Article

Testing the Laurentian hypothesis: regionalism and federal lobbying access

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Abstract

The literature on regional representation within the federal policy process has had limited engagement with interest group composition. While some have referenced an Ottawa 'bubble,' there has been no empirical demonstration. This paper responds to this gap in assessing how regional location affects organizational access to the federal government. Leveraging existing datasets through the Commissioner of Lobbying and some additional data collection, we test hypotheses relating to central Canadian lobbying. Our analysis makes three core contributions. First, we find that lobbying from central Canada has a statistically and substantively significant increase in expected average meeting counts per month. The Great Lakes-Laurentian region in particular sees higher access. Second, using the 'five region-Canada' model, we find that Ontario organizations are more active than most regions except the Prairies. Contrary to popular discourse, we find little evidence that Prairies organizations receive less access on average. Third, our findings are consistent when fixating on central agencies.

Résumé

La littérature sur la représentation régionale dans les processus des politiques fédérales a peu porté sur la composition des groupes d'intérêt. Tandis que certains ont fait référence à une « bulle » d'Ottawa, il n'y a pas eu de démonstration empirique. Cet article répond à cette lacune en évaluant comment l'emplacement régional affecte l'accès des organisations au gouvernement fédéral. En tirant parti des ensembles de données existant par le Commissariat au lobbying et de certaines données supplémentaires, nous évaluons des hypothèses concernant le lobbying dans le centre du Canada. Notre analyse apporte trois contributions essentielles. Premièrement, nous constatons que le lobbying émanant du centre du Canada entraîne une augmentation statistiquement et substantiellement significative du nombre moyen attendu de réunions par mois. La région des Grands Lacs-laurentides, en particulier, connaît un accès plus élevé. Deuxièmement, en utilisant le modèle des « cinq régions du Canada », nous observons que les organisations de l'Ontario sont plus actives que la plupart des régions, à l'exception des Prairies. Contrairement au discours populaire, nous trouvons peu de preuves que les organisations des Prairies reçoivent moins d'accès en moyenne. Troisièmement, nos résultats sont constants lorsqu'on se concentre sur les organismes centraux.

Keywords: Interest groups, Regionalism, lobbying

Mots-clés : groupes d'intérêt, régionalisme, lobbyisme

Introduction

There has long been a sense that the federal government is skewed toward particular parts of the country. A centre-periphery regional cleavage has often dominated the ebb-and-flow of federal politics. In turn, federal politicians are often judged in their capacity as custodians of federalism (Brown-John, 1987; Schertzer et al., 2018). This is observed in the symbolic and substantive efforts to allocate authority to regional representatives in governing institutions. The federal cabinet, parliamentary secretaries and Supreme Court appointments are examples of this effort.

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Nevertheless, a perception of unfairness pervades in many regions outside central Canada. One iteration of this perception frames the federal government as influenced by 'Laurentian Elites,' political elites who live along the St. Lawrence river (see Bricker and Ibbitson, 2013; Ibbitson, 2012). As a part of this theory, the federal political scene is positioned as insulated within a bubble rarely punctuated by periphery regions. Alternative frames emphasize Ontario's advantage or sometimes Ontario and Quebec together (see, for example, Dawson, 2019; Berdahl, 2021). Savoie (2006), for example, argues that the concerns of Ontario and Quebec are generally framed as national issues while other provincial concerns are dismissively framed as regional and therefore particular.

The Canadian regionalism literature has theorized several mechanisms that motivate a central Canadian advantage. Scholars often point to Ontario and Quebec's riding advantage as motivating greater federal attention (Marwah et al., 2013; Masson and Lachapelle, 2018). Another mechanism is the concentration of population (Méthot et al., 2015; Courchene, 2000). Relatedly, GDP size and economic power also tilt the federal calculus (Creighton 2002; Adanu, 2005; Gertler et al., 2000). The larger literature on regionalism has pointed to geographic proximity to power as an advantage, particularly for resource-limited organizations (Useem, 1986; Humphries, 1991; Antia et al., 2013; Kim, 2019). Finally, there is the embedded bias of national political institutions and its bureaucracy that undermine regional accommodations (Savoie 1992; 2000; 2006).

That said, to date, there has been limited academic engagement with the role of federal lobbying access in shaping regional outcomes. The 'Laurentian Elites' frame suggests that interest groups matter but with limited empirical demonstration. How does regional location affect the access trends of lobbying organizations to the federal government? Do 'periphery' lobbying organizations fare any better or worse within central agencies?

This article engages these questions with a quantitative analysis of federal lobbying reports over time. We advance lobbying access as another mechanism motivating regional disparities. Using data from the Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying complemented with original data collection, we find evidence of significant regional differences. We offer different conceptualizations of this regional divide. First, we examine the 'Laurentian' bubble as a regressor on monthly lobbying access per organization. We find that an organization located in the Laurentian region sees both a statistically and substantively significant increase in expected lobbying access. Second, we conceptualize region along provincial boundaries to test regional access against Ontario. We find that most regions see a statistically significant drop in access, except the Prairies. While Quebec and the Atlantic have substantively lower lobbying access, the Prairies observe neither a statistically nor substantively different average access. We conclude that while lobbying access is skewed, Western provinces are not as dramatically affected.

This paper proceeds as follows. First, we expand upon the empirical and theoretical context of regionalism and lobbying outcomes. From this discussion we derive our three hypotheses. Second, we detail and describe our data sources. Third, we specify our model for testing purposes (see appendix for elaboration). Fourth, we present our regression models and findings. Firth, we engage with these findings and their substantive meaning for lobbying in Canada. Last, we offer concluding remarks.

Literature review: regionalism and lobbying access

Since Confederation, a centre-periphery regional cleavage has been a mainstay conflict of federal politics. The literatures on regional alienation and underdevelopment have located this perception to federal policy choices (Burrill, 2019). Bricker and Ibbitison (2013) submit that federal government's centralism is a by-product of 'Laurentian elites' who guide government. These elites include both politicians in high positions of power and nearby advisors and lobbyists.

