

**ALIGNMENT, REALIGNMENT, AND DEALIGNMENT IN CANADA:
THE VIEW FROM ABOVE**

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ABSTRACT

Debate over realignment and dealignment is commonly unhistorical, notwithstanding its preoccupation with dynamics. The evidence is mainly from individual-level entailments rather than from the stuff that matters in history, aggregate outcomes. Nowhere is this more true than for Canada. Some see the Canadian case as exhibiting “stable dealignment,” with weak social foundations and directionless volatility. At a minimum, this characterization applies to the country’s big parties. Others see Canada as unexceptionable. In fact, aggregate patterns consistent with both views coexist. But the boundary between the system’s orderly and disorderly parts is not that stylized in the conventional wisdom. And the boundary is as much geographic as partisan. The parties with stable and enduring--or slowly evolving--foundations are the NDP and the Liberals. The parties that are susceptible to boom and bust episodes are the Conservatives and a rotating cast of province- or region-specific insurgents. Ontario and Atlantic Canada combine stability with unidirectional change, whether secular or critical. Quebec and the Western provinces conform to the *sui generis* Canadian type of episodic boom and bust. Provincial elections are generally more structured than federal ones, but the local focus of provincial elections allows wide, idiosyncratic divergence among provinces. The paper concludes with thoughts about a research program to account for Canada’s coexistence of opposites.

Americans look back to their civil war, Canadians look forward to theirs.

-- Sniderman, Forbes, and Melzer (1975, 268)

Realignment, whether critical or secular, presupposes alignment. So does dealignment, at least as usually conceived. But what if a system never aligned in the first place? An influential body of work on Canada makes precisely this claim, characterizing the party system as an example of “stable dealignment.” This view is held widely but not universally. Unfortunately, the debate is carried on for the most part at the wrong level of aggregation. The evidence marshalled by each side has been mostly about the individual-level entailments of system-level patterns, and not about the system itself. This paper starts to fill the gap by focussing on aggregate phenomena. As part of the Canadian debate concerns the role of federal-provincial electoral divergence in unsettling patterns within each of the federal and provincial arenas, the paper examines elections at both levels.

The analysis reveals that alignment and dealignment coexist. Some parties have long-lasting foundations, or change that is unidirectional and commonly slow. Others are susceptible to boom and bust episodes. But the boundary between these categories is located in a surprising place. Some provinces present a face the rest of the world would recognise instantly: enduring patterns or unidirectional change, whether secular or critical. Others conform to the *sui generis* Canadian type of episodic boom and bust. Provincial elections are generally more structured than federal ones, but the local focus of provincial elections allows wide, idiosyncratic divergence among provinces.

MATTERS IN DISPUTE

The most explicit statements of the “stable dealignment” claim are LeDuc (1984) and Bakvis (1988). Both claims work off a longer-standing literature, much of it predating the collection of machine-readable data, a literature dubbed by Sniderman et al. (1975) the “textbook theory.” On this account, Canada’s historically dominant parties are so preoccupied with simply keeping the framework going in the face of powerful centrifugal pressures that they minimize their policy differences and instead engage in brokerage. Most of the time, politics as usual is stultifying and offers little excitement. But inasmuch as the parties offer little basis for enduring loyalty, they are also vulnerable to flash episodes. Only for small parties are preferences anchored in ideas and substance.

Sniderman and his colleagues outlined this model to contest it, and others followed suit (Elkins 1978; Johnston et al. 1992). Their evidence did not lie in aggregate patterns, however, but rather in evidence from survey readings of the character of party identification, conceived in the Michigan mainstream mode. It is probably true that these authors staked claims beyond the reach of the evidence, and retorts based on the same data sources (for example, Jenson 1978) were not easy to answer.¹ Whatever the merits, the continued ubiquity of Clarke’s et al. (1996) brilliantly

¹ Although Johnston (1992) makes a strong claim that Canada/US divergences are the product of a measurement artifact. Before 1988, the wording of the Canadian party identification question differed in a significant particular from the US original: it failed to validate a nonpartisan alternative-.

titled textbook, *Absent Mandate*, ensures that the stable-dealignment view dominates the cognitive field for successive generations of undergraduates.

One critical element of this thesis is weakness in the issue foundations of party choice. This is certainly a theme in Clarke et al. (1996) and finds a powerful echo in Alvarez and Nagler (1998) Merolla et al. (2008), and Bélanger and Stephenson (2010). But supporters do differ over issues (Blais et al. 1992), as do activists (Cross and Young 2002), and the system of choice seems regularly to produce a vital policy-vote nexus (Bélanger 2003; Pétry 1999; Pétry and Mendelsohn 2004). The traditional view and more recent evidence of policy voting can be reconciled, as it is highly arguable that on the left-right axis the major parties really did not differ before the mid-1970s even as they diverged thereafter (Cochrane 2010).

If policy differences are traditionally seen as weak, so are the system's social foundations. An early and regularly cited source is Rose (1974).² Archer (1985) argues that this endemic weakness extends even to the supposedly more distinctive and policy-driven NDP. An alternative view has been articulated by Johnston (1991), Blais (2005), and Belanger and Eagles (2006). But all three of these emphasize the role of religious denomination in structuring the vote. Awkwardly, none of these can connect denominational differences in party choice to denominational divergences in policy opinion.³

Finally, there is the fact that Canada is a federation. It is a Canadian commonplace that party systems diverge markedly between arenas *within* certain provinces. It is not unusual for a province-specific (or nearly province-specific) party to be a major player in provincial elections but not even exist in federal elections. Sometimes the reverse is also true. Often these divergences are transitional but some "transitions" span several electoral cycles (Johnston 1980). It is natural to wonder if noise from these divergences undermines citizens' ability to connect themselves to one and only one party (Clarke and Stewart 1987; Clarke et al. 1996; Stewart and Clarke 1998). On this question, Blake (1982) takes a sharply contrasting view.

But all of this disputation is about entailments, and thus, arguably, about epiphenomena. Too often, the background to disputes conducted with evidence from sample surveys consists of stylized facts about history and aggregate patterns. What, then, of electoral history? There is a substantial literature on aggregate patterns, often with history in mind. Rather little of it, however, addresses the system's fundamentals.

