

# Dominion and Divergence: Creighton, Econometrics, and the National Energy Program

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## Abstract

We quantify the economic effects of Canada’s 1980 National Energy Program (NEP) using a balanced provincial panel (1975–1995) and three complementary designs—two-way fixed-effects difference-in-differences (TWFE DiD), dynamic event studies, and ridge-regularized synthetic control (SCM). Alberta’s path is compared to a data-driven counterfactual formed from other provinces.

We study log GDP per capita, log compensation per worker (all industries), and a distributional robustness metric: the **compensation-to-GDP (real) ratio**. Under our *main SCM specification* (Constrained + Bias Corrected), the 1981–1995 average ATT (Alberta minus synthetic) is **-5.9%** for GDP per capita, **9.7%** for compensation per worker, and **12.3%** for the compensation-to-GDP (real) ratio. Event-study *leads show no economically meaningful pre-trend* (joint tests non-significant), and placebo/leave-one-out checks corroborate inference. Taken together, Alberta’s GDP per capita is roughly unchanged to modestly below its counterfactual while labour remuneration rises relative to output—consistent with *rent reallocation* rather than a general labour–capital decoupling.

Interpreting through a Neo-Laurentian lens (centre–periphery with an ON–QC core), the NEP appears as a late effort at rent centralization colliding with a capital-intensive resource province increasingly tied to U.S. markets—an episode at the hinge between Canadian economic nationalism and the continental integration later cemented by CUSFTA/NAFTA.

## 1 Introduction

For Canada, 1980 was a defining moment. While the Quebec referendum loomed large, an arguably more consequential event for federal–provincial relations was the announcement of the National Energy Program (NEP) in the October federal budget.<sup>1</sup> Introduced by the returning Liberal government, the NEP sought to reassert federal authority over energy rents through price controls, revenue reallocation, and state equity. Its stated aims—“security, opportunity, and fairness”—met a political economy already in motion: Alberta had been

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<sup>1</sup>See Government of Canada (1980a), pp. 1, 6, 9–11.

renegotiating resource rents and autonomy through the 1970s, even as the oil patch became more tightly linked to U.S. capital and continental markets.

This paper reads the episode through a Neo-Laurentian lens—Canada’s core–periphery dynamic in which federal instruments can centralize rents to stabilize the core—and tests its implications using modern causal designs. With a 1975–1995 province–year panel, we combine TWFE difference-in-differences, an event study, and a ridge synthetic control. Across designs, Alberta’s GDP per capita after 1981 is roughly unchanged to modestly below its counterfactual, while *compensation per worker* and the *compensation-to-GDP (real) ratio* rise. We interpret this not as a general labour–capital decoupling but as a pattern consistent with temporary rent-centralization pressures at the hinge between late-stage national planning and the continental integration later formalized by CUSFTA/NAFTA.

## 2 Historical Context

Read in isolation, Donald Creighton’s narrative can look like an east–west triumph under firm central authority. From *The Commercial Empire of the St. Lawrence* to *Dominion of the North*, he emphasizes geography, finance, and statecraft as engines of national development (Creighton, 1937, 1957). Set against that is a resource political economy in which global prices, capital, and institutions shape regional fortunes—especially in oil (Yergin, 1991; Foster, 1986).

The 1975 Syncrude rescue crystallized this politics of energy rents: after a private withdrawal, Ottawa and Ontario joined Alberta as equity partners to keep the project alive—an explicit precedent for public equity in the oil sands (Pratt, 1976). Five years later, the October 1980 Budget framed energy as national political economy—securing supply, reallocating rents, and increasing Canadian control—foreshadowing the NEP’s price, revenue, and ownership pillars (Government of Canada, 1980a).

*Mini-timeline (selected waypoints).*

- 1961: National Oil Policy (east–west market segmentation).
- 1973–74: First oil shock; Alberta begins major royalty/tenure changes.
- 1975: Petro-Canada founded; Syncrude rescue brings federal/provincial equity.
- 1979–80: Second oil shock; deeper U.S. capital/market ties in the patch.
- 1980: Budget announces NEP pillars (price controls, revenue sharing, state equity).
- 1989/1994: CUSFTA/NAFTA formalize continental integration, bracketing the NEP era.

## 3 Data and Methods

### 3.1 Data Sources and Construction

We use a balanced provincial panel (1975–1995). To ensure consistent macro coverage, we exclude **Prince Edward Island**,<sup>2</sup> yielding Alberta plus eight comparator provinces (BC, MB, NB, NL, NS, ON, QC, SK). Monetary variables are deflated to **1986 CAD** using province-specific CPI (Tables 18-10-0004/0005). Limited early gaps (1975) are linearly interpolated to preserve balance; robustness checks drop any constructed cells.

#### Core Indicators (log, 1986 CAD)

- **GDP per capita**: real GDP (all industries) / population.
- **Compensation per worker**: real *compensation of employees* (all industries) / total employment.
- *Robustness*: **Compensation-to-GDP (real ratio)** = real compensation / real GDP.<sup>3</sup>

#### Panel construction.

All series are pulled from Statistics Canada bulk tables (Appendix Table A3) and harmonized on (Province, Year) with consistent geography labels. Province-specific CPI (18-10-0004-01, -0005-01) is used to deflate nominal series to 1986 CAD; we backfill minimal early CPI gaps as noted in the Appendix. Outcomes are strictly positive before log transforms.

