

**Electoral Reform and The Dynamics of Federal-Provincial
Conflict in Canada**

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Electoral reform is very much on the political agenda in Canada. The “democratic deficit” interpretation of Canadian politics focusses, amongst other things, on the rules used for the counting of votes and their purported negative consequences for Canadian politics. National political parties have committed themselves to at least discuss alternatives to the present single-member plurality (SMP) system, commonly known as “first-past-the-post”. Five provinces – British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick - have undertaken formal consideration of the issue of electoral reform, highlighted by the use of citizen assemblies, first in British Columbia, then Ontario.¹ Various interest groups and a healthy academic literature speak to the gathering interest in electoral reform.

Despite the enormous attention given to electoral reform by the academic community, two important lacunae are evident. First, little work has been done by political scientists on the effects of electoral rules on party systems in federations. Political science attributes to political parties the important function of integrating disparate elements in society. The role of parties is especially important in federations with territorially-based sociological differences and political interests. Canada is a leading instance of such a federation.

Second, little consideration has been given to the relationship between electoral systems and the nature and operation of federations. This is especially so in terms of intergovernmental relations.

In the case of Canada, this seems to be remarkably odd. Two central features of the Canadian political life are its federal system and electoral system. Or, is it the case that they are not connected in significant ways? The argument in this paper is that there are important links between the political processes of federation and electoral systems. Further, given the primacy of conflicts between governments in Canada, it is incumbent for electoral reformers to analyze the impact of changes to electoral rules, especially in terms of federal-provincial conflict: specifically, will electoral reform exacerbate conflict?; alleviate conflict?; or be inconsequential, in terms of change, for how governments approach each other?

The thesis of the paper is that electoral systems are incentive structures to which politicians and parties respond. Canada’s federal system is

seen as being primarily based on the competitive and bargaining relations between the national and sub-national governments. In such a federalized system, the issue, then, is: what kinds of incentive structures are best for Canada?

The paper's organization proceeds through a discussion of federalism and electoral systems; previous considerations of the Canadian case; the development of the Canadian federation since the 1960s; the electoral system, government formation, and vote shares; and two models of the impact of electoral reform upon federal-provincial relations. The conclusion calls for electoral reformers to address the issue of the impact of changing the SMP system.

1. FEDERALISM AND ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

The complexities of federalist thought and intricacies of federal systems suggest great separation from electoral systems, the rules employed to count votes and to determine how representatives in liberal democracies will be chosen. However, at a high level of abstraction there is an important link between federalism and electoral systems: each is an approach to the question of how to manage conflict.²

Federalism, by dividing authority between governments, pushes potential conflicts into different political spaces. Federalism is especially attractive for the organization of a political system when the separation of cleavage groups is seen as an important, if not the only, way to defuse, perhaps avoid, conflict between them. Canada is often cited as the classic case.

In contrast, electoral systems put social groups into the same political space, although the characteristics of particular spaces are enormously different. Different types of electoral rules are based on assumptions about the nature of the broader society. SMP presupposes a society not riven with deep cleavages, one in which dominant parties, normally numbering two, are much closer and similar than apart and different; politics is essentially just bickering. In a "winner-take-all" system, there is little to win.

In the case of divided societies, critics of SMP argue that important cleavage groups are excluded from government, leading to an

intensification of differences. One important way to ease tensions is through the adoption of an electoral system based on the idea of proportionality. Advocates for such systems use bringing-together language – co-operation, collaboration, collegiality, and sharing – to describe the desired and anticipated mode of decision-making in legislatures and executives. Politics means a lot and the costs of defeat and exclusion must be minimized. The overarching goal is to maximize inclusiveness.

