

Canadian Party Politics in the 2000s: A Re-examination of the Regionalization Thesis

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Abstract:¹ Since the 1990s scholars of party politics have written of the increasing regionalization of Canadian party politics, going as far as to label the current system “balkanized”. Using three widely established measures of party nationalization (party coverage, uniformity of support, and patterns of electoral competition), and one new measure (analysis of party advertisements), this paper explores the regionalization thesis in the post 1990s political landscape. While there is widespread consensus in the literature that the Canadian party system is highly regionalized, this paper provides evidence to the contrary. Rather than a balkanization of Canadian electoral and party politics we are witnessing a re-nationalization of Canadian party politics. This is especially true for those parties that compete in English Canada. Where regionalization, remains, however, is in the province of Quebec. Not only does the Bloc Québécois represent a regionalizing force in itself, but the party's very presence alters the strategies of the other parties that compete in Quebec. As a result of the different dynamics of party competition in Quebec, we are left with two distinct party systems: a regional party system in Quebec and a national party system in the rest of Canada.

Keywords: political parties; party nationalization; regionalization; party system

Résumé: Depuis les années 1990, les analystes de la politique des partis ont discuté la régionalisation croissante des partis canadiens, allant jusqu'à qualifier le présent système de "balkanisé". Utilisant trois mesures connues de la nationalisation des partis (la couverture média, l'uniformité de l'appui, les formes de compétition électorale) et une nouvelle mesure (l'analyse de la publicité des partis), cet article explore la thèse de la régionalisation dans le paysage politique ultérieur aux années 1990. Quoiqu'il y ait un vaste consensus chez les analystes selon lequel le système des partis canadiens est hautement régionalisé, le présent article souligne des faits à l'inverse. Plutôt qu'une balkanisation de la politique partisane et électorale, nous observons une re-nationalisation de la politique des partis canadiens. C'est surtout vrai des partis qui s'affrontent au Canada anglais. La régionalisation subsiste, cependant, dans la province de Québec. Non seulement le Bloc Québécois y représente-t-il en soi une force régionale, mais la présence de ce parti influence les stratégies des autres partis qui y sont présents. La résultante de cette dynamique compétitive différente au Québec, c'est que nous sommes en présence de deux systèmes de partis distincts: un système régional de parti au Québec et un système national de parti ailleurs au Canada.

Mots-clés: partis politiques; nationalisation des partis, régionalisation, système de partis

¹ **Acknowledgements:** I wish to thank Peter Woolstencroft for his comments on an earlier draft of this paper and the journal's anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful comments.

Introduction

For decades scholars of political parties have concerned themselves with the nationalization of parties, electorates, and party systems (Caramani, 2004; Chhibber and Kollman, 2004; Claggett et al. 1984; Cox, 1997; Jones and Mainwaring, 2003; Kasuya and Moenius, 2007; Kwato, 1987; Schattschneider, 1960). Nationalization can be broadly defined as the process whereby the behaviour of parties and voters becomes more geographically uniform and consistent over time. Caramani (2004:1) describes nationalization as a phenomenon where “peripheral and regional specificities disappear, and sectional cleavages progressively transform into nationwide functional alignments”.

In the Canadian literature, the focus of scholars has not been on nationalization but instead emphasis has been given to regionalization (Blake, 1972; Blake, 1985; Cairns, 1968; Carty et al., 2000; Cross, 2002; Schwartz, 1974; Young and Archer, 2002). As former Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King once remarked, “if some countries have too much history, we have too much geography.” In contrast to nationalization, regionalization refers to party and voter behaviour that lacks nationwide uniformity and varies, often considerably, from one region or province to another.

In Canada, regionalization has manifested itself through the rise of regionalist political parties that compete in a single province or region and through parties that compete nationwide but have clearly defined regional or provincial bases of electoral support. Much of this is a result of the dealignment of federal and provincial party systems and the breakdown of traditionally organizationally integrated political parties that has occurred in recent decades. While federal and provincial party

systems were once congruent, recent decades have witnessed widespread divergence. In particular, organizationally truncated parties that operate only at a single level have become increasingly common. At the provincial level, this includes parties such as the Wildrose in Alberta, the Saskatchewan Party, and the Parti Québécois.

While a focus on regionalism has been a staple in Canadian political science, the topic gained renewed attention in the 1990s from scholars of political parties. Two inherently regional parties emerged with great electoral success during the 1993 federal election: one that competed only in French Canada (Bloc Québécois), and another that competed only in English Canada (Reform).² What's more, these new parties helped shape a unique pattern of party competition that clearly defined the 1993 and 1997 federal elections and separated these elections from all those elections that had come before.³ Ultimately, these new parties and the new patterns of competition that they created have given rise to what can be termed the regionalization thesis. This argument, most prominently put

² While the Reform party saw its debut in the 1988 election, and elected its first MP in a 1989 by-election, it was not until the 1993 that the party had its breakthrough.

