

[On Prorogation: We Need Leaders, Not Quitters](#)

Thursday, December 4, 2008 at 6:24pm

Splendid. We're in the middle of the biggest mess of an economic crisis, and Prime Minister Harper thinks it to be a good idea to suspend Parliament for another 7 weeks.

This, of course is in response to the threat of the new Liberal/NDP/Bloc coalition from democratically and constitutionally leading the House of Commons as their own majority. This doesn't come as a shock. I understand why Mr. Harper did it; as the young Justin Trudeau so eloquently put it:

Mr. Harper is threatening to prorogue Parliament, which is akin to pulling the fire alarm before you go into an exam you know you're going to fail

Way to suspend democracy because you can't come to terms with the fact that you have lost the confidence of the House. Thanks for making matters worse by proroguing.



[Meghan McDermott](#) at 8:59pm December 4

Andrew, my heart is aching for our country today. I am so ashamed that so many of our fellow citizens buy into the populist and hateful crap this man is spewing. It makes me feel gross.

Where are our leaders?!



[Gaëtan Landry](#) at 11:51pm December 4

That's a pretty damn good analogy.



[Shawn Kivimaa](#) at 1:37am December 5

Aw, now Harper's suspending democracy? It's completely lawful. And what's more, it's what Canadians want. See Ipsos Reid. And not just a plurality, a huge majority. (68%). Of course, the Harper haters are now in a snit. Poor babies.

Dion had quite the performance last night. Let me get this straight. This guy can't even get a pre-recorded tape in to the media in time, and you want him to be Prime Minister? He's not good enough to be the Liberal leader, but he's good enough to lead the country in through the worst economic times we've seen in decades? Talk about cutting off your nose to spite your face.



[Gaëtan Landry](#) at 3:48am December 5

I don't give a rat's ass about the charisma of the head of the coalition. He's going out in 5 months anyway. The dude, along with Layon, sat down and worked things out, got the block to support them.

All Harper had to do was work with any of the three parties. He didn't work with any of them. Harper lost the trust of the Chamber, Dion gained it. As Justin Trudeau said, proroguing the government to avoid a vote of confidence you know you're going to lose is akin to pulling the fire alarm before you go into an exam you know you're going to fail".

As for the Ipsos Reid poll, see

<http://www.ipsos-na.com/news/results.cfm?geo=1>

No polls on this topic. At all. You're pulling that out of your ass.



[Jono Hasson](#) at 6:57am December 5

Apart from this one? <http://www.ipsos-na.com/news/pressrelease.cfm?id=4201>



[Jono Hasson](#) at 7:01am December 5

Which also reveals 60% of the country oppose the coalition, 62% are angry with the attempt to grab power, 60% believe the Conservatives should fight on, 68% believe in the decision to prorogue, 56% prefer an election to the coalition...

And let's face it, it's ridiculous to talk about Dion having the trust of anyone, all he's done is throw principle out the window in a desperate attempt to gain power by selling-out to whoever he needs to. And Canadians can see that.



[Tanya Arseneault](#) at 9:56am December 5

Harper only had to work with the other parties and get them involved in the action plan for the economy crisis, but he chose instead to act as though he had a majority government, which is false. Let's not forget that about 65% of Canadians did NOT vote Con. in the last election, and did not want Harper as their leader. In that aspect, the majority has spoken. Whatever happens on Parliament Hill will happen for a reason, if the opposition MPs have decided they could no longer trust Harper, we elected them there and they are deciding this for us. Plus the fact that the Bloc is not joining the Coalition but supporting the non-confidence vote means something really is up with Harper, which Duceppe has often worked with. I am in a way glad that the parties have another 7 weeks to try and work together for the budget plan, and that the Cons will have a chance to present it. I hope the Opp. will take a good look at it and if they decide to defeat the Cons, that it's for the right reasons...



[Jono Hasson](#) at 10:05am December 5

"Plus the fact that the Bloc is not joining the Coalition but supporting the non-confidence vote means something really is up with Harper, which Duceppe has often worked with." Well, someone fell for the BS that the Liberals were selling. Without the full co-operation of the Bloc in a coalition, the Liberals and NDP couldn't get near forming a working majority to replace Harper, fact is that the Bloc will extract a price for their support.



[Jono Hasson](#) at 10:06am December 5

And you also might note that polls show a HEFTY Conservative victory if an election were held soon, indicating that the people really don't want this coalition.



