



PRESS RELEASE

LIBERALS REELING UNDER WEIGHT OF BURGEONING SPONSORSHIP SCANDAL

National Federal Voting Intentions (n=1125)	
Liberal Party of Canada	25.0
Conservative Party of Canada	36.2
New Democratic Party	20.5
Bloc Quebecois	12.6
Green Party	5.0

Interviews conducted April 7 to 9, 2005

Ottawa, ONTARIO. An EKOS poll conducted for the Toronto Star and La Presse finds Paul Martin's Liberals reeling from the catastrophic political fallout of the recent Gomery hearings. Conducted following the release of previously banned testimony from the Gomery inquiry, the poll reveals a breathtaking shift in what had been a stagnant and listless political landscape. The Liberals have surrendered a near 15-point lead over the Conservative Party (noted in early February), and now trail the Conservatives by 11 points — a net 26-point worsening of their relative position.

OVERVIEW:

Our survey shows that nearly everyone is following the story unfolding at the Gomery inquiry and the effects are dramatic. There has been a sharp rise in the incidence of those who see this as the "worst scandal they can recall" (up from 22 per cent in April 2004 to 34 per cent). However, there is still a slightly greater proportion of the public (37 per cent) that feels that, while the scandal is bad, it is "no worse than others". By a margin of two to one, Canadians say that Prime Minister Martin must be held accountable for the sponsorship issue rather than receiving credit for calling the public inquiry.

The only finger in the dyke for the Liberals is a clear consensus by the public that an immediate election is not warranted. Voters are adamant that they want to hear the whole Gomery story before going to the polls — just 15 per cent say the election should be called now *versus* 62 per cent who say it should wait until the inquiry submits its report (the rest do not think that this issue justifies an election). There is little immediately apparent in the political environment, however, to suggest a path back to clear popular support for the Liberals.

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“While Canadians are clearly of a mind to wait for more answers and validation of recent allegations raised at the inquiry, it’s uncertain the extent to which they would punish a party or parties who caused what some would see as a premature end to this Parliament,” observed EKOS President Frank Graves. Graves continued, “Traditionally, an early election call doesn’t end up as a defining ballot box issue”.

There is little sense of any huge affection for the Conservatives, with voters caught between anger at the Liberals and only tepid enthusiasm for the only serious contender to form government. “Canadians pretty much got the Parliament they wanted last summer,” said Graves. “In the current volatile landscape, if there is to be another federal election in the near future, voters will likely consider where the broader electorate is before deciding where to throw their support. I suspect most still prefer a minority government, but this time of a different political stripe.”

Notes Graves, “We have seen other spikes in the past which have proven to be temporary, such as the short-term drop in federal Liberal support we witnessed in Ontario during the last election as a backlash to the unpopular provincial budget. The current situation, however, seems to be qualitatively different, with a good old-fashioned scandal apparently tied more directly to a wing of the federal Party.”

In the current environment, the NDP may be poised to do surprisingly well; they are up slightly since February, but more importantly, they now lead as the second choice party for those whose voting intention may change. They may ultimately benefit from erstwhile Liberal voters who are angry at the LPC but wary of the conservatives.

REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE:

The regional analysis reveals the depth of the Liberal decline and the real electoral significance of these results. The Liberals trail in every region of Canada and their prospects in Quebec and seat-rich Ontario are positively gloomy.

Quebec:

The Bloc’s enthusiasm for an election is readily understood, as these findings, translated into seats, would see the Liberals virtually wiped out in Quebec. Indeed, at 15 per cent support, the Liberals trail the Bloc by 35 points and the Conservatives by 2.5 points. For the Bloc, it is really a single issue — white-hot anger at the sponsorship scandal (71% of Bloc supporters say it is the worst scandal they can recall). Ironically, however, over 90 per cent of Quebecers say that issues other than ethics and accountability should be the most important in the next federal election. Noteworthy is that the rise in Bloc support is occurring in isolation from any parallel rise in support for sovereignty. The Bloc remain a single-issue party, but they have traded a focus on sovereignty to one on sponsorship.

Ontario:

A unique political alchemy has blended both sponsorship ire and a strong sense of unfairness (over the political economy of federal-provincial transfers) to produce a sulphurous meltdown of Liberal fortunes in Ontario. Their 14-point lead over the Conservatives in early February has turned into a seven-point deficit and, if these numbers were sustained, the seat impacts would be profoundly positive for the Conservatives. It was the recently released testimony of Jean Brault that lit the fuse, igniting resentment over fair share treatment and ultimately producing a Liberal implosion in Ontario. The Ontario landscape, coupled with the Quebec numbers, offers a double whammy for the Liberals and casts a daunting pall over their future. Extended wait times and cramped educational facilities become less bearable as prosperous Ontarians digest eye-popping details of the sponsorship testimony. The principal beneficiary of Premier McGuinty's campaign for a bigger share of federal revenues has been Stephen Harper and the Conservatives.

Atlantic:

A fairly tight two-way race between the Liberals and Conservatives; the sponsorship fallout may be tempered somewhat by worries over losing gains obtained in recent equalization deals.

Alberta:

Alberta is poised for a complete Conservative sweep, with 70 per cent support.

British Columbia:

A tight three-way race here, but the NDP now lead with 37 per cent support.

METHODOLOGY:

These data are based on telephone interviews conducted April 7 to April 9, 2005 with a random sample of 1,125 Canadians aged 18 and over. A sample of this size provides a margin of error of +/- 2.9 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The margin of error increases when the results are sub-divided (i.e., error margins for sub-groups such as regions).

All the data were statistically weighted to ensure the sample's regional, gender and age composition reflects that of the actual population of Canada according to Census data.