Most regions beyond Ontario have corresponding literatures on alienation or underdevelopment. In particular, the West has frequently been in conflict with federal governments (Bickerton, 2010). The historical legacy National Energy Program is one key component of this tested relationship (James and Michelin, 1989; Lawson, 2005). More generally, east-west disputes over energy policy have been intense. Atlantic provinces have a history of underdevelopment that is often laid at the feet of federal public policy (Burrill, 2019; Buckner, 2017). As one account goes, the long-term implications of post-WWII economic restructuring has left the Atlantic provinces with chronic high unemployment (McKay, 2000, 2009). This form of alienation is more muted than other regions, perhaps in part because of the Atlantic's reliance on federal supports. Quebec has had a conflictual relationship with the federal government and the 'Rest of Canada.' The emergence of Quebec nationalism in the wake of the Quiet Revolution has at times been at odds with 'ROC' nationalism (Rocher, 2009; Bickerton, 2010). The legacy of the 'Kitchen Accord,' the desire for decentralization and the disputes over equalization have been sticking points. Northern Canada, particularly indigenous nations within the north, have a history of being undermined by federal governments (White, 2002; Alcantara et al., 2012; Cameron and Levitan, 2014).

The central Canadian advantage can be attributed to five interrelated mechanisms. First and most pressing is the economic strength of central Canada. Even before Confederation, the region along the St. Lawrence was an economic powerhouse, due in part to its central and strategically advantageous position (Creighton, 2002). Today, the region is known for its manufacturing capacity (Gertler et al., 2000), especially auto vehicles (Rutherford and Holmes, 2014), and financial sector (Courchene, 2000). Despite the buckling of some industries (Siemiatycki, 2012; Anastakis, 2018), the region economically exceeds others and is thought to be crucial to the long-term viability of the Canadian economy (Adanu, 2005).

Second, central Canada has a significant population advantage over the rest of Canada. Approximately 50% of Canadians live along the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence region (Méthot et al., 2015), making it a focal point for Canadian politics (Courchene, 2000). Third and related, central Canada has an unavoidable electoral advantage in federal politics (Marwah et al., 2013; Masson and Lachapelle, 2018). Its high riding concentration makes the region a priority for any political party with ambitions for forming a government. No political party has won a federal majority without winning a plurality in Ontario since 1921. Fourth, there is a natural proximity advantage to the capital that helps sustain central Canada's political advantage. Elsewhere, scholars have identified geographic proximity as an important factor shaping lobbying strategies and outcomes (Useem, 1986; Humphries, 1991; Antia et al., 2013; Kim, 2019).

Fifth, Canadian national institutions are implicitly skewed to the regional interests of Ontario and Quebec. Savoie (2006) argues that Canada's national institutions, as inherited

from Britain, are naturally prone to unitary governance. The majority of the House of Commons is represented by Ontario and Quebec and the Senate is too weak to facilitate the influence of other regions. This deficiency, per Savoie, is joined by biased national political administrative institutions and their public servants. These institutions are disproportionately populated by individuals from Ontario and Quebec, especially within the national capital region (Savoie 2010). Likewise, federal policy-making tends to frame the concerns of Ontario and Quebec as "national unity efforts" while the concerns of other regions are dismissed as particular (Savoie 2006: 14). Altogether, these mechanisms are thought to facilitate advantageous policymaking for central Canada. This centralism should be reflected in the access of lobbyists in federal networks.

While there is some agreement that central Canada is advantaged in federal policy networks, there is disagreement over what constitutes 'central Canada.' The discourse around Western alienation tends to frame federal governments as bent toward either the east or Ontario and Quebec (Boily and Epperson, 2014). Others discuss central Canada as largely if not exclusively Ontario. The 'Laurentian Consensus' to which Ibbitson (2012) refers is a conceptual retooling of an historically rich area along the St. Lawrence river. While vague in what constitutes the region, this conceptualization of federal centralism moves regionalism beyond provincial boundaries. As Brodie argues, "Regionalism loses its conceptual distinctiveness because it is forced into the 'strait-jacket' of federalism" (1989: 141). There is an argument to be made, however, that neither parts nor the whole of Quebec should be conceptualized as 'central Canada' for the purposes of federal centralism. The Quebec model of civil society is understood as a heavily integrated policy community in which societal interests are "partners" to government (Béland and Lecours, 2008: 61). This corporatist model may reduce the incentive for Quebec organizations to advocate outside the province foremost (Graefe, 2019; Laforest, 2007; but see Montpetit, 2002).

Recognizing the literature's division, we conceptualize 'central Canada' in two ways. First, to match Ibbitson's (2012) thesis, we conceptualize central Canada as the region along the St. Lawrence. The region crosses provincial boundaries to include Montreal, which is thought to have similar political advantages to Greater Toronto and Ottawa. Second, we conceptualize 'central Canada' along provincial boundaries using the 'five-region Canada' model (see Schwartz, 1974; Elkins and Simeon, 1980; Cochrane and Perrella, 2012). In this conceptualization, Ontario is alone understood to be central Canada. This five region model has both practical and theoretical advantages. First, as we discuss in our model specification, we have limited observations to individually test some provinces, namely from the Atlantic. Second and more important, the five regions are aligned by their cultural similarities and relationship to the federal government. We conceptualize Quebec as outside of central Canada because it too has a tested and alienated relationship to the federal government. Moreover, the aforementioned distinct civil society could distort our capture of a central Canadian advantage. We also specify British Columbia as distinct from the other Western provinces. The relationship between BC and Canada is thought by some to be unique (Resnick, 2000; Lawson, 2005; Katz-Rosene, 2020), and federal elections tend to confirm this distinction. Thus, we advance two hypothesis related to federal lobbying access and regionalism:

> *H1: Organizations from along the St. Lawrence obtain greater monthly access to the federal government.*

> *H2: Organizations from Ontario obtain greater monthly access to the federal government than other regions.*

Still, not all access is equal. Increasingly, per Good (2014), formerly powerful departments are losing influence over key legislation like the budget. Priority setters, particularly those within central agencies, can shape the legislative agenda with greater ease. This is consistent with the existing Canadian lobbying literature, which has pointed to the importance of central agencies as crucial access points for policy influence (Pross, 1992; Boucher, 2015). In particular, scholars have argued that the Prime Minister's Office is pivotal to successful lobbying (Boucher, 2018; Montpetit, 2002). The concentration of power and the strength of party discipline limit the effectiveness of lobbying legislative institutions and some line departments (Savoie, 2019). As such, if lobbying is a mechanism of regional disparities, we should expect access to central agencies to skew toward central Canada:

> *H3: Organizations from central Canada obtain greater monthly access to central agencies within the federal government.*

Data description and sources

This project combines two different datasets available through the Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying and adds some original data collection as a complement.

