

# the Catalyst

Citizens for Public Justice

Fall 2021

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## 2021 ELECTION BULLETIN: CREATING A JUST CANADA

When the last federal election was called in 2019, no one could have imagined the events that would define the next two years:

- A global pandemic; over four million dead from COVID-19 (including 26,575 Canadians) exposing and exacerbating the pre-existing crises of poverty, homelessness, and inequity, as well as neglect and abuse in long-term care homes.
- Lethal acts of racism and police violence caught on video propelling the Black Lives Matter movement globally.
- The location of thousands of bodies of Indigenous children in unmarked graves on the grounds of former residential schools (and likely many more yet to be located).
- Record-breaking heat on Canada's west coast followed by an intense, Canada-wide wildfire season.

The strain placed on our society, economy, and ecology by the COVID-19 pandemic revealed several overlapping crises. At the same time, it demonstrated the political machinery's capacity to respond swiftly, compassionately, and collaboratively in the face of an emergency.

CITIZENS FOR  
PUBLIC JUSTICE



CITOYENS POUR  
UNE POLITIQUE JUSTE



*We couldn't have imagined the devastation of the last two years, even if we'd tried. But what if we could set out to imagine—and build—a better future?*

# WE CAN'T SETTLE FOR A RETURN TO "NORMAL"

Though the potential impact of a fourth wave is uncertain, a majority of Canada's adolescent and adult population has been fully vaccinated (73.3 per cent as of August 18). Most jurisdictions in Canada are several phases into their reopening plans, and many are feeling like life is getting back to normal.

Unfortunately, for far too many in Canada, a return to "normal" means a daily struggle to afford basic needs and have fundamental human rights respected.

**Will Canada's next federal government take the actions required to emerge from this moment a more resilient, more just, and more sustainable country?**

## Today's starting point

Before the pandemic even started, 1 in 8 households in Canada were struggling to put food on the table. 5.9 million people were estimated to be living in poverty. While data for the most recent years is limited, we know that poverty and precarity have been exacerbated by COVID-19.

**Poverty** is a complex and multifaceted reality. Far from simply "falling on hard times", millions of people living in poverty face multiple compounding systemic barriers based on their class, race or ethnicity (including Indigeneity), gender identity and sexual orientation, (dis)ability, age, family status, immigration status, and other forms of exclusion. This results in disproportionately high rates of poverty and disproportionately low levels of well-being among certain groups whose rights and interests are not prioritized or upheld by our current systems.

For example, **Indigenous Peoples in Canada experience disproportionately high rates of poverty** as part of the enduring and continued legacy of colonization, forced relocation, and residential schools, as well as ongoing racism, violence, and intergenerational trauma.

Our existing laws and social policies create **multiple, overlapping barriers** for many people, such as kids with disabilities living in rural and remote areas, or a racialized single mom newly arrived in Canada with precarious immigration status. This challenges the narrative of Canada as a welcoming, inclusive society where all have equal opportunity to thrive, a Canada that champions human rights and equality.

Canadians also like to think of our country as a welcoming place for those fleeing war, violence, civil unrest, and persecution. Each year, millions of people leave family and friends, the lands they love, good jobs, and their material belongings in search of safety. When they finally arrive in Canada, many—especially those that enter the country at "irregular" crossings—are detained in prison-like conditions. Most **refugees** are eager to work when they arrive in their new home, but may first have to learn a new language and wait to process their work permit, which can take many months. Their education, professional credentials, and experience may

not be recognized. They are also likely to face discrimination based on their language, ethnicity, or religion. These and other barriers to workforce entry often exacerbate the **economic insecurity of refugee families**. Canada must strive for real inclusion and opportunity for newcomers. We must also do our part to reduce the likelihood that people will be forced to leave their homes in the first place.

