

The Benefits of Office: Canadian Conservatives, Same-sex Marriage and the end of the
Tory Syndrome?

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Introduction

This paper wrestles with a disagreement in the study of Canadian parties about the influence of ideology in our politics. On the one hand, the brokerage party tradition posits that there is little room for ideology to influence our major parties.¹ Being ideologically motivated is an indulgence that only those (like the NDP) who have given up their hopes of winning office can afford. Major parties are bland vote maximizers; minor parties the innovators and policy developers. Instead of ideology, major parties are

¹ Key work in this vein includes Clarke et al. (1984), Brodie and Jenson (2007), and Meisel (1961). For the purposes of this paper, I take the category 'brokerage party' to be equivalent to that of 'office-seeking party' (Strom 1990). This is not completely true, as the brokerage model offers a nuanced account of Canadian politics, but it highlights the transition that this paper is concerned with. In Strom's (1990) categorization, it is contrasted with an emphasis on seeking policy or votes.

motivated by office in a system that pushes them relentlessly towards the middle of the political spectrum.

On the other hand, there are those scholars who have emphasized the influence of ideology on how Canadian political parties behave (Christian and Campbell 1996). This has been an especial theme since the 1993 election brought two ideologically motivated parties (the Reform Party and the BQ) into national politics (Carty, Cross, and Young 2000; Laycock 2002, 1994). Examinations of party activists (Cross and Young 2002) and of the image of parties held by the electorate (Belanger 2003) show clear evidence of ideological influence even on major parties during the fourth party system.

This paper agrees with the office-seeking model that the Canadian system does create powerful pressures on political parties to seek office and that social conservatives did eventually act on that attraction. Following on the organizational insights of scholars like Carty (2002, 2004 and Katz and Mair (1994), though, we need not expect office to be equally attractive to all parts of a given party.² Nor can we expect that the power of a leader or of the party's dominant group (even if it is office-seeking) will be enough to move all parts of the party to behave in an equally office-seeking manner. Instead, different parts of a party may well find different balances between pursuing policy and pursuing office or, the point here, move from pursuing policy to pursuing office at a different rate.

The movement of a party faction in an office-seeking direction happens through two mechanisms.³ The first -- the major focus here -- is that those social conservatives who remain active in party politics moderate their claims and goals. They do their best to be "team players" and try not to jeopardize their party's electoral chances by making claims too far from the mainstream. They accept that their achievements will be incremental and carried out below the radar. The second mechanism -- which lies in the background of this discussion -- is withdrawal from partisan political activity by some social conservatives. Those social conservatives who feel that shifting their goals from clear cut policy concerns to the winning of office is too much of a compromise can simply stop being involved in the party. They can shift their attention to social movement activity or (and there is some indication of this latter approach currently) they can refocus their activity on more local, often church-based, activity.

This paper finds that social conservatives were much slower to move from being policy-motivated to office-motivated actors than their populist or fiscal conservative co-partisans. For social conservatives, it was not the transition from a policy-seeking

² In both cases, the internal organizations and internal divisions of a party are considered important for its behaviour. Parties cannot be assumed to be monolithic, rather, they contain factions, which:

Whether formally structured or loosely and casually articulated, provide a vehicle for linking sets of individuals across separate and distinct elements of the organization and so constitute an integrative device in stratarchically organized parties. Politicians seeking to establish some dominance or control within their party find that factional activity provides them with an important tool for coordinating decisions taken in otherwise relatively autonomous organizational settings. (Carty 2004, 15).

³ Thanks to Scott Matthews for this helpful suggestion on an earlier draft of this paper.

(Reform) to an office-seeking (Canadian Alliance/Conservative Party of Canada) environment that caused them to cast their positions in more moderate terms and to place winning office over being ideologically consistent. Rather, it was only when the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC) formed a minority government that social conservatives stopped prioritizing policy and assumed a more moderate office-seeking stance.