The primary dataset, the *Monthly Communication Reports Dataset* (2021b), is taken from the Federal Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying. As a function of the *Lobbying Act, 2009*, the Monthly Communication Dataset documents all oral and arranged communications between registered lobbyists and Designated Public Office Holders (DPOH). The timeframe of the dataset is limited to 2010-19 to align with modifications to the definition of DPOH made in 2010 by the Treasury Board (Canada, 2020). The disaggregated dataset includes the organization name, lobbyist name, DPOH name and department, subject matter tag, and date.

The *Lobbying Registration Dataset* (2021a) is used to extract greater detail on organizations and their activity. Since 1996, lobbying organizations have been required to register with a federal authority (either Registrar of Lobbyists or OCL) to list their details and aims. These registrations include organization telephone number, address, lobbying aims, registering officer, and consultant lobbyist (if applicable). These registrations are updated when information changes. Individuals who are paid to lobby federal public office holders as a significant part of their duties to change the state of play must register their organization. Note that all monthly communication reports are associated with a registered organization.

Finally, we supplement these datasets with data collected on the sector and organization type (public or private interest) of the registered organizations. Searching online and analyzing web profiles, we have sorted each organization into one sector identifier (primary, secondary, tertiary, and multi-) and indicated whether they are public interest (eg. union) or not.

Model specification

Our data structure is time-series cross-sectional in which each observation represents an aggregated monthly total of lobbying reports (ie. meetings) per organization. This is similar to previous work (see Cooper and Boucher, 2019; Leech et al., 2005). Aggregating the data by organization has the advantage of directly testing whether regional geography affects access trends. Moreover, the monthly aggregation allows for precise controls for interventions like government change. We model using generalized linear regression models (negative binomial) and detail this choice (among other technical aspects from this section) in our appendix. Our model is specified to control for auto correlation through both time and spatial variant factors like government change and sector. Like other quantitative works on lobbying access (see Cooper and Boucher, 2019; Leech et al., 2005; Zhu, 2013), we also include a lagged dependent variable.

Following our hypotheses, models 1 and 2 test each specification of 'central Canada.' Model 1 incorporates a Laurentian regional indicator as its key independent variable where i is the organization and t is time:

$$Model\ 1: \ Access_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Laurentian_i + \beta_2 Sector_i + \beta_3 Liberal_t + \beta_4 Public_i + \beta_5 Consultant_{it} + \beta_6 Budget_t + \beta_7 Access_{i,t-1} + \epsilon$$

Model 2 is the same as Model 1 but with a regional factor variable ('Region') instead of Laurentian. Models 3 and 4 swap overall monthly access with central agency monthly access (*Central*).

Access is a count variable for the number of communication reports filed by a given organization within a given month. Meeting reports are filed by registered lobbyists who have contacted a 'Designated Public Office Holder.' The data begins in November 2010, which is second month following the Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying's expansion of DPOH actors (Canada, 2020). The final month is August 2019, which precedes the 2019 election. Months are aggregated by the organization code assigned with registrations rather than by organization name. This is to ensure the final dataset captures organizations that relocate within the examined timeframe. While the first month of the dataset is November 2010, the first month of a given organization will vary in accordance with the first month they register as lobbyists. All months preceding their first registry are dropped.

Central, our other dependent variable, is a count variable indicating the total lobby meetings held with a designated public office holder within a central agency per organization and month. The characteristics of this indicator are the same as *Access* except that the count is filtered for only central agencies. The following institutions were indicated as central agencies: Prime Minister's Office (PMO), Finance Canada (FIN), Privy Council Office (PCO), Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (TBS) and the Public Service Commission of Canada (PSC).

Laurentian is a dummy variable indicating whether the organization is located within the Laurentian region. This region is specified using the telephone area codes associated with the organization from their last registration (see Table 1). In reviewing their overall organization and report tallies, we can see a substantial discrepancy between organizations located insider the Laurentian region from those outside. While almost half the population lives outside the region, only about 30% of reports originate from a non-Laurentian organization.

Table 1. Laurentian indicator coding

Laurentian Region	Area Codes	# Organizations (%)	# Reports (%)
Yes (1)	416, 437, 647, 289, 365, 742, 905, 343, 613, 438, 514, 354, 450, 579	3377	94127 (69.4%)
No (0)	All Others	6740	41335 (30.5%)
Dropped	NA	246 (2.4%)	3126 (2.2%)

The second hypothesis is tested through *Region*, a categorical variable indicating the region in which the organization is located. Using the same procedure as the Laurentian variable, organizations were associated with regions through area codes (Table 2). The Territories are combined in the 'Other' category due to limited observations. The reference category is Ontario in order to test our hypothesis.

