Schism and Compromise

French student protests
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Municipal & US midterm reflection
Interview with Deborah Williams

Wed, Nov 11, 2026



CONVERGENCE

PANDÆMONIUM IN FRANCE

KIMI ZHAO & RYAN SHE
BLUE PAGE EDITOR & STAFF REPORTER



Over the past month, metropolitan France has been shaken by a wave of ongoing protests which, although at first rooted in student concerns over the state of public education, has expanded drastically into an all-encompassing, anti-government maelstrom saturated with numerous incidents of violence and disregard for the rule of law. Neighbouring nations in Europe have also been affected by the turbulence, with demonstrations spreading to states such as Italy and Spain. This article aims to provide an overview of the protests, from their inception to their current state.

The first of the demonstrations began on September 18th, 2026 in the suburb of Créteil of Paris due to student dissatisfaction with government policy. They protested against the mismanagement of the education system, a cornerstone of a nation's future, by the government of the French Republic; among the numerous factors which ignited student anger were constant teacher shortages, overly large classes of up to thirty-five students, extremely dilapidated conditions in schools and classrooms, and ten-hour school days. The Union Syndicale Lycéene, the French national student union, played a major role in articulating student demands, namely that the government address these issues. However, as is the case with nearly all instances of civil unrest, the student protests, despite being initially based on legitimate grievances, soon took a violent turn. On the 29th of September, students in Lille began vandalizing public property and attacking police forces with projectiles in disregard for the rule of law, with similar confrontations between protestors and police also occurring in Nantes, Rennes, Marseille, and Bordeaux. According to Interior Minister Laurent Nuñez, hydrochloric acid was also thrown at law enforcement. Police forces responded to attacks on them with tear gas, and, according to Nuñez, 440 students were detained due to their actions. Despite this, however, major public figures such as Bally Bagayoko, the mayor of the Seine-Saint-Denis suburb of Paris, and Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the leader of the far-left LFI ("France Unbowed") party, expressed support for the "harmless" demonstrations, which they labelled as fully justified. It is not clear whether this label excluded the violent actions of the protestors. The disorder and violence of the protests steadily increased over the following days, as clashes between demonstrators and riot police continued in Marseille, Rennes, and Strasbourg. The French government held an emergency meeting on October 1st, after which Justice Minister Gerald Darmanin claimed that the protests had been hijacked by subversive "outsiders". Darmanin also suggested that the parents of youths responsible for the vandalism of public property be made to compensate for said damage. Four hundred schools across France were closed on the 2nd of October due to the violence of the demonstrations. However, the use of violence was not limited to the demonstrators alone: government police forces have been accused of utilizing excessive force, including tear gas and batons, on protestors, many of whom were minors. On October 5th, the hand of a 15-year-old boy in the town of Lens, located near the Belgian border, was reportedly blown off by a police grenade which the boy had picked up. This incident led to the prohibition of stun-grenade use against protestors by the French police forces. Other similar injuries have been reported across the Republic. Questions surrounding the proportionality

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of the police response, including excessive force against minors, have threatened the legitimacy and legality of public order.

October 6th saw the largest number of protestors to date: according to the French interior ministry, 256,000 protestors, around a fifth of whom participated in Paris, joined the demonstration; however, the Union syndicale lycéenne, the French national student union for high school students, placed the figure at 450,000. While many demonstrators remained mostly peaceful, by October 8th, several incidents of violence, including the ransacking of a school in Saint-Etienne and the attack on a Bordeaux police station by arsonists, had occurred, which have led some critics, not without justification, to claim that the protests had been hijacked by radical far-left agitators. The French government has announced the formulation of some solutions to address the protestors' demands, including hiring new teachers, but these promises were rejected by the leaders of the demonstrations. On the other hand, Marine Le Pen, the leader of the French far-right, has pledged to slash public funding for schools if she were to come to power. At this point, 55% of French who were polled desired an end to the protests, despite 72% of them supporting the students' demands. The demonstrations continued to expand and spread over the coming days, reaching their peak on the weekend of October 17th–18th. On those dates, an estimated 500,000 to 800,000 demonstrators participated in over one hundred separate anti-government marches, whose demands had expanded from the domain of education to the general high cost of living, which the French government, in their eyes, had hitherto failed to address. The protests were marred with numerous incidents of rioting, looting, and vandalism of public buildings, sometimes through arson. Buildings victim to such hooliganism include the tourism office of Lyon and the town halls of Lille and Marseille. Over 2,000 demonstrators were arrested over the weekend, while the government denounced the violence which had infested the protests. The expansion within the movement transitioned from a dissatisfaction of the education system, to a wider expression of public discontent across Europe. Demonstrations reflected frustrations with broader economic and political direction of governmental systems.



