

**POPULAR FOUNDATIONS OF
DIVIDED GOVERNMENT IN CANADA**

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POPULAR FOUNDATIONS OF DIVIDED GOVERNMENT IN CANADA

Division between the federal government and the provinces is a Canadian commonplace. Often party domination is so complete in one arena that effective opposition can be found only in the other. Observers of the Canadian scene were the first to wonder at this puzzle. In recent years, students of other systems—of the US especially—have become fascinated by divided electoral patterns. And there are affinities, still only dimly recognised, between divided government notions and the idea of an electoral cycle. For all that, the very pattern of division in Canada, much less its sources, remains little studied.

This paper begins with indicators of division. It shows that federal-provincial divergence has been ubiquitous since at least the turn of the 20th century. It then canvasses three alternative explanations for division:

- As a pure *by-product* of federalism, reflecting differences in agenda between the federal and provincial tiers, compounded by geographic diversity, particularly within the provincial tier.
- As a product of the *rise and decline* of parties where discrepancies in the timing of elections produce temporary divergence between arenas. This could happen when a common factor drives electoral opinion in both arenas or when voters anticipate retribution at one level by administering it at the other. On either account, provincial elections can anticipate decay of federal coalitions, and *vice versa*.
- As the self-conscious product of short-term *balancing*, where voters moderate parties' extremity.

These factors are not necessarily incompatible, but identification must start with the by-product model, for only after it is identified can either rise-and-decline or balancing emerge.

Why bother? One answer lies in the arguments for federalism as a way of life. For many, the legitimacy of federalism depends on separate agendas, where territorial minorities pursue their particular goals and preserve their distinct communities (see Whitaker 1983). If, conversely, federal and provincial governments merely compete in the same policy space for the allegiance of the same voters, and parties are highly integrated across arenas, the rationale for federalism is nothing more than economic efficiency (Breton 1996).

Another answer lies in arguments about voters' capacity to employ information rationally. The argument for economic efficiency might be undermined by inefficiency in an electoral sense (Richards 1997; Cutler 2001). If *rise and decline* is a reality, it might be generated by independent common forces acting on parties of the same name at both arenas. That would be unexceptionable. But it could equally be the result of voters economizing on information, in particular, using judgements on a party in one arena to motivate judgement on the party in the other (Stewart and Clarke 1998). If federalism induces its own particular shortcuts to judgement among minimally-informed voters, we are left to judge the accuracy of these shortcuts. It is more than a faint possibility voters

will be led astray. Parties sharing the same name may not be ideologically similar, or the agendas of federal and provincial politics may be so distinct that the shortcut is simply inappropriate.

The balancing account brings both concerns together. Some kind of balancing by some of the electorate is required for federalism to manifest the alleged distinctive virtue of divided government—federal-provincial balancing would be a kind of “cognitive Madisonianism” (Ladd 1990, 66-67; see also Alesina and Rosenthal 1995, 253-256; Fiorina 1992; Underhill 1955; Wrong 1957). Balancing implies that voters can use federal institutions to avoid noncentrist political outcomes in the total policy context even when strong noncentrist tendencies prevail in each arena considered separately. Without federalism, they would fall victim to opposing governments tacking back and forth across the political spectrum; with it they can engineer optimal policy and a more stable political environment.¹

THE EXTENT OF DIVISION

Table 1 and Figure 1 capture the overall extent of division. To fix ideas, we focus on the response of provincial elections to the prior federal one. Units of analysis are the 229 provincial elections that follow a federal election. Typically, only one such election occurs in each province, but occasionally two provincial contests intervene between federal ones, and these too are included. Analysis begins with the 1908 federal election, the first with nine provinces.²

According to the leftmost column of Table 1, two of every three provincial elections in Canada produce a government at partisan odds with the one in Ottawa. This has been true, roughly speaking, almost every decade this century, according to Figure 1.A. Only in the 1930s and 1940s did a majority of provincial elections conform to the federal type. In earlier and later decades, divergent outcomes sometimes exceeded 70% of the total.

Federal-provincial divergence is *not*—or not just—an artifact of Canadian geography. It would be natural to suspect that most divergent outcomes occur in provinces where the federal winner’s federal support is already weak. And, of course, Canada’s provinces vary greatly in size, such that Ontario and Quebec alone command a clear majority of federal seats. The sheer bulk of those provinces makes them pretty much essential to a governing coalition. Might it not follow that federal-provincial divergence is really just interregional variance in disguise? The rest of Table 1 puts paid to this notion. In fact, the province most at odds historically with Ottawa is Ontario, followed by Quebec. The least divergent region, the Atlantic provinces, is the smallest.³ The other columns in Table 1 flesh the claim out. The typical vote gap within provinces is about 7 points. The regional rank orders of mean and median gaps replicates that for election wins. The basic generalisation holds for both historically major parties, the Liberals and the

¹ Note that this is a *checks-and-balances*-type claim, which is distinct from (even if institutionally linked to) a *separation of powers*-type claim. The pure separation claim is captured two paragraphs earlier.

² Alberta and Saskatchewan were organised as provinces only in 1905. Newfoundland does not appear in the data set until 1949.

³ The notion, properly conditioned, does capture part of the truth, however, as Figure 2 will reveal.

Conservatives. Figure 1.B indicates that the fall-off in the federal winner's share has not grown with time.⁴ The gap varies enormously from decade to decade. The pattern is saw-toothed, in fact: with one exception (the 1970s-1980s pair), each peak is followed by a valley and *vice versa*. Where in the 1960s gaps were minuscule, in the 1980s they exceeded those for the 1910s. In the 1990s, the gaps were smallest ever.

POSSIBLE SOURCES OF DIVISION

Divided government in Canada is not, then, an artifact of geography. The split is within provinces and runs deepest in the provinces most pivotal to the federal electoral game. This fact was noticed early, and Canadians seem to have been the first to venture explanations for it. But these early Canadian thoughts have not been followed by much systematic study since.⁵ Instead, the initiative lies with US scholars, beguiled by persistent electoral division between the Presidency and Congress as well as by the apparent breakdown of party consolidation within states and between federal and state elections. Supplementing the US literature is a modest European one.

