

# **Electoral Volatility and Political Party Organization in Canada and Australia**

Anthony M. Sayers  
University of Calgary  
[asayers@ucalgary.ca](mailto:asayers@ucalgary.ca)

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## INTRODUCTION

In many respects, the Canadian and Australian political systems are similar. Each marries a Westminster-derived parliamentary system with federalism. Each has political traditions, processes and institutions traceable to their common experience of British colonialism. Both are democracies in which elections are an open contest fought between organised political parties (Alexander and Galligan 1992: 4-5). Yet despite this, their political parties exhibit a number of distinctive characteristics.

For instance, Canadian parties generally select leaders using member conventions or a ballot of the full membership. While this method has been used in Australia, major parties in continue to rely on members of caucus – elected politicians – to select a leader, the method abandoned by Canadian parties in the early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. In Australia, the selection of candidates and prosecution of campaigns is centralized in powerful state and national organizations. Canadian parties give local associations control over the selection of candidates and a good deal of latitude to decide how constituency campaigns are organized.

A detailed ecological comparison of campaign techniques used by political parties in each country makes clear their distinctive organizational character. This investigation suggests that the structure of Canadian parties is consistent with their characterization as behaving much like commercial franchises, with local and components of national party running campaigns as semi-autonomous organizations working within broad ‘branding’ guidelines (Carty, 2004). For their part, Australian parties use a hierarchical arrangement, with a dominant non-local organization directing local campaigns.

The proposed explanation for the adoption of distinctive organizational responses to campaigning has two parts. The most proximate cause of these differences is the set of electoral laws and institutions facing the parties. But as well, it appears that the organizational character of the parties is a response to a sharp difference in what is labelled *the gradient of integration* confronting parties in each country. This refers to the degree of difficulty or strains placed on parties as they attempt to articulate and aggregate political demands emanating from society and coordinate their transmission to central state institutions. The steepness of this gradient reflects two factors: On one side, the diversity of demands thrown up by society; on the other, the degree of coordination of these demands required by central political institutions.

In essence, Canadian parties face a diverse society – heavily regionalized and ethno-linguistically divided – yet highly majoritarian political institutions; the former places heavy demands on the parties’ capacity to aggregate and articulate interests, while the latter requires them to present a highly coordinated front to parliament. Australian parties face a less diverse society, and more consensual

political institutions, with lower levels of demand on their capacity for articulation and aggregation of interests and less pressure to present a single front in parliament. Compared with their Australian counterparts, Canadian parties face a steeper gradient of integration.

The result is political parties that are distinctive because they have responded to very different social and institutional imperatives. Canadian parties have developed a franchise style of organization, where riding associations are linked to a central organization that provide branding services, but remain largely free in selecting candidates and adapting party messages to local circumstances. For their part, Australian parties are more easily able to link local, regional and national imperatives to create both more connected and coherent electoral campaigns. They continue to function with a branch structure, reminiscent of mass parties, but without many of the sociological underpinnings and mass membership associated with this style of party. That is, the mass party structure is a remnant of an earlier period, but has persisted in part because it continues to meet the organizational challenges associated with electioneering.

#### **AN ECOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF PARTY ORGANIZATION**

In both Canada and Australia, the dominant form of analysis of political parties is preoccupied with national patterns. Most have focused upon the leader-centred, television-orientated campaigns conducted by central party organizations, not on the efforts of party workers to win votes at the local level. This trend has encouraged the view that "while individual skirmishes go on in the constituencies, the major election battle is waged on a national front by the leaders of the contending parties" (White, Wagenberg and Nelson 1977: 96). Equally Australian political scientists have mostly opted to emphasise the campaign conducted by leaders and the central party organizations (Bennett 1992: 193; Hughes 1992).

While Australia lacks the pronounced regional variations and the linguistic divide that marks Canadian political life, campaign dynamics vary across states, regions and constituencies (see Bean et al. 1999). It can be argued that Canadian federal elections consist of contests fought in 308 ridings or constituencies, while Australian federal elections are fought in 148 diverse lower house seats.<sup>1</sup> This diversity leaves open the possibility that what little we know about campaigning in the trenches has been skewed by those few detailed studies that have examined by-elections or other atypical local contests (Hughes 1992:96). It also suggests our failure to study constituency contests is a limiting factor on our capacity to understand the dynamics of elections and the nature of politics.

As Blumler and Gurevitch argue (1995:76) comparative analysis serves as "an effective antidote to unwitting parochialism," helping us better understand our own political systems by setting its "characteristic features against those of others". An examination of variations in local campaign activities brings into sharper focus differences between the Canadian and Australian party systems by

rendering the “invisible visible” (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995:76). Taking these as a starting point, we can analyze the imperatives and constraints built into political communication at election time “which, though influential, may be taken for granted and difficult to detect when the focus is only on one national case” ( Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995:76).

The central focuses of this comparison are the Conservative Party of Canada (PCC) that resulted from the merger of the Canadian Alliance and the Progressive Conservative Party in 2004 and the Liberal Party of Australia (LPA). These two parties invite comparison. Each is or includes elements of a long-established conservative party with a nation-wide presence. The LPA has been in Australia since its formation in 1944, while the CPC now forms a minority government in Ottawa. The analysis makes use of party manuals from the old Progressive Conservative Party, interviews with current officials of the Conservative Party and election manuals prepared by the federal secretariat of the LPA.

### **SELECTING CANDIDATES**

The major Australian parties have mass party organisational structures (if not the large scale memberships to match). That is, their organisational base comprises numerous neighbourhood branches. There may be a dozen or more in a single constituency, each with a small but stable number of members. The ALP had an Australia wide membership of around 50,000 and an average of around 350 members in each electorate from which to draw campaign workers.<sup>ii</sup> Membership of the ALP and LPA does not fluctuate markedly with the electoral cycle (as happens in cadre parties).

