

## V. CANADIAN IDENTITY AND INDEPENDENCE

### A. Independence

A strong majority believed that the Canadian economy would become so closely tied to the American economy under a free trade agreement that it could affect our ability to make our own decisions, over the long term. They also felt that free trade would lead to a loss of independence or sovereignty for Canada in the end.

Free trade was directly linked with the acceleration of a process whereby the Americans were perceived to be increasing control of the North American economy. Very few believed that Canada enjoys an independent economic status at the present time, but even they rallied to the majority view that in the future, Canada will likely fall more and more under American influence.

In the short term, many believed things would not change greatly under a free trade deal, because the Americans would make sure of being "easy" with Canada to persuade us to sign. In the long term, however, virtually all believed that Canada would suffer a loss of independence and identity. This is in contrast to the results of the other groups in which participants expressed concern about a possible loss of independence or control, but were relatively unconcerned about free trade posing a threat to Canadians' sense of identity.

For a plurality of Montreal group participants, the great wealth of the United States was perceived to be the main threat ("they'll buy us out") to Canada's sovereignty, particularly in regard to control over Canada's natural resources.

Participants were asked if a continuance of present practices (i.e. quotas in certain areas, rules on ownership, etc.) would sensibly alter their perceptions of the outcome of the free trade talks, there were indications that participants' views would become more favourable towards the initiative. They appeared to be moved to hold this view if they believed that through free trade Canada was building on its existing strengths, as opposed to entirely reconstituting its bilateral ties with the United States.