



Gouvernement  
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of Canada

# **BUDGET DAY 2021 - ONLINE FOCUS GROUPS**

**Executive Summary**

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*Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français.*

This public opinion research report presents the results of an online survey conducted by Léger Marketing Inc. on behalf of the Government of Canada. The qualitative portion of the research study was conducted with 32 Canadians on April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre : Jour du budget 2021 : groupes de discussion en ligne.

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## Executive Summary

Leger is pleased to present the Department of Finance Canada with this report on findings from qualitative online focus groups designed to learn about Canadians opinions and perceptions on the April 19, 2021, federal budget speech.

This report was prepared by Léger who was contracted by the Department of Finance Canada (contract number 60074-191919/001/CY awarded January 29, 2020).

### 1.1 Limitation of Results

The qualitative portion of the research provides insight into the opinions of a population, rather than providing a measure in percent of the opinions held, as would be measured in a quantitative study. The results of this type of research should be viewed as directional only. No inference to the general population can be done with the results of this research.

### 1.2 Methodology—Qualitative Research

#### *Online Focus Groups and Moment to Moment Technology*

Leger recruited participants by telephone, using a thorough screening process, and those who qualified were invited to attend a 2-hour online focus group. Leger recruited 40 participants to achieve 10 participants per focus group. Three groups were conducted in English and the other one in French. This research included moment-to-moment technology built into the online focus group environment.

Participants answered introductory questions while the Budget was being delivered (to ensure participants did not watch the Budget in advance of the moment-to-moment evaluation) before providing real-time feedback using the moment-to-moment technology. Moment-to-moment technology allowed participants to evaluate the budget speech in real time. Participants provided their emotional response on a scale while watching the video recording of the speech. The measurement scale used ranked from very negative to very positive using a 0 to 100 scale.

Target	Number of participants
Parents 0-6 in English	9
Senior Canadians 65+	8
People who benefited from CERB	7
General population in the province of Quebec	8
TOTAL	32

## 1.3 Summary of Findings

The general opinion of the budget speech presented by Chrystia Freeland, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Canada, was generally positive in all four focus groups. In the words of many participants, it would be difficult to be negative about this budget that included elements to "satisfy everyone in Canada", was in continuity with the efforts to limit the negative impacts of the pandemic on Canadians, as well as a "recovery-oriented budget". Some did express some reservations calling it an "electoral budget". However, the general reaction remained fairly positive, matching their "prudent optimism" about Canada moving forward (expressed before the budget speech itself).

At no point during the dial test did participants' ratings fall below 45, indicating that the worst-case scenario was a "lukewarm" reception. Beyond this initial positive impression of the budget assessment, it is rather skepticism about the implementation of certain measures and doubts about the government's ability to deliver on its promises that emerged in the discussions following the dial test. Of the four groups, the seniors' group was the most cynical or skeptical about the budget promises and how these expenditures will be paid for.

The size of the deficit (overall or relative to GDP) did not generate a lot of discussion and the dial test trendline remained positive and largely stable during that portion of the speech. This was tied to comments on feeling that this level of spending was necessary in the circumstances to keep the economy afloat, while some said it was hard for them to understand the reality of such figures.

The following are key findings from each specific audience.

### Group 1 – Parents

#### **The budget items that received highest ratings from the parent focus group were:**

- ✓ Early childhood education/ Childcare. However, there were questions around how this plan will create more childcare spaces and providers. There were also questions on how a \$10 a day system would work.
- ✓ Rural broadband fund.
- ✓ Expansion of Canada's workers benefits and an increase in the minimum wage. Most reacted positively to this and noted the importance of having an increased wage for many frontline workers.
- ✓ 500,000 work experience opportunities and 1 million jobs to be created. This resonated strongly with parents who had children who were just finishing university or just starting secondary education.
- ✓ OAS was also mentioned as a positive element to the speech
- ✓ Interest free student loans.
- ✓ Positive reactions also spiked when assistance to family businesses was mentioned, the creation of Canadian vaccines, enforcing quarantine rules, and focusing on middle class Canadians.
- ✓ Participants reacted more positively to elements that were short term, that would happen soon and that were easy to envision (childcare, access to vaccines, increased minimum

wage). They had fewer positive reactions to element that were very long term and difficult to envision (green growth, investment in private corporations, digital training for the young workforce).

**The budget items that appeared to be less supported by the parents were:**

- ✓ Participants felt the luxury tax was not inclusive enough (or bold enough) and should include more than just boats and cars.
- ✓ Concerned that this was an election budget and that it was so long term, it was hard to really understand the impact.
- ✓ The line dipped into the more negative when the speech mentioned investments in private corporations, taxation, and green growth/reduction of emissions/ net zero accelerators. When asked specifically about this, respondents were unsure what these elements included so they were more inclined to rate them negatively.

