



A Decisive Vote and a Divided Kitchen Table: How Albertans Will Vote, and What the Referendum Is Doing to Them

This report explores how Albertans intend to vote on the separation question as it appears on the ballot, what supporters of commencing the process would do if a binding referendum followed, why each side is voting the way it is, how closely the province is paying attention, and how the debate is playing out in families, friendships and workplaces. Nearly two-thirds would vote to remain, fewer than one-in-five would ultimately vote to leave, and nearly a quarter say the argument has already strained a relationship.

Release 2 of 5: The Impact of the Referendum on Albertans | David Coletto, Curtis Brown, and Robson Fletcher

On October 19, Albertans will answer 10 referendum questions. The tenth asks whether Alberta should remain a province of Canada or whether the provincial government should commence the legal process required to hold a binding referendum on separation. Presented with that question in the words that will appear on the ballot, 64% of Albertans choose to remain and 24% choose to commence the process. A further 9% are undecided and 3% say they would leave the question blank, which Elections Alberta permits. Allocating undecided respondents who lean one way produces a split of 67% to 27%, with 5% still unallocated.

The study then asked everyone who would vote to commence the process, including undecided respondents leaning that way, how they would vote in the binding referendum on separation itself. About two-thirds (67%) said they would vote to separate, 7% said they would vote to remain in Canada and 23% said it would depend on the circumstances at the time. Applied to the whole adult population, 27% of Albertans would vote to start the process and 18% would vote to leave Canada at the end of it.

The referendum has also entered private life. 72% of Albertans say they are following the public discussion closely and 74% say they will definitely or very likely vote. 63% have talked about the referendum with family in the past month and 58% with friends. 23% say those conversations have caused tension or strain in at least one relationship, and 38% say they have avoided raising the subject with someone because they thought it might cause an argument.

Key findings

64% would vote to remain, 24% to commence the process. With undecided leaners allocated, the split is 67% to 27%. Rural Alberta is the only region where remain falls below a majority (46%), and it has the most undecided voters (23%).

Identity is the sharpest divider. 75% of those who feel Albertan, not Canadian and 62% of those who feel more Albertan than Canadian would commence the independence process, compared with 20% of those who feel equally both.

The separatist vote is smaller than the commence process (Option 2) vote. 67% of Option 2 supporters would vote to separate in a binding referendum, 7% would vote to remain and 23% say it depends. 18% of all Albertans would vote to leave Canada.

Only about a quarter of voters say they want an independent country. 26% give that as their main reason. The rest cite sending a message to Ottawa (19%), a better deal within Canada (23%) or the principle that Albertans deserve a direct say (29%).

Remain voters are far more certain than commence the process voters. 84% of remain voters are completely certain of their choice, compared with 55% of commence process voters. Three-in-ten remain voters (30%) say the referendum should not be happening at all.

The referendum is a household conversation – and a strained one. 63% have discussed it with family in the past month, 23% report it has caused tension in a relationship and 38% have avoided raising it. Among those who feel more Albertan than Canadian, 30% report tension and 58% have avoided the subject.

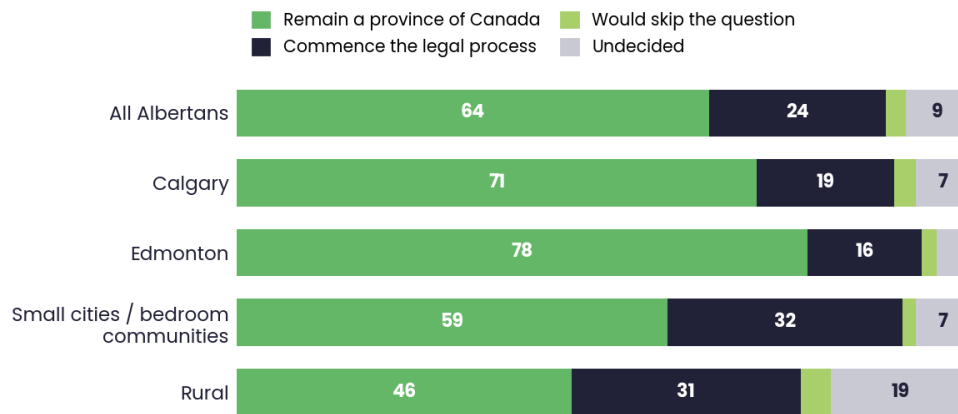
Albertans judge the debate harshly. 69% agree it is a distraction from other important issues and 60% agree it is hurting the economy. 51% agree holding the referendum is a healthy exercise in democracy; only 49% agree it is useful leverage with Ottawa.

The ballot question

Respondents saw the separation question in the exact words approved by cabinet and published by Elections Alberta, followed by the two ballot options in ballot order. Two additional survey options recorded whether they were undecided or intended to skip the question.

Nearly two-thirds of Albertans would vote to remain a province of Canada

Responses to the separation question as it appears on the October 19 ballot



Note: Question wording: "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?"

Source: Alberta at a Crossroads, Abacus Data Alberta Referendum Study, Wave 1. Survey of 1,000 Alberta adults, September 2026.

