10
Third Parties in Canada: Variety and Success

ÉRIC BÉLANGER

> If someone were to give the proverbial political sociologist from Mars a list of Canadian election results, province by province, provincial as well as federal, from 1921 to the present, and ask him with that knowledge alone to guess what kind of country Canada is, I suspect that he would conclude that it is an extremely unstable nation, full of unresolved tensions, with a political system close to collapse. No other country has produced so many electorally effective minor parties in the same period of time.
>
> —*Seymour Martin Lipset (1990, 201)*

THE VARIABILITY AND DURABILITY OF THIRD parties have become traditional characteristics of Canadian party politics.[1] This is especially intriguing given the fact that Canada offers an institutional environment that is usually hostile to the emergence of third parties because of the first-past-the-post electoral system, which introduces important distortions between the number of votes and the number of seats won by minor parties (Harmel and Robertson 1985). It is undoubtedly for this reason that an important body of theoretical and empirical research on the rise of third parties comes from Canadian political scientists and sociologists. It is the purpose of this chapter to describe the extent to which Canada's federal and provincial political systems have provided fertile ground for third parties and for theories trying to account for the varying degrees of success of these party movements.

Use of the term "third party" originally comes from the United States, where it refers to a party other than the two major parties, the Democrats and the Republicans. This also explains why these parties are often referred to as "minor parties" as well. Maurice Pinard (1973, 455) proposes that a third party "should be defined as any non-traditional party which has not yet been in power. It thus remains in the eyes of the voters as an untried alternative." This is the definition we adopt in this chapter. What really differentiates these parties from the other ones is not so much their numerical rank in terms of votes or seats as their institutional status within the party system.[2] These are parties that are not part of the "governing club," so to speak; that is, they are not considered as a natural (or traditional)

governing alternative because they are either new or they have been unable yet to enter the club.[3]

This definition can be generalized to any party system if we identify a set of conditions that have to be met for a party to become part of the "club" and thus lose its third-party status. We can think of three such conditions (see Martin 2007, 277–78). The party must first have the *will* to enter the club, in the sense that there are no debates within the party about the goal of winning office. It must also have the *ability* to enter the club. This requires that the party has enough electoral support to win office, but also that it is accepted by the other members of the club (the other government parties in a governing coalition, for instance). Finally, once it enters the club, the party must be able to *stay in*. The latter requires that the party's experience in office was not an overly negative one, meaning that it either did not quit the government, did not collapse in the following election, or was not excluded from the club by the other members. Unless this set of conditions is met, the party has to be considered as a third party, an outsider.

In this chapter, the terms "third party" and "minor party" are used interchangeably. It must also be stressed that this chapter deals with the rise (or emergence, or surge) of third parties *understood in terms of popular support in elections.* As such, we address only indirectly the factors behind the actual creation of these parties and their organizational development.[4] In effect, the success of third parties at election times may not always be entirely attributable to the same factors that initially led to their formation. One final precision is that a third party at the federal level may not necessarily be a third party at the provincial level. Federal and provincial party systems in Canada have to be considered separately in that respect. For example, the New Democratic Party, a third party in the federal party system, is currently considered an established governing alternative in the British Columbia provincial party system.

The next two sections present a brief survey of third parties in federal and provincial elections since 1945. This is followed by a review of the various theoretical arguments that have been proposed so far to account for third parties' electoral successes in Canada.

Third Parties in Canadian Federal Politics

There has rarely been a federal election where the two traditional governing parties, the Liberals and the Progressive Conservatives (PCs), were competing alone. Already by the 1920s, the Progressives, an agrarian protest party opposed to the tariff and freight rates imposed by the federal government, made substantial inroads in the prairie provinces, even to the point

of holding the balance of power between 1921 and 1925. This third-party tradition continued throughout the rest of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, as Table 10.1 shows. Here we will briefly look at the five minor parties that have attracted the most sizable portion of the vote in federal elections since World War II.[5]

The first of these parties is the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF). Created in Alberta in 1932, the CCF was a coalition of left-leaning

Table 10.1 Third Parties in Canadian Federal Elections, 1945–2015 (as Vote Percentages)

Election	CCF/ NDP	Bloc Québécois	Green Party	Reform/ Canadian Alliance	Social Credit	Créditistes	Bloc Populaire
1945	15.6	—	—	—	4.1	—	3.6
1949	13.4	—	—	—	3.7	—	—
1953	11.3	—	—	—	5.4	—	—
1957	10.7	—	—	—	6.6	—	—
1958	9.5	—	—	—	—	—	—
1962	13.5	—	—	—	11.7	—	—
1963	13.1	—	—	—	11.9	—	—
1965	17.9	—	—	—	3.7	4.7	—
1968	17.0	—	—	—	—	4.4	—
1972	17.7	—	—	—	7.6	—	—
1974	15.4	—	—	—	5.1	—	—
1979	17.9	—	—	—	4.6	—	—
1980	19.8	—	—	—	—	—	—
1984	18.8	—	—	—	—	—	—
1988	20.4	—	—	—	—	—	—
1993	6.9	13.5	—	18.7	—	—	—
1997	11.0	10.7	—	19.4	—	—	—
2000	8.5	10.7	—	25.5	—	—	—
2004	15.7	12.4	4.3	—	—	—	—
2006	17.5	10.5	4.5	—	—	—	—
2008	18.2	10.0	6.8	—	—	—	—
2011	30.6	6.1	3.9	—	—	—	—
2015	19.7	4.7	3.4	—	—	—	—

Sources: Gagnon and Tanguay (1996, 112) and Elections Canada.

