



**Voters not preoccupied by scandals; Social questions ranked biggest issue in next election Poll Priorities found beyond Gomery, ethics, tax cuts and crime**

*Sean Gordon, The Toronto Star*

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**EXCERPT**

For all the opposition clamour about government corruption and questionable ethics, the central preoccupations of Canadian voters continue to revolve around issues like health care, education and the economy, a new poll shows.

As the Liberal government prepares to unveil a series of new pre-election measures today - including tax cuts - an EKOS Research survey suggests voters' priorities lie elsewhere.

According to the poll, conducted for the Toronto Star and La Presse, 50 per cent of voters rank social questions as the most important issue of the next election, 20 per cent say jobs and growth, 17 per cent say ethics, and 12 per cent indicate tax and debt relief.

Issues such as child poverty, daycare and the environment are far ahead of debt relief, tax cuts and crime, the data showed. ....

A majority would like the government to provide a bolder vision for the country's future, and 43 per cent feel the government is no longer a positive force in their lives - in fact voters rate provincial governments as the most important.

A majority of Canadians (54 per cent) feel the country is moving in the right direction, even if 49 per cent of respondents said the federal government is headed in the wrong direction....

"When we ask them to think about the government and the future, they're pretty caustic, pretty gloomy. That leaves us this question If Canada is up, why is the government so down?

"There's a number of factors at play here, and one of them is the corrosive impact of this unremitting focus it seems on ethics and short-term politics," Graves said.

The negative feelings toward the government are strongest in the Prairies, where only 32 per cent believe the government is leading the country in the right direction, and in Quebec, where that figure is 34 per cent.

According to the survey, Atlantic Canada has the warmest feelings toward the government 57 per cent said it is heading in the right direction, and 60 per cent feel the country is.

In Alberta, a national high of 68 per cent said the country is moving in the right direction - although only 44 per cent said the same thing about the government.

"It really underpins the difficulty the government has, translating a situation where people feel pretty good, but they're quite down, extremely down on the government.

"Particularly in places like Alberta and Quebec which frankly look like wastelands for the federal government," Graves said...

The poll was conducted from Nov. 7-9 and surveyed 1,275 randomly selected Canadians. Its findings are considered accurate to within 2.7 per cent 19 times out of 20.