



PRESS RELEASE

FEDERAL ELECTION PART II: A LOOK AT WHAT IS DRIVING FEDERAL VOTING INTENTIONS

National Federal Voting Intentions (n=1306)	
Liberal Party of Canada	38.0%
Conservative Party of Canada	30.4%
New Democratic Party	18.1%
Bloc Quebecois	10.7%
Other	2.8%

Ottawa, ONTARIO. EKOS President Frank Graves had the following to say about the latest results: "Some interesting shifts have occurred. The CPC have newly recruited the top income groups, a former stronghold of the Martin camp. Interestingly, however, the Liberals and the NDP have retained the interest of the more educated. Usually there is greater cohesion between the upper SES groups." Graves continued, "Liberal support is heavily concentrated among youth, which isn't necessarily a good thing given that this group is least likely to vote." On the other hand, Graves notes, "those most inclined to vote – the "grumpies" – have found a resident home with Stephen Harper and have decidedly parked their vote with the CPC."

Another element of concern for the Liberals is the extent to which they have been able to maintain their supporters from the 2000 election. They in fact trail all parties in terms of holding onto their votes from 2000:

Current Vote intention	Vote in 2000 election				
	Liberal	PC	NDP	CA	BQ
Liberal	58%	18%	15%	3%	2%
CPC	22%	71%	5%	92%	3%
NDP	15%	8%	78%	6%	3%
BQ	3%	2%	-	-	89%

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THE ISSUES

The macro-level election issues are stable, with a clear emphasis on human capital. Health care eclipses all other issues as a top-of-mind mention (51 per cent) – with its closest competitors being accountability (seven per cent) and taxes (six per cent).

In a forced-choice presentation of four issue areas and their importance in this campaign, those in the social sphere again dominate (53% for health care and education) with an essential tie for ethics and accountability (17%), economy jobs growth (15%) and taxes and debt (15%).

There are, however regional, ideological and demographic fissures apparent. “Quebec is an interesting case in point”, explained EKOS President Frank Graves, “they see issues such as ethics and accountability as a distant last in terms of pressing matters in this campaign. You have to know that the root of some of the current Liberal woes in that province are found in the ongoing discussion surrounding the sponsorship program, with [former Public Works Minister] Mr. Gagliano’s lawsuit against the government and the Prime Minister serving to turn up the volume on the issue that the Liberals desperately need to mute, especially in Quebec. A slim majority (53%) of Quebecers now agree that BQ Members of Parliament are best positioned to defend Quebec’s interest since they don’t need to take into account the interests of other regions”.

Despite an issues hierarchy, which is stable from our pre-writ sounding in late April, there are now some major shifts in relative positioning of the parties, with the Liberals losing some of their overall advantage for addressing priority issues:

- The Liberals continue to hold a fairly substantive lead on **social issues** (28 per cent to 10 for CPC and 16 for NDP, all relatively stable since April).
- The Liberals hold a far less impressive advantage on **the economy** (25 per cent, down from 42 in April, compared to 18 for the CPC)
- The Liberals and CPC essentially tied on **fiscal issues** (though CPC has a slim 1 point advantage) – the Liberals have fallen 9 points in this area since April, with the drop potentially linked to fallout from the recent McGuinty budget.
- The CPC has a whopping lead on the handling of **ethics and accountability** (40 per cent compared to nine for the Liberals and 14 for the NDP, all largely stable since April)

PUBLIC VIEWS ON THE CAMPAIGN TO DATE

Six in ten (59%) voters agree that after so many years of Liberal government it is now time for a new ruling party government in Ottawa – with even three in ten (28%) Liberal voters taking this position.

Compared to the 2000 campaign, voters see the choices before them as somewhat better (48 per cent to 29) and also favour this campaign in terms of offering distinct and competing visions for the future (41 per cent to 30). We do, however, find rising scepticism about the impact or difference made depending on who gets elected (41% agree it makes little difference, up from 35% in the 2000 federal campaign). This sense of scepticism about the impact of the outcome is highest among BQ supporters (52% agree).

