

# TAKING THE PULSE

Aboriginal Issues

Assisted suicide

1,750 SURVEYS.  
THOUSANDS OF OPINIONS.  
**A SNAPSHOT OF THE NEW  
SASKATCHEWAN.**

Abortion

Crime

Health

The economy



The StarPhoenix LEADER-POST

## Taking the Pulse of Saskatchewan: Saskatchewan's Economy October 2012



UNIVERSITY OF  
SASKATCHEWAN

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## **METHODOLOGY**

### **The Study**

Taking the Pulse of Saskatchewan 2012 was launched by the University of Saskatchewan with the intention of ongoing research and public engagement. This innovative initiative brought together interdisciplinary research teams and an assertive public outreach strategy to create new research products that will inform research, policymaking and community life.

Thirty-two faculty members from across the social sciences contributed to the development of the Taking the Pulse questionnaire, covering a variety of topics and themes, including: sustainable resource development; crime and public safety; Saskatchewan's economy; Aboriginal issues; immigration and diversity; health, wellbeing and Saskatchewan families; and moral issues.

### **The Survey**

Taking the Pulse of Saskatchewan 2012 was administered as a 15-minute telephone survey from March 5, 2012 to March 19, 2012. The survey resulted in 1,750 completed interviews among randomly-selected Saskatchewan residents, 18 years of age and older. Results of the survey, which generated a response rate of 34.3%, are generalizable to the Saskatchewan population (18 years of age and older)  $\pm$  2.34% at the 95% confidence interval (19 times out of 20).

### **Presentation of Findings**

Stacked bar graphs presented in this report depict unrounded percentages generated by the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), whereas percentages presented in the text are rounded to the nearest whole number.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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### INTRODUCTION

Saskatchewan has experienced substantial changes in terms of economic output and growth. Over the past ten years, Saskatchewan has transformed from a *have not* province to a *have* province and every indication is that it will remain one of the top three economies in Canada for the foreseeable future. With real gross domestic product (GDP) growth rates forecasted at 4.6% for 2012 and 4.7% for 2013 (RBC, 2012), Saskatchewan is not only leading the economic surge underway in Western Canada, but it is the provincial leader in growth rates across the nation. Additionally, the province set records for private and public investment as well as population growth in 2011 (Global Saskatoon, 2012). Saskatchewan, once a province that relied on government transfers and equalization payments, has redefined itself as an economic leader in a period of slow economic growth.

Taking the Pulse of Saskatchewan 2012 evaluates residents' attitudes and opinions regarding the booming Saskatchewan economy. The issues covered in this section measure the degree to which Saskatchewan residents feel that the growing economy offers opportunities for individual economic advancement and gauges their opinions on some economic policy issues. Questions about jobs, home ownership and education assess current perceptions of the opportunities available for individuals and their personal responsibility. Other questions about collective bargaining, tax reform and the progressivity of taxes describe residents' public policy positions in the context of economic growth. The results reveal that a high level of optimism is common among Saskatchewan residents.

Taking the Pulse of Saskatchewan 2012 addresses six issues that are relevant to Saskatchewan's economy today: job opportunities, home ownership, educational attainment, collective bargaining rights, tax reform, and tax progressivity.

### JOBS

Canada is still struggling with the effects of the global economic recession that began in 2008, according to the *Labour Force Survey: 2011 year-end review* (Wannell and Usalca, 2012). The labour market showed signs of recovery throughout most of 2011, but employment increased by only 1.1%

overall and the unemployment rate was 7.5% by the end of the year, just under the rate of December 2010 (Wannell and Usalca, 2012).

