

L'ouvrage de Borrows parvient à un bel équilibre entre la description et la prescription, dont la clarté et la solidité saura interpeller un lectorat bien plus large que celui des juristes. Ceci est d'autant plus appréciable étant donné la nature intrinsèquement politique de la réflexion de Borrows, qui cherche à créer un dialogue constructif entre les Canadiens autochtones et les Canadiens non-autochtones qui pourraient être amenés à considérer leurs propres lois sous un jour nouveau.

Take a Number: How Citizens' Encounters with Government Shape Political Engagement

Elisabeth Gidengil, *Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020, pp. 248*

Amanda Clarke, Carleton University (amanda.clarke@carleton.ca)

Impatiently refreshing a government web portal to get a COVID-19 test result, sitting in on a child's virtual school day, applying for emergency income support—lately, we have all spent a lot of time with our public service providers. These interactions have highlighted the very direct and high-stakes implications of government for our personal and collective well-being. Theories of policy feedback tell us that these were more than just simple consumer transactions; when we use public services, we undergo a process of “adult political learning” (Soss, 1999) that informs how we view democracy and our place within it.

But how exactly do policy feedback effects operate in Canada? Before the publication of Elisabeth Gidengil's latest book, *Take a Number: How Citizens' Encounters with Government Shape Political Engagement*, we would have had very little evidence on hand to help us understand the relationship between public service experiences and Canadians' political views and activities. The first study of its kind in Canada, the book draws on a two-wave survey probing policy feedback effects across 11 different Ontario social programs.

Gidengil reveals that Canadian feedback effects appear to differ in marked ways from those identified in the much more developed literature on US policy feedback effects. Notably, the US consensus—that the less heavy-handed a program's oversight, the more politically mobilizing it is—simply does not hold true in this study of Ontario programs. Another notable contrast: in US studies, negative service experiences are associated with lower levels of political participation, whereas among her Ontario respondents, Gidengil finds that negative service experiences are associated with higher political and civic engagement. For women in particular, a negative service experience can surpass in magnitude the effects of obtaining a university degree on participation in political and civic activities.

Why does the Canadian experience differ from that in the United States? Gidengil suggests that this might be because our public services have not been as shaped by neoliberal paternalism as US welfare programs have, and the use of public benefits has not been as stigmatized in Canada as it is in the United States. By this logic, when Canadians rely on public benefits, they are less likely than their US counterparts to leave the experience feeling demeaned or judged, and in turn, politically impotent and marginalized. Gidengil also suggests that the existence in Canada of a viable social democratic party (the New Democratic Party) gives those reliant on, or dissatisfied with, social welfare programs an option to voice their concerns and be heard, whereas a similar option is not on offer to US citizens, leading them instead to exit politics.

Gidengil's Canada-US comparison will be of interest to scholars already engaged in research on policy feedback effects, and it hopefully will inspire comparative studies that test Gidengil's hypothesis about the influence of political party dynamics on policy feedback effects.

The book will equally find an audience among Canadian political scientists attempting to understand why some Canadians are active in political life and others remain absent from it. Gidengil begins the book by calling out her peers for ignoring service experiences in their analyses of Canadian political participation, and by its close, she convincingly justifies this provocation with the evidence she presents.

The book also offers a convincing provocation to scholars of Canadian public administration. Behavioural studies are extremely rare in the field. Scholars in this space (this reviewer included) predominantly focus on political institutions and the elites working in them, not the people affected by these institutions. By bringing the perspective of service users to the fore, Gidengil offers a wake-up call to those studying, and those leading, our public service institutions. A quarter of all social security applicants included in the study had negative service experiences. Those most in need of government services proved the least capable of identifying and accessing the services for which they were eligible. And, in line with an established literature on trust and government services (Kampen et al., 2006; Lægread and Christensen, 2005), Gidengil's study finds a strong association between negative service experiences and lower levels of confidence in governing institutions and of satisfaction with democracy.

To be sure, lower trust in government is not necessarily a problem; unwavering, unexamined faith in the quality of government is not something we look for in a healthy democracy. And Gidengil's finding that negative service experiences are tied to active political engagement suggests that a poor service experience may lower trust but also inspire individuals to get involved in an effort to improve their governments. So far, so good.

