

# **An Undivided Continent? Re-examining the Political Culture of Canadians and Americans<sup>1</sup>**

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In his seminal study comparing the American and Canadian political cultures, *Continental Divide*, Seymour Martin Lipset (1990a) argued that the distinct historical trajectories of both nations has had an enduring impact on their basic political values:

Americans do not know but Canadians cannot forget that two nations, not one, came out of the American Revolution. One was Whig and classically liberal or libertarian – doctrines that emphasize distrust of the state, egalitarianism, and populism . . . The other was Tory and conservative in the British and European sense – accepting of the need for a strong state, for respect for authority, for deference. (Lipset 1990a, 1)

Lipset's analysis was firmly planted in a long intellectual tradition linking the two nations' different historical experiences to their contemporary political cultures (e.g., Lockhart 2003; Horowitz 1973; Truman 1971; Lipset 1963). This continues in current scholarship. Arend Lijphart, for example, recently wrote: "I would argue that even among political scientists there is insufficient recognition of how radically different American democracy is: it is different not just in *many* respects, but in *most* respects!" (italics in original, Lijphart 2009).

Lipset claimed that the revolutionary heritage of the United States' separation from Great Britain produced a cultural tradition—the American ideology—that persists to the present. He described the American creed in four words: anti-statism, individualism, populism, and egalitarianism. Negative orientations toward the state flowed from the revolutionary break with Britain, reinforced by a political system and history that placed a premium on individual rights and a structure of weak government. Various American traditions nurtured individualism, from the norms of rugged individualism and self-reliance of its frontier experience, to the libertarian streak in the American political culture. Lipset argued that populism became part of the American creed not as a result of the American Revolution, but as a gradually developing norm of popular rule. This was typified by the early extension of the franchise to the white male population, the tradition of self-governance, and the spread of populist reforms such as the direct primary and referendum. Egalitarianism is rooted in the emphasis on the equality of opportunity in American political traditions—a tendency also noted by Alexis de Tocqueville—and institutionalized in a social and political system that encourages social mobility and meritocracy.

In contrast, Lipset saw the Canadian political culture as lacking a unified ideology or single creed as existed in the United States. He argued that because of their Tory origins, Canadians are more allegiant to the state, even to the point of desiring a strong paternalistic government (Lipset 1990a, 44). He depicted the Canadian political culture as stressing solidarity

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and social order in contrast to the individualism and rights consciousness of Americans. In contrast to the significant populist strain in the American political culture, Canada has a culture where deference to elites predominates and the nation continues to accept the role of the British monarchy as head of state. It is difficult to be a populist while accepting the monarchy. Finally, he maintained that the collectivist orientation of the Canadian political culture prompts social democratic redistributive and welfare policies. Thus, support for a larger state role in society and the economy is common among Canadians.

Furthermore, Lipset argued that these cultural traditions have persisted over time. “Despite the development of both countries into industrialized, wealthy, urbanized, and ethnically heterogeneous societies, the dissimilarities, particularly the cultural differences of the past continue. . . The two are like trains that have moved thousands of miles along parallel railway tracks. They are far from where they started, but they are still separated” (Lipset 1990a, 212).

Lipset (and others) therefore saw such differences in citizen values and beliefs as influencing the nature of the political process and government policy outputs that are discussed in the other chapters of this book. For instance, the anti-government orientations supposedly produced and now supports a U.S. system of limited government and extensive checks and balances (see Malloy and Quirk in this book). The American populist tradition led to institutional reforms of the U.S. political system in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and presumably the more recent wave of institutional change in expanding citizen access and the transparency of government (Cain, Dalton and Scarrow 2003). In contrast, the deferential traits of the Canadian political culture have a contrary effect in supporting a strong government that exerts a larger role in society. The public’s policy expectations presumably shape the types of policies actually in place (see chapters by Keech and Scarth; Marmor and Maioni in this book). In other words, cultural norms influence the political institutions, processes, and policies examined in this project.

Other scholars have challenged these characterizations on historical, theoretical and empirical grounds. First, the political cultures of both Canada and the United States are complex, and thus simple descriptions of modal patterns are often oversimplified (Graber et al. 1999). For instance, Blais and Gidengil (1991, ch. 2) describe Canadian attitudes as populist and individualist, but also statist and egalitarian. Similarly, some studies of the American political culture stress the national allegiance of Americans in almost the same paragraph as they discuss the revolutionary and populist traditions of the United States (King 1999). One can find a historical precedent for almost any cultural trait in both nations.

In addition, a second critique focuses on empirical tests of Lipset’s hypotheses. Baer and his colleagues were the first to systematically examine the supposed divide with public opinion surveys from the 1980s; they found “virtually no support to Lipset’s overall argument” (Baer et al. 1990a: 708; also Baer et al. 1990b).<sup>1</sup> Neil Nevitte’s extensive analyses of the 1990 World Values Survey generally found that Canadians are more similar to Americans than to West Europeans across a range of opinions related to the Lipset thesis (Nevitte 1996; Inglehart, Nevitte and Basañez 1996).<sup>2</sup> A more recent cross-national study by Welzel and Deutsch (2007) similarly demonstrates broad congruence between Canadians and Americans on attachment to Judeo-Christian religious values and the desire for personal autonomy and self-expression that overlap with many of Lipset’s cultural arguments. These studies do not argue that Canadians and Americans are identical in their political beliefs, only that these differences are modest relative to cross-national differences among the affluent democracies and relative to differences within both nation (such as by region, education, generation and other demographic variables).

In the context of this book's comparative study of Canadian and American politics, we use Lipset's theses as a basis for examining the potential differences in values between these two publics that might produce differences between the two systems of government and their respective policy outputs. Despite past criticisms of Lipset's descriptions, we suspect that many of his points are still commonly accepted popular categorizations of Canadian and American values. However, we also examine broader social values of both publics that appear to underlie many of the specific political attitudes studied in previous research. To put their differences in perspective, we also compare Canadian and American public opinion to that of other advanced industrial democracies.<sup>3</sup> We focus on five potential contrasts between American and Canadian political values:

- The broad social and political values of Canadians and Americans in comparison to other affluent democracies.
- Feelings of national identity and national pride, with presumably stronger feelings in the United States.
- Trust in political institutions and political authority, with Canadians expressing more political support.
- Opinions of the role of the citizen in the political process; Americans are presumably more engaged and assertive while Canadians hold a more circumscribed image of the citizen's role
- Expectations of government; Canadians expect the government to play a larger role in society and the economy.

This essay examines the validity of these broad descriptions of the opinion differences between Canadians and Americans. We draw upon recent cross-national public opinion surveys, such as the World Values Survey and the International Social Survey Program, to assess each of these points. In addition to examining differences between these two nations, we also consider possible divisions within each nation. Our goal is to describe the political values and expectations that broadly shape citizen politics in each nation, and thus define the political culture in which democratic politics functions.

