Hope and Fear Revisited:

Did the Provincial Election of 2007 Mark the Transition to a Stable Two-Party System in Saskatchewan?

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Prepared for the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association,
University of British Columbia, June 4-6, 2008

The Saskatchewan election of November 2007 seems to mark a significant break with the past. Lorne Calvert's NDP was decisively defeated by a new political entity, the Saskatchewan Party, under a new and relatively youthful leader, Brad Wall. His defeat, which brought an end to 16 years of NDP rule, was neither unexpected nor catastrophic. The Saskatchewan Party had held a commanding lead in the opinion polls for a year or more before the writ was dropped and Wall protected that lead with a low key, carefully scripted and uncontroversial campaign. While the NDP's share of the popular vote was lower than at any time since the 1930s - marginally lower even than the Grant Devine sweep in 1982 when the party was reduced to a rump of 9 MLAs - the Liberal vote held up just well enough to leave Calvert with 20 members in a 58 seat legislature. However, something unusual and interesting was clearly taking place.

Mr. Wall was certainly eager to give this impression. In his victory speech to a packed campaign headquarters in Swift Current, he surprised the party faithful by introducing a new theme in the form of a slogan: "Hope not fear." While echoing the rhetoric of the Bush administration, it was also a reference to the negative tactics of the outgoing government, which had bought advertising space before the campaign had even begun depicting their opponents as wolves in sheep's clothing. Attempting to repeat their success in the 2003 election - where the original Saskatchewan Party leader, Elwin Hermanson, had appeared fatally evasive when asked about the future of the province's Crown Corporations and never recovered - the 2007 campaign saw the NDP repeatedly suggesting that Wall had a hidden agenda involving the wholesale transformation of key provincial institutions and was not to be trusted. Wall, on the other hand, had built his campaign around a new confidence that was evident in a province riding the western Canadian resource boom, underpinned in Saskatchewan's case by an equally strong agricultural sector. Calvert's government, he had insisted, was tired and out of ideas - it was not just "time for a change", but safe to make that change. This proved to be a winning formula.

However, at a deeper level, in a province steeped in political history, Wall was surely trying to suggest that his was now the party of political change in a larger sense than simply a change of government. It was the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) that had swept to power in 1944 offering the hope of a New Jerusalem to be achieved by the political transformation of a tired, corrupt and unjust society. Wall's slogan hinted that this transformation, if it had ever

taken place, had now run its course and that hope for a different future rested elsewhere. Unfortunately, if Wall had supposed that this slogan would instantly catch the imagination of his supporters, he was sadly mistaken. In spite of repeated efforts, they declined to take up the chant that evening and the words themselves faded away, never again appearing on any set piece occasion of the new government.

Wall's failure to define his new government in these transparently ideological terms - a failure to convince even diehard party activists at their moment of triumph - is significant. It suggests that political scientists who have argued that a less ideological, more pragmatic approach to politics has been gradually taking hold in the Province are correct. The debate around pragmatism, which has been going on in its present form at least since the appearance of the Saskatchewan Party in 1997, pits those who see the new party as simply the latest embodiment of a province polarized between the old left and the new right against those who claim to see a growing convergence between the two major parties. Underlying the *polarization thesis* is the assumption of a party system with centrifugal tendencies, driven by deep ideological division forcing the major parties apart; underlying the *convergence thesis* is the assumption of a competition with centripetal tendencies in which the major parties become ever more alike as they battle to control the political centre. Similar debates are taking place in other provinces where there has been a history of ideological conflict between the NDP and opposition parties of the right: British Columbia, Manitoba and Ontario, in particular.

At one level, the debate between proponents of the two theses is easy to understand and carried on at a familiar level of analysis somewhere between political commentary and the higher journalism. The evidence for convergence over policy prescriptions during the 2007 campaign and the way in which both parties sought to outbid each other over a small range of proposals is clear enough (McGrane, 2008). At this level, the debate always ends up being about whether either party is really sincere in its efforts at convergence or whether there is a "hidden agenda" of traditional ideological prescription behind the bland façade - a charge that both parties tried to make a part of the election campaign itself. At a more sophisticated level, the convergence thesis appeals to the idea of a new climate of opinion converging on the Blairite "third way" or de-clawed neoliberalism, leaving little for the parties to argue about except who will offer the best value for the voter's grudgingly-proffered tax dollar (Wishlow, 2001). As

Pope put it more than two centuries earlier:

> For forms of government, let fools contest;
> Whate'er is best administer'd, is best.

