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Wed, November 16, 2005

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US**Grits lacking good graces**

Post-Gomery poll shows Liberals marred by report

By **KATHLEEN HARRIS**, OTTAWA BUREAU

OTTAWA -- The Liberal brand is taking a heavy beating from the sponsorship scandal as Canadians brace for a snap election campaign.

A Sun Media-SES Research poll finds 43% of furious Canadians tar the entire Liberal party with the kickback scheme that ripped off millions of taxpayer dollars -- a 13% jump since the spring.

Another 48% believe only a "few bad apples" are to blame for the corruption -- a 10% slide over the same period.

The poll also found while fewer Canadians think Prime Minister Paul Martin is exclusively to blame for AdScam, a majority believe he shares responsibility for the scandal with his predecessor, Jean Chretien.

On May 4, 29% thought Martin was solely to blame for the scandal compared to only 8% on Nov. 13, two weeks after Gomery tabled his report. Another 24% fingered Chretien, while a whopping 54% of Canadians believe the pair is mutually responsible.

SES president Nik Nanos said the survey results will force Grit strategists to downplay the party logo and talk up their leader as the campaign unfolds in coming weeks.

That could prove to be a challenge, since the three pillars of any election are party, policy and leader.

"When you take one away, you're on a two-legged stool. You take another away, you're on a one-legged stool," he said.



New polls show while Prime Minister Paul Martin was exonerated by John Gomery's report, many people still hold him accountable. (CP file photo)

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Nanos said the figures show Canadians are willing to give Martin a "bit of a break," but not ready to let him off scott-free.

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Conservative MP John Reynolds said Canadians are right to be skeptical.

Liberal party national director Steven MacKinnon admitted the Grit brand has been damaged, but noted Gomery concluded a "small identifiable group" was responsible for AdScam.

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The poll, conducted by SES Research, consisted of random telephone interviews of 1,000 Canadians. It is considered accurate within 3.1%, 19 times out of 20.

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