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Latest News

Bilingualism fallout helps Grits rebound

Pollster says real momentum will show after leaders' debates

Tim Naumetz

The Ottawa Citizen

Thursday, June 03, 2004

Voter support for the Conservative party across the country began to drop after last week's controversy over a Tory MP's statement that the party was prepared to overhaul official bilingualism, a new poll suggests.

The same day, Liberal party support began to rise, after what had been a steady fall, to the spot where the party is now as much as eight percentage points ahead of the Conservatives among decided voters, says the rolling poll being conducted daily by SES Canada Research Inc.

The poll results suggest that, despite what appears to be a steady decline in Liberal support since Prime Minister Paul Martin called the election, it is too early to say that enough momentum is building to predict a victory by either of the two leading parties.

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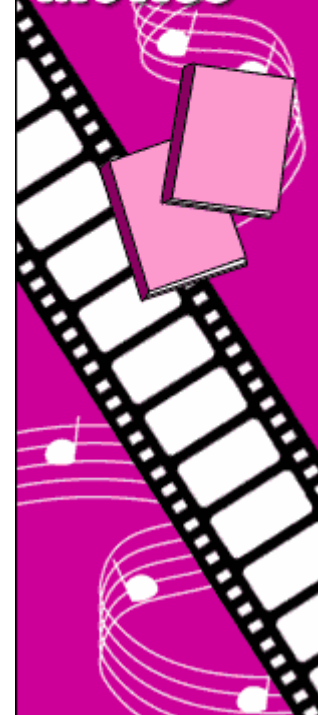
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SES president Nikita Nanos said the type of steady trends in voter opinion that could determine the outcome of the June 28 election will not become an issue until after the leaders' televised debates on June 14-15.

"I think the only time where momentum really becomes an issue is after the leaders' debate," Mr. Nanos said yesterday after his firm released its latest overnight tracking of voter intention. "The leaders' debate is one of the critical points where voters really start to pay attention. Right now, in my opinion, we're in the phony war."

SES is releasing the results of its rolling poll on a daily basis in partnership with CPAC, the political affairs cable TV channel. It is the kind of polling method political parties use to track voter intention during all election campaigns, although the parties survey a broader sample to break down results more confidently on a regional basis.

By combining each day's sample of opinion from 200 voters with the results of the previous two days of polling, SES is able to produce an almost instantaneous snapshot of voter intent. The results are considered accurate within 4.1 percentage points 19 times out of 20.

SES said yesterday that following the downturn for the Conservatives last Friday, after MP Scott Reid's comments about bilingualism the previous day, Liberal fortunes rose gradually to the point the party had the support of 37 per cent of decided voters by this past Tuesday.

The Conservatives dropped from about 35 per cent last Friday to a low of about 25 per cent over the weekend but began climbing again to 29 per cent by Tuesday.

A short, sharp upturn for the Conservatives coincided with a sharp downturn for the NDP, following party leader Jack Layton's promise to repeal the Clarity Act, which sets out conditions for a vote on separation by Quebec.

SES found the NDP had support from 19 per cent of decided voters by Tuesday.

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