

# Policy Attitudes of Party Members in Canada: Evidence of Ideological Politics

WILLIAM CROSS *Mount Allison University*  
LISA YOUNG *University of Calgary*

## Introduction

This article considers one of the recurring questions in the study of Canadian political parties: whether the parties that comprise the Canadian party system (and the system itself) are best described by the ideological or the brokerage model. While the brokerage model has generally been used, there is reason to suspect that the Canadian system is increasingly displaying characteristics of a more ideologically structured politics. Examination of the attitudes of party members suggests there are clear patterns of differentiation between parties in terms of their members' views, and that within each party there is considerable agreement among party members. Because party members have come to play a more significant role in constraining the flexibility of party leaders, greater policy cohesion and differentiation make the practice of brokerage politics more difficult.

---

**Acknowledgments:** This research was made possible by a standard research grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Research and other assistance was provided by Patrick Fournier, Diane Roussel, Anamitra Deb, Pam Mitchell, Kevin Snedker, Tracey Raney, Elizabeth Moore, Charlie Gray and James Miller. R. Kenneth Carty and George Perlin offered valuable advice regarding development and administration of the survey instrument. Donald Blake, Munroe Eagles and the JOURNAL reviewers provided helpful comments on an earlier draft. Finally, we thank the staff of the national offices of the five political parties and the members of the parties who took the time to complete the survey for their invaluable assistance.

William Cross, Department of Political Science, Mount Allison University, Sackville, New Brunswick E4L 1A7; [wcross@mta.ca](mailto:wcross@mta.ca)  
Lisa Young, Department of Political Science, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta T2N 1N4; [youngl@acs.ucalgary.ca](mailto:youngl@acs.ucalgary.ca)

*Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue canadienne de science politique*  
35:4 (December/décembre 2002) 859-880

© 2002 Canadian Political Science Association (l'Association canadienne de science politique)  
and/et la Société québécoise de science politique

Most accounts of Canadian party politics accept that the brokerage model best describes Canadian parties. Richard Johnston has written: "The brokerage image of Canadian parties does seem to be the dominant one. Indeed it has been characterized as the 'textbook theory' of the party system."<sup>1</sup> André Siegfried also observed, almost a century ago, that Canadian parties lacked strong ideological foundations, shifted policy positions rather routinely and sought power by stitching together coalitions that crossed any divides. And R. MacGregor Dawson contended that Canadian parties are the "outstanding agents for bringing about cooperation and compromise between conflicting groups and interests."<sup>2</sup> All support a brokerage interpretation of party activity. And the argument that this model best characterizes the Canadian case has also been convincingly made by Harold Clarke and his colleagues in the *Absent Mandate* series on Canadian elections, as well as by Janine Brodie and Jane Jenson who argue that on the infrequent occasions when Canadian parties do take coherent and even principled positions "these are fragile constructions easily reversed when conditions change."<sup>3</sup>

Nonetheless, others, such as William Christian and Colin Campbell, have found broad ideological underpinnings to the Canadian party system.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Richard Johnston and Donald Blake both find modest evidence of party ideology.<sup>5</sup> These findings might best be summed up with Johnston's conclusion that "The parties have proved to be ideological vehicles more than we might have expected them to be . . . however, a great deal of real non-ideological variance was still left."<sup>6</sup>

1 Richard Johnston, "The Ideological Structure of Opinion on Policy," in George Perlin, ed., *Party Democracy in Canada: The Politics of National Party Conventions* (Scarborough: Prentice Hall, 1988) 54-70, 57.

2 André Siegfried, *The Race Question in Canada*, ed. by Frank A. Underhill (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966; 1904); and R. MacGregor Dawson, *The Government of Canada*, revised by Norman Ward (6th ed.; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 415.

3 Harold Clarke, Jane Jensen, Larry LeDuc and Jon Pammett, *Absent Mandate: The Politics of Discontent in Canada* (Toronto: Gage, 1984); Clarke, et al., *Absent Mandate: Interpreting Change in Canadian Elections* (2nd ed.; Toronto: Gage, 1991); Clark, et al., *Absent Mandate: Canadian Electoral Politics in an Era of Restructuring* (3rd ed.; Toronto: Gage, 1996); and Janine M. Brodie and Jane Jenson, "Piercing the Smokescreen: Brokerage Politics and Class Politics," in Alain-G. Gagnon and A. Brian Tanguay, eds., *Canadian Parties in Transition: Discourse, Organization and Representation* (Scarborough: Nelson, 1991), 33.

4 For their most recent analysis, see William Christian and Colin Campbell, *Parties, Leaders, and Ideologies in Canada* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1996).

5 Johnston, "The Ideological Structure"; and Donald Blake, "Division and Cohesion: The Major Parties," in Perlin, ed., *Party Democracy*, 32-53.

6 Johnston, "The Ideological Structure," 65.

---

**Abstract.** This article considers the degree to which characteristics of the ideological model of political parties are evident in the Canadian party system. Four questions are considered: are members attracted to parties on the basis of their policy positions; is there a structure to party members' issue attitudes; is there significant attitudinal space between the parties; and is there cohesion within the parties on the identified attitudinal measures? Data collected through a national mail survey of members of the five federal parties are used to answer these questions. The article finds there is substantial evidence of the ideological model in the Canadian party system and concludes by considering the effect this may have on the brokerage traditions of Canadian parties.

