
– CANADIANS AND THE SENATE –



© Angus Reid Group, Inc.
Public Release Date: May 11, 1998

This Angus Reid Group/Globe and Mail/CTV poll was conducted by telephone between April 15th and 23rd, 1998 among a representative cross-section of 1,500 Canadian adults.

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 1996 Census data.

With a national sample of 1,500, 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 AND THE SENATE

Canadians' attitudes towards the Senate have hardened over the past decade. The late-April National Angus Reid Poll conducted between April 15th and 23rd among 1,500 Canadians shows that the public is now divided between reforming the Upper Chamber and abolishing it entirely; very few want to leave the Senate as it is. In the late 1980s, half or more Canadians were enthusiastic about reforming the Senate.

Canadians are also divided regarding what Prime Minister Chrétien should do about the vacancy in the Senate resulting from the resignation of Andrew Thompson, whose poor attendance record has contributed to a renewed debate over the relevance of the Red Chamber.

CANADIANS' VIEWS ON WHAT SHOULD BE DONE WITH THE SENATE

-- Abolition gains momentum --

The National Angus Reid Poll offered Canadians three broad choices in terms of what to do with the Senate: leave it as it is, reform it or get rid of it entirely.

- ◆ Four in ten (43%) surveyed Canadians prefer that the Senate be reformed, while the same number (41%) would abolish the Senate. One in ten (11%) respondents would opt for leaving the Senate as it is.
- ◆ This current picture shows more support for abolition and less for Senate reform than there was in the late 1980s. In February of 1989, Angus Reid polling showed 49 percent favouring Senate reform versus 28 percent opting for abolition of the Upper House. Two years earlier, in May of 1987 when the Meech Lake Accord was being inked, the split was 59 percent for reform versus 22 percent for abolition. Across these three soundings, only a small minority (peaking at 15% in 1989) opted for leaving the Senate as it is.
- ◆ Albertans (55%) and British Columbians (50%), along with the well-educated (54%) and the affluent (48%), remain the strongest proponents of Senate reform. Abolition is most popular among Québécois (54%) and older Canadians (47%).

CANADIANS' VIEWS ON WHAT SHOULD BE DONE ABOUT THE CURRENT SENATE VACANCY

Canadians were also asked what they would like Prime Minister Chrétien to do about the empty seat left in the Senate following the resignation of Ontario Senator Andrew Thompson. Three broad choices were offered: leave the seat empty for the time being; have Ontarians elect a new Senator; or appoint a Senator, which is the traditional procedure.

- ◆ Again, the poll found a split: four in ten (40%) surveyed Canadians want the Prime Minister to have the citizens of Ontario elect a new Senator, and four in ten (39%) prefer that the Senate seat be left empty for the time being. Meanwhile, the traditional procedure for filling a vacancy in the Senate, appointment by the Prime Minister, garnered support from only 14 percent of those polled.
- ◆ The strongest supporters of reforming the Upper Chamber, Albertans and British Columbians, are also most likely to prefer having Ontarians vote on a new Senator (60% of Albertans and 49% of British Columbians). Younger Canadians (46%) are also more likely than other respondents to support an Ontario Senate election.
- ◆ People's views on the broad issue of Senate reform relate to their views on the Ontario vacancy. Among respondents who would opt to get rid of the Senate entirely, 62 percent would like Prime Minister Chrétien to leave the seat empty for the time being (versus 39% of surveyed Canadians as a whole). Fully one-half (53%) of respondents who support reforming the Red Chamber feel the vacancy should be filled by having Ontarians vote for a new Senator (versus 40% of surveyed Canadians as a whole). Canadians who would opt to leave the Senate as it is are more divided as to what to do about the empty seat: one-half (48%) of the status quo supporters prefer an Ontario Senate election (versus 40% of all respondents), but fully one-third (34%) feel the Prime Minister should appoint a new Senator as usual (compared to 14% of surveyed Canadians as a whole).

For more information on this news release, please contact:

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

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

Christian Bourque
Directeur senior de le Recherche
Groupe Angus Reid
(514) 877-5550

Visit our website at **www.angusreid.com**