

## **HOW POLICY MAKERS VIEW PUBLIC OPINION**

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In a democratic society like Canada, government legitimacy requires popular consent, thereby implying that there ought to be a high degree of harmony or congruence between government policy and public opinion. How consistent is government policy with public opinion in democratic societies? The empirical evidence on this question is mixed. Some scholars have uncovered a high degree of consistency between policy and majority opinion as measured by surveys in the United States (Monroe, 1979, 1998, Page and Shapiro, 1983) Germany (Brettschneider, 1998) and Canada during the government of Brian Mulroney (Petry, 1999). Other studies, however, find substantially lower levels of opinion-policy consistency in the United States and Europe (Brooks, 1985, 1987, 1990) and in Canada under the government of Jean Chrétien (Petry and Mendelsohn, 2003). The latter results do not necessarily imply that politicians ignore public opinion. It is possible that politicians in modern democracies are highly attentive to public opinion but they don't trust survey results as valid indicators of public opinion, and therefore they prefer to be attentive to other aspects of public opinion, such as elite opinion or the sense of an electoral mandate. In other words, low consistency between policy and survey results might simply be a methodological artefact of the use of mass surveys as measure of public opinion. Policy might be consistent with public opinion measured by other means.

If we want to better understand the relationship between public opinion and public policy, we need to have a better grasp of how policy makers conceptualize public opinion. Do they define public opinion primarily in terms of mass opinion surveys? What role do decision makers assign to elite opinion? The news media? Do Canadian policy makers define public opinion in terms of interest group demands like their American counterparts?

A survey of the relevant literature (Herbst, 1998; Powlick, 1995) reveals that American policy makers utilize a variety of sources aside of opinion survey results to operationalize public opinion: among them elites; interest groups; news media; elected representatives, even friends and relatives. There is evidence from previous research that policy makers in Washington and in the American states rely on more than just one source and, remarkably, they rarely consider surveys as the most important source of public opinion operationalization. The Canadian evidence on these questions is extremely limited and mostly circumstantial. As a move toward better understanding, this chapter uses the data from a questionnaire and from interviews with federal officials to investigate how Canadian policy makers define public opinion.

## Method

The data come from 120 responses to a close-ended mail questionnaire that was sent out in November 2002 to 522 federal officials in Ottawa (the response rate is therefore 23 percent). English and French versions of the questionnaire were sent out to all members of Parliament (Senators were not included in the study), to deputy ministers, assistant deputy ministers, communications officers in central agencies (PMO, PCO) and several line departments, and executive assistants in the same departments. Enclosed with the questionnaire were clarifications concerning the research objective and a letter of consent guaranteeing anonymity of respondents and confidentiality of their responses. Twenty one questionnaire respondents were subsequently interviewed between January and July 2003.<sup>1</sup>

The questionnaires and the interviews sought complementary objectives. They both contained questions on officials' definition of public opinion—the topic of this chapter. There were also questions on officials' views toward the public's sophistication and understanding of public

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<sup>1</sup> Some interviews were conducted by Matthew Mendelsohn who was my co-researcher in this project until he joined the Ontario government in January 2004. I wish to thank Matthew for providing stimulating insights. Needless to say, any errors remain my own.

policy issues, their attitude regarding the amount of input that public opinion should have into the policy process, and the extent to which they factor public opinion into their own policy decisions and recommendations. These questions are addressed elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> Unlike the close-ended questionnaire which gave relatively little choice to the respondents, the interviews allowed respondents to provide spontaneous ideas and personal account and to give a more detailed evaluation of the opinion-policy relationship.

Table 1 about here

The sample of questionnaire respondents is composed of 35 Liberal MPs (including two cabinet ministers) and 28 MPs from the opposition, 12 officials at the rank of deputy or assistant or associate deputy minister and seven communications officers from specific departments and central agencies. Twenty five executive assistants and party activists also filled out and returned the questionnaire. Fifteen respondents did not identify their title and their questionnaires had to be classified in a special “other” category. There are three times as many male (91) as female (29) respondents, and, by coincidence, there are also three times as many anglophones (91) as there are francophones (29). These numbers roughly coincide with the observed gender and language distributions in the population that was targeted in this study. The age distribution in the sample is also fairly representative of what is observed in the population of federal officials. The modal age category in the sample is between 50 and 59.