**Résumé.** Cet article étudie jusqu'à quel point les caractéristiques du modèle idéologique des partis politiques sont évidentes dans le système canadien des partis. Quatre questions sont considérées : est-ce que les membres sont attirés aux partis à cause de leur politiques? Est-ce qu'il existe une structure applicable aux attitudes des membres des partis en ce qui a trait aux différents enjeux? Y a-t-il une différence appréciable entre les partis en ce qui concerne les attitudes des leurs membres? Enfin, est-ce qu'il existe une cohésion au sein des partis en ce qui a trait aux mesures comportementales qui ont été identifiées? Des données nationales recueillies par la poste auprès des membres des cinq partis politiques fédéraux sont utilisées pour répondre à ces questions. L'article conclut qu'on peut démontrer l'existence d'un modèle idéologique dans le système des partis politiques au Canada et il considère l'effet que cela peut avoir sur les traditions d'accommodement des partis politiques canadiens.

---

Changes to the party system also throw the brokerage model, which described what was essentially a two-party system, into question. Party competition was dominated from Confederation until 1993 by the Liberals and the Conservatives. Between them, these two parties routinely collected three quarters or more of the popular vote. This party system collapsed in 1993 and the system in place at the outset of the twenty-first century has a very different pattern of party competition than its predecessor, the contours of which suggest a more ideological politics may be emerging.

One of the important post-1993 changes is the emergence of the Bloc Québécois and the Reform/Canadian Alliance parties. These two parties finished second or third in the federal elections of 1993, 1997 and 2000, and have come to play a significant role in the new party system. Both parties explicitly reject the brokerage model. As R. Kenneth Carty, William Cross and Lisa Young have written: "The parties that constituted the third Canadian party system were characterized by ideological flexibility and an overarching desire to maintain national unity by fostering accommodation. . . ." And that the brokerage practice "has been a perennial feature of Canadian party politics since Confederation. Unlike their predecessors, the Bloc and Reform are essentially ideological parties."<sup>7</sup> These authors, and others, suggest

---

7 R. Kenneth Carty, William Cross and Lisa Young, *Rebuilding Canadian Party Politics* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000), 36. These authors identify four Canadian party systems: Confederation to 1920, 1920-1965, 1965-1993 and 1993-present.

that both new parties are more ideologically coherent than their traditional counterparts. The Bloc may be flexible on many issues, but sovereignty is its *raison d'être* and it is uncompromising in this regard.<sup>8</sup>

It is not just the presence of these two parties that suggests an ideological structure to the new party system.<sup>9</sup> Canadians' satisfaction with parties declined dramatically in recent decades, and there is evidence that, at least in part, this results from a rejection of the brokerage tradition by a growing number of voters.<sup>10</sup> Implicit in the brokerage model is substantial deference on the part of voters to the political elites who are charged with the task of brokering accommodations among competing interests. As the *Absent Mandate* authors argue, Canadian election campaigns seldom centre on detailed policy debates and, thus, it is left to these mandate-free elites to broker the relevant interests and establish public policy. As voters have increasingly expressed their dissatisfaction with this type of elite-dominated politics,<sup>11</sup> Canadian parties have responded. While much of the reaction to this changing voter sentiment has been championed by the Reform party, the traditional parties have also reacted, if considerably more cautiously.<sup>12</sup>

The brokerage and ideological models encompass both the attitudes and behaviour of party members and the parties' electoral approaches. Early students of Canadian parties such as Siegfried and Dawson concentrated their study on the electoral aspect of party activity in considering the role of ideology and brokerage practices.<sup>13</sup> Simi-

---

8 The Bloc is interesting, as it takes what might be considered a brokerage approach in welcoming anyone who supports sovereignty regardless of the rest of their political philosophy. Thus, party members have wide-ranging views on policy questions. Nonetheless, on the one issue the party cares most about (and some might argue the only issue it cares about), it is strongly ideological and willing to broker no compromise.

9 In spring 2000, the Reform party was refashioned as the Canadian Alliance. The Alliance was created in an attempt to expand the party's support beyond Reform's narrow regional and ideological base. Nonetheless, the views and attitudinal coherence of the membership make the adoption of such practices unlikely.

10 For more on changing voter sentiment in this regard, see William Cross, "Introduction," in William Cross, ed., *Political Parties, Representation and Electoral Democracy in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2002) 1-11; and Elisabeth Gidengil, et al., "Changes in the Party System and Anti-Party Sentiment," in *ibid.*, 68-86.

11 For a general discussion of voters' attitudes on this question, see Neil Nevitte, *Decline of Deference: Canadian Value Change in Cross-National Perspective* (Peterborough: Broadview, 1996).

12 For a full discussion of reforms adopted by the parties, see Carty, Cross and Young, *Rebuilding*, chap. 6.

13 Siegfried, *The Race Question in Canada*; and Dawson, *The Government of Canada*.

larly, later studies, such as those by Christian and Campbell, Brodie and Jenson, and the *Absent Mandate* series, all rely on a study of indicators such as party platforms, pronouncements of party leaders during election campaigns, the performance of parties in the House of Commons, and party policy and leadership conventions.<sup>14</sup> Others, however, such as Blake, Johnston, and Keith Archer and Faron Ellis, look not at the external face of the parties but, rather, at the opinion structure of party activists.<sup>15</sup> To do this, they surveyed delegates to national party meetings. They justified this method on the grounds that party activists in recent decades have assumed more power over party decision making (particularly in leadership selection) and that their policy preferences played an important role in organizing and constraining the parties' ideology.<sup>16</sup>

We follow in the path of this latter group. In this article, we focus on the views of party members and, thus, concentrate on the internal composition of the parties. We ask whether party policy is an important incentive to membership, whether there is a coherent structure to members' views, whether there is substantial intra-party issue agreement and whether there is substantial inter-party divergence. This approach allows us to consider the attitudes of members which are increasingly important in influencing and constraining the parties' actions, both between and during election campaigns. This study differs from those of Blake, Johnston, and Archer and Ellis, however, in that we examine the attitudes of rank-and-file party members rather than convention delegates.

