

THE LANDSCAPE OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN ONTARIO

A Paper Prepared for the Panel on the Role of Government

October 2002

David Cameron
Department of Political Science
University of Toronto

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Politics and Culture in Ontario.....	1
II. Setting the Context	6
Citizenship and Representation	6
Dimensions of Citizenship and Civic Activism	8
Getting At Civic Engagement.....	12
III. Mapping the Conceptual and Comparative Landscape of Civic Engagement... 	22
Political Participation.....	23
Voter Turnout: International and Comparative Experience	26
Voter Turnout: Canada and Ontario.....	28
Attitudes to Politics and Government.....	35
Charitable Giving, Volunteering, and Civic Participation	38
IV. Conclusion	44

The Landscape of Civic Engagement in Ontario

11 October 2002

I. Politics and Culture in Ontario

This is a paper on civic engagement in Ontario. The subject is important, but, for several reasons, complex.

First of all, the richness of the concept of civic engagement is matched by its indeterminacy. It is used in a wide variety of quite different contexts, and made to serve a striking array of purposes. It is embedded in distinct ideological and analytical traditions and is attached to a number of other equally complex ideas, such as civil society, social capital and social cohesion. We will attempt to set the notion of civic engagement in its intellectual context in the next section of the paper.

Secondly, when Canadian work on the subject is undertaken, it is normally at the level of the country as a whole, not at the provincial level; thus Ontario-specific data are scanty. We will discuss this first matter in somewhat more detail below.

Thirdly, the situation of Ontario and Ontarians is complicated and in flux. A political community of 11 million people producing more than 40% of Canada's gross national product, Ontario is large enough to be a country on its own, yet it has been for years the linchpin of the Canadian federation and one of the provinces most strongly committed to the Canadian project. Ontarians have traditionally not thought of themselves as a people; A.R.M. Lower's provocatively entitled article, "Does Ontario Exist?"¹ made the point eloquently in 1968 – Ontario was so little aware of itself that its status as a definable community could plausibly be put in doubt. In 1975 the Ontario historian, Peter Oliver,

¹ Ontario History 60 (June 1968), p. 64.

plaintively asked the following questions: “Why should anyone attempt to write the history of a region which isn’t? Why should historians labour to define regional characteristics of a society so elusive or so bland as to defy definition?”²

Oliver was writing 10 years after the Canada-US Auto Pact was signed, an international agreement which, as much as anything, signals the beginning of a tectonic shift in the political economy of Ontario, characterized by Tom Courchene as an alteration in status from Canadian heartland to North American region-state.³ Courchene’s thesis has been the subject of much discussion,⁴ but what is undeniable is the north-south shift in the Ontario economy that has occurred over the last several decades, as Ontario has integrated itself more and more fully into the United States economy. This is now the dominant economic reality for Ontario, carrying repercussions for the fiscal, political, and possibly socio-cultural dimensions of Ontario and Canadian life.

Add to that the massive and extraordinarily diverse post-war immigration Ontario has experienced, which has utterly reshaped the character of the Greater Toronto Area. Immigration is now overwhelmingly an urban phenomenon in three provinces. In fact, it is largely a story of Canada’s three great metropolitan centers – the lower mainland of Vancouver, Montreal Island, and the Greater Toronto Area. Toronto has moved down this late twentieth century development path farther and faster than any other part of the country. For well over three decades Toronto has received nearly twice its share of immigrants, as a result of which it has grown more rapidly and become more diverse than the rest of the country. While one might have expected that a rapid process of this kind would engender serious social stress and significant intercommunal tension and suspicion, in fact what it seems to be fostering instead is a community remarkably free of

² Public and Private Persons: The Ontario Political Culture 1914-1934 (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Company, 1975), pp. 7-8.

³ From Heartland to North American Region State: The Social, Fiscal and Federal Evolution of Ontario, Thomas J. Courchene with Colin Telmer (Toronto: University of Toronto Faculty of Management, 1998).

⁴ See, for example, Ontario: Exploring the Region-State Hypothesis, Proceedings of a Colloquium held at the University of Toronto, Friday, March 26, 1999.

such blights, one that values pluralism, freedom, equality, equity and an open system serving all.⁵

All in all, it is clear that, economically and demographically, much has been going on in Ontario over the last few decades that distinguishes this period of Ontario history from its recent past. Most observers believe that these forces have had a discernable impact on the politics and political leadership of the province, leading successive governments and premiers from all three of the province's political parties to adopt a more assertive role vis-à-vis the federal government, and to defend the province's interests as distinct from those of Ottawa and the country as a whole, rather than - as before - in bland conjunction with them. It can be argued that Peterson, Rae and Harris – very different in most other respects – were similar in this way, and that the consistency in this dimension of their leadership is a reflection of the structural realignment described above.⁶

The question for this study is this: What impact has all of this had on the views, attitudes and political culture of Ontarians? It is difficult to deny that large structural forces of change have been at work in Ontario in recent decades, but what is less clear is the effect that these forces have had on Ontarians and the way in which they relate to each other and to the political world. Civic engagement is not a form of human behaviour that takes place in a vacuum; it is embedded in a concrete social context, within a specific community or communities. Given Ontario's position within Confederation, one of the critical communities within which the civic impulses of Ontarians can find their life is the

⁵ Material in this paragraph drawn from: David R. Cameron, "Post-Modern Ontario and the Laurentian Thesis," in Canada: The State of the Federation 1994, eds. Douglas M. Brown and Janet Hiebert (Kingston: Queen's Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, 1994), pp. 109-34.

⁶ The Institute of Intergovernmental Relations at Queen's University has published a series of essays that explore these issues in their annual State of the Federation series: Donald W. Stevenson, "Ontario and Confederation: A Reassessment," in Canada: The State of the Federation 1989, eds. Ronald L. Watts and Douglas M. Brown (Kingston: Queen's Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, 1989), pp. 53-74; David R. Cameron, "Post-Modern Ontario and the Laurentian Thesis," in Canada: The State of the Federation 1994, eds. Douglas M. Brown and Janet Hiebert (Kingston: Queen's Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, 1994), pp. 109-34; Sid Noel, "Ontario and the Federation at the End of the Twentieth Century," in Canada: The State of the Federation 1997, ed. Harvey Lazar (Kingston: Queen's Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, 1994), pp. 271-94. In a very different context, this appears to be a throwback to an earlier period of Ontario's history, the eras of Mitchell Hepburn, and before that, Oliver Mowat. These were periods in Ontario's political life in which there were fierce struggles with the national government, during which time no one would have described Ontario politics as bland.

country as a whole. A shift or withdrawal from that level of politics and engagement would be a highly significant change in the circumstances of the province and would have a palpable impact on the country as a whole. Viv Nelles, writing towards the end of the David Peterson era about the social and economic forces in play in the province at that time, speculated about the possible emergence of “Ontario’s self-conscious identity as a distinct society.”⁷

In fact, on the basis of the evidence we have seen, the emergence of Ontario as a distinct society does not appear to be happening. Ontario’s provincial political elites may be conducting themselves as if that has happened, but their electors show relatively few signs of movement in that direction. Their view of Confederation and Ontario’s place in it seems remarkably little affected by the structural realignments their community has experienced. A greater interest in national politics, as compared to provincial political matters, appears to be reflected in the consistently lower voter turnouts in provincial than in federal elections, a matter we will discuss below in more detail. And the province’s federal political representatives have shown no growing inclination whatsoever to advance the interests of Ontario at the expense of the interest and needs of the country as a whole. Survey after survey shows Ontarians expressing stronger affiliations to Canada and the federal government than to Ontario and the provincial government. For example, Frank Graves and his colleagues contest what they take to be Tom Courchene’s assumption that the public perceptions and political culture of Ontarians are shifting in conjunction with the province’s new mission as a more autonomous region state. They report that the attachment of Ontarians to their province has been declining in the 1990s (81% in 1995 to 64% in 1998), while the attachment to Canada has been high and stable (89% in 1994 and 87% in 1998).⁸ Thus the political community and government with which people in Ontario are more inclined to engage are Canada and the federal government, not Ontario and Queen’s Park.

⁷ Viv Nelles, “Red Tied: Fin de Siècle Politics in Ontario,” in *Canadian Politics in the 1990s*, 3rd ed., eds. Michael Whittington and Glen Williams (Toronto: Nelson Canada, 1990).

⁸ Frank Graves, Tim Dugas and Patrick Beauchamp, “Identity and National Attachments in Contemporary Canada,” in *Canada: The State of the Federation 1998/99; How Canadians Connect*, eds. Harvey Lazar and Tom McIntosh (Kingston: Queen’s Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, 1989), pp. 307-56.

This provides a useful cautionary note to those who believe deterministically that, where the economy goes, society and identity are sure to follow. As Graves and his colleagues say: “Courchene clearly supports a materialist conception where economic arrangements (e.g., trade flow) will determine consciousness and identity. The data, at least in the short term, are difficult to reconcile with this perspective. We have seen no decline in affiliation to Canada as the vested economic interests of Ontarians shift from an east-west to north-south trade axis.”⁹

With this in mind, let us return to the question of the relative absence of data specifically on Ontario, mentioned above. For the purposes of this paper, we will make the general assumption that data collected for Canada as a whole (for example, in the World Values Survey) will reflect the reality in Ontario, unless there is reason to believe the contrary. Where Ontario-specific data are available, we will of course use them. Here is what we propose to do in this paper.

In Section II, we will set the notion of civic engagement in the pattern of the evolving development of western countries since the Second World War, and explore the linkages that obtain between the concept of civic engagement and such related notions as ‘civil society’, ‘social capital’, ‘public judgment’, and ‘social cohesion’. The goal here will be to offer a conceptual map of the territory within which civic engagement is located.

In Section III of the paper we will review the evidence – internationally and domestically – concerning the character, levels and trends of civic engagement, and consider the reasons why the patterns of civic engagement are evolving as they are. Particular attention will be paid to the situation in Canada and in Ontario.

The third task, addressed in the concluding section, will be to reflect on the meaning and the policy implications of the paper’s findings.

⁹ Op. cit., p. 317. See also, Cameron, op. cit., p. 129.

II. Setting the Context

Citizenship and Representation

For centuries, students of government have sought to understand the link between good government and a healthy society, recognizing that it is implausible to think of a just political regime utterly unsupported by an ordered, publicly spirited community. Even Plato's authoritarian rule by the wise and just establishes education as one of the central tasks of the polis, underlining the link between good government and the condition of the social realm. Aristotle's aphorism that "in the beginning, leaders create societies; later, societies create leaders," speaks to the intimate, complex relationship between the quality of political rule and the character of social life.

