The Canadian Party System and the Leadership of Stephen Harper

Howard Cody
University of Maine

Jamie Gillies
St. Thomas University

Abstract

Many scholars believe that Canada entered a fifth party system beginning in 2006 with a Conservative government and especially in light of the 2011 election and the reduction of the Liberal Party to third party status. But a fifth party system is still highly dependent on the results of the upcoming 2015 election. We argue that the costs of ruling for an extended period can lead to voter fatigue with long-serving incumbents and that Stephen Harper perhaps lacks the reserves of upbeat disposition and goodwill in an election year that might offset such fatigue.

Canada experienced four party systems between its 1867 Confederation and about 2006. A fifth party system may emerge after the federal election tentatively expected in October 2015. In this article we speculate on whether and how Canada may be approaching a new party system, and on the roles the Liberal Party and the New Democratic Party (NDP) may play in it. We define the party system and briefly survey Canada's party system evolution to date. Then we consider some of the many reasons for Canada's unusually frequent party system transitions: Canada's tentative political culture that features perpetual disagreements on fundamental issues; a focus on the Prime Minister and opposition party leaders at the expense of parties, cabinets and Members of Parliament; a nonideological electorate dealigned from parties and lacking class or other identities that elsewhere bind supporters to parties for life; the prevalence of ineffective parties with no consistent ideological or issue positioning; and the implications of Canadians' restriction to a single vote in federal politics amidst their diminished faith in federal politics and their disrespect for Westminster systems' government-versus-opposition mindset. Finally, we assess the leadership of Stephen Harper amidst this emerging party system, especially in his

embrace and extension of "court government" practices and executive personalization that has been occurring in Canadian political leadership circles since Pierre Trudeau.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper and his Conservative Party of Canada (CPC) have inherited, and are maintaining, these themes and other features of Canada's politics that reflect much continuity and consistency over time. Harper's party likely will remain the sole center-right player in federal politics for the indefinite future, but it is not clear which—or whether—one of the center-to-left opposition parties will emerge as the Conservatives' default alternative after the next election. We address these questions: Why does Canada change party systems more often than other Western democracies? How might a fifth party system differ from its predecessors? What roles might the Liberals and New Democrats play in such a system? And what has the leadership of Stephen Harper done to alter or destabilize the party system? In this article, we address these questions first by situating Canada's party systems in historical perspective to show why Canadians experience so many party systems. We then look at leadership personalization in Canada as a specific element in the decline and influence of parties before focusing specifically on Stephen Harper and the intense personalization of executive politics in Ottawa today. We then analyze each of Canada's three major parties in the current context and how they have contributed to a changing party system since 2006. We conclude by discussing these major questions and consider the possible impact a 2015 election will have on the emerging fifth party system.

Canadians burden their parties with daunting responsibilities. Because Canada's people are "hardly a nation," John Meisel argues that parties and party systems must obscure and accommodate diversities while fostering a sense of national unity. Parties serve as the primary institution which ties Canadians together and links them to the state. The condition of the party

system at a given time may reflect the health of the polity (Meisel 1992, 330). Ken Carty et al. describe Canada as a "party country" which uses parties to deal with its challenges. Since Confederation, parties have had to operate as prime legitimation devices with "the largest vested interest in the survival of the nation" (Carty et al. 2000, 14). However, the challenge of an increasingly disengaged and non-ideological electorate, less grass roots engagement and declining party membership, and an intense focus on leadership personalization have added to the difficult task of parties as prime electoral organizers.

Party Systems in Canada

We may define a party system as a period of balance in the relative status and position of political parties that extends through several election cycles. The same parties operate throughout this period. Two of them serve as government and opposition. These parties may or may not alternate in power. Smaller third parties may or may not aspire to major party status, but they do not disturb the balance between the two major parties or displace a major party and become major parties themselves (Carty, Cross and Young 2000, 3-4). Successive party systems may be separated by intervals of varying length, during which the political system sorts out the party alignment before a new party system can establish itself (Patten 2007, 57). Ken Carty and his collaborators have provided the best known analysis of Canada's four party systems to date (Carty, Cross and Young 2000). But Canadian and other literatures on parties and elections have long featured discussions of "critical" or "dramatic" elections that produced party realignments heralding new "electoral eras" that effectively constituted party systems (for example, see Blake 1979, 263-64). Lawrence LeDuc identifies a recurrent scenario in American work on party realignment: an established party alignment becomes sufficiently fragile that it can be toppled by a new party or leader, or a short-term political crisis. A new alignment slowly takes hold, and

prevails until the process is repeated (Sundquist 1983, 35-49; LeDuc 2007, 164). Canada's voters are notably "dealigned," unfaithful to the same party over time. While such fickleness spares Canada from Europe's deadlock-inducing "frozen cleavages" that the United States seems intent on replicating, it assures a high electoral volatility that facilitates periodic electoral convulsions (LeDuc 2007, 163, 172).

Canada may have experienced the most eventful party system history of any Western democracy. It began innocently enough with the first party system, which lasted from Confederation to 1921 and featured two-party domination by Conservatives and Liberals (Patten 2007, 57-58). Nearly continuous Liberal party control of federal politics characterized the second party system. But Canada's first major third party, the Progressives, briefly forced Prime Minister Mackenzie King's Quebec and Ontario-based Liberal governments of the 1920s to accommodate Western and agricultural interests in their policy making. Later, the mildly socialist Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) similarly influenced Liberal policy from the left. The second party system collapsed in 1957 when Progressive Conservative John Diefenbaker took power. When Diefenbaker failed to establish his party's hegemony, the Liberals returned to office in 1963, ushering in the Lester Pearson-Pierre Trudeau era as Canada's third party system of restored Liberal dominance which lasted until 1984. During this period, Liberal majority governments alternated with minorities in which the New Democratic Party, the CCF's successor in 1962, nudged Liberal policy leftwards. The third party system replaced Mackenzie King's accommodation of interests through regional brokerage with federal policy centralization in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), especially under Trudeau (Smith 1977, 323). In the same period, provincial premiers displaced federal cabinet ministers as regional champions in a policymaking practice called executive federalism (Carty 1992, 634;

Watts 1989, 1-6). Trudeau replaced King's accommodationism with a government featuring a narrow geographic base concentrated in eastern Canada. This development facilitated a fragmentation of Canada's electorate along regional, ethnocultural, and ideological lines that deepened in the fourth party system (Bickerton and Gagnon 2004, 250-51).

