

The Public Opinion Landscape

DARRELL BRICKER

Excerpts from a luncheon keynote speech and slide presentation delivered on 27 May 1999 at the Delgamuukw conference.

What I'd like to discuss is the public opinion landscape and Canadians' views and attitudes regarding aboriginal issues. One thing that people do have, relative to issues involving natives or aboriginal people, are opinions. Some of them better informed than others; some of them are more legally driven. One of the most interesting aspects of looking at these opinions is that they represent what I would call the antiseptic light of public opinion. They really do show you what the art of the possible is in terms of communicating to the public and talking to the public about some of these issues. You are going to find as we go through these data that while sometimes we would *hope* that the Canadian public has very well-informed opinions about these issues, quite frankly they don't. A lot of what [follows] are impressions or views that people have that have been derived from their own personal experiences—mostly what they have read in the newspaper, heard through the media, or possibly picked up from a friend or a relative in a casual conversation.

Public opinion on this issue is very malleable because it is not based on a lot of factual information. As we go through the legal machinations in places like British Columbia, people come more in contact with the realities of [issues] such as the *Nisga'a* treaty and the *Delgamuukw* decision. This [presentation] might show you the possibilities

that open when people come into contact with these issues in their day-to-day-life. Right now, the unfortunate thing is that it could go either way, depending on how people work through these issues and how they communicate them. I'll show you how there is potential to build a coalition in support of a more affirmative agenda on native issues, and I'll show you the potential pitfalls for trying to build that agenda. Currently, it is a very controversial issue—and one in which public opinion should be considered.

Figure 1 Methodology

- Interviews by telephone—April 1st-9th, 1998
- Randomly selected Canadian adults
- Sample

| | N | Error |
|-------------------------|--------------|-----------------|
| Canada | 2,550 | +/- 1.9% |
| British Columbia | 800 | +/- 3.5% |
| Alberta | 300 | +/- 5.7% |
| Saskatchewan & Manitoba | 300 | +/- 5.7% |
| Ontario | 400 | +/- 4.9% |
| Quebec | 400 | +/- 4.9% |
| Atlantic provinces | 150 | +/- 8.0% |
| North | 200 | +/- 6.9% |

- Data weighted to reflect actual Canadian population figures for 1996 Census.
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This 1998 study was the most comprehensive survey I have ever conducted specifically on aboriginal issues. When I talk about aboriginal issues I'm not saying that we were speaking to aboriginal people directly, although they were part of the random sample and are represented to their level in the Canadian population generally. In telephone interviews, 2,550 randomly selected Canadians were asked what they thought about aboriginal issues. Anyone who knows anything about public opinion research would know that is a very large sample, with a statistical margin of error of plus or minus 1.9 percent.

Given that most pyrotechnics on this issue these days are in one particular jurisdiction in Canada, that being British Columbia, we did

a very large oversample. In other words, we sampled more people in B.C. than we would normally sample for a proportionate nationwide survey because we really wanted to look at B.C. by itself, outside of the Canadian population. The data, though, are all weighted back to reflect the actual proportion of the B.C. population within the Canadian population. That's a very long-winded way of saying: "This is Canada."

I am going to discuss context. By context, I mean what Canadians think about aboriginal people, the situation of aboriginal people today in Canada. Are they making progress? Are they better off or worse off than they were in the past? And when people look at the most important issues facing native Canadians today, what do they see them as being?

The next subject is obviously a very controversial issue: self-government, and what Canadians think about some propositions relative to self-government. Next, are land claims. And finally, segmentation—a rather fancy word but one that is absolutely critical to understanding the public opinion environment on aboriginal issues. The survey will show you how the Canadian public segments out on this issue, so you can get some sense of how a coalition could be built or how it could be fractured, based on some of the basic tenants of public opinion.

Context

Figure 2—How Well Informed Are You about Native Issues?

Only 13 percent of Canadians say that they are well informed about native issues. Only 13 percent. The highest in terms of self-information—people who know the most about or identify themselves as knowing a lot about native issues—are people living in the Yukon and Northwest Territories. Obviously, we are dealing with a larger percentage of the native population and there's a lot of interaction between people. But looking at places where we see the most populous groups in the Canadian population, for example Ontario, it is 12 percent, a pretty low number. So, in the biggest jurisdiction in the country, very few people know about native issues, or self-identify as knowing about native issues. Not surprising. When you talk to people, for example in Toronto, about native issues, they really don't know what you are talking about. They think of native issues as being out somewhere else, in some remote place. They don't see them as something that is present in their own lives. The place that this has changed rather dramatically over the space of the last year has been British Columbia, where people have become a lot more informed about this issue—some of them positively, many more of them negatively. (Although B.C. was only 15 percent at the time of the survey, that number, at minimum, has probably doubled.)

**Figure 2 How Well Informed Are You about Native Issues?
“Well Informed” 6/7 on 7 pt. scale (N= 2,550)**

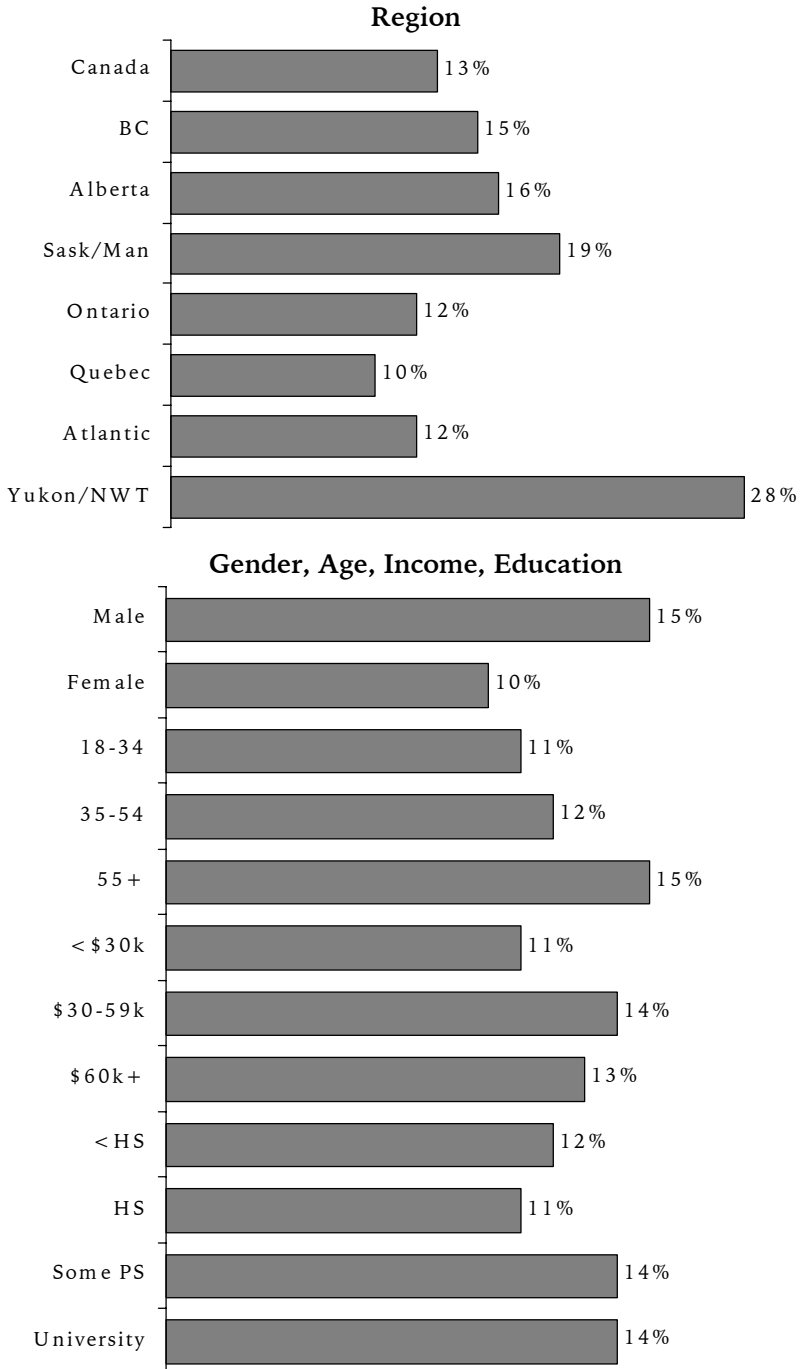


Figure 3—Overall Situation of Aboriginal Peoples over the Past 10 Years

The question: When you take a look over the last 10 years, do you think things are improving, or they are getting worse, for natives? What you find is 41 percent of the population say the situation has improved for natives, and 22 percent say that it has worsened. One of the overall things that is going to come out of this presentation is that there really is some positive momentum behind the native agenda right now. People are thinking that things are moving in the right direction, as we're talking about land claims, about self-government, about resolving some of these issues. They do think that there is a step in the right direction.

