

Alberta Separation: Three-in-five say they'd vote in October to stay, but half say the question is "confusing"

56% of Albertans say Premier Danielle Smith has handled the issue poorly

May 25, 2026 – A long-simmering "what if" has become a reality in Alberta, with federalists and separatists now on a five-month clock to convince Albertans to either smother the emerging flames of a sovereignty movement or "start a legal process" for a binding referendum to "separate from Canada".

Those are the options laid out in a 37-word question that the UCP government led by Premier Danielle Smith will put to Albertans in an Oct. 19 referendum.

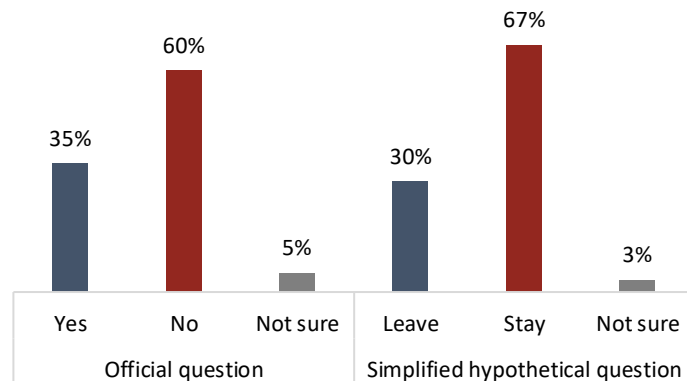
New polling data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute gauging Albertans' opinions leads to three key conclusions. First, in answering the official October question, most Albertans would choose not to proceed with starting the process of a binding separation vote (61% versus 36%). Second, half (51%) find the question confusing. And third, that if they were to answer a simpler hypothetical question – whether to leave or stay – support for the federalist side increases (67% stay, 31% leave).

The data also indicate significant dissatisfaction with the way the Alberta premier has handled the issue, and cynicism over her own motivations. But this sentiment is most widely and intensely felt among those who already do not support her party personally, nor the separatist movement.

About ARI

The Angus Reid Institute (ARI) was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public

Responses to official referendum question vs. simplified hypothetical leave/stay referendum (All respondents, n=800)



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from May 22 – 24, 2026, among a randomized sample of 800 Albertan adults. Respondents are drawn from the [Angus Reid Forum](#), a large-scale online panel developed to include Canadian residents in each of the 343 federal ridings in Canada and representative of the Canadian population by age, gender, family income, ethnic status and education. This sample was weighted to be representative of adults provincewide according to region, gender, age, household income, and education, based on the Canadian census. For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 3 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

For more information on our polling methods, [click here.](#)

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administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.

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Part One: Questions, Questions ... Regardless of framing, most Albertans would stay

The October Question: Three-in-Five say Alberta should remain a province

Alberta Premier Danielle Smith was well down the road of asking Albertans about a number of key issues related to federal-provincial jurisdiction this fall, when a major announcement last Thursday night changed and, some might say, clarified the conversation.

Related: [The other Alberta referendums: Majority support restricting temporary residents’ access to social services](#)

Angus Reid Institute had already canvassed Albertans over immigration, the appointment of judges and [abolishing the senate](#), when Smith announced a new question to add to the list. It is a 37-word query that reads as follows:

