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Federal election not needed now

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Editorial - Back in 1969, the Rolling Stones' Mick Jagger belted out the lines, "You can't always get what you want, but if you try sometimes, well you might find, you get what you need."

Prime Minister Stephen Harper should learn these lyrics, even embrace them, for it's a tune Canadian voters keep singing.

In fact, if anyone is getting what they want, it's the Canadian electorate, who are pretty good at it.

When Canadians wanted to punish the Liberals, but weren't yet ready to trust Harper, they gave the Paul Martin government a minority. When they were sick of the sponsorship scandal, they turfed the Liberals in January 2006, but they weren't yet ready to give the Conservatives a majority, so they gave him a test run.

Recent polls indicate Canadians are quite determined to maintain the current minority government, which must frustrate Harper intensely. After all, that 1,500-square-metre war room the Conservatives unveiled earlier this month is just sitting there, empty and inviting. One-hundred new desks, computers plugged in and humming. It must be so tempting to drop the writ.

The magic number for a majority government is 40 per cent voter support. The Conservatives just can't get there. A Decima Research poll published in mid-April put Tory support at 34 per cent nationally, while the Liberals polled 31 per cent, the NDP 15, the Green party 11 and the Bloc Quebecois seven.

An Ipsos Reid poll, conducted for CanWest News Service and Global National and published this weekend, put Tory support at 39 per cent, the Liberals at 29 per cent, the NDP at 16, the Bloc at nine and the Greens at seven per cent.

In February, an SES Research/Osprey Media poll found that 53 per cent of Ontario voters want to keep a minority government, while 37 per cent favoured a majority. Eleven per cent were unsure.

And of those who voted in a Sudbury Star online poll earlier this month, 75.8 per cent said no election was needed, 18.5 per cent favoured an election and 5.7 per cent were unsure.

Poll pundits have offered fuzzy explanations why the Conservatives can't hit majority territory. Decima CEO Bruce Anderson said voters are simply satisfied with the status quo, so they're not interested in hitting the polls again.

SES Research president Nik Nanos said after the February poll Canadians are still not ready to trust either major party with a majority.

And now pundits are citing voter contentment, electoral fatigue or just that's they way the polls bounce.

If you're a Conservative strategist, those numbers aren't solid enough to blatantly orchestrate a downfall of your own government.

The most likely suggestion is that Canadians are using a minority government to ensure their views on Afghanistan are heard. Recent polls have shown Canadians want their troops pulled out of Afghanistan when their extended mission ends in February 2009.

The Conservatives have hinted at a longer mission, but the high number of Canadian casualties there - 54 soldiers and a diplomat since 2002 - and the perception that other NATO countries are not willing to pull their weight, have tested Canadians' patience.

The minority government is possibly what Canadians are using to force the Conservatives' hand on the issue. Call another election, and another minority government is likely, though not necessarily a Conservative one. Don't call an election, and that's just fine with voters.

It's a tune that likely grates on Harper, but if he isn't a Jagger fan, he can always sing along with the London Bach Choir, who perform on the song. Canadians, seem to like the tune and, for the meantime, Harper gets what he needs - the keys to 24 Sussex Dr.

What do you think? Send us your opinion in a Letter to the Editor at 33 MacKenzie St., Sudbury, P3C 4Y1, or fax it to 674-6834 or e-mail it to letters@thesudburystar.com

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