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Continuous Qualitative Data Collection of Canadians' Views – July 2020

Executive Summary

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Canada 

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, as well as emerging trends.

This report includes findings from 12 online focus groups which were conducted between July 7th and 29th, 2020 in multiple locations across the country including in the Atlantic region, Quebec, Ontario, the Prairies, Alberta, and British Columbia. Details concerning the locations, recruitment, and composition of the groups are shown in the section below.

The research for this cycle of focus groups focussed primarily on COVID-19, as the pandemic continued in Canada. The discussion explored a wide range of related issues in depth, including what Canadians had heard recently about COVID-19, perceptions of the federal government's response to date, the economic impacts both broadly and in specific sectors, how Canadians were adapting to the situation as it evolved as well as how different regions across the country were moving through various stages of reopening. In addition, focused discussions were undertaken with key subgroups regarding the impact of the pandemic on parents and youth as well as the experience of those receiving the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB). Over the course of this wave of focus groups several creative concepts and materials related to promoting the COVID-19 Alert App were tested. Other topics were also examined in select groups, including of racism and immigration.

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 focussed on specific subgroups of the population including parents of school-age children, young adults, aged 18 to 24, those receiving the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) and Black Canadians

Detailed approach

- 12 focus groups across various regions in Canada
- Groups were conducted with the general population in Calgary, the City of Montreal, Atlantic Canada, the City of Toronto, and Lower Mainland BC.
- Groups were conducted with key subgroups including parents in Winnipeg and mid-size and small towns in Quebec, young adults (18-24 years old) in the Greater Toronto Hamilton Area (GTHA) and Windsor, Black Canadians in the Greater Montreal Area (GMA) and major centres in Ontario and those receiving the CERB in Windsor and Rural Quebec.
- Groups in Quebec were conducted in French, while all others 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, 76 participants in total took part in the discussions. Details on attendance numbers by group can be found below
- Each participant received a \$90 honorarium in respect of their time

Group Locations and Composition

| LOCATION | GROUP | LANGUAGE | DATE | TIME (EST) | GROUP COMPOSITION | NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS |
|--|-------|----------|---------|---------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Windsor | 1 | English | July 7 | 5:30-7:30 pm | Receiving CERB | 7 |
| Greater Montreal Area | 2 | French | July 9 | 6:00-8:00 pm | Black Canadians | 7 |
| Ontario – mix of major centres | 3 | English | July 14 | 6:00-8:00 pm | Black Canadians | 7 |
| Winnipeg | 4 | English | July 15 | 7:00-9:00 pm | Parents (gr.7+) | 6 |
| Rural Quebec | 5 | French | July 16 | 5:30-7:30 pm | Receiving CERB | 5 |
| GTA/Hamilton/Windsor | 6 | English | July 20 | 6:00-8:00 pm | Young Adults (18-24) | 7 |
| Calgary | 7 | English | July 21 | 7:00-9:00 pm | Gen Pop | 5 |
| City of Montreal | 8 | French | July 22 | 6:00-8:00 pm | Gen Pop | 8 |
| Atlantic Canada | 9 | English | July 23 | 4:30-6:30 pm | Gen Pop | 4 |
| City of Toronto | 10 | English | July 27 | 6:00-8:00 pm | Gen Pop | 7 |
| Lower Mainland BC | 11 | English | July 28 | 8:30-10:30 pm | Gen Pop | 7 |
| Quebec – mix of mid-size/smaller towns | 12 | French | July 29 | 6:00-8:00 pm | Parents (JK/K-gr.6) | 6 |
| Total number of participants | | | | | | 76 |

Key Findings

Part I: COVID-19 Related Findings

Timeline of July Announcements

In order to place the findings from focus group discussions which were conducted throughout July 2020 into context it is important to note that by the end of June all provinces had reopened, although the stage of reopening varied from one province to another, and that the Canada-U.S. border remained closed to non-essential travel. During the month of July, reopening in each province continued. At the same time, Canada and the U.S. agreed that the border would remain closed for other than essential travel for an additional 30 days, to August 21st. This was the fourth such extension since the start of the pandemic.

