

STRUCTURAL BASES OF CANADIAN PARTY PREFERENCE: EVOLUTION AND CROSS-NATIONAL COMPARISON

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STRUCTURAL BASES OF CANADIAN PARTY PREFERENCE: EVOLUTION AND CROSS-NATIONAL COMPARISON

The Canadian party system is truly peculiar. But its peculiarity is ill understood. A widely circulated image is of a system in “stable dealignment” (LeDuc 1984). It is routinely dominated by one party, the Liberals, and this would seem to suggest a system with deep roots. The roots are commonly thought to be weak, however, and so are individual Canadians’ ties to parties. The weak social base reflects, in turn, the policy similarity of the major parties. Although the Liberals usually win, the system also exhibits shocking electoral swings. These stylized facts were among those characterized years ago as the “textbook theory” (Sniderman et al. 1975). But the stylization sits uneasily with apparently contradictory facts. In particular, data from party conventions and candidate surveys indicate sharp policy differences.¹ Voters are similarly able to detect that the policy stakes in Canadian elections are high (Bélanger 2003). The claims about weak ties between individuals and parties may rest on a measurement artifact (Johnston 1992).

Some of the stylized facts really are facts. The system has become even more volatile than when its susceptibility to major swings was first noticed. The policy gaps between the major players, at least revealed by manifestos, are small by comparative standards, although they are not as small as they used to be (Budge et al. 2001). What is *not* true, however, is that the system is weakly rooted in the country’s social structure. This paper deploys Canadian Election Study data from five decades to show how this is so: cleavages in party preference are wide by comparative standards and, for the most part, change little. What the paper also shows, however, is that the cleavage structure is peculiar among Anglo-American democracies. It is dominated by cultural forces. Equally critically, the direction of the key cultural gaps reverses at the boundary between Quebec and the rest of Canada. This produces, or accommodates, another Canadian peculiarity: domination of the system by a party of the centre. From this flow the commonly observed weak policy differences and the alternation between repetitive Liberal victories and violent electoral swings.

THE CANADIAN SYSTEM IN COMPARATIVE CONTEXT

The obvious comparators are the consolidated systems produced by single-member plurality or majority institutions. Table 1 compares Canada with the USA, Great Britain, and Australia. Each country appears twice, with data from an early study (typically from the 1970s) and from a post-2000 one. The comparison captures three elements in a structural estimation: the width of the largest non-geographic cleavage; the width of the largest geographic contrast; and the overall explanatory power of an equation, indicated by the pseudo R^2 (\hat{R}^2) from probit regression. The cleavage widths represent the conversion of a probit coefficient into a parameter indicating the marginal effect from a unit shift of some independent variable, setting other variables in the estimation at their mean. For each system, the determination is made from a set of binomial estimations,

¹ For recent evidence and compendious references to earlier sources, see Cross and Young 2002.

party-by-party.² Most estimations feature a standard suite of indicators for “Industrial Revolution” cleavages: farm status; union membership; manual employment; and income. Some “National Revolution”³ contrasts are also common to most countries: the Catholic/Non-Catholic and No Religion/Any Religion contrasts. For Canada, language—“official” and “other”—are also factors, as for the US are race and (in 2004) Hispanic ethnicity.⁴ Geography is represented by dummy variables for large historically distinct regions: Atlantic Canada, Quebec, and the West; the US South; Scotland, Wales, and Northern England; and Victoria and Western Australia.

In country after country, the most consequential non-geographic cleavage represents a conditional difference of 15 to 20 percentage points in the likelihood of some party’s support. This is as true of the supposedly polarized British and Australian systems as of the supposedly brokerage-dominated US and Canadian ones.⁵ It is true that the Canadian system is less structured by economic factors than the others; for the other countries, the dominant factor is either manual employment, union membership, or income. It is *not* true that the Canadian system is peculiarly based on geography. Geography plays a bigger role in Canada than in Australia or the US, to be sure, but not a bigger role than in Britain. Finally, the power of social structure to explain variance in outcomes varies remarkably little from country to country. On average, about 10% of variance is explained. Canada exhibits the weakest explanatory power in 1974, but only by a small margin. In 2004, the Canadian system seems the most impressively structured, but by only a small margin over the US; the margin over Great Britain and Australia is considerable.⁶

² Estimation is by “dprobit” in Stata. The effect is for an indicated party relative to all others in the system taken together. This glosses over the fact that the relative power of factors shifts when parties are considered pairwise, a matter considered in detail later in this paper. The setups also assume that the effect of no factor is conditional on any other factor. This is unlikely to be true in general, and, as the rest of this paper emphasizes, is certainly not true for Canada. I decided, however, to keep matters reasonably simple for cross-national comparison. Even in this simple form the estimations deploy seven to ten free parameters, depending on the country and the decade. A detailed account of the estimations is available from the author on request.

³ The “National” versus “Industrial” Revolution nomenclature originates with Lipset and Rokkan 1967.

⁴ Although the “largest” contrast is usually just the biggest marginal effect, I imposed a further constraint that the smaller side to the contrast must comprise at least 15% of the electorate. Intuitively, a small group that is very distinct is not necessarily more consequential than a group that is somewhat less distinct but much larger.

⁵ If anything, the comparison understates the polarization of the US system as the massive Black/White contrast is removed from the table by the 15% threshold, mentioned in note 3.

⁶ None of the \hat{R}^2 values seems big in absolute terms, to be sure. In part this reflects the lowball values derived by the McFadden calculation used in Stata. Mention of calculation formula avoids the real issue, however, as variance explained is a largely meaningless concept. In the case of party estimations, the very fact that the four systems in question are relatively consolidated ensures that the variances to be “explained” are large by world standards. This is an artifact of how variances of proportions are calculated: $\text{var}(p) = p(1-p)$. The variance increases as $p \rightarrow 0.50$, and parties in consolidated systems are much more likely to do this than are parties in fractionalized systems. In this regard, I have the sense that Canada’s low standing in the variance-explained columns of Table 1 in Rose 1974 has helped reinforce the stylized fact that ours is a peculiarly weakly structured system (for a classic instance, see LeDuc 1984, p. 407). On that

CONTINUITY, CHANGE, AND GEOGRAPHIC CONTINGENCY

The true Canadian peculiarity is threefold: (1) the system is dominated by cultural factors; and (2) the key cultural factors interact with residence in or out of Quebec; this combination yields (3) a system uniquely dominated by a party of the centre. This section spells these elements (1) and (2) out in detail. The third peculiarity will animate the concluding discussion.