Figure 3 Overall Situation of Aboriginal Peoples over the Past 10 Years (N = 2,550)

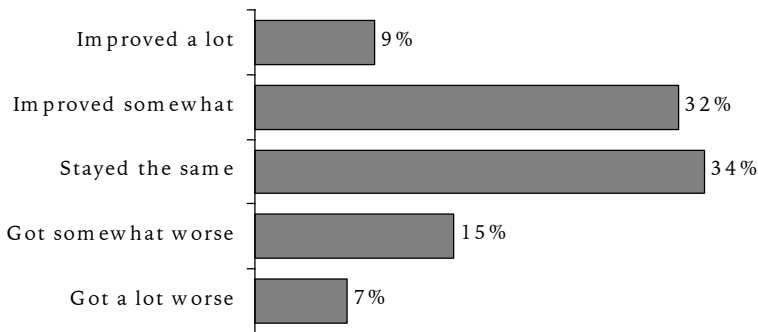


Figure 4—Personal Sympathy with Aboriginal Concerns

The question: What about your own personal sympathy about native issues? Would you say you have become more sympathetic, less sympathetic, or is it really just about the same? Thirty-five percent of the population says that over the last little while they have become more sympathetic. Only 15 percent say they have become less sympathetic. If I were doing this for a political party, I would say you have a rating of plus-20. In other words, when you take the people who are less sympathetic from the people who are more sympathetic, you are headed in the right direction there too. In terms of the overall level of belief that things are getting better for natives, people see that. And in terms of their own views about natives, they seem to be getting more sympathetic. At least they identify themselves as doing that.

Figure 4 Personal Sympathy with Aboriginal Concerns
(N = 2,550)

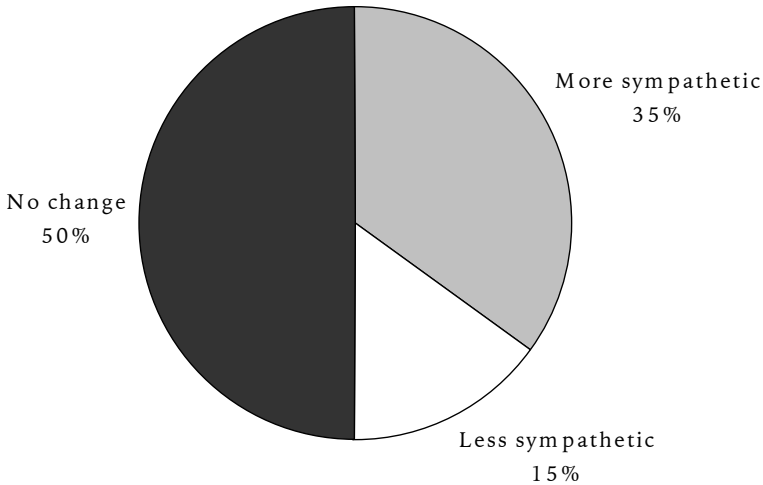
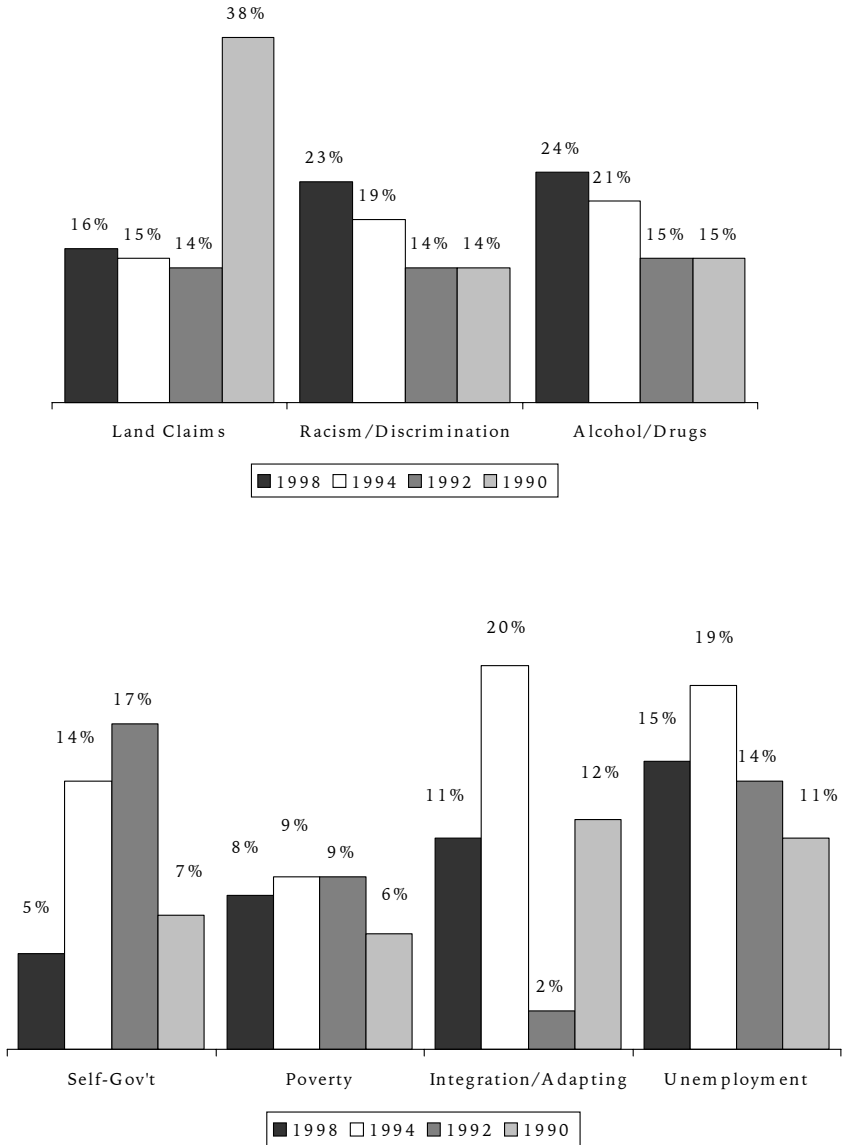


Figure 5—Most Important Issues Facing Canada's Aboriginals Today

These slides are very interesting, given the subject matter of this conference and the content of the discussion about native issues over the space of the last 10 years. The open-ended question is: when you think of issues confronting the native population in Canada these days, what would you say is the most important issue facing them today? Data collected since 1990, when we first conducted this survey at the time of the Oka crisis, show that what is really emerging as the number one issue facing the native community has nothing to do with self-government or land claims. [Instead], when you ask Canadians what they see facing aboriginal people today, the number one issue involve social pathologies. Alcoholism and drug abuse. Unemployment and racism. Now that's a sobering thought, given that some of these things that we're talking about have at best a tangential relationship to solving any of these problems.

You can continue down the list. Unemployment at 15 percent. What you find is that the political, or power, aspects of this have declined, and the social policy aspects have really increased over the space of the last 10 years.

Figure 5 Most Important Issues Facing Canada's Aboriginals Today; Open-ended, Volunteered responses (N = 2,550)



Note: Totals to more than 100%; up to two responses accepted

Figure 6—Perceptions and Attitudes about Aboriginal People, Life and Culture

When you ask people about what really gets them upset on the native agenda, it doesn't tend to be things like self-government and land claims. It tends to be things like, why do we have Third-World conditions in this country? Why do we have higher than average infant death rates in these populations? Why do I see what I see on the streets of downtown Edmonton, Saskatoon and Winnipeg? That's what Canadians are worried about, that's what they want to see solved. This legal stuff is all very interesting, but unless it leads to some of those solutions, people are not that interested.