Much as the six-year Diefenbaker government ranks as a gap between the second and third party systems, we may consider the nine-year Brian Mulroney Progressive Conservative government as an interval preceding a fourth party system that arrived with the electoral convulsion of 1993. This election, in which Liberal Jean Chretien won a majority government, reduced the Progressive Conservatives and New Democrats to only a few seats in the House of Commons and installed the insurgent Western-based, right-populist Reform party as a large third party and the Quebec sovereigntist Bloc Quebecois as the official opposition party. This regionally-oriented five-party "Pizza Parliament" splitting right-of-center votes two ways permitted Chretien to secure three consecutive majorities while writing off the West (Patten 2007, 71). By 2004, when James Bickerton and Alain-G. Gagnon could assert that "a cranky electorate now has no allegiance to party" and that "more electoral volatility and political insecurity for all political parties is in store" (Bickerton and Gagnon 2004, 256), Reform (renamed the Canadian Alliance) and the Progressive Conservatives had merged into the Conservative Party of Canada, uniting the right and setting the stage for Harper's ascent to power in 2006. Steve Patten's 2007 observation that "it will be some time before we can speak with certainty about the character and history of the fourth party system" remains accurate (Patten 2007, 58), but it is now clear that this party system has ended. Harper's 2006-2011 minority governments and his subsequent 2011 majority might normally signify the arrival of a fifth party system. But the 2011 Liberal collapse and the third-party New Democrats' first-ever elevation to

Official Opposition status postpones the fifth party system at least until the next election, which may—or may not—clarify these two parties' relative positions and roles. Royce Koop and Amanda Bittner argue that a new, enduring and stable fifth party system already has arrived as a result of a party system dealignment that occurred during the 2004 election and the subsequent realignment with the 2011 results (Koop and Bittner 2013, 309, 324). But we choose to defer such a declaration until New Democrats and Liberals sort out which of them, or perhaps both of them after a merger, will supply Canada's major party alternative to the Conservatives. In keeping with Diefenbaker and Mulroney, Harper's leadership tenure may also come to be seen as an interval between an existing and emerging party system.

Why So Many Party System Changes?

Canadians characteristically describe their country as tentative, fragile, and internally divided. They maintain that these qualities affect national politics and policymaking. John Ralston Saul calls Canada a "perpetually incomplete experiment" that endures more national insecurity than other countries (Saul 1997, 15). Part of this has to do with a nation forged without an origin story culminating in revolution (Black 1975; Smith 2010). Peter Russell maintains that "the lack of a political consensus on fundamental principles of our constitution poses a serious threat to the stability of our parliamentary democracy" because "the principal players in our constitutional politics do not agree on fundamental rules of the game" (Russell 2009, 148).

Others stress Canada's social and regional diversities and their effect on political life. Andrew Cohen laments that Canadians, once imperial subjects with a colonial mentality, never established a distinct identity as a "united, self-assured nation." This leaves them vulnerable as they pursue nearly open immigration that endangers any "centre of gravity" or "fragile sense of place" (Cohen 2007, 163-64). Further, regional and linguistic accommodation in the design of

the country created distinct societies that are provincially based (Ignatieff 2000, 123; Wiseman 2007, 264-66). French visitor Andre Siegfried observed in 1907 that the French-English cleavage already was forcing parties to obfuscate their positions on divisive issues to avoid inflaming social tensions (Tanguay 1992, 474). Carty, Cross and Young extend this argument into our own era. In their effort to contain the country's divisions, Canada's parties differ less on crucial questions and experience a narrower ideological range than parties elsewhere (2000, 15).

Leader domination has characterized Canada's parties since Confederation (Carty and Cross 2010, 194). For Siegfried, a leader's "mere name is a program" (Carty 2013, 19). But Donald Savoie argues that recent Prime Ministers have still further strengthened their power over their parties and cabinets through "court" government with their closest advisors, often in the PMO (Savoie 2014, 139-41). This process evidently commenced when Trudeau used "unerring presidential instincts" to "create a presidential system without its congressional advantages" by imposing centralized leadership on executive operations (Smith 1977, 322-23). Savoie quotes more recent Liberal Prime Minister Jean Chretien's memoir that a minister has become "just another advisor to the Prime Minister" (Savoie 2014 149). Chretien advisor Eddie Goldenberg notes that Chretien "was comfortable knowing that cabinet decisions are the sole prerogative of the prime minister" (Goldenberg 2006, 99). Herman Bakvis and Steven Wolinetz assert that Canadian executives dominate Parliament to a substantially greater extent than in the United Kingdom and other Westminster systems (Bakvis and Wolinetz 2005, 216). They impute "insularity and heavy-handedness" to Chretien's PMO in its dealings with MPs (2005, 218). Prime Ministerial prerogatives include policy shifts. Pearson pivoted Liberals leftwards towards a Keynesian welfare state in the 1960s (English 1992, 218 and 228). Three decades later Chretien and Finance Minister Paul Martin abandoned Keynes by defunding social programs

(Rice and Prince 2013, 132-33) while pivoting Liberals to the "market-liberal right" (Patten 2007, 76). Harper has operated like his predecessors. He sets and revises his government's priorities and policies with a few trusted advisors and without consulting his ministers and backbenchers individually or collectively (Savoie 2014, 135-36).

An effective unicameralism limits Canada's electorate to a single vote for the entire federal government and complicates life for Canada's parties and governments. Further, unlike in Britain, Australia, and Germany where regional or local elections provide choices that serve as proxies for closely affiliated national parties, Canadians can vent their grievances only in voting for their riding's MP. They have no alternative safety valve for protest. Australians Campbell Sharman and Anthony Sayers argue that the absence of a credible elected upper house affects Canada's politics. Without competing (or complementary) power centers, Canada's House of Commons-based cabinet must accommodate the country's disparate interests by itself. The governing party may find it hard to manage the pressures between the decentralized power in the federation and a centralized executive-dominated government at the center (Sharman 2005, 10). Sayers observes that given Canada's lack of Australia's two elected chambers with two different electoral systems, and in the absence of institutional checks and balances or multiple access points for social demands, the cabinet offers the single main conduit for effective policy making in Ottawa and the only elected instrument for integrating Canada's diverse ethnolinguistic and regional interests (Sayers 2002, 210-18).

Canada's voters have been volatile for a long time. Over a century ago, John Willison observed that with each election Canada was remade again (English 2004, 28). More recently, Carty, Cross and Young asserted that "it is a curious fact that when Canadians get really angry about national politics and the accommodations it demands, dissatisfied with public policy, or

disillusioned with their governments, and decide to do something about it, their instinctive response is to start by attacking the party system" by using their one vote in federal politics to turn out the party in power, sometimes replacing their party system with a new one (2000, 14). Moreover, surveys find that Canadians maintain less ideologically based loyalty to parties than their counterparts in other Western countries. LeDuc notes "extraordinarily weak" ideological identities in Canada, where nearly 70% of respondents could not locate themselves on an ideological spectrum (LeDuc 2007, 170-71).