### 3.2 Econometric Framework

We triangulate with three complementary designs:

1. **Difference-in-Differences (DiD)**: TWFE with Alberta×Post; province and year FE; province-clustered SEs.
2. **Event Study**: Dynamic DiD with event-time indicators ( $k$ ) from five years before to nine years after the NEP;  $k = -1$  is the reference; joint pre-trend test reported.
3. **Synthetic Control Method (SCM)**: *Main* spec is **constrained ridge** (non-negative, sum-to-one weights) with **bias correction**. We also report (i) unconstrained ridge (negative weights allowed; Ben-Michael, Feller & Rothstein, 2021), and (ii) NNLS variants with/without bias correction. Tuning  $\lambda$  via grid search minimizes pre-1981 RMSE.

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<sup>2</sup>PEI is excluded due to missing data in key series (CPI, GDP, employment) in early years, which prevents balanced panel estimation.

<sup>3</sup>Used as a robustness ratio; not the nominal national-accounts labour share, so values may exceed one.

### 3.3 Identification and Inference

Internal validity rests on (i) parallel trends (event-study pre-trend tests), (ii) good pre-period fit (SCM RMSE), and (iii) robustness to donor composition and placebo permutations. We report clustered SEs for DiD, permutation-based  $p$ -values for SCM, and sensitivity to donor leave-one-out.

## 4 Results

### 4.1 Summary of Main Outcomes

Across DiD, event studies, and SCM, three patterns emerge in the 1981–1995 window under our main spec (Constrained + Bias Corrected):

1. **GDP per capita:** average ATT  $\approx$  **-5.9%**, i.e., roughly unchanged to modestly below the counterfactual.
2. **Compensation per worker:** average ATT  $\approx$  **9.7%** (higher than counterfactual).
3. **Compensation-to-GDP (real ratio):** average ATT  $\approx$  **12.3%** (labour remuneration rising relative to output).

Placebo-in-space/time tests place Alberta’s post-1981 gaps in the upper tail; leave-one-out donor tests yield stable estimates.

### 4.2 Difference-in-Differences and Event Studies

Event studies (Figures 1–3) show flat pre-trends and post-1981 divergence consistent with SCM. We report the joint pre-trend  $F$ -test and province-clustered SEs.

### 4.3 Synthetic Control Method

Figures 4–6 show pre-period fit and post-1981 gaps for the main spec; gaps are summarized in Appendix Tables A4–A8. Donor weights appear in Tables A5–A9.

### 4.4 Interpretation

The NEP did not reverse Alberta’s ascent; it reshaped it. Capital-intensive growth persisted, but compensation per worker and a real compensation-to-GDP ratio rose relative to counterfactuals, implying no simple decoupling of labour from output. This is consistent with the NEP as a late-stage assertion of federal dominion colliding with continental market forces.

## Limitations

Global oil volatility and tight monetary policy complicate causal separation;  $N = 9$  provinces limits power; SCM’s linear weighting may understate heterogeneity. We therefore emphasize triangulation.

## 5 Discussion

When Allan MacEachen invoked “security, opportunity, and fairness,” Ottawa was responding to a political economy already in motion. Lougheed’s Alberta had been renegotiating resource rents and provincial autonomy through the 1970s. The NEP—via price controls, revenue sharing, and state equity—reasserted federal authority over energy rents, but it met an oil patch increasingly integrated with U.S. capital and markets. Using our extended panel (1975–1995), we place the episode at the hinge between late-stage national planning and the continental integration later formalized by CUSFTA/NAFTA. Within this setting, our estimates show a modest output shortfall alongside stronger labour returns—consistent with temporary rent-centralization pressures rather than a general labour–capital decoupling.

## 6 Conclusion

We revisit the National Energy Program using modern causal designs. Across DiD, event-study, and our ridge-SCM main specification, Alberta’s GDP per capita from 1981–1995 is at most modestly below its counterfactual, while compensation per worker and the compensation-to-GDP (real) ratio rise. We read this not as a general labour–capital decoupling but as a pattern consistent with temporary rent-centralization pressures. Interpreted through a Neo-Laurentian lens, the NEP fits a broader core–periphery dynamic in Canadian federalism, in which stabilization policies can reallocate rents across regions. We do not claim the NEP is the sole driver of Alberta’s trajectory; the results should be read as causal within the designs and data used, and they are robust across standard diagnostics.

