

Intergovernmental Relations in Canada's Immigration System: From Bilateralism towards Multilateral Collaboration

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Introduction

Identifying periods where a particular approach defines intergovernmental relations in Canada is a perennial exercise for Canadian political scientists. From this work, a measure of consensus has emerged that there are a number of loosely identifiable periods of intergovernmental relations: from an initially “quasi-federal” relationship (confederation to the late 1890s) to a “classical” era (early 1900s to 1939) to a period of “co-operative federalism” (1940s to 1960s) to more “competitive federalism” (1970s and 1980s) and, recently, a more “collaborative” period (from the mid-1990s) (see, for example, Bakvis and Skogstad, 2012: 3–11, Simeon and Robinson, 2004). Contemporary work in this area tends to focus on Cameron and Simeon’s argument (2002) that “collaborative federalism” has been the dominant approach from the mid-1990s forward (for example, Simmons and Graefe, 2013).

This article engages with this scholarship through an in-depth study of recent developments within one policy sector, immigration. I adopt this approach for two reasons: first, it facilitates the application of the collaborative federalism framework to describe and explain the emergence of recent intergovernmental dynamics within this increasingly important area of public policy; and second, it facilitates reflection on (and refinement of) the

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concept of collaborative federalism through an in-depth consideration of how relations play out in practice, which can be difficult in a summary analysis of events across the breadth of federal-provincial relations in a given period.

A study of intergovernmental relations in Canada's immigration system is timely; the sector has been growing in importance and undergoing significant reform over the last 20 years. One of the most striking changes over this period has been the increasing role of the provinces in the selection and settlement of immigrants (see Paquet, 2014). Despite the increased provincial role in immigration, the relevant literature does not identify the sector as an example of collaborative federalism. Instead, observers argue the growing provincial role has been established through a series of bilateral federal-provincial agreements, with a resulting decentralized and asymmetrical approach to immigrant selection and settlement (for example, Banting, 2012).

This study takes issue with these accounts by focusing on recent multilateral collaboration in the immigration sector. As I demonstrate below, the expanded provincial role in immigration has increasingly been negotiated and established through multilateral processes focused on setting shared national-level priorities and policy (outside of Quebec). Applying the conceptual framework of collaborative federalism to understand these developments, with a particular focus on the nature of intergovernmental relations as unilateral, bilateral or multilateral, I argue that there has been a *turn towards* a more substantive form of multilateral collaboration between the orders of government in the sector. This is not to say that the sector stands as a perfect example of collaborative federalism, since bilateral and unilateral channels are still used to conduct relations and implement policy; however, studying recent events shows a shift is taking place, whereby key areas of shared federal-provincial concern (namely economic immigration) are being managed through multilateral collaboration. And, through analysis that takes into account the motivations for pursuing this approach and the complexity of relations in practice, I argue that the turn towards multilateral collaboration can be explained by a shared provincial concern with (and engagement in) the area of economic immigrant selection and settlement, as well as the federal government's desire to reassert its own role as it implements a reform agenda.

The article starts with an overview of the concept of collaborative federalism, raising the point that we need to more fulsomely account for the nature of intergovernmental interactions as unilateral, bilateral or multilateral when applying the framework to refine its descriptive and explanatory utility. The second section provides a brief overview of the oft-cited view of the provinces' role in immigration as established through bilateral processes. The third section describes the three related developments that signal a turn towards more substantive, multilateral collaboration in the field: the establishment of a joint federal-provincial-territorial (FPT) vision for immigration; increasing reliance on multilateral institutions to manage

Abstract. This article has two objectives. The first is to highlight a turn towards multilateral collaboration in the immigration sector and the resulting focus on pan-Canadian policy objectives and initiatives. This account is set against the current literature, which argues a bilateral approach to intergovernmental relations in the sector has resulted in asymmetrical policies and programs. The second objective is to demonstrate the value of explicitly focusing on the nature of intergovernmental relations as unilateral, bilateral or multilateral. Applying this lens, the article draws out the drivers and complexity of the turn towards multilateral collaboration in the immigration sector, arguing it is motivated by an increased provincial engagement in economic immigration and also by the federal government's desire to reassert its own role in response.

Résumé. Cet article vise deux objectifs. En premier lieu, mettre en lumière l'évolution progressive vers une collaboration multilatérale dans le secteur de l'immigration et, conséquemment, l'importance accordée aux initiatives et aux objectifs en matière de politiques pancanadiennes. Ce compte rendu a recours, comme toile de fond, à la littérature actuelle, selon laquelle une approche bilatérale des relations intergouvernementales dans le secteur aurait entraîné des politiques et des programmes asymétriques. En second lieu, démontrer l'importance de faire ressortir clairement la nature des relations intergouvernementales - unilatérales, bilatérales ou multilatérales. À l'aide de cette perspective, l'article jette un éclairage sur les facteurs de changement et sur la complexité de ce virage vers la collaboration multilatérale dans le secteur de l'immigration en faisant valoir qu'il s'explique par l'implication accrue des gouvernements provinciaux dans l'immigration économique et par le désir du gouvernement fédéral de réaffirmer, en réaction, son propre rôle.

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relations; and multilateral agreement on an action plan to implement the FPT vision. The final section explains the key drivers of this turn and considers the principal implication, the potential for this development to reverse the trend towards asymmetrical policy arrangements and bring about more symmetrical, pan-Canadian focused approaches to immigrant selection and settlement.

A brief note on the scope and method of the study is needed. The primary focus is on federal-provincial relations with regard to immigrant selection and settlement policy *outside of Quebec*. Much has been written about the bilateral Canada-Quebec relationship, and how this has produced an asymmetrical immigration system wherein Quebec has considerably more power (and funding) than other provinces in the area of immigrant selection and settlement (for example, Kostov, 2008; Labelle and Rocher, 2009). A study focusing on the other 12 provinces and territories is timely, though, to reconsider how this relationship is being framed in the literature and to highlight some of the recent developments in this area.

The analysis in this study stems from two principal sources: publically available primary documents and a series of interviews with senior federal and provincial officials. The primary documents include reports, press releases and speeches from both orders of government, as well as a number of jointly developed federal-provincial-territorial communiqués following

ministerial meetings. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight senior officials in the immigration policy field (four federal and four provincial from Western, Central and Eastern Canada), at various executive levels (assistant deputy ministers, directors general, executive directors, and directors).¹ The interviewees were selected based on their knowledge of, and direct role developing and participating in, the multilateral processes examined in the study. While the personal involvement of the interviewees in this turn towards multilateral collaboration should be taken into account when assessing their statements, it should also be noted that they are, in large part, the same principal actors involved in managing the bilateral relationship in the immigration sector.²

Multilateral Collaborative Federalism

It is necessary to begin by reflecting on the core concept of collaborative federalism, looking in particular at its link to multilateral intergovernmental relations. The concept of collaborative federalism is well articulated by Cameron and Simeon (2002) (see also Cameron and Simeon, 2000; Lazar, 1998; 2006). The value of the concept as a *descriptive* tool characterizing the nature of intergovernmental relations has been further refined by recent studies on the post-1990 period (see Minaeva, 2012; Simmons and Graefe, 2013). From this body of literature we can identify three key elements that should inform a study investigating the extent to which intergovernmental relations follow a collaborative approach.

