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Tories tops in trust poll

31.8% confident of economic care

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OTTAWA -- More Canadians are putting their trust in the Tories to shepherd them through tough economic times, a new poll finds.

The Nanos Research-Sun Media survey shows 31.8% of Canadians have faith in the Conservatives when it comes to managing job security and the economy, compared to 23.6% who trust the Liberals. Only 8.4% would rely on the NDP, and a significant 16% don't see much hope from any political party.

"What this shows is what the Conservatives would probably like to fight the next election on," said pollster Nik Nanos. "But even though they have an advantage over the Liberals, it's not a huge advantage like the advantage Stephen Harper has over Stephane Dion. The Conservatives still have to exercise caution, because it wouldn't take much for the advantage to dissipate."

The trust gap is most stark in the West, where 39% have confidence in the Conservatives to manage the economy and only 20% put faith in the Liberals. The two main political parties are virtually tied in Ontario and the Atlantic, but the Tories have gained a trust edge on monetary matters in Quebec.

Nanos said the numbers tell a story not just about who Canadians trust, but who they don't. Liberal policy talk about bringing in a carbon tax -- dubbed the "tax trick" in Tory attack language -- could shake confidence in the Grits as stewards of the economy.

"I think what's happened is while it hasn't moved people into the Conservative column, it has taken the wind out of the sails of the Liberal plan," he said.

Despite a recent controversy over a major Taliban jailbreak in Kandahar, the poll also shows more Canadians have confidence in the Conservatives to properly manage the military mission in Afghanistan. Nanos said the Conservatives' united approach to the war -- compared to the often-divided Liberals -- has paid political dividends for the party.

But Harper is also riding the coattails of traditional party perception.

"The Conservatives generally have stronger brand equity when it comes to defence and also the economy and taxes," Nanos said. "I think that's part of the mix. I think the Conservatives are benefiting from their brand equity and their record."

Of those surveyed, 27.6% think the Conservatives are more competent to handle the war in Afghanistan, compared to 21.8% who trust the Liberals. Quebec bucked that trend, with only 19.2% trusting the Conservative course on the war, 22.4% trusting the Liberals and 10.6% relying

on the Bloc Quebecois.

The Tory approach to Af -ghanistan earned the most trust in the West, where 36.2% put their faith in the Tories and 15.9% in the Liberals.

The telephone survey of 1,002 Canadians was conducted June 23-July 2. It is considered accurate plus or minus 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

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