The Space Between Worlds:

Intergovernmental Policy and Elections in Canada

Fred Cutler
Political Science, UBC - Vancouver

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The Space Between Worlds: Intergovernmental Policy and Elections in Canada

David Elkins and Richard Simeon's *Small Worlds: Provinces and Parties in Canadian Political Life* (1980), along with Donald Blake's *2 Political Worlds* (1985), provided a much-needed corrective to the traditional top-down approach to the study of the federal condition in Canada, and indeed around the world. Their rich empirical evidence about voters and parties had many implications for the study of elections and electoral accountability in Canada. One prominent message taken from these studies was that Canadian voters and parties inhabit two separate, distinct political worlds, avoiding the cross-level contamination, or total dominance of one level, observed by researchers at the same time in Europe (Dinkel 1978; Reif and Schmitt 1980). Some readers may have been tempted to jump, perhaps unconsciously, to the conclusion that to most Canadian voters, federal elections were about one thing and provincial elections about another. Pushing this conclusion further, one might have been tempted to say that Canada's federalism was working better than most from the perspective of electoral accountabililty.

Those conclusions would certainly have been unwarranted from the findings in what we might collectively call *2 Small Political Worlds*. But the idea is important, not least for the evaluation of the Canadian federal form of government. The distinctiveness, even independence, of national and sub-national voting behaviour is a requirement of a theory of electoral politics in federations. If a division of powers is to be desirable in a mass democracy, it must be accompanied by an electoral politics that follows that division, and citizens themselves must be motivated and capable of separating the two political arenas. No serious theory of federalism that I am aware of admits and accepts the cost of voter confusion about responsibility generated by shared and ambigious jurisdictions. Students of federalism must begin to attend, empirically, to the degree of separation of the two worlds in voters minds during elections in the two arenas.

There are, in fact, two relevant Canadian literatures, but they lead to diametrically opposite conclusions. The first emanates from Simeon and Elkins' pioneering studies. It paints a picture of radically separate political worlds at the provincial and federal levels. More recent work shows that although federal countries vary in the degree to which sub-national elections are in fact merely referendums on the national government, or "second-order elections," Canada firmly occupies one pole, where voters do not use provincial elections to express their opinion about the federal government (Cutler 2008; Wolinetz and Carty 2003). The lack of linkage between elections, despite stereotypes to the contrary, provides another layer of evidence that Canadians are making separate decisions about separate things in their two worlds ((Johnston 1980; Johnston and Cutler 2003; Jeffery and Hough 2003). On the other hand, in a separate literature there have been quiet rumblings for some time about the inherent complexity of federalism presenting an obstacle to voters in their effort to reward or punish these governments (Cairns 1977; Whitaker 1983; Smiley 1987; Richards 1998). There is now evidence to substantiate this concern (Cutler 2004; Downs 1999; Soroka and Wlezien 2005a). So perhaps for some purposes, maybe the most important ones, the two political worlds are not separate enough.

Mea culpa – both perspectives are found in my own recent research using survey data. This paper attempts to reconcile them. I begin by arguing that theories of federalism imply a role for voters that depends on watertight compartments, not a confusing and conflict-ridden intergovernmentalism. The next step is to review the two strands of research and lay out how a reasonable interpretation of each could combine to produce ambivalent conclusions. I then outline a theory of voting in real federations with shared and overlapping jurisdiction that

implies that voters will, all else equal, downplay issues to the extent that they involve intergovernmental cooperation or conflict. The theory leads to predictions about the effects of voter confusion about responsibility and shows that one prediction is the separation of the *2 Small Political Worlds* with particular features, mostly nefarious. The tentative empirical analysis that follows involves data on the general features of recent provincial elections as well as survey data from provincial and federal elections.

Voters and Federalism

Voting behaviour is crucial to the democratic theory of federalism, but it has not been prominent in writing on federalism. And most contemporary students of federalism are more interested in formal institutional details, relations between governments, accommodation of ethnic and cultural minorities, and the question of citizens' loyalities. My concern is, instead, with the nitty-gritty of voters using elections to hold their governments accountable under multi-level governmenance. Federal theory has so far, for the most part, implicitly assumed that existing democratic theory applies without modification to a federal context. It does not.

Why is a theory of accountability through elections so different under a federal regime? It is easy to see if we begin with the strand of theory that portrays voters as principals and their governments as their agents. Unless voters and politicians' interests are magically aligned, voters must create an incentive for politicians to serve them by the constant threat of removing the politicians from office (e.g. Lupia 2003; Bergman and Strom 2004). But the threat can only be substantiated by monitoring – that is, by gathering information about the agents' behaviour. Electoral accountability is compromised if voters do not collect this information or when the information itself is ambiguous or inaccurate. This information is harder to gather and probably less accurate as the number of agents co-operating or competing to provide goods to voters in the same domain increases. So federalism, per se, is not the problem. A perfect 'watertight compartments' version of it would mean the same formula of accountability as with a unitary regime, but each government would be evaluated only on a subset of policy areas. For federalism not to entail costs to democratic accountability requires this watertight compartments model or super-citizens.

In practice, federalism involves two or more agents – sometimes divided within themselves – with varying degress of overlap in their mandates and capabilities. When more than one government is even potentially involved in a given policy area, voters must try to find out how much responsibility each government bears for the outcomes the voter experiences (Arceneaux 2006b; Cutler 2004; Rudolph 2003a; Simeon and Cameron 2002; Rudolph 2003b; Rudolph 2006). This is no simple matter. The *de jure* division of powers is usually a poor guide to actual responsibility. Money flows from citizens through their governments and back in a seemingly impenetrable maze. Politicians at either level often try to pass the buck or steal credit, claims that are usually countered by the opposition parties, leaving a citizen wanting for credible information about responsibility. Reg Whitaker pointed this out in an obscure monograph called *Federalism and Democratic Theory* 25 years ago: "…federations add a further dimension to the transformation of democratic politics into bureaucratic forms of elite accommodation, and the attenuation of the ideal of popular sovereignty. This happens everywhere, but the characteristic complexity, induced by federalism, of a maze of intergovernmental and interbureaucratic forums for federal-provincial cooperation removed by many stages from electoral responsibility to the voters, reduces democratic input even further than in unitary states" (Whitaker 1983). Simeon and Cameron point out that "fiscal federalism in particular tends to draw a veil between action and consequence" (Simeon and Cameron 2002)

All of this would be no issue if citizens and the mass media behaved in ways that made information about multiple governments just as accessible and accurate as about one government. But we know full well the limitations of citizens' motivation and capacity with respect to political information. Even experts are often hard pressed to allocate responsibility to multiple governments, which may explain the lack of reporting of expert opinion about which government did what. If there is a dispute between federal and provincial governments, as there was about their contributions to health care spending, the media usually provides both sides of the story, leaving the public no better off and perhaps more confused than ever. Given these realities, then, we can say that the more separable are the actions of federal and provincial governments in voters' minds, the more effective is the public at monitoring governments, and thus the stronger are the incentives for those governments to deliver good policy. A pernicious corollary is that if analysts of Canadian politics think the federal and provincial worlds are separate they will not be concerned by federalism's potential threat to electoral accountability.

2 Political Worlds – Separate or Not?

Separate Worlds

Two literatures are relevant to a judgment about the separateness of the political worlds. The first strand of research is encapsulated in Blake's (1985) and Simeon and Elkins' (1980) work. Precursors include Wilson and Hoffman (1970)) and Clarke and his colleagues (1978). Considered as a whole, this literature gave us a picture of Canadian provincial and federal elections to a large extent independent of one another. Provincial elections are no mirrors of federal ones – no mere "second-order elections". Blake concluded that "conflicts within them sometimes overlap, but as voting patterns will attest, they are more often driven apart"(1985) Party systems are "incogruent" (Thorlakson 2007; Wolinetz and Carty 2003). Parties of the same name can and do experience divergent fortunes at the two levels within a province (Johnston 1980). Parties of the same name can occupy different positions on the ideological spectrum and also engage in serious federal-provincial conflict (Blake 1985). Voters hold different images of parties of the same name at the two levels. Many voters maintain split partisan identifications and frequently vote for different parties at the two levels (Blake 1982; Clarke and Stewart 1987). The message beyond our borders was that Canadian federal institutions promoted the development of the most independent national and subnational electoral politics of any federation. In fact Canada seemed so extraordinary that, looking at some of this evidence, European researchers familiar with the connection between elections at different levels could claim that "the ideas of first and second-orderness simply do not apply in a state [Canada] where federal and provincial electoral processes are at best only tenuously connected and party systems highly incongruent" (Jeffery and Hough 2003).

