

# 2008 ELECTION UPDATE



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The Leaders' Debates on Wednesday and Thursday of this week will set the stage for the sprint to the October 14 finish line. Looking back at the first three weeks of the campaign gives us an indication of how we anticipate the final stretch to play itself out.

The Conservatives have been more than able to hold the lead that materialized as soon as the election was called, avoiding being dragged down by gaffes from members of their own team (such as Sparrow, Ritz and now Lee Richardson). Further, opposition attacks on Harper and Conservative programs and policies have failed to gain any real traction. So long as the Tory campaign machine keeps in control of their candidates and stays on top of their message, Stephen Harper will remain Prime Minister. The real question remains whether the government he leads will be a minority or a majority.

The opposition parties, on the other hand, face various challenges to stop the Conservative momentum. The NDP have clearly found their stride, with NDP Leader Jack Layton continuing to position himself as a credible contender for the Prime Minister's job. The Greens are in the process of taking their campaign to the grassroots as never before with Elizabeth May's national whistle stop tour. This has exposed the Green Party Leader to a wider constituency and should help to increase their polling numbers nationally. However, the real challenge for the Greens is concentrating this support into their first elected MP. A further challenge for both the NDP and the Green Party is the need for a plan to mitigate the risk that strategic voting will siphon votes from them to the Liberals in the last days of the campaign as was the case in 2004 and 2006.

### The 2008 Leaders' Debate

The Leaders' Debates are organized by a media consortium of the largest broadcasters in Canada: CTV, CBC, Global and TVA. The French language debate will be held at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa on Wednesday October 1st from 8 to 10 pm EDT. The moderator will be Stéphan Bureau, a journalist and host. The English language debate will follow the next evening at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa on Thursday October 2nd from 9 to 11 pm EDT. The moderator will be Steve Paikin the host of the current affairs show *The Agenda* on TV Ontario.

This year's debate will present several logistical challenges and is expected to be unpredictable. In addition to having five party leaders at the debate for the first time the format has been changed. Instead of the controlled environment of leaders standing up in front of podiums and delivering their statements, they will be seated around a table and the microphones will remain open for more than one leader simultaneously.

The English debate will open with a statement by Green Party Leader Elizabeth May, who will also be the first one to answer a question. Gilles Duceppe will make the opening statement at the French debate and Stephen Harper will answer the first question in French.

The Bloc Québécois have two key challenges: to push back against critics who argue the party has outlived its usefulness and to find a "hot button" issue to rekindle the enthusiasm and support of their nationalist base. BQ Leader Gilles Duceppe is

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facing off with the Liberals and NDP in Montréal and the Conservatives in the rest of Québec. Duceppe's message to voters is that a vote for the NDP is a vote for a Conservative majority. If Duceppe is able to capitalize on this message in the Leaders' Debates, he may be able to successfully make the case for the Bloc's relevancy and mitigate or even reverse growing Conservative support outside of Montréal.

This brings us to the oft-discussed Liberal campaign. Liberal Leader Stéphane Dion continues to have difficulty connecting with voters and the Liberal campaign has generally been perceived as weak. A case in point is the non-event this week as Dion released the Liberal platform, *Richer, Fairer, Greener*. The platform did not register with the public and failed to cause any change in the Liberal's support numbers in daily tracking polls.

Time is running out for Dion to find a campaign message that resonates with voters and provides him with a narrative to take into the Leaders' Debates and carry through to the end of the campaign. Failing this, media focus will shift from the day-to-day Liberal campaign to the future of the Liberal leadership, a subject the media has already begun to speculate about.

In sum, it appears that the adage that elections are lost and not won will apply once again in 2008. The overall trend is that the Conservatives have the edge and it is their election to lose. The campaign ahead for the Tories will be heavily focused on Québec and Ontario, where their biggest potential gains lie. The Liberals need to gain traction with voters and find a solution to the leadership issues that have dogged them throughout the campaign. They face the real possibility of substantial seat losses and must quickly reverse direction if they are to convince strategic voters that only a Liberal vote will prevent a Conservative majority. This week's Debates will provide the parties with an opportunity to reinvigorate and reposition their campaigns and we will be watching as the next few weeks unfold.

