

## **Public, Private, and Non-profit Sector Employees: Voting Behaviour and Ideology in the 2011-2012 Provincial Elections**

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**Abstract** This paper focuses attention on the political orientation and civic behaviour of people working in the non-profit, private, and public sectors. While considerable research has been completed to understand how variables such as age and gender influence voting patterns, one variable that remains understudied is employment by sector. To develop hypothesis statements for this research, this paper begins with the Bureau Voting Model which is rooted in rational choice theory. The hypothesis statements are tested using data from the SSHRC-funded Canadian Provincial Election Project (CPEP) Survey, conducted post-provincial election in 2011-2012 in eight provinces. The paper concludes that while there were diverging orientations amongst employees in the three sectors, there were also some areas of convergence to suggest that there may be substantial diversity within each sector.

**Key words** Voting behaviour, provincial elections, public sector, non-profit sector, private sector

**Résumé:** Ce document se concentre sur l'orientation politique et le comportement civique des personnes qui travaillent dans les secteurs publics, privés et à but non lucratif. Bien qu'une étude considérable ait été effectuée afin de comprendre en quoi certain variable tel que l'âge ou le sexe des personnes influencent les habitudes de vote, l'emploi par secteur reste une variable qui a été mal étudié. Pour développer cette hypothèse au sein de cette étude, ce document a utilisé le " Bureau Voting Model ", qui est enracinée dans la théorie du choix rationnel. Les informations de cette hypothèse ont été testé avec l'enquête financé par le SSHRC " Provincial Élection Project Survey " menées après les élections provinciales de 2011-2012 dans huit provinces. Cette étude conclut qu'il y a des divergences dans trois secteurs parmi les employés, mais aussi des convergences malgré leurs différences dans chaque secteur.

**Mots-clés:** habitudes de vote, élections provinciaux, secteur à but non lucratif, secteur privé

## **Theoretical Framework**

Understanding the voting patterns of Canadians has long been an important and fruitful research area. Variables such as age, gender, ethnicity and religiosity have been explored to understand how they influence voting behaviour (see Rubenson et al., 2004; Gidengil, Giles and Thomas, 2008; O'Neill, 2009; 2012 as examples). One variable that could benefit from further analysis is 'employment by sector' in the provinces. In Canada, workers are employed in one of three sectors: private, public, and non-profit.<sup>2</sup> Given that Canadians spend decades working in these areas, the institutions, ideas and values that underpin each sector may shape voting patterns.

Enumerating the public sector in Canada is a challenging proposition. Governments - the primary institutions in the public sector - are active in a wide variety of areas and make use of many different tools and partners (including the private and non-profit sectors) in delivering services and programming. The public sector in Canada is understood to include:

all government controlled entities such as ministries, departments, funds, organizations, and business enterprises which political authorities at all levels use to implement their social and economic policies (Statistics Canada, 2013),

And public sector employees are

those who work for a local, provincial, or federal government, for a government service or agency, a crown corporation, or a government funded establishment such as a school (including universities) or hospital (Statistics Canada, 2013).

Public sector workers in Canada are more likely to be unionized than those in other sectors (76% overall in 2012); more

likely to be women (63%); more likely to be a permanent employee (90%); more likely to be part of an employment-equity designated group (55% women; 13% visible minority status; 4.5% Aboriginal people; 5.7% persons with disabilities) (Uppal and LaRochelle-Cote, 2013; Treasury Board Secretariat, 2012).

The business (or private) sector is defined to include organizations the non-financial corporations sector, the financial corporations sector, and the unincorporated business sector (Statistics Canada, 2008). Statistics Canada data shows that the private sector contains approximately 65% of all employees, as of September 2013 (Statistics Canada, 2013). Private sector employees are those "who work as employees of a private firm or business" (Statistics Canada, 2013). They are less likely to be unionized than employees in other sectors (19% as of 2012) and more likely to be men (55%) (Uppal and LaRochelle-Cote, 2013).

The non-profit sector in Canada is large and diverse. It includes 165,000 organizations across a variety of sub-sectors including health, culture, sports/recreation, social services, environment, housing, advocacy and religion. Half of these organizations are registered as charities with the federal government that are able to provide an income tax receipt for donations. The economic impact of this sector cannot be underestimated. Hall et al. (2005: 7) report that the Canadian non-profit sector contributes 8.5% to the GDP and employs 2 million full-time equivalent staff.

There are challenges associated with differentiating among the sectors, their activities, and their members. Given the growing concern over the blurring of these sectors<sup>3</sup>, or what Smith (2010: 1) refers to as hybridization of

“organizational structures with mixed public, nonprofit, and for-profit characteristics” and Statistics Canada’s (2013) inclusion of non-profit organizations within either the private or public sector categorizations, we will use the categories that survey respondents have chosen for themselves.

While there is some literature related to the voting behavior and ideological beliefs of private and public sector employees (see Blais, Blake, and Dion, 1990; 1991; Corey and Garand, 2002; Freeman and Houston, 2010; Garand, Parkhurst and Seoud, 1991; Jenson, Sum and Flynn, 2009; Rounce, 2014), there is very little known about the voting behavior of employees in the non-profit sector despite being increasingly important and growing partner in government service delivery, participant in public discourse, and potentially – participants in elections.

Additionally, we know very little about the differences between groups of employees in the provinces. Given that each province has three orders of government that are active in programming and services, distinctive private sectors, and non-profit sectors that are oriented to meeting the needs of provincial citizens, exploring differences and similarities at the provincial level provides a way to understand these relationships at the subnational level. To that end, this article contributes to the elections literature and literature on the provinces by assessing the voting behaviours and ideology of public, private and non-profit sector employees in eight provinces, using the 2011-2012 Canadian Provincial Election Project (CPEP) survey data.