Figure 6 Perceptions and Attitudes about Aboriginal People, Life and Culture; based on a 7-point scale (Agree 6, 7)

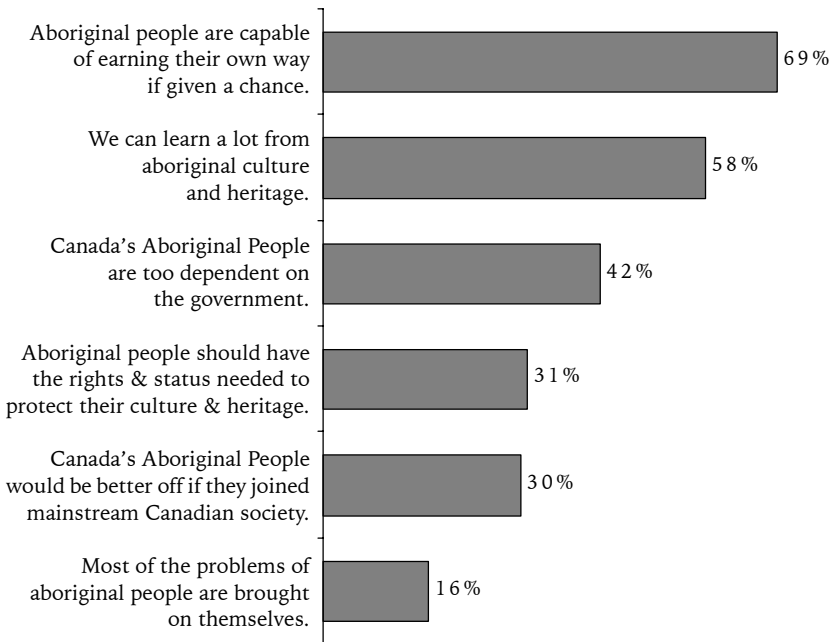


Figure 7—Standard of Living versus Average Canadian

Are natives better or worse off than the average Canadian? Sixty-three percent say that the native standard of living is worse than the average Canadian standard is. And that's universal across the country. That's what the public wants to deal with.

Figure 7 Standard of Living versus Average Canadian

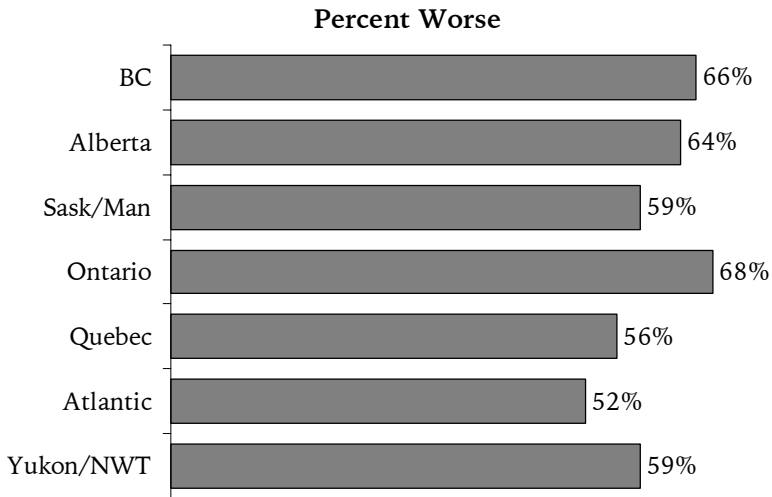
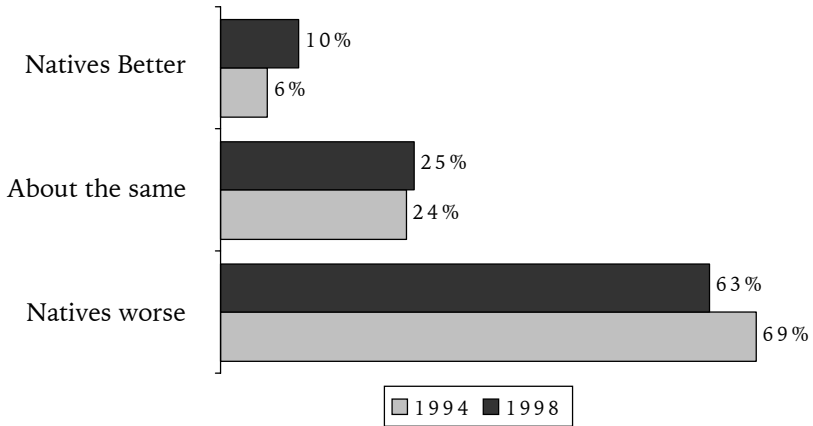
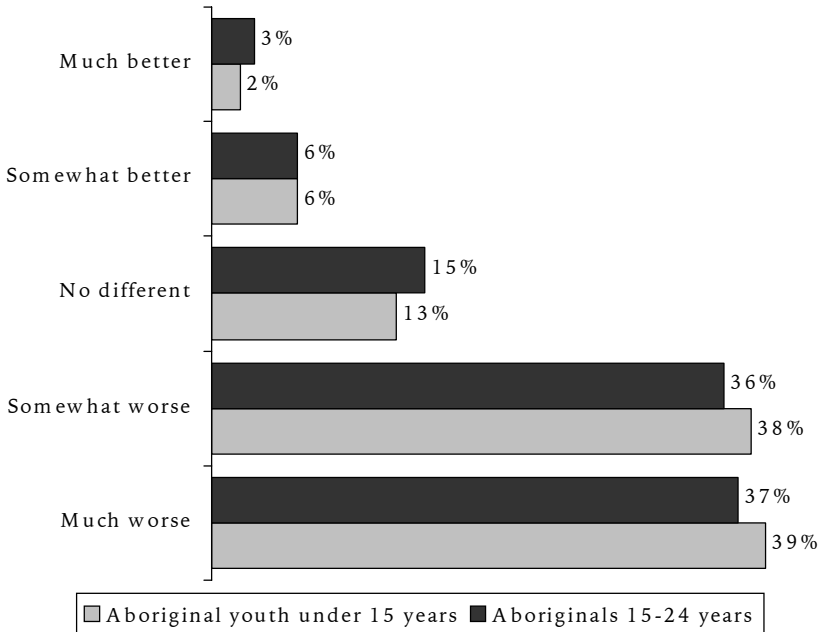


Figure 8—Young Aboriginals Chances for Success in Life Compared to Young Canadians

Probably the most shocking number that I saw on this survey, not that I'm easily shocked, [involve opinions on] young aboriginal chances for success in life. Compared to young Canadians, many more think that the life chances of young aboriginals are very much disadvantaged than are the life chances of non-aboriginal Canadians in this country. The

hope here, if anything, is that we'll be able to do something about this problem. Because when they talk about the linkage of social pathologies and life chances, they are talking about this group of young natives, and about trying to do something to salvage their lives.

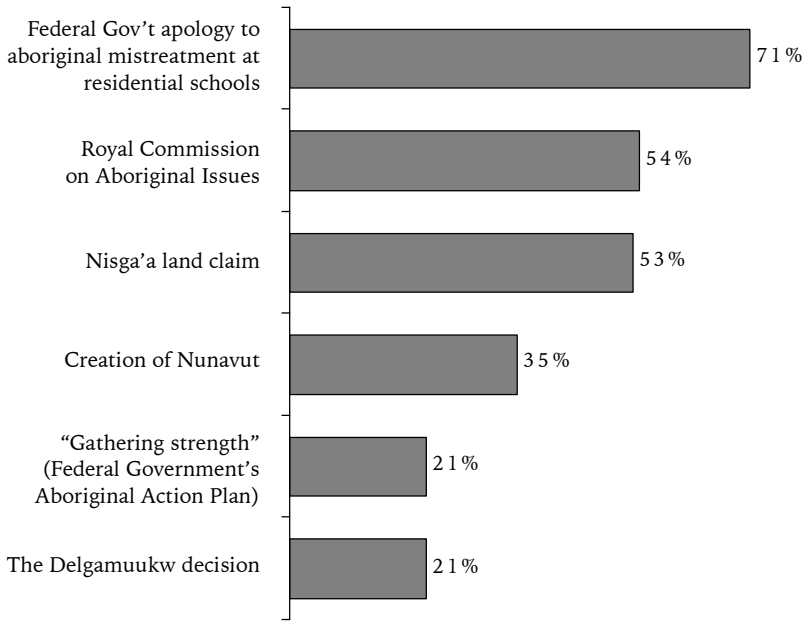
Figure 8 Young Aboriginals Chances for Success in Life Compared to Young Canadians (N= 2,550)



Note: Split sample. Each scenario presented to 1,275 respondents.

