



Overview of Public Opinion

July 2009

Presented to the Government of Alberta

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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Research Findings	5
Economic Perceptions.....	5
Provincial Priorities	6
Satisfaction Levels.....	7
Health Care	8
Conclusions	12

Introduction


Harris/Decima is pleased to present the following report to the Public Affairs Bureau of the Government of Alberta. This report is based on a province wide survey of 1,005 residents, conducted by phone, between May 28th and June 4th, 2009. The margin of error for this study is 3.2%, 19 times out of 20.

The objectives of the research study were to:

- assess the current economic perceptions and expectations of provincial residents;
- assess their satisfaction with the performance of the provincial government at a general level and with respect to a number of detailed areas of policy;
- assess public priorities for government focus; and,
- assess reactions to a number of policy ideas or initiatives that could be considered by the government of Alberta.

Methodology

Sample size	
Total	1,005
Region	North (86)
	Edmonton (329)
	Central (130)
	Calgary (342)
	South (118)
Field dates	May 28 to June 4, 2009
Margin of error	+/- 3.2%



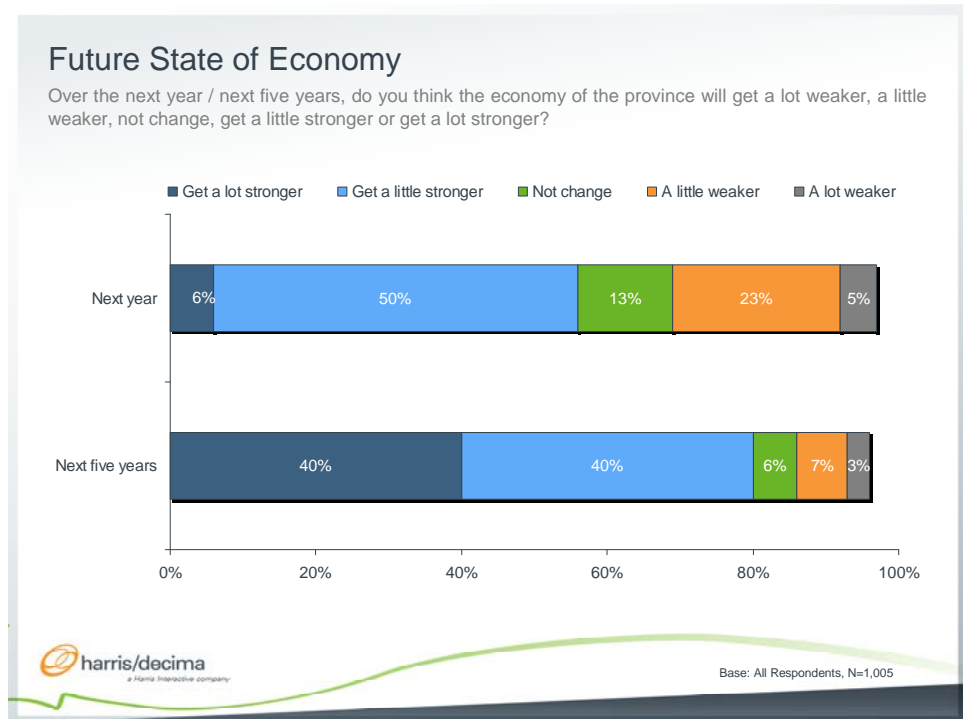
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Research Findings

Economic Perceptions

Albertans are optimistic about the economy in both the short term and the long term.

- 56% say that they think the Alberta economy will grow over the coming year.
- 80% believe the economy will become stronger over the coming five years, including 40% who say it will get a lot stronger.



