

## CHANGES IN THE PARTY SYSTEM AND ANTI-PARTY SENTIMENT <sup>1</sup>

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### INTRODUCTION

The 1993 federal election shattered Canada's traditional 'two-plus-one' brokerage-style party system. The five-party configuration that emerged may be inherently unstable <sup>2</sup>, but, as Carty et. al argue in Chapter 4, a return to the former system seems unlikely. Frustration with the traditional parties undoubtedly played an important role in destabilizing the old system. Between 1965 and 1991, there was a progressive 'disaffection of degree' with political parties.<sup>3</sup> Two years later that disaffection found expression at the ballot box when the Bloc Québécois and the Reform Party smashed through the old system. In this chapter, we ask how the change in the party system has affected Canadians' views of political parties: has the trend toward increasing disaffection been arrested, or even reversed, or has it continued to grow?

For the first time, in the 1993 election (and again in 1997), Quebeckers had the option of voting for a sovereigntist party at the federal level, while voters in other provinces could choose a party that rejected the traditional top-down party model.<sup>4</sup> The consequences go beyond having more choice. As Carty and his colleagues note in Chapter 4, Reform's electoral success induced the traditional parties to institute changes aimed at enhancing their openness and responsiveness. The emergence of the two new parties could thus be helping to restore Canadians' confidence in the health and viability of political parties as institutions. If so, disaffection with political parties should be declining, or at least not rising. On the other hand, the increasing regionalization of the vote <sup>5</sup>, combined with the dynamics of multi-

partyism in a first-past-the-post system, have left more Canadians without representation in the caucus of the governing party. It is quite possible, then, that the changes in the party system have been accompanied instead by a deepening disaffection with Canada's political parties: as the system destabilizes, indifference or even hostility towards political parties may be mounting.

In order to determine which of the two interpretations holds, the first part of the chapter examines trends in Canadians' orientations toward political parties between the 1965 and 1997 federal elections. Then the second part of the chapter takes a closer look at attitudes toward political parties in the 1997 election to determine why anti-party arguments resonate with some Canadians, but not with others, and how this affects their electoral behaviour.

### **The Evolution of Orientations Toward Political Parties, 1965-1997**

Anti-party sentiment is typically defined at the mass level as denoting "sceptical or even hostile attitudes towards the role, function, or performance of political parties".<sup>6</sup> This definition may *appear* straightforward, but the topic "is larded with methodological booby traps and theoretical pitfalls".<sup>7</sup> One difficulty is the dearth of longitudinal data on popular attitudes toward political parties. As a result, orientations toward parties have had to be inferred from such indirect indicators as declining partisanship, non-voting, and voter hesitancy.<sup>8</sup> The reasoning behind these measures is simple. As people become more critical of political parties in general, their sense of attachment to a particular party is likely to diminish. They are also more likely to abstain from voting if they harbour hostile feelings about the contenders. And if they do end up voting, they will likely find it harder to settle on a party.

The problem with all of these indicators is that they could equally well be interpreted as measures of sheer indifference toward political parties.<sup>9</sup> Either way, though, each of them can tell us something about the changing health of Canada's political parties. And, fortunately, in the Canadian case, we have a time series of ratings of political parties that can be used to track whether Canadians are actually becoming more negative toward political parties. All of the data come from the 1965 to 1997 Canadian Election Studies, except for turnout (which is taken from official returns).<sup>10</sup>

### **Declining Turnout?**

In the 1997 federal election, fully one third of eligible voters failed to cast a ballot. At only 67 percent, turnout for Canada as a whole was the lowest of any postwar election. Moreover, turnout has been declining steadily since the 1988 federal election (see Figure 1). This drop in turnout is certainly no cause for complacency, but it may be too early to label it a trend. The three elections in the immediate postwar period (1945, 1949 and 1953) witnessed a very similar decline, only to see the trend reversed in the next election. It remains to be seen whether the decline that began in 1993 will continue. One indication that it may is the fact that the generation born after 1970 votes at a lower rate than preceding generations.<sup>11</sup>

[Figure 1 about here]