The CPC and the Liberal Party of Canada (LPC) are cadre-style parties built from local associations each spanning an entire riding. As Carty (1991: 36) has shown, participation in the riding associations of the two Canadian cadre parties is volatile. The number of members rises sharply in election years and then quickly falls away. Local riding associations serve little electoral purpose between elections. But as a poll approaches the associations of both established parties conduct nomination meetings to select a candidate. Associations retain control of the nomination process and remain beyond the direct reach of the central party. A measure of party size is therefore problematic as it varies greatly across the electoral cycle (Cross and Young, 2004).

Table One displays a comparison of the locus of control for a range of party functions. Beginning with the process for selecting candidates to represent the parties in local constituencies highlights many of the differences between political parties in the two countries. Riding, not central party rules and conventions govern the selection of candidates. It is an open, relatively democratic process. Since the nomination goes to the candidate who can enrol and organise the largest number of party members, this process encourages candidates to nourish a personal organisational base within the local party association (Carty 1991: 205).

### **Table One about here**

Typically in Canada, all the members of a local association are entitled to vote at the nomination meeting, and, sensibly, candidates wishing to maximise their chances of winning party endorsement work to recruit large numbers of supporters as party members. The drama of an approaching election may attract others. Often successful candidates may join either of the major parties CPC or the LPC only weeks or months before nomination, and win by signing up enough new members (often personal acquaintances) to command a majority at the nomination convention. As a result, campaign teams constructed by candidates often comprise of volunteers who have an allegiance to the candidate, as well as those who are staunch party supporters. In turn, this encourages (in contrast to Australian experience) a more personal and more local flavour to fund-raising and campaigning (Carty 1991: 203).

Local campaigns of this kind which are at least partly driven by new-comers with an allegiance to the candidate rather than the party are likely to be suspicious of central party interference. In practice, not all party members are willing campaign workers (see Carty 1991: 168). But it seems that during an election Canadian parties are able to draw campaign workers from a larger pool of party members than the Australian parties have available. IN 1988 CPC riding associations' averaged 1,062 members, although the median of 600 suggests a few far larger associations inflate this figure (Carty 1991: 37).

Local autonomy of this sort stands in stark contrast to the centralised approach to party activity in Australian parties. The formal rules governing preselection in Australia are complex. In both the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and the Liberal Party of Australia (LPA) different procedures are used to endorse candidates from State to State. However, neither Australian party entirely entrusts the selection of candidates to its grassroots members in the manner that their Canadian counterparts do.

The preselection processes of the LPA tend "to be more decentralised than those of the Labor Party" and it does allow local members some say in the selection of candidates. Nonetheless in most States the LPA has rejected forms of rank-and-file endorsement as encouraging "branchstacking" and parochialism, leaving the central organisation of each State Division with a major hand in deciding who may campaign under the LPA banner (Jaensch 1993: 125-6). Similarly it is the central party machines rather than the rank-and-file members in the constituencies who effectively control the preselection of ALP candidates.<sup>iii</sup>

## LOCAL CAMPAIGN ORGANIZATIONS

Local party organisations in Canadian and Australian parties appear to play different roles at election time. As Dyck (1993: 243) notes, an effective riding-level campaign in Canada "requires a veritable army of volunteers and an elaborate hierarchical organisation". Given the importance of local canvassing, it is not surprising that constituency campaign organisations are more elaborate in Canada.

In Australia local parties rarely canvass electorates with the thoroughness of their Canadian counterparts, the exception being marginal seats (Sayers 1997, 133) as discussed below. The Australian Electoral Commission supplies candidates and hence their parties with up-to-date computerised lists of voters from its permanent rolls. This enables the construction of the databases that are used to contact voters by mail or telephone. Australian campaigners do canvass in order to "cleanse" the rolls by identifying names of voters who should not be listed (because they have moved away, died, or been fraudulently enrolled). But this is usually not considered a vital task given the thoroughness of the Australian Electoral Commission's own housekeeping.

The purpose of canvassing in Australian election campaigns merely is to identify the partisan loyalties of and issues of concern to, residents in order to target effectively the subsequent delivery of direct mail and other election propaganda. Some individual candidates do prefer the 'walk and talk' politics. However where it does occur canvassing or 'door knocking' is often spread over a period of many months and commenced well before the issue of election writs. The lower priority given to canvassing in Australian campaigns has less to do with the maintenance of permanent electoral rolls than with a further feature of the Australian electoral system, compulsory voting.

Since 1921 voting has been compulsory in Australian federal elections, whereas in Canada, it is voluntary. The Australian system of compulsory voting alleviates the need to "pull" the vote on election day. Local campaigners in Canada must identify supporters and ensure that they turn-out on election day (which in Canada is always a Monday, not a Saturday as in Australia), and if possible, deter those voters who support opposing candidates from casting a vote. In this campaign environment, contacting voters individually has an additional significance. Witness Dyck's (1993: 242) characterisation of the canvass organiser as second only to the campaign manager in importance. Furthermore, Canadian electoral laws proscribe political advertising in the broadcast and print media for the first eighteen (and last two) days of the formal campaign period.

No such provision is found in Australia's *Electoral Act*. Providing that they can afford to do so, candidates in Australian elections are free to place (properly authorised) ads in the local media when

they choose. The only restriction is a broadcast media black-out, which takes effect 48 hours before polling day. In Canada, lawn signs provide a means for communicating with voters during the first days of an election campaign when election advertising is not permitted.