Policy vs. Office-Seeking for Social Conservatives in the Reform Party

The Reform Party emerged during a time of discontent in Western Canada. Initially, hopes were high that strong Western support for Brian Mulroney's PCs would translate into influence in Ottawa. These hopes were soon dashed, for many, as Mulroney seemed to prefer accommodating Quebec's interests on the constitution and in the awarding of government contracts to dealing with Western grievances. This, combined with his seeming inability to balance the federal budget, led to renewed Western dissatisfaction with Canada's political situation. At its origins and for some time after, Reform was a classic protest or third party, driven by ideological commitments and a sense of disenfranchisement.⁴

Reform's early platforms and announcements were very populist in tone and stressed three issues: fiscal reform, democratic renewal, a Triple-E Senate, and opposition to bilingualism. Notably absent in early party discussions and planning were questions about abortion or same-sex rights, issues central to social conservatism.⁵ The extent of the treatment of social issues in the 1989 *Blue Book* is a statement that the party would "affirm the value and dignity of the *individual person*, and the importance of strengthening and protecting the *family unit* as essential to the wellbeing of individuals and society" (italics in original, 26). This principle remained in subsequent versions of the party's platform, but was balanced by the party's populist stance on moral decision making.

This overarching populism placed social conservatives in an ambiguous position. As Foster (2000) has argued, this populist norm made it difficult for Reform activists working from the grassroots or socially conservative MPs to make socially conservative positions central to the party's image. Reformers preferred to call for populist procedures like referendums to resolve such morally contentious issues, rather than taking a socially conservative line. On the other hand, Reform did contain many activists and some MPs who were socially conservative on issues like same-sex rights and abortion and who would, at some important junctures, speak out and garner significant attention (Archer and Ellis 1994, Cross and Young 2002). Such members – and their supporters among the grassroots of the party – did give a socially conservative colouring to Reform.

Moreover, some room was granted to social conservatives within the party's broader populist framework (Interview Flanagan 2005, Interview Cameron 2005). At the level of principle, the mention of healthy families as central to the party's vision of what a healthy Canadian society was important. Organizationally, socially conservative members of the party were channeled first into the Family Task Force and then, once a

⁴ On the Reform Party see Ellis (2005), Harrison (1995), Foster (2000), Laycock (2002, 1994), Flanagan (1995).

⁵ Though there were some prominent early disputes over immigration, perhaps most notably the party's opposition to the wearing of turbans by Sikh RCMP officers.

Parliamentary caucus was formed, into a Family Caucus (Interview Manning 2005). Both of these groups had responsibility for investigating the impact of government action on Canadian families.

This recognized, but limited, place for social conservatism within the party worked well at limiting the prominence social conservatives received on all issues except for debate over same-sex rights. It was on this set of issues – perhaps because they had not been discussed at the 1988 convention -- that social conservatives took a more clearly ideological, and non-populist, line.

Same-sex rights only emerged as a notable political issue federally with the 1993 election, as the Liberal party had suggested it would act on the recommendations of the Human Rights Commission to extend equal treatment to same-sex couples (Rayside 1998). This resulted, throughout 1994, in members of all parties tabling petitions from their constituents on one side or another of the issue and, in the spring of 1995, in a BQ member introducing a private member's bill to extend "legal recognition of same sex spouses" (Hansard Wednesday April 26, 1995). Because it was a private members bill, debate was not extensive, but did reveal that Reformers were willing to make arguments which gave the legal system the role of promoting traditional morality, portrayed the traditional family as the bedrock of society, and warned of Canada's moral decline.

Bill C-33, a government bill to add sexual orientation to the prohibited grounds of discrimination in the Canada human rights code, was introduced into the House on April 29, 1996. In an effort to assuage critics of the bill within the Liberal Party, the bill included a preamble which stated that nothing in it should be read as affecting the traditional definition of the family then in effect in common law. In particular, Allan Rock, then the Justice Minister, insisted that the changes to the Human Rights code would not facilitate the extension of spousal benefits to same-sex couples.⁶ With the Bloc, the NDP, and the vast majority of Liberals (only 28 voted against the bill) supporting Bill C-33 passed into law by May 9.

While Liberals like Tom Wappel and Roseanne Skoke took a very strong line against the bill, Reform's situation as the only party where most of the MPs opposed C-33 set it apart. While party discipline was not imposed on the vote, the 45 'no' votes cast by Reform MPs made it seem as if the party was dominated by social conservatives. While, in general, this would be something of an overstatement, a considerable number of the party's MPs opposed C-33 for what can only be described as ideological reasons. One small group (Breitkreutz, Hill, Morrison, Thompson, and Williams) argued that the law should not seem to condone or to promote homosexuality. They assigned to the legal system a role in promoting a conservative vision of private virtue and saw the recognition of same-sex rights as creating a great disturbance in society:

Canada may recover in time from the huge financial mess it is in, but the damage that will be caused to Canadian society by the changes made this week to the Canadian Human Rights Act will haunt us for many generations to come...the irreparable harm caused by creating virtually equal status for gay and lesbian marriages with others will take a lot longer to heal. We will destroy the very fabric of our society by allowing the courts to redefine marriage. (Gary Breitkreutz 1996).

