

**Selecting Selinger:
The 2009 Leadership Race and the Future of NDP Conventions in Manitoba ***

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Paper for Presentation at
The Annual Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association
Concordia University, Montreal
June 2010

Abstract

In a delegated convention held in October, 2009, the Manitoba New Democratic Party (NDP) selected former Finance Minister Greg Selinger to replace Canada's longest-serving and most popular premier, Gary Doer. Official appeals filed by the victor's chief rival, Steve Ashton, and persistent criticism of the process in the media raised significant concerns over the method by which the new premier was selected. These complaints proved a fleeting fixation of the media, and have not harmed the NDP's popularity or affected the smooth transition of the premiership from Doer to Selinger. Yet, questions persist as to whether the 2009 leadership race marked the last delegated convention in the history of the Manitoba New Democratic Party. This paper examines the 2009 leadership race in the context of contests past, analyzing the list of criticisms directed at the process. Grounding its findings in the comments of delegates to the 2009 Convention, it concludes with a series of probable choices for the party, as it begins the process of considering reforms to its leadership selection process. Leading contenders for adoption include a pure one-member, one-vote system and a modified version similar to that of the federal NDP.

* Funding for the 2009 Manitoba NDP Convention Study was provided by the Faculty of Arts, Duff Roblin Professorship, and Department of Political Studies at the University of Manitoba, and the Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Politics and Governance. Research assistance was ably provided by Maria Nyarku, Paul Marchand, and Brett Loewen. Much thanks is owed to Tara Peele and Lorraine Sigurdson of the Manitoba NDP, for facilitating access to delegates. Paul Thomas provided valuable comments on an earlier draft. The largest gratitude is reserved for the 150 delegates who took the time to participate in this survey. Errors in interpretation remain those of the author.

Introduction

In a traditional, delegated convention held in October, 2009, the Manitoba New Democratic Party (NDP) selected former Finance Minister Greg Selinger to replace Canada's longest-serving and most popular premier, Gary Doer. Official appeals filed by the victor's chief rival, Steve Ashton, and persistent criticism of the process in the media raised significant concerns over the method by which the new premier was selected. These complaints proved a fleeting fixation of the media, and have not harmed the NDP's popularity or affected the smooth transition of the premiership from Doer to Selinger. Yet, questions persist as to whether the 2009 leadership race marked the last delegated convention in the history of the Manitoba New Democratic Party. This paper examines the 2009 leadership race in the context of contests past, analyzing the list of criticisms directed at the process. Grounding its findings in the comments of delegates to the 2009 Convention, it concludes with a series of probable choices for the party, as it begins the process of considering reforms to its leadership selection process. Leading contenders for adoption include a pure one-member, one-vote system and a modified version similar to that of the federal NDP.

The paper begins by describing the history of leadership selection in the Manitoba New Democratic Party, noting several trends and patterns in its first four contests. Discussion then turns to the 2009 leadership race, including the precise rules governing the process and the three distinct stages that characterized the campaign.

Leadership Conventions Past

Since transforming from its roots in the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) in 1961, the Manitoba New Democratic Party has had just five leaders, all of whom have been selected through delegated conventions. Incumbent CCF leader Russell Paulley defeated rural outsiders Cliff Matthews and Hans Fries in the new party's first convention, held on November 4, 1961. Eight years later, after weathering a challenge to his leadership from left-leaning elements of his party, Paulley stepped down just days before a snap election was called by Progressive Conservative Premier Walter Weir. The ensuing leadership race between Sidney Green and Edward Schreyer benefitted from the spotlight of the general election campaign,

boosting the visibility and popularity of its eventual victor. Schreyer was selected leader at a party convention held on June 7, three weeks before winning the general election. Having served as premier from 1969 to 1977, Schreyer remained Leader of the Official Opposition for two years before being appointed Governor General by the Trudeau government in Ottawa. Veteran cabinet minister Howard Pawley replaced Schreyer as the leader of the Manitoba NDP, after defeating Russell Doern and Muriel Smith at a convention on November 4, 1979.

Pawley's popularity waned throughout his premiership, culminating in his government's defeat at the hands of one of its own members. Gary Doer assumed the helm of the Manitoba NDP on March 30, 1988, following an abbreviated, five-person leadership race.¹ His third-ballot victory over Len Harapiak capped the only multi-round convention in the party's history, and one that featured four separate voting sites throughout the province.² The event was held amid the 1988 provincial election campaign, at Pawley's request. The outgoing leader was attempting to recreate the momentum generated during the party's 1969 leadership race, but to no avail. The strategy failed in terms of maintaining the NDP's control of government; indeed, the party was reduced to just six seats and third-party status in the legislature. Yet, Doer's rise to the helm did help to salvage what little popular support existed for his party at the time.

Having declined to be sworn in as Premier during the 1988 election campaign, Gary Doer's eleven-year term as an opposition party leader remains one of the longest in modern Canadian history. By steadily increasing his party's share of seats and the popular vote, his leadership survived three unsuccessful election campaigns – in 1988, 1990, and 1995. Following his breakthrough in 1999, Doer first expanded, then consolidated, these gains in 2003 and 2007.

While his rebuilding and rebranding of "Today's NDP" constitutes one of the most remarkable political comebacks in recent memory, an event just prior to the 2007 election proved to be a pivotal one in the history of the party. On February 4 of that year, delegates to the NDP's annual convention voted to abandon the "one-member, one-vote" leadership

¹ Doer's opponents included Len Harapiak, Andy Anstett, Maureen Hemphill, and Conrad Santos.

² Satellite voting sites in Brandon, Dauphin, and Thompson were connected by phone to the main convention in Winnipeg.

selection process that had been established in the aftermath of Doer's victory in 1988. The motion to return to the delegate convention format was introduced by representatives from the Manitoba Federation of Labour (MFL) and, while carrying the two-thirds majority necessary to make changes to the party's constitution, was criticized by grassroots members, opposition parties, academics, and the media as a "Power grab by big labour" (Welch, 2007b).³ Political scientist Kim Speers viewed the change in terms of intra-party power struggle. "There are always groups within any party – environmental groups, anti-abortion groups – who want to make sure their issues get heard," she said. "This is about the maintenance of power" (in Welch, 2007b). Progressive Conservative party leader, Hugh McFadyen, also characterized the move as "an attempt by special interest groups to reassert their authority" following the expansion of the leadership electorate decades earlier (in Welch, 2007b).

In defence of the change to the party's constitution, MFL President Darlene Dziewit responded by citing her critics as desperate "to paint labour as some sort of bogeyman." She noted that the forty labour representatives present at the 2007 convention constituted only ten percent of the 400 total delegates. Instead, support for the return to delegated conventions was based on the fears of many party members that their leaders could be chosen by 'party tourists' – so-called 'instant members' recruited by candidates for temporary service as one-time voters in the leadership selection process. Others touted the merits of conventions in terms of increasing the amount of substantive dialogue during the campaign, bringing together Manitobans from across the province to foster debate and shared understandings. As Conservation Minister Stan Struthers put it, "There's more to democracy than just marking an X on the ballot... It's just as important that we get to look at our candidates eyeball to eyeball to debate the issues" – something that electors do not have the opportunity to do in one-member one-vote systems (in Welch, 2007a).

Before moving on to discuss the party's fifth leadership race, it is important to note the several patterns present in the Manitoba NDP's first four contests. First, each process resulted in the selection of a relatively youthful, yet experienced, male leader. At 52, Russell Paulley was the oldest man chosen by delegates to lead the party; Howard Pawley (44), Gary Doer (40), and

³ The motion carried by a vote of 263 to 123 (71% in favor).