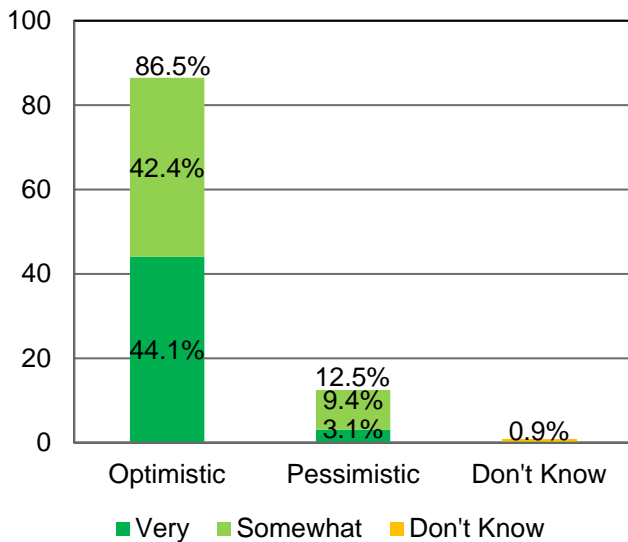
In contrast to national trends, Saskatchewan's unemployment rate was 5.2% by the end of 2011, one of the lowest rates across Canada (Wannell and Usalca, 2012). This trend continued into 2012: in April of this year employment rose by 2.3% in Saskatchewan, the nation's second-highest growth rate (Statistics Canada, 2012). In that same month, job vacancies posted on Saskjobs.ca increased by nearly 40% compared to April of 2011 (Government of Saskatchewan, 2012). These labour market figures confirm that Saskatchewan is experiencing a period of economic prosperity, especially relative to the rest of Canada.

Taking the Pulse of Saskatchewan 2012 measures current perceptions of the economy as well as the degree to which residents are optimistic about the future economy. In order to gain a sense of residents' confidence in the economy, Taking the Pulse of Saskatchewan 2012 asked respondents how optimistic they are about the possibility of young people finding good jobs in Saskatchewan (see Figure 1). The results demonstrate that Saskatchewan residents are optimistic regarding employment possibilities within the province. 87% of respondents express some degree of optimism: 44% are "very optimistic", and 42% are "somewhat optimistic". A small number of respondents express that they are pessimistic (13%), and of that, a very small percentage of respondents are "very pessimistic" (3%). Taking the Pulse of Saskatchewan 2012 results demonstrate that there are differences among sexes. Men are more likely to be "very optimistic" (52%), while women are more likely to be "somewhat optimistic" (47%). Income has an impact on responses. Respondents with incomes under \$50,000 are less optimistic (81%) than respondents with incomes between \$50-\$100,000 (85%) or respondents with incomes above \$100,000 (92%). More than half of respondents within the highest income bracket are "very optimistic" (55%), whereas most people in the middle and low income bracket are only "somewhat optimistic" (42% and 49% respectively). Some differences of opinion among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal respondents are

apparent. Aboriginal people are less optimistic (80%) than non-Aboriginal people (87%).

Opinions on this topic have changed dramatically since the same question was asked in the Taking the Pulse of Saskatchewan survey of 2001; Saskatchewan residents are much more optimistic today. In Taking the Pulse 2001, 10% of respondents were "very optimistic" and 42% were "somewhat optimistic." It is likely that the increase in optimism over time is related to the present-day strength of Saskatchewan's economy, and the current rate of job creation in the province.

**Figure 1. How optimistic are you about the possibility of young people finding goods jobs in Saskatchewan.**



**HOME OWNERSHIP**

The Royal Bank of Canada releases a quarterly report that pinpoints cross-country trends in housing affordability in provincial and major metropolitan housing markets. According to the May 2012 *Housing Trends and Affordability* report, homeownership costs have been rising moderately, eroding the affordability of housing across the country (RBC, 2012). The report also states that Saskatchewan was the only provincial market that showed across-the-board improvements in housing affordability (RBC, 2012). The RBC measures of affordability dropped between 0.2% and 2.0% in the province, representing an increase in the affordability of Saskatchewan housing (RBC, 2012). Home re-sales reached record-high levels in the first quarter of 2012 (RBC, 2012). The report further

states that rapid economic growth in the province will continue to support the housing market (RBC, 2012).

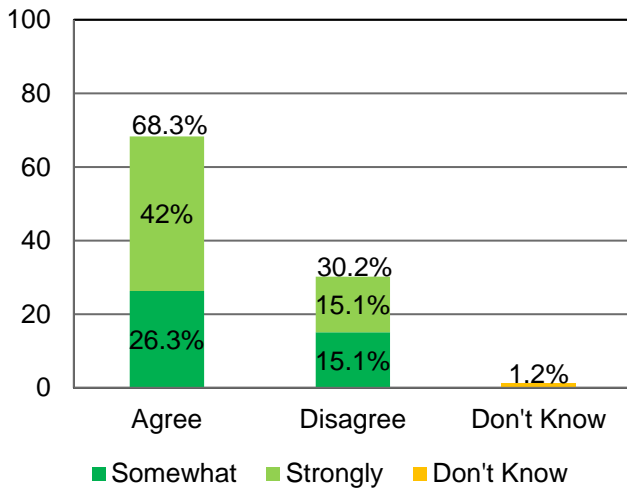
Taking the Pulse of Saskatchewan 2012 asked respondents if home ownership is attainable for everyone in the province as long as they work hard, save money and spend wisely (see Figure 2). Responses to this question may reflect the degree to which residents feel home ownership is attainable given external forces (such as the economy) and individual responsibility (such as working hard and saving money). The results demonstrate that, given individual inputs such as effort and savings, Saskatchewan residents are confident that the economic climate makes home ownership attainable for everyone.

