

Pinch or Rogue?

ANDREW STEELE, OCTOBER 3, 2008 AT 3:03 PM EDT

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Nik Nanos' new numbers (say that five times fast) are going to set off a blogosphere babble bubble.

Tories and – to an extent – New Democrats will call it an outlier or even a rogue poll. Some may call bias or other ridiculous smears.

Liberals will cuddle it like a new born baby, desperately hoping it will live and thrive, terrified it won't.

But who is right? Only time will tell.

An outlier is a particular observation that is distant from the rest of the data. A good analogy is that when you are finding out the average temperature in a room by testing ten objects, if one of them is the oven at 350 degrees, it is going to pull the mean far higher than the median.

The survey could meet all the methodological tests of robustness and still include some outlier inputs that could shift it in one direction or another.

So let's compare it to some other survey data we have available from Ekos.

Both firms are showing a bump in Quebec for the Liberals. This would make sense given the data showing Dion decisively winning the French language debate.

The difference is in Ontario. Whereas Ekos continues to show the Conservatives leading in Ontario by around 8 points, Nanos is showing the Liberals and Conservatives in a tie at 36% each.

Perhaps Dion's performance in the French debate – watched by over a million Canadians outside of Quebec – had a major impact on a subset of Ontario voters that Nanos captured and Ekos did not?

If so, would Dion's less proficient performance in English dispel those gains?

Really, the two firms are within each other's margin of error for the Ontario results, so it's impossible to say.

And tomorrow is another day.

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