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# Continuous Qualitative Data Collection of Canadians' Views – November 2023

Final Report

**Prepared for the Privy Council Office**

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Canada 

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## Final Report

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This public opinion research report presents the results of a series of focus groups conducted by The Strategic Counsel on behalf of the Privy Council Office. The seventh cycle of the first year of this study included a total of twelve focus groups with Canadian adults (18 years of age and older) conducted between November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023, and November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre : Rapport final - Collecte continue de données qualitatives sur les opinions des Canadiens – novembre 2023.

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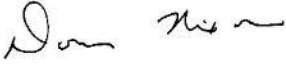
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## Political Neutrality Certification

I hereby certify as a Senior Officer of The Strategic Counsel that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Policy on Communications and Federal Identity and the Directive on the Management of Communications – Appendix C – Mandatory Procedures for Public Opinion Research.

Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

Signed:  \_\_\_\_\_

Date: December 19, 2023

Donna Nixon, Partner  
The Strategic Counsel

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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

The Communications and Consultation Secretariat of the Privy Council Office (PCO) commissioned The Strategic Counsel (TSC) to conduct continuous cycles of focus group research across the country with members of the public on key national issues, events, and policy initiatives related to the Government of Canada.

The broad purpose of this ongoing qualitative research program is three-fold: to explore the dimensions and drivers of public opinion on the most important issues facing the country; to assess perceptions and expectations of the federal government's actions and priorities; and, to inform the development of Government of Canada communications so that they continue to be aligned with the perspectives and information needs of Canadians, while remaining both clear and easy-to-understand.

The research is intended to be used by the Communications and Consultation Secretariat within PCO in order to fulfill its mandate of supporting the Prime Minister's Office in coordinating government communications. Specifically, the research will ensure that PCO has an ongoing understanding of Canadians' opinions on macro-level issues of interest to the Government of Canada, as well as emerging trends.

This report includes findings from twelve online focus groups which were conducted between November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023, and November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2023, in multiple locations across the country. Details concerning the locations, recruitment, and composition of the groups are provided in the section below.

The research for this cycle focused largely on the Government of Canada's priorities and performance on a range of issues important to Canadians. Related to this, some groups took part in targeted discussions focusing on federal activities related to housing, the cost of living, immigration, Indigenous peoples, and the Caribbean diaspora in Canada. All discussed what they had seen, read, or heard regarding the federal government in recent days, focusing on actions and initiatives it had taken within Canada as well as on the international stage.

This research cycle also explored issues related to the Canadian economy. Several groups engaged in discussions related to the Government of Canada's Fall Economic Statement (FES), the economic situation in Canada, and the current state of the employment market. Two groups based in Alberta also shared their perspectives related to the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) and the recent proposal by the Government of Alberta to create its own provincial pension plan. A number of groups shared their perspectives related to the Government of Canada's Wordmark and musical signature, while others engaged in an exercise where they were asked to evaluate a range of potential creative concepts designed to promote Canada Day.

Other topics discussed in this cycle included carbon pricing, community safety, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), public sentiment, opioids, and the protection and promotion of the French language.

As a note of caution when interpreting the results from this study, findings of qualitative research are directional in nature only and cannot be attributed quantitatively to the overall population under study with any degree of confidence.

## Methodology

### Overview of Groups

Target audience

- Canadian residents, 18 and older.
- Groups were split primarily by location.
- Some groups focused on specific cohorts of the population, including active military members and veterans, those aged 55+ approaching retirement, members of the Caribbean diaspora, young adults aged 18-24, Francophones, and Indigenous peoples.

### Detailed Approach

- Twelve groups across various regions in Canada.
- Six groups were conducted among the general population residing in Ottawa, Newfoundland, Toronto, Northern Quebec, Southern Alberta, and Vancouver
- The other six groups were conducted with key subgroups including:
  - Active military members and veterans
  - Individuals aged 55+ approaching retirement
  - Members of the Caribbean Diaspora
  - Young adults aged 18-24
  - Indigenous Peoples
  - Francophones residing in the Prairies
- The two groups based in Quebec and one group based in the Prairies were conducted in French. All other groups were conducted in English.
- All groups for this cycle were conducted online.
- A total of 8 participants were recruited for each group, assuming 6 to 8 participants would attend.
- Across all locations, 86 participants attended, in total. Details on attendance numbers by group can be found below.
- Each participant received an honorarium of \$125.

