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LOOKING BACKWARD, LOOKING FORWARD: PART 5

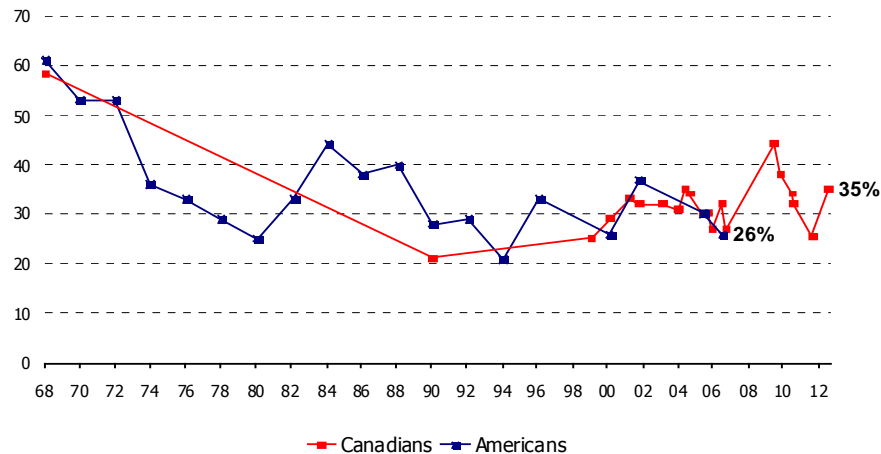
FORCE FIVE: THE NEW POLITICAL MARKETPLACE

Why political technology is widening the gap between the public interest and politics and why citizens seem helpless in dealing with this

[Ottawa – January 5, 2013] Our most recent soundings of democratic health reveal a deeply mistrustful public, perhaps more so than at any time in the past thirty years. Some of this mistrust is rooted in the broad value shifts that we discussed earlier. A less deferential, less respectful of authority, and more sceptical public pose deep challenges to governments. Increasingly, it appears that political parties are attempting to solve these problems not through policy solutions but through better political technology. The irony is that this strategy may well be worsening the problem and steering ever closer to a basic legitimacy crisis (see Figure 5-1).

Figure 5-1: Tracking trust in government

Q. How much do you trust the government in Ottawa 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 November 20 – December 3, 2012 (n=5,433)

Since Theodore White's *The Making of a President*, the connection between marketing and politics has been clear to most people. It seems that each year, there is some new political technology which is raising the stakes in the ecology of predator-prey which characterises political practice. Whether it is wedge politics and the culture war strategies pursued by Rove et. al. in the service of George W. Bush's regime, the George Lakoff framing technology that was all the rage a few years ago, the new adaptation of neuroscience to 'neuropolitics' laid out by Drew Westen, David Plouffe's methodical review of the use of polling and particularly focus groups in

the Audacity to Win, or the most recent celebration of big data and the science lab in the constant experimentation of the most recent Obama success, it is clear that something is very different today.

The most recent presidential campaign in the United States cost some \$11 billion, much of that devoted to research and advertising. It would be very interesting to compare the relative dollars spent on political marketing versus policy research over the past generation. My guess is that there has been a dramatic shift in favour of the tools of persuasion and manipulation which may not have served the public interest. While one can question the value of a political world immersed in nonstop campaigning to better sell candidates and policies, this new battle mode seems to have produced even less savoury abuses in the form of the marriage of new information technologies to vote suppression and an expansion of the ethical boundaries of political practice into areas that would have been deemed unthinkable even a decade ago.

In Canada in 2006, the federal government spent roughly the same amount of money on polling as it did advertising (I declare a major self-interest on this point). Polling for the federal government is non-partisan and designed to solicit the feedback of citizens and clients for government on programs and policies. Advertising is also supposed to be non-partisan and is intended to explain or communicate.

