

Harper `clearly won' the English TV debate

Conservatives maintain a solid lead

But Liberal `bleeding' may have stopped

Jan. 11, 2006. 01:00 AM

RICHARD BRENNAN

QUEEN'S PARK BUREAU

Star Columnists

[Graham Fraser](#)

[Richard Gwyn](#)

[Stephen Handelman](#)

[Chantal Hebert](#)

[James Travers](#)

[Ian Urquhart](#)

[Thomas Walkom](#)

A strong debate performance after a flawless election campaign has helped solidify Conservative Stephen Harper's lead, according to a cross-country poll completed yesterday.

"Clearly Harper won (Monday's) debate and (Liberal Leader Paul) Martin lost," said Paul Adams, executive director of EKOS Research Associates.

The survey of 667 decided voters for the *Toronto Star* and *La Presse* showed 37.1 per cent support for the Conservatives. The Liberals stand at 29.9 per cent, the NDP 17.6 per cent, the Bloc Québécois 11.6 per cent and the Green party 3.2 per cent. The poll is considered accurate within 3.8 percentage points 19 times out of 20.

EKOS also reported 8.7 per cent of those questioned were undecided.

In addition, the survey asked who won Monday's English debate. About two-thirds of the 745 people surveyed watched the two-hour debate and 29 per cent said the 46-year-old Conservative leader won. Martin, 67, was a distant second at 13 per cent. The largest percentage, 35 per cent, did not know.

"Clearly among those who had an opinion, Stephen Harper was far and away stronger. ... Martin lost pretty decisively," Adams said.

"The very high number of `don't knows' suggests there wasn't a knockout blow, there wasn't a decisive punch."

The poll shows the Conservatives dropped slightly from a three-day survey of 1,240 Canadians published in yesterday's *Toronto Star*. It gave the Tories 39.1 per cent support, the Liberals 26.8 per cent, the NDP 16.2 per cent, the Bloc 12.6 per cent and the Greens 4.6 per cent.

That same poll showed the Conservatives with a 10-percentage point lead over the Liberals in Ontario, 43.8 per cent to 33.5 per cent.

"(Yesterday's poll) shows that we're in a continued period of volatility and the numbers are moving up and down by a few points every night," Adams said.

But he emphasized "what does seem to be clearly established is this new pattern of a comfortable Tory lead over the Liberals, knocking on the door of a majority but not necessary quite there."

Adams said the good news for the Liberals is that the bleeding of support appears to have stopped. The NDP is also holding "quite firm" to its core support, despite Liberal tactics to try to siphon off NDP voters fearful of a Tory victory.

Adams said the current results are not much different from where the Liberals were two weeks before the 2004 election.

"At least it doesn't seem as if the bleeding is getting worse in the wake of the debate," he said.

The new poll also shows about 30 per cent of decided voters felt Harper had the "best vision" for Canada following the debate, with Martin a close second at 24 per cent.

The poll published yesterday showed the Conservatives leading the Liberals slightly in Quebec, where the Tories dearly hope to get a foothold.

The New Democrats, meanwhile, are said to be keenly aware of the fight they face to avoid getting squeezed out of the limelight by the sparring between Harper and Martin.

At dissolution of Parliament, there were 133 Liberal MPs. The Conservatives had 98 seats, the Bloc 53 and the NDP 18. There were four independents and two vacancies.

WITH FILES FROM BRUCE CAMPION-SMITH AND GRAHAM FRASER

[Get great home delivery subscription deals here!](#)

[FAQs](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Webmaster](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [My Subscription](#) | [RSS Feeds](#) | [Webmaking Blog](#)

[Home](#) | [GTA](#) | [Business](#) | [Waymoresports](#) | [A&E](#) | [Life](#)

Legal Notice: Copyright Toronto Star Newspapers Limited. All rights reserved. Distribution, transmission or republication of any material from www.thestar.com is strictly prohibited without the prior written permission of Toronto Star Newspapers Limited. For information please contact us using our [webmaster form](#). www.thestar.com online since 1996.

