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Harper among least trusted leaders, poll shows

By DANIEL LEBLANC

Survey of 26 countries in the Americas reveals diminishing faith Canadians have in their political system

Canadians are slowly losing trust in Parliament and political parties, and share some of the toughest views in the American hemisphere about their national leader, according to a new 26-country survey.

At the same time, Canadians are holding on to their positive views of the Canadian Forces and the RCMP, an above-average appreciation of their law-and-order institutions. All in all, Canadians are expressing dissatisfaction with their political system, but also no appetite for major changes to the federal apparatus.

The survey by The Environics Institute, part of an investigation into political attitudes in 26 countries in the Americas, found that Canadians have been shedding some of their optimistic and positive views on politics and government.

While attitudes toward politics are slowly improving in the southern half of the Americas, the findings in Canada show "clear evidence of decline" in the approval of political institutions since the first survey was conducted in 2006.

"Canada hasn't made any progress [on a number of key rankings] in recent years, and it has lost a bit of ground on others in the last few years," said pollster Keith Neuman of The Environics Institute. "The gap with other countries is smaller than it was before."

The survey found only 16 per cent of Canadians place "a lot of trust" in their Prime Minister, putting Stephen Harper near the bottom among all leaders in the Americas.

"In an international context, Harper has a lower level of trust than almost every other national leader in the hemisphere," Mr. Neuman said.

The levels of trust are also low for the Canadian Parliament (17 per cent), political parties (10 per cent) and mass media (6 per cent). The findings come after Canada lived under a series of minority governments from 2004 to 2011, fuelling a sense of growing partisan bickering in Ottawa.

Still, the survey found little appetite for major changes to Canadian institutions or the governance regime, with large numbers of respondents feeling that they can make their views heard in the political process.

"There is no groundswell for an overhaul of the system," Mr. Neuman said of the results.

A large number of Canadians have trust in institutions such as the Canadian Forces (53 per cent) and the RCMP (36 per cent), and the level of confidence in the country's justice system remains above average among respondents to the pan-American survey. Mr. Neuman said that the Canadian Forces and the RCMP have long commanded much respect in Canada, despite controversies that have affected the national police force in recent years.

The full results of the Canadian survey will be made public on Thursday at a meeting of the Marketing Research and Intelligence Association in Ottawa.

The 2012 AmericasBarometer survey was conducted in 26 countries. Overall, 40,971 people were polled, with samples ranging from 1,412 in Haiti to 3,009 in Bolivia. Each questionnaire was administered by a domestic pollster, with the polls conducted in people's homes everywhere but in the United States and Canada, where an online survey of 1,500 respondents was conducted.

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