The first element signaling adherence to collaborative federalism is the presence of jointly developed principles and norms that drive intergovernmental relations. For Cameron and Simeon, the focal point is the extent to which “national policies” are “co-determined” through collective action involving some or all of the federal, provincial and territorial governments (rather than being Ottawa-led or the result of settling a conflict) (2002: 49, 54). Related to this, Harvey Lazar has argued that collaborative federalism’s defining feature is a recognition of the interdependence of the two orders of government in an area, with subsequent relations and work being carried out in a non-hierarchical manner (2006, 28–29). Underlying these two similar points is the observation that collaborative relations are carried out with a general acceptance of the equality of the two orders of government.

The second element is the presence of multilateral institutions to manage relations. The defining characteristic here is the reliance on multilateral, FPT forums to set priorities and carry out joint policy work, often under the rubric of a co-chaired federal-provincial ministerial forum within a particular portfolio, though sometimes without the active participation of Quebec (see Cameron and Simeon, 2002: 61–63).

The third key element of the collaborative approach is the actual outputs of intergovernmental relations. As Simmons and Graefe argue, a collaborative approach should lead to “promising solutions to difficult problems” (2013: 30). The metrics that indicate outputs aligned with a specifically collaborative approach include multilateral framework agreements; jointly developed policies or programs; a focus on accountability and transparency; attempts to find efficiency and the involvement of wider stakeholders beyond the federal-provincial-territorial governments (Cameron and Simeon, 2002: 63–64; Simmons and Graefe, 2013: 30–32).

Applying this three-part framework to analyze intergovernmental relations in the immigration sector over the last decade would clearly show that there has been a turn away from bilateralism towards multilateral collaboration. However, additional nuance is required to avoid a superficial account. The mere presence of principles established by multiple actors, or the fact that some or all of the provinces and territories participate in negotiations, may obscure our view of processes that are ultimately rhetorical window dressing, hiding coercive power dynamics or adding unnecessary complexity that limits accountability, transparency and efficiency in providing public policy. In addition, the above framework shares a common characteristic with much of the work on collaborative federalism: the ability to *characterize* intergovernmental relations for a period of time but a limited ability to *explain* the dynamics of how relations emerge, are maintained and evolve.³ In other words, the above framework sheds little light on the potential motivations of the actors for pursuing and maintaining a collaborative approach, the complexity of relations in practice and the implications of a turn towards multilateral collaboration.

To address these shortcomings in both the descriptive and explanatory power of the current collaborative federalism framework we need to more explicitly consider the extent to which the institutions of intergovernmental relations actually operate in a *substantively* multilateral manner. This additional level of analysis involves investigating the extent to which the first aspect of collaborative federalism (principles) is *integrated* into the second aspect (multilateral institutions) and in turn *inform* the third aspect (outputs, that are indicative of a collaborative approach to managing relations and implementing policy). In other words, a comprehensive analytical framework should be able to describe the *intersections* between the three pillars of collaborative federalism. I argue that we can best assess the intersection of these three elements of collaborative federalism by considering whether the processes that established the principles, the functioning of the institutions and the resulting outcomes reflect a *substantive* multilateralism. And, from an explanatory standpoint, the concept of substantive multilateralism helps to unpack why actors would adopt the processes of establishing multilateral institutions and how we can expect such institutions to function once in place.

The concept of “substantive” multilateralism is well articulated in the literature on multilateral institutions in international relations. The concept itself, and the value of applying it here, is brought into relief by considering how multilateralism and the related concepts of bilateralism and unilateralism are generally used in the international relations literature compared against the work on Canadian intergovernmental relations.

First, within the study of Canadian intergovernmental relations, Kenneth McRoberts (1985) completed the foundational study on the use of unilateral, bilateral and multilateral approaches across the breadth of federal-provincial relations (including immigration). In his study, McRoberts differentiates between unilateralism, bilateralism and multilateralism by looking at the number of actors: multilateral arrangements are those that “combine Ottawa with two or more provinces” and bilateral arrangements are those that “link it to a single province,” which, he argues, is the case in immigration (McRoberts, 1985: 71–72, 90). Cameron and Simeon have a similar understanding of multilateralism, saying that institutions where some or all of the governments act collectively is a defining feature of collaborative federalism (2002: 54–55). This formalistic definition of unilateralism, bilateralism and multilateralism, looking at the number of actors involved in policy development or negotiations to classify the approach, is also apparent in the more recent work on intergovernmental relation in Canada that considers the channels through which relations take place in various sectors (see Friendly and White, 2008; Poirier, 2004; Wood and Klassen, 2009).

This more formal understanding of multilateralism can be compared against John Ruggie’s perspective on multilateralism in the international arena. Ruggie argues that to understand an arrangement as bilateral or multilateral we need to look at the qualitative, substantive elements and processes of relations (1993: 6; also see Diebold, 1988). From this perspective, a multilateral arrangement is one in which relations between governments are carried out in line with, and outcomes are founded upon, principles of conduct that are not particularistic to one of the parties. *Multilateralism*, then, is a process that operates on a set of principles, roles and expectations informed by the indivisibility of interests and joint ownership, seeking outcomes and arrangements that promote “diffuse reciprocity” among a set of three or more actors (Ruggie, 1993: 11). Diffuse reciprocity is about finding an arrangement that will eventually “yield a rough equivalency of benefits” to the members, in the aggregate over time (11; also Keohane, 1985). In contrast, bilateralism operates on the basis that instantiations of relations and outcomes can be differentiated from each other on a case-by-case basis, with negotiations designed around “particularistic grounds or situational exigencies” that seek more “specific reciprocity” among the main actors involved (Ruggie, 1993: 11). Specific reciprocity is about realizing

an immediate equivalency of interests, a quid-pro-quo arrangement for the parties (Keohane, 1985; Ruggie, 1993: 11).

The concept of substantive multilateralism can be further refined—and the value of applying it to reflect on intergovernmental relations demonstrated—by also drawing on elements of the related literature on multilateral institutions and co-operation in international relations. One such element is the work that applies neo-institutional theory (particularly from the sociological institutionalist perspective) to show how norm and value congruence between actors and governments can be a motivating force in establishing multilateral institutions (see Finnemore, 1996; Fioretos, 2011: 374). Related to this is the work that shows the norm and legitimacy generating potential of multilateral processes—once multilateral institutions are established (for example, Blum 2008: 343–48, 362–69). There is also the literature that stresses the more (rational) strategic calculations and incentives that go into actors and governments adopting bilateral or multilateral approaches to negotiations, particularly in light of transaction costs (for example, Thompson and Verdier, 2014).

Drawing insights from this body of work and layering the concepts of substantive multilateralism and collaborative federalism provides a richer descriptive and explanatory analytical framework.⁴ From a descriptive standpoint, this approach allows for a clearer benchmark to assess whether the principles, institutions and outputs of intergovernmental work are truly collaborative, so as to determine if the governing principles of relations are jointly built upon shared norms that are integrated into the institutional practices and outputs. In the third section of the article I apply this refined framework to characterize recent multilateral collaboration in the immigration sector.