³ Federal parties have often been accused of resting on the organizations built by the provincial wings of the party (Stewart and Carty, 2006: 101). Doing so allows federal parties to have organizations in all of the provinces and thus be more competitive statewide. While federal parties may have been able to rest on provincial machines to achieve nationalization in the past, the new federal parties of the 1990s had no such provincial counterparts to rely on. The Reform party, for example, competed only at the federal level and did not have provincial branches of the party to rely on for support across the country. It is worth noting that nationalization may therefore be related to party integration. That is, party system congruence and integrated federal-provincial party organizations may facilitate nationalization at the federal level.

forth by Carty, Cross, and Young (2000), suggests that national parties and national elections are no longer present in Canada. The result, the authors suggest, is a set of regionally distinctive party systems where elections are fought and lost based on local issues in different regions across the country. As Carty et al. (2000:34) explain:

Throughout the third party system, Canadians had participated in a genuinely national system...The 1993 political explosion tore up this pattern and left the country balkanized, with a set of regionally distinctive party systems. Canadians no longer faced a common set of electoral forces or political options. Instead, each region spurred its own distinctive party system...

Nor were Carty, Cross, and Young alone in their assertions. A similar argument was made by Bickerton, Gagnon, and Smith (1999: 194) in their book *Ties that Bind*. Writing about the electoral landslide that occurred in 1993, they argue that:

These shifts have increased the balkanization of the Canadian electorate and party system. The divisions between parties and voters have been magnified and multiplied; regional bases of party support and activity are more sharply delineated; and the pattern of voter loyalties and preferences is more spatially differentiated.

There is, however, a great deal of debate about the nature and characteristics of the party system. According to Lapp (2002:633), the regionalization thesis presented by Carty, Cross, and Young is an “impressive opening volley in what promises to be a long and lively debate over

the nature and the role of parties in the Canadian political process.” Others, however, have been more critical. Clarkson (2001: 15), for example, has argued that the regionalization thesis is greatly exaggerated: “there is much less evidence of change than [Carty, Cross, and Young] maintain – whether this be a change in the party system, change in the nature of the parties themselves, or change in the manner in which they wage their campaigns.”

This paper adds to the debate by examining the five federal elections that have occurred since the 1990s. In doing so, this paper makes two primary contributions. First, it applies widely established measures of party/party system nationalization to the Canadian case in order to assess the degree of regionalization that remains. While considerable attention has been devoted to the 1993 and 1997 elections (Carty et al., 2000; Clarke and Kornberg, 1996; Erickson, 1995; Nevitte et al., 2000; Patten, 2007), relatively little work has been done in the elections that followed the turbulence of the 1990s. Given recent developments, there are a variety of reasons to expect that the Canadian party system, and the individual parties that make up that system, have re-nationalized. In particular, the merger of the Canadian Alliance and the Progressive Conservatives, the introduction of campaign finance reform that incentivises nationwide competition,⁴ and the resurgence of support

⁴ 2004 party financing legislation required a party to either win 5 per cent of the vote in all of the constituencies in which it had candidates or 2 per cent of the vote nationally to be eligible for funding. This provided parties with an incentive to compete nationwide, as it would be easier to achieve the 2 per cent threshold. The Green Party, for example, competed in every Canadian riding in 2004 under the new financing rules compared to less than 40 per cent in the previous election. The financing legislation therefore had a nationalizing impact on the party system. As the direct per vote subsidy is being phased out, the implications for nationalization are uncertain. It is unclear, for example, whether smaller parties

for Canada's brokerage parties all suggest that a re-examination of the regionalization thesis is in order.

The second contribution concerns the way we measure nationalization/regionalization. Current indicators tend to focus on the voter side of the equation and do not adequately account for party strategy. A party may very well appear national in support (receiving a similar share of the vote in all provinces) while simultaneously behaving in a regional manner. A measure of nationalization is needed that has the ability to capture cross-provincial differences in party behaviour. In this sense, we need to 'bring parties back in' and study not only electoral results but also party inputs. To address this limitation, the paper examines the messages that the parties are transmitting. If a political party is nationalized, it is expected that this will be reflected in their campaign advertising and techniques. In the Canadian case, for example, this would mean that the same messages should be transmitted in English and French. Regardless of vote share or electoral success, a party cannot be considered to be truly national if it wages dramatically different campaigns in the various regions of the country.

Using three widely established indicators (party coverage, uniformity of support, and patterns of electoral competition), and one new measure (analysis of party advertisements), this paper explores the regionalization thesis in the post 1990s political landscape. What we are witnessing is not a balkanization of Canadian electoral and party politics but rather a re-nationalization of Canadian party politics. The evidence provided in this paper demonstrates that Canadian parties, and the party system as a whole, are more nationalized than previously thought. This is

will continue to compete nationally without the monetary incentive.

especially true for those parties that compete in English Canada. Where regionalization does still exist is in the province of Quebec. Although the Bloc suffered a significant electoral setback in the 2011 federal election, the party represents a strong regionalizing force in the Canadian party system nonetheless. What's more, the party's very presence in Quebec alters the strategies of the other parties that compete in Quebec. The Bloc does so by forcing the Liberals, Conservatives, and to a lesser extent the New Democrats, to engage in regional politics by targeting Quebecers explicitly, therefore abandoning their national messages when competing in the province of Quebec. Despite the continued influence and impact of the Bloc, the analysis of Canadian parties provided here demonstrates more nationalization than the literature suggests.