Democracy – understood as direct rule by citizens – was regarded as positively undesirable by many early political thinkers, on grounds of the political incapacities of ordinary people; or else it was viewed as a possible form of government only in exceptional circumstances - for example, in a very small, compact country, such as a city-state in which, even then, women and slaves were typically excluded from the ranks of citizenship, and, therefore, from the right to participate in democratic government. For centuries, therefore, kingship and aristocratic government were regarded as natural and appropriate forms of political rule, well adjusted to the character of civil society, as it was understood at the time. In the 17th and 18th centuries, however, liberal individualism became an increasingly important way of understanding the social, political and economic order, leading to an increasing interest in the idea of equality. The American and French Revolutions, in the last half of the 18th century, created an interest in broader conceptions of citizenship and put democracy, this time in the framework of large European states, on the agenda of political thinkers.

The gradual emergence of the idea of political representation on the basis of popular election, as the instrument which would make democracy in large states possible,

led to a focus on the binary relationship between citizen and representative as the central factor in modern democratic government. The diverse roles of the representative began to be developed and explored,¹⁰ and processes and institutions were established to link the representative back to his or her source of legitimacy and accountability, the citizen, in whose hands ultimate authority was deemed to rest. It is against this backdrop that the great 19th and 20th century stories of modern democratic government have been told: the extension of the franchise, the emergence of political parties; the battle against political corruption; the recognition of the importance of a free press; the refinement of the electoral process and the implementation in many countries of election finance regulations; the protection of human rights.

Democracy, invariably in the form of representative government, has made remarkable progress in the 20th century. Samuel Huntington has written about the “three waves” of democracy in the 19th and 20th centuries, each of the first two being followed by what he calls a “reverse wave,” in which there is a falling back from the high water mark just achieved before.¹¹ The first long wave occurred between 1820 and 1926, during which 29 democracies were brought into being. The subsequent “reverse” wave set in between the 1920s and the 1940s, the period when Mussolini came to power in Italy in 1922, Hitler took over Germany, and the Russian Revolution led to the creation of the Soviet Union. By 1942, the number of democracies had been reduced from 29 to 12. The second wave commenced with the 1945 Allied victory in World War II, and ran until 1962. This period of post-war reconstruction and decolonisation expanded the number of democracies from 12 to 36. Again, there was a falling back with the second reverse wave from 1960 to 1975, when the number of democracies fell back to 30. The great third wave began with the democratization of Portugal, Spain and Greece in 1974-75 and runs right down the mid-1990s, when Huntington was writing. By 1996, 117 of the world’s 191 countries were constitutional democracies and held competitive elections. Huntington

¹⁰ Edmund Burke’s classic discussion in his Letter to the Electors of Bristol, written in the latter part of the 18th century, is an early examination of some of the conflicting roles embedded in the concept of political representation.

¹¹ Samuel P. Huntington, “After Twenty Years: The Future of the Third Wave,” *Journal of Democracy* 8(4), 1997, pp. 3-12.

speculated about the possibility of another reverse wave, but, at the time of his writing, saw no signs of it.

However, the most recent United Nations Human Development Report chose to make democracy its theme, partially on the basis of the difficulties democracy appeared to be having in many of the newly democratic countries. Of the 81 countries that had moved down the path to democracy in the last 20 years, the UN Report found that just 47 of them had retained their democratic systems. Some, like Pakistan, had lapsed back into authoritarian rule, while others, like Zimbabwe, had entered the realm of what the UN Report called 'pseudo-democracy'.¹² Despite these setbacks, it remains the case that, for the first time in human history, the principles of democracy have achieved acceptance almost everywhere as universal values, displacing almost all other forms of political legitimacy. And what makes democracy in modern countries work is representation.

Dimensions of Citizenship and Civic Activism

The centrality of political representation in modern democracies has been associated, at times, with a heavy emphasis on voting and a relative neglect of other forms of democratic expression and engagement. The act of voting has been understood as the privileged – and sometimes virtually the unique – vehicle by which the citizen authorizes the representative to act on his or her behalf. As a consequence, a preoccupation with elections, political parties and voting behaviour has sometimes pushed other forms of democratic practice into the shadows. Active citizen participation - between elections, and beneath and beyond the formal framework of representative government - has often been regarded as a second-order consideration. Recognition of this tendency is important, because it alerts us to the need, when reflecting upon the question of citizen participation in political affairs, to extend our enquiry well beyond the formal representative process. For example, declining voter turn out at successive general elections cannot, in itself, be regarded as definitive evidence of declining citizen

¹² United Nations Human Development Report 2002, cited in The Globe and Mail, Wednesday, 24 July 2002.

participation; it could as easily mean a transfer of political commitment and activity to other sites and processes perceived to be more significant and satisfactory to the democratic citizen.¹³ Brian Tanguay notes that “while the parties continue to field candidates, contest elections and provide government with decision-makers, the affective or ideological ties between them and their supporters are unravelling.”¹⁴

In the post-war period, until about the 1970s, the conventions of representative democracy appeared to hold pretty well in industrialized countries. Politics was what took place in the clash of political parties in elections and in the legislature. Governance was to be found in the formal institutions of government. And citizenship was to be expressed chiefly through the act of voting in periodic elections. When I was an undergraduate in the early 1960s, the classic text in political science was R. MacGregor Dawson’s The Government of Canada. I used the third edition, revised by Norman Ward.¹⁵ If we consult the table of contents we will find sections on the constitution and constitutional development, the executive, the administration, the legislature, the judiciary and political parties, but no sections or chapters devoted to pressure groups, Canadian society, political culture, the provinces, political economy, the electoral system and voting behaviour, or globalization and Canada’s place in the world. Politics, and the study of politics, were understood to be clear and fairly straightforward matters.

Structural Shifts and Value Change

The post-war consensus, reflected in Dawson, about what constituted government and politics began to break down in the 1970s, as a part of a much broader pattern of

¹³ Neil Nevitte writes: “... in most representative democracies political parties carry the unique responsibility of connecting citizens to the state by aggregating, representing, and responding to citizens’ interests. But, to focus only on the shifting foundations of political parties and rising levels of voter volatility captures only a narrow slice of what counts as ‘political.’ Moreover, to rely exclusively on these indicators as signs of stress may falsely invite the conclusion that citizens in advanced industrial states are simply becoming more disengaged from, and less interested in, their political worlds.” Value change and Governance in Canada, ed. Neil Nevitte (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), p. 11.

¹⁴ Brian Tanguay, “Canada’s Political Parties in the 1990s: The Fraying of the Ties That Bind,” Canada: The State of the Federation 1998-99: How Canadians Connect, eds. Harvey Lazar and Tom McIntosh (Kingston: Queen’s School of Policy Studies, 1999), p. 232.

¹⁵ The Government of Canada, 3rd ed., revised by Norman Ward (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963).

change in Western societies and governments. The counter-cultural movement of the 1960s that swept through most western countries clearly provided the backdrop to the emergence of new understandings of politics and society, as did the Civil Rights movement, Vietnam War protests, and the Watergate affair in the United States. However, to characterize that change more systematically, one can draw on a good deal of social science research that has sought to account for the most striking social, economic and political developments in western countries. In doing this, it is useful to distinguish between socio-economic structure, on the one hand, and values, on the other, even while recognizing that the two are in reality entangled together in complex ways; analytically, it is helpful to distinguish between what has happened structurally in most western industrial societies, and the way in which people in those societies think about their lives, their communities, and their aspirations. Neil Nevitte neatly summarizes the evidence in this way in the opening chapter of Value Change and Governance in Canada.¹⁶

Advanced industrial states have undergone a number of significant structural shifts since the 1970s, which together are characterized by some observers as the emergence of post-industrial societies. These states have become significantly richer, with the generation of wealth deriving increasingly from the service and technology sectors of the economy, and less and less from the industrial sector. This has meant that what workers do today is typically quite different from what they did in previous generations. There has been a revolution in education, with far more people pursuing post-secondary education than before; this is especially true of women, whose participation rates have dramatically increased. These shifts have had major effects on the composition of the work force and on family structures and incomes. In addition, technological advances have led to dramatic changes in electronic communication, transportation and the availability of information, again altering the way in which people in Western countries spend their paid and leisure time.¹⁷

¹⁶ The next four paragraphs rely heavily on the Nevitte chapter, pp. 4-13. See also his The Decline of Deference: Canadian Value Change in Cross National Perspective (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1996).

¹⁷ Op. cit., pp. 5-6.

As for core values and beliefs, analysts have sought to characterize the shifts in a number of different ways. One of the most widely cited theses has been advanced by Ronald Inglehart, who has argued that the post-war growth in material security has led to an increasing preoccupation with 'post-materialist' concerns, such as freedom, self-expression and the quality of life.¹⁸ Others have spoken of the increased importance of 'individual autonomy',¹⁹ the move from 'solidarity toward self-affirmation',²⁰ the 'emergence of individualism',²¹ the rise of 'expressivism' or 'self-expression'.²² Very substantial accumulations of data in the World Values Survey since the 1980s confirm that the opinions of citizens in advanced industrial countries, Canadians included, have shifted in strikingly parallel ways; orientations to politics, and to economic and social life, have altered in ways that are broadly consistent with the phrases used above to suggest the overall character of the change.

The Impact on Politics and Government

Not surprisingly, both the structural change and the attitudinal shifts outlined above have reverberated back in to the political system and have been linked to evolving re-definitions of the meaning of politics and the role of government, to new citizen expectations of the state, and to altered relations between citizens and their governments. A system of political representation that has really changed little in its fundamentals since the 19th century confronts a 21st century political community impatient with an exclusive reliance on the old ways of doing politics. German sociologist Ulrich Beck has declared that modern political parties resemble "dinosaurs from a fading industrial age ... [which] seem to belong more to a museum than to a government."²³

¹⁸ Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

¹⁹ Daniel Bell, The Coming of Post-Industrial Society (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

²⁰ Pierro Ignazi, "The Silent Counter-Revolution: Hypotheses on the Emergence of Extreme Right-Wing Parties in Europe," European Journal of Political Research 22 (1992), pp. 3-34.

²¹ Peter Ester, Loek Halman and Ruud de Moor, "Value Shift in Western Societies," in Ester, Halman and de Moor, eds. The Individualizing Society: Value Change in Europe and North America (Tilburg: Tilburg University Press, 1993).

²² John R. Gibbins and Bo Reimer, "Postmodernism," in Jan van Deth and Elinor Scarborough, The Impact of Values (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

²³ The Reinvention of Politics, trans. Mark Ritter (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), p. 145. Quoted in Tanguay, op. cit., p. 231.