Government of Canada economic supports continued, including announcement of a \$19B investment in the national Safe Restart Agreement and further refinements to the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS). S&P Global Ratings confirmed Canada's stable economic outlook and AAA credit rating.

COVID-19 in the News (All Locations)

In July, participants said they were continuing to listen to news about COVID-19 although some reported less interest while others indicated they were actively avoiding news about the virus, feeling that the volume of information on the topic was overwhelming and the news itself somewhat disheartening. Participants reported hearing too much news, conflicting reports and stories, some fearmongering and a sense that no one really knew what to do to effectively vanquish the virus. This confused situation was borne out by further questioning indicating varying levels of understanding as to whether the number of infections was increasing or decreasing, and as to whether or not there might be a second wave.

Some confusion was also apparent in participants' views about coverage in the news related to the development and availability of a vaccine. Participants were unclear as to whether the news on this front was positive or negative, and some were quite pessimistic about their own chances of being vaccinated.

One area of consensus among participants in many groups was with respect to the situation in the United States. In several groups participants noted the much higher infection rate in the U.S., and that the border would remain closed for at least another month.

Government of Canada Response (GMA Black Canadians, Major Centres Ontario Black Canadians, Rural Quebec CERB Recipients, Winnipeg Parents, Toronto, Lower Mainland BC, Mid-size and Small Town Quebec Parents)

Most participants expressed an overall positive response to the Government of Canada's actions with respect to the pandemic, even if they mentioned few specifics. They were quite effusive about the speed and breadth of the economic supports that were made available, although a few critical comments were made regarding the impact of the pandemic on long-term care facilities and the low stock or availability of personal protective equipment (PPE) in the early stages of the pandemic. Some also felt that federal government had underestimated the seriousness and severity of the pandemic and, as a result, certain key measures such as border closures and travel restrictions had been implemented too slowly.

The level of information provided by the Government of Canada as well as its transparency were well-appreciated. Some participants remarked on the fact that scientists and healthcare workers were highly respected for their expertise and credibility and were being listened to.

Status of COVID-19 (Toronto, Lower Mainland BC, Mid-size and Small Town Quebec Parents)

When asked about current trends regarding the spread of the virus, a clear majority of participants held the view that the number of daily new COVID-19 cases was staying about the same or increasing. Perceptions that cases were on the rise were linked to reopening in many provinces and the resulting increased activity and social interaction.

Participants' reactions varied between being worried and annoyed when asked how concerned they were about COVID-19. A large part of the annoyance expressed by participants was less about the behaviour of people around them and more about the ongoing nature of the pandemic situation and associated restrictions when many had hoped that by this time things might begin to return to normal. At the same time, participants felt that while cases of infection may be increasing, the total was below previous peaks and that society was better placed to handle the crisis as compared to the initial days and weeks of the pandemic.

Participants were asked if they thought that a second wave was inevitable or if anything could be done to prevent one from happening. This question prompted discussion of the need for a vaccine, a further push for more preventative distancing measures (especially when the weather changes and activities move back inside), and for more active contact tracing.

Reopening and Behaviour Change (Winnipeg Parents, GTHA and Windsor Young Adults, Toronto, Lower Mainland BC, Mid-size and Small Town Quebec Parents)

All participants reported ongoing and significant reopening initiatives in their areas. The majority were comfortable managing through reopening and many stated that the pace was appropriate given low local rates of infection. This sentiment was not unanimous however, and there were some regional variations with participants in some areas proposing greater caution and/or slowing down the

speed of reopening. Nevertheless, most participants fully supported reopening, and variously described it as inevitable, necessary for the economy, and good for public morale and mental health.

When asked if they had changed their behaviours recently or in response to reopening, some had and others had not. When asked why participants had not changed their lives and routines very much as reopening progressed, many explained that this was because they were still trying to avoid infection. Keeping oneself and one's family healthy was viewed as critical for some so that they could continue to visit or care for immunocompromised relatives. Participants also reported feeling a greater sense of freedom being able to spend more time outdoors. Some also reported a general sense of ease in adapting to the newer rhythm of life during a pandemic or commented that they had been able to find what they needed and wanted locally, without having to travel. Others reported feeling "safer" in their current patterns, and others that they had adjusted to working 100% from home.

