

## Conservatives hold slender poll lead

**REUTERS** 

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The Conservative Party is clinging on to a slender lead against the main Liberal opposition, but is doing badly in French-speaking Quebec, according to an opinion poll released on Thursday.

The poll, from SES Research, put support for the Conservatives at 34 percent, down from 36 percent which they registered in the previous SES survey in August and in the January election.

The Liberals, who will elect a new leader next month, had 32 percent voter support, up from 30 percent in August and in the election.

"The Liberal leadership will be critical to the fortunes of both the Conservatives and the Liberals," SES said.

"A divided Liberal party (or anything that has a whiff of inappropriate behavior by a leadership campaign) will be good news for the ... Conservatives. If the Liberals come out united and have a leader who can have some sort of appeal to Quebecers, they will be back in the game."

The new poll is in contrast to a Decima survey released on Wednesday that gave the Liberals 33 percent voter support, and put support for the Conservatives at 31 percent.

SES had the most accurate surveys in the run-up to the January election, which resulted in a minority Conservative government that needs support from other political parties to stay in power.

This month's SES poll showed that support for the Conservatives in Quebec had sagged since August by 14 percentage points. The party took 10 of 75 seats in the province in the election.

Only 12 percent of Quebec voters said they would back the ruling party now. The Liberals had 25 percent voter support in Quebec, while the Bloc Quebecois had 50 percent. But the margin of error was 6.6 percent in Quebec, twice the national margin of error.

The Bloc, which campaigns only in Quebec, is the federal offshoot of the pro-independence Parti Quebecois.

SES surveyed 884 committed voters by telephone between November 5 and November 9.

In the January election, the Conservatives won 36 percent of the vote, the Liberals 30 percent and the New Democrats 17.5 percent. In Quebec the Bloc took 42 percent, the Conservatives 25 percent and the Liberals 21 percent.