



Award date: 2016-10-31

Contract # 35035-165058/001/CY

POR 061-16

POR@PCO-BCP.gc.ca



Privy Council Office Continuous Qualitative Data Collection of Canadians' Views – Wave 8 of Focus Groups

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
OCTOBER 2017**

Ipsos Public Affairs
1 Nicholas Street, Suite 1400
Ottawa ON K1N 7B7
Tel: 613.241.5802
Fax: 613.248.7981
www.ipsos.ca

« Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français »



Political Neutrality Statement

I hereby certify as Senior Officer of Ipsos that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Communications Policy of the Government of Canada and Procedures for Planning and Contracting Public Opinion Research. Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Colledge". The signature is stylized and somewhat cursive.

Mike Colledge
President
Ipsos Public Affairs

1. Executive Summary

Background and Objectives

The Privy Council Office (PCO) is the hub of non-partisan, public service support to the Prime Minister and Cabinet and its decision-making structures. Led by the Clerk of the Privy Council, PCO helps the Government implement its vision and respond effectively and quickly to issues facing the government and the country.

As an advisor to the Prime Minister, PCO brings together quality, objective policy advice and information to support the Prime Minister and Cabinet, including information on the priorities of Canadians. To this end, the Communications and Consultation Secretariat within PCO supports the Prime Minister’s Office in coordinating government communications and setting broad government communications themes and messages, in accordance with government priorities, as determined by the Prime Minister, Cabinet, Cabinet committees and the Clerk of the Privy Council. The Secretariat also works with PCO policy secretariats to advise and support Cabinet and its committees.

In fulfilling its mandate, PCO required an ongoing cycle of qualitative data collection to ensure that it has up-to-date representations of Canadians’ opinions on macro-level issues that are of interest to the government, such as their views on what should be the priorities of the government. Additionally, such research increases the Government of Canada’s understanding of emerging trends, and measures Canadians’ views on key national issues and policy initiatives.

Through the use of an ongoing cycle of focus groups, PCO is gaining a solid understanding of Canadians’ views as they relate to the most important issues facing the country; their perceptions of how the federal government can best address these issues; expectations of actions related to government priorities; and perspectives on how the government can most effectively convey its efforts in dealing with emerging issues. This research helps inform the development of communications messages, products and dissemination tactics to respond to priority issues. Additionally, the research allows the Government of Canada to develop and refine communications activities to meet the specific needs of Canadians with timely, up-to-date, easily understood information based on the current perceptions of Canadians in the requisite areas.

This eighth wave of ongoing qualitative research was meant to gather feedback from Canadians on select issues and policy areas that are important to the Government of Canada. The issues discussed during focus groups differed from one location to the next. Topics covered included:

- Government of Canada actions (in all locations)
- Canada-US Relations (in all locations)
- Asylum Seekers (in Quebec City and Brampton)
- Climate Change (in Quebec City and Brampton)
- Local Challenges (in Nanaimo and Brampton)
- Seniors Policies (in Quebec City only)
- Port of Churchill (in Winnipeg only)
- Parents Policies (in Winnipeg only)

- People with Disabilities (in Nanaimo only)
- Official Apologies (in Winnipeg only)

Overview of Methodology

This sixth wave of qualitative research was comprised of a series of eight focus groups with Canadians aged 20 years old and above, held between August 15th and 30th, 2017. All group discussions lasted approximately two hours and were conducted in the evening, with the first session in each city starting at 5:30pm and the second starting at 7:30pm. These sessions were held in the following locations:

- August 15th – Winnipeg, Man
- August 17th – Nanaimo, BC
- August 29th – Quebec City, QC
- August 30th – Brampton, ON

A total of 12 participants were recruited for each session to ensure that a minimum of eight to ten participants would attend. In total, 73 participants took part in the discussions. All participants received an honorarium of \$75 for attending the sessions at the focus group facilities. Groups were meant to be representative of select sub-groups of the Canadian population for each location. Participants in Winnipeg and Brampton were all parents with children under the age of 18 living at home. Participants in Quebec City were all aged 55 years and above as issues pertaining to elderly Canadians were discussed in more depth at this location. Finally, participants in Nanaimo were recruited to be representative of the local population aged 20 years and above.

