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Continuous Qualitative Data Collection of Canadians' Views – September 2023

Final Report

Prepared for the Privy Council Office

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Canada 

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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 sixth 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 September 6th, 2023, and September 28th, 2023.

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

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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: October 13, 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 12 online focus groups which were conducted between September 6th, 2023, and September 28th, 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 climate change, public safety, and supporting middle-income Canadians. All participants discussed what they had seen, read, or heard about the federal government in recent days, with a number of groups engaging in extended conversations related to their news consumption habits and the response to recent wildfires and other extreme weather events.

This research cycle also explored issues related to housing, which were discussed by participants residing in the Northeastern Greater Toronto Area (GTA), Edmonton, and mid-size centres in Quebec. Several groups engaged in conversations related to affordability measures recently announced by the Government of Canada related to building more homes, stabilizing grocery prices, and supporting small businesses. A large number of groups were asked to evaluate potential branding concepts related to the introduction of the 9-8-8: Suicide Crisis Helpline. Participants residing in Saskatchewan who were currently in the labour force and construction/trades workers in Quebec discussed the current employment market in Canada, while heavy social media users based in Montreal shared their perspectives regarding issues related to news media and social media. One group comprised of participants who identified as living with a disability engaged in a discussion related to the challenges faced by those with disabilities and actions being taken by the federal government to better assist these individuals.

Other topics discussed this cycle included the federal government's carbon pricing system, communications testing regarding initiatives to mitigate the impacts climate change, branding for Pacific

Economic Development Canada (PacifiCan), and community challenges faced by those in the Northeastern GTA and Northeast Ontario.

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 middle class Canadians, heavy social media users, those in the labour force aged 25-44, those working in trades/construction, persons living with disabilities, and members of the South Asian diaspora.

Detailed Approach

- Twelve groups across various regions in Canada.
- Six groups were conducted among the general population residing in Calgary, Edmonton, mid-size centres in Quebec, rural Northeastern Ontario, Nova Scotia, and Interior B.C.
- The other six groups were conducted with key subgroups including:
 - Middle class Canadians;
 - Heavy social media users;
 - Members of the labour force, aged 25-44;
 - Construction/trades workers;
 - Persons living with disabilities; and
 - Members of the South Asian diaspora.
- The three groups based in Quebec 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, 87 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
Northeast Greater Toronto Area	1	English	September 6	6:00-8:00	Middle Class Canadians	8
Montreal	2	French	September 7	6:00-8:00	Heavy Social Media Users	8
Edmonton	3	English	September 12	8:00-10:00	General Population	7
Rural Northeastern Ontario	4	English	September 13	6:00-8:00	General Population	7

Mid-Size Centres Québec	5	French	September 14	6:00-8:00	General Population	8
Nova Scotia	6	English	September 18	5:00-7:00	General Population	6
Saskatchewan	7	English	September 19	8:00-10:00	In the Labour Force, Aged 25-44	6
Calgary	8	English	September 20	7:00-9:00	General Population	6
Metro Vancouver	9	English	September 21	9:00-11:00	South Asian Diaspora	8
Ontario	10	English	September 26	6:00-8:00	Persons Living with Disabilities	7
Major Centres Quebec	11	French	September 27	6:00-8:00	Working in Trades/Construction	8
Interior British Columbia	12	English	September 28	9:00-11:00	General Population	8
Total number of participants						87

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 the response to wildfires taking place in many parts of the country, the decision by the Bank of Canada to leave its policy interest rate unchanged at 5%, and the announcement that the federal government would be removing the goods and services tax (GST) from the building costs of new rental developments. Other actions recalled included an announcement that the Employment Insurance (EI) premium rate would be rising by three cents in 2024, meetings between federal officials and the heads of major grocery chains to discuss ways to stabilize grocery prices for Canadians, and the investment of \$322 million (through the Strategic Innovation Fund) by the Government of Canada towards the building of a new electric vehicle (EV) battery materials production plant in Bécancour, Quebec.

Participants also recalled activities related to the Government of Canada on the international stage. These included the attendance of the Prime Minister and other federal officials at the Group of Twenty (G20) Summit in New Delhi, India, the announcement by the federal government 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, and a visit by the President of Ukraine to Canada to discuss ways both governments could work together to strengthen ties between the two countries.