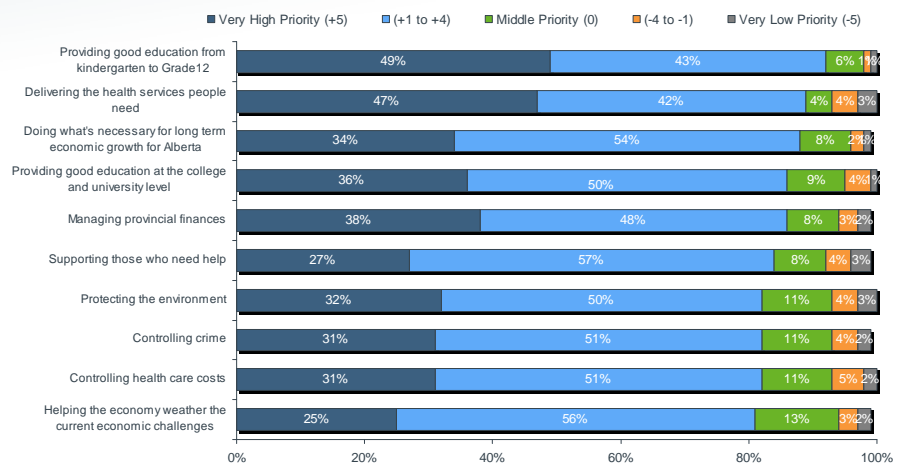
Provincial Priorities

When it comes to the priorities which residents of the province would set for their provincial government, there are many things which most people consider important; however, health and K-12 education are at the top of the list:

- 49% would assign a 5 out of 5 in terms of the priority they would put on “providing good education from kindergarten to Grade 12”.
- 47% would assign a 5 out of 5 for the priority they would put on “delivering the health services people need”.
- A little further down the list of priorities would be “doing what’s necessary for long term economic growth for Alberta”, “providing good post secondary education”, and “managing provincial finances”.
- Large majorities also say that supporting those who need help, protecting the environment, controlling crime and controlling health care costs, should be high priorities for the provincial government.
- The lowest rated priority is “helping the economy weather the current economic challenges”.

Issue Priority

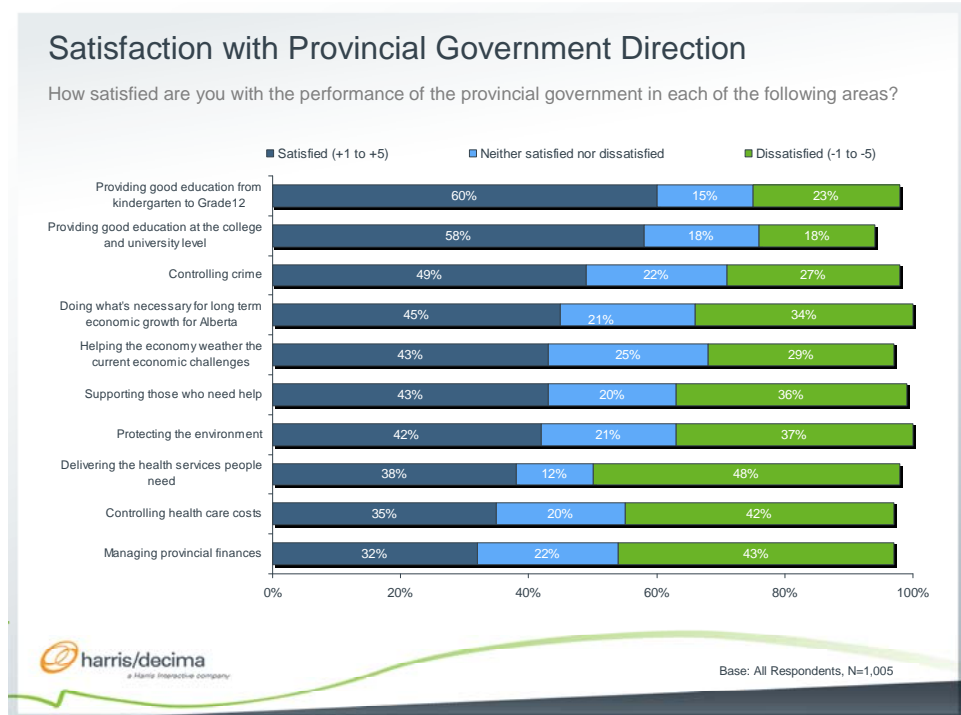
For each of following provincial priorities, please tell me if you think this should be a high or low priority using a scale of -5 to +5, where -5 means you think it should be a very low priority and +5 means a very high priority and zero means a middle priority.



Satisfaction Levels

When asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with the direction of the provincial government, responses range from 60% satisfied to 32% satisfied, depending on the specific area of assessment.

