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BEYOND THE HORSERACE

THE LONGER TERM VIEW FROM THE PUBLIC

JANUARY 14, 2012

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INTRODUCTION

Is there anything sadder than a pollster without a horserace? The fever pitch of real and imagined perturbations in an electorate vibrating to the vagaries of minority governments has been displaced by the serenity of a clear majority government. Not only are the Conservatives ascendant in the House of Commons, they have a clear majority in the Senate and are refashioning public institutions such as public service, the courts, and the media to support their goal of a new era with Conservatives as the new “natural governing party”. Stephen Harper’s Conservatives are on the verge of achieving the fruition of their patiently executed strategy to allow Canada to discover its inner Conservative child. The only mild uncertainty is another opportunity to drub the newly anaemic Liberals and the upstart NDP opposition, now leaderless and reeling with a neophyte caucus stripped of its top talent seeking leadership in some distant federal election. There appears to be no obstacle in the path of the Conservative machine’s continued dominance and the pollster has been reduced to tortured interpretations of what essentially meaningless vote intention data might mean for an indifferent public.

The current majority reflects a broad national fatigue with horse races and the fractious and unstable dynamics of the past decade. This sentiment, coupled with a high degree of risk aversion in an economically anxious and aging Canada were the key drivers of the last majority. This result was not only the product of these active factors; there were other more passive yet crucial factors which shaped the final outcome. Increasingly, there is a profound generational gap emerging in Canada. Whereas older Canada opted for prudence and stability, younger Canada largely stayed home. A blend of indifference and disapproval of politics has produced burgeoning

levels of disengagement in younger Canada. Not only is Canada older than it has ever been, the relative political advantage of older Canada has been amplified by a steep fallout in younger voter participation and a newfound senior consensus around conservatism. This may reflect the still lingering echo of September 11th and a more astute and political playbook in conservative politics but there is little question that this political landscape is very different and unexpected from what we saw at the outset of this century, when liberal and progressive governments seemed to have an unshakable stranglehold over the political world that experts are now bestowing on conservatives. Yet the received wisdom of a decade ago was wrong and perhaps we should pause and reflect on something other than a nonexistent horserace.

In this coming series of columns and reports we want to shift away from the obsessive media focus on the horserace and offer an alternative approach to polling. While retaining a commitment to the increasingly elusive goal of scientific representativeness, we want to look at the deeper issues facing the country. We want to move from the hurly burly of the race to a more in depth consideration of where the public are and where they wish to go. We want to have citizens themselves select the top issues they want to discuss with their leaders and we want to engage them using reflection and information. We want to hear the voices of all Canadians but we are not satisfied with the nostrum that if one didn't vote, too bad lost your turn and we will see you in four years (maybe). This is particularly unacceptable when we now have most of under 40 Canada staying home and when this may well be a product of conscious political strategies designed to suppress their participation. The missing voices of under 40 Canada are crucial to the economic, cultural, and political well-being of this country. If our politics is teetering into the realms of oligarchy and gerontocracy then perhaps the tools of representative sampling coupled with the capacity for citizen engagement through the power of new electronic technologies, can redress some of this lacuna. If politics is becoming less and less democratic, maybe a rethought polling strategy become more so.

We will be releasing this poll in six parts, including this first release which will look at Canadians' outlook on the country. The series will conclude with the winning choices for national conversations.

1.0: NEW MORNING OR JUST MOURNING?

In this initial release of a six-part series we examine the public's outlook on the country. This release is intended to be an introduction to the more important series which will examine how citizens see the future and what national conversations they select as most important from their perspective.

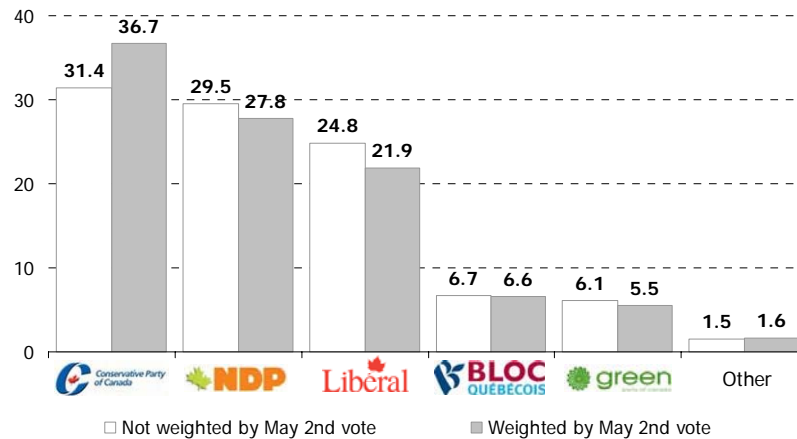
Many of the year end reviews of the political landscape have suggested that the country is experiencing a growing level of comfort with a new Conservative majority. The consensus seems to be that the government's remarkable political success last May was a prelude to a new era of Conservative dominance tantamount (at least) to the historical successes of the erstwhile "natural governing party", the now hapless Liberal Party of Canada. Moreover, the view is that this incipient dynasty is producing broad confidence and satisfaction with the public.

Whereas the government's political success is indeed impressive, it would appear from a review of key barometers of approval that the depiction of a new national spring might be somewhat premature and, more pointedly, the country is divided into those who are very pleased with national direction and those who are underwhelmed. In fact, the review of some of the longer term tracking indicators suggest that enthusiasm for the new government is tightly pocketed within those who voted for the government and that the overall national outlook is more sour than sweet. The media and intelligentsia may be bestowing a consensual nod to the continued dominance of the Harper political machine, but there are some troubling signals emerging from the citizenry themselves. This puzzling gap between what the public are telling us and what the punditocracy is telling us may reflect a widening rift between voting and nonvoting Canada which reflects newer fault lines across generations, social classes and regions. These fault lines are by no means the familiar ones we have seen in Canada and they deserve careful attention.

Chart 1.1 – Federal vote intention



Q. If a federal election were held tomorrow, which party would you vote for?



Note: The data on federal vote intention are based on decided and leaning voters only.

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BASE: Decided voters; December 14-21, 2011 (n=1,908)






There is nothing more numbingly irrelevant than an update on a nonexistent horse race. While urging the media to wean itself off the collective ADHD which seems to have gripped it in recent years, we will provide the obligatory update of the party standings. Basically, the Conservatives continue to perform at about the same levels as they did last May (and they continue to do so with the same constituency of older, Anglophone males who propelled them to a majority). When we try and isolate the roughly 60% of Canadians who now vote, the Conservatives are basically in the same position as they were last May 2nd. When we broaden our focus to include all eligible voters, however, we find that they are supported by only about one in three voters.



Chart 1.2 – Vote intention demographics



Q. If a federal election were held tomorrow, which party would you vote for?

	Overall	Region	Gender	Age Group	Education
	31.4	AB (54.4%) SK/MB (42.0%) ON (34.6%)	Male (36.1%) Female (26.4%)	Under 25 (15.3%) 25-44 (27.6%) 45-64 (35.3%) 65+ (39.4%)	High Sch (37.6%) College (42.3%) University (23.1%)
	29.5	BC (35.9%) SK/MB (38.7%) QC (34.4%)	Male (24.5%) Female (35.0%)	Under 25 (38.3%) 25-44 (33.4%) 45-64 (27.3%) 65+ (23.2%)	High Sch (28.3%) College (24.5%) University (32.7%)
	24.8	ON (31.9%) Atlantic (33.3%)	Male (26.6%) Female (23.4%)	Under 25 (26.4%) 25-44 (22.4%) 45-64 (23.9%) 65+ (29.3%)	High Sch (16.0%) College (20.2%) University (30.0%)
	6.7	QC (27.4%)	Male (5.7%) Female (7.0%)	Under 25 (8.3%) 25-44 (6.9%) 45-64 (6.9%) 65+ (4.9%)	High Sch (10.3%) College (5.1%) University (6.7%)
	6.1	BC (13.5%)	Male (5.4%) Female (6.9%)	Under 25 (10.5%) 25-44 (7.5%) 45-64 (5.2%) 65+ (2.3%)	High Sch (6.6%) College (5.4%) University (6.5%)






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BASE: Decided voters; December 14-21, 2011 (n=1,908)

Chart 1.3 – Vote intention demographics (cont.)