The screening questionnaire helped ensure that participants included a good cross-section of the selected subgroups in each location, with good mixes of gender, ages, education and income levels, as well as household composition. Additional methodological details, including the detailed recruitment questionnaire, can be found in the appendix of this report.

This eighth wave of research is part of a continuous qualitative research project that will include a total of 144 focus groups to be held in multiple waves over the 2017 calendar year, with the option of renewing the cycle of research for two additional years. The contracted amount for this research project for calendar year 2017 is \$916,865.05, including HST.

Key Findings

Government Actions

At the start of each group, participants were asked to relate what they had seen, read or heard about the Government of Canada recently. Items spontaneously mentioned covered a broad range of issues:

- Asylum seekers/border security (in all locations)
- Legalization of Marijuana (in all locations)
- Canada- United States relations (in all locations)
- Free trade agreement negotiations (NAFTA)
- Softwood lumber negotiations
- Canada’s 150th Birthday celebrations
- Canada Child Benefit
- Infrastructure spending (Winnipeg only)
- Tax reform (Winnipeg only)

Canada-US Relations (in all locations)

Participants were given a list of issues and asked to select the three they felt were most important for the two countries to discuss. Most Quebec City participants approached this exercise with a clear focus on asylum seekers. Participants from other locations selected a broader array of key priorities, with trade and environmental issues more commonly selected as top priorities. Border security and anti-terrorism security were ranked as second-tier priorities.

Most participants across locations were aware that trade negotiations were taking place between Canada and the United States and believed that negotiations were triggered by the US President’s dissatisfaction over the terms of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The negotiation process was a source of concern for most because of the tone used by the US administration, although most participants did not feel a great sense of alarm at this stage of the process. Most participants felt the approach taken by the Government of Canada in dealing with NAFTA negotiations was sound. They believed that a careful, measured approach that did not grab headlines was probably a good way to move forward.

Asylum Seekers (in Quebec City and Brampton)

The issue of asylum seekers crossing the Canada-US border was top-of-mind for nearly all participants in Quebec City and Brampton. Participants in Quebec City spontaneously added that this issue grabbed so much media attention, including on social media, that hardly anything else seemed to filter through. The issue of asylum seekers was viewed as an important, even urgent, matter in all Quebec City and Brampton groups.

A positive element raised by many when asked how the Government of Canada was handling the situation was that it appeared welcoming and that it seemed to treat asylum seekers with respect and dignity. Nevertheless, participants in Quebec City and Brampton expressed mainly negative views regarding how the Government of Canada has been handling the arrival of asylum seekers at the border. Negative impressions stemmed in large part from a lack of awareness and understanding regarding the role played by the government and the policies that were in place to deal with the unfolding situation.

Climate Change (in Quebec City and Brampton)

Participants in Quebec City and Brampton shared different views regarding what could be done locally to improve on current levels of greenhouse gas emissions. Those in Brampton were more likely to point to the importance of minimizing the impact of personal car usage through investments in better public transit, provision of more local jobs that did not require commuting, tougher rules against idling, as well as through additional investments in green energy sources. In Quebec City, the discussion centered mostly on the need to increase the proportion of electric cars on the road, with some also talking about better transit.

Views on imposing a price on carbon were mixed. Most participants agreed that policies to fight climate change through a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions were necessary, but opinions were mixed as to how this would be implemented and how effective it would be. It proved difficult for many to understand how the government could enforce carbon pricing because carbon was not instinctively viewed as a tangible good that could be measured, aside from increasing the price at the gas pump.

Local Challenges (in Nanaimo and Brampton)

When participants in Nanaimo and Brampton were asked if they could think of actions by the Government of Canada that have had a positive impact on the local community, Nanaimo participants mentioned the introduction of the Canada Child Benefit and marijuana legalization. In Brampton, participants mentioned the benefits brought about by an increased investment in apprenticeship programs and local infrastructure projects, starting with public transit.