Increasingly, **climate change is a driver of international migration**. As of 2020, there were 82.4 million forcibly displaced people globally. Of these, 20.7 million are recognized as refugees by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR). According to the UNHCR's 2020 Report, "In 2020 alone, disasters triggered 30.7 million new internal displacements around the globe... This is the highest figure in a decade and more than three times as much as the 9.8 million displacements triggered by conflict and violence." The same report noted that "95 per cent of all conflict displacements in 2020 occurred in countries vulnerable or highly vulnerable to climate change." Climate-related displacement and migration will continue to be a challenge for years to come and it is critical that Canada bases our response in human rights and acknowledges responsibility for our historic greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

According to the most recent data available, Canada emits about 1.5 per cent of total global GHG emissions. Though a seemingly small percentage, this puts us among the world's top ten emitters. It must also be remembered that these numbers don't capture the emissions from all of the "stuff" that we import into Canada (China holds the bag for most of that). We're also in the global top ten for historic emissions (cumulative emissions since the industrial revolution) and emissions intensity (GHG emissions per unit of gross domestic product-GDP). In other words, we bear significant responsibility for the climate crisis.

Now, in addition to the persistent impacts of rising temperatures in the Global South, the Arctic, and low-lying small-island states, the ravages of the global climate emergency are being more acutely felt across Canada. This summer's "wildfire season" started early and has brought devastation across the country. The fire that destroyed the village of Lytton, BC and surrounding First Nations communities on June 30, continued to burn seven weeks later (when this bulletin was published). At the same time, thousands of people from remote Indigenous communities were being evacuated as fires also raged in northern Ontario and Manitoba.

Additionally, Indigenous homelands located in what is now Canada face continued threats from federal, provincial, and territorial government projects as well as corporate interests that continue to push for **urbanization** and **resource extraction**. This disregard of Indigenous rights to self-determination, the right to free, prior, and informed consent, and the traditional Indigenous stewardship of lands, has led to ongoing social and economic exclusion, inequity, and violence, as well as environmental degradation and land appropriation. These losses, of course, are about so much more than material belongings or personal claims of ownership.

Indigenous Peoples view nature with deep respect. Indigenous teachings are grounded in the **interconnectedness of all creation**. It is of paramount importance to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people and cultures to foster, appreciate, and preserve relationships with both the animate and inanimate; but these relationships are critical to non-Indigenous people and societies, too. Honouring our interconnectedness with one another and with all creation is central to ecological and economic integrity, fostering right relations between Indigenous Peoples and Settlers, and ensuring a holistic, just recovery from the pandemic.

Citizen engagement is key to creating change and the most fundamental way to participate is through elections. Yet during Canada's 2019 federal election, just 67 per cent of eligible voters turned up to cast their ballot. Voter turnout can be impacted by several factors, including systemic issues like the inability to get time off of work or the inaccessibility of polling stations. Still, apathy remains one of the main reasons cited for not voting.

*We have the necessary tools to confront the myriad crises that remain.*



Governments and civil society alike have a tendency to try to address challenges one issue or program at a time, each with separate mandates, jurisdictions, and budgets. Unfortunately, this approach assumes that each challenge is distinct from the rest; it fails to acknowledge the fullness of people's lives, the intersections of various identities and power, and the interconnectedness of our society, economy, and ecology. While more holistic measures may be more difficult or complex to develop, they also have the capacity to simultaneously address a range of issues. Energy efficient affordable housing, a basic income that supports an economy in transition, and subsidized childcare to encourage women's workforce participation, are some examples of holistic policy approaches that address immediate needs and promote equity.

There are many overlapping challenges before us, but we have the necessary tools and resources to confront these crises together. The way communities and various levels of government pulled together at the beginning of the pandemic (despite distinct political leanings) demonstrated our capacity to mobilize the necessary will and resources in the face of emergency. We have the wealth, creativity, and resourcefulness not only to do this again, but to build and sustain solutions for a more resilient future!

What is more, according to a recent survey by Ekos Research Associates, "Once the global pandemic is over, most Canadians say they expect the country to go through a 'broad societal transformation,' and believe Canada is on the cusp of 'transformative change.'" Ekos president Frank Graves further elaborates saying that people "want the country to deal with deep, social-class and racial injustices and broad gender inequalities, which have been laid bare through the pandemic, but they also have 'a sense of hope' for the future. Most say Canada should be more 'societally focused' on health and well-being."

Our success will be found in working together and tackling the root causes common to these multiple crises.



*At CPJ, we envision a society in which individuals, communities, institutions, and governments all contribute to and benefit from the common good. We value respect, dignity, fairness, and justice. It is our view that public policy should prioritize human and environmental rights, well-being, sustainability, and love.*

**The questions we propose, then, for voters are:**

- What kind of citizenry and civic engagement do we require to achieve this vision?
- What forms of governance and accountability are needed?
- What do we need our federal government to be and do to get us there?

