Sustaining A Dynasty in Alberta: The 2004 Provincial Election[1]

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Abstract

In 2004 the Alberta Progressive Conservative party won an election that prolonged their political dynasty, which had begun some thirty-three years earlier. Dynasties seem to characterize Alberta politics, and over the years several researchers have formulated models to explain them. This paper uses the 2004 election as a case study to evaluate the contemporary relevance of a number of those theories of one-party dominance; in particular, it examines how they would explain the latest extension of Tory hegemony. The article also examines some factors that are not contained in the models in order to provide a fuller explanation of how the Conservative dynasty was preserved. We conclude that some of the standard theories of one-party dominance in Alberta are problematic or incomplete, and suggest some modifications.

Introduction

On November 22, 2004, Alberta premier Ralph Klein led his Progressive Conservative (PC) party to its tenth consecutive majority government. With the victory, the PCs surpassed Social Credit's record of nine consecutive majorities, and made it almost certain that the party would eclipse Social Credit's record of thirty-six consecutive years in power. As Alberta enters its second century in Confederation, the Progressive Conservative party is poised to emerge as the preeminent political dynasty in Alberta's history, if not the history of Canadian provincial politics.

To emerge as the paramount political dynasty in a province known for its dynasties is no small accomplishment. The pattern of Alberta party politics is well known. Albertans tend to elect one party multiple times, often providing it with large majorities in the legislature. At some point the party is defeated and replaced by a new dynasty, never to return to power again. Thus the province's political history can be divided into four periods: the Liberal (1905-1921), UFA (1921-1935), Social Credit (1935-1971), and Conservative (1971-present) eras.

Over the years, various explanations for the pattern of one-party dominance in Alberta have been offered. This paper weighs the contemporary relevance of those perspectives, some of which have been around for decades, by bringing them to bear on the latest extension of one-party dominance—the Tory victory of 2004. Times have changed, and it would be worthwhile to determine which, if any, of the standard theories can account for the most recent prolongation of Conservative rule. The paper also goes beyond theories of one-party dominance to examine some additional factors, such as voter turnout and regional variations in the vote, that may help to explain how the Tories were able to prolong their dynasty. Thus the purpose of this paper is twofold: to use the 2004 election as a case study to assess the present-day relevance of various theories of one-party dominance in Alberta, and to explain the outcome of that election.

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To begin, we will clarify the meaning and nature of one-party dominance in Alberta and examine how the province may differ from others on that score, focusing on the post-World War II era. An inventory of the various theories purporting to explain one-party dominance is then provided, and their usefulness in illuminating the 2004 campaign and its outcome is assessed. The assessment will be based in part on a multivariate, ecological analysis of the election results. The multivariate analysis will also be used to assess the impact of the factors that go beyond theories of one-party dominance. The paper concludes with some comments on what the findings suggest about the 2004 election and Alberta politics more generally.

Measuring One-Party Dominance

Although the term "one-party dominance" is often only loosely defined, here it shall refer to three interrelated things: relatively infrequent changes of government; the tendency for victorious parties to get relatively high proportions of the popular vote; and the propensity of winning parties to garner a comparatively large portion of legislative seats. To take the first dimension, Alberta has the highest level of one-party dominance in the post-war era (1945-2003) in that it has had only one change of government in that period, the 1971 defeat of the Social Credit party by the Progressive Conservatives. With regard to the proportion of the popular vote received by the winning party, Alberta ranks a close third behind Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island in offering an average of just over 53% of the vote to the winner. In other words, Alberta scores high on this dimension but is by no means unique. And it should be noted that statistics based on the popular vote are the best measure of one-party dominance if one's goal is to examine the mass acceptance of a particular party at a particular time. The single member plurality system and opposition fragmentation introduce distortions that make seat counts misleading in this respect, although it is clear that the proportion of seats the government holds has implications for how democracy functions in a particular province. In terms of seat shares in the post-war era, Alberta governments had the highest mean percentage, winning on average about 82% of the seats available, although PEI and Newfoundland were only 5.6 and 7.2 percentage points lower respectively.[2]

Theories of One-Party Dominance

Structural Theories

Perhaps the most widely discussed explanation for the pattern of single-party dominance in Alberta is offered by C.B. Macpherson in his 1953 book, *Democracy in Alberta* (1962). Writing in 1980, Peter McCormick stated that Macpherson's thesis seemed to "lurk in the background" of most subsequent discussions of the topic, and his observation holds true to this day. Macpherson describes Alberta's political arrangements as a "quasi-party system" (1962: 237-239), arguing that with the advent of the UFA and Social Credit, a unique form of politics evolved in the province that was not similar to the non-, one-, two-, three- or multi-party systems found elsewhere in the world. He maintains that under the UFA the quasi-party system took of the form of instructed delegate democracy, while during the Social Credit era it materialized as "plebiscitarian" democracy. Two structural factors are said to have produced the quasi-party system: Alberta's "relatively homogeneous" class composition, and its "quasi-colonial status."

> The former seemed to make a party system unnecessary, the latter led to a positive aversion to party. The absence of any serious opposition of class interests within the province meant that alternate parties were not needed either to express or to moderate a perennial conflict of interests. There was

> apparently, therefore, no positive basis for an alternate-party system (Macpherson, 1962: 21).

In sum, Macpherson argues that the predominance of the petite bourgeoisie, in particular "independent commodity producers" (mainly farmers), led to the adoption of a quasi-party system to help the province fight its subordinate position in the national political economy (1962: 221-230).[3]

Dacks (1986) has proposed a neo-Macphersonite explanation of Alberta politics, suggesting that western alienation with federal institutions combined with an identification with a single dominant commodity has created one-party dominance. He claims that identification with the commodity (first grain, later oil and gas), in particular the idea that the wealth derived from it should remain in the province, transcends social class in that it unites people from a variety of occupational categories against outside interests. The focus on the external threat, he suggests, tends to mute the normal class divisions and class politics that would otherwise bring forth a competitive party system.

