

April 2020

ALBERTANS DEEPLY CONCERNED ABOUT ECONOMIC IMPACTS BUT PRIORITIZE HEALTH RESPONSE TO COVID

HEALTH CARE EXPERTS LAUDED FOR COVID RESPONSE

- MEDIA RELEASE -

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Research Methodology



- Study fielded with Adult Albertans, via online research panel
 - Field dates: April 22 - 26, 2020
 - Panel source: ThinkHQ Connect & MARU
- n=1,231
- Weighted to reflect gender, age and region of Alberta population according to Stats Canada
- A random stratified sample of panelists was invited to complete the survey from several on-line research panel sources. The margin of error for a comparable probability-based random sample of this size is +/- 2.8 percentage points, 19 times out of 20
- Accuracy of sub-samples of the data decline based on sample sizes

Regional Sample Sizes and Margins of Error



Region	Total interviews	Total Interviews	Margin of Error*
	Unweighted	Weighted	
ALBERTA TOTAL	n=1,231	n=1,231	+/- 2.8 percentage points
Calgary	n=471	n=429	+/- 4.5 percentage points
Edmonton	n=355	n=389	+/- 5.2 percentage points
Northern Alberta	n=94	n=148	+/- 10.1 percentage points
Central Alberta	n=146	n=138	+/- 8.1 percentage points
Southern Alberta	n=165	n=127	+/- 7.6 percentage points

*NOTE: The margin of error is associated with a probability sample of this size

Albertans Deeply Concerned About Economic Impacts but Prioritize Health Response to COVID

- Health Care Experts Lauded for COVID Response



(April 30, 2020 – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE)

(CALGARY) Albertans' concerns about the economy and employment have climbed to record levels across the province due in large part to impacts of COVID-19, outstripping concerns about the spread of the virus itself, but when it comes to balancing economic and public health policies, a majority place a priority on health according to a new ThinkHQ public opinion poll.

The survey also noted very high levels of approval for the efforts of health experts such as Alberta's Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Deena Hinshaw, while certain politicians also receive positive grades for their actions on COVID.

Interestingly, while the provincial government gets top marks for its Coronavirus response, its performance on health care generally is panned by most voters, attributable in large part to an ongoing dispute with Alberta's doctors.

Economic Concerns Reach Record Highs



2020 hit Alberta with a “triple-whammy”. On March 5th, Alberta reported its first case of COVID-19, with confirmed cases now reaching ~5,000 across the province. Much like most of the rest of the globe, measures to stem the spread of the virus shut-down major industries and limited others, creating unemployment and economic misfortune. Alberta’s energy industry has been particularly hard hit by the decline in global demand (and prices) for oil, which was exacerbated by a dispute between Russia and Saudi Arabia over production in March, driving oil prices down just as the economic consequences of COVID were beginning to take hold. There was a moment in April when WTI traded in negative territory due to inconsistencies in demand, production and storage capacity. These realities are not lost on Albertans.

- Fully 77% of Albertans say they are very concerned about the state of the provincial economy right now, with another 71% reporting they are deeply concerned about unemployment in the province right now. These are the highest levels of concern ever recorded by ThinkHQ on these two issues
 - Anxiety about the economy and jobs has climbed sharply in the past month, increasing by 11 and 15 percentage points respectively
- COVID is also very much top-of-mind for Albertans, with 58% of those interviewed saying they are very concerned about the spread and impact of the virus
 - This represents a 16-percentage point increase in concern about COVID over the past month
 - Concern about COVID generally tracks with population density, declines with income, and is higher among women, and older Albertans

Should Alberta “Open” Economy if it Risks Public Health?



Despite the relative ascendancy of economic concerns compared to COVID, most Albertans endorse a cautious approach when it comes to policymaking. Survey respondents were presented with a 5-point scale to rate their feelings about whether governments should prioritize protecting public health on one end and protecting the economy and jobs on the other.

In this, a majority (52%) say protecting public health outweighs economic concerns, while 28% believe both should receive equal standing, and only 17% maintain that economic concerns should trump health concerns in government decisions.

- Emphasis on public health is more common in Alberta’s two major cities
- Women are more likely to prioritize health vs. economy than men, as are those over the age of 55 compared to their younger cohorts
- Placing importance on public health tends to increase with education and decline with income levels



Should Alberta “Open” Economy if it Risks Public Health?



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This sentiment is confirmed by reaction to “attitudinal” statements related to the balance between COVID response and economic performance. Survey respondents were presented with the following statements and asked to what extent they personally agree or disagree:

“With COVID, the cure is worse than the virus; they need to open up the economy now”

- Just over one-quarter (28%) of Albertans agree with this view, while two-thirds (67%) disagree and 5% are unsure

“Other places like New York are bad, but the COVID situation in Alberta is overstated”

- Again, about one-quarter (27%) of those interviewed agree with this sentiment, while two-thirds (67%) disagree and 6% aren’t sure

Continued 

Provincial Government Performance on COVID



Albertans offer strong marks for the Province's reaction to the spread and impacts of the Coronavirus here. Fully 72% of those interviewed say they approve of how the provincial government has handled the crisis, compared to only 24% who disapprove, and 4% who are unsure. This is by far the best performing issue for the UCP government, whose overall ratings are far more lacklustre. A bare majority of Albertans (50%) say they currently disapprove of the provincial government's performance since being elected a year ago, while 46% approve and 4% are unsure.

