THE CANADIAN "WEST" AS A PUBLIC POLICY SPACE?

Public Policies in Western Canadian Provinces from a National and Cross-National Perspective

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> Such phrases as the "The West" ... are in actuality meaningless, dreamed up by people who find all that space west of Bay Street a little hard to define.
>
> Rod Sykes, former Calgary mayor[1]

INTRODUCTION

THERE IS A LONG-STANDING, ongoing, and vigorous debate in Canada as to whether the contemporary Canadian West exists as a political, economic, or cultural space. Within the West there are similar long-standing debates as to whether various provinces or groups of provinces – most notably British Columbia – constitute distinct regions unto themselves. This article considers these questions by examining whether patterns of public policy are sufficiently distinct from the rest of Canada, as well as sufficiently similar across Western provinces, to justify viewing the West as a regional public policy space. Three questions are posed: (1) Do Western Canadian provinces tend to differ significantly from the rest of Canada in terms of patterns of public policy? (2) Are public policies sufficiently similar among the Western Canadian provinces that they might be considered a singular policy space within Canada or are there multiple "Wests within the West"? And (3) if Western Canadian provinces differ significantly from one another other, then do they do so in patterns that suggest that they are more similar to their nearest American neighbours than they are to each other?

[1] As quoted in Gibbins (1980, 5).

First, we present an overview of some of the literature that generates expectations about patterns of public policies across Western provinces. Second, we briefly review a number of quantitative indicators of public policies across Western provinces – indicators drawn from the fields of environmental protection, social assistance, post-secondary education, and health care provision. While our examination is obviously suggestive rather than definitive, we find that the West does not appear as a coherent and distinct public policy space in Canada. What emerges is a complex pattern of similarity and difference among Western provinces themselves, between Western provinces and other provinces, and between Western provinces and northwestern border states. Viewing the West as a singular policy space within Canada captures neither the uniqueness of each of the Western provinces nor the significant differences in the patterns of similarity and difference across policy fields.

THINKING ABOUT "THE WEST" AS A POLITICAL SPACE

In Canadian debates on regionalism, there are both thick and thin conceptions of region. In the "thin" conception of Western regionalism, Western distinctiveness rests primarily on the idea that the component provinces share a sense of regional alienation from the rest of Canada in political, economic, and cultural terms. In this sense, there appears to be little question that the West exists.

However, a thicker conception of region can be constructed on the basis of substantive similarities across geographically contiguous territories:

> If a region is to be identified as a distinctive social entity, then at least some of its most important social, economic, and political structures must be identifiably different from those of adjoining territorial areas ... [A]ny delineation of regional social structure must go beyond simple geo-political boundaries to determine the fundamental differences in family life, economic behavior, religion, recreation, and the other organizations and behaviors which comprise social life. Indeed, unless fundamental differences in social organization can be demonstrated to exist, there is little basis for declaring any territorial area to be a region distinct from adjoining territories. (Matthews 1983, 15)

This distinction between thin and thick conceptions of region is evident in debates over the extent to which the electoral success of the Canadian Alliance (formerly the Reform Party) in Western Canada provides conclusive evidence of the existence of the West as a distinct political space. At issue is whether this success simply represents a common regional response to the existing structure of the national political community or whether it represents the existence of a more substantive set of ideas about the appropriate role of the state. The Canadian Alliance is often portrayed (and portrays itself) as representing a thick Western regionalism, including "a western anti-government cultural bias" and ideological preferences for individual responsibility, reliance on markets, antipathy to budgetary deficits, and support for the traditional family. However, it may only represent a thin notion of Western regionalism – demands for reform to central political institutions (Friesen 2000, xvii).

Do Western provinces share nothing more than a sense of grievance against Central Canada? Or does the West exist in terms of a thicker conception of region. Should one expect the West to exist in this sense? If so, then where should one look for such similarities in "behaviors which comprise social life" (Matthews 1983, 15)?

One of several possible places to examine similarities and differences is in patterns of public policy. Public policy is arguably a hard test of political similarities and differences. Similarities and differences in patterns of public policy tend to be much more deeply rooted and enduring than more ephemeral – and sometimes more superficial – differences in public opinion or partisan politics. According to Manzer (1985, 13), differences in public policies are the embodiment of differences in public philosophy, which he defines as "a set of political ideas and beliefs that enjoy widespread acceptance in a political community and serve as principles to guide and justify governmental decisions." One may examine the substance of policies in order to "interpret the political ideas and beliefs that appear to be implicit in them" and interpret them as "collective responses to enduring questions of human need and political good" (19).

Views on the West as a Political Space

To the extent that "the West" exists as a meaningful way of conceiving of political space, it must demonstrate two characteristics: relative cohesion and distinctiveness. The West must be held together by some common likenesses; however, the primary characteristics of

those likenesses cannot simply be those that adhere to being members of a larger political space. There is little consensus in the academic literature on history and political science as to whether the West is both cohesive and distinct. Differing conceptions of larger Canadian patterns of similarity and distinctiveness each generate differing expectations as to the existence of a relatively coherent and distinct West.

Distinctiveness: Does A West Exist?