Table 2. Region indicator coding

Region	Area Codes	# Organizations	# Reports
Ontario	226, 289, 613, 807, 437, 249, 343, 416, 519, 647, 905, 365, 548, 705, 742	3559	88144 (65.0%)
Quebec	367, 579, 873, 514, 581, 819, 438, 418, 450, 354	816	10248 (7.6%)
Atlantic	506, 902, 782, 709, 428, 879	176	2954 (2.2%)
Prairies	403, 587, 780, 825, 431, 204, 306, 639, 474, 368, 584	755	17856 (13.2%)
British Columbia	236, 778, 250, 604, 672	594	9682 (7.2%)
Other	All others	934	6578 (4.9%)

Briefly, one should also take note of the organization and report tallies for each region. Prior to running a model, we can tell that the vast majority of access (65%) is from Ontarian organizations. This is substantially higher than the 40% of the population found within Ontario. Every other region is underrepresented in access, though the Eastern provinces (ie. Quebec and Atlantic Canada) seem to be more impacted than their Western counterparts.

To allow for a robust estimate, we include several controls in our models. *Sector* is a categorical variable indicating whether the organization is associated with the primary, secondary, tertiary, or multi- sectors. *Liberal* is a dummy variable indicating whether the governing party is Liberal or Conservative. *Public* is a dummy variable indicating whether the lobby meetings were held by a publicly-oriented organization or not. *Consultant* is a ratio variable indicating the percentage of lobby meetings facilitated through a paid and

registered consultant lobbyist. *Budget* is a dummy variable indicating whether the lobbying month falls during a typical budget consultation period (October to December). We provide justifications for these controls in our appendix.

Table 4 provides descriptive statistics of our continuous variables. Table 5 summarizes the expected impact of each indicator on our dependent variable.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics

Indicator	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Standard Deviation
Access	0.352	0	178	1.856
Central	0.045	0	15	0.313
Laurentian	0.075	0	1	0.263
Liberal	0.613	0	1	0.487
Public	0.029	0	1	0.169
Consultant	0.039	0	1	0.194
Budget	0.235	0	1	0.424

Table 5. Summary of hypotheses and controls

		Expected Direction	
		Access	Central
H1, H3	Laurentian	+	+
H2, H3	Region: Ontario	#REF	#REF
	Region: Atlantic	-	-
	Region: BC	-	-
	Region: Prairies	-	-
	Region: Quebec	-	-
	Region: Other	-	-
C1	Sector: Primary	#REF	#REF
	Sector: Secondary	+	+
	Sector: Tertiary	+	+
	Sector: Multi-	NA	NA
C2	Liberal	+	+
C3	Public (Type)	-	-
C4	Consultant Lobbying	+	+
C5	Budget Consultations	+	+

Notes: 'H' stands for hypothesis and 'C' stands for control.

Results

Table 6 reports the results of our four models. Models 1 and 2 test the first two hypotheses directly. Models 3 and 4 test hypothesis 3. Generally, we find strong support for hypotheses 1 and 3, and moderate support for hypothesis 2.

Table 6. Regression models on monthly lobby communications per organization

	Total Count		Central Agency	
	(1)	*(2)*	*(3)*	*(4)*
Laurentian	2.898***		2.609***	
	(0.028)		(0.039)	
Atlantic		-0.281***		-0.487***
		(0.102)		(0.099)
BC		-0.356***		-0.226***
		(0.040)		(0.047)
Prairies		-0.032		-0.085**
		(0.032)		(0.038)
Quebec		-0.351***		-0.304***
		(0.031)		(0.043)
Other		-1.100***		-0.858***
		(0.036)		(0.052)
Multi	-0.541***	0.313***	0.394***	1.181***
	(0.098)	(0.087)	(0.089)	(0.091)
Secondary	-0.715***	-0.021	-0.257***	0.235***
	(0.031)	(0.035)	(0.040)	(0.040)
Tertiary	-0.884***	-0.455***	-0.166***	0.167***
	(0.026)	(0.028)	(0.033)	(0.033)
Liberal	-0.115***	-0.250***	-0.088***	-0.245***
	(0.021)	(0.023)	(0.024)	(0.025)
Public	2.113***	2.713***	0.877***	1.707***
	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.042)	(0.034)
Consultant	2.266***	2.835***	1.500***	2.487***
	(0.025)	(0.017)	(0.038)	(0.026)
Budget	0.098***	0.127***	0.018	-0.005
	(0.025)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.028)
Access$_{t-1}$	0.359***	0.595***	0.266***	0.444***
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.001)
Constant	-2.376***	-1.909***	-4.430***	-4.016***
	(0.025)	(0.028)	(0.036)	(0.033)

Note: Negative binomial regression with robust standard errors in brackets. *p < .1; **__p < .05;__ ***p < .01. N = 384,926. Coefficients indicate the change in the expected log count of our dependent variable.

In Model 1, we see that an organization located within the Laurentian region gets a statistically significant increase in monthly access. All else held constant, a 'Laurentian' organization increases average monthly access by a factor of **17**. This affirms hypothesis 1, though one should note that the baseline of the model is small. Controls are mostly consistent with expectations, though the public organization (type) covariate is very different. In all the models, organizations with public orientations are predicted to have greater access to the federal government. One should be cautious, however, in making conclusions on this finding. There is a difference between the organizations required to register according to the *Lobbying Act* and the population of organizations actually lobbying government. Many public organizations, like charities and other non-profits, may not have a dedicated employee whose lobbying meets the 'significant part of duties' floor to register.[1]

The control for a Liberal government seems inconsistent with theoretical expectations. For all models, the Liberal control is negative. There are a couple explanations for this unexpected result. First, the model is specified to test the role of regionalism in shaping lobbying access, not the influence of government change. Second, the structure of the data

may be misleading. The spatial unit is registered lobbying organizations. If there are more organizations getting access to government, then the results may underassess the intervention of a Liberal government on overall lobbying access.

Notably, our seasonal control for pre-budget consultations is both statistically and substantively significant for the overall count. Model 1 indicates that an organization lobbying during budget consultations is expected to see a **10% increase** in their average meetings, all else held constant. We also find that organizations from the primary sector seem to have greater access than those from other sectors in model 1. Given the reliance of primary industries like the dairy sector on federal programs, this finding is reasonable.

