



Government
of Canada

Gouvernement
du Canada

Continuous Qualitative Data Collection of Canadians' Views – July-August 2024

Executive Summary

Prepared for the Privy Council Office

Supplier name: The Strategic Counsel

Contract number: CW2241412

Contract value: \$1,629,482.60

Award date: December 19, 2022

Delivery date: September 16, 2024

Registration number: POR-053-22

For more information on this report, please email por-rop@pco-bcp.ca

Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français.

Canada 

Continuous Qualitative Data Collection of Canadians' Views

Executive Summary

Prepared for the Privy Council Office

Supplier Name: The Strategic Counsel

July & August 2024

This public opinion research report presents the results of a series of focus groups conducted by The Strategic Counsel on behalf of the Privy Council Office. The third and fourth cycles of the second year of this study included a total of ten focus groups with Canadian adults (18 years of age and older) conducted between July 9th, 2024, and August 21st, 2024.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre : Rapport final - Collecte continue de données qualitatives sur les opinions des Canadiens – juillet 2024 et août 2024.

This publication may be reproduced for non-commercial purposes only. Prior written permission must be obtained from the Privy Council Office. For more information on this report, please contact the Privy Council Office at: por-rop@pco-bcp.ca or at:

Privy Council Office
Blackburn Building
85 Sparks Street, Room 228
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A3

Catalogue Number:

CP12-4E-PDF

International Standard Serial Number (ISSN):

ISSN 2816-9360

Related publications (registration number: POR-053-22):

CP12-4F-PDF (Final Report, French)

ISSN 2816-9379

© His Majesty the King in Right of Canada, 2024

Political Neutrality Certification

I hereby certify as a Senior Officer of The Strategic Counsel that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Policy on Communications and Federal Identity and the Directive on the Management of Communications – Appendix C – Mandatory Procedures for 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.

Signed:  _____

Date: September 16, 2024

Donna Nixon, Partner
The Strategic Counsel

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Communications and Consultation Secretariat of the Privy Council Office (PCO) commissioned The Strategic Counsel (TSC) to conduct continuous cycles of focus group research across the country with members of the public on key national issues, events, and policy initiatives related to the Government of Canada.

The broad purpose of this ongoing qualitative research program is three-fold: to explore the dimensions and drivers of public opinion on the most important issues facing the country; to assess perceptions and expectations of the federal government's actions and priorities; and, to inform the development of Government of Canada communications so that they continue to be aligned with the perspectives and information needs of Canadians, while remaining both clear and easy-to-understand.

The research is intended to be used by the Communications and Consultation Secretariat within PCO in order to fulfill its mandate of supporting the Prime Minister's Office in coordinating government communications. Specifically, the research will ensure that PCO has an ongoing understanding of Canadians' opinions on macro-level issues of interest to the Government of Canada, as well as emerging trends.

This report includes findings from ten online focus groups that were conducted between July 9th, 2024, and August 21st, 2024, in multiple locations across the country. Details concerning the locations, recruitment, and composition of the groups are provided in the section below.

The research for these cycles primarily focused on issues related to housing as well as actions that the federal government was taking related to the cost of living, employment market, and making life more affordable for Canadians. Some groups engaged in discussions related to health care, consumer protection measures, news consumption, and immigration. A few groups also shared their impressions related to the design of home energy labels.

Other topics discussed as part of these cycles included what participants had seen, read, or heard about the Government of Canada in recent days, as well as their perspectives regarding the Government of Canada's management of important priority areas. Participants in Western Canada and British Columbia (B.C.) shared their perspectives related to natural disasters and the impacts of climate change, and those in Calgary provided their outlook on the future of the Canadian energy sector. The group based in Quebec also discussed actions by the federal government to protect and promote the French language.

As a note of caution when interpreting the results from this study, findings of qualitative research are directional in nature only and cannot be attributed quantitatively to the overall population under study with any degree of confidence.

Methodology

Overview of Groups

Target audience

- Canadian residents, 18 and older.
- Groups were split primarily by location.
- Some groups focused on specific cohorts of the population including prospective homeowners, current homeowners, individuals who had been impacted by fires, floods, and/or droughts, and Canadians aged 18-34.

Detailed Approach

- Ten groups across various regions in Canada.
- Five groups were conducted among the general population residing in Western Canada, Calgary, the Greater Toronto Area, Eastern Ontario, Quebec, and Ontario;
- The other five groups were conducted with key subgroups including:
 - Prospective homeowners residing in Western Canada;
 - Homeowners residing in Quebec, Ontario, and New Brunswick;
 - Individuals impacted by fires, floods, and/or droughts residing in British Columbia;
 - Participants aged 18-34 residing in Western Canada; and,
 - Participants aged 18-34 residing in Atlantic Canada.
- The groups comprised of members of the general population of Quebec and homeowners in Quebec, Ontario, and New Brunswick were conducted in French. All other groups were conducted in English.
- All groups for this cycle were conducted online.
- A total of 8 participants were recruited for each group, assuming 6 to 8 participants would attend.
- Across all locations, 73 participants attended, in total. Details on attendance numbers by group can be found below.
- Each participant received an honorarium of \$125.

