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Continuous Qualitative Data Collection of Canadians' Views – August 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 14 online focus groups which were conducted between August 4th and 27th, 2020 in multiple locations across the country including Ontario, Quebec, the Prairies, Alberta and British Columbia. Details concerning the locations, recruitment, and composition of the groups are shown in the section below.

Discussions for this cycle of focus groups focussed primarily on COVID-19 as various jurisdictions across Canada continued to reopen and announce their 'back to school' plans. The research explored a wide range of related issues in depth, including what Canadians were hearing about the pandemic and the Government of Canada's response, the felt impact of the pandemic on Canadians and how their behaviours have evolved, as well as the intersection of COVID-19 and the economy, specifically in terms of government financial supports and the transition from CERB to EI. There were also discussions held among particular subgroups of the population, such as parents, immigrants, seniors and young adults to explore in a more in-depth fashion issues directly affecting them. Throughout the month various creative concepts intended to promote greater awareness around limiting the spread of COVID-19 were shown to young adults and some other groups in order to gauge receptivity and obtain feedback on their effectiveness.

In addition to the pandemic, discussion broached other topics including youth employment, carbon pricing, immigration, contract policing, the opioid crisis and government activism.

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 young adults (aged 18-24 years old), parents of school-age children, seniors (aged 55 and older) and immigrants (who have lived in Canada for less than 10 years).

Detailed approach

- 14 focus groups across various regions in Canada.
- Three groups were conducted with the general population in U.S. Border Towns in Ontario, Eastern Townships in Quebec, and Interior B.C.
- The other eleven groups were conducted with key subgroups including young adults in Eastern Ontario, Quebec, Calgary, and B.C., parents in small, rural and Northern town in Ontario, Vancouver, and Quebec, seniors in small and mid-size centres in the Prairies and immigrants in the Golden Horseshoe of Ontario and Montreal.
- 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, 95 participants attended, in total. Details on attendance numbers by group can be found below.
- Each participant received an \$90 honorarium in respect of their time.

Group Locations and Composition

LOCATION	GROUP	LANGUAGE	DATE	TIME (EST)	GROUP COMPOSITION	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Ontario – Eastern Regions	1	English	August 4	6:00-8:00 pm	Young Adults (aged 18-24)	8
Ontario – Golden Horseshoe	2	English	August 5	6:00-8:00 pm	Immigrants (less than 10 years in Canada)	7
Quebec	3	French	August 6	6:00-8:00 pm	Young Adults (aged 18-24)	6
Interior B.C.	4	English	August 10	8:00-10:00 pm	Young Adults (aged 18-24)	3
Calgary	6	English	August 11	7:00-9:00 pm	Young Adults (aged 18-24)	8
B.C.	14	English	August 11	8:00-10:00 pm	Young Adults (aged 18-24)	7
Ontario – Border towns	5	English	August 12	5:30-7:30 pm	General population	6
Montreal CMA	13	French	August 13	6:00-8:00 pm	Immigrants (less than 10 years in Canada)	7
Prairies	7	English	August 17	6:30-8:30 pm	Seniors (aged 55+)	6
Ontario – small towns, rural + Northern	10	English	August 18	5:30-7:30 pm	Parents (of children in Junior Kindergarten-Grade 6)	6
Quebec – Eastern townships	9	French	August 19	6:00-8:00 pm	General population	8
Vancouver	11	English	August 24	7:00-8:00 pm	Parents (of children in Junior Kindergarten-Grade 6)	8
Interior B.C.	8	English	August 25	8:00-10:00 pm	General population	8
Quebec	12	French	August 27	5:30-7:30 pm	Parents (of children in Grade 7-12)	7
Total number of participants						95

Key Findings

Part I: COVID-19 Related Findings

COVID-19 in the News (Eastern Ontario Young Adults, Golden Horseshoe Ontario Immigrants, U.S. Border Towns Ontario, GMA Immigrants, Mid-size and Small Town Prairies Seniors, Small, Rural and Northern Towns Ontario Parents, Eastern Townships Quebec, Vancouver Parents, Interior B.C., Mid-size and Small Town Quebec Parents)

In August, most participants were still following COVID-19 in the news. They were most attuned to information regarding updates on case counts, which were increasing in some regions and decreasing in others, and the high infection rates of COVID-19 reported in the United States. In addition to this, participants had heard about the development of a vaccine in Russia as well as differing, and somewhat confusing, information on the reopening of schools.