The paper's first estimation strategy involves pairwise comparison between parties, effected by multinomial probit. Paired comparison allows the system's multidimensionality to emerge. Some of this can appear simply through a rich set of independent variables, but the pairwise strategy shows how different dimensions govern the contrasts between different party pairs (Whitten and Palmer 1996).⁷ As Alvarez and Nagler 1998 point out, the multinomial logistic strategy advocated by Whitten and Palmer is equivalent to a sandwich of pairwise binomial logistic regressions. As such it imposes an independence-or-irrelevant alternatives assumption on the calculation that is unrealistic given the very interaction between party pairings and underlying dimensionality. Multinomial probit imposes no such restriction, and so is the estimation method of choice here.⁸

Given the claim of geographic contingency, analyses are performed separately for Quebec and the rest of Canada. Within each place, analysis is initially divided by period according to the menu of parties. Outside Quebec, this dictates three periods: 1965 to 1988, when the menu featured Liberals, Progressive Conservatives, and the NDP; 1993 to 2000, the years of deconsolidation, when Reform/Alliance was added to the mix; and 2004-2006, the reconsolidated system, with the Alliance and the Progressive Conservatives now joined as just the Conservative party. In Quebec, the number of periods is effectively two: 1965 to 1988, when the three national parties shared the field with Social Credit; and 1993 to 2006, years of three-party competition, as Social Credit and the NDP departed (notwithstanding the pretensions of the latter) and the Bloc Québécois entered. Although the Conservatives changed their official organization between 2000 and 2004, for Quebec, there is little evidence that this changed the party's actual or potential appeal. The critical fact about Quebec seems to be the continuity of the Bloc for all the years since 1993.⁹

table, however, Canada outranks all three of the comparators, a fact that seems to have disappeared from view. The truth is that all the Anglo-American systems, whatever the stylization of their essential character, are at the bottom of the list. The systems higher up Rose's list are all fractionalized, PR-based systems.

⁷ For a sensitive discussion of this logic also applied to the Canadian case, see Gidengil et al. 2005.

⁸ Truth to tell, using probit rather than logit makes little difference to the relative magnitudes of coefficients, certainly not enough to disturb this paper's conclusions. And probit is computationally much more demanding than logit, requiring as it does numerical integration of bivariate normal distributions.

⁹ Bear in mind the following methodological differences among the studies, and thus among the periods. The samples from 1965 to 1984 inclusive are spatially clustered, as a reflection of the face-to-face mode of administration. This includes the 1980 sample, which, although interviewed by telephone, was a proper subset of the 1979 FTF sample. Studies from 1988 are not clustered, thanks to the economies of the telephone. Clustering and mode nearly coincide, then, but not quite: six are clustered, six are not; five are FTF and seven are by telephone. Further, all studies before 1988 were strictly post-election, so structural

Canada outside Quebec

Although the 1993-2000 deconsolidation disrupted some of the older system's features, the rebirth of a nationally competitive Conservative alternative also resurrected most of them. The biggest qualitative change was in geography. Otherwise, changes to the old structure were at the margin, as certain features gained strength and others lost it.

In the 1965-88 period, the following were the basic polarities:

- The dominant forces were cultural and mostly pitted the Liberals against the Conservatives. The Catholic/Non-Catholic contrast was the most consequential, both in that it yielded a big marginal effect and in that Catholics are a big minority. Even with religion controlled, ethnolinguistic contrasts were also sharp and all tended in the same direction: French Canadians, Eastern Europeans, Southern Europeans, and Non-Europeans were significantly more likely than Northern Europeans and the British/Canadian-only/don't-know reference category to be Liberals, as opposed to Conservatives. The NDP was always the middle party, usually closer to the Liberals.
- The one cultural axis on which the NDP controlled a pole was religiosity as such: respondents of no religion were more likely than all others to support the NDP and less likely than all others to support the Conservatives, with the Liberals very close to the Conservatives.
- In the economic domain, the Conservative party always anchored a pole. The identity of the other polar party was not consistent, however. Union families were much more likely than others to support the NDP and much less likely than others to support the Conservatives. But the Liberals exerted no more attraction for union families (*qua* union family) than the Conservatives did. The Conservatives were the party of farm families. Although the farm/non-farm difference was not as great as the union/non-union divide, the Conservative party was alone at the pro-farm pole. In these years, the Liberals and the NDP were essentially indistinguishable on the axis.
- The NDP was distinctively a party of the West and not a party of Atlantic Canada. The Conservatives were relatively strong in both regions. The Liberals were weak in the West, matched the Conservatives in Atlantic Canada and, by implication, were (even then) the party of Ontario.
- A final point worth noting about Table 2 is the intercepts: the value on the Conservative versus Liberal contrast is positive, a reminder that outside Quebec

variables and vote reports are all after the fact. From 1988, demographics are captured in the pre-election wave and vote reports in the post-election wave. For demographics it is difficult to see what difference this would make. Finally, two studies—1980 and 2006—are full inter-election panels. In 1980, the entire sample comprised panel respondents. In 2006, panel respondents represented roughly half the sample. The 1993 sample was a panel of sorts, in that roughly one respondent in three was first interviewed for the 1992 Referendum study. It is possible that these three years exhibit slightly more robust relationships, reflecting a combination of selection and conditioning.

the Conservative party was consistently stronger in this period than the Liberal party.

The deconsolidation of 1993 changed few of the underlying structural features of the old system, and such changes as occurred foreshadowed the system put in place in 2004. Table 3 shows that the most interesting elements refer to the new party, Reform (later the Alliance):

- On the Catholic/Non-Catholic axis, Reform was the most polarized against the Liberals, more even than was the Progressive Conservative remnant.
- Reform was most favoured by the oldest “immigrant” group, Northern Europeans. This is the only time this group emerges as distinct, and Reform seemed to peel Northern Europeans away from each other party. Reform was least favoured by the newest “immigrant” group, non-Europeans. The Reform/Liberal gap for this group was almost half again as wide as the Progressive Conservative/Liberal gap was in the earlier period.
- Reform was distinctively a party of farm families, however much their numbers had dwindled. The Reform/NDP gap was almost twice as great as the Conservative/NDP one had been. The distance to the Liberals was one-third greater.
- Reform was, of course, distinctively a party of the West.

