

Conservative support among Quebec women plunges to 11%, scrapping long-gun registry a factor

A poll of Quebec voters this week found support for the federal Conservative Party has plunged to only 11 per cent among women voters in the province, and critics of the governing party say it is a direct result of the government's decisions to scrap the long-gun registry and impose controversial initiatives in other justice and social issues, including the areas it chose to cut in \$5.2-billion public service operations.



The Hill Times photograph by Jake Wright

Prime Minister Stephen Harper's government put into force last week to dismantle Canada's long-gun registry. Forum Research pollster Lorne Bozinoff agreed it affected the voting intentions of women in Quebec, but said other factors have also contributed to a trend of lower support levels for the Conservatives among female voters compared to men.

By [TIM NAUMETZ](#) | April 12, 2012

PARLIAMENT HILL—A poll of Quebec voters this week found support for the federal Conservative Party has plunged to only 11 per cent among women voters in the province, and critics of the governing party say it is a direct result of the government's decisions to scrap the long-gun registry and impose controversial initiatives in other justice and social issues, including the areas it chose to cut in \$5.2-billion public service operations.

NDP MP Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, Que.) said the reaction against the government in Quebec, where the Forum Research public opinion poll found support for the governing Conservatives had dropped to only 14 per cent, behind all other federal parties but the Greens, could spread to other provinces, particularly neighbouring Ontario.

Ms. Boivin and one of the leading opponents of a law the government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper (Calgary Southwest, Alta.) put into force last week to dismantle the long-gun registry said the attention that was given to the measure—including an awkward boast from a Conservative backbench MP who quoted the famous “free at last” declaration made by the 1960s U.S. civil rights leader Martin Luther King before he was assassinated—likely contributed to the basement level of support for the Conservatives among Quebec women, as well as male voters.

A Quebec Superior Court judge on Thursday heard arguments in a Montreal court over a temporary injunction the Quebec government recently won to suspend the law dismantling the rifle and shotgun registry out of action. The provincial government sought the injunction to maintain the registry and its records until a court hears its application in June for an order that Ottawa should allow Quebec to maintain its own registry with the data already collected in the federal system. The new law dismantling the registry also calls for the destruction of its records on more than six million rifles and shotguns.

“I think there's no question the position of the federal government on the registry contributed to this,” Heidi Rathjen, a survivor of the 1989 shooting of 14 female engineering students at Montreal's L'École Polytechnique, told *The Hill Times*.

“The Harper government has consistently demonstrated total disdain for everything Quebec holds dear, whether it's crime prevention, by abolishing the registry, by focusing on punishment and building prisons as well as their disregard for science and evidence, undermining having good statistics, discrediting experts, suppressing relevant data and ignoring the environment, pulling out of Kyoto,” Ms. Rathjen said. “This obviously contributes to the very low showing in the polls for Conservatives, women yes, but men too.”

The Forum Research survey of 1,496 randomly-selected, voting-age Quebecers and who were included in the poll results, found only 11 per cent of the 815 female voters who were decided or leaning toward a federal party in the event of an immediate election said they preferred the Conservatives. Forty-three per cent favoured the NDP, while 22 per cent said they were decided or leaning toward the Bloc Québécois. Seventeen per cent favoured the Liberals, and four per cent were decided or leaning in favour of the Green Party.

Of the 681 male voters who were counted in the results, 18 per cent said they were either decided or leaning in favour of the Conservative Party, with the Liberal party receiving 16 per cent of the decided or leaning support. The NDP were again in the lead among male electors, with 40 per cent support from men, while 21 per cent of the male respondents said they would vote Bloc Québécois or were leaning in that direction. Three per cent of men preferred the Green Party.

“I think this is the result of the positions they have made, and unless they reverse course, there’s no indication that they would, I don’t see how their numbers can go back up,” Ms. Rathjen said. “Just on the issue of gun control, they are incredibly insensitive, condescending toward the victims of gun crime, which is a very emotional issue in Quebec.”

Ms. Boivin said the low level of support among Quebec women is a result of the gun registry’s destruction, but also flows from government policies in other areas.

“Definitely all the issues that really interest women, the Conservatives are rarely if ever on par with what women think,” said Ms. Boivin. “Definitely I do think that it [the destruction of the registry] has an impact. I think it’s an accumulation of factors. Even the cuts to civil service, I’ve been stressing the point over and over that it’s mostly women who are going to be cut. The first thousands of letters that are being received mostly will be women, holding those positions.”

Ms. Boivin said the downturn for the federal Conservative Party in Quebec could spread to other provinces as the impact of the measures it has taken, including a controversial omnibus crime law experts say will require an expansion of prison space and lead to court logjams, take effect.

“I think it could [spill over Quebec’s borders],” Ms. Boivin said. “How it would convey and where would the women go after that, will they become more undecided, more NDP, it’s for us to work on those factors, but I think women throughout Canada share those views on environment, on the public security aspect, I wouldn’t be surprised that it could move from Quebec to elsewhere,” she told *The Hill Times*.

Forum Research pollster Lorne Bozinoff agreed passage of the law destroying the gun registry affected the voting intentions of women, but said other factors have also contributed to a trend of lower support levels for the Conservatives among female voters compared to men.

“There is almost always a gender gap in the support for the Tories,” Mr. Bozinoff said. “Liberals and the NDP are usually stronger on the social issue that women care more about. Having said that, I do think the controversy over dismantling the gun registry is making the gender gap worse.”

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