

**Integrating Multi-Level Party Politics from the Ground Up:
The Local Organizations of Canada's Liberal Parties**

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All statewide parties in decentralized states will have to accommodate inter-territorial tensions over the distribution of resources, manage the relationship between party officials and representatives of various tiers of government, and speak for the 'general' interest whilst simultaneously representing potentially contradictory 'particularistic' interests. But these contradictions are likely to be much stronger in heterogeneous societies where strong ethnoregionalist parties are present.

(van Biezen and Hopkin 2006)

Just how do political parties manage the organizational tensions involved in multi-level politics? Van Biezen and Hopkin (2006, 15) are surely correct in identifying this as one of the critical problems of such systems and in noting that this is a particularly difficult problem when the basis for democratic multi-level structures lies in the conflicts inherent in ethnically divided societies where the constituent communities command their own space. To explore this problem van Biezen and Hopkin analyze three key accommodative strategies – nomination, electoral and governing – that parties in Spain and the United Kingdom adopt. In both cases the decentralized political institutions (i.e. the basis for multi-level politics) were new and the comparison led to few hard generalizations. However van Biezen and Hopkin were confident in claiming that: “the nature of party organizations will have an important impact on the choices available to state-wide parties under conditions of political decentralization” (2006, 35).

In this paper we take up this observation and explore “the nature of party organizations” themselves in Canada, a system whose long-established multi-level political structure is deeply rooted in territorially-based ethnic division. Where van Biezen and Hopkin asked how party organizations coped with major functional challenges, we start with an analysis of the organizations themselves asking how the parties construct local (electoral district level) organizations that serve as the constituent building blocks for their wider organization. It turns out that there is no simple template, no uniform organizational solution, either within individual parties or across the wider party system(s). That then leads to a discussion of distinctive responses to the organizational imperatives faced by the parties, and their partisans, and how they may be understood and explained.

To approach the issue of how political parties manage the realities of multi-level political imperatives on the ground it is necessary to start with a brief account of Canadian parties and the party systems they define. The conventional view is that the parties have simply given up attempting to operate across levels and created, at least organizationally, two political worlds (Blake 1985). We will conclude that whatever the merits of that analysis it over simplifies and thus misrepresents an important dimension of partisan life.

Party Organization in Canada

Conventional portraits of Canadian political parties, and the nation's party systems, point to distinctive features of each that are held to reflect both the underlying social base as well as the dynamics of a highly decentralized set of federal political institutions. Unlike in most democratic political systems, where parties are agents of social division representing the interests of distinctive groups, Canadian parties are charged with being agents of social integration and so have always had a catch-all electoral orientation. In a very diverse society this has meant that individual political parties have often found themselves harbouring local groups with divergent, even conflicting interests. As a consequence they have evolved a stratarchical organizational style that is designed to permit maximum local autonomy to their local associations to mobilize who they are able, and then to organize and operate as they choose (Carty 2002, Carty and Cross 2006). Given their electoral preoccupations, these local organizations are defined by the (shifting) bounds of the single-member electoral districts that shape their immediate competitive environment (Carty and Eagles 2005).

With little but the discipline required for electoral success to hold them together, Canadian parties have not been able to withstand the disintegrating impact of conflict between the distinctive interests and opportunities offered by the provincial and national electoral arenas. This is particularly true when parties of the same label are in government at both national and provincial levels because intergovernmental conflicts between them are often highly divisive (Cairns 1977). As a consequence, to be effective, parties have fragmented and established separate and distinct organizations at the two levels of the system. And given the differing social and political complexion of the societies in which they compete, an asymmetrical set of party systems has emerged. There are three aspects of this asymmetry that need to be noted: the same set of parties are not found in all (provincial and national) the party systems; within any given province the same set of parties may not compete at both levels; and even when a party is present at both levels it may command very different levels and/or bases of support and a very different position in the alignment of competitive forces.

