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Referenda and Representative Democracy: Congruence or Irony?

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«Asserting that limited information precludes reasoned choice is equivalent to requiring that people who want to brush their teeth recall the ingredients of their toothpaste.»

Lupia and McCubbins. *Can Citizens Learn What They Need To Know?* : 37.

Introduction

It has been frequently argued that the level of political knowledge of Canadian constituents remains relatively low; the knowledge of basic political facts, such as the name of different political candidates and representatives, their objectives, the functioning of elementary governmental institutions, and the relevant economic context, is unevenly distributed, and low on average. I wish to examine in this paper the consequences that such observations entail. In other words, this essay explores the repercussions of the Canadian political disinformation on electoral behaviour. I will look more precisely at the entailment of the Canadian level of political sophistication on the outcome of federal elections as well as federal and provincial referenda.

Generally, it will be argued that the Canadian "knowledge deficit" has marginal effects upon the party configuration of the House of Commons, meaning that political disinformation has virtually no effect when it comes to national elections. That is to say that in our current system, Canadians can afford to know little and still profit from a Parliament that is configured virtually as it would have been had they been better informed.

However, it will also be argued that the same levels of information have less desirable results when time comes for Canadians to express themselves via referenda on electoral or constitutional reform. Essentially due to some mechanics inherent to the very fact of questioning Canadians on complex issues that have abstract and minute repercussions on their lives, referenda results do not yield policies that stand for their interests.

This suggests that Canadians should accept the idea that their interests are better served by others, whose professions consist in the making of public policy. In order to explore this idea in some depth, we will first start, in the section below, by defining relevant terms, and circumscribing different theoretical notions, such as political information

and education, involved in the present discussion.

Political knowledge

Many scholars have assumed and continue to assume that for representative democracy to function effectively, it necessitates a well-informed and attentive citizenry. Precisely because they are run by *selected* officials, the popular choices upon which representative democracies are based must, at a very minimum, be non-random (Lupia and McCubbins: 3, Fournier, 2002: 92, Weissberg in Bennett: 477). At best, popular votes are informed by basic political facts that help citizens assessing the respective merits of different political options, in light of their own preferences and interests.

In the scientific literature, political information is described as being political data (Carpini and Keeter: 1179, Lupia and McCubbins: 24, Johnston *et al.*, 1996: 221), stocked in the long-term conscious memory and capable of being recalled (Fournier, 2002: 93, Luskin: 858). For instance, it is generally expected that a voter knows about the names of main political actors, political parties, and about different party stances on important domestic and foreign issues. One's level of political information is typically related to, but not determined by, cognitive capacities (Luskin: 857), interest in politics, political activity, exposure to the media, education, and socio-demographics, such as gender and race (Fournier, 2002: 98).

Misinformation, as the holding of misguided information, must not be confused with disinformation, which consists in a lack of information. Fournier argues insightfully that misinformation is not the norm for Canadians (Fournier, 2002: 93, 96). Furthermore, Lupia and McCubbins comment that the conditions under which political misinformation, or deception, is generated "are not trivially satisfied" (10). For citizens to be misguided, a communicator must lie, and be believed. For the present matter, misinformation will therefore

edgeable electorate.²

not be a source of concern.

Political information is likewise conceptually distinct from rationality. If the former consists in mere data, the quality of which is assessed in terms of accuracy, the latter is mostly assessed in terms of consistency (Converse, 1964).¹ In other words, rationality represents the extent to which a rational being can make choices in accordance with his principles and preferences. Interestingly, it is often argued that it is quite irrational for citizens to get informed, for the costs of acquiring political information largely outweighs the benefits (Fournier, 2002: 93, Gidengil *et al.*, 2004: 58, Lupia and McCubbins: 7, Luskin: 864, Johnston *et al.*, 1996: 19).

Another branch of the literature on political information claims that individuals can mimic the decision-making processes of individuals equipped with full information and come up with the same conclusions. Thanks to different cues and information shortcuts, some scholars argue that electors can make the “correct” decision, that is the one they would have been taken, had they been better informed (Blais *et al.*, 2009: 257, Bartels: 194-197). Cues are oral and written testimonies of other people that provide indications about how one should vote, given certain principles and preferences. Information shortcuts play a similar role in electoral behaviour. According to McKelvey and Ordeshook, electors can successfully use trustworthy and knowledgeable endorsements to compensate for their lack of encyclopaedic knowledge (McKelvey and Ordeshook in Bartels: 198). “Ask not for more sobriety and piety from citizens, for they are voters, not judges; offer them instead cues and signals which connect their world with the world of politics,” Popkin argues (236, see also Alvarez: 9, Gerber and Lupia: 2, Johnston *et al.*, 1996: 283, Lupia, 1994: 63, Lupia and McCubbins: 64, 148, 201). Although cues and shortcuts cannot absolutely overcome knowledge deficits, they have the potential to cause electoral and referenda results that, in the aggregate, resemble that of a quite knowl-

