



In Wake of Constitutional Crisis, Dominion Institute Survey Demonstrates that Canadians Lack Basic Understanding of our Country's Parliamentary System

*Half of Canadians (51%) Believe the Prime Minister is Directly Elected by Voters
and Three in Four (75%) Don't Know Who Canada's Head of State Is*

Toronto, December 15, 2008 – The last two weeks have marked a time in Canadian political history that will not soon be forgotten. According to a new Dominion Institute poll conducted by Ipsos Reid in the wake of the recent constitutional crisis, many Canadians lack basic knowledge of our country's parliamentary system, including how the Prime Minister is elected and who Canada's head of state is.

"During the recent constitutional crisis, we heard many conflicting, often incorrect, messages about how Canadian democracy works, and what powers the Governor General actually has," said Marc Chalifoux, Executive Director of the Dominion Institute. "Citizens need to understand the basic elements of our parliamentary system if they are to develop informed opinions and take part meaningfully in public debate."

The survey found that Canadians are split on whether the Prime Minister is directly or indirectly elected by the people of Canada. One half (51%) believes he is directly elected, while the other half (49%) believes he is not. In fact, the Prime Minister is not directly elected, as Canadians vote for their local Member of Parliament, and the leader of the party with the most seats in parliament is invited by the Governor General to become Prime Minister.

Four in ten (42%) believe that the Prime Minister is Canada's head of state, and one in three (33%) think this title belongs to the Governor General. In truth, though, the Queen is Canada's Head of State, and only one quarter (24%) of Canadians knew this.

Four in ten (41%) Canadians were unable to correctly identify Canada as a 'constitutional monarchy'. One in four (25%) Canadians described it as a 'cooperative assembly' and 17% believed Canada is a 'representative republic'.

Much debate has ensued around whether or not the Governor General could constitutionally refuse a sitting Prime Minister's request for a new election if he no longer commanded the confidence of the House of Commons, particularly when an election has just occurred. While one in ten (10%) believe that the Governor General cannot refuse the Prime Minister's request, nine in ten (90%) believe that she can. The Governor General can in fact refuse this request as part of her reserve powers. This scenario could be at play in January or February if the opposition parties decide to defeat the government's budget in a vote of non-confidence.

"The Dominion Institute hopes that the events of the past two weeks demonstrate that steps must be taken now to improve civic literacy in Canada," added Marc Chalifoux, the Institute's Executive Director.

For detailed survey results, visit: <http://dominion.ca/polling.htm>.

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