

Citizenology:

Towards a New Vision of Public Opinion Research

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*Presentation to the Community of Practice
for Public Opinion Research*

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EXOS



- 1) Trends in Public Opinion Research**
- 2) Long-Term Changes in the Citizenry
- 3) Between Consultation and Polling: The Case for Scientific Public Engagement
- 4) Conclusions: A Citizen-Centred Vision for the Future

Issues in public opinion research

- » Confidence in public opinion research has eroded over the last 20 years, as has the scientific rigour
- » Variety of factors at play:
 - Proliferation of cellphones
 - Declining response rates
 - Media polling problematic
 - Weakening of serious survey research in the federal government/elsewhere (in recovery)
 - Competitive market pressures have created a race to the bottom
 - Overall level of methodological fluency has atrophied

Is scientific accuracy still possible? (i)

- » Various workarounds or attempts to mimic scientific accuracy with non-probabilistic methods have been largely disappointing (particularly for governments)
- » These methods distract from the more pressing problem of achieving scientific accuracy in the current climate
- » Evidence suggests¹ it is still possible, but not going to be found in the world of non-probability data
 - These surveys will always have uses, but have dangerous limitations for governments

(1) Pew Research Centre, "Flashpoints in Polling", Oct. 24, 2016.
Available online at: goo.gl/o7CUgy

Recent experimental comparison

Age:



	18-24	25-34	35-54	55+
CENSUS	12%	18%	39%	31%
IVR	11%	18%	36%	36%
CATI	8%	14%	42%	35%
NADbank 2012 ¹	6%	15%	44%	35%
Opt-in 1	1%	7%	40%	52%
Opt-in 2	1%	8%	43%	53%

(1) Figures from 2012 Newspaper Audience Databank (NADbank) readership study, which measures magazine and newspaper readership in Canada

Is scientific accuracy still possible? (ii)

- » Scientific accuracy still possible, but costs more (e.g., Statistics Canada Labour Force survey / PMB Household Survey)
- » Ten years ago, standing offer rates for phone surveys were 20% higher
 - Due to declining response rates, we need to call many more households to complete the assignment with only 80% of past resources

Is scientific accuracy still possible? (iii)

- » One key to ensuring scientific accuracy may lie in diversifying the range of research applications that we address when we collect representative data on citizens
 - Deliverology?
 - Labour market forecasts
 - Policy analysis
 - Client satisfaction
 - Ad impacts
 - Et cetera

Is scientific accuracy still possible? (iv)

- » The expense of scientific accuracy suggests a greater need for multiple applications and return to panel
- » The horizontal partnership syndicated model is also an attractive option
- » If the answer is more money, we need pooled platforms and ongoing high-quality probability panels with multiple applications

Principles for polling in the future (i)

- » Technology provides challenges, but also provides opportunity for doing things cheaply / more rapidly
- » Right now, there is a false dichotomy between new technology and random probability methods
 - How do we fuse probability methods with new technology?

Principles for polling in the future (ii)

- » Challenges in comparing mode effects through time as technologies evolving
 - Sometimes difficult to compare live CATI results to online, IVR, and other methods
 - We can stick with live interviews, but if we want to take advantage of newer, more cost-effective technologies, we need formal experiments to calibrate mode effects

Recent innovations

- » New entrants to the field (partial list):
 - Neuroscience
 - Textual analysis
 - “Big data” analytics
 - Digital diaries / Passive metering
 - Geomatics / Mapping technologies
 - Online qualitative
- » Huge range of non-probability samples



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Long-term changes in the citizenry (i)