Ed Schreyer (32) were even younger. At the same time, each man brought significant political experience to the position. After serving seven years as an opposition MLA, Paulley had been selected CCF leader a year prior to the formation of the NDP. Schreyer brought a combined eleven years elected service to the leadership – seven in the provincial legislature, and four in the House of Commons. Once the party reached office, Pawley served in Schreyer's cabinet, and Doer served briefly in Pawley's. Of note, only two women have officially contested the leadership of the Manitoba New Democratic Party: Muriel Smith placed second in 1979, earning the support of 29 percent of delegates; and Maureen Hemphill placed fourth, with 10 percent support, in 1988. In sum, while none of the first four Manitoba NDP leaders could be considered an inexperienced "outsider," each was considerably younger than many members of his party and caucus. In this sense, their rise to power could be seen as a renewal of the party, especially in the case of Schreyer and Doer. At the same time, the lack of women among Manitoba NDP leadership contenders is also noticeable.

Second, there were also distinct parallels in terms of the campaign dynamics of the four contests. Despite the attempts of opposing parties and some members of the media to portray the party as divided, none of the races featured particularly heated ideological or personal conflict among the candidates. Perhaps this was the product of the compressed timeframe and circumstances involved; two of the four races were run amid a general election campaign, leaving the candidates with less time and motivation to engage in divisive debates. This said, each contest did feature a similar "story" or motif – one in which the more centrist candidate emerged victorious over his more radical opponents. As mentioned, Russ Paulley's rise to power came at the expense of the party's less-influential rural wing, as represented by Cliff Matthews and Hans Fries. Accurate or not, Sid Green's loss to Ed Schreyer in 1969 was viewed by many as a victory of the party's moderates over its far-left wing. By the same token, Howard Pawley's defeat of Russell Doern and Muriel Smith was portrayed as the triumph of the party's centre-left over its socially-conservative and Waffle-feminist components, respectively. As Gary Doer's chief rival, Len Harapiak emerged as the more unorthodox, anti-establishment candidate in the 1988 NDP leadership race. This common theme – the triumph of the centre over the extremes – unites all four contests.

The 2009 Leadership Race

The 2009 Manitoba NDP Leadership race was unique in many ways. Unlike any of the previous contests, the outcome was certain to result in the selection of the province's next premier, and the party entered its fifth on a high note. Throughout his premiership, Gary Doer had remained one of Canada's most popular first ministers, handily outpolling opposition leaders in Manitoba (not to mention his own party). Under Doer's guidance, and buoyed by the Premier's personal popularity, the NDP government had weathered several potentially-damaging political developments, including those related to questionable financial management by crown corporations and agencies, and several high-profile incidents related to patient care in Manitoba hospitals. Indeed, the New Democrats had actually increased their share of the popular vote and their legislative majority in 2003, reaching further into suburban South Winnipeg and consolidating those gains during the 2007 election. By the end of Summer 2009, the New Democrats appeared as strong as ever, both in terms of seats in the provincial legislature and public opinion polls that had them in the mid-40 percent range.

Given these circumstances, Doer's decision to step down as premier after ten years at the helm came as a surprise to many observers. Ostensibly, the move served as a prelude to Doer's appointment as Canada's Ambassador to the United States. Publicly, Doer described his exit as follows:

I had planned to step down in and around this 10-year period... I thought, if you ever get a chance in this job to go out on your own timing, you'd better take advantage of it. I have watched very good people leave not of their own accord... I think it's important that you go out on your own terms as an individual but you also go in a way that allows your party to renew and the government to renew and the public to have a renewed sense of energy (in Puxley, 2009).

While it left him with precious little time to campaign, Doer's choice left his successor with two full years upon which to build his own legislative agenda, record, and image. (According to fixed election date legislation, the next provincial election would be held in

October, 2011.) Granted, this two year period was fraught with uncertainty, as the province grappled with the onset of a global recession and H1N1 influenza pandemic.

Timing

Given the timing of Doer's announcement, the party's executive was left with a difficult decision of its own – when to hold the leadership convention. A traditional, two-month leadership race would have stretched the contest into late-October or early-November – an undesirable period for a variety of reasons (not limited to the flu vaccination program, heightened economic uncertainty, fall harvest, and the potential for poor weather). Mindful of similar events at the federal level, in which Liberal Prime Minister Jean Chretien had undertaken a “long goodbye” several years earlier, many in the party were wary of conducting a lengthy leadership campaign while presiding over the Manitoba government. While allowing for increased exposure, the lengthier campaign would also expose the candidates to more scrutiny by opposition parties and the media. Proponents of a later date cited the increased opportunity for organizers to recruit new members, raise additional funds, and level the playing field for non-establishment candidates. In the process, they argued, the added time would serve to open-up the delegate selection process to a larger segment of the Manitoba electorate.

In the end, the party executive opted for a more compressed timeframe. The leadership race officially opened on August 31st, leaving prospective candidates just under three weeks to recruit supporters prior to the membership deadline of September 17th. Members registered after this point would be ineligible to participate in the delegate selection process, which took place in all fifty-seven provincial constituencies between September 20th and October 3rd. An initial spending cap of \$50,000 was increased to \$82,000 upon agreement with all leadership contenders. The leadership convention, itself, was to be held in the Winnipeg Convention Centre, October 16th and 17th.

Delegate Selection

According to the party's constitution, delegates were to be awarded to four main groups within the party: constituency associations, unions, youth, and automatic delegates.

Each of the party's fifty-seven constituency associations received one delegate for every ten party members registered with their organization.⁴ Heading into the race, the party contained 5,500 members; by the membership deadline, this number had ballooned to over 14,000. This left The Maples with the most representation at the convention (138 delegates, based on 1377 active members), compared to Steinbach, which had the fewest (1 delegate, based on 14 active members). In the end, a total of 1400 constituency association delegates were eligible to vote at the convention, representing 65 percent of the total electorate. Each of these delegates was chosen in one of the fifty-seven selection meetings held in late-September.

Unions, known in the constitution as "affiliated organizations," were guaranteed 20 percent of the total number of delegates. This meant that, as the party's grassroots membership grew, so, too, did the number of labour representatives at the convention. By the end of the leadership race, unions were entitled to send 433 delegates to the convention. The Manitoba Federation of Labour allocated these credentials based on its own formula. Individual organizations were awarded delegates based on their size, and were left to determine precisely how individuals would be chosen to attend the convention. In the end, several unions proved unable to find enough representatives to attend the event, a contentious development discussed in greater detail below.

As a group, the Manitoba Young New Democrats (MYND) were granted representation on the same basis as a constituency association. That is, they were awarded one delegate for the first ten MYND members and one delegate for each additional ten members (or major fraction thereof). This resulted in 107 Young New Democrats attending the convention, constituting 5 percent of total delegates. Precisely how these delegates would be selected was another matter of contention, as addressed below.

⁴ The party executive elected to use those boundaries in place for the 2007 provincial election, in lieu of the updated boundaries put in place in 2009.

Lastly, all members of Provincial Council and all Manitoba New Democrats elected at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels were granted credentials as “automatic delegates” at the convention. A total of 214 individuals were designated as such.

