

Personalistic politics on Prince Edward Island: Towards a subnational approach to personalism and democracy

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Abstract: This paper engages with the scholarly discourse on the effects of size on democracy by exploring the applicability of small state personalism theory to subnational jurisdictions. Using Prince Edward Island, Canada's smallest province, as a case study, this research attempts to determine whether personalism is strictly a feature of small *states* and whether it might also apply to small *polities* more generally. The study, which relies on secondary literature and some primary sources, shows that personalism works well to describe politics in the province. Implications of these findings are reviewed, including the effect of subnationality on personalism, the potential of personalism theory for other subnational jurisdictions, and a brief exploration of the potential effect of the stage of development and maturity of political institutions. The paper concludes with a brief consideration of possible future research directions.

Keywords: Canada, democracy, governance, personalism, politics, Prince Edward Island, subnational jurisdictions, small polities

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Introduction

The effect of the size or scale of a polity on the nature of its democracy and governance has been a question for scholars since ancient Greece (Dahl & Tufte, 1973). A recent thread within this discourse argues that personalism plays a central role in the politics and governance of small states. Most research on democratic theory, including small-state personalism, focuses at the level of the sovereign nation-state, but governance occurs concurrently at both more local and more international scales. This is particularly relevant given that there are much higher numbers of small polities at subnational and local levels, often within large countries like Canada, that are not included in research on small states. This paper further explores the relationships between size and democracy by assessing the applicability of small state personalism theory to subnational jurisdictions. Using Prince Edward Island (PEI) - a subnational unit of Canada and that country's smallest province - as a case study, this research attempts to determine whether personalism is strictly a feature of small *states* and whether it might also apply to small *polities* more generally. My research helps to improve our understanding of how democracy functions in jurisdictional scales below the nation-state, specifically within subnational polities [i.e. those immediately below the national level such as provinces (Canada), states (United States), prefectures (Japan) or departments (France)]. It should be noted, however, that the scope of this paper does not include subnational regions or local levels of governance such as municipalities, though these may also present a useful avenue of research.

This paper provides an overview of the literatures on democracy in small states and small state personalism theory, followed by a brief discussion of subnational jurisdictions. The paper then examines a case study by applying Corbett & Veenendaal's (2018) model of small state personalism to Prince Edward Island. Relying largely on secondary literature and a few primary sources, this analysis shows that personalism theory works well to describe politics in the province. In the discussion section, I outline some notable aspects of these findings, including the potential effect of subnationality on personalism, the potential of personalism theory for other subnational jurisdictions, and finally a brief exploration of the potential effect of the stage of development and maturity of political institutions. The paper concludes with a brief consideration of possible future research directions.

Background

Democracy in small states and islands

The relationship between polity size and democracy has long been a question of interest for scholars (Dahl & Tufte, 1973; Thorhallsson, 2018; Wettenhall, 2018). However, despite modern calls for smaller political units, epitomised by the “small is beautiful” movement (Schumacher, 1973), small (mostly island) states have routinely been excluded from analyses of democratisation. Veenendaal & Corbett summarise the reasons given for this exclusion as “insignificant population size, they are not “real” states, that others exclude them too, the absence of data, and the perceived need to compare similar systems” (2015, p. 528). They argue that the exemption of 15%-20% of cases (states) is methodologically questionable, especially given current trends of states decreasing in size or devolving power to smaller subnational units (Veenendaal & Corbett, 2015; Corbett & Veenendaal, 2018). Furthermore, for the purposes of studies in democratisation and governance, this exclusion is problematic because these small states are much more likely to be democratic (Diamond & Tsalik, 1999; Srebrnik, 2004), meaning that an important group of cases has been neglected in the literature. Consequently, recent research has shown that mainstream democratisation theory, developed exclusively in reference to large states, does not apply well to small states, and that significant differences between large and small states have been missed. There is thus a need to develop theories to explain democratisation that applies specifically to small states (Corbett & Veenendaal, 2018).

It should also be noted that the question of what qualifies as a ‘small’ state is not straightforward and can have different answers, almost all of which are arbitrary. Dahl & Tufte, in their pioneering book *Size and Democracy* (1973), explored several potential variables for measuring size, including population, area, population density, economic development indicators and geographic characteristics. Since their work, the field has tended to rely on population as the primary variable of size (Srebrnik, 2004; Wettenhall, 2018), although some have used variations on the number of residents, including combining it with land area (cf. Hadenius, 1992). With the current consensus to use population as the measure of size, the question then arises as to what differentiates a small population from a large one. A quick scan of recent scholarship suggests that the figure of one million is most commonly used (Hadenius, 1992; Diamond & Tsalik, 1999; Corbett & Veenendaal, 2018), though a range of other threshold levels has been suggested (Baldacchino, 2018; Wettenhall, 2018).