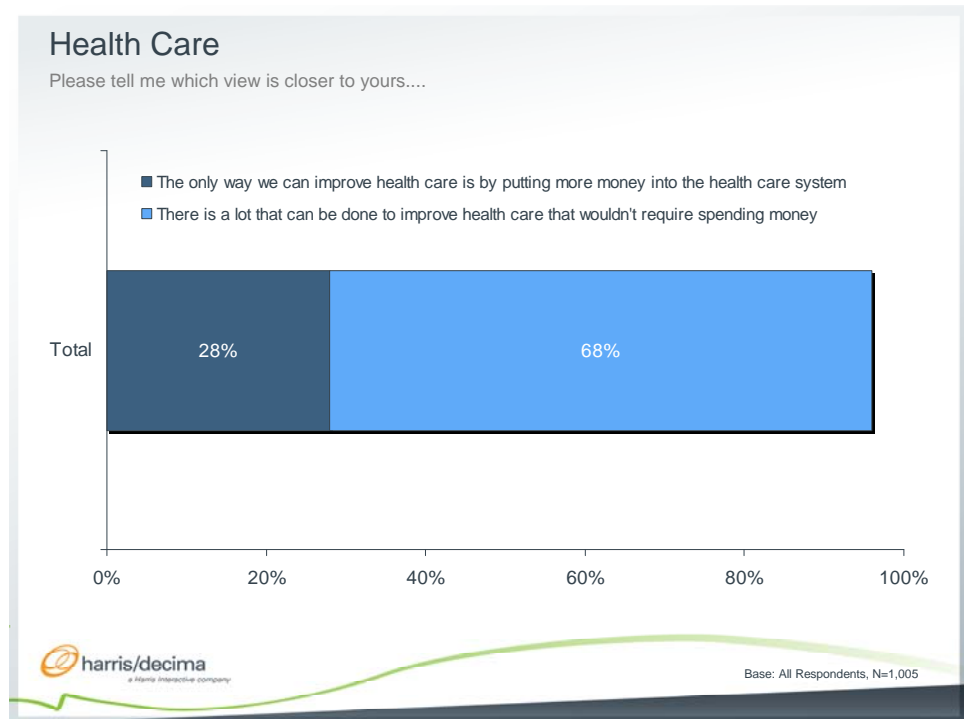
- Education, which happens to be among the most important priorities for the public, is also the area of responsibility where satisfaction levels are highest. Roughly 60% are satisfied with education, including K-12 and post secondary.
- Satisfaction levels are also relatively elevated for “controlling crime”, “doing what’s necessary for long term economic growth”, “helping the economy weather current economic challenges”, and “supporting those who need help”.
- 42% are satisfied when it comes to protection of the environment.
- Satisfaction levels are lowest for “delivering health services people need”, “controlling health care costs” and “managing provincial finances”. Worth noting is that most governments in Canada have experienced low ratings for health services for a long time.