Party Coverage

The first measures of nationalization focused on competition indices (Caramani, 2004; Bochsler, 2010). As Schattschneider (1960), Urwin (1982), and Caramani (2004) each note, the most basic measure of nationalization is the degree of statewide party competition. Parties and party systems are to be considered national if parties compete throughout the country rather than focusing on certain constituencies or regional strongholds. Cornford (1970) operationalized nationalization by measuring the number of "safe seats". That is, the number of constituencies where a party faced little or no opposition. In a similar fashion, others have counted the number of uncontested seats in their study of party competition.

Caramani (2004) has refined these competition measures, creating a territorial coverage index. This measure calculates the number of ridings in which a party has a

candidate as a percentage of the total number of constituencies. Parties that field candidates in all or most constituencies and therefore compete nationwide are considered to be national while those parties that compete in a single province or have considerable gaps in their coverage are considered regional. While the territorial coverage index is not the most robust measure in the study, it does provide a

useful starting point for our analysis of individual parties and the party system as a whole. Before examining electoral support, campaign techniques, or broad patterns of competition, we first need to understand where the parties are competing and where they are absent. Using Caramani's territorial coverage index, Table 1 includes individual party coverage scores and the average total coverage for each election.

Table 1: Party Coverage by Party (2000-2011)

Party	2000	2004	2006	2008	2011
Liberal	100%	100%	100%	99.7%	100%
Conservative	-	100%	100%	99.7%	99.7%
New Democrat	99.3%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Bloc Quebecois	24.9%	24.3%*	24.3%	24.3%	24.3%
Canadian Alliance	99.7%	-	-	-	99.7%
Progressive Conservative	99%	-	-	-	99%
Election Average	84.6%	81%	81%	81%	81%
Election Average (Without Bloc)	99.5%	100%	100%	99.8%	99.8%

*The reason for the decline in coverage from 24.9 per cent to 24.3 per cent is due to the increase of seats in the House of Commons from 301 in 2000 to 308 in 2004. These seven new seats were used to adjust the House in terms of population redistribution. The new seats were divided as follows: Ontario (3), Alberta (2), and British Columbia (2).

As Table 1 makes clear, Canada's major political parties cover a tremendous proportion of the constituencies nationwide. With only few exceptions, the Liberals, New Democrats, and Conservatives compete in, or cover, nearly 100 per cent of Canada's political territory in each federal election. In fact, the commitment to nationwide party competition is so strong that the Progressive Conservatives rejected the notion that they should field joint candidates with the Reform Party, despite the fact that vote splitting on the right was leading to significant Liberal gains. In 1999 a majority of PC delegates endorsed the party's "301 rule" prior to the 2000 election. This resolution, a commitment to run a candidate in each of the country's 301 electoral districts, prevented the party from having any meaningful electoral cooperation with the Reform or Canadian Alliance (Woolstencroft

and Ellis, 2009: 80). Being perceived as a national party and having an electoral presence throughout the country was more important to the PCs than the immediate electoral gains that would have been won by ending the vote splitting that had plagued the parties on the right of the political spectrum.

Table 1 also demonstrates that the Reform Party's transformation into the Canadian Alliance had a positive impact on nationalization. As the party transformed itself, the primary focus of the party was no longer on the policy articulation of western interests but rather on vote maximization. Consequently, the party was forced to expand the area in which it competed. In doing so, the party became much more national in scope. While the Reform Party covered 70 per cent of the ridings in the 1993 election and only a slightly higher percentage in 1997, it did not contest any seats outside of English Canada.

By the 2000 election, however, the Canadian Alliance was competing from coast to coast. That the Canadian Alliance competed in more than 99 per cent of the constituencies in the 2000 election was a marked improvement from previous elections when the party had considerable gaps across the country. For example, competing in Quebec represented a symbolic and strategic effort on behalf of the party to move beyond its traditional western base in an attempt to be seen as a truly national political party as opposed to a regional vehicle for western policy articulation. When the Canadian Alliance merged with the Tories in 2003 this trend of nationwide competition continued.

Overall, the Canadian party system has experienced a resurgence of national party coverage and competition in recent elections. This is in direct contrast to the 1993 and 1997 elections which saw one major party only run candidates in English Canada and another only run candidates in French Canada. At the system level, the merger of the Canadian Alliance and Tories has replaced a party that covered 70 per cent of the country in 1993 for a party that has continuously covered over 99 per cent of the constituencies in each of the elections that it has contested. In total, the major parties compete in more than 80 per cent of the country's 308 constituencies. What's more, when the Bloc is removed from analysis, this number increases to 99 per cent. In terms of electoral presence, it is clear that Canadian parties are national actors, competing from coast to coast.