It would appear then that Canadian parties have dealt with the challenge of accommodating multi-level politics by simply opting out – by establishing separate, parallel party systems at each level. This bifurcation of a system in which political parties are cadre-style agglomerations of local associations means that in any community each party will need to have its own organization. Thus, for instance, in any community in the province of British Columbia there will be two separate local Liberal organizations – one established by the Liberal Party of Canada (British Columbia) and the other by the Liberal Party of British Columbia – each charged with advancing their respective electoral interests in the quite different party systems that structure national and provincial competition in the province. One of the consequences of this has been the weakening and fragmentation of party identifications by Canadians so that by 2000 only about a third of respondents to the national election survey reported holding a consistent party identification across both levels (Carty and Wolinetz 2006, 64).

This formal organizational divide may serve the interests of the system-wide parties (and their leadership cadres, especially while in government) but it does create burdens for local partisans. Building and sustaining two local organizations consumes limited resources and fragments local activity. Thus a central question is how do local partisans respond to this structured bifurcation of their political world? What kinds of organizational responses are there on the ground? While the formal division of the parties suggests that there will be distinctive structures, the autonomous character of local associations fostered by the parties' stratarchical structure means that local activists are relatively free to find ways to organize their partisan activity in ways that respond to their needs. In effect, we are suggesting that while in countries like Spain or the United Kingdom where unified parties must struggle against the disaggregating impact of multi-level politics on the ground, it may be the activity of ground level organizations in Canada that mitigate some of the disaggregating impacts of the divisions between system-wide party organizations.

To explore the extent to which this is the case we examine the pattern of local level organization and activity in the Liberal party – historically the dominant national party and the only one regularly competitive in all of the provincial party systems. There is some interesting empirical evidence that leads us to believe that local Liberal partisans are not as divided as the conventional portrait of the formal party structures suggests. Sixty-four per cent of respondents to a 2001 survey of Canadian party members reported that they were members of national *and* provincial parties (Sayers and Koop 2005, 11). A study of the national party's constituency-level organizations done for the 1991 Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing reported that fifty per cent of the local associations claimed that their membership was held jointly with the respective provincial party (Carty 1991). When asked about what their local association's executive was concerned with:

36% said "*federal [i.e. national] politics exclusively*"
45% said "*mainly federal politics but sometimes provincial affairs*"
18% said "*federal and provincial politics equally*", and
1% said "*mainly provincial politics but sometimes federal affairs*"

This is clearly not the pattern of a set of separate and distinct party organizations operating in the water-tight compartments of a federally divided system. It would appear that Liberal activists are exploiting the autonomous character of their local party organizations to provide for greater political integration than is suggested by the formal structures.

In the following sections of the paper we account for three types of local party organization and activity among Liberals in three very different provinces (British Columbia, Ontario and New Brunswick) and discuss the forces that appear to account for different local responses. But first we use three case studies of provincial constituency associations in the constituencies of Don Valley East, Port Moody-Westwood, and Perth-Wellington to illustrate each type of organization and their consequences for local party life in the constituencies.

Three Types of Constituency Associations

Party life is decidedly unitary in nature in the provincial constituency of *Don Valley East*, Ontario. Local party activists make little effort to distinguish between national and provincial politics or between the national and provincial Liberal parties. For them, a Liberal is a Liberal, and this unitary view of partisanship is reflected in their own participation. To the extent that their resources allow them to, these activists attend partisan events and participate in and donate to nomination and constituency campaigns without reference to whether the event or campaign is associated with the national or provincial party. As such, these individuals can be referred to as *consistent* party activists because they participate in the same (Liberal) parties at both the national and provincial levels, as opposed to *inconsistent* activists (those who participate in different parties at the national and provincial levels) or *single-level* activists (those who participate at either the national or provincial level).¹ They become accustomed to seeing the same faces at events, many of which are coordinated jointly by the parties' local national and provincial constituency associations. The solidary bonds that result reinforce their will to participate at both the national and provincial levels. The end result is that the distinction between the national and provincial Liberal parties, however well established its formal organizational separation, is hardly experienced by the consistent local activists of Don Valley East. The provincial constituency association in Don Valley East is an example of an **integrated** constituency association.

