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MAJORITY OF CANADIANS CONTINUE TO SUPPORT  
FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

Public opinion research conducted for the Department of External Affairs during May, 1988 shows a majority of Canadians continue to support the pact.

On behalf of the Department of External Affairs, Decima Research Limited of Toronto conducted a national poll between May 9, 1988 and May 15, 1988. They determined that there had been no significant shift from the level of support found in the survey of December 8 - 16, 1987.

|                        | <u>Support</u> | <u>Oppose</u> | <u>No Opinion</u> |
|------------------------|----------------|---------------|-------------------|
| May 9 - May 15, 1988   | 51             | 43            | 6                 |
| Dec. 8 - Dec. 16, 1987 | 51             | 42            | 8                 |

The reported aggregate results are for a weighted sample of 857 Canadians which is proportionate to the national population. Results for a sample of this size are accurate to plus or minus 3.4%, 95 times out of 100.

Attached is a summary by Decima Research of public opinion trends, along with poll questions and results.

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SUMMARY - DECIMA RESEARCH LTD. POLL -  
MAY 1988

Overall Support/Opposition

In general attitudes towards the Free Trade Agreement remain stable, with 51% supporting the deal and 43% opposing. There has been no significant shift from the level found in December.

Despite the profile which this issue has achieved over the last few years, a remarkably large segment of the population reports feeling that they do not know enough about the agreement, and feel the government should be providing more information.

Economic Considerations

Most Canadians believe that free trade will bring economic benefits, at a national, provincial and household level, findings which are consistent again with past surveys.

Most people seem uncertain about specifically how these benefits will materialize. However, two-thirds of those interviewed anticipated lower consumer prices.

Majorities continue to disagree that U.S. branch plants will close, that incomes will be higher or that regional disparities will end.

In short, while there remains some uncertainty about the specific economic impacts of free trade, overall people tend to think the effect will be positive.

To the extent that they will make predictions about the effect of free trade on specific industries, people generally assume that the oil and gas, wood and paper products, and fish and fish products industries will benefit, while agriculture, wine, autos, and films, books and magazines will be adversely affected. It should be strongly noted that the degree of consensus on any of these is very slight: Most people acknowledge their unfamiliarity with the contents of the Agreement and appear to have absorbed little information about sector-specific effects.

A consistent majority of Canadians have said that they will be basing their view of free trade on economic criteria, rather than those relating to Canada's degree of independence from the United States. Among this group, two of three say they anticipate economic gains rather than losses for Canada.

### Other Issues

Questions about how free trade might affect Canada's ability to retain its independence from the U.S. have attracted a lot of public attention. Nevertheless, the number of people who say they consider this issue to be paramount and who feel that our independence will be weakened has not at any time exceeded 30%.

There is a consistent majority who feel that closer economic ties will mean a loss of some control for Canada, and that free trade will increase American cultural influences. This appears moderated somewhat by the fact that people say it is possible for the two countries to become more similar while the two peoples remain different.

Alongside this, people do not think that closer ties will affect Canada's ability to maintain its distinctive social programs.

Most Canadians expect a moderate amount of federal adjustment assistance, and as of this sounding seem uncertain about whether such assistance is being planned. There seems little strong consensus about the form this aid should take, but there is a mild preference for the government helping shoulder the financial costs of adjustment.

Most people believe that this Agreement will affect average workers and think the time has arrived to start planning on how to take advantage of the opportunities free trade presents.

A majority continue to say they view the Agreement as part of a larger effort to enhance Canada's trade situation around the world.

Some doubts persist about whether Canada got the best deal possible, however, it remains worth noting that people can hold concerns in this area but still be of the view that the deal is in Canada's best interests.

Consistent with earlier findings, a majority continue to feel that Canada-U.S. free trade is more a question of economics than one of Canadian independence.