

Public Attitudes Towards Devolution of Powers to the Government of the Northwest Territories

SURVEY REPORT

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Background and Methodology

The recent announcement of the devolution of powers agreement between the Canadian Federal Government and the Government of the Northwest Territories marks an end to a lengthy and significant set of negotiations to deliver some authority over public land, resources and revenues to the Territories. In an era of broad fiscal restraint and austerity, new cost-sharing and resource development arrangements between the Federal and NWT governments will likely have wide-ranging effects on the general population. In light of this EKOS Research Associates has conducted a survey for Alternatives North to gather public perception about the deal and its likely effects.

This study involved a telephone survey of 400 residents of the Northwest Territories aged 18 and over, using EKOS' computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) system. The surveys were completed using random digit dialing (RDD), from a routinely updated selection engine, designed to generate geo-coded random samples of telephone numbers. This is an equal probability sample, where every household with a landline in the Northwest Territories had an equal and known chance of selection. Cell phone sampling was not included in this study.

The margin of error associated with the total sample is +/-4.9 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Please note that the margin of error increases when the results are sub-divided (i.e., error margins for sub-groups such as sex, age and education). All the data have been statistically weighted to ensure the samples composition reflects that of the actual population of the Northwest Territories, according to Census data. The survey was carried out March 5-13, 2013.

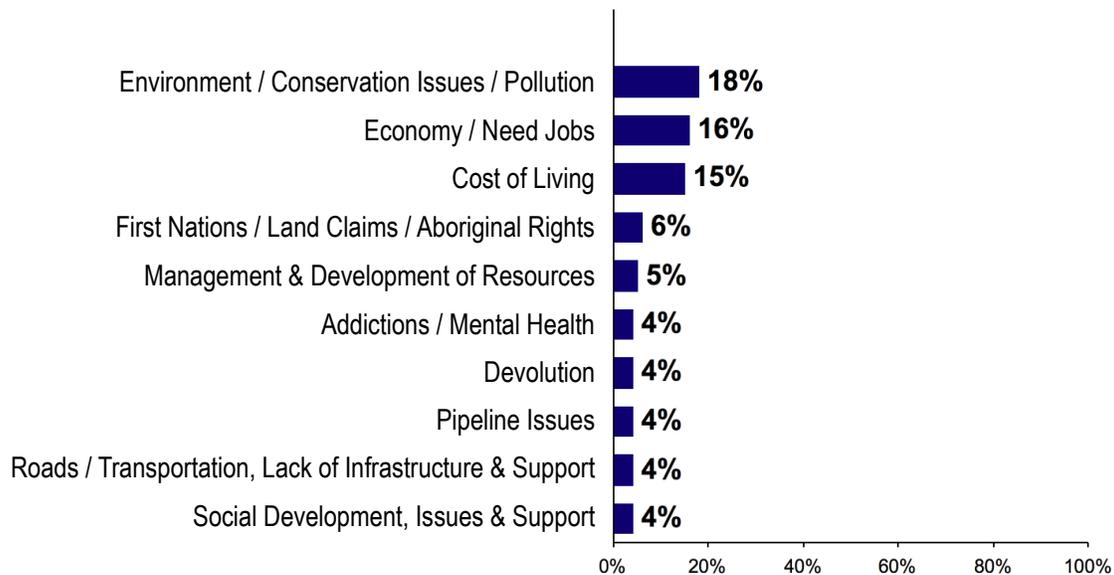
Survey Findings

Outlined below are key findings and conclusions from this study. The survey results are broadly suggestive of a divided populace in the Northwest Territories with big differences in what Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal respondents think about the deal, their degree of support for the character of economic development that is promised by the devolution deal and the need for further public consultation. Smaller divides appear between newer arrivals to the NWT and more established residents. But these differences in perception are outweighed by the very strong public support for some further process of public consultations – nearly three quarters of survey respondents think further consultation is required. Given the recent vote by MLAs in the Legislative Assembly against a plebiscite, this is perhaps the most significant finding of this survey. Also notable is the publics' perception of the (economic) fairness of the deal – significant numbers of respondents are uncertain whether the NWT is getting a 'fair deal' in the re-division of resource revenues and control over lands and waters.

