

# A Consideration of Cabinet Size

Cabinet size has fluctuated in Canadian legislatures over the past century. Beginning in 1993, two federal governments introduced “roll back” cabinets which sought to significantly reduce the number of ministers. The author, focusing especially on the years 1993 to 2014, asks if Canadian governments have a “cabinet size problem.” He notes that since 1993 two trends have emerged: 1) cabinets are more likely to expand during government and more likely to consolidate between governments and 2) cabinet size is more likely to increase during government under centre-left parties than centre or centre-right parties. Although arguments for a reduction of cabinet size tend to focus on financial costs, the author highlights the political cost of having a large cabinet relative to the size of the legislature, as there are fewer private members to keep the government accountable.

**J.P. Lewis**

Following a January 2014 cabinet shuffle, Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s 40-member federal ministry tied Brian Mulroney’s 1984 cabinet as the largest in Canadian history.<sup>1</sup> Compared to other Westminster systems, Canadian cabinets have been noted for their large membership.<sup>2</sup> Does Canada have a cabinet size problem? As Graham White wrote in 1990, “foreign visitors to Canada are frequently bewildered by the size of Canadian cabinets”.<sup>3</sup> Beyond the institutional differences identified by political scientists between Westminster states, the size of the ministries in Canadian federal and provincial governments is subject to domestic scrutiny after each cabinet shuffle. On occasions of cabinet expansion, critics express austerity-themed worries of the cost of government and populist-based concerns of “too many politicians”. On occasions of cabinet reduction, first ministers are praised for “streamlining government” or “doing more with less”. Not surprisingly, Canadian politicians have been quick to pursue the positive responses to cabinet reduction, promising to appoint fewer ministers to cabinet.

While politicians have focused on the financial savings of cabinet reduction, others have focused on the institutional impact of cabinet reduction. In 2011,

Aucoin et al. argued that large cabinets had considerable negative consequences including decreasing the number of private members to hold the government to account and creating more positions to which private members can aspire, thereby contributing to the culture of strict party discipline.<sup>4</sup> While Aucoin et al.’s arguments are important – their claims mostly reflect the normative nature of the debate around cabinet size. In fact, most of the political discussion about cabinet size is also based in a normative frame with smaller cabinets acting as a symbol of smaller governments.

Instead of addressing the financial or institutional costs of cabinet size, this article endeavours to introduce an empirical approach to the understanding of cabinet size in Canadian federal and provincial governments by attempting to answer the question: Do Canadian governments have a cabinet size “problem”? To consider this question, three hypotheses are tested: 1) Cabinet size has increased at both the federal and provincial levels of government in Canada, 2) Cabinet size has increased during government and decreased upon dissolution and swearing in of a new government, 3) Cabinet size has increased under governments formed by left-of-centre parties, remained the same under governments formed by centre parties and decreased under governments formed by right-of-centre parties. This study focuses on the period from 1993 to 2014, based on the notion that the 1993 cabinets of Kim Campbell and Jean Chretien represented the first attempt at what I call the “roll-back” cabinet: smaller executives that were mostly symbolic creations

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to reflect governments' adoption of neo-liberal approaches to the growth and role of the state.

In determining if Canada has a cabinet size problem, I first describe the Canadian case in more detail, and review the academic literature and a sample of the Canadian political narrative on cabinet size. I then present analysis from data collected on cabinet size, including a newly created dataset based on cabinet size changes in the federal and provincial governments from 1993 to 2014.

Before discussing the relevant literature it is important to explain why the Canadian case is unique when examining the issue of cabinet size. Canada's federal system provides two types of jurisdictions with varying sizes of legislatures to observe cabinet reduction and expansion – the federal and provincial levels of government. As well, Canada's lack of coalition governments provides a different perspective than most of the international research that focuses on cabinet size in states with coalition governments – a variable that

has a major impact on increasing the ministry size.

In comparing Canada's federal cabinet size with other similar states such as the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, Canada falls in the middle of the pack. As *Table 1* indicates, regardless of the political attention paid to cabinet size, comparatively Canada's federal cabinet size is moderate in both proportion of the lower house and ministers per capita.

When we consider Canada's provincial level of government, we find larger cabinet sizes. As *Table 2* shows, cabinets take up a large proportion of the legislature in most Canadian provinces.

The provincial numbers help to explain why cabinet size might be of concern. Moreover, they provide good reason to examine if large provincial cabinets are a recent development and what types of variables, such as timing and type of government, lead to cabinet reduction or expansion.

**Table 1: Comparative Cabinet Size: Canada, UK, Australia, New Zealand**

	<b>Ministers as of December 2014*</b>	<b>Proportion of Lower House</b>	<b>Minister per capita</b>
Canada	39	12.7%	923,076
UK	33	5.1%	1,942,424
Australia	28	18.7%	845,046
New Zealand	28	23.1%	162,038

\*Includes ministers of state, ministers without portfolios and ministers outside cabinet

**Table 2: Comparative Cabinet Size: Canadian Provinces**

	<b>Ministers as of December 2014</b>	<b>Proportion of Lower House</b>	<b>Minister per capita</b>
British Columbia	20	23.5%	231,565
Alberta	20	23.0%	206,085
Saskatchewan	18	31.0%	62,500
Manitoba	19	33.3%	67,473
Ontario	27	25.2%	506,618
Quebec	27	21.6%	304,248
New Brunswick	13	26.5%	57,992
Nova Scotia	16	31.4%	58,918
Prince Edward Island	11	40.7%	13,300
Newfoundland	15	31.3%	35,133

