



Government
of Canada

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du Canada

Continuous Qualitative Data Collection of Canadians' Views – March 2024

Final Report

Prepared for the Privy Council Office

Supplier name: The Strategic Counsel

Contract number: CW2241412

Contract value: \$814,741.30

Award date: December 19, 2022

Delivery date: April 24, 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 

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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 eleventh cycle of the first year of this study included a total of twelve focus groups with Canadian adults (18 years of age and older) conducted between March 5th, 2024, and March 28th, 2024.

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

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Catalogue Number:

CP12-4E-PDF

International Standard Serial Number (ISSN):

ISSN 2816-9360

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

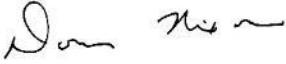
CP12-4F-PDF (Final Report, French)

ISSN 2816-9379

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: April 24, 2024

Donna Nixon, Partner
The Strategic Counsel

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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 twelve online focus groups which were conducted between March 5th, 2024, and March 28th, 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 this cycle focused largely on the Government of Canada's priorities and performance on a range of issues important to Canadians. All groups engaged in discussions related to what they had seen, read, or heard about the federal government as of late as well as their perspectives regarding what they felt should be its top priorities going forward.

This research cycle also explored a range of issues related to pharmacare, out-of-status workers, immigration, and online safety. A few groups participated in discussions related to housing, with some engaging in specific conversations related to a potential Renters' Bill of Rights, mortgages, and the housing supply. Members of the middle class in major centres in Quebec spoke about the federal government's upcoming 2024 Budget, while those residing in Atlantic Canada discussed taxation. A group of millennials from mid-size centres in British Columbia (B.C.) and a group comprised of members of Generation Z residing in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) engaged in conversations related to intergenerational issues. A number of groups were also asked to share their perspectives regarding social media concepts designed by the Government of Canada to highlight the potential dangers of supplemented foods.

Other topics explored in this cycle included carbon pricing, climateflation, and perspectives regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion in Canada.



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 Black Canadians, recent immigrants, millennials, middle class Canadians, members of Generation Z and prospective homeowners.

Detailed Approach

- Twelve groups across various regions in Canada.
- Six groups were conducted among the general population residing in British Columbia, Quebec, Urban Alberta, Ontario, Urban Manitoba, and Atlantic Canada.
- The other six groups were conducted among key subgroups including:
 - Black Canadians
 - Recent immigrants
 - Millennials
 - Middle class Canadians
 - Generation Z
 - Prospective homeowners
- The three groups based in Quebec 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, 89 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	LANGUAGE	DATE	TIME (EDT)	GROUP COMPOSITION	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Toronto	1	EN	Tues, March 5 th	6:00-8:00 PM	Black Canadians	8
British Columbia	2	EN	Wed, March 6 th	9:00-11:00 PM	General Population	7
Quebec	3	FR	Thurs, March 7 th	6:00-8:00 PM	General Population	6
Urban Alberta	4	EN	Tues, March 12 th	8:00-10:00 PM	General Population	7
Ontario	5	EN	Wed, March 13 th	6:00-8:00 PM	General Population	7
Greater Montreal Area	6	FR	Thurs, March 14 th	6:00-8:00 PM	Recent Immigrants	7
Mid-Size Centres British Columbia	7	EN	Tues, March 19 th	9:00-11:00 PM	Millennials, Age 28-43	8
Major Centres Quebec	8	FR	Wed, March 20 th	6:00-8:00 PM	Middle Class Canadians	7
Greater Toronto Area	9	EN	Thurs, March 21 st	6:00-8:00 PM	Generation Z, Age 18-27	8
Southwestern Ontario	10	EN	Tues, March 26 th	6:00-8:00 PM	Prospective Homeowners	8
Urban Manitoba	11	EN	Wed, March 27 th	7:00-9:00 PM	General Population	8
Atlantic Canada	12	EN	Thurs, March 28 th	5:00-7:00 PM	General Population	8
Total number of participants						89

Key Findings

Government of Canada in the News (All Locations)

At the beginning of each group, participants were asked what they had seen, read, or heard about the Government of Canada in recent days. A wide range of announcements and initiatives were recalled, including the announcement by the Government of Canada of the first phase of a national universal pharmacare program, the introduction of the Canada Dental Care Plan (CDCP), an upcoming increase (as of April 1st, 2024) to the federal price on carbon, the announcement of the creation of a new Renters' Bill of Rights, the discontinuation of the First-Time Home Buyer Incentive, and the decision by the Bank of Canada to maintain its policy interest rate at 5 per cent. A number of participants also recalled ongoing discussions related to the costs incurred during the development and implementation of the ArriveCan app, and the rejection by the Government of Canada of a request by



the Government of Quebec for it to receive complete jurisdictional control over immigration into the province.