### Group Locations and Composition

LOCATION	GROUP	LANGUAGE	DATE	TIME (EDT)	GROUP COMPOSITION	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Ottawa	1	EN	Tues, Nov 7 <sup>th</sup>	6:00-8:00 PM	General Population	8
Newfoundland	2	EN	Wed, Nov 8 <sup>th</sup>	4:30-6:30 PM	General Population	8
Calgary	3	EN	Thurs, Nov 9 <sup>th</sup>	8:00-10:00 PM	55+ Approaching Retirement	8
Mid-Size and Major Centres Ontario	4	EN	Tues, Nov 14 <sup>th</sup>	6:00-8:00 PM	Caribbean Diaspora	8
Sherbrooke	5	FR	Wed, Nov 15 <sup>th</sup>	6:00-8:00 PM	Youth Aged 18-24	7
Toronto	6	EN	Thurs, Nov 16 <sup>th</sup>	6:00-8:00 PM	General Population	8
Mid-Size Centres British Columbia	7	EN	Tues, Nov 21 <sup>st</sup>	9:00-11:00 PM	Indigenous	8
Northern Quebec	8	FR	Wed, Nov 22 <sup>nd</sup>	6:00-8:00 PM	General Population	5
Eastern Ontario	9	EN	Thurs, Nov 23 <sup>rd</sup>	6:00-8:00 PM	Active and Veteran Members of the CAF	6
Southern Alberta	10	EN	Mon, Nov 27 <sup>th</sup>	8:00-10:00 PM	General Population	4
Vancouver	11	EN	Tues, Nov 28 <sup>th</sup>	9:00-11:00 PM	General Population	8
Prairies	12	FR	Wed, Nov 29 <sup>th</sup>	8:00-10:00 PM	Francophones Living in the Prairies	8
<b>Total number of participants</b>						<b>86</b>

## Key Findings

### Government of Canada in the News (All Locations)

At the beginning of each group, participants were asked what they had seen, read, or heard about the Government of Canada in recent days. A wide range of announcements and initiatives were recalled, including meetings between federal officials and the heads of major grocery chains to discuss ways to stabilize grocery prices, an announcement by the federal government that it would temporarily be pausing the fuel charge on the deliveries of heating oil in all provinces and territories, and the release of the Fall Economic Statement (FES). Other actions mentioned by participants included the announcement by the federal government that it would be removing the goods and services tax (GST) from the construction of new rental developments, the provision of a \$1 billion top-up to the Affordable Housing Fund towards the building of new non-profit, co-op, and public housing projects,

and an agreement reached between the Government of Canada and Google regarding the establishment of a regulatory framework that would allow Google to continue sharing Canadian news online.

Participants also recalled activities related to the Government of Canada on the international stage. These included the provision of humanitarian assistance to civilians in Israel, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank who had been impacted by the ongoing conflict in that region, as well as continued tensions between Canada and India following the announcement that Canadian security agencies were in possession of intelligence potentially linking agents of the Government of India to the killing of a Canadian citizen in Surrey, British Columbia (B.C.) in June of 2023. A number reported hearing that numerous Canadian diplomatic personnel had been recalled from India in recent months following a formal communication from the Government of India that it was planning to unilaterally remove their diplomatic immunities.

**Government of Canada Priorities and Performance (Ottawa, Newfoundland, Calgary 55+ Approaching Retirement, Mid-Size and Major Centres Ontario Caribbean Diaspora, Sherbrooke Young Adults, Toronto, Northern Quebec, Mid-Size Centres B.C. Indigenous Peoples, Eastern Ontario Active Military Members and Veterans, Vancouver, Prairies Francophones)**

Eleven groups took part in conversations related to the issues currently facing Canadians as well as their perspectives regarding the federal government's management of these priorities. Participants were asked to identify areas in which they felt the Government of Canada was performing well and areas where they felt there was room for improvement. On a number of issues participants expressed a range of positive and negative views. These included health care, immigration, climate change and the environment, reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, and national security.

Participants also identified a number of areas where they felt that the Government of Canada had performed well. These included the wide range of supports and benefits that were available to Canadians, the promotion of diversity and inclusiveness across the country, and the provision of humanitarian assistance on the global stage.

Additionally, participants mentioned a range of areas in which they believed the Government of Canada had room for improvement. These included housing, inflation and the cost of living, and a perceived lack of resources allocated towards addressing issues related to mental health and addiction.