- Support for provincial efforts on COVID increases with the age of respondents

While the Province gets top grades for COVID reaction, one of their most poorly rated areas for performance is ensuring a quality health care system overall. On this issue, 54% of those interviewed say they disapprove vs. 43% who approve of the UCP government. In fact, 32% of survey respondents gave the Province positive ratings for COVID and negative ratings on health care generally. When this group was asked about the contrary ratings, most attributed their feelings to the ongoing contract dispute with physicians (48%), along with perceived cuts to healthcare spending healthcare cuts (38%).

Evaluating Prominent People on COVID



Our April poll asked Albertans to rate the performance of a number of prominent figures in relation to the Coronavirus crisis. These included medical experts, along with provincial, federal and international politicians.

- Medical experts tend to fare better than their political counterparts in the public's mind. Of particular note is Alberta's Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Deena Hinshaw. An astounding 88% of those interviewed say they approve of Dr. Hinshaw's COVID leadership (63% strongly), compared to only 8% offering any degree of criticism. Meanwhile, Dr. Hinshaw's boss Premier Jason Kenney receives the approval of 59% of Albertans in relation to his performance on the COVID issue, compared to 37% who disapprove of Kenney on this issue.
- A similar, albeit less exaggerated, trend appears federally. Dr. Theresa Tam, Canada's Chief Public Officer of Health, receives a positive nod from 58% of Albertans (vs. 34% disapprove), while one-half (50%) say they approve of how Prime Minister Trudeau has handled the COVID crisis (47% disapprove).
- Provincial NDP leader Rachel Notley receives more mixed, but still slightly favourable, ratings on her performance in relation to the pandemic: 43% approve vs. 39% disapprove.
- The only Canadian politician tested who does not receive positive ratings on this issue is Alberta Health Minister Tyler Shandro. Nearly half (45%) of those interviewed say they disapprove of Minister Shandro's conduct on COVID, compared to 34% who approve and 21% who are unsure.

Commentary



Commenting on the survey, ThinkHQ Public Affairs President Marc Henry notes:

“February seems like an awfully long time ago – people’s lives, concerns and priorities have shifted incredibly due to COVID-19. In Alberta, the pandemic and its economic impact, cascading on top of an economy which was already struggling; it’s little wonder that public apprehensions about jobs and the economy are at record highs right now.

Notwithstanding this, there is a reticence among Albertans about re-igniting the economy too quickly, if it comes at the expense of public health. Most clearly understand the seriousness of the virus and the kind of societal damage it can cause without mitigation, and Albertans seem to also draw a connection between effectively managing the COVID situation with the ability to be able to ramp up the economy again. It will be a delicate balance for public health officials and politicians, but at this stage Albertans seem to be saying err on the side of caution.

So far, Albertans are very supportive of the steps taken by the Province. There is a lot of confidence in the people making the decisions, particularly Dr. Hinshaw. The Premier is also getting a lot of credit for his leadership during this crisis – most Albertans think he and his government are doing a good job on it. Not to diminish that in any way, but there may also be some “halo effect” at play if you look at Dr. Hinshaw’s approval, the government’s approval and the Premier’s approval on COVID, compared to overall government approval.



Commentary



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It's interesting that the government is getting such high approval on COVID, yet this is not translating into positive ratings or even an increase in positive ratings on health care overall. One might have expected that to happen, but it isn't. The ongoing dispute with physicians during all this seems to be dampening any crossover on the two issues."

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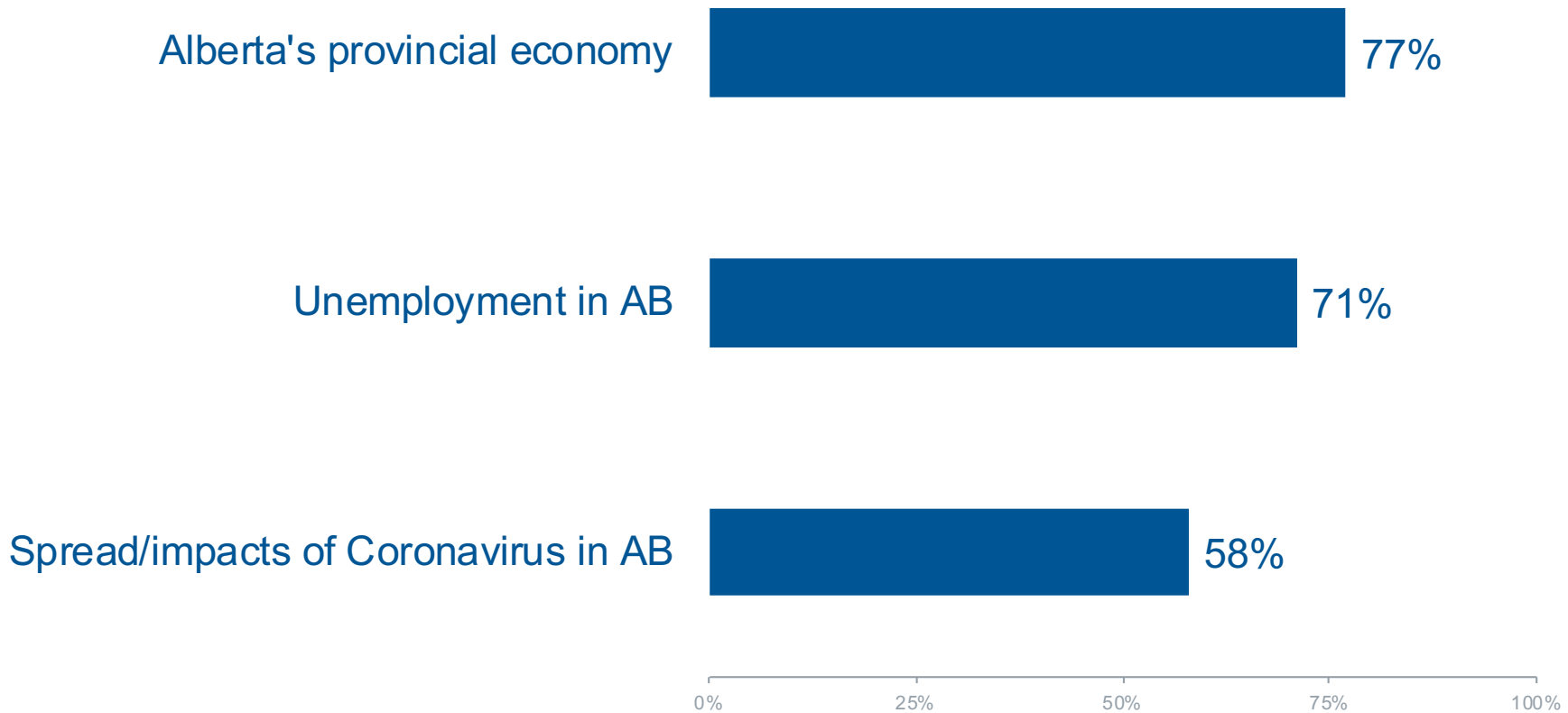
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Economic Concerns Slightly Outstrip COVID