Some widely accepted interpretations of Canadian political space place little emphasis on the existence of regions, including the West. Dualist conceptions see Canada comprised primarily of two nations – a French-speaking Quebecois nation and an Anglophone nation. In this conception, the provinces comprising the West are similar in their public philosophy and political outlook primarily as a result of being part of a larger English-Canadian nation. Alternatively, much of the current debate on Canadian public policy posits that the most fundamental distinction is that between Canada and the United States (Lipset 1990). According to Lipset, cultural differences between Canada and the United States are significant and include broad differences with regard to the appropriate role of the state. While there are important regional differences in political culture, these are washed out by the starker national differences. A contrary conception sees Canada as sharing certain fundamental characteristics with the United States, with regional distinctions representing relatively minor variations on the theme of North American similarity. All of these interpretations of political space augur against an understanding of Canada based on regions such as the West.

On the other hand, there has been a strong tradition in Canada of defining and recognizing the existence of regions based on their geographically grounded relations of economic exchange (trade) and political power. The broadest regional distinctions are those drawn between the central Canadian metropolis and the outer Canadian hinterlands.[2] In Canadian political thought, this appears to be the primary underpinning for a continuing regional conceptualization of "the West." In this vision, the West is defined primarily by its position as a staples-based economy (forestry, mining, petroleum production, and agriculture) vis-à-vis the manufacturing economy of

[2] See, for example, Bell and Tepperman (1979), esp. chaps. 5 and 6.

the Canadian heartland. These economic and political relationships between centre and periphery have been institutionalized and congealed.

Cohesiveness: Does the West Exist?

A second axis of debate hinges not on whether Western provinces as a group are distinct from the rest of Canada but, rather, on whether they are coherent in this distinctiveness. There are numerous interpretations that accept certain aspects of Western distinctiveness but that suggest that cohesion within the West is limited.

Economic, Geographic, and Demographic Conceptions of the West

An important modification of the heartland/hinterland thesis based on a staples interpretation is the recognition that the nature of different types of staple development will have significantly different effects on political culture. An oft-noted example here is staple development in British Columbia, which combined relatively concentrated ownership of staples production with the formation of a staples-based working class (Resnick 2000, 5). It has been argued that this development has led to fundamentally different patterns of political competition and a different role for the state in comparison with the development of the wheat economy in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, which relied upon farmers as independent producers.

Another perspective on the West that focuses on economics and generates expectations of considerable differences among provinces might be termed the fiscal perspective. British Columbia and Alberta are "have" provinces, being two of the three Canadian provinces whose economic position is sufficiently favourable that they do not receive equalization payments from the federal government. Saskatchewan and Manitoba are not. As a result, demands on the state have been greater in the latter two provinces than in the former two, while the ability of provincial governments to meet these demands has been more constrained. This has led to different patterns of public policy in these provinces.

A different perspective on the West stems out of a consideration of primarily geographical and economic considerations (reinforced by cultural patterns.) Taking such an approach, Garreau (1981) depicts North America as a series of highly distinct regions. For him, political

boundaries are of little consequence with regard to defining regions. As a result of his focus on geography (rather than on relations of political and economic dependency), Garreau envisions multiple Wests within the West: the Pacific Northwest, the Mountain Region, the Prairie Region. The currency of this conception is heightened by contemporary patterns of intensified North-South economic relations between Canadian regions and neighbouring parts of the United States. Historically, "just as the evolution of modern Canada has been marked by the development of a dense system of interregional relations, so too have Canada's regions developed in relation to specific, often geographically adjacent local areas in the United States" (Williams 1995, 19).

This image has considerable contemporary resonance. Recently, Courchene and Telmer (1998) have powerfully restated a current version of a regionalist thesis (similar to that of Garreau) focusing on Ontario, which, they argue, has shifted from being the Canadian heartland to being a North American region state. A similar line of reasoning is increasingly evident with regard to British Columbia and its relations to the Pacific Rim, the "strong north-south pull" of its external trade relations with Washington, Oregon, and California, and the nascent political region of Cascadia (i.e., British Columbia, Washington, and Oregon) (Resnick 2000, 19). These forces have important consequences for the existence of the West: "Global economic change has renewed the sense of a Pacific distinctiveness from the Prairie neighbours beyond the Rockies" (Ruff, quoted in Resnick 2000, 13).

In contrast to these geo-economic arguments, Wiseman (1996) focuses on historical patterns of immigration. These patterns contributed to distinct political cultures in various provinces, which, within the framework provided by provincial geo-political boundaries, then congealed. In Wiseman's conception, four distinct waves (or ripples) of immigration contributed to shaping the distinct political cultures of the Western provinces: (1) an early British wave (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia), (2) an American wave (Alberta), (3) an Eastern European wave (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta), and (4) a more recent and more highly variegated influx of immigrations from Southern Europe, Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America (primarily British Columbia). These different waves of immigration have contributed to significant differences among the provinces that make up the West. These cultural differences, which do not strictly follow provincial boundaries, have been translated into

provincial political differences primarily because they have developed within the framework provided by individual provincial political systems. Not surprisingly, Wiseman concludes that viewing the four western-most provinces as a singular West "is akin to trying to tie four watermelons together with a single piece of string" (311).

Institutional Conceptions of the West

While Garreau dismisses the importance of political boundaries, and while they are only important for Wiseman to the extent that they provide the space that is filled by different political cultures emanating from different historical patterns of immigration, a significant strain of thought in Canadian political science is based on the importance of political institutions themselves. One institutional conception of the West defines that entity in terms of historical conceptions of regions within the Canadian Confederation.[3] However, with only a few exceptions (e.g., the Western Premiers Conference), there is little in the way of a formal institutionalization of the West as a coherent political unit; rather, the salient political units are provincial governments. To the extent that a West exists – or persists – it does so in spite of the lack of formal institutions.