A major question has been the fractionalization of the party system, a subordinate element in the textbook theory. Rae (1967) established the country's uniqueness as an abiding deviant case from the Duvergerian two-party norm. Most of the early literature on Canadian multipartism focussed on the necessary conditions for third-party breakthroughs (Pinard 1975; Blais 1973; White 1973).⁴ More recently attention has shifted to multipartism as an equilibrium state, where the issue is whether coordination failure is solely across constituencies (Chhibber and Kollman

² An awkward fact about the Rose claim is that the British system is also portrayed as weakly founded. It seems pretty clear that his classification is driven by a misunderstanding of the logic explained and residual variance.

³ It is not that denominations fail to differ on policy, just that those differences have not traditionally mapped onto the party battle.

⁴ Bélanger (2004a,b) are more recent looks at the question, although--significantly--using survey data.

2004)--where Cox (1997) says it might occur--as opposed to within constituencies (Gaines 1997, 1999; Johnston and Cutler 2009)--where Cox's neo-Duvergerian synthesis says it absolutely should not occur. For all its sophistication, this literature does not so much address the system's fundamentals as presuppose them.

Moving up the ladder of aggregation is work on the nationalization of electoral forces. Most analysts look at levels of nationalization, rather as Caramani (2004) does for European systems. Critical contributions are Blake (1972), Chhibber and Kollman (2004), and Johnston and Cutler (2009). Jackman (1972) and Johnston (1980) look at the nationalization of inter-election swing. Of all these, only Blake and Johnston look at the substance of electoral geography, in each case, though, somewhat as an aside.

Closer to the mark is a modest body of work on critical elections. Blake (1979) was the first to propose a diagnostic tool and Martin (2005) takes the logic further. Neither looks much at defining characteristics of the periods bounded by those elections, however. Carty (1988) and Johnston et al. (1992) commit the opposite sin. They distinguish electoral periods and consider substantive features of each period, but they supply no algorithm for distinguishing the periods. Awkwardly, each contribution produces its own periodization.

Finally, a modest amount of work considers relationships between federal and provincial arenas. Johnston (1980) is quite explicit about the timing and scope of federal-provincial divergence, but the analysis is dated. More recent work, notably Erikson and Filippov (2004) and Cutler, Johnston, and Lockhart (2012), looks at dependencies across arenas but finesses the question of patterns within each arena.⁵

PLAN OF ANALYSIS

In short, much spadework needs to be done. As a start, this paper proposes a simple accounting of aggregate alignment and dealignment that accommodates possible asymmetries among parties and places. The approach is modelled on Gaines and Crombez (2004), who used the analysis of variance to partition the course of postwar German elections between cross-sectional and longitudinal components and then to identify the "normal vote" in each state and the variation around it.⁶

Variance here refers to the spatiotemporal distribution of shares for a specific party, with the factors in the ANOVA being province and electoral year.⁷ This is tantamount to a dummy-variable regression, or a setup with only fixed effects. The summary partition of variance is the statistic of interest at this point, however, hence the use of ANOVA. Note that the "residual" in these non-experimental data is the interaction of place and time, the variance left after fixed effects are extracted. In the ANOVA, the animating intuition is as follows:

⁵ The fact that Canada is a federation is also hugely important for Chhibber and Kollman (2004) but they are not focussed on divergence between arenas, as opposed to interprovincial differences within the federal one.

⁶ Identification of the normal vote was not their ultimate objective but was part of a reconsideration of the claims about retrospective voting and "balancing" in Lohmann et al. (1997).

⁷ Critically, electoral year is *not* a covariate.

- The higher the ratio of longitudinal to cross-sectional variance, the more plausible is a claim that the system is chronically dealigned. The higher the ratio in the opposite direction, the more aligned the system may be said to be, at least with respect to geography.
- Interpretation of the residual is ambiguous. As an interaction between place and time, it could indicate place-specific short-term flux, diagnostic of regional variation in propensity to boom and bust. But it could also indicate geographic realignment, flux that transforms one equilibrium into another. Only when we complete the empirical account will we be able to adjudicate between these alternatives.

The next stage is to assign the names of provinces to the cross-sectional component. This is most easily done with party-share means, party by party and province by province. Looking at means enables both a snapshot of geographic patterns and a comparison between federal and provincial elections for their degree of geographic compartmentalization.

It is reasonable to ask how well a party-province mean represents the the total distribution. The simplest way to get at this is through standard deviations. The larger the standard deviation the less representative the mean is. Comparing standard deviations across provinces and arenas will reveal which are particularly prone to flux.

The simple volume of flux is not its only relevant attribute, however. Is the flux cyclical or episodic--pulses that then subside--or does it herald a long-term shift, a true realignment? And is the realignment critical or secular? To address these questions and facilitate visual comparison, it helps to anchor the time path at the same place for each province and party. To this end, I start with fixed-effect for each party, with province as the factor. This is essentially equivalent to the comparison of provincial means. The plot of residuals from these estimations will tell us how much of the flux is episodic or cyclical and how much of it is cumulative--indicating realignment. It will also enable a visual read on whether a realignment is critical or secular.

Although the accounting is complete for years and provinces, it leaves out all elements in choice that require evidence from individuals, such as union membership, ethnicity, language, or religion. In this sense, the estimation systematically underrepresents the totality of the party system's social anchoring. Mainly it captures the system's geographic foundations, although these also align with language, ethnicity, and religious denomination.⁸

A Note on the Data. The data are for federal and provincial elections in each province from 1935 to 2011. The 1935 election is commonly identified as a critical one (Johnston et al. 1992; Martin 2005) and marks the beginning of enduring multiparty competition. Although multipartism first appeared in 1921 it evaporated quickly and seemed to disappear in 1930, and the new parties that figured in the 1920s episode left no single legatee in later years. The 1935 election marks the first appearance by the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), predecessor to the modern New Democratic Party (NDP). Although the NDP is more than just the CCF relabelled (Johnston and Cutler 2009), the continuities are great, including in key personnel. In some ways the Conservatives are more discontinuous than the CCF/NDP. They have been variously labelled "Liberal-Conservative," "National Government," "Progressive

⁸ In earlier decades, union density was also quite regionalized but has become much less so.