Q. If a federal election were held tomorrow, which party would you vote for?

	Overall	Religious service (past 3 months)	Marital status	Visible minority	Place of birth*	First language
	31.4	0 (27.1%) 1 (31.1%) 2+ (43.8%)	Married (36.1%) Single (23.3%)	Yes (26.2%) No (32.4%)	Can (31.3%) Other (31.8%)	Eng (37.5%) Fr (13.2%)
	29.5	0 (32.3%) 1 (28.3%) 2+ (21.2%)	Married (26.4%) Single (33.6%)	Yes (36.1%) No (28.1%)	Can (29.7%) Other (28.9%)	Eng (28.6%) Fr (34.2%)
	24.8	0 (24.6%) 1 (25.9%) 2+ (25.4%)	Married (24.6%) Single (25.8%)	Yes (27.5%) No (24.4%)	Can (23.6%) Other (31.6%)	Eng (25.9%) Fr (19.1%)
	6.7	0 (7.7%) 1 (8.9%) 2+ (3.7%)	Married (5.7%) Single (8.6%)	Yes (2.8%) No (7.4%)	Can (7.7%) Other (0.5%)	Eng (0.0%) Fr (27.6%)
	6.1	0 (7.0%) 1 (3.8%) 2+ (5.5%)	Married (5.4%) Single (7.5%)	Yes (6.6%) No (6.1%)	Can (6.1%) Other (6.4%)	Eng (6.9%) Fr (3.3%)

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BASE: Decided voters; December 14-21, 2011 (n=1,908)

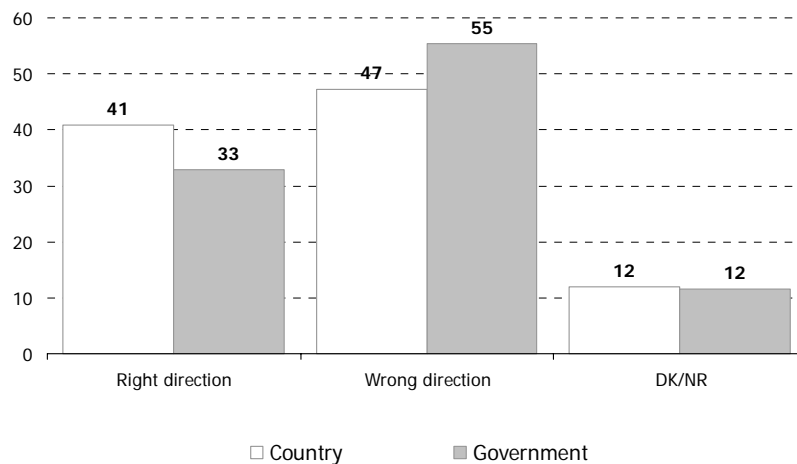


The apparent gap between all eligible voters and the election result is largely a product of better get-out-the-vote by the Conservatives¹. In fact, the Conservatives are doing much better with the groups that matter most politically – the actual voting public. Just as Canada has become older than it ever has been (hence increasing the clout of older voters) two other linked phenomena have occurred. One, the newly muscular senior vote has become remarkably unified in support of the Conservative Party and two; the numerically disadvantaged younger vote has opted out of voting in numbers which are a fraction of how younger voters have participated in the past. Much of the apparent “blueing” of the Canadian public is restricted to the diminished fraction of our society that is participating in elections. As a whole, and even more pointedly in non-voting Canada, the shift to the right is much harder to see.

Chart 1.4 – Direction of country/government



Q. All things considered, would you say the country/Government of Canada is moving in the right direction or the wrong direction?



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BASE: Canadians (half-sample each); December 14-21, 2011 (n=997/1,008)

Beyond the tediously irrelevant horserace numbers, what else do we see out there? First of all, the broad directional numbers for the country and the federal government are not the crisis like numbers evident in places like the USA but they fall short of a new “morning in Canada”. In fact, outside of the one in three core supporters for the government, the more apt description may well be “mourning in Canada”. Only 41 percent believe that the country is headed in the right direction and that number plummets to just one in three (mirroring Conservative support on vote intention) when asked about the direction of the federal government². When we look at certain

¹ For evidence of this point, see our retrospective analysis of the May 2nd election titled “Accurate Polling, Flawed Forecast”, accessible online at: http://www.ekospolitics.com/wp-content/uploads/accurate_polling_flawed_forecast.pdf

² The shift to an online, self-administered survey will produce somewhat lower satisfaction numbers due to the absence of social desirability effects. For further reading, please see:

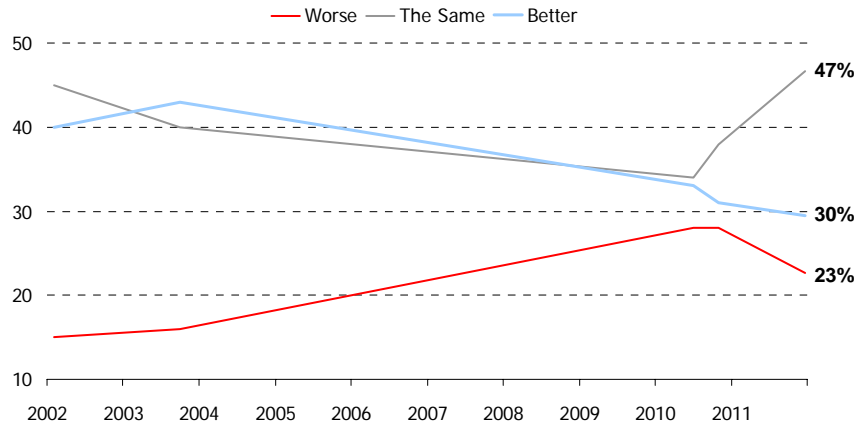
key groups, such as Quebeckers, the university educated, and the younger citizens of Canada, the outlook on the country and particularly the government is nothing short of bleak. By corollary, the sense of a new spring or morning is very strong amongst the current Conservative constituency which includes Albertans, older Canada, those who are living with families, and those who attend church. These positive sentiments are also somewhat higher among males and the college educated. We see these patterns of approval and disapproval permeating our research. It is also worth noting that there is a sizable group of Canadians who fall into the ambivalent or uninterested category.



Chart 1.5 – Short-term personal financial outlook



Q. Thinking ahead over the next year or so, do you think your personal financial situation will be better or worse than it is today?



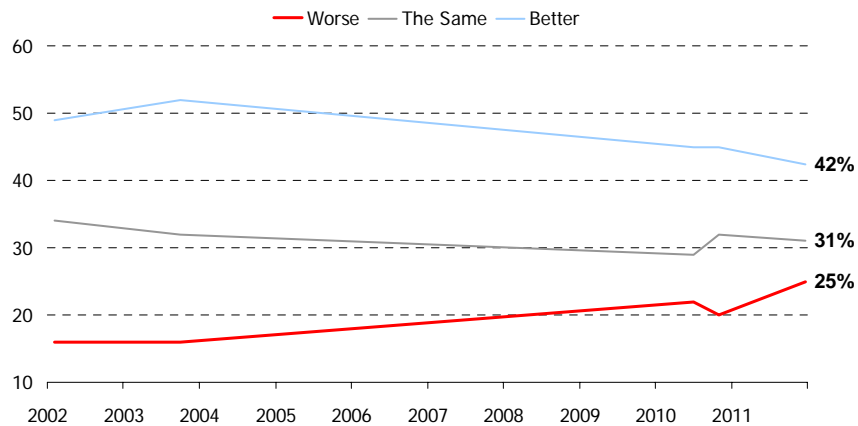
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BASE: Canadians (half-sample); most recent data point December 14-21, 2011 (n=1,027)

Chart 1.6 – Long-term personal financial outlook



Q. Thinking ahead over the next five years or so, do you think your personal financial situation will be better or worse than it is today?



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BASE: Canadians (half-sample); most recent data point December 14-21, 2011 (n=978)

Public outlook on the economy is not pretty. Canadians' sense of the shorter term economic outlook is much less positive than it was several years ago and the pattern is to an increasingly

gloomy outlook. In terms of the next year or so the most notable movement is a sharp spike up in the sense of things will be the same, but a gentle yet steady long term slide in short term optimism. This growing sense of stagnation and decline can be quite grinding and may wear on the popularity of incumbent governments as time goes on.

There was little doubt that shorter term insecurity worked in favour of incumbent governments in Ottawa and Queen's Park in the past year. It is a much more open question whether longer term persistence of stagnation will weigh heavier on governments in the longer term. Further to this question, we have data on trends in how Canadians see the longer term economy evolving for them as well as their longer term views on the future political landscape. To the degree that the public as prognosticators might be correct, both measures may be a source of concern to the current government.

In terms of the five year outlook on whether things will be better or worse, there is less clarity than in the case of the one year outlook but the overall trends are to mildly rising pessimism and eroding optimism. Negative views are stronger among older Canadians and the economically vulnerable (lower socioeconomic status). Somewhat surprisingly, the East-West patterns where the West enjoys greater confidence in the current economic outlook flips when Canadians are looking at the longer term. In this case, citizens from Ontario to the Atlantic are relatively more optimistic in their long term outlook than those in the West.

In conclusion, it appears that the question of whether Canada is experiencing a new morning or simply mourning depends on who we ask. Conservative Canada is very happy with the current directions and this includes many groups who have been historically alienated from federal politics. The rest of Canada is more glum or indifferent with the 'mourning' characterisation really limited mostly to younger Canada, Quebec and, more secular and highly educated Canada. Even though dissatisfaction is more prevalent than approval, there is little to suggest that any of this is politically threatening to the government's success in the shorter term. The real questions lie in the longer term effects which we will examine in more detail in the coming portions of this release.

2.0 Trust in Democracy: A National Check-Up

It will come as little surprise that our review of Canada's democratic health produces some spotty results. What may be more interesting is what the trend lines are, what seems to be producing trust and mistrust and which aspects of our democracy is seen as most in need of attention. There are some ironies and contradictions as well which will become clearer as we consider the issue of alternatives to the status quo and how prominently issues of democracy reckon in the public hierarchy of preference national conversations. Some 'alternatives' may be contributing to the very problems they are seen to be helping (e.g. social media) and whereas some aspects of the problem are seen as surprisingly low priorities (e.g. voter turnout and youth disengagement), the overall issue of eroding democratic health does appear around the top of the list of preferred National conversations.

