
REGIONALISM IN POLITICAL ATTITUDES, 1993 TO 2010

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Le régionalisme a une influence indéniable sur la vie politique canadienne. Notre histoire est marquée de nombreux tournants qui ont révélé ou progressivement établi d'importants clivages politiques. On peut donc s'étonner que les chercheurs se soient si rarement intéressés aux variations régionales des comportements politiques. Soucieux de combler au moins partiellement cette lacune, les auteurs ont structuré ce chapitre autour de la question implicitement soulevée par l'observation de Gidengil et coll. : Que signifie le régionalisme en matière de comportement politique ? Et leurs données racontent une histoire en deux volets, à la fois simple et nuancée. Elles montrent d'abord que face à d'importants enjeux politiques, les différences d'attitude entre régions se sont amoindries ces dernières décennies. Mais elles révèlent aussi que notre vie politique reste clairement dominée par le régionalisme, au sens où des écarts grandissants séparent les régions en matière de processus intergouvernementaux et de politiques régionales. Qu'ils soient plus ou moins fondés, ces comportements risquent de compliquer dans les années à venir l'adoption de mesures visant à réduire le déficit, à renouveler les transferts financiers ou à combattre les changements climatiques sans exacerbation des tensions interrégionales.

INTRODUCTION

The impact of regionalism in Canadian political life is unmistakable. Looking across our history we observe numerous critical turning points that reflected, or came to define, important political cleavages along regional lines – the “conscription crises” of the First and Second World Wars, the collapse of the wheat economy and the

rise of the Progressives, the ascent of Social Credit and the CCF-NDP, the Quiet Revolution in Quebec and decades of constitutional turmoil, the National Energy Program, Brian Mulroney's grand coalition and its eventual demise into a pair of manifestly regionalist alternatives – the Bloc Québécois and the Reform Party, and so on. The list is virtually endless.

It is curious, therefore, that regional variation in political attitudes has so rarely been a focus for scholars of Canadian political behaviour. Indeed, notwithstanding formidable literatures on the impact of region in other areas of Canadian political life, students of survey research and political attitudes have had little to say about the nature and psychology of regional differences, especially recently.¹ In introducing one of the rare analyses of regionalism in voting behaviour, Elisabeth Gidengil and colleagues tellingly remark that “[t]he basic facts of regional voting are well known. Much less clear is what they mean” (1999, 247).

This chapter begins to address this gap in our knowledge about Canadian regionalism. Our project is framed by the larger question implicit in Gidengil et al.'s observation above, *what does regionalism in political behaviour mean?* We assume that the “meaning” that matters largely involves the views of Canadians themselves. Therefore, as an operational matter, we ask, what is the nature of regional difference in political attitudes? Regional effects in political attitudes may be great, or they may be small. They may be quite generic in structure – extending across many dimensions of political conflict in a homogeneous fashion – or sharply differentiated by the domain under consideration. Most critically for those interested in Canada's political prospects, regional differences in political attitudes may be stable or they may be in flux – regionalism in political attitudes may grow or shrink over time.

To the task of understanding regionalism in political attitudes we bring a wealth of information from two sources. First, we analyze data across two decades of the Canadian Election Study (CES), covering all elections from 1993 to 2008. Second, we examine the Portraits of Canada surveys and a more recent survey using the same questions conducted by the Mowat Centre.² Similar to the CES, The Portraits of Canada-Mowat Centre (PC-MC) series offers longitudinal coverage of political attitudes, although over a slightly shorter interval from 1998 to 2010. Importantly, the CES and PC-MC surveys offer leverage on different attitudinal domains relevant to Canadian regionalism. Whereas the former offers excellent coverage of views on a host of long-standing conflicts over substantive issues of public policy, the latter provides unique indicators of attitudes on the processes of federalism and federal-provincial relations.

¹See Simeon and Elkins (1971), Blake (1972), and Gidengil et al. (1999).

²Complete methodological details of the Canadian Election Studies and the Portraits of Canada surveys can be obtained from the Canadian Opinion Research Archive in the School of Policy Studies at Queen's University (www.queensu.ca/cora). Details of the Mowat Centre survey are reported in Mendelsohn and Matthews (2010).

We conclude, among other things, that a proper assessment of regionalism in political attitudes must be attentive to these two domains – of public policy *substance* and federal-provincial *process*. The reason is that regionalism operates quite differently when the object of evaluation shifts from the ends to the means of Canadian federalism. To summarize our findings, regional differences regarding the ends of public policy are small and getting smaller. On the other hand, regional differences over the nature of federal-provincial relations are big and getting bigger. It is also important, and somewhat ironic, that the most significant over-time developments in regionalism are confined to the political attitudes of Ontarians.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE FOUND

The vast geography of Canada has generated a correspondingly vast literature on explaining the significance of regions and regional differences. While some countries have “too much history,” Canada, it is said, has too much geography. Although regions are universally considered to be important, there is little consensus on how they affect citizens. Risking oversimplification, we might roughly categorize this literature into four areas – culture, political economy, institutions, and attitudes.

Much of the early literature on regionalism places the emphasis on formative events and the ways these shaped the basic ideals of regional societies. The differing actions and opinions of regions reflect the history and ideas of the past. Perhaps the premier examples are Lipset’s account of the American Revolution and Canada’s lack of one, (1968, 1990), Bell and Tepperman on the migration of loyalists (1979), and Horowitz’s discussion of Canada’s “tory touch” (1966), although debates still continue (Ajzenstat and Smith 1997; Wiseman 2007). These authors argue, among other things, that we can attribute differences in opinion among Canadians to historical settlement patterns, and the different ideals that settlers brought with them. Naturally there is disagreement on the details (Forbes 1988; Wiseman 1988), but the key is that we should understand current regional differences in their historical context. The roots of regionalism are not based in economics or institutions, but in contingent – and generally long-past – events. As a result of the long historical time frame emphasized, we expect that regional differences would not change dramatically over a short time period.