Conservative,” and “Conservative.” The most difficult period is 1993-2004. The termination of this period saw a party called “Conservative” emerge from a reverse takeover of the Progressive Conservatives by the party had emerged as the insurgent Reform in 1993 (Martin 2010).⁹ Some observers are reluctant to see the new party as heir to the old Conservative one, and the new one does exhibit Reform’s hard edge. But it has nonetheless held on to old Progressive Conservative personnel and is closely aligned with provincial parties with the old name. If I class the new Conservatives as continuous with the old ones, should I also include votes won by Reform simply as part of the Conservative bloc? With hindsight the Reform insurgency could be described as within-bloc volatility, on the model of Bartolini and Mair (1990). At its origin, however, Reform was a protean phenomenon (Flanagan 1995) and only late in the 1990s did it become evident that its first leader, Preston Manning, was eager to reconstitute the political right. It was not obvious until the merger was actually accomplished that it was even possible. A non-trivial fraction of Reform support was sectionalist and melted away when that reunion occurred. So it seems best to treat any party bearing the name Conservative as part of a continuous entity and to treat Reform as a distinct. This does mean that some of what I treat as volatility in the 2000-4 federal sequence is really a merger.

With 1935 as the starting point, then, the continuously available objects on the landscape are the Liberal party, a Conservative party, and the CCF/NDP. All other parties are lumped together. Most of the rest of the vote has gone to “niche” parties (Meguid 2008). In Canada these have mainly been province- or region-specific entities: Social Credit in Alberta, British Columbia, and Quebec; the Bloc Populaire Canadien mainly in Quebec; the Bloc Québécois and Parti Québécois exclusively in Quebec; the Saskatchewan party in the province of that name; and the Reform party (in 2000 renamed the Alliance) with a strong western tilt. Occasionally, a more ambitious insurgent appears but its actual appeal is always less transcendent than its aspirations. Examples include Reconstruction in 1935, the National party in 1993, and the Green party in the 2000s.

Each data point is a party’s share in a specific election--federal or provincial--in a specific province.¹⁰ Data are anchored to federal election years. This is true even for the provincial arena, with each provincial election being the closest in time to that federal year. This makes the longitudinal sum of squares for provincial elections more readily comparable with the federal data, as it constrains the number of discrete longitudinal values to be identical to the total number of federal election years; otherwise the cross-sectional degrees of freedom is much larger for the provincial ANOVA than for the federal one. Relative to the federal matrix there are 38 “missing” province-year combinations. This reflects the high frequency of federal elections in two prolonged transition periods, 1962-8 and 2004-11 plus the short hung parliaments of 1972-4 and

⁹ Formally, Reform’s first contest was in 1988 and its first MP was seated in a by-election in 1989. But 1993 saw the breakthrough to official party status.

¹⁰ The analysis of multi-party election data should arguably be conducted with ratios of support and Seemingly Unrelated Regression (Katz and Kng 1999; Tomz, Ticker, and Wittenberg 2002). An example with Canadian data is Cutler, Johnston, and Lockhart (2012). But these arguments apply where what is being gauged is the impact of external forces. For the purposes of this paper it makes more sense to let the shares themselves stand as the data.

1979-80. The panel is slightly unbalanced as Newfoundland joined Canada only in 1949. Hence, the series for that province omits 1935, 1940, and 1945.

I treat 1935-2011 as a single period. Certain elections since 1935 have also been identified as critical (Martin 2005), or at least periods can be distinguished (Johnston et al. 1992; Carty 1988; Carty et al. 2000). It is conventional, for instance, to distinguish the party system in place after 1960 from the pre-1960 one. The years since 1984 are hard to pin down but are not a simple projection from earlier years. So treating the period as a whole loads the dice for finding volatility at the expense of structure. But breaking the period up would load the dice the other way, and I wish to give the conventional wisdom a fighting chance. History will reveal itself anyway as I plumb the variance in depth, and for this the full 76-year span is appropriate.

RESULTS

The story is one of radical asymmetry. For some parties, electoral followings have been quite orderly; for others, disorderly. In some provinces electoral change is modest and routinized; other provinces are susceptible to tidal waves. The federal arena is less orderly than the provincial one, although the relative compartmentalization of provincial elections enables local idiosyncrasy.

Analysis of Variance

The most highly summarized rendering of these propositions is in Table 1, which portrays four parties or party groups and federal and provincial elections separately. For each party in a given arena, four values appear:

- *Cross-sectional*: the percentage of the total variance that is across-provinces, averaged over the full period.
- *Longitudinal*: the percentage of the total variance that is across-election years, averaged over all provinces. This is the electoral change that comes in waves, whether episodic or sustained.
- *“Residual”*: the percentage of the total variance left unexplained by the cross-sectional and longitudinal factors. As mentioned, this represents the interaction of place and time--electoral flux that is specific to certain provinces or regions.
- *Total Sum of Squares*: the total amount of variance (strictly speaking, the variance times the degrees of freedom) to be explained, a summary indicator that combines regional differentiation with electoral instability. It also reflects the average size of the party's shares; bigger parties tend to have larger variances. Interpretation of the value requires some nuance.

One outstanding fact is the contrast between the Liberals and NDP, on one hand, and the Conservatives and “all others,” on the other. This is especially evident in federal elections. Sums of squares are half again or more larger for the Conservatives and “all others” than for the Liberals and the CCF/NDP. This is so even though the average Liberal federal share has been at least three times larger than the average niche party share and somewhat larger than the Conservative one. When the total variance is decomposed, the cross-sectional component dominates for both the Liberals and the NDP, indicating a fairly stable differentiation across provinces. The distribution across components is almost identical to that found by Gaines and

Crombez (2004, Table 1, p. 199) for postwar German federal elections, and these two Canadian parties also seem as rooted in place as US congressional parties are.¹¹ For the Conservatives and the “all others” group, in contrast, cross-sectional components are small. Much more impressive are their longitudinal and residual components. By implication, these parties are subject both to national waves of boom and bust and to regionally differentiated shifts.