Group Locations and Composition

LOCATION	GROUP	LANGU AGE	DATE	TIME (EST)	GROUP COMPOSITION	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Western Canada	1	EN	Tues, July 9 th	8:00-10:00 PM	Prospective Homeowners	8
Calgary	2	EN	Wed, July 10 th	8:00-10:00 PM	General Population	8
Greater Toronto Area (GTA)	3	EN	Tues, July 16 th	6:00-8:00 PM	General Population	8
Quebec, Ontario & New Brunswick	4	FR	Wed, July 17 th	6:00-8:00 PM	Current Homeowners	7
Eastern Ontario	5	EN	Tues, July 23 rd	6:00-8:00 PM	General Population	7

British Columbia	6	EN	Wed, July 24 th	9:00-11:00 PM	Impacted by Fires/Floods/Droughts	6
Western Canada	7	EN	Tues, Aug 13 th	8:00-10:00 PM	Ages 18-34	7
Quebec	8	FR	Wed, Aug 14 th	6:00-8:00 PM	General Population	7
Atlantic Canada	9	EN	Tues, Aug 20 th	5:00-7:00 PM	Ages 18-34	8
Ontario	10	EN	Wed, Aug 21 st	6:00-8:00 PM	General Population	7
Total number of participants						73

Key Findings

Government of Canada in the News (Western Canada Prospective Homeowners, Calgary, Greater Toronto Area, Ontario/Quebec/New Brunswick Homeowners, Eastern Ontario, British Columbia Impacted by Fires, Floods, and/or Droughts, Western Canada Aged 18-34, Quebec, Atlantic Canada Aged 18-34)

Participants in nine groups were asked to share what they had seen, read, or heard about the Government of Canada in recent days. A range of announcements and initiatives were recalled, including the decision by the Bank of Canada to lower its policy interest rate to 4.50 per cent, the provision of quarterly Canada Carbon Rebate (CCR) payments to eligible Canadians, the implementation of the Canada Dental Care Plan, and the announcement of new measures to protect renters, including the introduction of a Canadian Renters' Bill of Rights.

Several also recalled hearing about the attendance of the Prime Minister and other federal officials at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) summit in Washington, D.C., as well as the commitment made by the Government of Canada to increase its spending on national defence, with the aim of investing at least two per cent of Canada's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) towards this area by 2032.

Government of Canada Priorities and Performance (Western Canada Prospective Homeowners, Calgary, Western Canada Aged 18-34, Quebec, Atlantic Canada Aged 18-34)

Five groups took part in conversations related to the issues currently facing Canadians as well as their perspectives regarding the federal government's management of these priorities. Participants were asked to identify areas in which they felt the Government of Canada was performing well and areas where they felt there was room for improvement.

On a number of issues participants expressed a range of positive and negative views. These included health care, immigration, and actions that had been taken by the federal government related to climate change and the environment. Participants also mentioned a number of areas where they felt that the Government of Canada had performed well, including providing supports for Canadians, protecting and promoting diversity and human rights, reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, and its management of the NEXUS trusted traveller program. Additionally, participants identified a range of areas in which they believed the Government of Canada had room for improvement. These included inflation and the cost of living, the affordability of housing, and the need to create more full-time high paying jobs for Canadians

as well as make it easier for them to acquire the skills they need to compete in the current employment market.

Asked to identify what they viewed as the most important priorities for the federal government to be focusing on, a large number reiterated the need for a greater emphasis to be placed on addressing the cost of living, including reducing costs for housing, gasoline, and groceries. Several also thought that more needed to be done to prepare for and mitigate the impacts of climate change, believing that this represented a major issue for both present and future generations. Other top priority areas mentioned by participants included reducing wait times for emergency and primary care, providing increased supports and benefits for seniors, and addressing issues related to homelessness and addiction.

Housing (Western Canada Prospective Homeowners, Calgary, Greater Toronto Area, Ontario/Quebec/New Brunswick Homeowners, Eastern Ontario)

Five groups took part in conversations related to the housing situation, both in their respective communities as well as across Canada more broadly. Participants residing in Western Canada, Calgary, the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), and Eastern Ontario discussed a range of housing initiatives that had recently been announced by the Government of Canada, while those in the group comprised of homeowners in Ontario, Quebec, and New Brunswick engaged in a conversation related to mortgages.