[Tanya Arseneault](#) at 11:03am December 5

That is because I think the opposition might have rushed things with this coalition... You know, I would also rather see all the leaders try to work together with the current government, but if it is clear (and made very clear to the public) that a government run by the Conservatives at this time will cripple Canada and its future, I would rather see an opposition not afraid to fight for what is right, but again, this has to be for the right reasons and be beyond reasonable doubt, because Harper DID win the election after all. I don't think a Conservative majority would be a good thing, Harper can't be left to his own devices if the House of Commons' trust in him is already shaky. There must be a reason for this mistrust, it can't all be for power, because the coalition would also be in minority government and could be overturned by a Conservative and Bloc agreement. I like to believe our MPs have a conscience and intelligence, maybe I'm wrong...



[Andrew Manderson](#) at 1:37pm December 5

I want to thank Shawn and Jono for contributing. I will now respond as best as I can.

Let's get this Ipsos-Reid Poll thing straight. The numbers don't lie at all, and for a second I was starting to lean away from my side of the argument, thinking "Shit, I guess people really don't want this". Then I looked at the graph: only 921 people responded.

According to Statistics Canada, the 2007 census indicates that there are more than 25 million eligible voters. We can say that just fewer than 15 million of them voted in the last election. That poll asks the equivalent of 0.006 % of people who voted in the last election. Enough said.

About the Bloc: I have yet to understand why people are so dismissive of the Bloc. I'll re-iterate: the separatist movement is dead. There are over 7.5 million *Canadians* in Québec (about 23% of the national population). How about we actually value their

opinion? No wonder some of them seek sovereignty - because their culture is being completely alienated. I think a thorough understanding of Québec would end a lot of these dumb stereotypes. On the flipside, I find that some Québecers are just as arrogant as any "separatist" Albertan. So I understand feelings of anger on either side.

Conservatives put tons of legislation through last year because only the Bloc would support them. Does that mean Harper endorses separatists? Of course not.

On Dion's Leadership: I fully agree with Shawn. The poor telecast was a huge dent to his already poor image. However, I personally find the guy's ideas to be the soundest. His party supports him. Other parties are still willing to let the guy be PM. Of course it's trying to achieve power! They've seen that they can make the House work by working together. They're willing to let Dion lead them in order to make their ideas get through.



[Andrew Manderson](#) at 1:38pm December 5

No matter what happens, at least Mr. Harper will table a budget that makes sense now. Cutting \$26 million in party funding will just allow more ideas of people who live over oil take precedent. And now he won't make strikes illegal for public service workers, and he won't put in measures against women who seek income equality.



[Jono Hasson](#) at 2:19pm December 5

A poll can't be dismissed out of hand because it only samples a thousand people, most polls only sample a thousand people and if that rendered them meaningless, then what would be the point of polls existing? The fact is that dismissing polls - done by professional polling companies who use technical methods to gain accurate representations simply because in your completely inexpert opinion they "didn't talk to enough people" - is simply ridiculous.

Why are people dismissive of the Bloc? Really? I think the fact they want to rip the country apart might have a little something to do with their lack of mainstream support.

And there is a clear and manifest difference between the Bloc supporting your legislation and getting in to bed with the Bloc in a deal that would give them a significant say in how the country is run.



[J-D Daigle](#) at 2:37pm December 5

Not sure about that one...I think he'll just wait a bit to implant those ideas more subtly. About the Quebec separatists, the movement still exists, but it isn't as strong as it once was. However, this debacle is probably going to give the mouvement more energy.

That aside, am I the only one who hates all the statistics going on in this mess? I heard

one of Harper's ministers say that 80% of Canadians voted against the Green shift. I think that, because of Harper's charisma, the only statistic that seems rational is that people voted against Harper.

Either way, not having a government sucks



[J-D Daigle](#) at 2:40pm December 5

About the Bloc, sure they want to separate, but they know that a crumbling Canadian economy won't be to their favor, Quebec will be affected just as much as the rest of Canada.



[Pierre-André Doucet](#) at 5:24pm December 5

What makes me laugh about the attitude towards the Bloc is that Harper has been denigrating their support for a coalition, saying they'll extract something in exchange for their support, etc...

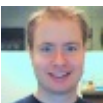
What the hell has the Bloc been doing for the past 2 and a half years? Does no one remember the motion on the Québec nation? Does no one remember blatant pandering to Quebecers (both the electorate and the Bloc) through asymmetrical federalism? Does no one remember gutting federal programs and substituting them with extra transfers to the provinces? Come on, Harper. Talk about the pot calling the kettle black.

What all of this tells me, though, is that the British first-past-the-post system is dysfunctional. This kind of confrontational politics only works in majority government situations, which we're trending away from - people want to see a government that truly represents ALL Canadians, a government that reaches out and cooperates with other parties. It's time for mixed-member proportional representation.