Contrary to this focus on the historical development of ideas and political culture, others define regionalism as the product of patterns of economic development and policy responses. Early Canadian political economy (Innis 1930; 1940), focused on the development of “staple” resources as required by imperial and continental relationships. Later elaborations of “hinterland-heartland” scholarship, including Macpherson (1953), Mallory (1954), and others, argued that the hinterland regions were an “internal colony” of Canada, placing the federal government at the heart of economic conflict. For these writers the prime movers are conflicting economic

interests between centre and periphery. Important political events, like the emergence of Social Credit, are simply reflections of these economic forces (Mallory 1954, 4). Perhaps the most influential recent author is Janine Brodie, who argued that “regions are political creations that state development strategies cumulatively impose upon the geographic landscape” (1990, 77). It is uneven development that drives regionalism – both the calls for its amelioration and the concentration of economic power. In this literature, southwestern Ontario and the Laurentian region were the economic heartland that treated the rest of the country as an internal colony.

Although political economists recognized the role of the state in shaping economic conflicts, institutional regionalists focus more directly on the role of the state in shaping society. As Donald Smiley notes, our institutions have “a pervasive bias in favor of mobilizing interests which are territorially based and frustrating the political expression of interests and attitudes which are largely non-territorial” (1977, 450). Richard Simeon expressed a similar position, noting that institutions are not simply products of society, but “independent forces” which exert their own influence once established (1975, 504). That institutions matter is relatively non-controversial. The real question is to how much they distort the “inputs” of public desires.

On this issue Alan Cairns had perhaps the most pessimistic view of the effects of institutions. He famously showed how our electoral system favored territorially concentrated parties (1968). Cairns took this argument even farther, arguing that institutions not only distort political outcomes, but dominate and shape the society that they purportedly serve. Governments do not simply strive to follow their constitutional mandates, but are “aggressive actors” (1977) seeking to expand their areas of control. Indeed the literature on province-building makes clear that the process reflected provincial intentions (Black and Cairns 1966; Pratt 1977). While this claim is controversial, there is little doubt that provincial governments often have an interest in exacerbating regional conflicts and reinforcing whatever provincial or regional cultures and identities exist. There can also be little doubt that, until the 1990s, Ontario had been a far less “aggressive actor” than other provinces in the latter half of the twentieth century.

A final area worth review is the work focused on regional differences in the attitudes and values of citizens, both toward policy and toward their governments. One of the earlier students of differences in attitudes and voting behavior was Mildred Schwartz (1974), who argued that Canada was composed of distinct communities and interests, with different regional identities, and that these differences were reflected in voting, party identification and political orientations. Unfortunately, as Smiley (1977) notes, Schwartz did not control for factors such as income, age, or other standard control variables. Blake (1972) examined the effects of region on voting patterns with more sophisticated models, and also suggested that region has a considerable effect on political outcomes, although he moderated this conclusion in later work (1978).

In perhaps the most influential study of regional attitudes, Simeon and Elkins (1980) found small and shrinking differences between provinces on policy issues. These small differences in attitudes were, nonetheless, coupled with a strong sense of “regional feeling” (Clark et al. 1979). Ailsa Henderson has updated Simeon and Elkins’ analysis, and questions if what we have been measuring thus far in political culture research is not the existence of provincial sub-cultures, but micro-regional variations. In addition, she argued that since regional clusters perform as effectively as provincial boundaries in accounting for variations in political attitudes and behavior, there is reason to doubt, at the very least, the impact of provincial institutions (Henderson 2004).

In sum, there has been a large literature in Canada on the importance of region and regionalism, with a heavy emphasis on historical analysis of culture, interests and institutions. In more recent decades, empirical studies focused on differences in attitudes or identities have complemented the other approaches. Two general comments should be highlighted as a preface to our chapter. First, the major studies are not recent and do not capture the significant evolution of Canadian regions that has occurred in the past two decades, including increased immigration and the importance of global communication flows. Second, the analysis of regionalism has focused far more intensely on Atlantic Canada, Western Canada and Quebec than on Ontario.

DATA AND ANALYTICAL APPROACH

We use data from the CES for the six elections between 1993 and 2008. The CES in these years was a multi-mode, panel survey, with campaign-period and post-election waves conducted by telephone, and a second post-election wave delivered in the form of a pencil-and-paper mail-back survey. These data contain a very large number of survey items relevant to diverse domains of public policy, and to respondents’ general orientations toward the political system, including toward federalism. For two reasons, however, the lion’s share of these items is not available to us. To maximize the number of respondents in any given analysis and, equally, to minimize the effects of panel attrition, we confine ourselves to questions asked in the campaign-period and post-election waves of these studies.³ More

³Questions from the mailback surveys, therefore, are excluded. These data are highly unlikely to closely represent the general population, as CES response rates tend to fall precipitously between the post-election and mailback waves. The concern is that this relatively self-selected group of respondents are highly interested and engaged in political matters – so much so that they trouble themselves to fill out and return an extended pencil-and-paper survey on political attitudes. This level of cognitive engagement with politics is clearly out of step with the Canadian population as a whole (Fournier 2002).

importantly, we only utilize questions that have been asked in the same – or highly similar – ways over the several surveys. These two constraints sharply reduce the items available for analysis.

Even so, the available items give broad coverage of Canadian political attitudes. Our CES-derived dependant variables are divided into two categories – welfare state attitudes and non-welfare state attitudes. Regarding the former, we have three questions concerning support for spending in various policy areas: welfare, health care, and education. Roughly speaking, the items assess the priority attached to funding in these areas. Notably, the items have proved useful in previous analyses of Canadians' welfare state attitudes (Matthews and Erickson 2005, 2008) and in Canadian and cross-national work on the link between public opinion and policy outcomes (Soroka and Wlezien 2004; 2010). Furthermore, previous research suggests that responses to spending in these areas are differently structured, a reflection of the varying entitlement structures involved (Matthews and Erickson 2008). Building on comparative accounts of welfare state politics (e.g., Korpi 1980; Esping-Anderson 1990), this research suggests that programs that involve means-testing, such as welfare, are more likely to divide Canadians than more "universalistic" programs, such as health care and education, that are in principle accessible by all. This chapter offers an original assessment of this claim with respect to regional divisions.