## CREATING A BETTER CANADA.

**POVERTY DIGNITY** Everyone living in Canada should have confidence that their human rights are respected and that they can live their life with dignity. Children must have the freedom to enjoy all the opportunities of a safe, healthy childhood with access to culturally appropriate education, health care, and homes. No child should have to wonder whether they'll have food to eat, a safe place to sleep, or whether their feelings, thoughts, and dreams matter. As they grow to be adults, they must have opportunities that build confidence to face the challenges of life, knowing that they won't be refused service or turned away from a job, an apartment, or any public space, based on socio-economic status, race (including Indigeneity), gender, immigration status, sexual orientation, or (dis)ability. Everyone, young and old, should feel they are part of a community, take pride in their accomplishments, and know that they are valued as a person.

At the heart of ending poverty in Canada is upholding this inherent value, rights, and dignity of every person—each created in the image of God—regardless of their social position or how much they “contribute” to the economy. To date, Canada has committed to reducing poverty by 50 per cent (compared to 2015) by 2030, but the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) call on governments to “end poverty in all its forms everywhere.” Poverty is itself created and sustained by systems that deny the rights and dignity of people and communities; in order to build a new future, we need new systems.



**ASK FEDERAL CANDIDATES:**

- How will you/your party support collaboration with community-led initiatives to improve equity and health outcomes, build capacity, and ensure that programs and services reach all who need them?
- What will you do to support people throughout the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic? How will you ensure corporate responsibility for COVID-19 relief funds so that this money benefits workers and communities before shareholders?
- How will you ensure adequate funding and minimum delivery standards are in place for universally-accessible public services and infrastructure like childcare, pharmacare, and affordable housing to help offset rising costs of living and increasing social and economic inequity?
- When will you develop and implement a universally-accessible basic income guarantee to replace our current patchwork of inadequate income assistance programs?

**RACIALIZED POVERTY**  
**SOCIAL INCLUSION**

Black, Indigenous and people of colour are equal members of society. They, along with women, newcomers, members of the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community, youth and the elderly, and people living with disabilities, should have the same opportunities and enjoy the same rights and well-being as White, cis-gendered, straight, working-aged, able-bodied folks. Systemic barriers, prejudice, and racism must become a thing of the past. It is essential that communities, workplaces, social institutions, and governments honour the diversity and contributions of all members of Canadian society and uphold their socio-economic and cultural rights.

**ASK FEDERAL CANDIDATES:**

- What is your/your party’s plan to achieve equitable socio-economic outcomes for individuals and communities facing systemic oppression (including First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples; racialized people; refugees and other immigrants; women; 2SLGBTQQIA+ people; and people living with disabilities)?
- How will you encourage the social and economic integration of racialized communities?
- What will you do to address the systemic barriers faced by newcomers? How will you ensure that their foreign professional credentials, education, and experience are recognized in Canada?

**INEQUALITY**  
**EQUITY**

Canada is a country with great wealth and resources. Our federal policies, programs, and tax system must work in tandem to ensure a more equitable distribution of wealth and well-being among people in Canada. Critical investments are needed for universally-accessible social programs, affordable housing, and other infrastructure. These should be financed via progressive tax policies that contain corporate and individual accountability measures. Canadians for Tax Fairness estimates that a four per cent increase in federal tax on personal wealth over \$750,000 alone would yield \$1 billion annually.

Governments, civil society, and the private sector must all cooperate in building a just future. This includes upholding minimum standards based in human rights and operating according to principles that are both environmentally and economically sustainable.

**ASK FEDERAL CANDIDATES:**

- What changes will you/your party make in the next four years to eliminate tax evasion by individuals, corporations, and multinational enterprises?
- How will you remove barriers to tax filing and accessing federal tax benefits to increase uptake among marginalized people and communities?

**DISILLUSIONMENT APATHY**  
**DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION**

Confidence and participation in our electoral system are essential facets of a functioning democracy. While opportunities to engage in the democratic process abound year-round, elections serve as a unique moment to reflect and propel the changes we need to create a more just society.