## Frequencies

Included in the questionnaire is an item designed to measure how federal officials define public opinion. The item presents the respondents with a list of twelve possible indicators they can use to operationalize public opinion and ask them to evaluate the importance of each

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<sup>2</sup> See for example Petry, 2004.

indicator when it comes to knowing what the public thinks. The elements in the list include four indicators of public opinion that have appeared in previous studies of how political actors view public opinion (Herbst, 1998; Powlick, 1995): election results, newspaper articles, survey results, and lobbyists. The list of indicators also features specific actors –party activists, people you know, protesters--that are intended to reflect a conceptualisation of public opinion in terms of elite (or counter-elites) opinion, or what is sometimes referred to as “activated opinion” defined as “the opinions of engaged, informed, and organized citizens—those who are mobilizable during campaign periods and between elections as well.” (Entman and Herbst, 2001: 207). Respondents were also asked to evaluate the importance of focus groups, radio talk shows, and public consultations. The meaning of public consultations was left rather vague on purpose. We wanted to know how respondents reacted to the term “public consultations” without having been prompted as to what the “correct answer” was. When the issue of defining public consultations more precisely came up during the interviews, respondents typically thought of either “referendum” or “public inquiry” as possible definitions of consultation. Remarkably, referendum was mentioned by more than twice as many interview respondents as compared with public inquiry. This is revealing because it suggests that federal officials are not inclined to think of public inquiries as indicators of public opinion--unless they are prompted to do so.

Figure 1 provides a visual display of respondents’ ordering of indicators of public opinion based on the number of officials who declare that the indicators are “very important” and “important.” The full table with frequencies of “not very important”, “not at all important” and “unsure” responses can be found in the appendix.

Figure 1 about here

From the bar graphs of figure 1 we see that the indicators that spring first to the mind of public officials when it comes to knowing what the public thinks are not associated with public opinion surveys. It is true that 86 percent of respondents declare public opinion polls to be “very important” or “important” as indicator of public opinion. But even larger percentages of respondents find elected officials, public consultations, and election results “important” or “very important” as indicators of public opinion.

The preference that Canadian officials display toward a definition of public opinion in terms of election results and elected representatives rather than in terms of opinion surveys is consistent with findings and arguments by academic experts. In the popular folklore, public opinion is often equated with surveys. However scholars are much less sanguine about the relative importance (and usefulness) of surveys as indicator of public opinion. Public opinion scholarship usually associates surveys with three strong points. First, although public opinion can be discerned through a variety of additional means such as the media, interest group representation, public inquiries or political protest, surveys are the only means exclusively designed to reveal the public’s will (Herbst, 1993). Second, public opinion scholars will concede that elections are probably the most important means for citizens to communicate their preferences and values to governments through the selection of representatives.

However, they are also aware that surveys provide a more accurate picture of what citizens want than elections because, unlike the latter, they do not require citizens’ mobilization. By literally bringing the poll to randomly selected samples of citizens, surveys allow equal representation of the underprivileged, something that elections are not very good at, as students of democratic participation have often pointed out. The same argument applies to other means of revealing public sentiments such as demonstration activities or interest groups. Third, surveys provide explicit and detailed information to decision makers about where the

public stands on specific issues. Elections by contrast send blunt messages which provide ambiguous information about public preferences on issues. In this respect, the information that surveys provide to political leaders is as precise and explicit as that provided by interest groups.

Having said this, surveys also have disadvantages. First, although random sampling allows all survey respondents equal opportunity to be represented in surveys, this does not mean that all survey respondents are given equal opportunity to express an opinion. Some socio-demographic groups—white males with higher socioeconomic status—are overrepresented in the ranks of opinion givers. Underprivileged groups, by contrast, tend to be underrepresented among opinion givers because they give “don’t know” or “no opinion” responses significantly more often. As Althaus (2003) points out, a sample of potential opinion givers can be perfectly representative of a population from a descriptive point of view and still produce a non representative group of opinion givers. However most of the problems with surveys stem from their failure to achieve representation in a prescriptive sense. Althaus offers the following list of specific problems that arise when we try to interpret surveys in a prescriptive sense, as a channel for interest representation (as opposed to simply spatial or statistical representation):

- *Surveys do not include any formal consent by the population to be represented.* Unlike elected representatives, people who agree to participate in an opinion poll have not been given the authority to represent the general population. They can only be said to *informally* represent society as a whole.
- *Unlike elected representatives, survey respondents are often unaware that they represent others.*
- *Surveys are not deliberative.*

- *Surveys create a public voice that is reactive rather than proactive.*

These problems all point to the conclusion that survey results cannot be equated in simple terms with the will of the people the same way that election results can.