The other outstanding fact is the contrast between federal and provincial elections. For all parties, sums of squares are massively larger in provincial elections than in federal ones (in three of the four cases almost twice as large). But the difference is entirely the product of sharper geographic differentiation. The Liberals aside, roughly two-thirds to three-quarters of provincial-election variance is cross-sectional.¹² Very little of the provincial variance is from a longitudinal main effect. This is not to say that provincial elections have little temporal flux. Rather, the flux that occurs is overwhelmingly concentrated in the “residual,” which is to say that the rhythms of provincial elections are quite specific to each province. Even so, relative to federal ones, provincial elections are marked by temporal continuity, no less for the Conservatives and niche parties than for the Liberals and NDP.

Regional Means

The cross-sectional pattern for federal and provincial elections is shown by Figure 1, which plots parties’ mean shares by province for the full 1935-2011 period. Federal and provincial patterns are plotted on the same graph.

The Liberal and NDP plots are almost mirror images in their east-west tilts. And they state the federal-provincial contrast modestly but clearly. The Liberals’ gradient rises as one moves east, but more steeply for provincial than for federal elections. The Liberal base is roughly the same provincially as federally in Quebec and Atlantic Canada; in these regions the Liberal party has been similarly strong at both levels. In the West and Ontario, in contrast, the Liberal share is about five percentage points smaller in provincial than federal elections. The pattern for the NDP is complementary and sharper. Where the party is relatively strong--the West, mainly--its provincial version draws five to ten more points of the popular vote than does the federal counterpart. Where the party is weak, it draws about 5 points less.

The really striking contrast, however, is for the Conservatives and “all others.” The differences require a bit more explication as they do not follow a simple east-west gradient. Indeed, in federal elections the Conservative gradient seems very shallow; their outstandingly weak place is Quebec. In provincial elections, however, the contrast between Quebec and parts of the West

¹¹ Postwar US House elections grouped into the nine standard census divisions constitute a data matrix broadly comparable to the Canadian one. ANOVAs (by the author, results available on request) on the US data indicate that Democratic and Republican variances have a similar ratio of cross-sectional to longitudinal variance (2:1) as in the Liberal and CCF/NDP data and total sums of squares that roughly split the difference between the two Canadian parties. The residual is more than twice as large proportionally in the US, suggesting that flux over the full span is quite region-specific. And indeed, US political geography has rotated dramatically over this period, with the South moving one way and the West Coast and New England moving in the opposite direction. The Canadian landscape has also shifted, as later sections of this paper indicate, but dramatic shifts have been more characteristic of Conservatives and other parties than of Liberals and the CCF/NDP.

¹² Even for the Liberals, the actual sum of squares is larger for provincial than for federal elections.

against the rest is very stark. Some of the gaps are on the order of 20 to 30 percentage points. The extremes are British Columbia and Quebec, where the Conservative party has next to no provincial presence, but is often competitive (and sometimes dominant) in federal elections. Niche parties, conversely, have appeared in strength in both the West and Quebec and in both arenas, but much more prominently in provincial politics. These generalizations apply less comfortably to Alberta and Saskatchewan than to the British Columbia, Manitoba, and Quebec.¹³

Regional Volatility

Just as Quebec and the West are prime sites for federal-provincial discontinuity, so are they for electoral volatility. In those provinces, 1935-2011 mean shares are less informative than elsewhere. Again, most of the story is about the Conservatives and the niche parties.

For the Liberals and NDP, the federal scene is remarkably uniform. The Liberal share is less stable in Quebec than elsewhere. The NDP share shows slightly more instability as one moves east. For both parties, however, the provincial-election pattern is less uniform. In the Liberal case, the party's history in the West is one of modest flux. The NDP pattern is less easily stylized. But for neither party does the geography of flux hit the observer between the eyes.

For Conservatives and "all others," in contrast, Quebec and the West stick out. Within the West the outstanding locus of flux is Alberta. For the Conservatives, federal and provincial patterns roughly coincide: where the party's support is volatile in one arena, so is it in the other, and vice versa. For niche parties, the basic pattern is the same as for the Conservatives but with much more volatile support on the provincial scene. Quebec's place in electoral flux is distinct: it occurs in relation to three party groups, not just two. Most spectacularly implicated are niche parties, but flux engulfs not just the Conservatives but also the Liberals. In contrast to the Western provinces, Quebec's flux is purely a federal phenomenon; for provincial elections Quebec is not notably unstable.¹⁴

The Interaction of Space and Time

The previous section addressed only the scale of longitudinal variation, not its character. Over-time change does not necessarily indicate chronic or episodic instability. It could equally signal realignment. And the greater part of the longitudinal variation *does* comprise orderly and intelligible transformations in the bases of party competition. But there are exceptions: massive change that is often sudden and--the Canadian peculiarity, perhaps--equally suddenly reversed. By now it should be no surprise that the orderly patterns pertain to the Liberals and NDP and the disorderly ones, to the Conservatives and their niche-party complements. The evidence is in the residual plots of Figure 3.

¹³ Alberta exhibits the general pattern, but federal/provincial differences are smaller than elsewhere. In Saskatchewan the federal/provincial difference is great for the Conservatives but not for niche parties, which have historically been weak in both arenas. Until recently, that is: the Saskatchewan party emerged in 2000 as the chief provincial rival to the NDP. It has strong overlap with the federal Conservatives but probably also picks up other elements including right-wing Liberals.

¹⁴ The coding of data masks the transition in the Quebec nationalist vote from the Union Nationale to the Parti Québécois. I return to this in the last section.

Orderly Federal. The place to start is with the Liberals and NDP in federal elections. Roughly put, the NDP has been making gains at the expense of the Liberals over much of the 1935-2011 period but especially in the last few decades. Liberal losses have been greatest where the party was initially strongest, while NDP gains came where the party was initially weakest. The Liberals also lost ground where they were initially weak, just not as much as elsewhere. For the NDP, there have been essentially no gains in places of initial strength (notably Saskatchewan and British Columbia). For both parties, gains and losses were mostly gradual. The major exception is Quebec, where the Liberals plummeted in 1984 and plummeted again in 2011. The NDP made modest gains in that province over the 1970s and 80s, was nearly eliminated in the 1990s, poked through again in 2008, and then burst to dominance in 2011.

