

Book chapter in  
C. Green-Pedersen and S. Walgrave (2013), *Agenda-setting from a Policy Theory to a Theory of Politics*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

## **Diffusion of Policy Attention in Canada: Evidence from Speeches from the Throne, 1960-2008**

Martial Foucault, [martial.foucault@umontreal.ca](mailto:martial.foucault@umontreal.ca)

Eric Montpetit, [e.montpetit@montreal.ca](mailto:e.montpetit@montreal.ca)

*Université de Montréal, Département de science politique*

### **Introduction**

The Canadian federation is often praised for its decentralized nature. Such decentralization, it is claimed, enables different provincial and regional communities to live peacefully under the same political system (Montpetit, 2006). Scholars have paid much attention to Canadian federalism by investigating vertical relations between the federal government and provinces leaving aside horizontal relations (between provinces). This pattern is not surprising as different forms of federalism in Canada have stressed the content of institutional arrangements and the policy-making process whereby policy choices are made through negotiations and deliberations among the members of the executive branches of the federal and provincial governments. However, the evolution of Canadian federalism goes with an increasing transfer of competencies to provinces that implied a new puzzling issue in terms of intergovernmental relations. Indeed, not only provinces get autonomy in implementing policies in education, health, and environment but also they developed a large variety of official and unofficial arrangements at the horizontal level. Consequently, it remains to know to what extent provinces define policy priorities, elaborate policies by taking into account what neighboring provincial governments do and what the federal government facilitates or not.

Among the latest development in the public policy literature, theories of policy diffusion have rapidly grown and established some crucial results in the knowledge of diffusion processes. Aside from political scientists, political economists and sociologists are also investigating more and more the policy diffusion processes without necessarily identifying it as such explicitly. The fiscal federalism literature, in particular, provides a good example of scholars thinking about the impact of tax and fiscal choices of some jurisdictions on other ones. This avenue of research underlines two important considerations: space and time. Space since in a federal system, some vertical strategic interactions occur between the centre and the local jurisdictions and horizontal strategic interactions arise when jurisdictions compete among themselves (Boadway and Shah, 2009). Time since the reaction of a local government can be simultaneously based on the neighboring jurisdictions' decisions or derived from rational or limited rational expectations (Besley and Case, 1995). Although we do not ignore such developments in the recent literature, our argument is not directly linked to political actors' behavior in a federal system. Instead, we choose to focus on how the prioritization of attention in a federation entails a dynamic within political institutions and shapes policy diffusion processes. Political scientists have recently renewed the approach of policy diffusion by using new empirical tools – i.e. history-event analysis, dyad analysis (Shipan and Volden 2008) or new datasets (Krause 2011, Nicholson-Crotty 2009). At the core of their approach, we find a common goal, namely understanding why and how some governments – at a local or national level – adopt new policies. Three main avenues of research have been borrowed: (a) the influence of neighboring jurisdictions' decisions through a mechanism of learning or competition (Shipan and Volden 2006, 2008); (b) the regional patterns of policy adoption (Walker 1969); and (c) the role of institutions (intergovernmental relations) as disseminators of policies (Dolowitz and Marsh 1996, Weyland 2005, Gilardi 2010). But little attention has been paid to the salience of policy issues and their potential diffusion in a federal context, since the seminal work of Soroka (2005) only focused the dynamics of agenda-setting in Canada at the federal level. This argument seems to be particularly relevant when analyzing federal systems as decentralized as the one in Canada. Indeed, the long tradition of decentralization in Canada offers not only a case for a laboratory of democracy but also an intriguing

institutional framework for observing the propensity of provincial and federal governments to compete or coerce each other.

In other words, we are more concerned with the emergence of issues in a decentralized system where each provincial government attempts to define its policy agenda, regardless of what the other provinces do. To improve our understanding of how policy priorities are distributed within subnational governments and federal governments, we propose to analyze a unique dataset based on 445 speeches from the Throne delivered in Canadian provinces, as well as in the federal parliament from 1960 to 2009.

In this chapter, our main theoretical argument is to combine agenda-setting literature with policy diffusion theories with the aim of highlighting policy patterns in Canada over the longest period ever empirically tested. Thus, we focus on the nature of diffusion that may occur during this long period of transformation of Canadian federalism and wonder to what regional and policy extent governments' agendas influence each other. We compare the importance of attention change (or stability) in policy issues.

The first section offers an overview of Canadian politics since the beginning of the 1960s to better specify expectations about diffusion of policy attention in an evolving federation. The second section indicates briefly the main mechanisms of policy diffusion that have influenced political actors in order to analyze policy attention across provincial governments over fifty years. We describe in the third and fourth sections respectively testable hypotheses and data. In a fifth section, we present results before concluding and discussing the next steps of a research agenda on policy diffusion with agenda-setting data for Canada.