Participants also recalled activities related to the Government of Canada on the international stage. These included the ongoing provision of humanitarian support to civilians in Israel, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank, the continued provision of military and financial support to Ukraine in its efforts to defend itself against the Russian invasion of its territory, and efforts by the federal government to assist Canadian citizens, permanent residents, and their eligible family members to leave Haiti in the wake of its ongoing state of emergency.

Government of Canada Priorities and Performance (Toronto Black Canadians, British Columbia, Quebec, Urban Alberta, Ontario, Greater Montreal Area Recent Immigrants, Mid-Size Centres British Columbia Millennials, Major Centres Quebec Middle Class, Greater Toronto Area Generation Z, Southwestern Ontario Prospective Homeowners, Urban Manitoba)

Eleven 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, education, and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

Participants also mentioned a number of areas where they felt that the Government of Canada had performed well. These included providing financial benefits and supports for Canadians, protecting and promoting diversity and multiculturalism, and providing humanitarian assistance to those impacted by events such as armed conflicts and natural disasters in other parts of the world.

Describing areas in which they believed the Government of Canada had room for improvement, participants mentioned the perceived high cost of living at present, a lack of affordable housing in many Canadian communities, and what was viewed as the high rate of taxation currently being paid by lower- and middle-income Canadians.

Asked to identify what they believed were the most important priorities for the federal government to be working on, a large number reiterated the need for a greater focus on areas such as reducing the cost of living, addressing housing unaffordability, making improvements to the health care system, lowering the cost of post-secondary education, and stabilizing the rate of immigration. Other priority areas mentioned by participants included the creation of more well-paying jobs for Canadians, continuing to work to make child care more affordable, and providing greater financial assistance to lower- and middle-income households currently struggling with the cost of living.

Black Canadians (Toronto Black Canadians)

Participants in one group, comprised of Black Canadians residing in Toronto, shared their perspectives related to their lives in Canada and actions that the Government of Canada had taken to better engage with and support Black Canadians. Asked to identify what they viewed as the top issues facing Black



Canadians that required greater prioritization from the federal government, participants commented on a range of areas. These included the need for increased investments towards housing and education in predominantly Black communities, making it easier for Black Canadians to enter the housing market, addressing perceived differences in the treatment of Black Canadians by law enforcement, and the need for greater representation of Black Canadians in positions of power and responsibility at all levels of government.

Questioned whether they viewed anti-Black racism as being a significant issue in Canada, almost all believed that it was. Several felt this issue had grown more prevalent in recent years and believed that a greater number of individuals now felt emboldened to engage in racist actions and behaviours. Many felt that more needed to be done by the federal government to ensure that equality rights, as outlined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, were being sufficiently upheld and that racism and discrimination were not occurring in Canada.

Asked whether they felt the Government of Canada was on the right track when it came to engaging with Black Canadians, all were uncertain, with none being aware of any actions or initiatives it had taken on this front. Discussing ways that it could increase its engagement with Black Canadians, many believed that more could be done by the federal government to reach out to and establish dialogues with leaders in Black communities. Additionally, it was thought that a greater focus should be placed on establishing initiatives, programs, and communications specifically targeted towards uplifting and empowering Black Canadians.

Pharmacare (Toronto Black Canadians, Ontario, Quebec, Mid-Size Centres British Columbia Millennials, Greater Toronto Area Generation Z)

Participants in five groups engaged in a conversation on pharmacare and recent actions by the Government of Canada related to the introduction of a national pharmacare program. Asked how significant a priority they felt health care was at present, almost all believed that this was one of the most pressing issues currently facing Canadians. Describing what they viewed as the biggest challenges related to health care provision in their communities, participants identified issues such as perceived shortages of doctors and nurses, long wait times at emergency rooms and walk-in clinics, difficulties finding a family doctor, and significant backlogs for those seeking appointments and/or procedures with specialists.

Asked specifically whether they viewed the cost of prescription medication as a major challenge facing Canadians, while most believed that it was, a few viewed this as a lower priority compared to other issues such as health worker shortages and long wait times. While several were of the impression that a large number of Canadians currently had coverage for prescription medications through their employers, it was felt that these drugs could be very expensive for those with only partial coverage or no coverage at all. Many felt that the perceived high cost of prescription drugs was having a negative impact on the mental and physical health of those struggling to afford these medications. It was felt that this issue represented a significant source of stress in the lives of many who were suffering from

chronic conditions, placing them in a precarious financial situation and forcing them to make cutbacks in other important areas of their lives.

While most were familiar with the term 'pharmacare', few were aware of any specific details as to what this type of program might entail. Asked whether they would support the introduction of a universal pharmacare plan in Canada under which everyone would receive prescription medication coverage, most reported that they would. It was felt that this could have a significant, and in some cases lifesaving, impact on those with serious conditions (such as diabetes or epilepsy) who were currently struggling to afford their medications. While still supporting the aim of increasing the affordability of medication in Canada, a number expressed concerns regarding what they expected would be the high financial costs of establishing and administering a national pharmacare program and worried that this might lead to an increase in taxes if implemented.