When it came to administering the delegate selection process, party officials were challenged in several respects. Most notably, the compressed schedule, while self-imposed, left organizers with little time to plan and anticipate potential areas of concern. The fact that this was the party’s first leadership race in twenty-one years also resulted in a steep learning curve.

While the delegate selection process went smoothly in the vast majority of constituencies, high profile cases of long lines and drawn-out meetings drew negative attention. In all constituencies, eligible party members were required to cast a series of votes in favour of specific delegates. If the constituency was allotted 15 delegates based on its membership of 150, for example, voting members were required to place a check-mark next to the names of exactly 15 delegate-hopefuls. (Ballots containing more or fewer check-marks were deemed to be spoiled.) In most constituencies, delegates ran in slates, as organized and announced by the various leadership contenders. In others, including Premier Doer’s constituency of Concordia, a slate was organized by the local constituency association. (Reports indicate that, in some instances, would-be delegates were listed on several slates.) And in many constituencies, hopefuls ran independently, to serve as unpledged delegates at the convention.

The sheer number and scheduling of these meetings challenged party organizers in terms of logistics. Media reports suggest that, at a small number of meetings, it took several hours to certify members as eligible to vote or stand for election as delegates, then several more to conduct the balloting, itself. Despite the compressed timeframe, the process itself was subject to sporadic – and seldom attributed – accusations that it had allowed certain candidates to sign-up “party tourists” to swam delegate selection meetings and undercut the influence of long-time party members. On occasion, these criticisms, while rare, contained racial overtones, intimating that several immigrant and ethnic minority communities – including Greeks, Filipinos, and Indo-Canadians – had been exploited in the process of member recruitment.

The selection of union delegates was even more contentious, as several labour organizations proved unable to recruit enough volunteers to participate in the convention. This resulted in some unions appointing non-labour representatives to serve as delegates, while almost a quarter of the delegate spots allotted to unions were returned to the party for redistribution.

For their part, the Manitoba Young New Democrats had decided upon an ambitious means of selecting their convention contingent. Treating their organization as one, giant constituency, the youth intended to hold a province-wide election, through which each MYND member would cast a series of votes in favour of 107 delegate-hopefuls. On September 24th, the party's executive ruled that this process was too cumbersome, replacing it with a modified form of direct election. Instead of voting for delegates, MYND members ended up voting directly for their preferred leadership candidate. Delegates were then distributed by the party executive, in consultation with the leadership campaigns, according to each candidate's proportion of youth votes, province-wide. The move angered many Young New Democrats, who felt that their autonomy had been usurped by the party's executive. "I think it's pretty silly," said one MYND organizer. "I mean, we as an executive voted to do basically the same thing as every constituency association is doing and we were basically told that we were not allowed to do that because two of the leadership camps [Selinger and Swan] complained... I'm all in favour of democracy... But to have different rules for the Young New Democrats because they don't trust who we're going to for or whatever is ridiculous. If you're going to do a delegated convention, then treat us the same way as you're going to treat labour and the constituencies" (in Kusch, 2009c). A spokesperson for the third candidate, Steve Ashton, sided with the youth, claiming that the party's decision was inconsistent and "paternalistic" (Ibid.).

Lastly, while the selection of "automatic delegates" was entirely uncontroversial, their existence was portrayed by some populist critics as evidence of the party's "establishment" character. Because of their resemblance to ex-officio representatives at the Democratic Party Convention in the United States, "automatic delegates" to the NDP convention were often referred to as "super delegates" – the connotation being that elements of the party's elite

could hold ultimate authority when it came to deciding a close contest among leadership contenders.

Criticisms of this final element of the delegate selection process were far less prominent in the campaign. This was largely because, unlike labour (which was granted a fixed percentage of delegates), the relative strength of automatic delegates fell as more memberships were sold. Nonetheless, when combined with concerns over the selection of constituency, union, and youth delegates, the resulting chorus raised a considerable amount of negative publicity and internal party strife.

At the convention, constituency representatives made up 65 percent of the delegates; union representatives, 20 percent; youth, 5 percent; and automatic delegates, 10 percent.

The Campaign

STAGE 1

The 2009 leadership race was divided into three phases. Stage one began with Premier Doer's decision to leave provincial politics for a diplomatic post in Washington. Immediately after his announcement, speculation surrounded the list of his possible successors. Within weeks, three candidates officially entered the contest. Rookie MLA from Minto and Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade, 40-year-old Andrew Swan, was the first to confirm his candidacy on September 2nd. Since entering the Legislature in a 2004 bi-election, Swan was regarded by many as a leader of the party's "new guard" – a cadre of young cabinet ministers and back-benchers who had entered politics following Doer's rise to the premiership. Ironically, Swan also cultivated an image of being Doer's protégé – a label the Premier was careful to dismiss, despite the fact that many of his closest advisors were working on the Swan campaign.⁵

Two days later, long-time journeyman cabinet minister and MLA from the northern riding of Thompson, 53-year-old Steve Ashton, was the second to declare his intention to run. From his opening press conference, Ashton portrayed himself as an advocate for the party's

⁵ Early Swan supporters included long-time Doer organizers Eugene Kostyra, Bob Dewar, Becky Barrett, David Woodbury, Leslie Turnbull, and others.

grassroots, stressing the importance of social and economic justice and the politics of inclusion. His appeal was strongest among those who felt the Manitoba NDP had drifted too far to the centre under Doer's leadership, as well as those in his home region of the North.

Doer's only Finance Minister, Greg Selinger (MLA, St. Boniface), was third out of the gate, waiting until September 7th to announce his candidacy. With a doctorate from the London School of Economics and a background in community activism and municipal politics, the 48-year-old Selinger was touted as a pensive politician with strong left-wing credentials. At the same time, he had earned a reputation for fiscal prudence, having delivered a decade of balanced budgets. Like Schreyer, Pawley, and Doer before him, Selinger's balanced background made him one of the more moderate choices for Premier. This label was affixed despite his connections with social advocacy groups and left-wing think tanks, like the Social Planning Council and Centre for Policy Alternatives, and his close ties with leading neo-Marxist economist, John Loxley. Given these credentials, Selinger leaned further to the left than Doer in philosophical terms. Nonetheless, his experience and penchant for a more centrist, third-way approach to social democracy made him the "safest" choice in the minds of most observers, particularly in times of economic uncertainty.

Throughout this first phase, several high-profile New Democrats publicly declined to enter the race. Despite persistent rumours that he had left Ottawa to pursue the premiership, and consistent with his repeated denials of those rumours, former senior parliamentarian Bill Blaikie confirmed on September 1st that he would not compete in the race to replace Doer. Ten days later, Blaikie officially endorsed Selinger. To that point, Blaikie had been considered a front-runner, and his exit was perceived by many as opening the field. Blaikie's former parliamentary colleagues, sitting MP's Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre) and Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North), also ruled out bids for the premiership, the latter placing her support behind Selinger. Citing family and ministerial responsibilities (including overseeing the province's H1N1 pandemic planning), Manitoba Health Minister Theresa Oswald also declined to enter the race, endorsing Swan at his campaign launch. Family Services Minister Gord Mackintosh, another presumptive front-runner, also withdrew his name from contention, also endorsing Swan on September 15th.

