

NEWS RELEASE: Public Opinion Poll

Negative Initial Reaction to the 2015 Ontario Budget

(27-Apr-2015 | Toronto) – An online survey of 1,017 Ontarians from Friday, April 24 to Sunday, April 26, 2015 shows a strong negative reaction to the provincial budget. Digging deeper, we find some specific measures generate a positive reaction but so do some opposition arguments.

Among the 53% who are sure they have heard about this budget, one third (34%) are satisfied while 60% are dissatisfied. Satisfaction comes primarily from voters who identify with the Liberal party (58% satisfied) while a majority in all other partisan groups are dissatisfied with the budget.

While every measure of budget impact is more negative than positive, several areas stand out as particularly negative.

1. This budget is seen as a tax and fee raising budget. Well over half say they will pay more in taxes (62%) and fees (67%).
2. This budget is seen as bad for health care with 48% saying health care will be worse off and just 9% stating better off. Even 35% of Liberal identifiers say the budget will leave health worse off.

We asked respondents to react to seven specific budget initiatives and indicate whether these measures would leave them more or less likely to vote Liberal. As described, four clearly help Liberal fortunes:

- Investing \$130 billion on transit, roads, bridges and other infrastructure over the next 10 years
- An additional \$200 million invested in the Jobs and Prosperity Fund to attract more business investments and create jobs
- Eliminating the province's \$8.5 billion deficit by the 2017-18 fiscal year
- The creation of an Ontario Retirement Pension Plan

Another two leave voters more ambivalent:

- The government will raise \$100 million a year with a new beer tax that will increase the price of beer by about 25 cents a year for four years on the cost of a case of 24
- No wage increases for public sector workers - including teachers and nurses - until the \$8.5 billion deficit has been eliminated

The only measure with a clear negative impact on first impression is “Selling 60% of Hydro One, with no shareholder allowed to control more than 10% of the company with government retaining 40% ownership and remaining the single largest shareholder.”

We tested three arguments in opposition to government initiatives as well.

- 65% say selling off government assets is not a good way to raise funds for other investments.
- 49% agree and only 27% disagree that the Ontario retirement Pension Plan is just a hidden tax.
- 49% agree and 39% disagree that it is not fair to government workers to make them wait until the budget is balanced before they can get any raises at all

As with the budget, only about half of Ontarians (47%) are familiar with the idea of cap and trade with only 10% claiming a detailed understanding. On first impression, Ontarians are divided on cap and trade with a third favourable, a third unfavourable and a third uncertain. When we explain cap and trade as a proponent would, support grows to 54% with only 18% opposed.

Looking across the poll, it is clear the budget is off to a rocky start. Initial impressions are negative. While most specific initiatives tested enjoy a positive response when respondents are introduced to the ideas, opposition attacks also enjoy good support.

Compared to last year, the Liberals find themselves in a tougher starting position with the budget seen primarily as a revenue grab. Building support for the sale of Hydro One will be a challenge and cap and trade will require a major communications push to build support.

The Liberals remain in a good political position leading both in vote and Party ID, but Sir Humphrey from *Yes Minister* would likely call the 2015 Ontario budget a “courageous” document.

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