In an analogous manner, aggregation may compensate for information differentials in Canadian constituencies. According to the jury theorem of Condorcet, the more people are voting, the more likely they will reach the “correct” decision, for errors will cancel out one another (Page and Shapiro, 1992, notably in Blais *et al.*, 2009: 256, and Bélanger et Pétry for Canadian data). Therefore, thanks to the “miracle of aggregation” no bias caused by a lack of information would subsist in electoral results. Nevertheless, the inherent problem of the theorem is that not all biases are truly “random” and capable of being cancelled out (Bartels: 199). The effects of aggregate processes, information shortcuts, and cues will be contextualised throughout this essay, and their usefulness, assessed under different circumstances.

Education as a source of spuriousness

One might worry that the distribution of political information is not unrelated to some socio-economic factors such as, most significantly, the level of education (Fournier, 2002: 98, Berinsky and Cutler: 1, Johnston *et al.*, 1996: 227). In fact, education was found to be the most important demographic characteristic to discriminate those who are more informed from those who are less (Bennett: 485, Gidengil *et al.*, 2004: 49). Indeed, the «education» variable predicts comparatively well how people tend to acquire information. Moreover, education itself often causes easier acquisition and processing of information (Gidengil *et al.*, 2004: 50). Therefore, it seems, we need be concerned about the qualitatively different decisions that highly educated people tend to make, not specifically because of their very holding of information, but because of the different roles educated citizens tend to play, and the different cultural universe⁴ they inhabit (Johnston *et al.*, 1996: 231, 238).

Were education a confounding factor, however, the alleged influence of information

**«If the information-
Yes vote
relationship proves
indeed to be
positive, then one
reading of the event
is that the
Charlottetown
Accord was a test
which most
Canadians failed.»**

Johnston *et al.*, *The
Challenge of Direct
Democracy*: 28

on opinions and decisions, in the aggregate, would collapse with a proper control for relevant socio-demographic characteristics such as education. Yet, it does *not*. While control for education (as well as other key political attribute variables) attenuates to some degree the repercussions of information, the relationship between high levels of information and distinct opinions remains statistically significant (Berinsky and Cutler: 4). Hence, not only intuitively but empirically, it seems that information have an influence of its own on opinions and on electoral behaviour: by implication, a well-informed individual will tend to have distinct opinions and distinct voting patterns.⁵

Assessment of Political Information Levels in Canada

It proves difficult to gauge levels of political information; indeed some extensive academic articles are entirely devoted to the usefulness of different measure of political information (see Carpinini and Keeter, 1993 and Luskin: 857). Nevertheless, many researchers maintain that the North Americans' level of political information appears to be quite low, at least from anything approaching elite standards (Gerber and Lupia: 1, Bennett: 482, Alvarez: 2, Luskin: 889, Fournier, 2002: 94, Gidengil *et al.*, 2004: 45, Blais *et al.*, 2009: 256). For Schumpeter, "the typical citizen drops down to a lower level of mental performance as soon as he enters the political field. He argues and analyses in a way which he would readily recognize as infantile within the sphere of his real interests" (Schumpeter in Lupia and McCubbins: 4).

Political knowledge, besides from being low, is unevenly distributed across the electorate (Fournier 2002).

According to the Canadian Democratic Audit research project, Canadians sharing particular socio-demographic characteristics have systematically lower levels of political knowledge; all other things being equal, female, young and new Canadians know less (Gidengil *et al.*, 2004: 51-55). Finally, the politically apathetic and very aged generally have less political information than their peers (Bennett: 485).

In light of the above briefing and the assumption that political information is essential for the proper functioning of our political regime, what does the generally low level and unequal distribution of knowledge therefore entails for Canadians? Under which conditions is political information most crucial and the lack thereof, most threatening? The following section aims at rigorously circumscribing the repercussions of Canadian political disinformation on electoral behaviour.