Attempts to provide a more general explanation of this phenomenon, one that could be the basis for a comparison between developments in the different provinces, are hampered by the usual methodological conflicts. On the one hand, there are those who take a sociological approach, explaining voter preferences and party competition as the surface effects of such underlying variables as class or geography. On the other, an older institutionalism - now powerfully reinforced by both public choice and new institutionalist theories - looks to features of the formal and informal rules of the political game to explain outcomes. Either approach can be used to support the convergence or the polarization theses. Sociological convergence theorists, for example, argue that party convergence reflects an underlying convergence on suburban values and lifestyles in the electorate at large, overcoming the old urban/rural cleavage that some saw as the sociological foundation of polarization (Rasmussen, 2008). Institutional convergence theorists on the other hand see party convergence as driven by the logic of the single member plurality (SMP) system combined with an inability to define the issues or exploit cleavages in ways that would give one party a permanent edge over the other. In Saskatchewan, the sociological approach has dominated discussions, not least because of the enduring influence of Seymour Martin Lipset's classic study *Agrarian Socialism* (1959) [first published in 1950 and subtitled "a study in political sociology"]. And yet, as Smith (2007) notes, within four years of the publication of *Agrarian Socialism*, Lipset had revised his analysis of the rise of third parties to include an institutional explanation that stressed the impact of federalism, party discipline and SMP.

It is possible, of course, that Lipset was just a victim of confusion. Smith, for one, finds Lipset's institutional arguments wholly unconvincing. However, as Ware (1996) has argued, it is not that one approach is obviously right and the other wrong. There are circumstances in which sociological arguments seem to work and others where institutional features come to prominence. As a general rule, Ware proposes that, in societies where deep social cleavages form the basis for party support based on social solidarity, where parties themselves reach down into

society to play a role in the day-to-day lives of the electorate in between elections, the sociological explanation will tend to gain some traction. In societies where social solidarity becomes less relevant and voters are open to switching parties on the basis of policies and personalities, clever moves by parties to exploit the rules of the game will be more significant and institutionalist explanations will prevail (1996: 199-202). If this is so, we can test the claim that Saskatchewan politics has become more pragmatic by turning the methodological argument in the previous paragraph on its head. When the link between voters and parties is a pragmatic one, then we ought to be able to give an explanation of the party system largely in institutionalist terms. In fact, the point at which an institutionalist explanation begins to have more purchase will be the point at which the change takes place. On the other hand, to the extent that the link between voters and parties is still social solidarity mediated by ideology, a more sociological explanation will be needed to make sense of the party system. After briefly outlining the electoral history of the Province, we consider these alternatives in turn.

ELECTIONS, PARTIES AND PARTY SYSTEMS IN SASKATCHEWAN

Commentators generally agree on four central features of Saskatchewan's political history. First, there is a pattern of surface stability: 26 elections spanning just over a century have resulted in only 8 changes in the governing party (Figure 1). This pattern has inevitably meant serial election victories by the same party interspersed with long periods consigned to opposition. Second, and related to the first point, the creation of the CCF, its belated transformation into the NDP, and its extraordinary staying power in both government and opposition form a major part of the story. However, as Courtney and Smith (1978) note, the other parties have rarely failed to play the anti-Ottawa card when it seemed prudent to do so. Thus, the provincial Liberals and Progressive Conservatives (PC) have more often than not stressed their singularity as provincial parties. Nonetheless, they have come and gone, and sometimes come again, in a different pattern to the persistence of the CCF/NDP. The creation of the Saskatchewan Party is, in this sense at least, part of a larger pattern of provincially-orientated political parties created to provide credible opposition to the natural governing party. As a result, accounts of Saskatchewan political parties have sometimes seemed the best, if not the only way of explaining Saskatchewan politics (Leeson, 2001).

Third, there have been two interesting and highly significant episodes of coalition government, defying the maxim that coalitions are not found in Westminster systems outside wartime or other emergency. The first, in 1929 was, as Marchildon (2006) argues, an offensive coalition, engineered by an increasingly frustrated opposition to bring an end to nearly a quarter century of Liberal rule. Conservatives had cooperated with Progressives and Independents not to run candidates against each other where there was a chance of defeating a Liberal and post-election cooperation in government was relatively easily accomplished. The coalition partners were destroyed by the Depression and the election of 1934 which consigned the Conservatives and their heirs - the PCs - to nearly 50 years in the political wilderness. However, the failure of the Conservative coalition did open up space for a new opposition party, a space that was soon occupied by the fledgling CCF. Courtney and Smith (1972) argue that the election of 1934 thus marks the transition from a first party system, marked by patronage politics and dominated by the Liberals (who seized the levers of patronage in 1905), to a second party system featuring effective two party competition between the Liberals and the CCF. This is a characterization which will be taken up in the sociological analysis.

