

Canadian Social Policy in Transition

Jewish Family Services of Ottawa-Carleton

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Canadian Policy Research Networks

Outline

- What forces are shaping social Canada today?
- Where have we come from?
 - Three eras of social policy making
- What themes are likely to guide social policy going forward?

Key forces

- Strength of the economy
 - Will a rising tide lift all boats?
- Shifting political beliefs
- Capacity of population to participate
 - Inclusion in employment
 - Integration into social and cultural fabric
 - Participation in political life
- Federal-provincial-municipal collaboration
- Core social values of Canadians

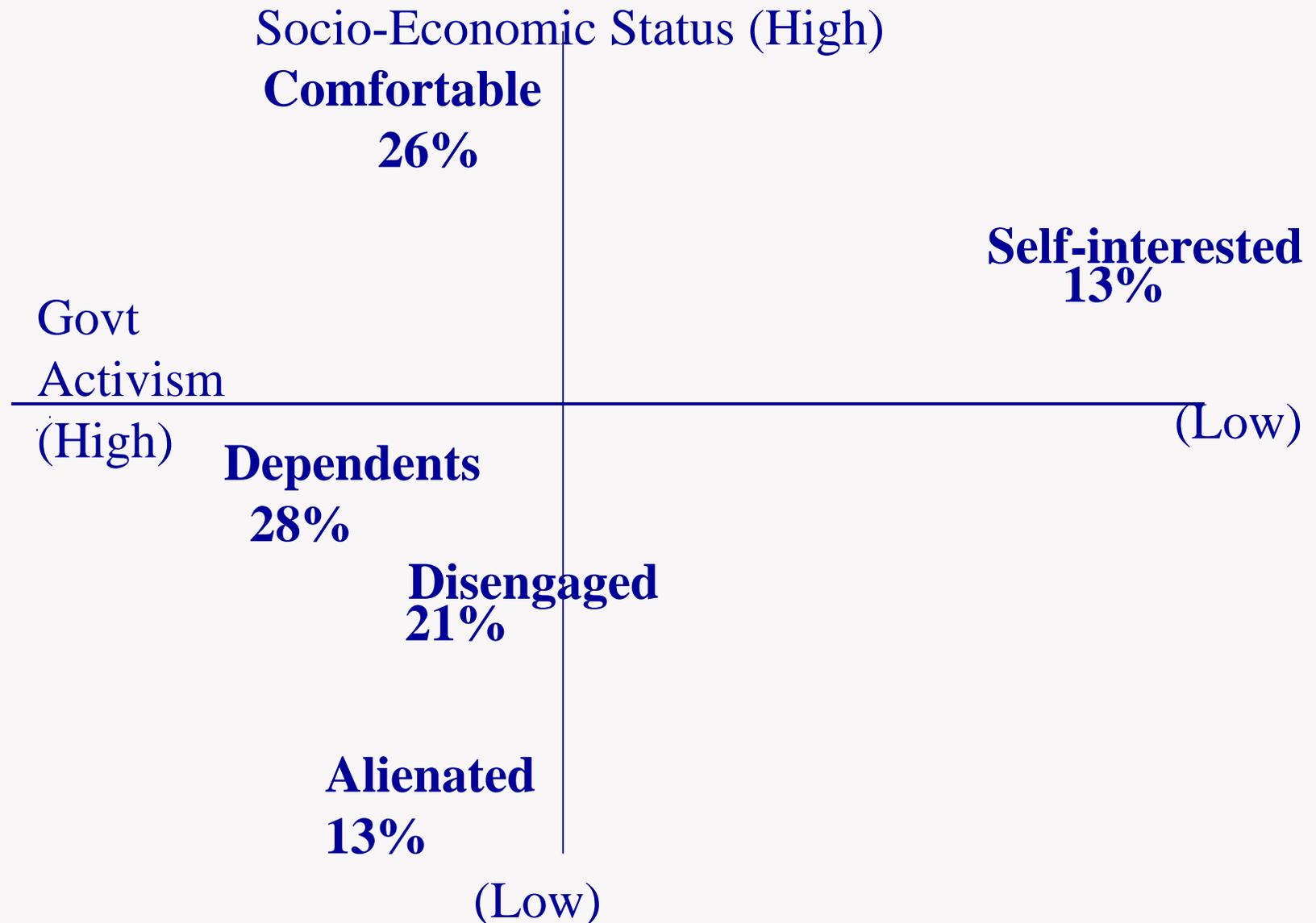
Core social values

- **Self-reliance**
 - taking responsibility for oneself and one's family and community
- **Compassion**
 - leading to collective responsibility
- **Investment in the future**
 - especially in children
- These values are always in tension -- how much self-reliance is enough?