Political Information and Electoral Behaviour

We start from the findings of two different studies conducted on the effect of political information on electoral behaviour and outcomes. Bartels conducted a study, published in 1996, on six presidential elections in the United States between 1972 and 1992. The study showed that the aggregate deviations from the hypothetical "fully informed" election outcome range from 0,35 to 5.6 percentage points, with an average deviation of 3,66 percentages points. Thanks to their national prominence, Bartels analyses that incumbent presidents do almost five percentage points better than if American voters were fully informed (Bartels: 201, see also Alvarez: 170). Previous electoral experience, personal characteristics and aspects of the larger politi-

cal context may also account for part of the disparity (Bartels: 202, Alvarez: 170).

A comparable study with analogous data was conducted in Canada. In 'Information, Visibility and Elections', Blais *et al.* investigate the effect of political information on the voting behaviour of Canadians in six federal elections between 1993 and 2006. They find that information has no significant effect on vote choice in three elections out of six, namely in 1988, 2004 and 2006. In the other three, the Liberal vote would have been three to five percentage points lower had Canadians been better informed; the New Democratic Party (left) and Reform or Alliance (right) would have benefitted from information gains (Blais *et al.*, 2009: 260-270).

According to their approximations, the ultimate outcome of three elections would have been very similar, in that the Liberal Party would have maintained a plurality of the vote⁶ (Blais *et al.*, 2009: 270). In at least one election, in 1997, the party configuration of the House of Commons would have been different. The Liberals, had Canadians known more about all party platforms and candidates, would have received 35 percent of the vote instead of 38. Because in 1997 the Liberals won 155 seats out of 301, barely enough to form a majority government, a three percentage point lower in vote share would most probably have resulted in a Liberal minority government. The researchers ultimately attribute the knowledge gap to the lack of visibility of some parties and candidates, in some constituencies (Blais *et al.*, 2009: 266).

In sum, it seems that Canadian knowledge deficit, parallel to that of the Americans, has "quite modest" (Blais *et al.*, 2009: 271) repercussions on the final party configuration of the House of

Commons. Yet, is a 5-percentage points a cause for concern? To better assess the implications of such findings, we will contrast them with the repercussions of knowledge gap on the Canadian vote in four different federal and provincial referenda.

Provincial and Federal Referenda

In 2004, the British Columbia Liberal Party appointed a Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform responsible for drafting a recommendation that was put in a referendum held concurrently with the 2005 provincial election (Fournier *et al.*, forthcoming: 135). If passed, the proposal would be implemented.⁷ Since the first referendum failed only by a small margin, it was organised a second time during the 2009 provincial election, and likewise failed to pass. A similar Assembly was implemented in Ontario, and its recommendation lost in the 1997 referendum. If the imposition of high thresholds did hypothetically prevent the propositions from being implemented in one occasion (the reform proposal in British Colombia initially won over

50% of popular support in 2005), Canadians rejected decisively in two occasions the Assembly's proposal to abandon the existing SMP electoral system and replace it with a new one⁸ (Fournier *et al.*, forthcoming: 126).

According to Fournier *et al.*, these referendum failures are fundamentally attributable to a substantive information deficit. Although a wealth of information on electoral systems was made available on the assembly's website and sent by mail, it is unlikely that voters were sufficiently engaged by the debate to invest the time necessary to reach the assembly participants' level of information on electoral reform

(Fournier *et al.*, forthcoming: 120). As calculated by the researchers, popular support for the three referendum would have approached or even surpassed the 60% threshold imposed by the government, had electors held more political information on electoral systems and the Assembly's activities; "if all voters had behaved like those who knew something about MMP/STV and the assembly [...] then the votes in favour of change would have averaged an extra 21 percentage points in the three referendums" (Fournier *et al.*, forthcoming: 128). In sum, the more knowledgeable the people were about the recommended reform, the most likely they were to vote for it (Fournier *et al.*, forthcoming: 141).

Johnston and his colleagues, in *The Challenge of Direct Democracy* notably examine the patterns of electoral behaviour during the 1992 federal referendum on the ratification of the Charlottetown Accord, a comprehensive package of constitutional amendments (Johnston *et al.*, 1996: 4)

Generally, the researchers argue that voters who knew more had a greater propensity to vote in favour of the Accord than those who knew less: the likelihood of well-informed voters of saying Yes approached the 50:50 ratio (Johnston *et al.*, 1996: 238, 285), whereas the electorate as a whole, defined by both high and low levels of information, rejected the proposal with a majority of 55%.

