

Patterns of Federal-Provincial Party
Membership in Canada since 1993

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Comments Welcome

Introduction

The nature of federal¹ party membership in Canada has been transformed in two fundamental ways in the period of electoral dealignment following the 1993 national election. First, party members experienced increasing involvement in party affairs, particularly in the Reform Party/Canadian Alliance. (Young and Cross 2002, 678) As a result, individual party members in the post-1993 party system have more influence over party decision-making than their pre-1993 predecessors. (Carty 2004, 16-17) Second, the 1993 dealignment presented new choices to Canadians who wished to continue or become party members. Many previous members of the “traditional” parties as well as individuals who had never before held party memberships became members of new parties.

A corollary of this consideration is the changing *federal* nature of party membership. As members have switched parties or joined largely single-level parties at the national level, their membership in provincial parties has increasingly been confused along partisan lines. As individual membership has become less consistent across federal levels, the nature of the party organizations of which these members are a component has also become more complex.

¹ During the course of this paper we use the term “federal” to refer to concepts that are related to federal arrangements rather than to the federal level in Canada’s particular arrangements. Instead, we use the terms “national” and “provincial” to refer to the different levels.

This paper is a preliminary attempt to make sense of federal party membership in the period following the 1993 electoral dealignment of the national party system. In doing so, it focuses on two variables: individual party members and party organizations, and asks: How did Canadians react to the 1993 dealignment in their choices of party membership across federal levels? And what were the consequences of this for Canadian political parties, particularly for how they organize themselves across federal lines?

In addressing these questions, we follow in the tradition of deriving theoretical insights from other disciplines and other areas of political science and applying them to new phenomena. (Shively 1990, 165) We first outline a range of models derived from research conducted on party identification and party organizations in federal states, particularly in Canada, to assist in understanding the nature of party membership in such states. Then, we use descriptive statistics to examine the extent to which national and provincial party memberships overlap or are distinctive, and how this varies across parties. In these discussions we are primarily interested in addressing the specifics of how it is that individuals and party organizations adapted to the new realities of the post-1993 party system. We conclude by speculating on the questions our observations raise and further avenues of research.

While the data utilized restricts our analysis to Canadian party members and is thus not comparative, this paper does not constitute simply a narrative of the Canadian party system in the year 2000. Rather, it adapts existing theoretical

frameworks to the study of party membership in federal Canada. We view Canada in the post-1993 period as an ideal disaggregated federal party system; the methods used in this paper are fully generalizable to other federal states with aggregated and disaggregated federal party systems alike. Further, with the arguable rise of a new party system in the 2004 national election, it is now possible to begin telling the story of the post-1993 party system. The federal nature of party membership and party organization represents a significant component of that story.

Concepts

The literature dealing with individual party membership consists primarily of studies of party identification. With respect to party organization, we frame the discussion in terms of the determinants of organizational centralization versus decentralization.

Models of Federal Party Identification

Party identification consists of four dimensions: direction (Weisberg 1980), intensity (Petrocik 1974), durability (Campbell et. al 1964), and consistency. Consistency refers to whether individual party identification is identical at both levels of the federal state or whether that identification differs between the two levels. (Jennings and Niemi 1966)

The transfer of models of party identification from the U.S. to Canada has not been without controversy. Early observers noted that party identification in Canada was as unstable as vote choice itself. (Meisel 1972, 67; Regenstreif 1965). A challenge

from Sniderman, Forbes, and Melzer (1974) contributed to further discussion on the applicability of the party identification framework to Canada, although later works have tended to maintain that party identification is not a particularly strong determinant of the vote in Canada.

Nevertheless, and no doubt partially because of the omnipresence of federalism in Canadian political science (Simeon 2002, ix), studies of party ID in Canada have tended to focus upon the consistency aspect of that measure. In an early study, Clarke, LeDuc, Jensen, and Pammett identified a high degree of inconsistent partisanship and found that such inconsistency was identified with partisan instability. (1979) Blake, however, contested this finding, pointing out that is unreasonable to expect partisan consistency when party system divergence between the two levels does not permit it. (Blake, 1982) As he notes, “some voters may operate from the same attitudinal or ideological perspectives in both federal and provincial politics but adopt different ties at the two levels because the *parties* are not consistent between levels.”² (710) Other works have addressed the determinants of inconsistent partisanship. Clarke and Stewart argue that federalism itself may provide individuals with an institutional incentive (rather than simply an opportunity) to develop inconsistent partisan identities. (384) Addressing other potential causes of consistent or inconsistent partisanship, Uslander claims that sociopsychological orientations

