

Canadian Federalism and Change in Policy Attention: A Comparison with the United Kingdom

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Introduction

Does policy change more or less in federal than in unitary states? For some scholars, the division of policy responsibilities between a federal government and sub-federal units provided by federalism multiplies the chances of success of actors who seek policy change. According to this perspective, federalism enables actors to shop for agreeable venues or to experiment with innovative policy options (Constantelos, 2010; Rabe, 1999). Other scholars disagree, arguing instead that federalism adds opportunities for partisans of the status quo to veto change or reduce the magnitude of change. Federalism, according to this latter perspective, increases the number of actors whose consent is necessary for policy change, thereby reducing the likelihood of major change (Braun, 2000; Scharpf, 1988; Tsebelis, 2003).

This article is a contribution to this debate. Through a study of the Canadian federation, and using the United Kingdom (a more centralized state) as control, we argue that neither of the two perspectives is entirely wrong. In fact, thanks to the prudence inspired by the presence of other significant governments, change is least important in Canada

Acknowledgments: The authors would like to thank Martin Lodge, Frank Baumgartner, Bryan Jones, Stuart Soroka, Jean-François Savard and the journal's anonymous reviews for comments on previous versions of this paper. They acknowledge the financial contributions of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and of the Fonds de recherche Société et culture Québec.

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when it is most expected for a single-party government system, that is, immediately after the election of a new government. Conversely, the multiple interactions enabled by Canadian federalism make change in policy attention far more frequent between elections than in the unitary British state. In the UK, change in policy attention mostly occurs right after government turnovers. In other words, change in Canada is decided during periods of government stability while the opposite is true in the UK. Unsurprisingly, then, cumulative change in policy attention in the last fifty years is more important in Canada than in the UK, as years of government stability are more frequent than years of government turnover.

In this article, we examine change in policy attention as expressed in speeches from the throne. Having inherited the British parliamentary tradition, governments in Canada, as in the UK, announce their policy intentions during speeches read by the head of state at the beginning of parliamentary sessions, which occur about once every year. Given this institutional similarity, British and Canadian speeches from the throne offer ideal comparatives units, as they are deprived of much of the noise characterizing policy comparisons (that is, differences between countries in the propensity to resort to lawmaking). Moreover, studies more focused on instrument choice and policy designs rather than attention frequently overestimate differences between countries (Green-Pedersen and Wilkerson, 2006). Since we are primarily interested in country differences, resorting to an approach more likely to uncover similarities adds robustness to our results. Lastly, studying attention to policy problems is particularly revealing of the bias in political mobilization, agenda choices and ultimately the exercise of power (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962; Schattschneider, 1960).

After reviewing the literature on the relationship between institutions, federalism in particular, and policy change, we present the results of a statistical analysis of the content of 494 speeches from the throne read in the legislative institutions of the UK and Canada, at the federal as well as at the provincial levels, between 1960 and 2009. The analysis shows clearly that change in policy attention occurs at different periods in the Canadian and British electoral cycles.

Change in Policy Attention in Single-Party Government Systems

In theory, the autonomy of a newly elected party to emphasize its own policy issues and drop those of the previous government should be high in single-party government systems, such as those of the UK and Canada. In fact, the two countries have political systems that encourage the formation of governments by a unique political party that has significant control over the legislative assembly. In the two countries, members of parliament are elected through single-member plurality systems where con-

Abstract. Federal systems empower multiple policy actors from different levels of governments. For some scholars, the disagreements arising within such a diverse group of actors create policy stalemates. Others contend instead that new ideas are more likely to arise and diffuse from such a diverse group. This article is a contribution to this scholarly debate, proposing an original contribution on policy agendas. It argues that both perspectives are useful to understanding the dynamic of policy making within federal systems. Looking at change in policy attention in Canadian and British speeches from the throne, the article argues that federalism constrains change immediately following a party turnover in government. In the following years, however, federal arrangements encourage larger changes in policy attention than arrangements where power is centralized.

Résumé. Les systèmes fédéraux rassemblent plusieurs acteurs politiques issus de différents niveaux de gouvernement. Pour certains chercheurs, l'existence de potentiels désaccords entre de tels décideurs est susceptible de créer des impasses politiques. D'autres soutiennent au contraire que les nouvelles idées sont plus susceptibles d'émerger et de se diffuser à partir d'un tel groupe diversifié. Cet article s'inscrit dans ce débat sur le fédéralisme et propose une contribution originale en termes de mise à l'agenda des politiques publiques. Il soutient que les deux perspectives sont nécessaires à la compréhension de la dynamique de l'élaboration des politiques au sein des systèmes fédéraux. En mesurant le changement de l'attention politique dans les discours du Trône canadiens et britanniques, l'article affirme que le fédéralisme freine le changement de politique immédiatement après un changement de parti au gouvernement. Au cours d'une législature, toutefois, les institutions fédérales encouragent de plus grands changements dans l'attention des politiques que dans des systèmes unitaires où le pouvoir est centralisé.

situencies are represented in parliament by the person who obtains the largest number of votes. In turn, governments are formed by the party that won the largest number of seats in parliament. Only when none of the parties obtains a majority of seats does the possibility of a governing coalition of parties arise, as it occurred in the UK in 2010. In almost all situations of absence of control of a majority of seats by a single party, however, power goes to the party that won the plurality of the seats in the house, thereby forming a single-party minority government (called hung government in the UK). More importantly, in the two countries, the members of parliament who belong to the governing party are expected to support the government agenda and bills introduced in the legislative assembly. In such a system, therefore, a newly elected government has the "mandate" to pay attention to its own policy issues, irrespective of those prioritized by past governments, as well as adversaries (Blais et al., 1997; Castles, 1982; Klingemann et al., 1994). Arguably, however, mandates are more difficult to implement when the governing party forms a minority government.

