Attitudes Toward Immigration in Canadian Provinces, 1988-2008

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Attitudes Toward Immigration in Canadian Provinces
Setting the Stage

- Provinces play an increasing role in handling immigration
  - Yet most investigations focus on pan-Canadian public opinion
- Need to study public opinion about immigration in provinces
  - Provincial govt. will be increasingly sensitive to public opinion in their province
  - Immigrants live with people in provinces, not Canada as a whole
- Three questions:
  - 1. How do provinces compare to each other?
  - 2. Has anything changed over the last 20 years?
  - 3. What explains differences and similarities across provinces?

Attitudes Toward Immigration in Canadian Provinces
Research Design & Data

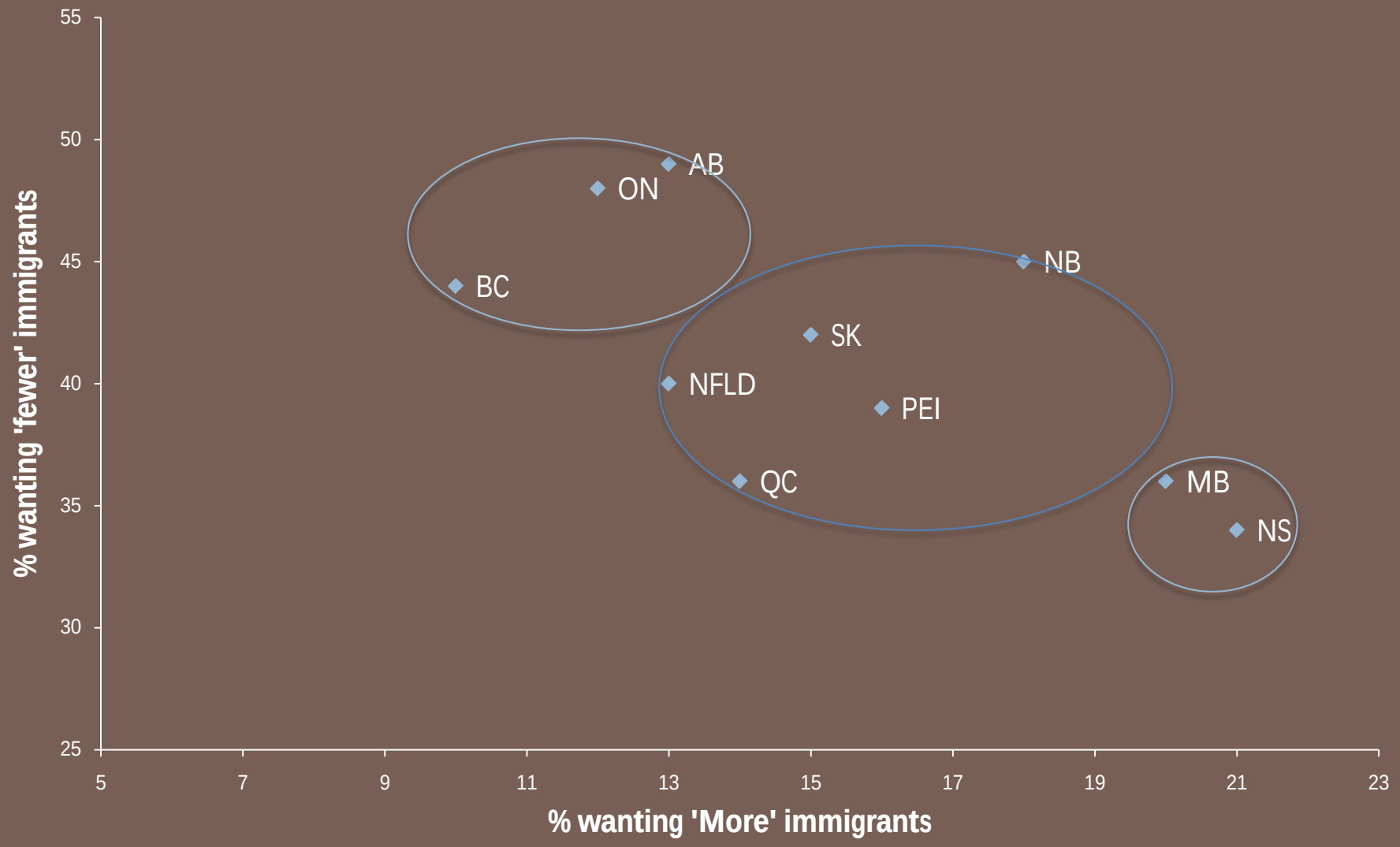
- Focus on:
  - All ten provinces
  - Canadians born in Canada who are NOT members of a visible minority group
  - Period from 1988 to 2008
    - Recession & great economic recovery; increase in immigration intake; change in federal and provincial govt. (except Alberta)