Politics on the right side of the ideological spectrum in the province of British Columbia has always been about coalition-building, and this is hardly better exemplified than in the provincial constituency of *Port Moody-Westwood*. Local Liberal activists distinguish between the national and provincial Liberal parties partially because differences in the national and provincial party systems create an imperative to do so. The national Liberal and Conservative parties are both competitive locally, but the absence of a Conservative party in the provincial system means there is no local provincial Conservative association. Accordingly, the activist base of the provincial constituency association in Port Moody-Westwood contains both national Liberal and national Conservative activists. Such party activists inhabit two political worlds. They attend separate events for national and provincial parties. Provincial activists participate in provincial election campaigns but separate into Conservative and Liberal campaign teams during national election campaigns. Liberal partisans in Port Moody-Westwood, in contrast to their counterparts in Don Valley East, experience party life at the national and provincial levels as separate. But their participation at the national and provincial levels constitutes an informal connection between the national and provincial parties. The provincial constituency association in Port Moody-Westwood is an example of a **connected** constituency association.

¹ We adapt these terms (consistent, inconsistent, and single-level) from the literature on party identifiers in multi-level states (for example: Jennings and Niemi 1966).

Party activists in the provincial constituency association of *Perth-Wellington*, Ontario, enjoy the aspects of local party life typically associated with strong associations, including an incumbent member, inter-election events, and a dedicated constituency association executive. Missing from party life in the constituency, however, is any connection to the local national Liberal constituency association. Provincial activists attribute this separation of the national and provincial associations to internal strife within the national association that originated with an earlier contested nomination contest and had led to the development of a dysfunctional and weak national constituency association executive. The response of the provincial executive has been to maintain a distance from the “toxic” conflict of the national association. For party activists in the constituency, dedication to the vibrant provincial association has increasingly entailed avoidance of the national association and its limited activities. Such activists live in one world, but, unlike their counter-parts in nearby Don Valley East, it is an exclusively single-level world. The provincial constituency association in Perth-Wellington is a classic example of an **autonomous** constituency association.

This brief ethnographic sketch of Liberal party organizations in three constituencies suggests that sharp differences exist in the nature of activists’ engagement with national and provincial parties. In each riding, the local constituency association reflects the nature of this engagement in its organization. The constituency associations of Don Valley East, Port Moody-Westwood, and Perth-Wellington are examples of three distinctive types of Liberal constituency associations. Integrated, connected, and autonomous constituency associations differ in four important characteristics: the multi-level activism of executive members (whether members of the constituency association executive tend to be consistent, inconsistent, or single-level activists); executive openness (the extent to which the constituency association executive is open to involvement from activists that diverge from the dominant form of multi-level activism present on the executive); auxiliary linkages (whether auxiliary organizations in the constituency are connected one or both local party associations); and, multi-level cooperation (whether national and provincial constituency associations cooperate either formally or informally in planning and executing inter-election events and activities). Table 1 summarizes the four characteristics that differ between the three types of constituency associations. In the following sections, we describe these characteristics in greater detail.

Table 1:

Characteristics of Integrated, Connected, and Autonomous Constituency Associations

	Integrated	Connected	Autonomous
Multi-Level Activism of Executive Members	Consistent	Consistent & Inconsistent	Single-Level
Executive Openness	Closed	Open	Indifferent
Auxiliary Linkages	Interconnected	Separate	Separate
Multi-Level Cooperation	Formal & Informal Cooperation	Informal Cooperation	No Cooperation

This categorization of constituency associations is drawn from empirical research, particularly interviews with national and provincial Liberal party activists and constituency association officials conducted between January 2006 and January 2007. Interviews were conducted in several constituencies within the provinces of British Columbia, Ontario, and New Brunswick. These three provinces were selected to maximize variation on the dimensions along which we expected local organizations and activist behaviour to vary. The national and provincial party systems in British Columbia are deeply dissimilar and the national and provincial Liberal parties are seen to be ideologically divergent; national and provincial constituency boundaries in Ontario are, in contrast to the other provinces, congruent²; and the national and provincial Liberal parties in New Brunswick share some formal organizational resources in the form of a common party office. Within each province, a sample of ridings was selected based on the density of the riding, the strength and activity of the local constituency associations, and whether a Liberal incumbent was present at the national and provincial levels.³

Integrated Constituency Associations

This unitary experience of party activists in constituencies like Don Valley East is reflected in the arrangements of the riding's national and provincial constituency associations. Integrated constituency associations are characterized by the behavior of the activists that make up the constituency executive, or the multi-level activism of executive members. Their activists tend to be consistent in their engagement with national and provincial parties: they are Liberals at the national and provincial levels. In fact, consistent activists may sit on both the national and

² The 1996 "Fewer Politicians Act" introduced by the Ontario government linked provincial constituency boundaries to those of national constituencies in Ontario, thereby creating coterminous national and provincial ridings in Ontario. Eleven sparsely-populated northern ridings, however, were subsequently de-linked from national redistributions. Representation Act, S.O. 2005, c.2.

