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Ontarians Waiting For Leadership On Poverty Reduction

By Trish Hennessy

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Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

2 Carlton Street, Suite 1001

Toronto, Ontario

(416) 263-9896

www.GrowingGap.ca

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Introduction

IN A YEAR WHERE GLOBAL MARKETS are rattling entire nations and Ontario has slipped into have-not status, Ontarians are dealing with their own financial worry and looking to their governments for leadership.

Between September 24 and October 21, 2008 Environics Research conducted a national poll of 2,023 Canadians for the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. This report represents the responses provided by Ontarians, and it tells a story of economic worry and of resolve: Ontarians say now is the time for governments to make us proud and take clear steps to reduce poverty in our provinces.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives is grateful to the Atkinson Foundation and the Metcalf Foundation for helping to fund this important and groundbreaking research. The entire poll is available at www.policyalternatives.ca.

Trish Hennessy is director of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' Inequality Project, www.growinggap.ca.

Financial Worry

Thinking about your standard of living, would you say that compared with 10 years ago, you are generally better off, worse off, or about the same?

Only 38% of Ontarians say they are better off today than they were 10 years ago.

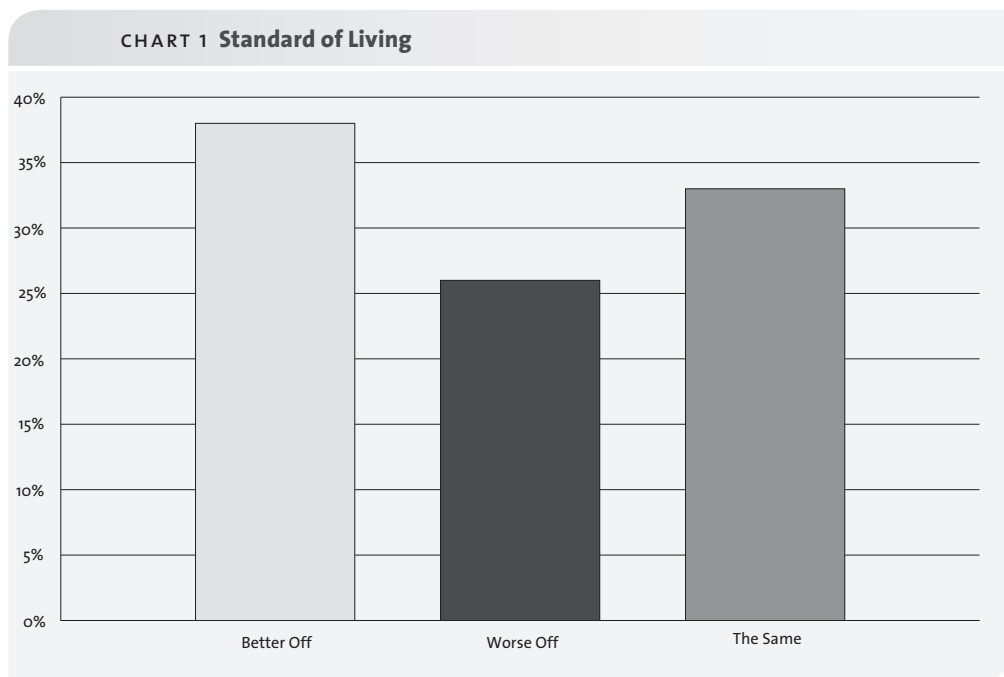
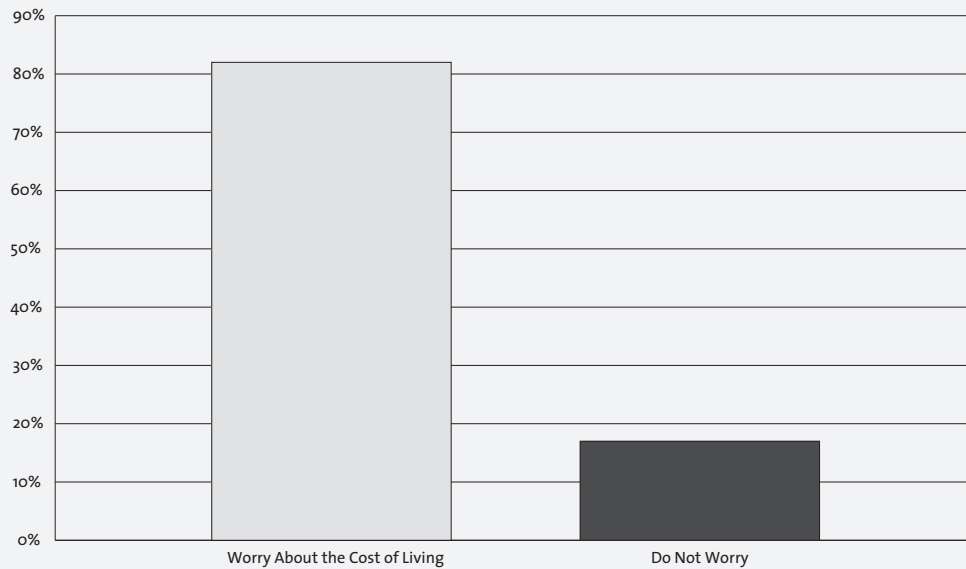