# Figures

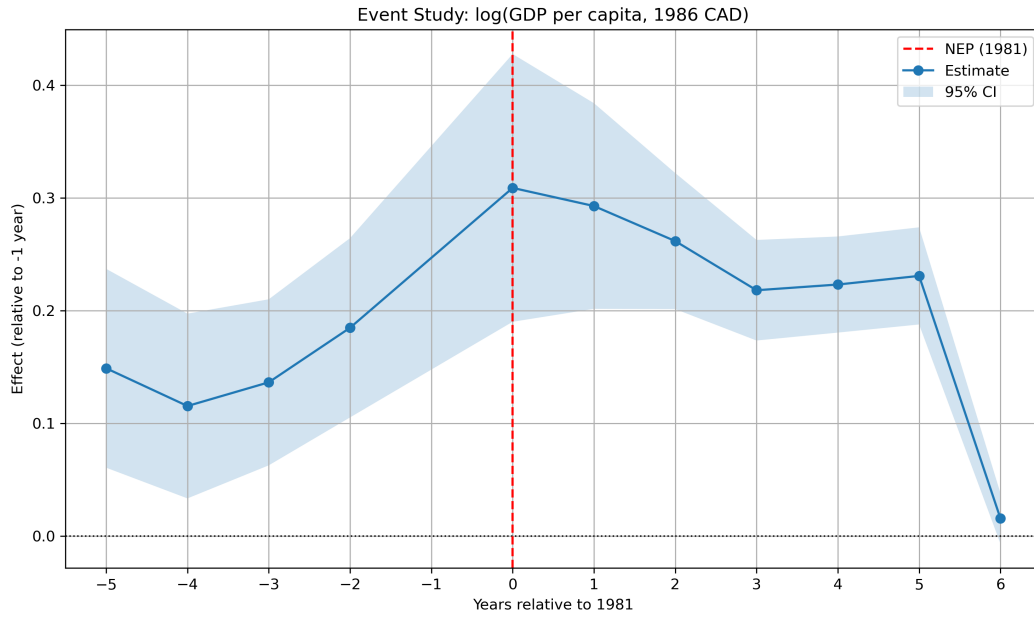


Figure 1: Event study: **log GDP per capita** (1986 CAD). Points show event-time coefficients  $\hat{\beta}_k$  with confidence intervals, relative to the reference period  $k = -1$  (1980). Vertical line marks  $k = 0$  (1981). Dashed horizontal line denotes zero.

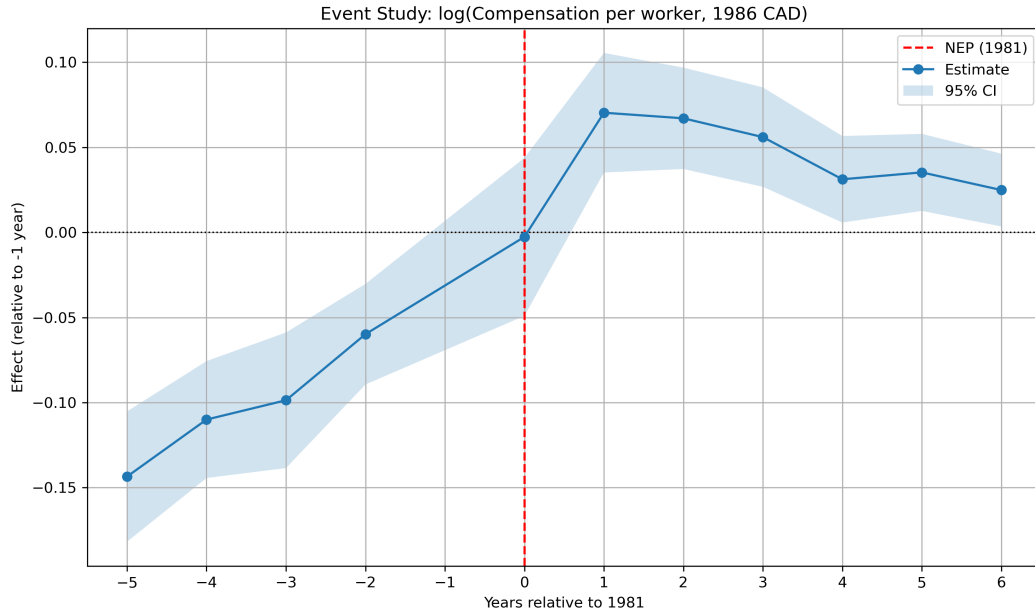


Figure 2: Event study: **log compensation per worker**. Points show event-time coefficients  $\hat{\beta}_k$  with confidence intervals, relative to the reference period  $k = -1$  (1980). Vertical line marks  $k = 0$  (1981). Dashed horizontal line denotes zero.

