Straddling the Divide: Conservatism and Populism in Harper's Canada and Howard's Australia

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In 2003, future Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper delivered a speech in the Canadian House of Commons regarding the Iraq war that plagiarized from then-Australian Prime Minister John Howard (Weeks and Taber 2008). Harper and Howard, as it turns out, have far more in common than some borrowed words. Despite governing a decade apart in very different economic circumstances, both leaders identified policies to satisfy two factions within their respective centre-right parties – social conservatives and classical liberals. Moreover, in framing these policies to the electorate, both Harper and Howard made frequent appeals to populism, using wedge politics and "dog whistling" to divide the community between "ordinary" Canadians/Australians and an "out-of-touch" elite. When it came to uniting their base to defeat and subsequently stifle their opposition, Harper and Howard pursued remarkably similar strategies with respect to both policy content and political messaging.

As with recent attempts to situate Canada and Australia in a "most similar" comparative framework (Baier 2006; Banfield and Knopff 2009), this paper identifies similarities between these conservative leaders' strategies. Using recent developments in the political theory of populism, we examine how both leaders purported to act on behalf of "the people" in such a way that allowed them to straddle ideological divisions and satisfy their electoral coalition. We begin with an exploration of populism as a concept, stressing the need to apply the "symptomatic approach" (Panizza 2005) to populism to both internal party politics and electoral strategy. We then examine Howard and Harper's use of populism in comparative focus. Specifically, we focus on quotations from both leaders during their electoral campaigns and their tenure as Prime Minister, drawing from speeches and campaign material. Our analysis suggests Howard and Harper both used populist strategies and discourse as a way of fostering party unity and achieving electoral success, and that their experiences provide validation of recent theories of populism (Panizza 2005; Mudde 2007) that see populism as the symbolic division (and simplification) of the electoral space. We conclude with a few thoughts on the link between populism and conservative parties, as well as the long-term electoral consequences of populism.

ONE: Perspectives on Populism

There is little doubt that the term "populism" has been used and abused to label a wide array of social and political phenomena over past decades, often in a disparaging manner. Indeed, it has become almost obligatory for contemporary discussions of populism to begin with a statement regarding its elusive nature, and the general impossibility of defining it in a satisfactory manner (see, for example, Knight 1998; Panizza 2005; Schmitter 2007; Weyland 2001).

However, recent comparative approaches to populism have opened up fruitful avenues for enquiry, reclaiming some of the term's analytic usefulness. The most influential of these has been Mudde's minimal definition of populism as "a thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' and 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté general* (general will) of the people" (2007: 23). For Mudde, the strength of a minimal ideological definition of populism lies in its applicability to comparative empirical research as well as its ability to jettison any normative baggage often associated with the term. He further argues that as a *thin-centred* ideology, populism does not exist in any pure form, but rather is always present in mixed forms with other ideologies. Abts & Rummens (2007) and Stanley (2008) also view populism as a thin-centred ideology, with Canovan (2002) going so far to suggest that populism can be understood as *the* ideology of democracy.

While we build off Mudde's distinction between the people and the elite, we believe that designating populism as an ideology – even a thin ideology – presents problems when investigating how populism translates into practical mainstream politics. We are particularly concerned with how "thin" an ideology can become before it loses conceptual validity and usefulness. While Howard and Harper have both employed populist rhetoric and framing, it would be difficult to label their ideological outlooks as primarily "populist." Rather, both men share an ideological approach that reflects their parties' tensions – a mélange of economic neoliberalism and social conservatism. An ultimately more useful definition for exploring this situation is thus the "symptomatic approach" to populism. This approach sees populism as a discourse that "simplifies the political space by symbolically dividing society between 'the people' (as the 'underdogs') and its '*other*'" (Panizza 2005: 3). Such a view is indebted to the work of Shils (1954, 1956) and Worsley (1969), who conceptualized populism as a dimension of political life rather than a political tradition or theory of politics, and Laclau (1977, 1980, 2004), who highlighted populism's divisive nature. Much of the recent literature concurs with the characterization of populism as the simultaneous construction of "the people" and the division of society into two antagonistic groups (see Westlind (1996), Mény and Surel (2002), Stavrakakis (2004), Laycock (2005), Howarth (2005) and Albertazzi and McDonnell (2008)). This approach therefore identifies an "analytic core around which there is a significant degree of academic consensus" (Panizza 2005: 1).

If we wish to escape the sins of the past when theorizing populism, we must commit to a non-essentialist theory that posits "the people" as a non-fixed, contingent and open category. This allows us to focus on the political operation by which political leaders are able to construe one part of the community *(plebs)* as the legitimate "whole" community *(populus)*, as well as the subsequent dichotomization of the political space. Moreover, concentrating on the political operation of populism permits scholars to focus on populism as a strategic tool for both electoral success and party building. While scholars have paid scant attention to the impact of populist discourse on internal party politics (Mudde (2007) is a notable exception), we argue that the use of populist discourse and tactics not only resulted in electoral success for John Howard and Stephen Harper, but that it also was effective in bringing together and satisfying the sometimes competing demands of the wings within their own parties – in Howard's case, the "wets" and the "dries," and in Harper's case, classical liberals and social conservatives. The following sections outline how Howard and Harper pursued this strategy, and discuss their comparative successes.

