Merger as a Means to (Re-)Gain Office for Right-Wing Federal Parties in Canada

Jean-François Godbout
Northwestern University

Éric Bélanger
Université de Montréal

Like most other political parties, new radical right-wing parties generally aspire to public office in hope of implementing their policy preferences. As a consequence, they often seek to move away from the margins. One way for these parties to "go mainstream" is through organizational change, for instance by adopting new party rules, policies, strategies or structures.

The recent case of the Reform Party/Canadian Alliance in Canada provides an interesting illustration of the types of organizational changes that may be attempted by new radical right-wing parties in order to broaden their appeal. Founded in 1987, the Reform Party was a populist right-wing federal party whose roots were found mainly in Western Canada. The party's rhetoric attacked the existing political institutions of Canada and proposed radical changes within the federal system. Despite some efforts to win seats outside of the West and across all Canada, the new party met with only modest successes in its first three federal elections (1988, 1993 and 1997). In the course of this period, the Reform Party was able to secure no more than 20% of the national vote (and no more than 60 seats out of 301 in the House of Commons) and could not replace its closest competitor, the weakened but still competitive right-wing Progressive Conservative party (created in 1854). Reform's rhetoric was considered too extreme by the population and much change was needed within the party in order to unseat the ruling Liberals. Prior to the 2000 federal election, the Reform Party changed its name to the Canadian Alliance, adopted more moderate policy positions, and elected a new leader in an attempt to broaden its support base. The result was again disappointing, with the Alliance gaining only 66 seats and the Progressive Conservatives still winning 12 seats (and about 12% of the vote). Both parties soon realized that the only realistic way for the Canadian right to (re-)gain office was to have only one right-wing party

competing. Thus, they decided to merge into the new "Conservative Party of Canada" in October 2003.

Merger with another existing political party probably constitutes the most radical of organizational changes. It is also one of the least studied types of party change. What factors hinder or facilitate party mergers? This paper is an attempt to better understand this particular phenomenon in party politics by using the Reform Party/Canadian Alliance as a case study. Our explanation relies both on party change theory and partisan realignment theory. We argue that since the 1980s, federal party competition in Canada revolves around two policy dimensions, economic (left/right) and regional (centralization/decentralization). This important feature of recent party politics had two effects. It splintered the party system by sparking the creation of two new parties, one of these being the radical right-wing Reform Party. And for a decade, it prevented a merger from happening between Reform and the traditional Progressive Conservative party, until short-term forces acted to allow the vote-seeking goal of both parties to take prominence and facilitate the merger.

The paper proceeds in four steps. We first review the main events that led to the recent merger of the Canadian Alliance and the Progressive Conservatives in Canada. This section will open up the way to an analysis of the factors that directly led to the party merger. We first propose a bi-dimensional model of partisan issue cleavages in Canada to account for the current party system, and then turn to the important interplay between the vote-seeking and the policy-seeking goals of both parties to explain the elite decision to merge. We conclude with a discussion about the contributions of our analysis to our theoretical understanding of party mergers, and of organizational party changes more generally.

The Merger of the Canadian Alliance and the Progressive Conservative Party

In 1984, under the leadership of Brian Mulroney, the right-wing Progressive Conservative (PC) party was elected for the first time in twenty-five years with a majority government. This achievement was made possible by the far-ranging electoral coalition that PC leader Mulroney was able to build between Quebec and Western Canada. The previous Liberal government generated discontent in both regions at the beginning of the 1980s by repatriating the Canadian constitution from England without the province of Quebec's consent, and by imposing the National Energy Policy, a centralizing program that lessened the Western provinces' decision-making freedom with regards to the management of oil and gas resources. In his campaign, Mulroney tapped those feelings of regional alienation by promising to "bring Quebec back" within the Canadian federation by amending its constitution; and by pledging the abolition of the Liberals' NEP program. With the electoral support of both regions, the Progressive Conservative party was able to get into office with a landslide victory, winning 50% of the national vote and 75% of the seats in the House of Commons (see Table 1 for complete election results for the period 1984-2000).

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

This voter coalition soon collapsed, however (see Nadeau et al. 1995; Nevitte et al. 1995; Bickerton 1997). The Meech Lake constitutional accord, negotiated between the federal government and the ten provinces, provided Quebec with a "distinct society" status within the federation, but failed to be ratified in June 1990. This debacle directly sparked the creation of the Bloc Québécois, a sovereignist party that was to compete only in Quebec under the leadership of former Progressive Conservative Lucien Bouchard. A second constitutional agreement, the Charlottetown accord, was negociated in 1992 but rejected by the population in

a national referendum. In the West, both the Meech Lake and Charlottetown accords were perceived as giving "too much" to Quebec (see Johnston et al. 1996). This added to Western Canada's feeling of alienation which had already been fuelled by the Mulroney government's allocation of an important defence maintenance contract to Quebec over Manitoba in 1987. That same year, Preston Manning created the Reform Party which fielded candidates in the four Western provinces at the 1988 federal election.

The Reform Party basically started out as a Western populist formation whose discourse relied on radical right-wing policy stances (see Laycock 2002). The party expressed strong support for cutting or privatizing welfare programs, and proposed a plan for a dramatic slashing of the federal deficit. It was also in favour of "giving back" power to the people through mechanisms of direct democracy and reformed governmental institutions. Perhaps its most radical (and controversial) policy position was on the national issue. Reform was against the recognition of Quebec as a distinct society and against the maintenance of bilingualism as a defining feature of the Canadian federation. In a way, the Reform Party was situated at the complete opposite of the Bloc Québécois on the dimension of regional power.

Reform and the Bloc made significant inroads at the 1993 federal election, due in large part to these regional grievances (see Bélanger 2004). The Reform Party gained nearly 19% of the national vote and 52 seats, almost all of these in the Western provinces. It soon became clear, however, that the party was facing limited potential for expansion. In the following 1997 election, Reform captured only 6 more seats and still received about 19% of support. They were still unable to break into Ontario and they got next to no support in Quebec, where they presented a handful of candidates for the first time (in 11 out of 75 ridings). Some changes

were needed within the party in order to have a real chance at forming the next government, which was ultimately Preston Manning's ambition (see Flanagan 1995).