Results from Taking the Pulse of Saskatchewan 2012 indicate that a sizeable majority of Saskatchewan residents agree that with some effort home ownership is an attainable goal (68%). There is a difference between both rural and urban residents in their perceptions regarding housing affordability. Rural residents are more likely to agree (76%) than urban residents (64%), and rural residents are more likely to "strongly agree" (48%) than urban residents (39%). There is also a significant gender difference in the opinions expressed. Men are more likely to agree (74%) than women (63%), and women are also more likely to "strongly disagree" with the statement (19%) in comparison to men (11%). A relationship between education levels and responses is evident, where high levels of educational attainment are associated with less agreement with the statement. Respondents with a high school education or less are more likely to agree (79%) than those with technical college/some university (69%) or those with university degrees (56%). Over half of the respondents with a high school education or less "strongly agree" with the statement (54%), compared to respondents with technical college/some university education (42%), or respondents with a university degree (29%). Aboriginal people are also more likely to agree (75%) than non-Aboriginals (68%).

**EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT**

A report regarding education and corresponding outcomes for youth in the labour force was

**Figure 2. Home ownership is attainable for everyone in Saskatchewan as long as they work hard, save money and spend wisely.**



published by Statistics Canada in December of 2010. This report, *Labour Market Experience of Youth After Leaving School: Exploring the Effect of Educational Pathways Over Time*, made several relevant conclusions linking educational attainment and employability. Firstly, the report demonstrated that post-secondary education is important because: “the pathways with either the lowest proportion employed full-year or with the lowest average earnings are those with a high school diploma or less” (Hango, 2010). Secondly, the report found that youth who dropped out of high school and returned to complete their degree did not improve their employability in comparison to those who dropped out of high school and did not return (Hango, 2010). However, high school drop outs who returned to finish high school and then continued on to post-secondary education did improve their employment rates (Hango, 2010). These findings suggest that finishing high school is no longer a sufficient educational endpoint.

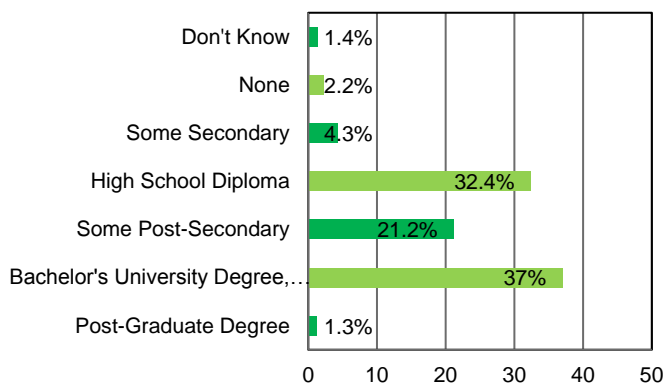
In order to measure residents' expectations of how important education is for individuals, Taking the Pulse of Saskatchewan 2012 asked respondents what level of education was required to be a productive citizen in today's knowledge-based, globally connected world (see Figure 3). Respondents are given the option of: "post-graduate degree, such as a Master's degree or Ph.D.," "Bachelor's university degree, trade diploma, or

post-secondary certificate," "some post-secondary education," "high school diploma," "some secondary schooling" or "none." The results demonstrate that most respondents feel that a “Bachelor's university degree, trade diploma or post-secondary certificate” is the minimum requirement to be a productive citizen (37%). “High school diploma” is the second-most frequent response (32%) followed by “some post-secondary education” (21%). A majority of the respondents believe that at least “some post-secondary education”, if not a completed post-secondary program, is required to be a productive citizen in today's society (58%). There is a significant difference in opinions among sexes. Men are more likely to think that a “high school diploma” is the minimum level of education required (36%) in comparison to women (29%), and women are more likely to feel that the minimum requirement is a “Bachelor's university degree, trade diploma, or post-secondary certificate” (40%) than men (34%). Differences are also found among education levels. University graduates are more likely to think that the minimum requirement is a “Bachelor's university degree, trade diploma, or post-secondary certificate” (52%) than those with technical school/some university (38%) or those with a high school education or less (22%), and those with a high school education or less are most likely to feel that a “high school diploma” is the minimum requirement (45%), compared to those with technical college/some university (32%) or those with a university degree (19%). Whether or not a respondent identifies as a visible minority also has an impact on responses. Visible minorities are more likely to feel that the minimum requirement is a “Bachelor's university degree, trade diploma, or post-secondary certificate” (57%) than those who are not visible minorities (36%).