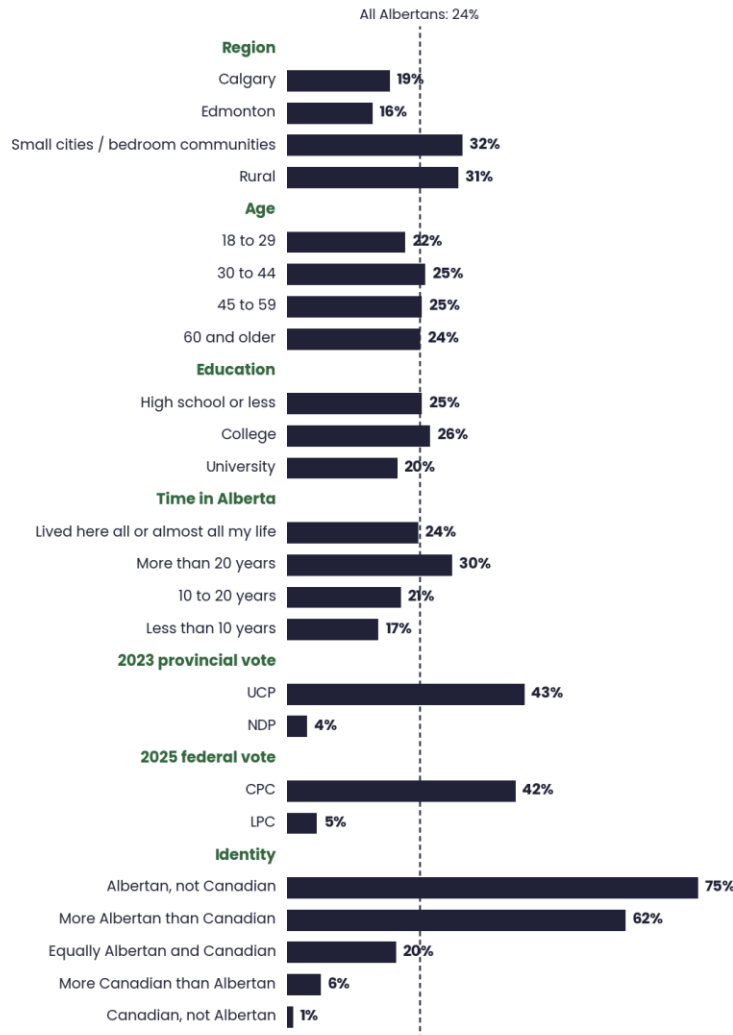


Regional differences are large. Edmonton is the most firmly remain (78%), followed by Calgary (71%) and the small cities and bedroom communities around the two metros (59%). Rural Alberta stands apart. There, 46% would vote to remain, 31% would vote to commence the process and 23% are undecided or would skip the question. Rural Alberta is the only region in which remain is not a majority position, and the region with by far the largest reservoir of unallocated voters.

Men are somewhat more likely than women to choose the commence process choice (27% versus 21%). Age makes little difference to the Option 2 share, which ranges from 22% among adults under 30 to 25% among those 30 to 44; those 60 and older are the most likely to choose remain (69%). University graduates are notably more remain-leaning (72%) than those with a college (64%) or high school (59%) education. Albertans who have lived in the province for more than 20 years but not their whole lives are the most Option 2-leaning tenure group (30%), while those who arrived within the past decade are among the most likely to be undecided (13%).

Support for commencing the process is highest among rural residents, UCP and Conservative voters, and those who feel more Albertan than Canadian

% who would vote to commence the legal process toward a binding referendum on separation



Note: "Albertan, not Canadian" and "10 to 20 years" are each based on fewer than 100 respondents; treat as indicative.
Source: Alberta at a Crossroads, Abacus Data Alberta Referendum Study, Wave I. Survey of 1,000 Alberta adults, September 2026.



Partisanship divides the province almost in half on this question. Among 2023 UCP voters, 48% would vote to remain and 43% to commence the process. Among 2023 NDP voters, 94% would remain and 4% would commence. Identity, reported in Release I of this series, is the sharpest divider of all: 75% of those who feel Albertan, not Canadian would commence the process, 62% of those who feel more Albertan than Canadian, 20% of those who feel equally both and 6% of those who feel more Canadian than Albertan. The midpoint group, nearly half the province, is decisively remain (69%). The more Albertan than Canadian group is the only sizeable group in which Option 2 leads, and it contains the largest share of undecided voters of any identity group (14%).

The undecided, and where they lean

Respondents who were undecided or said they would skip the question, 11% of the sample, were asked which way they lean. 29% said they lean toward commencing the process, 25% toward remaining and 46% said they are truly undecided or would not vote on the question. Undecided voters are the least engaged group in the study: only 41% say they are following the referendum closely and only 44% say they will definitely or very likely vote.

Undecided Albertans split three ways, with the largest group refusing to lean

Among the 11% who are undecided or would skip the question, % who say they lean toward each option



Note: Based on fewer than 100 respondents. Results are indicative.

Source: Alberta at a Crossroads, Abacus Data Alberta Referendum Study, Wave 1. Survey of 1,000 Alberta adults, September 2026.



Referendum Scenarios: At this point, how big could the Option 2 result get?

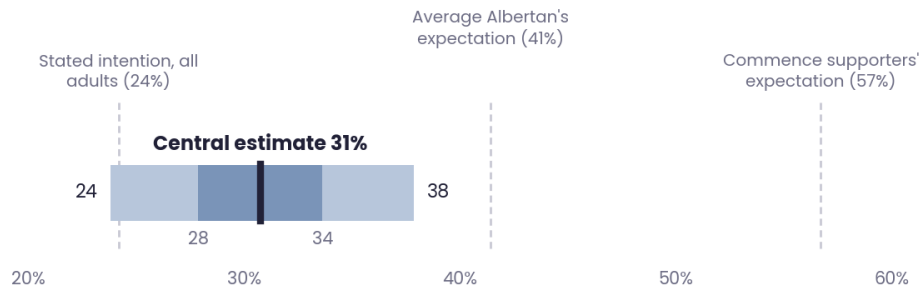
Stated intentions are not a forecast. Turnout differs by side, undecided voters break unevenly, some voters leave a question blank, and six weeks of campaigning could move opinion. To translate the survey into a range of plausible outcomes, the study simulated 200,000 versions of the vote, each drawing on the survey's own measures: the ballot question and its leaners, the likelihood-to-vote scale within each camp, and a set of assumptions about the undecided and about late movement.

On that basis, the Option 2 share of valid votes is most likely to land near 31%. Half of simulated outcomes fall between 28% and 34%, and nine-in-ten fall between 24% and 38%. The central estimate sits above the 24% of adults who say they will vote for Option 2 because its supporters are somewhat more likely to say they will vote, and because a small share of remain-leaning Albertans say they would leave the question blank. It sits well below the 41% share the average Albertan expects.

