

Wait...what? Party cooperation, explained

Written by Think Forward Staff
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2012 has seen a number of calls for "party cooperation" and "electoral reform," and it seems voters are uneasy with the Conservatives having 100 percent control over our federal government after winning only [39 percent](#) of the popular vote in the last election. The party has pushed hugely unpopular [policies](#) through Parliament with little support from the opposition, and this has many citizens asking how we can elect a government that represents and listens to the majority of Canadians. Party cooperation has been suggested as a possible solution to our woes, but what does the term mean?

Before we answer that question, it's important to start with the basics. Canada's system of government is a [parliamentary democracy](#) in which the federal government is "responsible" to Parliament. This means the government has to report on its decisions and the performance of its departments to Members of Parliament (MPs), and is required to answer questions on these matters from opposition MPs and its own members. The opposition parties have a duty to oppose the government by critiquing its legislation and decisions, outlining alternative policies to the Canadian public, and voting against key government bills when necessary. In this way, the opposition is meant to serve as a "check" on government power.

Sounds pretty reasonable, right? But there's a big problem with our "us vs. them" system: it [discourages](#) parties from cooperating to pass policies that reflect the wishes of most voters (the first type of cooperation). And this is made worse by our voting system, which often gives a majority of seats in Parliament to the party with the highest number of votes, even if most people voted for other parties. As a result, our politicians spend more time bickering with each other than getting things done for the people who elect them, and governments that receive less than 40 percent of the vote can force their policies on every Canadian. If you ask us, that's messed up.

Enter party cooperation (the second type). Whether it's because they [don't like](#) our current federal government, or because they want to see [positive changes](#)

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to our voting system, Canadians of all political stripes are calling on the Liberals, Greens, and New Democrats to cooperate in the next election to defeat the Conservatives and reform our voting system for the better. They note that the opposition parties share more in common with each other than they do with the Conservatives, and the Greens and NDP have long advocated for a different voting system.

So how would party cooperation work in an election? Opinions on the best approach vary, but the gist of what organizations like [Leadnow](#) and NDP MP [Nathan Cullen](#) have recommended is simple: the Liberals, Greens, and New Democrats would nominate candidates in Conservative-held ridings and allow the winners to compete in a run-off in which members of the three parties would vote. The chosen candidate would then represent their preferred party and run against the Conservative incumbent as the only progressive candidate in the riding. Bingo, bango, bongo.

It's believed that this strategy would allow our forward-thinking opposition parties to form a "coalition" majority government that represents the views of most Canadians. Then, the three parties could revamp our voting system so that parties receive a percentage of seats in Parliament that closely reflects their percentage of the popular vote, and no party could govern without a majority of support. Looking at the [countries](#) that use this type of system - usually called "proportional representation" - it's safe to say that it would force like-minded parties to [cooperate](#) in the interests of voters, and would create a new way of doing politics in Canada. Imagine that!

So, to recap: party cooperation can refer to different political parties working together to pass or defeat legislation, or cooperating before and after elections to form a government. In Canada's "adversarial" system, it'll probably take the second type of cooperation for us to see the first on a regular basis. And we want to know what you think about that. Should the Liberals, Greens, and NDP cooperate to defeat the Conservatives, and reform our voting system once in power? Would this sort of coalition government reflect the values of most Canadians? Or do you think our current government and voting system are just fine? Tell us your thoughts below!