

Liberals still have support in region

Survey indicates swing to the right

But in the coffee shop, ambivalence

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Reyes Werner sees no reason to switch. Neither does Dave the retired printer.

These 905-belt residents say they will vote Liberal on Jan. 23, despite an upswing in Tory fortunes in the region reflected in a *Toronto Star* poll this week.

The poll shows the Tories edging ahead in the Liberal-dominated areas around Toronto. In the 2004 election, Liberals captured 18 of the 23 seats in Peel, Durham, Halton and York regions, with an average margin of victory of 21 per cent. Conservatives won the remaining five.

The latest poll, conducted by EKOS Research Associates for the *Star* and *La Presse*, suggests the Conservatives are favoured by 41 per cent of 905-area voters, with 37 per cent for the Liberals and 20 for the NDP.

But informal conversations with seven voters yesterday in Richmond Hill and Vaughan turned up only one unshakeable Tory supporter. Mortgage broker Don Vanbodegom says he always has and always will vote Conservative.

"I like the things the Tories stand for," Vanbodegom said as he sipped coffee in a Vaughan Tim Hortons shop.

He agreed with companion Catherine, a Toronto developer, that leader Stephen Harper was driving away voters. "I think more people would vote Conservative if the leader was Peter MacKay," he said.

Catherine, who wouldn't give her last name, said she is a disaffected Tory voter who will swing back as soon as the Conservatives ditch their current leader. "There's something about Harper. I just don't trust him and I don't know why," she said. "The last Tory leader I really liked was Mike Harris."

Dave, a retired printer who lives in Richmond Hill, generally thinks of himself as a Conservative but said he'll probably vote Liberal "because I really like Martin." He didn't want to give his last name because "then everyone will know how I vote."

"The Liberal party isn't as good as Martin, but I believe he can change things around," he added. "I just don't like Harper."

Werner, a confirmed Liberal voter, agreed her party of choice "has made mistakes."

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But "I like their policies on health care and education and I like the way Martin has responded to issues of violence in the city," said the early childhood educator from Maple.

NDP supporter Julius Olajos, a Richmond Hill engineer, said he cast his vote strategically last time, voting Liberal to help shut out the Tories. Not this time.

"I just don't think the Liberals have offered us anything of any real social value," said Olajos.

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