Most of the literature about the ideology and civic behaviour of public, private, and non-profit sector workers

centres on the differences between public and private sector workers. There is very little of this work, and it focuses primarily on public servants - with those in the private sector being used as a comparator. There is no work in the Canadian context that examines the ideological orientation and voting behavior of non-profit sector employees, but we often think of non-profit sector employees as being closer ideologically to those of the public sector. Public servants are often conceptualized as being different than people working in the private sector. Research evidence has shown that the political views (Garand, Parkhurst, and Seoud, 1991; Blais, Blake, and Dion, 1991; Conway, 2000) and civic engagement and behaviours (Blais, Blake, and Dion, 1990; Brewer, 2003) of people working in the public sector are somewhat different from those of people working in the private sector. Although the research findings are not conclusive across time periods or countries (see Jenson, Sum and Flynn, 2009), research at the federal level in Canada has consistently demonstrated that these differences do exist (Blais, Blake, and Dion, 1999; Johnston, 1979; Blake, 1985).

We begin with the assumption that there is a significant difference of character between the public, private, and non-profit sectors. Researchers focusing on the distinctions between the private and public sectors (such as Frederickson, 1991; Luton, 1996; Boyne, 2002; Savoie, 2013) note that the public sector focuses on accountability, while the private sector is oriented to profit-making. There are often significant differences in pay scales and benefits, and in human resource management. Time pressures are different, with the public sector oriented to election cycles while the private sector is focused on quarterly and annual

reporting of profits. These differences are likely to be reflected in the realities facing public and private sector employees.

There is limited research on the ideological and voting preferences of supporters – members, volunteers and staff – of non-profit organizations. What literature exists in this area focuses on the organization as a group – specifically the interest group literature – and its ability to mobilize voters (see Berry, 1977; Levasseur, 2014 Phillips, 1993; Phillips et al., 1990; Pross, 1986). Understanding these organizations as mobilizers is important:

Elections provide citizens the opportunity to exercise their fundamental and sovereign right to cote to constitute their government...[voluntary organizations] are taking advantage of their connections with citizens and their knowledge of the issues to influence voter preferences through raising and spending private dollars for broadcast ads during elections, voter information on candidate positions, candidate forums and coordinated targeted voter turnout operations (Boris and Steurle, 2006: 356).

We also assume that these differences in sector are further reflected in the political outlook and ideology and in the civic behaviours like voting of public, private, and non-profit sector workers. And that this matters. Despite the reality that public servants are expected to be politically neutral in Westminster-style parliamentary systems like Canada's, we assume that personal beliefs, values, and actions influence how individuals interact with the world. Freeman and Houston (2010) argue that the nature of the public sector has changed with the incorporation of ideas and processes from the private sector, which has implications for the power of public servants:

The New Public Management, characterized by employee empowerment, outsourcing, and entrepreneurship, increases worker discretion and makes issues of representative bureaucracy even more relevant (698).

Additionally, changes in governance means that public servants have greater interactions - both in quantity and possibly in quality - with organizations in the non-profit sector as they work together to deliver services and develop public policy.

There are two key theoretical approaches used to understand potential differences between public and private sector employees when it comes to ideology and civic engagement and behaviour: the "Bureau Voting Model" (BVM) and "Public Sector Motivation" (PSM) theory. This article will focus on the BVM approach.<sup>4</sup> BVM, which is rooted in rational choice theory, proposes that public sector employees choose to maximize their power through maximizing their budgets. This requires public sector employees to actively press for a larger budget (usually through expanded programming) and to support candidates and parties which will support expanded funding for government intervention (Blais, Blake, and Dion, 1991). Thus, we would expect that public servants would be more leftist than the general population. They should vote in higher numbers than those in the private sector (Bennett and Orzechowski, 1983; Blais, Blake, and Dion, 1991; Kim and Fording, 1998; 2003). They should also be more likely to vote for leftist parties (Garand, Parkhurst, and Seoud, 1991; Jensen, Sum, and Flynn, 2009). Ultimately, this theoretical orientation suggests that public servants' investment in their careers and their continuing employment is more important than their experiences as taxpayers or consumers, for example

(Garand, Parkhurst, and Seoud, 1991). While BVM is rooted in rational choice theory, it should be noted that our model does not use rational choice in its purest form, but rather that we rely on BVM to help us build hypothesis statements about voting and ideology amongst employees.

This theory has been tested at the federal level in Canada (Blais, Blake, and Dion, 1990; 1991), and more recently at the federal level in the United States (Jensen, Sum, and Flynn, 2009 and Freeman and Houston, 2010). In the Canadian work, researchers have found that public sector employees are more likely to be "leftist" on the ideological spectrum, and are more likely to vote for parties of the left (Blais, Blake, and Dion, 1990; 1991). However, they also found that public sector employees did not vote at higher rates than those in the private sector - a somewhat surprising finding. Most recently, Rounce (2014) examined the differences between public and private sector employees in 2011 Manitoba, and found that the BVM theory held for the provincial case.

However, challenges to this theoretical approach suggest that public servants should also be more aware of government inefficiencies and problems. Their higher level of civic literacy may result in public servants voting less often than those in other sectors, because of their familiarity with negative government behaviours, etc. Additionally, public sector workers are often portrayed as a relatively homogenous grouping, and we know that there are important differences between within the category. Research conducted by Blais, Blake, and Dion (1991), for example, differentiated between senior-level public servants and those at lower levels, concluding that there were significant differences in ideology and in voting behaviour. There

may also be differences depending on what level (or order) of government public sector employees serve, and in what policy or program areas they work.