³ The term "riding" is widely used in Canada as a synonym for electoral district or constituency.

provincial association executives, constituting an important means of communication between the two executives. The executives of integrated constituency associations may also contain members that are appointed to the executive to represent the association from the other level, ex-officio members. In Don Valley East, for example, the president of the national constituency association sits on the provincial executive as an ex-officio member.

Integrated constituency associations are also characterized by an ongoing rejection of inconsistent party activists and activism on the part of members of the constituency executive. The executives of integrated constituency associations are closed to the involvement of non-consistent party activists. Executive members in integrated associations are suspicious of party activists that have differing partisan affiliations at the national and provincial levels, even if the activists in question are Liberals at one level. Consistent members of integrated executives generally regard inconsistent members with a sense of Liberal tolerance: “You can't hold that [inconsistent activism] against someone. If they sign up for a membership with us and attend our meetings and help with activities, then we accept them.” But underlying that tolerance may be suspicion: “We accept that, but we don't put them in positions where they'll carry secrets.” Another consistent executive member is even blunter: “To me, that's like having a spy in your midst...That's shocking.”

Auxiliary organizations in constituencies with integrated associations tend to be connected in a formal or informal manner to both the local national *and* provincial party associations. In this way, auxiliary organizations in constituencies where integrated association are present act to reinforce the interconnections between the national and provincial associations. In Don Valley East, for example, the president of the youth auxiliary sits as an ex-officio member on both the national and provincial executives in the riding. In addition, youth members are active in planning and executing inter-election events in the riding. The connection of auxiliary organizations to both national and provincial associations may reflect the consistent nature of the activists involved in the auxiliaries. The linkages to both national and provincial associations also serve to emphasize and reinforce the connections that exist between the two associations.

Integrated associations are also characterized by their willingness to cooperate with their counterpart(s) at the other level in holding inter-election events. Integrated constituency associations are likely to engage in formal *and* informal types of cooperation. The Don Valley East annual Liberal picnic is an example of an event that entails formal cooperation between integrated associations. However, the substantial professional and solidarity bonds that exist between members of integrated national and provincial executives also allow for informal types of cooperation between national and provincial associations.

Characteristics of the party system help to structure the nature of the constituency association executive. Party activists on the constituency executive are more likely to identify with the national and provincial Liberal parties (or be consistent Liberals) where the national and provincial party systems are similar and where the national and provincial Liberal parties are

perceived to be similar in an ideological sense (Blake 1982). In influencing the nature of the activists that make up the constituency executive, the nature of the party system influences the type of association present. Ontario's national and provincial party systems, unlike those in British Columbia, are similar to one another.

In addition, constituency associations are affected by the formal arrangements that exist between national and provincial Liberal parties. While national and provincial Liberal Party organizations are largely separate from one another in all provinces (Dyck 1995), national and provincial organizations do maintain certain linkages. In New Brunswick, for example, the provincial Liberal office is funded by the national and provincial parties and services national and provincial constituency associations in each constituency.⁴ In such cases, the central party office may encourage and facilitate cooperation between local national and provincial associations, creating an impetus for the development of integrated associations. In addition, the perception of camaraderie between the national and provincial parties at the organizational level sends signals to local party activists that such camaraderie is appropriate and should be replicated at the local level in the form of cooperation between associations. Despite this, local conditions may discourage constituency associations from developing an integrated form even where such formal linkages do exist.

Characteristics of the local riding also influence the development of the constituency association. Integrated associations are more likely to develop in urban and high-density ridings than in rural ridings. The relative proximity of party activists in high density ridings allows for easier access to national and provincial riding events and executive meetings. Ease of access allows national and provincial associations to stay in contact with one another and facilitates cooperation between associations. In addition, informal regional forums that may include national and provincial constituency associations are more accessible for party activists in urban rather than rural regions.