Compulsory voting excuses Australian parties from conducting campaigns to persuade voters to participate. There are other legal provisions that also make different demands on Australian and Canadian local party organisations. The Australian *Electoral Act* (since voting is compulsory) permits voters unable to attend a booth on polling day to cast a pre-poll (or "postal") ballot. The numbers of voters who take up this option obliges Australian parties to organise to assist their supporters who wish to lodge a pre-poll ballot, and to ensure that all applicants for "postal" votes are mailed their "how-to-vote" cards. These services must be made readily available in hospitals, aged homes and other places in electorates where extensive pre-poll voting is likely to occur. This task falls to the local campaign team (because the Returning Officer in each seat supervises pre-poll voting). But given its importance, it is always conducted under the tutelage and watchful eye of the central party.

In contrast Canadian electoral laws provide for both advance polling and proxy voting. This obliges Canadian parties to pursue a different strategy for maximising their vote. Campaigners must plan to ensure all "supporters who expect to be absent on election day vote at Advance Polls" prior to polling day itself (PC 1988: 124). Since Canadians who are unable to attend either advance or election day polls in the riding in which they are registered are entitled to vote by proxy, and since these might number as many as 10,000 voters in some ridings, local campaign teams must develop a plan to encourage party workers to systematically identify and obtain potential proxy votes. Again this requires effective canvassing.

These differences are reflected in the parties' suggested campaign organizations. Both parties prescribe a constituency organisation headed by a campaign manager whom the LPA manual describes as "the key person of the local organisation" who must be "responsible for the oversight and co-ordination of every aspect of the campaign". The LPA counsels that the campaign manager should be assisted by a team of between 5 and 10 including an intelligence coordinator responsible for "good, accurate research"; a polling day manager to oversee the organisation of election day activities; a campaign treasurer "responsible for the campaign budget and fund-raising"; and an operations manager to do "the nuts and bolts stuff". The LPA campaign manual also suggests that, where possible and appropriate, committee members should gather helper groups or delegate responsibility to individuals for activities such as fund-raising, postal or pre-poll voting, direct mail, signs and posters, tele-marketing and canvassing and community and party liaison (LPA 1988: 1.4).

The CPC campaign manual prescribes a much larger hierarchical organisation and a more elaborate

division of labour (PC 1988: 123). It is noteworthy that it uses the term "committee rooms" as a synonym for "campaign headquarters". For it envisages that a riding campaign organisation will comprise more than a dozen committees of indeterminate size, each with responsibility for a particular aspect of campaign such as canvassing voters, operating a telephone centre, planting lawn signs, researching policy issues, liaising with multicultural groups, organising the candidate's schedule, preparing advertising, dealing with the media, and, of course, planning for the election day itself. If followed, the recipe given in CPC manual would see Tory riding campaign teams twice as large as prescribed by the LPA. Given their size and complexity, local party organisations in Canada appear to play a more central role in prosecuting election campaigns than their Australian counterparts, where the central party has usurped some of this role and where the scale of local campaigns is often smaller.

### **CAMPAIGNING**

One little-remarked feature of Canadian elections is the numbers of lawn signs that blossom in front yards in suburbs and towns. Political posters may have disappeared from Canadian politics (Taras 1990, 198), but candidates often print several thousand lawn signs boasting their name, party affiliation, and a simple slogan. In some ridings parties even keep maps of who took their lawn signs last time but have taken another candidate's sign this time, so that a canvasser can visit and find out why this is so (Howard 1993: A3). Organised teams of campaign workers plant their candidate's signs around the riding, and then patrol and protect them from overly zealous foes who may be undeterred by that section of the *Canada Elections Act* which makes it an offence to remove, cover or deface an election sign without authority. In marked contrast lawn signs are far less visible in Australian federal elections. In many areas they are not normally used.

It is not that would-be Australian politicians are modest or publicity shy. They commonly do produce laminated posters with larger-than-life portraits of themselves. (Canadian lawn signs seldom feature photos of candidates.) But these posters will have a limited circulation. They are most likely to be seen in campaign offices, or being waved by supporters at political rallies and other campaign events in the hope of catching a fleeting snatch of television news time. In hotly contested constituencies a few hundred--not thousands--of posters may be fixed in shop windows or along busy roadways. This latter practice is more common in some States than others (perhaps because individual State and municipal laws about the display of political posters vary). But generally Australian candidates do not feel compelled to visibly stake out their turf, as do their Canadian counterparts.

Lawn signs also reflect the centrality of candidates to local campaign strategies in Canada. Candidates often direct the formation of the campaign team (relying on friends and acquaintances as well as party stalwarts) and shape strategies. Focusing on the candidates seems natural to his or her local supporters, and lawn signs are ideal for this. As well, local campaigns use signs to stake out territory and boost the morale of campaign workers. As a Tory campaign manager with experience in



some 70 campaigns observes: "If you can get 10 or 12 houses in a row with signs up, the other guys don't like the street" (Makin 1993: A6).

Given the importance of the candidate and of local canvassing, lawn signs play a more than symbolic role in Canadian elections. Campaign teams measure their success by how many signs they erect compared with their opponents, how much of the riding they cover, and who has secured the most favourable sites. Signs may even deter supporters of opponents from voting (given it is voluntary) if they become convinced that their candidate has already "lost." In Australia, where the selection of candidates and the creation of campaign team are not locally controlled, the candidate is not as important (Jaensch 1981), and does not warrant such attention.

On the surface it may simply appear that Australian and Canadian political parties have fallen into the habit of campaigning in different fashions. Habit is important, and grassroots campaigning that relies on the same core of volunteers is something of a ritual. Many Canadian canvassing practices date from the mid nineteenth century (Wearing 1990: 111), while Hughes (1992:92) has observed that Australian volunteers cling to the old campaign methods they know and believe to work. However, habitual local campaign practices also reflect the formal rules that govern elections.

