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Peer Effects in Standardized Testing

Tell me who your classmates are, and I'll tell you how much you would improve your next English test.



**By Margarita Pivovarova,
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University of
Toronto**

By the end of 2016, every Saskatchewan student in Grades

4 to 12 will be required to participate in annual standardized tests. This is part of a government achievement initiative aimed at improving educational outcomes in the province. The new standardized assessment system has drawn attention and provoked debates from school administrators, teachers, policy makers and parents. The debate is centred on the interpretation of the results of these tests: should they be diagnostic or evaluation tools? For instance, how legitimate is the use of standardized tests to rank schools – the Fraser Institute School Report Card is one example of such ranking? At the same time, provincial curriculum-based tests serve as an important tool to diagnose schools and boards that need attention.

Ontario has administered standardized tests since 1998 for students in grades 3, 6, 9 and 10 for three subjects – mathematics, reading and

writing. The main purposes of standardized testing are two-fold:

- They provide individual students and their parents with the records of student's progress and relative standing according to provincial standards.
- They measure the trends in performance across schools, pinpointing the areas that need improvement.

School results together with the information about the percentages of low-income families, ESL students and even parents with university degree are reported on the School Information Finder website maintained by the Ministry of Education allowing parents to “shop” for a school.

For researchers, the data collected from students' performance on standardized tests give vast opportunities for testing theories and uncovering common trends in education and school performance. The results of standardized tests might also be used to quantify the determinants of students' achievement. Another area where the results of the standardized tests scores over time may be used is teachers' accountability and evaluation. In Canada, while the provincial test results have not been tied to teachers' compensation, they have been used in the variety of contexts. The data from Alberta have been used to explore the relationship between the degree of sorting across schools

and educational inequality. Studies using the data from British Columbia shed light on how the home language and other characteristics of student's schoolmates influence that student's academic achievement, and whether the segregation of Aboriginal students contributes to the achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

Another question that can be addressed using the consistent data on students' performance is the existence of knowledge spillovers, or more generally, peer effects. The question is important for the education policy design that considers the efficient makeup of the classroom. For instance, if knowledge spillovers do exist, and we are aware of the magnitude and structure of these spillovers, then there might be achievement gains from re-allocating students with different abilities across classrooms.

In my research to quantify peer effects, data from Ontario collected over the course of three years (2008-2010) for the entire population of six-graders in all public schools was analyzed¹. I have linked tests scores in Grade 3 and Grade 6 for the same student over time and then matched students to their respective classrooms and schools. As a result, I obtained a unique and rich three-year panel of 1,989 public schools and test scores for more than 400,000 individual students.

¹ The data are collected and maintained by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) – a government agency responsible for the administration of the Ontario tests.

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While interesting and important, peer effects are hard to quantify in practice because of their reciprocal nature and selection of students into schools. My idea of estimating peer effects is based on exploiting the entrance of new students to a school. On average, every year a school in Ontario receives about 10% of new students in Grade 6 which corresponds to 2 or 3 new students in a class. While characteristics of those new students are likely to be correlated with the average characteristics of all students in the same school and the neighborhood, the way new students are assigned to classes within their new school may generate idiosyncratic variation in the average characteristics of classmates. What I find is that new students are allocated to classes within school based on their gender or their status as a second language learner, but not based on their prior achievement. This observation is confirmed by the empirical analysis and also by school principals whom I interviewed as a part of my research project.

This quasi-random assignment of new students to classes creates an idiosyncratic shift in the average ability of the classmates for each student who stayed in school since Grade 3. I use this plausibly random shift to identify and quantify knowledge spillovers among students. Not surprisingly, I find that while new students are placed into classes not based on their ability, this is not the case for students who stayed in the school and for the students who entered two or three years before then – those students are mixed to create balanced-ability classrooms. I also find that all students independent of their level of prior achievement benefit from the presence of high-achieving classmates. This effect is not linear and is larger for students from the very top of the ability distribution. Thus, being surrounded by classmates who scored on average 1 point higher in mathematics exams raises individual achievement by 0.42. This average figure masks the difference in the effect for students



Figure 1: Individual Achievement Gain from Peer Effects, Grade 6 Students, Ontario

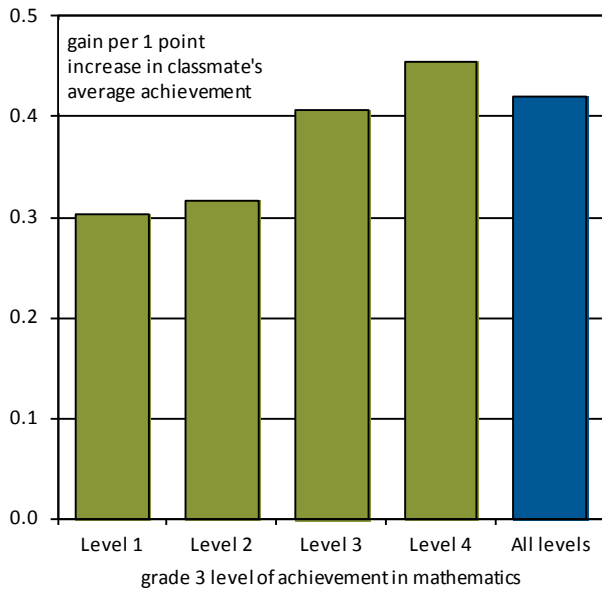
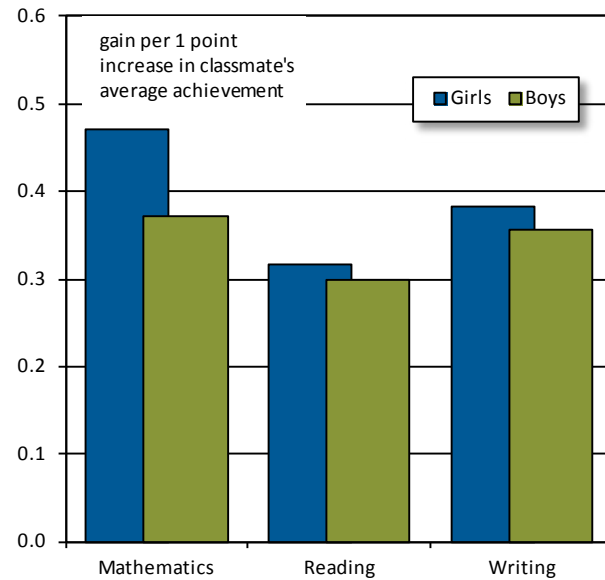


Figure 2: Individual Achievement Gain from Peer Effects, Grade 6 Students, Ontario



at different levels of achievement (see Figure 1). The effect of classmates on individual achievement in reading and writing exams has the same structure (with high achievers benefiting the most) but is slightly smaller in magnitude.