The Mulroney era left the Progressive Conservative party devastated. The PC was reduced to only two seats (from 169) in the Commons after the 1993 election. The party barely improved its situation in 1997, winning 20 seats. But, by getting about 16-19% of the national vote share, the PC was nonetheless cutting crucial support from the Reform Party, especially in Eastern Canada (Nevitte et al. 2000). In an attempt to broaden Reform's electoral base and out beat the Progressive Conservatives, Manning decided in 1998 to launch a "United Alternative" campaign, which aimed at promoting the idea of a new national conservative party that would attract support from other groups than the Reform Party's regionally and ideologically limited constituency (Carty et al. 2000, 56-59).

In early 2000, the United Alternative campaign led to the renaming of the Reform Party as the "Canadian Alliance." Also, a softer right-wing policy agenda was adopted; and a new leader, Stockwell Day, was selected as the replacement of Preston Manning. These efforts proved disappointing. In the fall 2000 federal election, the Canadian Alliance received around 25% of the national vote (a gain of 6-7 points compared to the previous two elections) but won 66 seats, only six more than in 1997. Again, this result was considered by the party as a partial failure. The Alliance was still considered too radical in its policy positions by a majority of Canadians (see Blais et al. 2002). In effect, the Alliance remained against the country's official bilingualism policy, and did not support more liberal issues like same-sex marriage.

This other electoral failure led Stephen Harper, newly elected leader of the Alliance in 2002, to propose a merger with the Progressive Conservatives. But Harper, a former Reform chief policy officer and MP, was generally considered to be too close to the Western radical

roots of the Reform Party. For four years, he headed the National Citizens' Coalition, a right-wing public advocacy group based in Alberta. In 2003, he was also the only federal party leader in Canada to support the war in Iraq in order to maintain the country's important political and economic ties to the United States. Despite weak results in the 2000 election, PC leader Joe Clark dismissed any talk of a merger with the Alliance, wanting to preserve his party's identity and believing that it could stand again in the near future as a credible alternative to the ruling Liberals.

However, Clark retired from politics and, in May 2003, Peter MacKay was elected new PC leader. Part of a new generation of Progressive Conservatives that believed that a merger with the Alliance was the only realistic way for the PC to regain office, MacKay proved to be more open than Clark to Harper's proposition. After two months of hard negotiations, both party leaders arrived at an historic agreement on October 15, 2003. The agreement proposed the merger of the two parties into a new right-wing formation named the Conservative Party of Canada. The merger became effective on December 7 when members from both parties approved of the project: 96% of Alliance and 90% of PC members voted in favour of the agreement. In March 2004, Stephen Harper won the new party's first leadership race and became leader of the Conservative Party of Canada.

Why the Two Parties Merged: Explaining Party Organizational Change

As Harmel and Janda (1994, 261) rightly assert, party change does not "just happen." Below, we identify a series of factors that can theoretically account for party merger, as applied to the case of the Reform/Alliance and Progressive Conservatives in Canada. Our explanation rests on a set of short and long term explanatory variables. The decision in

October 2003 to merge the two parties directly resulted from leadership change, from change in dominant faction within party, as well as from external stimuli. These short-term factors converged so as to allow both parties to better reach their vote-seeking goal, as opposed to their policy-seeking goal. But the merger of the two right-wing formations cannot be fully understood without taking into account important long-term factors. Changes in the federal party system, which resulted from the increased polarization of the Canadian electorate on two issue dimensions since the 1980s, have set the stage for subsequent party elite decisions in that they have created both opportunities and constraints for – or against – party merger.

These two theoretical approaches, the "discrete change" and the "system-level trends," offer complimentary explanations of party organizational change (Harmel 2002). We would further argue that a combination of both approaches is necessary in order to provide a complete and compelling account of such a radical organizational change as party merger. We begin our analysis of the Reform/Alliance and Progressive Conservative merger by looking at the long-term factors associated with the dynamics of the Canadian federal party system, before turning to the more short-term, goal-oriented decisions that allowed the merger to finally happen.

The Long-Term Factors: Partisan Issue Cleavages in a Bi-Dimensional Setting

Prior to the 1984 election, the federal party system in Canada was simply characterized by two major parties, the Liberal party and the Progressive Conservative party, competing in a traditional left/right policy dimension space – with a small third party on the left, the New Democratic Party. Because the NDP generally received weak electoral support and never won any election, the party system was qualified as "two-party-plus" (Epstein 1964). While the PC

was competitive and formed majority governments in the past, this federal party system was nonetheless dominated by the Liberal party, the latter being the natural "government party" (Whitaker 1977; also Bernard 1996) for most of the 20th century.[1]

Beginning with the 1984 election, however, this pattern of party competition has been dramatically altered. With the 1982 repatriation of the constitution and the two subsequent (but failed) attempts to amend its content so as to recognize a special status for Quebec, the Canadian policy space has been modified to include a new political dimension: the issue of the constitutional rights of Quebec (Nevitte et al. 1995; Flanagan 1998). This issue dimension first became salient when it was raised by Mulroney in the 1984 campaign in a strategic attempt at unseating the dominant Liberals. Thus, partisan issue cleavages in Canada went from a one-dimensional (economic) to a bi-dimensional (economic and regional) policy space.

In order to remove a party that seems to be the natural governing coalition in the electorate, an opposition party has two options. Either it can wait until the traditional ruling party is held responsible for major governmental failures (e.g., domestic and foreign policy crises or scandals). In this case, voters will punish the incumbent and look for any other viable alternative (Key 1966). This strategy cannot, however, guarantee that the opposition will become a permanent fixture in the government. Its ascension to power should rather be seen as a temporary disruption of partisan equilibrium. Given the preferences of the electorate – the distribution of party identification and ideology – the traditional ruling coalition should regain power pending a short period in the opposition. Furthermore, pressure from party activists will eventually force the new incumbent party away from the median voter (Aldrich 1983). This

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[1] Between 1921 and 2004, the Liberals have held power 64 years and have won 17 out of the last 24 elections.

may put the primary governing coalition at an advantage, since a majority of the electorate will ultimately prefer less extreme governmental policies (Downs 1957).