#### **THE LOCAL-NATIONAL BALANCE**

Historically, local party organizations in Canada have been much more powerful with respect to their national headquarters than have their Australian cousins. Nevertheless, there is evidence, particularly within the CPC, but also in the LPC, that a range of new technologies are reshaping the relationship between the local and national parties.

The biggest single change in electioneering in recent decades in both Canada and Australia has been the rise of the national campaign. In the age of television, elections have been largely turned into jousts for favourable media coverage fought between the party leaders reading from scripts prepared by media advisers and pollsters in the employ of the national party organisations (for Canada, see Fletcher 1987, 363-7). But even this trend is modified by the nature of electoral laws and party organisation, so that it surfaces in peculiar ways in each country.

In Australian elections the national campaign now entirely overshadows the constituency campaigns fought by candidates. In key marginal seats the central parties dictate how the campaign will be fought. According to Simms (1997: 51) the key marginal seat strategy which Australian parties have pursued has seen both "an increase in integration and co-ordination" and, curiously, a localisation of campaigning. However the Liberal officials have denied this suggestion, suggesting the organization does not determine "the entire detail of the campaign" (Crosby 1996, 160). But the increasing

emphasis placed on winning marginal constituencies means that “the influence of the federal Liberal Party in individual campaigns has increased” as the central party organisation “has taken the view that it is in its interests to ensure minimum standards of performance” (ibid).

For example, the Liberals 1996 campaign strategy was to “localise the national”. In some targeted seats this entailed dispatching - many months in advance of the campaign - centrally employed organisers to build up the local party organisation, to research local issues, and to identify prospective candidates. During the campaign proper information gathered by these organisers was used to develop television spot ads which presented the party’s national themes using local issues and identities (Ward 1997). Intervention by the federal party often brings in "a lot of technological support" which a grassroots campaign would otherwise not have access to.

Targeting of marginal seats is now commonplace in ALP campaigns. Data obtained by cross referencing electoral rolls and telephone books was first used to identify voters, then supplemented with data collected by phone interviews, and used to launch a laser printed, computer driven, substantial direct mail campaign. For instance in the marginal NSW seat of Barton some "65 separate personalised letters were sent to electors selected through telephone surveying" (Warhurst 1987: 54). Constituency campaigns of this order are clearly beyond reach without the input of financial and technical resources from the central party.

The Conservative party used similar techniques in 1988 with its Target 88 campaign (developed for the 1984 election). Target 88 used data from Tory opinion polls to identify distinct categories of voters who were most likely to be undecided. The Ottawa CPC then bought (from commercial sources) lists of the names and addresses of voters who matched these profiles and compiled a target list of about 5,000 undecided voters for each participating riding. These voters were sent customised letters ostensibly from the Prime Minister, then phoned to inquire about issues which concerned them, and their answers used to send further targeted persuasive messages by letter and phone (Lee 1989: 260-4).

In the Canadian context Target 88 was unusual because it used direct mail to supplement phone canvassing. In the past Canadian parties (exploiting the generous tax rebates for donations put in place in 1974) have mostly used direct mail as a fund-raising tool rather than for propaganda. Party manuals do note that persuasive direct mail is a useful technique. But one warns that it is costly, time consuming, must be carefully targeted at "households which are identified as undecided voters", and should include additional campaign literature given the substantial postage costs letters (PC 1988: 99).

The need to maximise the impact of mailings where they are used--and a reason why Target 88 involved only two letters and calls to just 5000 undecided voters in each riding--is that Canadian

electoral laws fix strict limits upon campaign expenditure. The CPC and LPC are effectively prevented from using direct mail on the scale and with the frequency of their Australian counterparts whose campaign spending is unrestricted. It should also be noted that, unlike its Australian variant, the CPC's Target 88 campaign was not concentrated in seats selected by party headquarters. It was offered to candidates willing--and many were not--to provide \$5000 and to place ten volunteers under headquarters' control (Lee 1989: 265).

Target 88 provides evidence that there is a similar impetus within Canadian parties toward a homogeneous, centralised campaign. However, turmoil on the right of politics meant the Conservatives were unable to mount a similar program in 1993, 1997 or 2000. It was not until the merger of the two right wing parties in time for the 2004 election that a similar program was re-established. The new CPC has led the Liberals in further developing these techniques (Flanagan, 2007).

Voter volatility and the vagaries of Canada's first-past-the-post system make it difficult to pursue a strategy (as Australian parties can) that rests upon distinguishing between safe and marginal seats (see Blake 1991). Moreover central party organisations lack the authority to muscle-in on campaigns mounted by riding associations, and the spending limits which apply in each constituency once the election writs are issued prevent Canadian parties from concentrating most of their resources in a few selected ridings.

Nonetheless the central organisations of the CPC and LPC alike do take a keen interest in and underwrite the campaign in selected "showcase" ridings. These are not marginal seats on which the final result is thought to hinge. Rather they may have a high profile candidate who will attract national media attention and give the party's overall campaign a particular credibility (Sayers 1991: 45). Or they may be chosen to demonstrate that parties are campaigning in all regions of the country. In general show case ridings are in (or close to) the downtown of provincial capitals and large cities, well placed to attract coverage from the large media organisations located in these urban centres.

In Australia the central party machines also only seek to take over control of and funnel party resources into local campaigns in special circumstances. While such direct intervention typically occurs in no more than two dozen seats which have been identified as key 'marginals' that must be won to secure victory, it does appear that Australian parties have travelled somewhat further down the road toward centralised campaigning. But in both countries the central party organisations now exercise a more subtle influence over campaigns fought at the grassroots. They have largely achieved this by simply offering a "package" of services to their constituency campaign teams. This comprises ready-made (and standardised) pamphlets, signs, posters, letterhead paper, policy summaries, draft media releases and other basic campaign materials which local campaigns would otherwise have to

generate for themselves.