As first noted by Axel Hadenius (1992), island states are a particularly interesting group of cases in that they are significantly more democratic than other states. He claimed that this relationship is spurious and that it is rather the strong Protestantism of these islands that explain their democratic nature (Hadenius, 1992). This interpretation was challenged by Anckar & Anckar (1995) who showed that the correlation between democracy and islandness is improved when distinguishing islands based on size; differentiating between large and small island states, as opposed to all islands. Thus, both islandness and size appear to be relevant factors associated with the level of democracy in a state.

Critical analysis of these findings, however, has suggested that the relationship between small islands and democracy is more complicated than the above statistical analyses suggests. When investigating the phenomenon further, scholars have noted that many of these small states that are nominally classified as democracies often have political and cultural practices that are quite undemocratic. Small-scale societies often create situations of monopoly elite control, which leads to nepotism and patronage (Srebrnik, 2004; Buker, 2005). Similarly, homogenous and conformist cultures often lead to unitary and authoritarian tendencies, and ostracism of non-conformists (Baldacchino, 1997; 2012b). This seemingly unifying force, while it might create a sense of solidarity, can also obscure ethnic and cultural cleavages, even secessionist movements (Srebrnik, 2004), contributing to an uncritical and “naive mythology ... [of] harmonious polities” (Baldacchino, 2012b, p. 115).

Small state personalism

To explain the disconnect between the two bodies of evidence outlined above, Erk & Veenendaal (2014) point to a reliance on data from Freedom House, the only international measure of democracy that includes small states, which “overemphasises the more formal aspects of democracy while failing to capture the informal but real power relations and pathways of influence that are common in microstates and frequently lead to *de facto* deviations from democracy” (pp. 135-136). Thus, small states generally have formal political structures that are democratic, but informal social processes that are undemocratic. As a result of years of in-depth qualitative research to better understand these informal aspects of political systems in small states, Jack Corbett and Wouter Veenendaal have collated a body of research which suggests that democratisation operates differently in large versus small states (2017; 2018; Corbett, 2015; 2018; *also* Veenendaal, 2013; 2015a; 2015b). Large states (populations greater than one million) are adequately explained by existing democratic theory focusing on the typical variables of economic development, culture, institutions, political parties, and geography. However, democratisation in those states of less than one million people is not adequately explained by mainstream democratic theories, and therefore requires alternative explanations. Corbett and Veenendaal’s (2018) findings lead them to describe a theory of small state hyper-personalism, which they argue provides the best explanation for the patterns of democratisation in small states. Consistent with the above criticisms of the ‘small is democratic’ discourse, they argue that the common characteristic of democracy in small states is the “intensely informal, localised and personality-driven” nature of political practice (Corbett & Veenendaal, 2018, p. 5).

While personalistic politics exist in states of all sizes to some extent, Corbett and Veenendaal (2018) argue that a distinct version of personalism is present in small states. Hence, they define ‘small state personalism’ based on six dimensions:

- Strong connections between individual leaders and constituents
- A limited private sphere
- The limited role of ideology and programmatic policy debate
- Strong political polarisation
- The ubiquity of patronage, and
- The capacity to dominate all aspects of public life.

The authors make their case by conducting a series of regression analyses on the relationships between the level of democracy reported by Freedom House and the variables of economic development, cultural diversity, institutional design, political parties, geographic factors and size, while also distinguishing between large states and small states. Through this analysis, they show that none of these variables explains the differences between large and small states. They then present small state personalism as a feature that is “ubiquitous” in these states and explain the preponderance of both nominally democratic structures and the anti-democratic political tendencies of small states (Corbett & Veenendaal, 2018, p. 10).

As noted above, the focus on the analytical scale of the sovereign nation-state has led to a gap in the research on democracy in small places. While Corbett and Veenendaal have identified personalism as a key defining characteristic of democracy in small states, their work leaves out a multitude of other small polities that operate at subnational scales. This paper contributes to addressing this gap by attempting to apply small state personalism to the subnational level.

