

Canadian Prime Ministers and Their Parties

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When Julia Gillard successfully challenged and overthrew Australian prime minister Kevin Rudd in June 2010 in a matter of days, even educated and informed Canadians were amazed. “How can you challenge a prime minister?” was a common question. Similar bafflement was raised two decades earlier with the falls of Margaret Thatcher and Bob Hawke. For Canadians, the obvious comparison to the Gillard-Rudd struggle is the drawn-out insurrection of Paul Martin against Jean Chretien, which spanned several years including sixteen months between Chretien’s conceding defeat and his actual departure. Other Canadian intra-party challenges have been similarly prolonged and no other sitting prime minister has faced a noteworthy challenge to his leadership since John Diefenbaker in the early 1960s.

Savoie (1999, 2003, 2008) argues that Canadian prime ministers are becoming ever more powerful. While some have qualified this argument (Bakvis 2001; Thomas 2003-4; White 2005), prime ministerial power in Canada is particularly noteworthy for the way in which Canadian prime ministers dominate their parties and the manner in which they are selected and deposed as party leaders. The longstanding practice of leadership conventions in Canada - now extended to various direct-election schemes - gives prime ministers strong personal authority rooted in the dispersed extraparliamentary party, regardless of the parliamentary caucus. This, along with other instruments of control and the inherent flexibility of Canada’s governing parties, means Canadian prime ministers dominate their parties to a greater extent than their Westminster counterparts (Weller 1997; Bakvis and Wolinetz 2002). However, this chapter argues that prime ministers remain constrained by aspects and elements of their parties.

The chapter links the entrenchment of party leaders to the larger incoherence and weakness of Canadian parties, especially the dominant Liberals and Conservatives. These “brokerage” parties have historically blurred rather than sharpened ideological divisions, in a Canadian parliamentary culture that relies more on discipline than ideological cohesion to maintain party lines. The net result is prime ministers that seem unassailable and able to steer their party and government abruptly as they see fit, while the parties are relegated to highly supportive roles (Blondel 1995). Yet there is more subtlety at work and this is explored below.

We proceed by first discussing the tradition of Canadian brokerage parties and their ideological heterogeneity. The chapter then focuses on prime ministerial selection and the Canadian practice of leadership conventions and now direct votes. It discusses both formal and informal constraints on prime ministers, including the challenge of removing prime ministers, and briefly reflects on whether prime ministers are significantly constrained by

past party legacies or able to leave their own. We then conclude with some observations for the future. While ranging throughout Canadian history, the discussion focuses on the ten prime ministers since 1960, the point in time that is commonly associated with a shift to the modern Canadian party system (Carty, Cross and Young 2000).

The Canadian Brokerage Tradition

Only two parties have held power federally in Canada; the Liberals and the Conservatives. However, the latter has a complex history. Known originally as the Liberal-Conservatives and since 1942 as the Progressive Conservatives, the party split badly in 1993 with many Western Canadian and right-wing elements forming a new Reform Party of Canada. Reform changed its name to the Canadian Alliance in 2000 before reunifying with the rump Progressive Conservatives in 2003 to form a fully reconstituted Conservative Party of Canada. Debate continues about whether this is “essentially the same” as the historic party (Carty and Cross 2010); regardless, there are certain institutional changes significant to our analysis below. Other currently significant national parties in Canada are the New Democratic Party and the Bloc Quebecois; neither has come close to power and they are less relevant for a discussion of prime ministers, although the NDP has held power provincially.

Political scientists have long defined the Liberals and Conservatives as “brokerage” parties driven by the quest to accommodate widely disparate interests in a quest for power, finding them “by comparative standards, among the most organizationally weak and decentralized of parties in established democratic party systems” (Carty and Cross 2010: 191) and “at one end of any spectrum” (Weller 1997: 44). Even among their Westminster-model counterparts, Canadian parties appear more ideologically elastic and heterogeneous. Carty and Cross distinguish brokerage parties from “catch-all” parties (195) by suggesting the latter still retain some ideological clarity even as they serve as coalitions of convenience, while brokerage parties are held together overwhelmingly by personalities and indiscriminate loyalty in sometimes remarkable contortions and contradictions.

