

“Public Support for Direct Democracy in Canada: The ‘Post-Charlottetown’ Era and Beyond”

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I. Introduction

In recent years, a variety of initiatives – from the Charlottetown referendum to sovereignty referendums in Québec to recall legislation in British Columbia – have reflected a popular desire for enhanced citizen involvement in political decision making. These developments have been covered widely in media as well as studied in recent provincial commissions addressing democratic reform (in Québec, British Columbia, and Prince Edward Island). Despite significant media and academic attention, we lack a thorough understanding of public opinion toward the use of referendums, especially whether experiences over the past decade have altered public support for direct democratic modes of decision making.

Using data from the 1992/3, 1997, and 2000 Canadian Election Studies (CES), the paper builds on past studies of public attitudes toward referendums (and direct democracy more generally) to achieve a more complete and focused understanding of this critical subject matter. We examine whether support for referendums has changed over the last decade, and if so, among which groups and in which provinces. Past analyses indicate that support for the use of referendums is not monolithic; it varies widely according to important social, regional, and attitudinal characteristics. In addition, the past few decades have witnessed repeated calls for institutional reform and more responsive politics, not to mention declining voter turnout levels and diminishing party membership rosters. Thus, the issue of alternative modes of political decision making is high on the public agenda, and it is imperative that we delve further in our understandings of public attitudes toward the referendum option.

II. The Referendum in Canada: From Historical to Contemporary Considerations

Study of public attitudes toward the referendum as a mode of decision making must be considered in the context of actual experiences with referendums. The particular issues and proposals which have been put to popular referendums as well as the parties and personalities in Canadian politics that have endorsed the use of the referendum influence greatly citizens' views on the utility of referendum decision making.

Canada has had only three national plebiscites: the 1898 prohibition vote, the 1942 conscription vote, and the 1992 referendum on the Charlottetown Accord. Johnston and his colleagues describe our plebiscitory history as dreary (1996), for all three votes "gave the 'wrong' answer, or the 'right' answer in the wrong places, and each was deeply divisive" (252).

Nonetheless, the referendum is still very much an option for deciding constitutional and policy issues in Canada. Referendum decision making, as we will see, commands strong public support. High aggregate levels of support for the referendum is fuelled by a combination of historical and contemporary factors.

The allure of the referendum lies largely in the desire for enhanced popular involvement in political decision making. Referendums, and direct democratic mechanisms generally, have been closely associated with populism both in theory and in practice (for example, Riker, 1982). In Canada, direct democratic decision making has been a perennial feature of populist movements and parties, particularly those originating in the Prairies (for example, Laycock, 1990). Examples include the endorsement of referendums, initiative and recall by the Progressive Movement in the 1920s – which had its roots in the United Farmers parties – and, later, by the former Reform and Canadian Alliance parties. To varying degrees, populism in the Canadian West has been characterized by its opposition to elitism, partyism, and privilege in general. From the Progressives to the Reform/Alliance, oft-warranted suspicion about the motives of old-line parties leaders and

parties have fuelled calls for the use of the referendum to decide important policy matters. Prairie populism has been driven in part by regional grievances over the dominance of central Canadian interests in the political history of the country, from the National Policy of Macdonald's early governments to the National Energy Program of more contemporary times. Yet, populism in the Canadian West is far more than an expression of regional grievances. Favourability toward direct democratic modes of political decision making also rests on the belief that ordinary citizens can come together to act politically in order to transcend the artificial divisions created by greed, corruption, and elite dominance.

In Québec, the history of referendums has been mixed. On the one hand, there is the 1942 vote on conscription. Prime Minister Mackenzie King had pledged in the 1940 election campaign that troops would not be conscripted for military service overseas. The question posed in the 1942 referendum asked citizens to decide whether to release Mackenzie King's government from this promise in order to impose conscription if it was deemed necessary ("conscription if necessary, but not necessarily conscription"). Québec was the only province to reject the proposal (by a four-to-one margin); yet, all the other provinces voted in favour of conscription by the same margin (Clarke et al., 2000). Mackenzie King went with the 'majority' vote on the issue, and conscription for overseas military service began in 1944. For many Quebeckers, the episode must have recalled the emotional Conscription Crisis of 1917 and cast the referendum process itself as a tool of Anglo dominance over Québec.

On the other hand, contemporary experience with the referendum in Québec has been more positive. Provincial referendums on sovereignty-association were held in 1980 and again in 1995. Both referendums were initiated by Québec governments, and can be viewed as empowering exercises in public decision making. The sovereignty-association referendums were deeply divisive, both within and outside Québec. Indeed, the margin of difference between the two camps

in 1995 was little more than a single percentage point. Yet, regardless of the outcome, there was no sense that the process of referendum decision making itself was suspect (unlike the 1942 conscription vote). It bears emphasizing that the sovereignty-association referendums were provincial referendums that held no danger of the Québec population's final preference on the issue being swamped by the country's total population or the other nine provinces.

In the contemporary era, two factors in particular combine to produce relatively strong pro-referendum attitudes among the population. The first factor is disenchantment with elite brokerage models of decision making, especially in the context of the "mega-constitutional" politics (Russell, 1993). The 'closed-door' negotiations between federal and provincial executives that produced the Meech Lake Accord was highly criticized in many circles, and the experience of the 1992 referendum may have established a conventional precedent whereby future amendments must stand the test of a popular vote (for example, Cairns, 1993). In other words, there is a general sense that substantial amendments that involve the entire country – or large segments of it – must be offered for public ratification. Related to this is the second factor. The adoption of the Charter has produced a strong rights-consciousness among Canadians, in turn driving expectations that citizens must be more involved in the policy and constitutional trajectories adopted by governments (Cairns, 1991; Blais and Gidengil, 1991). Clearly, the referendum option is popular among citizens, and how individuals themselves view this direct democratic mechanism of decision making will have important consequences for potential institutional and procedural reforms concerning its future usage.

Turning to the contours of public orientations toward referendum decision making, three overarching generalizations can be made. First, aggregate support for the use of the referendum has been high in throughout the 1990s. Second, attitudes toward the referendum are not monolithic or evenly dispersed among the population. Rather, opinion varies according to social background

characteristics, region, and attitudinal considerations. Third, there have been changes in levels of public support for use of the referendum among identifiable segments of the population in the post-Charlottetown era. We turn now to a closer examination of these three points.

A variety of surveys have revealed strong pro-referendum attitudes among the general population. A survey commissioned by the Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP) in 2000 revealed that 57 per cent of Canadians regard referendums as “good things” (Mendelsohn and Parkin, 2001a: 4; 2001b).¹ Likewise, data presented by Clarke and his colleagues indicate that roughly the same proportion (60%) feel that referendums give “ordinary people” input into deciding the county’s future (2000: 100). Other surveys reveal similarly strong pro-referendum attitudes. However, support for direct democracy is not unconditional. Mendelsohn and Parkin’s data reveal that most respondents believe that referendums should be held only “sometimes”, and only 37 per cent could name an issue on which a referendum should be held (ibid). The authors argue that these findings indicate “support for direct democracy does not appear to be very deep” (Mendelsohn & Parkin, 2001a: 4). Clarke and his colleagues’ data seem to support this contention, for a majority of their respondents also question the utility of the referendum to solve important policy and constitutional issues (2000: 100).