The second coalition was a rather different animal. It was constructed after the 1999 election, (the first contested by the Saskatchewan Party) which saw the reduction of the governing NDP's majority to a plurality. While the Liberal MLAs may have taken some pleasure in frustrating their erstwhile colleagues who had defected to the new party by supporting the government, there was little real connection with the NDP and there had been no attempt to coordinate activities during the election. The effect of this coalition was disastrous only for the junior partner, the Liberals, as they were subsequently shut out of the legislature in both the 2003 and 2007 elections. While Marchildon (2006) seeks to distinguish the second coalition from the first as defensive rather than offensive, there are clearly some important parallels between the two in respect of their impact on the provincial party system. The very unusual occurrence of a coalition itself suggests a break from the normal pattern of competitive interaction between parties in a plurality electoral system.

Fourth, and finally, there is the curious but possibly misleading parallel between the fates of the two major parties who opposed the CCF/NDP. Ross Thatcher's Liberals came to power in 1964 after a confused and turbulent period in the politics of Saskatchewan. The doctor's strike of 1962

and the exit of Tommy Douglas to federal politics were only the most familiar features of a period that appeared to herald the breakdown of two party competition in the late 1950s, only to see it reasserted with Thatcher's two-term government and an NDP opposition. Two party competition did eventually break down in 1975, as the PCs rose phoenix-like from the ashes of the Liberal defeat and their subsequent party infighting, sweeping the 1982 election under Grant Devine and collapsing in their turn after two terms. The failure of the Liberals to reestablish themselves as a credible opposition in the 1990s brings us to the formation of the Saskatchewan Party in 1997 and ultimately, to Mr. Wall's victory a decade later. The significance of this victory depends very much on whether it is just the latest in the swing of the ideological pendulum from left to right and back again, or whether it marks the creation of a new two party system featuring pragmatic accommodation between the two major parties. If the former, we would expect to be able to explain the whole sequence sociologically. If the latter, we would expect to find institutionalist explanations increasingly persuasive.

A SOCIOLOGICAL EXPLANATION: THE LONG SHADOW OF SEYMOUR MARTIN LIPSET

The enduring interest of Lipset's (1959) sociological explanation for Saskatchewan party politics cannot be overstated. Unlike the institutionalists, who are concerned with the logic of competitive behaviour under a given set of rules and procedures, Lipset viewed political parties as organic institutions whose identities were rooted in deep social cleavages. In the Saskatchewan context, Lipset observed that the first elected socialist government in North America - the CCF - battled the Liberals in something akin to a microcosm of the ideological battles of the Cold War era (Lipset, 1959; Leeson, 2001). Peace – or victory – in this battle has been declared a number of times - from the “end of ideology” thesis of the 1960s to the collapse of communist regimes after 1989 - and each time, commentators in Saskatchewan have confidently predicted that ideological polarization would come to an end. Yet, as recently as 2001, one political scientist reflected that "Saskatchewan could not afford capitalism" (Leeson, 2001: 6) and emotional rhetoric evoking rosy memories of Tommy Douglas has continued to be used by the NDP, helping to entrench the perception of ideological polarization as a distinctive feature of Saskatchewan political culture.

In fact, of course, the sociological approach in the hands of sophisticated writers like Lipset rarely considered ideology as the only independent causal variable. Other factors include how parties are structured and organized, their leaders, their leadership styles, their societal penetration, and the relative level of political competition (Patten, 2007). The real key to Lipset's contribution to understanding Saskatchewan politics is his analysis of political parties as fluid institutions. Influenced by his own reading of Michels (1962) - for whose classic text on the "iron law of oligarchy" Lipset wrote a modern introduction - Lipset regarded it as inevitable that a political party which began life as the electoral voice of subordinate populations and radical social movements would become institutionalized and lose its oppositional edge. Under SMP, as in Saskatchewan, the result should be a party system that oscillates between 2 and 2 1/2 parties as third parties or new grassroots movements appear to champion the cause of the disgruntled party faithful. The new party either reinvigorates one or both of the dominant parties or supplants one of them to become a governing party in its turn. Parties are punished for convergence and polarization is constantly renewed.

If our own hybrid thesis is correct, a Lipset-inspired approach should have considerable success at explaining the party system where the key assumptions of significant social cleavages and party penetration based upon them hold true. In fact, the two party systems identified by Courtney and Smith (1978) lend themselves well to sociological explanation: the first extending from the creation of the Province in 1905 to the election of the CCF in 1944 and the second from the CCF's first term in office in 1944 to the re-emergence of the PCs in 1975 In each of these periods, there is an observable pattern of protest, growth and entrenchment, followed by a period of transition where the rise of a protest party – from either end of the ideological spectrum - or the resurgence of disaffected dominant party supporters motivates a period of change before the pattern is repeated again.