“The following is a list of provincial issues. Please tell us if you personally are very, somewhat, not very or not at all concerned about each.”

% saying very concerned

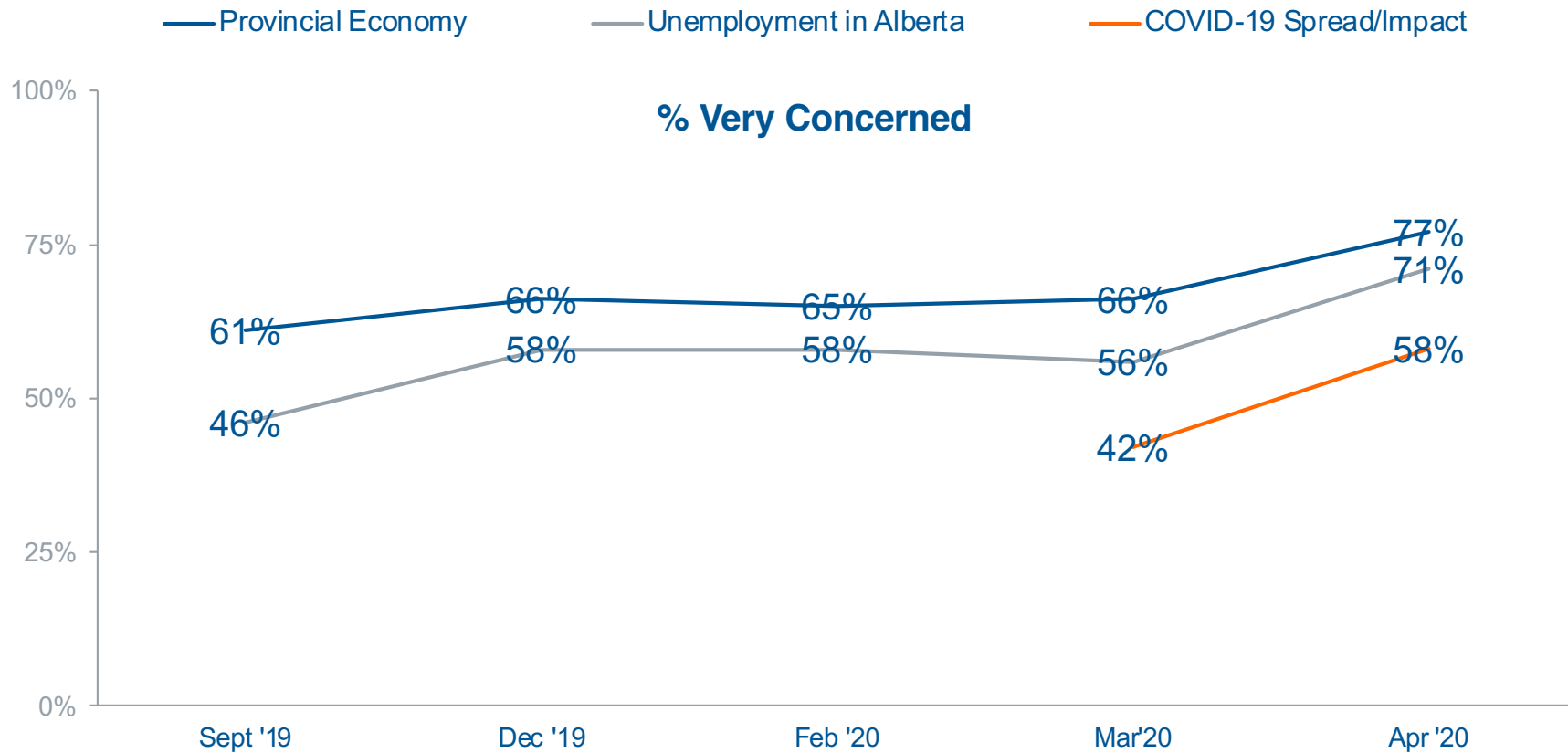


Base: All respondents (n=1,231)

Tracking Key Issues of Concern in Alberta



“The following is a list of provincial issues. Please tell us if you personally are very, somewhat, not very or not at all concerned about each.”