According to Table 4, the following are the structural changes that accompanied the resurrection of the Conservative alternative:

- Although the Catholic/Non-Catholic contrast persists it is not as powerful as it once was. Its effect appears to have been cut roughly in half. The same is also true of an ethnic distinction that strongly overlaps the religious one: Southern Europeans remain disproportionately Liberal but only about half as distinctive as before. It is also true for Eastern Europeans, who are no longer a politically distinct group. French Canadians and Non-Europeans, in contrast, are more distinctly tied to the Liberals than before. Non-Europeans of course, are much more numerous than in the earlier period. For the most part, then, the Liberals assemble much the same coalition as before. But its ethnic components have gained prominence relative to the religious one.
- Religiosity as such has also gained prominence, and the NDP/Conservative contrast is bigger than ever. But the Liberals have moved: where before they were indistinguishable from the Conservatives, now the party is almost exactly half way between the other two.
- In the economic domain, the NDP remains as polarized against the Conservatives as before. The Liberals appear to have moved away from the Conservatives, in the sense that union families are now significantly more likely than non-union ones to choose the Liberals over the Conservatives, but the Liberal/NDP gap is still twice as great as the Liberal/Conservative one. Farmers have disappeared from view. They do not appear in Table 4, indeed are no longer routinely identifiable in each CES. The next section shows that they have also ceased to be politically distinct.

- The geographic deck has been shuffled dramatically. The West is more distinct than before in relation to all parties. The Liberals are even more shut out than in the earlier period. The new Conservatives, reflecting the Reform/Alliance transition, are both more distinctly Western themselves and more Western than the NDP. The NDP, although considerably rejuvenated in the region relative to the 1990s, are now also a party of Atlantic Canada.

The very richness of the pairwise display in Tables 2 to 4 carries a price in complexity. At the same time, pooling of elections into two or three periods masks possible shifts within periods. The discussion thus elided much temporal detail, so Figures 1.A to 1.D bring the detail back. As the figures pull large amounts of information together, they require preliminary explication. To allow for fine-grained temporal analysis, estimation shifts back to the binomial form, rather on the model of Table 1. As already mentioned, this averages effects for a given party across all the alternative parties. Values in the figures depict marginal effects, defined as for Table 1, for all the key structural elements and for all the relevant parties. Underlying estimations are multivariate and specific to each year. Effect coefficients are then grouped by variable and arrayed for consecutive years, so that the election-by-election evolution of a cleavage can be presented for the entire period. The lines link estimated values for a given party and all parties appear on the same graph.

Figure 1.A presents the system's religious dimensions. The "Catholic" panel confirms the diminished power of the cleavage but suggests that the critical year was 1974.¹⁰ After 1974, the cleavage stabilized. Indeed, it widened in the 1990s, with the emergence of Reform/Alliance as the chief alternative. In 2004, the cleavage shrank again¹¹ and was unchanged in 2006. It is tempting to infer that each shift reflects repositioning of the Liberals (and sometimes the Conservatives) on issues with moral content. The mid-1970s drop may reflect the party's rôle in the Criminal Code amendments on divorce and abortion. The 2004 Liberal shift follows debate on gay marriage, on which question the Liberal party changed sides.¹²

The story for voters with no religion is one of short-term flux but long-run resilience. As is already clear, the poles are controlled by the NDP and the Conservatives. The apparent similarity in Table 2 of the Liberals to the Conservatives disguises considerable movement by the Liberals, and some by the Conservatives. The Liberals tack back and forth, making them sometimes indistinguishable from the NDP and sometimes indistinguishable from the Conservatives. All parties land in the same place in 1993, but with the clarification of Reform's stance on moral questions, gaps reemerge in 1997, with Reform occupying the place once held by the Conservatives. With the union of the Right, the new Conservative party assumed the Reform/Alliance position.

¹⁰ For all we know, 1972 might be the critical year. The absence of an official 1972 election study means that this paper cannot draw a definitive conclusion.

¹¹ This is consistent with the report in Gidengil et al. 2005.

¹² The fact that the Church of John Paul II and Benedict XVI has increased its own emphasis on moral issues may also be relevant.

In the patterns for French Canadians and postwar immigrant groups, Brian Mulroney looms large. Building on the efforts of Robert Stanfield and Joe Clark, Mulroney set out to make his party inclusive on the Liberals model. For French Canadians and Southern Europeans he largely succeeded: he erased, or came close to erasing, long-standing differences. For Non-Europeans, he at least made his party converge on the NDP. No good turn goes unpunished, however, and the gap—especially for Non-Europeans—reappeared in the 1990s, with Reform usurping the old Conservative position. The new Conservatives have inherited the Reform/Alliance position, and the gap with the Liberals is wider than ever. It is wider partly because of the lack of clarity on the Liberal/NDP side in the early years. I suspect that this is partly a sampling issue: in the early years the number of Non-European respondents was very small.¹³ Now, the group is an important electoral building block, with the Liberals the beneficiary.

The economic realm is a combination of stability and inaction. Stability describes the union/non-union axis. Although the Liberal party moves back and forth, it was closer to the Conservative party most of the time and certainly was so in 2006. In the 1990s, the overall weakness of both the Conservatives and the NDP reduced the impact of union membership, although Reform/Alliance picked up some of the slack. In the 2000s, everything old is new again, and the gaps are as great as ever. For the farm/non-farm axis, in contrast, parties have shifted ground and, as mentioned, farm families have essentially disappeared from the CES.

The regional pattern, as we have already seen, has been shifted dramatically, and no party has been immune. Figure 1.D organizes the regional data differently from the non-geographic axes in the earlier panels. Here each panel refers to a single party and arrays marginal effects for both the West and the Atlantic provinces, with Ontario as the reference category. The NDP panel shows how the party moved east: it gathered up a reaction to the Martin budgets of the mid-1990s and so did particularly well in Atlantic Canada in 1997. In later years, its Atlantic share faded back toward the Ontario baseline. Liberal dynamics are partly complementary. The party dropped in Atlantic Canada as the others rose and then bounced back. This repeated an earlier episode, produced by Robert Stanfield's emergence as Tory leader. In the West, despite occasional plateaux and recoveries, the Liberal trajectory has been basically downward.¹⁴

In part, the Liberals' Western decline in the 1990s mirrors the rise of Reform. Reform emerged almost fully fledged as a Western vehicle in 1993, but it gained more ground in the region in 1997 and 2000. Strikingly, it became progressively more repellent to Atlantic Canada.

This paved the way for the weakness of the new Conservative party in the same region. Although the party lost its Stanfield edge in the 1970s, it was never distinctively unwelcome before 2004. In 1997 it benefited from reaction to the Martin budgets, and the leadership transition from Charest to Clark did not hurt. Of course, the West had ceased to be distinctively hospitable, a shift that predated the 1990s, having begun under

¹³ This could also reflect the geographic clustering of early samples.

¹⁴ The party is able to extract seats from the urban West, but mainly because of the fragmentation of the rest of the vote.