Figure 9—Awareness of Specific Aboriginal Issues

The question: Have you ever heard of the following things related to the aboriginal agenda? Remember that this is back in April of 1998. The federal government's apology to native Canadians: 71 percent had heard of that. Now remember, you've got a lot of yea-saying going on here. You don't know how many actually have, but you know that it's higher than for the ones that are lower in the bars here. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Issues: 54 percent. Nisga'a: at 53 percent, obviously much higher in British Columbia. The creation of Nunavut was only 35 percent. The gathering strength initiative by the federal government, and *Delgamuukw*: 21 percent. Half of these people are lying. Why? [Because] what does it have to do with what they are worried about, which is solving those social problems?

Figure 9 Awareness of Specific Aboriginal Issues (% aware)

Self-Government

Figure 10—Perspective on the Concept of Aboriginal Self-Government

We asked this question back in September 1990 and again in April 1998: When you look at self-government, do natives have inherent right to self-government? Do they have a delegatable right? Or do they have no right to self-government? The majority, 62 percent of the population, says that at least some right to self-government exists within the native community. (What I would love to see someday is somebody doing a survey of aboriginal peoples on these issues. I haven't seen one that I thought was credible yet. It's the Mount Everest of doing social research in Canada—really doing an accurate survey of opinions, not just demography, but opinions of aboriginal Canadians themselves on some of these issues.) When you ask them about the inherent right that exists, they answer: No—and this is where you get the Canadian population and the aboriginal population to assert—it's a conditional right. Only 26 percent of the population actually believe that there is an inherent, non-conditional right to self-government.

The next level is for delegatable: 36 percent. And then finally, no right to self-government at all: 36 percent, a very significant minority.

Figure 10 Overall Perspective on the Concept of Aboriginal Self-Government (September 1990 to April 1998)

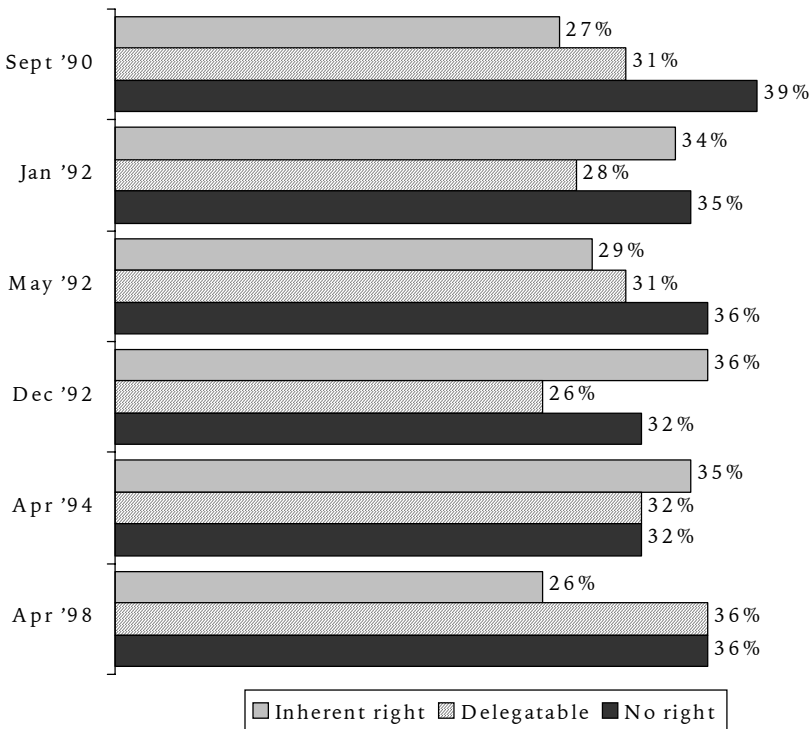


Figure 11—Nature of Self-Government

Again, we have been asking this question since January 1992, so we have five iterations of these data. What are Canadians looking at, consistent with their view of sort of a delegated power—a separate nation within a nation? No, it's not. Only 27 percent—although that's up dramatically—believe that it is. Is it like a provincial government? 28 percent of the population accept that. Or is it more like a municipality? 40 percent agree with that. Based on the number of focus groups that I've done on these issues, I can tell you that Canadians get very conservative, very fast, on these issues, when you move beyond the powers of a municipal government.

Figure 11 Nature of Self-Government

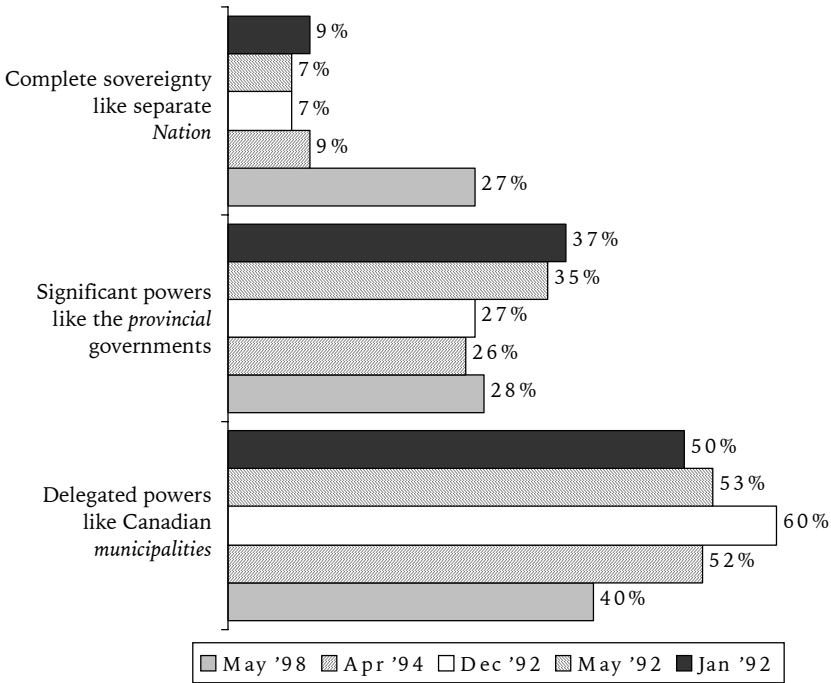


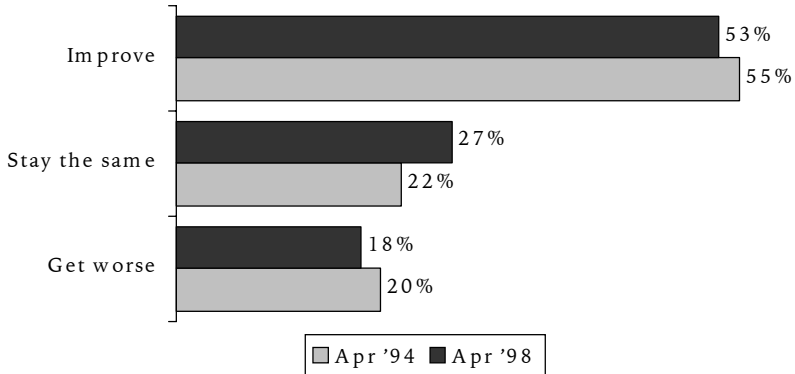
Figure 12—Canadians' Expectations for Self-Government

The question: What do you think aboriginal self-government will mean for the overall standard of living for aboriginal people? Fifty-five percent say that it's going to improve. Stay the same: in the mid-20s. Get worse: 18 percent. Now that's not exactly a stunning endorsement in terms of affecting the things that people want to have affected, is it?

Is it going to improve the standard of living? The Canadian population is basically split on that. They don't necessarily see the linkage between self-government and actually improving the day-to-day lives of the aboriginal peoples that they are worried about.

**Figure 12 Canadians' Expectations for Self-Government—
April 1994 to April 1998 (N = 2,550)**

“What do you think aboriginal self-government will mean for the overall standard of living for Aboriginal peoples?”