We add to this research - and expand on the dichotomy of public and private sector employees -by considering workers in the non-profit sector. However, there is limited research that explores the 'individual' that makes up the sector as the unit of analysis and his/her voting and ideological preferences. One piece of research in this area stems from The Netherlands. Relying on a dataset of the Dutch population, Bekkers (2005) assesses the influence of sociological (i.e. education, income, religious attendance), psychological (agreeableness, openness) and political characteristics (i.e. post-materialism, ideological self-identification, voting preferences) on civic engagement. The analysis is two-fold. First, he assesses by type of organization to include 'quasi-political organizations' such as political parties, unions, and advocacy organizations including women's organizations, and 'non-political organizations' such as recreational organizations, arts and cultural groups. Second, he assesses by type of participation to include volunteer work and membership.

Bekkers' (2005) research sheds light as to the political orientation of volunteers and members of voluntary sector organizations in The Netherlands, suggesting that members and volunteers of voluntary organizations are more likely to be on the political left (which may be in keeping with public-sector employees) or support Christian political parties which may be anywhere on the political spectrum. Members and volunteers are thus diverse in their voting preferences and this may, in part, be the result that

there are more political parties in Europe than in Canada. Another point to consider is the sheer diversity in the voluntary sector that spans a variety of sub-sectors such as health, sports/recreation, religion, environment, justice and arts/culture. Indeed, Lansley (1996: 237) argues that even in one sub-sector, there is bound to be ideological diversity: "Given the range of differing ideologies within the broad area of environmental issues, conflict is inherent in the system." To what degree these findings relate to paid staff in Canada's non-profit sector is one of the goals of our research.

This article focuses on the central hypotheses of the Bureau Voting Model, while expanding the theory and hypotheses further to consider the political orientation and civic behaviour of people working in the non-profit sector.

## **Methodology**

The data for this article comes from the SSHRC-funded Canadian Provincial Election Project (CPEP) Survey, conducted post-provincial election in 2011-2012 in eight provinces: Ontario (N=997), Prince Edward Island (N=507), Newfoundland and Labrador (N=843), Manitoba (N=777), Saskatchewan (N=807), Alberta (876), Quebec (N=1,009), and British Columbia (N=803). The survey was conducted online in all provinces, and samples were drawn from an existing panel of respondents.<sup>5</sup> The data was weighted using standard procedures.

The analysis in this paper is rooted in the three hypotheses central to the BVM, and expanded to recognize the addition of the non-profit sector. The six hypotheses are:

Hypothesis 1a: Public sector employees are more likely to be on the Left of the ideological spectrum than those in the private sector.

Hypothesis 1b: Non-profit sector employees are more likely to be on the Left of the ideological spectrum than those in the private sector.

Hypothesis 2a: Public sector employees vote at higher rates than those in the private sector.

Hypothesis 2b: Non-profit sector employees vote at higher rates than those in the private sector.

Hypothesis 3a: Public sector employees are more likely to vote for parties/ candidates of the Left.

Hypothesis 3b: Non-profit sector employees are more likely to vote for parties/ candidates of the Left.

Employment by sector is the primary independent variable for this research. It is conceptualized and operationalized through self-identification. Respondents in the survey self-identify as being employed in either the 'private (i.e. for-profit)', 'public (i.e. bureaucracy)' or 'non-profit' sector.

This research has three dependent variables. The first dependent variable is political ideology and is measured using an ideology index created from ten questions designed to assess orientation to politics and society. Each of these ten statements will be described in the section on ideology. Each was recoded to correspond with "Left", "Centre-Left", "Centre-Right", and "Right", added

together, and used to create a 4-point scale. Respondents did not have to answer all ten questions to have their responses included in the index.

Voter turnout is the second dependent variable. To measure this concept, respondents were asked whether they voted in the most recent provincial election. This is a dichotomous variable with an answer of 'yes' indicating that this survey respondent did vote in the most recent provincial election and 'no' indicating otherwise. In the CPEP survey, for all provinces, respondents were much more likely to indicate having voted in the last provincial election: this makes it a more challenging variable to analyze because of the low numbers of non-voters. Relatedly, the key concern with the voter turnout variable is the over-reporting. Indeed, Thorkalson's (2013: 7) comparison of the CPEP survey voter turnout percentage with the actual voter turnout percentage illustrates there is over-reporting. This is a source of bias in the CPEP data and as a result, readers should be cautious when interpreting findings related to this variable in this paper.

The last dependent variable is voting behaviour. This variable is measured by asking survey respondents which political party they voted for in the most recent provincial election. Further analysis requires the ordering of political parties from "Left" to "Right": this is done using respondents' average assessment of where the parties "fit" on the ideology scale, from "Left" (0) to "Right" (10).

Much of the analysis in this article uses significance-testing with two variables (bivariate analysis). Since much of our data is either nominal or ordinal, we use chi-square testing to examine the relationship between two variables, and any variation within the categories of

those variables. We also use comparison of means when our data is continuous. Throughout the analysis, we use a cutoff point of  $p \leq .05$  to determine statistical significance. We report only statistically significant findings.

It is important to recognize that the number of respondents reported throughout the article will not necessarily be consistent: not every respondent will answer every question that we consider. Given that we are focused on analysis using sector of employment as the independent variable, we will have a maximum of 3,078 respondents for any specific question.

## **Findings**

Table 1 outlines the demographic and employment features of survey respondents from all provinces combined.<sup>6</sup> Only statistically significant data at the .05 level is reported in this table.<sup>7</sup> Women are more likely to be employed in the non-profit (60.4%) and the public sector (55.6%) than the private sector (36.7%). Conversely, men are more likely to be employed in the private sector (63.3%) than the public (44.4%) and non-profit sector (39.6%). Younger employees (18-34) are more likely to work in the non-profit sector.