2. PREVIOUS CONSIDERATIONS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FEDERALISM AND THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM IN CANADA

In the late 1960s Alan Cairns identified a number of important consequences of the SMP system for the nature of party competition in Canada from 1921 to 1965.³ Because leading parties in regions received more seats than their votes warranted, party caucuses over-represented certain regions and underrepresented others, contributing significantly to the regionalized nature of Canadian parties. One consequence was that parties were more responsive to the interests of their electoral bases rather than areas of weakness. Another was that parties were encouraged to heighten differences – say, French versus English – as the marginal gain in voters led to winning a large number of seats. Overall, the effect of SMP was to undercut the efficacy of parties as integrating and nation-building entities. In fact, Cairns make the point that regionally-oriented and spatially-concentrated parties were rewarded with a “surplus” of seats compared to a party with diffused support. On the other hand, the logic of the SMP system may lead to the exclusion of ethnic, linguistic, or religious minorities that are not spatially-concentrated.⁴

The power of the argument led many to call for electoral reform, usually some variant of proportional representation in which seats (at least in part) would be allocated to parties on the basis of votes received. Subsequent governments (minority or coalition) would necessarily have to incorporate more views and interests in the course of policy-making than presumably is or would have been the case in governments formed under the SMP system. Simple majoritarianism would be replaced by the politics of power-sharing.

William Irvine characterized Canada as prone to heightening conflict, especially ethnic-based, but argued that PR “would help to defuse any such conflict not supported by majorities in both English and French Canada.”⁵ While there is a possibility with PR for extreme parties to make headway, Irvine assumes that they would be essentially regionalist in character and, failing coordination with each other, would be marginalized. Indeed, there is great potential for such parties to make electoral gains in a SMP system as geographically-concentrated votes lead to exaggerated legislative seat strength.

Louis Massicote, focussing on the latter part of the last century, notes that to “a large extent, regionalism is an undeniable fact of Canadian life and cannot be eradicated simply by modifying electoral rules” but argues that SMP exaggerates regionalism.⁶ The most important manifestations are parties with regional agendas; under- and over-regional representation in parliamentary caucuses; and regionally-imbalanced cabinets.

Massicote, as do many recent discussants of electoral reform, also evaluates the SMP system from the perspective of fairness. Parties with similar national shares of the vote can have widely different seats in the Commons. Turnout in SMP elections is pushed downward because supporters of parties in areas where they are weak have little incentive to show up at the polls. Further, SMP seemingly creates barriers for women; other systems, especially PR, will see more women elected. Indeed, in the SMP system “parties tend to select candidates that fit the prevailing stereotypes of the politician as a middle-aged male.”⁷

Massicote makes a rare observation about the impact of PR upon the conduct of federal-provincial relations. In the course of discussing the impact of PR upon the Canadian political process, he observes that “the federal-provincial balance might be modified as well.” His focus, however, is what would happen to Ottawa’s standing in the event of short-lived governments facing single-party majority administrations in the provinces. His belief is that provinces would follow the lead of the national government, since it would be problematic if the two levels of the federal system used different rules and criteria for the election of politicians.

As for the specific issue of federal-provincial relations, the matter is most unclear. While it is case that in the 1960s, when Ottawa had a series of minority governments, the national government was very accommodating vis-à-vis the provinces, it is true that Trudeau was no different in the minority years from 1972 to 1974 than he was before or after with majority governments. Brian Mulroney's governments were very accommodating in federal-provincial affairs despite their strong majorities in the House of Commons. Last, Massicote, following Irvine's argument, suggests that PR, resulting in more representative governments at the national level, might ease the pressure on Ottawa to make concessions to the provinces. On the other hand, electoral reform might lead to weaker prime ministers. For example, "in coalition cabinets, many ministers would belong to a party other than the prime minister's and would have more complex loyalties."⁸ In the present context of Canadian politics, it is hard to imagine that pressures to strengthen Ottawa will outweigh calls for more accommodation with the provinces.

Although national parties have expressed increasing interest in electoral reform, most of the energy and progress are evident at the level of the provinces. So, contrary to Massicote's assumption that the provinces would follow the lead of Ottawa, it seems more likely that Ottawa will follow the provinces.

