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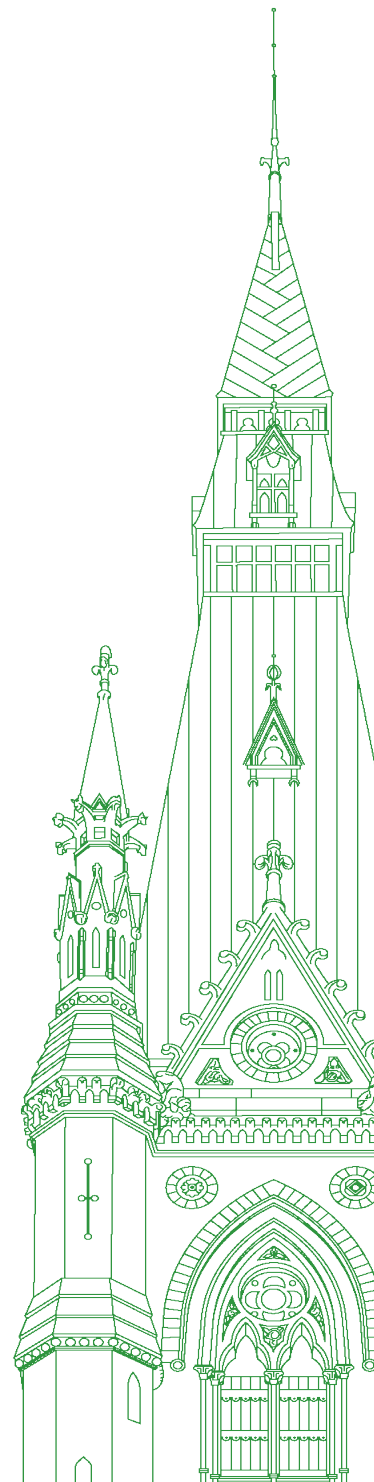
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Thursday, March 12, 2020

Chair: Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg



Standing Committee on Official Languages

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● (1530)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.)): Good afternoon everyone.

First off, I'd like to point out that today's meeting is being broadcast online, which is why your names are arranged the way they are.

Next, I'd like to welcome the team from Statistics Canada. Joining us, we have Anil Arora, chief statistician of Canada, Lynn Barr-Telford, assistant chief statistician, social, health and labour statistics, and Stéphane Dufour, assistant chief statistician, census, regional services and operations.

Committee members, please keep in mind that we'll be taking 10 or 15 minutes at the end of the meeting to discuss subcommittee business.

Now, let's turn our attention to Statistics Canada.

As you know, the committee has been eagerly awaiting your appearance. You'll have 10 minutes or so for your presentation, and then, committee members will take some time to ask you questions.

Mr. Arora, you may go ahead.

Mr. Anil Arora (Chief Statistician of Canada, Statistics Canada): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to begin by thanking the committee members for inviting Statistics Canada to appear before you today to provide an update on its efforts regarding the enumeration of rights holders under section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

As you mentioned, Mr. Chair, with me today are my colleagues Lynn Barr-Telford and Stéphane Dufour, who will assist me in answering your questions. The fact that I am here with assistant chief statisticians attests to how important we consider the issue to be and gives them an opportunity to hear from you directly. Ms. Barr-Telford and Mr. Dufour are responsible for census content and operations, respectively.

Statistics Canada is committed to providing high-quality up-to-date data and analysis to policy-makers. To that end, we have formed strong relationships with our partners, developed world-class expertise, established robust methodologies, pursued constant innovation and explored new ways to meet the data needs of Canadians.

[English]

We use sample surveys, administrative and new emerging data sources, and the census, conducted once every five years, to build, maintain and further strengthen our data infrastructure in Canada. This infrastructure reflects a support of our values, our laws and societal needs with good facts and evidence. This evidence and need for unbiased data—not influenced by factors other than statistical rigour and independence—was made explicit through changes to the Statistics Act in 2017, subsequent to the return of the mandatory long-form census in 2016.

Canadians, 88% in fact, say they trust Statistics Canada. The 2016 census achieved the highest-ever response rate, which lends further support for a strong and credible statistical system in Canada.

● (1535)

[Translation]

Meeting the data needs of our bilingual society, where English and French have had official language status for the past 50 years, is something we take very seriously at Statistics Canada. We are unaware of any other statistical agency in the world that has acquired expertise equivalent to ours or built such an extensive wealth of knowledge around a society with two official languages as dynamic as the one we have here in Canada.

We are also committed to meeting the specific needs of language rights holders, a commitment I care deeply about. I'd like to take a few moments to show you that by sharing some of the tangible measures we have taken at Statistics Canada in the past few years.

First, we secured stable funding for a language statistics program at the department, as provided for in the 2019 budget. Through a leading-edge centre of expertise for statistical production and analysis for Canada's official languages, we can support related government initiatives. Our efforts support the official languages action plan and give official language communities, as well as all Canadians, access to high-quality information.

[English]

In 2017, we assembled Canada's leading experts through a formal advisory committee on language statistics to help guide our commitment to further strengthen our capacity to serve Canadians with the best information possible, the measure of right holders being an important focus.

Given the specific requirements that define minority language rights holders both within and outside Quebec, we developed, through robust qualitative testing, a module of comprehensible questions in both languages to ensure that we could obtain a highly reliable count of right holders.

To ensure that the questions designed through qualitative testing would work to yield high quality and reliable results, we conducted a large-scale quantitative test with 135,000 households in 2019.

Over the past many years, Statistics Canada has also strengthened its ability to obtain and maintain administrative data on school enrollments from other jurisdictions, including enrollments in minority language schools across this country.

[Translation]

In addition, together with the Department of Canadian Heritage, we built the capacity to produce geographic databases that make it possible to overlay the location of rights holders' children and the exact location of every minority language education facility in Canada. This will enable Statistics Canada to determine the distance between where rights holders live and where the education facility is located geographically.

We are also working with the Department of Canadian Heritage, as well as other federal partners, to develop a new post-census survey on official language minorities in Canada. The survey should provide relevant contextual information on rights holders' intentions when it comes to sending their children to a minority language education facility. The survey should also highlight the challenges official language minority communities face, including access to education in their official language.

[English]

The census is a signature data collection vehicle that dates back to 1666 in Canada, and one that obviously has evolved since in content and methodology. It serves our nation's needs for high-quality data at low levels of geography for very small populations. It provides a statistical basis upon which numerous legal, statutory and policy programs are assessed, and subsequent decisions are made to increase their effectiveness, including the Employment Equity Act, the Official Languages Act, the Canadian Human Rights Act, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act, the Employment Insurance Act and Canada Pensions Plan, just to name a few.

[Translation]

However, the census is a specific snapshot in time and, on its own, cannot provide all the information rights holders are seeking. It is therefore important to build an ecosystem of data that will shed light on this important issue. To that end, Statistics Canada is exploring various data sources that will help paint an accurate picture of rights holders. This includes provincial and territorial data on an-

nual school enrolment and a follow-up survey of rights holders to produce estimates of the number of parents who intend to send their children to a minority language education facility.

• (1540)

[English]

Indeed, existing questions on mother tongue and language spoken at home on the census, along with annual administrative data on school enrolments and the possible addition of a module of five questions on rights holders and a post-censal survey, would immensely strengthen the information on this vital aspect of our bilingual society.

[Translation]

We are eager to continue working with our partners to enrich this important ecosystem of data.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arora. You did that in record time, so we can now move into questions and answers.

I will turn the floor over to Mr. Gagné for six minutes.

Mr. Bernard Gagné (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses today. To say that we were eager to meet with them is putting it mildly.

My first question is this. Is Statistics Canada an arm's length agency, in other words, independent from the government and equipped with its own board of directors? If so, can the political powers that be ask you to include certain questions in the census?