## Literature Review

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Much of the international literature on cabinet size focuses on cabinet formation in jurisdictions where parties are working in coalitions to form government.<sup>5</sup> When considering cabinet formation in coalition governments, both intra-party politics (which applies to single-party governments) and inter-party politics (relationships and dynamics between parties) are considered. Scholars in this area believe inter-party politics help shape and influence size of cabinet in coalition governments.<sup>6</sup> Other research has stressed the conundrums that large cabinets present; while a larger ministry provides greater opportunity for representation in the political executive, the larger membership presents challenges for its ability to function effectively.<sup>7</sup> Other studies have found that the size of cabinet can influence the size of government and increase levels of spending and deficits.<sup>8</sup>

Cabinet size has been a topic of discussion in Canadian political science literature since the 1960s but more rigorous examination of trends did not emerge until the 1990s.<sup>9</sup> In 1990, Graham White argued that size of Canadian political institutions mattered more than what had previously been understood. White described a number of implications of larger cabinets including: cabinet size's impact on decision making; the power of the first minister; representation in cabinet; and the influence of private members in the legislature.<sup>10</sup> A notable study that specifically focused on cabinet size in Canada was Peter Aucoin and Herman Bakvis' 1993 article "Consolidating Cabinet Portfolios: Australian Lessons for Canada." As the title suggests, the authors compare the Australian experience of reducing cabinet size and the Canadian consolidation of cabinet in 1993 under the two new prime ministers who held the office that year, Progressive Conservative Kim Campbell and Liberal Jean Chretien. As Aucoin and Bakvis noted, "The appeal of cabinet consolidations derives from several sources. At a symbolic level, it speaks to the perceived need to reduce government waste. Given the low level of public esteem for politicians, reducing the size of cabinet is seen to constitute an especially appropriate reform measure".<sup>11</sup> However, Aucoin and Bakvis suggested that too much focus on the number of ministers detracts from what the real concern should be - the organization of the portfolios.

Much of the recent Canadian literature on cabinet size has focused on the implication for democratic practices in the country's legislatures. David Docherty has pointed out the provincial trend toward weak ratios of backbenchers to cabinet ministers and the

negative impact on members being able to hold ministers to account. Docherty also noted the impact a large cabinet has on the presence of party discipline stating that "Canadian assemblies lack a critical mass of parliamentarians...the rows of government backbenchers are filled with members hoping for an eventual cabinet seat...across the floor, the ambitions are very similar: most opposition members assume they are only a victory away from a car with driver and the ability to initiate legislation".<sup>12</sup> In Aucoin et al.'s *Democratizing the Constitution*, the authors criticized the ever common practice of increasing the number of ministers, ministers of state and parliamentary secretaries at the federal level of government. Aucoin et al. proposed adopting legislation that would limit the size of ministries to 25 ministers. Echoing Docherty's concerns, the authors contended the legislation "should also increase the likelihood that backbench MPs will act as something other than trained seals clamouring to benefit from the prime minister's power of appointment, and will perhaps even take seriously their role in scrutinizing and holding the government to account".<sup>13</sup> The increase in government members provides the prime minister with more power through the cabinet solidarity that comes with ministerial positions and party discipline that comes with the possibility of being appointed to a larger pool of ministerial positions.

While academic attention to federal cabinet size has been scant, even less attention has been paid to provincial cabinet size. Jennifer Smith took note of the growing cabinets in the Atlantic provinces beginning in the 1970s in her 1988 chapter "Ruling Small Worlds" from *Prime Ministers and Premiers: Political Leadership and Public Policy in Canada*. Smith noted "by strengthening their executives in ways that the institutions of responsible government permit...the premiers in Atlantic Canada have benefitted from the fact that their provinces, however small, are endowed with the full array of the institutions of responsible government".<sup>14</sup> Christopher Dunn noted that provincial cabinets can account for 20 to 40 percent of the legislative caucus and the significant degree of power and control this gives the premier and government over "backbenchers on both sides of the House".<sup>15</sup> One explanation for large provincial cabinets is that premiers are pressured by similar representation concerns as the prime minister but with smaller elected chambers.<sup>16</sup> Still, regardless of which level of cabinet government scholars have studied, the majority of approaches have been based in a normative framework without explicit attention on empirical questions of rate of cabinet growth and variables that may influence cabinet growth. White's

comments on larger cabinets illustrated the normative conundrums that exist due to the difficulty of measuring cabinet structure effectiveness. He said, "large cabinets clearly involve more people directly in government decision making. In turn this can only widen the range of interests and perspectives brought to bear." White remarked, "to the extent that reducing the constraints on the first minister's power is undemocratic, larger cabinets can represent a diminution of democracy".<sup>17</sup>

### **A Brief History of the Issue of Cabinet Size in Canada to 1993**

While cabinet composition and size is currently the prime minister's prerogative, most forget that the size of the original 1867 federal cabinet was a group decision, made by members of the Fathers of Confederation. As noted Canadian historian W.L. Morton wrote, "It was both acceptable policy and quite practicable to keep government in all its activities, and the cabinet in number of members, quite small. This disposition explains why the leading politicians of Confederation so readily agreed that the cabinet of the Dominion should be no more than 13...the leading politicians unanimously and steadfastly held that a larger cabinet would be 'unworkable'".<sup>18</sup> The delegates to the Westminster constitutional conference in London agreed to the size and composition of cabinet: Ontario (five), Quebec (four), New Brunswick (two) and Nova Scotia (two).<sup>19</sup> Significantly, the total number in cabinet was only one more than the previous cabinet of the Province of Canada (future Ontario and Quebec) even though Confederation added Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