**Group 2 – Senior Canadians**

**The budget items that received highest ratings from senior participants were:**

- ✓ Pandemic related supports—extending personal supports to Canadians through EI (i.e. sickness benefits) and supporting small businesses by extending wage and rent subsidies
- ✓ Support for Long Term Care facilities. However, some questioned whether \$3 billion was enough and how does the government address the mix of private and public providers
- ✓ Luxury tax on high priced cars, aircrafts and boats

**The budget items that appeared to be less supported by senior participants were:**

- ✓ Any references regarding the “sacrifices youth and young adults made as a result of the pandemic”. You could detect a generation gap when it comes to COVID impacts
- ✓ References to Net Zero emission goals. When probed two sources of discontent: 1) The target date of 2050 too far out in the future; 2) Net Zero was interpreted as a ban on oil and this was not supported by some in the group. A couple of Alberta residents voiced concerns about this and that oil and energy in general was not mentioned in the speech at all.
- ✓ The section of the speech where Minister Freeland challenged those who would criticize spending at this time, which characterized those would do so as being ‘uncaring about some who lost their job’ or ‘uncaring about struggling small business’. This group is somewhat uneasy about the level of spending and how it gets reconciled in the future. There was a feeling it was legitimate to raise questions of spending.
- ✓ The OAS changes. Participants liked the fact payments are increasing to those age 75 and older, but they were not pleased there is nothing for those age 65 to 74. This group felt it should be from 65+. The change in spousal survivor benefits was not clearly understood in the speech, but when raised, it was noted as a good thing.

**Group 3 – Canadians who Received the CERB**

**The budget items that received highest ratings from participants who Received the CERB were:**

- ✓ This group was positive about the Canada Recovery Benefits extension and most commented that this was the piece of the budget that was most relevant to them.
- ✓ All the aspects relating to younger Canadians (child care, students) were positive with several mentioning that they have children in the house that will benefit (which, in turn, will take the pressure off of them).
- ✓ Given that the plan with the budget was to restart the economy, the overall feeling about it was positive.

**The budget items that appeared to be less supported by participants who Received the CERB were:**

- ✓ This group was generally skeptical about the ability of the reallocation of housing (office towers converted to residential) to be repurposed into affordable housing. One mentioned that this had been done in Alberta but, the result was cost-prohibitive to most.
- ✓ There were questions about frontline workers and what was being done to help them.
- ✓ There was also skepticism about whether or not the changes mentioned would affect the entire country as some believe the smaller provinces and territories get left out of the mix. As such, they suggested that the budget look at Canada as a whole and not to forget the Territories.
- ✓ While nearly all thought the budget spoke to them as Canadians, there was a lack of understanding of the foreign buyer's tax.

**Group 4 – French Group with the General Population of Quebec**

**The budget items that received highest ratings from the Quebec participants were:**

- ✓ Measures to support low-income workers who took risks being on the front lines of the pandemic (i.e. investment of \$8.9 billion in support for those workers and the increase in the federal minimum wage to \$15)
- ✓ Measures to help students and young Canadians (i.e. waiving interest on student loans, investment of \$5.7 billion in support for Canadian youth)
- ✓ Fund for improving high-speed communications in rural and remote areas of Canada
- ✓ Investment in bio-manufacturing to facilitate the manufacture of vaccines in Canada
- ✓ Investment in technology and leading sectors (i.e. artificial intelligence, geomatics, quantum, etc.)
- ✓ Luxury tax on high-priced cars, planes and boats
- ✓ Tax on vacant properties owned by foreigners

**The budget items that appeared to be less supported by the Quebec participants were:**

- ✓ Quebecers scored high on environmental measures, however, there was a sharp decline when the goal of carbon neutrality by 2050 was mentioned (too far in time for some). The same was observed when the Minister mentioned the seven-year target for the implementation of the net zero accelerator. Some participants would have hoped for more clean energy measures.
- ✓ Measures concerning children and access to quality early childhood learning services were well received by Quebecers, but \$10 daycare had less of an impact on them as it is



already established in the province. The notion of it and how Quebec would be compensated was not mentioned by participants.

### **Missing items or questions participants expressed about the budget speech**

- ✓ In terms of questions or what was missing in this budget, as noted above, this budget was perceived as covering a lot of ground. As one participant said: “It covered all the pain points that we have talked about during the pandemic.” Two areas that were noted without prompting as missing:
- ✓ No reference to a national pharmacare program in the speech. Several seniors saw this as an oversight on a policy that was important in the past.
- ✓ No reference to addressing homelessness. Toronto and Vancouver residents noted this. A few people said poverty was referenced but not homelessness specifically
- ✓ A couple of people referenced the \$15 an hour minimum wage rate as not something that will help low income in the long run. A few individuals said as the minimum wage goes up so will the prices charged by those employing people at this new minimum wage. Not a really negative thing on the dial – neutral.
- ✓ For example, some participants pointed out that there was no mention of healthcare in the speech.
- ✓ In addition, whether on a positive or negative note, others noted the absence of pipelines or the oil industry in the speech.

## **1.4 Notes on The Interpretation of The Findings**

The opinions and observations expressed in this document do not reflect those of the Department of Finance of Canada. This report was compiled by Leger based on research conducted specifically for this project.

Given the nature of the qualitative research undertaken, some of the findings related here will take the form of figures, numerical ratings and some comparisons will be made between different groups present in the qualitative exercise. Participants had to evaluate the budget speech in real time using a dial with numerical figures and were asked to privately answer some polling questions appearing on their computer screens. However, the reader is advised to exercise caution when reading the analysis which follows as the process remains qualitative in nature and therefore does not allow for statistical inference to be made to a larger population. The “results” presented are only directional in nature and are used to be reflective on what went on during the qualitative exercise.

## 1.5 Declaration of Political Neutrality and Contact Information

I hereby certify, as chief agent of Leger, that the deliverables are in full compliance with the neutrality requirements of the [Policy on Communications and Federal Identity](#) and the [Directive on the Management of Communications—Appendix C](#) (Appendix C: Mandatory Procedures for Public Opinion Research).

Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, party positions, or the assessment of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

Signed by:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Christian Bourque".

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