

SPANNING THE SPECTRUM: POLITICAL PARTY ATTITUDES IN MANITOBA

BY

JARED WESLEY

A Thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Political Studies
University of Manitoba
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ABSTRACT

This Master of Arts Thesis analyzes the contours of the Manitoba political party system. By surveying Progressive Conservative, New Democratic and Liberal Party candidates in the 2003 Provincial Election, the study uncovers a distinct left-right pattern among their attitudes. In particular, each party contains its own unique 'alloy' of attitudinal elements. New Democratic candidates hold social democratic, reform liberal, 'New Left', and neo-liberal attitudes, for instance. Meanwhile the Tories are divided between their 'progressive' and 'conservative' wings, and the Liberals between their reform and neo-liberal factions. These internal cleavages help bridge the gaps along the party spectrum, as certain left-wing and right-wing values permeate the attitudes of each party. Specifically, the survey reveals widespread leftist support for welfare, civil liberties and the environment, as well as cross-party adherence to neo-liberal concepts like affordable government. Nonetheless, despite intra-party divisions and inter-party convergence, the study concludes that there is considerable attitudinal distance between the New Democrats, Liberals and Conservatives, thereby confirming the existence of the 'traditional party spectrum' in Manitoba – with the NDP on the left, the PC's on the right and the Liberals in the centre.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 – COHERENT CHOICES AND CLEAR OPTIONS 1

<i>Creating 'Attitudinal Profiles'</i>	5
<i>Devices for Surveying Party Attitudes</i>	7
<i>The Observation and Structure of Political Attitudes</i>	10
<i>Dimensions of Political Attitudes</i>	13
<i>Shortcomings of Existing Research</i>	15
<i>Research Design</i>	20
<i>Choice of Sample</i>	20
<i>Survey Instrument</i>	21
<i>Indexes & Attitudinal Dimensions</i>	22
<i>Formulating Questions</i>	23
<i>Additional Variables</i>	24
<i>Survey Administration</i>	25
<i>Spanning the Spectrum</i>	27

CHAPTER 2 – THE EVOLUTION OF MANITOBA PARTY POLITICS 29

<i>Manitoba: An "Unspectacular" Province</i>	31
<i>Political Culture in Manitoba</i>	33
<i>The Politics of Class in Manitoba</i>	34
<i>Ethnic Politics in Manitoba</i>	36
<i>'A Fragment of a Fragment'</i>	38
<i>Provincial Regionalism</i>	42
<i>The Manitoba Party System</i>	43

<i>A Two-and-a-Half-Party System</i>	44
<i>An Adversarial Environment</i>	46
<i>The Liberal-Progressives and Classic Liberalism: 1919 to 1958</i>	47
<i>The Roblin Conservatives and Tory Keynesianism: 1958 to 1967</i>	50
<i>The Weir Conservatives and a Return to Classic Liberalism: 1967 to 1969</i>	52
<i>The Schreyer New Democrats and Social Democratic Keynesianism: 1969 to 1978</i>	53
<i>The Lyon Conservatives and Neo-Liberalism: 1977 to 1981</i>	57
<i>The Pawley New Democrats and the Return of Social Democracy: 1981 to 1988</i>	60
<i>The Filmon Conservatives and the Refinement of Neo-Liberalism: 1988 to 1999</i>	62
<i>The Doer New Democrats and 'The Third Way': 1999 to 2003</i>	66
<i>The Evolution of Adversarial Politics in Manitoba</i>	68
<i>'Then and Now'—Remaining Questions with Regard to Manitoba Party Politics</i>	69

CHAPTER 3 – PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE PARTY 72

<i>The Divided Right</i>	72
<i>Manitoba Conservatives and the 2003 Election</i>	75
<i>The 2003 Conservative Platform</i>	76
<i>The Divided Right in Manitoba</i>	82
<i>Differences of Opinion</i>	84
<i>The 'Progressive/Conservative' Divide</i>	87
<i>Conclusion</i>	104