STAGE 2

With the initial field set, the second stage of the race consisted of a three-way contest for the premiership. Four familiar themes and two distinct strategies characterized this phase of the campaign. The “story” of the 2009 leadership race resembled those of contests past, complete with several intersecting plotlines: (1) youth versus experience; (2) establishment candidates versus grassroots advocates; (3) a willingness to “stay the course” versus a desire to push forward in new directions; and (4) a tension between elements of the party’s centre and its left wing. In this vein, Swan adopted the image of the youthful, yet centrist, inheritor of Doer’s legacy; while experienced, Ashton was portrayed as the more radical outsider, representing the party’s northern and leftist wings; and Selinger was viewed as the more seasoned insider, whose record as finance minister had proven his “steady hand on the rudder.” Thus, stage two of the campaign featured a series of competing narratives, with Swan preaching the importance of party renewal, Ashton advocating a shift to the left and the inclusion of previously-marginalized elements of the party’s coalition, and Selinger promoting a familiar theme of prudent progress (see Lambert, 2009).

Given these images and their corresponding bases of support, each camp opted for one of two campaign strategies. Swan and Selinger pursued a more traditional course of action in convention-style races, as they sought to secure endorsements from key party elites, labour leaders, and other public figures. These endorsements would provide some direct benefit, in the form of votes from automatic and union delegates. Yet, the larger payoff would come indirectly, by convincing members in constituency delegation meetings of the strength of their respective candidacies.

By September 15th – two days before the membership deadline – Selinger and Swan had collected the public support of nearly all NDP caucus members. Of the 29 non-neutral New Democratic MLA’s (i.e., excluding those in the leadership race, serving as Caucus Chair, or Speaker), Selinger had earned the support of 16, and Swan, 10. (See Table 1.) This left one uncommitted caucus member (Gerard Jennison), and three declaring their support for Ashton.

Among the 12 remaining members of Doer’s cabinet (following the mandatory resignations of the three leadership contenders), Swan and Selinger each received 6.

Outside of the provincial government, Swan and Selinger also found support from a variety of provincial and national notables. The former received endorsements from leaders of the Manitoba Federation of Labour (MFL), United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) local 832, the Communications, Energy and Paperwork Union, and the Winnipeg Police Association. In part because of a promise to remain “open” to the notion of discussing the Bipole III project with First Nations communities on the east side of Lake Winnipeg, Swan also earned the backing of Manitoba Grand Chief Ron Evans, who pledged his support through The Pas MLA, Frank Whitehead. For his part, Selinger secured endorsements from leading figures in the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE National) and the Manitoba Building and Construction Trades Council; MP Judy Wasylycia-Leis; former MLA and provincial NDP leadership candidate, Muriel Smith; city councillor Jenny Gerbasi; and former national Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Misipawistik Cree Nation Chief Ovide Mercredi. By comparison, Steve Ashton received relatively few high profile endorsements, including city councillor, Russ Wyatt (his campaign manager); community activist, Sel Burrows; and the United Steelworkers and the United Firefighters of Winnipeg.

Table 1: Official Endorsements

	Cabinet Ministers	Backbench Members	Total Caucus Support
Ashton	0	3 (Nevakshonoff, Jha, Reid)	3
Selinger	6 (Rondeau, Irvin-Ross, McGifford, Melnick, Robinson, Wowchuk)	10 (Martindale, Howard, Blaikie, Dewar, Brick, Saran, Marcelino, Altemeyer, Caldwell, Korzeniowski)	16
Swan	6 (Struthers, Chomiak, Lemieux, Oswald, Mackintosh, Allan)	4 (Bjornson, Blady, Selby, Whitehead)	10

Undeclared: Doer (outgoing leader), Hickes (Speaker), Braun (Caucus Chair), Jennissen

Instead of the “endorsement strategy,” Ashton’s approach more closely resembled those of candidates engaged in a one-member-one-vote campaign. Rather than attempting to win over automatic delegates and union leaders, from the outset, Wyatt’s primary focus was on securing the support of youth and constituency delegates. In addition to running the only televised advertisements of the campaign, this meant signing up as many Ashton supporters as party members before the September 17th deadline, then delivering these voters to the various delegate selection meetings. By recruiting new party members at the grassroots level, Ashton was not only reinforcing his populist image and winning more individual constituency races. Crucially, he was also increasing the size of the delegate pool; provided he was able to secure their attendance at key delegate selection meetings, by bus or otherwise, Ashton would derive one extra delegate for every ten members he convinced to join his cause. The tactic was so successful that, having sold or renewed over 1350 memberships at the outset of the delegate selection process, Wyatt openly mused about an Ashton victory on the first ballot (Kusch, 2009a).

It was not that the Selinger and Swan campaigns avoided selling new memberships as a means of securing more delegates to win the convention vote. The former team, in particular, actively pursued both strategies, running up membership totals in favoured constituencies (like St. Boniface, Wolseley, Brandon East, River Heights, and Fort Rouge) and reaching out to new members in rural and Francophone communities across the province. As one organizer put it, this strategy did not result in the “Maples-like totals” accumulated by Ashton, “but twenty or so delegates from Ste. Rose, ten from somewhere else, and so on... those all add up. It was like vacuuming up nickels. We quite consciously adopted a version of Obama’s 50-state strategy against Clinton. We valued small prizes” (Scarth, 2010). This said, the Selinger and Swan campaigns placed a far greater focus on attracting high-profile endorsements than did Ashton, particularly early in the campaign.

Ashton’s membership strategy had noticeable benefits, as illustrated in Figure 1. Considered a dark-horse candidate early in the campaign, and trailing his opponents in terms of endorsements, Ashton was able to make up the gap in terms of constituency delegates. The

effect of these duelling strategies was most evident in The Pas, where Ashton's victory proved to be a turning point in the campaign. Six months earlier, Frank Whitehead had won a byelection, keeping the constituency in New Democratic hands. Whitehead had boosted local NDP membership rolls to over 1100, which, when combined with the additional 100 memberships sold in September, provided a prize of 120 delegates to the winner of the fall leadership race.⁶ On September 18th, by promising to engage with First Nations communities regarding the Doer government's decision to bypass their land in the construction of a new hydro line down the west side of Lake Winnipeg, Andrew Swan secured Whitehead's endorsement -- a key component of his strategy to win delegates from The Pas. By contrast, Ashton's team focused on mobilizing members at the grassroots level, hoping to steal stray delegates away from the Whitehead-Swan camp. To the surprise of most observers, only 10 percent of members showed up to cast ballots on delegate selection day in The Pas, with most of Swan's supporters staying home and many ballots cast being spoiled. This meant that there were as many voters as there were delegate spots to be filled. In this atmosphere, Ashton won a resounding victory, claiming 117 delegates to Swan's 2, with one delegate remaining unpledged. One day later, on September 28th, Andrew Swan withdrew from the race, citing his inability to win The Pas as the primary reason.