Base: All respondents

Issues of Concern in Alberta

-By Gender and Age



“The following is a list of provincial issues. Please tell us if you personally are very, somewhat, not very or not at all concerned about each.”

<i>% very concerned</i>	TOTAL (n=1,231)	Males (n=612)	Females (n=618)	<35 (n=374)	35-54 (n=438)	55+ (n=419)
Provincial economy	77%	79%	75%	71%	78%	82%
Unemployment in AB	71%	72%	69%	63%	73%	75%
Spread/impact of Coronavirus in AB	58%	48%	67%	54%	54%	64%

Base: All respondents

Issues of Concern in Alberta -By Region



“The following is a list of provincial issues. Please tell us if you personally are very, somewhat, not very or not at all concerned about each.”

<i>% very concerned</i>	TOTAL (n=1,231)	CGY (n=429)	EDM (n=389)	North (n=148)	Central (n=138)	South (n=127)
Provincial economy	77%	78%	75%	80%	81%	73%
Unemployment in AB	71%	72%	68%	79%	75%	57%
Spread/impact of Coronavirus in AB	58%	66%	61%	39%	43%	54%

Base: All respondents

Issues of Concern in Alberta -By Total Household Income



“The following is a list of provincial issues. Please tell us if you personally are very, somewhat, not very or not at all concerned about each.”

<i>% very concerned</i>	TOTAL (n=1,231)	<\$50K (n=240)	\$50K-\$99K (n=374)	\$100K+ (n=423)
Provincial economy	77%	73%	73%	79%
Unemployment in AB	71%	67%	71%	69%
Spread/impact of Coronavirus in AB	58%	66%	55%	50%