Percent Improve

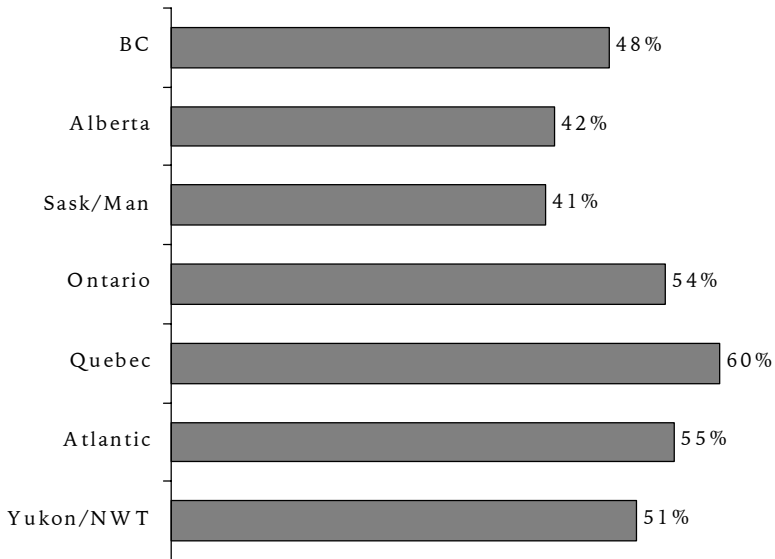


Figure 13—Canadians' Feelings about Aboriginal Self-Government

This is on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 is strongly disagree and 7 is strongly agree. These are the people who gave 6 or 7 to these various responses.

The government should not be responsible for covering any financial problems aboriginal self-government may get into: 49 percent of the population agree with that. Based on all the research I've done on this, people believe that if you are going to govern yourself, you have to govern yourself. In other words, don't be coming back to us all the time asking for money. There has to be some finality to this.

Aboriginal peoples are fully capable of governing themselves competently: 40 percent of the population strongly agree with that point. So, yeah, you can do it, is basically what they are saying.

Even with self-government, the federal government should be responsible for ensuring that quality services are maintained by aboriginal governments: 38 percent agree with that. Basically, what they are telling us is similar to the way that they peruse and are responsible for the services that provincial governments provide to their citizens. The federal government has a similar role to play with aboriginal governments.

Government efforts have failed badly, so aboriginal people should take control of their own affairs: 27 percent of the population strongly agree with that. I would say that that is under-representing that opinion. People really do believe an awful lot when you talk about self-government: i.e. they can't do any worse than we have done.

Figure 13 Canadians' Feelings about Aboriginal Self-Government
—Percent Agree (score 6 or 7) (N = 2,550)

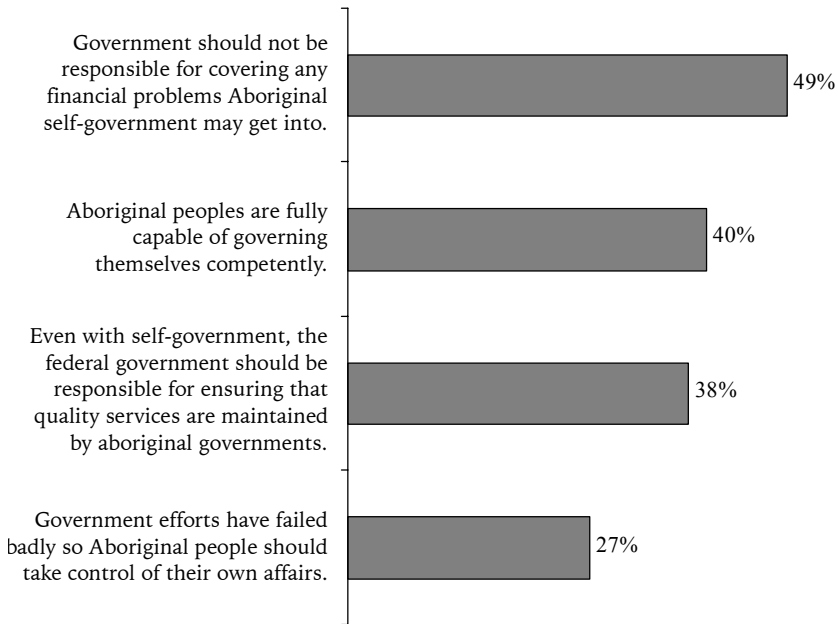


Figure 14—Tracking Canadians’ Views on the Overall Legitimacy of Native Land Claims

How legitimate are land claims? No legitimate land claims, no compensation: 19 percent of the population agree with that. So, in other words, to make the argument that there is no such thing as a legitimate land claim doesn’t wash in Canada. Some legitimate land claims are worthy of some compensation. Better than half support that. The last one is that all the claims are legitimate, they deserve full compensation. About a quarter of the population agrees with that. What you see from this is that people do want to talk about it. They believe that there is a basis to make these claims.

Figure 14 Tracking Canadians’ Views on the Overall Legitimacy of Native Land Claims

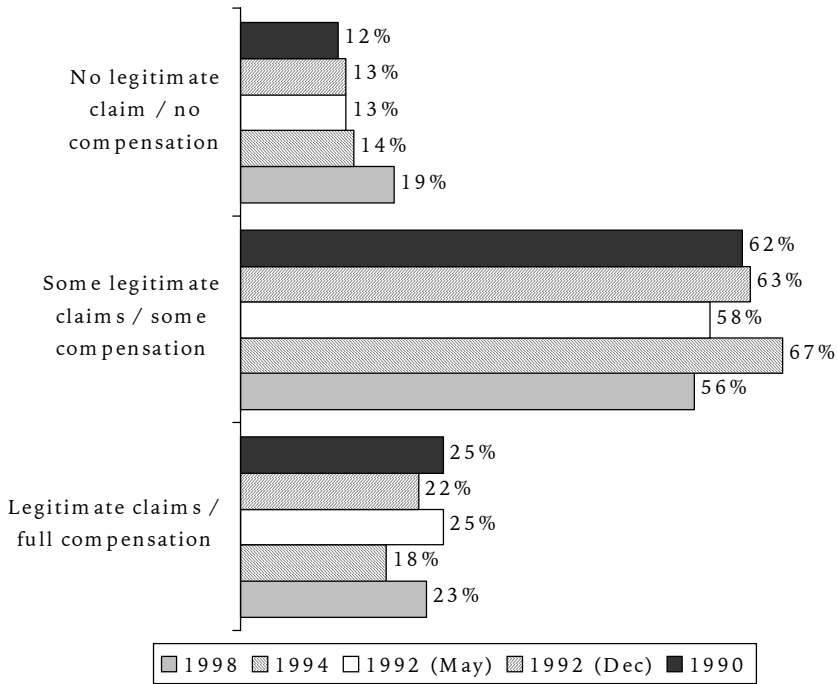


Figure 15—Preferred Approach for Addressing Aboriginal Land Claims

And how do they want to deal with it? Negotiate, don’t litigate. This is again consistent: 62 percent of the population say have a treaty negotiation process; 34 percent say let the courts decide.

You see the story beginning to develop here?