Model 2 is less clear when applied to hypothesis 2. Generally, organizations outside Ontario seem to have less access to the federal government. Quebec organizations, for instance, are predicted to receive **30% less access** to the federal government than their Ontarian counterparts. This was expected given what the literature has identified about the 'Quebec model' of civil society. Unexpectedly, organizations from the Prairies do not seem to have substantively different access. Given that the parameter is not statistically significant, we are unable to reject the possibility that there is no difference between Ontario and the Prairies in organizational lobbying access. This finding puts in question the extent to which the West is disadvantaged in overall lobbying access. Crucially, the British Columbia coefficient is negative and statistically significant. Organizations from outside a province (ie. the Territories) or Canada have notably less access than Ontarian organizations, which is expected.

We find that multi-sector organizations are predicted to gain greater monthly access than primary sector organizations across models 2, 3 and 4. We also find that consultant lobbyists have a meaningful impact on lobbying outcomes. This serves as an indication of the importance of having a link to government to gain influence over public policy. Many of these consultant lobbyists are previous government officials who operate near Ottawa.

Models 3 and 4 test hypothesis 3. Altogether, they indicate that central Canadian organizations hold greater monthly access to central agencies, therefore supporting our hypothesis. None of the key independent variables see a major shift in their directions and substantive interpretations. The coefficient for the Prairies is negative and statistically significant at the secondary level. Substantively, the access difference between Prairie and Ontarian organizations is modest at 8%. Figure 1 presents the regional coefficients for both Models 2 and 4.

There are a couple small differences in the central agency count models to note. First, the seasonal control for pre-budget consultations is no longer statistically significant. This is surprising given the influence central agencies often have over the budgetary process. Second, both secondary and tertiary sectors change from models 1 and 2. In model 4, both swap to positive. This may be a result of different access points for primary sector organizations. Petroleum organizations, for example, may find Natural Resources a better match for their lobbying.

Figure 1. Model 2 and 3 lobbying access coefficients by region
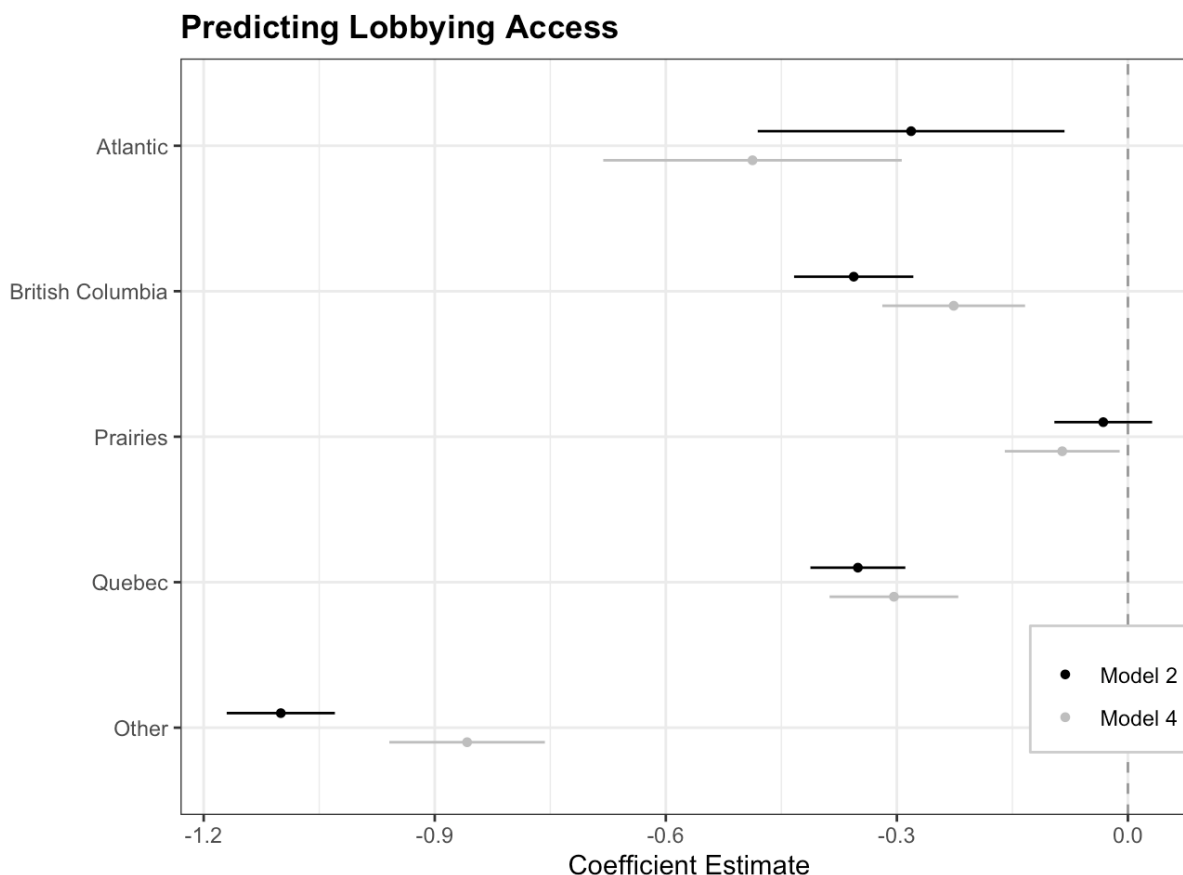
Note: The coefficients are as presented in models 2 and 4 respectively with 95% confidence interval.. Coefficients are interpreted as the change to the expected log of the dependent variable against the reference category, Ontario. The negative coefficients show that most regions see lower monthly communications with designated public officer holders, except the Prairies.

Revisiting the Prairies, Table 7 presents Models 2 and 4 with Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan separated rather than aggregated together. The other variables from Models 2 and 4 substantively remain the same and are therefore not presented in the table. We see that neither Alberta nor Saskatchewan have statistically significant access at the organizational level. When fixating on central agencies, Albertan organizations appear to have a 11% increase in access relative to Ontario while Saskatchewan organizations have a 25% decrease. Manitoba is consistent in both models with statistically and substantively significant decreases in organizational access all else held constant.

