

Tories slip back to election level: poll

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OTTAWA -- Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservatives have slipped in popular support to the level they garnered in January when they won a minority government, a poll released on Friday showed.

The SES Research survey put the Conservatives at 36 percent, down from 38 percent in its last poll in May and identical to what they won on January 23.

The Liberals recovered to 30 percent, again the same as in the election. In May they stood at 28 percent. The leftist New Democrats, who had 17.5 percent in the election, polled at 18 percent.



Prime Minister Stephen Harper pauses while delivering a statement in the foyer of the House of Commons on Parliament Hill in Ottawa August 22, 2006. REUTERS/Chris Wattie

"As the numbers from our latest national survey came in Wednesday evening, this pollster had a serious case of *deja vu* -- pretty well exactly the same numbers as the last federal election," SES President Nik Nanos said in a statement.

SES polled 886 committed voters, with a margin of error of 3.3 percentage points 19 times out of 20. The firm also found 12 percent of those it called were uncommitted.

Nanos singled out a softening of support in Quebec as worrisome for Harper. He unexpectedly made inroads in the French-speaking province in the last election and needs further gains if he wants a majority in Parliament.

The Conservatives still lead the Liberals 26 to 22 percent in Quebec, compared with the electoral result of 25 to 21 percent. But they had led by 35 to 19 percent in May. The Bloc is at 42 percent, the same as in January but up five points from May. The Quebec numbers carry twice the margin of error, plus or minus 6.6 percentage points.

Nanos pointed out that Harper had gained early in his term by focusing on five domestic priorities, including cleaning up government, cutting the sales tax and cracking down on crime, but spent more of his effort this summer on the Middle East.

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