In our current “winner takes all” system, voters who cast their ballots for unsuccessful candidates or parties can often feel like their perspectives go unheard. A system of proportional representation could combat feelings of disillusionment, ensure that all voices are heard—including individuals experiencing poverty, Indigenous Peoples, and others disproportionately marginalized—and guarantee that every vote counts.

Democratic reform has the potential to reignite political engagement by better reflecting the preferences of all voters.

**ASK FEDERAL CANDIDATES:**

- How will you/your party move forward on proportional representation during the upcoming parliamentary session?
- How will you work with other elected officials to ensure the voices of the most vulnerable are heard, and their needs prioritized?
- What strategies will you employ to foster greater collaboration and meaningful dialogue across parties, jurisdictions, and with civil society?
- Beyond the election, how will you ensure you are hearing from and answering to those typically excluded from decision-making processes?

**INDIGENOUS RIGHTS AND RECONCILIATION**

INDIGENOUS POVERTY First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people should be celebrated both as the First Peoples of this nation and as caretakers and knowledge keepers since time immemorial. It is critical that the inherent human rights and also treaty rights of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people and communities be honoured and upheld in all laws, policies, and practices across sectors and jurisdictions. Just like Western science, Indigenous experiences and ways of knowing must also be recognized and valued throughout policy development, implementation, and evaluation.

The well-being of Indigenous Peoples must be considered a national priority, closing the gap in health and socio-economic outcomes of Indigenous and settler populations. Specifically, this should include an end to all boil water advisories and disproportionate rates of incarceration, violence, and child apprehensions, as well as measures to ensure access to healthy, culturally appropriate food; quality education; training and employment opportunities; and affordable and appropriate housing in Indigenous communities so people aren't forced to leave.

Indigenous Peoples must have access to traditional lands and waters, exercising the right to free, prior, and informed consent over the use of these territories. It is paramount that Indigenous nations are respected as sovereign, equal partners in the nation-to-nation relationship with the Government of Canada and that treaty rights be honoured.

Building on the passage of the “United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act” in June 2021, it is imperative that the Government of Canada follow through on its previous commitment to enact the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 Agenda, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s calls to action, and the calls to justice of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

**ASK FEDERAL CANDIDATES:**

- When will you/your party deliver on all of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s calls to action that pertain to the federal government?

- When will you respond to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls’ calls to justice?
- What will you do to honour Indigenous Peoples’ right to free, prior, and informed consent on an ongoing basis?
- What will you do to ensure that the remaining on-reserve boil water advisories are lifted in the immediate short-term?
- Will you immediately comply with all rulings by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal to immediately cease its discriminatory funding of First Nations child and family services and fully implement Jordan’s Principle?
- How do you plan to develop the action plan required by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act? When will this be done?

**FORGED MIGRATION  
A WELCOME HOME**

Newcomers to Canada must be welcomed as equals, with respect for their human rights, culture, knowledge, and experience. Detainment and separation must be replaced with supports conducive to a sense of safety and opportunities for socio-economic security, including safe and affordable housing. Reuniting families would be made a priority.

Newcomers should have access to good, secure employment, as well as supports for those outside the workforce. Opportunities should be provided (with the necessary supports) to learn English or French. Education and professional credentials obtained internationally should be recognized and supports to bridge any gaps with Canadian certification requirements should be provided. Broader Canadian society must recognize and honour the contributions of refugees, refugee claimants, temporary foreign workers, and immigrants. Access to services and benefits should not be tied to immigration status. Everyone—but especially





*With the passage of the “United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act” in June 2021, it is imperative that the Government of Canada follow-through on this commitment.*

political leaders—would recognize the essential nature of immigration in addressing labour shortages, rebuilding the economy, and assisting in paying off our national debt.

**ASK FEDERAL CANDIDATES:**

- What will you/your party do to reduce application processing times, barriers, and backlogs in the refugee resettlement process? What additional financial resources and personnel will you allocate to processing centers to tackle these delays and barriers?
- What investments will you make to establish a service standard of 12 month processing times for family reunification applications?
- When will resettled refugees no longer be required to repay travel loans?
- When will you eliminate Canadian citizenship fees?
- How much will you invest in policies and programs that honour the rights of immigrants, migrant workers, refugees, and all newcomers to Canada?
- Will your party ensure all kids in Canada receive the support of the Canada Child Benefit by untying eligibility to the parent or caregiver’s immigration status?
- Will you cease the separation and detainment of children, families, and individuals seeking asylum in Canada? What measures will you take to ensure all claimants’ human rights are upheld?