Echoing Willison's aphorism, Bickerton and Gagnon detect weak class voting: Elections traditionally are fought over short-term issues, scandals, and the "personal attributes of leaders" (Bickerton and Gagnon 2004, 241). Similarly, Harold Clarke and Allan Kornberg's analyses of recent elections conclude that "partisanship, valence issues, and leader images dominate multivariate models of party choice in Canada" (Clarke and Kornberg 2012, 186). Valence factors alone, namely how each party leader projects an image of leadership and competence in handling the economy and other matters important to the average voter, now supply "the single best explanation" for Canadians' voting choices (Clarke, Kornberg, and Scotto 2009, 276). This trend is strengthening. Elisabeth Gidengil et al. observe that Catholic voters, long displaying (a rather inexplicable) allegiance to the Liberal party, have finally joined the dealigned ranks and are now in play in each election much like other Canadians (Gidengil et al. 2012, 181).

Lack of ideological commitments in parties or voters, pervasive voter dealignment, young voter disinterest and disengagement, and leader-dominated parties help to explain parties' weaknesses and Canadians' noted susceptibility to charismatic politicians who can "capture the public imagination and…reflect the mood of a particular time" by marketing their personal qualities rather than resting their appeal on party loyalty or a detailed policy agenda (LeDuc

2007, 172-73). Leon Epstein observed in 1975 that parties everywhere have lost the capacity to mobilize or adapt to new challenges and demands in a rapidly changing society (Epstein 1975, 269), but Canadian parties endure particular criticism for serious shortcomings. Alexandra Dobrowolsky finds them in decline, unable to broker diverse interests effectively and leaving policy innovation to social movements (Dobrowolsky 2004, 180). William Cross argues that parties do not broadly represent Canada's people or permit many Canadians to "see" themselves in political elites. Despite recent efforts, parties are making too little progress in recruiting parliamentary candidates and MPs who represent women, young people, and ethnic minorities in numbers approaching their shares of Canada's population (Cross 2009, 249-74). But Canadian parties' deficiencies are nothing new. In the 1980s, Meisel identified several factors that already had reduced parties' spheres of influence and arguably have only intensified since. They included the rise of the bureaucratic state and its monopoly of increasingly indispensable policy expertise, the growth of interest group politics, the rise of electronic media (especially television) that let media intermediaries shape the public's perceptions of politics, the growing sophistication of opinion polling that makes party organization less necessary, and the expansion of "vast, global-girdling" multinational corporations adept at pitting parties and interests against each other to maximize their leverage (Meisel 1992, 333-47).

Leadership Personalization in Canada

With their 2011 majority government win, the Conservative Party of Canada now finds broad inclusiveness inconvenient and unnecessary. Tom Flanagan, a onetime close advisor to Prime Minister Harper, has posited a "median voter theorem" based on Anthony Downs' "convergence at the median" brokerage model (Johnston et al. 1992, 81). Flanagan contends that winning parties like Harper's direct their appeals to middle-road, nonideological voters

preoccupied with everyday concerns like taxes, crime, economic conditions, and other quality of life issues (Flanagan 2011a, 104-8; Flanagan 2011b). Flanagan's successful "minimum winning coalition" strategy for Harper recruited carefully targeted groups—the suburban private sector middle-class, especially if married with children, many of them Asian immigrants—that are not so diverse that they risk implosion like Mulroney's unsustainable Quebec-plus-West coalition of the 1980s (Flanagan 2011a, 104).

Voter targeting, even microtargeting, is here to stay (Delacourt 2013, 321). Carty, Cross and Young foresaw Harper's narrowcasting over a decade ago by noting that "new communication technologies, coupled with increasingly rich sources of sociodemographic data, have allowed parties to make their appeals to the electorate in increasingly targeted and private ways." They predicted that the "national discussion of politics during an election campaign will increasingly be replaced by a series of highly focused, private conversations" that will help contribute to "the end of pan-Canadian politics" with the assistance of pollsters and marketing specialists (Carty, Cross and Young 2000, 224-25). Reg Whitaker detects "virtual" parties in which leaders and their coteries run parties and package direct "producer-to-consumer" appeals in poll and media-driven exercises unmediated by cabinet, Parliament, individual MPs, media outlets, or organized interests (Whitaker 2001, 17 and 22). Colin Bennett reports that all three national parties now operate extensive and technologically sophisticated voter management systems to identify potential supporters (Bennett 2013, 52). Brad Walchuk notes that parties, following their counterparts in the United States, increasingly employ Web 2.0 and social media such as Facebook and Twitter to connect with targeted voters (Walchuk 2012, 423-25). Finally, Alex Marland, Thierry Giassen and Jennifer Lees-Marshment have focused on the political

marketing of the parties and how each major party is now using voter data to turn out its base and supporters (Marland et al. 2012, 5-21).

The concentration of federal policy direction in the Prime Minister also obscures decades-long "shifts in leadership and responsibility from the federal government to the provinces…in key public policy domains" that matter to most Canadians like social services and energy resources (Atkinson et al. 2013, xxiii). In the upshot, Canada has become the world's most decentralized federation (2013, 11-12). Roger Gibbins argued in the late 1990s that a progressive federal withdrawal from energy and other jurisdictions important to Westerners already had eroded their emotional and practical engagement with Canada as a whole (Gibbins 1999, 214). For Canadians, their one vote in federal politics no longer matters much. As David Smith expresses it, "because the kind of power that changes lives no longer is seen to rest in the hands of legislators, the public has small expectations of politicians and what they may do" (Smith 2013, 161). These trends, all of which predated Harper's time, have helped to validate Smith's thesis that Canadians disrespect Parliament and the parliamentary opposition as an alternative government. A diminished investment in national politics matters to us because it helps to account for Canadians' lack of party loyalty. It also helps to explain their willingness to shift from one party system and from one opposition party to another.

These party system dynamics and trends in Canadian political marketing and vote targeting have been exploited well by the Conservative Party under Stephen Harper. Both in recognizing how to construct a viable coalition of supporters, a western-based and Ontario suburban majority coalition, and in how to play personalized politics with party leaders and sink the hopes of three successive Liberal leaders, Harper gets credit for electing a right of center party to power for the first time since 1988. In so doing, Harper updated Meisel's theory of party

influence by expanding the technological dimension of vote targeting and personal marketing. But he was not the first to systematically shift the focus of politics towards leadership and make elections about image and image control.

Party System 4.5: Stephen Harper and Institutionalized Personalization in Canada

After the long tenures of Trudeau, Mulroney and Chrétien, punctuated by the shorter tenures of Joe Clark, John Turner, Kim Campbell and Paul Martin, Stephen Harper led a two-election minority government in which he more doctrinally followed Trudeau's lead by personalizing leadership in the PMO and within the other central agencies of the Privy Council Office, the Treasury Board Secretariat, and the Federal-Provincial Relations and Social Policy Branch within the Department of Finance (Savoie 1999). As a majority government leader now, Harper has almost a decade of using personalization tactics like freezing out the Canadian public service, most notably in controversial and alienating politics such as muzzling Canadian scientists and in calling out independent officers such as the head of Elections Canada. He has also thrown fellow Conservatives under the bus, especially MPs that cross him or hurt the party's image (Martin 2011), along with Senators who have been unable to play within the rules, his own cabinet colleagues whom he uses occasionally as attack dogs but mostly as focus groups for policies, and the mainstream media, which is an afterthought following press releases and interviews to Conservative-friendly media. This all fits with the pursuit of a personalized command and control model for the political agenda in Ottawa.