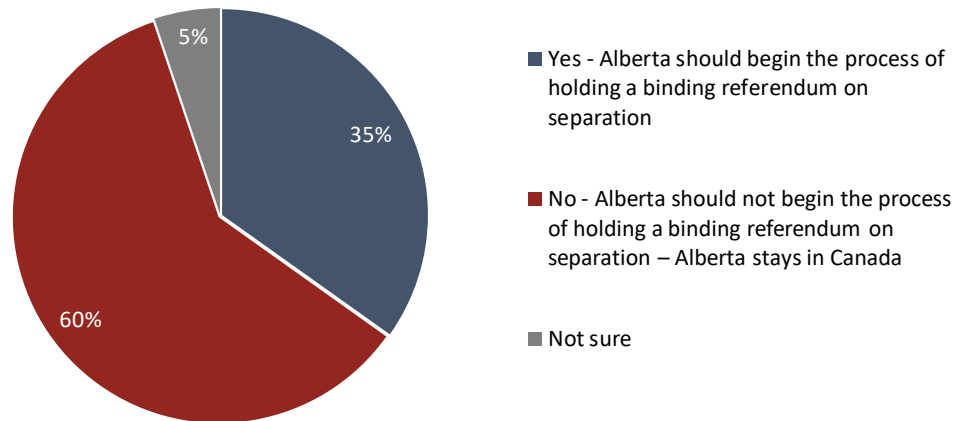
“Should Alberta remain a province of Canada or should the Government of Alberta commence the legal process required under the Canadian Constitution to hold a binding provincial referendum on whether or not Alberta should separate from Canada?”

When asked how they would vote on such a question, more than one-third say they would choose to begin a process towards a binding referendum on the issue of separation, while the majority, three-in-five say Canada should remain a province and the process should not proceed:

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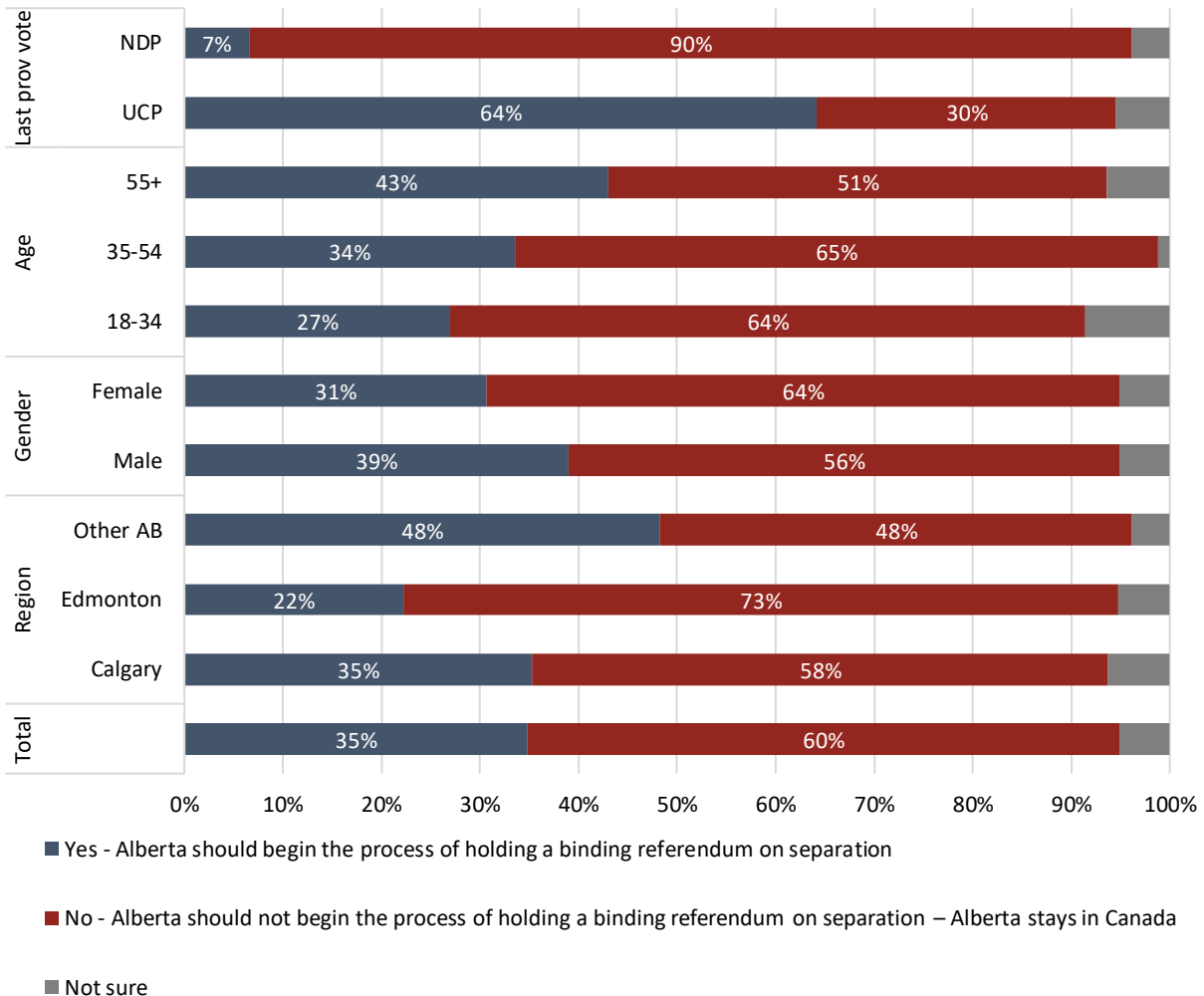
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Having read the question, how would you vote?
(All respondents, n=800)



