EVOLVING CANADIAN VALUES: EXPLORING INCOME FAULT-LINES

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Values, or deep dispositions, are important because they guide decisions about right and wrong and because they underpin a whole array of social, economic and political preferences.

Neil Nevitte, *Decline of Deference*

... the institutional changes that are taking place in this country, and Canadians’ reactions to them, cannot be fully appreciated without an understanding of changes in Canadians’ underlying, and evolving, social values.

Michael Adams, *Sex in the Snow*

... the perception of life as a task and a duty to society has diminished over the last four decades, whereas the perception of life as a pleasure has increased considerably.

DIMENSIONS OF VALUES RESEARCH IN CANADIAN HERITAGE

Surveys examined

- *World Values Surveys 1981 and 1990*
- *International Social Survey Program*
Research Objectives

- Current research
  - a work “in progress”
  - “Two waves”

- Primary focus on “unpacking” social values according to fault-lines:
  - economic status
  - geographic location
  - cultural factors
  - demographics
Preliminary Results

- Preliminary results suggest that growing pressures on the middle-income group may be having an impact on social cohesion in Canada.

- Presentation today will examine income-based values trends on:
  - determinants of success
  - determinants of need
  - personal responsibility versus government responsibility for well-being
  - happiness
  - control over life
INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON DETERMINANTS OF SUCCESS

Factor 1 - Birthright
Defined as race, gender, religion, political beliefs, region

Factor 2 - Connections
Defined as wealth, political, social and family connections

Factor 3 - Hard work
Defined as ambition, natural ability, good education, effort

Source: International Social Survey Program, 1992
BELIEFS ON INCOME DISTRIBUTION AND GOVERNMENT’S ROLE

People at all income levels tend to agree that income differences are too large.

Canadians believe that the government should provide for poor people.

Source: International Social Survey Program, 1992
Respondents were asked whether:
- individuals should take more responsibility for providing for themselves
- government should take more responsibility for providing for people

Support for self-sufficiency is high overall, but rises with income.

Middle-income Canadians have seen the biggest decline in disposable income over the past decade and a half.

Source: Statistics Canada
General decline in happiness between 1981 and 1990.

Much of the change in overall population unhappiness is due to a shift in the middle-income population (those with household incomes of $25,000 to $50,000).

Feelings of being in control rise as income increases

Self-sufficiency versus government intervention

- Canadians are not inclined to blame others for being in need
- People want to be self-sufficient
Happiness and loss of control

- Current pressure on social cohesion in Canada related to changes in income and rising unemployment.
- Middle income people have become significantly less happy over the past 15 years
- Unemployment and low income are major factors contributing to loss of control