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NEWS NATIONAL

Thu, November 16, 2006

Tories lag in Quebec

UPDATED: 2006-11-16 01:19:21 MST

Conservatives nationally in statistical tie with LiberalsBy **ALAN FINDLAY**, OTTAWA BUREAU

OTTAWA -- Public support for Canada's Conservative government has fallen back into a statistical tie with the leaderless Liberals, a Sun Media-SES Research poll shows.

"The results show a statistical dead heat," said SES president Nik Nanos.

"What we see is a slide in support for the Conservatives specifically concentrated in Quebec."

The Conservatives' strong electoral support in Quebec has all but evaporated in the past 10 weeks and dropped to 12% of decided voters -- compared to 26% in late August.

The Conservatives won 10 seats in Quebec last January with 24.6% of the province's popular vote.

Nationwide, the Tories kept 34% of committed voters' support, compared to 32% for the Liberals, 16% for the NDP, 13% for the Bloc Quebecois and 5% for the Greens.

Nanos warns the Liberals not to pop the champagne corks just yet, however.

The Quebec support falling away from the Tories is landing back in the Bloc camp, with half of the province's committed backers now behind Gilles Duceppe's party.

"It speaks to the fact Stephen Harper was able to connect with soft nationalist supporters (last election)," said Nanos. "I think what this also means is, if Gilles

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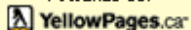
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Duceppe is looking at these numbers, he might be thinking, 'I want an election sooner than later.' "

Since the last SES poll released Aug. 25, nationwide support for the Tories and New Democrats has fallen 2% for each party while the Grits' backing has grown 2%. The Conservatives' support appears to have risen significantly in the West to 48% since the summer.

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The Sun Media-SES Research poll surveyed 884 eligible committed voters Nov. 5-9. The nationwide results are considered accurate to within 3.3 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

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