### **1- Norms of Canadian federalism**

John and Jennings (2010: 565) argue that political scientists have described post-war British politics as “club government”, controlled at the summit by a “policy-making elite”, which promotes “a closed and secretive style of government”, unresponsive to interest groups and change in public opinion. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this image could just as well describe post-war Canadian politics. Canada has indeed inherited Westminster style legislative institutions, whereby single party governments control the

legislative agenda. Thanks to cabinet governments, policy-making has been the purview of the Prime Minister, surrounded by a closed circle of ministers and high ranking civil servants (Savoie 1999; 2008). Unlike the United Kingdom, however, Canada is a federal country, in which a constitutional division of legislative responsibilities between the federal and provincial governments prevails. Moreover, the Canadian Senate does not provide for provincial representation, distinguishing the country from other federations such as Germany, Switzerland and the United States. Instead, Canada's upper house is modeled after the British House of Lords and has only a limited legislative role. The combination of federalism and cabinet governments, at both levels, has led to the development of intense intergovernmental relations, outside formal institutions. These intergovernmental relations have become one of the most distinctive features of Canadian politics in the post-war period (Smiley 1987).

The constitution of 1867 attributes exclusive jurisdiction to the provinces over social policy, including health and education. Several exclusive federal jurisdictions are related to the economy, such as banking, interprovincial trade and fishery. Federal jurisdictions also include criminal justice, defense and international affairs. Agriculture and immigration are the only two shared jurisdictions between the two levels of government. Before 1982, only two minor constitutional amendments altered this division of jurisdictions: the first one transferred unemployment to the federal government in 1940 and the second one transferred pensions to the federal government in 1951 (Rice and Prince 2000: 74).

For as long as federal and provincial state interventions were limited (up until the Second World War), Canadian federalism was consistent with so-called "watertight compartments federalism", whereby each level of government confine its policies strictly within its constitutional jurisdictions (Bakvis and Skogstad 2002: 7). Thanks to this form of federalism, Canadian politics was similar to British secretive politics, only with multiple club governments, one at the federal level and one in each province.

With government expansion, however, intergovernmental relations came to play a prominent role. After the Second World War, several intellectuals, government reports and the political elite agreed that provinces, alone, would not be able to develop welfare state policies as efficiently as most industrialized countries (Rice and Prince 2000).

Consequently, policy-makers in several provinces began displaying a flexible attitude toward the constitutional division of powers, accepting federal intervention and national standards in social policy. More specifically, the immediate post-war period was characterized by the development of several shared-cost and other forms of joint programs between the federal and provincial governments (Barker 1988). Intergovernmental meetings of politicians and high-ranking civil servants presided over the development of these programs. No longer divided among multiple government clubs, policy in post-war Canada has often been developed by a “cartel” of government clubs (Breton 1988). Ever since, intergovernmental meetings of all sorts have featured prominently in the study of Canadian politics (Bakvis and Skogstad 2002: 9).

Canadian scholars have developed several typologies and concepts to describe the evolution of Canadian federalism. Cameron and Simeon (2002) distinguish between cooperative federalism (1950-1968), executive federalism (1969-1991) and collaborative federalism (1992-present time). Cooperative federalism is associated with stable and discrete intergovernmental relations dominated by civil servants. Executive federalism refers to publicized intergovernmental relations, dominated by come-and-go politicians. Collaborative federalism is closely associated with visible performance management and the objective of reducing intergovernmental conflicts. Some scholars prefer to speak about a period of province-building, beginning in the mid-1960s, which would have followed a period of Canadian state building (Black and Cairns 1966; Young, Faucher and Blais 1984). While Canadian state building involved the intervention of the federal government in the development of a Canadian welfare state, province building involves provincial governments promoting their distinctive resource-based economies. Other scholars simply rely on a dichotomy between the early period characterized by cooperative intergovernmental relations and the more competitive latter period.

## **2- Theoretical background**

### *2.1- Mechanisms of Policy Diffusion*

The diffusion of policy attention in federal systems is likely in light of two perspectives on federalism. The first perspective insists on the autonomy of the decentralized units of

federal arrangements while the second focuses on policy coordination among the various governments of federations.

Proponents of the first perspective argue that federated units in those arrangements provide opportunities for experimentation at small scale as well as opportunities to diffuse innovations. Containing policy change within the territory of one or few federated units limits the cost of each experiment, thereby increasing experimentation possibilities. With increasing experimentation possibilities also come increased chances of innovation and therefore of countrywide policy change. Even scholars who do not believe in the reality of such a quasi-natural selection process sometimes admit that federal systems offer more venues to those who press for policy change than unitary states. When federal policy-makers refuse to embrace change, whether it is innovative or not, change advocates can always try to convince sub-federal policy-makers (Constantelos 2010).

Proponents of the second perspective insist frequently on the interdependence of governmental action within modern federal states. Experimentation with policy change, they argue, is never achieved wholly autonomously by federated units in the complex policy context of modern states. As policy decisions in one sector can have important effects on the policies of another sector, federations can no longer function with watertight divisions of responsibilities. Modern federations have intergovernmental forums within which federated units and the federal government coordinate their policy decisions. In fact, some scholars argue that these forums have become the centre of policy decisions in several federations, including Canada. Certainly that discussions and negotiations taking place among policy-makers within these forums enable the transmission of information about policy experience, likely to focus attention on given topics.

The literature on policy diffusion emphasizes various mechanisms whereby diffusion occurs (see Shipan and Volden 2008). Our goal is not to test which mechanism of policy diffusion is most prominent in the Canadian federation. Indeed we have not relevant data to lead an empirical analysis of the nature and intensity of policy diffusion in Canada. As we are only concerned with the diffusion of policy attention, we mobilize theories of policy diffusion to look at to what extent such a process of diffusion may be

applied to policy attention. In this perspective, a quick review of these mechanisms might be useful to highly the plausibility of diffusion in a federal context.

