

Majority of Albertans would vote to stay in Canada, find Smith's handling poor: poll

About half of Albertans said they found the official referendum question confusing

Rukhsar Ali · CBC News · Posted: May 25, 2026



Alberta Premier Danielle Smith speaks during a news conference in Calgary on May 22, 2026. A day prior, she announced she is planning to put a question on the fall referendum ballot that will ask Albertans if they want the province to remain in Canada or if they want a future binding referendum on separation. (Jeff McIntosh/The Canadian Press)

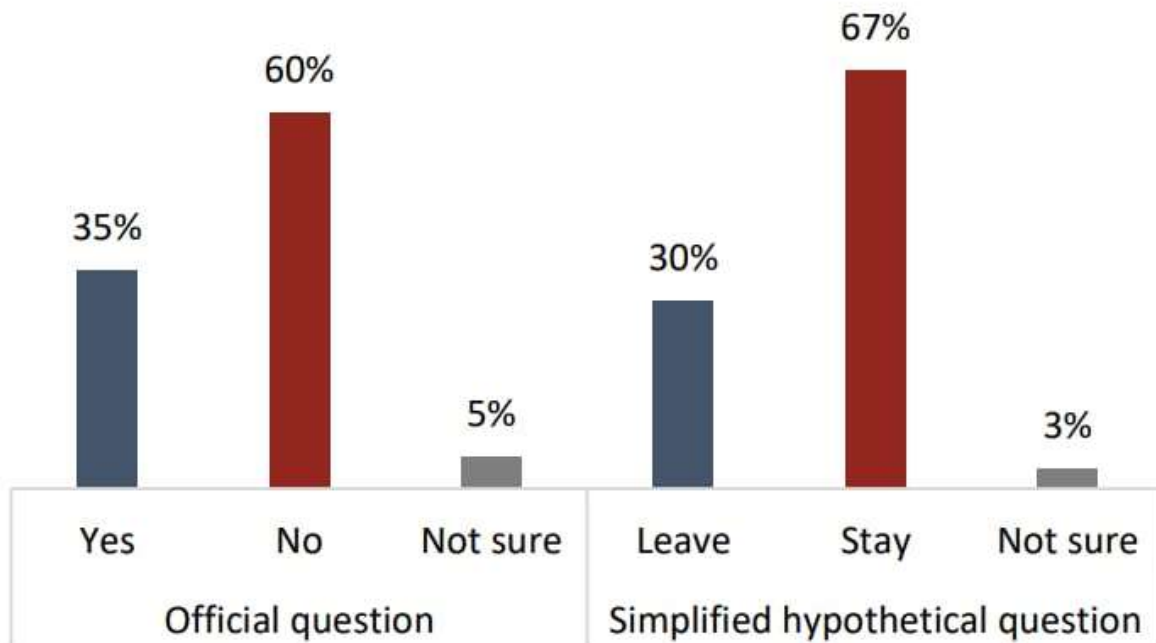
As an October referendum on the future of Alberta separation looms, new polling finds three in five Albertans say they would vote to stay in Canada, while more than half of Albertans feel Premier Danielle Smith has handled the issue “poorly.”

On Thursday, Smith announced she is planning to put a question on the fall referendum ballot that will ask Albertans if they want the province to remain in Canada or if they want a future binding referendum on separation.

According to a poll from the Angus Reid Institute released Monday, 60 per cent of respondents would vote no to the official referendum question, compared to 35 per cent who would vote yes.

But when asked a simpler hypothetical question about whether to leave Canada or stay, support for separation decreased and federalist sentiment grew, with 30 per cent choosing to leave and 67 per cent opting to stay.

Responses to official referendum question vs. simplified hypothetical leave/stay referendum (All respondents, n=800)



When Albertans were asked a simpler hypothetical question about whether to leave Canada or stay, support for separation decreased and federalist sentiment grew, according to an Angus Reid poll. (Angus Reid Institute)

Shachi Kurl, president of the Angus Reid Institute, told CBC's Aarti Pole the responses to both poll questions "indicate overwhelming majorities" don't want to leave Canada.

"One of the biggest takeaways here is when you ask a simpler question, and albeit hypothetical ... you see the number of people who say they'd vote to stay [in Canada] shoot right up to 67 per cent."