Parenting Through COVID-19 (Winnipeg Parents, Mid-size and Small Town Quebec Parents)

Parents in Winnipeg and Quebec exhibited a balanced view of their experience parenting through COVID19, citing both positive and negative aspects. Some felt challenged with the responsibility of having to closely supervise their children and manage their time. This included responding to requests from children to socialize with friends as well as monitoring their online schooling, a task they faced in the earlier months of the pandemic. Many used terms like 'security', 'mental insecurity', 'prevention', 'restriction' and 'management' to describe being a parent during COVID-19.

However, on the positive side many parents cited great pleasure in being able to spend more quality time with their children and, in many cases, having their relationship grow closer as a result. In this context, parents used terms like 'patience', 'fun', 'caring' and 'supportive' to describe parenting during the pandemic.

While many parents said their children were advised of and following preventative measures such as wearing a mask and social distancing, they were still very concerned about keeping their children from contracting COVID-19, especially as the stages of re-opening progressed in each province. Parents were particularly concerned about the prospect of a second wave. Although they questioned what back-to-school would look like in September, as of July most suggested that they would prefer to send their children to school in a positive learning environment where they would benefit from socialization with their peers.

Goals for the Economy (Mid-size and Small Town Quebec Parents)

When thinking more about specific goals for the economy, parents in Quebec reviewed and commented on a series of descriptions for the type of economy Canada could be aiming for:

- Future-proof economy (Une économie à l'épreuve du temps)
- Green economy (Une économie verte)
- Healthy economy (Une économie saine)

- Modern economy (Une économie moderne)
- Resilient economy (Une économie résiliente)
- Strong economy (Une économie forte)
- Economic solidarity (Solidarité économique)

By far, the goal of achieving 'economic solidarity' was the priority for this group as it suggested teamwork, community and ensuring support for local, Canadian products.

Experiences with the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) (Windsor CERB Recipients, Rural Quebec CERB Recipients)

Participants were asked to provide three words to describe their experience receiving the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) and virtually all of the descriptions were positive. The few negative descriptions put forward were not necessarily pejorative, but more questioning in tone.

Most participants indicated that they had been asked to return to work or were actively looking for work. Some also mentioned that they had already returned to work and would not be reapplying for the CERB. In considering a return to work, some participants were monitoring infection rates in their area and were more comfortable going back to their place of work knowing rates had dropped. Others mentioned their employers did not have sufficient work to recall workers at this time.

Many participants felt the CERB was fair, especially because the speed and simplicity of the program met individual and national interests. Those who thought that it was unfair focused on the varying circumstances of people and households across Canada which they felt had not been reflected in the way in which CERB was administered (e.g., \$2,000 monthly to each individual who met the eligibility criteria and applied, regardless of their previous income, family size, etc.). However, these participants also acknowledged the complexities and difficulties of administering such a system.

There was broad support for extension of the CERB (even beyond the additional eight weeks). Participants commented that economic activity had yet to return to pre-pandemic levels and that workers were still being laid off. There was a consensus that continued financial assistance would likely be required until such time as a COVID-19 vaccine had been fully deployed and it was safe for everyone to return to work. Some participants also acknowledged that, in the interim, a transitional program leveraging some version of Employment Insurance (EI) and disability benefits may be required. They also felt that the larger, looming issue was how the various economic measures would be paid for.

Travel and Airlines (Winnipeg Parents, Rural Quebec CERB Recipients, GTHA and Windsor Young Adults, Calgary, Montreal, Mid-sized Centres Atlantic Canada, Toronto, Lower Mainland BC, Mid-size and Small Town Quebec Parents)

Travel (GTHA and Windsor Young Adults, Calgary, Montreal, Mid-sized Centres Atlantic Canada, Toronto, Lower Mainland BC, Mid-size and Small Town Quebec Parents)

In the above-noted locations, participants were asked a series of questions intended to explore issues related to the border, including the status of the Canada-U.S. border and travel into and outside of Canada.

Most participants were aware that the Canada-U.S. border was closed to non-essential travel and that the two countries had reached an agreement to extend the closure for another month. Participants were generally supportive of this decision.