As observed with the five-region model, the results for the Prairies remain ambiguous. One should keep in mind that these models include a control for sector, which may otherwise explain variation in access across these provinces (eg. Alberta and the petroleum industry). Overall, we favour the ambiguous conclusions reached from the five-region models for two reasons. First, there are limited observations to allow for disaggregation, hence why we are uncertain about Alberta and Saskatchewan. Second and crucially, we maintain that the Prairie provinces hold a similar relationship to the federal government and otherwise have notable cultural and political connections. If anything, the most pronounced frustrations with the federal government come from Alberta and Saskatchewan, not Manitoba.

Table 7. Regression models on monthly lobby communications per organization (prairies disaggregated)

	Total Count	*Central Agency*
Alberta	0.031	0.102**
	(0.037)	(0.044)
Manitoba	-0.202***	-0.739***
	(0.067)	(0.094)
Saskatchewan	-0.107	-0.288***
	(0.082)	(0.095)

*Note: Negative binomial regression with robust standard errors in brackets. *p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01. N = 384,926. Other covariates (not presented) substantively remain the same from Models 2 and 4.*

Altogether, our models clearly confirm hypotheses 1 and 3 and generally support hypothesis 2.

Discussion

The location of a lobbying organization matters to access. The more proximate the organization is to Ottawa; it appears the better the expected lobbying outcomes. Put differently, regional location does impact access to federal decision-makers. This finding in itself is not surprising. The more important contribution is the substantive impact of regional location on lobbying access. We find this impact to be substantial.

As we noted earlier, there are several mechanisms motivating regional disparities in access. We argue that the strength of central Canadian organizations can be attributed to proximity, electoral influence, economic power, population and institutional biases. Arguably, one limitation of this exercise is that we are unable to test each of these mechanisms individually. Others in the American context have controlled for organizational size or resources in assessing lobbying habits (see Baumgartner and Leech, 2001; Leech et al., 2005; Mahoney and Baumgartner, 2015). There is no tracking of organizational size or expenditures in Canada, making these very difficult to observe. We believe, however, that our model is still robust. We maintain that the mechanisms shaping central Canadian lobbying outcomes cannot be disentangled as they are inherently linked. Even if data on organizational size was available, for instance, it is unclear whether it would be desirable to include it within our models.

Some other limitations should be noted. First, formal access does not necessarily translate to influence. It is possible that greater access is not translating to greater influence, though we find this unlikely. Second and perhaps more pressing, interest group access can take place informally, therefore being unobserved in our dataset. The *Lobbying Act* has gaps through which interest group actors can shape outcomes outside the public's eye (Fry, 2022). As MP Charlie Angus remarked in reflecting upon the *Act*,

> I have many friends of mine who are lobbyists, or they seem very friendly to me when they're talking to me, which maybe is the case of being a lobbyist, but I'm concerned. We can't deal with every eventuality or every potential eventuality, but Ottawa is a pretty small town for a big city, and if you want to find out where the New Democrats are, we're not at the Albany Club. We're at Brixton's on

>Wednesday night. If people want business with me, they just have to be there. (Canada, 2012: 5)

This unobserved lobbying could bias our parameter estimates, though we should expect this to mean our estimates for central Canada are conservative. Informal lobbying is easiest to pursue within the Ottawa bubble.

Third, some organizations purposefully move to Ottawa and its surrounding area to lobby. These organizations may continue to lobby for the interests of other regions and are perhaps primarily focused on another region. This nuance is not observed in our dataset. Nevertheless, the need for an organization to operate proximate to Ottawa is indicative of the regional concern at the heart of this article. To be influential in federal policy-making, it appears organizations may need to join the Ottawa 'bubble.'

Fourth and last, these results only address one avenue for shaping public policy, albeit a critical one. Interest group representation matters but we must not dismiss the role of public servants, intergovernmental relations, courts and federal institutions generally that mediate regional conflicts. The pluralist approach of this article should not distract from the role these institutions play in reducing or, as scholars like Savoie (2006) advance, exacerbating core-periphery conflicts.

These limitations noted, this paper advances the role of policy networks as sites of for regional disparities. Interest groups are crucial actors within policy networks. These networks help establish the bounds of public policy and institutionalize power relationships (Coleman and Skogstad, 1990; Skogstad, 2008). If the population and total access of interest groups within these networks are severely skewed, then the likelihood of a region's interests getting dismissed may increase. As Pross (1992) argues, interest groups are particularly important in conveying sectoral concerns to the federal government. We find reason to believe that these voices are not representative of the regional composition of Canada.

To be sure, the impact of this disparity is not uniform. Contrary to what some argue, many of the Western provinces are not disadvantaged relative to Ontario. The Prairies maintain similar access to Ontario at the organizational level. Our models, however, indicate that British Columbian organizations have lower expected counts. Perhaps the most disadvantaged region is the Atlantic. Not only do Atlantic Canadian organizations see substantially lower access (both at the organizational level and in overall tallies), but the region itself has limited electoral influence. This is not the case with Quebec or British Columbia. While many narratives on regional disparity focus on either the West or Quebec, the Atlantic provinces have a strong case to make. Despite unemployment rates being routinely higher in the Atlantic, the most vociferous dissent against central Canada comes from elsewhere. There are Atlantic narratives of underdevelopment but these rarely puncture federal consciousness.

We should not dismiss the role of political actors within government to counter the challenges of organizational regional disparities. Members of Parliament, cabinet members, central agencies and bureaucrats can counter bias with policy networks. Of course, the influence of these actors do vary. There is a convention for governments to represent each province within cabinet, but the influence of cabinet members is increasingly dependent on the Prime Minister (Good, 2014; Savoie, 2010). A better check on federal policy may be premiers. Where this is a norm of federal accommodation, these premiers can make

demands of federal government. This check can be abused, though, by premiers aiming to score political or partisan points.

