Il est un peu difficile de juger à qui cet ouvrage s'adresse. La première partie constitue une bonne introduction aux grands problèmes des politiques publiques. Le propos vise les néophytes, car le chercheur en science politique trouvera les concepts exposés trop simplistes. Le reste de l'ouvrage toutefois se complique et risque de perdre rapidement le non spécialiste. Globalement, le plus grand reproche que l'on peut faire à l'ouvrage est son côté très descriptif et typologique. On se serait attendu d'un tel ouvrage qu'il porte plus sur les aspects politiques concrets du budget du Québec, par exemple l'impact des réformes en santé, le Fonds des générations, les ressources naturelles ou le régime de garderies publiques. On retrouve des chiffres parmi les descriptions, mais sans vraiment plus. Le politique proprement dit est à peu près complètement évacué. Si on suit la logique du livre, les décisions budgétaires sont rationnellement adoptées selon des critères comptables rigoureux. Cliche remarque en page 45 que les « promesses électorales » peuvent influencer le processus budgétaire, mais c'est à peu près tout. Or, nous savons tous très bien qu'une décision de couper ou non en santé ou en éducation relève bien plus du programme du parti au pouvoir et des opportunités électorales que de la réflexion administrative neutre.

L'ouvrage est parsemé de schémas et de tableaux, peut-être même un peu trop. Plusieurs schémas s'avèrent triviaux, exposant avec boîtes et flèches ce qui était déjà clair dans le texte. Les explications ont tendance à être courtes et nous laissent sur notre faim. Pour des sujets plus complexes, comme les modes de budgétisation par exemple, il aurait fallu étayer le propos par des exemples concrets. Avec toute l'expérience que Pierre Cliche possède dans les hautes sphères de la fonction publique québécoise, on aurait grandement apprécié ses explications et ses commentaires sur les décisions budgétaires des dernières décennies au Québec.

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Comparing Quebec and Ontario: Political Economy and Public Policy at the Turn of the Millennium
Rodney Haddow
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In this book, Rodney Haddow asks a simple question. Can subunits confront globalization and still pursue fundamentally different social and economic policies? For Haddow, in looking at Ontario and Quebec, the answer is yes.

The book is extremely ambitious and it does not disappoint. Recently nominated for the best book in Comparative Politics by the Canadian Political Science Association, it orients itself in the comparative political economy literature to test nearly 20 hypotheses about the freedom of governments to pursue different agendas in an age of globalization. It selects four areas—government budgeting, social assistance and transfers, childcare and early learning, and economic development—to assess the extent to which the two provinces differ and why. Each of these policy fields is treated to a very rich qualitative assessment that leaves the reader fully satisfied with his account. Haddow goes further, however, to fully embrace the spirit of mixed methods research, in two quantitative chapters at the end. The hypotheses are then tested through sophisticated regressions, offering the reader all he or she would need to review the work on their own. Here, the book is quite technical, and it will likely be beyond some readers. Anticipating this, Haddow mercifully offers non-technical summaries that are very accessible and guides the reader through to the conclusions. The mixture of qualitative and quantitative work makes for a very convincing performance overall.

In explaining the divergence in the policy fields, Haddow finds Ontario is more "pluralist" than Quebec. Many outcomes in the province rest on the greater partisanship in the party system and poorer interest organization than in its eastern neighbour. For its part, Quebec is far better at "concertation" with societal actors and the partisan divide on the economy or on social policy does not run quite as deep. The results have been a lack of "Harris era" politics in Quebec, for example, and a greater willingness to stand by national champions in the economy and to protect generous spending in social assistance and economic development.

Much of this is intuitively satisfying, but the book also holds a number of surprises. It is very strong in challenging some of the beliefs that we have about what makes the two provinces similar in some ways and different in others. On globalization, for example, Haddow shows that its alleged homogenizing role is actually not particularly apparent or important in this story. The "Quebec model," so often dismissed as overly burdensome on the public purse, is not found to be unsustainable, and he offers good reasons for why. Nor is nationalism as directly influential in shaping these areas of Quebec's politics as much as one might think. And, despite the more generous social spending in Quebec, the book also finds that it is not much better at tackling some types of poverty than Ontario; the picture is much more complicated. Ultimately, not all of his hypotheses turn out, but in those cases Haddow's assessments make for very provocative reading.

Every reviewer has his or her quibble, and mine is with the treatment of nationalism in Ontario. The book follows the familiar line that Ontarians simply lack a subnational identity, an idea once summarized in A.R.M. Lower's aptly titled 1968 article "Does Ontario Exist?" Quebec nationalism plays an important role as an ideational mechanism shaping outcomes, with no equivalent in Ontario. Yes, that's a fair enough call insofar as it goes, since more than 90 per cent of its people and higher than any other province, identify as Canadian, a point Haddow makes. Still, I can't help but wonder if this conventional view might not be getting a little stale. There may not be a subnational identity but that's not to say there is no nationalism at all. The brand of "Canadian" Ontarians identify with is not perfectly static; it mutates somewhat and informs its politics, however mildly. Are Ontario's institutions shaped with a view to that broader national interest? Has that fact shaped political thinking, processes, and outputs in any way? And does it really matter that the national identity is not totally unique to Ontario in this comparison? Perhaps not for this work, but Ontarians might benefit in the future by being studied a little less two-dimensionally when it comes to identity.

Overall, this is a truly excellent book and it will hold broad appeal for many political scientists. On one level, the comparison of Quebec and Ontario over the last 20 years will hold innate interest for students of Canadian politics. Given the obvious differences in language, culture and social outlook, but coupled by the fact that the two are similar enough to normally be considered as representing the region of "Central Canada," it is interesting to find out how different they are. But it will also be of interest to scholars beyond Canada, in particular those interested in federalism, political economy and comparative public policy who want to examine how much freedom subunits have when designing public policy.

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