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Where has federal Green Party gone?

A recent Nanos Research poll pegs Green support at 5.9 per cent, up from 4.6 per cent in October, but well below the double digit range they usually enjoy. This may be cause for concern.

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TORONTO—One year ago in these same pages, I wrote a column titled, *It's Closing Time for the Greens*. In it, I argued that the Green Party of Canada would "fade away from federal politics" because of the first-past-the-post electoral system; the impending indifference towards Elizabeth May from Liberals; and the possibility of a North American climate change deal.

Let's review these three reasons, among others, to ascertain the Green party's outlook.

One, absent a geographic concentration of support, the FPTP system will continue to constrain the ability of Green candidates to get elected.

Two, Liberal Leader Michael Ignatieff, unlike his predecessor, has indeed completely ignored the Green Party and its leader. This should come as no surprise, especially given the current state of affairs in the Liberal party. It's hard for Ignatieff to help May stay afloat when his own party's ship is sinking.

Three, despite no North American (or global) climate change deal, Prime Minister Stephen Harper has done a great job professing his desire for a greenhouse gas emissions reduction strategy, as long as all countries, developed and developing, are included—an unlikely proposition right now.

Harper's insistence on the need to protect Canada's fragile economy from an unfair global agreement will serve to strengthen his core message among likely Conservative voters. In addition, once the conversations conclude in Copenhagen, environmental issues will likely fall further from the minds of most Canadians. This may leave little room for May to grow support for her party.

In fact, the Greens will have a tough time maintaining the level of support attained in the 2008 general election if the Nov. 9 by-elections are any indication. The results from these four ridings (two in Quebec and one each in British Columbia and Nova Scotia) show the average Green candidate won three per cent of the vote—2,898 of 95,598 total votes.

It's telling that so few people decided to go Green the first time they had the opportunity to pass judgment on the government's performance.

In contrast, Green candidates captured 4.6 per cent of the vote in these same ridings last

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year, representing a statistically significant difference. (It should be noted that May endorsed former Independent MP Bill Casey and therefore did not run a Green candidate in the riding of Cumberland—Colchester-Musquodoboit Valley.)

A recent Nanos Research poll pegs Green support at 5.9 per cent—up from 4.6 per cent in October, but still well below the double digit range they usually enjoy. These numbers may be cause for concern, especially considering that Greens typically perform better in polls than they do on election night.

Additional evidence, albeit anecdotal, shows that May and her party have faded from the political radar.

A recent Google news search of "Elizabeth May" returned just 83 results. In contrast, a "Stephen Harper" search got 6,794 results; Michael Ignatieff – 1,017; Jack Layton—432. Not a scientific study, granted, but successful politicians need publicity to push their message, and May just isn't getting any.

Moreover, Green Party spokespeople are rarely invited to participate on political panels, such as those on *Power Play with Tom Clark* or *Power & Politics with Evan Solomon*.

The media paying no attention to Greens may continue during the writ period, which has been the case historically. This is especially true given that the novelty of May—and her alliance with the federal Liberals—is no more.

With their continued absence from the House of Commons, it seems that the future of the Green Party is less than rosy, just 13 short months after its best finish in a general election, ironically.

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