

The opposition and media are out of touch

Outside Ottawa, nobody cares about Jaffer-Guergis or Afghan detainees

BY L. IAN MACDONALD, FREELANCE MAY 16, 2010

For the last month, the opposition and news media in Ottawa have obsessed over the Jaffer-Guergis affair and the release of documents pertaining to the handover of Afghan prisoners by Canadian troops.

The coverage has swamped everything else in the news cycle, with no negative impact on the Conservative government in the polls. In fact, the Tories have gone up in the EKOS poll for the CBC, and the Nanos Research poll.

That should tell both the opposition and the media that neither story is getting any traction, and that perhaps they should look under other rocks for something more newsworthy.

Consider: In the weekly EKOS poll released on Thursday, the Conservatives moved out to a 6.5-per-cent lead, 33.6 per cent to 27.1 per cent for the Liberals, and 16.9 per cent for the NDP and 10.6 per cent for the Greens, with the Bloc at 9.3 per cent nationally. In Quebec, the numbers break out to 37.7 per cent for the Bloc, 20.4 per cent for the Liberals 16 per cent for the Conservatives and 13.6 per cent for the NDP. The two biggest parties are competitive in the Atlantic and Ontario, while the Conservatives have a huge lead in the West.

In terms of attitudinal data underpinning voting intention, 51 per cent of EKOS respondents think the country is moving in the right direction vs. 39.1 who think it's moving in the wrong direction. Those numbers are weakest in Quebec, where 40.8 per cent think the country is moving in the right direction and 50 per cent say the opposite.

The latest Nanos poll shows a four-point spread, 37-33 for the Conservatives over the Liberals, with the Tories up two points from the previous month. On the question of who would be the best prime minister, Stephen Harper leads Michael Ignatieff by 30 to 17 per cent. Interestingly, both leaders trail their parties in voting intention. But Ignatieff is definitely a drag on the ticket - twice as many Nanos respondents intend to vote Liberal as think Ignatieff would be the best PM.

Both polls are delivering clear messages to the opposition and the media that the country doesn't share their agenda.

The fall from grace of Rahim Jaffer and Helena Guergis might be fun, though not for them, but it isn't fundamental. It doesn't have any effect on voters' lives. Similarly, the Afghan detainee document story has no resonance outside Ottawa. If anything, in the world of Tim Horton's, the Taliban are seen as the guys killing our guys. If some of them get roughed up by their own countrymen, how is that our problem? Again, outside Ottawa, no one cares about the paper trail.