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Harper won the English debate, Duceppe took home the French: poll

Apr 15, 2011 by Kate Lunau

According to a *Maclean's* poll, Stephen Harper had the best performance in this week's English-language leaders' debate, while the Bloc's Gilles Duceppe handily won in French. But the real victor may be Jack Layton, who impressed not only his NDP stalwarts, but also Greens, undecided voters, and even Liberals, a scenario pollster Greg Lyle calls "a Liberal nightmare."

The survey conducted by Innovative Research Group found 43 per cent of respondents thought Harper won Tuesday's English-language debate, with Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff coming third at 11 per cent. As for the French-language debate, 46 per cent thought Duceppe won, while Ignatieff was best in the eyes of 11 per cent of respondents (Harper, in fourth, won over only seven per cent of respondents). Meanwhile, Layton was a clear second in both English and French, which is "nothing to write home about," says Lyle, managing director at Innovative Research. "But when you look at how leaders did according to different groups of voters, it's a dream for the NDP."

Both Harper and Duceppe managed to rally their own—78 per cent of Conservatives thought Harper performed best, and 67 per cent of the Bloc gave it to Duceppe—but the same can't be said of Ignatieff. Only 32 per cent of Liberal voters thought he performed best, while a whopping 21 per cent thought it was Layton.
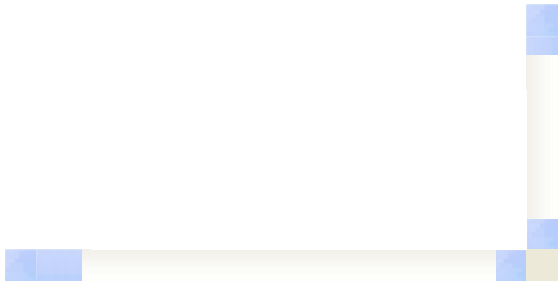
The NDP leader also won over 33 per cent of Greens and 25 per cent of the undecided, the highest of any leader. "He's not just solidifying his base. He's reaching into Liberal, Green and undecided voters," Lyle says. The Conservatives came second among the undecided, with Harper convincing 17 per cent of them he performed best.

The picture isn't completely grim for the Liberal leader. When measured against himself in terms of expectations, Ignatieff did best among Quebecers. In fact, 43 per cent of respondents thought Ignatieff performed better than expected in French, while only 4 per cent felt the same about Harper. Still, "he was found wanting in English," Lyle says, with 25 per cent of people saying he did better than expected, while 38 per cent thought he did worse.

Overall, Lyle says, "Harper and Duceppe did their job, but Layton really won."

The online survey was conducted on April 13 and 14 after the end of the leaders' debates among a representative

sample of 1,058 Canadians, including 249 in Quebec. The margin of error is plus or minus 2.16 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

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