Crossing Boundaries National Council | Conseil national Traverser les frontières

Getting to Ground: *Democratic Renewal in Canada*

The Crossing Boundaries Working Group on Democratic Reform and Renewal

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The Crossing Boundaries National Council (CBNC) is a not-for-profit national forum whose mission is to foster the development of Canada as an information society through the transformation of government and governance. CBNC is co-chaired by the Hon. Tony Valeri, Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, and Dan Bader, Deputy Minister, Municipal Affairs, Government of Alberta. It is made up of about 40 members, including senior public servants and elected representatives from each of the 10 provinces and the federal government, as well as representatives from territorial and municipal governments and the Aboriginal community. The initiative is sponsored in part through a partnership with the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council under its Initiative on the New Economy program area.

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About the Authors

Members of all Crossing Boundaries Working Groups participate as individuals with informed perspectives on the issues of concern to their Working Group. They do not sit as representatives of their respective governments.

The views expressed in this report therefore reflect the discussions and views of the members of the Democratic Reform and Renewal Working Group only, and should not be attributed to their individual governments. The Council would like to take this opportunity to thank the Working Group members for their insights and commitment to the process, especially the co-chairs of the Working Group, David McLaughlin and Jeff Bray.

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Preface

Overview of the Process

The Crossing Boundaries Working Group on Democratic Reform and Renewal was formed in January 2004 to provide Canadian governments who are working on democratic reform with an opportunity to share ideas and experiences.

While the Group found that these governments seemed motivated by similar concerns, it also found that they are taking quite different approaches to reform. That led to a discussion of which reforms would be most likely to succeed and how success should be measured. In its report, the Group arranged the various approaches under three headings: citizen engagement, enhancing the role of elected officials and electoral reform. It recommended that the Council build on this by launching a series of cross-country roundtables to consult with experts on the following questions:

- **Are there some basic questions or concerns that all democratic renewal initiatives should be addressing? If so, what approaches are most likely to succeed? How would we measure success?**

This first phase of the Democratic Renewal project culminated in a National Forum, hosted by the National Council on March 30–31, 2005 in Ottawa. It brought together some 75 people from across the country, including politicians, public servants, journalists, academics, and representatives from the NGO and business communities. This paper consolidates what was heard throughout this first phase of the project—the consultation with experts.

In the next phase, beginning in the fall of 2005, the Council will launch a ***national consultation with citizens***. This paper will guide the discussion. At the end of these consultations, the Council will produce a final report that will synthesize Phases I and II of the project, that is, the discussion with experts and with ordinary Canadians. That report will be published in the spring of 2006.

1. Two Approaches to Democratic Renewal

In the course of our discussions, two quite different views emerged concerning why we need democratic renewal and what it should achieve. One view is that Canadians' views of democracy have changed but our institutions have not kept pace. In the early days, our society was largely agrarian, more culturally homogeneous, and dominated by a small class of white, male land-owners. In addition, it was economically and socially less complex, governments were less interdependent, less involved in citizens' lives, and public policy was far less subject to rapid change and unforeseen events.

By contrast, citizens today are more educated and informed; our society is less culturally homogenous, increasingly urban in many parts but rural in others, and embedded in a global economy. Our ability to communicate with one another, to organize for a variety of purposes, commercial and political, and to manage and use stores of knowledge that only a couple of decades ago were unthinkable, is evolving at an exponential rate, thanks to the emergence of a vast information and communications technology network.

There is another way that Canadians' views on democracy may be changing. Not long ago most elected representatives were part of a relatively small demographic group: white, educated, upper-middle-class men. Over the last few decades, that has changed. Today, there is an on-going debate over how effectively people of different social and cultural backgrounds can represent each other.

In this view, while effective, fair and meaningful representation often requires no more than a fair-minded outlook and a sense of empathy, sometimes that is not enough. Sometimes disadvantaged groups face social or cultural challenges that can only be adequately understood through first-hand experience. In such cases, having had that experience may be a reasonable criterion for acting as a representative. Insofar as Canadians now accept this, our views of representation have changed.

