

Challenging the Status Quo:
Lessons on Parties, Elections and Voting from the Great White North

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Abstract

Canadian scholars are often thought of as “takers” of theories, conducting research by applying theories developed elsewhere to the case of Canada. The argument presented in the following pages is that this process has led to a better, comparative understanding of the theories themselves due to the challenges, corrections and contradictions that the Canadian case provides for the original literature. In this paper I focus on Canadian contributions to two areas of research, elections and political behaviour. I argue that the lessons the Canadian case offers in these areas originate in the character of the Canadian party system, which has been greatly influenced by the regionalism that has characterized the country since it was created. Not only has Canada provided unique findings that enrich comparative studies of elections and political behaviour, but the realization of how Canada differs from other countries of study has also highlighted a prominent and important area of study (party politics and regionalism) for domestic scholars.

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The discipline of political science evolved slowly in Canada, at times lagging significantly behind its counterparts in Britain and the United States. This pace of development contributed to a situation where Canadian researchers were often “takers” of theories, choosing to use and apply ideas developed elsewhere instead of crafting new theories of their own. The country’s connection to Britain, the early reliance of universities on British-born and/or trained scholars, and the reverence with which European education was held, all factored into this. After WWI, Canadian academia began to branch out more and develop its own path, although the discipline remained very small (only 30 persons in 1950) (Cairns 1975, 196). As the discipline grew, it became more and more institutionalized in the manner of the American system, creating distance from Britain but establishing a continued interdependence, this time on a different nation’s academic community. The small size of the academic community meant that PhDs from other countries had to be hired in order to meet Canadian education demands – the Canadian graduate programs simply did not supply enough graduates.

This dependence on education and theories from elsewhere led Canadian academics, surveying the state of their discipline in the 1950s and 1960s, to the bleak conclusion that an Americanization of the discipline was occurring. Cairns (1975, 228), however, offers a more balanced analysis:

Students of Canadian politics would be impoverished if the rich literature produced by American political scientists did not exist. The possibility of employing tools of analysis developed by a larger academic community, and profiting from their prior testing by that community, are benefits too easily taken for granted. However, potential costs and dangers also exist, and they too are easily overlooked. It requires little imagination to visualize a pessimistic scenario in which inadequate attention is paid to the differences in the subject matter studied by originator and borrower, and in which students of Canadian politics participate in a continental division of labour in which they exhaust themselves

trying to apply the latest, ever-changing model, approach, or theory developed by the bulk of the world's political scientists who live in the United States.

His main concern was that the nuances of the Canadian experience could be lost or ignored if scholars concentrated too intently on “keeping up with the Joneses.” Taking theories and learning from established literatures is one thing, but “[a]ny attempt to “catch up” is therefore utopian, irrelevant to sensible research decisions, and fruitlessly demoralizing if pursued as an attainable objective.” (ibid, 224)

This paper demonstrates how the danger of minimizing the importance of Canadian content and research, as expressed by Cairns (and others), has not been realized. Canada is an established democracy, and as such has experiences that are worthy of study not only in comparison with the experiences of other established democracies, but also as models for other societies to learn from. The argument presented in the following pages is that the “taking” of theories by Canadian scholars has led to a better, comparative understanding of the theories themselves due to the challenges, corrections and contradictions that the Canadian case provides for the original literature.

In this paper, I discuss Canadian contributions to two areas of research: elections and political behaviour. I investigate how the application of established theories to the case of Canada has challenged aspects of the accepted wisdom. The lessons the Canadian case offers in these areas, I argue, originate in the character of the Canadian party system. In turn, the party system has been greatly influenced by the regionalism that has characterized the country since it was created – namely, the co-existence of two different cultures that divide along ethnic and religious lines, and significant regional differences. Thus, the observed differences in elections and political behaviour that offer comparative lessons for political science are rooted in the party system, and thus regionalism, of Canada. The danger of overlooking the contributions that

Canadian studies can bring to political science has not been realized. Not only has Canada provided unique findings that enrich comparative studies of elections and political behaviour, but the realization of how Canada differs from other countries of study has also highlighted a prominent and important area of study (party politics and regionalism) for domestic scholars.