It should be underlined that the autonomy of majority governments in single-party government systems is debated among political scientists, even in the UK where the mandate granting system originated. Rose and Davies (1994), for example, argue that newly elected British governments inherit the policies and programs of their predecessors and therefore they are constrained to pay attention to problems related to these programs rather than to their preferred policy issues. Likewise, Klingemann and colleagues (1994: 262) failed to find much empirical evidence

behind the British mandate model. They argue that “The consistently clear majorities of seats in Parliament are based actually on a mere plurality of votes. The claim on a mandate is thus weaker than legal theory might suggest.” John and Jennings (2010) find patterns of change in issue attention in the UK that closely match patterns of punctuated equilibrium, that is, long periods of incremental changes followed by policy ruptures. They also claim that punctuations, the ruptures, are mostly unrelated to changes in government. They nevertheless recognize that changes in attention are on average larger after government changes than during years of government stability (Jennings et al., 2011). Overall, these findings contrast with common wisdom and scholarly work confirming that single-party government systems provide a comparative advantage to the partisans of policy change (Tsebelis, 1995).

Interestingly, Klingemann and colleagues (1994) argue that the mandate model is more closely applied by Canadian than by British governments. In line with the argument, Petry and colleagues (1999) find that provincial political parties spend in a manner consistent with their partisan inclination early in mandate and expand their agenda only when elections approach. Most scholars, however, acknowledge that the Canadian political system is more complex than the British system. The authors of *Absent Mandate* (Clarke et al., 1996), for example, argue that the federal parties cannot afford ideological distinction if they want to stand a chance of forming a government. Rather, political parties display sufficient flexibility in their position to broker coalitions across complex cultural and regional cleavages, sustained by Canadian federalism. In other words, federalism influences the Canadian party system in a manner that renders the mandate model unlikely. Clearly, federalism adds complexity to the Canadian single-party government system.

Federalism and Change in Policy Attention

If the British and Canadian parliamentary systems are similar, the two countries have distinctive forms of state. Canada is among the most decentralized federations in the world, while the UK typified a unitary state for most of the period covered in this article. Admittedly, the British system has grown in complexity since devolution in 1997 and the deepening of European integration following the *Single European Act* of 1987. Despite devolution, however, Westminster still makes policy for England and reserves several areas of jurisdictions in Wales and Northern Ireland (Keating, 2002; Trench, 2007). The Scottish devolved government may stand out, but according to some accounts weaknesses in administrative capacity enable London to exert considerable influence on Scottish policy (Cairney, 2009a). Unsurprisingly, then, intergovernmental relations

between London and Edinburgh have largely been quiet and top-down, at least before the 2007 Scottish election (Cairney, 2009b). In addition, the UK has opposed significant resistance to a supranational European Union, preferring arrangements that preserve the primacy of member states. The country has notably refused to participate in the monetary union and remains outside the Schengen borderless zone. In other words, power in the UK remains sufficiently centralized around Whitehall to provide an excellent control to study the effect of Canadian federalism on change in policy attention. Moreover, patterns of policy attention in Canada may illustrate the complexity awaiting the UK in the future.

In a federal country, the constitution provides for a division of policy responsibilities between federal and sub-federal governments. In Canada, the constitution notably confers exclusive responsibilities for health, social services and education to provincial governments. The responsibilities of the federal government are mostly over the economy, defense and foreign affairs. With the emergence of the welfare state in the post-World War period, however, it became increasingly difficult for modern governments to respect neat constitutional distribution of policy responsibilities. As the effects of policy in one domain spilled over into other domains, federal and sub-federal governments began intervening in each other's jurisdictions. In Canada, bitter disputes followed, as well as the development of intergovernmental forums to improve policy co-ordination (Bakvis and Skogstad, 2002; Robertson, 1988). Since the 1960s, intergovernmental relations play an important role in policy development in Canada. In fact, as most policy domains are permeable to influence from policy in other domains, provincial and federal governments cannot expect to achieve their policy objectives without a minimum of co-ordination between their respective domains, as difficult to achieve as it may be (Bakvis and Brown, 2010; Howlett, 1999; Soroka and Wlezien, 2010). Defense and foreign affairs are the most likely exceptions to this logic and perhaps the only ones.

Therefore, intergovernmental relations can prevent a party newly elected to form a majority government to pay attention to its preferred issues.¹ Again, even after devolution and despite European integration, British governments are not faced with a comparable constraint. As Braun puts it, "Unlike unitary countries, the mode of concertation as a restrictive factor is more important, and develops a pervasive dynamic, in federal countries" (2000: 49).

To take measure of the weight of the constraint intergovernmental relations create in Canada, it is essential to underline two key characteristics.

