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BEYOND THE HORSERACE

HOW CANADIANS SEE SOCIETY EVOLVING

[Ottawa – February 21, 2013] – We have recently updated our research on broad social trends in values and ideology. The approach we used was to track the same measures asked of random samples of the Canadian public using exactly the same questions and to then test the direction and significance of any shifts that are occurring. It seemed interesting to compare the results of these repeated measures tests with current public perceptions of the trajectory of those trends. The actual trend lines are more accurately revealed using the tracking methods, but it is more than anecdotally curious to compare the perceptions of those trends.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Perceived shift in Canadian ideology:**
 - **37% Moving right**
 - **38% Not moving at all**
 - **18% Moving Left**
 - **7% DK/NR**

Please note that the methodology is provided at the end of this document.

First, to summarise the results of a number of tracking tests over the last few years (based on tracking going back a decade and sometimes two decades), we find scant evidence to support the fairly popular thesis that Canada is shifting to the right. On several different tests, we find that within a pattern of overall values stability, what changes are occurring are a withdrawal from socially conservative values such as respect for authority, traditional family values, security, and minimal government¹. In the case of attitudes to issues such as decriminalisation of marijuana, same sex marriage, abortion rights, and capital punishment, we find either no movement (from a largely progressive orientation) or a further drift to the progressive side of the issue. In tracking whether people identify themselves as small-l liberals or small-c conservatives, we see a collapse of the most popular neither category nor a more polarized ideological fragmentation with a lean more to the left than the right. So all of the evidence lines up with the conclusion that we may or may not be moving to the progressive or left, but we are clearly moving away from the socially conservative ideology and values. These broad and fairly gentle value shifts are by no means unique to or even originate in Canada. They are particularly pronounced in younger Canada, metropolitan Canada, and university educated Canada. The gaps are so large between older and younger Canada on these values that they are basically irrelevant values in younger Canada, yet continue to exert profound influence over older Canada, particularly older conservative Canada.

It is therefore curious in the least to contrast the tracking of self-identified ideology with the perception of where the changes are going:

¹ See "Looking Backward, Looking Forward: Part 4", by EKOS Research Associates, January 14, 2013.
Accessible online at: <http://goo.gl/NdLZ1>

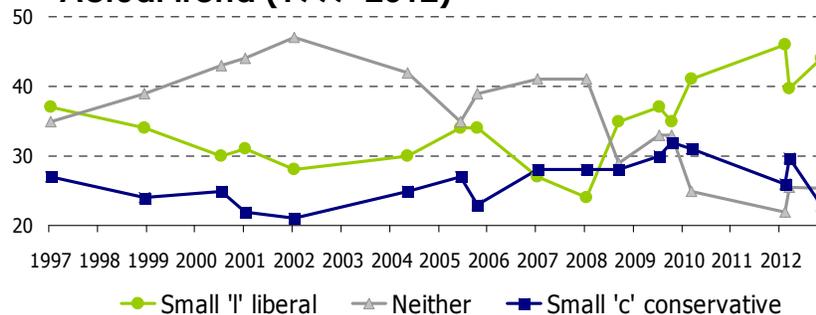
Perceived shifts in Canadian political ideology

Q. When it comes to political ideology, some people say that Canada is moving to the right while others say it is moving to the left. Do you believe Canada is moving right, moving left, or not moving at all?

Perceived trend



Actual trend (1997-2012)



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BASE: Canadians; February 1-10, 2013 (n=5,947)

In stark contrast to the myriad tests that show no movement right, more than twice as many Canadians think we are moving right than think we are moving left. In a further bit of irony, the spurious perception of a rightward tilt is most pronounced where it is least welcome. Those who lean left are most likely to see a rightward tilt and the corollary is true for those on the right who see a leftward movement. The dominance of the apocryphal right shift perception (although notably equal numbers see no movement) is curious given its apparent disconnection from the 'real' movements. One could speculate this might be a product of the relative success of right wing governments, particularly at the federal level. Another thesis is that this perception is closer to the received wisdom in the national media and reinforced by research claiming that this blueing is in fact occurring.

A final question might be what is the significance of such a broad delusion in public opinion? Is this belief a precursor to a genuine rightward shift and will it become part of a self-fulfilling prophecy? Or, is this merely an example of the public opinion being out of synch with reality. The forces producing values shifts are far deeper than the media or politics and many of these movements emanate from broad global shifts in what some have called post-materialism. Without knowing the answer I would tend to favour the thesis of a relatively benign error in public perception which will eventually be dispelled by the deeper reality. It is, however, the role of the student of society to be iconoclastic when such deceptions are evident.



Detailed Tables:

Perceived Shifts in Canadian Political Ideology						
<i>Q. When it comes to political ideology, some people say that Canada is moving to the right while others say it is moving to the left. Do you believe Canada is moving right, moving left, or not moving at all?</i>						
	Moving right	Not moving at all	Moving left	DK/NR	Sample Size	Margin of Error (+/-)
NATIONAL	37%	38%	18%	7%	5947	1.3
REGION						
British Columbia	39%	36%	18%	7%	687	3.7
Alberta	31%	38%	22%	9%	607	4.0
Saskatchewan	37%	32%	22%	10%	219	6.6
Manitoba	32%	43%	16%	9%	186	7.2
Ontario	39%	38%	18%	4%	1797	2.3
Quebec	38%	41%	15%	6%	1723	2.4
Atlantic Canada	30%	40%	18%	12%	709	3.7
GENDER						
Male	41%	39%	17%	3%	2769	1.9
Female	35%	40%	19%	7%	3021	1.8
AGE						
<25	45%	31%	17%	7%	301	5.7
25-44	37%	38%	20%	5%	1473	2.6
45-64	37%	41%	18%	4%	2360	2.0
65+	37%	44%	15%	4%	1652	2.4
EDUCATION						
High school or less	28%	48%	19%	5%	1919	2.2
College or CEGEP	33%	42%	20%	6%	1832	2.3
University or higher	51%	30%	15%	4%	2031	2.2
COUNTRY OF BIRTH						
Canada	36%	40%	18%	5%	4812	1.4
Other	44%	34%	18%	4%	1012	3.1
FEDERAL VOTE INTENTION						
Conservative Party	33%	42%	20%	5%	1366	2.7
NDP	47%	34%	15%	4%	1226	2.8
Liberal Party	45%	36%	15%	3%	1205	2.8
Green Party	40%	34%	22%	5%	366	5.1
Bloc Québécois	42%	41%	15%	3%	397	4.9
Other	26%	48%	23%	3%	130	8.6

Methodology:

This study was conducted using Interactive Voice Response (IVR) technology, which allows respondents to enter their preferences by punching the keypad on their phone, rather than telling them to an operator.

In an effort to reduce the coverage bias of landline only RDD, we created a dual landline/cell phone RDD sampling frame for this research. As a result, we are able to reach those with a landline and cell phone, as well as cell phone only households and landline only households. This dual frame yields a near perfect unweighted distribution on age group and gender, something almost never seen with traditional landline RDD sample or interviewer-administered surveys. This methodology is not to be confused with the increasing proliferation of non-probability opt-in online panels which have recently been incorrectly reported in major national media with inappropriate margin of error estimates.

The field dates for this survey are February 1-10, 2013. In total, a random sample of 5,947 Canadians aged 18 and over responded to the survey. The margin of error associated with the total sample is +/-1.3 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 sex, age, education and region). All the data have been statistically weighted to ensure the samples composition reflects that of the actual population of Canada according to Census data.