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## FEATURED Q&A

# Who Is Best Placed to Win Canada's October Election?



Conservative Party leader Andrew Scheer is "the only plausible alternative prime minister" to Justin Trudeau and will mount a strong campaign, Christopher Sands writes below. // File Photo: Andre Forget via CC license.

**Q** Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Sept. 11 called for a federal election to be held on Oct. 21. Trudeau, who has been facing an ethics scandal in recent months, is seeking his second term in office. Opinion polls show both the prime minister and his main rival, Conservative Party leader Andrew Scheer, with just over 30 percent support each. How likely is Trudeau to be re-elected in October, and what platforms are other candidates running on? What factors are most shaping the race? What is at stake for Latin America and the Caribbean if there is a change in government, including on issues such as Venezuela's political crisis and the United States-Mexico-Canada, or USMCA, trade deal?

**A** Maureen Boyd, fellow at the Canadian Global Affairs Institute and director of the Carleton Initiative for Parliamentary and Diplomatic Engagement: "Canadian elections are volatile with unpredictable outcomes. In 2015, the Trudeau Liberals started in third place and ended up with a majority government. The Liberals are campaigning on their record on environmental and economic issues. The Conservatives will focus on the economy and ethical lapses of the Liberals. The New Democratic Party platform advocates increasing social benefits, and the Green Party will campaign on stopping climate change. The campaign matters, particularly the last days. Voters will pay attention to the leaders' debate on Oct. 7 two weeks before the election. The leaders will talk about foreign policy, but it won't decide the election. While the Conservatives say they would deal better with China and the United States, no one expects there would be substantive policy differenc-

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## TODAY'S NEWS

### POLITICAL

## Guatemala Has Become a Cocaine Producer: Gov't

Authorities have discovered coca plantations near Guatemala's borders with Honduras and Mexico.

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### ECONOMIC

## Argentina's Economy Shrinks in Second Quarter

The country's GDP contracted in the second quarter in seasonally adjusted terms as compared to the first. However, the economy grew 0.6 percent in the second quarter as compared to the same period last year.

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### POLITICAL

## U.S. Orders Expulsion of Two Cuban Diplomats

The State Department ordered the expulsion of two Cuban diplomats to the United Nations, accusing them of participating in "influence operations" against the United States. Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez called the accusations against the envoys "vulgar slander."

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Rodríguez // File Photo: Cuban Government.

## POLITICAL NEWS

## U.S. Orders Expulsion of Two Cuban Diplomats

The administration of U.S. President Donald Trump on Thursday ordered the immediate expulsion of two Cuban diplomats to the United Nations, accusing them of participating in “influence operations” against the United States. “The Department of State today notified the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the United States requires the imminent departure of two members of Cuba’s Permanent Mission to the United Nations for abusing their privileges of residence,” the State Department said in a statement. The State Department added that travel in the United States by all members of Cuba’s permanent U.N. mission “essentially be restricted” to Manhattan. It also said that it takes “any and all attempts against the National Security of the United States seriously, and will continue to investigate any additional personnel who may be manipulating their privileges of residence.” Though the State Department did not elaborate on the reasons behind the diplomats’ expulsions, “influence operations” typically refers to intelligence-gathering operations and recruiting sources for

espionage efforts, the Miami Herald reported. In a statement, Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez angrily responded to the expulsions. “It is vulgar slander the imputation that they performed acts incompatible with diplomatic status,” he said in a tweet.

## Guatemala Has Become a Cocaine Producer: Gov’t

Guatemala has become a cocaine-producing nation and not just a transit country, according to Interior Minister Enrique Degenhart, *El Periódico* reported Thursday. “Guatemala has become a cocaine producer, which puts [it] in a completely different situation in terms of regional security,” the minister told reporters after a cabinet meeting. His remarks followed Guatemalan authorities’ discovery of drug laboratories and coca plantations in municipalities near the country’s borders with Honduras and Mexico, where a state of siege has been declared after suspected drug traffickers were blamed for the killing of three soldiers earlier this month. In 2018, Guatemalan police found a coca plantation of nearly one hectare and a laboratory to process the plant, from which cocaine is made. This was the first such discovery in the Central American nation, and

## NEWS BRIEFS

## Medical Cannabis Could Raise \$6 Bn Annually for Colombia: Official

Colombia could raise as much as \$6 billion a year by exporting medicinal cannabis products, which would make marijuana the country’s third-largest source of foreign exchange, the government’s vice minister of commerce, Saúl Pineda, said Thursday, Reuters reported. Colombian law regulates the possession, production, distribution, sale and export of seeds and other cannabis products including oils and creams, but investors are calling for a simpler export approval process.