CHART 2 Cost of Living



About one-quarter (26%) say they are worse off, and 33% say they are doing about the same.

You worry about the rising cost of living

As the cost of housing and gas increases, 82% of Ontarians say they worry about the rising cost of living. Only 17% do not worry about the cost of living.

You struggle to keep your personal debt under control

Canadian household debt levels are at a record high, so it is not surprising that 51% of Ontarians say they struggle to keep their personal debt under control; 46% say they do not struggle.

You can afford a comfortable retirement

Ontarians are split over whether they can afford a comfortable retirement: 51% believe they will be able to afford a comfortable retirement; 47% do not.

You are always just one or two missed paycheques away from being poor

A significant segment of Ontarians (37%) say they are always just one or two missed paycheques away from being poor; 59% do not feel this way. The majority of Ontarians (78%) say the gap between the rich and poor in Canada widened over the last 10 years. Only 3% say the gap narrowed while 15% said it has not changed.

CHART 3 Personal Debt

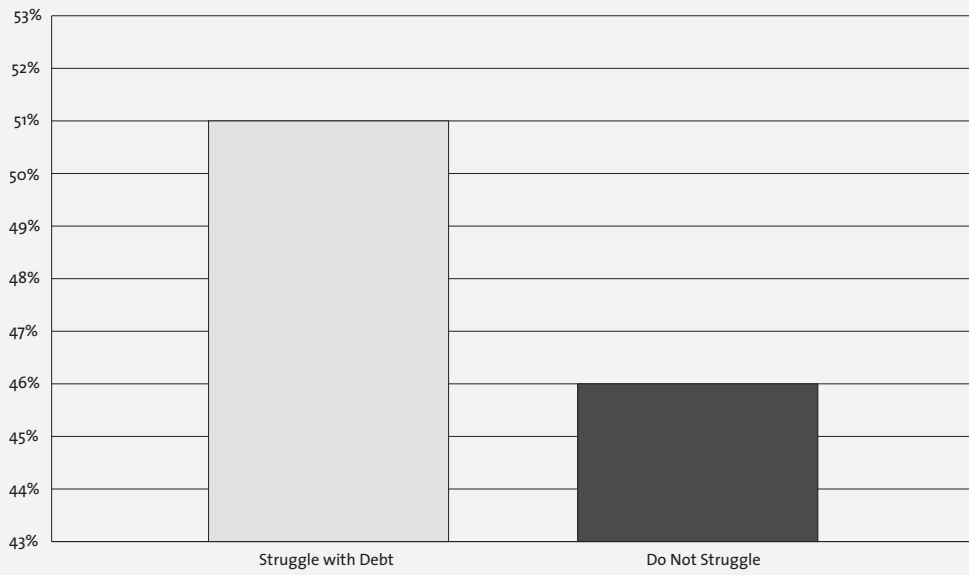
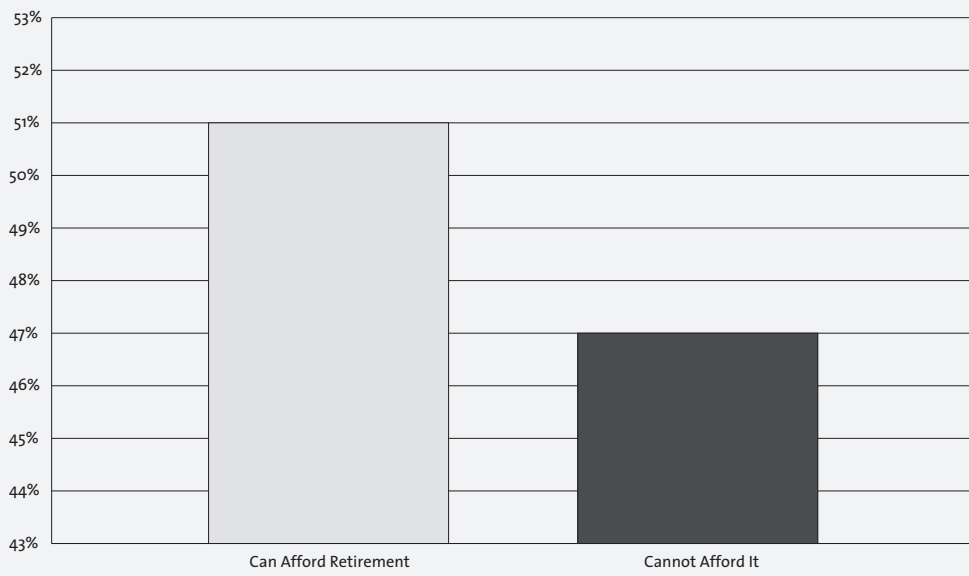


