

# Canadians warming up to minority rule: poll

Emily Senger, National Post

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After five years of constant election speculation, Canadians may be warming to the idea of minority governments, according to a new poll.

The poll, conducted by Nanos Research, suggests that more than half of Canadians, 53.9%, say their impression of minority governments is positive or somewhat positive.

With Conservative MPs beginning to ramp up rhetoric about the need for a majority in the next election, the poll suggests they may not have a high degree of support for that view, said Nanos president and CEO Nik Nanos.

"The Conservatives have said that they want a majority government for stability, but the polling suggests that only about 31.5% of Canadians would even like them to see them get re-elected," Mr. Nanos said.

In the poll, 58.5% of respondents said the statement "Stephen Harper has had his chance and it's time for a change" matched their beliefs.

The appetite for minority governments is partially driven by the fact that Canadians don't see a single leader as particularly strong or desirable, so electing a leader into a minority situation provides a check on power, Mr. Nanos said. This situation played out with Paul Martin in 2004, and now twice with Stephen Harper in 2006 and 2008.

"It's a bit of a reflection on the state of affairs in regards to the leadership of the federal political parties," Mr. Nanos said.

The poll indicated that those in Quebec are most in favour of a minority government, with 29.7% of respondents saying the idea of a minority government was positive. On the Prairies, only 11% of respondents said the idea of a minority government was positive.

This isn't surprising given the number of Bloc voters in Quebec, who benefit greatly when there is a minority in the House, Mr. Nanos said.

"Any situation where the BQ could potentially place leverage on the government of Canada, would probably be welcome for those voters," Mr. Nanos said.

When asked why they viewed a minority as favourable, 54.8% of respondents said: "It's good because it forces parties to co-operate." But when asked if minority governments actually do co-operate, Mr. Nanos replied simply. "No," he said, laughing.

Co-operation between minorities happened when Lester B. Pearson's Liberals created the Canada Health Act in 1984, but today's minority governments seem to spend more time fighting than forging alliances.

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