

Formal and Informal Volunteering and Giving: Regional and Community Patterns in Canada

A Research Report

by

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1. The Issue

Clear and consistent regional differences in the volunteering and charitable giving behaviour of Canadians have been documented repeatedly, over time and in diverse surveys.¹ The most recent figures, from the 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, reveal the highest levels of giving in the Prairies (an 85% charitable donor rate, averaging \$354 annually). The Prairies also show the highest rate of volunteering (39%) with B.C., having the highest median hours volunteered (92 hours). The lowest rates of giving were found in Quebec and B.C., (74%), with the lowest average annual donation in Quebec (\$117). Quebec also had the lowest rate of volunteering (19%), and along with the Prairies, the lowest median hours volunteered (69 and 68 hours, respectively). While public commentators have been noting these differences for years, particularly the low levels of contributory behaviour in Quebec, no explanations have been advanced to account for them. In this paper we suggest that any analysis of variations across Canada in the patterns of contributory behaviour is incomplete if it focuses solely on the formal modes of contributing because when informal modes of contributing — those ways of giving and helping that are not mediated by formal organizations — are also considered, the pattern of regional variations changes significantly. We suggest that in no small measure, this is due to the existence of different styles of contributory behaviour that are characteristic of several regions of the country and certain types of communities.

Our analysis is based on data from three national sample surveys of the Canadian adult population; the 1987 Volunteer Activity Survey and the 1997 and 2000 National Surveys of Giving, Volunteering and Participating. (All three were conducted by Statistics Canada.) Formal volunteering or helping is defined as any contribution of unpaid time to the activities of formal organizations. Informal volunteering or informal helping is any assistance given directly to non-household individuals, that is, not through a formal organization. Formal giving is any money

¹For documentation and analyses of these patterns, see Caldwell and Reed (1999), Reed (1999), Reed and Selbee (2000), and Statistics Canada (1998).

donation made directly to a formal charitable organization, while informal giving includes donating to charity cash boxes, making a bequest, making donations of food or clothing, or giving money to the homeless, or to non-household relatives. When the formal and informal modes of helping or giving are treated in combination, we speak of total helping or total giving.

2. Formal and Informal Volunteering

We begin by considering rates of volunteering and direct, informal helping in 1987, 1997, and 2000 (Table 1). The pattern of rates of formal volunteering across regions was remarkably stable between 1987 and 2000. Despite the fact that these rates rose between 3 and 6 percentage points in the ten years between 1987 and 1997, and then declined by the same amount in the three years from 1997 to 2000, the relative rank ordering of the regions remains unchanged. In all three years, the rates are highest in the Prairie provinces and lowest in Quebec, with the difference between the two remaining stable at about 20 percentage points in each year. The pattern of informal helping over the same period is quite different. In 1987, the rates were again highest in the Prairies, followed closely by the Atlantic provinces. The lowest rates were found in British Columbia, along with Quebec and Ontario. In 1997, the highest rates were in the Prairies and B.C., while the lowest were again in Quebec. By 2000, the highest rate was in the Prairies and the lowest rate was in Ontario, which was followed closely by Quebec and B.C. In each year, the range between the high and low rates is about 10 percentage points, roughly half the variation seen in the formal rates. So while there is less variation across regions in the rates of informal relative to formal helping, there is less stability in the rank order of the regions over time. There is a degree of volatility across regions in the levels of informal giving that does not occur in the rates of formal volunteering.

When formal volunteering and informal helping are combined as all helping, the regional variation in levels of helping is much reduced. In all three years, the Prairies had the highest levels of combined helping, while Quebec and B.C. were lowest in 1987, and Quebec again in 1997. By 2000, Ontario had the lowest overall level of helping. This change at the bottom of the distribution was the result of the sustained growth of informal helping in Quebec between 1987 and 2000 and

a flattening of the trend in Ontario post-1997. As a consequence, by 2000 the level of informal helping in Quebec actually surpassed that of Ontario and was only 8 percentage points below that of the Prairies. Moreover, by subtracting the proportion who are formal volunteers from the rate for all helping we can identify the proportion of individuals in a region who are involved in informal helping only. These data are presented in the final panel on the right-hand side of Table 1 as Informal Only helping. In direct contrast to the rates for formal volunteering, the highest rates of informal-only helping occur in Quebec and the lowest rates in the Prairies. The differences between the two regions are 9, 10 and 12 percentage points for 1987, 1997, and 2000 respectively. This suggests that where people in the Prairies have a relatively stronger propensity to manifest their helping and caring via formal organizations, people in Quebec have a stronger propensity to manifest their caring through informal means. Quebecers are distinctly more likely to bypass formal organizations in favour of direct personal helping. These differences may reflect different styles of contributory behaviour in different regions of Canada.