To these spending items we add a measure concerning the relative roles of government and the private sector in job creation. The measure asks for level of agreement with the proposition "government should leave it entirely to the private sector to create jobs." Previous research reveals that, at least through the 1990s and into 2000, this measure taps something other than value commitments concerning capitalism and the proper role of government in the market. Matthews and Erickson argue that the measure indicates "assessments of the technical capacity of the welfare state – that is, the question at stake is the ability of government to take effective action in the pursuit of its social and economic goals, rather than the nature of those social and economic goals, as such" (2008, 17). Interestingly, the disposition would seem to constitute a rare source of cleavage in Canadian attitudes toward universal social programs (Matthews and Erickson 2008, 14, 17). That said, it is not obvious how – or even if – regional political currents might be reflected in this item.

As regards the non-welfare state items, we have items touching on security and trade, racial diversity, the "national question," and moral issues. Using the same instrumentation as applied in the domain of social spending, we tap the priority Canadians attach to defence spending. In view of the centrality of economic relations with the United States to the history of regional conflict (see, especially, Johnston, Brady, Blais and Crete 1992, Ch. 2), we include a measure of attitudes toward the "closeness" of "Canada's ties" to its southern neighbour. In deference to the political importance and contentiousness of racial and ethnic diversity in contemporary Canada (Banting 2008), we also include a measure of support for "doing more

for racial minorities.” The place of Quebec in Canada is a regional issue without peer. Accordingly, we tap the domain with an indicator – “how much do you think should be done for Quebec?” – that has proven discriminating in recent work on the spatial foundations of the Canadian party system (Johnston 2008). Finally, regarding questions of morality, we have indicators of support for free access to abortion and for capital punishment. However, as we lack consistent measurement across the full period, we must confine this analysis to 2000 and after. Note that, in the analysis, all CES variables are coded to vary across the (0,1) interval, where 1 indicates “support for” or “agreement with” the object under evaluation.

From the PC-MC data series we extract four variables, each of which addresses a different, albeit related, dimension of federal-provincial relations. Coverage is somewhat inconsistent in temporal terms, as is apparent in the analysis below. Critically, however, for all items we have measurement at both the beginning and end of the analysis period, i.e., in 1998 and 2010, permitting assessments of over-time change.

Our most consistent measure in the PC-MC surveys indicates global evaluations of one’s province’s treatment at the national level: respondents are asked if their “province [is] treated with the respect it deserves in Canada or not.” While rather diffuse in semantic content, on its face, the item would seem to address sentiments in the affectively-charged domain of symbolic recognition – attitudes that have been highly salient in regional conflicts over the years (Taylor 1993; Mendelsohn 2003). To this item we add more narrowly cast indicators of perceptions of one’s province’s “share” of political influence “on important national decisions in Canada” and perceptions of the dynamics in one’s province’s political influence. Finally, we have an item focused on the concrete and generally contentious business of federal-provincial fiscal transfers. Respondents are asked if their province receives “more than,” “less than,” or “about its fair share” in federal spending on “programs and on transfers.”

It should be noted that, although we have chosen questions to avoid wording changes as much as possible, a number of the items included in the analysis do contain wording shifts over time. By and large, our sense is that these changes are not of great concern. Moreover, the evolving implications of word choice and social context mean that even identical wording provides no guarantee of conceptual equivalence. At various points, however, where a wording change seems to have produced systematic effects, we are careful to describe the substantive consequences.⁴

⁴A related issue concerns the treatment of missing values. Generally, middle values were assigned to those replying “don’t know” or refusing to answer, since such responses likely imply attitudinal ambivalence. However, for questions that were potentially controversial, such as those on abortion or racial minorities, we excluded refusals, since those answers may mask answers that are seen to be socially unacceptable.

Our basic analytical approach is simple: we examine regional differences in the attitudes above, and also over-time changes in the magnitude of these differences. We follow standard practice by defining region as a four-category nominal variable, separating Atlantic Canada, the West, and Quebec from Ontario (the reference category in all regression analyses reported). Although Smiley (1987, 164) and others have suggested that British Columbia might properly be treated as its own region, for reasons of scope, we focus on the four-part distinction. Moreover, the small number of observations for British Columbia in any given year makes attention to this finer issue somewhat inadvisable.

In assessing regional differences in policy attitudes, we must attend to the proposition that regions are merely “empty containers” (Simeon and Elkins 1971) and that, consequently, regional political differences are simply “artifacts” of differences in regions’ social composition. As Gidengil et al. explain, this view implies,

that people belonging to similar social categories share the same basic political orientations *regardless* of region of residence. “True” regional differences are present when people belonging to the *same* social categories manifest *different* political preferences from one region of the country to another. (1999, 249) (emphasis in original).

Accordingly, our analysis must attempt to control, as much as possible, for exposure to such structural effects. Rather than reporting simple comparisons of means or frequencies across regions, therefore, we estimate ordinary least-squares regression models of the policy attitudes and report predicted values. These models include measures of the following socio-demographics: income, education, language (French vs. English-speaking), marital status, age, visible minority status, gender, and employment status.⁵ Several of these controls reflect explicit claims made in regionalism scholarship. Smiley, for example, suggests that Atlantic Canada’s distinctive political views are largely a result of the region’s high rate of unemployment (1987, 171). Likewise, levels of income and education may be connected to patterns of regional economic domination (cf. Brodie 1990). Some of the controls we include are not likely to vary from region to region – gender, for example – but help to enhance the precision of our estimates, nonetheless.

For the examination of views on federal-provincial relations, we are able to rely on simpler analytics: we simply report cross-tabulations of the various measures by region. Arguments about compositional effects have not been applied to such attitudes and perceptions, as the link between demographic characteristics (region excepted) and evaluations of the federal system is difficult to imagine.

