



## NEWS RELEASE

# Parties Fiddle While Canada Gets Burnt Support for Unity Plummets in Quebec Federalism in Trouble in Alberta and Elsewhere

### Attitudes towards Sovereignty

Residents of Quebec n=365

<i>Q: "Ideally, which of the following four options would you prefer for Quebec?"</i>	
Sovereignty association	31
Decentralized federalism	24
Complete independence	23
Status quo	15

  

<i>Q: "If you were forced to choose between complete independence for Quebec from Canada or maintenance of the status quo, which would you choose?"</i>	
Status quo	49
Complete independence	46
Do not know/no response	6

  

<i>Q: "If a referendum were held today on the same question as that asked in 1995, that is, sovereignty with an offer of partnership with the rest of Canada, would you vote yes or would you vote no?"</i>	
Yes	56
No	38

While the sponsorship scandal dominates Parliament and the media, a deeper crisis in the fabric of Canadian politics is gestating. A new EKOS/Toronto Star/La Presse poll shows that support for sovereignty is cresting at historic highs in Quebec. Meanwhile, belief in the value of the federal government is collapsing in Alberta and is vulnerable elsewhere.

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“The political and parliamentary turmoil in Ottawa is drawing our attention away from an incipient constitutional crisis in Quebec and a loss of faith in federal institutions in other parts of Canada,” said EKOS President Frank Graves.

Ironically, Quebecers and Albertans, like other Canadians, are quite positive about the general direction of the country. However, they have soured on the federal system.

## Sovereignty and Independence in Quebec

The support for federalist options is in precipitous decline in Quebec, assisted no doubt by the federal sponsorship scandal and the near-collapse of the federal Liberal Party in the province. Supporters of sovereignty-association or outright independence now outnumber those who favour a federalist option by a margin of 54 per cent to 39 per cent.

Yet more striking, when offered the stark choice between independence and the status quo, the Quebecers in our poll are almost evenly split. Just five years ago, the status quo enjoyed an advantage of more than thirty percentage points.

“This represents an implosion in support for Canadian unity,” said Graves.

## Federalism in Trouble

While Canada’s federal institutions may be most vulnerable in Quebec, they are also under attack elsewhere, particularly in Alberta.

We asked Canadians how important they rated each level of government: federal, provincial and local. Most Canadians (58 per cent) regard the federal government as important, though less so than their provincial (72 per cent) or local governments (66 per cent).

To probe these sentiments more deeply, we asked our respondents to think forward 25 years, and imagine which level of government would be easiest to live without. Although nationally, Canadians were quite evenly split, there were dramatic regional variations. Forty-eight per cent of Quebecers say that they could do without the federal government (compared with just 15 per cent who cited the provincial government). In Alberta, the results were scarcely less dramatic: 45 per cent said they could do without the federal government (compared with just 20 per cent who cited the provincial government).

In contrast, people in British Columbia, Ontario and the Atlantic provinces, were much less likely to say that they felt they could do without the federal government in the future. Indeed, in Ontario, a plurality is inclined to say that they could do without the provincial government – the only region of the country where this is true.

## *METHODOLOGY:*

These data are based on telephone interviews conducted November 7 to November 9, 2005 with a random sample of 1275 Canadians aged 18 and over. A sample of this size provides a margin of error of +/- 2.7 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The margin of error increases when the results are sub-divided (i.e., error margins for sub-groups such as regions).

All the data were statistically weighted to ensure the sample's regional, gender and age composition reflects that of the actual population of Canada according to Census data.