However, the past 18 months have also underscored how essential confidence in governing institutions can prove to be when it comes to tackling complex policy problems whose resolution hinges on individuals self-regulating in favour of collective outcomes. Wearing masks, practising physical distancing, complying with testing and isolation, getting vaccinated—all are actions requiring some degree of trust in government. In this context, and going forward as we face subsequent existential crises that can only be solved through collective self-sacrifice (hello, climate change), policy makers and those studying them should take note of Gidengil's evidence on the link between poor quality public services and confidence in government.

As the first study in Canada to generate large-scale empirical evidence on the link between public service use and political engagement, *Take a Number* makes an undeniable contribution to scholarly research and to policy. But because it aims to start this conversation, the book's contribution equally emerges from the questions it raises but does not answer.

As Gidengil herself notes, the findings at times beg for more qualitative studies and experimental research designs that might illuminate why use of public services appears to drive certain political outcomes and not others. A larger sample of respondents would help researchers probe how race, immigrant status and the intersections of key demographic variables condition policy feedback effects. Of course, this is not a limitation unique to this survey study.

More specific to the study of policy feedback effects is the fact that the object of inquiry—public service experience—is a moving target these days. Accelerated in part by the population's heavy reliance on digital services over the course of the pandemic, governments across Canada are now investing in some fairly significant reforms to their public service operations. Alongside these public service reforms, the adoption of artificial intelligence, increasingly ambitious models of data collection and use, and the ever-present influence of corporate technology vendors on government make for a public service landscape in flux and at risk of eroding public confidence in the Canadian welfare state. Gidengil and others who are engaged in the study of Canadian policy

feedback effects will not be short of work in the coming years. *Take a Number's* helpful first contributions to this research agenda set the stage for this exciting and essential new area of Canadian political science and public administration scholarship.

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Electing a Mega-Mayor: Toronto 2014

R. Michael McGregor, Aaron A. Moore and Laura B. Stephenson, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021, pp. 208.

James Ankers, University of Toronto (james.ankers@mail.utoronto.ca)

Eleven years ago in this journal, Zack Taylor and Gabriel Eidelman lamented that "scholarship on the institutions, processes, practices and impacts of Canadian urban politics is anaemic" (2010: 961), identifying four major approaches demanding further attention: institutions, regional governance, social-political governance and local-global studies. Today, their thoughtful critique has been rendered largely (and thankfully) outmoded, a development perhaps best represented by two pioneering book series: *Innovation, Creativity, and Governance in Canadian City-Regions*, published by University of Toronto Press; and *Fields of Governance*, published by McGill-Queen's University Press. Even these titles reflect the advances made in our study of city-regions, urban governance and Canadian cities' positions in a global economy. During this maturation, however, it seems that institutional studies—those concerned with municipalities, rather than the urban—have been left comparatively underdeveloped. To be sure, a raft of exploratory articles and books on the subject have pushed the subject along, including Jack Lucas's and R. Michael McGregor's (2021) recent edited collection *Big City Elections in Canada*, but the stuff and substance of municipal politics has proven consistently abstruse due to, among other complicating factors, the (general) absence of political parties (see Breux and Couture, 2018) and a paucity of both electoral and voter-level data (see Couture et al., 2014).

Electing a Mega-Mayor sets itself the task of correcting this lacuna. Somehow, it is the first book-length study of a Canadian municipal election in over 40 years. It is animated by a pressing sense of making up for lost time and thus establishes an impressive range of goals: not only to empirically explain why voters in 2014 embraced John Tory over one-time frontrunners Olivia Chow and the Ford brothers (chapters 2 and 3) but also to elucidate the disparate coalition of "Ford Nation" (chapter 5), to better understand how voters perceive local governments (chapter 4) and to locate the insights that a party-less electoral environment may yield for political behaviour studies. The authors' central resource is their Toronto Election Study (TES), an ambitious rolling panel survey from the 2014 campaign period (complemented by follow-up