Another strategy for an opposition party consists of campaigning over an underlying salient issue (Burnham 1970; Sundquist 1983; Laver 1989, Schofield et al. 2003). This issue has to divide the electorate in two polarized groups. The greater the polarization and the size of the factions within the electorate, the greater the likelihood of breaking or weakening the traditional ruling coalition. It is important that these factions hold more extreme views on the new cross-cutting issue space. And, as the second dimension becomes more important relative to the more traditional economic issue dimension, the polarization within the electorate will increase (Miller and Schofield 2003; Theriault 2003). In the American case, we find such dividing issues by looking at race or social conservatism. In Canada, we have regional cleavages, such as Western alienation and the issue of English-French relations. Consequently, by introducing an issue considered to be more salient than traditional economic cleavages by an important segment of the electorate, an opposition party may improve its chances of getting (re-)elected. But the party is bound to run into some problems if it tries to unite newly polarized groups together; if it succeeds, however, it could well become the new natural governing party (Sundquist 1983; Riker 1986).

The main topic of the 1993 Canadian federal election outside Quebec was related to the state of the economy (Clarke and Kornberg 1996; Flanagan 1998). The same left/right economical cleavage was also identified as an important determinant of the outcomes of the 1997 and 2000 elections (Blais et al. 2002; Nevitte et al. 2000; Scotto et al. 2004). The Liberals have historically occupied the center, or the center-left, of the ideological spectrum in Canada. This position has given them an enormous advantage in terms of electoral support

since a majority of Canadians prefer more liberal economic policies (Blais et al. 2002). In order to win elections in the early 1980s, the Progressive Conservatives had no choice but to look for other avenues by which they could wage a successful political campaign and destabilize the center. Alternative salient issues like the alienation of Western provinces and the constitutional future of Quebec, which greatly polarized two regional segments of the electorate, were identified as such. The PC also promoted neo-conservative policies aimed at pleasing the more traditional financial and pro-business activists of the party. Consequently, by making regional cleavages more salient, the PC was able to get a substantial proportion of the vote in Quebec and to carry most of the Western ridings in the 1980s, while ultimately implementing some of its neo-conservative agenda (Bickerton 1997). On the short-term, then, this strategy proved successful at dislodging the traditional ruling Liberals.

However, as Sundquist explains in his study on the *Dynamics of the Party System* (1983), when two hostile factions emerge and locate themselves on opposite sides of the line of cleavage created by the introduction of a new political issue in the electorate, a party realignment is likely to occur. The extent of this party realignment will vary according to a number of factors. For example, "if the centrists are able to resolve the new issue before the polar groups have achieved significant growth, both major parties will survive and the realignment will be minor" (p.35). This is exactly what happened in the 1984 and 1988 elections in Canada. On the one hand, the Progressive Conservatives raised the salience of the constitutional reform issue in order to attract voters in Quebec, but ultimately failed at modifying the status quo and accommodating this province. On the other hand, they also tried to accommodate the Western provinces by abolishing the National Energy Program, only to discard the West in favor of Quebec in both the negotiation of a new constitutional agreement

and the awarding of a major defense maintenance contract. As Sundquist points out, "if the issue remains unresolved and public concern continues to grow, the polar forces will increase" and "if neither polar group can gain control of a major party […] then some elements of one or both polar groups may create a new party or parties" (p.36). In the Canadian context, the realignment produced the Reform Party and the Bloc Québécois, therefore altering the party system.

Thus far, the general theory on partisan realignment seems to explain well the dynamics behind the establishment of the 1993 Canadian federal party system. However, it fails to account for an important aspect of the Progressive Conservative strategy. In order to break the Liberals' coalition at the center, the Tories relied in 1984 on feelings of regional alienation and resentment felt by the Western provinces and by Quebec. In the years following their victory, they took position in favor of Quebec's rights by endorsing constitutional reforms. Hypothetically, they moved in the pro-French direction on a vertical issue dimension space (opposing a traditional left/right economic issue dimension space at the horizontal level). In contrast, the Liberal party remained at the center on both of these issues.

Figure 1 illustrates a hypothetical spatial model with two issue dimensions. Regional perception of alienation is found on the *y* axis, and left/right economic cleavage is located on the *x* axis. The colors represent the Progressive Conservatives (blue) and the Liberals (red); the letter Q stands for Quebec's position and W, the Western provinces' position. As we can see, both Quebec and the West have a high level of regional alienation. However, if we look at Figure 2, where the second dimension now represents the general feeling towards Quebec and the French-Canadian nation in general, we find an important cleavage between Quebec and the West. The increasing opposition on the vertical issue dimension space between the pro-

French (pro-Quebec) and the pro-English sentiment in the West could create an unbearable tension between Western and Quebec Conservatives. This is exactly what happened in the late 1980s when the schism appeared and precipitated the creation of the Reform Party and the Bloc Québécois.

[FIGURES 1 AND 2 ABOUT HERE]

Theories of realignment do not generally assume that the party who introduces a new salient issue within the electorate will polarize his own party supporters on that same dimension. In effect, Mulroney was successful in removing Quebec from the Liberal coalition in 1984. However, as Figure 2 illustrates, the regional alienation soon turned into a visceral debate between anti-French rhetoric in the West and nationalism in Quebec.

The regional alienation of Western provinces is not only directed towards the central province of Ontario, but also towards Quebec (see Henry 2002). Mulroney's Tories, by priming regional grievances in the 1984 campaign, wrongly assumed that Western and Quebec residents would find a common ground to work and correct the asymmetrical distribution of power within the federation. They did not anticipate that the Quebec provincial government would ask for the inclusion of a "distinct society" clause in the Meech Lake accord of 1987 as a sine qua non condition for Quebec to accept the repatriated Canadian constitution. And, partly as a result of this, Quebec was perceived by many Westerners to be part of the national unity problem. As history demonstrates, the new coalition brokered by Mulroney proved too hard to manage, and the strategy ultimately failed. Since 1993, the Reform/Alliance and the Bloc Québécois have owned the issue of regional grievances. As a result, the Progressive Conservatives have almost completely lost their support in Quebec and in the West. The Liberals, by slightly moving towards the right on the economic issue dimension and by

proposing the status quo on the constitutional question, further weakened the PC party's position. To win the 1993 election, the Liberals had only to collect the centrist votes without having to radicalize their political discourse on the constitutional issue.

