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Laurier research institute plays key role in 2014 Ontario election

WATERLOO – A Laurier research centre will play a key role during the spring election campaign in Ontario. The Laurier Institute for the Study of Public Opinion and Policy (LISPOP) has formed a partnership with Global News to provide analysis and commentary over the course of the six-week campaign.

Barry Kay, a LISPOP associate, will serve as the election analyst for the news network and will head the decision desk on the night of the June 12 election. The decision desk will be staffed with Laurier students and former students, and the exercise will make use of LISPOP resources, which will be available on the lispop.ca and globalnews.ca/toronto websites.

Kay will also generate seat projections, which converts polling data to seats numbers for the parties. The most recent projection was released May 6, and shows a very tight race. These are fairly accurate, often making use of many polls at the same time.

“The more polls that are available and the larger the sample size, the less likelihood of a sampling error,” said Kay. “But they aren't perfect, as we have seen recently in British Columbia and Alberta. When I see polling numbers, I always put a range of plus or minus three percentage points around them in my mind.”

The seat projection is one of several features of LISPOP's election coverage of the 2014 campaign. Visitors to www.lispop.ca can view a map of Ontario's 107 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 12 ridings with very tight races showing no clear leading candidate. These include local ridings of Kitchener Centre, Kitchener-Waterloo, Brant and London West. Another 10 ridings “lean” towards one party, defined as a lead of three to seven percentage points.

“Given the tightness in the polls, the election may very well be decided within these two-dozen ridings,” said Andrea Perrella, director of LISPOP. “We will definitely watch closely how even subtle changes in poll numbers can shift the party standings. But subtle shifts in voter behavior have not been the norm lately.”

Perrella says several provincial elections, most notably the recent one in Quebec, show just how quickly a campaign can rattle voters and produce a result that no one expected at the beginning of the election.

“Voters are not as loyal to parties as they once were, and are also not as interested in party politics. So, they are not as stable as they once were.”

About LISPOP: The Laurier Institute for the Study of Public Opinion and Policy is a research centre at Wilfrid Laurier University which studies issues pertaining to the creation, use and representation of public opinion in the policy process. The institute serves as a catalyst to promote individual and collaborative research on these issues. In addition, the institute monitors the practices and claims of the public opinion and interest group industries, and serves as an educational resource to the university and the larger community on questions and issues pertaining to those claims and practices.