Dualism, Regionalism, and the Canadian Political Party System

E.E. Schattschneider once observed, “modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of parties.” (Schattschneider 1942, 1) Similarly, when considering the contributions of studies of Canadian elections and political behaviour to the existing literature, the party system is a strong explanatory factor. In order to develop this argument, that the uniqueness of Canada’s political party system underlies the country’s contributions to the study of elections and political behaviour, it is first necessary to discuss the development of the various parties that constitute the system.

The party system that exists in Canada is particularly interesting because of how it has developed, and especially how all of the various parties have been influenced by some of the dominant characteristics of Canadian life – namely, dualism and regionalism. As Schwartz (1974, 547) notes, these characteristics cannot be overlooked: “Geographically, economically, and demographically, Canada is a set of separate units. Politics have brought the units together but have also kept them apart.”

While there is much discussion today of the three founding nations of Canada, and the overlooked importance of Aboriginal contributions to Canadian society, at the time of Confederation in 1867 the reality was that there were only two vocal groups that needed to be accommodated within the institutions of the new country. Despite being under British control

since the decisive victory at the Plains of Abraham in 1759, the French-speaking people of North America had been accommodated in many ways. The Quebec Act of 1774, for example, allowed the use of French civil law, the seigniorial system, and the practice of Roman Catholicism in the territory. After the American Revolution the territory was divided into Upper and Lower Canada to allow different governance for the French-speakers and English-speakers (whose numbers had recently been enlarged with loyalists). The effect of this was, as Dawson (1970, 9) notes, that “[b]y 1840, when the two provinces were again united, the half-century of segregation and self-government had done its work and French Canada was too firmly entrenched to be seriously threatened.” As one of the four founding provinces, Quebec was recognized in the British North America Act, 1867, with the protection of its civil law tradition (for civil law), the protection of French as a language of official documents, and the protection of Roman Catholic education.

The development of the party system after Confederation continued this pattern of integration, to the point that the two original parties, the Liberals and Conservatives, are often classified as brokerage parties because of the coalitions they attempt(ed) to broker in order to get or keep power (Bickerton, Gagnon and Smith 1999, 2). Containing approximately 34% of the population of the young country, the voters of Quebec could not be ignored. Politicians soon realized the importance of wooing various segments of the province, which John A. Macdonald accomplished early on with his brand of conservative Toryism that was attractive to the religious, conservative French Canadians. The Liberal Party was likewise able to attract Quebec support once it had a charismatic French leader (Laurier) and adopted policies similar to the Tory policies preferred in Quebec (Bickerton, Gagnon and Smith 1999, 26). This not only began the practice of brokerage, which was later continued with respect to other cleavages around the country, but also made the distinctions between these two parties minimal. Scarrow (1965, 76)

notes that “there is no “cause” to which either of the parties is pledged, and ...each party is potentially capable of recruiting to its side the successful vote-getting intermediary.”

Throughout the years, the support of Quebec continued to be important to winning power in Canada. In 2003, for example, the province held 24% of the population, and 75 seats,¹ making it possible for a party to form the government with the support of only Ontario and Quebec. Given the propensity of Quebec to give all of its seats to the same party,² political parties traditionally have had to contend with the demands of that province in order to realize a chance at governing. For example, in 1992 Clarke and Kornberg (1992, 53) counselled that the Progressive Conservatives would do well to find a way to gain francophone Quebec’s support in upcoming elections, as it was “a group and a region that has done much to decide the outcome of virtually every national election since Confederation.”

While the importance of Quebec has been a constant feature of Canadian politics, one must also consider the broader issue of regionalism and how this has impacted the development of other parties in the Canadian system. The concept of regions in Canada can be traced back to Confederation and the distribution of Senate seats by region (with Ontario and Quebec constituting single-member regions). With over 75% of the population at the time, central Canada quickly became the focus of the government. In many ways the accommodation afforded Quebec is just one aspect of the regionalism that characterizes Canada – not only because Quebec is considered a region, but also because reaction to Quebec as a privileged region within the country has contributed to the development of a strong regional identity for other provinces.