Prompted to identify what they viewed to be the top issues that the federal government should be prioritizing going forward, many reiterated the need for a greater focus on making housing more affordable for Canadians as well as taking actions to reduce inflation and the cost of living. Several also identified health care and climate change as areas that they felt needed to be prioritized to a higher extent going forward. Other top priority areas mentioned by participants included reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, increased investments towards education and the training of teachers, greater supports for seniors, and reducing federal spending with the aim of reaching a balanced budget.



### **Housing (Ottawa, Toronto, Vancouver)**

Participants in three groups engaged in a discussion related to the housing situation in their respective communities. Asked whether they felt that housing was an important priority for the Government of Canada to focus on, all did, with many believing that this was the top issue at present. Almost all believed that the housing situation in their communities had gotten worse in recent years. It was widely thought that housing costs for both prospective homebuyers and renters had risen sharply in the past few years and that this had made it increasingly difficult for lower- and middle-income Canadians to secure safe and affordable housing in their areas. Several were of the view that rising housing costs had significantly contributed to what they perceived as rising rates of homelessness in their area. Describing additional challenges that had negatively impacted the housing situation in their communities, participants cited issues related to what they viewed as the growing prominence of short-term rental companies (such as Airbnb and Vrbo) which they believed had reduced the long-term rental supply.

Very few reported having seen, read, or heard about any recent actions or initiatives from the Government of Canada related to housing. Asked whether they were aware of an initiative by the federal government to provide additional funding to municipalities that commit to reducing red tape in order to build more housing, none were. Questioned whether they supported this type of measure, several reported that they did, believing that this would assist in increasing the supply of housing in their community. A number, however, interpreted this as removing existing housing regulations and expressed concerns that doing so could have a negative impact on communities and the surrounding environment.

Asked what came to mind when they heard the term 'densification', several believed that this referred to strategies aimed at increasing the number of people living in a specific area, as well as the construction of multi-unit developments rather than single-family homes. Several expressed uncertainty as to whether densification would have an overall positive impact, with a number mentioning concerns related to greater congestion, traffic, and increased strain on important services. Among the smaller number who supported increased densification, it was felt that pursuing this strategy would ultimately lead to more sustainable cities, with a greater focus on enhancing the walkability of communities and increasing the use of public transportation rather than personal automobiles. Questioned whether they would support greater densification in their own communities, several expressed that they would, but only if sufficient additional infrastructure (such as schools, hospitals, and public transportation) were built ahead of time to accommodate an influx to the local population.

Participants were next provided with information related to the Government of Canada's Housing Accelerator Fund. Asked what types of infrastructure they felt should be built by municipalities through this initiative, participants identified services such as public transportation, schools, hospitals, green spaces such as parks and playgrounds, and waste management systems. Questioned whether knowing that the Government of Canada was taking these actions to support growing communities affected their opinion regarding densification, few indicated that it did. The view was reiterated by several that this additional funding on its own would not be enough to address the current challenges related to

housing, and that a greater focus needed to be placed by the federal government on making homes more affordable for Canadians going forward.

### **Cost of Living (Sherbrooke Young Adults)**

Participants in the group comprised of young adults residing in Sherbrooke, Quebec engaged in a brief discussion related to the cost of living at present. Asked to identify the biggest challenges related to the cost of living that they felt the Government of Canada should be prioritizing, participants cited issues related to the affordability of groceries, the cost of housing, and the perceived high rate of taxation at present. Most felt that the federal government was currently on the wrong track when it came to addressing the cost of living, with several of the impression that this issue had worsened in recent years.

Asked whether they felt that climate change was having an impact on the cost of living, most believed this to be the case. It was thought that natural disasters such as wildfires, windstorms, and large-scale flooding had caused considerable economic damage in recent years and that perceived colder temperatures in the winter months had made it more expensive for Canadians in some parts of the country to heat their homes. A few expressed the opinion that initiatives related to mitigating the impacts of climate change, such as the implementation of a federal price on carbon, had also served to increase the cost of living in recent years.

### **Immigration (Toronto)**

Participants residing in Toronto were asked a few additional questions related to the Canadian immigration system. Describing what they believed to be the most important issues related to immigration, several felt that more needed to be done to streamline the certification process for new arrivals seeking to work in their fields of expertise. Participants also felt that action needed to be taken to ensure that sufficient employment opportunities and housing would be available to meet the needs of incoming immigrants. A number recalled hearing accounts of new immigrants who had struggled to begin their lives in Canada due to difficulties in finding work and housing in their communities.

