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Redford in solid position heading into spring vote: poll

Joseph Brean, Postmedia News

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Just two months into the rookie term of Premier Alison Redford, her Progressive Conservative party appears to hold a strong lead heading in to next spring's vote, despite solid support for rival Danielle Smith's Wildrose party, a new poll suggests.

Lorne Bozinoff, president of Forum Research, which conducted the poll for the National Post, said it reflects the "new Tory look" in Alberta, after a bumpy few years in which former Tory Premier Ed Stelmach posted the province's first budget deficit in more than a decade and the Wildrose was the primary beneficiary of its slumping fortunes.

With the support of 38 per cent of respondents, compared to 23 per cent for the Wildrose, the Tories can now seek to build support in demographic segments in which they are traditionally weaker, and which have drifted toward the more libertarian politics of the Wildrose, Bozinoff said.

One of the more dramatic findings is the gender gap - Tory support is especially strong among women (42 per cent, compared to 33 per cent among men), while Wildrose support is much stronger among men (28 per cent, compared to 18 per cent among women).

New Democrats and Liberals are both distant challengers, at 12 per cent and 13 per cent, with most of that support in Edmonton, and little elsewhere in the province. The Alberta Party registered at six per cent.

The poll also indicates that Wildrose support skews significantly older, from just 16 per cent in the 18-34 age group, up to 34 per cent among those older than 55.

Public opinion of Redford as leader remains largely undecided, the poll shows. A lawyer with deep experience working for the UN, she won the Tory leadership, and thus the premiership, in October. Her approval numbers, 38 per cent, are greater than her disapproval, 29 per cent, but fully 33 per cent did not have an opinion, which Bozinoff said was remarkably high so near to a vote. Her support is also stronger among women than it is among men, by 43 per cent to 32 per cent.

Wildrose Leader Danielle Smith's popularity, however, seems to exceed that of her party. At 35 per cent overall, her approval rating is significantly higher among men (41 per cent compared to 30 per cent among women).

Raj Sherman, the emergency medicine doctor who was ejected from the PC party in 2010 after criticizing the government for hospital wait times, and became Opposition Liberal leader in September, received the worst numbers, with a full 41 per cent having no opinion about him, and a disapproval rating that, at 35 per cent, was 11 points higher than his approval rating.

"It's the wrong direction," Bozinoff said.

Conducted by Forum Research on Dec. 14, 2011, the poll of 1,072 adult Albertans via an automated interactive telephone survey is considered accurate to within 2.9 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

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