Responses vary massively across different demographic groups, including predictably past vote, but also across age and regional lines:

**Having read the question, how would you vote?
(All respondents, n=800)**



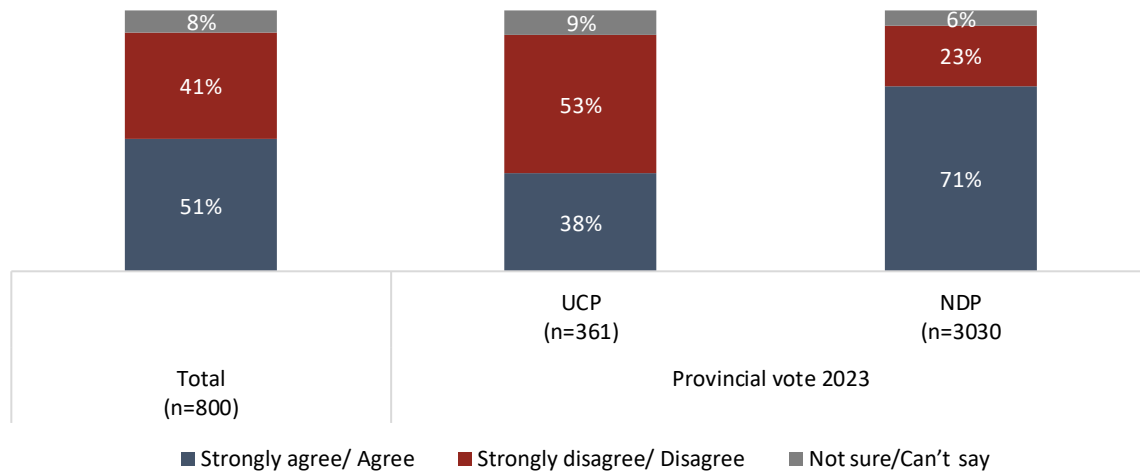
Half say wording of October question is “confusing”

Smith said the wording of the question was supposed to “appease both sides of the debate”. At least half of Albertans, however, do not find the question clear, including a significant segment of her own United Conservative Party vote base:

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Agree vs. disagree - "The question that will be asked in October is confusing"



A simpler question shows less support for separation

An outstanding question: how many would vote to begin a process for a binding referendum on separation without actually voting for separation when it came to it in the end? Indeed, some respondents view the official October question as an opportunity to protest, given two notable findings. First, a plurality (43%) view a referendum as a “legitimate way for Alberta to deal with its grievances” ([see detailed tables](#)). Over the years, people in Canada’s second most western province have chronicled to the Angus Reid Institute the ways they feel their place in confederation is neither respected nor taken as seriously as it should be.

