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The Conservatives: Rebuilding and Rebranding, Yet Again

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For the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC), victory in the 2015 election would have been historic. It would have been the first time the party had won four consecutive elections (minority or majority) since the late 1800s.[1] Will its defeat be consistent with its electoral record, where a winning electoral coalition is brought together, but the party soon has problems maintaining its base? Then, upon defeat it struggles to rebuild or, worse, fragments. This chapter discusses the CPC as an electoral entity through two prisms. How did the party respond to new political demands? And how was the party organized? The answers speak to old and contemporary Canada.

From 1867 to 1917, the CPC was dominant in a two-party system, winning six of ten elections, although closely challenged by the Liberals. From 1921 on it has generally been the second party, with the Liberals being so strong (primarily because of its hegemonic Quebec base) that they were dubbed "Canada's natural governing party." Conservative victories were episodic and spasmodic, though the party could claim Canada's most impressive triumphs in 1958 and 1984.[2]

Since the modern party system's beginnings in 1921 (understood as more than two parties winning seats), the Conservatives formed government 10 times (five as a minority, five as a majority) out of 29 elections. These mediocre results were offset by the fact that the party won over half of the vote in 1958 and 1984—the two biggest electoral landslides in Canadian history. The 1958 triumph was frittered away in 1962, with the Conservatives first relegated to a minority until the 1968 election, after which they remained out of office until the brief Joe Clark interregnum of 1979–80. The 1984 victory, with a majority of seats in every province and territory, was a singular achievement. However, two elections later, in 1993, in one of the world's greatest electoral tsunamis, the party was almost extinguished, winning just two seats and 16 per cent of the vote.

Following a decade-long fight between the Reform/Canadian Alliance parties and the Progressive Conservatives (PC), a disputed merger produced the CPC in 2003, which Stephen Harper led to defeat in 2004. The party, [illegible] its electoral strength, won minority governments in 2006

and 2008 and a majority in 2011, but only reached the high 30s in voter support.

Two questions about Harper's electoral legacy were answered in 2015: Would he recalibrate electoral metrics to make the CPC the new dominant party (Wells 2013)? And would the new "national" party include Quebec? To do so would be doubly remarkable.

The Political Party

Here the party will be understood as an organization that nominates candidates to contest an election to form government or influence those who do. And there is a broader matter: for Canada, lacking many national symbolizations, "one of the chief and most important latent functions of the political parties and the party system is to foster and develop a sense of national unity and of national being" (Meisel 1963, 370). But does the party add to or undercut the nation?

Downs (1957, 25–30) famously understood a party to be a coalition whose members agree on all goals and "formulate policies in order to win elections." Other analysts, while accepting the power premise, argue that members commit time and resources for myriad reasons (Eldersveld 1964, 220–44). One motivation is ideas about society's organization and prospects. These matters, fundamentally political, may clash with power seeking. Canadian conservatives have been riven by ideological disputes undercutting their electoral purposes. "Blue Tories" subscribe to frugality in spending, balanced budgets, and prefer markets over governments in economics. "Red Tories" believe in British institutional traditions and, suspicious of "the market is supreme" and individualistic arguments, will use state instruments for collective purposes. More recently, the latter category of Tory encompasses those with liberal rather than traditional views on social issues. The anti-statism of the "Blues" means there is both suspicion of the state and high regard for the United States; for the "Reds" the state is an important nation- and community-building force, and the United States commands both respect and suspicion.[3]

Liberal democracy generally allows for the unimpeded formation of parties and for citizens to choose freely. Any party, then, is in a highly competitive situation, ordinarily having to face traditional rivals but at times also confronting insurgents, perhaps even drawn from its own ranks. Moreover, the environment in which the party operates is highly contingent; uncertainties arise either from long-term changes in society, which the party may reject, welcome, or be oblivious to, or from immediate events, such as a sudden economic crisis or some explosive mid-campaign revelation, which may derail a well-prepared and well-resourced campaign even if the claim is unsubstantiated.

Electoral success requires that a vote-seeking party address five organizational issues: (1) prepare its resources for optimal application; (2) raise money to support its infrastructure and messaging; (3) develop a clear and accessible presentation of its ideas, old in terms of its mythic public purposes and new in terms of how it will address social and economic changes; (4) establish sustaining connections with "friends"—those social groups and institutions supportive of the party's being and efforts; and (5) develop a strategy to define "enemies" and repel their attacks. The competitive rhythm of continuity and change in part reflects a party's management of its organizational challenges, which contain another issue: How does the party connect its "top" with its "bottom"? What is the role of members?

The parliamentary system built on disciplined parties poses a fundamental issue. How are the disparate voices and interests across Canada to be represented in such a tight system? One answer is that the traditional party had two important elements. The national party organization (the dominant part) defined its central character—policies, leaders, communication strategies and appeals, and organizational infrastructure—while individual units (constituency associations, the weaker part) allowed for local interests and concerns to be expressed and to mount the local campaign (Carty 2002, 731–32).

The party, as a coalition of voluntary members coming together for various interests and perspectives, suffers the danger of members and supporters exiting. The party is a means for winning power, but it also contains forces seeking to replace those who lead, if not now then tomorrow. The logic of democracy has led parties to open themselves up to increasing involvement of members in party life, notably in the selection of leaders.

