Political Parties & Party Competition

or

The pervasive, perennial problem of political parties preempting personal preferences

Canadians on Political Parties

69% of those elected soon lose touch

74% solve problems better by grassroots action

82% better laws if MPs vote their conscience and not the party line

69% without political parties there can't be true democracy

Political Parties & Party Competition

- Why do political parties exist everywhere?

- Can we have electoral politics with no parties?

- How does the electoral system shape the number & kind of parties?

- What happens to the parties when we change the electoral system?

- What kind of parties do we have in Canada under our current system? How do they work?

Problems of electoral democracy

The politicians' problems:

- *Assemble an electoral support base*
- *Coordinate legislative action*
- *Define the public agenda*
- *Organize the government & manage its activity*

Problems of electoral democracy

The voters' problems:

- *Make elections collective decision-making events*
- *Recruit and train leadership*
- *Hold those in power accountable*

Parties as the answer

Parties are organizations which:

1. *Articulate and package ideas & interests*
2. *Recruit candidates for office*
3. *Campaign on identifiable positions*
4. *Structure the electorate into recognizable blocks*
5. *Organize and operate governments & oppositions*

Political Parties as "public utilities"

Electoral rules provide the framework for democracy

Political parties deliver it:

- *Organize competition*

- *Provide for government accountability*

Party Discipline

Parties work as they do because members:

- Agree to campaign on the same issues
- Vote together as a team in the legislature
- Defend each other and their leaders

It crowds out any significant place for independents

Party Discipline

83%   *we would be better off if MPs voted the way their constituents thought best rather than the party line.*

For voters:
1. Elections would lose their collective dimension
2. Electorate could not give a mandate
3. Voters could not hold governments accountable

For politicians:
1. Governments would have no stable base
2. Legislature would depend on day-to-day bargaining

The Number of Parties

Winner take all systems

➢ Rewards large parties

➢ Penalize small parties

➢ Encourage parties to amalgamate

➢ Leads to 2 parties dominating competition

Proportional systems

➢ Parties get what voters give

➢ Allows more parties to win

➢ Provides chance for new parties

➢ Leads to multi-party competition

Party Competition Dynamics

2- Party Competition

- Simple choice between 2 similar parties with incentives to minimize their differences

- Elections tend to determine government

- Debate and bargaining over issues and policies takes place *inside* 'catch-all' parties

Party Competition Dynamics

Multi-Party Competition

- Wide choice among (ideological) parties with explicit positions

- Elections allow expression of preferences

- Political bargaining takes place *between* parties in the legislature

Electoral system change -> Party system change

the New Zealand example:

	Before	*After*
Electoral system	Plurality	Mixed-Proportional
# parties	2 Big (Lab / National)	2 Big & 5 Small
Party styles	Broad appeal	Broad appeal
		Specific interests
		Personal machines
Elections	Chose government	Reflected preferences
Governments	1-party majority	Multi-party parliamentary coalitions

Canadian Political Parties

A unique balance between:
* National party discipline
* Local organizational autonomy

A unstable trade-off that ensures internal party conflict

Flexible enough to allow parties to appeal to a wide range of diverse interests

Canadian Parties as Franchise Systems

Central Organization:

1. Define the product – leadership & policy
2. Runs advertising – election campaign
3. Supports local outlets – help for local associations

Local Associations:

1. Builds a local outlet – members & money
2. Markets product – finds & supports a candidate
3. Harvests support – mobilizes votes on election day

Changing Party Organization

New party types -> new organizational practices

Candidate selection:

Plurality – local members choose

Party list – party leaders / bureaucrats choose

Preferential systems – voters determine

Some Questions

Does it matter how many parties we have?

Do we want an electoral system that makes it easy for new parties to grow?

Is multi-party or 2-party competition better for BC?

How should candidates be chosen, and by whom?