For the scholars, 'getting to Yes required an ability to deal with abstractions and a positive orientation to certain traditionally devalued out-groups, both things promoted by education and information'. Therefore, there is once again a legitimate worry that the "education" variable functioned as a confounding

factor in the relationship between the information and electoral behaviour (Johnston *et al.*, 1996: 219, 228, 234-238). However, they illustrate persuasively that levels of education and information indeed worked in the same direction, but *independently* (Johnston *et al.*, 1996: 281). In sum, superior levels of information, they argue, "made a huge difference in 1992" in that it had an genuine influence in the referendum of a little bit more than five percentage points⁹, notably under induction from polls (*ibid.*: 281-283).

From the above empirical findings, it appears rather clear that the repercussions of the Canadian knowledge gap were slight in regular federal elections. Out of six, one federal election could have changed the Liberal majority government into a minority one. However large the consequences of such a move could be for policy outcomes, it seems that knowledge discrepancies amongst voters in referenda have greater scale and effects: had Canadians been better informed, they would have consented to an electoral reform in Ontario and British Colombia, and would have approved the amendment of the Canadian Constitution. The next section goes into hypothetical justifications of such conclusions in attempting to circumscribe the conditions under which different levels of information help or prevent citizens from making the "right" choice.

Why the Knowledge Gap Matters in Referenda but Not in Elections

It might not always be the case but it turns out that in the last referenda held by the provincial or federal government (let aside that of Quebec sovereignty), Canadians had to

vote on questions that required very specific political knowledge electoral and constitutional reform. Yet, citizens are more generalists than they are specialists (Fournier, 2002: 93) and we know from McGraw and Pinney that momentarily accessible specific information in political campaigns (however irrelevant) has disturbing effects on opinions, especially amongst the non-sophisticated (McGraw and Pinney: 26).

In the case of the electoral reform, for instance, a comprehensive and intense learning phase was needed for the Assembly members to understand the implications of different voting systems (Fournier *et al.*, forthcoming: 36). It is non-contentious to argue that the electorate would likewise need a fair amount of time and information to be allowed to cast an educated vote. Therefore, it seems that only a subgroup of the population could afford the costs of acquiring and processing information in order to decide by themselves whether they should vote Yes or No to better serve their interests and preferences (however defined).

In fact, referenda (or direct legislation ballot) typically submit long, technical, and complex questions to the electorate just as that of electoral reform, however simple they may appear (Lupia, 1994: 6, 63, Johnston *et al.*, 1996: 10). Because voters often do not have a great deal of prior information about the alternatives, and given that new information is very expensive to acquire, people might opt-out, and rely more on others' endorsements (the discussion on cues and short-cuts will help clarify this point later). In sum, when the questions asked in referenda are so complex, with abstract and remote consequences on people's individual lives, it

might become unreasonable for citizens to get informed (in that benefits outweigh costs) and it may likewise be unreasonable for government to think the electorate will be interested enough in learning about the details and its implications to care about the electoral outcome.

On the contrary, representative democracy functions efficiently in spite of citizens' low levels of political sophistication. In fact, the demands of the thermostat model of representative democracy elaborated by Soroka and Wleizen (2010) are low; it requires of citizens to know simply whether government has increased or decreased spending in an area and whether it is by too large or too little an amount to conform to their preferences and interests. Equipped with that much information, it might be argued, they are entitled to vote "in the right way" in the next election. Interestingly, Soroka and Wleizen comment that in representative democracy, being perfectly informed is neither necessary nor useful on average (*ibid.*: 19, 161, 170).

Repeated character of elections

The very fact that elections come around at least every 4 years allows the electorate to constantly collect information in order to serve their interests best. As Bélanger and Pétry suggests, being polled about an issue, such as which political party is more entitled to govern this country, increases the likelihood that people recognise and understand the main points of political platforms. In other words, the fact that citizens can expect elections to occur every period of time does not necessarily affect their level of knowledge, but facilitate the usage of cognitive shortcuts that help citizens overcome their lack of politi-

cal knowledge (Bélanger et Pétry: 205).

At the opposite, referendum questions typically pertain to unique issues about which few people care (Johnston *et al.*, 1996: 10). Much like opinion polls, they can even become "a way of manipulating opinion, precisely because they impose questions that might be quite foreign to people's concerns and to which people respond in order to [...] avoid appearing ignorant" (Manin: 173). Referendum questions, Bourdieu worries, deny legitimate agnosticism, in that it forces people to make up their minds about questions whose answer citizens do not feel compelled to find: 'un des effets les plus pernicious de l'enquête d'opinion consiste précisément à mettre les gens en demeure de répondre à des questions qu'ils ne se sont même pas posées' (Bourdieu: 226).