⁶ Unless noted here as interviews, references to MPs positions or statements attributed to them are taken from the relevant *Hansard* proceedings.

Reform MPs also opposed the Bill for what might be termed populist reasons: that it was being forced through the House of Commons by a government without a clear mandate on the question, that undifferentiated individual rights were preferable to group rights, or that their constituents opposed the motion. Preston Manning and Sharon Hayes (the leader of the family caucus), offered this sort of argument.⁷

The Reform Party's position in the 1996 debate was, then, a mixed one. Significant numbers of its MPs did ground their positions in socially conservative principles. A significant other group grounded their position in populist language about the correct manner in which public policy decisions ought to be made. Even if the populist arguments some MPs offered might be seen as slightly disingenuous, the arguments of a clear grouping of socially conservative MPs can be taken evidence for a clearly defined group of social conservatives in the party.

The Reform Party's position in the House was overshadowed, and its public image damaged, by a newspaper story that ran on April 30, 1996. The story was based on an interview that Bob Ringma, one of the whips, had given in 1994. In that interview, he stated that he believed an employer should have the right to fire a gay or lesbian employee or move them 'to the back of the shop'. Dave Chatters, an MP from Alberta, then defended Ringma's remarks while Jan Brown, from Calgary, began denouncing the "rednecks" in the party.⁸ Preston Manning was away from Ottawa when the crisis broke, which greatly disrupted Reform's crisis management plans. This delayed the party's response and made Ringma's remarks the centre of political attention for some time. Manning's eventual response illustrates how a powerful leader was able to maintain discipline in a Canadian party: Ringma and Chatters were suspended from the party and Brown resigned before she could be suspended (Manning 2002, Grey 2004, Ellis 2005).

With the passage of C-33, the debate over same-sex rights in Canada shifted to the question of whether or not same-sex marriages ought to be recognized by the state. Throughout the later half of the 1990s, MPs of all parties introduced motions or petitions concerning same-sex unions into the House of Commons. However, debate on a large scale only broke out in reaction to the *Rosenberg* decision extending spousal benefits to same sex couples. Reform MP Eric Lowther introduced the following private member's motion:⁹

That, in the opinion of this House, federal legislation should not be altered by judicial rulings, as happened in the redefinition of the term 'spouse' in the *Rosenberg* decision, and that, accordingly, the government should immediately appeal the *Rosenberg* decision (June 8, 1998).

⁷ MPs who made such positions the major part of their argument included Ablonczy, Benoit, Epp, Gouk, Hermanson, McClelland, Mills, Scott, and Stinson.

⁸ Manning notes that neither Ringma nor Chatters were part of the family caucus. That is, they were not amongst the self-identified social conservatives in the party who saw issues of family and gender as especially important. Rather, they were both Reformers who had gotten involved in politics for other reasons (Manning 2002).

⁹ Liberal member Tom Wappel did introduce a private members bill in April of 1998 to define marriage as between persons of the opposite sex. However, it was not deemed votable, so that it only received an hour of debate in the House and then was dropped from the order paper. Hansard October 9th, 1998.

While *Rosenberg* was a case about the extension of same-sex rights, most Reform speakers framed their arguments as protests at the power of judges to over-rule decisions made by Parliament (cf. Lowther, McNally, Jason Kenney, Schmidt, Strahl June 8-9, 1998). Only a few Reform MPs argued that “what is happening here is an abandonment of family values” (Jim Pankiw June 8, 1998) and that “the institution of marriage and the family unit which is the fundamental building block of society” (Vellacott June 8 1998).

More extensive debate broke out the following year over a motion to define marriage as being only between a man and a woman. Again, Lowther took the lead and framed his motion as a response to “public debate around recent court decisions, to state that marriage is and should remain the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others” (Lowther June 8, 1999). A few MPs emphasized the position of the traditional family as the basic unit of society (Epp, Schmidt, Strahl, Hill). However, most speaking to the motion emphasized a populist discontent with important decisions being made by the court system, rather than by Parliament (Lowther, Grewal, Lunn, Solberg, Vellacott, Ablonczy, Pankiw). Somewhat surprisingly, Lowther’s motion passed the House of Commons with overwhelming support from the Liberals who were not subject to party discipline on the question.