Subsequent research has developed and entrenched most of these points. At the aggregate level, Richard Johnston and I have used election results since Confederation to give one kind of answer(Johnston and Cutler 2003). Our analysis demonstrated that provincial and federal party fortunes more often than not move in the same direction, but their linkage is a response to common background forces operating on both levels simultaneously, not a leakage or contagion of forces from one level to another. The implication is that voters are not simply making one global decision and applying it to both levels; they are making separate decisions that often point to parties of the same name at both levels, but need not do so.

At the level of individual behaviour, there is ample evidence of split partisanship across levels, which is surely even stronger evidence of separation than inconsistent vote choice across levels (Blake 1982; Clarke and Stewart 1987; Blake 1985; Stewart and Clarke 1998; Uslaner 1990). Blake makes the most of the separation of political worlds, signalled obviously in the title of his book *2 Political Worlds*, but he is quick to point out that BC was at the time of his research Canada's most extreme example of separation. Stewart and Clarke argue that total separation is untenable, since it is reasonable for voters who "evaluate party performance at a given level to use those evaluations when updating their party identifications at the other level" (1998: 113). Nevertheless, these studies agree that it is fairly easy for citizens with just moderate attention to the two arenas to engage with them separately. Even consistent party identification – the least discussed of all of the two-level partisanship possibilities – is just as likely to be a product of separate (but obviously reinforcing) socialization into the two identifications, or independent evaluation of the parties at the two levels.

My own recent work with provincial election surveys addresses the separateness of the two arenas directly by adding approval of the federal government to provincial vote choice models. Using a case study of the 2003 Ontario provincial election, I demonstrated that voters' decision criteria were genuinely provincial and that a voter's approval of the federal Liberal government made no difference to their voting decision (Cutler 2008). And it will come as no surprise that the Ontario campaign, like those in other provinces, featured its own home-grown issues and events and that voters responded to these issues and events, not what was going on at the federal level. In Saskatchewan in 2003, approval of the federal Liberals was negatively related to a preference for the Saskatchewan party, but did not affect a voter's choice between provincial Liberals and NDP (regression results not shown). The dominant issue was the Saskatchewan party's proposal to sell off Crown Corporations; others included limited privatization of health care delivery, workfare, and the priority that should be given to tax cuts or improving programs or balancing the budget. Other provincial elections surely show similar independence from federal politics.[1] None of this will surprise Canadians or Canadian political scientists; provincial elections are by-and-large independent of the influence of federal politics.

The general tenor of both aggregate and individual-level findings is that Canadian voters do this much required of them by a theory of electoral accountability in federalism. But it would be easy to take the interpretation of the evidence too far. No-one has been explicit about this, but there is an undercurrent of self-congratulation about the electoral aspects of Canadian federalism in the studies cited so far, my own included. We implicitly suggest that Canadian federalism is superior in this regard to other federal countries where "second-order elections" – sub- or supra-national elections that are mere referendums on the national governing party – are an accepted reality (Marsh 1998; Reif and Schmitt 1980; Reif and Schmitt 1997). The self-congratulation is unwarranted. Voters find the political discourse that frames their choices guides them to narrowly provincial issues in provincial elections and federal issues in federal elections. Or voters themselves may drive the media agenda by indicating that these issues are the ones on which they divide. *But this does not mean that choice in elections at either level is based on issues that matter most to voters in proportion to the real power of the government in question on those issues.* That is a tall order indeed, and as yet we have no evidence for it. In what follows, I try to provide some.

Overlapping, Indistinguishable Worlds

[1] I am tempted to say that Quebec is the exception that proves the rule.

The second strand of literature on the separation of political worlds documents the difficulty Canadians have in attributing responsibility to governments. Richard Simeon and David Cameron are among the most recent to clearly argue that federalism, at least as currently practiced in Canada, entails a compromise of democratic responsiveness and accountability. They contend that when "the federal government converted a variety of social programs into the single block grant…it exacerbated a problem intrinsic to federal-provincial transfer arrangements. That is, how was a student to know what explained the rise in her university fees? How was an elderly person to know why the local recreation centre had been closed? Was it a result of a federal decision or a provincial decision; and if it was a combination of both, then what to do?"(Simeon and Cameron 2002). Evidence of the seriousness of this problem has begun to appear.

The simplest piece of evidence is a direct question, but the results are almost comical. In a number of surveys (BC, Alberta, Ontario) we asked people whether "It is often difficult to figure out which level of government is responsible for what" and found nearly three-quarters agreed. But in Saskatchewan the question read: "It is *pretty easy* to figure out which level of government is responsible for what" and two-thirds agreed with this! A less direct instrument is required to find out how well Canadians are negotiating the intergovernmental context.

Matthew Mendelsohn and I asked voters in BC and Alberta to attribute responsibility in a few policy areas to their governments in 2001 (2003). Our conclusions, consonant with an earlier study by Richard Johnston (1986) and with some recent American research, showed that there is sensible variation across issue areas in the distribution of responses to the "which government most responsible" question. We were encouraged by the patterns, but we probably overstated the case for optimism. On health and the environment a plurality parked in the "both governments" category, which for some was probably a reasoned response but for others was merely a don't know in disguise. In BC, where the economy was poor, 44% implicated the federal government (either alone or part of "both"); but in Alberta, which was riding high, only 7% gave the federal government some credit (all in the "both" category). In Alberta where deregulation of the energy sector had led to a spike in prices, only 25% blamed the province, with 9% blaming both governments, and 12% saying they didn't know. Clearly, when asked to choose, provincial pride leaks into responsibility judgments.

The Canadian Election Study team found that voters in 2000 were divided on the question of "which level of government is most responsible for health care getting worse." One-third of Canadians picked each government and one-third said both or could not tell. Support for the Liberal government was significantly higher among those who "did not put all the blame on the federal government" (Blais et al. 2002). My own work showed that dissatisfaction with health care had an impact on support for incumbent provincial and federal governments, but only among the 60 percent who thought one government was principally responsible (Cutler 2004). Voters who said both governments were responsible were not able to bring negative judgments about health care to bear on their vote. This did not carry over to judgments about the economy or energy prices, where those who thought both governments responsible punished the governments about half as strongly as those who thought one or the other solely responsible. In contrast to these results, Anderson, using the 2004 Canadian Election Study, found that the economy was not a more powerful determinant of vote choice among voters who thought that the federal government had been "most responsible for how Canada's economy has been doing"(Anderson 2006). All these results show that attributing responsibility is not a simple matter and many citizens are not up to the task.

Dissatisfied with the either/or/both format of responsibility questions, I conducted provincial election surveys in 2003 in Ontario and Saskatchewan with a focus on attributions of

responsibility. Respondents were re-interviewed during the federal election campaign of 2004. These studies showed that Canadians understand what is meant by government responsibility but are uncertain and vague when it comes to apportioning responsibility to their governments . For most citizens, and in most policy areas, even ones of pressing concern, the contributions of the two levels of government to real-world conditions are significant and barely distinguishable. Few citizens attribute low levels of responsibility to either government, even when a government has little to do with a policy area, like the federal government's contribution to electricity problems in Ontario. And many citizens attribute full or nearly-full responsibility to *both* governments for shared policy areas. That is, few citizens think of responsibility as zero-sum.

A few studies in other countries are slighlty more sanguine about responsibility attributions in federal countries. Rudolph (2003a) found that in another context of divided authority – a separate Legislature and Executive – citizens' attributions of responsibility to state Governors and legislatures are sensibly, but not perfectly, related to the presence of divided versus unified government. Arceneaux (2006a)finds that elected officials across three levels of government are held accountable only for those matters for which they are responsible, *but that this only applies for a minority of voters whose responsibility attributions are highly accessible*. In other words, separating the political worlds for the purposes of electoral accountability demands political sophistication – information and the capacity to use it. Federalism, then, unequivocally exacerbates the monitoring problem facing citizens.

