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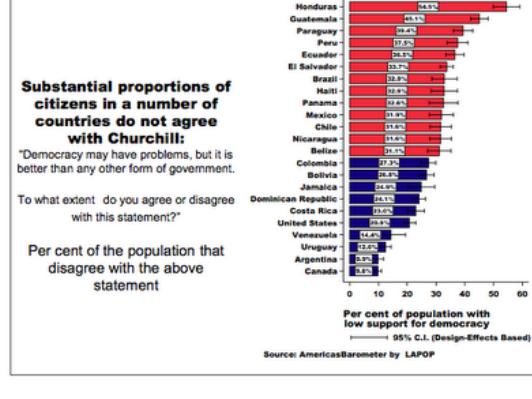
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Category: Canada Published on Friday, 16 November 2012 23:23 Written by Glen Asher

A recent AmericasBarometer report on Canada by the Environs Institute examines public opinion on several key issues relating to democracy and governance in our country. Here is a summary of their findings in relation to how citizens of other countries in both North and South America feel about the same issues.

Let's open by looking at how Canadians feel about democracy. Back in 1947, Winston Churchill stated that "Many forms of Government have been tried and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.". Here is a bar graph showing what percentage of people in other countries do not support this statement:



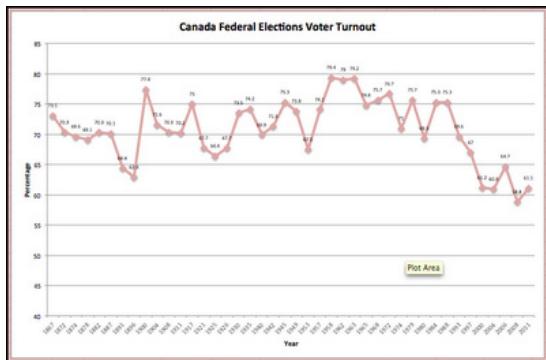
Only 9.8 percent of Canadians feel that democracy is not better than other forms of government, the lowest among all nations surveyed; this compares to a rather surprising 20.9 percent in the United States and 54.5 percent in Honduras. Surprisingly, 14.4 percent of Venezuelans feel that democracy is not the best form of government, 6.5 percentage points less than those who live in the United States!

How satisfied are Canadians with how democracy functions in Canada? Seventy percent of Canadians are satisfied with the state of democracy in Canada but only 7 percent are very satisfied. Overall, Canadians' satisfaction with the state of democracy comes in second place among 26 nations in the study, after Uruguay.

While Canadians are generally happy with their rights to good government, freedom to vote, freedom to move about, freedom of speech and retain a good quality of life, they are somewhat less enamoured with some of the country's institutions. For example, while 53 percent trust the military, only 36 percent trust the RCMP. This may well be due to the large number of negative incidents involving Canada's national police force in the past few years. Only 27 percent of Canadians feel that

our courts are able to guarantee a fair trial. Interestingly, 47 percent of Canadians believe that corruption among public officials is common and an additional 17 percent feel that corruption is very common.

In sharp contrast to the level of trust in the military, trust in Canada's politicians and Parliament is at pitifully low levels. Only 17 percent of Canadians trust Parliament, a significant decline since 2006, and only 16 percent trust Prime Minister Harper. Political parties are given a strong vote of confidence by only 10 percent of Canadians and the mass media has the confidence of only 6 percent, among the lowest levels in the Americas, excluding the United States. Prime Minister Harper, as a national leader, is among the least strongly trusted among all leaders in the Americas. Perhaps all of these issues explain dropping voter turnout in Canada since Confederation as shown here:



As Canadians become increasingly convinced that our Parliamentarians have their own best interest at heart rather than ours, it seems easier to stay at home on election day. Interestingly, only 28 percent of Canadians agree that they understand the most important political issues facing Canada and only 15 percent state that they have a lot of interest in Canada's political theatre.

There is one issue that Canadians overwhelmingly agree on; the legitimacy of coalition governments when no one political party wins a majority. Nearly seven out of ten Canadians agree that coalitions are a good idea in this case, however, only 43 percent agree that coalitions should take place when they exclude the party that won the most seats in Parliament during an election.

Lastly, let's look at the political divide in Canada. Nearly seventy percent of Canadians describe themselves as "politically central" with 14 percent leaning to the left and 18 percent leaning to the right. Not surprisingly, left-leaning Canadians tend to live in Quebec and have no religious affiliation while right-leaning Canadians tend to live in Alberta and define themselves as evangelical Christians. While the political divide in Canada is still far less extreme than in the United States.

While it is interesting to see that Canadians are generally satisfied with the state of democracy in Canada, with only 24.1 percent of eligible voters in Canada essentially picking Stephen Harper as our current Prime Minister, it certainly appears that democracy is "on the ropes". Sometimes the line between a benevolent dictatorship and a democracy become blurred.

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