Between 87 and 92 percent of the officials in this study expressed operationalizations of public opinion that include elected officials, public consultations (where public consultation is often synonymous with referendum), and election results. The following quote by the executive assistant of a senior member of the Chrétien cabinet is a good example of this kind of operationalization:

The best barometer in my view of public opinion are members of the legislature and cabinet ministers. They were the ones that had the best feelings in so far as the polls there in the ridings—just as a means of measuring the impact upon particular policies that the government was launching, as it might affect us politically.

Here is another example of a definition of public opinion in terms of elected officials by an assistant deputy minister:

Elected officials tend to know what people are thinking. I mean that is their business. I think every decision that a minister takes, he looks at it (*public opinion*). These are people that read the newspaper everyday. They live, they eat, they breathe the radio, the TV, you know. They get their morning clippings. That is what they want to know right away. What is the public out there saying? What are the journalists out there saying? And what are the polls saying?

Another assistant deputy minister argues that election results are the most important indicator of public opinion by pointing out the legitimacy that a fresh electoral mandate provides:

You can do a lot more with a strong mandate. In fact that is the wind in the sail of a political office in the year after an election.



By placing elected officials, public consultations, and election results ahead of public opinion polls as indicators of what the public thinks, Canadian officials reveal that they share, for the most part, a conception of representation centered on the decidedly Shumpeterian concept of an election mandate. Public opinion polls (and focus groups) by contrast, are all components of a more substantive conception of majoritarian democratic representation (Pitkin, 1967).

Clearly, the majoritarian concept of representation only comes second, behind the Shumpeterian concept of representation in the minds of Canadian federal officials. Only 13 percent of respondents consider opinion surveys as “very important” indicators of public opinion, against 55 percent who think election results are “very important” indicators when it comes to knowing what the public thinks. Moreover, officials who express operationalizations of public opinion that emphasize surveys of mass opinion simultaneously express misgivings about them. For example, this is what an executive assistant has to say about the use and limits of mass opinion surveys :

Obviously polls are important to reflect the mood of Canadians. But I think you can't just rely on polls—I mean quantitative survey research—and figure that you know what the Canadian public thinks and what it feels. I think you have to use a variety of methods: media analysis; roundtables, academic reports.

The next item in the graphic of figure 1 is the news media. Eighty percent of respondents in the study thought that newspaper articles were an “important” or a “very important” indicator of public opinion. The news media are, by definition, transmitters of information but they are also an important source of public opinion. This is obviously true in the sense that the news media are the primary source of information on which citizens form their opinions (Zaller, 1992). But the news media are also an important source of public opinion in the sense that the stories they report are themselves interpreted by officials as an indicator of where the public

stands on issues (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987). The following quote from an assistant deputy minister summarizes well the role of the media as source of public opinion:

The media analysis and the clipping service is always important in government. Every day, any bureaucrat of any stature basically has the clippings in front of him, and that is the print and the electronic media for the day. If you are a senior decision maker in any department you look at these things every day to see what is in them and you keep an eye on them. And that gives you, I think, a good sense of what the public attitude and views are in general. Not just public opinion but also how public opinion is being viewed by the media.

Public opinion scholars have often pointed out the important of elites as a source of public opinion on which decision makers can rely. Elite opinion is generally seen as more knowledgeable and articulate than mass sentiment. The elites also have more influence on policy decisions than the masses. Elite influence on policy is seen in a favourable light by some precisely because elite opinion is perceived as being better informed and articulate (Almond, 1960; Lippman, 1925). This study operationalizes elite opinion by asking respondents whether they consider people they know (friends and colleagues) as an important indicator when it comes to knowing what the public thinks. Seventy percent of officials in the study cited people they know as “important” or “very important”. This suggests that decision makers in Ottawa think that elites are an important indicator of public opinion.

So far the data from the questionnaire indicate that a large proportion of officials in Ottawa agree to define public opinion in terms of a series of indicators that include election results and elected representatives, survey results and focus groups, news media, and people they know (elites).