According to previous studies, there are large differences in the effects for boys and girls. Using the methodology described above

and the same Ontario data, girls do indeed benefit more than boys from the presence of high-achieving peers with more able girls experiencing larger impact compared to everyone else (Figure 2). This finding implicitly points out that peer effects include not only the direct interaction (for instance, students teaching one another), but may also operate through the influence of students on academic and disciplinary standards in the classroom,

or through the teacher’s expectations and reactions to students’ behavior.

All together, the findings imply that the magnitude of peer effects in the classroom is large and significant. They should not be ignored when considering the best way to allocate students with different abilities across classrooms.

The Residential Housing Market in Western Canada



By Doug Elliot, Publisher, Western Policy Analyst

In the February issue of the *Western Policy Analyst* we looked at the rental market

in western Canada. This article is a follow-up examining the larger part of the residential housing sector, what we will call the “ownership” side of the market. As with the previous article, the analysis is for the seven large metropolitan areas in western Canada.

Reliable statistics are available describing a) the sale of existing homes, which involves

100,000 sales and \$50 billion in the seven largest metropolitan centres in the West, b) trends in the approximately 50,000 new houses under construction, and c) a comparison between income and the price of homes as an indicator of affordability.

Resale Market

The Multiple Listing Service (MLS) operated by the Canadian Real Estate Association provides statistical information about most of the sales of existing houses in Canada with privately arranged sales being the major exception. Figure 1 shows the number of units sold through the MLS system for the seven largest urban centres in western Canada.

The pattern over time for the number of sales is similar in the four urban centres in B.C. and Alberta with an upward trend from 2000 to the mid 2000s followed by a sharp decline in 2008 after the credit crunch hit in late 2007. The drop was particularly pronounced in Vancouver where sales fell by 35%. The number of sales recovered somewhat in 2009 but have been drifting down since then so that by 2012, approximately the same number of units changed hands as in 2008. In Alberta sales have been broadly flat since 2008.

A different pattern is evident in the three urban centres in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. The number of sales increased from 2000 to the mid

Figure 1: Housing Resale Market, Units Sold, Multiple Listing Service

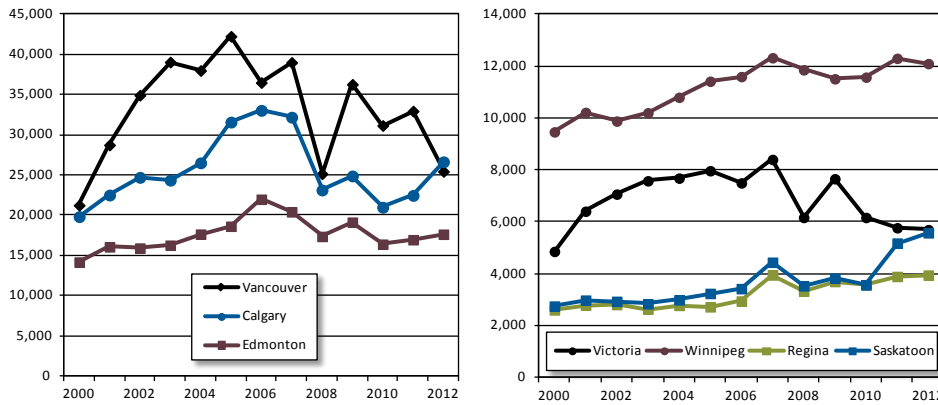


Figure 2: Housing Resale Market, Average Selling Price in Constant \$2010, MLS

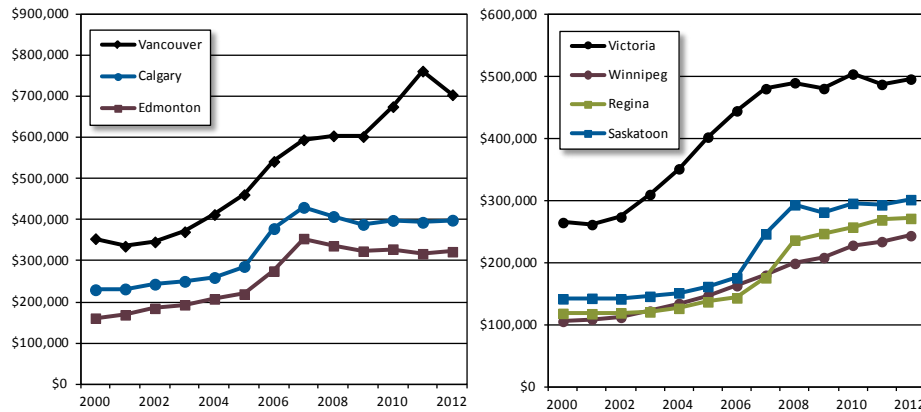
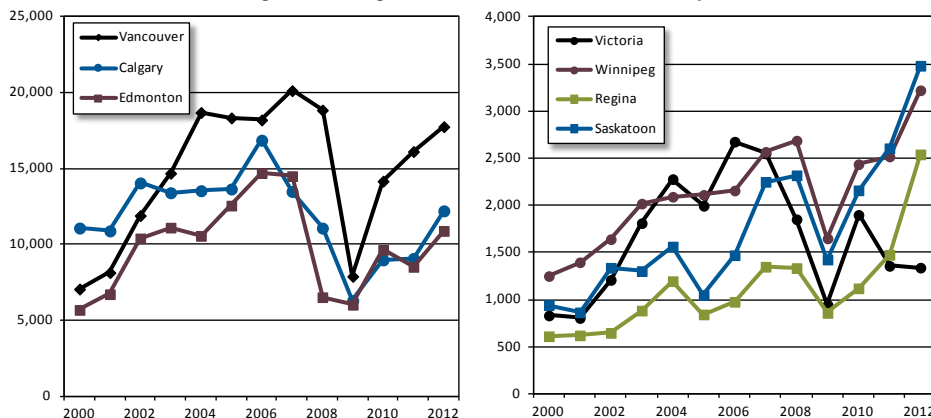


Figure 3: Housing Starts Intended for the Home Ownership Market



2000s with only a slight drop in 2008 and relative stability since then. Sales in 2012 were about the same level as in 2008 although Saskatoon is an exception because of a surge in 2011 and 2012.