**CLIMATE CRISIS**  
**CLIMATE STABILITY**

An honest response to the rapidly accelerating impacts of the global climate crisis requires governments, industry, and society at large to respond ambitiously to the scientific imperative of reducing GHG emissions and a compassionate but expedient phasing out of the fossil fuel sector. The interruption to “business as usual” of the COVID-19 pandemic has made space to consider creative, strategic alternatives aligned with a decarbonized future.

This does not mean turning our backs on workers—quite the contrary. The way forward requires significant investment in a fulsome, just transition to a more equitable and sustainable economy: one that upholds the rights of Indigenous Peoples, integrates racialized and disabled people, AND that includes funding for skills development, retraining programs, clean infrastructure and industrial development, as well as early retirement options to guarantee the livelihoods and well-being of former fossil fuel workers. In other words, a just transition to a green economy that supports all people and all of creation.

**ASK FEDERAL CANDIDATES:**

- Do you/your party have a plan to reduce Canadian GHG emissions by 60 percent below 2005 levels by 2030? If not, when will such a plan be made available?
- When will you/your party end all subsidies to the fossil fuel industry?
- How do you envision a just transition to a decarbonized economy? When will you mandate the managed phase out of the oil and gas industry (as has been done with coal)? What will you do to support workers and communities through this transition?
- How much will you invest in creating a new, green economy? What will you do to ensure that racialized, disabled, and other marginalized populations are a part of the new economy?
- When will you enforce the “polluter-pays” principle and remove the exemptions currently given to large emitters under the federal carbon pricing mechanism?
- How will you accelerate the reduction of transportation-related emissions? When will electric vehicle charging stations be available across the country at the scale required to comply with the 2035 phase-out of gas-powered vehicles?

Canadian climate action must also recognize our responsibility for our historic emissions and the harm that has been caused internationally. Rapid decarbonization could serve to lessen the potential of extreme weather events, but a lot of damage has already been done.

**ASK FEDERAL CANDIDATES:**

- Will you/your party advocate to have climate migrants recognized by the UNHCR as refugees?
- When will you provide equal support for both climate change adaptation and mitigation measures in the Global South through international climate financing mechanisms?

As part of its commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals, the Government of Canada set out to: “Demonstrate leadership, at home and abroad, in shaping a sustainable and resilient future that promotes prosperity, partnership, peace, people and the planet, while ensuring that no one is left behind.” Let it be so.

# A JUST CANADA WOULD:

- Respect human rights and honour the dignity of every person on this land. Create accessible accountability mechanisms to ensure restitution is made if these rights are violated.
- Take action to end poverty in all its forms everywhere (including food and housing insecurity).
- Improve equity and outcomes for individuals and communities facing systemic oppression.
- Implement a fair and progressive tax system that contributes to a more equitable distribution of wealth.
- Follow-through on the commitment to develop an action plan to fully implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- Engage settlers in the healing processes of reconciliation and upholding Indigenous rights and sovereignty.
- Inform and educate all inhabitants about Canada's colonial history and the ongoing legacy of anti-Indigenous, anti-Black, and anti-Asian racism.
- Cultivate accessible and effective processes for civil society participation in public policy development, implementation, and evaluation, particularly among communities typically excluded from decision-making processes.
- Extend a full welcome to asylum-seekers, refugees, and other migrants to Canada, honouring their inherent rights and providing them with equal opportunities.
- Accelerate GHG emissions reductions across the Canadian economy. Implement specific decarbonization measures in the highest emitting sectors.
- Promote climate justice by investing heavily in a just transition to a new green, decarbonized economy.
- Prioritize human and environmental rights, sustainability, and the flourishing of all creation.

**Join CPJ in encouraging voters and electoral candidates alike to “do everything in love” (1 Corinthians 16:14) for all people and all of creation. Together, we can join in the work of building a just Canada.**



Go to [cpj.ca/election2021](https://cpj.ca/election2021)

Throughout the entire election campaign, you'll find more in-depth coverage including:

- Additional articles on the issues covered in this bulletin
- Election resources from our partner organizations.
- Information on the voting process.
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- Information on how to order copies of this Election Bulletin.

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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.

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