We focus on party members rather than convention delegates because members have become more important in party decision making in the new party system.<sup>17</sup> The Reform/Alliance party has been the dynamic force in increasing the influence of members. Having based a considerable part of its electoral appeal on a condemnation of the

---

14 See William Christian and Colin Campbell, *Political Parties and Ideologies in Canada* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1983); Christian and Campbell, *Parties, Leaders and Ideologies in Canada*; Brodie and Jenson, "Piercing the Smokescreen"; Clarke, et al., *Absent Mandate: The Politics of Discontent*, *Absent Mandate: Interpreting Change* and *Absent Mandate: Canadian Electoral Politics*; and C. Winn and J. McMenemy, eds., *Political Parties in Canada* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1976).

15 See Blake, "Division and Cohesion"; Johnston, "The Ideological Structure"; and Keith Archer and Faron Ellis, "Opinion Structure of Party Activists: The Reform Party of Canada," this JOURNAL 27 (1994), 277-308.

16 See, for example, Blake, "Division and Cohesion," 33.

17 For more on the changing norms of intra-party democracy that are strengthening the role of the member in party decision making, see Lisa Young and William Cross, "The Rise of Plebiscitary Democracy in Canadian Political Parties," *Party Politics* 8 (2002), 673-99.

elite-dominated brokerage model, the Alliance continues to refer to members as “owners” and “stakeholders” in the party.<sup>18</sup> This principle is manifested in many ways, including Reform being the first federal party to offer direct membership to voters and a constitutional provision requiring that all party policy be approved by members in convention. After their 1993 electoral disaster, the Conservatives quickly followed Reform’s lead by implementing their first-ever national membership programme in 1995, and by taking steps to increase the role of their grass-roots supporters in the policy development process.<sup>19</sup> As well, all five of the major federal parties have adopted some form of direct leadership selection. The Bloc was the first federal party to select its leader through a direct vote of the entire party membership rather than at a traditional delegate leadership convention.<sup>20</sup> The Canadian Alliance and Conservative parties quickly followed suit, and the Liberals amended their party rules to allow for a form of direct election when they next choose a leader. The New Democratic party was the last to adopt direct elections. Nonetheless, they used a version of this method in choosing their leader in January 2003.<sup>21</sup>

Given this increasingly consequential role of the membership in party decision making, we surveyed the five major parties’ grass-roots members in order to gauge the degree of attitudinal cohesiveness within each party and map the patterns of inter-party cleavages. This will yield insight into how party ideology may develop in the emerging party system. If party members are to play a key role in selecting party leaders, determining policy platforms and nominating candidates (in a system with increasing pressure for more responsive members of parliament), then their attitudes are certain to play an increasingly important role in framing the parties’ policies.

This examination of the attitudes of party members leads us to

---

18 For a full discussion of the Reform/Alliance party’s view of members and the effect this has had on party democracy, see Carty, Cross and Young, *Rebuilding Canadian Party Politics*, 107-29.

19 For more on changes of this nature in the Conservative party, see *ibid*, 119-21.

20 Interestingly, this selection method was pioneered in Canada by the Bloc’s provincial cousins, the Parti Québécois. For more on the early use of direct leadership selection, see John C. Courtney, *Do Conventions Matter? Choosing National Party Leaders in Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995), 233-63; and William Cross, “Direct Election of Provincial Party Leaders in Canada, 1985-1995: The End of the Leadership Convention?” this JOURNAL 29 (1996), 295-315.

21 For a general discussion of leadership selection politics in the NDP, see Keith Archer and Alan Whitehorn, *Political Activists: The NDP in Convention* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1997). For a discussion of the Conservative direct vote, see David K. Stewart and R. Kenneth Carty, “Leadership Politics as Party Building: The Conservatives in 1998,” in Cross, ed., *Political Parties*.

conclude that the parties that comprise the contemporary Canadian system do manifest some of the characteristics of the ideological model. Partisans join parties at least partially on the basis of policy, and policy agreement with the party is an important incentive to activism. There is a clear structure to attitudes among party members, and the membership of each of the five major parties is coherent on some dimensions of this structure. Although it is impossible to draw direct comparisons with the pre-1993 party system, there is evidence that the entry of two new parties into the system significantly increased the issue space covered by the major parties and added new dimensions to party policy differentiation.

While we do not look directly at the external faces (and particularly the electoral behaviour) of the parties, our analysis does allow us to draw some tentative conclusions in this regard. We argue that the views of members are an important constraint on a party's leadership. That the attitudes of party members are largely consistent with the ideological model (particularly in the three new parties) makes it difficult for their leadership to act in a brokerage fashion. With members who are motivated by policy concerns and who evidence substantial attitudinal coherence playing an increasingly important role in party decision making, party elites are increasingly constrained in their ability to disregard the views of their members.

## Methodology

This analysis is based on the Study of Canadian Political Party Members, a mail-back survey of randomly selected members of the five major Canadian political parties conducted between March and May of 2000.<sup>22</sup> The survey was mailed to a regionally stratified, random sample drawn from the membership lists of each political party.<sup>23</sup> A total of 10,928 surveys were mailed to partisans, with 3,872 completed surveys returned, yielding an overall response rate of 36 per cent.<sup>24</sup> Given that the sample was drawn during a period when there was no election anticipated and no leadership contests underway, we expect

---

22 More information about the Study can be found at <<http://www.mta.ca/faculty/socsci/polisci/scppm/index.html>>.

23 The regional sampling process varied by party. Contact the authors for details. For all parties except the Liberals and the Bloc, a regional weighting variable was created to correct for sampling procedures. Accurate regional membership breakdown was not available for the Liberal party, and regional weighting was not relevant for the Bloc.