The presence of congruent national and provincial constituency boundaries also encourages the integration of national and provincial constituency associations. The separation of national and provincial constituency boundaries together with the imperative for Canadian parties to maintain an organizational presence in each constituency has led in part to the development of separate national and provincial constituency associations (Perlin 1980, 52). Where constituency boundaries are congruent, such as in Ontario, the opportunity for national and provincial associations to cooperate with each other to maximize the presence of a limited pool of local activists within each riding is obviously increased. Congruent constituency boundaries also streamline the process of cooperation by decreasing the number of associations present. Only one national and one provincial Liberal association exist in the congruent Ontario riding of Don Valley East. In contrast, the national riding of *Acadie-Bathurst* in New Brunswick contains seven provincial ridings and therefore seven provincial constituency associations. Drawing eight

⁴ Until recently, Liberals in New Brunswick held a joint membership in both the national and provincial parties.

organizations into an integrated structure is more difficult than for two, although some associations in Atlantic Canada have developed informal mechanisms to streamline the process.

Finally, integrated associations rely on the presence of a relatively vibrant nucleus of activists within the constituency to conduct communications between the associations. Where a large pool of committed activists exists in an area and participates on the association executives, the potential for open communication between the two associations is increased. While active associations generally exist in ridings with an incumbent member (Carty 1991, 56), the presence of an elected member does not necessarily encourage the development of integrated associations. The elected member may personally encourage such integration and may in fact be an important linkage between the national and provincial associations. In Don Valley East, for example, the national and provincial members oftentimes attend executive meetings at the other level. In other cases, such as in the New Brunswick provincial constituency of Nigadoo-Chaleur, the elected member may be hesitant to have the key members of his constituency association participate at the other level. In such cases, the elected member may be an obstacle to integration of the national and provincial constituency associations.

Connected Constituency Associations

The nature of the activist base in Port Moody-Westwood shapes the organization of the BC Liberal constituency association. Unlike the executives of integrated associations, its executive is staffed by consistent and inconsistent members who have developed informal mechanisms that function to integrate the two groups on the constituency executive. Several members of the provincial executive sit on the executives of the local Liberal and Conservative national parties' constituency associations. The presence of both these consistent and inconsistent activists on the constituency executive has consequences for other aspects of the organization of connected constituency associations.

Connected constituency associations are characterized by a sentiment of acceptance toward inconsistent partisans on the constituency executive. Executive members of connected constituency associations are open to involvement from both consistent and inconsistent partisans. In this regard, connected constituency associations differ sharply from integrated associations where inconsistent partisanship is viewed as an impediment to cooperation between the provincial and provincial associations and is therefore frowned upon. Instead, inconsistent partisans on connected constituency executives are accepted or even valued. The presence of both consistent and inconsistent activists on the association executive encourages members of both groups to remain active lest the other faction gain influence in the constituency or over the party's policy formulation processes. At the same time, comraderie at the provincial level lessens conflict between inconsistent and consistent members at the national level. In this way, connected constituency associations may decrease the intensity of conflict between local partisans while the monolithic integrated associations often reinforce such conflict.

In the same way, auxiliary organizations in constituencies with connected constituency associations tend to be officially separate, with separate auxiliary organizations for each association. In British Columbia, for example, the Liberal's provincial youth organization has no formal association with the national Liberal Party. Such groups, however, may share informal linkages to national parties. In particular, such groups may come to be dominated by one of the consistent or inconsistent groups of activists. In British Columbia, for example, the provincial women's commission was perceived to be a bastion of national Liberals. Such perceptions can have consequences for the balance inherent in connected associations between consistent and inconsistent party activists. Thus, when the former president of the provincial women's commission ran for the provincial party nomination in Port Moody-Westwood her previous role in the women's commission became a liability amongst the members who supported the Conservative party nationally.