Perceptions on Government of Canada's Response to COVID-19 (Eastern Ontario Young Adults, Golden Horseshoe Ontario Immigrants, GMA Immigrants, Quebec Eastern Townships)

Most participants held positive views of the Government of Canada's response to the pandemic and generally believed it has been appropriate. Participants were quite complimentary of the government for having taken active measures from the start of the pandemic, including implementing guidelines to stop the spread of the virus and promptly providing financial support to Canadians who needed it. Common criticisms of the federal government's response were focused around delays both in closing international orders and in encouraging mask-wearing across the country.

Awareness of COVID Alert App (U.S. Border Towns Ontario, Small, Rural, and Northern Towns Ontario Parents)

Over half of participants in the two groups where this topic was discussed had heard about the COVID Alert app and were able to provide some details on how the app worked. Relatively few participants, however, reported having downloaded the app. Participants who had done so expressed that they were motivated by the ability to know if they had been exposed. Additionally, they were generally comfortable with the purpose of the app and its functionality. Those who had not downloaded it, or were opposed to doing so, expressed several concerns. They were worried that the app would allow their location to be tracked or, similarly, that the app would require them to turn on their location services. After learning how the app worked, many participants who were unaware or concerned about the app initially reported being interested in learning more and saw value in being able to track their potential exposures, especially as schools and offices began reopening. All participants agreed that the app was an effective tool to help stop the spread of COVID-19 by allowing people to know if they had been exposed to the virus and to promptly get tested.

Canada-U.S. Issues (Eastern Ontario Young Adults, Golden Horseshoe Ontario Immigrants, U.S. Border Towns Ontario, GMA Immigrants, Mid-size and Small Town Prairies Seniors, Small, Rural, and Northern Towns Ontario Parents, Eastern Townships Quebec)

Many participants recalled hearing news about the U.S. border in addition to other general U.S.-related news, such as the upcoming presidential election. When prompted, most participants remembered hearing something about U.S. aluminum tariffs. Participants perceived the actions of the U.S. government to have been met with strong and vocal condemnation from Canadian officials. Those residing in the Eastern Townships in Quebec were most divided on their opinions towards whether the Government of Canada had handled the aluminum tariff situation well or not, with some praising them for acting quickly while others felt that Canada's response would do little either to reverse the tariffs or to effect a corresponding punitive impact.

Behaviour Change (Eastern Ontario Young Adults, Quebec Young Adults, Interior B.C. Young Adults, Calgary Young Adults, B.C. Young Adults, U.S. Border Towns Ontario, Mid-size and Small Town Prairies Seniors, Small, Rural, and Northern Towns Ontario Parents, Eastern Townships Quebec, Vancouver Parents, Interior B.C., Mid-size and Small Town Quebec Parents)

Overall

In August, participants had been noticing changes in their own and others' behaviours in terms of more people being out and about, and there being more noticeable out-of-province tourists. They attributed this to lockdown fatigue and commented that many people did not seem to be taking appropriate measures in terms of social distancing and/or wearing masks. Some of this was viewed as inevitable or even necessary, both for facilitating economic activity and for positive mental health.

There were multiple views expressed as to what participants were doing themselves. Many were getting out more and expressed relief at having the opportunity to do so. The majority reported that they had expanded their social circles and were generally feeling more comfortable about going out more, especially to outdoor venues such as patios. At the same time, comments from young adults revealed a tendency among this demographic to relax compliance with the various measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, especially when alcohol is involved. Many participants across all groups also discussed how they were using sanitizer more often, wearing masks, avoiding crowds and following all of the marked precautions in stores and workplaces.

Some expressed that their recreational activities had changed. More people were taking up outdoor pursuits and there were comments made by a number of individuals about developing new pastimes and hobbies such as sewing and other creative outlets.