Uniformity of Support

Although Canadian parties compete nationally it does not mean that their electoral support will be national as well. For example, a party may run candidates in every constituency and still have varying degrees of support throughout the different provincial units. While coverage is likely linked to support (a

party cannot have uniform support if it does not compete nationally), it does not automatically follow that support will be nationalized simply because coverage is national. Likewise, parties may field candidates in all ridings but these candidates may be nothing more than names on paper. Coverage, therefore, does not provide sufficient grounds to make conclusions about the extent of nationalization. More than party coverage, nationalization also requires that parties receive homogeneous support across the country despite provincial borders. Homogeneity of support, as Claggett et al. explain, is when parties draw increasingly uniform or homogeneous levels of support across all of the geographic subunits of the electorate (1984:80). Nationalization thus involves the erasing or diminishing of provincial and regional patterns of electoral behaviour, replacing them with a more national or countrywide pattern of competition and results.

A party's electoral support can be measured two ways, through either an examination of seats or votes. The literature, however, has frequently highlighted the tendency of the single member plurality (SMP) electoral system to distort electoral outcomes (see, for example, Russell, 2008). This distortion occurs because there is often a disconnect between the number of seats a party has captured and the percentage of the popular vote that the party has won. In particular, parties with regional bases of support are often rewarded far more generously than those that do not. Likewise, the SMP system tends to create false majorities by over-rewarding large parties. While seats are undoubtedly important, a simple example will illustrate the shortcomings of using seats over vote share in our analysis of party support. In the 1987 New Brunswick provincial election the Liberal Party received 60 per cent of the popular vote but won 100 per cent of the seats in the

legislature.⁵ An examination of party support that focused on seats would therefore significantly overestimate the amount of support for the Liberal Party while simultaneously underestimating support for other parties, ignoring 40 per cent of the electorate. What's more, there have been a number of occasions (1957, 1962, and 1979) where a party with more votes has actually won fewer seats than its competitor (Courtney, 2010: 131). This distortion necessitates that the vote share, and not the number of seats in the legislature, be examined to accurately study party support.

Jones and Mainwaring (2003) offer an innovative way of measuring the uniformity of party support. Rather than using the traditional statistics that political scientists often use (standard deviation, variance, etc.) they suggest a measure that is associated with the field of economics.⁶ To measure the nationalization of political parties, they argue that the Gini coefficient be subtracted from 1 (Jones and Mainwaring, 2003:142). The Gini coefficient, a measure of statistical dispersion that is widely used to measure income inequality across geographical units, has been used in the field of economics for decades. This measure ranges from 0 in cases of perfect equality and 1 in cases of perfect inequality. Applying this measure to nationalization assesses the extent to which a party has won an equal share of the vote across all the geographical units. By subtracting the Gini coefficient from 1, a high score indicates a high level of nationalization whereas a low score indicates a low level of nationalization.⁷ Jones and Mainwaring term this the *Party*

Nationalization Score (PNS). In addition to individual party scores, a system score can also be calculated. By multiplying the PNS for every party by its share of the popular vote and then summing across parties, we can create a system level score. Jones and Mainwaring term this the *Party System Nationalization Score (PSNS)*.

Table 2 contains the Party Nationalization Scores (PNS) for each party during the 2000, 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2011 elections. Also included in Table 2 are the aggregated Party System Nationalization Scores (PSNS) for the same elections. Given the results, we can make a number of observations about individual parties and the party system as a whole.

Perhaps the most interesting finding presented in Table 2 is that Canadian parties are considerably more national than they are typically depicted. Far from being “balkanized”, Canada’s major political parties routinely receive Party Nationalization Scores above 0.75. These scores reveal that the brokerage parties enjoy a considerable degree of uniform and consistent electoral support throughout the country. The Liberals, for instance, have an average PNS of 0.78, slightly higher than the New Democratic Party's 0.75. With the exception of the Bloc, all major parties scored 0.75 or higher in the post 2000 elections. More importantly, the scores of the Conservatives, Liberals, and New Democrats are once again consistent with the level of nationalization that they enjoyed prior to the regionalization of the 1993 election. The New Democrats, for instance, received a PNS of 0.72 in 1980, however, this plummeted to 0.52 by 1993. The party's average PNS of 0.75 over the past five elections represents a considerable re-nationalization of the party's electoral support.

⁵ In a more recent case (2008) the Conservative Party captured 93 per cent of the seats in Saskatchewan with only 54 per cent of the vote.

⁶ For a discussion of the shortcomings of these traditional methods see Caramani, 2004 or Bochsler, 2010.

⁷ In accordance with Jones and Mainwaring (2003), the STATA command ‘ineqdec0’ was used to calculate the Gini coefficient.