Note: Only third parties obtaining at least 3 per cent of the national vote are included in the table.

groups that adopted a common socialist platform. After peaking in the 1945 federal election with 16 per cent of the popular vote, the party slowly declined. In 1961, CCF members decided to de-radicalize their policy positions, establish more formal links with organized labour, and relaunch the party under the label of the New Democratic Party (NDP) with a moderate social-democratic platform. The NDP enjoyed marked success in the 1980s before encountering some difficulties at the polls during the 1990s. The party then recovered significant ground under the leadership of Jack Layton and in part because of the weakening of the Liberal Party following the 2004 sponsorship scandal. But the best was yet to come. In the 2011 federal election, the NDP managed to supersede the Liberals and form the Official Opposition for the first time in its history, thanks to a wave of support in Quebec where it received 43 per cent of the vote (30 per cent at the national level). The CCF-NDP is currently one of the two parties occupying the political left on the Canadian federal scene. It has spawned several provincial wings, some of them having been successful to the point of forming governments on a regular basis (in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia).

The second party to occupy the federal political left is the Green Party of Canada. Obviously this minor party's main policy concerns involve the protection of the environment and the adoption of sustainable modes of economic development. But the Greens also defend several policy positions that reach beyond the environment and speak to issues of social justice and grassroots democracy. The federal Green Party was founded in 1983. Its support remained under 1 per cent until the 2004 federal election, where it tipped over 4 per cent. The party reached a peak of 6.8 per cent in the 2008 election. In 2011, its leader, Elizabeth May, became the first elected Green Party Member of Parliament (MP) in Canadian history, representing the riding of Saanich—Gulf Islands in British Columbia. In 2013, independent MP Bruce Hyer (formerly with the NDP) joined the Greens, thus increasing the party's parliamentary representation to two MPs up until the 2015 general election.

The Social Credit Party was formed in Alberta during the 1930s by William Aberhart. This movement was based on right-leaning ideas rooted in Major C.H. Douglas's radical monetary doctrine. Social Credit thus frequently used to attack federal monetary policies and decisions, a discourse that particularly appealed to farmers and small merchants from the West. The party also made a significant breakthrough in Quebec at the beginning of the 1960s under the leadership of populist Réal Caouette. Following tensions within the Social Credit federal caucus, Caouette created his own party in 1963, the Ralliement des Créditistes, which competed only in Quebec. Social Credit had several provincial wings, and two of them regularly formed governments in Alberta (between 1935 and 1971) and British Columbia (between 1952 and 1991). In spite of this, Social Credit vanished from the federal scene after 1980.

Created by Preston Manning in 1987, the Reform Party started as a Western populist party, catalyzing discontent with some of the Mulroney government's policy decisions that seemed to systematically favour the centre of the country over Western provinces. In addition, Reform was against the "old-line" parties and the pre-eminence of special interests in Canadian politics; it considered unions, feminist groups, and ethnic and linguistic lobbies as enemies of the people and obstacles to democracy. The Reform movement, however, quickly developed into a socially conservative party that sought to impose itself as a genuine national alternative to the ruling Liberals. In an attempt to shed its regional party image and to broaden its electoral appeal, the Reform Party changed its leader and platform and was renamed the Canadian Alliance a few months before the 2000 federal election. Still unable to break through in Ontario despite attracting the support of 25 per cent of the Canadian electorate, the party proposed a merger with the ailing PCs. The merger was endorsed in December 2003 by the two parties' memberships and led to the creation of the Conservative Party of Canada.

Finally, the Bloc Québécois was formed in 1990 by a handful of Progressive Conservative and Liberal MPs who were deeply dissatisfied with their parties' constitutional treatment of Quebec in the wake of the Meech Lake Accord debacle. The party soon became a sovereignist vehicle whose main objectives were to defend the interests of Quebec and to ease Quebec's eventual transition to independence. The Bloc was led to its first electoral success in 1993 by Lucien Bouchard with 49 per cent of the vote in Quebec (13.5 per cent of the national vote share), achieving Official Opposition status with a total of 54 seats in the House of Commons. The defeat of the sovereignty option in the October 1995 Quebec referendum weakened the party in the following two federal elections, but its electoral fortunes were rekindled in 2004 in the wake of the sponsorship scandal, which sullied the Liberal Party's reputation in Quebec. Over the years, in constantly pushing for Quebec's interests, the Bloc Québécois has ended up advocating distinctive positions on several important federal policy issues, such as fiscal imbalance, the preservation of a social safety net, and the treatment of criminal offenders. However, with the lack of constitutional disputes, a fatigue with the Bloc seems to have set in. That factor, together with the Bloc's development of a left-leaning policy agenda, has facilitated Quebecers' shift toward the NDP in 2011, resulting in the Bloc's collapse—the party kept only four seats in that election with all of its other seats going to the NDP. While in 2015 the party rebounded to 10 seats, its actual vote share continued on its declining path.

Popular support for these nontraditional parties has not always been constant over time. As Table 10.1 suggests, third parties have generally attracted around one-quarter (more or less) of the national vote share in federal elections since 1945. But there have also been important ups and downs in third-party support over that period, with the low points being the 1950s and the 1980s, and the high points the 1990s and the 2000s. These high points mostly reflect the rise of the Reform/Alliance and the Bloc Québécois. Third-party support reached its highest level ever in the 2000 federal election, where almost half of registered Canadian voters decided to support a party other than the Liberals or the PCs.

Third Parties in the Canadian Provinces

The presence of significant minor parties has also been a regular feature of provincial electoral politics in Canada. In effect, Canadian provinces offer a particularly rich and diversified environment to study third parties. Below we provide an overview of third-party successes in the country's 10 provinces since World War II, using Carty and Stewart's (1996) typology of Canadian provincial party systems as a guiding framework. These authors classify provincial party systems into four broad categories: one-party dominant systems, traditional two-party systems, three-party systems, and polarized party systems. Covering most of the same time period as ours, their typology also has the advantage of resting on the dynamics of party competition in each province, which is precisely our focus in this chapter. Table 10.2 provides a list of the most important third parties that have competed in the 10 provinces during the period 1945 to 2015.