Prior to the creation of the Province in 1905, the Territorial government was largely non-partisan under the Premiership of Frederick Haultain. Haultain had campaigned vigorously that the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan should be united and continue to be governed on a nonpartisan basis and he had also been a vocal critic of the Laurier government in Ottawa. When

Saskatchewan became a province in 1905, he was passed over for the position of Lieutenant Governor in favour of Amedee Forget. Forget used his powers to appoint the Liberal leader, Walter Scott, as the Province's first Premier (Archer, 1980). Haultain responded by creating and leading the Provincial Rights party, campaigning against the education and natural resources components of the *Saskatchewan Act.* Despite the Provincial Rights party's failure to form a government, its institutionalization created a stable two party system until the election of 1921. The provincial Liberals benefited from their identification with federal Liberals' immigration policies while the supporters of the Provincial Rights party vented their frustration with Ottawa's policy impositions and the lack of adequate infrastructure (Archer, 1980; Eager, 1980). Thus, from 1905, Saskatchewan's two dominant political parties experienced a period of growth and entrenchment, rooted in the developing social structures of the province.

The election of 1917 marked the peak of support for Saskatchewan's two main parties in the first party system. As Lipset (1959) would have predicted, the two parties became increasingly institutionalized, choosing new leaders from their own political elites and becoming less representative of and responsive to their own voters. They gradually lost a substantial base of their support which sometimes shifted to new radical parties or movements. The outlet for disaffection with the major parties was, at first, Independent candidates, who collectively captured 25.7% of the popular vote in 1921 to secure Official Opposition status in the Saskatchewan legislature and reduced the Conservatives to below 5%. From 1921 onwards, a number of new parties also appeared representing specific social groups, leading to the Farmer-Labor Alliance and ultimately, to the CCF. On the sociological account, the failure of the two major parties to respond to their own loss of appeal to key groups of voters created the conditions for the rise of third and fourth parties.[1]

Lipset's analysis has a certain amount of traction in the second, post-1944, party system as well but it starts to run into difficulties early on. While the older of the two major political parties, the

[1] Lipset's own analysis is much more complex at this point because he is interested not just in explaining the rise of any third party but why this particular third party should be a socialist party in a province largely populated by farmers. As Cairns (2007) convincingly demonstrates, Lipset was too honest an historian to fail to note the role played by sheer historical contingency in any explanation of singular events, especially the crucial timing of the elections of 1921 (before Saskatchewan farmers could organize their own party) and 1938 (after questions about Aberhart's leadership of Social Credit in Alberta had surfaced).

Liberals, was the first to suffer attrition from a more ideologically radical competitor, Social Credit, it was able to stave off the collapse predicted by Lipset. It did so by electing a radical outsider, the former CCF federal MP and born-again free-enterpriser, Ross Thatcher as its leader. While an entirely successful move, because it forced Social Credit out of contention as an opposition party, made Crown Corporations a key election issue (as they would remain for the next 40 years) and brought the Liberals to power in 1964, the "iron law of oligarchy" predicts that mature political parties will continue to elect leaders from inside their own political elite until driven out of business. In Saskatchewan, as in this case, the reverse is true. There are many instances of opposition parties finding new leaders capable of bringing their party back to power. Nonetheless, the underlying logic of the sociological explanation seems to explain the result: however implausibly, the Liberals were able to find their way back to the ideological corner favoured by their supporters in a province characterized by deep social cleavages and they were duly rewarded for doing so.

With the benefit of hindsight, we know that the outcome of the Thatcher government was not the permanent reinvigoration of the Liberals. With Ross Thatcher in opposition and the PCs assuming Social Credit's role as the protest party of the right, the stage is set for another political transformation of exactly the kind Lipset would have predicted. It begins in 1975 when the Saskatchewan Liberals were punished for not responding to the centrifugal ideological tendencies of the electorate and the PCs oust them from their position as the official opposition. The latter then take up the familiar pattern of leadership change in opposition, replacing Dick Collver with the ideologue Grant Devine, and they sweep to power in the election of 1982.

At this point, however, the sociological account seems to run out of steam. Devine's PCs were elected on a 1980s New Right campaign platform that promised both tax cuts and increased spending - a combination which ultimately resulted in the accumulation of a massive provincial debt and deficit (Praud & McQuarrie, 2001). The Devine government marked a very sharp transition from its predecessor, Blakeney's NDP administration. Devine reversed many Blakeney initiatives, culminating in the sell-off of all or part of some of the Province's Crowns in an effort to get government out of the economy (Pitsula and Rasmussen). So far, so good. But the response of the NDP to Devine's administration was not to emphasize its own ideological

distinctiveness. Rather, the election of Roy Romanow as leader was generally understood, even at the time, as the election of a pragmatist and a competent public manager rather than an ideologue. Not only was the NDP successful in 1991 on this basis, but the resulting turmoil in the party system took place among the opposition, involving the disappearance of, first, the PCs, followed soon after by the Liberals, and leading to the formation of the Saskatchewan Party. Thus, while the temptation to argue that the polarization thesis still holds is understandable (neither the PCs nor the Liberals were true to their roots, they were duly punished, and their place has been taken by a new party of anti-establishment protest) the possibility that Saskatchewan politics had undergone a fundamental change now looks equally plausible.

