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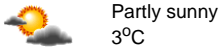


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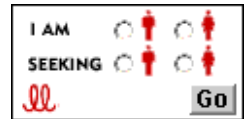
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NEWS NATIONAL

Sun, April 8, 2007

Poll may cool election talk

UPDATED: 2007-04-08 01:26:46 MST

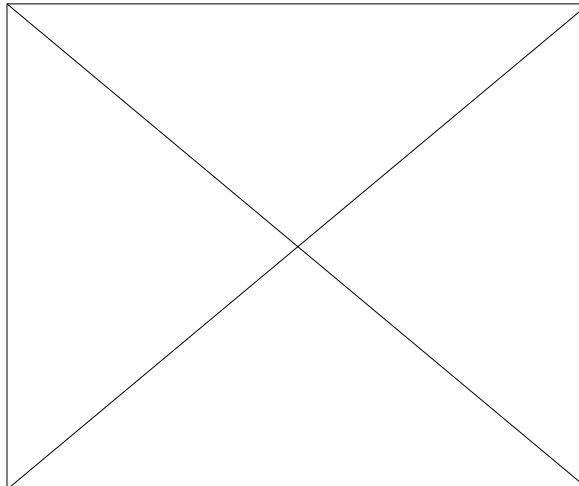


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SES Research has parties in 'holding pattern,' as Tories fall short of majority support

By **GREG WESTON, SUN MEDIA**

OTTAWA -- While a spring freeze grips the nation's capital, an exclusive SES Research opinion poll for Sun Media may also cool growing election fever as Stephen Harper's ruling Conservatives remain well short of the support needed to win a majority government.



The SES-Sun Media survey over the past week shows despite all the Conservatives' wooing of voters and the rocky start for Liberal Leader Stephane Dion, the national standings for all the federal parties are roughly back where they started on election day last year.

If an election were held today, the poll indicates the Conservatives would win about 36% of the popular vote, with the Liberals close behind at 33%, the New Democrats with 16%, the Bloc Quebecois 10%, and the Green Party 6%.

While the survey gives Harper's party a slight increase in national support since early February, the Tories are still well shy of the magic 40% considered the tipping point for winning a majority government.

QUEBEC TURNAROUND

The most dramatic change has been in Quebec, where the Liberals and Conservatives have virtually switched standings, making the Tories the dominant federalist party in the province.

With all the talk of the country taking a possible spring trip to the polls, political insiders have been keenly awaiting the SES Research results, the firm having predicted the last election outcome to within one-tenth of a percentage point.

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SES pollster Nik Nanos says the results indicate the chances of the Harper government's winning a majority anytime soon -- the assumed pre-condition for calling an election -- may depend more on the Liberals losing votes than on anything the Conservatives can do to win more support.

"Fact is, despite all they have done, the Conservatives have not been able to move their numbers outside of Quebec," Nanos said. "I think for all intents and purposes, we are in a holding pattern."

In electoral heartland Ontario, the Conservatives and Liberals are locked in a statistical dead heat, with both parties having made slight gains at the expense of the NDP and the Greens.

In the west, support for the Conservatives remains unchanged at 41%, while the Liberals have increased their support five points to 35%, again taking votes from the New Democrats and Greens.

What's On

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The biggest change for the Conservatives has been in Quebec where they have jumped from 20% in early February to an impressive 28% this week.

At the same time, the Liberals have been losing ground at a precipitous rate in the seat-rich province they once all but owned, dropping from 27% support of Quebec voters two months ago to only 18% in the latest survey. The Bloc Quebecois leads with 37%.



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Nanos says the numbers in Quebec partly reflect the Harper government's having thrown "just about everything but the kitchen sink" at the province.

The whopping \$3.4-billion windfall for Quebec in the recent Conservative budget was evidently appreciated by voters, he says, along with recognition of the Quebecois as a "nation," and all the other special attention the province has been getting from the Harper government.

SUNshine Girl



At the same time, Nanos believes the Liberals are taking yet another hit from the AdScam fiasco.

The pollster says the recent arrest of Montreal advertising executive Jean Lafleur, a key figure in the sponsorship program, has simply put the whole scandal back in front of Quebec voters.

On Canoe

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Max Haines

Nanos says the Harper Conservatives are also benefiting from the stunning surge of the upstart Action Democratique party in the recent Quebec provincial election.

In the Maritimes, all the Harper-bashing over the recent federal budget has not altered Conservative support there from two months ago.

It is the Liberals that have bled about five points to the NDP and Greens across the region, although the Grits still lead the Tories 40% to 28%.

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Finally, the SES-Sun Media poll suggests any signs of "Green-mania" sweeping the electoral landscape have all but disappeared, as support for Elizabeth May's party is back to roughly the level that won no seats in the last election.

Full poll results are available at sesresearch.com.

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