Social conservatives in the Reform Party were a reasonably defined group. Despite the party’s generally populist stance on social or moral issues, the issue of same-sex rights saw social conservatives address the issue in quite ideological ways. That some members of an ideologically motivated third party would take such arguments is not, of course, very surprising. It is when the positions taken by the Reform party’s social conservatives are compared to succeeding, more office-seeking parties that the position of social conservatives become more interesting.

Policy vs. Office-Seeking for Social Conservatives in the Canadian Alliance

While the early 1990s was a period of great success and growth for the Reform Party, it was also a period of increasing debate over what, exactly, the party’s goal should be. For Manning and much of the leadership, especially once Reform had replaced the Progressive Conservatives as the major right-wing party, the party needed to try to form the government (Flanagan 2005, Manning 2002). For others, located mostly outside the party leadership, the party should have continued to be a Western party and focus on articulating a full version of its right-populist ideology and defending Western identity (Ellis 2005). This tension between those who argued the party should seek office and those who wanted it to articulate policy broke out frequently. It underlay debate about whether the party should expand into Ontario in 1991 and, more significantly, about what attitude Reformers should take to those Progressive Conservatives who remained after 1993. It was a debate that was resolved, by the mid 1990s, in the favour of those who argued Reform needed to become an office-seeking party (Ellis 2005).

This new goal meant that Reform’s disappointing performance in the 1997 election caused a re-consideration of the party’s form and strategy. It had become clear that central to any right-wing party winning office was the formation of a better relationship between the Progressive Conservative Party and the Reform Party. In an effort to jump-start this co-operation, Manning launched a proposal for a United Alternative (to the Liberals) at the Reform convention in London, Ontario in May of

1998. Most Reformers, and certainly those PC's (usually from provincial parties) involved in the process, saw it as an opportunity to unite the right and finally push the Liberals out of office. His idea approved by the Reform Convention, Manning then successfully shepherded the idea of a new party through the first United Alternative convention, again in London, in February of 1999. This was followed by a second United Alternative Convention and a membership in the spring of 2000 that formed the Canadian Alliance.¹⁰

Just as importantly, the need to select a new leader for the new party opened up Preston Manning to a leadership challenge – something that was very unlikely had Reform continued in its previous form. Stockwell Day, who mobilized social conservatives to support his leadership bid, took advantage of this opportunity. Day's challenge to Manning was partially rooted in his promise of being a more telegenic, bilingual, and more electorally appealing figure than Manning (Harrison 2002).

It is also the case, though, that Day's leadership bid benefited a great deal from his successful mobilization of social conservatives. He was especially successful at garnering the support of the Pentecostal and pro-life communities. Day worked hard to build contacts in these communities and often used the language of social conservatism and evangelical Christianity (Interview Tuns 2005, Interview Hughes 2006). As a result, Day was able to convince many that he was a more 'Christian' candidate than Manning and would be less inclined to the kind of compromises that Manning's populism had lead him into on same-sex rights and abortion.¹¹ (Interview Flanagan 2005, anonymous interviews, Harrison 2002).

That Day's leadership bid stressed both his capacity for winning office and his solid social conservative credentials is perhaps not too surprising – candidates do often make different appeals to different constituencies. What is worth noticing, though, is that Parliamentary debates around the time of his leadership see more strident social conservative appeals being made by already sitting Reform (soon to become CA) MPs. This upswing was in response to the Liberal government's introduction of Bill C-23, the *Modernization of Benefits Act*, which extended many spousal benefits to same-sex couples. Lowther and CA MPs like him made their social conservatism more obvious than they had during earlier debates¹². Grant McNally argued that “the guiding philosophy of our day and our society, I would propose, is something called personal subjective relativism.” For him, issues like the extension of same-sex rights were not so much religious ones as philosophical: either one believes truth can be absolute and so opposes the bill, or believes all things are relative and subjective and so supports it (McNally April 3). Elly spoke of how in 1968 the “government started its assault on tradition, family, and marriage.” Pankiw was even explicitly partisan, arguing that “we

¹⁰ See Harrison 2002, 21-93; Manning 2002, 270-340; Ellis 2005, 164-176; and Segal 2006, 108-134 for different accounts of this attempt to unite the Canadian right.

¹¹ One fiscal conservative/libertarian party insider suggested that this difference could be partly attributed to a generational difference in evangelical theology. Manning's generation of evangelicals were hesitant to be politically involved at all, let alone openly mix faith and politics. Alternatively, younger Canadian evangelicals like Day saw themselves as a minority who needed to come out of the closet (a phrase frequently heard in evangelical circles) to articulate their own unique approach to politics.