² Engelmann and Schwartz concur with this view.

cannot explain partisan consistency or inconsistency (978) while Clarke and Stewart conclude that party identification does not parallel societal cleavages in Canada. (386)

It is important to keep in mind that these ongoing scholarly debates have been conducted using a remarkably coherent and agreed-upon vocabulary which involves consistent and inconsistent partisanship as well as dual, split, and single-level partisans. This vocabulary makes up the model that political scientists have used to address the federal nature of party identification, which has been extended to voters (Courtney and Smith, 1966; Perlin and Peppin, 1971) and can naturally be extended to party members. Utilizing individual party members as units of analysis, one can distinguish between three ideal types of party members: single-level members, dual-level members, and split-level members.³

Single-level members are those individuals that hold a membership in a party at one level but not at the other level. In this analysis, the limitations of the data necessitate classification of single-level members as national party members but not provincial party members, although the inverse is certain to exist. (Ursini and Jacek, 2001) Even the act of single-level membership in and of itself may betray certain characteristics or orientations of such members, such as an exclusive interest in the politics of a single level or an attraction to a certain leader or party at one or the other level, although further analysis would be required to demonstrate this.

³ While Niemi, Wright, and Powell, for example, distinguished between consistent and multiple identifiers, Blake (1982) distinguishes between single-level, consistent, and split identifiers.

Dual-level members hold memberships in both national and provincial parties, but these parties are of identical partisan affiliation. Thus, an Albertan with simultaneous memberships in the national and provincial Progressive Conservative (PC) parties would be considered a dual-level member. Like single-level membership, dual-level membership would appear to betray certain characteristics of an individual, including a strong commitment to partisan affiliation although, as before, this cannot be substantiated without further analysis.

In Canada, dual-level membership has traditionally been considered the norm, due in no small part to the organizational integration of parties which have considered membership at one level to entail membership at the other (the New Democratic Party (NDP) is organized in this manner). This norm was affected by two trends, the first toward divergence of national and provincial party systems (Blake, 1985) and the second toward a “disentangling” of national and provincial party organizations, (Carty, Cross, and Young, 23) both of which eased the bonds between national and provincial parties that encouraged dual-level membership and discouraged split and single-level membership.

The third type of engagement with federalized party systems is split-level membership, where individuals hold memberships at both levels of a federal state, but not of identical partisan affiliation. Party system divergence and the increasing separation of national and provincial party organizations contribute to the likelihood of such membership patterns. Split-level membership may well be a rational response

to both party system divergence as well as ideological differences between national and provincial parties of identical partisan affiliation. (Blake, 1982) While this explanation has been utilized to explain split-level party identification in Canada, it is perhaps even more plausible with regard to party membership. Membership would appear to involve a stronger cognitive commitment to party than does simple identification.

Models of Federal Party Organization

In exploring the nature of party organization, writers such as Ostrogorski (1964) and Michels (1959) focused on the role of party members, examining the power balance between them and party leaders. Later models of party organizations such as Kirscheimer's catch-all party, Panebianco's electoral-professional party, and Katz and Mair's cadre party assumed that party members were unnecessary to the success of parties and perhaps even a road-block to electoral success.⁴ As new technologies converted campaigning from a labor to a capital-intensive enterprise (the contagion from the right thesis), parties increasingly turned to the state rather than members for funds. (McKenzie 1995, 591; Epstein 1967, 148) In addition, increasing affluence broke down social and class identities which would previously have motivated individuals to join parties and dissuaded potential members from taking on the limited roles parties afforded them as members in favor of roles in new

⁴ On the undesirability of party members, see: John May. "Opinion Structure of Political Parties: The Special Law of Curvilinear Disparity." *Political Studies*. 21 (1973): 135-151.

social and pressure groups. (Katz 1990, 144) Party members thus fell from sight, only to be rediscovered when it was noticed that they were generally gaining influence within party organizations, this despite an aggregate fall in numbers. (Mair 1994; Mair and van Biezel 2000) Several explicit studies of party members have since appeared, many arguing that party members may be more useful than previously thought. (von Beyme 1982; Ware 1992; Scarrow 1996)