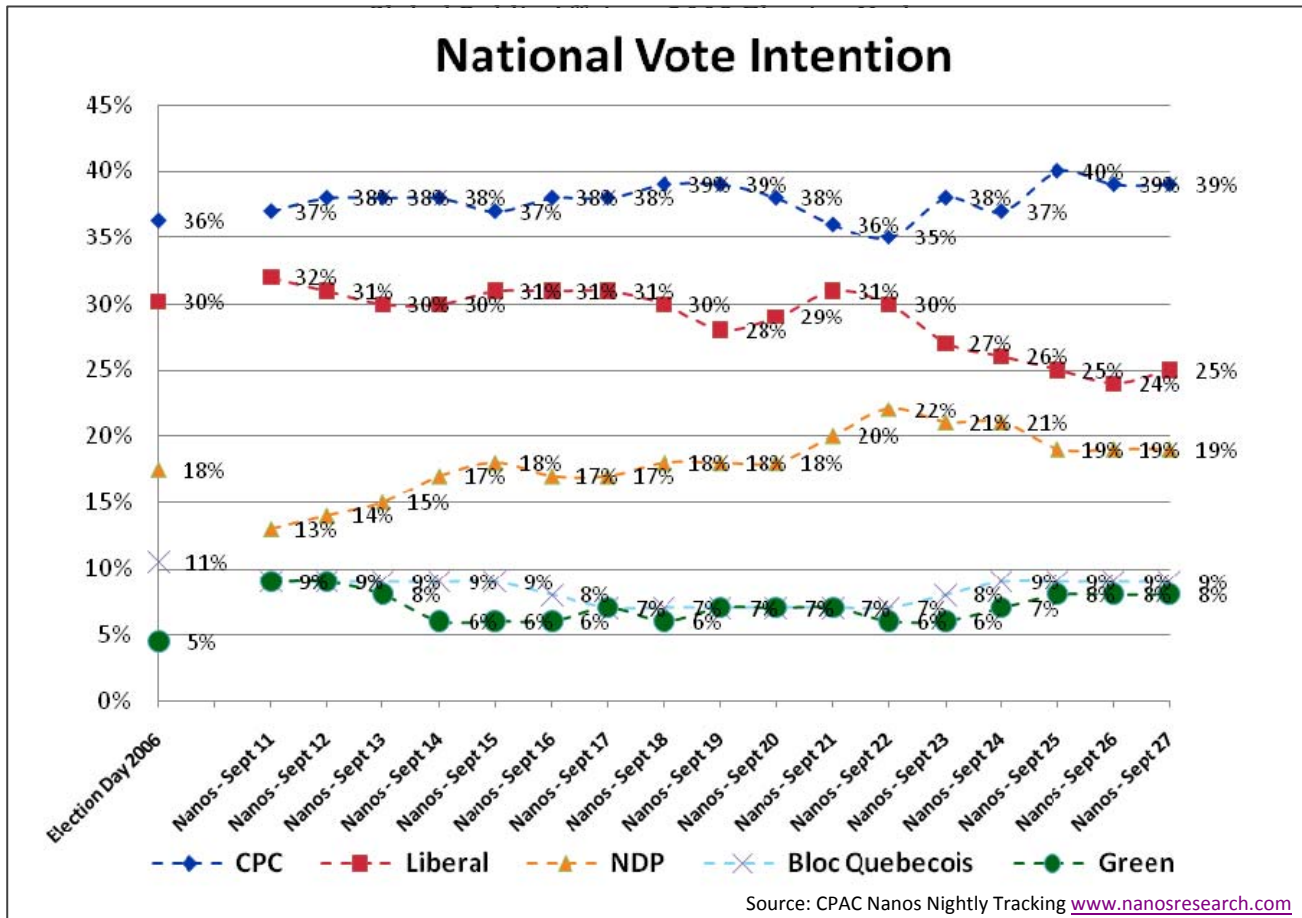
### **Campaign Wild Cards – The Arts and the Economy**

This week, two wild card issues which could have a drastic impact on the election outcome emerged at the forefront of the campaign: the arts and the economy. In Québec, cuts made to arts funding nationwide by the Conservative government triggered a lot of attention this week. The arts issue runs deeper than just money in that province, as it impacts cultural identity and has the potential to become a wedge issue that could favour the Bloc.