Our results do not provide definitive evidence of either conceptualization of central Canada. The Laurentian estimate is high, but it is still a blunt instrument for assessing central Canadian influence. The regional indicator broken along provincial boundaries is more informative. This indicator seems to confirm theoretical expectations about the nature of Quebec's societal advocacy culture. There is room to question how best to specify Ontario. We should expect that the northern part of the province does not benefit in the same way as the southern part. This is not tested but may prove to be an important component of federal lobbying.

Going forward, there are many aspects to federal lobbying in Canada in need of study. There is still a lacuna in the literature on the informal lobbying culture within Ottawa that should be filled. Works examining particular policy choices help contextualize this culture and draw out the mechanisms shaping regional disparities. Scholarly accounts like Banack (2015) and Jacek (1994) that trace processes are natural complements to quantitative large-N work. There is also room for further accounts of institutional access points for 'periphery' organizations. Works like Cooper and Boucher (2019) consider the internal dynamics of institutional change on lobbying activity, but the literature does not speak to the relationship between organizational types and lobbied institutions. Finally, there is a need to inspect how resources affect lobbying. In making the *Lobbying Act*, political elites thought that tracking expenses would be burdensome for organizations (Fry, 2022). While this may be true, we are left with little information on resource-driven access. There is potential, however, to use economic significance as a proxy for resources and examine industry-driven access.

Conclusion

To date, the literature on regional disparities within the federal policy process has had limited engagement with sectional representation of interest actors. While some have referenced an Ottawa 'bubble,' there has been no empirical demonstration. This paper responds to this gap in assessing how regional location affects organizational access to the federal government. We test hypotheses relating to central Canadian lobbying using existing datasets through the Commissioner of Lobbying and some additional data collection. Our analysis makes three core contributions. First, we find that lobbying from central Canada has a statistically and substantively significant increase in expected average meeting counts per month. The Great Lakes-Laurentian region in particular sees higher access. Second, using the 'five region-Canada' model, we find that Ontarian organizations are more active than most regions except the Prairies. Contrary to popular discourse, we find little evidence that Prairies organizations receive less access on average. Third, our findings are consistent when fixating on central agencies.

Representation within policy networks is important to addressing regional disparities. As sectoral and sectional concerns are intertwined, there is a need for regions to have information disseminated to federal policymakers. With the centralization of power away from legislative actors and cabinet, the extent to which regions are represented may otherwise be limited if they do not puncture policy networks. Our work gestures to the notion that these networks are skewed and provides some substantive evidence as to which regions may struggle the most. It would seem the Atlantic provinces are most disadvantaged

by the current posture of policymaking, though more evidence is needed. Even if interest representation is tilted, other avenues may be available. The most reliable avenues is through provincial governments. Intergovernmental relations offer some hope where these results may appear dim, providing these relations are in good faith.

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Notes

[1] The Commissioner of Lobbying interprets this significant duties floor to be approximately one fifth (20%) of paid work. It is unlikely, however, that this changes the results considerably. If anything, the exclusion of these organizations may negatively bias our Laurentian parameter. It likely takes more time for an organization further away from Ottawa to lobby.

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Appendix: Extended model specification

Our data structure is time-series cross-sectional in which each observation represents an aggregated monthly total of lobbying reports (ie. meetings) per organization. This is similar to previous work (see Cooper and Boucher, 2019; Leech et al., 2005). Aggregating the data by organization has the advantage of directly testing whether regional geography affects access trends. Moreover, the monthly aggregation allows for precise controls for interventions like government change. We model using generalized linear regression models (ie. negative binomial), which presents two challenges. First, there is potential for autocorrection. If an organization receives access one month, for example, there is potential they have increased access the next month. That is, there may be a growth rate to lobbying outcomes as groups enter policy communities. There may also be a seasonal quality to lobbying that could affect how robust the standard errors are. Second, there is potential for correlations between organizations (ie. spatial autocorrelation). It is possible that organizations cluster around spatial factors such as sector. Neither of these challenges bias estimates but may render the standard errors inefficient.

To address these concerns, we model with a lagged dependent variable (LDV), and time variant and spatial controls. Some argue, like Achen (2000), that a lagged dependent variable can negatively bias estimates, particularly if they have limited variance. Others, however, argue that lagged dependent variables can make for a robust estimation strategy under careful consideration of the data structure (Wilkins, 2018; Keele and Kelly, 2005; Beck and Katz, 2011). The inclusion of an LDV is common in similar works (Cooper and Boucher, 2019; Leech et al., 2005; Zhu, 2013). We also include additional controls for seasonal lobbying trends, interventions like government change, and clustering factors like sector.

We deemed fixed effects modeling inappropriate for our purposes. Estimating our models with either or both organizational and monthly fixed effects runs the risk of overfitting (Plümper et al., 2005). We choose to theoretically justify specific controls instead. We did not consider the assumptions of random effects modeling to be realistic. The effects in question are expected to be correlated with our independent variables, making random effects suboptimal (see Wooldridge, 2012).

Given that our outcome variable is a count, we model using a generalized linear model. The distribution of this dependent variable leads to a skew distribution of the error term, therefore violating an important Gauss-Markov OLS assumption (Lewis-Beck, 1995). Instead, and consistent with similar works, we model using a negative binomial model, as our dependent variable is overdistributed.

Following our hypotheses, models 1 and 2 test each specification of 'central Canada.' Model A incorporates a Laurentian regional indicator as its key independent variable where *i* is the organization and *t* is time:

$$Model\ 1\text{: } Access_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Laurentian_i + \beta_2 Sector_i + \beta_3 Liberal_t + \beta_4 Public_i + \beta_5 Consultant_{it} + \beta_6 Budget_t + \beta_7 Access_{i,t-1} + \epsilon$$

Model 2 is the same as Model 1 but with a regional factor variable ('Region') instead of Laurentian. Models 3 and 4 swap overall monthly access with central agency monthly access (*Central*).