Deconstructing aggregate pro-referendum attitudes reveals that support for referendums is not evenly dispersed among the population. Using the same IRPP data, O’Neill (2001) examines generational differences in public attitudes toward referendums. Majorities in all age cohorts agree that referendums are good things (pp. 22).² While the four youngest cohorts share roughly equal levels of support for referendums (from 62 to 65% agreement that referendums are good things), only 51% of those over the age of 57 (the oldest cohort) hold the same position (ibid.). In addition

¹ The data set used by Mendelsohn and Parkin is the *Strengthening Canadian Democracy* (SCD) survey of 1,278 Canadians commissioned by the IRPP and carried out from February to April 2000.

² Age cohorts in O’Neill’s article are divided as follows: 18-27, 28-37, 38-47, 48-57, and over 57.

to generational differences, there are also important regional differences in attitudes toward referendum decision making. Residents of the Prairies and British Columbia are more likely than other Canadians to believe that important political questions should be decided by referendums versus decided by federal and/or provincial elites (Clarke et al., 2000: 1000). Indeed, there is concrete evidence suggesting that who you are and where you live condition referendum attitudes.

Of particular relevance in the Canadian setting, are the potential drawbacks of referendums. The referendum is a majoritarian mode of decision making that has the potential to threaten minority rights and exacerbate group tensions within culturally heterogeneous societies ((for example, Johnston et al., 1996: 252-4; Mendelsohn and Parkin 2001a: 19-25; Sartori, 1987). Although the 1992 referendum on the Charlottetown Accord largely avoided producing intergroup hostilities (Mendelsohn and Cutler, 2000: 696-7), the possibility for division may nonetheless influence public attitudes toward referendums, especially among those concerned about equality rights for minority groups and the importance of fostering cohesion between Québec and the rest of the country. In fact, Quebeckers appear to be particularly concerned about this possibility. Clarke and his colleagues estimate that a majority of Quebeckers (54%) believe that referendums do little to unify the country; however, this position is held by a minority in the other provinces (2000: 101).

Of additional concern is whether voters possess sufficient information and cognitive skill to engage in direct policy making (Johnston et al., 1996: chapter 1). Citizens are not particularly knowledgeable about politics, even when it comes to identifying the individuals and institutions at the forefront of political life (for example, Blais and Gidengil, 1991; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Fournier, 2002; Gidengil et al., 2004; Howe, 2001; Lambert et al., 1988; Milner, 2001). The importance of competence is compounded when referendums present voters with decisions on remote, abstract, or complex matters, such as the 1992 Charlottetown Accord. Indeed, there is

ample evidence that many people really did not understand the contents and implications of the Charlottetown Accord (Clarke et al., 2000; Johnston et al., 1996).

III. Variables and Expectations

Our analyses consider the effects of a host of theoretically- and empirically-informed socio-variables on attitudes toward referendums as well as how popular views have changed through time. We start with socio-demographic variables: age, gender, income, post-secondary education, religion, ethnicity, and region of residence.³ The decline of deference thesis (Inglehart, 1990; 1997; Nevitte, 1996) suggests that older respondents will hold more conservative views on referendums, preferring traditional forms of representative decision making to direct democratic forms such as the referendum. Women and minorities should also be less pro-referendum due to recognition of the dangers of majoritarian modes of decision making (Mendelsohn and Parkin, 2001).

While an important component of socioeconomic status, income effects are difficult to predict. Previous work finds little or no relationship between income and support for direct democracy (Blais et al, 2002). More generally, the impact of income is likely to be indirect through other attitudinal and cognitive variables, such as political knowledge levels (for example, Fournier, 2002; Gidengil et al., 2004; Lambert et al., 1988).

Expectations about the influence of education are mixed. On the one hand, the cognitive mobilization and decline of deference theses suggest that advanced education is likely to weaken support for referendums by orienting the politically sophisticated toward elite-directing rather than elite-directed political action (Dalton, 1984; 2002; Inglehart, 1990; 1997; Nevitte, 1996). Indeed, education is often attended by a strong sense of political competency and independence. On the other hand, the well-educated, politically knowledgeable, and politically sophisticated are also

³ See Appendix for discussion of how all independent variables are coded.

likely to recognize that traditional, elite-directed modes of policy making are beneficial in facilitating compromise and bargaining. Simple, majoritarian decision making procedures, such as the referendum, do not permit the delicate balancing of competing interests across regional, ethnic, and linguistic divides. As such, our expectations are unclear. There are plausible reasons for the highly educated and politically savvy segments of the population to be either pro- or anti-referendum.

While often neglected, religion can play an important role in public opinion. Support for traditional modes of elite decision making associated with representative democracy should be stronger among Catholic respondents. Indeed, the historically hierarchical nature of the Catholic Church may have instilled a deference to authority figures among Catholic identifiers that is then extended to the political realm. This expectation is also informed by the idea that Catholics are more collectivist than Protestants (van Kersbergen, 1999).

For regional variables, residents of the Western provinces should be more supportive of direct democracy. Western support for referendums is consistent with historical practice and the political culture of the region, and as outlined previously, has also been confirmed in past analyses.

We expect several attitudinal and cognitive variables to condition referendum attitudes independent of social background and regional factors. According to the cognitive mobilization thesis (for example, Dalton, 1984; 2002; Inglehart, 1990; 1997), the net effect of social and economic changes attending postindustrialism is a more educated and politically sophisticated citizenry confident in its ability to make autonomous political decisions. We use two variables that serve to operationalize these proposed shifts in the electorate: political knowledge and personal political efficacy.

Expectations regarding the politically knowledgeable are basically the same as for the highly educated. There are good reasons to expect either pro- or anti-referendum sentiments from this

portion of the population. It bears emphasizing that a precise coincidence between the educated and the knowledgeable is not necessarily expected; indeed, sometimes the highly educated *are not* the most knowledgeable citizens. So, at the very least, it is possible to predict that political knowledge levels influence referendum attitudes independent of education. Finally, we expect that high levels of personal political efficacy – the self-perception of one’s ability to understand the political world – will be positively related to pro-referendum attitudes.

We also test the impact of majoritarianism. Specifically, the survey question used to tap majoritarian attitudes asks which is more important in a democratic society: ‘letting the majority decide or protecting the rights and needs of minorities?’ Majoritarians should be more supportive of referendums than those who privilege the protection of minority rights. Along similar lines, we also test the impact of equality views. Whether one thinks enough has been done to protect the rights and interests of marginalized groups should condition views on the utility of referendum decision making, which potentially threatens minority interests.