In terms of explanation, combining the concepts of substantive multilateralism and collaborative federalism helps uncover three insights into intergovernmental relations. First, the associated concepts of diffuse and specific reciprocity help unpack the potential motivations for actors and governments to pursue a multilateral approach, as well as how we could expect them to act when engaged in substantively multilateral collaboration. Second, this lens helps us account for the complexity of intergovernmental relations in practice, breaking through the tendency to simply count the number of actors involved in a process to classify its nature. This insight allows us to appreciate that even within a single sector, relations may be taking place on many different fronts (as unilateral, bilateral or multilateral) within a general turn towards the collaborative approach. Third, applying this layer of analysis provides a clearer sense of the potential impacts the different approaches of managing relations can have on policy development and the federation more broadly. How relations are carried out—as unilateral, bilateral or multilateral—can affect both the nature of federal-provincial relations,

as a hierarchical relationship or as one between equal partners, and the negotiated policies or programs, as imposed, as asymmetrical and tailored to regional interests or as more symmetrical and pan-Canadian-focused. In the fourth section of the article I elaborate on these points to help explain the establishment, maintenance and implications of the turn towards multilateral collaboration in the immigration sector.

The Current Picture of Intergovernmental Relations in Canada's Immigration Sector

Before turning to consider recent developments in the sector, a review of the current scholarship is needed. In framing the development of intergovernmental relations in the immigration sector, a general narrative within the relevant literature is evident.⁵ The first point generally made is that immigration is one of only two areas of concurrent jurisdiction laid out in s. 95 of the *Constitution Act 1867* (the other being agriculture, though subsequently public pensions were also made an area of shared concern). From here, observers often note that intergovernmental relations in the immigration sector have shifted from an initial period of federal-provincial engagement, to provincial disengagement (and federal unilateralism) from the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century, then to provincial re-engagement through a series of bilateral relationships that began to develop in the latter half of the twentieth century, led first by Quebec and today being established across the country.

There are three oft-cited pillars of the contemporary provincial role in immigration: 1) bilateral federal-provincial agreements; 2) the ability of provinces to select immigrants, principally through the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP), outside Quebec; and, 3) varying levels of control over the delivery of federally funded immigrant settlement services.

Bilateral federal-provincial agreements in the area of immigration, outside Quebec, emerged in the late 1990s (see Seidle, 2010). These arrangements are generally portrayed as comprehensive, framework agreements that “formalize how governments work together” on immigration (CIC, 2013: s.3). There are currently eight such agreements (including the *Canada-Quebec Accord*), each of which has a set of annexes covering individual topics, such as establishing a PNP. Four jurisdictions without a framework agreement have stand-alone PNP agreements.

While technically a federal program under the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (IRPA) (s. 87), the PNP is implemented in practice through the above-noted agreements. The broad objectives of the program are to give provinces a role in selecting permanent economic migrants to increase the economic benefits of immigration for all jurisdictions by meeting their specific local or regional labour market needs. When

considering these objectives, the program is generally seen as a success. The PNP started with 477 people coming to Canada in the first year, growing to just over 40,000 people in 2012 and now representing the second largest class of economic migrants after the Federal Skilled Worker program (see Banting, 2012: 26; CIC, 2012a). Moreover, a number of studies demonstrate that the program has managed to divert economic migrants to areas other than Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, including settling people in more rural areas (Baglay, 2012; Lewis, 2010; CIC, 2011; Pandey and Townsend, 2013, 2011).

On settlement service delivery, as the provincial role in the field increased, a number of delivery models emerged. In general, four models are identified in the literature: the Quebec model of complete autonomy; the “devolved” model, used in Manitoba and British Columbia from 1999 to 2014 (for an overview: Leo and August, 2009; Leo and Enns, 2009); a federal-provincial co-management approach, used in Alberta since 2007 and Ontario between 2005 and 2011; and federal control elsewhere (on the models, see Andrew and Hima, 2011: 60; Banting, 2012: 267–68;). In addition to these models of delivering *federally funded* settlement services, there are the numerous programs run by the provinces and municipalities that facilitate the integration of newcomers (see Biles, 2008: 157–66; Biles, et al., 2011; Young and Tolley, 2011). It is also important to note, as I discuss below, that in April 2012, the federal government unilaterally decided to take back control over federally funded settlement services in Manitoba and British Columbia (against both provinces’ wishes).

It is the view of these three pillars—and particularly how they have developed—that leads scholars to argue intergovernmental relations in immigration are essentially conducted on a bilateral basis, resulting in asymmetrical policies and programs. Notable among these studies is the work of Keith Banting (2012) and Leslie Seidle (2013) (also see Paquet, 2014; Wood and Klassen, 2009).

Banting presents immigrant selection and settlement policy as “transformed by a rapid decentralization” that is “highly asymmetric” and the result of “bilateral political deals” (2012: 262). To support this argument he points to the considerable asymmetry in selection policy, with Quebec having the autonomy to pursue its own approach to selection and other provinces using the PNP to meet specific regional needs free from the federal points system or language requirements (2012: 265). He also highlights the asymmetry in settlement delivery models noted above. Importantly, Banting links this asymmetry to the fact that “the critical bargaining tends to proceed on a bilateral basis,” with the result being “no obvious policy rationale for the complex patterns that have emerged” (2012: 261, 263).

Seidle presents a similar case, arguing the “series of bilateral agreements” has given provincial governments “considerable leeway in shaping their nominee programs” (2013: 3). While saying the PNP has responded to the diverse labour market needs of the provinces, he is somewhat critical of how the “strong bilateral dynamic” of negotiations operating through a hub-and-spoke process creates a series of challenges, such as program overlap, lack of information sharing, and most importantly lack of a broader shared vision and policy framework for the PNP (2013: 3, 19–21). Accordingly, Seidle indicates there has been an emerging reassertion of a federal role through the implementation of measures like caps on PNP levels, an emphasis on reducing program overlap and introducing minimum language standards, though he says these developments are being implemented on a bilateral basis with the federal government “pressuring individual provinces” (2013: 18–19).

The Turn towards Multilateral Collaboration

The issue with the current literature on intergovernmental relations in immigration is that it largely misses the turn towards a more multilateral, collaborative approach to managing relations. In this section I apply the framework introduced earlier to describe three related developments that signal this turn: the establishment of a joint FPT vision for immigration; the increasing use of multilateral institutions to manage relations in the sector; and the key output from this work over the past 10 years, the FPT Vision Action Plan.

The first development—the Joint FPT Vision for Immigration—is a set of co-determined principles that guide federal-provincial relations and policy development in the sector. This agreement stemmed from FPT ministerial-level observations that there was a “need for stronger federal-provincial-territorial partnerships on a multilateral and bilateral basis” (SCICS, 2002) and consensus to “work together to develop a shared vision for...Canada’s immigration program” (SCICS, 2004). Work on the vision began in earnest following a 2005 FPT ministerial-level agreement on a “strategic direction on immigration” (SCICS, 2005). Subsequent negotiations produced the actual Joint FPT Vision, which was publically announced in 2012 (see SCICS, 2012). The process was an onerous and difficult one, as both federal and provincial officials noted in interviews, particularly since every aspect of the vision was jointly developed and owned by all parties (outside Quebec).