A number of social scientists have explored the disjunction thus created between government and politics, on the one hand, and socio-economic realities and citizen values on the other.²⁴ They have used a number of different tools to explore the stresses western industrial democracies are experiencing. Some have spoken of a problem of governability;²⁵ others have identified a legitimacy crisis, in which the conventional institutions and processes of government appear to be increasingly discounted by the citizens they are allegedly designed to serve;²⁶ still others have professed to discover in the situation of many western countries signs of government 'overload', a condition in which citizens' demands far outreach the capacity of governments to satisfy them.²⁷

Getting At Civic Engagement

As an advanced democracy, then, Canada experiences pressures and challenges that parallel those being felt by other political communities in the West.²⁸ Most cross-national comparisons, however, assemble and analyze data at the national level, but in a decentralized federation, such as Canada's, information gathered at the level of the country as a whole can tell only part of the story. We need to realize that in a federation, especially a highly decentralized one, members of the national political community can act within two political frameworks and can express their political aspirations at both the federal and the provincial levels, or neither. They are citizens in two senses – both

²⁴ Nevitte discusses this and cites the authors mentioned below, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-13.

²⁵ Michael Crozier, Samuel Huntington and Joji Watanuki, The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission (New York: New York University Press, 1975).

²⁶ Jurgen Habermas, Legitimation Crisis (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975).

²⁷ Anthony King, "Overload: Problems of Governing in the 1970's," Political Studies 23 (1975), pp. 284-96.

²⁸ There has been a lively debate in Canada about the extent to which shifts in Canada's political culture are a distinctive result of alterations in the Canadian political system, such as the introduction of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982, or are the generic expression in Canada of forces shaping political culture in most countries in the western world. Alan Cairns develops the first view, while Ian Brodie and Neil Nevitte rely on the second. Ian Brodie and Neil Nevitte, "Evaluating the Citizens' Constitution Theory," Canadian Journal of Political Science 26(2), pp. 235-59; Alan C. Cairns, "A Defence of the Citizens' Constitution Theory: A Response to Ian Brodie and Neil Nevitte," Canadian Journal of Political Science 26(2), 1993, pp. 261-67; Ian Brodie and Neil Nevitte, "Clarifying Differences: A Rejoinder to Alan Cairns' Defence of the Citizens' Constitution Theory," Canadian Journal of Political Science 26(2), 1993, pp. 269-72.

citizens of their country, and citizens of their respective provinces.²⁹ It is possible, for example, that national results during the last few decades concerning political culture and political participation have been skewed by the nationalism of francophone Quebec. One has to bear in mind that francophone Québécois may be less involved in politics at the Canadian level, but more involved at the Quebec level, as a result of nationalist sentiment about where the priorities should be placed and which political community is really 'theirs'.³⁰

In recent years, then, a concern about the state of democracy in advanced societies has led to a heightened interest in exploring the relationship between citizen and state. Concepts such as civil society, social capital, public judgment, social cohesion, and, of course, civic or citizen engagement – all address dimensions of the complex relationship between politics and society. While these concepts have deep theoretical and historical roots,³¹ all have come into prominence in the last couple of decades in response to a perceived problem with the way in which existing democratic practices operate. Implicitly or explicitly, contemporary interest in them responds to a perceived lack or absence or inadequacy in the public arrangements of western countries, to a sense that something is out of joint and not working properly in the democratic practices of advanced industrial states. We will discuss each of these in turn in a moment.

²⁹ I realize that some people take exception to speaking of 'the citizens of Ontario' or 'the citizens of Quebec'. They argue that citizenship is a legal status, which lies within the authority of the national government, and that therefore it should be understood that there are 'citizens' of Canada, but 'residents' of provinces. But this seems to me to be an excessively narrow and restrictive way of conceiving citizenship, and, indeed, is not the signification most people have in mind most of the time when they are speaking of the phenomenon. If one accepts two notions, namely, that a federation is a system in which sovereignty is shared between two orders of government, and that - by that act of dispersing sovereignty to two levels - genuine political communities are established at both levels, then it is a perfectly natural way of speaking to refer to 'citizens' of Ontario or British Columbia or Prince Edward Island.

³⁰ Frank Graves et al explore this issue in "Identity and National Attachments in Contemporary Canada," in *Canada: The State of the Federation 1998-99: How Canadians Connect*, eds. Harvey Lazar and Tom McIntosh (Kingston: Queen's School of Policy Studies, 1999), pp. 307-56. They write: "... our research suggests that attachment to Canada is qualitatively different in intensity and form in Quebec than in the rest of Canada... the sheer impact of living in Quebec overwhelms the influence of all other factors on how strongly one feels attached to Canada."

³¹ Jane Jenson identifies a tradition of reflection with respect to social cohesion that goes back through Talcott Parsons and Emile Durkheim to Alexis de Tocqueville.

In the exploration of the linkages between society and state, one kind of approach has been to focus on how the state and its institutions (including, in Canada, the institution of federalism) shape society and social structure.³² But there is another approach apparent in the growing literature on civil society, civic engagement and social capital, that turns the causal arrow around: it assumes that civil society influences the structure, stability, and effectiveness of the state, and that it does so in many ways. Patterns of trust and cooperation developed in associational life translate into the ability to cooperate and compromise at the political level.³³ Strong associations contribute to stability by acting as a buffer, or intermediary, between the individual and the state: at once protecting the citizen from manipulation and coercion by state officials, and protecting state institutions from being overwhelmed by un-mediated, un-aggregated individual pressures.³⁴ In like manner, to the extent that deep divisions in society are mediated at the associational level, the burden of accommodation falling on governments and their leaders will be less. In this paper, we will be attentive to the exercise of influence in both directions, recognizing that the state can play an influential role in the constitution of civil society, but that the health of the individuals and institutions composing civil society can also have a dramatic impact on a country's government and political life.

A brief consideration of the concepts of civil society, social capital, social cohesion, and public judgment will be helpful at this point, because it will expose the context in which civic engagement exists, as well as revealing a number of its dimensions.

³² A. Paul Pross, "The Mirror of the State: Canada's Interest Group System," First World Interest Groups: A Comparative Perspective, edited by Clive S. Thomas, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1993), pp.67-79; Alan C. Cairns, From Interstate to Intrastate Federalism in Canada, (Kingston: Institute of Intergovernmental Affairs, 1979); Leslie A. Pal, Public Policy Analysis: An Introduction, 2nd edition, (Scarborough: Nelson Canada, 1992); Susan D. Phillips, "Meaning and Structure in Social Movements: Mapping the Network of National Canadian Women's Organizations," Canadian Journal of Political Science 24(4), December 1991, pp. 755-82; William D. Coleman and Grace Skogstad, eds., "Policy Communities and Policy Networks: A Structural Approach," in Policy Communities and Public Policy: A Structural Approach, (Mississauga: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd., 1990); Hugh Thorburn, ed., Party Politics in Canada, (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall Canada, 1996).

³³ Putnam, Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); "Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America," PS: Political Science and Politics, 28(4), 1995; Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).

³⁴ William Kornhauser, The Politics of Mass Society (New York: Free Press, 1965).

Rooted in Enlightenment thinking, *civil society* is a broad and multi-dimensional concept. Culturally, it is constituted by the shared images and metaphors found in music, literature, the media, and popular culture. Economically, it consists of patterns of exchange of goods and services. At the level of individuals, it consists of patterns of attitudes and identities, as measured by survey research. Associations mediating between citizen and state are the social spaces in which citizens learn trust and gain awareness of shared and common interests, and develop the desire and the ability to cooperate and compromise. Associations, then, are critical elements in the social construction of identity and community.

Benjamin Barber, in *A Place for Us*,³⁵ has argued that there are at least three distinguishable understandings of civil society; the libertarian view, which understands civil society as the equivalent of the private sector; the communitarian view, which understands civil society as the community; and the democratic view, which locates civil society 'between' the government and the market.³⁶ This last is probably the dominant view among social scientists in the United States; civil society, according to this view, is an idea best understood in terms of that which it is not. It is not the state; and it is not the market; it lies between - the domain of family, faith and community - and its health is widely believed to have a material impact on the condition of each of the other two sectors of American life. As Barber has written, "civil society is the domain that can potentially mediate between the state and the private sector, between the rabid identity of an exclusive tribe and the exhausting identity of the solitary consumer, between Jihad and McWorld. Civil society offers women and men a space for activity that is simultaneously voluntary and public; a space that unites the virtue of the private sector - liberty - with the virtue of the public sector - concern for the general good."³⁷

³⁵ *A Place for Us: How to Make Society Civil and Democracy Strong*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), Ch. 1.

³⁶ See Lisa Young's brief discussion in "Civic Engagement, Trust and Democracy: Evidence From Alberta," in *Value Change and Governance in Canada*, ed. Neil Nevitte (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), pp. 109-11.

³⁷ "Democracy at Risk: American Culture in a Global Culture," *World Policy Journal*, Vol. XV No. 2 (Summer 1998), p. 40.

There are grounds for believing that this “between” notion is an American view that does not sit quite right in the Canadian context. We have had a long history of a strong state: in some cases, virtually preceding society (for example in the settlement of the West); vigorously directing markets; and penetrating market society with state economic enterprises, such as the railways, the first national airline, and an array of other crown corporations. State, society and market have been deeply entangled in Canada since the beginning. Hence, when Canadians think about civil society, they are much more likely to think of it as a dimension of national life that manifests itself in each of the three notionally distinct sectors of market, society and state.

Social capital theorists examine the character and impact of the web of human relations that contribute to the constitution of the realm of civil society. As with the concept of civil society, so with the notion of *social capital*, there are a variety of ways in which the term can be understood. Jane Jenson identifies three somewhat different definitions.³⁸ First, she cites the Trillium Foundation’s understanding of social capital as the “space between the individual and the state. In that space is the community, social agencies, informal and formal activities such as sports clubs, volunteering, caring for neighbours and so on.”³⁹ Second, she refers to a designation by J.R. Kesselman who says that “the core of the concept is the density and quality of ties among persons and households.”⁴⁰ This understanding of social capital builds on the well-known work of Robert Putnam who says that social capital refers to “features of social life – networks, norms, and trust – that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives.”⁴¹ The third is from Lars Osberg who speaks of social capital as “the social institutions that create and sustain such traits as honesty, law abidingness and nurturance of the young.”⁴² Jenson notes that the first definition emphasises social capital as a place or

³⁸ Mapping Social Cohesion: The State of Canadian Research (CPRN Study No. F/03, 1998), pp. 26-8.

³⁹ Julie White, Five Capacities That Build Communities and Ten Things Funders Can Do to Support Them, Speech, 10 April 1997.

⁴⁰ J.R. Kesselman et al, Equality, Security, and Community: Explaining and Improving the Distribution of Well-Being in Canada, SSHRC application, 1997.

⁴¹ “Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America,” PS: Political Science and Politics, 28(4), 1995.