¹ Quebec is guaranteed to have at least 75 seats in the House of Commons, regardless of population decreases, by the grandfather clause of the Representation Act, 1985. This is another example of a guarantee that shows Quebec’s privileged place in Canadian politics.

² See Bakvis and Macpherson (1995) for a discussion of this tendency.

The 1993 election saw Quebec and the West support parties that moved away from traditional brokerage between the interests of English and French Canada toward a focus on regional priorities. While the Bloc Quebecois represented the first incarnation of Quebec-only regionalism, the Reform Party was simply the latest in a line of parties that had emerged from the West in response to perceived neglect by Ottawa. The Progressive Party formed out of farmers' desire for free trade in the 1920s, Social Credit emerged in 1935 from populist, socialist roots, and the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation was established in 1932 by socialist, labour and farm groups in Alberta. These early parties represented a mix of western regional sentiment and socialism, and were able to gain seats (although not control government) in the House of Commons. In 1961, the NDP was formed from the remnants of the CCF, and the party worked to establish itself throughout the nation, eventually muting the link between socialist leanings and the Canadian West. Thus, while the Reform and BQ parties did bring a strong element of regionalism to the party system in 1993, it was not the first time that regionalism had found its voice in the party system.

In summary, the Canadian political party system is one that contains traditional brokerage parties (without strong ideological leanings) and smaller, more ideological parties. Some of these parties are regionally concentrated; others contest elections across the country. The party system exemplifies the dualism and regionalism of the country because the accommodation of one province, reactions to this accommodation, the predominance of central Canada, and the primacy of regional interests, has shaped the party system that exists today.

Turning now to the main issue of this paper, how does the party system figure into the lessons the Canadian case provides for issues of elections and political behaviour? Put simply, parties are the entities that contest elections and sway voters; they campaign, cajole, and concoct

policy ideas, and woo voters. It is not possible to think of how elections are run, nor how citizens vote, without considering the main actors. The next sections of this paper will thus address the role of the party system in two areas of study: first, how Canadian elections provide insight into existing theories of elections, and second, how the political behaviour of Canadians raises questions about some of the findings commonly accepted in the United States.

Elections

Canada is not unique in terms of its electoral system or the fact that it has regular elections, as most democracies do. There is, however, one way in which Canadian elections are unique: the challenge they present to Duverger's Law. Developed by Maurice Duverger in 1946, the "law" is really a statement that "a majority vote on one ballot is conducive to a two-party system." (Duverger 1972, 27) According to Duverger, the tendency to a two-party system occurs because the electoral system (in Canada's case, the first-past-the-post system) privileges winning parties and severely punishes parties that come third (what he calls the mechanical effect). As Duverger puts it, "Elections determined by a majority vote on one ballot literally pulverize third parties (and would do worse to fourth or fifth parties, if there were any; but none exist for this very reason)." (ibid) In time, this translates into a disincentive for third parties to contest elections at all. Furthermore, voters are aware of this effect of the electoral system and tend to concentrate their votes on the two leading parties to avoid not contributing to the outcome. When absolute, this effect turns every contest into a two-way competition (what Duverger calls the psychological effect). Thus, for Duverger, the combined effect of the electoral system's punishment and abandonment by the voters leads to the creation of two-party competition in elections.

Canada is a challenge to Duverger's Law because its "majority vote on one ballot" electoral system (also known as plurality, or single member district, or first-past-the-post) has been able to sustain a party system with more than two parties for most of its existence.³ The small parties discussed in the previous section have all managed to make real contributions to the Canadian political scene, and today the NDP and BQ as stable entities in federal politics, enjoying significant support of the electorate. Rae (1971, 94) held that "[i]t must be conceded that the Canadian exception is a valid and important one, which necessitates modification of the proposition that plurality formulae cause two-party competition." This challenge has been handled by electoral system scholars in the most basic of ways – by establishing caveats that Duverger's Law holds *except* in certain situations.⁴