- Data used for the project
  - Canadian Election Studies (1988, 1993, 1997, 2000, 2004, 2006, 2008)

- Attitudes toward 'national' immigration intake
  - Should Canada admit 'more', 'fewer' or 'about the same' number of immigrants as now?

Attitudes Toward Immigration in Canadian Provinces

Q1: Provinces Most and Least Favourable to Immigration?



Source: 1988-2008 Canadian Election Studies

Note: Figure reports aggregate scores for the period 1988-2008.

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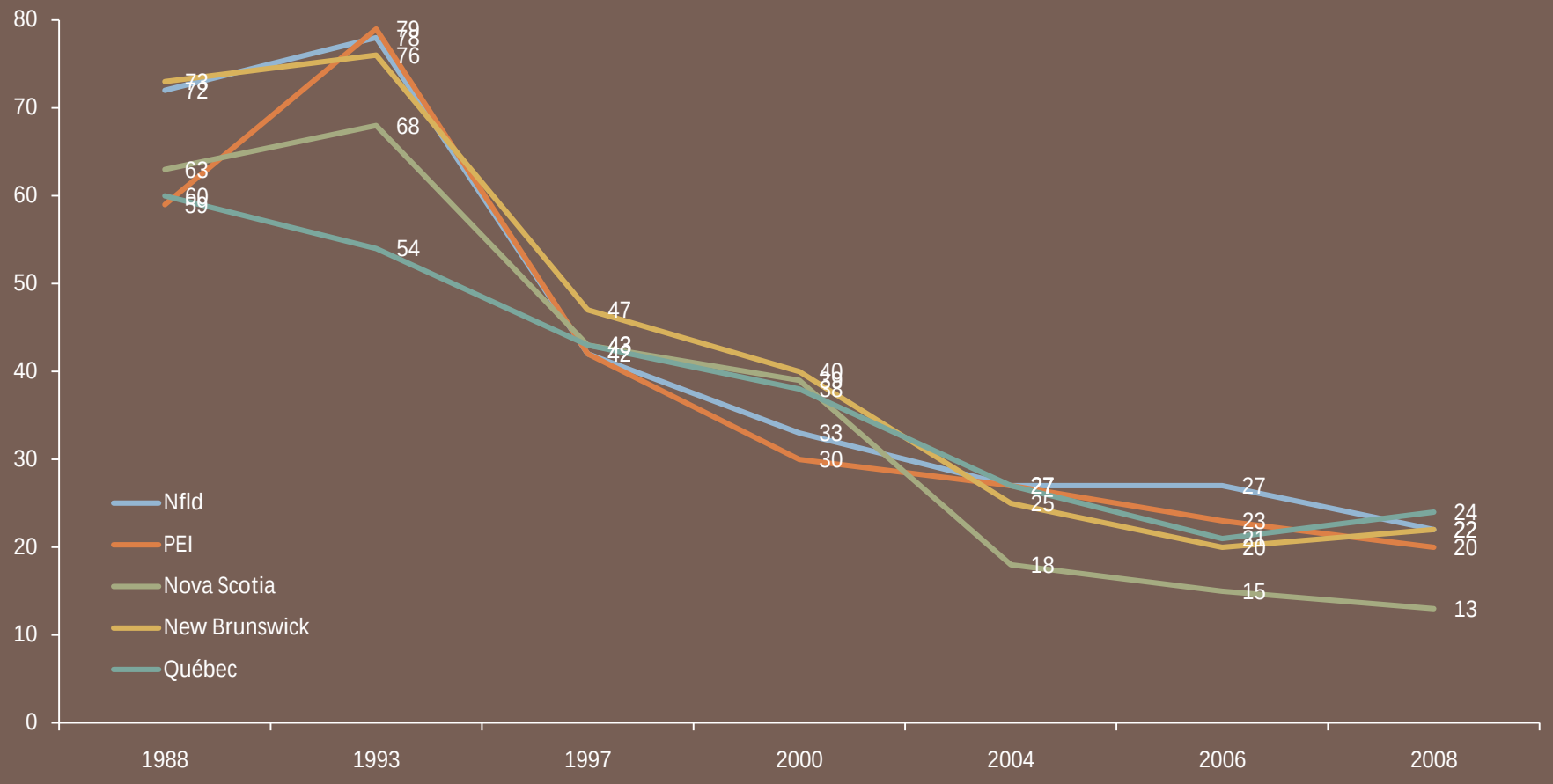
Q2: The Melting of Opposition to Immigration (1/2)