The average value for houses changing hands in the resale market is shown in Figure 2. Here again there are distinct patterns evident in the data. In the most common pattern (Calgary, Edmonton, Regina, and Saskatoon), the downturn in 2008 ended a two-year period of rapid growth and prices have been stable or on a gradual upward trend since then. The average price increases in Regina and Saskatoon have been somewhat higher than in Calgary or Edmonton.

- In Regina and Saskatoon the average annual increases from 2006 to 2008 were 32% and 34% respectively and the increases from 2008 to 2012 were 6% and 2% respectively.
- In Calgary and Edmonton, the increases from 2006 to 2008 were 15% and 8% respectively and the increases from 2008 to 2012 were 0% in both cities.

Victoria is not unlike the prairie cities except that the rapid increase from 2006 to 2008 was not evident. Winnipeg is unique with a steady upward trend in resale prices. Vancouver is also in a class by itself. Not only are prices the highest in western Canada, but the downturn in sales in 2008 was accompanied by only a short hiatus in price increases. A downturn in 2012 has reversed some of the 32% increase from 2009 to 2011; this is thought by many to be the start of a more substantial drop in 2013.

Housing Starts

How has the market responded to these price changes? Figure 3 shows the number of new units constructed for the home ownership market. Note that these statistics measure only part of the supply because they will not include the sale of rental units or condominium conversions.

The number of starts in every urban centre declined in 2008 or 2009 in response to the 2008 slowdown in sales. The decline was the most pronounced in Vancouver (a 58% drop),

Winnipeg, and Saskatoon. Since then, starts have recovered and are at or near 2008 levels in Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, and Edmonton. Starts have not recovered in Victoria and, at the other extreme, are well above the pre-crash levels in Regina and Saskatoon.

Affordability

As a simple measure of the affordability of home ownership, Figure 4 shows the price in the resale market relative to estimated gross household incomes, both measured in constant 2010 dollars. The ratios are stable near 4:1 in Calgary, Edmonton, and Saskatoon. They are lower but still stable at 3:1 in Regina. The least affordable units are in Victoria (7:1) and Vancouver (9:1). Once again, Winnipeg shows a gradual upward trend.

Another measure of affordability treats the place to live as a simple commodity rather than as an investment. Is it less expensive to rent or to own your home? The ratio of rents (average two-bedroom apartment) to ownership (average price in the resale market) is measured in constant \$2010 dollars and expressed as the number of years of paying rent that would be required to purchase a home (see Figure 5).

Vancouver and Victoria are at one extreme in this measure. In theory, it would take the equivalent of 48 years of rent to purchase a home in Vancouver and 40 years in Victoria. In the other urban centres, the figure is typically 25 years although it is higher at 30 years in Calgary. This suggests that prices may be unsustainably high (or rents poised for increases) in Vancouver and Victoria and, to a lesser extent, in Calgary.

Summary

We noted in the February issue that housing “bubbles” like all asset price bubbles are notoriously difficult to forecast, prevent, or even

Figure 4: Affordability Measure (Average Resale Price as % of Income), Constant \$2010

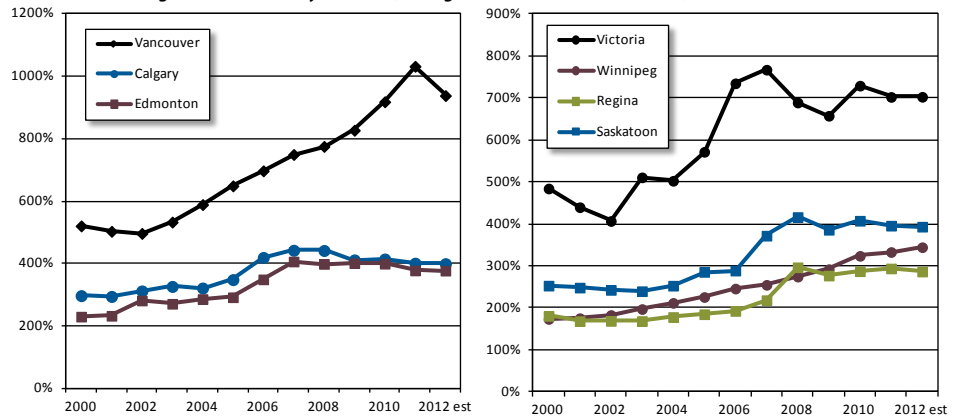
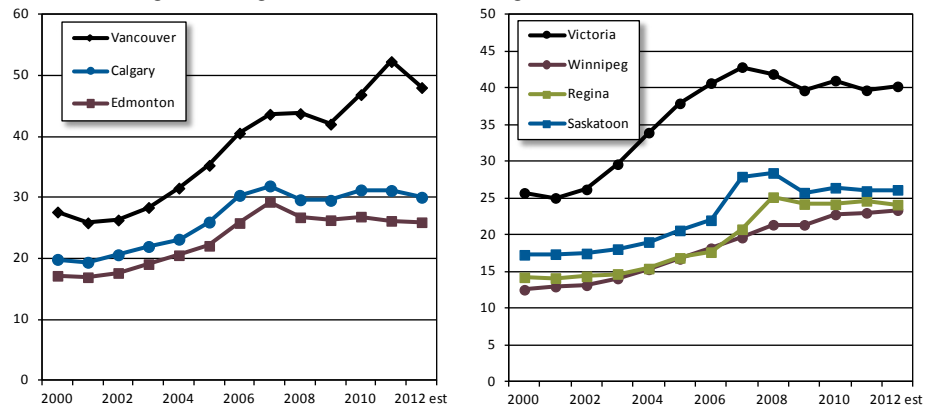


Figure 5: Average Resale Price Relative to Average Rents, \$2010, Years of Rent to Purchase



recognize. It is only in retrospect that we see that the prices were rising too quickly, were too high relative to ability to pay, or that the supply was outstripping the demand.