The one-party dominant system category includes only one province, namely Alberta. This province probably represents the perfect example of a party system conducive to the emergence of third parties. It has been successively dominated by two parties for long periods (Social Credit from 1935 to 1971, followed by the PCs until 2015), which has had the result of preventing the Liberals and the NDP from taking office in that province since the 1930s. In addition, several other third parties have made important electoral inroads in that province over the past seven decades. Before 2015, the standout cases of success have been the Western Canada Concept Party in 1982 (12 per cent of the vote) and the NDP and Raymond Speaker's Representative Party in 1986 (29 per cent and 5 per cent of the vote, respectively). In the 2004 election, two small parties had relative success, the Green Party and especially the Alberta Alliance. Obtaining 9 per cent of the vote but no seats, this latter party, created by former supporters of Social Credit and the now-defunct Reform and Canadian Alliance federal parties, wished to offer

Table 10.2 Third Parties in Canadian Provincial Elections, 1945–2015

Party System	Province	Party	Best Score	
One-party dominant	Alberta	Alberta Alliance	2004	(9.1)
		CCF-NDP	2015*	(40.6)
		Green Party	2008	(4.6)
		Progressive Conservative Party	1971*	(46.4)
		Representative Party	1986	(5.1)
		Western Canada Concept	1982	(11.8)
		Wildrose Party	2012	(34.3)
Traditional two-party	Newfoundland	CCF-NDP	2011	(24.6)
	Nova Scotia	CCF-NDP	2009*	(45.2)
	Prince Edward Island	CCF-NDP	2015	(11.0)
		Green Party	2015	(10.8)
Three-party	Ontario	CCF-NDP	1990*	(37.6)
		Green Party	2007	(8.0)
	Manitoba	CCF-NDP	1969*	(38.1)
		Social Credit	1953	(13.1)
Polarized	New Brunswick	CCF-NDP	2014	(13.0)
		Confederation of Regions	1991	(21.0)
		Green Party	2014	(6.6)
		Social Credit	1956	(3.1)
	Quebec	ADQ	2007	(30.8)
		CAQ	2012	(27.1)
		Créditistes	1970	(11.1)
		Equality Party	1989	(3.7)
		Parti Québécois	1976*	(41.4)
		Parti Vert	2007	(3.9)
		Québec Solidaire	2014	(7.6)
		RIN	1966	(5.6)
		Ralliement National	1966	(3.2)
		Union des Électeurs	1948	(9.2)
	Saskatchewan	Progressive Conservative Party	1982*	(54.1)
		Independence Party	1982	(3.3)
		Saskatchewan Party	2007*	(50.9)
		Social Credit	1956	(21.5)
	British Columbia	CCF-NDP	1972*	(39.6)
		Green Party	2001	(12.4)

(*continued*)

Table 10.2 (Continued)

Party System	Province	Party	Best Score	
Polarized		Marijuana Party	2001	(3.2)
		Progressive Democratic Alliance	1996	(5.7)
		Reform Party	1996	(9.3)
		Social Credit	1952*	(30.2)
		Unity Party	2001	(3.2)

Sources: Feigert (1989), the *Canadian Parliamentary Guide* (annual), and the *Reports of the Chief Electoral Officer* from each province (selected years).

Notes: Figures in parentheses are vote percentages; only third parties obtaining at least 3 per cent of the vote were considered for inclusion in the table; * indicates the party took power that year and ceases to be considered a third party according to our definition.

a right-wing alternative to the dominant PCs. This new party formation came to be known a few years later as the Wildrose Party, and it achieved a breakthrough in the 2012 election with 34 per cent of the vote (20 per cent of seats) under the leadership of Danielle Smith. However, this result was a far cry from the predictions that were putting Wildrose into power, and the party started to lose steam after that relatively disappointing electoral performance. Since 1971, the most important third-party surge has been achieved by the NDP, which managed to form a majority government in the 2015 election, thus putting an end to more than 40 years of PC dominance in that province.

Conversely, the three provinces included in the traditional two-party systems category certainly represent good examples of party systems that are generally *not* conducive to third parties. Since the 1940s and generally since their inclusion in Canadian Confederation, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island have all experienced strong competition between two traditional parties, the Liberals and the PCs, each having formed the government at various times over the past 70 years. In addition to fostering regular alternation between the two main parties, this particular environment has seen few successes from third parties, the NDP being one of the only two parties able to attract more than 3 per cent of the vote (the other one is the Green Party in the 2015 PEI election). Yet the NDP's scores frequently approach or even exceed 10 per cent of the vote in these three provinces. In Newfoundland and Labrador, the party experienced a sudden surge in the 2011 election with 25 per cent of the vote. In Nova Scotia since 1998, the NDP has proven to be a serious threat to the traditional parties, having forced three minority governments before finally taking power in [6]

Ontario and Manitoba are the only Canadian provinces where a competitive three-party system can be found. In spite of a period of temporary weakness between 1985 and 1995, Ontario's PCs have generally dominated the legislature, but it is worth noting that no party in this province—not even the PCs—has been able to obtain a majority of votes during the entire period under study. This fact underlines the strong competitiveness of Ontario's party system—the Liberals and the NDP usually obtaining at least 20 per cent of the vote each, and each having formed the government at least once since 1945. The often slim legislative majorities in Manitoba also reflect a strong competition in this province between the PCs, the NDP, and the Liberals, even though the latter party has sometimes encountered electoral difficulties, especially during the early 1980s and since the end of the 1990s.[7] Apart from the three competitive parties, though, no other party has experienced any electoral breakthrough in those two provinces. For example, the Social Credit and the Confederation of Regions Party never obtained more than 3.5 per cent of the vote during the period, except Social Credit in the 1953 Manitoba election with 13 per cent support. The Ontario Family Coalition Party, a social conservative formation created in 1987 and opposed to abortion and gay rights, had its best score in the 1990 election with nearly 3 per cent of support. Some Manitoba Social Credit members joined the new Progressive Party[8] (created by former NDP members) at the beginning of the 1980s, but that party never received more than 2 per cent of the vote and was dissolved in 1995.