At the same time, despite his limited popularity in Canada as a whole (the province of Alberta notwithstanding), Harper frequently addresses the public directly, in a Canadian version of "going public"-style tactics, as if operating like a contemporary parliamentary executive should, but without the same level of support. He even used these maneuvers without a working

majority. So Harper has been a prime minister pursuing personalized leadership, but without a national mandate for much of his tenure, and with a fragile majority since 2011.

Harper exploited a fracturing party system the most in 2011 through an extraordinary campaign of personalizing the election and his party. No longer willing to play down his central roles as party architect and policy facilitator, Harper pursued 2011 advertising and campaign tactics that made it explicit that this was his Conservative Party (Ellis and Woolstencroft 2011). Harper, who has always had a problem connecting personally with the electorate, saw that with a sustained focus on the negative aspects of his primary opposition leader, Michael Ignatieff, he could improve his own image without altering it. In a textbook case of effective negative campaigning, Harper and his public relations and advertising teams characterized Ignatieff as an American carpetbagger returning to Canada for selfish reasons (Jeffrey 2011). Like the "swiftboating" of John Kerry, Ignatieff failed to respond in any meaningful way in order to combat the attack advertising and shape his own political image (Ignatieff 2013). By the time Ignatieff orchestrated the non-confidence vote to take down Harper's minority government on parliamentary procedural grounds amidst Liberal and NDP concerns over transparency in government, the public did not share the same level of concern. Procedural inconsistencies and interparty mudslinging were not high on any Canadian voter's list of concerns. Ignatieff's popularity fell sharply in the 2011 federal election campaign after an initial leadership debate in which longtime NDP leader Jack Layton proved to be the beneficiary (McGrane 2011). But the overall campaign was marked by Harper's steady hand in convincing Canadians, especially in swing ridings in Toronto's growing suburbs, that he was the only one fit to lead Canada.

The 2011 election is indicative of a true personalized election, with each party leader structuring his campaign around his own image (Flanagan 2012c, 144-46; Taras and Waddell

2012, 102-5). Harper and Layton were very successful in this regard, making the case that their leadership style and competence should be rewarded. Harper was able to benefit from NDP/Liberal vote splitting and won a majority government with about 40% of the national vote. Since this outcome, all three major parties have been adapting to the new style of sustained personalized executive leadership. Following Jack Layton's passing and Ignatieff's rapid departure, the opposition NDP and Liberals carefully selected interim leaders in order to allow enthusiasm to grow for leadership contests that were not held immediately following an electoral disappointment. Harper used his first year with a majority on improving personalization by responding to policy unveilings and government criticism in rapid-fire public relations terms. He has used the Canadian government advertising resources to champion issues and government spending projects, such as the Canada Action Plan, that were designed to continue the solidification of his majority (Ibbitson 2012a). Further, Harper used executive personalization in 2011 and 2012 to make a single but effective argument; in difficult economic times and uncertainty, his leadership is better than a social democratic champion or a muddling and indecisive middle of the road alternative. Without a viable opposition leader, he was working to shift Canadian politics to a two and a half (and perhaps to a realigned two) party system by logically breaking down the party platforms and positions of the major opposition parties. In that sense, we may be in a fifth party system now. Harper was also not particularly revolutionary, as many of his detractors warned, but was systematic and cautious in pointing out what he sees as the flaws with NDP and Liberal ideologies (Loewen 2012).

Since 2013 and especially in 2014, the fifth party system is perhaps on hold. Poor policy decisions, scandals, and bad press, as well as two formidable opposition leaders, have put into doubt a sustained Conservative majority. Initially, Harper avoided many of the issues that were

a concern during his minority government years, such as problematic position taking and his targeting of Liberal government programs like the long gun registry. He tightened control over a more seasoned cabinet and there have been fewer gaffes from neophyte ministers. The personalization, especially in framing issues at budget time, seemed institutionalized, using the government advantage and talking points to keep Conservative MPs on message. That style of personalization and communications coordination was also being replicated in some provincial governments, and in the cases of Conservative provincial governments, often coordinated at least in part with the federal party.

Harper's style was perhaps most effective when the government was responding to a crisis, scandal or noteworthy event. The Idle No More protests in 2012 exemplified that. While media coverage criticized the Prime Minister's handling of the protests and his lack of empathy towards Indigenous Canadians, he presented his case in logical and unemotional terms and emphasized why he was not willing to negotiate one-off agreements or be held to account for individual protests. It did not benefit him in the short-term but six months later, Harper's instincts of limiting debate and ignoring the issue paid off as Aboriginal issues fell from the public's attention (Kennedy and Fekete 2013).

When issues in 2013 shifted to scandals and policy decisions that angered not just those who voted against Harper but Conservative Party activists, the personalized control style began to expose some serious flaws. The party's handling of the robocalls issue, the Senate expenses scandal, backbench revolts, and then three botched policies (the omnibus crime bill, Senate reform, and the Fair Elections Act) exposed the cracks in a party that seems devoid of ideas and has little means of expanding its voter base for 2015. Part of this stems from the "ten-year itch" problem in which parties in power tend to start to drift and priorities and planning focus on

issues inside the bubble of Ottawa. The party then forgets or downplays public perceptions and consequently is forced to address issues not previously deemed important. In Harper's case, it was the sustained focus on the Senate expenses of three Conservative senators, Mike Duffy, Pamela Wallin and Patrick Brazeau, which led to Harper's first real communications failure as Prime Minister. But since then, there have also been a series of policy decisions and image problems that heading into the 2015 election campaign could be major stumbling blocks for forming another majority government.

A Majority Squandered? Poor Decision Making, Poor Issue Management

Despite using relentless voter targeting tactics and negative advertising, especially against Justin Trudeau, Stephen Harper does not seem to be getting the traction he did against Dion and Ignatieff. Further, Thomas Mulcair, leader of the official opposition, focused almost every question period in the House of Commons on Harper's leadership problems in light of the Senate scandal in 2013 and 2014. While he has not found or uncovered a "smoking gun" piece of evidence, in which a Watergate scenario might play out, Mulcair has convicted Harper of guilt-by-association, and public trust in the prime minister has weakened ("Stephen Harper Plumbing Record" 2013; Abacus Data 2014; Angus Reid Global 2014).