According to Lipset, the rightward shift of Romanow's NDP should have been offset by the rise of a third party acting as a source of protest against two complacent political parties increasingly out of touch with their own core supporters. At first, it appears that this will occur. The Liberals, who received 23% of the popular vote in the 1991 election under the leadership of Saskatchewan's first female political leader, Lynda Haverstock, oust the PCs from their position as official opposition in the election of 1995. But the Liberals at this time are an ideologically moderate political party not a party of political protest at all (let alone a party on the political left). On the contrary, when the NDP lose their majority in the legislative assembly in 1999, Haverstock's Liberals build a coalition with Romanow's NDP to keep the fledgling protest party under Elwin Hermanson, out of office. The coalition, as we have noted, was fatal for the Liberals, who decline in importance from that point onwards as a viable third party. It was beneficial for the NDP, who reap the rewards of a convergence strategy..

The election of 2003 is thus central to the confrontation of the polarization and convergence theses. On the former interpretation, the error by the leader of the Saskatchewan Party in not being forthright about the future of the Crowns allowed the NDP to reassert its position as the guardian of ideologically left values in the province, galvanizing its traditional bases of support and increasing voter participation for the first time since 1991. On the convergence thesis, Hermanson's waffling was a false step precisely because it appeared to reintroduce the possibility of an ideological confrontation that no longer made sense to a pragmatic electorate. The NDP countered by promising business as usual and was rewarded As McGrane (2008)

notes, the Calvert government continued with the market liberalization policies of his predecessor and despite some popular innovations, such as a tuition freeze (a policy that appeals above all to middle-class parents), social welfare liberalization also continued apace. In 1997, for example, Calvert's NDP government introduced the *Building Independence, Investing in Families* policy framework which essentially reduced social assistance caseloads by moving people into schemes resembling workfare. And the party made no real effort to repair the strained relationship with its traditional base of support in the labour movement after it legislated public sector unions back to work precisely because it no longer believed it important to do so.

Sociological explanations for convergence remain possible. As we have noted, the "suburbanization" thesis sees parties responding to a convergent value shift in the electorate. The trend is sometimes expressed in traditional terms as a shift to the "right" but increasingly appears as a phenomenon that cannot be accurately captured on the left-right scale. But the particular version of the sociological thesis that has dominated explanations of politics in Saskatchewan, under the long shadow of *Agrarian Socialism*, lays stress on the penetration of society by political parties and the reciprocal obligation of parties to respect and respond to social cleavages if they are to survive. That kind of explanation no longer seems to work. On our hybrid account we would expect an institutionalist explanation to do better. The question is: when does it start to do so?

AN INSTITUTIONALIST EXPLANATION: PRAGMATISM ALL THE WAY DOWN?

An institutionalist explanation must at least begin with the most significant institution for a party system, the electoral system (Cairns 1968). The connection between plurality systems and two partism has often been noted. Indeed, it formed the basis for Duverger's (1952) infamous and obviously overstated "law" connecting the two. Nonetheless, the connection is important as a kind of limiting case. If parties really are free to compete over a whole range of issues, the expected outcome under SMP is likely to be two "brokerage" parties. The key assumptions here, of course, are that the parties have no burden of ideological baggage or other deeper connection to a segment of the electorate that impairs their freedom to propose different policy packages and that policy preferences are roughly evenly distributed in the electorate across one or more

dimensions. An explanation of this kind underlies Evelyn Eager's (1980) general interpretation of Saskatchewan politics and in a rather more sophisticated form, supports the arguments of Wishlow (2001) and Rasmussen (2007) about the appearance of a new party system in the province.

Eager's (1980) argument is much the more sweeping. Writing in the late 1970s, just as the PC revival was beginning, Eager set out to demolish what she called the "myth" that Saskatchewan voters were especially attracted to co-operation on ideological grounds. On her view, *contra* Lipset, Saskatchewan farmers were, like farmers everywhere, rugged individualists. Finding themselves at the mercy of a hinterland economy in the midst of drought and economic depression, they saw virtue in cooperation but strictly as a strategy for survival:

> (t)he homesteader remained an individualist but he was not independent. Co-operative enterprises which arose from his dependence were not usually based on idealistic or theoretical premises. Co-operation was pragmatic. It was developed in specific areas of prairie life to meet practical needs, and it was meant to serve an individualistic purpose. Co-operation was the means to an end: the end itself was the ownership and operation of an individual farm. (1980: 2)

In addition, Eager argued, commentators had been far too quick to imagine that "farmers" were a homogenous group, sharing the same interests. There were always a variety of cross cutting cleavages in the electorate: large farms and small ones, urban interests and rural ones, northern and southern, and so on.