While every party faces intraparty contests over its direction and its leadership, Conservatives have been particularly susceptible to factionalism—in Perlin's phrasing, "disruption from within"—and coalition fracturing (Perlin 1980, 28–57). No other Canadian party has spawned more competitors, and no other party has had to rebuild more often.

The party's ability to compete successfully in the contingent electoral game is greatly affected by changes in its political environment. Canada, as with other long-established democracies, has gone through enormous changes. How has the CPC comprehended what is happening and responded to the inevitable grievances, demands, and interests intertwined in change?

The Canadian Political Environment

Since 1867, Canada has undergone great territorial expansion and experienced enormous population growth and diversification, along with rapid and extensive industrialization and urbanization. Social and economic changes

created new electoral marketplaces and challenges: How to simultaneously represent traditional interests and values while engaging emerging social forces?

The political system itself has changed enormously. To summarize a complicated history, from 1867 on the secular trend has been Ottawa's decline and the rise of the provinces. Macdonald's vision was of Canadians imbued with a British-centred nationalism identifying strongly with a dominant central government; now the national government operates alongside provinces as "interdependent political competitors" (Cairns 1977) with Canadians holding "limited identities" (Careless 1969) and living in "small worlds," viewing politics through prisms of place, ethnicity, and language rather than monochromatically (Elkins and Simeon 1980). For parties, the consequence was that national appeals were hard to construct; what might work well in one region might be repellent elsewhere.

The party system has also changed enormously. John English (1977, 15) notes that Macdonald's dream of a "hegemonic national party system . . . was largely the work of Laurier and (Robert) Borden" from 1896 to 1917. However, since 1921 not only has there been a gradual increase in the number of parties winning seats (over the seven Parliaments from 1993 to 2015, the mean number of parties was 4.7, with more registered by Elections Canada) but the very idea of a "national party system" has been challenged (see Patten's chapter in this volume).

In Confederation's first five decades, both the Conservatives and the Liberals were nationally competitive; one party's area of strength also elected the other's Members of Parliament (MPs). Since 1921, the major parties have had regional areas of strength and weakness. Themes of regional domination and subordination have underlain much of the party system's evolution. Instead of an integrated party system crossing jurisdictions, clear discontinuities between the national and provincial systems have developed. Only two parties have won national office, but in seven provinces (Quebec to British Columbia plus Nova Scotia) other parties have formed government. In some provinces one or both of the Liberals and Conservatives have disappeared as viable contenders. Provincialization produced increasing separation between the national and subnational parties of the same name. Activists have been identified as working for different federal and provincial parties (Koop 2011, 186–87). At times the electoral necessity for a party to be seen as advancing its jurisdiction's interests would drive it to oppose its namesake at the other level, ordinarily the national (Walchuk 2008).

One important difference between American and Canadian electoral politics is that successful presidential candidates are often drawn from the ranks of former governors. In Canada, however, no provincial premier has

won a federal election after becoming the national party's leader. Does provincial political success create resistance from voters in other provinces? The structure of the Canadian party system undercuts the ability of parties to be nation-builders.

The last change is communications. In Canada's first election, voting was spread over weeks; Macdonald did not leave his constituency, and there was no platform (Beck 1968, 1–12). Just as the parties learned to use print, radio, and television, they now use many communication technologies. One overarching feature of the 2015 election is that, for most voters, it was conducted on a screen.

In this world of continuing electoral contingency, the Conservative Party, so often proud of its founding role and its early public purposes, has struggled with honouring its past while confronting issues arising from socio-economic changes. Consider the 1891 election, held just months before Macdonald's death. The party's winning slogan—"The Old Flag, The Old Policy, The Old Man"—artfully heralded its mythologizing of its past and imagery of Canada built on the British connection, resistance to assimilation with the United States, and the building of an industrial heartland in Ontario and Quebec through the National Policy (Pennington 2012). How would the messaging be understood and appreciated by the enormous number of immigrants, mostly drawn from outside of France and the British Isles, entering Canada through the immigration policy of the Liberal government elected in 1896 and mostly settling in Western Canada? All policies entail differential costs and benefits; the National Policy promised industrialization for Ontario and Quebec while requiring Western Canada to be a food supplier. The electoral legacy for the Tories was that the Prairies were uncongenial territory until 1957. Conservative politicians until the 1970s would make tradition and the British connection central to their rhetoric, highlighted by opposition to the new Canadian flag in 1965. How would that messaging be understood and appreciated in Quebec?

The party's origins and its development through Canada's first decades defined it as an electoral entity, led to its success, and limited its future. In the first six elections it fought, the party won almost 60 per cent of Quebec's seats and 70 per cent of Ontario's. Since 1896, Quebec has been the pivot point of electoral politics for both the Liberals and Conservatives. In the 36 elections from 1896 to 2015, Quebec has elected 2,493 MPs; the Liberals have won 63.4 per cent of them, the Conservatives only 15.4 per cent. The Tory record is worse than presented, as three elections produced 45 per cent of their seats. The fundamental fact of electoral politics has been the Liberal dominance of Quebec and the failure of the Conservatives to do better than intermittent strong showings. The Conservative problem of establishing a sustainable Quebec base was exacerbated by the polarized federalism–separatism debate from the 1970s onward, with the Liberals holding the federalist flag until the sudden rise of the NDP and the precipitous fall of the Bloc Québécois in 2011.