Asked whether they felt the Government of Canada was on the right track when it came to immigration, a roughly equal number believed that it was headed in the wrong direction as those who were more uncertain. Among those who thought that it was on the wrong track, participants expressed concerns regarding the increased demand for housing and the potential strain that further immigration could place on vital sectors such as health care and education. Among these participants, it was widely felt that the rate of immigration should be temporarily reduced until the basic needs of those already living in Canada could be met.

### **Indigenous Peoples (Mid-Size Centres B.C. Indigenous Peoples)**

One group, comprised of Indigenous peoples residing in mid-size centres in B.C., took part in a discussion related to reconciliation and the Government of Canada's progress on this front. Asked to identify what they viewed to be the top issues impacting Indigenous peoples, participants provided a range of responses. These included mental health and addiction, the need for additional recreational

and cultural programming for Indigenous youth, and the building and/or repair of infrastructure in Indigenous communities such as clean drinking water systems, health care facilities, and schools.

Asked whether they felt that the Government of Canada had prioritized reconciliation in recent years, participants were mixed in their views. While it was generally thought that there had been a greater effort to bring attention to and discuss the unique challenges facing Indigenous peoples, most did not believe that there had been much in the way of tangible progress on these fronts. Discussing actions that could be taken by the federal government to address these issues, it was thought that more should be done to encourage the self-sufficiency of Indigenous peoples, providing Indigenous communities with the financial resources and infrastructure they required to build self-sustaining local economies.

Describing the measurements that they would use to determine whether progress was being made on reconciliation, many expressed the desire to see greater Indigenous governance over their own communities as well as the creation of one-to-one dialogues between the federal government and individual Indigenous nations. Asked how the federal government could improve its engagement with Indigenous peoples, participants suggested making greater use of Indigenous-led organizations and friendship centres.

#### **Caribbean Diaspora (Mid-Size and Major Centres Ontario Caribbean Diaspora)**

The group comprised of members of the Caribbean diaspora residing in mid-size and major centres in Ontario engaged in a brief discussion related to their perspectives and experiences as Caribbean Canadians. Asked to identify what they felt to be the top issues that were currently impacting the Caribbean community in Canada, a number felt that more needed to be done to make it easier for new immigrants, including those from Caribbean nations, to become certified to work in their fields of expertise. It was also thought that greater efforts could be taken by the federal government to promote Caribbean culture and the historic contributions of Caribbean Canadians, with some believing that the Caribbean diaspora often received less attention relative to other cultures. A few expressed the opinion that the immigration process was easier for individuals from some regions of the world compared to others, and that Caribbeans often faced challenges in this regard. Related to this, a number believed that immigrants from Caribbean countries where English was an official language should not be required to take a language test and should be treated in the same manner as immigrants from other English-speaking parts of the world.

#### **Fall Economic Statement (Mid-Size Centres B.C. Indigenous Peoples, Northern Quebec, Eastern Ontario Active Military Members and Veterans, Southern Alberta, Vancouver, Prairies Francophones)**

Participants in six groups engaged in a conversation related to the Government of Canada's Fall Economic Statement (FES), which was released on November 21<sup>st</sup>, 2023. Asked whether they had seen, read, or heard anything about the FES, very few indicated that they had. Provided with information related to numerous measures included in the FES, participants engaged in an exercise where they

were prompted to select the measure that they felt would be most important to helping Canadians going forward.

Across all groups, a large number selected the initiative to increase funding towards the building of more homes. It was widely felt that there needed to be significant increases in the housing supply in many parts of the country and that by taking this step the federal government could make progress towards making housing more affordable for a wider range of Canadians. Several also selected the measure to crack down on anti-competitive practices by bigger companies, including major grocery chains. Among participants, it was felt that this action would likely benefit the largest number of Canadians, with several of the impression that many were currently struggling to make ends meet amidst the high cost of living.

A number selected the initiative to establish a Canadian Mortgage Charter, believing that this would protect the large number of households who they expected would be negatively impacted and potentially at risk of losing their homes due to significant increases in their mortgage payments in the next few years. Participants also expressed support for greater investments by the federal government towards the manufacturing of clean energy technology in Canada, believing that this would have a positive impact on both the economy and the fight against climate change.

Asked to share their overall reaction to these measures, most believed that these actions represented a step in the right direction. It was widely felt that the measures aimed at addressing the housing situation and the cost of living were the most important areas for the federal government to be working on. A few, however, believed that the FES focused on too many areas and that a more focused approach on a smaller number of priorities would likely be more effective.