These figures do suggest that the residential housing markets in Vancouver and, to a lesser extent, Victoria are due for a correction. Having said that, Vancouver is clearly an outlier in the data. The city has a worldwide reputation as a desirable place to live so it may be somewhat

protected from the normal market supply, demand, and pricing pressures.

The figures also show that prices in Alberta and Saskatchewan do not seem abnormally high but that the number of starts in Regina and Saskatoon seem to be higher than demand would suggest. This new construction will provide a growth in supply in the coming years which will have a dampening effect on prices in 2013 and 2014.

Sources:

Income and inflation figures are from Statistics Canada CANSIM Tables 202-0401 and 326-0001

Average rents and housing starts are collected and compiled by CMHC and published by Statistics Canada in CANSIM Tables 027-0040 and 027-0034 respectively. The resale market is based on statistics compiled by the Canadian Real Estate Association and published by CMHC. MLS is a registered trademark of the Canadian Real Estate Association. Estimates are the responsibility of the author.

Northern Voting Patterns



By Ken Coates, Professor and Canada Research Chair in Regional Innovation, JSGS, University of Saskatchewan and Associate Professor of Political Studies and Greg Poelzer, Director of International Center for Northern Governance and Development and Head of the Northern Governance Thematic Network, University of the Arctic



** Many thanks to Paola Chistie for her help with this article.*

The 2013 debate about electoral boundary reform has sparked renewed interest in Northern participation in provincial and federal elections. At the same time, a major research project on political engagement in Northern Saskatchewan, conducted by Bonita Beatty, Loleen Berdahl and Greg Poelzer, identified strong electoral participation at the local (municipal and band) level, but decreasing participation by Northerners in provincial and federal elections. The study also showed a high level of political and civic engagement in non-electoral processes, especially at the local level, including through less formal political networks and processes. In fact, electoral participation at the local level – both band and municipal, -- was two to three times higher than is the case in municipal elections across the rest of the province. Northern Aboriginal people are highly politically engaged, but not in provincial or federal elections.

Across western Canada, northerners are significantly less engaged in electoral politics at the provincial and federal levels, despite the fundamental and often growing importance

of federal and provincial programming in shaping regional affairs. There are six federal constituencies across western Canada that cover the northern regions of the four provinces.

- In Manitoba, the riding of Churchill stretches across most of the North as far as the Nunavut border; a small panhandle drops to the east of the province and actually ends up south of Lake Winnipeg.
- In Saskatchewan, the riding of Desnethes-Missinipi-Churchill River incorporates all of northern Saskatchewan north of Prince Albert.
- In Alberta, there are two ridings – Fort McMurray-Athabasca and Peace River – that are responsible for the northern sections of the province.
- British Columbia also has three northern constituencies: Cariboo-Prince George, Prince George-Peace River and Skeena-Bulkley Valley.

Each of these ridings covers a vast distance, stretching hundreds of kilometers North to South and East to West. Many of the communities are isolated, with many, particularly in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, accessible only by air, water or winter road. Most of the constituencies have at least one major city, with a large non-Indigenous population, including Thomson (Man), Fort McMurray (Alta) Grand Prairie (Alta), Prince George (B.C.), Dawson Creek (B.C.), Fort St. John (B.C.), Terrace (B.C.), Kitimat (B.C.), and Prince Rupert (B.C.). In British Columbia, the voters are predominantly non-Aboriginal, even though the area has a significant (10% to 20%) Aboriginal population. Northern Alberta is much the same. Saskatchewan's northern riding has a majority Aboriginal population, but there are several smaller-sized non-Indigenous communities such as Meadow Lake and Creighton. Northern Manitoba's northern riding has a more mixed population, largely because of the non-Aboriginal communities of Churchill, Thompson, and The Pas.

In the most recent three federal elections (2006, 2008 and 2011), voter turnout in the northern constituencies has been well below the western Canadian average. Northern voters in Saskatchewan, for example, turned out at between 45% to 58%, with the larger number coming in 2006, as against averages for the rest of

Saskatchewan (excluding the northern riding) of between 60% and 65%, with the largest turnout in Saskatchewan also recorded in 2006. In Manitoba, the northern turnout ran between more than 10% lower (2006) to a full 17% lower (2008). Northern Alberta followed suit, with a 10% lower turnout in 2006, 13% in 2008 and more than 11% in 2011. British Columbia showed the smallest gap in overall voter turning, with a 6% lower turnout in 2006, 8% in 2008 and a little more than 5% in 2011.

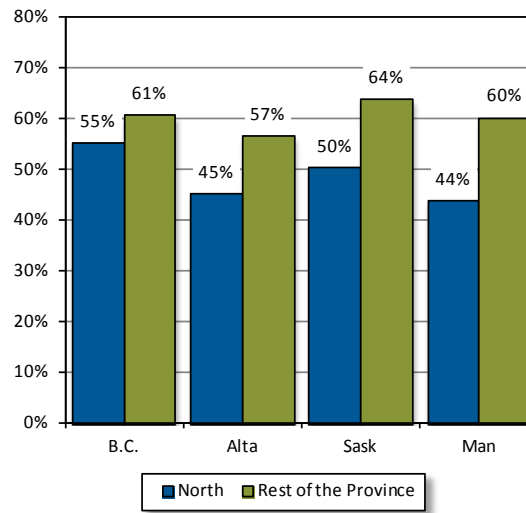
A similar pattern emerges for provincial elections. There are, of course, more Northern provincial constituencies, as follows:

- Saskatchewan (Athabasca and Cumberland);
- Manitoba (Flin Flon, Thompson, Kewatinook, and The Pas);
- Alberta (Lesser Slave Lake, Peace River, Fort McMurray-Conklin, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo and Dunvegan-Central-Peace Valley); and
- British Columbia (Nechako Lakes, North Coast, Peace River North, Peace River South, Prince George-Mackenzie, Prince George-Valemount, Skeena and Stikine).