The latest survey by Angus Reid was conducted online from May 22-24. It polled a randomized sample of 800 Albertan adults and has a margin of error of plus or minus three percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

'Question wording matters,' prof says

A little more than half of Albertans polled said they found the official question confusing.

"Question wording matters," said Lisa Young, a professor of political science at the University of Calgary, in reference to the discrepancy between the response to the official question and Angus Reid's simplified one.

The official 37-word question will ask, "Should Alberta remain a province of Canada or should the Government of Alberta commence the legal process required under the Canadian Constitution to hold a binding provincial referendum on whether or not Alberta should separate from Canada?"



As premiers from across Western Canada gather in Alberta for their annual meeting, Premier Danielle Smith was asked for her reaction to Prime Minister Mark Carney calling her Alberta referendum question a 'dangerous bluff.' Smith said it was 'a decision for Albertans to make' while reiterating that she supports Alberta staying in Canada.

Young warned that could potentially influence how people vote in October.

"People are reading their own interpretation into what the question means. Now, we're going to have the next five months to talk about what the various options actually mean, so that may move people a little bit," she said.

"I wonder if some people who are just tuning into this conversation think that, well, there's no harm in having another referendum and keeping the conversation going."

More than half of Albertans surveyed think Smith handled issue 'poorly'

Fifty-six per cent of poll respondents said Smith has handled the issue "poorly," including nearly a third of UCP voters.

"If you're someone who is already inclined to not want to vote for the UCP and Danielle Smith, you're going to say that she's done a bad job, and we see that," Kurl said, with the poll showing most Alberta NDP voters responding "very poorly/poorly."

At the same time, she said, there is a significant segment of UCP voters who feel that this has been mishandled, so Smith is being squeezed by criticism from both sides.

"You have true hardcore separatists — people who really follow the Alberta Prosperity Project — saying, you know, she's not calling a simple question. She's not calling a yes, no question ... So there is that level of unhappiness."

Young said, "in some ways [the poll] validates the analysis that we've seen that suggests that almost everyone is angry at Danielle Smith about this."

"When we look at the numbers about anger at Smith, she has retained support among many conservatives or UCP voters but has perhaps ... engendered some anger from a smaller group of deeply committed separatists."





CBC News reporters asked people in Camrose, Leduc and Edmonton how they feel about voting in a fall on whether to have a binding referendum on separating from Canada.

The poll also suggested 33 per cent of respondents who voted for the UCP in 2023 view the referendum as a move by Smith to appease the separatists in her party.

And while Smith has previously stated she supports Alberta staying in Canada and will campaign for the "remain" side, 40 per cent of Albertans polled indicated the premier's motivations are predicated on her keeping her job, the institute's report said.

Nearly half of those surveyed said Smith should resign.

Kurl said that speaks to a broader challenge Smith will continue to have in trying to walk a line between keeping the separatist forces within her own party and her own segment base, the federalists, on side.

The poll also found that decided voters were nearly split on the party they'd vote for in the event that an election were called today, with 46 per cent provincewide choosing the UCP and 45 per cent choosing the NDP.

On Monday, Prime Minister Mark Carney said Smith's referendum question is "not helpful" and that votes like this are a "dangerous bluff," citing the Brexit referendum of 2016 as an example.

Looking at how different age demographics responded to the poll, Young said she sees an interesting parallel to the vote patterns in Brexit, as older Albertans were more likely to vote for separation than younger ones.

Prime Minister Mark Carney said Alberta's separation question will not create softer negotiations in the future. He cited the United Kingdom as an example: 'they're still, 10 years later, trying to undo what people didn't think they were voting for,' he said.

In response to the simplified question of separation, 20 per cent of Albertans between 18-34 years old said they would vote to leave Canada, while 38 per cent of Albertans over 55 responded the same way.

"It's this question where, you know, older people are favouring ... the more radical outcome, which young people have to live with the consequences of," said Young.

The poll also found that seven out of 10 respondents believe "separatists will never accept" the outcome if Albertans vote against advancing the separation process.

Of those who would vote to separate in a hypothetical future referendum, 41 per cent of people said they would not accept the outcome if Albertans vote against starting the separation process, while 45 per cent would.



Albertans will be able to vote on whether they want the province to hold a binding referendum on separating from Canada on Oct. 19.