We can find some empirical evidence of this party dynamic in the four spatial models presented in Figures 3 thru 6. The figures correspond each to a different Canadian election, and are based on survey results from the Canadian Election Studies (1988-2000). The x axis in the models corresponds to the traditional left/right economic issue dimension space. The y axis is characterized by a pro-French/pro-English scale. The data results represented in the plots are the average responses to a set of questions on the economy, and on the attitude of respondents towards Quebec.[2] Respondents were grouped in each election by the party they reported voting for. The positions of supporters on the left/right and pro/anti-French dimensions were then summed and averaged across party vote.[3]

[FIGURES 3 THRU 6 ABOUT HERE]

If we begin by looking at the 1988 election (Figure 3), we can clearly see that there is a traditional left/right economic cleavage in Canada. On the outmost left corner, we find the NDP. Closer to the center is the Liberal party, which appears to be leaning to the left.[4] The Progressive Conservatives are situated on the right of the Liberals. And finally, on the outmost right corner, we find the Reform party, which had a very limited number of supporters in 1988. The pro/anti-French issue dimension space is rather stable across the three main

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[2] See the Appendix for details; full data codings can be obtained from the authors upon request.

[3] This method for modeling issue positions according to party support is employed by both Johnston et al. (1992; 1996) and Flanagan (1998).

[4] In 1988, the Liberal party was overtly opposed to the Free Trade Agreement with the U.S., which put them on the left of the Progressive Conservatives (see Johnston et al. 1992).

Canadian parties. If we exclude the Reformists, a majority of the population in 1988 had a rather positive view of Quebec. However, the most interesting aspect of this spatial model is related to the position of the PC supporters in Quebec and in Western Canada on the pro/anti-French issue. We can clearly see an important gap between those two groups in Figure 3. However, since the constitutional dimension (the distribution of power between French and English) was not the main issue of the 1988 election (the Free Trade Agreement was), this regional disparity did not interfere with the outcome.

However, if we look at the 1993 election (Figure 4), we can see a drastic change in the relative equilibrium that was apparent in 1988. The Western and Quebec Conservatives shifted their support to the Reform Party and the Bloc Québécois, respectively. Disenchanted Tories voted according to their preferences on this new policy dimension. In the case of Bloc supporters, this was the defense of the French-speaking province's interests. In the case of Reform voters, this was to demonstrate their growing dissatisfaction with a pro-French Progressive Conservative party. It is interesting to note that on the left/right issue dimension space, the PC and the Reform Party occupy basically the same position as in 1988.

The 1997 results (Figure 5) essentially reproduce the previous party positions, except for Liberal supporters who have on average moved to the right of their previous centrist position.[5] In essence, this incumbent party shared the same left/right positioning as the Reform Party and was situated to the left of the PC party.[6] If the electorate had relied on a single issue dimension space (left/right), we would normally have expected the Progressive Conservatives

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[5] This is coherent with the anti-deficit, anti-debt rhetoric of the party in the years prior to the 1997 election (see Nevitte et al. 2000).

[6] The Reformists appear on the left of the Liberals. However, we can basically assume that they have the same position since a confidence interval of 95% gives us similar intervals: $16.82 \pm 1.96(.94) = [14.98, 18.66]$ for Liberals; $16.59 \pm 1.96(1.30) = [14.04, 19.04]$ for Reformists.

to win in 1997 because the center-right vote would have been somewhat split between Reform and the Liberals (Downs 1957). However, since part of the electorate was also divided over another issue (pro/anti-French), the Liberals were able to maintain control of the government.

Finally, the 2000 election presents another interesting case (Figure 6). Once again, we can see the important cleavage between the Canadian Alliance (formerly Reform) and the Bloc Québécois on the pro/anti-French issue. However, the Reform/Alliance supporters appear to have moved to a more extreme location on the economic right. It is also interesting to note the important shift in the Progressive Conservatives' position on the same left/right scale. Now this party is somewhat a little closer to the Liberals' position. It was not, however, able to make any significant gains in the 2000 election, primarily because "the PCs were burdened with debt, troubled fundraising, organizational deficiencies, and leadership controversies" (Woolstencroft 2001, 106). Despite this, it did manage to run a relatively good campaign and capture 12% of the national vote.

To summarize, these four figures identify three important characteristics of the new Canadian federal party system. First, it appears that a substantial proportion of the electorate is situated around the center on both the economic and constitutional issues. In effect, the Liberals were able to capture a plurality of the vote in three of the last four elections by occupying the political center. Second, it seems that the Reform/Alliance vote is mainly influenced by an "anti-French"-driven sentiment which dates back to the Mulroney government years, and which originated in Western Canada. Finally, it seems that the pro-French political dimension is also responsible for an important proportion of the federal vote in Quebec.

What does this all imply for the Canadian party system? On the short term, it guaranteed a multiparty system. Basically, the problem of the Reform Party in the 1990s was that it could not completely replace nor absorb the Progressive Conservative party. As this brief analysis demonstrated, the PC has captured around 15 to 20% of the vote in the last three Canadian elections, which is not enough to regain office but enough to keep reclaiming their place in the party system. These votes are what the Reform/Alliance needed in order to outset the Liberals. But while the extreme views that the Reformists hold towards Quebec guarantee them some success in the West, they also alienate them a significant proportion of voters on the right who prefer to support the more conciliatory Progressive Conservative party. Electoral failures in 1997 and 2000 ultimately proved to both PC and Reform/Alliance party elites that it would be impossible to dislodge the Liberals without some sort of unification. The fact that both parties finally agreed to merge strongly suggests that electoral goals ultimately triumphed over ideology.