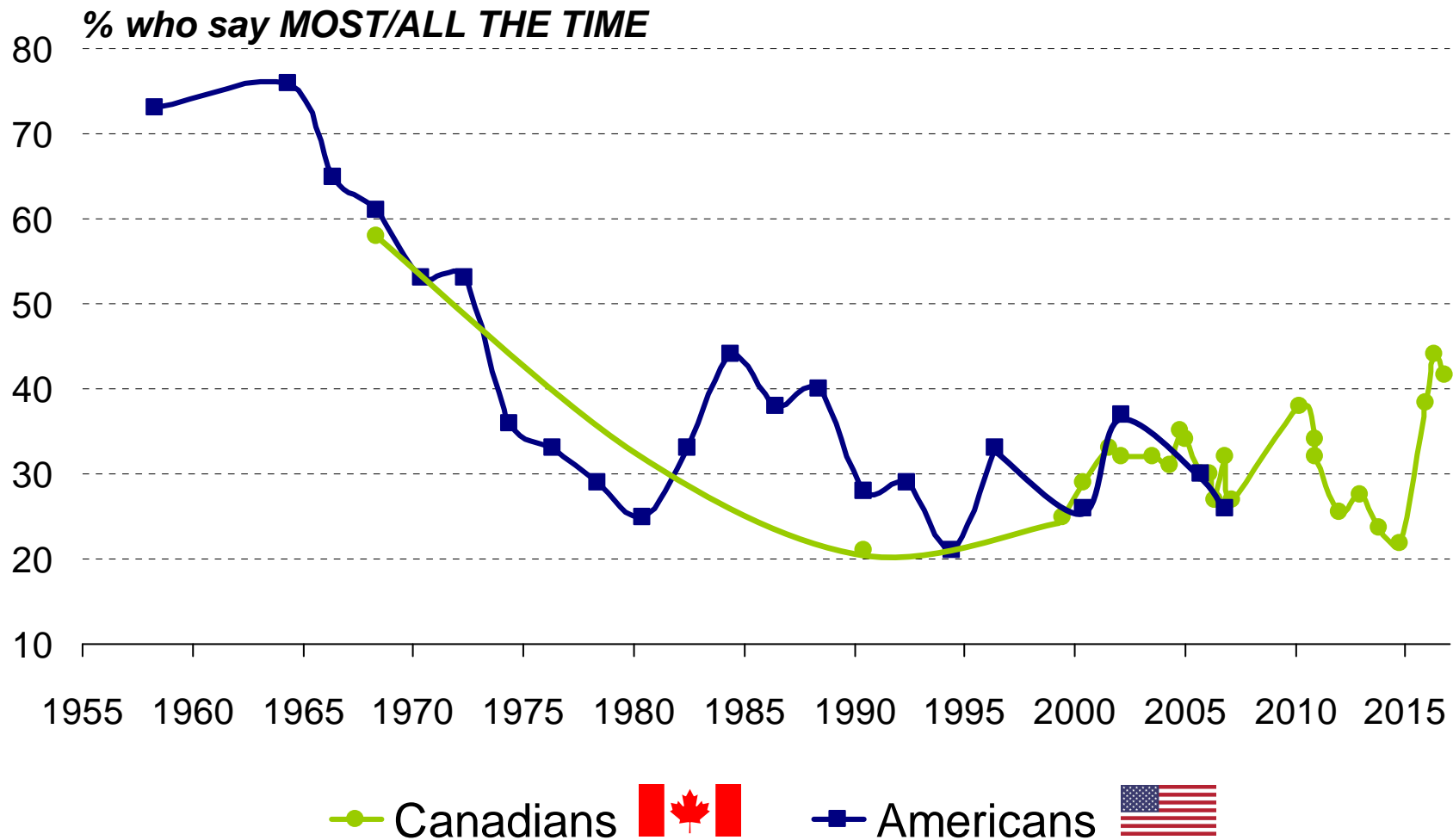
- » We have to be mindful of the long-term changes in the citizenry
- » These define evolving challenges of surveying and help us understand big picture shift of values and priorities:
 - Older
 - More pluralistic / diverse
 - More individualistic and less trustful
 - More economically anxious, pessimistic about medium/long-term future

Long-term changes in the citizenry (ii)

- Social class and intergenerational tensions rising
- Much more frightened
- A resurgence of authoritarianism
- Declining support for neo-liberal policy framework
- Post-materialist value shifts
- Ubiquitous social media, post-truth, fake news, etc.