With the same aim the central parties provide candidate training sessions and the campaign manuals which we have already described. During the 1993 and 1997 campaigns the Liberals' Ottawa campaign headquarters also supplied candidates across Canada with daily faxed draft media releases, and with suggested responses to issues thrown up by the national campaign. Local campaign committees are free to manufacture their own campaign materials but often do not because it is easier to purchase these from the central party. Where they do not use services and materials on offer it is usually because they are cash-strapped and unable to buy them rather than determined to hoe their own patch. In Canada where the riding associations are ostensibly far more independent, in the case of both the CPC and LPC alike, the central party has gradually assumed a greater control over the campaigns conducted by riding associations in order to "send forth a homogenised brigade of candidates" (Lee 1989:39).

As Preyra (1991:147) notes in his 1988 study of two Nova Scotia riding campaigns, the "striking" result of the efforts parties now make to homogenise campaigns in the trenches is that "the campaign structures and management processes at the local level, both within parties and between parties, [are] virtually identical". Hence across Canada (but for Quebec in which the parties run separate, parallel campaigns) party lawn signs, pamphlets, posters and other paraphernalia bear a remarkable resemblance. This testifies to the importance central party organisations attach to, and the success they have had in imposing, "the same visual theme across the country" (Lee 1989: 38). This very same argument can be made about the control that the central party secretariats exercise over grassroots campaigns in Australia.

The LPA campaign manual provides a clue to the different ways in which local organisations relate to the party hierarchy in Canada and Australia. It presumes that employees of the central party organisation oversee local campaigns. Each state Division of the LPA employs a number of organisers whose job includes guiding the campaigns conducted in a number of electorates. The LPA sees the actual structure of its campaign organisation as "very much like a series of building blocks "built upon the foundation provided by local party branches "from where most of the volunteer support for the campaign is drawn" (LPA 1988: 1.11).

The LPA manual makes it clear that campaign strategy and tactics are decided by the central party organisation and imposed upon local campaign committees from above and reveals how carefully the central party contrives to corral campaigning in the constituencies. For instance it urges campaign committees to consider direct mail as a means of reaching targeted groups of voters but cautions that campaign managers "should first check with their State Secretariat before commencing". Similarly it suggests that local campaigns consider systematically using "talk back" radio shows but warns that in

some States the central party has established talk back radio monitoring teams and that someone should "check to see if this is the case and what part the electorate [organisation] can play".

In discussing advertising in local media, the LPA manual states "some State Divisions forbid use of the metropolitan media by candidates. Check whether this applies to you before moving outside strictly local media." In a similar vein it points out that telephone polling and canvassing must be professionally done to be effective and advises interested local campaign committees to "consult with State Divisional headquarters". In discussing the printing of campaign literature it says that while local campaigns are not "obliged to adopt the general campaign slogan etc", they are "strongly advised" to incorporate the approach taken by the central party and should "include information on Senate candidates". Use of the party's "standard Liberal logo" and colours is "essential" (LPA 1988).

Undeniably the Ottawa-based central organisation of the CPC also attempts to standardise and control the constituency-level campaigns conducted by its candidates. The existence of a CPC campaign manual is itself evidence of this, as are the training colleges the party runs for candidates and campaign managers (see Lee 1989: 39). However the CPC manual contains no similar warnings about the need to tailor local campaigns to the needs of the national party. Its tenor is rather different, for the control that the central party is able to exercise over constitutionally autonomous riding associations is ultimately limited. The advice it proffers is not intended to establish centralised control over riding-level campaigns but to help them complete campaign tasks.

Given the more decentralised structure of Canadian parties it is not surprising that the CPC manual has no top-down organisational chart like the one found in the LPA manual. Nor does it demand, as the LPA manual does, that local campaigns check with headquarters before launching their own advertisements or direct mail campaign. With just one exception links between riding campaign teams and the wider party are seen as largely informal. For example, the manual suggests that candidates should seek campaign advice from "former candidates, former sitting members of the Federal or Provincial House, municipal politicians, prominent local business people, or local community leaders" (PC 1988: 20). Even then, local campaigners often do ignore the organisational and strategic advice offered by national headquarters.<sup>iv</sup>

The exception noted arises directly from the need for all candidates to comply with Canadian electoral law. This requires a more formal link between the local and national campaigns. As the CPC manual notes, the national party has a direct interest in its candidate's legal counsel. Hence it insists that counsellors should liaise with the central party's own legal officers, and attend its training program. This is to "ensure total compliance with all aspects of election legislation" (PC 1988: 13).

One of the more direct ways in which Canadian political parties can exert a degree of control over a

constituency campaign is to provide the campaign manager. The Australian variant of this is to have a centrally--not locally--paid organiser oversee and assist several local campaigns. In Canada the NDP has developed the practice of installing professional campaign managers in ridings where it considers it is most likely to gain ground. More so than either the CPC or LPC, the NDP has a centralised organisational structure rather like that of the major Australian parties. Although all the Canadian parties rely heavily on volunteers, it is quite common for candidates to hire campaign workers. This reflects the financial independence of local campaigns. Thirty-seven percent of riding campaigns paid workers in 1988--most often hiring a campaign manager (Carty 1991: 163). In that election one in five campaign managers were paid. Constituency campaign management is increasingly becoming a full-time, specialised job. As a result, more local campaign managers are being directly paid (as opposed to awaiting some political pay-off) for their services (Carty 1991: 158-9).