Our working group heard that these developments have changed how citizens see their place in our democracy. They no longer see themselves as passive consumers of government policies and programs. They are less willing to accept that their role in democracy is largely confined to participating in elections. They want their voices heard between elections, they want to participate more fully in the debates that lead to important decisions and they want their communities to become more fully and meaningfully democratic.

> Citizens want their voices heard between elections.

Nevertheless, this view was not shared by everyone that we consulted. At our National Forum, for example, some people had a quite different take on democratic renewal. They argued that while citizens certainly want good governance and want their elected representatives to be accountable, they are not especially interested in being more engaged between elections.

Some of these people went on to argue that too much engagement could even hamstring governments, making it impossible for them to make hard choices and provide the kind of leadership that citizens really want. Rather than trying to engage citizens more directly in the policy process, they thought democratic renewal should focus on ways to make government more accountable and transparent, make the electoral system fairer or encourage political parties to offer clear and well thought-out platforms at election time.

Finally, some of the people felt that the growing interest in citizen engagement is due more to the growth of advocacy groups outside government. They range from businesses and lobbyists to public interest groups and community organizations. In many engagement processes,

they are the real participants and are often strong proponents of more engagement because it strengthens their voice in the policy process.

This last point provoked some strong reactions. Defenders replied that this way of looking at organizations outside government, especially so-called "civil-society organizations," was misleading and unfair. They argued that a vibrant, active policy community outside government is a good—even a critical—thing for democracy. It helps ensure that policy debate is more inclusive and more informed. They pointed out that efforts to export democracy to developing countries have shown just this. Experience shows that countries without such a culture are the least likely to sustain a real democracy.

Far from hamstringing government, then, they saw the growth in this sector as part of the evolution of our democracy. Moreover, insofar as civil society organizations genuinely represent citizens' interests on important issues, they wondered why governments would want to deny them a more influential role in public debate. In a democracy, citizens have a right to choose their spokespersons. If citizens really want these organizations to represent them on key issues, the process should make room for it.

The exchanges we heard expose a fundamental difference in how the experts see democratic renewal.

Our participants also saw a complex array of other factors affecting government's ability to respond to the needs of citizens. Governments everywhere are being compelled to do more with fewer human and financial resources; meanwhile what were once considered domestic policy issues are increasingly implicated in international agreements in trade and other areas.

In conclusion, the exchanges we heard over how or whether the changes in our society and attitudes have affected Canadians' views of democracy exposes a fundamental difference in how the experts see democratic renewal.

One view is that citizens have changed. They are more educated and aware and they want their voices to matter between elections, not just

during them. In part, this means that they want a more active and ongoing role in the policy process. A central challenge for democratic renewal is to provide citizens with the opportunities to do so. Insofar as these voices are coming from organizations outside government, they should be viewed as a part of the changing democratic landscape and one of the challenges of democratic renewal is to understand how governments should work with them.

The other view is more in keeping with conventional representative democracy. It sees democracy mainly as a fair and accountable way to make public decisions legitimate. The challenge of democratic renewal is to make this process more effective, transparent and accountable, say, by reforming parliamentary and legislative processes and strengthening reporting—and to make the overall process fairer, say, by reforming the electoral process. Citizens continue to have the final say over their governments through elections but, for the most part, they are not looking for a new role in the process.

In the end, however, these two approaches need not be seen as exclusive. Many people in the first camp were supportive of the kind of options being proposed by those in the second one. Their concern was that the proposals did not go far enough. In their view, it is not enough to reform our representative institutions. Democratic renewal must also seek to engage citizens more fully and meaningfully in the political process.

Our Working Group leaned in this direction. We were convinced that important changes had taken place in Canadian society and, indeed, in other societies around the world. We thought that these changes not only call for adjustments to our democratic practices and institutions, but to the basic relationship between citizens and governments.