In Canada, the prevailing wisdom on the organizational nature of political parties is that they tend to reflect the decentralization of the state's federal arrangements: integration of the national and sub-national party functions is rare and the outright separation of party organizations at the two levels is increasingly common. Thus, parties tend to reinforce the "two political worlds" thesis, where voters draw a strict boundary between their behaviors at the two levels of government. (Blake, 1985)

Or do they? Our research suggests that at least a single component of party organization in Canada, that of the party membership, tends to reinforce ties between national and provincial parties. This occurs regardless of the formal declarations of party leaderships and, reflecting the increasing divergence of the national and provincial party systems following 1993, oftentimes takes place between parties of differing names at the two levels. Thus, while the prevailing wisdom is correct in identifying separation of national and provincial parties at the formal level, party members represent a crucial organizational linkage between parties at the two levels.

On the basis of the proportion of party members that are single, dual, or split-level members, we can apply an organizational classification in order to classify parties on a continuum from split to unitary parties. In addition, we can identify truncated parties.

The distinction between these ideal types of parties is based upon the extent to which the parties are integrated across federal levels, or, in this case, the extent to which national and provincial parties share members. A split party would share either no or very few members across levels, while a unitary party would share either all or a very high proportion of members across levels. Confederal and integrated parties make up a middle ground between these two ideals, but it should be noted that the distinctions between these classifications are likely to be somewhat arbitrary in nature. In addition, we can identify truncated parties, which are parties whose members tend not to be join parties at the other level.

Methodology

We utilize the Study of Canadian Political Party Members mailback survey, which was conducted in the Spring of 2000, to examine patterns of party membership across federal levels in Canada. The survey was conducted in the Spring of 2000 and included 3872 completed responses.⁵ Only two questions from the survey are utilized. The first simply inquires as to the federal membership of the member. The second is

⁵ We are grateful to Lisa Young and William Cross for allowing us access to this dataset. Further information on the Study of Canadian Political Party Members can be found at: <http://www.mta.ca/faculty/socsci/polisci/scppm/>

an open-ended question asking which provincial party the member belongs to if he answers a previous question inquiring as to whether he currently holds a membership in a provincial party in the affirmative.

Readers should note the implications of four aspects of this research design: First, the format of the second question carries with it temporal implications; the use of the word “currently” means that the survey is a snapshot of federal membership at the time of the survey. Second, a small number of respondents claimed that they did hold a membership in a provincial party but did not specify which provincial party. These respondents are treated as split-level members. Third, as with any self-reported characteristics, there is potential for inaccuracy, although there is no compelling reason we can think of for why respondents would lie with regards to their provincial membership. Fourth, members of the federal N.D.P. are deleted from the analysis since they were not asked what their provincial membership was in the survey. This is because membership in the federal N.D.P. entails membership in a provincial affiliate, thus rendering the questions this study asks redundant in the case of the N.D.P..

In total, 3256 respondents from the survey are included in this analysis. Of these respondents, 1328 (40.8%) did not answer the second question and are therefore classified as single-level members at the national level. 1928 (59.2%) respondents did return an answer to the second question and therefore are classified as either dual or split-level members depending upon their provincial membership.

Analysis

Using cross-tabs, this section utilizes the distinctions between the various types of memberships to address the research question posed at the outset of the paper: How exactly have individual party members and party organizations adapted to the new realities of the post-1993 party system?