These constituencies vary widely in nature, with many dominated by a single, largely non-Indigenous community and others, incorporating largely Aboriginal people.

In the most recent provincial elections (BC in 2009, Alberta in 2012, Manitoba in 2011 and Saskatchewan in 2011), northerners showed

Figure 1: Voter Participation in the 41st (2011) Federal Election



up at the polls in significantly lower numbers. The gap was relatively slight in British Columbia, with 52% of eligible voters participating in the North as against 55% for the rest of the province. In Alberta, the gap was a full 14% with Saskatchewan only slight behind with a 12% lower turnout in the Northern constituencies. Manitoba, however, had a 57% turnout in southern constituencies and only 34% in the North, a difference of 22%. It is important to note that Northern Saskatchewan, the riding with the highest proportion of Aboriginal voters, had a higher participation rate in the provincial election than the federal election.

There were major gaps in voter participation in provincial elections within the North. For example, Thompson recorded an almost 38% turnout, still low by provincial standards (57% for the rest of Manitoba) but well ahead of the 30% turnout in The Pas. In Alberta, the largely non-Indigenous population of Dunvegan-Central-Peace Valley was actually well above the 54% provincial average with more than 58% of eligible voters participating. Lesser Slave Lake, with a large Aboriginal electorate, saw only 38% of the electorate show up to vote. In Saskatchewan, the constituency of Athabasca had a voter turnout of only 45%, much lower than Cumberland (60%) and the provincial average of 66%. In British Columbia, the general pattern of constituencies with a large Aboriginal population voting at a lower level than those dominated by non-Indigenous people, was



reversed. Peace River South constituency (check boundaries) had a much lower turnout (44%) than areas with a substantial Indigenous population, like Skeena (55%) and Stikine (65%).

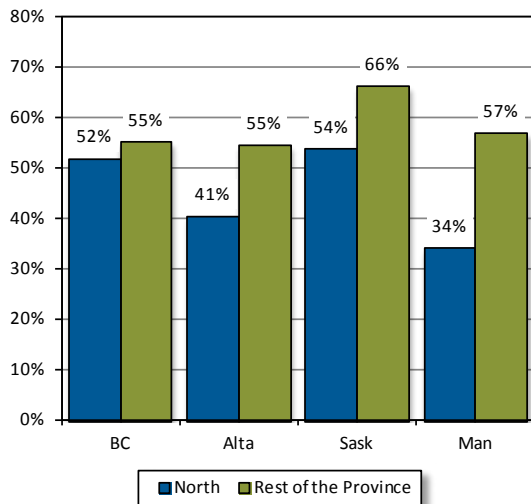
The Northern parts of the western provinces remain more disengaged from the provincial and federal electoral processes than the South. There are many reasons for this pattern and the reasons vary with the history, demographics and economies of the respective regions. Most importantly, however, the voting patterns also speak to the lack of federal interest in the provincial Norths in Canada. In contrast to the Northern territories, visited regularly by the Prime Minister and highlighted in national policies, the provincial north does not register as a region on the national political radar. As a consequence, it is hardly surprising that the provincial North does not feel like a highly valued, political important part of the country.

Herein lies the great political irony of Northern political engagement. From Labrador through to British Columbia, it is the sub-Arctic, and not the Arctic, that is driving the country's economic future. In the East it is the Voisey Bay mine and the Lower Churchill River, northern Quebec's power resources and the Ring of Fire in northern Ontario that hold the greatest

promise for regional growth. Across the western provinces, the resource potential of the region is being tapped at a remarkable rate, with legally empowered Aboriginal communities (thanks to the "duty to consult and accommodate" regulations) more heavily engaged than in the past. The North matters, to both provincial prosperity and the future of the Canadian economy, as the extended debate about the Northern Gateway Project attests.

Northern provincial constituencies should and perhaps will be the focal point for crucial national debates about the future of the Canadian resource economy and the role of Aboriginal communities within the rapidly expanding northern economy. These areas are profoundly affected by resource development, in ways positive and negative, and their representatives should have a great deal to say about the evolution of the country. At present, the pattern of lower engagement, political marginalization and greater Indigenous distance from provincial and federal electoral politics has left the western provincial Norths without a powerful and united regional voice. It will take, it seems, a realization of the North's vital contributions to provincial and national prosperity and the Norths' realization of their importance to Canada's future to convert the current provincial and federal electoral disengagement into an influential voice for regional and nation-wide political change.

Figure 2: Voter Participation in the Most Recent Provincial Election



Governments and Social Media



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The use of social media among governments in Canada is increasingly common with a great deal of experimentation occurring. All four western provinces have begun to develop social media guidelines but the approaches adopted vary with Alberta and British Columbia treating social media as a communication tool, while Saskatchewan and Manitoba approach it from a service-orientated approach. Despite the different administrative strategies all four provinces are using it to catch citizen's attention at their point of interest. For example all four host LinkedIn sites for human resource recruitment. The Governments of British Columbia, Alberta, and Manitoba all have YouTube channels used for public messaging. Citizens may also get Twitter updates on highway conditions and closures in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia. In fact all four western premiers host very active Twitter accounts.

International trends suggest that governments will have to develop sophisticated digital strategies that integrate web, social media and mobile technologies to keep pace with the citizens' emerging expectations for public engagement and service delivery. Citizens no longer rely on fixed points of internet access with various market predictions suggesting that mobile devices will largely replace personal computers in the next fifteen years. In 2010:

- 68% of Canadians banked online;
- 65% visited government websites;
- 64% searched for health-related information; and
- 53% had a Facebook profile.

Everyday 54% of Canadians visit a social media site, while 26% seek information and join conversations on political, social and/or policy-related issues.

Current trends in social media usage suggest that it is not only the growing levels of penetration of social media but also the frequency of use. Canadians are increasingly relying on social media and mobile platforms for communication, information seeking, and socializing. In 2010 27.4 million Canadians over the age of sixteen were using the Internet with over half this population having a social networking profile. Social media penetration in Canada is extremely high with:

- 86% of online users having a Facebook site;
- 19% on Twitter; and
- 14% with LinkedIn profiles.