The four remaining provinces form the last category, polarized party systems, because they are characterized as provinces in which party competition is organized around a particular issue or cleavage. In the case of Saskatchewan and British Columbia, it is the traditional left–right cleavage: the NDP faces either Social Credit or the Liberals in British Columbia, and either the Liberals or the PCs in Saskatchewan.[9] Until recently, third parties rarely emerged in these two provinces. The exceptions are British Columbia's NDP and Saskatchewan's PCs, who formed a government for the first time in 1972 and 1982, respectively, and Social Credit in both provinces. The latter party had brief success in Saskatchewan during the 1950s (21 per cent and 12 per cent of the vote in the 1956 and 1960 elections, respectively) before merging with the PCs. In British Columbia, the Social Credit surged in the 1952 election with 30 per cent of the vote and went on to govern the province for the next 40 years with only one interruption (1972–75). However, the party disappeared at the beginning of the 1990s after most of its voters had shifted their support to the Liberals following Bill Vander Zalm's eccentricities and the numerous scandals that plagued his government. Former Social Credit members then joined the socially conservative

but short-lived provincial Reform Party and Progressive Democratic Alliance in 1996 (9 per cent and 6 per cent, respectively) and Unity Party in 2001 (3 per cent). Recently, the Green Party has made significant electoral inroads, achieving 12 per cent of the vote in the 2001 British Columbia election and around 8–9 per cent ever since. We should finally point out the recent breakthrough of the Saskatchewan Party. Created in 1997 by right-leaning politicians to fill the void left by the collapse of the PCs following several scandals and fraud charges from the late 1980s,[10] the party received 39 per cent of the vote in both the 1999 and 2003 Saskatchewan elections before finally seizing power in 2007 with 51 per cent of the vote (it was re-elected in 2011 with a massive 64 per cent support).

While being correctly described by Carty and Stewart (1996) as "polarized" around the language issue, New Brunswick's party system closely resembles the other Atlantic systems, since it also is characterized by strong competition between the Liberals and the PCs that does not leave much room for third parties. Nevertheless, New Brunswick's NDP has regularly managed to get around 10 per cent of the vote since 1982, and the Confederation of Regions Party (CoR) experienced an electoral breakthrough in 1991 (21 per cent). This significant surge happened in a period of sudden weakness in the post–Hatfield PC Party,[11] but the CoR quickly disappeared from the provincial electoral map and was disbanded in 2002.

The case of Quebec is more particular. Polarized around the national question, this party system experienced a partisan realignment at the beginning of the 1970s when the Parti Québécois (PQ) replaced the Union Nationale as one of the two main contenders to form a government, which the PQ did for the first time in 1976. What is more, the province has seen many other third parties appear and disappear over the past 70 years: Réal Caouette's Union des Électeurs in 1948 (9 per cent of the vote), the Rassemblement pour l'Indépendance Nationale and the Ralliement National in 1966 (9 per cent combined), the Ralliement des Créditistes in 1970 and 1973 (11 per cent and 10 per cent, respectively), and the Equality Party in 1989 (4 per cent). The last two decades have seen a gradual fragmentation of Quebec's party system, with the appearance of several new parties, the most notable of these being the right-leaning Action Démocratique du Québec (which merged with the Coalition Avenir Québec in 2012) and the left-leaning and sovereignist Québec Solidaire. None of these third parties have yet been able to really shake the Liberal–PQ duopoly in the province, although the popular support for these two old-line parties (and especially the PQ) has been in constant decline since 1998, and the Action Démocratique was able to form the

To summarize, we can observe that third parties in Ontario and Manitoba have been rare and have had almost no success, whereas a variety of them have appeared on an almost regular basis in Quebec since the 1940s. The other seven provinces provide a mixed picture. Third-party support has been moderate but steady in Alberta and the four Atlantic provinces over the past seven decades. But since the 1990s, one can notice a relatively clear trend whereby minor parties gather a significantly growing share of the popular vote in provincial elections. In fact, nearly half of the parties listed in Table 10.2 have experienced their best electoral result in the past 15 years only. Some of these have been competing for most of the period under study but have just recently started to receive a greater share of the vote, like the NDP in Nova Scotia. Others are new party formations that have experienced a sudden rise, like the Saskatchewan Party, the Wildrose Party, and the British Columbia Green Party.

In fact, the relative success of the federal Green Party has been reflected at the provincial level. There is now a Green Party that competes in all of the Canadian provinces. Since 2001 the Greens have obtained between 2 and 4 per cent of the vote on a regular basis. They have been particularly successful in British Columbia, New Brunswick, and PEI: one Green Party candidate has been elected in each of these three legislative assemblies in their most recent elections (2013, 2014, and 2015, respectively). Thus, the slow rise of the Greens, at both the federal and provincial level, is an important feature of the last decade of Canadian electoral politics. It mirrors a similar Green surge in West European political systems (Spoon 2011).

The next section presents some of the theories that have been formulated to explain why third parties are such an important feature of Canada's political system.

Explaining the Electoral Success of Third Parties

What accounts for these ups and downs in third-party success in Canadian federal and provincial elections? The most important Canadian works on third-party support have often relied on a structural approach. However, several institutional or cultural counterarguments have also been proposed to account for the phenomenon. These theoretical divergences have led to a few important debates in the literature, the first of these having occurred during the 1950s between C.B. Macpherson and Seymour Martin Lipset.