Tracking trust in government

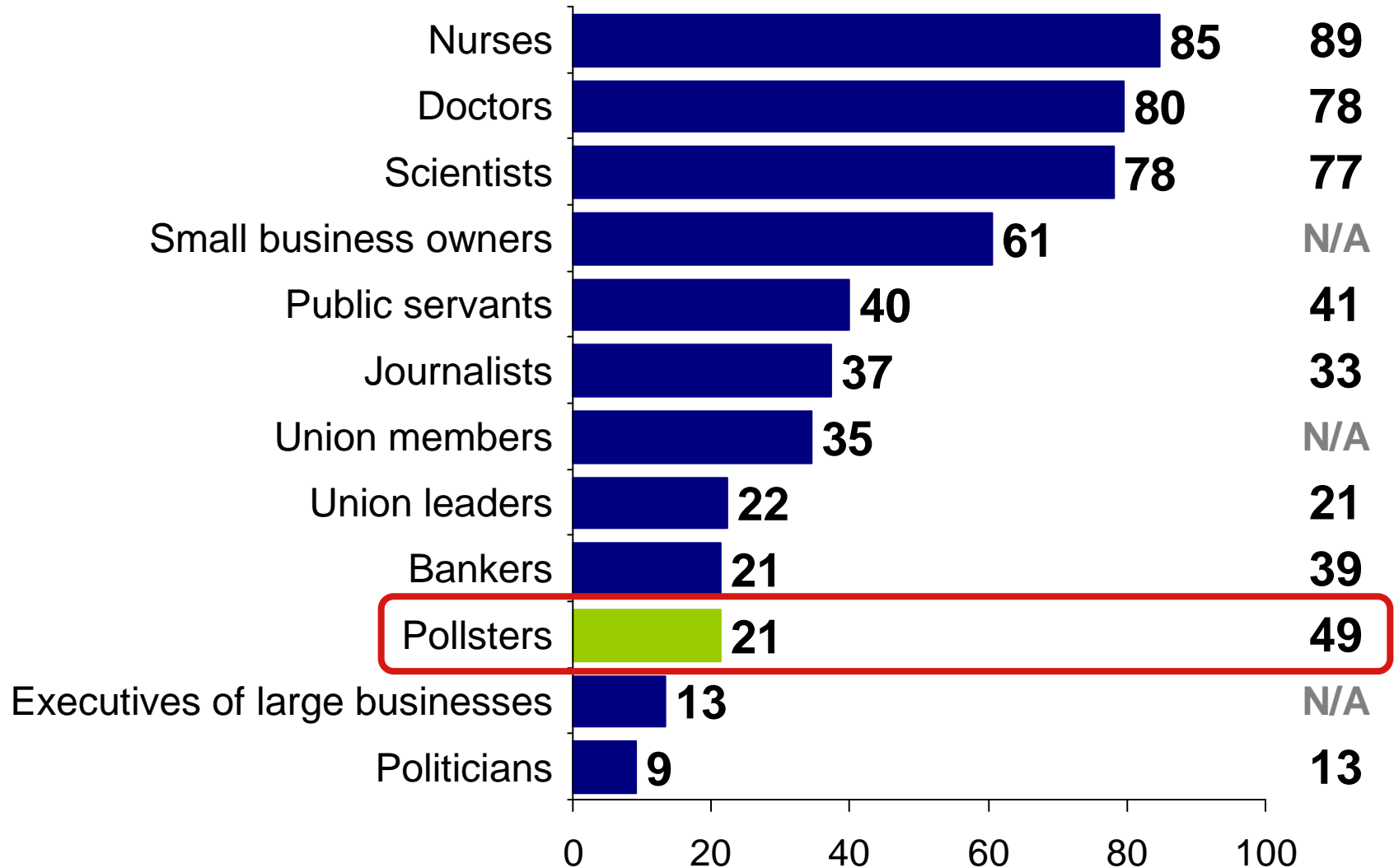
Q. How much do you trust the government in Ottawa/Washington to do what is right?



Trust in occupational groups

Q. How much trust do you have in each of the following?

1996

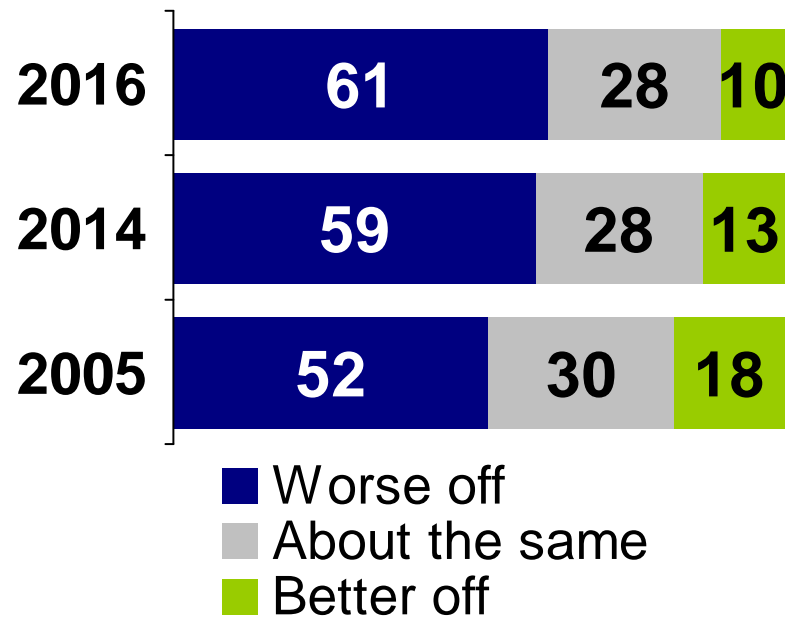


Generational outlook & social class

- » Fears are highest when turned to the future
- » The grey outlook on the present turns almost black as the public ponder the fate of future generations
- » It appears that we have at least temporarily reached the end of progress, the defining achievement of liberal capitalism