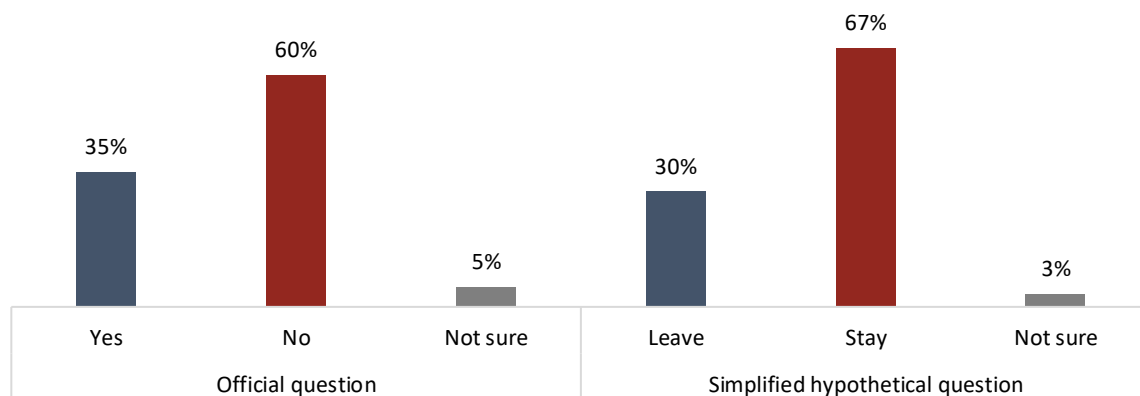
Related: [Unity or Separation: Quebec, Alberta & Canada’s future: How the rest of the country is responding to separatism debates](#)

Next, and importantly, a hypothetical question finds that when Albertans are simply asked whether the province should either stay in Canada or leave, *more* respondents say they would opt to stay than in the first, official, question.

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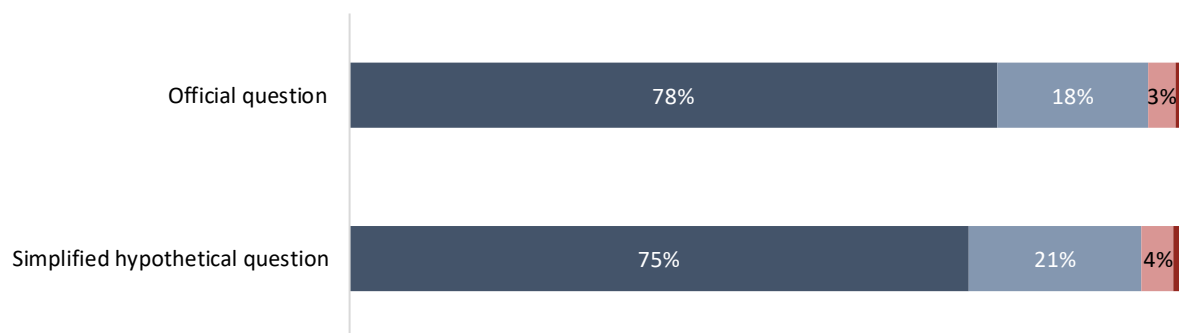
**Responses to official referendum question vs. simplified hypothetical leave/stay referendum
(All respondents, n=800)**



Commitment strong on both sides

That said, it is clear battle lines, for now, are hardening. Among those who respond either to the official or hypothetical question that Alberta should stay in Canada, majorities say they are committed to their stance. The same applies to those who say they opposite.

**Vote commitment, official referendum question vs. simplified hypothetical leave/stay referendum
(Excluding those who aren't sure how they'd vote)**



- Absolutely committed – no way you'll change your mind
- Mostly committed – something could change your mind, but you doubt it
- Not very committed – I'm open to hear the other side
- Not committed at all – I'm just leaning this way at the moment