CHAPTER 4 – NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY..... 106

<i>The 'Third Way': Balancing the Left</i>	107
<i>Manitoba New Democrats and the 2003 Election</i>	115

<i>The 2003 New Democratic Platform</i>	115
<i>The Balanced Left in Manitoba</i>	120
<i>Areas of Consensus</i>	122
<i>The 'Inter-Left' Continuum</i>	123
<i>Conclusion</i>	132

CHAPTER 5 – LIBERAL PARTY..... 136

<i>The Divided Centre</i>	139
<i>Manitoba Liberals and the 2003 Election</i>	141
<i>The 2003 Liberal Platform</i>	141
<i>The Divided Centre in Manitoba</i>	148
<i>Areas of Consensus and Disagreement</i>	150
<i>The Reform / Neo-Liberal Divide</i>	152
<i>Conclusion</i>	158

CHAPTER 6 – THE STRUCTURE OF THE MANITOBA PARTY SYSTEM..... 161

<i>The Traditional Party Spectrum in Manitoba</i>	162
<i>Attitudinal Positions and Distance</i>	166
<i>Self- and Mutual Perceptions</i>	168
<i>Cleavages Within and Bridges Between</i>	176
<i>Right, Left and Centre in Manitoban Party Politics</i>	181
<i>Coherent Choices and Clear Options</i>	183

BIBLIOGRAPHY..... 186

<i>Appendix A: Questionnaire.....</i>	<i>190</i>
<i>Appendix B: Attitude Indexes.....</i>	<i>200</i>
<i>Appendix C: Regional Classifications.....</i>	<i>205</i>
<i>Appendix D: Respondent Comments.....</i>	<i>208</i>
<i>Appendix E: Consensus Scores.....</i>	<i>216</i>

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1.1: Region, by Party, All Respondents.....	27
Graph 2.1: Seats by Party, 1958-2003.....	45
Table 3.1: Average Attitudinal Scores, PC's.....	84
Table 3.2: Average Attitudinal Scores, PC's, by Year of Birth.....	89
Table 3.3: Average Attitudinal Scores, PC's, by Gender.....	92
Table 3.4: Attitudinal Index Scores, PC's, by Region.....	97
Table 3.5: Attitudinal Spectrum Scores, PC's by Region.....	97
Table 3.6: Federal Party Membership by Provincial Party, All Respondents.....	99
Table 3.7: 2000 Federal Election Vote Choice by Provincial Party.....	99
Table 3.8: Anticipated 2004 Federal Vote Choice by Provincial Party.....	100
Table 3.9: Average Attitudinal Scores, PC's, by 2000 Federal Vote Choice.....	104
Table 4.1: Average Attitudinal Scores, NDP.....	122
Table 4.2: Attitudinal Index Scores, NDP, by Year of Birth.....	126
Table 4.3: Attitudinal Spectrum Scores, New Democrats, by Year of Birth.....	126
Table 4.4: Average Attitudinal Scores, NDP, by Gender.....	128
Table 4.5: Attitudinal Index Scores, NDP, by Region.....	131
Table 4.6: Attitudinal Spectrum Scores, NDP, by Region.....	132
Graph 5.1: Liberal Party Performance in Manitoba: Provincial and Federal, 1958-2003.....	137
Table 5.1: Average Attitudinal Scores, Liberals.....	150
Table 5.2: Average Attitudinal Scores, Liberals, by Year of Birth.....	154
Table 5.3: Attitudinal Index Scores, Liberals, by Region.....	156

