



PHOTO CREDIT: HÉCTOR BERGANZA ON PEXELS

## ▶▶ The Apex of Alienation: What Longitudinal Data Reveal About Alberta and Saskatchewan Separatism

By: Gregory Jack, Senior Vice President, Ipsos Public Affairs, Canada

March 12, 2026

### ▶▶ Introduction

Recent media attention and talk of separation in both Alberta and Quebec has reignited debate over national unity and left the impression that separatist sentiment is on the rise in these two provinces. Canada appears to be a country divided once more. However, the data suggest that western alienation peaked not in 2026, but in the aftermath of the 2019 federal election. To understand that claim, it is worth first examining where separatist support stands today. While Quebec is included in the recent Ipsos data, the longitudinal analysis that follows focuses on Alberta and Saskatchewan, where comparable historical tracking is available.

A [recent poll](#) I contributed to for Ipsos found that 28% of Albertans would at least consider voting for separation, a number that rises to 31% in Quebec. While the separatist movements in Quebec and Alberta are getting the bulk of media attention, the

same study found 32% of respondents in Saskatchewan would consider voting to separate. It should be noted that the number of Saskatchewan people surveyed was small and has a large margin of error.

In Alberta and Quebec, roughly half of these “yes” voters appear to be committed separatists, that is, those willing to pay the economic costs of separation, according to a “Confederation Stress Test” built into the Ipsos poll.<sup>1</sup> These numbers are consistent with [other recent polling](#) by the Angus Reid Institute. Taken together, we can surmise that around three in ten Quebeckers, Albertans and Saskatchewanians would at least consider voting “yes,” and among that group, as many as half (or roughly one in six adults) could be classified as committed to the project in the face of measurable costs to their province.

<sup>1</sup> We did not conduct the “stress test” analysis on Saskatchewan respondents due to insufficient sample size in Saskatchewan.

Although we have cause to be concerned today, the data point to national unity being somewhat stronger, not weaker, in the face of American political turmoil and broader geopolitical realignment. Heightening the situation is a better organized, more vocal separatist movement in the West and an Alberta government that appears, at best, ambiguous on where it stands on the question of Alberta independence. Alberta Premier Danielle Smith herself [has said](#) she supports a “sovereign Alberta in a united Canada,” a stance that echoes some nationalists in Quebec. There is, however, also reason for optimism.

## ►► The Apex of Alienation

Think back to the aftermath of the 2019 federal election. The Justin Trudeau–led government had just won a minority, with virtually no representation west of Manitoba. Questions of who [would speak for the West](#) abounded. CBC [called](#) the deteriorating relationship between Ottawa and the West “dépjà vu all over again.” Irritants included pipeline battles (Trans Mountain), Bill C-69 (“no more pipelines”), the federal carbon tax, and equalization fights. There were reports of Facebook groups forming, rallies, and early party formation efforts, most notably what became the [Maverick Party](#).

Overall, there was a sense that the West had been “locked out of Ottawa” after four years of Liberal governance. Though we didn’t know it at the time, we were mere months away from the world shutting down due to COVID-19, putting many of these concerns on the backburner for several years.

Ipsos [conducted polling](#) on the “Wexit” – short for West exit – threat in November 2019, right after the federal election, asking questions we had tracked previously in the west about national unity across the country for the first time. We found a decreasing commitment to Canada in both Alberta and Saskatchewan, and much lower levels of commitment in those provinces than in Canada as a whole.

*AGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENT: I FEEL LESS COMMITTED TO CANADA THAN I DID A FEW YEARS AGO. [5,6 OR 7 ON A SEVEN-POINT SCALE]*

	1997	2001	2018	2019
CANADA	Not asked nationally			
SASKATCHEWAN	23%	30%	29%	42%
ALBERTA	22%	29%	34%	38%

***These results show a long, gradual increase in alienation in both provinces, with a clear spike by 2019. We also found increasing numbers in Alberta and Saskatchewan who felt that their province would be better off if it separated from Canada.***

*AGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENT: MY PROVINCE WOULD BE BETTER OFF IF IT SEPARATED FROM CANADA. [5,6,7 ON A SEVEN-POINT SCALE]*

	1997	2001	2018	2019
CANADA	Not asked nationally			
SASKATCHEWAN	NOT ASKED	13%	18%	27%
ALBERTA	NOT ASKED	19%	25%	33%

In 2019, the sense that Alberta and Saskatchewan did not get their “fair share” from confederation was strongly felt in both provinces, and much less nationally. ion accounted for 14% of the variance in approval of the government.

*AGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENT: MY PROVINCE DOES NOT GET ITS FAIR SHARE FROM CONFEDERATION [STRONGLY AGREE PLUS SOMEWHAT AGREE]*

	1997	2001	2018	2019
CANADA	Not asked nationally			
SASKATCHEWAN	45%	53%	54%	62%
ALBERTA	45%	49%	62%	65%

Finally, in 2019 we also asked respondents across Canada whether Canada was more divided than ever. A sense of national division was palpable nationally, but especially in Alberta and Saskatchewan:

*AGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENT: CANADA IS MORE DIVIDED THAN EVER [STRONGLY AGREE PLUS SOMEWHAT AGREE]*

	2019
CANADA	59%
SASKATCHEWAN	77%
ALBERTA	79%

## ►► How things look today

Almost seven years later, [a slightly different picture](#) has emerged. There are still national unity concerns, but the numbers suggest they have been tempered. There are fewer people saying they are less committed to Canada than said this in 2019, and fewer saying their province would be better off if it separated from Canada. Those saying Canada is more divided than ever are also harder to find.

AGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENT: I FEEL LESS COMMITTED TO CANADA THAN I DID A FEW YEARS AGO. [5,6 OR 7 ON A SEVEN-POINT SCALE]

	2019	2026	CHANGE
NATIONAL	24%	25%	1%
SASKATCHEWAN	42%	38%	-4%
ALBERTA	38%	32%	-6%

AGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENT: MY PROVINCE WOULD BE BETTER OFF IF IT SEPARATED FROM CANADA [5,6,7 ON A SEVEN-POINT SCALE]

	2019	2026	CHANGE
CANADA	17%	18%	1%
SASKATCHEWAN	27%	30%	3%
ALBERTA	33%	25%	-8%

Those who feel their province doesn't get its "fair share" from confederation are still very high in Alberta and Saskatchewan compared to Canada as a whole, while Canada as a whole is less likely to think this. However, Albertans are significantly less likely in 2026 than they were in 2019 to think this, perhaps owing to the prime minister's recent efforts and a new Memorandum of Understanding with Alberta. Saskatchewan, on the other hand, is unchanged.

AGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENT: MY PROVINCE DOES NOT GET ITS FAIR SHARE FROM CONFEDERATION [5,6 OR 7 ON A SEVEN-POINT SCALE]

	2019	2026	CHANGE
NATIONAL	35%	27%	-8%
SASKATCHEWAN	62%	61%	-1%
ALBERTA	65%	51%	-14%

Overall, slightly less Canadians feel the country is more divided than ever in 2026 than they did in 2019, and both Albertans and Saskatchewanians are less likely to believe the country is more divided than ever.

AGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENT: CANADA IS MORE DIVIDED THAN EVER [STRONGLY AGREE PLUS SOMEWHAT AGREE]

	2019	2026	CHANGE
NATIONAL	59%	55%	-4%
SASKATCHEWAN	77%	68%	-9%
ALBERTA	79%	68%	-11%

In comparing 2026 to 2019, it is especially notable that the number of Albertans who say their province would be better off if it separated from Canada is actually down eight points, while

the number of Saskatchewanians who say this is up slightly. Separatist sentiment appears to have declined somewhat in Alberta, and at most plateaued, if not inched higher, in Saskatchewan. So why does it feel like the country is more divided?

---

**"Policymakers should accept that there are real risks to national unity at play, and acknowledge that Saskatchewan might actually pose a bigger risk than Alberta."**

---

### ►► What makes today different?

Both the Angus Reid poll and our Ipsos poll found an openness on the part of some separatists to joining the United States, and a not-insignificant contingent of Alberta UCP voters who were open to separation and even American annexation. Outside the survey instrument, several contextual factors help explain the heightened salience of separatism today. In 2019 Jason Kenney had just been elected premier of Alberta. Kenney is a known ardent federalist and explicitly sought to secure Alberta's place within Canada in his dealings with Ottawa. Today, he is a [prominent critic](#) of the Alberta separatist movement.

