

FOREIGN POLICY DEBATES AND SLEEPING DOGS: ALL QUIET ON THE PUBLIC FRONT

Using data drawn from a survey of senior undergraduate students attending nine regionally-dispersed Canadian universities, this article investigates why there has been so little foreign policy debate in Canada. The analysis suggests that the absence of debate does not stem from a lack of interest in foreign policy matters, or from any broad consensus about Canadian foreign policy. Nor does it stem from a lack of structure or coherence in the way in which Canadians organize their foreign policy perspectives. Rather, the basic explanation seems to lie with the failure of political parties to organize and thus mobilize foreign policy debate along partisan lines.

to raise some principal questions about Canada's relations with the rest of the world. 'Priorities will have to be established,' the introduction warns, and 'difficult choices will have to be made'. The specific aim of the Green Paper was to prompt public discussion about foreign policy directions, and to this end the government empowered a Special Joint Committee of the House of Commons and the Senate to conduct hearings across the country.

Open invitations for public debate on Canada's international position are relatively rare, and theoretically at least, should be warmly welcomed. Observers have pointed out, however, that since the Second World War such debates

Utilisant les résultats d'un sondage auprès d'étudiants du niveau baccalauréat de neuf universités réparties dans les différentes régions du Canada, les auteurs s'interrogent sur les raisons de la tiédeur du débat sur la politique étrangère au Canada. Il leur semble que ce ne soit pas l'intérêt pour la politique étrangère qui manque, et par ailleurs, il ne semble pas que la politique étrangère canadienne fasse l'unanimité. L'explication ne résiderait pas non plus dans le fait que les Canadiens ne sauraient pas structurer leurs idées sur la politique extérieure. Les auteurs seraient portés au contraire à faire porter la responsabilité du phénomène sur les partis politiques qui n'auraient pas su mobiliser l'opinion en la polarisant sur les lignes des partis.

Introduction

When general elections occasion the transfer of power from one party to another, new governments commonly seek to establish their imprint on foreign, as well as domestic, policy. The tabling in the House of Commons of the Green Paper entitled *Competitiveness and Security: Directions for Canada's International Relations* is the most recent case in point. The Secretary of State for External Affairs introduced the document, intended as a first step in a broad review of Canada's international position, with the observation that 'dramatic changes have taken place in the world' and that 'it is time

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Table 1
Comparative rating of political interest

	Canada			United States		
	% scoring interest highest*	Mean score	Rank	% scoring interest highest	Mean score	Rank
1. International affairs	18.9	3.04	1	17.9	3.08	2
2. Federal/National affairs	12.3	3.06	2	22.3	2.59	1
3. Provincial affairs	13.5	3.13	3	—	—	—
4. Local affairs	11.9	3.78	4	11.9	4.0	3
	N = 779			N = 364		

Question: "How would you describe your interest in international, federal/national, provincial and local affairs?"

1 = "one of my major concerns"; 4 = "moderate concern"; 7 = "I pay little attention".

* Proportion of sample indicating area as "one of my major concerns".

difficulties on two fronts. First, since the capacity for abstract debate is no guarantee that international politics will be the primary focus of the attentive public's interest, interest in foreign policy has to be considered in the context of other, say domestic, issues which are also battlegrounds for principled debate and therefore compete for attention. Secondly, a cross-national perspective allows us to judge whether the Canadian attentive public's interest in international affairs is 'high' or 'low' compared to that found in similar publics elsewhere.

Respondents to the Canadian survey, and to a comparable American survey conducted in 1979,² were asked to indicate their level of interest in international as well as federal/provincial and local affairs. The findings summarized in Table 1 illustrate some substantial similarities in the perspectives of Canadian and American respondents. On average, both groups rated international affairs as being of more than 'moderate concern' and, perhaps surprisingly, American respondents expressed no greater interest in international affairs than did their Canadian counterparts. The most significant difference between the two groups shows up in the relative distributions of political interest. For American respondents, national affairs was clearly the primary focus of interest whereas Canadian respondents displayed almost identical levels of interest in national and international affairs. Furthermore, and

again unlike the American case, the segment of Canadian respondents expressing 'hard core' interest in international affairs was significantly larger than the corresponding segments reporting 'hard core' interest in federal, provincial or local affairs.