### **Social Values**

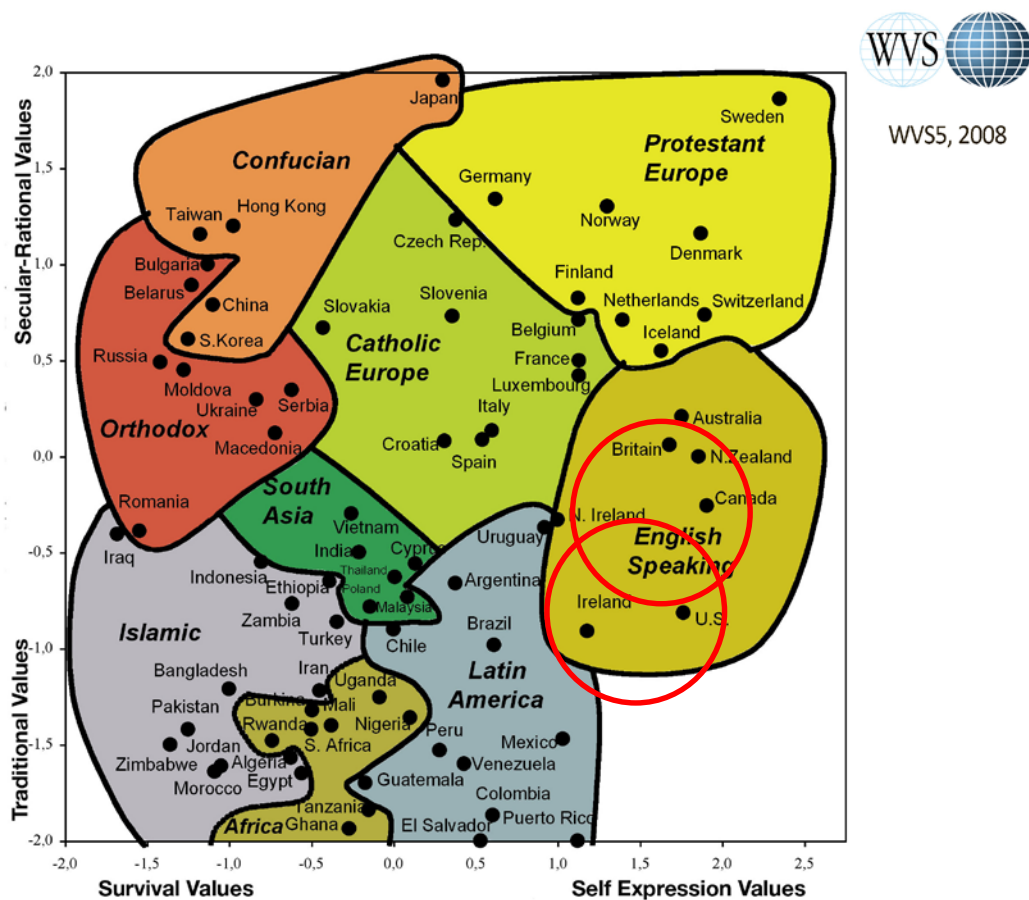
Much of the literature on political culture maintains that political attitudes arise from basic social relations (in the family, with peers and at work) and core values (e.g., Almond and Verba 1963; Eckstein 1965; Inglehart 1990). The social authority relations in a society supposedly provide a foundation for attitudes toward political authority. The patterns and norms of social relations shape individual's identity as citizens. And policy preferences might be traced back to social values such as the emphasis on equality, security, and personal responsibility.

There are repeated popular claims that Canadians and Americans differ significantly in their basic social values as discussed above. In addition to the earlier writings by Lipset and others, contemporary scholarship repeats this refrain. Robert Kagan's (2003) famous first lines in *Of Paradise and Power* are typical of recent debates, "It is time to stop pretending that Europeans and Americans share a common view of the world .... Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus"—with Canadians presumably on the European side.

We might compare many alternative social values across these two societies. However, the most extensive cross-national comparisons of citizens' basic values priorities are based on a framework developed by Ronald Inglehart (1997; Inglehart and Welzel 2005). Inglehart argues

that the social conditions of a nation are linked to two main dimensions of human values. The first dimension (traditional/secular-rational) ranges from traditional values that draw upon moral and religious frameworks at one end to secular-rational values at the other extreme. This dimension is measured by attitudes such as the importance of God in one's life, deference to authority, traditional family values, national pride, and attitudes on various moral issues (Inglehart and Welzel 2005, ch. 2; Welzel 2014). The second dimension (survival/self-expression values) ranges from survival values that sustenance and security needs at one end to self-expression values at the other extreme. This dimension is measured by questions that tap the relative priority of economic and physical security at the survival pole versus an emphasis on self-expression, subjective well-being, willingness to challenge elites, and tolerance of alternative lifestyles at the other pole. While developed for other research purposes, these two dimensions seem to capture many of the social values that supposedly differ between Canadians and Americans, such as orientations toward authority, nationalism, and religious orientations. Where, then, are Canadians and Americans located relative to each other on each value dimension?

**Figure 1. Dimensions of Human Values**



Source: World Values Survey website ([www.worldvaluessurvey.org](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org)) for fifth wave of the WVS.

Figure 1 presents the mapping of nations on these two dimensions derived from the fifth wave of the World Values Survey.<sup>4</sup> There are differences in these basic social values between Canadians and Americans, but the similarities outweigh the differences. As Inglehart and Welzel (2005) have previously shown, both nations fall into a cluster of English-speaking democracies that are typified by high levels of self-expression values and moderate levels of traditional/secular-rational values. The circles around the United States and Canada represent the range that includes about two-thirds of the population in each nation. There is more overlap between Canadians and Americans than between either nation and any non-English speaking society.

Canada and the United States are multicultural societies, and thus the national mean may combine quite different values for subgroups of the population. The most potentially significant comparison is between French and English Canadians, and different ethnicities in the United States. If one were to plot the separate points for English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians and for Anglican and Roman Catholic Canadians in figure 1, these groups would fall within the circle surrounding the Canadian mean.<sup>5</sup> In other words, French-speaking Canadians are more likely to share the broad social values of English-speaking Canadians than they are to share the values of the French public (and the same for English-speaking Canadians and Britons). There is a similar pattern for Catholics and Protestants in the United States, and even black-white differences are located within the circle surrounding the U.S. mean (also see Inglehart and Welzel 2005, 65-69).

Welzel and Deutsch (2007) tracked the values of Canadians and Americans (and other nations) over the two decades of World Values Surveys (1981-1999). They found that both publics have followed a similar trajectory of cultural change, general moving in a direction toward more self-expression values and more secular-rational values.