- (1) Intergovernmental forums are expected to achieve consensus. Intergovernmental forums comprise first minister meetings, ministerial

meetings as well as numerous meetings of civil servants. Despite recent efforts toward developing a method of collaboration, these meetings remain without any formal decision rule, resting instead on tacit norms acceptable by participants (Boismenu and Graefe, 2004; Simeon and Robinson, 2009). As participants represent governments, whose limited sovereignty is constitutionally recognized, they rarely consider simple majorities sufficient to decide on a policy shift. Rather, intergovernmental forums in Canada function like diplomatic meetings on the international scene, which are expected to decide on a consensual basis (Simeon, 1972). Therefore, a newly elected government, federal or provincial, may prefer delaying comprehensive policy change over facing the difficulty—or the conflicts—involved in seeking wide intergovernmental agreement over its own priorities in the areas that require policy co-ordination.

- (2) Policy co-ordination rests on a resilient equilibrium of intergovernmental positions. Analysts of intergovernmental relations too often limit their studies to actual meetings between officials of various governments. In fact, up to a point, intergovernmental policy co-ordination in Canada occurs through mutual adjustments, which do not have to involve any direct contact between persons. Bakvis and Brown (2010), for example, argue that despite weaker co-ordination instruments and unmanageable intergovernmental forums, Canada's policies are frequently just as cohesive as those of the United States. Co-ordination is notably apparent in the area of health care, in which most provinces maintain services consistent with the principles of the *Canada Health Act*, without being directly coerced to do so.² To the extent that provincial policy makers assume that these principles contribute to the equilibrium of positions within the federation, they will prefer adjusting to them, even without being asked, over challenging them. Likewise, the federal government makes prudent discretionary adjustments in the enforcement of the act's principles to prevent costly disruptions in the intergovernmental equilibrium of positions (Boychuk, 2008). The same logic prevails for newly elected governments in Canada, which should act prudently in announcing their priorities to avoid disturbing prevailing equilibrium of positions, at least in domains where intergovernmental co-ordination factor in policy success.

The challenge of managing policy attention within the limits permitted by the intergovernmental equilibrium of positions may be particularly difficult for the federal government. In fact, all provincial governments have relatively intensive bilateral relationships with the federal government, but dyads of relationships between provincial governments are frequently weaker. Therefore, a change in attention by a newly elected federal government should cause widespread provincial reac-

tions, while a change in attention by a newly elected provincial government should be less noticed. In other words, newly elected federal governments should shift attention to new policy issues with more caution than newly elected provincial governments. However, provincial constraints, arising from intergovernmental relations, should exceed any constraint faced by new British governments.

It would be misrepresenting the literature, however, to impute a constraining effect only to intergovernmental relations. The web of intergovernmental relations can in fact carry new ideas and lessons from concrete policy experience, which promote rather than prevent change in policy attention (Broschek, 2010; Johns et al., 2006; Montpetit, 2002:). Three characteristics of intergovernmental relations are worth underlining to better understand how federalism might encourage change.

- (1) The sheer density of the Canadian intergovernmental web is conducive to change in policy attention. Meetings of first ministers are the most visible occurrence of intergovernmental relations, but they are only the tip of the iceberg. In fact, meetings involving sectoral ministers and civil servants are so frequent that it is difficult to measure the density of the intergovernmental web with precision. As Johns and colleagues write, “Hundreds of meetings each year, millions of dollars’ worth of agreements negotiated monthly, countless of informal contacts and a varied and complex intergovernmental machinery—this is the nature of intergovernmental administrative relations in Canada today” (2007: 22). Likewise, Bakvis and Skogstad observe that “there are a myriad of working meetings of officials at lower levels who typically do the preparatory work for ministerial meetings or bilateral sessions between Ottawa and a specific province. Overall, it is rare that some consultation between different orders of government is not required whenever a government agency tackles a specific policy problem” (2002: 9). At the administrative level, in particular, the dense web of interactions between officials from various orders of government is conducive to policy learning and innovation (Johns et al., 2006). In contrast, British officials, who are not as concerned with policy co-ordination imperatives, are more likely to interact within the confines of Whitehall only.
- (2) This dense web of intergovernmental relations is unstable. Provincial and federal elections in Canada are not held simultaneously, but at whichever level, they take place about once every four years. Therefore, the personnel of at least two new governments (although not necessarily from different parties) can be expected at the table of intergovernmental meetings every year. We saw above that unfamiliar governments with intergovernmental relations act with prudence initially, but they will eventually present their new ideas. In other

words, owing to the frequency of government turnovers in Canada, lasting governments are always exposed to some new ideas through intergovernmental relations. And this is without mentioning the turnover of the administrative staff encouraged by managerialism in Canada since the 1960s (Johns et al., 2007).

- (3) The web of intergovernmental relations involving civil servants, which is particularly dense, is less prone to conflicts than that involving politicians (Dupré, 1988; Johns et al., 2006). To show to their electorate that they care about their province's interest, premiers expose vociferously their disagreements with the prime minister, as well as among themselves, even if they disagree out of thin air (Stevenson, 1995). In contrast, intergovernmental relations among civil servants are more deliberative, featuring discussions over policy analysis. In laying the ground for ministerial meetings, civil servants are exposed to analyses prepared by colleagues who work at a different level of government or in different provinces. Some of these analyses are likely to feed into their opinion and eventually make their way to political intergovernmental meetings, orienting them in new directions.