TWO: Populism and Conservatism in John Howard's Coalition

John Howard is Australia's second-longest serving Prime Minister, leading the country from 1996 to 2007, when along with losing office, he became only the second Prime Minister in Australian history to lose his own seat in the same election. Howard's influence on Australian society is difficult to overstate. As such, this section examines how he successfully employed populism to unite his party and redraw the lines between the Australian people and those who are "un-Australian." We focus specifically on his framing of immigration, multiculturalism, and the culture wars.

Wets & Dries

One of the curious characteristics of the Liberal Party of Australia is that it often claims to be a party of pragmatists, as opposed to the more ideological and factionally volatile Australian Labor Party. Yet even a supposedly catch-all party must have an ideological viewpoint. As Liberal Party historian Judith Brett asks, how can we characterize the Liberal Party's philosophy – "Liberal, conservative, anti-labour, non-labour?" (2003: 1). This question haunted the party for the twelve years prior to Howard's re-ascension to leader in 1995, a period of great turmoil that saw six leadership turnovers and bitter ideological feuds within the party (Brett 2004: 74).[1] Unlike his predecessors, Howard was able to successfully unite the factions of his party – the "wets," advocates of economic and social liberalism who are typically described as small-l liberals in Australian political discourse, and the "dries," the social conservatives.[2] While economic neo-liberalism generally unites the factions,

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[1] When in government, the Liberal Party typically has a formal coalition agreement with the National Party of Australia, a small, primarily rural conservative party. For the purposes of this paper, we focus solely on the intra-Liberal dynamic. Future research would do well to explore the effect of populism on the Liberal/National dynamic.

[2] These terms were originally used to describe similar factions within Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government.

there are nevertheless challenges to governing a united party. Howard (2005: 1-2) played down these challenges in a 2005 speech, arguing that

> The Liberal Party is a broad church…we are the trustees of two great political traditions. We are, of course, the custodian of the classical liberal tradition within our society, [and] Australian Liberals should revere the contribution of John Stuart Mill to political thought. We are also the custodians of the conservative tradition in our community. And if you look at the history of the Liberal Party it is at its best when it balances and blends those two traditions. Mill and Burke are interwoven into the history and the practice and the experience of our political party.

Those familiar with Howard's time in power know that one side of this equation came out far more strongly than the other: indeed, Howard described himself as "the most conservative leader the Liberal party has ever had" and "the Messiah of conservative politics" (in Rundle 2001: 14). To overcome potential disillusion from the wet side of the Liberal Party, populism became Howard's weapon of choice.

The Culture Wars: The "People" versus the "Elite"
One area in which Howard used populism for political gain is in what has been called "the culture wars." As Kelly (2010: 331) notes, Howard "defined what he was against more than what he was for – against the Aboriginal apology, the republic, gay marriage, Kyoto, boat arrivals, multiculturalism." Not only did Howard frame debate over cultural issues as one between the people and the elite, he succeeded in painting all of these issues as things that did not matter to the ordinary voter. Instead, they were the domain of the "special interests" of the urban elite: the intelligentsia, the left, environmentalists, the media, writers, artists, judges and so on.

Howard's Manichean distinction between the people and the elite was clear early in his leadership. "There is a frustrated mainstream in Australia today which sees government decisions increasingly driven by the noisy, self-interested clamour of powerful vested interests," Howard said in 1995. "Under us, the views of all particular interests will be assessed against the national interest and the sentiments of mainstream Australia" (1995b: online). Much of this was a reaction to the previous government of Paul Keating, whose ambitious "Big Picture" view of Australia involved introducing compulsory superannuation (pensions), Native Title, significant funding increases for the arts, and increased funding in areas of social policy such as childcare and rental assistance. Keating also focused on Australia's role in the Asia-Pacific region, and promoted multiculturalism as a government policy. Against Keating's more cosmopolitan view of Australia, Howard campaigned in 1996 under the slogan "For All of Us" – albeit an "Us" that did little to include the "special interests" listed above.

This appeal to mainstream Australia was also evident in Howard's distaste for political correctness, which he labeled as "minority fundamentalism" (Howard 1995a: 5). While other political leaders condemned One Nation leader Pauline Hanson for racism (see below), he claimed that Hanson had a positive effect on the nation, as "people do feel able to speak a little more freely and a little more openly about what they feel…I welcome the fact that people can now talk about certain things without living in fear of being branded as a bigot or as a racist" (Howard 1996: 13). In this vein, Howard repudiated of the "black armband" view of Australian history and refused to apologize to Australia's indigenous people for past injustices.[3] "The people" had a right to feel proud of their heritage, and should not feel guilty for their colonial history.