"Political" Explanations

It is sometimes said that in looking for structural explanations for Alberta party politics, Macpherson and others overlooked more mundane explanations for single-party dominance. Several authors stress the importance of "political" explanations rather than structural causes, often claiming that there are weak ties between Albertans and their political parties, and that it was strong leadership that produced electoral success in the province. Smith (1972: 214-215), for example, argues that the "achievement of power comes … more directly from management of the vote by an efficient machine, from long-term public attachment to a leader, or from demagogic appeals that turn sudden changes of public feeling to partisan advantage." McCormick extends this argument further, suggesting that Alberta actually has a "no-party system" (1980: 93). Arguing that Albertans have not supported the dominant party "based upon a deep and abiding commitment to the party and to the ideology of the party," he maintains that Albertans are characterized by low levels of party identification, and hence display significant voter volatility (1980: 93). McCormick suggests that Albertans are particularly influenced by leadership, and that the defeat of Social Credit in 1971 was largely caused by the inability of the party to find a leader to succeed Ernest Manning who could compete with Peter Lougheed (1980: 95-96; see also Archer, 1992: 114-19; and Bell, 1993b). Archer (1992) largely echoes McCormick's analysis and extends it into the early 1990s, emphasizing the role of partisan instability and the importance of leadership.

Pal (1992) also stresses the role of leadership in suggesting that that Alberta's politically successful premiers present themselves as being above the partisan fray. The argument that Albertans to some degree reject the party system as such in favour of non-partisan movements and leaders is also found in earlier accounts of Alberta politics, such as Macpherson's (Macpherson, 1962: 20-27).[4]

Stewart and Archer (2000) also maintain that leadership and weak partisan ties are crucial in understanding one-party dominance. "Alberta politics is leadership politics," they write, "encouraging direct, populist links between the leader and the public" (172-73). For instance, with regard to Klein's first two terms in office, they suggest that there was an "almost total conflation of a party with its current leader" (171). For a party to be successful, the leader must personify Alberta's political culture, which they describe as "alienated, conservative, and populist" (13).[5] They see the long periods of rule by a single party as resulting not from voter attachment to a particular party, but from the dominance of a few strong leaders who confronted the issues of the day in accordance with the provincial political culture (13, 171). They also claim that the importance of leaders can only grow as more parties adopt the practice of selecting their

leaders through a direct election open to all party members, since that procedure makes the leader less beholden to party caucus members.

The degree of opposition fragmentation is also said to have an impact on the longevity of a dynasty. As McCormick (1979) and Jansen (2004) have pointed out, the opposition vote in Alberta tends to be fairly evenly distributed among the major parties, which in a single-member plurality system can boost the seat count of the incumbent and help to prolong a dynasty.

The Pinard Thesis

A final perspective to be considered is Maurice Pinard's theory of one-party dominance (Pinard, 1975 [1971], 1973; see also: Lemieux, 1965; White, 1973; Blais, 1973; Studlar and McAllister, 1987; Eagles and Erfle, 1993; Bélanger, 2004). His argument is that one-party dominance (in combination with structural strain) is conducive to the rise of third parties and new political movements, whereas its absence fosters the alternation in office of traditional parties.[6] Pinard defines one-party dominance as a situation in which the main opposition party or parties are too weak to pose a challenge the incumbent party's hold on power (1975: 22 n.2, 278). The logic of the model is that when grievances mount and voters want to bring down the government, they will be inclined to support an opposition party that has a realistic chance of taking power; where traditional opposition parties are too enervated, immobilized or uninspired for victory, voters turn to a new or "third" party in the hopes that it can topple the government.[7] It is ultimately a voter's subjective judgment as to whether an opposition party is too weak to be a contender, but for purposes of empirical analysis, a situation of one-party dominance is said to exist if the main opposition party receives less than one-third of the votes (63). Thus Pinard's definition of one-party dominance relates primarily to the second dimension of our definition given above, the tendency for victorious parties to get relatively high proportions of the popular vote.[8] As for a time-frame for the persistence of one-party dominance, Pinard concludes that it appears to be impossible to determine how long a one-party dominant system has to be in existence before the rise of the third party becomes likely (64 n.5). He observes, however, that one-party dominance typically involves "very long administrations by the dominant party, with third party outbursts of varying magnitudes and occasional third party victories" (64). Pinard (1973: 442-45) also maintains that one-party dominance is more likely to be a factor in the rise of protest movements, which seek to redress short-term grievances with limited social change, than with radical movements, which seek more extensive change.

One thing to note about Pinard's perspective is that, for the most part, one-party dominance is analyzed as an independent variable—it is seen as being conducive to the genesis and growth of third parties.[9] In fact he points out that his treatment of one-party dominance as an independent variable is an important point of departure from Macpherson's model, wherein Alberta's quasi-party system (which Pinard equates with a one-party dominance system) is presented as a *dependent* variable that arises from the province's quasi-colonial status and class homogeneity (Pinard, 1975: 66-70).

Which, if any, of the theoretical positions outlined above can shed light on how in 2004 the Tories managed to win re-election and hence prolong the pattern of one-party dominance in Alberta? That question will be addressed following a synopsis of the 2004 election campaign.

The 2004 Campaign

Ralph Klein called the election only three and a half years into his third mandate, ostensibly to avoid a campaign during Alberta's centennial celebrations in 2005. The eventual outcome—another Conservative majority—was never in doubt, but there were questions about how large that majority would be. In the 2001 provincial election, the Conservatives had won a

massive landslide with 62% of the vote and all but nine of the legislature's 83 seats. The strongest opposition party, the Liberals, managed to attract only 27% of the vote and seven seats.

Klein had led the party for some twelve years by 2004, and the Conservatives' success in those years, many scholars have observed, had been due in no small measure to his shrewd (albeit controversial) leadership and folksy public persona (Stewart, 1995; Steward, 1995; Stewart and Archer, 2000: 165; Tupper and Taras, 1994: 65-69; Martin, 2002; Dabbs, 1995; Cooper and Kanji, 2000: 100-105). In his first election campaign in 1993 he made the elimination of the provincial deficit a prime objective, a goal his government would achieve within two years of taking office. The deficit reduction measures were contentious, involving as they did spending cuts, privatization programs and public sector layoffs (Harrison and Laxer, 1995; Hughes et al., 1996; Taft, 1997; Lisac, 1995, 2004a). Nonetheless, the PCs under Klein increased their share of the popular vote in the next election, going from 44% in 1993 to 51% in 1997. This renewed mandate, however, partly masked the fact that the Klein government lacked a policy program beyond the goal of deficit elimination. Plans to revamp the health care system through a greater role for the private sector were voiced, but they were met with stern public opposition and negative posturing by Ottawa, and were not implemented. A robust provincial economy in the government's second term allowed it to spend its way out of any political troubles, to the detriment of the Klein's government's reputation for fiscal austerity. In the election of 2001 the party once again increased its percentage of the popular vote, earning the 62% noted above.

