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Liberals bounce back with new leader

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OTTAWA (Reuters) - New leadership has helped Canada's opposition Liberals recover the public support they had lost following threats to topple the minority Conservative government, a poll released on Friday showed.

Leader Michael Ignatieff has distanced himself from -- though not abandoned -- an idea put forward by predecessor Stephane Dion to team up with the leftist New Democrats and separatist Bloc Quebecois to try to replace the Conservatives with a coalition government.

The coalition idea and Dion's deep unpopularity had put Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservatives ahead of the Liberals by about 20 points - a level where they would have been able to win a parliamentary majority. But under Ignatieff the race has tightened greatly, with the two main parties running neck and neck.

A Nanos Research poll published by Canadian Press had the Liberals ahead of the Conservatives by 34 percent to 33 percent. It put the New Democrats at 19 percent.

Pollster Nik Nanos said the surge in Liberal strength could be partly a honeymoon effect.

"What I've found is whenever there's a new leader, before people get to know who that leader is, they project positive things onto that leader," he told Canadian Press.

In the October general election, the Conservatives took 37.6 percent of the vote, the Liberals 26.2 percent and the NDP 18.2 percent.

Ignatieff, a former Harvard professor, has said he would not automatically bring the government down over its January 27 budget, but he did warn on Friday that the coalition idea remained alive.

"All options remain on the table here, and he (Harper) shouldn't underestimate us. He shouldn't underestimate my resolve," he told CBC television. [Continued...](#)

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