Figure 1a. Proportion of Population in Each Province Reporting They Want 'Fewer' Immigrants to be Admitted to Canada (1988-2008)



Source: Canadian Election Studies (1988-2008)
Question: "Do you think Canada should admit more, fewer or about the same number of immigrants as now?"
Respondents born outside of Canada or of visible minority background are not included in the analyses.

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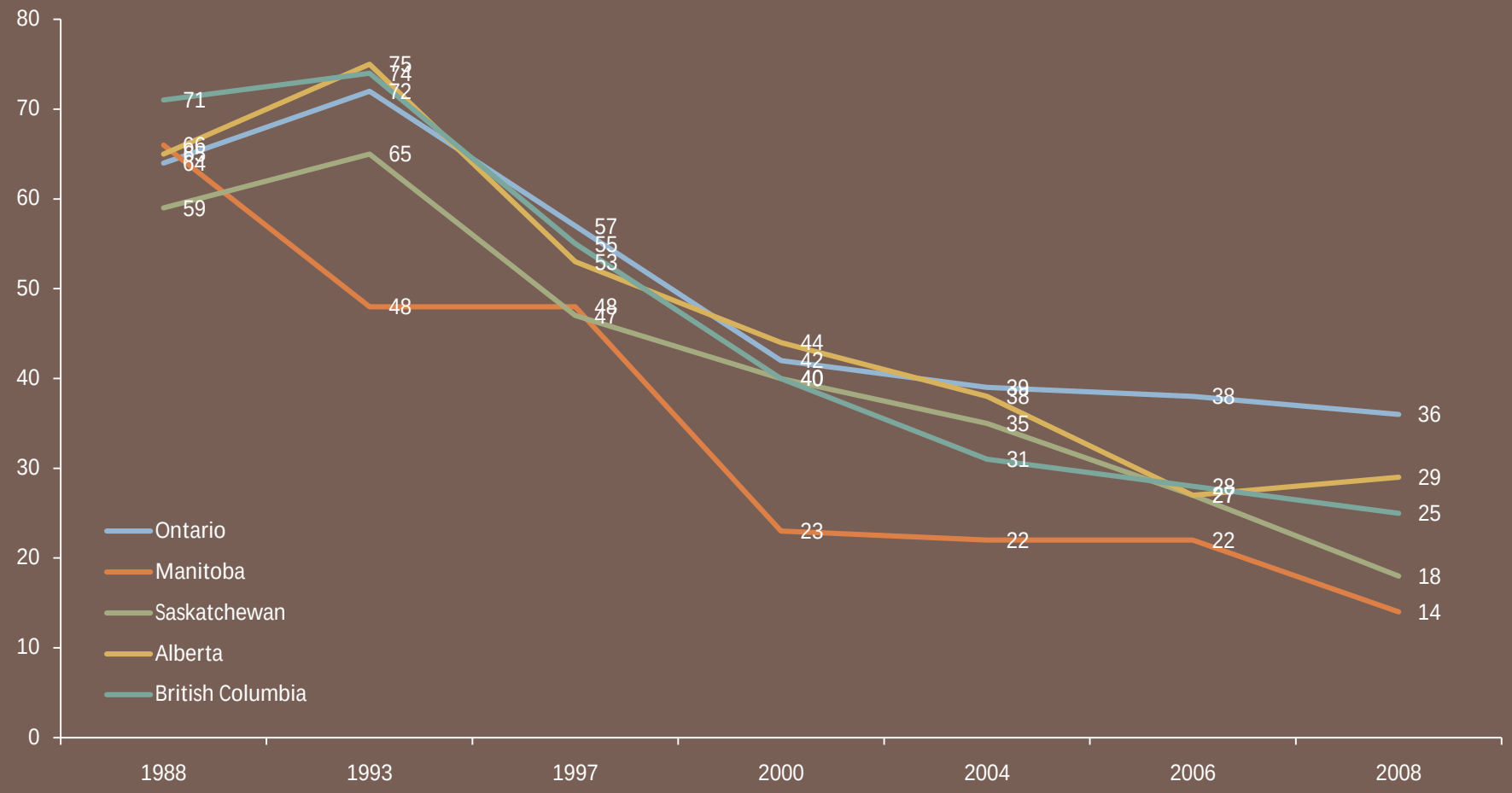
Q2: The Melting of Opposition to Immigration (2/2)