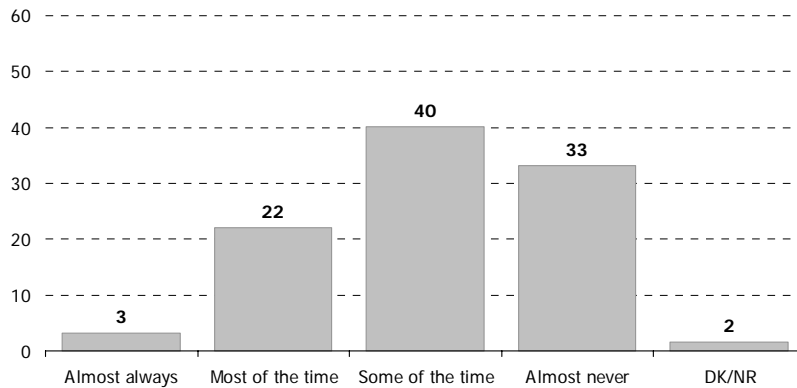
In addition to standard directional and approval measures, we also use some longer term tracking indicators that get at the deeper problems of institutional mistrust. One of those indicators asks citizens how much they trust the government in Ottawa (or Washington in the United States) to do the right thing most or all of the time. Today in Canada, the incidence of those who pick all or most of the time is only 26%. That number compares very poorly to the salad days of the sixties when the government enjoyed the trust of a clear majority of citizens in both Canada and the United States. As shown in Chart 2.1, however, this current mark is pretty typical of the numbers witnessed in both Canada and the USA over the past couple of decades.

The fact that the chart shows the numbers working in lockstep in Canada and the USA punctures the oft held belief that this erosion is caused by the local issues of the day (e.g., Watergate or Sponsorship). In fact, the steep decline – which Nevitte linked to the decline of deference – is part of a broader decline in trust which has occurred throughout the advanced western world. The key driver of this broad decline in trust has been a growing conviction that the public interest has become subordinate to the private interests of political parties, big business, and other groups while average citizens have become an afterthought. The Conservatives cannot be pleased that they have seen four successive declines since moving the trust needle up after the 2008 election, but the Sisyphean challenges of "restoring trust in government" lie well outside the grasp of any single government.

Chart 2.1 – Trust in government



Q. How much do you trust the government in Ottawa to do what is right?



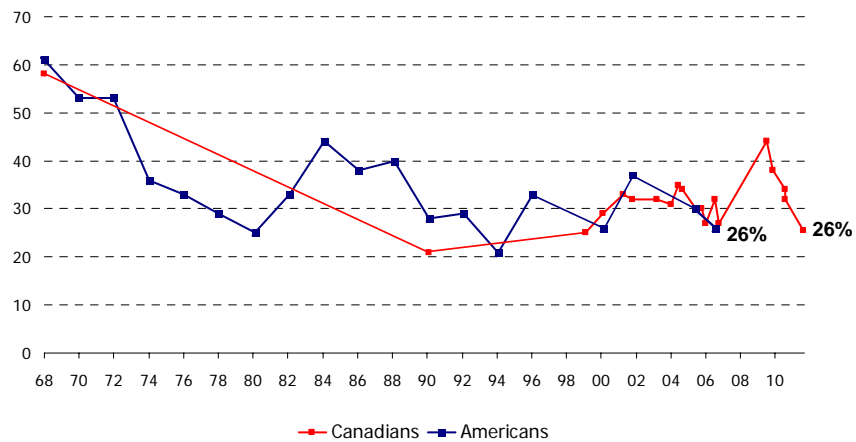
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BASE: Canadians; December 14-21, 2011 (n=2,005)

Chart 2.2 – Tracking trust in government



Q. How much do you trust the government in Ottawa/Washington to do what is right?



Note: Most recent figure recalculated to exclude those who answered "Don't know/No response".

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BASE: Canadians; most recent data point December 14-21, 2011 (n=2,005)



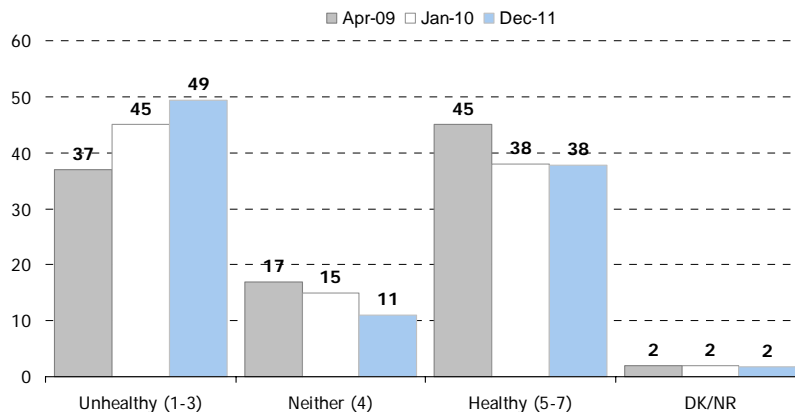
Another shorter term indicator shows similar poor results and a pattern of recent decline. Over the past couple of years, the public rating of democratic health has gone from a plurality healthy to a plurality unhealthy. Taken together, these two indicators and their trend lines paint a picture of marginal public trust which is moving in a more negative manner recently. The underlying anatomy of trust is also interesting. Somewhat obviously, one of the key correlates of trust is party preference. Conservative supporters are very trusting of the government in Ottawa; all other supporters, not so much. In fact, outside of the Conservative supporters, the clear majority of all other citizens rate our overall democratic health as unhealthy.

So what are the conditions most associated with trust? Other than voting for the winner, it appears that positive views are strongest in Alberta (negative views are by far strongest in Quebec). This regional finding mirrors earlier research we have conducted showing Alberta is now the centre of happiness in Canada³ (and perhaps trust which some argue is closely linked to social capital and cohesion). Similarly, the very low levels of trust in Quebec are also consistent with other lower measures of social cohesion in Quebec. Two other interesting correlates of higher trust are religiosity (i.e., regular church attendance) and living with family.

Chart 2.3 – Perceived Health of Democracy:



Q. How would you rate the overall health of democracy at the federal level in Canada?



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BASE: Canadians; most recent data point December 14-21, 2011 (n=2,005)

We now look beyond these very general social barometers to the more specific problems on people’s minds when they think of their apparently checkered democratic health. There are two dominant issues: concerns about the effectiveness of Parliament and the issue of proportional representation. We don’t have adequate evidence to fully understand which aspects of poor

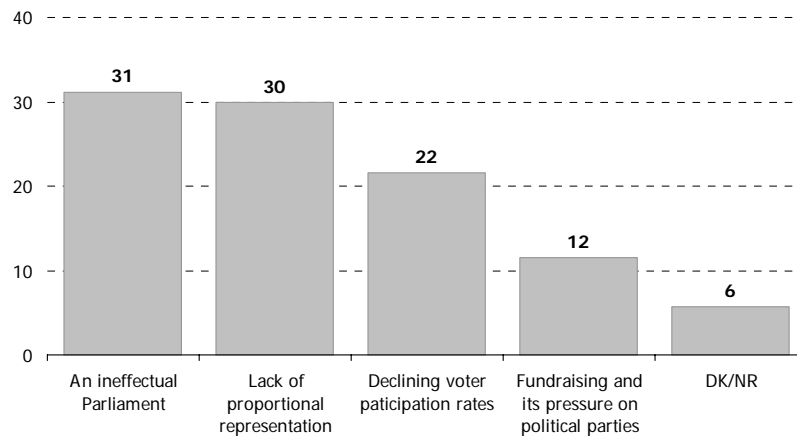
³ See our report on quality of life titled “Quality of Life in Canada” published on February 10th, 2011 and accessible online at: http://www.ekospolitics.com/wp-content/uploads/full_report_qol_2011.pdf

effectiveness place this issue at the top of the list. Questions of decorum are obvious, but it would be ironic if Canadians' search for the less fractious and more decisive character of majority governments now has them mourning the loss of an effective opposition.

Chart 2.4 – Biggest issue facing democracy



Q. Which of the following issues do think is the biggest problem with democracy in Canada?



Copyright 2011. No reproduction without permission. **BASE:** Those who do not rate the state of democracy as healthy; December 14-21, 2011 (n=1,548)

Consistent with earlier research that we and others have conducted, lack of proportional representation is another dominant concern. Canadians' basic sense of fairness leads them to support proportional representation, while large differences in the number of voters in different jurisdictions getting the same single Member of Parliament under our current first-past-the-post system lead them to feel this a major issue. It is particularly salient among young voters who, in past research, have told us that this is one of factors discouraging youth voting. It is also mildly surprising given the Greek chorus around declining voter participation that this is identified as an issue but not a top issue. This pattern will be seen again with the selected conversations in part 6 of this series – democratic health is a top issue; voter participation is only a modest issue. Finally, the issue of fundraising and the pressures it places on the political parties is seen as a relatively minor issue (a point which would bring the public into disagreement with many experts). Notably, the issue rates much higher in Quebec where there are still lingering corrosive impacts of the sponsorship scandal.