Mulroney. But the new Conservatives inherit a large measure of the Westernism *pur et dur* of Reform/Alliance.¹⁵

Quebec

The story for Quebec is simpler but more dramatic. In the early period, party competition was radically unbalanced but dimensionally complicated. In the later period, the province became competitive and, as it did so, the choices simplified. Tables 5 and 6 suggest that the boundary lies between 1988 and 1993. In fact, as Figure 2 indicates, the shift began in the 1980s.

The old system in Quebec featured four parties, of which before 1984 only one, the Liberals, had serious pretensions. These four parties tapped four dimensions of choice. On none of these dimensions was the party ordering the same. The Liberal party and Social Credit controlled poles on two of the four dimensions, but only on one dimension were they polarized against each other.

Significantly, this polarization was on the most critical dimension: language. Even in the old system, although the Liberal party was dependent on Quebec for its quasi-permanent lock on power, it was distinctively *not* the party of Francophones within the province. *All* other parties were more French than the Liberals, and the most distinctively French one was Social Credit. The Conservatives were somewhat more distinctively French than the NDP. Of course, the Conservative party was much more consequential than the NDP in Quebec, even before 1984. What the multivariate estimation picks up is the conditional effect: relative to its generally weak base, the Quebec NDP was a quite distinctively French party. This point can be made more generally: given the weakness of the other parties in this era, the Liberal party was almost always the plurality or majority choice among Quebec Francophones, those that voted at least; it just enjoyed bigger shares among non-Francophones.

Religion produced a different ordering. Again, Social Credit anchored one end, as both the most distinctively Catholic voting bloc and the least irreligious. Next in line in this period was the Liberal party, both quite Catholic and hardly irreligious. The Conservatives, as in the rest of the country, anchored the non-Catholic end, while the NDP, also as elsewhere, controlled the no-religion pole.

The union/non-union dimension polarized the NDP against the Liberals. Again, this is not to say that union members were mostly NDP supporters, just that they were distinct in such support as they gave. The distinctively *non*-union shop was the Liberal party. In absolute numbers, the party of unionized Quebeckers was the Conservatives.

The rural cast of Social Credit is confirmed by the farm/non-farm dimension, although Conservative support was also quite rural. As in the rest of Canada, the NDP was a distinctively urban-industrial party.

In the later period, one of the four dimensions effectively disappears. This is the farm/non-farm contrast.¹⁶ Two of the four pre-1993 players also disappear, Social Credit

¹⁵ Not all of it. The mere fact of reconstitution with power as its object deprived the party of some of its Western edge, creating room for the NDP. Compare in Figure 1.D the 2000 endpoint of the Reform/Alliance series with the 2000 and 2006 values for the Conservatives.

from history and the NDP, in effect, from Quebec in particular. In place of both parties is the Bloc Québécois. And on the three remaining axes of choice, the polarity is always the same: the Liberals anchor one pole and the Bloc, the opposite one. The Conservatives are always the middle party. This is true even for the oddly complicated domain of religion. The Conservatives are now more Catholic than the Liberals (in contrast to the earlier period) but less so, at least in terms of raw identification, than the Bloc. They are less irreligious than the Bloc; that comes as little surprise. But they are also more irreligious than the Liberals, which *is* surprising. On the union/non-union dimension, the Conservatives and Liberals are indistinguishable.

Figure 2 indicates that the old system was cracking in the 1980s. The figure is simpler than its rest-of-Canada counterparts. Because of collinearity and small numbers, year-specific estimations often collapse. For example, in some years not one non-Francophone respondent claims to have voted for Social Credit. This token of the language cleavage's very power causes the estimation to drop the critical respondents. The estimation that results is thus both misleading and statistically weak. In light of this, the best way to proceed is to focus on the two most critical axes, language and unionization, and present simple between-group differences of proportions, cast for visual clarity as percentage points.

The most dramatic shift is on the language axis. The 1968 election did foreshadow what was to come: a dramatic widening of the language gap, reflecting, presumably, Trudeau's sharpening of a rights-based conception of language policy pitted against the Conservatives' dramatic but temporary commitment to a "Two Nations" conception of Canada. Aside from 1968, differences before 1988 were never massive, partly because the alternatives to the Liberal party were so weak. As Social Credit evaporated, the Liberals increased their relative drawing power among Francophones. But in 1988, the language cleavage blew wide open. In that year, the gap for the Liberals was nearly as great as it became—and stayed—after 1993. For the next several elections, the Conservatives were disproportionately French. In 1988, this added up to a large absolute share. In 1993 and after, with the advent of the Bloc, the Conservatives' distinctively French character did not help much. With the Bloc now firmly anchoring the nationalist pole—and bringing large numbers of hitherto inert sovereignists into the federal electorate (Johnston 2005)—the linguistic gap in the province became massive. The Conservatives reverted to the middle ground. The further reconfiguration of the party in 2003 pushed the party back in an Anglophone direction, at least for now.

In the world of unionization, Quebec continues to be a distinct society. The Liberal party still anchors the non-union pole, in contrast to the situation elsewhere. The Bloc has gathered up all the pieces that formerly engaged in feeble competition for the other pole and made itself the party of the province's union movement. Indeed the union/non-union gap in Quebec—idiosyncratically framed as it is—is wider than in the rest of Canada.

¹⁶ It disappears from the CES, at least. Whether or not the power of the Union des producteurs agricoles has also waned is an interesting question.

DISCUSSION

Notwithstanding changes in party nomenclature, the polarities of Canadian elections endure. The polarities are not trivial, neither in the width of the gaps nor in the substantive stakes. The social bases of the system are quite complex, in that different dimensions of the social structure order the parties differently. This represents a brokerage challenge, to be sure, but the historically big parties are not the only ones that face the challenge. And the orderings are interpretable and stable.

Multiplicity in the underlying dimensionality of a party system is not unusual. What *is* unusual is the fractionalization of the Canadian system, relative to its Anglo-American comparators. This in turn makes possible the variety in the parties' dimensional orderings. The reason for this fractionalization must be sought elsewhere than in this paper.