In accounting for the impressive success achieved by the United Farmers of Alberta and the Social Credit Party in Alberta since the early 1920s, Macpherson (1953) proposed that two favourable conditions were behind these parties' rise. The first condition was the quasi-colonial relationship that

existed between Alberta and the country's eastern region at the beginning of the twentieth century, when that province was mostly treated as a simple peripheral economic region. This relationship engendered a long-term feeling of alienation toward the Liberal and PC parties, which were seen, especially by the farmers, as political instruments of power controlled by Ontario's and Quebec's manufacturing and financial elites. The second condition was the relative class homogeneity among the group of Alberta farmers that started this protest movement and formed those new political parties. According to Macpherson, a majority of Alberta's society was composed at the time of one "petty bourgeois" class of agricultural producers that depended on a capitalist economy mostly controlled by Eastern Canadians. Sharing similar economic interests, this homogenous social class was easily able to organize itself politically and defend its interests against the menace of imperialism. This homogeneity of class also made the traditional parties useless, argued Macpherson, because the main function of a bipartisan system is to moderate class conflict.

It appears, however, that Macpherson may have overstated the homogeneity of class among Alberta's society, especially since Social Credit also drew strong support among the province's working class at that time (Bell 1993). Another weakness of Macpherson's approach is that it does not explain why the other prairie provinces, sociologically quite similar to Alberta, did not develop the same type of party system. According to the "fragment theory" (Hartz 1955; Horowitz 1966; McRae 1964), this difference might be explained by the differing political cultures that waves of immigrants brought with them (Wiseman 1981). The founding fragments thus brought a socialist touch in Saskatchewan and a populist touch in Alberta—hence the greater success of the CCF-NDP in Saskatchewan and of agrarian protest parties in Alberta.

The strongest critique of Macpherson came from Lipset (1954), who suggested that the conditions of third-party success in Western Canada had nothing to do with social structures, but were instead linked to two institutional factors: the parliamentary system and the electoral system in Canada. First, the party discipline inherited from British parliamentarianism tends to muffle dissent and protestation within the traditional political parties. It forces dissenting party members either to comply with the party line or exit the party and join (or create) a different party movement (see also Gerring 2005; Hauss and Rayside 1978). Whereas in the United States the system of primary elections allows the different factions within each major party to debate their views openly, party discipline in Canada leaves internal party cleavages unresolved and also prevents the creation of nonpartisan alliances in the House of Commons. The second factor identified by Lipset (1950; 1990, 203) is the electoral system. Based on constituencies, the first-past-the-post system favours the implantation and electoral success of local or regional parties (see also Cairns 1968; Gerring 2005).[12] This situation again contrasts with that of the United States, where the constituency has no real significance because the American electorate votes for a candidate at the national (the president) or state (the governor) level. According to Lipset, these institutional factors account for the Canadian specificity in terms of third-party success.

Lipset's institutional approach provides a compelling explanation as to why third parties have had more electoral success in Canada than in the United States. However, these factors cannot constitute sufficient conditions of success because they remain constant across all Canadian regions (Macpherson 1955). Yet, as we have seen in the preceding sections, there exist important differences across regions in Canada, not only in the number of third parties competing but also in the patterns of their success.[13]

The second debate in the Canadian literature on third parties revolved around Maurice Pinard's (1971) work. To account for the sudden breakthrough of Social Credit in Quebec in the 1962 federal election, Pinard proposed a general theory of third-party success that mostly relies on two structural factors. Together, these two variables should provide a third party with a substantial boost at election time. The first is the presence of specific grievances held against the government among some segments of the electorate. Such grievances are often economic in nature, but they can also be political, ethnic, linguistic, class, regional, or based on something else. What is important is that these grievances result from "gaps created between a group's expectations and its actual conditions" (Pinard 1971, 119), thus creating readiness among dissatisfied voters to vote against the government in an attempt to improve their conditions.

The second factor identified by Pinard is what he called "one-party dominance." What this really means is that the traditional opposition party has to be electorally weak. In such a situation, if angry voters want to cast their ballot for an opposition party, they will not consider the traditional "second" party as a viable alternative to the dominant governing party, and they will thus be more tempted (or predisposed) to turn toward a third party as a way to express their grievances. It is in this sense that the configuration of the party system, or its level of competitiveness, can act as a structural condition for the rise of a third party. According to Pinard, this is exactly what happened in 1962 in Quebec, where the rural population experienced serious economic hardship in the early 1960s; this dissatisfied portion of the electorate massively voted for Social Credit instead of the traditional federal PC Party because the latter had always been historically weak in Quebec.

The emphasis placed by Pinard on the condition of one-party dominance has led several scholars to criticize his theory. Using aggregate indicators of predominance different from Pinard's, both Lemieux (1965) and Blais (1973) were unable to confirm the theory. Blais argued that third-party success was due instead to the weakness of traditional party attachments, a view similar to that of Clarke and Kornberg (1996), who suggest that third-party support is mostly due to unstable party identification (i.e., partisan "dealignment") among the Canadian electorate. And according to Graham White (1973), one-party dominance does not help explain the success of minor "class parties" that arise at times of intense dissatisfaction within specific social classes toward the party system.

Following these critiques, Pinard reformulated his one-party dominance condition into "a more general condition of structural conduciveness, that of the political nonrepresentation of social groups through the party system" (Pinard 1973, 442). He also proposed to distinguish between two types of third parties: protest parties, such as Social Credit, and radical parties that propose an articulated ideology that integrates class or communal consciousness and values, like the farmers' and labour movements or the Parti Québécois. According to Pinard, one-party dominance would be a favourable condition for the rise of third parties of the protest type only. Minor radical parties, on the other hand, would be able to emerge even in a strongly competitive party system, as long as there was a significant portion of the electorate whose ideological positions were not represented through the existing parties.