The level of commitment to personal precautions varied from group to group, and there were some who did not believe in the utility of masks at all, while others commented that masking should have been instituted at a much earlier phase in the pandemic.

Only a handful participants, across all groups, reported little to no change in their behaviour from earlier stages of the pandemic, for various reasons. Several thought that in reality there was no real

decrease in risk and that the opening up was primarily for financial reasons, while others reported being more cautious as a result of being/living with disabled and immunocompromised people. There were also others who described themselves as introverts and who indicated that the pandemic had little effect on their routine as they tended not to go out very much anyway.

Most participants in all of these groups were worried about the possibility of a second wave, and many made a connection to the reopening steps that had commenced through the summer months. Most did not seem to worry about getting sick themselves but were aware that the virus could affect people of any age. Concerns over mental health were raised, as participants expressed some worry about the impacts of reduced social interactions resulting from a second wave.

Seniors (Mid-size and Small Town Prairies Seniors)

A more cautionary attitude and approach was expressed by those who participated in the seniors group. Most participants reported that they were not travelling outside the geographic boundaries of their area and nor were they inclined to visit public areas or participate in public events (e.g., libraries and festivals). A few, however, were attending religious services, although they were reserving their seating in advance. Others spoke about restrictions dining out and many stated a strong preference for enjoying life at home. In this group, some also reported that their lives had not changed very much and that their usual routine meant they were already quite comfortable living in quiet isolation in a rural setting.

Asked if they felt particularly vulnerable, given their age, most said they did not. They extolled the virtue of Canada's healthcare system and emphasized that they kept themselves fit and active. They commented that the social isolation aspects of the pandemic, especially being separated from family, had been the most difficult. At the same time, they felt that staying home had been easier than they anticipated, especially because of videoconferencing platforms like FaceTime and Zoom.

Parents (Small, Rural, and Northern Towns Ontario Parents, Vancouver Parents, Mid-size and Small Town Quebec Parents)

In general, parents appeared to be much more cautious than young adults, but also more inclined to expand their circle compared to seniors. Much of the behavioural change among this group has been driven by the need to work while also having responsibility for day-to-day supervision of their children, as well as preparing for the fall school session. They reported that mask wearing had become natural, but as they looked forward to school openings, they believed that their circles would be widening and therefore saw no reason not to start taking children to playgrounds and other recreational facilities. A number of parents also reported they were no longer using public transit and this was, in part, a reflection of the shift to working from home. Some participants also mentioned an increase in online shopping given their wariness to frequent retail outlets.

Most participants reported being quite strict about their outings and social interactions in the spring but easing off somewhat in the summer, especially as they were thinking about quality of life for their children. Many acknowledged that there would have to be a tightening up in the fall, especially to avoid a second wave.

Gender (Golden Horseshoe Ontario Immigrants, Quebec Young Adults, Interior B.C. Young Adults, Calgary Young Adults, B.C. Young Adults, U.S. Border Towns Ontario, Eastern Townships Quebec)

Most participants felt that the economic repercussions of COVID-19 had negative impacts on both men and women to about an equal extent. Many held this view because they believed the impacts were less related to gender and more a factor of other issues such as one's family role or financial situation. In particular, single parents were identified as a subgroup perceived to be among those most adversely impacted by the pandemic.

However, as discussions evolved, participants did point to certain key differences in how they viewed women and men to have been affected differently by COVID-19. Some felt women had been more negatively affected, since they were seen to hold the primary responsibility for childcare and were more likely to have jobs in more female-dominated sectors, such as in restaurants and schools, which had been among the first to shut down in the early weeks at the onset of the pandemic. Comments suggested that participants believed men to be less negatively affected overall. They described men as more likely to have continued working, either because they were more likely to earn the higher income in a two-parent household (compared to women) or to be employed in male-dominated industries (such as trades or construction) which had remained open throughout the pandemic.

There was general agreement that the federal government did not need to take any specific actions to help women during the recovery period, but instead, that recovery support should be directed to those who have been most affected (e.g., on the basis of industry or type of job) and are most in need, regardless of gender.