Housing Initiatives (Western Canada Prospective Homeowners, Calgary, Greater Toronto Area, Eastern Ontario)

Asked to describe the housing situation at present in their respective communities, almost all were of the impression that housing had become increasingly unaffordable as of late. It was widely felt that housing costs had risen substantially in the past few years and that this had negatively impacted both renters as well as those looking to purchase a home. Questioned whether, relative to other parts of Canada, they felt their housing situation was better, worse, or about the same, most (with the exception of those in Alberta who generally felt their situation was somewhat better), believed their situation to be relatively similar.

Prompted to identify the factors that they felt had most contributed to the current state of the housing market in Canada, participants provided a range of responses. These included the inflation (including increases to the cost of construction materials and labour), the rising rate of immigration in recent years, higher interest rates for mortgage holders, and the growing prevalence of residential housing being purchased as investment properties.

Informed that (as part of Budget 2024) the Government of Canada had recently introduced a plan to address the housing crisis, laying out a strategy to unlock 3.87 million new homes by 2031, participants were provided with information related to a number of the specific measures that had been announced. On balance, most reacted positively to these initiatives. Several felt the initiative to allow 30-year amortization periods for first-time home buyers purchasing newly built homes would provide greater financial flexibility for those looking to enter the housing market. A number also were of the opinion that increasing the Home Buyer's Plan limit from \$35,000 to \$60,000 would be helpful to those seeking to purchase their first home, and especially younger Canadians who would have a longer time horizon to build up their Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP).

Participants were next provided with information related to several additional measures that had been proposed by the federal government to make it easier for Canadians to rent or own their own homes. Once again, almost all reacted positively to these initiatives, with several expecting that they would have a

tangible impact on the state of the housing and rental markets in Canada. A large number thought that the measures to extend the ban on foreign homebuyers by an additional two years, as well as restrict the purchase and acquisition of existing single-family homes by very large, corporate investors, would be especially helpful in making housing more affordable for prospective first-time home buyers. A number also believed that it was important for the federal government to be cracking down on illegal short-term rentals such as Airbnb. Among these participants, it was felt that short-term rental services had served to drastically reduce the supply of available housing in many Canadian municipalities and had further driven up housing prices by incentivizing individuals to purchase properties primarily for use as short-term rental investments.

Questioned whether they were familiar with the concept of co-operative housing, a roughly equal number indicated that they were, compared to those who had not heard of it. Provided with information regarding this type of housing, several reacted positively, believing that this represented an additional potential pathway to homeownership for Canadians and would likely positively impact the housing situation of those interested in pursuing this option.

Asked whether they would consider living in co-op housing, only a small number indicated that they would. For most, it was felt that the challenges of having to collaborate with and maintain a consensus with a number of other homeowners would be quite stressful and would not result in a pleasant living situation. Among the smaller number who were more open to co-operative housing, it was felt that mutual ownership would likely instill a collective feeling of pride among the owners of the property and encourage all members of the co-op to actively participate in the upkeep and maintenance of their property.

Mortgages (Ontario/Quebec/New Brunswick Homeowners)

Participants in one group, comprised of homeowners residing in Ontario, Quebec, and New Brunswick, engaged in a discussion related to mortgages, including actions that the federal government had recently taken to make mortgages fairer and more affordable for Canadians. Asked whether they felt that their mortgage payments were currently affordable, most believed that they were. A number clarified, however, that while their mortgages were affordable at their current rates, it was expected that their monthly payments would likely increase considerably when it came time to renegotiate with their lenders.

Asked what role they felt the Government of Canada should have in supporting homeowners looking to renew their mortgages, most expressed uncertainty, with a number unclear as to the actions it was currently taking on this front. Provided with information related to the recently announced Canadian Mortgage Charter, while most believed this represented a step in the right direction, several were uncertain as to how impactful it would ultimately be. Discussing specific measures contained within this Charter, a number spoke positively of the initiative to have banks/lenders connect earlier with homeowners regarding the renewal of their mortgages and discuss the different options available to them. Several also expressed interest in the ability to switch lenders more easily when renewing, believing that this would provide homeowners with much greater flexibility on this front.

Asked whether they thought the Canadian Mortgage Charter was on the right track when it came to supporting mortgage holders, a roughly equal number believed that it was compared to those who felt otherwise. Among those who viewed these measures as a step in the right direction, it was believed that the introduction of this Charter would lead to increased options and flexibility for mortgage holders going forward and would likely have a positive impact on the overall financial situation of homeowners. For those who felt that these measures could be improved, a number reiterated the view that there needed to be a greater focus placed by the federal government on reducing the overall costs required to purchase a

home, believing that this would be the most effective way to make mortgages more affordable for Canadians in the long term.