Whatever the pattern, the fundamental question revolves around the impact of electoral reform on the conduct of federal-provincial relations.

3. THE FEDERAL SYSTEM IN CANADA SINCE THE 1960S

The Ottawa-centred development of the federation predicted by J. Corry in 1958, in which a province would be limited to "freedom for minor adventure, for embroidering its own particular patterns in harmony with the national design, for playing variant melodies with the general theme"⁹ was soon belied by subsequent developments, in which the provinces increasingly became central actors within the federal system. Canadian political scientists began to use "province-building", "federal-provincial diplomacy", and "executive federalism" to analyze the interactions between Ottawa and the provinces.¹⁰ Alan Cairns described the fundamental feature of the federation as being

governments interacting with each as “interdependent competitors.”¹¹ Garth Stevenson in 2004 described the fundamental feature of the federation as bargaining between governments.¹²

Although there are clear signs of cooperation between the national and sub-national governments, Canada, from a comparative perspective, is the most federalized of the world’s federations for the following reasons:

- Governments are the most important actors in Canadian politics**
- Parties, social movements, citizens, and interest groups are weak, in comparison**
- Interaction between governments is the most important determinant of what happens in Canadian politics**
- Bargaining between governments occurs in a context in which one level cannot eliminate the other and each level is dependent upon the other**
- Canadian society is highly heterogeneous, one to which the concept of “federal society” is most applicable.**

The development of the Canadian federation, then, contains strong elements of both cooperation and competition between governments. Federations, generally, can be seen as political arrangements in which governments – the leading actors of the systems – compete for dominance of one level over the other. Riker argues that the degree of centralization in a federation is closely related to the nature of the party system.¹³ Canada would seem to be an exemplar of the point, given the highly federalized nature of its party system, in which national and provincial parties operate very much independently, paralleling the decentralized nature of the federation itself.

4. THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM, GOVERNMENT FORMATION, AND VOTE SHARES

Nationally, Canadians have always employed the SMP system. Provincially, the general pattern has been SMP, though there have been some exceptions. In national politics, minority governments are not unknown, but majority governments are the norm. Of the 36 national elections since 1867, ten governments have been formed without a party having a majority in the House of Commons. One coalition government was in office nationally during World War I.

Provincially, since 1921, majority governments have been the general pattern with minority (or coalition or coalition-like) governments being rare. Ontario has experienced minority governments on occasion (1919-1923 and in the period from the 1970s to the present). Nova Scotia also has had minority governments. Saskatchewan had a coalition government in the 1930s and in effect a minority government from 1999 to 2002. Manitoba had a long period of coalition government from 1931 to 1950. British Columbia's experience was in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Some provinces – Alberta, Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island – have never elected minority governments. Quebec elected its first minority government in 2007.

Nationally, in terms of popular vote, it is rare for a party to win 50% of the vote; in the 26 elections since 1921 the 50% threshold has been breached only in 1940, 1958 and 1984.¹⁴

Provincially, the overall pattern is more complex (see Table 1).

Compared to Ottawa, the provinces have seen many more governments elected with at least 50 percent of the vote (and, in many instances, with opposition parties reduced to a handful of seats or none at all). About 40 percent of all provincial governments elected in Canada have secured at least 50% of the vote.

However, in the last 20 years or so, increasingly provincial governments have been formed with less than a majority of the votes cast. (See Table 2). Over three-quarters of all governments were elected with a plurality. (Almost all were majority-seat governments.) Three provinces (Ontario, Quebec, and Manitoba) during the period never gave a party a majority of the vote and only one – Prince Edward Island – elected more governments with a majority-vote than with a plurality.