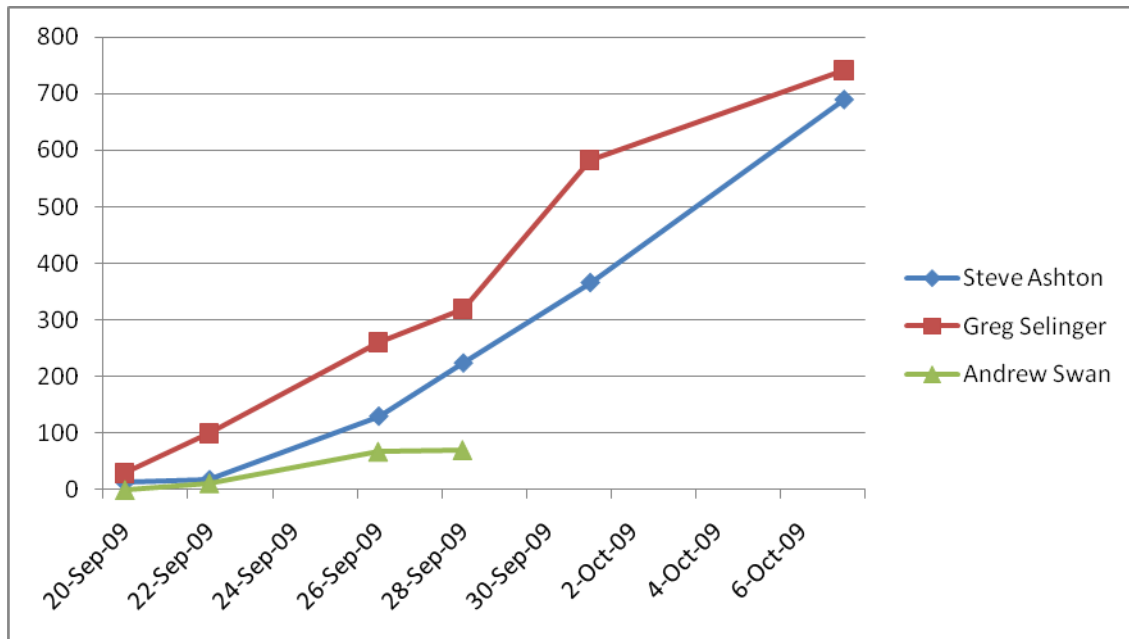
STAGE 3

At the same press conference, Swan officially endorsed Selinger as his choice for Premier. "I'll do everything I can to have my delegates and my supporters and anybody else support Greg Selinger," Swan said. "I believe he's the best person to keep our party moving in the right direction" (in Owen and Kusch, 2009b). With many of his endorsers following him into Selinger's camp, Swan's move served to polarize the third stage of the campaign, pitting members of the party's moderate establishment against the grassroots outsiders backing Steve Ashton. Both remaining candidates appeared comfortable in these roles, as each continued to emphasize his own unique campaign narrative. Aside from Ashton's decision to walk a picket-

⁶ Indeed, the initial size of the membership meant that, when Premier Doer resigned, nearly one-quarter of all Manitoba New Democratic Party members resided in The Pas. This motivated party officials to establish open rules with regard to membership sales and delegate numbers, to ensure that no single riding would have an inordinate amount of influence on the outcome of the leadership race.

line and promise to explore anti-scab legislation – a proposal roundly criticized from both the centre, left, and right (Green, 2009) – there were few ambitious policy pledges during the course of the campaign, and even fewer missteps and gaffes.

Figure 1: The Race for Constituency Delegates



Source: the Ashton and Selinger Leadership Campaigns / Winnipeg Free Press

Instead, closing days of the race featured much conflict over the leadership selection process, itself. Whether the product of media agenda-setting, a lack of substantive policy debate, increased focus on the horserace aspects of the contest, political posturing on the part of the Ashton campaign, a genuine concern for the fate of democracy within the party, or some combination of these factors, the final two weeks of the campaign were uncharacteristically divisive for the Manitoba NDP.

Initially, the intensity increased as Ashton countered criticisms that his strategy entailed artificially bloating the party’s membership roles with new people that were more committed to voting for him than to supporting the party in the long-term. In the process, Ashton reinforced his populist image, reminding his audiences that none among them were to be

considered “second-class New Democrats.” The merit of these charges against Ashton remains questionable, given similar tactics employed by the Selinger campaign to reach out to the Indo-Canadian and immigrant communities in Winnipeg.

In early October, the Ashton camp went on the offensive, turning their sights – not on their rivals, but – on the party executive for what it called “uncommon discrepancies and irregularities” in several key delegate meetings. In an October 2nd letter addressed to the leadership convention committee, Wyatt requested that the results from Elmwood, Riel, and Inkster be overturned, and that new meetings be held in their place. “This must be done to restore confidence in the democratic process,” Wyatt wrote (Kusch, 2009b). Among the complaints, the Ashton team criticized party officials for a lack of appropriate staff, the selection of venues that were too small to accommodate the large numbers of new members, and unequal treatment of members of “non-European descent.” The letter went on to cite inconsistencies in the application of voting procedures, allowing members to register after the cut-off time in some constituencies but not others. This criticism echoed later in the week, when nine Ashton voters were refused re-entry to the constituency meeting in The Maples, after a long voting process had prompted them to leave in order to tend to family commitments. (Ashton won 128 of the constituency’s 138 delegates.) Earlier discontent surrounding the selection of youth delegates also resurfaced, as Ashton claimed 68 of the 108 MYND delegates on October 6th.

The Selinger team – which won just 40 youth delegates and 10 delegates in The Maples, but won Elmwood, Riel, and Inkster by significant margins – distanced itself from these complaints, with campaign spokesperson Todd Scarth commending party officials as “incredibly professional and patient” in interpreting and enforcing the rules (in Kusch, 2009b). Meanwhile, Ashton’s critics accused him of playing the martyr and succumbing to conspiracy theories, with one prominent commentator warning him to “remember that it is paranoia if they’re not out to get you” (Lett, 2009).

Opponents of the delegate convention systems seized on these complaints, however, as the first round of Ashton appeals were dismissed by an impartial board convened at the request of the party’s leadership convention committee. Citing the delegate process as too complex

and unwieldy, and publicizing the growing rift between the party's establishment and traditional labour base, on one hand, and its new, heterogeneous grassroots, on the other, the media began reporting a groundswell of support for the adoption of a one-member-one-vote (OMOV) system for future party leadership races. Letters to the editor, like the following, provide evidence of this sentiment:

Why did it take them [the NDP executive] so long to figure out that the delegate system would cause so many problems and so much bad blood? As a rank and file member, I spoke out at the 2007 policy convention on a delegate system that gave unions an extra 20 per cent weighted vote, because of the same exact problems that are occurring now. Why? ...The delegate system for electing the current leader favours unions, party establishment figureheads. At the same time the delegate system hurts those who are rank and file members, students, poor, small business owners, environmentalists and more centre-left members, who are the bread and butter of the NDP. While there may be some problems with OMOV... [it] would alleviate many of the problems that the current delegate system, while allowing rank and file members like myself to support a candidate whose views closely relate to their own. Time for the NDP to go back to one member, one vote at the next policy convention (Johnston, 2009).

Party President, Lorraine Sigurdson acknowledged the discontent. Referring to the possibility of once again abandoning the convention process in favour of an OMOV system, she said, "I'm sure some people will want it... I think we'll wait for the dust to settle and have a look at it" (in Skerritt, 2009).

Following its failed appeals of the MYND and several constituency meeting results, the Ashton team lodged its third and final set of complaints in the final week of the campaign. At issue were 90 unclaimed union delegate credentials, which were being distributed by the Manitoba Federation of Labour to non-union members of the New Democratic Party. Ashton's camp argued that these credentials ought to remain unclaimed, rather than being given to alleged "rental delegates" supporting Greg Selinger. "How on earth can we go into a leadership convention with people that are going to show up as affiliated union delegates who quite clearly have no connection to unions?" Ashton asked (in Owen and Kusch, 2009a). "All we're asking is for a fair process that reflects our constitution as a party but also what most Manitobans would consider to be a fair process," Ashton stated. "For me making sure that the delegate selection process is above and beyond reproach is absolutely critical. I keep stressing

we're not just electing a leader, this is not just an internal election, the leader is going to be the premier" (Owen, 2009).