Economy (Quebec Young Adults, GMA Immigrants, Mid-size and Small Town Quebec Parents)

Participants in three of the focus groups held through the month of August were shown seven possible options for describing the type of economy that Canada could be aiming for and asked to select up to two:

- Future-proof economy
- Green economy
- Healthy economy
- Modern economy
- Resilient economy
- Strong economy
- Economic solidarity

While no strong consensus emerged around any one of the options, overall, many participants favoured 'economic solidarity' and a 'strong economy,' seeing these two options as inter-related and mutually reinforcing terms. Solidarity implied prioritizing and meeting citizens' needs, taking care of all segments of the population, with a focus on health as well as jobs, banding together, stability and community. Having a strong economy was seen as an aspect of solidarity, but was also more directly

associated with job creation, a more diverse workforce, and an economy that would generate positive health outcomes for Canadians. The idea of a 'resilient economy' encompassed attributes associated with some of the other options, including solidarity, strength and adaptability. Younger participants tended to favour the ideas of a 'modern,' 'future-proof,' 'green' and 'healthy' economy. These resonated with them as they felt it was important to respect the environment and that doing so was integral to achieving the goal of a future-oriented, modern, healthy economy.

Financial Support: Transition from CERB to EI and Recovery Benefits (Eastern Townships Quebec, Vancouver Parents, Mid-size and Small Town Quebec Parents)

Participants were generally aware of the ending of the Canada Emergency Recovery Benefit (CERB) and the transition to Employment Insurance (EI), in addition to a range of new recovery benefits. Awareness was noticeably higher among participants in groups that were held towards the end of the month.

Participants favoured the continued provision of support for Canadians negatively affected by the pandemic, and the continuation of benefits for up to a year was seen as reasonable, although some did think that the date could be left open and reviewed at semi-regular intervals given the fluidity of the situation.

Reaction was, however, more mixed regarding how large the ongoing support should be. While participants were quite definitive that financial support was needed by many Canadians, there was a fairly commonly held view that some individuals were collecting the CERB while not really needing it and that a reduction in the amount of the benefit would encourage more people to return to work. Some thought that the level of support should continue at \$2000 per month (\$500 per week) until a vaccine was available, while more thought that the new level of support should be closer to the standard level of EI. There was support for the transition to EI, including the 120 hours of accumulated work (although it was thought that could be more difficult to achieve depending on where one resided) and the three new recovery benefits including The Canada Recovery Benefit, The Canada Recovery Caregiver Benefit and the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit.

Participants were generally aligned around the importance of continuity, seeing an uninterrupted continuation of payments as the most important aspect of transitioning away from the CERB, and that there should be no gap between the CERB and its replacements. At the same time, participants' comments about the financial supports encompassed an element of concern about fiscal sustainability although some were less fixated on this aspect, describing events and the required response as being unprecedented.

Re-opening Schools (Small, Rural, and Northern Towns Ontario Parents, Vancouver Parents, Mid-size and Small Town Quebec Parents)

Unprompted, participants recalled very little details about plans for children to return to school in their respective communities. However, once updated with the most recent announcements from their

provincial governments, participants expressed mixed opinions on whether they planned to send their children back to school this fall. Parents who did plan to send their children back to school explained that this decision was either one their children wanted or was being made due to financial reasons. Regardless, participants were concerned with maintaining safety in schools in a pandemic context. Those who planned to keep their children home were generally confident they could handle the curriculum and the time commitment and were not feeling strongly reassured that their province could make schools safe enough in time for the beginning of the school year.

When prompted to think of ways to make schools safer, participants generated the following ideas (from most to least mentioned):

- Smaller class sizes;
- Additional funding for teachers and teaching supplies;
- Additional time (some participants advocated for pushing back the start date of school to provide educators with additional time to create safe learning spaces);
- Vaccinations – it was expressed that this was the only real solution;
- Hiring more psychologists to help children deal with pandemic and school-related stresses;
- More hand washing stations (in addition to hand sanitizer); and
- Additional education on hygiene and safety protocols.

