



PROFILE ON WESTERN CANADA

ABOLITION OF THE SENATE

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INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RESEARCH
Faculty of Arts
The University of Manitoba

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This report was written by Mr. Kerry Dangerfield of the Institute. The Profile on Western Canada is under the direction of Dr. Greg Mason, Director of the Institute, to whom further inquiries should be directed.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Telephone survey on political preferences of Western Canadians.
 - Interview dates: March 11 to March 21, 1985 (n = 2,339).
 - Western Canadians (residence of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia) are divided on the question of abolition of the Senate.
 - Younger respondents are more likely to favour the retention of the Senate.
 - Men are more likely than women to favour the Senate's abolition.
 - Respondents stating they would vote for the federal Progressive Conservatives are more strongly in favour of abolishing the Senate. Liberal voters are more likely to favour its retention and those expressing a voting preference for the NDP are evenly split.
 - Respondents who are very interested in politics or make it a regular practice to 'catch' the news on a daily basis are more likely to favour the abolition of the Senate.
- All four western provinces are divided on the question, but the least support for the Senate comes from B.C.

1. INTRODUCTION

From March 11 to 21, 1985 the Institute for Social and Economic Research undertook a random telephone poll on political preferences of Western Canadians (residents of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia). Included in the poll was a question which dealt with the abolition of the Canadian Senate. At the time the poll was conducted the Senate was the centre of controversy and the federal Progressive Conservative government announced its wish to curtail what it saw as the excesses of the Upper House.

Western Canadians (n=2,339) were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statement:

"Some people think the Senate should be abolished."

The responses to this statement are examined in association with age, gender, the stated voting preference of the respondents, their interest in politics and news awareness. A breakdown of response by province is also given. This sample provides an overall error rate of less than 2.5 percent 19 times out of 20.

2. SHOULD THE SENATE BE ABOLISHED?

As shown in Table 2.1 the West is almost evenly divided on the question of the abolition of the Senate. Slightly more persons (36%) agree with the statement than disagree (32%)

TABLE 2.1
QUESTION: "SOME PEOPLE THINK THE SENATE SHOULD BE ABOLISHED.
DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE?"

	(PERCENTAGE)
AGREE	36
NEUTRAL	11
DISAGREE	32
DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE	21
	100%
	n=2339

3. AGE OF RESPONDENT

Generally, the younger the respondent the more likely he/she disagrees with the abolition of the Senate (see Table 3.1). Conversely, there is greater agreement with the statement among older (45 and over)

TABLE 3.1
"THE SENATE SHOULD BE ABOLISHED.
DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE?"

AGE OF RESPONDENT	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	DK/NR	TOTAL
18 TO 24	32	5	46	17	100%
25 TO 44	32	11	36	21	100%
45 TO 64	45	13	25	17	100%
65 AND OVER	38	15	25	22	100%

NOTE: statistically significant to .0001 (Chi Square).

respondents.

4. GENDER OF RESPONDENT

Women are less likely to agree with the statement than men. However, women are also less likely to have an opinion on this issue (27% an-

TABLE 4.1
"THE SENATE SHOULD BE ABOLISHED.
DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE?"

GENDER	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	DK/NR	TOTAL
FEMALE	30	11	32	27	100%
MALE	43	11	33	13	100%

NOTE: statistically significant to .0001 level (Chi Square).

swered 'don't know' or gave 'no response' compared to 13% for men).

5. PARTY PREFERENCE

At the time the poll was undertaken the question of Senate reform and possible abolition was in the news. The federal P.C. government argued that the Liberal-dominated Senate was obstructing the will of the elected representatives. The Liberals stated that the Upper House was performing its constitutional role, while the New Democrats reaffirmed their party's position calling for the abolition of the Senate. As might be expected, the respondent's political preference appears to influence his/her response to the question. The strongest support for abolition comes from those who would vote P.C. in a federal election. The least support for such a move is among those who said they would

TABLE 5.1
"IF A FEDERAL ELECTION WERE HELD TODAY, WHAT PARTY WOULD YOU VOTE FOR?"

	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	DK/NR	TOTAL*
P.C.	42	11	30	16	99%
LIBERAL	27	13	44	16	100%
N.D.P.	36	11	36	16	99%

* Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.
NOTE: statistically significant to .0001 level (Chi Square).

vote Liberal. Those stating that they would vote for the New Democratic Party were evenly divided.

6. POLITICAL INTEREST AND INFORMATION

A person's general level of interest in politics and how often they claim they 'catch' the news appears to affect his/her response to the question of abolition of the Senate.