The distinction between "the people" and "the elite" was further apparent in the Howard government's attempt to assert its control over the higher education system, as well as public broadcasting, thus taking on what Gregg (2007: 100-101) labels "the so-called intellectual 'elite'," typified by a "Left-wing, intellectual, educated, media literate, member of the 'chattering classes' or the chardonnay- or café latte-drinking set." This has been evident in a number of significant policy decisions: as outlined by Bonnell and Crotty (2008: 153-155), Australia was the only OECD country to reduce funding of tertiary education as a proportion of GDP between 1995 and 2003, moving towards a "user-pays" model; the Howard government vetoed certain grant applications through the Australian Research Council, thus interfering with the peer-review process; and the public broadcaster ABC had its budget cut by almost ten percent soon after Howard's victory, with controversial right-wing figures being appointed to its board. Such decisions drove a wedge between "the people" and "the elite" in Australia, marginalizing academic freedom and public scrutiny as relatively unimportant issues. Political commentator David Marr (2007) has gone further, arguing that the legacy of the Howard government has been a worrying corruption and constraining of public debate in Australia.

Howard's strategy was thus one of simplification – an Australia that ignored political correctness, dealt only with "practical" issues, and did not dwell on the past. In this sense, Mondon (2010: 293) argues that Howard's "relaxed and comfortable" Australia was encapsulated in a

> …clearer, simpler *Weltanschauung:* a view of the world which would shift the blame for economic hardships onto cultural and racial issues. Of the two revolutions which had shaken Australia's foundation, the cultural one of the 1970s and the economic one of the 1980s, Howard would successfully attack the former, while pursuing the latter with increased ardour.

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[3] In 2007, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd made an official apology with bipartisan support.

Howard's cultural populism provided considerable overlap to unite the conflicting wings of his party, as his cultural policies appealed to both the dries' social conservatism and the wets' fiscal restraint. To take but two examples from Howard's playbook: expanding Aboriginal self-determination would bring about enormous costs to the average taxpayer, while permissive asylum policy would lead to more "boat people" coming to Australia, creating greater welfare dependence. Sharpe & Boucher (2007: 26) claim Howard combined "neo-liberal and neo-conservative ideas in a repetitive attack on the 'new classes' who allegedly promote minority 'victim cultures' to justify their own 'vested interests'." Electorally, this proved a successful strategy, as Howard framed lower and middle class economic concerns as being inextricably tied to cultural issues more broadly.

Immigration, Multiculturalism, and One Nation
Related to these "culture wars," immigration and multiculturalism represent perhaps the most pertinent and permanent areas in which Howard used populism to reshape Australian politics. Asylum seekers, or "boat people" as they came to be known, were central to Howard's ability to harness anxieties about national security, terrorism and national identity in a way that drew a distinct line between "us" and "them" in the Australian polity.

In particular, two diplomatic decisions in 2001 illustrate Howard's populist strategy in this area: the turning away of MV Tampa and the Children Overboard affair. The MV Tampa incident occurred when Howard prevented a Norwegian cargo ship, which had rescued 439 Afghani asylum seekers from a sinking vessel, from entering Australian waters. Accused by many of disregarding the asylum seekers' basic human rights (see Bostock 2002; Burnside 2002; Mares 2002; Mathew 2002), Howard's hardline approach legitimized public concerns about opportunistic "queue-jumpers" and potential terrorist threats to Australia's national security. This was further compounded in the Children Overboard affair, during which Howard and other Liberal Ministers claimed that Middle Eastern asylum seekers had thrown their children from their vessel in an attempt to stop the HMAS Adelaide from turning them away from Australian waters. Although a subsequent Senate enquiry found that no children had been thrown overboard and that the government deliberately misled the public (Commonwealth of Australia 2002), the strategy nonetheless worked for Howard, who was re-elected with an increased majority shortly after the affair.

This approach to asylum seekers, and national security more generally, is reflected in Howard's now famous maxim, "we will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come" (in Goot & Watson 2007: 267), along with his declaration that "I don't like hyphenated Australians, I just like Australians" (in Johnson 2007: 202). As Mondon (2010) and Wear (2008) note, much of Howard's strategy in this area was foreshadowed by the rise of the One Nation party in the late 1990s, led by Queenslander Pauline Hanson. Howard successfully appropriated Hanson's nationalist, anti-immigration rhetoric and repackaged it in a more moderate and politically palatable form. By gaining "issue ownership" (Mudde 2007:

241-242) around nationalism and multiculturalism, Howard was able to stunt One Nation's electoral growth - indeed, Hanson accused Howard of stealing her policies in 2001 (Wear 2002: 243). Howard's legacy in this arena still remains strong – elements of his Pacific Solution, by which asylum seekers were transferred to detention camps in small Pacific nations, remain part of the current Labor government's immigration policy. Indeed, some commentators claim Australian multiculturalism has never quite recovered from the Howard's sustained opposition (Batainah & Walsh 2008; Ho 2009; Poynting 2008).

While most Liberal MPs supported Howard's policy in this area, a "gang of four" backbenchers – Petro Giorgiou, Bruce Baird, Judi Moylan and Russell Broadbent – voted against offshore processing of asylum seekers. These four MPs were labeled as "political terrorists" by a colleague and generally ostracized within the party (Panopoulos in Maiden 2010: online). Thus, Howard's populist stance on asylum seekers in this case did not necessarily unite the entire party, but rather relegated social liberalism to the sidelines, tying the economic liberalism of the wets to the social conservatism of the dries in order to present a united front against "boat people," "people smugglers" and "queue jumpers" in the name of national security, terrorism, and the potential of great financial costs to the country. This reinforced the notion that the asylum seekers' values were completely incompatible with Australian values, and solidified the exclusionist attitude that they had no place in Australian society.