Although Eager's account is resolutely innocent of theory, the overall effect that she depicts is much more like the distribution of interests assumed in the simple institutionalist account. Thus, the outcome, from the beginning of the province's political history, should have been a two party system featuring brokerage parties subject to a strong centripetal pull minimizing the ideological distance between them. Other kinds of parties may well have arisen as a result of the misguided fervour of party activists or simple miscalculation by the party leadership but, to survive, they must become pragmatic in their search for votes (a logic that supplies Eager with her account of the transformation of the CCF into a brokerage party). Repeated mistakes of this kind will cause the rise of enterprising third parties, eventually supplanting those who fail to adapt to the discipline of two partism.

To assess this claim, we first need a working definition of two partism and a measure, however rough and ready, for identifying it. According to Sartori (1976), third and subsequent parties should count in a party system (leaving aside the perennial question of whether they are "half" parties or not) when they have either the positive potential to be included in a coalition or the negative potential to blackmail the other parties to take their proposals seriously. The latter might include responding to these proposals in election campaigns rather than simply ignoring them or even drafting them into their own platforms, for example. As a measurable indicator, Courtney and Smith (1978) propose that smaller parties need not be taken seriously if the combined proportion of the vote attributable to the two major parties in an election reaches 80% or more. This is a robust, if somewhat arbitrary measure appealing to the fact that, under SMP, the residual 20% of the vote, when spread amongst several parties, will almost certainly result in the two major parties monopolizing all the seats in the legislature. This claim in turn rests on the assumption that there is no regional party that can turn a smaller percentage of concentrated votes into seats won - not an unreasonable assumption in provincial elections. The occasional Independent member elected as a result of some obscure local grievance can safely be discounted for the purposes of analyzing a party system.

Ware (1996), on the other hand, takes issue with an approach that measures the proportion of votes cast for the major parties because of the distorting effect of the way that different electoral systems translate votes into seats. While Ware's concern is really directed at comparative studies encompassing jurisdictions with very different electoral systems, it is worth remembering that Saskatchewan experimented with multi-member constituencies in the cities during Ross Thatcher's government, an innovation that was intended precisely to alter the way votes translated into seats in favour of the Liberals themselves. Ware proposes instead that a two party system is one in which no other party achieves more than 3% of the seats in the legislature.

For the sake of inclusiveness, we have used both measures and noted the occasions on which each used alone would give a different result than both taken together. As Figure 2 shows, using the combined measures there have been 12 elections where two partism has broken down in Saskatchewan (almost half of the 26 elections). The five elections between 1921 and 1938 are all of this kind, accounting for nearly half of the total. It is noteworthy, too, that the “seats” measure correctly identifies 1929, the election that resulted in a coalition government, while the “votes”

measure does not. This is the period when Courtney and Smith's first party system, based on Liberal patronage, came under stress and eventually broke down, but it is interesting to note that two partism on our measures is not strictly restored until the watershed election of 1944.

The combined measures identify three more elections resulting in a multi-party system during the Tommy Douglas years, 1948, 1956 and 1960, though only one (1956) would appear on the list if we counted seats alone. It is an interesting reminder of the extent to which the CCF benefited from a weak and divided opposition, including Social Credit (which elected 3 members in 1956). As noted above, while the Liberals formed the official opposition during this period, it was by no means clear that they would always do so. Here, the "votes" measure more accurately captures the feel of the politics of the time; the fact that third parties rarely elected any members to the legislative assembly did not mean that they were of no account at all.

After 1964, the situation changes dramatically. Between 1964 and 1986 there is only one election, 1975, in which two-partism breaks down (significantly enough, it is squarely during this period that Eager researches and writes her dissertation, published in 1980 as *Saskatchewan Government*). The period is characterized by straightforward two party competition: between Thatcher's two term Liberal government and Lloyd's CCF; Blakeney's three term NDP government and a fading Liberal opposition (replaced in 1978 by the PCs); and finally Devine's scandal-plagued two-term PC government with Blakeney's NDP, now in opposition. In the event, 1975 simply marked the turnover from one major party to another, and not, as Courtney and Smith (1978) imagined at the time, a transformation of the party system as a whole.