But one implication of the fractionalization—and, I suspect, one cause of it—is the peculiar strength of the Liberal party. And this is the Canadian system's other major peculiarity: its historic domination by a party of the centre. It is always tempting to attribute the party's dominance to its very centrism. In most countries, however, parties of the centre are electorally weak (Macdonald et al. 1991).¹⁷ In Blais' 2005 catalogue of the four most successful political parties in the world, two are clearly on the right and one, clearly on the left. The Liberals are the sole party of the centre. That they are indeed of the centre is confirmed by the tracking in Budge et al. 2001, Figure 1.5. Before the 1970s, both the Liberals and the Conservatives look centrist. After the 1970s, the Conservatives pull to the right, but the Liberals stay in the middle, sometimes leaning right, sometimes the other way. Canadian voters also see the system this way. When asked to place themselves on a left-right scale and then to place the parties on the same scale, the mean imputation for the Liberals is almost identical to respondents' mean self-location.¹⁸

How is this possible? I submit that the answer lies in this paper's ensemble of estimations and images on the core "National" questions. The Liberal party is *not* centrist—or is not responded to as if it were—on the ethnoreligious components of the cleavage structure. *But its relative positioning on these components is the opposite inside and outside Quebec.* Outside Quebec, it is still the party of Catholics and French Canadians, joined by the ethnic or religious minorities that pose, or have posed, "deep diversity" challenges. This mix is complicated, but an underlying logic of accommodativeness is detectable (see Abu-Laban and Niegurth 2000 for a start on working out this logic).¹⁹ In Quebec, the

¹⁷ Their electoral weakness may still leave them critical to government formation. In relatively fractionalized PR-based systems, governments almost always cover the median, and this implies that a party or parties of the centre are included in the ruling coalition (Powell 2000). What is unusual is a party of the centre that can govern by itself.

¹⁸ Based on analyses by the author with data from the 2004 Canadian Election Study.

¹⁹ It is difficult to see a sharp reflection of this in public opinion data, especially for Catholics, as Blais 2005 reminds us. So far, we have done well at saying what the Catholic cleavage is not: not just ethnicity in disguise (Irvine 1974); not just a residue of socialization pressures in the family of origin (Johnston 1985); not a strong issue complex (Blais 2005), and not just response to religious bias in candidate selection (Blais 2005).

Liberal party is the party of non-Francophones, now more than ever. In that province, the party now also anchors the right side of the economic spectrum, even as it is the most secular in its support base. To put matters crudely, outside Quebec, the Liberals are the party of accommodating Quebec. Inside Quebec, they are the party of accommodating Canada. Taking the country as a whole, this is a defensible and, indeed, coherent position. And this is the centrist position on the National Question, again taking the country as a whole. This helps explain why the Liberal party is peculiarly credible on the question (Bélanger 2003). It is striking, though, that Bélanger's finding is arguably about *management* of the issue. Often managing the issue requires not talking about it, at least not out of doors, another commonly observed feature of Canadian politics. But the Liberal party might not have survived to be credible in this way were the electorate not segmented between Quebec and the rest of Canada.

Coherent and defensible though this position is for the Liberal party, it leaves its chief rivals caught on the horns of a dilemma. On the National Question, the NDP and the Conservatives can trump the Liberals only by playing the ends against the middle. The NDP did this before the Bloc marginalized that party in Quebec. The NDP's modest base in that province was essentially sovereigntist, certainly opposed to the party's generally centralist posture outside Quebec. Perhaps fortunately for the NDP, the party was essentially faking it: a feint in Quebec to enhance its credibility elsewhere. In government, the Conservatives actually had to live with the consequences of the strategy, and the major consequence was the party's collapse in 1993. But this boom-and-bust cycle is a longer standing pattern, even if the 1993 manifestation was especially dramatic. The Liberal command of the centre has forced the Conservatives to alternate between me-tooism, which implicitly concedes Liberal ownership of the issue, and the internally centrifugal strategy that can deliver power, but as a poisoned chalice.

Table 1. The Canadian System in Comparative Context

Country/ Year	Max $ \partial F/\partial x $ non-geographic ^a	Max $ \partial F/\partial x $ geographic ^b	Max \hat{R}^2
Canada			
1974	0.184	0.173	0.093
2004	0.166	0.201	0.118
Great Britain			
1974	0.191	0.256	0.134
2005	0.109	0.190	0.053
USA			
1972 (Pres)	0.151	0.135	0.108
2004 (Pres)	0.158	0.076	0.114
Australia			
1967	0.228	0.082	0.126
2004	0.204	0.032	0.039

Estimation by probit regression; cell entries are absolute value of the largest marginal effect in the set of estimations.

^a Group must represent at least 15% of voters in the sample.

TABLE 2. STRUCTURAL FOUNDATIONS, OUTSIDE QUEBEC, 1965-88

	Conservative vs Liberal	NDP vs Liberal	NDP vs Conservative
Union	-0.001 (0.047)	0.521 (0.052)	0.51 (0.051)
Farm	0.295 (0.075)	0.009 (0.091)	-0.285 (0.087)
French	-0.283 (0.084)	-0.090 (0.096)	0.193 (0.099)
Northern Europe	-0.035 (0.060)	0.025 (0.068)	0.060 (0.066)
Eastern Europe	-0.313 (0.071)	-0.125 (0.078)	0.187 (0.078)
Southern Europe	-0.796 (0.141)	-0.386 (0.145)	0.410 (0.160)
Non European	-0.573 (0.126)	-0.225 (0.137)	0.348 (0.142)
Catholic	-0.623 (0.052)	-0.299 (0.060)	0.324 (0.061)
No Religion	0.026 (0.086)	0.612 (0.089)	0.585 (0.083)
West	0.427 (0.048)	0.515 (0.054)	0.088 (0.052)
Atlantic	0.056 (0.057)	-0.490 (0.074)	-0.546 (0.074)
Intercept	0.208 (0.040)	-0.752 (0.047)	-0.960 (0.046)
χ^2		849.052	
<i>N</i>		8241	

Estimation by multinomial probit. Entries in parentheses are asymptotic standard errors.