Brokerage politics and regionalism are closely linked. Region and language rather than class have long been the dominant animators of Canadian party politics (Brodie and Jensen 1988), bolstered by a single-member plurality electoral system that favours concentrated regional support over dispersed national support (Cairns 1968). For party politics, this means constant attention to regional bases and possibly fighting differentiated electoral campaigns in different regions (Carty Cross and Young 2000). Again, in the words of Carty and Cross:

The principal functions of the country’s major parties are not those of mobilizing distinctive communities and articulating conflicting claims rooted in their interests. Canadian parties are organized to do just the opposite. In the name of accommodating the potentially destructive internal tensions of a weakly integrated national community,

they work to obscure differences and muffled conflicting interests. This is the brokerage politics model of democracy.” (193)

Characterized by elite-led compromise and mixed messages, brokerage parties are not mass movement parties. But are they cadre-dominated (Bakvis and Wolinetz 2002), or outright leader-centered? The premium on accommodation means parties are dominated by a small cadre at the top, usually representing key regions and interests. While Canadian prime ministers may be portrayed as “friendly dictators” (Simpson 2001) and governing by random “bolts of electricity” (Savoie 1999), they are not true one-man bands. The cadre model may be more consistent with the brokerage strategy, especially for prime ministers. To rise to the top, leaders must accommodate regional brokers and party strongmen (or women) and can act unilaterally only within these constraints. For example, Jean Chretien reached an uneasy alliance with Paul Martin for much of his government (Greenspan and Wilson-Smith 1996); Brian Mulroney’s style of leadership was built largely on extensive brokering and promises within the party (Blake 2006); Joe Clark was ultimately unable to surmount his own internal critics (Simpson 1980) and Pierre Trudeau, while largely unilateral in his key constitutional priorities, left considerable discretion on other items to trusted ministers and took an integrated and theoretically collegial approach to most domestic policy-making (Aucoin 1986, 1994; White 2005) Canada’s most short-lived prime ministers, John Turner (June-September 1984) and Kim Campbell (June-October 1993) were also very much products of cadre consensus. Having said that, current Prime Minister Stephen Harper appears to display remarkable paramouncy over his Conservative party (Martin 2010), but this has not yet been subjected to sufficient scholarly analysis.

Party Leadership Selection

The imperatives of brokerage are further illustrated in Canadian party leadership selection, which has long been far more decentralized and complex than nearly all Westminster counterparts except the British Labour Party. The complexity of Canadian leadership selection both stems from and further encourages the brokerage model; it also has critical implications for the subsequent relationship of Canadian prime ministers with their parties. This next section explores how Canadian party leaders are selected and the implications for brokerage politics and prime ministerial power.

Up until the early 1900s, Canadian party leaders were selected by parliamentary caucuses in the manner of other Westminster systems. However, in 1919, the Liberal Party of Canada held a national leadership convention in which local constituency associations sent delegates (Courtney 1995). This was soon copied at the provincial level and emulated by the federal Conservatives in 1927, and soon become the norm for all parties.

Why did Canadians move decisively and early to the convention model? One possibility is proximity to the United States and its party nominating conventions, then at the height of their own power. Though Canadians remained strongly committed to the parliamentary system, conventions were seen to invigorate the extraparliamentary party and especially constituency associations; they also drew prolonged publicity and attention

to the party, over the months of the contest and the final gathering (Courtney 1995) – usually in a large hockey arena. Notably, initial conventions were more popular when the party was out of power, as were the Liberals in 1919, and in 1920 the out-of-power Ontario Conservatives also held their first convention (Woolstencroft 1992). In contrast, the governing federal Conservatives replaced retiring prime minister Robert Borden in 1920 by caucus vote, and they did not hold a convention until 1927 after having lost two national elections.

Conventions were presented as more transparent and democratic, and less prone to manipulation and pressure by party elites (Woolstencroft 1992). However, the imperatives of regionalism and brokerage were perhaps most important. Courtney (1995) attributes the 1919 Liberal convention to the massive skewering of the parliamentary caucus after the devastating 1917 election, in which many English-Canadian MPs defected entirely to the Conservatives and left the Liberals as a largely French-Canadian Quebec rump. A national convention was an obvious solution to ensuring a broader representation of regional and language interests in the selection of a new leader than was possible through the parliamentary caucus alone. The Conservatives had the opposite problem; convention was a solution to the absence of Quebec MPs. Conventions thus increased pressure on leadership candidates to play to regional interests. But they also led to further ideological dilution of the parties, especially since in convention all regions were equal; areas where the party was perpetually weak and unlikely to elect members still had a say in selecting the leader. Along with others, Courtney (1995) concludes that conventions led to a different type of party leader in Canada, one beholden less to the parliamentary caucus and chosen more for their organizational abilities and general media appeal.