While our analytical aims are primarily descriptive, it bears noting that significant system-level variation over the analysis period allows suggestive conclusions about the impact of the political context of regionalism. Jointly, our data cover seventeen

⁵Precise details of coding for these variables are available from the authors. Note that the mean of income was imputed to those who did not give a valid response on this item.

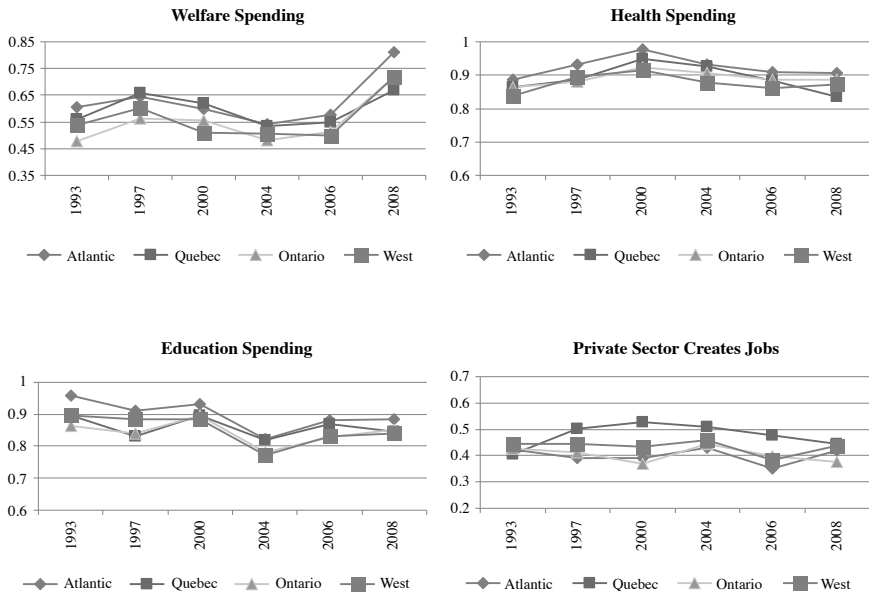
years of Canada's political history, including six elections, two changes of government and four prime ministers. Moreover, we have data from three party systems. While we do not observe Canadians prior to 1993, the 1993 election was fought prior to the implosion of the Progressive Conservatives (PCs). The elections of 1997 and 2000 occurred under quite different conditions. The right was divided between the PCs and the Reform – later the Canadian Alliance – party, and the separatist Bloc Québécois competed for official opposition status in the House of Commons. The 2004 election witnessed another, ultimately pivotal, change – a reunited right under Stephen Harper and the Conservative Party of Canada.

POLICY ATTITUDES ACROSS THE REGIONS

In line with discussion above, in Figures 1 and 2 we isolate the “pure” effect of region by plotting predicted values from the regression models.⁶ For a given combination of region and year, we compute the predicted value of the attitude under consideration for an individual who is otherwise at the national average (in a given year) on the socio-demographic components of the model. The vertical distance between the lines, therefore, solely reflects the unique impact of residence in a given region. Taking the top-left panel of the figure, for instance, we see that an otherwise average individual living in Atlantic Canada or Quebec in 1993 was moderately more supportive of welfare spending than her counterpart in either Ontario or the West.

As it happens, roughly speaking, this pattern of regional difference in welfare spending attitudes persists over the analysis period. Atlantic Canadians or Quebecers are most, or second-most, supportive of welfare spending in every year. Conversely, Ontarians or Westerners are least, or second-least, supportive of such spending in all years. Overall, regional differences are quite modest on support for welfare spending, with the scope of regional variation covering little more, and sometimes a little less, than one-tenth of the range of the survey item. Indeed, from 2000 to 2006 these regional differences are generally not statistically significant. The exception is 2008, when support for welfare spending spikes across the country, particularly among Atlantic Canadians. Presumably the pattern reflects the dismal economic conditions surrounding that election, which was fought amidst a global financial crisis.

⁶Coefficient estimates for the regression models are available from the authors. While we do not pursue the issue here, it bears noting that the addition of controls to the models does little to disturb the substance of the results. That is to say, those regional differences in policy attitudes as exist are largely not a function of compositional differences but are “true regional differences” in the sense intended by Gidengil et al. 1999.

Figure 1: Welfare State Attitudes by Year by Region, 1993-2008*

Source: Canadian Election Studies, 1993-2008

*Predicted values, controlling for various socio-demographics

Regional differences in support for health care and education are typically even smaller and less consistent. This comports with the speculation above that these programs, owing to their universalistic entitlement structures, should tend not to divide Canadians. Indeed, looking across the pattern of regional effects on support for health care and education spending, all but nine of the thirty-six coefficient estimates fail to reach statistical significance (at the 0.05 level), and none do so after 2004. Those differences that do reach conventional significance thresholds are tiny – generally covering about one-twentieth of the range of the measure concerned. The largest difference by far is between Ontarians and Atlantic Canadians in 1993 on the priority of education spending. Ontarians are significantly less supportive than those in the Atlantic region in that year, a difference covering about one-tenth of the range of observed opinion. Tellingly, this difference erodes almost completely by 2008.

If the regions are – or have been – divided on the welfare state, then it is largely with respect to the relative roles of government and the market in job creation. The variance is mostly a function of the views of Quebecers. Between 1997 and 2006, respondents in this province are significantly, in both a substantive and statistical sense, more sceptical of government's role in job creation than are other

