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# Liberals trusted on economy

36 per cent prefer them to Tories  
Social issues are top concern

LES WHITTINGTON  
OTTAWA BUREAU

OTTAWA—Voters are far more ready to turn to the Liberals than the Conservatives to address their concerns on the economy and social issues, according to a new national poll.

And, despite the sponsorship uproar, jobs and social programs such as health care still carry a lot more weight with voters than questions of government ethics, says EKOS Research Associates.

Asked which federal party offers the best solutions to boost economic growth and employment, 36 per cent of respondents said the Liberals, compared to 21 per cent who named the Conservatives.

The New Democrats had 9 per cent, the Bloc Québécois, 6 and the Green party, 2. Fully 27 per cent said "none" or "don't know."

On social issues such as health care and education, Canadians give the NDP the nod, with 25 per cent saying the party offers the best solutions.

This is slightly ahead of the Liberals, with 23 per cent, and well exceeds the Conservatives' 11 per cent.

But the scandal arising from the federal sponsorship program has left the Liberals far behind other parties when it comes to ethics and government accountability.

Only 8 per cent of respondents said the Liberals offered the best solutions on ethical issues, while 43 per cent named the Conservatives and 16 per cent picked the NDP.

The Tories "are benefiting from acute anger over the sponsorship scandal and are seen as the party best able to address ethics and accountability," EKOS president Frank Graves noted in an analysis.

The Conservatives are also seen as offering the best solutions on fiscal issues such as taxes.

The Tories get the nod from 32 per cent on fiscal issues, ahead of the 28 per cent for the Liberals.

Aside from the Liberals' dismal scores on ethics, Martin's party is doing well on all other issues, particularly the economy, which is an area of rising importance, Graves commented.

Asked what should be the most important issue in the next election, 25 per cent said the economy, up from 18 per cent in early April, perhaps reflecting concerns about the business climate in the United

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States.

But 47 per cent of respondents said social issues should be the most important theme in the next federal election.

In contrast, only 14 per cent said ethics ranks as the most important issue in the next election (down from 17 per cent a few weeks ago).

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