News Sources (Montreal Heavy Social Media Users, Metro Vancouver South Asian Diaspora)

Two groups engaged in a brief conversation related to the sources they typically use for news as well as their perspectives concerning the reliability of these sources. Asked which sources they used to receive their news participants mentioned traditional outlets such as the Globe and Mail and the National Post, televised news on channels such as the CBC, CTV, and TVA, radio news produced by CBC/Radio Canada, and search engines such as Google. Several also reported using social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram. Discussing the reliability of these news sources, most were of the impression that news emanating from mainstream outlets was generally more trustworthy than the items they encountered on social media.

Natural Disaster Response (Nova Scotia)

Participants residing in Nova Scotia briefly discussed the federal government's response to Hurricane Lee which made landfall with near-hurricane strength in the province on September 16th, 2023. Asked whether they could recall any actions taken by the Government of Canada on this front, none could, with a number of the impression that the storm had not been as destructive as originally anticipated. Discussing the federal government's response to natural disasters more broadly, almost all believed that it had performed well in supporting Canadians and providing assistance in the wake of wildfires, flooding, and other extreme weather events that had been occurring in several parts of the country. A number were of the impression that the federal government had bolstered its ability to respond to natural disasters in recent years and hoped that it would continue to provide a high level of rapid and effective support going forward.

Indo-Pacific Engagement (Metro Vancouver South Asian Diaspora)

Participants in the group comprised of members of the South Asian diaspora residing in Metro Vancouver discussed the relationship between the Government of Canada and India as well as Indo-Pacific engagement more generally. Asked how they viewed the state of the relationship between Canada and India, most believed it to be quite tense at present. Several were worried that these perceived tensions could create challenges for those who had family and close connections in both countries. Discussing whether they were aware of any actions from the Government of Canada related to its engagement with South Asian nations more broadly, some were of the impression that there were organizations in place that promoted trade and immigration between Canada and the Indo-Pacific region. Asked to identify the top issues impacting South Asian Canadians that the federal government should be prioritizing, a number believed that more needed to be done to address what they perceived as racism and discrimination towards South Asians and other visible minorities. It was felt that a greater focus on educating Canadians about South Asian issues and history could help to promote a better understanding of their culture and the challenges they have faced.

Government of Canada Priorities and Performance (All Locations)

All 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 shared both positive and negative views. These included inflation and the cost of living, health care, education, climate change and the environment, the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

Discussing areas where they felt that the Government of Canada had been performing well as of late, participants mentioned actions to assist parents such as the Canada Child Benefit (CCB) and initiatives to make child care more affordable, as well as additional benefits and supports such as Employment Insurance (EI), the goods and services tax/harmonized sales tax (GST/HST) credit, and the introduction of the Canada Disability Benefit. Other areas mentioned included the response to wildfires that had been occurring in many parts of the country, protecting and promoting diversity and multiculturalism throughout Canada, and providing international assistance to countries such as Ukraine. Additionally, participants mentioned a number of areas in which the Government of Canada had room for improvement. These included housing, immigration, and what was perceived as the high tax burden of many Canadians who were currently struggling with the cost of living.

Asked to identify the top issues that they felt the Government of Canada should be prioritizing, many reiterated the need to focus on key areas such as inflation, the cost of living, housing, health care, immigration, and preparing for and mitigating the impacts of climate change. A number thought that a greater focus needed to be placed by the Government of Canada on reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, believing that not enough in the way of tangible progress had been made on this front. Participants also believed that there needed to be a greater focus on providing supports for vulnerable groups such as seniors, those living with disabilities, and individuals suffering from challenges related to mental health and addiction.

Middle Class Issues (Northeast GTA Middle Class)

Participants residing in the Northeast of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) took part in a brief discussion related to the challenges currently impacting middle class Canadians. All identified as being middle class themselves. Asked to describe what they viewed as the top issues facing middle class Canadians at present, many mentioned the high rate of inflation and what they viewed as a substantial increase to the cost of living in recent years. Several were of the impression that prices for essentials such as groceries and gasoline had risen considerably as of late and that this had made it increasingly difficult for them to make ends meet financially. A number also mentioned difficulties related to housing costs, including higher mortgage payments and rising home energy rates.