Finally, analyses also include party identification and ideology variables. Incumbent party affiliation may have a conservative effect on views toward the referendum, in essence, orienting incumbent party identifiers toward preserving the status quo and the decision-making prerogative of the governing party. Moreover, the former Reform/Canadian Alliance policy platforms have included appeals for more citizen involvement in decision making, leading to expectations that right-wing ideology may be positively related to support for more frequent use of referendums (for example, Campbell and Christian, 1996; Laycock, 1990).

IV. Data and Methods

The data come from the 1992/3, 1997, and 2000 Canadian Election Studies (CES).⁴ Analyses are performed on responses to comparable questions about referendums in each survey. In the 1992/3 combined referendum and election survey, respondents were asked ‘who should have the final say in changing the constitution: people in a referendum or elected representatives?’ Responses were rescaled from 0 to 1, where 0 indicates elected representatives and 1 denotes people in a referendum. An intermediate value of 0.5 was assigned for depends/both/neither responses. From the 1997 and 2000 election studies, views on direct democracy were measured with a question asking whether referendums on important/controversial issues should be held regularly, occasionally, rarely, or never.⁵ Responses were rescaled from 0 to 1; where 1 indicates support for regular use of referendums, 0.67 occasional use, 0.33 rare use, and 0 indicates that referendums should never be held on important/controversial matters.⁶

Clearly, there are substantive differences between the questions used to measure views on the use of referendums. The 1992/3 question applies specifically to the context within which it was asked – the national referendum on the Charlottetown Accord – while the other surveys ask about views on the use of referendums more generally. Notwithstanding these differences in wording and context, both questions attempt to gauge popular opinion on the same aspects of public decision-making processes: are referendums useful in making decisions on matters of widespread

⁴ The 1993 data were collected during and after the Charlottetown Accord referendum campaign by the Institute for Social Research at York University. Of the 2,530 respondents who completed the pre-referendum survey, 2,223 completed the post-referendum survey. The 1997 CES is a three wave survey and was conducted by the Institute for Social Research (ISR) at York University. This survey consists of 3,949 respondents in total, of whom 3,170 completed the post-election telephone survey and 1,857 completed a mail-back survey. Finally, the 2000 CES is also a three wave survey and was conducted by the Institute for Social Research (ISR) at York University and Jolicoeur & Associates in Montréal. The 2000 CES consists of 3,651 respondents in total, of which 2,852 completed the post-election survey, and 1,535 completed the mail-back questionnaire.

⁵ Half of the sample was asked this question using “important issues” and half was asked using “controversial issues”. While there may be some substantive difference in the connotations elicited by using controversial versus important issues, we have combined them into a single direct democracy measure. A comparison of the distribution of responses between these two questions showed very similar patterns.

⁶ For all three surveys, ‘don’t know’ and ‘refused’ responses were coded as missing.

importance to Canadian society? For this reason, we argue that results can be analyzed and discussed comparatively through time.

Ordered logit is used for all analyses, and there are several reasons for choosing this order logit to estimate our models.⁷ The dependent variables consist of mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive response categories numbering more than two. In addition, the dependent variables are ordinal in that the response categories represent increasing support for the use of direct democracy. As Borooah (2002: 24) notes, the signs of coefficient estimates allow us to gauge how changes in the predictors affect changes in the extremes of the response variables. In other words, the direction of change in the probabilities of the ‘middle’ or intermediate categories of the response variable cannot be measured or inferred (Borooah 2002: 24). Put simply, ordered logit coefficients tell us the likelihood of being in one of the extreme (either highest or lowest) categories of the dependent variable.⁸ Ordered logit coefficients obtained for the following analyses are presented as odds ratios.

V. Results

Before turning to results of our ordered logit models, a look at the distributions for each of the dependent variables provides a general sense of the levels of support for or opposition to the use of the referendum in Canada as well as any changes in this distribution over the time period under study. As Table 1 indicates, respondents to the 1992/3 combined referendum and election study

⁷ For an excellent overview of the ordered logit model, see Borooah (2002).

⁸ To clarify the interpretation of ordered logit results, a brief example may be useful. Suppose an odds ratio of 1.20 is obtained for the dummy variable of university graduate in an ordered logit regression with views on direct democracy as the dependent variable (note: this is hypothetical example using themes from the paper but *not* actual results). The correct interpretation of this odds ratio is that assuming two respondents had the same values on every independent variable in model, having a university education increases the likelihood of being in the category of greatest support for direct democracy by 20% and, correspondingly, decreases the likelihood of the university graduate being in the lowest support category by 20% as compared to the non-university graduate respondent. For the sake of clarity, results are only discussed in terms of how independent variables increase or decrease the likelihood of respondents registering a preference in the highest response category (regular use of referendums).

were quite inclined toward the use of the referendum for deciding constitutional questions as opposed to allowing elected representatives – provincial premiers, federal members of Parliament (MPs), and the government – to have unilateral decision making powers over the constitution. There were slight differences between Québec and non-Québec respondents, whose levels of support were 71% and 68% in favour of referendums, respectively. While Quebeckers were slightly more supportive of referendums in 1992/3, the three-point difference between Québec and the rest of the country is neither large nor statistically significant.⁹

(Table 1 about here)

The distributions change slightly when we look at the referendum questions for 1997 and 2000 (Table 2). Overall, throughout the 1990s and into 2000 the majority of people both in and outside Québec have continued to hold positive views toward referendums. Indeed, if we combine the proportions of people who think referendums on important or controversial matters should be held occasionally or regularly, over 60% of people in all provinces in both 1997 and 2000 were favourable. While there are high levels of aggregate support, there are slight differences by year and by province. Table 2 shows that Canadians outside Québec are more likely than Quebeckers to endorse the regular use of referendums. In 1997, 35% of outside Québec respondents advocated the regular use of the referendum option. Only 19% of Québec respondents chose the same category, resulting in a 26-point gap between Québec and non-Québec respondents on the question. The large gulf between Québec and the rest of the country may have been due, in part, to the fact that the most recent Québec sovereignty referendum was held only two years prior to the 1997 federal election. Thus, it is possible that Québec respondents were questioning the usefulness of referendums as a policy tool.

⁹ Based on cross-tabulations for 1992/3, the difference between Québec and the rest of the country in support for referendums is not statistically significant ($p < .1$).

(Table 2 about here)

In 2000, the Québec/outside Québec gap in support for the regular use of referendums closed substantially. However, Quebecers' support continued to decline and reached a low of 16% support for regular referendums. Support for regular use of referendums in the rest of the country dove even more substantially; down 13 points to 22%. While there was significant change in the highest support categories of the 1997 and 2000 CES referendum questions, the distribution within the more moderate category of 'occasional use' of the referendum was remarkably stable across time and space. Very few people believe that referendums should never be held on important or controversial issues. For all cases except Québec in 2000, the proportion of people who believe referendums should never be held was under 10%. In short, we see relatively consistent support for referendums on the whole. However, support has declined both in and outside Québec over the 1992-2000 period, reaching a low in both groups during the latest election.