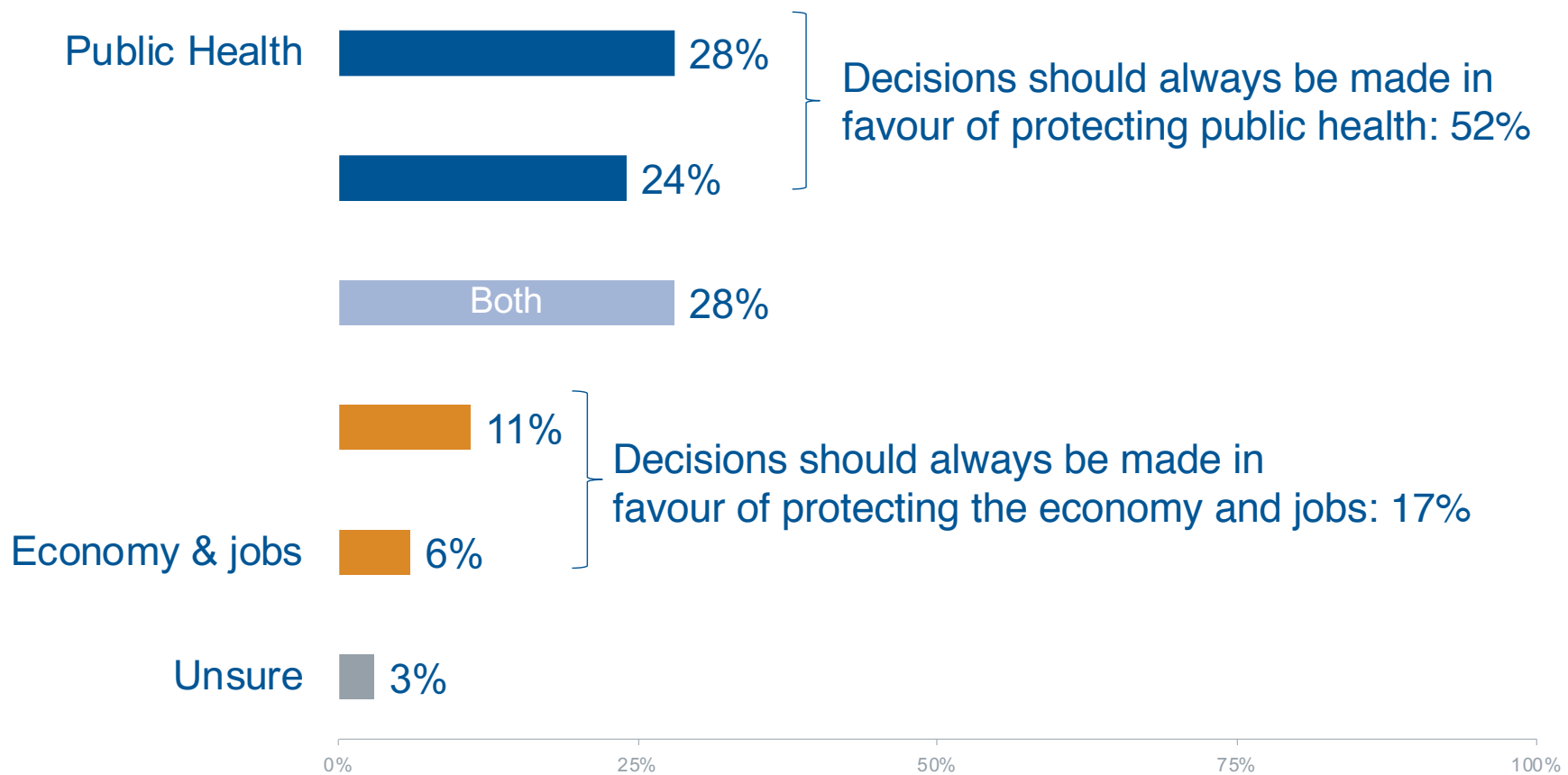
Base: All respondents

Public Preference: Public Health vs. Economy & Jobs



“Governments all over the world are struggling with balancing two priorities today. On one hand, there is a need to try to protect public health from the Coronavirus, and on the other hand there is a need to try to protect the economy and jobs.

What should governments today be doing in light of COVID-19? “



Base: All respondents (n=1,231)

Public Preference: Public Health vs. Economy & Jobs -By Gender and Age



“Governments all over the world are struggling with balancing two priorities today. On one hand, there is a need to try to protect public health from the Coronavirus, and on the other hand there is a need to try to protect the economy and jobs.

What should governments today be doing in light of COVID-19? “

	TOTAL (n=1,231)	Males (n=612)	Females (n=618)	<35 (n=374)	35-54 (n=438)	55+ (n=419)
Public health	52%	47%	57%	48%	47%	61%
Economy & jobs	17%	23%	10%	22%	17%	12%
Both	31%	30%	33%	31%	36%	27%

Base: All respondents

Public Preference: Public Health vs. Economy & Jobs -By Region



“Governments all over the world are struggling with balancing two priorities today. On one hand, there is a need to try to protect public health from the Coronavirus, and on the other hand there is a need to try to protect the economy and jobs.

What should governments today be doing in light of COVID-19? “

	TOTAL (n=1,231)	CGY (n=429)	EDM (n=389)	North (n=148)	Central (n=138)	South (n=127)
Public health	52%	55%	62%	32%	41%	48%
Economy & jobs	17%	14%	12%	24%	26%	20%
Both	31%	31%	26%	44%	33%	32%

Base: All respondents

Public Preference: Public Health vs. Economy & Jobs -By Education and Total Household Income



“Governments all over the world are struggling with balancing two priorities today. On one hand, there is a need to try to protect public health from the Coronavirus, and on the other hand there is a need to try to protect the economy and jobs.

What should governments today be doing in light of COVID-19? “

	TOTAL (n=1,231)	HS or Less (n=148)	Some PS (n=256)	Grad+ (n=825)	<\$50K (n=240)	\$50K-\$99K (n=374)	\$100K+ (n=423)
Public health	52%	39%	51%	55%	63%	51%	49%
Economy & jobs	17%	18%	19%	16%	12%	16%	20%
Both	31%	43%	30%	30%	25%	32%	31%

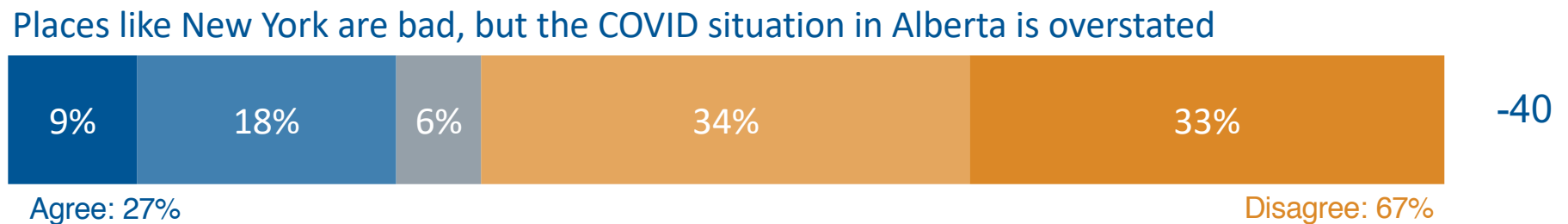
Base: All respondents

Attitudes Towards the Pandemic in Alberta



“The following are a list of statements that some people might say about the current COVID-19 situation. To what extent do you personally agree or disagree with each of the following?”

■ Strongly agree
 ■ Somewhat agree
 ■ Unsure
 ■ Somewhat disagree
 ■ Strongly disagree