Figure 1b. Proportion of Population in Each Province Reporting They Want 'Fewer' Immigrants to be Admitted to Canada (1988-2008)



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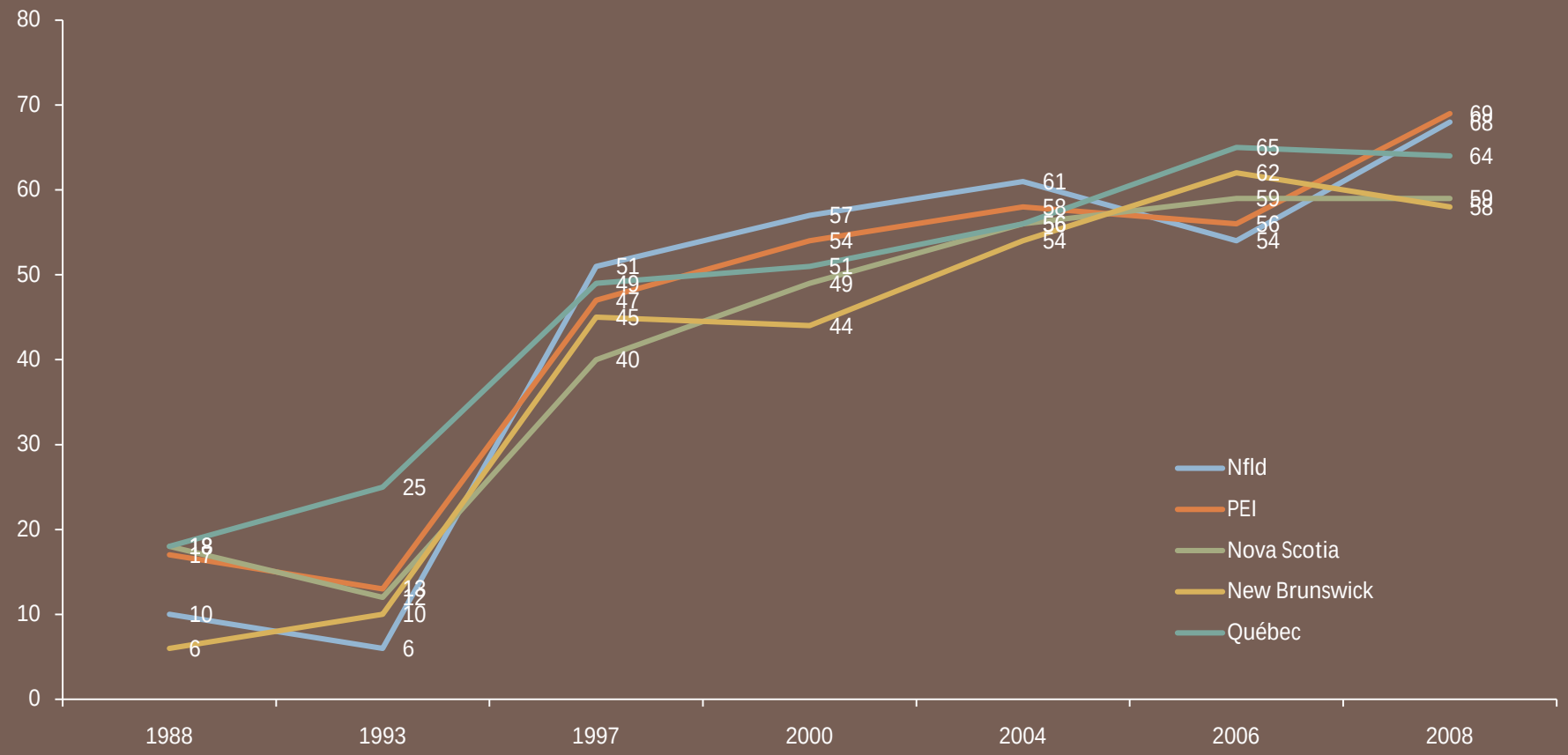
Q2: Emerging Consensus Around Status Quo (1/2)