At the core of the issue, the Conservatives' cuts to arts funding suggests insensitivity to culture and the delicate relationship between the arts, language and identity deeply entrenched in Québec society. The Bloc Québécois have an opportunity to frame this perceived affront to Québec culture as a nationalist issue, allowing them to pick up the mantle of defending Québec's intrinsic need for sovereignty over its culture and way of life.

The other opposition parties share the same message on the arts issue: their party, not the Conservatives, is the party which will support artists and the arts. The Liberals have pledged to reverse the Conservatives' cuts and increase the budget for the Canada Council for the Arts. The NDP have also pledged to reverse the cuts and to properly fund Canada's cultural industries.

The Bloc gains the advantage on this issue through their ability to tie arts into the grander scheme of culture and identity in Québec. However, there are questions of whether this issue can be sustained as a wedge issue – if it can, it could be the "Hail Mary pass" the Bloc has been hoping for. The test will be in Wednesday's French language Leaders' Debate. If the arts and culture issues continue to dominate, the Conservatives may decide to mitigate their position with a Québec-focused arts policy announcement (which may be a risky move, as the cuts have not resulted in a similar outcry in the rest of Canada).



The economy continued to gain traction as a campaign issue, particularly as the U.S. worked to achieve a bailout package for Wall Street. Increased Canadian worries over the economy are driven by the possible spill-over effects of the growing risk to the U.S. financial system. Unless quickly mitigated by the U.S. Congress (indications point to a package to be confirmed by Congress on Monday), anxiety will continue to grow and concern over the economy could become the overarching context for the remainder of the campaign. This would actually be a boon to the Conservatives as they are seen as the best party to lead on economic issues and have been buoyed by the news of a budget surplus in July. Look for Harper to strongly make the case for Conservatives to be the party to manage the economy in the Leaders' Debates this week.

### Week in Review

#### Conservative Party

As the third week of the campaign comes to a close, the Conservatives should give themselves a pat on the back for the least number of gaffes made in a week. Aside from Calgary Centre MP Lee Richardson's comments regarding immigration and crime, the Tory campaign ran a smooth week of policy announcements, building towards next week's Leaders' Debate and their anticipated platform release.

The tough on crime message, which the Conservatives have been promoting since 2006, was reinforced with pledges to strengthen sentencing for youth criminals, reveal the identities of teens over 14 who commit serious crimes, and ending conditional sentencing for serious crimes. While critics take issue with the Conservatives' assessment that crime is increasing, the tough on crime message has played well for the Conservatives in the past and will likely help to

solidify some of their voters, particularly in suburban Canada.

The Conservatives this week also promised to crack down on environmental crime and announced a consumer protection package including an internet anti-spam law, a ban on unsolicited text messages and action on bid-rigging, price fixing and gas-pump tampering. After the announcement of consumer protection issues, the Conservatives have begun to turn their campaign attention back onto the economy. Particularly as the economic situation in the U.S. becomes more grim, the Conservative campaign will likely take their message of economic leadership into next week's debates.

Overall, this week has ended on a rather high note for the Conservatives. This has been reflected in the polls as well, as the Conservatives are coming within grasp of a 40% voter intention. If the Conservatives can maintain this momentum and discipline on the campaign trail through to the end of the campaign, a majority may be within their grasp.

### Liberal Party

Liberal Leader Stéphane Dion kicked off week three with the official release of their policy platform. The beleaguered leader may have been trying to draw attention away from the Green Shift plan, which he noted last week was not as large a component of his policies as everyone has made it out to be. Yet, a look inside the Liberal platform, entitled *Richer, Fairer, Greener*, proves it is still a significant piece of the party's vision for Canada.

While the launch of the party's platform has brought an opportunity for Liberals to speak to more than just the Green Shift plan, Dion has not done a particularly good job communicating his ideas to voters. At the platform launch and at stops in Winnipeg, Québec City and Toronto, Dion talked about such diverse matters as income tax cuts, funding measures for workers, families, seniors and students, more support for the arts, a \$75 million pledge to improve security at cultural

### Highlights from the Liberal Party Platform

On Tuesday, Liberal Leader Stéphane Dion released *Richer, Fairer, Greener*, the Liberal Party's platform. Below are highlights from that document.

