



NEWS RELEASE

Tories Take Clear Lead *Harper “vision” starting to connect*

National Federal Voting Intentions (n=1386; decided voters n=1226)	
Conservative Party of Canada	36.2
Liberal Party of Canada	30.4
New Democratic Party	17.9
Bloc Québécois	10.4
Green Party	4.7

The Conservative Party has established a significant lead over the Liberal Party for the first time in the election campaign. Stephen Harper's attempt to soften his image and bolster Conservative credibility on the issues during the pre-Christmas campaign period has clearly worked. For the first time, he is rated as high or higher than Paul Martin for articulating a positive vision for the future; this is a major improvement for Harper.

“The Conservatives have broken out,” said EKOS President Frank Graves, “and they have further room to grow. Not only is their support on the rise, but more and more Canadians supporting other parties are starting to consider them seriously.”

This poll provides unusually fresh numbers for publication. It was taken Tuesday and Wednesday, with the last interviews completed around 9:30 p.m. Wednesday night.

Although Liberal support has ebbed somewhat, the reversal of fortunes between the two main parties is also partially the result of Conservative growth at the expense of the other parties, the New Democrats (most notably in British Columbia) and the Bloc Québécois.

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The Tory surge is accompanied by sagging confidence in the future of the country and an apparent resurgence in concern about ethics and accountability – likely driven by the announcement last week that the RCMP has launched an investigation into a possible government leak prior to a decision by Finance Minister Ralph Goodale regarding the taxation of income trusts.

Generation and Gender Gaps

The improvement in Tory fortunes is accompanied by a generational gap and a continuing gender gap. Older Canadians are tilting clearly Tory, while younger Canadians are less likely to do so. Younger Canadians are less engaged in this campaign and the Tory growth is being propelled by their strength among voters middle aged and older. Men are also much more likely to support the Tories than women are.

“This is a significant advantage to the Conservatives,” said Graves. “Women generally are less likely to vote than men, and young people are dramatically less inclined to vote than their elders.”

Regional Patterns

The most dramatic changes are occurring in Quebec and British Columbia.

In Quebec, the Conservatives are now emerging as a serious federalist rival to the Liberals. Indeed, their recent growth in the province has come mostly at the expense of the BQ. If this pattern continues, they may become an alternative to the Liberals as the champions of the federalist option in the province. This would have a profound significance: the potential re-emergence of the national Conservative coalition forged by Brian Mulroney.

“What we are seeing in Quebec,” said Graves, “is that there is a rock solid rejection of the Liberals, but without a correspondingly firm embrace of Gilles Duceppe and the BQ. Many voters are still deciding how to express their anger at the Liberals on election day.”

In British Columbia, the Liberals are holding steady. The volatility in the province comes from a surge in Conservative support accompanied by a substantial drop in NDP fortunes.

Despite the strong drift to the Tories elsewhere, many Ontarians seem to be digging in their heels in support of the Liberals. Suspicion of the Conservatives is stronger in Ontario than elsewhere and they are having more trouble breaking through in the province.

Liberal-NDP Dynamic

There may be some comfort for the Liberals in this poll – and a corresponding reason for NDP anxiety. NDP voters are very worried about the possibility of a Conservative government led by Stephen Harper. They are also much less firm in their voting intention than supporters of other parties, and consequently ripe to bolt to the Liberals if they fear a Tory win.

“This is the NDP’s nightmare scenario,” said Graves, “being squeezed out in the contest between the two major parties. Interestingly, support for the Green Party has already started to ebb, possibly for the same reason.”

“We will see whether more Canadians begin to think tactically about their vote as the reality of a Tory surge begins to sink in,” he added. “Right now, a substantial majority of Canadians still think a Liberal government is the most likely outcome of the election – something that no longer seems objectively true.”

There is an overwhelming consensus among Canadians that a minority government is the likely result of this campaign.