"I believe in being average and ordinary"[4]
Howard did not simply seek the votes of ordinary Australians: part of Howard's populist appeal was his ability to present *himself* as a man of "the people." For example, he frequently eschewed the public broadcaster (ABC) and major broadsheet newspapers in favour of talk radio, commercial stations and the tabloid media. He delighted in his apparent lower middle class background, and took pride in being "average and ordinary" (in O'Brien 2006: online). He loyally followed the national cricket team, and was often photographed in (and ridiculed for) his unfashionable matching tracksuit on his morning walks (Campbell 2009; Rossiter 2010)

His ordinariness in this regard was not something that just happened, but as Rossiter (2010: 18) argues, was carefully constructed and maintained through "bland style, modest appearance, flat tones and affectless presence." It ultimately sought to *make ordinary* the suburban, Anglo-Australian mainstream, and in the process, delineate "the people" from "the other." As the following section on Stephen Harper demonstrates, Howard was not the only conservative leader to play up this "everyman" image.

There are a number of conclusions we can draw about Howard's time as Prime Minister of Australia. First, he pursued populism as a strategy to "wedge" the

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[4] Howard in O'Brien (2006).

electorate between the "people" – that is, in Howard's view, the "mainstream" or "ordinary Australians" – and an "other." "The other," in Howard's populism, not only constituted the elite; it also extended to asylum seekers and immigrants. This is in line with examples of right-wing populism in Europe (Albertazzi & McDonnell 2008), where populists have succeeded in linking the policies of the elite with the challenges of multiculturalism and globalization. Such an example lends credence to the "symptomatic approach" to populism discussed earlier, as the division is not just between "the people" and "the elite" as in Mudde's definition (2004, 2007), but more broadly, "the people" and an "other." Second, Howard's populism was successful in uniting the "wet" and "dry" factions of the Liberal Party. Although social liberalism was often marginalized during the Howard years, Howard was effective in tying economic liberalism to social conservatism, often presenting economic and social concerns as one and the same thing. This was most pronounced in his frequent criticisms of multiculturalism, as well as his border control policies.

Finally, Howard's use of populism served him well. As Australia's second longest serving Prime Minister, he enjoyed great popularity and success, and will remain a figure who casts a long shadow over Australia's political history. However, his defeat – not only losing office, but his own seat – shows that populism cannot necessarily provide the coordinates for lasting political success. A politics of opposition eventually runs out of steam – as van Onselen and Senior (2008: ix) argue, by the end of his reign, "Howard's confrontational style was successfully pegged by Labor as nothing more than a cynical, out-of-date approach to politics." Whether the same fate awaits Stephen Harper remains to be seen.

THREE: Populism and Conservatism in Stephen Harper's Conservative Party
As the above section demonstrates, Howard's populism was instrumental in terms of ensuring party unity and electoral success. This section explores the extent to which Stephen Harper adopted a similar strategy during his tenure as Conservative Party leader. Like Howard, Harper has consistently pursued populist policies that have drawn explicit lines between ordinary citizens and unsympathetic elites; indeed, many of these strategies, such as lowering taxes, getting "tough on crime" and using rhetoric concerning reduced funding for the arts or the academy were also adopted by Howard.[5] Below, we outline how Harper's populist strategies tend to satisfy the two conservative "wings" he identified in a 2003 speech: classical liberals and social conservatives.

The Conservative Coalition: "Neo-Cons" and "Theo-Cons"
In the 1993 federal election, Canada's governing Progressive Conservatives were reduced to just two seats, with much of the vote migrating to the newly formed Reform Party. Reform has been labeled a populist party, but its populism, typified by

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[5] As Williams (2000: 33) notes, although Howard employed a "tough on crime" discourse, he also "conceded that the criminal justice system was largely the responsibility of state and local governments." As such, it did not play as prominent role in Howard's populist strategy as it has in Harper's. It could be argued that being "tough on border security" filled this lacuna.

its founder and first leader Preston Manning, attempted to spread across the entire ideological spectrum. However, as former Manning advisor Tom Flanagan notes, Manning's "populist dream of consensus about policy matters is both empirically impossible and logically incoherent" (1995: 27). As a result, Manning was unable to dissociate his populism from his conservatism; while Manning claimed populism was a "methodology, not an ideology," voters and activists within Reform were overwhelmingly conservative, as were the majority of its policy pronouncements (Flanagan 1995: 2-3, 160-164).

One of those early to recognize the impossibility of a "post-political" populism was Stephen Harper, who worked for Reform in its early days as a senior policy advisor and later was elected as a Reform MP. Harper "directly challenged Manning's belief in the obsolescence of ideology," urging for Reform to become, in his words, "a Canadian version of the Thatcher-Reagan phenomenon" that focused on social conservatism and neoliberal economic policy (quoted in Flanagan 1995: 60-61). After a brief sojourn from politics, Harper became leader of the Canadian Alliance (Reform's successor) in 2002. He brought with him a blueprint for conservative electoral success in a country that had been dominated by the Liberal Party for much of the previous century.