Other research has shown that the disaffinity of Quebecers for formal organizations is not restricted to contributory behaviour. A similar pattern exists across the regions when participation in community organizations is considered; the level of participation in such organizations is much higher in the Prairies than it is in Quebec (Caldwell and Reed, 1999). One perspective, suggested by Goyder and McCutcheon (1995), suggests the aversion to formal organizations in Quebec may be symptomatic of the weaker development of civic culture among Francophones. Alternatively, aversion to organizations may be an adjunct of Quebecois culture. (See Herbert Gans' Urban Villages (1962) for an illustration of aversion to organizations in the Italian-American community of Boston.) Simply put, one consequence of the traditional dominance of the Catholic Church and the English economic elite in Quebec society is that Quebecers place less trust in formal organizations than is the case elsewhere in Canada. As a result Quebecers place more emphasis on informal as opposed to formal means of helping than other Canadians do. If different styles of helping are typical of different regions, then it is only appropriate to analyze contributory behaviour in all its forms when examining such patterns in Canada.

Table 2 presents the rates of formal volunteering and informal helping broken down by community size. For 1987 and 1997 it was possible to divide communities into three groups; large urban centres with a population of 100,000 or more, small urban centres with populations between 15,000 and 99,999, and rural areas (including small towns) with populations less than 15,000. In 2000, however, the data could only be divided into two groups; large urban areas of 100,000 or more as represented by Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) and all other areas (non-CMAs). For all three years the data are presented for the CMA and non-CMA distinction, with the non-CMA subdivided into small urban and rural areas for 1987 and 1997.

Table 2 shows that the level of formal and informal helping is inversely related to community size. As community size increases, the level of helping decreases. However, the differences are not large: in both 1987 and 1997, the rate of formal volunteering was about 8 percentage points higher in rural areas than in large urban centres, and informal helping was about 7 percentage points higher. When both types of helping are combined, the pattern remains. Of interest is the fact that in 1987 and 1997, the difference between the large urban and all other areas (the CMA versus non-CMA distinction) for formal, informal and all helping were about the same, but by 2000 this difference had declined to the point that the rate of helping was virtually identical in CMAs and non-CMAs. The relationship between community size and helping that was prevalent in the past may be disappearing. Nor is there evidence of different styles of helping in CMA and non-CMAs; while formal volunteering is higher in non-CMAs, there is no offsetting tendency for CMAs to engage in proportionately more informal-only forms of helping.

Table 3 presents rates for regions and community size categories together. Again, the non-CMAs are divided into small urban and rural area for 1987 and 1997. The figures in this table are complex but some broad patterns are evident. First, whether looking at formal volunteering, informal helping or the two combined, in 1987 and 1997 the inverse relationship between community size and helping was strongest in Ontario and B.C., weaker in Quebec and the Prairies, and non-existent in the Atlantic provinces. By 2000, the evidence for the inverse relation between community size and contributory behaviour was far weaker. For formal volunteering, Ontario,

Quebec and B.C. still showed a slight tendency for rates to be higher in the non-CMAs, but in the Atlantic and Prairie provinces, there was no longer a difference between urban and rural contexts. For informal helping, the reversal of trend is even more dramatic. By 2000, only in Ontario were the rates slightly higher in non-CMAs as compared to the CMAs. Everywhere else in the country, there were no differences by community size. When the two trends for formal and informal helping are viewed in combination, the result is weak evidence for a possible reversal of the relationship between community size and helping behaviours. Only in Ontario does helping still decline as community size increases. In all other regions there is a tendency for helping to be slightly higher in the CMAs than it is in the non-CMAs. This change in the relationship between community size and helping behaviour is almost entirely due to a larger growth in the rates of informal helping in the large urban CMAs as compared to the non-CMAs between 1987 and 2000.

In addition to the incidence, or rates of formal and informal helping, the magnitude of involvement is of interest because it can vary independently of incidence. While rates of participation may vary by region or community size, these often do not reflect the amount of effort that formal and informal volunteers expend in helping others, whether this is measured in hours volunteered or number of informal helping events. Unfortunately, data from the three surveys do not contain a measure of the magnitude of informal helping, only a count of the different kinds of informal helping that respondents reported, making it impossible to examine the formal-informal connection using magnitude of volunteering activity.