Subnational jurisdictions

In recent decades, there has been increasing pressure within many states to devolve authority to subnational or even local levels of government (Diamond & Tsalik, 1999; Baldacchino & Milne, 2000; Marks, Hooghe, & Schakel, 2008a; 2008b). Successful devolution from the national to subnational level may be exemplified in the creation of the Scottish and Welsh parliaments in the United Kingdom; but there are various other examples that could be listed, including some unsuccessful or still contested attempts at devolution such as Catalonia, Bougainville or Kurdistan. Even in places where significant devolution has been achieved, such as Scotland and Canada’s French-speaking province of Québec, pressures for further autonomy in the form of sovereignty often remain (Guibernau, Rocher, & Adam, 2014). With this push for devolution, along with earlier decolonisation movements, there is a growing number of subnational polities that could be characterised as near-sovereign in that they have most of the powers of a fully sovereign state but remain dependent in some regard; and many of these are small polities (Baker, 1992).

Furthermore, self-governing territories, even if they remain dependent to some degree, are much more similar to sovereign states than are local and municipal governments, the latter having a much more limited range of functional responsibilities (Kersell, 1992). Therefore, although I suspect the local government (e.g., municipality, county, region) level could be an interesting and potentially fruitful jurisdictional scale for the study of personalistic politics (e.g., Dahl & Tufte, 1973), for the purposes of this paper I will limit my focus to subnational polities.

Within subnational polities there is a wide range of self-governance capacities. Work by Marks, et al. (2008a, 2008b) in developing a Regional Authority Index provides a mechanism to assess these different levels of autonomy. We might assume that polities scoring higher in the Regional Authority Index would have governance systems more akin to those of sovereign states. As Corbett & Veenendaal's personalism theory was developed through analysis of small states, the move to apply it to subnational polities with relatively high levels of self-governance is the logical first step in testing the application of personalism theory at other scales, and less of a stretch of logic than attempting to apply it to polities with low levels of self-governance or to local levels of government.

Canada is a federal state containing two types of subnational jurisdictions: provinces and territories. The ten Canadian provinces have populations ranging from 153,000 to over 14 million persons (Statistics Canada, 2018b). Despite these vastly different population sizes, they all have "virtually identical" constitutional arrangements based on the Westminster cabinet-parliamentary system with only minor variations in their conventions and practices (Thomas & White, 2015, p. 364; Rowe & Collins, 2015). In spite of this structural sameness, many different political cultures have arisen across the provinces from their unique circumstances and historical experiences (Wiseman, 2015). One of the most striking differences between the provinces is the unique system of *civil law* used in Québec, instead of the *common law* used in other provinces; though this system still functions within the same constitutional division of powers that applies to all provinces (Hurtubise-Loranger, Lithwick, & Nichol, 2011; Valeke, 1996). The three Canadian territories, all with populations under 50,000 (Statistics Canada, 2018b), have some jurisdictional autonomy, but less than the provinces (Hooghe, et al., 2008a). According to the Regional Authority Index, the Canadian provinces are highly autonomous subnational units relative to other countries (Hooghe, et al., 2008b).

Subnational polities, and the various ways in which they exercise their jurisdictional powers, have been the subject of a significant amount of scholarship, especially within the field of island studies. This makes sense, given that many islands are also subnational political units (Baldacchino & Stuart, 2008). Significant scholarship has thus centred on the classification of the 'subnational island jurisdiction' or SNIJ (Baldacchino, 2004). Island scholars have noted that many SNIJs have negotiated higher levels of autonomy than other regions in their respective states, and then used this increased jurisdictional authority to develop innovative political economic strategies that allow them to compete successfully in the modern global capitalist system (Baldacchino & Milne, 2000). An examination of the global list of SNIJs shows that they are predominantly small polities (Stuart, 2008). This suggests that the potential exists for further studies involving and linking SNIJs, small states and small island states. Indeed, many scholars have interchangeably varied their unit of analysis between small states, islands, small island states, and SNIJs (Briguglio, 1995; Briguglio, et al., 2008; Baldacchino, 2004; 2012b; 2018). Small SNIJs are therefore some of the most highly autonomous subnational polities, and, as I suggest, a potentially fruitful group from which to draw for the study of subnational personalism.

Personalism on Prince Edward Island

The remainder of this paper explores the feasibility of linking the discourses on small states and subnational jurisdictions by applying the theory of small state personalism in a case study, namely Prince Edward Island (PEI), an island province of Canada in the North Atlantic. With a population of 153,000 (Statistics Canada, 2018b), PEI is Canada's smallest province and clearly qualifies as a small polity. The province's Legislative Assembly is currently made up of 27 members, representing constituencies with an average of 3,700 voters each (Electoral Boundaries Commission of Prince Edward Island, 2017). Since the emergence of political parties in the province, only two – the Liberal Party and the Progressive Conservative (PC) Party (formerly called the Conservative Party) – have ever governed the province and very few members from other parties have ever been elected (MacKinnon, 1973; Desserd, 2016). The party standing in the Legislature as of the recent election in April 2019, with 12 PCs, 8 Greens, 6 Liberals, and one seat vacant (later won by the PCs in a deferred election), is the first time that a party other than the Liberals or Progressive Conservatives has formed the Official Opposition.