Table 2: Party Nationalization Score and Party System Nationalization Score (2000-2011)

Party	2000	2004	2006	2008	2011	Average
Liberal	0.82	0.77	0.82	0.75	0.75	0.78
Conservative	-	0.87	0.83	0.82	0.83	0.84
New Democrat	0.68	0.76	0.76	0.76	0.81	0.75
Bloc Quebecois	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.08
Progressive Conservative	0.63	-	-	-	-	-
Canadian Alliance	0.57	-	-	-	-	-
Party System	0.63	0.71	0.72	0.72	0.76	0.71
Party System Without Bloc	0.70	0.80	0.81	0.79	0.81	0.78

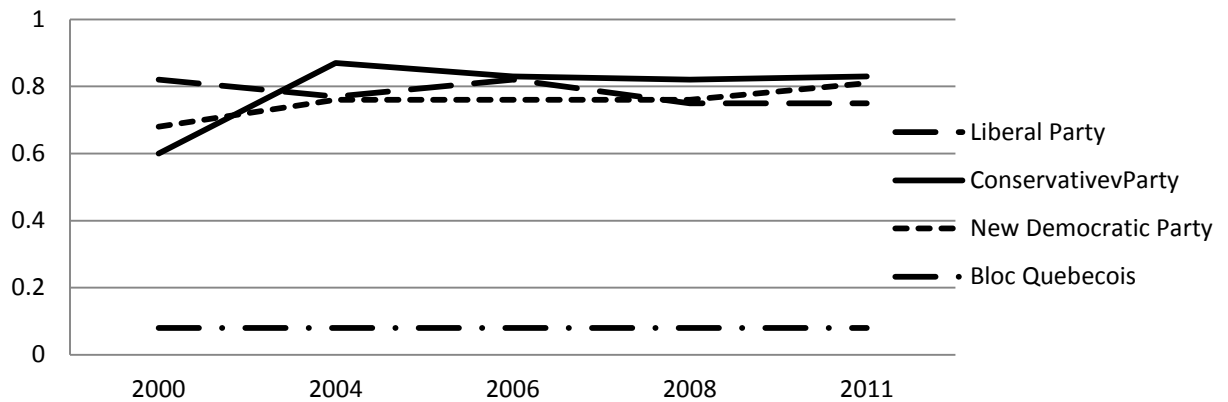
The Canadian Alliance's PNS illustrates that despite its efforts to compete nationwide in the 2000 election, the party received uneven support throughout the country. Ultimately, the party's lack of support east of Ontario resulted in a low PNS of 0.57. The 2000 election was the first time that the party had attempted to move beyond the west and despite its presence throughout the country (see Table 1), its image had yet to be solidified as a truly national party in the views of the electorate. Although the Canadian Alliance fared much better than the Bloc Quebecois (PNS of 0.08), the party still scored considerably lower than the traditional brokerage parties and its main competitor, the Liberal Party, which received a PNS of 0.82 in 2000. Once the Tories and the Alliance merged, however, the newly formed Conservative Party consistently received a higher PNS than any of its rivals. The merger, which combined the Canadian Alliance's strong western base with the central and eastern support for the Progressive Conservatives, resulted in the creation of Canada's most nationalized party in terms of electoral support.

Figure 1 illustrates the sharp increase in nationalization between 2000 and 2004 for the Conservatives. The 2000 Conservative PNS represents the average of its two predecessors while the 2004 score represents the actual numbers from the party's first election. The Canadian Alliance and Tories

had an average PNS of 0.60 in 2000, compared to the Conservative Party's 0.87 PNS in 2004. This represents a considerable inter-election PNS change of 0.27. What's more, the Conservatives have been remarkably stable in their support since their first election in 2004, demonstrated by a mean inter-election PNS change of only 0.02. Like the Liberals and New Democrats, this score is back to pre-1993 levels of nationalization. The Progressive Conservatives PNS of 0.84 in 1984 is in line with the 0.84 PNS average of the new Conservative Party.

In terms of electoral support, the Bloc remains the only regional party in the Canadian party system after the 2000 election. The Bloc's low PNS is not surprising, given that it only competes in the province of Quebec. In addition to receiving low Party Nationalization Scores, the Bloc further reduces the overall system score. As illustrated in Table 2, the low Bloc PNS has consistently lowered the system level PSNS. Overall, the presence of the Bloc has reduced the system level score by an average of 0.07 in each election. Despite the presence of the Bloc, the Canadian party system exhibits a moderately high degree of nationalization. The mean PSNS for the five elections is 0.71 and when the Bloc is excluded from the analysis, the average Canadian system level score increases to 0.78. It should be clear that even with the Bloc, the system cannot be considered balkanized in any meaningful way.

Figure 1: Party Nationalization Score (2000-2011)



Patterns of Party Competition

In addition to measuring coverage and support, students of political parties have often also examined broad patterns of electoral completion in order to study the regionalization of the party system. In the Canadian case, this means comparing patterns of competition across the various provinces. To the extent that there are only one or two distinct patterns of electoral competition, the party system can be considered nationalized. On the other hand, the party system is considered regionalized when there are a variety of different patterns of electoral competition across the country.