TABLE 3. STRUCTURAL FOUNDATIONS, OUTSIDE QUEBEC, 1993-2000

	Cons vs Liberal	NDP vs Liberal	NDP vs Cons	Reform vs Liberal	Reform vs Cons	Reform vs NDP
Union	-0.184 (0.085)	0.404 (0.088)	0.587 (0.098)	-0.201 (0.078)	-0.017 (0.090)	-0.605 (0.092)
Farm	0.151 (0.201)	-0.121 (0.243)	-0.272 (0.255)	0.396 (0.175)	0.245 (0.194)	0.517 (0.237)
French	-0.249 (0.160)	0.068 (0.162)	0.317 (0.187)	-0.297 (0.155)	-0.048 (0.182)	-0.365 (0.182)
N Europe	0.109 (0.123)	-0.049 (0.138)	-0.157 (0.149)	0.475 (0.105)	0.367 (0.120)	0.524 (0.135)
E Europe	-0.044 (0.144)	0.243 (0.145)	0.287 (0.164)	0.205 (0.122)	0.249 (0.145)	-0.038 (0.146)
S Europe	-0.118 (0.241)	-0.092 (0.270)	0.026 (0.305)	-0.074 (0.218)	0.044 (0.262)	0.018 (0.287)
Non Europe	-0.341 (0.157)	-0.406 (0.172)	-0.065 (0.193)	-0.824 (0.156)	-0.482 (0.180)	-0.417 (0.192)
Catholic	-0.468 (0.101)	-0.424 (0.111)	0.045 (0.123)	-0.508 (0.094)	-0.040 (0.110)	-0.084 (0.118)
No Religion	-0.148 (0.114)	0.135 (0.116)	0.283 (0.130)	-0.079 (0.101)	0.069 (0.116)	-0.214 (0.118)
West	0.259 (0.091)	0.718 (0.101)	0.459 (0.112)	0.816 (0.082)	0.558 (0.095)	0.098 (0.105)
Atlantic	0.444 (0.120)	0.598 (0.135)	0.154 (0.145)	-0.494 (0.140)	-0.939 (0.149)	-1.093 (0.161)
Intercept	-0.659 (0.087)	-1.451 (0.103)	-0.792 (0.112)	-0.487 (0.081)	0.172 (0.093)	0.964 (0.108)
χ^2			461.667			
N			2868			

Estimation by multinomial probit. Entries in parentheses are asymptotic standard errors.

TABLE 4. STRUCTURAL FOUNDATIONS, OUTSIDE QUEBEC, 2004-6

	Conservative vs Liberal	NDP vs Liberal	NDP vs Conservative
Union	-0.185 (0.083)	0.403 (0.088)	0.588 (0.086)
French	-0.396 (0.151)	-0.282 (0.164)	0.113 (0.167)
Northern Europe	-0.154 (0.125)	-0.083 (0.138)	0.071 (0.130)
Eastern Europe	-0.018 (0.158)	-0.100 (0.177)	-0.082 (0.166)
Southern Europe	-0.487 (0.194)	-0.290 (0.211)	0.197 (0.215)
Non European	-0.926 (0.137)	-0.341 (0.140)	0.585 (0.147)
Catholic	-0.302 (0.099)	-0.128 (0.110)	0.174 (0.108)
No Religion	-0.434 (0.103)	0.436 (0.106)	0.870 (0.104)
West	0.738 (0.086)	0.604 (0.094)	-0.134 (0.091)
Atlantic	-0.371 (0.124)	-0.059 (0.134)	0.312 (0.139)
Intercept	0.333 (0.079)	-0.685 (0.090)	-1.019 (0.088)
χ^2		310.671	
N		2459	

Estimation by multinomial probit. Entries in parentheses are asymptotic standard errors.

TABLE 5. STRUCTURAL FOUNDATIONS, QUEBEC, 1965-88

	Cons vs Lib	NDP vs Lib	Soc Credit vs Lib	NDP vs Cons	Soc Credit vs Cons	Soc Credit vs NDP
Union	0.419 (0.075)	0.592 (0.094)	0.216 (0.105)	0.173 (0.098)	-0.203 (0.108)	-0.376 (0.122)
Farm	0.215 (0.149)	-0.660 (0.280)	0.245 (0.192)	-0.874 (0.284)	0.030 (0.199)	0.905 (0.307)
French	0.457 (0.143)	0.365 (0.181)	1.718 (0.441)	-0.092 (0.193)	1.260 (0.446)	1.352 (0.458)
Catholic	-0.338 (0.167)	-0.073 (0.220)	0.237 (0.408)	0.266 (0.232)	0.576 (0.412)	0.310 (0.434)
No Relig	0.472 (0.295)	1.211 (0.335)	0.206 (0.672)	0.739 (0.336)	-0.266 (0.672)	-1.004 (0.688)
Intercept	-0.850 (0.118)	-1.868 (0.166)	-3.485 (0.482)	-1.017 (0.174)	-2.635 (0.484)	-1.617 (0.496)
χ^2			118.581			
N			2803			

Estimation by multinomial probit. Entries in parentheses are asymptotic standard errors.

TABLE 6. STRUCTURAL FOUNDATIONS, QUEBEC, 1993-2006

	Cons vs Lib	Bloc vs Lib	Bloc vs Cons
Union	0.097 (0.102)	0.458 (0.090)	0.360 (0.097)
French	0.906 (0.150)	2.551 (0.191)	1.645 (0.207)
Catholic	0.267 (0.195)	0.986 (0.246)	0.719 (0.264)
No Relig	0.232 (0.256)	1.450 (0.286)	1.217 (0.310)
Intercept	-1.507 (0.169)	-3.099 (0.274)	-1.591 (0.287)
χ^2		280.080	
N		2158	

Estimation by multinomial probit. Entries in parentheses are asymptotic standard errors.

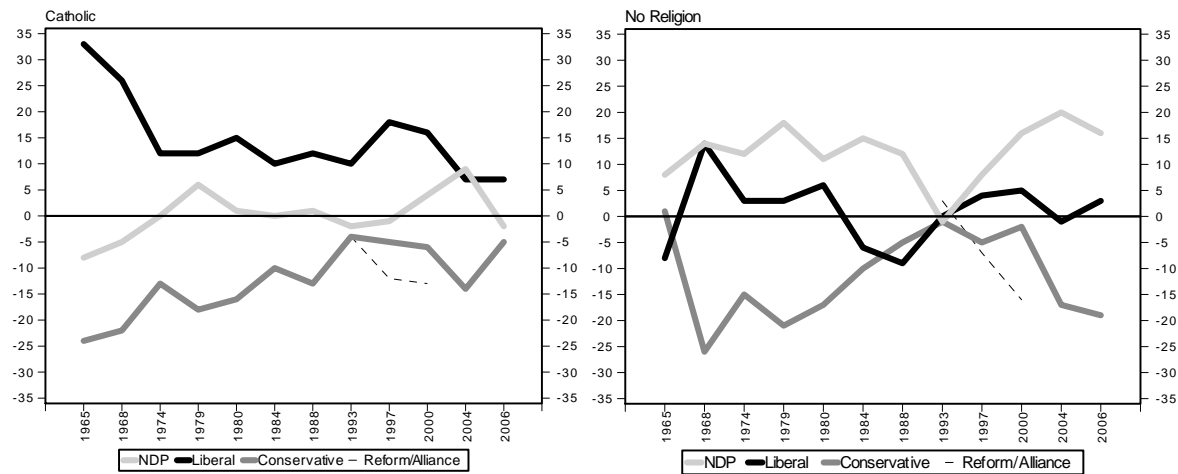


FIGURE 1A. RELIGIOUS CLEAVAGES

Marginal effects estimated from year-by-year multivariate probit regression, binomial by party.