Certainly, there are some specific values in which Canadians and Americans differ substantially.<sup>6</sup> Still, the overall value framework in Figure 1 has been widely replicated as a way to identify two of the most important dimensions that define a nation's broad value priorities. If we compare Canadian-American value differences to other nations in the world, then we are left with the conclusion that the overlap on these two values dimensions is greater than the differences. Since Inglehart (1990, 1997) has linked these two value dimensions to a wide range of specific political attitudes and behaviors, this implies that Canadians and Americans might share other specific political traits.

### **National Attachments**

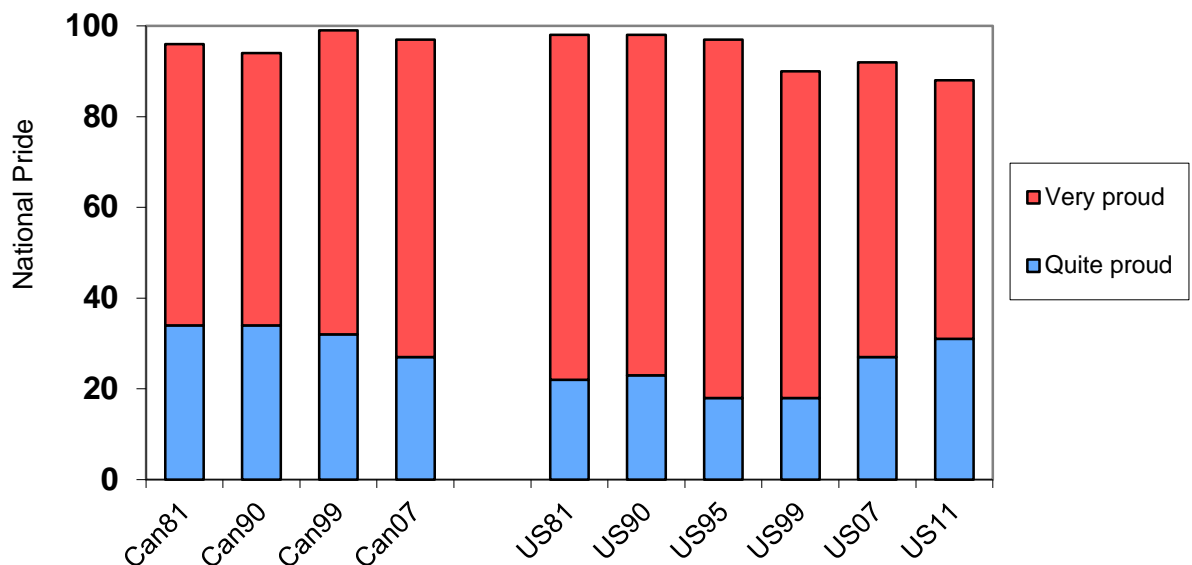
If we shift from broad value priorities to more specific political orientations, probably no element of the American political culture is as apparently distinctive as the strong sense of national identity that Americans openly express. Americans proudly place the U.S. flag on their bumper stickers, sing the national anthem at sporting events (and now "America the Beautiful" as well), and chant "U.S.A., U.S.A." with abandon. Previous studies have traced these sentiments to the United States's history as the first new nation (Lipset 1963; Hofstetter 1972). Meanwhile, many writers depict Canadians as sitting quietly on the sidelines, only marked by a maple leaf pin or logo unobtrusively displayed on their clothing. And only since 1980 have Canadians had their own national anthem in "O Canada" instead of singing "God Save the Queen."

Furthermore, the English/French regional split is another factor possibly eroding Canadian feelings of national identity.

However, such public displays and rituals are not necessarily a valid measure of the internal values and beliefs of the general public. Lipset's (1990a) evidence on this point was largely anecdotal, without extensive reference to public opinion polls. Using data from the 1981 and 1990 World Values Survey, Ronald Inglehart and his colleagues (1996, 95) found that Americans expressed more intense feelings of national pride than Canadians. Using a different method to tap support for a Canadian sense of national community, Kornberg and Clarke (1992, 107-108) showed high levels of Canadian national attachments. Over three-quarters of Canadians supported the national community in surveys between 1974 and 1988, and the percentage with negative sentiments exceeded 5 percent only once. Similarly, Neil Nevitte (1992, 65-67) showed that Canadians were even more likely than Americans to report belonging to the nation as their prime basis of geographic identity.

Figure 2 summarizes the often-used question on pride in one's nation to measure feelings of national attachment over the last quarter century.<sup>7</sup> In broad terms, the overall similarity of Canadian and American sentiments is more apparent than the alleged differences. Roughly 90 percent in both nations say they are "very proud" or "quite proud" to be Canadian/American, ranking both nations in the upper quartile of nations in the World Values Survey. The statistical differences between Canadian and American orientations are minimal ( $\eta^2=.07$ ). And these sentiments have changed very little over time, with a slight trend of increasing national pride in Canada and a slight decline in the United States. Similarly, the 2007 World Values Survey asked whether respondents felt like a citizen of the nation: 98 percent of Americans agreed compared to 96 percent of Canadians.

**Figure 2. Feelings of National Pride in Canada and the United States**

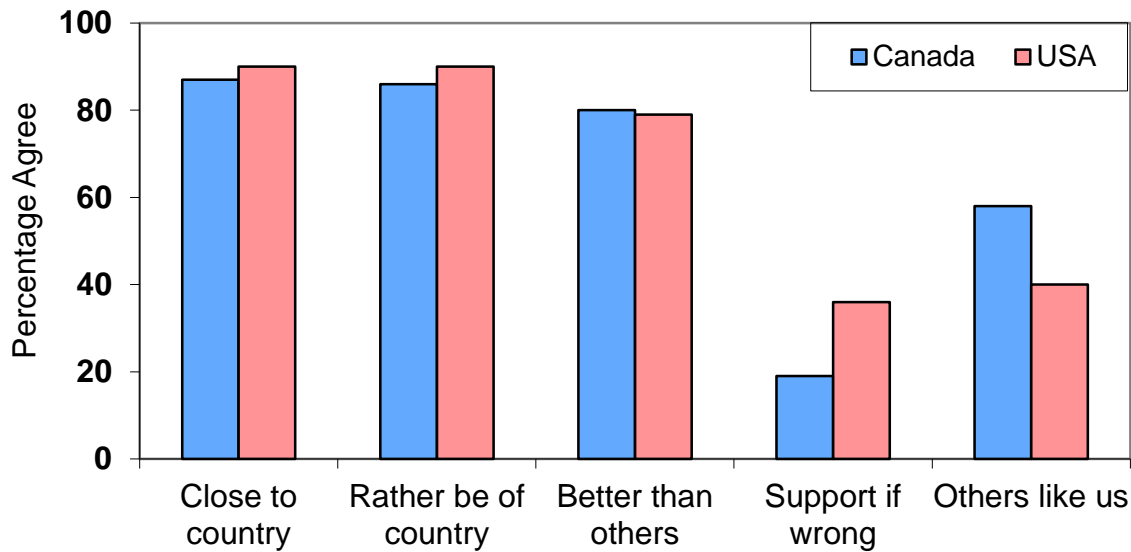


Source: World Values Surveys

Other public opinion data yield broadly consistent results. The most recent International Social Survey Program (ISSP) that includes both Canada and the US and which asks about national feelings is presented in Figure 3. When asked how close they felt toward their country, 87