Declines in turnout, of course, are not just a matter of growing disaffection. Detailed analysis of the factors that affect variations in turnout from one election to another highlight the importance of the specific context of the election and particularly the closeness of the race.<sup>12</sup> If a race is not close, voters

have less incentive to make the effort to vote. This explains at least some of the drop in turnout in the 1990s.<sup>13</sup>

Two things *are* clear from Figure 1. First, there has been no consistent downward trend in turnout since 1965 to match the ‘disaffection of degree’ in Canadians’ party ratings that Clarke and Kornberg observed. And second, only in Quebec did the emergence of a new political party coincide with an *increase* in turnout in 1993. Turnout fell off in 1997, but remained significantly higher than in the country at large. These were the only federal elections in the entire postwar period in which turnout in Quebec clearly surpassed the figure for Canada as a whole. This is attributable to the emergence of the Bloc as a viable contender. A detailed analysis of the flow of the vote between the 1988 and 1993 federal elections indicates that Bloc support came disproportionately from 1988 abstainers. As many as 17 percent of Bloc voters had abstained in the preceding federal election, compared with only 11 percent of Reform voters and 11 percent of voters overall.<sup>14</sup> The Bloc Québécois has clearly had a mobilizing effect on the Quebec electorate. No such effect can be attributed to the Reform Party outside Quebec. Indeed, in Reform's Alberta heartland, turnout declined from 75 percent in 1988 to 70 percent in 1993 and then plummeted to 59 percent in 1997.

### **Voter Hesitancy?**

As Figure 2a shows, there has been no clear trend in the percentage of voters who report having decided on their vote even before the campaign began. Predictably, the figure was lowest (39 percent) for the electoral earthquake of 1993, but it reverted to a level (50 percent) within the typical range in 1997. To the extent that there has been a trend, it has been downward, but a regression

analysis indicates that the trend is not statistically significant.<sup>15</sup> The fluctuations in the percentage of early deciders are very similar inside and outside Quebec, with one telling exception: in Quebec, there was no drop in 1993. Presumably, many sovereignists approached that election knowing from the outset that they would vote for the Bloc. Outside Quebec, it was Atlantic Canada that was different, though now the difference lay in a continuing decline in the percentage of early deciders through the 1997 election.

[Figure 2 about here]

It is when we look at the percentage of voters deciding on election day itself that greater voter hesitancy becomes apparent (Figure 2b). The percentage reporting that they made their final choice only on the day of the election has almost doubled since 1980 from 7 percent to 13 percent in 1997.<sup>16</sup> This upward trend is statistically significant ( $p < .01$ ). Quebec was again an outlier in 1993, registering a drop in the percentage of late deciders. By 1997, though, the figure for Quebec was the same as the rest of the country. There is evidence, again, of greater voter hesitancy in Atlantic Canada in the 1990s than in other parts of the country which is understandable, given the flux in the region's vote. Across the country, though, Canadians were finding it harder to decide on a party. One possible inference is that growing numbers of Canadians were finding none of the parties to be much to their liking.

### **Declining Partisanship?**

Declining partisanship is another possible indication of citizens' growing disaffection with political parties or, at least, their increasing indifference to them. We look at three indicators of declining partisanship: the percentage of Canadians who lack any sense of identification with a political

party, the percentage of non-identifiers who feel a little closer to one of the parties, and finally the percentage with a very strong party identification. In examining trends in these three measures, it is important to take account of a major change in question wording, beginning with the 1988 Canadian Election Study.<sup>17</sup> Until that study, the Canadian election study party identification question lacked an explicit option for those who did not identify with any of the federal political parties. The effect of this omission was to discourage some non-partisans from responding that they did not have a party identification. The resulting inflation of the proportion of identifiers appears to account for some of the instability that had been observed in the measure.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, in 1988, the option 'none of these' was added.