In 2003, while still leader of the Canadian Alliance, Stephen Harper delivered a speech outlining how to unite Canadian conservatives to create a successful long-term electoral coalition. The key was to pursue policies that united classical liberals[6] and social conservatives, groups conservative journalist Ted Byfield labeled "neo-cons" and "theo-cons" (Citizen Centre Report Magazine 2003; see also Wells 2010a).[7] Like John Howard, who in 2005 claimed "Mill and Burke are interwoven into the history and the practice and the experience of our political party" (2005: 1-2), Harper stressed similarities between the two camps, saying they share an opposition to the "social agenda of the modern Left." The key for a conservative party was to implement policies that satisfied both "wings" of the conservative coalition. "It helps," Harper added, "when social conservative concerns overlap those of people with a more libertarian orientation."

Shortly after the speech, Harper was instrumental in merging his Canadian Alliance with the Progressive Conservatives to "unite the right," and he quickly won the leadership of the new Conservative Party of Canada. While the Reform-Alliance/Progressive Conservative split was not a simple dichotomy between economic and social conservatives – as Harper said, "the strongest economic and

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[6] In the speech, Harper referred to classical liberals as "economic conservatives"; elsewhere in the Canadian conservative context, they have been referred to as "libertarians" (Knopff and Snow forthcoming). For consistency with the Australian terminology, we adopt the term "classical liberals" to define economic conservatives, except when quoting Harper directly.

[7] The speech was originally given behind closed doors at Civitas, a private gathering for conservative intellectuals in Canada. It was later published in the now-defunct Citizens Centre Report magazine. The link has appeared in (and disappeared from) various fora online, and was recently linked by Macleans' Paul Wells (2010a).

social conservatives both found homes within the Reform and Canadian Alliance parties" – Harper nevertheless recognized the difficulty of keeping the Conservative Party together, and in his speech he stressed that "rebalancing the conservative agenda will require careful political judgment" (Citizens Centre Report Magazine 2003).[8] This meant avoiding issues most likely to offend classical liberals, such as abortion and same-sex marriage, and identifying policies that appeal to both social conservatives and classical liberals. Following his election as Prime Minister in 2006, Harper put these principles into action. In doing so, he frequently came to rely on populism as a strategy for uniting the two wings.

Criminal Justice and Tougher Sentencing
Small-c conservative commentators have frequently criticized Harper for abandoning his principles during his five years as Prime Minister (Corcoran 2011; Coyne 2009: 10). However, there is little doubt that the Conservatives have been effective in implementing their criminal justice platform, particularly given their precarious minority governments. Harper campaigned on getting "tough on crime" in all four elections since he became Conservative leader. The Conservatives followed through with many of these policies, ending house arrest for serious crimes, preventing courts from giving extra "credit" for time spent in pre-trial custody (known as the "two-for-one" rule), and increasing sentences for gun crimes, impaired driving, and violent offenders. They also introduced Bill C-4 (*Sébastien's Law*), which includes a substantial overhaul of the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*, offering many opportunities for longer sentences.[9]

Tougher criminal sentences can easily appeal to social conservatives and classical liberals. The retributive function of a tough-on-crime platform appeals to social conservatives by reinforcing public morality and safety, and by ensuring proportionality between crime and punishment. While one could argue that tougher sentencing does not appeal to classical liberals, even the staunchest Benthamite libertarian need not be opposed to longer sentences provided those sentences respond to direct, "violent" harm (see Knopff and Morton 1992: 315-331; Knopff and Snow forthcoming). The policies have also proven popular with much of the Canadian electorate, who are concerned about rising rates of violent crime (see Bryden 2009).

However popular with the public, Harper's tough-on-crime stance has been widely denounced by criminologists and law professors. University of Toronto

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[8] We do not claim that the Conservative Party of Canada contains only two "wings." As Flanagan (2009: 19) notes, the divisions within the Conservative Party are "not just between fiscal and social conservatives but between populists and traditionalists and between Quebec nationalists and western followers of Diefenbaker's 'One Nation' view." Our contention is merely that finding policies that overlap between classical liberals and social conservatives is the most difficult challenge for Conservatives today.
[9] This bill died on the order paper when the 2011 election was called. During the election, Harper promised to reintroduce all un-passed criminal justice legislation within 100 days, if elected to a majority government.

criminologist Anthony Doob said Harper's youth crime policy might help get the Conservatives elected, "but it won't do anything to reduce crime" (CBC News 2008). Michael Jackson, a University of Ottawa law professor, claimed Harper's policy was based on a "complete ignorance of history, of law, and of evidence" while Graham Stewart, the retired head of the John Howard Society of Canada, criticized Harper for "polarizing a discussion about corrections" and basing public policy on "raw wedge politics" rather than evidence (Cheadle 2009).

