

## Hold the Phone: Most Manitobans disapprove of BCE-MTS merger

*Majority see deal as bad for their monthly mobile bills*

**June 1, 2016** – If it were up to Manitoba residents, they'd be hanging up on Bell Canada's planned \$3.9 billion purchase of Manitoba Telecom Services.

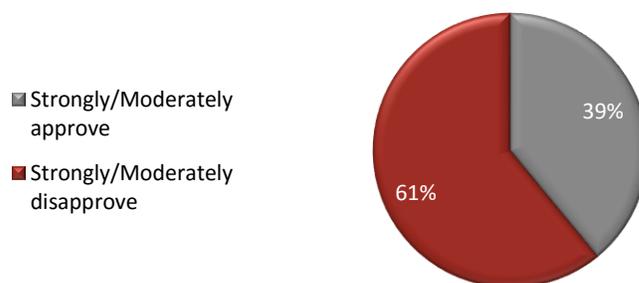
A new public opinion poll of 450 adult Manitobans conducted by the Angus Reid Institute finds most disapprove of the deal that would break up their province's largest telecommunications company and send its customers to national giants Bell and Telus.

A majority of Manitobans say the proposed sale would be bad for the prices they pay for service, while nearly half say it would be bad for the amount of competition in the marketplace. Fewer than one-in-five say the deal would be good for the province as a whole.

### **Key Findings:**

- Three-in-five Manitoba residents (61%) disapprove of the sale of MTS to BCE; just one-in-five (21%) say it would be "good" or "very good" for the province as a whole
- Manitobans also take a dim view of what the agreement will mean for the amount of competition in the provincial marketplace (48% say it will be bad, just 19% say it will be good) and the prices customers pay for service (53% bad, 14% good)
- If there is one perceived positive from the deal, it's Bell's promise to spend \$1 billion over five years on telecommunications infrastructure in the province. Infrastructure investment is the only area where Manitobans are more likely to see the deal as good (32%) than bad (21%)

### Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the sale of MTS to BCE?



### **METHODOLOGY:**

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from May 9 – 13, 2016 among a representative randomized sample of 450 adult Manitoba residents who are members of the [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 4.6 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

### **CONTACT:**

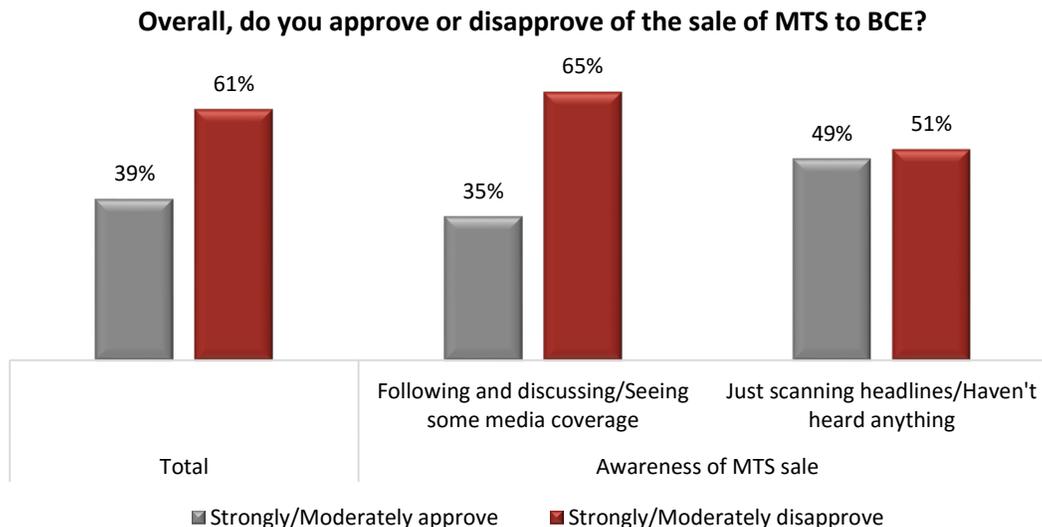
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## **Most disapprove of the deal:**

The sale of Manitoba's largest telecom company – a former Crown corporation with more than 100 years of history – is understandably big news. Fully seven-in-ten Manitobans (70%) say they have at least seen some media coverage and had the odd conversation about the deal, while just one-in-ten (9%) say they haven't seen or heard anything about it (the remaining 20% are "just scanning the headlines").