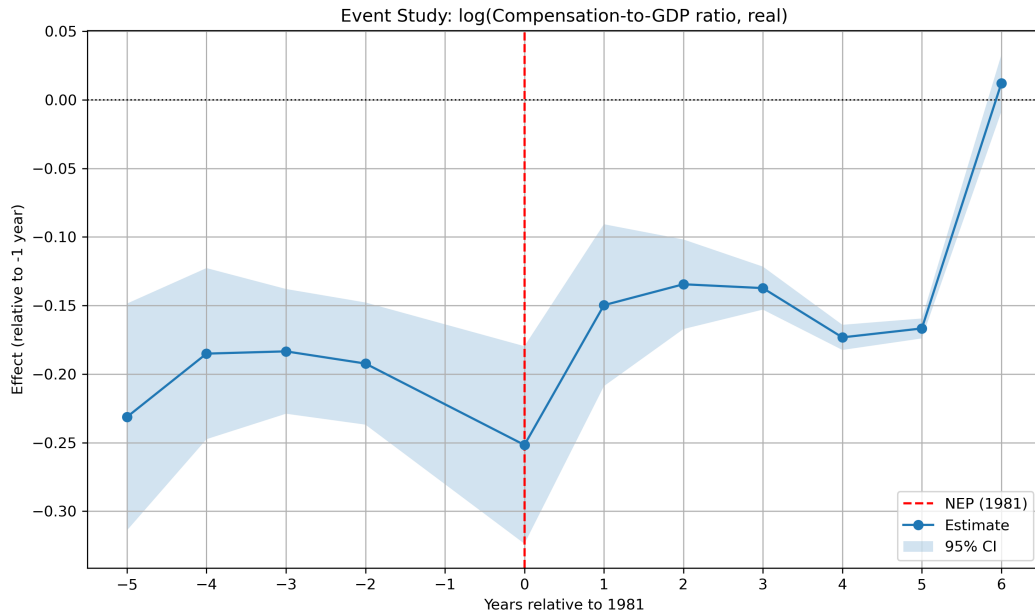


Figure 3: Event study: **Compensation-to-GDP (real ratio)**. Points show event-time coefficients  $\hat{\beta}_k$  with confidence intervals, relative to the reference period  $k = -1$  (1980). Vertical line marks  $k = 0$  (1981). Dashed horizontal line denotes zero.

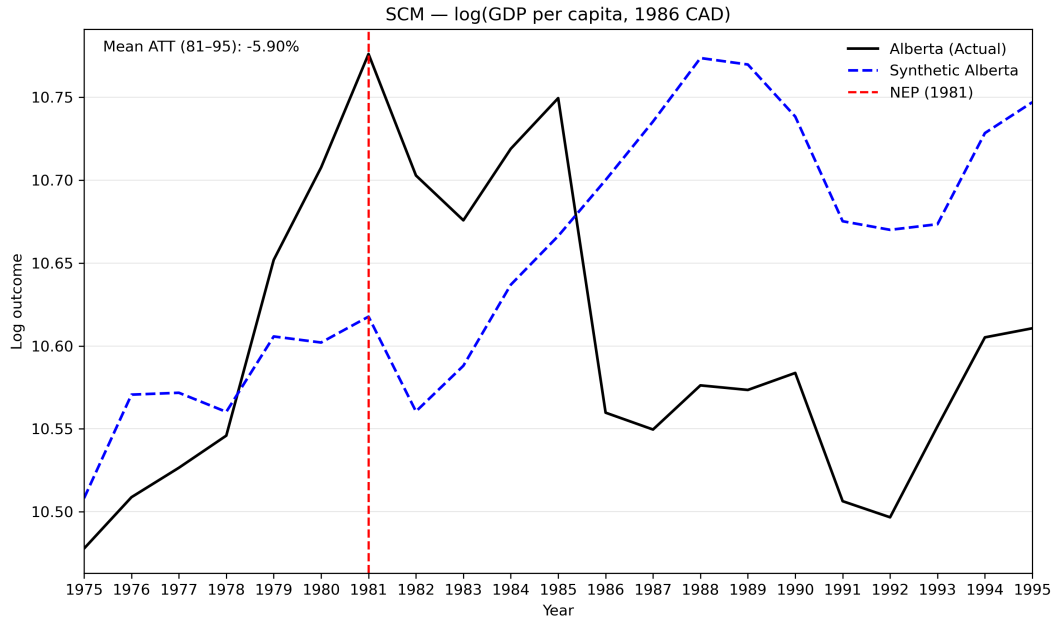


Figure 4: SCM (Main Spec): Log GDP per Capita—Alberta (solid) vs Synthetic (dashed).

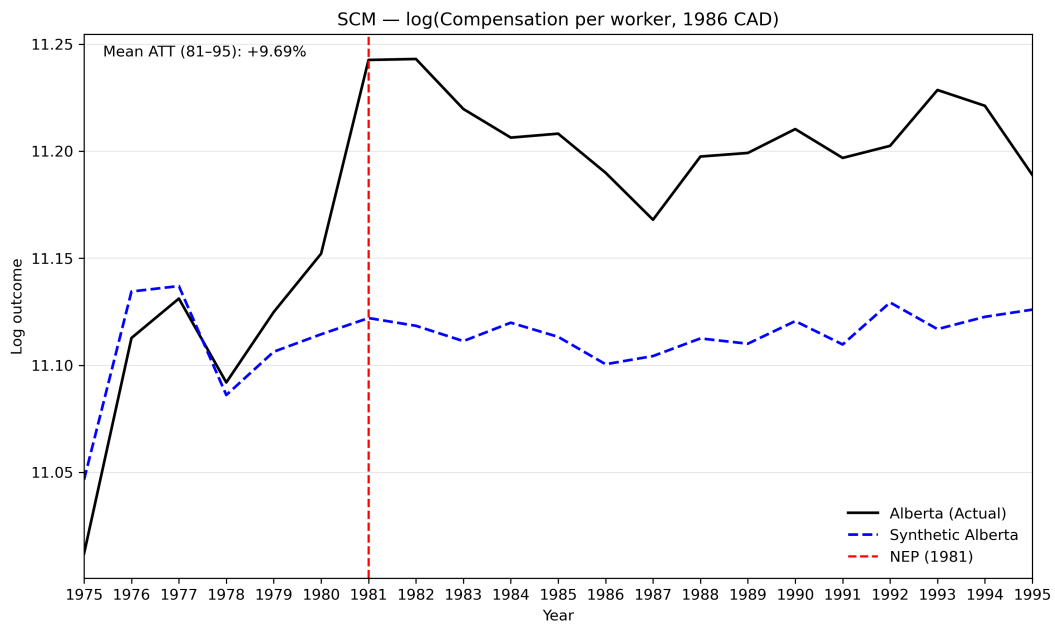


Figure 5: SCM (Main Spec): Log Compensation per Worker—Alberta (solid) vs Synthetic (dashed).