Currently YouTube is the 2nd largest search engine in Canada. In addition, to these high levels of penetration the frequency of use has climbed significantly from 2011 to 2012 with a 32% increase in the amount of time spent using social media.

The proliferation of Internet phones and the provision of mobile support for Web connectivity allow users to be constantly connected to their online world and in particularly social media. Today 70% of Canadians use mobile devices and between 2009 and 2011 Canadians accessing Facebook through their mobile devices grew from 65 million to 250 million. Indeed in October 2012 SASKJOBS.CA reported that in one year mobile device job searches have increased by 266%. These trends suggest that social media is having a significant impact on how governments engage citizens and deliver services.

According to the 2012 United Nations Survey on e-Government 12 countries in Africa, 21 in America, 20 in Asia, 23 In Europe and 2 in Oceania host government websites that encourage visitors to follow the organization on Twitter or Facebook. In Canada the federal government and all provincial governments with the exception of Saskatchewan and Quebec provide similar opportunities to connect to government. And citizens are connecting.

The province of Manitoba uses various types of social media including Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and RSS feed. The province's social media presence is very centralized with no accounts hosted at the ministerial level other than a Twitter account that provide updates on highway conditions (3,765 followers). The



Government of Manitoba's YouTube channel hosts approximately 70 videos that often attract more than a 1000 views. The Manitoba Twitter account has approximately 5,231 followers, while its main Facebook site has just over 958 likes.

The Government of Saskatchewan launched official service portals on both Twitter and Facebook in March 2013. Currently Saskatchewan uses an ad hoc approach to social media with various ministries and public agencies using social media tools. For instance Tourism Saskatchewan is using Instagram (400+ followers), Facebook (more than 10,700 likes), YouTube (120 videos that are often viewed more than 5,000 times), Pinterst (450 pins), Twitter (more than 7,355 followers) and Tumblr. On Twitter the Saskatchewan Highways hotline has over 7,500 followers, while Saskatchewan Agriculture has 1,091 Twitter followers. Facebook sites are also hosted by SaskPower, Saskatchewan Arts Board, and SaskParks.

The Government of Alberta uses YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Flickr; taking a decentralized approach to the cross government social media presence. The Government of Alberta has an official Twitter accounts with more than 16, 492 followers; however almost every ministry in the province hosts a separate organizational account. The official Your Alberta Facebook page has more than 3,450 likes, while the Your Alberta YouTube channel has 640

subscribers and more than 684,000 video views. Alberta Health also hosts a photo stream on Flickr.

The province of British Columbia uses YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Blogs and RSS Feeds also takes a very decentralized approach to social media. The Government of British Columbia's Twitter account currently has approximately 18,360 followers in addition to 33 other program specific Twitter accounts. Similarly there are 20 different Facebook accounts and 16 additional blogs and similar engagement sites. There are 5 separate Flickr groups and RSS feed available based on ministries, sectors, and regions. The main Government of British Columbia's YouTube sites has approximately 804 subscribers and 608,365 views since November 2009. In addition, there are another 17 BC government channels on YouTube.

The influence of the Internet in general, and the interactive, collaborative potential of social media in particular, will continue to create both opportunities and tensions for governments. From an organizational context social media provides many opportunities to maximize impacts and improve effectiveness and efficiency. From a social context emerging evidence suggests that social media fosters social inclusion, encourages stakeholder participation and advances democratic dialogue. Finally, from the public engagement context social media tools offer new opportunities for collaboration, consultation, public education, transparency and accountability.

Despite the seemingly positive benefits, there are also negative implications associated with new digital tools as benefits are variable across populations with digital exclusion consider a major policy challenges. In addition, there are

numerous challenges associated with privacy and security, which are major priorities in the information technology sector, with social media sites prone to various types of cyber threats.

The most recent survey of Internet use conducted by Statistics Canada shows that there are still a significant number of western households without easy access to the Internet in 2010 (see Figure 1). That year, approximately one in four western households did not have internet access at home. This means that, even if they were knowledgeable about Internet use, they would need to access the Internet from work, a library, or another public place. The proportions without Internet access at home ranged from 16% in B.C. to 26% in Manitoba; the national average was 21%.

There is strong correlation between income and access to the Internet as Figure 2 shows. Whereas virtually all households in the top income quartile have Internet access at home but the proportion is less than one half among those in the lowest income quartiles in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Government social media presences will therefore be unavailable to reach a significant portion of the population, particularly in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. It should, however, be noted that the rising popularity of mobile devices is changing how people access online resources, which is a trend that will continue to grow in the future.

Figure 1: Percentage of Households with Internet Access at Home, 2010

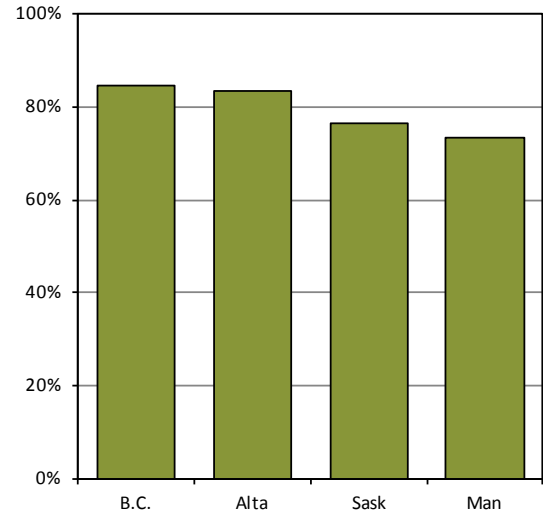
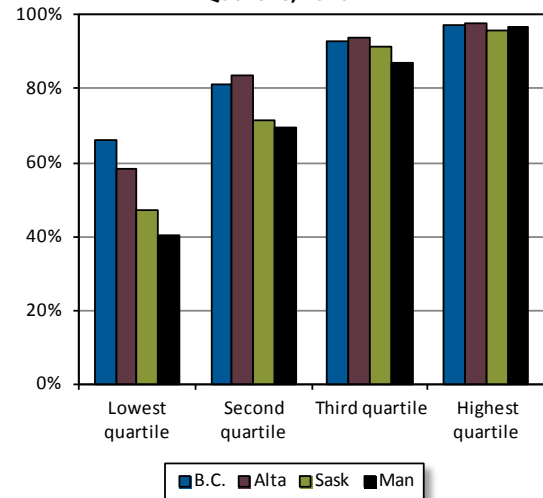


Figure 2: Percentage of Households with Internet Access at Home, By Income Quartile, 2010



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Immigration to the West and Human Rights: Is there a Correlation?