Asked whether they had seen, read, or heard anything regarding actions from the Government of Canada to assist the middle class, few could recall anything. Almost all felt that the federal government was currently on the wrong track when it came to assisting the middle class. The view was expressed by several that middle-class Canadians should have the same level of access to the supports and benefits currently available to lower-income households. Discussing additional measures that could be taken by the federal government to assist the middle class, participants suggested actions such as lowering taxes for middle class households and increasing the range of benefits and supports available within Canada.

Public Safety and Bail Reform (Metro Vancouver South Asian Diaspora)

Participants in the group comprised of members of the South Asian Diaspora residing in Metro Vancouver briefly discussed public safety and recent actions from the federal government to reform the bail system in Canada. Participants did not recall having seen, read, or heard anything about this issue. Provided with information regarding actions by the Government of Canada to change the bail system to make it more difficult for individuals who have previously been found guilty of some types of violent crimes to be released on bail, all reacted positively to this initiative, believing that this represented an effective step towards reducing crime in their communities. It was thought that this action would hold repeat offenders to greater account and could help towards deterring further criminal activity going forward. Asked whether they felt that this would have an impact on reducing crime in Canada, while most did, many felt that in order to be effective this action would need to be accompanied by other measures such as increasing resources for law enforcement and taking steps to address what were viewed as the root causes of crime, such as homelessness, addiction, and issues related to mental health.

Climate Change (Interior British Columbia)

The group based in interior British Columbia (B.C.) engaged in a conversation related to climate change and the actions which could be taken on an individual and/or community level to mitigate the impacts of changing weather patterns and extreme weather events. A roughly equal number believed that climate change was a pressing issue as those who did not. Among those who were concerned, a number cited what they perceived as an increased number of natural disasters such as wildfires, flooding, and windstorms as well as more unpredictable weather patterns in recent years. Among those who were less

concerned, it was felt that rising temperatures and other changes to typical weather patterns were likely part of a natural cycle and not connected to human activity. Asked what came to mind when they thought about the potential impacts of climate change, participants mentioned issues such as droughts, flooding, wildfires, rising ocean levels, and extreme heat and cold in the summer and winter seasons respectively.

Participants widely felt that their communities were not sufficiently prepared for climate change. Asked whether they had taken any actions on this front within their own household, several reported having recently prepared emergency kits in the event that they were evacuated from their homes due to a natural disaster in their area. Several expected that their respective communities would be at a greater risk due to climate change over the next few decades.

Asked whether they had seen, read, or heard about any actions from the Government of Canada related to recent wildfires in B.C., a number recalled hearing that Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) personnel had been deployed to assist with the response. Almost all thought that the Government of Canada was on the wrong track when it came to responding to wildfires and felt that more needed to be done to prepare for and react to these types of events going forward.

Affordability Measures (Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan in the Labour Force, Calgary, Metro Vancouver South Asian Diaspora, Major Centres Quebec Working in Trades/Construction, Interior B.C.)

Participants in six groups took part in discussions related to a range of affordability measures recently announced by the Government of Canada. Asked what they felt should be the federal government's top priority at present, a large number mentioned housing and what they viewed as a perceived lack of safe and affordable housing in many Canadian communities. Several believed that more also needed to be done to address the high cost of living at present, with a number commenting that it had become increasingly difficult to afford essentials such as groceries and gasoline as of late.

Asked whether they had recently seen, read, or heard anything from the Government of Canada regarding actions it was taking to address the housing situation, the cost of living, and/or providing supports for small businesses, several indicated that they had. A large number of responses focused on housing and included the announcement of an agreement between the federal government and the City of London, Ontario to build more housing as part of the Housing Accelerator Fund, the removal of the goods and services tax (GST) from the construction of new rental developments, and the introduction of the First Home Savings Account (FHSA) to assist prospective first-time home buyers with purchasing their first home.

Housing Initiatives (Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan in the Labour Force, Calgary, Metro Vancouver South Asian Diaspora, Major Centres Quebec Trades/Construction Workers, Interior British Columbia)

All six groups were provided with information concerning a number of actions recently announced by the federal government related to building more homes faster: Several reacted positively to these initiatives, believing that they represented a step in the right direction. A large number, however, felt that these actions would do little to make housing more affordable in the immediate future and that more urgent action would need to be taken to make housing more affordable for lower- and middle-income Canadians.