[Jono Hasson](#) at 5:58pm December 5

You cannot have a government that truly represents ALL Canadians, that doesn't make any conceptual sense given that Canadians cover a huge spectrum in their political beliefs. At some stage a majority has to rule. And the problem with the sort of PR system you advocate is that inevitably the balance of power doesn't end up with large parties, it ends up with minority and fringe parties who can extract disproportionate prices for their support. You only have to look at the countries that have such systems to see how unstable their governments are and how much small parties can control policy through their few seats.



[Shawn Kivimaa](#) at 8:49pm December 5

I would have responded to your comment regarding polling, Andrew, but Jono beat me to it. Thank you kindly for your comments, Jono. Very well said.

I'll also refer you to a link showing the historical election results in Canada.
<http://pelalusa.blogspot.com/2008/11/historical-summary-of-canadian.html>

Of particular interest: Trudeau never once received a majority of the Canadian vote. Therefore the majority of Canadians voted against him, in every election. Representative of ALL Canadians? Far from it.

Also, the Chretien Liberals received a majority in 1997 with only 38.46% of the popular vote. By comparison, Harper received 37.65% of the popular vote in the recent election.



[Meghan McDermott](#) at 2:59am December 6

I don't think it is fair to point to current polls as legitimizing what Harper has done. As Andrew said, who is to know if those people voted last month and if they would vote again. When it comes to our current Federal representation, only one "poll" counts: the official election results.

The election resulted in a lack of seats for Harper to have a majority. As a result, we had to have the confidence of the House. I know you guys know this, but my point is that we voted and this is the parliament we got. A parliament with seats distributed in such a way that a coalition is legitimate, legal and surely democratic.

Funny enough, the election was called because Harper deemed the last parliament to be too "dysfunctional." Odd, I thought, given that the House wasn't even sitting.

So here we are, 30 million dollars wasted, and here is the great new "functional" parliament. Put on hold.

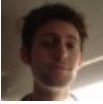


[Jono Hasson](#) at 6:44am December 6

Once again, desperate attempts to discredit a universally acknowledged method of finding out public opinion because it shows you're actually in a minority.

"A parliament with seats distributed in such a way that a coalition is legitimate, legal and surely democratic."

Funny description of "democracy" - where the PM will be the guy whose party garnered barely a quarter of the popular vote, where cabinet positions are held by those whose party has the support of less than 1/5 of Canadians and where the balance of power and influence is held by a party that got less than 10% of the vote...



[Julien Léger](#) at 3:30pm December 6

Wow, lots of directions in this thread. I think most revolve around the essentially political questions of who's most legitimate and democratic. Here are some thoughts.

I don't have a strong opinion on who I support, but I more generally support the coalition to take the reigns of government, because I don't identify with Harper and his populist rhetoric and policies.

A reaction to what's been said;

A poll is NOT a "universally method of finding out public opinion". It's a contest acknowledged idea;

- It assumes everyone can have an opinion on a given subject.
 - It assumes every opinion has value, or is equally valuable.
 - It assumes there's a consensus on the problem that should be debated and the questions to be asked.
 - It assumes that the abstract notion of "public opinion" is something that exists, and that it's quantifiable in a mathematical, unitary and disinterested way.
- I'm sure we can find some contexts where a poll has value. But we can also find a lot of contexts where it functions in an argument to hide the forces that are at play.

On the question of the Bloc; If they were not supporting the coalition, by default, they would be supporting the current Harper government. Yes, a bunch of sleazy separatists would be maintaining Harper in place (and yes, Dion would probably also use that argument).

On the question of democracy and what is or is not democratic; The meaning of democracy is a contested idea. For me, democracy is exactly about being like the meaning of democracy, it's a contest without end. Democracy is more about tension and conflict than about a fixed system of legal rules we have about governing. I don't think democracy was suspended by Harper, or will be usurped by Dion with his coalition.



[Meghan McDermott](#) at 3:33pm December 6

Hey, if you don't like this democracy, don't argue with me - change the constitution! This is how the blueprints of our nation say that our representation works. My opinion, and yours, do nothing to change that. For Harper to talk about the coalition as antidemocratic offends the very constitution that he is supposed to be upholding and protecting.

As for the issue of polls, I am sure some of the people who answered their phones this week were influenced by the Conservative PR machine that used dishonest messages to invoke fear. Harper has characterized this whole meltdown in very slimy terms - why did he lie about the coalition party leaders not willing to be photographed in front of flags? If

it is in the interest of all of us for Harper to remain the PM, why resort to flat out lies and cowardice?