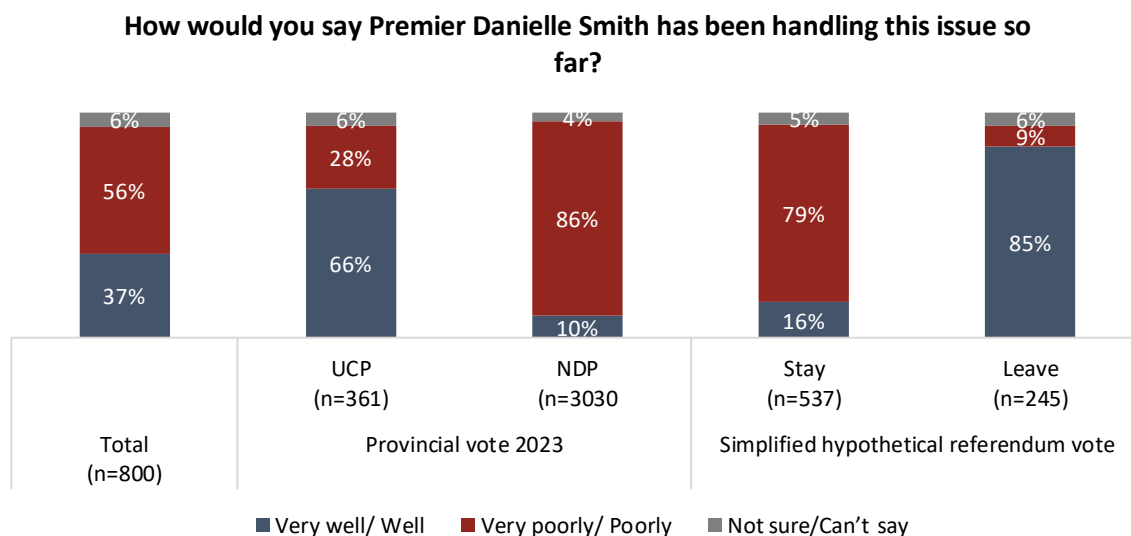
Part Two: Criticism of Premier comes from nearly 30% of UCP voters

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It can be hard out there for a premier. Particularly one facing pressure and criticism not only from her usual, committed opponents, but also from those who may have aligned with her in the past. That is situation facing Smith, currently on the receiving end of wrath from both Alberta separatists and federalists.

A slight majority of Albertans (56%), for their part, tell the Angus Reid Institute the premier has been handling the issue poorly. This importantly includes nearly a third (but not the majority) of UCP voters, and a near-unanimous number of Alberta NDP voters.



Why did Smith call a referendum?

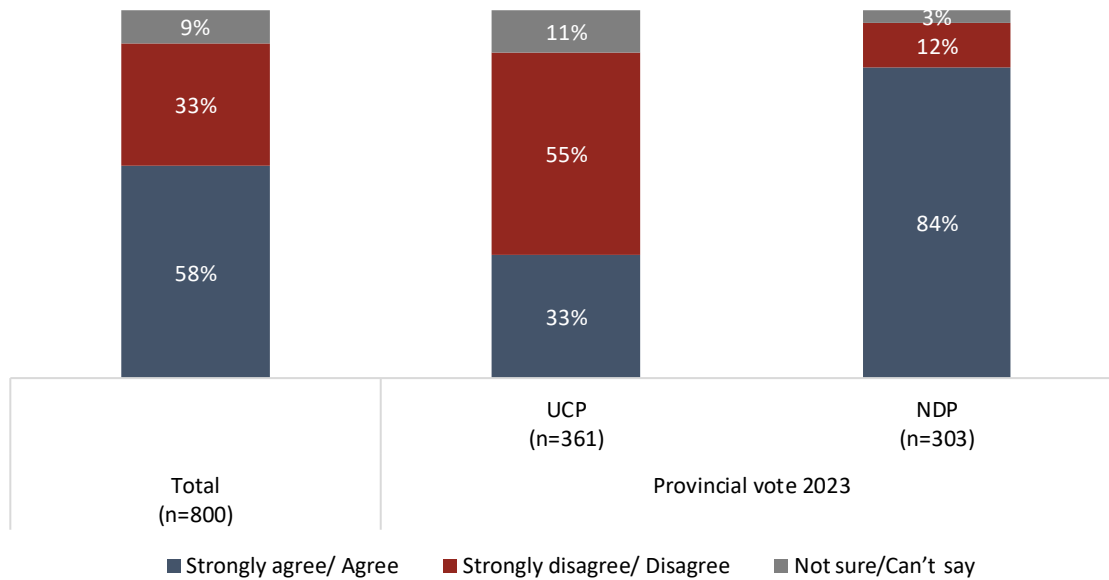
Given Smith's stance that she prefer Alberta remain within Canada, some may ask why she added this question to the existing October 19 referenda. The premier has her decision is driven by wishing to "settle the issue democratically", adding, "she had no choice".