¹² See Lowther 2000, Strahl April 3, Ablonczy April 3, Solberg April 3, Epp April 3, Reynolds April 3, Ritz April 10, Williams April 10, Casson April 10, Thompson April 10, White April 10.

are a pro-family party as opposed to the anti-family policies of the federal government” (April 3).¹³

MPs were also far more likely to offer explicitly religious arguments. Jim Hart, for example, “spoke out on behalf of a minority group in the country, that group being Christians....I speak out on behalf of the traditions, society, and foundations we have here in Canada.” (Feb 21, 2000). He went on to argue that “the union of a man and a woman is something sacred in this country” (Feb 21, 2000), but that the government was not doing enough to promote and protect family life. Forseth, another CA MP, quoted from Corinthians to express his opposition (April 3) while Garry Breitkreuz quoted from the Gospels (April 3).

Day’s leadership was brief, but marked a high-point in social conservative fortunes within the party, for not only was the leader one of them but they became generally more outspoken as well. For other groups in the party, though, Day was supported on the premise that he would be an electorally successful leader (Harrison 2000). Optimism on this point faded quickly. During the 2000 election campaign he was disorganized and gaffe-prone (Harrison 2002; Ellis 2001, 2005). After the election, Day proceeded to alienate both many of the party’s senior staff and a significant portion of the parliamentary caucus. The situation eventually became so bad that 13 dissident MPs left the party in the summer of 2001 to form a Democratic Reform Caucus that co-operated with the Progressive Conservatives in the House.

Eventually, this pressure caused Day to announce definite plans to resign the leadership, though with the caveat that he would run to succeed himself as leader of the party. In a formal race that ran from December 2001 to March 2002, Stephen Harper defeated Day. Harper did not, however, launch any purge of Day’s supporters from the party. Day himself received an important shadow cabinet position, and many of his supporters continued to play important (if not quite so prominent) roles in the party. Many of the social conservatives that Day had mobilized also stayed in the party.

Policy vs. Office-Seeking for Social Conservatives in the Conservative Party of Canada

Even during Harper’s leadership and this return to a brokerage style of politics, the Conservative Party of Canada has maintained a place for social conservatives.¹⁴ This place has changed, but it was not with Harper’s leadership win or the successful reunification of the Canadian right. Before 2006, social conservatives retained the prominence that they had achieved under Day. As the debate over gay marriage in 2005 showed, there have even been times when social conservatism has defined important parts of the party’s image. This continued prominence of social conservatives is somewhat surprising, as the both the CA and CPC are largely brokerage parties and have compromised ideology on other issues if it helps them win.¹⁵

¹³ Other MPs speaking in this vein included Mills (April 3), Vellacott (April 3), and Morrison (April 3).

¹⁴ On the Conservative Party of Canada and its desire for office see Segal (2006), Plamondon (2006), Ellis and Woolstencroft (2004, 2006). On Evangelical activism see Malloy’s unpublished work (2007).

¹⁵ Perhaps the most striking example of Harper’s willingness to compromise was his recognition of Quebec as a nation, despite the long tradition on the Canadian Right (of which he was a vocal exponent while a Reformer) of rejecting the ‘two nations’ vision of Canada and defending the ‘ten equal provinces’ one.

Rather, the changed place of social conservatives has come since the Conservatives formed a minority government in February 2006. Since then, their prominence of social conservatives has declined and the nature of the demands they make on the party has moderated. They no longer are as important in the party's image as they once were. Their reduced prominence as part of the parties public face could, perhaps, be understood as the result of the failure of socially conservative appeals to win either Parliamentary votes on their critical issues (same-sex marriage) or to bring new (ethnic) voters to the Conservative Party. This should not be downplayed, but social conservatives have changed their own internal messaging as well. They now speak in terms of pursuing incremental change and being team players.

The successful unification of the Progressive Conservatives and the Canadian Alliance in 2003 was followed by a leadership race that Harper won handily. The party, shortly after this race, fought what most observers saw as a reasonably successful 2004 election campaign. The Liberals were reduced to a minority government and the Conservatives had positioned themselves on the centre-right as the government in waiting (Ellis and Woolstencroft 2004). In the 2006 campaign, Harper followed an even more brokerage strategy in the election and successfully won a minority government (Plamondon 2006, Ellis and Woolstencroft 2006).