[Figure 3 about here]

The effect of this change in response options is obvious from Figure 3: the proportion of non-identifiers rises dramatically between 1984 and 1988. Because of the wording change, it is not clear whether the level of non-identification itself changed between 1984 and 1988. What is clear is the *drop* in non-identification for Canada as a whole in both the period before and the period after the change. This is confirmed by a trend analysis. When non-identification is regressed on year of survey and a dummy variable to control for the change in question wording, the trend coefficient is both negative and statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ). It indicates that non-identification dropped an average of .42 percentage points per year across the 1965 to 1997 period.<sup>19</sup>

On closer examination, it becomes clear that Quebeckers were driving this trend. This is especially evident in the period between 1988 and 1997. Non-identification dropped 18 percentage

points from 38 percent in 1988 to 20 percent in 1997 in Quebec, while remaining virtually unchanged in the rest of the country. With most of the drop occurring between the 1988 and 1993 elections, this is clearly due to the appearance of a sovereigntist option at the federal level. The advent of the Reform Party as a major contender, on the other hand, had no discernible effect on levels of identification outside Quebec. One reason is that Reform voters were much less likely than Bloc voters to identify with their chosen party.<sup>20</sup>

[Figure 4 about here]

While the trend in non-identification does not suggest an increasing distance between the federal parties and the electorate, the drop in the proportion of ‘leaners’ does (Figure 4). These are non-identifiers who nonetheless say that they feel a little closer to one of the parties. The increase in the percentage of ‘leaners’ between 1984 and 1988 is probably attributable to the wording change in the party identification question. Non-partisans who might have been induced by the pre-1988 wording to state an identification are presumably also the non-partisans who are the most likely to feel a little closer to one of the parties. Once we control for the change in question wording, a statistically significant downward trend is confirmed ( $p < .001$ ), with the percentage of ‘leaners’ dropping an average of 1.13 percentage points a year.<sup>21</sup> Again, there is a contrast between Quebec and the rest of Canada: in Quebec, the proportion of leaners has actually increased since 1988. Outside Quebec, the post-1988 drop in the number of ‘leaners’ is especially steep in Atlantic Canada (from 43 percent to 26 percent) and the West (from 55 percent to 38 percent).

Taken together, the trends for non-identification and for ‘leaners’ since the 1988 federal election do point to a distancing between the federal parties and the electorate outside Quebec. The proportion of non-identifiers may not have gone up, but those who do not identify with a party are markedly less likely to feel any residual sense of attachment. At over 15 percent, this is a significant portion of the non-Quebec electorate. This is despite the appearance on the electoral scene of a party that seeks to appeal to those who are disaffected with the traditional partisan alternatives.

[Figure 5 about here]

On the other hand, if we look at those who do identify with a party (Figure 5), the proportion of strong partisans has, if anything, risen. This is especially true of Quebec. Outside Quebec, the increase is very modest and for the country as a whole, the trend coefficient (while positive) is not statistically significant. What is clear is that the intensity of partisanship has not actually diminished.<sup>22</sup>

In summary, then, in Quebec both the number of identifiers and the intensity of their partisanship has increased since the 1988 federal election, coinciding with the new availability of a sovereignist party at the federal level. Outside Quebec, the increase in the number of options has had much less effect. Despite the presence of the Reform Party, levels of party identification have not increased and there has been, at most, a slight increase in the strength of party identification. And non-identifiers appear to be losing any lingering attachment to the parties.

### **Disaffection or Indifference?**

Just as a strong sense of party identification does not preclude anti-party attitudes<sup>23</sup>, so a lack of party identification does not necessarily betoken disaffection with political parties. It could simply indicate indifference. It could even reflect a vigorous party system where increasing numbers of citizens are choosing on the basis of the parties' current performance and positions rather than relying on the habits of a lifetime.<sup>24</sup>

In order to resolve this question, we can use ratings of political parties on a 100-point scale (the so-called 'feeling thermometers') to track feelings about the parties as a whole. Since the same mean affect score could reflect either a large number of people with slightly negative feelings or a much smaller number of people with intensely negative feelings, we look at the mean number of negative evaluations<sup>25</sup>, as well as mean affect.