percent of Canadians said they are close, compared with 90 percent among Americans. Four other items appear in the figure: I would rather be a citizen of my country than any other, this country is better than most others, one should support country even if wrong, and it would be better if other nations were like us. These items generally show modest cross-national differences, although Americans are often more likely to say strongly agree rather than agree. Canadians actually score higher in the belief it would be better if other nations were like Canada. Averaged across the five items, the opinions in Canada and the United States are virtually equal (67 percent in Canada versus 68 percent in the United States).

**Figure 3. Measures of National Attachment**



Source: 2003 International Social Survey Program

Of course, these opinions are not evenly spread across the population. As one might expect, feelings of national pride vary significantly across the Canadian regions ( $\eta^2=.32$ ). In Quebec significantly fewer express great pride in being Canadian, but the total percentage expressing at least quite a lot of national pride is still 92 percent. There are also significant regional differences in the United States, even though more modest than in Canada ( $\eta^2=.12$ ). National pride is generally lower on the West Coast and East Coast of the United States, with higher pride in the South and Mountain states. Yet, the initial presumption was that Canadians, as a whole, are markedly less attached to their nation than Americans as a whole—and we find a broad similarity in national attachments.

### **Allegiance and Political Support**

A second comparison involves feelings of allegiance and support for government. Lipset (1996) emphasized the anti-statist values of Americans as a result of the nation's revolutionary traditions, and this thesis has been echoed by other scholars (e.g., King 1999; Mueller 1999; Huntington 1981). King, for instance, writes of "Americans' long-standing and well-known proneness to be suspicious of government. Americans are almost certainly suspicious of

government today because Americans have always been suspicious of government” (1999, 78). Indeed, there is a rich series of public challenges to government across the history of America.

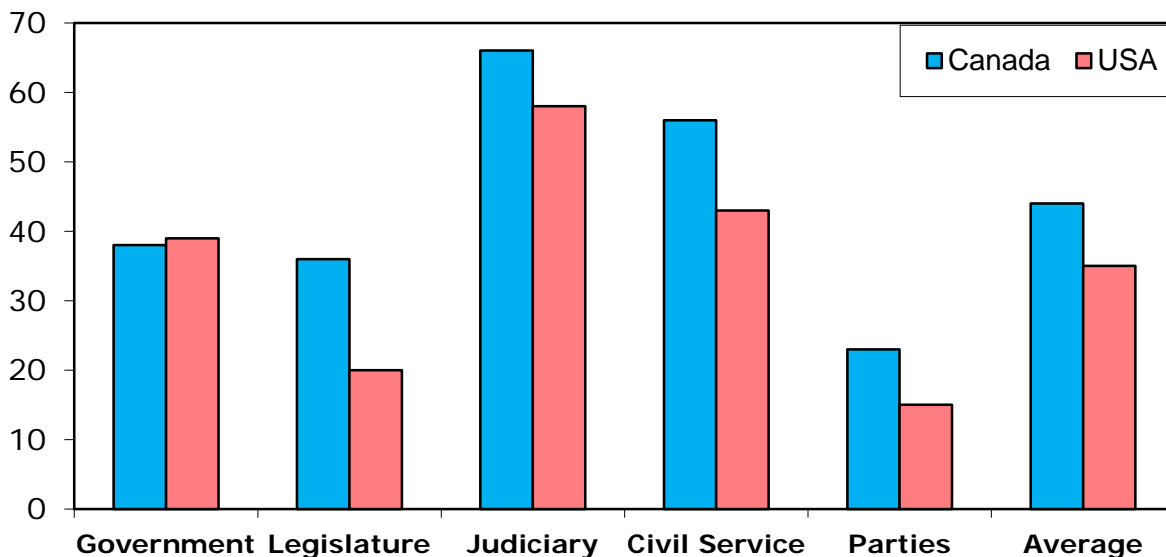
Yet, Lipset’s thesis runs counter to Almond and Verba (1963) and others who stressed supportive, allegiant opinions as a key aspect of the American political culture. Another study by Lipset actually documented this high level of political support among the American public in the 1950-60s, and its subsequent erosion (Lipset and Schneider 1983).

In contrast, while American political traditions embrace a revolutionary spirit and skepticism of government, Canadians are supposedly more acceptant of the power of the state and deferential to political elites.

Several recent studies have examined the levels of political support, trust and allegiance in the United States, Canada, and advanced industrial democracies (Dalton 2004; Norris 1999; Pharr and Putnam 1999; Nevitte 1996; Kornberg and Clarke 1992; Nye et al. 1992). The findings were not generally supportive of these Canadian-American stereotypes. Indeed, the empirical evidence again seems to highlight the greater similarity between nations rather than their differences.

Confidence in specific political institutions is a common way to assess public trust in government. Figure 4 presents Canadians’ and Americans’ confidence in government and five political institutions from the most recent World Values Survey.<sup>8</sup> Americans are slightly less confident in the four specific political institutions: the legislature, judiciary, civil service and the political parties. American confidence in government was slightly higher at the time point of each survey. This fits the theorized pattern of cross-national difference—except that the gap is quite modest. Averaged across all five examples in the figure, there is only a 9 percentage point difference between American and Canadian images of these governmental actors. This is hardly evidence of sharp distinctions in the political culture.