Table 5.4: Attitudinal Spectra Scores, Liberals, by Region.....	157
Table 5.5: Average Attitudinal Scores, Liberals, by Gender.....	158
Table 6.1: Attitudinal Distances Between Parties (Indexes).....	167
Table 6.2: Attitudinal Distances Between Parties (Spectra).....	167
Figure 6(a): Perceptions of NDP Position.....	171
Figure 6(b): Perceptions of Liberal Party Position.....	172
Figure 6(c): Perceptions of PC Party Position.....	174
Figure 6(d): NDP Perception of the Manitoba Party System.....	175
Figure 6(e): Liberal Party Perception of the Manitoba Party System.....	175
Figure 6(f): PC Party Perception of the Manitoba Party System.....	175
Figure 6(g): Manitoba Party Spectrum.....	175

PREFACE

From the outset, I believe it is crucial to detail precisely what this thesis will *not* address. I, myself, find it frustrating to wait until the end of a paper to discover exactly what the author intended to overlook. And, as there are no doubt readers who have turned to this thesis in search of an answer to a particular question, I would hesitate to waste their time unnecessarily. In this spirit, I present the following list. (And if the reader should discover any topics that are on neither this list or in the subsequent chapters, please assume that I intended to overlook them, as well.)

The following pages will *not* analyze minor parties – like the Greens or Communists – nor the impact of religion upon political attitudes. While each of these topics is certainly deserving of study, we could afford neither the time nor the pages necessary to do so. The same is true of topics like political leadership, nominations, electoral systems, or other institutions. By the same token, political behavior – including voter turnout and voting patterns, for instance – are only cursorily addressed in the following pages. This is a study of *political attitudes*, specifically those of Manitoba politicians, leaving little room for these topics.

Indeed, our respondents noted many such ‘shortcomings’, themselves. For one, we opted not to delve into the issue of campaign finance reform, although candidates were generous in their comments on the subject. One New Democrat explained, “There seems to be a move away from ‘dollar democracy’. The new legislation of banning union and business donations to political parties has created a level playing field for politics in Manitoba.” Another astutely noted,

Political standards in this province have vastly improved since the imposition of a ban on union and corporate donations to political parties. The spring election in '03 was very honourably contested with a minimum of dirty tricks in marked contrast to 1995 (the vote-rigging scandal that led to the Inquiry) and 1999 (smear campaign orchestrated against the Interlake NDP candidate). Clean elections that focus on the issues will lend to greater interest in the public eye and higher turn-outs at the polls. Low road, American-style politics turn Canadians off.

On another topic, a Conservative candidate – no doubt in reference to the prevailing political issue at the time, involving the federal Liberals' involvement in the Political Advertising Scandal – asked us bluntly, “Where are the questions regarding effective/efficient government?” Still others wished to see more direct questions regarding the relationship between voters and themselves, as candidates. “When I decided to run for public office, it was my intention from the outset to keep an open mind,” wrote one Liberal respondent.

I was ready to act as a "sounding board" for any variety of views and opinions and I prepared myself studiously for that task. I was however not prepared for the bleak ennui which appeared like a black hole before me. More often than not I was told point blank "I don't vote!" and the 48% voter turnout in my constituency served to underscore this opinion. I challenged these people by saying "get out and spoil or decline your ballot!" Perhaps some people took my advice. I will never know. The electorate has been so disconnected from the process that all that is left is inaction. "And so it ends not with a bang but with a whimper." There will be a hard lesson in this. One which we have failed to learn from the past.

Conservative candidates echoed these sentiments. “Most Canadians have become cynical about all levels of government,” one noted. “We no longer vote for the best candidate but often opt for the lesser of three evils... A very high percentage of under-30 voters don't even make the effort to vote because they are convinced ‘nothing will change.’ Many have no faith or trust in the political system.”

A second Tory concurred. "It seems like after talking to people they don't look for the best person anymore," he wrote.

They look for who is going to screw them the least. Also there seems to be a stigma attached to each group. NDP are for low income, social program, union voters. Conservatives are big business, period!! (the rich voters). Liberals are in the middle: small and medium business, middle and lower income. When I was going door to door I heard a lot of complaints about politics in general. The ones that bothered me the most were: They didn't care any more – we're all the same cheats, liars and crooks.