After the 2001 election the economy soared even higher, which enabled Klein to declare Alberta debt-free in the summer of 2004. The government, however, displayed few signs that it had tangible plans to manage the challenges of Alberta's rapid growth. Furthermore, Klein's folksy persona took a beating through incidents such as a late night confrontation between the premier and a group of men at a homeless shelter, a testy appearance before the province's Public Accounts Committee where he refused to produce receipts for government travel, and an incident where he abruptly left a dinner with the Prime Minister and other premiers to go gambling at a casino. Klein indicated that the 2004 election would be his last, but there were already questions about whether his personal popularity could buoy his party as it had in past elections.

In the weeks leading up to the 2004 election call, Klein employed the time-honoured tactic of presenting his government as the bulwark needed to protect Alberta from a predatory federal government. In particular, the Conservative government was set on fighting the implementation of the Kyoto Accord, which the Chrétien government had ratified a few years earlier. Klein announced that Alberta has "the constitutional authority to protect and to run our resources and reap the profits and rewards of those resources. And by God, Ottawa, keep your hands off."[10] Not much came of the remarks by way of a reaction from the general public, opposition groups or the federal government.

The pre-election period also saw the PC government ensnared in a scandal when it was revealed that a close friend and associate of Health Minister Gary Mar had received $400,000 in fees over three years for work that was not documented. Liberal leader Kevin Taft pounced on the issue, vowing to make PC cronyism and corruption a big issue in the coming campaign. But Taft overplayed his hand when he named two Alberta companies as part of an allegedly larger pattern of government corruption, only to retract his statement and apologize when he learned that the companies had merely done legitimate business with the government. The gaffe took the edge off what had been a growing scandal and was gleefully exploited by Klein, who accused the Liberals of mounting a smear campaign. The verbal sparring between the two leaders had been poisoned by a residue of ill will stemming from some remarks Taft had made a few months earlier, when the premier was accused of plagiarizing a paper he had written for Athabasca University. Years before, Klein had accused Taft of advocating communism after he published a popular book (Taft 1997) that was highly critical of Klein's first term in office.[11]

Klein lowered expectations about what he would do during the coming campaign. Possibly taking a leaf from former Ontario premier William Davis' "bland works" strategy, on

the eve of the election call he remarked: "I said I'm going to be boring. Good government is never exciting."[12] As soon as the election writ was dropped, there was speculation that voter turnout would be low. Although he encouraged people to vote, Klein said that low turnout would be an indication that most Albertans were happy with the government. A voter interviewed by a Calgary newspaper had a somewhat different interpretation: "This election will be a big yawn. We're so well off that nobody cares about who's running the government."[13] Some speculated that voters would be suffering from "election fatigue," given that the election would be the third in Alberta in five months, coming as it did on the heels of a federal election and municipal elections. Another interpretation had it that low turnout would be the result of uninspired PC voters staying home.

Standing in the way of another Conservative victory were the three major opposition parties. The Liberals had a new and relatively inexperienced leader in Taft. The NDP also had a new leader in MLA and former Edmonton city councilor Brian Mason. Both parties—and their Edmonton-based leaders—were pinning their hopes on the city of Edmonton. The fear for the opposition was that the Liberals and NDP would split the vote in Edmonton, allowing the Conservatives to retain their beachhead in the provincial capital. The Tories also had to contend with the newly-formed Alberta Alliance, which was seeking to attract the support of those disgruntled with the Conservatives over issues of provincial rights and social conservatism. The Conservatives thus faced a two-pronged opposition attack, with the Alliance challenging from the right and the Liberals and NDP from the left. But the fight was not to be one between financial equals. In fact the dynastic party had greater financial firepower than all the opposition parties combined. The Conservatives ended up spending $2,094,533 on the campaign; the Liberals $319,937; the NDP $570,693; and the Alliance $541,910.[14]

On the first day of the campaign, Klein again launched into the theme that his party would protect Alberta's wealth and prosperity from a rapacious federal government. "Let's build an Alberta that stands up to Ottawa to defend its interests," he said.[15] But once again the issue never caught on. Klein rarely mentioned the federal government again in the campaign, nor did the opposition parties. This probably stemmed from the fact that the only matter dividing Alberta and Ottawa at this time was the Kyoto Accord. But it was clear that, despite the Conservative attempts to portray Kyoto as another National Energy Program, the federal Liberals under Jean Chrétien were not the same as the Liberal government of Pierre Trudeau, and could not be demonized as easily. Furthermore, public opinion in Alberta over Kyoto was divided, with many Albertans supporting ratification of the agreement.[16]

The campaign had an air of unreality about it. It was essentially a contest to determine which party was most worthy of overseeing a debt-free state awash in money, a condition that in any other democratic locale could only be experienced as a thought experiment. The campaign grew more surreal when it became clear that the Tories had no bold new policy initiatives, not even a plan to take advantage of the surplus, and were not willing to expound on any matter of government policy. Instead they offered vague platitudes such as promising to maintain a "positive investment and business climate;" to ensure the "long term viability of the agricultural industry;" to see to it that each child gets a "good start in life;" and to "preserve the land we love, the air we breathe and the water we drink."[17] The previous June, Klein had rocked the federal election campaign by musing that he had plans to introduce some changes to health care that could violate the Canada Health Act, but now he had nothing to say about them.

Klein unintentionally created some excitement in the opening week of the campaign when he told a disparaging anecdote about two women who, he alleged, were abusing a provincial guaranteed income plan for the severely handicapped. Despite a firestorm of public criticism he faced for making the remarks, Klein maintained that no apology was necessary because the incident had taken place seven years earlier. Soon after the controversy arose, however, Klein's mother died, which caused him to take several days off from the campaign. When he returned he was quite subdued, and in fact all but disappeared from the election battle.

The opposition parties hammered the Conservatives for their reluctance to discuss issues. The NDP produced a *Health Care for Dummies* booklet in an attempt to goad the premier into a discussion of health matters. The booklet contained some of the NDP's policy ideas, such as eliminating health care premiums and prohibiting public funding for private clinics. In their campaign, the New Democrats also promised to get tough on crime by spending $40 million a year to hire 500 community police officers. Another feature of their platform was electoral reform, including the introduction of a system of proportional representation. They also vowed to increase royalties as oil prices increased, and to cancel corporate tax cuts.