Employees in the private sector (39.6%) and public sector (43.0%) are more likely to have some elementary/secondary school/high school or completed elementary/secondary school/high school. Comparatively, employees in the non-profit sector (34.4%) are more likely to have completed or completed some studies at the university level.

There are observable differences between private, public and non-profit sector employees in relation to the

importance of religion. Non-profit sector employees (24.9%) are more likely to say that religion is very important in their lives than employees in the private (19.3%) and public sector (20.0%). This is perhaps not surprising since religious institutions make-up a significant portion of the non-profit sector in Canada. Almost one-fifth (19%) of the entire non-profit sector in Canada is made of religious institutions with approximately 109,000 employees (Imagine Canada, 2006: 1).

Employees in the non-profit sector earn less than their counterparts in the private and public sectors. Of the lowest income category – less than \$20,000 per year – 9.4% of non-profit sector employees report falling into this category compared to 6.8% (private sector) and 6.4% (public sector). Of the higher income categories – above \$60,000 – employees in the non-profit sector earn significantly less. This reflects other similar findings that employees in the non-profit sector tend to earn less. A report by the HR Council (2008: 29) indicates that 80% of employees across all job categories in the non-profit sector report incomes under \$60,000.

In terms of union membership, a larger proportion of public sector employees (56.3%) are unionized compared to non-profit sector employees (17.9%) and private sector employees (12.2%).

In the CPEP survey, ten questions were posed of respondents to assess their beliefs, values, and orientations toward politics and society. These questions were used to create an index of ideological orientation, with 1="Left" and 4="Right", in order to assess any differences among public, private, and non-profit sector employees. All three groups oriented themselves (on average) slightly differently: private sector

employees were located at 2.44 (to the right of Centre), public sector employees were further "Right", at 2.56, and non-profit employees were even further to the "Right", at 2.84.

A series of ten questions were posed to survey respondents to ascertain their ideological beliefs, and where these beliefs may diverge or converge across the three sectors (Table 2). In terms of diverging ideological belief, public and private sector employees (39.3% and 42.2% respectively) are more likely to be 'centre-right' on the political spectrum in relation to whether "government regulation stifles personal drive", suggesting that are more likely to see government regulation as being problematic. Comparatively, non-profit sector employees (36.4%) are more likely to be 'centre-left'.

In response to the statement, "It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if Aboriginals would only try harder they could be just as well off as everyone else", more private sector employees are 'centre-right' (33.1%); public sector employees are 'centre-left' (29.4%) and a larger proportion of non-profit sector employees are 'left' (44.9%).

Employees in the private sector (45.0%) are more likely to be positioned on the 'centre-right' in regards to the following statement: "Protecting the environment is more important than creating jobs." This suggests that employees in the private sector are more likely to think that the creation of job is more important than protecting the environment. Public sector employees are roughly equal in that 39.1% are 'centre-left' and 40.1% are 'centre-right'. Comparatively, non-profit sector employees are more likely to be 'centre-left' on this issue.

**Table 1: Demographic and employment characteristics**

| <b>Variable</b>               | <b>Attributes</b>                                      | <b>Private Sector</b> | <b>Public Sector</b> | <b>Non-Profit Sector</b> |
|-------------------------------|--|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Gender</b>                 | Male   | 63.3%<br>(N=1,106)    | 44.4%<br>(N=488)     | 39.6%<br>(N=89)          |
|                               | Female   | 36.7%<br>(N=642)      | 55.6%<br>(N=612)     | 60.4%<br>(N=136)         |
| <b>Age</b>                    | 18-24  | 7.4%<br>(N=128)       | 9.0%<br>(N=97)       | 10.2%<br>(N=23)          |
|                               | 25-34  | 24.3%<br>(N=421)      | 25.8%<br>(N=279)     | 32.3%<br>(N=73)          |
|                               | 35-44  | 23.4%<br>(N=406)      | 24.2%<br>(N=262)     | 17.7%<br>(N=40)          |
|                               | 45-54  | 24.8%<br>(N=430)      | 23.5%<br>(N=254)     | 21.7%<br>(N=49)          |
|                               | 55-64  | 17.5%<br>(N=303)      | 15.2%<br>(N=164)     | 13.7%<br>(N=31)          |
|                               | 65+  | 2.8%<br>(N=48)        | 2.4%<br>(N=26)       | 4.4%<br>(N=10)           |
| <b>Education</b>              | Some/completed elementary/secondary school/high school | 39.6%<br>(N=658)      | 43.0%<br>(N=435)     | 23.1%<br>(N=49)          |
|                               | Some/completed technical, community college            | 29.6%<br>(N=491)      | 21.1%<br>(N=214)     | 25.9%<br>(N=55)          |
|                               | Some/completed university/Bachelor's degree            | 23.5%<br>(N=391)      | 25.1%<br>(N=254)     | 34.4%<br>(N=73)          |
|                               | Graduate/Professional degree                           | 7.3%<br>(N=121)       | 16.5%<br>(N=35)      | 9.2%<br>(N=265)          |
| <b>Importance of religion</b> | Very important   | 19.3%<br>(N=336)      | 20.0%<br>(N=218)     | 24.9%<br>(N=56)          |
|                               | Somewhat important                                     | 25.3%<br>(N=442)      | 26.7%<br>(N=291)     | 20.0%<br>(N=45)          |
|                               | Somewhat unimportant                                   | 20.8%<br>(N=362)      | 23.1%<br>(N=252)     | 20.0%<br>(N=45)          |
|                               | Very unimportant                                       | 34.6%<br>(N=604)      | 30.2%<br>(N=330)     | 35.1%<br>(N=79)          |

