

# **Positioning the Voluntary Sector in Canada: What the Elite and General Public Say**

**Final Report**



**EKOS Research Associates Inc.**



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in Canada:  
What the Elite and General Public Say

Final Report



March 2003

This project was conducted on behalf of the Joint Awareness Table, part of the Voluntary Sector Initiative launched by the Government of Canada in 2001.

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## Highlights

This report aims to develop an understanding of the interrelations between government, business, the voluntary sector and citizens in contemporary Canadian society. This is accomplished through an examination the role and responsibilities of the voluntary sector from the perspective of the elite and the general public. Two surveys were conducted: one with the general public and one with elite from five sectors (public, private, voluntary, media and academic).

### *Voluntary sector is seen a permanent and important fixture in Canada's way of life*

- » Consensus between the elite and general public that the voluntary sector, along with the public and private sectors, is a main contributor to Canada's way of life. Overwhelmingly, the voluntary sector is believed to have a major impact on society and on the life of Canadians.

### *Voluntary sector provides a formidable link between citizens and decision-makers*

- » The voluntary sector is rated as the most trusted sector among the public and the most ethical among elites. It is also seen as being more in touch with and closer to citizens.
- » In terms of their political ideologies and goals for the direction of the country, voluntary sector elites are more similar to the public than any of the other elites surveyed.
- » On various fronts (i.e., social needs, cost and quality, transparency and accountability), the performance of the voluntary sector is rated by the elite as being superior to that of the private and public sectors.
- » Despite the fact that elites appear fragmented on the notion of citizen engagement, in general, both the general public and the elite agree that promoting citizen engagement is an important priority for the voluntary sector over the next 5 years.

### *Voluntary sector should play a more active role in public policies*

- » The voluntary sector is seen as lacking sufficient influence over political decision-making process in Canada. Accordingly, both the elite and the general public are supportive of an increased and a more influential role for the voluntary sector in the determination of policies in Canada.
- » The general public sees an enhanced role for the voluntary sector in the development of public policies as a complement to the state and market rather than a substitute. Building strong communities, providing service delivery and participating in policy development and the determination of societal direction rank as dominant priorities for the voluntary sector.

*Elites see the voluntary sector very favorably, especially with regard to public decision-making*

- » Public opinion surveys conducted over the past few years, have established that the general public sees the work, role and contribution of the voluntary sector as important to Canadian society. This research also shows that, on a series of items, the views from the elite are as or more favorable than those of the general public.
- » Having the voluntary sector participate in decision-making at all political levels and, to a lesser extent, increase its involvement in the future are seen more favorably by the elite.

*Outlook bright for voluntary sector: consensus that it will grow!*

- » Elites place non-performance related factors such as increasing monetary funding and recognition of services, as the most needed improvements to the role played by the voluntary sector in society.
- » Elite from the private and public sectors open to increased contact and collaboration with the voluntary sector in professional activities.
- » The elite and the general public expect the voluntary sector to become larger, more influential, more involved in societal decision-making and interdependent with the private and public sectors.



# Methodology

The elite survey was conducted during the months of September and October 2002. Five main sectors were surveyed in this project: public sector elite, private sector elite, media elite, elite from non-governmental organizations and academic elite. Media elites were not included in the final analysis due to a low number of collected cases. The distribution and definition of the sample population is provided in Table 1.

**Table 1 – Sample Distribution**

Sector	Target Group	Population	Sample Criteria	Data Collection	Number of Questionnaires Distributed	Response Rate
<b>1. Public Elite</b>	Municipal Government	Elected Mayors, Reeves, Regional Municipal Chair	Largest (by community size)	Mail-in questionnaire	1,000	n=133 (13.3%)
	Federal and Provincial DMs, ADMs	All	N/A	Mail-in questionnaire		
	Elected: MPs, MLAs, MPPs, MNAs	All	N/A	Mail-in questionnaire		
<b>2. Private Elite</b>	Private sector firms	CEOs	Largest (by revenue) private and publicly-traded companies in Canada	Mail-in questionnaire	1,000	n=53 (5.3%)
<b>3. NGO Elite</b>	Associations and/or non-profit org's	CEOs	Largest (by operating budget and membership)	Mail-in questionnaire, Internet questionnaire	3,500	n=212 (6.1%)
<b>4. Media Elite</b>	National and Provincial publications, video/wire, and audio	All Editor-in-Chiefs, News Directors, Directors of Information, Bureau Chiefs and Columnists	N/A	Internet questionnaire	930	n=22 (2.4%)
<b>5. Academic Elite</b>	Colleges and Universities	Social science instructors	N/A	Mail-in questionnaire	1,000	n=112 (11.2%)
<b>Total — Response Rate</b>						<b>7.2 per cent</b>

# Awareness and Knowledge

## *Low Level of Awareness Among the General Public – High Level of Familiarity Among the Elite*

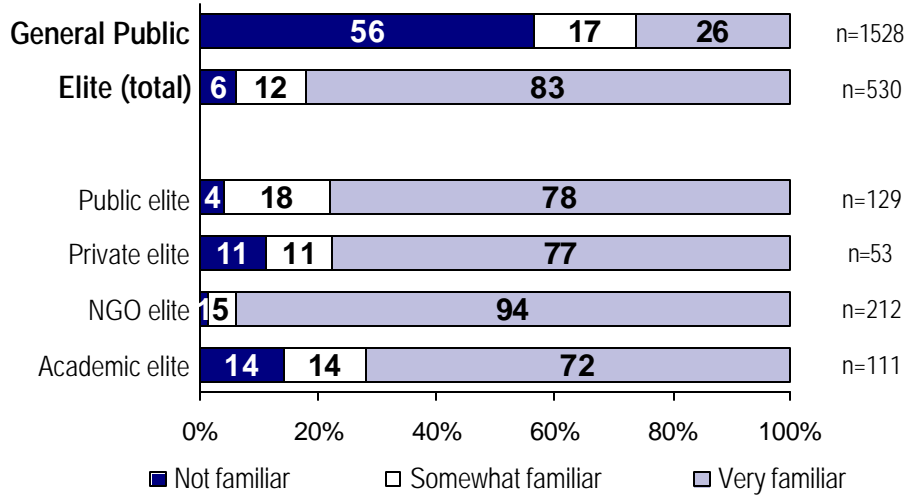
- » With over 80 per cent citing familiarity with the voluntary sector, the elite are far more aware than the public where less than one-third report that they are familiar with the term.
- » While all elite groups report a high level of awareness of the voluntary sector, not surprisingly, elite from non-governmental organizations are most conscious of the term, exceeding other groups level of knowledge by approximately 20 percentage points.
- » Within the general population, Quebeckers and the University educated are the most informed when it comes to this sector (respectively, 36 and 35 per cent are familiar with the term compared to 26 per cent for all Canadians). Age is also correlated with the general public's knowledge of the voluntary sector; as age increases, so does familiarity with the sector.
- » Interestingly, among the elite, gender is a strong predictor of familiarity with the voluntary sector (90 per cent of females were aware of the term compared to 79 per cent of males).

## *Voluntary Sector Overwhelmingly Associated with Health*

- » When asked about the type of organizations thought of when they heard the term "voluntary sector", elites most frequently named those involved in the delivery of health-related services (34 per cent). The United Way/Oxfam, the Cancer/Multiple Sclerosis/Alzheimer Societies and the Red Cross were the organizations most often cited by elites.
- » When it came to the other types of organizations that were mentioned, elites were less familiar with the specific name or title of the associations. In fact, over half (53 per cent) of those listed by elites did not relate to a particular organization (i.e., cultural societies, church groups, food banks, amateur sports, school groups).