Despite their seemingly random and accidental development (Carty and James 1992), conventions gradually became the norm in provincial parties as well, with the last caucus-selected premier taking power in 1960 (Carty Erickson Blake 1992). In the 1960s campaigns became more fervent with high-profile campaigns to sway delegates and dramatic all-day television coverage of multiple ballots; conventions also escalated in size, with the number of delegates rising from just over a thousand in the 1950s to 4658 for the 1990 Liberal convention and 3550 for the 1993 Progressive Conservatives (Carty 2007). This expansion was driven both by increases in constituency delegates and the growth of special caucuses with their own delegates – including students, youth, women, Aboriginals and others (Carty 2007).

Yet by the 1980s there was increasing restlessness for a new era of direct selection by party members. Analyzing conventions from the 1960s to 1990s, Carty (2007) argues they became steadily less competitive; while those of the 1960s and 1970s offered multiple ballots and somewhat unpredictable outcomes, later conventions were fought and largely won before the event through local delegate selection battles and even earlier in the “pre-contest” period as campaigns raised funds and prepared their organizations. Again like American politics, conventions had become coronations rather than sites of struggle. Combined with feelings about the cost and travel demands of conventions for ordinary

members, parties began moving to new methods of direct selection by party members (Sayers 2002). Reforms this time began at the provincial level – and again by out-of-power parties. The Parti Quebecois elected its leader by membership voting in 1985 and the Ontario Progressive Conservatives did the same in 1990 (Woolstencroft 1992). This trend spread to other provinces and the rump federal Progressive Conservatives in 1998 and the Canadian Alliance in 2000, with the Liberals adopting a hybrid version in 2003 and 2006.

The direct selection model has two distinct variants of interest for this analysis. The first is a simple mass vote by all party members, used by the Canadian Alliance and some provincial parties. The second, and more popular, is a weighted system that gives equal voice to each constituency.¹ Like the leadership conventions, the objective of the weighted system is to broaden the party rather than playing only to its areas of strength, further encouraging heterogeneous appeals. It is significant that the more regional and ideological Reform/Alliance party was the one major national party to rely on a single mass-member vote; after merging with the Progressive Conservatives, the new party reverted again to a weighted system more accommodating of the brokerage strategy, at the insistence of the PC side (Flanagan 2007).

The complexity of leadership selection in Canada means that outcomes are animated substantially and even primarily by organizational and logistical dynamics over a period of many months, rather than clear policy and ideological struggles. Whether through delegated conventions or direct election, leadership is won and lost primarily by mass organizing on the ground. The leading student of Canadian parties, R.K. Carty, observes that leadership selection practices “push competition down into the autonomous local associations with their idiosyncratic membership and particularistic preoccupations” in a way that “forces nationally ambitious politicians to build and finance highly personalized networks” that “leaves the parties honeycombed by a set of personal factions organized around would-be leaders” (2002: 741). The key tactic followed by both leadership candidates and candidates for the local nomination is to sign up entirely new members to support them, meaning that party membership levels commonly rise enormously during leadership races and contested nominations, only to fall afterward as they are no longer needed (Carty, Cross and Young 2000: Carty 2002; Malloy, 2003: Cross, 2010).

While leadership races feature numerous policy debates and candidate platforms, policy and ideology seem to have limited effect on outcomes. More important is the vague concept of “electability” (Johnston 2002). This again often has regional and linguistic dimensions. The Liberal party has remarkably managed to alternate anglophone and francophone leaders throughout its history (though Paul Martin qualified as either) and Brian Mulroney’s strongest claim for his party’s leadership was his Quebec origins. Ideology is occasionally significant, as seen in the Alberta Progressive Conservative Party

¹ A further variation – less important for this discussion - is how to deal with multiple ballots; parties have held run-offs; multiple ballots on the same day; or a hybrid in which members express initial preferences and the party gathers for a subsequent tradition delegate convention, which is the Liberal Party’s method.

(in office continually since 1971), which adopted a mass voting model in 1992 allowing party memberships could be purchased at the time and place of voting and even between ballots. The 1992 leadership race featured clear ideological choices between the two leading candidates (Stewart 2002), as did the 2006 race, suggesting decentralized selection is not incompatible with ideological choice.

