Questions

• What is the state of Canadian attitudes towards social policy?
• How have attitudes shifted over the past 10-20 years?
• More recently, have attitudes shifted following...
  • ... shifts in public spending?
  • ... the Great Recession?
• What are the implications of current attitudes for public policy?

Context: Economic Sentiment

![Economic Sentiment Graph](image)
Support for Welfare Spending

Do you think the government should spend more, spend less, or spend the same amount on... welfare (% more - % less; Environics & CES)

Net Preferences for Spending

Support for redistribution is lower when economic sentiment is lower; i.e., when need is higher.

Increasing support?

Support for Welfare Spending, across Income Groups

Do you think the government should spend more, spend less, or spend the same amount on... welfare (% more - % less; CES)

Low Income

Middle Income

High Income

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Trends in Welfare Spending

Expected Trends in Welfare Spending?

Based on a regression of current % changes in spending on current changes in unemployment.
Expected Relative Preferences for Welfare Spending

Based on a regression of current preferences (Environics only) on spending and unemployment.

Do you think the government should spend more, spend less, or spend the same amount on... welfare (% more - % less; Environics & CES)

Relative Preferences and Spending Change

• Relative preferences for spending are as we would expect given economic conditions and (low) spending increases

• However, this apparent shift in relative preferences tells us relatively little about trends in absolute preferences for social welfare

• In fact, measures of absolute preferences show a rather different trend...

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Shifts in Absolute Preferences

- Existing data thus suggest a downward shift in absolute preferences for redistributive policy
- This trend appears to be steady post-2008, in spite of the Great Recession
- There are hints of a similar shift in preferences on health care as well, where...
- Support for health care spending remains high even as spending increases, but...
- There are shifts in support for pay-for-access services, driven by concerns about the viability of the current system

Support for Health Spending

[Graph showing support for health spending from 1990 to 2010, with a note that support is perpetually high.]
Support for Pay-for-Access in Health Care

- Individuals should be allowed to pay extra to get quicker access to health care services. (% agree - % disagree; Strategic Counsel, as reported in 2009 OMBRF report)

From Spending to Taxes...

- So (rightward) shifts in support for social welfare policy are evident even in health care, albeit in a different way.

- We thus far have relatively little data that can speak to whether these trends are related to attitudes about taxation.

- But there is some evidence that, over the long term, there are not increasing concerns about the fairness of taxes.

- Nor have there been major changes in attitudes about changes in tax levels...
Fairness of the Tax System

In your opinion, is the current system of income taxation fair or unfair for the average taxpayer? (% fair - % unfair; Environics Focus Canada)

Current Personal Tax Levels

Should PERSONAL INCOME TAXES be increased, decreased, or kept about the same as now? (% increased - % decreased; CES)

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Current Corporate Tax Levels

Findings / Observations

- Overall, what do existing opinion data tell us about public preferences for social welfare policy in Canada?
  1. Over the past decade there has been an increase in relative preferences for welfare spending
  - These appear to be the consequence of spending levels that have been lower than we might expect given economic circumstances
  1. Underlying absolute preferences for redistribution seem to have declined somewhat
  2. And overall support for taxes does not seem to have increased, and may have decreased, in the recent past
  3. This means that governments face the current economic climate with a somewhat different distribution of public support for redistribution

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Support for Immigration