Public Policy Preferences

Future Concerns

“Thinking about the future of the Northwest Territories, what is the ONE ISSUE that CONCERNS you the most?”



(n=400)

NWT Survey, 2013

Here public sentiment appears relatively focused around the twin poles of the Environment and the Economy. Given recent discourse at the federal level (the current government’s singular focus on jobs and an attendant policy focus on reducing environmental review and oversight capacity - most recently in the C-45 omnibus bill) this seems unsurprising. That the devolution arrangement has been promoted in terms of resource rights and development clearly reaffirms this focus.

The fact remains however that of all of the single issues options available to respondents, it is **environment / conservation issues / pollution** (18%) that leads the table, followed closely by the **economy** (16%) and concern over the **cost of living** (15%). This reflects the major public concerns of the day. [Other long-term tracking that EKOS continues to conduct suggests we are entering a prolonged period of ‘hunkering down’ as the public reacts to a perceived slowing of economic progress. We see strong trends towards an ‘end of progress’ ethos that drives respondents to consider their options in more starkly survivalist terms].

Devolution appears at a distant 4% of respondents' choices, but given the context, a more abstract conception of new political arrangements is not likely a core concern for many, at least at first glance. But when the question is understood more concretely in terms of the rights and powers that a devolution arrangement ought to provide, public concern shifts quite markedly. Notable here are the following:

- Non-Aboriginal concern for jobs and the economy is double that of Aboriginal respondents (20% to 11%)
- A similar split emerges between the two groups when polled about concern for support for the environment - Aboriginal respondents were twice as likely to select the environment over non-Aboriginal (25% vs 12%).
- Among those who think devolution is a good or very good deal, and for those that consider themselves either moderately or highly informed, concern for the economy is greater by a factor of up to three (14% highly informed and the largest support levels from among those who self-identify as moderately informed at 35% respectively versus 6% who identify as not informed). That concern for jobs and prior support for the devolution deal are both high is not surprising given these respondents are much more likely to understand the deal as economically beneficial to the NWT (see also questions 5C, 5F)

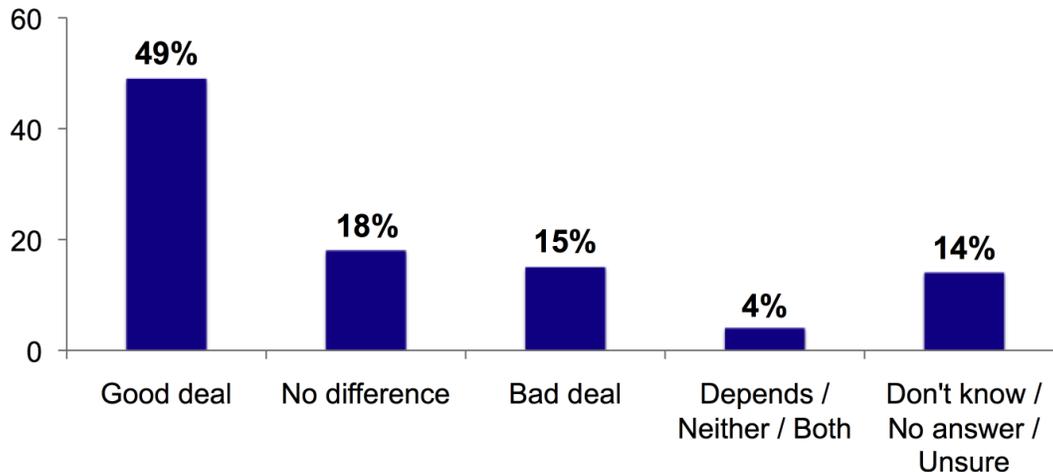
Support for Devolution

After surveying the public's general sense of being informed about the deal, and in light of the initial table of single issues, the next significant question surveyed general attitudes towards the devolution arrangement specifically.

