

Signing the Canadian Constitution: Are Quebecers interested?

Jack Jedwab
Association for Canadian Studies
November 2014

That Quebec was not part of the signing of the 1982 Constitution has long since been one of the principal arguments given by the leaders of the Quebec independence movement to justify separation. The feeling of rejection to which it gave rise for many Quebecers has been tapped into with some regularity over the past few decades. Surveys reveal that the mention of the debacle around the 1982 Constitution resonates increasingly less with Quebecers below the age of 40 for whom the sense of grievance is less connected to this important event.

While sovereigntists continue to call on Quebecers to “remember 1982” there is continued weariness in Quebec and for that matter elsewhere in Canada when there is talk about the constitution. Hence federalist leaders are rightly reluctant to raise the possibility of constitutional discussions and the idea of getting a Quebec government to sign the constitution seems at best very remote. Moreover the idea that the rest of Canada would accept Quebec’s conditions- however defined- for such signing remains far from certain. One thing that Quebec political leaders and most Quebec opinion makers tend to agree upon is that in its current form the 1982 Constitution is anathema.

A September 2014 survey conducted with 1000 Quebecers via web panel by the firm Leger Marketing for the Association for Canadian Studies reveals that support for the signing the Constitution in its current form would not work for the Quebec electorate. Yet opposition is not as vehement as the impression often given by observers. When asked whether Quebecers should seriously consider signing the 1982 Constitution in its current form some one in four Quebecers agree, one in three disagree and the rest say they don’t know. It is hard to describe this as a consensus. Also the idea that there is a consensus neglects the fact that the majority of non-francophone Quebecers would strongly endorse its signing in its current form. But perhaps the larger lesson to be taken from the results is that the issue does not have considerable traction with important segments of the population, notably with women and Quebecers below the age of 55 who say they don’t know. This response is less likely a sign of uncertainty about the issue but rather that they lack knowledge about the matter which for many is more a footnote than a dramatic turning point in this ongoing debate.

Quebec should seriously consider signing the 1982 Constitution in its current form

	Total	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65 +	Francophone	Non-Francophone
Weighted Totals :	1000	486	514	109	161	160	200	172	198	781	215
Unweighted Totals :	1000	529	471	133	138	159	229	141	200	787	208
Strongly agree	11%	14%	8%	11%	13%	7%	7%	11%	18%	8%	24%
Somewhat agree	15%	16%	15%	15%	13%	16%	15%	11%	20%	13%	23%
Somewhat disagree	10%	12%	8%	10%	10%	10%	7%	10%	12%	11%	7%
Strongly disagree	22%	31%	13%	13%	18%	19%	25%	30%	21%	27%	5%
I don't know	37%	25%	48%	47%	39%	42%	41%	34%	24%	37%	38%
I prefer not to answer	5%	2%	7%	4%	5%	7%	5%	3%	4%	5%	5%