A first mechanism – learning or efficiency process – rests on policymakers' rational behavior of collecting information on the experiences of other governments prior to committing themselves to new policies. From this information, policy-makers learn about inefficient policies to avoid and about efficient ones to follow. Given relative economic and social similarities among the federated units, this learning mechanism should be common in federations.

A second mechanism, called either mimicking, imitation or isomorphism, emphasizes legitimacy rather than efficiency. It refers to what economists call a reaction function into a Stackelberg game with a leader and a follower. Simply put, a government decides to adopt the same policy implemented by a reputed neighbor in order to avoid being sanctioned by its public opinion or its electorate for failing to adopt the policy. This mechanism assumes discrepancies pertaining to reputation between the borrowing and the lending governments. Size is an example of a reputation-related discrepancy: politicians from smaller jurisdictions risk sanctions if they do not imitate larger ones. Such discrepancies are common among the federated units of federations.

A third mechanism – coercive process – is likely to occur in a federal system where vertical relations between the centre and subnational governments are a source of conflicts. In situations of conflicts, governments will mobilize their resources to obtain from rival governments the adoption of the policies they would not otherwise adopt. For example, in Canada, Ottawa has frequently resorted to its so-called spending power to force provinces to adopt policies, which might not have featured as their first choice. But this mechanism is not necessarily a one-way mechanism. A successful experimentation in a province might encourage policy-makers to press the centre to resort to coercion to diffuse similar policies across the federation.

Once again the goal of this chapter is not to assess the prevalence of one or the other of these mechanisms in the Canadian federation. In fact, the mechanisms are not mutually exclusive; they can operate simultaneously. Clearly, they likely operate with some intensity in federal countries.

## *2.2- Issue Attention*

The empirical work behind this chapter is linked to the agenda-setting and issue attention literature. Particularly relevant are Baumgartner and Jones (1993, 2005) whose approach, mainly applied to the American agenda, rests on the analysis of thousands of issues data in several institutional venues (bills, laws, parliamentary questions, hearings, budget, party manifestoes, public opinion with the most important problems, ...). So far, the data have been used to document the spread of leptokurtic distributions of attention to policy issues across venues. The leptokurtic distributions, it has been argued, support the argument that government is unable to react proportionally to the large quantity of problems it has to face and information it has to process.

This chapter uses data collected with the method originally devised by Baumgartner and Jones, in order to analyse the diffusion of attention to policy issues rather than the proportionality of reaction to policy problems. Therefore, the distribution of the data within venues is less a concern in this chapter than correlations across jurisdictions.

In fact, the empirical strategy derived from Jones and Baumgartner's approach consists in measuring the attention of political actors to main policy topics (and sometimes related subtopics). We assume that attention provides useful information on the variance of the intensity with which policy-makers work on different or similar policy issues. Where diffusion is most important, policy-makers should work on the same issues with similar intensity, hence this chapter's focus on space and time correlations. Before presenting theoretical expectations for the Canadian case, two methodological warnings are necessary. First, as we do not strictly test a theory of policy diffusion, we have not looked at some temporal reactions between levels of government by including lagged variables of policy attention. Moreover, such a design would have supposed that every speech of the throne be delivered at the same time (month or year). That is not the case as reported in the fourth section. Second, Canadian federalism is often scrutinized through vertical relations. Here our argument consists in going further by testing the existence of both vertical and horizontal relations, mostly in terms of simultaneous interactions that could suggest diffusion of attention as a transferring mechanism from one government to another one.



### **3- Expectations**

Given current knowledge on Canadian federalism, we expect various correlations on three distinct dimensions: time, policy sectors and territory. We begin this discussion with time.

As explained above, Canadian federalism went through different phases, variously described by scholars. Some scholars speak of transitions between cooperative federalism, competitive federalism and collaborative federalism. Others insist on phases of province-building, which would have taken off in the 1960s. Whatever might the appropriate characterization be, this literature points at important variations over time.

Thinking strictly in terms of correlation between the federal government and provinces over decades, three specific time-related expectations arise from the literature. Whether scholars speak of cooperative federalism or province-building to describe the 1960s, they agree that provincial and federal governments will prioritize distinct issues. On the one hand, depiction of federalism as cooperative in the 1960s rests on the recognition of complementarities between the two orders of government. Cooperative federalism was in fact premised on a division of labor whereby provinces have the constitutional and administrative capacities to implement typical welfare state policies while the federal government has fiscal resources to provide funding to those policies (Simeon and Robinson 2009: 165). The shared-cost programs that stemmed from the recognition of complementarities involved some attention to typical welfare state policy (e.g. health) by the federal government, but Ottawa was primarily concerned with fiscal and budgetary issues (Barker 1988). Meanwhile, provinces were paying more attention to substantial welfare state issues and state administration. On the other hand, scholars speaking of province-building insist on the desire of provincial governments to become full-fledged states, autonomous from the federal government. Consequently, provincial governments in the 1960s were developing policies of their own choosing, as independently as possible of the preferences of the federal government. In other words, the literature leads us to expect low correlation between provincial and federal issue attention in the 1960s.