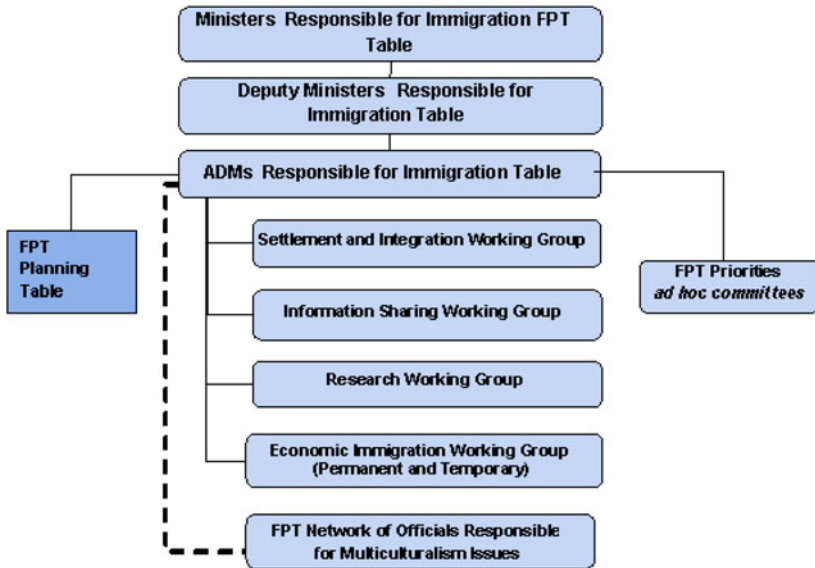
The FPT Vision for Immigration presents a system that “attracts, welcomes and supports newcomers to join in building vibrant communities and a prosperous Canada” (SCICS, 2012). This “motherhood statement” is given additional meaning through its high-level objectives, in areas such

as achieving common economic objectives, sharing the benefits of immigration across Canada and facilitating economic and social participation of immigrants (see the background of SCICS, 2012).

The process of establishing the vision and its substance indicates the role it plays in bringing about a more multilateral, collaborative approach to intergovernmental relations in the sector. Notably, the vision represents a congruence of norms and values that frame the immigration system as jointly owned by both orders of government. As a senior provincial official said, the vision and the multilateral work to establish it created a new “norm of shared jurisdiction” with elaborated “common FPT interests.” Importantly, establishing this area of common FPT concern (particularly related to economic immigration) sets up the conditions to allow negotiations and relations to be governed by the principle of diffuse reciprocity. A sense of joint ownership and shared priorities can, over time, create acceptance among actors (federal and provincial) that action on specific areas may be needed even if the result does not produce immediate benefits for particular jurisdictions. In a related manner, the vision is a classic example of co-determined, national-level policy objectives. As Mark Davidson, the Director General of Intergovernmental Relations at Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), framed it, this is a novel agreement with the provinces (outside Quebec) “on common priorities for where we mutually want the immigration program to go.” This perspective is largely shared by senior provincial officials, with one saying it is a “genuine attempt to define the sandbox” of constitutionally shared FPT responsibilities in immigration, and another echoing that the vision “allows for a more cohesive approach to immigration in Canada.” The sum of these provincial and federal perspectives is a shared recognition that the vision provides an overarching set of principles to manage intergovernmental relations and set policy in key areas of the immigration sector, notably, in economic immigration.

The second development indicating a turn towards collaborative federalism in the sector is the increasing reliance on multilateral institutions to manage relations. As noted above, 2002 was the starting point for this development, with the first meeting of FPT ministers responsible for immigration in over a century. From this point, and in line with the consensus at that first meeting, multilateral engagement increased over the years; from 2002 to 2014 FPT ministers met 10 times, with their deputy ministers meeting 18 times (including two trips abroad on fact-finding missions). Even more telling is the frequency of multilateral interaction at the assistant deputy minister (ADM) level; in 2011 and 2012, FPT ADMs responsible for immigration met through teleconference on a nearly bi-weekly basis, with over 40 meetings in these two years. This multilateral work took place within a well-defined governance structure. As [Figure 1](#) illustrates, there is an institutional hierarchy whereby a series of formal and ad hoc working groups

FIGURE 1
FPT Governance Structure in the Immigration Sector



Source: CIC (2011: S. 1.1.4)

support the ministerial, DM, ADM and executive level (FPT Planning Table) committees.

As noted earlier, though, the simple observation of multilateral institutions is not enough to claim relations in a sector are truly collaborative, since this fails to consider the extent to which the institutions operate in line with co-determined norms and the model of substantive multilateralism. There are two characteristics that show how these multilateral institutions do, in practice, operate in line with the principles reflected in the FPT Vision for Immigration and collaborative federalism.

The first characteristic is the adoption of a federal-provincial co-chair approach for the various committees and working groups. From 2008, the FPT ministerial, DM, ADM, executive-level and working group tables have been co-chaired by CIC and a designated province. The provincial co-chair rotates on a two-year basis; British Columbia served as the first co-chair, followed by Nova Scotia, Alberta and Ontario. Under this model, the two chairs jointly manage the agenda, logistics and running of meetings. As Cameron and Simeon point out, this is an important feature of collaborative federalism because it signals acceptance of a measure of equality between the orders and co-ownership of the policy area (2002: 63). In a related manner, the co-chair role also demonstrates how provinces

can move from being more particularistic actors to striving to bring about consensus in the hopes of achieving diffuse reciprocity. This is a dynamic that both senior provincial and CIC officials noted: they consistently identified the provincial co-chair as taking on a role of “honest broker,” both amongst provinces and between the provinces and CIC. In this regard, the co-chair generally makes an effort to “take off their hat” as a particular jurisdiction and move beyond a provincialized view of issues, often putting forth an aggregated view of the diverse regional needs. As one senior provincial official put it, this role is critical to multi-lateralism functioning effectively.

The second characteristic is the emergence of a secretariat to support the provincial co-chair and work on behalf of all provinces and territories within the multilateral fora. While starting out more as administrative support, the role has grown with each successive co-chair towards a stand-alone office with a dedicated staff and senior-level leadership. In discussions with senior provincial officials, the central objectives of this secretariat became evident: 1) developing strategic policy and positions on behalf of all provinces and territories; 2) co-ordinating positions between provinces and territories and representing their aggregate interests with CIC; and, 3) pooling resources to manage the logistics and heavy workload associated with the significant level of engagement. It is the first two objectives that show how the secretariat can help shape the collection of individual provincial perspectives into a bloc. This dynamic is well exemplified by the growth of interprovincial communication prior to discussions with CIC (which takes the form of regular provincial-only teleconferences or meetings that mirror the FPT governance structure) to work out positions and discuss common objectives. In the view of one senior CIC official, this is an unexpected, but helpful, by-product of the increasing reliance on the multilateral fora, as it allows provinces to co-ordinate their views among themselves before engaging with CIC, leading to more substantive discussions and ultimately to joint policy development. In other words, the strength of a provincial bloc, when it is able to form, represented by a co-chair at the multilateral fora, can temper the traditionally dominant position of the federal government and thus facilitate more collaborative policy.

