

UPDATE ON BC HST REFERENDUM

'Scrap HST' (44%) Leads 'Keep HST' (38%)

Majority (55%) Say Referendum Question is Confusing



Ipsos Reid

Public Release Date: June 12, 2011

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Vancouver, BC - A new Ipsos Reid poll in British Columbia shows that British Columbians are leaning toward voting against the HST in the upcoming mail-in referendum. The poll also shows that a majority of voters think the actual referendum question is confusing. Voters who want to scrap the HST seem better informed about the referendum question than those who want to keep the HST.

Referendum Preference

Currently, 44% of British Columbians say they expect to vote to 'remove the HST and reinstate the PST and GST'. This is a 6 point lead over the 38% who say they expect to vote to 'keep the HST'. Eighteen percent are undecided or say they will not vote in the referendum. On a decided basis (i.e. excluding undecided/will not vote), this translates into 54% for removing the HST and 46% for keeping the HST.

Referendum Preference

<i>How do you expect to vote in the mail-in referendum on the HST that will take place this summer?</i>	June 8-10 (n=1,117) %	May 26-27* (n=1,150) %	May 9-13 (n=1,200) %
Remove the HST and reinstate the PST and GST	44	40	52
Keep the HST	38	42	36
Undecided/Will not vote	18	18	12
* Note: All respondents to May 26-27 poll were informed of HST changes announced by Clark government, including reduction to 10% by 2014. This was not done in other polls.			

The current result is best compared to our May 9-13 poll which was taken a few weeks before the provincial government announced changes to the HST, including a tax reduction. This comparison shows an 8 point decline in the percentage of British Columbians who plan to vote to scrap the HST (from 52% to 44%). This decline is countered by a 2 point increase in voters wanting to keep the HST (from 36% to 38%) and a 6 point increase in voters who are undecided or will not vote (from 12% to 18%).

A comparison to our May 26-27 poll would not be apples-to-apples because all respondents in the May 26-27 poll were informed of the changes the provincial government had just announced to the HST. The purpose of the May 26-27 poll was to

measure the potential impact of the changes. The only way to do that was to inform respondents about the changes, which makes them different from the general public who likely have far less than universal awareness of the changes.

Support for the HST continues to be divided along gender lines. Men slightly favour keeping the HST (47% keep vs. 41% scrap) while women favour scrapping the tax (47% scrap vs. 30% keep). Many women, however, are still undecided or will not vote (23% of women vs. 12% of men).

In the Lower Mainland, there is almost equal support for scrapping the tax (42%) and keeping the tax (40%). Outside the Lower Mainland, the scrap the tax sentiment (47%) leads by a substantial margin over the keep the tax sentiment (35%).

A majority of 2009 BC Liberal voters (61%) say they will vote to keep the HST, while one-quarter (27%) will vote to scrap the tax. Among 2009 NDP voters, two-in-ten (19%) say they will vote to keep the HST, while six-in-ten (63%) will vote to scrap it.

Unaided Understanding of 'Yes' and 'No'

Before they were shown the actual referendum question, survey respondents were asked for their top-of-mind understanding of what a 'Yes' and 'No' vote means. It appears there is some opportunity for voter confusion as more than two-in-ten (22%) residents incorrectly said that a 'Yes' vote means keeping the HST and a 'No' vote means removing the HST. A slight majority (55%) of residents correctly identified the meaning of 'Yes' and 'No', while one-quarter (23%) were unsure.

Unaided Understanding of 'Yes' and 'No'

<i>As you may know, the actual referendum question asks for a Yes or No answer. To the best of your knowledge, which of the following is correct?</i>	June 8-10 (n=1,117) %
Yes means 'Remove the HST and reinstate the PST and GST' No means 'Keep the HST'	55
Yes means 'Keep the HST' No means 'Remove the HST and reinstate the PST and GST'	22
Don't know	23

Among those who earlier said they will vote to 'keep the HST', more than one-quarter (27%) gave the wrong response (54% correct, 19% don't know). Among those who earlier said they will vote to 'scrap the HST', 16% gave the wrong response (65% correct, 19% don't know).

Aided Understanding of 'Yes' and 'No'

Once shown the actual referendum question, most respondents (85%) correctly interpreted 'Yes' as meaning remove the HST and 'No' as meaning keep the HST. However, nearly one-in-ten (8%) misinterpreted 'Yes' and 'No' even after seeing the actual question and a further 7% said they did not know how to interpret the question.

Aided Understanding of 'Yes' and 'No'

<p><i>Here is the actual referendum question.</i></p> <p><i>Are you in favour of extinguishing the HST (Harmonized Sales Tax) and reinstating the PST (Provincial Sales Tax) in conjunction with the GST (Goods and Services Tax)?</i></p> <p><i>Now, based on your understanding of the question, which of the following is correct?</i></p>	<p>June 8-10 (n=1,117) %</p>
<p>Yes means 'Remove the HST and reinstate the PST and GST' No means 'Keep the HST'</p>	85
<p>Yes means 'Keep the HST' No means 'Remove the HST and reinstate the PST and GST'</p>	8
<p>Don't know</p>	7

Again, those who earlier said they will vote to 'keep the HST' were more likely to misinterpret the question (12% gave wrong answer) than those who said they will vote to 'scrap the HST' (5% gave wrong answer).

Perceptions of Question

A slight majority (55%) of British Columbians say they find the referendum question confusing.

Perceptions of Question

<p><i>Do you find the referendum question confusing?</i></p>	<p>June 8-10 (n=1,117) %</p>
Yes	55
No	40
Don't know	5

Interestingly, of those who say the question is confusing, only 6% gave the wrong answer in the previous question (aided understanding). This is less than the 10% wrong answers from those who said the question is not confusing.

These are the findings of an online Ipsos Reid poll of 1,117 adult British Columbians conducted using Ipsos Reid's online household panel between June 8 and 10, 2011. A survey with an unweighted probability sample of this size and a 100% response rate would have an estimated margin of error of ± 3.0 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The margin of error would be larger within regions and for other sub-groupings of the survey population. These data were statistically weighted to ensure the sample's regional and age/sex composition reflects that of the actual BC population according to 2006 Census data.

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For more information on this news release, please contact:

Kyle Braid
Vice-President
Ipsos Reid Public Affairs
778-373-5130

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