Several observers have noted that PEI's political culture differs markedly from that of other Canadian provinces, primarily because of the effects of its small size (Driscoll, 1988; Smith, 1988; Buker, 2005; MacKinnon, 2011; McKenna, 2014b), suggesting that the pattern of small states diverging from large ones may similarly hold among subnational polities within the Canadian federation, thus making the province a potentially fruitful case for study. The following subsections will examine PEI politics using Corbett & Veenendaal's (2018) core dimensions of personalism as an analytical framework, relying primarily on secondary literature on the politics of PEI. Consequently, the following analysis will focus primarily on political practices, rather than structures.

Dimension 1: Strong connections between individual leaders and constituents

This dimension emphasises direct and personal links between politicians and citizens, as well as the "role multiplicity" (Baldacchino, 1997) of politicians. Relationships between individuals in small-scale societies tend to be "functionally diffuse", in that there are multiple points of contact between people, often in a variety of separate contexts (Benedict, 1967). There are thus myriad opportunities for citizens to directly interact with their political representatives, without the usual mediation of political parties (Corbett & Veenendaal, 2018). Furthermore, smaller-scale politics allows greater access by citizens to senior political leaders, which reduces the asymmetries in knowledge, power and information that can emerge in larger more hierarchical systems (Dahl & Tufte, 1973). These factors may improve the quality of representation: but they may also increase the pervasiveness and influence of political conflicts throughout a society (Corbett & Veenendaal, 2018; Benedict, 1967).

A study on the role of Members of the PEI Legislative Assembly (MLAs) found that politicians face strong expectations to intervene directly in the day-to-day concerns of their constituents, especially with respect to finding employment. They are correspondingly expected to be accessible and to meet directly with constituents on a regular basis. This sometimes goes to comical extremes, such as the story of an MLA having to rescue a stranded cat from the roof of a constituent's house (Lund, 2009). Another key aspect of this research is that it gathered data on other Canadian provinces as well. The comparison between PEI and the rest of Canada showed that constituency duties, such as "meeting with or corresponding

with individual constituents, attending private functions (such as funerals and birthday parties), and helping constituents to access employment” (Lund, 2009, p. 6), occupied a significantly larger proportion of PEI MLAs’ time. With 5,378 residents per riding, PEI has a much smaller ratio of residents to politician compared to other provinces, where the figure ranges from 10,973 to 126,573 residents per riding with an average of 38,178 (Thomas & White, 2015). One might therefore expect that MLAs would spend *less* time dealing with constituency duties, not *more*, since they are responsible for far fewer constituents. The greater time spent dealing with constituents may reflect a more active relationship between politicians and constituents, combined with smaller staff complements and fewer supports for MLAs (Lund, 2009; MacKinnon, 2011; Thomas & White, 2015). These and similar concerns about the roles of MLAs have been raised (Buker, 2005; MacKinnon, 2011; Simpson, 2007); but politicians have so far seemed generally disinclined to move away from the status quo, suggesting that the direct personal links between politicians and constituents are still perceived as highly important. During a 2017 debate on an opposition motion calling for the establishment of an ombudsperson office, government backbench MLA Richard Brown argued in defence of the current system:

It’s important that we get to know the issues firsthand from our constituents. I think that’s one of the reasons Prince Edward Island is one of the greatest provinces here in Canada because [of] our closeness to our constituents ... I really feel that [with] an ombudsperson, then, that job will be taken away from us because the next thing will be: Well, you shouldn’t be helping constituents navigate government. We have an ombudsperson for that (Brown, 2017, pp. 1252-1253).

In a recent interview, Charles MacKay, the former long-time Clerk of the Legislative Assembly of PEI, noted that this type of access to politicians extends to the highest level:

Here, you could see the Premier at a coffee shop; or the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the Third Party. They’re all very accessible and would pretty much without exception take appointments, if that’s desired (MacKay, 2019).

Role multiplicity is also a common and explicit feature of the political culture on PEI. Sitting MLAs who are not members of Cabinet routinely maintain other roles in civil and private life beyond their responsibilities as elected representatives, including secondary employment and business interests (Wright, 2017; Campbell, 2019). Role multiplicity also extends beyond politicians to the broader political elite, in that people connected to political parties often sit on multiple boards and commissions (Simpson, 2007). Drawing on PEI as an example, Baldacchino points out (2012a; 2012b) that the particularistic and complex networks that emerge in small-scale social systems can create conditions that strongly discourage dissent and difference.