Stakes and Incentives

Fournier *et al.* implicitly assume, throughout *When Citizens Decide* that, when stakes are high, citizens do get informed because they have the proper incentive to do so (Fournier *et al.*, forthcoming: 13). But in general elections as well as in referenda, the size of the electorate is so large as to make it rational for citizens to free ride, that is to let the others bear the cost of deciding (Johnston *et al.*, 1996: 19).

This might prove even truer for referenda than for regular elections because in the latter case, constituencies are smaller, and people have control over who will represent them locally. Furthermore, countless political candidates have, in election campaigns, a strategic interest to coordinate their policy positions and to make voters aware of them (Gidengil *et al.*, 2004: 62, Lupia and McCubbins: 207). Inversely, it was not the case that British Columbi-

often let aside in some referendum campaigns.

ans and Ontarians felt that an electoral reform was of much concern, and thus did not perceive the necessity to mobilise their efforts and energy for acquiring and disseminate information (Fournier *et al.*, forthcoming: 126). This might help to explain why participation drops off for direct ballots relative to candidate ballots (Johnston *et al.*, 1996: 19).

Availability and Accessibility of Information

Some domains of the political world have little bearing on individual lives; some may be too obscure or simply very small (Soroka and Wlezien, 2010: 182). In the case of the Citizen's Assembly propositions, for instance, the average citizen of British Colombia or Ontario was not exposed to substantial public debates about the prevailing electoral system and its alternatives. As a result, "it is hardly surprising that citizens ended up knowing little about them" (Fournier *et al.*, forthcoming: 134). In the case of the three referenda, Fournier *et al.* suggest that the lack of public debate might be attributed to the non-intervention of political parties, and the (subsequent) deficient media coverage of the Citizen's Assembly propositions. In fact, journalistic articles were not numerous, especially during the political campaign of the second referendum in British Colombia, and not very instructive¹⁰ (Fournier *et al.*, forthcoming: 129). At the opposite, Alvarez argues that in regular elections, abundant political information pertaining to substantive aspects and policy positions of the candidates, especially at the end of campaigns, allows learning to occur, and debates to take place (Alvarez: 201).

Cues and Information Shortcuts

All of the above discussion speaks to the argument that regular elections al-

low for the effective use of cues and information shortcuts. The section on incentive, firstly, underlines the fact that political candidates have interest in clarifying their party's political stances. In so doing, they "establish a reliable party brand name that provides a useful cue to voters about candidates' policy positions" (Lupia and McCubbins: 207). Secondly, the fact that elections occur over and over again makes the usage of shortcuts coherent over time, and thus helps citizens overcome their lack of political knowledge.

Indeed it seems that party identification is a widely used and rather efficient voter cue. This may even prove truer inasmuch as regular elections provide media-friendly content. If the media takes up electoral issues, citizens will tend to hear more about them, and cues will tend to clarify (Fournier *et al.*, forthcoming: 134). The more speakers there are on issues (and there are lots in political campaigns, including friends and family), the more endorsements, and the more information shortcuts (Lupia and McCubbins: 206, Lupia, 1994: 63) Even though the availability of cues and shortcuts does not necessarily allow constituencies to vote exactly as if they were perfectly informed, it certainly helps them vote non-arbitrarily (Bartels: 217).

Yet, nonpartisan elections, or referenda, appear to Lupia and McCubbins as being the classic example of an institution that hinders reasoned choice under conditions of individual low-information (225). Referenda on constitutional or electoral reform tend to not to be run by established political parties but by groups that form for the sole purpose of taking a position on the direct legislation measure. (Lupia, 1994: 6).

Hence, one of the most relevant types of cues, namely partisan endorsements, is

Furthermore, citizens may to be able to appeal to relevant past histories, another pertinent and useful cue (Lupia, 1994: 6), for referenda mostly ask unprecedented and specific questions. Finally, the fact that voters are deprived of those two key cues and information shortcuts are further complicated by the fact that in times of referenda, cues and shortcuts are often more *needed* (recall the referenda questions appeal more to specific than general political knowledge).

Conclusion

It may be concluded from the previous hypotheses and observations that Canadians' level of political information matters only marginally in times of federal elections. It indeed matters that political information is not so scarce that citizens systematically vote for the "wrong" party because of a complete lack of information. Yet, the current level of information seems good enough for us to not worry about knowledge deficits.