The ordered logit analyses will provide more detail as to who is and is not supportive of referendums as well as the changes over time among people with certain characteristics believed to influence attitudes toward the referendum. Results are presented thematically starting with the impact of social background variables on support for the use of referendums, proceeding then to discussion of regional and attitudinal influences in turn. Thematic treatment of the topic will permit a more organized discussion of changes across time, which is the chief goal of the following analyses. In addition, we will discuss results for Québec separately. Experience with and meanings attached to the use of the referendum have been quite different for people living in Québec, and this warrants separate analysis of Québec results.

Social Background Factors

The influence of social background factors is a natural point from which to begin any study of popular political preferences. Starting with Canada outside Québec (Table 3), there have been several interesting patterns over the 1990s. For all three surveys, the three post-war ages cohorts were more supportive of the referendum than the oldest cohort, that is, people born prior to WWII. In many cases, the magnitude of the differences between the post-war cohorts and the pre-war cohort were substantial. For example, in 1993, the generation X cohort was 2.5 times more likely to support regular use of referendums than the pre-war cohort. This may indicate a high degree of deference to political authority among the oldest generation, an interpretation that corresponds with the postmaterialist thesis. On the other hand, the fact that the oldest generation is least likely to endorse the referendum as a policy-making tool may simply indicate a general conservatism and preference for the status quo.

(Table 3 about here)

There are also interesting differences between the post-war cohorts. In two of the years (1993 and 2000), generation X respondents were the most supportive of the referendum. In 1993, generation X respondents were over 50% more likely than either boomer or post generation X respondents to support regular use of the referendums. In 1997, boomers comprised the generational cohort most supportive of the use of the referendum.

In terms of broad trends over the past decade related to generational support for the referendum in Canada outside Québec, two overall points can be gleaned from Table 3. First, among the cohorts, members of the youngest generation – post generation X (respondents born since 1970) – were not the strongest supporters of the use of the referendum. For each time period, generation X and/or boomers were more oriented toward this mode of political decision making. This is somewhat counterintuitive given the improvements in cognitive abilities and access to

information that are often theorized for the youngest generation. One might expect the youngest generation to endorse the sharing of policy making authority between governments and citizens. On the other hand, the youngest Canadians are also the most frequent non-voters, and their relative lack of support for the referendum may be an indication of a more general apathy toward the political system at large. In addition, for all three surveys many of the post generation X respondents would have been ineligible to vote in the 1992 Charlottetown referendum, in effect missing what may have been an empowering exercise in citizen political participation that enhanced support among the other post-war generations (boomers and generation X).

The second overarching trend has been a decline in support for the referendum in all post-war cohorts from 1993 to 2000, as well as a relative convergence between the post-war cohorts in their levels of support. Indeed, the gap in support between the most supportive and least supportive post-war cohorts appears to have diminished significantly from 1993 to 2000.

Moving to other social background factors, gender has become a significant predictor of pro-referendum attitudes after 1993. While there were no significant gender differences during the national referendum on the Charlottetown Accord in 1992, the post-Charlottetown era witnessed the opening of a gender gap in referendum attitudes. In 1997, women were nearly 40% more likely than men to support regular use of referendums. Although absolute levels of support for the referendum decreased among women in 2000, women were still over 30% more favourable toward the referendum than men were in 2000. Pro-referendum attitudes among women are somewhat puzzling given our initial expectations. The referendum is a majoritarian mode of decision making, and as such, it potentially threatens minority rights and interests. Women have been relatively successful in obtaining and maintaining favourable policies from liberal governments throughout the last century, and majoritarian policy making may endanger these gains. However, perhaps

women respondents recognize that they are the majority of the population, suggesting that referendums can work in women's interests.

In 1997 and 2000, higher income respondents were less supportive of the referendum than lower income respondents. While the magnitude of difference between high and low- income respondents in 1997 was small (only a 6% difference in likelihood of being in the category of highest support for referendums), this gap widened substantially in 2000. In fact, in 2000, high-income respondents were more than 40% less likely to favour the regular use of the referendum than lower income respondents. Similar to high-income earners, university graduates are less supportive of referendums than those without a university degree. While the gulf between university graduates and non-graduates closed slightly in 1997, it reopened in 2000 to produce a sizeable difference: university graduates were 40% less likely to support the regular use of referendums than non-graduates in 2000.

As Table 3 indicates, in none of the outside Québec models were religion and ethnicity statistically significant. This is somewhat contrary to expectations: Catholics were expected to be disinclined toward the referendum due to their relatively hierarchical and deferential religious heritage, and minorities were expected to display less favourable attitudes on the basis that referendums are majoritarian mechanisms that potentially threaten minority rights and interests.

(Table 4 about here)

As expected, the Québec results reveal slightly different patterns depending on social background factors as well as over the time dimension. Table 4 presents the Québec models for 1993, 1997, and 2000. Starting with generational cohorts, contrary to the results presented for respondents who live outside Québec, the youngest Quebecers are the most strongly pro-referendum. Compared to the pre-war cohort, post generation X Quebecers were 3.5 times more likely to favour the regular use of referendums in 1993. Support for the referendum dipped among

all generational cohorts in 1997. This is likely the result of a combination of events during the period: the failure of mega-constitutional politics in the late-1980s and early-1990s, the outcome of the extremely close 1995 sovereignty referendum, the 1995 Supreme Court decision in the Québec secession reference, as well as the political upheaval caused by the Clarity Bill (in process by 1997). Support for the referendum increased again among all generational cohorts in 2000, and for boomer and generation X respondents their favourability toward referendums eclipsed 1993 levels. Post generation X did not return to its previous high from 1993, although it was still the cohort most favourable toward the referendum as a decision-making tool.

Table 4 also indicates that high-income respondents were slightly less inclined toward the referendum in 1993 and 1997 compared to lower income respondents. By 2000, however, there were no significant differences between income categories. Surprisingly, education was not a significant factor in any of the time periods. In both 1997 and 2000, non-Europeans living in Québec were substantially less favourable toward the referendum. This finding on ethnicity corresponds with initial expectations, as mentioned earlier, that there may be a sense among minority groups that majoritarian modes of policy making threaten minority interests. This “minority effect” may be especially salient in Québec due to Québec nationalism at the societal level and efforts at the policy level to preserve the dominant (francophone) national culture, history, and language.

Regional Factors

Regional factors add another layer of interest to these analyses. It should be noted that while Québec is a “region” in the sense of being a geographically delineated area with its own distinct political culture and heritage, the paper does not regard Québec as a region like the others. This has been clear from the start. Rather, regional factors refer to the core-periphery distribution of

Canadian provinces with Ontario as the “centre” and the Western and Atlantic provinces as the peripheral regions. In this context, we consider three regions: Atlantic provinces, Prairie provinces, and British Columbia.¹⁰

In the 1992/3 survey, there were no significant regional effects (from Table 3). However, regional effects were revealed in 1997 and again in 2000. British Columbians were consistent supporters of the referendum over the 1997 – 2000 period. Irrespective of all other socio-demographic factors, British Columbians were between 43% (1997) and 51% (2000) more likely to support regular use of referendums than their counterparts from Ontario.

