



By: TA | AP Brief

Alberta voters reject a move toward independence



Voters in Canada's oil-rich Alberta province overwhelmingly backed remaining in Canada, with early **referendum** results Tuesday delivering a boost to Prime Minister Mark Carney's push for national unity amid U.S. President Donald Trump's trade war and annexation threats.

With more than 1 million votes counted, 77% supported remaining in Canada, while 23% backed beginning a process toward separation, according to unofficial results from Elections Alberta.

The vote was not a direct referendum on independence but would have set oil-rich Alberta on a path toward a future vote on separation from Canada.

Alberta Premier Danielle Smith welcomed the early results, saying they showed widespread support for remaining in Canada.

"Albertans have voted for a stronger Alberta in a united Canada," Smith posted on social media.

Smith, who called the referendum amid pressure from separatists within her governing United Conservative Party despite opposing independence, said she would address the province Tuesday evening about the results and Alberta's future.

"We are a solid country that's united from coast to coast to coast," Thomas Lukaszuk, a former Alberta deputy premier who led the Forever Canadian campaign against separation, told supporters.

Results were delayed after late openings forced more than 100 polling stations to **extend voting hours** Monday.

Alberta, home to the world's fourth-largest proven oil reserves, is cowboy country and a conservative stronghold whose political culture has long had more in common with the American West than much of Canada.

Resentment toward Ottawa runs deep, but has not traditionally translated into widespread

support for independence.

Despite the proposal's apparent failure, **separatist leaders** have said they turned a fringe cause into a movement that will not disappear.

Carney earlier urged Albertans to deliver a decisive vote for unity. "Vote like Canada's future depends on it because it does," he told a rally Friday in Edmonton, where he grew up.

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Separatist parties traditionally attracted only 1% or 2% of the vote, former Premier Jason Kenney said. Anger over COVID-19 restrictions helped mobilize activists who later embraced the separatist movement, he said.

Trump's trade war and threats to make Canada the 51st U.S. state have helped **Carney rally support** in Alberta, where Liberal prime ministers have historically been unpopular.

Separatist advocate Jeff Rath said he would be thrilled if 30% of Albertans voted to begin the separation process. He wants Smith ousted as leader of her governing United Conservative Party and said the party could splinter, potentially creating a new pro-independence party.

Dustin Degenhardt, a Wainwright voter, said Albertans have long been mistreated by Ottawa.

Alberta has essentially been treated as a colony - Dustin Degenhardt

"Alberta has essentially been treated as, you know, a colony," he said after voting Monday. "They want to take and take and take from us and not return anything."

Taylor MacIsaac, another Wainwright voter, backed separation.

“I think it’ll be good for Alberta to separate personally, as a very conservative individual that grew up in rural Alberta,” she said.

Dave Malka, 59, of Edmonton, criticized spending money on a “referendum on a referendum” rather than health care.

With Trump threatening Canada, Malka said, “It seems to be happening at the absolute worst time when we should be united; instead we’re fighting among ourselves.”

Jake Graham, 35, of Calgary, attended a Carney rally wearing maple leaf pants and a Canada hockey jacket. He hopes the vote ends the debate.

“I hope this squashes this for a long time to come and that it’s clear and decisive, that these grumblings disappear for a while and we can be a united Canada,” he said.