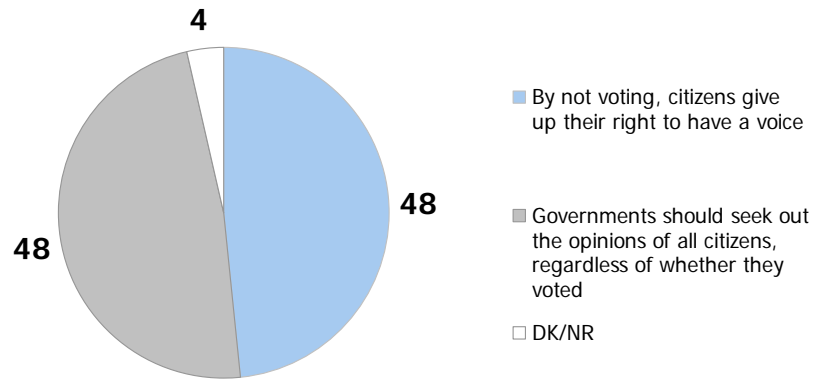
It may well be that the relatively lower ratings of the salience of voter turnout, against a backdrop of very deep concerns about overall democratic health, may reflect deep ambivalence about the responsibility to vote. In contrasting two forced choices – “non-voters give up their right to have a voice” versus “it is important to seek out the voices of those who didn't vote” – we see the public are exactly deadlocked on this important question. If one believes that not voting surrenders one's right to democratic input, then it may explain why issues of declining

voter rates receive relatively lower priority and indeed why voting rates themselves may have fallen. Half of Canadians feel that it is important to capture the opinions of all Canadians, even those who don't vote and this view is more popular amongst younger Canadians who are the very citizens who are least likely to vote. Some would argue that the very fact that these voices were missing in the last election makes it even more important to seek out some form of representation afterwards. Good polling tries to represent all members of the population equally. If politics is falling short of full representation at least polling should redress some of this shortfall.

Chart 2.5 – Do non-voters count?



Q. Voter participation rates in Canada have declined dramatically over the past two decades, particularly among young people. Some people argue that by not voting, a citizen gives up his or her right to have a voice in government. Others say that it is important for governments to seek out the opinions of all Canadians, even if they did not vote. Which of these statements comes closest to your own point of view?



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BASE: Canadians; December 14-21, 2011 (n=2,005)

The dynamics of the impact of the missing voters can be demonstrated more clearly with a specific policy example. Chart 2.7 shows public's response to the Government's recent decision to withdraw from the Kyoto Accord. As one can see, 53% oppose the decision and only 33% support it. For purposes of this illustration, we are not really that interested in this specific issue in and of itself but as a proxy for a broader issue. In a fascinating presentation at the National Arts Centre on the 41st election last fall, pollster Greg Lyle showed how this government achieved a majority with minority support on most of its key positions. He noted that the majority opposition tended to be scattered ineffectually across the other party choices while supporters were heavily concentrated in the governments supporters. Not only were the opponent scattered, but they were less likely to vote.

The Kyoto issue shows this in terms of generational impacts. When we look at older voters (over 45) the decision to exit Kyoto is opposed 56/44, but this is not a real political problem as most Conservative supporters are fine with the decision and the margin of opposition is modest. The more significant policy issue comes into clearer relief when we look at the under 45 citizens. Here



the margin of opposition is enormous at 70 to 30. But less than half of under-45 Canada is voting and most of over-45 Canada *is* voting. This profound gap between the preferences of younger Canada and older Canada is having no apparent impact on the policy decisions of the government. This lack of influence is a reflection of anaemic voting rates among younger voters. The research shows that older Canadians do not see this as a major issue and, later in this series, we will see that younger Canada is more prone giving up on traditional politics and political parties. Yet their enthusiasm for social media and new social movements like the occupy movement may, in fact, be reinforcing this problem and ceding their policy future to older Canada.

Chart 2.7 – Support for Kyoto withdrawal

Q. Lately, there has been a lot of debate over the Kyoto Protocol and whether or not Canada should officially withdraw. Would you support or oppose withdrawing from the Kyoto Protocol?

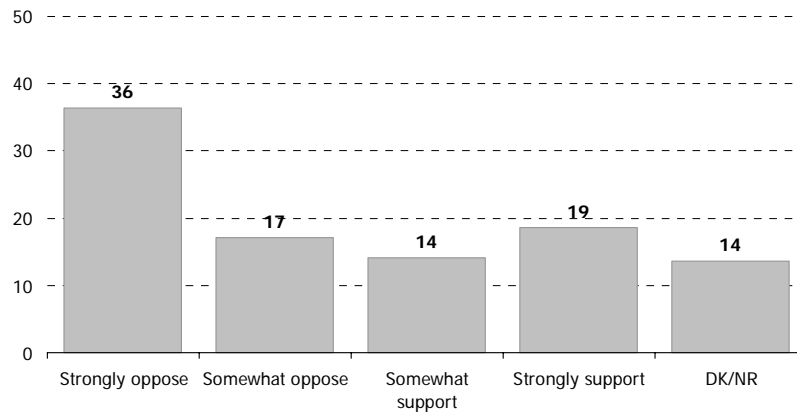
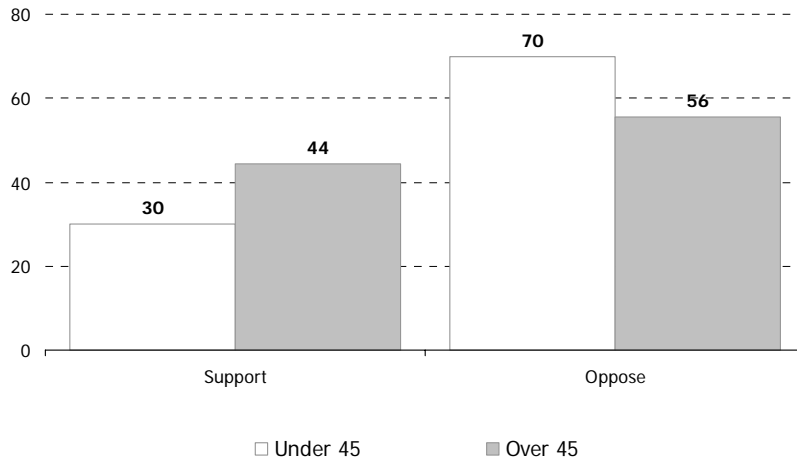




Chart 2.8 – Support for Kyoto withdrawal by age



Q. Lately, there has been a lot of debate over the Kyoto Protocol and whether or not Canada should officially withdraw. Would you support or oppose withdrawing from the Kyoto Protocol?



Note: Figures exclude those who replied DK/NR.

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BASE: Canadians; December 14-21, 2011 (n=2,005)

3.0 DEMOCRATIC ALTERNATIVES: POST-PARTY POLITICS?

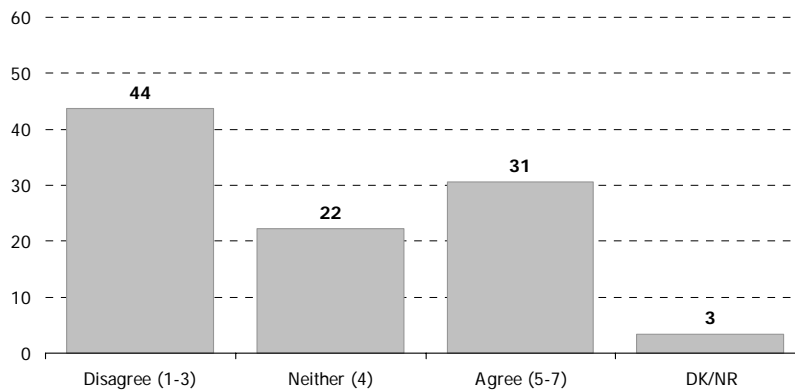
If democratic malaise is a serious and growing problem in Canada, particularly in the half of the population under our rising median age (now 42), what can and should be done about this? We see that concern with rates of voter decline is muted among those still voting and we see a cleavage on whether this is a serious issue lining up along generational lines. By way of illustration, a modest majority of all Canadians did not support the decision to leave the Kyoto accord but, opposition dramatically outstripped support among those under the median age, most of whom are not voting. In older, voting Canada, the sense is that this state of affairs is largely fine and that if you don't vote you lose your seat at the public table. In younger, non-voting Canada, however, there is massive mistrust and disagreement with key national decisions. We see that trust in democracy and government is declining to areas which cause one to think about issues of fundamental legitimacy.

Are pressures building for some sort of alternatives? Clearly, the public are very receptive to moving to some form of proportional representation⁴ and our earlier research has also shown strong support for both mandatory voting and online ballots. Here we look at some other alternatives. We also note the irony that some of these alternatives may actually be perpetuating the problem of lower voting rates in younger Canada.

Chart 3.1 – Usefulness of political parties



Q. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Political parties have outlived their usefulness and it is time for a new type of political institution"?