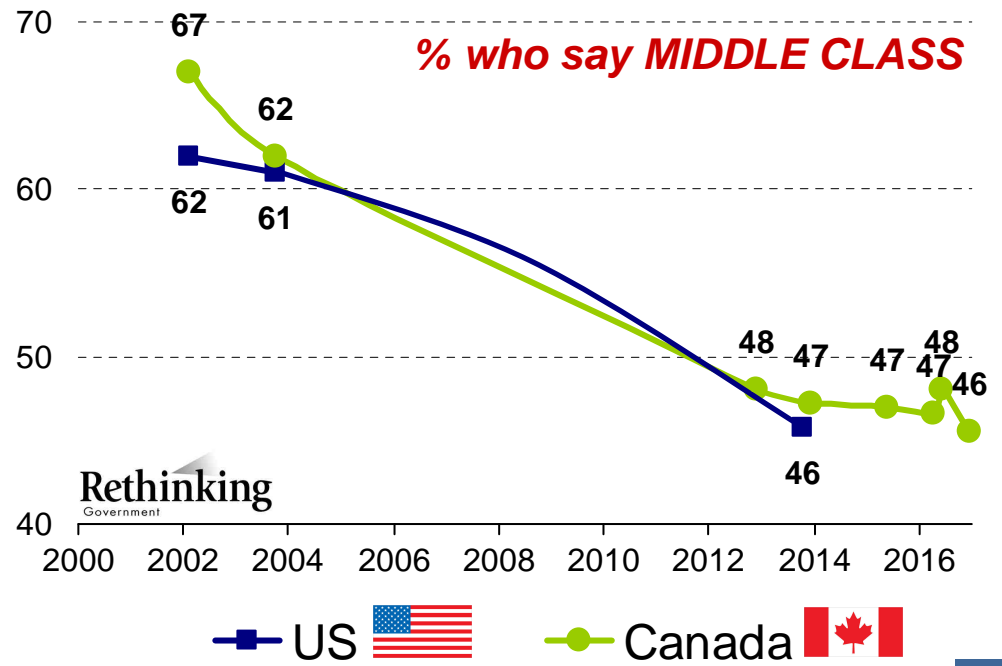
Generational Outlook

“Thinking about your overall quality of life do you think the next generation will be better off, worse off, or about the same as you are 25 years from now?”



Self-Rated Social Class

“Would you describe you and your household as poor, working class, middle class, or upper class?”

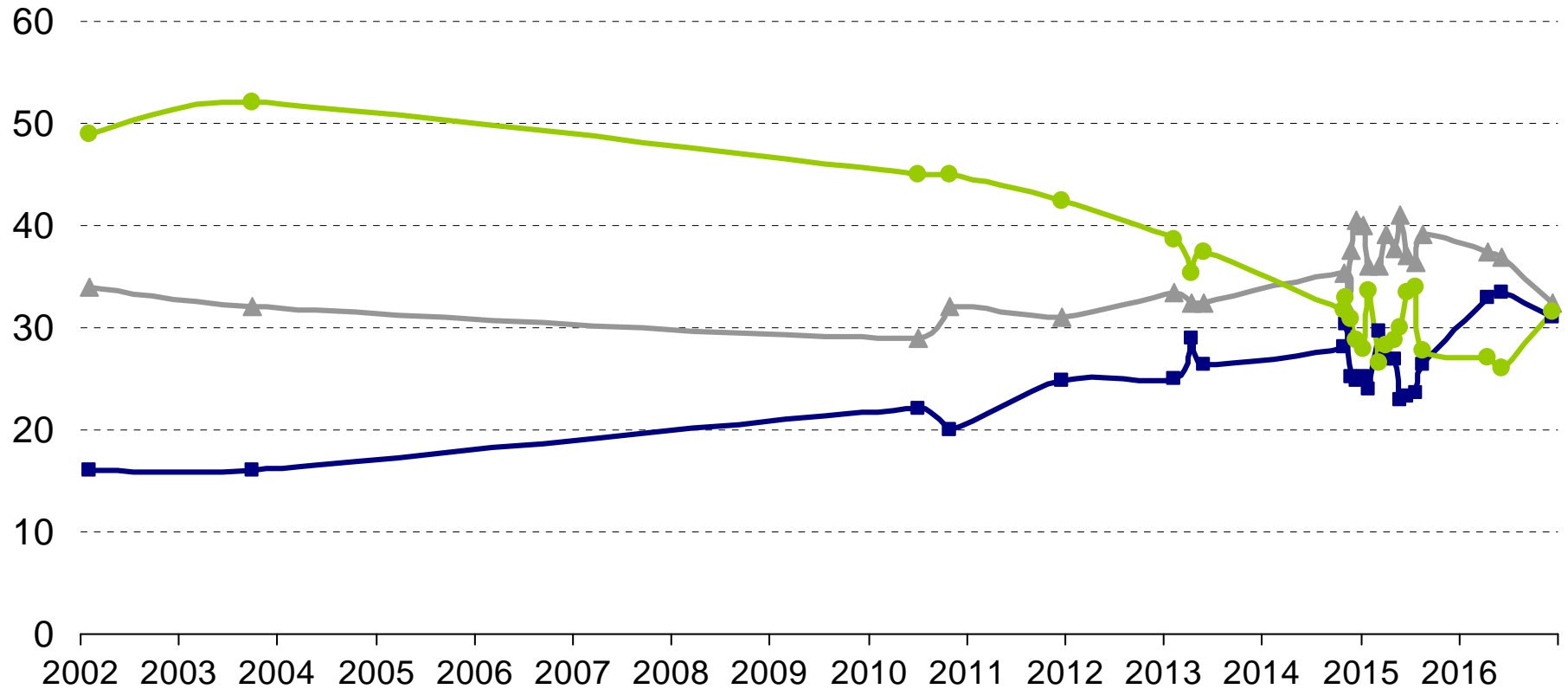


BASE (left): Canadians; December 8-11, 2016, n=2,433, MOE +/- 2.0%, 19 times out of 20

BASE (right): Canadians; April 14-15, 2016, n=611, MOE +/- 4.0%, 19 times out of 20

Medium-term 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?



