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Race comes full circle

Leaders spend frenzied last day on campaign trail in a final push to woo voters

Posted By Kathleen Harris, Sun Media

Posted 1 month ago

VANCOUVER — It's decision day for Canadians.

After a gruelling and gaffe-prone 37-day campaign that focused sharply on leadership and the troubled economy, voters head to the polls Tuesday to pick the next government to steer the nation through tough times.

Party leaders spent a frenzied final day in key battlegrounds, working to shore up support.

Polls in the run-up to today's vote suggest Stephen Harper's Conservatives were gaining momentum in the last days of the campaign and poised to win at least a minority government.

Nanos Research daily tracking numbers, released Monday and broadcast on CPAC last night, show the Conservatives nearing the finish line with 34.2 per cent support nationally compared to 26.7 per cent for the Liberals and 21.4 per cent for the NDP. The poll also showed support for the Bloc Quebecois at 9.5 per cent and the Green Party at 8.2 per cent.

The three-day rolling sample is comprised of 1,502 respondents, and is considered accurate plus or minus 2.5 per cent, 19 times out of 20.

Making a coast-to-coast campaign blitz on the eve of the election, Prime Minister Stephen Harper urged voters from Prince Edward Island to British Columbia to reject "doom and gloom" recession predictions from the opposition and promised to make Canada's economy his "top priority" in office.

He began with an 8 a.m. rally in soggy Cornwall, P.E.I., where he told the peppy morning crowd he would do everything in his power to protect Canadians' savings, earnings and jobs.

He warned of Stephane Dion's "stubborn obsession" — a carbon tax he claims would drive up prices and wreck the economy.

"If you want a prime minister who will protect the Canadian economy, then I ask you for a mandate. If you want a prime minister who will experiment with the Canadian economy, then give Mr. Dion a mandate to impose his carbon tax," he said.

"Economic protection versus economic experimentation. That's why we, and not Mr. Dion, must get a mandate to govern this country."

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It seems to be coming too common for women to go missing in this area. First there was Jennifer Catchway, now it is Amber McFarland.

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The PM made the same pitch in Fredericton and again in Vancouver before hunkering down in Calgary to await tonight's election results.

He stressed Canada is better positioned than most to weather the financial storm with a stable banking system and an economy still churning out new jobs.

The campaign has been a rollercoaster for Harper, who lost a big early edge due to an angry backlash, especially from Quebec, over controversial comments on arts cuts and his promised crackdown on youth criminals.

He also took a beating when opposition parties ganged up to accuse him of doing nothing to ease fears about plunging stock markets. But he managed to bounce back by insisting his role as prime minister is not to panic, but to offer a steady hand and concrete plan to weather the crisis.

Monday, he rallied the troops and put a confident face forward, insisting rally crowds have never been bigger — including in Quebec.

"If you give me the honour of re-electing me as your prime minister, I can assure you that I will make it my top priority to protect Canada's economy and Canadians' stake in it," he said.

Liberal Leader Stephane Dion, pumelled by his opponents through the campaign over his Green Shift plan to introduce a carbon tax, made a last-ditch effort to remind voters that tax cuts are also part of the platform.

Racing against time and the polls with a cross-country sprint of his own, he travelled from Fredericton, to Longueuil, Que., and Winnipeg before touching down for a campaign event in Richmond, B.C. He made another pitch to Green Party supporters or NDP backers who want to "stop Harper."

"If we pull our votes together, we will win this election," he told party faithful in New Brunswick.

He noted many top-class economists have endorsed the general principle behind "Green Shift" policies: Easing income and corporate taxes while shifting more of the burden to activities that produce greenhouse gases.

"There is only one economist that disagrees with this," Dion said, referring to Harper.

NDP Leader Jack Layton wound up his campaign to become a "PM for the people" with a series of rallies in the Toronto area. He appealed to urban voters to reject the Tories for ignoring cities, the doctor shortage and the economy.

"He was just hoping he could make his way through without people noticing. Well guess what? People noticed, they didn't like what they saw and they are in the process of rejecting Mr. Harper as prime minister," he said.

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