Expectations are different for the 1970s. In fact, the 1970s witnessed a growing competition between newly built modern provincial governments and the federal government. Once welfare state policies consolidated, provinces became interested in the control of their respective economy, resulting in increased attention to policy domains that had been dominated by the federal government. Intergovernmental conflicts became increasingly frequent, governments competing for policy space within the same domains. In the 1970s, therefore, correlations between provincial and federal issue attention should gain in strength in comparison with the 1960s.

Correlations, the literature further suggests, should be strongest in the most recent phase of intergovernmental relations, beginning in the 1990s. Tired after many years of intergovernmental conflicts and related policy stalemates, policy-makers across Canada started working toward ways to improve collaboration. The emergence of new policy issues, including environmental protection, public health, food safety and international trade, was seen as an opportunity to leave jurisdictional fighting behind and work collaboratively toward innovative solutions. New managerial tools, such as performance evaluation, had become popular by then and were mobilized to focus collaboration on policy performance. According to some scholars, the policy results of these collaborative efforts are far from impressive (Simeon and Robinson 2009; Montpetit 2006). Nevertheless, they have doubtlessly encouraged the diffusion of policy attention across Canada. We certainly expect stronger correlations of attention between the federal government and provinces starting in the 1990s.

As suggested above, diffusion can occur through mechanisms that are more subtle than direct intergovernmental relations. Mimicking, for example, does not require direct discussions between the borrowing and the lending governments. However, everything else been equal, mimicking among provinces is more likely to occur in domains of provincial jurisdiction. In the classification of policy topics that we present in the data section below, there are three responsibilities in which provinces enjoy a large autonomy: education, community development and housing, local government administration. Correlations of provincial attention over these topics, therefore, are more likely to be stronger than those in domains of exclusive federal jurisdiction, including defense, foreign affairs and criminal justice. Naturally, correlations of attention between provinces

in policy areas where both orders of government collaborate directly should be just as strong as correlations of attention between provincial and federal governments. In short, variations of correlation between governments from one topic to the next are plausible.

Lastly, the geographical size of Canada and regional histories suggest territorial variations of correlations. In his seminal study of policy diffusion in the United States, Walker (1969) found regional clusters. In Canada, at least three territorial clusters of correlations are likely to be found. First, with similar natural resources and economies, western provinces are likely to be strongly correlated among themselves. Second, Québec and Ontario, the two largest industrial provinces, both located in central Canada, should also yield strong correlations. Lastly eastern Canadian provinces, which are all relatively small and all share a large coastal area are also expected to be strongly correlated.

In the next section, we turn to the empirical examination of these time-related, sectorial and regional variations in correlations of issue attention among Canadian governments.

#### **4- Data: Speeches from the Throne**

Speeches from the Throne are read by the Queen's representatives, the Governor General at the federal level and the Lieutenant governor at the provincial level, at the beginning of parliamentary sessions. The speeches are written by the close entourage of Prime Ministers and Premiers and they announce the priorities of governments. They are similar to States of the Union in the United States. As John and Jennings (2010) argue, they can be more revealing of policy priorities than laws, as government policies frequently do not involve lawmaking.

As indicators of government priorities, they also present some shortcomings. They cannot be considered as faithful reactions to all cabinet deliberations, nor can they be taken as indicative of specific policy formulation and implementation (John and Jennings 2010). A high ranking Canadian public servant, who has been involved in the preparation of Speeches from the Throne, told the authors of this article that he views them as poor indicators of government priorities. They are like "Christmas trees" he said, with a little bit of everything for everyone. Were this view to be right, we would have observed a wide spread of the attention over several issues and little change over time. In

contrast, we found that speeches from the Throne are frequently concentrated on few issues, with large variations over time (Montpetit, Foucault 2010). Therefore, we adopt John and Jennings' (2010) view that a speech from the Throne is a robust aggregate-level measure of policy-making attention.

Five closely supervised research assistants have coded all federal and provincial speeches from the Throne between 1960 and 2009. A total of 445 speeches have been coded with a 90% inter-coder reliability (based on a random selection of speeches). The coding was achieved using the codebook of the Comparative Agenda Project, with only minor adjustments to account for the specificity of Canadian politics.

The coding method requires the decomposition of speeches into quasi-sentences. Most quasi-sentences are in fact full sentences, but sentences can be split when they treat more than one topic. Quasi-sentences are then distinguished between those that have and those that do not have a political content. Quasi-sentences with a political content are then associated with one of 25 topic codes. Again, a quasi-sentence has only one code for the main topic, but they can have sub-topics. We do not use sub-topics in this article.

In view of assessing variations of correlations from policy sector to policy sector, we distinguished between topics of federal, provincial or shared jurisdiction. Note that this classification does not perfectly match the formal constitutional division of jurisdictions; it rather reflects our own assessment of actual policy responsibilities of the provincial and federal governments:

- (a) Federal responsibilities: Banking, Finance and Domestic Commerce; Defense; Foreign Trade, International Affairs and Foreign Aid; Space, Science, Technology and Communication.
- (b) Provincial responsibilities: Community Development and Housing Issues; Education; Provincial and Local Government Administration.
- (c) Shared responsibilities: Agriculture & Forestry; Civil Rights; Minority Issues and Multiculturalism; Constitutional and National Unity Issues; Culture and Entertainment; Energy; Environment; Fisheries; Government Operations; Health; Intergovernmental Relations & Trade; Labour, Employment and Immigration; Law,

Crime, and Family Issues; Macroeconomics; Native Affairs; Public Lands and Water Management; Social Welfare; Transportation.