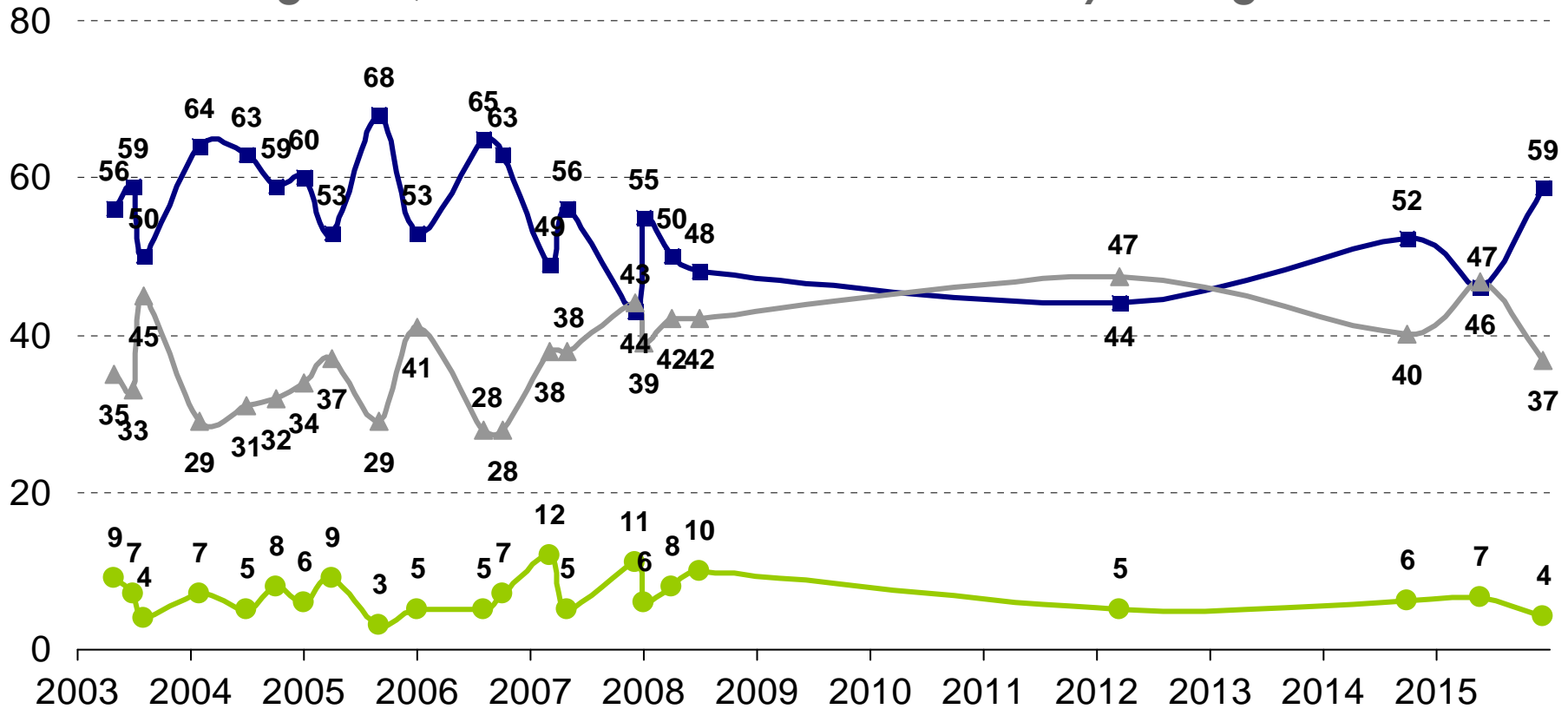
■ Worse (1-3)

▲ The Same (4)

● Better (5-7)