Canadian officials also agree about what public opinion is not. As figure 1 shows, only 40 percent of respondents think that public protests and demonstrations are “important” or “very important” indicators of public opinion, and the numbers are even less for party activists and radio talk-shows (37 percent each). These items are not considered as a good indicator of public opinion. One communication officer adopts the typical attitude toward radio talk-shows when he dismisses them as “the uninformed talking to the ignorant.” As a high ranking official explains “no one really listen to those here in Ottawa. In the West perhaps but back in Ottawa, you don’t really pay much attention to that.”

Another items that receives little recognition from officials as indicator of public opinion is interest groups. Fifty respondents (42 percent) consider lobbyists as an “important” source of public opinion and only four percent view them as “very important”. That is the lowest proportion of “very important” responses in any of the twelve sources of public opinion mentioned in the questionnaire. These low numbers are in stark contrast with the high percentages of US officials who believe that interest groups are an important indicator of public opinion.

In his study of how US foreign policy officials conceptualize public opinion, Powlick (1995) reports that a large proportion of respondents find interest group opinion to be the most reliable indicator of popular sentiment. He attributes this in part to the unavailability of survey results on many foreign policy issues, interest groups therefore becoming the only “public” upon which foreign policy official can rely. However valid this interpretation, it cannot represent the whole picture. In her study of how state decision makers conceptualize public opinion in America, Herbst (1998) finds that a majority of policy experts (legislative staffers) equate interest groups with public opinion. These staffers are concerned exclusively with

domestic decisions so Powlick's argument does not seem to apply. It could still be argued that the availability of survey results on state or local policy issues is limited by comparison with survey results on national issues, thereby rendering interest groups more important as a source of public opinion by default so to speak. However, this does not seem to be the case. Quite to the contrary, Herbst is careful to point out that state officials prefer to be attentive to group opinion in spite of the large number of poll results that are available to them on a variety of issues. State policy experts who equate public opinion with interest group sentiment emphasize several characteristics of interest groups that make them reliable indicators of public opinion. Lobbyists are efficient communicators—much more so than individual citizens—because they are well informed about the issues for which they speak. Moreover lobbyists are well aware of the needs of policy makers and the sort of constituencies they must be accountable to. This can be contrasted with the low level of political knowledge in the public (see Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996 for the US; see Fournier, 2002 for Canada). A similar picture of interest groups seen as public opinion is presented by Powlick (1995)

The reason why Canadian officials do not consider interest groups as useful indicators of public opinion is twofold. First, Canadians in general have a somewhat negative attitude toward lobbyists which explains their reluctance to recognize the representative role of interest groups. Unlike their American counterparts, Canadian officials tend to view lobbying by interest groups as influence peddling by the organized rich, often at odds with public sentiment. This attitude is reflected in the following quote from a high ranking official:

Lobbyists play a role but I cannot say they are very influential, for me anyway. They come in here all the time but they have a set of goals that they want and they have only one point of view that is very predictable. And what they want is it the public interest? It is usually somebody's interest. And a very narrow interest what they want.

The second reason why Canadian officials do not consider interest groups as useful indicators of public opinion is primarily institutional. Unlike the US system of separation of power, where elected officials at the federal and state levels have constant and intense interactions with lobbyists, the Canadian parliamentary system is not conducive to intense interaction between elected officials and lobbyists. The following quote by an executive assistant illustrates the point:

Lobbyists rarely consult with me and my department here in Ottawa. Things are different in Washington.

Given the relatively low intensity of contacts between lobbyists and officials in Canada, it is no coincidence that, whereas US officials often name interest groups as the most useful indicator of public opinion, a majority of Canadian officials do not even consider lobbyists as part of the definition of public opinion.

## Factor Analysis

So far we have only looked at the relative frequency of responses to questionnaire items. This allows to tell salient indicators of public opinion from less salient ones. Now we want to see what indicators measure fundamentally similar attitudes and what indicators measure separate attitudes. Two equally salient indicators of public opinion may or may not be related. For example a high number of respondents operationalize public opinion in terms of election results and a high number of respondents operationalize public opinion in terms of survey results. But that does not mean that the two indicators are components of a similar underlying attitude toward what best defines public opinion. We cannot be sure whether these two items (or any pair of items) measure separate or similar attitudes until we perform some kind of data reduction analysis that will reveal underlying regularities across individual indicators of public opinion.