Health Care (Atlantic Canada Aged 18-34)

Participants in the group comprised of individuals aged 18-34 residing in Atlantic Canada engaged in a brief discussion related to health care services in their area. Asked how they would rate the quality of their health care system, most described it as being fairly average. The view was expressed by a number that while the health care workers (such as doctors and nurses) they interacted with were typically highly skilled and professional, the health care facilities, medical equipment, and organizational procedures of the health care system in their area had become somewhat outdated. All described accessibility to health care in their region as being extremely poor. A large number recalled having encountered long wait times for both emergency and primary care, and several reported having been unable to find a family doctor.

Asked to describe what they viewed as the biggest challenges facing health care in their area, participants mentioned a range of issues, including a perceived shortage of doctors and nurses, difficulties in accessing certain medications, and issues such as the growing prevalence of opioid use and addiction in their communities. Questioned whether they felt the Government of Canada was generally on the right track when it came to addressing these challenges, a roughly equal number felt that it was on the wrong track compared to those who were more neutral in their opinions. Among those who were mostly negative in their opinions, it was felt believed that far more needed to be done to incentivize and encourage Canadians to consider careers in the health care field, believing that this was the best way to address health worker shortages.

Affordability Measures (Greater Toronto Area)

Participants residing in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) took part in a conversation related to measures recently announced by the federal government to make groceries more affordable for Canadians as well as to crack down on issues such as shrinkflation and junk fees.

Asked how they would describe the cost of groceries in Canada, many believed that they had become exorbitantly expensive in recent years. Discussing what they believed was contributing to rising grocery prices, participants identified a range of factors. These included the perceived increased costs (due to issues such as inflation and climate change) for farmers to grow food, growing demand for groceries and other products resulting from higher rates of immigration in recent years, and profit-seeking behaviour on the part of major grocery chains.

Informed that the Government of Canada had recently announced that it would be taking steps to stabilize the cost of groceries by monitoring major grocers, increasing competition within the grocery sector, and tackling issues such as shrinkflation, all reacted positively to this information. A number expressed the view that increasing competition in the grocery sector was an especially important issue for the federal government to be working on.

Participants were also informed that the Government of Canada had recently held a meeting with the heads of Canada's major grocery chains where they had agreed to support the federal government in its efforts to stabilize food prices. Discussing whether they expected that these major grocery chains would follow-through on taking targeted actions to help stabilize grocery prices, only a small number felt that

they would. Several did not believe that major grocers would be willing to sacrifice potential profits and/or would find a way to get around any price regulations that were imposed.

Questioned whether they were familiar with the term 'shrinkflation', a large number indicated that they were. Asked how they would feel about the Government of Canada creating a task force that would investigate instances of shrinkflation, participants were mixed in their opinions. While some felt that any action on this front represented a step in the right direction, a number questioned to what extent the Government of Canada would be able to regulate how private businesses price and package their products.

Discussing whether they had previously heard the term 'junk fees', only a small number had. To clarify, participants were informed that junk fees could refer to additional charges attached to a wide range of services and purchases, including additional fees when purchasing concert and event tickets, additional baggage fees for air travellers, various fees charged by banks (such as transaction fees), cancellation fees when switching to a different phone or Internet plan, and international roaming charges. Provided with information related to actions the Government of Canada was taking to address junk fees, most reacted positively. It was widely thought that this was an important area for the federal government to be focusing on and that making cell phones and Internet plans cheaper for Canadians needed to be a top priority. A few, however, expressed concerns that, if banned, these junk fees would be reallocated into the overall prices of the goods and services sold by businesses and that this would ultimately lead to higher prices for Canadian consumers.

Cost of Living (Atlantic Canada Aged 18-34)

One group, comprised of individuals residing in Atlantic Canada aged 18-34, engaged in a brief discussion related to the cost of living and the affordability of housing. Discussing the challenges related to the cost of living and housing affordability that were impacting their lives on a day-to-day basis, participants provided a range of responses. Several who were currently renting mentioned what they perceived as the exorbitantly high cost of rent, commenting that while they would prefer to live by themselves, they were currently living with roommates out of necessity and in order to make ends meet financially. A number also described the high cost of home energy costs, believing that it had become more expensive to heat and/or cool one's home in recent years. Unrelated to housing, participants mentioned additional challenges related to the cost of living including the high cost of groceries, rising gasoline costs, and wages not increasing at the same rate as inflation.

Asked whether they were aware of any actions that the federal government had taken to address the high cost of living and housing affordability, participants mentioned (though not by name) initiatives such as the Greener Homes Grant, making it easier for Canadians to build additional units in their homes through the proposed Secondary Suite Loan Program, and agreements it had reached to increase the housing supply in Canadian municipalities through the Housing Accelerator Fund.

Discussing additional actions that they felt the Government of Canada should take to make housing and the cost of living more affordable for younger Canadians, participants mentioned actions such as capping the amount that landlords can charge in rent, placing further restrictions on short-term rental units (such as Airbnbs), providing tax-relief for younger individuals struggling with the cost of living, and increased assistance in paying off debt such as student loans.