The nature of the association executive has consequences for the nature of connected constituency associations. One consequence of the participation of consistent and inconsistent partisans in connected associations is that formal cooperation between national and provincial associations is ruled out. Such formal cooperation would serve to alienate the inconsistent segment of the constituency's provincial activist base. The combination of consistent and inconsistent activists on the constituency executive and in the local activist base as a whole in connected associations renders unacceptable formal cooperation between the association and any single association at the other level. Just as an official emphasis on national issues is avoided in connected associations, so too is official cooperation between national and provincial associations. As a result, the type of joint inter-election functions held by integrated national and provincial associations do not take place in constituencies where connected associations are present.

Informal cooperation between connected associations, however, is compatible with the make-up of the executives of such associations. The executives of connected associations are populated by activists with substantive ties to parties at the other level. Such activists may act as informal means of communication between the national and provincial associations and therefore spur informal cooperation between the associations. In fact, connected associations may take advantage of such informal linkages in order to gain support for their inter-election activities. In Port Moody-Westwood, for example, provincial executive members advertise and sell tickets to provincial events at national executive meetings. In this way, the mixed constituency executive in Port Moody-Westwood allows the association to reach out to both national Liberals and Conservatives in the community.

Connected associations tend to develop where the national and provincial party systems differ from one another and, more importantly, where the national and provincial Liberal parties are seen to differ from one another in an ideological sense. Party members are less likely to be consistent partisans when party systems differ substantially between the national and provincial

levels than when the two systems are relatively similar (Sayers and Koop 2005). In the same way, differences between the national and provincial party systems create obstacles to consistent party activism. Where both consistent and inconsistent activists are active in a local constituency, connected constituency associations will result.

British Columbia provides a good example of a party system context within which connected associations are likely to arise. Provincial Liberal associations are given incentives to adopt a connected form in response to the structure of the national and provincial party systems in BC. While the national and provincial New Democratic parties are generally integrated in their organization, non-NDP voters and activists have struggled to form a “free-enterprise” alternative to the left-of-centre party (Kristianson 1977). Given that the national Liberal and Conservative parties are both competitive in B.C., this has entailed aggregating the interests of the national Liberal and Conservative activist bases within the provincial Liberal Party. The executives of provincial Liberal constituency associations therefore tend to be populated by consistent activists (Liberals at the national level) and inconsistent activists (Conservatives at the national level). We would similarly expect to find connected constituency associations in jurisdictions where the national and sub-national party systems are unmatched, such as in the province of Saskatchewan where three parties are competitive at the national level and two parties are competitive at the provincial level.

Connected associations are likely to develop in a local environment that is also conducive to the development of integrated associations. The informal cooperation that characterizes connected associations at the national and provincial levels is simplified in urban ridings. In contrast, cooperation is made difficult in large rural ridings where the national and provincial associations present may find centers of strength in different sections of the constituency. The relative high density of Port Moody-Westwood and the surrounding ridings has allowed for the development of informal linkages between national and provincial associations and also between provincial constituency associations in the region.

Connected associations also tend to be relatively strong, active associations. Weak associations are less likely to contain the sort of devoted activists required to build informal relationships between the national and provincial associations. Strong connected associations generally have an incumbent member. Whereas elected politicians in integrated associations may play an important role in linking national and provincial associations to one another by, for example, attending executive meetings of the association at the other level, elected politicians in connected associations do not involve themselves in the affairs of the association at the other levels. Politicians in connected associations, such as the provincial member from *Richmond* (in British Columbia), may allow themselves to be identified with a single party at the other level. But the extent to which members can involve themselves in partisan politics at the other level is limited. In British Columbia’s *Kootenay-Columbia*, national Conservative activists involved with the provincial Liberal Party grudgingly concede that the former provincial Liberal politician from

the riding was a federal Liberal. From their perspective, the politician's defeat was partially attributable to her connections to the national Liberal Party in a constituency where the national party is unpopular.

Autonomous Constituency Associations

The members of autonomous constituency association executives are generally single-level in nature. That is, members of the executives of autonomous constituency associations tend to be involved in politics at only the national or provincial levels. Ex-officio members are therefore not appointed to association executives from the association at the other level. Unlike integrated and connected associations, executive members in autonomous associations are focused exclusively on either the national or the provincial level. Autonomous associations therefore lack the formal and informal linkages that characterize integrated associations and the informal linkages that characterize connected associations. This lack of engagement holds consequences for other aspects of autonomous organizations.

