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Letter published by the Canadian Muslim Forum on the eve of the 2012 Quebec provincial elections

Original address: http://www.fmc-cmf.com/fileadmin/user_upload/No_Knock_Out_in_Quebec_Election_Campaign.pdf

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Excerpt about the Quebec Liberal Party:

Calling an election in Quebec was the only exit for the Liberal government to shift the spotlight away from the students' strike and the controversial tuition increase. Jean Charest hopes to win another term that will give him the mandate to impose his views over the tuition increase and to end the students' protest in a manner that meets his economic policies.

However, the Liberals' request to drop the writ for a provincial election carried the risk of losing their status as the governing party in Quebec for the past nine years. Accusations of corruption, a large budget deficit and the controversial Bill 78 that limited fundamental civil liberties have hurt the Liberals bid for another majority government.

Excerpt about the Parti Québécois:

On the other hand, the Parti Québécois (PQ), a separatist group, entered the election campaign relying on the weakness of the Liberals and relying on votes in rural areas. In doing so, they promised painless economic policies and engaged in identity politics, placing at issue Quebec values and the French language and proposing a "charter of secularism". In her original declaration on the charter of secularism, Ms. Marois indicated that the PQ will prohibit all religious symbols from government institutions. Coming under enormous media backlash, Mrs. Marois made exceptions to her proposed charter of secularism and suggested that Crucifixes and Stars of David would be permitted. Ms. Marois did not address the hijab, worn by Muslim women or turbans worn by Sikhs, for example.

No Knock Out In Quebec Election Campaign

As September 4th, the date of Quebec provincial elections, approaches, voters are left with several choices at the polls. None of the choices, however, has presented Quebecers with a palatable vision for the future of Quebec. Indeed, advance polls indicate that the Parti Québécois' xenophobic vision of Quebec's future may become a reality.

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François Legault, the leader of the Coalition pour l'avenir du Québec (CAQ), previously served as cabinet minister in a Quebec government that was led by the PQ. The CAQ was founded by Mr. Legault in February 2011. Its policies have been described as centre-right, but the party describes itself as belonging to neither the left nor the right. The CAQ also describes itself as centre-right on economic matters and centre-left on social issues. The newly-formed party attracted "soft" sovereignists and federalists. Trying to distinguish itself from the PQ, CAQ has called for a ten-year moratorium on referenda on the issue of sovereignty. The CAQ has considered the Quebec economy and welfare to be priorities and has indicated a sense of inclusivity with respect to members of minority communities.

Two other emerging smaller parties, one on the left, Quebec Solidaire (QS), and an extreme nationalist party at the centre-left, Option National, are struggling to build a presence in National Assembly, though it appears that QS has a more realistic chance of winning one to two seats.

It is clear that a three-way battle has emerged among the three main political parties to gain voters' attention in advance of the September 4th election. Notably, despite enormous efforts on the part of the three main parties, none have been able to take a decisive lead for any prolonged period of time. Since the campaign started, polls have swung significantly in favour and against all three main parties. This suggests that none of the main parties have made a compelling case to voters.

The latest polls indicate that the PQ would win 64 seats, the Liberals would win 33 seats, the CAQ would win 26 seats and two seats would belong to QS. The threshold for a majority government is

63 seats. As such, the latest polls suggest that the PQ is on the cusp of forming a majority government. A more nuanced analysis suggests that the PQ will win between 54 and 73 seats – leaving Quebec with either a majority PQ government or a minority PQ government. The Liberals, projected to win between 27 and 43 seats, may form the Official Opposition. Though less likely according to polls, the CAQ could also form the Official Opposition as they are projected to win between 19 and 32 seats. The remainder of the seats would go to QS, projected to win one or two seats, and Option Nationale, with potentially one seat.

Samer Majzoub, president

Canadian Muslim Forum