

Is this who we are?

by BROCK WEIR

Whenever we go to the polls, at least at the Federal level, we're invariably told it is going to be one of the most consequential of our lives.

We were told this when reasonably freshly-minted Liberal leader Justin Trudeau took on Stephen Harper in 2015, sweeping the Liberals into power with a voter turnout of 68.3 per cent. We were told this again in 2019 when Justin Trudeau took on Andrew Scheer and his Conservatives and swept back into power with a voter turnout of 67 per cent. We were told this once more in 2021 when he again took on the Conservatives, this time led by Erin O'Toole. While he swept back into power that time around, it was with a Minority Government and a voter turnout of just 62.3 per cent.

It appears by almost all estimation that we will be back at the Federal polls sometime ? any time ? in the next six to twelve months ? and while some things remain the same, other factors are certainly up in the air.

Trudeau insists he will be carrying the Liberal banner again whenever the time comes, but the reality could be quite different. Polls indicate it is increasingly unlikely Trudeau will make it four out of four. And, with even a week being a long time in politics, it's hard to say with absolute certainty just who will be on the final ballot for any party once the writ is dropped. Yet, I'm reasonably certain we're going to be told once again that that this will be the most consequential election of our lifetimes.

Recent events in the United States might give this claim a bit more heft than it's had in the last few go-rounds, but will it make a difference in voter turnout?

Who can tell these days?

On the one hand, turnout has been on a downward trajectory, on average, for several years now, and there doesn't appear, at least on first glance, any ?magic bullet? is on the horizon to turn things around.

On the other hand, it seems that, by and large, we're collectively a far angrier set of voters than we were in September of 2021, although at that point the myriad and desperate issues that have come together to make so many Canadians' blood boil was just beginning to simmer.

Come poll time, we're told it could prove cataclysmic and, at the same time,

Each time we go to the polls told that this will be the one with cataclysmic and, at the same, it often prompts something of a cross-country identity crisis, with many questioning who we are as Canadians; who we want to be; and, given the polls, the blueprint we want to follow to get as close as possible to the goal.

As angry as it feels we're collectively becoming, however, the less I'm seeing us go down the road of soul-searching.

Back in June of 2021, at a time when the remains of 215 First Nations children were found in graves associated with a former residential school in Kamloops, snapped our attention back to a grim reality in our past, another horrific event, the terrorist act in London, ON, which decimated a Muslim family simply out on a neighbourhood walk, also snapped our attention back to a grim reality in our present.

While leaders offered words of support on both fronts, the words of the NDP's Jagmeet Singh struck a particular chord with me.

'Today is a hard day,' he said. We think about what this means to Muslims and their families across the country. We have heard

people mention this, but it is so common. All of us have gone for walks with our families in this pandemic because there is nowhere to go? to think a family going for a walk could not make it home, that a casual walk around the block in our neighbourhood would be one's last, that one cannot walk safely down one's own street, we need to think about what that means for a Muslim family. Right now, people are talking to their families and saying maybe they should not go for a walk. There are people literally thinking about whether they should walk out their front door in our own country.

?Some people have said that this is not our Canada, and I think about what that means when people say this is not our Canada. I love this place, but the reality is this is our Canada. Our Canada is a place where 215 little kids were found dead in unmarked graves. Our Canada is a place where people cannot walk down the street if they wear a hijab, because they would be killed. This is our Canada. We cannot deny it. We cannot reject that because it does no one any help.'

?We have to make this a moment when we decide to do something differently as a country, when we come together to say that we are going to put an end to hatred, that we are going to put an end to violence, and that we're not going to allow political leaders to use this type of divisive hatred to gain political points. We have to be serious about this.?

Three years on, and it's clear we haven't heeded this warning ? and rhetoric has only become more heated.

This past weekend saw an expansive demonstration, organized by the Divest for Palestine Collective, in Montreal ostensibly to protest the NATO meeting held in the city. The protest, which was intended to denounce NATO itself, snowballed into a melee which saw windows broken, cars set ablaze and other non-peaceful forms of taking a position.

It comes on the heels of scores of attacks on Jewish- and Muslim-owned businesses across the country, a reflection of the current conflict between Israel and Hamas reaching far beyond its epicentre.

The weekend's events were at times called anti-Semitic by the Prime Minister, although local police said they could not make a ?correlation? on whether the demonstration was or was not.

As the conflict continues unabated, so too is our homegrown response to it, but over the last year or two, one thing I've been hearing less and less of is the response, ?This is not who we are? generally, or ?This is not who we are as Canadians.?

Is that a sign, at best, that we're collectively tired of constant introspection ? or, worse, that this is who we've decided to be?

I certainly hope it's the former, rather than the latter ? but we can't take our eyes off who we are, who we want to be, and how we want to represent ourselves to others.