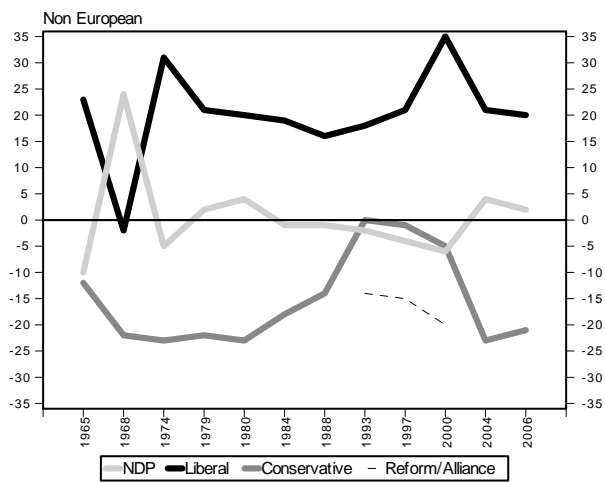
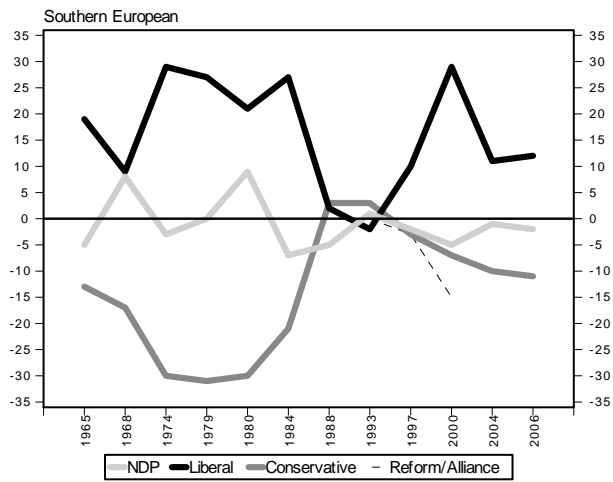
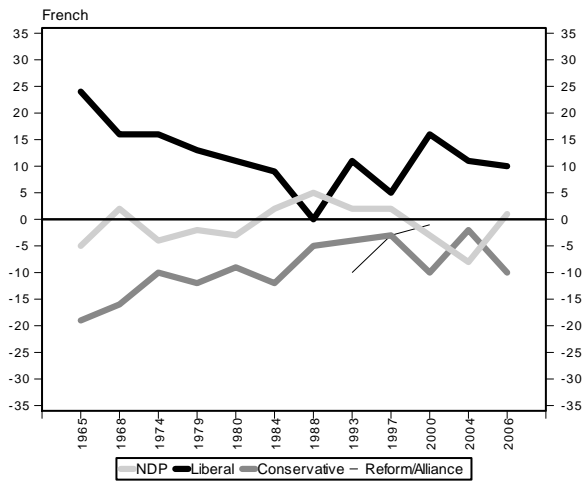


FIGURE 1B. ETHNOLINGUISTIC CLEAVAGES

Marginal effects estimated from year-by-year multivariate probit regression, binomial by party.

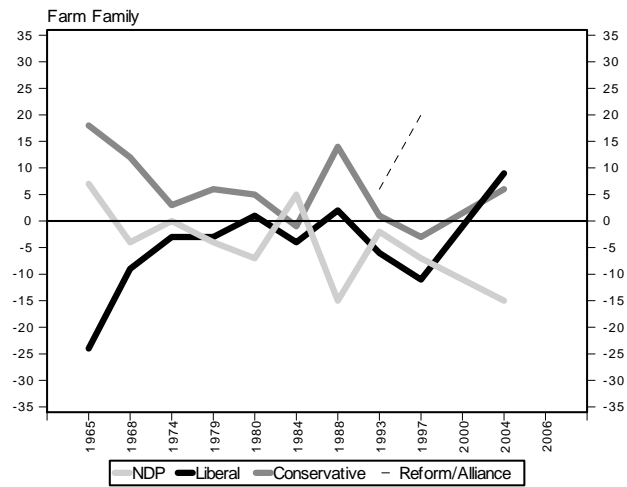
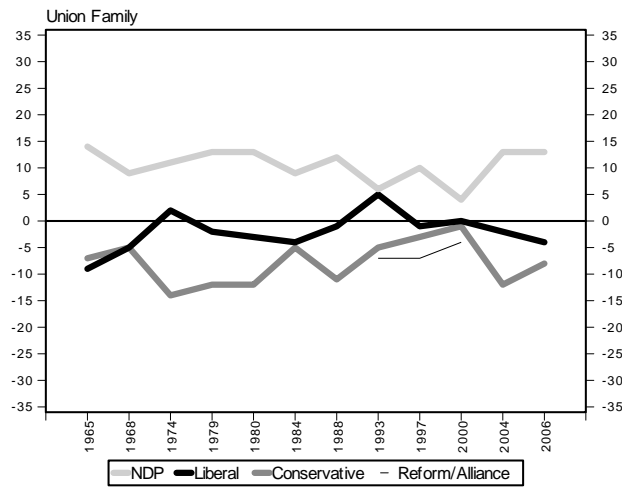


FIGURE 1C. ECONOMIC CLEAVAGES

Marginal effects estimated from year-by-year multivariate probit regression, binomial by party.