While Canadians do not appear to lack interest in international affairs, interest itself is a necessary but not sufficient condition for a foreign policy debate. To express an abstract interest in international affairs gives no indication of how that interest might prompt debate on specific international issues. Both the consensus and partisanship-mobilization explanations argue that it is the *distribution* of opinion that is crucial to the prospects of a foreign policy debate.

According to the consensus explanation foreign policy does not precipitate debate because it is not an arena of principled conflict. As Table 2 shows, however, there is little evidence of consensus in the Canadian data. On only one of the ten foreign policy issues in the upper half of the table — testing the cruise missile — did at least two-thirds of the respondents share the same policy perspective. Even if we were to adopt an even less stringent definition of a consensual situation, say where at least 60 per cent shared the same opinion, a consensus would emerge on only three additional policy statements. When the weaker criterion of consensus is applied to the lower half of the table, a similar divisive pattern of orientations is

Table 2
Foreign policy consensus: an inventory

	% Agree	% Disagree
1. Canadians should be prepared to use force to prevent the spread of communism	47	53
2. The government should do more to protect businesses from foreign competition	63	37
3. Canada should give economic aid to poorer countries even if it means higher prices at home	47	53
4. We shouldn't think so much in international terms but should concentrate more on domestic problems	50	50
5. Canada has a moral obligation to prevent the destruction of Israel	36	64
6. The main goal of those who make foreign policy is to protect the interests of big business	51	49
7. Canada should play a larger role in the defence of its Western Europe allies	43	57
8. We should do more to encourage American investment in Canada	36	64
9. Canadians have an obligation to allow our allies to test cruise missiles in Canada	25	75
10. Foreign students are taking up too many places at Canadian universities	41	59
	% closer	% more distant*
Britain	32	11
China	65	4
France	43	7
India	30	13
Israel	20	27
South Africa	19	40
Soviet Union	38	20
Saudi Arabia	42	13
United States	36	26

* Percentages don't round to 100 because the middle category "Stay about the same" is omitted.

evident in the attentive public. On the questions addressing Canada's bilateral relations with nine countries, a consensus emerged in only one instance — closer ties with the People's Republic of China. Overall, then, Table 2 provides little evidence for consensus. Furthermore, on the one issue about which there is greatest agreement, testing the cruise missile, the consensus formed in a direction which was diametrically opposed to government policy.

Dimensionality

While the degrees of interest in and consensus on foreign policy issues potentially shape foreign policy debate, we must also consider how interest and consensus combine and interact. If an interested attentive public is haphazardly divided on discrete issues which spin in

isolated and unconnected orbits, then the potential for debate will be dissipated. If, however, the lines of disagreement are organized coherently, then we might expect harnessing disagreement to be fuelled more efficiently by interest and to enhance the chances of debate. The next step in the analysis, then, is to ask whether the divisions within the attentive public conform to any underlying pattern or patterns.

Dimensionality refers to the organization or inter-relatedness of attitudes. It is not a question of whether individuals simply agree or disagree on specific substantive issues, but whether that

Table 3
Foreign policy dimensions: a three factor solution

Issue question	Factors		
	I Militarism	II Internationalism	III Americanism
1. Maintain strong military defence	.55		
2. Use of force against Communism	.62		
3. Defence of European allies	.74		
4. Allies test cruise missiles in Canada	.50		
5. Too many foreign students at Canadian universities		.45	
6. Economic aid to poor countries		.60	
7. Concentrate on domestic problems not international affairs		.46	
8. Prevent the destruction of Israel		.34	
9. Interest in international affairs		.26	
10. Ties to the United States			.72
11. Encourage American investment			.50

Loadings shown are those above .25.

agreement or disagreement is knit into recognizable and coherent structures which in turn reflect ideological or principled divisions. If the attitudes of the attentive public are in fact structured in a predictable and meaningful way, the underlying dimensions can be used to distill a potentially wide and complex range of issues into a manageable number of summary measures which can then be employed in the analysis of partisan mobilization.