Indeed, one Conservative candidate appeared to share the sentiments of her constituents. "I believe most politicians are in politics for the money," she wrote. "They do not think long term as a rule. They believe their first job is to get re-elected by spending other people's money."

I, for one, disagree. While there is likely enough material to construct another thesis on this topic, I think Manitoba politicians are, indeed, concerned with more than simply "spending other people's money." In this sense, I believe Henry Kissinger had it almost right when he lamented that "90 percent of politicians give the other 10 percent a bad name." In Manitoba, this figure appears even more optimistic, as a full 47 percent of provincial politicians took the time to complete our questionnaire – evidence, perhaps, that their interest in politics extends beyond plain greed and blind ambition. I wish to thank *them* for making the time and effort to participate in our study. Their knowledge and experience has made them among the very few "experts" in the field of Manitoba politics, and their assistance is indispensable to our understanding of the province's party system.

Of course, so, too, was the funding and administration necessary to conduct this research. For this, I extend thanks to Dr. David Stewart and the University of Manitoba Faculty of Arts Endowment Fund, as well as the Duff Roblin Fellowship Committee. Also, I wish to thank Cathy, Shirley, Linda, Jo-Ann, Bonnie, April, Sarah, Lisa, Angela, and Sean for all their support and restraint.

To my parents, I owe my stability, education and self-confidence. Without their encouragement (read: “tolerance, indulgence, room and board”), I would never have completed this work. I also owe to them my interest in politics, more generally, which – as of late – has broken a cardinal rule in our family: *it is*, now, discussed at the dinner table.

Likewise, I am appreciative of the efforts of my patient advisor, Dr. David Stewart, whose guidance was neither too strict, nor too lenient. His questions stretched my mind around numerous difficult concepts, and, although we may disagree on some of the answers, I truly enjoyed the debates. To my academic confidant, Dr. Brenda O’Neill, I also extend great thanks. Her tutelage in the area of survey design and data analysis were invaluable, as was her moral support for my studies. In light of their assistance, it felt awkward to write this thesis using terms like “I”, “me” or “my”. For, although I assume full responsibility for the content, accuracy and quality of the following thesis, I have always viewed this as a collective project. To my diligent thesis committee member, Dr. Barry Ferguson and defence Chair, Dr. Richard Sigurdson, I remain thankful for their insightful comments and suggestions. Together, my committee’s advice exposed me to the many intricacies and rewards of academic research. I look forward to working with each of them in the years to come.

In the meantime, I offer “Spanning the Spectrum” as the product of an academic curiosity and a tri-partisan collaboration – a combination that is all-too-infrequent in Manitoba today. In the following chapters, I hope we not only respond to the questions of some readers, but also incite further curiosity in our province. For there is much to be discovered about Manitoba politics, and, as Bertrand Russell once wrote, “it’s a healthy thing now and then to hang a question mark on things you have often taken for granted.”

CHAPTER 1 – COHERENT CHOICES AND CLEAR OPTIONS

Many Canadians expect political parties to offer them coherent choices and clear options. Whether at the ballot box or in the legislature, citizens often insist that parties display internal consistency and clarity in their principles, while, at the same time, remaining distinct in their visions for society. In short, voters expect that parties will be discernable – even adversarial – in their attitudes toward public policy, offering clear-cut alternatives from which to draw political leadership.

In reality, few party systems meet these expectations, and citizens are often discouraged by their lack of meaningful choice during elections. For one, divisions can appear within parties, creating friction and factionalization of the party's message. As the attitudes of party followers clash, entire party 'wings' are pitted against one another, fostering tension and conflict over the party's ultimate direction. Conversely, cohesion can develop *across* party lines, blurring the boundaries between the organizations. In this way, party policies and stances may converge with those of their competitors, thus confusing and frustrating voters. Given this dual tendency – to develop both intra-party divisions and inter-party similarities – parties often struggle to provide the coherent choices and clear options that their constituents demand.