(cont'd)

|                         |                                |                    |                  |                  |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|------------------|------------------|
| <b>Income</b>           | less than \$20,000             | 6.8%<br>(N=109)    | 6.4%<br>(N=62)   | 9.4%<br>(N=20)   |
|                         | between \$20,000 and \$40,000  | 18.0%<br>(N=288)   | 16.8%<br>(N=164) | 17.5%<br>(N=37)  |
|                         | between \$40,000 and \$60,000  | 16.9%<br>(N=270)   | 14.9%<br>(N=145) | 27.4%<br>(N=58)  |
|                         | between \$60,000 and \$80,000  | 13.7%<br>(N=219)   | 20.2%<br>(N=197) | 9.9%<br>(N=21)   |
|                         | between \$80,000 and \$100,000 | 15.1%<br>(N=241)   | 14.7%<br>(N=143) | 12.7%<br>(N=27)  |
|                         | more than \$100,000            | 29.5%<br>(N=469)   | 27.1%<br>(N=264) | 23.1%<br>(N=49)  |
| <b>Union membership</b> | Yes                            | 12.2%<br>(N=213)   | 56.3%<br>(N=617) | 17.9%<br>(N=40)  |
|                         | No                             | 87.8%<br>(N=1,535) | 43.7%<br>(N=479) | 82.1%<br>(N=184) |

\*All reported data is statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .

In response to the statement, “It is more difficult for non-whites to be successful in Canadian society than it is for whites”, a slightly greater proportion of private sector employees (35.1%) are ‘centre-right’ to suggest that they do not entirely agree with this statement. Comparatively, a larger proportion of non-profit sector employees are ‘centre-left’ (42%). Most surprisingly is the finding for public sector employees. Almost one-third (30.3%) are located on the ‘right’ of the spectrum to suggest that there is agreement that it is not any more difficult for non-whites to advance in Canadian society.

There are several areas where convergence of ideological belief occurs across the sectors. In response to the statement “Government should leave it entirely to the private sector to create jobs,” a greater proportion of employees in the public and non-profit sector identify themselves as being ‘left’ or ‘centre-left’ on this issue. Surprisingly, a greater share of private sector employees (43.8%) also identify themselves as ‘centre-left’. One would expect private

sector employees to desire less government intervention in the marketplace. However, private sector employees may perceive a need for government support (i.e. subsidies, tax credits) to support job creation in the private sector or this result may point to an issue in how the response categories were recoded. Either way, this unexpected result requires more research.

There is some convergence of ideological belief when it comes to the government’s responsibility to “see that everyone has a decent standard of living.” Respondents across all three sectors are more likely to be ‘left’ or ‘centre-left’ on this issue. The largest share is non-profit sector employees (50.2% ‘left’ and 38.2% ‘centre-left’) followed by public sector employees (32.6% ‘left’ and 46.3% ‘centre-left’), which is not surprising given the front-line work undertaken by these employees with marginalized citizens (i.e. homeless and welfare recipients). Given the differences between the three sectors, we might anticipate that private sector employees would be less

supportive of this issue. Yet, 26.2% of private sector employees are 'left' and 44.5% are 'centre-left'. This is a reminder that while there can be convergence of ideological beliefs on specific public policy issues across the sectors. Despite this finding, however, there is also convergence of ideological belief across the sectors that individuals, not the system, may have more responsibility for an inability to advance. More respondents in all three sectors are 'centre-right' or 'right'.

Regardless of sector, more respondents are slightly more likely to be 'centre-right' in relation to whether "society has reached the point where women and men have equal opportunities for achievement". This result is important to note because we would expect public and non-profit sector employees to hold more left or centre-left positions. This may be perhaps it is the reflection that there are different conceptualizations of equality and a greater portion of employees in these sector feel that their version of equality is met.

More private and public sector employees (35.1% and 34.3% respectively) are 'centre-right' when asked whether "This country would have many fewer problems if there were more emphasis on traditional family values." 43.6% of non-profit sector employees are positioned on the 'centre-right' and 'right' on this matter. This is a sizeable percentage given the work this sector does in advancing human rights, promoting equality and so forth which would leave us to expect a different result. Yet, this finding reminds us that the non-profit sector is not wholly unified. We noted earlier that 19% of this sector is comprised of religious institutions. These institutions, and their employees, may adhere to more traditional values.

While we hypothesized that public sector and non-profit sector employees would vote at higher rates than those in the private sector, the results of the survey in the eight provinces showed otherwise. In relation to the voter turnout in the most recent provincial election (Table 3), only two jurisdictions produced statistically significant data: Ontario and Alberta. In Ontario, more non-profit sector employees voted in that election (89.0%) compared to private sector employees (86.4%) and public sector employees (85.6%). In Alberta, non-profit (96.2%) and private sector employees (96.3%) were more likely to vote than their public sector counterparts (87.9%). This does not support the expectation that public sector employees are more likely to vote, but appears to support the second hypothesis.

Research suggests that public and non-profit sector employees are more likely to vote for candidates of the left than those working in the private sector. Table 4 indicates the political party that survey respondents voted for in the most recent provincial elections. The political parties are ordered in Table 4 according to the perceived ideological placement by respondents. By comparing the voting behavior of private, public and non-profit sector employees, an interesting – and statistically significant – pattern emerges.

In every jurisdiction with statistically significant data, private sector employees are more likely to have voted for a centre-right political party (i.e. PC Party, Saskatchewan Party, Coalition Avenir Quebec) than a left leaning political party (i.e. NDP). Comparatively, public servants are statistically more likely to have voted for left leaning political parties (i.e. NDP) and less likely to have voted for right leaning political parties (i.e. PC Party).

