Power and Knowledge: Shifting Public Perspectives

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Outline

1.0 The Priority of Knowledge and Expertise

2.0 Knowledge Underrepresented and Undervalued

3.0 Faith and Reason

4.0 Limits to Knowledge and Understanding

5.0 The Future and Conclusions
1.0 The Priority of Knowledge and Expertise

- Knowledge is important
- Linked to social class, age, and gender
- Strongly linked to political ideology and vote intention
Most important trait in a national leader

Q. Which of the following traits would you most like to see in a national leader?

- Knowledge and understanding: 51%
- Decency and morality: 20%
- Decisiveness and certainty: 19%
- Compassion and empathy: 8%
- DK/NR: 2%

BASE: Canadians; March 15-17, 2011 (n=984)
Most important factor in national decision making

Q. In making important national decisions, which of the following factors do you think should be most important?

- Hard evidence of need/impacts: 34%
- Fairness and social justice: 29%
- Affordability and costs: 24%
- Impacts on social values/morality: 9%
- DK/NR: 3%

BASE: Canadians; March 15-17, 2011 (n=984)
Trust in occupations

Q. How much trust do you have in each of the following occupational groups or individuals?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>% High Level (5, 6, 7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scientists</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University professors</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalists</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pollsters</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priests</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union leaders</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politicians</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bloggers</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BASE: Canadians; March 15-17, 2011 (n=984)
2.0 Knowledge Underrepresented and Undervalued

- Broad belief that populism is the dominant political mode
- Equally strong belief it should not be; knowledge should rule
Q. Do you think that contemporary politics is/should be driven by intellectualism and rational debate or by populism and common sense?

**Is driven by**
- Intellectualism and rational debate: 17
- Populism and common sense: 46
- DK/NR: 37

**Should be driven by**
- Intellectualism and rational debate: 60
- Populism and common sense: 28
- DK/NR: 12

**BASE:** Canadians; March 15-17, 2011 (n=984)
Q. Which of the following groups have/should have the most influence in defining public policies in Canada?*

- Lobbyists: Have 11, Should have 52, GAP -41
- Media/Journalists: Have 14, Should have 46, GAP -32
- The Prime Minister: Have 34, Should have 48, GAP -14
- Parliamentarians: Have 54, Should have 55, GAP +1
- Public Servants: Have 42, Should have 45, GAP +3
- Experts/Professionals: Have 39, Should have 62, GAP +23
- Average Citizens: Have 26, Should have 75, GAP +49

*Presented in series of random paired choices. Per cent indicates average number of times option is selected over all others.

BASE: Canadians; March 15-17, 2011 (n=984)
3.0 Faith and Reason

- Chief contest is between certainty/morality and evidence/reason
- Certainty and morality are strongly linked to conservatism and religiosity
- Links to gender and ethnicity (as well as social class)
Origins of mankind

Q. Which of the following statements comes closest to your point of view?

Humans were created by God within the last 10,000 years
Humans evolved over time, but through divine guidance
Humans evolved through natural selection
DK/NR

Breakdown by ideology

Left: 74
Centre: 51
Right: 42

Base: Those who say humans evolved through natural selection

BASE: Canadians; March 15-17, 2011 (n=984)
Origins of mankind: Canada versus US

Q. Which of the following statements comes closest to your point of view?

*Source: Gallup poll: December 10-12, 2010 (n=1,019). Question worded as follows:
“Which of the following statements comes closest to your views on the origin and development of human beings:
1) Human beings have developed over millions of years from less advanced forms of life, but God guided this process;
2) Human beings have developed over millions of years from less advanced forms of life, but God had no part in this process; or
3) God created human beings pretty much in their present form at one time within the last 10,000 years or so?”

