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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 tenth cycle of the first year of this study included a total of eight focus groups with Canadian adults (18 years of age and older) conducted between February 7th, 2024, and February 28th, 2024.

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Privy Council Office
Blackburn Building
85 Sparks Street, Room 228
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A3

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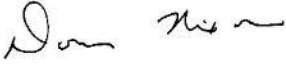
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Political Neutrality Certification

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: March 19, 2024

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 eight online focus groups which were conducted between February 7th, 2024, and February 28th, 2024, 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. All groups also engaged in discussions regarding what they had seen, read, or heard about the federal government as of late.

This research cycle also explored a range of issues related to climate change, Canada's energy outlook, electric vehicle (EV) manufacturing, and the production of hydrogen-based energy. Several groups engaged in discussions related to housing, with some participating in specific conversations related to housing affordability measures introduced by the federal government as well as actions that it had taken to increase the supply of available housing. Focusing on the economy, the group based in Southwestern Ontario shared their perspectives on the employment market, while others took part in discussions related to the cost of living. Ontario parents with children in child care or who were seeking child care shared their perspectives on the current state of child care, while Ontarians who identified healthcare as a top priority discussed the quality and accessibility of the health care system in their area. Additionally, members of the Ukrainian diaspora residing in mid-size and major centres in Saskatchewan took part in a detailed discussion related to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

Other topics explored in this cycle included immigration, post-secondary issues, auto theft, the upcoming 2024 federal Budget, and community challenges.

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 Albertans concerned about the energy grid, residents of Ontario who identified health care as a top priority, parents with children in child care or who were seeking child care, post-secondary students, and members of the Ukrainian diaspora.

Detailed Approach

- Eight groups across various regions in Canada.
- Three groups were conducted among the general population residing in Southwestern Ontario, Quebec City, and the Mauricie region of Quebec.
- The other five groups were conducted with key subgroups including:
 - Albertans concerned about the energy grid;
 - Ontarians who identified health care as a top priority;
 - Parents with children in child care or who were seeking child care;
 - Post-secondary students; and,
 - Members of the Ukrainian diaspora.
- The two 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, 59 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
Southwestern Ontario	1	EN	Wed, Feb 7 th	6:00-8:00 PM	General Population	8
Alberta	2	EN	Thurs, Feb 8 th	8:00-10:00 PM	Albertans Concerned About the Energy Grid	7
Mid-Size and Major Centres Ontario	3	EN	Tues, Feb 13 th	6:00-8:00 PM	Ontarians who say Healthcare is their top Priority	8
Ontario	4	EN	Tues, Feb 20 th	6:00-8:00 PM	Parents with Children in or Seeking Child Care	8
Quebec City	5	FR	Wed, Feb 21 st	6:00-8:00 PM	General Population	7
Vancouver Island	6	EN	Thurs, Feb 22 nd	9:00-11:00 PM	Post-Secondary Students	8
Mid-Size and Major Centres Saskatchewan	7	EN	Tues, Feb 27 th	7:00-9:00 PM	Ukrainian Diaspora	7
Mauricie Region	8	FR	Wed, Feb 28 th	6:00-8:00 PM	General Population	6
Total number of participants						59

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 announcement of details related to the roll-out of the Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDCP), the hosting by the Government of Canada of a National Summit on Combatting Auto Theft, ongoing discussions related to the costs incurred during the development and implementation of the ArriveCan app, and the announcement by Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) that it would be setting an intake cap on international student study permit applications for a period of two years.

Participants also recalled activities related to the Government of Canada on the international stage. These included the ongoing provision of humanitarian support to civilians in Israel, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank as well as the recent visit by the Prime Minister and other federal officials to Kyiv, Ukraine to announce a commitment of \$3 billion in financial and military assistance to Ukraine in 2024. Asked an additional question as to how they felt about this additional support for Ukraine, all in the



group comprised of members of the Ukrainian diaspora felt that this was an important action to take, while almost all in the Mauricie region of Quebec expressed concerns related to the potential negative financial impacts this action could have on Canadians and the cost of living.

Government of Canada Priorities and Performance (Southwestern Ontario, Alberta Concerned About the Energy Grid, Ontario Parents with Children in Child Care or Seeking Child Care, Quebec City, Vancouver Island Post-Secondary Students, Mid-Size and Major Centres Saskatchewan Ukrainian Diaspora, Mauricie Region Quebec)

Seven 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 immigration, reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, and the level of assistance provided to countries such as Ukraine as well as to humanitarian initiatives in other parts of the world.