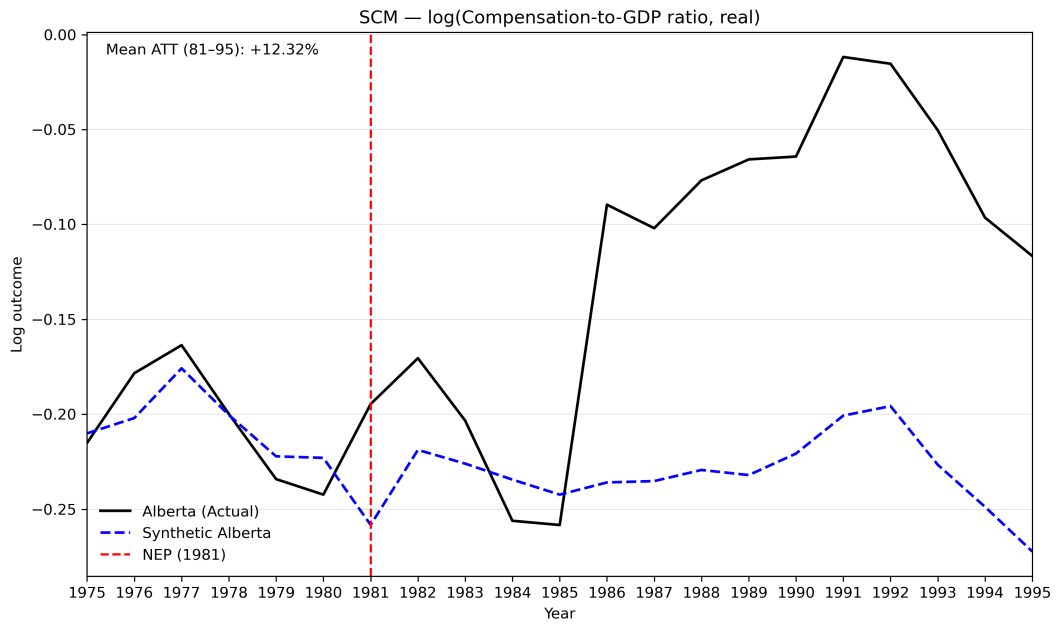


Figure 6: SCM (Main Spec): **Compensation-to-GDP (real ratio)**—Alberta (solid) vs Synthetic (dashed).

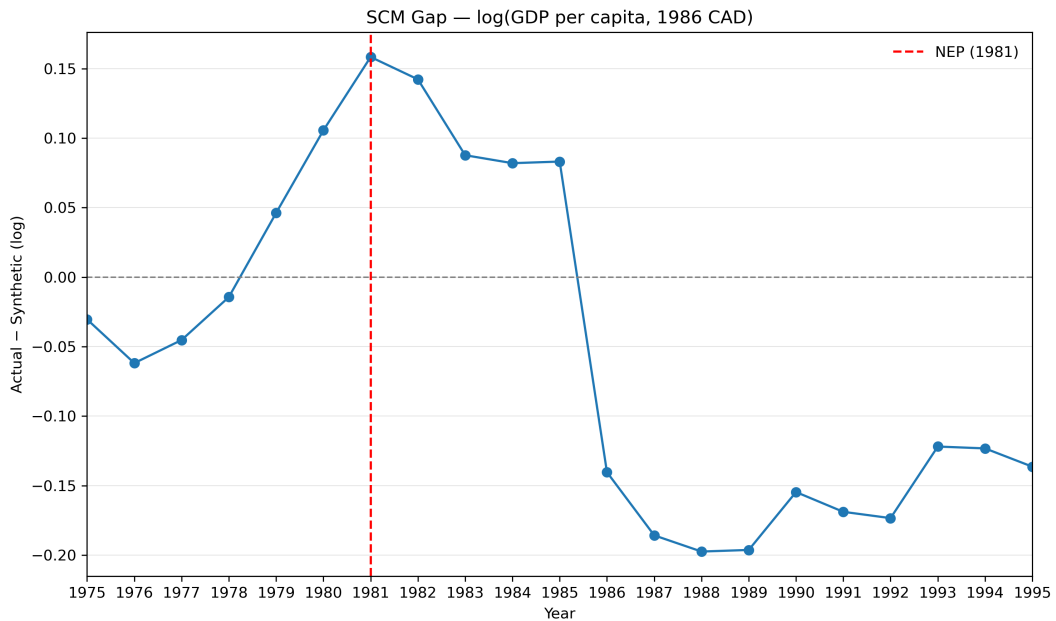


Figure 7: SCM Gap (Main Spec): Log GDP per Capita—Alberta minus Synthetic (positive  $\Rightarrow$  Alberta > Synthetic).