All the details of the method can be found online at [www.policyagendas.com](http://www.policyagendas.com). We thus have computed 116,753 observations (quasi-sentences) classified into 25 main categories. Table 1 provides a statistical summary of the data and indicates the distribution of quasi-sentences according to both the main topics of policy and jurisdictions (10 provinces and the federal state). On average, about 90% of speeches have a political content from which we built our measure of policy attention.

[Table 1 about here]

## 5- Results

### *5.1- Empirical strategy*

The empirical strategy We study attention to policy diffusion by constructing a symmetrical correspondence matrix where each entry is the correlation between issue attention in jurisdiction  $i$  ( $i=1, \dots, 11$ ) to the jurisdiction  $j$  ( $j=1, \dots, 11$ ) over the 1960-2008 period. The basic idea remains to measure interactions between provinces themselves and between the federal and provincial governments to capture the intensity of policy attention. Following the method adopted by Jones, Larsen-Price and Wilkerson (2009), we first construct a priority-by time matrix, where each column is a policy content topic (25 total) and each row is a year. Each cell entry in the matrix indicates the level of the attention dedicated to one of the 25 topics for each year. Next, we construct similar activities-by-time matrices, where each entry is the percentage of attention (political content of each quasi-sentence) that is devoted to each one of these 25 issues in a given year (49 years total). All in all, 11 matrices (10 provincial and 1 federal) were built from which we perform a correlation analysis to ascertain whether provinces devote attention simultaneously to the same issue and comparatively with the federal government.

The correspondence matrix is the matrix of correlations formed by the priorities by time and activities by time matrices for our specific policymaking channel, i.e. speeches from the Throne. We then correlate the level of attention dedicated to one issue

in province  $i$  with the level of attention to the same issue in province  $j$  (11 jurisdictions x 25 topics x 49 years). Before presenting results, a methodological issue related to the type of correlation calculus must be pointed out and carefully controlled. Indeed, the first step consists in selecting an appropriate method for measuring the correlation of series' bivariate. The nature of data reveals huge variance across time and space. After depicting histograms for each variable, a suspected non-normality form appeared. This implied checking such a suspicion before running a correlation analysis since an appropriate coefficient of correlation depends on the normality condition being satisfied. That is why we performed a Shapiro-Wilk  $W$  test for normality for each variable<sup>1</sup>. Not surprisingly, we had to reject the null hypothesis of a normal distribution for all data. Consequently, the usual Pearson coefficient was not appropriate and we chose to calculate the Spearman coefficient of correlation in order to respect the non-normality condition. This method is far more relevant since it is suitable with our data organization. Let us not forget that our aim is to reveal the level of attention for each jurisdiction and for all issues, which implies aggregating the level of attention for all 25 topics and compare the priorities of attention for each topic analyzed independently. The same procedure has been applied for measuring attention according to some specific time periods, geographical distribution and kind of responsibilities.

### *5.2- The correlates of attention diffusion*

Our results are divided into three parts. The first objective was to ascertain whether correlations of attention to policy issues between provincial governments on the one hand and the federal government on the other vary according to the different phases of Canadian federalism. Figure 1 provides evidence suggesting that the time-related expectations presented above are correct. That is, correlations are weakest in the 1960s and they are strongest in the 1990s.

[Figure 1 about here]

---

<sup>1</sup> For space limit reasons, we do not present in annex results from the Shapiro-Wilk test for normality. But all results could be asked to the authors.

The graph on the left of Figure 1 (1960-1970) indicates that none of the provinces, except Quebec, has patterns of policy attention similar to that of the federal government. The peculiar situation of Quebec might be explained by the determination of the provincial government during this decade to obtain additional powers from the federal government. Quebec thus experienced harsh intergovernmental disputes before any of the provinces. Again, intergovernmental conflicts became more common in the 1970s.

The fourth graph in Figure 1 indicates strong correlation in the 1990s. In fact, the graph shows that the federal agenda is correlated with the agendas of 8 out of 9 provinces (we have only 9 provinces because some data for Manitoba are missing). The desire to improve collaboration in the 1990s has encouraged provincial and the federal governments to pay attention to similar policy issues. The emergence of problems that did not fit neatly the constitutional division of jurisdictions (e.g. climate change, public health, food safety) combined with collaborative federalism to create common provincial and federal patterns of attention to policy issues. Newfoundland stands out as a province that defines its agenda autonomously from the federal government throughout the entire period.

Results are more ambiguous for the 1970s and 1980s, with Ontario and British Columbia seemingly most connected to federal priorities. Although stronger than in the 1970s and the 1980s, correlations for the 2000s are weaker than they were in the 1990s, suggesting that collaborative federalism was short-lived. Overall, Figure 1 justifies examining time-related patterns of diffusion of policy attention.