2. Two Ways to Engage Citizens:
Deliberative vs. Direct Democracy

If we accept the view that Canadians want to be more involved, a key issue is how this is to be done. In our sessions, much of the debate turned around a distinction between two kinds of democracy, so-called "deliberative" and "direct" democracy. Each has the aim of involving citizens more actively and more regularly in the democratic process, but there is a difference.

Direct democracy aims at giving citizens a role in the act of decision making. This usually happens in one of two ways. One is through more direct control over elected representatives. The other is to by-pass the elected representatives and to give citizens a direct say through the use of instruments such as referendums.

While deliberative democracy is open to the idea of giving citizens a direct say, first and foremost it aims at strengthening their capacity to do so and creating opportunities for democratic discussion and debate. This requires action on a number of fronts, such as launching consultation processes, engaging in public education and ensuring that the public has the information they need for an informed discussion.

Advocates of this view see democracy as more than a way to make decisions. Discussion and debate foster a deeper understanding of and commitment to the values that underlie our political institutions

and practices. In this view, democratic renewal is about building a civic culture that expresses more clearly our roles, rights and responsibilities as citizens. Such a culture reaches beyond our political institutions and into the workplace, our organizations, schools and communities. In short, democratic renewal is not just about making our political institutions more democratically engaged, but also our society.

At the National Forum, we heard a lot about this view of democracy. Those who share it feel that if there is a "democratic disquiet" among citizens, or if legitimacy is eroding, it is not just because citizens feel that our governments are not transparent or accountable enough. It is also because they do not do enough to encourage and support the kind of discussion and debate that fosters a deeper sense of responsibility, engagement and empowerment. Renewing democracy should be about engaging citizens in such discussion.

The problem of engaging youth was cited to support this line of thinking. According to Elections Canada, only about a quarter of eligible voters between 18 and 24 cast ballots in the 2000 federal election. Many of our participants argued that this low turnout shows that the political system is out of step with, or simply disconnected from, young Canadians. They tied the prospects for reversing this trend to our willingness—and ability—to engage youth in public debate on terms that they understand and relate to.

In particular, participants spoke of the need to promote a higher level of civic literacy among youth and, indeed, Canada's population as a whole. We heard that Canadians need to know more about our institutions and how they work. This was seen as a critical condition for promoting engagement and for developing the knowledge-base and skills that are necessary for informed, democratic debate.

This last point underscores a deeper difference between direct and deliberative democracy. While direct democracy does make room for different views, on its own it does little to foster the kind of discussion and debate that encourages openness to and awareness of the perspectives of others, leads to critical reflection of one's own views, or develops the skills and attitudes needed to negotiate compromises with competing views. Indeed, insofar as instruments like polling or referendums suggest that all views are equally valid and equally justified, it could even contribute to a culture that avoids debate and discussion and seeks instead to resolve

differences by a simple show of hands. Taken to the extreme, this would be the "push-button democracy" of science fiction, a scenario no one we talked to favoured. As for deliberative democracy, it may or may not be combined with direct decision making, but either way the emphasis on deliberation seems to lead in a different direction from direct democracy, that is, toward a culture of participation, evidence-based debate, mutual adjustment and accommodation.

As an example of deliberative democracy, our group heard about the Government of British Columbia's Citizens' Assembly. It brought together a group of citizens from across the province to discuss and make recommendations on electoral reform. As a result, major changes to the province's electoral system were proposed to citizens in the last provincial election. Ontario plans to use a similar forum to carry out some of its work on democratic renewal.

> Democratic renewal is not just about making our institutions more engaged, but also our society.

We saw this as an impressive and innovative experiment in deliberative democracy. Through a series of meetings the Assembly encouraged ordinary citizens (without the involvement of elected officials) to participate in a unique and far-reaching discussion of the province's electoral system. It serves as a powerful demonstration that citizens are willing to engage whole-heartedly in a deliberative exercise—often at considerable personal cost. They gave up their weekends for several months, left their homes and families, sat through long and often complicated learning sessions, and then debated the options with one another until they arrived at a conclusion. Through the referendum, it gave British Columbians the final say on an issue of real significance to their future.