Participants also mentioned a number of areas where they felt that the Government of Canada had performed well, including the provision of benefits and supports for Canadians, the protection and promotion of diversity and multiculturalism, and the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, participants identified a range of areas in which they believed the Government of Canada had room for improvement. These included the perceived high cost of living at present, a lack of affordable housing in many parts of the country, issues related to health care, combatting and mitigating the impacts of climate change, and support for the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF).

Prompted to identify what they viewed as the most important priority areas for the Government of Canada to be focusing on, many reiterated the need for a greater emphasis to be placed on addressing issues related to inflation and the cost of living, health care, housing affordability, and mitigating the impacts of climate change. Other important priority areas mentioned by participants included the need for further investments in education, stabilizing the rate of immigration, building new infrastructure (such as roadways and public transportation), and reducing federal spending.

Electric Vehicle Manufacturing (Mauricie Region Quebec)

Participants in the Mauricie region of Quebec engaged in an additional discussion related to the federal government's performance in supporting the electric vehicle (EV) manufacturing sector. Asked whether they felt the Government of Canada was headed in the right or wrong direction on this front, almost all felt that it was on the wrong track, while a smaller number were more undecided in their opinions. Several believed that while investments had been made by the federal government towards the building of more EVs in Canada, these vehicles had remained prohibitively expensive for a large portion of Canadians and that far more needed to be done to make EVs more affordable for lower- and middle-income households. A number also believed that increased investments needed to be

made towards the construction of EV infrastructure such as charging stations as well as to strengthen the electricity grid to prepare for the increased demand wider EV use would likely place on it.

Asked whether they felt the Government of Canada was on the right or wrong track when it came to supporting the clean energy sector, most were uncertain, with many feeling that they did not know enough about its activities on this front to provide a proper evaluation. Among the smaller number who said that the federal government was on the right track, it was felt that investments in clean energy, such as hydroelectricity, had been effective in their region, and had also been beneficial for the environment.

The Economy (Southwestern Ontario, Ontario Parents with Children in Child Care or Seeking Child Care, Mauricie Region Quebec)

Three groups engaged in discussions related to the Canadian economy, focusing on issues such as the employment market, the cost of living, and perspectives related to the Government of Canada's management of the economy.

At the beginning of their conversations, participants in Southwestern Ontario and the Mauricie region of Quebec were asked how they would describe the state of the economy at present and whether they felt the federal government was headed in the right or wrong direction in its handling of the economy in recent years. A roughly equal number felt that the Government of Canada was on the wrong track on this front as those who were more uncertain in their opinions. No participants felt that it was on the right track.

Discussing additional measures that they believed the Government of Canada should take related to the economy, participants suggested actions such as providing increased financial supports to lower-income households, taking further action to expedite the construction of new housing (including for vulnerable groups such as seniors), and placing an increased focus on modernizing the technology used in Canadian factories.

Jobs (Southwestern Ontario)

Participants in Southwestern Ontario were asked a series of questions related to the employment market in their respective communities and their expectations regarding how the job market in Canada would evolve in the next five to ten years. Asked to identify the most important industries in their local areas, participants mentioned sectors such as automotive manufacturing, agriculture, and transportation. Discussing potential economic challenges in their area, some expressed concerns related to the continued viability of locally produced agriculture. It was believed that many small farms were currently struggling financially, as well as facing challenges related to the impacts of climate change and the negative effect that this was believed to be having on crop yields.

Asked what industries they expected would be prioritized in the Canadian economy in the future, most believed that there would be a continued focus on agriculture and automotive manufacturing. It was also thought that there would likely be significant growth in the construction sector, with some of the

impression that the building of more residential housing was an urgent priority for municipalities such as London.

Focusing specifically on jobs, an equal number thought that the employment market was currently headed in the right direction as those who held a more mixed opinion. Several expressed the view that while there were currently a large number of job opportunities available in their area, most of the applicants lacked the skills or experience required for these positions. Discussing the types of skills that they expected would be in demand over the next decade, participants identified areas such as health care, information technology, software development, and artificial intelligence (AI).

