



Democratic Renewal

Presentation to the CPRN Board of Directors

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Outline

- Causes and symptoms of our democratic malaise
- Rethinking representative democracy
- Recent democratic renewal initiatives
- Institutional reform
- Transforming political and civic culture
- Questions for discussion



Causes and Symptoms

- Disconnect between people and politics
- Less deferent, trusting and more educated public
- Civic literacy and public affairs knowledge declining
 - Especially among younger people and the less educated
 - People misinformed on policy relevant facts
- Institutional inertia / resistance
 - Political parties, Parliament, centralized control
- Impact of the media
- Voting decline & drop in party memberships



Causes and Symptoms (2)

Youth and Democracy

- Less likely to be politically informed than older Canadians
- Participating less than previous generations
 - About one-third voted in the 2004 federal election
- Little evidence to suggest that community/non-traditional involvement is serving as a substitute for political engagement
 - Same trend as among older adults: those who are active in voluntary activities are more politically engaged



Rethinking Representative Democracy

From Locke to...Burke to...Habermas, Rawls and Beyond

- 'Deliberative democracy': 4 purposes (Gutman, Thompson)
 - Promote legitimacy of collective decisions (reciprocity)
 - Encourage public spirited perspectives
 - Promote mutually respectful processes of decision making
 - Dynamic process that allows for self-correction
- Kinds of deliberative democracy
 - Instrumental, expressive, procedural, substantive
 - Revise not replace representative democracy: not direct democracy but more participatory



Recent Democratic Renewal Initiatives

- Commission on PEI's Electoral Future
- Ontario's Democratic Renewal
 - Citizens' Assembly (electoral system) and Citizens' Jury (electoral financing): results for Oct./07 election
- British Columbia Citizens' Assembly
 - Electorate to decide on STV on May 17
- New Brunswick Commission on Legislative Renewal
 - Considering MMP (mixed member proportional), public dialogue office, party financing



Recent Initiatives (2)

- Quebec Estates General (2003) → Reform of Democratic Institutions (04-05)
 - Dec./04 tabled draft bill to replace FPP with mixed proportional system, public consultations
 - Enable greater citizen participation in the Assembly
- Federal Democratic Renewal
 - Martin's democratic deficit reforms: parliamentary focus
 - Low key 'diagnostique': Committee study, Research papers, Expert RTs, Take-Note Debates, Civic Literacy Colloquium



Institutional Reform

- Electoral reform
 - Making your vote count more: MMP, PR, STV
 - Electoral and Party financing
- Renewing political parties
 - Party Policy Foundations, nominations process
- More responsive parliament
 - Role of MPs, role of Committees, resource centre to support citizen engagement and consultation
 - Office of Public Dialogue (NB Report)



Transforming Political and Civic Culture

- Democracy between elections
 - Engaging citizens: learning and deliberation with each other and with decision makers
- Civics for 21st Century Canada
 - Citizenship skills: foundational years and beyond
- Role of the media
 - People get most of their information from TV
 - Need for more civic journalism



CPRN's Contributions...

- Understanding governance better
 - Social architecture: citizens at the centre
 - Horizontal governance, complexity, civil society and citizens
 - Accountability
- Public Involvement - citizen dialogues
 - National Dialogue and Summit on Engaging Young Canadians
- Human capital development workshop/conference
 - Includes examining the contribution of civic literacy and engagement to HCD



Questions for Discussion

- How do we understand the paradox of unprecedented educational attainment co-existing with low civic knowledge, little political participation and declining voter turnout?
- What attributes do we think are needed to be an effective citizen?
- What 3 steps would you take to enhance democratic citizenship in Canada, especially among youth?
- Governance: effectiveness vs. inclusion: is there a trade-off?



From Our Dialogues...

“ ...we, in Canada are becoming less responsible, and that citizenship aspect is perhaps a lesser concern. I would like us to be aware that we are citizens, and as such, that we have responsibilities and not just rights” (young Montreal man, 2002)

“ ...we want a real democracy, not some tin-pot thing we've got now that totally ignores what people want...” (Calgary, older man, 2002)

“ ...voting is about deciding who you want to speak for you in government. Why would I do that?... how meaningful is it to vote?... We don't feel like we're represented... "If each of us thinks our vote won't change anything, how will we ever change? How can you change the system if you aren't in the system?"” (voices of young Canadians, CPRN/PIN workshop, 2005)



Key References

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