- ❖ Reducing federal corporate tax rates to 14 per cent by the fourth year of the Liberal's plan
- ❖ Immediately ending the accelerated capital cost allowance rates for oil sands development and shifting it to companies making green technology investments
- ❖ Before any cap and trade systems are in place, a Liberal government would provide \$400 million over four years to offer refundable tax credits for non-energy related industries, such as farming and forestry that achieve real emissions reductions.
- ❖ Providing \$10 billion for Strategic Infrastructure Fund which will go towards green infrastructure projects such as clean water and sewage treatment
- ❖ Creating a \$1-billion Advanced Manufacturing Prosperity Fund to support major investments in manufacturing and R&D facilities that aim to position Canada as a leader in green products and technology
- ❖ Development of a National Forestry Summit with industry, unions, communities, Aboriginals and all levels of government to formulate a National Forestry Strategy

[Click here](#) for the full version of *Richer, Fairer, Greener*.

centres and places of worship, and incentives to invest in green technologies. However, Dion's messages have not resonated with voters. Daily polling shows a consistent slide in Liberal support.

For now it seems there may be no rebound in sight for the Liberal Party. Not only have voters kept

their distance, but reports of infighting within the party have been running rampant. Former Liberal Party President, Stephen LeDrew, publicly stated that the party was heading towards some “needed drubbing” and that they “required a beating so they can rebuild.” While the group of Liberal dissenters is relatively small, their statements on disorganization and discontent have been held up for all to see, spurring a media frenzy of speculation on when whether a new Liberal Leader is in the cards. True to his persistent character, Dion’s message to his fellow party members was to ignore these Liberal critics and concentrate on promoting the Liberal platform.

### **Bloc Québécois**

This has been a relatively successful week for Gilles Duceppe and the Bloc, as they capitalized on the anger in Montréal over Conservative cuts to arts programs. Throughout the week Duceppe continued to use the culture issue and his opposition to the Conservatives’ youth crime measures to convince voters of the dangers of voting Conservative. Duceppe was so encouraged by his party’s jump in the polls that by week’s end he was willing to put a stop to speculation about his future as Bloc leader and declared that he will run again for the party’s leadership. On the media front Duceppe got a boost with splashy coverage of Tuesday’s protest concert in Montréal and an investigative report in *La Presse* exposing the alleged corrupt past of four prominent Conservative candidates.

With Duceppe reaching the halfway point of his ‘do or die’ campaign many critics suggest he is still in a losing battle. Polls have indicated that while Bloc support increased in the last week, there is still potential for them to cede significant seats to the Conservatives. The NDP in Québec are not to be underestimated. Although a minor player in the province, they are targeting essentially the same left of centre votes as the Bloc, particularly in Montréal.






Duceppe also has to deal with the fact many Quebecers openly argue that 18 years of Bloc

Québécois representation in Ottawa have not achieved the desired results and it is time to switch away from what in the end can only be an opposition party. To counter this argument and in an effort to hold the committed separatist vote, Pauline Marois, the respected leader of the provincial Parti Québécois actively campaigned with him this week, thereby underscoring the importance the PQ attached to the Bloc’s continued presence in Ottawa.

### **NDP**

In the past week (and indeed, since the election writ was dropped), Jack Layton and the NDP have been running a focused and sophisticated campaign, turning out clear messaging and solid positioning on key issues. The NDP election machine has continued to gain speed over the course of week three, quickly recovering from the loss of three BC candidates the previous week. Moving across the country from Kamloops to Halifax and three provinces in between, Layton and his party opposed Stephen Harper’s proposed corporate tax cuts, vowed to establish an investigative agency examining gas gouging at the pumps and directed a scathing attack at the Conservatives over the hot-button issue of the week - the arts funding cuts. While there was no major defining event during the week for the NDP, they continue to mount a strong national campaign focused on the Tories, while remaining largely indifferent, yet cautious, towards the Liberals.

Important to note is how the NDP are positioning their leader. With a weakened Liberal Party and its increasingly disillusioned membership, Jack Layton has styled himself as the “other” realistic alternative to Stephen Harper. In NDP campaign literature, as well as on the party’s website and in its leader’s speeches, Jack Layton is being portrayed as prime ministerial material - “*A Prime Minister Who’ll Put You and Your Family First.*” Based on recent polling information, the use of this kind of messaging is not misplaced; the most recent Nanos polling numbers have put the NDP at 19%, not far behind the Liberals at 25%.

