

Stop the games and get back to work. That's the message voters have sent to party leaders ^[1]

Author: Star Editorial Board

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EXCERPTS

Stop the games and get back to work. In a nutshell, that seems to be what Canadian voters have told the leaders of the federal parties.

After 36 days of campaigning and \$610 million of our tax dollars, the electorate appears to have returned a new Parliament that looks an awful lot like the old one.

At this writing the votes are still being counted. But all indications are we'll have another Liberal minority government in Ottawa. Justin Trudeau will still be prime minister. And the parties will in all probability have roughly the same number of seats they had before the election was called on Aug. 15.

What was the point? Maybe not much. The Liberals had a functioning minority government before Parliament was dissolved, supported on key issues by the NDP. That's what it seems they'll have when Parliament returns.

It was a cynical, unnecessary call by the Liberals, who pulled the trigger because they thought they could turn their minority into a majority. They fell well short of what they were looking for. Their opponents will continue to accuse them, with justice, of wasting public money. But the bottom line is they, not those opponents, are going back to the government benches.

And, despite everything, the outcome isn't a bad one.

We know that minority government can be made to work. Indeed, we've just had a 23-month demonstration of that proposition and there's no reason it can't continue.

And if the parties know what's good for them, they'll make it work. After this exercise the public will have zero appetite for another campaign for a long time to come. Any leader who toys with the idea of calling another election before it's absolutely necessary will be punished severely.

So it's up to the parties to make the new House of Commons productive, and the Liberals can justly claim that they have a mandate to push ahead on the key issues that differentiated them from the Conservatives.

On fighting the pandemic, there was a clear divide between the Liberals, who support vaccine mandates, and the Conservatives. And now that all major provinces are on board with taking aggressive measures to containing COVID, Ottawa should lead a renewed push in that direction.

On climate change, voters also had a clear choice and the Liberals offered the best plan. They need to continue along the path they set out in the campaign, raising the country's targets on reducing greenhouse gases.

And on child care, the Liberals were making real progress before the campaign on reaching deals with the provinces for a national, \$10-a-day system. With support from the NDP they need to continue that drive and finally put make such a program a reality.

For the Conservatives, the result will be awfully disappointing. After the 2019 election they dumped Andrew Scheer as leader almost immediately. But they should think hard before forcing Erin O'Toole out. He started the difficult process of pulling his party back toward the political centre and Conservatives would be smart to give him more time to continue the job.

Voters also sent a sharp message to the smaller parties. The Green vote is significantly down, no doubt due to turmoil at the top of the party, and it appears leader Annamie Paul will trail badly in her riding. She didn't deserve the treatment she got at the hands of her own party.

And it was unclear last night what level of support the People's Party of Canada will get, but early results suggested it will be less than some opinion polls suggested. And leader Maxime Bernier lost his own riding, so the party won't have a foothold in the Commons. That is a result for which we should all give thanks.

But for now, the people have spoken. They've told all the parties and leaders to make the best of the hand they've been dealt. Go back to Ottawa and this time, for heaven's sake, make it work.

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