Mr. Anil Arora: We are referred to as a department; we are under the authority of a minister. We are independent to the extent that we have control over our methodology, meaning, the decisions we make are by default our own. Since 2017, however, Statistics Canada has had a process in place to ensure greater transparency around its decision-making.

Mr. Bernard Gagné: I'll rephrase my question. Can the political class order you to include questions in the census?

Mr. Anil Arora: Section 21 of the Statistics Act gives cabinet the responsibility of approving the content of the census, which is then published in the Canada Gazette to inform Canadians.

Mr. Bernard G  n  reux: Given what you've just said or read in your statement, my inclination would be to end the meeting right there and declare the matter resolved.

Will both the short-form and long-form questionnaires include questions pertaining to rights holders the next time a census of population of Canada is taken, yes or no?

Mr. Anil Arora: That hasn't been determined yet. As I just said, the content of the census is determined by cabinet, pursuant to the act. In 2019, we conducted qualitative testing, followed by quantitative testing.

Mr. Bernard G  n  reux: Can you share the results of those qualitative and quantitative tests with the committee?

Mr. Anil Arora: Absolutely. We are in the process of finalizing the results, and we'll be releasing them in a few months.

Mr. Bernard G  n  reux: Very well. Will the next census be taken in 2020?

Mr. Anil Arora: It will be taken in May 2021.

Mr. Bernard G  n  reux: That leaves 14 or 15 months until the next census.

You told us that this is an issue you care about deeply. Those are your words, not mine. That makes this a serious concern in your mind.

• (1545)

Mr. Anil Arora: Indeed.

Mr. Bernard G  n  reux: If the person at the helm of Statistics Canada considers this a serious concern, is there reason to think that the 2021 census will address rights holders using the questions you tested?

It's a straightforward question. Can you give us a yes or no answer?

Mr. Anil Arora: As I said, that responsibility falls to cabinet under the current act.

Mr. Bernard G  n  reux: What you're telling us today is that the ball is in the Liberal government's court. We will find out from the government whether it truly cares about rights holders in Canada.

I would remind you that, back in 2017, the Standing Committee on Official Languages recommended in its report that the 2021 census include these questions. I can't recall whether it was you, personally, who appeared before the committee and told us that the agency would be doing testing and would see what results it yielded.

Since the decision is up to cabinet—and now I look to the committee members from the Liberal Party of Canada—will the census finally include the two questions on rights holders, once and for all? Are you going to recommend that cabinet include them?

Mr. Anil Arora: Bear in mind that this process is decades old; it isn't just starting in 2021.

Our role is to carry out testing, consultations and analysis. We are statisticians, not politicians. That means we do our best to really test the census content in line with the priorities that have been established.

We make recommendations to cabinet or to our minister—

Mr. Bernard G  n  reux: Mr. Arora, I'm going to repeat my question. You said earlier that this issue mattered to you. If that's true, are you going to recommend to cabinet that the next census include questions on rights holders?

The Chair: You have only two seconds left. You'll have an opportunity to follow up, Mr. G  n  reux.

It is Mr. Arseneault's turn for the next six minutes.

Mr. Ren   Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I don't really like doing this, but I'm going to pick up where my fellow member Mr. G  n  reux left off. Mr. Arora, my understanding is that you will be recommending to the Government of Canada that rights holders under section 23 be enumerated using the short-form questionnaire for the 2021 census. Is that correct?

Mr. Anil Arora: As I said, the content—

Mr. Ren   Arseneault: Is that what you're saying, yes or no?

The Chair: Mr. Arseneault, let's let Mr. Arora answer the question.

Mr. Anil Arora: All I can do is what the act allows me to do as chief statistician. That's the process we follow for every census.

Mr. Ren   Arseneault: Thank you for your answer, Mr. Arora.

Mr. Anil Arora: We will provide advice, but according to the act, the decision is up to—

Mr. Ren   Arseneault: What is your advice? That's what we want to know. I have six minutes. What is your advice?

Mr. Anil Arora: As you know, the advice I provide is not really something I can share with you.

Mr. Ren   Arseneault: What were the results of the short-form and long-form questionnaire testing you conducted this summer? Did it yield good results?

Mr. Anil Arora: As I said, we are in the process of finalizing the test results, and we will be releasing the details of those results shortly. It's a transparent process. You will be able to review the information.

Mr. Ren   Arseneault: I understand, but will you be sharing that information before or after you make your recommendations to the government?

Mr. Anil Arora: We share some of the analysis with the government. That will inform the analysis that the government carries out. As I said, at Statistics Canada, we are ready to collect information from Canadians on a very important issue. This isn't the first time Statistics Canada is collecting data. We've been in the business for 50 years.

• (1550)

Mr. Ren   Arseneault: Thank you. We're in a hurry because we don't have much time.

You've been testing questions on rights holders. I'll ask you a direct question and I'd like a direct and honest answer. I know that you can provide one, Mr. Arora, because this issue is important to you.

Do the test results that you obtained using the short form, which counted rights holders according to the charter, comply with the Supreme Court of Canada's decision in the Mahe case, a matter familiar to you?

Mr. Anil Arora: We carried out tests—

Mr. René Arseneault: Yes or no, Mr. Arora?

Mr. Anil Arora: I already described the process, the law, the responsibility of Statistics Canada. We'll follow the law. You're—

Mr. René Arseneault: Okay. We're the law. We're the legislator. We're asking you whether you've received the test results for a short form and a long form. Based on what you've heard and seen so far, do the results of the short form meet the criteria required by the Supreme Court in the Mahe case, yes or no?

Mr. Anil Arora: As I said, we've carried out the tests. We'll finalize the results and we'll provide our best advice according to statistical science. We're ready to collect and share the data.

Mr. René Arseneault: You've said the same thing three times. You're telling me that you don't know the test result. Is that right?

Mr. Anil Arora: We're in the process of finalizing the test results. We're testing the content for the sole purpose of providing advice to cabinet so that it can make a decision based on the needs of our country.

Mr. René Arseneault: Mr. Arora, rights holders are important to you. Do you acknowledge that you and your department are keeping your cards close to your chest and that you're hiding information from us? When you share your suggestions with the government, it will be a done deal for the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Can you at least acknowledge this?

Mr. Anil Arora: We're ready to proceed with the collection and to include the questions in the census, pursuant to the law and based on the cabinet decision and the law that you created. Statistics Canada is ready to carry out the work to give Canadians the best and highest quality data that meets the needs of rights holders.

Mr. René Arseneault: Are there any issues with the answers that you obtained in the short form? Were there any minor things that bothered you?

Mr. Anil Arora: We tested the questions in the short form and the long form. The results will be released for both questionnaires.

Statistics Canada truly meets the needs of users. That's our sole reason for existing. There are a number of requests, requests that are always changing in our country. In the current system, there are many requests, there are fixed resources, there's the burden—

Mr. René Arseneault: Are there many constitutional requests, concerning rights holders, under the charter?

Mr. Anil Arora: I'm sure that cabinet will follow the law when making its decision.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arora.

Mr. Arseneault's time is up.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): The organizations that we met with told us that they needed Statistics Canada to

assess the issue of rights holders by region, using the short form. They told us that this would require two additional questions.

Have you assessed this?

Mr. Anil Arora: We formed a committee of experts to help us develop the questions. That committee put a great deal of effort into the testing process, the questionnaire and the number of questions. The committee's input was critical to our process. The 2019 census test included a module of five questions that we tested. As I said, we tested the module on the short-form questionnaire and on the long-form questionnaire. The results will be shared with everyone.

• (1555)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Why can't you share them now?

Mr. Anil Arora: Because we're in the process of finalizing the results.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: So you haven't finished the analyses.