A pattern is evident among education levels: the highest education level (those with university degree's) and lowest education level (high school or less) respond with a level of education that corresponds to their own (see Table 1). As such, university graduates are more likely to think that the minimum requirement is a “Bachelor's university degree, trade diploma, or post-secondary certificate” (52%) than those with technical school/some university (38%) or those with a high school education or less (22%), and those with a high school education or less are most likely to feel that a “high school diploma” is the minimum requirement (45%),

compared to those with technical college/some university (32%) or those with a university degree (19%).

**Figure 3. What is the minimum level of education needed to be a productive citizen in today's knowledge-based, globally connected world.**



**Table 1. How respondents' education level corresponds to their responses.**

	University Degree	Some Post-Secondary	High School or Less
High School or less	23.9%	18.2%	55.4%
Technical College/Some University	39.1%	23.5%	36.5%
University Degree	53.4%	21.4%	23.2%

**COLLECTIVE BARGAINING RIGHTS**

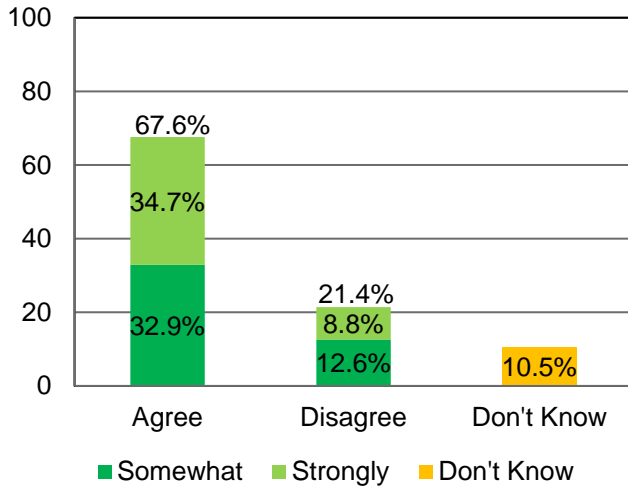
In 2011, Saskatchewan was the fourth-most unionized province, after Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec, and Manitoba (Uppal, 2011). The Saskatchewan Federation of Labour (SFL) serves as the representative body for all of Saskatchewan's "working people" (Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, n.d.). The SFL represents approximately 98,000 members from 37 national and international unions (Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, n.d.). In recent history, steps have been taken to alter the scope of labour unions and their collective bargaining abilities.

Globalization and the importance of economic competitiveness have led to new trends in labour law across North America, especially in the context of the economic downturn beginning 2008. Reducing the capacity of labour unions is a policy option that a number of Canadian provinces are now exploring. In May 2012, the Government of Saskatchewan released *A Consultation Paper on the Renewal of Labour Legislation in Saskatchewan*, which proposes a number of amendments to labour law. The proposed legislation includes measures such as: jettisoning mandatory union-due deduction; reforming the finances of unions that spend money on non-union activities (such as political activities); and, placing new restrictions on picketing (Government of Saskatchewan, 2012). While some key actors welcome the changes as a step toward balancing the rights of employees and employers (Canadian Federation of Independent Business, 2012), others feel that these changes compromise the integrity of basic workplace rights and protections, without giving workers an opportunity to influence the decisions that will be made (Cameron, 2012).

