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Christina Blizzard

Sun, June 3, 2007



Election will be a doozy

Dead heat in Sun poll hints at minority -- and a sizzling campaign

By CHRISTINA BLIZZARD

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There's nothing like a poll showing politicians in a dead heat to turn the political climate up a notch or two.

A surprise new survey by pollster Nik Nanos of SES Research shows the provincial Liberals and the Progressive Conservative Party in a tie in the run-up to the Oct. 10 election.

Both the Liberals and P.C.'s have 29.8% of the decided vote. The NDP show a respectable 16% of support, while the Green Party is nipping at their heels, with 9.3%. There is still a sizable 15.2% undecided vote, understandable perhaps with more than four months to go before ballots are cast.

"What is interesting is that there exists a dead heat on both the ballot and the best premier questions," says Nanos.

"Usually one party has the upper hand" on the leadership front.

"As we enter the pre-election summer, the McGuinty Liberals and Tory P.C.'s are effectively locked in a tie," he said.

Of those polled, 26.5% like PC leader John Tory for premier, while 26.8% say they will stick with Dalton McGuinty. NDP leader Howard Hampton is at

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13%, while Frank de Jong of the Green Party trails them at 4.2%.

What is surprising, perhaps, is the number of people who are saying none of the above when it comes to leaders -- 10.6% say they don't want any of them.

"On the performance front almost one of every two Ontarians describe Premier McGuinty's job performance as average -- even 40% of committed provincial Liberals consider his performance average," Nanos said.

The trickiest numbers for any government are the right track/wrong track figures. And McGuinty can hardly be taking much comfort from these. A substantial 46% of those who responded say they think McGuinty is on the wrong track. Only 35.3% say he's heading in the right direction.

"Ontarians are more likely to say they think that the McGuinty-led Liberals are heading in the wrong direction," Nanos said.

"Dissatisfaction with the Liberals is more likely to be found among middle-aged voters 40-49 -- a key target group," he points out.

Nanos is fast establishing himself federally as a highly accurate pollster. He's called the last two federal votes spot on. When he speaks, the parties listen. The numbers are especially timely this weekend as the Liberals ratchet up their election machinery in a weekend gabfest. Next weekend the Tories are expected to gear up parts of their platform as well.

Key to both campaigns now are their platforms. The biggest problem the Liberals have is credibility. How do they convince a cynical electorate (remember that 10.6% who said "none of the above"?) they will actually deliver on their promises?

For the Tories, the issue is in part the legacy of the Harris years. The Liberals are already trying to tar Tory with that brush. How much of it sticks remains to be seen.

"In our current political climate, the summer will be a critical lead up to the fall provincial election," Nanos said. "Right now, neither the Liberals nor the PCs have the upper hand," he said.

We all know what that spells, don't we? Minority. And a red hot barbecue season for the politicians.

Of course, a lot depends on the election campaign. Right now, though, there is a very real possibility of a minority government of one stripe or another -- with the NDP holding the balance of power. Now there's a scary thought.

Meanwhile, just a couple of thoughts. First, John Tory will have a tough fight to win the Don Valley West seat from Liberal incumbent, Education Minister Kathleen Wynne. Suppose the Tories win a minority government -- but Tory himself doesn't get elected. Sure, he can lead the party for a while outside the Legislature. But he will need a safe seat -- and fast. Who's going to be the lucky donor?

And what of McGuinty and the Liberals? One way or another, sooner or later he will bow out after the next vote. Who will replace him as leader?

Hmm. Let's see. We will need someone with experience. Someone with ambition and a grand vision.

Someone like, say, that great Liberal Bob Rae.

Bob Rae for premier.



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Oh, right. Been there, done that.

To see the full results of this poll, go to www.sesresearch.com

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