Aggregate-level evidence has also been brought to bear on the question of federalism and accountability. Soroka and Wlezein show that Canadian public opinion on government spending is less responsive to changes in spending than either the UK or the US. In fact, when asked about their preference for one government's spending, Canadian public opinion seems to respond to overall levels of spending, not that of the government in question by itself. Soroka and Wlezien suggest that the reason is Canadian federalism: "As effective public responsiveness depends on an accurate signal of what government is doing, it may be that the relationship between spending and opinion is mitigated in policy domains for which multiple governments have responsibility" (2005b).

These two literatures coexist uneasily. It is perfectly reasonably to expect separation between federal and provincial political worlds given Canada's relatively decentralized version of federalism. There can be no question that provinces have the autonomy to affect Canadians' lives as much or more than the federal government. So again, it is no surprise that party systems have diverged and voters can keep the worlds largely separate in their minds. The question becomes how they do so, given that it is equally reasonable to expect them to have a great deal of trouble figuring out how responsible is each level of government for changes, good or bad, in health care, education, tax levels, transportation, the economy, and so on. That question, more concretely, becomes: On what basis are they separating the two levels? And then, does it matter? Are their voting decisions disproportionately grounded in factors that can be separated?

A Theory of Voting in Federations

My formal representation of voting in federations, combined with an assumption that the average voter is uncertainty-averse, leads to the expectation that voters are likely to downplay potential voting criteria that carry greater uncertainty. The model was sketched in a previous paper (Cutler 2004); so I summarize it verbally here. It is based on a standard spatial voting

model (Downs 1957) where the voter's estimate of the utility differential among alternatives is the basis for her choice. Ignoring for the moment other possible criteria, we can focus on the performance of the government, surely the most important from the perspective of accountability. My conception of accountability follows a clear statement by Fiorina: "Given political actors who fervently desire to retain their positions and who carefuly anticipate public reaction to their records as a means to that end, a retrospective voting electorate will enforce electoral accountability, albeit in an ex post, not an ex ante, sense" (1981) To do this, voters must perform the task set for them by Downs (1958) and estimate the distance between the government's actual performance and either the hypothetical performance of the opposition parties had they been government or, more simply, the voter's expectation for what the government should have been able to produce. The greater the distance, the less utility is likely to be provided by the government party in the upcoming term, so the more likely is a vote for an opposition party.

In a federation, however, voters often can only observe the joint performance of both governments and yet must make separate voting decisions. This is a question of degree, and one that varies across policy domains. It will be at its height in those policy areas featuring the greatest formal jurisdictional overlap, the greatest uncertainty about the source of revenue, and the most federal-provincial co-operation *or* conflict. And of course, this all depends on information. With enough information and care in interpreting it, the separate actions of both governments could be observed, in theory. On health care, for instance, the federal government might have funded the purchase of 80% of a province's new MRI units through a dedicated fund for medical technology. Or, a nurses strike has little to do with the federal government (though the provincial government may put the blame on federal funding cuts!). But to voters, surely much of the current state of health care is a simple function of overall spending, which is clearly a function of revenue-generation and spending at both levels, whether direct or through transfers. It will be a rare citizen who goes to the trouble of assessing the various components of a policy domain to identify areas where each government is responsible. So it is fair to stylize the problem in stark terms as a voter observing one performance level and having to apply it to both levels of government.

Faced with this uncertainty, a fully rational voter might well decide to weight this policy area equally in voting choices at the two levels. The correct weight might well be one-half in some domains, some of the time. But it is an empirical question whether voters really do this. I want to suggest voters are likely to ignore policy areas where they have trouble attributing responsibility. One way to see this is to portray uncertainty about responsibility as a distribution around a performance judgment. I may think education is improving but if I am uncertain about a government's contribution to this, my distance from that government's performance might be small or large. One consequence is that it is harder to tell the parties apart. Given the need to make a decision, a voter might try to think of areas where the government's performance is clearer, and find herself thinking of policy domains where responsibility *is* clearer. So, despite concern about health care or higher education or even urban transit, a voter might dwell on foreign affairs, international trade, and defense policy in her federal voting decision while turning at provincial election time to public sector labour relations, the child welfare system, or simply the provincial economy.

A separate potential consequence is that if voters are uncertainty-averse, a fact which has been demonstrated in a number of studies (Bartels 1986; Cutler 2002), their calculations will emphasize the fact that the government's performance could have been even worse than the mean of the performance judgment, and so they are likely to punish the government more harshly than is warranted.

There are two other possibilities. First, it is conceivable that voters will fail to apportion responsibility at all. These voters would treat each government just like a unitary one with respect to the current state-of-the-world. Rather than turning the other cheek, voters would take a shortcut and throw all the bums out. This too, would distort accountability, since governments might collectively over-compensate (Harrison 1996). The second possibility, with the opposite, more pernicious consequence for accountability, is that voters are turned off by the uncertainty that comes from intergovernmentalism, can't tell the difference between parties, and so don't vote.

It is worth emphasizing that the discussion here is about judgments of governments' performance in a federal context. It may be possible to tell parties' promises for the future apart and federalism may not complicate this very much. But the Downsian calculation of the current government's performance as compared with the opposition parties' hypothetical performance over the same period is clouded by uncertainty about how much the policy outcomes are the result of the actions of the other level of government. So in judging the provincial state-of-the-world, a voter has to ask not only "what did the government do" and "what did the federal government do" but also "what would the other provincial parties have done (in response to federal action)" and "what response would their actions have generated from the federal government".

My recognition of the challenge for voters in a federation is not new. What the theory makes clearer than existing suggestions of a threat to accountability (e.g. Smiley 1987; Richards 1998) is the variety of consequences produced by a variety of mechanisms at the level of voters. In what follows I shall argue that the dominant mechanism involves voters, perhaps driven by the media, seeking out issues that can clearly differentiate the parties. And, more provocatively, that the result is that in a context where policy domains important to voters are highly intergovernmental, elections at both levels systematically downplay these issues, with obvious consequences for accountability in these areas. I shall try to provide some loose evidence for these propositions. I will conclude that this bias in the issues at play in Canadian elections resolves the seeming incompatibility of the two literatures I discussed above.

Are Canadian Elections About What the Electorate Cares About?

My aim, then, is to examine recent Canadian elections, federal and provincial, to determine what those elections are about. Are some issues potentially salient to voters systematically under- or over-emphasized? At this point I can only sketch broad patterns using a combination of the existing survey-based literature and some new media content analysis.

It is notoriously difficult to say what elections are about. The analytic challenge is usually put in prospective terms, however, where the goal is to define the policy mandate for the winning party. But more important for accountability and responsiveness is for parties and candidates to have an idea of which policy domains were important to voters' retrospective judgment of government performance (Przeworski, Stokes, and Manin 1999). Did the government lose office because unemployment was too high or because surgical wait times were too long or because it did not deliver public auto insurance? Or was it mostly about the new, charismatic opposition party leader? Without some degree of consensus on the interpretation of the electorate's verdict, parties will not know how to respond in such a way as would make accountability meaningful. The media now does the necessary heavy lifting, interpreting elections for voters and politicians alike (Mendelsohn 1998). But what do they elevate to the received wisdom about a given election? We might hope that construction of the collective will of the electorate in the days following an election would follow closely on the

decision criteria used by voters, but the media's interpretation of the result is often a narrative detatched from evidence from public opinion surveys or from indentifiable differences between the competitors (SHAMIR 2008). It is clear, however, that voters' choices are narrowed, made manageable, by the interaction of parties and the media *during the campaign* (Sniderman and Bullock 2004). Voters are told what the election is about and this shapes their decisions. So in the absence of, or as a supplement to, public opinion evidence on what voters thought the election was about, we can examine pre- and post-election media content as a guide to what the election was about.