⁴² “Meaning and Measurement in Intergenerational Equity,” in Miles Corak ed., Government Finances and Generational Equity (Ottawa: Statistics Canada and Human Resources Development Canada, 1998), p. 132.

space in the social universe - “between the individual and the state” - while the second talks of the embeddedness of individuals and households in social networks, and the third concentrates on the role of institutions.⁴³

From the point of view of our inquiry into civic engagement, what we would wish to draw the reader’s attention to is that each of the conceptualizations of social capital is preoccupied with the sphere of the social world that lies beyond the political and the economic, and the character of human relations that obtain within that sphere. Less explicit in the definitions themselves, but very much a working assumption supporting most of the writing on social capital, is the belief that there is a relationship between the state of social capital in a region or country and the quality of its government. Robert Putnam, based on his study of regional governments in Italy, asserts the link baldly, when he states that “good government in Italy is a by-product of singing groups and soccer clubs.”⁴⁴

Social cohesion is an idea that came into broad use in western countries in the last decade and a half. It speaks to the disquiet observers and policy makers feel about the atomizing and alienating effects of recent political and economic practices, like the downloading and offloading of government responsibilities⁴⁵ and corporate downsizing, which have diminished the supportive role of the government and left people more to their own individual devices. While satisfied with the fiscal and economic benefits that have come with the implementation of a range of programs reflecting neo-liberal beliefs about state and market, officials and analysts have been less content with what appear to be the negative social impacts of these changes. It is in this context that a number of international organizations, such as the OECD, and many western countries began to concern themselves with social cohesion. A 1997 OECD working group claimed that social cohesion “raises questions about our current grim realities,” and asked the

⁴³ Op. cit., pp. 26-7.

⁴⁴ Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 176.

⁴⁵ For a discussion of the disadvantages of downloading policy responsibilities from provincial to municipal governments, see Gregory Boyd Bell, “You Say You Want a Devolution: Retreating into Local Government is No Way Forward For the Left,” ThisMagazine 35 (2), September-October 2001, pp. 26-29.

following questions: “Why is it that we can no longer, as we could yesterday, live together in accordance with our common values? How can we reinvent for tomorrow our ability to live successfully together?”⁴⁶

In addition, greater ethnic and religious diversity, particularly in urban centres as a result of immigration, have shaped the expression and exercise of civic engagement in Ontario. As Myer Siemiztycki and Engin Isin have observed, “global migration is nurturing new expressions of urban citizenship among immigrant communities in Toronto. Fundamentally these emerging patterns of ‘urban belonging’ among diverse communities are rooted in immigrant demographics, identities, spatial settlements and adversities.”⁴⁷ Increasing diversity in ethnocultural groups presents new challenges to political parties as they attempt to guarantee their continued relevance and revitalize citizen participation in the process.⁴⁸

Several of the definitions that we will mention below reveal the extent to which there is overlap with social capital theory. The main difference appears to be that social cohesion theorists tend to focus on the desired social outcomes of integration and the sharing of values, while students of social capital are more inclined to concentrate on the elements and processes, such as trust and reciprocity, that give rise to a shared sense of fate and identity. Here are several definitions of social cohesion, taken from Jane Jenson’s thoughtful monograph on the subject.⁴⁹ The first is from the working group of the Commissariat général du Plan of the French government:

⁴⁶ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Societal Cohesion and the Globalising Economy (Paris: OECD, 1997), p. 13. Cited in Jenson, op cit., p. 5

⁴⁷ The authors find a disproportionately high use of public space by immigrant and ethnocultural minority communities, “particularly streets for parades, marches and religious processions; civic squares; and parks for picnics and recreational events.” “Immigration, Diversity and Urban Citizenship in Toronto,” Canadian Journal of Regional Science 20 (1-2), spring-summer 1997, pp. 73-102.

⁴⁸ For a discussion of direct democratic reforms, tailored to the Canadian context, that may bolster the relevance of political parties, see Matthew Mendelsohn, “Introducing Deliberative Direct Democracy in Canada: Learning from the American Experience,” American Review of Canadian Studies 26 (3), autumn 1997, pp. 449-68.

⁴⁹ Mapping Social Cohesion: The State of Canadian Research (CPRN Study No. F/03, 1998), p. 4.

“Social cohesion is a set of social processes that help instill in individuals the sense of belonging to the same community and the feeling that they are recognised as members of that community.”

The second is from the Government of Canada’s Policy Research Sub-Committee on Social Cohesion. Social cohesion, the Committee asserts, is:

“The ongoing process of developing a community of shared values, shared challenges and equal opportunity within Canada, based on a sense of trust, hope and reciprocity among all Canadians.”

Jenson identifies five dimensions of social cohesion in the work of those who write about the concept:

- Belonging, which involves shared values and feeling part of the same community;
- Inclusion, especially, the opportunity to participate in the economic life of the country;
- Participation, especially political participation;
- Recognition of differences and the inevitable pluralism associated with modern life; and
- Legitimacy, meaning that the social, economic and political institutions of the modern state are acknowledged by its citizens to be authoritative and valid.

Acknowledging that social cohesion is a contested concept, Jenson makes the point that exponents of this understanding of society are inclined to see social order “as the consequence of values more than interests, of consensus more than conflict, and of social practices more than political action,” and that an agenda based on this model risks downplaying claims for social justice and recognition, a point of particular significance for a pluralistic modern democracy like Canada.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Op. cit., p. vii and pp. 35-9.

Daniel Yankelovich has developed the idea of *public judgment* to get at one of the central deficiencies of modern representative government, and how it could be improved.⁵¹ He is concerned with the distance that has developed between citizens and those who influence or wield political power in the state – elected representatives, senior bureaucrats, policy elites, opinion makers and the like. He contends that the gulf between the citizen and his or her representative, and the frustration the public feels with politicians and the political process are understandable, when one takes account of the inequality between the two.

The governing elites in a society spend much of their time and effort engaged in attending an informal ‘policy university’, that is, a world of conferences, think tanks, policy journals, discussion groups and so forth, in which sustained analysis and conversation is carried on with respect to the major public issues the society is confronting. This deep, continuing discourse, informs the policy preferences of members of this group.

The citizen, on the other hand, has none of these advantages, and is not creatively invited by the policy elites to participate in this ongoing process. The citizen is expected to vote in general elections, but not do much of the other democratic work associated with the healthy political existence of the community. When he or she is suddenly called upon for broader participation, little information and less time for consideration and discussion of the issues is provided; a citizen is supposed to arrive at an intelligent conclusion without the rich array of supports that buttress the policy elites in the performance of their parallel roles. Not surprisingly, the citizen does not perform well, and is alienated by the experience; and the barren, dessicated version of democracy continues. What you get is ill-informed, flighty public opinion, not solid political judgment. Declining public participation in the formal political process can be understood in part from this perspective.

⁵¹ He has published a number of works that develop his ideas on the subject: See, for example, Daniel Yankelovich, *Coming to Public Judgment: Making Democracy Work in a Complex World* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1991); Daniel Yankelovich and I.M. Destler, eds. *Beyond the Beltway: Engaging the Public in U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994).

Yankelovich argues that it need not be this way. On the basis of empirical work he has conducted over the course of his career, he contends that it is possible to equalize the positions of the citizen and the policy elites, and to equip the former with the time, space and tools to participate effectively in the making of the choices confronting the political community. This he characterizes as constituting a shift from ‘public opinion’ to ‘public judgment’. Public opinion is the type of declared preference you get if you ask someone for their view, pretty much out of the blue, on a single subject bereft of its context, and shorn of any consideration of the implications of choosing one way or another. The response, in these circumstances, is likely to be uninformed, volatile and irresponsible. “Are you in favour of a strong Canadian military?” “Yes.” No consideration of what it is, how much it costs, what will have to be forgone to sustain it, whether it is in need of reform, contraction, or extension. Public judgment, on the other hand, is a declaration of preference that is settled, that is informed by an appreciation of the costs and benefits, that is aware of and accepts the necessary trade-offs, and that is sturdy and durable in its basic structure. Helping the public to get from opinion to judgment takes time, information, discussion and debate; it requires an assumption of equality as between the expert and the citizen, and respect for the native intelligence of the latter, but it can be done.

It is clear that the Yankelovich project is to deepen and extend modern democracy. It is not to displace representative government with something else, like referendums or technology-based voting on all major policy issues. It is rather designed to enrich and thicken up the democratic process, to re-engage citizens in the governance of their communities, and to teach the political elites the beneficial lessons of humility.

Each of the approaches briefly discussed above is complex in itself and contains within its ambit a variety of orientations and ways of tackling the issues of concern. Yet all of them – the civil society, social capital, social cohesion and public judgment approaches – display a shared concern about the state of democracy in western countries. Each, in its own distinctive way, wrestles with the link between the representative and the represented, placing its emphasis on the character and health of the community and its

citizens, rather than on the institutions and processes of political representation or the probity and performance of the people's representatives. In this way, each of the approaches echoes and amplifies the concerns of those who analyze and evaluate the democratic process from the perspective of civic engagement, a subject to which we now turn.

III. Mapping the Conceptual and Comparative Landscape of Civic Engagement

What is Civic Engagement?

Civic engagement may be understood in a number of different ways, but at the core of most definitions is the notion of the participation of the members of a community in the common life of that community. Dis-engagement occurs when citizens withdraw from participation in common life, in its many different guises, and return to the private sphere. The term 'civic engagement' is used by social scientists in both a broad and a narrow sense: broadly, to refer to a citizen's general involvement in the life of his or her community; narrowly, to refer to a citizen's involvement in politics and the political life of his or her community.⁵²

One of the challenges in doing a paper on civic engagement in Ontario is, as we have said, the lack of data, specifically relating to the province. Often what we have to make do with is data that have been collected for Canada as a whole. Where that is the case, we make the tentative assumption that findings relating to the country as a whole, can, broadly speaking, be expected to apply to Ontario as well. This is, we think, justified by the sheer demographic weight of Ontario in the Canadian population as whole,

⁵² Robert Putnam distinguishes between civic engagement and political participation. Political participation, he says, "refers to our relations with political institutions." Civic engagement, a broader concept, refers "to people's connections with the life of their communities, not merely with politics." "Tuning In Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America," *PS, Political Science and Politics*, vol. 28 no. 4 (December 1995), p. 664. Lisa Young identifies three types of engagement – civic, political, and professional for the purposes of her study of civic engagement in Alberta. See her discussion in "Civic Engagement, Trust and Democracy: Evidence From Alberta," in *Value Change and Governance in Canada*, ed. Neil Nevitte (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), pp. 109-11.

currently about 38% of the total, and by the fact that its demographic and cultural composition parallels that of other Anglophone parts of the country.

There is another consideration relating to the available information base that is worth mentioning. The bulk of the literature on civil society, social capital and civic engagement emanates from the United States, where masses of data are available and have received substantial analysis. As an example of this plenitude, consider one set of data that Putnam reports on in his book, Bowling Alone. Since 1979, information has been gathered on driver behaviour at several intersections in suburban New York. From this information, Putnam is able to determine that, whereas 37% of motorists came to a full stop in 1979 at the given intersections, 17 years later 97% made no stop at all - yet another example, according to Putnam, of declining trust and reciprocity. As Lisa Young says, “directly comparable measures are not available in Canada,”⁵³ and the concepts have not been scrutinized nearly as intensively in this country as they have been in the United States.