Table One

Formation of Governments, Plurality or Majority of the Vote, by Province (various years)

Province	Number of Elections	Largest Party Has a	
		Plurality	Majority
		Of Votes Cast	
Newfoundland and Labrador	17	5	12
Prince Edward Island	29	28	1
Nova Scotia	33	14	19
New Brunswick	35	9	26
Quebec	23	10	13
Ontario	38	27	11
Manitoba	25	25	
Saskatchewan	25	14	11
Alberta	26	13	13
British Columbia	24	20	4
	275	165	110

Table Two

Formation of Governments, Plurality or Majority of the Vote, by Province (last 5 Elections)

Province	Largest Party Has a	
	Plurality	Majority
	Of Votes Cast	
Newfoundland and Labrador	3	2
Prince Edward Island	2	3
Nova Scotia	4	1
New Brunswick	3	2
Quebec	5	0
Ontario	5	0
Manitoba	5	0
Saskatchewan	4	1
Alberta	3	2
British Columbia	4	1
TOTAL	38	12

All provinces can be said to have at least competitive three-party systems (competitive in the sense of a party nominating candidates in at least half of the electoral districts). At times, some provinces have had four such parties (British Columbia, Alberta, Quebec, New Brunswick) or five (British Columbia, Alberta, Quebec). It must be noted that Alberta, often described in singular terms, saw 5 competitive parties in its last election (2004), and four parties elected candidates to the legislature. Four other parties attracted support up to 3% of all votes.

Overall, at the level of the provinces, party systems and electorates increasingly show signs of fragmentation, though not as much as is the case in national politics.¹⁵

PR undoubtedly would produce minority governments. Even with an electoral system that combines SMP and PR, it would seem that in every national election¹⁶ and almost every provincial election no single party would form a majority government; either single-party minority governments or coalition governments would be the norm.

For purposes of this paper, it will be assumed that every national and sub-national election results in no party securing sufficient support to form a majority government. The question, then, is: What would be the effect of having either minority or coalition governments bargaining with each other?

5. TWO MODELS

In the following, two alternate models of the impact of electoral reform on the conduct of federal-provincial relations are outlined. One model – based on rational-choice institutionalism – predicts enhanced conflict at the worst; and no appreciable change from the present pattern at best.

The second model predicts that electoral reform will lead to the formation of cross-border political alliances that will result in the attenuation of provincially, perhaps regionally, based interests and allegiances.

Advocates of PR make a number of arguments for why change in the electoral system will lead to salutary effects. A more heterogeneous

political class will lead to incorporation of wider views in the making of policies. Generally, that is, PR will lead to more cooperative, collegial, consensual, and conciliatory politics.¹⁷

To date, the argument of electoral reformers has focussed only on the national level. They have argued that PR would change the composition of the Commons and cabinets. Regional tensions would be dampened as the House of Commons would reflect partisan minorities that presently are not able to win seats in the current SMP system. A more representative Commons – and, indeed, government party – would be better for Canada.¹⁸

But the PR argument is limited to what happens *intra-government*. Even if it is true that PR increases co-operation between at least some of the parties in the Commons, it does not follow that such co-operation will extend to relations *inter-government*.

Rational choice institutionalism (RCI) focusses on the impact of electoral rules upon political behaviour, especially pertaining to political parties and politicians. It builds on the fundamental premise of rational choice theory that actors, when considering available options, seek to maximize their utilities. Parties, for instance, offer the platform that is most likely to win favour.

Pippa Norris argues that

“the core theoretical claim in rational choice institutionalism is that formal electoral rules generate important incentives that are capable of shaping and constraining political behaviour.”¹⁹

With electoral systems as the variable, she focuses on the development of party systems; evolution of social cleavages; the rooting of party loyalties; the pattern of women’s representation; the inclusion of ethnic minorities; and how MPs perform constituency service. The relationship between governments, however, is not addressed. The argument here is that the electoral system is one the essential building blocks of the Canadian political system.²⁰

Incentives are the critical dynamic in RCI, which assumes that formal electoral rules shape the incentives to which political actors respond.