The Commence process share on October 19 is most likely to land near 31%, and very unlikely to reach 40%

Simulated range of the Commence process share of valid votes, based on stated intentions, turnout likelihood, undecided allocation and campaign movement

■ 50% of simulated outcomes ■ 90% of simulated outcomes



Note: Monte Carlo simulation of 200,000 outcomes. See text for assumptions. Probabilities are model-based, not a forecast.

Source: Alberta at a Crossroads, Abacus Data Alberta Referendum Study, Wave 1. Survey of 1,000 Alberta adults, September 2026.



Commence process share of valid votes	Probability
At least 25%	91%
At least 30%	57%
At least one-third (33%)	28%
At least 35%	16%
At least 40%	2%
A majority	0%

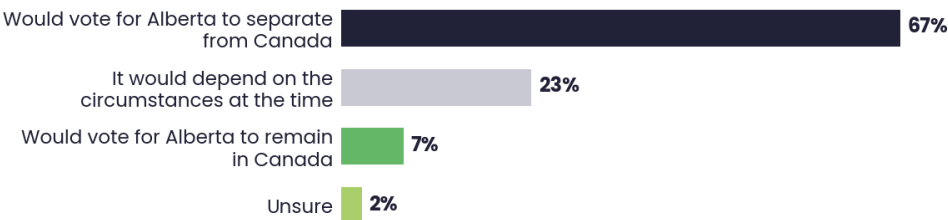
The simulation makes five assumptions, each of which can be revised as later waves report. Sampling error is applied to the allocated shares using the study's sample size. Turnout propensity is assigned from the likelihood-to-vote scale, ranging from 90% for those who say they will definitely vote to near zero for those who say they will not, with random variation of about eight per cent on each side. The truly undecided who do vote are assumed to break between roughly 20% and 60% for Option 2, centred on 40%, reflecting the tendency of undecided referendum voters to favour the status quo. Between zero and 4% of remain-leaning voters are assumed to leave the question blank. And a symmetric campaign-movement term with a standard deviation of three points is applied to the final share. The model does not assume any systematic late swing toward the status quo, although the record of Scotland in 2014 and Quebec in 1980 suggests one is more likely than the reverse; if it occurred, the range would shift downward.

From the process to the country

Option 2 does not ask Albertans whether they want to leave Canada. It asks whether the government should begin a legal process that could lead to a binding vote on that question later. To establish what that coalition would do if the vote arrived, the study asked everyone who would vote to commence the process, including undecided leaners, how they would vote in the binding referendum on separation.

Two-thirds of Commence process supporters would vote to separate; most of the rest say it depends

Among those who would vote to commence the process or lean that way, % who say they would vote each way in a binding referendum on separation



Source: Alberta at a Crossroads, Abacus Data Alberta Referendum Study, Wave 1. Survey of 1,000 Alberta adults, September 2026.



Step	% of all Albertans	Description
Would vote to commence the process on October 19	27.4%	Includes undecided respondents who lean toward commencing
...and would vote to separate in a binding referendum	18.4%	The separatist vote
...and say it would depend on the circumstances	6.3%	Conditional
...and would vote to remain in Canada	2.1%	Process voters who oppose separation
Would vote to remain on October 19	67.3%	Includes undecided respondents who lean toward remaining
Truly undecided or would skip the question	5.3%	Unallocated

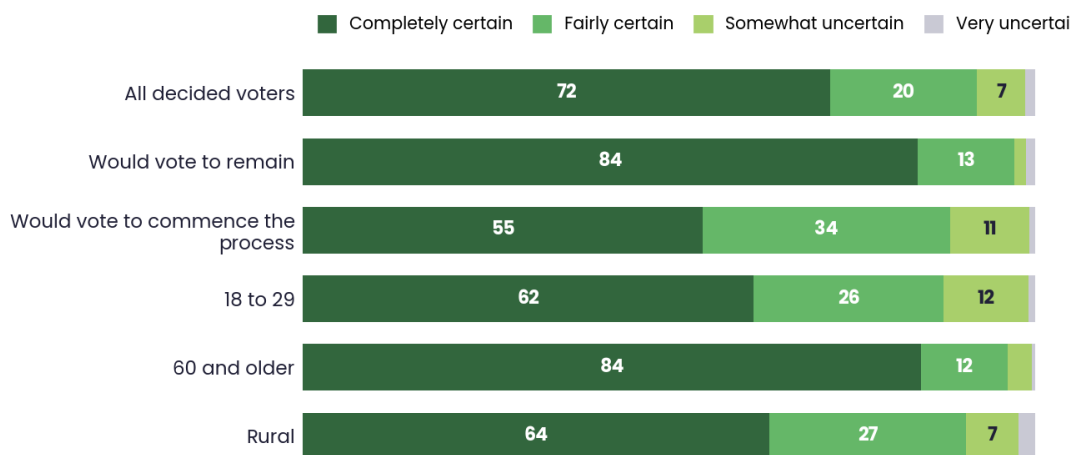
The share of Option 2 supporters who would ultimately vote to separate rises with age. Among those aged 60 and older, 84% would vote to separate and only 13% say it depends. Among those 45 to 59, 69% would. Among those 30 to 44, 53% would separate and 31% say it depends. Among those under 30, 61% would separate and 17% would vote to remain in Canada, the highest remain share of any age group.

How firm the vote is

Everyone who chose or leaned toward an option was asked how certain they are. 72% say they are completely certain and will not change their mind, 20% are fairly certain, and 8% admit some uncertainty. The two sides are not equally firm. 84% of remain voters are completely certain, compared with 55% of commence process voters.

Remain voters are far more locked in than Commence process voters

% who say they are certain or uncertain about how they will vote, among those who chose or lean toward an option



Source: Alberta at a Crossroads, Abacus Data Alberta Referendum Study, Wave 1. Survey of 1,000 Alberta adults, September 2026.



