

Social Cohesion: Insights from Canadian Research



Presentation by
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Outline of presentation

- Debates about definitions of social cohesion
- Overview of Canadian research on social cohesion
- Key findings about social cohesion
- Public policy implications
- Possible model for social cohesion

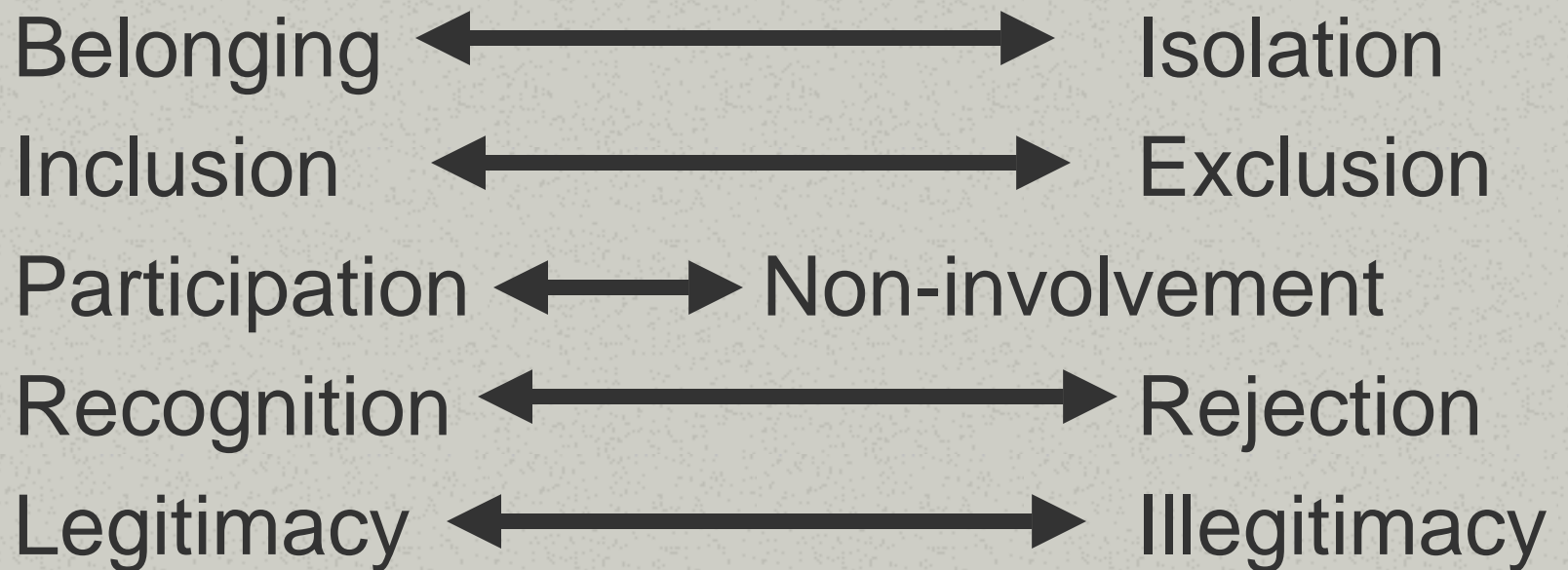


Definitional debates

- Social cohesion is:
 - often defined as a political, economic or social threat
 - treated both as:
 - an independent variable
 - a dependent variable



Jenson's five dimensions of social cohesion





Bernard's formal and substantive dimensions of social cohesion

Formal

Equality/Inequality

Recognition/Rejection

Legitimacy/Illegitimacy

Substantive

Inclusion/Exclusion

Belonging/Isolation

Participation/Non-
involvement



Social Cohesion Network's definition

- **“Social cohesion is based on the willingness of individuals to cooperate and work together at all levels of society to achieve collective goals.”**
- Focus is on outcomes and behaviours (dependent variables)
- No focus on inputs or enabling conditions (independent variables)



Canadian research framework

- Social Cohesion Research Network established in 1997 – over 20 departments and agencies are involved
- Work undertaken to:
 - develop a conceptual framework
 - develop indicators
 - do research under three themes
 - consult widely on priorities for future research



Faultlines

- Research addressed three issues:
 - intersection of ethnic, gender and age-related faultlines with economic disadvantage
 - linkages between economic exclusion and political, social and cultural exclusion
 - means of bridging faultlines



Changing axes of community identification

- Research addressed three issues:
 - Citizenship as an element of social cohesion (included national identity, belonging, system of rights and political and civic participation)
 - How values have changed in the 1990s
 - Implications of changing levels of trust (for governments and for citizens)