24 The response rate by party is: Conservative 44 per cent, Alliance 43, Bloc 34, Liberal 32, NDP 29. To increase the response rate, each survey mailed was followed approximately one week later by a reminder card giving contact information for the researchers.

that the members sampled are longer-term, more active members than would be captured had the survey been conducted during leadership or nomination contests.<sup>25</sup>

## Analysis

In order to consider the role of ideology in party membership, we examine four questions: are members attracted to parties on the basis of their policy positions; is there an identifiable structure to public policy attitudes among Canadian party members; is there significant issue space between the parties; and is there substantial cohesion within the parties on the identified attitudinal measures? There is evidence of the ideological model if we find members motivated by policy, structure to views among party members, significant difference among parties on the factors underlying any attitudinal structure and substantial coherence among members of the same party on these underlying factors.

### *Are party members motivated by policy?*

Consistent with the brokerage model in which party competition was often described as a contest between two competing groups of elites, observers of Canadian parties have long contended that voters are primarily attracted to parties in order to support one of these sets. Leadership selection and candidate nomination contests have often been identified as the party events that trigger membership recruitment.<sup>26</sup> We find some evidence in support of this hypothesis, but also find that policy agreement with a party is, at minimum, an important condition to membership.

Members were asked their reasons for originally joining their political party. Respondents were offered eight possibilities and asked to rank them as “not at all important,” “somewhat important,” or “very important.” As illustrated in Table 1, more than four fifths of respondents said that support for their party’s policies was very important to their decision to join. While many of these members also listed other factors as being important (particularly support of a candidate for a local nomination or party leadership), no other option was ranked very important by a majority of respondents.<sup>27</sup> However, there is sig-

25 The Alliance leadership campaign was underway in the spring and summer of 2000. However, the membership list we used did not include those new members signed up during the campaign. Given that the survey captured mainly those individuals who had joined Reform, and not the Alliance, the results for the Alliance should be interpreted with some care.

26 See, for example, R. Kenneth Carty, *Canadian Political Parties in the Constituencies* (Toronto: Dundurn, 1991), 36-39.

27 Note that respondents were not limited to one option. Many who listed party pol-



nificant variance by party on this question. Agreement with the party's policies was ranked very important by 90 per cent of members of the Alliance, Bloc and New Democratic party respondents, but only 75 per cent of Liberal and Conservative respondents.

TABLE 1

Importance of Reasons for Joining the Political Party (in percentages)<sup>a</sup>

	Not at all	Somewhat	Very
To support a candidate for the local nomination	28	27	45
To support a candidate for party leader	38	26	36
I believe in the party's policies	3	14	84
I thought it would help my career	88	9	4
A friend asked me to	81	13	6
A family member asked me to	81	12	7
I thought it would help me get a government job	95	3	2
I wanted to influence party policy on an issue	44	37	19
N = 3872			

<sup>a</sup>We are interested in knowing your reasons for originally joining the \_\_\_\_\_ party. Please indicate whether each of the following reasons was not at all important, somewhat important, or very important to you.

While the data show policy support to be an important prerequisite for party membership, leadership and nomination contests appear to be the triggering events that induce individuals to join parties. More than 80 per cent claimed to have originally joined a party in order to support either a preferred nomination or leadership candidate—the same proportion that cited the party's policy positions. It appears that recruitment of members is largely limited to that group of voters who believe in a party's policy positions. There is little evidence, at least among those who remain members, of voters joining parties being unconcerned with the party's policy positions—even among those joining to support a leadership or nomination candidate.

Similarly, when respondents were asked what was the one best thing about belonging to their party, the party's policies were overwhelmingly mentioned for every party. This was an open-ended question and, as shown in Table 2, this answer was offered by more

icy as very important also listed a nomination or leadership contest as a very important factor in their decision to join the party.

than one third of respondents while no other answer was mentioned by as many as 10 per cent of members. While supporting a party's policies was the most common answer for members of all five parties, members of the Liberal and Conservative parties were significantly less likely to list this as the best thing about party membership. Thirty per cent of their members listed policy support, compared with almost one half of the members of the other three parties.

TABLE 2

The "Best Thing" about Being a Party Member (percentages)<sup>a</sup>

	%
It's a way to support the party's policies/ideology	36
It gives me a way to contribute to party decision making	7
Social reasons	7
It's an alternative to the Liberals	7
It's a way to influence public policy	6
N = 3520	

<sup>a</sup>What in your opinion is the one best thing about being a member of the \_\_\_\_\_ party? (open-ended).

While the data suggest that general support for a party's policies is an important incentive to membership, it is interesting to note that partisans were not attracted to party membership out of a desire to influence party policy. Only 6 per cent of respondents said the best thing about membership was an ability to influence public policy, and less than 20 per cent were initially motivated to join a party by a strong desire to influence its policy positions. This may reflect members' views regarding the likelihood of their participation actually affecting either public policy or their party's position on a policy issue.<sup>28</sup>

### *Is there a structure to members' views?*

Is there a structure to the attitudinal preferences of political party members in Canada? As Johnston has written: "When individuals think ideologically, their response to one policy question should predict their response to other questions."<sup>29</sup> The objective then is to dis-

28 For more on the general question of incentives to membership, see Lisa Young and William Cross, "Incentives to Membership in Canadian Political Parties" in *Political Research Quarterly* 55 (2002), 547-69.