Factor analyzing the twelve indicators of public opinion allows us to examine the underlying structure and reduce the complexity of the data using a smaller set of variables than existed originally. Table 2 displays the results. The twelve indicators generate three factors (with eigenvalues larger than 1) that explain together 65.3 percent of the total variance. The first factor (26.4 percent of the total variance explained) picks up five items that do not appear to have much in common at first glance: public protest and demonstrations, radio talk shows, party activists, newspaper articles, and people you know. However, upon further examination, the items all seem to evoke a definition of public opinion in terms of activated or elite opinion. This is why the factor is labelled “Activated Opinion”.

Three items are highly loaded along the second factor (22.1 percent of variance explained): public consultations (i.e., referenda), elected officials, and election results. This suggests a common underlying definition of public opinion that is positively associated with election results. The factor is named “Electoral Mandate” because there is a clear indication that the factor taps the notion of a mandate that is periodically given by the public to the federal government through elections.

The items that load positively along the third factor (16.9 percent of variance explained) are focus group, public opinion polls and internal polls. We name the third factor “Mass Sentiment” because indicators closely associated with mass opinion are the most distinctive component items in the factor. (Note that the components for public opinion polls and internal polls are also positively loaded along the second factor).

Table 2 about here

The factor analysis presented above indicates that federal officials tend to conceptualize public opinion along three distinct underlying dimensions. With 26 and 22 percent of total

variance explained respectively, the components for activated opinion and electoral mandate are the most salient dimensions. With less than 17 percent of variance explained, the mass sentiment dimension of public opinion comes as a distant third. One additional finding deserves notice. It is the absence of a positive loading for lobbyists in any of the three factors reported in the table. This finding reinforces what was said earlier about the reluctance of Canadian officials to operationalize public opinion in terms of interest groups.<sup>3</sup>

## Multiple Regression

In addition to examining the attitudes that Canadian officials express about what exactly constitutes public opinion, this chapter also explores the variables that may explain differences in the way Canadian officials define public opinion. As a first step, table 3 cross-tabulates the twelve indicators of public opinion with individual respondents' occupation, ideology and language. The entries in the table report the number of respondents who declare that a particular item is "important" or "very important." From the table we see that the different occupations of respondents generate only a moderate variation in their responses. Some values stand as outliers, however, and deserve notice. Taking the values in the column for others as a reference, we see that majority MPs are less likely to mention public consultations and focus groups as important indicators of public opinion. Not surprisingly, opposition MPs don't believe internal polls are important tools for their definition of public opinion. One can speculate that opposition MPs either do not have access to this information or if they do, they do not consider it as trustworthy as other officials. Communication officers and assistant deputy ministers are significantly less likely to consider people they know as indicators of public opinion. Note that assistant deputy ministers are unusually restrained in their responses. They are more reluctant than other respondents to evaluate indicators of

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<sup>3</sup> Not surprisingly, lobbyists appear with high positive loading in a fourth factor (not reported) with eigenvalue < 1.

public opinion as “very important.” The reverse seems to be the case for francophone respondents who give “very important” responses more frequently than Anglophones in almost all cases.

However useful, the data of table 3 can only suggest associations between respondents’ occupation and their definitions of public opinion. Yet, we suspect that respondents’ occupation can also explain in a causal fashion how they conceptualize public opinion. However a causal explanation necessitates multivariate analysis. Multiple regression is used to examine the causal impact of respondents’ occupation on how they define public opinion. Three OLS regression models are run in which the dependent variables are the scores of individual respondents in the three factors identified above. Two control variables are added in the models: one for ideology, the other for language. From table 3 we know that francophone respondents tend to give more “very important” and “important” ratings in their evaluation of virtually all possible indicators of public opinion. The language of respondents apparently introduces a bias in the data and this bias may have an impact on the regression estimates. It is therefore necessary to add language in the regression equations as a control. There is also evidence from bivariate regressions that ideology has a significant impact on respondents’ definition of public opinion. Officials who declare that they are right-of-centre on the ideological spectrum tend to define public opinion less in terms of activated opinion than those who declare that they are left-of-centre; and this may also have an unwanted statistical impact on the regression estimates.