An alternative institutional conception focuses on the existence of provinces as autonomous political units and has important implications for the existence of a unified and cohesive Canadian West. Because Canada is divided into provinces Canadians are encouraged to adopt provincial (as opposed to regional) orientations. In part, this process is passive – Canadian citizens develop provincialist orientations simply by virtue of the existence of provinces. At the same time, the emergence and definition of provincial political cultures may also be fostered by provincial governments actively attempting to encourage provincial cohesion and distinctiveness – a process that has come to be termed "province-building."[4] Within this institutionalist perspective it seems that there are slim grounds upon which to base expectations of a cohesive, distinctive West.

[3] This appears to be the basis for the conventional fivefold definition of Canadian regions as Atlantic Canada, Quebec, Ontario, the Prairies, and British Columbia. An important distinction is drawn here between the Prairies, which "entered Confederation as a colonial possession of the Dominion government," and British Columbia, which "negotiated the terms of Confederation as fully fledged British colony" (Conway 1983, 11). This conception sees two distinct Wests within the West.

[4] The concept of province building was introduced by Cairns (1977). For a critique, see Young, Faucher, and Blais (1984).

Conclusion

Even within perspectives that recognize the distinctiveness of the West, there are widely varied perceptions regarding the coherence of the West. The West may be seen as a relatively homogenous entity defined primarily by its unequal economic and political relationship with the Canadian heartland. Alternatively, it may be seen as an agglomeration of fragmented and distinct identities defined primarily by its diverse geography, demography, and economic links. The question remains as to whether either image finds resonance in patterns of provincial public policy.

EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM AN OVERVIEW OF PUBLIC POLICY INDICATORS

In order to consider the plausibility of viewing the Canadian West as a distinct regional public policy space, we use a number of quantitative indicators of public policy in the fields of environmental protection, social assistance, post-secondary education, and health care.[5]

Policy Fields and Policy Indicators

We are concerned with using public policy as an indicator of public philosophy regarding the appropriate role of the state and, implicitly, the appropriate balance between the individual and the collectivity. A disaggregated approach to the public philosophy underpinning policy (i.e., an approach that examines policy similarities and differences within specific policy fields) is likely to be more sensitive to differences and similarities than is an approach that uses more highly aggregated indicators of state involvement (such as overall levels of taxation or total government expenditures). Within these broad indicators of state intervention, government policies can be variously aimed at undermining existing social hierarchies or market outcomes, reinforcing those hierarchies or market-determined outcomes, and protecting or encouraging the degradation of the

[5] In a series of papers, we have undertaken a review of both qualitative and quantitative indicators of public policy in all American states and Canadian provinces in the fields of environmental protection, social assistance and income maintenance, post-secondary education, and health care. See VanNijnatten and Boychuk (1998); Boychuk and VanNijnatten (1999); Boychuk (1999); Boychuk and VanNijnatten (2000); Boychuk (2000); VanNijnatten (2000).

environment. If there are differences or similarities in public philosophies across Western provinces, then such differences ought to be evident in variations in the provincial state's role in redistribution (social assistance), providing protection from risk (health care), creating equality of opportunity (post-secondary education), and protecting the environment (environmental protection).

Within these policy fields, choosing specific indicators for comparison is plagued by at least two difficult problems. The first involves ensuring that policy indicators accurately measure policy as it is provided on the ground rather than simply the policy pronouncements of government. Second, it is imperative that these indicators measure aspects of policy that are determined, at least to a significant degree, by the governments in question. The tension between these two aims poses serious problems for the choice of policy indicators.

The potential for a disjunction between the policy aims pronounced by governments and the policy actions actually undertaken is very significant. For example, instances of stringent environmental policy that remain largely unenforced are widely recognized. The possibility arises that governments are simply arriving at similar policy ends (e.g., lax environmental regulation) through different means (e.g., lax regulation versus lax enforcement.) Thus it is crucial to strive to find indicators that capture how policy is actually provided on the ground. This problem is exacerbated by the often unidimensional nature of individual indicators of public policy. For example, expenditures on social assistance may fail to capture other important differences in policy. Social assistance benefits of a given level may be restricted to a very narrow range of eligible recipients or distributed to a much broader range of recipients. Thus a range of indicators is often needed to capture important policy differences. At the same time, the range of indicators that can reasonably be included in an empirical examination are bounded by the constraints of manageability as well as by the existence of comparable data.

The problem with moving to an intermediate range of indicators of policy outputs is that they are often contaminated by differences in the socio-economic context. For example, social assistance eligibility restrictions are a crucial determinant of the proportion of the population in receipt of assistance; however, levels of receipt are also related to levels of poverty and unemployment. Similarly, government expenditures on health care depend at least in part on the health status of the population. In the absence of the highly detailed data

required for micro-data simulation or other sophisticated statistical techniques used to control for such differences, this difficulty appears intractable. Any choice of policy indicator will be open to criticism from one side or the other of this difficult issue – that the indicator in question represents policy intentions but not how policy actually operates in practice or, alternatively, that the indicator is driven too heavily by factors other than the intentions of policy makers.