<b>Week Three: Leaders' Travels and Policy Announcements</b>					
					
Sunday	<b>Ottawa, ON</b>	<b>Montréal, QC</b> \$530 million for arts and culture	<b>Gatineau, QC</b> Campaigns with local candidate	<b>St. Eustache, QC</b>	<b>Vancouver, BC</b> Attends AIDS Walk
Monday	<b>Ottawa, ON</b> Announces slate of youth crime measures	<b>Ottawa, ON</b> Releases Liberal platform "A Richer, Fairer, Greener Canada"	<b>Hamilton, ON</b> Unveils trade policy priorities; would not implement Conservatives' corporate tax cut	<b>Montréal, QC</b>	<b>Edmonton, AB</b> Announces party's policy on nuclear disarmament
Tuesday	<b>Saskatoon, SK</b> Increased limitations on use of house arrest	<b>Vancouver, BC</b> If elected, would reverse current income trust tax and replace with a lesser tax (10%)	<b>Québec City, QC</b> Announces support for artists; would reverse Tories' arts funding cuts;	<b>Montréal, QC</b> Measures to investigate gas price gouging	<b>Multiple stops in SK and MB</b> Promotes party platform at whistle stops
Wednesday	<b>Vancouver &amp; Courtenay, BC</b> \$113 million for Environmental Enforcement Action Plan	<b>Ottawa, ON/Winnipeg, MB</b> \$75 million for Communities at Risk program (funding for security at various facilities in high-risk communities)	<b>Kenora, ON</b> Introduces policy to improve forestry sector; would end softwood lumber agreement	<b>Montréal, QC</b> Calls for government to devolve 1% of Canada's budget to the arts	<b>Toronto, ON</b> Rally at Hockey Hall of Fame
Thursday	<b>Edmonton, AB</b> Unveils new consumer protection plan	<b>Québec City, QC</b> Announces measures to improve job market in Québec	<b>Kamloops, BC</b> Calls for federal office to investigate gas prices and gouging at the pump	<b>Montréal, QC</b> Demands increased transfer payments for education and health	<b>Guelph, ON</b> Rally at Guelph Youth Music Centre
Friday	<b>Calgary, AB</b> New plan for protecting Canada's natural resources (prohibit export of bitumen, etc)	<b>Toronto, ON</b> Proposes tax cuts benefiting seniors (cuts on pension/reversal of tax on income trusts)	<b>Vancouver, BC</b> Makes health policy announcements; would launch program to make prescriptions drugs affordable	<b>Warwick, QC</b> \$763 million for agriculture sector	<b>Multiple stops in ON</b> Promotes party platform at whistle stops
Saturday	<b>Ajax, ON</b> Highlights GTA initiatives including FLOW (transportation action plan)	<b>Stoney Creek, ON</b> \$1 billion to support the manufacturing sector	<b>Vancouver, BC</b> Campaign rally	<b>Montréal, QC</b> Unveils environmental component of Bloc platform	<b>Multiple stops in QC, NB and NS</b>

Increasingly, rumblings in the media are suggesting that an NDP official opposition is not entirely out of the question.

### Green Party

This week, Green Party Leader Elizabeth May began her cross-country whistle stop tour in Vancouver, where she boarded a Via Rail train and began the week long journey to Halifax, Nova Scotia. The tour, a throwback to political campaigns of past, saw the Green Party take over a rail car and hold small rallies at all hours of the day and night at Via Rail stops in some big and not-so-big locations across the country. The Greens are hard at work invigorating the grassroots campaign and getting their leader national exposure which should help to increase their vote share.

Like the other parties, the Greens are also preparing for next week's debates, which is a historic opportunity for the party. Elizabeth May has a golden opportunity in the English debate, where by the luck of the draw, she landed the coveted opening statement slot. Lots of eyes will be

on May to judge her performance at the debate and it likely will impact whether Green Party supporters stick with the Party or vote strategically in a few short weeks.

### Election Timeline – 16 Days to Go

<b>Week 4</b> <b>September 28 - October 4</b>	Oct 1-2 – Leaders' debates (Ottawa) Oct 3-6 – Advance Polls open Oct 6 – Final election expense limits released
<b>Week 5 – E-Day</b> <b>October 5 - October 14</b>	Oct 13 – Thanksgiving Holiday Oct 14 – Election Day

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