This limitation has been operationalized in many ways. Taagepera and Grofman (1985) and Taagepera and Shugart (1989) argue that the number of parties can be influenced by the number of issue dimensions in a country, which in the Canadian case could mean considering regionalism to be a divisive issue dimension. Rae (1971, 94) argues for the importance of geography, in that "the intense hostility between overlapping regional, cultural, and linguistic groups produced a strong base of support for locally strong minority parties." Riker (1982, 761) revises Duverger's law to say "except in countries where...third parties nationally are continually one of two parties locally." Palfrey (1989) also highlights the variation in the party systems at different levels, arguing that bipartisan competition at the provincial level creates strong regional parties that become minor parties at the national level. Kim and Ohn (1992) deal

³ Cairns (1968) argues that the electoral system in Canada has had a serious impact on the development of the party system. He implicates some of the same factors that Duverger highlighted, such as the over-rewarding of winning parties, as contributions to the regionalized focus of the political parties. In turn, he argues that this created a situation where parties focused only on areas in which they are likely to win, thus reducing the nationalizing effect of elections and parties.

⁴ Canada is not the only country that does not follow Duverger's Law. India is another notable, oft-cited example (Riker 1982). Rae (1971) highlights Austria as another exception.

with the Canadian exception to Duverger's Law by arguing that the mechanical effect on small parties may be affected by the geographical distribution of voters – that is, a concentration of support for a small party in an area can moderate Duverger's Law, and in turn have the effect, nationally, of increasing the number of parties. Contrary to some of this work, Gaines (1999) demonstrates that the data do not support the contention that Duverger's Law, or two-party competition, holds at the local or provincial level. Instead, he supports the idea that regionalism has an important impact on the party system and mitigates the impact of the electoral system's mechanical and psychological effects.

Regionalism's influence on the party system is a constant thread throughout all of the explanations for Canada's multiple parties. The distribution of voters, the importance of provincial-level politics, even the number of issue dimensions – all are related to the differences that exist between regions in Canada. Each of the hypotheses has some validity. There have been, historically, geographical bases to the support for various political parties, even the Liberals and Conservatives (Cairns 1968; Meisel 1973), although these bases have not been static. It is also true that provincial politics do often incorporate parties that do not exist at the federal level, and that those parties that do exist federally are not always competitive at the provincial level. Furthermore, the issues that are important to Canadians often have a regional flavour to them – for example, think of Western alienation and the way that the National Energy Policy was perceived in the West and in central Canada. Thus, focusing on regionalism summarizes all the other suggestions that have been made for why the party system exists as it does (and why elections do not work as they “should”) into one neat, encompassing package.

The role of regionalism also is prominent when one looks to studies of strategic voting in Canada in order to understand the Duvergerian exception. If the psychological effect discussed

by Duverger is accurate, large numbers of voters should cast strategic ballots. Blais (2002), investigating why there are not higher levels of strategic voting in Canada, points to the importance of two things. First, some minor party supporters hold very strong preferences for their preferred party, to the point that they are unwilling to consider voting for others. This is likely to be most true in areas where a party holds particular appeal or with persons who have strong convictions about the appropriateness of their preferred party. For example, the NDP may have survived because its supporters consider themselves to have strong socialist tendencies, which would not be adequately served by voting for the Liberals. This is a possibility not discussed by Duverger.

Second, many voters incorrectly estimate their preferred party's chances of winning. This is in line with Cox's (1997, 196) suggestion that the information available to voters about each party's chances of winning can be a significant factor in whether the Duvergerian effects are realized. The psychological effect requires voters to believe that they will waste their votes by casting a ballot for a party that cannot win, but miscommunication between estimates of party performance and the voters is possible. This could happen if voters live in areas of strong support for the party and choose to ignore more national polls. Alternately, it could be that Canadians are simply more optimistic about their preferred party's chances of winning. That strategic voting is somehow hindered in Canada means that the push factors toward a two-party system are not working as they might be in other systems.