Demonstrations continued in various cities, such as Lille and Rennes, on the 20th, while three university campuses in Rouen were closed due to the protests. By October 24th, the demonstrations had spread to neighbouring states such as Spain and Italy, with the Spanish police arresting over a hundred protestors in Barcelona and clashes between police and demonstrators occurring in Turin, Milan, and Bologna in Italy. In Paris, over 100,000 marched against the government, while calls for the ignition of further protests in other European states circulated via social media. As the great Imperial Austrian statesman Prince Metternich reportedly once quipped, "When Paris sneezes, Europe catches cold." On October 31st, the number of demonstrators partaking in protests across France numbered in the hundreds of thousands, while an estimated 70,000 participated in unauthorized demonstrations in Paris. Police forces used tear gas against violent demonstrators as tensions flared between them. The same weekend, tens of thousands of protestors marched in Germany in demonstrations organized by "Gen Z regelt" ("Gen Z takes charge" in English) against government reduction of public spending and rising costs of living. The protests rapidly descended into chaos, with numerous shops being looted by protestors and stones and Molotov cocktails being thrown at emergency service workers. Fortunately, German police forces were able to dispel the protests with water cannons and, according to the interior ministry, prevent the levels of anarchy which had been seen in Paris. The interior minister of Hesse, Roman Poseck, claimed that around a hundred "left-wing extremists" had infiltrated the protests and initiated the violence.

As of the date of submission for this article, the protests show no signs of weakening or dispersing, as localized, student-led protests in certain cities of France focused on the specific issue of the mismanagement of the education system have expanded into massive, violent demonstrations across Western Europe demanding government action against the rising cost of living, attacking private property and police forces in the process. It remains to be seen what impact these events, fuelled by genuine grievances against government incompetence yet stained with violence, hooliganism, and disregard for the law, will have on Europe and the world.

ALBERTA - WHAT NEXT?

IBRAHIM CHAUDHRY
JUNIOR EDITOR



On October 19, 2026, Albertans voted on 10 questions, including whether they want to leave Canada. However, this referendum wasn't out of the blue; many actions led up to it, but the trigger was Mark Carney winning a 4th straight term for the Liberals. Albertans have been frustrated with the government, particularly the Liberals, for many years, as they didn't believe the Liberals had a solid economic strategy and were overreaching on Alberta's powers. A public opinion study from 2019 reported that 70% of Albertans felt that the federal government treats them worse than other regions, 75% sense a lack of respect from Ottawa, and 84% have felt increasing anger towards the federal government. Section 92A of the Constitution gives provinces exclusive power over exploring, developing, managing, and conserving non-renewable resources, but the federal government was trying to overstep these powers, and a clear example of this is Bill C-69. This bill lets the federal government consider how new resource projects affect environmental issues like climate change, and this was viewed as a "Trojan Horse" by Alberta, as it would allow the federal government to override their provincial power. Alberta's Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court of Canada later forced the government to amend the legislation. Given the policies that the federal government proposed, it is clear why Alberta's government was concerned.

One policy proposed by the federal government was an emissions cap, which would have limited how much oil Alberta could produce. However, under the Constitution, this type of decision relating to provincial resources belongs to the province, making the cap an example of federal overreach. Furthermore, Alberta holds 97% of Canada's oil reserves, and the oil and gas sector makes up almost 25% of its GDP, meaning the cap would hit Alberta much harder than on other provinces. The 2015-16 Alberta recession exemplifies how those effects could spread across Canada. Prior to the recession, Canada's total internal trade was roughly $380 billion, with Alberta representing around $75 billion of that. However, after the recession, that number fell by nearly $14 billion from $380 billion, and many statistics point to Alberta's recession as the main reason. Ottawa defended the cap, saying it was necessary for the environment and was within its powers. These concerns were further exacerbated when the Liberals won a fourth straight term in 2025.

On May 5, 2025, just a week after the federal election, Premier Danielle Smith announced the Alberta Next Panel, which she chaired. She said the purpose of the Panel was to protect Alberta from what the United Conservative Party (UCP) viewed as a federal overreach, and Albertans would vote on the best ideas in a referendum in 2026. The fifteen-member panel (plus Premier Danielle Smith as the chair) focused on six core topics: immigration, a pension plan separate from the Canada Pension Plan (CPP), a provincial police force separate from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), equalization, taxes, and the Constitution. The panel expanded on previous ideas from organizations, such as Jason Kenney's Fair Deal Panel, and they tested their proposals through 10 town halls and several online surveys, though many called the surveys biased, saying they included leading questions.