## Level of Awareness

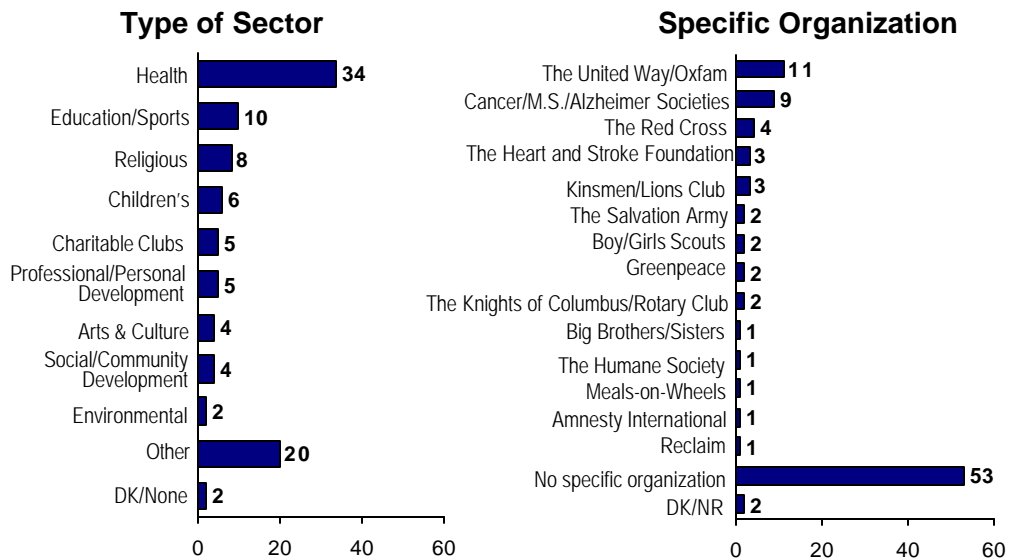
“How familiar are you with the term VOLUNTARY SECTOR?”



*The Voluntary Sector Initiative,  
September-October 2002*

## Top-of-Mind Imagery

“What organizations do you think about when you hear the term voluntary sector?”



n=530

*The Voluntary Sector Initiative, Elite Survey  
September-October 2002*

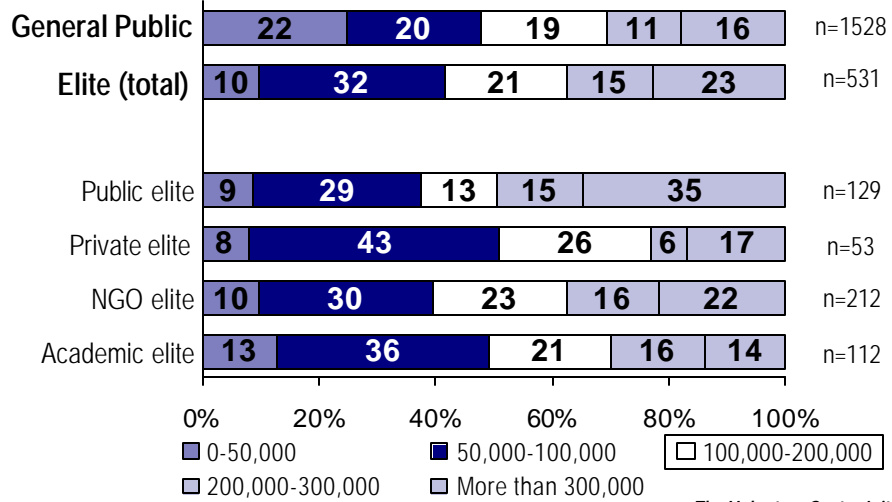
### *On a Test of Literacy, the General Public Underestimate while Elite Overestimate Number of Charities and Non-Profit Organizations*

- » Despite their high level of awareness of the voluntary sector, elites were only slightly more likely (21 per cent) than the general public (19 per cent) to identify between 100,000-200,000 as the category containing the correct number of registered charities and non-profit organizations. Overall, we find that the general public tends to underestimate while the elite overestimate the number of charities and non-profit organizations.
- » Among the general public, it was those from Alberta that were most likely to know the correct number of organizations (25 per cent). Respondents from the Prairies were least knowledgeable on the subject with only 13 per cent choosing between 100,000 and 200,000.
- » While members of the private elite were most accurate in their answers (26 per cent knew the correct category), elites as a group tended to overestimate the number of voluntary organizations. In fact, half of the elite from the public sector and over a third from non-governmental organizations had a highly inflated view of the number of these associations.

# Literacy Test

"How many registered charities and non-profit organizations do you think the country has?"

Correct Answer: 180,000 organizations



The Voluntary Sector Initiative,  
September-October 2002

# Values, Trust and Confidence

## *General Public and Elite Share Some Similar Values*

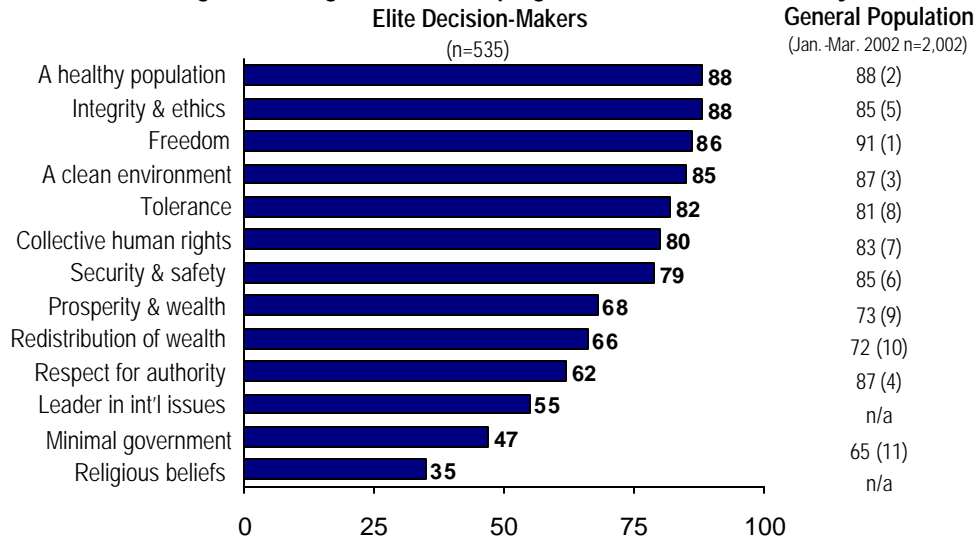
- » In terms of selecting a general direction for the country, the elite share three of the public's four top rated values (healthy population, freedom, and a clean environment). It is worthwhile to note that elites placed integrity and ethics in the top four whereas the public ranked this priority sixth.
- » Interestingly, the views of the elite and general public are more dissimilar in regards to less dominant values such as respect for authority or minimal government and elites tend to be more discriminating in their ranking of the values and goals. For instance, the range between the highest and lowest rated goals for elites is 53 percentage points compared to 26 percentage points for the public.
- » Elites from the public sector and non-governmental organizations were most similar to the general public in terms of the degree of importance placed on each of the values and goals. Academic elites, on the other hand, held the most divergent views and were the group least similar to the public at large.

## *Intra-Elite Value Differences Greater than Public-Elite Gap*

- » The value of "minimal government" produced the most fragmented set of responses among the elite, ranging from a high of 63 per cent among elites from the private sector to a low of 28 per cent from academic elites. Redistribution of wealth and respect for authority also produced a wide range of responses among the different elite groups.
- » With the exception of the goal of being a leader in international issues (where large discrepancies appear between men and women as well as the different age groups), differences between elites can be linked specifically to elite group association and not necessarily to variations in age, gender or province of origin.

## Values & Goals for Direction of Country

"If you were to direct the federal government, how important would you say each of the following values or goals are in shaping the direction of the country?"



The Voluntary Sector Initiative, Elite Survey, September-October 2002  
Rethinking North American Integration, General Public, 2002

## Values & Goals for Direction of Country

"If you were to direct the federal government, how important would you say each of the following values or goals are in shaping the direction of the country?"

