



PRESS RELEASE

FEDERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN 2004: APPROACHING STALEMATE?

National Federal Voting Intentions (Decided Voters,)	
Conservative Party of Canada	31.4%
Liberal Party of Canada	29%
New Democratic Party	20.5%
Bloc Quebecois	14.2%
The Green Party	4.3%
Other	0.6%

Ottawa, ONTARIO. In the final stretch of an election campaign which is garnering elevated levels of voter attention, a new EKOS Research poll conducted for the Toronto Star and La Presse points to an electorate which may well produce a national stalemate with no party able to secure a clear moral or legal mandate to govern.

OVERVIEW:

EKOS President Frank Graves had this to say of the overall findings: "The campaign to date is attracting high interest levels among voters, with reported viewership of the debates also elevated. Close to half of voters report following the current campaign "very closely", up significantly from our post-debate survey in the 2000 federal campaign. "

States Graves, "While those who watched the debates lean towards seeing Harper as having won, the Conservatives have failed to impress non-CPC voters. It is notable that there was no clear winner, with just one in four giving Harper the nod (beating 'none of the above' by a scant single percentage point" Graves continued, "And while Mr. Martin is seen as having lost the debates, he may have achieved some key objectives." Despite the inauspicious evaluation of the Leaders' performance, the Liberals have narrowed the Conservative lead, mostly by way of a drop in Conservative support (contrary to some reports, there is no groundswell of Conservative support, in fact they have dropped two and a half points in popular support with the Liberals down one point). Support for the Conservatives has basically been frozen around 32% (+/- two percentage points) throughout the campaign. "As with the debates, a lot of voters seem somewhat underwhelmed by all choices," Graves observed.

OTTAWA OFFICE
99 Metcalfe Street, Suite 1100
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 6L7
T: 613.235.7215
F: 613.235.8498

TORONTO OFFICE
480 University Avenue, Suite 1006
Toronto, Ontario M5G 1V2
T: 416.598.8002
F: 416.598.2543

EDMONTON OFFICE
9925 109th St. NW, Suite 606
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2J8
T: 780.408.5225
F: 780.408.5233

“There are some counterintuitive features to the debates’ apparent impacts. Mr. Martin and Mr. Layton were seen as the worst performing participants yet the Liberals have narrowed the gap with Stephen Harper, while Layton and the NDP have grown their support slightly. It is extremely significant that Mr. Harper, despite a deft debate performance has failed to bolster Conservative support” Graves said. “At this late stage of the campaign it appears there is little available to propel the Conservatives into majority territory”.

“There is, however, some notable movement on other indicators,” remarked Graves, “For instance, we have seen dramatic shifts in terms of who voters think will win the election, with the electorate now leaning towards the expectation of a Conservative victory.” Indeed, the Conservatives now hold a 49:35 advantage over the Liberals, essentially a reversal of voters’ assessment of the outcome just last week.

“The heightened perception of a Conservative victory is notable but as our past poll showed it has had no significant impact on voting patterns. It would appear that overall the public are not seeking a Conservative (or Liberal) majority” Graves said. “In fact it increasingly appears that the most interesting and hotly contested campaign in recent history will produce no clear public judgement. We may well find the country locked in something of a stalemate with the Conservatives and Liberals virtually tied (and the reinvigorated NDP and Bloc parties holding greatly increased influence). The constitutional and practical implications of this parliamentary gridlock are the most complex and profound since the King-Byng affair.”

Graves continued, “We also see voting intentions solidifying as we near the last week of the campaign” (73% now say it’s unlikely they’ll change their mind, up from 60%). Notes Graves, “Bloc and Conservative supporters are more clear in their resolve whereas other voters seem to be blending attractions to the Liberals, NDP and Greens with a strong aversion to Conservative rule — the ABC (anyone but Conservatives) may result in further strategic shifting.”

“There are also growing demographic cleavages in party support,” Graves observed, “particularly among men where bedrock Conservative support lies” (39% of men say they will vote Conservative versus just 26% of women).

“Quebec has followed a different pattern in this election. In Quebec, Mr. Duceppe was overwhelmingly seen as the winner of the debate (68%) and this reinforced his party’s pre-existing dominance. This has been a breathtaking transformation of the federal political landscape in that province over the past six months as the Liberals moved from a stranglehold to a toehold” Graves added.

“The bottom line,” Graves concluded, “is that this doesn’t augur well for a party ending up with either the moral authority or practical ability to control the House of Commons. The two real contenders for power, the Liberals and Conservatives, are really locked down in the low 30s in terms of popular support.”

“For the final week of the campaign, there is little evidence of any sea change in support, rather we will be watching for any potential mobility from the Greens and NDP towards the Liberals in an effort to block a Conservative victory. It really is going to be down to the wire”.

METHODOLOGY:

These data are based on telephone interviews conducted June 16 and 17, 2004 with a sample of 895 Canadians aged 18 and over. This survey featured a panel design, with all respondents having also been included in our June 7 to 10 survey. A sample of this size provides a margin of error of +/- 3.3 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.