[Julien Léger](#) at 3:38pm December 6

This is the context in which I read what's happening; Politics is essentially a conflict, a necessary conflict for democracy.

We have an attitude towards searching for political solutions that is in a geometrical or mathematical sense ($2+2=4$). But in politics, problems have no solutions in that sense, there is no solution where everything or everyone would agree or come in harmony. The different elements of a political problem contradict one another; no answers can satisfy them completely. Political problems are not solvable, but they are usually regulated with choices: compromise, authority, justify with "superior principle" (this in itself does not mean anything; some example: God, universal rationality (of polls!), telos of history), etc.

I'm stating the obvious here; this is a conflict with no mathematical solution. But understand my strategy, I'll I've been hearing for the past week is that Harper or Dion are engaged in "petty fights", unethical behavior, that they should stop acting like children, playing politics at the expense of the well being of the country, that we need a group of people that's ready to pull their sleeves, and take action about the things we care about, etc.

Ok, but what's the "well being of our country"? There is no "Right" answer to that question, only endlessly debatable ones, which is exactly what is happening here. The only sad thing I find is the simplified rhetoric. I would love to hear a debate about public financing of parties and it's value for democracy, or about a possible "bail out". But these are not winning strategies.

Politics aims at creating unity in a context of conflict and diversity; it is always concerned with the creation of an "us" by the determination of a "them". Can you see that at play here?



[Jono Hasson](#) at 3:48pm December 6

"It assumes every opinion has value, or is equally valuable."

"As for the issue of polls, I am sure some of the people who answered their phones this week were influenced by the Conservative PR machine that used dishonest messages to invoke fear."

These statements perfectly sum up the ever-present and frankly extraordinary liberal arrogance, - "normal people are too stupid and easily influenced to know what's best for them".

The fact is, the majority of the Canadian public are not in support of the coalition and do not feel comfortable with the idea that a bunch of defeated parties are trying to take

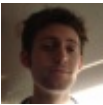
power. And the best response that liberals etc. can come up with is basically, "the majority of the Canadian public are stupid". This is maybe why the Liberals were so badly beaten and why if another election were held today, they'd be even more badly beaten.



[Meghan McDermott](#) at 3:58pm December 6

Jono, what are you and the conservatives saying about the population of Quebec voters, then, when you denigrate their choice of elected representation?

Can you address Harper's lies and dishonesty head-on? Why did the Conservatives invoke the idea of "treason" last week? Or is it indefensible, so you try to cut down us "liberals" on other matters?



[Julien Léger](#) at 4:08pm December 6

It's not that the people are too stupid to know what's best for them. (that's actually one of the pillars of conservatism)

What I was raising was actually your, essentially Liberal, argument that polls are somehow indicators of truth outside the reality they are describing. A poll is always loaded with biases. It's an instant picture of 1000 people we decide to extrapolate. I'm putting context to politicize your universalisation of polls.

I don't think your belief that Harper should stay is founded on a poll. Don't hide behind polls.

Politicians use to say, "God is with me". One of its equivalent today is "the public opinion is with me".



[Jono Hasson](#) at 4:30pm December 6

I'm not Canadian, Harper is not my PM and I have little but a passing interest in Canadian politics. I'm not going to start defending everything everyone has or hasn't said. I'm simply fascinated by such a brazen and unprincipled attempt to gain power and the breathtaking arrogance of liberals in ignoring a clear majority of Canadians opposed to the deal.

"It's not that the people are too stupid to know what's best for them."

Oh, so the comments you two made that accused people of being influenced by Conservative lies and that the opinion of some has less value than others on who should govern them... was not asserting that some people are too stupid to know what's best for them?

Furthermore, polls exist in virtually every country and political system as gauges of public opinion. They are used every day for a whole range of things, both political and not. And there are numerous companies that specialise in them - spending their time figuring out how to remove biases and gain the most accurate samples. Why would this whole industry exist if polls were useless, full of biases and unrepresentative?

I'm amazed that anyone could be so insanely arrogant to think that not only are the polls very wrong, but that they themselves are a more reliable gauge of public opinion than polls. But that's liberals for you. Do you honestly believe that public opinion is with you?! And what on earth do you base that on?



[Shawn Kivimaa](#) at 4:55pm December 6

Meghan, the Bloc isn't so much a separatist party as it is a shakedown scheme. Don't give Quebec the billions they want, and they threaten to leave. I think that's why most Bloc voters vote the way they do, because they identify with the socialist bent of the Bloc, and they realize that the threat of separating gives them the most leverage to achieve their political wants. It's actually a great scheme, because who in their right mind would actually think that Quebec could survive on its own, as is (i.e. social spending at current levels.) Only the truly delusional actually want to separate. Should Quebeckers be "denigrated" for voting Bloc? Well, if it means calling their bluff, I say by all means.