More recent studies have confirmed the existence of a relationship between one-party dominance and third-party breakthrough. It seems that one-party dominance was a significant factor in the rise of the Reform Party in the West in the 1993 federal election (Bélanger 2004b; Michaud 1999), but not in the upsurge of the more "radical" Bloc Québécois in that same election (Bélanger 2004b). It also appears to have facilitated the sudden success of the NDP in Atlantic Canada in the 1997 federal election (S. White 2000), as well as the rise of the Social Democratic Party–Liberal Alliance in the 1983 British general election (Bélanger, Nadeau, and Lewis-Beck 2010; Eagles and Erfle 1993).

The role of grievances in the electoral breakthrough of third parties has also been confirmed recently. Perrella (2005, 2009) and Bélanger and Nadeau (2010) have shown that long-term economic hardship is related to voting for "nonmainstream" parties in federal elections, providing support to Pinard's argument about long-term economic grievances fuelling support for third parties. Analyzing the success of Reform and the Bloc Québécois in 1993, Bélanger (2004b) found that economic grievances had no effect on the vote for these parties but that support for both formations was instead

linked to political grievances that rested on feelings of regional alienation that were exacerbated in Quebec and the West in the wake of the Meech Lake and Charlottetown constitutional debacles.[14] Given the often widespread perceptions in Quebec and the Western provinces that regional interests receive insufficient attention from the federal government, such political grievances may partly account for the fact that third parties are usually more successful in those two regions of the country. Finally, a few studies have shown that the upsurge of the CoR in New Brunswick at the beginning of the 1990s was due to two "Pinardian" factors, namely the weakness of the provincial PCs and the development of grievances among the province's anglophone population regarding the Hatfield government's bilingualism policies (Belkhodja 1999; G. Martin 1998).

A different theoretical approach used to study the success of third parties in Canada has been to look at the varying political cultures found across the country. Several past studies have characterized the inhabitants of the Atlantic provinces as traditionalists and as inefficacious[15] people (Brym 1979; Clarke et al. 1979; Gidengil 1990; Leuprecht 2003; Simeon and Elkins 1974). Such cultural traits would make the mobilization of these people around a nontraditional minor party much more difficult; hence the low rate of third-party success in this region. However, this explanation remains unsatisfying, mainly because this rather naive picture of Atlantic political culture as markedly displaying political inefficacy appears to be mostly outdated (Henderson 2004; I. Stewart 1994).

Another cultural argument that has been proposed is that the rise of some third parties, in particular that of the Reform Party during the 1990s, is a direct consequence of changing values among Canadian society. In other words, Reform would be the ideal vehicle for the "new politics" of the postmodern era (Sigurdson 1994). More generally, it is possible that the rise of new postmaterialist values might have encouraged support for new parties that promote better democratic participation for citizens (Inglehart 1998; Nevitte, Bakvis, and Gibbins 1989). But as Covell (1991) has argued, movements of the new politics in Canada have generally found a way of influencing politics through actions other than the creation of a political party. And while it is possible that these new values may influence electoral behaviour, it is unlikely that they would be a significant factor behind the sudden breakthrough of third parties. In addition, it seems that the established parties are usually successful at adapting themselves to the rise of postmaterialist values and at integrating these new issues into their political discourse and orientations (Pelletier and Guérin 1998).

The theoretical approaches discussed so far may lead one to believe that support for third parties lies solely in conditions that are external to them.

Yet these parties—just like major traditional party formations—are not simply passive actors of the political system. Several scholars have highlighted the importance of mobilization strategies in accounting for the success of third parties. For instance, Bell (1993) argues that Social Credit's organizational failures are the main reason why the party lost the 1971 Alberta election. The presence of a charismatic leader like Aberhart, Douglas, or Caouette can also help minor parties overcome the structural and institutional barriers facing them (Gagnon 1981). Likewise, the positive image of NDP leader Jack Layton over that of his opponents was one of the key factors explaining the party's surge in the 2011 federal election (Fournier et al. 2013).

Factors of a strategic nature have often been alluded to when accounting for the rise of the Reform Party in 1993. Some have argued that the party succeeded in constructing a sense of political identity among Canadian people by relying on a "modernized" populist discourse, which explains Reform's substantial electoral support at the time (Harrison 1995; Laycock 1994; Patten 1996). However, this hypothesis is usually developed based on an analysis of Preston Manning's writings and speeches, with the untested assumption that such a rhetoric had an important persuasive effect on public opinion and voter choice.

Whatever the case may be, these kinds of studies have the merit of focusing attention on the role of party strategies and rhetoric in mobilizing the vote (Hirano and Snyder 2007; Mair, Müeller, and Plasser 2004; Meguid 2008; Spoon 2011). Like every political party, minor party movements aim at getting their candidates elected and at promoting, if not enacting, their policy ideas. Recent work on the electoral success of extreme right-wing parties in Western Europe has shown the extent to which those parties' discourse, revolving around issues of declining economic conditions, immigration, insecurity, and national identity, has helped them build a relatively strong support base (e.g., Betz 1994; Delwit, De Waele, and Rea 1998; Golder 2003; Ignazi 1992; Jackman and Volpert 1996; Kitschelt 1995). Indeed, the choice of campaign issues and themes that parties make can explain part of their electoral appeal. During election campaigns, political parties tend to "prime" issues that will likely draw them popular support. For example, Jenkins (2002) has shown that the Reform Party's emphasis on cultural issues like bilingualism, multiculturalism, and immigration toward the end of the 1993 federal election campaign significantly contributed to its emergence.