Voters clearly only play a part in driving the agenda in a given election. Strategic choices by parties and editorial choices by media are the dominant forces. This is to say that citizens have their own views about what the most important issues are before an election is held and then they have their own ideas about the most important issue of the campaign. Because of this independence, scholars have been able to observe that the public agenda and the media agenda do travel together and the media agenda influences the public agenda, though not deterministically so (Soroka 2002; Weaver, McCombs, and Shaw 2004). Obviously, election campaigns are a special time where the public agenda can change most quickly and where media (and party) effects on the public agenda will be most powerful. The crystallization of the 1988 election as a "free-trade election" not a national unity election is an obvious Canadian example (Johnston et al. 1992). All this means that elections may well be fought over, and voters' decisions based on, factors very different than what voters thought was important beforehand.

Does federalism exacerbate this divergence? To find out, I present evidence on Canadians' views of the importance of issues and compare this with the issues that were, in fact, most important in federal and provincial election campaigns over the last decade.

What issues did the public care about, 1997-2007?

Most of the survey-evidence is in the form of questions that ask respondents what is the most important issue to them personally (sometimes "in this election campaign") or facing the country today. Right across Canada, the last decade saw health care eclipse the economy and become easily the plurality choice most-important issue. Figure 1 shows its meteoric rise and the corresponding drops in concern with the economy and the national debt. But these are readings taken mostly outside of elections and with a question asking about "the most important problem facing Canada today". Table 1 confirms that this concern carried over to federal elections by showing the distribution of voters' personally most important election issue in 2000, 2004, and 2006. The dominance of health care is stunning, given that Figure 1 shows these years as relatively low years for health care over the last decade. Table 1 also breaks it down by province, showing relatively little variation across the country, even in Quebec where different issues are usually at play. Health is easily the plurality choice in all three federal campaigns. In only three provinces in 2006 is it surpassed by the sponsorship scandal as the most important issue. No other issues come close to health care. Even a combination of taxes, the economy, debt/deficit/budget, and jobs can't touch it.[2]

[2] Looking back to the 1993 election, unemployment was dominant, with 42% of valid open-ended responses referring to a need for more jobs. Taxes and general economic concerns ran a distant second and third, with health care mentioned by only 5% of respondents. By 1997 there was some movement toward debt/deficit concerns, national unity, and health care, but unemployment was still out front with 33% mentioning it as most important (Source: CES).

Scattered evidence from provincial elections tells the same story. In the 2007 Ontario campaign, widely thought to have been dominated by the faith-based schools issue, health care outpaced education by 42% to 17%. And despite talk of a downturn in the economy, the Liberals' health levy, and environmental concerns, these issues were cited as most important by only 17%, 11%, and 11% respsectively. Four years earlier in Ontario, with an open-ended question, health was trump as well, mentioned by 32%; education trailed with 21% and all economic and budgetary issues behind that at 18%. Likewise in Saskatchewan in 2003, health dominated all other issues. Health is deemed "extremely important" by 85%, with the economy next at 69%, and Crown Corporations, widely thought to be the issue of the election, at only 56%. In the open-ended question at the start of the survey, health is mentioned as the "most important issue to you personally in this provincial election" in 27% of responses, with the Crowns at 12% and education, the economy, and agriculture below 10%.

The dominance of health care was not confined to election periods. Commercial polling firms found much the same, with a representative example reproduced here, as Table 2. Environics asked "And what would you consider to be the most important issue facing [province name] today?" in the spring of 2005. The distribution of citizens' concerns is very similar to the ones described so far.

For all this concern, it might have been that Canadians were satisfied with health care and government performance – or at least divided on it. Concern with an issue, however, is almost universally linked to dissatisfaction, particularly with government performance. So it is no surprise that over this period Canadians became increasingly negative about the performance of the system, of governments' handling of it, and ultimately of its sustainability. Numerous surveys showed Canadians' confidence in the system falling over the period (for a review see Soroka 2007). A striking example is that in early 1988, two-thirds said the federal government was doing "a good job" improving health; 17 years later, in 2005, the numbers were flipped: more than two-thirds said it was doing a poor job. And in that same 2005 survey, the federal government's health care performance was ranked dead last out of 19 performance domains! So not only were Canadians' concerned, they thought governments were to blame for shortcomings in the system.

Clearly, the first decade of this century will be remembered for the public's seeming obsession with health care and the system's deterioration. The evidence above indicates the overwhelming concern with health was not specific to one or the other order of government. Nor was the concern specific to election campaigns. Canadians' recent governmental priority, right across the country, has been their health care system. Other concerns have been more episodic and have only fleetingly eclipsed health in some places. Over this period, in general the economy, government budgets, and education have been important to those citizens not primarily concerned with health.[3]

How do these issues, particularly health care, fit in Canada's federal context? The easy answer is that they are areas of shared, highly intergovernmental, *de facto* authority. Issues more specifically attributable to one or the other order of government have been less important: Canadians have not been focussed on defense, international trade, unemployment insurance, nor, on the other hand, on provincial public sector labour negotiations, road quality, or auto insurance. Whatever the constitutional division of powers, we know that in health care, the economy, government budgets, and to a lesser extent education the on-the-ground outcomes for Canadians are driven by the joint action of provincial and federal governments.

[3] The sponsorship scandal is the obvious exception.

These are the areas that have been of most concern and therefore the ones where we would hope for effective accountability.

What have Canadian elections been about?

Federal Elections

Elections at both levels, then, must surely have been about the issues voters say are most important. Any democratic theory would expect as much. It is not enough for elections to translate voter preferences and evaluations into offices on *any* issues – the first step in electoral democracy is for elections to involve debate about issues that voters care about and for the interpretation of those elections by the media, political elites, and the public to be cast in terms of those important issues. Otherwise, elections are red herrings. Are they?

The obvious place to focus our attention is health care. Casual observation of federal and provincial elections would suggest that the last decade has not seen fierce electoral battles fought over health care, nor governments driven from office in the face of the public's widespread apprehension of a crisis in the health system. There has been no federal health care election akin to the free-trade election of 1988. Nor has there been a health care version of blockbuster provincial elections like the 1995 "Common-sense revolution" in Ontario or the 2001 decimation of what was seen as an incompetent, scandal-ridden BC NDP government or the 2003 Saskatchewan contest that turned on public versus private ownership of "the Crowns" or even the disastrous faith-based schools issue in Ontario in 2007. But what have recent Canadian elections been about?

I begin with the federal level. In 1997 the health care issue had not yet surpassed the economy for voters. Not surprisingly, only the NDP talked about health care and even then it was only a tertiary afterthought in their advertising strategy. It was so little discussed that the Canadian Election Study (CES) team asked about six areas of Liberal performance, but not health care specifically. They found, furthermore, that Liberal performance in "protecting social programs" was a weaker influence on the vote than in national unity, the deficit, jobs, and crime. Only the 15% who mentioned social programs (health, education, welfare, etc.) in an open-ended most-important issue question used Liberal performance in this area as a criterion in their decisions (Fournier et al. 2003). I note in passing that although social programs was the second-most frequently mentioned issue, it was less influential than the four issues listed above, all of which are more clearly under federal control.[4] The 1997 election, then was about a combination of national unity, the broken GST promise, slaying the deficit, and general economic optimism (Nevitte et al. 2000).

In the federal arena, the closest one finds to a health care election is 2000, where the most significant media intervention was a *Globe and Mail* headline claiming that the Alliance supported a two-tier health system. Stockwell Day's famous debate protestation "No Two-Tier Health Care" was an attempt to minimize perceived differences between the Alliance and the Liberals. And yet the CES team calculates that even though the message of the *Globe* headline stuck in voters minds, this only cost the Alliance one percentage point outside Quebec. This side of the health issue is, in any event, not about accountability for government performance so much as it is about different policy positions for the future.

[4] Obviously, the federal influence on the character and quality of social programs is profound; but it is indirect, and involves notoriously hard-to-follow money.