**Table 2: Recoded Ideology By Sector**

| <b>Ideological statement</b>  | <b>Sector</b>     | <b>Left</b>       | <b>Centre-Left</b> | <b>Centre-Right</b> | <b>Right</b>      |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| "Government should leave it entirely to the private sector to create jobs."   | Private Sector    | 21.4%*<br>(N=372) | 43.8%*<br>(N=761)  | 27.1%*<br>(N=471)   | 7.7%*<br>(N=133)  |
|   | Public Sector     | 27.8%*<br>(N=304) | 48.0%*<br>(N=524)  | 20.9%*<br>(N=228)   | 3.3%*<br>(N=36)   |
|   | Non-profit Sector | 47.6%*<br>(N=107) | 36.9%*<br>(N=83)   | 10.7%*<br>(N=24)    | 4.9%*<br>(N=11)   |
| "Government regulation stifles personal drive."   | Private Sector    | 10.7%*<br>(N=184) | 31.0%*<br>(N=533)  | 42.2%*<br>(N=726)   | 16.2%*<br>(N=278) |
|   | Public Sector     | 15.0%*<br>(N=164) | 35.4%*<br>(N=386)  | 39.3%*<br>(N=428)   | 10.3%*<br>(N=112) |
|   | Non-profit Sector | 23.6%*<br>(N=53)  | 36.4%*<br>(N=82)   | 32.0%*<br>(N=72)    | 8.0%*<br>(N=18)   |
| "Society has reached the point where women and men have equal opportunities for achievement."   | Private Sector    | 4.5%*<br>(N=77)   | 27.0%*<br>(N=467)  | 41.1%*<br>(N=710)   | 27.5%*<br>(N=475) |
|   | Public Sector     | 6.3%*<br>(N=69)   | 29.4%*<br>(N=324)  | 37.7%*<br>(N=415)   | 26.7%*<br>(N=294) |
|   | Non-profit Sector | 11.1%*<br>(N=25)  | 32.4%*<br>(N=73)   | 37.8%*<br>(N=85)    | 18.7%*<br>(N=42)  |
| "This country would have many fewer problems if there were more emphasis on traditional family values."   | Private Sector    | 17.4%*<br>(N=302) | 26.6%*<br>(N=463)  | 35.1%*<br>(N=610)   | 20.9%*<br>(N=364) |
|   | Public Sector     | 21.1%*<br>(N=232) | 26.7%*<br>(N=294)  | 34.3%*<br>(N=378)   | 17.9%*<br>(N=197) |
|   | Non-profit Sector | 33.8%*<br>(N=76)  | 22.7%*<br>(N=51)   | 28.9%*<br>(N=65)    | 14.7%*<br>(N=33)  |
| "It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if Aboriginals would only try harder they could be just as well off as everyone else." | Private Sector    | 16.3%*<br>(N=283) | 28.0%*<br>(N=487)  | 33.1%*<br>(N=575)   | 22.6%*<br>(N=393) |
|   | Public Sector     | 22.4%*<br>(N=247) | 29.4%*<br>(N=324)  | 28.9%*<br>(N=318)   | 19.3%*<br>(N=213) |
|   | Non-profit Sector | 44.9%*<br>(N=101) | 26.7%*<br>(N=60)   | 25.3%*<br>(N=57)    | 3.1%*<br>(N=7)    |
| "Government should see that everyone has a decent standard of living."  | Private Sector    | 26.2%*<br>(N=454) | 44.5%*<br>(N=771)  | 23.5%*<br>(N=408)   | 5.8%*<br>(N=101)  |
|   | Public Sector     | 32.6%*<br>(N=357) | 46.3%*<br>(N=506)  | 14.9%*<br>(N=163)   | 6.2%*<br>(N=68)   |
|   | Non-profit Sector | 50.2%*<br>(N=113) | 38.2%*<br>(N=86)   | 6.2%*<br>(N=14)     | 5.3%*<br>(N=12)   |
| "Protecting the environment is more important than creating jobs."  | Private Sector    | 11.9%*<br>(N=206) | 32.4%*<br>(N=565)  | 45.0%*<br>(N=780)   | 10.7%*<br>(N=185) |
|   | Public Sector     | 12.8%*<br>(N=140) | 39.1%*<br>(N=428)  | 40.1%*<br>(N=439)   | 8.1%*<br>(N=89)   |
|   | Non-profit Sector | 25.2%*<br>(N=57)  | 34.5%*<br>(N=78)   | 32.7%*<br>(N=74)    | 7.5%*<br>(N=17)   |

|   |                   |                   |                   |                   |                   |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| “It is more difficult for non-whites to be successful in Canadian society than it is for whites.” | Private Sector    | 7.8%*<br>(N=136)  | 28.3%*<br>(N=493) | 35.1%*<br>(N=610) | 28.8%*<br>(N=501) |
|   | Public Sector     | 12.4%*<br>(N=136) | 28.5%*<br>(N=311) | 28.8%*<br>(N=315) | 30.3%*<br>(N=331) |
|   | Non-profit Sector | 17.7%*<br>(N=40)  | 42.0%*<br>(N=95)  | 25.2%*<br>(N=57)  | 15.0%*<br>(N=34)  |
| “People who don’t get ahead should blame themselves, not the system.”                             | Private Sector    | 10.2%*<br>(N=312) | 29.4%*<br>(N=899) | 32.1%*<br>(N=982) | 28.3%*<br>(N=866) |
|   | Public Sector     | 6.1%*<br>(N=107)  | 23.7%*<br>(N=413) | 48.1%*<br>(N=837) | 22.0%*<br>(N=383) |
|   | Non-profit Sector | 10.7%*<br>(N=117) | 26.1%*<br>(N=286) | 42.8%*<br>(N=468) | 20.4%*<br>(N=223) |
| “The world is always changing and we should adapt our view of moral behaviour to these changes.”  | Private Sector    | 18.4%<br>(N=319)  | 48.0%<br>(N=835)  | 21.9%<br>(N=380)  | 11.7%<br>(N=204)  |
|   | Public Sector     | 17.7%<br>(N=194)  | 47.9%<br>(N=526)  | 23.0%<br>(N=252)  | 11.5%<br>(N=126)  |
|   | Non-profit Sector | 19.9%<br>(N=45)   | 46.5%<br>(N=105)  | 25.2%<br>(N=57)   | 8.4%<br>(N=19)    |