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The Government of Canada's focus on attracting immigrants has expanded greatly in recent years. As the global financial crisis affected many nations, western Canadian provinces experiencing economic stability and even (in the case of Saskatchewan) an enviable prosperity welcomed a steadily-increasing number of foreign-born workers to their communities and their corporations.

"This government is focussed on the priorities of Canadians, which are economic growth and prosperity", Minister Jason Kenney told the House of Commons. "We need newcomers working and paying taxes and contributing to our health-care system." In alignment with Canada's efforts, every province in the West – Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia – has or has had an active Provincial Immigrant Nominee Program. These programs were established as a joint effort by the provincial governments and Canada to help ensure that the foreign workers needed to support labour markets can become permanent residents¹.

Has Canadian society been as accommodating as its various levels of government in embracing immigrants? Has the Government properly prepared both the immigrant and the citizen to understand and embrace the influence that newcomers often have on their community, and vice versa? Are there unforeseen policy issues that have resulted from the Government's aggressive immigration policy that may require additional intervention?

In contemplating these questions, we might look to what is happening to human rights complaints based on what might roughly be

regarded as discrimination. There are parts of this story to be found in Statistics Canada data related to immigrants, and in the annual reports of human rights commissions and/or tribunals in the four western provinces. In doing so, we can ask one final question: with caveat that correlation is not necessary causation (see box), do the numbers of human rights complaints based on protected grounds such as race, religion, and place of origin correlate to the number of newcomers immigrating to the western provinces each year?

Statistics Canada defines an immigrant as someone who was born outside Canada and who has been permitted by immigration authorities to live in Canada permanently. Some will have lived in Canada for a number of years, while others have arrived recently. Other terms that have become synonymous with this definition are "new Canadian", "foreign born", and "newcomer". The four human rights organizations in Western Canada use these terms interchangeably in their documents and on their websites.

Figure 1 shows that the largest number of immigrants are to Alberta and B.C. although the number is increasing in the former and stable in the latter. The numbers are smaller but increasing more rapidly in Saskatchewan, with Manitoba exhibiting stability.

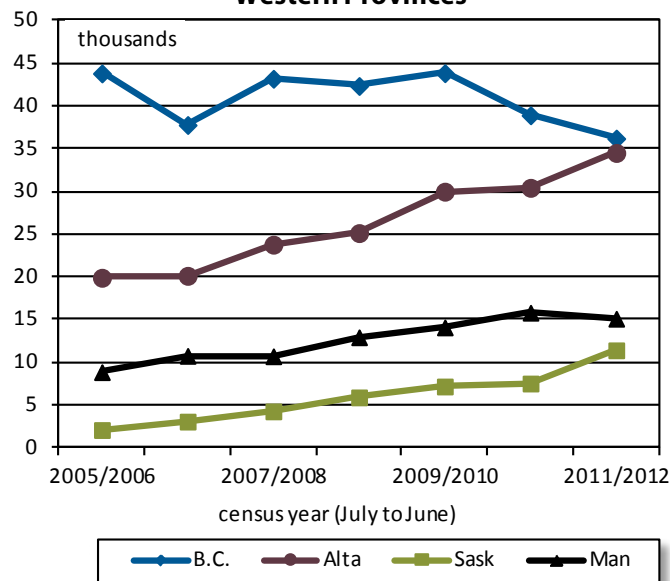
While each of the human rights commissions/tribunals have their own mission statement and are autonomous agencies, their *raison d'être* is based on the *Canadian Human Rights Act* and therefore the *United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. As an example,

These statistics need to be interpreted carefully because correlation does not necessarily imply causation. A simultaneous increase in immigration and human rights complaints could be the result of a cause-effect relationship, could be related to a third unexplained variable, or the two events might not be related at all.

the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission has declared that its mission is "to promote and protect the individual dignity, fundamental freedoms and equal rights of Saskatchewan citizens." Likewise, Manitoba's Human Rights Code says that "Manitobans recognize the individual worth and dignity of every member of the human family" ... and promotes "equality of opportunity" and "freedom from discrimination".

The number of human rights complaints in Western Canada has fluctuated over the past three to five years, with the differences

Figure 1: Annual Immigration to the Western Provinces



Source: Statistics Canada CANSIM Table 051-0004

¹ British Columbia has recently (November 2012) suspended their program pending a review of efficiencies and impact.

² No Alberta data are available for 2007 or 2008. Saskatchewan's 2011 data have not yet been released. Some annual reports are based on calendar years; others are based on fiscal year.

from year to year stark in some provinces, like Alberta, and relatively flat in others over similar periods of time (see Saskatchewan, 2008-2010)². It is in looking more deeply into the nature, or grounds, of those human rights complaints that we start to see a pattern emerging that may be related to the number of new immigrants in each province, and therefore, to the provincial and federal governments' immigration policies and practices.

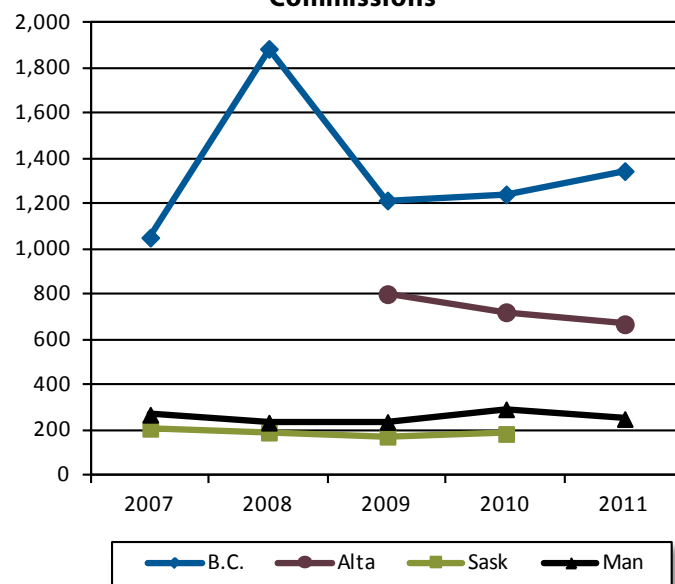
Protected grounds under the Canadian Human Rights Act and in the four provinces' own codes include such categories as marital status, ancestry, religion, sex/pregnancy, sexual orientation, race, gender, family status, and physical or mental disability. While immigrants obviously have the same ability as any Canadian to submit a complaint on any or all of these grounds, for this study the numbers reflected in Figure 3 illustrate a compilation of grounds that have more frequently been associated with human rights infringements/discrimination against newcomers, namely race, religion/creed, color, place of origin, and other ancestry. Note that the ancestry ground has been largely associated with complaints made by Aboriginal Canadians. For this discussion, ancestry was not included in the compilation of statistics.