As for the flag question, I don't really think that Harper would say that if he knew it was untrue. Say what you will about him, he's a smart man, and obviously it would be caught. I would guess that he didn't see a flag when he watched the signing, since it wasn't directly behind the table. It seems like it was something he thought of on the spur of the moment in question period from recollection of the event. That's my interpretation, anyway.

Why would Conservative supporters use the term "treason"? Because that's the kind of anger we feel about this scam. The Conservatives actually strengthened their support, and the Liberals were DECIMATED. But now, these bumbling idiots have decided that (despite the fact that the Liberals CAMPAIGNED AGAINST a coalition with the NDP), they are going to take the power.

One more point. The rise of the coalition is supposedly because of the economy. This is obviously complete crap, because the economy definitely isn't being helped by the prospect of instability, even less by the prospect of the three stooges in control. Pure lust for power is what it amounts to.



[Meghan McDermott](#) at 7:23pm December 6

The thing I find funny with the Harper supporters is that you scream bloody murder when the coalition threatens your elected representation in Ottawa ("undemocratic", "coup", etc...) and yet you have no problems disregarding the votes that came out of Québec.

Either you respect the election results or you don't. You can't have your cake and eat it too.



[Amie Geall](#) at 8:45pm December 6
Wow, this is lovely. I'm kidding, a bit.

What would a regionalist party such as the Bloc, have to offer Canadians nationally? That is the real question here. Not much, when their whole stated reason for being is in the sole interest of one single province. That's probably why a lot of Canadians don't take too seriously.

Public opinion polls DO MATTER. Even the politicians themselves use them in gauging the success of their public relations campaign. I watched a CBC news in depth with the public relations manager for Paul Martin's Liberal campaign and he described how they frantically and desperately were running for the morning newspaper to read the polls to see what had happened and how to plan or prepare for their next strategic public relations move. So they do matter, always have, always will. None of us being expert statisticians here, it may be hard for us to understand how they are representative, but they are - and are regularly used as part of the political process.



[Andrew Manderson](#) at 8:47pm December 6
"What would a regionalist party such as the Bloc" = former Reform. Just pointing out.



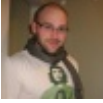
[Amie Geall](#) at 8:59pm December 6
Also.....it was a DIVIDED vote. If you took almost any single party running in the election, you could look at the numbers, flip them, and say, "THE MAJORITY DIDN'T VOTE FOR THEM". And then take the rest and say that that represents the majority. So Conservatives are saying the majority didn't vote for Dion, and the NDP/Liberal are saying that the majority didn't vote for Harper. The only real truth is that if you take any slice you will see that the only party that came closest to a majority is the Conservatives, that's why they won.

Democracy is as much of a personal, social, and moral ideal of the developed and industrialized world as it is an actual operating principle in our political systems. It is on the personal and moral basis of democracy that Conservatives are outcriing the formation of the coalition. They feel that their political will is being manipulated through political and constitutional manoeuvring right after an election.



[Amie Geall](#) at 9:05pm December 6

P.S. Harper's not perfect- he needs to shape up a bit...I think he was cracking a bit under some of the pressure in regard some of the things he was saying -



[Andrew Manderson](#) at 9:09pm December 6

First of all, I want to THANK EVERYONE for their input. Jono, Shawn and Amie in particular. I am a strong believer in having my ideas adequately challenged, and you have all provided. I think everyone here has left their mark on my personal opinion of this whole thing, in both directions.

I now ask for anyone who have any, to present closing arguments. I think it's possible that Gaëtan, Tanya and others are sick of getting a ton of notifications about the same note. =)

I'll be blogging once more, and if we want to continue this debate, which I do find enjoyable, especially with such intelligent people, you may post comments on that one.

Thanks again to everyone!



[Jeremie Stephenson](#) at 12:13pm December 13

Andrew, you bring up a very interesting argument here. I'm going to try to explain why getting approximately 1000 people to respond to a poll actually is significant, and to attempt to decrease the politicization of statistics here a little bit, since it appears to be that many people for Harper's strategy of proroguing parliament are attempting to state that basic statistical theory can in fact not be employed to represent Canadians' opinions.

When a survey company, such as Ipsos-Reid, conducts one of these polls, they will draw a random sample from the population, given the confidence interval of the population that they want to achieve. These types of polls are usually done with a 95% C.I., which they state as being accurate "19 times out of 20". They derive the z-score from this confidence interval, and the bound (B) that they want, to determine the sample size of the survey.