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BASE: Canadians; December 14-21, 2011 (n=2,005)

⁴ See our report on electronic voting titled "To Vote... Click Here" released on December 17, 2009 and accessible at: http://www.ekospolitics.com/wp-content/uploads/full_report_december_171.pdf

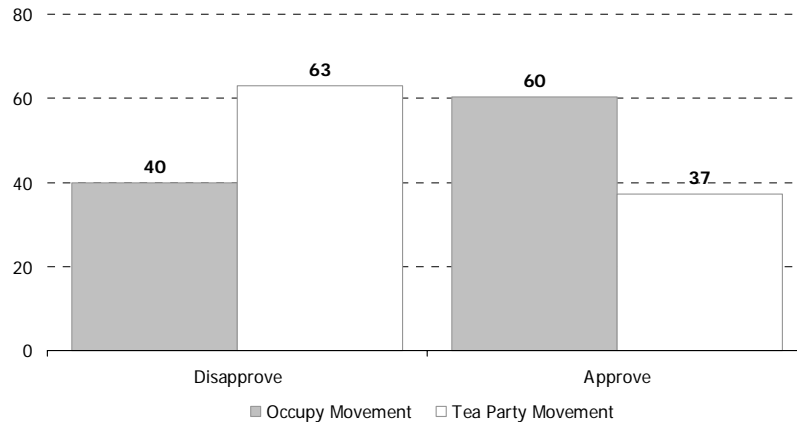
The decline in trust in government has been led not by eroding trust in parliamentary democracy, bureaucracy, or even elected representatives. Views of political parties have declined even more steeply than trust in other portions of government. We asked whether people agreed with the rather radical proposition that political parties had outlived their usefulness. This is radical in the sense that there really aren't any obvious alternatives out there at the moment. Nonetheless, only 44 per cent disagree and nearly one third agreed with 22 per cent undecided. This is less than a stirring endorsement of the political party as the central organizing engine of politics in Canada and members of the Liberal Party may want to ponder this rather tenuous connection with voters as they convene this weekend. In fact, the support for political parties is strongest among the supporters of the Liberals and Conservatives. NDP supporters are less convinced of the continued relevance of political parties and those who endorse the newer parties such as the Green Party and Bloc Quebecois are much more likely to see political parties as anachronisms. Many of the groups which are least likely to vote, particularly young Canadians, have scant fealty to the political party system and they seem to be opting out of traditional politics in increasing numbers. In a vicious circle, this cynicism and opting out may end up just muting their voices and ultimately reinforcing their decision that there is nothing of relevance for them in the world of voting and party politics.

When societal frustrations build to points where the institutional status quo cannot accommodate those tensions, we occasionally see the emergence of social movements. These movements begin outside of the mainstream political world but often will have a major impact on the mainstream political world. The civil rights and antiwar movements of the sixties would be good examples. There have been more violent and class rooted social movements in Europe, but as Western societies have aged, there have been less frequent and forceful social movements in recent decades. Over the past years we have seen a couple of significant new social movements occur (emanating from the United States). One is the Tea Party movement, which has largely remained in the United States and the other is the Occupy movement (which moved outside of the United States over the past year). While neither of these movements can fairly be compared to the earlier examples they were both powerful and both continue to exert unknown but sizable effects on the political mainstream.

Chart 3.2 – Support for political movements



- Q1. As you may know, the Occupy movement is an international protest movement which is primarily directed against economic and social inequality. Protesters will often organize marches and camp out in parks and other public spaces. Do you support or oppose this movement?
- Q2. As you may know, the Tea Party movement is an American political movement that is generally recognised as conservative and libertarian. The movement endorses reduced government spending and reduced deficits, and opposes taxation. Do you support or oppose this movement?



Note: Figures exclude those who replied DK/NR. Four per cent of respondents did not express an opinion regarding the Occupy movement, while 12 per cent did not express an opinion regarding the Tea Party movement.

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Although both the Tea Party movement and Occupy movements share a fundamental disaffection for the status quo and mainstream politics, they have quite different roots and goals (with some shared ones as well). Without pretending to look at these more complex issues, it is useful to examine how these movements are perceived in terms of basic approval and disapproval. Both movements represent unconventional expressions of the left (Democratic) and right (Republican) parties. Notably, both the Occupy and the Tea Party movements have increasingly been explicitly linked to traditional parties and the electoral politics in the United States. In Canada, this is not the case.

The older Tea Party movement enjoys the approval of about one-third of Canadians but does much better with many of the same groups it enjoys favour with in the United States (e.g., Conservatives, church goers, etc.) and it fares much better in Alberta. A majority (63 per cent) holds the movement in negative regard but this negativity is much more strenuous than the positive sentiments. Negative views are very strong in Quebec, younger Canada and the university educated; all in all not a very favourable outlook.

The Occupy movement is focused on inequality and it finds favourable approval overall by a majority of 60% with 40% negatively disposed. Support is a mirror image of the Tea Party support with strong sympathy in Quebec, non-Conservative supporters, and younger Canada. It is worth noting that we would find that the voting rates among those who sympathize with the Occupy movement are significantly lower than those who don't.

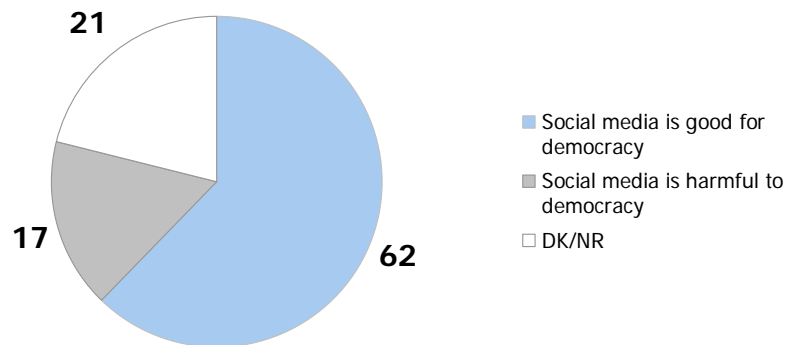
These results, and results from the wining national conversations, may bring into question the notion that the Occupy movement has been a failure. It has produced positive resonance with

the Canadian public and seems particularly resonant with some of the groups that are most disaffected with traditional politics and their parties. It may also be the case that the allure of non-traditional democratic alternatives may be reinforcing alienation from the mainstream and hence perpetuating non-voting.

Chart 3.3 Role of social media in democracy



Q. As you know, the use of social networking websites such as Facebook and Twitter has increased dramatically in recent years. Some people argue that social media is good for democracy since it offers new ways of participating in politics and communicating with the public. Other people argue that social networking is harmful to democracy, since many people will use these websites as a substitute for real world action. Which of these statements comes closest to your own point of view?



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No force has been more profound in reshaping society, economy and polity than the internet. An obscure phrase 20 years ago is now the new mass universal media. Some have argued that the interactive Web 2.0, led by Facebook, Twitter and other social media is having similarly explosive impacts as the first wave of the internet. Basic concepts of community and privacy are being reshaped in unexpected ways and politics has been no exception. Whereas social media are ubiquitous in younger Canada, they are relatively less present in over 45 Canada and this generational fault line mirrors some of the broader generational tensions we have been discussing.

The survey tested the degree to which new social media were seen as having a positive transformative effect on democracy and politics versus the alternate view that they were a distraction and having a corrosive impact on democracy. In the public's mind this is no contest. By a margin of three-to-one the public pick the positive option. We are not so sure they are right on this point.

First of all, this strong majority view strays very close to the realm of unanimity in the case of younger Canada. Anecdotally Liberal supporters are equally positive while Conservatives are less enthusiastic.

We find it mildly curious that such uncritical blanket optimism for this new form of alternative democracy, particularly in younger Canada, coexists with such dismal levels of confidence in politics and democracy. Given the increased stranglehold that older Canada is exerting over politics and the large gap in the priorities and values of older and younger Canada, it must be the case that this optimism is directed to future fruition rather than established achievements. Just as social media have been exploding this growing disconnection of younger Canada from the political sphere has been worsening. It was Neil Postman who argued in *Amusing Ourselves to Death* that Huxley's future dystopia was more prescient than Orwell's 1984. At the heart of the differences was a society where trivial and idle amusement were disconnecting citizens from controlling their own future and interest. Social media may well achieve the enormous promise that citizens place in it but the record so far would suggest that the results look closer to the amusing ourselves to death concept than seizing our future.

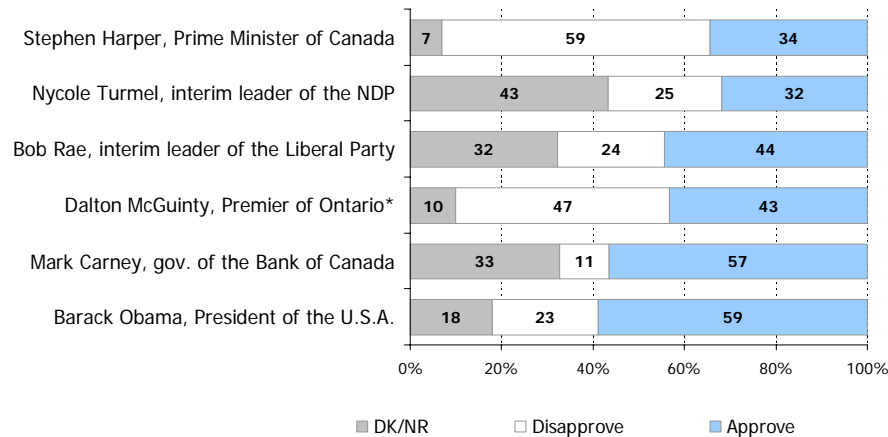
4.0 WHO DO YOU LIKE?