Outside of Quebec, the Tories are much more competitive, winning 47 per cent of the seats from 1896 to 2015, compared to the Liberals' 40 per cent. The 13 per cent won by "others" are concentrated in the West, which meant, depending on the province and the time, two or three "other" parties compete with the Tories and Grits. For the Liberals, the drive for a majority rests on its Quebec heartland and winning seats elsewhere, usually in Ontario. The Conservatives have electoral lockjaw: Quebec only comes on board when they are doing very well elsewhere, and there are limited opportunities, generally, for the party to win a massive number of seats elsewhere.

Canada's electoral bifurcation produced a strategic conundrum for the party. How should resources be allocated? A national risk/reward calculation either by electoral district or by province would have disproportionately limited resources for one province over another, or even selected constituencies. However, perhaps the party had to "overinvest" in Quebec, since it would be problematic for national unity for the party not to campaign in the province.

The Conservatives and the Early Game

The CPC's birth in 1854 resulted from a meeting of political leaders to address another of the recurring political crises related to the use of the governor's executive powers, along with issues related to religion and English–French differences. The roots of Canadian political culture were deeply established at that time: sharp partisanship, pervasive patronage, premium on a strong leader, and a strong state orientation. And underlying Canada's development was strong localism flowing from the nature of social organization. "Political parties did not create localistic attitudes, but by their use of them, they entrenched localism in the Canadian political tradition" (Stewart 1986, 97). Lipset (1989) argues that the American Revolution created two different political systems. The United States was built on republican and liberal ideas that emphasized "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," while British North America reflected monarchical beliefs and Tory values expressed in "peace, order, and good government." While the notion of path dependency is highly contested, it seems indisputable that pre-Confederation politics influenced the formation of the Canadian state and the subsequent practice of party politics. The widespread and widely accepted use of state resources to reward friends and punish foes was the heart of party organization in the post-Confederation period. Supplicants applied not to the department

"but to the executive committee of the local Conservative association" whose recommendations were made to Macdonald, who passed advice to the pertinent minister (Pennington 2012, 24–25). The effect was to reinforce localistic tendencies: local committees considered local people for what were mostly local jobs. Borden's 1917 civil service reform, which introduced merit employment, "nationalized" the party system (English 1977).

How, then, to understand Canadian conservatism? Interpreters of Canada's early political development produced three analytical approaches—materialism, brokerage politics, and the primacy of the great leader—that have continuing pertinence for contemporary politics.

First, the materialist interpretation centres on the relations between private economic enterprises and parties. Colonial politicians' close ties with business entities imbued the development of representative institutions and early political life in Canada. Underhill (1960, 177) argued that Confederation was the work of Tory politicians and Montreal–Toronto capitalists. Stevenson (1989, 24) described capitalists as hegemonic since there were few countervailing interests (labour or middle class). Conservatives, dependent on election monies from business and industrial concerns (famously in the railway scandal of the 1870s), became perceived as closely connected with large-scale private economic interests (Williams 1956, 144). Recent electoral law changes have severely limited the reliance of all parties on private economic interests for election monies.

Second, André Siegfried's examination of how parties addressed French–English relationships provided the influential account of "brokerage politics." Parties, being primarily interested in their continuance, tend "to become agencies for the conquest of power," thereby discarding ideals and principles to be "a machine for winning elections" (Siegfried 1907, 112–13). It is not just a cynical game that is played, however, but one that reflects the perception that Canada's racial (ethnolinguistic) and religious divisions are so incendiary that "prudent and far-sighted" politicians avoid them. It is a bittersweet heritage, because the resulting heterogeneous parties avoid sharp positions but also lower political discussion as people focus on material advantage, especially through patronage. For Siegfried the irony is deep: conflicts are depoliticized, yet elections produce unparalleled "fury and enthusiasm" with contests of "great gusto." Politics is poorly served because the parties do not represent points of view but simply combine different views into bland compromise. Brokerage politics was well practised by Macdonald's Conservatives in the first decades of Confederation; but increasingly, after his death, the party lost its ability to play the brokerage game effectively.

Macdonald, who for most Canadians belongs in the "great leader" category, is the basis of the third interpretation. He is credited for his political

vision and practice that took Canada in new and, for most, better directions. Although flawed, as are all human beings, his central role in the building of Canada is indisputable. As a politician, his approach from his early days was to find common ground between Roman Catholic French and Protestant English. He dismissed those he regarded as having "pre-adamite" views and called for progressive conservatism to underpin the party's thinking.

And his appeal to many was indisputable. Canadians were forgiving of Macdonald's drinking and eager to hear him. Plamondon (2009, 57) references crowds of 5,000 in Belleville, Ontario, and 50,000 in Montreal. Conservatives took Macdonald to validate their belief in the strong leader for the well-being of the nation (Morton 1962, 287). Embedded in that belief is the necessity to find a leader with the right electoral stuff.

One Light in the Dark Decades: From 1921 to 1953

From 1921 to 1953, the Conservatives fought eight elections under five different names; it also had nine leaders (two interim) and considerable battles over its platform, reflecting both the leader's influence and the party's efforts to find a winning formula. Only the 1930 campaign produced a victory.

The party's dismal record was contoured by the 1917 Unionist victory. Fought on the necessity of conscription, it produced a bifurcated electorate, with Quebec against and the rest of Canada for. Macdonald's coalition, challenged in the 1890s but showing life in the 1900s, was seriously undercut. Moreover, the party was grappling with issues relating to postwar social unrest, a rapidly urbanizing and industrializing society, and the 1930s Depression.