While many felt that removing the GST and asking provinces/territories to remove their portion of the harmonized sales tax (HST) from new rental developments would help to spur the construction of new

projects, some expressed concerns that other constraints such as the high cost of materials, a shortage of labourers, and the need to adhere to municipal building requirements could lead to delays in the construction process. Several of those residing in more rural areas expected that these initiatives would have little impact on their own communities. Among these participants it was believed that efforts to increase the housing supply would primarily be focused on larger urban centres.

All groups with the exception of those residing in Metro Vancouver were asked a few additional questions related to exclusionary zoning. Very few indicated having previously heard of this term. Questioned how they felt about the Government of Canada asking local governments to end exclusionary zoning in exchange for funding towards the building of additional housing, participants were mixed in their reactions. While some felt that this could benefit urban centres that had limited space to expand outwards, a larger number believed that decisions related to changing exclusionary zoning laws should be considered on a municipality-by-municipality basis. It was felt that many communities that had been built primarily around single-family homes would face significant disruption if exclusionary zoning was ended completely and that this would have a negative impact on existing neighbourhoods and homeowners.

Asked whether they felt that the Government of Canada was on the right track when it came to addressing housing most felt that these measures did not go far enough to address what were seen as urgent problems related to housing affordability in many parts of the country. Several expressed the view that until tangible, measurable progress had been made towards making housing more affordable for a greater number of Canadians, they would continue to feel that the federal government was on the wrong track on this front.

Stabilizing Grocery Prices (Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan in the Labour Force, Calgary)

Three groups were presented with information related to recent steps taken by the federal government towards stabilizing high grocery prices and increasing competition within the sector. A number expected that these actions would be beneficial to small businesses in this sector as well as increase the options available to Canadians when shopping for groceries. It was hoped that any additional tax revenue collected by the federal government through this initiative would be redistributed via the creation of programs and supports to assist Canadians with the purchase of groceries and other essentials.

Asked whether they felt that these actions would be helpful towards making life more affordable for Canadians, a large number did. Several, however, expected that the success of these initiatives would largely be dependent on their implementation and whether sufficient oversight of major grocery chains would be provided by the federal government. A few suggested that actions should also be taken by the Government of Canada to lower transportation costs (including fuel prices), believing that increased expenses in this area had been a major contributing factor behind rising grocery prices.

Small Business Supports (Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan in the Labour Force, Calgary)

These three groups were also provided with details related to steps that the Government of Canada was taking to support small businesses, including an extension of the deadline for Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA) loan repayments. Asked what impacts, if any, they thought that extending the loan repayment deadline by one year would have, most believed that this would assist small businesses by providing them with more time to repay the federal government. A few felt that the repayment deadline should be extended by five years or that these loans should be completely forgiven by the Government of Canada.

Engaging in an exercise where they were asked to select one word to describe the whole package of measures (housing initiatives, stabilizing grocery prices, and small business supports) that they had

discussed, participants in these three groups provided a wide range of responses. While several selected positive terms such as 'effort', 'generous', 'responsive', and 'relief', a roughly similar number selected more negative words such as 'minimum', 'mediocre', 'slow', and 'inadequate'. Asked which measures they felt would have the most impact on them personally, most expected that the initiatives related to housing and (to a lesser extent) stabilizing grocery prices would have the greatest effect.

Housing (Northeast GTA Middle Class, Edmonton, Mid-Size Centres Quebec)

Participants in three groups took part in conversations related to housing. All believed that housing was an important issue at present and needed to be a top priority for the federal government going forward. Asked whether they had recently seen, read, or heard anything related to the Government of Canada's policies on housing, only a small number had. Among those who had heard something, participants mentioned initiatives such as the introduction of the First Home Savings Account (FHSA), a one-time top-up to the Canada Housing Benefit (CHB) to help lower-income Canadians with the cost of rent, and the provision of a one-time Grocery Rebate to some households as a part of their quarterly Goods and Services Tax/Harmonized Sales Tax (GST/HST) credits. Asked to identify the most significant challenges related to housing that needed to be addressed by the federal government, participants put forward a range of responses. These included building more homes, providing greater assistance to first-time home buyers, lowering interest rates, temporarily reducing the rate of immigration as a way to alleviate demand for housing, and banning real estate speculation and the practice of individuals and businesses purchasing residential housing properties primarily as investment vehicles.

