



NEWS RELEASE

We're Great. Politicians Are Dirt. *Canadians Like Themselves, Their Neighbours, Even Their Public Servants. Just Don't Get Them Started on Their Politicians.*

Canadians have high personal ethics; just ask one. And our neighbours have high standards too – almost as high as our own, in fact. Almost. But somehow, Canadians feel, this ethical land has produced a political class that lacks our high standards, takes care of itself, and leaves the rest of us to suffer. These are some of the findings of an EKOS/Toronto Star/ La Presse poll conducted in part to mark EKOS' 25th anniversary.

"You have to wonder where Canadians think their politicians come from," commented Frank Graves, President of EKOS Research Associates. "And with public attitudes like this you have to wonder why anyone would want to enter public life."

Canadians were asked in the survey to rate their personal ethics. Eighty-nine per cent put them in the high range. And 70 per cent said that other Canadians were ethical too. Contrary to what some have suggested, Canadians also believe their public servants have ethical standards that reflect their own, notwithstanding the involvement of some of them in the federal sponsorship scandal recently dissected by Justice Gomery's first report.

Where the federal sponsorship scandal does seem to have had an effect is in reinforcing the public's negative view of politicians, though this fits into a much longer pattern of declining trust in public figures and institutions. In 1996, 47 per cent of Canadians said that they had less trust in the federal government than they had a decade earlier; today that figure has risen to 54 per cent. According to some measures, Canadians' contempt for politicians may actually be moderating, though ever so slightly. The number agreeing that politicians take care of themselves and their friends while average Canadians suffer badly has declined from 83 per cent in 1994 to 70 per cent today.

But overall, the picture is bleak for politicians. Just 16 per cent rate the ethics of politicians as high. And Canadians aren't afraid to get personal. Asked whether they would be proud to have their child grow up to be a politician, 45% said "no". Ouch.

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“In a way, though Canadians are quick to flatter themselves about their personal ethics, the collective portrait they paint doesn’t necessarily reflect all that well on them,” said Graves. “They are at the same time self-satisfied and cynical about participating in the public debate. The question is: If they don’t like the character of their public life, do they not bear at least some of the responsibility to change it?”

METHODOLOGY:

These data are based on telephone interviews conducted Nov 7 to Nov 9, 2005 with a random sample of 1275 Canadians aged 18 and over. A sample of this size provides a margin of error of +/- 2.7 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.