Moreover, these citizens not only rose to the occasion, they did what their political representatives may not have been able to do. They reached almost unanimous agreement on an option for electoral reform. This not only shows that citizens are willing and able to participate more fully on complex issues, but that they can be relied upon to work together and to find solutions to problems that may elude their governments.

In the end, the Citizens' Assembly's recommendation did not achieve the support it needed to be implemented. According to some commentators, this may have been a result of the complexity of the recommendation from the Assembly. Others suggest that there could have been a stronger effort to educate the public on the recommendation and its implications. Nevertheless, it remains a remarkable example of citizens' willingness and ability to handle complex issues.

Some in our group wondered why, if citizens can be relied on to work together and find solutions, legislatures often cannot do so. We discussed how the adversarial nature of our politics and the role of political parties made this difficult, sometimes almost impossible. One of the attractive features of the Citizens' Assembly, we agreed, was the way it avoided this situation. This led us to suggest that such assemblies could be an important tool for breaking political log-jams around politically sensitive questions.

3. Concerns Over the Role of Elected Representatives

The role of elected representatives was a recurring theme in our discussions. In our democracy citizens get to choose their representatives, who are then supposed to represent them. But many people told us that the role of backbenchers and opposition members has eroded over the years, while cabinets, bureaucrats and, increasingly, powerful advocacy organizations have come to dominate the policy process.

In this view, many citizens today feel that politicians and governments have lost touch with them. They have become too focused on their own priorities. The popular political discourse reflects this. For example, we hear that when governments consult with citizens, they do not really listen to what citizens have to say. We hear that institutions, such as legislatures, courts and political parties, no longer work for the people, but are controlled by elites who have their own agenda. We hear that politicians say one thing before an election and do another after. According to some, the growing sense of alienation from government and our political institutions is leading to a distrust of politicians and the political process.

One of the elected officials in our group challenged this view. He said that he is widely trusted in his community and has very good relations with his constituents, as do many of his colleagues. The reason, he noted, is they have deep roots in their communities. Many began their political careers as volunteers on local community boards, members of Rotary Clubs or workers in community organizations. They went on to serve in provincial or federal legislatures because they wanted to see things change in their communities. They wanted to make a difference.

But, he continued, once elected, they find that the policy process is not what they expected. Trying to influence policy can be a bit like pushing a big stone up a steep hill. For example, even when government and opposition members work well together in committees, they feel they often have little or no real influence over the policy process. In the end, decisions are made by a small group of senior ministers and bureaucrats. As a result, many legislators today feel as alienated from government as their constituents. They feel that their role as representatives and legislators has diminished. Indeed, they often find themselves in the awkward position of explaining to their constituents that they must work within the system, that their hands are tied or that they must support their government's or party's position.

Many legislators today feel as alienated from government as their constituents.

This leaves the people they represent feeling resentful and disenfranchised. They think that "the system" is not working for them and that their elected representatives are powerless to do anything about it. If there is a general distrust among citizens, concluded a member of our group, it is aimed less at local representatives and more at how the system undermines their role. Any effort to renew democracy must recapture for them a meaningful role in debate and decision making.

4. Citizen-centred Government

This discussion of how "the system" has changed over the years occupied our group at some length. A whole range of new forces is at work, including globalization, new technologies, a more informed citizenry, and the rise of a new class of non-governmental organizations and businesses on the service delivery and the advocacy/policy-making fronts. In our sessions we discussed two ways that they have affected governments and then tried to draw out the lessons for democratic renewal.

First, so-called "cross-cutting" or "horizontal" issues—those that affect many ministers and even governments but are the sole responsibility of none—are multiplying rapidly. Health is one example of a policy field that has become increasingly horizontal. Governments used to think that health policy was about *curing* sickness. Now they recognize that it is also about *preventing* it. This, in turn, has led them to focus on the causes of illness—such as obesity, smoking, pollutants and workplace stress—and ways to prevent it, such as exercise, public education or drugs.