For the third time in a month, the party's appeals committee rejected Ashton's complaints. A spokesman for Greg Selinger summarized his candidate's position on the ruling: "While the leadership selection process has not been perfect, we are confident that it has been fair – and the independent rules committee has consistently agreed with that view" (in Owen and Kusch, 2009a). With his avenues for appeal exhausted, Ashton entered the convention in a dead-heat with Selinger in terms of constituency delegate support, but trailed significantly behind the former finance minister among union and automatic delegates.

In the convention's only ballot, as expected, Greg Selinger won the NDP leadership with the support of 1317 delegates to Ashton's 685. The final tally suggested both men were able to maintain the vast majority of their constituency and youth support. According to numbers compiled by their respective campaigns, and reported in the *Winnipeg Free Press* (October 16, 2009: A7), heading into the convention, Ashton had won the support of 689 youth and constituency delegates – a number just below that of Greg Selinger (741) and significantly ahead of Andrew Swan (72). (A total of 53 delegates were reported as being unpledged.)

Interestingly, the bulk of Ashton's support came from a much smaller number of constituencies than Selinger's. By the close of the delegate selection period, Ashton had won just 10 constituency races, compared to Selinger's 36. (Swan had won 4, and 7 were considered draws.) This suggests the success of Wyatt's 'plumping' strategy,⁷ through which he was able to amass a much larger payoff by building up the membership, and thus delegation size, of a small number of select constituencies. Indeed, Ashton won the three largest delegate prizes available, with resounding victories in The Maples (128), The Pas (117), and Thompson (83). When added to victories in Fort Garry, Interlake, Radisson, River East, Springfield, and Tuxedo, and handfuls of delegates in ridings carried by Selinger and Swan, Ashton's support among rank-and-file party members was impressive, considering his underdog image.

By contrast, Selinger's largest single-constituency victory came in Inkster, where he won 61 of 71 delegates. Instead, he appeared able to translate a long list of MLA endorsements into

⁷ As used here, "plumping" is not to be confused with the strategy employed by parties in proportional representation systems, like Australia and New Zealand.

a long list of constituency victories. In only two cases – The Maples (where Selinger had received the backing of MLA Mohinder Saran) and The Pas (where Swan had secured the support of MLA Frank Whitehead) – did the membership of a constituency send a majority of delegates against the wishes of its MLA.⁸ Selinger’s relatively slim victory in terms of constituency and youth delegates was reinforced by his overwhelming support among Swan’s former supporters, as well as his near-sweep of union and automatic delegates. In this sense, Selinger’s “endorsement” strategy proved effective, as well.

More than holding its own among the party’s rank-and file on the convention floor, however, Ashton’s campaign team had succeeded in raising serious questions about the conduct of the leadership selection process. As one columnist remarked on the eve of the convention,

the NDP leadership race has been a logistical and democratic disaster from the start, from the chaos of the first delegate selection meeting to this week’s hubbub over rent-a-delegates. It’s easy to hide behind the independent rules committee when it consistently rules against your opponent even though any reasonable person can see the whole process has been made up as it went along.

Let’s recap: The riding meetings were at best chaotic, slow and inconsistent. In ridings with big delegate counts, the voting was often delayed by an hour or more and counting the huge ballots was a nightmare. In places like The Pas, many ballots were spoiled. At the big meetings like Inkster, there weren’t enough NDP staffers to sign people in and there was often fights over memberships. Members got locked out after the meeting began in some places, but allowed in at others.

Halfway through, they changed the rules for the Manitoba Young New Dems to use a proportional-style vote to pick the MYND delegates instead of a slate system. If it had been done the slate way, Ashton probably would have hovered up all the delegates. Instead he got about two-thirds.

Now, there’s the 80 or 90 rental delegates – the unused union spots that are being doled out to party faithful. Those are almost exclusively Selinger supporters who have virtually no union ties past or present. That includes tons of NDP Leg staffers who didn’t get elected in their ridings, NDP strategist and Viewpoints co-owner Leslie Turnbull, a senior guy at Treasury Board, Manitoba Hydro chair Vic Schroeder (whose staff just went on strike) and a gas station owner. Even one Selinger supporter I know called the union delegate dole-out a “racket.”

⁸ It is impossible to discern whether MLAs played a leadership role in this regard, or whether they responded to the sentiment of the members in their constituencies.

Frankly, it's completely anachronistic to earmark 20 per cent of the delegates for unions in the first place, especially when union donations are banned. But when the unions can't even get organized enough to find a few hundred NDP members among the rank-and-file, the party establishment shouldn't be seen handing out the leftover delegate spots to whomever they please.

Is this really how a modern, First World democracy picks a premier? Really (Welch, 2009) ?

These negative reports died down considerably following the convention, with much of the focus turning to questions of cabinet formation and Selinger's ability to step out of Doer's shadow. The question remains, however: how will the New Democratic Party respond to these criticisms, now that the leadership race is over?

The Delegates' Perspective

To address this inquiry and others, a research team at the University of Manitoba conducted an online survey of participants in the aftermath of the convention.⁹ All delegates were eligible to take part, with invitations being included in their convention packages and sent to them through two rounds of email reminders. A very low response rate (150 of 2002) leaves us with little confidence in the representativeness of the sample, particularly as relates to the quantitative components of the survey. This said, the qualitative responses do lend some insights into the delegates' sentiments about the leadership selection process in which they had just participated.

Not surprisingly, delegates who had supported different candidates offered varied opinions of the race. Those who had cast a ballot for Steve Ashton were more critical of the process than those who supported the victor, Greg Selinger. Once again, we must remain cautious about interpreting these results, given the small sample size. (Only 23 of Ashton's 685 delegates, and 127 of Selinger's 1317 delegates, responded to the survey). Still, among all

⁹ The survey was administered by Prairie Research Associates, between October 16th and December 1st, 2009. The New Democratic Party declined the researcher's request for a mail-out survey, and did not grant direct access to the delegates via email.

respondents, there was a considerable amount of overall agreement in favour of changing the process.

Regardless of their suggestions for reforming the leadership selection process, most delegates felt that the 2009 race was well-run and impartial. Of the 150 delegates who responded to the survey, an overwhelming majority either strongly agreed (46.3 percent) or agreed (37.6 percent) that “This year’s NDP Leadership Convention was administered professionally.” Among the 23 respondents who voted for Steve Ashton, the sentiment was more mixed but still generally supportive. While 8 Ashton supporters disagreed (1) or disagreed strongly (7) with the professional handling of the convention, a majority either agreed (5) or strongly agreed (8). Similar proportions of respondents believed that the convention “produced a fair result;” 84.6 percent either agreed (23.5) or strongly agreed (61.1) with the statement, compared with just 10.7 percent who disagreed (4.0) or strongly disagreed (6.7). A majority of respondents supporting Steve Ashton either disagreed (17.4 percent) or strongly disagreed (39.1 percent) with the fairness of the result, however, a sentiment no doubt reflecting their disapproval of verdicts handed down by the party’s appeals committee.

When asked if “This year’s NDP Leadership Convention incorporated the views of the Party’s grassroots,” however, the sentiments were more deeply divided. A majority of all respondents either agreed (36.5 percent) or strongly agreed (25.0 percent) with the statement, but over two-thirds of those supporting Ashton disagreed (26.1 percent) or strongly disagreed (43.5 percent).