Table 4 about here

Table 4 presents the results. From model 1 (with activated opinion as the dependent variable) we see that opposition MPs and communication officers are significantly more likely to



define public opinion in terms of activated opinion than the 15 officials that are classified in the other category (the reference group). In model 2, the highly significant negative correlation between the dependent variable and opposition MPs suggest that politicians from the opposition are significantly less likely to define public opinion in terms of an electoral mandate than other officials. The dependent variable in model 2 also correlates negatively with majority MPs (somewhat paradoxically) and assistant deputy ministers. But the variable for francophone respondents correlates positively with the dependent variable, suggesting that francophone respondents are significantly more likely to conceptualize public opinion as election results than Anglophones. From model 3 (with mass sentiment as the dependent variable) we see a negative coefficient between communication officers and the dependent variable, suggesting that communication officers are significantly less likely than other officials to conceptualize public opinion in terms of mass opinion surveys. The coefficient for the variable for right ideology is also significantly negative, suggesting that respondents who declare that they are right-of-centre on the ideological spectrum are statistically less likely to conceptualize public opinion in terms of mass opinion surveys than left-of-center respondents.

## **Conclusion**

When it comes to knowing what the public thinks, officials in Ottawa use a variety of sources. Most salient among those sources is a definition of public opinion in terms of election results and elected officials, reflecting the importance of the government's belief in its electoral mandate to govern as guidance on policy direction. Survey results are the second most salient source of public opinion among federal officials. Elections and surveys are aggregative ways of assessing public opinion. As such they fulfil some of the needs that prompt officials to be attentive to public opinion. Most of the time, however, policy makers are in the business of making specific policy decisions on a day-to-day basis, and they have difficulty connecting

the public's response to surveys or election results to this type of decisions. Policy makers want to know how intense the public's preference is on particular issues, which part of the public might be willing to change its views on that issue, or how a particular decision will affect their chance of winning the next election. Aggregative ways of assessing public opinion offer limited help here. So officials will rely on more local or disaggregated means of opinion evaluation that will enable them to evaluate public opinion in more detail. The questionnaire that was used in this study mentions several disaggregated indicators of public opinion, the news media, friends and colleagues, and party activists among them. Taken individually, none of these indicators elicit a very high level of "important" or "very important." Responses. Thus they are not as individually salient as elections or surveys. However, when they are considered together, these indicators produce a single recognizable common dimension of public opinion (named activated opinion) with a surprisingly large explanatory power.