The Short-Term Factors: Goal-Oriented Party Decisions

On top of that broader context, a series of factors all fell into place in 2003, that allowed both right-wing parties to unite under a new banner, the Conservative Party of Canada. In this section, we analyze these short-term factors, relying on a "discrete change" approach (e.g., Panebianco 1988; Harmel and Janda 1994; Bille 1997; Harmel 2002). Our analysis mostly applies Harmel and Janda's (1994) proposed theoretical framework and examines the impact of leadership change, change in dominant party faction and external stimuli, on the decision to merge parties. As a first step, we specify the goals each parties were

pursuing in recent years. Then, we examine the parties' decision to merge in the context of Harmel and Janda's model.

A discrete change analysis of party change is based on goal-oriented decisions. Therefore, the goal(s) pursued by the parties must first be identified. Harmel and Janda propose four possible party goals: vote maximizing, office maximizing, policy/ideology advocacy, and representation/participation of members. It appears obvious that the merger of the PC and the Reform/Alliance did not involve the latter goal (intraparty democracy). It was not based on office maximizing either. Unlike in proportional systems, parties in Canada cannot "maximize" the number of ministries held because of the first-past-the-post electoral framework: only the winner of a plurality of seats forms the government.[7]

We argue that both parties pursued vote-seeking and policy-seeking goals during the 1990s-early 2000s. Harmel and Janda's theory, however, requires that a "primary" party goal be identified. Which goal was primary for the PC and for the Reform/Alliance, respectively? We believe that both goals were important, but that it is the relative asymmetry between those two goals – in terms of importance, or primacy – that explains the decision to merge (or not to). Up until 1993, the Progressive Conservative party was considered as one of the two major federal parties in Canada and, like the Liberal party, it has never been characterized as a strong ideological party (Bernard 1996; Brodie and Jenson 1996). As such, it has primarily been a vote-maximizing party but, as will be shown, its fight to differentiate itself from the Reform Party during the 1990s resulted in policy advocacy. As for the Reform/Alliance, the party started as policy-seeking, but ultimately shifted to vote-seeking at the end of the 1990s.

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[7] Informal coalitions can be formed in Canada when the governing party does not hold a majority of parliamentary seats, but such coalitions do not involve the awarding of ministerial portfolios to coalition partners.

The Reform Party was created in the 1980s as a result of ideological impulses. Since part of the Western electorate felt unrepresented by the major federal parties, Preston Manning and his supporters proposed radical and populist right-wing policies to address some of these concerns. In addition, Reformists believed that since the PC had sold out to Quebec, it was not paying enough attention to the Western people's interests. Thus, Reform's constituency held slightly different positions than the PC (or any other existing federal party) on both dimensions of the policy space discussed in the preceding section.

Manning's party did a fine job of representing its constituency's policy views. But Reform's performance in achieving its policy-seeking goal ultimately proved unsatisfactory because the party was never able to gain office in order to implement its right-wing policy agenda and bring about the "New Canada" that Manning advocated since 1987. The disappointing outcome of the 1997 election was crucial in that respect. The launch of the United Alternative campaign signaled a shift in the party's goals towards a vote-maximizing strategy. The party was now determined to shed its image of a regional protest party and to call for a broader support base. Pressures for party change resulted in a new name for the party (the Canadian Alliance), a new leader (Stockwell Day), and a slightly moderated policy platform prior to the 2000 election. However, these changes in party organization proved insufficient to outset the Progressive Conservatives. The PC's continued presence in the 1993, 1997 and 2000 elections, as well as its modest electoral successes left the Alliance (and its new leader Stephen Harper) with only one viable option: to form a merger with the Progressive Conservative party. In other words, the vote-seeking goal required the Reform/Alliance to sacrifice part of its radical ideological platform in order to succeeded electorally.

At first, the Progressive Conservatives were not interested in such a merger because of a series of important factors. Harmel and Janda suggest that an "external shock" to the party is often the main trigger for party change. The Reform/Alliance's external stimulus to propose a merger with the PC party was actually the latter's resilience in the Canadian political landscape; but this can hardly be characterized as a "shock." In the case of the Progressive Conservatives, however, such an external shock occurred in the form of the 1993 electoral defeat. In a single election, the PCs went from a majority of seats to only two, and their share of the national vote dropped from 43 to 16% (see Table 1). Moreover, they lost parts of their traditional constituency to two newly-born competitors, the Reform Party and the Bloc Québécois. This electoral shock deeply affected their vote-seeking performance.

How could the Tories recuperate from this shock and regain some grounds at the polls? The PC party could have increased its support by strategically moving on one or both of the salient policy dimensions. Unfortunately, because of the presence of the Liberals on the left and of the Reform on the right, there was not much space for the party to move on the economic spectrum. And the PC could not change its position on the Quebec issue either because it had just alienated Quebec and Western voters with the failures of both the Meech Lake and the Charlottetown constitutional accords. In other words, the Progressive Conservatives had lost any credibility and could not play the regional alienation card anymore in order to appeal to Canadian voters. Besides, the Reform/Alliance and the Bloc appealed more to Canadian regional votes. With the Liberals now back as the natural governing coalition, and without any possibility of polarizing the electorate, the Progressive Conservatives faced a dead end. Either the party could disappear, or it could form an alliance with the Reform Party.

The PC elite, however, chose neither of these options. Indeed, two other factors came into play after the 1993 electoral shock to obstruct a potential alliance. The first of these variables is the party's age (Harmel and Janda 1994, 282). The longevity of a party usually acts against organizational party change because the party has become institutionalized over time. The Progressive Conservative party's origins dates back to the mid-19th century, even before Canada became an independent colony of the United Kingdom. In contrast, the newly-formed Reform/Alliance was more inclined to experiment with organization reforms, and thus in favor of a merger. This is partly why the PC party was less tempted by organizational merger.

Furthermore, the leaders of the dominant faction within the Progressive Conservative party were themselves less open to the idea of a merger since they had a strong feeling of attachment towards their party. As Panebianco (1988, 217) explains, "The competitor in laying claim to another party's hunting ground, threatens the latter's identity and destabilizes it; its dominant coalition's only defence is to be hostile. It must deny the competitor's claim to the hunting ground in order to preserve its identity." This is exactly what PC leaders did during the 1990s. Especially with the election in 1998 of Joe Clark as leader (who had already been at the head of the PC party in the 1970s), this more traditional faction offered resistance to change and preferred to emphasize policy seeking in order to differentiate themselves as much from the Reform Party as possible. They refused to merge because of different ideologies, notably on the issue of Quebec's place within the Canadian federation. But, as we argued, the party's freedom in moving on either policy dimensions was greatly reduced.