\*Statistically significant at .05

**Table 3: Provincial Election Turnout by Sector (2011-13)**

| Jurisdiction | Overall sample     | Private sector    | Public Sector     | Non-profit sector |
|--------------|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Quebec       | 97.0%<br>(N=1,510) | 98.0%<br>(N=348)  | 97.8%<br>(N=271)  | 100.0%<br>(N=48)  |
| Ontario      | 88.4%<br>(N=2,225) | 86.4%*<br>(N=653) | 85.6%*<br>(N=321) | 89.0%*<br>(N=81)  |
| Manitoba     | 87.3%<br>(N=198)   | 87.9%<br>(N=51)   | 78.3%<br>(N=47)   | 100.0%<br>(N=7)   |
| SK           | 89.5%<br>(N=174)   | 93.5%<br>(N=43)   | 89.6%<br>(N=43)   | 100.0%<br>(N=4)   |
| Alberta      | 94.3%<br>(N=634)   | 96.3%*<br>(N=232) | 87.9%*<br>(N=109) | 96.2%*<br>(N=25)  |
| BC           | 94.1%<br>(N=1,510) | 92.7%<br>(N=215)  | 91.5%<br>(N=107)  | 97.5%<br>(N=39)   |

\* statistically significant at .05

**Table 4: Vote Choice by Province and Sector**

| Jurisdiction | Political Party                | Overall Sample   | Private Sector    | Public Sector     | Non-profit Sector |
|--------------|--------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Quebec       | Quebec Solidaire               | 9.2%<br>(N=135)  | 38.2%*<br>(N=23)  | 33.3%*<br>(N=20)  | 28.3%*<br>(N=17)  |
|              | Option Nationale               | 2.1%<br>(N=31)   | 41.2%*<br>(N=7)   | 47.1%*<br>(N=8)   | 11.8%*<br>(n=2)   |
|              | Parti Quebecois                | 40.2%<br>(N=593) | 47.9%*<br>(N=134) | 43.9%*<br>(N=123) | 8.2%*<br>(N=23)   |
|              | Coalition Avenir Quebec        | 25.1%<br>(N=370) | 61.9%*<br>(N=91)  | 35.4%*<br>(N=52)  | 2.7%*<br>(N=4)    |
|              | Liberal Party                  | 23.3%<br>(N=344) | 56.8%*<br>(N=83)  | 41.1%*<br>(N=60)  | 2.1%*<br>(N=3)    |
| Ontario      | New Democratic Party           | 24.8%<br>(N=547) | 47.8%*<br>(N=117) | 38.4%*<br>(N=94)  | 13.9%*<br>(N=34)  |
|              | Liberal Party                  | 33.2%<br>(N=732) | 60.9%*<br>(N=206) | 31.7%*<br>(N=107) | 7.4%*<br>(N=25)   |
|              | Progressive Conservative Party | 34.2%<br>(N=754) | 71.7%*<br>(N=268) | 24.3%*<br>(N=91)  | 4.0%*<br>(N=15)   |
| MB           | New Democratic Party           | 46.1%<br>(N=87)  | 29.8%*<br>(N=14)  | 61.7%*<br>(N=29)  | 8.5%*<br>(N=4)    |
|              | Liberal Party                  | 5.0%<br>(N=9)    | 50.0%*<br>(N=2)   | 50.0%*<br>(N=2)   | 0.0%*<br>(N=0)    |
|              | Progressive Conservative Party | 46.2%<br>(N=88)  | 66.7%*<br>(N=32)  | 27.1%*<br>(N=13)  | 6.4%*<br>(N=3)    |
| SK           | New Democratic Party           | 27.8%<br>(N=48)  | 34.6%<br>(N=9)    | 61.5%<br>(N=16)   | 3.8%<br>(N=1)     |
|              | Green Party                    | 3.3%<br>(N=6)    | 66.7%<br>(N=2)    | 33.3%<br>(N=1)    | 0.0%<br>(N=0)     |
|              | Saskatchewan Party             | 67.0%<br>(N=115) | 51.7%<br>(N=30)   | 43.1%<br>(N=25)   | 5.2%<br>(N=3)     |
| Alberta      | New Democratic Party           | 9.0%<br>(N=56)   | 50.0%*<br>(N=13)  | 42.3%*<br>(N=11)  | 7.7%*<br>(N=2)    |
|              | Liberal Party                  | 8.6%<br>(N=53)   | 50.0%*<br>(N=11)  | 40.9%*<br>(N=9)   | 9.1%*<br>(N=2)    |
|              | Progressive Conservative Party | 39.9%<br>(N=248) | 49.7%*<br>(N=79)  | 39.0%*<br>(N=62)  | 11.3%*<br>(N=18)  |
|              | Wildrose Party                 | 39.9%<br>(N=248) | 85.3%*<br>(N=122) | 13.3%*<br>(N=19)  | 1.4%*<br>(N=2)    |
| BC           | New Democratic Party           | 41.5%<br>(N=314) | 38.9%*<br>(N=82)  | 52.1%*<br>(N=50)  | 69.2%*<br>(N=27)  |
|              | Green Party                    | 5.2%<br>(N=39)   | 10.0%*<br>(N=21)  | 15.6%*<br>(N=15)  | 20.5%*<br>(N=8)   |
|              | Liberal Party                  | 34.1%<br>(N=258) | 48.2%*<br>(N=102) | 30.2%*<br>(N=29)  | 10.3%*<br>(N=4)   |
|              | Conservative Party             | 4.1%<br>(N=31)   | 2.8%*<br>(N=6)    | 2.1%*<br>(N=2)    | 0.0%*<br>(N=0)    |

\* statistically significant at .05

The same appears to also hold for non-profit sector employees. Again, in every election with statistically significant data, save Alberta, non-profit sector employees are more likely to have voted for political parties that are located on the left of the political spectrum. This appears to support Bekkers (2005) finding that those associated with non-profits tend to prefer left leaning political parties.