**Figure 4. Confidence in Political Institutions, 2007**

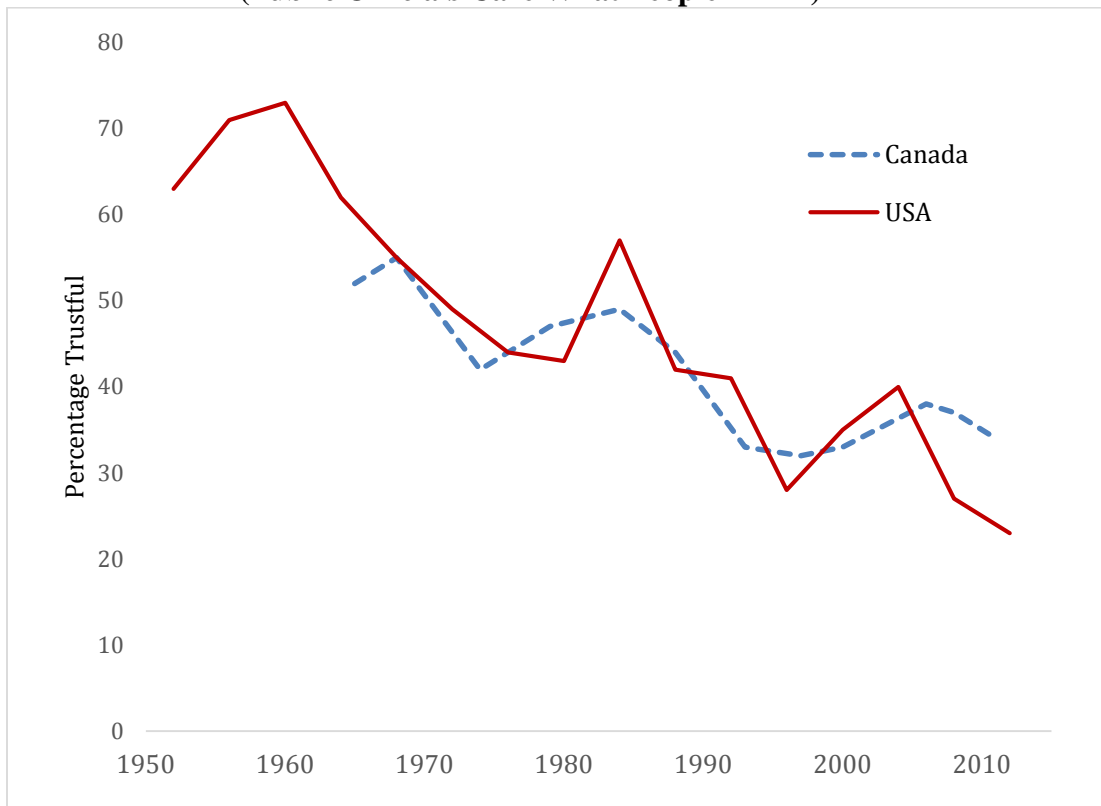


Source: 2005-8 World Values Survey (Canada N=2148; USA N=1249).



Although Canadians and Americans express similar levels of confidence in government and political institutions, opinions may have diverged in the recent past. In both nations, scholars have written about the changes in political trust in the past several decades. Figure 5 tracks the trends in political trust using a question common to both the Canadian and American national election studies: do public officials [Canada: the government] care what people like you think. The two series follow a strikingly similar trajectory. Political trust was higher in the 1950s and 1960s in both nations, reflecting an allegiant and supportive political culture in both countries. Then sentiments have declined over time. Other measures of trust in government in both nations generally follow the same trajectory.<sup>9</sup>

**Figure 5. Trends in Canadian and American Political Trust  
(Public Officials Care What People Think)**



*Source:* Canadian Election Studies (1965-2011) and American National Election Study (1952-2012).

While the national discourse on this trend in both Canada and the United States often links the decline to specific features of each nations—such as regional strife in Canada or social conflict and political scandal in the United States—this same downward trend in political trust occurs in most other advanced industrial democracies (Dalton 2004; Dalton and Welzel 2014). Unique national histories seem less important in explaining the decline in political trust than shared features of social change in these democracies.

## The Role of the Good Citizen

Another supposed contrast between Canadian and American political cultures holds that these two publics have different images of what constitutes a good democratic citizen. Lipset (1990a), for instance, emphasized the *participatory tradition* of the American political culture, reflecting a Tocquevillian view of contemporary America.<sup>10</sup> Often this presumes participation in free and fair elections, but the range of political participation can be, and should be, much broader. A related category taps what Petersson et al. (1998) call *autonomy*. Autonomy implies that good citizens should be sufficiently informed about government to exercise a participatory role. The good citizen should participate in democratic deliberation and discuss politics with other citizens, and ideally understand the views of others (Almond and Verba 1993; Verba and Nie 1972; Norris 2002).

Citizenship norms also involve *adherence to social order* and the acceptance of state authority. Even democratic governments emphasize the role of the loyal law-abiding individual as a prime criterion of citizenship (Maravall and Przeworski 2003; O'Donnell, Guillermo. 2004). Indeed, acceptance of the legitimacy of the state and the rule of law is often the implied first principle of citizenship, since the rule of law is necessary for political discourse and democratic choice.

Lipset (1990a) argues that Canadians would be more allegiant than Americans, although the full literature generates a mix of contrasting expectations. Because of its revolutionary tradition, Americans supposedly are more populist and less willing to accept state authority. At the same time, the strong sense of national identity and patriotism identified with the American political philosophy should work to the contrary. “My Country Right or Wrong” is a sentiment less often expressed by Canadians (see figure 3).

Finally, another potential element of citizenship involves what T.H. Marshall (1992) described as *social citizenship*. The expansion of civil and political rights in European democracies led to new category of social rights, such as social services, providing for those in need, and taking heed of the general welfare of others. Citizenship thus may include an ethical and moral responsibility to others in the polity, and beyond. These norms are identified with the growth of the European welfare state, and as such should be more common among Canadians who share these cultural traditions. In contrast, American individualism supposedly represents a contrasting view of citizenship and one’s relationship to others.

The 2004 International Social Survey Program asked a sample of Canadians and Americans to define the norms of good citizenship.<sup>11</sup> This question defines citizenship in terms of attitudes toward the role of the individual in the political system. Respondents are asked how they think a ‘good’ citizen should behave—the perceived norms of citizenship—rather than personal adherence to each behavior. In other analyses we used these items to construct two general dimensions of good citizenship (Dalton 2015). Duty-based norms define citizenship largely in terms of the duties and responsibilities, such as following the law or voting. Engaged citizenship emphasizes a questioning of government, a sense of social responsibility, and participation beyond elections.

What do Americans and Canadians think defines the good citizen? The striking pattern of Table 1 is the broad similarity in the citizenship norms of the two publics. The ascribed importance of accepting authority and the rule of law is quite similar across nations. Only military service displays a gap larger than ten percentage points, and this might reflect the U.S.’s involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan at the time of the survey. The examples of engaged

citizenship in the lower panel of the table also show only small differences between Canadians and Americans for each item.

