

## Polls may influence election results, pollsters say

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CanWest News Service

*Thursday, June 01, 2006*

CALGARY - Polling Canadians during election campaigns doesn't distort the political process, though it may have an influence, pollsters say.

Much has been made of the effect of surveys during election races, but pollsters in Calgary for the national conference of the Marketing Research and Intelligence Association say polls are just one source of information voters use to make their decision.

"Distort? No. Inform? Yes. Influence? Possibly," said Nik Nanos, president of SES Research and national president of the association.

Nanos said research done after January's federal election indicates 12 per cent of Canadians made up their minds at the ballot box.

"That doesn't mean that all the polls they saw influenced them, but they're just trying to synthesize all of the information," he said.

John Wright of Ipsos-Reid said polls help bring forward issues Canadians care about, not just the ones politicians want to discuss. However, pollsters must work to ensure their survey results aren't being misinterpreted, Wright added.

"I'm not sure distort, but there's a lot of people who use the results of these polls to do lots of different things and, as a result, I think everybody has to be vigilant to defend them and to get some balance to them," he said.

Scott Cho of Leger Marketing added: "We are one of the sources of information and news and ideas about what's happening.

"And it is up to the reader, up to the viewers, to decide exactly how and who to vote for."

But critics say the media has to do its part, too.

Duff Conacher of Democracy Watch says news outlets sometimes fail to report all survey findings, leaving out the number of undecided voters. Headlines also hype one particular result in a poll, giving it more prominence than it deserves, he said.

Of particular note, Conacher said, polls are reported as big news even when the

changes are within the margin of error.

"That's not informing the public, that's misleading the public," Conacher said from Ottawa.

Attendance at the Marketing Research and Intelligence Association conference in Calgary has surpassed 350. It runs through Friday.

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Calgary Herald

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