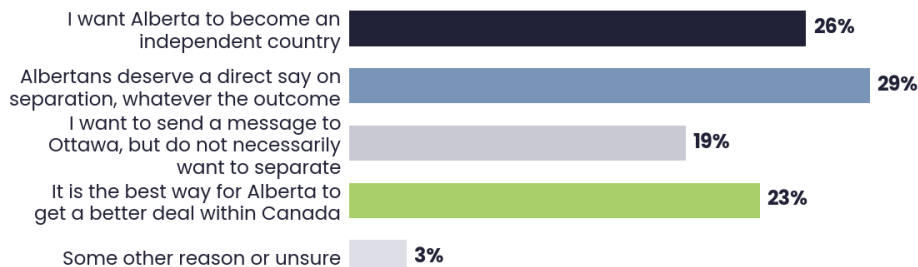
Certainty rises with age: 62% of decided voters under 30 and 63% of those 30 to 44 are completely certain, compared with 84% of those 60 and older. Rural voters (64%) are also less firm than average. NDP and Liberal voters are the most certain groups in the study (93% and 92%), a reflection of how uniformly they favour remaining.

Why Option 2 voters would vote to commence the process

Option 2 supporters were asked which of four statements best describes why. The responses divide fairly evenly. The largest group, 29%, say Albertans deserve a direct say on separation, whatever the outcome. 26% say they want Alberta to become an independent country. 23% say it is the best way for Alberta to get a better deal within Canada, and 19% say they want to send a message to Ottawa but do not necessarily want Alberta to separate.

A direct say on separation is now the most common reason for voting to commence the process; a quarter cite wanting an independent country

Among those who would vote to commence the process, % who say each best describes why



Source: Alberta at a Crossroads, Abacus Data Alberta Referendum Study, Wave I. Survey of 1,000 Alberta adults, September 2026.



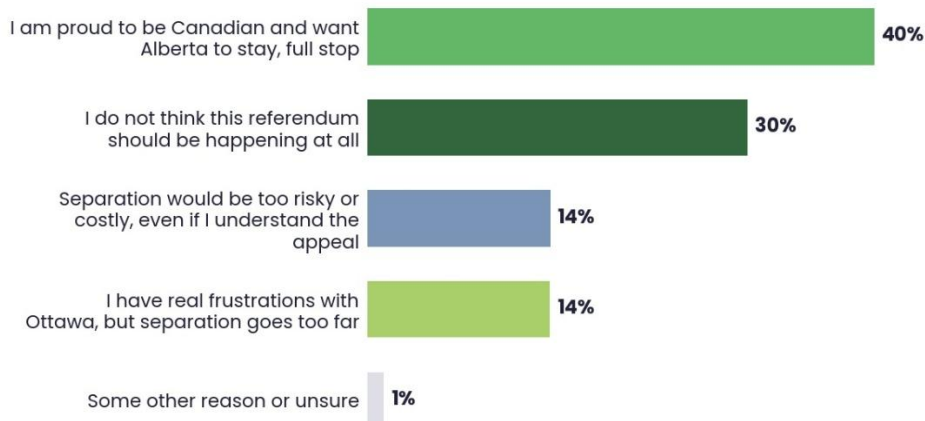
These answers contain a discrepancy worth noting. 67% of Option 2 supporters say they would vote to separate in a binding referendum, but only 26% give wanting a country as their main reason. Some of those who frame their vote as a message, a bargaining tactic or a matter of principle would, when the direct question arrived, vote to leave.

Why remain voters would vote to remain

Remain voters were given a parallel set of reasons. The largest group, 40%, say they are proud to be Canadian and want Alberta to stay, full stop. The second largest, 30%, say they do not think the referendum should be happening at all. 14% say separation would be too risky or costly even if they understand the appeal, and 14% say they have real frustrations with Ottawa but separation goes too far.

Canadian pride and objection to the referendum itself account for seven-in-ten remain votes

Among those who would vote to remain, % who say each best describes why



Source: Alberta at a Crossroads, Abacus Data Alberta Referendum Study, Wave I. Survey of 1,000 Alberta adults, September 2026.



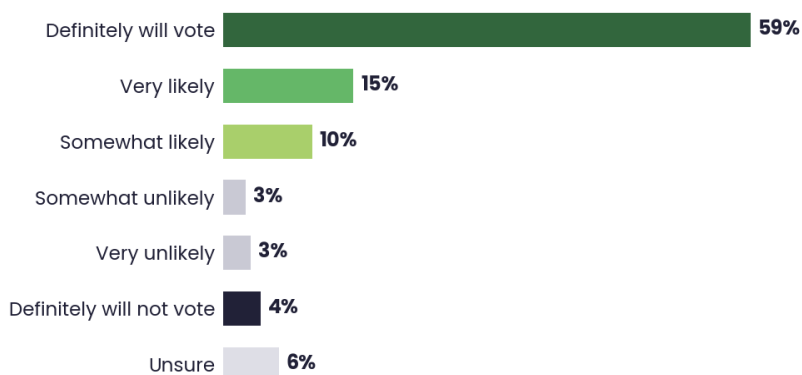
Among UCP voters who would vote to remain, 42% cite pride, 22% frustration with Ottawa, 17% risk and only 18% object to the referendum. Among NDP remain voters, objection to the referendum (43%) edges pride (40%). Remain voters aged 60 and older are the most likely to cite pride (48%); those under 30 are the most likely to say the referendum should not be happening (32%). Among the small group of remain voters who feel more Albertan than Canadian, nearly half (46%) say separation is too risky.

Attention and intention to vote

72% of Albertans say they are following the public discussion about the referendum questions very or somewhat closely, including 31% very closely. 74% say they will definitely or very likely vote, and 59% say they definitely will. Attention is highest among NDP (85%) and Liberal (88%) voters, university graduates (82%) and Option 2 supporters (81%). It is lowest among undecided voters (41%), and below average among rural Albertans (62%), those with a high school education or less (61%) and recent arrivals (61%).