In that same campaign, the NDP tried in vain to pin blame for a health crisis on the Liberals with their key TV ad showing disappearing equipment around a decrepit hospital bed. But the evidence from the CES showed "the NDP had campaigned hard on health, but it did nothing to attract votes to the party (Blais et al. 2002)". One reason for this must be the recognition by voters that the NDP could not form a government. The crucial comparison for the purposes of holding the Liberals' feet to the fire would have been with the Conservatives, and it must be that voters did not make the calculation that the Conservatives would have been better on the health file. The other reason, pinpointed by the CES team, is federalism. It is worth quoting their analysis at length:

> Discontent with their handling of health care certainly cost the Liberals votes: among non-partisans who were satisfied with the Liberals' performance, the party's vote share went up to 50 percent. But it is puzzling that the cost was not higher. One reason is that the federal government did not shoulder all the blame for the problems in the health care system. Voters in general were quite divided when asked which level of government was most responsible for health care getting worse: about one-third (35 percent) pointed to the federal government, one-third (33 percent) to the provincial government, and one-third (32 percent) either could not tell or said both. And only 32 percent of Canadians thought that the main reason the quality of health care had gotten worse was lack of money (that is, federal funding). The fact that many voters believed that the provincial governments were as much (or more) to blame helped to limit the damage for the Liberals. *This ability to share (or avoid) the blame was an important ingredient in the Liberal victory.* The party's vote share fell to only 23 percent when dissatisfied non-partisans thought that the federal government was most responsible for the problems in the health care system. (Italics added)

An optimistic interpretation of these results would be to see this as evidence of sophisticated federal voting: only those who thought the federal government most responsible for the problems punished them. But what about the third who said both or could not tell? And surely the third who said the provinces were most responsible did not think the federal government has no role in the domain of health care[5]. As I demonstrated elsewhere (Cutler 2004), a huge proportion of these two groups have good reason to punish the federal government, but do not. The 2000 election should have been a health care election, and it was to some extent. But the governing Liberals increased their vote and seat share, despite concern about and dissatisfaction with Liberal performance on health. So one can hardly see 2000 as exacting electoral accountability on the issue of most concern to voters.

By 2004 the issue was now dominant and as the CES team notes "the Liberals campaigned hard on the health issue, and it featured prominently in their ads" (Gidengil et al. 2006). Paul Martin began the campaign trumpeting a $9-billion restoration of health care funding and the Liberals' early advertising suggested the Conservatives would weaken universality and cut taxes rather than replace health funding. The Conservatives again tried to minimize differences with the Liberals, saying that they would pursue the 2003 Chrétien government-provincial health accord more assiduously than the Liberals themselves had done under Paul Martin. But when push came to shove at the end of the campaign, the Liberal ad campaign switched from health care spending to the more ideological matter of privatization, universality, and the CHA. So again, the CES team reported that "views about health spending had little independent effect on Liberal voting. What mattered were views about public versus private health care" (Gidengil et

[5] In fact, when asked in September 2004 to choose "Which level of government, federal or provincial, would you say is most responsible for the deterioration [in the quality of health care]?", the federal government was the choice of 46%, compared with 37% saying the provinces. Until 2002, the provinces were the plurality choice. (source: The Strategic Counsel, cited in Soroka 2007).

al. 2006). Apparently, the governing Liberals were spared the effects of this cleavage – only the NDP picked up votes among those opposed to privatization. The newspaper post-mortems reflect the ultimate insignificance of accountability for health care. To the extent they mention health it is in the context of Conservatives' "hidden agenda" to weaken universality. Rejection of the Liberals in 2004 came nearly exclusively through the sponsorship scandal (Gidengil et al. 2006), so despite the importance of health to voters, the election was still no wake-up call for the Liberals on health.

There is as yet no comprehensive survey-based account of the 2006 election. It is telling that the CES team asked only a question about private hospitals during the campaign and nothing about Liberal performance. There is a question about health spending in the post-election CES survey, but voters who wanted more spending preferred the Liberals or NDP over the Conservatives. In other words, dissatisfaction with the current level of spending *promoted* support for the government.

My reading of all of the accounts of voter choice in federal elections from 1997 to 2006 is that only in a limited way are voters are getting it right on health care, holding the federal government accountable in areas they really control. The only health-related question that has consistently mattered to the federal vote is about the public-private mix in the system. This sub-issue hurt the Alliance and the new Conservative party until the Harper team was able to impose discipline on their troops and convince enough voters that the party is committed to the five principles of the Canada Health Act. So far, so good. But the other side of this coin is the lack of any relationship between Canadians' views about spending on health and their support for the governing Liberals in this period. Blais and his colleagues' conclusion about the 2004 election involving universality not spending applies generally. In 2004, for instance, 80 percent said they wanted more spent on health care, and yet the Liberals appear to have escaped any kind of censure on these grounds.

As the CES team concluded, some of this is about the ability to share or deflect the blame on issues like health care where outcomes are the result of complex intergovernmental interactions. Sharing the blame directly, though, is not the only mechanism that can reduce the impact of performance evaluations on vote choices. Indirectly, the mere possibility that blame can be diffused may mean that opposition party strategists avoid attacking the government on its record. Of course, blame can be shifted on any issue, but in the Canadian system issues where jurisdiction is shared involve a target (a "shiftee", if you will) that cannot generally fight back. During an election campaign the federal government can, within certain limits, blame "the provinces" without worrying about much of a response – and vice-versa in provincial campaigns. The national media is extremely unlikely to let the premiers speak back, even if premiers thought it were worth the risk of being accused of meddling in the federal campaign, itself unlikely. Compare this to a Presidential system when elections are concurrent: the President may try to blame Congress, but Congress has an opportunity to fight back. Opposition parties and the media will, therefore, all else equal, ignore issues to the extent they are intergovernmental. I take the federal election focus on the public-private mix at the expense of discussion of spending and management to be *prima facie* evidence for this proposition.

Provincial Elections

I turn now to consider provincial elections. The provinces give us many more cases for analysis. The nature of shared power with the other order of government is also substantially different. One might think, or hope, that the provincial responsibility for insurance for, regulation of, and direct funding of health care delivery would mean voters could use the mechanism of electoral accountability to fix a perceived crisis in the system. Given the degree of concern and the negative attitudes about the state of the system and government performance, one might expect to have seen a fair number of provincial governments driven from office over this issue.

To find out what recent provincial elections have been about, I employed a research assistant to read newspaper and online coverage of each campaign and its aftermath. She was asked to give a one-phrase description of the issues that the government party and up to two opposition parties wanted the campaign to be about. In addition, she coded what issues the media actually chose to focus on, both during the campaign and in their post-election analysis. She was unaware of the purpose of the data collection. The coding covers 11 years from 1997-2007, which amounted to 31 provincial elections. The results are presented in Table 3; where health care issues are highlighted in yellow.

A minority, seven of 31 provincial campaigns, could be said to have revolved around health care. Amazingly, in only one of the seven, Manitoba in 1999, did the incumbent government lose. The 2007 Québec election might be placed in the loss column, since the result was interpreted as a rebuke for the Charest Liberals *and* the Parti Québecois. Two (perhaps three) elections in Alberta were classified as health care elections, but of course the notion of electoral accountability is particularly dubious that province. The Alberta election of 2004, however, might be considered an endorsement of the Conservatives' policies and management, since all three parties wanted to focus on health and the media appears to have coooperated. In the other three-quarters of the elections (25), health care did not feature, despite the attempts of government or opposition to put it on the agenda in the majority of these cases. This first reading of the table tells us that the public did not get its concern with health translated into campaign discourse, nor did health care decide the fate of many provincial governments.

There are, of course, many possible reasons for the absence of health care from any one of these campaigns. In thirteen of them, no party seems to have wanted to talk about health. That in itself should give us pause, considering the level of public concern. But what were these campaigns about? Were they always personality contests, or did the provincial economy loom large, or were taxes often the crucial issue? The two right-most columns of table 3 reveal a wide variety of issues. The provincial economy in general, the budget, and income taxes are frequent provincial campaign issues in this period. Leadership looks about as prevalent and as prominent as is generally the case in modern mass democracies. The other issues, though, strike me as surprisingly parochial: auto insurance, highway tolls, consumer energy prices, youth crime, Sunday shopping, and so on. Only in a very few cases do we have campaigns about education or the environment or other areas of obviously shared jurisdiction. (The education elections tend to be about clearly provincial public-school matters rather than, for example, post-secondary funding). In general, and other than health care itself, provincial campaigns seem very rarely to be about issues with very substantial *de facto* shared authority.

