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Sun, September 14, 2003

Martin leads packBy **BILL RODGERS, OTTAWA BUREAU CHIEF**

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Ottawa -- Sixty-nine per cent of Canadians believe Paul Martin will lead the federal Grits to a fourth consecutive victory in the next election, a SES/Sun Media poll suggests. The national survey of 1,000 people conducted between Aug. 24 and Sept. 2 found just 7% didn't believe the former finance minister would win. Twenty-four per cent wouldn't say or were unsure.

"Canadians generally have high expectations of Paul Martin," said Nik Nanos, president and CEO of SES Canada Research, adding the poll found Martin currently "has an image as a winner and a person with a strong vision for the future who will change things in Ottawa."

But the poll also shows Martin has some political vulnerabilities. Only 38% of those interviewed said Martin shares the views of average Canadians -- 35% disagreed.

On another important issue, 42% said Martin was somebody they could trust -- 31% disagreed.

Martin left his political opponents in the dust when the poll asked Canadians who would make the best prime minister.

Forty-nine per cent chose Martin as the best man for the job. Alliance Leader Stephen Harper was picked by just 10% while Tory Leader Peter

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Sun Media Newspapers

MacKay and NDP Leader Jack Layton are tied at 8%.

Bloc Quebecois Leader Gilles Duceppe is hardly a blip on the national public radar at 2%, based on responses from interviews in Quebec only.

Martin's popularity is highest in Quebec (60%), British Columbia (53%), and Ontario (52%). His lowest numbers come from Alberta (24%), Manitoba and Saskatchewan (39%), and Atlantic Canada (47%).

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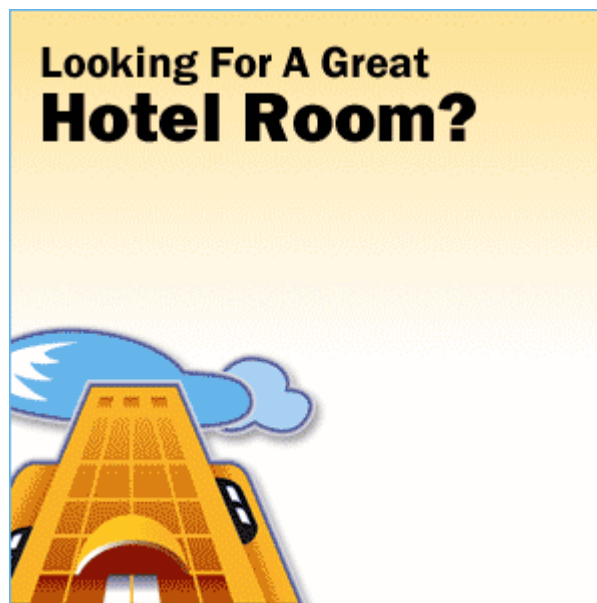
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