	Total (n=535)	Public Elite (n=133)	Private Elite (n=53)	NGO Elite (n=216)	Academic Elite (n=108)	General Population (Jan.-Mar. 2002 n=2,002)
A healthy population	88	87	88	89	86	88 (2)
Integrity & ethics	88	87	85	92	83	85 (6)
Freedom	86	85	90	88	80	91 (1)
A clean environment	85	84	80	86	85	87 (3)
Tolerance	82	82	81	84	78	81 (9)
Collective human rights	80	80	75	83	75	83 (8)
Security & safety	79	81	77	81	70	85 (7)
Prosperity & wealth	68	73	69	65	67	73 (15)
Redistribution of wealth	66	68	53	69	64	72 (16)
Respect for authority	62	67	58	68	44	87 (4)
Leader in int'l issues	55	56	49	61	46	n/a
Minimal government	47	52	63	49	28	65 (17)
Religious beliefs	35	40	26	38	26	n/a

The Voluntary Sector Initiative, Elite Survey, September-October 2002  
Rethinking North American Integration, General Public, 2002

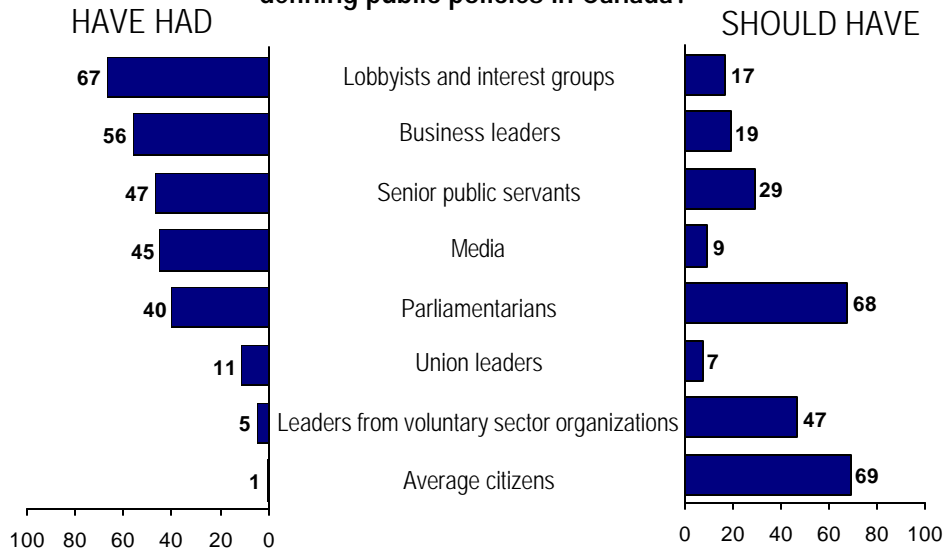
### *Influence Deficit Rooted in Democratic Deficit*

- » According to elites, lobbyists/interest groups have had the most (67 per cent) influence on public policy in Canada whereas average citizens have had the least (1 per cent).
- » When asked about who they thought should be most influential in this area, the majority of elites agreed that more decision-making power should be awarded to the average citizen (69 per cent). Elected representatives and leaders from the voluntary sector were also identified as having insufficient influence over the direction of public policies.
- » With the exception of the academic elite, most elite felt that union leaders should have the least amount of influence over the policy process (in relative “equilibrium” when computing the “have had/should have” influence gap). Alternately, academic elite saw business leaders as having enjoyed the most influence (75 per cent shared this view), yet believed overwhelmingly that this group was least deserving of this power (only 5 per cent thought they should be the most influential).



## Perceived Level of Influence

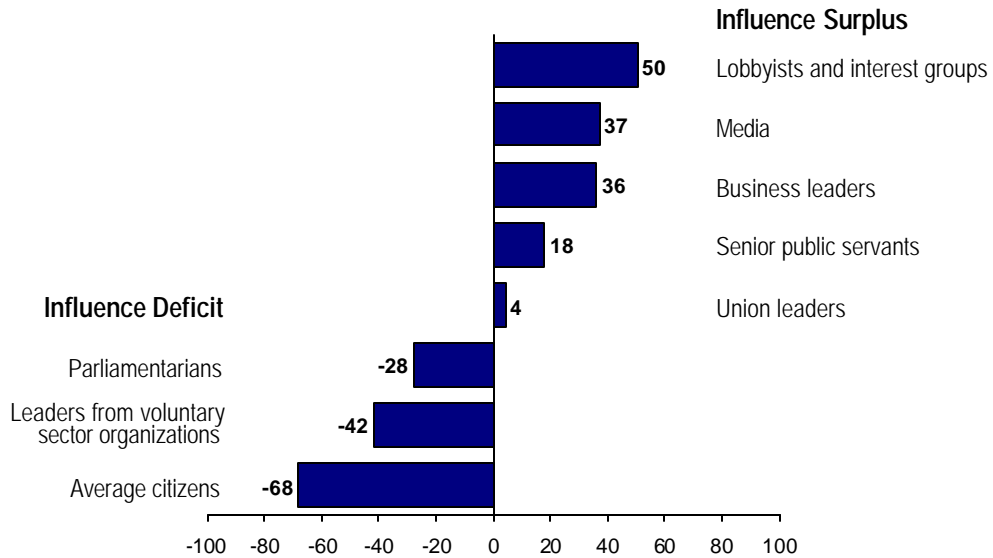
"Which of the following groups have had/should have the most influence in defining public policies in Canada?"



n=555

The Voluntary Sector Initiative, Elite Survey  
September-October 2002

## Influence Gap



n=555

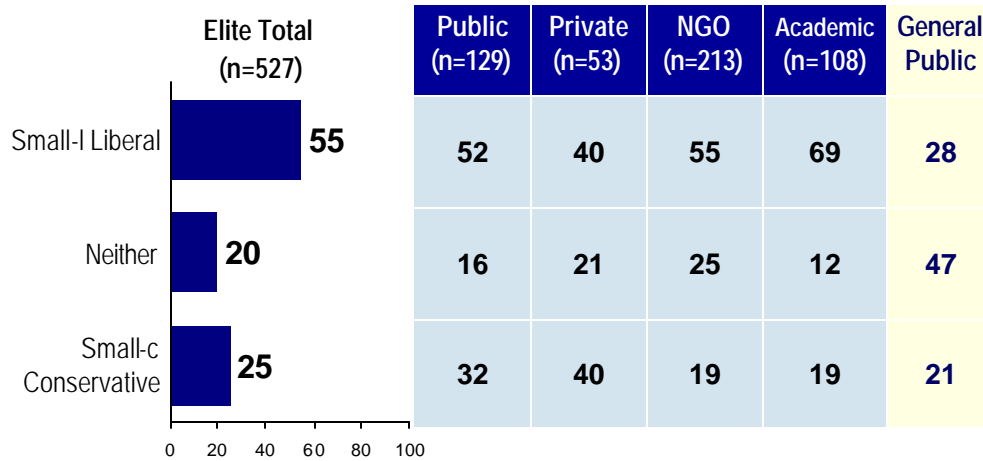
The Voluntary Sector Initiative, Elite Survey  
September-October 2002

### *General Public and Voluntary Sector Elite Closest on Ideology*

- » Although a larger proportion of the general public identify themselves as small “l” liberals over small “c” conservatives (28 compared to 21 per cent), the trend in recent years has increasingly been for more of the public to define themselves as neither liberal nor conservative.
- » Elites, on the other hand, are far more comfortable with these ideological designations; with the exception of elites from the private sector (where equal numbers assign themselves to either category), the majority of elites consider themselves small “l” liberals.
- » Given that one-quarter refused to brand themselves either liberal or conservative, elites from non-governmental organizations are the most politically neutral group and are therefore most similar to the general public. Conversely, with nearly 7 out of 10 (69 per cent) classifying themselves as small “l” liberals, academic elites are once again the group that is most different from the public.

## Ideology

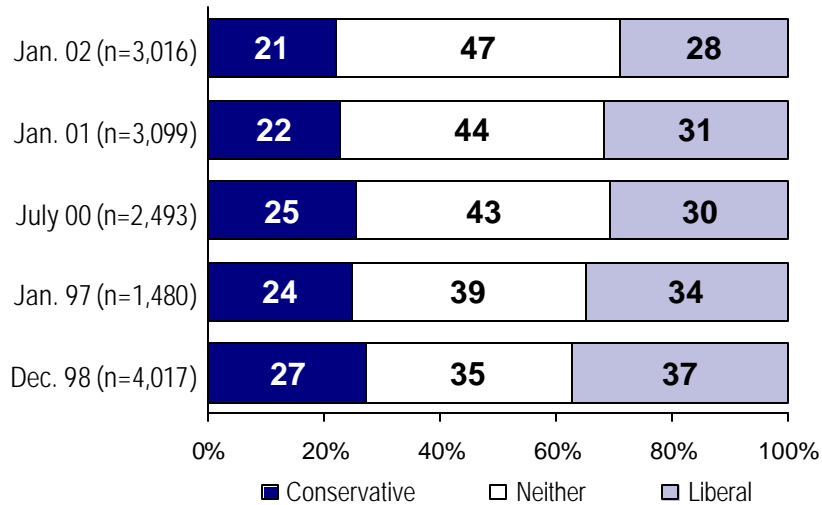
“Thinking about your overall political persuasion, would you say you are more of a small-l Liberal or a small-c Conservative?”