There are clearly many UCP voters and members who are sympathetic to the separatist movement. Some have speculated this wing of the party's pressure on Smith is a key reason she has eased the way for this referendum. A majority (58%) of Albertans agree that Smith's only reason for calling the referendum is because of the separatists in the UCP. Most who voted for the party in 2023 disagree, but there are one-third (33%) who see the referendum as a move by Smith to appease those in the UCP who want to see an independent country of Alberta:

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Agree vs. disagree - "Smith is only calling this referendum to appease the separatists in her party"



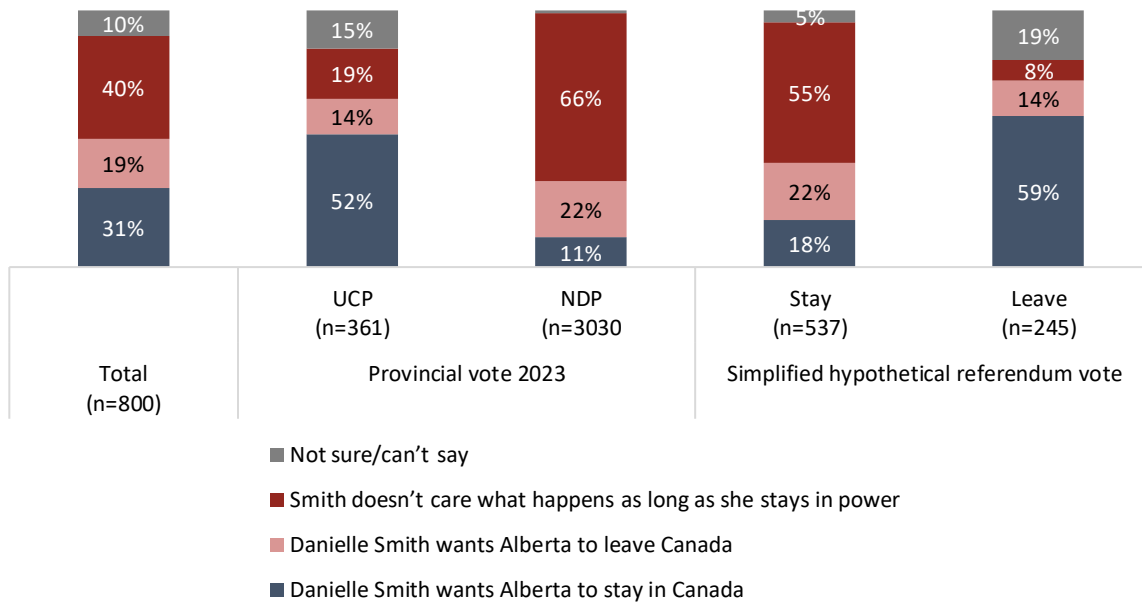
Fewer than one-third say Smith actually wants Alberta to stay in Canada

Premier Smith is on record according to media reports saying "[she would prefer Alberta stay](#)" in Canada, but most Albertans indicate to ARI that they don't believe her. A plurality (40%), including 20 per cent of past UCP voters and two-thirds of past NDP voters, indicate that Smith's motivations are predicated on hanging onto her job as first minister of Alberta. A further one-fifth are of the view Smith's true motivation includes Alberta leaving Canada:

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Which of the following is closest to your own view?