A handout presenting a list of potential concerns for their community was given to participants so they could select up to three concerns that they felt were particularly important for their community. While a few issues came up in both cities, including an aging population, affordability of childcare options and retirement security, the most pressing ones in each location were different. Availability of jobs came up as a top priority for many in Brampton, while those in Nanaimo raised strong concerns with opioid addiction and overdoses. Participants in both cities, but more particularly in Nanaimo, also viewed cost of housing as a major concern for their community.

Seniors Policies (in Quebec City only)

Seniors in Quebec City completed a written exercise to identify which actions taken by the Government of Canada they felt were, or would be, most beneficial to seniors in their community. Measures chosen were mostly related to senior’s income, which participants deemed to be too low to allow for a decent living. The most important measure according to them was the introduction of a tax credit for caregivers. This was followed closely by the introduction of the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) for seniors with low income. On the negative side, many stated that the proposal to legalize marijuana and the raising of immigration levels were decisions that could hurt seniors in their community.

Port of Churchill and Health Accord (in Winnipeg only)

Most participants in Winnipeg had heard something about the Port of Churchill, with some noting that the port was recently sold to Omnitrac and had since been shut down. Most participants felt that the port was important to the province overall, mostly because of its economic impact on the local economy.

Participants in Winnipeg were also asked if they were familiar with the Health Accords signed between the federal and provincial governments. Most were aware of them and knew that Manitoba had not yet signed such an agreement. Some felt the Manitoba government was holding out for a deal that would bring stronger benefits to the province, while others were concerned about a perceived lack of healthcare services in the province and felt that it would be important for the Manitoba government to sign the agreement.

Parents Policies (in Winnipeg only)

Most Winnipeg parents agreed that childcare was the most stressful expense faced by parents overall, with the cost of tuition ranking a close second. Other expenses discussed were the cost of food, activities for children and caring for children with special needs. Participants were given a list of things the Government of Canada has done over the past year and asked to select those actions they felt could have the most positive impact on themselves and their families. Actions related to education and childcare costs were selected by many as the most important. One of the actions deemed most important by a number of participants was the enhancement of the Canada Student Loans Program. Another crucial action taken, according to participants, was the introduction of the Canada Child Benefit. Providing funding for Winnipeg buses and public transit infrastructure was also chosen as an important government action that benefited parents.

People with Disabilities (in Nanaimo only)

Participants in Nanaimo strongly felt that disabled Canadians faced numerous unique challenges that did not afflict those without a disability. They talked about the social stigma that often comes with being disabled, the lack of understanding and care. The financial challenges that came with being disabled were also raised as key issue and were seen to be often made worse by the difficulty in finding meaningful, permanent employment. Some also mentioned the overall lower quality of life and the lack of accessible services for people with disabilities.

On a list of possible actions that could be taken by the Government of Canada to assist people with disabilities, improving access to employment for people with disabilities was chosen as the most important. Participants found this to be essential because employment would greatly increase the quality of life of people with disabilities by building social relationships, hereby reducing the stigma and isolation they felt were faced by Canadians with disabilities.

Official Apologies (in Winnipeg only)

Most participants felt that official apologies from the Government of Canada were important. They were deemed especially important for those who were directly impacted, or who were part of communities who were victimized in the past. Participants agreed that while actions cannot be changed, apologies can help with the process of healing for the victims and is a sign that the government intends to make things right moving forward. To be effective and sincere, an apology should be accompanied by a form of assurance that the same issues or behaviours would not reappear in the future.

Participants in Winnipeg felt the criteria used to decide whether the Canadian Government should formally apologize should include whether the incident was the results of direct and willful action by the federal government, as well as whether this action had long term effects and was an important legal or moral issue for Canadians.

Note on Interpretation of Findings

Qualitative research is designed to reveal a rich range of opinions and interpretations rather than to measure what percentage of the target population holds a given opinion. These results must not be used to estimate the numeric proportion or number of individuals in the population who hold a particular opinion because they are not statistically projectable.

Focus group research on government priorities seeks to provide a deeper understanding of participants’ views, often complementing quantitative findings gathered through survey research. Discussions allow for deep probing on key issues that is not possible with quantitative research. This type of information is essential for the Privy Council Office in its role advising and supporting the Cabinet and its committees.