Figure 3a. Proportion of Population in Each Province Reporting They Want 'About the Same Number of Immigrants as Now' to be Admitted to Canada (1988-2008)



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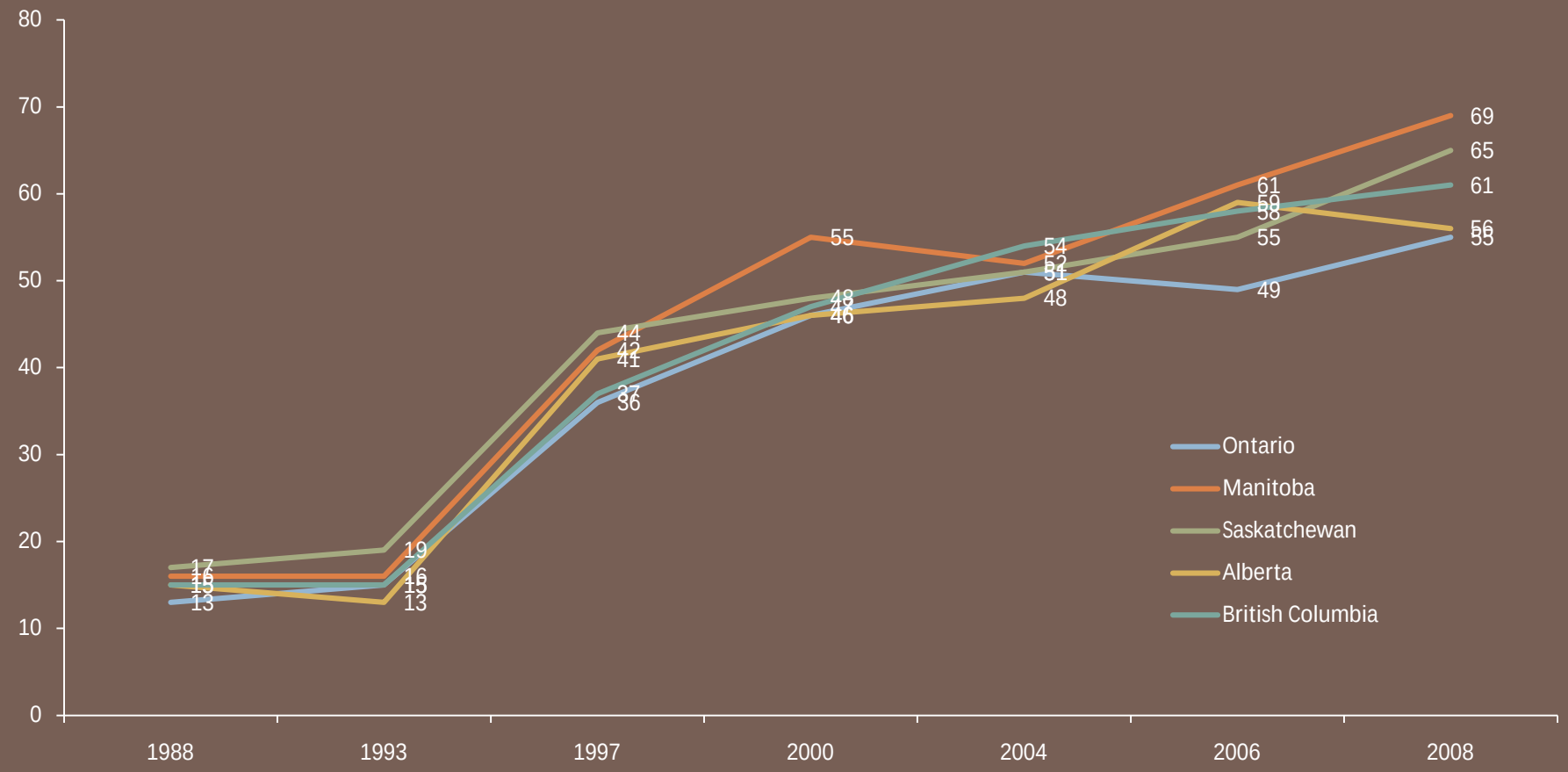
Q2: Emerging Consensus Around Status Quo (2/2)

Figure 3b. Proportion of Population in Each Province Reporting They Want 'About the Same Number of Immigrants as Now' to be Admitted to Canada (1988-2008)