Cost of Living for Parents (Ontario Parents with Children in Child Care or Seeking Child Care)

Participants in the group comprised of parents in Ontario who either had children in child care or were in the process of finding child care took part in a conversation related to the cost of living and how it is currently impacting families with young children. Asked how they would describe the Government of Canada's management of the economy, almost all believed that it was currently headed in the wrong direction. Several were of the impression that many households were currently struggling with challenges related to the high cost of living, a lack of affordable housing, and increasing debt loads, and a number believed that perceived high levels of federal spending had served to further exacerbate these challenges.

Asked which economic issues concerned them the most as parents, many identified challenges related to inflation and the high cost of essentials such as groceries, clothing, and gasoline, and the increasing costs of education (including the cost of educational supports such as tutors as well as saving up for their children's post-secondary studies).

Providing examples of areas of their lives that had become less affordable in recent years, many reiterated the high cost of groceries and the increasing challenges they faced in providing nutritional food for their families. Other areas mentioned included the cost of vision care and eyeglasses for their children, the perceived high cost of formula for infants, and challenges related to affording recreational and extracurricular activities for their families. Several indicated having taken actions such as actively seeking out sales, purchasing off-brand groceries and clothing, and cutting down on dining at restaurants and travelling as ways of responding to the high cost of living at present.

All were aware of the Canada Child Benefit (CCB), and most had heard about the creation of the Canada Dental Benefit (CDB). Many expressed the view that these benefits were very helpful to Canadian families, including their own. Most, however, did not feel that these initiatives on their own would be sufficient to address the challenges related to affordability and the high cost of living, feeling that more urgent action would need to be taken by the Government of Canada to assist families going forward.



Housing (Southwestern Ontario, Mid-Size and Major Centres Ontario Identified Health Care as a Major Priority, Vancouver Island Post-Secondary Students)

Participants in three groups took part in discussions related to housing. Conversations in the two groups based in Ontario focused on measures the Government of Canada was taking to make housing more affordable, while those residing on Vancouver Island discussed the housing situation in their own communities as well as a recent joint federal/provincial initiative to build more homes across British Columbia (B.C.).

Housing Affordability Measures (Southwestern Ontario, Mid-Size and Major Centres Ontario Identified Health Care as a Top Priority)

Two groups engaged in conversations related to actions that the federal government was taking to make housing more affordable for Canadians. Asked if they had recently seen, read, or heard, anything from the Government of Canada related to housing, participants recalled a number of initiatives. These included the removal of the goods and services tax (GST) from the construction of new rental housing developments, the provision of increased funding through the Housing Accelerator Fund to assist municipalities in the building of new housing, the introduction of programs such as the First Home Savings Account (FHSA), and measures such as temporarily banning non-Canadians from purchasing residential property.

Asked what came to mind when they heard the phrase 'unlocking housing', most believed that this referred to the building of a greater number of affordable homes in Canadian communities. Several associated this phrase with actions to reduce or remove municipal zoning regulations that determine where and what types of housing communities can build. Discussing specific actions that could be taken on this front, participants believed that municipalities should consider adjusting zoning requirements to allow for increased densification, streamlining the building permitting process, and working to convert unused office and retail space into residential housing.

Discussing the effectiveness of the actions that the Government of Canada had taken thus far to unlock housing, several were of the impression that little progress had been made on this front and that the housing supply in their community had remained mostly unchanged. A number expressed the view that the effectiveness of these actions would be dependent on the cooperation of provincial and municipal governments and that it would take a concerted effort from all levels of government to make housing more affordable for Canadians going forward.

Housing Supply (Vancouver Island Post-Secondary Students)

Participants in the group comprised of post-secondary students living on Vancouver Island engaged in a brief conversation related to the housing situation in their communities and actions that could be taken to increase the supply of housing. All described the housing situation in their communities as very challenging at present, with a number viewing housing as having become prohibitively expensive in recent years, with few safe and affordable options available. Securing housing was believed to be especially difficult for students, who were perceived as typically having less available income to spend on housing compared to other cohorts of society.

Asked whether they had heard anything about the Government of Canada and the Government of B.C. working together to build more housing, none indicated that they had. Informed that the federal government had committed to working with the Government of B.C. by providing financial support towards the construction of thousands of new affordable rental homes, while a few felt that this represented a step in the right direction, most did not believe that this action would have a significant impact on the housing situation. Among participants, it was generally felt that until issues related to the unaffordability of housing were resolved, housing would remain out of reach for many lower- and middle-income Canadians.