The Tories were confronted with three strategic challenges. First, economic protectionism dominated the party's discourse through the decades: How to present a persuasive appeal across the land, not just in the party's strongholds? The party's "Red Tory" and "Blue Tory" divide was manifest. Second, Quebec was inhospitable, with Tories castigated as anti-French by the Liberals. What would be the party's message? Finally, did the party have the organizational capacity—active local associations and successful fundraising—to produce victory?

The 1930 triumph reflected a well-organized campaign that effectively used radio, mass mailings, and printed media to communicate the party's messages, both nationally and locally (Beck 1968, 191–205; Glassford 1992, 72–97). Noteworthy innovations included using the leader's sister on a gramophone recording and delivering quick responses to Liberal announcements and questions posed by citizens. The campaign was well funded, primarily because of large amounts of money provided by business interests (mostly from Montreal) and the leader, R.B. Bennett (Glassford 1992, 85–89).[4]

The construction of a "national" election campaign provides an important insight. How did the party plan to improve on its base in the Maritimes, Ontario, and British Columbia, where there were few prospects for gains? Should they focus on Ontario and the Prairies? Or Ontario and Quebec? With Bennett, a Calgary lawyer, as leader and a platform designed for the West, the choice was clear: "Quebec was not written off completely, but no substantial improvement was expected. If all went as planned, none was needed" (Glassford 1992, 75). The Conservatives did better in Quebec than expected (but not so well elsewhere) in 1935, but from that year until Diefenbaker's breakthrough in 1958, the party failed to win more than a handful of seats in the province in any election.

The party, mindful that Westerners were not sympathetic to protectionism, virtually dropped the term. In Quebec, moreover, the party engaged in symbolic shuffling: its slogan was "Canada first, then the Empire," but in Quebec the message was different: "*Canada d'abord*" (Glassford 1992, 79). Muddying of messages is at the heart of brokerage politics, but the party's approach also presaged its contemporary emphasis on symbolic presentation and branding.

The 1930 victory also contained a lesson for future successes. Five Tory provincial governments strongly supported the Conservative campaign. The road to Ottawa was seen to be through provincial capitals, and certainly the party had considerable provincial support in 1957, 1958, and 1979; in some defeats, such as 1921 and 1935, Conservatives were weak provincially.

The party's organizational strengths were soon undercut by Bennett's inattention, financial shortfalls (Glassford 1992, 132–34), and the intraparty debate driven by the deepening Depression. One side, comprising traditional business and commercial interests, insisted on free market solutions. Bennett's side (eventually) committed itself to an expansive state role in economic transactions, akin to the American New Deal. The debate's effect was to create two new (albeit short-lived) parties that eroded the Conservative base.

The 1935 election set the stage for the next 20 years and four elections in which Conservatives won only 239 of 1,017 seats as the Liberals rolled to consecutive majorities. Almost two-thirds of the party's parliamentary caucus came from Ontario. Conservatives before World War I worked quietly with Quebec nationalist groups, and a similar approach was taken in the province during this period as the Tories worked with the Union Nationale until its disappearance in 1985.

Party leaders at a 1938 conference made vigorous affirmations about being British subjects and about ensuring "the safety of the Commonwealth," which riled Quebec's delegation (Glassford 1992, 219). The 1940 party, led by Robert Manion, was attacked for being hostile to business, socialist in its

aspirations, and unsympathetic to its traditional support of British-centred policies (Plamondon 2009, 178–79). The 1943 Port Hope Conference affirmed conscription, the Empire, and free enterprise, but argued also for state intervention in the event of market failures and for "extraordinary resolutions" supporting a wide range of welfare state components, including (in essence) medicare (Granatstein 1967, 134). The party then turned to John Bracken, Manitoba's premier, who had the party adopt the name "Progressive Conservative" as a condition of his leadership, reflecting his political history and Macdonald's terminology. However, Bracken moved away from the progressivism of Port Hope and recommitted to conscription, while the Liberals co-opted much of the Conservative agenda as well as that of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation. For the Tories, 1945 was not only lost but it represented the nadir of its Quebec weakness, with only 29 candidates nominated in the province's 75 ridings.

Notwithstanding Ontario's long-standing centrality for the party, since World War II only one Ontario politician (George Drew, from 1948 to 1956) has become leader. There also has been a reduction in the number of Ontario-based candidates. In the party's first two leadership races Ontario politicians were prominent: three of six candidates in 1927 and four of five in 1938. In 1942, however, there were no Ontarians. In the seven leadership races from 1956 to 2003, only twice did an Ontarian reach the final ballot.[5] Quebec, surprisingly, given the Conservative weakness in the province, has produced two leaders, Brian Mulroney and Jean Charest. Of the party's 13 elected leaders since 1927, nine came from outside of Ontario and Quebec. The two Drew campaigns (1949 and 1953) were uninspired efforts, and the party was weaker after 1953 than it was after 1945. Overall, the party, while looking for leaders to transcend its narrow base, lacked a clear understanding of its place in rapidly changing mid-century Canada.