Access is a count variable for the number of communication reports filed by a given organization within a given month. Meeting reports are filed by registered lobbyists who have contacted a 'Designated Public Office Holder.' The data begins in November 2010, which is second month following the Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying's expansion of DPOH actors (Canada, 2020). The final month is August 2019, which precedes the 2019 election. Months are aggregated by the organization code assigned with registrations rather than by organization name. This is to ensure the final dataset captures organizations that relocate within the examined timeframe. While the first month of the dataset is November 2010, the first month of a given organization will vary in accordance with the first month they register as lobbyists. All months preceding their first registry are dropped.

Central is a count variable indicating the total lobby meetings held with a designated public office holder within a central agency per organization and month. The characteristics of this indicator are the same as *Access* except that the count is filtered for only central agencies. Every communication report includes information on which institution was lobbied in the contact. The following institutions were indicated as central agencies: Prime Minister's Office (PMO), Finance Canada (FIN), Privy Council Office (PCO), Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (TBS) and the Public Service Commission of Canada (PSC).

Laurentian is a dummy variable indicating whether the organization is located within the Laurentian region. This region is specified using the telephone area codes associated with the organization from their last registration. In Table 1, the area codes associated with Laurentian region are indicated. In some instances, the area codes were not available in a given registration. In that event, either the geographical destination (if available) or the first registration with an indicated telephone number were used. Approximately 246 organizations, representing approximately 2% of reports, were not identified.

The alternative hypothesis is tested through *Region*, a categorical variable indicating the region in which the organization is located. Using the same procedure as the Laurentian variable, organizations were associated with regions through area codes (Table 2). There are different ways of conceptualizing the regions of Canada. Some commentators, particularly from the West, tend to bundle Ontario and Quebec together (Boily and Epperson, 2014). Others still suggest regional boundaries do not match provincial (Brodie, 1989). For this study, we have operationalized region using the 'five-region Canada' model (see Schwartz, 1974; Elkins and Simeon, 1980; Cochrane and Perrella, 2012) with an 'Other' category. The Atlantic provinces are combined for both theoretical and practical (ie. limited observations) reasons. British Columbia is distinct from the Prairies because the number of observations allow for robust testing. Moreover, the relationship between BC and Canada is thought by some to be unique (Resnick, 2000; Lawson, 2005; Katz-Rosene, 2020). The Territories are

combined in the 'Other' category due to limited observations. The reference category is Ontario in order to test our hypothesis.

   Sector is a categorical variable indicating whether the organization is associated with the primary, secondary, tertiary, or multi- sectors. In previous literature, access has been shown to vary by industry (Schlozman and Tierney, 1986; Baumgartner and Leech, 2001; Boucher, 2018). As Pross (1992) argues, there is a clear link between sector and region in Canada. For example, it is thought that the Prairies are associated with primary industries (Lawson, 2005; Harrison, 2019) while Ontario is associated with manufacturing and financial industries (Kukucha, 2018). Likewise, regional differences may be solely sectoral-driven. There are different categorizations of lobby organizations, however. Our categorization of sector narrows the potential for miscoding, as some organizations are a part of several industries, while reflecting the broad political economic structure of Canadian federalism (Table 3).

Table 3. Sector Indicator Coding

Sector	*# Organizations (%)*	*# Reports (%)*
Primary	1445	32352 (23.9%)
Secondary	1378	23780 (17.6%)
Tertiary	3892	76245 (5.6%)
Multi	39	3085 (2.3%)

   Liberal is a dummy variable indicating whether the governing party is Liberal or Conservative. Scholars have found that the political party in power impacts lobbying outcomes (Rheault, 2013; Cooper and Boucher, 2019; Raess et al., 2018). This can work multiple ways. On the one hand, interest groups may change their lobbying habits based upon opportunity structures different political parties present (Young and Everitt, 2004; Banack, 2015). On the other hand, parties may strategically mould interest group access to their calculated benefit (Ainsworth, 1997; Fraussen and Beyers, 2016). In the Canadian institutional context, the role of political parties at the federal level is amplified by limited access points for influence (Levesque, 2017; Kamal and Burton, 2018). With few access points to note, the potential for influence outside majority Parliaments is limited without a favourable position to the governing party. Similar studies of Canadian lobbying, such as that by Cooper and Boucher (2019), have observed broad increases in lobbying access beginning with the Trudeau government.

   Public is a dummy variable indicating whether the lobby meetings were held by a publicly-oriented organization. The lobbying literature has identified organization type as consequential to access trends (Halpin and Thomas, 2012). One common division of organization types is public and private interests (Schlozman, 1984; Brasher, 2014; Baroni et al., 2014). This division has been used in previous quantitative work on federal Canadian lobbying (see Boucher, 2018; Hopkins et al., 2019). Scholars have pointed to the structural advantage of capital-oriented civil society in puncturing policy networks (see, for instance, Lindblom, 1982). Canadian lobbying scholars have observed a similar advantage (Stritch, 2017; Smith, 2018). This advantage is facilitated through resource-advantage (Vogel, 1983; Baumgartner and Leech, 2001), the strength of business associations as information

providers (Stritch, 2017; Atkinson et al., 2013), and the perception that business is most affected by policy decisions (Bull, 2008).

Consultant is a ratio variable indicating the percentage of lobby meetings facilitated through a paid and registered consultant lobbyist. As pervious literature has indicated, consultant lobbyists obtain more access, particularly with central agencies like the Prime Minister's Office (Boucher, 2018; Boucher and Cooper, 2019). Consultant lobbyists often have pre-existing associations with government, giving them an edge in access. This 'revolving-door' lobbying has received ample attention in the broader lobbying literature (see Lapira and Thomas, 2014; Dabros, 2017; Yates and Cardin-Trudeau, 2021).

Budget is a dummy variable indicating whether the lobbying month falls during a typical budget consultation period. Good notes that pre-budgetary consultations normally begins the Fall around "late October or early November" (2014, 50) Running until late December, this consultation includes key stakeholders like interest groups and takes place across several institutions. An examination of the data reveals a seasonal jump in accordance with these consultations. Following Wooldridge (2012) on seasonality within time series data, we include an indicator that controls for the last quarter of the year.