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## *NEWS RELEASE*

# **Bob Rae is Public's Favourite for LPC Leader** ***Liberals Close Gap on Tories*** Environment/Afghanistan Hurting Tories Senate Reform a Surprising Winner

<b>National Federal Voting Intentions</b> <b>(n=1211; decided voters n=1012)</b>	
Conservative Party of Canada	36.0
Liberal Party of Canada	31.7
New Democratic Party	16.2
Bloc Québécois	9.9
Green Party	6.2

### **Liberal Leadership**

Michael Ignatieff may have the edge among delegates in the race to lead the Liberal Party of Canada, but Bob Rae is the choice of the general public. Rae is favoured by 26% of the public, compared with 21% for Ignatieff. Rae also leads Ignatieff as second choice. The other two candidates with significant shares of delegate support -- Stéphane Dion and Gerard Kennedy -- trail far behind with 12% support each. In the public's mind at least, the Liberal leadership has resolved itself into a two-horse race between Rae and Ignatieff.

Each respondent was asked to evaluate one of the four leading contenders and say whether that leader would make them more or less likely to vote Liberal in the next election. Rae outperformed Ignatieff by this measure as well. Despite Rae's clear advantage a preferred leader among the public, however, Ignatieff is viewed as somewhat more likely to win the next election if chosen leader.

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“What we are seeing is that Canadians’ perception of who is most electable is being influenced by media coverage and the race for delegates, which Ignatieff is winning,” said EKOS President Frank Graves. “However, the evidence of this poll is that Rae would actually attract more voters to the Liberals than Ignatieff. Ignatieff’s lead among Liberal delegates seems to reflect the triumph of political machinery over popular preferences.”

Where Ignatieff is performing very strongly is in Quebec, where his willingness to re-open the constitutional debate, and perhaps also some of his views on the Middle East, may be finding resonance. Rae is also a more polarizing figure than Ignatieff: Conservative voters are much more inclined to say that he would turn them off the Liberal Party, while NDP voters are more attracted to him. Taking this all into account, however, Rae appears to be in a better position than Ignatieff to bring potential Liberal voters to the fold.

“One thing we are *not* finding is that Rae is a liability in Ontario, as many people have suggested he would be,” said Graves. “Sure he turns off Conservative voters, but he is also a draw for traditional Liberal and NDP voters.”

Still, there is a lot of ground ahead of the leadership candidates, among the general public as well as among delegates. Many Canadians have not yet tuned into the Liberal leadership race. In fact, essentially one in two says they are not following the race closely.

## Party Standings

Right now, the outcome of the next federal election is hard to predict, in part because the Liberals have no leader. However, there are some troubling signs in this poll for the Conservative government led by Stephen Harper. The post-election “honeymoon” that lifted Tory support tantalizingly close to majority territory seems to be waning, and the Liberals are closing ground.

“It is worth pointing out that the results of this poll mimic the results of January’s election, to within a percentage point for most of the parties,” said Graves. “If historic patterns prevailed, we’d expect the Liberals to get a ‘bounce’ from their leadership convention in December, which could make the race very tight. Right now, almost anything is possible: another Conservative or Liberal minority government, or even a majority for one or the other of the two major parties. All these political outcomes are in play.”

Conservative fortunes are sagging somewhat in Quebec, where the party had hoped to make a breakthrough in the next election, weighted down by unpopular Tory positions on the environment and Afghanistan. The Liberals have overtaken the Conservatives in Quebec. Meanwhile the Liberals have also regained the lead in seat-rich Ontario.

“There has been some weakening in the public’s confidence in the direction of the country, especially in Quebec, though it is still pretty positive,” said Graves. “However, confidence in the direction of the federal government is slipping, and is now sharply polarized.”

## Issues

Support for the Afghanistan mission among Canadians continues to sag, despite a recent campaign by the government to get its position out to the public more clearly. However, there has been a slight drop in opposition as well, and a slight increase in Canadians not taking a position, which may be an indication that some people have begun to reflect on the issue. Nowhere is opposition more dramatic than in Quebec. However, only Alberta and the other Prairie provinces are showing a plurality favouring the mission.

The government also faces scepticism from many Canadians about their environmental agenda, which is being revealed this month. While 57% express “moderate confidence” that the Conservative plans will come to grips with our environmental problems, 46% have “low confidence” and only 7% have “high confidence”.

On the other hand, the Conservatives may have a somewhat surprising winner in Senate reform. Sixty percent said that now is the time for getting on with reforming Canada’s unelected Senate, something Prime Minister Harper has recently highlighted, while just 35% say it is a waste of time and energy at the moment.

Although most Canadians have an opinion on the recent nuclear test by North Korea, there is no sign that they are intensely concerned. Forty-five percent advocate diplomatic talks as the best way for the international community to address the issue, and about the same proportion advocate some kind of sanctions or embargo. Very few Canadians advocate military action.

## *METHODOLOGY*

The EKOS survey sampled 1,211 Canadians between October 10 and October 12, 2006. A sample of this size produces a statistical margin of error of +/- 2.8 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The statistical error margin of for questions posed on half of the sample is +/- 4.4 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.