

In Canada's 2025 federal election, is anyone paying attention to rural communities?

By [The Canadian Press](#)

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A voter arrives to cast his ballot at a rural polling station in Cremona, Alta. on April 16, 2019. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Jeff McIntosh

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The 2025 federal election is characterized by anxiety, primarily driven by the actions and economic consequences of United States President Donald Trump's agenda.

As tariffs and threats to Canadian sovereignty continue, it is little wonder why election promises have so far focused on jobs, tax breaks, infrastructure reinvestment, trade and military spending.

While sovereignty and rising costs of food, energy and critical minerals are key election issues, rural Canada has not been the focus of any of the major political parties.

The importance of rural Canada

Rural Canada is home to roughly one in five Canadians. It's also home to the vast majority of the Canadian land base, including watersheds and food sheds — geographical areas that supply food to the population — as well as energy sources, critical minerals and forests.

As Canada faces increasing economic uncertainty, rural areas will play a critical role in supplying essential resources. Ensuring they benefit from this role requires strong place- and evidence-based rural development programs and policies from the federal government, whoever leads it after April 28.

Complete coverage of the 2025 federal election

Significant challenges — from trade wars to climate change — impact every community across Canada. However, what this looks like and how this is felt on the ground is different across rural Canada. All too often government policies and programs fail rural citizens and communities in one of two ways:

They don't account for the impact of rural Canada. This means policies and programs fail to consider how rural realities can interfere with their intended implementation. They don't account for the impact of policies and programs on rural Canada. These failures are the unintended impacts that "place-blind" policies and programs have on rural communities.

Creating regional disparities

These policy failures are driven by an urban bias in federal policies and programs. This bias is a result of limited or obscured rural data and the concentration of policy and decision-makers in Ottawa. These policy failures contribute to larger problems, like Canada's growing issue with regional disparities, often along rural-urban lines. This is nothing new.

Rural Canada has a long history of being misunderstood and poorly represented in federal policy. Past and current federal efforts to include rural Canada in policymaking have been sporadic or uneven.

A national Rural Secretariat was established in 1996, and a “rural lens” was established in 1998. Both had the express purpose of providing leadership and co-ordination related to rural and remote areas within the federal government. These programs were then dismantled by the former Conservative government in 2013.

In 2019, the Liberal government established Canada’s first minister of rural economic development. Alongside this came a strategy for rural Canada, new tools to incorporate rural considerations and the Centre for Rural Economic Development, which included regionally located rural advisers.

However, as of 2025, these efforts have been weakened or ignored. The minister for rural economic development is now the minister of agriculture and agri-food and rural economic development. The Centre for Rural Economic Development — now housed in a separate ministry from the minister — has quietly ended its regional rural adviser program.

The risks of a sector-based focus

These examples illustrate the ongoing uncertainty of how realities of rural Canada are integrated — or not — into federal policies and programs. Rural Canada is often lumped in with a particular sector, including agriculture or natural resources. The de facto rural policy then becomes sector-focused.

This is a problem, because rural communities often have little or no power over resource development decisions and are largely at the mercy of companies that can simply pack up and leave.

A sector-based approach also ignores the multiple, complex and integrated needs and opportunities across rural places. The 2024 State of Rural Canada illustrates this complexity of rural issues. It offers recommendations to policymakers, one of which is the development of a comprehensive, cross-sectoral strategy that recognizes the diversity of rural Canada and provides a framework for co-ordinated action.

The need to shift to integrated, place-based approaches over sector-based is echoed in findings from research conducted both in Canada and internationally.

Based on our research across rural Canada, we support these findings. We also support the recent statement by the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation, which calls on the federal government to implement the following actions:

Revitalize the rural lens;

Strengthen the Centre for Rural Development;

Deliver rural development in rural Canada for rural Canada.

No vision?

Rural Canada is vital to the future of Canada. It is critical that all political parties campaigning for the federal election have a platform that meaningfully includes rural Canada — and refrain from focusing only on sectors that operate in rural Canada.

The Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation recently released a list of questions that people can pose to their potential member of Parliament.

No. 1 on this list is: “What is your party’s vision for rural and northern Canada?” And yet few of the parties are answering or tackling that question during the ongoing election campaign.

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