The Liberals favoured establishing an independent health ministry auditor to prevent the sorts of abuses they believed characterized that department. They proposed an endowment fund for universities and colleges, public auto insurance, electoral reform, and a large grant to municipalities for infrastructure. The Alberta Alliance wanted to eliminate health care premiums and reduce waiting times by introducing innovations developed in Sweden and Japan, and expressed their displeasure with the existing health-care system with "Blame Ralph" signs. The Alliance also wanted to drastically reduce personal income tax rates and introduce electoral reform, and spoke out in favour of various socially conservative causes. Klein had earlier called the AA "scary" right-wing extremists and accused them of being separatists. Although the opposition parties tried to introduce a plethora of issues into the campaign, no single issue captivated the public. In fact some pundits called the event a Seinfeld election—all about nothing.

The results of the vote turned out to be far more interesting than most observers of Alberta politics expected. Although the Conservatives won the election that placed them in a position to become the greatest political dynasty in Alberta's history, by Alberta standards they won a comparatively small legislative majority, and faced a rejuvenated opposition. The Conservatives experienced a dramatic slide in the popular vote, attracting the support of 46.8% of the electorate, down 15 percentage points from the last election. They were reduced to 62 of 83 seats, with most of the losses coming in Edmonton. All of the opposition parties—but especially the Liberals—were successful with their modestly-funded operations. The Liberals took 29.4% of the vote, just two percentage points more than in the last election, but they more than doubled their standing in the legislature, winning sixteen seats. Most encouraging for the Liberals was that their caucus was not limited to Edmonton. They managed to establish a small position in Calgary, taking three seats there, and they held Lethbridge East. The NDP increased their vote share only marginally to 10.2%, but managed to win four seats in the legislature, all in Edmonton. The Alberta Alliance, which was competing in its first election, took 8.7% of the vote and managed to win the seat of Cardston-Taber-Warner, a rural riding in the southwest corner of the province.

The other story on election night was the low voter turnout. Albertans have always been known for their low levels of voter participation in provincial elections, but they managed to outdo themselves in 2004. Only 44.7% of the province's registered voters chose to vote, the lowest turnout for a provincial general election in Alberta's history.

Theories of One-Party Dominance and the 2004 Election

Macpherson's Thesis

As seen, writing over a half-century ago Macpherson proposed that Alberta party politics was affected by a relatively homogeneous, petit-bourgeois class structure. While it is common knowledge that Alberta's class structure has changed since then, it would be worthwhile to note what the size of the petite bourgeoisie was at the time of the 2004 election. According to the 2001 census, people engaged in agriculture comprised only 5% of Alberta's workforce, while self-employed people in all occupations (including unpaid family workers) made up only 14.7%.[18] Clearly, the size of the petite bourgeoisie today renders it incapable of affecting one-party dominance in the manner hypothesized by Macpherson. Nonetheless, given the influence his

analysis has had on political studies of Alberta, and since this class plays an ongoing and often public role as an interest group in the province, in the next section of this paper we explore the effect it had on the 2004 vote.

The other aspect of Macpherson's hypothesis concerns anti-"colonial" sentiment. As observed above, in this election the PCs tried to stir up anti-Ottawa feelings just before the election was called as well as on the first day of the campaign, but to no discernible effect. It is significant that an Alberta premier cannot simply conjure up anti-"colonial" sentiments at will. Macpherson and others have portrayed the quasi-colonial effect as a constant, but it may be more useful to view it as a variable, something that ebbs and flows with the times.[19] Although there is never perfect harmony between any province and the federal government, there can be prolonged periods of relative calm. With regard to Alberta, the post-war decades were not a time of severe tension until the sudden increase in world oil prices in the early 1970s. Lougheed's battles with the federal government in the ensuing years undoubtedly won him political points at home, but an opportunity to defend provincial interests in such a dramatic fashion does not come along every day. In fact the period from the mid-1980s to the present has not witnessed a level of conflict between Alberta and the federal government that even remotely resembles what occurred in the fifteen years that preceded it. The premiers that followed

Lougheed—Getty and Klein—did not win elections by proving their mettle in combat with Ottawa. In fact Martin (2002: 212-15) suggests that for many years Klein had a rather warm relationship with Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, although Klein was politically savvy enough not to go public with it. Thus it seems that neither of Macpherson's two causal factors are particularly relevant to the latest extension of the Tory dynasty.

As reviewed above, several accounts of one-party dominance in Alberta concern the role of leadership. The effect of that variable, as well as other relevant factors, is explored in the multivariate analysis presented below.

Multivariate Analysis

Methods

A multivariate ecological analysis was performed using 2001 Census data provided by the government of Alberta, Ministry of Finance (http://www.electionsalberta.ab.ca). Voter turnout and party vote share data were taken from the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Alberta Elections website (ibid.). The units of analysis were the 83 provincial constituencies. Ordinary Least Squares regression was used. Statistical significance is not reported because data are available for all 83 cases in the population, namely all constituencies.[20]

The Parties' Vote Shares

The regression analysis discussed below uses the proportion of the vote won in each constituency by the Progressive Conservative, Liberal, New Democratic and Alberta Alliance parties as dependent variables. A description of the independent variables follows.

1) The proportion of the riding labour force who were *self-employed*, including those engaged in agriculture and unpaid family workers. This variable was designed to measure the effect of the "petite bourgeoisie," the class central to Macpherson's analysis.

To get further information on the effect of social class on the vote, two additional class variables were included:

2) The proportion of the riding labour force in *manual, non-farm* occupations. This measures the effect of the presence of working-class constituents.

3) Average family income.

The following was used as a measure of leadership:

4) Whether the party's *leader* was running in the riding (coded as a dummy variable). This variable allows a comparison of the vote for the party leader in his own constituency with his party's support in all other constituencies, controlling for the other variables in the analysis. This is an indirect measure of leadership, and has to be interpreted accordingly.[21]

Students of Alberta politics have long observed that party support varies by region of the province (for example, Flanagan, 1972; Bell, 1993a: 29-33, chs.6, 8; Stewart and Archer, 2000: 171). A post-election tally showed that of the ten ridings in which the Tories fared the worst in 2004, nine were in Edmonton. Similarly, of the ten constituencies that had the lowest support for the Alberta Alliance, seven were in Edmonton. Conversely, seven of the ten best ridings for the Liberals were in Edmonton, as were nine of the top ten for the NDP. Given the apparent difference between Edmonton and elsewhere in the province, the following variable was included:

5) *Edmonton*[22] vs non-Edmonton ridings (coded as a dummy variable). This variable provides a comparison of the mean level of a party's support in Edmonton with its mean level of support elsewhere in the province, controlling for the other variables.