Several interpretations offer interesting insights into these regional effects. The first and most obvious point to be made is that British Columbia has a history of experimentation with direct democracy in terms of referendums and recall legislation. Thus, not only might BC be more oriented toward populist politics in general – like other Prairie provinces – but BC has had experience with direct citizen involvement in political decision making beyond conventional forms of participation such as voting, party activism, and so forth. In fact, the non-significant findings for the other Prairie provinces suggests that experience with direct democracy, rather than populist politics per se, accounts for the strong pro-referendum attitudes of British Columbians.

In addition, Atlantic Canadians had distinct and significant opinions toward the referendum in 2000. Atlantic respondents were 30% less likely to support the regular use of referendums than their Ontarian counterparts. Interpretation of this finding is somewhat less straightforward than for BC; however, several explanations can be offered. First, the idea that Atlantic Canadians are less favourable toward the referendum probably reflects awareness of the region’s relative disadvantage in terms of population size, especially compared to Ontario and Québec. Indeed, the Atlantic

¹⁰ Rather than consider the Western provinces as a single region, there are good reasons to separate BC from the Prairie provinces. Indeed, especially in the context of direct democratic modes of political decision making, BC has a unique history and outlook on these issues. Note, that for all regions, Ontario is used as the reference category.

“voice” would be muffled in national referendums due to its small proportion of the national population. This interpretation reflects a similar logic as the hypotheses that women and minorities may be less supportive of the referendum. Indeed, there may be a fear that concerns specific to the Atlantic region – such as unemployment and management of natural resources – may be trumped by the concerns of more populous regions in national referendums. In addition, the finding for Atlantic respondents may also reflect the existence of a more traditional, deferential political culture in the four Atlantic provinces (see for example, Adamson and Stewart 1996; Wiseman 1996). This interpretation should be considered cautiously, for there is debate as to how traditional or conservative Atlantic political culture(s) really are. Nonetheless, it is certainly true that Atlantic Canada has not been the most politically experimental of the country’s regions, especially compared to the West and Québec.

Attitudinal and Cognitive Factors

Attitudinal and cognitive factors add a final layer to these analyses of attitudes toward the referendum. Starting with Table 5, we can see the impact of a variety of such variables on support for the referendum outside Québec. In 1993, the addition of attitudinal factors renders several variables non-significant compared to the results presented in Table 3, which estimated the independent impact of social-background and regional predictors of support for the referendum. Generation X respondents are the only generational cohort to remain significant, and members of generation X are almost 100% more likely to support the referendum than the oldest age cohort (those born prior to WWII). In 1997 and 2000, boomers and generation X respondents are more likely than the oldest cohort to support the referendum; post generation X is no longer significant for any of the years.

(Table 5 about here)

University graduates are still much less likely to support the use of the referendum than non-graduates in 1993 and 2000. However, the introduction of attitudinal factors resulted in a decrease in pro-referendum attitudes among university graduates generally, and university education became non-significant in 1997. Similarly, the impact of BC residence diminished following the introduction of attitudinal variables in 2000; yet, in 1997 the impact of BC residence was enhanced by the addition of attitudinal variables. On the whole, these changes in the relative importance of social background and regional variables reflect the importance of attitudinal and cognitive factors in Canadians' assessments of the relative merits and drawbacks of the referendum.

Several attitudinal variables had substantial influence on support for the referendum among non-Québec respondents. First, irrespective of education, the impact of political knowledge levels is large and significant in all three surveys. In 1993, the most politically knowledgeable are 71% less likely to support the referendum than the relatively less knowledgeable. The knowledge gap closed significantly in 1997, with the most knowledgeable 52% less likely to support the referendum; however, in 2000, the knowledge gap widened once again, with the most knowledgeable 66% less likely to support the referendum. So, to varying degrees, the information-rich are consistently less supportive of the referendum than their less knowledgeable counterparts. Our interpretation of this result rests mainly on the idea that the politically knowledgeable are more attuned to the fact that referendums are not amenable to the type of bargaining and compromise characteristic of traditional modes of decision making and necessary for large, diverse, and segmented societies.

Contrary to expectations, personal political efficacy appears to reduce support for referendums. In both 1997 and 2000, respondents with higher reported levels of efficacy are 32% and 41%, respectively, less likely to support the regular use of referendums. Those who believe they have a good understanding of the political world are also more likely to know or realize that

political decision making often reflects the compromise and balance of competing interests. In addition, the efficacious are probably more satisfied with current political processes and feel less need to alter existing modes of decision making. In other words, those who feel competent within the confines of current political arrangements are certainly less likely to endorse altering decision making procedures than those who are confused or alienated.

The independent effects of incumbent party identification are variable across time. Only in 1997 does identification with the incumbent party reduce the likelihood of support for the regular use of referendums – Liberal Party identifiers are 40% less likely to endorse the referendum compared to individuals who identify with another party or no party. The lack of statistically significant results in 1993 is particularly surprising given that it was the Conservative government that initiated the referendum process. The 1997 result is consistent with our expectations based on the logic that incumbent identification may also indicate satisfaction with the status quo. That said, the lack of significant effect for incumbent party affiliation in 2000 may demonstrate how the 1995 Québec referendum galvanized opinion in 1997 but this effect dissipated by 2000.

Consistent with expectations, strong majoritarian views increased the likelihood of support for the regular use of referendums in 1993 and 2000 by nearly 100%. The absence of a similar finding for 1997 may indicate that in the wake of a narrow federalist victory in the sovereignty referendum of 1995, majoritarians across the country faced with the potential downside of referendums in Canada: the break-up of the country.

Of note is the puzzling lack of effect for both ideology and views on equality. Notwithstanding the prominence of direct democratic reforms in the platforms of the former Reform/Canadian Alliance parties, the lack of findings for ideology may be explained by the possibility that ideology and populism are not as closely linked in Canadian politics as previously thought. In addition, the 2000 election campaign witnessed an embarrassing gaffe for the Alliance

regarding the use of referendums. Mid-way through the campaign, reports alleged that an Alliance government planned to hold a referendum on abortion if at least three hundred thousand citizens signed a petition calling for such a vote (Blais et al., 2002: 144). The Alliance denied the allegation, but controversy ensued nonetheless about the possible uses (and misuses) of the referendum as a mode of decision making. This may be one reason for the lack of influence of right-wing ideology in 2000 on pro-referendum views, for it was a serious gaffe for the Alliance and possibly other right-wing identifiers.

Views on equality are another surprising non-finding. The potential uses of direct democratic modes of decision making are extremely varied. Similar to the earlier experience of the 1942 conscription vote, fairness and sensitivity to all segments of the population are not always the end goals of plebiscitory decision making. It was expected that negative views about the current state of equality in Canada would be associated with declining support for referendums.

