

Newest poll confirms Conservative lead

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Confirming the findings of an Ipsos Reid survey released at the beginning of the week that showed the Conservatives in the lead for the first time in this election campaign, a CPAC/ SES poll released yesterday gave Stephen Harper and his party a three-point advantage over the Liberals.

The Tory momentum in this heavily polled campaign was first revealed by Ipsos Reid on Dec. 22 when the Liberals were shown to have a slim one-point advantage over the Tories.

SES Research, which started regularly reporting its three-day tracking poll during the 2004 election, is one of several firms providing daily numbers. The Strategic Counsel surveys for CTV and the Globe and Mail, while Frank Graves, the president of Ekos Research, said his firm will begin releasing daily polling numbers beginning today through the Toronto Star, La Presse and Le Soleil.

The Conservative party's gain in the polls in the past week occurred as neither the Tories nor the Liberals were able to close the gender gap.

Ipsos Reid president Darrell Bricker said Paul Martin and the Liberals enjoyed a seven-point lead over Mr. Harper and the Conservatives late last week when it came to women, with 36 per cent of female respondents saying they would vote Liberal, while 29 per cent sided with the Tories. Among male voters, the Conservatives held an even larger 10-point lead, with 37 per cent favouring them to the 27 per cent who said they intended to vote Liberal.

Mr. Harper has made a visible effort to warm up to the electorate during this campaign by smiling more on the hustings, appearing less angry and sporting an open-neck shirt without a tie at many events. He has also avoided getting bogged down by social conservative issues, such as same-sex marriage, that have gotten him in trouble with female voters in the past.

As in the overall race, momentum -- as regards the gender gap -- is with the Tories, as they have risen from a low of 24 per cent in female support and 30-per-cent male backing on Dec. 11. The Liberals, meanwhile, have fallen from their campaign high of 33-per-cent support among male voters on the same date and 39 per cent among females.

Mr. Bricker is certain the Liberals are holding back some ammunition to stop their fall in the polls, just as they did with negative ads in the 2004 campaign.

"It's like Wyle E. Coyote, the cartoon creature, who just fell off the ledge and hit one of those little outcrops on the way down. He's kinda rubbing his brow and the question is: 'Can he climb back up from there or will he just keep on falling?'"

He said the Liberals seem to continue to sit back and wait, despite the Conservatives' surge.

"It's all about timing. But you can be so focused on picking the right time that it

passes you by. The right time to do anything is now."

The Winter Campaign

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