None were aware of any actions from the federal government related to the establishment of a national pharmacare program. Provided with information related to the introduction of the first phase of this program, almost all reacted positively. It was widely felt that this action by the Government of Canada was a step in the right direction and would likely have a positive impact on the lives of a large number of Canadians. All believed that it was important for the federal government to include diabetes medication in the first phase of this program, believing that this was a serious disease that was impacting a growing number of Canadian families. Most also viewed contraception as being important to include in this initial phase, believing this would be especially important towards supporting the health and overall wellbeing of women in Canada.

Describing the types of impacts they expected this initial phase would have, many believed that this expanded coverage would be especially beneficial to groups such as seniors and persons living with disabilities. It was felt that these groups typically had higher medication costs and fewer financial resources to afford these expenses. A number expected that this initial phase would also have the impact of creating positive momentum towards the provision of universal coverage for other medications and health supports (such as vision care and mental health resources) in the years to come.

Informed that a national pharmacare program could either be completely public, where all Canadians are on the same plan, or follow a 'close the gaps' approach that would allow people to continue to use existing public and private plans while providing coverage for those without, a larger number expressed a preference for a 'close the gaps' approach. Among these participants, it was felt that this approach would likely cost the federal government less money and would also allow those who preferred to keep their existing private coverage to do so. For the smaller number who favoured a universal pharmacare program, it was felt that this would be the most equitable approach and would ensure that everybody was provided the same standard of coverage.



Housing (Greater Toronto Area Generation Z, Southwestern Ontario Prospective Homeowners, Major Centres Quebec Middle Class)

Participants in three groups took part in conversations related to the housing situation in Canada. Discussions in the group comprised of prospective homeowners residing in Southwestern Ontario focused on issues such as the need for greater protections for renters and challenges related to obtaining and affording a mortgage, while those in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and major centres in Quebec discussed potential actions that could be taken to increase the housing supply.

Renters' Bill of Rights (Southwestern Ontario Prospective Homeowners)

To begin, participants were asked to identify what they felt to be the most important challenges facing Canadians related to housing that they believed required greater prioritization from the federal government. Almost all felt that more needed to be done to ensure that Canadians had access to safe and affordable housing (both for purchase and for rent) and many believed that actions needed to be taken to better protect the rights of renters. Several believed that there should be stricter regulations concerning the amount of rent landlords can charge, the rate at which rent can be increased, and how many properties individuals and companies are able to own as rental properties and/or investments.

Almost all participants indicated that they were currently renting their homes. When describing their experiences as renters, most felt that the rental market as a whole had become far more expensive in recent years, while some reported that their own rent had remained relatively stable and affordable. Asked how they would describe their rights as renters, most expressed uncertainty and did not feel that they had a strong understanding of the protections available to them.

Discussing what came to mind when they heard the term 'Renters' Bill of Rights', participants believed that this would include the regulations on rent that they had mentioned above as well as greater assurances that renters could not be discriminated against based on characteristics related to their race, gender, and/or sexuality, and clear national standards related to the degree of upkeep and maintenance required by owners of rental properties. Asked what additional rights or protections they felt should be included in a Renters' Bill of Rights, a number believed that practices such as renovictions and evictions of vulnerable groups (such as seniors and persons living with disabilities) should be regulated to a greater extent to ensure all renters are treated equitably through the eviction process.

All indicated that they would support the federal government working with provincial and territorial governments to establish the creation of a national Renters' Bill of Rights. A number expressed the view that collaboration between the different levels of government would be of critical importance in drafting this legislation. Among these participants, it was felt that provincial and territorial governments would likely have a better understanding of the unique challenges facing renters within their jurisdictions and have important insights as to what safeguards could be implemented to better protect renters going forward.



Mortgages (Southwestern Ontario Prospective Homeowners)

Focusing next on issues related to mortgages, participants were asked to share their experiences navigating the housing market in recent years. All had previously indicated they were seeking to purchase a home in the coming years, with almost all reporting being first time home buyers. It was widely felt by participants that housing prices in their communities had risen substantially over the past few years and had made the goal of purchasing a home prohibitively expensive for many Canadians, including themselves. Several described having faced challenges not only in being able to afford the down payment required to purchase a home at current prices, but also in obtaining a mortgage to finance this purchase. It was felt that due to recent increases to interest rates it had become increasingly difficult for prospective homebuyers to obtain a mortgage, especially if one did not have well-established credit.

Asked how big of a barrier affording a down payment was when it came to their plans to purchase a home, a roughly equal number of participants identified this as a major concern compared to those who felt otherwise. Questioned whether they had heard about the introduction of the FHSA, a number of participants indicated that they had, with almost all who were aware of this initiative reporting that they had opened an FHSA themselves. All who had opened an FHSA felt that it had made a positive impact on their ability to save towards a down payment.