The panel released a report on December 19, 2025, making seven recommendations: building Alberta's own government systems, creating an Alberta Pension Plan, researching benefits to provincial tax collection, reforming equalization, replacing the RCMP by the year 2032, gaining more control over immigration, and amending the Constitution to protect the powers of the provinces.

Later, these ideas were turned into questions, and on February 19, 2026, the questions were announced, and the referendum was set for October 19, 2026; these questions were later formally confirmed on March 31, 2026. However, in this original announcement, there were only nine questions, which didn't include the separation question. The first five questions went over immigration and voting, by giving Alberta more provincial say over the immigration levels and giving job priority to Albertans, deciding who qualifies for provincially funded programs such as health care, education, and other social supports, and lastly requiring people to show their citizenship to vote in provincial elections. Questions six through nine went over constitutional changes, such as provinces being able to choose their own superior court judges and abolishing the Senate, being able to opt out of federal programs while keeping the money, and having provincial laws take priority over federal laws when they conflict. With all of these questions combined, Alberta would have more control over its own affairs within Canada. Only the first five questions succeeded, while the others failed.

ALBERTA - WHAT NEXT?

However, there are two questions that has a major impact. First is question two, which limited public programs to citizens, permanent residents, and immigrants approved by Alberta, which passed with 52.6%. However, since it covers healthcare, education, and social services, it would directly have an impact on the daily lives of so many temporary residents, and their families wouldn't be able to use basic services. Furthermore, Alberta can largely act on this themselves without federal approval, and Smith has said that people should expect changes by the spring legislative season. However, it is important that the government defines who "Alberta-approved immigrants" are, so that it is clear who is being affected. Question nine about provincial laws taking priority over federal laws failed, with 55.5% voting no; it would have made a major impact if passed. This would have flipped one of the fundamental rules of Canadian law, being that federal law wins over provincial laws when conflicting. This could have changed disputes over energy, the environment, immigration, and much more, and it ties back to their concern about federal overreach. However, even if this passed, it would have required the Constitution to be amended and backed by at least seven provinces, which would have been very hard to do.

Question ten about Alberta leaving Canada was not originally part of the referendum. Smith had stated herself that she opposed separation and wanted to work out a solution with the federal government of Canada. However, she promised that she would add a separation question if a citizen petition gathered enough signatures, and her party later lowered the threshold. Many critics also linked this decision to pressure from the UCP, as, reportedly, over half of the members supported a separation vote. Mitch Sylvestre's "Stay Free Alberta" petition to leave Canada got about 223,000 signatures, which was more than the approximately 178,000 needed, but a court later blocked it in May, stating that Indigenous peoples were not properly consulted. However, Smith still added Question ten to the referendum for two particular reasons. Officially, she said that the court ruling should not be the reason that over 200,000 Albertans don't have their voices heard. Many people have also speculated that the separatists in the UCP threatened to remove her as party leader, and adding this question was a way to calm down her own party while maintaining control of the question. Even if most people opted to separate, it would have only initiated a process toward holding another referendum that would have deciding power on whether Alberta leaves or not.

Then, on October 19, 2026, Albertans voted in the referendum, with 70.4% of eligible voters voting on question 10, with the final results being 74.9% wanting to remain in Canada and 25.1% wanting to begin the separation process, meaning that ultimately, Alberta chose to remain in Canada. This question gave so many Albertans their first chance to weigh in with their opinion on this separation, and though clearly most Albertans want to stay in Canada, it is still significant to see that over half a million people want to begin the separation process.



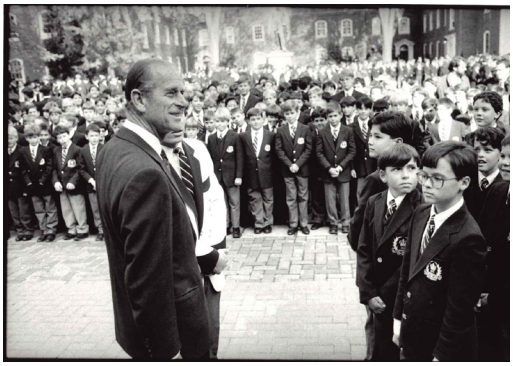
These results show the clear difference between the frustration that many Albertans feel and their desire to leave. A large number of Albertans feel that the federal government has overreached on their provincial rights, but most also prefer to mend the relationship with Ottawa, rather than leaving. Even with these results, the issue isn't fully resolved. Smith has said that there will be no more separation referendums while she is premier, but the separatists can continue petitioning, and the separatists are still active within her own party. However, one notable issue to consider is that the 25% result falls in the same range of 19%-33% as several polls conducted between 2005 and 2018. This suggests that though the officiality of this referendum drew more attention, core support for separation has stayed fairly stable. Yet, due to the recent actions of the federal government, it is safe to expect that this strong sense of federalism in Alberta may change since most people wanting to remain in Canada are expecting the federal government to cooperate and respect the rights of Albertans. Hence, this referendum is a representation of how Albertans feel today with their current expectations, but if they aren't met, the proposal of leaving may begin to resonate with more Albertans.