To apply some impartial expert judgment to the classification of these issues, I hired a (different) senior doctoral student, expert in federalism, to put them on a scale from zero to ten, where zero indicates an exclusively provincial matter and ten an exclusively federal one. I asked her to consider *de facto* authority as it affects the outcomes a citizen would experience on the ground (see appendix A). Obviously, this is an inexact science, since one must weigh revenue-

generation, transfers of cash and tax points, spending, policy development, legislation, regulation, and administration at both levels. Some cases are easy, as when a campaign 'issue' was about leadership or a provincial scandal. The coding tended to put any mention of health care in the middle, 4-6 range. Issues like major hydro development, provincial tax rates, and consumer energy princes were classified at the provincial end of the scale.

The mean of all 211 issues was 1.9 with a standard deviation of 1.8; a histogram appears as Figure 2. Perhaps not surprisingly, but no less significantly, provincial campaigns do appear to be about matters close to the provincial end of the continuum. A strong hypothesis derived from my general argument about the effect of federalism would be: the issues that became the real election issues feature more exclusive provincial jurisdiction than the issues proposed by the opposition parties. The hypothesis is not supported in these data: the mean authority of opposition issues versus election issues is not significantly different. This may, however, just reflect the opposition's reticence to bring up issues of shared jurisdiction in the first place. Interviews with opposition leaders and strategists might be the only way to find out.

Unfortunately, there is very little provincial survey evidence to provide an account of what issues voters actually used to make their decisions. It is impossible to do for these provincial elections what I have done, with the help of the CES, for federal ones. My studies of Saskatchewan and Ontario in 2003 have almost no company. In Ontario, perceptions of a health care crisis made no difference to the vote, in contrast to the economy and taxes. The Saskatchewan data does, however, indicate that voters who saw a health care crisis and saw the provincial government as signficantly responsible inclined very strongly to the opposition parties (Cutler 2007). The effect is limited to the 35 percent of voters who thought the system was in full crisis or no crisis at all. Nevertheless, despite the coding of the election in Table 2 as not a health care election, some voters did try to exert electoral accountability on health. This single piece of evidence mandates an obvious caveat about the validity and power of the content analysis I have relied on above. Voters may have choices narrowed for them by the parties and media, but a significant number may easily base their voting decisions on other factors. Thus, saying an election was not health care election does not mean that no voters based their choices on health care. Until provincial election studies become common, saying what provincial elections are about will be more art than science.

Discussion and Conclusion

All told, the last decade in Canada has seen a remarkable divergence between Canadians' avowed priorities and the debate in elections that are the principal tool by which they can extract action on these priorities from their governments. Because this paper's analysis is essentially limited to one issue over this period I hasten to point out that there are a variety of reasons why health care has not been an electoral crucible. The complexity of the issue, independent of federalism, is surely a barrier (Carmines and Stimson 1980). Services are delivered by medical institutions at one remove from government, so it is very hard to see the direct effect of government managament. And it is an issue where science must play a prominent role. But federalism is surely an additional factor in the case of health care. It bears repeating, however, that this is not specific to health care. Any issue will be less prominent in elections – for parties, media, and voters – to the extent that outcomes are determined by a policy process that involves both levels of government interacting at various stages. Every federal system has a different constellation of policy domains featuring degrees of shared and exclusive authority, so different issues will be disadvantaged in different contexts.

It might be objected that voters have to perceive parties to be different for an issue to matter and health care is just so central to Canadian values (Soroka 2007) that it is a consensus issue where party differences will never properly emerge. The logic of this argument is that voters would have to think another government would have done something different, closer to their preferences, for performance in health care to hurt the governing party. But this is, in a way, a chicken-and-egg problem. If voters don't perceive a difference, the parties' pre-election polling will tell them the issue is not a 'mover', so they will not press the issue and it will fall off the campaign radar. In that case, the impotence of the issue is nearly a foregone conclusion; the lack of debate itself prevents voters from perceiving interparty differences. I am arguing, consistent with the logic of this counter-argument, that federalism is part of the reason why voters can't tell their governments' performance from what the opposition parties would have done, generating the mechanism by which issues like health are ignored in elections.

The other side of this coin is that elections can also be conceived as an opportunity for consensus, albeit one that is elite-driven, not bottom-up. That is, parties offer the same promises, or, much rarer, even admit to having advocated the same approach during the government's term of office. In doing so they take certain issues off the table. The election ought to be considered just as much "about" the building of this consensus as "about" the issues that separated the parties and drove voter choice. Johnston and his colleagues suggest something like this was at work in the 1988 election when the parties played down the national unity issue, even in the face of public concern that grew out of the Meech Lake process. The 2006 federal Conservative platform fits this mould, with its commitment to the five principles of the CHA as well as the promise to "Push ahead with implementing the September 2004 federal-provincial Health Accord." It is difficult to say what kind of balance of consensus-building and issue conflict is ideal from the point of view of accountability, but again, it seems clear that in areas important to citizens with widespread dissatisfaction, a deliberation-free elite-generated consensus has serious democratic shortcomings.

These caveats made, I return to the two literatures reviewed earlier. If federalism does profoundly affect what issues are prominent in elections, then federalism can give rise to the seeming tension between the two general findings. To put it simply: Citizens can inhabit two *separate* political worlds precisely because the institutions that define the choices in those elections—namely parties and the media—systematically ignore issues and policy domains with a high degree of intergovernmentalism. Parties and the media do this for the very reason that the subjects of these policy domains are difficult to comprehend, communicate, and deliberate. The resolution of the paradox of these two seemingly conflicting literatures is that one causes the other: limits on the information-processing and information-gathering capabailities of citizens ultimately determines the separation of political worlds. The overall result is that the various institutions and actors that make up the electoral process force more separation of worlds than is warranted by voters' issue priorities and the distribution of real authority in the federation.

Instead of congratulating ourselves about the separation of the political worlds, then, Canadians should be re-evaluating this state of affairs. A separate-worlds social and electoral federalism is only salutary if policy-making and service-delivery follows a watertight compartments model. To the extent that policy is made and delivered by an impenetrable morass of intergovernmentalism, federalism slides into unitary government from the perspective of voters in their role as the agents of electoral accountability. In a highly decentralized, yet highly intergovernmental context like Canada's, efficient electoral accountability demands an integrated party system and parties at both levels that respond to the electoral signals at the other level. Only then would voters be encouraged, and encourage

the media in turn, to elevate matters of joint authority to prominence in election campaign debate.

To put it another way, among federations Canada is probably at the extreme of a (hypothetical) measure of electoral separation *and* a measure of the difficulty of assigning responsibility to the two constitutional levels of government. Our election results and party systems and identities may all be extremely separate, relative to other countries – that is Canadians instinctively understand the importance of keeping them separate – and at the same time our extreme intergovernmentalism make it very hard to do so on the big, important issues. Canadians may be able to use general ideological criteria in their voting decisions to transmit their preferences on domains with shared authority, and the parties' approaches in executive federalism may be guided by this behaviour, but it is a poor substitute for a more straightforward link from government action to public response that is possible with more separate, watertight levels of governmetn or fundamentally less balanced federal regimes.