**Table 1. The Norms of Good Citizenship**

<b>Norm</b>	<b>Canada</b>	<b>United States</b>	<b>Difference</b>
<b>Duty based norms</b>			
Always obey law	95	95	0
Never evade taxes	90	92	2
Always vote	91	88	-3
Serve in military	60	75	15
<b>Engaged citizen norms</b>			
Keep watch on government	91	89	-2
Understand others	91	85	-6
Help others in nation	86	89	3
Boycott ethical/moral	67	63	-4
Help others in world	63	60	-3
Active in association	53	56	3

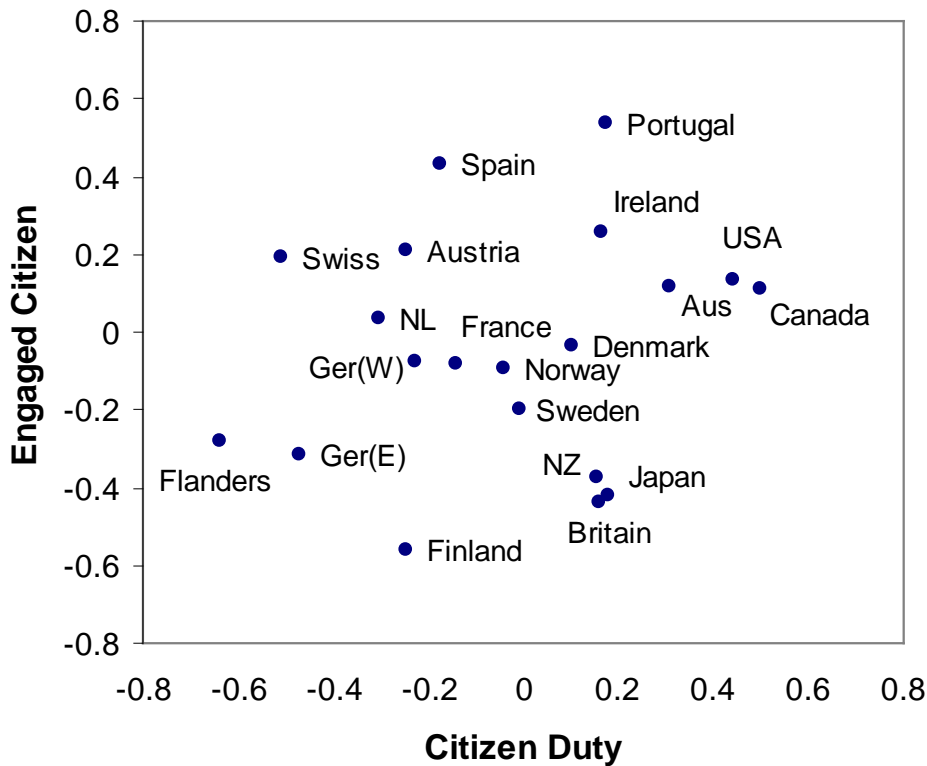
*Source:* 2004 International Social Survey Program.

The similarity between Canadians and Americans stands out even more clearly in cross-national terms. Figure 6 presents indices of citizen duty and engaged citizenship for all the advanced industrial democracies included in the ISSP survey.<sup>12</sup> The horizontal dimension in the figure represents a nation's score on the citizen duty index; the vertical dimension is the nation's score on engaged citizenship.

Again the distinctive pattern is the similarity of Canadian and American citizenship norms. Canadians score highest in citizen duty—immediately followed by Americans. More than most other democratic publics, these two nations believe a good citizen pays taxes, obeys the laws, and votes. There is also a broad similarity to two other nations that share a British heritage (Australia and Ireland). As in the value comparisons of Figure 1, this similarity among Anglo-American democracies suggests that citizen duty norms are linked to this legacy, perhaps from a tradition of popular sovereignty and the expectation of citizen allegiance in response. By comparison, most Scandinavian nations are located near the midpoint on citizen duty, and the lowest nations include several with a Germanic background.

Canadians and Americans also score above most nations in engaged citizenship as shown on the vertical axis. Given the tradition of social citizenship in Europe, the relatively high placement of the United States is surprising. As Table 1 suggests, Americans' participatory norms that extend beyond voting may contribute to positive scores on engaged citizenship. Moreover, Americans are not dramatically different from Canadians and most Europeans on the two measures of social citizenship. Indeed, Canadians and Americans are more similar to each other than to any other nation in this figure.

**Figure 6. Norms of Citizen Duty and Engaged Citizenship**



*Source:* 2004 International Social Survey Program.

*Note:* Figure entries are national positions based on mean scores on the citizen duty and engaged citizenship factor scores.

### **Expectations about the Role of Government**

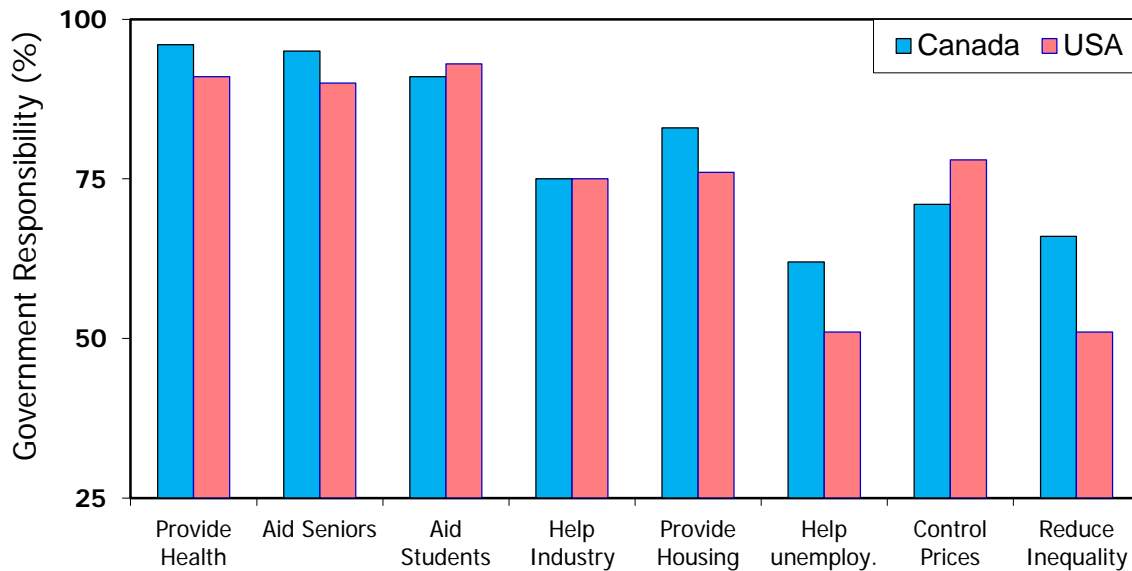
If there is one area where Canadians and Americans can be expected to differ in their political attitudes, it is the role of government. As other chapters in this book demonstrate, there are clear differences in the policies enacted in both nations across a range of policy domains (see chapters by Marmor and Maioni; Keech and Scarth; Mucciaroni and Scala). The contrasts in health care policy, economic policy, and other areas imply that these two societies differ in their images of the desired role of government and the policies outputs of government. Indeed, the contrast between Canadians' support for state action and Americans' stress on independence from the state is presumably one of the most fundamental contrasts between the two political cultures.