(Table 6 about here)

The introduction of attitudinal and political variables into the Québec models produces slightly different results (Table 6). Many of the initial socio-demographic effects disappear. Again, this is an indication of the independent effects attitudinal and cognitive variables have on direct democratic views. However, several socio-demographic factors retain their influence. Post generation X respondents are 16 times more likely to support referendums than members of the oldest cohort. While the magnitude of difference is much less, in 2000, both boomers and post-generation X'ers are more likely to support regular use of referendums than the oldest cohort. In contrast to the insignificant effects for Catholics in the original model (Table 4), the inclusion of attitudinal and cognitive variables results in a significant effect whereby Catholics are much less likely to support regular use of referendums. Finally, in 1997 respondents of non-European origin remained 61% less likely to support regular referendums. Thus, independent of the impact of

political knowledge, efficacy, and party identification, minorities in Québec are sceptical about the utility of referendum decision making.

In contrast to the rest of the country, knowledge had mixed effects in Québec. While knowledge significantly reduced support for referendums in 1993 and 2000 (as in Canada outside Québec), the extent of confidence in this result only reaches the $p < .1$ level. In addition, knowledge had no independent influence in 1997 referendum attitudes. The relative weakness of knowledge effects in Québec is surprising given the prominent effects estimated outside Québec.

Identification with the incumbent party influences support for referendums in both 1992/3 and 1997. In 1992/3, Conservative identifiers were 60% less likely to support the use of referendums to change the constitution as compared to letting the government decide. At first glance, this may appear curious given that it was the Conservative government's decision to put the Charlottetown Accord to a referendum in the first place. However, as noted above, Quebeckers were sceptical about the Accord from the start. Additionally, the 1993 federal election made it clear that even people who traditionally identified with the Conservative party were prepared to alter allegiances following the failure of Mulroney governments to bring Québec back into the constitutional fold.

In 1997, as consistent with expectations, Liberal identifiers were less likely to support the regular use of referendums by 44%. In the context of Québec, this result makes sense, as identifying with the Liberal Party is likely to be closely associated with support for a united Canada more generally.

Finally, in 1997 right-wing ideological orientation is negatively associated with pro-referendum attitudes. This effect of ideology in Québec can perhaps be best interpreted in the prevailing ideological context of social democratic thought, statism and support for sovereignty in Québec. It may be that a right-wing ideology most clearly delineates the sub-set of Québec society

that lies outside of this cohesion of ideological and political positions. That said, while the effect of ideology in 1997 is large, these effects are not similarly observed in the other two surveys.

(Table 7 about here)

Given the recent experience with sovereignty referendums in Québec, the analysis would be remiss in not estimating the effect of sovereignty views on support for referendums. Table 7 reveals the results of adding views on sovereignty to all the previously introduced independent variables. In 1992/3, the CES did not include a view on sovereignty question. As a result, identification with the Bloc Québécois is used as a proxy for support for sovereignty. In 1992/3, the sovereignty support measure has no independent effect on referendum attitudes. This might be expected, because the 1992 question on referendums specifically referred to changing the constitution through referendums. If a respondent is strongly supportive of sovereignty it is likely that they do not wish to merely change the constitution but in fact separate from the country.

In 1997 and 2000, views on sovereignty was the strongest predictor of pro-referendum attitudes. Indeed, in 1997 and 2000, individuals who adhered to pro-sovereignty views were over 3.5 times more likely to favour the regular use of referendums than those who did not hold pro-sovereignty views.

VI. Discussion and Conclusion

This paper has sought to consider the distribution and nature of public opinion regarding direct democracy in general and referendums in particular throughout the post-Charlottetown era.

Surveying the results en masse, a number points are worthy of further discussion.

The first point to make is that throughout this period the overall level of support for referendums and by extension direct democracy is quite high. For each of 1992/3, 1997 and 2000 a clear majority of respondents both within and outside Québec supported either constitutional change

through referendums (1992/3) or the occasional/regular use of referendums to decide important/controversial issues. Therefore, consideration of changes in the distribution of support for referendums must be considered in light of this observation.

Despite consistent pro-referendum attitudes at the aggregate level, that there has been a clear decline throughout the post-Charlottetown era in public endorsement of this mode of policy making. Notwithstanding substantive differences between the meanings of the questions used to tap attitudes toward referendums in the three surveys, positive orientations toward the use of referendums outside Québec were similar from 1992/3 to 1997 but declined prominently between 1997 and 2000. In contrast, the decline in pro-referendum attitudes occurred earlier in Québec; relative to the high levels of favourability toward referendums in 1992/3, pro-referendum attitudes diminish substantially in 1997 and even further in 2000. The divergent timing of decline in support suggests that different dynamics have been involved in shaping public support for referendums and direct democratic modes of decision making more generally.

As noted earlier in the paper, we suspect that a combination of factors has contributed to the earlier timing of weakening pro-referendum attitudes in Québec. In general, there may be some level of “referendum fatigue” within the province. By this we do not suggest that there have been *too many* referendums in Québec. Rather, after several politically charged sovereignty referendums as well as the 1992 vote on the Charlottetown Accord – a package meant to bring Québec back into the constitutional fold – it is plausible that many Quebeckers associate referendums with the constitutional wrangling characteristic of post-war Canada. By extension, as a mode of decision making, the referendum may be regarded as unproductive and unnecessarily divisive.

In Québec, as revealed from the models in Table 7, support for regular use of referendums is largely explained by respondents’ level of support for sovereignty: greater support for sovereignty leads to more support for regular referendums. This connection is of course logical in an advanced

democratic society like Québec. Based on this finding, it is plausible if not likely that declining support for sovereignty itself contributes to declining support for referendums in Québec. Since the 1995 referendum on sovereignty a number of factors have coalesced that, in the minds of Quebeckers, may have made the likelihood of sovereignty less. The razor-thin defeat in the 1995 referendum, the Supreme Court decision in the reference case regarding Québec secession as well as the federal Clarity Bill may all have contributed to the declining likelihood of achieving sovereignty in the near future. Thus, in addition to general “referendum fatigue”, we argue that the decline of support for sovereignty in Québec throughout the 1990’s is also a function of changes in views on Québec sovereignty.

Interpreting the decline in pro-referendum attitudes among Canadians outside Québec may not be as straightforward. We propose three possible explanations. First, it may be that support for referendums was particularly or unusually strong in the early 1990s. The high degree of support was the result of general excitement over widespread citizen involvement in the constitutional reform process. This is in stark contrast to previous experiences of closed-door “executive federalism” and elite bargaining, as exemplified by the negotiation of the Meech Lake Accord. Thus, in 1992/3, high levels support reflected the optimism of the time; yet, over time, 1992/3 attitudes toward referendums may actually represent a ‘blip’ of increased support that has slowly reverted to more normalized levels.