Policy lags as a priority for Canadian parties in any case (Cross 2004). Policy discussions and conventions are erratic; Cross notes that after electing W.L.M. King as leader in 1919, the Liberals did not meet again in convention for thirty years, until it was time to select King's replacement in 1948 (2004: 38). This is perhaps by design; "Once elected to its head, most leaders see the party, outside of its electoral role, as a nuisance" (Pal 1988: 91) and party organization becomes "rusty" (Pal) and "skeletal" (Bakvis and Wolinetz 2002). Parties both in and out of power do hold policy conventions, but rarely and irregularly, and leaders can usually ignore resolutions with little consequence. (Cross 2004) Similarly, party headquarters – separate from parliamentary leaders' offices – are small and administrative between elections, lacking policy foundations or significant capacities for policy research (Cross 2004) and operating very much at the convenience of the party leader. Party platforms are – with occasional exceptions like the sprawling promises of the Liberal Red Book of 1993, the succinct Conservative five pledges in 2006, and the disastrously unpopular Liberal "Green Shift" of 2008 – vague and inconsequential even during elections.

A final point about leadership selection and the importance of the extraparliamentary party is the modest importance of parliamentary experience in becoming leader and even prime minister. The extreme example is Brian Mulroney, elected leader in 1983 (on his second attempt) without a parliamentary seat; only after becoming party leader did he run for elected office for the first time in his life. Yet others have become prime minister with limited parliamentary service – Pierre Trudeau (three years), Kim Campbell (4.5 years) and Joe Clark (becoming leader after four years and prime minister after seven). A variation is to depart and return, often after failing to win the party leadership the first time: John Turner, Jean Chretien and Stephen Harper all resigned their Commons seats for a period, only returning after winning the party leadership, and Turner became prime minister in July 1984 without a Commons seat at all. John Diefenbaker and Paul Martin are the only recent prime ministers to take office after extended and unbroken parliamentary careers (seventeen and fifteen years respectively). A corollary is that prime ministers rarely remain in Parliament unless they are obviously seeking a comeback; Pearson, Trudeau, Mulroney, Campbell, Chretien and Martin all left political life entirely after leaving the prime ministership; Turner remained as leader for another election after his brief stint, Clark remained as a senior minister under his nemesis Mulroney and regained leadership of the rump party in the late 1990s; and the redoubtable John Diefenbaker ran as a candidate to succeed himself and fought four further general elections before dying while still an MP. The lack of prerequisite parliamentary experience also applies to ministers, it being not at all uncommon for newly elected MPs to be immediately elevated to cabinet (Weller 1997).

In summary, the two governing Canadian parties – and indeed most Canadian parties – stand out as brokers and accommodators, with significantly decentralized leadership selection systems that express and encourage this heterogeneity. This shapes the type of person who becomes party leader, and even more who becomes prime minister, given the similar prominence of regionalism and the broadening effects of the first-past-the-post electoral system in Canadian elections (Cairns 1968). To become prime minister in Canada requires first winning the organizational ordeal of party leadership selection and further triumphing in a general election through the regionalized game of brokerage. Parliamentary experience and even a current seat are clearly not essential. This means prime ministers ascend to the top with considerable networks and political debts but often limited ideological platforms or policy direction, and owe success to the extraparliamentary party rather than parliamentary caucus.

Control Mechanisms and Practices

Once a prime minister reaches the top, it is extremely difficult for their party to get rid of them. Because they are selected by the extraparliamentary party through the elaborate procedures of conventions or mass votes, Canadian prime ministers enjoy tremendous discretion and power over their parliamentary parties. Control mechanisms and practices in Canadian parties are wildly imbalanced in favour of the leader.

Prime ministers have complete discretion over the selection of cabinet ministers and other members of the ministry; through the whip, they also control all assignments to standing committees and, indirectly, the selection of committee chairs². Another notable power by Westminster standards is control over government members for parliamentary questions, since the Speaker of the House does not have authority to recognize members without party approval. Until 1986 prime ministers appointed the House Speaker – who is now elected by secret ballot - and they continue to name the Speaker of the Senate. The Prime Minister also appoints members of the Senate, who then serve until age 75; this means, especially over time, an increasing number of personal loyalists in the upper chamber. Like other prime ministers, Canadian leaders enjoy considerable other powers of appointment that can be used or withheld to reward loyalty, not to mention direct or indirect control over everything from travel opportunities to the assignment of office space in the sprawling parliamentary precinct.