Instead of looking at policy preferences in specific areas, we ask the broader question of how citizens in both nations view the role of government. What is the responsibility of government to protect and aid its citizens, and when should the government leave matters to others. Indeed, this debate is both central to the theoretical discourse on political cultures in both nations and central to the ongoing policy debates on this topic in both nations.

The International Social Survey Program (ISSP) has regularly asked citizens whether they think the government is responsible for dealing with specific social problems (Borre and

Scarborough 1995).<sup>13</sup> The most recent cross-national evidence comes from 2006 (Figure 7). In contrast to expectations of a substantial gap between both publics, the similarity of opinions is more apparent in the figure. Canadians and Americans both have high expectations of government in several areas: providing health assistance, aiding seniors, financial assistance for college students, providing decent housing, controlling prices and helping industry. In all but one area (“reducing income differences between the rich and poor”), the gap between Canadians and Americans is less than 10 percent.

**Figure 7. Beliefs in Government Policy Responsibilities**



*Source:* 2006 International Social Survey Program.

*Note:* The figure displays the percentage who think each policy area is definitely or probably a government responsibility.

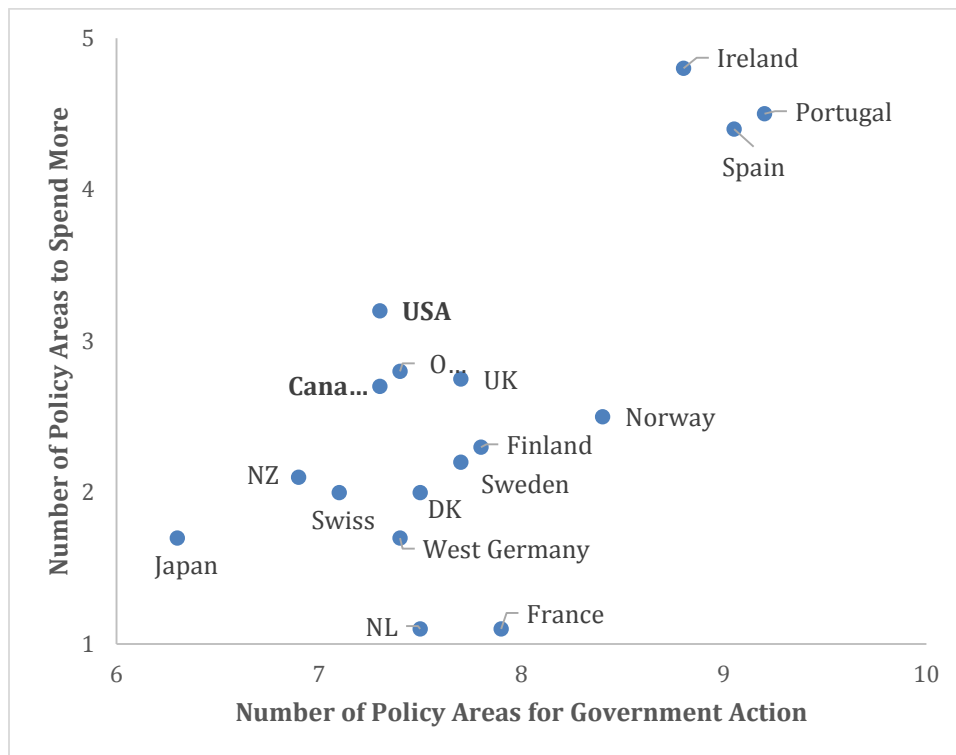
Since the ISSP began asking this question in 1990, there has been increasing support for a greater role for government in both nations. This trend has been roughly parallel in both nations. For instance, in 1996 Canadian respondents favored government responsibility in these areas by an average of about 5 percent more than Americans; in 2006 this gap remains at five percent. The ISSP will repeat this module in 2016, and this can provide insights into whether the recent political debates over globalization and income inequality have significantly shifted opinions. Gallup Poll data for the United States suggests that between 1998 and 2015, Americans have become more supportive of government action to limit income inequality (Newport 2015).

The 2006 ISSP also contained a series of questions about whether the government should spend more or less on certain policy areas.<sup>14</sup> Here there is a long-observed paradox in public opinion. The General Social Survey’s time series on American policy spending preferences has documented that despite the rhetoric clamoring for smaller government, a plurality of Americans favor more public spending in most policy areas (Dalton 2015). Americans’ motto for

government is clear: tax less and spend more. This is widely described as the combination of ideological conservatism and programmatic liberalism (Ellis and Stimson 2012).

Rather than focusing on the specific spending priorities, we want to use these questions to tap support for a larger role of government as a general aspect of the political culture. In addition, we want to compare these orientations cross-nationally to put Canadian-American comparisons in a larger context. Figure 8 compares advanced industrial democracies in terms of the number of policy areas where citizens favored more government spending and the number of policy areas where governments were seen as responsible (figure 7).

**Figure 8. Public Support for Government Responsibility and Government Spending More**



Source: 2006 International Social Survey Program.

Note: The x-axis displays the average number of areas where the public feels the government has policy responsibility (figure 7) and the y-axis displays the average number of policies where the public feels the government should spend more minus those where the government should spend less.

Figure 8 shows that citizens in advanced industrial democracies vary significantly in their images of the role of government. The Spaniards, Portuguese and Irish favor a much more active government on both dimensions, while the Japanese have distinctly more limited images of their government's role. Americans favor more government spending in three policy areas more than policy areas where they favor cuts. Perhaps this is because total government spending is still modest in cross-national terms, and the Bush administration had been decreasing social spending.<sup>15</sup> But the general similarity of American and Canadian publics is again apparent. Both publics list approximately the same number of areas where the government should be responsible, and on average Canadians see fewer policy areas where spending should be increased.<sup>16</sup>

Certainly one could mine existing public opinion surveys to find areas where the specific policy preferences of Canadians and Americans differ significantly. However, one of the central claims in the literature on the cultural differences between Canadians and Americans supposedly involve broadly different images of the role of the state. The 2006 ISSP survey was designed explicitly to assess this aspect of the political culture, and the patterns of overlap seem more prevalent than a continental divide.<sup>17</sup>

### **Culture and Politics**

I liken the findings presented here as similar to going to a family reunion. At the reunion one might be struck by the differences between those attending, either in their social status, appearance, personal beliefs or other traits. But if you took a family member to a convention of people from other advanced industrial democracies, you would suddenly recognize that your relative speaks the same language, has many similar tastes, and many similar preferences. Are there really greater differences between the average citizen of Toronto and Chicago, compared to the differences between Toronto and Berlin (or Chicago and Paris)?