The second possibility is related to the first. Since the national referendum on the Charlottetown Accord, Canadians have had time to ponder the value of the referendum process.

Lastly, it may be that declining support for referendums reflects an increasingly sophisticated and knowledgeable citizenry. With the country’s experience of referendums throughout recent decades as well as exposure to oft-vigorous public debate on the relative merits and drawbacks of the referendum procedure, citizens in Canada may have become more aware of

the potential pitfalls of referendums as well as more sceptical of the regular use of referendums. Referendums are absolute in the sense that they ask citizens to either accept or reject some policy proposal. Referendums do not permit bargaining and compromise at the societal level, and they may be unsuited for complex or multifaceted policy decisions. The Charlottetown Accord is an excellent example; presented with a “seamless web” of proposals and amendments, many voters must have been overwhelmed by the Accord and virtually every voter could find some reason to reject the Accord. Many political issues and decisions, especially relating to complex constitutional proposals, may simply be too complex to put to a simple yes or no vote.

This paper began with the intent of discovering the nature of support for referendums through time and the variety of factors that influence this distribution. Results of the research indicate that, despite high overall levels of support for direct democracy, there has been decline in the strength of this support. While we have offered some explanation for the decline in support for referendums, further work is required to more specifically tackle and understand the causes of this emerging trend, particularly outside Québec where ready explanations are more difficult to identify.

The findings of this paper also have relevance for institutional reform. Indeed, distrust of politicians and frustration with the political process have contributed, in part, to widespread cynicism vis-à-vis political elites and government in Canada. The adoption of referendum procedures has been an appealing institutional innovation to help solve vexing questions of public policy as well as restore public trust in Canadian government. As declining support for the referendum mechanism indicates, it may be that other avenues of institutional reform would best address demands for change.

Table 1: Aggregate Support for Direct Democracy, 1992/1993		
	1992/3 outside Québec	1992/3 Québec
No/Low Support	28%	26%
High Support	68%	71%
Source: 1992/1993 Referendum Study/CES		

Table 2: Aggregate Support for Direct Democracy, 1997 & 2000				
	1997 outside Québec	1997 Québec	2000 outside Québec	2000 Québec
Never	2 %	6%	8%	12%
Rarely	19%	27%	27%	28%
Occasionally	44%	48%	43%	44%
Regularly	35%	19%	22%	16%
Source: 1997, 2000 CES				

Table 3: Support for Direct Democracy by Social Background
(outside Québec)

	1992/3	1997	2000
Boomers	1.69 (.27)***	1.95 (.28)***	1.54 (.20)***
Gen X	2.52 (.48)***	1.84 (.29)**	1.83 (.25)***
Post-Gen X	1.99 (.54)**	1.39 (.27)*	1.45 (.20)***
Female	.95 (.12)	1.39 (.16)***	1.31 (.12)***
Income	.98 (.03)	.94 (.02)***	.58 (.09)***
University Grad	.56 (.09)***	.64 (.08)***	.59 (.07)***
Catholic	.90 (.12)	.93 (.12)	1.09 (.11)
Non-European	1.07 (.27)	.92 (.21)	1.18 (.22)
Atlantic	.74 (.15)	.78 (.13)	.79 (.10)*
Prairies	.87 (.14)	.98 (.13)	1.08 (.13)
BC	1.12 (.21)	1.43 (.23)**	1.51 (.21)***
Pseudo R ²	0.03	0.02	0.02
N	1108	1158	1578

Note: figures in columns are odds ratios with standard errors in parentheses
 *** p<.01 ** p<.05 * p<.10

Source: 1993, 1997, 2000 CES

Table 4: Support for Direct Democracy by Social Background (Québec)			
	1992/3	1997	2000
Boomers	1.66 (.35)**	1.26 (.31)	2.76 (.49)***
Gen X	2.02 (.50)***	1.53 (.40)*	2.48 (.48)***
Post-Gen X	3.50 (1.39)***	1.70 (.55)*	3.22 (.66)***
Female	1.32 (.24)	.73 (.14)*	1.02 (.14)
Income	.94 (.04)*	.94 (.03)*	.99 (.23)
University Grad	.85 (.18)	1.11 (.25)	1.16 (.20)
Catholic	1.15 (.55)	.78 (.21)	.87 (.18)
Non-European	.63 (.24)	.39 (.14)***	.34 (.16)**
Pseudo R ²	0.03	0.02	0.03
N	667	407	810
Note: figures in columns are odds ratios with standard errors in parentheses *** p<.01 ** p<.05 * p<.10			
Source: 1993, 1997, 2000 CES			

Table 5: Support for Direct Democracy with Attitudinal Factors
(outside Québec)

	1992/3	1997	2000
Boomers	.98 (.26)	1.82 (.30)***	1.57 (.27)***
Gen X	1.97 (.68)**	1.62 (.29)***	1.49 (.29)**
Post-Gen X	1.22 (.62)	1.28 (.28)	1.27 (.28)
Female	1.04 (.25)	1.43 (.18)***	1.07 (.15)
Income	1.05 (.05)	.96 (.02)*	.68 (.15)*
University Grad	.63 (.17)*	.87 (.13)	.69 (.11)**
Catholic	.94 (.22)	.94 (.13)	1.10 (.17)
Non-European	1.21 (.54)	1.05 (.26)	1.38 (.42)
Atlantic	.79 (.28)	.85 (.17)	.93 (.17)
Prairies	.96 (.27)	.98 (.15)	1.10 (.19)
BC	.85 (.28)	1.55 (.28)**	1.48 (.30)*
Political Knowledge	.29 (.15)**	.48 (.12)***	.34 (.10)***
Incumbent Party ID	.68 (.18)	.60 (.08)***	1.00 (.16)
High Efficacy	2.38 (2.13)	.68 (.13)**	.59 (.15)**
Right-Wing Ideology	.43 (.25)	1.21 (.58)	.92 (.34)
Views on Equality	.80 (.34)	.79 (.18)	.90 (.20)
Marjoritarianism	1.97 (.51)***	1.28 (.20)	1.93 (.32)***
Pseudo R ²	0.06	0.04	0.04
N	395	934	823

Note: figures in columns are odds ratios with standard errors in parentheses
 *** p<.01 ** p<.05 * p<.10

Source: 1993, 1997, 2000 CES

Table 6: Support for Direct Democracy with Attitudinal Factors (Québec)

	1992/3	1997	2000
Boomers	1.35 (.57)	1.23 (.36)	1.92 (.55)**
Gen X	1.42 (.79)	1.64 (.50)	1.12 (.36)
Post-Gen X	16.01 (19.65)**	1.81 (.66)	2.23 (.83)**
Female	1.79 (.82)	.70 (.15)	.88 (.19)
Income	1.06 (.09)	.97 (.04)	1.24 (.49)
University Grad	.87 (.37)	1.30 (.33)	1.38 (.39)
Catholic	.27 (.28)	.64 (.18)	.51 (.18)*
Non-European	2.12 (2.43)	.39 (.15)**	.30 (.28)
Political Knowledge	.22 (.20)*	.54 (.24)	.42 (.19)*
Incumbent Party ID	.40 (.21)*	.56 (.13)**	.69 (.19)
High Efficacy	11.42 (20.36)	.78 (.27)	1.60 (.62)
Right-Wing Ideology	.78 (.83)	.22 (.18)*	1.44 (.93)
Views on Equality	1.06 (.85)	.98 (.43)	1.13 (.42)
Marjoritarianism	1.56 (.60)	.72 (.17)	1.25 (.31)
Pseudo R ²	0.11	0.04	0.04
N	173	326	320

