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Delivery Date: February 19, 2019
Contracted Cost: \$218,920 (excluding taxes)

National Focus Groups – Winter 2019 First Cycle

Executive Summary

Prepared by:
Corporate Research Associates Inc.

Prepared for:
Privy Council Office

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



Suite 5001, 7071 Bayers Road
Halifax NS B3L 2C2
www.cra.ca
1-888-414-1336



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Background and Objectives

The Communications and Consultation Secretariat of the Privy Council Office (PCO) commissioned Corporate Research Associates Inc. (CRA) to conduct public opinion research using qualitative approaches, to explore the perceptions of Canadian adults on the state of current events that relate to the federal government. Findings from the research will be used to develop effective communications strategies and products, to ensure that communications with the Canadian public on important issues remain clear and easy to understand. More specifically, objectives of this first cycle of focus groups aimed to assess opinions and perceptions on the state of the economy and job market, the environment, the Canadian Coast Guard, the management of irregular migrants, and issues most pressing for Canadian youth.

The first cycle of the study consisted of a total of twelve (12) in-person focus groups conducted from January 15th to February 4th, 2019. Two French sessions were conducted in Saint-Hyacinthe (QC) while two English groups were held in each of Peterborough (ON), Coquitlam (BC), St. John's (NL), North York (ON) and Calgary (AB). Focus group participants included Canadian residents between the ages of 18 and 74 years old, with a mix of education, household incomes, and parental responsibilities represented in each group. In each location with the exception of Calgary, focus groups were divided by gender. In Calgary, focus groups were divided by age (18-34 years old and 35+ years old). All participants lived in their respective markets for at least two years. Across all groups, a total of 118 participants took part in this research.

This report presents the findings from the study. Caution must be exercised when interpreting the results from this study, as qualitative research is directional only. Results cannot be attributed to the overall population under study, with any degree of confidence.

Political Neutrality Certification

I hereby certify as a Senior Officer of Corporate Research Associates Inc. 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***. 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



Margaret Brigley, CEO and Partner | Corporate Research Associates

Date: February 19, 2019



Key Findings and Conclusions

The following presents a summary of key findings from the *Focus Groups – Winter 2019 – First Cycle* for each topic discussed.

The Economy and the Job Market (all locations)

There is some uncertainty regarding the state of the economy, especially with respect to what is perceived to be an increasingly challenging job market over the past year. The declining number and quality of jobs available is most concerning. At the same time, the future of the job market in the next five or ten years is questioned, and there was a sense that it will continue to be affected by increased automation, outsourcing, recessions, economic migration, cost of housing, and wages not keeping up with the cost of living. In some locations, the low unemployment rate reported by Statistics Canada at 5.6% was felt to be surprisingly low.

Various factors are used to help assess the strength of the economy, with a strong retail environment, low unemployment and the availability of quality, high-paying jobs being most indicative of a strong economy. By contrast, factors that speak to household financial hardship, such as lower household incomes, increased price of goods and services, high bankruptcy levels, high interest rates and inflation were most commonly associated with signs that the economy is doing poorly. There was, however, widespread belief that the Government of Canada can influence the state of the economy, primarily through policy setting, encouraging trade, managing immigration, funding of key industries, setting the interest rate and by adjusting equalization payments to provinces. When provided with a list of seven job-related issues the Government could tackle, participants identified some as being of the highest priority. Wages not keeping up with the rising cost of living was considered a top priority across locations, followed by job security and skills training and retraining.

Youth Economic Opportunities (Calgary)

In Calgary, youth were generally under the impression that there are many more opportunities available to today's younger generation than were evident in the past, particularly with increased technology and global trade. That said, there was a clear perception that youth face many challenges that did not exist in the past, most notably in relation to the environment, the cost of living, increased reliance on global relationships, and a decreased focus on resource-based economies. While Canada was recognized as a country largely dependent on its natural resources (regardless of region), today's global landscape places great pressures on that dependence and questions its relevance or appropriateness.

When asked to identify the largest challenges facing younger Canadians, Calgary youth consistently identified finding suitable, full-time employment, the high cost (and resulting debt) of education, as well as a perceived inability to ever own their own home. In addition, participants felt that youth today are generally unable to deal with basic life skills and have a lack of awareness of how to cope with day-to-day living.

When considering how government could help young adults, the greatest emphasis was placed on actions that would help make life more affordable, with priority given to helping young families with the



cost of raising children, making it more affordable for people to buy their first home and relieving student debt.