Based on Canada's population in 1867, the 13-member cabinet meant one minister for every 250,000 people/citizens.<sup>20</sup> As of July 2014, the ratio of federal ministers to Canadians citizen was roughly one minister for every 900,000 citizens. In Canada's first 50 years, federal cabinet size slowly grew until 1921 when Liberal Prime Minister Mackenzie King reduced cabinet to 16 members (from the previous government's 21) and made cabinet's regional representation based on the number of parliamentary seats from each province.<sup>21</sup> King's cabinet soon increased to 19, which as a ratio of minister to population in 1921 became 1:463,000.<sup>22</sup>

In Canada, cabinet growth has been tied to the entrenchment of cabinet committee systems since the 1960s, representational concerns in Quebec, representation of politically significant groups and simply the growth of government responsibilities.<sup>23</sup> A significant development in the history of cabinet size in Canada was the passage of *The Ministries and*

*Ministers of State Act* in 1970. The act established two new types of ministers of state: one type oversaw a Ministry of State and a second type was assigned to assist a minister or ministers in their duties. While the introduction of a new type of minister was seen as a natural result of the increased role of government in Canadian society, some concerns were expressed about control and accountability in the new arrangements created by ministers of state.<sup>24</sup> Federal cabinet size went from about 20 under Louis St. Laurent to almost 30 by the time John Diefenbaker left office in 1963.<sup>25</sup> One clear outcome was that the legislation provided for much larger ministries under Pierre Trudeau and Brian Mulroney in the 1970s and 1980s. By the 1980s, concern over expanding cabinets emerged. The Mulroney cabinet, which expanded to 40 ministers, was referred to as a "mini-caucus" of Progressive Conservative members of parliament.<sup>26</sup>

In 1993, Aucoin and Bakvis argued that "the consolidation of cabinet portfolios in order to reduce the size of the Canadian cabinet has become a theme in vogue".<sup>27</sup> The authors cited attention to cabinet consolidation made by politicians and bureaucrats. Preston Manning (Reform leader), Jean Charest and Kim Campbell (Progressive Conservative leadership candidates), Robert de Cotret (former Treasury Board president) and Gordon Osbaldeston (former clerk of the Privy Council) all advocated for cabinet reduction. During the 1993 federal election, a few months after Campbell had made the initial reduction to cabinet, the new, upstart, populist Reform Party pledged to reduce the federal cabinet even more, down to 16 ministers. While the Reform Party did not form the government, the new Liberal Prime Minister, Jean Chretien, continued with the momentum of cabinet consolidation by introducing a relatively small first cabinet composed of 31 ministers. Along with heightened attention to cabinet consolidation at the federal level, provincial leaders began to discuss smaller ministries.

Since 1993 a long list of candidates for provincial premierships and party leaderships have promised to reduce cabinet size including: Glen Clark (BC), Gordon Campbell (BC), Ralph Klein (AB), Ed Stelmach (AB), Jim Prentice (AB), Lorne Calvert (SK), Mike Harris (ON), Tim Hudak (ON), Bernard Lord (NB), Dominic Cardy (NB), John Hamm (NS), and Roger Grimes (NF). Provincial leaders who cut cabinet regularly cited financial reasons. After their respective cabinet consolidations, New Brunswick Premiers Bernard Lord (1999-2006) and David Alward (2010-2014) noted that "[it] really means better respect for your



tax dollars” and “we have reduced our spending by literally thousands of dollars because we have made a decision to have fewer ministers, other political staff, and staff who go with those ministers”.<sup>28</sup> In 1999, when Nova Scotia Premier John Hamm introduced a cabinet of 11 ministers he argued, “This is a province that can’t afford more government”.<sup>29</sup>

As well, negative financially-based criticisms emerged in response to cabinet growth. When Alberta Premier Alison Redford increased the province’s cabinet size by one in 2013, opposition leader Danielle Smith contended, “I am exceedingly disappointed by the new cabinet’s size, as cabinet ministers now outnumber private members in the Progressive Conservative caucus. Increasing the payroll of cabinet-level politicians and staff does not support the premier’s supposed commitment to living within our means”.<sup>30</sup> Premiers have been quick to justify any cabinet increases, focusing on political reasons. Alberta Premier Ralph Klein argued his larger cabinet was due to an expanded caucus and regional representation pressures stating that “We have 74 members, and in order to give Edmonton greater representation, we’re going to have to expand it”.<sup>31</sup> In 2004, when Gordon Campbell appointed the largest BC cabinet ever, (28) he defended his move arguing that “We have to find a way to establish political accountability. You hold me to account for those things. If I can establish that with cabinet, I think that’s important”.<sup>32</sup>

Given the list of Canadian politicians who have decided to include cabinet reduction as part of party or leadership platforms, it is apparent that since Campbell and Chretien’s 1993 federal cabinet consolidations, cabinet size has become a common idea identified when discussing reform of federal and provincial institutions. While the discourse may have increased in the last two decades of Canadian politics, there is still little discussion around the empirical aspects of cabinet size, especially at the provincial level of government.

## Methods and Results

In their 2014 study, Indridason and Bowler tested a number of hypotheses on coalition government cabinets, two of which could be tested in single-party governments: 1) Left-wing governments are expected to have larger cabinets; 2) As the size of the legislature increases so should the size of the cabinet.