Prime ministers can also expel members from the party caucus unilaterally and do so on occasion, about equally for disloyalty and for personal misconduct. Furthermore, all party leaders must sign the nomination papers of all candidates for office under the party banner. This is rarely exercised but remains a potent threat. More commonly, the Liberals allow party leaders to name local candidates unilaterally without election by the

² A dramatic 2002 vote amidst the Martin-Chretien struggles established that committee chairs were to be elected by secret ballot of the committee rather than the traditional show of hands. However, the practice remains for the dominant party to designate its preferred chair and to instruct its members accordingly.

constituency association, and the Conservatives have used similar tactics to control local processes from the top. In 2009 the national party noticeably fought a Calgary constituency association unhappy with its own MP that had already nominated an alternative candidate (Martin 2010). Naturally, this power allows prime ministers to nominate and/or protect loyalists.

In contrast, leaders face few controls. Unlike the quick demise of Rudd or Thatcher, the only formal mechanisms to challenge Canadian prime ministers are through the extra-parliamentary party. Prior to the 1960s, votes of confidence in the leader, if they happened at all, were held at party conventions called for other reasons or at national executive meetings and, crucially, were public rather than by secret ballot. Changes occurred after the extended Progressive Conservative struggle to overthrow former prime minister John Diefenbaker, who was reduced to a minority government in 1962 and then to opposition in the 1963 election. Diefenbaker fought attempts to remove him as leader (including a 1964 proposal at a national executive meeting to hold a secret ballot vote on whether members had confidence in the leader) until after the further 1965 election defeat; he then resigned and then ran as a candidate in the 1967 leadership convention, finishing fifth. (Perlin 1980) The Diefenbaker experience led both major parties to institute more formal mechanisms for leadership review by secret ballot, though they remain highly conditional and normally depend on the party meeting in convention in order to hold the actual vote.

Issues such as the Progressive Conservative public vote on whether to have a secret ballot vote to review the leadership (Perlin 1980) demonstrate the degree to which leadership review in Canada is anything but straightforward and depends heavily on preliminary skirmishes and procedural and other proxy battles. As with leadership conventions themselves, the “pre-contest” (Carty 2007) becomes the crucial battleground. This characterized the Martin-Chretien struggles of 2001-2002, which included serious and nationally-covered arguments about whether party membership application forms could be photocopied or required official issue, and whether more than five forms could be issued at a time. (Delacourt 2003). Such trivia received national media attention (e.g., Dawson 2002) because of the central importance of signing up new members in any internal Canadian party campaign; in this case, restrictions favoured the Martin side, which already controlled most constituency associations, and mitigated against a Chretien counterattack.

The complexity of formal review processes means that no prime minister has ever been forced from office through one; Chretien ultimately resigned because of the *threat* of an unfavourable review. The one prime minister to suffer a significant review vote was out of office. Joe Clark, three years after his 1980 election defeat, received 66% support in a party review vote (after receiving the same result in a 1981 vote); deeming two-thirds support insufficient, he resigned but ran in the subsequent leadership convention, losing to Brian Mulroney and Mulroney’s superior financial and organizational resources. One might also note the demise of Canadian Alliance leader Stockwell Day in 2001, though not a prime ministerial case. Under intense pressure both inside and outside caucus and facing an unprecedented non-confidence vote in his caucus (the precise implications of which were

unclear), Day made a complicated announcement to resign ninety days before the party held a leadership vote; the national party council then called a leadership vote in which Day ran and was defeated (Flanagan 2007). As these cases show, formal controls and votes are less decisive in their own right than the circumstances and impressions surrounding them, and especially the preliminary proxy battles that characterize any intra-party insurrection.

Thus in contrast to their Westminster counterparts, Canadian prime ministers of both major parties enjoy strong powers over their members and few constraints on their own. Chosen in convention or mass vote, they can only be removed by similar processes, and in practice this has meant prime ministers can only be challenged by the most arduous and complex efforts. Few prime ministers - or party leaders as a whole - depart due to "intraparty tension." (de Clercy 2007).

Other Constraints: Cabinet, Backbenchers and Senate

The imbalance of control mechanisms of course does not exclude more informal constraints on prime ministers. In this section, we will look at the more subtle dynamics between Canadian prime ministers and their parties, particularly cabinet ministers and backbenchers along with the Senate. Prime ministers may be almost impregnable from direct challenge. But how does prime ministerial power play out in the day-to-day circumstances of their relations with their parties?