Voluntary Sector Initiative, Elite Survey, 2002  
General Public: Rethinking Government, January 2002 (n=3016)

## Tracking Ideology

“Thinking about your overall political persuasion, would you say you are more of a small-l Liberal or a small-c Conservative?”



General Public, Rethinking Government

### *General Public Favour Human Investments Over Economic Priorities*

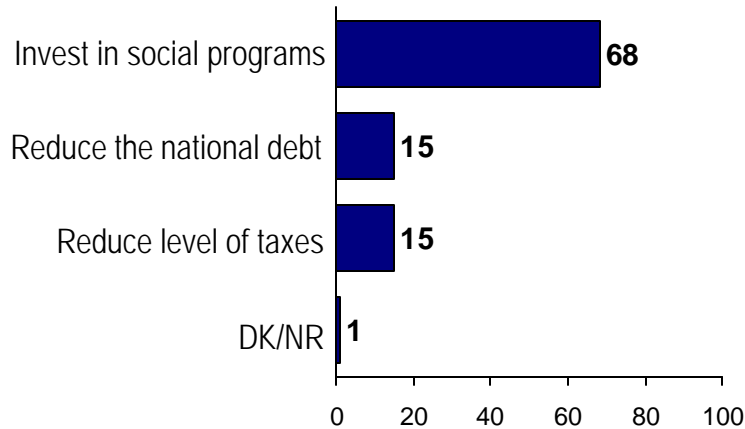
- » When asked about what should be done with a budget surplus, more than two-thirds (68 per cent) of the general public responded that they would invest this money in social programming.
- » While both men and women see investing in social programs as the greatest priority, men are twice as likely as women to be interested in paying down the debt or reducing the level of taxes.

### *General Public More Trusting of NGOs than Private Sector or Government*

- » The general public places more than twice as much trust in non-governmental organizations than they do in either the private sector or the government; while NGOs are rated as trustworthy by 61 per cent of the public, only 30 per cent rate the private sector this way and fewer still (25 per cent) regard the government as deserving of their trust.

## Budget Surplus

“As you may know, the Government of Canada has said that it will have a budget surplus over the next several years. How would you prefer the Government of Canada make use of this budget surplus?”

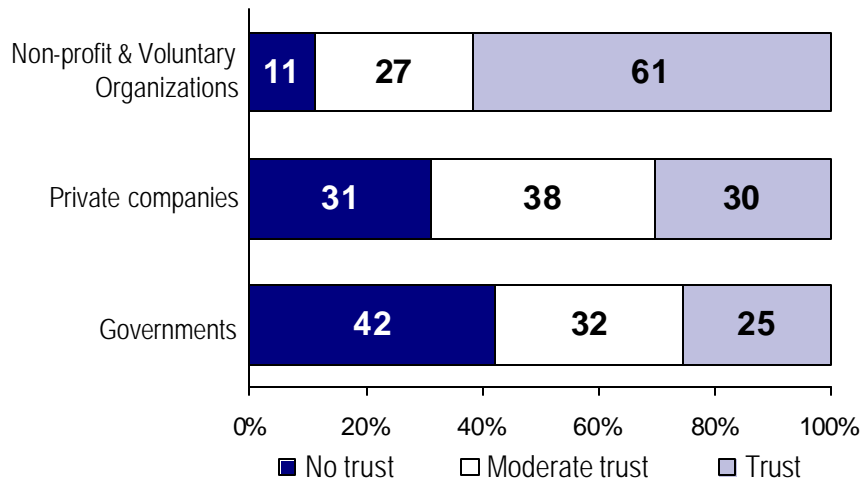


n=1528

The Voluntary Sector Initiative, General Public Survey  
September-October 2002

## Public Trust in the Three Pillars

“How much trust do you have in...?”



n=1528

The Voluntary Sector Initiative, General Public Survey  
September-October 2002

### *Private Sector Seen as Being Most Unethical*

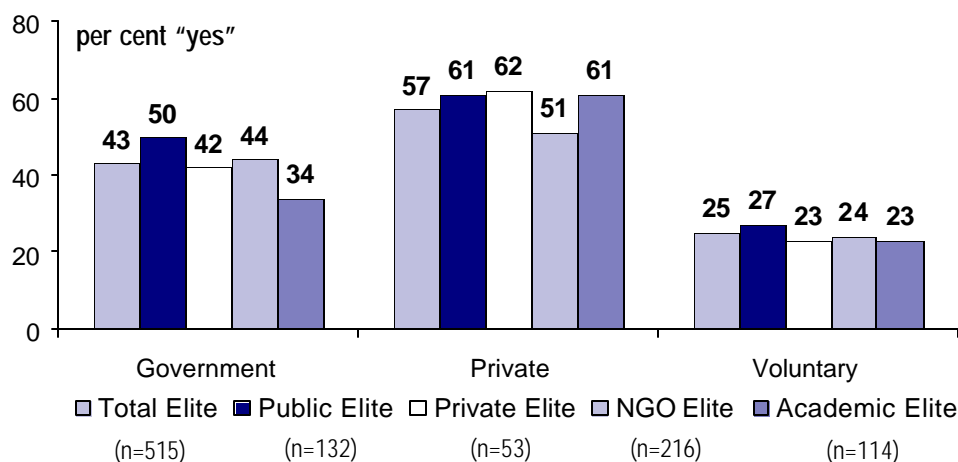
- » When asked whether or not they had encountered any unethical conduct when dealing with the different sectors, elites replied that they were most likely to have experienced such behaviour when interacting with the private sector (57 per cent expressed this view). In comparison, 43 per cent had come across this type of conduct in the government and only 25 per cent in the voluntary sector.
- » Interestingly, elites from the public and private sectors tended to be most self-critical, reporting the highest levels of unethical conduct within their own sectors.

### *Unethical Conduct Rooted in Dishonesty and Lack of Transparency*

- » The overriding concern for each of the sectors is that of lying and dishonesty where 53 per cent of elites had experienced this behaviour with the private sector, 40 per cent with the government and 33 per cent with the voluntary sector.
- » While lying and dishonesty was the dominant issue for all sectors, a lack of transparency was almost as much an issue for the voluntary sector (30 per cent of elites expressed having experienced this type of unethical conduct).

## Unethical Conduct?

"In your dealings with government/private/voluntary organizations over the past two years, have you ever personally encountered any evidence of unethical conduct?"



*The Voluntary Sector Initiative, Elite Survey  
September-October 2002*

## Nature of Unethical Conduct

"If YES, what was the most important unethical conduct you experienced?"

	Government (n=228)	Private (n=296)	Voluntary Sector (n=131)
Unfairness	18	12	13
Lying/Dishonesty	40	53	33
Indifference	12	18	9
Lack of Transparency	22	11	30
Error	5	3	9
Other	2	3	6

*The Voluntary Sector Initiative, Elite Survey  
September-October 2002*

## Role, Capacity & Effectiveness

### *Voluntary Organizations Seen as being Closer to Citizens*

- » The majority of both the general public and elites agree that the voluntary sector understands the needs of average citizens better than the government. Not surprisingly, elites from non-governmental organizations are, by a large margin, the group most likely to support this view.