Political and social values

- Strong post-war consensus focused on universal programs, equity and social justice
 - Gradual construction of the welfare state
- Hard times and restructuring of past 20 years has forced a rethink; created strong voices on the political right
 - Two streams on the right -- economic conservatives and social conservatives
 - Both contribute to tension in debate about social priorities

Typology of Canadian public



Source: Ekos

Three eras of social policy

- Construction -- 1940 to 1975
- Retrenchment -- 1975 to 1995
 - The CHST broke the contract with citizens and provinces
- Renewal -- post-1995
 - Fiscal surpluses create opportunities
 - But lack of consensus about where to go

The construction era

- 1940 to 1975
 - Strong growth, rising real wages and tax revenues permitted incremental construction of a comprehensive social safety net
 - Often informed by provincial innovation
 - Basic principle of universality
 - Entitlement based on work or age
 - One-earner families the norm
 - Poor elderly were removed from social assistance through OAS, GIS, CPP, while RRSPs and RPPs protected middle class

Retrenchment era

- 1975 to 1995
 - Economy fluctuates, jobs polarizing, fiscal limits reached, cuts begin
 - Targeting gradually becomes the norm
 - Two-earner families become the norm
 - Increasing focus on personal responsibility -- workfare and higher tuition fees
 - Few, if any, additions to social safety net. Most innovations designed to save money
 - **CHST breaks contract with citizens, provinces -- decline in federal clout**

Renewal era

- Post 1995
 - Economy still fluctuating
 - Polarization of jobs continues
 - Budget surplus opens new possibilities. . .
 - But no consensus on how to use it.
 - Blurring of health and social policy
 - Continuity of care for elderly, disabled
 - Merging of employment and social policy
 - Struggle to balance income and services
 - New program -- NCB begins to take children off social assistance

Challenges ahead

- Provincialism (fair share)
- Tax transfer system a weaker buffer to support unemployed
- Polarization moving beyond jobs to affect values, beliefs, opportunities -- the conservative discourse
- Literacy, education major barrier to mobility
- Poverty concentrating in inner cities; vacuum in social housing

Poverty is concentrating

- Middle class moved to suburbs
- Industrial base migrates to high skill
- Unskilled, blue collars are stranded
- Influx of Aboriginal and low-skill migrants, facing literacy and racial barriers
- Housing stock fails to adapt to new needs
- Imbalances between health care and social care lead to ER crises
- Children and youth in distress -- canaries in the coal mine.

Consequences for policy

- New constraints
 - New political discourse,
 - Priority to reduce taxes and pay down debt
 - Pervasive effects of globalization and new technologies
 - Example: Major layoffs in banking, retail trade, yet the economy is strong
 - Weakened political institutions
- Create need for a new balance between the state, the community, and the individual.

What is the community role?

- Identify needs and make them visible
- Build coalitions around problem solving
 - Horizontal coalitions with other agencies
 - Vertical coalitions with governments and other public institutions
- Create single windows:
 - For referral, assessment, service delivery.
Examples: children's services, disabled, youth, Aboriginal
- Social agencies and faith communities can be leaders in fostering collaboration

Closing comments

- Inequality is now deeply embedded in the economic structure; reinforced by the new political discourse
- But governments are not helpless. They (and we) can focus on creating self-reliance by
 - Including people in the market -- jobs that pay
 - Integrating them into the social and cultural fabric by creating space for public involvement
 - Creating pathways to participate in political life -- giving people voice

Concluding comments --2

- Social agencies and faith communities are and will be fundamental to the new social policy. You can be:
- Conveners of community actors, they can identify the core issues and mobilize
 - Create community schools with access/ programs from dawn until midnight
- Volunteers and providers of services, to help prevent risky behaviours and promote healthy social and political spaces
- Advocates for social justice



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