Discussing additional actions that they would like to see from the federal government related to housing, participants suggested measures such as introducing stricter regulations on how much landlords can charge for and/or raise rent, implementing increased financial penalties for homeowners who leave their homes vacant, and providing greater financial supports to Canadians struggling with the cost of housing in their communities.

Budget 2024 (Vancouver Island Post-Secondary Students)

One group, comprised of post-secondary students residing on Vancouver Island, engaged in a conversation related to the federal government's annual Budget, which was scheduled to be tabled on April 16th, 2024. Asked how they felt the Canadian economy was currently performing overall, all were of the impression that it was facing considerable challenges, with a large number expressing concerns related to areas such as inflation, the perceived high cost of living, and what they viewed as a lack of well-paying jobs available to Canadians. Many thought that a greater emphasis needed to be placed by the Government of Canada on reducing the cost of living, increasing wages, and creating more full-time jobs in emerging sectors such as renewable energy production.

Participants engaged in an exercise where they were presented with a list of potential priority areas for the federal government to focus on in its upcoming Budget and asked to select which they felt would be most impactful towards improving the lives of Canadians. The priority of addressing affordability and the cost of living received the highest level of support among participants. It was felt that this was one of the most fundamental challenges facing Canadians at present and that addressing this area would likely help the largest number of people. Many also selected the goal of achieving long-term economic growth through investments in clean technology and energy and the initiative to make improvements to the health care system. A smaller number selected the initiatives to provide more opportunities for good careers, support the middle class, unlock pathways to the middle class, maintain a responsible plan for public spending, and raise taxes on the wealthiest Canadians.

Health Care (Mid-Size and Major Centres Ontario Identified Health Care as a Top Priority)

Participants in the group comprised of individuals residing in mid-size and major centres in Ontario engaged in a discussion related to the health care system as well as a recently announced plan by the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario aimed at improving health care provision in the province. Asked to describe the current state of the health care system in Canada, while many were of the impression that health care had remained relatively affordable and accessible for most Canadians, a number expressed concerns related to issues currently impacting the health care system in their area. These included the closures of emergency rooms in some communities, long wait times to receive emergency and primary care, a lack of available beds in hospitals, perceived widespread shortages of doctors and nurses, and difficulties in accessing appointments and/or procedures with specialists.

Describing their own experiences in accessing health care services, many reported having personally encountered long wait times and overcrowding at emergency rooms and walk-in clinics. Asked how they believed the quality of health care in their local area compared to other regions and provinces, most felt that it was significantly higher relative to many parts of the country. All, however, felt that major changes would be required to sustain the current level of care and to address the issues that they had identified earlier.

Asked what they felt was the role of the Government of Canada when it came to health care, all were of the impression that it was primarily to provide funding to the provinces and territories to assist them in delivering health care within their jurisdictions. A few believed that the federal government also worked to set national standards for the provinces and territories to follow to ensure that all Canadians were provided with a sufficient level of care. Discussing whether they had recently seen, read, or heard anything about actions that the federal government had taken related to health care, only a small number indicated that they had. Among these participants it was believed that agreements had been reached between the Government of Canada and the individual provinces and territories to increase the health care funding it provided so long as these additional funds were allocated towards certain priority areas.

Provided with information related to a recent agreement between the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario to improve health care in Ontario by allocating federal health care funding towards increasing access to family doctors, reducing wait times, and hiring more healthcare workers, most reacted positively. Engaging in an exercise where they were shown a number of health care priority areas and asked which they felt would be most impactful towards improving health care in their region, the initiative to enhance access to primary care received the highest level of support among participants. Many also selected expanding the health care work force and reducing wait times and backlogs as important priorities, while only a small number selected the initiatives related to boosting mental health supports, making it easier for health care professionals to practice in Ontario, and improving health information management.

Asked whether they expected this plan would have a major, minor, or no impact on improving the quality of health care in Ontario, almost all felt that it would have a minor impact. While all supported this plan from the Government of Canada, most believed that its success would primarily be

determined by its implementation and how effectively these additional resources were allocated by provincial and territorial governments going forward.

Child Care (Ontario Parents with Children in Child Care or Seeking Child Care)

One group, comprised of participants residing in Ontario who either had children in child care or who were currently seeking child care, engaged in a conversation related to the Government of Canada's recent work to lower the cost of child care. Asked how much they currently paid for child care (or how much they anticipated it would cost) participant responses ranged from \$350 to over \$1100 per month. All who had children enrolled in child care described it as representing a significant portion of their monthly household budget, with a number believing that they paid more for these services each month than they did towards other important areas such as groceries or their monthly car payments.