His successor, current Alberta Premier Danielle Smith, has not forcefully defended Canada. Her position has institutionalized the possibility of a referendum should statutory thresholds be met, thereby increasing the movement's legitimacy and treating the province's constitutional future the same as any other citizen-initiated question.

Since 2019, organized groups have been actively pushing for an Alberta referendum. Under Smith, the provincial government has legitimized separatist rhetoric by lowering the threshold of names required to stage an independence referendum and institutionalized various 'firewall' measures, giving the movement time to organize and coalesce. In addition, elements of U.S. politics and media have shown sympathy for or amplified Alberta separatist narratives.

The fact a senior U.S. administration official has [openly commented](#) on the possibility of an Alberta referendum and framed the province as a 'natural partner' for the United States (a remark that was reported widely in Canadian media and interpreted as sympathetic to the idea of separation), means the U.S. is now an active player in this debate.



Finally, the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) and the preponderance of misinformation have led to a decline in trust and faith in news sources and the rise of “alternate facts.” It is increasingly difficult to tell what is real and what is fake, and this may complicate any future referendum campaign and destabilize the public environment in Alberta, Saskatchewan or elsewhere. This may be the most consequential change, and the most difficult to combat.

Together, these forces keep the story in the news and give the impression of a surging movement, even though our longitudinal tracking data suggest that 2019 was the spike in western alienation and 2026 is lower in both breadth and intensity, particularly in Alberta.

## ►► What does it mean?

Although separatist sentiment in Western Canada, and especially Alberta, appears stronger and more salient in 2026 due to media attention and political sponsorship, survey evidence indicates that the true apex of western alienation occurred around the 2019 federal election. Since then, core grievance and identity measures have moderated, and national cohesion has slightly improved in the face of shared external shocks. Today’s Alberta separatism is best understood as a smaller, more institutionalized movement rooted mainly in policy-based grievances, with only a relatively small, intensely angry minority (on the order of 15–16% of adults) treating separation as a genuine constitutional end rather than a bargaining tool.

Saskatchewan, by contrast, shows little post-2019 cooling on several key indicators. Its levels of “better off if separated” have climbed and stayed high, suggesting a more deeply rooted and under-recognized reservoir of western alienation that now rivals Alberta and Quebec in hardline separatist support. Likewise, Saskatchewanians persist in their belief that their province does not

get its fair share from Canada; though still much higher than the national average, Albertans are less likely to believe this than they were in 2019. For Saskatchewan, post-2019 moderation is minimal across key indicators.

## ►► What could policymakers do?

Policymakers should accept that there are real risks to national unity at play, and acknowledge that Saskatchewan might actually pose a bigger risk than Alberta. However, they may be comforted by the fact that the overall mood of the country appears more united than it was seven years ago, media coverage notwithstanding. There remains a core of committed separatists, more organized than in 2019 and enjoying the tacit support of the U.S. Their activity ensures the issue will remain politically salient even if most Canadians, Albertans and Saskatchewanians do not want this discussion.

We seemed destined to have that discussion regardless. Addressing traditional western grievances, combating disinformation and calling out the actual costs of separation will be important to make the case for Canada. There is arguably no more important a project for policymakers than preserving the union.

As author and commentator Dale Eisler has [asked elsewhere](#), we must answer the question of “who speaks for Canada.” Right now, there is no immediate, obvious answer. Recently, former federal minister and author [Clarity Act](#) Stéphane Dion has [written](#) about the dangers of separatism. Beyond Jason Kenney in Alberta, former premiers such as Brad Wall and Rachel Notley represent examples of figures with cross-partisan credibility who could engage constructively in their respective provinces. Other opinion leaders, whether in the business community, local government or civil society also need to speak up for Canada. We can begin from a starting point that the data suggest Canada has become more, not less, united since 2019.

## ►► Limitations

There are several limitations to this analysis that must be acknowledged. Tracking back to 1997 was done on different surveys, often using different methodologies; telephone was used in 1997 and 2001, while later waves were conducted online. The method can affect responses.

As well, the small sample sizes, especially in Saskatchewan, where samples were sometimes less than  $n=100$ , must be treated with extreme caution.

Quotas and weighting were employed on each survey to ensure that the sample’s composition reflects that of the Canadian population according to the most recent census parameters at the time. The 2019 and 2026 surveys were conducted using the same online panel infrastructure and comparable weighting procedures; however, in 2026 the Alberta data were additionally weighted by region within Alberta via nested weights, while region was not applied to other provinces.

