



Latest News: [Legal options running ou-](#)

[NEWS](#) [Programs](#) [CTV News Team](#) [Services](#)

[Top Stories](#) [CANADA](#) [World](#) [Entertainment](#) [Health](#) [Sports](#) [Business](#) [Sci-Tech](#)

[Consumer](#) [Specials](#)

Canada

Tue. Mar. 22 2005 5:25 PM ET



Conservative Leader Stephen Harper delivers his keynote speech in Montreal Friday night.

Tories hope policy facelift leads to poll gains

CTV.ca News Staff

The Conservative Party touted its new, moderate face when it wrapped up its policy convention on Sunday. But it's not clear if the party's facelift will translate into substantial gains in public opinion polls.

"One thing we do know is the Conservatives managed to navigate some turbulent waters on the weekend," pollster Nick Nanos, president of SES Research, told Mike Duffy on CTV Newsnet.

But Nanos says the weekend, in itself, won't be enough.

"They're going to have to get out there and do some hard work."

In late February, about a month before the party's convention, an Ipsos-Reid poll showed the Liberals leading the Tories 37-26 in popular support. However, 56 per cent of those polled thought the Liberals deserved to be re-elected.

The Conservatives seemed to have recovered little from outbursts made by lone-gun candidates and the party's leader in the final stretch of last year's election campaign that drove away many moderate voters.

For example, Cheryl Gallant compared abortions to the beheading of hostages in Iraq. And Conservative Leader Stephen Harper accused Prime Minister Paul Martin of being soft on child pornography.

Such comments left many moderate voters wondering about the party's "hidden agenda."

"We knew at the beginning of the (June 28 federal) election, a lot of Canadians were taking a look at the Conservatives," Nanos said.

"But it didn't take long for that goodwill to turn sour."



Conservative Leader Stephen Harper waves after delivering his speech to the Conservative Convention Friday night in Montreal.

USER TOOLS

- [Print This Page](#)
- [E-Mail Story](#)
- [Feedback](#)

VIDEO

- [CTV Newsnet: Mike Duffy speaks with Nick Nanos from SES Research 4:00](#)

RELATED STORIES

- [Conservatives happy with new, moderate image](#)
- [Harper wins backing of 84% of Tory delegates](#)
- [Tories endorse traditional marriage definition](#)
- [Harper, MacKay deny rifts in relationship, party](#)
- [Harper savages Liberals in keynote speech](#)
- [Tory MP says Christians are persecuted in Canada](#)
- [Conservative presidency candidates stress unity](#)
- [Martin and Liberals get pre-budget boost in poll](#)

WEB LINKS

- [Conservative Party - 2005 Convention Montreal](#)

For this reason, the Conservative convention in Montreal was seen by many as a chance to define the party's identity and cast it in a more moderate light.

The party formally agreed that a Conservative government will not introduce abortion legislation.

But when it comes to another hot-button social issue, same-sex marriage, the the Conservatives will continue to oppose extending marriage to gays and lesbians while instead proposing same-sex couples be provided equal rights and benefits through civil unions.

In other areas, Conservative policy remains largely unchanged. Delegates voted to:

- Review participation in the Kyoto Accord;
- Let provinces experiment with private health care;
- Support an elected Senate;
- Toughen crime legislation, such as a "three strikes" law for violent offenders;
- Remove defences for child pornography;
- Repeal the gun registry;
- Promote tax cuts; and
- Make all votes in Parliament free votes, except for the budget and main spending estimates.

Some Reform Party-era policies were dumped, like recall votes for MPs and citizen-initiated referendums.

But a unilingual Canadian Alliance backroom official from the Prairies, Don Plett, won the party's presidency over Brian Mitchell -- a bilingual lawyer from Montreal with Progressive Conservative roots.

"I think the Conservatives are trying to put the Progressive back in Progressive Conservative," joked Herb Dhaliwal, a former Liberal cabinet minister.

Dhaliwal, who was a Vancouver-area MP, noted the Conservatives have previously tried to moderate their image, only to be harmed by negative publicity when someone said something outrageous.

Nanos said it is important for Harper to connect with voters and "convey the message that both him as the leader and the party are not risky choices."

Canadians wanted to change the government in the last election, "but the Conservatives were considered risky change," he said.

In the days following the Conservative convention, the Liberals are still being pounded on the sponsorship scandal, as more damaging revelations emerge from Gomery Inquiry hearings in Montreal.

"It's one of those things where the Conservatives come out of a reasonably positive convention and then there's more blockbuster news on the advertising scandal front," Nannos said. "Those two things in conjunction should really worry the Liberals."




In Quebec, where both parties need to make big gains if they hope to form a majority government, the sponsorship hearings in Montreal have become a ratings hit.

But unless the scandal hits Martin personally, he could dodge the damage,

Nanos said.

He said Canadians are in no mood for an election. Instead they are content to wait and see how Martin and Harper perform over the next year before seriously examining each party's policies.

USER TOOLS

-  [Print This Page](#)
-  [E-Mail Story](#)
-  [Feedback](#)

CANADIAN STORIES

- ▶ [Jetsgo may resume operations under new plan](#)
- ▶ [NHL cancels 2005 entry draft in Ottawa](#)
- ▶ [Closer trade ties will help sovereignty: Martin](#)
- ▶ [Woman charged with assault in Ont. HIV case](#)
- ▶ [Alta. father wants Ottawa to fund son's drugs](#)
- ▶ [Rescuers fretting over fate of trapped dolphins](#)

[About CTV](#) | [Careers](#) | [CTV Announcements](#) | [Advertise on TV](#) | [Advertise on Web](#)

[Archive Sales](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms and Conditions](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Site Map](#)