All felt that affordability and availability represented the most significant challenges related to child care at present. A large number of those who had secured child care spots (as well as those who were still searching) described the process as being very challenging, with a number reporting having been on waiting lists for over a year at some facilities.

Many felt that the quality of child care in their area had been below their expectations. It was felt by several that the quality and safety standards of many child care facilities had deteriorated in recent years, and that the provincial government had not been providing adequate oversight in this regard. Others expressed concerns related to the operating hours of local child care programs, believing that many facilities that had initially shortened their hours during the COVID-19 pandemic had since made these changes permanent, making it increasingly difficult for parents to balance their work commitments with caring for their children.

Informed that the Government of Canada had agreements in place with all provinces and territories to lower the cost of child care to an average of \$10/day and create 250,000 child care spaces across Canada by 2025-2026, all reacted positively to this information. Many, however, expressed uncertainty as to whether the Government of Canada would be able to fully implement this initiative by 2026, believing that this was too short a time frame for what they viewed as a complicated, and large-scale program. Focusing on the positive aspects of this program, some believed that these actions would help enable parents (and mothers especially) to return to the workforce and earn additional income for their families.

All felt that making investments towards lowering the cost of child care was an important action for the Government of Canada to take in its efforts to make the cost of living more affordable. Several reported that due to the high cost of child care it had become difficult to save money and/or devote additional funds towards other aspects of their lives. It was widely thought that taking this approach would have a positive impact on the economy as well as lead to job creation in the early childhood education (ECE) sector.

Energy Outlook (Alberta Concerned About the Energy Grid)

Participants residing in Alberta engaged in a discussion related to energy generation, the oil and gas sector, and concerns regarding the electricity grid in their province. To begin, participants were asked how important they believed the oil and gas sector was to the Albertan economy. All felt that oil and gas played an important role in their province's economy, with many describing it as having been the primary economic driver in Alberta for many decades. While most felt that there would be a continued economic role for oil and gas in the years to come, several thought that more needed to be done to transition the Albertan economy and energy grid to incorporate more renewable energy sources going forward.

Describing what came to mind when they heard the phrase 'sustainable jobs', a number believed that this referred to jobs that did not rely on the consumption of non-renewable resources. Related to the clean energy sector, most believed that sustainable jobs would likely be those involved in the building, maintenance, and operation of clean energy infrastructure. Questioned whether they felt the creation of sustainable jobs in the clean energy sector would benefit the Albertan economy, participants expressed a range of opinions. While some believed that this would have a positive impact on the provincial economy and would help increase the resilience of the electricity grid, a roughly equal number expressed uncertainty as to whether enough jobs would be created in the clean energy sector to accommodate the large number of Albertans currently working in the oil and gas sector.

Asked whether their communities had experienced extreme cold in recent months, all reported that they had. Discussing the potential impacts of this weather on their communities, all expressed concerns related to the provincial energy grid and whether it would be able to withstand extreme cold temperatures going forward. Many believed that significant efforts needed to be taken to expand the province's energy infrastructure to increase its capacity to meet the energy needs of its growing population. Several also reiterated that a focus should be placed on diversifying the sources utilized for electricity in Alberta by incorporating a strategy that uses both renewable and non-renewable resources.

While all thought that the federal government should be making investments towards clean energy and clean technology, several reiterated the view that support should be provided to the oil and gas sector and believed that non-renewable energy sources would continue to play a critical role in meeting the energy needs of Albertans. Discussing what they viewed as the potential benefits of the Government of Canada encouraging investments in clean electricity and clean technology, participants believed this approach would assist in diversifying the provincial economy, expanding the energy sources available to Albertans, and aligning the province with what they perceived to be a trend towards renewable energy and sustainability. Asked whether they felt that an increased focus on clean energy and clean technology would lead to more or fewer risks of power outages, most believed that investments into this area would bolster the capacity of the electricity grid and reduce the risks of large-scale outages.

Climate Change (Southwestern Ontario, Alberta Concerned About the Energy Grid, Quebec City, Vancouver Island Post-Secondary Students, Mauricie Region Quebec)

Participants in five groups engaged in conversations related to climate change and the actions that the Government of Canada was currently taking to mitigate its impacts. To begin, participants in the groups based in Alberta, Quebec City, and Vancouver Island were asked to what degree, if at all, they were concerned about climate change. Most reported that they were very concerned, believing that climate change represented a significant threat to current and future generations and that its impacts were being felt with increasing frequency with each passing year.

