

LOOMING ELECTION

Taking a tactical cue from the Republicans

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Armchair politicians who are perplexed by why the federal Tories sometimes play up divisive social conservative issues such as opposition to same-sex marriage need look no further than today's poll. It's all about shoring up the party's core vote.

According to the Strategic Counsel survey, of those Canadians who consider themselves Conservative in ideological orientation, 69 per cent will cast ballots for the Conservative Party, while the other 30 would split their ballots among the other four parties. By contrast, of those who consider themselves Liberal in spirit, only 51 per cent would vote Liberal, with the rest scattering to other parties. This gives the Conservatives a large starting point advantage.

It's a tactic that has been immensely successful for the U.S. Republicans, pollster Greg Lyle said. By putting such initiatives as same-sex marriage on ballots, the Republicans have been able to bring out large numbers of supporters who vote not only on the social issue, but also for the presidential candidate who backs it.

"This is a way in which the U.S. fights campaigns that has spilled over to Canada that it hasn't in the past," said Mr. Lyle, managing director of Innovative Research Group, Inc.

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The tactic, however, can sometimes backfire, particularly if the polarization offends voters who consider themselves moderate and who form a large portion of a particular constituency.

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