When explicitly asked what role the Government of Canada could play in helping to make schools safer, participants primarily advocated for financial support to parents. Some participants worried about their financial stability should their children get sick and bring the disease home, putting them at risk and possibly out of work. Additionally, participants felt as though additional funding could help parents who wanted to homeschool do so effectively.

Parents in mid-size and small towns in Quebec were additionally informed about the Government of Canada announcement to provide two billion dollars of funding to the provinces and territories to help ensure children could safely return to school. While participants responded that they were grateful for the money, they also felt that it would not be enough for each school across Canada to make all the necessary changes in order to be considered safe by parents.

Long-Term Care Homes (Eastern Townships Quebec)

Overall, participants were readily able to recall recent news, both positive and negative, regarding long-term care homes. And, when prompted, many participants posited that the Government of Canada could do more to support residents and workers in long-term care facilities including providing assistance to hire more staff, to improve the residents' quality of life, and more direct involvement in setting and regulating national standards for long-term care homes, specifically around acceptable standards of care. While virtually all participants agreed that explicit and enforceable standards of care were of higher importance than additional funding, some felt this was a provincial rather than a federal responsibility.

COVID-19 Youth Ad Testing (Eastern Ontario Young Adults, Quebec Young Adults, Interior B.C. Young Adults, Calgary Young Adults, B.C. Young Adults, Mid-size and Small Town Prairies Seniors, Small, Rural, and Northern Towns Ontario Parents)

Storyboard and Banner Concepts (Eastern Ontario Young Adults, Quebec Young Adults, Interior B.C. Young Adults, Calgary Young Adults, B.C. Young Adults)

During the early part of the month, groups of young adults from across Canada were asked to view three different ad concepts, which included storyboards and accompanying banners. These ads were designed with a young adult audience in mind as a reminder that attending parties and gatherings in large groups can further facilitate the spread of COVID-19 and that doing so puts themselves and those around them at risk. Throughout the month, and based on the reaction and feedback from participants in the preceding groups, some of the concepts were further refined and updated.

Early in the month, three concepts were tested (see the Detailed Findings and the Appendix for all concepts), some of which included a variant or alternative. Over the course of the month, as testing continued, Concept 1 (and an alternative version – Concept 1A) gained the most traction among participants.

This concept worked well for a number of reasons. Participants responded positively to the use of glitter as an effective creative technique and a metaphor for how easily COVID-19 can be spread. Overall, this concept, and particularly the main message to limit social interactions and slow the spread of the virus, was seen as clear and to the point. The alternate version (Concept 1A) also resonated particularly well with young adults who were less concerned about their own vulnerability to COVID-19, and more worried about the effect of transmitting it to family members and others they cared about. Many participants found this concept to be especially relevant to a younger demographic, although some felt that the target audience could also extend to parents and older adults.

Video Concepts (Mid-size and Small Town Prairies Seniors, Small, Rural, and Northern Towns Ontario Parents)

Later in the month, participants were able to view rough cut versions of 15-second video ads based on Concept 1. Overall, reactions to the two videos shown to participants were quite positive. Most quickly understood the use of the glitter to reflect transmission of the virus, although it appeared easier to see in one video compared to the other. They also appreciated that the video underscored how the virus can remain on clothes and other objects for a period of time, a message which some felt was important to stress in awareness-raising efforts. While the two groups of participants (seniors and parents) who were shown these short videos did not reflect the primary target audience for this ad campaign, the main message and the approach nevertheless also resonated with them.

Canada's Approach (Interior B.C.)

Participants were shown an image highlighting the Government of Canada's overall approach to addressing COVID-19 (included in the Detailed Findings and the Appendix) and asked to comment on

both the title and the information provided. The title – ‘Living with COVID’ – was widely misinterpreted as meaning that the information contained in the infographic was primarily directed to people who have been directly affected by the virus, specifically those who have had a positive test and/or were recovering from the virus. Even those who did interpret the title more broadly expressed concerns about the tone, as they found it to be overly downbeat. For these participants, the title appeared to be suggesting that Canadians would need to learn to live with COVID-19 rather than recover from it and return to a strong, vibrant and healthy economy. This positioning, along with the fact that much of the content lacked clarity and relevance to participants, tended to negatively affect participants’ understanding of the information or the overall purpose of the piece. On a more positive note, however, several participants pointed to the series of nine items listed at the bottom of the document as being of most interest to them, particularly the reference to an ‘early warning and rapid response capability.’ Relative to the other information, these items piqued their curiosity and were identified as being of more tangible and practical interest to them.

