

Canadians particularly trustful of their democracy, poll finds

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Canada is an "island of stability" amidst a Western world roiled by political discontent and populism, the country's trust in democratic institutions steady in the face of upheavals such as Brexit and the election of Donald Trump, according to new polling from the Environics Institute.

The Canadian portion of the latest AmericasBarometer study, carried out every two or three years to gauge attitudes toward democracy and governance in the region, found that Canadians' trust in things such as the judicial system and the national economy has fluctuated little since 2010, even as other Western countries have seen that confidence waver.

Not all Canadians are satisfied with the state of the country, notes Keith Neuman, executive director of Environics, but their level of satisfaction hasn't changed much during a turbulent time in the world.

"In some areas, they're pretty satisfied, in other areas, it's pretty mixed or not great," he said. "But I would say the most important thing is that over the past couple years, there's not much erosion."

The online survey, carried out in late March and early April among slightly more than 1,500 Canadian adults, even indicates a rise in positive attitudes toward the conduct of elections and the role of the prime minister since 2014, when Stephen Harper was in power, along with a decline in political polarization.

Otherwise, the study largely points to "business as usual," Mr. Neuman said – a result that is perhaps as surprising as its opposite would have been, as voters in the United States and Western Europe cast their ballots for anything but business as usual in election after election.

"There is no clear evidence of growth in anti-government or populist sentiment among Canadians over the past

three years," Mr. Neuman writes in the report. "As before, Canadians are generally positive about their system of government and democracy."

Notably, the poll shows growing support for Canada and the Canadian political system among young people. A higher proportion of under-30s expressed strong pride in being Canadian than in 2014 (66 per cent to 55 per cent) and a bigger chunk of that cohort said that people who govern the country care what people like them think (35 per cent to 16 per cent). The young are also likelier to think their rights are protected than they were three years ago.

Economic confidence has also been on the rise, slowly but steadily, since 2010, when 32 per cent of Canadians thought the country's economy was good, a figure that has risen to 44 per cent. Oddly, even more people are content with their own financial situation – 52 per cent, up from 38 per cent in 2010.

The numbers give a portrait of a country uncommonly insulated from much of the seething anti-government resentment that has fuelled populism on the left and right in countries across the developed world in recent years. Coupled with low rates of racial antipathy and strong economic mobility, the study shows the broad Canadian centre holding.

"There's not much us against them" in Canada, Mr. Neuman notes.

The Environics study also contains a few potential storm clouds for those who fear a resurgent Canadian populism. Trust in many key institutions remains feeble, with just 10 per cent of Canadians placing "a lot" of trust in political parties, 19 per cent in Parliament, and 16 per cent in the mass media.

There has also been a drop in the proportion of young adults who believe democracy is preferable to any other form of government: down 16 points from five years ago to 52 per cent, similar to the decline experienced by Canadians in their thirties and early forties.

Michael Adams, president of Environics and author of the forthcoming *Could It Happen Here? Canada in the Age of Trump and Brexit*, said that while Canada is remarkably stable right now, the possibility of a wild-card event such as the rise of a charismatic radical leader or a major terrorist attack should make us cautious about complacency.

"It doesn't happen until it happens," Mr. Adams said. "So anyone like me who comes up with this rosy analysis of where we are relatively in the world would be wise to say we aren't as smart about the future as we are about the past."