

# THE SPONSORSHIP SCANDAL: CHRÉTIEN'S MESS, MARTIN'S INHERITANCE

Nik Nanos



While the sponsorship scandal occurred entirely on Jean Chrétien's watch as prime minister, nearly twice as many Canadians (29 percent vs. 16 percent) hold Paul Martin responsible for it, according to a survey of Canadians' attitudes on the sponsorship scandal and the Gomery Commission conducted for *Policy Options* and the IRPP by SES Research. This is the first in an occasional series of polls tied to the magazine's monthly thematic.

Bien que le scandale des commandites se soit entièrement déroulé sous le règne de Jean Chrétien, près du double des Canadiens (29 p. 100 contre 16. p. 100) en tiennent Paul Martin responsable, révèle un sondage sur l'attitude des Canadiens vis-à-vis des commandites et de la Commission Gomery, mené pour *Options politiques* par SES Research. Il s'agit du premier d'une série de sondages d'opinion que nous publierons périodiquement dans le cadre de notre thème mensuel.

Nearly twice as many Canadians believe Paul Martin should take responsibility for "activities uncovered by the Gomery Commission" rather than Jean Chrétien, who was prime minister during the entire sponsorship program from 1997 to 2003.

In an SES Research attitudinal survey for *Policy Options* and IRPP, 29 percent of respondents believe Martin should take responsibility for the scandal, as opposed to 16.3 percent who blame Chrétien for the mess, among 1,000 Canadians surveyed from April 30 to May 4, 2005.

And this, in spite of the fact that Prime Minister Martin cancelled the sponsorship program on his first day in office, December 12, 2003, and appointed the independent Gomery inquiry on February 10, 2004, the very day his government released the explosive report of Auditor General Sheila Fraser.

This shows that Martin, by being proactive on the sponsorship file, has taken ownership of it. Three Canadians in ten hold Martin accountable for the sponsorship scandal, while only about half as many place the blame on Chrétien's shoulders, even though these events occurred entirely on his watch as prime minister.

Canadians see Prime Minister Martin talking about it, answering questions about it, and trying to manage it — so they see it as his responsibility more than Chrétien's. And Chrétien's not talking.

As well, 43 percent of Canadians thought both prime ministers shared responsibility for the revelations before Gomery. Only 6 percent of respondents thought that neither Martin nor Chrétien were responsible for the sponsorship scandal.

Only in Quebec, where voters are most aware of the sponsorship program, was Chrétien perceived as more responsible for the negative impact — and there by an impressive margin of 7 to 1. In Quebec, 29 percent of respondents thought Chrétien should take responsibility for the sponsorship revelations, while only 4 percent thought Martin was responsible.

Moreover, our research also indicates that 67 percent of Canadians, fully two-thirds of the population, believes Martin, as minister of Finance, "was aware that government sponsorship money was allegedly directed to advertising agencies closely linked to the federal Liberals." However, only one-third of the population, 34 percent in our sample, thought Martin was "personally involved."

So, Canadians believe Martin was aware, but uninvolved in the dubious transactions around the sponsorship scandal, including illegal third-party donations, unreported cash and kickbacks that have been alleged before Gomery.

To the casual observer, Martin was the senior Quebec minister, and therefore he had to know what was going on, even if he wasn't directly involved. The suggestion that Martin was not aware simply does not resonate with voters.

Nearly six Canadians in ten — 59 percent — say they have been following the work of the Gomery Commission very or somewhat closely. While 12 percent of our respondents said they were following it very closely, 47 percent said they were following it somewhat closely.

That's a very high number — nearly as many Canadians who voted in the 2004 election: 60 percent. Essentially, all Cana-

dians who are politically engaged are following Gomery's work. Commissions of inquiry do not usually generate much ongoing interest, but Canadians are following Gomery on a day-to-day basis.

SES also asked Canadians on behalf of *Policy Options* and IRPP whether Prime Minister Martin's tele-

vised *mea culpa* in April affected their perception.