Members

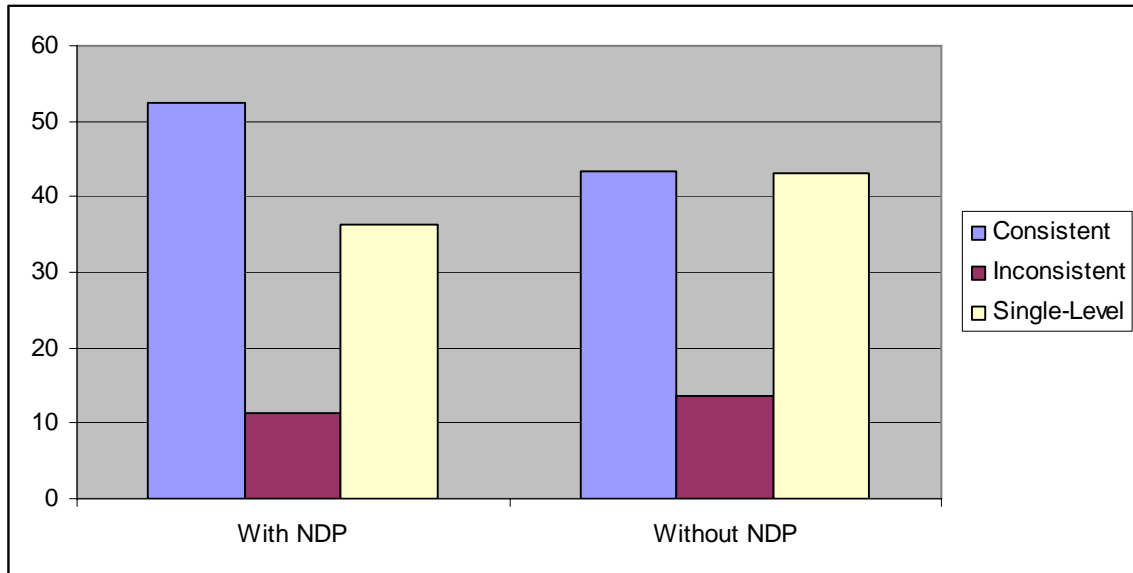
We focus on individual party members as units of analysis in order to discover the simple proportions of self-reported single, dual, and split-level members in Canada at the time of the survey. Table one reports the raw number of national party members in each category as well as the proportion of each:

*Table 1: Types of Federal Party Members
(Column Percentages)*

	With NDP	Without NDP
Consistent	2029 (52.4)	1412 (43.4)
Inconsistent	438 (11.3)	438 (13.5)
Single-Level	1403 (36.3)	1403 (43.1)

Figure 1 illustrates this information in graphical form:

Figure 1: Types of Federal Party Members



In the following, we distinguish between the aggregate figures derived from members of all parties and members of all parties except the NDP. This is because membership in the NDP automatically entails consistency across levels; the inclusion of NDP members thus drives the proportion of consistent members up.

Despite the presence of a largely truncated national party (the Alliance), Canadians at the time of this survey were very unlikely to be split-level members. Only 13.5% of respondents (when the NDP was not included) reported belonging to parties of different partisan affiliation at the two levels. Dual and single-level membership, on the other hand, occurred much more frequently at 43.4% and 43.1% respectively. The implication of this finding is clear: Canadians, when they are not dual-level members of national parties, are much more likely to be members of a party at only a single level rather than members of different parties at the two levels.

The distinction in this matter is between dual-level and single/split-level members since the directional arrow points in that direction; dealignment should lead from dual to single/split membership. In an integrated federal system, members could be expected to be dual-level identifiers. But as dealignment takes place, old parties decline and new parties arise, leaving previously dual-level identifiers in a difficult position. Do they accommodate this new situation by dutifully taking out memberships in new parties or do they simply let their memberships lapse?

At the time of this survey, Canadians who were no longer dual-level members wrestled with the 1993 dealignment by retaining memberships at only a single level of the federal state. In other words, Canadians were more likely to disengage from one level of politics rather than conform to the newly divergent party systems at the different levels. On the one hand, such members may have sensed that the post-1993 period was merely deviating and that a return to pre-1993 electoral competition was inevitable. In this sense at least, they may well be right. But divergence between federal and provincial systems remains despite the apparent 2004 realignment at the national level, particularly in provinces such as British Columbia. While our finding from this 2000 survey may not travel to these different cases, our finding for this year of the post-1993 period is clear: individual party members faced with party system divergence were very unlikely to resort to split membership, instead retaining memberships in only a single party at a single level.