Discussing the potential impacts of climate change, many in these three groups expressed the view that changing weather patterns had been a contributing factor to what they perceived as an increase in the frequency of natural disasters such as wildfires, windstorms, and large-scale flooding. A number worried that more unpredictable weather patterns and extreme temperatures could ultimately result in the destabilization of food production in Canada, leading to food shortages in the decades to come.

Asked whether they were worried about the impacts of climate change on their own communities, a large number indicated that they were. Several described being especially concerned about warmer temperatures leading to an increase in wildfires, as well as potential water restrictions in their communities due to what they perceived as below average rainfall and snow in recent years. A number also worried about the potential of climate change to impact the cost of living, believing this could lead to higher food and energy costs, as well as require homeowners to spend more on retrofitting their homes to make them more sustainable and climate-resilient going forward.

Those in the groups based in Southwestern Ontario, Vancouver Island, and the Mauricie region of Quebec were asked whether they felt the Government of Canada was currently on the right or wrong track when it came to addressing climate change. A larger number felt that it was headed in the wrong direction compared to those who felt otherwise. Among the few who believed that the federal government was on the right track, it was felt that some actions had been taken to address and adapt to climate change, but noted this was a long-term process and one that would not be quickly accomplished. For those who felt it was on the wrong track, many believed that the actions being taken by the federal government did not reflect the urgency of this problem and that far more needed to be done to prepare for and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Discussing additional actions that they believed the Government of Canada should take to address climate change, participants suggested measures such as further investing in the protection of natural ecosystems and wildlife, increasing the affordability of EVs, and instituting more comprehensive, federally managed recycling initiatives.

Hydrogen-Based Energy (Mauricie Region Quebec)

Participants residing in the Mauricie region of Quebec engaged in a brief discussion related to hydrogen-based energy. Very few reported having previously heard about this type of energy. Provided with information related to the use of hydrogen as a potential energy source, most believed

that investments in this area could have a positive impact on reducing emissions. A number, however, expressed concerns regarding the potential consequences of taking this approach, with some especially concerned about the safety of working with hydrogen, given their impression that hydrogen was a highly combustible element.

Asked how many jobs, if any, they felt could be created in the clean hydrogen sector, participant estimates ranged from 5,000 to 100,000 new positions. Discussing the types of jobs that could be created, it was expected that these could include positions related to constructing and maintaining clean hydrogen infrastructure, managing and ensuring the safety of hydrogen energy production facilities, and the pursuit of further research related to this type of energy and its potential applications.

Discussing the extent to which they felt the Government of Canada should be prioritizing investments towards hydrogen-based energy compared to other renewable energy sources (such as solar, wind, and hydroelectricity), participants were mixed in their opinions. While some felt that this type of energy should receive the same prioritization as other renewable energy sources, others were worried about the potential expenses of taking this approach and questioned whether hydrogen-based energy could be produced in a cost-effective manner.

Immigration (Quebec City)

Participants residing in Quebec City took part in a conversation related to immigration. Asked whether they had recently seen, read, or heard about any actions or initiatives from the Government of Canada on this front, several recalled having heard that it had taken steps to place a temporary cap on the number of international student study permits it would be issuing in 2024. Asked whether they felt the Government of Canada was currently on the right or wrong track when it came to its management of the immigration system, participants expressed a range of opinions, with a roughly equal number believing it was headed in the right direction as those who felt otherwise.

Describing the potential benefits of immigration to Canada, several felt that the continued arrival of new immigrants would help to bolster the employment market and would lead to increased economic productivity across the country. A small number expressed the opinion that a continued high rate of immigration would be critical in ensuring that there would be enough workers to support an aging population in the years to come.

Discussing potential challenges related to welcoming new immigrants, a large number expressed concerns regarding the ability of new immigrants to integrate into Canada's Francophone culture. Related to this, a number expressed concerns about the potential impact that high immigration to their province might have on Quebecois culture and identity. Describing potential actions that the federal government could take to address these concerns, several suggested that it should allocate increased funding towards integrating new immigrants into Canada, including providing them with access to employment opportunities and language training resources.

