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NEWS RELEASE

**Tories Knocking on the Door of Majority
But Quebec Not Answering
Afghanistan Support Ebbing as Hope for Success Fades**

**National Federal Voting Intentions
(n=1004; decided voters n=848)**

Conservative Party of Canada	38.7
Liberal Party of Canada	28.8
New Democratic Party	17.0
Bloc Québécois	8.4
Green Party	7.0

Stephen Harper and the Tories have improved their lead over the Liberals since the election earlier this year, buoyed by a consolidation of their support in English Canada. However, they are being prevented from charting into majority territory by their inability so far to breakthrough in Quebec.

Meanwhile, opposition to the Afghanistan mission continues to grow, though contrary to the conventional wisdom, it is not the rate of Canadian casualties that is driving public opinion. It is the belief among opponents that the mission there is futile and that it draws Canada too close to American policy in the region.

“Despite a sharp rise in opposition to our involvement in Afghanistan, Stephen Harper and the Tories are doing reasonably well,” said Frank Graves, President of EKOS Research. They are knocking on the door of a majority but Quebecers aren’t answering, and seem less and less likely to do so.”

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Outside of Quebec, the Conservatives are sinking their roots deeper, though this is partially disguised by a slight resurgence of the Liberals in Ontario (accompanied by an NDP slump). By many measures, Stephen Harper and his government are a solid success so far: Harper himself has a solid approval rating and well over half of Canadians say his government has matched or exceeded expectations.

Ironically, the government's perceived success may be limiting its growth for now. A plurality of Canadians say the government's performance would be about the same even if it had a majority. And among those who think a majority might make a difference to the government's performance, there is an almost even split between those who think it would be for the better and those who think it would be for the worse. In other words, for the moment, there is no great national yearning for a majority government.

That having been said, a majority government is still a possibility after the next election. Both the Conservatives and the Liberals have the potential to form a government, when voters' second choices are taken into consideration. Interestingly, the NDP, which was once the favoured second-choice of many voters, has now slipped to third place in this category.

"If there is a warning signal for the Tories, from a national perspective, it is that comfort with the direction of the government is lower than comfort with the direction of the country," said Graves. "It is interesting as well, that concern with economic issues is rising, and that a sizeable minority are worried about a collapse in the housing market."

QUEBEC

In Quebec, however, the Tories do not seem to be building on the bridgehead they established in the election. They seem stalled, and this may reflect the relatively sour mood of Quebeckers compared with other Canadians. They are less positive about the direction of the government and the direction of the country; a majority of Quebeckers say the government has fallen short of expectations; and Quebec is the only region in the country where a majority gives Harper a negative performance-rating as Prime Minister.

"For a while, many Quebeckers who were disenchanted with their traditional choice between the Bloc Quebecois and the Liberals were moving to the Conservatives," said Graves. "However, as they become more familiar with the Harper government on a range of issues, including foreign policy, that growth has stalled."

AFGHANISTAN

The growing dissatisfaction with the Afghanistan mission is not a surprise, but the reasons behind it are. Nearly half of Canadians (49 percent) now oppose the mission, compared with 38 percent who support it and 12 percent who are sitting on the fence. However, contrary to the conventional wisdom in the media, and perhaps also among politicians, Canadians do not say that it is the mounting losses of soldiers that is driving their opposition. By far, the most common reasons cited for opposing the mission are the unlikelihood that it will succeed and concern that it brings Canada uncomfortably close to American foreign policy.

Among those who support the mission, the overwhelming majority are motivated either by a desire to fight terrorism or by a commitment to keep faith with our NATO allies and the Afghanistan government. A smaller number support the mission in order to bring stability and democracy to Afghanistan.

“It is important to recognize that while many of the supporters of the Afghanistan mission cite the fight against terrorism as their objective, this is an argument that carries the most sway with the hard-core supporters of the mission,” said Graves. “If the government wants to rebuild support, it needs to bring back those who originally hoped that Canada could work with its allies to improve the lives of the people of Afghanistan.”

CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Although discomfort with American policy in the Middle East has been growing for several years, that doesn't mean Canadians want to turn their back on the United States so far as our direct relations are concerned. Almost twice as many Canadians think Canada-US relations are improving as think they are worsening – and that is a plus for the Harper government. And even those who think that relations aren't getting better wish that they would.

“By a ratio of more than eight-to-one, Canadians think it is important to improve relations with the United States,” said Graves. “Although they are uncomfortable with American policies overseas, that doesn't mean they don't value the relationship with the United States more broadly. In fact, a plurality of Canadians thinks relations with the United States are improving under Harper, and he is getting credit for that.”

METHODOLOGY

The EKOS survey sampled 1,004 Canadians between September 12 and September 14, 2006. A sample of this size produces a statistical margin of error of +/- 3.1 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 subdivided (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.