All of this raises a question with implications for the party system. How could a prime minister, who publicly harnessed the image of a leader in total control of his own party, Parliament, and the media message, miss the overarching problem with his leadership during the Senate scandal? Harper was a student of the leadership styles of his predecessors. He watched, learned from, and benefitted from those who were prime minister before him. So in the case of the Mike Duffy and Nigel Wright scandal, why was this lesson not learned? Part of the problem is that Harper has never crafted a positive image of himself to sell to the public. He is prime

minister on the back of negative views of other leaders, especially the decline of the Liberals from Martin to Ignatieff. In one sense, Harper is leader by default and won the political center in 2011 without a real electoral threat. But it makes it difficult to campaign for reelection without a core group of policies or a positive image. The other problem is the command and control model has frozen out fresh advisors who might have shifted Harper's leadership image. Harper still has an opportunity to alter course but the negativity surrounding his leadership, especially by the public, but even in his own party, is difficult to recalibrate (Hebert 2014). While public opinion polling suggests the Conservatives are still competitive, Justin Trudeau appears to have been the beneficiary of the Senate scandal. Polls consistently rank him ahead of Stephen Harper in leadership qualities.

The major fissure exposed by the Senate scandal is that the Conservatives do not seem to know how to self-correct. Here was a classic case of transparency issues with the PMO and the Conservative senators but instead of coming clean and taking responsibility, the cover-up of the cover-up of the cover-up, as Andrew Coyne characterized it, became far more important than Mike Duffy's expenditures (Coyne 2013b). Frustrated perhaps by the lack of media and public awareness of the Conservative Party's policy agenda, they have reverted in many respects to a "survival politics" mode (Campbell 1986), designing policy, bad policy in many respects, which targets the Conservative voting base, but is unappealing to undecided and middle of the road voters. This played itself out repeatedly in 2013 and 2014.

The first notable policy error for the majority Conservative government was the passage of the omnibus crime bill in 2012, which continues to have both policy and constitutional repercussions. Despite warnings from opposition parties and from law enforcement organizations tasked with implementing the changes to criminal laws, Harper and Justice

Minister Rob Nicholson passed the changes over growing concerns that these laws were incongruent with the Government of Canada's own policy analysis and recommendations, as well as with provincially-based law enforcement. Sometimes, political parties and governments make decisions that defy policy logic despite overwhelming evidence about the direction a policy area should take. The Conservative base supported the Safe Streets and Communities Act (2012). Committed to a law and order agenda, the Conservative government embarked on a series of changes to the Criminal Code of Canada that even staunch law enforcement supporters found to be counter-productive. The now majority government wanted to remove perceived soft-on-crime legislation during the Chretien-Martin Liberal years, so the Act imposed "mandatory minimum sentences for a wide range of offences, a broadly expanded jail system, the closure of the prison farm system, the limiting of parole opportunities, and any number of other bills that set harsher punishments and sent young people to the slammer for minor offences" (Martin 2011).

The problem was that there was scant evidence to support the changes. Mandatory minimum sentences did not lower crime rates, harsher penalties for young offenders moved more of them into the prison system without reforming behavior, and new prisons are very expensive and likely would lead to more crime. Harper's legislation focused specifically on drug possession with increased penalties. Ironically, it was not drug treatment or marijuana legalization/decriminalization advocates who complained the most but law enforcement officials angry that implementation of these measures would cause a huge increase in prison and justice system usage and cost a fortune to enforce. In provinces like British Columbia, the RCMP and provincial police forces simply said they would not enforce these provisions. In Quebec, the Premier said the province would not pay for them.

One of the chief concerns was that parts of the law would violate provisions of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and open up the government to legal challenges. While critics cite the usual list of concerns with any tough-on-crime measure – it adversely affects lower socio-economic demographics, particularly Aboriginal Canadians, stigmatizes young first time offenders, costs more, gives less for rehabilitation – the Tories pushed for and passed this legislation. Despite these warnings, the laws are now in effect and are cost-prohibitive in terms of enforcement. Policy competence has to be questioned when the implementing organizations are refusing to enforce these new rules. The law's passing even helped allow Justin Trudeau to move the Liberal Party to support decriminalization of marijuana. So there seems to be a disconnect between policies that appeals to the 40% who voted for Harper in the last election and a policy designed solely for the party base.

Another policy issue that threatens to endanger Conservative reelection hopes is the politicization of the justice system through court appointments. Harper's appointment of Marc Nadon to the Supreme Court of Canada angered court officials. Nadon's credentials were not only challenged, the court itself weighed in on why Nadon's appointment was unconstitutional. Again, leadership qualities were on display as Harper chose to fight for an undistinguished jurist instead of following constitutional form and judicial nominating traditions and procedure. This seems to stem from an anti-establishment ideology but its motivations, unlike the US Republican Party, do not necessarily follow a populist logic. Few people in Canada complain bitterly about the judicial nomination system. In fact, they embrace the post-Charter of Rights and Freedoms judicial consensus. With respect to the courts however, the focused policy that *might have been* good, especially in passing the Victim's Bill of Rights, a piece of legislation with much broader public support, vanished amidst scandal or tone-deaf political decision making.

Finally, the 2014 Fair Elections Act debate caused the Conservative Party to experience yet another media and opposition backlash and more polling setbacks. As a result of the Robocall scandals of the 2011 election, in which Conservative party activists in more than a dozen ridings sent out misleading recorded calls to non-Conservative supporters explaining that their polling station had been changed, both provincial and federal elections officials demanded reform. Elections Canada, the independent agency responsible for the conduct of elections, investigated and found that the Conservative Party was behind these incidents. In response, the Tories developed the Fair Elections Act, which attacks the independence and integrity of Elections Canada, as well as altering Canada's vouching system, where people need not have identification but merely be recognized by somebody at the polls. This could have a dramatic effect on vote suppression. Even the former Auditor General of Canada, Sheila Fraser, has condemned the bill. And yet Harper and the minister defending it, Pierre Poilievre, wanted to pass it intact despite obvious policy flaws and likely court challenges. As Andrew Coyne argues,

> This is how you get to 28% in the polls: when every criticism is only further proof that you're right. It's one thing to fleece the rubes in the grassroots with this nonsense—*They're all out to get us! Please send money!*—but when you start to believe your own rhetoric, your brains turn to mush. It makes you incapable of acknowledging error, or even the possibility of it. And so it blinds you to the train wreck to which you are headed (Coyne 2014).

Kristen Kozolanka argues that a party brand can become damaged over time by political behavior. Parties essentially become unpopular because after connecting with citizens and using the media, the way they manipulate and handle the media and public becomes the news story (Kozolanka 2012). After a few elections, the focus shifts from decisive leadership and winning

tactics against the other parties, to public and media focus on deceitful, calculating strategies for staying in power.

The Liberals: A "Government Party" of Brokers Faces an Existential Crisis

We turn to the Liberal Party under its new leader Justin Trudeau. The Liberals built and maintained a reputation as the "natural governing party" by holding power for nearly three-fourths of the last century (Whitaker 1977) while occupying (and occasionally shifting) the political center and exploiting what Richard Johnston calls a detectable "underlying logic of accommodativeness" (Johnston 2012, 175). French-English elite accommodation predates Confederation (Brooks 2009, 48). Liberals long sought to reconcile Quebec with English Canada by brokering their often divergent interests and by building a reputation among Quebecers as the party accommodating Canada while they operated as Quebec's conciliator elsewhere (Johnston 2012, 174-75). As long as Liberals could convince enough Canadians (principally all-important Ontarians and Quebecers) that they could manage the Quebec-English Canada file and preserve national unity, they held a commanding position in national politics.