'The NWT territorial government is negotiating with Ottawa over DEVOLUTION to obtain greater control over NWT resources AND an increased share of the tax revenues generated by these resources. From what you've heard so far, do you expect the outcome of current "DEVOLUTION" negotiations to be "A GOOD DEAL", "A BAD DEAL" or "MAKE NO DIFFERENCE" for your community? Would you say "VERY GOOD/BAD" or just SOMEWHAT?'

Expectations over Devolution Deal

“From what you’ve heard so far, do you expect that the outcome of current “DEVOLUTION” negotiations to be “A GOOD DEAL”, “A BAD DEAL” or “MAKE NO DIFFERENCE” for your community?”



(n=400)

NWT Survey, 2013

Here the NWT public clearly thinks the deal is a good one (49% in total, 20% see it as a very good deal, 30% as a somewhat good deal) while 16% see it as a bad deal (10% bad deal, 6% somewhat bad) and 18% see it making no difference. Notable here are the following:

- Men think devolution is a **good** deal more than women do (54% to 45%)
- Non-Aboriginal respondents support it over Aboriginal respondents by 25 points (61% to 36%)
- Newer residents (5 years or under) think it is a better deal than long time residents (71% vs 52%)
- And by a huge margin, those who self-identify as highly informed about the deal think it is a good deal as opposed to those who feel not at all informed (73% vs 32%)
- Among those who thought it would make **no difference** the only significant difference is between Aboriginal respondents and non-Aboriginal respondents (25% vs 12%)

- The only significant differences among those who think devolution is a **bad deal** are between Aboriginal respondents and non-Aboriginal respondents (20% vs 10%)

The split between Aboriginal respondents and non-Aboriginal respondents is reinforced here along with a substantial difference in opinion between new residents and those already established as to the merits of devolution. That respondents who identify as highly informed think the deal is a good one may not reflect anything more than a sense of self-confidence in this group – ‘I’ve understood this deal as granting ‘power’ to the Territories and it will come through ‘resource rights and as such I think it a good deal’

Economic benefit understood as a ‘fair deal’

When asked if they understood the Devolution agreement as a fair deal on economic terms the public is still largely positive. Whether in term of **tax revenues** (44% think it a fair deal vs 20% who don’t but with a huge group that are unsure 38%) or **control over resources** (43% vs 12% vs 45% uncertain) the significant feature here is that an equal or larger number are uncertain. New residents think it will be a fair deal as do non-Aboriginals but given that nearly half of respondents are uncertain about the deal as inherently fair is an important insight into the public mind and certainly suggestive for future debate and discussion. When cast solely on economic terms, support is high, but the public is uncertain the deal as it now stands is the *fairest* deal possible.

A more fine-grained reading of the devolution arrangement

“Please say, to the best of your ability, whether you believe the DEAL being negotiated on DEVOLUTION by the current NWT government will make things BETTER, WORSE or the SAME for each the following areas...?”

Here the survey looked at how respondents would react if the devolution agreement is understood in more concrete fashion. Significant highlights from across the thirteen issues areas include:

- By a significant margin non-Aboriginal respondents think devolution will be better for **people like yourself** than Aboriginal respondents do (34% vs 19%). So too for recent arrivals to the NWT over long-time residents.
- A small edge goes to those who think **government jobs** will be better served by devolution (41% better, 34% same, 10% worse, 15% don’t know or depends). Long time residents are most likely to think public sector jobs will be helped by the devolution

agreement. This may reflect differences in where new arrivals and established residents are employed – although likely public sector employment outcomes are not expected to be positive.

