
THE NATIONAL ANGUS REID/SOUTHAM NEWS POLL

- FEDERAL POLITICAL TRENDS AND THE PUBLIC AGENDA -



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This National Angus Reid/Southam News Poll was conducted by telephone between November 26th and December 2nd, 1996 among a representative cross-section of 1,520 Canadian adults.

The actual number of completed interviews in each region was as follows: B.C. - 200; Alberta - 150; Manitoba/Saskatchewan - 123; Ontario - 526; Quebec - 401; 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 1,520, 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.

FEDERAL POLITICAL TRENDS

The Chretien Liberals' support has inched down below the 50 percent mark and the Charest Conservatives are all alone in second place according to the latest National Angus Reid/Southam News Poll conducted among a representative cross-section of 1520 Canadian adults between November 26th and December 2nd, 1996. The poll highlights on the federal political scene include:

- The federal Liberals are currently holding the support of 47 percent of decided voters – this still gives them a huge lead over the rest of the field and is a half dozen points ahead of their 1993 election showing, but it is the lowest level the Liberals have been at in the Angus Reid Poll since that election (they had hit 49% last December). The Jean Charest Conservatives are up at 18 percent of the decided vote nationally, a gain of 5 percentage points since late October and their highest support level since the 1993 election. The other three main parties – the Bloc Quebecois, Reform and the New Democrats – are each holding 11 percent of the decided vote nationally. For Reform, this is on par with their post-election low, and for the NDP it is a post-election high in Angus Reid Polling. (This latest poll shows 10% of voters are undecided/refused or not intending to vote in a federal election, a figure which was 24 percent before a follow-up "leaners" question was asked – that "leaners" question is used in the calculation of party support.) (Table 1A)

- The Charest Conservatives have made gains (of varying intensity) in all major regions of the country this past month – especially in Alberta (up to 25%) and in Ontario (up to 22%). The New Democrats have also made gains in B.C. (now up at 18%), Manitoba/Saskatchewan (in second place with 29%) and the Atlantic region (16%). The contest remains most competitive for the Liberals in Alberta (tied with Reform in this latest sounding thanks to the Conservatives' gains here) and in Quebec (the Liberals are at 37% against the Bloc's 44% in this poll); the Liberals continue to enjoy a solid lead in all other major regions. (Table 1B)

- This National Angus Reid/Southam News Poll also updated our tracking of the federal party leaders' popular approval ratings: (Table 2)
 - Liberal Prime Minister Jean Chretien enjoys a national approval rating of 63 percent versus 33 percent disapproval. This is the same approval rating Mr. Chretien received a year ago and is a little better than his ratings this past summer. Still, most Quebecers continue to disapprove of Jean Chretien (53% versus 42% approve), in contrast to solid majority approval across the rest of Canada (70%).
 - This poll, completed just a day before Bloc Quebecois leader Michel Gauthier announced his intention to resign, found little change in his popular approval ratings from the summer: in Quebec, 39 percent approved of Mr. Gauthier, 32 percent disapproved, and 30 percent were unsure. Elsewhere, a majority (59%) disapproved of Mr. Gauthier's performance.
 - Reform party leader Preston Manning's approval ratings have not changed since the summer and remain weaker than they were before 1996. Nationally, 33 percent of voters surveyed expressed approval of the Reform party leader against 52 percent who disapproved and 15 percent unsure. Mr. Manning's performance meets with majority disapproval east of Alberta and even Albertans are evenly split on the Reform leader's performance.
 - Conservative leader Jean Charest enjoys majority approval nationally (54%) and is the only federal party leader to receive majority approval both within Quebec (52%) and across the rest of the country (55% – a majority everywhere but B.C.).

- NDP leader Alexa McDonough remains the least known of the federal party leaders – 48 percent were unable to appraise her performance (a full majority in Alberta and Quebec). Those with an opinion remain evenly divided on Ms. McDonough's performance – 25 percent approve versus 27 percent disapprove. Voters in her home Atlantic region remain most positive (56% approve), followed by Manitoba/Saskatchewan (39% versus 25%). B.C. voters are the most critical of the NDP leader (35% disapproval versus 19% approve).

THE PUBLIC AGENDA

The late-November 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, presented here in descending order of their level of total mentions: (Tables 3A & 3B)

- Jobs/Unemployment - The jobs issue remains front and centre on the public's agenda, with "top-of-mind" mentions at 45 percent (consistent with the October level but higher than the 40% recorded in September). Significantly, Quebecers continue to distinguish themselves from other Canadians on the unemployment front – fully six in ten (62%) surveyed Quebecers named jobs as the country's most serious problem right now.
- National Unity/Quebec's Future/The Constitution - The issue of national unity/Quebec's future remains in second spot on Canadians' policy issues agenda. Slightly more than one in three (35%) of those surveyed cited this issue as one of the most important concerns presently facing Canada, identical to October's level of mentions. Concern about national unity is relatively higher among men (42% compared to 27% of women) and higher income Canadians (45% versus 27% among the less affluent group).
- Deficit/Debt - One in four (25%) survey respondents mentioned Canada's fiscal situation as a priority for the country today, comparable to the "top-of-mind" mentions recorded in recent months. Unaided concern about the deficit/debt remains comparatively higher among residents of B.C. and Alberta (36% and 35% respectively), men (29%) and the most affluent (29%).
- The Economy in General - The overall state of the Canadian economy was cited by one in five (22%) of all those surveyed (rising to 31% in Quebec).
- Health Care/Medicare - One in five (20%) polled Canadians pinpointed the availability and/or quality of health care as a pressing issue currently facing the country. Unaided concern about health care has been in this range in recent soundings, but was less than half

the present level about a year ago (7% in October 1995). Mentions of the health care system were highest among Albertans (36%) and women (26%).

- Education - One in ten (11%) cited issues concerning the education system in this country, double the mentions observed at the start of this year.
- Poverty - Almost one in ten (8%) respondents pointed to issues relating to poverty.
- Taxes - Around one in twenty (6%) named taxes/taxation as an area warranting the country's undivided attention at this time.
- Other Social Services - The same number (6%) mentioned other social services as a very important issue for Canada today.
- Crime/Justice Issues - Six percent also volunteered issues pertaining to crime or the justice system as critical for the country to address right now.

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

For further information, contact:

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

Bob Richardson
Vice-President
Angus Reid Group
(416) 324-2900