Liberals find their unaccustomed third party situation disorienting. For the first time, they serve as neither the government nor the official opposition. The mutual indifference between Quebecers and other Canadians has weakened consumer interest in their accommodative brand (Simpson 2013c). Liberals' earlier success contrasts with the more common fate of other countries' center parties that were relegated to third party status decades ago and remain there (Johnston 2010, 216-17). Recent traumas for centrist third party Liberal Democrats in Britain and Free Democrats in Germany should give Liberals pause: Maurice Duverger's contention that "the fate of the center is to be torn asunder" (Johnston 2013, 301) potentially applies to them as well. Some observers speculate that middle-road parties have run

their course and that brokerage parties not offering an ideological vision risk having to justify their existence in the center (Newman 2011, 120; Saunders 2011; Whitaker 2011).

Enter Pierre Trudeau's son Justin. If the Liberals wish to maintain their middle-road positioning, which appears unavoidable with the center-left and center-right both occupied, Trudeau may represent their best course. If, as alleged, Liberals stand for nothing distinctively different, especially from the NDP (Coyne 2013a), and if they have nothing to say anymore now that the Conservatives and New Democrats have intentionally staked out positions so close to the center that there is little policy room for Liberals to occupy (Ibbitson 2012b), they might as well choose a leader who can sell himself to Flanagan's nonideological median voters on his charisma and who can readily pivot the Liberals to the left or right as circumstances warrant. If Canadians remain pragmatic and progressive while they straddle the center (Cohen 2013a), Trudeau's vagueness on major issues and his position squarely between the other parties may work to his advantage (Den Tandt 2013b). Moreover, his "sunny ways" which make him "by a considerable stretch more likeable, approachable, and engaging" than Harper or Mulcair (Rae 2013) plays into Canadian politics' preoccupation with valence issues, its focus on party leaders' personal appeal, and its elevation of character above experience (Cohen 2013b).

Trudeau's economic and fiscal policy positions, to the extent we may discern them, resemble Harper's. His fiscal frugality and support for resource development, free trade, and pipelines for Alberta's oil betray caution and policy centrism (Walkom 2013). Liberals have a long history as self-proclaimed centrists. Chretien maintains that "in essence, to be a Liberal is to be middle-of-the-road. Liberal roots are in the pragmatic, free-market philosophy of the nineteen century, but over a hundred years the party also became the guardian of a social vision" which includes advancing the principle of universal social benefits (Chretien 1994, 202-3).

Beyond this, Trudeau's call for legalizing possession of marijuana should benefit him. Most Canadians support his position (Grenier 2013). Besides, Trudeau's taking a stand on a "hot button" issue supplies a useful symbol to show he is different (Walkom 2013) while he distracts attention from his policy similarities with Harper. It also affords him a helpful "wedge" issue and an opportunity to exemplify the openness, empathy and idealism that heretofore voting-averse young Canadians value highly (Adams 2013).

As always in politics, timing is crucial. The international literature contends that the "costs of ruling" erode incumbents' support over time. The cross-national average loss is 3% at each election (Naanstead and Paddam 2002, 17-44). Canada's long-serving Prime Ministers leave office by defeat or (involuntary) retirement after nine to eleven years in power. Harper will approach the supposedly lethal "ten-year itch" four months short of a full decade in office in the expected October 2015 election. Recent polls have detected a steady decline in his personal leadership rating and in his party's support (Plecash and Bruno 2013). All this suggests that the next election will prove critical to the Liberals, who must exploit leadership issues to avert an enduring third party fate (Ryckewaert 2013). Canadians now may need a center party only when it has the most attractive leader. That may prove just good enough—for a while.

Since taking over their parties, Thomas Mulcair and now Justin Trudeau have had to play the same kind of personalization game as Harper in order to counter or respond to attack advertisements or general Conservative Party of Canada talking points that negatively depict the opposition leaders. Mulcair has perhaps an easier task than Trudeau, in shoring up a Quebec electorate that shifted NDP in the wake of the collapse of the Bloc Québécois and has shown little enthusiasm for Harper's Western-based leadership. Mulcair, like Harper, is also more focused on defeating the Liberals than necessarily trying to go negative against the government.

To form a majority government, the NDP would likely have to expand their vote by appealing to Liberal voters.

Trudeau wants to be a national leader of relevance and has to rebuild a Liberal party devastated by Harper's electoral tactics. In his first test of this personalization, just days after Trudeau overwhelmingly won the Liberal leadership contest in 2013, Harper responded with attack ads that played up Trudeau's inexperience and greenhorn tendencies and sought to characterize him as "in way over his head," complete with an anti-Trudeau website. Canadians are unaccustomed to this kind of negative advertising and when it has been used in the past, was derided and actually hurt those who sought to deploy them. So Trudeau responded much more rapidly than Ignatieff, issuing his own ad defending his record and appealing to Canadians' common sense. The media then tied the Harper ad to bullying tactics and criticized the Conservatives for authorizing it (Leblanc 2013). Over a year later, the attack ads are still in place, and still use the same image of Trudeau. This is the permanent personalization campaign now as Canadians refer to the Government of Canada as the "Harper Government," and the opposition parties as the Mulcair NDP and the Trudeau Liberals.

The New Democrats: A "Nudge" Party Goes Mainstream and Makes a Play for Power

The New Democratic Party evolved from the British Fabian socialist-minded CCF founded in 1933. A classic protest third party for three decades, the CCF served largely as an originator of social policies for Liberal governments to coopt. In a 1956 speech, CCF National Chairman David Lewis, a future NDP leader, described his party's role as "the political and social conscience of Canada" to "fight the big interests of this country." Lewis proclaimed that "we need not necessarily be in power" to goad governments to implement policies that benefit "the common people" (Young 1969, 292). The NDP diluted its predecessor's socialism into the

popular European-style social democracy of the 1960s. It helped Pearson's 1963-1968 minorities to introduce the Maple Leaf Flag, the Canada Pension Plan, the Canada Assistance Plan, and national health care. Trudeau's 1972-1974 minority passed the NDP-supported Foreign Investment Review Agency, Petro-Canada, indexed pensions, and an Election Expenses Act (Cody 2004). Finally, the NDP goaded Paul Martin to add $4.6 billion to his spending on low-cost housing, urban mass transit, foreign aid, and higher education tuition breaks in his 2004-2006 minority. Pearson, Trudeau, and Martin protested that they personally endorsed all of these initiatives (English 1992, 218; Trudeau 1993, 164-67; Martin 2008, 313), but the fact remains that they implemented them only in minorities with NDP support.