Orderly Provincial. For these parties, the provincial story has parallels to the federal one even as some provincial electorates also exhibit *sui generis* behaviour. For the Liberals, the pattern is like the federal one in that change was inversely related to initial strength. In contrast to the federal case, however, the party has not always shrunk. It actually grew in some provinces and maintained its position in others. Most change was gradual, although with striking exceptions. The biggest outlier is British Columbia where the Liberals went from a near nullity to major-party status overnight in 1991 and then surged to a landslide victory in 2001. The party has governed the province ever since. Liberal growth in Alberta (a decade earlier than in British Columbia) was also startling.¹⁵ The NDP has advanced in six provinces and not really retreated in any.¹⁶ For the most part, NDP provincial patterns have been orderly: growth has come as a long-term trend; declines have been abrupt, but modest and reversible--in short, politics as usual.

Disorderly Federal. The Conservatives' history west of Atlantic Canada is one of sudden large shifts that are commonly reversed. In Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, the party's abject weakness was abruptly rectified in the late 1950s. It then collapsed in the 1990s, only to recover in the 2000s. The pattern in British Columbia and Ontario had strong affinities with that in the Prairie Provinces: the party did not make permanent gains in the 1950s but did suffer massive collapse and recovery in the 1990s and 2000s.¹⁷ Quebec was *sui generis*: the Conservative share surged in 1958 and 1984 and grew a bit more in 1988, but after each of these surges it plummeted, leaving the party at least as badly off as before.¹⁸

The abrupt shifts in Conservative fortune do not, for the most part, intersect with Liberal or NDP movement. Rather, the Conservatives give and take from the system's episodic niche players. In Alberta from 1935 and British Columbia from 1953, Social Credit was a federal presence, which then was swiftly and summarily absorbed by the Conservatives. In those same provinces, the

¹⁵ The Alberta shift has not been widely remarked, probably because the Liberal party has never been more than a weak opposition. That the Liberals and not the NDP form the opposition is a striking exception to the Western pattern, however.

¹⁶ The party has lost ground in Ontario relative to its early 1990s high point but that peak was an exception to the longer-term pattern. The party was badly defeated in British Columbia in 2001 but its most recent shares, although not big enough to win, are bigger than those returned by the party when it did win in 1991 and 1996. The place where the party may truly have lost ground on an indefinite basis is Saskatchewan, but it is too early to tell.

¹⁷ The Conservative share did grow in British Columbia relative to the 1950s but only after 1968 and only slowly.

¹⁸ In Atlantic Canada, in contrast, the Conservatives' pattern features orderly, small swings and a modest net decline.

Conservative collapse in the 1990s mainly benefitted Reform. In Ontario the Conservative collapse was also startling and Reform was a major beneficiary (although so, it must be admitted, was the Liberal party). Between 2000 and 2004, Reform in its new guise as the Alliance took on the Conservative name and some of the old organization.

The Conservatives also interacted with niche parties in Quebec. Unlike in other provinces, however, the Liberal party was also implicated, but only when the Conservatives surged. When they declined after a surge, the beneficiary was never the Liberals. The 1945 surge of the Bloc Populaire Canadien accompanied a drop in the (admittedly already modest) Conservative share, and the situation reversed in 1949. Although most of the Conservatives' Quebec 1953-58 surge in came at the expense of the Liberals, about one-third came from gobbling up insurgent share. The party's abrupt drop in 1962 opened space for Social Credit. Most of the 1984 surge came at the Liberals' expense but the Conservatives' drop in 1993 mainly benefitted the Bloc Québécois.

Disorderly Provincial. In Atlantic Canada, Ontario, and Manitoba, the Conservative party is simply part of routine politics. In Manitoba and Newfoundland, the party did not start the period with major-party status but rose to it and then stayed there. Elsewhere, however, the Conservative party's provincial history is idiosyncratic. In Quebec and British Columbia the party simply does not exist or is only exiguous. In Saskatchewan, the party rose swiftly in the 1970s and 1980s, pushed the Liberals aside as the alternative to the NDP, and just as suddenly disappeared. In Alberta, the Conservatives made a swift (but not instant) rise over the 1960s and in 1971 achieved office, never to lose it.

Niche parties have played a role in provincial politics that rivals their federal one. Some governed for extended periods and came to preside over quite routine politics. This was the history of Social Credit in British Columbia and Alberta and now seems true of the Saskatchewan party. In Quebec, a province-specific nationalist party has been prominent for the entire period. From 1935 to 1970, this was the Union Nationale, and since 1970, the Parti Québécois.

DISCUSSION

This paper challenges widely-held prejudices about the Canadian party system. Some it overturns, others it merely qualifies. It also engages in the long-overdue task of replacing stylized facts with real ones. But it raises as many questions as it answers, and what follows is more an agenda for further research than a body of explanations. Mostly it addresses anomalies at the system level, but at the end returns to the starting point, of entailments for individual behaviour.

Multipartism and Volatility

Part of the system seems very orderly and part of it, very disorderly. Multipartism permits such compartmentalization and perhaps even facilitates it. Although the traditional, or "textbook," model acknowledges the possibility of compartmentalization, it locates the partisan boundary in the wrong place. The line between order and disorder does not divide supposed brokerage parties from parties of ideas. Rather the boundary lies between the Liberals and NDP, on one hand, and the Conservatives and everybody else, on the other.

It is not obvious, however, why this should be boundary. A true Canadian peculiarity has been the persistent strength of a party of the centre, the Liberals. In other Westminster systems, once a party of labour appears on the scene, the non-socialist rivals are forced to sort out which among them, or what combination, will be the anti-socialist coordination point (Cox 1997). This implies large-scale and lurching voter exchanges involving the Liberals and Conservatives, with one of them ultimately marginalized. This may be the story of the 2011 election, although Liberal losses were probably as great to the NDP as to the Conservatives. And why this happened only in 2011 demands explanation. The puzzle is only deepened by the fact that starting in the 1970s the Conservatives increased the policy distance between themselves and the rest of the system (Cochrane 2010). Yet this was also the period of maximum Conservative volatility, in interaction with regionalist parties. Over the same period, the average Liberal-NDP policy gap shrank. This probably does help account for the fact that exceptions to the general pattern of placid trends involving those two parties mainly appear in the 1990s and 2000s. It is not obvious, however, why the first phase of that volatile period featured leakage from the NDP to the Liberals, and not the reverse. More generally, if we focus on a left-right dimension, both the pattern of volatility and the very persistence of multipartism constitute a puzzle.

