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Martin losing voters' favour, says poll

MARIA MCCLINTOCK, Free Press Parliamentary Bureau**2004-04-27 03:21:17**

OTTAWA -- A rapidly declining number of Canadians believe Paul Martin would make the best prime minister and an increasing number view his government's performance as poor, an SES/Sun Media poll shows. Martin's poor showing among 1,000 Canadians polled between April 20 and 25 is directly related to the sponsorship scandal, according to SES president Nik Nanos.

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The poll comes as the PM hosted a private dinner with his cabinet ministers at 24 Sussex Drive last night to canvass their advice about the timing of an election. The poll numbers show 33 per cent of Canadians think Martin would make the best PM, a drop of 17 points since February.

Asked about Martin's overall performance, 31 per cent said it was poor or somewhat poor, compared to 13 per cent in February. Twenty-five per cent think the PM's performance is somewhat or very good, down from 30 per cent two months ago.

When asked to rank Conservative Leader Stephen Harper, 16 per cent of those

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surveyed said he'd make the best PM -- double the number who chose him in February. NDP Leader Jack Layton was the choice of only seven per cent, an increase of only two per cent.

A significant finding shows 11 per cent of people thought none of the party leaders would make a good prime minister. Another 31 per cent were undecided.

"What the numbers speak to is volatility and when we see the number of undecided voters increase . . . that's basically a bit of a thermometer reading of how volatile the situation is," Nanos said.

The poll is accurate within plus or minus 3.1 per cent, 19 times out of 20.

Meanwhile, a separate SES/ CPAC poll conducted during the same period shows 60 per cent of Canadians are dissatisfied with Martin's handling of the sponsorship scandal.

"Canadians have . . . gotten a better indicator of what type of performance to expect from Paul Martin, and this clearly shows he's got a problem," Nanos said.

An Environics poll released Friday put support for the Liberal party at a fragile 39 per cent. The Grits will likely need more than 40-per-cent support to form a majority government because conservatives have reunited.

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