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Tue, June 8, 2004

Tories eating up Grits: Poll

By BILL RODGERS, Parliamentary Bureau

WITH three weeks to go in the federal election campaign, the Conservatives have taken a slight nationwide lead over the Liberals, according to an SES election poll. "I think this represents a huge psychological breakthrough for the Conservatives," said SES pollster Nik Nanos.

The survey, conducted for CPAC, the parliamentary channel, shows the Conservatives in the lead for the first time at 34%.

The Liberals trail with 32% and the New Democrats have 20% support.

Quebec's separatist Bloc stands at 11% while the Green Party has 4%. The number of undecided Canadians has hit 22%.

Although still a statistical tie, it is the first time in more than ten years the Conservatives have nudged ahead of the ruling Grits across the country. And the news doesn't get better for the Martin team when Canadians are asked about who would make the best prime minister.

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Sun Media Newspapers

The daily tracking poll of 600 Canadians, taken June 4-6, shows 27% of decided voters believe Paul Martin would make the best prime minister -- down 4% from a poll released May 25. Stephen Harper is the choice of 23%, up six percentage points. The NDP's Jack Layton is up four points to 13%. But the survey shows 35% of Canadians are either unsure who would make the best PM or dislike all of the above.

The new numbers come following almost a week of negative Liberal attacks on the Harper-led Conservatives on the issues of abortion, same-sex marriage, the effects of tax-slashing on social programs and accusations of cosyng up to Quebec separatists. But it seems the attacks and Martin's promises to spend billions on improved health care, pharmacare, daycare and assistance to cities have fallen on deaf ears.

"The Liberals just have not been able to tilt those numbers," Nanos told Sun Media. "It's going to take more than going negative on Stephen Harper to move those numbers because they really have to focus on what their vision is for the future."

The SES tracking poll is accurate to within 4.1%, plus or minus, 19 times out of 20.

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