- An even larger spread appears for the **NWT Economy** category with positive support just over half (51%) with only 11% seeing things as worse under devolution and 22 % seeing no change, 14% unsure or don't know. So fully three quarters of the population see the deal as either positive or neutral for the economy at its most abstract. The biggest gap is between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal appears here (40% vs 60%) with a similar gap between women and men
- So too for **resource development** with 53% assuming things would improve, 17% seeing no change, only 15% predicting things would get worse and 15% unsure. The largest spread (between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal respondents) emerges here with nearly three times the number of Aboriginals predicting things would be made worse (22% vs 8%). The opposite is equally disparate with 59% of non-Aboriginals assuming things will be better as opposed to 47% of Aboriginal respondents. When asked in terms of **Corporate and private sector profits and wealth** surveyed support is also high (50% expecting things to get better and 24% at least neutral). In keeping with other findings the highest support is found in recent residents and non-Aboriginal respondents.
- When asked to think about changes to **Quality of life** differences in public response are a little less robust, with 37% seeing positive change while the same percentage think nothing will change, only 10% see it worsening quality of life and 16% weren't sure
- In a similar vein a small number of respondents thought **local government services** would improve (30%) whereas a much larger group thought nothing would change (44%) while 11% expected things to worsen and 14% are uncertain. Similar differences emerge here as with other categories between gender and along aboriginal/non-aboriginal lines.
- **Protection of land and water** under devolution has wide support (40% to 21%) that is highest among new arrivals to NWT and between Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal respondents (48% to 31%). The numbers are very similar when the question is asked about **birds, fish and wildlife**.
- Likely improvement to **social conditions in your community** elicits a more neutral response (35% think devolution will improve conditions but 41% think the effect will be neutral). Similar responses are seen in terms of future **relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples** with a very neutral response pattern – except among those who think relations will be made worse. Here only 10% of Aboriginal respondents expect things to worsen while 23% of non-Aboriginal respondents do.
- More than half of respondents expect the **position of women** to stay the same.

Clearly, when the question is framed in starkly economic terms, public support is largely in favour of, or at least neutral to, the presumed economic benefits of the devolution agreement. But when queried in terms that are more abstracted and communal in scope, public reaction is more mixed. So when understood in terms of 'the economy' or 'jobs' or even 'resource development' there is a large plurality of support from the surveyed population. But at the same time there is a far more hesitant public reaction to the broader effects of the deal. This should not be surprising – as suggested above - our tracking of the Canadian public suggests some core sentiments reflective of a deep worry over global economic conditions. But there are still powerful concerns for equality and accountability in politics and policy-making and this more neutral stance is very much in keeping with our values tracking.

Typically here, support is substantially different between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal respondents, between men and women, and at times, between recent and long-time residents. When the question is cast in more abstract terms – asking respondents to make deeper assessments about the quality of life or social conditions, thinking in terms of their community produces a less robust degree of support

Public support for further consultation

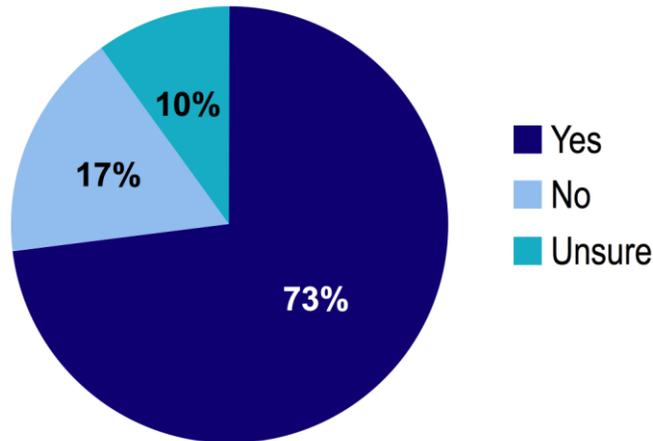
When asked about consultation efforts to date (Q6), the public is very much dissatisfied. Respondents are twice as likely to describe prior consultation efforts as inadequate (61% feel it inadequate and 34% think efforts so far have been sufficient)

When asked about the need for more public consultation, there is overwhelming support for a plebiscite.

'Before signing the agreement to create Nunavut, the NWT government of the time, asked NWT residents to vote on the proposal. In your opinion should the NWT Government ask NWT residents to vote on whether to accept the proposed DEVOLUTION deal with Ottawa before the deal is finalized?'