The third development in the turn towards collaborative federalism is the principal output of the multilateral work over the past 10 years: the FPT Vision Action Plan (VAP). Given the breadth of potential areas of joint FPT interest, both provincial and federal officials noted the perceived need to prioritize their co-ordinated work and find efficiency in how they interacted. The principal mechanism by which this has been achieved is through a comprehensive framework marking out the areas where multilateral engagement takes place (see [Figure 2](#)). Notable here is the agreement to focus joint efforts on three key objectives between 2012 and 2015: immigration

FIGURE 2
FPT Vision Action Plan (2012)

	Immigration Levels Planning	Economic Immigration	Settlement and Integration of Newcomers
Strategic Objectives	Immigration levels plans that reflect economic demand	A fast, flexible economic immigration system focused primarily on meeting labour market needs across Canada	Improved economic and social settlement and integration outcomes
Expected Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing multilateral discussions on levels planning • A solid evidence base of labour market information identifying skills needs. • A flexible model of distributing immigration among provinces and territories that responds to labour market and regional needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selection of immigrants to respond to labour needs, based on labour market information, regional needs and employer demand. • Economic immigration programs with strong design, management and integrity mechanisms. • Fast, transparent and easy processes for prospective immigrants and employers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinated, seamless settlement service delivery focused on reducing barriers to social and economic integration, including barriers to labour market participation. • Continuous assessment of newcomer settlement outcomes based on common measurement mechanisms across jurisdictions.
Key Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement an Expression of Interest application management system • Continue immigration levels planning, including development of evidence base and distribution model for overall economic immigration • Strengthen the design, management, accountability and integrity of economic immigration programs • Develop and implement a Pan-Canadian Framework for Settlement Outcomes that establishes common settlement outcomes and measurement mechanisms • Develop principles and guidelines for FPT partnership models for settlement 		

Source: SCICS (backgrounder, 2012)

levels planning that reflect economic demand, the development of a system that meets regional and national labour market needs, particularly through the development of an expression of interest system, “Express Entry,” and improving settlement and integration outcomes. In addition, the VAP lays out five areas for multilateral action to meet these objectives. As I discuss below, this does not mean bilateral relations have ceased, or that all areas in the immigration sector are co-managed, but it does signal the growing importance of multilateral engagement in key policy areas, notably economic migration, and thus signals a turn towards collaborative action.

The VAP largely corresponds to what we would expect to see from the principal output of multilateral work within a sector practising collaborative federalism.⁶ It is a multilaterally negotiated framework agreement that, as some senior provincial officials noted, lays the groundwork for success in

jointly developing policy in the identified areas (particularly, Express Entry). This is a view shared by Mark Davidson, Director General of Intergovernmental Relations at CIC; from the federal perspective, the VAP is a shared agenda of priorities, the mechanism to guide work on these priorities and the way to measure results. This view points us towards the VAP's focus on accountability and transparency through a set of performance measurement indicators built into the plan. Davidson's comments also signal the shared concern with finding efficiency, as the VAP seeks to prioritize FPT work on three outcomes and five actions over a three-year period. The focus on accountability is of particular importance for a few of the provincial officials interviewed, who indicated a truly collaborative approach requires more than elaborating principles; it is about the practice of relations. A senior provincial official captured this idea with a comment that monitoring the implementation of the plan against its performance measures and expected outcomes is critical to determining its success.

Picking up on this last point, it is the integration of co-determined principles into the operation of institutions and how this informs outcomes that demonstrates when relations are following the collaborative federalism model. Such integration is readily observable within the VAP through the associated agreement on a set of FPT "roles, responsibilities and accountabilities to inform work under the Vision Action Plan" (SCICS, 2012). In discussions with senior CIC and provincial officials, it is clear that this element of the VAP is a jointly developed agreement on how the two orders of government will decide on the specific mode of interaction to work on the various priorities. Under this arrangement, there is a scale of engagement: from collaboration, implying co-ownership and responsibility for an area; to co-operation, implying that one order of government may take the lead on an issue, but will work closely with the other; to consultation, where essentially unilateral action by a government is deemed appropriate, with the recognition that the others need to be informed, notably in areas of exclusive federal legislative authority under IRPA. The main purpose of this striking application of the broader taxonomy of intergovernmental relations was summed up well by a senior CIC official, who presented its value as managing expectations, both within the federal government and among provinces, on the level of engagement that can be expected on any given issue, as well as on the scope for joint decision making or lack thereof.

While provincial officials generally shared this view, one also had some reservations about this element of the VAP, indicating it had the potential to be too rigid and may actually raise expectations among the provinces that everything within the immigration sector was to be managed through a collaborative, co-ownership approach, when, in the view of the interviewee, this is simply not feasible or possible given provincial capacity

issues and CIC's interests in maintaining control over parts of the system, such as refugee and humanitarian policy. Nevertheless, this agreement is a clear example of "principles which specify appropriate conduct for a class of actions, without regard to the particularistic interests of the parties" (Ruggie, 1993: 11), given they are co-determined guidelines for whether collaborative, co-operative or consultative engagement should be used in an area.

Explaining and Considering the Turn

Reflecting on the above-noted developments raises questions about why multilateral collaboration has been adopted in this sector, how it plays out in practice and the implications of this turn. Applying the framework developed in the first section of the article helps to explain some of these dynamics, while also showing the potential of employing substantive multilateralism to analyze intergovernmental relations. In response to the first question, I argue two principal factors have driven the turn towards multilateral collaboration in the immigration sector: a shared provincial concern with economic immigration that has resulted in increased engagement in this policy area and a recent reassertion of the federal role in the field as part of an aggressive reform agenda.

Over the past 20 years the views of the provinces on the value of immigration have largely coalesced, pushing them to seek, and achieve, a more substantial role in economic immigrant selection and settlement delivery.⁷ Discussions with senior provincial officials indicated the two largely shared perspectives behind this increased provincial interest in immigration: an acknowledgement of its importance in addressing labour market shortages and population growth and political incentives among provincial ministers and premiers to claim ownership over the file. These shared incentives for engagement—particularly the focus on the importance of economic immigration—are well substantiated by reviewing the increasingly sophisticated provincial immigration strategies (see Alberta, 2005; British Columbia, 2012; New Brunswick, 2013; Nova Scotia, 2011; Ontario, 2012; Saskatchewan, 2009). For example, the first objective of Ontario's recent immigration strategy is "attracting a skilled workforce and building a stronger economy" and 11 of the 14 targets in the strategy are clearly focused on the economic dimension of immigration, with the first one being to "raise the proportion of economic immigrants to 70 per cent" (Ontario, 2012: 1). The interest in capitalizing on the economic and demographic benefits of immigration can be said to represent a consensus position among the provinces (see Council of the Federation, 2011, 2012, 2013). This shared view, which developed over the last 20 years, can be seen as the necessary normative congruence that helps explain the

emergence and establishment of a multilateral approach to managing relations in immigration; the turn has largely been motivated by provinces engaging with the federal government *on a collective, multilateral front* to pursue their common interest in the area of economic immigration.