Whatever the complete answer is as to why Canada has a multiparty system, it is clear that the regionalism that is ever-present in Canadian politics, and which has led to the creation of numerous third parties, is at the root of one of the lessons studies of Canada has provided for the political science literature. Two-party competition is not the norm at the local level, which

would enable Duverger's Law to stand with only a mild level-of-analysis correction. Parties vary in strength by region, and thus regional political competition varies greatly. A party that is capable of winning enough seats to be a vocal addition to Parliament is unlikely to be discouraged by the electoral system or abandoned by key supporters, *especially* if that party represents region-specific concerns. Thus, the Canadian case provides some insight into one of the most basic "laws" in political science, and demonstrates the role that comparative research has in determining the generalizability of scholarship.

Canadian Behaviour

In terms of political behaviour, studies of the Canadian situation have provided challenges to literature first established elsewhere on a number of fronts. Some of the most prominent challenges to the appropriateness of voting models have come from the nature of Canadian society, partisan identification in the country, and the role of these two factors in vote decisions. Each of these challenges can be traced, at least in part, to the conduct of political parties. In turn, regionalism is implicated, for Bashevkin (1985, 5) notes that from the early stages of studies of Canadian political behaviour "regional differences held much promise for explaining variations in electoral choice, political trust, efficacy, and other variables." This section will examine two specific challenges, to the Columbia and Michigan models of voter behaviour.

The Challenge of Social Class Consciousness

How do voters determine who they will vote for? Studies conducted primarily in the United States have developed a number of theories over the years, one of the earliest of which is

the sociological, or Columbia, model, named after the university at which it originated. This model, developed by Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, Hazel Gaudet, and William McPhee, focuses on the affiliation of various social groups with particular political parties (Lazarsfeld et al. 1948, Berelson et al. 1954). In the Columbia model, there is a “right” way for a person to vote, based on social group membership. If someone belongs to a particular religious denomination, lives in a rural neighbourhood, or has a certain economic status, then his/her vote choice is clear. However, as Kanji and Archer (2002, 162) note, for this to happen persons with more than one group affiliation (which almost everyone has) “must first sort through the opposing cross-pressures and decide which of their particular group affiliations are the most important. This process is likely to make the task of voting more difficult, as well as more time-consuming.”

This model has come under fire for many reasons, one of which arises (in part) from its application to the Canadian case. Researchers discovered that the model did not fit well with the Canadian reality. Alford (1964), for example, noted an absence of collective group experiences in Canada that precluded the model from having any real predictive power. He wrote, “Class voting is low in Canada because the political parties are identified as representatives of regional, religious, and ethnic groupings rather than as representatives of national class interests.” (Alford 1964, 251) Regenstreif (1965, 98) echoes this finding, noting that “[a]ll the evidence points to the fact that, for Canada as a whole, there is little in the way of long-term status-party linkage.” Furthermore, Clarke et al. (1996, 94) explain: “Although social class divisions constitute one of the major fault lines in party systems in many Western countries, Canada is an exception. Surveys conducted since the mid-1960s show that relationships typically are quite weak between indicators of social class such as education, income, and occupations, on the one hand, and

voting behaviour, on the other.” Some group affiliations, specifically ethnoreligious and regional, can be significant vote predictors in Canada, but socio-economic status and class (two characteristics which should be significant, according to the model) really do not apply consistently to the Canadian voter (Meisel 1973).

Particularly interesting is how this discrepancy between the Canadian case and the American case, for which the Columbia model was built, has been dealt with. One of the most prominent explanations offered focuses on the role of political parties in mobilizing class cleavages. Meisel (1973) and Schwartz (1975) both argue that the model’s applicability to Canada is weak because Canadian parties are not class-based. In fact, Meisel finds that the parties vary in their appeal to occupational and subjective class groups *by province*, thereby leading to a situation of varied support for the entire party. Only some small parties, such as the NDP, are able to boast any type of consistent class appeal. The major parties, the Liberals and Progressive Conservatives, do/did not provide distinct alternatives for voters and therefore cannot count on attracting specific groups of support. This, of course, can be related to the brokerage nature of the two parties; taking strong stances risks alienation, and thus attempting to be “all things to all voters” is a wise strategy.

