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and Three in Four (75%) Don't Know Who Canada's Head of State Is*

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Ipsos Reid

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Toronto, ON – The last two weeks have marked a time in Canadian political history that will go down in the history books. During the recent constitutional crisis, conflicting messages were presented about how Canadian democracy works, and what powers the Governor General actually has. According to a new Ipsos Reid poll conducted on behalf of the Dominion Institute in the wake of the recent constitutional crisis, many Canadians appear to be unsure of some basic Canadian political knowledge, including how the Prime Minister is elected and who Canada's head of state is.

Canadians are split on whether the Prime Minister is directly or indirectly elected by the people of Canada. One half (51%) believes he is directly elected, while the other half (49%) believes he is not. In fact, the Prime Minister is not directly elected, as Canadians vote for their local Member of Parliament, and the leader of the party with the most seats in parliament is invited by the Governor General to become Prime Minister.

Four in ten (42%) believe that the Prime Minister is Canada's head of state, and one in three (33%) think this title belongs to the Governor General. In truth, though, the Queen is Canada's Head of State, and only one quarter (24%) of Canadians knew this.

Four in ten (41%) Canadians were unable to correctly identify Canada as a 'constitutional monarchy'. One in four (24%) Canadians described it as a 'cooperative assembly' and 17% believed Canada is a 'representative republic'.

Much debate has ensued around whether or not the Governor General could constitutionally refuse a sitting Prime Minister's request for a new election if he no longer commanded the confidence of the House of Commons, particularly when an election has just occurred. While one in ten (10%) believe that the Governor General cannot refuse the Prime Minister's request, nine in ten (90%) believe that she can. The Governor General can in fact refuse this request as part of her reserve powers. This scenario could be at play in January or February if the opposition parties decide to defeat the government's budget in a vote of non-confidence.

These are the findings of an Ipsos Reid poll conducted on behalf of the Dominion Institute from December 9 to December 12, 2008. This online survey of 1070 Canadians was conducted via the Ipsos I-Say Online Panel, Ipsos Reid's national online panel. The results of this poll are based on a sample where quota sampling and weighting are employed to balance demographics and ensure that the sample's composition reflects that of the actual Canadian population according to Census data. Quota samples with weighting from the Ipsos online panel provide results that are intended to approximate a probability sample. Statistical margins of error are not applicable to online polls because they are based on samples drawn from opt-in online panels, however, an unweighted probability sample of this size, with a 100% response rate, would have an estimated margin of error of +/- 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, had the entire adult population of Canada been polled.

How is the Prime Minister Elected?

Canadians are split on how the Prime Minister of Canada is elected. While one half (51%) believes that he is directly elected, one half (49%) does not.

- Quebecers (70%) are most likely to believe that he is directly elected by the people of Canada, the only region wherein a majority believes this. A minority of those in British Columbia (49%), Ontario (47%), Saskatchewan and Manitoba (44%), Alberta (42%) and Atlantic Canada (35%) think he's directly elected.
- In contrast, a majority of Atlantic Canadians (65%) do **not** believe he is elected in this manner, and the same can be said about those living in Alberta (58%), Saskatchewan and Manitoba (56%), Ontario (53%), and British Columbia (51%). Only three in ten Quebecers (30%) believe this.

Who is Canada's Head of State?

Much confusion exists when it comes to knowing who Canada's head of state is. Four in ten (42%) believe that the Prime Minister is Canada's head of state, and one in three (33%) think this title belongs to the Governor General. Only one quarter (24%) knows it's the Queen.

- Ontarians (33%) are most likely to know that the Queen is Canada's Head of State, followed by those living in Saskatchewan and Manitoba (28%), Atlantic Canada (26%), Alberta (18%), Quebec (17%) and British Columbia (16%).
- British Columbians (43%), residents of Saskatchewan and Manitoba (41%) and Albertans (40%) are most likely to say that the Governor General is head of state, followed by Atlantic Canadians (33%), Ontarians (32%) and Quebecers (26%).
- Quebecers (57%) have the highest propensity to believe that the Prime Minister is the head of state, while those living in Alberta (42%), Atlantic Canada (41%), Ontario (35%) and Saskatchewan and Manitoba (31%) are much less likely to think this.

How is Canada's Government Best Described?

Six in ten (59%) Canadians were correctly able to identify Canada as a 'constitutional monarchy'. Four in ten gave an incorrect response, believing that it was best described as a 'cooperative assembly' (25%) or a 'representative republic' (17%).

- Ontarians (63%) and residents of Saskatchewan and Manitoba (63%) are most likely to know that Canada is a constitutional monarchy, while Albertans (61%), Atlantic Canadians (60%), and Quebecers (57%) are only slightly less likely to know this. However, British Columbians (48%) are much less likely to know this.
- British Columbians (24%) are most likely to think that it's a representative republic and a cooperative assembly (28%) when compared to other parts of the country.

Can the Governor General Refuse the Prime Minister?

Nine in ten (90%) Canadians believe that the Governor General has the power to refuse the Prime Minister's request for an election. Just 10% do not.

- Albertans (97%) are the most likely to know this, followed by Canadians living in Atlantic Canada (96%), Saskatchewan and Manitoba (92%), Ontario (89%), British Columbia (88%) and Quebec (86%).
- Conversely, Quebecers (14%) are the most likely to think that the Governor General cannot deny the Prime Minister's request, while those in British Columbia (12%), Ontario (11%), Saskatchewan and Manitoba (8%), Atlantic Canada (4%), and Alberta (3%) are less likely to think this.



Ipsos Reid

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