THE SLOW DEMISE OF OUR MONARCHY

FERRARI ZHANG
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

"The opposite of love is not hate, it is indifference" - Elie Wiesel



Prince Philip greets UCC boys, 1993

The initial takeaway of many towards recent elections in Quebec was that Canadian unity is once again in danger. The sovereigntist Parti Québécois (PQ) formed a minority government, while sovereigntist parties have a majority in the National Assembly of Quebec. This takeaway, however, can largely be construed as an exaggeration. The PQ and QS combined only won 40% of the vote, with the PQ receiving merely 28% of the vote, hardly a thundering mandate for independence. Actual support for independence is even lower, as polls show that only roughly 30% of Quebecers want independence from Canada, and according to Premier Paul St-Pierre Plamondon, of the PQ, there will not be a referendum as long as Donald Trump is in office. Indeed, the risks of political suicide are too high for St-Pierre Plamondon and his party if they were to attempt separation.

But it appears that a different long-standing Canadian institution is in danger. For the National Assembly of Quebec's swearing-in, St-Pierre Plamondon disinvited Quebec's lieutenant governor, as well as refusing to swear allegiance to King Charles III, but rather to "the people of Quebec". The official opposition, the staunchly federalist Liberal Party of Quebec (PLQ), followed suit, as well as every other party in the Assembly. This marks the first government in Canada in which allegiance to the monarchy was not declared, a major turning point in Canadian history. Additionally, St-Pierre Plamondon has stated his intention to abolish the office of lieutenant governor in Quebec. What was the reaction? Crickets. Apart from a constitutional lawyer filing an emergency order to stop the swearing-in (which, as of the date of publication, appears not to have gone through), not a single federal party leader currently in Parliament expressed any sort of strong support or opposition to this move, not even the traditionally loyalist Conservative and Liberal parties. Constitutionally, the Crown serves as the foundation for all sovereignty in the land, a more visible example being the prosecutor for all criminal cases in the judicial system. For such an important role in the constitution, it is not given much attention at all.

This is a far cry from the past. Royalism and loyalty to the monarch were powerful motivators across the political aisle: although the British flag was used as a campaign object more often by conservative parties, it was the Liberal Prime Minister William Mackenzie King who stated that it was a "self-evident national duty" to back the mother country, Britain, during World War II, shedding 45,000 Canadian lives in the process. Even after the rise of Canadian nationalism post-World War II, the monarchy and its associated symbols still provoked debate: Parliament sat for 37 days to debate the merits of replacing the Red Ensign due to the reluctance of many to replace a flag containing the Union Jack, a symbol of the monarchy. The monarchs themselves were highly popular figures. In 1979, Prince Philip received an emphatic welcome at UCC when he arrived to celebrate the sesquicentennial anniversary of the school.

Contemporarily, the personal reputation of the royal family has taken a hit, due to the passing of the widely respected Queen Elizabeth II and recent revelations that royal properties were used for visits of the late Jeffrey Epstein. But the prevailing sentiment is that of disinterest: little heed is being paid to the ceremonial roles of the King and the Governor General. Not even the looming figure of Donald Trump can motivate Canadians to consolidate behind the head of state: when King Charles III read the Speech from the Throne in 2025 as a gesture of unity, a poll by Angus Reid found that 83% of Canadians did not care about this gesture. Perhaps it has to do with the King's own inaction: he has spent just two days in total in Canada since his coronation. This trend of increasing apathy reflects upon our school community as well: 2026 marks the fifth full year UCC has gone without an official visitor, ever since HRH Prince Philip's passing in 2021. This would be inconceivable in our heavily royalist past. Even though the monarchy is still on our currency, our laws, and our symbols, it is no longer anything but paper. All of these factors culminated to produce the events of Quebec in October, when the new government finally opted out from respecting the royal family, a political convention iron-clad through centuries. In a battle between our history and indifference, indifference has won. But what comes next? No one is certain. But one thing is certain: the only thing that doesn't change is change itself.