Jobs (Atlantic Canada Aged 18-34, Ontario)

Two groups engaged in conversations related to the current employment market and actions that the federal government was taking to create more jobs for Canadians. Participants in the group comprised of individuals aged 18-34 residing in Atlantic Canada discussed the employment market more generally, while those in Ontario focused specifically on job creation in the electric vehicle (EV) sector.

Employment Market (Atlantic Canada Aged 18-34)

Asked how they would describe the state of the employment market at present, several felt that it had become increasingly difficult to find a job and that opportunities were quite limited for those looking to secure well-paying, full-time employment. Some commented that while there were numerous jobs currently available in their communities, very few of these offered full-time hours, benefits, and/or a living wage.

Discussing what skills they felt would be in the greatest demand in ten years' time, several believed that those with experience in health care, the trades, and technology and computers would likely have the greatest advantage in finding high-paying employment. Asked how confident, if at all, they were that they would have a good job five-to-ten years from now, almost all expected that they would. It was felt by several that this would be a long enough time period for them to acquire the education and skills training that they would need to excel in their field of choice.

Almost all thought that the Government of Canada was on the wrong track when it came to creating good jobs in Canada. The view was expressed by several that more should be done by the federal government to create jobs that offered a living wage and opportunities for advancement. A number believed that an increased priority should be placed on creating jobs in areas that were perceived to be experiencing significant labour shortages, such as health care, mental health, and social services. Among the few participants who believed that the Government of Canada was on the right track when it came to creating good jobs, a small number were of the impression that it had recently been responsible for the creation of many new construction and trades jobs in their respective areas.

Electric Vehicle Sector (Ontario)

Participants in the group comprised of members of the general population of Ontario took part in a discussion specifically related to job creation in the electric vehicle (EV) sector. Asked whether they felt the Government of Canada was headed in the right direction when it came to creating jobs in the automotive industry, no participants thought that it was. While many were of the impression that expanding the EV industry and the manufacturing of EVs and EV parts in Canada had been a major priority for the federal government in recent years, several were doubtful as to whether this transition would be feasible in the coming decades and whether there would be enough demand and infrastructure in place to facilitate a large-scale transition by Canadians to EVs. A number expressed concerns that a transition to EVs would have an overall negative impact on the automotive industry and auto workers, and that this could lead to less jobs being available in the sector due to a diminishing demand for gas-powered automobiles.

Provided with information related to recent announcements made by the Government of Canada related to EVs, several reiterated concerns as to whether it would be possible for Canadians to transition to EVs at such a large-scale. Some also worried about the feasibility of these vehicles for those living in rural and remote communities, and whether the electricity grid would be able to handle the increased demand placed on it by expanded EV use. A number questioned whether the Government of Canada's investment

of \$44.3 million towards the creation of approximately 1,000 jobs in Napanee was an effective use of funds, given what they viewed as the relatively low number of new jobs created compared to the size of the investment.

Asked whether they felt it was important for Canada to become a global leader in the EV sector, many were uncertain. While most thought it was important for the federal government to be focusing on increasing manufacturing activity within Canada, a number questioned whether the manufacturing of EVs and EV parts was an area of particular strength for the country's economy. A few were of the opinion that, due to there being no major Canadian-owned EV manufacturers at present, it was difficult to see how Canada would be perceived as a global leader in this field.

Consumer Protection (Eastern Ontario)

Participants in Eastern Ontario engaged in a discussion focusing on the rules and regulations in place to protect Canadian consumers. Asked to share their perspectives related to the current cost of living, participants were largely negative in their views, with a number describing it as challenging, frustrating, and/or unfair. Discussing which of their regular expenses, outside of rent or mortgage payments, were currently a source of stress in their lives, participants identified a range of areas. These included groceries, gasoline, credit card bills, and telecommunications and utilities bills.

Sharing the strategies that they had developed to protect themselves from the increasing cost of living, participants reported having taken actions such as shopping around at multiple stores to find the lowest-priced items, purchasing more products from local businesses, and buying non-brand name food products. No participants reported being aware of any rules or regulations that corporations must follow when it came to things like pricing and consumer protection. Asked what obligations they felt corporations should have to consumers, participants believed that limits should be implemented to regulate how much businesses can profit off the sale of essential goods and services. It was also felt that rather than raising prices for consumers, businesses should instead be encouraged to consider ways to improve their internal efficiencies and processes as a way of saving money.

Discussing what role they felt the Government of Canada should have when it came to protecting the rights and interests of consumers, several felt that it should be more involved in increasing competition within important sectors (such as groceries and telecommunications) and reducing red tape for businesses. It was expected that these actions would likely result in lower prices for consumers. Questioned whether they were confident in the federal government's ability to protect consumer rights and interests, very few indicated that they were, with a number of the impression that it had done little to address this area in recent years.