Political actors are seen as rational vote maximizers who respond strategically to electoral incentives as they pursue electoral office. Politicians can choose between two broad strategies. One, labelled “bridging” by Norris, leads actors to engage in coalition-building and present wide and general appeals to voters. The other – “bonding” – sees actors adopt positions that are narrow, specific, and focussed.

The choice between strategies is shaped by the electoral rules in place. In a SMP system vote-maximizing politicians adopt “bridging” approaches in order to develop winning coalitions. One consequence is that at least two parties will adopt centrist positions rather than extreme ones because they are more likely to find converts – and build an expanding coalition - in the middle of the spectrum rather than at the extreme. In PR systems, the electoral rules reward specificity rather than generality in the sense that a well-targeted appeal will be rewarded with the support of certain voters. The ability to increase significantly a party’s electoral standing will be limited by the specificity of its platform. The reward for the party’s strategy is that in the course of the post-election manoeuvring there may be opportunities to become part of a larger coalition in return for certain of its priorities to be acted upon.

In the Canadian case, following the thinking underlying RCI, the following observations about the interaction between Ottawa and provinces seem reasonable.

First, given that even in the SMP system it is unusual for parties to achieve the 50% threshold, it would seem very unlikely that parties operating in the environment of PR will reach 50%. Second, since Maurice Duverger’s work on party systems and electoral systems, it is recognized that PR systems support the formation of new, and most likely smaller, political parties.²¹ In comparison, there is a strong tendency for SMP systems to create two-party systems. Yet, in Canada, since 1921 there has been a breakdown of the two-party system, and the fragmentation of the party system seemed to accelerate from the 1993 election to the present.²² The prospect for the formation of new parties seems high given the propensity of Canadians to create new parties in the context of an electoral system not conducive to their vitality. (The previously-mentioned case of Alberta comes to mind.) Weaver argues that the combination of PR and federalism may lead to the proliferation

of political parties. In particular, federalism “can clearly lead to the development of territorially-based sub-national parties, usually based on linguistic differences or strong regional cultural identities.”²³

Accordingly, then, both the national and provincial systems will be characterized by minority or coalition governments., with party systems that would have more competitive actors and more fragmentation than is the case under SMP. To the extent that history is a guide, minority governments will be more likely than coalitions. How, then, will national and sub-national governments bargain with each other?

Federalism itself can be seen as part of the incentive structures in which politicians operate. Its leading features – the division of powers and the workings of central political institutions – are part of the highly contested nature of the Canadian political system. Amongst a wide range of issues, some - Ottawa’s exercise of the federal spending power, its approach to redistributive policies and equalization, and its handling of policies which seemingly threaten provincial control of natural resources - are matters on which provinces have strong and, often, divergent views. Ottawa, then, is at the centre of many pressures and demands emanating from the provinces. National politicians, conscious of the heterogeneous nature of Canadian society and the potential for conflict with and between the provinces and regions, seek to minimize conflict by finding points of agreement that lead to accommodation of differences.

One leading way to avoid the charge of being insensitive to regional needs and interests is to give way to the demands of sub-national governments. For a national government to be perceived as resisting, if not stamping on, the provinces and the regions will be to court the risk of parliamentary defeat and to energize (some) opposition parties which will see benefits in speaking strongly in favour of disaffected areas of the country.

This suggests that the electoral marketplace is tilted in favour of politicians who are sympathetic to accommodation rather than politicians who are hardnosed. “Holding the centre” will be a strategy that leads to decreased electoral strength. In the present system, of course, these pressures already exist and manifest themselves in many attempts by Ottawa to address provincial and regional grievances.

The greater change in the dynamic of federal-provincial relations will occur at the sub-national level. Provincial governments deal with a wide range of issues, though health, education, and welfare will continue to be the major expenditures in budgets. As such, they will be the central issues that parties will need to address in their election manifestoes.