In terms of opening up travel to and from countries (other than the U.S.), most participants were opposed. Many believed that the virus was not yet under control in Canada and felt that opening up the borders to international travellers would be too risky until Canada was in a better position in terms of numbers of cases and the rate of infection. Some commented that Canadians were not yet able to travel between provinces in some regions of the country or that isolation was required for those who did. Others spoke about recent spikes in the number of cases as provinces advanced through the stages of reopening. Those who favoured opening up international travel, a relatively small number overall, suggested that travel should be restricted to those countries that are doing as well as or better than Canada in terms of limiting the spread and flattening the curve for COVID-19 (e.g., New Zealand) and that non-essential or short-term trips should be discouraged or not permitted.

Asked if mandatory testing of those coming into Canada and a compulsory 14-day quarantine would change how they felt, most remained opposed to relaxing current restrictions. Participants were of the view that improvements to the timeliness and accuracy of the tests were needed. Moreover, they preferred international travellers to be tested before they left for their destination. With regards to the 14-day quarantine, participants were not convinced that travellers would abide by these rules and also believed that it could not be adequately enforced.

Airlines (Winnipeg Parents, Rural Quebec CERB Recipients, Calgary, Montreal, Mid-sized Centres Atlantic Canada)

Many participants were aware of the significant financial repercussions of COVID-19 on the airline industry, having heard about cancelled flights, routes being terminated and layoffs of airline and airport staff. And, while many favoured offering financial aid to the industry, viewing air travel as an essential service which employs a significant workforce and serves many of Canada's smaller communities, they also felt certain conditions should accompany any bail-out (e.g., loans and grants, full reimbursement to customers for cancelled flights, more affordable ticket prices, and continued service to rural/remote communities). A few participants were opposed to any kind of financial assistance for the airline industry from the Government of Canada, maintaining the view that the

industry should adjust its business model to the current circumstances and that travel would recover to pre-pandemic levels in the near future.

Participants generally understood and supported the business decision that some airlines have taken to suspend dozens of domestic flight routes, including regional routes as well as service to a number of domestic cities, even knowing this would adversely affect many communities. However, when specifically asked whether the Government of Canada should step in to ensure air service to smaller communities is preserved, many began to reconsider and spoke strongly in favour of keeping these communities connected. Discussions centered on the reliance of smaller and less accessible communities, particularly in the North, on air service to bring in needed goods and to provide access to health care.

As the discussion progressed, participants were increasingly supportive of financial aid to airlines particularly if the airlines agreed to meet one or more of the following potential conditions:

- Cannot sell middle seat in rows as a COVID safety precaution
- Refund everyone who had tickets cancelled due to COVID (right now most only received vouchers)
- Maintain service to smaller communities
- End the practice of charging extra fees for things like checked bags

The possibility of a scenario in which Canadian airlines go bankrupt without federal aid and Canadians are served only by U.S. or international airlines was met with considerable concern. Facing this prospect, many participants opted to ensure that Canadian airlines would receive financial aid. They felt it was vital to sustain the Canadian airline industry for a number of reasons, including maintaining a strong Canadian identity and presence in the sector, as well as jobs and employment, and greater competition.

COVID-19 Alert App – Creative Testing (Windsor CERB Recipients, GMA Black Canadians, Major Centres Ontario Black Canadians, Winnipeg Parents, Rural Quebec CERB Recipients, Toronto)

Relatively few participants had heard anything about the COVID Alert app, and those who were aware of it had only heard that it was under development. Very few could provide further details about the app.

Prior to being given more information about the app, participants were asked to assess some messages from the Government of Canada that could be used to promote it via social media. Images of each of the messages which were tested can be found in the Detailed Findings. Two of the seven tested were identified by participants as particularly compelling in terms of convincing them to download the app (Options A and E), while two others (Options C and G) were also viewed as having some motivational appeal. In general, participants were drawn to messages that:

- Were framed as a request for help, rather than perceived as a directive;
- Spoke to them in a relatable and respectful fashion, and in a friendly rather than more formal tone;

- Included imagery which more clearly reinforced the app itself (e.g., images of cellphones transmitting information/data) and its purpose regarding prevention and protection. Some participants noted that the image of a face mask, in addition to the cell phone, would further underscore the latter point;
- Gave them a sense of control and referenced protecting themselves or loved ones from the virus; and
- Focused on community, promoting a unified approach to reducing the spread of the virus.