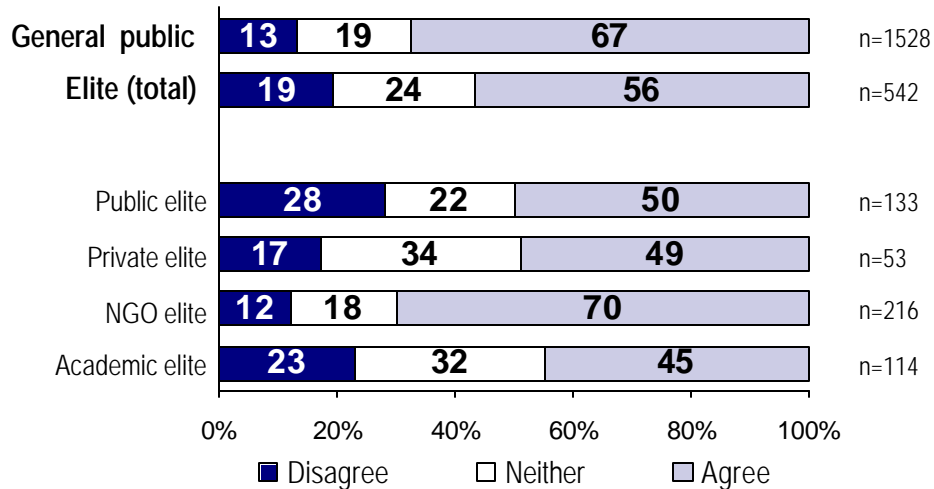
### *Voluntary Sector Seen As a Partner, Not a Substitute to Government*

- » Though both the public and elites agree that the work done by the voluntary sector should not abdicate the government of its responsibility to provide services to citizens, elites are somewhat more likely to take this view (84 per cent compared to 71 per cent of the public).
- » Elites from non-governmental organizations were particularly likely to have this opinion (89 per cent agreed), indicating that they do not support having their efforts replace the work done by the government.



## Closer to Citizens?

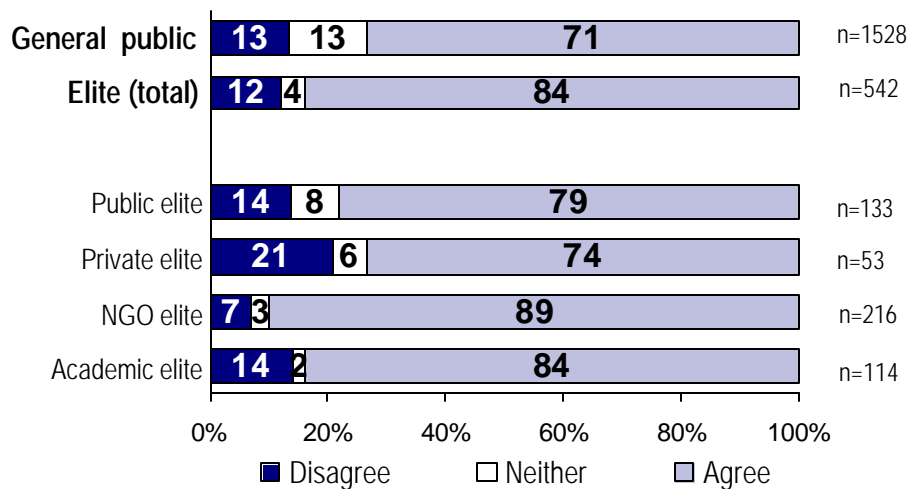
“Voluntary organizations understand the needs of average citizens better than government.”



*The Voluntary Sector Initiative,  
September-October 2002*

## Substitute for the Government?

“The work that voluntary organizations do should not be a substitute for government’s responsibility to provide services to the public.”



*The Voluntary Sector Initiative,  
September-October 2002*

### *Voluntary Organizations Seen As Having a Vital Role in Society*

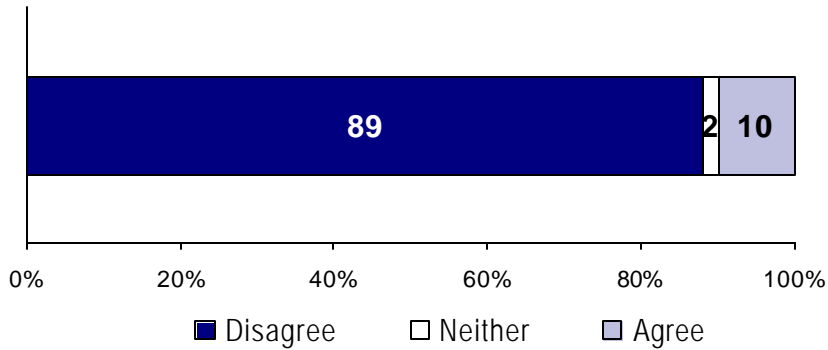
- » With only 1 out of every 10 elites expressing the view that the disappearance of the voluntary would have a minimal impact on society, the overwhelming recognition of the importance of this sector is undeniable.
- » For obvious reasons, elites from non-governmental organizations were least likely to view the disappearance of the voluntary sector as having a negligible effect (92 per cent expressed this view).

### *Elite and General Public Divided on Issue of Citizen Engagement*

- » While half of the general public believes that citizens themselves could better solve national problems, only 40 per cent of elites take this position.
- » There are some surprising intra-elite differences on this issue: whereas elites from the public and academic sectors were the most cynical (only a little over one-third felt that citizen engagement was the solution to national problems), private sector elites were the most positive (55 per cent support grassroots decision-making).

## Perceived Importance

"If the voluntary sector were to disappear, it wouldn't have much of an impact on society as a whole."

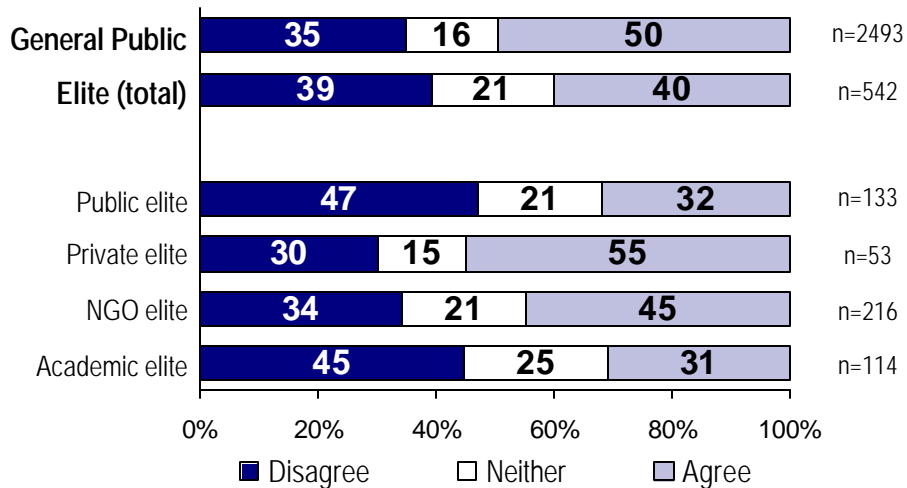


n=542

The Voluntary Sector Initiative, Elite Survey  
September-October 2002

## Demand for Citizen Engagement

"We would probably solve most of our big national problems if decisions could be brought to people at the grassroots."



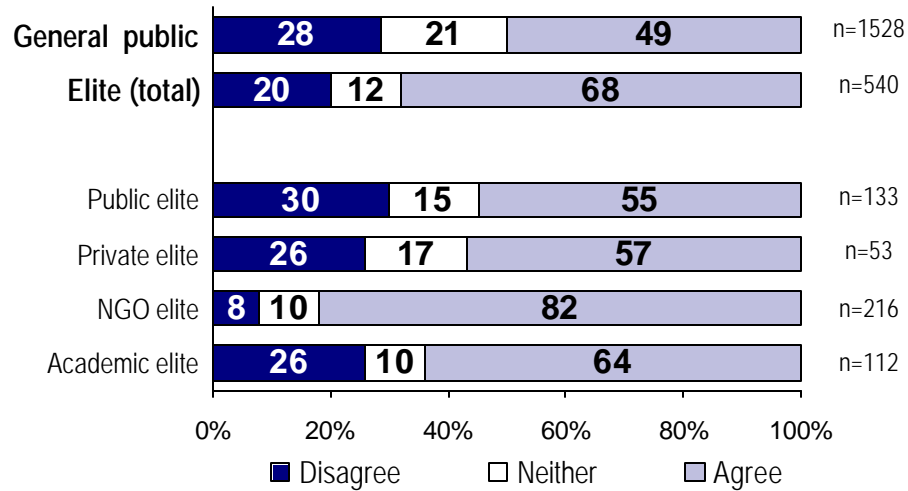
The Voluntary Sector Initiative, September-October 2002  
General Public, Rethinking Citizen Engagement, July 2000

### *Voluntary Organizations Seen as a Player in Political Decision-Making*

- » The general public is far less convinced than elites that the voluntary sector has a role to play in making political decisions (49 per cent feel this way compared to 69 per cent of elites).
- » Among the general public, those with university educations and yearly incomes of \$80,000 or greater were the least supportive of the voluntary sector participating in political decision-making.
- » Once again, non-governmental elites were significantly more inclined to view the role of the voluntary sector as integral to the decision-making process (82 per cent had this view compared to 55 per cent of public elite, 57 per cent of private elite and 64 per cent of academic elite).