29 Johnston, "The Ideological Structure," 58.

cover whether party members' "attitudes are structured around a core set of beliefs."<sup>30</sup>

Factor analysis considers the relationships between respondents' views on particular issues and identifies groups of issues on which respondents' views are predicated on a single underlying belief. If there are no significant relationships between respondents' views on various questions, suggesting they see issues as being independent of each other, then no significant factor will underlie their views. An analysis of responses to 23 questions relating to attitudinal preferences indicates that opinion among Canadian political party members is substantially structured around four underlying factors,<sup>31</sup> each independent of each other, and each comprising two or more related variables (see Table 3). Based on a common principle uniting the variables associated with each factor, they capture party members' views on social tolerance, a laissez-faire economic approach, provincial powers and populism. These four factors explain 49 per cent of the total variance. While all four are significant and explain a substantial proportion of the variance in party members' views, the first two factors are substantially more important than the others.<sup>32</sup>

The first factor includes eight variables, all of which concern attitudes relating to social tolerance. The coefficients reported in Table 3 indicate a strong positive relationship between members' views on whether Canada has gone too far in pushing equal rights and whether newer lifestyles contribute to societal breakdown. Those who agree with one of these propositions are likely to agree with the other. Similarly, these party members are likely to disagree with the statement that feminism encourages women to stand up for themselves rather than to be selfish (thus the negative coefficient for this variable). We interpret these findings as meaning that members' attitudes towards social tolerance underlie and structure their views on the eight questions. Table 3 also indicates that a significant proportion of the variance in members' views is explained by this factor (17%).

The second factor includes 10 variables, all of which concern attitudes towards government intervention in the economy. These range from spending on social programmes and job creation projects,

---

30 Patrick Seyd and Paul Whitely, *Labour's Grass Roots: The Politics of Party Membership* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 118.

31 One question relating to environmental regulation did not load very strongly on any of the factors. The full wording of the 22 questions used in this analysis is included in the Appendix.

32 We have chosen in this investigation to examine attitudinal structure among party members as a group and not by individual party. This allows for better comparison among parties and for examination of the system as a whole. Subsequent analysis may consider the attitudinal structure of individual party memberships.

TABLE 3

## Factor Analysis of Responses to Questions on Attitudinal Preferences

	Social toler- ance	Laissez- faire eco- nomics	Provin- cial powers	Pop- ulism
We have gone too far in pushing equal rights	<b>.68</b>	.21	0	.13
Newer life styles contribute to societal breakdown	<b>.65</b>	0	0	.19
We have gone too far in pushing bilingualism	<b>.64</b>	.17	-.13	.27
Feminism encourages women to be independent rather than selfish	<b>-.61</b>	-.17	.01	.01
Immigrants contribute to Canada	<b>-.54</b>	.23	-.31	.01
Minority groups need special rights	<b>-.53</b>	-.21	.25	.01
Quebec should not be recognized as a distinct society	<b>.52</b>	.01	-.44	.35
Courts should be able to overrule parliament	<b>-.50</b>	-.01	-.01	.11
Free trade with US has been good for Canada	0	<b>.74</b>	.11	0
International trade creates jobs in Canada	-.18	<b>.71</b>	.01	.01
Government must reduce gap between rich and poor	-.28	<b>-.63</b>	.13	.11
Need stronger protection for domestic businesses from foreign competition	0	<b>-.60</b>	.19	.21
Should allow private medical clinics	.26	<b>.59</b>	.33	.14
Should leave it to private sector to create jobs	.40	<b>.53</b>	.21	.12
Should increase spending on social programs	-.38	<b>-.53</b>	.01	-.11
Should institute health care user fees	.30	<b>.51</b>	.37	.01
Universities should raise tuition	.35	<b>.46</b>	.23	-.14
Make employment insurance harder to collect	.35	<b>.42</b>	0	.11
Quebec has the right to separate unilaterally	-.22	0	<b>.73</b>	-.11

TABLE 3 (CONTINUED)

	Social toler- ance	Laissez- faire eco- nomics	Provin- cial powers	Pop- ulism
Provinces should have more powers	.19	.19	<b>.67</b>	.22
MPs should represent constituents' views	0	.01	.01	<b>.74</b>
Could solve more problems if left to grass roots	.19	-.15	.13	<b>.67</b>
Variance explained (%)	17	17	8	7
Eigenvalues	3.7	3.6	1.9	1.5

KMO = .889; varimax rotation used

to limitations on health care and university tuition expenses, and attitudes towards free trade. The coefficients indicate a strong positive relationship between voters' views on issues such as allowing health-care user fees and leaving job creation to the private sector. Those who agree with these positions are highly likely also to believe that free trade has been good for the Canadian economy. Similarly, these members are likely to disagree that spending on social programmes should be increased (thus the negative coefficient for this variable). We interpret these findings as meaning that members' attitudes towards a *laissez-faire* economic approach underlie their views on these 10 questions. Table 3 indicates that a significant proportion of the variance in members' views is also explained by this factor (17%).

The third and fourth factor each include only two variables. These factors are significantly less important in the structure of members' opinion as they explain only 8 and 7 per cent of the overall variance respectively. The third factor concerns respondents' views relating to provincial powers. Here, those who believe provinces should have more powers are highly likely also to believe that Quebec has the unilateral right to separate from Canada.<sup>33</sup> The fourth factor concerns party members' attitudes towards populism. There is a substantial relationship between party members' views on the proper representational role of the member of parliament, and on shifting more decision-making power to the grass roots.