Our choice of policy indicators attempts to draw a reasonable balance between these two considerations as well as to incorporate, where feasible, multiple dimensions of policy within each area.[6] In *social assistance*, we examine maximum social assistance benefits (which are strongly policy determined), social assistance recipiency rates as a percentage of total population (which are partly determined by eligibility criteria and help capture the range of population that actually has access to those benefits), and total social assistance expenditures (as a large proportion of recipients may receive considerably less than maximum benefits).[7] In *post-secondary education*, we examine total public expenditures and public university tuition (which are both highly policy determined) and full-time enrolments (which, although conditioned by socio-demographic characteristics, still remains one of the best measures of access). In *health care*, we examine total public expenditures, public versus private health care expenditures (in provincial comparisons only, as comparable state data are not available), and public/private control of hospitals – all of which are relatively highly policy determined. In *environmental protection*, levels of actual pollution and, as a result, total pollution abatement and control expenditures are heavily determined by factors other than policy (e.g., industrial structure, including reliance upon natural resource extraction and processing). Thus, we examine the ratio of private to public pollution and abatement control expenditures as being indicative of the degree to which the costs of environmental protection are borne either privately or publicly.

The following section uses these policy indicators to examine three questions: (1) is public policy in Western Canadian provinces cohesive and distinct in contrast to the other Canadian provinces? (2) is there one West or are there multiple Wests within the West? and, where cohesion among Western provinces, is weak, are there obvious

[6] Descriptions and sources for each of the following indicators are presented in Appendix B.

[7] In Canada, *average* social assistance benefits as actually paid are not publicly available on a comprehensive and comparable basis across provinces.

subregional groupings? and (3) are public policies in Western provinces more similar to those of their nearest American neighbours than to other Canadian provinces (as per expectations generated by increasing economic and political integration)?

Distinctiveness and Cohesion

In comparing these policy indicators across jurisdictions, the evidence on Western distinctiveness is weak. Differences in the averages of Western provinces and the other provinces fall generally within a relatively slight (e.g., 10 per cent) range (see Table 1, cols. 1 and 2). Only two of the eight indicators mark notable exceptions – social assistance recipiency rates (where the average of the Western provinces was one-third less than the average across the remaining provinces) and post-secondary enrolment (where the average of the Western provinces was approximately 20 per cent less than the average of the other provinces).

For Western provinces to form a region of policy similarity, the variation among them should be less significant than the variation among all provinces. The evidence for this is mixed. In post-secondary education and, less notably, environmental protection, variation among Western provinces is less significant than is variation among all Canadian provinces (see Table 1, cols. 4, 5). In social assistance, variation among Western provinces is more significant than is variation among all provinces and, in health, variation among Western provinces is equal to variation among all provinces. Thus, across these policy fields, the trend towards greater similarity among Western provinces is no stronger than it is among all Canadian provinces.

Using a statistical test (t-test), which accounts for both variation among Western provinces and between Western provinces and the other provinces, statistically significant differences between Western provinces as a group and the remaining provinces are evident in only two of eight public policy indicators (See Table 1, col. 6).[8] Public health expenditures are significantly higher and social assistance recipiency rates are significantly lower in Western provinces than in other provinces.

[8] Higher t-ratios indicate a greater degree of difference between the designated group and the other group (Western states/all other provinces). Positive t-ratios indicate that the scores of Western provinces on these policy indicators are higher than are the scores for the other group (Western states/all other provinces). Negative t-ratios indicate that the scores of Western provinces on these policy indicators are lower than are the scores for the other group (Western states/all other provinces.)

TABLE 1

Western Provinces versus Other Canadian Provinces/Western States

	(1) Western Provinces (mean)	(2) Other Canadian Provinces (mean)	(3) Western States (mean)	(4) Western Provinces (dispersion)	(5) All Provinces (dispersion)	(6) Western Provinces vs. Other Provinces (t-ratio)	(7) Western Provinces vs. Western States (t-ratio)
Public/Private PAC (ratio)	0.26	0.25 (a)	0.22	0.31	0.40 (a)	-0.79	-0.51
SA – Benefits ($US)	13929.00	14416.00	13703.00	0.09	0.09	-0.55	0.23
SA – Expenditures ($US)	274.28	309.02	228.50	0.36	0.33	-0.41	0.69
SA – Recipiency (% total pop.)	7.15	10.72	7.47	0.32	0.27	-2.79*	-0.22
PSE Tuition ($US)	1992.37	2026.77	2569.25	0.06	0.16	-0.14	-2.87*
PSE Public Exp. ($US)	407.69	441.73	467.15	0.07	0.15	-0.60	-1.00
PSE Enrolment (% total pop.)	2.14	2.61	3.30	0.07	0.19	-1.62	-2.51*
Health Public Exp. ($US)	1594.88	1464.40	1262.78	0.065	0.064	2.38*	3.93**
Profit hospitals (% of all hospitals)	0.00	0.00	2.2	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.37

*significant at 5 per cent confidence level

**significant at 1 per cent confidence level

(a) Does not include PEI, which is a marked outlier in terms of public to private PAC expenditures.

-Dispersion is measured as the standard deviation divided by the mean.