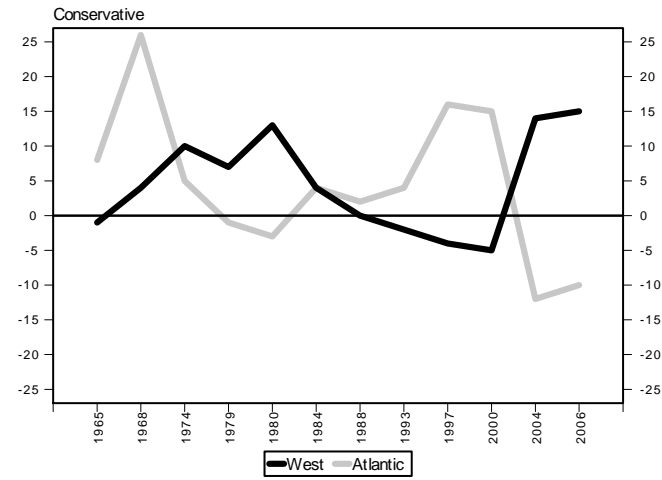
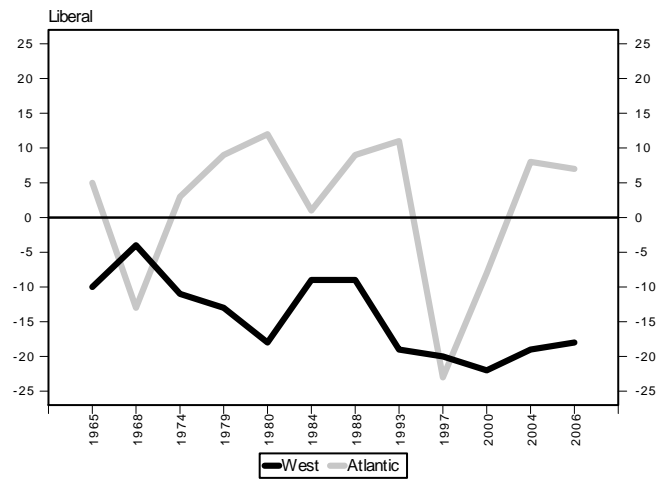
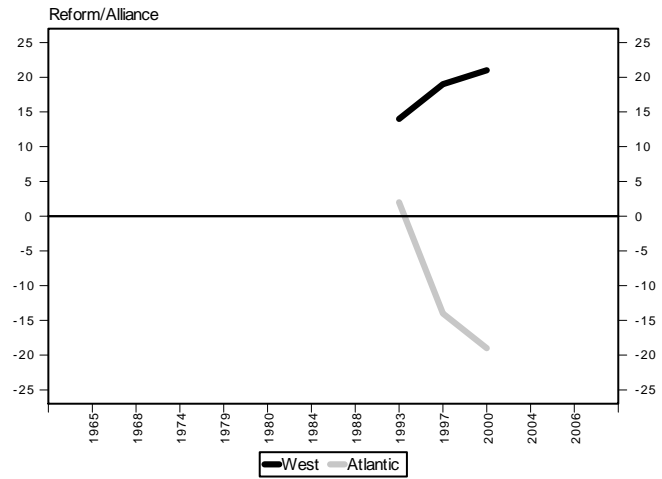
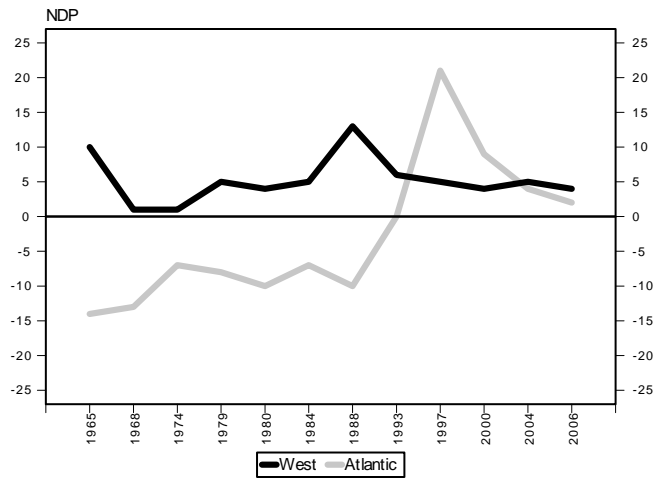


FIGURE 1D. GEOGRAPHIC CLEAVAGES

Marginal effects estimated from year-by-year multivariate probit regression, binomial by party.

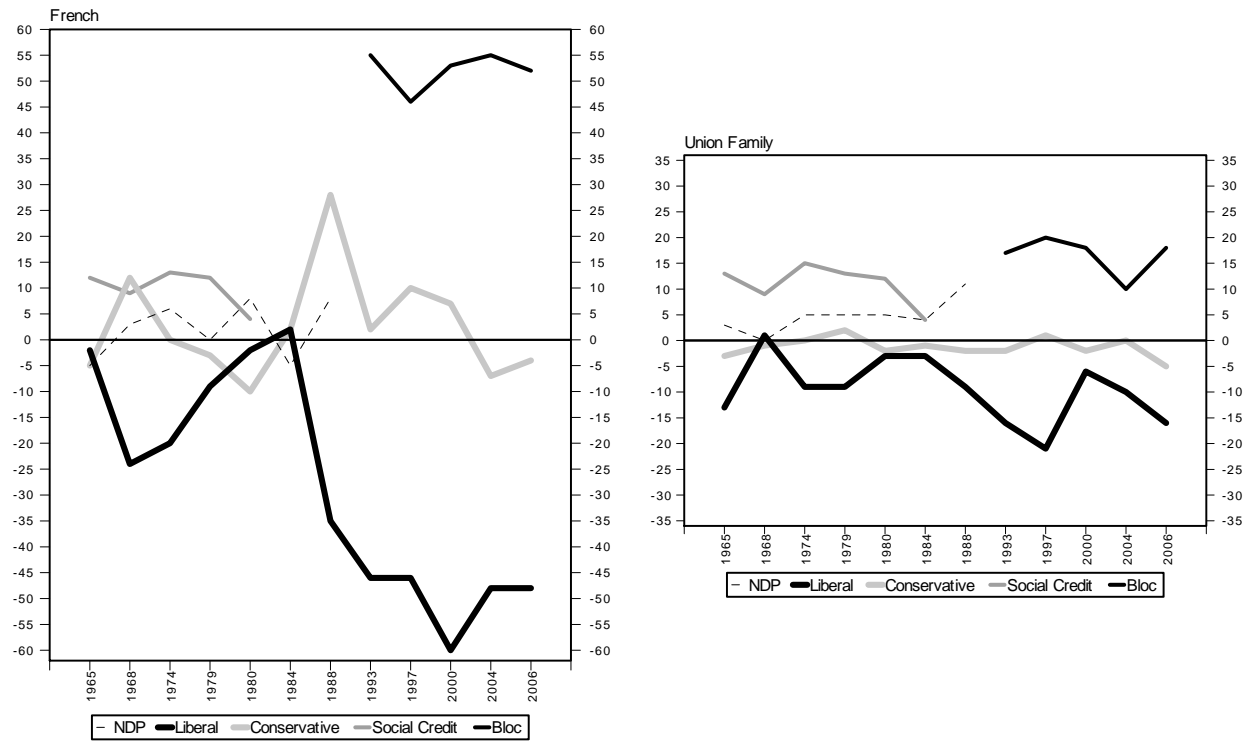


FIGURE 2. LANGUISTIC AND ECONOMIC CLEAVAGES IN QUEBEC
 Entries are percentage-point differences between groups by year.

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