Constraints, Opportunities and Timing in Governmental Terms

In theory, electoral turnovers of parties in power should change policy attention significantly in single-party government systems. Even if all scholarly observations do not match, this is the expectation that we have for the UK, a highly centralized country during the period covered by this article. The dynamic of change in policy attention should not be as straightforward in Canada, despite the country's single-party government system. In fact, federalism occasionally constrains change in policy attention and occasionally encourages it beyond governments' desire to distinguish themselves from past governments. Students of federalism are frequently divided between those who argue that federalism acts as a constraint and those who believe that it encourages change. We argue in this article that federalism can do both, constrain and encourage change in policy attention, depending on timing during governmental terms.

Specifically, we suggest that the nature of intergovernmental forums and concerns for policy co-ordination guard against immediate sudden change in policy attention by newly elected governments, perhaps more so in Ottawa than in the provinces. Newly elected parties might desire profound changes and begin concrete work early on to realize these changes. In all likelihood, however, they will be discrete about their intention, as discretion might prevent disturbances in the equilibrium of intergovernmental relations and avoid worrying intergovernmental partners. In short, there are large intergovernmental risks and little gains for a newly

elected party to announce loudly the policy changes it may be working toward. Therefore, it might be wise strategy for newly elected political parties in Canada to avoid shifting policy attention radically onto new policy issues. Newly elected parties in the UK are not faced with a similar constraint.

The experience of intergovernmental relations during the course of a mandate, however, exposes governing parties to new ideas coming from various regions and levels of government, which are likely to orient attention in unexpected directions. In fact, these new ideas will be occasionally so compelling that parties elected to shift the focus on given issues may change their mind, paying attention instead to issues commanded by intergovernmental relations. In other words, as the distance in time from the election increases, governments in Canada are presented with opportunities to consider the new issues arising from intergovernmental relations. Thanks to these opportunities, governments in Canada might change their policy attention significantly during the entire course of their term, although not at the mandate's outset.

Variations from policy domains to policy domains are likely, following the particularity of the division of policy responsibilities between the federal and provincial orders. Thanks to the permeability of policy domains, however, the policy-making logic related to intergovernmental relations in Canada probably endures in most policy domains. Defense and foreign affairs are likely exceptions. Control over defense and foreign affairs is more exclusively exercised by Ottawa, creating expectation of a lesser differentiation between Canadian and British patterns of policy attention in these domains.

The logic whereby forms of state shape issue attention, presented above, can be translated into the following two hypotheses:

H1: Change in issue attention between years during which a change in governing party occurs is larger in the UK than in Canada, because centralization enables rapid changes in the UK.

H2: Change in issue attention in years of stability in governing party is larger in Canada than in the UK, because federalism exposes Canadian policy makers to new ideas during the course of their mandates.

The rest of this article is designed to test these two hypotheses.

Policy Attention in Speeches from the Throne

In this article, we examine policy attention as expressed in speeches from the throne. Speeches from the throne, known as Queen's speeches in the UK, are read by the head of states or representatives (the governor general or lieutenant governors) at the beginning of new parliamentary ses-

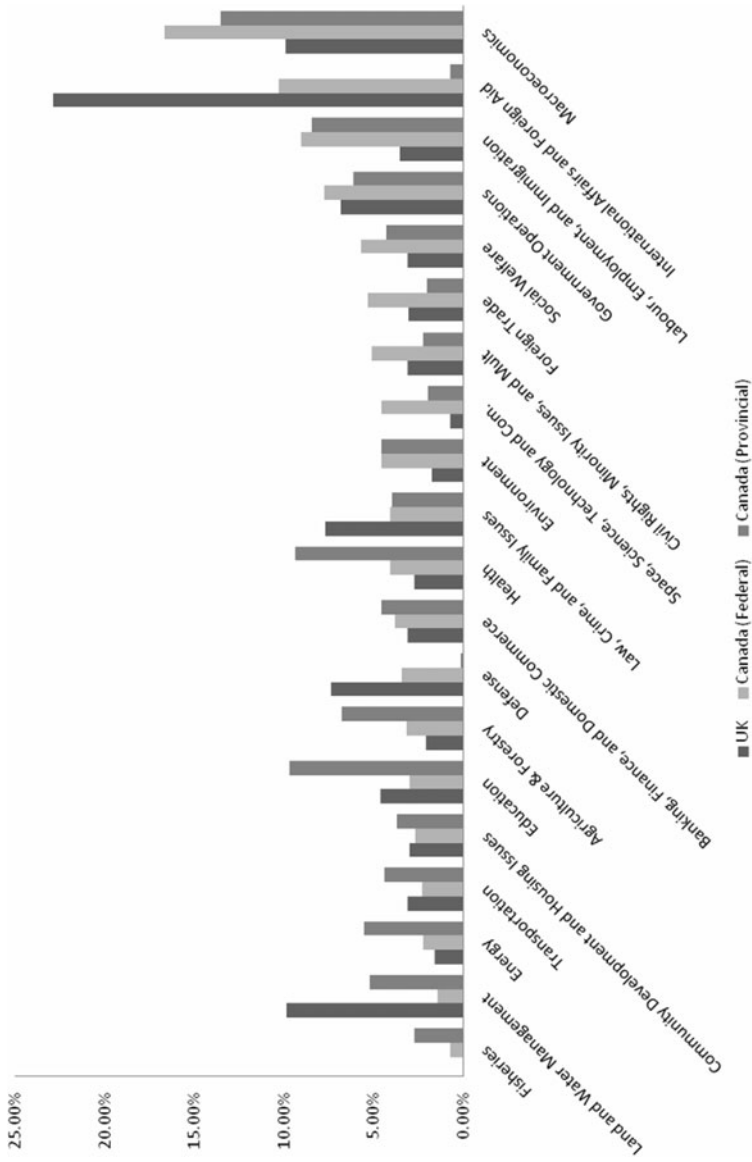
sions. Speeches from the throne, however, are prepared by the head of government (the prime minister or premier) and are meant to announce legislative priorities for the coming session. Parliamentary sessions last about a year and therefore speeches from the throne are read almost each year in the UK parliament, in the Canadian federal parliament and in provincial legislative assemblies. The press offers extensive coverage of these speeches and political observers eagerly await the first speech from the throne of newly elected governments, which normally occurs shortly after the election. These observations about speeches from the throne equally apply to the UK, Canada at the federal, as well as at the provincial levels. This regularity across the two countries and levels of government in Canada offers outstanding advantages for comparing policy attention.