Factor analysis, a traditional way of uncovering attitudinal dimensions in public opinion data, was applied to all Canadian respondents who answered the nineteen survey questions (Table 2) which dealt with international affairs. Initially, a principal components factor analysis uncovered three factors embracing fifteen of the nineteen items. As a few items within each dimension were related to other factors, we sought to clarify and simplify the structures by incorporating only uncorrelated items. The resulting three factor orthogonal solution, reported in Table 3, contained eleven of the fifteen items identified in the initial principal components analysis.

The three dimensions are fairly easy to identify. The most powerful dimension, 'Militarism,' embraces such issues as Canada's role in western

Europe and the use of force. The second factor, 'internationalism,' embraces a more loosely knit but still statistically powerful set of orientations revolving around issues which, for want of a better term, might be broadly described as humanistic concerns. The third factor, 'Americanism,' while statistically weaker, is retained on substantive grounds. It identifies a particular set of concerns — Canada's ties with the United States — which are clearly set apart from the more general internationalism dimension.

It is worth noting that 'interest in international affairs' loads on the internationalism dimension and not on the militarism dimension, a finding which suggests that interest does not simply heighten respondents' attention but injects a principled dimension into their attitudinal map of the world. A further test of the impact of interest on attitude structures was developed by dividing the attentive public into two groups, those reporting high and low levels of interest in international affairs, and then repeating the factor analysis on each group separately.

Table 4 shows, as we might expect, that there is greater attitudinal constraint in segments of the population reporting high interest. For the high interest group the three dimensions

Table 4
Interest and dimensionality

Factor	High interest		Low interest		Total sample	
	% variance explained	cumulative	% variance explained	cumulative	% variance explained	cumulative
I. Militarism	55.9*	(55.9)	35.8*	(35.8)	49.5*	(49.5)
II. Internationalism	22.4*	(78.3)	20.4	(56.2)	25.6*	(75.0)
III. Americanism	14.0	(92.3)	15.7	(72.0)	15.4	(90.4)
(Unexplained variance)		(7.7)		(28.0)		(9.6)

* Eigenvalues exceed 1.0

explain 92 per cent of the variance in the set of foreign policy items, compared to 72 per cent for the low interest group. While two statistically significant factors, militarism and internationalism, structure the attitudes of the high interest group and the total sample, only a single such factor, militarism, structures the orientations of the low interest group. It should nonetheless be noted that the same pattern of factors, containing the same elements, is evident across the attentive public regardless of level of interest. In other words, level of interest affects the clarity of the pattern, bringing issues into sharper or weaker focus, but it does not change the content or the shape of the pattern.

A surprising finding, perhaps, is the failure of the Americanism factor to emerge as a more potent organizing dimension. One possible explanation might be related to the relative power of the militarism and internationalism factors. If, however, the power of the two dominant factors were responsible for depressing the third factor then we would expect Americanism to emerge as more significant in the low interest group if only because the dominant factors are less powerful, thus leaving more variance to be explained. Yet as Table 4 shows, the structuring impact of the Americanism factor shifts only marginally. An alternative explanation is that the weakness of the Americanism factor is an artifact of the data. The questionnaire contained few items probing Canadian-US relations, and as a consequence the Americanism factor may be under-articulated. Nevertheless, the fact that Canadian respondents did not weave their views on Canadian-US relations into the fabric of the

internationalism optic is itself substantively significant; it suggests that Canadian-US relations may be more properly interpreted as an element of Canada's domestic, or perhaps continentalist, political world.

To summarize briefly, the factor analysis findings amount to a fairly compelling case against the view that attitudes to foreign policy are haphazardly distributed. In the context of the findings presented in Table 2, the evidence of coherent polarities contradicts the expectation of the consensus hypothesis. Moreover, the level of interest in the attentive public gives ground to expect that the attentive public would be willing recruits to a foreign policy debate, especially one with an agenda sufficiently open to include such issues as 'Star Wars' or North-South relations. New recruits, however, may be less likely to spring spontaneously into the foreign policy fray than to respond to political cues which, traditionally, flow from political leaders and parties.