Continued poor electoral performance was enough to demonstrate to some within the PC party that the dominant anti-merger faction had to be replaced in order to pursue vote-

seeking goals. The possibility of a change in dominant faction came with the leadership race of May 2003. The race principally opposed David Orchard, an ally of Joe Clark, to Peter MacKay, a young Tory MP. After much fighting, Orchard accepted to retire from the race and support MacKay only if the latter pledged that he would not attempt to merge with Stephen Harper's Canadian Alliance. MacKay agreed and became the new PC leader. Despite the no-merger pledge, the election of Peter MacKay as leader meant that a new faction, one that was more open to an alliance with Harper, was now in control of the party. This faction – among them five provincial Premiers, a former Tory Ontario Premier, and Brian Mulroney himself – applied strong pressures on the new leader, who eventually broke his promise and agreed to initiate talks with the Alliance in the Summer of 2003.[8]

To summarize, the decision of the Reform/Alliance and the PC party to merge is better understood when we take into account the incentives and constraints of both parties. This decision was ultimately based on vote-maximizing goals. The radical right-wing Reform Party tried to broaden its support base at the end of the 1990s, hoping to enhance its chances of electoral success by changing the party's name. When this strategy failed, the Reform/Alliance proposed a merger with the Progressive Conservative party. However, additional resistance to the idea of a merger came from the Progressive Conservatives. Despite a major external shock (the 1993 electoral debacle) which undermined the vote-seeking performance of the party, two factors worked against the party merger. These were the institutionalization of the PC party, and the organizational dominance of the old Tory elite. It

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[8] When the two parties merged in October 2003, David Orchard and some anti-merger activists went to the court asking authorization to keep their party alive with the name still "Progressive Conservative Party." The court denied them their wish. They are now asking Elections Canada for the same; a decision is pending.

was only when this dominant faction and its leader were replaced in 2003 that a window of opportunity opened for a merger.[9]

Conclusion

The merger of the Canadian Alliance and the Progressive Conservative party may appear as a successful venture. Nevertheless, this alliance has only put the newly formed Conservative Party of Canada right back to where the Tories stood prior to the 1984 election. In a sense, the Conservatives are still on the right of the Liberals on economic policies, and they can always count on substantial support from Western voters. Quebec, however, is no longer a central part of the Liberal coalition – just like it was after the repatriation of the constitution in 1982. But it is the Bloc Québécois, not the Tories or the Liberals, that collects the votes of perceived regional grievances in that province. Overall, the 2004 Canadian federal party system is very much like the status quo ante of 1984, with the exception of the Bloc Québécois' presence.

It is also important to note that the second issue dimension over regional cleavages remains salient in Canada today. The Bloc has not yet exited the federal party system. And the unification of the right has done nothing to resolve this issue. Judging from recent polls, the sovereignty movement still has strong support in the French-speaking province.[10] If anything, the newly formed Conservative Party will try to minimize the issue of regional alienation in the upcoming election. However, this will prove hard to accomplish since the sole purpose of the Bloc Québécois is to campaign in favor of Quebec's constitutional rights. Unlike

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[9] Panebianco (1988, 218) argues that the least stable alliances are those that take place among ideologically similar parties; the future of the Conservative Party of Canada will tell if he is right on that point.

[10] About 47% are in favor of sovereignty, from a January 2004 Léger Marketing poll.

Mulroney's party in the 1980s, the Conservatives will not have the capacity to claim any significant role in defending Quebec's interests within the confederation. As we write, the Conservative Party's merged policy platform has yet to be drafted, but as some of the recent claims made by the new party's leader Stephen Harper indicate, the party is not about to embark on a crusade to defend Quebec's rights any time soon. The paradox here lies in the fact that Mulroney needed Quebec in order to dislodge the Liberals in 1984, just like Harper needs the same province today if he hopes to form a majority government.

As we argued, to unseat a natural governing coalition, an opposition party has one of two choices: either it can wait for the incumbent to stumble and fall on the traditional economic policy dimension, or it can prime more risky policy concerns like minority rights, religion, or regional conflicts in an attempt to polarize the electorate on a cross-cutting issue. It remains important to understand why parties might prefer the riskier second strategy over the more conservative method of winning elections. This gets back to Harmel and Janda's model of vote-seeking and policy-seeking party goals. In the case of Canada, it was almost impossible for the PC party to dislodge the Liberals from power and hope to form a lasting governing coalition simply by relying on the grievances produced by traditional economic cleavages. Since the Liberals (as well as a majority of the electorate) occupied the policy center on this issue dimension, the Tories had no choice but to campaign over a new salient issue and hope that this tactic would weaken part of the ruling coalition. As the 1984 and 1988 election outcomes demonstrate, this strategy succeeded. It realigned an important proportion of Quebec and Western voters towards the Progressive Conservative party.

It remains difficult to determine if the Conservative party agenda of the 1980s has really been oriented towards a vote-seeking or a policy-seeking strategy. In 1984, the Tories

proposed to accommodate Quebec on the constitutional issue in order to gain support from that province, which corresponded to a vote-seeking behavior. But by doing so, they condemned themselves to pursue a policy-based approach in order to satisfy their new partisan clientele once elected. This was guaranteed by Quebec Tory MPs, who pushed for constitutional reforms that led to the failed Meech Lake and Charlottetown accords. We believe that the same type of problems may arise within the newly formed Conservative Party. By merging, both right-wing party elites pursued vote-seeking goals in order to unite the Canadian right and present a viable alternative to the Liberal party. But one has only to look at the supporters of the Conservative Party in Western provinces to understand that regional alienation will inevitably resurface in that region as a salient electoral or post-electoral issue. And re-election incentives will certainly motivate an important proportion of Western Tory MPs to address this concern in the House of Commons.