Because few commentators have come out in favour of tougher sentences,[10] Harper and the Conservatives have successfully used populist strategies to discredit such academics for being out of touch with ordinary Canadians. Harper accused criminologists of trying to "pacify Canadians with statistics… [y]our personal experiences and impressions are wrong, they say; crime is not really a problem" (Martin 2010: 210). Conservative cabinet minister Peter Van Loan criticized those opposed to tougher sentences as "university types," while former Harper Chief of Staff Ian Brodie claims "Canada had a very small community of criminologists propagating a policy perspective that didn't relate to the facts," (Martin 2010: 212) and that "politically it helped us tremendously" to be attacked by academics (Cheadle 2009). With respect to criminal justice policy, Harper's populism was useful for both electoral strategy and party stability.

Cutting the GST
Taxation is another area of overlap between classical liberals and social conservatives. Both groups prefer voluntary association and individual responsibility, sharing skepticism about the welfare state. It is therefore not surprising that in his 2003 speech, Harper claimed Canada needed "deeper and broader tax cuts." Indeed, tax cuts formed a major plank of the Conservatives' 2006 election platform, as Harper announced he would lower the federal General Sales Tax (GST) from 7% to 5% over a two-year period (he followed through once elected). Although the Conservatives also cut corporate and income taxes, the GST was by far the most prominent cut, and it comprised one of the Conservatives' "Five Priorities" during the 2006 campaign.

The GST, a value-added consumption tax, has always been unpopular with the Canadian electorate, but is favoured by many economists for being efficient and transparent (see Simpson 2007, 2011; Wells 2006: 179). Yet as with his crime policy, Harper was willing to go against "expert" opinion on the issue. Tom Flanagan, a member of Harper's campaign team in 2006, claimed the GST cut, was "a very populist move: It was catchy, highly visible, easy to communicate, and unlikely to be stolen by the Liberals" (2009: 225), while the other tax reductions in the 2006 platform were also "meant to be highly visible and easily understandable" (2009: 226). Hence, Harper frequently referred to the tax cut as one geared toward "working families" (CTV News 2007). While perhaps going against his economic

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[10] One notable exception is lawyer Bob Tarantino, who has been heavily critical of selective use of data by media analysts and criminologists. See Tarantino (2009a; 2009b; 2010); Corbella (2010).

instincts (Harper has a Master's Degree in economics), the move was good politics: a GST cut is "very good at reducing federal revenues—and hard to ratchet back up without a fight" (Wells and Geddes 2011). It also proved an effective political weapon for Harper even after he made the cuts. In response to Liberal leader Stéphane Dion's remarks that he would "consider" reversing the GST cut, the Conservatives launched a series of attack ads highlighting this quotation, even after Dion categorically announced he would not raise the tax (Proudfoot 2008).[11]

Childcare and the Family
In his 2003 speech, Harper claimed the traditional family was "key to a conservative agenda." Yet policies related to the family do not always unite classical liberals and social conservatives. Classical liberals do not typically share the social conservative position on abortion and same-sex marriage – nor, for the most part, do the other parties in the Canadian House of Commons. For these reasons, Harper did not legislate in these two areas,[12] instead offering a populist approach in an area central to the traditional family: childcare. During the 2006 election, Liberal Prime Minister Paul Martin committed $6 billion to the provinces (in addition to $5 billion already promised) to create subsidized daycare spaces. By contrast, the Conservatives offered a $1,200 allowance to parents for every child under the age of six (CTV News 2005). This Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB) provided Harper with a policy that was supported by social conservatives and classical liberals alike, both of whom are wary of a perceived state bureaucracy usurping the role of parents. Harper's desired overlap was clear, as childcare contains a financial dimension as well as a social one (Myers 2008: 88).

In addition to uniting his base around the childcare policy, Harper was given a political gift when Liberal strategist Scott Reid mused that, under Harper's plan, parents could simply spend the money on "beer and popcorn." The Conservative response was quick and effective: "I say there are already millions of childcare experts in this country," Harper retorted. "Their names are Mom and Dad and that's who we're going to work with" (Taber 2006). This populist tone permitted Conservatives to stand up against what one columnist called a "smarmy condescension toward the nation's parents" (Blatchford 2006). Moreover, it permitted the Conservatives to "claim the moral high ground as the champions of choice" (Myers 2008: 89).

Arts Cuts and the Census

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[11] Harper subsequently, and effectively, launched a series of ads aiming at Dion's "Green Shift," which involved a carbon tax, as a "permanent tax on everything." Harper has certainly asserted "issue ownership" in the area of tax cuts.

[12] Although he did allow a free vote on discussing the definition of marriage, this was a vote Harper knew he would lose. As Myers (2008: 87) notes, Harper "cleverly managed to shore up his support with the party's social conservative wing (what other leader would have done this much for them?) without actually implementing any policies that might offend more moderate voters."