Two important conditions, however, will likely influence how provincial governments bargain with each other and Ottawa. The first is that how a government has negotiated with Ottawa and other governments will closely scrutinized by their opponents.²⁴ Critics will emphasize that the province had got less than its due or had made unwarranted concessions. Governments, then, will have to be very sensitive to what their opponents say and averse to making concessions.

The argument to this point suggests that electoral reform will not appreciably change the nature of federal-provincial bargaining. However, electoral reform will result, to some degree at least, in weaker political executives, which will be in the constant uncertainty in the absence of single-party majority governments.

To the extent that electoral reform leads to weaker first ministers, as Massicote speculates, governments will be sensitive to be what their opponent or, indeed, coalition members think of what has been negotiated.²⁵ Generally, parties in a PR-type system will be oriented to the “bonding” strategy. However, in situations when a government party (minority or coalition) is perceived to be vulnerable because of how its federal-provincial strategy then (some) parties will see electoral gain in adopting a “bridging” posture. Running against Ottawa is a productive tactic in SMP systems. It will also be so in PR elections.²⁶ And, perhaps more so, because it will be a clearly productive way to take supporters away from other parties and bring them into your camp. The reward for successful “poaching” will be heightened weight in all aspects of the legislature’s politics.

The second condition pertains to the formation of new parties. In the course of Canadian history certain provinces have seen the emergence of autonomist or even secessionist political parties. For such parties, the threshold for political influence by winning seats is much higher in the SMP system than it is in a PR-type system, which will reward parties

with seats in accordance with their electoral support (provided that parties achieve whatever minimal level of voter support is mandated). The argument, then, is that electoral reform will see the birth and development of autonomist or secessionist parties that will make it harder for other parties to make arrangements with other governments, especially Ottawa.

The second model predicts that change in the electoral system will lead to the development of different kinds of political alliances than Canada has experienced to date. Political parties will emerge that are not interested in the advancement of territorial interests. The obvious case in point is the environmental movement. At its core, its project is based on a fundamental reordering of the economic system. While it is the case that the organization of Canada's various green parties reflects the present federal system, with the national party being a separate entity from its provincial counterparts, it is also the case that the green parties share a commitment to an overarching set of values and goals that transcend the advancement and enhancement of jurisdictions, especially sub-national governments.²⁷

A few cautions, however, are in order about the potential for the development of new political alliances, especially those that do not speak to territorially-based interests.

First, Canada's constitutional order has a long history. Provinces enjoy a high degree of legitimacy and there is little support for their elimination. Over the last 50 years Canada has moved from an Ottawa-centred system to one in which both governments interact with each other as interdependent competitors. The present system is not only well-established in terms of its norms and procedures, it seems to be well-embedded in terms of popular acceptance even if the public at large has no appetite for constitutional reform discussions.

Second, as Edwin Black and Alan Cairns argued over 40 years ago, Canadians organize themselves, for the most part, along provincial lines, even for the most commonplace of social arrangements²⁸ Third, Canada's economic development more and more proceeds along north-south lines rather than east-west. Thomas Courchene reports that from 1989 to 2001 interprovincial exports, as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product, dropped from 22.9% to 19.7%. In 1989 only two provinces

exported more to the United States than to other Canadian provinces. By 2001 only Manitoba had more exports to Canadian provinces than to the United States.²⁹ Canadians in their social and economic lives are oriented to their provincial environments rather than some overarching national one.

Last, since the early 1960s the Canadian party system has become increasingly fragmented, regionalized, and federalized (in the sense of separation between national and sub-national parties in terms of finances, careers, and organization).

The organization of Canadian society, economy, and political system all point to the centrality of provinces and regions in the life of Canadians. The development of cross-political border alignments that will lead to the easing of spatially-based interests and conflicts may occur, but will likely take a considerable period to take root and flourish, even in an age of rapid communication and quick diffusion of ideas.