Part II: Other Issues

Government Objective (Golden Horseshoe Ontario Immigrants, Quebec Young Adults, Interior B.C. Young Adults, Calgary Young Adults, B.C. Young Adults, U.S. Border Towns Ontario, GMA Immigrants)

Most participants expressed confusion when asked about their familiarity with the term “activist government,” and subsequently voiced a wide range of beliefs regarding what an activist government does – everything from a government that fights for minority rights and social causes to one that could be overbearing and/or holds to extreme political positions. This confusion extended into a conversation that prompted participants to consider if they viewed the Government of Canada as an activist government. While some participants believed it was, citing the financial support during the pandemic as sign of a government that is proactive, supportive and flexible, others felt it was not doing enough to be considered activist. Despite participants’ initial confusion with the idea of an activist government, a majority agreed that, especially in the light of COVID-19, having a more activist government would be a good thing.

Youth Employment (Quebec Young Adults, Interior B.C. Young Adults, Calgary Young Adults, B.C. Young Adults, U.S. Border Towns Ontario)

Participants across the five groups noted above, four of which were comprised exclusively of young adults, were provided with some information explaining the European Union’s Youth Guarantee.

Asked how they would feel about Canada taking a similar approach, most reacted quite positively to the idea. They believed such a program would help young adults with opportunities to find employment and offer career direction (something they suggested was a current barrier for them), and also felt it would help to promote the value of post-secondary education through its guarantee of

employment opportunities post-graduation. Overall, they saw the program having a positive impact across three levels – individually (for themselves or other young adults), for businesses, and most predominately for the Canadian economy as a whole, through the reduction in unemployment rates and fewer people on Employment Insurance.

At the same time, participants did have some questions and concerns with the approach, including how the program would be funded, program set up and eligibility criteria. Some also cautioned about the loss of lower-paid, less desired jobs that are currently filled by this demographic.

Carbon Pricing (U.S. Border Towns, GMA Immigrants, Mid-size and Small Town Prairies Seniors)

Unprompted, there was little understanding of the Government of Canada’s climate change plans, nor of the overall issue. With further prompting and the provision of some background information, there was support for the use of economic instruments, such as carbon pricing, as part of Canada’s climate change plan. As discussions continued on this topic, it became more evident that links made between carbon pricing and taxes at the fuel pump had a tendency to weaken participants’ overall support for this initiative. Some regional variability in attitudes was also apparent, as participants from the Prairies were mostly of the view that the region was doing enough to address climate change, as farms were viewed as being carbon sinks.

Immigration (Golden Horseshoe Ontario Immigrants, GMA Immigrants, Interior B.C.)

While many participants viewed immigration as a net positive to Canada, most were of the opinion that immigration should be paused until the economy recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic and more jobs become available. Participants did view immigrants as having much needed and valuable skill sets, with specific mention made of the role of immigrants in addressing shortages in the healthcare sector as well as in helping to expand Canada’s network of and opportunities among a broad range of economic trading partners. Yet, many participants remained firm in their view that it would be unfair to welcome immigrants to Canada at this time given the level of uncertainty with respect to employment opportunities and the concomitant potential financial strain.

This attitude coloured participants’ views regarding the appropriate number of immigrants that should be admitted into Canada in the coming year. The figure of 350,000, reflecting the average annual level of immigration over the last few years, was seen as too high given the current pace of economic recovery. At the same time, some participants did suggest that holding to this level, or even higher, could in fact boost economic recovery although the caveat was put forward that immigrants should be directed to settle outside of Canada’s major urban centres so as to avoid putting further upward pressure on housing prices in these areas.