Speeches from the throne provide one of the best indicators of policy attention by governments. As said above, they are aimed at announcing the legislative priorities of governments and they are reliable. John and Jennings (2010) found that they are highly correlated with the government bills introduced in a session. In fact, they might even be more revealing of policy priorities than bills, as policy does not always rely on legislative instruments. A government that pays attention to health, for example, may prefer spending over legislating in this domain. Whether a government prefers spending or legislating, however, it will insist on health in its speeches from the throne if it cares a great deal about the issue.

The Canadian speeches, federal and provincial, were coded by research assistants, supervised by the authors of this article. As the Canadian constitution divides policy responsibilities between the federal and provincial governments, the coding of speeches at both levels of government was essential to cover the entire range of policy issues to which government pays attention in the country. The coding for the UK speeches was supervised by Will Jennings and Peter John (2009), who provided us with the data. British and Canadian coders applied the same methodology, which was developed in the Comparative Agendas Project (<http://www.comparativeagendas.org/>). The 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 20 topic codes. Again, a quasi-sentence has only one code for the main topic, but they can have subtopics. We do not use subtopics in this article. Lastly, tests were conducted to ensure consistency across coders. We estimate inter-coder reliability to average above 90 per cent, in both Canada and the UK.

Moreover, an examination of the distribution of codes matches current knowledge of the two countries. As indicated in Figure 1, defense,

FIGURE 1
Distribution of Topics by Country, 1960–2009



for example, is a more important topic in the UK than in Canada; hardly a surprising observation considering the importance of military involvement by the UK in the past 50 years. And in Canada, provincial governments pay little attention to defense and foreign affairs, which are federal jurisdictions. Conversely, health and education are provincial jurisdictions in Canada, and unsurprisingly provinces, as shown Figure 1, pay more attention to these topics than the federal government. Figure 1 also shows large overlaps in topic attention between the two orders of government in Canada, notably for macroeconomics, the environment and community development. As discussed above, the watertight division of responsibilities between the two orders of government has become increasingly difficult to sustain in several policy domains since the end of the Second World War. Figure 1 speaks to the quality of the coding of the speeches, but also to the importance of intergovernmental coordination in achieving policy goals in most domains, with the notable exceptions of defense and foreign affairs.

As Table 1 indicates, our results are based on the analysis of the content of 494 speeches from the throne. Interestingly, speeches in Canada have more words than British speeches. However, 93 per cent of the British speeches have policy content, against 83 per cent for those of the Canadian federal government and 89 per cent for those of provincial governments. In other words, Canadian speeches are lengthier, but have more empty content, from a policy perspective, than those in the UK.

Despite outstanding similarities in the institutional use of speeches from the throne in Canada and in the UK, comparing change in attention

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics 1960–2009

Country	Number of Speeches	Average Number of Quasi-sentences	Average Policy content	Average Change
UK	49	3984	0.9270	0.1366
Canada (total)	445	10614	0.887	0.5350
Newfoundland	44	14474	0.908	0.4032
Prince Edward Island	48	15359	0.872	0.7206
Nova Scotia	38	8460	0.885	0.2909
New Brunswick	47	13978	0.916	0.5947
Quebec	29	7902	0.877	0.7644
Ontario	37	10452	0.892	0.5731
Manitoba	34	7847	0.915	0.5171
Saskatchewan	36	7652	0.908	1.0381
Alberta	49	10120	0.886	0.3098
British Columbia	48	12362	0.861	0.4508
Federal	35	8147	0.833	0.4016

in the speeches was not entirely straightforward. Shorter and concentrated on fewer topics, British speeches yielded zeros for more topics than Canadian speeches. It goes without saying that zeros pose problems for the calculation of a percentage, in the change from one year to the next. To circumvent the problem, we systematically gave a -100 percent value to any change from a frequency higher than zero for a given topic and year to a zero the following year on the same topic. Conversely, percentage changes were replaced by missing values for any change from zero to any frequency. This methodological choice, however, creates distortions in the measure of change; a change between a frequency of two and a frequency of zero, for example, is translated into a -100 per cent change, just like a change between 50 and zero. To minimize the problem caused by the zeros, particularly important in the UK, we collapsed the 20 topics into 6, in a manner consistent with Breunig and colleagues (2010). Table 2 presents the six topics and the related 20 original topics. Collapsing topics in this manner reduced the number of zeros from eight per cent to less than four per cent of all observations. In the UK, it reduced the number of zeros from 18 to 10 per cent.