Most intriguing is the idea of self-conscious *balancing*. Underhill (1955) and Wrong (1957) proposed that Canadian discrepancies reflect voters' conscious preference for divergence. Their speculation generated only modest empirical follow-up. Wilson and Hoffman (1970) and Perlin and Peppin (1971) used survey data to condition split and straight voting on approval of divergence. Neither addressed the hard identification issues and, in any case, one study contradicted the other. Gibbins and Reeves (1976) also grappled with the issue, but their study was inconclusive and seems to have sunk from view.

The torch has clearly passed south of the border. Erikson (1988) argued on empirical grounds that mid-term losses by the President's party in House voting are best explained as a penalty for mere office. Fiorina (1988; 1992) supplied a theoretical basis for the phenomenon. The key intuition is that, in policy space, many voters lie between the partisan alternatives; they choose the closer alternative in the more important race, for the Presidency, but many then chose the more distant alternative in the other race, to force the parties to converge. Alesina and Rosenthal (1995) focus on the fact that in Presidential elections uncertainty forces sincere, consistent voting for Congress. Only at midterm can voters "fully moderate the sitting president.... Some voters [ideologically located between parties] who hedge by voting for the party of the future president in the on-year choose to support the opposition at midterm" (1995: 10).

The relevant insight is that balancing is a form of strategic voting. If uncertainty forces sincerity, then what is facilitated by the removal of uncertainty is strategic behaviour. In this case, strategic induction takes account of the *total* policy-making context. As such, it is akin to other electoral or quasi-electoral phenomena in operation between the elections that decide the fate of governments. Very early on it was observed that by-elections in the

⁴ Visually, the figure seems to hint at growing negativity, but this is an illusion created by a starting value near zero and the very negative reading for the second last decade. Regression of the gap on time yields no trend.

⁵ It is striking that Erikson (1988), in introducing his pioneering study of balancing in US midterm elections, reaches back to Underhill and Wrong but can cite no later Canadian source.

UK commonly go against the governing party but carry little predictive value for the next general election (Norris 1995).⁶ The US midterm pattern just discussed encouraged studies of Presidential popularity over the full term, and it seems clear that a popularity cycle exists (Brody, 1991). How far a President falls reflects real world phenomena (of which more below) but a fall of some distance seems close to inevitable, so much so that when it does not happen, as in 2002, speculation about a fundamental realignment of political forces immediately follows. Thinking like this is now commonplace in studies of European Union elections. Reif and Schmitt (1980) propose a notion of second-order elections, with European Parliament elections as a paradigmatic case. Although these elections nominally choose a common European parliament, in fact the point of reference for each EU member's electorate is its own national government.⁷ What all of these arguments have in common is that the life of the government in question is *not* at stake. Choice in the second-order election sends a signal—in the US, more than just a signal—without changing the identity of the government. When the choice of government is on the agenda, voters have less scope for total-system strategic behaviour.⁸

The balance argument is most appealing where the competing electoral arenas are linked in the policy process. This is obvious in the case of US federal elections, where balancing carries implications for the width of the “gridlock interval,” the gap spanned by the threshold for blocking Congressional override of Presidential vetoes, on one hand, and Senate threshold for breaking a filibuster, on the other (Krehbiel, 1998). The argument seems correspondingly weaker where no requirement of inter-institutional collaboration exists, or where the requirement is weak. In this respect, Canadian governments (at *both* levels) may be intermediate between US states in relation to the federal government and the legislative and executive components within a US tier. Canadian provincial politicians can play an active role in shaping federal policy, and even when a direct role is absent, they commonly feel entitled to comment. In some areas, such as pension policy, provinces have a veto. In other areas, such as the health system, politics in the two arenas jointly affects the overall scale of expenditure and the degree of resistance to user fees. Recently, federal and provincial governments seem to have responded to public pressure by pledging to increase the extent of collaboration in policy-making with, for example, the *Social Union Framework Agreement*.

Evidence for true balancing is hard to find, however. There is little question that aggregate empirical phenomena of sort reviewed in the preceding paragraph exist, even if not at all times or in all places. By-election cycles, popularity cycles, mid-term losses by the President's party, and the use of EU elections for strategic punishment of otherwise

⁶ Kay (1981) was unable to find this pattern in the Canadian case, however. He did find that governments commonly lose ground, but this is indicator of their fate at the next election not of some recurring cycle. This anticipates a process that we discuss below under the rubric “rise and decline”.

⁷ Reif and Schmitt extend to the EU case a logic first proposed by Dinkel (1977) for Länder elections in relation to the federal governing party. See Reif's (1997) reflection on the subsequent treatment of his initial insight.

⁸ Of course, to extent that electoral rules punish coordination failure (Cox, 1997), voters may be encouraged to vote strategically in relation to the general outcome itself. In this case, however, strategic behaviour follows precisely because they do hold the fate of the government in their hands. Reif (1997) points out that where general elections are not decisive, second-order elections carry less distinctive charge.

secure national governments have all been empirical regularities. What is less clear is the individual-level process that generates them. Tests for balancing by ideological centrists have not yielded much.⁹

A second possibility also sees separate arenas as linked, such that voting in one reflects facts about the other. But the linkage is not one of balancing. The alternative mode of linkage might be called a “*rise-and-decline*” process. Common forces—changing voter preferences or changing characteristics of parties—may pervade both arenas, such that pressures for convergence exist, but the timing of elections produces leads or lags in the expression of these forces and, at least temporarily, divergence between levels. Alternatively, powerful momentum toward or away from a party in one arena might induce anticipatory shifts at the other. The most likely possibility is that provincial elections forecast the rise and decline of federal electoral coalitions. Less likely but certainly possible, federal elections within provinces might predict the rise and fall of provincial coalitions. Dawson (1947) adumbrated an argument along these lines for Canada years ago,¹⁰ Scarrow (1960) repeated it, and Johnston (1980), addressing a related, but different issue, identified such a pattern in some provinces. Shugart and Carey identify a process rather like this in certain Latin American countries. Division in their examples is always between Presidential and sub-Presidential voting, where the latter can include elections not legislatively linked by the constitution to the presidency, municipal ones, for example. The critical thing, for our purposes, is the variable timing of sub-Presidential elections in relation to Presidential ones. This variation allows them to be a gauge of the consolidation and erosion of régimes’ support bases. And a process rather like this seems to be part of the story of variation in US midterm elections. Independently of the cyclicity discussed above, the magnitude of loss reflects factors in Presidential popularity, notably economic well-being and foreign policy success.¹¹ These are substantive considerations, not strategic ones, and they continue to play a role in actual Presidential outcomes. If, for example, economic performance is as bad in the next Presidential year as in the preceding off-year, the incumbent may well lose.

