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Sunday, November 10, 2002

In the grip of the Grits

What scandal? Sun poll shows Liberals so far ahead it's embarrassing

By BILL RODGERS, Parliamentary Bureau Chief

SCANDALS, controversies and backbench revolts aren't enough to shake the confidence of Canadians in the governing Liberals, a new Sun Media poll reveals.

The poll, conducted by Ottawa-based SES Canada Research, shows that if an election were called today, 49% of decided voters would back the Grits.

The Tories are a distant second at 16% with the New Democrats third at 13%. The official Opposition Canadian Alliance is mired in fourth place at just 12%. The Bloc Quebecois is at 7%.

The telephone survey of 1,000 Canadians was conducted between Oct. 25 and Nov. 3.



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"What it (the poll) demonstrates is, for the average Canadian voter, there is a lack of alternative to the Liberals," SES managing director Nik Nanos told Sun Media.

Nanos added that Canadian Alliance Leader Stephen Harper "may be the victim of bad timing."

With the Grits, Tories and NDP all getting set to choose new leaders, Harper finds himself "in the backseat, not in the front seat when it comes to people's attention," said Nanos.

The Grits maintained their stranglehold on Ontario with 57% of decided voter support. In the West their support drops to 37%.

"People would be interested in who won federal elections and might cast their vote differently if they thought it would make a difference," noted Dr. Scott Bennett, a Carleton University political science prof.

Bennett added that with the opposition split into four parties in the Commons, people "rely on the unofficial opposition of the provinces and the media to keep the Liberals on some kind of leash."

The poll also found almost half of Canadians want to see the Tory party become a major political force again.

The survey shows 49% believe "the time is right for renewing the PCs." Thirty per cent of those responding said the Tories "don't deserve another chance to govern Canada" while 21% were unsure.

Interestingly, the poll shows 41% of those who identified themselves as Canadian Alliance supporters agreed the time is right to renew the Tory party, with 39% feeling the Tories don't deserve another chance.

The survey also found that former finance minister Paul Martin's popularity remains spectacularly high across the country.

Just over 62% of Canadians agreed Martin deserves a chance to be prime minister. Only 23% said they believed Martin, at age 65, was too old and should retire.

Martin's popularity soars to 67% in Atlantic Canada, dips slightly in Ontario at 59.7% and hits 63% in the West.

"No one is going to get any mileage out of attacking Paul Martin for his age," Nanos said. "Canadians are more concerned about what he's done and what he will do for Canadians.

"That being said, the numbers could change depending on who the new leaders of the other parties are," he added.

The national poll's margin of accuracy is 3.1%, plus or minus, 19 times out of 20. The margin may be greater for regional samples.

Sun Poll

Atl. Que. Ont. West

WHERE THEY STAND

The National Party Standings of Decided Voters -- Likely Ballot Outcome

Liberals: 48.6%

Progressive Conservative: 16.2%

New Democratic Party: 12.5%

Canadian Alliance: 12%

Bloc Quebecois: 6%

Others: 4.2%

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