
THREE-QUARTERS (77%) OF CANADIANS (INCLUDING TWO-THIRDS (66%) OF QUEBECERS) REJECT “50%PLUS 1” AS “CLEAR MAJORITY” ON REFERENDUM VOTE

Wide range of thresholds offered – but “clear majority” average: 65%



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This Angus Reid Group/CTV/Globe and Mail poll was conducted by telephone between August 20th and 25th, 1998 among a representative cross-section of 1,511 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 1,511, 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.

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In the first few days after the Supreme Court delivered its historic decision on the Québec secession reference, the National Angus Reid Poll gauged the Canadian public’s initial reaction. The poll highlights:

50% Plus 1 Not a Clear Majority

- ◆ Most Canadians – both within and outside Québec – believe that a simple 50% plus one referendum vote would not constitute a “clear majority”. Nationally, three-quarters (77%) said a larger majority would be required for Québec to proceed to separate versus only one in five (22%) who said 50% plus one would be adequate. In Québec as well, two-thirds (66%) of those polled said a higher threshold would be required while one in three (32%) would accept a bare majority. The three-quarters opting for a larger majority were asked what percentage would be appropriate. These responses covered a very wide range, with substantial proportions opting for a figure either in the 51-60% range, the 61-70% range, or the 71-80% range. Across Canada as a whole, just over half chose a majority threshold over 60%. The mean or average response across all Canadians surveyed was 65.5%. In Québec, where a majority also opted for a stronger majority than 50% plus one, somewhat more modest majorities are deemed adequate. There is, predictably, a great division of opinion between Québec sovereigntists and federalists: whereas federalists almost unanimously reject 50% plus one, sovereigntists are pretty well evenly divided on whether that would suffice as a clear majority.

Plurality (49%) believe Quebec and federal governments should collaborate in writing any future referendum question

- ◆ On the issue of who should be charged with writing a “clear question” for any future referendum, these poll results show the most favourable option is a collaboration between the Québec and federal governments. This option was selected by 49 percent of Canadians nationally – including a plurality of 43 percent of Québécois. Only 11 percent of all Canadians – and 27 percent of Québécois – opted for the government of Québec writing the next sovereigntist referendum question, while 9 percent chose the federal government – only 4 percent in Québec. Interestingly, 13 percent of those polled chose “a body of academics” for the task and 16 percent chose “some other group”.

Decision Seen to Make Canada More Secure

- ◆ Canadians tend to believe the Supreme Court’s decision will make the future national unity of Canada more rather than less secure (47% vs. 33%, with 14% volunteering that there will be no impact.) This was the general assessment across ROC and in Québec, although closer analysis of the Québec results shows federalists (Liberals and No voters) were quite confident that national unity has been strengthened, while sovereigntists (PQ supporters and Yes voters) were slightly more likely to believe the Court’s decision makes Canadian unity less secure.

The Québec Political Climate

- ◆ Meanwhile, in Québec, the political climate this summer continues to look very competitive:
 - The Charest-led Liberals are just edging out the Bouchard Parti Québécois government (48% to 44%) as they contemplate a fall election.
 - Québécois remain virtually evenly split on Québec sovereignty accompanied by a partnership with the rest of Canada: 48 percent Yes versus 52 percent No. The

prospect of Québec becoming “an independent country, separate from Canada” meets with a 63 percent No versus 37 percent Yes.

- On these major political questions, these latest polling data underline the patterns traditionally observed in Québec: Montrealers, women, and older people tend to be federalist whereas other parts of the province, men and younger Québécois tend towards the sovereigntist side.

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