Another oft-cited explanation for the lack of class voting in Canada is that Canadians do not think in terms of left-right ideologies. Clarke et al. (2005), for example, note that only 31% of respondents to their Political Support in Canada project said they use “left” and “right” labels when thinking about politics. Trying to use a vote model that relies on class consciousness, then, is destined to have little predictive power in Canada. This suggests an important contextual constraint on the Columbia model – only in a certain type of society can a group-based model of voting be appropriate. Only when voters are not only aware of their group affiliations but also

able to see a link between those affiliations and the political party choices being offered can the Columbia model be applied successfully. In the case of Canada, this prerequisite framework does not exist due to the natures of the major political parties, which are themselves influenced by the regional nature of the electorate.

Partisanship and Loyalty

Another area of challenge presented by Canadian studies of political behaviour arises out of the concept of partisan identification. Partisan identification is a hotly contested concept in Canadian politics.⁵ Partisanship is often assumed to be (at least in the American literature) a long-standing, strong loyalty to a party that culminates in consistent voting for that party during elections – the “unmoved mover” in vote choice. First developed by researchers at the University of Michigan (Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller and Donald E. Stokes), the concept holds that when one identifies with a political party, for whatever reason, that identity then directs how that person’s votes are cast and “...identification with political parties, once established, is an attachment which is not easily changed.” (Campbell et al. 1960, 149) However, if voters do not feel affiliated with any party, then partisanship cannot have this effect on vote choice.

Campbell et al. developed a model that prioritized three factors for vote choice – partisanship, issues, and political candidates – after noting that social group characteristics alone could not explain short-run turnover in government. Only by taking into account all three factors, they argued, could one properly understand the development of vote choice, in which “[t]he role of party identification seems [primarily to be that of an antecedent factor that colors these attitudes as they are formed.”(ibid, 137) This is a realistic improvement over the Columbia

⁵ Studies in Britain have also found differences with the American literature. See Butler and Stokes 1969.

model in that it allows for shorter term influences to play a role in swaying voter preferences. The Canadian case challenges the usefulness of this model, however, because the model relies on partisan attachments having specific characteristics. Early researchers found that Canadian partisans were neither as numerous nor as committed as American partisans (Regenstreif 1965, Meisel 1973). This view was challenged by Sniderman et al. (1974), who, using the same data as Meisel, found that many Canadian partisans maintained stable party loyalties. Despite this dissenting opinion⁶, it was generally agreed by researchers that Canadian partisanship is certainly different than its American counterpart, and thus its role in vote choice may also be very different than the Michigan model assumes.⁷

In light of the challenge of integrating a different kind of partisanship into vote models, Clarke et al. (1979, 1996) developed a way of taking the uniqueness of Canadian partisanship into account when applying a basic Michigan model of voting behaviour. Their solution was to consider “flexible” and “durable” partisans differently in terms of how issues and candidates figure into their vote calculations. They write:

...one would not anticipate that these issue and leader effects would be distributed equally across the electorate. Rather, they should be concentrated among persons with flexible partisan ties. Some of these flexible partisans will react primarily to the issues stressed by the parties and the mass media in a particular election campaign, whereas others will be affected more strongly by perceptions of party leaders. Voters with durable partisan ties, in contrast, should be more resistant to the impact of short-term forces, and thus less likely to switch their votes across successive elections. (Clarke et al. 1996, 98)

This corrective to the role of partisan identification in voting behaviour is a challenge to the accepted literature, but also an enrichment. Understanding that partisan identification cannot be assumed – that party identification may be different in different contexts – gives greater travelling capacity to the vote model. Furthermore, this adjustment to the concept of partisan

⁶ There were a few scholars who agreed with Sniderman et al., such as Jacek 1975.

⁷ For a critique of Sniderman et al, see Jenson 1975.

identification gives insight into why Canadian elections often seem to be contests about specific short term issues and considerations.⁸

Naturally, researchers have attempted to discern why the difference in partisanship exists. Two main answers have been proposed, both of which have merit. The first is that the nature of federalism in Canada is such that voters are often called upon to choose from different menus of parties at the provincial and federal level. For example, the main parties in the recent B.C. election were the Liberals and the NDP, while federally the province elects Conservative, Liberal, and NDP candidates. Because party choices are not reinforced at both levels, Canadians can establish what has been called “dual partisanship” (Clarke and Stewart 1987; Stewart and Clarke 1998; Uslander 1990). Thus, the federal and provincial party systems, influenced by region, can be implicated in the weakness of partisan identification.