In contrast, it would be extraordinary for a constituency campaign in Australia to hire a campaign manager or to pay any campaign worker. A lack of local funds and the nature of centrally controlled campaigns prevent this. Paid political organisers who do work on local campaigns are invariably employed by federal or State party secretariats or, in the case of the ALP, occasionally by sympathetic trade unions that lend out their staff. Outside of those key marginal seats on which Australian parties concentrate their attention and resources, there are few local campaigns that are sufficiently complex to warrant professional management. It is this central control of a campaign focused mainly on a few marginal constituencies that has encouraged permanent campaigning by Australian parties.

### **THE MOVE TO CONTINUOUS CAMPAIGNING**

Outwardly Canadian elections seem more drawn out than Australian contests. For instance Lloyd (1977: 176) has suggested that, since they usually span no more than three weeks, "compared with campaigns in countries like Canada ...Australian election campaigns are relatively short". This is true of the formally defined national campaign which is usually declared underway once the LPA and ALP leaders have launched their policy platforms with a televised speech (and not at the moment when election writs are issued as in Canada).

In fact the formal campaign marks the climax of long months of grassroots campaigning. Whilst naming candidates willing to "fly the flag" in patently unwinnable seats may be left to the last, mostly ALP and LPA candidates are endorsed at the initiative of the central party long before the election looms. They are able to commence canvassing many months, even years in advance of the issuing of election writs. And there is an incentive to do so given that prime ministers have a habit of calling elections when the time is ripe rather than allowing the federal parliament to go its full three year term.

The LPA campaign manual points to a growing need for continuous campaigning. It urges that

campaign teams be formed, strategy decided, volunteers recruited, research completed and door-knocking commenced as early as possible: "once the candidate is endorsed, there is a focal point for the campaign, and the job of election campaigning really gets under way" (LPA 1988: 3.3).

In Canada federal elections occur less frequently than in Australia. The House of Commons has a five rather than three-year term, and in itself this may discourage permanent campaigning. Canadian party riding associations--especially in British Columbia and Quebec and in the CPC much more than the LPC--do report launching their campaigns in advance of the formal forty-seven day campaign period. More and more associations are moving to endorse candidates in the months prior to rather than after an election is announced (Carty and Erickson 1991: 112). Nonetheless almost half (44%) of riding associations still leave spending on the campaign until after the election writ is dropped. In 1988 two-thirds waited until a candidate had been endorsed before beginning to assemble a campaign organisation (Carty 1991: 152,195).

Compared with those in Australia, constituency campaigns mounted by Canadian parties tend to blitz voters during the formal campaign period. As a result campaigns in Canadian trenches generally appear to be seven-week long bursts of activity which are more intense and which involve more campaign workers than the more drawn out campaigns which parties are likely to fight in Australia.

No doubt the fact that the central secretariats of the LPA and ALP are able to ensure that candidates are endorsed well before an election is called helps explain the prolonged nature of Australian constituency campaigns. But it may simply be that Australian parties often lack the volunteers needed to intensely canvass constituencies during the formal campaign in the way that Canadian parties are still able to do. There is little hard data about the numbers of campaign workers that the two major Australian parties are presently able to muster with which to test this particular thesis. However, the local branches upon which both major Australian parties are built now contain relatively few members. (For example in 1991 the 250 local branches of the Queensland ALP had an average 12 active members willing to attend meetings and a further two dozen on their books.)

In the 1950s and 1960s local branches were considerably larger, and campaigns were able to attract hundreds of volunteer workers. However given the recent decline in their membership, it seems unlikely that either Australian party might now muster the 300 to 500 volunteers which some reports (eg Makin 1993: A6) suggest that Canadian parties mobilise in ridings during the final stages of a general election. In 1988 the average (median) CPC riding campaign attracted 180 (and aimed to have 200) volunteers, and the typical LPC campaign attracted 100 of the 150 workers thought necessary to mount an effective assault (Carty 1991: 161-62). Australian constituency campaigns now seldom attract this number of volunteers. They have little alternative but to extend the campaign period to get the job done.

Of course, not all constituency campaigns in Australia are fought on a continuing, "out-of-season" basis. Many seats are safely held by one or the other party and are most unlikely to change hands. In their opponent's safe seats Australian parties are unlikely to have a local organisational presence able to sustain anything more than a short-lived campaign to defiantly "fly the flag". Party activists who reside in securely held enemy territory have no incentive to take seriously the campaign advice that the next campaign commences the moment the last ends.

On the other hand incumbent Members of the House of Representatives (MHRs) intending to stand again do have an incentive to build electoral support on an ongoing basis. And of course they have the advantage of a staff, postal allowance, and all the computing and communication facilities of an electorate office with which to keep in touch with their constituents. Most out-of-season campaigning occurs in those several dozen marginal seats in which the party oversees and underwrites the campaign. For instance the ALP commenced its direct mail campaign in targeted seats fully two years before the 1993 poll (Mills 1993).

Targeting seats in this way is possible because of the relative stability of patterns of party support in Australia, and because Australia uses a system of preferential voting which eliminates much of the uncertainty which large fields of candidates can introduce in the Canadian plurality system. Both the LPA and ALP are able to identify a set of key marginal seats the results in which are likely to determine the overall election campaign. Invariably campaigning in these seats begins early and is controlled by the central party secretariat rather than left in the hands of a local campaign committee.

There is increasing evidence that Canadian parties are also becoming involved in continuous campaigning, although any analysis of this is hampered by successive minority governments. This has forced parties to maintain an 'election-ready' status for the three years since the 2004 election. Nevertheless, guaranteed annual public funding since 2004 has allowed the building of strong central organizations. The CPC in particular appears to have quickly adopted a range of new communication and fundraising technologies that have enabled it to colonize functions was performed largely or exclusively by local associations. Increasingly, the party is able to project a national interest into local association and campaign activities (Flanagan, 2007).

