

Initial Public Reaction to Prime Minister Martin's April 21st Televised Address

Canadians generally like what they hear BUT
ROC reactions more favourable than Quebec

Public divided on whether Martin part of solution or problem.
Public prefers election to wait until final report
BUT Conservatives pay small price if election forced

Martin moves viewers in English Canada



Toronto – April 22, 2005: Going over the heads of the media and speaking directly to Canadians had a small pay-off for the Prime Minister on some key questions in the first survey of public reaction to the Prime Minister's speech last night.

Reaction to the Address

Where you live is the key dividing line in Canadian reactions to the Prime Minister's address last night.

Just over one in four (28%) Canadians outside of Quebec watched the Prime Minister last night. They were fairly typical in terms of partisanship and they generally liked what they saw. Almost two thirds (64%) had a favourable impression of the Prime Minister's broadcast. Just over three quarters (76%) found him to be at least somewhat believable.

Almost half (49%) of the Quebecers we were able to reach last night report that they watched the speech. At 64%, Bloc identifiers were the most likely group of Canadians to watch the broadcast. Given that partisan skew in Quebec viewership, it comes as little surprise to see slightly more Quebecers had a negative impression (48%) than a positive one (44%). As well, with a bare majority of 53% assessing the Prime Minister as believable, Quebecers were far more skeptical than other Canadians.

Viewers outside of Quebec report a mixed impact on their willingness to vote Liberal – 22% say they are more likely to vote Liberal and 23% less likely. However, the good news for the Liberals is that the more likely were overwhelming from their base of partisan supporters who are likely to act on that intention while the less likely voters are mostly partisans of other parties who were unlikely to vote Liberal in the first base.

Viewers in Quebec tended to say they were less likely to vote Liberal (29%) rather than more likely (12%). Again there is a strong partisan skew with many of those reporting they are less likely to vote Liberal already aligned with the Liberal's opponents.

Impact of the Address

Vote

Our poll last night gives the Liberals a small lead. This is likely a result of the small sample and the rushed nature of the survey. However, our core interest in this survey is not the absolute numbers, but the differences in the horserace between viewers and non-viewers.

Viewership has no impact on the relative standing of the various parties. The Liberals lead the Conservatives by roughly the same amount among viewers and non-viewers. The main difference between them is viewers are more likely to have a political preference.

Martin: Part of the problem or part of the solution?

Our poll last night asked Canadians to chose between two points of view: Paul Martin is doing his best to clean up a mess left by former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, OR Paul Martin is part of the problem when it comes to sponsorship.

Canadians were almost evenly split on this measure – 41% say he is doing his best to clean up someone else's mess and 44% say he is part of the problem.

The Prime Minister's broadcast may have had a positive impact on this question outside of Quebec. Half the 'ROC' viewers (50%) say Martin is doing his best to clean up the

mess compared to 40% of non-viewers. However, the broadcast did not appear to make a difference on this question in Quebec.

Wait until final report for election

The opposition has two choices when it comes to forcing an election, they can ask voters for permission or they can ask forgiveness.

When it comes to asking permission, we found once again they Canadians prefer to have the election after the final Gomery report. More than three out of four Canadians (77%) agree that there should not be a federal election until the sponsorship commission finishes its final report.

Once again, the Prime Minister may have had some impact outside of Quebec. While the total level of agreement among viewers and non-viewers is similar, viewers were more likely to strongly agree (64%) than non-viewers (50%). In Quebec we found the opposite pattern, but it appears to be driven by the previously noted Bloc Quebecois skew among viewers in Quebec.

Impact on Conservatives if they force an election

One of the core underlying dynamics of last night's broadcast was a Liberal attempt to frame an early election in such a way that if the Conservatives do force an election, they pay a David Peterson price. So what happens if the Conservatives ask for forgiveness after forcing an early election?

We asked Canadians if they would be more or less likely to vote for the Conservatives if they cause a federal election in June after the sponsorship hearings are complete but before the final report comes out.

Most people (52%) say a Conservative move to force an election would make no difference to their vote, but among those who care twice as many say it would leave them less likely to vote Conservative (27%) rather than more likely (12%).

Martin was most effective at driving this message home among viewers outside Quebec, where twice as many who viewed the broadcast are much less likely to vote Conservative if they cause an election, (30%) than non-viewers (15%). There is a weaker echo of this pattern in Quebec as well.

Just as there is a partisan skew in those who say the broadcast left them less likely to vote Liberals, so to do we see people who identify with Conservative opponents more likely to say they are less likely to vote for the Tories if they force an election. However, in this case, people who volunteer they are Independents also tell us they are less likely to vote for the Conservatives. That result is something the Conservatives will have to balance against their current momentum.



About This Study

Innovative Research Group Inc. (Innovative) conducted a telephone survey of a random sample of 500 Canadians on the evening of April 21st immediately following the TV address. The sample was drawn proportionately from across Canada and has a margin of error of +/-4.38%, 19 times out of 20. The margin of error for sub-samples is larger.

The survey had two objectives:

1. To assess public reaction to the address itself in terms of how many people watched and what they thought of it.
2. To assess the impact of viewership on Liberal support and the desire for an election.

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