Mr. Anil Arora: We're in the process of finalizing the analysis of our tests, which will be part of the cabinet decision, along with the act that will be part of the analysis and the cabinet decision.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: You're saying that, once your tests are finalized, you'll release them to the public.

Mr. Anil Arora: Exactly.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Approximately when will that happen?

Mr. Anil Arora: It will happen in a few weeks.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: You will then make your recommendations and cabinet will meet. When will you make the decision?

Mr. Anil Arora: Cabinet will make the decision, according to section 21 of the Statistics Act. It won't be my decision. It will be cabinet's decision. We'll comply with cabinet's decision, as we've done in previous censuses.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: This means that we're meeting with you too soon.

It would have been worthwhile to meet with you after receiving the results.

Mr. Anil Arora: The results will be released to the public. So, if you have any questions—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: So everyone will have access to the results and, at that point, there can be a debate.

Mr. Anil Arora: As I was saying, we really strive to meet the needs of our users. That's our sole reason for existing. We have a process and a law to follow, a law that you have put in place as legislators.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: How would including questions on the short form be beneficial?

What would be the pros and cons?

Mr. Anil Arora: Thank you for your question.

Statistics Canada is already responding to a number of requests for information based on the data obtained through the long-form questionnaire. This isn't new. Canadians have been filling out this long form for 50 years.

The methodology used to provide this high-quality data isn't exclusive to Canada. The methodology is used around the world in countries that conduct traditional censuses.

In Canada, the employment insurance program distributes \$17 billion annually based on census data. Many other laws and programs depend on the high-quality data obtained from the long-form questionnaire. We provide the best possible data using a solid methodology and a process tested over the past 50 years.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: You're not really answering my question. I gather that you receive many requests to change the long questionnaire or the short questionnaire. What would make this particular request relevant? What would be the pros?

I'm not asking you to take a position. I want you to tell us for which results the test on the short questionnaire would be beneficial or detrimental.

The Chair: You have 20 seconds to respond, Mr. Arora.

Mr. Anil Arora: First, we take into account the main criteria, the best possible quality data that the question will help us obtain. Second, we analyze the burden of the question, meaning whether Canadians can understand it and answer it correctly. Third, there are the costs associated with the question. Lastly, we must ensure that the question won't have a negative impact on another question in the form. As statisticians, we take these factors into account to provide the best possible advice.

• (1600)

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll now give the floor to Mr. Duval, who has six minutes.

[English]

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Thank you for coming, Mr. Arora.

You mentioned the test results. How many questions about rights holders were tested?

Mr. Anil Arora: We put together a committee. We have our statistical expertise, but we're not.... We put together a committee of experts to help us with what the most efficient and most effective way to collect this information would be. That committee was very helpful in helping us formulate quantitative tests. In fact, we started off with certain things and we thought it might work. We tested it and found out it didn't work. We went back and retested other versions. In the end, what we tested in the quantitative test—the test with the 135,000 dwellings in Canada—was a module of five questions.

We think we're in the final stages of assessing their quality. Obviously, we think that we get from those five questions a really good base on which to satisfy the needs of right holders in this country.

That's one piece of the puzzle. We have to go further than that. I don't think that alone is going to do it because a census is an exer-

cise at one point in time. I think the needs of the users are really on an ongoing basis.

We have been working with partners in other departments on a post-censal survey that can get at not only the total number that we can get from the census, but also how many intend to actually use the services.

We're also working with administrative data sources and other.... We already have some data that we get on an annual basis to see how many people are actually making use of that service.

If you look at some of the legal decisions, the judges have said that we need all three of these. You need the upper limit. You need how many are going to actually make use of that service, and you need to know what that demand is and how is it going to evolve over time.

Statistics Canada wants to work on actually developing the infrastructure that is going to be needed for this country—not just in 2021, but on an ongoing basis—so that we can meet the needs of users on an ongoing basis.

Mr. Scott Duvall: Mr. Arora, were there any objections to any of the questions by any department, any stakeholders, ?

Mr. Anil Arora: As I've said, we've formed an advisory committee of experts representing different viewpoints. I think what we found was that it's the module that will get us the highest quality data that responds to the data need that we have.

Mr. Scott Duvall: But were there any objections from any?

Mr. Anil Arora: I'm not aware of any objections. I think those questions were well received.

Mr. Scott Duvall: Is the committee still functioning? Has it been meeting on a regular basis?

Mr. Anil Arora: Yes, they do meet on a regular basis. We continue to use their expertise both as a committee and also dealing with members.

Mr. Scott Duvall: You mentioned that your test results were to be done shortly. Can you define that to us? Do you have an estimated time?

Mr. Anil Arora: As I've said before, we're certainly not going to test things and just hold the results for ourselves. The testing is there. The results are going to be transparent. We're in the final stages of putting the report together. As I've said before, that report becomes a part of the considerations for the final content that cabinet is going to have to make.

The report will come out as soon as the decisions are made public about the content that's going to be on the 2021 census.

Mr. Scott Duvall: When is shortly?

Mr. Anil Arora: I don't know when cabinet is going to convene and actually have the conversation.

I'm sure once it's done and the questions are gazetted as under the law, it will be shortly after the gazetting.

Mr. Scott Duvall: Okay.

So let me ask you this. When do you plan on sending your recommendations to cabinet?

Mr. Anil Arora: It's part of the process that's—

Mr. Scott Duvall: That's doesn't answer my question.

There was a question that was asked in the House today—very, very important. The answer we got back from the government kind of concerns me because they are putting it in your lap saying that you guys are working on it. They are waiting for it. We need to know, this committee, when those recommendations going to cabinet will be done.

Mr. Anil Arora: Look, you know, I want you to know that I don't sent cabinet dates. I don't set when these meetings happen. All I know is that, when that schedule gets set, we are ready with our set of recommendations. We will be ready. We are ready to collect the information and provide the information to users. That's what we do. That's what our job is.

• (1605)

Mr. Scott Duvall: Don't you send a report with the recommendations so that the cabinet can read it prior to having their meeting?

Mr. Anil Arora: No. We will take the kernel of our analysis. As I've said, we're still in the process of finalizing the report. We will certainly be inputting our bottom-line results as part of the decision for cabinet to make.

Mr. Scott Duvall: Can cabinet ask Statistics Canada to modify the recommendations?

Mr. Anil Arora: We do what we do best, which is statistics. Our recommendations are based on sound statistical methodology, something that we've been using for decades. Our recommendation is always going to be based on whether this set of questions will respond to the needs of users and whether it will give good quality data that meets the users' needs. That's our consideration. That's what we will put in, obviously, for consideration by cabinet members.

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Mr. Scott Duvall: Okay.

Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: We'll move on to Mr. Godin for the next five minutes.

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): I want to thank you, Mr. Arora, and your colleagues who have joined you.

I'll take a different approach. My statistics 337 college course was a long time ago, and I don't have your expertise.

Instead, I'll ask you the following question. If we want a true picture of a specific situation in a given population, what's the best method?

[English]

Mr. Anil Arora: I think it's a really good question, because it really is dependent on a number of factors. Statistical sampling is a very solid method—I speak in general here—to get at a particular aspect that we're trying to study. I'll just give you one example.

We do the unemployment rate every single month, if I may—

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Arora, I'll interrupt you right now because we have very little time.

If I wanted to provide an accurate picture of a given situation, the best thing would be to knock on every door, paper in hand, to make a list. Unfortunately, that's no longer possible, and we're using statistical science.

What's the best statistical method for providing the most accurate picture possible of the situation of linguistic minorities and rights holders in Canada?

Mr. Anil Arora: We conduct surveys all the time.

I was explaining to you that every month we survey millions of households regarding the level of unemployment. The science and the statistics help us to obtain high-quality data through surveys. We don't need to carry out a census. We don't carry out the census every month. That wouldn't be practical.