TABLE 2

Distinctiveness of Regions/Provincial Groupings (Variously Defined) vs. All Other Provinces

Policy Area	Indicator	West (t-ratio)	BC (t-ratio)	AB (t-ratio)	SK (t-ratio)	MB (t-ratio)
Environment	Public/Private PAC	-0.79	-0.69	-0.66	-0.67	-0.69
Social Assistance	SA Benefits	-0.55	0.28	0.00	-1.33	-0.83
	SA Expenditures	-1.20	-2.27	-0.16	-0.82	-0.85
	SA Recipiency Rates	*-2.80**	*-3.72***	-0.71	*-2.40**	-1.95
Post-secondary	Public Expenditures	-0.60	-0.99	-0.31	-0.31	-0.24
Education	PSE Enrolments	-1.61	-0.87	-1.33	-1.60	-1.16
	PSE Tuition	-0.14	0.16	-0.41	-0.23	0.03
Health Care	Public Expenditures ($)	*2.38**	0.80	*5.17***	1.70	1.24
	Public vs. Private Exp.	0.88	0.67	1.20	0.44	0.38

*significant at 5 per cent confidence level

**significant at 1 per cent confidence level

However, there may be reasons to expect that Western distinctiveness would appear more robust if it were defined somewhat differently and if certain provinces were left out of the comparison. Removing British Columbia from the equation allows us to examine the claim that the Prairies are the core of the distinctive Western region. Removing Alberta from the equation allows us to consider whether the Western provinces with a significant New Democratic Party presence differ from other Canadian provinces. Removing Manitoba allows us to examine whether it may be more akin to Ontario than to other Western provinces. However, successively removing each of the Western provinces from the calculation of statistical difference does not result in a more robust image of Western distinctiveness (See Table 2).

Wests within the West

The lack of cohesiveness among Western provinces in certain policy fields raises the question of whether, across these policy indicators, there are consistent patterns of similarity or difference among particular groups of Western provinces. There are several potential hypotheses: that British Columbia is distinct from the other three Western provinces; that British Columbia and Alberta are more similar to each other than to Saskatchewan and Manitoba as a result of their status as "have" provinces, while the latter are more similar to each other than to the former as a result of their "have-not" status; that there are regional distinctions between British Columbia (coastal), Alberta (mountain), and Saskatchewan and Manitoba (prairie); or, finally, that all Western provinces are relatively unique.

Taking all four policy fields together, there is little empirical evidence of a West composed of distinct subregions made up of more than one province. (See Table 3, which presents provincial scores on each of the eight indicators indexed to the four-province "Western" average.) While there is relative regional uniformity among Western provinces with regard to post-secondary education and health care, differences among the four Western provinces with regard to environmental protection and social assistance provision are much more marked. With regard to the ratio of public to private pollution abatement and control expenditures, Alberta and Saskatchewan both have less significant public components than do British Columbia and Manitoba. With regard to social assistance expenditures and recipiency rates, Saskatchewan and Manitoba look relatively similar, while British Columbia is much higher on both indicators than are the

TABLE 3
Public Policy Indicators in Western Provinces (Indexed to Western Average)

Policy Area	Indicator	BC	AB	Sask	Man
Environment	Public/Private PAC	1.24	0.62	0.78	1.36
Social Assistance	SA Benefits	0.90	0.94	1.11	1.05
	SA Expenditures	1.56	0.55	0.94	0.96
	SA Recipiency Rates	1.37	0.49	1.13	1.01
Post-secondary	Public Expenditures	1.12	0.97	0.97	0.95
Education	PSE Enrolments	0.90	1.03	1.09	0.98
	PSE Tuition	0.93	1.08	1.03	0.96
Health Care	Total Public Expenditures	1.07	0.90	1.00	1.03
	Public vs. Private Exp.	1.00	0.96	1.02	1.02
Average**	All	0.18	0.19	0.08	0.07

*Four province unweighted average = 1.00
**The mean of the absolute difference from the four province average on each of the nine indicators.

other provinces, and Alberta is much lower. Thus, while there are significant differences across some of the policy indicators, there is no clear pattern of similarity among pairs or groups of provinces.

Western Canadian Distinctiveness in Cross-National Perspective

Examining Western provinces in cross-national perspective helps us to address two issues. First, it places differences between Western provinces and the other Canadian provinces within a broader comparative perspective. Second, it helps us to find out whether the differences among Western provinces outlined above are indicative of their public policies being more closely aligned with those of the neighbouring northwestern states than with each other's.

Do Western provinces as a group resemble the northwestern border states (Washington, Montana, North Dakota, and Minnesota) to a greater degree than they resemble the other Canadian provinces? (See Table 1, cols. 1, 2, and 3.) The only evidence supporting this hypothesis may be seen in social assistance provision, where both the average benefit rates and recipiency rates in Western provinces are closer to the average rates in northwestern border states than to the average rates in other Canadian provinces. While differences between Western provinces and their other provincial counterparts are not, in general, greater in comparison to those between Western provinces and the northwestern border states, the differences between Western provinces and northwestern states are only statistically significant in three of eight indicators (post-secondary tuition and enrolment and public health expenditures). (See Table 1, col. 7.)