Table 1 displays the number of speeches per country (including Canadian provinces), the average number of quasi-sentences per speech, the average proportion of policy content and the average change. Average change is the mean percentage change in all topics and between all consecutive years. Attention changes, Table 1 shows, are on average higher in Canada than in the UK. The average change, however, should be interpreted with care. On the one hand, two changes of the same magnitude, but one positive and one negative, cancel each other out. On the other hand, the maximum for negative change cannot exceed -100 per cent, while there is no ceiling for positive change. The maximum is in fact 4800 per cent (reflecting a change from one quasi-sentence in a given year to

TABLE 2
Content of the Six Topics

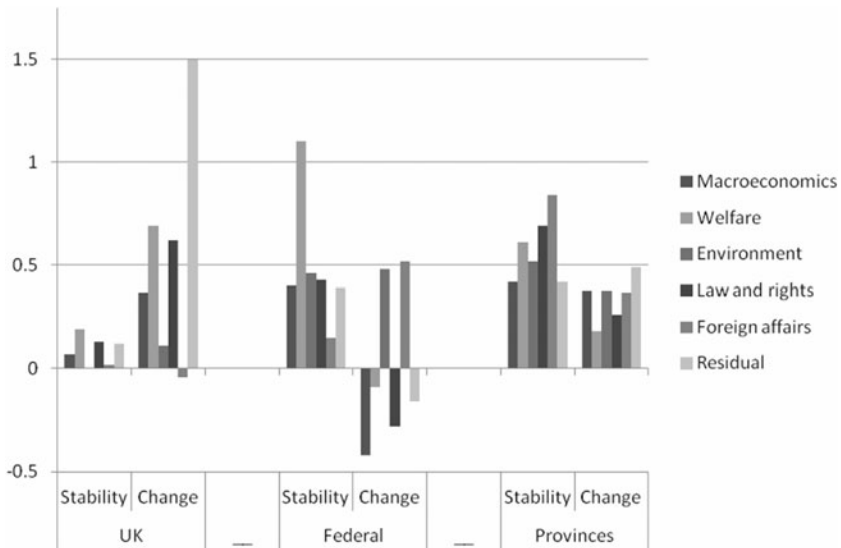
Topics (6)	Corresponding 20 Topics
Macroeconomics	Macroeconomics; Labour and employment; Banking finance and domestic commerce
Welfare	Health; Social welfare; Community development and housing issues; Education
Environment	Environment; Energy; Transportation; Agriculture and forestry; Land and water management; Fisheries
Law	Law, crime and family issues; Civil rights, minority issues and multiculturalism
Foreign Affairs	International affairs and foreign aid; Foreign trade; Defense
Residual	Space, science, technology and communications; Government operations

48 the following year). Eighty per cent of the observations, however, indicate annual change of magnitudes ranging from 80 to 100 per cent.

Time-Series Panel Analysis of Change in Policy Attention

Together, the two hypotheses presented above suggest that change in policy attention is different between years of government stability and years of government change. While H1 suggests that attention change in the UK comes immediately after a change in the governing party, H2 suggests that attention change in Canada occurs mostly during years of government stability. Figure 2 presents mean differences that support our hypotheses. In the UK, average change is higher after a change in government in all six topics. In contrast, in Canada, change in attention is higher during years of government stability in all topics, with the exception of foreign affairs. It should be underlined that foreign affairs, as seen above, is a federal jurisdiction to which provincial governments pay little attention. It is therefore plausible that newly elected federal governments enjoy more autonomy in this domain than in any other domains. In other words, patterns of policy attention over foreign affairs in Canada and in the UK might be similar. At the provincial level, change is

FIGURE 2
Attention Change between Years of Government Stability and Years of Government Change, 1960–2009



more important during years of government stability for all topics, but the residual category. Interestingly, negative change appears particularly important at the federal level after government turnovers, suggesting that newly elected federal parties prefer remaining quiet about some of the topics high on the agenda of previous governments, without insisting too much on new topics. New topics, however, appear with a vengeance during years of government stability.

Figure 2 rests on averages, which can again be misleading because of negative values. A regression analysis partly corrects this problem, measuring covariance between variables rather than straightforwardly comparing means. In addition, regression analysis enables controlling for the potential effect of factors beside those identified by the main hypotheses. Given the nature of our data, we performed six time-series panel analyses, with correlated panels corrected standard errors. Each analysis is for change in attention over one of the six topics, from year to year, by 12 governments (the UK government, the Canadian federal government and 10 provincial governments), over a period of 49 years.

