

Who's that Ignatieff guy again?

Voters still unsure if Liberal leader is man of promise or man of promises

John Ivison, National Post

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Years ago, while lining up to watch the movie *The Usual Suspects*, I glanced at the famous promotional poster that had the cast of criminals in a police lineup, above the line: "Who is Keyser Soze?"

Helpfully, some joker had scribbled on an arrow pointing up at Kevin Spacey's character and annotated the words: "It's him."

The ending ruined, we went to see Kevin Costner's *Waterworld* instead. Grrrrr.

Still, it seems like a tactic the Liberal party could use if it decides to force an election in the fall.

Judging by a new poll from Nanos Research, many voters still couldn't pick Michael Ignatieff out of a police lineup.

Fully half of the 1,004 Canadians polled by Nanos between June 17 and 21, were unsure of the Liberal party's strengths and weaknesses. Only 35% of those polled could define any strengths, against 49% who could define weaknesses -- which means most Canadians have a negative impression of the Liberal party (an overall definition of -14%).

Worse news for the Liberal leader is that, of those who do recognize him, more believe he is a liability for the party than think he is an asset.

This suggests the Conservative negative advertising campaign, designed to undermine Mr. Ignatieff's personal numbers, has had some success. This confirms a long-suspected and deep-seeded distrust of learning and worldliness in the Canadian psyche -- not something over which we should rejoice.

But it offers an explanation for recent public polls on the horse race that have shown the Conservatives edging back into a narrow lead, and suggests that Mr. Ignatieff was smart to climb down from threats to take the country to a summer election last month.

The prospect of entering a campaign with what Nanos president Nik Nanos characterized as a "perception void" would have been a massive gamble. "This points to the fact that the Liberals still require a significant effort to define themselves," Mr. Nanos said.

The only good news for Mr. Ignatieff is that an earlier poll carried out by Nanos, which appeared in the *Post* last month, was even more negative for the Conservatives. It gave the Tories an overall definition of -29% and found that more than twice as many respondents found Stephen Harper's leadership to be a weakness than a strength.

The juxtaposition of the two polls provides an interesting glimpse into the way Canadians think about the Conservative and Liberal brands.

They suggest that the Conservatives score when voters consider performance factors

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