NEWS RELEASE

Wilfrid Laurier University

Web site provides independent overview of latest election opinion polls
Laurier Institute for Public Opinion and Policy focuses on quality and format, not just numbers

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WATERLOO (Ont.) – A new Web site by the Laurier Institute for the Study of Public Opinion and Policy (LISPOP) will help the general public and members of the media put the latest election polls in perspective. Launched yesterday, www.wlu.ca/LISPOP will offer an up-to-date overview and commentary on the latest public opinion polls.

The site draws attention to current issues in polling – such as the wording of questions, the context and order in which questions are asked, the difference between decided voters and people who are simply leaning toward one party, and the significance of non-response rates – that aren't usually reviewed. It will include summaries of all national polls, making it a complete and convenient source for information on polling in the federal election.

"People use polls to develop an understanding of how other people are thinking, but they don't always know how the format and context of the actual question affects the polling results," says Wilfrid Laurier University political science professor and LISPOP director Steven Brown. "Our purpose is to fill the gap in what's available to the public by serving as an independent educational resource."

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The site will also include seat projections by Laurier political science professor Barry Kay. Kay developed a model that brings together information from several national polls and, taking regional breakdowns into account, forecasts the outcome of an election. Kay began using his model in 1980 and it has proven to be accurate within an average of four seats per party for every election since that time.

Kay has tested his model, with equal success, on elections dating back to 1963. The LISPOP Web site will eventually include a feature comparing polling results with the actual number of seats won by each party in past elections.

As a university, Laurier is well positioned to analyze issues of public opinion, polling and policy. Along with several professors in the political science department, faculty members in marketing, social work, sociology and psychology are also associated with the Institute. Following the federal election, LISPOP will deal with a wide range of public opinion and policy issues.

LISPOP is a newly created research centre that studies issues related to the creation, use and representation of public opinion in the policy process. The Institute also monitors the practices and claims of the public opinion and interest group industries. It serves as an educational resource to the University and to the larger community on questions and issues surrounding these industries.

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