The key independent variables in each of the six analyses are *Change in governing party* and *Change in governing party in the UK*. The first variable is a dummy identifying years of first discourses after a change in governing party. The second variable is an interactive dummy, which singles out years of first discourses after a change in governing party in the UK. Our two hypotheses yield the following expectation: negative coefficients for *Change in governing party*, entirely cancelled out by stronger positive coefficients for *Change in governing party in the UK*. The negative coefficients for *Change in governing party* would indicate that change is less important immediately after a government turnover than it is during years of government stability, reflecting the prudence of newly elected parties in Canada. Meanwhile, the positive coefficients for *Change in governing party in the UK* would suggest a willingness on the part of newly elected British parties to distinguish themselves from their predecessors, immediately after their victory. Incrementalism would prevail in the following years. These expectations, however, may not apply to the analysis of change in attention to foreign affairs. As explained above, Canadian and British patterns of attention change may be similar in this particular domain.

The model tested also includes five control variables. First, the inclusion of a dummy variable identifying the UK was warranted by the interactive variable just presented (Brambor et al., 2006). The dummy also controls for fixed effects arising from differences in the nature of the British government in the panel. An additional dummy, *FED*, identifying the Canadian federal government was included for the same reason. As the panel is mostly comprised of provincial governments, the UK and the Canadian federal governments may stand out. The third control

variable, also a dummy, identifies periods of *Conservative* governments. In fact, the ideological inclination of the party in power may influence change in policy attention differently from topic to topic. Conservative governments, for example, may emphasize the economy, but not welfare, a topic preferred by adversaries. The fourth control variable is the percentage of government seats (*% of government seats*). As explained above, single-party governments have more leeway to pay attention to their preferred topics when they control a majority of parliamentary seats.³ The last control variable is the number of consecutive mandates by the same party. We hypothesize that the experience of intergovernmental relations during years of government stability encourages change in policy attention. It might also be possible that more experience encourages more change, perhaps up to a point. The number of consecutive mandates by a party should capture this possibility.⁴

The results of the regression analysis are presented in Table 3 and they match the expectations arising from our hypotheses. In all policy domains, except foreign affairs, the negative coefficients for *Change in governing party* are lower than the positive coefficients of the interactive variable, although the level of statistical significance varies from domain to domain. Overall, the results of the regression analysis suggest that everything else being equal, there is less change in issue attention during years of change in the governing party than during years of government stability in Canada. The opposite is true in the UK where change in issue attention is positively correlated with change in governing party.

Three domain differences are worth underlining. First, foreign affairs are different. The low attention provinces pay to this topic produced such a large number of zeros and hence missing values that we had to confine the regression to British and federal speeches. Failure to obtain a significant coefficient for the interactive variable suggests that the two countries' patterns of change in attention to foreign affairs are similar. In fact, the absence of statistical significance for *Change in governing party* for foreign affairs also suggests that change in attention to this topic is unrelated to government changes in the two countries. In other words, attention to foreign affairs fluctuates independently of government change or stability. This is consistent with analyses suggesting that elections are rarely won or lost on issues related to foreign policy.

Second, coefficient signs are as expected in the environmental domain, but coefficients are not statistically significant. Therefore, government turnovers or stability do not seem to have as clear an impact in this domain as it does in other domains. Lastly, in three of the domains (macroeconomics, law and the residual category), the statistical significance of the interactive variable is higher than that of *Change in governing party*. From this observation, we conclude that the effect of party

TABLE 3
Regression Analysis with Time Series Panel Data

Variables	Macroec.	Welfare	Environ.	Law	Foreign	Residual
Change in governing party	-.29* (.15)	-.72*** (.15)	-.21 (.28)	-.39* (.23)	.30 (.43)	-.13 (.23)
Change in governing party UK (interactive)	.51** (.20)	1.13*** (.39)	.28 (.27)	.88*** (.29)	-.42 (.44)	1.46*** (.42)
% of government seats	.87*** (.30)	-.80*** (.29)	-1.42*** (.56)	.18 (.50)	-.41 (1.33)	.74 (.57)
# of consecutive party mandates	-.12*** (.04)	-.07* (.04)	-.04 (.06)	.09 (.06)	-.06 (.09)	-.11* (.06)
Conservative	-.12 (.09)	-.18** (.08)	.16 (.13)	-.54*** (.13)	-.05 (.13)	.07 (.15)
FED	-.08 (.25)	.10 (.30)	-.20 (.34)	-.40*** (.13)	NA	-.03 (.18)
UK	-.34*** (.06)	-.59*** (.10)	-.73*** (.10)	-.50*** (.12)	-.14 (.19)	-.29*** (.13)
Constant	.20 (.24)	1.45*** (.25)	1.51*** (.41)	.64* (.32)	.53 (.75)	.17 (.36)
(N)	481	477	477	455	81	479
R ²	.01	.01	.01	.02	.05	.01

***p ≤ 0.01, ** p ≤ 0.05, * p < 0.1
Standard errors are in parenthesis.

change on policy attention in the UK is more probable than the effect of government stability on policy attention in Canada.