The National Question

One obvious answer is that a dimension other than a left-right one has been in play. It is not enough to identify just any second dimension, however. It seems pretty clear that two-party politics can accommodate two dimensions, social and economic liberalism-conservatism as in the US or class politics combined with republicanism as in Australia. There must be an interaction of dimensionality with the strategic properties of the electoral system. In the Canadian case, this other dimension pits Quebec against the rest of the country. For much of Canada's electoral history, Quebec has been the pivot for government (Bakvis and Macpherson 1994; Johnston et al 1992). From 1896 to 1984 this usually meant sustaining the Liberals in power. This alone would give the Liberals a strategic advantage over the NDP as a pole of attraction for voters on the centre-left and might also help explain why Liberal-NDP competition was usually orderly. For voters in Quebec, the NDP was effectively not even in competition with the Liberals. The Quebec connection also arguably helped the Liberals win supporters on the centre-right.

The "Quebec-Canada" dimension also seems an obvious place to start to account for the concentration of flux in Quebec and the West, and in the Conservatives' and niche parties' votes. For the Conservatives on this dimension, a reasonable stylization of the 20th century is as follows. Most of the time, the Conservatives cultivated a base outside Quebec that was profoundly unsympathetic to that province's interests. But only by adding Quebec seats to its non-Quebec complement could the party attain majority status. They could do this only by leapfrogging the Liberals inside Quebec and winning votes from Quebec nationalists. The result was an incoherent, ends-against-the-middle electoral coalition. Such coalitions are impossible to sustain, and each time the Conservatives constructed one they paid for it soon after, either inside Quebec, outside Quebec, or both. Often this involved losing share to a regionalist insurgent (Johnston et al., 1992; Johnston 2008).

Path Dependency and the Many Wests

The West was the first region to entertain multipartism. This made it available for electoral volatility, both as traditional bonds were loosened and as counter tendencies were activated. But why did the region experiment with multipartism in the first place? Early insurgencies may be best explained by political economy. The West is a commodity-exporting region locked for decades into an import-substitution regime benefitting other regions, a regime that neither old party was willing to change. So Western multipartism began in protest against that situation. Why it persisted is more mysterious, however. Australia and the US, after all, also featured commodity politics--including farmers' parties--but both settled into essentially bipolar frameworks.

What is more, multipartism on the Western ground has never conformed to a simple geography of interest. British Columbia is a major site of multipartism but was never locked into the political economy of cereal grains. Alberta has historically been an outlier, but in ways that shifted dramatically from period to period. Most of the time Alberta elections also diverged profoundly from those in the province most like it, Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan remained inside the national party system until 1944, whereupon it became the epicentre of the CCF. Manitoba was like Alberta in the 1920s but more and more like Saskatchewan as the century wore on. In short, it is very difficult to impose a monocausal account on this patchwork.

A more promising account would involve path dependency. Provinces are not geographical fictions, even if they start that way. Once launched, each province acquired its own rhythm for provincial elections. Provincial parliaments have maximum durations of five years but also can be dissolved pretty much at the discretion of the governing party. Contrast this with the fixed and high-frequency schedule of US elections or the short durations of Australian parliaments. This creates a role for accidents of timing in distinguishing among Canadian provinces. In privileging certain players and not others at critical junctures, the results of accidents can replay themselves over repeated elections and potentially shape not just distinctive patterns of competition but also distinctive political cultures, a provincial version of the pattern identified by Boix (2007). Timing may be the key to the origins of the remarkable contrast between Saskatchewan and Alberta, for instance (Morton 1950; Lipset 1968).

Path dependency may also interact with the functionalist logics of class or regional defence. In provinces where the NDP is strong, alternatives are winnowed down to the single party best positioned to block the threat from the left. Just as the identity of this party varies across Britain, New Zealand, and Australia, so does it vary across the Canadian provinces where the NDP knocks on the door of power, at present British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. The regional defence variant occurs in provinces with a focussed incentive to oppose the federal government. This has been the story in Quebec for cultural reasons and in Alberta for economic ones. In either variant, the identity of the coordination point may shift, reflecting an ultimately unsustainable disconnect between the balance of forces inside the old anti-socialist or anti-Ottawa coalition and new socio-demographic realities. The displacement of Social Credit by the Conservatives in Alberta (1971) and by the Liberals in British Columbia (1991) reflected urbanization and secularization. The displacement of the Union Nationale by the Parti Québécois

is another example. The Union Nationale was initially a broad coalition but swiftly became an expression of conservative, clericalist sentiment. As Quebec nationalism secularized, took on a progressive cast, and upped the ante to advocate a form of separation from Canada, the Union Nationale yielded to the Parti Québécois.

Interaction Across Arenas

When a province's party system pulls away from the national one, the new tendency may leak upward, into the province's federal pattern. Social Credit in Alberta and British Columbia are obvious examples. The federal Bloc Québécois is difficult to imagine without the path opened by the provincial Parti Québécois. Leakage can also go the other way. The displacement of Social Credit in Alberta followed the rebuilding of the federal Conservatives. There is a faint echo of this for the Liberals in British Columbia. The federal strength of Reform may have been a factor in the rise of the socially and ideologically similar Saskatchewan party. And the inroads in Atlantic Canada made by the federal NDP have increasingly been mirrored at the provincial level. In short, the coexistence of arenas may make each a source of disruption for the other (Johnston 1980; Cutler et al. 2011).

The Relative Balance of Centripetal and Centrifugal Forces

Federal elections exhibit centripetal tendencies that are absent from provincial ones. Of course, federal elections are also prone to centrifugal pulls, as Figure 1 eloquently testifies. But the same figure also shows that centrifugal forces are even greater in provincial elections. Consider the example of the NDP and its rivals. In Atlantic Canada, circumstances were historically unfavourable to the NDP, and, a few local cases aside, the party was very late even to organize in these provinces. But these frictions were of greater relevance in provincial than in federal elections. In federal politics, once the NDP embarked on a path of seeking national power it felt compelled to offer candidacies everywhere (Johnston and Cutler 2009). Even token candidates get votes and in due course token candidacies may become real ones, and the NDP made its earliest inroads in Atlantic Canada in federal politics. For other parties, especially the Liberals, this geographic logic operates in reverse. Liberals and Conservatives maintain a federal presence, if only a token one, in all provinces. But where the NDP is strong in provincial politics, the two old parties cannot both be present. If the strategically privileged alternative to the NDP is a province-specific party, neither old federal party can flourish. Leakage between arenas complicates all this, of course.