## Peru’s Government Deports 150 Venezuelans

Peru has deported 150 Venezuelans in its northern border region with Ecuador for entering the country illegally, Peru’s immigration office said Thursday, Reuters reported. Peruvian authorities left the migrants in Ecuador and prohibited them from entering Peru for 15 years, the office said in a statement, which followed days of local television coverage of a murder involving Venezuelan gang members. Additionally, posts on WhatsApp and social media have been spreading rumors about Venezuelans trying to kidnap children, which Peru’s interior minister accused as false, warning against “xenophobic” practices.

## Brazil’s Oi in Talks to Sell Mobile Network

Brazilian telecommunications firm Oi is in talks with Spain’s Telefónica and Italy’s Telecom to sell its mobile network in a bid to avoid insolvency, Reuters reported Thursday, citing five people with knowledge of the matter. Oi, Brazil’s largest fixed-line carrier, has been struggling since filing for bankruptcy protection in June 2016 in an attempt to restructure approximately 65 billion reais (around \$15 billion) of debt.

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es. The focus of the Trudeau government’s efforts in the Americas has been on the renegotiation of NAFTA and now the U.S. Congress’ required ratification of USMCA. Minister Freeland has also taken a leadership role within the Lima Group in working with partners across the Americas for the restoration of democracy in Venezuela. No matter whether the incumbent Liberals or the Conservatives win the next election, major shifts are not expected within the Canadian government’s approach to Latin America. The next prime minister will need to ensure that Canada’s credentials and presence within Latin America and the Caribbean

remain a focus of the new government’s foreign policy.”

**A Satya Das, principal and co-founder of Cambridge Strategies:** “Canadians enter the October national election with no great enthusiasm. The politics of division are in full reign, with Conservative support heavily skewed toward Western Canada (in Alberta, about 80 percent support Andrew Scheer’s party), while the Liberals and Justin Trudeau more than hold their own in Ontario, Quebec and the Atlantic provinces. Even in Canada, there is a strong echo of

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since then, two more installations have been found, Degenhart said, Reuters reported. “We are ... working on a strong strategy with anti-narcotics authorities from the United States because the situation is now a totally different one,” he added. The minister added that five helicopters arrived in Guatemala on Tuesday after undergoing maintenance in the United States. The helicopters will be flying “day and night” in different regions of the country to monitor criminal groups, *El Periódico* reported. During 2017, 90 percent of the cocaine that reached the United States, the world’s top cocaine consumer, passed through the Central America corridor, according to the U.S. government.

## ECONOMIC NEWS

### Argentina’s Economy Shrinks in Q2 as Compared to Q1

Argentina’s economy shrank again in the second quarter as the country continues to struggle amid soaring inflation, government austerity measures and high interest rates, the national statistics agency said Thursday, *The Wall Street Journal* reported. Argentina’s GDP contracted 0.3 percent from the first quarter in seasonally adjusted terms, the fourth contraction in five quarters. From the same period last year, the economy grew 0.6 percent. The country’s unemployment rate rose to 10.6 percent in the second quarter, up from 10.1 percent in the previous quarter. Demand fell 18 percent year-on-year in the April to June period, while private spending and public spending both fell, 7.7 percent and 1.7 percent, respectively, *La Nación* reported. Exports declined 0.6 percent from the first quarter but increased 15 percent from a year earlier. “The third quarter will be very bad, especially this month and the next, until the elections,” Gabriel Caamaño, an economist at consulting firm Ledesma, told *La Nación*. “With the jump in devaluation, consumption and investment will significantly drop as compared to the second quarter.” [Editor’s note: See related [Q&A](#) in the Aug. 14 issue of the Advisor.]

## CAPITOL HILL WATCH

A Look at U.S. Congressional Activity on Latin America

### Rubio Blasts Nicaraguan Government’s OAS Denial as ‘Deplorable’

U.S. Senator Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) on Tuesday blasted the Nicaraguan government’s decision to deny an Organization of American States delegation from entering the country, calling it “deplorable,” *El Nuevo Diario* reported. The high-level commission, including representatives from the United States, Paraguay and Jamaica, was seeking to enter Nicaragua as part of a peace mission to discuss a “pacific solution” to the Central American nation’s political crisis, the OAS said in a statement. In a post on Twitter, Rubio said the “Nicaragua regime,” with its choice to deny entry to the OAS, had made clear that it is not looking for a solution to the crisis, according to the report. A day earlier, Rubio met with OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro, to talk about “the situation of democracy and human rights in our hemisphere,” Almagro said on Twitter, adding that they discussed the crisis in Venezuela and recent developments in Nicaragua.