Questioned whether they were concerned about the prospect of acquiring and subsequently paying off a mortgage, many indicated that they were. Several expressed concerns that once they had purchased a home, they would potentially never be able to pay off their mortgage given the significant amount of money they expected they would need to borrow, and the long time period required to pay it back.

All felt that interest rates were high at present, with several believing that increasing interest rates in recent years had placed many Canadian homeowners in a precarious financial position. A number were worried about the impact that higher interest rates would have on those homeowners who had purchased their homes when rates were considerably lower and would now be expected to make substantially higher monthly payments upon renewal of their mortgages in the months and years to come. It was expected that this sharp increase in housing costs would be unaffordable for many, and in some cases, would place Canadians at risk of losing their homes.

Discussing what they felt banks and other lenders should consider when determining eligibility for mortgages, participants suggested areas such as a lack of existing debt, consistency of employment, and the length of time spent residing in Canada. Asked whether rent payment history should be a consideration for lenders, most felt that it should, believing that this would be a helpful way for renters to build credit and demonstrate an ability to make future mortgage payments.

Informed that current mortgage rates are structured around terms of up to 25 years, participants were asked whether they felt that this was enough time to realistically pay off a mortgage. While some believed that, with stable employment and diligence towards making payments, this was a realistic timeframe, a roughly equal number thought that paying off a mortgage in 25 years would likely be difficult for the large number of homeowners they believed were currently living pay cheque to pay



cheque. Asked whether they felt lenders should be able to offer 30-year mortgages to first-time home buyers, almost all believed that they should. It was thought that this would provide additional financial flexibility for first-time home buyers and might remove some of the barriers they are currently facing related to affording a mortgage.

Participants next engaged in an exercise where they were presented with a number of potential actions that the Government of Canada could take related to housing and asked to select which they felt would have the most positive impact. The initiative to provide more low-cost financing to non-profits to improve and maintain affordable rental properties received the highest level of support among participants. It was felt that this action would have a considerable impact on lower- and middle-income Canadians and would represent an important step towards making housing more affordable. The initiatives to invest more in infrastructure to support the number of new homes being built in communities, provide low-cost financing to builders to encourage them to build more homes faster, taxing underutilized land, and improving the recognition of foreign construction qualifications and increasing construction worker training also received attention from participants. All felt that the federal government was on the right track with these priorities and expected that, if enacted, they would have a positive impact on the housing situation in Canada.

Housing Supply (Greater Toronto Area Generation Z, Major Centres Quebec Middle Class)

Participants in two groups engaged in a brief discussion related to the housing supply and potential actions by the federal government to build more housing on public lands. Asked what came to mind when they heard the term 'public lands', many believed that this primarily referred to land owned and maintained by the federal government. It was believed that this term could refer to land available for public use (such as parks and greenspaces) as well as those preserved for environmental conservation.

Asked whether they supported the Government of Canada taking action to allow for more homes to be built on public lands, almost all did. Several, however, clarified that they would only support this action if these homes were affordable for lower- and middle-income Canadians. A few expressed that their support for this type of measure would be dependent on whether there were any potential negative environmental consequences that could occur by taking this action.

Online Safety (British Columbia, Urban Alberta)

Two groups took part in conversations related to online safety and actions by the Government of Canada to combat hateful content and the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation in online spaces. When asked to identify what positive impacts, if any, participants felt the internet was having on society today, a range of responses were provided, including connecting with family and friends, a greater accessibility of knowledge and information, online services such as digital banking and health care, translation tools allowing individuals speaking different languages to communicate with one another, and greater access to entertainment.

Participants also identified a number of ways in which they felt that the internet had negatively impacted society. These included online harassment and cyberbullying, the spread of misinformation

and disinformation, online fraud, constant connection to one's workplace making it difficult to achieve a healthy work-life balance, and increased anxiety and depression believed to be associated with spending too much time online.

Questioned whether, to the best of their knowledge, there were currently protections in place to keep Canadians safe on the Internet, many believed that companies such as Google and Meta had filters and parental controls available to prevent children from accessing inappropriate content. Additionally, it was felt that most major social media platforms had policies in place to identify and remove hateful content, though many believed that these processes were not always effective. Asked whether they believed that social media companies were accountable for the impact of harmful content on their users, most believed that these companies had a responsibility to do their best to remove harmful content from their platforms.

Discussing whether they felt the Government of Canada should hold digital platforms accountable for addressing harmful content on their platforms, a large number believed that it should. It was thought that regulating the content available to Canadians was a responsibility of the federal government and that it, rather than online platforms, should be setting the standards and regulations.