Perceived Danger in the World

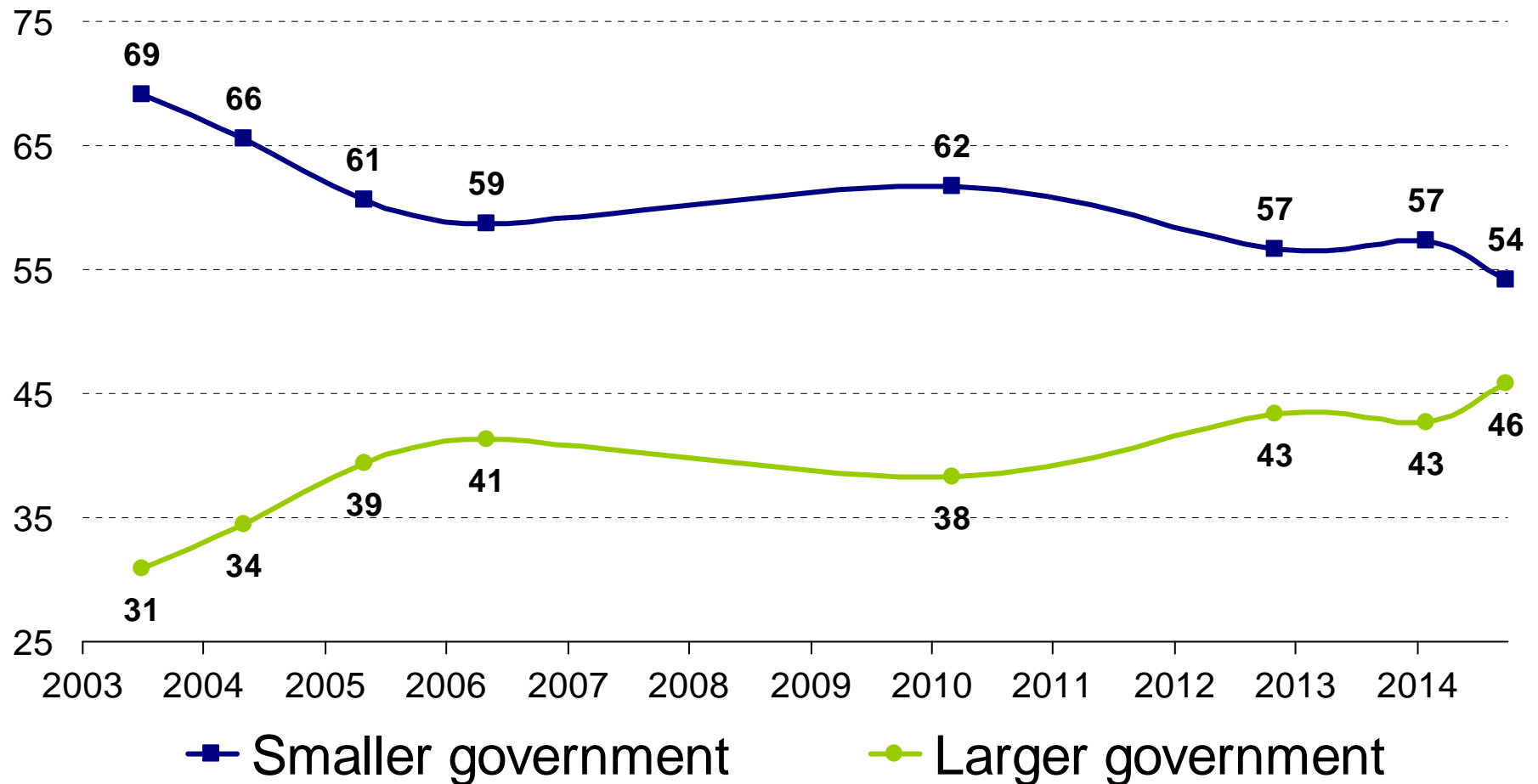
Q. From your own point of view, do you feel that, overall, the world is safer, more dangerous, or about the same as it was five years ago?



■ More dangerous
 ▲ About the same
 ● Safer

Preferred size of government

Q. Generally speaking, which of the following would you say that you favour: 1) a larger government with higher taxes and more services; or 2) a smaller government with lower taxes and fewer services?



Note: Figures adjusted to exclude those who skipped the question.

BASE: Canadians; September 21-25, 2014 (n=1,549), MOE +/- 2.5%, 19 times out of 20

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Need for citizen engagement

- » Clarify the boundaries between consultation, polling, and citizen engagement
- » Public pick regular citizen engagement as the best solution for democratic renewal
 - Gives citizens a seat at the table in a post-deferential world
 - Needs to be routinized into living process of governance

