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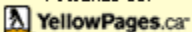
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Thu, November 16, 2006

Tory support slipping

Conservatives, Liberals in 'statistical dead heat' as Quebec voters return to Bloc Quebecois

By **ALAN FINDLAY**, PARLIAMENTARY
BUREAU

Public 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. "What we see is a slide in support for the Conservatives specifically concentrated in Quebec."

The Conservatives' strong electoral support in Quebec has all but evaporated in the past 10 weeks and dropped to 12% of decided voters -- compared to 26% in late August.

BLOC BENEFITS

The Conservatives won 10 seats in Quebec in January's election with 24.6% of the province's popular vote.

Nationally, the Tories kept the support of 34% of committed voters, compared to 32% for the Liberals, 16% for the NDP, 13% for the Bloc Quebecois and 5% for the Greens.

Nanos warns the Grits not to pop the champagne corks just yet. The Quebec support falling away from the Tories is

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THE EDITOR



Prime Minister Stephen Harper, speaking with the media yesterday, finds his Tories trailing the Grits in the latest polls. (Tom Hanson/CP)

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landing back in the Bloc camp, with half of the province's committed backers now behind Gilles Duceppe's party -- up from 42% 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 released Aug. 25, national support for the Tories and New Democrats has fallen 2% for each party while the Grits' backing has grown 2%.

The Conservatives' support appears to have risen significantly in the West, however, with a 5% boost to 48% 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.

"As long as Canadians and Quebecers are reading the newspaper and the front pages are Kyoto and Afghanistan, I can't see those numbers turning around," Nanos said.

The poll surveyed 884 eligible committed voters Nov. 5-9. The national results are considered accurate to within 3.3 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

Meanwhile, another poll released yesterday also showed the Grits and the Tories in a statistical tie.

A Decima poll showed the Liberals with 33% support, the Conservatives with 31%, the NDP with 15% and 10% for the Greens.

The poll of 1,126 Canadians was conducted from Nov. 9-13 and has a 3.1% margin of error, 19 times out of 20.

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