Implications of changes in social cohesion

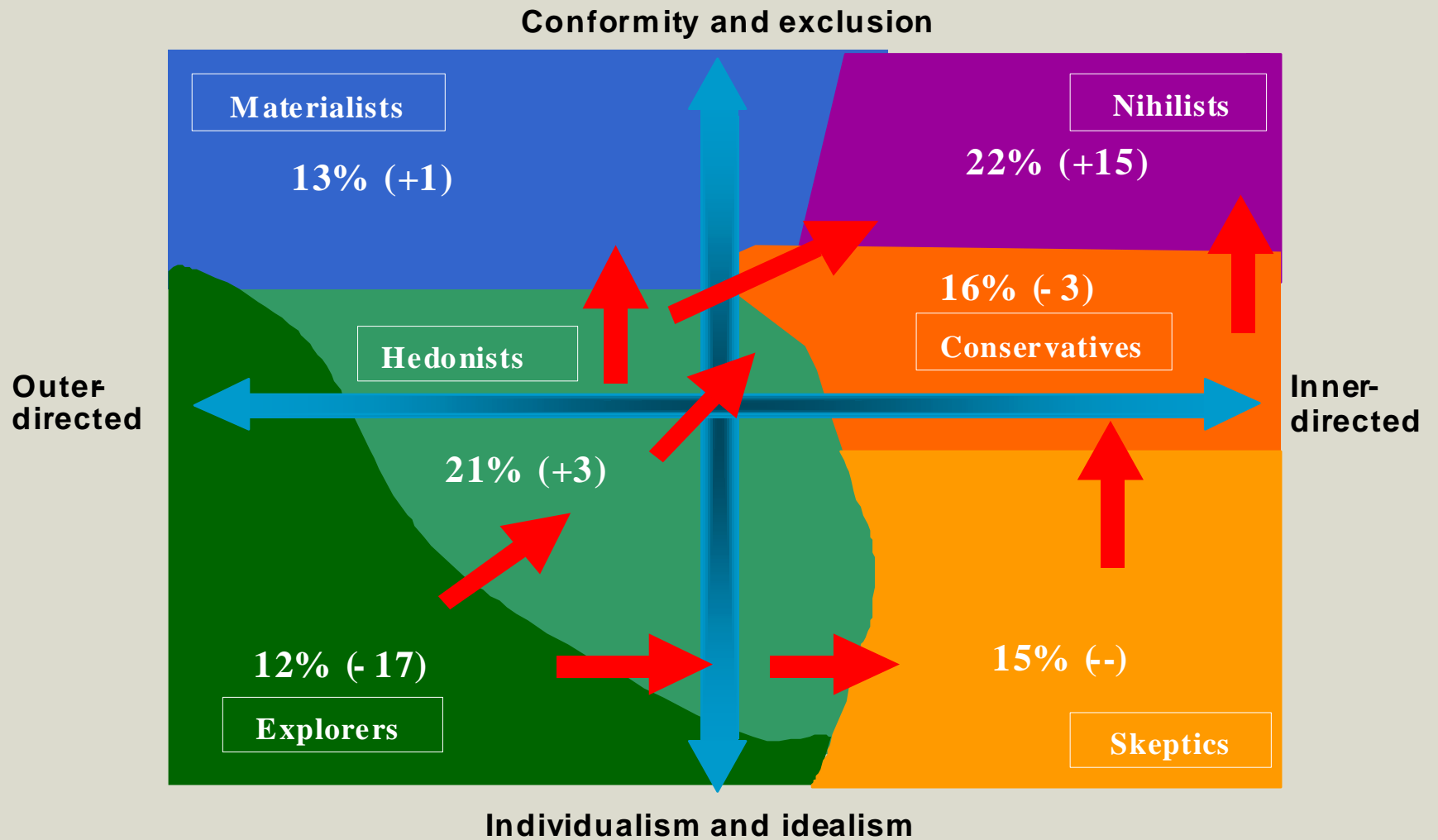
- Research focused on four issues:
 - Economic implications
 - Health and well-being implications
 - Security implications
 - Institutional and governance implications



Key findings on social cohesion

- **There are faultlines and growing cleavages in Canadian society.**
- **These cleavages are contributing to a weakening of the axes of community identification in Canada -- the basis of social cohesion and social citizenship.**
- **Consequences of weakened axes of community identification are:**
 - **poor social and economic outcomes**
 - **growing political disenchantment**