Factors influencing access to affordable homes are perceived to be the greatest problems impacting youth's ability to own a home and accordingly, it was felt that efforts to ease entry into home ownership, and support the development of more modest sized homes would be helpful. In addition, the introduction of legislation to address foreign buyers' home purchasing and the flipping of homes (without living in a home) were both deemed to be helpful initiatives. Participants voiced unanimous support for a program that makes it easier for first time home buyers to purchase a home.

The Environment (Peterborough, Saint-Hyacinthe, Coquitlam, North York, and Calgary)

The Trans Mountain pipeline, global warming/climate change and ocean plastic pollution were the most mentioned top-of-mind environmental issues. As such, environmental priorities for the Government of Canada included (from among a list of ten action items) investing in clean energy, driving new business opportunities and job creation in industries of tomorrow, addressing plastic pollution in oceans, lakes and rivers, and improving public transit. By contrast, the Government was seen as not having a role to play in funding new charging stations for electric vehicles given the low incidence within the Canadian population for this type of vehicles and a belief that this initiative should be undertaken by electric vehicle manufacturers.

Changes in weather patterns and climate over the past few years were widely reported as having had an impact on people's behaviours and habits. At the same time, it was believed that everyone has a personal responsibility to help reduce Canada's greenhouse gas emissions, with many in the focus groups having already adopted more environmentally-friendly behaviours. A desire to improve the environment for future generations and to save money are the greatest motivators to changing personal behaviours and habits, while the upfront costs, well-formed habits, and the inconvenience of public transit were identified as the strongest barriers.

Although the existence of a plan on putting a price pollution was largely known, knowledge and understanding of what the plan entails was limited. Many referred to it as a "tax" on pollution. Awareness of the Climate Action Incentive was nonexistent in North York. Regardless of knowledge or opinions of climate change issues, there was support for the Government to take a global leadership role on protecting the environment and fighting climate change.

The Canadian Coast Guard (St. John's)

The Canadian Coast Guard enjoyed positive opinions in St. John's, where the focus group included a discussion on this topic. It was widely seen as playing an essential role in Canadians' ocean safety and as being well managed overall. Among a list of six action items for the Coast Guard, ensuring the safety of Canadians at sea was widely seen as an important focus to support the organization's mandate. The renewal of the Coast Guard fleet was also considered important, either by building new ships or retrofitting existing ones with the newest technology.



As such, there is support for the Government of Canada to invest in building or retrofitting ships, including the purchase of new, innovative equipment to modernize the Coast Guard's capabilities. By contrast, opinions were mixed regarding the need to expand the fleet of icebreakers, with limited awareness and understanding of the current situation.

Irregular Migration (Peterborough, Saint-Hyacinthe, Coquitlam, St. John's, North York)

Although there was awareness of an influx of asylum seekers crossing the U.S.-Canada border over the past year, little else was known regarding the situation. Mixed opinions were offered as to the Government of Canada's performance in managing the increase in the number of asylum seekers.

Four possible deterrence measures were presented and discussed during the focus groups. Each option was very briefly explained and participants were asked for their level of agreement or disagreement with each. As possible deterrence measures were presented, participants often expressed that it is a difficult situation and not an easy one to fix. Overall, none of the four deterrence measures presented elicited strong support from participants in any of the locations. The idea of working with a U.S. NGO to manage the influx of daily asylum seekers was perhaps the most agreeable option, as it presented an opportunity for a more structured process, while ensuring that migrants stay in the U.S. until a designated date appeared fair. However, some also expressed concern about the feasibility of this option and how it would be received by the U.S.

Establishing a different way of handling irregular migrant claims by speeding up the review of claims from irregular migrants to allow faster removal of those who do not qualify was considered unjust towards migrants who used the established points of entry, since they thought that the latter would have to wait longer to have their claims processed. This approach was also seen as encouraging potential draw for irregular migrants given that their claims would be processed faster.

There was general disagreement with the third idea that entailed sending asylum seekers back to the U.S. while inviting them to return at a scheduled date, primarily due to a mistrust of the U.S. Administration in how migrants would be treated while they wait. Likewise, there was general disagreement with the option of sending asylum seekers back to the U.S. where, given that it has a well-established legal system that operates within international refugee law, they are able to pursue their claim. This approach was not seen as being aligned with the Canadian values of being welcoming to those in need of assistance.

Despite mixed feelings towards the various options presented, there was a clear belief that the Government of Canada should find ways to process asylum cases faster, even if this costs more money. It was believed that cost-savings would be achieved in the long run. It was also believed that asylum seekers in general should continue to have the right to appeal claim decisions made by the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB), while mixed opinions were offered regarding whether or not irregular migrants should have access to an appeal.