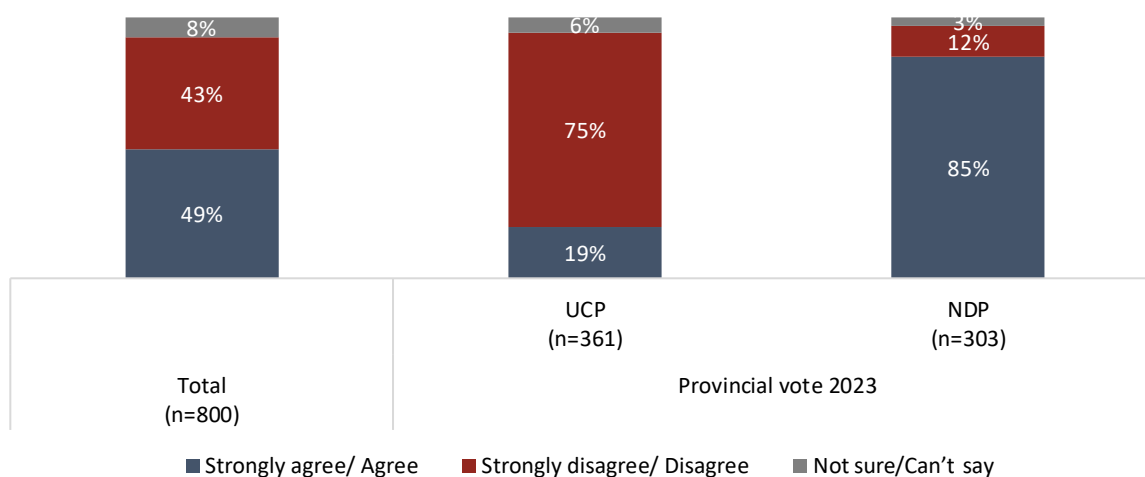
Half call for her resignation

Given these findings, it is perhaps unsurprising that Smith's political challenges stretch from beyond criticism to calls for the premier's ouster outright. Opposition leader Naheed Nenshi has said the premier "doesn't care about governing". Jeffrey Rath, lawyer for the separatist Alberta Prosperity project, has said, "[she has to go](#)". So too, say nearly nine-in-ten NDP voters and nearly 20 per cent of past UCP voters in the wake of [resignations from two UCP cabinet ministers, Nate Horner and Matt Jones](#).

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Agree vs. disagree - "Premier Danielle Smith should resign"



Part Three: Albertans weigh in on Motivations and Consequences of a referendum

Is a referendum the best way to deal with Alberta's grievances?

Some have viewed the threat of separation as [more of a political play to gain leverage with Ottawa](#) than a true bid to create an independent country. Indeed, in 2019, in the wake of Albertan angst over pipeline politics which led to the cancellation of Energy East and the precarious situation around the Trans Mountain expansion before it was ultimately finished, three-in-five Albertans believed that threatening separation was the only way to be heard by the federal government.

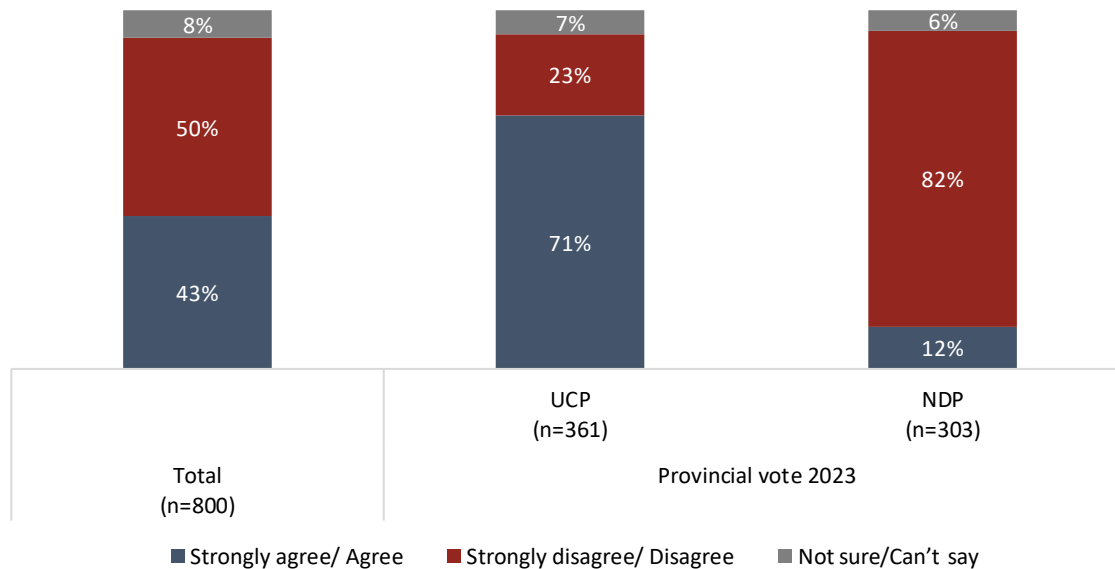
Related: Separatist sentiment? Three-in-10 in Alberta & Saskatchewan say they'd like to leave if Liberals form next government