Today health policy involves a growing maze of connections to other areas, such as parks and recreation, education, the environment and labour. It not only raises cross-cutting issues—the whole policy field cross-cuts other ones. A similar story could be told about the environment, immigration, education, security, justice, Aboriginal issues and the like.

In response to the second issue, we recognized that coordination within government needs to be complemented by finding new ways to coordinate and balance the interests of three orders of government, civil society and the private sector on issues of concern to citizens. No one has the authority to command them all to align to work together toward a common goal. Each one marches to its own drummer.

In our discussions of how to respond, we heard how governments—in response to consistent feedback from citizens through customer satisfaction surveying and other polling—have started to try and make government more citizen-centred. Citizen-centred government starts from the premise that Canadian society has changed and evolved. It accepts that new forces are at work and then asks how we can redesign governments for the 21st century to make them more open, transparent and responsive to citizens.

A citizen-centred approach responds to the two concerns we raised. It argues that many of the goals that citizens care about, such as safer streets, clean water and air, a strong economy or good health, are cross-cutting. Agreeing to adopt a citizen-centred approach ensures that

> Many of the goals that citizen care about are cross cutting.

government, community organizations, NGOs and the business community will work together to coordinate their activities in ways that will maximize their ability to achieve such goals.

An example is the Vancouver Agreement. It is an innovative arrangement that allows all three levels of government, along with non-governmental organizations from church groups to Meals on Wheels, to work together closely to support sustainable community health and safety, economic and social development, and community capacity building, in the downtown east side of Vancouver.

In setting up the Agreement, the parties recognized that the relationship between governments and community organizations had to be flexible enough to let the latter bring their special knowledge of the community to bear on solving local problems. They did it by agreeing to a framework of

Second, in a world of cross-cutting issues, complex arrays of government programs, and an exploding number of community organizations and NGOs, coordination becomes critical. Without it, overlap and duplication will go unchecked. Streams of red tape will form. Initiatives will conflict, cancelling out one another's benefits and wasting scarce resources.

In response to the first issue, we agreed that traditional programs are usually too narrowly focused to address cross-cutting issues effectively. For example, programs to promote exercise may help reduce obesity in Canadians but if we want to make real progress, we must attack the problem in other ways too, such as raising public awareness or making healthier foods more available.

The public generally expects government to have a coherent game plan in any particular issue area and technology tools have made it much easier for government to coordinate across various fields of activity. They also facilitate a much greater degree of transparency to the public about what government is doing (for example, by coordinated posting of results to the web). However, any single point of coordination on these major cross-cutting issues has a challenging task in understanding the views of citizens and stakeholders across all aspects of the issue.

We noted, for instance, that the Premier or Prime Minister and central agencies are often responsible for coordinating "whole-of-government" initiatives like this. The authority of individual ministers and departments is normally focused on a particular policy area. So a minister of health may have little opportunity to promote exercise. If she wants to launch a series of programs aimed at making progress on this, she will have to rely on central agencies to coordinate with other departments or governments who have that responsibility.

Many of us saw this as posing a potentially serious challenge for democratic renewal. As the number of cross-cutting issues grows, an increasingly small cadre of people in a few central agencies could play a bigger and bigger role in more and more files. In effect, this would centralize control and concentrate decision making in these organizations. We worried that, if this trend is not checked, it will only make governments more remote from citizens and their elected representatives.

principles, goals and performance indicators that left enough flexibility for these organizations to make further choices about their own goals and priorities and plans for how to achieve them.

That is the Agreement's strength. It attacks complex problems from many angles at the same time by letting people and organizations do what they do best. Such an approach also strengthens democracy, first, by allowing citizens and organizations to participate in setting goals and priorities in areas that matter to them and, second, by empowering organizations to make choices about how they will participate in the initiative. As a result, there is now a whole network of policy makers and service providers in Vancouver who are working together to resolve these issues. In effect, the Agreement is a cluster of mutually supportive partnerships—a network—involving community organizations, the business community and the three levels of government.