Province-State Similarity

Similar issues can be addressed from the perspective of individual provinces: do individual Western provinces more closely resemble the northwestern American states than their Western provincial counterparts? Table 4 presents all possible pairings of Western provinces and northwestern border states, arranged from the most similar to most dissimilar pairs in each of the four policy fields as well as for all four fields combined. Most provincial pairs are above average in their degree of similarity when all four policy fields are considered in combination. However, this pattern varies significantly by policy area. Despite the high degree of similarity among provincial

TABLE 4
Matching Pairs

Rank	Combined**		Environment Protection*		Social Assistance*		PSE*		Health*	
1.	SK-MB	-0.96	WA-AB	-1.58	MN-MB	-1.60	AB-SK	-1.61	MN-AB	-1.47
2.	MN-SK	-0.74	ND-MB	-1.18	SK-MB	-1.47	SK-MB	-1.42	SK-MB	-1.39
3.	BC-MB	-0.71	BC-MB	-1.18	WA-MB	-1.24	AB-MB	-1.41	BC-MB	-1.36
4.	AB-SK	-0.63	WA-SK	-1.04	MN-SK	-1.22	BC-MB	-1.14	BC-SK	-1.20
5.	MN-MB	-0.53	AB-SK	-1.04	WA-SK	-1.16	BC-SK	-0.84	AB-SK	-1.02
6.	MN-AB	-0.38	MN-SK	-0.91	ND-MB	-0.99	AB-BC	-0.83	MN-SK	-0.93
7.	WA-SK	-0.31	ND-BC	-0.78	ND-AB	-0.36	MT-AB	-0.40	AB-MB	-0.85
8.	BC-SK	-0.26	MN-BC	-0.64	MT-MB	-0.33	MT-SK	-0.39	MN-MB	-0.77
9.	AB-MB	-0.19	MT-AB	-0.51	ND-SK	-0.30	WA-AB	-0.23	AB-BC	-0.66
10.	MT-AB	-0.17	MN-AB	-0.37	MT-SK	-0.25	WA-SK	-0.21	MN-BC	-0.57
11.	MT-SK	0.01	MN-MB	-0.24	MT-BC	-0.02	MT-MB	-0.09	MT-AB	0.12
12.	WA-AB	0.06	MT-SK	0.03	WA-BC	-0.00	WA-BC	-0.03	ND-AB	0.20
13.	MN-BC	0.15	BC-SK	0.03	MT-AB	0.11	MN-AB	0.08	WA-AB	0.62
14.	ND-MB	0.17	SK-MB	0.43	MN-AB	0.23	MN-SK	0.10	MT-SK	0.66
15.	AB-BC	0.28	WA-BC	0.57	ND-BC	0.23	WA-MB	0.18	ND-SK	0.74
16.	WA-MB	0.31	AB-BC	0.57	AB-MB	0.53	MN-BC	0.43	MT-MB	0.83
17.	WA-BC	0.52	ND-SK	0.83	BC-MB	0.84	MN-MB	0.49	ND-MB	0.91
18.	ND-BC	0.55	WA-MB	0.97	BC-SK	0.98	MT-BC	0.59	MT-BC	1.02
19.	MT-MB	0.61	AB-MB	0.97	AB-SK	1.15	ND-AB	1.54	ND-BC	1.10
20.	ND-AB	0.69	ND-AB	1.37	MN-BC	1.40	ND-SK	1.56	WA-SK	1.16
21.	ND-SK	0.71	MT-BC	1.65	WA-AB	1.45	ND-BC	1.68	WA-MB	1.33
22.	MT-BC	0.80	MT-MB	2.05	AB-BC	2.02	ND-MB	1.95	WA-BC	1.52

*Absolute differences in standardized scores are calculated for each indicator within the policy area. These absolute differences are then averaged and presented as standardized scores for each province-state/province-province pair.
**In calculating this combined score, the standardized scores for each pair in all four fields (see note above) are averaged and presented as standardized score.

pairs in post-secondary education and health care, Western provinces are no more similar to each other in environmental protection and are less similar to each other in social assistance provision than they are to the northwestern border states. In environmental protection, only two of six provincial pairs (British Columbia and Manitoba, Alberta and Saskatchewan) display above average degrees of similarity. More notably, only one provincial pair (Saskatchewan and Manitoba) displays an above average degree of similarity in the area of social assistance provision. As noted above, the picture is quite different when it comes to post-secondary education and health care. With regard to the former, the six provincial pairs were the top six most closely matching pairs; with regard to the latter, all six provincial pairs had above average degrees of similarity.

A significant factor that explains this overall pattern is the similarity between Minnesota and the Canadian provinces.[9] Considering all four policy fields together, Minnesota is as much like the four Western provinces as they are like each other. Across the four policy fields, Minnesota and Saskatchewan are (with the exception of Saskatchewan and Manitoba) the closest matching of any province-state/province-province pair. With regard to social assistance, Minnesota paired with Manitoba is the closest match of all province-state/province-province pairs; and with regard to health care, Minnesota-Alberta is the closest match. In fact, in the fields of environmental protection and social assistance, Minnesota is, on average, more similar to the Western provinces than is any one of the Western provinces themselves. However, in the fields of post-secondary education and health care, more traditional distinctions apply, with the provinces, on avenge, looking more similar to each other than to Minnesota. However, it is interesting to note that the four state-province pairs including Minnesota were the only state-province pairs to have above average similarity in health care, with Alberta and Minnesota ranking as the most similar of all possible pairs.

Using comparisons of individual provinces and northwestern border states to put provincial similarities and differences into a comparative context, the most notable finding is the dissimilarity between British Columbia and Alberta – the one provincial pair that ranks below average in terms of similarity in all four policy fields. Considering

[9] Addressing a public administration convention in Ottawa in 2000, Seymour Martin Lipset quipped that, when Americans talk about Canada, it often sounds to other Americans as if they are talking about Minnesota.

the four policy fields together, Alberta is more similar to three of the four northwestern states (excluding North Dakota) than it is to British Columbia. While Alberta and British Columbia are similar with regard to post-secondary education and health care, they are the least similar of all possible pairs with regard to social assistance. Furthermore, British Columbia is only as similar to Alberta as it is to Washington on the environmental protection indicator.