Implications for Voters

Given all this, the intuition in Clarke et al. (1996) and elsewhere cannot be dismissed. But the observable implications that emerge from electoral facts are not those that currently prevail in the literature. If flux and federal-provincial divergence inhibit the stabilization and intensification of party loyalty, that inhibition should be visible in certain places and not others. We should see weak ties to parties with disorderly histories and strong ones to parties with orderly ones. We should see weaker ties in Quebec and certain Western provinces than elsewhere. Partisanship should be stronger in provincial than federal elections. These propositions have the peculiar merit of being falsifiable.

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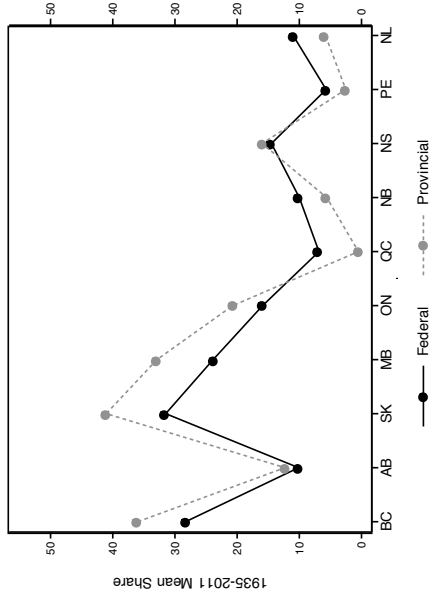
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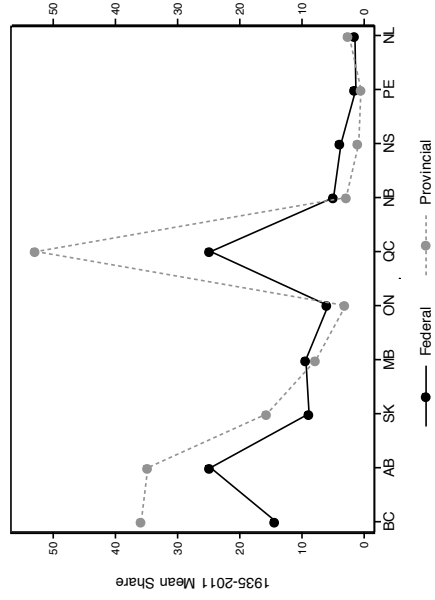
TABLE 1: VARIANCE DECOMPOSITION, TWO-WAY ANOVA, PARTY SHARES 1935-2011

Party	Component	Federal (<i>N</i> =237)	Provincial (<i>N</i> =199)
Liberal	% Cross-sectional	56.1	53.7
	% Longitudinal	26.8	13.6
	% “Residual”	18.5	33.8
	Total Sum of Squares	39093.2	49932.0
CCF/NDP	% Cross-sectional	59.7	74.2
	% Longitudinal	16.8	8.7
	% “Residual”	23.8	16.6
	Total Sum of Squares	29778.5	52051.3
Conservative	% Cross-sectional	19.5	62.3
	% Longitudinal	39.3	5.7
	% “Residual”	41.2	28.3
	Total Sum of Squares	45533.7	78215.5
All Others	% Cross-sectional	36.3	67.3
	% Longitudinal	31.5	4.1
	% “Residual”	31.8	28.3
	Total Sum of Squares	43872.0	93578.9

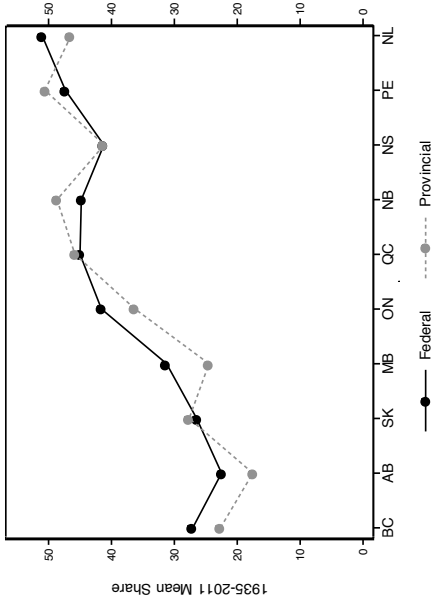
CCF/NDP



All Others



Liberal



Conservative

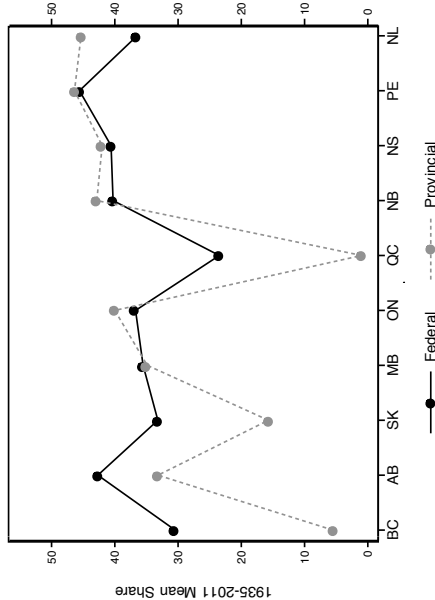
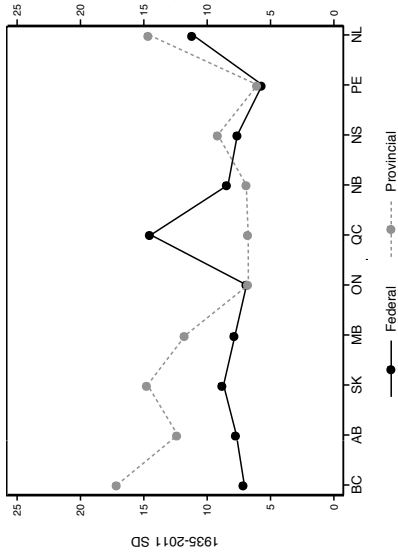
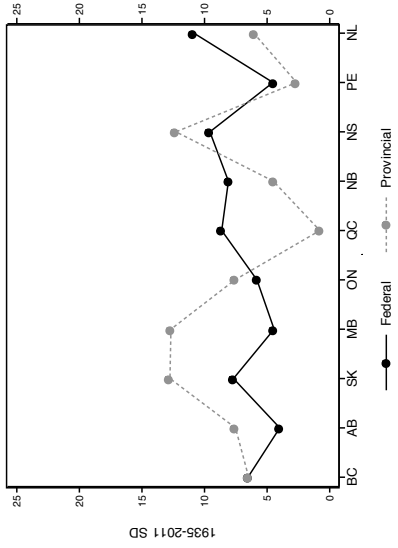