This study tests similar hypotheses in the following order:

*H1) Cabinet size has increased at both the federal and provincial levels of government in Canada;*

*H2) Cabinet size has increased during government and cabinet size has decreased between governments; and*

*H3) Cabinet size has increased under governments formed by left-of-centre parties, remained the same under governments formed by centre parties and decreased under governments formed by right-of-centre parties.*

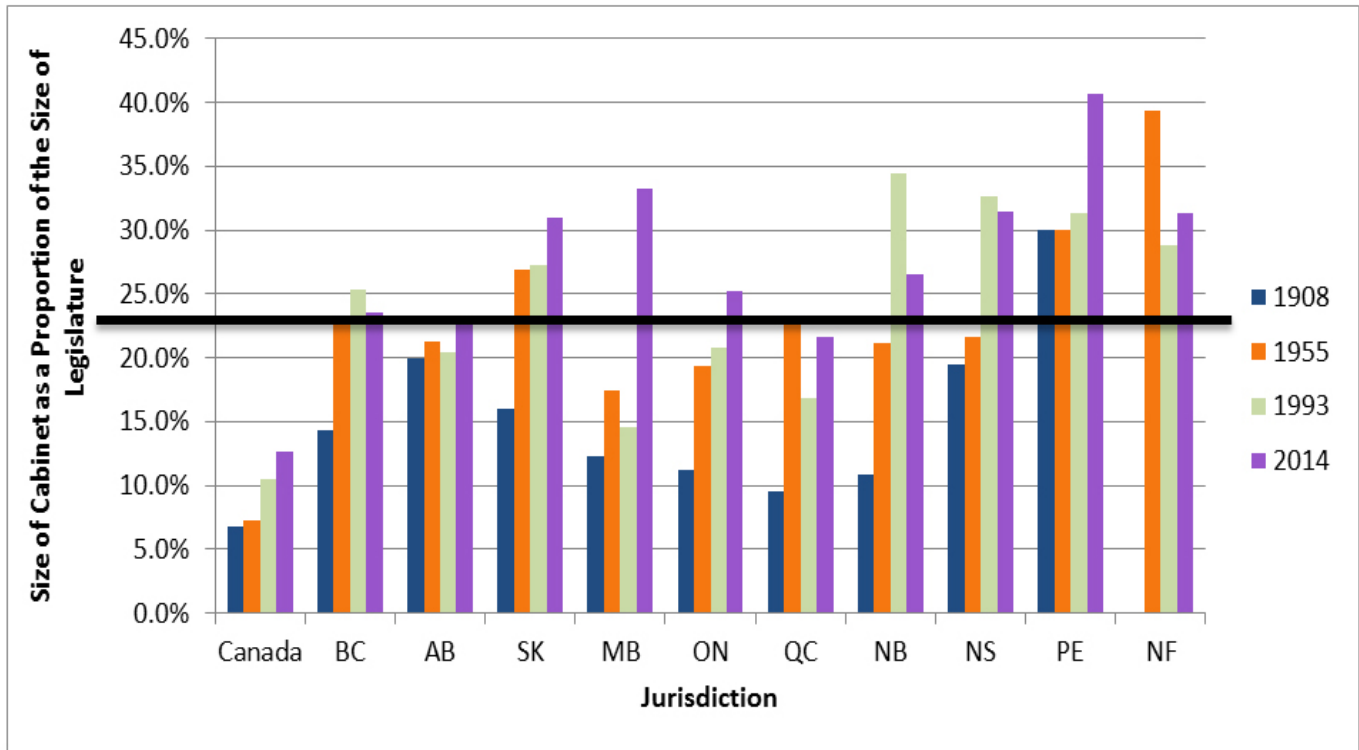
The hypotheses are tested using data on federal and provincial cabinets from 1993 to 2014. Changes in size of cabinet are determined using two types of cabinet size measures: 1) Cabinet Size before Dissolution (n=55); 2) Cabinet Size after Election (n=66). Using these numbers, two different types of changes of size of cabinet can be measured: 1) Change during government (from Swearing-in to Dissolution); 2) Change between elections (from Dissolution to Swearing-in).

*H1: Cabinet size has increased at both the federal and provincial levels of government in Canada.*

Data from 1867 to 2014 reveal that cabinets have increased in size in Canada, and that certain time periods and regions have experienced greater growth than others. As well, cabinets have increased as a proportion of the size of legislatures. While this study is concerned with the historic growth of cabinet in Canada, it is especially concerned with post-1993 cabinet size change. During the last two decades in Canada we find that eight Canadian jurisdictions (the federal government, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, PEI, Newfoundland) have seen cabinet size increase and three (British Columbia, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia) have seen cabinet size decrease.

While cabinet sizes have increased at both the federal and provincial levels, so too have federal and provincial legislatures. Therefore it makes more sense to consider growth of cabinet as a proportion of the legislature. *Figure 1* presents size of cabinet as a proportion of the size of legislature at the federal and provincial level at four selected time points. The first time point is 1908, just two years after Alberta and Saskatchewan entered Confederation. The second time point is 1955, six years after Newfoundland entered Confederation. The third time point is 1993; a turning point in the cabinet size history in Canada with Campbell and Chretien’s reductions to federal cabinet, and finally, the fourth time point is 2014, the most recent year to measure cabinet size.

