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Harper majority attainable despite controversies, pre-campaign polls suggest

WATERLOO – The Laurier Institute for the Study of Public Opinion and Policy (LISPOP) shows that the Conservatives retain a comfortable lead on the cusp of a possible election call, with a majority within its grasp. A LISPOP analysis of recent polls projects a seat distribution of 151 seats for the Harper Conservatives, down two seats from last month's projection.

The Conservative Party's strength endures amid several controversies that have surfaced on Parliament Hill with the potential to embarrass the government.

"This is the first projection since the parliamentary accountability issue became prominent, and at the moment it doesn't yet seem to have had much impact," said Barry Kay, an associate of LISPOP.

The latest projection by LISPOP is based on an aggregation of polls conducted by Ipsos Reid, Nanos Research, and Harris-Decima from March 10 to 20, 2011, with a blended sample of about 4,000 individuals. The regional swing model also projects 72 seats for the Liberals, 34 seats for the NDP and 51 seats for the Bloc Québécois.

"The seat projection suggests that the basic pattern of party preference has been quite stable over the past six weeks. It would not take much of a shift, particularly in Ontario, which is full of swing seats, to push the Conservatives into majority territory," said Kay.

This projection assumes an eight percentage-point Conservative lead in Ontario, down a point since the previous projection of March 14, 2011.

"As things stand, it is likely to be in Ontario, particularly in the bedroom suburbs surrounding Toronto, that the prospects for a Conservative majority in the forthcoming election will be determined," said Kay.

The seat projection is one of several features on LISPOP's election tracker coverage of the 2011 campaign. Visitors to www.wlu.ca/lispop can view a map of all federal constituencies, colour-coded to reflect the standing of each of the main parties and general level of competitiveness, as per LISPOP's analysis of the latest surveys.

Currently, the institute identifies 25 ridings with very tight races showing no clear leading candidate. Another 29 ridings are "leaning" towards one party, defined as a lead of three to seven percentage points.

"A lot of attention will be placed on these 54 seats," said Andrea Perrella, the director of LISPOP. "In several of them, high-profile candidates are vulnerable."

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Justin Trudeau in Papineau, former Liberal leadership contender Gerard Kennedy in Parkdale, and Health Minister Leona Aglukkaq from Nunavut are three examples of candidates with a projected slight lead.

Locally, Waterloo-area conservative MPs Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre) and Peter Braid (Kitchener-Waterloo) also show slight leads in their respective ridings.

Updates will be announced through LISPOP's Twitter account, @LaurierInst.

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