Self-Selected vs. Probability Sample: An Illustration

Q. How satisfied are you with the level of Internet service to your home, including WiFi?

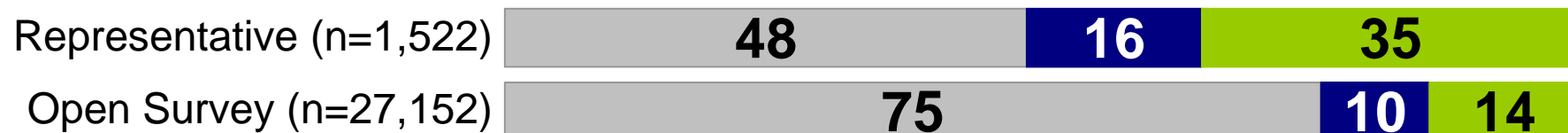
Reliability



Speed



Price



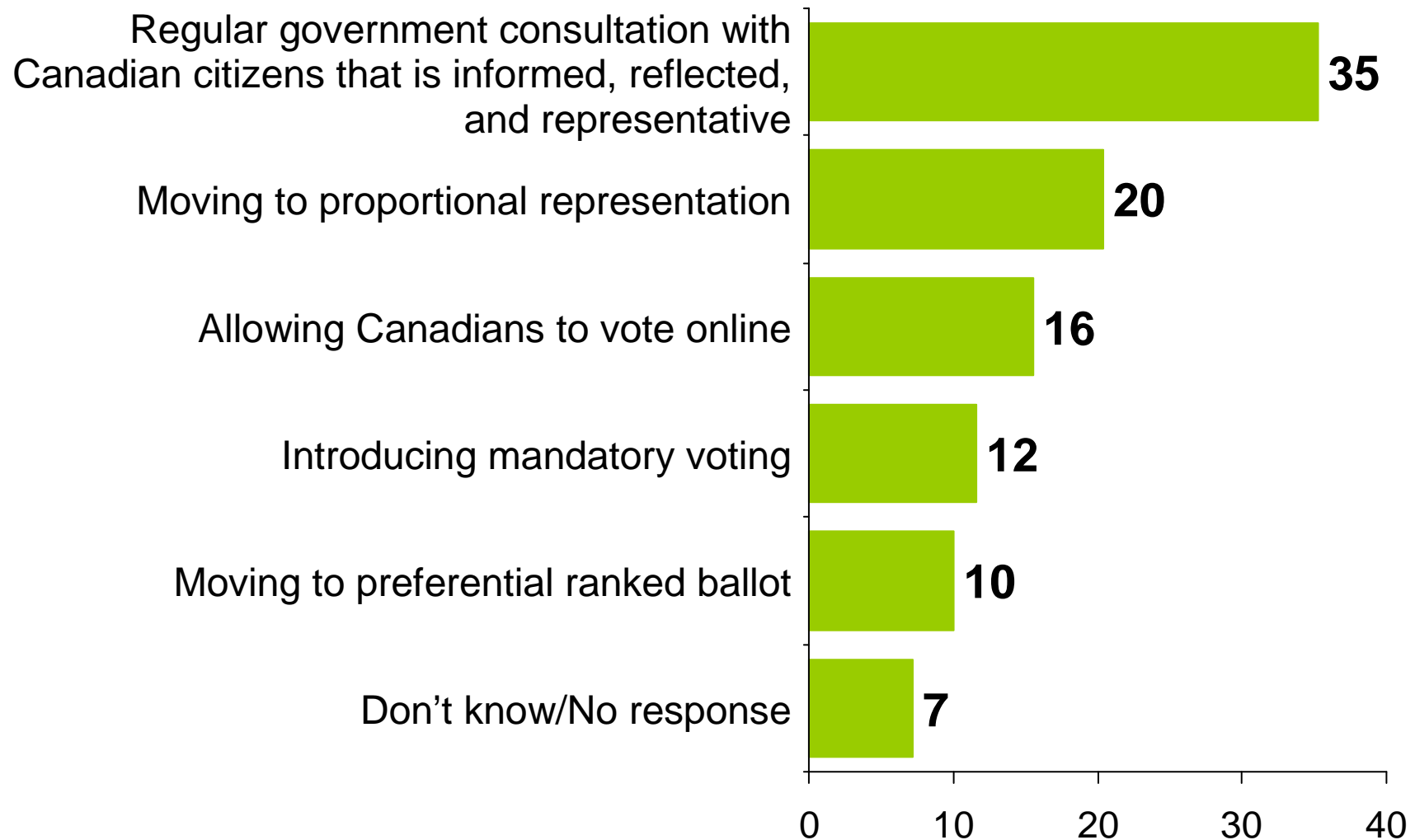
Dissatisfied (1-2)
 Neither (3)
 Satisfied (4-5)

Need for citizen engagement

- » Three dominant principles the public expect for citizen engagement:
 - Informed
 - Reflected
 - Representative
- » Brilliant new technological developments that can enhance speed, economy, and power of these approaches
- » We need both 'open' and scientific approaches to public engagement

