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Liberals sag in Canada polls as election talk rumbles

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By Randall Palmer

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OTTAWA (Reuters) - Canada's opposition Liberals are either tied or trailing the ruling Conservatives in two opinion polls released this week, results which could prompt caution about forcing an early election.

A Leger survey of 1,500 Canadians gave the Conservatives 38 percent support, compared to 31 percent for the Liberals, while an SES poll of 913 committed voters put the two parties tied at 33 percent.

The Conservative government has only a minority of seats in Parliament and can in theory be brought down at almost any time. Prime Minister Stephen Harper will face a confidence vote over his budget, most likely in late March or April.

Recently the prevailing wisdom in Ottawa has been that it would be too risky for the opposition parties to bring the government down or for Harper to call an election without an unassailable lead in opinion polls.

But there's still some lingering speculation about an election in May or June. One Liberal, Pablo Rodriguez, on Friday challenged Harper to call an election or else abide by Rodriguez's bill that forces the government to comply with the Kyoto protocol on climate change.

The House of Commons is likely to pass the bill next Wednesday, and Rodriguez said the Liberal-dominated Senate would then pass it into law quickly.

"He has to decide either to respect the will of Parliament or call an election," Rodriguez told reporters.

The Conservatives say the bill is not a matter of confidence and its passage would not force an election.

"There's certainly no confidence motion invoked," Peter Van Loan, who runs the government's agenda in the House of Commons, told reporters.

The bill would require the government to prepare a plan within 60 days that describes measures Canada will take to meet its Kyoto obligations to reduce greenhouse gases to 6 percent below 1990 levels by 2012.

Canada's emissions are 27 percent above 1990 levels and Harper says it will be impossible to meet the targets. [Continued ...](#)

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Harper's is Canada's second minority government in a row, and the polls give no indication that any party will win a majority next time. Parties traditionally need over 40 percent support to win a majority of seats in Parliament.

A major factor is the strength of two other opposition parties, the leftist New Democrats and the separatist Bloc Quebecois.

The Leger poll puts the New Democrats at 14 percent and SES sees them at 17 percent. Leger has the Bloc at 8 percent while SES records it at 10 percent. The Bloc runs candidates only in Quebec and usually takes a majority of that province's seats.

The Leger poll, conducted January 30 to February 4, carries a margin of error of 2.6 percentage points 19 times out of 20. SES was in the field February 2-8 and its margin of error is 3.3 points.

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