
THE NATIONAL ANGUS REID/SOUTHAM NEWS POLL

- CANADIANS' ECONOMIC OUTLOOK -



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Public Release Date: Monday, February 3rd, 1997

This National Angus Reid/Southam News Poll was conducted by telephone between January 21st and 27th, 1997 among a representative cross-section of 1,519 Canadian adults.

The actual number of completed interviews in each region was as follows: B.C. - 202; Alberta - 151; Manitoba/Saskatchewan - 121; Ontario - 523; Quebec - 401; Atlantic - 121. 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 1,519, 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' ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

Consumer confidence in the Canadian economy continues its very gradual improvement and is now significantly stronger than it was one year ago. Here in early 1997, more than one-half of Canadians say the national economy today is in good shape overall – an 18-point increase since January of 1996. In addition, in terms of the prospects for Canada's economy for the year ahead, optimists now outnumber pessimists by fully a two-to-one margin – the exact opposite of the public's outlook that existed this time last year.

These findings emerged from a National Angus Reid/Southam News Poll conducted among a representative cross-section of 1,519 Canadians between January 21st and 27th, 1997.

Assessment of the Canadian Economy Today

- The national economy continues to receive a positive appraisal from a majority (55%) of Canadians – 53 percent of those surveyed rated the current state of the overall Canadian economy as "good" while 2 percent opted for "very good". In comparison, 44 percent awarded negative marks (37% "poor", 7% "very poor"). This current overall assessment of the national economy is unchanged since the November 1996 sounding and only marginally better than last fall, but it does represent a marked improvement compared to consumers' appraisal a year ago (37% good/very good versus 63% poor/very poor). (Table 1)
- The current state of the Canadian economy is viewed in a particularly positive light by residents of Alberta (76% good/very good), and also by consumers in British Columbia (63%), Manitoba/Saskatchewan (61%) and Ontario (58%). In Quebec and Atlantic Canada, on the other hand, a majority give the national economy a "thumbs down" (58% and 56% respectively rated the national economy today as poor/very poor).

One-Year Outlook for the National Economy

- Canadians' forecast for the national economy continues its gradual improvement. By more than a two-to-one margin, survey respondents said they expect Canada's economy to "improve" (39%) rather than "get worse" (18%) during the coming year. A plurality (42%) anticipated the status quo will prevail. The public's outlook has improved steadily since a year ago when expectations were the opposite of what they are today – last January, consumers expected a downturn by a margin of two to one (35% get worse, 18% improve). Even in the past two months, the gap between the number of optimists and pessimists was 15 percentage points, compared to the 21 points recorded in this January 1997 sounding. (Table 2)
- Albertans are the most optimistic about the prospects for the Canadian economy in the next 12 months (52% predicted improvement on the national front), followed by Ontario consumers (46%). Optimism also exceeds pessimism among residents of British Columbia (35% versus 17%), Manitoba/Saskatchewan (32% to 18%) and Quebec (33% versus 18%). Atlantic Canadians, meanwhile, are split (28% improve, 29% get worse).

One-Year Outlook for the Provincial Economies

- Consistent with their positive perspectives on the national economy, residents of Alberta continue to harbour the most buoyant expectations for their own province's economic fortunes – fully two in three (65%) envisioned better economic conditions in Alberta for the year ahead. (Table 3)
- Ontarians also tend to be optimistic about the prospects for their provincial economy (a plurality of 42% expect things to improve). Optimism also outweighs pessimism by a slight margin in Manitoba/Saskatchewan, although fully one-half (49%) expect no change.

- In Quebec, by contrast, consumers are more likely to expect their provincial economy will deteriorate over 1997 than they are to foresee improvement (32% versus 20%, with one-half anticipating no change).
- Meanwhile, residents of British Columbia (30% improve, 29% get worse) and the Atlantic region (29% each) are divided in their overall outlook for their provincial economies.

For further information, contact:

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

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