By contrast, messages which emphasized protecting people's privacy were less reassuring as they tended to raise rather than assuage any concerns participants had about the privacy of users' personal data and information.

Additional information was then provided to participants which explained how the app works and what a user would see when downloading and setting up the app. This was shown to participants in the form of descriptions of what might appear on the app (the images tested are included in the Detailed Findings). Following a review of this information, many participants indicated they would be likely to download the app, primarily because they felt its effectiveness would be limited unless a critical mass of Canadians did the same. Many also felt that doing so would enhance their own personal sense of security knowing that the app would alert them to an incident of exposure.

At the same time, participants had questions about the functioning and mechanics of the app and it was apparent there was some confusion specifically with regard to the generation and sharing of 'random codes,' as well as concern by some participants about having to keep Bluetooth enabled. In addition, concerns about privacy, the accuracy of the data collected, and a reliance on individuals to input data if they had a positive test result led some participants to say they would be unlikely to download the app, or to express some uncertainty about doing so pending further clarification. Knowing that the Privacy Commissioner of Canada had said the app met all federal privacy requirements did little to allay participants' concerns. Some participants were also of the view that they were already doing as much as they felt was necessary to limit their risk of exposure to the virus and they did not believe the app offered them any useful additional protection.

Confusion and misunderstanding about the functioning of the app was a key factor in some participants' reluctance to download it. Some participants assumed the app operated in real-time, alerting users to an exposure instantaneously rather than to exposures occurring within the last 14 days. These participants questioned the utility of the app if it did not alert them immediately or 'in the moment' and were unclear on the importance of the 14-day timeframe (i.e., they did not understand or make the link to the incubation period for the virus). Others queried the information regarding having been exposed for a minimum of 15 minutes, noting that many of their interactions when running errands, for example, were of a much shorter duration.

Additional information provided to participants, showing them what would appear on the screen as they were setting up the app, did answer some of their questions and concerns. Specifically, some found it reassuring as it gave them a better understanding of the app's capabilities, specifically outlining what it would not do. Regardless, most participants who were initially reluctant to download

the app remained unconvinced of its merits and/or said they would need more information and reassurance before reconsidering.

COVID-19 Brand Concepts - Ad Testing (Windsor CERB Recipients)

In the first group held during the month of July, participants were shown a series of three creative concepts, including two variations within each concept that could be used by the Government of Canada to inform Canadians about COVID-19. For evaluation purposes, the concepts were labeled as A1 (the original) and A2 (the alternate version), B1 and B2, and C1 and C2. For each concept, various illustrations of the “look” showed participants how the concept might appear across different media. These included an example of an ad targeting people who may have an interest in travelling and which would be displayed on Facebook, as well as examples of ads which could be used in print or on billboards. When reviewing a concept, participants were shown the original version first, followed by the alternate version. After each concept was fully reviewed and assessed independently, participants were asked to select which one of the three they felt was most compelling. For reference, the creative concepts can be found in the Detailed Findings.

Of the three concepts presented, participants ultimately favoured Concept C, specifically Concept C1. They were drawn to the maple leaf graphic in C1 which was used as a creative element and reinforced the linkage across media for participants. Participants also focused heavily on the colour schemes used within each concept. Their comments suggested that there were marked differences in the types of emotions various colours provoked among participants. More tranquil colours, such as the peach used in Concept C1, were preferred because these tended to evoke a sense of calmness and serenity. The colour palette employed in C1 looked more ‘official’ and was more closely associated with the Government of Canada. By contrast, the vibrant yellow and black colours in Concept B were viewed as more alarmist, and were more strongly associated with safety or emergency messaging, specifically occupational health and safety. The colours employed in Concept A, while liked by some, were generally associated with other large organizations. For example, the Canadian Red Cross was mentioned in relation to Concept A2.

