarterly, or monthly donation, we appreciate your gifts. Visit [cpj.ca/support](http://cpj.ca/support) to donate.

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Citizens for Public Justice's mission is to promote public justice in Canada by shaping key public policy debates through research and analysis, publishing, and public dialogue. CPJ encourages citizens, leaders in society, and governments to support policies and practices which reflect God's call for love, justice, and the flourishing of creation.

**CPJ annual membership fee** includes *the Catalyst*: \$50 / \$25 (low-income)

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