In other words, our analysis has served to illustrate the partial endogeneity inherent to Harmel and Janda's model. First, electoral shocks such as the one experienced by the Progressive Conservatives in 1993 are not entirely "external," and sometimes can result from the party's own strategic behavior. This situation is different than one where the shock would be due, for instance, to the collapse of communism. Second, our analysis has also revealed a cyclical interplay between vote-seeking goals and policy-seeking goals (in terms of their primacy to the party). This phenomenon was obvious in the case of the PC party, but also occurred in the case of the Reform/Alliance. Once Manning and his supporters realized that in order to enhance their chances of forming a national government, the party had to soften its radical right-wing discourse, they tried to tone down their official position on a number of

issues. However, it was this neo-populist agenda that had guaranteed the party's core electoral successes in the beginning.

How can we explain the fact that we have recently seen an increase in political campaigns centered around cultural, regional, ethnic, or religious issues in Western democracies? We believe that the answer lies in vote-seeking strategic politicians. Only a limited amount of issues are salient enough in the general electorate to be perceived as being more important than economic well-being. In order to wage a successful electoral campaign, politicians in the opposition, facing a well-established centrist party on the economic issue dimension space, have no choice but to try and break up that ruling coalition by using alternative electoral cleavages. In effect, if the strategy works, they will ultimately have to address the issues of their campaign. This will lead them to become policy seekers rather than simple vote seekers. In return, this may ultimately produce an increase in electoral polarization and a division of the party system, as the Canadian case demonstrates. Unless the new issue is resolved quickly, a party that wins office by introducing a second salient dimension can never hope to pursue a pure vote-seeking strategy in the next elections.

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Appendix: Summary of Spatial Models

1988 Election

Political Party	Left/Right cleavage (union-opinion on Free Trade)	Pro-French (Opinion towards French Canadians)
Liberal Party	51.81 (.98)	66.03 (.84)
Conservative Party	43.80 (.74)	66.73 (.68)
New Democratic Party	64.78 (1.08)	65.62 (1.05)
Reform Party	36.40 (3.20)	48.83 (3.10)
National Results (n=2869)	49.83 (.49)	65.41 (.42)

1988 Election: Quebec/West

Political Party	Left/Right cleavage (union-opinion on Free Trade)	Pro-French (Opinion towards French Canadians)
Conservative Party PQ	46.45 (.45)	78.36 (1.00)
Conservative Party WEST	41.29 (1.24)	59.02 (1.21)

1993 Election

Political Party	Left/Right cleavage (union-big business)	Pro-French (Opinion towards the province of Quebec)
Liberal Party	-10.90 (.85)	63.43 (.75)
Conservative Party	-21.39 (1.26)	63.00 (1.28)
New Democratic Party	14.67 (2.15)	57.73 (2.08)
Reform Party	-21.01 (1.27)	52.24 (1.14)
Bloc Québécois	-10.00 (1.27)	86.20 (.81)
National Results (n=3282)	-11.97 (.51)	63.24 (.47)

1997 Election

Political Party	Left/Right cleavage (union-big business)	Pro-French (Opinion towards the province of Quebec)
Liberal Party	-16.82 (.94)	62.65 (.90)
Conservative Party	-24.20 (1.40)	64.57 (1.27)
New Democratic Party	11.80 (2.05)	62.84 (1.73)
Reform Party	-16.59 (1.30)	48.09 (1.34)
Bloc Québécois	-9.38 (1.55)	81.98 (1.07)
National Results (n=3017)	-13.73 (.53)	60.36 (.51)

2000 Election

Political Party	Left/Right cleavage (union-big business)	Pro-French (Opinion towards the province of Quebec)
Liberal Party	-8.78 (1.22)	58.06 (.86)
Conservative Party	-8.97 (2.3)	58.66 (1.6)
New Democratic Party	20.08 (2.38)	60.68 (1.68)
Canadian Alliance (Reform)	-18.37 (1.37)	51.89 (1.09)

| Bloc Québécois | -15.03 (2.52) | 76.54 (1.21) |
| National Results (n=2762) | -9.0188 (.66) | 58.09 (.47) |

Note (1): Standard error of the mean in parenthesis, actual mean reported.

Note (2): The entries are based on data from four Canadian Election Studies (1988-2000). The pro/anti-French dimension is simply a measure of the attitude of the respondents towards the province of Quebec (scale 1-100 reported as is). In 1988, this question asked for the opinion of French Canadians which, under these circumstances, can be considered to be an adequate proxy measure. For the left/right cleavage dimension, we used three different measures because of question availability in each survey. The 1988 scale measures the opinion towards unions (scale 1-100) minus the opinion towards the Free Trade Agreement (no scale available, construction of an ordinal variable 0, .5, 1; disagree, somewhat agree, agree strongly). The 1993 and 1997 measures are just the difference between opinion towards unions (scale 1-100) minus opinion towards big business (1-100); the actual mean of the difference is reported here. The 2000 measure is somewhat different; it modifies a question which asked respondents to tell if they approved or disapproved of big business (disapprove strongly 0; somewhat .25; neutral .5; somewhat approve .75; very much 1). The difference between this scale and the union scale is reported here.

Note (3): The second table represents the average for all respondents who voted for the Progressive Conservative party in Quebec, and in the West (British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba).

**Table 1. Votes and Seats in Canadian Federal Elections, 1984-2000**

|		Votes (%)	Seats (n)
1984	Liberal Party	28.0	40
	Progressive Conservative Party	50.0	211
	New Democratic Party	18.8	30
1988	Liberal Party	31.9	83
	Progressive Conservative Party	43.0	169
	New Democratic Party	20.4	43
	Reform Party	2.1	0
1993	Liberal Party	41.3	177
	Progressive Conservative Party	16.0	2
	New Democratic Party	6.9	9
	Reform Party	18.7	52
	Bloc Québécois	13.5	54
1997	Liberal Party	38.5	155
	Progressive Conservative Party	18.8	20
	New Democratic Party	11.0	21
	Reform Party	19.4	60
	Bloc Québécois	10.7	44
2000	Liberal Party	40.9	172
	Progressive Conservative Party	12.2	12
	New Democratic Party	8.5	13
	Canadian Alliance	25.5	66
	Bloc Québécois	10.7	38

Source: Elections Canada.