The photography and imagery used in the concepts was also a key topic of discussion. Photo-shopped masks overlaid on photographs of people generally prompted negative reactions, notably that it rendered the ads less professional or authentic. In general, participants also preferred imagery or photographs of multiple people, rather than an individual on his/her own. Additional comments from participants also indicated a general dislike for some of the icons which were included in the concepts, with participants expressing some confusion regarding their purpose, meaning and relevance to the ad or the message. Moreover, including icons in addition to photography was, in some cases, seen as redundant and participants generally tended to gravitate towards photograph-only ads.

COVID-19 Taglines (Lower Mainland BC, Mid-size and Small Town Quebec Parents)

Three taglines were tested among participants in two groups in British Columbia and Quebec. These taglines were developed for possible use in various federal government communications with the

intention of helping to motivate Canadians to follow preventive behaviours and keep them safe from COVID-19.:

- Is it really worth it?
- Outsmart future outbreaks
- Unstoppable together

While discussions did not reveal a clear or consistent preference between the two groups, Anglophones generally preferred 'is it really worth it?', whereas Francophones favoured 'unstoppable together.' 'Outsmart future outbreaks' was also well liked by several participants in each group.

Part II: Other Issues

Racism (GMA Black Canadians, Major Centres Ontario Black Canadians)

Two groups were held in July among Black Canadians, one in the Greater Montreal Area and the other among those residing in major centres across Ontario. Participants in both groups were paying close attention to the Black Lives Matters protests occurring in the U.S. and in Canada. Unanimously, participants were of the view that racism is a problem in Canada, but some qualified this by saying that the issue is not as significant or as overt or as it is in the United States. Nevertheless, participants described examples of racism and racist behaviours they have confronted in schools, workplaces, and in their interactions with police. In particular, participants commented on the various forms of micro aggression and stereotyping that occur on a day-to-day basis which they felt revealed more subtle, yet equally destructive, forms of racism toward people of colour.

While many participants believed government has a role to play in addressing the issue, and indeed could do more, few could point to any initiatives or actions taken recently by the Government of Canada, other than those held in conjunction with Black History month which is observed across Canada every February and is an opportunity for Canadians to share and learn about the experiences and achievements of peoples of African ancestry. Most felt opportunities existed for the Government of Canada to tackle racism in a variety of ways: via public education and awareness-raising, addressing the root causes such as poverty, providing greater access to education and housing, ensuring greater representation of Black people in leadership positions, including on Boards of Directors, revisiting the educational curriculum to include a more detailed and accurate history of Black Canadians' experience, exposing the broader public to Black culture, actively investigating cases of racism, and showcasing stories of success within the Black community.

When asked to consider a set of eight measures with a view to identifying those that could make the biggest difference in reducing racial inequality in Canada, participants were disinclined to narrow down the field, noting that all of the suggested initiatives would have a positive impact. At the same time, several initiatives did surface as being particularly important, including setting up programs that help more Black youth attend university, finding ways to honour Black role models in Canada, and providing

more training about racism to people in the justice system. There was also reasonable support for placing more body cameras on police officers, as a means of ensuring greater accountability, and increasing funding for anti-racism campaigns to bring the issue more into the open.

Participants debated the issue of whether government should collect better data on the conditions facing visible minorities. Relatively few participants were worried that this might lead to detrimental effects for racialized groups due to stereotyping, profiling and data being misunderstood or misinterpreted. By contrast, most felt that such data would provide a reality check and a means of determining the extent and nature of the issue of racism in Canada. At the same time, some concerns were raised about expending additional resources and efforts to collect more data rather than using what they believed currently exists, with several participants emphasizing the importance of action over further data gathering exercises.

Immigration (GTHA and Windsor Young Adults, Calgary, Montreal, Mid-sized Centres Atlantic Canada)

Most participants viewed immigration as key to Canada's economic recovery, pointing out the particular need to address short-term skills gaps in the fields of health care and technology. Although a number of participants expressed concerns about the capacity of the economy to absorb immigrants given current levels of unemployment, and were worried about over-taxing Canada's social safety net, including Employment Insurance (EI) and the health care system, many felt that immigration was vital to Canada's continued economic prosperity over the long-term. On balance, participants viewed immigration as having an overall net positive impact. They commented on immigrants' strong work ethic, their willingness to learn and to adapt, their contribution to innovation and economic growth and to a more diverse culture. The point was made that immigration enriches Canadian communities in many ways, especially over the long-term.