According to science, high-quality data can be obtained. We've been collecting high-quality data on official languages since the 1981 census using the long-form questionnaire.

Mr. Joël Godin: You're talking about the long-form questionnaire. I'll ask you the following question. If you include the questions on rights holders in both the long-form questionnaire and the short-form questionnaire, do you think that the picture will be more accurate?

Mr. Anil Arora: First, there are several requirements—

Mr. Joël Godin: I'm asking you a very simple question.

You have a long-form questionnaire that 25% of the population fills out, and a short-form questionnaire that the other 75% of the population fills out. What will provide the more accurate picture: a sampling of 25% of the population, or the results of 100% of the population?

Mr. Anil Arora: We conduct sample surveys that generate high-quality data, which reflects the population as a whole and the current situation. This isn't theoretical, because we do this every month.

• (1610)

Mr. Joël Godin: Your statement is correct if it applies to a homogeneous territory. However, territories where minorities live aren't homogeneous. That's the issue. Unless there's proof to the contrary, I'm convinced that, if we ask the question on right holders in 100% of the questionnaires, we'll obtain a better picture of the situation than if we rely on the 25% of the population to whom we send the long-form questionnaire.

Today, the Minister of Innovation told my colleague that he wanted to figure out the best way to collect quality information to enumerate rights holders. He probably meant “identify,” but that’s the term that appears in the House of Commons debates.

I understand that the minister responsible for Statistics Canada wants to figure out “the best way.” In my opinion, the best way is to include the questions in 100% of the questionnaires. This means that we could adjourn today and say that the 2021 census will ask 100% of the population the questions on rights holders.

What do you think?

The Chair: You have only five seconds left, Mr. Arora. We’ll have a chance to come back to this matter in another round.

Let’s avoid overly long preliminaries, please. Let’s try to stick to short questions and answers. Thank you.

Mr. Joël Godin: Let him respond, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We’ll go to Mr. Samson for five minutes.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being here.

We have all received the questionnaire and we have all the questions in front of us. Let’s go to page 7, where we see that five questions have been added.

[English]

Mr. Arora, I just want to thank you for a couple of things. You said that you would keep this at your heart and that you’re going to meet the needs of the community. Let’s keep that in mind as we go.

Let’s do the questionnaire. It’s simple. Let’s go to number 12 on page 7. You all have that in English in front of you. I believe, Mr. Arora, that you have it as well.

Let’s start with Mr. Godin. Mr. Godin, answer question 12. Is your house in Quebec, yes or no?

Mr. Joël Godin: Yes.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Yes. Gone. You’re going on to question 16. Don’t even do the question I asked you.

The next question is question 13: Did you go to a French school or immersion?

Mr. Chong, did you go to a French school or immersion, yes or no?

Mr. Michael Chong: No.

Mr. Darrell Samson: No. Gone.

There goes 70%, 80%, 95% of Canadians who don’t have to answer all of those questions. There are two arguments. There’s the argument that we bring forward that the test is too long and they won’t take it seriously—not true. On top of that, when you do it online you’re not even going to see it. In five years, 99% of the people will be doing it online. You won’t even see questions 14, 15, 16. They’re gone.

The argument that the test is too long is not at all acceptable.

Second of all, when we see the [Inaudible-Editor] is 25%, I can tell you that when you’re focusing on one zone, looking at the number of kids, as my colleague said, the best way to do it is to do each and every one of them. I know it. I lived it for 13 years as a superintendent of the French schools in Nova Scotia. I was the president across Canada of the French school superintendents.... I can tell you that we’re crying every day. This is the most important thing that we can deliver as a government to make sure that we’re reaching all Canadians to get the answers we need. Is it too long? We can get rid of that. Those questions are gone.

Let me go to the next one. Let’s go to page 9 of that questionnaire. As upset as I was there, I’m now stupefied. Now I’m gone. It says, “Reasons why we asked the question”. We’re saying reasons why. Just follow the yellow.... For questions two and seven that you’ve been asking for years and years, you’re saying the reason that you’re doing this, asking those questions, because we want to make sure that the municipalities that are planning a variety of services such as schools.... Who knew? The majority of English people in Canada have always been able to receive the information of how many people will go to school and how many schools have to be built. Can you believe it? It’s hard to believe that in this great country the French people and the English people in Quebec cannot have that. We have the question. It says, “from 12 to 17”. This is for the charter of rights and education. We’re not even meeting the rights and now we’re not meeting the education information. The only place it can be is in the short one.

I also want to bring you to question 10. That question 10 that’s been there for years is a great question, but it’s only ever asked in one category out of three. It was never asked in the other two categories, and guess what? There are more and more every day of category two and three than there is of one. It’s the parents who took the education. It’s the kids taking education. We’re too far from getting the information we require. You could say we can put it in the long one or the short one, 25%. I already put that one aside. You shouldn’t do that, based on that. But even if you did, on the long survey, do you know what happened? Did the long survey ever become optional in this country?

The Chair: One minute.

Mr. Darrell Samson: A quick yes or no.

Yes, it did. Did it not? It’s a simple question. Was the long survey ever optional?

• (1615)

Mr. Anil Arora: It was obviously made optional—

Mr. Darrell Samson: Was that under the Harper government, yes or no?

Mr. Anil Arora: It was under that—

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you.

If another government came in tomorrow morning, you’d put it in the long one, and they made it optional.

What was the result when you made it optional? Was there an increase or a decrease in people filling out that survey?

Mr. Anil Arora: Obviously, there was a decrease—

Mr. Darrell Samson: Increase or decrease. You know your statistics. You know the facts.

Mr. Anil Arora: Also, that language question was removed at the point from the long to the short one because it was no longer mandatory.

Mr. Darrell Samson: This is what my community is asking me. Did you ever do a survey to see the prejudice that not having those questions on the survey has resulted in for the Acadians and francophones and English people in Quebec? Have you ever done a survey on that? Have you ever done a survey on the provinces that do want to help French outside of Quebec, and the English? They know exactly and they cannot fulfill that because you're not giving them the information.

I'm coming back to what you said earlier, that your heart is in this and that you want to meet the needs.

When you consulted that committee, did they tell you they wanted that in the short survey? Yes or no?

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Samson, we'll come back to that in a future round. I'm sorry, but your time is up.

We'll let Mr. d'Entremont continue on the subject.

Mr. Chris d'Entremont (West Nova, CPC): This is my first experience as a committee member. I thought the Standing Committee on Official Languages would be interesting, but probably a bit dull. But it's not dull at all! It's exciting to see Mr. Samson and Mr. Arsenault speak up.

I'd like to know where we are in the process. You say that in theory the tests have been done and we're waiting for cabinet to make a decision. What's the timeline at the moment?

Mr. Anil Arora: First of all, I'm really pleased to see that the questions, the way they are written, will reduce the burden on the people answering them while still providing high-quality data. So I thank Mr. Samson.

Second, as I said, there's a process we have to follow. We have already done our qualitative and quantitative reviews. So we've already done the data collection and we're in the process of analyzing the results. That way, under the act, we will be able to make recommendations to cabinet so that they can make a decision. We are currently in the process of making recommendations based on statistical science.

Mr. Chris d'Entremont: In fact, I think you've already finished analyzing the data you've collected. I think your data is ready, I think you already have an idea of the results, and I think you're almost ready to communicate your recommendations to cabinet. Today, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry said he was ready to send them to cabinet.

So you can answer us: will these questions be in the 2021 census?

Mr. Anil Arora: We respect the process.

The only thing I can tell you is that we're ready. If this is the decision, it will be the first time these five questions will be in the census questionnaire. They will increase the quality and accuracy of the data as never before.

That's not the only thing Statistics Canada will do. We are prepared to work with our partners to develop a postcensal survey.

In addition, we are increasing our efforts to focus on administrative data. We are targeting a data ecosystem, as the need will exist after the 2021 census. We are therefore building a system that will serve users long after the 2021 census.