Asked if the Government of Canada should seek to increase, decrease, or maintain the current rate of immigration, all felt that the current level should be maintained. Maintaining the current level of

immigration was widely viewed as the best way to address issues such as labour shortages and an aging population, without exacerbating concerns related to increasing demand on areas such as housing, health care, and other important infrastructure and services.

Ukraine (Mid-Size and Major Centres Saskatchewan Ukrainian Diaspora)

Participants in the group comprised of members of the Ukrainian diaspora residing in Saskatchewan engaged in a conversation related to Ukraine's ongoing conflict with Russia following the Russian invasion of its territory in February 2022. All indicated having followed this conflict closely since it began two years ago, with many reporting that they would seek out news related to the war on a daily basis.

Asked what aspects of the war concerned them the most, many described the human cost of this conflict, including the large number of Ukrainian military personnel and civilians that had been injured or killed over the past two years. Several worried about the potential permanent loss of Ukrainian territory that had been invaded by Russian forces and expressed concerns regarding whether it would be feasible or possible for Ukraine to regain control of this territory. Some also shared concerns regarding the condition of the Ukrainian military, with a number of the impression that it was currently facing shortages related to personnel, equipment, and weapons and ammunition.

Discussing how, if at all, the conflict had influenced their view of the world and Canada's place in it, several reported feeling that the world was now a much less safe place than they had believed it to be prior to the Russian invasion. Asked how they felt that Russia's war with Ukraine had impacted the world, a number believed that this conflict had prompted many countries around the world to invest more heavily in their militaries and defence budgets. The view was expressed that this conflict had served to erode the peaceful international order that they believed had existed prior to the conflict, and some worried that this might lead to other countries pursuing similar militaristic objectives in the future.

All felt that it was important for the Government of Canada to continue to support Ukraine. It was widely thought that this assistance was critical, not just in terms of protecting Ukraine, but for preserving the sovereignty of other nations and preventing Russia from engaging in similar incursions in the future. Questioned whether they thought the federal government was on the right track when it came to assisting Ukraine, almost all felt that it was. Several were of the view that Canada had been a strong supporter of Ukraine from the outset of this conflict and had been among the most vocal countries in its opposition to the Russian invasion. Discussing the types of support that were most important towards assisting Ukraine, many reiterated the need for continued financial and military support to ensure that Ukraine had the resources it required to repel the Russian invasion.

Questioned whether they were aware of any humanitarian aid that the Government of Canada had provided to Ukraine, participants recalled hearing about actions such as the provision of food, medical supplies, clothing, and other essentials. A number were also of the impression that some Canadians had travelled to Ukraine and/or the surrounding region to assist those who had been displaced by the conflict. All were aware of the Government of Canada's commitment to bringing in and

accommodating Ukrainians who had been displaced by the conflict. Several reported having personally worked with organizations that assisted these individuals with acclimatizing to life in Canada.

All knew people who had arrived in their communities through the Canada-Ukraine authorization for emergency travel (CUAET) program. Most expressed support for this initiative, believing that it was an important way of assisting those whose homes had been destroyed and/or who may encounter difficulties in returning to Ukraine in the future. Discussing additional supports that they felt were important in assisting the Ukrainians who had arrived in Canada, participants mentioned areas such as language training in English or French, the provision of safe and affordable housing, opportunities for employment, and child care spaces for those with young children.

All reacted positively to the announcement of the Canada-Ukraine Free Trade Agreement (CUFTA) with several of the opinion that this agreement would be instrumental in assisting Ukraine with its economic recovery following the war. It was felt that this action would also benefit the Ukrainian diaspora living in Canada, making it easier and more affordable for them to import Ukrainian goods and cultural items. Discussing the types of supports they expected Ukraine would require after the conflict is resolved, participants mentioned initiatives such as rebuilding damaged or destroyed infrastructure, assisting Ukrainian businesses, and providing mental and physical health care supports to Ukrainian soldiers.

Asked whether they had ever encountered any information related to Russia's invasion of Ukraine that they believed to be false or misleading, all indicated that they had. It was felt that, especially in the initial months of the conflict, this misinformation had portrayed the Russian military as liberators, and conveyed the false narrative that this invasion had been largely welcomed by the Ukrainian people. While none, given their close connection to Ukraine, expected that this type of false information would impact their own perspectives regarding the war, several were concerned that the dissemination of misinformation and disinformation by Russia had been negatively shaping the attitudes of some Canadians against providing additional support for Ukraine.