This is because the contours of a party system are constantly in flux. And the traditional 'left-right' political spectrum – the most common tool used to distinguish parties from one another – is seldom as straightforward as some analysts would have us believe. The simpler days of a capitalist 'right' and an anti-capitalist 'left' have long

since passed. Instead, the picture is often clouded, with parties occupying vast areas on the continuum, divided from within and overlapping with each other to a substantial degree.

What is more, as we enter the so-called 'post-deficit' era of Canadian politics, our political leaders face new challenges that often lie beyond the traditional left-right spectrum. Concerns ranging from environmental protection and federalism, to maintaining competitive tax levels and balancing the budget – while by no means unique to twenty-first century politics – have taken on new meaning and importance in today's political arena. Such issues have compelled parties and their leaders to re-evaluate and revamp their approaches toward politics altogether, producing what some have called a "New Left" and "New Right" in political debate. Understanding the attitudes of today's parties and politicians can be difficult, considering these changes.

Such forces have challenged our conventional conception of party politics in Canada. In the face of recent developments, we must revisit the question, "Where *do* the various parties fall on the political spectrum?" Is it accurate to depict a 'New Democratic left', 'Liberal centre', and 'Conservative right' in post-deficit Canada? And where does each party stand on the various issues? Finding the answers is no easy task, considering the fluidity and diversity of political attitudes in this country.

Nonetheless, the following thesis offers a partial response. For ours is a case study in Manitoba political ideology, analyzing the contours of the province's party system in the wake of the 2003 Election. Surveying New Democratic, Liberal and Conservative candidates from that campaign, this represents the first examination of its kind in Manitoba, and one of a very few glimpses into post-deficit provincial party

attitudes. Our findings are many, as the following five chapters attest. Ultimately, they offer confirmation that the Manitoba party system *is* structured on a left/right axis. Divided as they are among their various internal 'wings', we discovered that each provincial party *is* distinctive in terms of its candidates' attitudes. Whether or not these divisions were visible to the electorate is the topic for another debate. However, in their own minds and through their own attitudes, the candidates in Manitoba's 2003 Provincial Election did offer the electorate a clear set of alternatives.

In this sense, our survey uncovered several notable findings. First, we found evidence of the traditional left-right spectrum in Manitoba, with the NDP occupying the left, the Liberals the centre-left, and the Conservatives the right. On average, the New Democrats, with their strong support of civil liberties, were diametrically opposed to the more socially conservative PC caucus, for instance, with the Liberals occupying the middle ground. Second, our survey revealed considerable ideological distance between the various parties on several key issues. So-called 'hot-button topics' – including the provision of health care services, the legalization of marijuana, same-sex marriage, Americanization, and free trade – separated the three parties to a considerable extent. On each, the Liberals were relatively divided, while the attitudes of Conservatives and New Democrats were virtually polarized. Taken together, these two findings suggest the persistence of a well-defined left-right political spectrum in Manitoba.

These conclusions required qualification, however, as further analysis revealed both attitudinal overlap between the parties, and division within each party's ranks. For example, there appeared an all-party consensus in three main issue areas: transparent and affordable government; environmental protection; and the universality of social

programs. All-party support for these issues tended to blur the lines between the NDP, Conservatives and Liberals. At the same time, our survey uncovered the unique cleavages *within* each party's campaign slate. New Democrats were most strongly divided according to region, for instance, as NDP candidates in Southwestern Manitoba were more centrist than their left-leaning counterparts in South Winnipeg. Moreover, NDP attitudes showed a balance between the three main modes of left-wing thought – social democracy, reform liberalism and 'New Left' activism – and a Third Way commitment to neo-liberalism. The PC Party was similarly divided along regional lines, with Southern Conservatives leaning further to the right than Tories in South Winnipeg. As noted in Chapter 3, these findings confirmed the existence of a 'progressive' / 'conservative' divide within the party. For Liberals, on the other hand, the deepest cleavage was along the lines of age. Young Grits were more closely linked to the philosophy of the 'New Right', while elder Liberals leaned toward the centre-left of the spectrum. As such, the party showed signs of both reform liberalism and neo-liberalism. In these ways, our survey helped qualify and clarify the contours of the Manitoba party system, indicating the existence of overlap and internal division among parties.