Figure 1: Historic Change in Size of Cabinet as a Proportion of the Size of Legislature



As Figure 1 shows, provinces, and especially smaller, Atlantic provinces, have the largest cabinets proportionate to legislature size. In fact, by 2014 the six provinces with the smallest population had over 25 per cent of their legislatures in cabinet: Saskatchewan – 31.0 per cent, Manitoba – 33.3 per cent, New Brunswick – 26.5 per cent, Nova Scotia – 31.4 per cent, Prince Edward Island – 40.7 per cent, Newfoundland – 31.3 per cent. The provincial proportions stand in stark contrast to the federal cabinet which is comprised of only 12.7 per cent of the House of Commons. Figure 1 also shows that cabinets, as a proportion of the legislature, have grown over the four time points used to assess change of cabinet size. On average, cabinet size grew most, as a proportion of the legislature, between 1908 and 1955, expanding by 6.04 per cent. During the other two time periods, growth measured at 0.97 per cent (1955-1993) and 3.49 per cent (1993-2014).

In examining the 1993-2014 period more closely, Figure 2 and Figure 3 present cabinet size change as measured at two different points in the cycle of government – post-election and dissolution. By using these two sets of data we can answer the question of whether or not cabinet expansion is most prevalent at the beginning or end of governments.

Figure 2 shows the change in cabinet size at the federal and provincial levels in Canada from 1993 to 2014 using post-election cabinet numbers. As the trend lines suggest, outside of the federal level, change has been quite gradual or non-existent with the exception of growth in some provinces (Alberta 17 to 24, Ontario 19-27, Quebec 20-26) and reduction, dramatic in one (New Brunswick 22 to 13).

Figure 3 shows the change in dissolution cabinet size at the federal and provincial levels of government in Canada from 1995 to 2014. As the trend lines suggest, many provincial cabinet sizes have remained flat, while several have experienced increases (Canada - 30 to 37, Ontario - 22 to 27), decreases (New Brunswick - 21 to 17, Nova Scotia - 17 to 14) or both (Quebec - 26 to 36 to 23, British Columbia from 22 to 28 to 23).

**H2: Cabinet size has increased during government and cabinet size has decreased between governments.**

The second hypothesis tested is whether or not cabinet size has expanded during government (in between elections) and whether or not cabinet size has decreased after an election (in between governments). To test this hypothesis, pre- and post-election cabinet sizes were collected from federal and provincial governments between 1993 and 2014.