The second explanation has similar roots. Jenson (1976) argues that partisanship in Canada is unstable because party labels cannot act as cues for voting behaviour. Downs (1957) was the first to argue that one of the functions of political parties is to provide a “brand name” that can act as a cue for partisans. In Canada, the brokerage nature of the major political parties has meant that party labels are not stable cues. Not being stable, they cannot encourage partisan identification or loyalty. Jenson (1976, 48) explains, “The [partisan] attachment seems to be maintained as long as it is useful, and once that usefulness ceases to exist, the identification is likely to be abandoned and another to be adopted. The new one in turn may well be regarded with some tentativeness as a cue to action.” This explanation is further supported by the findings of Merolla et al. (2005) regarding the usefulness of Canadian party cues.

⁸ Archer (1987) also supports the importance of short-term considerations. He developed a two-stage model of Canadian vote choice that considers the three Michigan factors (partisan identification, issues, and candidates) to be endogenously created. With his model, he finds that attitudes are more important vote determinants than sociodemographic factors, and that “short-term attitudinal variables, such as issue positions and leader evaluations, affect voter behaviour directly, and also indirectly through their effect on party identification.” (Archer 1987, 571)

Why are Canadian parties unable to perform the cue function, so frequently observed in the United States? Returning to Jenson, she argues that “the instability of partisan identification observed in the Canadian data is accounted for by the instability of the party system as, in a multi-party system, manoeuvring for electoral advantage by the parties occurs.”(ibid) The parties in Canada simply do not provide the same ideological guidance as the parties in the United States do, as in many cases the parties themselves shy away from statements of ideology in order to facilitate their appeal to the greatest number of voters. If Canada was not so divided, it is possible that the electorate would be able to rely on parties to take clearer stances in order to capitalize on the value of a consistent, brand name reputation (Downs 1957). Once again, the party system in Canada developed as it was out of the challenges of the dualism and regionalism of the electorate, is at the root of this explanation for the flexibility of partisan identification in Canada, and provides a comparative contribution to political science literature.

Conclusion

The “taking” of theories from elsewhere for application to the study of Canadian political science may seem like a short-cut or “easy” way of establishing a discipline and literature. What the paper has argued, however, is that this process has yielded important insights and challenges into theories that might not otherwise have been found. Theories that are not generalizable or applicable to other contexts should raise red flags for researchers – what is it about the theories that makes them so limited? By transferring theories outside of their original contexts, the entire field of political science can benefit from a better understanding of the assumptions and prerequisites of the models.

Because of research investigating the case of Canada, much has been learned about the stability of Duverger's Law and theories of political behaviour. Canada sustains a multi-party system that stands in opposition to Duvergerian expectations. Canadian voters also act differently than might be expected – class characteristics are less important and partisanship is more flexible, leading to differences in voter calculations. These findings enrich the original theories by refining them, but they also point to a key feature of Canadian politics that should not be overlooked – namely, the influence of regionalism on the party system. In discussing the explanations offered by various scholars for these divergent, uniquely “Canadian” findings, a recurrent theme is that the nature of Canadian political parties is an underlying factor. That nature has been developed, since Confederation, out of the need for politicians and parties to recognize and deal with the demands of different regions across the country. What started out as dualism has grown into a multidimensional national situation – voters in the regions (in some cases provinces) across the country need to be courted in different ways by political parties. This means that Canadian parties cannot be understood merely in terms of the functions they perform in elections and legislatures (Aldrich 1995). Instead, Canadian parties need also to be examined in terms of how they contribute to the regionalism of the country. Thus, the importation of theories has been beneficial both for the larger political science community, in pointing out key areas of research that need to be addressed in order to progress toward a better understanding of elections and political behaviour, and also for the domestic Canadian community. As Schwartz (1974, 607) summarized, “Comparative studies using Canada can be approached as a way of better describing and more completely understanding the nature of Canadian society itself.”

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