

Give it all the Consideration it Deserves: How other Canadians Respond to Alberta Referendum Questions and How the Federal Government Might Respond

1) Introduction

On October 19, 2026, Albertans are scheduled to vote on a series of referendum questions that would invite the province to seek greater authority in areas such as immigration, access to publicly funded programs, judicial appointments, Senate reform, federal program opt-outs and the priority of provincial law. The Association for Canadian Studies commissioned Leger Marketing to test the first nine Alberta referendum questions with respondents across Canada. For respondents outside Alberta, the wording was adapted by substituting the word province for Alberta. The objective was not to determine whether Canadians want to reinvent Canada, but to test the neutrality of the questions themselves and to assess whether their wording tends to produce affirmative answers across jurisdictions.

The central finding is that almost all Canadians, not only Albertans, are inclined to vote yes to most of the first nine questions when they are presented in their Alberta referendum-style wording. That result says less about a broad national desire to remake the federation than about the way the questions are framed. The wording often links complex policy or constitutional proposals to attractive ideas such as sustainability, fairness, voter integrity, reasonable fees, provincial rights and protection from federal interference. Those cues make agreement easier and disagreement more difficult.

The results have important implications for how federal authorities might assess the referendum results. A high yes vote may reveal real public anxieties about immigration levels, service capacity, fiscal fairness and federal-provincial relations. But the often suggestive/oriented question formulation cannot be treated as a clear basis for constitutional change or for a bilateral negotiation that would give Alberta powers that are unavailable to other provinces. Doing so could create precedents that other provinces might pursue with similar strategies.

Survey Methodology: The findings are based on a Leger survey conducted for the Association for Canadian Studies from June 19-21, 2026, among 1528 Canadians. Because the survey was conducted through a non-probability online panel, no margin of error can be assigned. For comparison, a probability sample of this size would have a margin of error of approximately plus or minus 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

The survey put the first nine Alberta referendum questions to Canadians. In order to test whether the questions were neutral or whether they were more broadly suggestive, respondents outside Alberta were asked the same questions with the word province substituted for Alberta. This makes it possible to compare whether the Alberta wording produces support that is distinctive to Alberta or whether similar wording produces broad agreement elsewhere.

2) The Results

The results show that, with only one exception, the questions yield positive responses across the country. The exception is the question on provincial opt-outs from federal programs without losing associated federal funding, which receives 47% support nationally. Even that result is close to half, but it is weaker than the others likely because the trade-off is more visible: respondents are asked to accept that a province could withdraw from federal program conditions while keeping the money.

Still, the broader pattern is clear. When a question is framed as reducing immigration to sustainable levels, prioritizing economic migration, giving citizens and permanent residents continued access, requiring proof of citizenship, charging only reasonable fees or protecting provincial rights, it is structured to elicit an affirmative response. These results should therefore be read as evidence of the persuasive power of the wording, not as a clean referendum mandate for the full legal, fiscal or constitutional consequences of each proposal.

3) Immigration control and access to provincially funded programs

Table 1 assesses the national results for the first three referendum questions, pointing to very high levels of agreement across the country with the statements. National support reaches 69% for increased provincial control over immigration when it is framed around reducing immigration to sustainable levels, prioritizing economic migration and giving first priority on new employment opportunities. Support rises to 74% for limiting provincially funded programs to citizens, permanent residents and people with approved immigration status, and to 75% for a 12-month waiting period for individuals with non-permanent legal status before they qualify for social support programs.

Alberta support is positive but not exceptional. Alberta stands at 64% on increased provincial control over immigration, 71% on limiting access to provincially funded programs, and 68% on a 12-month waiting period. In each case, Alberta is below several other regions, notably Quebec and Atlantic Canada. This suggests that the questions tap into broader Canadian concerns about immigration levels, service capacity and eligibility rules, rather than a uniquely Albertan constitutional demand.

Table 1. Immigration control, program eligibility and social-support waiting periods

Question / policy item	Total	Atl.	QC	ON	MB/SK	AB	BC
Do you support the Government of Alberta taking increased control over immigration for the purposes of decreasing immigration to more sustainable levels, prioritizing economic migration and giving Albertans first priority on new employment opportunities?	69%	74%	78%	67%	60%	64%	66%
Do you support the Government of Alberta introducing a law mandating that only Canadian citizens, permanent residents and individuals with an Alberta approved immigration status will be eligible for provincially-funded programs, such as health care, education and other social services?	74%	81%	77%	72%	77%	71%	77%
Assuming that all Canadian citizens and permanent residents continue to qualify for social support programs as they do now, do you support the Government of Alberta introducing a law requiring all individuals with a non-permanent legal immigration status to reside in Alberta for at least 12 months before qualifying for any provincially-funded social support programs?	75%	84%	79%	72%	79%	68%	78%

Source: Association for Canadian Studies / Leger, June 5-7, 2026.

4) Fees for non-permanent residents, proof of citizenship and judicial appointments

Table 2 seen below again shows broad support on the first two items and a weaker majority on the third. Nationally, 73% support charging a reasonable fee or premium to individuals with non-permanent status for public health care and education, assuming citizens and permanent residents continue to qualify. Proof of citizenship to vote in provincial elections receives 76% support nationally. By contrast, the proposal that provincial rather than federal governments select judges appointed to provincial King's Bench and Appeal courts receives 55% support nationally.