Reaching these conclusions was a challenging process, from designing and distributing the survey, to analyzing and interpreting the results. This introductory chapter is designed to provide the theoretical and methodological background to our study, shedding light on the context and structure of our analysis. To begin, we describe the process of "attitudinal profiling", itself, demonstrating how political scientists have approached questions of party ideology in previous analyses. We discuss how party

attitudes are observed, how they are structured, and how they are configured along multiple dimensions. From here, we identify gaps in the existing research, and outline our own unique research design in an effort to overcome them. In the end, our analysis provides a much-needed examination of the provincial party system in Manitoba, showing how candidates' attitudes "span the spectrum" from left to right.

Creating 'Attitudinal Profiles'

Canadian political scientists have studied the topic of party cohesion, tension, divergence, and convergence for decades. To date, efforts have focussed on discovering the core values of a particular party, or uncovering patterns of beliefs among party followers. Indeed, since the first detailed study by Robert Alford over forty years ago,¹ entire academic careers have been based on the examination of the opinion structures of Canadian parties, with analysts offering numerous theories and proffering various findings. Political scientists have approached the issue with different objectives, devices and research designs, and have drawn a variety of different comparisons, trends and conclusions, all of which have added to our cumulative knowledge of party politics in this country.

Capturing the essence of this subfield of research, Stewart and Archer once referred to their work as creating a series of "attitudinal profiles" to describe the unique composition of parties.² Analyzing provincial politics in Alberta, they concluded that

¹ Robert R. Alford. *Party and Society: the Anglo-American Democracies*. Westport, CN: Greenwood Press. 1963.

² David Stewart and Keith Archer. *Quasi-Democracy?: Parties and Leadership Selection in Alberta*. Vancouver: UBC Press. 2000.

New Democrats tended to be 'left'-leaning on most issues, with the Conservatives on the 'right' and Liberals in the 'centre'. Parties in the province were depicted as ideationally distinct and coherent organizations, each with their own unique policy space. Parallel studies have confirmed the existence of a similar spectrum at the federal level,³ offering proof that attitudinal profiling has a rich tradition in Canadian political science.

The value of this field of research lies in its capacity to offer insight into a wide range of information about parties. In particular, analysts have profiled party attitudes to: (1) draw divisions between parties; (2) measure ideational distances between them; and (3) assess the level of internal cohesion within parties. In the first instance, analysts have tested the traditional conception of the Canadian federal party spectrum: the New Democrats on the left, the Conservatives on the right, and the Liberals in the centre. Since Alford's study, other parties – including the right-leaning Social Credit and Reform Party⁴ – have been incorporated into the theory. A second stream of inquiry has added distance to this equation, analyzing not only the relative attitudinal positions of parties, but also the ideological space between them.⁵ For a host of other researchers, profiling the attitudes of political parties involves more than simply comparisons between them. Many recent research designs have also focused on exposing the internal dynamics within

³ See: Faron Ellis and Keith Archer. "Ideology and Opinion Within the Reform Party." *Party Politics in Canada*. (8th Ed.) Hugh G. Thorburn and Alan Whitehorn, eds. Toronto: Prentice-Hall. 2001. pp. 122-134.; Keith Archer and Alan Whitehorn. "Opinion Structure Among Party Activists: A Comparison of New Democrats, Liberals and Conservatives." *Party Politics in Canada*. (8th Ed.) Hugh G. Thorburn and Alan Whitehorn, eds. Toronto: Prentice-Hall. 2001. pp. 107-121.; Donald E. Blake. "Division and Cohesion: The Major Parties." *Party Democracy in Canada: The Politics of National Party Conventions*. George Perlin, ed. Scarborough: Prentice-Hall. 1988. pp. 32-53.

