

The two-party stranglehold is broken

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Lead Editorial

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He-can-go! Scott Morrison's defeat came at the hands of former Liberal voters who, among other issues, were disgusted at his treatment of women like Christine Holgate (who famously wore white to her 2021 hearing on the advice of fashion designer Carla Zampatti, the mother of the new teal independent Member for Wentworth Allegra Spender). Photos: AFP/Saeed Khan; screenshot

The extraordinary 2022 federal election confirms that the stranglehold of the two-party system over Australian voters has been broken. More than 31 per cent of voters gave their first preference to a candidate not from one of the major parties, and Anthony Albanese's Labor Party won on a very low primary vote of just 32.79 per cent. Perhaps the most stunning figures record the historic collapse in the vote of the Liberal Party: whereas in 1996, when John Howard won government, the Liberal Party received 4,210,689 votes, or 38.69 per cent, this year the party only received 2,829,719 votes—23.82 per cent. How the mighty have fallen.

Although the Albanese government will almost certainly have a majority in the House of Representatives, thanks to the magic of preferential voting, the new Parliament will have massive numbers on the cross benches in both the House and Senate. There will be at least 15 independents, Greens and other minor parties in the House, including the five new "teal" independents who displaced leading Liberals, including Treasurer Josh Frydenberg, in what were formerly the safest Liberal Party seats in the country—Frydenberg was just the fourth Member for Kooyong, including Sir Robert Menzies, since 1934. While the teal independents, all professional women, won on the promise of action on climate change and a federal ICAC, they also attracted the support of traditional Liberals thoroughly disgusted with the behaviour of Scott Morrison and his Liberal henchmen on issues including the treatment of women and refugees.

The Citizens Party approached this election as we always do, with a view to using the campaign to educate voters on the policy debates we have already instigated, especially the post office bank solution. This time, our election campaign employed the new technology of YouTube advertising, which helped to brand the Citizens Party as the party of the post office bank. In NSW, where the most advertising was targeted, we attracted a significant jump in votes in the Senate, and in the seat of Cunningham, where Alexis Garnaut-Miller had run an energetic campaign. That said, we didn't expect a large vote, because we're also the party that is prepared to lose votes by taking an unpopular

position, such as pushing back against the hysterical talk of war with China. The major parties, and many minor parties, engaged in such talk to exploit the prejudice that has been built up in the minds of Australians against China; the Citizens Party takes that prejudice head-on, even if it costs votes. Given that, it was good to see that one of the factors in the election outcome was a big shift in the votes of Australian Chinese away from the Liberal Party, because, as one community member observed, whatever Australian Chinese voters think of China, they know that Scott Morrison and Peter Dutton don't know what they're talking about!

The Citizens Party can share credit for one theme in this campaign—the public's objection to Scott Morrison personally, especially his treatment of women. The person who has come to exemplify Morrison's attitude to people who threatened his power is Christine Holgate, whom he brutally, and now infamously, denounced in Parliament and removed as CEO of Australia Post. Were it not for the Citizens Party, that would have been the end of the story—Christine Holgate would have been consigned to a footnote of history as the fat cat bureaucrat who lavished gold watches on overpaid executives. The Citizens Party's campaign exposed the truth that Holgate had threatened the banks, and thanks to the resulting shift in public opinion, Morrison's actions blew up in his face. On election night, the media's analysis of why voters turned on Morrison prominently featured Christine Holgate as the leading example. And to add insult to injury, Christine Holgate's friend Allegra Spender won Wentworth, the bluest of blue-ribbon Liberal seats, as a teal independent. He—has—gone!

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