Following a tough slog through democratic trust and alternative institutional arrangements for the future perhaps a more familiar review of approval ratings can serve as a light interlude before we conclude with Canadians' predictions for election 2015 (yikes!) and their selected top preferences for national conversations.

Chart 4.1 – Job approval ratings



Q. Do you approve or disapprove of the way ... is handling his job?



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Chart 4.1 is fairly self-explanatory. Let's start with Prime Minister Stephen Harper. Our most recognized leader produces the same polarized responses that we saw on the directional number for the federal government. With 34 per cent approval he slightly exceeds his party's standing and he enjoys near universal approval amongst his supporters, who are all basking in the dawn of Canada's new morning. For the rest of Canada, it is almost all disapproval (the just mourning segment of the country). The approval numbers closely mirror the demographics of party support we discussed earlier. What may be mildly disconcerting to the Prime Minister is the rise in disapproval over the past two years. The keyword, however, is "mild", as this rise in disapproval has coincided with successfully achieving majority government and his third successive government, which I am sure, are far more gratifying than his disapproval numbers.

Nycole Turmel remains the least familiar leader with very high "don't knows". While benefiting from very little negative sentiment with 25 per cent disapproval, she has approval numbers lower than her party's support. The jury is clearly still out on Ms. Turmel, but these numbers are much less auspicious than for her predecessor and this problem is reflected in the public's view of her

party's future prospects. Obviously the NDP future is, like the Liberals, hugely clouded by the question of who will lead.

Bob Rae is showing some surprising strength for a caretaker presiding over a party with one foot in the grave according to Peter Newman. With 44 per cent approval, he eclipses the Prime Minister's rating and with only 25 per cent disapproval he is seeing some receptivity from Canadians if he should decide to throw his hat in the ring again. One striking finding for those who caution about his Ontario record as his unshakable albatross: Bob Rae fares better in Ontario than in the rest of the country and he has a very regionally even distribution of approval. By contrast, Mr. Harper receives laurels in Alberta and raspberries in Quebec.

Some have suggested Ontario's premier Dalton McGuinty could be the next Liberal saviour. Fresh from an unexpected and impressive victory in Ontario, his approval numbers would do little to extinguish that idea. His main problem is a relatively high disapproval rating, but as Mr. Harper has vividly demonstrated, levels of disapproval are not the problem.

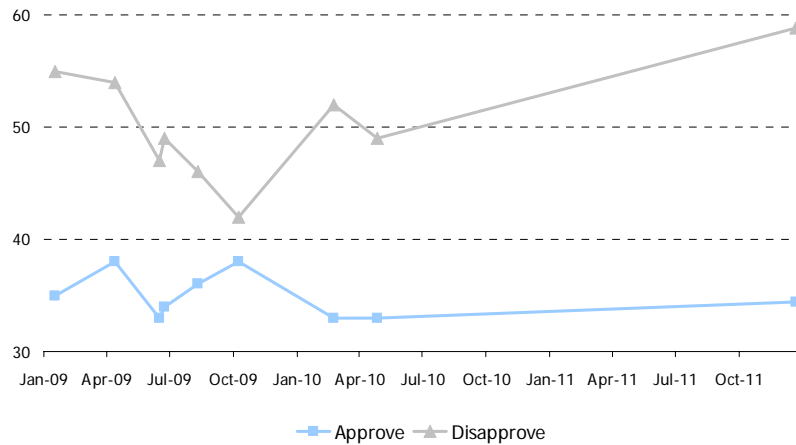
In the interest of little more than pure mischief, we complicate Mark Carney's already formidably challenging jobs by noting that he has the highest approval rating of all Canadians and ties the still (in Canada) revered President Barack Obama. Unlike Obama, he has virtually no negatives and we doubt that his trajectory is downward as in the case of President Obama. Perhaps even more remarkably, Mark Carney's blue ribbon rating with the public is equally strong among both Conservatives and Liberals – a rare point of agreement. Mark Carney may be the future Chuck Norris of Canadian politics; perhaps he can show up for the face off against Putin.

Finally, President Obama is probably ruefully wishing he was running in Canada where he retains his crown as the most approved of leader, albeit with a slight erosion from the urban sainthood Canadians conferred on him by in 2008.

Chart 4.2 – Approval ratings – Stephen Harper



Q. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada and leader of the Conservative Party of Canada, is handling his job?



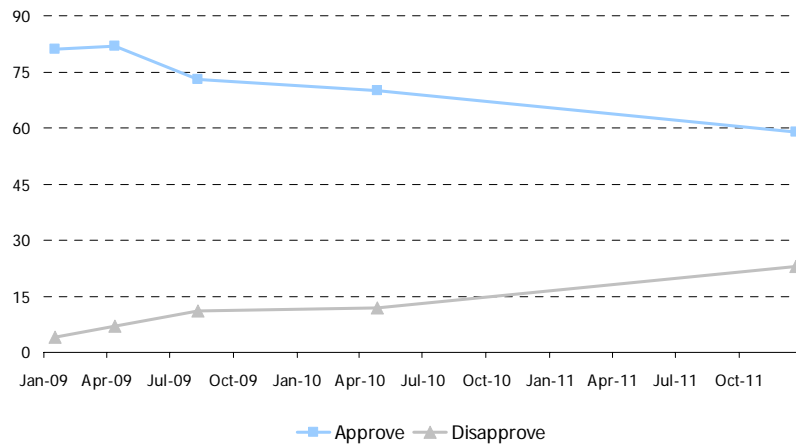
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Chart 4.3 – Approval ratings – Barack Obama



Q. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama, President of the United States, is handling his job?




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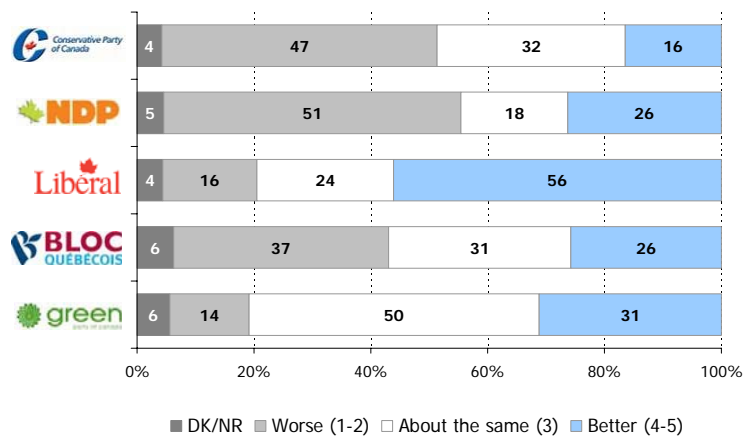
5.0 THE FUTURE THROUGH A PUBLIC LENS

Predictions are indeed hard, especially about the future as Yogi Berra once opined. Yet the public seem to have little difficulty offering their speculations about the next election, however distant it might appear now. Is this the wisdom of crowds, mob psychology, or just wishful thinking? Who knows, but there are some surprising areas of consensus in the Canadian public about 2015, and they don't look much like the received wisdom in the chattering classes and fifth estate.

Using two different methods, we arrived at basically the same conclusions about the public prognostication for that now distant 2015 election. One method asked about popular hypotheses regarding the political future. Another asked the dryer question of who will do better and who will do worse in the next election. Both approaches provide a surprising consensus. While it is clearly premature to speculate on such a distant event, it is at least as interesting as poking the ashes of current vote intention to pretend that has any possible significance to anything.

Chart 5.1 – Public conjectures on future party fortunes 

Q. If you were to make your best guess on how each of the major political parties will fare in the a federal election four years from now, how well do you think each one would do?