Gagnon and Tanguay's (1996, 107, 127) account of the surprising 1993 election outcome briefly alludes to another potentially important factor that might explain the upsurge of Reform and the Bloc Québécois. They observe that significant electoral breakthroughs by third parties "are usually symptoms of a deeper malaise in the party system" and suggest that the two

new parties' success coincided with "a wave of anger directed at the traditional mechanisms of political representation: the established political parties, politicians in general, bureaucrats, and legislatures" (see also Seidle 1994).

The Reform Party and the Bloc Québécois broke onto the electoral scene at the end of what Nevitte (1996) termed a "decade of turmoil," at a time when Canadians felt particularly disaffected from politics. As in other Western democracies, this sense of discontent with politics in Canada seems to go back a least a couple of decades. Even before the election of Brian Mulroney as prime minister in 1984, voters were starting to feel distrustful of their governing institutions (Bélanger and Nadeau 2005; Roese 2002) and were becoming increasingly disaffected from traditional party alternatives (Clarke and Kornberg 1993; Gidengil et al. 2002).

In effect, despite the role third parties' choices of campaign strategy and rhetoric might have on their individual electoral fortunes, it is striking that, in the past few decades, overall support for third parties has significantly grown in most advanced industrial democracies (see Dalton, McAllister, and Wattenberg 2000; Grofman, Blais, and Bowler 2009). We observed the same kind of phenomenon in the previous two sections of this chapter, where we concluded that third-party support reached new highs since the beginning of the 1990s, both at the federal and the provincial level. This strongly suggests that more general factors also greatly determine these parties' fate at the polls. One factor in particular—the rise of public discontent with politics (Dalton 2004; Dalton and Weldon 2005; Norris 1999; Pharr and Putnam 2000)—appears to be salient in explaining the recent success of third parties in several countries, including Canada. The impact of political disaffection on the rise of nontraditional parties can best be appreciated when one looks at the functions these parties fulfill in a political system.

One of these functions is the role of policy innovators that minor parties often play by bringing new ideas to the table and forcing the traditional parties to readjust their legislative agendas (Adams et al. 2006; Hesseltine 1962; Mallory 1954; Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus 1996) and even to modify some of their usual policy positions (Harmel and Svåsand 1997; Hirano and Snyder 2007; Meguid 2008). This is, for instance, the function often ascribed to the federal NDP, which most view as Parliament's "social conscience" and as an essential promoter of left-leaning policy ideas in Canada (Chandler 1977; Pétry 1988).

Another function of third parties is that they often spark large partisan realignments among the electorate (Key 1964, 256–62; P. Martin 2005; Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus 1996; Zingale 1978). When a third party attracts considerable support on the basis of a new salient issue dimension, it usually forces the major parties to adapt their own positions to the new

dimension to recapture part of the electorate. In the process, the traditional parties lose some of their supporters but acquire new partisans, with the minor party acting as a temporary "way station." This explains, for example, the continued presence of the Republican and Democratic parties in the United States in spite of the occasional rise of a third party. Alternatively, an issue realignment can lead to the replacement of one of the traditional parties by the emerging party. This situation provides an accurate description of what happened in Quebec at the end of the 1960s. The appearance of the sovereignty issue on the political scene brought about a realignment in the party system, with the PQ replacing the Union Nationale as the main party alternative to the provincial Liberals (Bélanger and Nadeau 2009; Clarke 1983; Lemieux, Gilbert, and Blais 1970).

The function most relevant to our discussion here, however, is that third parties provide disaffected voters with a political vehicle to channel and voice their discontent (Fisher 1974, 175; Ranney and Kendall 1956, 458). This is close to the "tribunician" function ascribed to political parties by Georges Lavau (1969, 38–39; see also Hamel and Thériault 1975). Voters discontented with politics tend to turn toward nontraditional parties either to signal their dissatisfaction with the political process as an attempt to make things change and improve, or because they believe that a third party cannot make things worse than they already are under established party rule. In other words, a protest vote cast against the political system is not simply an expression of anger but also has an instrumentality to it: it aims at potentially improving the state of political affairs (Bélanger 2016; Hirschman 1970; Kang 2004).

Recent empirical work has shown that third parties, in the United States and elsewhere, mostly benefit from a widespread sense of malaise with politics and the institutions of governance (Bäck and Kestilä-Kekkonen 2014; Dalton and Weldon 2005; Hetherington 1999; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002, 72–74; Hooghe, Marien, and Pauwels 2011; Miller and Listhaug 1990; Pattie and Johnston 2001; Peterson and Wrighton 1998). Political disaffection has to do with public expectations pertaining to government performance and to political parties as institutions linking citizens to the state and rests on a more or less systematic evaluation of the performance of established political institutions and parties (Dennis and Owen 2001). As Newton and Norris (2000, 61) put it, "Government institutions that perform well are likely to elicit the confidence of citizens; those that perform badly or ineffectively generate feelings of distrust and low confidence. The general public, the model assumes, recognizes whether government or political institutions are performing well or poorly and reacts accordingly." This entails that discontented voters may be significantly more prone to support nontraditional parties: "those low in trust . . . perceive the institutionalized alternatives as incapable of addressing their concerns, and hence they may welcome other options" (Hetherington 1999, 321).

Examining the phenomenon in Canada for the period 1984 to 1993, Bélanger and Nadeau (2005) have shown not only that "old-line" major parties suffer electorally from declining political trust but also that some third parties benefit more from this than others. Contrary to what was the case in the previous two elections, distrustful Canadian voters in 1993 were more likely to support the Reform Party or the Bloc Québécois than to vote for the NDP, suggesting that the transition from a three- to a five-party system had eroded the NDP's role as a vehicle for channelling citizen distrust. A similar situation has been observed with respect to another indicator of political cynicism, that of anti-party sentiment among the Canadian public (Bélanger 2004a; Gidengil et al. 2001). In their bid for voter support, third parties often tend to put all traditional parties together in the same bag and to exploit voters' hesitations to support old parties that appear disconnected from the needs and interests of the general population (Lemieux 1965, 188).