Participants were next provided with information related to numerous initiatives currently being undertaken by the Government of Canada to protect consumers and asked to select which three they felt would have on protecting their rights and interests as consumers. Many selected the actions to strengthen the *Competition Act*, with several believing that this approach would result in lower prices and increased competition across many key sectors. Stabilizing grocery prices was also seen as an important priority, with several expecting that the Government of Canada taking this action would have a significant impact on their lives. The initiative to tackle telecommunication prices also received interest from participants, with a number of the impression that Canadians were currently paying among the highest rates in the world for mobile phone and Internet services.

News Consumption (Western Canada Aged 18-34)

One group, comprised of participants aged 18-34 residing in Western Canada, engaged in a conversation related to their news consumption habits. Asked what their primary sources were for news, several mentioned social media and reported using platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram to receive news. Other sources identified by participants included podcasts, online discussion forums, and word of mouth from family and friends. Discussing where they would go to find news and information about the Government of Canada, many indicated that they would likely go directly to its official websites or social media channels. Asked whether they would ever turn to the Government of Canada as a source for news and information, a number indicated that they would use its website to receive important updates and information.

All reported having come across information online that they were unsure as to whether it was true or false, with many indicating that this happened on a relatively frequent basis. Questioned whether they were familiar with the terms 'misinformation' and 'disinformation' all indicated they were, though several were uncertain as to the distinction between the two. A few speculated that while misinformation might refer to the (knowing or unknowing) dissemination of factually incorrect information, disinformation could refer to those instances in which false information was created and communicated with the intention of being misleading to people. All indicated that they were concerned about the spread of misinformation and disinformation online. Many felt that a large number of users online experienced considerable difficulty in recognizing false information and that the malicious spread of disinformation in recent years had been a key contributor to what they perceived as a growing divisiveness within Canadian society.

Asked what they felt should happen to combat misinformation and disinformation online, many felt that there needed to be greater accountability and regulations imposed upon digital platforms and social media providers (such as Google and Facebook) hosting this content. It was largely believed that, given the far reach of social media, misinformation and disinformation posted on these platforms could have wide-ranging consequences and that it was the responsibility of these digital companies to ensure that false content was not disseminated on their platforms.

Discussing whether they felt the Government of Canada should have a role in combating misinformation and disinformation online, several believed that it should. Among these participants, it was felt that the federal government should be responsible for protecting the safety of Canadians online and that this was an important area for it to be focusing on. Some, however, expressed concerns regarding the potential subjective nature of what could be considered misinformation/disinformation and were uncertain as to whether it should be the responsibility of the federal government to determine what is true and what is false.

Immigration (Quebec, Ontario)

Participants in two groups took part in a discussion related to immigration. Asked if they had seen, read, or heard anything about immigration as of late, participants provided a wide range of responses. Several were of the impression that higher rates of immigration in recent years had placed increased pressure on the housing market as well as on vital services such as health care. It was believed that many communities (including their own) were currently facing challenges in accommodating these new arrivals. Some reported having heard that it had become increasingly difficult for individuals to come to Canada via international student study permits and/or temporary foreign worker visas and that limits had recently

been put into place regarding the number of visas that would be issued through these programs going forward.

Asked to describe the state of the immigration system in Canada, while several felt Canada was an overall welcoming country to immigrants, most believed that the immigration system was overextended at present. A number reiterated concerns regarding the pressure they believed rising immigration had placed on housing, the cost of living, and important public services. Some also were of the impression that higher immigration had made it more difficult for younger Canadians and entry-level workers to obtain employment due to the increased competition from newcomers who were also seeking work.

Describing what they viewed as the benefits of welcoming new immigrants to Canada, a number believed that immigration played an important role in supporting the Canadian workforce, especially in sectors (such as health care, construction, and agriculture) that were believed to be facing labour shortages at present. A few expressed the opinion that as a growing proportion of Canadian workers neared retirement, immigration would be critical to ensuring the continued viability of the country's labour force. Participants also believed that immigration benefitted Canada by increasing the diversity of opinions and backgrounds shared by its citizens and increasing the access of Canadians to different languages, traditions, cuisines, and perspectives.

Discussing their concerns related to welcoming new immigrants, a number worried that a continued high rate of immigration would serve to further increase home prices in Canadian communities as well as place additional financial pressure on Canada's universal health care system. Several also expressed concerns related to the challenges faced by immigrants in having their credentials and experience recognized upon arriving in Canada and believed that more needed to be done to streamline the foreign credential recognition process for new arrivals.