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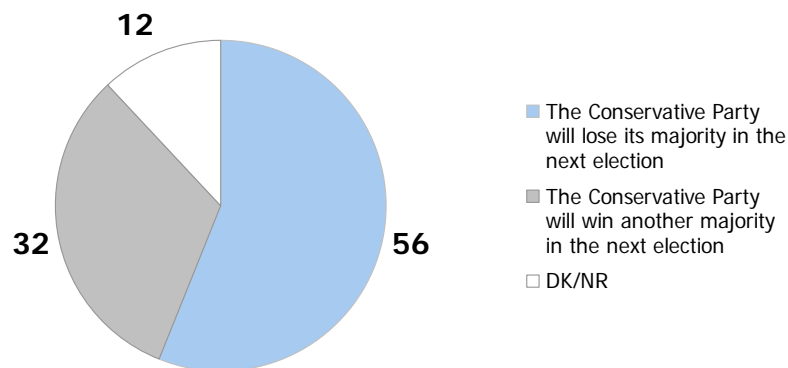
BASE: Canadians; December 14-21, 2011 (n=2,005)

The answers to this future quiz are very consistent regardless of how we ask. Notwithstanding the media consensus that we have entered a new Conservative dynasty, the public decidedly disagree. With remarkable unanimity the public do not believe that the Conservatives have tilted the long term game in their favour to the point that the next election will be another pro forma drubbing of the hapless Liberals and the upstart NDP opposition. The punditocracy forget that despite this new consensus about the inevitability of Conservative hegemony the final weekend of the last campaign saw the overall outcome in considerable doubt. If younger Canada had voted in even at fifty percent (well below their voting rate in the past), Jack Layton's successor

would have been presiding over a coalition government.⁵ So the newfound obviousness and inevitability of the Conservative juggernaut is quite inconsistent with the vagaries of the last race where literally no body seriously predicted the majority outcome. Yet in herd-like fashion, this is now the new normal and the incipient period of an uninterrupted Conservative dynasty as Canada's new natural governing party is upon us. The public, however, decidedly disagree. Perhaps all of the insiders should read Preston Manning's reminder that governments come and go and that prudent parties understand and anticipate this political promiscuity. Mr. Manning's statesmanship would preclude such a colourful descriptor but the hard evidence shows that Canadian voters are indeed a pretty fickle bunch.

Chart 5.2 – Conservative dynasty?

Q. As you may know, in the May 2nd federal election, The Conservative Party of Canada won a majority of the seats in the House of Commons. Some people say that the Conservatives are holding all the cards and are a safe bet for another majority win in the next election. Others say that the victory was a one time deal and after four years more years, the Conservative Party will return to minority status or even lose power. Which of these statements comes closest to your own point of view?



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The tests all converge with consistency and simplicity. First of all, the public don't think Stephen Harper will retain his majority. They are also very convinced of this view which is certainly offside the current expert consensus. Whether this is a product of the perception of longer term economic gloom and stagnation, or whether it is the result of mounting discomfort with the state of democracy in Canada is hard to say. But for whatever reasons that is what the public predict.

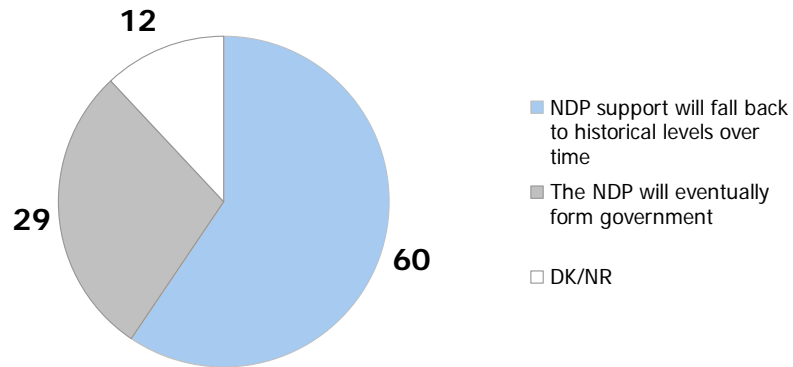
⁵ Please see our empirical retrospective on the May 2nd Election titled "Accurate Polling, Flawed Forecast", published on June 17, 2011 and accessible online at:

<http://www.ekospolitics.com/index.php/2011/06/accurate-polling-flawed-forecast-june-17-2011/>

Chart 5.3 – NDP government?



Q. As you may know, in the May 2nd federal election, The New Democratic Party won the largest number of seats in their history, enabling them to form the Official Opposition for the first time. Some people say that NDP support will continue to grow and they will one day form government. Others say that this surge in NDP support is merely a "blip" and it will soon fall back to historical levels. Which of these statements comes closest to your own point of view?



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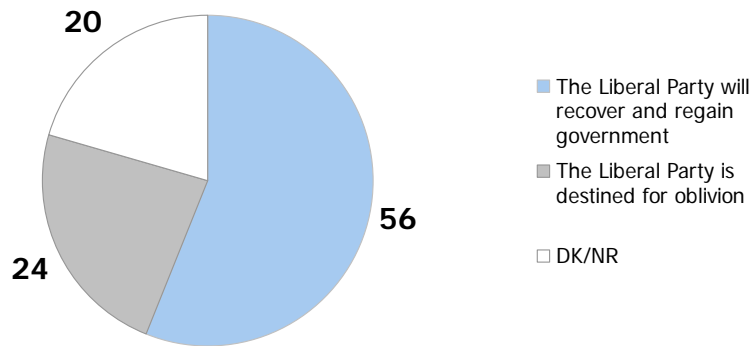
BASE: Canadians; December 14-21, 2011 (n=2,005)

As for the newly numerous but now leaderless NDP, the public outlook is equally grim. The public do not believe the NDP success was a segue to forming government and whatever their discontent with the state of the economy and democracy, they don't see a future period of NDP rule. Rightly or wrongly, the public see the NDP success on May 2nd as more of a blip than a breakthrough. The lacuna left in post-Jack Layton NDP may be reinforcing the view and things could definitely turn around, but that is what the public now think about their future prospects.

Chart 5.4 – Liberals on track to oblivion?



Q. As you may know, in the May 2nd federal election, the Liberal Party of Canada had its worst showing in history, winning just 34 seats. Some people say this is a sign that support for the Liberal party is declining and that the party is ultimately destined for oblivion. Others say that the party has faced major defeats in the past and it will recover and will one day regain power. Which of these statements comes closest to your own point of view?



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And what about the newly hapless, erstwhile natural governing party of Canada? As they chewed through four leaders in the last decade in search of redemption with a fickle public, the Liberals may well be heartened to hear that the public don't agree with Peter Newman's consignment to the historical dustbin and believe that the party will rebound and eventually form government. This is pretty heady stuff and if the public are to be believed then this will raise the stakes on discussions of leadership and policy from arid theory to the pregnant possibility of being restored to power. The long term conditions seem to be in place for a remarkable recovery but the Liberals have shown that their political antenna and sense of strategy had been displaced by a spurious sense of entitlement and inevitable return. Perhaps a newly humbled and more energetic Liberal party will find a path to turn this public forecast to their advantage. Or maybe Newman was right.

One thing is relatively clear: if any party (or parties) is going to turn these impressions of the future into reality and displace the Conservatives, they are going to have to hear the voices of the public more clearly and set their targets on that great sea of younger Canada who are increasingly content to avoid elections and politics. There is no path to success which is carved out through recapturing older Canada. Older Canada is very happy with the current government and is not likely to change. The path to disrupting the current gerontocracy lies through convincing under 45 Canada to abandon click democracy and join the real fray. Whether this can happen is a very open question and will determine whether these views become reality or just wishful thinking.

6.0 PSST! CANADA, CAN WE TALK?

One of the limitations of current media polling is that the pollster and media client tend to select the topics it wants to talk about and frames the questions in a way that s/he thinks is appropriate. Pollsters typically do so in a fair and balanced manner but, even if that standard is met, the universe of discourse is set by the pollster, not the public. In this exercise, we reverse the usual process and have a statistically representative sample of the public pick the conversations they deem to be the most important. We will then build upon this by returning to engage a representative sample of Canadians in a series of conversations that they themselves selected. We also want to inject some information into those conversations so that these exercises are reflected, informed and representative of all society (kind of like the idea of democracy is supposed to work).

In our experience, the public enjoy these kind of deliberative engagements more so than the typical top-of-mind polling we conduct on horse races and such. It is also notable that the public have told us that their expectations in participating in such an exercise are very modest. Contrary to the fears of some senior decision makers, the public are not looking for nor do they expect the politicians to follow their wishes in some form of direct democracy or populism. Rather, citizens are merely looking for a “seat at the table” or, rather, assurances that someone in power will listen and take their views into account. Citizens recognize that governments are juggling a myriad of conflicting values and interests; financial exigencies, expert views, specific stakeholder and interest group needs, political priorities, etc. All they would like to know that is that their reflected views could be seen as one source of advice. In other words, citizens want a seat at the table more often than every four years and a regular form of citizen engagement could go a long way to repairing some of egregious problems of trust and legitimacy that we have seen documented in the first parts of this release. In fact, almost 90 percent of the public tell us that they would feed better about democracy if governments regularly sought these sorts of inputs. Finally, in the few instances where governments have actually tried these approaches, the advice offered by the public has invariably been reasoned, moderate, and humane.

Recognizing that governments aren't terribly persuaded by these arguments at this time, and noting the futility of charting a nonexistent horse race three years before it begins, we are volunteering this input as a public service with our friends at iPolitics. The readership of iPolitics contains exactly the kind of audience that citizens would like to share their advice with. It is genuinely intended to be as fair and non-partisan as possible with a focus on the now hidden dimension of government – public policy. We don't pretend that this is exhaustive or rigorous but it is a good start. It has been nearly 20 years since the (extremely expensive) Spicer Commission. Using modern information technology, we can offer a form of scientific public consultation with a speed, economy, and representativeness that could not have been dreamed of at that time.