Respondents that claimed they "make it a regular practice to catch the news each day" are more likely to agree that the Senate should be abolished. There is a general decline in support for abolition among respondents that indicate they do not regularly try to get a daily dose of news. Those that said they do make it a regular practice are 40% in agreement, while only 25% of those that said no are in agreement (see Table 6.1). The people who do not 'catch' the news regularly are less likely to have an opinion (34% answered 'don't know' or gave 'no response' compared with only 17% of those that regularly caught the news).

TABLE 6.1

"DO YOU MAKE IT A REGULAR PRACTICE TO CATCH THE NEWS EACH DAY?"

"THE SENATE SHOULD BE ABOLISHED. DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE?"

	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	DK/NR	TOTAL*
YES	40	12	32	17	101%
YES, USUALLY	32	14	33	21	100%
NO	25	7	35	34	101%

* Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.
NOTE: Statistically significant to .0001 level (Chi Square).

Those respondents that said they were very interested in politics were much more likely to agree with the statement (46%) than those that were not very interested in politics (29%). (See Table 6.2.) Those that were not very interested were also more likely to answer DON'T KNOW or not respond to the question (DK/NR = 33% compared with 12% for those

TABLE 6.2

"HOW INTERESTED ARE YOU IN POLITICS?"

"THE SENATE SHOULD BE ABOLISHED. DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE?"

	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	DK/NR	TOTAL*
VERY INTERESTED	47	14	28	12	101%
SOMEWHAT INTERESTED	35	12	35	18	100%
NOT VERY INTERESTED	29	7	30	33	99%

*Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.
NOTE: Statistically significant to .0001 level (Chi Square).

that were very interested).

7. PROVINCIAL RESPONSES

A provincial breakdown of the question shows that residents of all four provinces are also divided on the issue, but it appears the least support for the Senate comes from British Columbia (only 29% disagreed

TABLE 7.1

"THE SENATE SHOULD BE ABOLISHED. DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE."

	MAN.	SASK.	ALTA.	B.C.
AGREE	33	38	36	37
NEUTRAL	10	10	11	13
DISAGREE	33	35	33	29
DK/NR	24	17	21	20
TOTAL*	100%	100%	100%	99%

* Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

with the statement).

8. DISCUSSION

The question phrasing is blunt and does not provide clues as to what alternatives might be supported by the public. Many who were neutral or DK/NR also indicated that some reform was desirable. This coupled with the fact that about one-third of respondents do wish to see the Senate abolished suggests ambivalence over the Senate and its role. What is especially interesting is that those who are interested in politics or try to inform themselves by 'catching' the news, ie. those we would assume are better informed about the issue, tend to support the abolition

of the Senate. Also, these results reflect only Western Canadian views, and cannot be generalized to the nation as a whole.

APPENDIX A METHODOLOGY

From March 11 to 21, 1985, 2,339 households in Western Canada were interviewed by telephone. Telephone numbers were drawn randomly from telephone directories, and the last digit randomized to provide access to unlisted numbers. The sample sizes for each province were between 564 and 606, and they provide an error level of less than 5 percent, 19 times out of 20 for each province. Overall error rate for the entire sample is less than 2.5% 19 times out of 20.

Refusals were relatively low (about 21 to 28 percent depending on the province). This refusal performance is toward the lower range of rates typical of those experienced in the industry (20 to 30 percent).

See previous Institute for Social and Economic Research Profiles for more detail on methodology.

APPENDIX B
SAMPLE QUALITY

Sample Size and Error Rates

	Sample Size	Refusals (percent)	Approximate Error Rate (19 times out of 20)
All Provinces	2,339	21.0	2.1
Manitoba	584	23.4	4.1
Saskatchewan	585	22.8	4.2
Alberta	564	17.5	4.2
British Columbia	606	23.5	4.1

To assess representativeness, gender, location, and age are compared to what is known about the Western Canada population from secondary sources such as the 1981 Census.

Distribution by Gender
(percent)

Gender	Western Canada	
	ISER Poll '85	Stats. Canada
Male	45.1	49.7
Female	54.9	50.3

Females tend to be over-represented in this survey; however, this is comparatively slight.

Distribution by Location
(percent)

	Western Canada	
	ISER Poll '85	Stats. Canada
Urban	48.3	45.5
Rural	51.7	54.5

The rural/urban ratios were reasonable, close

Age Distribution
(percent)

AGE	Western Canada	
	ISER Poll '85	Stats. Canada
18 - 19	1.8	-
20 - 24	10.6	14.8
25 - 44	47.1	43.4
45 - 64	25.0	27.0
65+	15.6	14.8

The age pattern reported by the poll and Statistics Canada are within theoretical error rates for the most part, and no adjustments were deemed necessary. The comparison data from Statistics Canada are now about four years old.