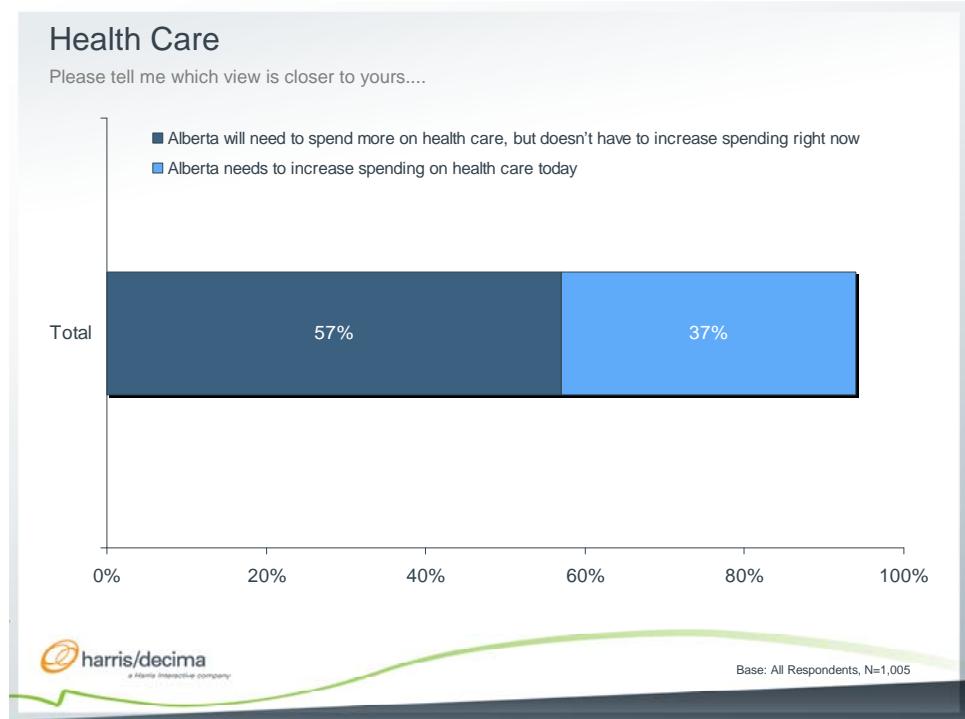


Health Care

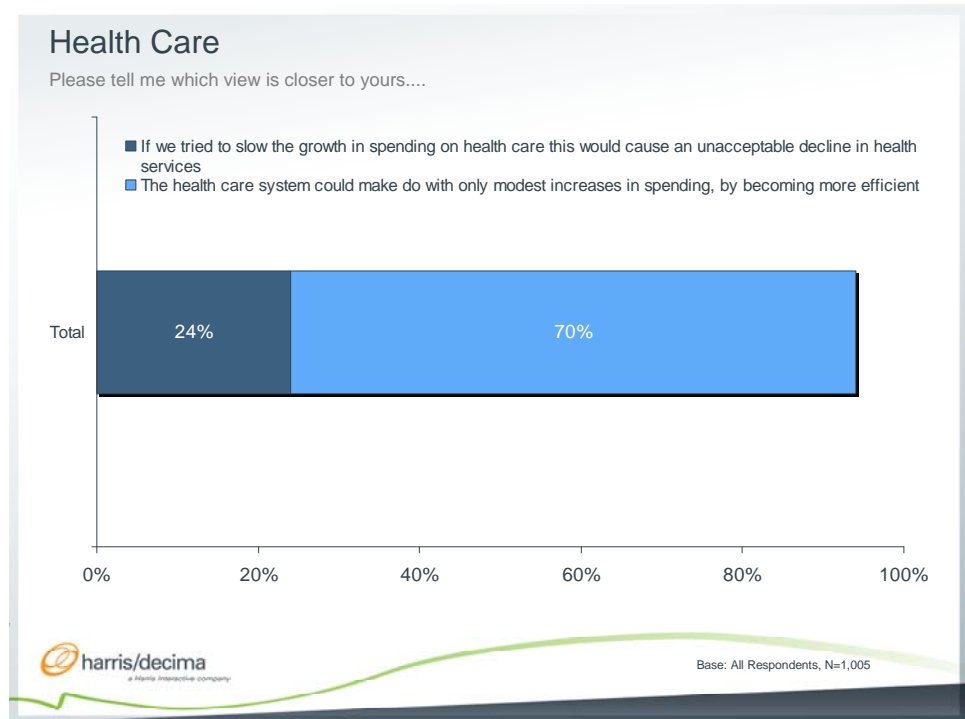
The survey included a number of probes on the health policy choices facing the province. The results showed:

- 68% believe there is a lot that can be done to improve health care that wouldn't require spending money. 28% believe that "the only way we can improve health care is by putting more money into the health care system."
- At the same time, this doesn't mean that Albertans believe the system will never need more money, only that they don't feel that spending increases are required today.



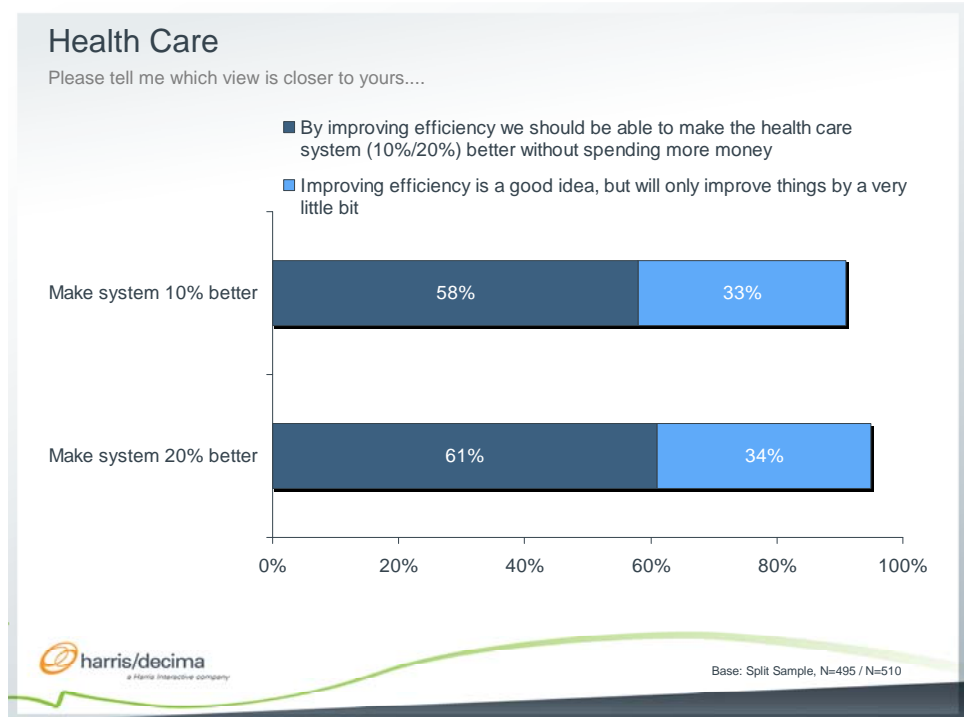


- Two out of three reject the idea that slowing the growth in health spending would cause an unacceptable decline in health services.