While 17 percent of respondents said their impression of Paul Martin improved after his television address to the nation, fully 59 percent — six voters in ten — said their impression was unchanged. And another 16 percent said

their impression had actually worsened.

Basically, it's a wash. Just as many said their impression of the prime minister had worsened as said it had improved, and for most Canadians their impression was unchanged. While Liberal voters felt better, most Canadians were just reminded why they were unhappy with the government.

WHO SHOULD TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR ACTIVITIES UNCOVERED BY THE GOMERY COMMISSION: PRIME MINISTER PAUL MARTIN, FORMER PRIME MINISTER JEAN CHRÉTIEN, BOTH OR NONE OF THEM?

		Total	Jean Chrétien	Paul Martin	Both	None of them	Unsure
		Interviews	%	%	%	%	%
Region	Canada	1,000	16.3	29.2	43.2	6.0	5.3
	Atlantic	100	10.0	38.0	40.0	7.0	5.0
	Quebec	250	28.8	4.0	51.2	12.4	3.6
	Ontario	300	15.0	38.0	38.3	5.3	3.3
	West	350	10.3	37.1	42.6	1.7	8.3

Note: 1,000 Canadians, ±3.1% 19 times out of 20, April 30 to May 4, 2005  
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DO YOU FOLLOW THE WORK OF THE GOMERY COMMISSION VERY CLOSELY, SOMEWHAT CLOSELY, NOT VERY CLOSELY OR NOT AT ALL?

		Total	Very closely	Somewhat closely	Not very closely	Not at all	Unsure
		Interviews	%	%	%	%	%
Region	Canada	1,000	12.3	46.9	25.9	12.8	2.1
	Atlantic	100	4.0	55.0	27.0	14.0	0.0
	Quebec	250	14.0	44.4	28.8	11.2	1.6
	Ontario	300	12.7	49.7	26.3	10.3	1.0
	West	350	13.1	44.0	23.1	15.7	4.0

Note: 1,000 Canadians, ±3.1% 19 times out of 20, April 30 to May 4, 2005  
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DURING HIS NATIONALLY TELEVISED ADDRESS, PAUL MARTIN APOLOGIZED TO CANADIANS FOR THE ACTIVITIES THAT WERE UNCOVERED BY THE GOMERY COMMISSION. DID YOUR IMPRESSION OF PAUL MARTIN IMPROVE, STAY THE SAME OR WORSEN BECAUSE OF THE APOLOGY?

		Total	Improve	Stay the same	Worsen	Unsure
		Interviews	%	%	%	%
Region	Canada	1,000	16.7	59.0	15.8	8.5
	Atlantic	100	18.0	67.0	6.0	9.0
	Quebec	250	13.2	67.6	13.2	6.0
	Ontario	300	23.0	55.0	15.7	6.3
	West	350	13.4	54.0	20.6	12.0

Note: 1,000 Canadians, ±3.1% 19 times out of 20, April 30 to May 4, 2005  
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There is no doubt that after months of televised hearings and a succession of sensational revelations before Gomery, the commission had become an important factor with voters in the period before a possible election campaign.

SES also asked Canadians about the impact or lack of impact the sponsorship scandal would have on their voting decision.

Nearly two Canadians in three, 64 percent, said the Gomery effect would greatly or somewhat impact their voting choice in a spring election. Fully 27 percent said it would greatly impact their choice, while another 38 percent said it would somewhat impact their choice. Another 31 percent said it would not impact their decision at all.

The impact of the Gomery inquiry on the public perception of Prime Minister Martin should give political leaders pause. It appears that the best of motives and a proactive open approach are no guarantee of gaining public confidence.

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Between April 30 and May 4, 2005, SES Research conducted a national random telephone survey of 1,000 Canadians 18 years of age and older. The accuracy of a random survey of 1,000 Canadians is ±3.1%, 19 times out of 20. The initiative was part of the SES NationState Quarterly Omnibus Survey and was registered with the Marketing Research and Intelligence Association, of which SES is a member.

For the detailed data tables and questions, please visit the SES Web site at [www.sesresearch.com](http://www.sesresearch.com)