While association executive members in autonomous associations tend to be single-level activists, this is not a prerequisite for participation on autonomous executives. Existing members of autonomous executives are generally indifferent to how activists participate at the other level. Exceptions exist, such as in Perth-Wellington where the provincial executive is wary of involvement from activists associated with the national executive. But in most cases, the association is generally indifferent to how activists participate at the national and provincial levels. In weak autonomous associations, stop-gap executive members do not attach any significance to the involvement of new executive members' involvement at the other level.

Auxiliary organizations in constituencies characterized by autonomous associations are generally single-level in nature. That is, such associations are linked to either the national or the provincial association but not both. In this way, auxiliary organizations do not provide a linkage between associations at the national and provincial levels in the manner that they do with integrated associations. Instead, the separation of national and provincial auxiliary organizations reinforces the separation of the national and provincial constituency associations.

The inter-election events of autonomous associations, where they take place, are single-level in nature. Autonomous associations do not collaborate formally with other associations on inter-election activities. And because the single-level members of autonomous executive do not maintain contact with the members of other associations, informal cooperation is also ruled out. That is not to say that individual members of the other association will not lend support by, for example, buying a ticket to the event. But the informal channels of communication between national and provincial associations are absent. Even informal means of assistance are therefore unavailable.

Like connected associations, autonomous constituency associations are likely to appear when the lines of similarity between the national and provincial party systems are confused. When the

national and provincial Liberal parties present share few or no organizational ties, constituency associations receive no encouragement to interact with the other constituency association present. In fact, such associations may be discouraged from doing so. This is the case with the provincial Liberal Party in British Columbia where constituency associations are encouraged by the party leadership to maintain their distance from the national Liberal Party. In such cases, autonomous constituency associations result.

The nature of the party system and the linkages between the national and provincial parties cannot entirely account for the development of autonomous constituency associations. The character of the local constituency strongly impacts the presence of autonomous constituency associations. Geographic obstacles make it difficult for integrated or connected associations to form in large rural constituencies. Instead, autonomous associations may develop. In such constituencies, the core nucleus of party activists tends to be located in a single area of the constituency, generally the riding's largest population centre. Party activists from outside of this area face obstacles to attending constituency meetings and therefore gaining access to that core nucleus. The result is that Liberals from the other level, particularly if they are dispersed throughout the riding, may find it difficult to establish meaningful professional and solidary ties with members of that association. In the rural national ridings of New Brunswick Southwest and Fundy-Royal, for example, provincial Liberals in the far-flung regions of the ridings feel frozen out of the primary groups of local party activists centred in the major towns of each constituency. In other cases, geographic distance may facilitate the development of distinctive national and provincial associations in far-away separate areas of the constituency.

The presence of non-congruent constituency boundaries may also increase the likelihood of autonomous constituency associations. This is particularly true in national ridings which contain several provincial ridings, such as in New Brunswick. In such cases, it is difficult for the national association to cooperate with all the provincial associations present. The result is that at least one provincial association may begin to lose contact with the national association and develop an autonomous form. The Liberal association in the provincial riding of *Shippigan*, for example, is a weak association. The riding is held by a Conservative member and is a significant distance from the major urban centre of the national association. In addition, the region in which Shippigan is located is geographically isolated and separated from the wider national constituency by language. Despite a long-standing and resilient organizational structure meant to draw the national and provincial associations to one another, the provincial association in Shippigan has developed an autonomous form.

The strength of the association plays a role in determining whether it will assume an autonomous form. Autonomous associations are likely to develop in constituencies where the Liberal Party is relatively uncompetitive. Integration between national and provincial associations requires a relatively vibrant activist base that staffs the local association executive and reaches out to the other association either formally or informally through personal connections. In weak

associations where an elected member is absent and the association executive has a placeholder form, no such activist base exists and an autonomous association results.

In other cases, differences in the local competitiveness of the national and provincial parties may lead to autonomous associations. In such cases, the national and provincial organizations may be largely focused on the elected member at the exclusion of involvement with the organization at the other level (Jacek, et al. 1972, 200). This tendency is observed in Perth-Wellington, where the provincial member has developed a strong personal following that is uninterested in becoming involved in the national association.