3. Charitable Giving

Our discussion of formal and informal charitable giving focuses only on the data for 1997 and 2000 since information about giving was not collected in the 1987 Volunteer Activity Survey. Table 4 presents the rates of giving disaggregated by region. With the exception of the Atlantic provinces in 1997, Table 4 shows that regional incidence levels of informal giving are consistently slightly above those for formal giving. When formal and informal giving are combined, approximately 90% of Canadians in all regions are involved in charitable giving. Comparing the

rates of formal giving and informal only giving reveals slightly different styles in giving in several regions. The high rates of formal giving in the Atlantic provinces are matched by slightly lower rates of informal only giving compared to elsewhere in Canada. There is no tendency for people in the Atlantic provinces to contribute in one way as opposed to the other. In contrast, the low rates of giving in Quebec and B.C. relative to the rest of Canada are partially offset by their slightly higher levels of informal only giving. As a consequence, when all forms of giving are considered, there is almost no regional variation in either 1997 or 2000. Thus where individuals in the Atlantic provinces show almost no preference for either formal or informal modes of giving, individuals in Quebec and B.C. show a slightly greater preference for informal means of giving relative to other regions of Canada.

A similar pattern holds for giving by community size. When both forms of giving are considered, the lower rate of formal giving in the CMAs is offset by higher levels of informal giving, leaving no variation by community size. The level of informal only giving in CMAs shows that there is a very slight preference for the informal mode of giving in large urban centres. This pattern repeats when giving is broken down by both community size and region (Table 6). With the exception of Quebec, where overall giving may actually be higher in large urban areas, combining formal and informal giving eliminates differences between communities of different size.

4. In Conclusion

(i) The Appropriate Measure of Caring and Contributing

Our findings concerning variation across regional and community contexts in the mix of formal and informal modes of volunteering and giving parallel, but on a far larger scale of empirical substantiation, the conclusion of Schervish and Havens that "formal philanthropic giving and volunteering [were] but one species of activity within the more catholic genre of willing acts of assistance" (2000: 2). In a group of 44 individuals in Boston repeatedly-interviewed over the course of a year, they observed that giving and volunteering done in ways other than via

organizations constituted a large and diverse part of the totality of acts of giving and helping. The significantly different picture that emerges as a result of aggregating formal and informal modes in Canada compels the conclusion that contributory behaviours can be adequately characterized only by presenting measures of both formal and informal volunteering and giving; neither is sufficient by itself.

(ii) Styles of Caring and Contributing

While regional and community differences in the incidence of volunteering and giving are considerably reduced when the sum of formal and informal modes is used, differences in the mix, or composition, of total caring and contributing remain. Our analysis has shown that for both volunteering and charitable giving, people in the Prairie region exhibit a relative preference for the formal mode while in Quebec there was a relative preference for the informal mode. In B.C. the latter was true for giving but not volunteering, and individuals in the Atlantic provinces show almost no preference for either mode of giving. When we examine the effects of community size, we find that there might be a slight preference for informal giving but not informal volunteering in large urban centres.

The existence of patterned differences in both incidence and composition of contributory behaviours points to the existence of ? style? in the form of identifiable and enduring combinations of elements, some more clearly evident and distinctive than others, that are regionally distinctive.

There is more evidence of regional styles of contributory and civic behaviour than what we have presented in this analysis. Our study of the civic core in Canada (Reed and Selbee, 2000) in terms of the co-distribution of giving, volunteering and civic participation, revealed Saskatchewan to have the largest civic core and a relatively particular pronounced preference for civic participation, compared with Ontario and Quebec; Quebec had the smallest civic core and a relative emphasis on charitable giving (and lowest preference for civic participation). The Caldwell and Reed (1999) study of civic participation in Canada likewise found Saskatchewan, Ontario, and

Quebec to have distinctive patterns of civic activity. Quebec, with lowest overall civic participation, was truly distinctive in having the lowest levels of participation in religious organizations and highest in fraternal organizations. Saskatchewan's much higher rates were more broadly distributed across all types of civic organization. (The Saskatchewan rate of religious group participation was four times that in Quebec.) Our analysis of the geographic distribution of volunteering and giving in Canada (Reed and Selbee, 2000) also showed clear patterns of regional disproportionality that were consistent with all the above evidence of regionally distinctive styles of giving. And last, an examination of trends in gift- and donation-giving in Canada over the past three decades (Reed, 2000) likewise revealed regional patterns or styles.