Many other instances of anti-elitism have peppered Harper's tenure as Canadian Prime Minister. During the 2008 election, for example, Harper responded as follows when asked about Conservative cuts to arts programs:

> I think when ordinary working people come home, turn on the TV and see a gala of a bunch of people at, you know, a rich gala all subsidized by taxpayers claiming their subsidies aren't high enough, when they know those subsidies have actually gone up – I'm not sure that's something that resonates with ordinary people. (quoted in Campion-Smith 2008)

This comment set off furious reactions from Canada's arts community, with various op-eds, rallies, and even YouTube videos condemning the Conservatives. The move was generally seen as a miscalculation, as it particularly upset Quebeckers, for whom "culture" is sacrosanct – one columnist even claimed the comment cost Harper a majority government in the election (Macdonald 2008). Although this attempt to produce a wedge in the electorate ultimately backfired, it was nevertheless indicative of Harper's view that criticism of the arts community appealed to the two wings of the conservative party. Nothing inherent in classical liberalism or social conservatism suggests funding artists is a priority.

The same can be said for Harper's view of academia. In 2010, the Conservatives announced plan to scrap the mandatory long-form census, replacing it with a voluntary form. Social scientists across the country condemned the move, with Munir Sheikh, the Chief Statistician of Canada, resigning in protest. Harper stuck by the change, as Industry Minister Tony Clement claimed the government had a mandate "to protect Canadians from the coercive and intrusive methods that had been used" by census-takers (Ibbitson 2010). Although unpopular with academics and "elites" who rely on the data, the decision permitted the Conservatives "to cast themselves as anti-government populists once more" (Chase 2010).

"More Don Cherry than Giorgio Armani"[13]: Explaining Harper's Populism
We can draw several conclusions about Harper's tenure as Conservative Party leader. First, he frequently uses populism as a strategy. This is clear from his appeal to "safe communities" with his tough-on-crime policies; to "working families" with his GST cut; and to "Mom and Dad" with his childcare strategy. Second, this populism is explicitly oppositional and anti-elitist. Harper frequently disagrees with "expert" opinion, whether those experts are daycare workers, criminologists, artists, or even economists. This form of anti-elitism is well documented in the populist literature (Canovan 2005: 77–78; Panizza 2005: 3; Wear 2008: 617-618). Third, Harper's populist strategy has been successful to the extent that it unites the two "wings" of Harper's electoral coalition: classical liberals and social conservatives. In his 2003 Civitas speech, Harper said "strong economic and social conservatives are

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[13] This quote comes from a Conservative pundit Tim Powers, referring to Canadian hockey pundit Don Cherry, known for his off-the-cuff remarks and conservative politics. See Wells (2006: 182).

more often than not the same people," and that conservative leaders must identify policies that provide "overlap" to both groups. The policies he has pursued most vigorously and vocally, such as choice in childcare, the GST cut, and criminal sentencing, provide such overlap.

Finally, Harper's populism provides a long-term strategy to expand his voting base. As Pollster Greg Lyle said of the 2006 election, the Conservatives "did not try and be everything to everyone. Instead, they attempted to maximize their vote within a Conservative universe" (quoted in Wells 2006: 233). Yet as early as 2003, Harper recognized that the Conservative universe was not static: "there will be changes to the composition of the conservative coalition… traditional Liberal voters, especially those from key ethnic and immigrant communities, will be attracted to a party with strong traditional views of values and family." Immigration Minister Jason Kenney has actively been courting new Canadians, and there are signs that it is working: in the last two elections, Conservatives made considerable gains on the Liberals with both visible minority and Catholic voters, both of whom traditionally vote Liberal (Gidengil, Fournier, Everitt, Nevitte, and Blais 2009: 3-4; see also Wells 2010b). Here Harper sees overlap between the policy preferences of new Canadians, particularly visible minorities – "lower taxes, a favourable business climate and safe streets" – and the Conservative Party (Flanagan 2008). We discuss the implications for both populist theory and electoral strategy below.

FOUR: Populism as "Straddling the Divide"
Panizza (2005: 3) describes populism as a discourse that simplifies the political space by creating a symbolic division between "the people" and its "other." The above analysis sought to explore the extent to which centre-right Prime Ministers in Canada and Australia engaged in such strategies. We suggest the experiences of John Howard and Stephen Harper lends empirical support to Panizza's conception of populism. Both leaders used wedge politics to dichotomize the political space, and both did so while claiming to have "the people" on their side. For example, the signifiers Howard used – "battlers" or "ordinary Australians" – were broad enough to accommodate a range of identities, without their meaning becoming entirely fixed. What was far clearer in Howard's discourse was who was *not* part of these categories: elites, "boat people", interest groups, and the Left. Harper made a similar distinction, relishing his opportunity to campaign against "experts" and the "rich gala" crowd while showing his support for "working families" and "ordinary people."

This effort to simplify the political space against an "other" has proven electorally successful. Those familiar of the Australian Liberals and the Canadian Conservatives should not find these links surprising; Patrick Muttart, a student of comparative politics and key backroom staffer for the Harper Conservatives, used John Howard's 1996 victory as a model (Wells 2006: 156). This Australian link was further pronounced after Brian Loughane, the national director of the Australia Liberal Party, made a presentation to senior Conservative Party staff at its inaugural policy convention in Montreal in 2005. Harper's former Chief of Staff Tom Flanagan notes that this presentation led to "further information-sharing and subsequent meetings

between Stephen Harper and John Howard" (Flanagan 2009: 223). Though our goal was not to systematically explore direct links between the two parties, our analysis suggests that Harper and his team learned from the previously fractured Australian Liberals how to engage in populist framing to target their key constituencies.