Even if feelings about political parties are becoming more negative, we should not rush to infer that the problem lies with the parties themselves. It is possible that political parties are simply serving as a lightning rod for frustration with the political process at large.<sup>26</sup> In that case, the problem would lie with the workings of the political system in general. One way of addressing this issue is to compare feelings about political parties with feelings about political leaders. If the trend is steeper for political parties than for their leaders, it would suggest that the problem lies with political parties as institutions. In order to enhance interpretability, the thermometer scores have been rescaled to run from minus 50 to plus 50, with 0 indicating the neutral point.

[Figure 6 about here]

The evidence is clear. As Figure 6a shows, mean feelings about the three traditional federal political parties have gone from positive to negative across the 30-year time span from 1968 to 1997.<sup>27</sup> The trend is statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ) and indicates that on average party affect has fallen by .35 points per year since 1968. The decline has been similar on both sides of the national divide. Mean party affect has dropped from plus 4.8 to minus 4.4 in Quebec and from plus 6.6 to minus 3.8 in the rest of the country. To be sure, the decline is not dramatic. It is what Clarke and Kornberg aptly termed ‘a disaffection of degree’<sup>28</sup>. That said, it is significant that it was only in the 1990s that the mean scores in post-election surveys became clearly negative. It is also significant that the picture outside Quebec does not change if we include the Reform Party in the calculation of the means.<sup>29</sup> This is a striking finding: the addition of a party that has explicitly offered an alternative model has apparently done nothing to improve Canadians’ feelings about their federal political parties. Even in Quebec, the increase in mean affect associated with the advent of the Bloc has proved to be short-lived. Substituting the Bloc in the calculations boosts mean affect by seven points in 1993, but by only 2 points in 1997.

Finally, Figure 6a confirms that the party leaders have not become as unpopular on average as the parties they lead. Save for the 1968 election when ‘Trudeaumania’ boosted average leader ratings, there was little to distinguish mean party affect from mean leader affect until the two elections of the 1990s. It was in 1993 that the gap opened up and it continued into the next election.<sup>30</sup>

The pattern is even clearer when we track shifts in the mean number of negative (<0) ratings for the three traditional federal parties (Figure 6b). While there is no discernible trend for leader ratings, the

mean number of negative party ratings has moved steadily upward ( $p < .01$ ). Moreover, where positive party ratings outnumbered negative ratings throughout the period from 1968 to 1988, in both 1993 and 1997 negative ratings clearly predominated.<sup>31</sup> If the Bloc is substituted for the NDP, Quebec deviates from this pattern: in both 1993 and 1997 the mean number of negative ratings was not much higher than in 1968 and the mean number of positive ratings exceeded the mean number of negative ones. There is no comparable effect in the rest of the country when Reform ratings are factored in. Outside Quebec, the conclusion has to be that disaffection with the federal political parties has grown. While the trend was evident before the 1990s, it was only in the 1990s that it became clear that Canadians were not merely increasingly indifferent toward the federal political parties, but downright negative. Far from arresting the decline in party affect, the changes in the party system outside Quebec have been associated with a deepening discontent.

## **EVALUATIONS OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE 1997 FEDERAL ELECTION**

In order to understand why so many Canadians are disgruntled with their political parties, the 1997 Canadian Election Study included five questions about political parties (see Appendix for full question wording). First, it is worth noting that only a small minority actually believes that we could do without political parties in Canada (Figure 7). That said, there was a good deal of uncertainty on this question of whether political parties are necessary to make the political system work, with fully a quarter of respondents unable to take a position. In Quebec, as many as 30 percent were undecided.

[Figure 7 about here]

Sizeable minorities see the parties as untrustworthy and uncaring, with one Canadian in three believing that parties hardly ever keep their election promises (32 percent) and do not care what ordinary people think (35 percent). The view that political parties are untrustworthy was especially common in Quebec (38 percent). Quebeckers were also particularly likely to believe that all federal parties are basically the same (60 percent). What is really striking about this result is that when the same question was asked in a survey conducted in 1990 for the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, the very same level of agreement was recorded.<sup>32</sup> The figure for the country as a whole (47 percent) also remains unchanged. In other words, the shattering of the traditional two-plus-one party system seems to have done nothing to shake perceptions that the federal parties are basically indistinguishable. Despite the electoral successes of an avowedly separatist party in Quebec and a neo-populist 'new right' party in the rest of the country, many Canadians, especially in Quebec, still seem to feel that there really is not much to choose among the parties.<sup>33</sup>