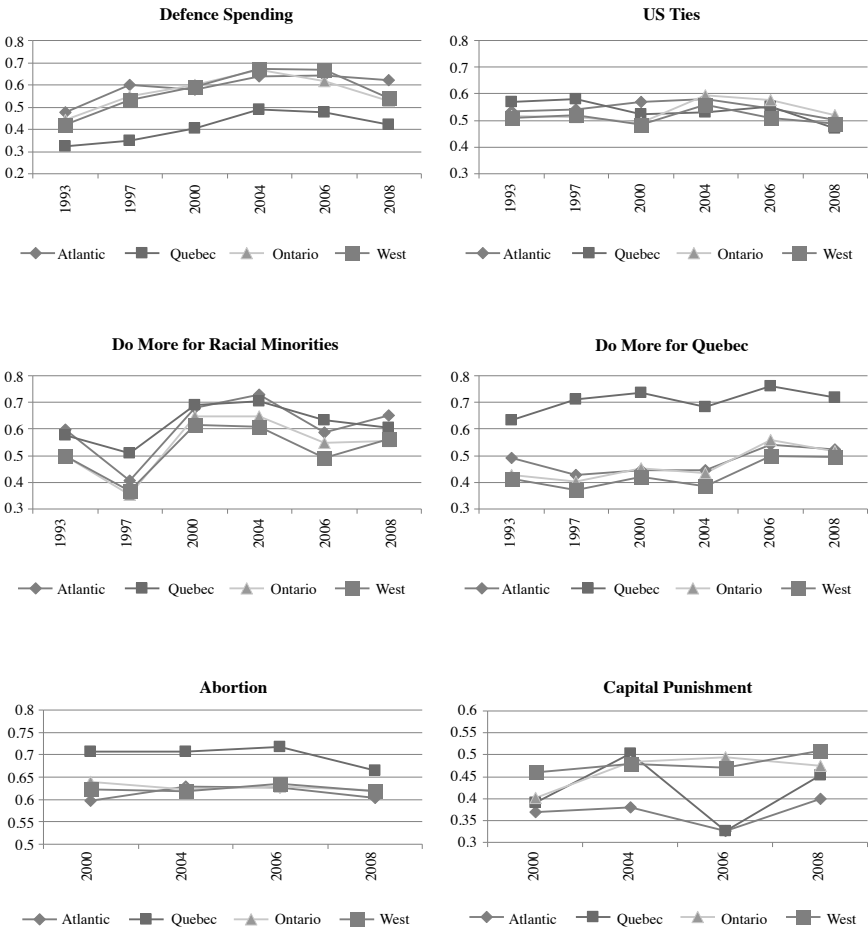
Canadians. The high point is 2000, when the difference is almost one-sixth of the range of the measure. Differences in views among the other regions are trivial. While we cannot pursue the issue in this paper, the distinctiveness of Quebec after 1993 – and, further, the erosion of this distinctiveness over time – suggests that the pattern reflects, in some degree, the historical rhythms of the unity debate. The sequence of events related to this issue in the 1990s (e.g., the stunning success of the Bloc Québécois in 1993, the Parti Québécois' victory in the province in 1994, the referendum of 1995) no doubt troubled Quebecers' confidence in government's capacity to deliver in diverse areas of public policy, including on job creation. And indeed, there is good evidence that diffuse evaluations of the political system can, in extraordinary circumstances, be affected by short-run political developments.⁷

Turning to non-welfare state attitudes, the pattern of generally modest regional differences continues, with two important exceptions. One exception is attitudes on defence spending, in relation to which we observe significant regional differences in every year. Aside from moderately stronger support for such spending in Atlantic Canada at two points (in 1997 and 2008 the difference is statistically significant), regionalism in regards to defence spending support is entirely a story of Quebec versus the rest. In every year, Quebecers are significantly less supportive of defence spending than all other Canadians. The largest differences are in 1997 and 2000, when the gap between, for example, Ontario and Quebec covers one-fifth of the range of the spending support measure. Perhaps more importantly, in four of the six years in the analysis, the nature of the regional differences is such that Quebec and the rest of Canada are on opposite sides of this issue, with the average Quebecer seeking less spending on defence and the average Canadian outside Quebec seeking more. Of course, this finding reflects a long-standing pattern of division between French-speaking and English-speaking Canada, one that mirrors divisions in the early twentieth century over Canada's "imperial role" (Johnston 2008, 828-9). That said, the pan-regional growth in support for defence spending after 2000 – in the wake of 9/11 and the start of Canada's involvement in the war in Afghanistan – also bears noting. While initial regional divisions were not eroded, all Canadians seem to have responded in similar ways to these events.

The second exception to the general pattern of inter-regional consensus in non-welfare state attitudes is both more dramatic and less surprising. Predictably, Quebecers are far more convinced than other Canadians that "more should be done" for Quebec. At its largest (in 1997), the gap between those in Quebec and elsewhere covers almost one-third of the range of the measure. Less obvious is the pattern of uniformity among the other provinces. Contrary to stereotype, Westerners are quite similar in their views on this issue when compared with Ontarians and Atlantic Canadians. To be sure, those in the West are less supportive than others of Quebec's aspirations, and the difference is statistically significant in most years.

⁷See Hetherington 1998 for work on the dynamics of political trust.

Figure 2: Non-welfare State Attitudes by Year by Region, 1993-2008*



Source: Canadian Election Studies, 1993-2008

*Predicted values, controlling for various socio-demographics

That said, the critical fact is that, even at its largest, this difference covers little more than one-twentieth of the range of observed opinion.

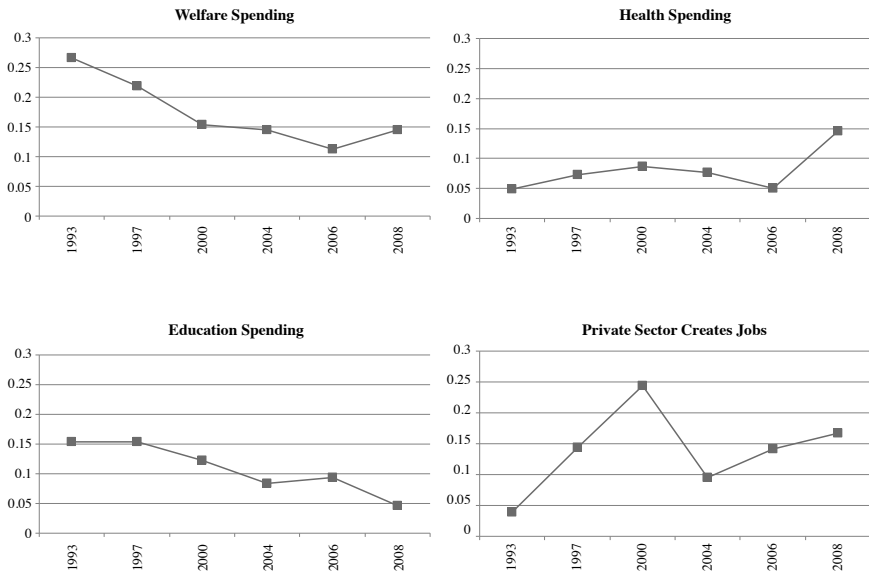
Looking across the remaining attitudes plotted in Figure 2, there are few systematic regional differences. On the issue of ties to the United States, the handful of significant regional effects that emerge are small and inconsistent. For instance, Quebecers are more supportive than Ontarians of close ties in 1993 and 1997, but this modest difference disappears in 2000, and then reverses in 2004. Other