After this debate, and Day's leadership, the question of exactly where social conservatives fit in the CA boiled over into a major election issue in 2004. This had not been the Conservative plan for the campaign, as they (and the other opposition parties) had been successful early in the campaign in keeping debate focused on the Liberal sponsorship scandal. In a series of ads, though, the Liberals countered that the Harper's Conservatives had a hidden agenda to transform Canada into something like George W. Bush's United States. This damage done by these adds was exacerbated late in the campaign when Conservative MP Randy White, in an interview, said that he thought laws prohibiting discrimination against homosexuals should be repealed and that a Conservative government would use the not-withstanding clause to repeal a same-sex marriage bill. When combined with earlier comments by Cheryl Gallant comparing abortion to the beheading of hostages by terrorists and an ill-advised press release asking whether Paul Martin approved of child pornography, the Conservatives had a difficult time resisting the charge that they were a party committed to social conservatism (Ellis and Woolstonecroft 2004).

Despite these problems, the Conservatives did reasonably well in the election, winning 30% of the vote and 99 seats. As the other opposition parties had also done well, they were now facing a minority Liberal government in the House of Commons. While this situation meant that all parties expected only a short time between the 2004 election and the next one, it was enough of a space for the Conservatives to improve the organization of the party and sort out policy.

Central to this project was the work, also meant to bring together former PCs and Reformers, to formulate a definitive policy platform for the party. This process culminated in a policy convention March 17-19, 2005 in Montreal. Meant to aggregate discussions that had gone on at the local level for some time before, the convention was quite tightly scripted. Much emphasis was placed on reaching out to Quebec voters, making the party appear moderate, and using the publicity from the convention as a springboard to a successful election campaign.

As Bill C-38 had already been introduced into the House at the time of the convention, it no surprise that there were attempts by social conservatives to get platform planks amenable to them placed into the platform. And, while the convention maintained substantively the same platform on same-sex marriage that the party had fought the election on, social conservatives did make gains on the issue:

- i) The Conservative Party believes that the family unit is essential to the well-being of individuals and society, because that is where children learn values and develop a sense of responsibility.....
- iii) The Conservative Party believes that Parliament, through a free vote, and not the courts should determine the definition of marriage. A Conservative Government would support the freedom of religious organizations to determine their own practices with respect to marriage.
- iv) The Conservative Government will support legislation defining marriage as the union of one man and one woman. (CPC 2005, 22).

Efforts by social conservatives to get a plank on abortion onto the platform from the floor were soundly rebuffed. One leading social conservative, former PC MP Elsie Wayne, was booed off the stage after a speech in which she referred to abortion as “baby-killing”. The convention settled on platform statement that “a conservative government will not support any legislation to regulate abortion” (CPC 2005, 20).

Debates over same-sex marriage began again when C-38, *The Civil Marriage Act*, was introduced 1 February 2005. They lasted late into June and overlapped not only with the Conservative policy convention but also with a very unstable political situation. Even with support of the NDP (which imposed party discipline on the vote), most of the BQ caucus, and a handful of Conservatives it was not clear until late in June that the bill would actually pass, such was the opposition of the Liberal backbenches to the motion.

Despite the heated political atmosphere, the CPC allowed a free vote on C-38. Aside from three MPs who voted for the bill, the party put forward a remarkably consistent front, with 93 of its MPs voting against it. Conservatives generally agreed that they would like to see a compromise enacted along the lines that Harper laid out in his response to the introduction of the bill. He argued that “marriage is a fundamental distinct institution, but that same-sex couples can have equivalent rights and benefits and should be recognized and protected.” (Harper, Feb 16 2005). In the rest of his speech, he argued that such a compromise would be legally defensible without using the s. 33 override clause and was in keeping with the preferences of most Canadians. He also tried to make clear that, to him, the issue was not a religious one but, rather, the protection of a traditional institution from state interference. He also expressed concern that religious freedom would be threatened by the bill – a part of a larger concern that too much power was being granted to the courts by Parliament.

