

This version of Groundhog Day is not a movie

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The phrase that best sums up the kickoff week of Election 2005 is: "Now, where were we?"

There's been a big temptation to see this unwanted holiday election as simply a replay of the 2004 campaign. But the polls and political strategy this week show Canada is seeing more election resumed than election replayed. It appears this campaign has simply picked up where the battle left off June 28, 2004.

First, look at it by the numbers: If this was a replay of the last election, we could have expected to see Liberals faltering and Conservatives climbing in the first week, as they did back in May 2004.

Instead, what the numbers show, is more in keeping with the fifth and *last* week of campaign 2004 — Liberals inching up, Conservative Leader Stephen Harper more or less stuck, if not falling.

The newest poll, a *Star/La Presse/EKOS* offering in today's paper, shows the Liberals with 34.1 per cent, Conservatives at 27.4 per cent, the NDP with 18.4 per cent and Bloc Québécois at 14 per cent.

This more or less reflects the average of the past five polls conducted over this week, according to results compiled by the PoliticsCanada website, which put the average for the Liberals at 34 per cent, the Conservatives at 30 per cent, the NDP at 17 per cent and the Bloc at 14.

Those are the same kind of numbers that characterized the days before the last election. On June 25, 2004, just three days before the country went to the polls, SES Research put the Liberals at 34, Conservatives at 30, NDP at 20 and Bloc at 11.

Moreover, this roughly aligns with the popular vote in the actual election: Liberals 36.7, Conservatives 29.6, New Democrats 15.6 per cent and Bloc at 12.4 per cent.

When you match up the numbers with what the politicians have been saying and doing this week, it probably shouldn't be a surprise to find Canadians in about the same mood they were back in the last week of the 2004 campaign.

The leaders have set about their kickoff tasks this week very much like a sweep-up operation from the last election.

- Prime Minister Paul Martin and his Liberals have been trying to re-create the same conditions that led to their last-minute reprieve from a Conservative surge — namely, an anti-Harper crusade.
- Harper and his Conservatives have been trying to confront the mistakes they made in the final days and address them head-on; whether it's the controversies on social conservatism or their failure to connect with voters' pocketbooks and personal issues.
- New Democrats have been trying to thwart a Liberal scare campaign before it takes votes away from ridings where the NDP is in strong contention.

So does this mean that Canada is headed for the same result as it was in 2004? Perhaps — if the vote was a few days away.

But the vote is more than seven weeks off. In between are four debates, the holidays and many more occasions for parties to rise and fall in the polls.

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