



VALUE DIVERSITY AND SUPPORT FOR ELECTORAL REFORM IN CANADA

KEYWORDS

Values; electoral reform; Canada; World Values Survey; Canadian Election Study

WHAT'S THE STORY?

Canada was once described by its Prime Minister as a “community of communities.” In this article, the authors contend that not only are the communities that make up Canada diversifying, but that the core values of their members are also diversifying. If value gaps between Canadian communities continue to widen, results suggest that calls for reforming the federal electoral system will intensify.

This conclusion is based on large-scale surveys of Canadians conducted in 1990 and 2000. Kanji and Bilodeau begin the analysis by identifying 19 underlying value-orientations in Canadian society. Values are derived from responses to a wide array of questions ranging from issues of religion, morals, work, family, and technology.

Each value orientation is determined by identifying groups of questions that people tended to answer in similar ways. For instance, one of the 19 values identified in the study is referred to as “orientations toward

spirituality.” This category encompasses responses to a series of four questions about belief in heaven, hell, life after death, and whether the human soul exists. The authors are able to show that when presented with these four questions, people tend to answer in consistent ways, pointing to the underlying core value: orientations to spirituality.

HEADLINES

Measuring Values

Values are assumed to structure everyday attitudes. Factor analysis is a common measure of values because it points to underlying patterns in survey responses.

A Growing Divide

Canadian society is a composite of old and new linguistic and ethno-religious cleavages. World Values Survey shows growing values divide between these cleavages.

Fed up with the Electoral System?

Expect for calls to reform the federal electoral system to strengthen as value orientations diversify within Canadian communities.

Having determined the sets of questions that “load together” in this way, Kanji and Bilodeau then compare how different societal groups in Canada score on the various value dimensions. One result that stands out is that traditional religious, linguistic, and regional cleavages in Canada have fewer shared values than similar ones, and that these differences seem to be growing wider over time. The other key finding is that value gaps are also growing between non-traditional cleavages based on gender, immigration, and generation.

In the final step of the analysis the authors show that geographic areas where value diversity is most intense are also areas where people are most likely to be dissatisfied with the federal electoral system. This result, they speculate, stems from the fact that single-member plurality electoral systems typically do not reward smaller parties with seats. The theory is that frustration about the fact that smaller parties have little chance of winning is likely to be strongest in communities where values are most diverse.

HOW WE DID IT?

This study relies on surveys of Canadians collected by the World Values Survey (WVS) and the Canadian Election Study (CES). Factor analysis is the technique used for identifying underlying core value orientations from a large battery of questions asked for the WVS. The 2000 CES, which includes questions about the federal electoral system, is used to test the

relationship between value diversity in different communities and frustration with the single-member plurality method.

FOR PUBLIC DEBATE

This study suggests that debates about reforming Canada’s electoral system are likely to strengthen in the years ahead. If the number of cleavages within Canadian society is growing and the diversity of core values between those communities is widening then it stands to reason that dissatisfaction with political representation will gain momentum. Perhaps more importantly, this study has profound implications for social cohesion in Canada.

“The preliminary evidence presented in this analysis suggests that the Canadian public’s more recent frustration with their current electoral system may be driven in part by the consequences of societal change” (p. 834)

LEARN MORE

Kanji, Mebs and Antoine Bilodeau. 2006. “Value Diversity and Support for Electoral Reform in Canada.” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 39(4): 829-836.
<http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=506156&fulltextType=RA&fileId=S1049096506061002>