Residents To Vote Before Deal Finalized

“In your opinion should the NWT Government ask NWT residents to vote on whether to accept the proposed DEVOLUTION deal with Ottawa before the deal is finalized? ”



In what is perhaps the most important finding here, **just over 7 in 10 respondents** in NWT think that residents should have a vote on the proposed deal with Ottawa on devolution of powers.

POSITIVE RESPONDENTS

- Support for a plebiscite is minimally divided across gender (6 points) with a much larger difference between Aboriginal and non-aboriginal respondents (81% vs 66% supportive of having a vote on the issue).
- The lowest levels of positive support for a plebiscite appear from those respondents that have lived the longest in NWT (27 points lower support from those that have lived 20+ years versus shorter-term residents)
- Among respondents that consider themselves highly informed about the proposed deal there is substantially lower support for a plebiscite (up to 40 point spread between highly informed and somewhat/not at all informed)

- And the more a respondent thinks devolution is a very good deal for the NWT the lower their positive support for a further vote (25 points between those who think the deal is a good one and those that think it is a bad deal)

These findings suggest that while general support is much higher for a plebiscite, Aboriginal residents are much more supportive of the idea, while long time residents, those who self-identify as being well-informed about the deal, or who already think the deal is good are less supportive of consulting the public any further.

Presumably the respondents that think the deal is already a good one don't feel the pressing need to spend more time consulting with the public – a scan of the open-ended responses suggests this is the case. But nearly one half of all respondents (and nearly 60% of Aboriginal respondents) appealed to the general democratic principles that 'all should have a say' or that there is a fundamental and democratic 'right to vote' on issues such as this.

For those who think they know a great deal about the devolution proposal there is less positive support for consultation (44% of highly informed respondents vs 84% somewhat informed / 75% not informed). The reasoning is less clear since their lower level of positive support for a referendum might be because they think, as above, the deal is a good one and feel confident in their assessment of its merits and don't feel a need to consult the public any further on a deal they already support.

NEGATIVE RESPONDENTS

- Among those opposed to a plebiscite, the notable differences are found between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups. (More than four times as many non-aboriginal respondents see no need for consultation as do Aboriginal respondents (26% vs 6%).)
- The longer respondents have lived in NWT, the higher their opposition to a plebiscite (four times that of more recent residents, 39% vs 10%)
- Those more highly informed about the deal are significantly more opposed to a plebiscite (52% of highly informed respondents vs 9% each for those who have little or no knowledge)
- Strong differences also appear between those who think devolution is a very good deal for NWT and those that do not (37% of those who think devolution is a good deal do not support a public vote while only 9% of those who feel poorly informed are opposed)

Unsurprisingly those who think the deal is a good one see no further need for a public vote – again owing to a sense that what is already deemed a good deal doesn't require any further electoral engagement. Highly informed respondents are also significantly more likely to not want a

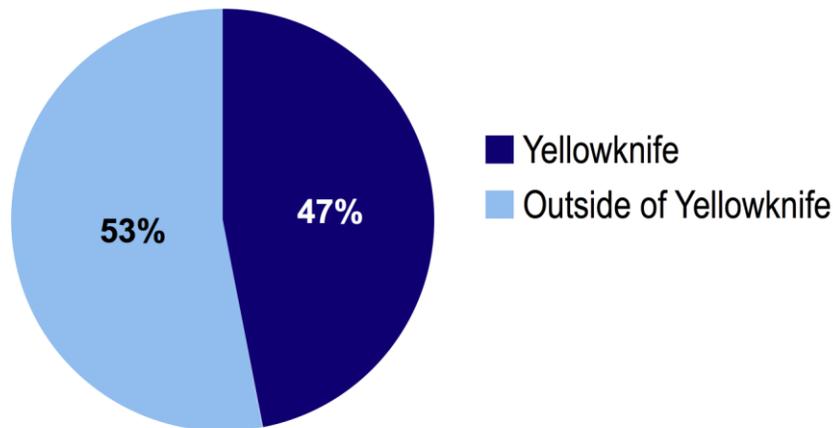
plebiscite (the logic presumably the same as in the previous section). Gender responses here are essentially the same.