5. From Citizen-centred Government to Citizen-centred Democracy

In fact, most governments are experimenting with ways to make government more citizen-centred in a wide variety of areas. They are using consultative processes to identify the goals and priorities of citizens; and they are developing new partnerships with other governments, NGOs, business groups and community organizations to promote these goals. As the work progresses, it introduces a counterweight to centralization by making the decision-making process more open, transparent and inclusive. Perhaps ironically, however, the very effort to make governments more open and responsive to citizens could put cabinets, bureaucracies and even outside organizations in competition with elected representatives in a new way.

As these new relationships develop, ministers become less dependent on the knowledge that local politicians have of their communities. Increasingly, they have their own contacts, networks and sources of information. If the old hierarchical model of bureaucracy made it hard for legislators to have an impact on the policy process, the new more networked one risks making them redundant. Not surprisingly, there is much concern among them that consultation, partnerships and citizen engagement threaten their role as representatives.

This point was discussed at our National Forum. It was argued that, while citizen-centred government can be seen as a threat to elected representatives, it can also be seen as an opportunity. The difference lies in how we view the role of a representative in a more citizen-centred world. We saw that citizen-centred government requires consultation and collaboration. If governments want to know what citizens think, they will have to ask them. If they want more alignment with each other and community organizations, they will have to form partnerships. Participants at the Forum pointed out that these are not insignificant tasks. For example, developing a framework of goals and indicators of the sort that defines the Vancouver agreement requires deliberation, debate, learning, negotiation and compromise among a large number of people and organizations. In fact, it requires the same kind of processes, skills and culture that we said define deliberative democracy.

An important conclusion follows from this analysis. It is that citizen-centred government requires deliberative democracy. They are two sides of a coin. The public is the only one that is in a position to set goals and priorities that we can expect governments, NGOs and community organizations to support. If all of these organizations claim to serve citizens, they must be prepared to listen when they speak. Engaging the public in such discussions is thus important not only because it deepens Canada's democratic culture, but because it makes citizens the authoritative voice that guides the evolution of our governments and democracy. We can call this ***citizen-centred democracy.***

Citizen-centred government requires deliberative democracy.

We felt that citizen-centred democracy should be welcomed by elected representatives because they are natural candidates to lead the deliberative processes. They could act as a kind of facilitator for governments who are seeking to identify citizens' goals or work more closely with community organizations in all kinds of areas and for all kinds of purposes. But taking this step involves a shift in the conventional view of the role of an elected representative.

6. Three Views of the Role of Elected Representatives

That view was famously summed up by the 18th century legislator, Edmund Burke, who said that a representative owes his constituents his best judgment. In this view, electors choose their representatives for the quality of their judgment. The representative then has a responsibility to use his or her best judgment to promote the best interests of the people that elected him. The key role of an elected representative is to be a ***decision maker***.

If this is accepted, it is not hard to see why many legislators feel their role has been eroded. In reality, they do not make many important decisions. Moreover, as governments seek to become more citizen-centred they will be turning to citizens for guidance. So representatives will have even less room to act as decision makers. But is this the only—or even the best—way to understand the role of an elected representative?

The distinction between direct and deliberative democracy suggests two other ways. Direct democracy casts the representative's role more as a ***messenger*** than a decision maker. In this view, it is citizens who are the real decision makers, perhaps through local polling, referenda or some other mechanism. But, as we have seen, the focus here is not on discussion, learning, negotiation and compromise, but on majority rule. Once the will of the people has been expressed, the job of the representative is simply to carry the message back to Parliament or the legislature.