• (1620)

Mr. Chris d'Entremont: Since there are two questionnaires, a long one that goes to 25% of the population and a short one for everything else. So it is the government that will tell us whether the questions will be in the short questionnaire.

Mr. Anil Arora: Forgive me, but I didn't understand your question.

Mr. Chris d'Entremont: Will the questions be included in the short questionnaire?

Mr. Anil Arora: In Canada, we have a census that consists of two questionnaires: a short one and a long-form questionnaire. It is mandatory to complete one or the other of the two questionnaires. That is the very definition of a census. Asking a sample of households to complete a long-form questionnaire is a feature of our census.

I'd like to stress again the importance of data quality. You make important decisions on a variety of issues for Canadians and it is essential that we provide you with the data you need to make those decisions. So we're concerned about providing high-quality data.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arora.

The next five-minute period will be shared between two members of the committee. We will begin with Ms. Lambropoulos.

[English]

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Arora, for being with us today.

I have a couple of questions. I'm an anglophone from Quebec. I noticed the questions that are in your survey, that are in the census so far—only questions 16 and 17: did this person do any of their primary or secondary school in an English language school in Canada? Obviously, this excludes the grandparent clause. Obviously, in Quebec we're allowed to send our kids to an English school even if the parent didn't go to an English school but the grandparent did. Is there any way of including some type of question to ensure that all rights holders...and to ensure that we get an actual number of eligible students who would be able to go to the school?

Mr. Anil Arora: That's our intent with the questions that we've tested. It is to make sure that we get the quality of information and the numbers that we need for very small regions, to make sure that we have a good sense of the number of rights holders. Obviously, that's our intent. That's what that module was built, designed and tested to do. It is to ensure that we have that.

The second part, as I keep saying, isn't just what that total eligible population is. It's also about being able to go further and ask how many would actually take advantage of that. It's not one or the other. You need both.

We also need to find out how many people are actually going, where they are going and what the distances are.

It's those three things that we want to try to work at. This will be the first time in the census—once a decision is made to include these questions on the census—that this kind of quality and detail of information will be there for all users. Our aim is to continue to work with stakeholders and with you to make sure that information is kept up to speed and that we continue to strengthen it and add to it over time.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Would these types of questions be included in both the short and the long-form survey?

Mr. Anil Arora: I'm speaking in general here because that's the heart of this debate. The question that's being asked is: Can we give good quality information at low levels of geography from the one in four sample part of the survey? There are so many programs already in Canada that use that information to make important decisions. It isn't just a homogenous population; it's heterogeneous or homogeneous. We do that. That's what we do all the time. That's what the science of the statistical rigour is. We want to make sure that we provide that detailed information to everybody.

The last point I'll make is that if you think that's theory.... I was just asking colleagues how many times people went those local levels. We had over 12 million visits to our census profiles that provide information at that very local level. We know we're providing it, we know it's of high quality and we know Canadians are consuming it.

• (1625)

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: When provinces counter that and say they don't have an exact number because they're not following the 25% of people who have been surveyed, they have no recourse afterward. I think that's the main problem here. That's why we're all fighting for the short-form census. This would give stakeholders—people—the ability to go and fight the province and say that this is the exact number of people who are eligible.

Mr. Anil Arora: First of all, there are many programs where there's a need for very high-quality data. The unemployment program is one example I've given that we benchmarked from the census to our ongoing surveys. There are a lot of programs, such as employment equity. There are many legal requirements that are based on the long form.

I'm trying to tell you that we do not want to inadvertently leave Canadians with the impression that the information that comes from the long form is untrustworthy, is not of high quality or is not something you can trust at low levels of geography. I'm trying to

explain that this is something we have done for 50 years in Canada on a whole host of areas. That information is not theoretical. It's something that we provided to you as legislators and as decision-makers. You make important decisions already on a whole host of laws based on that quality of information.

I'll leave you with this last point. If, in fact, that information was not reliable, we would see huge variances in the results from one census to the other for those local levels, but we don't. We're not the only country that uses a sample to do the census and to provide high-quality data at low levels. It is something that the world over.... It's a sampling technique that provides very high quality information. There are 3.7 million Canadians who fill out the long form and the quality of the information is very high.

That's all I'm trying to say.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much. Your time is up.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Good.

I mentioned I'd be asking questions other than about the rights holders. Maybe I'll come back to that later.

There's a question I wanted to ask you. Before 2005, there were multiple answers to the question of the language spoken at home. If people answered that they spoke both English and French, half of the answers were sent to the English side and half to the French side. Those who answered that they spoke English, French and another language were divided into three categories.

In 2016, you analyzed the results in such a way that someone responding by "English and French" was counted on both the English side, the French side and the allophone side. Therefore, compared to 2011, in Quebec, when there were 81.2% of people speaking French at home, the figure rose to 87% of people speaking French at home. These are Statistics Canada's results. If we look at the results for anglophones in Quebec, there was a jump to 19%. The results for allophones were even higher. This gave a total of approximately 121%.

Why did you make this change in your method of analysis?

Mr. Anil Arora: I think I understand the question.

The possibility of multiple responses is not unique to this question. There are several other questions like that. There may be situations where there is more than one answer. The question is how we deal with this and how it relates to the situation of the rights holders.

As soon as someone answers that they speak French, we use that as data. It's counted. So we use an order to determine whether the answer will be counted or not. When there are several answers to a question, if one of the answers is French, that counts as one of the characteristics.

• (1630)

The Chair: Thanks, your time is up.

Mr. Duvall now has the floor.

[English]

You have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Scott Duvall: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Arora, I guess everyone is trying to ask if the same questions are going to be put on the short form and the long form. You're talking about high-quality data. How do you get high-quality data if you're missing 25% of answers?

Mr. Anil Arora: I'll just repeat what I said before. I'm very concerned if people think that any of the data—through that logic that you've put—that comes from the long-form census is missing 75% of the responses or that it is not of good quality, because you as legislators make decisions on a whole host of programs based on the quality of the data that we get from the long form.

I cannot explain it strongly enough. We know the total population, and it is a systematic sampling technique that is used the world over where, in our case, every fourth household, with a random start and with a mandatory requirement, fills out a whole host of questions that are on the long form. When we get those responses, we have weighting techniques to make sure that the one house that says “yes” or “no” represents all four in that region. That is how we come up with the full population.

So, it's not that 75% are missed. It's that if you get selected, in a very statistically sound manner, to fill out the questionnaire, you are representing that whole area. That is a method by which we can ask questions of one person, and that response essentially represents others.

I don't want to make light of this, but we don't drain the entire transmission oil to find out whether it's good or not. We take a sample of it and say, “Yes, it's of good quality”, and then either it's time to change it or it's not.

The sampling technique is something that is germane to statistics. Asking a question, with that response essentially serving as a donor to the rest of the population, is what we do all the time.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

Colleagues, we are moving on to the third round of questions, and you will have five minutes.

We will begin with Mr. G  n  reux.

Mr. Bernard G  n  reux: Mr. Arora, what you just said is true. However, what you fail to say is that the way in which the sampling is working is good for you, but it's not good for the Supreme Court of Canada and the rights holders. That's the reality. Unfortunately, the F  d  ration nationale des conseils scolaires francophones, or FNCSF, which testified before the committee two days ago, as well as all the other witnesses who were present with them, all say the same thing. That is that all official language minority communities in Canada and rights holders cannot get their rights recognized, because they do not have the right figures to be able to judge the situation. When they go to the Supreme Court to defend their rights, they are always told that they do not have enough statistics.

We ask you to take note of the necessary statistics. I think and we think—tell us otherwise if it is not true—that the questions should be in both the long and short forms. You can't have them in one or the other. We think it is necessary to have them in both forms. Tell us why we are wrong to think that.