Dimension 2: A limited private sphere

In small states, the scope of what is considered public business is expanded, often beyond the formal institutional structures of government, with a correspondent limiting of the private sphere. This leads to weaker and more informal government institutions, blurred lines of accountability, but at the same time greater transparency. There also tends to be increased overlap between public and private activities and relationships, and political allegiances are less anonymous: they are often deduced by family names (Corbett & Veenendaal, 2018).

The fact that, as noted above, many PEI politicians maintain second jobs, businesses, and other private interests while serving as elected representatives (Wright, 2017), is a conspicuous example of the blurring of lines between public and private. Furthermore, as noted by Lund (2009), politicians are expected to deal with issues that often fall well outside the typical public sphere. This expansion of public reach applies not only to individual politicians but also to the provincial government: because of its small size, the executive can maintain a wide scope of concern without resorting to institutional and legal constraints (Buker, 2005). Furthermore, formal structures of accountability through the legislative branch are weak, leaving accountability substantially within the purview of direct politician-citizen relationships (MacKinnon, 2011). Whether transparency is improved on PEI because of these factors is unclear, though stronger systems of transparency and accountability have been noted as possible solutions to concerns about patronage and favouritism (Simpson, 2007).

The boundaries between the public and private sector in PEI are often porous, as illustrated by the practice of appointing a significant number of Deputy Ministers (the permanent heads of government ministries) from the private sector. Whereas the typical practice at the federal level in Canada and in other Westminster governments is to recruit permanent heads of ministries almost exclusively from within the public service (Bourgault & Dion, 1989; Paun & Harris, 2013), the practice in PEI has been, and remains, to appoint a mix of public servants and individuals recruited from outside government (McKenna, 2014a), including during the most recent change in government following the 2019 election (Neatby, 2019).

Dimension 3: The limited role of ideology and programmatic policy debate

Politics in small states tends to focus more on the personalities of leaders than on questions of policy, which leads to a lack of ideological differentiation between political parties. Rather than institutions for aggregating policy preferences, parties instead become vehicles for maintaining networks of patron-client relations (Corbett & Veenendaal, 2018).

The early politics of PEI was often focused on personal rivalries. The rise of the first political parties began as factions supporting and opposing the then colony's governor, Walter Patterson, due in part to the usual accusations of profiteering, but also due to an illicit affair with the wife of the Chief Justice, making it "perhaps the first political movement in North America began in part to revenge an extra-marital relationship" (MacKinnon, 1973, p. 7). Over the years, the two parties (precursors to the modern Liberal and Progressive Conservative parties) did take opposing stances, often along religious lines, on various issues such as the secularisation of schools, prohibition of alcohol, and confederation with Canada. However, the primary motivations of politicians may often (if not predominantly) have been securing the spoils of power (Buker, 2005), as illustrated by the fact that one party's constitution at one point included a 'Patronage Committee' to "keep records of service and contributions of party

supporters and shall make recommendations for patronage benefits” (cited in Simpson, 1988, p. 165). This example also evidences the formal institutionalisation of patron-client networks. Overall, observers note that there is little ideological difference between the two main political parties (MacKinnon, 2011; Smith, 1988). A possible explanation for the lack of ideological variation in PEI political parties may be found in the results of a 2011 study on the underlying values of voters, which found that the provincial electorate has a “uniquely centrist ideological structure”, with supporters of the two main political parties showing no significant ideological difference (McGrane, 2015, p. 194). All other provinces showed a traditional left-centre-right ideological split among voters.

Dimension 4: Strong political polarisation

Rather than mitigating political polarisation, the lack of political platform noted in the previous dimension instead acts to focus it on individual politicians and leaders. Rivalries between individual politicians are common and can lead to breaking of allegiances, fragmentation and unstable governments (Corbett & Veenendaal, 2018). Conversely, this polarisation and fragmentation can sometimes lead to increased political stability as power is more easily concentrated with individual politicians or elites (Veenendaal, 2018; see also *Dimension 6*, below).