That belief appears to be less pronounced now with the province on the precipice of referendum on separation. Two-in-five (43%) say they believe this forthcoming vote is a "legitimate way for Alberta to deal with its grievances" while half (50%) disagree. UCP voters (71%) are much more likely to be in the former camp than those who voted NDP in 2023 (12%).

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Agree vs. disagree - "This referendum vote is a legitimate way for Alberta to deal with its grievances"



Would separatists accept a loss?

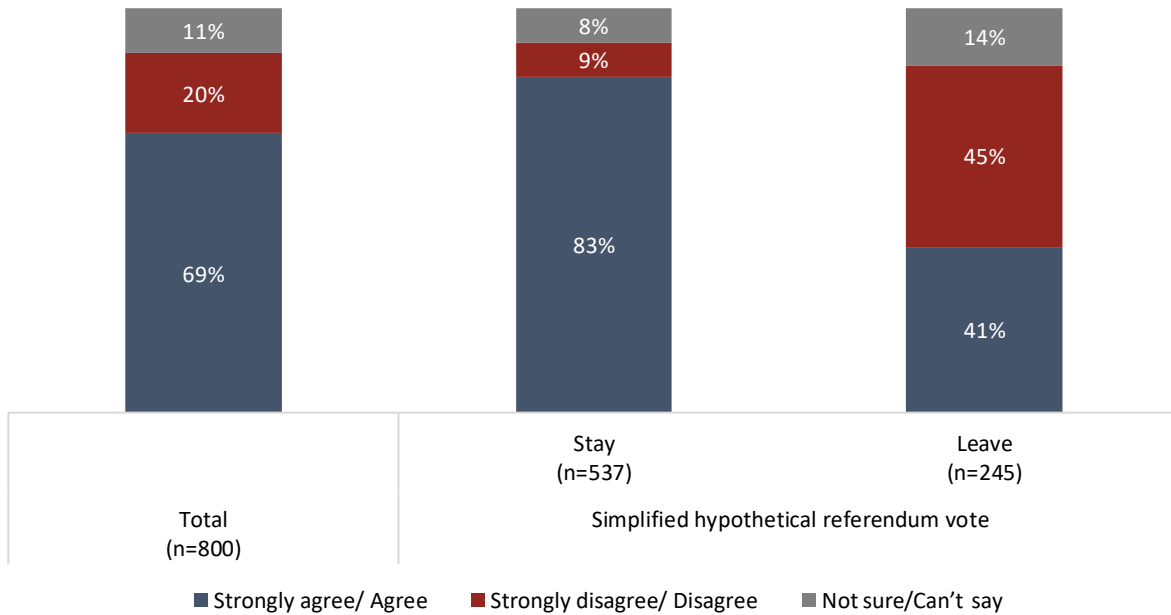
Smith said she would honour the outcome of the fall referendum on holding a future referendum on separation hopes that the separatist advocates in the province “[would honour the outcome as well](#)”. But many in the province expect even a no vote in October would not end the separatist movement. Seven-in-ten (69%) believe “separatists will never accept it” if Albertans vote against furthering the separation process.

Those who would vote to leave in a hypothetical future referendum on the province leaving Canada are split, with similar numbers believing separatists would respect the democratic result (45%) as not (41%):

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Agree vs. disagree - "If Albertans vote against starting the separation process, the separatists will never accept it"



For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

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