variations on this item over time are similar. There is something of a pattern across the regions with regard to “doing more for” racial minorities. Quebecers and Atlantic Canadians consistently give more positive responses than other Canadians, although the size of the differences fluctuates greatly. The typical inter-regional gap is modest – between 0.05 and 0.10 points.⁸ The largest regional differences on women’s access to abortion are in a similarly small range of magnitude, and always between Quebec and the rest of Canada. Finally, the pattern of regional effects on support for capital punishment is somewhat intriguing. The most consistent result is the gap between Westerners and Atlantic Canadians, with the former more accepting of capital punishment than the latter in every year. The views of Ontarians and Quebecers are more inconsistent. They are sometimes as conservative as Westerners and sometimes as liberal as Atlantic Canadians. Some of this may reflect the issue content and events of election campaigns, particularly the “Boxing Day shooting” prior to the 2006 election. In any event, the larger point is that on this issue, as on almost all other policy matters, regional differences are modest.

Figures 3 and 4 summarize the dynamics of regional differences in policy attitudes. Plotted are “total regional effects,” which are equal to the sum of the absolute values of the coefficient estimates on the regional terms in the regression models. As these lines tend toward zero, regionalism can be said to be on the decline; if the lines move away from zero, regional differences are on the rise. Generally speaking, we see no evidence here of an upward trend in regionalism. While a couple of plots indicate recent upticks in regional differences (health spending, private sector creates jobs), all others show flat or downward trends over time. The most striking downward trends are the declines for welfare and education spending, and on “doing more for Quebec.”

To summarize our findings so far, the magnitudes of regional differences in policy attitudes are generally small and, to the extent we observe over-time trends, those trends are negative. However, in regards to two matters we observe large regional differences. On the aspirations of Quebec, Canadians are predictably – and greatly – divided. Relatively smaller, yet still notable, are differences between Quebec and the rest of Canada on the issue of defence spending. We discuss the significance of these results in the Conclusion.

⁸The sharp increase on this measure in 2000, irrespective of region, seems to reflect an increase in the number of response categories in that year, a wording change that continues across the period. The change permits those who would like to “do more” for racial minorities to express a moderate view (“somewhat more”), whereas prior to that year the only available option for such respondents was “more.” Presumably, the binary nature of the earlier question forced some answers into the middle category.

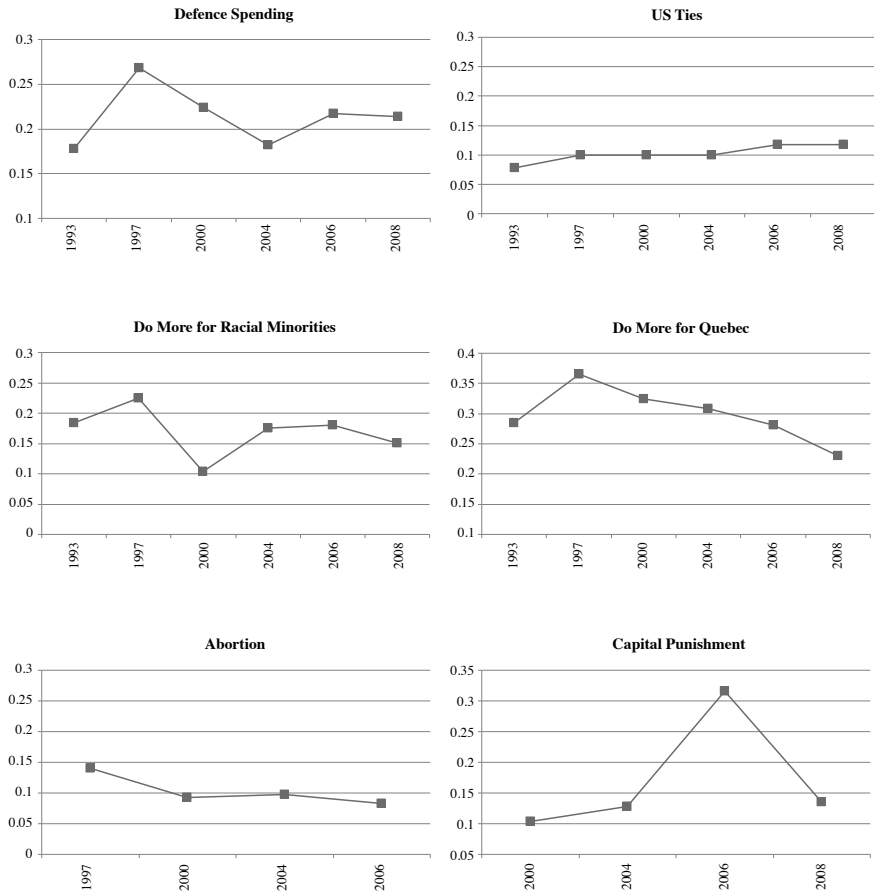
Figure 3: Total Regional Effect on Welfare State Attitudes, 1993-2008*

Source: Canadian Election Studies, 1993-2008

*Absolute value of regional coefficients, summed, controlling for various socio-demographics

REGIONALISM AND VIEWS OF FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL RELATIONS

The image of regional consensus on (most) policy attitudes sharply contrast with Canadians' views on federalism and federal-provincial relations. Before turning to specific findings, we must note that, for the remaining measures discussed in this chapter, evidence of regionalism is not to be found in increasing inter-regional variance in attitudes. Rather, growing regionalism is implied as the mean of a given attitude increases within a region because the evaluations themselves, which concern the quality of federal-provincial relations, are direct measures of regionalist sentiments. That is, as each of these sentiments becomes more widely held, the magnitude of regionally-focused political grievances would appear to be on the rise.