Housing Situation (Edmonton, Mid-Size Centres Quebec)

The groups based in Edmonton and Quebec discussed the overall housing situation in Canada at present. Asked whether they thought that Canada was currently experiencing a housing crisis, all believed this to be the case. Discussing the factors driving this perceived housing crisis, many cited the high cost of purchasing a home in many parts of the country. It was believed that real estate speculation, the ability of individuals and businesses to own multiple homes, and the growing popularity of short-term rental platforms such as Airbnb had all contributed to rising rent and home prices over the past decade. Other factors believed to be contributing to the housing crisis mentioned by participants included increased rates of immigration to Canada in recent years, the high costs of materials required to build new homes, and a focus by developers on accruing maximum profit rather than building affordable housing. Asked what progress on housing would look like to them, participants mentioned indicators such as lower home prices, a stabilization in rental costs, a visible decrease in the rate of homelessness in their communities, and a lower cost of living in general.

Discussing which level of government they believed was most responsible for addressing issues related to housing, most felt that due to the perceived size and scope of the housing crisis that all levels of government had a role to play. Describing specific actions which could be taken by the federal government related to housing, participants suggested initiatives such as increasing financial supports to provinces/territories to help build more homes, establishing and overseeing the progress of national housing goals, permanently banning non-Canadians from purchasing residential housing, temporarily lowering immigration rates to reduce housing demand, and regulating the number of residential properties that can be owned by an individual or business. Asked if they would support increased densification in their own communities most indicated that they would. It was felt that building more homes closer together was a viable solution to increasing the housing supply and could have the additional impact of revitalizing the downtown cores in many major urban centres throughout Canada. While still supporting densification, a few believed that these efforts should largely be targeted towards

mid-size and major centres, feeling that those who preferred to live in less-populated rural areas should continue to have the ability to do so.

Housing Supply (Northeast GTA Middle Class)

Participants residing in the Northeast GTA were asked a series of questions related to the housing supply and the challenge of building more homes, both in their local area as well as across Canada more broadly. Asked if they were familiar with the Housing Accelerator Fund, none were. After being provided with information about this program, a large number were concerned that this initiative would primarily benefit housing developers and questioned whether steps would be taken by the federal government to ensure that the housing built would be affordable for lower- and middle-income Canadians.

Asked whether they would support an increase to the housing supply in their area, several indicated that they would. Among the smaller number who were opposed to an increase in housing, a few clarified that they would be open to more homes gradually being built, so long as the number of new developments in the GTA was proportionate to other parts of the country. Questioned whether there should be consequences for municipalities that do not prioritize building enough homes, participants were mixed in their views. While some believed that there needed to be accountability for municipalities that did not prioritize addressing the housing needs of their residents, a similar number felt differently. Among these participants, it was felt that each municipality was dealing with its own unique challenges related to housing and that an increase in the housing supply might be difficult for some communities to achieve due to issues such as a lack of available land or environmental concerns.

Few were familiar with the term 'municipal zoning'. Informed that municipal zoning bylaws determine where housing can be built and the types of projects that can be developed, several expected that these regulations likely had a significant impact on the ability of municipalities to build more homes. It was widely believed that municipal governments should be encouraged to change these bylaws to allow for more homes to be built. Asked what else they would like to see from the federal government related to building more homes, participants reiterated the need to ensure that any new homes being built would be affordable for most Canadians. Other potential actions suggested by participants included lowering interest rates, providing more supports for first-time home buyers, and addressing the overall cost of living to make it easier for Canadians to save towards the purchase of a home.

Jobs (Saskatchewan in the Labour Force, Major Centres Quebec Working in Trades/Construction)

Participants in two groups engaged in discussions related to the current employment market and the Canadian economy more generally. To begin, participants in Saskatchewan were asked to share their perspectives related to the Government of Canada's management of the economy as of late. All felt that its performance had been average or slightly above average in this area. Several spoke positively regarding recent efforts by the federal government to reduce the rate of inflation, which was widely thought to have been one of the top economic issues over the past few years. A number commented that while they were dissatisfied with the current state of the economy, they believed that many of the economic challenges facing Canadians had been caused by external factors beyond the control of the federal government, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

Asked to describe what they viewed as the most important economic issues at present, participants mentioned areas such as inflation, the cost of living, a lack of safe and affordable housing, and the difficulties encountered by many in finding employment which paid a living wage. Focusing on retirement, many in the group based in Saskatchewan expressed concerns that due to the high cost of

living and other financial challenges they would likely have to delay their retirement plans or may never be able to retire. A number commented that due to the rising costs of everyday expenses such as groceries, gasoline, and housing, it had become very difficult to plan and save for retirement. All felt that the current supports and benefits in place to assist retirees, such as the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) and Old Age Security (OAS), did not provide enough assistance to help Canadians maintain financial security in retirement. Informed that, as of 2019, the CPP was being gradually enhanced meaning that workers today would need to contribute a bit more annually but should end up with higher benefits when they retire, all expressed support for this change, with many feeling that this would help a greater number of Canadians achieve financial stability in their senior years.