Partisanship, Dimensionality and Mobilization

Our data do not allow us to test directly the argument that political parties, by failing to provide appropriate cues, are responsible for the lack of foreign policy debate. However, they do enable us to examine a 'bottom up' version of the same argument. We can speculate that the potential for partisan mobilization would be high if the attitudinal polarization of the attentive public was organized along partisan lines. Conversely, if no significant relationship between party identification and foreign policy position emerges,

then the prospects for a foreign policy debate led by political parties would be low.

To explore the potential for partisan mobilization on general foreign policy dimensions, rather than on single foreign policy issues, requires some commensurate way of summarizing respondents' positions. Since the initial factor analysis has already identified those policy items which 'belong' to each of the three dimensions (Table 3), additive scales were developed by combining all items within each of the three dimensions (Wittkopf, 1981). After testing each of the scales for reliability³ we employed one-way analysis of variance to determine whether respondents' foreign policy positions varied systematically with their self-reported party identification.

The findings, shown in Table 5, report both the mean positions of party identifiers on each of the scaled items, and the statistical significance of the differences between partisans on each dimension. It can be seen from the table that partisans hold significantly different positions on the militarism dimension: Progressive Conservatives hold the greatest concern for defence and express the greatest readiness to use military force, New Democrats stand in staunch opposition to these positions, and Liberals hold the middle ground. These findings suggest that there is potential for partisan mobilization on the militarism dimension, particularly so since it is this dimension which is the most powerful organizer of foreign policy attitude structures.⁴

The data also show, however, that there are no significant differences between Liberal and Progressive Conservative partisans on either the Internationalism or Americanism dimensions. Indeed, the extent to which the orientations of the major party identifiers converge is illustrated by the fact that those reporting strong party attachments occupy precisely the same position on the internationalism scale. Only the New Democrats represent an outlier case, holding a distinctly more internationalist position than their Liberal or Progressive Conservative counterparts.

Several reasons might be advanced to explain why the internationalist dimension failed to evoke unique partisan positions among majority party adherents. One might be that the

dimension itself, which consists of a diverse array of issues, is too ephemeral. Another speculation that, historically, Canada has been a reactive rather than proactive international actor, one more prepared to take the lead of more powerful allies than to stake out its own clear international position. To the extent that Canadian governments, through 'helpful fixer' activities in the UN and other multilateral forums, have exploited this dimension as an aspect of Canadian national identity, they have done so in a bipartisan way. But for the most part Canada's low international profile provides few ideological cues for domestic consumption. By contrast, the NDP, never having held office, has not been confronted by the realities of conducting international relations as a middle power, and from its position as constant critic is well placed to provide clearer foreign policy cues for domestic consumption. The NDP's principled criticism is particularly effective on such issues as North-South relations which resonate with the party's domestic redistributive policy orientations (McCready and Winn, 1976: 222-3).

The distribution of partisan orientations towards Americanism mirrors those found above, although the fact that the Americanism dimension is a weaker organizer of foreign policy orientations suggests interpretative caution. Liberals and Conservatives share common ground with respect to Canada's ties with the United States and the desirability of American investment, offering further evidence for those who contend that the major parties have abandoned traditional Tory and Liberal stances on economic and cultural relations with the United States (Stevenson, 1976:257-61). Indeed the fact that those who most strongly identify with the Progressive Conservative party are also those who are most in favour of closer ties with the United States suggests, if anything, that the traditional positions of the major parties may be experiencing a reversal at the hands of a new breed of Conservatives and Liberals.