### **The Economy (Newfoundland, Calgary 55+ Approaching Retirement, Sherbrooke Young Adults)**

Three groups took part in a discussion related to the Canadian economy and the actions and initiatives they felt that the federal government should be prioritizing on this front. All felt that the economy was an important area for the federal government to focus on, with many believing that addressing issues such as inflation and the perceived high cost of living needed to be a top priority for the foreseeable future. Asked what concerned them the most about the economy at present, many described what they viewed as a significant increase in the costs of essentials such as groceries and gasoline in recent years as well as what they believed to be a widespread lack of affordable housing in many parts of the country. Several were of the impression that wages had not been increasing at a fast enough rate to match the cost of living and that, as a result, a growing number of Canadian households were now facing financial struggles.

Participants next engaged in an exercise where they were presented with a series of types of economies and asked to identify which approach they felt the Government of Canada should be pursuing. *An economy that works for all Canadians* received the highest level of support among participants, with many believing that this represented the fairest and most equitable approach and would benefit the largest number of Canadians. A smaller number selected *a strong economy* and *a sustainable economy*

while very few believed that the Government of Canada should be focused on building *a clean economy*.

Asked whether they believed climate change was currently impacting the Canadian economy, almost all felt this to be the case. Expanding upon this, many cited the economic costs involved in rebuilding Canadian communities following natural disasters such as wildfires, windstorms, and large-scale flooding, the expenses of retrofitting buildings and infrastructure to be more resilient and environmentally sustainable, and the additional costs to consumers of initiatives such as the implementation of a price on carbon by the federal government. Most believed that it was important for the federal government to be focusing on both the fight against climate change as well as growing the economy at present. It was thought that these areas were inextricably connected and that, when considering the potential large-scale disruption of climate change, it was impossible to consider long-term economic growth without taking the environment into account.

### **Jobs (Sherbrooke Young Adults)**

Participants in the group comprised of young adults residing in Sherbrooke, Quebec engaged in an extended discussion related to the current employment market. Most viewed the job market as being relatively poor at the moment. Participants were largely of the impression that while there were many employment opportunities currently available across a range of different sectors, few of these jobs offered a living wage. As a result, it was felt that prospective workers were for the most part unwilling to apply for these jobs and were holding out for opportunities that offered higher wages.

Asked whether they expected the job market to be better, worse, or the same in five years' time, most believed that it would remain relatively stable. Among these participants, it was felt that the level of employment in Canada had been steady for a long period of time and that this was unlikely to change over the next five years. For the smaller number who believed that the employment market would improve, it was felt that there would likely be job growth in vital areas such as health care and education, which were currently viewed as experiencing labour shortages and requiring additional investments from governments at the federal and provincial level.

Questioned whether they felt that the Government of Canada was on the right track when it came to creating good jobs in Canada, a roughly equal number felt that it was headed in the wrong direction as those who were more uncertain. Asked what additional actions the Government of Canada should be taking on this front, a number felt that there should be a greater focus on increasing wages to keep pace with the cost of living. Participants also believed that there needed to be more attention paid to the mental health of workers, believing that a large number of Canadians were currently suffering from some degree of burnout in their professional lives.

### **Canada Pension Plan (Calgary 55+ Approaching Retirement, Southern Alberta)**

The two groups based in Alberta took part in a discussion related to retirement and the Canada Pension Plan (CPP). Asked how often they thought about their retirement plans, most indicated that this was currently an important priority for them. A large number recalled having faced financial

challenges in recent years, with several feeling increasingly concerned about what their financial situation would be like if they were to retire as planned. A few were worried that they may never be able to afford to retire. Discussing specific steps that they had taken to plan for their retirements, a number reported having utilized savings programs such as the Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP) and the Tax-Free Savings Account (TFSA).

While all were familiar with the CPP, a number expressed the opinion that the amounts provided through this program would not be enough to meet their financial needs in retirement and that additional savings and sources of income would be required. Questioned whether they had seen, read, or heard anything about the CPP as of late, several mentioned the recent proposal by the Government of Alberta to leave the CPP to establish its own provincial pension plan. Most reacted negatively to this proposal, with many expressing concerns that they would lose a portion of their expected retirement income if the provincial government were to take this approach. While a few found the idea of a provincially run pension plan to be appealing, these participants were skeptical as to whether this was a realistic possibility and believed that it would be extremely difficult for Alberta to withdraw from the CPP.