The existence of these regional styles in Canada is not unusual or surprising ? there is, after all, systematic regional patterning of numerous other social phenomena such as unemployment, marriage and divorce, and crime, as well. Uncovering regional styles of contributory behaviour, however, immediately prompts the questions of why and how. What is it in certain regions that gives rise to their particular style? What is the role of regional values and subculture? of the region? s demographic features? of social and economic conditions? Answers to these questions require more detailed understanding of the dynamics of contributory behaviour and the contextual features that energize or suppress the operation of those dynamics.

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Table 1. Rates of Formal, Informal and All Helping by Region

	Formal Helping			Informal Helping			All Helping			Informal Only		
	1987	1997	2000	1987	1997	2000	1987	1997	2000	1987	1997	2000
Maritimes	29.7	35.7	31.8	69.0	76.0	80.1	72.2	79.1	82.2	42.5	43.4	50.4
Quebec	19.2	22.1	19.1	61.7	67.2	76.2	65.1	71.3	78.4	45.9	49.2	59.3
Ontario	25.5	32.0	25.5	62.2	73.2	73.5	66.9	77.0	76.1	41.4	45.0	50.6
Prairies	38.5	41.6	39.2	71.2	77.4	84.1	75.3	81.0	86.4	36.8	39.4	47.2
BC	29.0	32.2	26.0	60.2	77.1	76.9	65.0	79.4	80.4	36.0	47.2	54.4
Canada	26.8	31.4	26.7	63.9	73.1	76.9	68.1	76.7	79.4	41.3	45.3	52.7

Table 2. Rates of Formal, Informal and All Helping by Community Size.

	Formal Helping			Informal Helping			All Helping			Informal Only		
	1987	1997	2000 ^a	1987	1997	2000 ^a	1987	1997	2000 ^a	1987	1997	2000 ^a
CMA												
Large Urban	24.0	28.9	25.4	61.4	70.9	76.0	65.7	74.7	78.8	41.7	45.8	53.4
Non-CMA												
Small Urban	29.5	34.2	-	66.7	75.1	-	70.8	78.6	-			
Rural	32.2	36.8	-	68.3	78.2	-	72.0	81.3	-			
Total Non-CMA	30.6	36.0	30.1	67.4	77.3	78.9	71.3	80.5	81.1	40.7	44.5	51.0
Canada	26.8	31.4	26.7	63.9	73.1	76.9	68.1	76.7	79.4			

a. The data for Small Urban and Rural categories are unavailable for 2000.

Table 3. Formal, Informal and All Helping by Region and Community Size

		Formal			Informal			All Helping			Informal Only		
		1987	1997	2000	1987	1997	2000	1987	1997	2000	1987	1997	2000
Maritimes	CMA: Large Urban	31.6	35.8	32.2	78.7	77.2	80.6	80.4	79.7	83.1	48.8	44.0	50.9
	Non-CMA	29.5	35.5	31.5	67.9	75.2	79.7	71.3	78.6	81.3	41.8	43.1	49.8
	Small Urban	28.5	36.7	n.a.	65.0	67.1	n.a.	68.7	73.4	n.a.			
	Rural	30.7	35.2	n.a.	71.7	76.9	n.a.	74.5	79.7	n.a.			
	Total	29.7	35.6	31.8	69.0	75.9	80.1	72.2	79.0	82.2			
Quebec	CMA: Large Urban	17.3	20.8	17.6	60.0	66.8	76.2	63.5	70.7	78.6	46.2	49.9	61.0
	Non-CMA	22.4	24.7	22.2	64.4	68.2	76.0	67.8	72.5	78.0	45.4	47.8	55.8
	Small Urban	23.2	23.0	n.a.	64.3	68.5	n.a.	68.0	73.0	n.a.			
	Rural	21.4	25.4	n.a.	64.5	68.0	n.a.	67.6	72.2	n.a.			
	Total	19.2	22.1	19.1	61.7	67.2	76.2	65.1	71.3	78.4			
Ontario	CMA: Large Urban	23.4	29.9	24.0	60.6	70.3	72.0	65.5	74.5	74.7	42.1	44.6	50.7
	Non-CMA	29.9	37.5	31.1	65.4	80.5	78.8	69.8	83.5	81.4	39.9	46.0	50.3
	Small Urban	28.5	34.8	n.a.	65.5	75.2	n.a.	69.9	78.3	n.a.			
	Rural	32.3	39.1	n.a.	65.2	83.8	n.a.	69.6	86.7	n.a.			
	Total	25.5	32.0	25.5	62.2	73.2	73.5	66.9	77.0	76.1			
Prairies	CMA: Large Urban	36.6	38.1	39.0	69.5	73.7	84.0	73.8	77.8	86.6	37.2	39.6	47.6
	Non-CMA	40.8	46.9	39.4	73.4	83.1	84.2	77.2	85.8	86.0	36.4	38.9	46.6
	Small Urban	39.0	46.3	n.a.	72.7	81.5	n.a.	76.2	85.9	n.a.			
	Rural	42.5	47.0	n.a.	74.0	83.6	n.a.	78.1	85.8	n.a.			
	Total	38.5	41.6	39.2	71.2	77.5	84.1	75.3	81.0	86.4			
BC	CMA: Large Urban	24.5	28.8	24.8	54.2	75.4	77.0	59.1	77.7	80.8	34.6	48.9	56.0
	Non-CMA	35.3	38.8	29.6	68.5	80.6	76.7	73.0	82.8	79.3	37.7	44.0	49.7
	Small Urban	33.1	38.2	n.a.	69.3	82.8	n.a.	74.1	84.3	n.a.			
	Rural	39.7	39.4	n.a.	67.1	79.0	n.a.	70.8	81.8	n.a.			
	Total	29.0	32.2	26.0	60.2	77.1	76.9	65.0	79.4	80.4			