Figure 4: Total Regional Effect on Non-welfare State Attitudes*

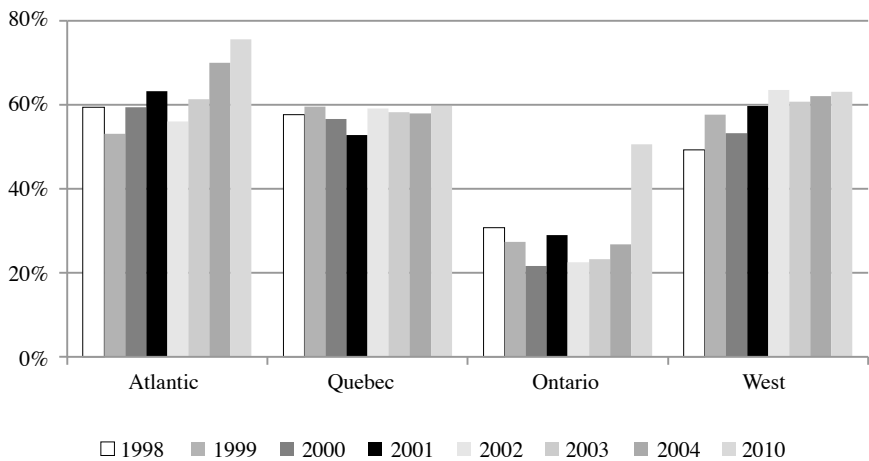
Source: Canadian Election Studies, 1993-2008

*Absolute value of regional coefficients, summed, controlling for various socio-demographics

Figure 5 reports levels of perceived “disrespect” of the respondent’s province over time, by region. We have continuous annual coverage on this item from 1998 to 2002, and two further readings in 2004 and 2010. Judged by this item, most Canadians’ views on federal-provincial relations have been consistently sour – and are becoming more so. Prior to 2010, outside Ontario, a majority (or, in two cases, virtual majority) of respondents in every region felt that their province was not

“treated with the respect it deserves in Canada.” Indeed, in most years, roughly 60 percent of respondents outside Ontario have taken this view. In Ontario, by contrast, a minority of less than 30 percent felt the province was “disrespected” in this way. This was until 2010, the first year in which a majority – 51 percent – of Ontarians join other Canadians in feeling their province is not treated with the proper level of respect on the national scene. As the figure reveals, this reflects a massive, nearly 100-percent increase in this sentiment in the province between 2004 and 2010. Elsewhere, over-time change has been modest. Even in Atlantic Canada, which leads the country in feelings of provincial disrespect, temporal variation is modest.

Figure 5: Perceived “Disrespect” Over Time by Region, 1998-2010*

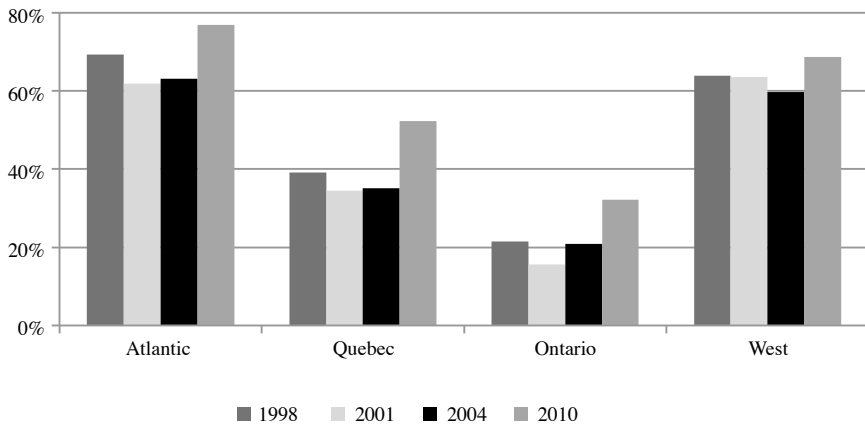


Source: Centre for Research and Information on Canada, *Portraits of Canada Surveys, 1998-2002*; Centre for Research and Information on Canada, *Portraits of Canada Survey, 2004*; Mowat Centre for Policy Innovation, *Survey, 2010*

*Bars indicate (valid) percentage answering “no” when asked: “Is your province treated with the respect it deserves in Canada or not?”

As suggested above, the question of “respect” is likely to elicit fairly affective and symbolic responses. It is interesting to observe, therefore, that significant regional grievances are also evinced on a measure tapping perceptions on the more concrete issue of one’s province’s “influence” on “important national decisions.” Figure 6 reveals that Canadians in Atlantic and Western Canada have consistently concluded that their provinces receive “less than their fair share” of political influence. Indeed, by 2010, this view had become virtually hegemonic in the