John Diefenbaker, Robert Stanfield, and Joe Clark

With John Diefenbaker at the helm and building on his 1957 minority, the 1958 victory might have been a "critical election" in the sense of a recalibration of the parties' competitive positions as large sections of the electorate migrated to a new party (Key 1955). In contrast to the patrician George Drew, Diefenbaker's populist style changed the party's base, especially in rural and small-town Canada. Quebec and the Prairies moved strongly to the Tories, reflecting their unusual election commitments to increased government spending and economic intervention, which were portrayed as moving the party from established Eastern business interests (now close to the Liberals) to neglected and less prosperous groups and regions (Meisel 1963, 377).

However, what is almost universally seen as an incompetent administration put the Conservatives into a minority in 1962 (Newman 1963). Massive Quebec losses were followed by weakening vote shares and fewer seats in the province through the seven elections until 1984, despite evident sympathies from Robert Stanfield and Joe Clark, Diefenbaker's successors. The Prairies, historically hostile, became the party's unyielding heartland until 1993 and Diefenbaker's electoral heritage.

One big internal issue was the relationship between the leader and the party. The use of delegated conventions, first by the Liberals in 1919 then by the Conservatives in 1927, considerably reduced the caucuses' role in choosing party leaders from within their ranks. Conventions raised two questions: To which body—parliamentary caucus or extra-parliamentary party—is the leader accountable? And how should conflicts between the two entities be resolved? Part of the problem is that the caucus is a continuing institution while the party does not have a fixed meeting schedule. For the Conservatives, the leader "gives symbolic expression to the party in the country" and "the role of the leader is endowed with transcendent authority in the structure of the party" (Perlin 1980, 27). Yet many party members were deeply unhappy with Diefenbaker's leadership. Prolonged fratricidal fighting over the question of how and where the party could withdraw confidence in the leader resulted in the party-in-convention, after the 1965 loss, deciding there would be a leadership convention. Diefenbaker was a candidate in the subsequent contest, which chose Stanfield.[6]

Another issue centred on the campaign in Quebec. Money in 1957 was not allocated to the province on the calculation that prospects were better elsewhere (Perlin 1980, 55), a decision that was interpreted by some as reflecting bias and by others as a "one Canada" view, a perspective that was to reappear in 2004. In 1958 the message to Quebec was simple: "N'ISOLONS PAS LE QUÉBEC."

The failed Stanfield campaigns of 1968, 1972, and 1974 represented generally a "Red Tory" approach supported by an attempt to modernize the party. Opposition to official bilingualism by a duly nominated candidate led Stanfield to refuse to sign the appropriate papers as required by Elections Canada. This marked the beginning of centralization of power in the party, as before that associations were on their own. The development of mass fundraising marked further centralization in party life, and as continued in the first Joe Clark regime (1976 to 1983) improved the party's finances, setting the stage for a revolution in party life in subsequent decades.

The convention system created an arena where opposing forces clashed in some measure publicly. Stanfield's victory was essentially polarized between pro- and anti-Diefenbaker forces, while Clark's win was underlain with "Blue"

and "Red" divisions. Both winners suffered from winning the convention but not the caucus, especially Clark, who had continuing problems with the party's right wing.[7] Quebec Conservatives, with two candidates (Brian Mulroney and Claude Wagner) losing to Clark, were generally unsupportive despite Clark's openness to Quebec. Anti-Clark voices were many and public after the 1979 and 1980 elections: the former produced a minority Conservative government, but an election following a lost confidence motion nine months later returned the Liberals to power. A leadership review convention gave Clark two-thirds support, which he took to be insufficient. Mulroney bested Clark at the ensuing leadership convention.

The Mulroney Conservatives

Mulroney's appeal was historically compelling: Liberals could not be beaten unless their Quebec base was destroyed. Mulroney, a fluently bilingual Quebecer, led his party to a smashing victory in 1984, winning 80 per cent of Quebec's seats and 50 per cent of its vote. The idea that his victory would restructure the Canadian party system was seemingly confirmed in 1988 with increases in Quebec's seats and votes. Although other Conservatives, even Joe Clark, often described as a Red Tory, spoke encouragingly about various neoliberal ideas popularized by conservatives in the United Kingdom and the United States, it was the Mulroney government that transformed the party's posture through privatization of Crown corporations (Petro-Canada and Air Canada, for instance); changes in the Canadian tax system through an introduction of a consumption tax, the GST; cuts to various Keynesian-type social programs; and free trade agreements with the Americas. On the other hand, Mulroney committed the party to state-centred health care insurance coverage, declaring the Canada Health Act to be a sacred trust.

As for the party, members, expressing considerable angst over perceived control of local affairs by party officials and those around Mulroney, resented just being "cheerleaders and fundraisers" (Woolstencroft 1996). A familiar pattern of Canadian politics reappeared: members attracted by a contested nomination soon drifted away; in Quebec, almost 90 per cent of members left from 1984 to 1985 (Woolstencroft 1996, 292). Carty (1991, 101) found in 1990 that while the Liberals and Conservatives were national organizations, the Quebec Conservatives had only one "paper branch"; the 1993 election (which produced one Tory seat, a drop of 62 from 1988) eviscerated the party's electoral base. In 1997, when the strong campaign by new leader Jean Charest resonated well in the polls, the party lacked the ability to mobilize potential voters (Woolstencroft 1997, 85–86). A decade later only one-third of PC associations met the national party's goals for organizational readiness—and only

16 per cent of Quebec's associations did so (Woolstencroft 2001, 255–59). The party's efforts to take advantage of opportunities were handicapped by its flaccid infrastructure.