FIGURE 1- SEGMENTATION EVOLUTION CANADA, 1996-2002



Source: CROP Inc., "Citizenship, Governance and Social Change", July 3, 2003



Public policy implications of social cohesion

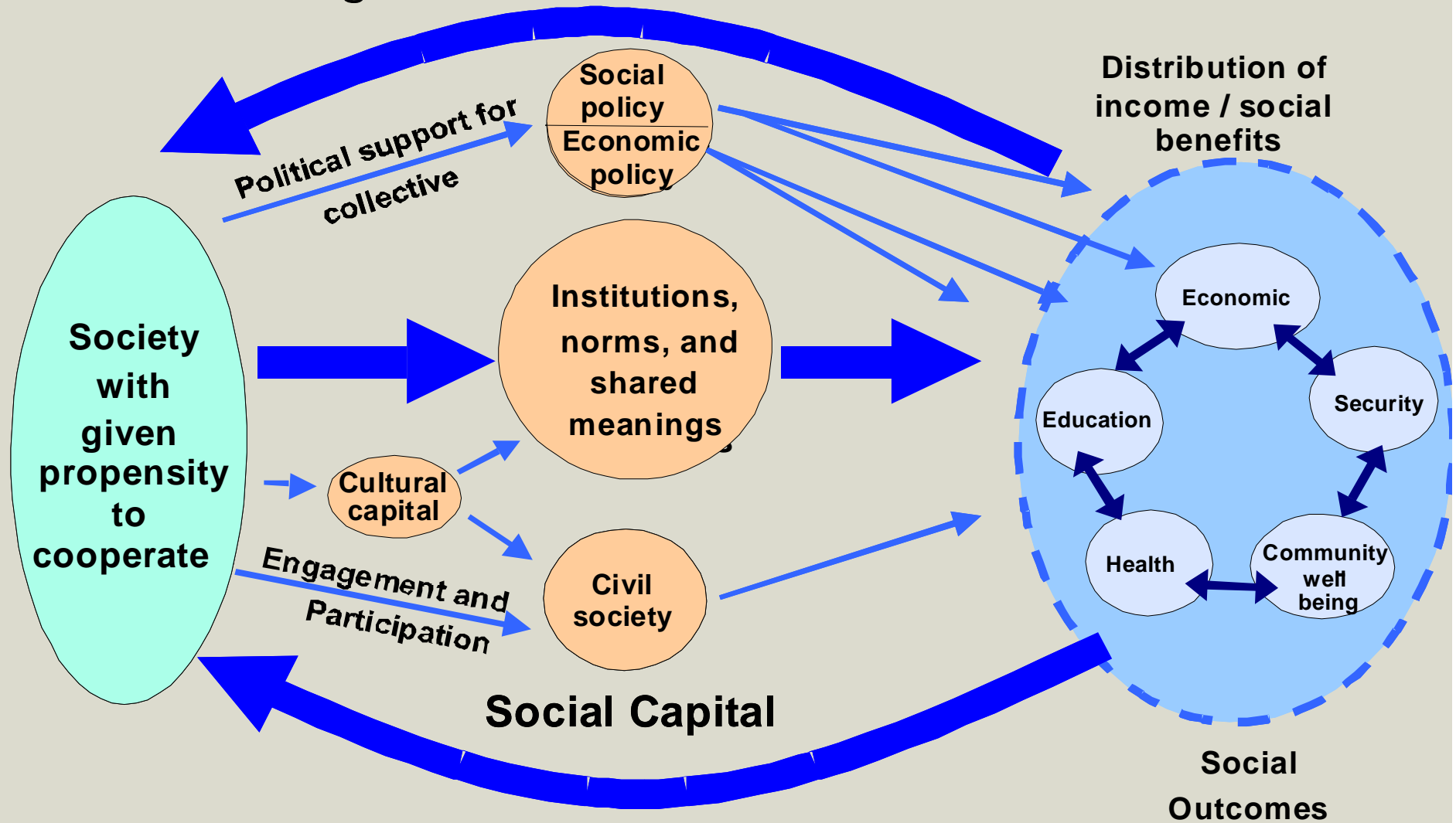
- Research has shown correlations between social cohesion and:
 - economic development
 - population health
 - well-being of children
 - security of communities
 - functioning of institutions
 - social capital investments



A systems theory model for social cohesion

- Social cohesion has multiple independent and dependent variables linked in a complex system characterized by:
 - emergent properties (more than the sum of the system parts)
 - adaptive capabilities (ability to withstand change in the environment)
 - self-referential and unpredictable outcomes

Figure 2 - How does social cohesion work?



Source: Strategic Research and Analysis Directorate, Department of Canadian Heritage



Dealing with complex social problems

- Need to recognize that:
 - different stakeholders may not agree
 - no definitive statement of problem is possible
 - problem is embedded in a dynamic social context and solutions must be assessed in that context
 - problem-solving is a social process of “learning what works”



Is all policy social cohesion policy?

- Systems model recognizes that social cohesion results not from the individual components of the system but from:
 - the interconnections between them
 - feedback loops between them
 - the interactions among the parts
- Good policy is the only lever available to governments to influence social cohesion