This “precondition” for collaborative intergovernmental relations has combined with a series of more strategic considerations that have led the provinces to pursue a specifically multilateral approach. First is the view that the provinces have strength in numbers. Banding together helps offset the power dynamics in their relationship with the federal government because it changes the relationship from one between the federal government and an individual province to one between two equal orders of government that have concurrent power over the field, as per the constitution. While interviewees did note that “speaking with one voice” can be rare, given the diverse provincial interests, when interests do align, the multilateral forum provides a powerful mechanism to communicate and defend a common position. The presence of a common voice is well exemplified by the formulation of broad principles and a shared focus on promoting the value of a strong provincial role in selecting economic immigrants, which is increasingly being linked to the maintenance of a strong PNP and, as I discuss below, a provincial role in Express Entry, introduced in early 2015 (see, for example, SCICS, 2014). In addition, the shared, sustained call by provinces for higher immigration levels exemplifies the commonality of provincial interests in this area (see Council of the Federation 2011, 2012, 2013).

Provincial interviewees also clearly indicated that another strategic consideration is capacity and transaction cost. The relatively novel nature of the PNP programs, combined with an initial lack of expertise in all of the jurisdictions in the immigration field, created a need to share information, to capitalize quickly on lessons learned in other jurisdictions and to rely on CIC for guidance in some areas as provinces grew their programs and expertise. With limited human and capital resources (particularly in smaller jurisdictions) the multilateral process offered an efficient and effective means to address these needs. Related to this, as policy and program innovation across the PNPs developed, the value of the multilateral forum increased as it reduced transaction costs to share best practices.

The second key driver of the turn has been a conscious use of multilateral engagement by the federal government to reassert its own role in immigration as part of a broader reform agenda over the past five years.⁸ Key elements of CIC's recent reform agenda are aimed at re-establishing a distinctly federal role in the sector and asserting a more pan-Canadian focus to immigrant selection and settlement policy. A quick overview of the key changes that directly and indirectly impact the provinces supports this point: refocusing the PNP on economic immigration and establishing minimum language requirements for nominees, developing a new

expression of interest selection system (Express Entry), reducing the regional footprint of CIC offices as a cost-savings measure, taking back control over federally funded settlement services (outside Quebec), using CIC's "ministerial instructions" power to target migrants with specific skills to meet national labour market needs in federal streams, proposing reforms to automatic citizenship through birth on soil and terminating the federal immigrant investment program that provided a source of funds to provinces for economic development projects. These changes signal a move to reassert a federal role in the sector, which is further supported by the way CIC generally frames the package of reforms as "transforming" the system into a "fast and flexible economic immigration system whose primary focus is on meeting *Canada's* labour market needs" (CIC, 2012b, emphasis added).

The strategic decision for the federal government to largely rely on multilateral collaboration to manage relations and advance key aspects of its current immigration reform agenda comes down to two related motivations. The first is that CIC uses multilateral institutions as a means to exert influence on the *shared* policy agenda for the sector. The provincial stake in this area has grown considerably over the last 20 years, as has the willingness of provinces to assert a position as a concurrent holder of constitutional responsibility for immigration. The value of the multilateral forum for CIC is that it provides a means to legitimately counter the growing provincial influence by shaping the broad priorities and FPT work plan to better align with federal interests. This is a strategy the provinces are well aware of, with one senior provincial official noting the multilateral agenda is largely "driven by the federal agenda." The second motivation is that multilateral work has allowed the federal government to secure legitimacy and provincial buy-in for the pan-Canadian focus of its reforms.

An inherent element of the multilateral approach is a bias towards nationally focused initiatives that reflect the aggregate interests of all provinces, rather than more case-specific, tailored policies designed with a particular region in mind. This does not mean all of the above-noted policy reforms have been developed and implemented through multilateral channels: some were unilaterally developed and implemented by the federal government, for example, repatriation of federally funded settlement service delivery. Other reforms were concurrently discussed through multilateral and bilateral channels, notably, a multilateral agreement to refocus the PNP on economic migration and to develop minimum language standards, with the *specific details* of reforming each jurisdiction's PNP streams done bilaterally. However, CIC has increasingly embraced the multilateral approach to develop and implement national level reforms with provincial support. This approach has ostensibly been taken to tailor the policy to their provincial needs and secure their buy-in; the case in point

here is the development of the provincial role in Express Entry, discussed below.

Unpacking the motivating factors behind the turn leads to consideration of the extent to which they align with what we would expect to see in substantive, multilateral collaboration. First and foremost, this means assessing whether the motivations and behaviour of the two orders of government *demonstrate a shared normative position* as the catalyst for multilateral action and whether subsequent behaviour corresponds to the expected *commitment to diffuse reciprocity* within substantive multilateral collaboration.

Looking at the provincial behaviour noted above, the provinces have pursued multilateral collaboration largely in line with the objective of securing a rough equivalency of benefits for all jurisdictions, over time. Provinces have, at times, tempered their more particularistic positions to develop a set of national-level principles, institutions and outputs related to (principally economic) immigration. Participation in the multilateral processes over time has reinforced this commitment to diffuse reciprocity. In recent years, certain jurisdictions have even gone as far as accepting arrangements that may be sub-optimal to their specific interests in the short-term, for example, Western provinces agreeing to minimum language requirements as part of refocusing their PNPs, when this limits the stock of nominees from which they traditionally draw. This emerging commitment to diffuse reciprocity has developed following a base-level consensus to seek more influence over national-level policy in a shared area of concern through multilateral collaboration, rather than having it imposed through unilateral action, or applied through a divide-and-conquer approach bilaterally.

On the federal side, elements of the observed behaviour align with substantive multilateralism, though not perfectly. Notably, CIC has embraced working with the provinces as partners in developing and implementing national-level initiatives in a number of key areas. For example, the process to establish the nomination limits and minimum language requirements for the PNP just mentioned were developed and implemented through extensive multilateral engagement. Provincial officials confirmed that this engagement directly resulted in (small) increases in the nomination limits for the PNP as well as tailoring how minimum language standards would be applied to account for some of their concerns. Similarly, the development of the new flagship selection system for economic immigration (Express Entry), and the provincial role in that system, has largely taken place through multilateral work (see CIC, 2012c; SCICS, 2014). Again, both provincial and federal officials noted that the early and extensive multilateral engagement in this area has helped shape the overall design of the system to take into account provincial interests and needs. The connection between a shared federal-provincial position, multilateralism and policy

tailored to reflect provincial interests was summed up well by Les Linklater, the senior ADM responsible for the breadth of policy files at CIC (including FPT relations) between 2009 and 2014. As he sees it multilateralism in the field is “a commonality of ideas and vision, agreement on outcomes and principles that will guide work on outcomes, but, at the same time a recognition that individual paths to get to that outcome may need to vary for very real practical, political and operational issues.”