Figure 3 shows some trends in the three provinces with the most readily available human rights data³. Saskatchewan has seen an obvious jump in related complaints between 2007 and 2008, and the level of complaints on these selected grounds has remained relatively steady. The 2010-2011 Annual Report of the *Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission* underscores the validity of this assumption, stating, "complaints from new Canadians accounted for one third of all complaints filed this year. This represents a significant rise in complaints from new Canadians over the past five years and corresponds with the government's increased efforts to attract new Canadians. The Commission has identified racism ... as a growing area of concern for complaint processing and as a topic on which to focus public awareness."

³ Alberta data not available.

What is interesting, especially in Saskatchewan and British Columbia, is that as Saskatchewan increases its immigrant population, so too do human rights complaints from that population.

Figure 2: Complaints to Human Rights Commissions

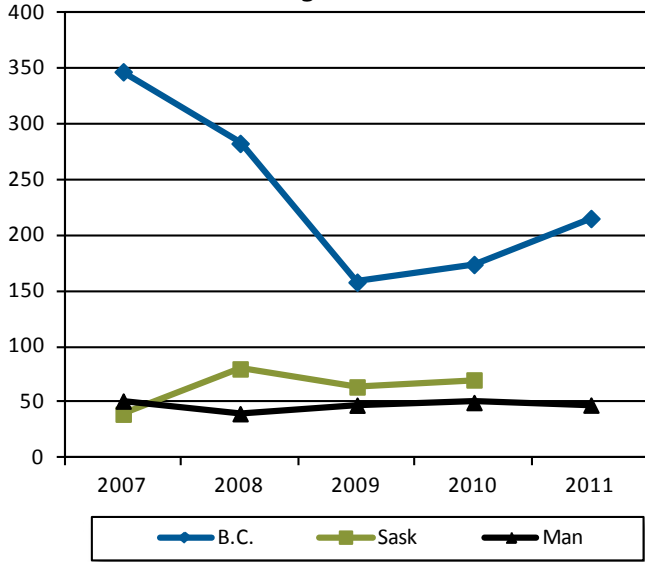


Source: Annual Reports

What is interesting, especially in Saskatchewan and British Columbia, is that as Saskatchewan increases its immigrant population, so too do human rights complaints from that population. British Columbia, while having no more recent immigrants come to the province than in the past, has had a steady rise in human rights complaints in 2010 and 2011. This is likely the result of two issues. First, aggressive immigration policies that were implemented earlier than in the other provinces saw an earlier spike in human rights complaints that created an administrative backlog; these claims are carried over year to year until they are closed. Secondly, as B.C. reaches a saturation

point in relation to its immigrant population, and more new Canadians have become aware of the protections that are available to them, they have felt empowered to take a stand against discriminatory practices. On the plus side, it is also possible that there has been a more successful campaign to explain their rights to new immigrants, along with assistance in making such complaints. If this is the cause of the increase, then the higher numbers might represent an increased ability and willingness to file complaints on the part of immigrants, rather than an increase in violations. As already emphasized above, the apparent correlations do NOT tell us about causation, though they may lead us to ask important questions.

Figure 3: Immigrant-Related Complaints to Human Rights Commissions



Source: Annual Reports

There are clear policy implications surrounding immigration that need to be addressed in order to counteract the steady rise in human rights issues in the western provinces. As the figures illustrate, even with a combined decrease in the total number of immigrants in these three provinces, the number of human rights complaints has increased and with them, the number of complaints from new Canadians.

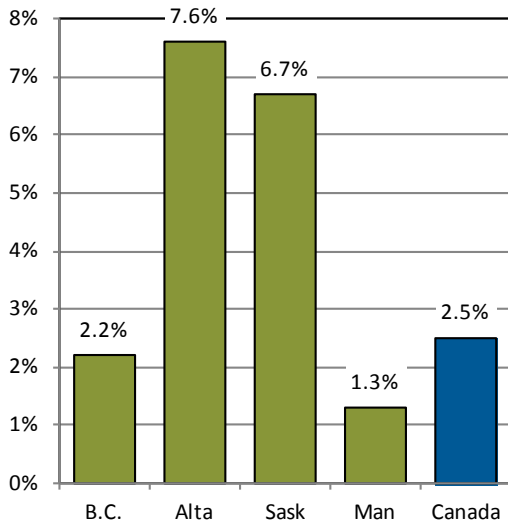
Whether it is public awareness campaigns, better community support programs for new Canadians, or increased monitoring and enforcement/penalties for discriminatory actions, one thing is certain – there is work to be done to ensure that western Canada remains a destination of choice for the immigrants it needs to help it continue to grow and prosper.

STAT FACTS

Consumer spending is slowing in Canada but not in Alberta or Saskatchewan where gross retail sales grew by 7.6% and 6.7% respectively in 2012. Spending is much more subdued in B.C. (2.2%) and Manitoba (1.3%).

Weakness in the B.C. labour market lead to slower employment growth in the West in early 2013. In the first quarter, employment in the West grew by 1.8% compared with 1.7% in Canada as a whole. Employment in the prairie provinces, particularly Saskatchewan, is growing more quickly than the national average.

Annual Increase in Retail Sales, 2012



Annual Employment Increase, 2013 Q1