## Involvement in Political Decision-Making

"The voluntary sector should be participating fully in decision-making at all political levels."



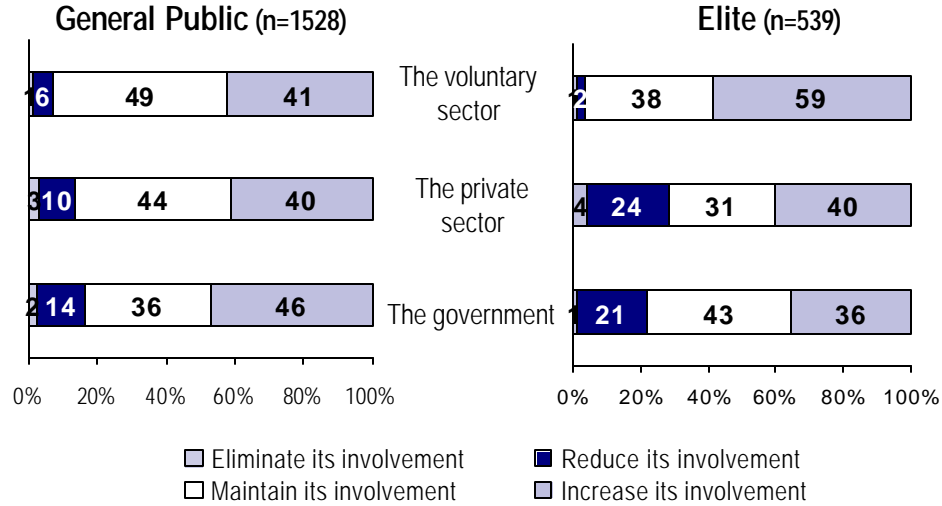
*The Voluntary Sector Initiative,  
September-October 2002*

### *Public Supportive of Increased Role for Government – Elite See Larger Part for the Voluntary Sector*

- » When asked about what they would like to see the different sectors do in the area of public policies, 46 per cent of the general public (the highest score when compared to private and voluntary sectors) felt that the government should increase its involvement (16 per cent said “reduce/eliminate” involvement). The elite, on the other hand, are least likely to see an increased role for this sector, with only 36 per cent wanting the government to become more involved.
- » Elites, particularly those from non-governmental organizations, are far more supportive of a larger role for the voluntary sector (59 per cent would like to see the voluntary sector increase its involvement). While there is some support among the general public for an increased role, a larger proportion would prefer the voluntary sector to maintain its current level of involvement (49 compared to 41 per cent take this view).
- » In terms of the private sector, the views of the public and elites are fairly consistent with both agreeing that this is the sector they would least like to see increase its involvement (only 40 per cent want role to increase). Academic elites are particularly negative towards this sector with only 20 per cent wishing to see it increase its role.

## Activism & Division of Labor (I)

"In the area of public programs and policies, what would you like to see the government, private and voluntary sectors do in the future?"



The Voluntary Sector Initiative,  
September-October 2002

## Activism & Division of Labor (II)

"In the area of public programs and policies, what would you like to see the government, private and voluntary sectors do in the future?"

per cent "increase involvement"

	Total (n=539)	Public (n=133)	Private (n=53)	NGO (n=216)	Academic (n=113)
The Voluntary Sector	59	56	53	65	55
The Private Sector	40	46	49	43	20
The Government	36	26	25	41	43

The Voluntary Sector Initiative,  
September-October 2002

### *Building Strong Communities and Delivering Services Seen As Dominant Priorities*

- » When elites were asked to rank a list of eight potential priorities for the voluntary sector as high, moderate or low, all but one was seen as a high priority, indicating that there are great expectations regarding what the voluntary sector can accomplish.
- » The uppermost priorities rated by elites involved building stronger communities (88 per cent said this was a high priority) and delivering services (rated as a high priority by 80 per cent of respondents). Advancing religious faith and practice was seen as the least important priority (only 11 per cent thought it should be a main concern).

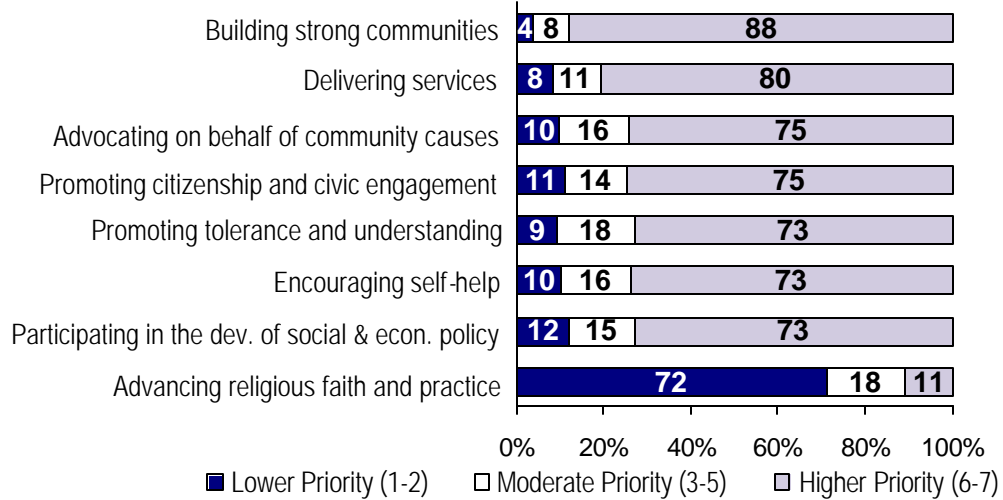
### *Participation in Policy Development Seen As Important, But Lower in the Hierarchy of Priorities*

- » While participating in the development of social and economic policies is seen as important among elites as a group, it ranks lower. Not surprisingly, elite from non-governmental organizations placed this priority higher, immediately after service delivery.



## Priorities for the next 5 years

“Thinking not just of today but over the next five years, what priority should the voluntary sector place on each of the following areas?”



n=532

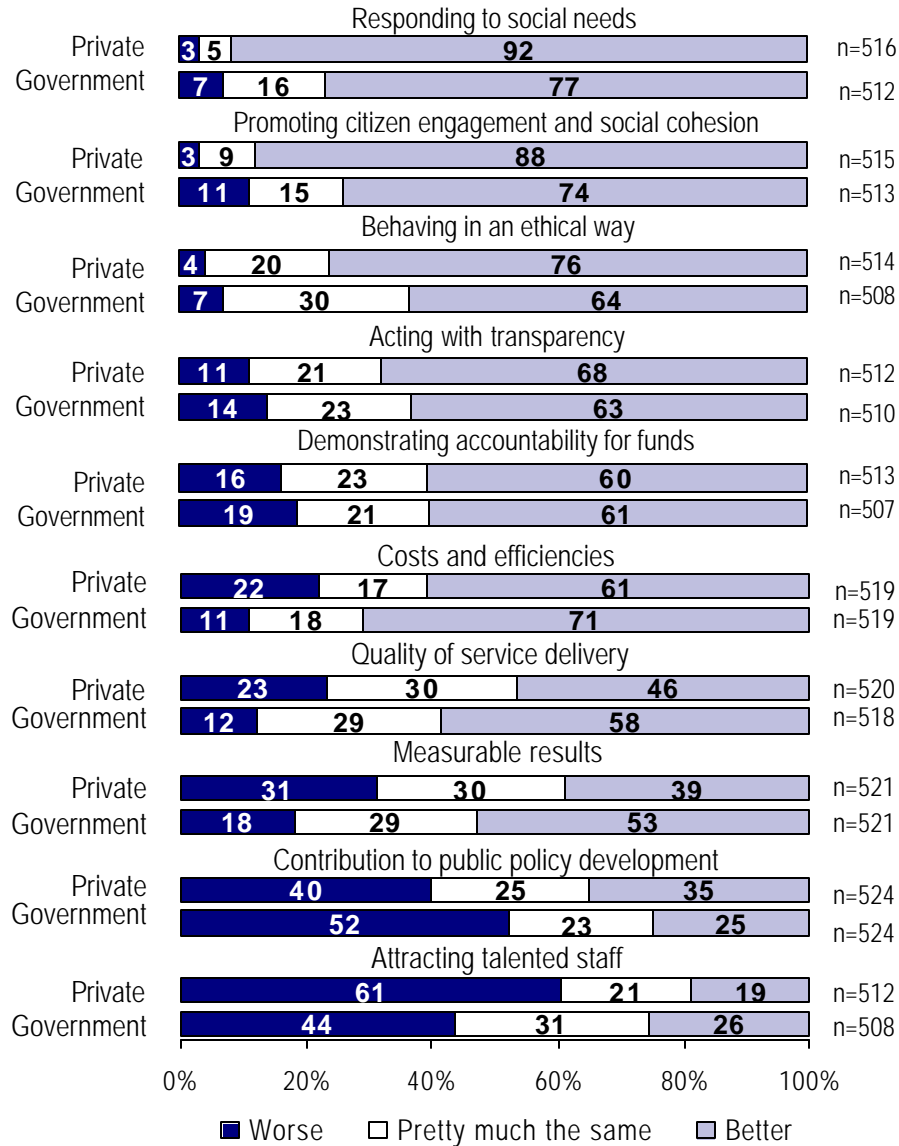
*The Voluntary Sector Initiative, Elite Survey  
September-October 2002*