Organizations

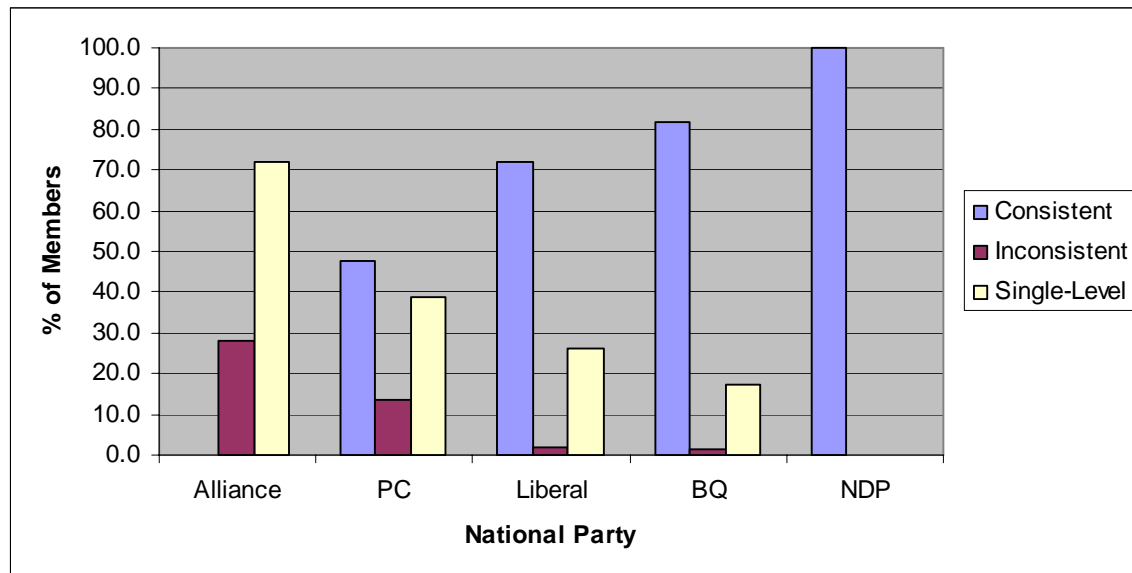
Breaking down proportions of the three types of federal party members found in each party allows us to utilize parties as units of analysis and compare differences in member types in each of the parties. Table two presents these proportions for the members of the five major national parties in the 1997 national election:

*Table 2: Types of Federal Party Members by National Party
(Column Percentages)*

	PC	Liberal	Alliance	BQ ⁶	NDP
Consistent	424 (47.8)	653 (72.2)	0	335 (81.7)	617 (100)
Inconsistent	121 (13.6)	15 (1.7)	297 (28.3)	5 (1.2)	0
Single-Level	342 (38.6)	237 (26.2)	754 (71.7)	70 (17.1)	0
Total	887	905	1015	410	617

Figure 2 illustrates these findings in graphical form:

Figure 2: Types of Federal Party Members by National Party



⁶ Bloc Québécois

Immediately, one notes the apparent inverse relationship between consistent and single-level membership. As consistent membership rises, single-level membership falls, and vice-versa. This might be expected, except for the presence of inconsistent membership, which exhibits itself most prominently in the case of the Alliance.

The Liberal Party and the B.Q. similarly diverge greatly from the national average. Both parties contain very high proportions of dual-level members and extremely low proportions of split-level members. In this regard, the Liberal Party and the B.Q. represent the most integrated national parties. Where members of these parties are not dual-level members, they tend strongly to be single rather than split-level identifiers. This trend is higher for Bloc Québécois (BQ)- Parti Québécois (PQ) members, given the polarized party system in Quebec.

Members of the PC party most resemble the national average with regard to categories of national members. On the other hand, PC members replicate the national average by preferring single-level to split-level membership, helping to drive up the national average of single-level members. Still, the proportion of PC identifiers that are split-level members is higher than that of the Liberal Party or especially the BQ. If the Liberal Party and the BQ are largely integrated parties, the PC Party is less so; just over 60% of its national members remain members of provincial affiliates.

The Alliance constitutes a deviant case. Given the small number of parties of identical partisan affiliation at the provincial level, a small proportion of members are dual-level identifiers. As a result, its members tend to be either single or split-level

identifiers. Like the other parties, members of the Alliance who are not dual-level members are much more likely to be single rather than split-level members. Still, such members are more likely to be split rather than single-level members than are members of any other party.

On these bases, we can attempt to distinguish between the integrative strength of the different parties on the basis of their memberships. The Liberals and BQ would appear to be largely integrated parties given the high proportion of their members who are dual-level members. The PC Party is also a relatively integrated party, with just under half of its members being dual-level members. The Alliance, with its very small proportion of dual-level members, would appear to be a truncated party. On these bases, the Liberal and B.Q. parties integrate members most effectively across levels, but it should be noted that distinguishing between the integrativeness of different parties does not take account of differences between single and split-level members. In addition, what role does party system divergence play in determining the integrativeness of different parties?

Future Research

The preliminary analysis of both the character and interaction of national and provincial party systems in Canada has identified a complex set of membership options and patterns. These findings suggest a number of future directions for research, both at the individual and organizational levels. A better understanding of

these factors is important in building a reliable model of parties and party systems and the nature of representation in Canada.