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Electoral Laws and Institutions**

The particular electoral laws and institutions which apply help to explain why Australian and Canadian approach constituency-level campaigning with rather different priorities, and why grass roots organizations in Canada have more autonomy than their Australian counterparts.



Canadian and Australian elections are fought in different institutional environments, and as a result, grassroots campaigns in Canada and Australia take peculiar forms and adopt different objectives. The need to “pull” voters in Canada that their Australian counterparts are spared by compulsory voting, and the directing of state funding to local party organisations in Canada and to the central party in Australia, are just two examples of institutional differences that are reflected in local practices. Without understanding how institutional and cultural factors interact -- and they do most pointedly at the local level -- a full grasp of how parties and the party system operate in Australia and Canada is not possible

The Canadian and Australian electoral systems have operationalized different representational values (Courtney 1992:46-7). The greater adventurousness of Australians in experimenting with electoral design (Elkins 1992) has resulted in a preferential or alternative voting system for lower house elections, compulsory voting, and permanent electoral rolls (see Costar 1994). In contrast, Canada has a first-past-the-post system, voluntary voting, and a newly introduced permanent register of voters. Yet while provides opportunities for coalition building, because of its bias towards disproportionality and its geographic basis, it sustains most of the same organizational imperatives as FPP.

Financial accountability regulations also burden constituency organisations in Canada, requiring of them greater organisational effort than their Australian counterparts. There are no legislative limits upon campaign spending in Australian elections, relieving parties of the need to record expenditures. However, Canadian electoral law restricts expenditure once the election-writ is issued. Moreover, it requires each candidate (not the central party) to appoint an official agent to take formal responsibility for the raising and spending of all monies during the campaign. This accounting requirement is understandable, given that taxpayers reimburse candidates for some of their election expenses. As a result campaigns in the trenches are often at least financially independent from the generals in party headquarters, allowing them choose how they spend their money. Indeed Carty (1991: 215) found that during the 1988 election just 27 percent of riding organisations received campaign funds from the national party. Rather, national parties in Canada attempt to claw back funds from riding organisations where they can.

Not being reliant on the central party for funding frees local campaigns in Canada to pursue their own strategies, and requires them to maintain relatively complex, locally directed constituency campaigns. For its part, the Australian *Electoral Act* establishes a scheme of public election funding in which the national political parties rather than individual candidates are the beneficiaries. Controlling nearly all the campaign funds gives national parties in Australia nearly exclusive license to determine campaign strategies. The reduced strategic autonomy of constituency campaigns limits the need for elaborate, locally controlled organisations.

A great majority riding associations in 1988 had sufficient funds to fight quite sophisticated local campaigns. The numbers of paid managers running riding campaigns and the widespread use of expensive local telephone banks for canvassing are just two indications that constituency-level campaigning in Canada tends to be a more substantial exercise (Sayers 1995:227). Although in Australia, the LPA campaign manual suggests that local campaign teams explore the possibility of systematic telephone canvassing, few actually have the resources to consider this option without the immediate support of the central party. Phone canvassing tends to be conducted only in those marginal seats that the national parties have identified as crucial to their chances. Equally, opinion polling is beyond the reach of Australian grassroots campaigns. While fully one third of riding associations conducted their own opinion polls during the 1988 Canadian election (Carty 1991: 180), polling in Australia remains almost entirely the province of the central party organisations (*Background Briefing* 17 December 1995).

The *Canada Elections Act* has, since 1970, required party leaders to formally approve a list of those entitled to be described on ballot papers as endorsed party candidates. This gives leaders the personal prerogative and party headquarters a *de facto* power to veto endorsements decided by constituency associations. While somewhat anti-democratic, this law can be seen as a logical response to local control of the nomination process. Party leaders in Ottawa have essentially given themselves the capacity to prevent difficult or rogue candidates from imposing themselves on the party.

In addition, this veto may be used in other ways. The central party (particularly in the LPC in 1993 and 1997) may use it to "parachute" a number of high profile candidates into safe ridings to give them smooth passage into the House of Commons and perhaps Cabinet. Yet as evidence of the strength of local associations, many of these efforts have either backfired or been highly controversial, leading to a loss of activist support in those riding (Jackson and Jackson 1994, 482). This of course stands in to the control of candidate selection by sharp federal and State party machines. In 1996 the LPA party even disendorsed a candidate during the last days of the federal campaign when her views on race proved embarrassing for the wider party leadership.

While access to local funds and a history of important local activities such as enumeration all play a role in this outcome. As well, the importance of state based parties – the historical predecessors of national parties in Australia and a state-based electoral system in the Senate create incentives for organizational coherence above the constituency level in the Australian case. But there are also other factors at work that help explain why political parties in each country approach campaigning in the trenches differently and are so organisationally dissimilar.

### **The Gradient of Integration**

Canadian society is more politically diverse than its Australian counterpart. Canada's regions often

have distinctive political interests, and as a result, lead to less cohesive representational behaviour in comparison with Australia (Epstein, 1977, 21). This diversity makes it difficult for any party to develop a single national vision that is relevant to riding associations and local campaigns in different parts of the country. Moreover, it finds expression in the much greater volatility of Canadian electoral outcomes compared to their Australian equivalents. Parties are regularly frozen out of various regions of the country (Leithner, 1997). There is also a much higher average turnover of MPs, with the long term average being around 40 percent (Blake, 1999).