Since the 2004 election was characterized by a record low turnout:

6) *Voter turnout in each constituency*. As mentioned, some observers predicted that uninspired PC voters would be inclined to stay home on election day, suggesting that voter turnout would be positively associated with support for the opposition parties.

Some common socio-demographic variables were also included in the analysis:

7) The proportion in the riding having at lease *some university* education.

8) The proportion *aged 20 to 24*. This is a distinctive cohort characterized by relatively low levels of voter turnout and political information.

9) The proportion of people in the riding who were *immigrants*.[23]

10) The proportion of residents who identified themselves as *Catholic*, given findings elsewhere (for example Blais, 2005) that religion affects vote choice, in particular that Catholics disproportionately favour the Liberal party.

The results are shown in Tables 1 through 4. The adjusted R Square for the models range from a respectable high of .773 for the Progressive Conservative vote share to a more modest .401 for the Alberta Alliance. Figures 1 to 6 illustrate the relative effect of selected variables on the four parties' vote shares.

Table 1: PC Vote Share

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients
	B	Std. Error	Beta
(Constant)	.848	.156	
Self-employed (including agriculture)	.442	.173	.255
Manual non-farm	-.390	.228	-.216
Average family income	.000	.000	.333
PC Leader	-.017	.063	-.016
Edmonton	-.078	.024	-.286
Voter turnout	-.704	.145	-.443
Some university	-.365	.226	-.358
Age 20 to 24	-1.111	.568	-.196
Immigrant population	-.066	.146	-.047
Catholic	-.049	.135	-.025
Adjusted R Square = .773			

Table 2: Liberal Vote Share

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients
	B	Std. Error	Beta
(Constant)	.056	.228	
Self-employed (including agriculture)	-.971	.259	-.493
Manual non-farm	-.552	.361	-.278
Average family income	.000	.000	.133
Liberal leader	.225	.094	.191
Edmonton	-.025	.035	-.084
Voter turnout	.771	.210	.439
Some university	-.308	.349	-.273
Age 20 to 24	.712	.831	.114
Immigrant population	.506	.218	.324
Catholic	.085	.202	.039
Adjusted R Square = .588			

Table 3: NDP Vote Share

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients
	B	Std. Error	Beta
(Constant)	-.168	.192	
Self-employed (including agriculture)	-.011	.219	-.007
Manual non-farm	.553	.290	.326
Average family income	.000	.000	-.148
NDP Leader	.399	.075	.397
Edmonton	.114	.030	.443
Voter turnout	.081	.179	.054
Some university	.281	.279	.294
Age 20 to 24	1.067	.702	.201
Immigrant population	-.292	.182	-.221
Catholic	.207	.170	.112
Adjusted R Square = .589			

Table 4: Alberta Alliance Vote Share

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients
	B	Std. Error	Beta
(Constant)	.167	.156	
Self-employed (including agriculture)	.445	.176	.412
Manual non-farm	-.263	.231	-.234
Average family income	.000	.000	-.231
AA Leader	.056	.059	.085
Edmonton	-.039	.024	-.231
Voter turnout	.030	.143	.030
Some university	-.242	.221	-.383
Age 20 to 24	.108	.559	.031
Immigrant population	.087	.145	.099
Catholic	.058	.140	.048
Adjusted R Square = .401			

Figure 1: Self-employed

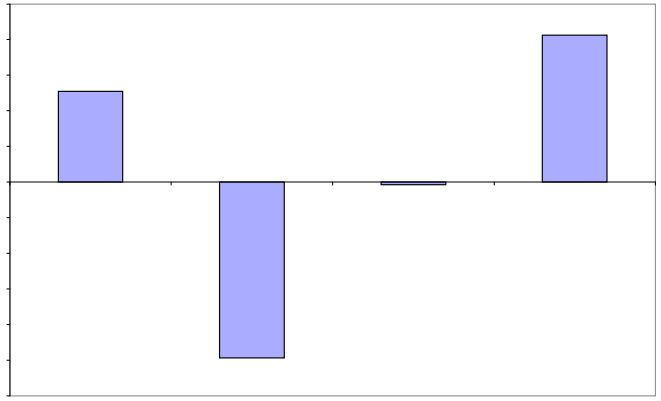
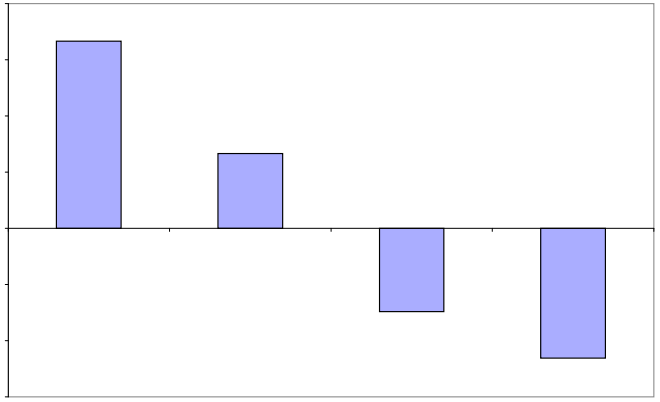


Figure 2: Average Family Income



Districts with higher levels of the self-employed, Macpherson's "petite bourgeoisie," showed higher levels of support for the Alberta Alliance and the Tories, but lower levels of

Liberal support, as illustrated in Figure 1. These findings are in keeping with Macpherson's characterization of this class as conservative, but in terms of its importance relative to the other predictors of the reigning party's vote share, Table 1 indicates that the proportion self-employed was less important than voter turnout, having at least some university education, and average family income.

Average family income also had an impact on the parties' vote shares, as shown in Figure 2. The Conservatives did better in districts with higher incomes, as did the Liberals, whereas a negative relationship between income and vote share was observed for the NDP and the Alberta Alliance. This result, along with the fact the NDP was the only party to have a positive coefficient for the "manual non-farm" variable, suggests that the NDP's primary basis of support in this election was the traditional blue collar sector upon which left parties have historically relied. This stands in contrast to the post-materialist support base many left parties have turned to in recent years. The NDP's main competition among lower-income voters in this election, especially in rural areas, appears to have been the Alberta Alliance.