Figure 15 Preferred Approach for Addressing Aboriginal Land Claims

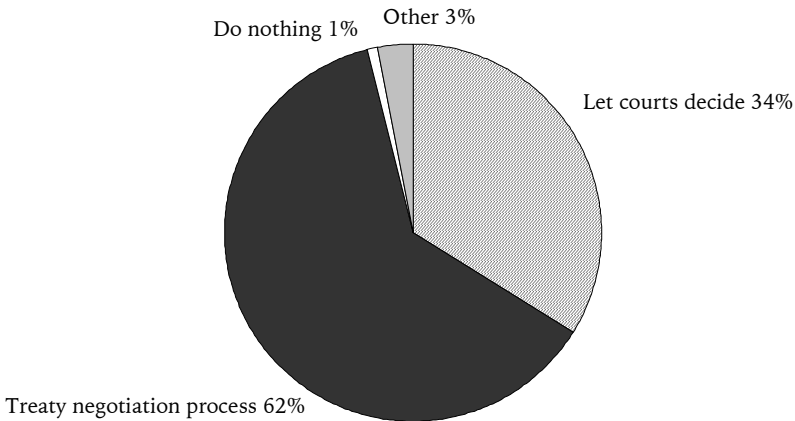
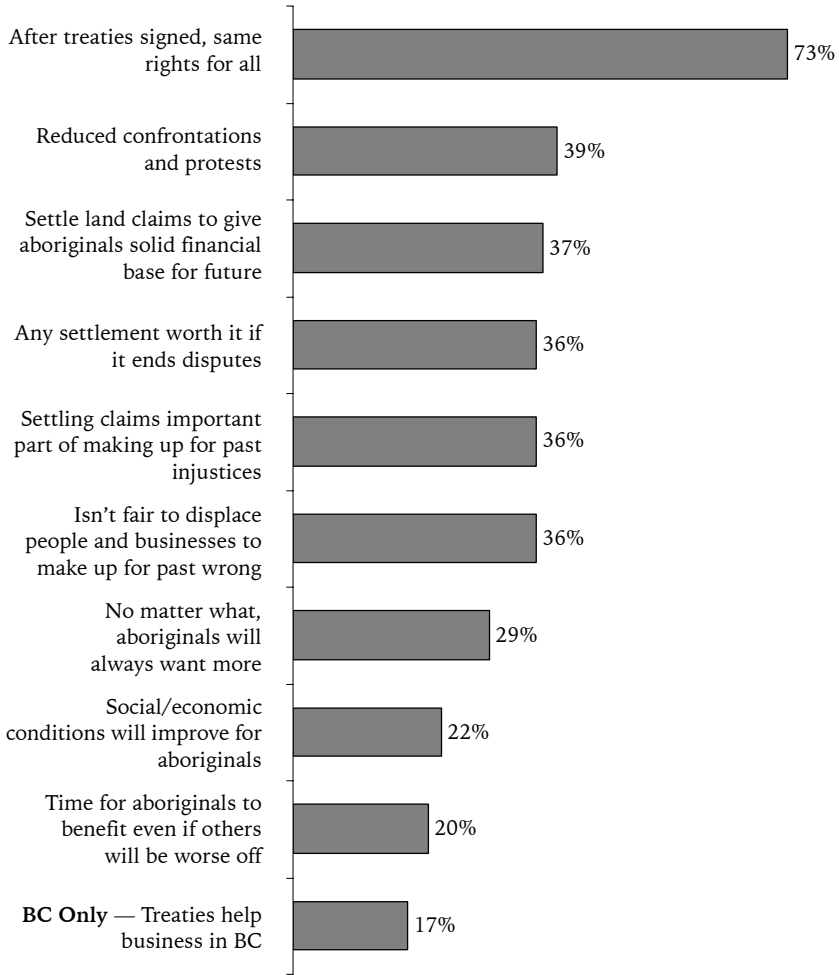


Figure 16—Possible Impacts of Aboriginal Land Claims

This is the percentage of the population that strongly agrees, so this is 6 or 7 on a 7-point scale, where 1 is strongly disagree with this statement; 7 is strongly agree. The first is after treaty's signed, same rights for all: 73 percent agree with that. This is one of the things that the aboriginal negotiators and other people are going to have to realize as part of the aboriginal community: if you are going to negotiate a self-government agreement, or you are going to negotiate something that's supposed to settle this in terms of land claims, it has got to settle it. And you know what? To a certain extent, it means that you'll have a very difficult time trying to sell the concept. Even though we say different doesn't always mean that it's unequal, Canadians have a hard time with that. Principally what we have seen over the space of the last 15 to 20 years in Canada is that the concept of equality has become very ingrained in the Canadian psyche. That's why the government of Quebec has such a hard time talking about distinct society status for people in the province of Quebec. Canadians don't buy that. So if it is a similar sort of approach to aboriginal self-government, you've got some problems.

Will there be reduced confrontations and protests? Yes, they should go down: 39 percent. Settle land claims to give aboriginals sound financial basis for the future: 37 percent agree with that. But in comparison to this other point, everything else pales. The one in B.C. that we asked, just focusing on treaties helping businesses in B.C., only 17 percent strongly agree with that point. In British Columbia, treaty negotiations and settlement are not necessarily linked to economic progress.

Figure 16 Possible Impacts of Aboriginal Land Claims
Percent Agree 6/7 on 7 point scale



Figures 17 to 19—Reasonability Regarding Land Claims Negotiation of Position on Land Claims by Region
Regarding Land Claims Negotiations (BC Only)

Who's being more fair and reasonable here? In April 1998, the feds have a 10-point lead over the aboriginals. I didn't think I'd see that. This is becoming a lot more controversial as time goes on. Actually, when you go into the individual provinces, the provinces rank further ahead than

the federal government. Interestingly enough, it becomes more controversial in B.C., where it's more competitive. The problem in B.C. is that this is all beginning to shake out, and people are starting to feel this in their day-to-day lives. For example, what's happening in Musqueam right now is really bad for this. I don't care about all the legal arguments, about who is right and who is wrong, but the impression of the public is: is this turnabout fair play? In other words, is this what we can expect under native self-government? Is this what we can expect in terms of attitude from the native community when they have their chance to govern? And the answer coming back is: now I am more uncomfortable.

So again, looking across the country, and looking at who is more reasonable, the only place where the natives actually lead is in Ontario where this issue matters about the least. In B.C. it's not going very well.

Figure 17 Reasonability Regarding Land Claims Negotiations (Percent reasonable)

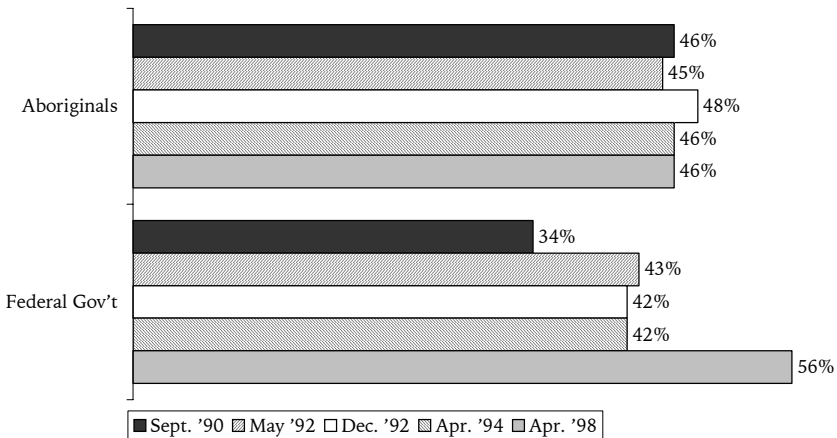


Figure 18 Reasonability Regarding Land Claims Negotiations (BC Only)

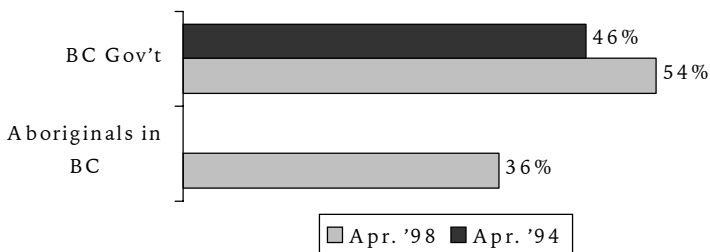
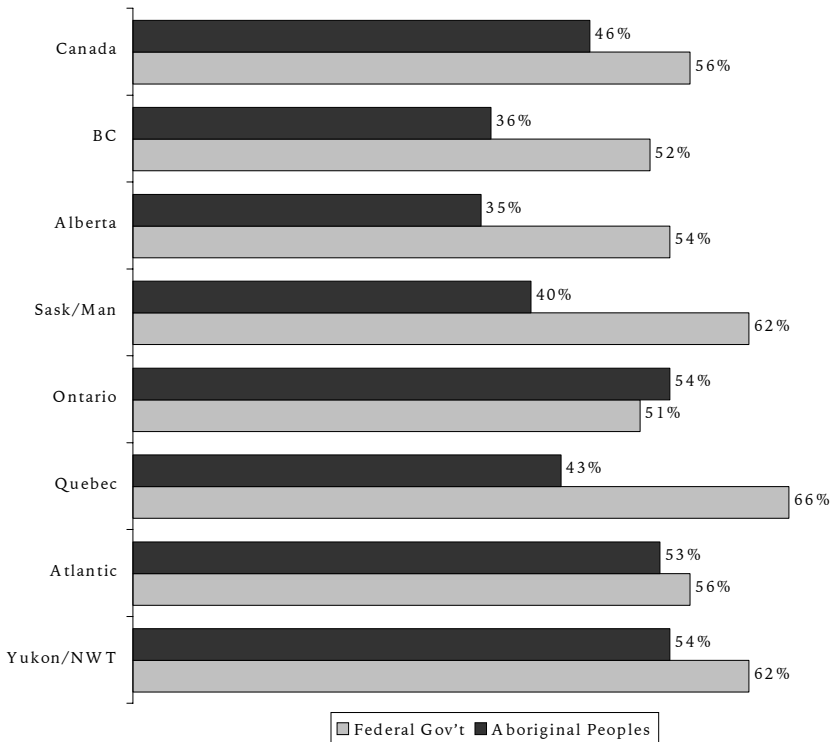