Figure 2: Size of Post-Election Cabinet (beginning of government), 1993-2014

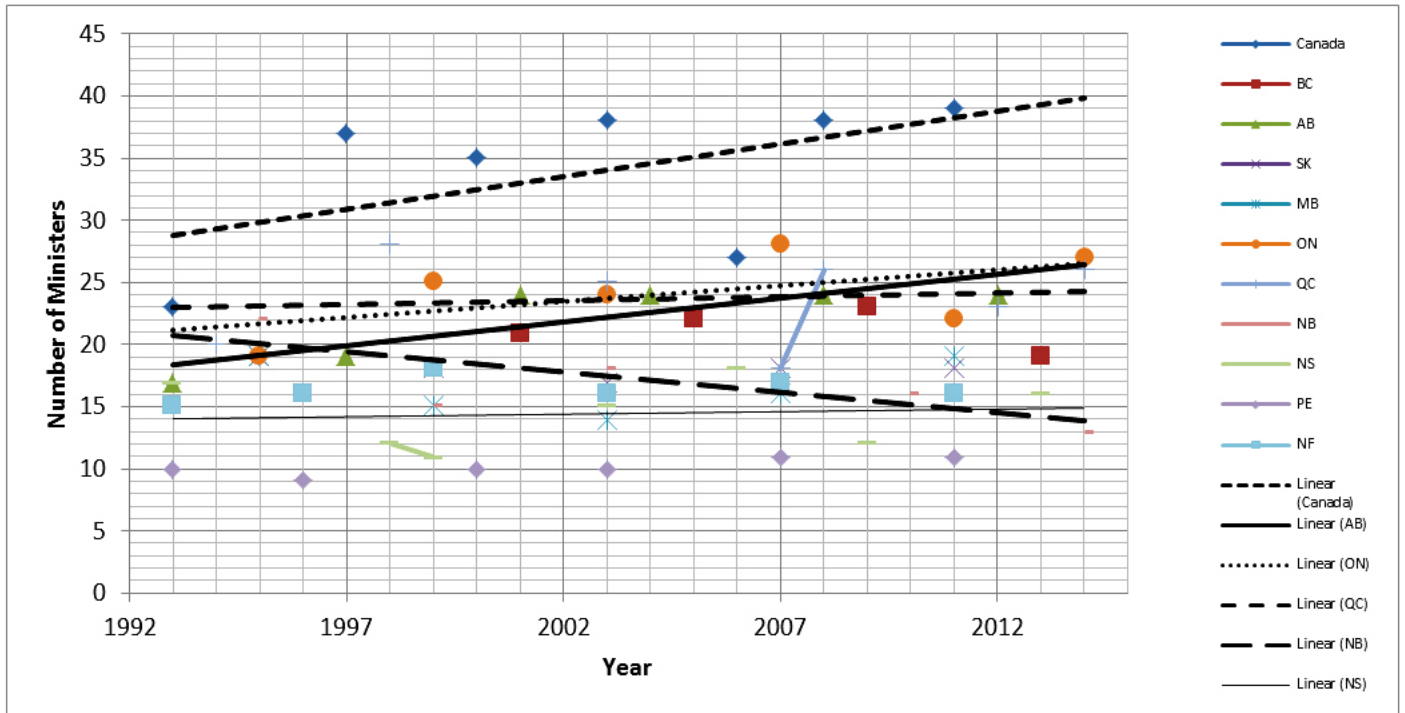
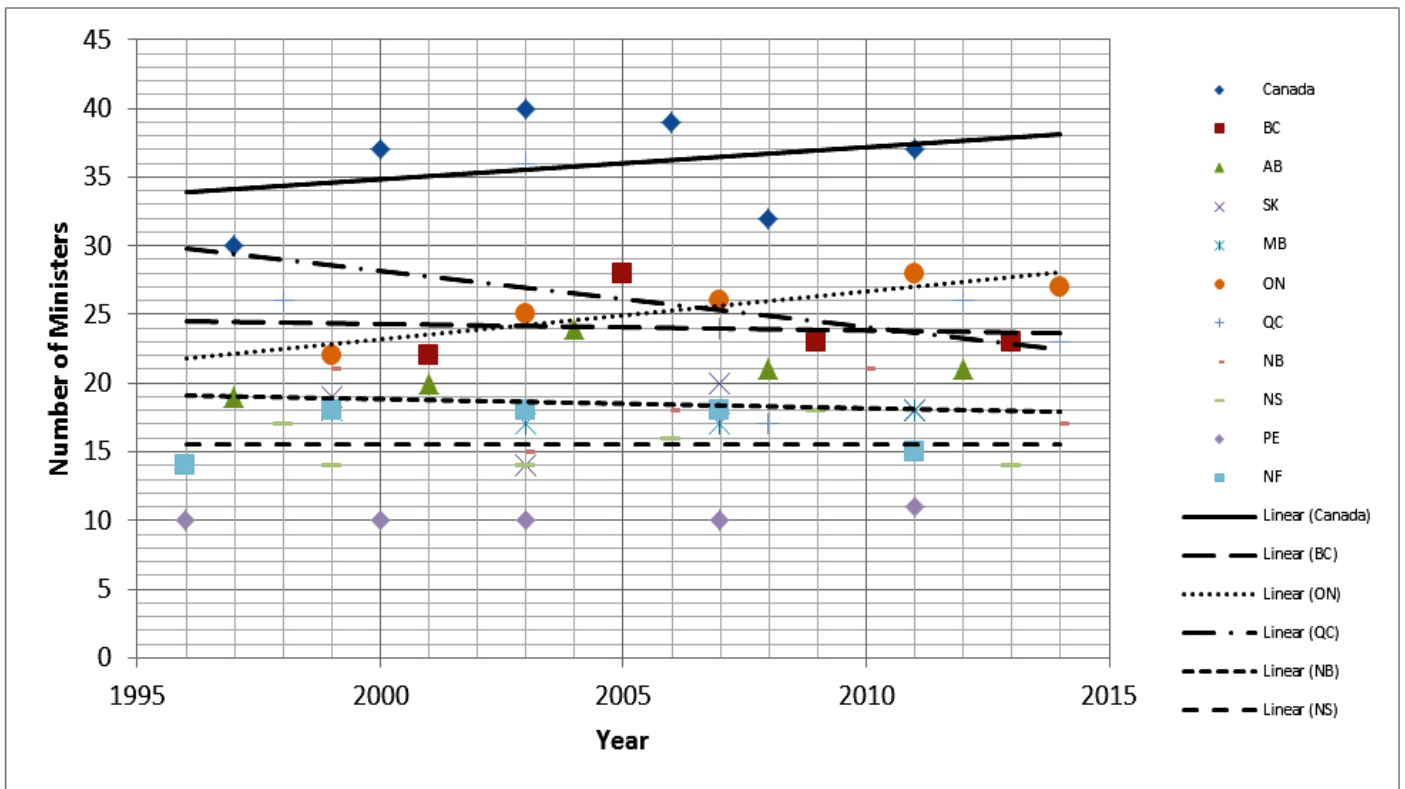


Figure 3: Size of Cabinet at Dissolution (end of government), 1995-2014



Cabinets grew by an average of seven per cent during government compared to decreasing in size by an average of three per cent between governments. When controlling for new governments with new leaders, cabinets decreased even more by an average of 10 per cent. This finding suggests that new political actors are more likely to present ideas of institutional reform. Veteran political actors may have difficulty reducing cabinet size because they have more historical connections to party members that they might reward with cabinet appointments.