As noted, many accounts of Alberta politics posit that leadership is central to one-party dominance. The leadership coefficients reveal an important difference between Ralph Klein and the other leaders in this election, as indicated in Figure 3. Although, as noted, this variable provides only an indirect indicator of the role of leadership, unlike those of the opposition leaders, Klein's leadership coefficient was *negative* (although just barely so). His riding had a level of Tory voting that was 1.7 percentage points *lower* than the mean level of support found in all other constituencies (holding the other variables constant). By contrast, all the other party leaders had fairly high, positive coefficients on this variable. Its effect was most pronounced for Brian Mason; his riding had a level of NDP support that was 39.9 percentage points higher than the mean level of NDP support found in all other constituencies. Kevin Taft produced a 22.5 percentage point leadership advantage. Given that after controls, the dominant party was slightly less popular in the premier's riding than elsewhere in the province, these data are not consistent with the notion that the Conservative dynasty was prolonged in 2004 by strong leadership. The findings suggest that those who had suspected that Klein's public image had suffered in recent years were correct.

As shown in Figure 4, there appears to have been an Edmonton effect, especially for the Tories and the NDP. With all other factors held constant, the PC vote in the Edmonton constituencies was, on average, 7.8 percentage points lower than in the non-Edmonton ridings. For the NDP, there was an 11.4 percentage point advantage for their Edmonton candidates.

Figure 3: Leadership Effects

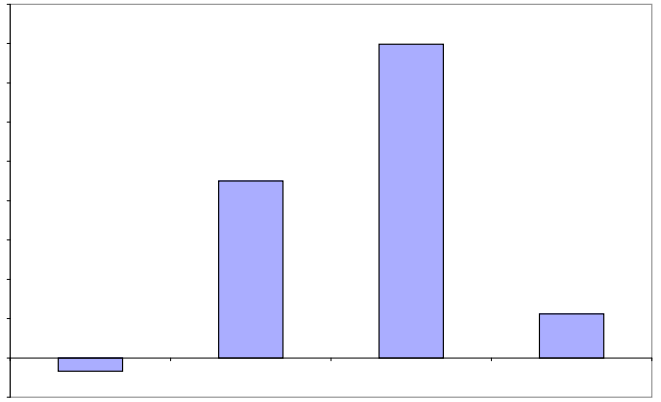
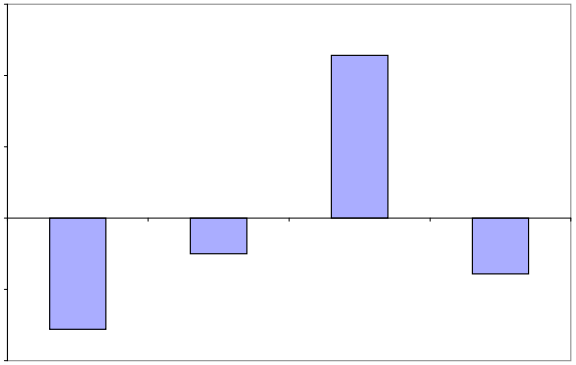


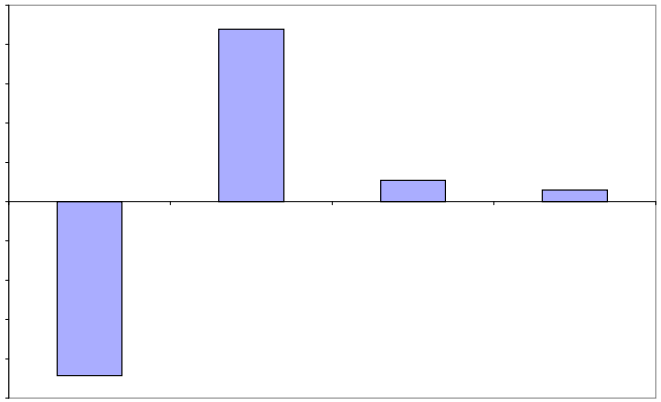
Figure 4: The Edmonton Effect



With regard to voter turnout, Figure 5 indicates that in general, the higher the turnout in a constituency, the lower the PC vote share. For every additional percentage point increase in turnout, the Conservatives lost over two-thirds of a percentage point in vote share. The opposite

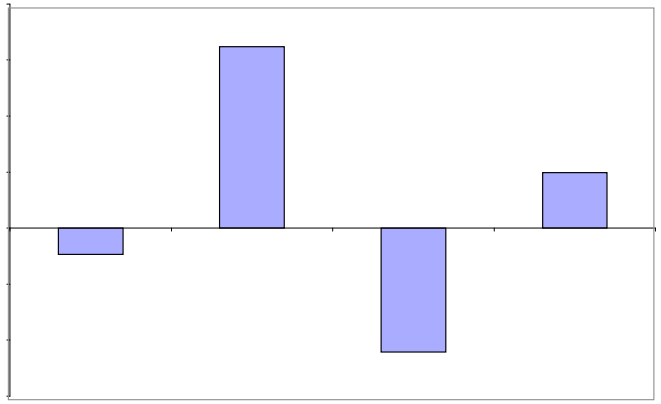
pattern was observed for the other parties, especially the Liberals. For every additional percentage point increase in turnout, the Liberals gained over three quarters of a percentage point in their vote share. These findings are consistent with the hypothesis mentioned earlier that supporters of the opposition parties were more motivated to vote than erstwhile Conservatives supporters, who may have become disaffected or complacent.

Figure 5: Voter Turnout



The effect of the size of the immigrant population in a constituency is shown in Figure 6. Having a higher proportion of immigrants was associated with higher levels of Liberal voting. Its effect was also positive for the Alberta Alliance, but negative for the NDP and PCs. These findings suggest that the Liberal party stands to benefit the most as Alberta's population becomes more ethnically diverse.

Figure 6: Immigrant Population



Fragmentation

Since, as noted, some theories of one-party dominance maintain that fragmentation of the opposition vote contributes to the pattern of Alberta politics, the level of fragmentation in the 2004 election was examined. To measure fragmentation, we used the effective number of opposition parties, which is calculated by taking the square of the vote share earned by all opposition parties collectively, and dividing it by the sum of the squares of the vote shares won by each opposition party (see Jansen, 2004: 7). A score of 1 on this measure indicates that all of the opposition vote was received by one party, a score of 2 means that the opposition vote was split evenly between two parties, and so on. There was a fragmentation level of 2.7 in 2004, which is high compared to other provinces and even exceeds the mean in Alberta for the post-war era (see Jansen, 2004: 16). By contrast, in the Alberta election of 1971, which ended the Social Credit dynasty, the fragmentation level was 1.5. The level of fragmentation found in the latest election, in which the Conservatives took 75% of the seats with 47% of the vote, suggests that Conservative dominance was enhanced in 2004 by opposition fragmentation.

