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David Rider

Mayor Rob Ford's handling of the 2012 budget has badly shaken Torontonians' faith in him, according to a new opinion poll that finds his popular support dropping like a rock across the city.

The Forum Research survey of 1,046 Torontonians conducted Monday after the release of city manager Joe Pennachetti's [recommended budget cuts](#), pegs Ford's support at 42 per cent — a big drop from 57 per cent on June 1, and 60 per cent in late February.

Lorne Bozinoff, the Forum president independently tracking Ford's support each quarter, said the mayor's "very low" numbers are only likely to sink.

"This drop in support has come without any cutbacks actually coming into effect, we're only at the idea stage," Bozinoff said. "This is a ceiling — I think it's going to get a lot worse for him before it gets better."

"He campaigned on a gravy train, none was found and the reality of cuts to services that residents rely on, often daily, is setting in. That has shaken public confidence in his ability to handle the job of mayor."

The poll also found no public appetite for the major KPMG-suggested cuts Pennachetti is forwarding to the executive committee Monday as part of Ford's solution to fix Toronto's finances.

"It's one thing to say, 'look at this, look at that,'" Bozinoff said. "Now, when people see cuts in black and white, all of these things are extremely unpopular."

"It's also the process, I think — the mayor's people haven't been very good at building public support. It's all, 'My way or the highway.'"

Ford dismissed Pennachetti's suggested cuts as "just scraping the surface."

Half of Etobicoke-York respondents approve of "the job Ford is doing," down from 58 per cent in June. In Scarborough, his support is 49 per cent (down from 59 per cent); 43 per cent in North York (down from 69 per cent) and only 30 per cent in Toronto-East York (down from 44).

Ford took office Dec. 1 on a wave of popularity fuelled by his "Stop the gravy train" mantra. By comparison, former mayor David Miller enjoyed an 82 per cent approval rating in May 2004, six months into his first term.

Ford remains more popular with older Torontonians than young, while his disproportionately weak appeal for women is eroding further, the poll suggests.

But the budget isn't Ford's only problem. Since the last poll, Bozinoff said, Ford and his brother Doug have "squandered a lot of political capital" with controversies over refusing to attend Pride celebrations, a public feud with author Margaret Atwood over the fate of libraries, and the like.

The automated telephone poll's margin of error is plus or minus 3 per cent, 19 times out of 20.

Here are respondents' reactions to proposed budget cuts "in order to have a smaller increase in property taxes next year":

- Some 84 per cent disapprove of cutting late-night TTC buses, ranging from 79 per cent in Scarborough to 88 per cent in the city's core. "And that's before the news broke Tuesday morning of major proposed transit cuts," Bozinoff said.
- "Reducing the number of child care spaces" was opposed by 76 per cent. Pennachetti is recommending 2,000 subsidized spaces expire next year unless the province agrees to fund them.



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- 73 per cent disapproved of closing or selling Toronto Zoo. Pennachetti suggests gauging interest for the “sale, lease, operation or other arrangement.”
- There is less opposition — 66 per cent — to selling or closing Riverdale Farm and/or the zoos at High Park and Centre Island.
- 70 per cent oppose reducing public library services and hours. Disapproval is highest in Toronto-East York (76 per cent) and lowest in Etobicoke-York (64 per cent). Some 79 per cent oppose closing branches.
- Selling some of the city's 10 long-term care homes was opposed by 68 per cent. Pennachetti said that option requires further study.
- A halt to clearing snow left by plows across driveways got a thumb's-down from 61 per cent. Opposition ranged from 50 per cent in the core — where residents don't get the service — to 71 per cent in North York.
- 77 per cent disapprove of eliminating or reducing dental care to the poor.
- Some 61 per cent oppose selling the city's three performing arts theatres — the St. Lawrence Centre, the Sony Centre, and the Toronto Centre for the Performing Arts. Pennachetti recommended soliciting interest in their “sale, lease, operation or other arrangement.”
- Selling “green P” and TTC parking lots was also rejected by 61 per cent. Pennachetti calls for a review of the sale or lease of the facilities.