### Torres Criticizes Supreme Court Decision Allowing Asylum Restrictions

U.S. Representative Norma Torres (D-Calif.) last week criticized the Supreme Court’s decision to allow the administration of President Donald Trump to enforce asylum restrictions while legal challenges to the new policy are heard. “It doesn’t matter where you come from or how you got here. This is America, and you have the right to tell your story and ask for asylum,” Torres wrote on Twitter. The Supreme Court last week lifted a California district court’s block on new rules that allow the United States to deny asylum requests from migrants who have transited other countries to reach the U.S. border. The measure, which would virtually allow the rejection of asylum claims from most Central American migrants, is among the toughest and broadest immigration restrictions the Trump administration has implemented, *Axios* reported. According to the ruling, the measure can take effect while challenges to its legality are heard, a process that could take as long as a year.

### Democrats Are on ‘A Path to Yes’ on USMCA Approval: Pelosi

U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) on Tuesday said Democrats are optimistic that they are “on a path to yes” regarding the approval of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, or USMCA, adding that enforceability was their biggest concern, *CNBC News* reported. “The idea that we would give a victory to the president is irrelevant,” she said. “It’s a victory for the American people.” Also on Tuesday, Vice President Mike Pence expressed optimism that Congress would approve the trade deal by the end of the year.

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the growing global disaffection: a stagnant middle class, the rapid spread of income inequity, the unanswered challenge of climate change—and above all, no clear answer to the disruption and displacement Canadians face as machines replace more and more of the work once performed by humans. None of the parties are perceived to have answers to inspire a plurality of Canadians. Even though the national polls reflect a virtual tie, the imbalance in regional support almost certainly means Justin Trudeau will be re-elected: at least with a strong minority, if not a reduced majority. The caveat, of course, is that there may yet be nasty October surprises in store. Trudeau's crude attempts to dilute the planned criminal prosecution against a Canadian engineering firm continue to haunt him. Jagmeet Singh's New Democrats are melting, as he seems singularly unable to connect with middle-class angst; and may well be eclipsed by Elizabeth May's Greens, who seem to be drawing the millennial vote. As for international policy, there is only a cosmetic distinction between the government of Stephen Harper's Conservatives and Trudeau; hence Latin America can expect the status quo."

**A** **Christopher Sands, director of the Center for Canadian Studies and acting director of the Latin American Studies Program at Johns Hopkins University:** "As Canada holds federal parliamentary elections on Oct. 21, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is ahead, but voter frustrations may lead to the defeat of his Liberal Party government or might reduce him to a minority government. Canadians are enjoying modest economic growth, but key export sectors energy (oil and gas) and automobiles have seen reduced investment, suggesting a contraction ahead. A reorganization of the permitting and approval process for energy pipelines and the federal purchase of the Transmountain pipeline

connecting Alberta oil to the Pacific coast via Vancouver have upset environmentalists as well as energy firms. Two scandals, one tied to engineering firm SNC Lavalin, and the other an accusation that he sexually

**“ Conservative Party leader Andrew Scheer is the only plausible alternative prime minister and will mount a strong campaign.”**

— Christopher Sands

harassed a female journalist nearly 20 years ago, have damaged his progressive image; two prominent female cabinet ministers resigned as a result, and Trudeau forced both out of the Liberal Party. Yet, Trudeau and his able Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland fought hard for Canadian interests in the negotiation of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) that would replace NAFTA. Tense relations with the Donald Trump administration are overshadowed by the open hostility of China and Russia. Conservative Party leader Andrew Scheer is the only plausible alternative prime minister and will mount a strong campaign. Canadian voters may be frustrated enough to give him a chance, or perhaps they will decide that a change now would only lead to more uncertainty and frustration."

*Editor's note: The commentaries above were submitted to the Advisor before the emergence of images showing Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau wearing blackface and brownface makeup.*

*The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at [gkuleta@thedialogue.org](mailto:gkuleta@thedialogue.org).*

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