



## Quebecers want coalition, ROC wants election if budget defeated: Poll

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OTTAWA — Quebecers and Canadians elsewhere in the country are at odds over what should happen if the Harper government is defeated over this month's budget, a new poll suggests.

According to the Nanos Research survey provided exclusively to The Canadian Press, Quebecers overwhelmingly said the Liberals and NDP should be given a chance to form a coalition government, propped up by the Bloc Québécois.

But a majority of westerners and a plurality of respondents everywhere else favoured calling an election immediately.

Overall, 49 per cent said an election should be called versus 42 per cent who said Gov. Gen. Michaëlle Jean should invite the opposition parties to form a coalition.

"What is striking about the numbers is the regional differences," said pollster Nik Nanos.

In Quebec, 62 per cent wanted the opposition parties to have a chance to govern, while 30 per cent wanted an election called.

Those numbers were reversed in western Canada, where 65 per cent wanted an election and only 29 per cent favoured an opposition coalition.

Ontario and Atlantic respondents were more closely split, with 46 per cent and 49 per cent respectively favouring an election. Forty per cent in both regions favoured a coalition government.

"In a way, this is a bit like an old movie in Canadian politics, where we pit east versus west," said Nanos.

The survey suggests the Christmas holidays did nothing to bridge the regional chasm that opened last month when the three opposition parties first struck an agreement to replace Stephen Harper's Conservatives with a coalition government.

The prime minister dodged a confidence vote that would have toppled his minority government only by suspending Parliament. It is to resume on Jan. 26 with a crucial budget to be unveiled the following day.

Newly minted Liberal Leader Michael Ignatieff was never keen on the coalition idea but he has continued to hold it like a cudgel over Harper's head, threatening to defeat the government if he deems the budget insufficient to protect Canadians from the ravages of the global economic crisis.

Nanos attributed Quebecers' continuing enthusiasm for the coalition to their growing disenchantment with Harper and the Tories.

"There's probably a greater appetite in that province to see an alternative."

Moreover, he said Quebecers who park their votes with the separatist Bloc Québécois likely see the coalition as a way to get a better deal for Quebec.

"(They) wouldn't mind kind of dislodging the federal Conservatives and putting the Bloc in position to exercise more influence."

But Nanos noted that giving more influence to separatists is precisely what worries Canadians outside Quebec, particularly in the West.

Nanos said it's not surprising that bedrock Conservative supporters in the West are more inclined to want to give Harper another chance to fight an election. Moreover, he said westerners' opposition to the coalition idea is consistent with their more populist approach to politics.

On issues of democratic renewal, Nanos said westerners tend to be "more prone to see big

issues of the day go before the people" for resolution.

Conservatives played to those sentiments when the opposition parties struck their coalition agreement last month. The Tories blasted the idea as illegitimate, anti-democratic and akin to a coup d'etat - even though experts said it was perfectly constitutional.

They also blasted the Liberals for climbing into bed with separatists - even though Harper had contemplated a similar arrangement with the NDP and Bloc in 2004 to unseat the then-Liberal minority government.

The telephone poll of 1,003 Canadians was conducted Jan. 3-7 and is considered accurate within 3.1 percentage points 19 times in 20.

More information is available at [www.nanosresearch.com](http://www.nanosresearch.com).