ARE THERE URBAN-RURAL DIFFERENCES?

As a rough geographic proxy that may be useful in developing further polling, advocacy and communication strategy, we went back and looked at the postal codes – using as a rough guide postal codes inside Yellowknife and those outside of it to see if anything interesting could be gleaned. We see the overall sample population is fairly evenly split (47% to 53%) with a much larger percentage of non-Aboriginal and new residents living in Yellowknife itself.

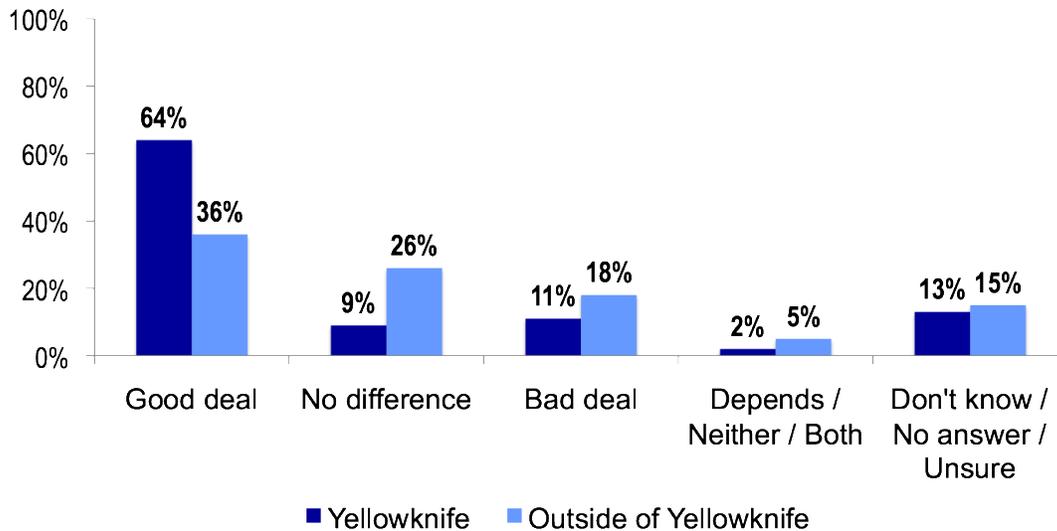
Although perhaps a crude measure of confirmation we see here that those living in Yellowknife are far more inclined to think the devolution arrangement will be a good or very good deal for the NWT. And respondents outside of Yellowknife are markedly more likely to self-identify as being ill informed about the deal and to think the deal will have no effect or a negative effect. See figures below for specific details. This split is in keeping with indicated support for the devolution deal and for a tendency to understand the deal first and foremost in economic terms that was evident earlier in the survey.

Respondents living in or out of Yellowknife



Expectations over Devolution Deal

“From what you’ve heard so far, do you expect that the outcome of current “DEVOLUTION” negotiations to be “A GOOD DEAL”, “A BAD DEAL” or “MAKE NO DIFFERENCE” for your community?”



(n=400)

NWT Survey, 2013

- Support for the devolution deal is substantially higher in Yellowknife than out of the city (of those who think it a good deal, 64% are in Yellowknife with 36% outside,)
- For those neutral to the deal, three times as many are out of the city (26% vs 9%)
- For those opposed to the deal it is a little more mixed (11 in city and 18% out of city)
- Public support for a plebiscite reveals a mixed result - which confirms the cross-cutting demand for more consultation (70 % in city and 75% out of Yellowknife)
- The only notable point is that of those who do not want a plebiscite, it is 9 points higher in Yellowknife (which correlates with higher urban support for the deal - 'why consult further when we know the deal is good') (22% vs 13%)

Residents to Vote Before Deal Finalized

“In your opinion, should the NWT Government ask NWT residents to vote on whether to accept the proposed DEVOLUTION deal with Ottawa before the deal is finalized 2014?”