Mr. Anil Arora: Users have expressed their requests, the courts have made their decisions, and three elements are required. First, what is the entire population in a given region? Second, how many people will prefer or use a service? Third, what will be the changes in the population?

The judges, in their rulings, were very clear. These three elements are necessary in order to respond to user requests. We will provide these three elements by working with the public. As I said, we are dedicated to providing high-quality data on the total population, also from a postcensal survey, to the people who will use the services and the administrative data. So these three elements are necessary.

• (1635)

Mr. Bernard G  n  reux: All right. You're saying the Supreme Court says we need all three. Why, in previous censuses, was it not possible to provide this information so that the Supreme Court could make decisions in favour of minority schools or official language minority communities? This is the first question.

Next, as part of your process and analysis, what recommendations will you make over the next few weeks and months to Minister Navdeep Bains for inclusion in the long and short census forms? What will your recommendations be?

Mr. Anil Arora: We will present recommendations that will provide high-quality data that will meet the expressed needs. That is our goal.

I don't understand why we would provide a recommendation that would not have that objective. Our goal is always to provide high-quality data.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I'll repeat what I asked before.

Will the final decision to include the question or questions in the long form or short form rest with Minister Navdeep Bains?

Mr. Anil Arora: Under the law, the decision rests with cabinet. Our job is to provide the right questions to collect high-quality data.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I'm trying to sort out what you're telling me. You are essentially telling me that the questions on the three elements, which should normally satisfy the Supreme Court, are already in the system. That's what you're telling me. Are they already in the long form?

Mr. Anil Arora: The only reason we tested the five questions is because they were not there before, and depending on the decision that will be made, they will be asked for the first time. This is new.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Lattanzio, you have five minutes.

[English]

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Thank you for being present here this afternoon for a very important question.

I'm going to go straight to the heart of the matter in terms of the legalities. It seems as though Stats Canada has been testing the patience of Canadians, perhaps members of this committee also and those of the official language minority communities.

Does Stats Can realize that it is potentially exposing itself to the risk of being sued by the official language minority communities for the repeated omission to serve and to record all three of the categories of section 23? Are you aware of that?

Mr. Anil Arora: We are committed to providing good data to Canadians. That is our sole objective—

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: I understand.

Mr. Anil Arora: —and that's what we will do.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: We are at the crux right now to be able to historically—historically, and I'm going to put emphasis on that—get precise data to be able to help the crying needs of minority communities across the land.

• (1640)

Mr. Anil Arora: We're confident that, once the decisions are made, we will provide data of high quality. It is not the first time that we will provide data of high quality. We have always done that—

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: But there have been omissions.

Mr. Anil Arora: I will argue that we're one of the best in the world, and we will bring that expertise of all our 6,000 people at Statistics Canada—

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Sir, the quality that has been given thus far has only focused on one group of individuals in virtue of section 23. I'm not the first to tell you that. You've been doing this over the course of the last seven censuses. We are at a point right now, the crux, where we have this opportunity to be able to remedy a situation that has gone on for far too long, and there's a crying need.

Do you agree that, if we do not address this pressing need today, we are exposing ourselves to lawsuits? Yes or no?

Mr. Anil Arora: I will once again emphasize that we would not have stabilized our program for official languages; we would not have done rounds and rounds of qualitative testing; we would not have had a committee of experts; we would not have subjected 135,000 households to a module of five questions, if we weren't serious about meeting the needs of this very important group, and I think that's not lost on cabinet.

When we've done all this work, we're going to give our best advice based on our statistical expertise, and at the end of the day, as I say, once this decision is made, it will be the first time in Canada that we will have had a module of five questions with very high quality data for very low levels of geography, and that's not enough. I think we're going to have to go even beyond that, and Statistics Canada is more than prepared to continue to work to do post-censal surveys, to go to administrative data, because as I keep repeating, you do the census in May 2021 and the information is out of date essentially the day after you collect it, but it serves as a good benchmark for us to continue that process. So we need—

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: So I understand then from—

Mr. Anil Arora: —to do more than that.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Yes. I'm sorry to cut you off, but time is limited and I want to maximize as much as I possibly can.

So I understand from your answer, then, that there could be a possibility that, this time around, your suggestion or your recommendation would be to be able to include those questions now that we've never included before, to be able to address this pressing problem. Is my understanding correct?

You're saying that you could do more, but for the time you seem to be on page and saying perhaps, yes, you are going toward including these other two subsections of section 23 that we have not in the past, in the short form.

Mr. Anil Arora: I'll just repeat what I have said, which is that we would not have gone to all those extents and tested and subjected 135,000 households if there were no intent to include that as a recommendation.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Okay. I'm a rookie on this committee. I'm newly elected, by profession a lawyer. I've just been practising 29 years, and I know that when I'm in a court of law, experts are called to give their opinions. They are not bound by any confidentiality. They're not bound by any secrecy. Courts want to hear from the experts.

So you're the expert here today. In your opinion, both the federal government and Stats Canada have an obligation to put in place positive measures to be able to help the minority communities. Would you not agree that incorporating these other two subsections of section 23 would be a positive step and a positive move for all the minorities concerned across the land?

As an expert, what would be your answer?

Mr. Anil Arora: First of all, we do get called in front of courts—

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: I know, but what is your answer?

Mr. Anil Arora: —to defend our methodology. We would be more than happy to do that on this aspect if called upon.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: So would it be a “yes”? Would you agree?

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you. We have to move on to the second round.

Mr. d'Entremont, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Chris d'Entremont: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I will share my speaking time with Mr. Godin.

[English]

I want to take as an example a small community of 3,000 people. Let's say there are 100 people in there who are *ayants droit*. What are the possibilities of StatCan missing those 100 people in the methodology it has today? Will you capture those small numbers that we're really trying to tease out of it so that we can build a school or a community centre, or do those kinds of things?

Mr. Anil Arora: The answer is yes. That's what we do and not just for this variable, an important variable, an important topic, an important aspect of our law and our society. We do this for so many other needs. Whether it's for hospitals, fire station or businesses, this is why we do these surveys and why we do the census. That's exactly why we do it, so we feel very confident in that.

It's not theory. As I said, there have been 12 million page views at those very small levels of our census profiles from the 2016 census to date. It's not a theory; this is what happens today.

• (1645)

Mr. Chris d'Entremont: I'm just trying to see how you hit those very small pockets in a lot of cases when you have this very broad census program. You're not hitting everybody; you're only hitting a certain—

Mr. Anil Arora: That's the value of the census. No other survey gets down to those very low levels of geography.

Mr. Chris d'Entremont: In some cases you're going to get zero. That's what's really going to happen.

Mr. Anil Arora: If I may, as you asked the question.... In very small communities, where, let's say, the number is less than 10—and it's a statistical technique that is used the world over to protect the privacy of the very small numbers of people who are there—it would be rounded to either zero, five or 10. If it were eight, it would be, through our routine, either five or 10. That's the rounding

that we do. Other than that, the numbers are available for very small communities.

Mr. Chris d'Entremont: I know I've run out of time, so your time's up.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, colleague.

I think it's fair to say that everyone on the committee here around the table wants to have the questions on 100% of the questionnaires. Arrange them any way you like.

Now, I'd like to ask you a question. How much time is left before it is too late to include questions in the 2021 census form?

Mr. Anil Arora: We are at the stage of providing the recommendations and receiving the cabinet decision.

Mr. Joël Godin: What you're telling me is that there were a few weeks, earlier, before this was tabled in cabinet.

How much time does cabinet have to make a decision on adding questions or sending instructions to Statistics Canada so that specific questions can be included in the 2021 census?

In fact, how many days or months are left before the form is printed?

Mr. Anil Arora: We're preparing for the census—

Mr. Joël Godin: Yes, but you're waiting for instructions from the cabinet. You can't act until cabinet gives you the green light.