Post-Secondary Issues (Vancouver Island Post-Secondary Students)

Participants in one group, comprised of post-secondary students residing on Vancouver Island, engaged in a discussion related to the challenges currently being faced by students in Canada. Asked whether they felt the federal government had been making an effort to reach out to students, all felt that it had been mostly ineffective in this area. Asked if they were aware of any work that the Government of Canada had done to make post-secondary education more affordable, while a few were of the impression that it had removed interest on federal student loans and had provided financial supports to students during the COVID-19 pandemic, no additional actions could be recalled.

Informed that the federal government had permanently eliminated federal interest on Canada Student Loans and Canada Apprentice Loans, increased Canada Student Grants by 40 per cent, and made improvements to the student loan repayment assistance plan, participants were mixed in their responses. While most felt that these measures represented a step in the right direction, few expected that they would be enough to have a tangible impact on making post-secondary education more affordable.

Asked if there was anything else that the federal government could do to support students, some suggested that greater investments be made towards expanding public transportation services in communities with large student populations as well as providing subsidized fares to those currently enrolled in a post-secondary program. A few suggested that the federal government should consider taking action to cancel existing federal student loan debt as well as work to reduce post-secondary tuition throughout Canada.

Auto Theft (Mid-Size and Major Centres Ontario Identified Health Care as a Top Priority)

Participants in one group briefly discussed auto theft and the actions that the Government of Canada was taking to address this issue. Asked whether they were aware of any recent actions that the federal government had taken to combat auto theft, few indicated that they were. Among those who had heard something, participants were of the impression that the federal government had recently held a summit to discuss how best to respond to this issue.

Provided with information related to a range of actions and initiatives the Government of Canada was taking to combat auto theft, all reacted positively, with many believing that this type of multifaceted approach would be critical towards addressing this issue and reducing instances of auto theft in Canadian communities. A large number expressed support for the measure to improve information sharing between local police and railway police. It was felt that ineffective communications between different law enforcement bodies had been a major contributing factor to perceived increases in auto theft across the country. Several also felt it was very important for the federal government to increase the capacity of the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) to conduct more investigations and examinations of stolen vehicles, particularly at Canadian ports where it was believed that many stolen vehicles were being illegally exported. A number believed that the imposition of greater legal penalties for this type of illegal activity would also serve as an effective deterrent for those individuals who may consider engaging in auto theft.

Discussing the potential impact of these measures on combatting auto theft, a slightly larger number believed that these actions would have a minor impact as those who thought it would have a major impact. Asked whether, having now seen this information, they supported the Government of Canada's plan to combat auto theft, all indicated that they did.

Community Challenges (Quebec City, Mauricie Region Quebec)

Two groups, comprised of participants residing in Quebec City and the Mauricie region of Quebec respectively, took part in conversations related to their local communities. Asked to identify the top issues facing their communities that required greater prioritization from the federal government, participants in Quebec City mentioned challenges related to a perceived lack of affordable housing, the need to build more infrastructure (such as schools, hospitals, and public transportation), and the need for stronger protection and promotion of diversity and multiculturalism within the province. A few in this group also believed that there needed to be a focus on providing funding towards specific projects in their area such as the Third Link highway project. Those in the Mauricie region identified issues

related to the high cost of living as well as a perceived shortage of health workers such as doctors and nurses as pressing issues facing their communities.

Asked to describe what they viewed as the most important industries in their communities, participants in both groups mentioned agriculture, technology, and tourism as being among the most important . A number from Quebec City also identified the cultural sector as playing a major economic role in their community, while those from the Mauricie region described manufacturing, forestry, health care, and education as key industries.

Questioned whether there were currently labour shortages in their area, almost all in both groups believed that there were. Several were of the impression that this was a particular issue in key sectors such as health care and education and believed that this was having a negative impact on the availability of services in these areas. Discussing what they viewed as being potential causes behind these perceived shortages, participants mentioned a range of factors including the COVID-19 pandemic, a greater number of individuals entering retirement, and a lack of well-paying jobs being offered by employers. Describing potential solutions that the federal government could take to address this issue, participants suggested measures such as working to increase wages for Canadians, offering incentives for individuals to work in sectors facing labour shortages, and streamlining the foreign credential recognition process to make it easier for new immigrants to work in their fields of expertise.

MORE INFORMATION

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