About one in three say they've never been less interested in a federal election campaign, but the plurality (42 per cent) think that this election will be one of the most important in Canada's history. This perceived importance of the election is highest among supporters of the NDP (51%) and the CPC (48%). "It's instructive to note," Graves observed, "that supporters of these two parties, which are currently seeing a great resurgence in fortunes, are most likely to feel this campaign is one of the most important in Canadian history".

EVALUATING THE LEADERS

Mr. Martin holds a significant advantage over the other Parties' Leaders in terms of offering a positive vision for the future (33% say Mr. Martin has been best in this regard, *versus* 19% for Mr. Harper, 14% for Mr. Layton and 8% for Mr. Duceppe). Turning to the issue of honesty, Mr. Martin holds a slimmer advantage over the other Leaders on the dimension of being trustworthy to "do what they are promising to do if elected", with 23% giving Mr. Martin the edge, followed by Mr. Harper (17%), Mr. Layton (13%) and Mr. Duceppe (8%). Reflecting the general cynicism of the public on political honesty, a plurality (26%) volunteers that, in fact, none of the Leaders holds an advantage here.

A testing of the resonance of some of the critiques of the three main national Leaders also reveals some troubling finding for the Liberals. Essentially one in two Canadians (49%) agree with the notion that Mr. Martin has not shown that "he deserves to be Prime Minister", a view held by one in four (25%) of those who currently plan to vote Liberal. Majorities of supporters for the other parties agree with this statement.

Just over one in three (36%) Canadians agree that the "have serious doubts about Stephen Harper's real agenda", with this view being held by one in five (19%) of his own supporters, and being especially strong (55% agree) among those planning to vote NDP.

As Mr. Layton unveiled his economic platform that seeks to establish his *bona fides* for fiscal prudence, we find a polarized public with respect to the notion that, if he were to become Prime Minister he would "spend the country into bankruptcy"(30% agree and 32% disagree).

"The current hurdles or roadblocks for the Liberals are substantial," Graves said, "they hold a narrowing competitive advantage on issues, concerns with ethics are not fading, they are dealing with a broad desire among voters to see change in the ruling party in Ottawa, and the public has significant questions about whether Mr. Martin has demonstrated himself deserving of being Prime Minister. He is, however, still seen as articulating the most positive vision for Canada and ranks as the leader most trusted to follow through with election promises."

“Liberal fortunes in the key battleground of Ontario are also currently suffering from events well out of the national Party’s hands,” Graves said. “Anecdotal reports of Liberal candidates in Ontario candidates getting an earful over the recent provincial budget are supported by our findings,” Graves continued, “with over one in two (54%) Ontario voters saying that the budget has made them less likely to support the Federal Liberals”.

“Our ultimate bottom line is that the current trajectory evidence is bad for the Liberals” Graves concluded.

WHAT’S NEXT FOR THE LEADERS?

“Looking at the numbers, I can’t help but offer some free (and unsolicited) advice,” Graves said, “Canadians want to elect the party that will serve the interests of the entire country,” Graves continued, “and they also want social issues like health and education to be the top priority. The Liberals have the advantage here and should capitalize on it.” Mr. Graves also stressed, that “Canadians are growing weary of the ethics issue – especially in Quebec and Ontario, which are key for the Liberals. They have to turn the volume off on ethics and up on social issues, which shouldn’t be hard to do.”

As for Paul Martin in particular, Graves suggests that, “he needs to focus on his leadership advantage.” As Graves points out, “One in four planning on voting for the Liberals is doing so because of Mr. Martin – no other leader garners this kind of support.” Paul Martin also has an advantage over the other leaders in that he is seen as best articulating a positive vision for the future.

When asked about what Stephen Harper and the CPC should be focusing on, Graves says, “it will be important for them to secure their new moderate centrist image.” Graves adds, “They can enhance this image by shoring up health care promises and continuing to attack the exposed ethics flank.”

As for Jack Layton and the NDP, Graves had this to say: “The NDP should emphasize their power broker potential, stressing that they are a home for orphaned centre and centre left. They should push the view that the NDP is the *safer* place to register discomfort with the Prime Minister and the LPC.” Graves also points out that, “There is some concern among Canadians over Jack Layton’s ability to run a financially solvent government, so they will need to stress fiscal moderation fiscal.”

METHODOLOGY:

These data are based on telephone interviews conducted May 25-27, 2004 with a random sample of 1,306 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.