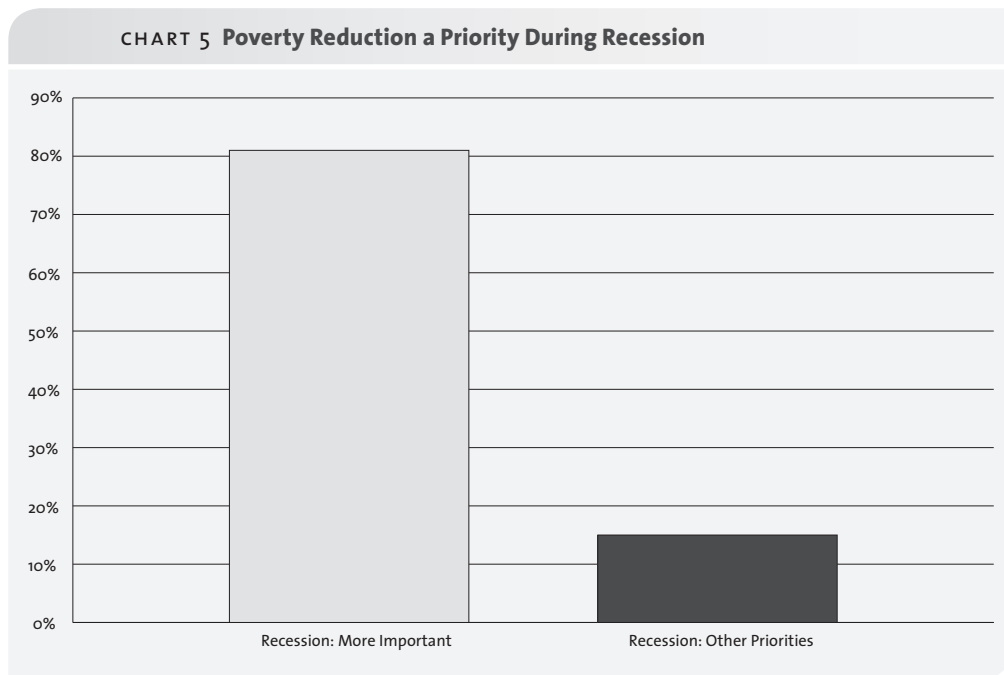
CHART 4 Retirement



Government action

WHAT'S INTERESTING about the Environics poll results is that, despite strong levels of personal financial worry, the vast majority of Ontarians are looking beyond their own interests and saying it's time to think about the poorest among us.

Canada may be heading towards an economic recession. Some people say that if this happens governments will have too many other priorities and won't be able to afford



to help poor Canadians. Other people say that if this happens it will be more important than ever for governments to make helping poor Canadians a priority. Which of these views is closer to your own?