Both the balancing and the rise-and-decline arguments presuppose linkage between arenas. A third class of explanation emphasizes the *lack* of linkage. Rather, electoral division reflects the arenas’ policy separation, and is a *by-product* of that separation. In Canada, this argument is rehearsed briefly in Johnston (1980) and runs through Blake

⁹ Garand and Lichtl (2000) provide a useful review of empirical work on the balance thesis. Their own analysis does not really go to this motive, unfortunately, and what they do find is vulnerable to questions of simultaneity bias. The most important contributions since their review are Mebane (2000) and Mebane and Sekhon (2002), where voters are posited as agents of policy moderation through noncooperative, rational expectations driven coordination. They do find, consistently with Alesina and Rosenthal, that some voters shift because of certainty newly provided by the Presidential outcome, but this is insufficient to cover all the change from on-year to off-year. The rest requires further strategic action, and most plausibly involves substantive change in the perceived policy locations of elite actors.

¹⁰ “First, the great majority of the Dominion and provincial governments will belong to the same political party; second, the provincial governments will begin to fall away to the opposition party or parties until these are in a majority; third, there is an overturn in the Dominion parliament which brings it once more into sympathy with the provinces, whereupon the cycle begins anew.” (p. 528, in 4th edition, 1963, revised by Norman Ward).

¹¹ Tufte (1978) seems to be the first to put economic effects in the context of midterm loss.

(1982), but neither study was about divided government as such. In the US, however, the argument seems to be gaining ground. House elections are about one set of issues and Presidential ones are about another. Shafer and Claggett (1995), for instance, argue that divergence reflects the constitution: Congress is about bread-and-butter domestic issues, while Presidential politics is constituted around foreign-policy and cultural questions, where the latter commonly carry a powerful moral charge. The same voters are distributed differently in each domain, with divergent majorities, which in turn are faithfully reflected in the corresponding electoral arenas. Petrocik and Doherty (1996) make a similar case, in terms of a notion of institutional issue “ownership.” Jacobson (1990) also seems mainly in this camp, with his emphasis on the contrast between the localism inherent in the decentralised system of Congressional choice and the centralism of the almost-binary nation-wide system of Presidential choice.¹²

The sheer scale of federal-provincial gaps in Table 1 points toward the “by-product,” or agenda divergence, model. So does the fact that gaps are differentially distributed across place, time, and political party. This suggests that history and geography are critical, as correlates of divergent agendas and interests. These reasons alone make agenda divergence the place to start. Indeed, we shall show that only after we get the by-products out of the way can we even begin to talk about identifying either of the other two processes.

INDEPENDENT ARENAS: GAPS AS BY-PRODUCT

Consider more closely the bottom parts of Table 1. Conservative governments are incredibly prone to electoral drop-off from federal to provincial elections. Although they are only slightly more likely than Liberal governments to face an opposing government in a province (both federal governing parties usually face opponents, in fact), the popular vote fall-off experienced by Conservative governments is two to three times as great as that visited upon provincial Liberals. Similarly the largest single Tory government drop (70.6 points) is nearly twice as big as that for the governing Liberals (37.9).¹³ Not all provinces are equally prone to anti-Ottawa swing. Ontario clearly stakes out the highest average swing, over four times as large as in Atlantic Canada, but the laurels go to the West, followed by Quebec.

For a balance argument, swing on this scale is hardly necessary. Under Canada’s First Past the Post electoral formula, change of government, the essential element in divided government models, requires only modest vote shifts. Indeed, swing on this scale is positively hostile to balancing logic, in which swing voters are bracketed, in policy space, by the contenders for government. That so many voters should lie between Canadian parties—by implication, that Canada’s governing parties should diverge so greatly on policy—is implausible.

Figure 2 captures the interaction of party and geography, by presenting average shares in each arena in each province for each party when it is in power in Ottawa. It overrides all

¹² Jacobson (1990, Table 6.14) also presents evidence that hints at balancing. Jacobson (1996) seems to go further down this road.

¹³ This difference between parties accounts for the distinctiveness of the 1910s and 1980s in Figure 2. These were decades of Tory federal governments.

temporal variance within the 20th century, but remarkably little is lost by doing this: splitting the graphics further by time yields patterns that differ from these summary ones only in the fine print. Clearly, federal-provincial divergence differs quite fundamentally between Liberal and Conservative federal governments.

When the Liberals govern, the divergence is more between than within provinces. Of course, within-province gaps do appear, but they are essentially null in Atlantic Canada and Saskatchewan. Elsewhere the provincial share is smaller than the federal one and, consistently with Table 1, the gap is widest in Ontario. More important is the remarkably smooth East-West gradient in both the federal and the provincial vote. To go back to a question raised earlier, many of these non-Liberal governments control provinces where the Liberals are weak federally as well as provincially.

The same is not true for Conservative federal governments. In provincial elections, Conservatives exhibit roughly the same pattern as Liberals: an East-West gradient, although one that is less smooth and less steep. The party is highly competitive in the Atlantic provinces and typically leads the Liberals in Ontario, Manitoba, and Alberta. The weakest provinces are British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Quebec, in that order.¹⁴ The federal pattern is completely different: Conservative governments represent remarkably inclusive coalitions. Province averages are not identical, of course, but *no* East-West gradient is identifiable, or if one is, it has the opposite slope to the provincial one. This reflects the peculiar circumstance under which Conservative victories typically occur. They articulate pent-up resentment at a generation of Liberal rule. The Tories commonly execute an ends-against-the-middle strategy, which produces Figure 2.B's appearance of geographic inclusiveness. But the coalition so constructed is unsustainable, and when the Tories ultimately lose power their federal geography reverts to an approximation of its provincial pattern (Johnston, 2000). The sharp Tory gaps in Table 1 and the downward spikes in Figure 1 correspond to the wedge in Figure 2.B.