The extent to which multilateral engagement has truly tempered federal objectives within the broad policy agenda, however, remains questionable. For example, some provincial interviewees noted a lack of trust in the multilateral process because they see it as allowing CIC to propel its agenda. A senior CIC official echoed this view, framing the process as superficial at times, as being multilateral, without any multilateralism. At the same time, CIC’s ability to shape the overall FPT policy agenda is related to the lack of a strong, common provincial position in all areas. Both CIC and provincial officials noted that one of the central problems with multilateral collaboration to date in the sector has been the difficulty in building the necessary level of diffuse reciprocity among provinces in all areas, given they often do not speak with one voice. Thus, while we see elements of federal behaviour that align with the collaborative approach, engaging provinces in national-level policy development, we can question the extent to which CIC has fully tempered its positions in developing national policy initiatives in adherence with the principle of diffuse reciprocity. And, in a related manner, this also signals a lack of full commitment among the provinces to the principle of diffuse reciprocity and the ability to use the multilateral forum to fully shape policy development. When assessing the extent to which intergovernmental relations are carried out in relation to the benchmark of truly substantive multilateral collaboration, then, it is clear that while there has been a *turn towards* this approach it has not been followed perfectly.

The divergent and competing motivations of the governments involved in multilateral processes also shows the need to adjust our understanding of collaborative federalism to account for the complexity of how relations play out in practice. At any given time intergovernmental relations are driven by competing mandates, are shaped by the power imbalances of the players and so take place through a number of channels, that is, through multilateral, bilateral and unilateral processes. The actors in the immigration sector have explicitly accounted for this aspect of intergovernmental relations by focusing their multilateral collaboration on a specified set of objectives and actions through the VAP, while continuing to conduct bilateral negotiations to renew their immigration framework agreements and even accepting that unilateral action takes place to achieve particular objectives. As a senior provincial official expressed in interviews, not everything can or should be conducted through multilateral collaboration, as this would

stretch provincial capacity, while limiting meaningful engagement and progress in those areas where there is a genuine consensus among the jurisdictions. The existence of multiple channels of relations thus reflects the preferences of the actors involved, as well as the institutional rigidity of the existing bilateral processes previously developed in relation to the PNP. For most provinces, particularly those with well-established PNPs, the bilateral relationship remains a critical way to engage with CIC. Bilateral channels logically co-exist alongside multilateral engagement, enhancing the collaborative approach by providing a means to further reflect specific regional interests within areas of broader FPT concern (see Cameron and Simeon, 2002: 64). Additionally, given the reality of power imbalances and the need for governments to deliver results, the use of unilateral action always remains a possibility in intergovernmental relations.

The presence and use of multiple channels of relations is not inconsistent with my argument that there has been a turn away from bilateralism towards multilateral collaboration as a key characteristic of intergovernmental relations in the sector. The presence of unilateral, bilateral and multilateral relations simply shows that in a period of transition multiple channels of negotiation can be expected, and that bilateral and unilateral action can coherently continue within a field demonstrating a broader commitment to engagement through multilateral collaboration in areas of jointly defined federal-provincial concern.

Recognizing the complexity of relations in practice allows us to reconcile the presence of clearly unilateral action—CIC's decision to repatriate control over federally funded settlement services in Manitoba and British Columbia—during the turn towards multilateral collaboration in the sector. CIC's decision, announced as part of the 2012 federal budget, was taken without any prior consultation with either province and against their wishes. It is the very definition of unilateral action, ostensibly taken in this manner due to budget secrecy rules and a view that negotiations would have yielded little result. However, when considering the rationale behind the decision and its effect, a more complex picture emerges. The public communications rationalizing the move stressed the need for "a more consistent level of services," the need to "avoid the development of a patchwork approach" and to ensure that settlement services contribute to "nation building" (CIC, 2012d). In interviews with senior CIC officials, these same messages (particularly the focus on coherence and consistency) were reinforced, along with the perceived value of greater accountability and transparency by bringing the program under CIC's control, given the significant level of federal funds being dedicated to the area. Taken together, the public communications and interviewee comments point towards a clear federal objective of reasserting its role in settlement service delivery and facilitating what it sees as a more consistent, pan-Canadian approach

to the delivery of the program. The underlying rationale for this decision, then, aligns with aspects of the federal government's motivation for embracing the turn towards multilateralism in the sector.

The decision to seek a more "consistent" approach to the delivery of federally funded settlement services outside of Quebec, even if done in a unilateral manner, has also had the incidental effect of facilitating multilateral collaboration in the policy area. Despite an immediate, negative impact to the level of trust between, mainly, Manitoba, British Columbia and CIC in the wake of the decision, multilateral work has continued (on the negative impact, see CBC, 2012). Currently, under the auspices of the VAP, multilateral work is taking place on the development of national settlement outcomes and joint partnership models to deliver services. As ADM Linklater from CIC indicated in conversation, from the federal perspective, the settlement decision is consistent with the wider turn towards multilateralism; it addressed the asymmetry in approaches to federally funded settlement services outside Quebec, laying the path for multilateral collaboration in the area moving forward. The same view was shared by a senior provincial official (though from a jurisdiction other than Manitoba and British Columbia). That being said, I am not arguing the decision on settlement is a symbol of the turn towards multilateralism. I am simply saying that recognizing multiple channels of relations can coherently exist at the same time within a sector helps show how this unilateral action does not negate the observed turn towards a more collaborative approach to relations, in the general sense.

One of the incidental effects of this unilateral action—removing barriers to multilateral collaboration in the area of settlement service delivery and bringing about a more pan-Canadian focus to federal-provincial work—draws attention to what is arguably the principal implication of the broader turn towards multilateral collaboration: the potential for a shift away from asymmetry towards a more symmetrical, pan-Canadian approach to defining the provincial role in immigrant selection and settlement. This potential policy shift is the counterpoint to the underlying argument of the current literature on intergovernmental relations in immigration. As noted earlier, a number of studies make the case that the bilateral nature of intergovernmental relations in immigration has produced a decentralized, asymmetrical and incoherent policy environment (Banting, 2012; Seidle, 2013; Wood and Klassen, 2009). The underlying argument of this work, and my own piece, is that how intergovernmental relations are carried out—as unilateral, bilateral or multilateral—affects the resulting policy design and implementation.

Since bilateralism is premised on an expectation of specific reciprocity and immediate quid-pro-quo arrangements, we can expect the resulting policies and programs to more directly reflect the particular interests of the province involved. In addition, since bilateral negotiations are conducted

on a case-by-case basis they are more likely to produce a greater diversity of outcomes given the higher number of resulting arrangements to implement a particular policy or program across the country.

In contrast, multilateral collaboration has a greater likelihood of producing more symmetrical and pan-Canadian-focused policies and programs. This is because the underlying negotiation process is built on principles of diffuse reciprocity and an attempt to reflect the aggregate view of provincial interest along with a tempered federal perspective in essentially one agreement. The nature of this negotiation process can thus be expected to produce policies and programs that are more "symmetrical" in terms of the relative limits placed on the variation in design and delivery options across jurisdictions. In a related manner, the resulting policies should be more pan-Canadian focused to the extent they reflect and propel a national-level perspective to dealing with the issue of immigrant selection and settlement (rather than starting with the goal of addressing unique regional or provincial needs).