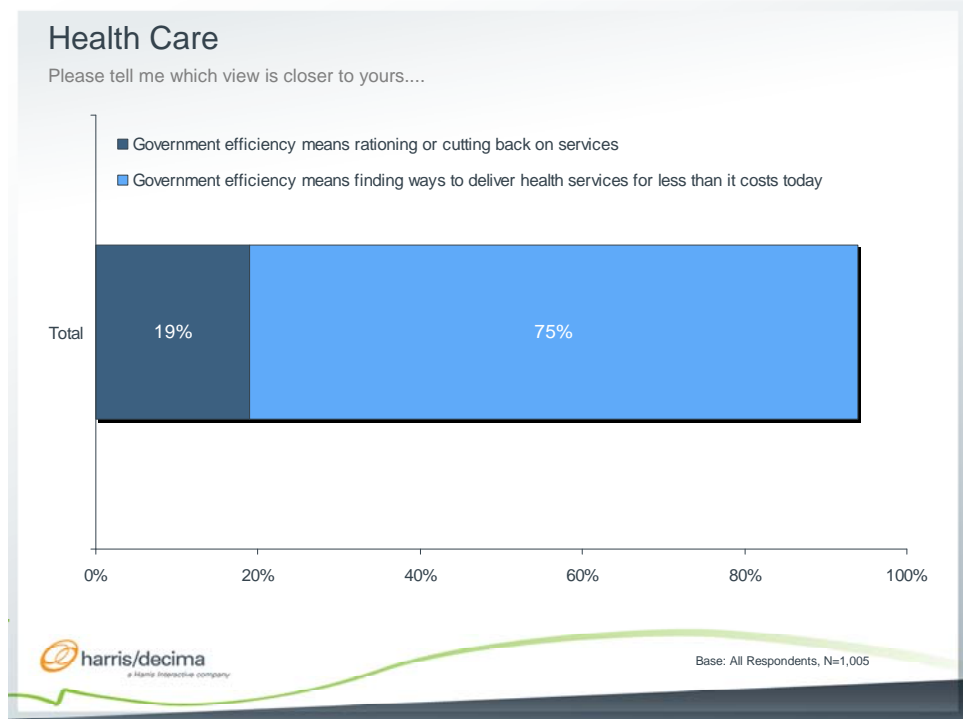


- Most Albertans believe that the provincial health care system could use improvements in efficiency as an alternative to spending more money now.

Equal sized majorities agreed with the proposition that the efficiency of health services can be improved by 10% and 20% respectively.



When asked what they would assume a provincial focus on efficiency in health care system would really mean, three-quarters of Albertans (75%) said that it means finding ways to deliver health services for less than it costs today. Only 19% sense that it would mean rationing or cutting back on services.



Conclusions

Most Albertans are optimistic about the economy in the short term and over the long term. The majority foresee growth in the coming year, and fully 80% expect growth over the coming five years. The ups and downs of oil pricing and the swings in global commodity and financial markets have had only a modest, and time-limited impact on the economic optimism of Albertans.

When it comes to the top priorities Albertans would set for the province, the focus starts with health and education, along with longer term economic growth. At the bottom of the list of priorities tested is the idea of the province doing things to help weather the short term economic situation. While most people support some stimulus, especially that involving building out infrastructure, there are clear limits to the enthusiasm Albertans have for this idea.

Positive assessments of the provincial government range from a high of 60% on education to a low in the 30's where health care, near term economic and fiscal management are concerned. It bears noting that most governments in Canada have been experiencing public discomfort with health services, and concerns about government finances, given the aging population and the recent downturn in the economy.

Where health care is concerned, people are concerned about both the access to quality health services and the cost, which not surprisingly is linked to a broad belief that improvements are needed, but that much can be achieved without increasing spending beyond normal growth. Albertans believe that efficiency improvements are possible, necessary and desirable.