There are significant differences between Canadians and Americans on some political opinions. This is inevitable if one compares a wide range of questions asked in any two nations. We would, for example, expect the two publics to differ in specific opinions on how to provide health care and their opinions of the health care system in both nations—because these opinions should reflect the reality of the different public policies now operating in both nations. Similarly, images of current policy issues—such as dealing with international terrorism or the government’s handling of the economy—can reflect differences in the political circumstances in each nation.

However, if we step back and consider the broader elements of political culture that supposedly divide Americans and Canadians—the continental divide in Lipset’s terms—the evidence of differences is much less apparent. Despite a long academic and popular tradition of emphasizing the distinct historical roots of both societies and the apparent implications for the political cultures, the similarities generally outweigh the differences. In broad value priorities, Canadians and Americans are more similar to each other than to the citizens in most other advanced industrial democracies. Feeling of national identity and trust in government are also strikingly similar across these two nations. And perhaps most surprising of all, images of the appropriate role of government overlap substantially. Like other empirical studies of public opinion, the rhetoric of cultural differences is less apparent in the reality of public opinion surveys (Graber et al. 1999; Baer et al. 1990a, 1990b; Nevitte 1996; Inglehart, Nevitte and Basañez 1996).

In retrospect, we can cite several reasons for this congruence. Americans and Canadians do not divide a continent, they share it. The commonalities of their histories and life experiences are more apparent from an international perspective than their differences. Language, Judeo-Christian heritage, popular culture, commerce, and a myriad of other factors create a similar experience for both publics, and a similar view of politics in many aspects of each nation’s political culture. Or as *The Economist* (2010) recently claimed: “Any country living beside an economic and cultural colossus tends to shore up its separate identity by emphasizing its differences and ignoring its similarities. Few nations have mastered this better than Canada, which for decades has seen itself as a kind, gentler counterpart to the United States.”

Still, the findings in this chapter raise an apparent paradox for the comparisons of this volume. If the citizens in both nations share important aspects of their political culture, why are there such apparent and real differences in the functioning of their political systems and the outputs of government? The broad differences in health policy, for instance, do not appear to arise from fundamental differences in how both publics view the government's responsibility for providing health care for its citizens. This policy gap may be more attributable to the structure of government in both nations and the role of interest group politics. Or it might reflect small historical differences that initially set both nations down different paths, and the gap became path dependent over time. But such explanations would then raise the question of whether public preferences are being met when such a gap emerges. The comparisons in subsequent chapters provide a basis for judging the political distinctiveness of both systems, and the implications in the context of the cultural similarities we have described.



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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Lipset also replied to their criticisms (Lipset 1990b).

<sup>2</sup> Some empirical indicators are actually opposite to Lipset's thesis. For instance, Americans appear more deferential to authority (Nevitte 1999: 38) and express more confidence in political institutions (p. 56).

<sup>3</sup> We strongly concur with Lipset's general dictum that the best way to study any nation is to compare it to others. Lipset's now famous line is that "he who knows only one country, knows no country." He began many of his graduate seminars with this observation, as well as repeating it in his various writings on comparative politics.

<sup>4</sup> This is predominately based on the 2005-2008 fifth wave of the World Values Survey, although some nations are from an earlier wave when they were not surveyed in the fifth wave. The scores for each nation are based on a factor analyses described in Inglehart and Welzel (2005, ch. 2). A nation's mean on both factor scores is used to locate it in Figure 1.

<sup>5</sup> Religious groups display larger differences on the traditional/secular-rational dimension than on the security/self-expression dimension, as one might expect. But the largest deviations occur for smaller religious groups, such as Muslims, Jews or the non-religious. Ethnic differences tend to be larger for security/self-expression values.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Americans tend to be more religious than Canadians, which may account for some of the gap on the vertical dimension.

<sup>7</sup> The question reads: How proud are you to be [your nationality]? Very proud, quite proud, not very proud, or not at all proud. The figure presents the combined percentage of those saying very proud and quite proud.

<sup>8</sup> The sixth wave of the WVS did not, unfortunately, include Canada. The question in the fifth wave read: "I am going to name a number of organizations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence or none at all?"

<sup>9</sup> Other measures of trust in government also show declines in both nations. One of the longest and most frequently used survey questions asks about confidence in the legislature, and this declines in both nations. The strength of party attachments has also weakened in both nations. See Dalton (2004, ch. 2).

<sup>10</sup> Of course, this image of the U.S. political culture has been challenged by Robert Putnam and several other recent studies (Putnam 2000; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002). We disagree with this characterization and believe that overall political participation is actually increasing (Dalton 2015; Zukin et al. 2006).

<sup>11</sup> The ISSP survey question asked: To be a good citizen, how important is it for a person to be . . . [list items]: 1 is extremely unimportant and 7 is extremely important.

<sup>12</sup> We calculated a two dimensional factor structure (Dalton 2015: chapter 8). Engaged citizenship is the first dimension, explaining 25.9 percent of the variance in these ten items; and citizen duty is the second dimension (21.7 percent variance). We then computed factor scores for the two dimensions, and then used the average scores for each nation to locate it in Figure 5. The American survey was repeated in 2014 with similar results, but this ISSP module was not conducted in Canada.

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<sup>13</sup> The question asked: “On the whole, do you think it should or should not be the government’s responsibility to . . . : definitely should be, probably should be, probably should not be, or definitely should not be.” For additional information go to the project website: [www.issp.org](http://www.issp.org).

<sup>14</sup> The question asked: “Listed below are various areas of government spending. Please show me whether you would like to see more or less government spending in each area. Remember that if you say “much more” it might require more taxes to pay for it: spend much more, spend more, spend the same as now, spend less, and spend much less.” The eight policy areas were the environment, health, the police and law enforcement, education, the military and defense, old age pensions, unemployment benefits, and culture and the arts.

<sup>15</sup> Soroka and Wlezien (2010) suggest this reflects a thermostat model of public spending preferences. When the spending in desired policy areas decreases, people generally want more. And when spending surges, opinions shift toward less spending.

<sup>16</sup> The Canadian-American pattern in the number of areas where spending should be increased is not due to one or two specific policies, but occurs because Americans are slightly more positive toward increased spending in several different areas.

<sup>17</sup> The 2006 ISSP also contained a series of questions about actions the government might take to stimulate the economy, such as cutting spending, supporting job programs or reducing government regulations. Again, Canadians and Americans broadly agree on most of these policy alternatives, which bespeaks a commonality of basic political values.