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Q3: What Explains Differences & Similarities Across Provinces

- Three Tentative Explanations
  - Economic Situation
    - Unemployment rate in provinces
    - GDP growth in provinces
  - Demographic Situation
    - Immigration intake in provinces in preceding 15 years (in % of population)
  - Tolerance for Diversity
    - Based on ethnic diversity thermometer question (0-100)
    - % in province that is POSITIVELY oriented toward ethnic diversity (score 67-100)
    - % in province that is NEGATIVELY oriented toward ethnic diversity (score 0-33)

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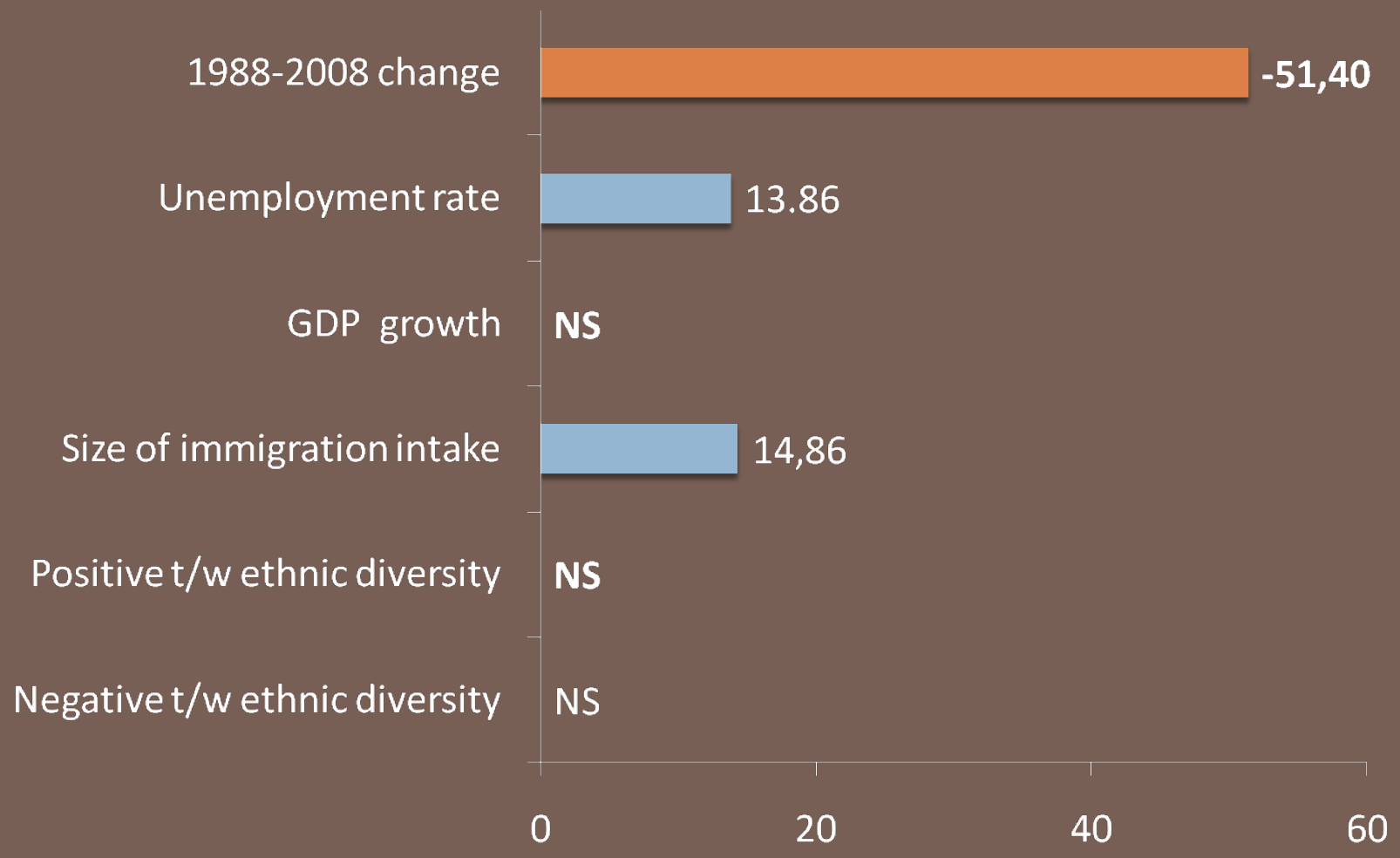
Q3: Explaining desires for 'Fewer' immigrants admitted



Results derived from OLS regression. Results reported are predicted change with a max to min. change on the ind. var.