33 It is worth noting that the four factors remain virtually the same when removing respondents from Quebec. The two variables relating to provincial powers continue to load on the same factor and attitudes towards distinct society are more closely related to the tolerance factor.

*Is there substantial issue space between the parties?*

Having determined the basic structure of party-member opinion in Canada, factor score means (essentially index values created using the results of the factor analysis) are compared to determine whether there is substantial issue differentiation across party memberships. Respondents receive a score for each of the four factors composed of their response to the variables within each. The relative weight given to each variable is determined by the strength of its relationship with the underlying factor. We then calculate the mean score for each factor by party.<sup>34</sup>

There is substantial difference among the parties on the social tolerance factor (see Table 4). The factor scores of Alliance members differ dramatically from those of the other parties. The Alliance is the only party that falls on the less tolerant side of the overall mean, while the Liberals fall in the middle of the five parties and Bloc members are shown to be the most tolerant.

On the laissez-faire factor, the NDP differs from the other parties by the greatest margin. Its members are by far the most supportive of government intervention in the economy. The Bloc and Liberals fall slightly on the government intervention side of the overall mean, while the Alliance and Conservatives show support for a laissez-faire approach. The Liberals again fall in the middle of the five parties.

Not surprisingly, members of the Bloc are the most supportive of increased provincial powers. Their opinions dramatically differ from those of other party members. The Alliance is the next most supportive of provincial powers. This is the only factor on which the Liberals fall at one end of the spectrum—the least supportive of increased provincial powers.

The range of variance among the parties is smallest on the populism factor. Nevertheless, there are still significant differences. Support for the populist position is strongest in the Alliance and weakest among the New Democrats and Conservatives. This is the only factor on which the Alliance and Conservatives are not neighbours; instead, they fall at opposite ends of the scale. The Liberals are closest to the overall mean.

An examination of the mean factor scores for each party indicates significant variance in attitudes among them. This is made evident by examining the variation in the parties' means as a percentage of the scale range for each factor. Table 5 displays the actual variance between the parties at each end of the factor scales, and the variance as a percentage of the scale range. The greatest variance is found on factor three (provincial powers), where the variance among the parties

---

34 Factor scores are calculated using mean values for missing cases.

TABLE 4

## Factor Scores by Party on Social Tolerance, Laissez-faire Economic Approach, Provincial Powers and Populism

	mean	standard deviation	N
<b>A. Factor One: Social Tolerance: Mean factor scores by party (higher scores indicate greater tolerance)</b>			
Bloc Québécois	.53	.82	410
New Democratic party	.48	.99	616
Liberal	.38	.85	905
Conservative	.00	.88	889
Overall	.00	1.00	3872
Canadian Alliance	-.80	.76	1052
<b>B. Factor Two: Laissez-faire Economic Approach: Mean factor scores by party (lower scores indicate greater support for laissez-faire approach)</b>			
New Democratic party	1.04	.71	616
Bloc Québécois	.16	.82	410
Liberal	.13	.79	905
Overall	.00	1.00	3872
Canadian Alliance	-.41	.92	1052
Conservative	-.45	.94	889
<b>C. Factor Three: Provincial Powers: Mean factor scores by party (lower scores indicate greater support for provincial powers)</b>			
Liberal	.42	.85	905
New Democratic party	.32	.72	616
Conservative	.13	.75	889
Canadian Alliance	.01	.69	1052
Overall	.00	1.00	3872
Bloc Québécois	-1.88	.69	410
<b>D. Factor Four: Populism: Mean factor scores by party (lower scores indicate greater support for populism)</b>			
New Democratic party	.16	1.0	616
Conservative	.16	1.1	889
Bloc Québécois	.14	.9	410
Liberal	.01	1.1	905
Overall	.00	1.0	3872
Canadian Alliance	-.34	.8	1052

covers 36 per cent of the range. However, this difference is largely attributable to the Bloc, as the variance for the other four parties equals only 7 per cent of the range. There is also substantial variance among the parties on factors one (tolerance) and two (*laissez-faire*). Here the variance is equal to approximately one fourth of each scale's range. The least variance is found on the populist measure, where the difference in party means is equal to only 9 per cent of the scale's range. This small variance is largely attributable to the Alliance party, the variance among the other four parties is less than 3 per cent of the range.

TABLE 5

Degree of Variance between Party Means on Each Factor

Factors	All Five Parties		Lib., Con., NDP	
	difference	as per cent	difference	as per cent
Social tolerance	1.33	23.0	.48	8.0
Laissez-faire economics	1.49	24.0	1.49	24.0
Provincial powers	2.30	36.0	.29	5.0
Populism	.50	9.0	.15	3.0

Differences in means between parties found at each end of factor scale, and the per cent of the scale range covered by the variance in means.

Using the factor scores we can also examine whether the presence of the two newer parties, the Bloc and the Alliance, has expanded the policy space among the parties. Recalculating the scores using only the Liberals, Conservatives and New Democrats, the two right-hand columns of Table 5 show that the percentage of the scale covered by the variance among parties drops dramatically when the Bloc and Alliance are removed from the analysis. On factor one, the variance is reduced from 23 to 8 per cent, on factor three from 36 to 5 per cent and on factor four from 9 to 3 per cent. The variance does not change on factor two, as the NDP and Conservatives are the outliers on this factor.

