
THE NATIONAL ANGUS REID/SOUTHAM NEWS POLL

**- THE FEDERAL POLITICAL SCENE ON THE CHRETIEN
LIBERALS' THIRD ANNIVERSARY -
- THE PUBLIC AGENDA -**



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This National Angus Reid/Southam News Poll was conducted by telephone between October 22nd and 28th, 1996 among a representative cross-section of 1,502 Canadian adults.

The actual number of completed interviews in each region was as follows: B.C. - 200; Alberta - 135; Manitoba/Saskatchewan - 121; 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 1,502, 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 ON THE CHRETIEN LIBERALS' THIRD ANNIVERSARY

As the Chretien Liberals celebrated their third anniversary in power with an upbeat national convention, the latest Angus Reid/Southam News Poll shows they continue to enjoy a wide lead in popular support. The poll, conducted October 22nd to 28th among 1,502 Canadian voters, also looked at the electorate's appraisal of this federal government's major accomplishments and disappointments and probed for what issues will be on voters' minds in the next federal election campaign. The poll highlights:

Party Support

- The Liberals are holding 52 percent of the decided vote nationally, against 14 percent for Reform, 13 percent for the Conservatives, 12 percent for the Bloc Quebecois, and 9 percent for the New Democrats. (Table 1A) (A total of 12% of voters polled were undecided/refused or said they would not vote in a federal election – this figure was 25% before a follow-up "leaning" question was asked of those initially undecided; both questions have been used to produce the party support figures.)
- The Liberals have been in this support range throughout their sustained post-election honeymoon. For the opposition parties, these October results show Reform up a marginal 3 points in the wake of the release of their "Fresh Start" platform while the Conservatives are down 4 points, turning last month's 6-point PC lead into a 1-point Reform edge. (Table 1A)
- In Quebec, this latest poll shows the Bloc Quebecois up at 46 percent against the Liberals' 40 percent. The Liberals enjoy a lead in all major regions outside Quebec – with their

support level most modest in Alberta (43% versus Reform's 36%) and strongest in Ontario (62% versus 15% for the second place Tories). (Table 1B)

Overall Direction

- Canadian voters also give the Chretien Liberal government a "thumbs up" for its overall direction: by a margin of two to one – 62 percent versus 31 percent – those polled said they believe this government is "on the right track in terms of the overall direction in which they have been leading the country". This is a modest improvement from the 55 percent to 35 percent margin recorded a year ago, but is consistent with earlier soundings. Ontarians are most enthusiastic (73% "right track") and Quebecers the least – an even 46 percent to 47 percent split, still higher praise than offered last November (when 57% of Quebecers said "wrong track"). (Table 2)

Accomplishments/Disappointments

- The voters participating in this National Angus Reid Poll, conducted as the Chretien Liberals were celebrating the third anniversary of their 1993 election win, were asked to highlight in their own words what they see as the major accomplishments and the major disappointments of the Chretien Liberal government to date. The results of this open-ended probing indicate that voters' views of this government's record have "crystallized" over the third year of their mandate and, notwithstanding their continued high levels of popular support, voters can still cite more disappointments than accomplishments of the Liberals' first three years in power. (Table 3)