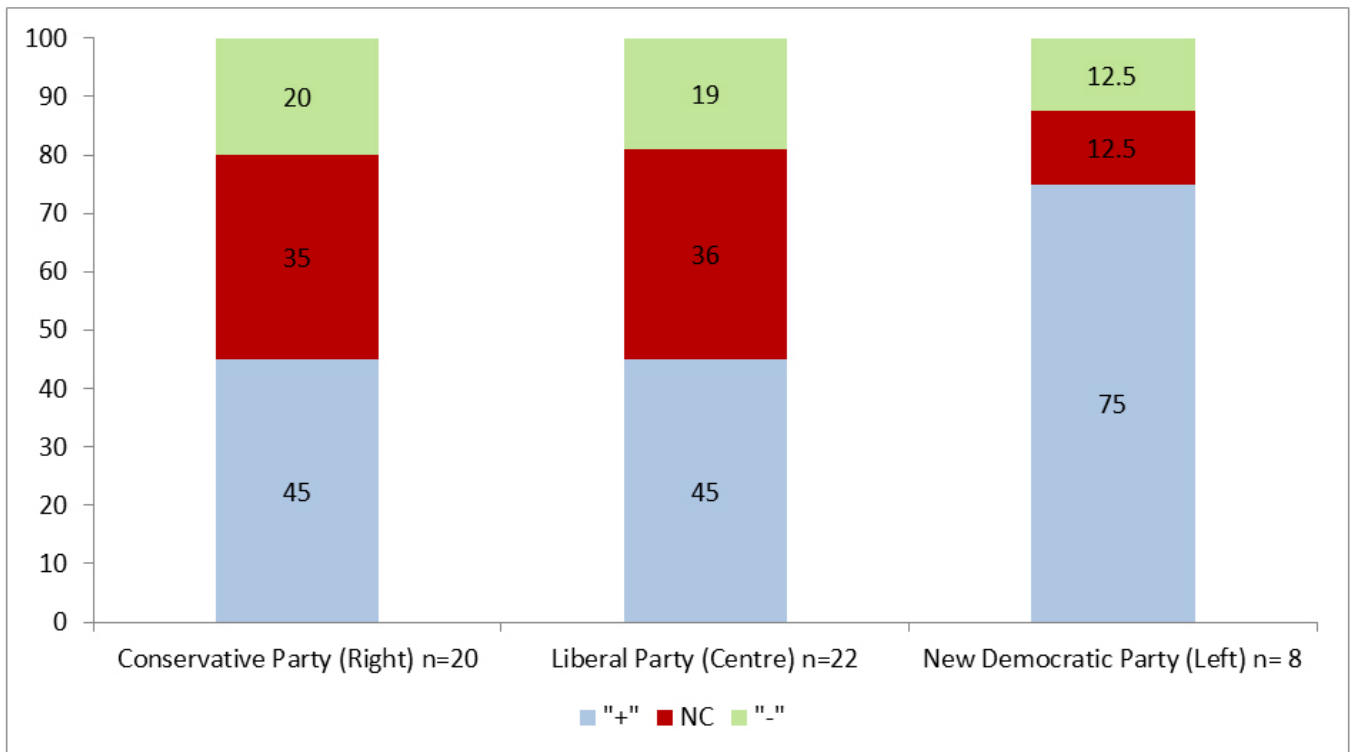
**H3: Cabinet size has expanded under governments formed by left-of-centre parties, remained the same under governments formed by centre parties and decreased under governments formed by right-of-centre parties**

Another variable that may relate to expansion or reduction in cabinet size is the party in power. It can be hypothesized that parties on the right of the political spectrum would seek to reduce the size of government while parties on the left of the political spectrum would seek to expand the size of government. In Canada's multi-party system (at both the provincial and federal level, excluding the province-specific Saskatchewan

Party and Parti Quebecois), since 1993, three different parties have won enough seats to form governments: the Progressive Conservative Party (Conservative at the federal level), the Liberal Party and the New Democratic Party. Most political observers agree that the parties fit on the political spectrum in the following manner: Progressive Conservative (right), Liberal (centre), New Democratic Party (left). *Figure 4* presents the percentage of increase, no change or decrease to cabinet size of parties in power at the federal and provincial levels from 1993 to 2014. The percentage change in size is calculated based on the change of number of ministers from swearing-in to the dissolution of government. Out of 55 governments (three Parti Quebecois and two Saskatchewan Party governments were not included in this table), 20 governments were Conservative or Progressive Conservative, 22 were Liberal and 8 were New Democratic. While the total number of governments in power (n) is especially low for the NDP, the numbers still present some interesting trends of expansion of cabinet during government by party in power.

As *Figure 4* shows, in the case of Progressive Conservative or Conservative-led governments there was an increase in cabinet size in 45 per cent of the

**Figure 4 Change in Cabinet by Party During Government (Federal and Provincial Governments), 1993-2014**





governments, no change in 35 per cent and a decrease in cabinet size in 20 per cent of the governments. Similar to Progressive Conservative or Conservative-led governments, for Liberal-led governments there was an increase in cabinet size in 45 per cent of the governments, no change in 36 per cent and a decrease in cabinet size in 19 per cent of the governments. While the centre and centre-right party-led governments made similar cabinet size changes during the course of a government, the left party led-governments in Canada were almost twice as likely to increase cabinet size. In the case of New Democratic Party-led governments, there was an increase in cabinet size for 75 per cent of the governments, no change in 12.5 per cent and a decrease in cabinet size in 12.5 per cent of the governments.

In conclusion, the main findings of this study are as follows: 1) While federal and provincial cabinets have expanded over time, as a proportion of the legislature, provinces and especially smaller, Atlantic provinces, have the largest cabinets in the proportional sense (e.g. Federal 12.7 per cent compared to PEI 40.7 per cent); 2) Federal and provincial cabinets expanded by an average of 7 percent during government mandates compared to decreasing in size by an average of 3 percent between government mandates. When controlling for new governments with new leaders, cabinet size decreased even more by an average of 10 percent; 3) Cabinets expanded during government mandates more often under centre-left parties (75 per cent of the time) than under centre (45 per cent of the time) or centre-right parties (45 per cent of the time ).

## Discussion

During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Canadian political executive grew and evolved without much attention. It was not until the dramatic changes introduced by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, and embraced by Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, that negative attention began to influence the narrative about cabinet size and the growth of the centre of Canadian government. Trudeau introduced the so-called “institutionalized cabinet”, with a myriad of new cabinet committees, and the “presidentialization” of the prime minister’s office, with an accelerated growth in PMO staff. Following Trudeau, Mulroney, contributed to the growth and evolution of the centre with additions such as American-style chiefs-of-staff to ministers’ offices. Both of these actions resulted in greater public and academic focus on the political executive and contributed to an eventual, inevitable political backlash.

