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Conservatives near majority: Ekos poll

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OTTAWA (Reuters) - Canada's ruling Conservatives are again within reach of winning a majority in next Tuesday's election, according to a poll released on Friday, though other surveys showed a tighter race.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservatives, who currently govern as a parliamentary minority, would take 152 of the 308 seats in the House of Commons, three short of a majority, the Ekos poll

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found.

The Liberals would be reduced to 60 seats, barely above the 57 the separatist Bloc Quebecois would take, while the leftist New Democratic Party (NDP) would take 39 seats.

If the Ekos projection is right, it would mark a turnaround for Harper's party, whose polling lead has shrunk in recent days over his handling of the global financial crisis.

Ekos is showing the Conservatives with a 12-point lead over the Liberals. Two other pollsters are showing smaller leads, of 6 and 8 points, but like Ekos, they indicate a widening lead for the ruling party.

"A Tory victory now seems quite likely if not yet certain," Ekos President Frank Graves said.

Ekos said that, if anything, its projection underestimated the Conservatives' strength since it does not take into account the fact that their support is stronger among demographic groups, such as older people, who are more likely to vote.

When the election was called last month, the Conservatives had 127 seats in the House of Commons, the Liberals 95, the Bloc 48, the NDP 30 and the Greens one. Three seats were independents and four were vacant.

The Ekos poll has the Conservatives winning 36 percent of the popular vote, the Liberals 24 percent and the NDP 19.

A Harris-Decima/Canadian Press survey puts them at 34 percent, 26 and 18 respectively while Nanos has them at 33 percent, 27 and 22.

Nanos said the Conservatives' support was not rising but they still benefited from Liberals drifting to the NDP.

Ekos and Nanos covered Tuesday through Thursday and Harris-Decima Monday through Thursday.

Ekos surveyed 2,934 decided voters, with a 1.8 point margin of error 19 times out of 20. Harris-Decima interviewed 1,284 people with a 2.7 point margin of error, and Nanos surveyed 1,003 committed voters with a 3.1 point margin of error.

(Reporting by Randall Palmer; editing by Frank McGurty)

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