CONCLUSION

Mikhail Filippov and his colleagues argue that the fundamental purpose of federal design is to keep in check the inevitable processes of negotiation and bargaining between national and sub-national politicians. Their optimal design calls for the establishment of a federal supremacy clause in the constitution. That is a most unlikely eventuality in Canada. They also argue that central political institutions must work in such a way that sub-national political actors find more satisfaction of their interests by working through the centre rather than by asserting the primacy of their jurisdictions or working for secession. Compared to the American presidential-congressional system, the parliamentary system, characterized by disciplined political parties, is not amenable to incorporating regional perspectives. Provinces have become the principal sources of opposition to Ottawa's initiatives and leadership.

The primacy in the analysis by Filippov and his colleagues of the party system's role as an integrating mechanism is especially telling in the Canadian case given the very little connection between parties of the national and sub-national levels.³⁰

Louis Massicote in his discussion of electoral reform observed that it is hard to predict the effects of change to an electoral system because the decisions of myriad political actors are central to what happens.³¹ There is, to be sure, much that is open-ended about the consequences of electoral reform. Rein Taagepera argues that not only should electoral reformers be cautious but they should be self-consciously aware that our knowledge in a predictive sense is very limited. Indeed, he argues that given “the complexity of socio-political phenomena, electoral studies are about where astronomy was 400-500 years ago: lots of observations and little predictive ability.”³²

The argument here is that the nature of electoral competition and the incentives provided by electoral systems channel or direct the behaviour of (most) political actors. In the SMP system, the threshold for winning seats serves to move most political parties toward each other (and, it is presumed, to where most citizens are located). In PR-type systems, however, the threshold, being much lower, encourages those parties which offer specialized appeals.

In the Canadian case, with great differences that are territorially-based, PR-type systems will not only foster the emergence of new parties, but some will be highly autonomist or secessionist in character. Some of those parties will be found in national politics; they will make it harder for Ottawa to “hold the centre”. In provincial politics, they will generate pressure on provincial governments to hold fast in federal-provincial negotiations and avoid accommodation with Ottawa. How a federal system highly dependent upon bargaining will operate when electoral incentives will encourage parties to take non-accommodating postures is most problematic.

Kent Weaver argues that “the most important question about the effect of electoral rules on party systems in federations concerns democratic stability.”³³ In a country sorely lacking in strong national bonds, especially in terms of its party system, it is necessary for electoral reformers to address the effects of changing from SMP to PR, of whatever type.