By 1993, a number of factors emerged to challenge the growing centre. First, neo-liberal ideological positions on political institutions held by some parties were critical of growing government, both in its size and expense, pushing back against the growth of government that had been occurring for decades. Second, the argument of “doing politics differently” began to find a place in the political mainstream narrative as citizens and the media continued to be less deferential to political actors and question political institutions like never before. Finally, a new Canadian political force, the upstart, regional and populist Reform Party, emerged as a competitive political party with ideas that would pull the parties of the centre (Progressive Conservative, Liberal) to the right and embrace notions of smaller government. The Progressive Conservative and Liberal parties were quick in attempting to adopt Reform platform planks related to smaller government, balanced budgets and other austerity measures. Since then, there has been heightened scrutiny of the size of federal and provincial cabinets and, as listed earlier in the paper, numerous calls by political actors to consolidate ministries.

The findings support the idea that the actions of governments are often based on their age (newly elected or mid-mandate) and ideological position. However, due to the fact that cabinet construction and composition is the prerogative of the first minister, we know that the debate over cabinet size will not easily subside. First ministers are confronted with many pressures when facing cabinet construction including representation, managerial concerns and government image-making. In discussing cabinet size in Canada we should note that arguments are based on financial or political cost. The main financial argument against large cabinets is the cost of ministers’ salaries, benefits, expenses, and staff. The main political argument against large cabinets is the loss of private member scrutiny in Canadian legislatures due to backbenchers’ promotion to government.

While cabinet may be used as a symbol of the size of government, many forget cabinet is *the force* of government in the legislature. Due to high levels of party discipline in Canada it is easy to forget that all backbenchers, from the government and opposition parties, are there to hold the government (the cabinet) to account. Therefore in the legislature, a large cabinet is not just a symbol, it is a significant number contributing to control and power in the legislature. When cabinet is larger there are more government members and fewer private members to hold the cabinet to account. The political cost is much greater than the regularly overstated financial cost.

Regardless of the significance of the political costs of large cabinets, the financial cost of cabinet is the focus of the political narrative on cabinet size. During the 1993 Progressive Conservative leadership campaign, Kim Campbell's main rival, Jean Charest, pledged to reduce cabinet. Charest argued that his cabinet consolidation would save \$6 billion – a figure that was said to have puzzled government officials.<sup>33</sup> The financial cost of cabinet minister salaries is a common argument for consolidating cabinet. In 2008, it was argued that adding one more minister to cabinet would cost the federal government \$446,400 in additional salaries (out of total federal government expenses of roughly \$240 billion).<sup>34</sup> Even on a smaller scale, it is easy to challenge the cost-saving function of cutting cabinet. For example, in New Brunswick, in 2014, a new minister including additional salary, vehicle allowance and staff costs between \$116,078-\$211,296, which in New Brunswick's 2013-2014 gross expenditures would have amounted to between 0.001 per cent-0.003 per cent of total costs.

A champion of balanced budgets and cutting government waste and a former Reform MP, Prime Minister Harper, in 2011, defended his 39-minister cabinet by arguing, "I think it's important to know when you're talking about austerity, that this government has reduced ministerial budgets significantly. So the question here is not cost. The question is making sure that we have a ministry that is broad, representative of the country and tried to use people's talents to the maximum. I think it would be a mistake to try and have a smaller cabinet that would make less use of people".<sup>35</sup> Harper's argument for a larger cabinet is based in normative terms and this rationale reflects most of the discourse on cabinet size in Canada.

The normative element is significant because even at the point of the heightened focus on cabinet size in 1993, central political actors expressed skepticism about the real benefit of altering its size. In 1993, prior to the cabinet consolidation directed by Kim Campbell, former Finance Minister Donald Mazankowski noted, "You are dealing with something [cabinet size] that's essentially symbolic".<sup>36</sup> All of the attention paid to cabinet size raises the question: Is there a trend of expanding political executives in Canada? The negative reaction of the media, opposition parties and political observers to any increase in cabinet numbers implies that Canada's jurisdictions may be in the midst of a trend toward ever-growing executives. The results of this study suggest that while cabinet numbers may be trending upward slightly, the situation is more nuanced. When considering cabinet size in the future there should be a focus on three important elements:

- 1) The proportion of the cabinet to the legislature; 2) The timing of cabinet size changes; and 3) The party in power during cabinet size changes. By examining these variables, a more empirical and contextually sound discussion can take place, instead of resorting to normative arguments such as "small is better" or "government continues to grow".

## Notes

- 1 Independent Member of Parliament Brent Rathgeber (a former Conservative and author of the book *Irresponsible Government*) introduced a Private Member's Bill to limit the number of ministers and ministers of state to 26 in response to the news. Brent Rathgeber, "Smaller cabinet, better democracy," *National Post*, May 1, 2015.
- 2 Graham White, *Cabinets and First Ministers* UBC Press: Vancouver, 2005. p. 145
- 3 Graham White, "Big is Different From Little: On Taking Size Seriously in the Analysis of Canadian Governmental Institutions," *Canadian Public Administration* 33:4, 1990, p. 53.
- 4 Peter Aucoin, Mark Jarvis and Lori Turnbull, *Democratizing the Constitution: Reforming Responsible Government*. Emond Montgomery Publications: Toronto, 2011. p. 118-119
- 5 Indridi Indridason and Shaun Bowler, "Determinants of Cabinet Size," *European Journal of Political Research* 53, 2014.
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