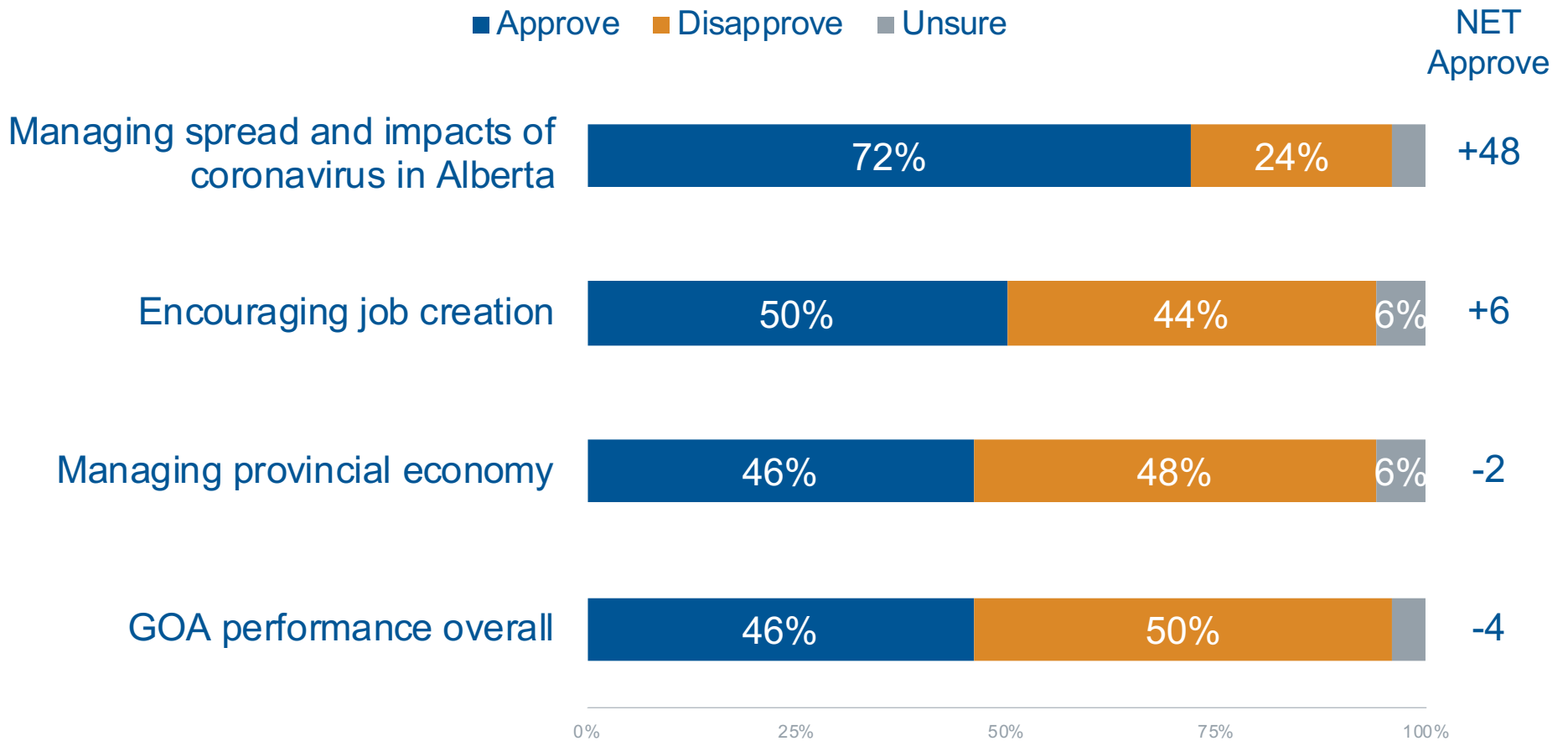
0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

NET Agree: Agree minus disagree | Base: All respondents (n=1,231)

GOA Approval on Key Issues



“What about when it comes to specific issues? Would you say you approve or disapprove of the performance of the Provincial Government when it comes to...?”



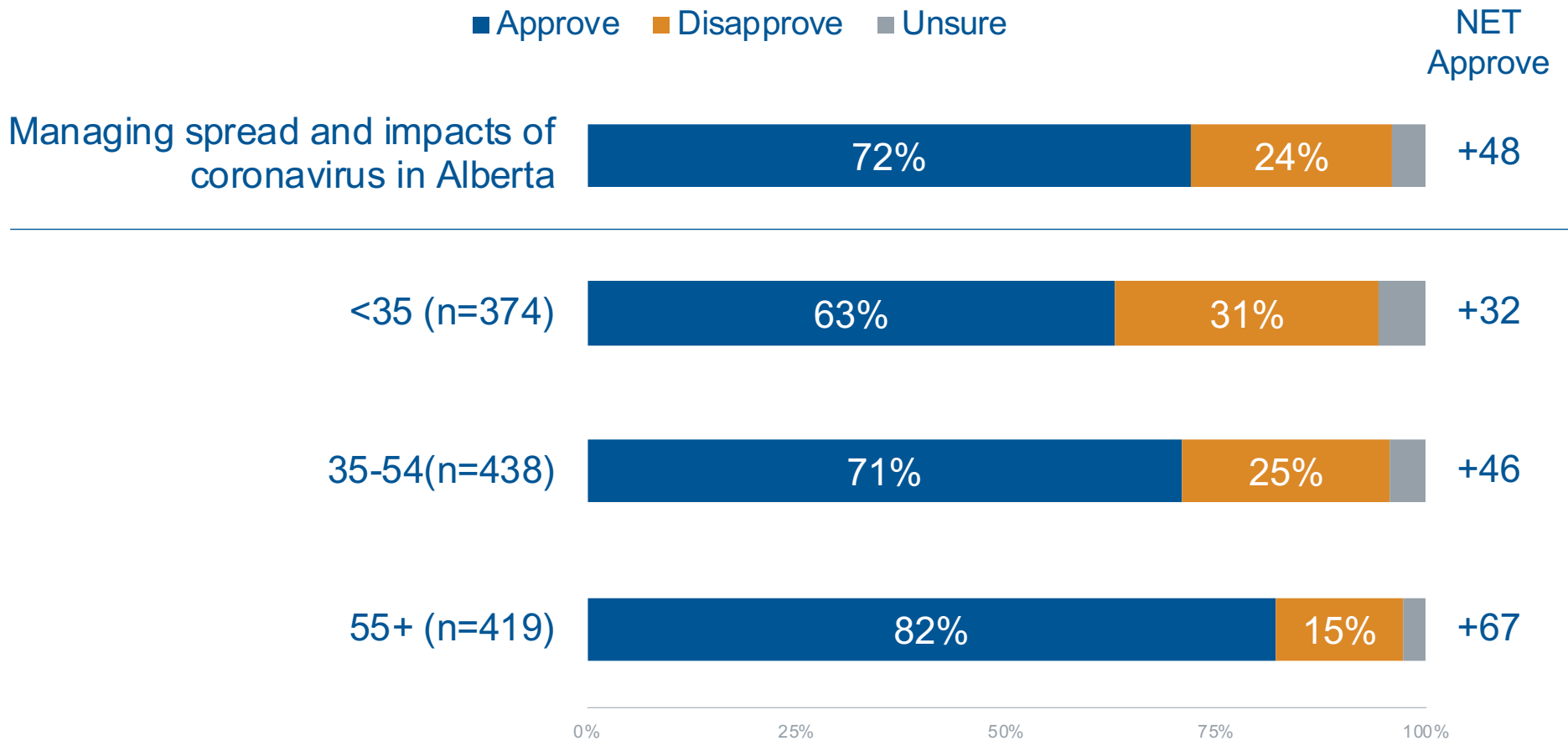
NET Approve: Approve minus disapprove | Base: All respondents (n=1,231)