Even as the province heads into a possible economic recession, the majority of Ontarians (81%) say a recession is more important than ever for governments to make helping poor Canadians a priority.

Great Britain and Sweden have managed to significantly cut the proportion of poor people in their countries and the province of Quebec has managed to cut its number of poor children by more than half since the mid-1990s.

If other countries can succeed in significantly reducing their number of poor people, so can Canada

The vast majority of Ontarians (93%) say if other countries can succeed in significantly reducing their number of poor people, so can Canada. Only 6% disagree.

It's time for strong political leadership to reduce the number of poor people in Canada, and in your province

In fact, 89% of Ontarians say it's time for strong political leadership to reduce the number of poor people in Canada; only 10% disagree.

CHART 6 Time for Leadership

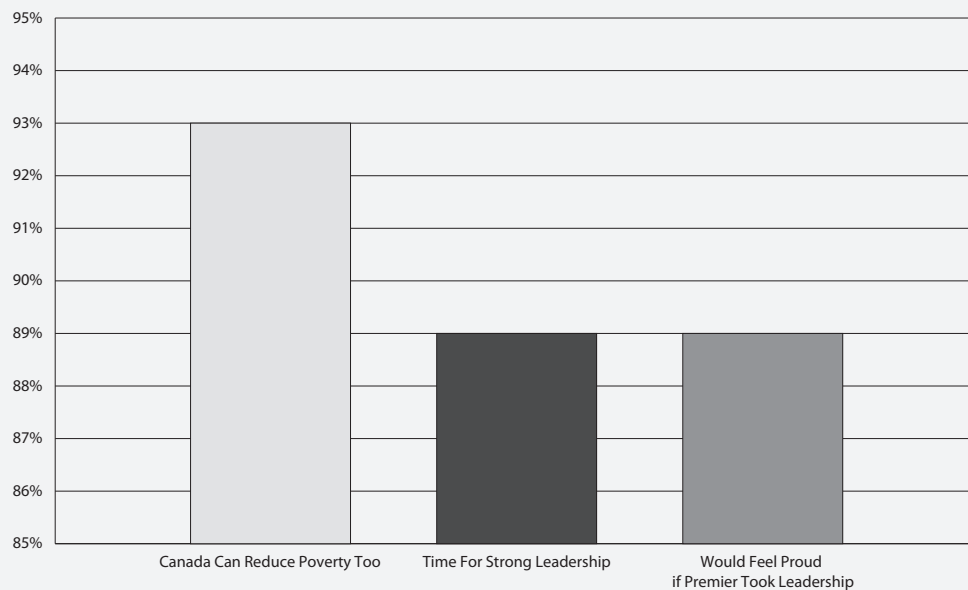
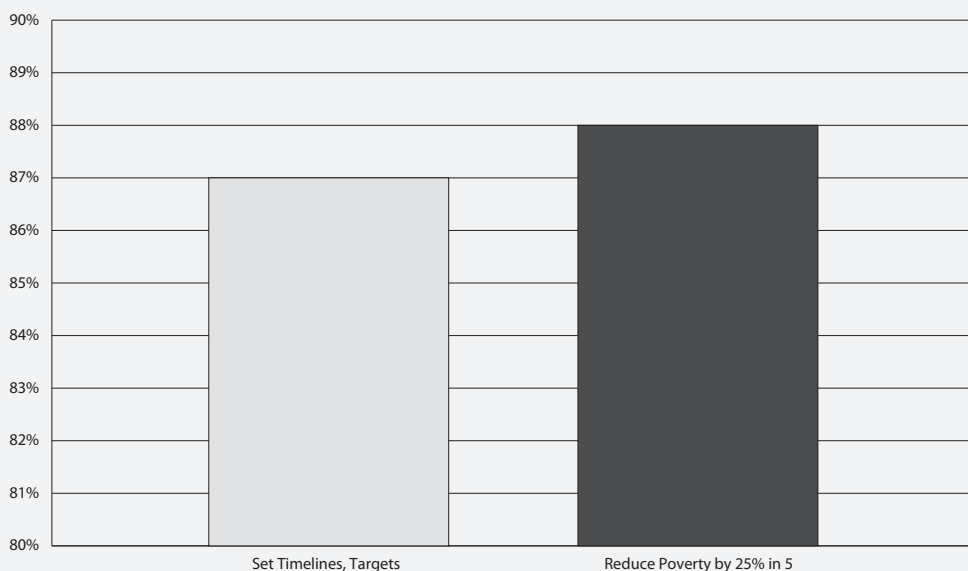


CHART 7 Poverty Reduction



You would feel proud if your Premier took the lead in reducing the number of poor people in your province

A similar number (89%) would be proud if their Premier took the lead in poverty reduction. Only 10% disagree. And 85% say if governments took concrete action, poverty could be drastically reduced. Only 14% disagree.