Quebec was decisive. Mulroney sought to rectify Quebec's refusal to sign the 1982 Constitution, but intraparty disputes over the Meech Lake Accord led to the formation of the Bloc Québécois, which dominated Quebec from 1993 to 2011. Western Canada, angered that a technically superior and cheaper aircraft maintenance contract was moved from Winnipeg to Montreal and then energized by discussions seen as giving Quebec special constitutional standing, migrated to the fledging Reform Party, which (along with its successor, the Canadian Alliance) dominated Western Canada from 1993 to 2000. Mulroney's dream of a coalition reminiscent of Macdonald's imploded in less than a decade.

The New Conservatives: Harper's Party and Government

The 2003 merger between the Progressive Conservatives and the Canadian Alliance (CA) was the culmination of many frustrated attempts to unite two parties whose continued existence seemingly offered the Liberals an easy path to government.[8] Following Clark's resignation as PC leader,[9] Peter MacKay won the 2003 leadership after publicly signing a document stipulating that he would not engage in merger talks with the CA. A precipitating event for the CA was its 2003 by-election defeat to the PCs in a putatively winnable district (Marland and Flanagan 2015, 280–81). Long-term factors—changes in party financing laws, the parliamentary weakening of the PCs from 1997 to 2000, and the underrepresentation of each parliamentary party as a result of the single-member electoral system—generated merger pressures (Bélanger and Godbout 2010). The following talks quickly led to agreement and acceptance by each party's members.[10] One immediate issue during the merger negotiations was the party's name and the CA caucus's unhappiness "over the policy symbolism of the colour of the maple leaf in the CPC logo" (Marland and Flanagan 2013, 952). Harper won the subsequent leadership contest.

Three questions can be asked about the new party: How did it present itself as an electoral competitor to Canadians? What was the significance of its internal organization? What was its electoral base?

Following the disappointing 2004 election (in which the CPC received 29.6 per cent of the vote compared to 37.7 per cent for the CA and PCs in 2000), the party at the next year's convention confronted the Liberals' framing of the CPC as extremist and harbouring a secret agenda on social-conservative issues. Right-to-life advocates were the most dangerous from the perspective of the party's image. Harper, ironically given his Reform

Party history and its advocacy of candidates and MPs speaking freely, developed strict controls over messaging and policy positioning and declared that the party would not have an abortion plank. The convention's resolutions on a wide range of issues reflected more PC than CA antecedents (Ellis and Woolstencroft 2006, 62–65).

The 2004 election revealed a modern electoral danger. "Bozo" eruptions—unorthodox or incendiary pronouncements by candidates—that rapidly circulated through social media, were cited by opponents as revealing the true party.[11] The party developed an imperfect system to approve those seeking the party's nomination.[12]

Changes in election law were arguably to the CPC's advantage. The Liberal government's 2004 election financing reforms, which radically limited corporate and union donations, benefited the CPC, which had inherited the PC's well-developed direct-mail system that, with their own innovations, put the party in a strong financial position. The 2007 amendment to the Canada Elections Act to set election dates, designed to limit prime ministerial power, had the effect of reproducing in Canada the permanent campaign characteristic of American politics. The CPC used its ample resources to run commercials to blacken the Liberal leaders, Stéphane Dion in 2008, Michael Ignatieff in 2011, and, less successfully, Justin Trudeau after he became Liberal leader in 2013. Changes introduced by the CPC to eliminate per-voter subsidies in 2015 also benefited the party, as it has a wider contribution base than the other parties.[13] The last systemic advantage for the Conservatives was the addition of 30 seats to the House of Commons, mostly located in suburban areas where the party had made significant gains in 2011.

The new party introduced a different mode of organization into Canada. The first parties, centred in Parliament with the caucus at their heart, paid little attention to riding associations except for the expectation they would organize the local campaign.

The 1983 PC leadership race led to charges that candidates' campaigns were manipulating the buying of memberships and running delegate selection meetings. The party began to develop rules regarding issuance of memberships, keeping of records, and procedures for nomination meetings and election of delegates to leadership conventions. Constituency autonomy was lost as the central party assumed control.

Centralization of party life also appeared through mass fundraising, as appeals to individual donors bypassed local associations. Intraparty life was complicated in that donations could be made through the national party or local association, but the former did not share lists with the latter lest the association "poach." Another complication was that donating to the party did not constitute membership. Donors to the national party would appear

at local nomination or delegate selection meetings to participate, but they were denied standing since they were not party members.

The new party committed itself to an organizational philosophy unusual in Canadian politics until recent times. The Progressive Conservative Party, as with other national parties, had maintained formal organizational ties with its provincial counterparts, but the Canadian Alliance had no such links. The new Conservative Party "operates at a single level and remains organizationally distinct from the existing PC parties in the provinces" (Pruysers 2014, 243). Perlin (1980) argued that the federal system necessitated a national party's organization that reflected Canada's institutional and political features, which served to mediate between people in provinces and regions. Such an organizational system was conducive to brokerage politics. The CPC's image of a "national" party was to create an organization free of subnational linkages, one that did not need to build and sustain relationships with provincial or territorial parties.