No participants were aware of any actions or initiatives from the Government of Canada related to online platforms and harmful content. Asked specifically whether they had heard anything related to the *Online Harms Act*, a small number believed they had heard about this legislation in passing but none could recall any specific details. Provided with information about this Act, participants expressed a range of views. Among those who felt more positively, participants viewed the scope of the legislation put forth by the Government of Canada as a sufficient starting point and, so long as these measures were properly implemented, expected that this initiative would go a long way towards combatting harmful content online. For those who had a more neutral reaction, the view was reiterated that while it was important to work to reduce harmful content online, the perceived subjective nature of what could be defined as harmful could ultimately lead to the censorship of certain viewpoints. Many in both groups felt that a clear definition as to what was considered harmful content would need to be provided by the federal government prior to this legislation being enacted.

Discussing whether they expected this legislation would have a positive impact on protecting the online safety of Canadians, while most believed that it would, a few expected that this would primarily be dependent on how diligently these measures were enforced and whether social media companies would be able to effectively identify and remove harmful content posted on their platforms. Provided with information related to the types of content this legislation would prioritize all believed that these were the right types of content to prioritize and felt that taking this action would have a positive impact on reducing the prevalence of harmful content online.

It was shared with participants that this legislation would also create a Digital Safety Commission to enforce the rules and hold platforms accountable to remove harmful content posted by their users. Most believed that the establishment of this Digital Safety Commission would be an effective step towards addressing harmful content online, especially if it were provided with the authority to enforce penalties on companies that do not comply with the regulations. Several, however, felt that there would need to be a clear and transparent process related to the formation of this body, how its

members would be selected going forward, and the specific types of content that it would be focusing on.

To aid in conversation, participants were provided with information related to how hate speech would be defined under this legislation. Asked whether they felt this definition was clear, a large number expressed that it was somewhat confusing, with many focusing on the aspect that *'speech would not be classified as hate speech just because it expresses dislike or disdain, or it discredits, humiliates, hurts, or offends.'* Among these participants, it was thought that the definition was too vague when it came to differentiating between discriminatory, vilifying content and that which was disdainful, hurtful, and/or offensive.

Immigration (Quebec, Greater Montreal Area Recent Immigrants, Major Centres Quebec Middle Class)

Participants in the three groups based in Quebec engaged in conversations related to immigration and the Canadian immigration system at present. At the outset of their discussion, participants in the group comprised of individuals residing in the Greater Montreal Area (GMA) who had immigrated to Canada in the past ten years were asked to share their overall experiences with the Canadian immigration process. Most described their experiences as having been relatively positive and believed that this process had been fair and straightforward. Asked whether they had encountered any challenges related to application processing times, a small number recalled feeling the application process had been quite complex and that they had been required to submit a large amount of documentation and forms.

Discussing the resources available to newcomers upon their arrival, several were of the opinion that these were too focused on providing general information about Canada rather than practical skills and advice regarding how to best integrate into their local communities. It was widely felt that more needed to be done to assist newcomers to Quebec with learning the French language, becoming eligible for provincial health care coverage, finding employment in their fields of expertise, and recognizing the training and certification they had acquired prior to arriving in Canada.

All three groups were prompted to share their perspectives on the current Canadian immigration system. A wide range of opinions were provided, with several believing that there were both positive and negative aspects to the current system. Many thought that the immigration system had been effective in bringing in an increased number of newcomers in recent years and expected that this would have a positive impact on the Canadian economy and workforce. Some also believed that higher rates of immigration had increased the diversity and cultural richness of the Canadian population.

Discussing potential challenges related to higher immigration, a number were particularly concerned about whether there would be sufficient housing, infrastructure, and public services (such as health care, education, and public transportation) available to meet the needs of a growing population.

Asked whether they felt the Government of Canada should increase, decrease, or keep the rate of immigration relatively the same, a roughly equal number believed it should be increased as those who felt it should decrease or remain stable.

Participants in the group comprised of recent immigrants were asked a few additional questions related to the foreign credential recognition process. All believed this to be an important concern at present and many reported having been personally impacted by this issue or having known someone who had. Discussing the types of measures that should be taken by the Government of Canada to address this issue, participants suggested actions such as taking into account the years of experience one has practiced at their specialty in other countries, establishing credential verification systems with other countries, making it more affordable to obtain the certifications necessary to work in Canada, and providing incentives encouraging employers to recognize the credentials of recent immigrants and consider them for employment opportunities.

Life in Canada (Greater Montreal Area Recent Immigrants)

Participants in the group comprised of recent immigrants residing in the GMA also engaged in a brief discussion related to their experiences living in Canada thus far and their expectations for the future. Asked what motivated them to move to Canada, and Montreal in particular, many reported that they had come to Canada to join family members, several of whom resided in or around the GMA. Describing additional factors that had motivated them to come to Canada, a number cited what they viewed as the relative safety, high quality of living, and protections from discrimination that they associated with life in Canada.