Figure 6: Perceived “Influence Deficit” Over Time by Region, 1998-2010*

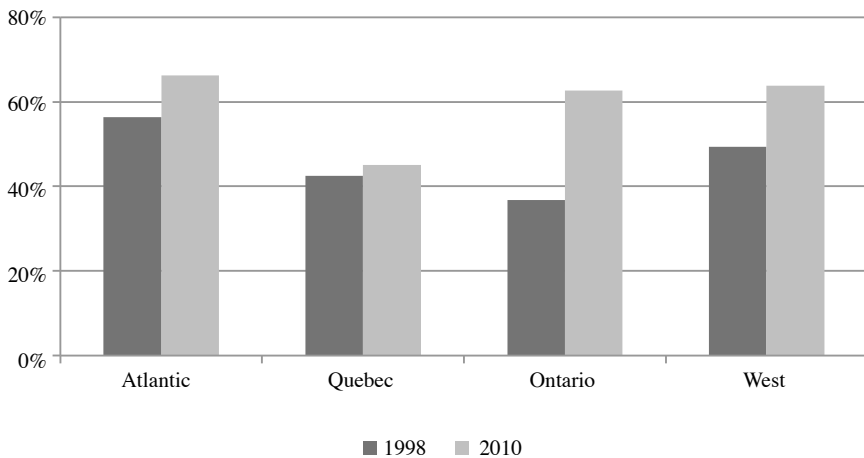


Source: Centre for Research and Information on Canada, *Portraits of Canada Surveys, 1998-2002*; Centre for Research and Information on Canada, *Portraits of Canada Survey, 2004*; Mowat Centre for Policy Innovation, *Survey, 2010*

*Bars indicate (valid) percentage answering “less than its fair share” when asked: “In your opinion, how much influence does your province have on important national decisions in Canada?”

Atlantic provinces. In that year, this evaluation was shared by almost 80 percent of respondents in that region. Quebecers and, particularly, Ontarians have been comparatively sanguine about their level of influence. However, even in Central Canada, the figure indicates that perceptions of an “influence deficit” seem to be increasing. Ontarians’ and Quebecers’ own perceptions of trends in provincial political influence parallel these findings. When asked in 2010 if their province’s “influence on important national decisions” is “increasing, decreasing or staying about the same,” almost half of Ontarians – 50 percent – answer “decreasing”; just eight percent of Ontarians think the province’s influence is “increasing,” a lower figure than in any other region. Likewise, 38 percent of Quebecers think their province’s influence is decreasing. Perceptions are comparatively bullish in the West, where more than twice as many as in Ontario – 18 percent – think their province’s influence is increasing.

Finally, Figure 7 reveals that the sense of “inter-regional unfairness” extends to views on federal programs and fiscal transfers. On this measure we have just two readings that happily bookend the analysis period. In 1998, only Atlantic Canada contained a majority that felt its region received less than its fair share. In Quebec,

Figure 7: Perceived “Transfer Deficit” Over Time by Region, 1998-2010*

Source: Centre for Research and Information on Canada, *Portraits of Canada Surveys, 1998-2002*; Mowat Centre for Policy Innovation, *Survey, 2010*

*Bars indicate (valid) percentage answering “less than its fair share” when asked: “Thinking about all the money the federal government spends on different programs and on transfers to the provinces, do you think your province receives... more than its fair share/less than its fair share/about its fair share?”

Ontario and the West, this was a minority view (although narrowly so in the latter region). By 2010, a majority in three regions believed that their province received less than its fair share of federal dollars. The exception to the pattern is Quebec; even there, however, perceptions of a “transfer deficit” have increased over the years. Most remarkable is the growing sense of grievance in Ontario. In this province, discontent over fiscal federalism represents a major break with the past. The last time Canadians were queried on the issue, just 37 percent of Ontarians felt the province received less than it deserved in federal spending, making the province an outlier and remarkably satisfied when compared to other provinces. Today, Ontario’s level of dissatisfaction over federal spending is actually above the national average.

Overall, then, in marked contrast to the pattern of growing – or, at least, stable – regional consensus on most policy attitudes, views on federal-provincial relations are contentious and becoming more so. Ironically, what this means is that Canadians’ views on *both* public policy and federal-provincial processes are becoming more similar. However, as noted above, a reduction of variance on the former has quite different implications from a reduction of variance on the latter. While Canadians are agreed on what government should be doing, they are also agreed that the

way government “does what it does” somehow offends ideals of fair, respectful regional treatment. It is also significant that the growing sense of regionalism is mostly a “made-in-Ontario” story. The largest shifts in perceptions of federalism are occurring in this province-cum-region. The great bulk of Ontario’s population means these are developments with potentially profound political implications.

CONCLUSION

The data presented in this chapter tell a simple but nuanced two-part story. First, in recent decades, differences between Canadian regions in political attitudes toward important policy questions have shrunk. Regionalism has always been an important feature in Canadian politics but the data suggest that to the extent that inter-regional conflicts exist, they do not stem from fundamentally opposing political attitudes. Simply put, Alberta is less conservative and Atlantic Canada is less liberal than they were two decades ago. Ideologically, we have today in Canada a more homogenous national political culture.

This has also been coupled with an increase of the Canadian national identity in many regions. Regionalism remains an important element of Canadian political life, but its salience has declined as Canadians have deepened their national identity (Mendelsohn and Matthews 2010, 6).

There are many explanations for this finding, some of which are speculative. They include interprovincial migration, international immigration, and the national and globalized flow of communications. We are particularly interested in the implications of immigration. Newcomers are attracted to Canada and may develop regional attachments, but the national unity debates, historical regional resentments, and provincial claims of injustice are entirely foreign to these newcomers. In fact, one reason many have come to Canada is precisely to avoid these kinds of political disputes. Immigration, we believe, is a source of national unity precisely because immigrants do not know or care about the national unity debates. They have come to Canada in part for national unity, while “National Unity Debates” are simply not part of their DNA.

Second, our political life is still clearly dominated by regionalism. In part, this could be explained by factors not examined in this paper, which include the different political economies of different regions, and the perception that different parties are stronger representatives of particular regions. Conflicts over interests on issues of inter-regional redistribution or the politics of energy, for example, are unlikely to disappear and may intensify. But there is another element which is clearly revealed in these data: there are growing differences between regions about regional politics and intergovernmental processes and outcomes. These attitudes do not find their foundation in, for example, attitudinal differences on the size of the state or value conflicts. They relate to questions of regional status and federal

treatment. These attitudes may or may not be well-founded, but they are likely to complicate attempts in upcoming years to deal with questions of deficit reduction, renewal of fiscal transfers, and the costs of climate change in a manner that does not exacerbate inter-regional tensions.

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