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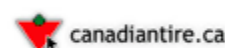
## NEWS NATIONAL

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### Conservative support drops to tie with Grits

Thu, November 16, 2006

By **ALAN FINDLAY**, FREE PRESS PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU



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OTTAWA --

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

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

A second poll by Decima puts the Liberals ahead of the Conservatives, but the narrow Liberal lead is within the three-percentage-point margin of error so it's too close to say who's ahead. The Grits had the support of 33 per cent, while the Tories had 31 per cent, the NDP had 15 per cent and the Green party had 10.

The first poll shows the Conservatives' strong electoral support in Quebec has all but evaporated in the last 10 weeks and dropped to 12 per cent of decided voters.



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The poll result compares to 26 per cent in late August.

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

Nationwide, the Tories kept the support of 34 per cent of committed voters. That compares to 32 per cent for the Liberals, 16 per cent for the NDP, 13 per cent for the Bloc Quebecois and five per cent for the Green party.

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 behind Gilles Duceppe's party -- up from 42 per cent in August.

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

Since the last SES poll out Aug. 25, nationwide support for the Tories and New Democrats has fallen two per cent for each party while the Grits' backing grew two per cent.

The Conservatives' support appears to have risen significantly in the West, however, with a five per cent boost to 48 per cent since the summer. Their popularity in Ontario looks to have sagged by a percentage point compared to a Liberal gain of two points and a two-point drop for the NDP.

The results come as support for Canada's role in the NATO-led Afghanistan mission likewise appears to be flagging. The mission is especially unpopular in Quebec.

A second sore point among Quebecers has been the government's lack of action on the environment, particularly toward meeting Canada's Kyoto Protocol commitments on climate change. The Conservatives tabled their proposed Clean Air Act last month, but it was widely panned and has little hope of getting past the opposition.

Those two issues, along with Quebec's skittishness about Harper getting too cosy with Washington, have erased the Conservatives gains from the GST and its focus on cleaning up government in Ottawa.

"As long as Canadians and Quebecers are reading the newspaper and the front pages are Kyoto and Afghanistan, I

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can't see those numbers turning around," Nanos said.

The 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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