GOA Approval on Managing Coronavirus in Alberta

- By Age



“What about when it comes to specific issues? Would you say you approve or disapprove of the performance of the Provincial Government when it comes to...?”



NET Approve: Approve minus disapprove | Base: All respondents (n=1,231)

Contrasting Performance on COVID vs. Health Care Overall



“What about when it comes to specific issues? Would you say you approve or disapprove of the performance of the Provincial Government when it comes to...?”

■ Approve ■ Disapprove ■ Unsure

NET Approve

Managing spread and impacts of coronavirus in Alberta



Ensuring the quality of the health care system in Alberta



0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

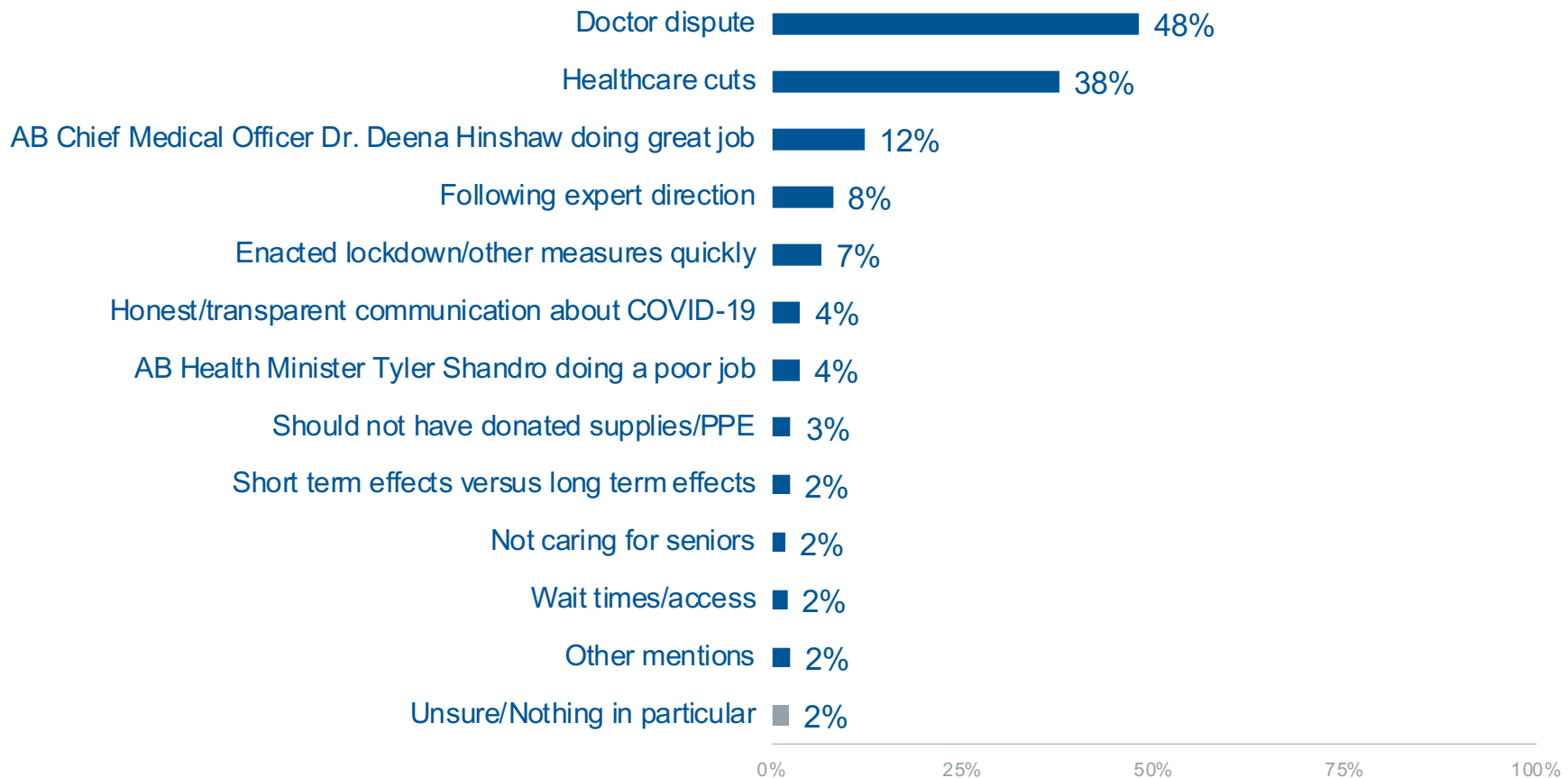
NET Approve: Approve minus disapprove | Base: All respondents (n=1,231)