Aside from those who voted with the Liberals, Conservative MPs generally followed the lines laid down by the policy convention and Harper’s speech. All MPs argued that civil unions would be preferable to extending the definition of marriage to include both same-sex and opposite-sex couples. They argued that such a solution would extend all of the legal rights of marriage to same-sex couples, but would retain the traditional recognition that opposite-sex marriage was a unique institution. There was also general agreement that, on such an important issue, Parliament, in a free vote, had

both the right and the responsibility to speak for the popular will against court decisions. Some added that progressive European countries had come to a compromise on same-sex marriage, others that the United Nations Human Rights Tribunal had argued that the traditional definition of marriage could be retained without infringing on the rights of gays and lesbians. Most also took the more partisan line that the Liberals were being inconsistent, as Martin and many of his senior colleagues had voted for the Reform motion defining marriage in traditional terms in 1999.¹⁶

While often drawing on these themes, and never disagreeing with them, more socially conservative MPs added other arguments. Particularly stressed was the argument that the traditional family, with two parents, did a far better job of raising children than other family models. This, social conservatives argued, reinforced the notion that procreation was a central part of the definition of the family and of marriage. They also argued that allowing same-sex marriage represented a harmful shift from a child-centred model of family life to an adult-centred one.¹⁷

Finally, a number of social conservatives took their stand based on personal faith commitments. Several quoted religious leaders or texts as the basis for their decisions, some going so far as to quote Scripture into Hansard. Others preferred to describe how their personal faith commitments prevented them from supporting the extension of the definition of marriage. Some argued that changing the definition of marriage showed how far society was falling into relativism.¹⁸

Despite the passage of C-38, in the summer of 2005 activists still hoped that a Conservative government would work to repeal the bill. In response, Harper made it one of his campaign promises that a Conservative government would introduce a motion (on which it would allow a completely free vote) to repeal the *Civil Marriage Act*. In December 2006, the Harper did introduce such a motion, asking the House to call on the government “to introduce legislation to restore the traditional definition of marriage without affecting civil unions and while respecting existing same-sex marriages” (Hansard Dec 7, 2006). This unusual legislative step – in essence the government asking the House for permission to introduce legislation – saw only brief debate before being defeated 175 to 123. In the debate, Conservative MPs spent far more time arguing that there was a need for continued debate than they did arguing for a substantive position one way or the other. Importantly, Harper had made it clear before debate on the motion that he would only return to the issue once, so that the defeat of the motion effectively ended his concern with same-sex marriage.

The relative weakness of this proposal has been echoed by the terms with which other social conservative initiatives have been put forward since the CPC formed the government. So far, there seem to have two items on the government agenda that can be

¹⁶ MPs taking this line included Moore, Skellon, Williams, O’Connor, Forseth, Smith, Kamarnicki, Allison, Toews, Hiebert, Mills, Merrifield, Kamp, Gurmant Grewal, Nina Grewall, Casson, Finley, Fitzpatrick, Miller, Epp, Fletcher, Watson, Mark, Batters, Cummins, Hinton, Schellenberger, Warawa, Nicholson, Tweed, Yelich, Poillievre, Bezan, Tilson, Johnston, MacKay, Harrison, Ambrose, Benoit, Preston, Menzies, Reid, Guergis, Anderson, Anders, Goodyear, Benoit, Brown, Hinton, Harris and Lukiwski.

¹⁷ Such MPs included O’Connor, Pallister, Vellacott, Hill, Ablonczy, Scheer, Merrifield, Warner Schmidt, Breitkreuz, Thompson, Komarnicki, Jean,

¹⁸ These included Warawa, Warner Schmidt, Duncan, Goldring, David Anderson, Day, Dale Johnston, Lunney, Hanger, Yelich, Doyle, Solberg, Prentice, Penson, Breitkreuz, Ritz, Myron Thompson, Scheer,

seen as socially conservative initiatives. Both are relatively minor, have been presented in a low-key fashion, and have not attracted a great deal of press attention.

The first initiative was an increase in the age of consent component of the government's justice bill. This measure had been introduced in one form or another for some time, but only passed at the end of last month as part of an omnibus criminal justice bill. More controversial, but still a far cry from the type of measures previously pursued from social conservatives, have been repeated efforts to introduce – by private members bills – ‘unborn victims of crime’ legislation. Leon Benoit introduced such a proposal in May 2006. It made it as far as committee before stalling in the face of objections that it was unconstitutional. Some argue (anonymous interview) that this was due to the bill's poor drafting, others (Reid 2008) that the constitutional judgement was merely cover for the government to remove a controversial measure from the legislative agenda. In revised form, introduced by Ken Epp last fall, it is currently before the House as C-484. While in public this measure has been described as a very minor and commonsensical change to Canadian law, social conservatives do see it as an incremental move on the abortion question (Interview Reid 2008).

This incrementalism has been a part of what both social conservatives close to the party (Interview Reid 2008, Interview Clemenger 2008, Interview Hughes 2006) and party insiders who are definitely not social conservatives (Interview Le Breton 2006) have described as a movement to become more part of a team on the part of social conservatives within the party. No longer do social conservative elites in the party feel it appropriate to articulate their views at any cost, nor do they see the articulation of principles as their primary purpose in politics. Instead, the vision they pursue is one that seeks incremental change in their favor, but only if pursuing that change does not endanger the party's chances of staying in office.