Regardless of participants’ perspectives on what they deemed to be an appropriate level of immigration, virtually all expressed strong support for keeping both immigrants and Canadians safe throughout the process of immigration to Canada. Participants favoured strict quarantine measures upon arrival in Canada and COVID-19 test routines, in addition to further screening of immigrants to

ensure they have adequate financial resources to sustain themselves and to ensure their ability to cover basic medical needs during the initial months after their arrival.

When prompted, most participants were familiar with the Temporary Foreign Worker Program. Views on the program were somewhat mixed. While some participants spoke in favour of the program as it was felt to address key labour shortages in specific industries and sectors, others expressed concerns about what they perceived as unethical working conditions (e.g. below minimum wage earnings) established by certain employers participating in the program. Despite these mixed views, most responded favourably to the idea of creating a path for temporary foreign workers to become permanent residents of Canada in the belief that having prior experience in Canada would help immigrants to integrate more effectively into Canadian society.

Additionally, virtually all participants supported international students' return to study in Canada for the upcoming academic year so long as proper COVID-19 safety measures were rigorously carried out. Participants saw this group as offering critical economic benefits both as students who pay tuition and as prospective entrants to the labour force, gaining the skills needed to potentially join the Canadian workforce upon graduation.

While participants were generally in favour of providing assistance to refugees, they also expressed some hesitancy towards accepting refugees at this time. Concerns were raised about the lack of job openings and the financial resources required to welcome and support refugees as they transition to life in Canada.

Participants were shown a series of messages that the Government of Canada could provide related to immigration and asked to select up to two that reflected the strongest reasons for bringing immigrants to Canada. While the choices varied somewhat between groups, overall, the one statement that seemed to resonate most strongly with participants was 'Canada has a history of immigration, and it is because of immigration that Canada is such a successful country today'. Participants responded positively to the idea that immigrants have helped to build Canada.

Contract Policing (Golden Horseshoe Ontario Immigrants, Interior B.C. Young Adults, Calgary Young Adults, B.C. Young Adults, U.S. Border Towns Ontario, Mid-size and Small Town Prairies Seniors)

Participants were generally unfamiliar with the concept of 'contract policing.' Once the term was further explained, discussions generated mixed views around whether this was a good or a bad idea. Generally, those who supported contract policing felt it was a fair use of RCMP resources and a way of ensuring that all communities, regardless of size or ability to pay, had access to law enforcement services. Others, however, held the view that local police forces were a better option to ensure that law enforcement better understood and reflected local concerns and issues. Still others were concerned that contract policing may lead to multiple layers of policing within a community, reflecting some degree of confusion among participants as to the role of the RCMP within those communities where their services are contracted.

Opioids (Vancouver Parents, Interior B.C.)

Almost all participants in Vancouver and Interior B.C. were aware of the opioid crisis and, in their opinion, "crisis" was an accurate word to describe what they perceived to be a serious and worsening situation. Some participants mentioned there had been a high number of recent opioid-related deaths in their province and many said they had themselves witnessed the prevalence of the crisis in their own communities. Participants suggested various possible root causes of the crisis, such as mental health issues, increasingly potent drugs that have been laced with other chemicals, and a corrupt supply chain.

Additionally, participants generated a number of potential solutions with regards to how the Government of Canada could help support the crisis that included:

- Promoting alternative pain medications, especially for treatment when hospitalized;
- Longer rehab requirements;
- Investing in more mental health resources, including social workers and addiction specialists; and
- Decriminalizing opioids.

Regarding the last suggestion - decriminalizing opioids - participants had mixed reactions. Some worried that decriminalization would only make drugs more accessible to everyone, thereby exacerbating the problem. On the other hand, some participants agreed that decriminalization, or even legalization, could help reduce addicts' fears of legal repercussions therefore making it more likely they would seek help.

Other Federal Government News and Issues (Eastern Ontario Young Adults)

Apart from COVID-19 news, participants reported awareness of other news from or about the Government of Canada, including the Government's contribution agreement with the WE Charity and the progression of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, primarily obtained via social media. Participants favoured more federal government action on racial-related issues.

MORE INFORMATION

The Strategic Counsel
Contract number: 35035-182346/001/CY
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