Differences from domain to domain are particularly striking for the control variables. The percentage of seats controlled by government matters in three domains only. Moreover, the effect differs: the size of the majority is positively correlated with change in attention to macroeconomics and negatively correlated with change in attention to welfare and the environment. The number of mandates is negatively correlated with change in attention to macroeconomics but matters little in the other domains. When conservative parties govern, change in attention to welfare and law is less pronounced than when other parties are in power. The result for law may appear surprising as conservatives frequently prioritize internal security issues, such as the fight against crime. One has to keep in mind, however, that the law topic includes issues such as civil rights and multiculturalism, which are preferred by the left. In any case, as far as change in patterns of attention to policy issues goes, conservative parties do not distinguish themselves from the other parties on the four other topics.

The results with the control variables indicate that patterns of issue attention are influenced by several factors, besides intergovernmental relations. Moreover, these factors vary extensively from one policy domain to the next. The relative similarity of the regression estimates for *Change in governing party*, however, suggests that intergovernmental relations influence patterns of policy attention with consistency across domains, with the notable exception of foreign affairs.

Conclusion

In single-party government systems, the months following the electoral defeat of a government should be characterized by changes in issue attention of a larger magnitude than those of previous years. The newly elected party should be eager to emphasize its own issues, leaving behind the preferred issues of the previous government. This is precisely what is occurring in the UK but not in Canada.⁵ In Canada, changes in issue attention are largest when they are least expected, that is, during years of government stability. Federalism, which distinguishes Canada from the UK, explains a part of the difference in the patterns of change in policy attention between the two countries. Owing to the necessity of policy co-ordination in demanding intergovernmental forums, newly elected governments in Canada, provincial and federal, use caution in announcing new priorities, refraining from publicizing large changes. Intergovernmental relations, however, expose non-elected and elected officials to new people, new analysis and new ideas. In the course of a mandate, then,

intergovernmental relations become a source of change in policy attention, rather than a constraint.

The argument has three main implications for the current state of knowledge in political science. First, it contributes to the debate between those who argue that the federal form of state acts as a constraint on policy change and those who adopt the opposite perspective. In light of our empirical analysis of change in policy attention, neither of the two perspectives is entirely wrong. In fact, the question should rather be under what conditions does federalism constrain change and under what conditions does it encourage it? We argued that the effect of federalism on policy attention is conditioned by the timing of government turnover. Specifically, intergovernmental relations act as a constraint for parties just elected to form new governments, but encourage change in attention by governments once elections are farther behind them.

Second, the article contributes knowledge about Canadian politics. A significant literature in Canada examines the extent to which Canadian governing parties are faithful to the mandates they receive from electors or whether they act opportunistically (Blais et al., 1997; Clarke et al., 1996; Klingemann et al., 1994; Petry, 1988; Petry et al., 1999). Petry and colleagues (1999), for example, argue that government compliance with the party's ideological inclination diminishes with the end of mandates coming into sight and approaching elections encouraging opportunistic behaviors. In this article, we have shown that governing parties in Canada, in contrast with governing parties in the UK, emphasize policy issues that are similar to those emphasized by their predecessors in the period immediately following their election. In other words, our findings mesh better with the idea that Canadian parties are more accepting of departures from their electoral priorities early on than the mandate thesis suggests (Clarke et al., 1996). Compromising on the party's platform, however, is quickly supplanted by deliberation, as time in government familiarizes officials with intergovernmental relations. And here rests the originality of our contribution to Canadian politics: while previous studies debate the relative weight of partisan versus electoral politics on policy, we show that governmental action can be more than either of mandate-driven or opportunistic. Over time, governing parties assimilate ideas that are neither connected with past or coming elections, developing rather from interactions with other actors and from exposure to analysis. That is not to say that elections and parties do not matter, however; they do matter in conjunction with intergovernmental relations.

Future research should trace with more precision the causal relationship between intergovernmental relations and policy attention. As intergovernmental relations materialize in an incalculable number of meetings and even less tangible mutual adjustments, precise measurement is difficult. We overcame the problem here by presenting a controlled com-

parison with UK's centralized single-party government system. Precise measures of the influence of policy interdependence and intergovernmental relations on patterns of attention to policy problems by new and not so new governments would however be ideal. It would also allow comparisons with other federations, such as Australia.

Thirdly, this study is the first policy study in Canada, to the best of our knowledge, that makes systematic use of speeches from the throne. Speeches from the throne are incredibly rich in information about the topics on which governments seek to act. Governments, however, do not make policy alone; a comprehensive overview of policy making also requires information on the topics to which parliaments, courts, bureaucracies and interest groups pay attention. Efforts at coding different agendas in Canada should therefore continue.

Notes

- 1 Éric Bélanger (2003) shows that federal parties in Canada do indeed "own" distinctive issues. Parties own the issues, he argues, for which the public perceive them as competent.
- 2 That is not to say, however, that coercion does not exist within the Canadian federal system. Sometimes it operates in subtle ways. See Rocher and Rouillard (1998) and Boismenu and Graefe (2004).
- 3 A dummy identifying minority governments was also tried, with weaker results than the proportion of government seats.
- 4 Here again, several options to measure time in government were tried. We kept the variable yielding the best results.
- 5 As a reminder, this finding is robust as we measure change in policy attention, which tends to reveal similarities rather than difference across countries (Green-Pederson and Wilkerson, 2006).

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