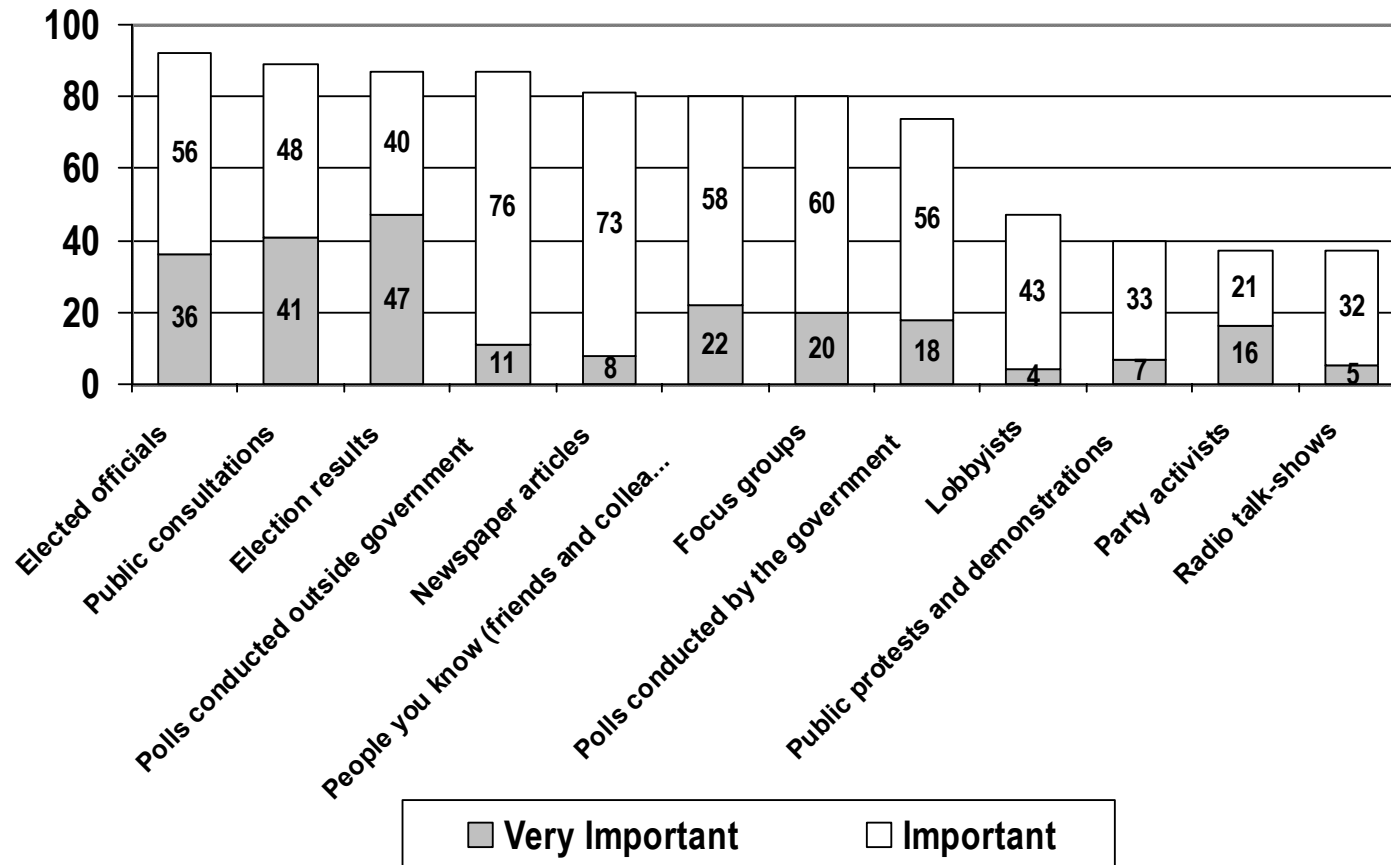
One important finding--whereby Canada strongly differs from the US--is the small importance of interest groups in the list of disaggregated means of opinion evaluation by officials. The reasons why Canadian officials, unlike their US counterparts, do not define public opinion as interest groups raise interesting speculations. There are also important implications for democratic representation and governance in Canada. In a series of comparative studies of how policy decisions correlate with mass opinion, Brooks (1985) finds that opinion-policy consistency is normally quite low. His explanation of low consistency relies on what he calls "democratic frustration", whereby mass opinion, when it differs from interest group opinion, is unsuccessful in achieving its policy options. Policy makers, in other words are more attentive to interest group opinion than to mass opinion as revealed by surveys. In their recent study of the opinion-policy relationship in Canada, Petry and Mendelsohn (2003) find consistency levels under Chrétien that are just as low as those

uncovered by Brooks. But since Canadian officials apparently do not define opinion in terms of interest groups, it seems that Brook's "democratic frustration" scenario, however valid toward explaining low consistency in the US (as observed by Brooks), cannot be easily transported North to explain low consistency in Canada. A more plausible explanation for low consistency under Chrétien points in an institutional direction. The absence of checks-and-balances and the strong party discipline in the Canadian system, compounded by an ineffective parliamentary opposition (at least until 2004) have contributed to concentrate powers in the hands of the prime minister to an extraordinary degree. The Canadian government is sheltered from public opinion and this permits the government to downplay not only mass opinion but also the opinion of interest groups and to look instead to its belief in its electoral mandate to govern as guidance on policy direction.

**Table 1. Sample Distribution**

	N	%
<b>Occupation</b>		
Majority MP	35	29.2
Opposition MP	28	23.3
(Assistant) Deputy Minister	12	10.0
Executive Assistant	25	20.8
Communications Officer	7	5.8
Other	15	12.5
Total	120	100.0
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	29	24.2
Male	91	75.8
Total	120	100.0
Francophone	29	24.2
<b>Language</b>		
Anglophone	91	75.8
Francophone	29	24.2
Total	120	100.0
<b>Age</b>		
29 or Less	5	4.1
Between 30 and 39	13	10.8
Between 40 and 49	35	29.3
Between 50 and 59	54	45.0
60 and Above	13	10.8
Total	120	100.0
<b>Ideology</b>		
Left & Far Left	8	6.7
Center Left	24	20.0
Center	43	35.8
Center Right	32	26.7
Right & Extreme Right	13	10.8
Total	120	100.0