We will begin with a discussion of forms and patterns of political participation.

Political Participation

Political participation can be understood in a restricted sense, as the formal participation in the limited political activities expected of a citizen in a representative democracy – voting, paying attention to public issues, attending formal political events, and working on a campaign.

Alternatively, it can be understood as a more thoroughgoing form of behaviour, having to do, not simply with participation in the choice of political representatives or the attempt to influence them, but also with active involvement in democratic government itself. Terms like ‘deliberative democracy’ reflect this deeper understanding of political involvement, as does Yankelovich’s idea of public judgment. Frances Abele *et al* are

⁵³ Op. cit., p. 113.

thinking of citizen participation in this deeper sense when they speak of citizen engagement as having the following attributes:

1. It involves the participation of citizens as individuals, as well as groups.
2. It may be initiated by government, intermediary institutions or citizens themselves.
3. It includes expression and exchange of views, group and individual deliberation, reflection and learning.
4. Sponsors have an obligation to provide adequate information in advance; participants have an obligation to inform themselves adequately.
5. The process is open, inclusive, fair and respectful, and most commonly, facilitated.
6. The process is sufficiently long to permit deliberation to a satisfactory end; it will rarely comprise a single isolated event.
7. The process is accountable; feedback about decisions and the reasons for the decisions must be provided to the participants.⁵⁴

The difference between these two forms or styles of citizen participation turns on an implicit evaluation of conventional representative government. Involvement in the first sense suggests an acceptance of the adequacy of the conventional institutions and processes of representative democracy. Involvement in the second sense carries with it an implicit critique of the inadequacies of representative systems, and a recognition of the need to deepen and extend democratic practices. Deliberative models can be understood in part as a bid to recover power on the part of engaged citizens, since the models require that politicians and governing elites hand back to the community or parts of the community some of the power to make collective choices. It is easy to see the affinity between this kind of project and the Yankelovich enterprise of public judgment.

Yet another form of political participation can arise in the context of a root and branch rejection of the representative system of democracy itself. While it is true that this type of fundamental rejection can often lead to passivity and utter withdrawal, it need not

⁵⁴ Frances Abele, Katherine Graham, Alex Ker, Antonia Maioni and Susan Phillips, Talking with Canadians: Citizen Engagement and the Social Union, a paper prepared for the Canadian Council on Social Development, Executive Summary, July 16, 1998. http://www.ccsd.ca/pubs/es_twc.htm.

necessarily do so. It can lead also to unconventional forms of political activity – militant and even violent protest, internet-based resistance, Greenpeace-style opposition to settled state and corporate practices, and the like.⁵⁵

This points to a reality of political participation that it is important to bear in mind. Disengagement from one sphere, site or style of action can be accompanied by the active participation of the citizen in another. A person who believes that the nation-state is impotent in the face of rampant globalization will not waste his or her time on national protest or influencing parliamentary elections, when the real game is taking place at the level of international organizations and transnational corporations. Someone who is fed up with the superficiality of conventional forms of political representation may take to the internet to make common cause with other like-minded persons and to organize new electronically based political movements.⁵⁶ A citizen who judges national politics to be vacuous may participate actively in the political life of his or her city, and forego involvement in national political life. Thus the choice facing the citizen is not purely and simply between political engagement and dis-engagement; it can, alternatively, be a choice between dis-engagement and any of a wide variety of forms and patterns of political participation, each one implying an understanding of the ‘real’ nature of politics in the contemporary world.

Let us look at several indicators of civic engagement, starting with political participation as expressed by voter turnout at general elections, both internationally and domestically, then looking at attitudes to politics and government, and concluding with an examination of charitable giving, volunteering and civic participation in the broad sense, as indicators of civic engagement.

⁵⁵ Neil Nevitte reports on a hierarchy of protest behaviour, beyond voting, developed by Russell Dalton, which runs from signing a petition, joining in boycotts, attending unlawful demonstrations, joining unofficial strikes to occupying buildings. *The Decline of Deference* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1996), p. 78.

⁵⁶ Ronald Deibert has written about this: “Civic Activism on the World Wide Web: The Case of the Anti-MAI Lobby,” in *Street Protests and Fantasy Parks: Globalization, Culture, and the State* eds. David R. Cameron and Janice Gross Stein (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002).

Voter Turnout: International and Comparative Experience

Perhaps the single most obvious form of political participation in a representative democracy is voting in democratic elections. Participating in the electoral process by which leaders are given the right to rule is about as centrally related to representative government as it is possible to be. What does comparative experience have to tell us about this feature of civic engagement? The international Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), based in Sweden, has gathered statistics on voter participation in elections since 1945 in over 150 countries.⁵⁷ This is of interest because it includes countries from all around the globe, and of every political and ideological stripe. Their data show that higher voter turnout is not the preserve of western industrialized states. Over 96% of eligible voters, for example, cast ballots in elections in Malta and Uruguay. Cambodia comes third and Indonesia fourth, demonstrating that high voter turnout occurs in open democracies and authoritarian regimes, in countries from all parts of the world, and in states both large and small. What the Institute found is that “overall participation in competitive elections across the globe” rose between 1945 and 1990, to 68% in the 1980s, but then dropped back to 64% in the 1990s.⁵⁸ They argue that a surge of competitive elections in newly democratic states is likely to have caused the downturn in the 90s.

The Institute considers what might affect the level of voting, noting that institutional, socio-economic and political factors are frequently offered as candidates. The type of electoral system and whether it is compulsory or not (institutional), the country’s literacy level, its wealth, its population size and its ‘human development’ level (socio-economic), and the ‘competitiveness’ of the political system (political) have all been suggested by social scientists as matters that might affect voter turnout.

⁵⁷ The data are carried on the IDEA website <http://www.int-idea.se>.

⁵⁸ IDEA uses number of votes cast as a proportion of total voting age population in their basic calculations. Number of votes cast as a proportion of eligible voters, as in the instances of Malta, Uruguay and Cambodia, cited above, gives higher figures.

With respect to institutional factors, the IDEA analysts conclude that pure PR electoral systems do seem to be correlated with slightly higher voter turnout than is the case with either plurality-majority (as in Canada) or semi-PR systems (68% on average, as compared to an average of 59-60% for the other two). Not surprisingly, compulsory voting, which exists in some form in Australia, Belgium, Greece, Italy and Luxembourg, is also associated with higher turnout rates, although it seems to make less difference than one would think.

What of socio-economic factors? While the 52 states with a literacy rate of over 95% enjoy higher turnout rates at 71% than the 104 states with rates below 95%, whose average turnout rate is 61%, there is, according to IDEA, no clear statistical correlation between literacy levels and voter turnout, nor is there evidence of a correlation between levels of voter turnout and a country's wealth or its population size. The only item in this category that does correlate is, interestingly enough, the UN Human Development Index (HDI). The average level of voter turnout at 72% is highest for those countries in the top fifth of the HDI range, and drops steadily as you move down to the bottom fifth where the average is 56%. Since the UN's Human Development Index is composed of the three social indicators of life expectancy, education, and income per person, one might speculate on the basis of the first two that this is another piece of evidence pointing to a correlation between voting behaviour and levels of social capital.

Finally, considering political factors, the electoral competitiveness of the system does appear to be related to the level of voter turnout. The IDEA analysts report that "in the 542 elections where the largest party won less than half of the votes turnout was a full 10% higher than the 263 elections where a single party won over 50% of the popular vote."

These judgments are partially confirmed by Nevitte, Blais, Gidengil and Nadeau, who, writing about the 1997 Canadian general election, note that "average turnout in Canadian federal elections since 1945 stands at about 74 %" of eligible voters, slightly

less than the average for electoral democracies in general, which is 77%.⁵⁹ They offer two main reasons for this. The first, echoing the IDEA findings, is that countries like Canada with plurality systems typically have turnouts of about three points lower than countries with PR. The second reason they offer differs from the findings of IDEA; citing Blais and Dobrzynska,⁶⁰ the authors contend that small, densely populated countries tend to produce higher turnout than large countries with dispersed populations.

Voter Turnout: Canada and Ontario

The IDEA analysis indicates that Canada's voter turnout performance is somewhat weaker than that of other countries on average, but that Canada parallels the experience of many other countries in witnessing sharply declining voter turnout in the 1990s, dropping by almost 14 points between the 1988 and the 2000 elections. See Table 2 below.

⁵⁹ Neil Nevitte, André Blais, Elisabeth Gidengil and Richard Nadeau, Unsteady State: The 1997 Canadian Federal Election (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 59. Note that the authors use 'those eligible to vote' as the basis for calculating turnout, not 'those of voting age,' as is the case with IDEA.

⁶⁰ André Blais and Agnieszka Dobrzynska, "Turnout in Electoral Democracies," *European Journal of Political Research*, 33 (1998), pp. 239-61.

TABLE 1

CANADA

Parliamentary Elections

Year	Total Vote	Registration	Vote/Reg	VAP	Vote/VAP	Invalid	FH	Pop. Size
1945	5,305,193	6,952,445	76.31%	7,560,340	70.17%	1.1%	n/a	n/a
1949	5,903,572	7,893,629	74.79%	8,202,670	71.97%	0.9%	n/a	n/a
1953	5,701,963	8,401,691	67.87%	8,720,790	65.38%	1.1%	n/a	n/a
1957	6,680,690	8,902,125	75.05%	9,839,430	67.90%	1.1%	n/a	n/a
1958	7,357,139	9,131,200	80.57%	9,758,400	75.39%	0.9%	n/a	n/a
1962	7,772,656	9,700,325	80.13%	10,602,000	73.31%	1.1%	n/a	n/a
1963	7,958,636	9,910,757	80.30%	10,599,680	75.08%	0.8%	n/a	n/a
1965	7,796,728	10,274,904	75.88%	11,020,800	70.75%	1.1%	n/a	n/a
1968	8,217,916	10,860,888	75.67%	12,023,400	68.35%	1.1%	n/a	n/a
1972	9,966,148	12,909,179	77.20%	13,984,000	71.27%	3.0%	2	21,850,000
1974	9,671,002	13,620,553	71.00%	15,061,600	64.21%	1.7%	2	22,480,000
1979	11,531,000	15,234,997	75.69%	16,860,370	68.39%	0.7%	2	23,747,000
1980	11,014,914	15,890,416	69.32%	17,070,530	64.53%	0.6%	2	24,043,000
1984	12,638,424	16,775,011	75.34%	18,611,000	67.91%	0.7%	2	25,150,000
1988	13,281,191	17,639,001	75.29%	19,433,250	68.34%	0.8%	2	25,911,000
1993	13,863,135	19,906,796	69.64%	21,705,750	63.87%	1.4%	2	28,941,000
1997	13,174,698	19,663,478	67.00%	23,088,803	57.06%	n/a	2	30,785,070
2000	12,997,185	21,243,473	61.18%	23,786,167	54.64%	1.1%	2	31,213,580

The definitions used in the Table are as follows.⁶¹

⁶¹ **Definitions as supplied by IDEA:**

Electoral System. For each country in the table we have listed the electoral system currently used, i.e. PR, Majority or Mixed. This information is taken from The International IDEA Handbook of Electoral System Design (1997) published by International IDEA. Please refer to the chapter on Voter Turnout Rates in a Comparative Perspective.