Such transience is not evident among those identifying with the NDP, a party which has been consistently suspicious of the economic and cultural consequences of closer ties with the United States. Table 5 indicates that New

Party Identification

Between group variance

Scales	Liberal			Progressive Conservative			New Democratic Party		
	Strong	Med.	Weak	Strong	Med.	Weak	Strong	Med.	Weak
Militarism ¹	10.1	8.9	8.1	10.6	9.2	9.8	6.8	7.1	7.7
Internationalism ²	9.3	9.4	9.8	10.2	9.2	9.8	11.3	11.4	10.1
Americanism ³	5.0	4.5	4.6	4.8	4.6	4.6	2.5	3.4	4.2
N	250	46	46	256	46	46	126	46	46
1. Militarism scale range	4 to 16,			4 to 16,			4 to 16,		
2. Internationalism scale range	4 to 16,			4 to 16,			4 to 16,		
3. Americanism scale range	2 to 8,			2 to 8,			2 to 8,		
4. n.s. = not significant at $p < .05$									

Scales

Militarism¹
Internationalism²
Americanism³
N

1. Militarism scale range
4 to 16,
High = 16

2. Internationalism scale range
4 to 16,
High = 16

3. Americanism scale range
2 to 8,
High = 8

4. n.s. = not significant at $p < .05$

Table 5
Partisanship and foreign policy orientations

Democrats share no common ground with their majority party counterparts. While those who identify most strongly with the party want the greatest distance from the United States, even those with weak party identifications are further down the Americanism scale than are their Liberal or Conservative counterparts.

The hypothesis under consideration here is that the lack of foreign policy debate is a direct result of the parties' inability to give the attentive public distinct foreign policy cues. On the first count, militarism, the evidence suggests that we reject the hypothesis: militarism was found to be the most powerful organizer of foreign policy orientations, and the location of respondents on the militarism scale varied systematically with party identification. On the second and third counts, internationalism and Americanism, Liberals and Conservatives had virtually identical positions. Only New Democrats held a distinctive position of these two orientations. These findings suggest that we tentatively accept the hypothesis that debate may be depressed by the similarity of the foreign policy positions of supporters of the major parties.

This does not mean, however, that foreign policy is not an object of ideological organization or that appeals to ideology are unlikely to precipitate debate. Table 5 shows that self-placement on the Left-Right scale varies systematically with foreign policy orientations across all three relevant foreign policy dimensions. The indication is that orientations towards all three foreign policy dimensions are subject to ideological organization. That ideological focus, however, is deflected and fades when it is transmitted through the prism of party identification because of the broad ideological reach and substantial ideological overlap amongst the supporters of the two major parties (Gibbins and Nevitte, 1985). To bring this discussion of the data to a close, we should note that the New Democrats within our sample were the most interested in international affairs. It is probable, then, that they rather than supporters of the two major parties would be the first recruits to join any expanded foreign policy debate. In short, the debate would be joined first by those who are ideologically at

odds with the goals of the governing party's supporters. Thus while the audiences at cross country foreign policy hearings would be larger, they would also be less sympathetic.

Conclusions

Speculations about why there is little foreign policy debate in Canada have not been subject to systematic comparative evaluation. This article set out to explore the empirical status for three such explanations through opinion survey data drawn from a segment of the attentive public. No support was found for the contention that lack of debate was due either to low levels of interest in international affairs or to the existence of a general consensus about Canadian foreign policy. Indeed, relative to other political concerns and compared to a matched segment of the American attentive public, Canadian respondents exhibited relatively high levels of interest in international affairs.

These findings raised the possibility that the lack of foreign policy debate might be explained by the haphazard combination of interest and dissensus. The reasoning was that if foreign policy orientations were haphazardly organized, then the chances of a coherent and clearly articulated set of policy preferences reaching even the most solicitous political leadership would be diminished. Factor analysis, however, revealed that the attentive public's orientations to international affairs were not incoherent. In fact, they were structured around three identifiable dimensions — Militarism, Internationalism and Americanism. Since the lack of debate thus could not be readily explained in terms of the fractured international perspectives of the attentive public, the remainder of the article turned to the speculation that the foreign policy positions of the major political parties are insufficiently distinct to cue or lead such a debate along partisan lines. Here the findings pointed to significant partisan division on the primary foreign policy dimension, Militarism, but limited partisan division on the two weaker dimensions.