Questioned whether they felt the Government of Canada should increase, decrease, or keep the rate of immigration at about the same level, a larger number thought it should be decreased compared to those who felt it should be kept relatively the same. No participants believed that immigration should be increased. Among those who felt the federal government should decrease immigration, it was widely believed that time should be taken over the next few years to allow for increased infrastructure and services to be put into place to ensure that the country would be able to accommodate more newcomers in the future. For those who felt the current rate of immigration should be maintained, the view was reiterated that immigration played an important role in supporting the Canadian economy and that limiting it would likely lead to negative economic consequences for Canadians in the years to come.

French Language Protection and Promotion (Quebec)

Participants residing in Quebec took part in a conversation related to recent actions by the Government of Canada related to the protection and promotion of the French language. Asked whether they felt the French language was currently under threat in some parts of Canada, several believed that it was. A number were of the impression that, outside of Quebec, the usage of French had been diminishing in most other parts of the country in recent decades and that even residents of cities such as Montreal were now speaking English to a greater extent compared to previous generations. Some also described what they viewed as the domination of the English language in the media and entertainment consumed by Canadians and believed that this had served to further diminish the use of French, including within Quebec.

Asked how big of a priority, if at all, it should be for the federal government to support both the English and French languages in Canada, several viewed this as an important area for it to be focusing on. A few expressed the opinion that the emphasis should primarily be placed on increasing the usage of French outside of Quebec, believing that the majority of Canadians already spoke English and that the English language was not under threat to the same extent that French was.

Discussing the Government of Canada's recently announced Action Plan for Official Languages, participants were provided with information related to key objectives and measures contained within this plan. On balance, participants were largely positive in their reactions to these initiatives, and all felt that the Government of Canada was headed in the right direction in its actions to protect and promote the French language.

Several spoke especially positively of the initiatives to invest in Francophone child care centres across Canada and expand program offerings in French minority-language schools outside of Quebec. A number believed that investments towards French second-language programs across the country would also serve to make it easier for Canadians to learn French and would likely increase the number of French-speakers in Canada as a result. The view was also expressed that actions such as the creation of a new French immigration policy, expanding global promotion and recruitment work in French-speaking countries, and investing in language training for newcomers would have a positive impact. Participants were also largely of the opinion that the provision of increased grants to French-language artists and musicians would help to increase the reach of the French language outside of Quebec and would serve as an effective way to promote Francophone culture throughout Canada.

Climate Change Impacts (British Columbia Impacted by Fires, Floods, and/or Droughts, Western Canada Aged 18-34)

Participants in two groups engaged in discussions related to the potential impacts of climate change, both at present and in the future. Almost all reported being concerned about climate change, with many viewing it as one of the most pressing issues currently facing Canadians. Unprompted, several expressed the opinion that far greater urgency needed to be taken by governments at all levels to prepare for the impacts of climate change, believing that this issue was already posing many serious challenges to communities across the country.

Asked what came to mind when they thought of the potential impacts of climate change, participants provided a range of responses. These included natural disasters (such as wildfires, floods, and windstorms), food insecurity due to worsening growing conditions, negative impacts on Canadians' physical and mental health, and the increased risk of being evacuated and/or displaced from their communities.

Discussing how prepared, if at all, they felt their communities were to handle the potential impacts of climate change, several believed that while their municipalities had emergency and evacuation plans in place, there was only so much that could be done to prepare for the destructive impacts of weather events such as wildfires, large-scale floods, and windstorms. Describing actions that they had personally taken, many in both groups mentioned having prepared an emergency kit containing essential supplies, important documents, and other valuable items that they could take in the event that they had to evacuate quickly.

Questioned whether they felt the Government of Canada was on the right track when it came to responding to natural disasters, most in the group comprised of individuals in Western Canada aged 18-

34 believed that it was and perceived this as having been a major area of its focus in recent years. Among those in the group based in B.C. comprised of individuals who had been impacted by natural disasters, a roughly equal number felt that the federal government was on the right track compared to those who were more neutral or uncertain in their opinion.

Natural Disaster Experiences (British Columbia Impacted by Fires, Floods, and/or Droughts)

Participants residing in B.C. who reported having recently been impacted by fires, floods and/or droughts engaged in an extended conversation related to their experiences in dealing with these challenges. Asked how they would describe the Government of Canada's response to wildfires in their province, a roughly equal number believed that it had performed well on this front compared to those who thought differently. For those who felt more positively, participants recalled numerous actions that the federal government had taken on this front, including the deployment of Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) personnel to assist with combatting fires in their region, the provision of essential supplies to households impacted by these disasters, and investments that it had made towards the recruitment and training of additional firefighters.

Asked whether they had personally experienced any serious impacts or disruptions (such as receiving an evacuation alert and/or being evacuated from their homes) due to extreme weather events, almost all reported that they had. Many felt that their physical and/or mental health had been negatively impacted by these experiences, with several reporting having faced increased levels of long-term stress and anxiety as a result of these events.