In an attempt to demonstrate regionally fragmented party competition in Canada,

Cross (2002:119-120) compared electoral results in 1988 to those of 1997 (Tables 3 and 4). Those tables have been reproduced here and a third table for the 2011 election has been added. In 1988, the Liberals and Conservatives were competitive across the country, with the New Democrats playing a significant role in Ontario and westward (Table 3). This resulted in two-party competition in Quebec and Atlantic Canada, and three-party competition in Ontario and Western Canada. Although the same pattern did not exist nationwide, there were only two unique patterns that existed across the country. Party competition during this time was, for the most part, nationalized as individual provinces did not have their own patterns but instead followed larger trends.

Table 3: 1988 Federal Election Results

Province	Party winning most votes	Parties winning at least half as many votes
Newfoundland	Liberal	Conservative
Prince Edward Island	Liberal	Conservative
Nova Scotia	Liberal	Conservative
New Brunswick	Liberal	Conservative
Quebec	Conservative	Liberal
Ontario	Liberal	Conservative, New Democratic
Manitoba	Conservative	Liberal, New Democratic
Saskatchewan	New Democratic	Conservative
Alberta	Conservative	
British Columbia	New Democratic	Conservative, Liberal

Source: Cross 2002

In 1997, by contrast, there was no clear pattern of nationwide party competition. Manitoba was the only province with four-party competition, Ontario was dominated by the Liberals, the traditional three parties (Liberals, Conservatives, and New Democrats) engaged in multi-party competition in Atlantic Canada, and Alberta was dominated by the Reform Party. As Cross writes, "There were, in fact,

seven different models of party competition evident in the 1997 election, with every province outside of Atlantic Canada having a different constellation of competitive parties" (2002:19). As Table 4 shows, regionally fragmented party competition was the defining feature of electoral and party politics during this period.

Table 4: 1997 Federal Election Results

Province	Party winning most votes	Parties winning at least half as many votes
Newfoundland	Liberal	Conservative, New Democratic
Prince Edward Island	Liberal	Conservative
Nova Scotia	Conservative	New Democratic, Liberal
New Brunswick	Conservative	Liberal, New Democratic
Quebec	Bloc Quebecois	Liberal, Conservative
Ontario	Liberal	
Manitoba	Liberal	Reform, New Democratic, Conservative
Saskatchewan	Reform	New Democratic, Liberal
Alberta	Reform	
British Columbia	Reform	Liberal

Source: Cross 2002

With the exception of the Bloc, Table 5 (2011 election) shares a number of similarities to Table 3 (1988 election). In 2011, the Conservatives and New Democrats were competitive across the country, with the Liberals playing a significant role in Ontario and eastward. Not unlike 1988, two unique patterns of electoral competition can be found in the 2011 election. This includes three-party competition in Atlantic Canada, and two-party competition between the New Democrats and Conservatives in Ontario and westward. In the decade that followed the turbulence of the 1990s, patterns of electoral competition have

once again stabilized. The fragmentation that was evident during the 1997 election is all but gone in English Canada and the Bloc's second place finish in Quebec is all that remains of the regionalized and fragmented party competition that characterized the 1990s. In many respects, party competition in Canada has moved back to pre-1990 patterns: the Liberals, Conservatives, and New Democrats are the major players; fragmentation is minimal; and only two unique patterns of party competition can be identified.

Table 5: 2011 Federal Election Results

Province	Party winning most votes	Parties winning at least half as many votes
Newfoundland	Liberal	New Democratic, Conservative
Prince Edward Island	Conservative	Liberal
Nova Scotia	Conservative	New Democratic, Liberal
New Brunswick	Conservative	New Democratic, Liberal
Quebec	New Democratic	Bloc
Ontario	Conservative	New Democratic, Liberal
Manitoba	Conservative	
Saskatchewan	Conservative	New Democratic
Alberta	Conservative	
British Columbia	Conservative	New Democratic

Campaign Advertisements

When considering the three established measures examined above, Canadian parties (with the exception of the Bloc) appear to be much more national than the literature suggests. There are, however, some limitations associated with these existing measures. In particular, party support and patterns of competition do not account for how parties achieve these ends. The existing measures largely ignore the possibility that parties are using regional tactics to achieve similar levels of support and success throughout the country. As Jones and Mainwaring note, their measure of party system nationalization (the PNS score) cannot capture this:

A party might have pronounced cross-state differences in programmatic character and social base and yet win the same share of the vote in all of the states. On our measure, this party would be perfectly nationalized, notwithstanding the internal differences across states (Jones and Mainwaring, 2003: 142).

