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### **Harper still far from majority: poll**

Apr 12, 2011 by Jason Kirby

Despite some high profile gaffes and billions in new spending promises, after two weeks on the campaign trail, the main parties barely budged in the minds of Canadian voters, according to a survey done for *Macleans* and *680 News*.

When asked which party people would vote for if there were an election today, 39 per cent of respondents on Innovative Research Group's Canada 20/20 panel picked the Conservatives, virtually unchanged from 39.1 per cent after the first week of the campaign. The Liberals move up, but only slightly, to 28 per cent, from 27.5 per cent, while the NDP was flat at around 17 per cent.

The poll also shows Stephen Harper still enjoys the most support for prime minister. Of respondents to Innovative's survey, 36 per cent said Harper would make the best prime minister, compared to just 22 per cent for Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff and 19 per cent for NDP leader Jack Layton.

But Harper still remains far short of his coveted majority. "If Michael Ignatieff brings the brand loyalists home, he'll inevitably do better than in the last election," says Greg Lyle, Innovative's managing director. "Harper's challenge is greater. He needs to reach outside his safe zone of party loyalists to people who don't feel the Conservatives are their party but will vote for the Conservatives regardless."

As the election moves forward, research by Innovative suggests a divide is forming between Quebec and the rest of Canada. While the Federal parties enjoy a strong connection with voters in most provinces, in Quebec the electorate is simply tuning out. In *la belle province* nearly half of panelists said this election is less interesting than most others, a far higher number than in the rest of Canada. Not only are Quebec voters less aware of the various campaigns—just 74 per cent of voters in Quebec had seen or heard anything about Harper or Ignatieff, compared to 87 per cent and 82 per cent respectively in the rest of Canada—barely half say the parties are talking about issues that matter to them, compared to 62 per cent in the rest of Canada.

There's an irony in the different way Quebecers and other Canadians are approaching this election though, says Lyle. While Quebec voters say they're less interested in the campaign, they're actually paying more attention to the issues than most Canadians are. Innovative asked panelists what they'd read, seen or heard about each of the leaders. In the case of Harper the dominant thing people in the rest of Canada recalled was the controversy that erupted after several people were ejected from Conservative rallies because of Facebook links to other parties. But in Quebec the most common news item the panelists recalled was the release of the Tory election platform. It was the same situation with the Liberals. While the dominant memory most Canadians had of that party's campaign were inappropriate comments by Liberal candidates, those in Quebec primarily recalled the Liberal promise to replace Montreal's Champlain Bridge.

Across the board, the Tory controversy threatens to hurt them at the polls much more than the Liberal gaffes do. Close to half of those surveyed said they were less likely to vote for the Conservatives after the Facebook incident, while less than 20 per cent said racist comments by a former Liberal candidate in

Manicouagan would negatively impact their decision to vote for the party. Having said that, Tory loyalists have generally ignored the issue and remain staunch supporters.

As in past elections, there have been complaints that the media are spending too much time covering gaffes and that not enough attention is being paid to the issues. Yet the results of Innovative's survey show that for most Canadians, it's the gaffes and gossip they pay the most attention to. "On the one hand people tell us they want to hear more about issues," says Lyle. "but on the other hand it's the gaffes that get the most interest."

The survey results were drawn from 2059 randomly selected respondents who live in the province, and are part of Innovative's nation-wide online panel. Responses were gathered April 8-11 and the margin of error is plus or minus 2.16 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. To join Innovative Research Group's Canada 20/20 panel, visit [www.canada2020.com](http://www.canada2020.com).

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