Similar lines were drawn over the question of whether the convention “helped to unify the party.” Here, 56 percent of all respondents agreed (37.8 percent) or strongly agreed (18.2 percent); 27 percent offered a neutral response. Ashton supporters were most likely to disagree (8.7 percent) or strongly disagree (39.1 percent) with the statement. Nearly identical results pertained to the question of whether the convention had “helped to renew the party.” A majority of Ashton-supporting respondents either strongly disagreed (39.1 percent) or disagreed (13.0) with this statement. By contrast, over three in four Selinger supporters responding to the survey indicated that they either agreed (46.8 percent) or strongly agreed

(30.6) that the race had helped to renew the party. Overall, 70.0 percent of respondents agreed (43.5) or strongly agreed (26.5).

Following these initial questions, respondents were asked “In the future, how do you think the Manitoba NDP should select its next leader?” The following five options were provided as part of the survey:

- through the same delegated convention process this year;
- using a one-member, one-vote system;
- allowing elected caucus members (MLAs) to select the leader;
- using a modified delegated convention process; or
- other (please specify).

A slim majority of all respondents (51.0 percent) favoured the move to a one-member, one-vote system to select the next leader of their party. This number is high, considering the fact that the respondents – themselves delegates under the present system – would stand to lose their position as gatekeepers to the leadership selection process. Of note, over three-quarters (78.3 percent) of Ashton supporters in the sample favoured a move to OMOV, compared to just 13.0 percent in favour of maintaining the delegated convention process used in 2009. Among all respondents, the existing system received the second-highest level of support (21.8 percent), followed closely by a “modified” version of the convention process (21.1 percent). Thus, combined, supporters of some form of convention totalled 42.9 percent of all respondents. A total of eight (8) respondents offered “other” options – most of which involved modified OMOV models, allowing representation for labour and youth, and/or strict requirements for membership – while one (1) respondent supported caucus selection.

Considering that many respondents who supported Steve Ashton felt the process produced an unfair result, and considering the fact that they also overwhelmingly favoured OMOV over the delegated convention process, it is worthwhile exploring the possibility that the voting system may have affected the result. Unfortunately, there is no way of reliably determining whether the method of selection affected the outcome of the 2009 Manitoba NDP leadership race. Moreover, different rules would have meant different strategies, both among party members and the leadership candidates themselves. While it is difficult to imagine a

more effective OMV campaign than that run by Steve Ashton, Selinger and Swan may have adjusted their “endorsement-first” strategies under a one-member, one-vote system. Faced with a ballot featuring candidates’ names, as opposed to delegates’, party members may well have voted differently. This makes any simulation of the results very tentative. (It is made impossible by the fact that researchers do not have access to the results of balloting held at constituency meetings.)

These caveats aside, it strains credulity to assert that the outcome of the leadership race would have been altogether different under a different set of rules. Ashton appears to have maximized his support by winning ten constituencies, including the three largest. This still left him short of a majority of support among rank-and-file members. Andrew Swan’s performance may have improved under different rules, thus keeping him in the race for a longer period. Even if he was able to reach the convention floor, however, it is unknown whether he would have enough support to survive the first ballot. Given that most of Swan’s supporters followed him to Selinger’s camp, the latter would have likely won on the final (first or second) ballot.

Of course, one cannot say *for certain* whether Greg Selinger would have won the race, were it held under different rules. In any event, conjecture to the contrary remains a small part of the critiques surrounding the leadership process. Most centred on the *administration* of the event, rather than the process.

Outright outrage over the leadership selection process was extremely rare in the comments provided by respondents; when present, such complaints were often conflated with disappointment over the results.¹⁰ Instead, criticisms over the process are better described as being ‘strong concerns.’ Many focused on what they deemed a “rushed” process. As one respondent put it, “The party had the option of taking some time with this process, and of actually doing some leadership and party building - and instead it rushed to the election - too bad, think it was a missed opportunity.” Others cited the unrepresentativeness of the process, whether in terms of the candidates who chose to run, or the types of people who took part in delegate selection. One respondent remarked, “it is too bad the only folks who stepped

¹⁰ According to one such respondent, “I was absolutely disgusted with the whole thing. So much seemed undemocratic. From the slates that selected people who had no commitment to a candidate but were prepared to commit to anyone so that they could go to convention, to union delegates who had no connection to a union. If there was another socialist option I would no longer be a member of the ndp.”

forward to lead the party were three white men - means we need more emphasis on developing diversity in our upper echelons and in our planning for future leadership.” Said another, “I think the delegate selection processes is democratic, but excludes some people who can’t afford to pay the fees.” Others applauded the party for its inclusiveness, however, including the party’s choice to include a satellite voting location in the north.

Other respondents focused on the delegate selection process, in particular at the constituency level and in terms of the distribution of union delegates. On the latter, said one respondent, “the allocation of delegates to the MFL to give spots to whomever they chose, whether or not even a union member, was unethical and highly unfair. If certain allocated delegate spots at the constituency level – e.g., president – were not filled they were forfeited. Same should have applied to MFL. Entire union delegate selection process needs to be thoroughly reviewed.”

By far the most numerous complaints among delegates who responded to the survey, however, surrounded the influence of “instant members” on the leadership selection process. “I have some real concerns about the membership renewals,” wrote one respondent. “Increasing party membership is wonderful if they are signing up for the right reasons. I think we need to look more carefully at the responsibilities of membership... or at least how long you have to be a member prior to a leadership campaign.” A second respondent concurred:

We should strongly consider the processes we use. Having to be a member for 30 days seems not very long in choosing the party leader. I understand selling memberships and having diversity in our membership, but we should work on this on a regular basis. How do we now encourage these new members to be on executives and take an active role? It was all so rushed and many joined to support a specific candidate. So many long term dedicated members did not get a chance to be a delegate. Are they hurt or angry? I don’t know. I hope we can keep our membership up, include all, and build for the future.

These concerns are notable, for if the party wishes to reform its leadership selection process while, at the same time limiting the influence of “party tourists,” it will have to consider important changes to the conventional one-member, one-vote model. If desired, these may include party loyalty requirements and lengthier leadership campaigns, such that last-minute

members cannot unduly affect the outcome. Such a system does not come without its downsides, as one respondent noted:

I was at MANY delegate selection meetings and the problems lay in so many unexperienced [sic] and new party members not understanding or being familiar with process. I feel the delegate meeting problems could be solved by not having members newer than, say, six months participating__ however this hampers fundraising and "party renewal" so it is not a real solution.

Respondents were not entirely negative in their assessment of the leadership selection process. Indeed, many couched their criticisms in constructive terms, praising the administration of a challenging contest. As one respondent argued, the race was “well planned and well run. The time allotted from the ex-Premier’s resignation to the date of the leadership convention was too short...” A second respondent agreed: “[The] time frame was unreasonable and volunteers and staff did a good job of correcting/amending process on the run.” A third felt likewise, that the contest “was well organized, particularly considering the time constraints.” According to another,

It was too quick, required a lot of ad-hoc decision-making, and produced a lot of unfortunate tensions along the way. Fortunately, people generally kept the overall objective in view, and behaved in an unusually mature manner, despite the fact that the rules changed every night. In the end, there was no doubt who the party wanted as leader. Steve Ashton’s motion to make the result unanimous was genuine.

Still another thought that “efforts were made to have representation from the grass roots party members. The voting process at convention was much more efficient than at the convention in 1988.”