Alberta is the interesting anomaly. Non-profit sector employees were statistically more likely to have voted for the PC Party, which is generally thought to be a right leaning party. One possible explanation relates to the fact that the Wildrose Party – a political party which is farther to the political right than the PC Party – was gaining ground during the election with the possibility of forming government. It is possible that citizens who would traditionally be on the left or centre-left of the political spectrum voted for the PC Party led by Alison Redford and its ‘red tory’ political platform as a means to prevent the Wildrose Party from winning the election.<sup>8</sup> In this sense, voters opted for the ‘most left’ political party of all the viable options available to them during the election which would have been the PC Party.

### **Implications and concluding thoughts**

When it came to ideology positioning on the ten individual questions, there were certainly areas of divergence – where private sector employees were more “right” than their counterparts in the public and non-profit sectors. However, there were also instances where there was convergence – where either private sector employees were left or left-centre on issues, or public sector and non-profit sector employees were right or right-centre on issues. We

had not anticipated these commonalities, and they help to support the conclusion that there is substantial diversity within each sector. While the data overall shows that there is broad support for the hypotheses (1a & 1b) which is consistent with the literature on public and private sector employees, there are certain nuances that are lost when using an aggregate measure of ideology - like with the index created from the ten measures of beliefs, values, and orientation to politics and society.

The Bureau Voting Model suggests that public sector employees should vote at a higher level than those in the private sector. Our findings do not support this hypothesis, with two exceptions: in Ontario, non-profit sector employees were more likely to vote than those in the private and public sectors. This supports our hypothesis 2B, which claims non-profit sector employees will vote in higher numbers than those in the private sector. In Alberta, turnout among non-profit and private sector employees was virtually identical, while being much lower among those in the public sector. While being consistent with other research findings, this is surprising, given the competitiveness of the Alberta election. With the exception of the Ontario findings, all other provincial voting patterns among public, private, and non-profit sector employees – although not statistically significant – did not support the second hypotheses of the BVM.

In terms of voting behavior – party selection – the findings for the six provinces with statistically significant results support the hypotheses that both public sector and non-profit employees are more likely to vote for parties on the left, with the exception of Alberta.

The results of this research are consistent with other research examining ideology and voting behavior among public and private sector employees. The addition of the non-profit sector into this work provided an opportunity to see whether or not our perceptions of the sector are accurate and fair representations of their political ideology and participation. By adding the non-profit sector, we contribute to the literature which allows us to understand how this might translate into discourse and focus during elections as well as outcomes. Despite these very promising results, more research is clearly needed to understand the diversity of this sector and what it means for the political system.

Being able to look at the provincial differences – using the CPEP Survey – allows us to test these hypotheses to see whether they apply at the provincial level

to the same extent that they do nationally and internationally. While the research on political culture (for example Wesley, 2011; Wiseman, 2007), historical development (Dyck, 2008; Wiseman, 2007), and federalism has pointed to important differences and similarities among the provinces, this research on voting behavior across employment sectors allows us to investigate whether or not differences that we see at the national level are also relevant at the provincial level. With the movement of the federalism “pendulum” back to the provinces, governments within the provinces matter more. Looking at ideological and voting differences across sectors at the provincial level provides an important way to assess how public servants, the private sector, and non-profit employees orient to their elected governments and the political culture.

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> The authors would like to thank Kelly MacWilliams of the University of Manitoba and Eric Van Aerde of the University of Alberta for their research assistance.
- <sup>2</sup> The term we have chosen to use throughout the article is “non-profit sector”.
- <sup>3</sup> For example, hospitals in Canada are registered charities and thus form part of the non-profit sector. However, given the heavy reliance on government funding and oversight, the degree to which hospitals are ‘quasi-governmental’ is open to debate.
- <sup>4</sup> PSM suggests that public servants are attracted to work in the public sector because they are more “civic-minded” than those working in other sectors (Brewer, 2003; Houston, 2006; Pandey, Wright, and Moynihan, 2008; Perry and Wise, 1990), rather than because they are focused on maximizing their personal benefit.
- <sup>5</sup> Margins of error will not be reported because the survey was conducted with respondents who were randomly selected from an established panel online. Thus, the sample cannot be considered a “true” random sample of the population for reporting purposes.
- <sup>6</sup> The data presented in these tables can be read vertically and horizontally. Vertically, the sum of each variable will be 100% (rounded). For example, under the variable ‘gender’ in the private sector, we have two attributes: male (63.3%) and female (36.7%). When these two cells are added, the result is 100%. This means that of those respondents who identified themselves as working in the private sector, 36.7% are female and 63.3% are male. Horizontally, we provide data across all three sectors so that readers can

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compare gender in each sector. Under the variable ‘gender’, readers can see that the

non-profit sector has the highest proportion of respondents who are female (60.4%) and the private sector has the lowest proportion (36.7%).

<sup>7</sup> Data for Aboriginal heritage, visible minority status and immigration status were analyzed but not found to be statistically significant and thus not reported.

<sup>8</sup> Thanks to Peter Elson, Mount Royal University, for raising this point to our attention.