WITHIN-ARENA VOLATILITY

All this implies that most of the within-province gaps in Table 1 represent something other than judgement on the particular government currently in place. They embody processes that lie deeper in the geology of the party system and that require explanation in terms of basic interests and critical conjunctures. By implication, any modelling of the other two processes—rise-and-fall and balancing—must be *within* the arena and *around* each election in the other arena. Table 2 captures one side of this by assessing provincial-to-provincial swing around each federal election. The initial election is the last before the federal election of interest. If two provincial elections occurred in the interval between that federal election and the one before, the earlier election is ignored. The same is not true on the other side, and so some federal elections are followed by more than one provincial election. An essentially similar table could be constructed for federal-to-

¹⁴ For these three provinces, the century-long aggregation is somewhat misleading. In BC and Quebec, the Conservative party was quite strong provincially down to the 1930s. In Saskatchewan it was devastated right after the Great War and scarcely existed until it was revived in the 1980s. Its 1980s revival was remarkable but short-lived.

federal swing in a province around each provincial election, but that is a task for the future.

Focussing on the provincial tier reduces the scale of apparent volatility dramatically. On average, within-tier swings are only about one-third as great as between-tier gaps. More to the point, the variation in the average swing across party and region is dramatically reduced. The Conservative within-province swing is still larger than the Liberal one, but the difference is only 2.6 points, as compared to 7 points for the gap data in Table 1. In the regional data, focus on the provincial tier brings volatility down to the Atlantic Canada level, such that in every region, the typical inter-election negative swing is two to three points. Only in Atlantic Canada are within-arena swings about the same size as cross-arena gaps. This reflects the continuing congruence of federal and provincial party systems in that region.

The extreme cases (“most negative” and “most positive”) in Table 2 still rival those in Table 1. But this just goes to the basic point, as the biggest discrepancies in Table 1 reflect realignments which have already taken place and the biggest swings in Table 2 reflect those realignments directly. The extreme negative values are drawn from two subpatterns and one critical episode. The subpatterns are the extreme federal-provincial discrepancies for the Conservatives in Quebec and the West, especially British Columbia, and for the Liberals in the West. The extreme positive values are mostly for Liberal governments, and reflect localised *federal* collapse combined with a surviving, sometimes governing provincial party, as characterised the Liberals in Saskatchewan in the 1920s, and again in the 1960s and 1970s, and in British Columbia in the 1940s.¹⁵ Extreme negative cases are generally less notable in Table 2, but the handful at the very tail of the distribution mirror some in Table 1. In BC in the 1910s and 1950s, the Liberals collapsed provincially before they did federally. For the Conservatives, the same was true after 1930 in BC and after 1917 in the Prairie provinces. The extreme positive values reflect reverse and rehabilitation for the Liberals in BC around 1945 and for reversal of the post-1917 provincial collapse on the Prairies by the Conservatives, in the wake of their federal breakthrough in 1958.

In general, however, the distributions in Table 2 seem “well behaved,” in contrast to those in Table 1. This reflects the *de facto* removal of cross-arena contrasts in the fundamentals of party alignment. The remaining variance embodies observations with the unit homogeneity and conditional independence for proper modelling (King, Keohane, and Verba, 1993).

LINKAGE ACROSS ARENAS

In contrast to the by-product account, the balancing and rise-and-fall accounts focus on cross-arena linkage. Three measures are potential indicators of linkage processes:

- The *gap* in years between the intervening election in the other arena and the current election at the arena of interest.

¹⁵ Although the BC example is somewhat tainted. See the Appendix, below.

- Whether or not the party *wins* (or wins a majority) at the intervening other-level election.
- The most recent interelection *swing* in the *other* arena.

As already noted, cases in the current dataset are provincial elections. For each case, vote shares in *any* of the elections recorded (two provincial and two federal for each case) appear only for the national winner in the last federal election. Ideally, the data would comprise vote shares in provincial and federal elections for each party, winner or loser, that made a serious running in the province in both arenas.¹⁶ With this limited dataset, we can still estimate the impact of winning or losing a *provincial* election on federal-to-federal swing. Additionally, because the dataset includes provincial swings that precede federal ones, we can also estimate the statistical association between the swings as well condition that association on the gap in years between the last provincial and the current federal election. What we cannot do is gauge of the impact of *federal* victory or loss on provincial-to-provincial swing (although we can investigate the closely-related impact of minority/majority government status) nor can we estimate the impact of prior federal swing on most recent provincial swing. We are in a position, then, to examine to features of linkage that provide critical tests of balancing and rise-and-fall processes.

Data limited to cases where the party wins at the other level; no predetermined federal-to-federal swing:

In this situation, we can look at the impact of gap between the last election in the other arena and the swing in the arena of interest (which happens to be provincial). We are interested in whether there is any such dependency and in the linearity/curvilinearity of the effect.

The ***rise-and-decline*** model implies the following:

1. The intercept may be positive, at least should be non-negative. If the party is indeed on the rise, and that rise is reflected at both levels, then the intercept should be positive.
2. The gap coefficient should be negative and linear. Not every parliament need yield a negative slope because other factors will intrude, but all federal-election pairs at the end of governments' lives should see provincial support shrink over the interval.
3. Minority-government status should have no bearing on the pattern of results.

To the extent that ***balancing*** is at work, the following should hold:

1. The intercept should not be positive. Even if many voters have too much uncertainty about the new government's position in policy space, the balancing motivation rules out the possibility that the median voter would want policy *more extreme* than the new government. So a strengthening of the party's hand at the other level is hostile to the logic of balancing.
2. The gap effect should be non-linear, although its exact shape cannot be predicted. It should not, however, be systematically greater at the end than at most earlier points in

¹⁶ We intend to construct the more complete dataset and make it available to the research community.

the life of the other arena's parliament. One might conjecture that the penalty should be immediate, once the winner in the target arena is known. But delay in onset is possible for one or the other of two reasons: (1) The imperative to balance may not be recognized until the target government begins to implement its preferred, possibly noncentrist policies;¹⁷ (2) if there is a honeymoon at the other level (Nadeau, 1991; Johnston, 1999), its impact might leak across arenas.