A TALE OF TWO ELECTIONS

JACK DEUDNEY
JUNIOR EDITOR



In 1837, hundreds of farmers trudged down Yonge Street, clutching their muskets, pikes and clubs. In the dark, a volley cracked out from behind a fence. The rebels at the front fired back and dropped to the ground. The men behind them, thinking their comrades had been cut down, panicked and ran away. Days later, the government militia fired cannonballs through the rebellion's headquarters and set it ablaze. Then, the rebellion's leader fled to the United States with a £1000 bounty on his head.

That fugitive is William Lyon Mackenzie, Toronto's first mayor, and among those who offered to help put down his rebellion is a troop of boys from Upper Canada College.



Battle of Montgomery's Tavern, 1837

In the 189 years since, Torontonians have learned to settle their issues with ballots, instead of cannons, and on October 26, nearly a million cast their ballots, thus giving Olivia Chow a second term. Eight days later, in the country that Mackenzie fled to, Americans handed Democrats both the House and the Senate, with over 40 House seats flipped.

In the weeks prior to the October 26 election, polls predicted that Brad Bradford would close the gap in votes on then-incumbent mayor Olivia Chow. Despite these assumptions, Olivia Chow ended up winning 54% of the popular vote to Bradford's 41%, and 19 out of 25 wards in the city. Additionally, turnout was the highest since 2014, up from 29% in 2022 to 46%. Although this 29% was affected greatly by the pandemic, the jump in turnout still demonstrates the interest, and divisiveness in this election.

These two candidates both promised to make Toronto affordable, but they had completely different ideas about how. Chow focused on direct relief, such as promising free TTC rides after 10 trips in a week, free school lunches, and a plan to lower grocery prices. Bradford argued that the city currently can't control these issues and thus focused on cutting residents' other bills through utility and tax reductions. On safety, Bradford pledged $143 million to hire more police, while Chow promised more money for youth violence-prevention programs and promised to reopen an east-end police station by 2030.

However, for everyone's favourite candidate, Edward (Xiao Hua) Gong, he ended up with only about 3,400 votes, or roughly 0.35% of the total.

In the U.S, though, more major shifts happened, with the Democrats winning both the House and the Senate, flipping them from the Republicans. During this time, they flipped or are leading in traditionally Republican states such as Texas, Mississippi, Alaska and South Carolina, along with many others, ultimately dealing a large blow to the G.O.P. Prior to this, South Carolina had not elected a Democratic senator since 1998, and in Texas, James Talarico won his Senate race by almost 10 points, with a total shift of 25.78% compared to Trump's support in the 2024 election. This is mainly due to the many different unpopular decisions made by the Republicans, such as trade wars and the war in Iran. Trump's trade war and tariffs have become increasingly unpopular due to increased prices for many important products like steel, furniture and consumer technology. In the same vein, the war in Iran has seen increased disapproval due to higher gas prices caused by the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz. This blue wave caused some Republicans to blame their side for the losses and reflect on why they had lost. Vice-President JD

A TALE OF TWO ELECTIONS

Vance pointed to the war in Iran and claimed this is why Trump voters had switched sides, with Trump himself corroborating this. Nikki Haley, the former UN ambassador, stated that the party had listened to the voices in Washington instead of voters. Trump said he was "a little bit surprised" and argued that results would have been different if his name had been on the ballot, which shows a disconnect between voter's attachment to the party and their attachment to Trump. Nevertheless, Republicans still won some important races such as Senate seats in Florida and Wyoming, though their losses greatly outweigh their wins.

In both elections, turnout played a major role, though it is often overplayed. In Toronto, CTV commentator Scott Reid credited all of Chow's win to the higher turnout, which helped her get more votes than any mayor since amalgamation. But higher turnout is not the only reason she won. For instance, Bradford received more votes than John Tory did when he won in 2022, and Chow's 13-point lead was the narrowest for a sitting mayor since amalgamation. Additionally, an increase in voter turnout results in the election being more representative of voter's true opinions as more opinions are represented. In the U.S. young voters turned out at the second-highest rate for a midterm in 30 years, and 66% supported the Democrats.

