
THE NATIONAL ANGUS REID/SOUTHAM NEWS POLL

- CANADIANS' CHRISTMAS SPENDING INTENTIONS -



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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.

CANADIANS' CHRISTMAS SPENDING INTENTIONS

More than one in three Canadian consumers surveyed say they intend to spend less money this Christmas than last, primarily because they have less disposable income. Still, almost one-half plan to spend about as much as they did last Christmas, and one in ten say they expect to spend more this year.

These findings emerged from a National Angus Reid/Southam News Poll conducted among a representative cross-section of 1,520 Canadians between November 26 and December 2, 1996.

Below are the highlights of the poll:

- More than one in three (37%) Canadian consumers surveyed said they plan to spend less money this Christmas than they did last year, three times as many as stated they intend to increase (12%) their Christmas spending this year. The single largest number – 45 percent – indicated they plan to spend about the same amount of money this holiday season as they did for Christmas '95. (The remainder of the survey sample – 6 percent – indicated they do not celebrate Christmas.) (Table 1) Responses to this spending intention question were fairly consistent across major population sub-groupings, although younger Canadians were among the most likely to say they intend to increase their Christmas spending this year (19% of those between 18 and 34).
- These 1996 Christmas spending intentions are broadly comparable to those recorded in Angus Reid Group soundings taken in the early 1990s, although the 37 percent who report intentions to spend less this year is slightly lower than the figures observed in these earlier readings (low to mid 40% range). It should be noted that these survey results measure the proportion of *consumers* who report intentions to reduce, maintain or increase their Christmas expenditures, and not necessarily the actual amount of *money* consumers will end up spending which will be reflected in retail sales figures. That said, the "thrifty" intentions of one-third of Canadians clearly underlines a continued cautious mindset among consumers.

- Those Canadians who intend to spend less money this Christmas than last – 37 percent of those surveyed – were asked why they plan to rein in their spending. This "open-ended" probing reveals that financial and economic considerations are the overwhelming reasons behind these consumers' intentions to cut back on their Christmas spending: over one-half of these respondents said their income is lower this year or they/their spouse is unemployed (20%) or that they simply have less money this year (38%); another 6 percent said they are too much in debt; another 6 percent cited a variety of other financial reasons; and, 13 percent said they are worried about the economy and/or their job security. Other reasons receiving significant mentions from those intending to spend less included: they have made a decision to cut back on spending/gifts at Christmas time (9%); they now have fewer people to buy for (5%); and, they believe Christmas has become too commercialized or materialistic (3%). (Table 2)

- Among the 12 percent of surveyed Canadians who stated they plan to spend more money this Christmas than they did last year, the most commonly volunteered reasons were: their income is higher this year (cited by 15% of those with intentions to spend more) or they simply have more money to spend (27%); fully one-third (34%) of this group said they have more people to buy gifts for this year. (Table 2)

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