

Confidence motion possible, but unlikely

Volatile situation means no party is eager for an election

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The same kind of high-stakes drama that gripped Parliament two years ago could begin again this week with the first of several opportunities for the opposition to challenge the minority Conservatives with a confidence vote in the Commons.

The government has designated Thursday as a "allotted" day in the House, when an opposition party, this week the Liberals, can move a votable motion on any issue, including no confidence in the government.

But, despite weeks of election posturing and taunting from both sides, a leading pollster said yesterday it's unlikely the opposition will try to topple Prime Minister Stephen Harper and his Conservatives so soon.

"Usually people either move a confidence motion or a government wants to be defeated when there's some chance of improving one's political position," said Nick Nanos, head

of SES Research. "Right now, things are so volatile it's not really in anybody's interest to pull the trigger on an election."

Until last week -- when the government began sending signals it wants to hold off until next year, but hold byelections to fill vacant Commons seats in the meantime -- the rattling sabres were getting noisy.

Mr. Harper flaunted an election-preparedness campaign school for 3,000 party organizers and candidates in Toronto, while Environment Minister John Baird figuratively brandished the party's spacious new campaign war room in suburban Ottawa.

The Liberals put their party on a campaign war-footing, invoking "electoral urgency" powers in Ontario, Quebec and Saskatchewan to shortcut candidate nomination rules if an election is called or imminent. Bloc Quebecois leader Gilles Duceppe unveiled his caucus election team, while Liberal leader Stephane Dion allied with Green party leader Elizabeth May.

NDP MP Pat Martin cautioned the Liberals against attempting to topple the government Thursday.

"I don't think this is the time for sabre-rattling and brink-manship," said Mr. Martin. "If the Liberals use their opposition day to play some juvenile, elaborate game of chicken, it could undermine (Bill C-30) the environment bill we invested the entire spring session on."

The Liberals would need the Bloc Quebecois to bring down the government, since they and the NDP do not, among themselves, have the numbers to out-vote the government in the Commons.

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