A nudge role was popular with NDP activists because it absolved them from the ideological and policy compromises that other parties of the left, such as Germany's Social Democrats and British Labour under Tony Blair's Third Way, were undertaking to enhance or restore their chance to win power. At the millennium, Third Way inspirer Anthony Giddens described the NDP as "the last unreconstructed social democratic party in the Western world" (Cardy 2012, 49). By no coincidence it was also the only self-defined third party in this group. Then, in 2003, Quebec-born Toronto City Councilor Jack Layton took charge of the NDP after two decades of leftist activism in municipal politics. At the time Layton assailed free trade pacts and capitalism, especially multinational corporations, from a left-nationalist perspective for gutting governments' will and capacity to provide social services and for endangering Canada's independence (Layton 2004, 29-31). But through four federal elections (2004, 2006, 2008, and 2011) Layton, pivoting right, incrementally transformed his party from a nudge vehicle into a power-seeking instrument with a deliberately ambiguous policy agenda (Lavigne 2012, 94-101).

The NDP's gradual rightwards repositioning "substantially reduced" the ideological space between Canada's left and right (Koop and Bittner 2013, 321).

In 2008, Layton proclaimed that he was running for Prime Minister to win power (Gidluck 2012, 11). The NDP thereupon wedded Layton's persona to a "broadly left populist appeal" (Erickson and Laycock 2009, 126-27). Layton commissioned pollsters and focus groups to gauge public opinion, and he adapted his election strategy to their findings (McLean 2012, 176, 179-81). By 2011 the affable Layton ranked highest in personal popularity among party leaders. The NDP organized its national campaign around him while replacing its left-wing policy proposals like costly universal child care with a "together we can do this" slogan appealing to "left" Liberals. These targeted voters could freely decide what "this" referred to (Loewen et al. 2012: 66; McLean 2012, 177-81).

Layton's NDP made moderate gains in English Canada in 2011, but it elected fifty-eight Quebec MPs, up from only Thomas Mulcair before the election. Native son Layton had long endorsed "flexible, asymmetrical federalism" to affirm Quebec's social policy autonomy and its right to self-determination (Layton 2004: 268-269). He used his "friendly, working class French" (Topp 2011: 60) to assure Quebecers that as Prime Minister he would accord Quebec a distinct status in federal policies and in constitutional negotiations, unlike the nationally unelectable Bloc Quebecois and the right-wing and equal-provinces Harper Conservatives (Loewen et al. 2012, 66). When Layton succumbed to cancer shortly after the 2011 election, the party chose Mulcair as its leader. It expects the non-ideological pragmatist, a former Liberal Quebec provincial minister, to protect its precarious Quebec base and maintain the more moderate image that helped it secure Official Opposition status for the first time ("Thomas Mulcair" 2012).

As leader, Mulcair has honored Flanagan's median voter theorem by positioning his party just to the left of center (Ivison 2012). In an appeal to middle class voters, the "Holy Grail" of Canada's electorate (Simpson 2013f), he has tried to convince Canadians that the NDP can manage the national economy without a "tax and spend" strategy (Harper 2012b). Parties of the left must counter the perception that they "can't manage the economy" and are "much better at redistributing wealth than creating it" (Simpson 2013f). Here Mulcair resembles British Labour's Ed Miliband, who for similar reasons pledges to impose "iron discipline" on budgets and reduce the deficit to zero (Rawnsley 2013). But the NDP left's critics of free-market capitalism jealously guard their party's cherished reputation as Canada's social conscience and champion of the poor (Chapnick 2013). Mulcair's predicament on Harper's incipient trade pact with Europe is telling. By repudiating it he unhelpfully "remains wedded to the [NDP's] past" of distrusting free markets (Simpson 2013i). But accepting it would endorse "redundant" market-based policies that threaten the NDP's identity (Azizi 2013). Mulcair has used his "assertive, aggressive, polarizing" personal style to stake out positions on selected issues that differentiate the NDP from other parties (Ibbitson 2012a). His "Dutch disease" argument charges that Harper favors Western energy producers, disregards the environment, and drives up the Canadian dollar at the expense of Eastern (read: Ontario) manufacturers who cannot compete in global markets with an artificially high currency (Harper 2012a). Mulcair's opposition to the Keystone XL pipeline endorsed by Harper and Alberta—and Trudeau—has been denounced by pipeline supporters (Gerson 2013). Conservatives are assailing Mulcair for dividing the country, but economist Thomas Courchene predicts that the West's resource boom may generate excessive and divisive interregional fiscal and economic inequality while damaging provincial economies in the East, Ontario's in particular (Courchene 2012, 27-29).

Michael Den Tandt and Jeffrey Simpson further assert that Mulcair is basically a provincial politician beholden to a caucus composed principally of Quebec nationalists and preoccupied with holding the NDP's new base in his province even if he must pander to "soft" sovereigntists the NDP detached from the Bloc Quebecois in 2011. Mulcair has revived Layton's policy dating from the NDP's 2006 "Sherbrooke Declaration" that recognizes Quebec's right to sovereignty if this option passes a referendum by a single vote. Liberals reject this position. Mulcair's leadership of a Quebec-centered NDP may pose problems as he attempts to fulfill his obligations to Quebec nationalists while he simultaneously frames an appeal in Ontario where solicitude for Quebec has weakened perceptibly (Den Tandt 2013a; Simpson 2013c). Further, his leadership style is not like Layton's. This has caused the NDP to lose traction since the 2011 election result.

Discussion

It is clear that since the ouster of Paul Martin, Canada has embarked on a new political era. But whether we are in a sustained fifth party system remains to be seen and likely will not be clear until after the presumptive 2015 election. We reserve judgment until Canadians identify which opposition party, the Liberals or the NDP, or perhaps both in a "Liberal-Democrat" type merger, becomes the logical principal opposition to the Conservatives. In that sense, we disagree with Koop and Bittner's assertion that Canada has a realigned electorate following the 2011 election (Koop and Bittner 2013). They may turn out to be correct, but the 2015 election should help sort out the electoral volatility that thus far has prevented the establishment of a sustained fifth party system.

And what has the leadership of Stephen Harper done to shift or change this party system? Darrell Bricker and John Ibbitson contend we have experienced the death of the Laurentian

Consensus, the forces that allowed the Liberal Party of Canada to co-opt and/or be supported by the set of 20th century governing elites primarily based in Ontario and Quebec, Canada's two largest provinces (Bricker and Ibbitson 2012, 12-31). They are correct insofar as population growth out West, especially in urban and suburban Vancouver and Calgary, now constitutes a significant driver of the Canadian economy and a voting base for the Conservative Party in its own right. But regional cleavages, incongruous voting patterns at the provincial and federal levels, and distinct political cultures in Canada's regions, continue to dominate politics. And therein lies some of the reason why it is difficult to say that a new party system has actually emerged.

Since the 1993 election, when Progressive Conservatives were reduced to just two seats in the House of Commons, the combined PC and Reform/Canadian Alliance vote total never fell below 34 percent. In fact the worst showing for the right was in the 2004 election, when Paul Martin formed a minority government and Conservatives won less than 30 percent of the vote. So the 40 percent result Harper achieved in the 2011 election may be fleeting as ex-Progressive Conservatives, especially in places where CPC support has dropped precipitously, like Atlantic Canada, park their vote with the Liberals. Meanwhile, the NDP's Quebec dominance may not survive a second election (Plecash 2014).