This high level of awareness could be related to Manitobans' high levels of personal interaction with MTS. Roughly [half of Manitoba's cell phone users are MTS customers](#), and this survey finds two-in-three Manitobans saying they get either cell phone, landline, or cable television service – or some combination of the three – from MTS.

Overall, most Manitoba residents disapprove of the sale of MTS to BCE (61% do so, compared to 39% who approve). This includes more than one-in-five (22%) who disapprove strongly. Disapproval is even higher among those paying closest attention to the story, as seen in the following graph:

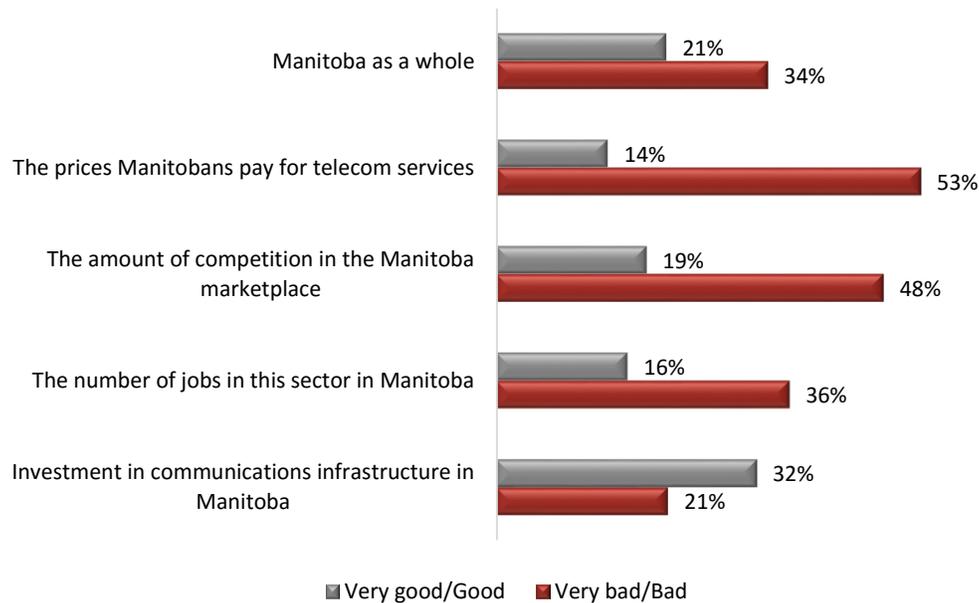


Interestingly, there is little difference in opinion between MTS customers and non-customers on this question. Each group follows the overall 60-40 split in disapproving of the deal (see summary tables at the end of this release).

## **Expected outcomes a mixed bag:**

Asked whether the sale of MTS to BCE will be good, bad, or neutral for a variety of aspects of Manitoba society, residents of the province offer varying opinions, but lean toward a negative view on most items, as seen in the following graph:

## Do you think MTS's sale to BCE will be good or bad for each of the following?



As the graph indicates, on every item canvassed except investment in communications infrastructure, larger numbers of Manitobans say the sale of MTS will be bad than say it will be good.

That said, on most of the items canvassed, the largest single choice for what the outcome of the deal will be is “neutral” (45% say the deal will have a “neutral” effect on Manitoba as a whole, for example). ([See comprehensive tables for greater detail](#)).

The exceptions – areas neutral is not the most-chosen response – are “the prices Manitobans pay for telecom services” (34% neutral) and “the amount of competition in the Manitoba marketplace” (33%). On these two highly related items, residents are most likely to say the deal’s effect will be negative – and perhaps for good reason.

Along with Saskatchewan, Manitoba enjoys [some of the lowest prices for cell phone service](#) in the country – prices so comparatively low that they have [reportedly spawned a black market](#) for prairie-based plans in other parts of the country.