## *Voluntary Sector Seen As Performing Better than Government and the Private Sector on Various Fronts*

- » In order to get a better understanding of how elites views of voluntary sector, respondents were asked to rate the performance of this sector against that of the government and private sector. In almost all of the tested areas (8 out of 10), the voluntary sector was rated higher than the private or public sectors. The competitive advantage that the voluntary sector holds over the public and private sector focuses on responding to social needs, promoting citizen engagement, confidence and trust, transparency and accountability, cost and quality and, to a lesser extent, measured results.
  
- » The private sector and the government were seen as superior to the voluntary sector on two fronts: attracting talented staff and contributing to the development of public policy. While the private sector was seen as three times more likely than the voluntary sector to attract talented persons to their organization, the government was believed to be twice as influential in developing public policy.

# Performance Rating

“Overall, in each of the following areas, how would you rate the current performance of the voluntary sector in comparison to the private and public sectors?”



The Voluntary Sector Initiative, Elite Survey  
September-October 2002

### *Areas for Improvement Focus on Three Key Elements*

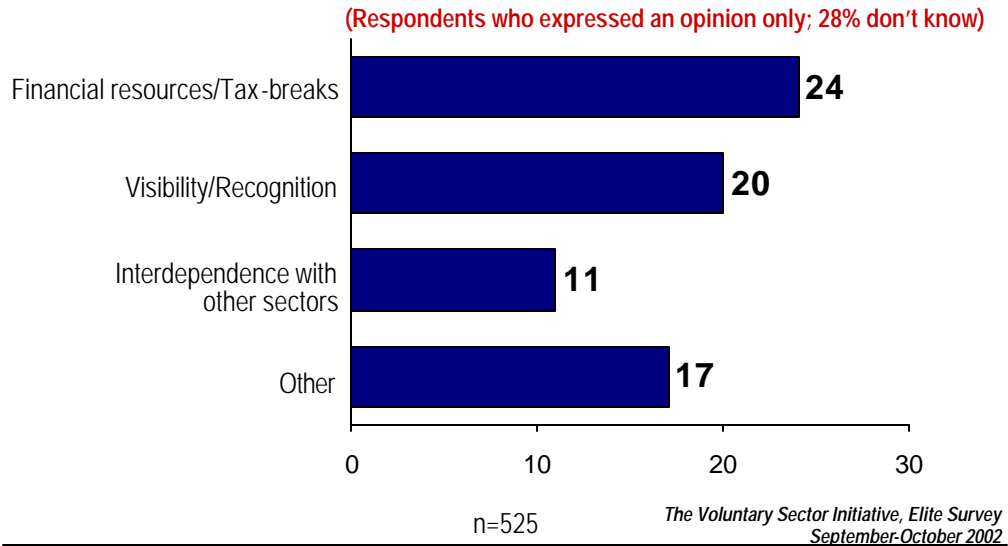
- » When asked about how the voluntary sector could improve its role in society, a significant proportion of elites (24 per cent) felt that this sector was under funded and would benefit most from increased access to financial resources and/or tax breaks.
- » Increasing their visibility and/or awareness of their services was seen as almost as important (20 per cent felt this was the best action for improvement). Interestingly, elites from the non-governmental organizations thought that this was the voluntary sector's dominant problem to overcome.
- » Although mentioned by a much smaller proportion of participants (11 per cent), increased interdependence with other sectors was also seen as an action that could improve the role of the voluntary sector.
- » There were a significant number of elites that were unsure of what action could best improve the role of the voluntary sector (28 per cent had no suggestions). Given their heightened familiarity with the sector, it is not surprising that a smaller proportion of non-governmental elites did not offer a response (only 13 per cent failed to propose a solution) compared to half of public sector elites, one-third of academic elites and one-quarter of elites from the private sector.

### *Voluntary Sector Seen As One of the Three Pillars of Society*

- » There exists an almost unanimous sense among the elite that the voluntary sector is one of the three pillars in society alongside the private and public sectors. Elites from non-governmental organizations, not unpredictably, are the most likely to hold this view (91 per cent compared to 86 per cent of public elite, 85 per cent of private elite and 74 per cent of academic elite).

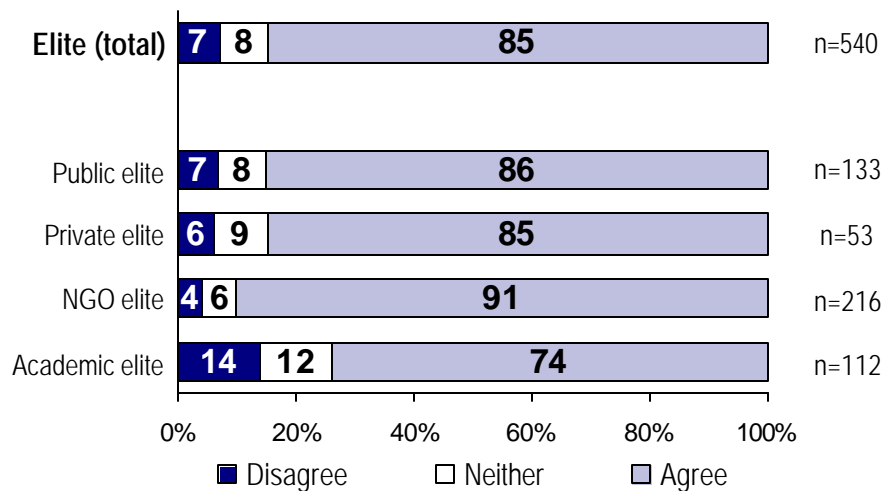
## Actions for Improvement

“What action would best improve the role of the voluntary sector plays in Canadian society?”



## One of the Three Pillars?

“The voluntary sector is one of the three pillars of society alongside the private and public sectors.”



## Past Experience & Receptivity to Partnership

### *Voluntary Sector Seen As Providing a Better Contribution than Other Sectors*

- » When asked to assess the contribution of different sectors to their most recent meetings, 37 per cent of elites from the private and public sector rated the input from the voluntary sector as valuable. In comparison, elites from the voluntary sector were slightly less positive in their evaluations: 31 per cent found their meetings with the public sector to be valuable and 34 per cent rated the meeting with the private sector as valuable.
- » Even though they rated the contributions less favourably, voluntary sector elites were most likely to want to increase their contact with the other two sectors.

## Past Experience and Performance

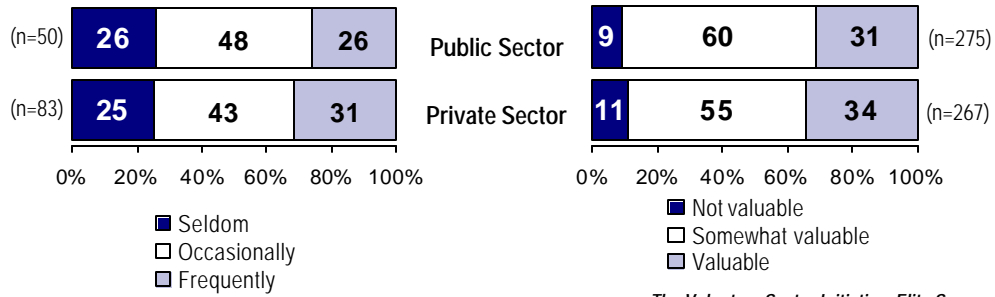
"In your professional activities, how often have you taken part in a meeting involving officials from...over the last year?"

