

**Business Panel on Census Long Form Controversy:
Apparent Reversal of Opinion,
Almost No Support for the Status Quo**



**COMPAS Inc.
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1.0 Overview

Two weeks ago, a clear majority of the CEOs and business leaders on the COMPAS business panel favoured no change in the Census Canada Long Form. Two weeks of debate ensued. It emerged that almost 200,000 Canadians do not actually complete the Long Form despite the legal obligation to do so.

In answering slightly different questions two weeks later, after being exposed to different news on the issue, the members of the business panel appear to have done an about turn. Almost none (15%) now favour the status quo.

While there is now a near consensus against the status quo, there is no consensus about what to do. Thus, 30% favour a voluntary survey (no legal right to punish for non-compliance), 20% incentives to participate, 19% both incentives and the threat of punishment for non-compliance, and 12% enforcing the current law so that non-participants are actually punished by the courts. Only 15% favour the present situation where non-participation is a crime that is not enforced.

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

Table 2a displays current business panel opinion about what should be done. Tables 2b and c provide some indication of the degree to which panelists and the organizations with which they are familiar use census data in their activities.



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Table 2a: (Q3) Statistics Canada finds that almost 200,000 Canadians do not complete the Long Form even though it is a crime not to fill it out. In practice, no non-participant has been punished. Which of the following situations would you prefer?

	%
Make the law consistent with what the government actually does and remove any threat of punishment.	30
Give all respondents a financial incentive to participate, and end using the threat of punishment.	20
Use both the threat of punishment and the carrot of a financial incentive to induce participation.	19
The present situation where non-participation is a crime that is not enforced.	15
Enforce the law so that non-participants are punished by the courts.	12
Don't Know	5

Table 2b: (Q1) The controversy over the Census Long Form continues. Thinking of your own organization, does it use...

	%
Census Short Form data—population numbers, age, gender, and marital status.	12
Census Long Form data—health, language, immigration status, race & ethnicity, birth place, address history, education, housework, hours worked, employment, commuting, income.	4
Both	17
Neither	62
Don't Know	5



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Table 2c: (Q2) Thinking of the other organizations with which you are especially familiar, do any of them use Long Form data?

	%
Definitely Not	10
Probably Not	36
Probably Yes	22
Definitely Yes	17
Don't Know	16

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

What is the point of having a law, if it is not enforced? The government should do a better job of informing Canadians about the importance of the data collected and how it is used.

We receive 3-4 questionnaires/yr. and ignore them. The data they request is of use only to academics.

We do need the long form census filled out and not have it be an opt in - opt out choice.

We didn't even know that that information was available to us, we don't sell on that information so we never [look] for it.

This issue is a tempest in a teapot that for reasons unknown to me refuses to go away!

There is nothing in the census that prevents people from lying in responding to certain questions if they do not want to truthfully answer - what value is that? For those sectors that rely on the census, they should figure out what information it is that they really need and determine how best to obtain



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that information. Personally I never saw the value in half the questions that were asked in the long form census and, to a great extent, found some of them invasive.

The use of the long form is necessary for long term planning and preparing ourselves for the future. The key to solid planning is information. The data can be generated through statistical samples, but having a higher degree of accuracy is beneficial for all.

The political correctness practiced by this country is an untenable position for government, the ultimate question is does the government have the right to make rules or not. If they do then the rules should be enforced and not just ignored with impunity. Take the way they deal with Quebec and the natives for instance, this is just the latest example of the same thing.

The form needs to be preserved but in a way that ends the use of highly invasive personal questions that have dubious statistical value.

Punishment should be only a minor fine.

Punishment - a fine if you do not comply (but not jail); plus an incentive (a tax credit) \$50 for short form, \$100 for long form.

Perhaps everyone should be sent the long form with the enticement of rewards for early submission...the first 200k gets the prize! I suspect this would increase the number of long-forms received. It should not take this much time or debate.

Now that there has so much media coverage of the actual enforcement practices of non-participation, it may in itself change the participation rates of the average participant, and therefore exacting some kind of deterrent that may be necessary in the future.

It is shocking that citizens of a modern, free democratic country can be forced by their government to disclose



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personal information on pain of prosecution. If this data is so important and valuable incent people positively to provide it and respect those who decline to do so.

In 30 years of business, I cannot ever remember receiving a census, long or short. As far as threats of jail if one doesn't fill out the long form, it has smacks of Communism.

If you want a non-biased sample, you HAVE to enforce! Otherwise you get a sample of people who are willing to fill out the form, which is a different sample than one of the general population.

I may not have the numbers right but, if 1 in every 6 Canadians is being asked to fill in the long form then that means that about 5 million are providing the data. If that's correct why are we so excited about the 4% or so that are not?

Hold back federally driven payments such as HST, income tax, etc until the form is filled out.

Global economic data obtained by The Economist is all supplied voluntarily - for usually a small book reward - and is generally accurate. Seems a small reward is more apt than threats.

Amazing - we are truly blessed when we can spend time in addressing the Great Canadian form filling crisis. Furthermore we can also sympathize with an ethical civil servant who elects to resign and collect his full pension and, no doubt, qualify for consulting assignments with his former employer rather than do the job he was hired for in the first place.



3.0 Methodology

The COMPAS web-survey of CEOs and leaders of small, medium, and large corporations was conducted July 30-August 3, 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=95 are deemed accurate to within approximately 10.7 percentage points 19 times out of 20. The principal and investigator on this study is Conrad Winn, Ph.D.