It is true that the single member constituency plurality system encourages national parties to run candidates throughout Canada (Carty 1991, 71). But in attempting to cover areas of poor membership that have distinct political interests, parties are forced to maintain 'paper' associations with little local activist support. In order to accommodate local and regional variation in political culture and electoral outcomes, Canadian federal parties are necessarily more loosely organised than their Australian counterparts. A party wishing to establish central control of local associations would find it difficult and perhaps unhelpful. It would be costly to replace local activists, and might alienate local political opinion.

As well, Australian parties confront political institutions that offer incentives for them to reproduce themselves in the various jurisdictions and to maintain organizational connections. The presence of a Senate with state-based electoral divisions helps support a crucial role of regional party organizations in national party affairs. The more consensual nature of Australian institutions requires them to negotiate across their own organizational components, and encourage a limited view of their capacity for or of the need for strong central control. This has allowed parties to incorporate greater institutional diversity at the mid-to-higher organizational levels (state and federal branches for example) that provide the necessary adaptations to and accommodation of diversity or integration of political impulses.

Compared with their Australian counterparts, Canadian parties confront a much greater challenge in articulating, aggregating and integrating political demands. That is, they face a much steeper *gradient of integration*. A political party seeking to win a majority in the House of Commons must find a way to knit together a disparate set of ethno-linguistic and regional political demands. On the other hand, the electoral and parliamentary institutions require tremendous coherence at the senior legislative levels of the party. Being strongly majoritarian in character, these institutions provide little incentive for parties to generate formal processes for intra-party negotiation and power sharing. Given that different parties in the same party system rely on distinctive electoral alliances, each may confront distinctive gradients of integration. This has been particularly sharp in the Canadian case, where the Conservatives electoral coalition has forced it to attempt to integrate an intrinsically more complex and fractious set of political demands than has its Liberal party opponent.

## CONCLUSION

In liberal democracies such as Canada and Australia the contest between political parties for a parliamentary majority and control of the government benches is pivotal. Elections pose the same broad challenge of winning and wooing voters. Inevitably this draws attention to the particular electoral process used to decide the contest. It is well understood that in all likelihood the single member, plurality method translates the contest between Canadian parties very differently than would the majority-preferential single member system used in Australia. Put the other way, the Canadian first-past-the-post system would almost certainly see a different party system and parliamentary party-mix if used to decide the party contest in Australia. Yet it is clear that other factors also shape party systems. In Britain, first-past-the-post voting and a Westminster style parliament have produced cohesive, centrally controlled parties and a classic two party system. This is not true of Canada. Australia shares a parliamentary tradition with both Canada and Britain, but not an electoral system, yet it has produced cohesive, mass-like parties similar to those in the UK.

The power of local constituency organisations in Canadian parties is remarkable in that elsewhere, Westminster parliaments tend to encourage centrally controlled mass parties, robbing local organisations of some of their power. Certainly this is the case with respect to Australian parties. The loose, cadre style parties found in Canada suggest that a competing logic is at work, one that reflects the regional and ethno-linguistic diversity of the country. This difference can be used to characterise the two party systems, and suggests that political parties embody the compromise between the imperatives of political culture and the logic of state institutions such as electoral laws.

Using local campaigns as a prism for comparing and contrasting the Australian and Canadian party system, we have shown that parties in the two countries have responded to distinctive institutional and electoral incentives. Just because they are the point at which these two factors commingle, constituency-level campaigning warrants closer attention than it has hitherto been paid. We need to understand that they give us an insight into how the logic of electoral systems interacts with local political culture to shape the character and conduct of the organisations that compete to win elections. In different settings the same goal of winning an election encourages different forms of organisation, activity and political communication.

**TABLE ONE**  
**Comparison of Local Campaign Activities**

Campaign Activity	Constituency Campaigning	National Campaigning
CAMPAIGN ACTIVITY	CANADIAN PARTIES	AUSTRALIAN PARTIES
Candidate nomination	organised locally	centrally coordinated
Lawn signs	major activity	very limited
Phone canvassing	common; local control	limited; central control
Foot canvassing	core campaign activity	declining importance
Direct mail	limited, local activity	common; central control
Postal/advance voting	locally organised	locally conducted, but centrally supervised
Financial resources	locally controlled	centrally controlled
Local support for campaign teams	single constituency association	several neighbourhood branches
Campaign Management	usually local	centrally controlled in all key seats
Advertising	most money spent locally	most money spent centrally
Links to party HQ	informal	formalised
Campaign time frame	short, formalised	continuous, strategic
Strategy-making	local and national	national and state

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## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Typically general elections for the House of Representatives are held simultaneously with half Senate elections. Unlike the Canadian upper house the Australian Senate is elected. For Senate elections each State serves as a single multi-member constituency. Normally six of the twelve Senators representing each State will face re-election every three years. (Double dissolutions of parliament requiring the re-election of the whole Senate are rare.) The parties do not conduct separate Senate campaigns. Rather these piggy-back onto the wider, centrally conducted lower house campaign. Possibly the need to win Senate as well as lower house seats is one reason why Australian exert greater central control over local campaigns than do their Canadian counterparts.

<sup>ii</sup> The last year for which there are clear figures is 1987. Party officials claim that the number has remained fairly stable over the last two decades.

<sup>iii</sup> For example, during the 1980's, Labor's federal secretariat secured the endorsement of several able candidates (Warhurst 1987:54). One consequence of this centralised control is that it has allowed both Australian parties to move to continuous campaigning.

<sup>iv</sup> This information is drawn from interviews with CPC candidates in Kootenay West-Revelstoke, Okanagan Centre, Fraser Valley West, Surrey North, Burnaby-Kingsway, Vancouver Centre and Victoria. Campbell won Vancouver Centre in 1988 and went on to become the Tory leader and Prime Minister.