By contrast, deliberative democracy casts elected officials in a more interactive role, one we might call the ***facilitator***. In placing a major emphasis on deliberation, discussion, learning, negotiation and compromise, it suggests that the elected representative is not there to make decisions for citizens. Nor is he or she there simply to carry their message back to government. Their real role is to help citizens work through the process of discussion, learning, negotiation and trade-offs in the hope of reaching a conclusion together.

Still we should keep in mind that this is only a shift in emphasis. Elected representatives have always been called upon to play all three roles in the course of their duty and that will continue. At issue is the question of where the main emphasis lies. In developing a program of democratic renewal, this is a particularly important question. Where one places the emphasis will play a major role in shaping the program. Consider:

- If democratic renewal is about enhancing the representative's role as a decision maker, attention will turn to strengthening conventional representative democracy, say, by reforming the committee system in legislatures or allowing for more free votes.

- If it is about strengthening the elected official's role as a messenger, direct democracy will become important and reform will focus on the use of instruments such as referendums.

- Finally, if, democratic renewal aims at enhancing the elected official's role as a facilitator, attention will shift to promoting more deliberation through public consultation, education and by making appropriate information available.

In the end, no one in our sessions seemed to think that there should be only one role for representatives. They have always played all three and will continue to do so. So a full set of options for democratic renewal would make room for all three roles. The hard question, however, is how and where to emphasize each one.

Although we heard articulate spokespersons for the view that citizens do not want a large role in governance, in the end we were not convinced that a simple strengthening of the traditional representative model was enough. First, we were convinced that important changes had taken place in Canadian society and, indeed, in other societies around the world. We thought that these changes not only call for adjustments to our democratic practices and institutions, but to the basic relationship between citizens and governments.

Second, we worried about the trend to centralization and agreed that it needs an effective counterweight. We thought that current efforts to make government more citizen-centred were moving in the right direction. But if citizen-centred government is going to work, it must be supported by a strong culture of discussion, learning, negotiation and compromise. Given what we heard, a major emphasis on direct democracy likely would not provide this. The emphasis on majority rule leads in a different direction.

So, we conclude that, if governments really want to become more citizen-centred, they should link that to a firm commitment to promote deliberative democracy and to enhance the role of representatives as facilitators of the process. We think that this is a solid foundation on which to develop a program for democratic renewal.

7. Conclusion:
Some Key Questions

Our efforts to explore the changes in Canadian society and to consider what this means for democratic renewal lead us to pose four basic questions that we think should guide the search for solutions:

- **What values are most important to Canadians' view of democracy and how do they understand them?**
- **What changes do we need in our institutions and processes to ensure that citizens have the opportunity for fuller and more meaningful participation in our democracy?**
- **How can our most important democratic institutions—parliament, legislatures, elected officials and political parties—become more responsive to the public's growing lack of trust in governments and the political process and their eroding confidence in the effectiveness of their representatives?**
- **Are there other approaches to governance that would help governments respond more effectively to the growing complexity, number of players and constant change in our society?**

In effect, the first question urges us to look at democratic renewal as a much richer enterprise than simply reforming the institutions that govern us. It underlines the need to foster a culture of civic engagement and literacy through a wide range of avenues, ranging from education to practices in the workplace. It focuses on the values that support our democracy and the roles, rights and responsibilities of citizens.

The second one encourages us to consider ways to engage citizens in more deliberative processes, up to and including the use of some elements of direct democracy.

The third underlines the public's diminishing trust in government, the political process and institutions. It directs our attention to the role that deeper centralizing forces play in eroding the capacity of representatives to speak effectively for those who have elected them and asks us to consider how this process is affecting the role of elected representatives.

The fourth one addresses the ways in which governments can better deal with an increasingly complex and changing policy environment, and achieve more sophisticated, inclusive and effective decision-making processes by identifying and experimenting with new approaches to governance.

Given the scope of the issues that democratic renewal raises, it seems clear that an adequate response will take time and will require changes on a number of fronts, using a number of different approaches. There is no silver bullet.

We look forward to the discussions that will take place in the next phase of this project: our consultation with Canadians.

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