Reasons - Inconsistent Views: COVID vs. Healthcare



Fully 32% offered positive ratings on COVID but negative ratings on Healthcare performance

“You mentioned that you approve of the provincial government’s handling of COVID-19 but disapprove of their overall handling of health care. Why is that?”



Base: Approve of provincial government’s handling of COVID but disapprove of their overall handling of healthcare (n=398)

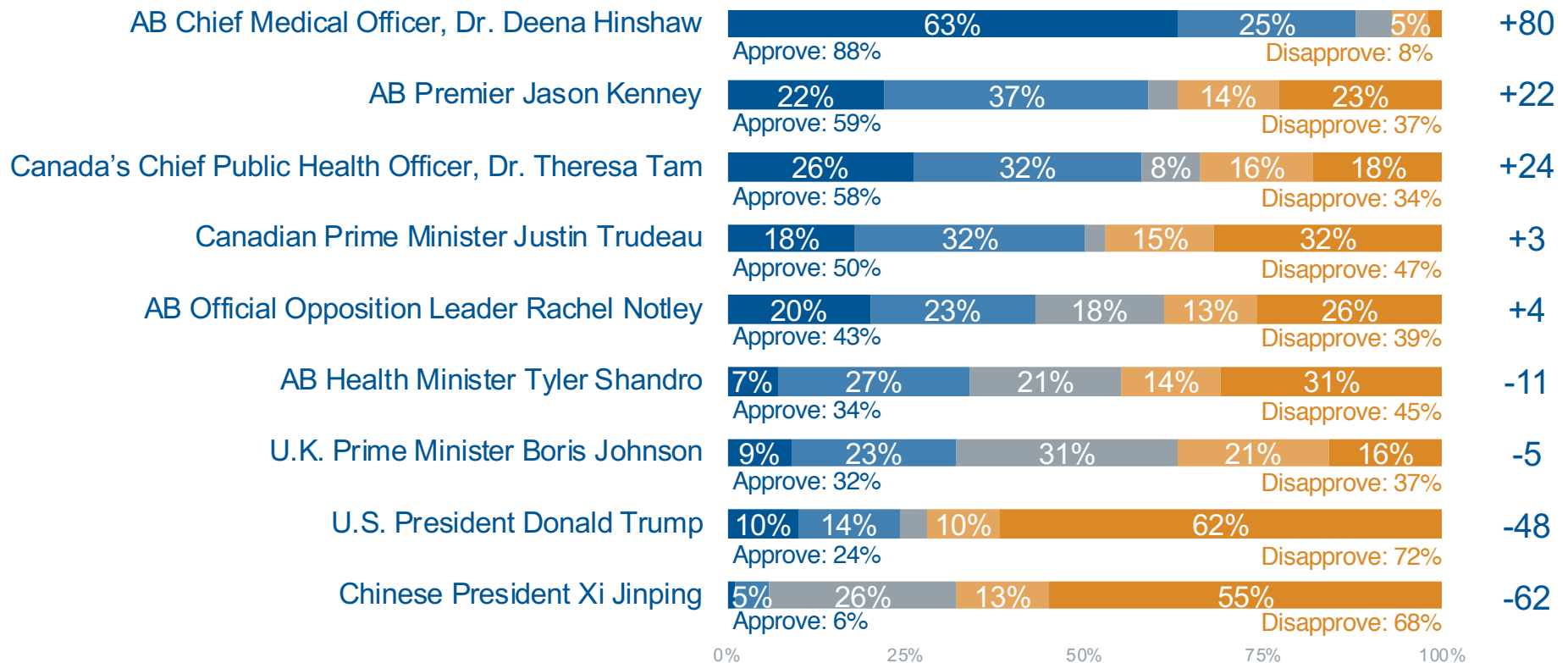
Public Approval: Prominent Leaders on COVID-19



“Thinking specifically about how they have behaved in relation to COVID-19, would you say that you personally approve or disapprove of the performance of each of the following?”

■ Strongly approve ■ Somewhat approve ■ Unsure ■ Somewhat disapprove ■ Strongly disapprove

NET Approve



NET Approve: Approve minus disapprove | Base: All respondents (n=1,231)



FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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