The most negative responses were recorded, though, when respondents were asked whether political parties spend too much time catering to minorities. Not surprisingly, the level of agreement was much lower in Quebec (40 percent) than in the rest of the country. Outside Quebec, a clear majority (58 percent) shared this view. More detailed analysis of anti-party sentiment outside Quebec shows that one of the driving forces behind this sentiment is a lack of perceived issue representation on the Quebec question.<sup>34</sup> While the perception that no party is close to the respondent's position is a factor, what counts more is the perceived distance between that position and the position of the governing

party. Parties as a whole are viewed more negatively when people feel that their opinions are not being represented by the party in power.

The 'national question' is a classic case of an issue that had been 'organized out'<sup>35</sup> of electoral politics by the traditional federal parties. As Johnston and his colleagues showed, in the 1988 federal election, taking a tougher line with Quebec was an area of the issue space that was well-supplied with voters but devoid of parties.<sup>36</sup> That changed dramatically, of course, in 1993 when both the Reform Party and the Bloc broke through electorally by politicizing this very issue.

[Figure 8 about here]

Further evidence of failed 'issue intermediation' can be found in what Biorcia and Mannheimer term the 'rational-instrumental' aspect of the party-citizen relationship.<sup>37</sup> This is the perceived capacity of political parties to handle the issues that matter to voters. Figure 8 shows the percentage of respondents who either responded 'none' or could not name a party when asked which party would be best at handling the issue in question. The two issues that were mentioned most frequently when respondents were asked what was the most important issue to them personally were jobs (36 percent) and taxes (18 percent). One fifth or more of respondents saw no party as being capable of acting effectively on one or both of these issues. The numbers were even higher when it came to fighting crime and keeping promises. Quebeckers, again, were the most sceptical about parties' commitment to keeping promises. On every issue, in fact, Quebeckers were more likely than respondents in the rest of the country to doubt the parties' capacity to act effectively. There is one telling exception to this pattern and that is on the question of which party would be best at defending the interests of Quebec.<sup>38</sup> Over 90 percent of Quebeckers named a party and almost two thirds (64 percent) of them named the Bloc.

No other party, on any other issue, came remotely close to enjoying this level of perceived competence.<sup>39</sup>

A final aspect of party performance that contributes, albeit modestly, to anti-partyism is frustration with the government's economic performance. In electoral democracies, the standard remedy for perceived shortcomings in economic performance is to punish the incumbent party by voting against it at the next election. If performance fails to improve with a different party in power, however, economic frustration may give rise to a broader dissatisfaction with political parties in general. The impact of economic unhappiness, though, is modest. This can be illustrated by combining responses to the five questions about parties into a simple additive scale that runs in value from 0 to 1. The higher the score, the more negative the view of parties. People who believed that Canada's economic situation had deteriorated over the previous year had an average anti-party score of .55, compared with .45 for those who thought that it had improved.

Socio-demographic differences in anti-partyism are also modest.<sup>40</sup> There is evidence that anti-party sentiment taps into regional frustration, but it is Atlantic Canadians, not Westerners, who harbour the most negative views of political parties. Women are a little more critical, on average, than men, which mirrors their views about the workings of representative institutions in general.<sup>41</sup> Those who work in the public sector can be expected to identify more closely with the state and its institutions and they are indeed a little less critical of political parties.<sup>42</sup> Those who are unemployed or laid off, on the other hand, are more disaffected. The background characteristic that has the most impact, though, is

education. The more formal education respondents have, the less critical their view of political parties. This effect turns out to be a function of political sophistication.<sup>43</sup> Based on their study of public attitudes toward the U.S. Congress, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse concluded that negative perceptions of representative institutions reflect frustration with the democratic process.<sup>44</sup> Democracy can be a messy process, requiring complex compromises. The politically sophisticated presumably have the cognitive resources to grasp what democracy entails and so they have a more charitable view of the central actor.<sup>45</sup> While all of these differences meet conventional levels of statistical significance, none of them is large. Even for education, the difference between university graduates and those who failed to complete high school is only .09. As for other social background characteristics, they have even less effect. Income is related to anti-partyism, but this effect turns out to be due to differences in education. And, despite the drop off in their turnout, there is no indication that younger Canadians are more critical of political parties.<sup>46</sup>