Table 5 summarizes the overall rankings presented in Table 4 by presenting the average ranking of each provinces when paired with the other provinces and when paired with northwestern border states. British Columbia is the most distinctive province both relative to other Western provinces and relative to the northwestern American border states. Both British Columbia and Alberta are much more distinct from the Western provinces as a group than are Saskatchewan and Manitoba. However, Alberta is comparable with Saskatchewan and Manitoba in terms of its average ranking of similarity with the northwestern states, while British Columbia scores considerably lower.

The Garreau Hypothesis

A more highly specified hypothesis can be derived from the reasoning presented in Garreau's work. Pairs of geographically contiguous cross-border jurisdictions (British Columbia and Washington, Alberta and Montana, Saskatchewan and Montana/North Dakota, Manitoba and North Dakota/Minnesota) may be more similar to each other than are the provinces involved to other Western provinces.

TABLE 5

Average of Rankings (Combined Indicator, Table 4), Each Western Province with All Western Provinces/Northwestern Border States

	Western Provinces	Northwestern Border States
British Columbia	8.6	17.5
Alberta	9.3	12.0
Saskatchewan	4.3	10.25
Manitoba	4.3	13.5

As these numbers are averages of rankings of similarity, lower scores represent a greater degree of similarity for those provinces paired with other provinces or the northwestern states relative to other pairs of provinces and provinces/states.

The policy comparisons undertaken here provide little evidence of this hypothesis (see Table 4). Considering the four policy fields in combination, most cross-border neighbouring pairs (with the exception of Manitoba and Minnesota) are either of roughly average similarity (Montana and Alberta, Montana and Saskatchewan, North Dakota and Manitoba) or below average similarity (Washington and British Columbia, North Dakota and Saskatchewan). Comparing provinces with their immediately neighbouring American states (rather than with all northwestern border states) does not, in general, increase the image of cross-border similarity – the only exception being Manitoba and Minnesota. Manitoba is almost as similar (considering the four policy fields in combination) to Minnesota as it is, on average, to the other Western provinces, although it is still more similar to Saskatchewan and British Columbia. The only other limited evidence supporting the Garreau hypothesis is the fact that Alberta is more similar to Montana than it is to British Columbia.

However, these patterns of cross-border versus cross-provincial similarity differ significantly by policy area. There is no evidence whatsoever of the Garreau hypothesis in post-secondary education or health care. In environmental protection, the evidence is more mixed. Manitoba is more similar to North Dakota than are any of its Western provincial counterparts, and it is more similar to Minnesota than it is, on average, to the other Western provinces. Similarly, Alberta is, on average, more like Montana on this indicator than it is like the other Western provinces. Stronger evidence of the Garreau hypothesis emerges in the area of social assistance. Here, on average, all four Western provinces are more similar to their nearest neighbouring state or states than they are to each other. In addition British Columbia and Washington, Alberta and Montana, and Manitoba and Minnesota (the most similar of any province-state/province-province pair) are more similar with regard to social assistance indicators than is any one of these provinces to any other Western province.

CONCLUSIONS

This examination of quantitative public policy indicators in Western provinces is not definitive. Divergent images of similarity and difference might emerge if we were to use different indicators within these fields or if we were to examine other policy fields. Second, this examination would also be greatly enhanced by the addition of qualitative comparisons. Nonetheless, what we have found is suggestive.

Considering the policy fields and indicators examined here, the West does not emerge as a coherent and distinct public policy space within Canada. There are few significant differences between Western provinces as a group and other provinces with regard to the policy indicators examined here, and variation among Western provinces is only slightly less significant than is variation among all provinces.[10] At the same time, no overall picture of cross-border policy similarity between Western provinces and northwestern border states emerges; what does emerge is a complex picture of similarity and difference among Western provinces, between Western provinces and other provinces, and between Western provinces and northwestern border states. This picture speaks primarily to the uniqueness of each of the Western provinces as well as to the uniqueness of the patterns of similarity and difference across each of these policy fields.

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[10] These conclusions are in keeping with Friesen's (1999, xvii) objection to broad substantive generalizations regarding the ideological predisposition of the West.

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APPENDIX A: DATA AND SOURCES

Environmental Protection Indicators

Public Pollution Abatement and Control Expenditures – $US per capita (1994). Conversion of Canadian to American dollars using purchasing power parity (1.24).

Sources: Data for American states derived from the Council of State Governments, *Book of the States 1999* (Lexington: Council of State Governments), Table 8.18. Data includes expenditures for air quality, drinking water, hazardous waste, nuclear waste, pesticide control, solid waste, and water quality. Data for Canadian provinces from Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 11-528-XPE. This is the last year for which Statistics Canada public PAC data is available.

Private Pollution Abatement and Control Expenditures – $US per capita (1994). Conversion of Canadian to American dollars using purchasing power parity (1.24).

Sources: Data for American states derived from Bureau of Economic Analysis, *Current Industrial Reports, Pollution Abatement Costs and Expenditures, 1994* (Washtington: Bureau of Economic Analysis, 1994), Table 2 (Summary of Capital Expenditures and Operating Costs by States: 1990 to 1994). Data for Canadian provinces drawn from Statistics Canada, *Environmental Protection Expenditures in the Business Sector, 1995* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, July 1998) (Item 16F0006XIE). Figures include both capital and operating expenditures (Tables A.4 and A.16).