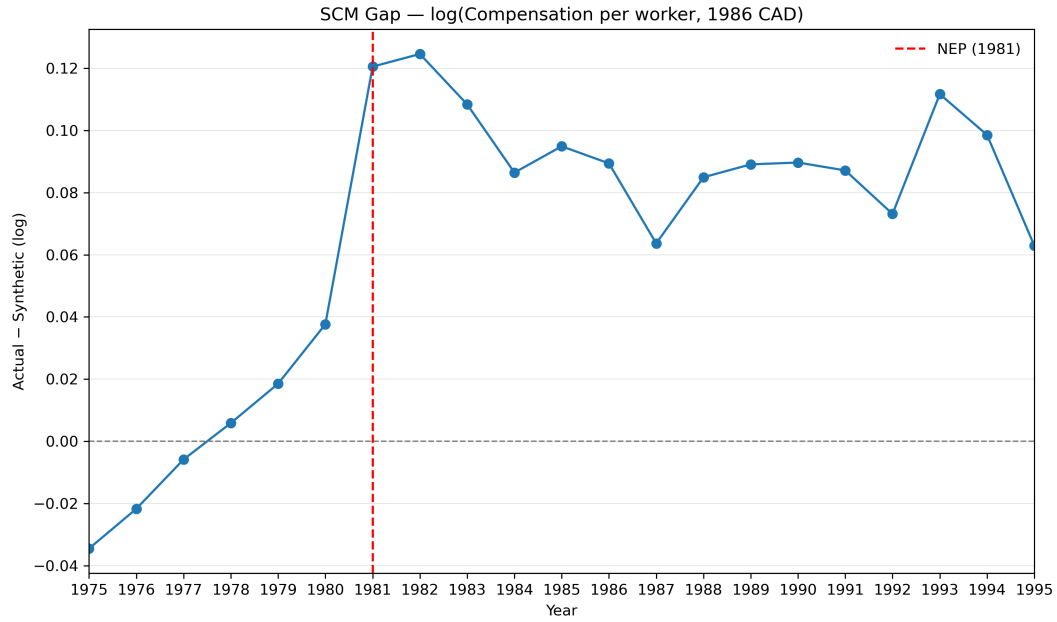


Figure 8: SCM Gap (Main Spec): Log Compensation per Worker—Alberta minus Synthetic.

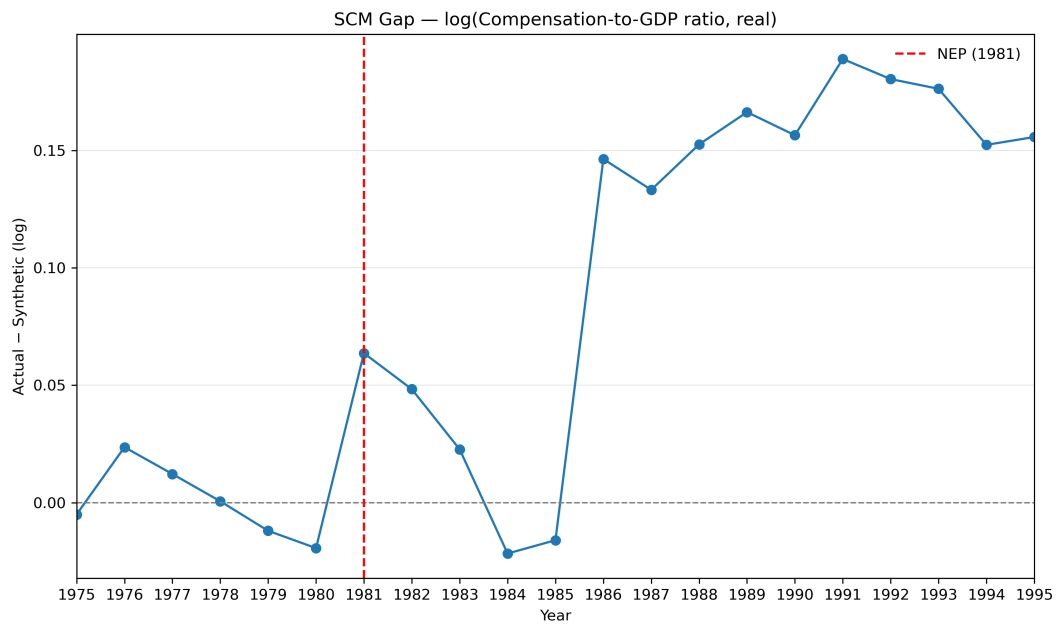


Figure 9: SCM Gap (Main Spec): **Compensation-to-GDP (real ratio)**—Alberta minus Synthetic.