A similar issue, one that vexed the merger discussions, concerned the organization of the party's members. Is one a member through the local association, or through the party as a whole? The PCs, based on the first definition, held leadership conventions on a points system: each association had 100 points, regardless of the number of members, which were awarded to candidates on the basis of their showing in the district. The CA system was based on Canada as the organizing unit. The PC system created "rotten boroughs," but also encouraged the party to establish "franchises" across the country and for candidates to organize where they could; otherwise they would focus on large population centres. The CPC has accepted the PC model, but only after fierce debates at conventions. At its core are two concepts of national party building: the PC system goes through local associations, the CA model through individual members, that is, the nation reflected by people's ideas and preferences, wherever they happen to live.

Overall, then, two organizational features are at the heart of the CPC. It is a highly centralized entity except for the holding of memberships. Second, it lacks institutional ties with parties centred in the provinces and territories. In 2011, civil servants received a memorandum from the Prime Minister's Office that henceforth "The Government of Canada" would be termed "The Harper Government."

New and old Canada challenged the party. The CA's 2000 election campaign suffered from advertising that was tone deaf to Quebec's political dynamics (Flanagan 2009, 148). The 2004 election reflected the party's continuing weakness in Quebec as well as its failure to win ridings with large numbers of new Canadians or in non-prairie metropolitan areas. Harper and his colleagues invested time and resources to build strength in these

weak areas in the knowledge that winning office was not otherwise possible, and showed gains in subsequent elections, especially in districts with large numbers of new Canadians.[14]

In 2011 the party's slogan was "Here for Canada." Harper's victory speech heralded "a strong, stable, national majority government." The unanswered question was whether the CPC was a national party. Certainly seats were won in every subnational jurisdiction, but how well did the party do across the country?

Table 8.1 shows the CPC vote proportional to subnational jurisdictions' populations for each of the elections in which Harper led the party. The logic underlying the data in Table 8.1 is that a "national" party would draw its vote in proportion to the population in the various jurisdictions. Parties with regionalized or provincialized appeals will do proportionally better in some areas and disproportionately worse elsewhere. The CPC campaigns in the five elections produced four significant features. The area from Ontario to the West and the northern territories overcontributed to the party's showing; to the East, the results were uneven, most striking being its sustained weakness in Quebec. In 2011, the CPC elected five MPs out of a possible

Table 8.1 Conservative Party Vote, by Province and Territory, Canadian Federal Elections 2004–2015

	2004	2006	2008	2011	2015
NL	+0.1	+0.3	−0.9	−0.5	−1.0
PE	+0.2	+0.1	+0.1	+0.2	−0.1
NS	+0.3	−0.2	−0.6	0.0	−0.9
NB	−1.0	+0.8	+0.9	+1.0	−0.1
QC	−13.9	−4.5	−6.3	−10.6	−10.4
ON	+1.3	−1.7	+0.2	+3.5	+2.3
MB	+1.0	+0.5	+0.8	+0.9	+0.4
SK	+1.4	+0.8	+1.3	+1.4	+1.6
AB	+8.6	+6.3	+4.8	+5.0	+9.8
BC	+2.5	−0.5	+2.2	+1.5	−0.5
Territories*	+1.2	+0.3	+0.1	+0.1	−0.1

* Nunavut, Northwest Territories, and Yukon, combined.

Source: Elections Canada, *Official Voting Results* (various years); Statistics Canada.

Entries in each cell represent the following calculation:
The CPC vote in a province (territory) as a percentage of the national CPC vote compared to the jurisdiction's share of the national population. For Ontario in 2011, the calculation is as follows:
Conservative vote as a percentage of the party's national vote: 42.1
Ontario's population as a percentage of Canada's population: 38.6
Difference: +3.5

75 in Quebec. The difference between the CPC's minorities and its 2011 majority was Ontario. And, from 2004 to 2015, the party did not expand its base beyond Alberta and (rural/small-town) Ontario.

Meisel's national unity premise requires parties to make inroads in areas strongly dominated by other parties. The old system had parties thinking of regional interests and regional support bases. Generally, Canadian politics historically has involved the articulation and accommodation of interests with a considerable, if not high, degree of spatial content.

Contemporary Canada's electorate is highly regionalized, as it has been since 1921, yet the rhetoric and policy positioning of parties, especially the CPC, are predicated on winning "middle class" voters wherever they are, while being seemingly indifferent to a divergent and regionalized electorate.

Conservatives, maintaining a long-term pattern, are more likely to be supported by older than younger voters. Polls also show a consistent pattern of men rather than women, in any socioeconomic category, supporting the CPC, a gender divide in support for the leftist and rightist parties that is ordinarily found elsewhere. However, from the perspective of comparative electoral behaviour, the CPC base contains an uncommon characteristic. Polls during the 2015 election showed that voters with lower levels of educational attainment were more likely to be Conservative voters than higher educated voters (EKOS 2015).

Since its birth the CPC has brought its resources together efficiently and effectively (Ellis and Woolstencroft 2011). Ample financial resources have been available for party work. Modern politics comprises an electorate with about 60 per cent voting in elections in which many parties fragment political space;[15] the CPC benefits since it has no serious enemies to its right and, as the 2015 election showed, could count on an electoral base that stayed largely loyal despite enormous negative publicity. In some ways the party plays the centrist game well by avoiding extreme positions on economic issues (Stevenson 2014). Its opponents are to the left (more mushy than hard, to be sure), with all playing to the amorphous "middle class" (Walchuk 2012). The CPC uses its control of government to "reward" its base by adopting right-wing policies that most do not care or know about (Frenette 2014). The CPC has developed the art of crafting niche policies that appeal to small slices of the electorate but who matter enormously in an electoral system that handsomely rewards a winning margin no matter how low its support level. The CPC's 2011 comfortable majority came from 39.6 per cent of the 61.1 per cent of Canadians who voted.