Both groups were asked to share their perspectives regarding the current state of the employment market in Canada. Regionally, while those in Saskatchewan expressed mostly negative views, feeling that the rate of unemployment was increasing and that it was difficult to find a high-paying job, most residing in Quebec felt differently. Among this group, most held a positive view of the job market, with almost all being of the impression that many companies were hiring across a wide range of sectors at present, and that there were numerous opportunities for those currently looking for employment. Asked to identify which industries they felt would experience the most growth over the next five to ten years, participants in both groups identified information technology, artificial intelligence (AI), mining, agriculture, energy production, and service and hospitality. Almost no participants in either group could recall any recent actions or initiatives undertaken by the Government of Canada to help create jobs or provide skills training. Most believed that the federal government was on the wrong track on this front and that far more needed to be done to support the training and development of Canadian workers.

9-8-8 Branding (Northeast GTA Middle Class, Montreal Heavy Social Media Users, Edmonton, Rural Northeastern Ontario, Mid-Size Centres Quebec)

Content Advisory: Please note that the following section deals with the topic of suicide and emotional distress and may be upsetting for some readers.

Participants in five groups shared their perspectives regarding four potential creative concepts currently being developed by the federal government to inform Canadians about the introduction of the 9-8-8: Suicide Crisis Helpline. On balance, most favoured those concepts that featured a blend of bright and vivid colours (such as whites, blues, and yellows) with calming colours such as gray. Many also expressed a preference for concepts that prominently featured the 9-8-8 number and the text 'Suicide Crisis Helpline', believing that this was the most important information for these advertisements to convey. A number spoke positively of concepts that highlighted that those suffering from mental health emergencies could call or text this service, believing this was important information for those (younger people in particular) who preferred to communicate by texting.

News Media (Montreal Heavy Social Media Users)

Participants residing in the City of Montreal engaged in a conversation related to the news industry in Canada. Asked to describe the ways in which they felt that the news media industry had changed over the last decade, a number believed that there were now far more subjects covered by news outlets and that the news appeared to move at a much faster pace. A few were concerned that the news had become more sensationalized in recent years, with outlets seeking to attract attention via provocative and/or inflammatory headlines that may not be fully representative of the actual issues at hand. All felt that Canadians now had more ways to access the news relative to previous decades. Several felt that the

advent of the Internet and devices such as smartphones had made it far easier to access news at all times of the day and from a multitude of sources. Asked whether they felt that there was a wide variety of coverage about news and events in their local community, few believed this to be the case, with most reporting that the news they received was primarily focused on national and/or global events.

Most expected that there were far more news outlets at present relative to ten years ago, with several of the impression that this increase had been connected to the growing prominence of social media over the past decade. Almost all, however, thought that there were fewer jobs in journalism today compared to ten years ago. Informed that the number of news media outlets operating in Canada had declined over the past decade and that this had contributed to the disappearance of at least-one third of Canadian journalism jobs, participants were asked what they felt was behind this trend. A number thought that the decrease in news outlets and jobs in journalism had at least in part been caused by what they saw as an increased focus by outlets on writing eye-catching headlines rather than in-depth journalism. Some also speculated that with a larger number of Canadians now accessing news on social media or other digital platforms, there was not as much attention being paid to more traditional outlets and, as a result, less revenue being generated by these news organizations. Several expressed concern regarding this trend, believing that a decrease in high-quality, independent journalism could lead to a greater prevalence of misinformation or disinformation being spread amongst Canadians.