Best method for improving democratic health

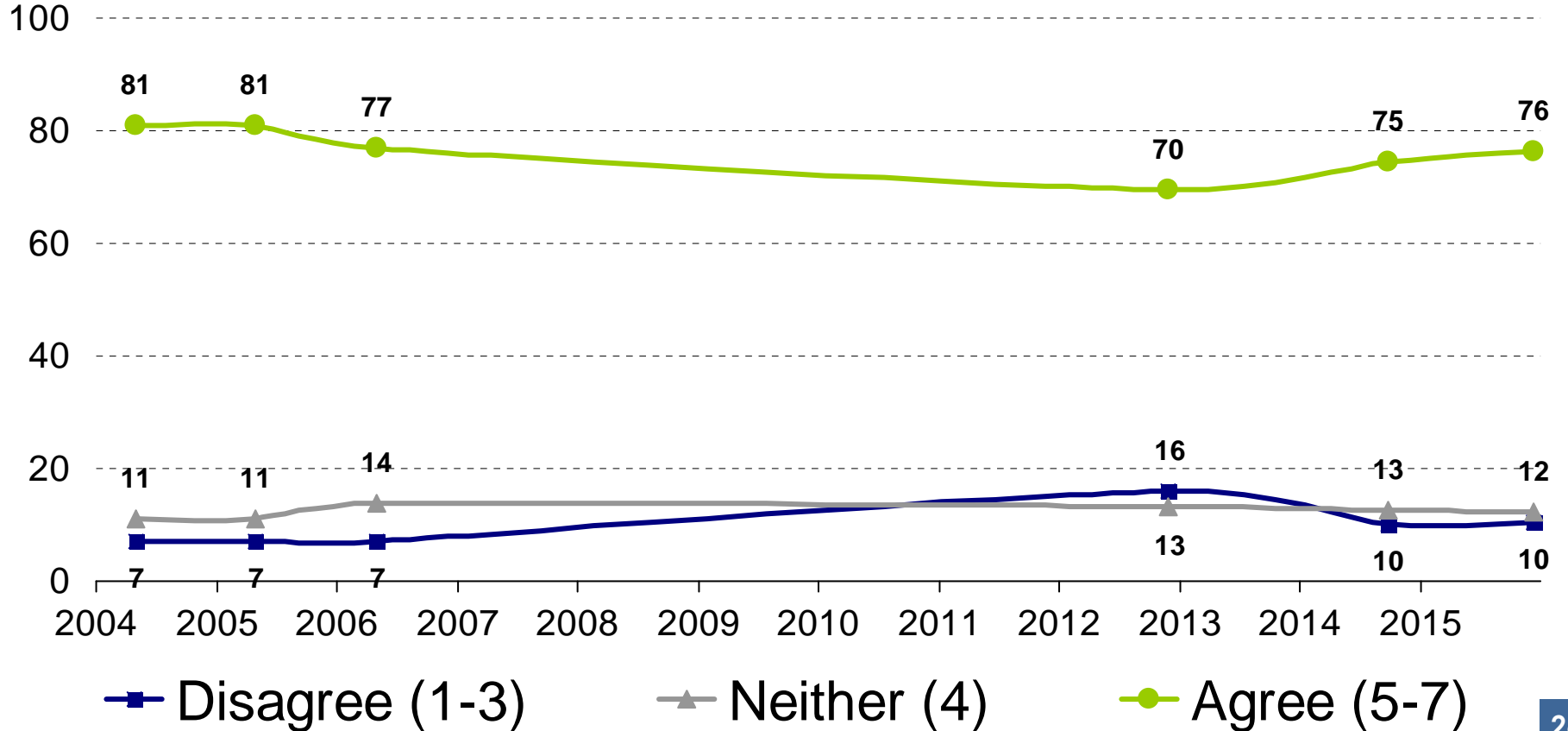
Q. In your opinion, which of the following would be the best way of improving democratic health in Canada?



Need for Public Engagement

Q. Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

“I would personally feel better about government decision-making if I knew that governments sought informed input from average citizens on a regular basis”



BASE: Canadians; December 7-10, 2015 (n=1,956), MOE +/- 2.2%, 19 times out of 20

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Key challenges

- » Key questions will continue to dominate the future of public opinion research:
 - How can public preferences inform government decision making?
 - How do these preferences differ between informed vs. top of mind preferences?
 - How to we empirically document the values and interests of diverse citizenry?

Key challenges

- How can such evidence lead to a closer match between the public interest and public policy?
- Understanding aggravated new divisions/fault lines rooted in generation and social class
- How do we make choices in an era of economic stagnation where wants are infinite and resources are limited?

Routinizing citizen-centred feedback

- » Citizens want a seat at the table
- » Need for platforms of excellence to deal with special groups (e.g., youth, indigenous, new Canadians)
 - These groups are hard to reach and we need scientific panels that we can revisit
- » If we want to scientifically measure impacts and delivery, is it not equally important to understand citizen wants, needs, and values (citizenology?)

Moving forward

- » How do we bolster the reputation of and confidence in polling and survey research?
 1. Do it properly
 2. Rebuild capacity
 3. Strengthen traditional polling with new technology
 4. Create high-quality platforms for routine citizen engagement
 5. Stress openness and transparency



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