The selection of Justin Trudeau as Liberal leader may advantage his party over a Mulcair-led NDP. A "fresh and new" Trudeau as a "visible manifestation of change" with a pan-Canadian image and appeal can honor the diversities of a tentative and fragile country while portraying Mulcair as an outdated and parochial Quebec politician (Gerson 2013). In contrast to the likeable Trudeau, Mulcair and Harper may look and act like ideologically blinkered "grumpy old men" whose regionally divisive policies and sparring over "Dutch disease" and pipelines

threaten national unity (Rae 2013; Wente 2013). Mulcair's dismissal of Trudeau as "Harper-light" (Vongdoungchanh 2013) may benefit Justin among voters who desire change in leadership more than in policy. Gidengil et al. find that Liberal and NDP voters (not party activists) occupy a common center-left value space and share similar views on moral issues, market liberalism, and policies on Quebec and ethnic minorities (Gidengil et al. 2012, 183). With a policy flexibility that Mulcair must envy, Trudeau can market himself and attract the media attention that third parties crave but rarely get. According to Andrew Coyne, Trudeau spares Liberals from introspection, self-examination, and searching questions such as whether Canada still needs them or needs a liberal or center party at all (Coyne 2013b). This is probably just as well. Such an existential ordeal could prove unproductive and even tear the party apart. Trudeau already has rebuilt his party's financial position and membership rolls. He and his circle promise to broaden Liberal membership further and implement the party infrastructure reforms necessary to compete effectively in future elections (Ibbitson 2013).

Trudeau and Mulcair will have to contend with the well-publicized argument advanced by Bricker and Ibbitson that Ontario's suburban voters whom Harper has successfully courted are forging a decisive, possibly long-lasting attachment to the Conservatives in a "Big Shift." Bricker and Ibbitson contend that these Canadians, many of them Asians from China, India, and the Philippines, endorse Harper's low-tax, crime-fighting, small-government agenda and have more affinity with Harper's West than with Mulcair and Trudeau's Quebec (Bricker and Ibbitson 2013, 19-39, 88; Nicholls 2013). Christopher Dornan agrees that the cohort of business-oriented "strivers" will not support a party they associate with big government (Dornan 2013). On the other hand, Jeffrey Simpson warns that Harper's "monochromatic" (uniformly right-wing) Conservatives offer a narrow appeal that leaves them little room for error or miscalculation

(Simpson 2013a). While Chris Plecash respects the Big Shift thesis, he suggests that Trudeau (but not Mulcair) has the potential to connect with immigrant and non-immigrant strivers on a personal level that they can identify with (Plecash 2013).

Some Canadians cannot wait until the next election to discover which of the opposition parties emerges as the Conservatives' stronger alternative. Paul Saurette has joined a chorus on the left that wants these parties to "cooperate" in some unspecified manner to avert dividing "progressive" votes yet again and electing a fourth consecutive Conservative government. Saurette argues that Liberals and New Democrats are growing more alike philosophically and politically on current issues. They will continue to compete for the same center-to-left voters (Saurette 2013). While we cannot rule out even a full merger on the Conservatives' model *after* the next election ("Liberal Democrats" anyone?), Ibbitson and Robert Silver, among others, insist that these parties maintain radically different self-identities, political cultures, and visions for Canada's future (Ibbitson 2011; Silver 2011). They also have dissimilar institutional memories, especially given the NDP's long-treasured professions of love and solidarity (Smith 1992). Like Liberals, NDP leaders pivot their party, but they keep to the left of center on firm principle, unlike Liberals whom they attack for pure opportunism. Besides, once New Democrats became the official opposition, their "long-standing goal of obliterating the Liberals and replacing them as the only *real* alternative to the Conservatives seemed a *fait accompli*" (Gidluck 2012, 13; italics in original). Mulcair's New Democrats will try to look and sound like Liberals to attract liberally-minded voters (Cohen 2011). But they must ask this question: If they are now a pragmatic party preoccupied with winning power, how can they split the center-left vote with the Liberals and keep electing Conservative governments?

To return to the central questions posed in our introduction, Canada has had a long history of party system realignments and the emergence of a new one since 2004 fits with historical trends. But how might a fifth party system under a Liberal or an NDP government, or a merged successor party, vary from its predecessors? Continuity will endure. Few features of Canada's political culture will change. We cannot expect the next Prime Minister, regardless of party, to surrender any of the well-established practices old and new that maximize his leverage in federal politics: the plurality electoral system that facilitates majority governments, the lack of effective institutional checks on the executive, a concentration of power in the Prime Minister and his closest advisors that marginalizes cabinets and MPs, and technological innovations that let the Prime Minister disregard ministers and MPs while targeting carefully selected segments of the electorate through "virtual" parties. Further, Canada's tentativeness, voter volatility with weak federal parties, fiscal restraint with no new federally-initiated taxes or social programs, and decentralization of power from Ottawa to the provinces are likely to last indefinitely.

What has the leadership of Stephen Harper done to alter or destabilize the party system? Harper has discontinued executive federalism that included Premiers in the federal policy process (Anderson 2012), except when a growing "intermesticity" forces cooperation on issues that overlap federal and provincial responsibilities like trade and social policy (Rice and Prince 2013, 115-37), and on energy and economic development issues (Hale 2012, 4, 202)—and sometimes not even then. His open federalism leaves provinces to manage their responsibilities without federal involvement (Crane 2013). Harper has intensified the pandering to narrow voter segments (Simpson 2013h). He has ended federal programs for science, cut foreign aid and the CBC, reduced embassy staffs, cancelled the Understanding Canada program that supported Canadian Studies abroad, and he is now cutting the defense budget. But Harper is funding new

local infrastructure projects that can attract grateful voters in the next election (Simpson 2013e). Neither Mulcair nor Trudeau, whose father introduced court government in the 1970s (Savoie 2009, 115), may roll back the pre- or post-Harper developments on these lists. Most or even all of them may survive into and through a new party system.

However, if Harper and Mulcair have their way and Canada's federal politics becomes bipolar with one center-right and one center-left party assigning the middle ground to the margins, which may yet happen, Canadians may increasingly resemble Americans with stronger ideological consciousness and partisan identities, and less volatile voting patterns. This could facilitate better established party systems of longer duration. Perhaps Quebec, which "on issue after issue" seems "more and more disconnected from how other Canadians see the country" thanks in part to Harper's "complete tin ear toward the province" (Simpson 2013b), can build a secure foothold in the New Democrats and/or Liberals and thereby regain a visible and influential role in the federal policy process through intraparty politics. The fifth party system's most consequential or conspicuous change from its immediate predecessor may lie in the relative positions and roles of the Liberals and New Democrats, or their mutual successor.

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