

A race to the bottom



By Nate Smelle

In the wake of every election, political scientists and journalists traditionally devote a week or so, making sense of the statistics spit up by the electoral process. Studying the tale of the tape, we collect data regarding the behaviour of the electorate in each riding and across the country, province, municipality, or whatever district is up for grabs. This information is then compared to the data arising from previous elections to give us an idea of where we stand as voters on the issues that matter to us most. After chewing on these stats and letting the flavours soak into our collective pallet, we are left with a hint of the future we are aiming for as an electorate. Well, I have been gnawing on the numbers served up by the recent election, and from the stale taste still lingering on my tongue, it is clearly time for us to re-imagine our political menu in Ontario. With only 43 per cent of eligible voters in the province participating in the process on June 2, the 2022 election will be remembered as a low point in Canadian democracy. On the bright side, the record low turnout by Ontarians at the polls sends a powerful message that must not be ignored if we value our democracy and want to preserve it. While the more than three week long occupation of the nation's capital by the Canadian branch of 'Make America Great Again' clan may not have succeeded in overthrowing our government this past winter, it did expose a growing level of frustration with politics as usual among our population. Revisiting my photos of the convoy in February over the weekend, I was reminded of how the 'freedom' fighters in Ottawa were carrying signs that placed the Progressive Conservative Premier of Ontario Doug Ford in the same sinking ship as Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. The one that got my attention this past Saturday night read, 'F*** Cherry Cheesecake! How about pork fried Doug!?' It wasn't the most articulate statement ever. Nor am I sure why exactly the creator is so angry at cheesecake. However, for me, the big takeaway from this artistic encounter in the city was the significant amount of time invested by the artist in drawing a pig with Doug Ford's face roasting on an open fire. Watching the news when I got home the next day, I could not believe my eyes and ears. During a live report where members of the convoy were shouting over a reporter, screaming that Doug Ford and Justin Trudeau were in cahoots with the mainstream media as part of a socialist conspiracy to take over Canada. Disappointed that I didn't get the memo, I laughed when I thought about how terrifying a socialist conspiracy would be for Canadians. Jesus! Can you imagine having to suffer through the perils of free universal health care, dental care, pharmacare, or post-secondary education? Next thing you know billionaires would be forced to pay their fair share and everyone would have access to affordable housing and clean drinking water. Anyways, that's a different sort of tangent that we will have to explore at another time. Witnessing the elevated, although misguided, passion of those taking over Ottawa's downtown core from Jan. 29 until Feb. 21; and the heightened level of rage directed towards Ford from a faction of the population that usually vote blue no matter who is on the ticket, I expected to see more of a fractured vote coming in from the right last Thursday night. Despite the presence of the far-right Ontario Party and New Blue Party shaving a few thousand votes off the PC's final tally, enough right-wingers forgave Ford for his socialist tendencies of late, to hand him another 'majority.' I place the word 'majority' in quotation marks because as we all know, he was elected by a minority of Ontarians, with only 4,683,796 of the 10,760,433 eligible voters in the province casting a ballot in the 2022 election. Considering the actual population of Ontario is upwards of 14.5-million people, one doesn't need to whip out their abacus to figure out that the priorities of the majority of people in Ontario will not be a priority for our government over the next four years. Usually this outrage comes from the left. 'Climate Action Now!' 'Black Lives

Matter!? ?Stop the War on the Poor!?! ?No Cuts to Education!?! ?Blah, blah, blah!?! These are the slogans we have grown use to seeing at protests over the past two decades. More and more, this sentiment of looking after one another that we have grown accustomed to seeing in those who step forward to represent us is disappearing. Instead, we are growing more complacent with the practice of electing officials who blatantly value their personal greed above the needs of the many. People want to have their voices heard. When their priorities are not meaningfully addressed by the government of the day, they become outraged and demand change. When they are systematically ignored by the political process for the sake of individual and party-oriented political gain, one cannot help but feel hopeless. A big part of the problem with our current ?first past the post? electoral system in Canada makes itself known in the language we use to describe and analyze an election. For example, when discussing elections in Canada political scientists and journalists often describe the ?race? and ?results? in the same terms one hears when wandering around the horse track. As entertaining as a political campaign can be, choosing who will lead us through the difficult times ahead affects the lives of more people than any horse race or sporting event every could. If we don't want the majority of Ontarians ? the true majority, who is mostly left of centre politically ? to lose interest in politics, we need to welcome proportional representation and rethink the way we approach choosing a government.