Causes and Consequences

Why do the local constituency associations in Don Valley East provide an ideal organizational context for the political integration of the national and provincial parties whereas the constituency association in Perth-Wellington replicates the organizational separation found at the elite level of the national and provincial Liberal parties? It would appear that the latter association responds not only to the directives of the party leadership but also to local incentives and constraints that shape the nature of the organization. In fact, the relative autonomy of constituency associations from the wider party ensures that such incentives and restraints shape the type of constituency association present in each riding. In the absence of stricter discipline imposed on local organizations from the party leadership such as that described by van Biezen and Hopkin in Wales or Scotland, local organizations in Canada respond instead to a set of system, party, and constituency-level factors that shape the institutional context within which the three types of constituency associations develop. These influences are the nature of the national and provincial party systems; the formal linkages between the national and provincial parties; the characteristics of the constituency, particularly whether it is a rural or urban constituency; the extent to which the national and provincial constituency boundaries are coterminous; and, the strength and vibrancy of the local association. Table 2 summarizes the conditions under which integrated, connected, and autonomous constituency associations will develop.

Table 2:
Causes of Integrated, Connected, and Autonomous Constituency Associations

	Integrated	Connected	Autonomous
National and Provincial Party Systems	Similar	Different	Different
Formal Linkages Between National and Provincial Parties	Many	None	None
Characteristics of the Constituency	Urban	Urban	Rural
Congruence of National and Provincial Constituency Boundaries	Congruent	?	Incongruent
Association Strength	Strong	Strong	Weak

The similarity of national and provincial party systems constitutes the foundational context within which constituency associations develop. Connected associations in particular provide a fascinating example of local organizational adaptation to the context provided by the national and provincial party systems. In contrast to multi-level states where the party exercises significant control over local organizations, formal linkages between national and provincial Liberal parties in Canada, where they exist, are not decisive in determining the multi-level character of local organizations.

However the extent to which constituency associations adapt to the party system context depends on the conditions of the local constituency which animate the organization of the constituency association. Similar party systems, for example, may encourage the development of integrated constituency associations. But this development may be impeded in sprawling urban ridings where the national and provincial constituency boundaries are incongruent and where the association is relatively weak. In contrast, an urban constituency where national and provincial constituency boundaries are congruent and where the association is relatively strong provides an ideal environment for integrated constituency associations to develop. Delineating how these variables combine and interact within individual constituencies allows one to account for the diversity found in constituency association organizational forms.

The constituency association is the primary location of engagement between activists and the wider party. The type of organization present is partially a reflection of that local activist base, but the organization also shapes the experience of local party activists. This experience is distinctively multi-level in integrated and connected association, although its nature differs between the two associations. Integrated associations in particular play a role in drafting activists

into engagement at both the national and sub-national levels. In contrast, autonomous organizations provide an incentive for activists to focus on either the national or the sub-national levels, not both. In this way, differences in the presence of the three types of associations produces differences in the nature of party life across constituencies.

Such differences have consequences beyond the experiences of local party activists. By shaping activists' engagement with national and provincial parties, the three types of constituency associations shape activists' sentiments towards the national and sub-national levels of the state. If the health of a multi-level state depends in part on the existence of mixed loyalties to the national and sub-national levels (Beer 1978, 15), then connected and especially integrated constituency associations may play a role in nurturing the development of an activist base that is conducive to the continued vitality of a multi-level state.

That having been said, local autonomy represents a response on the part of the Liberal Party to the unique organizational imperatives facing the party. Including Canada's political parties in comparative classifications of parties in multi-level states has proven to be a frustrating endeavor for political scientists. This is because national parties a) are not formally integrated with provincial parties and b) the parties, particularly the long-dominant Liberal Party, refuse to impose this organizational separation on the fundamental components of their expansive organizations, their constituency associations. The result is a significant amount of nuance in the national-provincial-local organization of Canada's parties. The apparent contradictions in this arrangement, however, have allowed the national parties to maintain a formal separation of the national and provincial parties that is essential to government leaders while simultaneously allowing their local organizations to adapt to the unique conditions found within each of the constituencies.

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