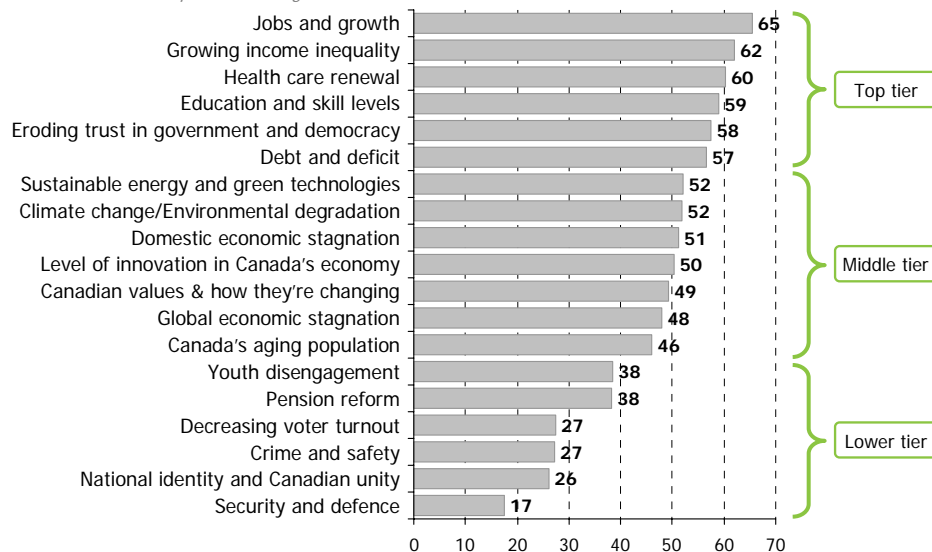
For purposes of this test, we came up with 20 areas of public concern/policy that we have looked at over the years. It isn't the definitive list, but it certainly captures many of the major issues which have been on the table over the past decade. It is tricky to pose such a long list as respondents tend to forget the long list and favour the most recent or first items they saw. Even

randomizing the order (which we did) doesn't solve the problem and the response burden would be prohibitive. We therefore used a form of trade-off analysis where respondents receive five randomly generated pairs from the list of 20 possible topics. Each "trial" provides a winner and loser and the cumulative results can provide an overall hierarchy. We can also show how the rankings vary by key demographic segments and these variations are quite pertinent.

Chart 6.1 – Preferred national conversations



Q. Which of the following issues do you think should be given the most attention when it comes to national conversations on the problems facing Canada?



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Chart 6.1 shows the results which are grouped into three broad tiers: urgent, moderate and lower. We note that there are many important topics which don't make the top tier and some topics appear in the top tier for some groups (e.g., Climate change for younger respondents) but fail to make top tier because they are not universally embraced. The humble positions of some of the lower ranked conversations also deserve some comment and tell us something about the current national outlook.

The economy tops the list as the most important conversation and it seems to be even more so given the current climate of anxiety. The issue of jobs and growth is the salient concern of a nervous public and we will be interested to see if we can find out more about how they see this issue is evolving and what they expect governments, the private sector, individuals, and families to do. There is growing economic fluency that many of these problems emanate outside of our borders and hence limit our ability to control. We have found that Canadians are highly receptive to a conversation on productivity (they aren't afraid of the P word) to the degree that it sustains quality of life. We also see unusual gloom about the longer term future and what we need to do ensure our long-term economic health.

The constituency for the jobs and growth conversation is broad but focussed among the more economically vulnerable, as well as older Canada and Ontario. The Government has clearly understood the dominance of this issue. Somewhat surprisingly, NDP supporters put topic considerably lower than Conservative supporters, and Green supporters tend to rate it much lower, perhaps seeing it stand in tension with environmental goals. Despite these variations, jobs and growth is the clear winner but its margin is quite scant over the second most important conversation that Canadians selected – growing inequality.

The near chart topping placement of growing inequality is as surprising, as the economy's top rating is obvious. In many years of polling on inequality, Canadians have expressed only tepid interest in the topic. While strongly endorsing equality of opportunity and access, the public have been more mixed. It is also the case that through the nineties, attitudes to the role of the state as a leveller of inequality morphed (just as tax rates plummeted). There was a growing conviction that the social safety net had become a hammock perpetuating the very problems it was supposed to solve. All of this may be on the cusp of a sea change as public demands for a national conversation on growing inequality have vaulted from nowhere to a top concern. For those who have discounted the Occupy movement as a failure, this is vivid evidence to the contrary. The issue would not have exploded in the Canadian public consciousness if it weren't supported by true objective changes. This topic cannot be enjoined in separation of the jobs and growth topic and it will inevitably lead Canadians to a renewed discussion of taxes and the role of the state.

While everybody is at least somewhat concerned with this new issue du jour, there are some striking variations in levels of concern. Conservative supporters have much lower levels of concern regarding income inequality than all other portions of the political spectrum. Regional patterns are also interesting: BC and Atlantic are extremely concerned while Alberta is not. Ontario is interesting by virtue of sharing very high levels of concern with both the economy and inequality (which they may see as twinned problems). The economically vulnerable – particularly the unemployed, also attach a great deal of importance to this issue. In departure from this pattern, however, the most educated are more concerned than the least educated and young people are more concerned than all. The most striking finding here is the explosion of inequality and long dormant notions of social justice back onto the public agenda.

Health care renewal, a perennial top concern, is once again a crucial area of conversation for an aging population (interestingly concern with health care renewal is higher in younger Canada). There really aren't that many variations across regions, demographics or party affiliations - this is a crucial conversation for all. In some respects, the conversation has been pre-empted by the federal offer to the provinces and also by a little recognized but dramatic decline in the sense that the system is in crisis⁶. There is, however, lots of room for a discussion about areas of reform such as home care, electronic health, patient centered care and so on. It is also clear that

⁶ See our report on attitudes towards doctors and health care titled "Shifting Public Perceptions of Doctors and Health Care", published February 2011 and accessible online at:
http://www.ekospolitics.com/wp-content/uploads/shifting_public_perceptions.pdf

the public hold the federal government accountable for health care along with the provinces and as in the area of education want to have National conversations (and policies) while recognising these are provincial areas of jurisdiction.

The other major area of human capital formation, education and skills ties Health as a winning national conversation. Once again the public discount the watertight theory of division of responsibilities across the senior levels of government and want a national conversation on knowledge and skills. Our past research has shown that Canadians now see knowledge and skills as a crucial determinant of both individual and national economic success. Ontario, Liberal supporters, and very strongly, younger Canada are the ones calling most strongly for a national debate on knowledge and skills. It has been a long time since we have had a serious national discussion on this topic.

Another top priority is a national conversation on eroding trust in democracy and government. The underpinnings of this debate are complex but it is notable that it has assumed such a high position. It is also notable that although Canadians want to discuss the issue of democracy, their enthusiasm for a discussion of related topics such as youth disengagement and declining voter turnout is much lower. It seems that only young people are concerned with the issue of youth disengagement, which may be part of the reason the problem is deepening. It may be worthwhile to consider a segmented conversation with young Canadians on this issue. As the earlier releases have shown, there are wide levels of alarm about the health of democracy and a series of key dimensions of the debate available for further discussion.

The final top topic is debt and deficit which reflects the inherent fiscal conservatism of Canadians (following the nineties) and the desire to approach national issues from a pragmatic and normative point of view. The blend of the top six issues provides a pretty broad framework for moving forward and blends both conservative and progressive values with a pretty hard nosed pragmatism and eclecticism, which Canadians have especially favoured. The spending within our means issue is a practical governor which disciplines the other investment priorities.

A few final comments are in order. Green technologies and climate change came very close to the top conversations and may well deserve inclusion. First of all, the two very similar choices may have diluted their overall position and they emerge at the top of the list for younger Canada and the Atlantic. Indeed, the blend of these two issues may well merit placement on the short list.

Finally, there are four things on this list that Canadians simply do not want to talk about – voter turnout (already discussed), crime and safety, national identity and unity, and defence and security. To be generous to the government, we can posit that their clear emphasis on crime and defence has removed this from the urgent “to do” list to “done that”. In any case, it is pretty clear that there is little appetite for further conversations on these topics at this time. National unity and identity, shibboleths for erstwhile Liberals and the focus of national debate twenty and thirty years ago, have also exhausted public patience and interest. This in itself is an interesting comment on how much Canada may have changed over that period.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using EKOS' unique, hybrid online/telephone research panel, *Prob/t*. Our panel offers exhaustive coverage of the Canadian population (i.e., Internet, phone, cell phone), random recruitment (in other words, participants are recruited randomly, they do not opt themselves into our panel), and equal probability sampling. All respondents to our panel are recruited by telephone using random digit dialling and are confirmed by live interviewers. Unlike opt-in online panels, *Prob/t* supports margin of error estimates. We believe this to be the only probability-based online panel in Canada.

This particular study involved an **online only** survey of 2,005 Canadians. While panellists are randomly recruited, the survey itself excludes the roughly 1 in 5 Canadians without internet access. The results should therefore be considered generalizeable to Canada's online population. The field dates for this survey are December 14-21, 2011. The margin of error associated with the total sample is +/-2.2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

Please note that the margin of error increases when the results are sub-divided (i.e., error margins for sub-groups such as region, sex, age, education). All the data have been statistically weighted to ensure the samples composition reflects that of the actual population of Canada according to Census data.