[Table 3 about here]

We also spelled out above territory-related expectations about policy diffusion. Following Walker (1969), we argued above that three regional clusters of correlations are likely to occur in Canada: Western, Eastern and Central clusters. Table 3 confirms the existence of these three clusters. Correlations in the three grey zones of the table are generally higher than the correlations outside of the zone and they are particularly strong in the western cluster. Geographical proximity (perhaps in addition to social as well as

economic proximity in the West) affects the diffusion of attention. Neighboring provinces appear to interact among themselves over policy issues more intensively than they interact with provinces located in the other regions of the country. These results must however be read with some caution, as we found positive and significant correlations among all provinces, suggesting that interactions even among the provinces located farthest from each other also occur (British Columbia and Newfoundland). Correlations simply suggest that they occur with less intensity than among neighboring provinces. In any case, the shaded areas in Table 3 leave little doubt about the existence of territorial differentiations of patterns of diffusion of policy attention.

One last intriguing observation about Table 3 deserves to be made: correlations among provinces are significantly stronger than correlations between the federal government and any of the provinces. The finding suggests that, over the entire period, so-called horizontal patterns of diffusion of attention have been stronger than vertical patterns of diffusion. Although our objective was not to test the prevalence of the various mechanisms of diffusion, this result may suggest that coercive mechanisms are less prevalent than mimicking and perhaps learning, if and only if the entire period is considered.

Lastly, we formulated expectations regarding variations of correlations from policy sector to policy sector according to the division of governmental responsibilities between provinces and Ottawa. We expect weak correlations among the topics corresponding to mainly provincial and federal responsibilities and stronger correlations among the topics for which the two orders of government share responsibilities. Figure 2 provides evidence supporting our expectations, with one exception.

As expected, Figure 2 fails to indicate positive correlation between priorities announced in the speeches from the throne of any of the provinces and those of the federal government for issues that are mainly of federal competencies (banking, finance, domestic trade, defense, foreign affairs, international affairs, space, science and technology). Significant signs in areas of federal responsibilities were found only for Nova Scotia and Alberta. However, coefficients are negative, suggesting that the two provinces pay attention to federal responsibilities only when the federal government prefers prioritizing other policy issues.



[Figure 2 about here]

In addition, the graph on the right of Figure 2 is perfectly consistent with our expectation. In sectors for which both the provincial and federal governments share policy responsibilities (e.g. health, energy, culture, social welfare, transportation) strong positive and significant correlations were found. This finding is consistent with our argument about collaborative federalism. Emerging problems which do not neatly fit constitutional division of policy responsibilities encourage intergovernmental collaborative effort or joint problem-solving. Rather than fight over who should do what, governments pool their resources to find efficient solutions to these problems.

Unexpectedly, however, we found several instances of positive correlations between provinces and the federal government in areas of provincial responsibilities. This finding echoes common complaints about interventions of the federal government in areas of provincial jurisdictions. Although horizontal correlations in Table 3 are stronger than vertical correlations, the latter are nonetheless statistically significant. Figure 2 adds evidence of vertical transmission of attention by the federal government to the provinces. Our results, however, do not allow any conclusion about the precise mechanism through which this vertical diffusion occurs. It might occur through coercion, as would suggest those who complain about federal intrusions of provincial jurisdictions. Alternatively, it might occur through learning, although one might wonder why provinces learn from federal officials in their own areas of responsibilities while federal officials fail to learn anything from their provincial colleagues when devising policies of federal competencies.

## **Conclusions**

As argued by Walgraave and Green-Pedersen in the introduction of this book, *institutions* in a given political system may exert a significant influence on those issues that will be attended to and those which will not. Institutions impose rules of collaboration and competition. Political actors are embedded in institutions whose rules constrain the issues they can attend to. Institutions create ‘free’ attention space that begs to be ‘filled’ while at

the same time they limit the amount of attention that can be paid to issues at any given time. We demonstrate, in this chapter, that the traditional question laid out by agenda-setting scholars – i.e. why policy agendas move on some issues and not on others – is particularly relevant in a federal context. We rely on an original dataset of speeches from the Throne for the 1960-2008 period to show that intergovernmental relations in Canada generate attention on some issues with variations on three dimensions: time, space and sectors). Using the method of the Comparative Agenda Project, we discussed policy attentions in Canada along expectations emerging from the literature on policy diffusion and Canadian federalism. Our goal was not so much to measuring the distribution of attention as it was to examine correlations among the various governmental units of the Canadian federation and investigate the existence of horizontal relations in policy attention between provinces.

The data and correlation analysis led to three key conclusions. First, we found that the 1990s is the period when both federal and provincial agendas were the most convergent. Second, we found territorial clusters of attention, with a particularly strong one in Western Canada. Third, we found stronger federal-provincial correlations of attention in shared than in federal areas of responsibilities. Unexpectedly, however, we found weaker but significant federal-provincial correlations in areas of provincial responsibilities. This latter finding invites further investigation of diffusion mechanisms such as learning, mimicking and coercion. In fact, the partial evidence presented in this chapter do not enable making any strong conclusion on the extent to which the federal government might coerce provinces to pay attention to topics they would otherwise ignore.