⁴ Our research has uncovered no substantial studies to place the Bloc Quebecois on such a scale. And, while research has been conducted on the Reform Party's placement on the political spectrum (Ellis and Archer, "Ideology and Opinion", 2001), no comparable, comprehensive analysis has been made of the Canadian Alliance.

⁵ Archer and Whitehorn, "Opinion Structure", pp. 115-117.

parties, enabling us to view the intra-party composition of various party systems. This third mode of analysis allows us to assess the internal cohesion within parties to determine the level of harmony among party followers and the types of divisions between them. Keith Archer, through studies conducted with Faron Ellis and Alan Whitehorn, has become a leading expert in this type of research. Thus, analyzing parties in terms of both their external *and internal* attitudinal divisions can yield important results. Our study takes this dual-focused approach.

Devices for Surveying Party Attitudes

Researchers have employed a variety of different techniques to uncover attitudinal differences among parties. Donald Blake outlines three main approaches.⁶ The first analyzes the differences between parties-in-government, a method used frequently by political scientists in the United States.⁷ By examining roll call records or party positions on issues before the legislature, analysts have drawn conclusions about the opinion structure between and within parties as they govern. A party whose members tend to vote together on social or economic issues, and against the members of another party, would tend to be both internally cohesive and attitudinally distinct under this approach. This is a difficult method to apply in Canada, considering the high level of party discipline. A second method involves examining the content of party artifacts, like platforms, leaders' speeches or memoirs. Christian and Campbell employed this particular technique with great success, as they drew conclusions about the relative

⁶ Blake, "Division and Cohesion", pp. 32-33.

⁷ For example, see: Eric Schickler and Andrew Rich. "Controlling the Floor: Parties as Procedural Coalitions in the House." *American Journal of Political Science*. 41 (1997): 1340-75.

positions of parties on a wide variety of attitudinal dimensions based on the rhetoric found in party literature.⁸ A third and final approach requires analysts to survey the attitudes of Canadian voters, activists, legislators, or party followers to discern broader party opinion structures. As will be discussed in the following pages, this particular method has become the most popular among Canadian researchers in recent decades. In reality, there is no best way to create attitudinal profiles of political parties, and all three approaches offer different and equally valuable perspectives on the topic of party attitudes. For reasons that will become clear, the third approach – involving surveys of individual political dispositions – will form the basis of our study.

In terms of surveys, the mail-in questionnaire has been the device of choice for researchers in the area.⁹ While the precise structure of these forms has varied from study to study, considerable consensus has developed over the types of questions and areas of inquiry to be included. For instance, most questionnaires have been ‘closed’ and quantitative in nature, allowing analysts to compile and compare data across large samples. Most questionnaires have also been cross-sectional, as opposed to longitudinal, although notable exceptions do exist. For example, David Elkins conducted a quasi-panel survey of political attitudes in 1965 and 1968,¹⁰ and Blake et al.’s 1991 study¹¹

⁸ William Christian and Colin Campbell. *Political Parties and Ideologies in Canada: liberals, conservatives, socialists, nationalists*. (2nd Ed.) Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson. 1983.

⁹ Analysts examining Canadian political attitudes have used in-person and telephone interviews far less frequently than mail-in questionnaires, although the results from these techniques have been equally impressive. The “Michigan School” of attitude analysis – developed by Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes (1960) – is modeled around this principle of in-depth personal interviewing. Such studies, including those of Klingemann (1979) and Kornberg et al. (1975), have been both rare and noteworthy for providing a deeper examination of individual attitudes in Canada. Each involved extensive, open-ended individual interviews of large samples of the population, and offered unique insights into not only the attitudinal profiles of parties, but also the conceptualization of political attitudes among party identifiers, themselves. As will be discussed, this type of analysis – while often desired – is not always available to researchers.