Individuals

Federalism provides an institutional opportunity, if not an incentive, for individuals to identify with different parties at different levels. A similar opportunity is created for inconsistent party membership across federal levels. But this assumes that identification and membership are equivalent in at least a rough sense. Is this the case?

Party membership requires a stronger commitment to a single party than does party identification. Whereas identification represents simply a cognitive commitment to a single party, membership entails a commitment that leads to, at the very least, the purchasing of a party membership. Further commitments, particularly of a social variety, may follow as members attend board meetings, barbeques, and volunteer in campaigns. Does this qualitative difference between mere identifiers and party members make a difference in determining individual propensities to be consistent or inconsistent identities?

We think that this is the case but that it should be expressed through elements of sociability. Recent accounts of party identification point to social interaction as a significant reinforcement of existing party identification, which is compared to identification with a sports team. (Green, Palmquist and Schickler 2002) We think that such reinforcement should be much stronger for party members than for mere

identifiers and that it should therefore be more difficult for individuals to cognitively embrace different parties at both levels. In the language of psychology, inconsistent membership should generate more cognitive dissonance than consistent identification. If this is indeed the case, then party membership should be seen as one determinant of party system consistency. Declining party membership in Canada may help to account for increased differences in the characteristics of the national and province party systems. The direction of the causal arrow, however, is in question; it is also possible that disaggregated party systems and the resulting complex choices facing electors may contribute to a decline in membership.

Organizations

Early on, we noted that political scientists in Canada have long viewed party organizations as separated along federal lines, an observation that has been confirmed by more recent comparative studies. In short, Canadian party organizations at the two levels tend to work independently of one another even when they share a common name and a common ideology. In Smiley's vocabulary, they are either truncated along federal lines or largely confederal. (104)

The attributes of party organizations that scholars have tended to look at (candidate nomination, fundraising, etc.) are largely formal. Further, they are subject to the discretion of the leader and his or her inner circle. If Cairns is correct in asserting that party leaders reject ties between their counterparts at the other level in order to maximize their intergovernmental bargaining capabilities once in

government, then it should be expected that the formal linkages between parties that are subject to the discretion of the leader would be severed. (Cairns 1977) But what of the other sectors of the party organization which are not subject to the discretion of the leader, particularly the activist and membership sectors?

While Canadian political scientists have stressed the formal disconnect between parties at the federal and provincial levels, we argue that they have largely missed the informal linkages that exist between organizations at the two levels in the form of activists and especially party members. This may be because the incentives for leaders and these other sectors differ. While party leaders are interested in maximizing their intergovernmental negotiating room, and therefore severing ties, the goals of activists and members may lead to involvement in party organizations at both levels. Career advancement and commitment to ideology, to pick two examples of incentives for members to become active in party organizations, are maximized by involvement in two rather than a single party organization. Moreover, if for example, party members are motivated in their partisan activist by commitment to ideology, than shared party members may represent a significant string of continuity between federal and provincial parties in Canada. The full implications of these patterns needs warrant more detailed exploration.

Party Systems

We have largely neglected party systems as an independent variable in favor of individuals and organizations, largely because of the highly descriptive nature of this

preliminary explanation. Nevertheless, we are aware that ideological placement and partisan choice are independently shaped by the dynamics of party system competition. This has not been given adequate attention in past studies of federal identification in Canada, despite the publication of Blake's *The Consistency of Inconsistency*. Using British Columbia's perpetually idiosyncratic party system as an example, Blake argues that it makes little sense to attribute any larger significance to the large number of inconsistent party identifiers in British Columbia since party system divergence between the two levels does not permit it. In our view, party system divergence between the two levels creates a crucial institutional context within which members identify with and hold memberships in parties at both levels. A fuller explanation of various forms of membership will require an exploration of these effects. Even party system divergence does not rule out informal linkages between parties at the two levels in the form of inconsistent party membership, raising the question of whether *parties of different names at the two levels may be bound together by informal means just as strongly as are parties with the same name.*

Whether or not party membership in a federal state is consistent or inconsistent can be summarized rather easily. More difficult is mapping out the incentive structures that lead to either consistent or inconsistent membership and the consequences for the larger federal state as well as for political parties and the party system. By providing some of the descriptive groundwork for this type of study we have taken a first step in exploring one of remarkable features of Canadian politics

and adding to the general theoretical understanding of the nature of parties and party systems associated with structures of multi-level governance.

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