Source: 1988-2008 Canadian Election Studies (2000 data not included).

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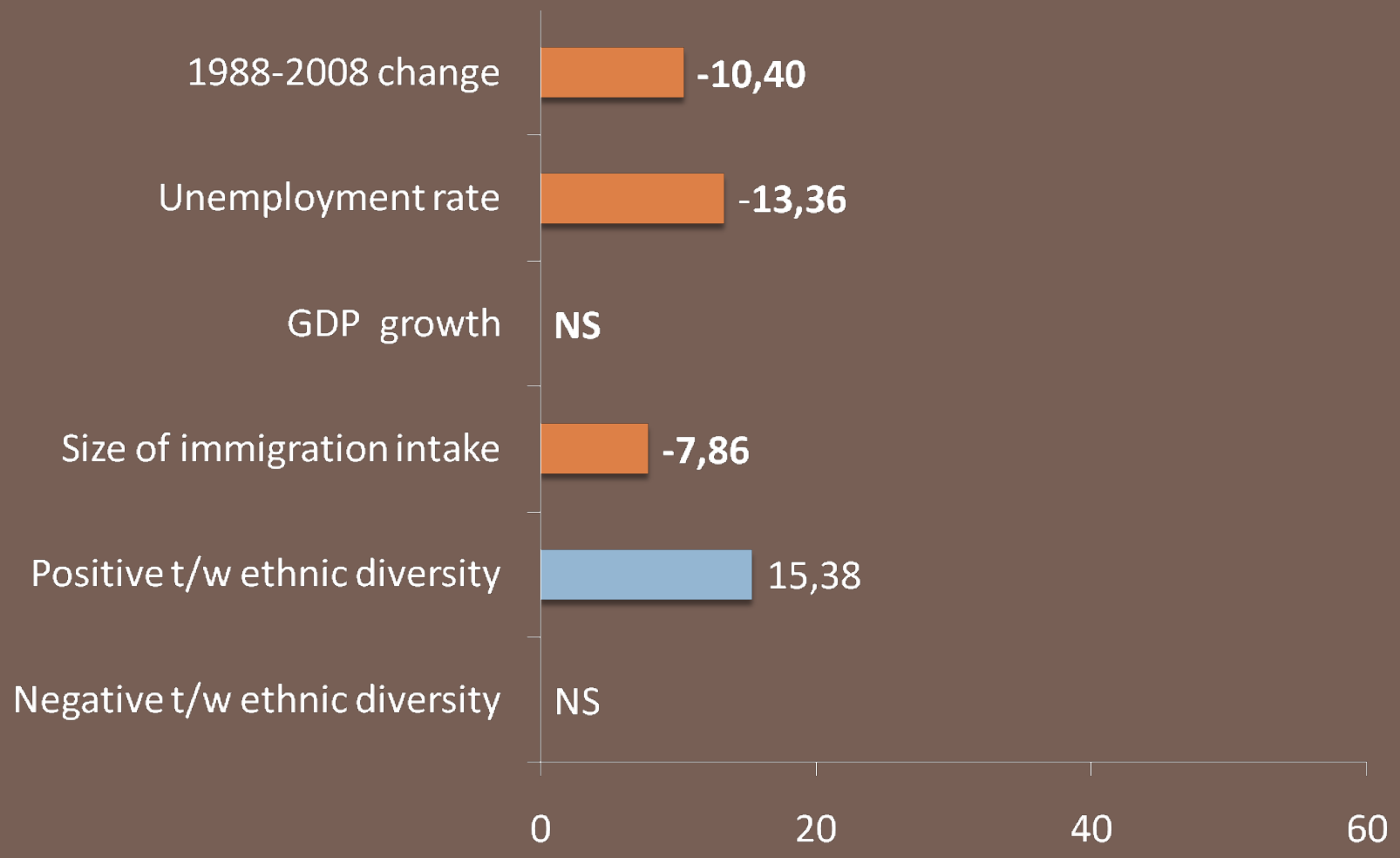
Q3: Explaining desires for 'More' immigrants admitted