¹⁰ David J. Elkins “The Perceived Structure of the Canadian Party Systems.” *Canadian Journal of Political Science*. 7 (1974): 502-24.

attempted a similar technique using secondary analysis of research in the 1970s. However, the majority of surveys in this area have offered only 'snap-shot' views of political attitudes at specific points in time. Indeed, few questionnaires have strayed from this 'closed' and cross-sectional model. While recognizing the major shortcomings of this type of survey, our study will be no different in this respect.

Furthermore, an analyst's choice between research devices is often intimately connected with her choice of research sample and topic. Conducting a series of personal interviews, for instance, may be possible if one's sample is of manageable size. For example, analyzing the attitudinal dynamics within the Prince Edward Island Legislative Assembly would require, at most, a total of twenty-seven interviews. Conducting the same type of analysis on the Canadian House of Commons would involve dozens more interviews, hundreds more hours of research and thousands more dollars. As Hill et al. have noted, one's choice of sample can, thus, create barriers to the type of study one wants to conduct.¹² Furthermore, the choice of one's topic can have a similar effect. In the 1960s and 1970s, for instance, a lack of access to party officials and legislators placed further restrictions on researchers seeking to study political party attitudes in Canada. As Clarke described it in 1978, the analysis of "patterns of variance in Canadian political culture" had been restricted to the attitudes of the mass public, leaving the beliefs of Canada's elite "largely unexplored."¹³ In recent decades, a combination of technological and democratic advances has exposed new opportunities for research in this area,

¹¹ Donald E. Blake, R.K. Carty and Lynda Erickson. *Grassroots Politicians: Party Activists in British Columbia*. Vancouver: UBC Press. 1991.

¹² Kim Quaille Hill, Stephen Hanna and Sahar Shafqat. "The Liberal-Conservative Ideology of U.S. Senators: A New Measure." *American Journal of Political Science*. 41 (1997): 1395-1414.

¹³ Harold D. Clarke. "The Ideological Self-Perceptions of Provincial Legislators." *Canadian Journal of Political Science*. 11 (1978), p. 617.

however. And, particularly since the late 1980s, analysts have begun making dramatic headway.

In particular, "activists" have been the most popular object of analysis among researchers in the field of political party attitudes in Canada. Whether defined as delegates to a party's leadership convention¹⁴ or party officials,¹⁵ activists have been surveyed for over two decades, as the importance and significance of parties' extra-parliamentary wings has grown. Other studies, such as those conducted by Lambert et al., have shifted focus toward the entire electorate, seeking to gain insight into general perceptions about party attitudes and identities.¹⁶ In very few instances, legislators have been the object of analysis, as well.¹⁷ Overall, however, activists have been the 'respondent of choice' among researchers in recent years.

The Observation and Structure of Political Attitudes

Having established the most common objectives, devices and sample populations used in the study of party attitudes in Canada, we are still left with one obvious question: Precisely what do analysts look for when creating an attitudinal profile of a political party? In other words, what sorts of questions do researchers pose of their respondents to determine whether each party is cohesive and distinct?

¹⁴ Archer and Whitehorn, "Opinion Structure"; Stewart and Archer, *Quasi-Democracy*; Ellis and Archer, "Ideology and Opinion", Blake et al. *Grassroots*, Blake, "Division and Cohesion".

¹⁵ John F. Zipp. "Left-Right Dimensions of Canadian Federal Party Identification." *Canadian Journal of Political Science*. 11 (1978): 251-77.

¹⁶ Ronald D. Lambert, James E. Curtis, Steven D. Brown, Barry J. Kay. "In Search of Left/Right Beliefs in the Canadian Electorate." *Canadian Journal of Political Science*. 19 (1986): 541-563.

¹⁷ Clarke, "Ideological Self-Perceptions".