Social Assistance Indicators

Total Expenditures – total expenditures by states and provinces on mean-tested social assistance (excluding Medicaid) programs (1995) in $US per capita.

Sources: United States Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States* (Washington: Census Bureau, 1997), Table 605 for Aid to Families with Dependent Children and Supplement Security Income, Table 604 for Food Stamps and National School Lunch Program, and Table 2 for Housing Benefits. Cori E. Uccello, Heather R. McCallum, and L. Jerome Gallagher, *State General Assistance Programs, 1996* (Washington: The Urban Institute, 1997). See Table 5.1 for state general assistance expenditures. Social assistance expenditures by province provided directly by Human Resources Development Canada. Data available upon request.

Benefits – social assistance income (1995) from all social assistance programs for a single parent with two children adjusted to the cost of living.

Sources: Michael Tanner, Stephen Moore, and David Hartman, "The Work Versus Welfare Trade-Off: An Analysis of the Total Level of Welfare Benefits by State," *CATO Policy Analysis*, No. 240 (September 1995): 19: Table 8 for American data. Michael Walker and Joel Emes, "Are Canadians Less Compassionate than Americas?" *Fraser Forum* (April 1996) 5-17: Table 3 is used to derive Canadian figures.

Notes: The Walker and Emes data are adjusted so that they do not include allowable employment earnings that are not included in the US assistance rates used in their comparison. Figures in Canadian dollars are converted to US equivalents using OECD purchasing power parities (ppp = 1.24 for 1995) rather than the exchange rage (1.3554) used by Walker and Emes. Cost-of-living calculations have been undertaken by the authors on the basis of the *Statistical Abstract of the United States* cost-of-living index for the United States, which indexes prices for maintaining a household at a "mid-management standard of living." Cost-of-living figures in the index for metropolitan areas were averaged to derive a state cost-of-living index. Data is from *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1997,* Table 749.

For Canada, the "cost-of-living" index does not measure the cost of living per se; rather, it is based on the average expenditures per household on shelter and food. These data are from Statistics Canada On-line, *Average Household Expenditures*, 1996.

Receipt – social assistance beneficiaries (1997) of AFDC, SSI, State General Assistance and Food Stamps (US) and social assistance (Canada) as a percentage of population.

Sources: Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1997, Table 605, for AFDC and SSI recipients. Food Stamp data from Table 604. Uccello et al., 1997, Table 5.1 for state general assistance recipients. Social assistance receipt by province provided directly by Human Resources Development Canada. Data available upon request.

Notes: State general assistance data is seriously incomplete.

Post-secondary Education Indicators

Total Expenditures – Total Public Expenditures on Post-secondary Education, Federal/State-Provincial/Local Governments (1996) in $US dollars per capita.

Sources: Direct general expenditures on post-secondary by state and local government, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics* (Washington: National Center for Education Statistics, 1997), Table 35. US Department of Education expenditures on higher education and student financial assistance, from National Center for Education Statistics, 1997 1997b, Table 363. State spending on student aid from Chronicle of Higher Education, *Almanac of Higher Education, 1994* (Washington: Chronicle of Higher Education, 1994). Data for Canadian provinces from Statistics Canada On-Line, *Expenditure on Postsecondary Education*, derived from CANSIM cross-classified tables 00590203, 00590206.

Notes: Statistics Canada data on post-secondary education expenditure for Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia do not include

university operating expenditures, which are listed as "unavailable, not applicable, or confidential." As such, data for these three provinces are not included in this comparison.

US federal on-budget funds for post-secondary education programs total $15.8 billion, of which $8.3 billion are US Department of Education post-secondary education expenditures and are included here. The remainder are expenditures by other departments and agencies, and data on the incidence of these expenditures by state do not appear to be available. Thus, in this comparison, US federal expenditures are underrepresented by $7.5 billion, or roughly 7.6% of total government expenditures on post-secondary education.

Public FTE – Full-time enrolment in public post-secondary education institutions as a proportion of total population in American states (1995) and Canadian provinces (1996).

Sources: National Centre for Education Statistics, 1997, Table 194. Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, *Trends 1996* (Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 1997).

Public Tuition – tuition levels ($US per annum) in four-year public institutions (US) and selected Canadian universities

Sources: National Center for Education Statistics, 1997 : Table 313; Council of Ontario Universities, Financial Position of Ontario Universities (Toronto: COU, 1997): Table 16.

Notes: Figures for US states are state averages. However, Canadian figures are for selected institutions in each province. These institutions are selected by the Council of Ontario Universities and reported in Table 16. This publication does not report any tuition figures for the province of Prince Edward Island, which is not included in this comparison. Statistics Canada collects data for all institutions but does not present an aggregated average by province; rather, the *Education Quarterly Review* reports tuition for the largest university in each province. These data do not differ significantly from the data used in this comparison.

Health Care Provision Indicators

Total Public Health Care Expenditures (per capita), all states and provinces, 1996.

Sources: Canadian Institute for Health Information, *National Health Expenditure Trends, 1975-1999* (Ottawa: CIHI, 2000) for total public health care spending by province; US, Bureau of the Census, 1998, for federal expenditures, including Medicaid, public health services (Health Resources and Services Administration, Centres for Disease Control, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration), Medicare (hospital

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