Some scholars have suggested that third parties construct or create feelings of discontent, arguing that voters become cynical toward politics only as a byproduct of first supporting the party for ideological reasons (e.g., Koch 2003; van der Brug 2003). While it is probably true that nontraditional party movements partly fuel feelings of discontent with their anti-establishment rhetoric, it has been shown that attitudinal measures such as political cynicism and distrust of government are sufficiently exogenous in nature to be considered as valid explanatory variables (Bélanger and Aarts 2006; Chanley, Rudolph, and Rahn 2001; Craig 1979; Hetherington 1998; Peterson and Wrighton 1998). It thus can be concluded that one of the important conditions for the recent rise of third parties in Canada, as well as in most advanced industrial democracies, is the existence of a significant reservoir of political disaffection among citizens.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a comprehensive overview of the ups and downs of third-party support in Canadian politics over the past 70 years. These nontraditional parties have had considerable success at the polls, both at the federal and provincial levels. In a few provinces—British Columbia, Manitoba, Quebec, and Alberta—some third parties have even managed to realign the provincial party system and to become one of the major governing alternatives. Although they also reached impressive levels of success at times, especially during the 1990s and 2000s, federal third parties have not been able so far to fully displace one of the two traditional governing parties.

The fact that in 2003 the Reform Party/Canadian Alliance merged with the PCs is indicative of the resilience of a two-party competition between Liberals and Tories at the federal level in Canada.

Several theoretical approaches have been used to account for the electoral breakthroughs of Canadian third parties. Structural conditions such as class homogeneity, one-party dominance, and grievances have been proposed as important determinants of the rise of third parties. Others have pointed to institutional features such as Canada's strong party discipline and constituency-based electoral system as explanatory factors. Provincial political cultures have also been suggested as variables accounting for variations in third-party support. These cultural traits include founding ideological fragments, feelings of inefficacy, and emerging postmaterialist values. Another important factor that has to be taken into account is the actual behaviour of third parties, including their choices of campaign discourse and rhetoric. In some ways, political culture and party behaviour might best be considered as key intervening variables in the relationship between structural conditions and third-party success.

Finally, it appears that the recent rise in public discontent with politics, in Canada as in other Western democracies, has provided fertile ground for the electoral success of third parties. As stated in the introduction to this chapter, third parties occupy a special place in the party system because they are not part of the traditional party group. This confers on them a peculiar status that appeals to voters disaffected from government and the established party elites and who seek out new options in an attempt to voice their discontent. The current era of cynicism and distrust thus creates a situation not only of declining political participation but also of greater electoral volatility and openness to nontraditional party alternatives.

Suggested Readings

Cairns, Alan C. 1968. "The Electoral System and the Party System in Canada 1921–1965." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 1 (1): 55–80. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0008423900035228

Carty, R. Kenneth, William Cross, and Lisa Young. 2000. *Rebuilding Canadian Party Politics*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

Duverger, Maurice. 1951. *Les partis politiques*. Paris: Armand Collin.

Epstein, Leon D. 1964. "A Comparative Study of Canadian Parties." *American Political Science Review* 58 (1): 46–59. http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1952754

Flanagan, Thomas. 2009. *Waiting for the Wave: The Reform Party and the Conservative Movement*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Lipset, Seymour Martin. 1950. *Agrarian Socialism: The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation in Saskatchewan*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Macpherson, C.B. 1953. *Democracy in Alberta: The Theory and Practice of a Quasi-Party System*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Martin, Pierre. 2005. *Dynamiques partisanes et réalignements électoraux au Canada (1867–2004)*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

Meguid, Bonnie M. 2008. *Party Competition between Unequals: Strategies and Electoral Fortunes in Western Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511510298

Rosenstone, Steven J., Roy L. Behr, and Edward H. Lazarus. 1996. *Third Parties in America: Citizen Response to Major Party Failure*. 2nd ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Web Links

Centre for the Study of Democratic Citizenship: http://csdc-cecd.ca
Making Electoral Democracy Work: http://electoraldemocracy.com

Sites of the Provincial Chief Electoral Officers:

British Columbia: www.elections.bc.ca
Alberta: www.elections.ab.ca
Saskatchewan: www.elections.sk.ca
Manitoba: www.electionsmanitoba.ca/en
Ontario: www.elections.on.ca/en.html
Quebec: www.electionsquebec.qc.ca/english/
New Brunswick: www.electionsnb.ca/content/enb/en.html
Nova Scotia: https://electionsnovascotia.ca
Prince Edward Island: www.electionspei.ca
Newfoundland and Labrador: www.elections.gov.nl.ca/elections/

Notes

1 I thank Maryna Polataiko and Gaby González-Sirois for their research assistance. This chapter is an updated version of the one I published in the previous edition of this volume.

2 Laurent (1997) finely illustrates the degree to which a definition of "small parties" based on quantitative indicators such as votes and seats leads to complex and often inconsistent classifications.

3 Perrella (2005) calls those parties "non-mainstream," a label conceptually close to our definition.

4 Among others, see Harmel and Robertson (1985), Perkins (1996), Lucardie (2000, 2007), Hug (2001), Chhibber and Kollman (2004), Tavits (2006), and Lago and Martinez (2011) for accounts of the factors behind the organizational emergence, or formation, of party movements.

5 One other minor party received slightly over 3 per cent of the national vote share during the period under study, namely the Bloc Populaire in 1945 (a party from Quebec that was opposed to conscription).