

**No Winners from Census, Long Form Controversy**  
**Statistics Canada, Its Supporters, and Minister Clement**  
**Do Not Earn Goodwill from Business Panel**



**COMPAS Inc.**  
**Public Opinion and Customer Research**  
**July 26, 2010**

## 1.0 Overview

CEOs and business leaders were asked for their opinions about the Census Long Form controversy. The online questionnaire was constructed before media revealed that almost 200,000 Canadians had broken the law by not completing the survey during its last round. Hence, in this unfolding controversy, we can only report the initial thoughts and opinions of the COMPAS business panel. We do not know if knowledge of the number of census law-breakers would have affected panel opinion.

CEOs and business leaders on the panel are not impressed with any of the three primary protagonists—Statistics Canada itself, its media and other allies protesting the government’s decision to end the Long Form’s mandatory requirement, or the Minister himself.

For almost a decade, COMPAS has been measuring the perceived performance of government departments, politicians, journalists, and various professions on a 100 point, school report card-type scale. With a 57% grade from the business panel, Statistics Canada receives a modest score in the controversy, which cannot be reassuring to a Department with a relatively uncontroversial record of performance by world standards. Panelists say that they are not impressed with Statistics Canada’s history of explaining and justifying the studies it does. In keeping with their lukewarm enthusiasm for the Department, only a bare majority of panel advocates keeping the mandatory character of the Long Form.

Advocates in the controversy fare less well than the Department itself. In part because they are sometimes seen as overstating their case, the opponents of the decision to cancel the mandatory feature of the Long Form census earn a barely passing grade, 52%.

Minister Tony Clement earns the lowest grade, 39%. The good news for the Minister is that a very high share of politicians have earned failing grades in the almost decade that COMPAS has been measuring performance scores. The Minister’s score is not untypical of the performance scores earned during the Jean Chretien period. The bad news is that Clement’s score is appreciably



lower than scores earned to this point by the Harper government, the Prime Minister, or individual Harper ministers.

These are the key findings from this past week's Internet survey of CEOs and business leaders on the COMPAS panel. The weekly business survey is undertaken for *Canadian Business* magazine under sponsorship of BDO Dunwoody LLP.

## 2.0 Details

Panelists are somewhat divided about what should be done. A small majority favours compelling respondents to participate in the Long Form Census, as shown in tables 2a and b, while others are divided about the best alternative solutions. Table 2c shows that the imbroglio over the Long Form has not benefitted Statistics Canada, critics of the decision to cancel the mandatory requirement, or the Minister.

*Table 2a: The Conservative government has faced some criticism for removing the legal requirement for 1 in 6 Canadians to fill out the Long Form Census. The Census Long Form asks potentially sensitive questions about mental or physical health. Which of the following opinions is closest to your own?*

	%
<u>Not Privacy Concern.</u> The Census should continue to compel people to answer these questions because the data are important for health service planning.	55
<u>Not Privacy Concern.</u> Statistics Canada has other research that explores these issues in more depth and should leave them out of the Census.	19
<u>Privacy Concern.</u> These are too invasive for the Census to <u>compel</u> people to answer them.	17



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	%
<u>Privacy Concern</u> Given the importance and yet sensitivity of these questions, the government should delegate such research to the universities or private sector.	4
Don't Know	4

*Table 2b: The Census compels people to answer a potentially sensitive question that combines skin colour (e.g. white, black) with country of origin (e.g. Korea, Japan) with background (e.g. Arab, South-East Asia). Which of the following opinions is closest to your own?*

	%
<u>Not Privacy Concern.</u> The Census should continue to compel people to answer these questions because the data are important for social and economic planning.	57
<u>Not Privacy Concern.</u> The Census should be allowed to ask such a question but the quality needs to be improved.	24
<u>Privacy Concern.</u> These are too invasive for the Census to <u>compel</u> people to answer them.	11
<u>Privacy Concern</u> Given the importance and yet sensitivity of these questions, the government should delegate such research to the universities or private sector.	7
Don't Know	1

*Table 2c: On a 100 point performance scale, what score would you give to...?*

	Mean
Statistics Canada over the years for explaining and justify the Long Form census, its questions, and the size of the sample (one of six Canadians)	57
Critics of the federal government decision to end the compulsory legal requirement to answer the Long Form census.	52



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	Mean
Minister Tony Clement for explaining the merits of ending the legal requirement to answer the Long Form census.	39

The following verbatim comments provide a nuanced sense of respondent opinion:

"The government has no place in the bedrooms of the nation." - Pierre Trudeau

Let's not get so politically [sensitive] that we can't keep track and understand who we are and where we came from.

Our companies provide sensitive business information to [Statistics Canada] all the time and they have incredibly strong standards...While I like this government's economic & broad approach generally, I keep running into knuckle dragging attitudes like this that prove Reform is too alive and well for my tastes. Lesson in how to kill a majority!

Contract the census out to a 3rd party and have anyone requesting information pay for the reports.

I believe that compiling statistics about racial and ethnic background is divisive. Once we are Canadian we should stop tracking where we come from to encourage people to think of themselves as Canadians rather than identify with racial or ethnic groups.

Are all the questions [of this very long Long Form] really relevant and required? Perhaps it should be shortened. As well, instead of penalties for not filling it out perhaps incentives for doing so would be more appropriate; such as a tax credit or a small payment in cash.

In a free country there is no justification for forcing citizens to provide personal information to the government. No exceptions.

Obviously any information is very useful for planning. Much could be achieved by the government collecting information on a volunteer basis and make it available.



Presumably citizens are free not to answer questions which they deem sensitive. The balance of the information may well be useful. Use the long form.

Privacy should not supersede security and social planning.

The compulsory requirement for completing the survey, even though the severest penalty for failure to complete have never been exacted, ensures a high participation to collect valuable planning information.

There is no real rationale for changing something that has fundamentally worked for decades.

Too much political correctness.

Unless it is compulsory the results of the census are suspect and unreliable.

Every once and a while [the Conservatives] shoot themselves in the foot.

With data security questionable at best, sensitive health data and the like is something that should be kept as private as possible; other data is necessary and should be provided by all Canadians.

### **3.0 Methodology**

The COMPAS web-survey of CEOs and leaders of small, medium, and large corporations was conducted July 21-23, 2010. Respondents constitute an essentially hand-picked panel with a higher numerical representation of small and medium-sized firms.

Because of the small population of CEOs and business leaders from which the sample was drawn, the study can be considered more accurate than comparably sized general public studies. In studies of the general public, surveys of n=98 are deemed accurate to within approximately 9.9 percentage points 19 times out of 20. The principal and investigator on this study is Conrad Winn, Ph.D.

