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Thu, August 19, 2004

Image problem persists for PM

By BILL RODGERS, Parliamentary Bureau Chief

Prime Minister Paul Martin's image among Canadians remains tarnished in the wake of June's bruising election campaign, a SES/Sun poll suggests. Twenty-one percent of 1,000 Canadians surveyed between Aug. 5 and 11 said their impression of Martin as a leader had weakened. Only 11% said it had improved while 64% said it hadn't changed.

"What the polling shows is that Martin has expended some of his personal capital during the recent federal election campaign," said SES pollster Nik Nanos, who expects the Grits will spend the next few months trying to buff up their leader's image among voters.

"They're going to be looking at rebuilding the Paul Martin brand in order to get ready to re-launch into another election," Nanos said.

The PM, who led the Grits to Canada's first minority government in 25 years, is also having a difficult time regaining the high level of confidence he enjoyed from voters last winter.



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HONEYMOON'S OVER

Asked who would make the best prime minister, 36% of Canadians in this month's survey give the nod to Martin, down from 50% during his political honeymoon period in February, but up from 28% in June when Grit support plunged in the first weeks of the election campaign.

The silver lining for Martin is that his main political opponent, Stephen Harper, remains a distant second choice for Canadian voters. Only 16% of those polled think the Tory leader would make the best PM, down five points from June, but double the 8% he scored last February. Thirteen percent believe NDP Leader Jack Layton would make the best PM.

Voters were also reluctant to give Martin high marks on job performance, with 42% rating his performance as average, a number that's consistent across the country.

Nationally, 26% say Martin's doing a somewhat good or very good job and another 26% score his job performance as somewhat poor or very poor. Eight percent of those surveyed were unsure.

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

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