While most felt that life in Canada had met or exceeded their expectations regarding its safety and the higher quality of life they could expect to enjoy, a number reported having felt surprised at what they viewed as the high cost of housing and challenges related to accessing health care in their community. A number expressed the view that while the cost of living had been relatively affordable when they first immigrated to Canada, it had risen substantially in recent years. Asked whether a lack of affordable housing would impact their decision to stay in Canada, a few indicated that it would, especially if they found that they could afford to purchase a home somewhere else.

Describing the advice that they would give to prospective immigrants coming to Canada, several suggested gaining a comprehensive understanding of the health benefits available to them, allowing them to better navigate the health care system in their province or territory upon their arrival. It was also felt that, if possible, immigrants should make every effort to secure employment prior to arriving in Canada, ensuring that they are not placed in a financially precarious position while also trying to establish a life in a new country.

Out-of-Status Workers (Quebec, Ontario, Mid-Size Centres British Columbia Millennials, Urban Manitoba, Atlantic Canada)

Five groups engaged in brief conversations related to out-of-status workers in Canada. Asked whether they were familiar with the terms 'out-of-status' or 'undocumented' people, many indicated that they were. A larger number reported familiarity with the term undocumented relative to out-of-status, believing that this referred to those who were living and/or working in Canada without a valid visa. Several were of the impression that this term primarily referred to those individuals who had initially arrived in Canada on valid study or work permits and had remained in the country after their visas had expired.

Asked whether they felt out-of-status workers residing in Canada should be provided with a pathway to permanent residency and citizenship, participants expressed a range of opinions. While some believed that there should be a degree of flexibility on this front for those whose documentation had temporarily lapsed and/or those who had applied and were waiting for the approval of a new work or study permit, a larger number did not believe any pathway to citizenship should be offered. Among these participants it was strongly felt that providing out-of-status workers with a pathway to permanent residency and citizenship would be unfair to those working to immigrate to Canada by following the official process. A number who had themselves immigrated to Canada by following the official channels felt that allowing out-of-status workers this opportunity would be very discouraging considering the many years it had taken them to acquire their permanent residency and citizenship.

Budget 2024 (Major Centres Quebec Middle Class)

One group, comprised of middle-class individuals residing in major centres in Quebec, engaged in a discussion related to the Government of Canada's upcoming 2024 Budget, scheduled to be tabled on April 16th, 2024. Asked how they felt the Canadian economy was currently performing overall, almost all believed that it was facing significant challenges at present, citing issues such as inflation, high interest rates, the rising cost of essentials such as groceries and gasoline, and a lack of affordable housing.

Engaging in an exercise where they were presented with a number of potential areas that the federal government could prioritize in the upcoming Budget, participants expressed the highest level of support for those measures related to growing the housing supply and addressing inflation and the high cost of living. While improving the health care system was also viewed by several as an important priority, few selected those priorities related to maintaining a responsible plan for federal spending, raising taxes on the wealthiest Canadians, unlocking pathways to the middle class, protecting seniors' benefits, and fighting climate change.

Asked whether they viewed themselves as being part of the middle class, most believed that they were. Describing what they felt it meant to be a part of the middle class, several thought that this typically referred to those individuals whose salaries were sufficient for them to afford their monthly expenses while still having some money left over at the end of each month to contribute to savings and/or for

discretionary spending. All felt that the federal government needed to do more to support the middle class, believing that many middle-class households were currently struggling to keep pace with the high cost of living at present.

Discussing whether they had confidence in the Government of Canada's ability to deliver on providing assistance to the middle class and those seeking to join it, participants were mixed in their opinions. While some expressed confidence and felt that the federal government would be able to have a positive impact in this regard, a roughly equal number were more uncertain, believing that success on this front would be dependant on the specific initiatives announced in the Budget and whether these could feasibly be accomplished.

Taxation (Atlantic Canada)

One group engaged in a discussion related to taxes and potential changes to taxation at the federal level. Asked if they believed that wealthy Canadians were currently paying their fair share in taxes, a larger number felt that they were not compared to those who were more uncertain. Several expressed the view that the Government of Canada should tax wealthier individuals at a higher rate while lowering taxes for lower- and middle-income households. Discussing whether they would support the creation of a wealth tax to be paid annually by the wealthiest Canadians, most indicated that they would, and all expressed support for this type of initiative if it were specifically applied to the top one per cent of income-earners in Canada.

Discussing the potential benefits of the creation of a wealth tax by the federal government, it was felt that in addition to potentially lowering the tax burden for the rest of Canadians, this increased tax revenue could be used to build vital infrastructure such as schools and hospitals as well as be directed towards addressing issues such as housing affordability and homelessness.

