



PMO – Press Gallery Dispute

A Canada 20/20 Poll Released Exclusively to The Hill Times

Embargoed until Sunday, June 10, 2007

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Low Awareness of Dispute Between PMO and Press Gallery

While the dispute between the PMO and the Press Gallery is very much an ‘inside the beltway’ issue, among Canadians who are paying attention, the Prime Minister is losing ground. In a survey of 1,067 members of Innovative Research Group’s Canada 20/20 panel, just one-in-four (24%) Canadians are aware of the dispute. British Columbians (32%) and Ontarians (27%) are the most aware, while men (30%) are much more aware than women (19%).

PMO Blamed for Dispute

That low awareness is good news for the Prime Minister. Among those aware of the dispute, 67 per cent say it leaves them with a more negative impression of the PM and the same number says the Prime Minister is most to blame for the dispute. British Columbia respondents report the least negative net impact on their impression of the PM and have the smallest gap between the Prime Minister and the Press Gallery regarding blame. The gap also narrows among older voters. Quebecers (74%) are the most likely to blame the PM.

In contrast, more people say their impression of the Press Gallery is more favourable (39%) than say it is less favourable (24%). The Press gallery does particularly well on this measure in Quebec (49%). Just 18 per cent nationally say the Press Gallery is to blame in the dispute.

The impact is even clearer when we look at perceptions of the government’s commitment to openness. A majority of 57 per cent agree with the statement that ‘The Prime Minister’s fight with the national media leaves me questioning whether he is really committed to openness in government.’ Agreement is strongest in Quebec (62%).

Dispute Hurts Tory Image

Even before we asked about the dispute, we asked panellists if the current government was more open or more secretive than previous federal governments. The largest number of respondents (46%) believe this government is more secretive than most. Just 15 per cent say it is more open.

Much of that result can be discounted to partisanship. Almost two-thirds (65%) of New Democrats and almost as many (62%) Liberals say the government is more secretive than most. While just 15 per cent of Tory partisans see the Conservatives as more secretive, a significant 30 per cent of the non-aligned say the government is more secretive than most. Demographically, Ontarians (52%) and younger Canadians (57%) are more likely to see the Conservatives as secretive.

However, the big story here is the impact of awareness of the dispute on perceptions of openness. The number of Tories who say the government is more secretive than most rises from 11 per cent among those unaware of the dispute to 27 per cent among those who are aware. Perceptions that the government is more open, drop from 40 per cent among the unaware, to 23 per cent among those paying attention to the dispute.

The non-aligned show a similar pattern. The number of non-aligned voters who say the government is more secretive than most rises from 24 per cent among those unaware of the dispute to over half (53%) among those who are aware.

Perceptions of Media Mixed

The public see the media playing an important role in keeping them informed. Almost two-thirds (66%) agree that 'the media are the public's eyes on the government, therefore the Prime Minister should be more responsive to the needs of the media.' Despite the public embrace of the importance of the media's role, the numbers are more mixed when assessing public perceptions of the media.

While few members of the public say the media is unbiased (18%), a few perceive a consistent bias in favour of the Liberals (13%) or the Tories (8%). Most (54%) believe media bias depends on the outlet. Quebecers are much less likely to see a Liberal bias (4%) than those in the rest of Canada

The poll also finds a strong public scepticism regarding what the public sees in the media. Virtually no one (less than 1%) reports they trust everything they see in the media. More significantly, only one-in-four (26%) is prepared to trust most of what they read, see or hear although Quebecers are more likely to trust most of what they see (36%) than the average. Two-thirds (67%) trust only some of what the media says.

Finally, the public isn't quite sure how to react to the statement "The members of the national media are too full of themselves and are over-reacting in this dispute." Just over four-in-ten in total say either don't know (18%) or neither agree nor disagree (23%). Of those who take a side, somewhat more agree (36%) than disagree (23%). Seniors (49%), Albertans (47%) and Prairie residents (49%) are most likely to agree the media are too full of themselves.

The Press Gallery may look good in the dispute compared to the Prime Minister, but they have work to do to improve their overall relationship with the public.

About This Survey

Innovative Research Group, Inc. (www.innovativeresearch.ca), a research and strategy firm with offices in Toronto and Vancouver, surveyed 1,067 Canadians from its online Canada 20/20 panel. The survey was conducted between Thursday, May 31st and Monday, June 4th, 2007. The data was weighted in accordance to the 2001 census. With a sample of this size the aggregated results are considered accurate to within 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, of what they would have been had a representative cross-section of Canadians been polled.

Canada 20/20 panel members were recruited to be representative of the Canadian population through on-line recruitment ads and Innovative's telephone surveys as well as emailed invitations to select lists. After accepting the invitation, each respondent is only enrolled in the panel after completing a full enrollment survey including complete demographics and double-opting into the panel. Invitations to complete individual studies are emailed to respondents, including a one-time only link to ensure the invitations can only be used to complete the study once. To accurately reflect the regional and demographic make-up of Canada, results of each study is weighted according to 2001 Census data.

Attribution

In the first instance of mentioning the poll results the survey should be identified as "an Innovative Research poll conducted for The Hill Times". All subsequent mentions can use the convention "the INNOVATIVE poll".

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Questions Asked:

HT1 Compared to past federal governments do you think that the current Conservative government is ... ? [ROTATE FIRST TWO OPTIONS]

More open than previous governments	1
More secretive than previous governments	2
About the same as previous governments	3
Don't know	98

HT2 Overall, when reporting the news, do you feel that there is a consistent bias by the Canadian media in favour of ... [ROTATE FIRST TWO OPTIONS]

The Dion/Opposition Liberals	1
The Harper Conservatives	2
There is no consistent bias	3
Depends on the media outlet	4
Don't know	98

HT3 How much do you trust of what you read, see or hear in the Canadian media? Do you trust ... ?

Everything you see in the media	1
Most of what you see in the media	2
Only some of what you see in the media	3
None of what you see in the media	4
Don't know	98

HT4 Have you recently read, seen or heard anything regarding a dispute between the Parliamentary Press Gallery in Ottawa and the Prime Minister's Office?

Yes	1
No	2
Don't know	98

[IF YES, CONTINUE; ELSE SKIP TO HT8]

Did what you read, saw or heard regarding the dispute between the Parliamentary Press Gallery and the Prime Minister's Office leave you feeling more or less favourable towards ... [ROTATE]?

Much more favourable	1
Somewhat more favourable	2
No difference	3
Somewhat less favourable	4
Much less favourable	5
Don't know	98

HT5 The Press Gallery

HT6 Prime Minister Stephen Harper

HT7 Thinking about this dispute, who do you think is more to blame . . . ? [ROTATE]

The Press Gallery	1
The Prime Minister	2
Don't know	98

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Strongly agree	1
Somewhat agree	2
Neither agree nor disagree	3
Somewhat disagree	4
Strongly disagree	5
Don't know	98

HT8 The Prime Ministers fight with the national media leaves me questioning whether he is really committed to openness in government

HT9 The members of the national media are too full of themselves and are over-reacting in this dispute

HT10 The media are the public's eyes on the government, and therefore the Prime Minister should be more responsive to the needs of the media