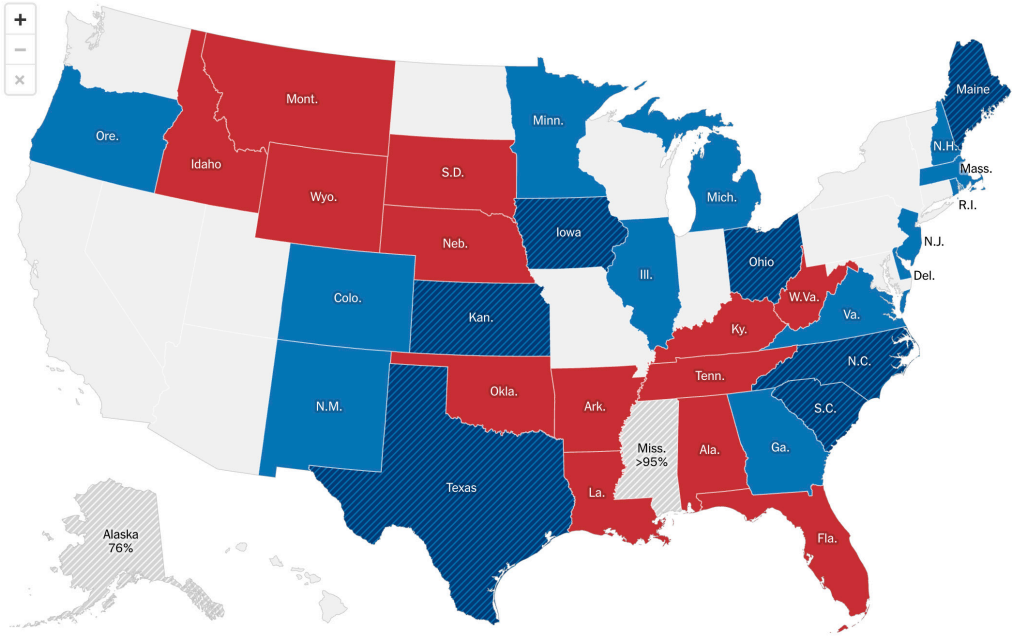
So what does this mean for the future? In Toronto, Chow enters her second term while facing serious challenges, including a projected $1.1-billion budget shortfall and the need to negotiate a new funding deal with Premier Doug Ford.

For the average Canadian, though, the U.S. midterms matter most because of the trade war. In fact, this trade war even shaped Canada's own federal election last year, when many voters turned away from Pierre Poilievre's Conservative Party for not being tough enough on Trump. Moreover, after the Democrats' midterm win, Prime Minister Mark Carney welcomed their push to repeal Trump's tariffs on Canada. However, a White House official dismissed this idea, stating that because the Democrats can't override a presidential veto, they ultimately can't repeal the tariffs. As a result, the trade war is expected to continue despite the change in Congress.

Additionally, even after taking control of Congress in January, Trump will still remain president until 2029. This is an issue for the Democrats as their gains during the midterm elections may not last, as seen when Republicans recovered in two years after similar defeats in 1992 and 2008.

Ultimately, both elections have set the course for the next few years, but with so much in the United States undecided, Toronto heads into an uncertain future.

2026 US Senate map, with flips in blue stripes. Mississippi and Alaska are to be called.





A Conversation With | Deborah Williams

"There Is A Complete Lack of Transparency in the TDSB"

FERRARI ZHANG & ANDRE CANTO CUBAS
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF & BLUE PAGE EDITOR



TDSB Trustee Deborah Williams (above)

In light of the recent municipal election and news of continuing provincial supervision of the TDSB, *Convergence* interviewed trustee Deborah Williams on her perspective of the provincial supervision, as well as her vision for the TDSB.

Williams currently serves as the TDSB trustee for Ward 9, whose boundaries include Toronto St. Paul's and therefore all TDSB schools adjacent to UCC. She was re-elected this year with 40.6% of the vote against seven other challengers, including *National Post* journalist Tasha Kheiriddin.

Due to the provincial supervision, she does not have any power and is prohibited from engaging with her constituents or speaking to the media via means such as e-mail. Therefore, this interview was conducted via telepathy and under her personal capacity. As a disambiguation, her views may not necessarily coincide fully with that of *Convergence*.

What is the biggest way Doug Ford's takeover of the TDSB has affected you and your ward?

I think the greatest impact and effect has been towards the transparency and the accountability of the board. Right now, there's a complete lack of transparency. The decisions are being made behind closed doors by the minister's appointed supervisor. The ability of the community to raise their concerns and have their concerns heard and addressed by the board has been effectively nullified. At the very beginning of supervision, all of our community advisory committees were paused. Those are committees that give the opportunity for the community to have input and make recommendations to the school board on issues like early childhood education, which was one of the committees I was trustee co-chair on, the Early Years Community Advisory Committee, as well as other committees such as the French Student Achievement Community Advisory Committee and the Parent Involvement Advisory Committee (PIAC). All of the ability for folks to see and participate in those committees was cut. The live streaming was cut immediately. I was actually sitting in one of the meetings when I heard the recording had been stopped. And that's really had an impact on the transparency of decisions that are being made, which, for me, it's effectively silencing any critique or dissenting views on what's happening, the actions that the province is taking with regard to not just the Toronto District School Board, but also the other 8 school boards under supervision

Minister of Education Paul Calandra is prohibiting most forms of public communication between TDSB trustees and their ward. What is your view on this, and how are you planning to engage with parents?