Asked whether they had previously heard the term 'capital gains', a number indicated that they had, believing this referred to the income individuals earned on investments that they had made, such as through the sale of securities such as stocks and bonds. Asked what types of people came to mind when they thought about individuals who earn income through capital gains, participants widely believed that capital gains could be earned by anybody, including those making contributions to programs such as a Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP) or Tax-Free Savings Account (TFSA).

Informed that, in Canada, capital gains were currently subject to taxation, participants were asked whether this should continue to be the case. Several were uncertain, believing that while capital gains represented another type of income and should likely be subject to taxation, they did not believe this should apply to one-time transactions, such as the sale of one's primary residence, which they felt fell outside of the realm of traditional investing. Told that there was a measure known as the Principal Residence Exemption which allowed Canadians to avoid paying taxes on the sale of their primary home, all believed that this was a fair policy to have in place. It was felt that this would be effective in

financially protecting those homeowners who had owned their properties for a long time and had purchased them as a place to live rather than as an investment vehicle.

Intergenerational Issues (Mid-Size Centres British Columbia Millennials, Greater Toronto Area Generation Z)

Participants in two groups, composed of millennials residing in British Columbia (B.C.) and members of Generation Z residing in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), took part in conversations related to their perspectives on the economy, social equity, and their aspirations for the future. To begin, participants were asked whether they felt the economy and their personal financial situation was better, worse, or similar to that of their parents when they were the same age. Almost all participants in both groups believed that their economic situation was considerably worse compared to previous generations and that life in general was far less affordable today. It was widely thought that the middle-class lifestyle enjoyed by their parents had become far more difficult to maintain and that wages had not remotely kept pace with perceived increases to the cost of living in recent decades.

Asked whether social equality had improved, most believed that it had. It was thought by many that there were now far more professional opportunities available for women today compared to previous generations and that while there was still work to be done, significant progress had been made in this area. Many also believed that there was now greater acceptance and protection of the rights of equity seeking groups such as visible minorities, members of the 2SLGBTQI+ community, and persons living with disabilities.

Discussing whether they felt they had the same or different goals compared to their parents, most believed that their goals were somewhat different. Some believed that they likely prioritized maintaining a work-life balance to a greater extent than their parents. While financial goals were viewed as being important, a number expressed that they did not wish to work a typical 9-5 lifestyle to achieve them and placed a high degree of value on the ability to have a flexible work schedule.

Focusing next on the tabling of the annual federal budget, participants were asked what areas they felt needed to be prioritized by the Government of Canada in the coming year. Almost all believed that a greater focus needed to be placed on addressing issues related to the cost of living and the ability of Canadians to afford essentials such as groceries and gasoline. Many felt that actions needed to be taken to reduce the cost of housing (both to purchase and to rent), believing that safe and affordable housing was a basic need that should be available to all Canadians. Other priority areas included the construction and repair of critical infrastructure (such as roadways and public transportation systems), creating more high paying jobs for Canadians, and making greater investments towards the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and national security.

Shown a list of potential measures that could be considered by the Government of Canada in its coming budget, almost all expressed support for the initiatives related to making housing more affordable for younger generations and securing jobs and investments in the economy of the future. Participants were mixed in their reactions to the initiative of asking the wealthiest Canadians to pay more in taxes in order to better support the rest of the population. A few felt that greater clarity

needed to be provided regarding who would be considered as the 'wealthiest Canadians' under this legislation.

Public Sentiment (Toronto Black Canadians)

Participants in one group, comprised of Black Canadians residing in Toronto, engaged in a brief discussion related to their expectations for the future as well as their perspectives regarding the current state of equity, diversity, and inclusiveness in Canada.

Asked what, if anything, made them feel optimistic about their future in Canada, many spoke positively about having access to publicly funded health care and retirement savings programs such as the Canada Pension Plan (CPP). Others identified the relatively high quality of life of Canadians and what they perceived to be a lower level of anti-Black racism and discrimination in Canada compared to other parts of the world.

Sharing their concerns related to life in Canada going forward, a large number identified the high cost of living as a significant issue, both at present as well as how it would potentially impact the long-term financial security of Canadians in the future. A small number expressed concerns related to a perceived increase in instances of overt racism against racialized people in Canada and were worried that this trend might continue in the years to come.

Describing the state of diversity, equity, and inclusion in Canada, many were positive in their impressions. It was widely thought that Canada was among the most diverse countries in the world, and was very welcoming and respectful of different cultures, beliefs, and values. A number shared the view that while Canada was mostly welcoming, more could be done to increase the representation of racialized individuals at all levels of government as well as place a greater focus on increasing the diversity of those working in executive roles at major Canadian corporations.

Carbon Pricing (Urban Manitoba, Atlantic Canada)

Participants in two groups engaged in discussions related to carbon pricing in Canada. Asked how important they felt it was for the federal government to be working to reduce carbon pollution, all in the group based in Atlantic Canada viewed this as being an issue of critical importance, and especially in terms of preserving a high quality of life for future generations. While also viewing climate change as an important issue, many of those residing in Manitoba felt that other challenges, such as those related to housing and the cost of living, were of greater importance at present.