In order to fill this gap we require a measure that can capture the cross-provincial

differences in party behaviour and strategy. One way that parties can engage in differentiated cross-provincial behaviour is through the messages and issues that they emphasize during their campaigns. Traditionally, the established methodology for exploring issue emphasis has been analyzing party platforms. Budge and Farlie (1983), for example, engaged in a content analysis of 50 years worth of party manifestos in Britain and the United States in a comprehensive examination of the ‘selectivity’ of issues. In the case of nationalization, however, an examination of party platforms is insufficient. Party platforms are inherently national documents inasmuch that they are available to everyone – the document is the same regardless of where you live. Despite the fact that platforms may include specific promises to particular provinces, they do not allow for inherently different messages to be sent to individual provinces or regions. Consequently, platforms cannot be used as a means of filling this gap.⁸ Given the inadequacy of examining platforms, this paper examines party

⁸ Future research may consider party campaign literature more broadly. While election platforms are consistent from province to province, the pamphlets and other materials that parties distribute may vary considerably. Although this material may be difficult to acquire, it would serve as a valuable method for examining cross-provincial party behaviour.

sponsored advertisements to develop a measure capable of capturing differences in party strategy. If parties are relying on regionally differentiated strategies for their support, we would expect to see this reflected in the messages that they are sending.

The most direct and most effective way of communicating with voters is through the use of the television. It has been said that “modern election campaigns are media campaigns” (Blais et al., 2002: 35), with television representing the primary source of information for voters. As Cross (2002: 124) notes, more voters will watch a campaign advertisement on television than will talk to local party candidate or read party supported campaign literature. As such, the messages that parties send via campaign advertisements are a crucial part of party competition.

Television initially had a nationalizing effect on Canadian party politics, encouraging and facilitating the “simultaneous delivery of the same partisan message to Canadians from coast to coast” (Carty et al., 2000: 200). It allowed for a level of consistency of party messages that political parties could not obtain with traditional print sources of media. More recently, however, students of party politics have questioned the nationalizing role of television in Canadian politics. While television easily allows the delivery of one message to the entire electorate, it can just as easily send different messages to different regions and provinces, targeting different groups within the electorate rather than the electorate as a whole. If the party system is nationalized, we expect to see this reflected in the messages that the parties are sending. In order to examine regionalism in cross-provincial party strategies, party sponsored advertisements were coded based on the following three criteria:

1. Does the advertisement specifically mention a region or province?
2. Does a French language advertisement have an English counterpart? In other

words, is there simultaneous delivery of the same message to both English and French Canada?

3. Does the advertisement focus on sectional or national content?

Subject to the availability of data, there are some limitations with the application of this approach. First, we are unable to gather reliable data about the precise location where the advertisements were aired. Likewise, we are unable to determine how often each advertisement was aired. As a result, each advertisement is weighted the same in the analysis, despite the possibility that it was aired more or less than others. Despite these limitations, an analysis of advertisements will nonetheless provide valuable insight into party strategy and behaviour, especially as it relates to nationalization. Overall, party advertisements are considered regional if they contain sectional content, single out particular provinces or regions, or if French advertisements do not have an English counterpart. Conversely, advertisements are considered national if they focus on national content, make no mention of individual provinces or regions, and deliver the same message in both French and English.

In total, 76 advertisements that were produced for the 2008 Canadian federal election campaign were coded. Based on the available data this includes 37 Liberal, 27 Conservative, and 12 New Democrat advertisements. Table 6 contains the results of the analysis for the 2008 election. The most important finding presented in Table 6 is the almost complete lack of regionalism found within the English language advertisements. None of the Conservative or New Democrat English language ads, for instance, singled out any province or region. Moreover, none of these ads focused on regionally specific content. For the Conservatives, the English language ads either focused on discrediting Liberal Leader Dion, or on issues that were

national in scope. These issues included foreign policy, childcare, immigration, Arctic sovereignty, and crime. As for the New Democrats, the message largely focused on leadership, contrasting Layton to Harper. Similar to the Conservatives and New Democrats, the Liberals only once appeared regional in their English language advertisements. In an advertisement titled 'This is Harpernomics', the Liberal Party singled out Ontario and spoke about investment opportunities within the province. Otherwise, the English language ads were national in their message focusing on issues such as the economy, Stephen Harper's leadership, and the Iraq war.⁹

The French language advertisements, by contrast, tell a very different story. Nearly 100 per cent of the regionalization found in party sponsored advertisements was targeted at Quebec. While 97 per cent of English language advertisements were national, a majority of advertisements in French (58%) were regional in tone and message. Not only did many of these advertisements mention Quebec specifically, but also they often focused on local issues that were uniquely important to Quebecers. The most prominent example of local content in the 2008 election campaign advertisements can be seen in the issue of proposed cuts to arts and culture

funding. This was particularly evident in the French advertisements by the Liberal and New Democratic parties. After announcing \$45 million of cuts to arts grants, the opposition parties took advantage of an opportunity to attack the governing Conservatives, claiming that the party was being openly hostile towards Quebec culture and identity. As Woolstencroft and Ellis (2009: 50) have noted, "the relatively minor issue had taken on singular importance in Quebec because of the close connection between culture and the province's sense of identity." The Liberal and New Democratic parties took advantage of this debate, creating numerous advertisements focusing on the importance of arts and culture funding and thus targeting and playing upon Quebec sympathies and fears about their own culture. These advertisements, of course, did not have an English language counterpart for viewing outside of Quebec.

