
THE NATIONAL ANGUS REID/SOUTHAM NEWS POLL

- THE FEDERAL POLITICAL SCENE - - THE PUBLIC AGENDA -



© Angus Reid Group, Inc.

Public Release Date: Monday, October 7th, 1996

This National Angus Reid Poll was conducted by telephone between September 20th and 29th among a representative cross-section of 1,516 Canadian adults .

The actual number of completed interviews in each region was as follows: B.C. - 200; Alberta - 150; Manitoba/Saskatchewan - 120; Ontario - 526; Quebec - 400; Atlantic - 120. These data were statistically weighted to ensure the sample's regional and age/sex composition reflects that of the actual Canadian population according to the 1991 Census data.

With a national sample of 1,516, one can say with 95 percent certainty that the results are within ± 2.5 percentage points of what they would have been had the entire adult Canadian population been polled. The margin of error will be larger within regions and for other sub-groupings of the survey population.

THE FEDERAL POLITICAL SCENE

The latest National Angus Reid/Southam News Poll, conducted between September 22nd and 29th among a representative cross-section of 1,516 Canadians, shows continued stability in the federal political arena: the Chretien Liberals continue to enjoy a solid lead in popular support and the Charest Conservatives are holding their edge among the other contenders.

The highlights of the poll's findings on the federal political scene include:

- The Chretien Liberals remain well out in front with 51 percent of the decided vote nationally. This is a 2 point dip from last month and is 6 points below their July position, but keeps them fully 10 points up over their 1993 election showing. The Conservatives remain up at 17 percent of the decided vote nationally, holding on to the 5 point gain they recorded last month following their national policy convention. Reform is at 11 percent nationally, down a point from last month, and 3 points from June. The New Democrats are at 9 percent, back where they had been earlier in the summer. The Bloc Quebecois is at 10 percent nationally (40% in Quebec). (Across English-speaking Canada, the Liberals are at 55%, the Conservatives at 17%, Reform at 14%, and the NDP at 11%). All other parties hold the support of 2 percent of decided voters. (A total of 12% of those polled were undecided/refused or said they would not vote in a federal election – this figure was 24% before a follow-up "leaning" question was asked of those initially undecided; both questions have been used to produce the party support figures). (Table 1A)

- Regionally, the Liberals continue to enjoy a solid lead in popular support in all major regions except Quebec and Alberta, strongholds of the two newer federal challengers. In Quebec, this latest sounding shows the Liberals and Bloc Quebecois virtually tied with 38 percent and 40 percent of the decided vote respectively. The contest also remains competitive in Alberta where the Liberals are just edging out Reform (43% versus 36%). Liberal support is as high as 57 percent in Ontario and the Atlantic region. (Table 1B)

THE PUBLIC AGENDA

The September National Angus Reid/Southam News Poll also included an ongoing monitor of Canadians' public issues agenda. Those surveyed were posed an "open-ended" question at the beginning of the interview asking them to name the issues which they believe are the most important for Canada today. This probing yielded the following responses in this September poll, presented here in descending order of their level of total mentions: (Tables 2A & 2B)

- National Unity/Quebec's Future/The Constitution – The issue of national unity/Quebec's future has climbed back to the very top tier of Canadians' policy issues agenda. Four in ten (41%) of those surveyed named this issue "top-of-mind" as one of the most important concerns presently facing the country, an 8-point increase over the level of mentions recorded in August but comparable to the figures posted earlier this summer. The number citing this issue was generally consistent across the major regions but remains relatively higher among men (47%) and more affluent Canadians (50%).
- Jobs/Unemployment – Tied for top spot is the unemployment situation, which was also mentioned by four in ten (40%) respondents as an issue warranting utmost attention from Canada's leaders right now. This represents a clear decrease from the 50 percent of Canadians highlighting this concern in August, and is more consistent with the "top-of-mind" presence for this issue earlier in 1996. Importantly, Quebecers clearly set themselves apart

from other Canadians on this front – close to six in ten (58%) of those surveyed said the jobless situation is the country's most pressing problem at this time.

- Deficit/Debt – One in four (23%) survey respondents pointed to Canada's fiscal situation as a priority for the country today, comparable to the mentions recorded for this issue since the start of the year. Population segments attaching comparatively greater priority to the federal deficit/debt include residents of western Canada, as well as men, older Canadians and those with higher incomes.
- The Economy in General – The overall state of the Canadian economy was cited by one in five (20%) of all those polled (and by one in four Quebecers).
- Health Care/Medicare – Sixteen percent of surveyed Canadians singled out the availability and/or quality of health care as an acute issue presently facing the country. This is down 5 points from the August sounding but is still slightly higher than the total mentions garnered by this item in earlier readings taken this year. "Top-of-mind" concern over the health care system is relatively more pronounced among residents of the prairie provinces (27% in Alberta, 30% in Manitoba/Saskatchewan), among women (21%) and older Canadians (20%).
- Education – One in ten (9%) named issues concerning the education system in this country (15% in Alberta).
- Poverty – Around one in twenty (6%) respondents cited issues relating to poverty as most important for Canada to address today.
- Other Social Services – A similar number (5%) mentioned other social services as a critical issue for the country today.
- Crime/Justice Issues – Issues pertaining to crime and the justice system were also named by 5 percent of those interviewed, down from the 10 percent registered in the August survey. Mentions were highest in British Columbia (11%).
- Taxes – One in twenty (5%) cited taxes/taxation as an area in need of the country's undivided attention right now.

A number of other issues were mentioned by smaller numbers of survey respondents, including: immigration/refugees (4%); the environment (3%); defence/military/peace issues (3%); trade issues (3%); government/politics (3%); issues concerning aboriginal Canadians (2%); among others cited by still fewer respondents.

For further information, contact:

Darrell Bricker
Senior Vice-President
Angus Reid Group
(613) 241-5802

John Wright
Senior Vice-President
Angus Reid Group
(416) 324-2900