3. The implications of majority-minority status are clear. The need for balance pertains only to majority governments, which are usually very powerful in relation to the rest of the government apparatus. But thirty-two of the provincial elections in the data set follow minority federal results. As minority governments are already checked by the House, there seems little need for further check at the provincial level.¹⁸

Data indicate whether or not the party wins or loses at the other level; predetermined provincial-to-provincial swing:

In this case, we can look both at the impact of win or loss at the other arena on the sign of swings at the indicated arena (this time, the federal one). We can also look at the covariance between earlier (in this case, provincial) on later (in this case, federal) swings.

The *rise-and-decline* model implies the following:

1. Swing should not be negatively affected by the result of the other-level election. In the most prevalent situation, negative swing should not be moderated if the intervening other-level election puts another party in power. To the extent that victory in the other arena is the product of swings toward the winner, winning might also produce positive swing in the arena of interest.
2. Swing at one level should be in the *same* direction as the other-level swing more often than not. There should only be one-time reversals of the consistency of direction of swing across levels, and they should come far more frequently and devastatingly towards the end of the other-level government's life. In other words, a given party should not see swing in different directions over more than one federal-provincial or provincial-federal election pair. The critical test for the rise-and-fall account is that a party should not be going in different directions at the two levels.
3. The closer the elections are in time, the more similar the swing.

The *balance* model implies that:

1. A party should suffer more if it is in power at the other level than if it is not. The coefficient on *winner at the other level* should be negative.
2. Negative swing should be:

¹⁷ This would be a Canadian variant of the process identified by Sekhon and Mebane (2002).

¹⁸ Some might protest that the archetypal minority is a Liberal one dependent mainly on the social-democratic NDP for support, as such a more left-leaning government than Liberal majorities typically are. This assumes, however, that the key policy dimension is mainly left-right in character. It is also untrue to the full record. Neither the NDP nor its predecessor, the CCF, existed in the 1921-26 minority sequence. The 1963-68 sequence saw the Liberals able to draw on small parties of both left and right. The three Conservative minorities are not captured by the archetype at all. This leaves one minority, the 1972-74 Liberal one to illustrate the supposed typical case.

- a. moderated or even reversed if an intervening other-level election puts another party in power,
- b. amplified if the other-level election puts the same party in power,
- c. and probably close to neutral if the other-level election maintains the same party in power

We begin by analyzing provincial-to-provincial swing, where we have only winners in the other arena. Table 3 represents the inter-election gap as a set of dummy variables, to allow any non-linearity to emerge naturally. Minority status appears as a main effect.¹⁹ All indications point to the dominance of a rise-and-decline process. First, the intercept is essentially zero, indicating no penalty for winning. Second, minority-government status has no discernible effect. Third, the gap in years has, after what appears to be an initial honeymoon, a roughly linear negative effect, averaging roughly 1.5 points per year. Over the typical federal parliament this yields a maximum drop of about 6 points from election year, nearly eight points from the honeymoon peak.

The swing data in Table 3 mask an increasing pattern of negativity over the “life cycle” of governments. Figure 3 divides this life cycle into three stages. The first and last Parliaments are mostly self-explanatory. The three that are both first and last (Conservatives, 1930-35 and 1979-80; Liberals, 1980-84) are classed as last Parliaments. The middle category is a mixed bag. Most of its instances are drawn from the periods of extended Liberal hegemony, 1935-57 and 1963-79.²⁰ Where a party survives into a second Parliament, its provincial counterparts typically do better at the end than at the beginning. The rot sets in somewhere in the middle years, such that the provincial decline begins before the last federal victory. In the last Parliament of a government’s life, the provincial share is some 10 points below the starting value, or about 5 points below the average ending value of all the middle Parliaments.²¹ In none of the phases is the pattern plausibly read as non-monotonic.

Further reinforcement of the rise-and-decline interpretation appears in Table 4. The first column of Table 4 indicates that at the ensuing federal election in the province a federal government party that wins the intervening provincial election does better than if it did not—and it doesn’t matter how far away that federal election is from the intervening

¹⁹ It would be tempting to interact minority status with the gap indicators, but this is impracticable. Of the 32 provincial elections conducted with a minority government in power only two took place in a minority’s third year and three in the fourth year. The basic background fact is that minorities do not usually last long. Indeed the only ones to last more than two years were Mackenzie King, 1921-26, and Pearson/Trudeau, 1963-68. The main effect should at least capture the possibility that provincial counterparts do better when the federal government is in a minority and so is checked already by the House.

²⁰ Only one Conservative government, under John Diefenbaker, had a middle Parliament, 1958-62. Consistency compels me class this as a middle Parliament, but in truth it bears all the signs of the last days. Provincial support for the Conservatives collapsed over this period, and the party’s 1962 minority victory (without a popular plurality) was merely a stay of execution. The 1925-6 House was classed in the middle, as the Liberal government retained power for most of it and the 1921-30 period is best seen as unitary. The 1974-79 House goes in the last category, as the Trudeau government’s temporary exile was the product of clear electoral defeat, and before December 1979 few doubted that this was the end of Pierre Trudeau’s career.

