

Who will try to make minority government work?

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If it's not too late, could someone collecting an MP's paycheque tell me how minority government can work?

Here's the deal. Canadians have voted in 2004, 2006 and 2008. Each time we've elected a minority government. And as for the latest spate of opinion polls, a 2009 election would return another minority government. So while it's clearly not the outcome either Stephen Harper or Michael Ignatieff would prefer, it's what Canadians have elected. And polls suggest that Canadians are not unhappy with minority governments.

When it comes to democratic reforms, politicians of all stripes put on their suit of self-interest and talk about electoral maps, election financing, proportional representation, anything but a reform of what happens between elections.

As citizens, reforms to the election process are a distant second to the importance of how politicians actually govern. The evidence shows that the gaps between ideological flavours in Canadian politics are narrow, sort of like the differences between iPhones and BlackBerries.

Here's what doesn't work in a minority government. The prime minister governs like he has a majority. The leader of the opposition concludes another election is needed to overturn the results of the last election. At \$300 million a pop, elections represent a non-productive form of economic stimulus.

So, Mr. Ignatieff, if you succeed in causing a new election and you become the prime minister of a minority government, what will you do? And Mr. Harper, you've tried governing like you had a majority, tried bullying the opposition and more recently tried ignoring collaboration, appointing hacks to the Senate, embraced deficit financing, pump-priming the economy and bailing out failed industries. Not exactly what Preston Manning had in mind.

How about a different focus on actual democratic reforms? How about some straight talk about engaging Canadians in a search for solutions to public policy issues? How about giving Canadians and MPs a genuine opportunity to develop a legislative agenda? How about restricting non-confidence motions to the budget? How about using new technologies to engage citizens in the legislative process?

Imagine this. Imagine an election campaign where political parties promised how they would make government work? Imagine a campaign where voters were given a choice about the way a prime minister would put governing at the centre of its purpose.

In Canada, our political leaders are all rooted in the values of mainstream Canadians. Whatever differences do exist are, of course, important. However, the goal of democracy is not to elect the most popular politicians, but to have governments that translate political will into political action. So, please, can someone cashing an MPs cheque tell me how they will make minority governments work?

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