Politics on PEI is commonly described as highly partisan, and in the past this did indeed lead to unstable governments (MacKinnon, 1973; MacDonald, 2000; Simpson, 2007). In recent decades, governments have been rather stable, with parties generally being in power for three to four consecutive terms at a time. However, PEI’s near-perfect two-party system is evidence that the system remains polarised; two parties, the Liberal Party and the Progressive Conservative Party, have amassed the overwhelming majority of votes in every election, except 2019. The single-member plurality electoral system (generally called “first-past-the-post”) amplifies this polarisation of votes so that small shifts in votes lead to big shifts in seats, allowing a substantial concentration of power in the winning party. Because of PEI’s small population and small electoral districts, these shifts in votes can be razor-thin; it is often pointed out that a shift of 100 votes spread across the 27 electoral districts is enough to award a majority to the opposite party (MacKinnon, 2011). This pattern is often locally referred to as PEI’s “ping-pong politics” (MacLean, 2019).

As noted above, the most recent election in 2019 saw a potential breakdown of the traditional Liberal-PC polarisation. This election returned PEI’s first minority parliament, with the Green Party, which had won its first-ever seat in PEI in the previous 2015 election, catapulted to Official Opposition status, relegating the Liberals to Third Party. While this could indicate a reduction in the polarisation of voters and the development of a three-party system (the longevity of the Greens may be the test), it should not be interpreted as an embrace of ideology nor a reduction in personalism. As University of Prince Edward Island political science professor Don Desserud points out, the charismatic personality of the Green Party’s leader, Peter Bevan-Baker, “played an extremely important role” in this result (2019). If anything, it reinforces the personal nature of politics in PEI.

Dimension 5: The ubiquity of clientelism and patronage

Due in part to many of the dimensions listed above, patronage, clientelism, and nepotism are typically ubiquitous in small states. This is seen in the promises and provision of largesse (now, often in the form of employment or other favourable treatment) by politicians to constituents, and subsequently in expectations from constituents that politicians provide this largesse. Patronage networks tend to be simple and direct, relying on face-to-face relationships. Small states tend to have large public sectors which are often rife with patronage. Patronage and clientelism are also thought to increase voter turnout (Corbett & Veenendaal, 2018).

Patronage has a long and important history in PEI politics. MacDonald (2000, p. 21) describes PEI politics in the early twentieth century as a “blood sport. Power was the goal, patronage its local expression”. As shown above with one party having a committee specifically devoted to maintaining patronage networks, this was quite openly practised. Prior to a period of reform from the 1970s to 1990s, it was not just common but expected that political parties would buy votes by providing 'treats' in the form of a pint of rum, cash (\$5 was typical in the early twentieth century), road paving, or promises of jobs or favours (MacKinnon, 1973; Simpson, 1988). With respect to jobs, the typical pattern was that each time power changed from one party to another the incoming administration would proceed with mass layoffs of all the previous government's patronage appointments and replace them with their own appointments (MacKinnon, 1973; Simpson, 1988). This remained the case for most of the twentieth century, though the increased professionalisation of the public service in later years, combined with a recent legal challenge of the mass layoff by an incoming administration, have reduced the extent of patronage (Buker, 2005; *Govt. PEI v. Condon et al.*, 2006; MacKinnon, 2011; Simpson, 2007). McKenna (2014a) notes, for example, that there is no longer a wholesale replacement of Deputy Ministers during government transitions, though, citing Crossley (2000), he describes the current appointment practice as following “the principle of merit-plus-a-little-bit-of-patronage” (cited in McKenna, 2014a, p. 79). As noted above, this particular practice remains in place (Neatby, 2019). Nonetheless, concerns about the persistence of patronage continue to be raised in the Legislature, as illustrated by recent debates:

Since being elected, I have been approached by multiple individuals as well, as [sic] a wide range of organisations and businesses that are under the impression that I, as the MLA for the district, am the gatekeeper for gaining access to jobs through the [Employment Development Agency] ... Clearly there are ethical concerns involved when individuals are under the impression that an MLA gave them a job, such that they may feel obligated to vote a certain way to gain or maintain employment (Altass, 2019, pp. 375-376).

Finally, PEI has long had the highest voter turnout in Canada, though as suggested by Corbett & Veenendaal, this may be due in part to attempts by voters to secure their source of patronage (2018; Simpson, 2007).

Dimension 6: The capacity to dominate all aspects of public life

This dimension is in a sense a culmination of the previous ones. Strong patronage networks can make it difficult to remove a politician or leader from power. Power tends to be concentrated due to the combination of an expanded public sphere and a lack of professional capacities. Weak institutional checks on executive power and a concentration of professional capacity in the bureaucracy (under executive control) allows the executive to dominate other parts of government and society. This is also connected to weak or partisan-controlled media (Corbett & Veenendaal, 2018).

