Three Ballots in One: Ballot Structure, Coalition Anatomy, and Demographic Splits in the 2026 Alberta Referendum

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1 Overview of the 19 October 2026 Ballot

On 19 October 2026, Alberta voters cast more than 2.07×10^6 ballots across ten provincial referendum questions—the largest ballot count in the province's history. Although presented on a single ballot, the ten questions partitioned into three distinct constitutional and policy regimes:

1. **Questions 1–5 (Non-constitutional provincial policy):** Five proposals on provincial immigration limits, eligibility for provincially funded health and social programs, a 12-month residency waiting period, fees for non-permanent residents, and proof of citizenship to vote.

2. **Questions 6–9 (Constitutional amendments):** Four proposals requiring bilateral or multilateral amendment of the Constitution of Canada: provincial selection of King's Bench and Appeal judges, abolition of the federal Senate, opting out of federal social programs with full funding, and provincial paramountcy over conflicting federal laws.

3. **Question 10 (Sovereignty process):** A binary choice between remaining a province of Canada (Option 1: *Remain*) or commencing the legal process toward a binding referendum on separating from Canada (Option 2: *Referendum*).

Let $p_q \in [0, 1]$ denote the two-way affirmative share on question $q \in \{1, \ldots, 10\}$:

$$p_q = \frac{V_q^{\text{For}}}{V_q^{\text{For}} + V_q^{\text{Against}}}. \tag{1}$$

The official Elections Alberta count reveals a clean regime boundary at the $p_q = 0.50$ threshold:

$$\min_{q\in\{1,\dots,5\}} p_q = 0.5229 > 0.50 > \max_{q\in\{6,\dots,9\}} p_q = 0.4978, \qquad p_{10}^{\text{Remain}} = 0.7495. \tag{2}$$

Q#	Subject	For / Stay	Against	For %
Q1	Provincial immigration control & job priority	1,093,541	907,731	54.64
Q2	Citizen/PR eligibility for social programs	1,032,950	941,379	52.32
Q3	12-month residency wait for benefits	1,053,247	932,163	53.05
Q4	Healthcare/school fee for non-perm. status	1,007,376	919,120	52.29
Q5	Proof of citizenship required to vote	1,083,647	730,033	59.75
Q6	Provincial selection of superior-court judges	832,386	918,241	47.55
Q7	Abolish the unelected federal Senate	898,093	926,950	49.21
Q8	Opt out of federal programs w/ full funding	752,760	855,376	46.81
Q9	Provincial law priority over federal law	785,995	792,812	49.78
Q10	Remain in Canada vs. separation referendum	1,551,868	518,766	74.95

2 Ballot Roll-Off and Issue Salience

Comparing total valid votes $N_q = V_q^{\text{For}} + V_q^{\text{Against}}$ across the ten questions measures voter roll-off relative to Question 10 ($N_{10} = 2{,}070{,}634$):

$$\rho_q = 1 - \frac{N_q}{N_{10}}. \tag{3}$$

Roll-off was minimal on Question 1 ($\rho_1 \simeq 3.35\%$) and Question 3 ($\rho_3 \simeq 4.12\%$), rose to $\rho_5 \simeq 12.4\%$ on voter citizenship ID, and peaked on the technical constitutional paramountcy and fiscal opt-out questions ($\rho_8 \simeq 22.3\%$, $\rho_9 \simeq 23.8\%$). Roughly one in five voters who cast a decisive ballot on remaining in Canada declined to endorse constitutional brinkmanship on Questions 6–9.

3 Demographic Decomposition of Question 10

Combining the Elections Alberta tally with pre-referendum and exit-poll cross-tabs from Abacus Data ($n = 1{,}021$, Oct 7–13, 2026) and Research Co. ($n = 811$ likely voters, Oct 16–18; $n = 601$ exit poll, Oct 19–20) shows how the aggregate 74.95% Remain share arises as a turnout-weighted sum across demographic strata g:

$$P(\text{Remain}) = \sum_g w_g \, P(\text{Remain} \mid g), \qquad \sum_g w_g = 1. \tag{4}$$

3.1 Regional Gradient

Remain won every geographic region of Alberta, but with a 20-point urban–rural gradient:

- **Edmonton Metro:** 77% Remain, 17% Option 2, 6% undecided.
- **Calgary Metro:** 75% Remain, 19% Option 2, 6% undecided.
- **Small Cities & Suburbs:** 62% Remain, 29% Option 2, 9% undecided.
- **Rural Alberta:** 57% Remain, 35% Option 2, 8% undecided.

3.2 Partisan Asymmetry

The referendum's sharpest cleavage ran inside the governing United Conservative Party (UCP) coalition rather than between the two major parties as wholes:

- **Provincial NDP supporters:** 93% Remain, 4% Option 2.
- **Provincial UCP supporters:** 44% Remain, 52% Option 2 (4% undecided), with 77% of all Option 2 voters coming from the UCP base. Among UCP supporters voting Remain, 52% cited economic caution or restraint rather than satisfaction with Ottawa.
- **2025 Federal Vote:** Federal Liberal (95% Remain / 5% Option 2) and Federal NDP (82% Remain / 18% Option 2) voters broke overwhelmingly for Remain, while 2025 Federal Conservative voters split 65% Remain to 35% Option 2.

3.3 Age, Turnout, and Identity Attachment

Turnout strongly favored older cohorts: 85% of voters aged 60+ definitely voted (including mail-in ballots, which broke 93% Remain), compared with 38% of voters under 30. Older Albertans (60+) reported identical 71% strong attachment to both Canada and Alberta. By contrast, interest in Alberta becoming a US state skewed toward younger voters (21% among ages 18–34 vs. 15% among 35–54 and 6% among 55+).

4 Decomposing the Option 2 Coalition: Leverage vs. Secession

A critical analytical mistake is equating the 25.05% Option 2 vote with hard support for independence. Let $M \in \{\text{Independence}, \text{Better Deal}, \text{Direct Say}, \text{Message to Ottawa}, \text{Other}\}$ denote an Option 2 voter's primary motive, with empirical shares $(0.32, 0.23, 0.22, 0.19, 0.04)$, and let $P(\text{Separate} \mid \text{Option 2}) = 0.63$ be the share of Option 2 voters who say they would vote to separate in a binding follow-up referendum. Accounting for non-separatist protest voters yields an implied direct-independence share across the entire electorate of

$$P(\text{Independent Alberta}) \simeq 0.18 \quad (18\%), \tag{5}$$

demonstrating that roughly one-third of the Option 2 vote functioned as constitutional bargaining leverage rather than a mandate to leave Confederation.