Seven-in-ten Albertans say they will definitely or very likely vote in the referendum

% who say each about their likelihood of voting on October 19



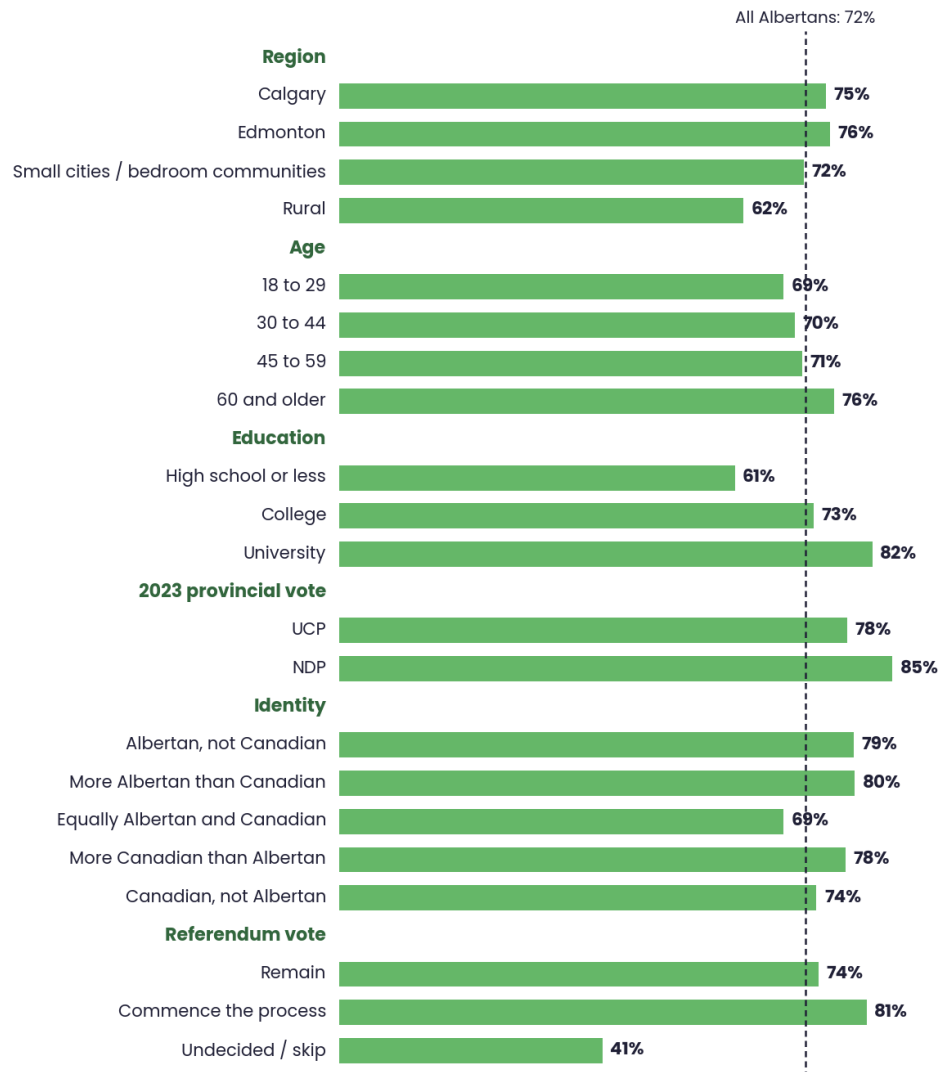
Source: Alberta at a Crossroads, Abacus Data Alberta Referendum Study, Wave 1. Survey of 1,000 Alberta adults, September 2026.



Turnout intention is driven by age. 94% of Albertans aged 60 and older say they will definitely or very likely vote; among those under 30, 51% say so. Lifelong Albertans (79%) are far more likely to say they will vote than those who arrived within the past decade (57%). Remain and commence process supporters say they will vote at similar rates (77% and 82%) although Option 2 has a slight turnout advantage.

Attention is highest among partisans and lowest among the undecided

% who say they are following the public discussion about the referendum questions very or somewhat closely



Source: Alberta at a Crossroads, Abacus Data Alberta Referendum Study, Wave 1. Survey of 1,000 Alberta adults, September 2026.

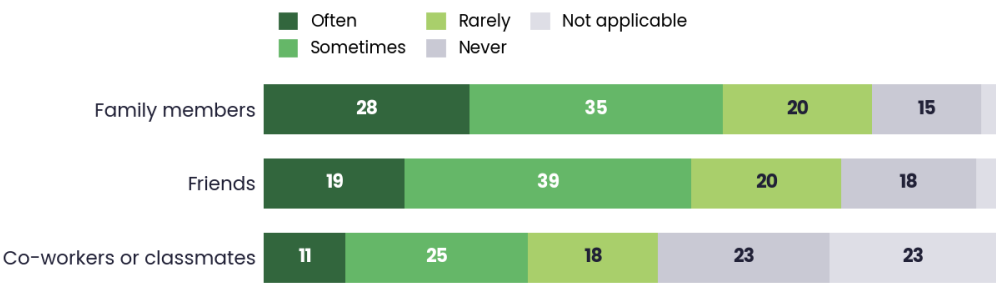


Who is talking about the referendum, and with whom

Family is the main venue for conversations about the independence referendum. 63% of Albertans have talked about the referendum with family members often or sometimes in the past month, including 28% who say often. 58% have talked about it with friends. Workplaces are quieter: 36% have discussed it with co-workers or classmates, 23% never have and 23% say the question does not apply to them.

The referendum is discussed most at home and least at work

% who have talked about the referendum or Alberta independence with each group in the past month



Source: Alberta at a Crossroads, Abacus Data Alberta Referendum Study, Wave I. Survey of 1,000 Alberta adults, September 2026.



