

Bob Rae top choice to lead the Liberals: poll

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PAT McGRATH/POSTMEDIA NEWS Interim Liberal leader Bob Rae

By Lee Berthiaume

OTTAWA — While interim Liberal leader Bob Rae remains coy about whether he plans to run for permanent leadership of the party, results of the latest poll suggest he is far and above the preferred choice of Canadians to lead the Liberals.

Twenty-one per cent of Canadians surveyed by Forum Research chose Rae over a slate of seven other candidates that included Mark Carney, the Bank of Canada governor, Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty and former NHL all-star goaltender Ken Dryden.

Dryden, who previously ran for the leadership, came second at 9% with former Ontario minister Gerard Kennedy third at 5%.

Rae has been seen as doing a good job as interim leader since taking over the position in May, said Forum Research president Lorne Bozinoff, "and he's used that to his advantage."

Over the weekend, Liberals agreed to let outsiders vote in future leadership contests, and Bozinoff said Rae stands to benefit immensely, should he decide to run again.

"A lot of this is driven by name awareness," Bozinoff said. "There are a lot of people who are well-known within the party but not well-known outside the party. Rae has an extremely high profile, so he's well-known outside the party."

Respondents also were asked whether Canada should cut ties with the monarchy once the Queen dies.

The Conservative government has been playing up Canada's royal connections since May. At the same time, this past weekend's Liberal biennial convention saw delegates debate, but ultimately reject, the idea of making abolishing the monarchy official party policy.

The Forum Research poll found Canadians decidedly split on the issue, with 43 per cent in favour and the same number opposed.

Conservatives were the most ardent supporters of the monarchy, with only 37 per cent in favour of abolishment. Liberals were divided, with 41 per cent in favour of severing ties and 45 per cent opposed.

The results show the Conservative government has been playing to its base by playing up Canada's relationship with the Royals, said Bozinoff, while Liberals unintentionally may have created a wedge issue within their own party.

However, Liberals may want to reconsider the abolishing the monarchy if they are as intent on winning a breakthrough in Quebec as they say. Sixty-seven per cent of Quebecers were in favour of abolishing the monarchy, compared to less than 40 per cent in all other parts of the country.

Both polls were conducted on Jan. 13 in an interactive voice response telephone survey of 1,211 residents aged 18 or older. Each has a margin of error of plus or minus 2.82 per cent, 19 times out of 20.

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