- In terms of the Liberal government's accomplishments, one-half (48%) of those polled could not cite any – 24 percent said there had been no major accomplishments and 24 percent said they could not think of any. Still, this group included two-thirds (65%) of voters a year ago. Accomplishments mentioned with greatest frequency included: the Liberal government's actions on the deficit/spending front (25% volunteered this, up from 13% last year); unity issues/Quebec (13%); jobs (6%); and the economy (6%). Other perceived accomplishments were each named by 2 percent or fewer of voters polled.
- On the disappointment side, only one in five (18%) voters surveyed were at a loss for words (down from 31% last year). The disappointments cited with greatest frequency included: national unity/Quebec's future (23%); the GST's continued existence (18% - this barely registered last year); jobs (16%, double last year); broken promises in general (11%, up from 4%); deficit/debt (9%, down from 15%); social programs (8%); leadership (6%); international issues/defense (4%); a perception that this government has done nothing (4%); gun control (3%); taxes (3%); health care (3%); among others mentioned by 2 percent or less of respondents. (Table 3)
- A look back at the electorate's appraisal of the Mulroney Conservative government's performance at the time of their first-term third anniversary in 1987 offers quite a contrasting picture. The Conservatives were down at a then record low 23 percent of the popular vote, trailing both the Liberals and the New Democrats. Most voters believed (erroneously as it turns out) that the Mulroney Conservatives were so unpopular they would not be able to win re-election. The picture was grimmer still at the third anniversary of their second term in 1991 when the Mulroney Conservatives were at a rock bottom 16 percent (the

same share of support they actually received at the polls two years later). Three years after they won re-election, voters found it difficult to cite an accomplishment of the Mulroney Conservative government's second term (61% could not), with the Gulf War topping the list (14%). On the disappointment side, only one in twenty (4%) were at a loss and the perceived shortcomings covered a wide range: the GST (30%); free trade (23%); Meech Lake (19%); the economy (14%); the deficit/debt (11%); among others.

Top-of-Mind Election Issues

- What issues are on the horizon for the next federal election? Asked what one issue they would like the parties and their leaders to focus on during the next federal election campaign, those polled cited the following: (Table 4)
 - Jobs remain number one (cited "top-of-mind" by fully 29% of all those polled, and by over four in ten voters in Quebec and Atlantic Canada);
 - The deficit/debt (named by 15%, double that in Alberta);
 - The economy (11%);
 - National unity/Quebec (10%);
 - Taxes (6%);
 - Health care (6% - triple that in Manitoba/Saskatchewan);
 - and others cited by smaller numbers.

THE PUBLIC AGENDA

The October 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 October poll, presented here in descending order of their level of total mentions: (Tables 5A & 5B)

- Jobs/Unemployment – The jobs issue is up at the very top of the public's agenda, with "top-of-mind" mentions at 47 percent (up from 40% last month, but consistent with the 50% recorded in August). Importantly, Quebecers continue to set themselves apart from other Canadians on this front – fully six in ten (62%) Quebecers surveyed named jobs as the country's most pressing problem at this time.
- National Unity/Quebec's Future/The Constitution – The issue of national unity/Quebec's future occupies second spot on Canadians' policy issues agenda. Just over one in three (35%) of those surveyed named this issue "top-of-mind" as one of the most important concerns presently facing the country, a dip from last month but comparable to the figures recorded earlier this year. Concern about unity remains relatively higher among more affluent Canadians (45% versus 22% among the lower income group).
- Deficit/Debt – One in four (27%) survey respondents pointed to Canada's fiscal situation as a priority for the country today, slightly higher than the mentions recorded for this issue in recent months. Albertans, as well as men and those with higher household incomes, express more unaided concern about the deficit/debt.

- The Economy in General – The overall state of the Canadian economy was cited by one in five (19%) of all those polled (and by one in four Quebecers).
- Health Care/Medicare – Almost one in five (17%) of surveyed Canadians singled out the availability and/or quality of health care as an acute issue presently facing the country.

Unaided concern about health care has been in this range in recent soundings – but mentions are fully double what they were a year ago. "Top-of-mind" concern over the health care system is relatively more pronounced among residents of the prairie provinces, especially Alberta (31%), and among women (24%) and older Canadians (21%).
- Education – One in ten (11%) named issues concerning the education system in this country, double the mentions recorded at the beginning of this year.
- Taxes – Eight percent cited taxes/taxation as an area in need of the country's undivided attention right now.
- Other Social Services – A similar number (7%) mentioned other social services as a critical issue for the country today.
- Poverty – Around one in twenty (6%) respondents cited issues relating to poverty.
- Crime/Justice Issues – The same number (6%) highlighted an issue relating to crime or the justice system.

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

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