FH. Freedom House from which we use the ratings calculated as an indicator of the levels of freedom in a country's political system. We have added together the "political rights" and "civil liberties" ratings to yield a number from 2 to 14, where 2 indicates the highest possible level of rights and freedoms and 14 the lowest. Data was collected from the Freedom House website at www.freedomhouse.org, where more information about the survey methodology is available.

Invalid. The number of invalid votes, as reported by each country.

Nevitte *et al* devote a chapter to low voter turnout in their book on the 1997 federal election.⁶² Looking more closely at the fluctuations in voting levels, they argue that some of the variations can be explained by the season in which the election was held, and the closeness of the race. A higher proportion of Canadians are inclined to vote if the election is held in the spring or fall, rather than in the winter or summer; and more vote when the election race is perceived to be close than when it is not. As is the case in other countries, Nevitte and his colleagues found that, in the 1997 election, turnout was higher with the older, the better educated and the better off, age being the most important variable, and level of education being the second most important. Looking at data gathered in Canadian Election Studies conducted since 1988, they found that the age factor is explained primarily by life-cycle effects, rather than generational effects. The first reflects the individual's maturation process, suggesting that people will simply be more likely to vote as they grow older. The second reflects the distinctive experiences that a particular age cohort has had and that may affect the outlook and behaviour of its members throughout their lives.

The authors found that in the 1997 election results the “generational effects are detectable but modest; the generation born after 1970 is somewhat less likely to vote than previous generations were at the same age;” they observe as well that “there are indications that new generations of electors are less inclined to vote. As these new generations come to represent a larger share of the electorate, turnout may be heading

Population. The total population as described under Voting Age Population.

Registration. The number of registered voters. The figure represents the number of names on the voters' register at the time that the registration process closes, as reported by the electoral management body.

Total vote. The total number of votes cast in the relevant election. Total vote includes valid and invalid votes, as well as blank votes in cases where these are separated from invalid votes. More information on valid, invalid and blank votes can be found at www.aceproject.org.

Vote/Registration. The number of votes divided by the number of names on the voters' register, expressed as a percentage.

Vote/VAP. The number of votes divided by the Voting Age Population figure, expressed as a percentage. The lowest age at which the right to vote is obtained in the relevant country.

Voting Age Population. International IDEA has chosen to use not only the reported registration rate to calculate turnout percentages, but also the voting age population (VAP) which includes all citizens above the legal voting age.

⁶² Op. cit., ch. 5.

downward in the long term.”⁶³ The authors regard this as perhaps their most important finding. Why this apparent change in the generation born after 1970? It is not, they say, “because it is more cynical that members of the youngest generation are less likely to vote. It could be that it is just because they are less convinced of the view that voting is a moral obligation.”⁶⁴

Brenda O’Neill’s study of the 1990s confirms that voting turnout is positively correlated with age, education and socio-economic status.⁶⁵ By re-asking in a 2000 IRPP survey a series of questions that had been asked previously in the early 1990s in surveys done for the Lortie Commission on Electoral Reform, she confirms Nevitte et al’s most important finding. As she says in her conclusion: “Generational effects are evident, suggesting that today’s younger Canadians are participating at lower levels than previously recorded both in elections and with political parties.”

In Table 2 we display voter turnout data of four kinds. The first column represents turnout of eligible voters nationally in federal elections; the second column represents turnout of eligible voters *in Ontario* in national elections; the third column indicates turnout of eligible voters in Ontario in *provincial elections*; and the fourth column indicates voter turnout in municipal elections in Toronto. . The voter turnout figures for the municipal elections between 1945 and 1951 are not readily available. The Elections Coordinator notes that “the percentages shown from 1951 through to 1994 are pre-amalgamation figures strictly for the old City of Toronto. The 1997 and 2000 percentages cover the amalgamated City of Toronto which includes East York, Etobicoke, North York, Scarborough, Toronto and York.”⁶⁶ Surprisingly, there is a certain amount of uncertainty regarding the 1997 and 2000 figures; we have employed what we understand to be the best numbers.

⁶³ Op. cit., pp. 62-3.

⁶⁴ Op. cit., p. 64.

⁶⁵ Brenda O’Neill, “Generational Patterns in the Political Opinions and Behaviour of Canadians: Separating the Wheat From the Chaff,” *Policy Matters* 2(5), October 2001, p. 41.

⁶⁶ Elections Coordinator, City of Toronto, e-mail correspondence, October 16, 2002.

Table 2
Turnout of Eligible Voters in National, Ontario and Toronto Elections from 1945

Election Year	National Elections		Ontario Elections***	Toronto Elections****
	Canada*	Ontario**		
Can 1945	76%	75%		
Ont 1945			72%	
Ont 1948			68	
Can 1949	74	75		
Ont 1951			65	
Tor 1951				43%
Tor 1952				35
Can 1953	67	67		
Tor 1953				30
Tor 1954				36
Ont 1955			61	
Tor 1955				31
Tor 1956				30
Can 1957	74	74		
Can 1958	79	79		
Tor 1958				31
Ont 1959			60	
Tor 1960				46
Can 1962	79	80		
Tor 1962				44
Can 1963	79	81		
Ont 1963			64	
Tor 1964				35
Can 1965	75	77		
Tor 1966				38
Ont 1967			66	
Can 1968	76	77		
Tor 1969				39
Ont 1971			74	
Can 1972	77	79		
Tor 1972				43
Can 1974	71	74		
Tor 1974				31
Ont 1975			68	
Tor 1976				31
Ont 1977			66	
Tor 1978				46
Can 1979	76	78		
Can 1980	71	72		
Tor 1980				45
Ont 1981			58	
Tor 1982				43
Can 1984	75	76		
Ont 1985			62	
Tor 1985				37
Ont 1987			63	
Can 1988	75	75		
Tor 1988				31
Ont 1990			64	
Tor 1991				43
Can 1993	73	68		
Ont 1995			63	
Tor 1994				37
Can 1997	67	66		
Tor 1997				46
Ont 1999			58	
Can 2000	61	58		
Tor 2000				36

*Data from Nevitte et al, op. cit., p. 60.

**Data from Reports of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, Elections Canada; summary data prepared by Elections Canada.

****Data from the Elections Ontario web site.*

*****City of Toronto, Elections Division.*

Several points are worth making on the basis of this data.

First of all, while Ontario's voter turnout in federal elections tracks general voter turnout in the country fairly closely (which is not surprising, given that Ontario represents about 38% of the national population), both national and Ontario-based participation in federal elections took a dive in the 1990s, dropping in the former case by 14 points and in the latter by 17 points. The substantially larger Ontario-based decline reflects a distinctive Ontario pattern; in the last 38 years, Ontario has shifted from participating at a higher rate in federal elections than the rest of the country to participating at a lower rate. In the nine federal elections between 1962 and 1984, Ontarians consistently turned out to vote at higher rates proportionately than did their fellow citizens in the rest of the country. In the election of 1988, voter turnout at 75% was the same in Ontario and in the country as a whole. In the three federal elections since 1988, Ontario turnout rates have consistently undershot those of the rest of the country (5 points less in 1993; one point less in 1997; and three points less in the 2000 election). On the basis of these data, the people of Ontario, who used to be more actively involved in federal elections, have disengaged faster than have Canadians elsewhere. The disengagement trajectory is steeper in the country's largest province than in the country as whole.

Secondly, and despite the trend line sketched above, Ontarians deliver consistently lower levels of participation in their provincial elections than they do when they go to the polls nationally. Table 3 below displays some of the indicators demonstrating the propensity of Ontario voters to turn out to provincial elections in lower numbers than they do in federal elections. The more than 8% spread in average turnouts reveals a consistent pattern. Why do the same electors vote less in Ontario elections than in federal contests? One likely reason is the lower importance that most Ontarians appear to attach to provincial politics, as compared to politics at the national level. For example, in the 1990 and 1995 Ontario elections, which were hotly contested three-party races, there were turnouts of 64% and 63% respectively. In the 1997 federal election, which was generally

regarded as a cakewalk for the federal Liberals, there was still a 66% turnout. Consider, for example, the comments of Lower and Oliver at the beginning of this paper, which provide relevant historical context. We will return to this general matter in the last section of the paper.

Table 3

Turnout of Eligible Ontario Voters in Federal, Provincial and Toronto Elections 1945 - 2000
Selected Data

	Canada	Ontario	Toronto
Number of Elections	18	16	24
Highest	81%	74%	46% (1960, 1978 & 1997)
Lowest	58% (once: 2000)	58% (twice: 1981 & 1999)	30% (1953 & 1956)
Average	73.9%	64.5%	37.8%

Thirdly, the data in Tables 2 and 3 show that Toronto voter turnout is dramatically lower than provincial and national voter turnouts. Toronto's turnout rate runs on average 36 points below the provincial average in federal elections, and 27 points below the average turnout rate in provincial electoral contests. Smaller municipalities boast marginally higher voter turnout rates than does Toronto; Joseph Kushner, David Siegel, and Hannah Stanwick have noted that lower voter turnout accompanies increased municipal size in Ontario and consequently question the political wisdom of consolidating municipalities.⁶⁷ What explains the low turnout in Toronto and other large municipalities,⁶⁸ given that cities deliver important services and one would think citizens would identify more closely with local rather than national issues? Explanations for low voter turnout in

⁶⁷ "Ontario Municipal Elections: Voting Trends and Determinants of Electoral Success in a Canadian Province," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 30 (3), September 1997, pp. 541-53; see also Hannah Stanwick, "A Megamayor for all People? Voting Behaviour and Electoral Success in the 1997 Toronto Municipal Election," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 33 (3), September 2000, pp. 549-69.

⁶⁸ The lower turnout for municipal elections than for provincial or federal elections is an international phenomenon, although the variance in Canada is more extreme. Robert L. Morlan, "Municipal vs. National Election Voter Turnout: Europe and the United States," *Political Science Quarterly* 99 (1984), pp. 462-65.

municipal elections generally point to the low profile of local councillors and their administrative rather than political focus. As Hannah Stanwick observes, “Voters often know little of their local candidates or their platforms and local campaigns usually do not generate the excitement and publicity that surround federal and provincial contests.”⁶⁹ The important exception that she noted is the Toronto mega-election of 1997, where turnout surpassed most other Toronto elections. Stanwick traced the high turnout rate in 1997 to the fact that “this election was the first for the pending megacity”: there was a tight race between front running candidates (Mel Lastman and Barbara Hall); the frontrunners were perceived as wearing partisan stripes; and electors were asked a referendum question.⁷⁰ In the Toronto election of 2000, voter turnout declined 10 points to its usual level.

