

Privatization: Framing the Message and Choosing Language



“Privatization” is a good ugly word.

Instead, privateers use:

- Public-private partnerships (P3s)
- Social impact bonds
- Asset recycling

Privatization? Meh ...

- 41% generally favour privatization
- 28% say “it depends”
- 31% generally oppose privatization

Privatization? Meh ...

- 75% say public hospitals are very important
- 56% say public prisons are very important
- 34% say public transit is very important
- 29% say public garbage collection is very important

The costs & quality trap

Does privatization save money?

- 51% say rarely or not very often

Does it improve services?

- 49% say rarely or not very often

The costs & quality trap

- ORNGE
- Highway 407
- NSP
- For-profit hospital
- McGill hospital
- Golden Ears Bridge
- Manitoba Telephone Service
- Privatized prisons
- Walkerton
- Privatized liquor
- Privatized transit

Scandals aren't a slam dunk

- 69% say the ORNGE fiasco proves government can't be trusted to manage our money
- 31% say the ORNGE fiasco proves public services are cheaper

The Values Propositions

- 82% say privatization means we lose control over services we rely on
- 69% say privatization weakens our ‘core values of caring and sharing’
- 43% say privatization is ‘immoral’
 - 60% of Atlantic Canadians say privatization is ‘immoral’

The Achilles Heel: Secrecy

- 93% say the public has a right to know all contract details
- 7% say corporations have a right to keep some details secret

Make privateers prove it

- 80% say politicians must prove a privatization will save money
- 75% support a moratorium on privatization until there is 'clear evidence' it benefits the public

Summing up

- No matter a project's official title, call it what it is: privatization.
- We're fighting an uphill battle: many people remain open to the concept of privatization
- Arguments based solely on cost or quality are hard to win. And even if you win, people might take it as "yet another example of government incompetence."
- Arguments based on values and transparency are much easier to make and win.