Savoie (1999, 2003, 2008) has long argued that Canadian prime ministers have become ever-more dominant, governing by random "bolts of electricity" and reducing cabinet to a "focus group." Yet cabinet retains more subtle and nuanced powers, often linked to Carty's above idea of a "honeycomb" of personal networks and factions that determine Canadian party dynamics, and still others to the general nature of regional and brokerage politics. For example, while prime ministers are nominally free to select their own cabinet, convention holds that each province must have at least one minister and regions must be proportionately represented, and regionalism in general remains significantly more important in Canadian cabinet selection than other Westminster governments (White 2005, 2010). This regional imperative remains a distinct check on prime ministerial power (Sayers 2002), though often compensated through ballooning cabinets of thirty or more members along with a clear if usually unstated distinction between "inner" and "outer" ministers.

Dupré (1985) divides Canadian cabinets between pre-1960s "departmentalized" versions and more recent "institutionalized" cabinets. In the former, ministers enjoyed more discretion within their portfolios, often tied to regional power bases such as Jimmy Gardiner from Saskatchewan and agriculture, or Ontario's C.D. Howe and industry, and hence represented more clear political bases. The growth and complexity of cabinet governance since the 1960s though has meant a more integrated and meshed system in which ministers consult - and check - each other. For prime ministers, this can mean an ideal system that further dilutes any potential challenge. However, Aucoin (1986, 1994) qualifies this by noting different prime ministers have different styles - some more

“command” or “collegial” in ways that encourage centralization, as opposed to more “conglomerate” or “corporate” styles that allow more ministerial autonomy and discretion.

Canada also has a tradition of “regional” or “political” ministers. Prime ministers have long designated certain senior ministers as responsible for each region or province (Bakvis 1991). Originally tied to the blatant direct dispensation of patronage, the regional minister phenomenon reasserted itself in the 1980s as a more nuanced position that combined patronage influence with other responsibilities including overseeing relations with provincial and municipal leaders (of any party) and the general steering of government programs and projects in the region toward favourable directions. Particularly significant is the devotion of bureaucratic resources toward these ends, often through regional development agencies and designated regional staff (Bakvis 1991). Regional ministers thus mix together partisan interests, other political relationships, and government responsibilities. The implications for prime ministerial power are interesting, since regional ministers are selected more on seniority (though not necessarily the most senior) and overall political connections, rather than simple loyalty to the leader; hence leadership rivals do serve as regional ministers. This can signify an important counterweight to prime ministerial power – certainly, prime ministers turn to regional ministers for political advice and appear to rely heavily on some ministers’ counsel. However, no notable challenge against a prime minister has been led by a regional minister (Paul Martin was not a regional minister). More plausible is that regional ministers spend their energies focused on each other as potential leadership competitors, while the prime minister remains above and unassailable.

Prime ministers must also watch carefully their past and potential leadership rivals. While previous rivals are assured of cabinet positions (only the most minor leadership candidates are not assured of receiving subsequent cabinet posts), those suspected of continuing aspirations are often watched closely – examples include Brian Mulroney’s wariness of Joe Clark, Jean Chretien’s relationship with Paul Martin, and Stephen Harper’s guarded relationship with Jim Prentice and Peter Mackay. Prime ministers may carefully weigh cabinet assignments with this in mind; for example, Clark became foreign minister and less able to build a domestic base, and Martin was assigned the usually politically disastrous finance ministry. Again, it is not clear how significant these actions are, but they suggest a further dynamic of control between prime ministers and their party.

Moving to the parliamentary backbenches, we again find a fuzzy picture. Canadian parliamentarians, especially in the lower House of Commons, have long been considered weak and lacking in power, though some of this may be self-inflicted by their own amateurism (Franks 1987). A shortage of veteran backbenchers due to rapid turnover and limited safe seats (Docherty 1996) and envy of the American congressional system have been identified as reasons why Canadian MPs consider themselves weak and powerless. Yet others have argued that Canadian MPs retain considerable influence that they do not always themselves recognize (Malloy 1996).

The most direct mechanism between backbenchers and prime ministers are weekly party caucus meetings in which all ministers and members are expected to attend. Closed to staff (and researchers), it is hard to gauge the value of these meetings, in which policies are proposed and discussion is held *in camera* (and remains largely unreported to the press). These meetings are often cited (at least by the leaders themselves, but often by MPs as well) as a key accountability session that often leads leaders to adjust or even abandon ideas. We lack systematic means to track this but, at the very least, caucus meetings likely serve as a key sounding board for prime ministers (Thomas 1985, 1996).