When we went under supervision, community members and parents continued to reach out to me. So when I respond, again, as I gave the disclaimer before our conversation, I speak to them in my personal capacity, using the experience and knowledge that I have of how the board works and how our processes and our policies work. I don't know how anyone is going to stop my freedom of association. If I'm walking on the street, and a constituent or a parent walks up to me and asks me a question, I'm not going to say, "no, sorry, I can't talk to you" because the Premier or the Minister of Education says I can't talk to you. That makes no sense to me. So, even though there are confines and constraints that are attempted to be put on me and other trustees, you can't silence my freedom of speech. If the community invites me to come and speak to them in my capacity as a community member with the experience that I have as a school board trustee, I welcome those opportunities. I welcome the opportunity to engage in conversation. And I think it's a crying shame that the education minister doesn't likewise invite those conversations and collaboration and discussions even prior to making decisions. Based on what I've seen and heard, the course of action that's been taken didn't involve any real communication and conversations with the stakeholders, with trustees, with parents, families, community members, etc. For me, it's always important to bring

A Conversation With | Deborah Williams

"There Is A Complete Lack of Transparency in the TDSB"

all of the stakeholders together, especially if you have different views on something. That's when you have to have those deep conversations. To get to solutions that work. The current direction that the province and the education minister is taking is leading us down the path of a really blatantly undemocratic outcome. We've just had a recent municipal election here in Toronto. The voters made their voices heard with their votes. Let's have that process be honoured and respected. And those communities deserve the representation that they elected. There's no justification for the supervision going on. When the TDSB was put under supervision back on June 27th, 2025, the reason was probable deficits. The province is now in control of balancing the budget. The budget still hasn't been balanced. Before we went under supervision, our board proposed a two-year plan to get us out of the deficit. The minister rejected that plan, and placed the board under supervision. Over a year later, for this school year, the budget that was put forward by the supervisor had a $15 million deficit. So now the minister and the province are in the driver's seat. They've got the wheel of our education system. And I don't see any of these deficits being dealt with. Again, this keeps pointing back and circling back to the issue of the chronic underfunding and the whole— that not just the Toronto District School Board, every school board across the province is facing similar challenges.

There is data showing that violent incidents are on the rise in the TDSB. Many, including your main election opponent, feel that the current disciplinary



schemes are not tough enough. What do you think are some ways the TDSB can be made safer?

I think that what you were referring to was some commentary and opinions around bullying. The issues and challenges go beyond the issue of bullying. Some of our students have special education needs. Some of our students need one-on-one support. When you pack a classroom full of thirty-plus students and you have maybe two or three who actually may need one-on-one support, you are setting the system up for failure. For example a young student maybe six or seven years old with self-regulation challenges needs the support, which would come if we were properly funded for those needs. But instead of supporting that student, you just have them dysregulate by throwing a pair of scissors across the room, for example, or just get up and walk out of the classroom. So when you talk about violence in the classroom or violence in the school, I challenge you to reframe that into unmet student needs. These are children. These are children who need support, children that need to be provided with the best quality education that we can give them so that they can reach their full potential. In my view, if adults have to go as far as to handcuff a six-year-old child, you have failed. If that happens in any of our schools, I challenge you to reframe that from a violent six-year-old or seven-year-old to a child who needs support. High school teachers would have conversations with me about how they have like thirty-plus students in their class. Post-pandemic, some of those students were struggling. They struggled through the pandemic. We came out of the pandemic, they needed to catch up. There are high school teachers telling me how challenging it is for them to get around to all of those thirty-five and support those who need to catch up because they need more time. Those are all of the challenges that have been faced by our students, by our teachers. I would hear from teachers and students about their struggles with mental health from the isolation they felt going through the pandemic. Now they're back with their peers and acting out because they are stressed out.

So for me, all of that is evidence that the "tough on crime" approach and the introduction of policing in our schools is not the solution that we need. If a student had behavioral challenges, you need psychologists and social workers and professionals to address those needs rather than have them fall by the wayside, get encompassed by a criminal justice system, and then their life just takes a downward trajectory. We need to give them opportunities. Students in some of the areas that I represent go to school in challenging parts of the city. Younger students may need after-school programming, and as they get older, what they need is opportunities for mentorship, opportunities for paid internships that lead them into productive activities and productive opportunities that lift them up. My role in public service is to lift our youth up. That's what we need to do.

