



NEWS RELEASE

Liberals Opening Widening Lead *Majority Now a Plausible Possibility*

National Federal Voting Intentions	
Liberal Party of Canada	38.7
Conservative Party of Canada	29.4
New Democratic Party	16.9
Bloc Québécois	10.6
Green Party	3.9

The Top Line

The Liberal Party has established a lead of nearly ten percentage points over the second-place Conservatives as Canadians prepare themselves for their first winter election campaign in a quarter-century. The “Gomery effect” that seemed to create a neck and neck race between the two major parties earlier this month has disappeared after several weeks of election talk and Liberal promises.

“The Liberals are back where they were prior to Justice Gomery’s report at the beginning of the month,” said Frank Graves, President of EKOS Research. “Although the election campaign could substantially alter the balance between the parties, from their position now, the Liberals can begin to dream about recovering the majority they lost in the 2004 election.”

For the moment, the Conservatives appear to have stalled below the 30 per cent mark in public support. Most worrisome for them is that the Liberals are opening up a larger lead in two key battlegrounds: Ontario and British Columbia. The Liberals also appear to be recovering some support in Quebec – albeit from a very low level.

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Underlying the Liberal buoyancy is the comfort most Canadians have with the general direction of the country. “The key thing for this campaign is the direction of the country,” said Graves. “Right now this is actually lifting the Liberal vote. Although many Canadians are disillusioned with the Liberals after a dozen years in office, their relative satisfaction with the direction of the country means that many be reluctant to ‘rock the boat’ by ejecting them from office.”

Meanwhile, despite the popularity of its leader, Jack Layton, and his prominent role in the political manoeuvrings of recent weeks, the NDP has sagged slightly in public support since the post-Gomery period earlier this month.

Leadership

The most popular candidate for Prime Minister continues to be “Don’t Know”. The fact that, with an election campaign just a few days away, a plurality of Canadians is reluctant to name anyone as the best candidate for Prime Minister conveys the general dissatisfaction with the political system.

However, among those who do express a preference, Paul Martin retains a comfortable lead over Stephen Harper. “Canadians are definitely more inclined to support Paul Martin as Prime Minister, particularly young Canadians, and women,” said Graves. “However, these groups are also less likely than average to vote, and Stephen Harper’s negative do seem to be falling somewhat.”

Jack Layton continues to run quite strongly as a potential Prime Minister, notably in British Columbia, despite the fact that his party is far from poised to form a government.

Quebec Separation

There is a substantial disconnect between Quebecers and the rest of the country over the possibility of Quebec separation. The combination of the sponsorship scandal, the unpopularity of both the federal and provincial Liberals, and perhaps also the election of a new leader of the Parti Québécois, has fuelled a surge in support for sovereignty in Quebec.

“Quebeckers are quite conscious that the ground is shifting on this issue,” said Graves. “Expectations among Quebecers that the province will separate are higher now than they were before the 1995 referendum. However, if there is a new unity crisis looming, the rest of Canada is sleepwalking into it. Whether from indifference, fatigue or denial, Canadians elsewhere haven’t acknowledged what is happening inside Quebec.”

METHODOLOGY:

These data are based on telephone interviews conducted November 22 to November 24, 2005 with a random sample of 802 Canadians aged 18 and over. A sample of this size provides a margin of error of +/- 3.5 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.