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Contradictions revealed in poll

Voters show attachment to issues identified with Liberals

Yet disaffection driving them to Conservatives, survey shows

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Canadians appear to want a Liberal-style government led by [Stephen Harper's](#) Conservatives, according to a new Toronto Star poll.

This contradiction emerges when respondents to the EKOS Research Associates poll were probed more deeply this week about the issues behind the tight Liberal-Conservative race in the federal election campaign.

Though the Conservatives now have the lead and the momentum, with 34 per cent support against the Liberals' 30 per cent, the poll also shows significant voter attachment to issues closer to the platforms of Prime Minister [Paul Martin](#) and even the New Democratic Party.

"There is little sense that the country will be better under Harper-Conservative rule. In fact, most see the possibility of a Conservative government as weakening key areas of Canadian achievement," EKOS president Frank Graves says. "In essence, what we are seeing is disaffection with the Liberals overwhelming wariness of the Conservatives."

Almost two-thirds of the respondents to the EKOS poll, conducted for the Star and La Presse, believe that the Liberals will win the election and 69 per cent believe it will be a minority.

Only 16 per cent said the most important reason to vote on June 28 is to kick the Liberals out of office. Four times that number, 64 per cent, said the choice should be motivated by what's best for the country.

Yet 51 per cent of the respondents said the Liberals didn't deserve to be re-elected and 48 per cent said Martin didn't deserve the mandate he's seeking.

The preferred alliance in any future minority government is one between the Liberals and the New Democrats, with 26 per cent of respondents saying this would be best for the country. Next favourite is a Conservative-NDP government, with 20 per cent — an apparent indication that Canadians would like to see the New Democrats hold the balance of power no matter which party gets the most seats.

The poll was conducted through 2,117 telephone interviews with Canadians 18 years of age and older from Monday to Wednesday this week. Results are considered accurate within 2.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

Over-all, the poll showed that most respondents placed abundantly more faith in the Liberals to strengthen the social agenda. A full 46 per cent said Liberals would strengthen equal rights for same-sex couples, compared to 17 per cent who thought Conservatives would do the same. On women's rights and access to abortion, 43 per cent said Liberals would strengthen them, compared to 21 per cent for Conservatives.

Liberals were also trusted more to keep up the commitment to the Kyoto air-quality protocol, with 41 per cent saying it would be strengthened by Martin's team, compared to 21 per cent who placed their faith in Harper (who said this week that the Kyoto accord was effectively dead).

On specific issues being raised in the campaign, the poll respondents showed more Liberal-NDP leanings. On health

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care, for instance, 54 per cent support national health standards, while 42 per cent would leave those to the provinces.

On financing health care, a full 40 per cent preferred that this happen through tax or premium increases of some kind, and more Ontarians were offended by the recent budget's broken promises than the actual health-care premium increases. The Conservatives favour tax cuts, while Liberals and New Democrats have not ruled out Canadians paying more for health care.

Meanwhile, 54 per cent of Ontario respondents said the broken promises bothered them most about Premier Dalton McGuinty's recent budget, while only 24 per cent said they resented the money being taken out of their pocket.

Same-sex marriage, supported by the Liberals and especially the New Democrats, is also supported by 53 per cent of the poll respondents. Mandatory abortion counselling, one of the hot-button issues in the campaign after it was raised by a Conservative MP, is opposed by 56 per cent of the people surveyed.

Even on the issues on which Harper and the Conservatives claim as their own — trust, prudence and integrity — voters aren't embracing the front-runners with any enthusiasm.

"Surprisingly, Mr. Harper is not being viewed as the guy to clean house in Ottawa," Graves says. "Rather, he seems to be filling the vacuum caused by the air leaving [Paul Martin](#)'s rapidly deflating balloon."

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