I'll repeat my question. What is the maximum amount of time cabinet has to tell you to include all questions on the long and short questionnaires?

Mr. Anil Arora: The census is in May 2021—

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Arora, what I want is a number.

Mr. Anil Arora: It takes a little time to print out the questionnaires.

Mr. Joël Godin: Yes, but you must have experience. Statistics Canada has been around for 50 years.

What is the maximum time?

Mr. Anil Arora: I'd say a few weeks.

Mr. Joël Godin: You say a few weeks. Does that mean that the minister can tell you, a few weeks before the census is due to begin, to include all the questions on the long and short questionnaires?

Mr. Anil Arora: The census is something we do every five years. It does not come as a big surprise. For the 2021 Census, we are going to follow the same schedule that we have followed in the past.

Mr. Joël Godin: Let me say, Mr. Arora, that if the minister intends to get things right with respect to rights-holders, he will only have a few weeks to say no.

Since the census is in May 2021, does that mean that, before April 1, 2021, he can say yes?

Mr. Anil Arora: Unfortunately, no. We need a decision much sooner.

Mr. Joël Godin: How much time do you need?

Mr. Anil Arora: As I told you, a few weeks.

Mr. Joël Godin: What's the deadline? Do you understand my question?

Mr. Anil Arora: I will let my colleague Mr. Dufour answer you.

Mr. Stéphane Dufour (Assistant Chief Statistician, Census, Regional Services and Operations Sector, Statistics Canada): Since I'm in charge of operations, I can tell you that, according to our current procedures, we are going to have a lot of logistical problems if we don't start printing by the end of July 2020.

The Chair: We will move on to Mr. Arseneault, who will have five minutes.

Mr. René Arseneault: Mr. Arora, what is the purpose of the short-form census?

Mr. Anil Arora: The census consists of a short form and a long form, which are used to enumerate the population in each of the small areas of Canada.

• (1650)

Mr. René Arseneault: Why don't we just use a long-form census? What purpose does the short form serve?

Mr. Anil Arora: It is used to better enumerate the population.

Mr. René Arseneault: Why do you say "better enumerate"?

Mr. Anil Arora: By better enumerate, we mean getting the exact population in each region. The federal government transfers billions of dollars to the provinces and communities based on these numbers.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you. So it is to get more accurate numbers.

Although you haven't yet told us what your recommendation to cabinet will be, we have all guessed it.

Schools and school boards across the country, both French and English, came to us and told us unanimously that these questions needed to be included in the short form. You have just told us that the short form makes it possible to better enumerate the population. You are sensitive to these stakeholders' requests and will be pleased to know that they think exactly the same way you do. They are unanimously requesting that these questions be included in the short form.

My question is really simple, and I'm asking you for a simple answer because I think you have the intellectual capacity to answer with a yes or a no: am I right to believe that, when our minister has to decide between the short form or the long form to enumerate rights-holders in accordance with section 23 of the Charter, it would not be unreasonable for the government to opt for the short form?

Mr. Anil Arora: I have already answered several times.

Mr. René Arseneault: Tell me yes or no, Mr. Arora.

Am I correct that it would not be unreasonable for the government, in this case, to choose the short form?

Mr. Anil Arora: It is the government's decision, that is, it's the cabinet's by law.

Mr. René Arseneault: In the case I just gave you, would it be unreasonable—I emphasize that word—for the government to choose the short form, yes or no?

Mr. Anil Arora: It is not up to us to determine who...

Mr. René Arseneault: I am not talking about you, Mr. Arora. I'm talking about the government.

Mr. Anil Arora: May I answer?

Mr. René Arseneault: No, you never answer the questions.

My question is simple, with what I have just explained to you and the purpose of the short form you gave, am I right in saying that it would not be unreasonable for the government to believe that the short form is the best solution?

Mr. Anil Arora: We are statisticians. For us, only science, statistics and methodology matter. We will provide our best advice. Then, it will be up to the government, to you, to the cabinet to decide, in accordance with the law.

Mr. René Arseneault: Mr. Arora, with your science, with all your experience and after hearing everything that the various stakeholders told us last Tuesday—since you did send someone to attend the meeting—why are you not able to answer this simple question that is so important to the stakeholders?

My question is very simple. Let me repeat it: am I right in saying that it would not be unreasonable for the government to choose the short form to enumerate the rights-holders, in this case? I'm talking about the government and I am appealing to your science and your experience.

Mr. Anil Arora: I understand completely how important this matter is. We are truly committed to providing you with high-quality data...

Mr. René Arseneault: Mr. Chair, the witness is not answering the questions.

It's annoying, Mr. Arora.

The Chair: Mr. Arseneault, please let Mr. Arora finish responding. He still has about 30 seconds left.

Mr. Anil Arora: We are very much prepared under the act to collect data in order to work with stakeholders to establish and maintain a system. That's really what this country needs in terms of a very significant population. We are really prepared to do our best. Our goal really is to provide the data.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arora.

Mr. Arseneault, please, I have to give the floor to Mr. Beaulieu for two and a half minutes.

• (1655)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I am less unhappy when I ask questions about something other than the rights-holders. It would have been nice of you to let us know that you had not finished analyzing the tests, so that we could meet with you when you could tell us about them.

I have another question. The answer to the question I asked earlier about the distribution of multiple responses was not clear. You said that, in the past, when a person answered “English” and “French”, half of them were counted as francophones while the other half were counted as anglophones. Now, both are counted, and that produces numbers. You said when someone answers in French, they are counted as French. So, you did that to increase the percentage of each language group. Do I understand you correctly?

Mr. Anil Arora: I said that there are a number of questions for which multiple responses are reasonable. That's something you would expect. With respect to rights-holders, when someone says their language is French based on the three criteria...

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: My question was not about rights-holders.

I can ask you a question I had prepared. Until 1993, there was a question about where people came from. It showed that about 70% of people of French origin spoke English at home. This gave an idea of the cumulative assimilation and the harm done to French-speaking Acadian communities by all the assimilation laws.

Starting in 1993, you added the “Canadian” category. It totally mixed up the data. You can't get an idea of the breakdown anymore. Anyone, regardless of where they come from, can say they are Canadian. Why did you do that? Would it be possible to go back or adopt a method that would allow us to assess that?

Mr. Anil Arora: You are talking about ethnicity issues. The formula is based on the percentage of Canadians and the answers they give us. We don't choose the categories on the census, they reflect the responses from the previous census. The ethnic aspect is changing a lot as the years go by. The “Canadian” category was one example we included in the census to reflect responses from the previous census.

The Chair: Mr. Arora, thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Duvall, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

[English]

Mr. Scott Duvall: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all of you for coming here.

Mr. Arora, I know you're on the hot seat. You've really confused me. You have really done a good job.

Mr. Anil Arora: Let's see if I can fix it up.

Mr. Scott Duvall: Okay.

I asked you earlier about when you're going to put the recommendations to cabinet. If I remember it correctly, you told me that you don't know; it may be a couple of weeks or whatever. My colleague asked when they could provide the questions or they want to change questions. You're saying in a couple of weeks.

It sounds to me like what's going to be on the census forms is already going to be determined. You're going to send it to cabinet and they have no other choice but to accept it. If they do, they do it for the next one over.

That's what I'm hearing here. I'm getting really different answers. It's very frustrating that I asked questions earlier and my colleague

asked his questions now, and I'm kind of getting really different points. Then this gentleman here, Mr. Dufour, even said something further, like maybe you can do it in the summer. You don't know when the cabinet dates are, so what is it?

Could you just help me out here?

Mr. Anil Arora: Let me see if I can just clarify it. As you said, the decision about the content that ultimately lands on the census questionnaire is a decision that's made by Governor in Council, by cabinet and then, subsequent to that decision, is gazetted—30 days, give or take, after that decision is made.

