

## Poll finds Harper appeal generalized

Those who dislike him, however, have very specific reasons.

By ALAN FINDLAY, FREE PRESS PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU

OTTAWA -- He gets things done, but he shouldn't stray far from home.

An SES Research-Sun Media poll suggests Canadians appreciate Prime Minister Stephen Harper's ability to keep his party's promises and "get the job done" most of all.

On the flip side, foreign affairs issues -- including his perceived coziness with the U.S., war and military policy, and overall foreign policy -- cover three of the six most common complaints levelled at him by the survey's 1,003 respondents.

Other frequent complaints include the government's overall policies, Harper's attitude and a lack of transparency.

SES Research president Nik Nanos said Harper has taken a high-risk approach to governing centred on himself with the hope that it will reap a high reward -- a majority.

"What we've seen is Stephen Harper taking ownership of all the big issues," said Nanos. "If everything goes well, he could really reap some dividends, but if it doesn't go well he could really be the lightning rod."

The survey specifically asked people what they like and dislike, "if anything, about the Stephen Harper-led Conservative government." All answers were unprompted.

About 30 per cent of the respondents were unsure of specific likes or dislikes about Harper's Conservatives.

Another 21.5 per cent said there is nothing they like about Harper's government, while 14.5 per cent said there is nothing they dislike.

The results were part of an Aug. 18-23 telephone survey, which also found the Conservatives are back where they started on election day when it comes to popular support.

Slightly more than half (51 per cent) said they would have some degree of comfort with a Conservative majority government, however. Only 45 per cent said they would be uncomfortable with a Harper-led majority.

The reasons for people finding comfort with a Harper majority government included Harper's policies, desire for change, belief the Conservatives are the best choice and wanting to give them a chance.

Those against a majority were more focused on particular concerns. Tops on the list are Harper's priorities, followed by a dislike for him and the Conservatives, lack of trust and a need to keep them in check with a minority.

Nanos said the results show the dislikes aimed at Harper are much more personalized than the likes.

Those comfortable with Harper are simply more willing to wait and see how he does, Nanos said.

"The jury's still out," he said. "Those who are comfortable with Stephen Harper say they just want to give him a try."

The poll is considered accurate to within 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.