Finally, three of the multi-party elections, one quarter of the total, occur in sequence from 1991 to 1999. A transition is in evidence, similar to that taking place between 1921 and 1938. However, in this case the process is compressed and the measures are highly contradictory. In 1991, the two major parties take 76.6% of the popular vote but the residual votes translate into only 1 Liberal member; in 1995, the two major parties (now NDP and Liberal) take 82% of the vote but, nonetheless, 5 PC members are elected. Only in 1999 do the two measures converge, with the NDP and the Saskatchewan Party between them taking less than 80% of the popular vote, allowing the 4 Liberals to hold the balance of power and creating the conditions for the

second coalition. From 2003 onwards, two partism is clearly restored, the two major parties taking 88% of the popular vote in 2007 and shutting out the Liberals for the second consecutive election.

To what extent, then, does this pattern support the claim that Saskatchewan politics is either exclusively pragmatic or has been transformed at some point from an ideological to a pragmatic character? And, if the latter, can an institutional analysis pinpoint when and how the change takes place? If the measure of pragmatic politics under SMP is two-partism, then clearly pragmatism has had a rough ride. Barely more than half the elections have resulted in a two party system. While some of the multi-party elections may be accounted as transitional from one opposition party to another, 1934 and 1975 for example, the persistence of multi-party elections in extended sequences clearly indicates that something other than pragmatic competition was taking place. As we noted in the previous section, Lipset-inspired sociological explanations are much more convincing for these occasions.

The period from 1964 to 1986 is more difficult to interpret. There is clear evidence of a two party system that would normally tend towards convergence between the parties. Nonetheless, as noted in the previous section, the period is actually characterized by sharp ideological differences and sociological explanations assuming polarization works well. It reminds us of the limitations of simple institutionalism, the fact that, under certain circumstances, two-partism can be associated with what Ware calls “a style of bitter, divisive politics” (1996: 174). In the case of inter-war Austria, for example, it was style of politics that brought about the collapse of the political system itself. While nothing quite so cataclysmic occurred in Saskatchewan, Ware’s description is not entirely out of place and reminds us that the connection between two-partism and consensus politics is a contingent rather than a necessary one. Nonetheless, the institutional analysis does point quite clearly to a breakdown of the system in the 1990s and the creation of a new party system in 2003.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there is some evidence to support the thesis that Saskatchewan politics has

changed its character from polarization to convergence and that the transition took place in the 1990s. Our conclusion rests on our argument that sociological explanations will do better explaining the party system that emerges when politics is based on polarized social solidarities and institutional explanations are superior in explaining the party system that emerges from brokerage politics.

The pattern of major parties being punished for deserting their ideological roots, allowing for the rise of third parties in a system that ought otherwise to be characterized by two partism, is clearly evident from 1905-1986. Within this period, there may be more than one party system based on features such as the peculiarities of the dominant party and the nature of the issues. Courtney and Smith's characterization of two different party systems separated by the transitional years 1929-1934 has held up very well in this respect. However, our analysis also points to a similar set of transitional years during the 1990s, culminating in the election of 2003 that reasserts two partism on the basis of convergence rather than polarization. The NDP led the way towards brokerage politics. The Saskatchewan Party, hampered by its original leader's ties to the past, took two attempts to get the formula right but did so in the end.

Finally, if it now seems fairly clear that the shift from polarization to convergence has in fact taken place, what are the implications for the future of politics and policy in Saskatchewan? Much of the rhetoric around the convergence thesis has been positive, even self-congratulatory. Convergence is taken to represent the belated modernization of politics in a province too long mired in the disputes of an increasingly distant past, leading to a welcome focus on issues of effective public management and efficient service delivery. Yet convergence may also mean the marginalization of interests and perspectives that lie outside the comfortable suburban consensus that will be the battleground for future votes. Not everyone shares the dream of an ATV in every garage, and plenty who do are still excluded from it.

The effect on the health of the democratic system when there is no legitimate outlet for significant opposition to consensus is hard to predict. While the last two elections have seen increases in voter turnout from the historically low levels of the 1990s, there is still a worrying lack of participation. The demise of liberal democratic politics has been predicted on plenty of

other occasions – during the debate over "elitist" theories of democracy in the 1970s, for example – and yet such systems have shown considerable staying power. It is worth remembering, though, that the condition identified by the poet as freedom from both hope and fear, is death.

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Figure 1 Saskatchewan Provincial Elections: 1905- 2007