# Appendix: Tables

## Appendix Tables Index

Table	Title	Description
A1	Summary Statistics	Descriptive summary of variables
A2	Model Overview	Summary of econometric specifications
A3	Data Sources	Statistics Canada tables used
A4–A6	SCM ATT Summaries	Gaps for GDP, WPW, and CGDP
A7–A9	SCM Donor Weights	Donors for synthetic Alberta by outcome
A10–A12	Event Study Coefficients	Coefficients by event time $k$

Table A1: Summary Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	P25	Median	P75	Max
Year	189	1,985.00	6.07	1,975.00	1,980.00	1,985.00	1,990.00	1,995.00
GDP_Real_Mining	189	2,708,718,589.81	4,544,024,557.49	76,152,702.03	290,900,000.00	1,210,400,000.00	2,379,700,000.00	25,146,952,789.70
Wpw_All	189	65,440.89	7,151.42	47,079.73	60,860.66	64,451.48	71,335.72	80,795.63
Population	189	2,873,730.90	3,002,281.81	556,496.00	852,659.00	1,082,495.00	3,292,111.00	10,950,119.00
Employment	189	1,292,741.98	1,416,277.23	158,825.00	321,066.67	486,866.67	1,559,658.33	5,199,008.33
GDP_pc_real_1986	189	27,110.28	6,962.53	13,829.44	23,303.99	27,096.09	30,594.91	47,862.91
GDP_per_worker_real_1986	189	63,176.20	9,436.26	42,738.83	58,350.73	61,676.20	66,386.59	95,466.23

*Notes:* Monetary values in 1986 CAD; employment in persons.

Table A2: Model Overview

Design	Specification / Inference
DiD	TWFE; AB×Post; province and year FE; cluster-robust SEs
Event study	Leads/lags $k \in [-5, 9]$ ; $k = -1$ reference; joint pre-trend test
SCM (main)	Constrained ridge ( $w \geq 0$ , $\sum w = 1$ ) + bias correction; pre-1981 RMSE; placebos; LOO donors
SCM (alt)	Ridge with negative weights (Ben-Michael, Feller & Rothstein, 2021); NNLS ± bias correction

Table A3: Statistics Canada Web Data Service Tables Used

Hyphenated ID	PID	Description
36-10-0380-01	3610038001	GDP by industry, annual (current \$ pre-1984; also constant)
36-10-0381-01	3610038101	GDP by industry (millions of dollars; constant series)
36-10-0324-01	3610032401	Income-based GDP, provincial, 1975–1980 (deflated)
36-10-0221-01	3610022101	Income-based GDP, provincial, 1981–1995 (constant/chained preferred)
36-10-0222-01	3610022201	Compensation of employees, by industry, monthly
18-10-0004/0005	1810000401/1810000501	CPI, annual average; CPI by province
14-10-0017-01	1410001701	Labour force characteristics (employment), monthly
17-10-0005-01	1710000501	Population estimates, July 1 (all ages)
10-10-0122-01	1010012201	Financial market statistics (policy rate), monthly

*Notes:* Accessed via Statistics Canada WDS; all series deflated to 1986 CAD.

Table A4: SCM ATT Summary: Log GDP per Capita (Main: Constrained + Bias Corrected)

Spec	Chosen $\lambda$	Pre_RMSE (log)	Post_RMSE (log)	ATT (log, 81–95)	ATT % (81–95)
Ridge (neg w)	$1 \times 10^{-6}$	0.000,05	0.372	0.356	42.79
Constrained ( $w \geq 0, \sum w = 1$ )	$1 \times 10^{-6}$	0.275,08	0.229	0.185	20.28
<b>Constrained (bias-corr)</b>	$1 \times 10^{-6}$	<b>0.059870</b>	<b>0.158923</b>	<b>-0.083846</b>	<b>-8.042707</b>
NNLS	–	0.338,82	0.341	0.330	39.12
NNLS (bias-corr)	–	0.051,49	0.086	–0.005	–0.47

Table A5: SCM Donor Weights: Log GDP per Capita (Main: Constrained + Bias Corrected)

Province	Weight
Quebec	0.566130
Ontario	0.433870
British Columbia	0.000000
Manitoba	0.000000
New Brunswick	0.000000
Newfoundland And Labrador	0.000000
Nova Scotia	0.000000
Saskatchewan	0.000000

Table A6: SCM ATT Summary: Compensation per Worker (Main: Constrained + Bias Corrected)

Spec	Chosen $\lambda$	Pre_RMSE (log)	Post_RMSE (log)	ATT (log, 81–95)	ATT % (81–95)
Ridge (neg w)	$1 \times 10^{-6}$	0.000,03	0.151	0.150	16.15
Constrained ( $w \geq 0, \sum w = 1$ )	$1 \times 10^{-6}$	0.023,97	0.132	0.131	13.95
<b>Constrained (bias-corr)</b>	$1 \times 10^{-6}$	<b>0.023946</b>	<b>0.130578</b>	<b>0.129473</b>	<b>13.822800</b>
NNLS	–	0.267,01	0.302	0.301	35.14
NNLS (bias-corr)	–	0.014,34	0.041	0.035	3.52

Table A7: SCM Donor Weights: Compensation per Worker (Main: Constrained + Bias Corrected)

Province	Weight
Saskatchewan	0.441565
Quebec	0.312202
Ontario	0.101636
British Columbia	0.094849
Manitoba	0.049748
New Brunswick	0.000000
Newfoundland And Labrador	0.000000
Nova Scotia	0.000000