Attitudes to Politics and Government

Canadians appear to be less and less willing to engage in the central act of citizenship in a representative democracy, namely, voting at general elections; and this is even truer of Ontarians. Why is this so? One might consider a variety of possible reasons for this downward trend line.

One would be declining interest in politics. However, Nevitte found no evidence that this was the case. Interest in politics on the part of citizens young and old is high, and, if anything, growing.⁷¹ Instead, there are, in the data, signs of a significant shift in the orientation of citizens to politics. In the 12 countries Nevitte reports on, including Canada, interest in politics is rising, but confidence in institutions, both governmental and non-governmental, is in marked decline, as is general deference. On the other hand, cosmopolitanism, the potential to engage in political protest, and belief in civil permissiveness are all on the rise. This appears not to be a picture of disengagement or a declining interest in political participation, but a shift in the character and focus of engagement and political activity. And, interestingly, the World Values data suggest that

⁶⁹ Stanwick, 2000, p. 556.

⁷⁰ Op. cit., pp. 556-57.

⁷¹ The Decline of Deference, pp. 51-4.

on some variables Canadians are at the front of the pack. When asked whether they have ever joined in boycotts, attended unlawful demonstrations, joined in unofficial strikes or occupied buildings or factories, Canadians led European and American respondents in both 1981 and 1990, and fewer Canadians than Europeans and Americans in both 1981 and 1990 responded that they would never engage in such 'protest behaviours.'⁷² Consistent with this is the finding that suggests that, contrary to widely held assumptions, Canadians are less deferential to authority than Americans; in both 1981 and 1990, proportionately fewer Canadians thought it would be a good thing if there were to be greater respect for authority in the future, although an even smaller proportion of Europeans in both years thought that this would be a good thing.⁷³

Some of the data breaks out attitudes among French, English, and 'new' Canadians, which is of particular interest to us, given the degree to which Ontario's political culture is affected by its matchless role as an immigrant receiving community. Ontario consistently gets well above what would be its population-based share of immigration, and Toronto is one of the most diverse cities in North America.⁷⁴ In terms of 'post-materialist' values – the need for belonging, self-esteem, and values relating to the quality of life – 23% of English Canada fell into this category in 1990, 29% of French Canada and 28% of 'new Canada'.⁷⁵ The 1990 World Values Survey asked a battery of questions designed to reveal what things people thought were very important – family, work, friends, leisure, religion or politics. In every country, family comes first, and in 11 of 12, friends and acquaintances come second. There is a striking consistency in the way in which citizens in these industrialized states ranked their priorities, and Canada is no exception. In Canada, the English, French and new Canadians all list family first, and work second, followed, in precisely the same order for all three, by friends and acquaintances, leisure, religion and politics. While there is some internal variation (French giving a higher priority than the other two to work; new Canadians giving lower priority to

⁷² Op. cit. pp. 79-80, Figure 4-2.

⁷³ Op. cit., pp. 38-9, Figure 2-7.

⁷⁴ Myer Siemiatycki and Engin Isin note that in 1996, across the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area, which largely, but not completely overlaps with the Greater Toronto Area, "immigrants comprised 42% of the population, while in the amalgamated City of Toronto 47.6% were foreign-born." p. 75.

⁷⁵ Op. cit., p. 31, Table 2-2.

leisure and a higher priority to religion and politics), what is more striking is that the overall rankings of what is important are precisely the same.⁷⁶ Interest in politics has been rising since 1981, more so in Canada than in Europe and the United States. The rise has been similar among English and French Canadians (from 7-8% in 1981 to more than 19% in 1990), and interest in politics is even higher, at almost 24%, among new Canadians.⁷⁷

Since the 1980s and well into the 1990s, a powerful message attracted the support of growing proportions of the population, namely, that government was too big, remote and inefficient, that taxes and deficits were too high, and that a central response to this problem was the reduction of public-sector spending, the trimming back of public services and the expansion of the private sector into spaces which had been within the purview of the state. The leading role of the state has been put under severe pressure as a consequence of the fiscal crisis in the public sector, growing globalization, and shifts in values and public attitudes. There are, however, some recent signs that this mood is moderating, or that our original understanding of it was in fact somewhat simplistic. Ekos Research has been tracking Canadian opinion for several years in their *Rethinking Government* study, and, in a journal article, Ekos President, Frank Graves, and Statistics Canada Senior Social Scientist, Paul Reed, report on a special set of 80 questions in the 1998 *Rethinking Government* survey, relating to Canadians' views of their public institutions.⁷⁸ Here are their conclusions:

“Findings of the 1998 *Rethinking Government* survey paint a picture of Canadians who believe that governments, working together with other public institutions, still have an essential role to play in the life of the nation. The findings also indicate that despite feeling disappointed in their public institutions, Canadians have not written them off; they have not enthusiastically supported the decline of government, nor do they support the transition to a “business” model of

⁷⁶ Op. cit., pp. 33-35, Table 2-3

⁷⁷ Op. cit., pp. 34-5, Table 2-3.

⁷⁸ “Canadians and Their Public Institutions,” *Optimum* 28(4), 1999, p. 2. This article was based on a more detailed report of the same title prepared by the authors for the Canadian Centre for Management Development in September 1998.

government. On the contrary, their sense of disappointment has created a strong desire to strengthen public institutions so they can work more successfully to achieve collective well-being, particularly in the social realm. The substantial concern Canadians feel for the institutional structures that underpin their society is matched not only by a desire to see public institutions strengthened, but by an active willingness to support initiatives in that direction. This is a mindset considerably removed from the simplistic 'less government, less public spending' mantra."

Charitable Giving, Volunteering, and Civic Participation

Let us turn more explicitly now to forms of civic engagement in the broader sense, and look at some of the indicators depicting the general involvement of Canadians and Ontarians in the life of their communities. In 1997 Statistics Canada undertook a National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (NSGVP), which aimed "to better understand how Canadians support individuals and communities on their own or through their involvement with charitable and non-profit organizations."⁷⁹ It built on the 1987 Volunteer Activity Survey (VAS). What they found was intriguing.

With respect to charitable donations, the survey found that 88% of the population 15 years of age or over – about 21 million Canadians – made financial or in-kind donations to charitable and non-profit organizations between 1 November 1996 and 31 October 1997. The value of the direct financial support during this period was estimated to be \$4.51 billion. On average donors gave \$239 during the year of the study,⁸⁰ with a small proportion of the donors giving the lion's share of the money; the one-third of the donors who gave \$150 or more during the year accounted for 86% of total donations.⁸¹

⁷⁹ The findings are reported in *Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians: Highlights from the 1997 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating*, (Ottawa: Minister of Industry, August 1998, Catalogue no. 71-542-XPE). The data in this section of the paper are drawn from this document.

⁸⁰ This calculation excludes deposits of spare change.

⁸¹ Op. cit., p. 10.

As for volunteering, the 1997 survey found that some 7.5 million Canadians, or more than 30% of the population aged 15 or over, engaged in volunteer activity for non-profit organizations in the 12-month period surveyed. Compared to the numbers volunteering at the time of the 1987 survey, this represented an increase in total numbers of 40%, double the increase of 20% in the Canadian population aged 15 and over during the same time period in 1987. The average amount of time contributed per volunteer in 1997 was 149 hours, down from the 191 hours contributed per person in 1987. As with donations, a relatively small group of volunteers contributed a great deal of their time; 22% gave more than 200 hours in the year.⁸²

Respondents were asked a series of questions about the third component being investigated, namely, broad civic participation (attending meetings, participating in local associations and organizations, keeping up with current events, etc.) Almost half reported that they were members of community groups, or that they participated in community affairs.⁸³

The survey found, not surprisingly, that “there are pockets of concentrated giving, volunteering and participating among identifiable groups of Canadians.” It also found that a person who engages in one of these activities is likely to engage in all: “For example, volunteers are more likely than non-volunteers to make charitable donations, help others directly and to be active civic participants.”⁸⁴ More recent investigation has disclosed a worrisome trend. About a million of the 7.5 million volunteers identified in the 1997 NSGVP survey appear to have dropped out in the course of the three subsequent years. This 13% decline puts additional pressure on the 8% of the population that forms the hardworking civic core of Canadian volunteers, who are actually prepared to increase the level of commitment as others reduce their hours or leave the volunteer realm altogether. Over-represented in this civic core is the generation born just after the Second World War; their high levels of commitment do not appear to be echoed in the generations that have followed them.

⁸² Op. cit., pp. 10-11.

⁸³ Op. cit., p. 11.

⁸⁴ Op. cit., p. 11.

The survey notes regional variations in these patterns of civic engagement. With respect to financial giving to non-profit and charitable organizations, the study noted that provincial variations exist in two forms: the rate of donations, that is, the proportion of the population who make donations; and the total annual value of contributions from donors. The donating rate was high in the Atlantic provinces (82-4%), although the contributions were smaller. Saskatchewan enjoyed a high donating rate as well (83%). At the other end were British Columbia (73% donating rate), Alberta (75%), and Quebec (75%). Ontario came down the middle, with a donating rate of 80%; the average value of donations was in the middle of the pack, too, at \$278 per year, behind the prairie provinces, but ahead of all the other jurisdictions.⁸⁵

Participation rates in volunteer activity increased between the 1987 and the 1997 survey in every province except Alberta, which remained steady, but there are substantial regional variations in the level of participation in volunteer activities. Again, the prairie provinces are at the top, while Quebec is at the bottom; British Columbia and Ontario are tied for next-to-last place.⁸⁶

Broad civic participation is again highest in the prairie provinces, but this time they are joined by Nova Scotia and British Columbia; Ontario comes 6th, with 52% of its population reporting that they belong to at least one organization. The prairie provinces and Nova Scotia again lead the pack when it comes to more intense civic participators, those who belong to two or more organizations, but this time Ontario replaces British Columbia in 5th place.⁸⁷

What are the leading characteristics of Canada's more active civic participators, as represented by their being members of one or more voluntary organizations? They tend to live on the prairies or in Nova Scotia. They are found in Canada's small towns and rural

⁸⁵ Op. cit., p. 17.

⁸⁶ Op. cit., p. 31.