Note: figures in columns are odds ratios with standard errors in parentheses
 *** p<.01 ** p<.05 * p<.10

Source: 1993, 1997, 2000 CES

Table 7: Support for Direct Democracy with Attitudinal Factors – Views on Sovereignty (Québec)

	1992/3	1997	2000
Boomers	1.28 (.55)	.97 (.29)	2.09 (.61)**
Gen X	1.35 (.76)	1.24 (.39)	1.10 (.36)
Post-Gen X	15.44 (18.79)**	1.56 (.59)	2.20 (.83)**
Female	1.77 (.80)	.75 (.17)	1.02 (.23)
Income	1.06 (.09)	.97 (.04)	1.41 (.56)
University Grad	.91 (.39)	1.26 (.32)	1.45 (.40)
Catholic	.30 (.32)	.54 (.16)**	.49 (.17)**
Non-European	2.19 (2.52)	.42 (.17)**	.51 (.48)
Political Knowledge	.22 (.20)*	.53 (.24)	.41 (.19)*
Incumbent Party ID	.43 (.23)	.88 (.24)	1.18 (.37)
High Efficacy	9.50 (17.05)	.74 (.26)	1.50 (.59)
Right-Wing Ideology	.71 (.76)	.28 (.23)	2.20 (1.46)
Views on Equality	1.01 (.81)	1.19 (.53)	1.18 (.45)
Marjoritarianism	1.56 (.60)	.58 (.14)**	1.28 (.32)
Support for Sovereignty	1.37 (.68)	3.72 (1.30)***	3.65 (1.23)***
Pseudo R ²	0.12	0.07	0.06
N	173	314	316

Note: figures in columns are odds ratios with standard errors in parentheses
 *** p<.01 ** p<.05 * p<.10

Source: 1993, 1997, 2000 CES

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Appendix: Coding of Socio-demographic variables and question wording¹¹

University Graduate:

Highest level of education completed

1=graduated from university, 0 = no university degree

Age Cohorts:

Age of respondents recoded into generational dummy variables based on year of birth. Note: the pre-war cohort (born 1902-1944) is used as the reference category for each of the following cohort dummies:

Boomers = 1 if born 1945-1959

Gen X = 1 if born 1960-1969

Post-gen X = 1 if born 1970-1982

Catholic:

Respondent reports religion as Catholic

1 = Catholic, 0 = not Catholic

Income:

Index of respondent's household income, 10 income categories ranging from \$0-\$10,000 to \$100,000 and over

Female:

Respondent's gender

1 = female, 0 = male

Non-European:

Respondent is of non-European ethnic origin

1 = non-European, 0 = European

Region:

Dummy variables for Atlantic, Prairies, and BC with Ontario as the reference category. Note that since analyses were conducted separately for Québec, no Québec regional dummy was required.

Party Identification:

Incumbent party identification = 1

no party identification and other party identification = 0

Personal Political Efficacy:

"Sometimes politics is so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on."

1 = strongly disagree, 0 = strongly agree

¹¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all variable coding and construction is consistent across the 1993, 1997 and 2000 Canadian Election Studies.

Equality:

“We have gone too far in pushing equal rights in this country.”

1 = strongly disagree, 0 = strong agree

Majoritarian/Consensus Views:

“Which is more important in a democratic society: letting the majority decide or protecting the needs and rights of minorities?”

1 = majority decision, 0 = protecting minorities

Left/Right Ideology:

Consists of an index of answers to questions pertaining to the economic Left-Right ideological spectrum. Answers are rescaled to 0-1 with 1 representing a right-wing orientation and 0 representing a left-wing orientation.

1993 CES (Cronbach’s Alpha= 0.54)

1. “Its up to government to ensure that basic needs are met” (1=disagree)
2. “How do you feel about unions” (1=most negative)
3. “Are you willing to pay more tax to maintain social spending?” (1=not willing)
4. “Government should leave job creation to the private sector” (1=strongly agree)
5. “Should spending on pensions be cut?” (1=cut spending)
6. “Should spending on welfare be cut?” (1=cut spending)
7. “Should spending on healthcare be cut?” (1=cut spending)
8. “Should spending on education be cut?” (1=cut spending)

1997 CES (Cronbach’s Alpha= 0.59) and 2000 CES (Cronbach’s Alpha= 0.53)

1. “The Government should leave it entirely to the private sector to create jobs”
(1 = strongly agree)
2. “When businesses make a lot of money, everyone benefits, including the poor”
(1= strongly agree)
3. “People who don’t get ahead should blame themselves, not the system” (1 = strongly agree)
4. “How do you feel about unions?” (1 = strongly dislike)
5. “Should the federal government spend more, less or about the same as now on welfare?”
(1= less)
6. “Should the federal government spend more, less or about the same as now on pensions?”
(1= less)
7. “Should the federal government spend more, less or about the same as now on unemployment insurance?” (1= less)
8. “Should the federal government spend more, less or about the same as now on health care?” (1= less)
9. “Should the federal government spend more, less or about the same as now on education?” (1= less)

Knowledge:

Index comprised of questions on knowledge of politics. Index values are rescaled to 0-1 where a score of 1 means that a respondent answered all four questions correctly, and a score of 0 means that no questions were answered correctly.

1993 CES (Cronbach's Alpha= 0.62)

1. "Do you recall the name of the Prime Minister?" (Kim Campbell)
2. "Do you recall the name of the NAFTA?" ()
3. "Do you recall the name of the GST1" ()
4. "Do you recall the name of the GST2?" ()
5. "Do you recall the name of the public?" ()

1997 CES (Cronbach's Alpha= 0.60)

1. "Do you recall the name of the Government Leader/Premier of this province/territory?" (varies with province)
2. "Do you recall the name of the President of the United States?" (Bill Clinton)
3. "Do you recall the name of the first woman Prime Minister of Canada?" (Kim Campbell)
4. "Do you recall the name of the Federal Minister of Finance?" (Paul Martin)

2000 CES (Cronbach's Alpha= 0.65)

1. "Do you recall the name of the Government Leader/Premier of this province?" (varies with province)
2. "Do you recall the name of the Minister of Finance of Canada?" (Paul Martin)
3. "Do you happen to know the name of the Prime Minister at the time of the Free Trade Agreement with the United States?" (Brian Mulroney)
4. "Do you know the capital of the United States?" (Washington)