**Figure 1. Indicators of Public Opinion**



**Table 2. Factor scores from components of indicators of public opinion (varimax rotation)**

	Factor 1 “Activated opinion”	Factor 2 “Electoral mandate”	Factor 3 “Mass sentiment”
Elected officials	.196	<b>.616</b>	.165
Public consultations	.098	<b>.701</b>	.087
Public Opinion Polls	.267	.440	<b>.628</b>
Election results	.157	<b>.790</b>	-.261
Focus groups	.113	-.110	<b>.726</b>
People you know	<b>.660</b>	.195	-.098
Newspaper articles	<b>.687</b>	.286	.050
Internal Polls	.126	.433	<b>.656</b>
Party activists	<b>.728</b>	.168	.123
Lobbyists	.452	.501	-.523
Protests & Demonstrations	<b>.795</b>	.110	.025
Radio talk shows	<b>.811</b>	.230	.157
Explained variance before rotation	26.404	22.109	16.865
Total variance explained=65.3			

**Table 3. Indicators of public opinion cross-tabulated with respondent occupation, ideology and language**

	Anglophone (91)	Francophone (29)	Majority MPs (35)	Opposition MPs (28)	Deputy Minister (12)	Executive Assistant (25)	Communica- -tion Officer (7)	Other (15)	Right Ideology (45)	Left Ideology (31)
Elected officials	89	100	91	86	100	92	86	93	89	90
Public consultations	88	90	60	86	100	84	86	93	87	84
Public Opinion Polls	85	90	86	75	83	96	86	93	93	77
Election results	85	83	89	82	75	88	86	80	84	84
Focus groups	79	72	74	64	92	88	86	93	84	77
People you know	77	86	100	89	50	64	57	73	84	81
Newspaper articles	77	86	74	82	67	76	86	87	78	84
Internal Polls	70	83	80	36	92	84	86	93	84	65
Party activists	54	79	66	79	25	76	57	20	51	77
Lobbyists	42	55	57	57	8	84	57	33	51	45
Demonstrations	38	38	34	43	42	28	57	53	31	87
Radio talk shows	37	34	31	64	8	32	29	33	75	39

Note: Numbers of respondents in each category are in parentheses. Entries are the number of "important" and "very important" responses in percentage of total.

**Table 4. Determinants of factor scores (OLS estimates)**

Dependent Variables	1: Activated Opinion	2: Election Results	3: Mass Sentiment
Explanatory Variables:			
Francophone	-.169 (.425)	.620 (.3.075)***	-.297 (-1.77)*
Right Ideology	.243 (.654)	.421 (1.36)	-.543 (-2.02)**
Majority MP	.175 (.559)	-.515 (-1.81)*	-.081 (-.027)
Opposition MP	.970 (3.15)***	-1.13 (-3.81)***	.021 (.065)
Assistant Deputy Minister	.281 (.747)	-.694 (-1.93)*	.355 (.917)
Executive Assistant	.106 (.341)	-.237 (-.800)	-.093 (-.091)
Communications Officer	.899 (2.06)**	.435 (1.04)	1.01 (2.24)**
Constant	-.339 (1.38)	.356 (1.51)	.047 (.061)
Adjusted R-square	.129	.196	.096
F-ratio	3.51***	5.66***	2.85**



### Appendix: Indicators of Public Opinion

Here is a list of possible indicators on which decision makers can depend on in order to monitor what the public thinks. Indicate the degree of importance you give to each of these indicators when it comes to knowing what the public thinks.

Items are ordered by decreasing frequency of the sum of "very important" and "important" responses.

	<b>Very Important</b>	<b>Important</b>	<b>Unsure</b>	<b>Not Very Important</b>	<b>Not at Important</b>
Elected officials	43	67	1	9	0
Public consultations	49	57	1	11	2
Public Opinion Polls	13	90	2	15	0
Election results	55	46	4	15	0
Focus groups	24	72	1	15	6
People you know (friends and colleagues)	26	69	1	23	1
Newspaper articles	9	86	3	18	4
Internal Polls	22	66	1	22	9
Party activists	18	54	5	29	14
Lobbyists	4	50	6	49	11
Public protests and demonstrations	8	38	4	55	15
Radio talk shows	6	38	2	54	20

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