Participants were largely of the opinion that the establishment of an Alberta Pension Plan (APP) would be unfair to Albertans in that it could potentially put their retirement savings at risk while providing no real improvement over the framework of the existing CPP. Asked how they felt the Government of Canada should respond to this proposal, most believed that it should present clear, factual information detailing the reasons the establishment of an APP would weaken the financial outlook in retirement for both Albertans and the rest of Canadians alike.

Focusing on the CPP more generally, participants were asked whether they felt it was worth contributing some of their earnings now to receive financial support later in life. Almost all believed that it was, feeling that this was an important action to take towards ensuring one's financial security in retirement, even if the amounts provided through the CPP would not be enough on their own to meet all of their financial needs. Informed that, as of 2019, the CPP was gradually being enhanced, meaning that workers today would need to contribute a bit more annually but should end up with higher benefits when they retire, most felt that this change made sense. Due to increases in the cost of living it was believed that many individuals would likely require more in retirement savings than they may have previously expected and that this step by the Government of Canada would be helpful to those who were currently struggling to save towards retirement on their own.

### **Canada Day Logo (Ottawa, Mid-Size and Major Centres Ontario Caribbean Diaspora, Sherbrooke Young Adults, Toronto, Mid-Size Centres B.C. Indigenous Peoples, Northern Quebec)**

Participants in six groups shared their perspectives related to a series of visual concepts developed by the federal government to promote Canada Day. Asked to select the approach that they felt best represented Canada Day, participants overwhelmingly expressed a preference for the concept featuring a multitude of colours surrounding the outline of a maple leaf. It was believed that this approach was the most celebratory, inclusive, and reflective of Canada's diversity and that considerable effort had gone into the design of this approach and that it was a lot more stylistic and eye-catching than the

other concepts. A smaller number expressed a concept which depicted many different shades of red coming together to form a larger maple leaf. It was felt this approach benefitted from its heavy use of Canadian elements such as the colour red and the maple leaf, and a number were impressed by what they viewed as the complex design of the concept.

### **Government of Canada Wordmark (Ottawa, Northern Quebec, Southern Alberta, Prairies Francophones)**

Four groups engaged in conversations related to the visual symbols and audio signatures that the federal government uses to identify itself. Almost all believed that it was relatively easy to determine whether information was coming from the Government of Canada. Questioned how they would typically go about determining whether information they encountered online, via physical correspondence, or on public advertisements such as billboards, television, and radio was from the Government of Canada, several were of the impression that official communications from the federal government were often accompanied by a logo, including the word 'Canada' and the Canadian flag. Asked how they would typically identify audio information from the federal government on television or on radio, many recalled what they described as a jingle that they believed often accompanied official communications.

Shown an image of the Government of Canada wordmark, all recognized this symbol, with a number confirming that this was the logo they had been describing earlier. Participants recalled having seen this wordmark on websites operated by the Government of Canada, on correspondence that they had received by mail, following television commercials, on print and digital advertisements, and at the physical branches of federal agencies and departments. Asked what they believed this symbol represented, most felt that it communicated that the information it accompanied was official, unbiased, and trustworthy. Many strongly associated the wordmark with the Government of Canada and viewed it as being similar to a signature for its official communications. Questioned whether this symbol evoked any feelings for them personally, several associated it with their identity as Canadians and pride in their country. Asked whether they would typically trust the information that accompanies the wordmark, most expected that they would. A few, however, felt that they would still be likely to verify any information they received, especially if they were skeptical as to whether it was actually from the federal government.

Participants were next presented with an audio signature produced by the Government of Canada. All recognized this audio recording, with many indicating that this had been the jingle they had mentioned earlier. A large number recalled having heard this audio signature following commercials on television and/or radio, often accompanied by a voice stating that the advertisement they had just seen or heard had been from the Government of Canada.

### **Carbon Pricing (Newfoundland)**

Participants residing in Newfoundland took part in a conversation related to the federal government's carbon pricing system. Asked whether they were concerned about the potential impacts of climate

change, almost all indicated that they were. While most believed that mitigating the effects of climate change should be a top priority for the Government of Canada, a few felt differently, believing that issues such as inflation, the cost of living, and a perceived lack of affordable housing represented more pressing matters at present.