Nevertheless, several participants expressed consternation about the possibility that immigrants, particularly those coming from countries with higher rates of confirmed coronavirus infections, may cause additional outbreaks across Canada, although they were also of the view that this could be addressed by stringent safety protocols upon entry into Canada. Some were also concerned about Canada's plans to admit about 350,000 in 2021 without a better understanding of how this volume compared to other years or the pace with which immigrants would be permitted into Canada, which some felt should be slowed down and closely monitored.

Participants emphasized the need to keep Canadians, and immigrants, safe and, in general, felt that immigrants should follow the same protocols, standards and guidelines that apply to other Canadians and/or travelers coming into Canada with respect to self-isolation. Some also volunteered that testing should be undertaken both prior to the immigrant's departure from their country of origin as well as upon arrival in Canada. Others suggested that immigrants should provide assurances that they have adequate funds to cover any health care costs. Questions were raised, in the context of this discussion, about the practicalities and logistics of quarantining new immigrants to Canada, specifically where immigrants would be able to self-isolate and how this would be enforced.

Most participants favoured continuation of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program and commented that these workers filled critical labour shortages in certain sectors, specifically agriculture. Reactions were more mixed, however, on the idea of creating a path for temporary foreign workers to become permanent residents of Canada. While some felt it made sense to offer incentives to foreign workers to forge a longer-term attachment to Canada, others had concerns about possible pressures on Employment Insurance and other financial and social support programs, especially given the seasonal nature of work in which many temporary foreign workers are engaged in Canada.

Focus group participants supported allowing international students to study in Canada this fall, noting the economic benefit both to the universities in which they are enrolled as well as the communities in which these institutions are located. And, they were strongly of the view that Canada should continue to offer assistance to refugees, taking some pride in Canada's history in this regard and understanding the dire conditions or circumstances faced by many in their home countries. Again, the main reservations expressed by a few participants had to do with the volume of refugees Canada could reasonably accept and the impact of doing so on Canada's economic recovery.

Messages on Immigration

Participants were shown a series of messages that the Government of Canada could provide related to immigration and were asked to select up to two that they felt were the strongest reasons for bringing immigrants to Canada. While the choices varied somewhat between groups, overall the two statements that resonated most strongly with participants were:

- Canada has a history of immigration, and it is because of immigration that Canada is such a successful country today.
- Immigrants contribute a lot to Canada, for example one-in-four healthcare workers in Canada are immigrants.

The information about the role that immigrants play in health care was new to some, although not all, participants. Moreover, this particular message seemed particularly relevant at this time, given the current public health crisis, the issues faced by long-term care facilities, and perceived shortages of front line health care workers. The historical perspective resonated with others as many could relate to immigrant families, either as part of their own family heritage or as integral to the history of the founding of their communities.

Other Federal Government News and Issues (Major Centres Ontario Black Canadians, Winnipeg Parents, GTHA and Windsor Young Adults, Calgary, Montreal, Mid-sized Centres Atlantic Canada, Toronto, Lower Mainland BC, Mid-size and Small Town Quebec Parents)

Apart from COVID-19, participants were paying some attention to other news involving the Government of Canada, including:

- The ban on many models of assault-style firearms;
- Issues surrounding the Government's contribution agreement with WE Charity;

- Canada-China relations;
- Racism and the Black Lives Matter protests;
- Pipelines, railway operations and Indigenous issues; and
- Canada-U.S. trade, including issues related to Canadian dairy products and tariffs on exports of Canadian aluminum to the U.S.

Most had not heard much about the Government of Canada's Economic and Fiscal Snapshot which was released on July 8, 2020.

Overall, the general consensus was that the Government of Canada has been appropriately focused on COVID-19, although some participants indicated that the volume of information from all sources on this topic was, at times, overwhelming and resulted in them paying less attention. While participants were mostly reassured by the downward trend in cases of COVID-19 across the country, they noted that the pandemic had shed a light on a number of concerns with respect to mental health, elder care, long-term care, poverty and the impact on marginalized groups which they believed the Government should evaluate more closely.

MORE INFORMATION

The Strategic Counsel

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