²¹ Observations tend to be sparsest in the year 0 and in years 4 and more (especially 5 and more), so end-point comparisons should not carry a huge weight.

provincial election. The next column separates the gap effect for provincial winners and losers, and the rather weak coefficients indicate only that winners have a tougher time the further away is the next federal election. The fact is that their advantage over a party that doesn't win the province is not cancelled out even after a four year wait until the next federal election.²²

The final test that can adjudicate between balancing and rise-and-fall asks whether and how provincial swing predicts federal swing. If there is any kind of balancing of federal votes on provincial ones, federal swing should be *negatively* related to provincial swing. Table 5 points in the opposite direction: provincial swing is a good predictor of federal swing, but the relationship is robustly positive. For every point of provincial swing, the federal party can expect two-thirds of a point of swing in the same direction. That result applies if the federal election is later the same year as the provincial. If the next provincial is, instead, right after the federal one and there are four years until the next federal election, then the positive swing is cancelled out. This is the indication of the interaction term.²³ If balancing were in effect, voters would want to temper the swing in favour of the provincial government by swinging against the federal party. Instead, the positive relationship lasts for the full term of most provincial governments; it only gets negative in the few cases when the gap between provincial and next federal is five years. In those cases it should be apparent to voters that the provincial government is desperately clinging to power, in which case sophisticated balancers should forecast the party's loss and *support* the federal party to offset its impending loss in the province. They do nothing of sort, of course.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Divergence between the federal and provincial elections is the Canadian norm. The overwhelming majority of provincial elections produce governments at partisan odds with the one in Ottawa. This is truer of Ontario and Quebec, the provinces most pivotal to federal elections than of smaller, more peripheral places. Most of the divergence seems to be a natural consequence of the division of powers in the federation. Even where federal and provincial patterns resemble each other, as with the Liberals, provincial outcomes differ more across provinces than federal outcomes do.²⁴ This difference is especially striking for the Conservative vote, however. When Conservative governments form, they often find no, or only a weak, counterpart carrying their name in several provinces. Most

²² The predicted values (and standard errors of the predictions), generated by the CLARIFY software (Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2003) on the basis of the estimates in the second column of table 6, are:

Federal	Winner of Prov	Loser of Prov	Difference
Elec Next Year	-2.68 (1.85)	-6.71 (1.23)	4.03 (2.29)
Elec in 4 years	-5.81 (2.34)	-6.19 (2.12)	.382 (3.10)

²³ Note that, although the estimation model in Table 5 is much more robust than that in Table 4, each tells a strikingly similar story about the passage of time. What ever the zero-gap effect or relationship, about one-fourth is snipped away each succeeding year, such that the impact has faded to zero roughly as the next election is typically called. We looked into putting victory and swing in the estimation together, but collinearity proved too strong.

²⁴ For a substantive interpretation of the specific pattern of divergence, see Johnston (1991).

federal/provincial discontinuities, in sum, are by-products of drift, of the divergence of agendas between arenas.

Once agenda-based discontinuities are cleared away, however, clear evidence remains for behaviour in one arena that is oriented to outcomes in the other. But the orientation is not one of balancing. Rather, the linkage reflects rise-and-decline: movement in one arena is shadowed by like movement in the other. Provincial elections track the rise of a new federal government and, by the same process, foreshadow its imminent collapse, whenever fate decrees it. Although Liberal governments, in particular, tend to be long-lived, when they approach the end of an extended time in power, their provincial allies begin to fall by the wayside. Similarly, victory in one arena does not immediately, or even eventually, impose a penalty on counterparts in the other. Rather victory in one arena produces positive swings at the other. Similarly, positive swings in one arena are reflected in positive swings in the other, and *vice versa*. Both these impacts fade, but positive effects remain visible for four years, the typical life of a Parliament.

Settling on rise-and-decline as the source of linkage begs the question of its cause. We imagine two possibilities, dissection of which requires individual-level data. The first involves parallel forces operating on both levels of government independently. This implies that parties of the same name occupy reasonably similar locations on relevant dimensions of political conflict, or pursue similar policies in domains where both governments are active.²⁵ As the electorate moves in a given direction or the parties of the same name are perceived to move in the same direction, support for the party changes accordingly (Mebane and Sekhon 2002). The second possibility is that voters use information about a party (particularly a government) from one level to update their judgements about that party at the other level (Stewart and Clarke 1998). This might be a rational and even effective way to economize on information costs, but it might just as well lead votes astray if, say, government policy and performance at one level is a poor indicator of the same party's likely policies and performance at the other level. A well-designed federal-provincial panel election study is the obvious, but as-yet unrealized, data source for such an inquiry.

This paper represents only an interim report, obviously. Only as we delved further and further into this dataset did we realise that it is radically incomplete. A more broadly symmetrical treatment of victories and losses and of the federal and provincial arenas and a more inclusive representation of parties will enable us to present the total system as a set of natural experiments. Limited as it is, however, the current analysis has clarified some relationships and has probably banished some myths.

²⁵ Variation in the strength of linkage across provinces should reflect variation in the congruence—nominal and ideological—of party systems.

APPENDIX: DATA SOURCES AND CODING DECISIONS

Provincial election data were collated from:

1. Compilations by Loren M. Simerl in Paul Fox, ed., *Politics: Canada* 1991 (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1982 and 1987, 5th and 6th editions) and by Paul Fox in Fox, ed., *Politics: Canada* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1991, 7th edition).
2. Reports of the Chief Electoral Officers for Alberta (1993), Saskatchewan (1995), New Brunswick (1991), and Prince Edward Island (1993).
3. The following provincial government web sites:

www.elections.bc.ca
www.elections.mb.ca
www.gov.pe.ca/election

4. The following current affairs and media web sites:

www.theglobeandmail.com/series/ontario/index.html
www.radio-canada.ca/elections
www.newbrunswick99.cbc.ca
www.novascotia99.cbc.ca
www.halifax.cbc.ca/election98
www.stjohns.cbc.ca
www.canoe.ca/CNEWSNewfoundlandElection/home.html
www.canoe.ca/CNEWSQuebecElection/home.html

The governing federal Liberals were deemed to have won the 1945 and 1949 British Columbia elections, even though the provincial government in each case was a Liberal-Conservative coalition. Liberals dominated the coalition, and it is hard to read either election as a repudiation of the federal party.

Where a minority government formed, the party forming it is deemed to have won so long as it stayed in power for most or all of the ensuing provincial parliament. If it met the legislature and fell with no consequent election, it was deemed to have lost. The Liberals are coded as winners of the 1998 Nova Scotia provincial election, for instance, for their minority government lasted a year and their fall produced the 1999 election, not a changeover inside the House. The 1985 Ontario Conservatives, conversely, who won a seat plurality, but lost the confidence of the House and were supplanted by a Liberal minority government, are deemed to have lost.