To be sure, a good part of this must be attributed to the defeat of social conservatives on the issue of same-sex marriage. On such symbolic issues, however, defeat does not always mean the end of activism – the American social conservative movement has been remarkably resilient in the face of policy setbacks. Rather, the situation of the party and a change in attitudes amongst the social conservative elite seem to be at the root of the change.¹⁹

Conclusion

This paper has examined social conservatives in three Canadian political parties: the Reform Party, the Canadian Alliance, and the Conservative Party of Canada. Treating social conservatives as a party faction, it found that this faction moderated its demands and strategies more slowly than the other major group in these parties, fiscal conservatives. While fiscal conservatives began to argue for a brokerage approach in the mid-1990s, social conservatives have only adopted a brokerage approach since the CPC formed the government in 2006.

This suggests that different parts of a given political party feel the gravitational pull of office differently. That partisans do so in relatively defined groupings and in a

¹⁹ As has been remarked by other observers, information is a tightly controlled commodity in the Harper government. Despite some early hopes, I have found this to be so – access to key players is more difficult to obtain now than while the party was in opposition. However, I am reasonably confident that the account offered here, while perhaps not correct in all details, is substantially the current situation in the Party.

politically salient way is in keeping with the trend in the literature on political parties that considers party organization central to the behaviour of parties. It calls, though, for some modifications to our understanding of office-seeking behaviour in Canada. It seems clear that some parts of office-seeking parties do not desire office above all else and sensible to expect that such factions, if sizable enough, would adversely effect a given party's ability to compete efficiently. Ripple effects would then be felt throughout the party system, as the afflicted party's competitors take advantage of its weakness.²⁰

Most importantly, it calls us to re-examine the role of ideology in Canadian party politics. It is clear that a shared ideology can define one faction or another within an office-seeking party. As the case of social conservatives shows, it is possible for such groups to fracture political parties by insisting on abiding by their principles or, in the case of the parties on the Canadian right, contribute to those parties staying fractured. Even if the faction in question eventually adopts an office-seeking approach, a delay in doing so can have considerable impact on how parties function.

While this case offers some interesting insights, it is just as useful in opening up topics for future research. One important question it raises concerns the extent to which factions link the party's grassroots to its Parliamentary elite. Particularly interesting would be to examine whether grassroots and parliamentary social conservatives moved towards an office-seeking strategy at the same rate. The two groups face different pressures, and we would expect activists to remain more ideological than MPs (Young and Cross 2001), but if there is a shared trend, it would be possible to see the demands of brokerage being transmitted fairly deeply into the party. Here, the data from the second wave of Young and Cross's *Canadian Political Party Membership* survey should be invaluable.

Expanding this argument from the party's elite to its grassroots would also allow it to address a generalized version of Perlin's (1980) question: is there an evolutionary effect at work here? That is, does the 'second' party in the Canadian system attract factionally minded activists who, whether divided by ideology or by leadership preference, are less likely to unite in pursuit of office. Being less united, must the second party in Canadian politics therefore be less successful? Here, a comparison with the Liberals would be useful. The Liberal Party has certainly suffered from factionalism during the past decade, albeit based on disagreements over leadership more than over ideology. Moreover – unlike the Conservatives – control of office seemed to do little to minimize the division between the Martin and Chrétien camps. Here again, the question becomes why command of office was not enough to prevent party activists and elites preferring party infighting to presenting a unified, moderate office-seeking front.

²⁰ Of course, the particular way that these incentives play out would be determined by the specifics of the Canadian system. The impact of these specifics should be spelled out formally, in ways that I certainly have not done here.

Interviews

A number of people took the time to have conversations with me, but have preferred to remain anonymous. I thank them very much for their time, as I do for those who spoke on the record. In addition to those who granted interviews, I owe a thank-you to Ian Brodie for allowing me access to the 2005 Conservative policy convention as a student observer.

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Flanagan, Tom. August 17th, 2005. Calgary, AB.
Hughes, Jim. July 31st, 2006. Toronto, ON.
Le Breton, Marjorie. August 10th, 2006. Telephone Interview.
Manning, Preston. April 27th, 2005. Toronto, ON.
Reid, Aidan. June 15th, 2005. Ottawa, ON.
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