Although the findings in Table 5 suggest that the entry of two new parties into the system has substantially expanded inter-party policy difference, it is possible that the space among the parties has not in fact increased since 1993. It is possible that many current members of the Alliance and Bloc are former members of one of the other parties. If this is so, the departure of more ideological members to the new parties might shrink the policy distance among the three traditional parties. Indeed, 36 per cent of our Alliance respondents formerly



belonged to another federal party. Of that cohort, the vast majority (76%) were previously members of the Conservative party. Table 6 shows that these former Conservatives are more ideological than Alliance members as a whole on the first two factors which are by far the most significant in structuring party member attitudes. A number of Bloc members are also former Conservatives (about 8%), as are a few current Liberals and New Democrats. When all former and current Conservatives are considered together, they differ from the current Conservative members only marginally.

TABLE 6  
Factor Score Means for Canadian Alliance and Conservative Members

	Factors				N
	1	2	3	4	
Former Conservatives now belonging to Alliance	-.85	-.60	0	-.27	291
All Canadian Alliance members	-.80	-.41	.01	-.34	1052
All former and current Conservatives	-.17	-.44	.09	.07	1292
Current Conservative members	0	-.45	.13	.16	889

The overall mean on each factor is 0.

While it is true that a substantial portion of ideological Alliance members formerly belonged to the Conservative party, their views were substantially muted within that party as they were outnumbered by more moderate Conservative members. It was the most ideological members that left the Conservative party and joined with others to form the Alliance. In the new party, these former Conservatives are no longer in the minority but, rather, are members of a party that gives voice to their policy concerns, thus significantly expanding the range of variance among parties on our attitudinal factors.<sup>35</sup> The entry of two new parties also expands the dimensions of policy differentiation among the parties. Judging from the data in Tables 5 and 6, it is apparent that the change in the party system has not affected the economic dimension of attitudinal difference, but has opened up substantial space among parties on three other dimensions; of these, by far the most significant is tolerance.

35 Our sample includes 37 Bloc members who are former Liberals and 32 who are former Conservatives. These numbers are not large enough to draw meaningful conclusions about the ideological position of these cohorts.

*Is there substantial attitudinal coherence within the parties?*

A key characteristic of ideological parties is the substantial agreement on important policy questions exhibited by their members, whereas members of brokerage parties are characterized by competing views on the principal issues. Blake has written of brokerage parties: "We would expect such parties to contain activists with a variety of positions on policy issues, whose loyalty is secured by leaders skilled in the art of compromise. Many activists may not view a party as a policy vehicle at all."<sup>36</sup> Thus, if the Canadian parties fit the ideological model, there should be substantial coherence within them—particularly on the first two factors which are the most important in structuring members' views.

The data in Figure 1 allow us to draw several conclusions. First, on each of the factors, the most coherent party is one of the three newer ones. The Bloc is the most coherent on tolerance and provincial rights (factors one and three), the NDP on the economic factor (factor 2), and the Alliance on the populist measure (factor 4). We also note that the Liberals are not markedly different on most of these measures from the three new parties. Only on the populism factor are they substantially less coherent than the others. The Conservatives most resemble a brokerage party as they are at the high end of internal variance on the tolerance, economic and populist factors. Only on factor three, provincial rights, do they fall in the middle of the pack, with the Alliance and Liberals showing more internal variance.

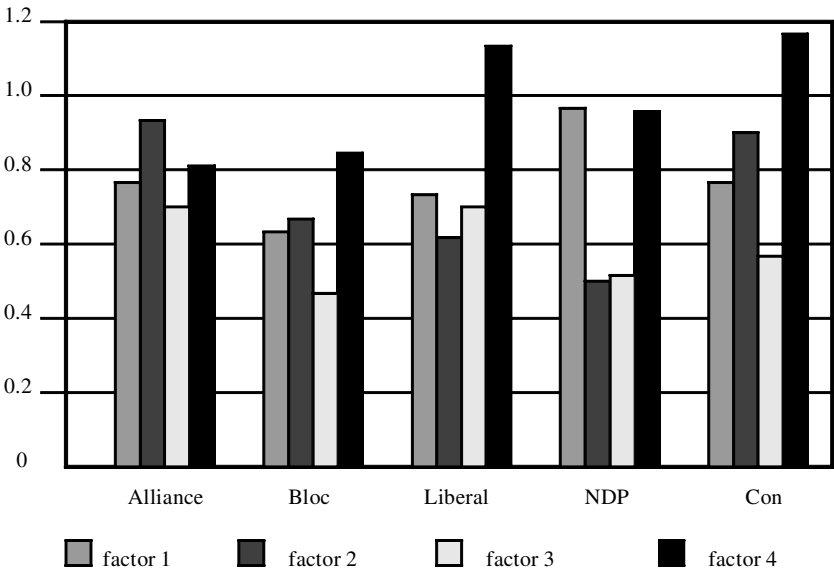
Examining the data by party, we see that the Alliance is most coherent on the provincial powers and tolerance factors and least so on the populism and economic measures. Not surprisingly, the Bloc is also most coherent on the provincial powers scale, and least so on the populism measure. The Liberals show their least variance on the economic scale and the most on the populism measure. The NDP is most coherent on the economic and provincial powers measures and least so on the tolerance and populism scales. The Conservatives are most coherent on the provincial powers question and least so on the populism factor.

Figure 1 illustrates that the emerging party system does not consist of two dramatically different types of parties. None of the parties is strongly coherent on all of the factors, and all of them demonstrate relative coherence on at least one factor. However, without being able to compare these data to similar earlier findings, it is impossible to conclude whether the system, and individual parties within it, are moving in a more ideological direction.

