



## *NEWS RELEASE*

# **Harper Closing the Deal *Quebec, Seniors, and the Better-Off Lifting Tories Over the Top***

<b>National Federal Voting Intentions (n=2306; decided voters n=2045)</b>	
Conservative Party of Canada	37.6
Liberal Party of Canada	28.3
New Democratic Party	18.1
Bloc Québécois	11.6
Green Party	3.7

Stephen Harper and the Conservatives now seem headed for power. The question that remains to be determined in this election is whether they secure a majority or fall tantalizingly short.

The Conservatives' success so far is driven by their surprising inroads in Quebec, their newfound dominance among older voters, and their growth in popularity among voters in the higher socio-economic strata. It remains to be seen whether the rising prospect of a Tory victory in itself affects patterns of support, but the evidence so far is that a recoil among some left-leaning voters in English Canada may be counter-balanced by a bandwagon effect apparent in Quebec.

The Conservatives continue to show surprising strength in Quebec, particularly in areas outside of Montreal. More importantly, they have begun to swing the old Liberal heartland into the Conservative column. Harper's deft campaign has produced precisely the reaction it was intended to engender in voters: growing comfort with Harper and a shift to seeing him as the most probable and desirable Prime Minister. Without some fairly strong (and, it must be said, unexpected) disruption in the current pattern, Stephen Harper seems destined for 24 Sussex Drive.

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“What we saw at the beginning of January was tremendous volatility, voters trying out the idea of voting Tory,” said EKOS President Frank Graves. “Now those Tory converts are starting to lock in their decision.”

At this point in the 2004 campaign, the Liberals are running at about the same level as they are now. The difference is with the Conservatives, who are doing much better now than at this point in the last campaign.

“The key difficulty for the Liberals is the bigger gap, which seems to have produced a stronger sense of inevitability to a Conservative conclusion to the election,” said Graves. “If they reproduced the gains they experienced late in the 2004 campaign, they might eke out a minority, but I don’t think that will happen. If Quebec was out of the equation, I think they could have reproduced the 2004 result, but Quebec now looks like scorched earth for the Liberals and I think this will be enough to prevent the same late pattern we saw in 2004.”

### ELECTION RESULT 2006: A CONSERVATIVE MAJORITY?

Although they are not yet there, a Conservative majority scenario is very much in play. Quebec is key to their success. The Tories need to augment their newfound support in Quebec by another five to 10 points. At that level, they would start winning seats in meaningful numbers.

“So far, Quebeckers haven’t blinked at their newfound attraction to Harper, and they increasingly dislike Martin. The federalist base in Quebec may decide to congregate around Harper who now decisively leads Martin in acceptability with Quebeckers,” said Graves. “Quebeckers overall comfort with and expectation of a Harper government is rising quickly. It is hard to imagine what the Liberals have left in the bag.”

A Tory breakthrough in Quebec could have profound implications for federalism and national unity. It suggests that some of the startling growth of sovereigntist sentiment in the last year is not as deeply rooted as some believed. As the prospect of a Tory government takes hold, more Quebeckers may find an appeal in having MPs on the government side of the aisle again, which in turn could help refurbish the federalist brand tarnished by the sponsorship scandal. The federalist lacuna left by the collapse of the Liberal brand is being tentatively filled by newfound Conservative support.

One factor that could check a Tory majority would be if the NDP vote in Ontario and B.C. were to defect to the Liberals on election day. So far, there is no sign that that is happening, at least in Ontario, but this is likely to be a key element in the Liberal strategy in the dying days of the campaign as they fight to save the store.

## REGIONAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

The Liberals have lost their lock on Ontario, except in Metro Toronto and the North, which remain their most secure strongholds in the country. The rest of the province has begun tipping decisively towards the Tories, particularly late in the week. The Conservatives are doing very well in 905 and best in Eastern Ontario, suggesting public servants are underwhelmed with the Liberals this time around.

In Quebec, the Tories' main inroads have been outside the traditional federalist fortress on the West Island of Montreal. Indeed, the Tory boom in Quebec began with an erosion of BQ support elsewhere in the province. The Conservatives have now started to bleed Liberal support as well. The question is whether they will reach a "tipping point" where federalist voters feel that their best strategic choice to stop the Bloc is Harper's Conservatives.

Demographically, Harper holds the trump cards: support amongst those Canadians most likely to vote on election day. He now owns the seniors' vote, for example. In the past both Martin and Harper fared well with this group.

There is a startling and almost direct correlation between level of income and Tory support. The more you make, the more likely you are to support the Conservatives. Meanwhile, the most educated Canadians have also rapidly shifted from Martin to Harper.

Younger Canadians (even the greying 35-45 cohort) seem to be relatively disengaged from this campaign and haven't found their political home. Interestingly, if it were up to voters under 25, this election would be a close three-way split between the Tories, the Liberals and the NDP. The key issues and values underpinning this campaign have been far more connected to the concerns of older more comfortable Canadians (e.g., ethics, taxes, medical wait lists, defence, crime and justice). Furthermore, the most important issues for those under 45 (e.g., the environment, education, the economy, and U.S. foreign policy) have not been prominent in this campaign. There may be potential generational tensions brewing in the future.

## *Methodology*

These data are based on telephone interviews conducted January 10 to 12, 2006 with a random sample of 2,306 Canadians aged 18 and over. A sample of this size provides a margin of error of +/- 2.0 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The margin of error increases when the results are sub-divided (i.e., error margins for sub-groups such as regions).

All the data were statistically weighted to ensure the sample's regional, gender and age composition reflects that of the actual population of Canada according to Census data.