These lower prices are commonly attributed to [the presence of a fourth major carrier](#) in those provinces (MTS in Manitoba, SaskTel in Saskatchewan). The impending loss of that fourth carrier – with MTS’s customers divided between Bell and Telus – has [caused considerable anxiety](#) among Manitobans, which is reflected in their responses to these questions.

Interestingly, the perception that Bell's purchase of MTS will be bad for competition isn't necessarily an indication that Manitobans have a positive view of the level of competition currently available.

In ARI's [recent survey on cell phone service](#) in Canada, nearly half (49%) of Manitobans said there was "not enough" competition in the industry, compared to 23 per cent who said there was "the right amount" and 11 per cent who said there was "too much" competition (17% were unsure).

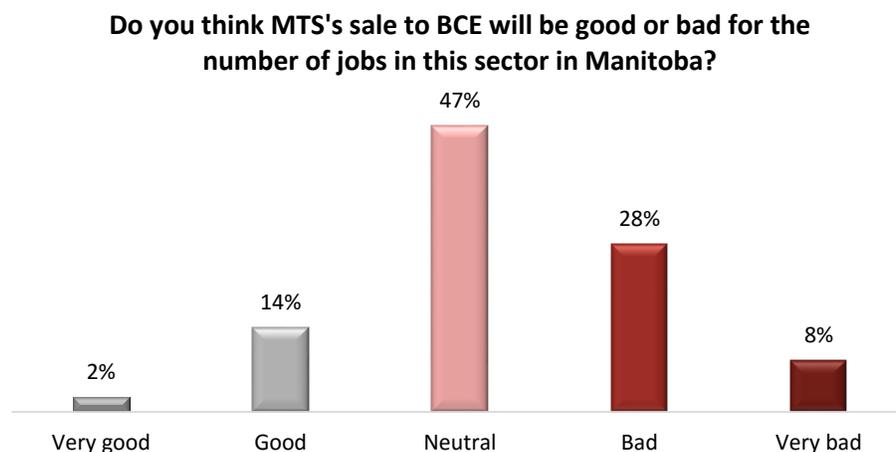
Despite the presence of MTS in their province, Manitobans' responses to this question were in the middle of the pack nationally, with Saskatchewan residents considerably more likely to be satisfied that "the right amount" of competition exists in that market (39%).

### Caution on jobs, optimism on investment:

In announcing its plans to buy MTS, BCE also announced that it intends to make Winnipeg [its Western Canada headquarters](#), bringing the company to a total of 6,900 employees in Western Canada, including the 2,700 who currently work for MTS.

The companies haven't announced any changes in staffing as a result of the proposed sale, and roughly half of Manitobans say they expect the effect of the agreement on jobs to be "neutral," as seen in the graph that follows.

That said, residents are anxious. More than twice as many anticipate a negative effect on jobs as anticipate a positive one:



Another promise that came with BCE's plan to buy MTS: Bell will invest \$1 billion over five years to improve and expand internet, television, and wireless infrastructure in Manitoba.

Perhaps as a result of this promise, infrastructure investment is the only item canvassed that finds more Manitobans expecting the result to be good (32%) than bad (21%), though "neutral" (46%) is again the most-chosen answer.

The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research organization established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.

Summary tables follow. For detailed results by gender, age, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the sale of MTS to BCE?			
(weighted sample sizes)	Total (450)	Awareness of MTS deal	
		Following it in the news and discussing with friends and family + Seeing some media coverage and having the odd conversation (315)	Just scanning the headlines + Haven't seen or heard anything about it (135)
Strongly approve	6%	7%	3%
Moderately approve	33%	28%	46%
Moderately disapprove	39%	38%	40%
Strongly disapprove	22%	27%	11%

Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the sale of MTS to BCE?			
(weighted sample sizes)	Total (450)	Subscribe to MTS for landline, cell phone, or cable TV service	
		MTS customer (315)	Not an MTS customer (135)
Strongly approve	6%	5%	8%
Moderately approve	33%	34%	31%
Moderately disapprove	39%	38%	40%
Strongly disapprove	22%	23%	20%