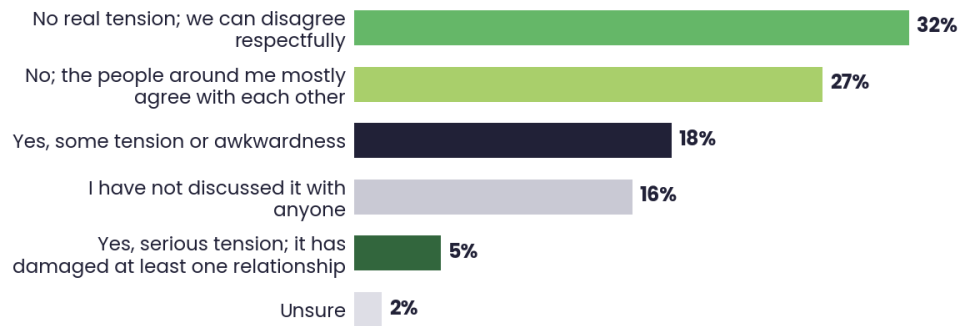
Conversation is most intense among partisans and Option 2 supporters. 75% of NDP voters and 68% of UCP voters have discussed the referendum with family, compared with 41% of undecided voters. Commence process supporters are the most likely group to have discussed it with friends (67%) and co-workers (46%). Adults under 30 are the most likely to be discussing it at work or school (45%), while those 60 and older are the most likely to be discussing it with family (69%).

Strained relationships

Asked whether conversations or disagreements about Alberta independence have caused tension or strain in any of their relationships, 23% of Albertans say yes: 18% report some tension or awkwardness and 5% report serious tension that has damaged at least one relationship. 32% say there has been no real tension because they can disagree respectfully, 27% say there has been none because the people around them mostly agree, and 16% have not discussed it with anyone.

Nearly a quarter of Albertans say the independence debate has strained a relationship

% who say each about whether conversations about Alberta independence have caused tension in their relationships



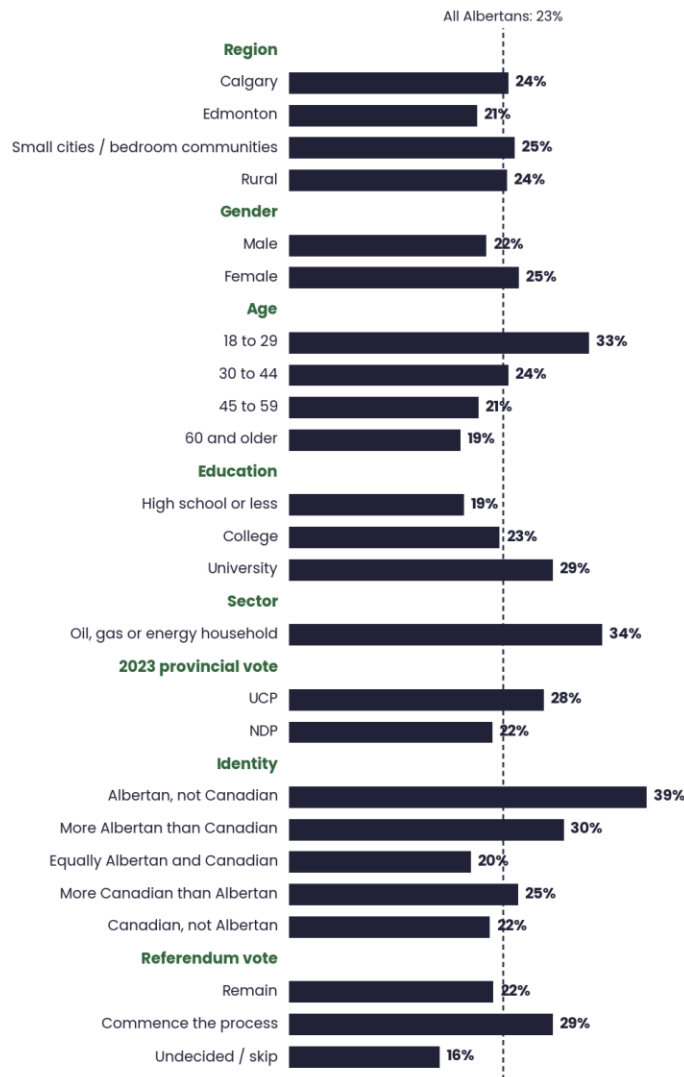
Source: Alberta at a Crossroads, Abacus Data Alberta Referendum Study, Wave I. Survey of 1,000 Alberta adults, September 2026.



Strain is highest among the groups whose identities and interests are most engaged by the question. 30% of those who feel more Albertan than Canadian report tension, as do 34% of oil, gas and energy households, 29% of university graduates, 29% of commence process supporters and 33% of adults under 30. It is lowest among undecided voters (16%), those born in Alberta (26%), Albertans 60 and older (19%) and those who feel equally Albertan and Canadian (20%).

Strain is highest among those whose identity or livelihood is most engaged by the question

% who say conversations about Alberta independence have caused some or serious tension in their relationships



Source: Alberta at a Crossroads, Abacus Data Alberta Referendum Study, Wave I. Survey of 1,000 Alberta adults, September 2026.