Cynics suggest that advertising is now more partisan in nature and is designed to persuade and comfort the public. Note, for example, the continuing federal advertising on Canada's Economic Action Plan. This program was a major one-time stimulus plan introduced in the aftermath of the economic meltdown of 2008. It was completed with a final report in 2012. Recognizing the success of the advertising and the comforting image it gave about government vigilance on the economy, a vastly smaller program which has little bearing to the original plan continues to be a cornerstone of government advertising. Although the numbers are difficult to precisely nail down, it is clear that the federal government now spends somewhere between ten and twenty times as much on advertising as it does on "listening to Canadians".

This dramatic shift from parity of polling and advertising is a fairly minor example of the shift from concerns with policy and engagement to concerns with persuasion and branding. Policy research has dropped dramatically in the Government of Canada as Alan Gregg and others have noted under the rubric of assault on reason. This is not unique to Canada and the shift from pursuit of rational public policy to massive investments in political marketing to cajole and persuade is our final main year end force. It is also quite likely the case that the boundaries between the state and the government of the day have become increasingly blurry in this new era.

This massive shift from policy to political marketing technology may not be the cause of the current depths of public trust in government and political parties, but it sure hasn't helped.



Detailed Tables

Trust in Government							
<i>Q. How much do you trust the government in Ottawa to do what is right?</i>							
	Almost always	Most of the time	Some of the time	Almost never	DK/NR	Sample Size	Margin of Error (+/-)
NATIONALLY	8%	27%	37%	24%	4%	5433	1.3
REGION							
British Columbia	9%	25%	36%	28%	2%	570	4.1
Alberta	9%	36%	32%	15%	9%	469	4.5
Saskatchewan	9%	27%	36%	15%	13%	254	6.2
Manitoba	14%	23%	36%	15%	12%	222	6.6
Ontario	9%	31%	37%	22%	2%	1694	2.4
Quebec	5%	21%	40%	32%	2%	1883	2.3
Atlantic Canada	6%	23%	41%	27%	3%	328	5.4
GENDER							
Male	10%	29%	36%	24%	1%	2530	2.0
Female	7%	27%	40%	25%	2%	2743	1.9
AGE							
<25	16%	24%	33%	24%	3%	260	6.1
25-44	5%	30%	38%	25%	2%	1439	2.6
45-64	7%	25%	40%	27%	1%	2166	2.1
65+	10%	32%	38%	19%	1%	1402	2.6
EDUCATION							
High school or less	10%	28%	37%	23%	1%	1723	2.4
College or CEGEP	7%	28%	40%	24%	1%	1695	2.4
University or higher	7%	28%	37%	26%	2%	1837	2.3
CURRENT VOTE INTENTION							
Conservative Party	17%	52%	25%	5%	1%	1384	2.6
NDP	3%	16%	44%	36%	1%	1128	2.9
Liberal Party	5%	23%	45%	26%	1%	1169	2.9
Green Party	6%	17%	44%	32%	1%	325	5.4
Bloc Quebecois	2%	11%	40%	47%	0%	431	4.7
Other	4%	13%	34%	48%	2%	111	9.3

Methodology

This series draws on data collected from **five separate surveys**. Two of these surveys used 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 the **first survey** are February 21-28, 2012. In total, a random sample of 3,699 Canadians aged 18 and over responded to the survey. The margin of error associated with the total sample is +/-1.6 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

The field dates for the **second survey** are November 20 – December 3, 2012. In total, a random sample of 5,433 Canadians aged 18 and over responded to the survey (including a sub-sample of 4,548 decided and leaning voters). The margin of error associated with the total sample is +/-1.3 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

The three remaining surveys were conducted exclusively online using EKOS' unique, hybrid online/telephone research panel, *Probit*. 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, *Probit* supports margin of error estimates. We believe this to be the only probability-based online panel in Canada.

The field dates for the **third survey** are December 14-21, 2011. In total, 2,005 Canadians aged 18 and over responded to the survey. The margin of error associated with the total sample is +/-2.2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

The field dates for the **fourth survey** are January 27 – February 8, 2012. In total, 2,891 Canadians aged 18 and over responded to the survey. The margin of error associated with the total sample is +/-1.8 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

The field dates for the **fifth survey** are November 20-29, 2012. In total, 1,181 Canadians aged 18 and over responded to the survey. The margin of error associated with the total sample is +/-2.9 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.