The question wording and order can affect responses, as can the timing of the poll. In the case of online polls, the sample is representative but not random. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error and measurement error.



**Gregory Jack** is a senior vice president at Ipsos Public Affairs, where he leads Ipsos' public affairs practice in the Ottawa region, focusing on government policy and political trends. In previous senior roles in both Canadian and Alberta governments, Greg has led key communications initiatives and research projects on energy, Canada-US relations and service delivery. He holds advanced degrees in Energy Policy and Public Administration, along with undergraduate degrees in political studies and philosophy. He and his wife live in Aylmer, Quebec.

## ► Bibliography

Kurjata, Andrew. 'Maverick Party out of federal election.' CBC News, March 4, 2025. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/maverick-party-out-federal-election-1.7491939>

Dion, Stéphane. 'Stéphane Dion: The secession process is dangerous.' The Line (Substack), 4 February 2026. <https://www.readtheline.ca/p/stephane-dion-the-secession-process>.

Eisler, Dale. 'Who will speak for Canada? And for Alberta and Saskatchewan?' SAGE (Substack), 5 February 2026. <https://sagecanada.substack.com/p/who-will-speak-for-canada-and-for>.

Government of Canada, Department of Justice. 'An Act to give effect to the requirement for clarity as set out in the opinion of the Supreme Court of Canada in the Quebec Secession Reference (Clarity Act).' Justice Laws Website, last modified 3 February 2026. <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/c-31.8/page-1.html>.

Ipsos. 'Support for Independence in Alberta Reaches Levels Similar to Quebec.' Ipsos, 23 January 2026. <https://www.ipsos.com/en-ca/support-independence-alberta-reaches-levels-similar-quebec>.

Korzinski, Dave, and Kurl, Shachi (Angus Reid Institute). 'Unity or Separation: Quebec, Alberta & Canada's future: In Alberta, a divided right dampens the sovereignty spark.' Angus Reid Institute, 9 February 2026. <https://angusreid.org/alberta-unity-separation-smith-carney-prosperity/>.

CTV. 'Former Alberta premier Jason Kenney says separating from Canada would be

"economically suicidal"... YouTube video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8EwL-Lhac7U>.

CTV. 'I support a sovereign Alberta in a united Canada: Smith.' YouTube Video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dzIKUNk8qNo>

Murphy, Meghan. 'Trudeau victory prompts "Wexit" talk in Canada's West.' Politico, 29 October 2019. <https://www.politico.com/news/2019/10/29/justin-trudeau-victory-canada-wexit-060634>.

Braid, Kyle. 'COMMENTARY: Separation sentiment soars in Alta. and Sask. — but there may be more smoke than fire.' Global News, 5 November 2019. <https://globalnews.ca/news/6128046/western-alienation-poll/>.

Shaw, Maryam. Global News. 'Separatist sentiment in Alberta, Saskatchewan at 'historic' highs: Ipsos poll.' Global News, 5 November 2019. <https://globalnews.ca/news/6127133/alberta-saskatchewan-ipsos-poll-separatism/>

Malone, Catherine Geraldine. 'Trump cabinet member weighs in on Alberta separatism.' CBC News, January 23, 2025. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/trump-cabinet-member-weighs-in-on-alberta-separatism-9.7058082>

*People who are passionate about public policy know that the Province of Saskatchewan has pioneered some of Canada's major policy innovations. The two distinguished public servants after whom the school is named, Albert W. Johnson and Thomas K. Shoyama, used their practical and theoretical knowledge to challenge existing policies and practices, as well as to explore new policies and organizational forms. Earning the label, "the Greatest Generation," they and their colleagues became part of a group of modernizers who saw government as a positive catalyst of change in post-war Canada. They created a legacy of achievement in public administration and professionalism in public service that remains a continuing inspiration for public servants in Saskatchewan and across the country. The Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy is proud to carry on the tradition by educating students interested in and devoted to advancing public value.*

**Sign up to receive digital copies of the Policy Brief**

For more information on the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School, visit [www.schoolofpublicpolicy.sk.ca](http://www.schoolofpublicpolicy.sk.ca)

Share your comments or feedback to the editor: [dale.eisler@uregina.ca](mailto:dale.eisler@uregina.ca)