Future research might consist in comparing the diffusion of attention in executive speeches (*input*) with the concrete fiscal outlays of governments (*output*). In a federal context, measuring the competitive vs. cooperative forms of federalism once a combined measure of policy inputs and outputs is carried out might largely focus on both vertical and horizontal processes of policy diffusion. For instance, the recent developments of spatial econometrics could enable us to ascertain the existence of mimicking behavior and then measure its intensity from one jurisdiction to another in a context of competitive

federalism. On the other hand, cooperative intergovernmental relations could arise if the priorities of one jurisdiction appear to be (strategic) complements for those of other jurisdictions, including the federal government. This would be an illustration of promising avenues of future research in policy diffusion combined with agenda-setting literature.

### **References:**

Bakvis Heman and Skogstad Grace. 2002. *Canadian Federalism: Performance, Effectiveness, and Legitimacy*. Toronto: Oxford University Press.

Baumgartner, Frank R. and Bryan D. Jones. 2005. *The Politics of Attention*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Barker, Paul. 1988. "The Development of Major Shared-Cost Programs in Canada" in R.D Olling and M.W. Westmacott. *Perspectives on Canadian Federalism*. Scarborough: Prentice-Hall Canada Inc.

Baumgartner, Frank R. and Bryan D. Jones.1993. *Agendas and Instability in American Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Besley, Timothy, and Anne Case. 1995. "Incumbent Behavior: Vote-Seeking, Tax-Setting, and Yardstick Competition." *American Economic Review* 85: 25-45.

Black, Edwin R. and Alan C. Cairns. 1966. "A Different Perspective on Canadian Federalism." *Canadian Public Administration* 9: 27-44.

Boadway, Robin and Anwar Shah. 2009. *Fiscal Federalism, Principles and Practice of Multiorder Governance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Breton, Albert. 1988. "Competition and Cooperation in the Canadian Federal System," in R.D Olling and M.W. Westmacott. *Perspectives on Canadian Federalism*. Scarborough: Prentice-Hall Canada Inc.

Cameron, David and Richard Simeon. 2002. "Intergovernmental Relations in Canada: The Emergence of Collaborative Federalism": *Publius* 32 (2), 49-71.

Constantelos, John. 2010. "Playing the Field: Federalism and the Politics of Venue Shopping in the United States and Canada," *Publius* 40 (3), 460-483.

Dolowitz, David P., and David Marsh. 1996. "Who learns what from whom: A review of the policy transfer literature." *Political Studies* 44(2): 343-357.

Gilardi, Fabrizio. 2010. "Who learns from what in policy diffusion processes?" *American Journal of Political Science* 54(3): 650-666.

John, Peter and Will Jennings. 2010. "Punctuations and Turning Points in British Politics: the Policy Agenda of the Queen's Speech, 1940-2005." *British Journal of Political Science* 40(3): 561-586.

Jones, Bryan D., Heather Larsen-Price, and John Wilkerson. 2009. "Representation and American Governing Institutions." *Journal of Politics* 71: 277-290.

Montepetit, Eric. 2006. "Declining Legitimacy and Canadian Federalism: An Examination of Policy-Making in agriculture and Biomedicine" in Michelmann Hans and Cristine de Clercy eds., *Continuity and Change in Canadian Politics*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Montpetit, Eric and Martial Foucault. 2010. "Canadian Federalism and Change in Policy Attention: A Comparison with the United Kingdom", *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, in revision.

Nicholson-Crotty, Sean. 2009. "The Politics of Diffusion: Public Policy in the American States." *The Journal of Politics* 71(1): 192–205.

Pross, Paul A. 1992. *Group Politics and Public Policy* (2nd edition). Toronto: Oxford University Press.

Rice, James J. and Michael J. Prince. 2000. *Changing Politics of Canadian Social Policy*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Savoie, Donald. 1999. *Governing from the Centre: The Concentration of Power in Canadian Politics*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Savoie, Donald. 2008. *Court Government and the Collapse of Accountability in Canada and the United Kingdom*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Shipan, Charles R., and Craig Volden. 2006. "Bottom-Up Federalism: The Diffusion of Antismoking Policies from US Cities to States." *American Journal of Political Science* 50(4): 825-43.

Shipan, Charles R., and Craig Volden. 2008. "The Mechanisms of Policy Diffusion." *American Journal of Political Science* 52(4): 840-57.

Simeon, Richard. 1972. *Federal-Provincial Diplomacy: The Making of Recent Policy in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Simeon, Richard and Ian Robinson. 2009. "The Dynamics of Canadian Federalism" in James Bickerton and Alain-G. Gagnon (eds.) *Canadian Politics*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Smiley, Donald. 1987. *The Federal Condition in Canada*, Toronto, McGraw- Hill

Ryerson Limited.

Soroka, Stuart. 2005. *Dynamics of Agenda-setting in Canada*. Vancouver: UBC Press.

Walker, Jack L. 1969. "The diffusion of Innovations Among the American States." *American Political Science Review* 63: 880-99.

Weyland Kurt. 2005. "Theories of Policy Diffusion. Lessons from Latin American Pension Reform." *World Politics* 57: 262-295.

Young, Robert A., Philippe Faucher and André Blais. 1984. "The Concept of Province-Building: A Critique," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 17(4): 783-818.

*Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Speeches from the Throne, 1960-2009*

Jurisdictions	Number of Speeches	Average Number of Quasi-sentences	Average Policy Content	Average level of issue attention	Average positive level of issue attention
Newfoundland	44	14474	0.908	<i>11.698</i>	14.841
Prince-Edward-Island	48	15359	0.872	<i>10.692</i>	14.820
Nova-Scotia	38	8460	0.885	<i>7.7252</i>	9.957
New-Brunswick	47	13978	0.916	<i>9.9004</i>	12.685
Quebec	29	7902	0.877	<i>10.390</i>	13.746
Ontario	37	10452	0.892	<i>9.2843</i>	12.303
Manitoba	34	7847	0.915	<i>7.5811</i>	10.594
Saskatchewan	36	7652	0.908	<i>9.4729</i>	11.789
Alberta	49	10120	0.886	<i>7.1616</i>	9.283
British Columbia	48	12362	0.861	<i>8.1758</i>	10.722
Federal	35	8147	0.833	<i>7.5505</i>	9.234

Table 3: Correlation between Canadian jurisdictions' policy attention, 1960-2009.

General Agenda (size)	New Foundland	PEI	Nova Scotia	New Brunswick	Quebec	Ontario	Saskatchewan	Manitoba	Alberta	British-Columbia	Federal
New Foundland		0.4923***	0.5080***	0.3946***	0.3458***	0.3225***	0.3842***	0.3973***	0.3920***	0.4489***	0.0832**
PEI	0.4923***		0.5806***	0.4494***	0.3112***	0.4028***	0.4275***	0.4747***	0.4816***	0.4615***	0.1300***
Nova Scotia	0.5080***	0.5806***		0.4655***	0.2765***	0.4675***	0.4964***	0.5807***	0.5575***	0.5438***	0.0725*
New Brunswick	0.3946***	0.4494***	0.4655***		0.2621***	0.3770***	0.4385***	0.4236***	0.4374***	0.4490***	0.1168***
Quebec	0.3458***	0.3112***	0.2765***	0.2621***		0.4045***	0.3572***	0.3583***	0.3574***	0.3282***	0.2731***
Ontario	0.3225***	0.4028***	0.4675***	0.3770***	0.4045***		0.4774***	0.5344***	0.4411***	0.4392***	0.2069***
Saskatchewan	0.3842***	0.4275***	0.4964***	0.4385***	0.3572***	0.4774***		0.5743***	0.5731***	0.5278***	0.1282***
Manitoba	0.3973***	0.4747***	0.5807***	0.4236***	0.3583***	0.5344***	0.5743***		0.5907***	0.5333***	0.1722***
Alberta	0.3920***	0.4816***	0.5575***	0.4374***	0.3574***	0.4411***	0.5731***	0.5907***		0.5334***	0.0639*
British-Columbia	0.4489***	0.4615***	0.5438***	0.4490***	0.3282***	0.4392***	0.5278***	0.5333***	0.5334***		0.1386***
Federal	0.0832**	0.1300***	0.0725*	0.1168***	0.2731***	0.2069***	0.1282***	0.1722***	0.0639*	0.1386***	

Spearman's rho (correlation coefficient), \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$



Figure 1: Correlation between provinces' policy attention and the federal government by decades.

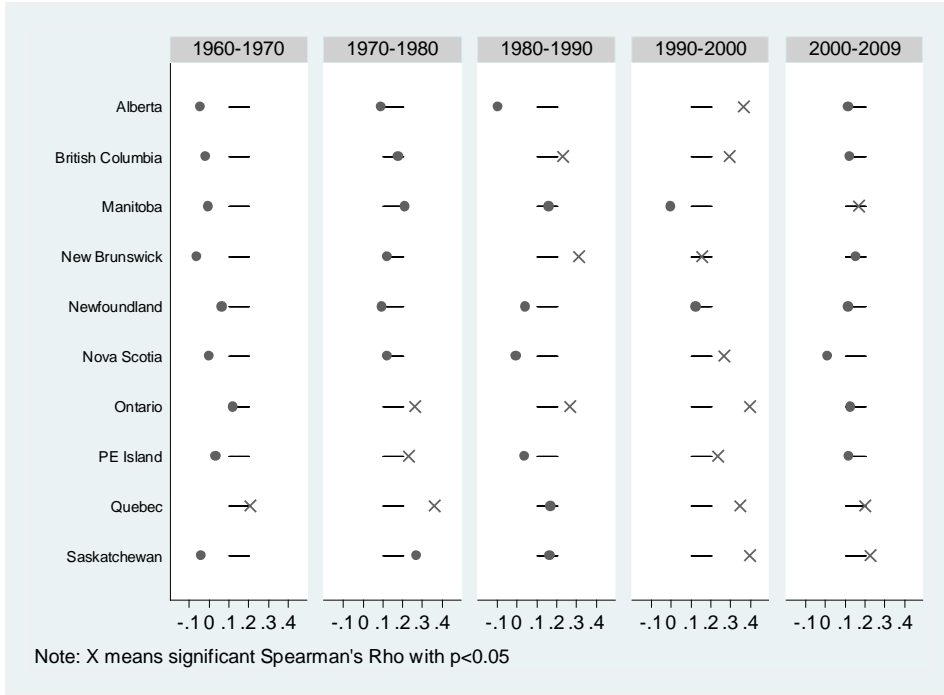


Figure 2: Correlation between provinces' policy attention and the federal government by responsibilities, 1960-2009.