Figure 19 Reasonability of Position on Land Claims by Region**Figure 20—A Psychographic Segmentation of the Canadian Population on Aboriginal Issues**

Psychographic segmentation is basically cluster analysis. All of you who took Statistics 270 in Political Science know what I'm talking about. In this instance, what cluster analysis does is take the responses from 2,550 people and, based on how they answered those questions, break them into certain groups that are logically consistent. I'll give you an example of this. Imagine, for example, we took 2,550 people and put them in a room, and asked them to find the people who they were most comfortable talking to about aboriginal issues and assimilate with them in the corner, and become a group. That's essentially what the computer does. It puts people together in like-mindsets. In other words, people who are very supportive, against people who are very against. Then you have everybody who is in between. The reason that you do this type of analysis is that you are not going to find the average

Canadian on this issue. There is no average Canadian. It is all levels of extreme, one way or the other. And that is similar to, I guess, the old statistical joke about means, and the problem with arithmetic means whenever you are doing it. That's not your statistical average. If your head is in the freezer and your feet are in the furnace, your middle is absolutely perfect. There are no people who are absolutely perfect here. It is a matter of fairly inconsistent and extreme opinions all over the place. So what I try to do, using the computer, is to actually sort these people into groups.

On aboriginal issues this is really, really important because there is an opportunity here to build a coalition in support of aboriginal issues, and there is an opportunity for coalition to fall apart. This shows how those coalitions are made up, and how one would go about building a coalition.

For example, I would usually do this for a political candidate. Tell them how to build the percentage of the vote that they have to win in order to win an election. And I want to take it from five groups: the committed advocates; the ambivalent patrons; fair-minded pragmatists; skeptical opponents; and confident hard-liners.

Figure 20 A Psychographic Segmentation of the Canadian Population on Aboriginal Issues

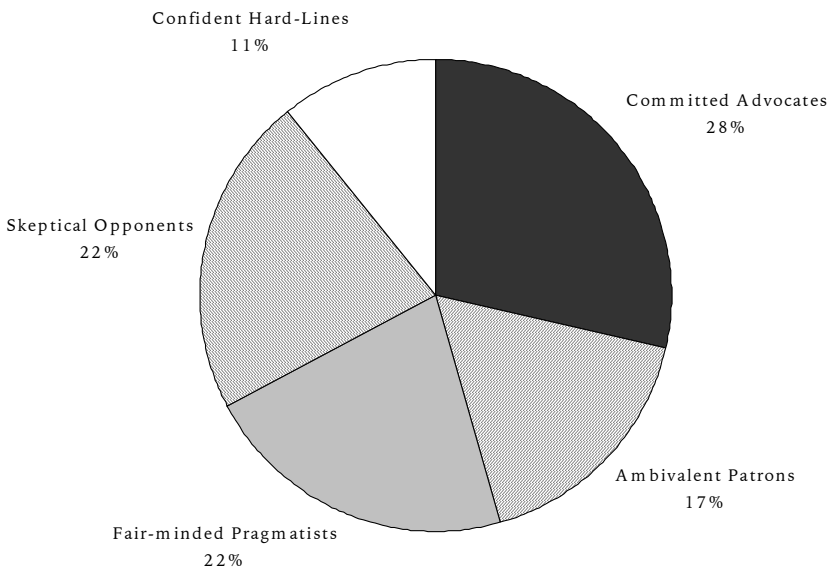


Figure 21 Committed Advocates (29%)

- Strongest supporters of aboriginals
 - Immediate justice
 - Accept special status, self-government, land claims
 - Increase aboriginal control
 - Like Federal Government's affirmative approach but want more
 - New Canadians, Ontario, highly educated, Liberal voters
-

The people who are the most supportive constitute 29 percent of the population. They are the strongest supporters of aboriginals. They believe in immediate justice. Anything that is happening right now on the aboriginal issue, as far as they are concerned, is too slow—we must move quicker. They accept special status. The question I raised before, about 73 percent saying there can't be separate but equal but different, these people don't have a problem with that at all. That's fine as far as they are concerned. So the federal government's line on Nisga'a in B.C., where you don't have to be treated the same to be treated equally, these guys would say absolutely, that's true. Not a problem. They accept special status, self-government, and land claims. They believe there needs to be an increase in aboriginal control over their own lives, and are really very supportive of aboriginal self-government. They like the federal government's affirmative approach, but they want more. They want the government to move more quickly. They tend to be newer Canadians; they tend to be disproportionately in Ontario; they are highly educated; and they are Liberal voters. So, if you are a government that has 100 seats in the province of Ontario, you would really care about what these guys think. They only represent 29 percent of the population though.

Figure 22 Ambivalent Patrons (17%)

- Strong supporters of aboriginals
 - Federal Government catalyst for improvement, need to do more
 - Worried about impact of redress on non-aboriginals
 - Paternalistic—natives not ready yet
 - Less informed, younger, Ontario
-

Ambivalent patrons add another 17 percent. But these people are more conditional. Why are they ambivalent? They are strong supporters of the aboriginal community. In other words, these people are not racist. They are comfortable with aboriginal people and support their cultural, their focus on culture and all that sort of thing. They are very supportive of the federal government's involvement, and very supportive of the federal government pushing. However, they are worried about the impact of redress on non-aboriginals. That's why they are more conditional. It's not just a question of: "We are going to do this because this is what is good for the aboriginal people." They want to know how it is going to affect them too. Although they are more willing to listen, probably more willing to give than some other folks, they tend to be a bit paternalistic. They tend to think that natives may not necessarily be ready yet. They tend to be less informed; younger; in Ontario.

So, again, 17 percent plus 29 equals what it equals. The whole coalition, really, for aboriginal self-government is disproportionately in the province of Ontario. Now, I should say that these people are represented all throughout the country. Ontario is just a tendency. It tends to be more than average in the province of Ontario.

Figure 23 Fair-Minded Pragmatists (22%)

- Somewhat assimilationist
 - Make a deal to get rid of the "problem"
 - do land claims, settle-up, move on—but, be fair to non-natives
 - Couldn't do worse than current government
 - Quebec, French speaking, middle income, less educated
-

Fair-minded pragmatists: 22 percent of the population. If you are going to build a coalition that is more than a majority, slightly more than fifty, you have to have these guys, because you move from 46 to 69. These are the people that you have to win, if you are going to communicate on these issues. The solid middle ground. Somewhat assimilationist in their perspective, they want to make a deal to get rid of the problem. In other words, they want to see some finality in this: "Put it aside. We want to do a deal so we can get this behind us. Do land claims, settle up, move on, but be fair to the non-natives." In other words, you just can't do what's good for the native community, you also have to worry about the people who are going to be affected directly by

this. Again: “They can’t do any worse for themselves than what we’ve done for them.” So a bit of throwing up your hands. They tend to be disproportionately in Quebec; French-speaking; middle-income; less-educated. We haven’t got the B.C. group here yet, do we? Although there is a large, large portion of each of these groups in that province too. Those are demographic tendencies.

