Question: Academics and pundits alike refer to a “democratic deficit” in Canada. Is this an analytically useful term? To what extent does Canada suffer from a democratic deficit?

Discussions around the democratic deficit are often attached to a number of sub-themes. It links concerns about the decline in deference (Nevitte) with the erosion of our political institutions (Savoie) to diagnose a larger issue regarding an increasing lack of attachment by Canadians to our traditional political institutions. The term is routinely applied to any perceived flaw in modern political-governance regimes, but there are significant definitional problems that must first be resolved prior to tackling this question.

Is this an analytically useful term?

What do we mean by democratic? – Savoie posits that we are becoming less democractic due to centralization of power. – Can handle this part

Rise of Court Govt - This court government is characterized by four key components: (1) court government provides quick and unencumbered access to the levels of power that make things happen in policy, and administrative oversight for the PM; (2) court government suits the PM and his/her courtiers because it enables them to get things done quickly, see results, and manage the news media; (3) within the court party, not all ministers are created equal; and related to this (4) power is centralized in the hands of the Prime Minister, a few key cabinet ministers and advisors, as well as a few key Deputy Ministers (few of which have the institutional memory to ensure things go smoothly).

These are Savoie’s main arguments. However, there are some serious limitations to these arguments, from both a methods and an empirical perspective. On the centralization of power argument, three counter-arguments can (and will) be made: (1) prime ministers in the past were also quite powerful; (2) prime ministers are not *that* powerful; and (3) we cannot really know *how powerful* the prime minister actually is.

Westminster system is inherently centralized. – same difficulties in measurement, are we *more* centralized? This is unclear.

What do we mean by deficit? -

Graham White tackles some of these definitional problems in a paper attempting to diagnose the ‘centre’ of the democratic deficit. He notes that though the term is evocative, it may be more accurate to describe what ails the Canadian polity as more of a “democratic debt.” In economic terms, this may be a more accurate characterization

Neil Nevitte utilizes an understanding of the decline of deference – lack of identification with institutions (both governmental *and* non-governmental) – causes questions with respect to – what is holding this country together?

Use this definition to assess the validity of the question.