---

36 Blake, "Division and Cohesion," 33.

FIGURE 1  
Variance within Parties



## Conclusion

This study identified four key questions to determine whether there is a meaningful ideological component to the Canadian party system. The results indicate that the Canadian party system does manifest some of the characteristics of the ideological model. Partisans are attracted to membership at least partially on the basis of a party's policy positions. Also, there is an identifiable structure to party members' views. The four factors relating to social tolerance, laissez-faire economics, provincial powers and populism explain a significant proportion of the structure of party members' attitudes. There is substantial difference among the parties on each of the factors.<sup>37</sup> Finally, all of the parties are internally coherent on some factors and less so on others. While the policy attitudes of members of the newer parties are somewhat more coherent, members of the traditional parties are not all that different.

37 The next step in the study of party ideology will involve a comparison of the views of party members with each parties' voters. Other considerations besides party (region, ethnicity and class) explain some of the attitudinal variance. While it is beyond the scope of this article, subsequent analyses may consider these questions.

The data support the proposition that the Canadian Alliance and the Bloc Québécois are moving the system in the ideological direction. The presence of these two parties has significantly increased the attitudinal space covered by the major parties in the system, and has added new dimensions to the existing, predominantly economic, differentiation. These findings offer additional evidence to the argument made elsewhere that the new party system, first apparent after the electoral earthquake of 1993, is more ideological than its predecessors.<sup>38</sup>

The analysis is incomplete as it does not directly consider the manner in which parties conduct their electoral campaigns. A full consideration of this would examine matters such as the leaders' debates, campaign manifestos, advertising and leaders' speeches to determine whether the parties are presenting a more ideological face to voters during elections. While such analysis is beyond the scope of this article, the findings suggest that Canadian parties will find it increasingly difficult to operate in a brokerage fashion during election campaigns. When members of a party are motivated to join because of what they perceive to be a party's policy positions, and when the majority of members are in agreement with what the positions should be, party leaders will find it increasingly difficult to cast off party policy as the electoral winds change.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, as members play an increasing role in party decision making, the parties' electoral appeals will reflect the growing policy distance between their respective memberships.

A more ideological party system is consistent with the changing norms of democracy currently found among voters. There is evidence that Canadians are dissatisfied with elite-dominated brokerage politics, and want parties to stake out clear and distinct policy positions. While this may be defensible on democratic grounds in that it increases voters' options and potentially makes parties more accountable, it does jeopardize the accommodative practices of the brokerage model.

The important question, of course, is the implications of this phenomenon for Canadian politics. On one hand, the move toward a more ideologically driven party system conforms to the desire of the electorate for meaningful policy choices among parties and for parties with greater capacity for policy innovation. On the other hand, in a party system driven increasingly by ideology, less space is left for brokerage politics. If parties are attracting partisans by staking out specific policy positions and attempting to distinguish themselves from their competitors by expanding the distance among parties on policies,

---

38 See Carty, Cross and Young, *Rebuilding Canadian Party Politics*.

39 The Alliance party may have particular difficulty in adopting brokerage practices as it gives substantial decision-making authority to its membership. This membership holds strongly ideological positions and is largely attracted to the party because of its policies.

and if rank-and-file members are playing a more decisive role in party decision making, then the brokerage tradition is at risk. For example, on the provincial rights question, one of the most salient issues in public discourse in Canada, there is both substantial coherence within the parties, and substantial distance among them. Members of each party largely agree with one another on the issue, and there is substantial disagreement among members of different parties. It is precisely this sort of national issue that the brokerage model was meant to moderate by accommodating divergent viewpoints within each party, thus pushing them to the centre on the issue and weakening its political salience. In a country with regional and linguistic divides as sharp as those in Canada, a move away from a brokerage-based party system may be cause for concern. A more ideological party system may sharpen partisan differences over fundamental issues, rather than encourage accommodation.

### **Appendix: Questions Used in Factor Analysis**

*Which ONE of the following best reflects your view?*

1. Members of parliament should reflect the views of their constituents.
2. MPs should reflect the views of local party members.
3. MPs should reflect the views of party policy conventions.
4. MPs should reflect the direction established by the party leader.
5. MPs should vote as their conscience dictates.

*Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with the following:*

1. The government must do more to reduce the income gap between rich and poor Canadians.
2. We have gone too far in pushing equal rights in this country.
3. Overall, free trade with the United States has been good for Canada.
4. Health care user fees should be instituted as a cost-control measure.
5. Minority groups need special rights.
6. More should be done to protect Canadian business from foreign competition.
7. Quebec has the right to separate no matter what the rest of Canada says.
8. Employment insurance should be harder to collect than it is.
9. The government should leave it entirely to the private sector to create jobs.
10. Newer lifestyles are contributing to the breakdown of our society.

11. Universities should make up revenue short-falls by raising tuition fees.
12. Provincial governments should have more power than they do.
13. If people are willing to pay the price, they should be allowed to use private medical clinics.
14. Immigrants make an important contribution to this country.
15. International trade creates more jobs in Canada than it destroys.
16. We have gone too far in pushing bilingualism in this country.
17. We could probably solve most of our big national problems if decisions could be brought back to people at the grassroots.

*We are interested in knowing your views about how the federal government should allocate its budgetary surplus. Please rank the following alternative in order of priority from the highest priority (1) to the lowest priority (3):*

Increase spending on social programmes.

*Please indicate which of the following statements comes closest to your own opinion:*

1. All provinces should be treated equally, with none receiving special powers OR Quebec should be recognized as a distinct society.
2. If the courts say that a law conflicts with the Canadian Charter of Rights, who should have the final say—the courts, because they are in the best position to protect individual rights OR the government because they are the representatives of the people?
3. The feminist movement encourages women to be independent and stand up for themselves OR to be selfish and think only of themselves?