Taking the Pulse of Saskatchewan 2012 asked respondents if the Government of Saskatchewan should NOT reduce workers collective bargaining rights (see Figure 4). This question attempts to measure the policy position of respondents in the context of economic growth and opportunities for policy change. The results demonstrate that a considerable majority of respondents agreed that workers collective bargaining rights should not be reduced (68%). This suggests that the viewpoint of many Saskatchewan residents is not aligned with proposed changes to labour legislation. Differences are found between education levels, where high levels of educational attainment are associated with higher levels of agreement with the statement. University graduates are more likely to agree (76%), than those with technical college/some university (67%) or those with a high school education or less (62%). Furthermore, most of the university graduates "strongly agree" (46%) rather than "somewhat agree" (30%). Results demonstrate differences between rural and urban respondents: rural respondents are less likely to agree (62%) than urban respondents (71%). There is also a pattern between age and responses: as age increases, the likelihood of agreeing decreases. Those aged 55 and older are less likely to agree (63%) than those aged

35 to 54 (70%) and those aged 18 to 34 (72%). Finally, while not much difference is found between the agreement levels of those born in Canada and foreign-born respondents, more immigrants "strongly agree" (40%) than Canadian-born respondents (34%).

**Figure 4. The Saskatchewan Government should NOT reduce workers' collective bargaining rights.**



**TAX REFORM**

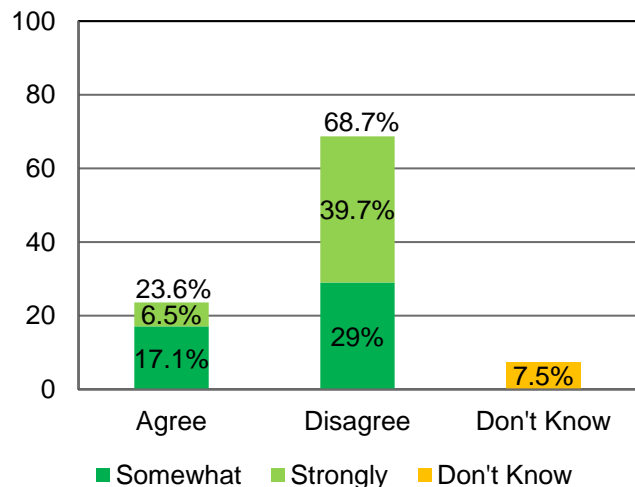
Saskatchewan's taxes provide the province with the financial resources required to meet the province's responsibilities in funding public services, such as health care and education (Government of Saskatchewan, n.d.). Tax revenues account for the majority of the province's own-source revenues, contributing 45% of the General Revenue Fund for the 2011-12 fiscal year (Government of Saskatchewan, 2012).

Provincial Sales Tax (PST) and Provincial Income Taxes (PIT) constitute a significant portion of the taxation revenue collected by the province. Saskatchewan levies a 5% PST on the purchase, importation or rental of all taxable goods and services (Government of Saskatchewan, n.d.). Saskatchewan's PST revenue was approximately \$1.32 billion for the 2011-12 fiscal year (Government of Saskatchewan, 2012). Saskatchewan also collects PIT from residents, which is determined by applying provincial tax rates directly to taxable income and then deducting provincial tax credits (Government of Saskatchewan, n.d.). In the 2011-12 fiscal year, the Government of Saskatchewan collected \$1.90 billion

in income tax revenues (Government of Saskatchewan, 2012).

The robust Saskatchewan economy allows for new policy options to be explored. In light of the view that sales taxes (including the PST) are generally regarded as unfair and unpopular, Taking the Pulse of Saskatchewan 2012 asked if the province should utilize this opportunity to rebalance its tax mix by reducing reliance on the PST and replacing the revenue by increasing the PIT. The results are clear: a strong majority of respondents (69%) do not agree with restructuring the taxation system in this way. The education level of a respondent has an impact on responses. University graduates are more likely to disagree (74%) compared to those with technical college/some university (69%) or those with a high school education or less (63%). Majorities in all education levels "strongly disagree" rather than "somewhat disagree." The results reveal that there is a relationship between age and responses. Those aged 55 and older are more likely to disagree (73%) than those aged 35-54 (70%) or those aged 18-34 (62%), and those in the 55 and older age bracket are more likely to "strongly disagree" (48%) than those aged 35-54 (39%) or those aged 18 to 34 (30%). A pattern among income levels is evident: the likelihood of agreeing decreases as income increases. Respondents with household incomes above \$100,000 are less likely to agree (75%) than those in the \$50,000-\$100,000 bracket (72%) or those in the under \$50,000 bracket (63%).