Indeed, comments suggest most respondents were willing to give party officials the benefit of the doubt, while offering suggestions for improvement. “This is a once in 2 decade process (I hope!),” one wrote, “and not a lot of people have the opportunity to organize more than one in their lifetime; as such it is not without flaw... Ultimately it felt like an election in Afghanistan, but in the end the flaws affected all sides equally and didn’t alienate too many people, so I think all things considered it worked out well.” As another respondent put it, “The lack of an NDP leadership convention in recent memory might explain the lack of organization

at the beginning of the delegate selection race, but in the end, it turned out that the process was fine tuned enough to get a fair representation of the ridings at the Convention.” Overall, said another, party officials “did a pretty good job... If there is a perceived bias, it undermines the trust and faith in the process and it can be reflected in the perceived legitimacy of the leader who is chosen. Thankfully, due to the level of support of one candidate over the other, the legitimacy issue is not being challenged. Imagine if the results had been closer!”

Discussion

Notwithstanding this internal debate, as party officials and members re-evaluate the leadership selection process in the aftermath of the 2009 Convention, they face little *external* pressure for reform. This is because, despite logistical challenges, numerous rounds of complaints and appeals, and intense media criticism, their administration of the campaign does not appear to have affected the popularity of the new leader, the party, or the government. Probe Research polls dating back to the 2007 Provincial Election indicate that support for the New Democrats has remained consistently above 40 percent.¹¹ Following a post-election decline, which culminated in December 2008, the party has polled between 46 and 47 percent of the popular vote – more than enough to guarantee a legislative majority in Manitoba’s two-and-a-half-party system. Consistent with the 2007 election results, as it entered the first stages of the leadership race in September 2009, the NDP had the support of 45 percent of committed Manitoba voters (compared to 38 percent for the Progressive Conservatives and 12 percent for the Liberals). In a poll conducted in December 2009, New Democrat support increased (albeit marginally) to 47 percent. This is hardly evidence of a “honeymoon” effect. Yet – considering the long-term stability of party support in the province, the popularity of the outgoing leader, and the challenges of managing both a flu pandemic and economic recovery – the fact that the NDP was able to *maintain* its support during a leadership change is a noteworthy achievement. Selinger’s rise to the premiership has not resulted in breakthroughs for the party in new regions of the province, or among different elements of the electorate. (Although, Probe’s research

¹¹ Probe Research posts the results of its quarterly “Provincial Party Standings” polls on its website: <http://probe-research.com>.

indicates they have slightly narrowed the Conservatives' advantage among rural and young voters since September 2009.) Yet, given the extent to which the NDP had consolidated and expanded its base under Doer, and given the entrenched nature of Conservative support in areas of Southeast Winnipeg and Southern Manitoba, few could have expected Selinger to expand the New Democrats' popularity to any great extent. Thus, while the longer-term effects of this change remain to be measured, it is safe to say that negative attention to its leadership selection process has not affected the New Democratic Party's popularity in the interim.

Any motivation to change its method of leadership selection, then, will come from within the New Democratic Party, itself. The push is likely to come from three sources: (1) former Ashton supporters who, if they remain committed to reform, provide a solid, vocal base of delegate support for one-member, one vote at the party's next policy convention; (2) the party's youth wing (MYND), whose support for OMOV may be contingent upon a guarantee of weighted votes to ensure their own influence on the outcome; and (3) so-called "rank-and-file" party members, who may seek an unmediated and tidier means of participating in the selection of the next leader.

Resistance will come from the party's labour contingent – a group that stands to lose most from the abandonment of the delegated convention model, whose return they championed in 2007. Given that it takes a two-thirds majority to make the necessary amendments to the party's constitution, and given labour's guaranteed presence at the convention (20 percent of delegates), success may be challenging for would-be reformers. Reasons for optimism include the fact that labour was unable to fill all of its delegate spots at the last, high-profile convention, at which the leadership of the party was at stake; with this in mind, questions surround the ability of unions to muster enough support at a convention to stall a concerted attempt at reform.

Barring outright victory by OMOV proponents at the convention, two specific models commend themselves as compromises for reform. The first, and least likely, would involve a move to a weighted-district voting system, as employed by the (federal) Conservative Party of Canada and Manitoba Liberal Party. Under this system, leadership candidates would compete

for “points” – an equal number of which are distributed among all constituencies. Depending upon the precise formula, these points are often awarded on a proportional basis, such that a candidate winning 60 percent of the popular vote in a 100-point constituency would receive 60 points from that district. The candidate winning the most points, across all districts, is determined the victor. This so-called “hybrid” model may appeal to similar members who wish to expand the visibility and popularity of the next leader in all parts of the province. Said one respondent to the delegates’ survey: “I was offended that my constituency did not have the opportunity to hear leadership candidates speak (even by video tape or streaming) at the delegate selection process. Some constituencies hear the leadership candidates, some even had opportunities to ask questions.” Outside a limited number of proponents in northern and rural areas, however, few Manitoba New Democrats have an incentive to equalize the number of delegates granted to each constituency.

In lieu of a weighted-constituency model, reformers may find a popular compromise in the (federal) New Democratic Party of Canada’s process. There, members representing labour maintain a proportion (25 percent) of the total votes, leaving the remainder (75 percent) to be decided through a traditional one-member, one-vote process. The present distribution of convention delegates in Manitoba suggests labour may receive 20 percent, and MYND, 5 percent, of votes in such a system. Strong advocates of a purer form of OMOV may object to this type of compromise, but it remains one of the few, tested compromises available to the party.

In order to satisfy the demands of those who want rank-and-file members to have unmediated, simpler access to the leadership selection process, on one hand, and the desires of many labour (and youth) leaders to maintain their own role, some form of mixed-system is likely to be adopted. Of course, preservation of the present system is also possible; institutional stasis may set-in, whether as a default choice, the product of the super-majority required to pass constitutional amendments, or the inability of reformers to coalesce under a common model. By the same token, a move to a purer form of one-member, one-vote is also possible; after all, it was accomplished once before. Regardless of their outcome, however, debates over the rules governing future NDP leadership races will raise the stakes of upcoming party meetings. The lack of attention paid to the 2007 policy convention, at which delegates

voted to abandon oMOV in favour of a return to the delegated convention, is unlikely to be repeated.

Conclusion

When taken with due methodological caution, and combined with the sentiment raised during the course of the campaign, the results of the 2009 Delegates' Survey indicate a substantial level of support for reform of the Manitoba NDP's leadership selection process. Not surprisingly, these feelings are felt most strongly among supporters of runner-up Steve Ashton, but they are not confined to his camp, alone. While a majority of respondents did offer positive assessments of the professional conduct and overall fairness of the convention, and most felt that the race had helped to unify and renew the party, almost 80 percent of respondents felt it is necessary to change the process through which the party selects its leaders. With the endorsement of a bare majority of respondents, one-member, one-vote is the most popular among the options for reform. Yet, it remains only one among many possible options for party officials and members to consider. Given the challenges that lie ahead of would-be reformers, some form of compromise is likely to take place between proponents of special representation for labour (and youth), on one hand, and those advocating a one-member, one-vote system (oMOV), on the other. Should reform be achieved, the most likely result will be some form of modified oMOV process, not unlike that used by the federal NDP, under which affiliated organizations will retain weighted influence in the next leadership vote. Observers are wise to pay close attention to the party's future policy conventions, where such issues are likely to receive substantial and substantive debate.

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