We're in the last stages, because obviously the census is coming up, so it's going to be very shortly that the government is going to have to make that decision about what is the ultimate content of the census. That's not something new. Every five years we do the census; it's at about this time, give or take, that they make the decision on the questionnaire.

Obviously, Statistics Canada, based on the testing we've done, gives our best advice as to what works or not through our testing—through qualitative testing, through the advisory committee that we put together, through the quantitative testing that we've done—and it's ultimately cabinet that says, “Okay, this is a question that we want and this is the content of the census questionnaire” and then we carry it out.

That process hasn't changed and I'm sorry if there's any confusion, but that's the process and that's where we are at this stage. That's why I assume we're here.

● (1700)

[Translation]

The Chair: I would say that, given the time, we're going to be able to do a fourth round, but at two minutes per party. That way, Mr. Arora will be able to answer the questions.

I will first give the floor to Mr. G  n  reux for two minutes.

Mr. Bernard G  n  reux: Mr. Arora, I don't know where to begin. I am putting myself in the shoes of the people listening to us today, who are going to hear your expert testimony. I liked what Ms. Lattanzio said earlier about being a lawyer and that the experts we invite are here to give their opinions. Mr. Arseneault asked you for an opinion. When asked whether it would be unreasonable for the government to include the questions in the short form census, you did not answer. You are an expert on the subject, as are your colleagues, and we're asking a question today as parliamentarians. As legislators, we're here to draft and enact legislation. When we ask, you are not in a position to answer a question that I too consider to be relatively simple. As an expert who cares about the situation of rights-holders across Canada, you are not in a position to answer.

Why won't you just say whether or not you think the cabinet should go one way or another to get the best possible data?

[English]

Mr. Anil Arora: One, our statistical advice is something that the courts ask us, not every day, but from time to time. We go, we defend that advice and we defend our sampling methods. Regardless of what decision gets made on this, we will be there to provide our best statistical advice and stand up for the quality of the data we provide.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard G  n  reux: Okay, but you understand that people have wanted data for decades to be able to get the services in their community. Now you're telling me that, when the Supreme Court calls you as a witness, you tell them that you can't just tell a minister or a department to do this or that. We are asking you the question. We are legislators just as much as the minister is.

[English]

Mr. Anil Arora: As I've said, we will stand behind the quality of the data that Canadians need and that you as legislators need to make important decisions. We have done that for decades and we will continue to do that, sir.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Samson has the floor for two minutes.

[English]

Mr. Darrell Samson: I need a quick, short answer.

Listen, we know statistically that it's very important and you do a good job. That's not what this is about. All we want to know is this. I went through the survey a few minutes ago. Is it true that most people will only have to answer one of the five questions—the added questions—because it's not for them?

Is it going to take a lot longer to answer the short survey with five questions because only five per cent are going to answer all of them because they don't apply? Is it true that they only apply to a small group of entitled parents?

Mr. Anil Arora: We've designed the questionnaire as it was administered, to your point, in 2019 to make sure that we keep the burden to a minimum, and I think you proved in quite eloquent terms that it works.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Very good, so we can't say that it's going to take too long or that people will get discouraged, because they're only going to answer the ones that are appropriate.

Thank you for that.

In consultation, did the committee you worked with give any opinions on whether it should be a short or long survey? Everybody who came here said short, so did you ask the committee experts for an opinion on that?

• (1705)

Mr. Anil Arora: They know exactly what we were testing, the different versions of the questionnaire. They know that we've tested it in different ways—

Mr. Darrell Samson: Did they express one preferred over the other, short or long survey?

Mr. Anil Arora: One, that's not their mandate.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I appreciate that, but everybody who came here said short.

You know, you also admitted that the short survey, because of your exact facts.... You know everything about it because everybody receives it, which is important. My colleague talked about 3,000 households in a community, and only 100 households in that community are French. Is it possible you wouldn't touch one of the 100 if you're only giving it to 25%? Is that possible—not probable—but possible? You only have 100 out of 3,000. Is it possible nobody in the 100 gets it, yes or no?

Mr. Anil Arora: The answer is no.

Mr. Darrell Samson: It's not possible?

Mr. Anil Arora: It's not possible. Through the statistical sampling, the way it works, what we do.... I'll just explain it. We take the list of addresses in a geography, there's a random-number start, and every fourth household after that—

Mr. Darrell Samson: Yes, but is it possible that none of the 100 will get it?

Mr. Anil Arora: In over 50 years of sampling, we have never—

Mr. Darrell Samson: Is it possible it's less than five, like four, three?

Mr. Anil Arora: I've explained.

Mr. Darrell Samson: All I'm saying is that, if there are only a few, you're not going to get the exact—

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Samson, your time is up.

Thank you, Mr. Arora.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have two minutes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Arora, I think you could at least give the different hypotheses, the pros and cons.

I will let you finish your answer to the question about the ethnicity of Canadians. I'm not sure that adding the “Canadian” category in the response choices is such a good idea, since anyone could answer “Canadian”. It would then be impossible to learn about people's ethnic origins and to see the cumulative assimilation of French-speaking and Acadian communities and the harm they have suffered.

Mr. Anil Arora: It is not a category we added, but one of the examples of the response sometimes given. The question simply asks people for their ethnic origin, and some people answered “Canadian”.

In addition, we did a study on the whole issue of ethnicity. We will share the report and the results with you if you are interested.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Perfect.

I will get back to the rights-holders, quickly. You said your test results would be made public before you submit them to cabinet.

Mr. Anil Arora: That's not what I said. The results will be made public after the cabinet makes its decision. These issues are addressed in the recommendations.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu and Mr. Arora.

[English]

Mr. Duvall, you have two minutes.

Mr. Scott Duvall: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thanks, Mr. Arora.

I need to ask this question. Just hypothetically, we're going to get a census here. I'm going to every fourth person and ask, "Are you a Canadian? Were you born in Canada?" That will be the question. Are you telling me that I'm going to get great, quality data just by asking three out of these 12 people?

Mr. Anil Arora: If you go to 3.7 million households in Canada and ask them that question, and you have the statistical rigour and the expertise to be able to weight that up to a population and to benchmark it to the fact that we've asked that question for the last so many censuses, yes, you will get a very good answer, one that you can repeat over and over again with a different sample. We can actually tell you the difference in the variability between one sample and the next. That's what we do all the time.

Mr. Scott Duvall: Okay. Thank you for that, but I must have gone to the wrong school. I look at everybody's vote. That's how I get the census of what the people are actually voting on or what they're saying, by asking each individual. I don't get it by skipping every three people, that's for sure. We'll never get a census out of that.

What would be the consequences of putting it only on the short form or the long form, missing one or the other?

• (1710)

Mr. Anil Arora: As I've explained before, if you put it on the short form, you are subjecting—notwithstanding the point that was made earlier about the reduction of burden—a response from a number of those, obviously, who are pertinent to that.... On the long form, it's the same thing. Now, there are questions of costs. There are questions of burdens. There are some quality issues that can also, by the way, enter into this. Just because you put it on the short questionnaire and administered it to all Canadians, there are non-sampling errors, if you like, that start to creep in. Some people may not understand the question and may give you what's called a false positive or a false negative.

Administering it on the short form doesn't always guarantee that you're going to get a better estimation. You could actually start to over-.... You could get responses from people who maybe don't understand what they're saying. Our statistical methods benchmark for those kinds of things. We have post-censal studies that adjust for those kinds of things.

Mr. Scott Duvall: We just want to make sure all the people are counted.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Duvall. Your time is up.

I'd like to thank Mr. Arora, Ms. Barr-Telford and Mr. Dufour for coming to testify for our study on the enumeration of rights-holders.

We're going to suspend for a few minutes.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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