Parliamentary standing committees have been less consistent in posing challenges to prime ministers. Historically weak and underused, the committee system was reformed in 1968 and again in 1982 and 1986 to provide more structure and opportunities for backbencher influence (Franks 1987). But committee influence depends heavily on other variables, especially the skill of committee chairs (Malloy 1996) and the dedication and experience of committee members (Malloy 2003). Most importantly though, committees often exercise direct influence only when the government indicates it values their advice; other reports are substantially ignored and committee inquiries into sensitive issues are quickly polarized along partisan lines with government members pressured to defend their own (Malloy 1996, 2003).

Canadian prime ministers thus have little to fear directly from the backbenches. But there is a more informal dimension, best illustrated by contrasting the prime ministerships of Brian Mulroney and Jean Chretien. Mulroney, notable for a gregarious nature even by the standards of politicians, was able to retain the loyalty of his party caucus in the early 1990s despite worsening economic conditions, disastrous constitutional policy setbacks, and abysmal polling numbers of less than 20% approval. Yet only two members of his caucus defected in his second term (though several left to form a new separatist political party, the Bloc Quebecois) and he faced no challenges to his leadership. While the poor conditions undoubtedly spurred the party to close ranks, Mulroney's ability to charm and cajole his MPs and the party at large was fundamental to his continued political survival and ability to resign on his own terms in early 1993.

In contrast, Paul Martin was able to undermine Jean Chretien's leadership through cultivation of Liberal backbenchers, and their own regional networks, as these MPs complained of being neither sufficiently consulted on government policy nor rewarded for loyalty (Malloy 2002; Docherty 2006). In the early 2000s MPs gradually began to declare public support for Martin and this, combined with Martin's vast extra-parliamentary organizing, led Chretien to announce his resignation in August 2002 (though delaying his departure until December 2003). (Delacourt 2003). While caucus relations were by no means the sole factors at work for either prime minister, they demonstrate the relevance of caucus management and relationships and that, particularly in Chretien's case, prime ministers are not invulnerable.

A final parliamentary institution that may exert control over prime ministers is the Senate. Senators are appointed by prime ministers and serve until age 75; since prime

ministers largely (but not always) appoint their own partisans who then outlast their own term in office, this means Senate party standings may be quite different than the Commons, especially when a new government takes power after a longstanding predecessor. Discussion of the Senate's relationship to prime ministerial power tends to focus on partisan dimensions when the opposition party still holds a majority in the upper chamber and can check the government (e.g. Joyal 2003; Docherty 2002). In contrast, it is less plausible that senators appointed by a prime minister will exhibit less than full loyalty toward their patron. Still, senators insulated from electoral risk, and perhaps not appointed by the current leader, might theoretically form a possible opposition or serious check on prime ministers. But while senators may be more critical and sceptical toward government bills (Joyal 2003), there is little evidence of organized dissent and opposition toward prime ministers in the unelected chamber.

Prime Ministers and Party Legacies

Canadian prime ministers clearly dominate the institutions of their parties during their terms in office, although not outright. Yet what about long-term policy legacies? This has two parts. First, to what extent are prime ministers constrained or shaped by existing party policies and principles? Second, can long-serving and powerful prime ministers shape the ideology and culture of their parties?

The nature of the Canadian brokerage parties has meant a high receptivity to new ideas and directions, and also to abandoning them. We have already discussed the low importance of policy in leadership contests. It is also not difficult to find examples of prime ministers embarking on major new policies that they had previously opposed and which fly in the face of their party's traditions. Examples include Pierre Trudeau's wage and price controls of the mid-1970s (after opposing them in the 1974 election), Brian Mulroney's drive for continental free trade (rejected in his 1983 leadership run and opposed by his predecessors dating back to John A. Macdonald) and Jean Chretien's drastic spending cuts in 1995 (after opposing the Conservatives' more modest previous cuts). Clearly prime ministers do not feel weighed down by past policy legacies if they find politically palatable alternatives.

Still, they can leave their future mark. The Liberal party has been known as "The Government Party" (Whitaker 1977), a party firmly of the political centre and valuing pragmatism highly. This is closely associated with the style and proclivities of long-serving Prime Minister W.L.M. King (1920-25; 1925-30; 1935-48). King's legacy remains dominant in the Liberal Party, though hardly celebrated, and echoed particularly by other pragmatists like Lester Pearson and Jean Chretien. However, Pierre Trudeau is by far the most revered past leader of the Liberal Party (excepting perhaps Wilfrid Laurier, who left office in 1911), and identified with values such as bilingualism, human rights, internationalism, multiculturalism and Canadian nationalism. But many of these values were already reflected in the party through leaders like Pearson, who carefully instituted them more in the plodding King style. Trudeau's legacy arguably rests more on his

charisma and embodiment of existing party values, rather than boldly steering it in new directions.