However, there are reasons to worry about the alleged knowledge gap that have more undesirable outcomes when Canadians are asked to express themselves in referenda. Because of the very nature of referendum questions and institutions, the "low-information rationality" seems here bound to fail. In the recent past referendum history, Canadians have taken decisions they would most probably not have taken had they knew more.

Trusteeship

Is that to say that we should abandon the idea that citizens can vote

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Trusteeship

Is that to say that we should abandon the idea that citizens can vote on direct legislation because they are not informed enough? I do not think so. The idea behind this paper is that when policy issues are complex and that their repercussions upon Canadians’ lives are remote and abstract, they should not necessarily be submitted to the electorate altogether. Indeed, if there are clear reasons to believe that stakes are high for Canadians (and that they will seek to accurately foresee the consequences of their vote), that information will spread, and be taken up by key political actors that will provide efficient cues for electors to pick up, the idea of a referendum may indeed prove ideal. This explains probably well the importance of submitting the question of Québec sovereignty to its population, and not to reserve it for cabinet decision.

In everyday politics, however, substantive representation may translate into the Pitkinian idea of trusteeship, more than that of delegate. In other words, it may prove appropriate for governments to take decisions

with regards to feedback the population gives it, without being bound by it. If the level of political knowledge is to remain relatively low, elections, not referenda, are still the best-suited institution to substantially serve the interests of Canadians, however unflattering this idea might first appear. I hope this paper contributed to show that representative government is not the abandonment of the idea of self-governance, quite far from it. Rather, democratic elitism, in that it reconciles democracy with the existence of elite, (Best and Higley: 2) is perhaps the first theoretical framework to look into to explain what Johnston *et al.* called “Canada’s dreary plebiscite history” (Johnston *et al.*, 1996: 252).

NOTES

¹In his comprehensive inquiry into the definition of political sophistication, Luskin ascertains that political information is a variable, whereas rationality is a *constant*. Therefore, the quality of the latter would not fluctuate amongst individuals. (Luskin: 864)

²This is not to say people cannot be deceived by other's advices. Actually, cues are quite worrisome trade-offs, insofar as acting on others' endorsement decreases the level of knowledge required of citizens, but augments the possibility of deception. (Lupia and McCubbins: 2)

³That is, one they would have taken in conditions of complete knowledge.

⁴Berinsky and Cutler find that this culture leans towards more economically conservative and socially liberal opinions (4).

⁵Berinsky and Cutler are positive about the virtually direct relationship between information and opinion: in their study, they find that "the better informed have a different mean opinion than the less informed, [even] in the face of a welter of obvious confounding socio-demographic and political attributes of citizens [...]. In other words, what we will call the *information gap* applies across the board, irrespective of other politically relevant characteristics. Although it does not follow logically, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the effect is causal" (10).

⁶Indeed, it could be argued that the organisation and dispersion of the votes among the remaining parties can have significant consequences (and it does), but we want to focus here on the most substantial electoral outcomes, that is, the identity of the party that wins the most seats in the legislature, and whether or not it forms a majority government.

⁷For the referendum to pass, it would require a rather high 60 % popular support across the province as well as a simple majority in 60% of the electoral districts (Fournier *et al.*, forthcoming: 29).

⁸Indeed, the Citizen's Assemblies were not *entirely* representative: participants tended to be better educated and older than the electorate at large. One must recall that all deliberative processes (in deciding to vote as well as in participating in the Assembly) involve some degree of inevitable self-selection (Fournier *et al.*, forthcoming: 21).

In any case, the researchers argue, the three reform proposals genuinely reflected the principles to which assembly members subscribed; the very fact that extremely large majorities adopted the final proposals ultimately suggests that a more representative assembly would probably have come to the same recommendations (Fournier *et al.*, forthcoming: 138).

⁹The researchers argue that the information variable did more that shift the vote's direction toward the Yes: its also reduced most group differences in the vote, it made ideas more important relative to feeling, it tightened the connection between substantive arguments, both general and specific, about the Accord and the vote. All in all, "it changed voters' calculus by taking them out of the group and into a larger forum" (Johnston *et al.*, 1996: 284).

¹⁰The case may be different for the national referendum of 1992, because political parties did take part in the discussions. Perhaps the intervention of political cues account for the better media coverage the referenda received, and the lesser gap between that results and the hypothetical "perfect information" electoral outcome.

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