Many felt that supporting the news media industry was an important priority for the federal government to focus on. Among these participants, it was thought that a robust, independent news industry was crucial to the ability of Canadians to stay informed about the events taking place around them. Asked whether they had seen, read, or heard anything from the federal government on this front, almost all were aware of the enactment of Bill C-18 (the *Online News Act*) and the subsequent decision by Meta to block news content for Canadian users on Facebook and Instagram. A number believed that it was important that news organizations be fairly compensated for the content they produce and felt that this was the right course of action from the Government of Canada. While hopeful that this action from the federal government would help to strengthen the Canadian news industry in the long term, a number were concerned about whether this would limit the overall ability of Canadians (and especially those who primarily relied upon social media) to remain informed about the news and events of importance to them.

Social Media (Montreal Heavy Social Media Users)

Participants in the group comprised of heavy social media users residing in the city of Montreal briefly discussed their social media usage as well as the types of content that they typically engage with. Asked to identify the social media platforms they use most frequently, many mentioned Facebook and Instagram while a smaller number used platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) and TikTok. All participants viewed social media as an important source of information, with many believing that it was particularly useful for receiving updates related to their community and/or region. Discussing the types of content that they would typically follow and/or engage with, participants mentioned areas such as local news and events, national and global issues, as well as sports and entertainment.

Asked whether they followed any accounts or pages operated by the Government of Canada only a small number indicated that they did. Among these participants, platforms/accounts mentioned included the federal government's pages on LinkedIn as well as content from Health Canada. While not actively following the Government of Canada on social media, several also recalled having accessed content related to COVID-19 over the course of the pandemic. Questioned as to how the Government of Canada could communicate more effectively on social media, several believed that it was important for it to develop content specifically tailored to each platform rather than following a one-size-fits-all approach. A

number felt that the federal government should prioritize creating concise, easily understandable content for its social media channels, believing that this was what the majority of social media users preferred.

Carbon Pricing (Rural Northeastern Ontario)

Participants residing in rural communities in Northeastern Ontario took part in a conversation related to the Government of Canada's carbon pricing system. Asked whether they had heard about the implementation of a price on carbon by the federal government, most indicated that they had. Provided with information related to the this system, almost all reacted negatively, with many of the view that this program would have little to no impact on reducing carbon emissions and mitigating the impacts of climate change. A number questioned how the revenue collected by the federal government through this program would be utilized and whether it would be directed towards initiatives related to fighting climate change. The view was expressed by some that climate change was a global issue and that unless other jurisdictions were also taking steps to reduce their emissions, these actions by the Government of Canada would likely have little impact.

Informed that the majority of the revenue collected via the price on carbon would be returned to Canadians via Climate action incentive payments (CAIPs), it was widely thought that these funds would be better directed towards initiatives to help prevent, mitigate, and respond to the impacts of climate change. A number worried that carbon pricing would disproportionately impact those living in rural communities, believing that these individuals often had to drive greater distances and utilize more fuel during their daily activities than those residing in urban centres. The view was added that while many larger cities had comprehensive public transportation systems, these methods of transportation were far more limited in rural communities. Almost all expected that the implementation of a price on carbon would have no impact on reducing their personal level of emissions.

Climate Change Message Testing (Nova Scotia, Calgary, Major Centres Quebec Working in Trades/Construction)

Participants in three groups reviewed two potential scripts for advertisements currently being developed by the federal government. Both scripts focused on climate change and the actions that could be taken to mitigate its impacts. Participants were informed that these advertisements would be presented on various social media platforms, news websites, television, in cinemas, and on physical media such as bus benches and billboards.

Presented with the first script (focused on consumers), several spoke positively regarding what they viewed as the clarity of the message and the information. Asked to identify what they felt to be the main message of this advertisement, most believed that it focused on the actions that individuals can take in their daily lives to prepare for and mitigate climate change. A few also viewed this advertisement as being designed to inform Canadians about the supports available to them to engage in sustainable activities such as retrofitting their homes. It was suggested by some that this advertisement should also highlight the actions the Government of Canada was taking to mitigate climate change, believing that this would allow it to show the ways in which it was leading by example on this front.

Provided with the script for the second advertisement (focused on the federal government), most once again reacted positively. Several felt that it was encouraging to hear that the federal government would be taking steps on numerous fronts to combat climate change. A large number commented that the information provided through this advertisement would motivate them to visit the website to learn more.

Among those who felt somewhat differently, concerns were raised regarding the use of the term climate crisis (believing this to be hyperbolic) as well as whether these initiatives would increase the cost of living.