FIGURE 1: THE GEOGRAPHY OF VOTE SHARES, 1935-2011

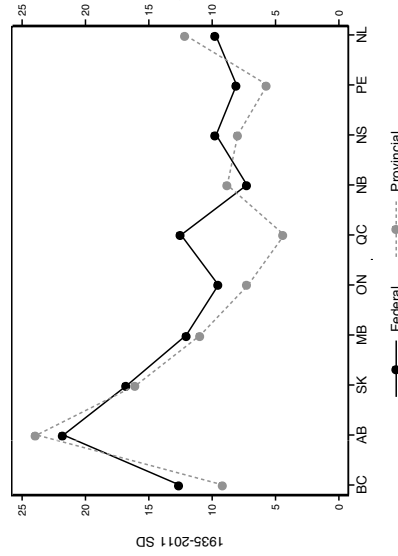
Liberal



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Conservative



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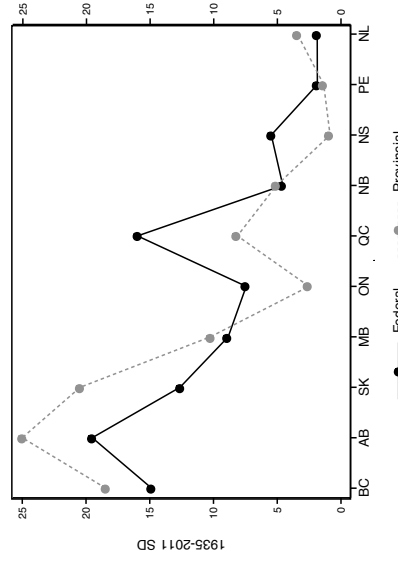
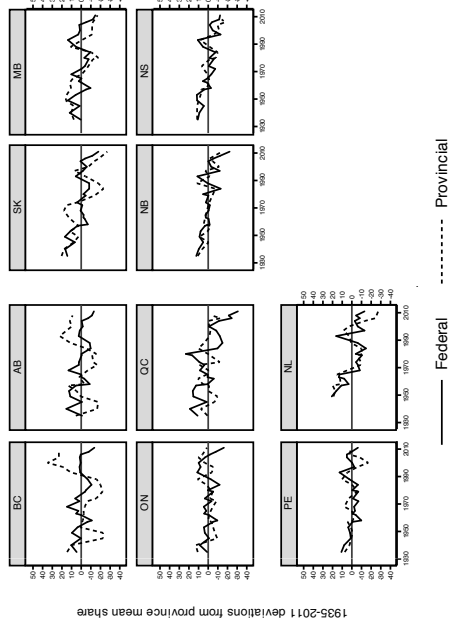
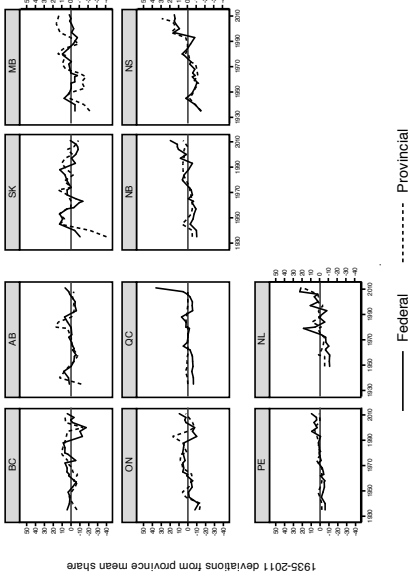


FIGURE 2: THE GEOGRAPHY OF FLUX, 1935-2011

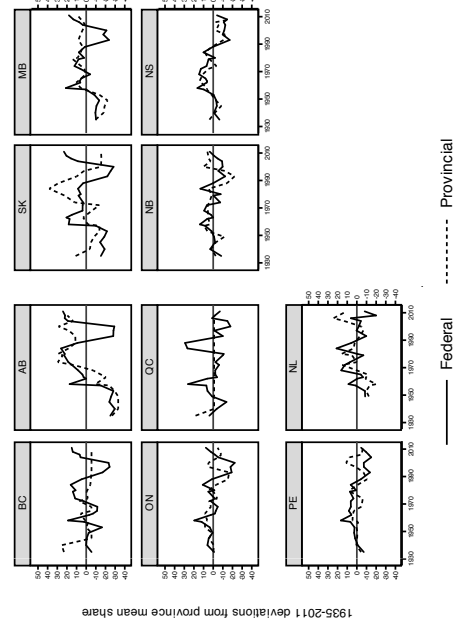
Liberal



CCF/NDP



Conservative



All Others

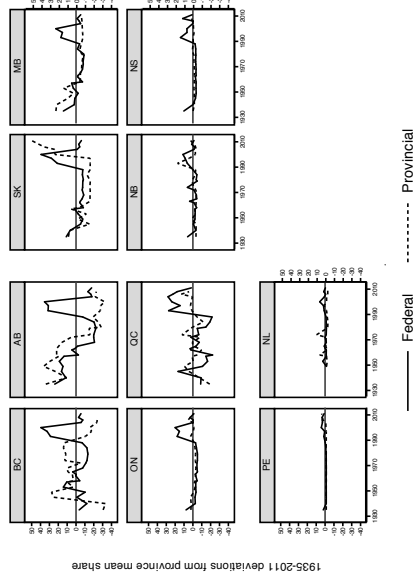


FIGURE 3: DEVIATIONS FROM “NORMAL VOTE” WITHIN PROVINCES