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- ¹ William Cross, "The Rush to Electoral Reform in the Canadian Provinces: Why Now?," **Representation: The Journal of Representative Democracy**, Vol, 41, No.2 (2005), 75-84.
- ² R. Kent Weaver, "Electoral Rules and Party Systems in Federations," in Ugo M. Amoretti and Nancy Bermeo, eds., **Federalism and Territorial Cleavages** (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 2004), 227-58.
- ³ Alan C. Cairns, "The Electoral System and the Party System in Canada , 1921-1965," **The Canadian Journal of Political Science** Vol.1, No.1 (1968), 55-80.
- ⁴ Weaver, 228.
- ⁵ W.P. Irvine, **Does Canada Need a New Electoral System?** Kingston, Ontario: Institute for Intergovernmental Relations, 1979), 69.
- ⁶ Louis Massicote, "Changing the Canadian Electoral System," **CHOICES** (IRPP: Montreal, Vol. 7, No. 1, February 2001), p.4.
- ⁷ Ibid. p.5.
- ⁸ Massicote, 15.
- ⁹ J.A. Corry, "Constitutional Trends and Federalism," in A.R.M. Lower *et al*, **Evolving Canadian Federalism**, Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1958, 95-123.
- ¹⁰ For "province-building:" see Edwin R. Black and Alan C. Cairns. "A Different Perspective on Canadian Federalism," **Canadian Public Administration** , Vol IX, No.1 (March 1966), 27-45.. For "federal-provincial diplomacy see Richard Simeon, **Federal-Provincial Diplomacy: The Making of Recent Policy in Canada** (Toronto: University of Toronto Press,, 1972), For "executive federalism" see Donald V. Smiley, **Canada in Question: Federalism in the Seventies** (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1972).
- ¹¹ Alan C. Cairns, "The Governments and Societies of Canadian Federalism," **Canadian Journal of Political Science**, Vol. 10, No. 3 (December 1977), 695-725..
- ¹² Garth Stevenson, **Canadian Federalism and National Unity** (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, fourth edition, 2004).
- ¹³ William Riker: **Federalism: Origin, Operation, Significance** (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1964).
- ¹⁴ In the 10 elections from 1867 to 1917, the winning party received more than 50% of the vote in all but one election (1896).
- ¹⁵ Yukon's last five elections produced governments elected on the basis of a plurality of the votes; in each of the elections three parties nominated full slates. Nunavut and the Northwest Territories do not have party-based elections.
- ¹⁶ Massicote acknowledges that MMP system will in all likelihood produce minority governments; 10.
- ¹⁷ Pippa Norris, **Electoral Engineering: Voting Rules and Political Behavior**, Cambridge University Press, 2004. p.7.
- ¹⁸ See, for example, Tom Kent, "Electoral Reform would ease regional tensions," **The Globe and Mail**, February 17, 2006. A17; also, Chantal Hebert, **Fench Kiss: Stephen Harper's Blind Date with Quebec** (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2007), 138.
- ¹⁹ Pippa Norris, p.7.
- ²⁰ A view shared by Massicote, who writes: "The first-past-the-post system is one three most critical variables that have shaped Canada's Westminster system of government , both federal and provincially, and replacing it with PR would likely have sweeping consequences." 10.
- ²¹ Maurice Duverger, **Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State**, (London, Methuen, 1964).
- ²² The coming together of the Canadian Alliance and the Progressive Conservative Party after the 2000 election marked, of course, an important contraction in the number of parties with significant vote shares. On the other hand, the slow but evident increase in support for the Green Party has contributed to the fragmentation of the Canadian party system.
- ²³ Weaver, 246.
- ²⁴ The classic case in the SMP era was in 1971 when the Quebec Premier, Robert Bourassa, changed his support for the Victoria Charter when he arrived from Victoria to discover a developing fire storm of opposition; see Donald V. Smiley, "Federalism and the Legislative Process in Canada," in William A.W. Neilson and James C. MacPherson, eds., **The Legislative Process in Canada: The Need for Reform** (Toronto: Butterworth and Co, 1978, p.78.

²⁵ One complexity arising from coalition governments will be the matter of which minister or ministers will be involved in federal-provincial bargaining. Will a minister be able to commit his or her colleagues?

²⁶ For incentives provided by the SMP system see Terrence J. Levesque and Kenneth H. Norrie, "Overwhelming Majorities in the Legislature of Alberta," **Canadian Journal of Political Science**, Vol 12, No. 3 (September 1979), 351-70. They argue that in the SMP system marginal increases in vote shares produce very strong seat shares in legislatures.

²⁷ See, for example, the Constitution of the Green Party of Ontario; www.greenparty.on.ca.

²⁸ Black and Cairns.

²⁹ Thomas J. Courchene, "Thinking North America, in Thomas J. Courchene, ed., **Thinking North America** (Montreal: IRPP, 2004), Vol. II, No. 2, 7-8.

³⁰ Mikhail Filippov, *et al*, **Designing Federalism: a theory of self-sustainable federal institutions** (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

³¹ Massicote, 10.

³² Rein Taageper, "Designing Electoral Rules and Waiting for an Electoral System to Evolve," in Andrew Reynolds, ed., **The Architecture of Democracy: Constitutional Design, Conflict Management, and Democracy** (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 256.

³³ Weaver, 244.