TABLE 1: ASPECTS OF FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL DIVERGENCE

	Win next?	Gap				<i>N</i>
	% Win	Mean	Median	Most Negative	Most Positive	
Canada	33.7	-7.6	-6.5	-70.6	32.0	229
<i>Government</i>						
Liberal	36.7	-5.0	-4.4	-37.9	32.0	154
Conservative	29.3	-13.0	-8.8	-70.6	20.9	75
<i>Region</i>						
Atlantic	46.5	-3.0	-2.1	-32.3	20.9	86
Quebec	25.0	-10.8	-8.2	-52.7	12.6	24
Ontario	16.0	-13.3	-12.2	-29.6	6.5	25
West	28.7	-9.5	-8.1	-70.6	32.0	94

**TABLE 2:
SWING IN PROVINCIAL-ELECTION SHARE AROUND FEDERAL ELECTIONS**

	Swing				<i>N</i>
	Mean	Median	Most Negative	Most Positive	
Canada	-2.8	-2.9	-50.9	34.0	228
<i>Government</i>					
Liberal	-1.8	-2.3	-30.5	34.0	153
Conservative	-4.9	-4.9	-50.9	34.0	75
<i>Region</i>					
Atlantic	-3.0	-2.9	-22.1	11.8	85
Quebec	-2.6	-3.1	-20.9	14.1	24
Ontario	-3.1	-2.3	-21.1	14.4	25
West	-2.6	-3.1	-50.9	34.0	94

TABLE 3: FACTORS IN PROVINCIAL SWING*N* = 228

	Coefficient	Standard Error
Gap in Years		
1	1.55	2.36
2	-0.93	2.32
3	-4.53	2.42
4	-4.43	2.60
5 or more	-6.22	3.04
Minority Govt	-0.26	1.84
Intercept	-0.88	2.03
R ² -adj		0.08
SEE		9.34

TABLE 4. FACTORS IN FEDERAL SWING ($N=222$)

	Main effects only	Interaction with time
Feds Win Province	2.776 (1.842)	5.247 (3.217)
Gap in Years	-0.347 (0.648)	0.162 (0.845)
Gap X Win	--	-1.234 (1.317)
Intercept	-5.911 (1.565)	-6.813 (1.838)
R ²	0.01	0.01

Standard errors in parentheses

TABLE 5 – THE COVARIANCE OF PROVINCIAL AND FEDERAL SWING ($N=221$)

	Coefficient	Standard Error
Provincial Swing	0.664	0.155
Gap to next federal election	-0.883	0.635
Swing X Gap	-0.167	0.067
Constant	-2.654	1.543
R ²		0.09