Figure 1. Bi-Dimensional Policy Space in Canada, with Regional Alienation Dimension

Y axis, Regional alienation

X axis, Economic dimension
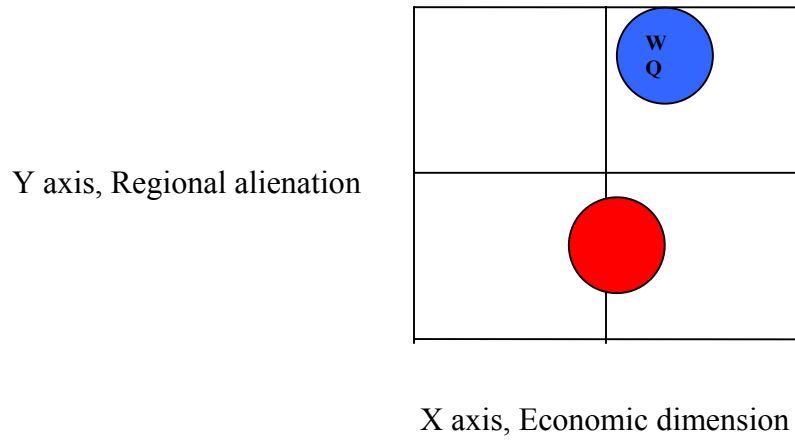
Figure 2. Bi-Dimensional Policy Space in Canada, with Pro/Anti-Quebec Dimension

Y axis, Pro/Anti-Quebec

X axis, Economic dimension
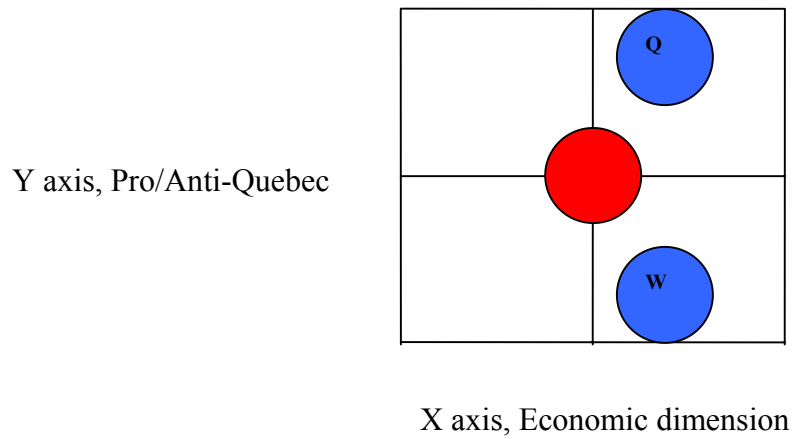
Figure 3. The 1988 Election, Spatial Model
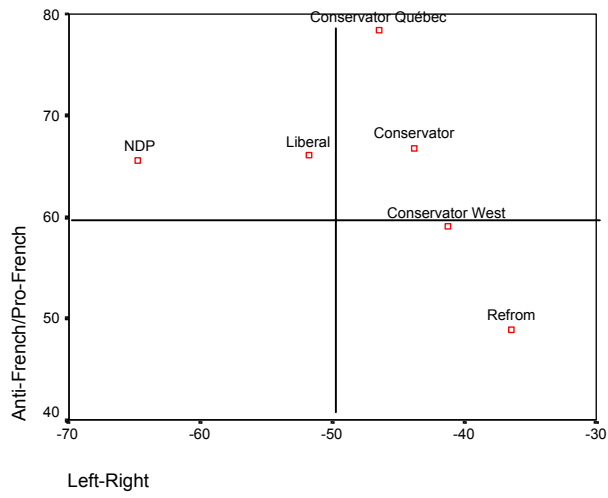
Figure 4. The 1993 Election, Spatial Model
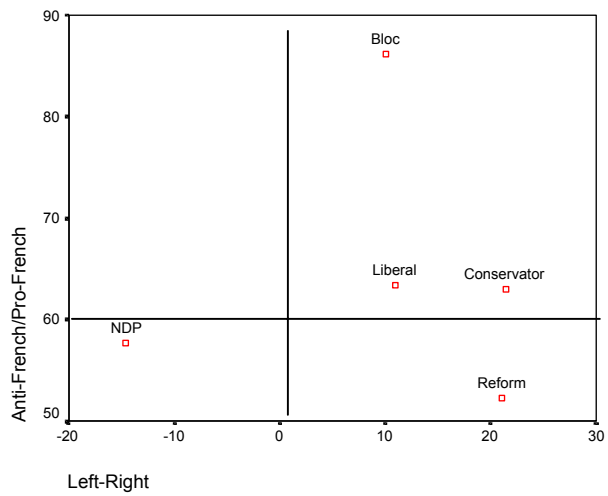
Figure 5. The 1997 Election, Spatial Model
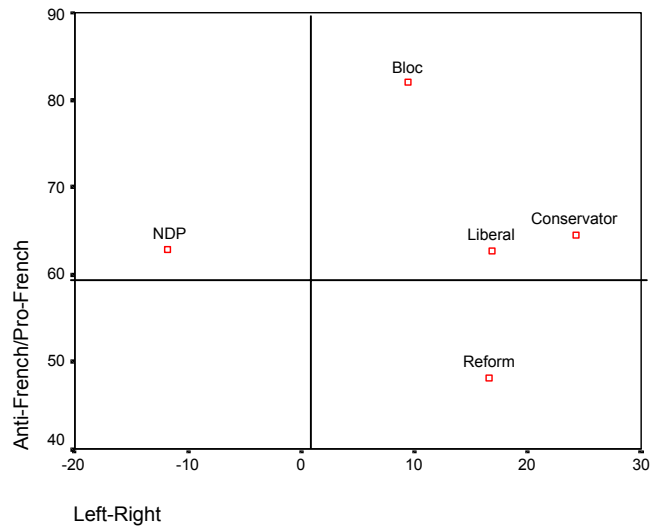
Figure 6. The 2000 Election, Spatial Model