Pinard's Theory of One-party Dominance

In one respect, the situation in Alberta for the past 30 years or so fits Pinard's scenario for the rise of a third party. Since the Conservative breakthrough in 1971, on only one occasion has an opposition party garnered more than a third of the votes, namely in 1993 when the Liberals won 39.7%.[24] The mean level of Liberal vote share in the eight elections since 1971 (not including 2004) was 19.2%. The mean level of NDP support in that period was 16.4%. In the election of 2001, the Liberals were the most popular opposition party, earning 27.3% of the vote. Pinard's model would predict that if a "third" party were to come on the scene, it should be most popular in areas where the Liberals had been weakest.

In the 2004 election a "third" party, the Alberta Alliance, did emerge, attracting 8.7% of the vote. Unfortunately, since all but six provincial constituency boundaries were changed between the elections of 2001 and 2004, a test of the model at the riding level was not possible. However, a basic test was done by dividing the province into three geographical areas—Edmonton, Calgary, and everywhere else—that produced findings that are consistent with Pinard's model. In the 2001 election, Liberal support was highest in Edmonton (38.5%, N = 274,933), followed by Calgary (23.3%, N = 282,305), and the remaining regions (23.1%, N = 455,914). In 2004, the Alberta Alliance was strongest (12.9%, N = 403,075) where the Liberals had had their lowest levels of support in 2001, outside the two metropolitan areas (although, to be sure, Liberal support there had been only marginally lower than in Calgary). Similarly, the AA was weakest (4.1%, N = 246,307) where the Liberals had been most popular, in Edmonton. Calgary had a middling level of AA support (6.4%, N = 241,253).

Discussion and Conclusions

It appears that, as far as the 2004 election is concerned, Macpherson's model offers little by way of an explanation as to how the Conservative dynasty was prolonged. The days of petit-bourgeois class homogeneity, if they ever did exist, had long since passed. Similarly, there was no pitched battle with Ottawa to obscure and obliterate the class and other social divisions that are presumed to create the alternate-party system elsewhere. In fact one could argue that there has not been an anti-"colonial" election in Alberta since Peter Lougheed was premier some two decades ago. In any case, class homogeneity and quasi-colonial status are not necessary conditions for the creation of a political dynasty in Canadian provincial politics—the Ontario Progressive Conservatives were in power for 42 consecutive years (1943-85) without the presence of either condition.

Nonetheless, since anti-central government sentiments played an important role in the Lougheed years, they are relevant to an understanding of Conservative dominance in the early years of the dynasty. But as mentioned, such antagonisms are probably more usefully conceived of as a variable than a constant. Moreover, the 2004 election illustrates that contemporary issues involving conflict with the federal government—for example, Kyoto and moves to introduce some privatization into health care—are far more divisive *within* Alberta than matters pertaining to energy policy ever were. Albertans did not unite and rally around Klein when he tried to take on the federal government on those issues.

Many scholars see leadership, along with weak party ties, as primary influences in Alberta politics. As noted above, several researchers have concluded that the Conservatives' victories in the three previous elections owed a great deal to Klein's performance as leader. Yet one would be hard pressed to find evidence of exemplary leadership in his 2004 campaign. On the contrary, the data presented above indicate that, unlike the other leaders, he was not quite as popular as the party he led, and the PCs dropped 15 percentage points in the popular vote despite having him at the helm. Yet the dynasty continued.

Another illustration of dynastic survival with marginal leadership comes in the person of Donald Getty, the premier who preceded Klein. Getty, arguably a mediocre leader at best,[25] even went down to defeat in his own riding in 1989 in his last general election as premier, but the dynasty was not broken. Given that the Conservatives succeeded in 2004 (and 1989) despite arguably undistinguished leadership, it would appear that the scholarship on Alberta politics sometimes overstates both the importance of leadership and the degree to which party ties are weak in the province—it seems that the Conservative brand name does count for something. Another illustration of the idea that party ties count for something in Alberta politics can be found in the 1971 election in which the Social Credit dynasty was brought to an end. Nowhere is Social Credit leader Harry Strom described as a strong leader, yet his party still captured 41.1% of the vote, a mere 5.3 percentage points below the Lougheed-led Conservatives.

At the same time, it would be a mistake to discount the role of leadership if one is to understand Conservative dominance over the past three decades. What this election appears to show is that the relationship between leadership, partisan ties and dynastic politics in Alberta is more complex that some accounts have made out. The closest the dynasty came to collapsing was in 1993, when the popular vote for the party exceeded that of the Liberals by less than five percentage points. But a crucial component of Liberal popularity in that election was their fiscally conservative, deficit-slashing platform (Stewart and Archer, 2000: 165), a platform that was not unlike that of the ruling party. With a level ideological playing field, namely one in which the both the reigning party and the leading opposition party take broadly conservative positions, superior leadership may be decisive, as it appears to have been in 1993. Consistent with this interpretation is the Conservative takeover of 1971, where Lougheed outshone Strom in a campaign in which the two parties did not differ substantially in terms of policy. The lesson from 2004 seems to be that unless the leading opposition party has strong leadership *and* presents itself as conservative, the Conservative dynasty can limp on, even without strong leadership. A plurality of voters, it seems, will buy the Conservative brand in such circumstances, perhaps seeing the party name as a proxy for conservatism. Evidently some degree of Tory "party" voting, in combination with the high level of opposition fragmentation observed above, helped to sustain the dynasty in 2004. The governing party's large financial advantage over the other parties in this election may have helped as well, although that hypothesis could not be tested in this study.