Informed that both advertisements would run at the same time and were designed to complement one another, almost all felt that this was the best way to present this information. A number felt that the ads should feature a similar visual design to highlight the connection between the two. A few believed that these advertisements should also provide a message of gratitude to Canadians for the actions they are already taking to reduce their carbon footprint and live more sustainable lifestyles.

Disability Benefits (Ontario Persons Living with Disabilities)

Participants in one group engaged in a conversation regarding the benefits and supports available to those with disabilities. All reported that they were currently living with a disability. Asked to share their perspectives regarding what it meant to be a person living with a disability, almost all highlighted challenges related to transportation and travelling outside of their homes, a lack of accessibility to local businesses and services, and the high cost of equipment and care for people with disabilities.

Most were unaware of any recent initiatives from the Government of Canada aimed at supporting those with disabilities, believing that the majority of the programs and benefits they had access to were primarily provided by the provincial government. Discussing the biggest challenges faced by Canadians living with disabilities, many identified issues related to personal finances, transportation and mobility, the high costs of specialized equipment and services, and a limited understanding among the general public regarding the challenges that they face. All felt that the federal government had an important role to play in ensuring that Canadians with disabilities were able to access a basic income that enables them to meet their essential needs. It was believed that this was critical towards ensuring the ability of people with disabilities to live with dignity and on an equal level as non-disabled Canadians. Many also felt that the Government of Canada had a responsibility to ensure that those with disabilities were able to find and maintain well-paying employment and had access to the same level of social and economic inclusion as other Canadians.

Informed that the Government of Canada had recently passed legislation to create a new Canada Disability Benefit that would create a direct monthly payment to low-income Canadians of working age who were living with disabilities, several expressed that this was the first time they had heard about this initiative. Asked whether they supported this action by the federal government, many were uncertain, and felt that they required further information before they could provide a proper evaluation. All, however, indicated that they were generally supportive of any initiative aimed at reducing poverty among those with disabilities and believed that this was important action for the Government of Canada to be taking. Discussing the potential impacts of the new Canada Disability Benefit, many focused on the positive aspects of this program, including what they viewed as its potential to lift many of those living with disabilities out of poverty. It was felt that this program would go a long way towards assisting those with disabilities in accessing safe and affordable housing, purchasing more and/or healthier groceries, and making it easier for them to afford the equipment, medications, and services they require as a part of their daily lives. Several commented that receiving a livable income each month would provide them with increased confidence, stronger mental health, and a higher overall quality of life. Asked who in the disabled community they felt this benefit should be targeted towards, all believed that this program should be made as broadly accessible as possible.

PacifiCan Branding (Metro Vancouver South Asian Diaspora, Interior British Columbia)

Two groups based in British Columbia (B.C.) took part in a brief discussion related to Pacific Economic Development Canada (PacifiCan). Asked whether they had seen, read, or heard anything from the Government of Canada related to supporting small businesses and communities in B.C., none had. No participants were aware of any economic development agencies focused on B.C. operated by the federal government. No participants were familiar with the PacifiCan logo, and none had previously heard of the agency. Asked what they felt this agency may be focused on, while a few assumed it had something to do with economic development in Canada's Pacific region, none could provide any specific details.

Community Challenges (Northeast GTA Middle Class, Rural Northeastern Ontario)

Participants residing in the northeast of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and those in rural communities in Northeastern Ontario engaged in discussions regarding the challenges facing their local areas at present. Participants in both groups identified issues such as homelessness, addiction, and challenges related to mental health as becoming increasingly prevalent in their respective communities. A number also described what they viewed as significant increases in the cost of living (and housing in particular) in recent years and believed that this was a challenge faced by many of those living in their area.

Discussing the most important sectors and industries in their communities, those in the northeast GTA identified the automotive industry, agriculture, and food production. Among those in the group from rural northeastern Ontario, almost all believed that mining was the most important industry in their area, with many identifying gold mining in particular. Other important sectors and industries mentioned included forestry, land development, and homebuilding. Asked whether they were aware of any actions or initiatives undertaken by the Government of Canada to support these sectors, few could recall anything. While none of those residing in the GTA were aware of any efforts by the federal government to support important sectors in their community, several felt that action should be taken to increase investments into public transportation and expand service offerings to make it easier for those in the GTA to commute throughout the region. A number also felt that greater actions should be taken to address the cost of living in general, as well as provide further investments towards areas such as agriculture and food production.

MORE INFORMATION

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