

EXERCISE YOUR RIGHT AND PRIVILEGE

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 **Dikran Abrahamian**, Ontario, 27 June 2015

These thoughts--long in advance of the Canadian federal elections in October--are precipitated by the announcement of Norair Serengulian that he has withdrawn his candidacy for the Liberal Party nominations in the Montreal suburb of Ahuntsic-Cartierville.



Keghart.com and other media venues have previously reflected on four Canadian-Armenians aspiring for the nomination as candidates under the banner of the Liberal Party of Canada. Following the defeat of Vicken Darakjian in Laval-Les Îles, there remained three candidates, i.e. Ohannes (Hovig) Tufenkjian campaigning in Vimy riding (Laval), Viken Attarian and Norair Serengulian in Ahuntsic-Cartierville.

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On June 26, 2015 Mr. Serengulian--on his [Facebook](#) page--stated, "Today, I am announcing my withdrawal as candidate for the Liberal Party of Canada nomination contest in Ahuntsic-Cartierville. I do so with the strong conviction that, at this point in time, it is in the best interest of both the Liberal Party and my supporters. I wish the best of luck to all of the remaining six Liberal nomination candidates for Ahuntsic-Cartierville, all of whom I've had the privilege to work closely with, and that today, I feel I can call my friends. As I have done for over 20 years, I look forward to working with the eventual Liberal candidate to win the confidence of the residents of Ahuntsic-Cartierville."

In [November 2014](#) Keghart.com had pointed out the disadvantage of having two Armenian candidates within the same riding as it would split the Armenian votes and hurt both candidates. Mr. Serengulian's withdrawal provides an opportunity to coalesce the Armenian votes around one candidate and spare everyone the anxiety and agony of witnessing Armenians split into two camps with the highly-possible defeat of both candidates. Mr. Serengulian and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, which supported him, should be commended for their wise decision.

In other provinces, especially Ontario where a sizable Armenian populace exists, there are no Armenian candidates. However, the recently-formed Armenian Canadian Conservative Association (ACCA) ostensibly will favor candidates of the Conservative Party.

So far no major issues have appeared to captivate the voters. There is no lightning rod. All three major parties--the Conservatives, the New Democrats, and the Liberals--are vying for the middle class vote by offering variations of tax cuts and programs which address family matters, such as child care. Combating ISIS and terrorism feature now and then in the statements and daily appearances of leaders and representatives of the respective parties. The problem of Ukraine and "punishing" Russia has been relegated to a secondary issue. The scandal-riddled senate preoccupies commentators but whether it will hurt any party or boost the fortunes of others is a moot question yet.

Voter apathy and skepticism towards elected officials continue to plague the electorate. [Over the past two decades](#), voter turnout has dropped below the 70% mark, the lowest in 2008 (58.8%). This is far cry from over 70% average in the previous decades. The highest records were in 1958 and 1963 with 79.4% and 79.2% respectively.

Institutions and individuals who have tracked elections have stipulated that "winner takes all" system does not reflect the intent of the electorate. Near three-way tie among the traditional parties favors the one that has very slight voter advantage over the other two individually, but not collectively. In such a distribution, they claim, the party that represents a minority of the electorate with 36% to 37% of the votes forms the government. This has been cited as a reason why many citizens do not participate in elections. To redress the situation proportional representation has been recommended and advocates for it have recently become more vocal, pointing out that it has worked in democracies in Europe. The New Democratic Party and the Liberals have promised to bring some sort of proportional representation if they form the next government.

Another reason cited for skepticism is the phenomenon of third-party donations which favor a party or parties receiving huge funds that can determine the outcome of any election. They mention that the American two-party system is the result of such donations, because in the absence of large funds third parties cannot survive, let alone launch successful elections. Both Liberal and Conservative governments have introduced laws to curtail the interference of large finances into the electoral process. Their targets are the corporations and unions. However, loopholes persist. The recently launched HarperPAC was short lived after overwhelming criticism from the public, including its repudiation by the prime minister. The abrupt end of the controversial Conservative political action committee was applauded by Canada's former chief electoral officer who declared, "We were prepared to take whatever actions necessary to prevent that from continuing." All three parties will maintain the course of upholding the principle of non-interference by third parties.



If pre-election polls are any indicators of voter intent, the New Democrats and their leader Thomas Mulcair are ahead. Mulcair is an articulate former lawyer, university professor, and cabinet minister in Quebec. He is the leader of the official opposition in the current parliament. The Alberta provincial elections in May 2015 brought in a New Democrat government ending almost a half a century of Conservative rule. Whether this is a factor in the recent substantial surge of the New Democrats in opinion polls is a matter of conjecture. The New Democrats lead in the three most populous provinces (Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia). They seem to be holding their share in Quebec despite the recently reinvigorated Bloc Quebecois under the leadership of Gilles Duceppe. Poll results will definitely vary between now and October.

It's immaterial who you vote for as long as you take pride in exercising your right and privilege to make your vote count. We urge all eligible Canadian-Armenians to cast their ballot in the coming federal elections.

