

## NDP Leadership: Thomas Mulcair Leads by Wide Margin in New Poll

Eric Grenier , The Huffington Post Canada

Tuesday, December 20, 2011, 7:32 AM



With the NDP's support beginning to slip in Quebec, a recent survey from Forum Research indicates that among the party's supporters Thomas Mulcair is the leadership candidate seen as the best person for the job.

The poll, conducted on December 13 and surveying some 300 NDP supporters, suggests that roughly half (47 per cent) of the party's voters are unsure who would make the best leader. But of the 53 per cent who expressed an opinion, Mulcair garnered 45 per cent support, well ahead of fellow MP Peggy Nash (16 per cent).

Brian Topp, seen in some circles as the favourite to win, had only eight per cent support, tied with the 29-year-old Manitoba MP Niki Ashton.

Of course, this sample size of NDP supporters was very small. The sample of those who know who they want as the party's next leader is even smaller, giving this survey a large margin of error (roughly +/- six per cent among supporters and eight per cent among decided supporters). However, even taking this into account, it still appears Mulcair has a real lead over his rivals.

But does it matter? After all, it is the 95,000-plus members of the New Democratic Party that will be deciding who becomes the next leader, not the millions of Canadians who voted for the NDP in

May. Paul Dewar, one of the presumed top contenders who had four per cent support among decided voters, dismissed the Forum poll as measuring “name recognition” only.

If that’s the case, and it could very well be, that is a problem for the NDP.

The leadership campaign has now been underway for more than three months. There have already been two debates, one organized by the party and another by the B.C. New Democrats. While the average NDP member undoubtedly has a much better idea of who the nine leadership candidates are than the average NDP supporter, it is the latter that will determine whether the party forms the next government.

This poll does not tell us who is most likely to win the leadership race, but it does tell us who Canadians want the party to choose. At this stage, that person is Thomas Mulcair.

And if the poll is all about name recognition, that is not a good sign for Peggy Nash, Paul Dewar and Brian Topp, seen as top tier contenders alongside the veteran Quebec MP Mulcair. While Mulcair’s name recognition is good (about 24 per cent among all NDP supporters, including those undecided on the leadership question), Nash’s is at only eight percent. Topp’s has half that, and Dewar even less.

Whereas Mulcair is already a recognized figure among the party’s supporters and beyond, the other candidates still have a lot of work to do to spread their names. Otherwise, while Nash, Topp or Dewar may win a majority of votes among NDP members in March, the rest of the country, and even those likely to vote NDP, may shrug “Brian/Peggy/Paul who?”

*Eric Grenier taps The Pulse of federal and regional politics for Huffington Post Canada readers on most Tuesdays and Fridays. Grenier is the author of ThreeHundredEight.com, covering Canadian politics, polls, and electoral projections.*

© Copyright (c) The Huffington Post Canada