The weak institutional checks on executive power are exemplified by the role of the Legislative Assembly of PEI, which has been described as “little more than a rubber stamp” for the executive branch (MacKinnon, 2011, p. 16). Centralisation of power within the executive has been noted in the wider Canadian context (Savoie, 1999); but Buker (2005) argues that in the PEI context this may be driven more by the fact that most policy solutions require negotiation with the federal government, which creates a sense of solidarity within government as a whole. Executive domination is therefore not always coercive.

National media outlets typically pay little to no attention to Prince Edward Island politics, to the point that the only one with any presence whatsoever in the province is the public broadcaster, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). At a provincial level, currently only three reporters regularly cover provincial politics, one for each of the CBC, Radio Canada (the francophone wing of the CBC), and Saltwire Network (which includes two local daily newspapers, the Guardian and the Journal Pioneer). Another publisher, the rural-focused Island Press (which includes two local weekly newspapers, the Eastern Graphic and the West Prince Graphic, as well as a couple of less frequent publications), does not have a regular political reporter but does feature regular opinion columns that frequently discuss provincial politics. The Saltwire and Island Press publications also feature active letter-to-the-editor sections in which political debates are common, and in which political leaders often participate. While in the past newspapers in PEI were explicitly partisan, often owned and actively managed by elected politicians, this has not been the case for some time (MacKinnon, 1973). Social media is also increasingly important in political communications in Canada (Marland, Giasson, & Small, 2014), which provides a new space in which this local tradition of active participation in political debate can flourish. In these circumstances, one could argue that the function of the formal news media to report on government and hold it accountable to the public are somewhat weak. However, this may be balanced to some degree by the active participation of the public in political debates.

The concentration of professional capacity in the public sector is suggested by PEI's higher proportion of workers employed in the public sector than the national average (Statistics Canada, 2018a) Along with the weak checks on power described above, this has allowed the development of a politics where a single monopoly elite can dominate policy decisions while simultaneously maintaining a “disarming influence” in respect to ordinary Islanders (Simpson, 2007; Buker, 2005). This is further exemplified by the tendency of the provincial executive to implement policy decisions with minimal public input or accountability, even where public resistance may be encountered, leading to an “overwhelming dominance of the provincial state in PEI affairs” (McKenna, 2014b, p. 67).

Discussion

In the section above, I have shown that all six dimensions of personalism attributable to small sovereign states are readily observed in the small province of Prince Edward Island, a subnational (non-sovereign) jurisdiction. In the rest of the paper, I discuss the implications of these findings in greater detail, starting with the potential effect of subnationality on personalism, then examining the potential of personalism theory for other subnational jurisdictions, and finally a brief exploration of the potential effect of the level of development and maturity of political institutions.

An obvious question that arises from this research is whether personalism in PEI politics may be modified by its status as a subnational polity. Generally speaking, governance in PEI is significantly affected by the policies of other governments within Canada, both national and of other provinces and territories. Politicians and civil servants participate in various networks with their counterparts, both in other provinces and at the federal level. Accordingly, the diffusion theory of Canadian federalism describes “the tendency for governments in Canada to emulate each other ... whereby an institution, practice or policy that is pioneered and proven effective in one jurisdiction is frequently copied by other jurisdictions” (Hyson, 2005, p. 76). It could reasonably be argued that, due to lower human resource capacities, small jurisdictions might tend to follow the lead of larger ones, or at least to specialise in a limited number of policy areas. Additionally, politicians from all parties in PEI regularly switch between running provincially and federally (normally for the same party), creating additional provincial-national linkages at the party level. More directly, the federal government provides large amounts of fiscal aid to the provinces and territories in order to allow a similar level of service provision across the country, despite varying fiscal capacities (Government of Canada, 2019). PEI and other small provinces have generally been large recipients of this aid on a per-capita level which has led to a dependence on the federal government, though there is substantial debate about the nature of this dependency and what to do about it (Savoie, 2017). In any case, the simple fact that the PEI provincial government derives nearly 40 percent of its revenues from these federal transfers (Prince Edward Island, 2019) creates a strong vulnerability to federal policy shifts, as happened in the 1990s when the federal government cut transfer payments as part of its effort to balance the budget. The provincial response to this drop in federal revenues was to cut the wages of provincial civil servants, a move that likely precipitated a change in government (MacDonald, 2000; Cusack, 2013). Another striking example of the influence of national politics on PEI is the pattern documented by Stewart where provincial voters “elect provincial administrations of the same party stripe as the federal government” (1986, p. 127). While since the time of Stewart’s writing this pattern has broken down, it is nonetheless a clear indication that federal politics matter in PEI. The existence of this pattern may have been influenced by the province’s fiscal and policy dependence on Ottawa, and the perception that having a friendly government nationally would ensure the maintenance of transfer payments (Simpson, 1988).