⁸⁷ Op. cit., p. 44-5.

communities, far more often than in its large metropolitan centres.⁸⁸ They are likely to be in their middle years: the highest participation rate for belonging to a single organization or to two or more organizations was for those people between the ages of 45 and 54, followed in both cases by those just older and just younger than they were. The 45-54 year olds are members of that famous post-war generation of highly committed contributors; a person who was 45 in 1997, when the survey was done, would have been born in 1952, while a person who was 54 at that time would have been born in 1943. Married people were more involved (at 54%) than were single people (46%), those who were separated or divorced (44%), or those who were widowed (39%). Those who were married were also more likely to be involved with two or more organizations (45%), than those who were not (37-39%). Levels of education were found in the 1997 survey to be a powerful indicator of levels of civic participation; the rate ranged from 40% for those with less than a high school education to 70% for those holding university degrees. An equally powerful correlation linked levels of household income and levels of participation; those with a household income of less than \$20,000 showed a participation rate of 34%, while those with a household income of \$80,000 or more showed a 71% level of civic participation. People who had paid employment were more likely to participate (57%), than those who were unemployed (36%) or not in the labour force (42%). Finally, those who declared themselves to be somewhat religious (54%) or very religious (65%) were more likely to be involved in civic activity than those who were not religious (45%) or not at all religious (43%).⁸⁹

The link between levels of civic participation and levels of other forms of contributory behaviour (donating, volunteering, helping others, giving directly to others) suggests a pattern or a civic profile. Those who are the most engaged in their community are those who are most likely to be contributing in the other ways. The 1997 survey gathered information about these forms of contributory behaviour for those who were members of no voluntary organization, of one, of two, and of three or more. The more

⁸⁸ This observation comes from Paul Reed, Reflections on the 1997 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering, and Participating in Canada, Remarks presented to the IAVE Conference in Edmonton, August 1998, p. 3.

⁸⁹ Op. cit., p. 44.

organizations a person belonged to, that is to say, the more intensely a person was embedded in the organizational life of his or her community, the more likely he or she was to make charitable donations, to volunteer, to help others, and to give directly to others.

These results point to the existence of a virtuous circle of civic life in which significant involvement in any one of these other-directed activities is likely to be accompanied by involvement in some or all of the other publicly spirited activities and engagements as well. As the survey report says in its concluding section:

“... those that provide any one type of support are also more likely to provide other types. For example, volunteers are more likely to make charitable donations than non-volunteers. They are also more likely to give help directly to their neighbours and relatives, to belong to organizations and to vote in elections. From these results, a portrait emerges of an engaged core of citizens who are actively involved in multiple facets of their community’s life.”⁹⁰

There are, however, several serious concerns that arise out of this portrait. While the vast majority of Canadians engage in at least some contributory behaviour, it is a relatively small group of committed citizens who do most of the heavy lifting. The survey reports that “one-third of all donors account for 86% of all donations and one-third of all volunteers account for 81% of total volunteer hours.”⁹¹ The bottom 50% of volunteers accounted for only 6.7% of total volunteer time. Only 16% of charitable giving was initiated by the donor himself or herself; by far the greatest proportion was in response to a request. Again, 71% of volunteers offered their service only after being asked.⁹² Extending that virtuous circle of civic engagement to larger numbers of Canadians constitutes a significant public policy challenge.

What is more, there is evidence that has been gathered since the 1997 NSGVP that suggests that the evidence of growth in levels of volunteering between 1987 and

⁹⁰ Op. cit., p. 47.

⁹¹ Op. cit., p. 47.

⁹² Reed, op. cit., p. 3.

1997 may be deceptive, and that the rate has been falling back sharply since that survey was conducted. The 2000 update of the Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians survey⁹³ shows an increasing number of hours being volunteered by a decreasing number of Canadians. Just over 6.5 million citizens volunteered their time and talents to organizations between October 1, 1999 and September 30, 2000, almost a million less than the number of volunteers in 1997. This represents a 13% decrease in the number of volunteers, even though the Canadian population increased during the same period by 2.5%. In fact, the volunteer rate for 2000 dropped back to 27%, the same level it was at in 1987.⁹⁴

Statistics Canada undertook a qualitative examination of the impact of some of these trends on voluntary organizations in Ontario. They interviewed 40 executive directors of voluntary organizations in 8 Ontario cities and towns between September 1997 and January 1998; as well, each organization completed a written questionnaire. What they found was a sector under increasing stress, but not for the reason that many would assume, namely, funding cutbacks.⁹⁵ Instead, the pressures arose out of two factors. The first was the way in which financial resources were being provided to voluntary organizations, and the second was changes in the social conditions under which these organizations were operating. Greater use of contracts for services, rather than grants, and an increased level of reporting requirements made the operation of voluntary organizations in all sectors surveyed more complex and demanding. With respect to altering social conditions, the demand for services of all kinds was found to be far outstripping the capacity of social agencies to respond, and the needs were becoming increasingly complex.

The authors of the report in their conclusion speculate that some of the contemporary forces to which the voluntary sector has been subject have the potential to permanently alter the basic character of voluntary organizations and volunteer activity.

⁹³ Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians: Highlights From the 2000 Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 71-542-XIE.

⁹⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 32.

⁹⁵ Paul B. Reed and Valerie J. Howe, Voluntary Organizations in Ontario in the 1990s (Statistics Canada, 2000).

“Among these forces are the pressures toward rationalization (maximizing organizational efficiency and eliminating all activities not directly related to the core mission); formalization (making organizational structures and procedures explicit and codified), professionalization (selecting personnel on the basis of credentials and formal education-based expertise); and commercialization (generating funds through the sale of services, and competing with other voluntary organizations as well as for-profit organizations). Taken together, they constitute a movement toward “corporatization”: basing operations on the template of large businesses. These pressures run counter to several of the voluntary sector’s defining traits: a strongly idealism-based ethos which places highest priority on responding to need or producing a social good, and doing so via indigenous, cooperative, mostly layperson- or community-based action.”⁹⁶

IV. Conclusion

Ontario, like other jurisdictions in North America and elsewhere, has experienced a structural reconstitution of its social and economic life since the second World War, and its citizens, in their values and aspirations, have moved down the post-materialist path at least as rapidly as has the rest of the country. Attitudes to government and politics, and styles of political participation and civic engagement have been very much affected by these forces of change. Indeed, if participation rates in general elections are any guide, it may be the case that Ontarians are in the vanguard when it comes to the desire to discard some of the old ways of doing things, and the search for new and more satisfactory patterns of action in the public realm. The information at our disposal suggests that disengagement from many of the conventional political institutions and practices should not be misconstrued as a sign of declining interest in politics and public affairs, but as an indication of discontent with the way in which traditional public institutions are operating. Clearly, the new landscape within which citizens increasingly

⁹⁶ Op. cit., p. 46-7.

desire to situate their civic life poses large challenges for our traditional political institutions, which have been slow to respond although many recommendations for parliamentary reforms that would improve democracy and enhance accountability have been put forward.⁹⁷

One might speculate that, at the centre of the stresses our political world is encountering, lies the question of political power. One of the reasons, surely, that the traditional systems have been slow to initiate real reform is that those who currently hold political and bureaucratic power are loath to give it up. One of the reasons why increasing numbers of citizens appear to be prepared to disengage from our traditional political systems is that their relationship to those systems is increasingly marked by a sense of impotence or lack of power. If politics is about making the crucial collective choices of a society, then political power is the energy source that permits these choices to be made definitively.

Designating political power as the heart of the matter forces the issue of representation back on the agenda, for it is electoral representation, in our present system, that is the primary instrument for creating power and authorizing its use. Difficulties with representative democracy, then, both create and are the result of public disaffection from conventional politics. It is inconceivable to think that our basic representative institutions could be replaced, and it would be undesirable even if they could be, but the forms of representation could certainly be improved, and a richer appreciation of governance in a democracy could open up a variety of channels of power and influence that could deepen and legitimize democratic practice and engage the involvement of citizens to a greater extent than is currently the case.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ For example, the Leader of the Official Opposition, Dalton McGuinty released a “Democratic Charter for Ontario”, which outlined a series of proposals for reforming the electoral and democratic processes in Ontario (e.g., campaign spending limits, a binding referendum on alternatives to the “first-past-the post” electoral system, online voting to boost voter participation, fixed election dates based on four-year terms, attendance requirements for Cabinet at Question Periods, and new powers for committees to initiate legislation). See “Legislative Reports: Ontario,” *Canadian Parliamentary Review* 24 (4), winter 2001, pp. 44-46.

⁹⁸ David Cameron and Richard Simeon, in an article entitled “Intergovernmental Relations and Democratic Citizenship” (in *Governance in the Twenty-first Century: Revitalizing the Public Service*, eds. B. Guy Peters

There are, after all, many conceptions of democracy and hence many different criteria or standards that can be brought to bear in assessing any set of institutions and processes. One conception, as we have seen, flows from the idea of representative government. The key here is accountability. Citizens should know who is responsible for making the decisions that affect them, and have the means to reward or punish them at the ballot box. This is the preferred understanding of most governments in Canada. The second flows from the idea of deliberative democracy. The keys here are deliberation and dialogue, in which governments engage with citizens to shape broad policy choices. This requires that processes be accessible to interested parties, that key decisions are not pre-cooked by political elites, and that discussions are open, transparent and conducted in a public language that is understandable. This is a model that encourages broadly based forms of citizen engagement, and holds promise in the effort to re-connect citizens to the political life of their country. Daniel Yankelovich's theories fit into this category. The third flows from the idea of direct or populist democracy in which citizens and groups participate directly in making the decisions that affect them. This form is necessarily a resource to be used only occasionally, but it remains a powerful instrument for making the collective wishes of the population known and influential. The second and third conceptions are frequently espoused as a check on the first, designed to make up for the inadequacies and limitations of representative government. Not surprisingly, both are often regarded with suspicion by the current beneficiaries of political power, because each, in its own way, challenges the existing power structure.

The deliberative and populist notions of democracy⁹⁹ point to the territory in which a sustained effort to re-connect citizens to the political life of their country would need to be located, for they offer new sites of political power to supplement, challenge and monitor existing representative institutions. Legislative reform, the development of new

and Donald J. Savoie [Montreal: McGill-Queen's, 2000], pp. 58-118), explore ways of strengthening Canadian federal democracy. Cameron also examines ways in which strengthening and linking the roles of federal and provincial legislatures could improve the functioning of both federalism and parliamentary democracy in Canada: "Inter-Legislative Federalism" in *The State of the Federation: 2001*, forthcoming.

⁹⁹ Matthew Mendelsohn (1997) offers suggestions for incorporating citizens into the policymaking process in Canada without adopting a U.S. model of direct democracy.

forms of citizen engagement, the selective use of referendums and popular assemblies – all these can be understood as ways of enriching democratic practice by the introduction of deliberative and populist elements. While some people would conceive of these as displacing representative government, a better view would understand them as existing alongside representative government and, more generally, deepening democratic norms and practices.

Seeking to foster citizen engagement without political reform is a mug's game. The forces distancing citizens from conventional politics are far too powerful for that. In any case, it is not the duty of citizens to bend themselves to the needs of political institutions, but the responsibility of institutions and political leaders to adapt themselves to what their people require. What is more, that is good democratic practice; in a democracy, popular will is the foundation stone upon which good government is constructed.