Asked whether they had been aware of the Government of Canada's carbon pricing system prior to this conversation, only a few indicated that they were. Provided with information related to the federal price on carbon, while most reacted positively, a few questioned whether this was the most effective strategy to combat climate change. Among these participants, it was felt that rather than redistributing the amounts collected through the price on carbon back to Canadians via Climate Action Incentive Payments (CAIPs), these funds should instead be invested towards sustainability-focused initiatives such as the development of clean technology and renewable energy sources.

Describing the energy sources they use to heat their homes, very few mentioned using heating oil for this purpose. Informed that the Government of Canada had recently announced that it would be pausing the carbon pollution price on home heating oil until April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2027, all reacted positively. It was widely believed that by taking this action the federal government would provide households who were considering a switch to a different heating source, such as a heat pump, with additional time and savings to carry out this project. Asked what more could be done to help with the affordability of home heating, it was felt that action should be taken to encourage rental properties to install energy-efficient heating systems and incentivize landlords and property management companies to find ways to reduce heating costs for their tenants.

Informed that, starting April 2024, the Government of Canada would be doubling the rural top-up for pollution price rebates from 10 per cent to 20 per cent, most believed that this would have a positive impact, and several who lived in rural communities expected that they would personally benefit from this initiative. Asked whether they felt that this approach was fair to Canadians living in smaller or rural communities, several believed that it was. A few were more uncertain, feeling that they needed more information on this issue to determine whether this was a fair approach and whether these rebates would sufficiently account for the different energy costs of those living rurally.

### **Community Safety (Toronto)**

Participants residing in Toronto shared their perspectives related to the safety of their community. Asked if they felt safe in their communities, all indicated that they did. Discussing whether they felt the level of crime in their community had increased, decreased, or stayed the same in recent years, a roughly equal number were of the impression that it had increased as those who believed it had stayed the same. Among those who felt that crime had increased, it was believed that a growing number of Canadians were currently struggling with issues related to addiction, mental health, and poverty, and that a large proportion of this perceived rise in criminal activity had been due to these individuals committing crimes out of desperation.

Questioned as to what role they felt the Government of Canada should play when it came to addressing crime, participants cited its responsibility in overseeing agencies such as the Royal Canadian



Mounted Police (RCMP) and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) as well as specific areas such as the control and regulation of firearms. Focusing on gun control specifically, while few were aware of any specific actions from the federal government on this front, a small number recalled hearing that it had established a buyback program for recently prohibited firearms, as well as a national ban on the sale, purchase, and transfer of handguns.

Discussing additional actions that the Government of Canada should take to reduce crime, several believed that more needed to be done to address what they viewed as the root causes of criminal activity, including poverty, homelessness, and challenges related to mental health and addiction. Other measures suggested by participants included greater accountability and stricter bail conditions for violent criminals and/or repeat offenders, as well as increased investments toward community programming for young people as a way of preventing them from being drawn to gangs and other criminal activity.

### **Canadian Armed Forces (Eastern Ontario Active Military Members and Veterans)**

Participants in the group comprised of active military members and veterans residing in Eastern Ontario engaged in a discussion relating to numerous issues currently impacting the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF). Asked to share their perspectives related to CAF's contributions to the world and domestically in Canada, many felt that the strength and preparedness of the Canadian military had diminished as of late. Several were of the impression that there had been numerous financial cuts to the national defence budget in recent years and that this had made it more difficult to train service members, procure necessary equipment, and engage in military and peacekeeping activities on the international stage.

Asked to identify areas where they thought the CAF was currently performing well, a few believed that the military continued to offer Canadians with the opportunity to earn a living, travel, and gain valuable skills and experiences, while also working to protect their country. Describing specific areas related to the CAF where they felt that there was room for improvement, participants identified a range of issues. These included the quality of the equipment utilized by CAF members, perceived challenges related to recruitment, and the view that the leadership of the CAF was too highly consolidated among the top ranks.

All felt that the Government of Canada was currently on the wrong track when it came to addressing the priorities most important to the CAF. Prompted to share what they felt to be the top issues impacting the CAF requiring higher prioritization from the Government of Canada, several reiterated the need for increased funding and resources across all aspects of the armed forces. A number believed that more could be done to provide greater family supports for service members, including ensuring that families would be relocated together and that all members of the armed forces would have access to services such as family doctors and dentists.