Recalling their experiences in handling these weather events, very few believed that they had been able to access the health care services they had needed. Describing specific issues that they had faced, participants recalled difficulties accessing a doctor to check on their children's health issues, being unable to find a pharmacist to refill their prescriptions, as well as what they had perceived as a lack of mental health resources during this stressful and frightening period in their lives.

Discussing whether they felt they had sufficient access to the information, supports, and services they required to recover physically and mentally from these events, very few answered affirmatively. Many recalled finding it difficult to acquire information related to the services that were available in their communities. A number described having primarily relied on social media platforms such as Facebook and X to receive updates related to their respective communities. Several reiterated the need for additional mental health resources to be made available to those whose lives had been disrupted by extreme weather events.

Several felt that more needed to be done at all levels of government to communicate information related to weather emergencies, with some recalling having been evacuated from their homes very suddenly and with little advanced notice. A few believed that, in the future, emergency alerts should be sent to the mobile devices of those in at-risk communities. Following these disasters, a number believed that information should also be provided regarding what services (such as electricity and clean drinking water) were operational in their communities, as well as what supplies they would need to purchase prior to returning home.

Energy Outlook (Calgary)

Participants residing in Calgary engaged in a discussion related to the oil and gas sector, clean energy, and the state of the electricity grid in their province. Asked how important they felt the oil and gas sector was to Alberta's economy, all viewed it as being extremely important, with many identifying oil and gas as the top economic driver in the province and a major source of jobs for Albertans. Several, however, felt that it would be critical for the Albertan economy to diversify away from oil and gas in the coming decades, especially given their expectation that oil and gas usage would decrease as more renewable energy sources became available. Asked what sectors (apart from oil and gas) they felt would be most important for the future of Alberta's economy, many mentioned renewable energy technologies such as wind, solar, and hydroelectricity.

Focusing specifically on the electricity grid, participants were asked whether they felt there was anything that the Government of Canada should be doing to support the reliability of Alberta's electricity grid and reduce the risk of power outages, especially in instances where extreme temperatures contributed to higher power demand. Several thought that it should take action to increase the construction of renewable energy infrastructure such as windmills and solar panels, as well as provide increased financial incentives to homeowners looking to install solar panels on their own homes.

All felt that the federal government was on the wrong track when it came to its approach to the electricity sector. Describing why they felt this way, several cited what they perceived as the high costs of electricity in their province and believed that the Government of Canada should be doing more to work with the provincial government to make energy more affordable for Albertans. A few also felt that more should be done at the federal level to educate Canadians regarding ways they could adopt greener practices in their daily lives as well as providing increased incentives and rebates to homeowners looking to retrofit their homes to be more energy efficient.

Many thought that it was important for the federal government to be making investments towards clean energy and clean technology, with many believing that these would yield long-term environmental and economic benefits in the decades to come. While supportive of diversifying Alberta's electricity grid to use more renewable energy sources, a number believed that this transition needed to be undertaken gradually. Asked whether they expected that the increased use of clean electricity and clean technology would lead to more, fewer, or about the same risks of power outages, a slightly larger number expected that this approach would lead to fewer risks as those who believed it would lead to more or about the same level of risk.

Home Energy Label Design (Western Canada Prospective Homeowners, Ontario/Quebec/New Brunswick Homeowners, Ontario)

Three groups took part in conversations related to the design of home energy labels produced for the Government of Canada's EnerGuide program. Asked whether they were familiar with home energy labels, only a small number indicated that they were, and very few reported having them in their own homes. Discussing what types of information they would want a home energy label to tell them about their home, several expressed a desire for information that would assist them in reducing their monthly home energy costs. A number also felt it would be important to have information related to the energy efficiency of their home, energy use by source, and how their energy usage compared to other similar-sized homes in their area.

Presented with an example of the Government of Canada's EnerGuide home energy label, many spoke positively of the label's layout and aesthetic design, with a number commenting that the design was very well organized in terms of how the information was presented. Several identified the label's graphics as being a positive element, believing that they were colourful, eye-catching, and easily understandable in terms of the information that they were conveying. A number of participants, however, thought that more information should accompany these labels regarding what actions homeowners could take to improve their home's energy efficiency as well as how the energy efficiency of their homes compared to other households.

Participants were next shown a number of different examples of home energy labels from other countries around the world. Sharing their reactions, participants felt most positively about those designs that they viewed as being the most straightforward and informative, with a number favouring labels that included information related to one's home energy score and how much money homeowners could save by making improvements. A few also spoke positively about the designs that featured bright colours and eye-catching, visually appealing graphics. Comparing the EnerGuide label to the other examples, a number spoke positively of its inclusion of a QR code, believing that this was an effective way of providing individuals with an immediate way to find out more about the information contained on their home energy label.

MORE INFORMATION

The Strategic Counsel

Contract number: CW2241412

Contract award date: December 19, 2022

Contract value: \$1,629,482.60