Nevertheless, in framing their policies in populist terms against a left-wing elite, Harper and Howard certainly share common ground. Both leaders – Howard in 2005, Harper in 2003 – gave speeches in which they candidly described their respective parties as coalitions of Burkean conservatives and classical liberals. In these speeches, the leaders did not bemoan their hard luck for being burdened with leading a party rife with divisions; instead, they were both sanguine about the prospects for uniting these two parties against, in Harper's words, the "moral nihilism" of the modern Left (Citizens Centre Report Magazine 2003). The key was locating policy areas that provide overlap with these two constituencies. Howard did so by focusing heavily on the "culture wars," refusing to expand Aboriginal self-determination and to offer asylum to boat people on both cultural and fiscal grounds. Harper's childcare and criminal justice strategies provide similar overlap against a progressive "elite" to which both wings are natural hostile.

This raises a question: is populism, as a strategic tool, more at home with mainstream conservative parties than progressive parties? We suggest it is. Simply put, populist anti-elitism resonates with classical liberals and social conservatives. Both groups share a pronounced skepticism toward social engineering schemes in areas previously governed by individuals and families, and can therefore agree with deep tax cuts, choice in childcare, a voluntary census, and the like; both are critical of redistributive policies, and have no reason to support funding for arts; and neither have any love for the "moral relativism, moral neutrality and moral equivalency" that Stephen Harper claimed was "beginning to dominate [left wing] intellectual debate and public-policy objectives" (Citizens Centre Report Magazine 2003). In short, if "elite" and "expert" opinion consistently proposes public policies antithetical to conservative beliefs, is it any surprise that anti-elitist populism resonates strongest with conservative voters and activists?

Our analysis is, of course, partial. Neither Harper nor Howard can be accused of using populist strategy for *every* public policy decision, nor does every decision they made resonate with both wings of their respective parties. Moreover, the party leaders did not adopt *identical* strategies. For example, the targeted "other" varied based on different political circumstances. For Howard, this meant a two-pronged attack on both elites and non-Australians. These two "others" are not unrelated; Howard's criticism of the post-material values held by the Australian Left is logically connected to his targeting of asylum seekers, for whom the Left are particularly sympathetic. By contrast, "experts" took the brunt of Harper's populist criticism, as demonstrated by his appeal to "Mom and Dad" over ivory tower criminologists and statisticians. His unwillingness to wade into criticism of refugees, immigrants, or multiculturalism is likely due to three factors. First, Harper's precarious electoral standing, particularly his inability to win a majority government, made him

moderate his tone on controversial issues. Second, political culture matters. The *idea* of multiculturalism, it is fair to say, is far more popular in Canada compared to Australia, and criticizing the policy would be politically risky. Moreover, the ever-present specter of Quebec separatism would make a comment such as "I don't like hyphenated Canadians, I just like Canadians" unthinkable for any Canadian Prime Minister. Finally, there has not been a triggering event that would mobilize public opinion and force Harper to take a stand on touchy issues of multiculturalism and immigration. Canada has not had an equivalent Tampa or Children Overboard, particularly in the middle of an election.

In spite of these small differences, there is far more commonality in Howard and Harper's approaches to populism. They show that the use of populist strategic discourse can be effective, particularly when modern conservative parties must appeal to both social conservatives and classical liberals. From an intra-party perspective, both leaders were very successful in uniting a fractured party that had spent more than a decade out of power. Howard's three consecutive majority governments certainly make him a successful Prime Minister, although his embarrassing loss of his own seat in the 2007 election suggests the use of populism as a strategic tool cannot last forever. And while Harper has not yet achieved his elusive parliamentary majority, our evidence suggests his populism has been reasonably successful, in terms of swaying Canadian voters, uniting his previously fractured party, and marginalizing the previously hegemonic Liberal Party. The 2011 election will provide further evidence in this regard.

Conclusion
Although there is much work to be done on study of populism as a political strategic tool, we draw three broad conclusions. First, the experiences of the Howard and Harper governments lend empirical support to theories that view populism as the symbolic division of the political space between "the people" and an "other." Both Howard and Harper used the concept of the "other" to vilify elites, while Howard sometimes extended this to various other "un-Australian" groups. Second, we suggest a link between populist strategies and conservative mainstream political parties, particularly in Western democracies. Specifically, populism proved a useful *intra-party* strategy to unite social conservatives and classical liberals, whether conceived of as targeted electoral groups or intra-caucus factions. The anti-elitism inherent in populist discourse sits well with both groups.

Finally, it is unclear the extent to which populism has been successful as a long-term *electoral* strategy in both Canada and Australia. John Howard won three straight majority governments, but he eventually as suffered electoral defeat along with the loss of his own seat. In Canada, Harper successfully reunited his party, but his sought-after majority remains elusive. While populism united previously fractured conservative parties that had spent years out of office, time will tell whether it remains a viable long-term electoral strategy for modern conservative parties.

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