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Preferred source of personal guidance

Q. If you were facing a deep personal crisis, which of the following individuals would you prefer to consult?

- A priest, rabbi, or other religious leader
- A psychiatrist or other professional
- DK/NR

Breakdown by religious service attendance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attendance Level</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: Those who prefer a priest, rabbi, or other religious leader

BASE: Canadians; March 15-17, 2011 (n=984)
4.0 Limits to Knowledge and Understanding

- Lagged rebound effect on evidence and crime
- 1 in 4 Canadians are anti-science, anti-expertise
- Broad but mixed concerns about impacts of democracy and equality
Perceived changes in violent crime rates

Q. Over the past 10 years, would you say that the crime rate in Canada has been ... ?

- Decreasing (1-3): 29
- Staying the same (4): 30
- Increasing (5-7): 38
- DK/NR: 4

Breakdown by age

- Under 25: 18
- 25-44: 31
- 44-64: 43
- 65 and over: 55

Base: Those who say increasing

BASE: Canadians; March 15-17, 2011 (n=984)
Tracking perceived changes in violent crime rates

Q. Over the past 10 years, would you say that the crime rate in Canada has been ... ?

- Decreasing (1-3)
- Staying the same (4)
- Increasing (5-7)

BASE: Canadians; most recent data point March 15-17, 2011 (n=984)
Attitudes towards climate change

Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “I don’t believe all this talk about greenhouse gas emissions causing global climate change.”

Disagree (1-3) 64
Neither agree nor disagree (4) 9
Agree (5-7) 26
DK/NR 1

BASE: Canadians; March 15-17, 2011 (n=984)
Concerns over science and expertise

Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

"It really bothers me that hard scientific evidence isn't shaping public policy to the degree that it should be."

- Agree (5-7): 17%
- Neither agree nor disagree (4): 39%
- Disagree (1-3): 11%
- DK/NR: 3%

"I worry that the rule of experts and professionals produces elitism and inequality."

- Agree (5-7): 22%
- Neither agree nor disagree (4): 39%
- Disagree (1-3): 19%
- DK/NR: 17%

"I am worried that science is going too far and is hurting society rather than helping it."

- Agree (5-7): 23%
- Neither agree nor disagree (4): 19%
- Disagree (1-3): 56%
- DK/NR: 1%
5.0 The Future and Conclusions

- The public strongly believes that intellectual-scientific approaches will dominate in the future.
- Social media and Web 2.0 are pro-knowledge but eschew traditional vertical authority (anti-gate keeping).
Q. Overall, do you think that the use of hard evidence and professional expertise in public decision making is/will be more or less important than it was 10 years ago/10 years from now?

10 years ago

- Less important (1-3): 20
- About the same (4): 32
- More important (5-7): 43
- DK/NR: 6

10 years from now

- Less important (1-3): 7
- About the same (4): 31
- More important (5-7): 55
- DK/NR: 7

**BASE:** Canadians; March 15-17, 2011 (n=984)
Use of social media in constructing knowledge and expertise

Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "In an era of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Wikipedia, knowledge and expertise can be constructed from ordinary citizens."

Disagree (1-3) 32
Neither agree nor disagree (4) 17
Agree (5-7) 49
DK/NR 3

BASE: Canadians; March 15-17, 2011 (n=984)
Conclusions (i)

- Hard knowledge is seen as hugely important principle for societal decision making (trailing only democracy)

- There is a strong sense that knowledge, science, and expertise are undervalued

- Contested terrain revolves around relative salience of reason and knowledge versus moralism and certainty

- The fault lines are deep and these world views are relatively incompatible

- The rational-empirical view is much more prevalent, particularly among younger, more educated Canada

- There is a dramatic left-right split and it is also strongly connected to secularism and religiosity
Conclusions (ii)

• The recent political success of populism is paradoxical and may reflect low recognition and the weakness of the rational view to handle values

• The challenge to reason and knowledge comes from the political right; it is rooted in a search for certainty and morality and a discomfort with evidence and ambiguity

• Populism is viewed as an interruption, not a structural shift
  - Public conviction about the future
  - Demography forces favour educated
  - Lagged but rational rebound on crimes rates

• Future complicated by the digital generation and the flattening of intellectual authority
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