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Figure 1 – Most Important Issue, Canada 1994-2006

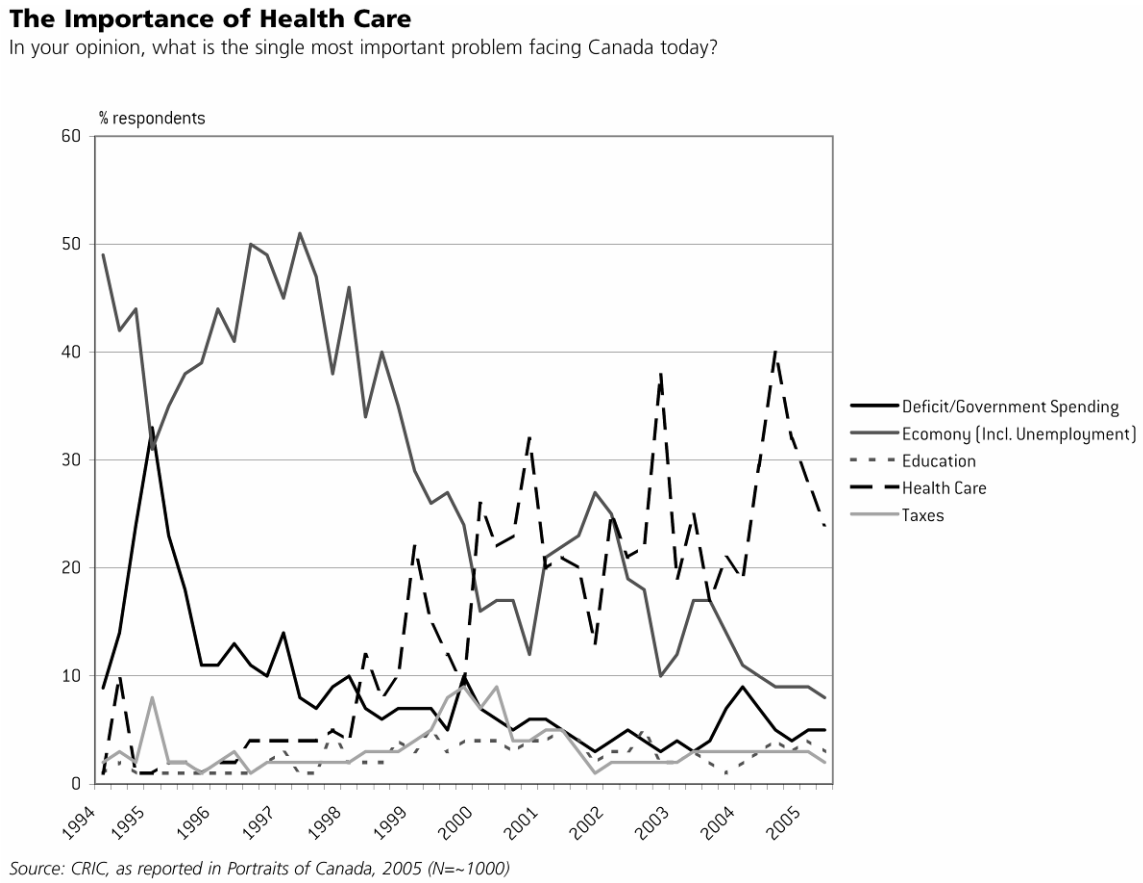

Figure 2

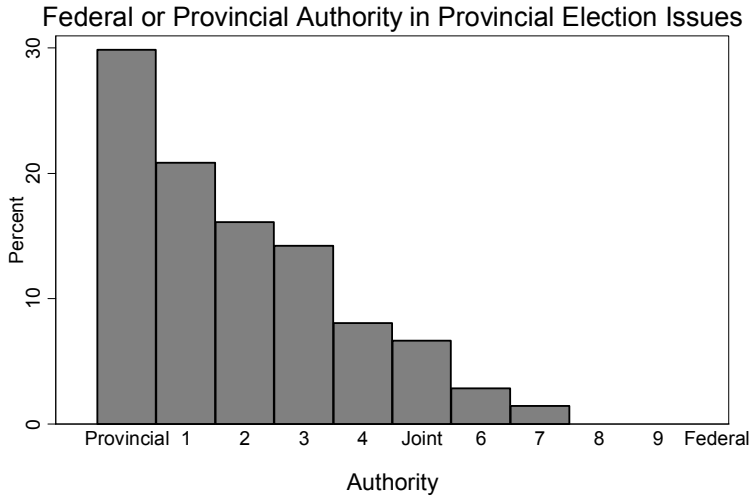

Table 1 – Most Important Issue, Federal Elections

Personally most important issue in 2006 federal election , by province (fixed choice)
column percentages

	Total	nfld	pei	ns	nb	quebec	ontario	manitoba	sask	alberta	bc
health care	39	55	51	43	39	39	43	32	37	29	37
taxes	11	12	7	13	11	7	12	21	12	12	8
social welfare programs	11	10	10	14	13	18	8	5	9	7	10
the environment	7	0	2	12	8	11	6	6	4	5	7
corruption in government	30	24	25	17	26	21	29	33	36	44	35
other/don't know	2	0	5	0	2	3	2	2	3	2	3

Personally most important issue in 2006 federal election , by province (open-ended)
column percentages

	Total	nfld	pei	ns	nb	quebec	ontario	manitoba	sask	alberta	bc
health care	27	35	34	41	23	19	30	26	29	21	31
jobs-unemployment	1	4	0	1	3	0	1	0	2	0	0
debt-deficit	2	2	0	3	2	2	2	5	3	4	3
economy	2	0	2	3	2	3	3	3	2	1	2
corruption-representa	21	16	19	13	25	22	17	19	23	35	22
taxes	4	4	2	4	5	2	6	10	6	4	3
social programs	5	2	8	6	3	6	5	5	8	4	7
crime	2	0	0	1	0	0	5	2	1	0	5
poverty-rights	1	0	5	0	2	3	1	0	2	0	1
environment	2	0	0	1	0	3	2	1	2	2	3
national unity	3	4	2	0	0	8	1	3	1	1	0
education	2	0	3	3	2	2	3	0	0	3	1
Other	13	12	12	12	11	11	15	11	11	14	15
None	13	22	14	12	23	18	11	14	13	10	8
Total taxes/economy/debt/jot	10	10	3	12	11	7	11	19	12	9	8

Personally most important issue in 2004 federal election , by province (open-ended)
column percentages

	Total	nfld	pei	ns	nb	quebec	ontario	manitoba	sask	alberta	bc
health care	34	41	49	44	36	28	36	35	37	30	36
jobs-unemployment	1	7	2	2	5	1	1	0	0	0	1
debt-deficit	4	0	2	6	7	2	5	5	6	6	5
economy	2	5	3	4	0	3	1	1	1	1	2
corruption-representa	11	3	3	5	7	11	12	8	14	15	13
taxes	6	3	4	4	1	2	9	10	5	6	6
social programs	2	2	2	3	0	3	1	2	2	1	3
crime	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
poverty-rights	1	0	0	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
environment	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	2
national unity	1	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
education	5	5	3	7	3	3	8	6	3	7	5
Other	16	14	17	11	22	17	15	18	17	17	18
None	15	19	14	12	18	25	11	13	12	15	8
Total taxes/economy/debt/jot	13	15	10	16	13	8	16	16	13	13	14

Personally most important issue in 2000 federal election , by province (open-ended)
column percentages

	Total	nfld	pei	ns	nb	quebec	ontario	manitoba	sask	alberta	bc
health care	35	43	44	46	50	26	38	44	41	31	41
jobs-unemployment	4	8	12	7	8	5	3	3	6	1	2
debt-deficit	4	1	2	1	1	3	5	5	3	7	6
economy	3	1	0	1	3	4	3	1	3	2	3
corruption-representation	4	3	4	3	2	3	5	7	6	7	6
taxes	10	3	8	10	6	7	11	14	16	16	11
social programs	3	3	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	2
crime	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	2	3	2	2
poverty-rights	2	0	0	1	0	3	1	0	1	1	1
environment	1	0	4	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	2
national unity	2	0	0	0	1	4	1	0	0	1	0
education	7	7	6	14	8	4	9	5	4	7	7
other/don't know	26	31	18	12	19	36	21	18	16	21	17
Total taxes/economy/debt/jot	21	13	22	20	17	19	22	22	28	26	22

Table 2 – 2005 Most Important Provincial Issue

Most Important Issue Facing Province Environics - Focus Canada 2005 Q2

"And what would you consider to be the most important issue facing __ today? (Open-Ended Question)"