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Concluding Remarks

- Clear differences in attitudes toward immigration across all 10 provinces
- Sharp changes in public opinion between 1988 and 2008
  - Canadians of all provinces increasingly comfortable with status quo in immigration intake
  - But in practice, status quo means more immigrants!
- Key factors to account for provincial differences:
  - State of the economy
  - Past provincial intake of immigrants
  - Levels of tolerance for ethnic diversity
- The above explanations do not account for profound cross-time changes

THANK YOU

For more information please contact:

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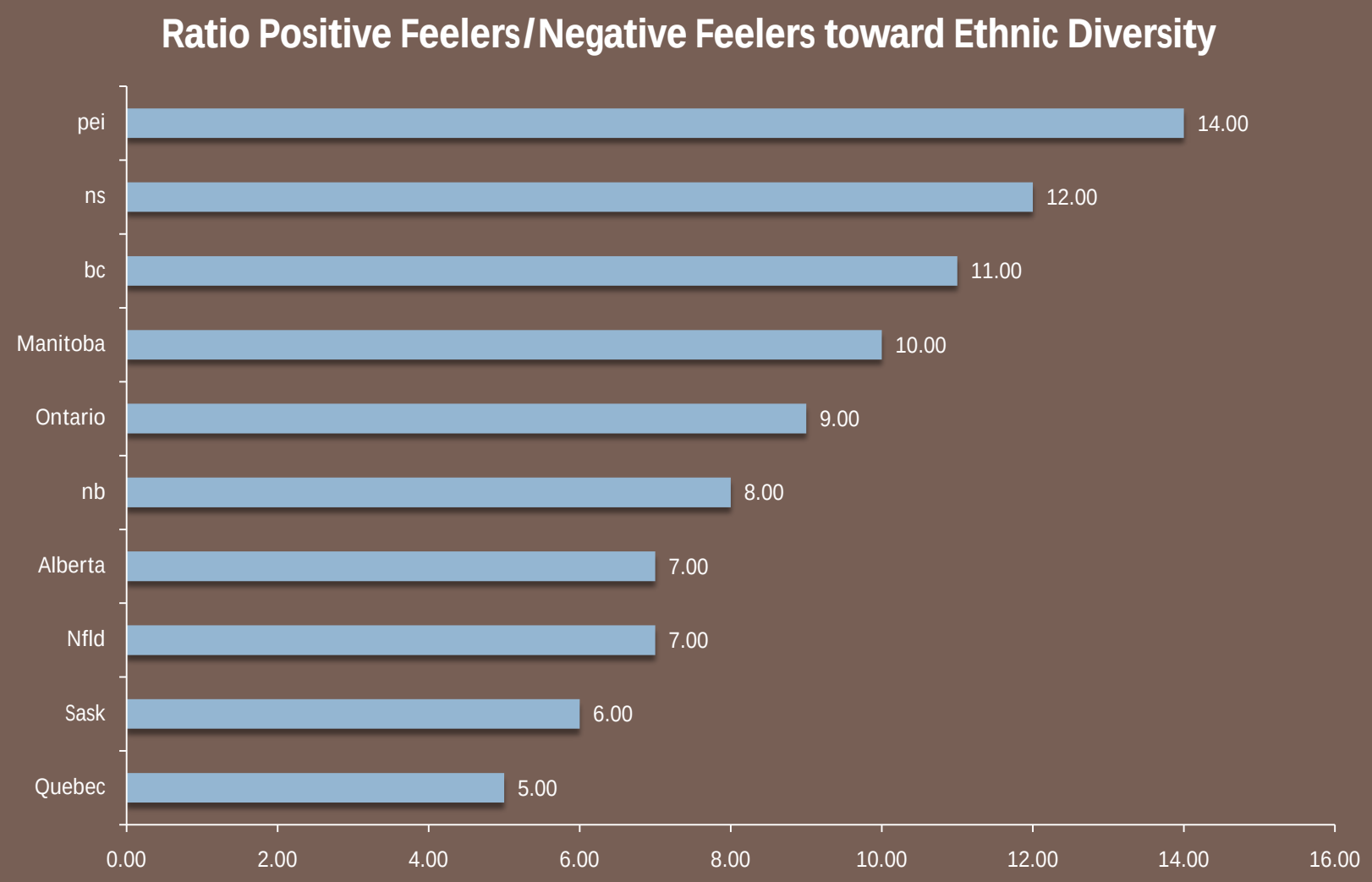
A. Bilodeau, L. Turgeon & E. Karakok