In two of the oft-cited examples of asymmetrical policy in the field, the PNP and settlement services, we can see a shift towards symmetry taking place and the role played by multilateral collaboration. Having already discussed settlement and the current multilateral work on pan-Canadian settlement outcomes and partnership models, a look at the changes to the provincial role in selecting economic immigrants is telling here. For example, the process to establish nomination limits and minimum language requirements for the PNP was implemented through extensive multilateral engagement. The national-level focus of these changes is clear, as CIC has explicitly said they are aimed at ensuring "immigrants coming to Canada under the PNP will...be selected for the impact they can have on *Canada's economy*" (CIC, 2012e, emphasis added). This more pan-Canadian vision for the PNP has also driven a push for consistency between the various provincial PNP streams and other federal programs, with CIC lobbying provinces to remove PNP streams that overlap with federal programs, like family reunification and investor programs. Related to this push to better align each province's PNP is the current approach to renegotiating the next generation of framework and PNP agreements. While these agreements are being negotiated on a formally bilateral basis, senior CIC and provincial officials confirmed that the current approach to negotiations is to use a "prototype agreement." So, while the agreements currently in place and those being negotiated do differ from province to province to reflect specific needs, their *basic structure, key clauses and principles* are all established through a *benchmark agreement* that sets shared standards for each subsequent iteration. In this way the current set of PNP agreements in place and being renegotiated are underpinned by an element of *multilateralism*, rather than a pure *bilateralism* (that stresses significant case-by-case difference).

The development of a new selection system for economic immigration (Express Entry, launched in early 2015), and the provincial role in that system, has also largely taken place through multilateral work (see CIC, 2012c; CIC, 2014). Express Entry will introduce a new method of selecting permanent economic immigrants based on largely national-level objectives: pooling applications that are ranked for selection on a set of criteria related to their ability to meet labour market shortages, a job offer and their human capital. These are traditionally federal concerns with immigration, particularly human capital. Given Express Entry is likely to become an important tool in how provinces select economic migrants moving into the future, the introduction of this system may signal a shift towards greater similarity in the particular profile of economic migrants selected by provinces. However, it should be noted that provincial participation in Express Entry is at their discretion (see Mas, 2014) which also signals that the provincial role in the new system is linked to multilateral work.

These examples show how, in a number of areas, a multilateral approach has resulted in an increased focus on symmetry in immigrant selection and settlement policy, by seeking consistency and coherence across jurisdictions, in line with a broader pan-Canadian perspective. Moving forward, it will be important to assess the extent of this seeming shift away from asymmetry and whether it holds or if provinces can leverage a unified position to temper federal objectives and maintain a more regionally tailored approach to selecting and settling immigrants. It is also important to consider whether this turn towards multilateral collaboration will result in a greater role for municipalities in immigrant selection and settlement policy and program delivery, given they are a key player in the field. Finally, it remains to be seen whether the initial work undertaken through these mechanisms will improve service delivery and outcomes for migrants themselves. These are questions beyond the scope of this article, but mark future research directions.

Conclusion

In this article I have sought to both describe and explain the turn towards multilateral collaboration between the two orders of government to manage key policy areas within the immigration sector. Applying the framework of collaborative federalism, with a particular focus on the extent to which relations are substantively multilateral in practice, the study highlighted three key developments that signal a turn towards this approach: 1) a jointly established FPT Vision for Immigration; 2) the increasing use of multilateral institutions to manage relations in key areas; and 3) the principal output from this work, the FPT Vision Action Plan, which is a jointly established framework marking out the areas where multilateral

engagement will take place and how work will be completed. In particular, the above analysis showed how the jointly developed principles and norms elaborated in the vision have been, to an extent, integrated into the multilateral institutions and outcomes in this sector.

I also applied the refined framework to help unpack and explain the principal drivers for the turn: increasing provincial consensus on the importance of economic immigration and related engagement in this area, as well as a reassertion of a federal role in the sector through CIC's recent reform agenda. Reflecting on the extent to which the motivations and observed behaviour of the two orders of government aligned with what we could expect to see in substantive multilateral collaboration raised three considerations. First, while the actions of the federal and provincial governments largely show a shared normative position and commitment to diffuse reciprocity, their behaviour does not meet the benchmark of truly substantive multilateralism. The second consideration is that there is a need to account for the complexity of intergovernmental relations in practice and the fact that relations may coherently take place through multiple channels within a field. Linking these two considerations together brings us back to a principal argument of the article: there has been a *turn towards* multilateral collaboration in the immigration sector but not a perfect implementation of the approach. And, it is by applying the concept of substantive multilateralism in combination with the concept of collaborative federalism that this insight is brought to light, reinforcing the value of layering these two approaches to create a more refined framework to analyze intergovernmental relations. Finally, recognizing how the turn towards multilateral collaboration has played out in practice, and its effect on the development of immigration policy, draws our attention to the principal implication of this development: the potential shift away from a decentralized and asymmetrical approach to immigrant selection and settlement policy towards a more symmetrical, pan-Canadian focused policy.

Notes

- 1 Eleven invitations were extended. Interviews were conducted between the spring and fall of 2014, with subsequent correspondence and discussions carried out as necessary on points of clarification and as part of an ongoing research agenda in this area. Participants are attributed according to their consent.
- 2 I should also disclose that I was employed by Citizenship and Immigration Canada from 2008 to 2013 as a senior advisor working in this area (intergovernmental relations and strategic policy).
- 3 I would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for this insight.
- 4 There are also many limitations to applying international relations theory to intergovernmental relations. For example, the relative autonomy states have to enter into or avoid multilateral negotiations, compared to the interdependence of federal and provincial governments and a sometimes dominant position of the federal government (in terms

- of resources and public legitimacy) can produce more hierarchical negotiation dynamics in the latter area. I am motivated, though, by Richard Simeon's (2006) reliance on elements of international relations theory to inform his seminal study of federal-provincial diplomacy.
- 5 There are many examples of this narrative. See Banting (2012: 261–63); Boushey and Luedtke, (2006: 213–16); McRoberts (1985: 86–87, 90–91); Seidle (2013: 3–6; 2010: 49–51); Vineberg (1987, 2011); Wood and Klassen (2009).
 - 6 One notably absent feature is engagement with relevant stakeholders. For example, despite the integral role of municipalities in the successful integration of migrants, they are not considered or represented in the VAP. Indeed, while there are tables where the federal and provincial governments engage with municipalities on immigration, they are generally not provided an opportunity within the intergovernmental structures to shape immigrant selection and settlement policy. This is, in large part, because provinces have been cautious in expanding the formal role of municipalities in the field.
 - 7 A recent study by Mireille Paquet (2014) investigating the rising provincial interest in immigration makes a similar argument. Paquet's focus, though, tends to be on the "decentralizing" and "federalizing" effects of this provincial engagement on the system, whereas my own focus is on the establishment, maintenance and implications of specifically *multilateral* institutions.
 - 8 Although, the *initial* position of the federal government was largely reactive: one senior CIC official explained that CIC was largely "caught off guard" by provincial engagement in the area in the early years.

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