When the content of French language advertisements was more national in message, many of the French language advertisements did not have an English language counterpart. This included advertisements focusing on healthcare, prescription drugs, and abortion. While these issues are not inherently Quebec focused, they did not have English language counterparts that were aired in the rest of Canada. It is also worth noting that the French language advertisements made by the Conservative Party ended with a different slogan than the English language advertisements. While the French ads produced for Quebec ended with the slogan "With the Conservatives Quebec Takes Force," the English ads produced for the rest of the country ended with "Canada. We're Better off With Harper." The differentiated slogans represent yet another means of making direct appeals to the province.

Table 6 highlights the findings of the analysis of party advertisements. In total, 37 per cent of Liberal, 29 per cent of Conservative, and 17 per cent of New

⁹ Carty et al. (2000) and Cross (2002) have written about a different manifestation of regionalization in television advertising: micro targeting. Although issues such as the economy or leadership are not inherently regional, they may be more or less popular in certain provinces. These authors contend that regional targeting allows parties to send seemingly national messages to provincial markets that are more receptive to the content. Ontario, for example, may get an ad about immigration while BC gets an ad about water supply. Both issues seem national but may have more traction and appeal in a certain province. Given that there is no reliable way to test this, our focus is on the content of the message and not necessarily on the delivery. The exception, of course, is in Quebec where the language of the ad makes it easy to identify the market.

Democrat advertisements can be considered regional. Overall, nearly one-in-three advertisements produced for the 2008 election campaign were regional in nature. The vast majority of this regionalization, however, was targeted at Quebec. Given that the Conservatives, Liberals, and New Democrats face a uniquely local opposition in Quebec, it is not surprising to find evidence of regionalism in French language election campaign advertising. As a result of the Bloc's ability to speak directly to Quebecers on the issues that they care about, the Liberals, Conservatives, and New Democrats are forced

to adopt regional strategies in order to be competitive in the province. The Bloc, which is already a regionalizing force in itself (lowering party coverage and party system nationalization scores), further regionalizes the party system by forcing the national parties to appeal directly to Quebecers in a way that is fundamentally different from how the parties campaign in the rest of the country. When competing in Quebec, each of the major parties make targeted appeals and tailor their message directly for Quebecers, fundamentally changing how they contest election campaigns in the province.

Table 6: Regionalism in Party Advertisements

Party	English Ads	Regional English Ads	French Ads	Regional French Ads	Total Ads	Total Regional Ads
Liberal	13	1 (7.7%)	24	13 (51%)	37	14 (38%)
Conservative	18	0 (0%)	9	7 (78%)	27	7 (26%)
NDP	7	0 (0%)	5	2 (40%)	12	2 (17%)
Total	38	1 (3%)	38	22 (58%)	76	23 (30%)

Conclusions

The evidence presented in this paper is somewhat mixed. In English Canada, the major parties compete in all constituencies, receive relatively uniform levels of support, and focus on national issues with their advertising and message. Due in large part to the merger on the right, Canada's major parties have returned to pre 1993 levels of nationalization. In Quebec, by contrast, the dynamics of party strategy and electoral competition are very different. The presence and continued strength of the Bloc has altered the strategies of Canada's national parties. As the analysis of 2008 election advertising has demonstrated, the Liberals, Conservatives, and New Democrats each use party sponsored advertising to speak directly to Quebecers, sending the province targeted advertisements not shown in the rest of the country. While their English advertising is national in scope,

their French advertising is distinctly regional. When competing in Quebec, these parties abandon their 'national' characteristics and engage with the Bloc in regional politics. As a result, Quebec becomes its own party system; there is a different constellation of parties competing, different issues being debated, and different strategies being utilized. The situation in Quebec is therefore in sharp contrast to the re-nationalization of parties and party competition that we are witnessing in the rest of the country. As Carty and Young write, it is "a misnomer to talk about 'the' national campaign in the Canadian context. In reality, each Canadian general election encompasses two national elections: one in its English, the other in its French-speaking areas" (2012:227). The evidence provided in this paper supports this claim, demonstrating two very different party systems and campaigns.

Overall, the current party system should not be characterized as being highly

regionalized. Instead, it should be viewed as a nationalized system in English Canada and a regionalized system in Quebec. While Carty, Cross, and Young (2000) were correct to describe the 1993 and 1997 elections as being highly regionalized, this paper demonstrates that their predictions of balkanization did not hold true for the five elections that followed. More than a party system in its own right, we should think of the two elections of the 1990s as a period of transition. Due to the

unprecedented magnitude of the electoral earthquake that shook the Canadian political landscape in 1993, the party system completely collapsed. After a period of rebuilding in the 1990s, Canadian party politics appears to have stabilized over the past decade. What we are left with is two distinct party systems: a regional party system in Quebec and a national party system in the rest of Canada.

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