In contrast, the Conservative Party has long suffered bouts of “The Tory Syndrome” (Perlin 1980) and a tendency to internal schism, most notably the long estrangement of 1993-2003. While every Liberal leader of the 20th century became prime minister, five Conservative leaders (Manion, Bracken, Drew, Stanfield, Charest) failed to do so, and a further three (Meighen, Clark and Campbell) served very briefly. The less stable Conservative party has been more inclined to switch leaders, discarding past policies and trying new approaches, and the most notable and effective approaches have been regional. John Diefenbaker broke the “Toronto Tory” mould in favour of Western Canadian populism (after a similar failed attempt by John Bracken in 1942), and this remains the party heartland today. Brian Mulroney led a dramatic breakthrough in Quebec after decades of almost total failure; while eclipsed by the Bloc Quebecois in the 1990s, the party remains more electorally competitive in Quebec today than before Mulroney. But in neither party can we identify a powerful ideological stamp stemming from past prime ministers (though King’s trademark may be the abhorrence of ideology).

A final point about legacies is to recall that Canadian prime ministers normally depart under a cloud. They are defeated in election (Diefenbaker, Clark, Turner, Campbell, Martin) or abandon ship under poor political conditions (Trudeau, Mulroney, and possibly Chretien). Indeed, the most recent Canadian prime minister to successfully hand over power to his successor was Lester Pearson in 1968 (unless one considers the Chretien-Martin handoff a success given Martin’s demise 25 months later).

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated how Canadian prime ministers can dominate their parties, through authority anchored in the extraparliamentary party and an imbalance of formal controls that strongly favour them over their parliamentary caucuses. Yet we have also seen there are more informal constraints and dynamics that prime ministers must take into account. Ultimately, Canadian prime ministers act more as cadre leaders, working particularly with regionalized networks and elites, in their exercise of power.

In this conclusion, we will raise two areas of possible future significance – changes to fundraising rules, and the possibility of coalition government. The first concerns major changes in 2004 to federal party finance rules, including the raising of money for leadership campaigns. Prior to 2004, individual political donations were unlimited and corporations and unions were also allowed to contribute. In 2004 the latter two were banned, and individual donations capped at \$5400 per person per year; this was further reduced in 2006 to \$1100. This global figure applies to all party donations, whether local or national and toward general elections or internal party campaigns.

The effect is seen by contrasting Paul Martin’s 2003 Liberal leadership campaign – costing at least \$3 million and much more in the “pre-contest” period – with the 2006

Liberal campaign to replace Martin. In this race, the four leading candidates raised between \$500 000 and \$1 million each (*source to come*); much of this was through loans from individuals who had reached the donation limit (including from the candidates themselves). These loans were to be paid back through further donations from others; as of 2010, several candidates have yet to retire these loans, which cannot be forgiven without violating campaign laws, and the entire donation loophole is likely to be closed in the near future. The point is that future leadership campaigns will find it much harder to raise money. This could lead to more ideological races; given a shortage of money to run aggressive ground campaigns to organize new members, candidates may be forced to compete more on the issues. But a more likely possibility is that regional brokers and networks will become even more important, making up for the organizing shortfall.

A second issue is the future possibility of coalition government. Canada is no stranger to minority government – having thirteen including three since 2004 (Russell 2008). Minority government has usually meant the same or increased power for prime ministers, since the pressures of imminent defeat tend to curb dissent even further – certainly no minority government - save perhaps the 1979 Clark government (Simpson 1980) - has been plagued by internal party turmoil. Minority governments in Canada have worked largely on a day-to-day basis of continual bargaining and never federally with any type of long-term agreement (Malloy 2010); prime ministers typically devolve these negotiations to house leaders and ministers and remain above the fray. No government has formed a coalition since the unusual 1917 Unionist government in which many Liberals defected to the Conservatives. But in December 2008 the opposition Liberals and New Democrats briefly proposed a coalition of their own. While short-lived, this and the continuing state of minority government since 2004 have led some (Cross 2009; White 2009) to suggest coalitions may be in Canada's future. This may further consolidate prime ministerial power over their own party as they negotiate with their partners, but the dynamics would certainly add a new complexity. Regardless, it is clear that Canadian prime ministers are currently dominant over their parties, to a greater extent than most or all of their Westminster counterparts.

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