Both the Prime Minister and the provincial Premiers need to set concrete targets and timelines to reduce the number of poor Canadians

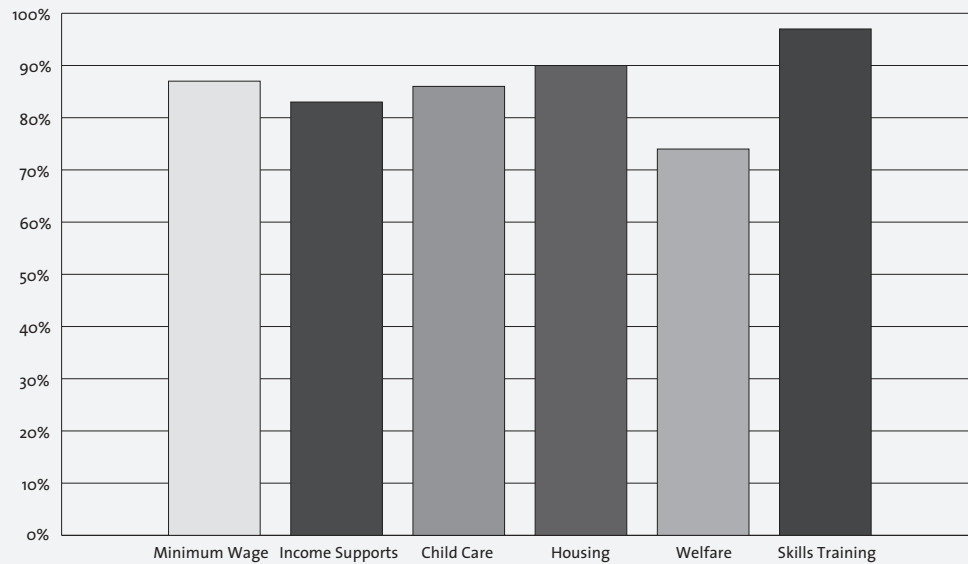
Ontarians are pragmatic. The majority (87%) of Ontarians believe their governments should set targets and timelines to reduce poverty. Only 11% disagree. The vast majority (88%) of Ontarians would support having their provincial government bring in a concrete strategy to reduce poverty by 25% over the next five years. Only 8% disagree.

More than half of Ontarians (54%) say reducing poverty by 25% over the next five years sounds about right, but another 25% say that's not ambitious enough and only 17% think that is too ambitious a goal.

Canada should try to distinguish itself in the world as a country where no one lives in poverty

A strong majority (89%) of Ontarians agrees Canada should try to distinguish itself in the world as a country where no one lives in poverty. They are looking to their governments to be less timid, to take bold leadership and distinguish Canada as a leader in poverty reduction across the globe. Only 10% disagree.

CHART 8 What Should Be Done



Ontarians have a clear vision of the types of measures their governments should take:

- 87% of Ontarians support raising the minimum wage so that full-time work lifts people above the poverty line;
- 83% support improving income support programs to help poor families with the cost of raising kids;
- Ontarians work hard, and so it's no surprise that 86% support creating more low-cost child care spaces;
- The majority worry about the rising cost of living, so it follows that 90% support creating more affordable housing;
- 74% support making sure welfare rates keep up with annual increase in the cost of living;
- And in this era of increased job insecurity, there is practically unanimous support (97%) for their governments to invest in jobs and skills training for people in between jobs.

Conclusion

THE RESULTS speak for themselves. Ontarians want governments that will do them proud, at home and around the world. They want their Premier to take a leadership role in reducing poverty, and they feel a recession is all the more reason to act. The good news is that what Ontarians say would be best for helping the poor in this province would, in fact, benefit all of us.