Thus, while an expanded discussion on defence issues would likely promote an all party

debate, an expanded debate on a more open agenda including such items as international aid or free trade with the United States would likely pit an interested, critical and ideologically coherent group of New Democratic recruits against a relatively loose knit and disinterested coalition of majority party identifiers. The implication is that if the governing party were to pursue vigorously the Green Paper's intention of promoting a wider debate across an open foreign policy front, then it would precipitate more vocal criticism than support.

Notes

* We would like to acknowledge the helpful comments of Kim R. Nossal on an earlier draft of this paper.

1 The universities in the sample include Dalhousie University, Memorial University, Wilfrid Laurier University, Queen's University and the universities of British Columbia, Calgary, Laval, Montreal and Toronto. The sample was stratified according to four areas of study — business and commerce, social sciences, humanities and natural sciences/engineering, and by gender. The standard checks indicated that the sample was not systematically biased. For further details see Gibbins and Nevitte (1985).

2 The American survey was the first segment of a larger comparative research project, The Cross National Equality Project, directed by Sidney Verba, Harvard University. The Canadian survey was designed specifically to match the American study. Details of the American survey are reported in Verba and Orren (1985:269-276 and 295-299).

3 The reliability of each scale was measured by Cronbach's alpha coefficients, a technique which is especially useful in estimating the internal consistency of scales developed through factor analysis. The reliability coefficients derived were as follows: Scale 2 (Internationalism) = 0.53; and Scale 3 (Americanism) = 0.58. These fairly modest reliability scales probably reflect the fact that each scale consisted of relatively few items. For a detailed statistical discussion see Zeller (1978: 52-76).

4 The inscription crises of World Wars I and II, and the nuclear arms debate of 1962-3, provide past evidence of how divisive this dimension can be.

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In the mid seventies, the federal government launched an ambitious program to decentralize part of its operations to a number of communities in all regions of the country. The program was to contribute simultaneously to several important objectives of the federal government. Early on, the program generated a number of announcements which would have involved the relocation outside of Ottawa of at least twenty-four units of the federal government. After only half of these projects had actually been initiated, the program was effectively terminated. This article reviews the program, looks at the reasons why it was dropped, and suggests that it should be re-established with some modifications.

Au milieu des années 70, le gouvernement fédéral entreprenait un ambitieux programme de décentralisation qui, en disséminant une partie de ses opérations dans toutes les régions du pays, devait contribuer à la réalisation simultanée de plusieurs objectifs importants. Alors qu'il avait annoncé la relocalisation à l'extérieur d'Ottawa d'au moins vingt-quatre unités administratives, le gouvernement fédéral a brusquement abandonné le programme à mi-chemin. Notre intention est de donner un aperçu du programme, d'examiner les raisons pour lesquelles on l'a abandonné, et de suggérer des révisions en vue de le réintroduire.

S'adressant à l'Institut canadien d'administration publique en 1975, l'honorable Jean Chrétien, alors président du Conseil du Trésor, déclarait que les gouvernements allaient devoir s'attaquer à un problème important au cours des années à venir: leurs rapports avec les citoyens. Le gouvernement, disait-il, est devenu ni plus ni moins qu'une autre bureaucratie à combattre; il fait désormais partie du problème. Il faut, insistait-il, que des moyens soient trouvés pour rapprocher le gouvernement fédéral des administrés. (Chrétien, 1975:1.)

Pour sa part, il croit que la décentralisation est 'peut-être la meilleure façon' d'arriver à un tel rapprochement, en faisant sentir la présence du gouvernement fédéral 'dans toutes les provinces,

dans toutes les régions, dans toutes les localités'. La décentralisation, explique-t-il, signifie à la fois la relocalisation de certains services fédéraux d'Ottawa à d'autres régions du pays et la délégation d'un plus grand nombre de pouvoirs de l'administration centrale aux fonctionnaires en poste 'sur le terrain'.

Le Cabinet fédéral estime que la décentralisation peut avoir de nombreux avantages, notamment en favorisant l'unité nationale, le développement économique régional, la croissance urbaine et la prestation de services gouvernementaux au public. Un groupe de travail spécial est donc formé afin d'élaborer le programme de décentralisation et d'en articuler les avantages, tandis que Jean Chrétien est chargé de