"Thinking about your most recent meeting, how valuable was the contribution or perspective brought by officials from the...?"

### Excluding Elite from the Voluntary Sector



### Elite from the Voluntary Sector Only



The Voluntary Sector Initiative, Elite Survey  
September-October 2002

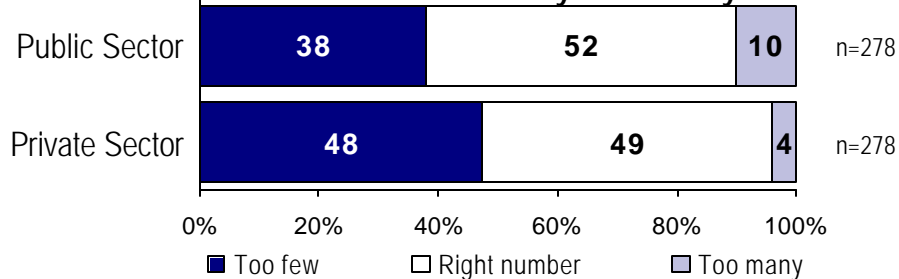
## More Contacts with the Private and Public Sector?

"Would you say you have too many contacts, too few contacts or just about the right number of contacts with the...in your professional activities?"

### Excluding Elite from the Voluntary Sector



### Elite from the Voluntary Sector Only



The Voluntary Sector Initiative, Elite Survey  
September-October 2002

## Vision for the Future

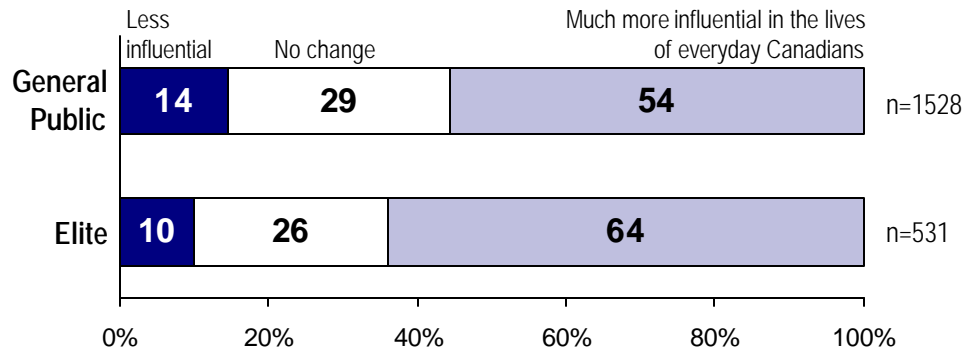
### *Broad Sense that the Voluntary Sector will Grow, Be More Influential and Involved in Societal Decision-Making*

- » When asked to think about the future, elites and the general public both believe that the voluntary sector holds a great deal of promise. For example, a little over half of the public (54 per cent) and almost two-thirds of elites (64 per cent) are convinced that, in the future, the voluntary sector will become much more influential in the everyday lives of Canadians.
- » Overall, elites were most likely to think that the voluntary sector would become larger in the future (73 per cent asserted this view). Nearly two-thirds also felt that the voluntary sector would become more involved in societal decision-making. A little under half felt that the voluntary sector would become more dependent and mixed with the private and public sector.
- » Interestingly, academic elites (more than any other group) tended to be less optimistic, often suggesting that the future held little in the way of change for the voluntary sector.



## Vision for the Future (a)

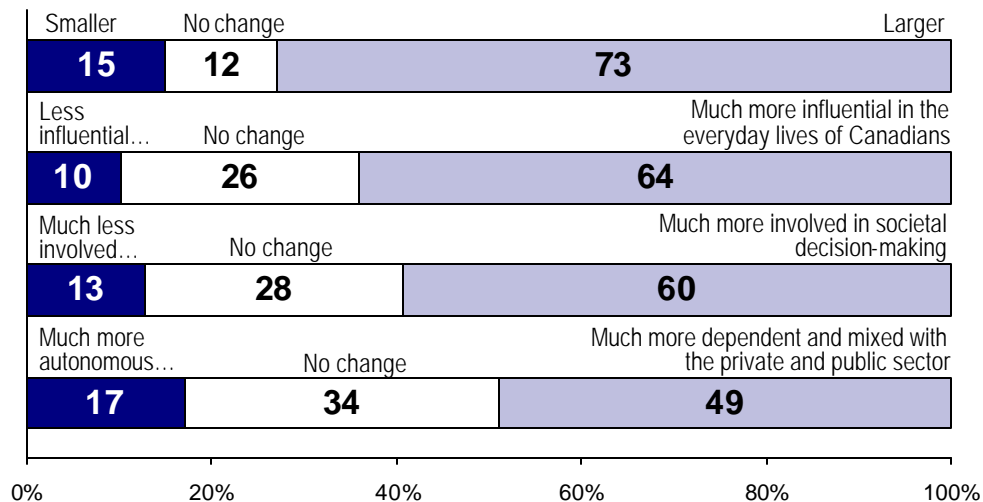
“How do you think the voluntary sector in Canada will differ 10 years from now in the following areas?”



*The Voluntary Sector Initiative,  
September-October 2002*

## Vision for the Future (b)

“How do you think the voluntary sector in Canada will differ 10 years from now in the following areas?”



n=531

*The Voluntary Sector Initiative, Elite Survey  
September-October 2002*



# Conclusions

1. Overall this research suggests that there is a broad consensus among the general public and elite that the voluntary sector will be larger and more influential in the lives of Canadians in the future. There are at least three drivers that strengthen this finding:
  - » Firstly, in terms of trust and ethics, the general public and elite view the voluntary sector very favorably. The voluntary sector is also seen as closer and more responsive to citizens than government.
  - » Secondly, the level of trust in public and private sectors institutions is low and has declined over the past two decades. Conversely, the level of confidence in the voluntary sector is high and perhaps growing, with the voluntary sector enjoying as much as twice the level of trust as the private sector or the government.
  - » Thirdly, the public endorses an enhanced role for the voluntary sector in the development of public policies. However, they also support a strong role for government (i.e. a strong majority of the public thinks that the work of voluntary organizations should not be a substitute for government's responsibility to provide services to the public). Interestingly, the elite are significantly more likely than the general public to support an enhanced role for the voluntary sector in the area of public policies.
2. Other important similarities and differences between the general public focuses on values and ideology. It is interesting to note that, not only do the general public and elite share some similar values, the intra-elite value differences are greater than the public-elite gap. Further, in terms of selecting a general direction for the country, the elite share three of the public's four rated values (healthy population, freedom, and a clean environment). The views of the elite and general public are more dissimilar in regards to less dominant values such as respect for authority or minimal government.
3. With respect to ideology, some important similarities and differences emerge. Overall, we find voluntary sector elite to be closest to the general public on ideological matters, more so than elite from other sectors (both private and public). However, it is also important to point out that our data suggests that the general public is less likely to identify along ideological lines (small l Liberal, small c Conservative) and a growing plurality of Canadians are defining themselves as neither (small l Liberal, small c Conservative).
4. Two challenges/obstacles are worth mentioning with respect to a more influential and involved voluntary sector. First, the high public trust of the sector translates into high public expectations; responding to public expectations will be challenging given the limited staff/financial resources of the voluntary sector. Second, developing a unified and unique voice from the sector will be challenging in light of the heterogeneous nature of the sector (i.e., values and mandates of the sector are complex, broad and distinct).
5. The pending question is how to negotiate a path to a bigger, more influential, politically active and coordinated voluntary sector. Raising recognition and understanding; clarifying roles and direction in transition; securing resources and building capacity; and responding to various organizational issues that emerge are among the key ingredients that will need to be addressed in repositioning the sector as a main contributor to Canada's way of life and as a vital factor in the economic and social well-being of Canadians.



# Appendix