A Conversation With | Deborah Williams

"There Is A Complete Lack of Transparency in the TDSB"

Only 52 percent of grade six students and 56 percent of grade 9 students scored at or above the provincial standard in math in EQAO testing, as of 2025. Why is this, and how will you address this problem?

Well, again, it's back to the support that the students need. You know, often those individualized supports. For me, those standardized tests are like a snapshot in time. The real work needs to happen daily in the classroom. The real work needs to happen with ongoing assessment and support. So those EQAO results could be better. But this is just a snapshot. I believe it needs to go deeper than that. And for some students, those tests are stressful. We need to account for that fact as well.

But again, there needs to be more ongoing and deeper data collection and assessment rather than the emphasis on that snapshot in time. That's been my view of the EQAO for many years. Some improvements can look like smaller class sizes. That would allow the teachers to actually give more time one-on-one for students, which is challenging when the class has 30-plus students. There's also peer supports as they get older. In the younger grades, I've seen things like Reading Buddy, which has a dual benefit for the older students. It allows them to engage and mentor their younger, younger students. Support can also come through community engagement as well, such as literacy and numeracy programs.

Between all of that, there has to be data collection and the assessment of the impact that those kinds of programs have. So those are like a couple of specific, very specific examples. But there's so many different ways to support students. And I know like community and partnerships with community and nonprofits, they have filled the gap in some communities. But I always circle back to the need for the province to invest in our public education system. It needs to be seen as an investment, not something that you have to keep cutting and trimming.

What's your message to the UCC Community?

Folks are free to make their own choices while navigating their educational journey. But show your solidarity to our public education system because the majority of students are in public education. It's got to be high quality. It's got to be well funded because that serves our society well.

Toronto District School Board

Education Quality and Accountability Office

EQAO

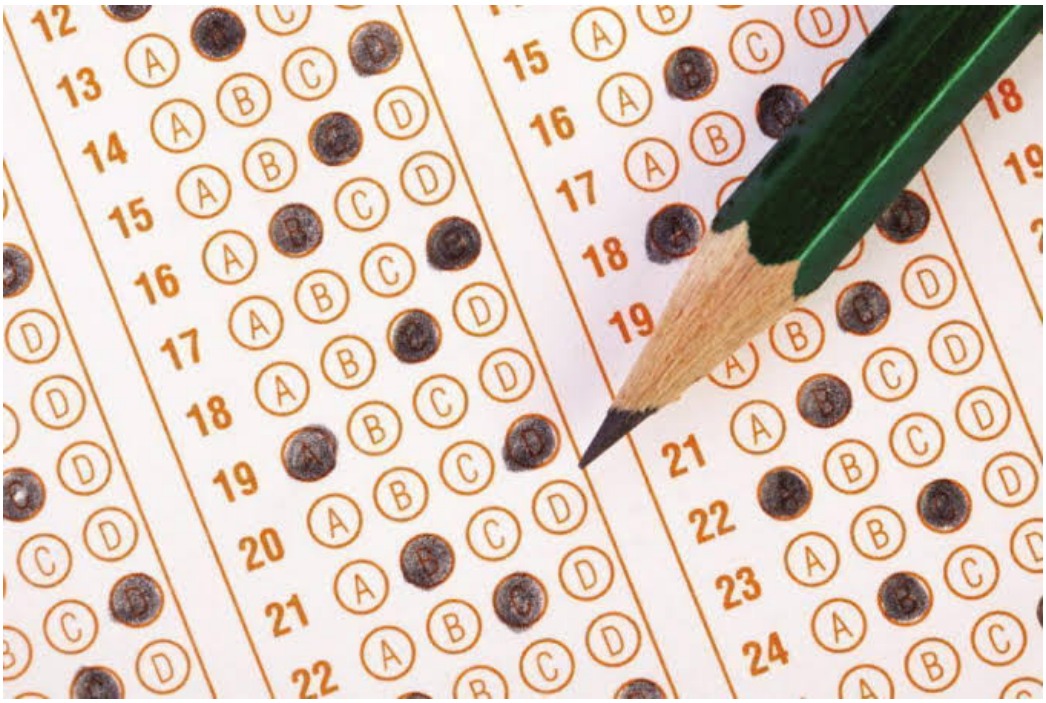




IMAGE CREDITS

Special thanks to Ms. Khaleeli of the UCC Archives for providing the image of Prince Philip's visit to the school in 1993.

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A Conversation With Deborah Williams
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Global News - TDSB looks to expand community partnerships to tackle school safety

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