**Figure 5. The Saskatchewan government should reduce the provincial sales tax and replace the revenue by increasing provincial income taxes.**





**TAX PROGRESSIVITY**

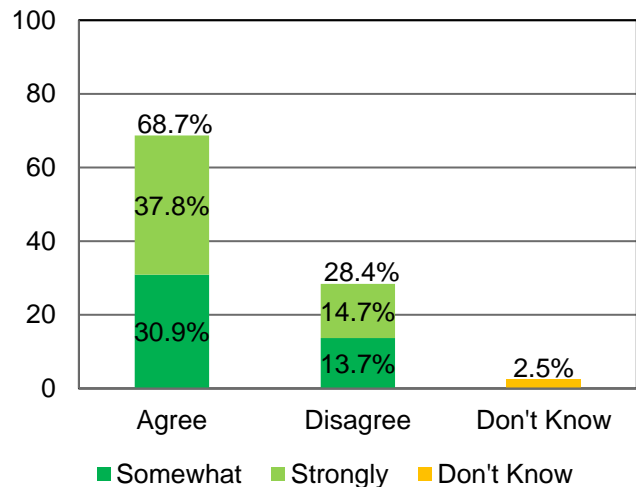
Saskatchewan's PIT is progressive: high income residents pay a higher percentage of their taxable income than low income residents. The PIT is applied to the taxable income of individuals in a three-rate, graduated structure: 11% is levied on the first \$42,065; 13% is levied on the next \$78,120; and, 15% is levied on incomes above \$120,185 (Government of Saskatchewan, n.d.). According to the 2006 census, only 6.7% of Saskatchewan residents reported an annual income of \$80,000 or higher (Statistics Canada, 2011). Only a very small proportion of the population is in the 15% tax bracket. Note that, although Taking the Pulse of Saskatchewan 2012 recorded total family income, income tax is based on individual income so a family reporting total income over \$100,000 need not have any members with income over \$100,000.

The most recent statistics available for Saskatchewan tax filers are for the tax year 2009 (Canada Revenue Agency, 2011). In that tax year, the rate structure was 11% on the first \$40,113, 13% on the next \$74,497, and 15% on taxable income over \$114,610. Grouping all tax filers that year to approximate the rate brackets: 36.8% reported total income of \$40,000 or more (so 63.2% reported less), and 5.5% reported total income of \$100,000 or more (so 31.3% reported total income between \$40,000 and \$100,000). The 5.5% of tax filers reporting total income of \$100,000 or more earned 23.6% of the total income reported by all tax filers and paid 36.9% of net provincial tax. Increasing the tax rate by 1% on the taxable income of filers reporting \$100,000 or more total income would raise \$63.2 million. If redistributed equally to all tax filers reporting less than \$40,000 total income, each would receive \$128.66; if redistributed equally to all tax filers reporting less than \$20,000 total income, each would receive \$222.57. It would require a substantial rate increase on high earners to finance significant tax relief for low earners.

Taking the Pulse of Saskatchewan 2012 asked respondents whether the Saskatchewan government should raise the income tax rate on high income earners in order to fund programs to bring low income individuals above the poverty level (see Figure 6). The results demonstrate that a significant number of respondents agree that the income tax rate on high income earners should be raised

(69%). A majority of respondents identifying as Aboriginal agree that the income tax rate should be changed (79%), and a majority of respondents identifying as a visible minority also agree (80%). Women are more likely to "strongly agree" with increasing tax rates (41%) than men (34%), and men are more likely to "strongly disagree" (19%) than women (11%). There is also a pattern among income groups: as family income increases, support for increasing the tax rate on high income earners decreases. Respondents in families with total incomes less than \$50,000 are more likely to agree (80%) than respondents in families with incomes between \$50,000-\$100,000 (75%) or above \$100,000 (51%). It might be concluded that there is little support for decreasing taxation on the highest tax bracket.

**Figure 6. The Saskatchewan government should raise the income tax rate on high income earners in order to fund programs to bring low income individuals above the poverty level.**



**CONCLUSION**

Taking the Pulse of Saskatchewan 2012 finds that Saskatchewan residents view the state of the Saskatchewan economy positively. Respondents recognize the possibilities for young people finding good jobs, the attainability of home ownership, and the level of education required to be a productive citizen. Respondents have clear opinions on economic policy. The majority would not support a reduction of workers' collective bargaining rights, a restructuring of taxes to rely less on sales taxes and more on income taxes, or a reduction in the

progressivity of income taxes. However, opinions vary with demographic characteristics. Differences are found according to a respondents region, sex, income, education, age, country of birth, identification as Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal and

identification as a visible minority or not. The most substantial divergences are found between genders, income levels, educational attainments and Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal identification.

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