



NEWS RELEASE

THE NATIONAL ANGUS REID/SOUTHAM NEWS POLL

- FEDERAL POLITICAL TRENDS -

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FEDERAL POLITICAL TRENDS

The federal Liberals have slipped down to 41 percent of the decided vote, the same level of support they received in the 1993 election. The Reform party looks to be the beneficiary of this recent shift with a five point boost in its popular support level.

These findings emerged from a National Angus Reid Poll taken among a representative cross-section of 1,500 Canadian adults between March 26th and 31st, 1997.

Party Standings

The Chretien Liberals are currently holding 41 percent of the decided vote, the same level of support they received in the October 1993 election. This puts them 5 points back from February, 11 points back from their third anniversary last October, and 16 points back from their support level last summer. The Charest Conservatives are at 18 percent nationally, Preston Manning's Reform party is at 17 percent, which is a 5-point boost from February, and the highest level of support Reform has recorded in two years in the Angus Reid Poll. The New Democrats are now at 12 percent (also a post-election high) and the Bloc Quebecois is at 11 percent nationally (44% in Quebec). (Table 1A) (A total of 14% of those surveyed were undecided/refused or said they would not vote in a federal election, a figure that was 20% before a follow-up leaning question.)

Regionally, the Liberals have lost ground recently in B.C. where they are now tied with Reform (34% and 36% respectively), and in Alberta where Reform leads (with 38%) and the Liberals and Conservatives are tied (at 26% each). In Quebec, the Liberals continue to trail the Bloc Quebecois (by a margin of 44% to 36%). The Liberals maintain their lead in Manitoba/Saskatchewan and across the Atlantic region, but they have slipped in favour of Reform in these two prairie provinces, and in favour of both the Conservatives and the NDP down east. Ontario, with its 103 seats, remains solidly Liberal (53%). (Table 1B)

Commitment/Residual Support

A look at the commitment of the parties' support bases suggests no major advantage for any of the parties at this time in terms of the likelihood of their supporters actually going to the polls to vote and with respect to the certainty of voters' current party choice (with the one exception of apparent slight "softness" on the part of BQ supporters). (Table 2A)

But the polling data regarding residual support – decided voters' second choice party – shows a distinct advantage for the Conservatives. Across all decided voters, the Tories are named by 27 percent as their second choice party, followed by the Liberals at 19 percent, the NDP at 15 percent and Reform at only 10 percent. The Conservatives are well placed to pick up disaffected Liberals (39% of Liberals choose the Conservatives as their second-choice party, and only 11% choose Reform). Current Reform party supporters also tend to opt for the Tories (35%). Conservatives, for their part, are far more likely to name the Liberals as their second choice than they are to name Reform or the New Democrats (44% versus 17% and 11% respectively). (Table 2B)

Voters' Response To A Possible June Election

This National Angus Reid Poll finds many Canadian voters – one in three overall – are unimpressed with the prospect of a June election call. Overall, six in ten (62%) of those surveyed said in their view "it is acceptable for the Liberals to hold an election before they have served four years and having an earlier election really isn't a problem", while 35 percent disagreed and said "it is unacceptable for the Liberals to hold an election until they've served at least four years because they still have time left in their current mandate". This figure is about this high across all regions and among voters of all political stripes – including fully one in three (33%) current federal Liberal supporters who describe a June election as "unacceptable". (Table 3)

Do The Liberals Deserve Re-Election?

Asked a broad question as to whether the federal Liberals deserve to be re-elected, one-half (48%) of all Canadians surveyed said they do "deserve to be re-elected because, overall, they've been doing what's right for the country". This compares to four in ten (42%) who said instead that "the Liberals do not deserve to be re-elected because one of the major federal parties could do a better job of managing the country".

As for which of the other parties could do a better job as government, the Conservatives and the Reform party were both named by 25 percent of those voters who said another party could do a better job than the Liberals (ie: by that 42% of the total sample). Another 15 percent named the NDP and 10 percent the Bloc Quebecois. One in five of those voters who expressed the view that the Liberals should be replaced by an alternative were unable to name one. There is an interesting regional dimension to these disaffected voters' views of which party would be the best alternative – across the west the Reform party is named most often by these voters, while in central and eastern Canada the Conservatives are named more often than Reform (with the Bloc chosen by a plurality in Quebec and the NDP a close second across the Atlantic).

Preferred Approach On Tax Cuts

A broad question on the public's preferred federal government approach on the issue of tax cuts suggests there is little taxpayer consensus on this issue, but also that there is an appetite among many voters for a more concrete commitment on this than the Liberals have been offering. The poll found:

- Only one in three (30%) of those surveyed opting for seeing the federal government proceed with "maybe a tax cut in the future, but only after the federal deficit has been brought under control and there are no spending needs";
- Another one in three (34%) said there should be "absolutely a tax cut in the future, but only after the federal deficit has been brought under control";

- The third option won the support of one in three (33%) respondents: "a tax cut right away, because it is possible to both cut taxes and reduce the deficit at the same time".

This broad question meets with a noteworthy lack of consensus across all major regions of the country and among supporters of all major political parties. (Table 5)

Best Party For Jobs

The Chretien Liberals continue to enjoy the best positioning on the key question of which party would do the best job of improving the unemployment situation, although their margin is not overwhelming. Overall, 28 percent of Canadians surveyed chose the Liberal party as best for jobs, while 17 percent chose the Charest Conservatives, 15 percent Preston Manning's Reform party, 9 percent the McDonough NDP and 6 percent the Bloc Quebecois led by Gilles Duceppe. The Liberals enjoy a particularly solid lead on this question in Ontario, the Atlantic region and Manitoba/Saskatchewan. They are tied with the Bloc and the Tories among Quebec voters, and the Reform party has the edge on jobs in the two western-most provinces. (Table 6)

Trust Most To Keep Promises

The Chretien Liberals also have the best positioning in terms of which party voters trust most to keep their promises – 27 percent named the Chretien Liberals versus 17 percent for Preston Manning's Reform party, 16 percent for the Charest Conservatives, 10 percent for the NDP and 8 percent for the Bloc Quebecois. The Liberals' lead here suggests that their credibility has not been mortally wounded by the GST issue and other perceived Red Book failings, consistent with the findings of earlier Angus Reid Group polling. The fact that just over one in five voters would not name a party they trust most also illustrates public cynicism on this count. (Table 7)

Survey Methodology

This National Angus Reid/Southam News Poll was conducted by telephone between March 26th and 31st, 1997 among a representative cross-section of 1,500 Canadian adults.

The actual number of completed interviews in each region was as follows: B.C. - 200; Alberta - 135; Manitoba/Saskatchewan - 123; Ontario - 524; Quebec - 400; Atlantic - 120. These data were statistically weighted to ensure the sample's regional and age/sex composition reflects that of the actual Canadian population according to the 1991 Census data, and were also adjusted for respondents' past voting behaviour.

With a national sample of 1,500, one can say with 95 percent certainty that the results are within ± 2.5 percentage points of what they would have been had the entire adult Canadian population been polled. The margin of error will be larger within regions and for other sub-groupings of the survey population.

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