

ELECTION 2008 

Election Results

155 Seats for Majority

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Conservative Party	Liberal Party	New Democrats	Green Party	Bloc Québécois
Seats 143	Seats 76	Seats 37	Seats 0	Seats 50
38 % Pop. Vote	26 % Pop. Vote	18 % Pop. Vote	7 % Pop. Vote	10 % Pop. Vote

Green Party could win seats if May changed tactics

Richard Foot, Canwest News Service

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Green Party leader Elizabeth May.

Sandor Fizli/Reuters

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The morning after the big smackdown - after a wave of public outrage forced Prime Minister Stephen Harper, NDP Leader Jack Layton and a group of TV executives to capitulate and allow Elizabeth May into the leaders' debates - Ms. May stood on a street corner in her home riding of Central Nova, greeted like a conquering hero.

Passersby patted her on the back, and drivers honked their horns or cheered from their windows.

Many had no intention of voting for the Green party, but like others across the country, all were offended that powerful forces had tried to exclude Ms. May from the debate, and their grassroots anger gave the Greens an early campaign boost like no other.

In a matter of days, this David-and-Goliath affair had transformed an upstart affiliation on the fringes of the election into a legitimate, mainstream party - a status it is unlikely to yield even if the party fails to win a seat on Tuesday.

"The fact that they got into the leaders' debates is a major stepping-stone for the Green party," says Nik Nanos, an Ottawa pollster and political watcher. "It allowed them to morph from a movement into a party. Elizabeth May changed the rules about who

belongs in the debates. And she became a winner just by being there on the platform with the other leaders."

Without money to mount an airborne campaign, Ms. May kept her name in the news by riding the rails from Vancouver to Halifax, a "whistle-stop tour" notable for its novelty, that emphasized her down-to earth style and took her to small, railway towns never visited before by a campaigning federal leader.

The environmental activist and lawyer also proved her effectiveness as a communicator, explaining in simple terms the purpose of a Green tax shift - a feat that eluded Liberal Leader Stephane Dion.

"We tax the pollution, and we take the taxes off families," she said in announcing her plans for a national carbon tax.

There have been missteps along the way. Ms. May continues to be dogged by the controversy over a 2007 television statement in which she appeared to say that Canadians are "stupid."

She also has been forced to defend, again and again, the deal she struck with Mr. Dion not to run a Green candidate in his riding in return for the Liberals not contesting in Central Nova.

Ms. May has campaigned earnestly in the riding, but few expect her to pick up enough Liberal votes there to knock off the longtime Conservative incumbent, Defence Minister Peter MacKay.

Nationally, polls suggest support for the Green party is tracking between 10-13% - more than double what the party received in the 2006 vote - but still not enough to assure the election of any Green MPs on Tuesday.

Observers say Green hopes for a breakthrough in the House of Commons are hobbled by the fact that the party, unlike previous newcomers such as Reform, has no regional base from which to grow.

Even though British Columbia seems a natural place for the Green party to focus its resources and energies, it has instead chosen to represent itself as a national movement.

"Elizabeth May is the party's only star candidate," says Nanos. "She should be in a riding that is most ripe for a Green win.

"If the party is really serious about winning a seat, then next time, they should pick two or three winners - a couple of ridings in Toronto and Vancouver - and put all their resources to bear there."

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