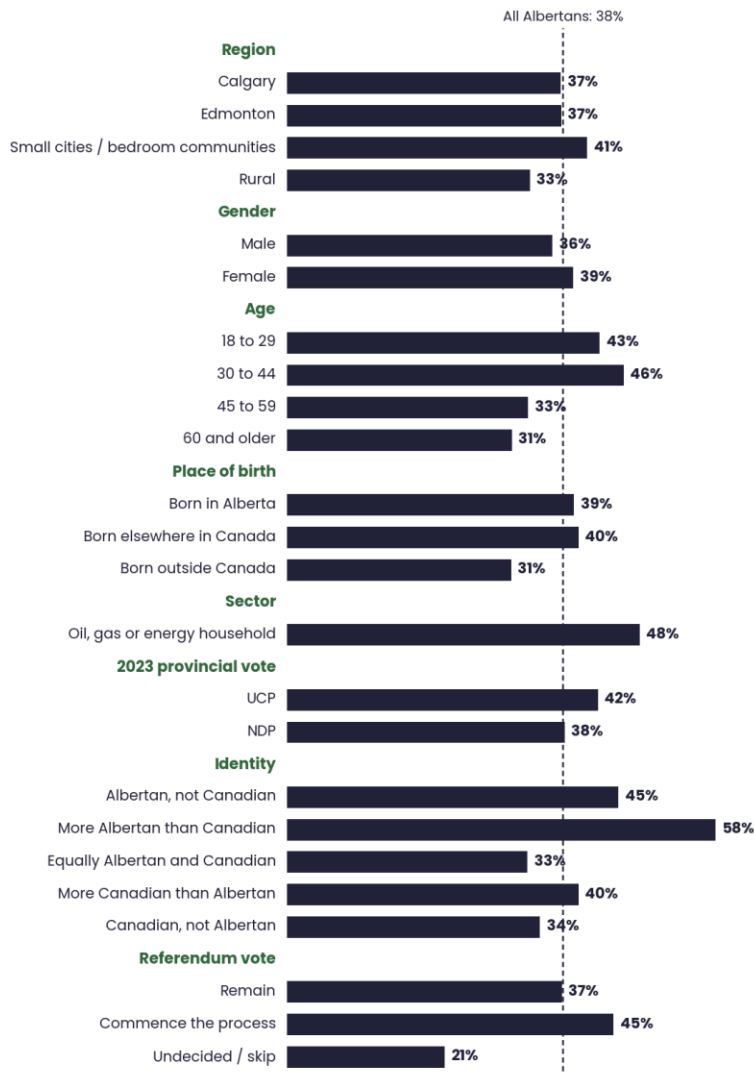
The symmetrical finding is that 27% of Albertans say there has been no tension because the people around them mostly agree with each other, rising to 32% among remain supporters and 44% among NDP voters. In a province that splits roughly 67 to 27 on the ballot, more than a quarter of adults report living in social circles that are effectively unanimous.

Avoiding the subject

38% of Albertans say they have avoided bringing up the referendum with someone because they thought it might cause an argument: 26% once or twice and 11% often. Avoidance runs highest among the same groups that report the most strain, and is most striking among those who feel more Albertan than Canadian: 58% of them have avoided the subject, including 20% who do so often. Among commence process supporters, 45% have avoided it; among those in oil, gas and energy households, 48%. Avoidance is lowest among undecided voters (21%), and below average among those who feel equally Albertan and Canadian (33%), those 60 and older (31%) and undecided voters (21%).

Nearly six-in-ten Albertans who feel more Albertan than Canadian have avoided raising the referendum

% who have avoided bringing up the referendum with someone because they thought it might cause an argument



Source: Alberta at a Crossroads, Abacus Data Alberta Referendum Study, Wave I. Survey of 1,000 Alberta adults, September 2026.



The pattern among those who feel more Albertan than Canadian deserves note. They are the identity group in which Option 2 leads, the group with the most undecided voters, the group reporting the most relationship strain and the group most likely to be avoiding the subject. They are, on this evidence, the Albertans for whom the referendum is most personally costly.

The pattern of avoidance raises the question of whether Alberta is experiencing a *spiral of silence*, the dynamic in which people who sense they hold a minority view fall quiet to avoid isolation, and the minority comes to look smaller than it is. Half of that dynamic is present here, and it appears to run in the expected direction.

Option 2 supporters avoid the subject more than remain supporters (45% versus 37%), those who feel more Albertan than Canadian avoid it more than anyone (58%), and Option 2 supporters are less likely than remain supporters to say the people around them mostly agree with them (21% versus 32%).

But the other half is missing. A spiral requires the minority to perceive itself as a minority, and Option 2 supporters do not: **they expect their side to receive 57% of the vote**. They are also the group most likely to be discussing the referendum with friends (67%) and co-workers (46%), and remain supporters avoid the subject at nearly the same rate they do.

What the data describe is not a minority being silenced but two camps sorting themselves into separate conversations, each avoiding the other and each overestimating its own size, an effect made even more real due to the fragmented information ecosystem both worlds likely inhabit.

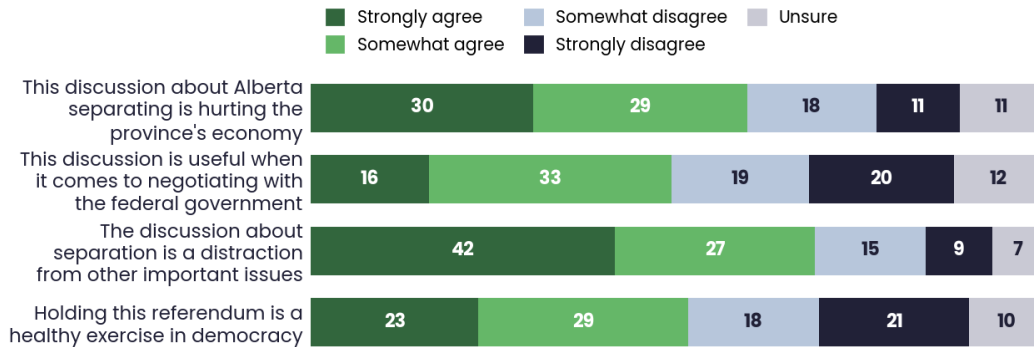
The implication for October 19 is the reverse of the one a spiral would carry. A spiral would suggest shy Option 2 voters and a poll that understates them. This pattern suggests a poll that captures them, since respondents answer anonymously and in private, and a commence process coalition that will be surprised by the result because its members have mostly been talking to each other. The risk is not to the measurement of the vote but to the acceptance of it, and a later release in this series returns to that question.