Figure 24 Skeptical Opponents (28%)

- Question need for action
 - Skeptical more than opposed
 - Equality driven be fair to non-aboriginals
 - Cut them loose, but skeptical of self-government
 - Don’t want to perpetuate aboriginal dependency
 - Ambivalent on self-government, land claims
 - Older, French speaking, middle income
-

Skeptical opponents: again, a fairly sizable group of the population, better than a quarter. They question the need for action at all. Skeptical, more than opposed. To the extent that you tell them that something is going to solve a problem, they want to see some evidence and proof that it is actually going to solve it. So these guys will be worried about the social pathologies and actually having a positive effect on those. Equality-driven: “You have to be fair to non-aboriginals; cut them loose. But they are skeptical about the effect of self-government on those social pathologies that I mentioned before. Don’t want to perpetuate aboriginal dependency, ambivalent on self-government, land claims. Older; disproportionately French-speaking; middle-income. Again, these are demographic tendencies. These people also exist in BC and around the country.

Figure 25 Confident Hard-Liners (11%)

- Reject special treatment
- Little sympathy, don’t accept responsibility for the past
- Well informed
- Strongly assimilationist

- Government wastes too much time on this
 - Too dependent, architects of own problems
 - Reject self-government, land claims
 - Male, middle-aged, Canadian Born, more affluent, Reform votes
-

And finally, the confident hard-liners: about 11 percent of the population. This is: “No way, we are not going to do this at all. We don’t care.” Aboriginal agenda is of no interest to me whatsoever. They reject special treatment, and that’s what they see this as. Little sympathy, don’t accept responsibility for the past. It is interesting when you get into focus groups with people like this. Basically, the line they give you is, “Excuse me, I didn’t do anything. Why are you punishing me? That may have been my ancestors, but that was my ancestors, so why are we changing it now? And why am I responsible, and why am I paying for it?” They tend to be very well informed. I am adding the word very because they do tend to be well informed. They tend to know more. When I talk to people in focus groups, these guys tend to be really on the ball. They know what is going on. They have read the material. And they disagree with it. They are strongly assimilationist, and you hear this when you go out in focus groups and talk to these folks: they say, if they just became like us, it would all be fine. Government wastes too much time on this. It is not a priority. They see the natives as too dependent and as architects of their own problems: if the native community has any problems, they did it to themselves. They reject self-government and land claims. They are male; middle-aged; Canadian-born; more affluent—Reform voters.

See what we are dealing with here? We want to build a coalition. Committed advocates, plus ambivalent patrons, plus fair-minded pragmatists, equals majority support. Are you ever going to convince the confident hard-liners to change their minds? I doubt it. Don’t waste your time. And do you have to kowtow to the committed advocates? No, because if you kowtow to the committed advocates, the fair-minded pragmatists won’t have anything to do with you.

Obviously the place you are shooting for is this 22 percent. These guys are the ones that are the key to this whole debate. They want a certain amount of assimilation; they want to solve the problem; they want to get this thing; they want a deal. And they also believe that rather than holding out a lot of hope for aboriginal self-government, it is now their turn: “They can’t do any worse for themselves than we have done for them.”

Conclusion

First, there is a general sense among the Canadian population that life for aboriginal people is improving. In other words, there is some positive momentum happening on the aboriginal file. The major issues for the future are not land claims and self-government, they are youth and social policies. Land claims, and especially self-government, are of lesser importance. Of the two, land claims are more important. However, both have tremendous potential for controversy, depending on how they are positioned, and how they are brought to the Canadian population.

Major issues for any settlements are equality—in other words, treating people who are non-aboriginals at least as well as you are treating the people who are benefiting from the settlement; and finality—once we have signed the settlement, it is done. Finally, Canadians get conservative very quickly on this issue, particularly if it violates the tenets of finality and equality.

Questions

Roland Ponguis (Land Rights Director with the Assembly of First Nations) You focussed on what we call the symptoms, the social pathologies. It is funny that Canadians don't make the connection between the two issues, because that is what we call the symptoms of the deprivation of lands and resources, as well as self-government.

Bricker I think that is a very important point. What it underscores is that there has to be a linkage between land claims, and self-government. The problem is that we don't hear much talk about that. What we hear a lot of talk about is justice. We don't hear a lot of talk about solutions. If I were advising the native community on putting together a communications strategy on this, I would be talking an awful lot about how these settlements lead to solving these problems. But we don't hear enough about that. It's about Constitutions, big government, power. People aren't interested.

Gordon Gibson These data you indicate come from people who are relatively uninformed. Do you have an instinct as to how the data will shift with increasing information? I understand it depends on the kind of information. With that caveat, can you give us any insights on that?

Bricker It depends on what jurisdiction you are talking about. I would say that for the short-term in B.C., these data are going to go decidedly negative. Unfortunately, the *Nisga'a* agreement has been linked with a government that is not especially popular right now with the public. I

am being very subtle on this. So, the degree to which there is a linkage isn't going to help. But there are also a lot of unanswered questions about *Nisga'a* that a lot of people just try to paper over with platitudes. For example: "You don't have to be treated the same to be treated equally." Well, I'm sorry. You are not going to get anyone to accept that. They don't believe that. That's just a silly thing to say. And to the extent that that is the rhetoric of the people who are trying to sell this—which is sort of like saying to the population, "there, there, you just don't understand"—it is going to fail, in terms of public opinion terms. There has to be a full and frank discussion of what all of this means.

When you talk to people in focus groups about native issues you find that the more information on the table, the better. The fewer platitudes, the better. When people do get the real stuff on the table, they can deal with it. They can discount it depending on the source that it came from, but at least they feel they know the facts. And in fact, when you do focus on the facts, you tend to find that people move to the more affirmative side, because their *suspicions* about what it is about tend to be a lot worse than what it really is about. At least when you talk to them and you let them make a choice. But that is the problem—we tend to deal with the public as being incapable of forming a reasonable opinion on this, based on the facts. When I go out to BC and talk to people about this, I find that you spend the first hour yelling at each other. But after a while, people come to the conclusion that you are going to have to come up with a settlement, or you are going to have the courts impose it. We already know what people think about the courts. And you know what? It is going to be coming from Ottawa rather than from here, which really bothers people.

If anything, I would say to anybody on this: get out there, talk about it, get the facts on the table. [Facts] tend to move people in the right direction.

Gordon Gibson Well, it seems inconsistent that you say British Columbia is both going to become more knowledgeable and more negative. It contradicts what you said now.

Bricker It is going to be a two-stage thing. The problem is that they are dealing with things like Musqueam, which is not helping. The more they hear stories like that, the worse this is going to get. To the extent that that is the information people have about the treaties, and that is the information that they are going to have about self-government and aboriginal land claims, British Columbia is going to become very combustible. I am not talking just about a lack of rain here. It is going to be a very, very difficult situation for anybody on this issue, until somebody

is prepared to get out there and just lay the straight facts on the table. Stop trying to sell this, and just tell people really what the facts are. And the government of B.C., for example, has really erred on the side of trying to sell this, with its advertising program on television and everything else. It is not done well.

Question It seems that self-government means that aboriginal communities are going to run their own affairs, at least to some extent, and they are going to be different. How does one address that and get more people on side for that idea, given their strong beliefs in equality?

Bricker You are asking me to square a circle. It is going to be a very difficult set of circumstances. When we are talking about self-government, it really depends how we are talking about operationalizing self-government. If we are talking about a place that has got its own local community police force with fairly limited powers vis-à-vis the rest of the population—that runs like a municipal government; is able to tax in a fairly limited way like municipal governments are—that is a lot more of an acceptable proposition to the public. When they become more exposed to that, my view is that it should go reasonably well. But the problem is, they don't know. And, when we talk about what government is going to be, for example, in the Nishga territory, nobody really seems to know. They don't know how the people out there are going to be affected by it, and they don't know what kind of precedent *Nisga'a* sets for the rest of the self-government agreements, negotiations, and land claim settlements that are taking place in other jurisdictions. So the problem is that we have got to get some facts on the table here about what it is, and what it isn't. If they negotiated some things that just won't work in terms of public opinion, deal with it. But right now, what we have is a lot of talk about justice and fairness and what's good and what's bad, rather than a focus on what the facts are.

And my personal view of this—I am not supposed to have any, but I will just offer one up—is that the facts will set you free. At the end of the day, if you get the facts on the table, and they are as they are being communicated, then you should be fine.