Categories	%	N
Health care - non-specific	24	485
Cost of health care/OHIP (not SARS/West Nile)	2	31
New health care premiums	0	5
Hospitals- services/closing	1	26
Total Health Care	27	
Unemployment	7	134
Economy/interest rates	4	73
Total Economy / Unemployment	10	
Poor government/leadership	4	84
Govt breaking promises	1	16
Liberal/McGuinty govt/Provincial govt - non-specific	4	71
Total Government Performance	9	
Deficit/public debt/govt spending	2	35
Govt spending/waste	2	30
Taxes	4	74
Total Budget / Taxes	7	
Education issues	4	75
Farming/ fisheries/forestry	2	38
Environment/pollution	6	122
National unity/Quebec	3	67
Mad Cow disease/BSE	1	21
Hydro/energy - non-specific	1	25
Electricity (supply mgmt by govt)	1	16
Electricity costs/prices	0	9
Crime/law and order	1	17
Infrastructure/ roads/transit	2	34
Social issues/cuts to social programs	2	38
None	1	23
Other (SPECIFY)	18	358
DK/NA	6	115
Valid cases		2022

Table 3 – Provincial Election Issues

Province	Election date	Govt win?	Government Issue 1	Government Issue 2	Opposition1 Issue 1	Opposition1 Issue 2	Opposition2 Issue 1	Opposition2 Issue 2	Media Campaign Issue 1	Media Campaign Issue 2	HC?
AB	March 11 1997	Yes	balanced budget	future health spending	health spending cuts	budget cuts	health spending cuts	nurse cuts	health care - spending cuts	elimination of deficit	y
AB	March 12 2001	Yes	economic boom	increased government spending	gas and electricity prices	two-tiered health care	re-regulate electricity	oppose private health care	energy prices	health care - private delivery	y
AB	March 3 2008	Yes	health care delivery	infrastructure spending	cut health care premiums	investment of resource royalties	affordable housing	cap greenhouse gases	Stelmach as cautious, hardworking Premier	cost of living	y
AB	Nov 22 2004	Yes	health care reform	equalization negotiation	health care reform	post-secondary education	oppose health privatization	schools funding	health care - private delivery	Klein's retirement	y
BC	May 16 2001	No	leadership change	need for credible opposition	balance budget	tax cuts			economic mismanagement	political corruption	n
BC	May 17 2005	Yes	strong economy	increase in jobs	maintain balanced budgets	health care - effect of cuts			economic turnaround	potential teachers strike	y
MB	June 3 2003	Yes	frozen hydro rates	frozen auto insurance rates	reduce property tax	reduce middle income tax			need for prudent economic management	leadership - Doer's sensible approach	n
MB	May 22 2007	Yes	reduced medical waiting lists	keep provincial Hydro utility public	public safety and crime	reduce provincial sales tax			health care - waiting times	more police officers	y
MB	Sep 21 1999	No	tax cuts	reinvestment in health	hire more nurses and rural doctors	shorten medical waiting times			health care - bed closures	cuts to social services	y
NB	June 7 1999	No	strong economy	lower taxes	oppose highway tolls	need for change (200 Days of Change)			highway tolls	leadership - Lord's youth and dynamism	n
NB	Sep 18 2006	No	leadership - Opposition Leader's inexperience	regulate energy costs	increase funding for higher education	investment in energy sector			electricity and gas prices	scandal - failed fuel agreement	n
NB	June 9 2003	Yes	more nurses hired	balanced budgets	public ownership of power utility	cost of auto insurance			cost of auto insurance	employment growth	y
NL	Feb 9 1999	Yes	natural resources - major hydro project	natural resources - capital investment in mineral processing	tax cuts	job creation			Churchill Falls hydro power project	Premier's federal political ambitions	n
NL	Oct 21 2003	No	strong provincial economy	potential public service cuts by opposition if it forms government	economic uncertainty	greater control of natural resources			Williams' business acumen	potential public service cuts	n
NL	Oct 9 2007	Yes	projected budget surplus	greater control of natural resources	middle to low income tax cuts	reduce home-heating costs			spending oil revenues	intergovernmental relations	n
NS	June 13 2006	Yes	balanced budgets	home-heating tax rebate	home-heating tax rebate	more police officers on street	personal income tax exemptions	job creation	home-heating tax rebate	youth crime	n
NS	Aug 5 2003	Yes	10% income tax cut	increased infrastructure funding	public auto insurance	increased funding for nursing homes	debt repayment	freeze taxes	cost of car insurance	Sunday shopping	y
NS	July 27 1999	No	health care - borrow to increase funding	public debt - opposition's contribution when it was in government	balance budget	sell or close public steel mill	public debt	health care - modest spending increase	public debt	budget deficit	y
NS	March 24 1998	Yes	health care - increase funding	leadership - popularity of new party leader	balance budget	tax cuts	sales tax cuts for low income	review health spending	health care - funding cuts	budget deficit	y
ON	June 3 1999	Yes	income tax cuts	deficit reduction	oppose funding cuts for schools	oppose hospital closures	roll back social program cuts	distance NDP from previous NDP government	balancing the budget	McGuinty's leadership inexperience	y
ON	Oct 10 2007	Yes	defending province against Conservative federal govt	successful economic stewardship	phase out Provincial Health Premium	government's broken promises	increase minimum wage	schools funding formula	faith-based school funding	government's broken promises	y
ON	Oct 2 2003	No	Premier's leadership experience	tax cuts for mortgagees and seniors	no tax cuts or increases	more teachers and nurses	public electricity generation and distribution	public auto insurance	school reforms	tax cuts	y
PE	April 17 2000	Yes	income tax cuts	public kindergarten program	improve roads	increase education spending			strong economy	patronage - government jobs	n
PE	May 28 2007	No	Premier's leadership experience	funding for a new public school	access to family doctors	cut fuel tax			govt's sudden promise to build new school	tired three term government, time for change	y
PE	Sep 29 2003	Yes	Premier's leadership experience	raise funding for healthcare	improve doctor recruitment	increased cost of electricity			doctor shortage	leadership - Ghiz's youth vs Binns' experience	y
QC	Nov 30 1998	Yes	cutting budget deficit	more provincial control of social programs	no sovereignty referendum	tax cuts			leadership - Bouchard's popularity	social union negotiations	n
QC	April 14 2003	No	expand $5/day child care	sovereignty as solution to fiscal imbalance	health care - reduce waiting lists	reduce income tax	pay down public debt	excessive government bureaucracy	political scandal - Parizeau Affair	family-work conciliation	y
QC	March 26 2007	Yes	tax cuts	reduction in hospital wait times	education	sovereignty referendum	family financial assistance	health care - more private delivery	health care - broken govt promises	reasonable accommodation' for cultural minorities	y
SK	Nov 5 2003	Yes	opposition's hidden agenda to privatize crown corporations	low cost of living	wasteful government spending	declining population			public vs private ownership of Crown corporations		n
SK	Sep 16 1999	Yes	free first year university tuition	gradual tax cuts	income tax cuts	improve rural roads			tax cuts	farm income crisis	n
SK	Nov 7 2007	No	universal prescription drug plan	unprecedented economic prosperity	managing economic development	targeted prescription drug plan			building on robust economy	time for change after 4 term govt	y

Appendix A: Instructions to Issue Coder

These are phrases describing issues that were prominent in some recent provincial elections. Think of them in that context, but also in the context of the activity of a provincial government during its term of office.

I want you to think less about the constitution and more about how a prov govt could act in these areas. Would it be able to act basically alone and any success or failure would be unambiguously the provincial government's own? Or is it a policy area where much of the background features, like money and federal legislation, mean that what the public gets is a joint product of action and inaction by both levels of government -- whether there are obvious, prominent fed-prov negotiations or not.

So please use a scale measuring the degree of federal government involvement/authority/power/effect on the policy area, where 0 is a totally, exclusively provincial issue, 5 is a totally 50/50 joint-shared-overlapping issue, and 10 is an exclusively federal issue.

Obviously, some of them are totally provincial, like provincial leadership or broken provincial promises. Some refer to things like "economic boom" and "balanced budget" etcetera. You should just read "provincial" into these ones. That doesn't mean that they end up as a zero on the scale, but it does mean that the locus of the issue is provincial.

The spreadsheet just lists issues with a blank space to the right. Please just put in your number in the column to the right of the issue.

I would like you to do this from the top of your head. Don't consult the constitution, or the internet. Don't over-think; it's not a test.