What Albertans think the debate is doing to the province

Respondents were asked whether they agree or disagree with a series of statements about the referendum debate. 69% agree it is a distraction from other important issues facing the province, including 42% who strongly agree. 60% agree the discussion is hurting the province's economy. 51% agree that holding the referendum is a healthy exercise in democracy, against 38% who disagree. 49% agree the discussion is useful when it comes to negotiating with the federal government, against 39% who disagree. Those two statements are the ones on which Albertans are most divided.

Two-thirds call the debate a distraction; the leverage argument splits Albertans

% who agree or disagree with each statement about the referendum debate



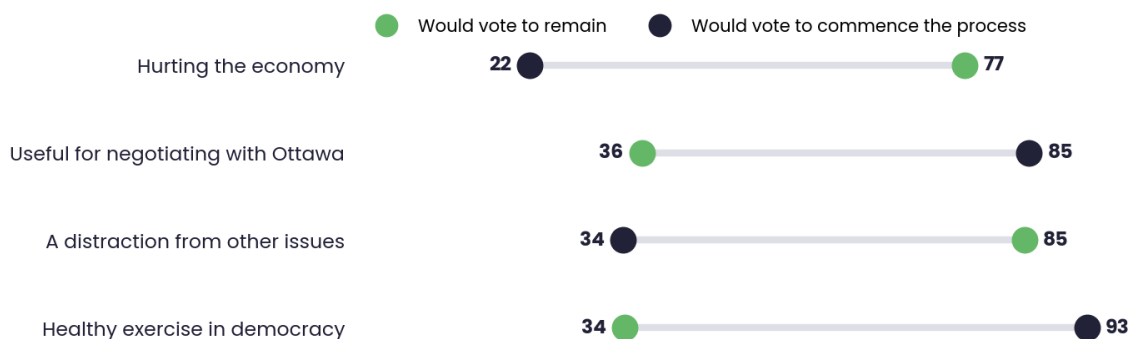
Source: Alberta at a Crossroads, Abacus Data Alberta Referendum Study, Wave I. Survey of 1,000 Alberta adults, September 2026.



The two sides of the referendum inhabit different debates. Among remain supporters, 85% agree the discussion is a distraction, 77% agree it is hurting the economy and only 34% agree it is a healthy exercise in democracy. Among Option 2 supporters, 93% agree the referendum is healthy for democracy, 85% agree it is useful leverage and only 34% agree it is a distraction. 72% of UCP voters and 21% of NDP voters agree the referendum is healthy for democracy. Rural Albertans are the region most likely to call it healthy (67%); Edmontonians are the most likely to say it is hurting the economy (72%) and is a distraction (77%).

Remain and Commence process supporters describe two different referendums

% who agree with each statement, among those who would vote to remain and those who would vote to commence the process



Source: Alberta at a Crossroads, Abacus Data Alberta Referendum Study, Wave I. Survey of 1,000 Alberta adults, September 2026.



The Upshot

The headline is not close, and it is not likely to become close. With leaners allocated, the remain side leads the commence the process camp by 67% to 27%, and 72% of decided voters say they will not change their minds. Rural Alberta is the one place where the outcome is genuinely uncertain – and it is also the place with the most undecided voters and the softest commitment on both sides. If the campaign has any battleground, it is there.

The more consequential finding is the structure of Option 2 support. It is not all a separatist vote. It is a coalition of people who want a country, others who want a bargaining chip, some who want to send a message and citizens who believe in the principle of a direct vote regardless of outcome.

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It is a coalition of people who want a country, others who want a bargaining chip, some who want to send a message and citizens who believe in the principle of a direct vote regardless of outcome.

Only a quarter of these Option 2 supporters give independence as their reason. Two-thirds would vote to leave if the binding question is asked; most of the rest say it would depend on the circumstances. Applied to the province, the separatist vote is under one-in-five. Two features of the coalition compound this: its members under 45 are markedly less committed to separation than those over 60, and its members as a whole are far less certain of their vote than remain voters.

The referendum has also entered the private lives of Albertans as a subject most families are discussing. This is a topic that a quarter of adults say has strained a relationship and that almost four-in-ten have decided, at least once, not to raise. The strain is concentrated among the Albertans with the most at stake: the more Albertan than Canadian, energy households, the young and Option 2 supporters themselves. The people carrying the bulk of the referendum's social cost are disproportionately the people voting for it. And more than a quarter of Albertans say the people around them mostly agree, which suggests two provinces engaging in two separate conversations, each largely insulated from the other.

Finally, the remain coalition is not a satisfied one. Three-in-ten remain voters object to the referendum being held at all, two-thirds of the province calls the debate a distraction and a majority believes it is hurting the economy. The one argument for holding the vote that does not command a majority is the one most often offered in its defence: that it strengthens Alberta's hand with Ottawa. The provincial government has secured a question that most Albertans will answer decisively, but it has not secured a province that is happy to have been asked.

About this study

This report is part of Alberta at a Crossroads, the Abacus Data Alberta Referendum Study. It draws on Wave I, an online survey of 1,000 Alberta adults eligible to vote in the referenda conducted September 4 to 7, 2026, ahead of the province's October 19 referendum. Results are weighted by age, gender, region and educational attainment to match the adult population of Alberta according to census data.

The referendum question was presented to respondents exactly as it will appear on the ballot, with the two response options in ballot order. Respondents who chose Commence process, or who were undecided but leaned that way, were then asked how they would vote in the binding referendum on separation that Commence process contemplates. Percentages reported for those follow-up questions are of the respondents who were asked them, unless the text says otherwise.

Some subgroups are small. Results for Albertans who identify as "Albertan, not Canadian" or "Canadian, not Albertan", for those who have lived in Alberta 10 to 20 years, and for undecided voters are each based on fewer than 100 respondents and should be read as indicative rather than precise.

Online panel surveys are not probability samples and a margin of error does not strictly apply. For reference, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of roughly plus or minus 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Percentages may not total 100 because of rounding. Net figures, such as "agree" (strongly plus somewhat), are computed by Abacus Data.