However, despite the large role that federal and even other provincial politics can play in PEI, this research was unable to find any direct indication that the personalistic character of PEI politics is significantly affected by this. As the analysis in the previous section showed, each of the dimensions of personalism are still observed in PEI. Admittedly, these practices are changing, in part due to external influences. For example, the instance cited above with regard to the creation of a provincial ombudsperson, an issue that has been raised multiple times in the last 25 years, shows that policies learned from the broader Canadian political system can

generate debate on the very nature of the relationship between politician and constituent. Such examples point to a potential path for external influences to enter PEI's system (often framed as "best practices" that ought to be followed). The creation of a provincial ombudsperson, for instance, would likely have a significant impact on personalistic political practices, in particular the ubiquity of patronage and the strong connection between politicians and constituents. Ultimately, this paper points to subnationality, and the place-specific variations that it may bring (in particular when dealing with highly autonomous SNIJs that may have unique constitutional arrangements), as a potential factor that personalism theory may need to grapple with if it is to be applied to subnational polities. If the personalistic character of politics in small non-sovereign polities is indeed unaffected by subnationality, then a shift in focus beyond small states toward small polities within personalism theory may be in order. Indeed, closing this gap between small states and small polities (territories) is part of the mandate of *Small States and Territories* (Baldacchino, 2018).

Randma-Liiv & Sarapuu (2019) point out that much of the literature on small polities is based on developing states, so that it is not always clear whether the particularities of their political systems are a consequence of their small size or their stage of democratic development. With its legislative assembly dating to 1773, and as part of one of the most highly developed countries in the world, PEI qualifies as a well-established and developed polity. However, the high level of personalism seen in PEI politics demonstrates that it is also highly affected by its small size. Furthermore, some aspects of personalistic politics appear to be more pronounced in PEI's past. In particular, declining patronage and the gradual and ongoing professionalisation and formalisation of the provincial civil service suggest that PEI may be becoming less personalistic.

Conversely, other factors may be contributing to an increase in personalism. Social media, in particular, provide a new medium for highly personalised connections and communications between politicians and constituents (Corbett & Veenendaal, 2018). They also offer new and effective forums for sharing political rumours and gossip, which play an important role in the everyday politics of small societies (Besnier, 2009). Furthermore, in larger jurisdictions, many politicians can delegate the management of their social media accounts to a staff person. However, the much more limited support staff available to politicians in small jurisdictions like PEI (MacKinnon, 2011) means that politicians in small polities are more likely to manage their social media accounts personally. These interactions can thus easily bypass formal institutional pathways, such as political parties or support staff, creating more direct and informal linkages between politicians and constituents. Given these points, it would seem that, rather than becoming less personalistic, PEI may be entering a new phase of personalistic politics.

Accordingly, PEI's more mature and developed political institutions may provide the basis for a variant of personalism; in other words, that personalism works slightly differently in developed and/or established democratic polities. Additional research to better describe PEI's political institutions and to examine personalism in other established and developed small polities would be needed to test these hypotheses. My initial research here shows that personalism, and (by association) smallness, are indeed important factors in explaining governance in at least one developed small polity.

Conclusion

This paper seeks to contribute to the development of personalism theory and the study of small states and polities. It has attempted to expand the scope of personalism theory beyond small states by analysing a case study of a small subnational jurisdiction, namely Prince Edward Island, a province of Canada. By evaluating PEI politics against each of the six dimensions of personalism, I conclude that PEI politics are indeed highly personalistic. The discussion then examined some of the broader implications of these findings. With respect to the effect of subnationality on personalism, this study does not find any convincing evidence to suggest that subnationality affects the personalistic character of politics in small subnational polities any differently than it does in small sovereign states. I suggest that there is indeed scope for the application of personalism theory to other subnational jurisdictions, which moreover points to the potential to expand small state studies to include small polities. The potential effect of development is briefly explored but found to be a less important factor than smallness in explaining governance in small polities.

These findings, of course, are based on a case study of one: they are admittedly indicative and preliminary, while pointing to future research directions that may contribute to the development of small state (or small polity) studies. Additional case studies of politics and personalism in small subnational polities could help to reinforce, refine or refute the conclusions made in this paper. Additionally, comparative studies might be conducted to determine whether the level of autonomy, development, or other aspects of governance have any effect on personalism in small polities.

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