So why did Klein's appeal dissipate in 2004? One factor may have been the high profile meltdowns in his last term, reviewed above. Another consideration would be his decision to avoid presenting a platform for the election. Although earlier in his career as premier he pursued deficit and debt elimination with a vigour that was in keeping with the spirit of the times, by 2004 these were non-issues, and he failed to re-invent himself as a leader who was capable of dealing with contemporary challenges. He had nothing to offer by way of managing the huge government surpluses or ameliorating the strains created by the economic boom and the attendant rapid population growth. And the finding that voter turnout was negatively associated with Tory support—but positively related to opposition success—suggests that the strategy taken by Klein and the PCs in 2004 contributed to the party's decline in part by helping to create the record low turnout.[26]

The findings regarding the pattern of class support illuminate, to some extent, the role of one aspect of populism in this election. That support for both the Conservatives and the leading opposition party, the Liberals, varied positively with income suggests that populism, insofar as it involves championing the interests of "the common people," did not contribute to the election outcome in a substantial way. At the same time, the vote for both the NDP and the AA did vary inversely with income, which suggests that this aspect of populism may have been a facet of their appeal. An important difference between Edmonton and the rest of the province was observed in this study, such that the Liberals and NDP has their greatest successes in that city. At various points in Alberta's history opposition parties have fared better in Edmonton than elsewhere, and further research into why this occurs would be beneficial.

Finally, the findings of this study are, to some extent, supportive of Pinard's theory of one-party dominance—"third" party success was greatest in the areas where the main opposition party had been weakest. As observed, the AA was most popular in the regions outside the two metropolitan cities, where the Liberals had fared worst in 2001. Nonetheless, these results are somewhat surprising, given that the AA had all the earmarks of a "radical" movement in its "real" phase, the sort of movement that is, according to Pinard's model, more commonly found in competitive two-party or multi-party systems than in a situation of one-party dominance.[27] It may be that Pinard's approach has greater relevance for "radical" third parties than previously believed.

What of the future? Ralph Klein's political *raison d'être* as premier was deficit and debt elimination. Now that those goals have been achieved and he has retired from politics, the results

of the 2004 election suggest that his party may have to re-define itself in order to keep the dynasty alive. New conditions, in particular the challenges related to rapid population growth and increasing social diversity, call for new approaches to politics. Given the difficulties the new premier, Ed Stelmach, has had in addressing those issues and in garnering public support for his policies, Alberta's latest dynasty may again be vulnerable, just as it was in the early 1990s.

Endnotes

[1] The authors thank Paul Barker, Samuel Clark, Richard Ogmundson, and Maurice Pinard for their helpful comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of this paper, and Janine Marshal for her research assistance. We are also grateful for the contributions made by three anonymous reviewers.

[2] See Jansen (2004) for a fuller discussion of the figures cited here.

[3] Macpherson's thesis has been challenged by many. McCormick (1980: 86-87) casts doubt Macpherson's causal argument, observing that Saskatchewan had a more homogeneous class structure than Alberta, was more dependent on farming, and shared Alberta's "quasi-colonial" status, yet it retained a competitive, two-party system. He also notes that one-party dominance did not disappear in Alberta as the province's class structure became increasingly diverse in the decades after Macpherson's book appeared. See also Richards and Pratt (1979: 149-53), Pinard, (1975: 69), Finkel (1984), and Bell (1992, 1993a).

[4] Some researchers reject the idea that non-partisanship was ever widespread in Alberta. See Pinard (1975: 69, n.24).

[5] Some recent works (Lisac, 2004; Lawson, 2005; Barrie, 2006) challenge the standard ways of viewing Alberta's political culture.

[6] Pinard's theory is an application of the general theory of collective behaviour proposed by Neil Smelser (Smelser, 1962). One-party dominance is presented as a crucial instance of "structural conduciveness," one of several conditions necessary for the emergence of collective behaviour.

[7] Pinard (1973: 455) defines a third party as "any non-traditional party which has not yet been in power. It thus remains in the eyes of the voters as an untried alternative."

[8] Pinard (1975: 290) points out, however, that his model makes predictions based on the weakness of opposition parties as opposed to the dominance of government parties.

[9] Pinard does offer a brief explanation of how one-party dominance arises, but that is not the main focus of his inquiry. He writes: "Structural cleavages of various sorts or certain types of community structure or widespread and flagrant corruption in very high places—all this possibly reinforced by single-member plurality elections—lead to alienation from one major party and to one-party dominance ..." (1975: 66).

[10] *Calgary Herald*, October 3, 2004: A1.

[11] *Edmonton Journal,* February 1, 1997: A7.

[12] *Calgary Herald*, October 20, 2004: A18.

[13] *Calgary Herald*, October 26, 2004: A4.

[14] http://www.electionsalberta.ab.ca/annualrpt28th.html#page24.

[15] *Calgary Herald*, October 26, 2004: A1.

[16] http://www.cbc.ca/news/story/2002/06/09/kyoto_poll020609.html

[17] *Calgary Herald*, November 6, 2004: A5.

[18] www.finance.gov.ab.ca/aboutalberta/ped_profiles/2004_new_boundaries/Summaries,%20Alberta.pdf.

[19] Even in periods of high tension, an Alberta governing party is not guaranteed political gains by taking on Ottawa. For example, there was a great deal of federal-provincial conflict following the disallowance of Social Credit legislation by federal authorities in the late 1930s, but the Aberhart government almost lost the 1940 election, surpassing the coalition Independents by less that one-half of one percentage point in the popular vote.

[20] The data for each constituency are based on a random, weighted, 20% sample of the non-institutional population.

[21] The rationale behind this measure is that if a particular leader does less well in his riding than the party does collectively everywhere else, that's an indication of weak leadership; in such situations it appears that the party is more popular than the leader. Conversely, if a leader is more popular in his riding than the party is everywhere else, that's an indication of strong leadership; the leader appears to be more popular than the party. A drawback of this variable is that it is not a direct measure of the public's assessment of the leadership abilities of a particular party head, as would be the case if survey data were used. It is problematic insofar as the level of support for the party outside the leader's riding is influenced by the public's perception of his leadership abilities.

[22] In this study, "Edmonton" includes the ridings of Sherwood Park and St. Albert (as well as the constituencies in Edmonton proper).

[23] According to the *2001 Census Dictionary*, the term "immigrant population" refers to people "who are or who have ever been landed immigrants. Landed immigrants are people who have been permitted by immigration authorities to live in Canada permanently; some will have lived in Canada for a number of years, while others have arrived recently." http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/Products/Reference/dict/pop056.htm

[24] This was almost achieved by the Liberals again in 1997, when they captured 32.75% of the vote.

[25] A poll taken in the spring of 1990 indicated that about two-thirds of adult Albertans believed that Getty was doing a poor job as premier (Lisac, 2004b: 246).

[26] The relationship between one-party dominance and low voter turnout may prove to be recursive in nature in that the former may contribute to low turnout, which in turn reinforces one-party dominance, which then affects turnout, and so on.

[27] See Pinard (1975: 280-4).

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