Discussing what they had seen, read, or heard about carbon pollution pricing in Canada, while most believed that there was some form of federal carbon pricing currently in place in their respective provinces, few were aware of any specific details related to this initiative. Related to this, a number commented that it had become increasingly difficult to discern whether information they encountered related to carbon pricing was accurate, given what was viewed as the high amount of misinformation and disinformation currently being disseminated about this issue.

Questioned whether they felt the implementation of a price on carbon had been effective in reducing emissions, most expressed uncertainty. Several felt that, due to the relatively recent nature of the carbon pricing program, it was difficult to determine whether this initiative had been successful and that more time and data was needed.

While several reported having heard about the Canada Carbon Rebate (CCR), very few could recall any specific details about these payments. Provided with information about the carbon pricing system and the CCR, many expressed the view that the annual rebate for a family of four was too low to sufficiently account for the overall rise in prices they believed had resulted from carbon pricing. A number questioned how these amounts were calculated and whether this rebate would be available to all Canadians or if one would have to be below a certain income in order to be eligible for this program. Asked whether they supported or opposed the Government of Canada's carbon pricing system, almost all in Manitoba opposed this initiative while a roughly equal number of those in Atlantic Canada expressed support compared to those who were opposed or more uncertain in their views.

Several believed that a greater focus should be placed on changing the behaviours of major corporate and industrial emitters rather than individual households. It was felt that taking this approach would have a much greater effect on mitigating the impacts of climate change and would help to reduce the financial impacts of carbon pricing on those Canadians who were already struggling with the cost of living.

Climateflation (Atlantic Canada)

Participants in Atlantic Canada engaged in a brief discussion related to the concepts of "climateflation" and "heatflation". Asked whether they had heard either of these terms before, none indicated that they had. Describing what they believed these terms referred to, many expected that they were likely connected to the issue of climate change and the rising economic costs of its effects as well as efforts to mitigate its impacts going forward. To clarify, participants were informed that heatflation is when extreme heat, caused by climate change, makes food and other items more expensive, and that climateflation was a broader term that encompassed all of the ways in which climate change can cause prices to go up, including but not limited to extreme heat.

All believed that climate change was having at least some impact on the price of food. It was felt that in addition to extreme heat and drought making it more difficult for farmers to protect their crops and livestock, extreme weather events could also cause damage to vital roadways and infrastructure, making it more difficult to transport food products across the country. A few also expressed that in addition to impacting Canadian food production, climate change could also make it more expensive to import food products from other parts of the world that were also dealing with its effects.

While all felt that heatflation and climateflation represented an increasing concern for Canadians, a number believed that recent increases to food prices had also been caused by what they viewed as excessive profit-seeking from major grocery chains. With this in mind, it was believed that in order to make food more affordable, action would need to be taken by the Government of Canada to place stricter regulations on the prices that grocery companies can charge for their products.

Supplemented Foods Concept Testing (Ontario, Greater Montreal Area Recent Immigrants, Major Centres Quebec Middle Class, Urban Manitoba)

Four groups were asked to share their perspectives related to social media concepts designed by the Government of Canada to highlight recommendations related to supplemental foods. All participants were informed that these concepts had been specifically designed for those who were currently pregnant or breastfeeding.

While participant views on the concepts varied, a large number believed that the concept featuring the mock beverage product was effective in that it provided a clear example of a type of product that could include supplemented ingredients. It was felt that in order to increase the effectiveness of this campaign, a wider range of supplemented food products should be highlighted.

Participants were also shown a number of additional concepts, respectively featuring a pregnant woman, a pregnant woman and her partner, a group of pregnant women, and a breastfeeding mother. The concepts shown varied among the groups. Across all groups, most were of the opinion that, unless they were the target audience (i.e., pregnant or breastfeeding), these concepts would be unlikely to stand out to them if they encountered them on social media. Several believed that in order to be more successful in capturing the attention of social media users, these concepts should seek to add brighter colours, provide specific examples of the different types of supplemented food products, and ensure that a diverse group of pregnant or breastfeeding Canadians are featured in these advertisements. A number also felt that more should be done to reach out to the partners of those who were currently pregnant or breastfeeding, believing that they would also be interested in learning more about this issue.

Asked whether they would be likely to share, comment, or like these posts if they encountered them on social media, several expressed that they would only be likely to do so if they were currently pregnant or breastfeeding or were close to someone who was. Discussing whether had they learned anything from the posts or if anything had been surprising to them, several indicated having not been previously aware of supplemented foods and their associated health risks.

MORE INFORMATION

The Strategic Counsel
Contract number: CW2241412
Contract award date: December 19, 2022
Contract value: \$ 814,741.30