Its strongest public commitments were lower taxes, followed by personal and state security, but under the radar the policy has been a gradual reduction of federal government spending in Canada as a proportion of the gross national

product. A generation ago PC politicians lamented the absence of market-centred think tanks; in 2015 the CPC has many ideological friends.[16] It has avoided free market rhetoric, focusing more on the virtue of lowering taxes, but clearly "Blue" Tories won the day and "Red" Tories drifted away.

The Harper government's many actions and postures had created deep-seated animosity by the time the 2015 election was called; polls showed that two-thirds of voters wanted change, and only about 40 per cent would even consider voting Conservative. Its two leading opponents vied to lead the charge but with campaigns that avoided ideological crusades; like the Conservatives they focused on the "middle class," and the "change" they offered seemed more of personnel and style than a significant alteration of the socioeconomic structure. In that sense, then, the Conservatives, despite their defeat, had changed the substance of political discourse.

Rebuilding and Rebranding, Yet Again

With Harper's resignation as leader, the party awaits a leadership convention. How will the CPC in its newest incarnation handle the transition to its second leader? Every party has its factions, but the Conservatives, for much of their history, have been marked by internecine battles. The CPC under Harper had successfully tamped down the fractiousness of Conservatives, but the party's leadership conventions have been seriously riven. How will the party's social-conservative and moderate wings view each other? Leader-centred politics means that the new leader will be able to put his or her stamp on the party's branding. However, the legacy of Harper's steely-eyed populism will be difficult to overcome in the near-term future.

With support of 32 per cent of voters, 99 MPs in the House of Commons, and no foe on the right, CPC partisans will think it is in a strong position to fight the next election. Moreover, contemporary electorates, lacking firm commitments and party loyalties, move easily from one party to another. Recent electoral history has seen weak parties make enormous gains, sometimes vaulting from obscurity into office. Nonetheless, the sobering thought for Conservatives is what to do about their poor showing in urban districts in Quebec and especially Ontario and British Columbia, where the party had invested much to gain some profit that has subsequently disappeared.

One traditional road to office was through building support with provincial parties. At the end of 2015 no Conservative provincial party was in office (though the Saskatchewan Party is a successor to the province's former Conservative Party). Does the party's centralized structure allow for spatially based issues to be heard in its processes? Moreover, if electoral reform is put into place, as promised by the Liberals for the 2019 election, the electoral

calculus will have been fundamentally changed. How will the Conservatives play that game?

Suggested Readings

English, John. 1977. *The Decline of Politics: The Conservatives and the Party System, 1901–20*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

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Notes

1 In its long history the party has had many names:

Liberal-Conservative (1867–1917)
Unionist (1917–22)
National Government (1940)
Progressive Conservative (1942–2003)
Conservative (1922 to 1940; 2003 to present)
"Tory" and "Conservative" will be used at times for stylistic reasons.

2 Overwhelming victories can be problematic. What led so many to support the party? And what will maintain their support? In discussing the electoral virtue of the minimum winning coalition, Tom Flanagan (2014, 71) points to 1958 and 1984 as being fragile because of the incompatible expectations of supporters in Quebec and elsewhere.

3 There is a voluminous literature on this subject. For a cogent recent discussion, see Stevenson (2014). Taylor (1984) presented a literary examination of various luminaries with "Red Tory" inclinations.

4 Although the 1930 election nicely illustrates Flanagan's (2014) argument, he does not make any reference to it.

5 The 1967 leadership convention had five Ontario candidates out of 11; there were five rounds of voting, but no Ontario candidate lasted beyond the third.

6 Diefenbaker was a candidate and spoke about his opposition to the "Deux Nations" interpretation of Quebec and Canada and the importance of the British connection.

7 In 1977, Jack Horner, a long time MP and fellow Albertan, crossed the floor to join the Liberals; he was one of many hostile to Clark.

8 The complex history from 1973 to 2003 has been covered by many; the best single source is Flanagan (2009). See also Ellis and Woolstencroft (2004).

9 Clark, who left politics in 1993, returned to become leader of the PCs in 1998 and won a seat in 2000. He resigned as leader in 2003, and not only did he not join the CPC, he became a continuing critic.

10 Negotiations on the PC side were carried out by people chosen by Peter MacKay without the involvement of Bruck Easton, party president since 2000.

11 To be sure, all parties have had to deal with candidates saying politically incendiary things; in some cases the words are from many years ago. In the electronic world, anything is fair game for one's opponents, as we saw in the 2015 campaign.

12 Control extended deep into the party. A student of the author's was interviewed for an internship with the party; two employees from the Prime Minister's Office attended the interview.

13 The subsidy was based on a certain sum paid to a party for each vote it received. It means that people, in effect, are donating to a party when they vote for it.

14 See the various essays by Ellis and Woolstencroft on the CPC's campaigns. Flanagan (2009) speaks to Harper's work on learning French and various outreach undertakings.

15 The turnout of over 68 per cent in 2015 seemingly played to the CPC's disadvantage.

16 Principally, the Fraser Institute, Macdonald-Laurier Institute, Atlantic Institute for Market Studies, C.D. Howe Institute, Frontier Centre for Public Policy, Manning Centre, and Canadian Taxpayers Federation.

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