Table 4. Rates of Formal, Informal and All Giving by Region

	Formal Giving		Informal Giving		All Giving		Informal Only	
	1997	2000	1997	2000	1997	2000	1997	2000
Maritimes	83.2	84.1	79.5	85.8	90.4	91.8	7.2	7.7
Quebec	75.0	74.0	76.6	82.0	88.0	90.0	13.0	16.0
Ontario	80.3	78.2	83.8	86.9	91.0	91.8	10.7	13.6
Prairies	78.3	84.4	83.5	88.3	89.0	93.5	10.7	9.1
BC	73.4	74.0	84.9	85.1	90.1	89.0	16.7	15.0
Canada	78.0	78.1	81.8	85.6	89.8	91.3		

Table 5. Rates of Formal, Informal and All Giving by Community Size

	Formal Giving		Informal Giving		All Giving		Informal Only	
	1997	2000	1997	2000	1997	2000	1997	2000
CMA	75.9	77.1	82.5	86.4	89.4	91.6	13.5	14.5
Non-CMA	81.8	80.4	80.3	83.5	90.5	90.5	8.7	10.1
Canada	78.0	78.1	81.8	85.6	89.8	91.3		

Table 6. Rates of Formal, Informal and All Giving by Region and Community Size

		Formal Giving		Informal Giving		All Giving		Informal only	
		1997	2000	1997	2000	1997	2000	1997	2000
Maritimes	CMA	83.0	84.0	85.7	88.7	91.9	91.9	8.9	7.9
	Non-CMA	83.1	84.1	75.7	83.2	89.2	91.8	6.1	7.7
	Total	83.0	84.1	79.4	85.8	90.2	91.8		
Quebec	CMA	72.7	74.4	79.2	84.0	88.3	91.7	15.6	17.3
	Non-CMA	79.8	73.1	71.4	77.7	87.3	86.3	7.5	13.2
	Total	75.0	74.0	76.6	82.0	88.0	90.0		
Ontario	CMA	78.8	76.4	83.4	86.6	90.4	91.5	11.6	15.1
	Non-CMA	84.1	84.6	84.8	87.9	92.7	93.3	8.6	8.7
	Total	80.3	78.2	83.8	86.9	91.1	91.8		
Prairies	CMA	75.2	84.3	82.8	90.3	87.3	94.1	12.1	9.8
	Non-CMA	83.1	84.8	84.6	84.0	91.7	92.2	8.6	7.4
	Total	78.3	84.4	83.5	88.3	89.0	93.5		
BC	CMA	71.8	73.2	84.5	84.8	89.4	88.9	17.6	15.7
	Non-CMA	76.6	76.0	85.8	86.0	91.5	89.4	14.9	13.4
	Total	73.4	74.0	84.9	85.1	90.1	89.0		