Table A8: SCM ATT Summary: Compensation-to-GDP (real ratio) (Main: Constrained + Bias Corrected)

Spec	Chosen $\lambda$	Pre_RMSE (log)	Post_RMSE (log)	ATT (log, 81–95)	ATT % (81–95)
Ridge (neg w)	$1 \times 10^{-6}$	0.000,15	0.177	0.150	16.15
Constrained ( $w \geq 0, \sum w = 1$ )	$1 \times 10^{-6}$	0.034,19	0.066	0.020	2.05
<b>Constrained (bias-corr)</b>	$1 \times 10^{-6}$	<b>0.033696</b>	<b>0.067936</b>	<b>0.026089</b>	<b>2.643229</b>
NNLS	–	0.102,02	0.070	–0.029	–2.84
NNLS (bias-corr)	–	0.018,53	0.096	0.072	7.42

Table A9: SCM Donor Weights: Compensation-to-GDP (real ratio) (Main: Constrained + Bias Corrected)

Province	Weight
Saskatchewan	0.401963
Newfoundland And Labrador	0.242488
British Columbia	0.187255
Ontario	0.148306
Quebec	0.019988
Manitoba	0.000000
New Brunswick	0.000000
Nova Scotia	0.000000

Table A10: Event Study: log(GDP per capita, 1986 CAD)

Variable	Estimate (s.e.)	95% CI: low	95% CI: high	p-value
Intercept	10.163 (0.002)***	10.160	10.167	0.000
NEP_bin_m5	0.149 (0.045)***	0.061	0.236	0.001
NEP_bin_m4	0.115 (0.041)***	0.034	0.197	0.006
NEP_bin_m3	0.136 (0.037)***	0.063	0.209	0.000
NEP_bin_m2	0.185 (0.040)***	0.106	0.264	0.000
NEP_bin_p0	0.309 (0.060)***	0.191	0.427	0.000
NEP_bin_p1	0.293 (0.046)***	0.202	0.383	0.000
NEP_bin_p2	0.262 (0.031)***	0.202	0.322	0.000
NEP_bin_p3	0.218 (0.023)***	0.174	0.262	0.000
NEP_bin_p4	0.223 (0.022)***	0.181	0.265	0.000
NEP_bin_p5	0.231 (0.022)***	0.188	0.274	0.000
NEP_bin_p6	0.016 (0.011)	-0.006	0.038	0.166

Notes: Province and year FE. Bin -1 omitted as baseline. Significance: \*  $p < .10$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table A11: Event Study: log(Compensation per worker, 1986 CAD)

Variable	Estimate (s.e.)	95% CI: low	95% CI: high	p-value
Intercept	11.084 (0.001)***	11.082	11.085	0.000
NEP_bin_m5	-0.144 (0.019)***	-0.181	-0.106	0.000
NEP_bin_m4	-0.110 (0.017)***	-0.144	-0.076	0.000
NEP_bin_m3	-0.099 (0.020)***	-0.138	-0.059	0.000
NEP_bin_m2	-0.060 (0.015)***	-0.089	-0.031	0.000
NEP_bin_p0	-0.003 (0.023)	-0.049	0.043	0.911
NEP_bin_p1	0.070 (0.018)***	0.036	0.105	0.000
NEP_bin_p2	0.067 (0.015)***	0.038	0.097	0.000
NEP_bin_p3	0.056 (0.015)***	0.027	0.085	0.000
NEP_bin_p4	0.031 (0.013)**	0.006	0.056	0.016
NEP_bin_p5	0.035 (0.011)***	0.013	0.058	0.002
NEP_bin_p6	0.025 (0.011)**	0.004	0.046	0.023

Notes: Province and year FE. Bin -1 omitted as baseline. Significance: \*  $p < .10$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table A12: Event Study: log(Compensation-to-GDP ratio, real)

Variable	Estimate (s.e.)	95% CI: low	95% CI: high	p-value
Intercept	0.049 (0.001)***	0.047	0.051	0.000
NEP_bin_m5	-0.231 (0.042)***	-0.313	-0.149	0.000
NEP_bin_m4	-0.185 (0.032)***	-0.247	-0.123	0.000
NEP_bin_m3	-0.183 (0.023)***	-0.228	-0.138	0.000
NEP_bin_m2	-0.192 (0.023)***	-0.236	-0.148	0.000
NEP_bin_p0	-0.252 (0.036)***	-0.323	-0.180	0.000
NEP_bin_p1	-0.150 (0.030)***	-0.208	-0.091	0.000
NEP_bin_p2	-0.134 (0.017)***	-0.167	-0.102	0.000
NEP_bin_p3	-0.137 (0.008)***	-0.153	-0.122	0.000
NEP_bin_p4	-0.173 (0.005)***	-0.182	-0.164	0.000
NEP_bin_p5	-0.167 (0.004)***	-0.174	-0.159	0.000
NEP_bin_p6	0.012 (0.010)	-0.008	0.033	0.252

Notes: Province and year FE. Bin -1 omitted as baseline. Significance: \*  $p < .10$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*\*  $p < .01$ .

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