Election	Winning Party	% votes	Seats/total	Official Opposition	% votes	Seats/total	Combined Share of Pop. Vote	Other Seats	% Voter turnout
1905	Liberals (Scott)	52.25	16/25	Provincial Rights (Haultain)	47.47	9/25	99.72	0	
1908	Liberals (Scott)	50.79	27/41	Provincial Rights (Haultain)	47.88	14/41	98.67	0	
1912	Liberals (Scott)	56.96	45/54	Conservatives (Haultain)	41.98	7/54	98.94	0	
1917	Liberals (Martin)	56.68	51/59	Conservatives (WB Willoughby)	36.3	7/59	92.98	1 IND	
1921	Liberals (Martin)	51.39	46/63	Independent	25.73	7/63	77.12	6 PRO 3 CON	
1925	Liberals (Dunning)	51.51	50/63	Progressive	23.04	6/63	74.55	3 CON 2 IND 1 lab/lib	
1929	Liberals (Gardiner)	45.56	28/63	Conservatives (Anderson)	36.44	24/63	82	6 IND	
1934	Liberals (Gardiner)	48	50/55	Conservatives (Anderson)	26.75	0/55	74.75	5 CCF	85
1938	Liberals (Patterson)	45.45	38/52	CCF (Williams)	18.73	10/52	64.18	2Unity 2 SC	84
1944	CCF (Douglas)	51.13	47/52	Liberals (Patterson)	35.42	5/52	88.55	0	81
1948	CCF (Douglas)	47.56	31/52	Liberals (Tucker)	30.6	19/52	78.16	1 IND	83
1952	CCF (Douglas)	54.06	42/53	Liberals (Tucker)	39.27	11/53	93.33	0	83
1956	CCF (Douglas)	45.25	36/53	Liberals (McDonald)	30.34	14/53	75.59	3 SC	84
1960	CCF (Douglas)	40.76	36/54	Liberals (Thatcher)	32.67	17/54	73.43	0	84
1964	Liberals (Thatcher)	40.4	32/58	CCF (Lloyd)	40.3	25/58	80.7	1 PC	83
1967	Liberals (Thatcher)	45.57	35/59	NDP (Lloyd)	44.35	24/59	89.92	0	78
1971	NDP (Blakeney)	55	45/60	Liberals (Thatcher)	42.82	15/60	97.82	0	83.22
1975	NDP (Blakeney)	40.07	39/61	Liberals (Steurt)	31.67	15/61	71.74	7 PC	80.28
1978	NDP (Blakeney)	48.12	44/61	PC (Collver)	38.08	17/61	86.2	0	79.44
1982	PC (Devine)	54.07	55/64	NDP (Blakeney)	37.64	9/64	91.71	0	83.9
1986	PC (Devine)	44.61	38/64	NDP (Blakeney)	45.2	25/64	89.81	1 LIB	82.12
1991	NDP (Romanow)	51.05	55/66	PC (Devine)	25.54	10/66	76.59	1 LIB	83.22
1995	NDP (Romanow)	47.21	42/58	Liberals (Haverstock)	34.7	11/58	81.91	5 PC	64.59
1999	Sk. Party * (Hermanson)	39.61	29/58	NDP* (Romanow)	38.73	25/58	78.34	4 LIB	65.5
2003	NDP (Calvert)	44.68	30/58	SaskParty (Hermanson)	39.35	28/58	84.03	0	70.95
2007	SaskParty (Wall)	50.92	38/58	NDP (Calvert)	37.24	20/58	88.16	0	74

Figure 2 Saskatchewan elections resulting in more than two significant parties

Election	Winning Party	Combined Share of Pop. Vote	# of Parties over 3%	Parties	Votes/Seats
1905	Liberals (Scott)	99.72	0	0	
1908	Liberals (Scott)	98.67	0	0	
1912	Liberals (Scott)	98.94	0	0	
1917	Liberals (Martin)	92.98	0	1 IND	
1921	Liberals (Martin)	77.12	2	6 PROG 3 CON	YY
1925	Liberals (Dunning)	74.55	1	3 CON 2 IND 1 LAB/LIB	YY
1929	Liberals (Gardiner)	82	1	5 PROG	NY
1934	Liberals (Gardiner)	74.75	1	5 CCF	YY
1938	Liberals (Patterson)	64.18	2	2 UNITY 2 SC	YY
1944	CCF (Douglas)	88.55	0	0	
1948	CCF (Douglas)	78.16	0	1 IND	YN
1952	CCF (Douglas)	93.33	0	0	
1956	CCF (Douglas)	75.59	1	3 SC	YY
1960	CCF (Douglas)	73.43	0	0	YN
1964	Liberals (Thatcher)	80.7	0	1 PC	
1967	Liberals (Thatcher)	89.92	0	0	
1971	NDP (Blakeney)	97.82	0	0	
1975	NDP (Blakeney)	71.74	1	7 PC	YY
1978	NDP (Blakeney)	86.2	0	0	
1982	PC (Devine)	91.71	0	0	
1986	PC (Devine)	89.81	0	1 LIB	
1991	NDP (Romanow)	76.59	0	1 LIB	YN
1995	NDP (Romanow)	81.91	1	5 PC	NY
1999	Sk. Party * (Hermanson)	78.34	1	4 LIB	YY
2003	NDP (Calvert)	84.03	0	0	
2007	SaskParty (Wall)	88.16	0	0	