Figure 1. Division by Decade

A Outcomes

% different winner at next provincial election



B. Vote Differences

Vote gap within province between federal and next provincial election

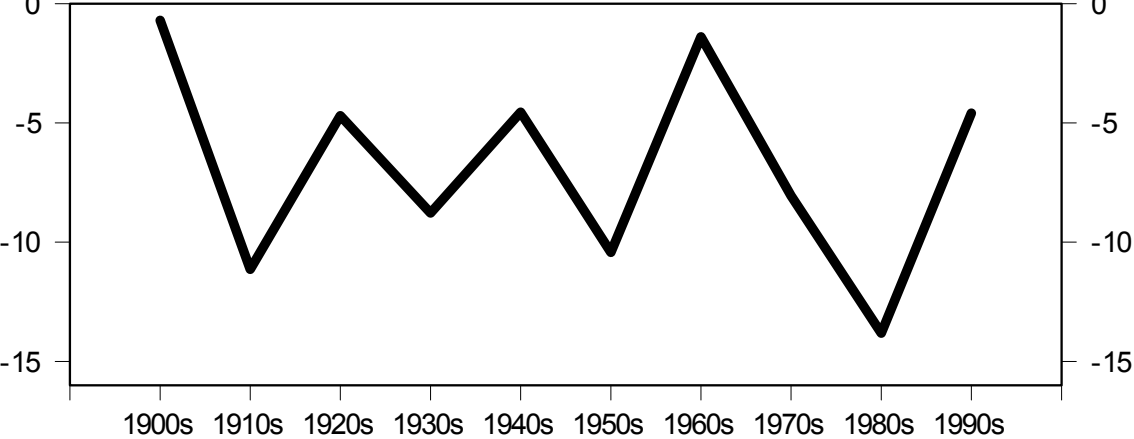


Figure 2. The Geography of Divergence

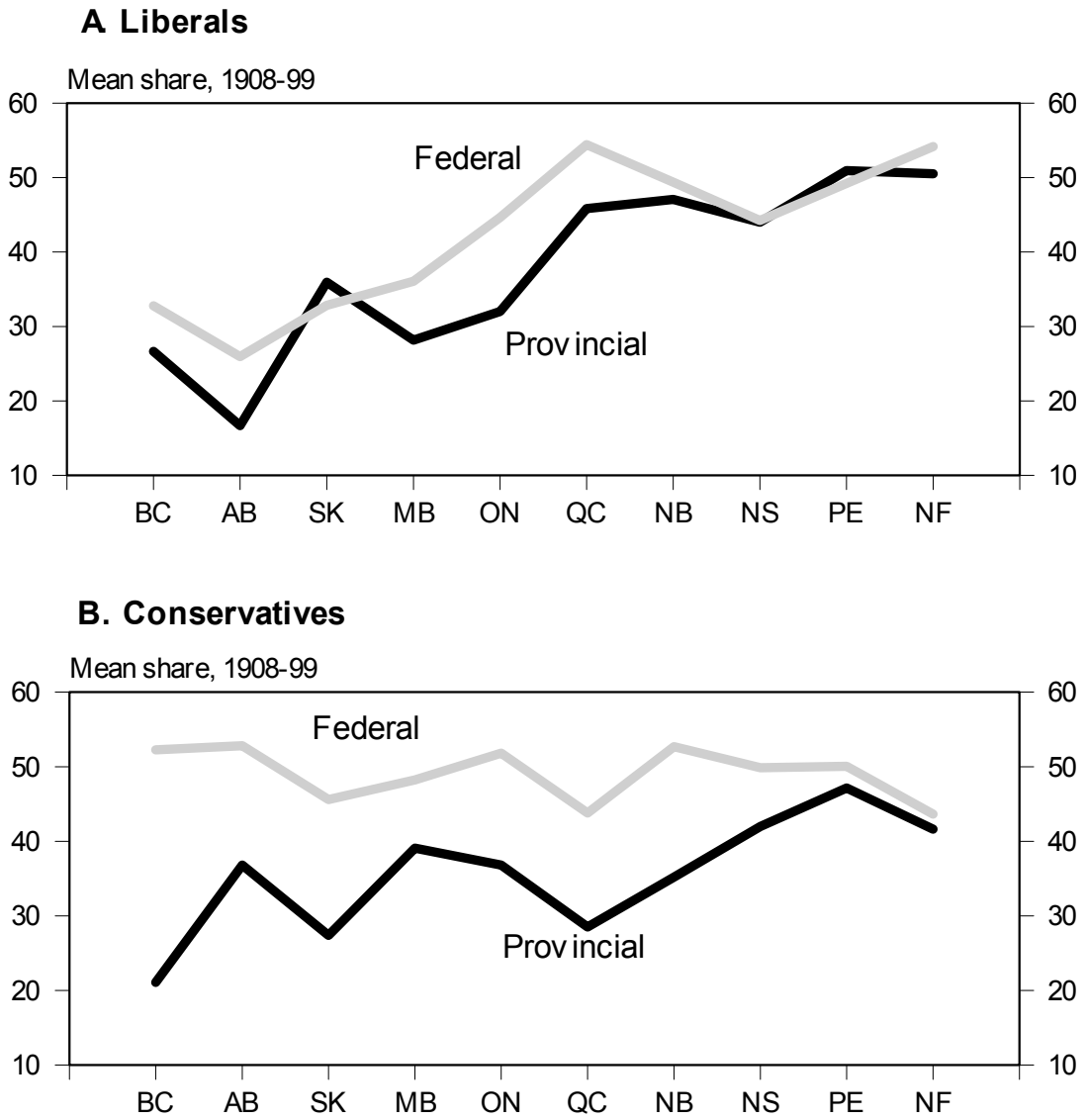
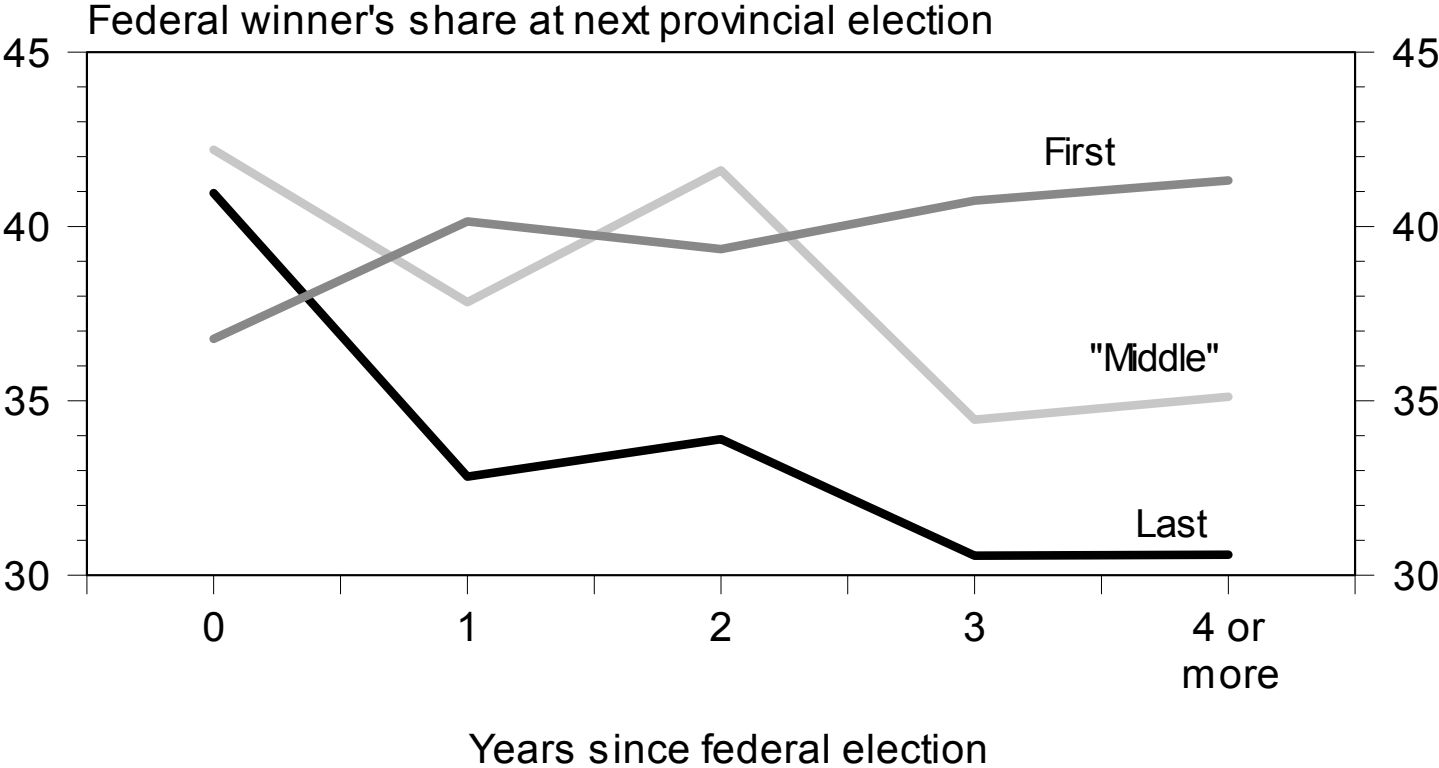


Figure 3. Provincial Vote by Stage in the Federal "Life Cycle"



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