

The Rethinking Citizen Engagement 2007 Study Towards Civic Participation & Democratic Renewal

Context

Governments' increased commitment to engaging citizens in consultation, and more recently, to exploring democratic renewal, has in large part been a response to declining civic participation and eroding trust in public institutions. During the last 10 years, a significant amount of work has been undertaken in an effort to understand why an increasing number of people appear to have become estranged from mainstream politics and political institutions.

Many of these studies have focused on measuring and analyzing declining electoral participation, which is considered by many to be the most obvious and alarming aspect of the general decline in civic engagement. Evidence of civic disengagement is also found in an analysis of Statistics Canada data, which suggests that much of civic participation in Canada is concentrated in about one quarter of the population, a group that Reed and Selbee have labelled the "civic core". Members of this core, who account for 83 per cent of total hours volunteered in Canada and 69 per cent of civic participation, tend to be older and relatively well educated.¹

Researchers have put forward a number of explanations for these trends. In studies of the generation born after 1970, lack of civic literacy (i.e., the knowledge to be effective citizens), apathy and a weaker sense of civic duty are identified as some of the main drivers behind declining electoral participation. There is also some debate around the possibility that today's non-voters are making up for their lack of electoral participation by substituting other "more relevant" political activities, such as political blogging and the signing of on-line petitions. Similar arguments have been made with respect to civic participation (e.g., the tendency of young people to "informally volunteer" as opposed to joining

volunteer organizations).² Whatever the extent and nature of these trends, it is clear that Canadians' relationships with their community, institutions and their governments are rapidly evolving.

For the past several years EKOS has been conducting extensive research in an effort to identify what Canadians consider to be the essential characteristics of meaningful consultation. We now know, for example, that the opportunity to interact with subject matter experts, receiving feedback on consultation results and the use of methods that draw on a representative sample of Canadians are among the most popular consultation features. Canadians also continue to see information technology, such as the Internet, as a very promising consultation tool.

We propose to revisit Canadians' views on consultation and civic participation to gain a better understanding of the factors that motivate people to lend their views to government, and more broadly, become civically active. We also propose to explore a number of more practical issues pertaining to outreach/communications and the marketing of government-sponsored engagement efforts.

Thematic Overview

Based on a review of last year's study, we will select a number of tracking questions for inclusion in this year's study. The study issues/questions will be developed in close consultation with clients, however, below we outline some proposed areas of examination for the study:

- Federal government performance on engaging Canadians and democratic renewal
- Extent and nature of participation in government consultations (e.g., method, subject, sponsor, satisfaction, etc.)

¹ Reed and Selbee, "Canada's Civic Core: On the Disproportionality of Charitable Giving, Volunteering and Civic Participation", ISUMA, Vol. 2, Number 2.

² For competing schools of thought, see: Pammett and LeDuc, "Explaining the Turnout Decline in Canadian Federal Elections: A Survey of Non-Voters (Elections Canada, March 2003) and D-Code, *Youth Voter DNA Report*, January 2006.

- Motivations for participating in government consultations (e.g., civic duty, to help achieve a specific goal, values, interest/curiosity, etc.)
- Factors that facilitate participation in government consultations (e.g., the method, having a knowledge base, marketing/advertising, peer influence, sponsors, potential for “making a difference”)
- Preferred sources of information for learning about government consultations (e.g., web-site, media, voluntary groups, etc.)
- Obstacles to participating in government consultations
- Level of civic involvement, both traditional (e.g., membership in organizations) and non-traditional (e.g., membership to civic-oriented Internet chat groups)
- Motivators and barriers to civic involvement, including the creation of a civic literacy index
- Perceived linkages between citizen engagement, civic participation and democratic renewal

Methodology

The methodology for this study would involve a nationally representative telephone survey of 1,500 Canadians 16 years of age and over. Survey results will be statistically reliable in all major regions of Canada. The questionnaire will be developed in close consultation with participating subscribers, and will be designed to gain insight into public views on the study issues outlined earlier.

We will cross-tabulate the survey results by a range of demographic and socio-economic variables (e.g., gender, income, education) to get a clearer understanding of the results obtained. In addition, we will conduct a segmentation of respondents using cluster analysis. Cluster analysis is a multivariate statistical procedure aimed at identifying relatively homogeneous groups or clusters. Forming clusters of individuals and studying the characteristics that they share, as well as those in which they differ, provides valuable insights into the data collected.

Once analysis of the data is complete, we will submit a report containing detailed analysis of the survey results, as well as an executive summary of key findings and implications from the study.

Please note that a minimum of five partners will be needed to undertake the study.

Schedule

Assuming sufficient participation, the study will commence in April 2007. The major milestones are show below.

Design	April-May 2007
Data Collection	June 2007
Analysis and Reporting	July 2007

Costs

The study is available to clients at two subscription levels:

Limited Subscription \$15,000 (excluding GST)	<p>E-version and 1 hard copy of all deliverables.</p> <p>Access to the Rethinking Citizen Engagement database (in electronic format).</p> <p>Subscribers at this level can purchase a maximum of 2 special purpose closed questions at a cost of \$1,500 each.</p>
Core Subscription \$25,000 (excluding GST)	<p>E-version and 2 hard copies of all deliverables.</p> <p>Access to the Rethinking Citizen Engagement database (in electronic format).</p> <p>Opportunity to define, jointly with EKOS, 6 special purpose closed questions.</p> <p>Subscribers at this level can purchase a maximum of 4 additional special purpose closed questions at a cost of \$1,250 each.</p>

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