The fairness cues are important. A reasonable fee or premium sounds moderate, and proof of citizenship sounds like a basic electoral integrity measure. The judicial appointments question is more institutionally complex and less connected to everyday fairness, so support is lower. That gap is revealing: Canadians are not automatically endorsing every autonomy proposal. They are more likely to say yes when the question gives them a reassuring or commonsense reason to do so.

Table 2. Fees, proof of citizenship and selection of judges

Question / policy item	Total	Atl.	QC	ON	MB/SK	AB	BC
Assuming that all Canadian citizens and permanent residents continue to qualify for public health care and education as they do now, do you support the Government of Alberta charging a reasonable fee or premium to individuals with a non-permanent immigration status living in Alberta for their and their family's use of the healthcare and education systems?	73%	80%	74%	72%	75%	65%	75%

Question / policy item	Total	Atl.	QC	ON	MB/SK	AB	BC
Do you support the Government of Alberta introducing a law requiring individuals to provide proof of citizenship, such as a passport, birth certificate or citizenship card, to vote in an Alberta provincial election?	76%	83%	79%	72%	73%	76%	77%
Do you support the Government of Alberta working with the governments of other willing provinces to amend the Canadian Constitution to have provincial governments, and not the federal government, select the justices appointed to provincial King's Bench and Appeal courts?	55%	59%	65%	47%	50%	52%	60%

Source: Association for Canadian Studies / Leger, June 5-7, 2026.

5) Senate abolition, federal program opt-outs and provincial law priority

Table 3 moves more directly into constitutional and federal-provincial questions. Across the country, 57% support abolishing the unelected federal Senate, 47% support provinces opting out of federal programs without losing associated federal funding, and 64% support giving provincial laws priority over federal laws in provincial or shared areas of constitutional jurisdiction.

This table is the clearest evidence that question wording can generate agreement without producing a clear constitutional mandate. Abolishing an 'unelected' Senate is easy to support when the institutional consequences are not specified (they could have asked for an elected Senate). The provincial-priority question is framed through the language of protecting provincial rights from federal interference, which points respondents toward agreement while obscuring the consequences of allowing provincial laws to override federal laws in shared or contested fields.

Table 3. Senate abolition, federal program opt-outs and provincial law priority

Question / policy item	Total	Atl.	QC	ON	MB/SK	AB	BC
7. Do you support the Government of Alberta working with the governments of other willing provinces to amend the Canadian Constitution to abolish the unelected federal Senate?	57%	57%	67%	51%	48%	54%	63%
8. Do you support the Government of Alberta working with the governments of other willing provinces to amend the Canadian Constitution to allow provinces to opt out of federal programs that intrude on provincial jurisdiction such as health care, education, and social services, without a province losing any of the associated federal funding for use in its social programs?	47%	42%	59%	40%	43%	47%	51%
9. Do you support the Government of Alberta working with the governments of other willing provinces to amend the Canadian Constitution to better protect provincial rights from federal interference by giving a province's laws dealing with provincial or shared areas of constitutional jurisdiction priority over federal laws when the province's laws and federal laws conflict?	64%	75%	73%	57%	67%	62%	61%

Source: Association for Canadian Studies / Leger, June 5-7, 2026.

6) How might the federal government respond to the oriented questions

It is hard to treat yes votes to such ambiguous questions as a blank cheque. The survey shows that suggestive wording can produce majority support across Canada. Federal authorities might not read an Alberta yes vote as a clear mandate for the detailed policy, fiscal or constitutional implications of each proposal.

Separate grievances from jurisdictional claims. Many respondents appear to be endorsing broad concerns about immigration levels, public service capacity, voter integrity or provincial autonomy. That is not the same as endorsing a transfer of immigration authority, restrictions on legal residents, changes to judicial appointments, Senate abolition or provincial priority over federal law.

Assess wording, turnout, margins and public understanding. The result of a referendum question should be weighed against the structure of the question itself. A high yes percentage on a loaded question should not be treated the same way as a high yes percentage on a neutral, precise and legally grounded question.

Avoid creating interprovincial precedents by negotiation under pressure. If Ottawa treats suggestive referendum results as the basis for serious bilateral concessions, other provinces could reasonably conclude that the same strategy is available to them. That would turn referendum-style pressure into a recurring method for renegotiating federalism outside ordinary constitutional and intergovernmental processes.

Respond substantively but cautiously. Despite the above, Ottawa should not dismiss the results as mere populism. The responses point to real anxieties about immigration, services, fiscal fairness and federalism. But the federal response should focus on policy coordination, fiscal clarity and public explanation rather than conceding constitutional principles through referendum pressure.

Insist on process. Several items cannot be implemented unilaterally by Alberta. Judicial appointments, Senate reform and the priority between federal and provincial laws are governed by constitutional rules, not by a single-province referendum outcome.

7) Conclusion

The ACS-Leger results suggest that the Alberta referendum questions are written to sound practical, fair and protective. That does not mean they produce informed consent to constitutional restructuring. The fact that Canadians outside Alberta also say yes to most of the questions should make federal authorities more cautious, not less. It shows that the questions are broadly attractive because of their wording, not necessarily because Canadians have embraced a new federal architecture.

For Ottawa, the lesson is to look behind the yes. The referendum may identify long-standing grievances that merit attention, but it should not be allowed to transform suggestive language into constitutional authority. Federal authorities can negotiate seriously on practical concerns while refusing to treat the results as a mandate to alter the rules of Canadian federalism or to create precedents that other provinces would then use to make similar demands.