Focusing on the issue of housing for current and former CAF members, many reported having faced challenges related to purchasing a home in the communities in which they had been stationed. It was felt that far more could be done by the federal government and the CAF to build more housing for

military members as well as to subsidize the cost of housing for those in the military. Asked whether they felt that homelessness was a major issue for CAF veterans, while some had heard that this was a problem, none reported having personally known any veterans who had dealt with this. It was widely felt that more needed to be done to address mental health challenges faced by veterans, believing that many of the issues faced by service members upon leaving the armed forces primarily stemmed from unresolved PTSIs and other psychological challenges.

### **Public Sentiment (Mid-Size and Major Centres Ontario Caribbean Diaspora)**

Participants in one group, comprised of members of the Caribbean diaspora residing in mid-size and major centres in Ontario, briefly shared their perspectives related to their futures in Canada, as well as the inclusiveness of Canadian society. Asked to identify what made them optimistic about their future in Canada, several mentioned the perceived feeling of safety, the protection of personal freedoms, and their ability to celebrate their culture in Canada free from discrimination. Discussing the areas which made them more concerned about life in Canada going forward, many identified issues related to the high cost of living and a perceived lack of affordable housing across the country.

Asked to describe the state of diversity, equity, and inclusion in Canada, participants largely responded positively. Most reported feeling welcomed in their communities and believed that the federal government had placed a strong focus on ensuring the protection and promotion of different cultures and backgrounds in Canada. A few felt somewhat differently, believing that while Canada was generally an inclusive and welcoming place, some visible minorities were still treated differently in some parts of the country and that there continued to be room for improvement on this front.

### **Opioids (Vancouver)**

Participants residing in Vancouver shared their perspectives regarding addiction and opioid use in their community. All felt that opioid addiction was a major issue in Vancouver and viewed this issue as having worsened significantly in recent years. Asked whether they believed that this situation would improve in the coming years, none expected that it would.

Questioned whether they could recall any actions from the Government of Canada related to addressing opioid addiction in their area, participants recalled numerous initiatives focused on harm reduction. These included the removal of criminal penalties for the possession of small amounts of certain illegal substances in B.C., the funding and establishment of safe consumption sites, and the provision of safe supply to those suffering from addiction. None viewed these efforts in a positive light, believing that they had served to enable those struggling with addiction by increasing their access to opioids and removing the consequences for possessing and using these substances. Asked if they felt that it was important for those struggling with addiction to have access to safe supply and safe consumption sites, it was largely believed that the resources currently allocated for these programs should instead be directed towards what participants viewed as more long-term solutions such as treatment, rehabilitation, and detoxing.

Informed that the Government of Canada had granted an exemption to the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act to remove criminal penalties for the possession of up to 2.5 grams of certain illegal drugs in B.C., all believed that this was a step in the wrong direction. It was widely felt that opioid use had increased in the province following the announcement of this exemption. Asked what else they would like to see the Government of Canada do to address this issue, all reiterated a desire for increased funding for treatment centres. A small number felt that the federal government should create additional support for the family members of those experiencing addiction, including the financial assistance required for them to take time off work to support family members who were facing these challenges and/or undergoing treatment.

### **French Language Protection and Promotion (Prairies Francophones)**

Participants in the group comprised of Francophones residing in the Prairies engaged in a conversation related to the protection and promotion of the French language in Canada. Asked whether they felt that promoting and protecting the French language should be a priority for the federal government, all indicated that they did. Several, however, felt that it was also important to promote bilingualism, believing that focusing solely on the promotion of the French language could detract from the ability of Francophones to communicate and associate with other Canadians.

Questioned whether they were aware of any actions that the Government of Canada had taken to help protect and promote the French language, a range of initiatives were recalled. These included the release of the Government of Canada's Action Plan for Official Languages, the provision of French language resources for students and immigrants, and the offering of free language programs at some local colleges and universities.

Focusing specifically on the Government of Canada's Action Plan for Official Languages, participants were provided with information regarding the key objectives and proposed measures contained within the plan. On balance, all reacted positively to these initiatives, believing that they would provide considerable assistance to Francophones across Canada, and especially those residing outside of Quebec. Asked which measure they felt would have the greatest impact on the promotion and protection of the French language, many identified the actions focused on increasing investments towards French child care and educational resources. It was widely felt that these actions were critical to ensuring the continuity of the French language among the next generation of Francophones in Canada.

Discussing additional actions that the Government of Canada could take to promote and protect the French language, participants suggested the provision of free online French language courses for Anglophones interested in learning French, increasing the availability of federal services in French, and requiring bilingual road signage in all provinces and territories across Canada.



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**MORE INFORMATION**

The Strategic Counsel

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