The modest effect of region is especially surprising. Western populism has traditionally contained a strong strain of anti-partyism, ranging from crypto-populists who nonetheless saw the major political parties as reformable to radical populists who called for the replacement of political parties by new forms of democratic representation and governance.<sup>47</sup> By the 1990s, though, populist discontent with political parties was no longer a distinctively Western phenomenon. Where Westerners did differ was in the behavioural consequences of their anti-party attitudes.

At election time, people who are frustrated with political parties basically have three choices: they can abstain from voting altogether, they can vote for a party that promises to do politics differently, or they can vote for one of the traditional alternatives in the hopes that its behaviour will change. Borrowing from Hirschman, Mudde has dubbed these choices 'exit', 'voice', and 'loyalty'.<sup>48</sup> Westerners were significantly more likely than other Canadians to opt for 'voice' by voting Reform.<sup>49</sup>

To the extent that it mobilized on the basis of anti-party sentiment, the Reform Party can be classified as an 'anti-party' party. Like its European counterparts, the Reform Party successfully melded its neo-populist appeals with a clear 'new right' agenda.<sup>50</sup> In doing so, it provided anti-party sentiment with a channel of expression within the party arena. Indeed, in the 1997 federal election, anti-partyism was more likely to lead to a Reform vote than to abstention.<sup>51</sup> Almost half of Reform voters (48 percent) scored in the top tercile on our anti-partyism scale, compared with just over a third (34 percent) of non-voters outside Quebec. These are respondents who scored .6 or higher on the scale and thus had clearly negative opinions of political parties. The Bloc, on the other hand, has not explicitly sought to capitalize on anti-partyism. Instead, it seems to have helped to defuse some of the anti-party sentiment by offering sovereignists a way of expressing their preference in federal elections. Only two-fifths of Bloc voters (39 percent) scored in the top tercile on the anti-partyism scale, compared with fully half of nonvoters (50 percent).<sup>52</sup> For Quebeckers who remained dissatisfied with political parties, exit was the more likely choice.

The Reform Party's success in tapping into anti-party sentiment raises intriguing questions about the meaning of anti-party attitudes and the motivations of anti-party voters.<sup>53</sup> In the 1997 federal election, the Reform Party was no longer a new party trying to break into the party system. When Reform voters responded to our questions about political parties, the Reform Party should presumably have been part of their frame of reference. And in voting for Reform, they were voting for what is, after all, still a political party. One possibility is that they did not see the Reform Party as a 'real' party: in responding to the questions, they were thinking only of the traditional political parties. If so, this would suggest that the problem lies not so much with political parties as such, but with a particular *type* of political party.<sup>54</sup> Another possibility is that Reform voters were not voting for the party as such, but for its leader. Leader evaluations were a more salient factor in Reform voting than in voting for any of the other parties in the 1997 election, and Reform voters were much less likely than those who voted for the traditional parties (or for the Bloc) to identify with their party.<sup>55</sup>

## **DISCUSSION**

We began with the question of the impact of party system change on Canadians' views of political parties: has the trend toward increasing disaffection been arrested, or even reversed, by the electoral earthquake of 1993 or has disaffection continued to grow? It is now clear that the answer has to be different for Quebec and for Canada outside Quebec. In Quebec, the availability of a sovereignist option at the federal level has clearly helped to check anti-partyism. For the first time in the entire post-war period, turnout in the two most recent federal elections has been markedly higher in Quebec than in the rest of the country. This is directly attributable to the fact that sovereignists now have the option of

voting for a sovereigntist party in federal elections. Similarly, for the first time since the question has been asked in election studies, Quebec voters were more likely to know how they were going to vote even before the campaign began. Partisanship has also increased since the emergence of the Bloc as a viable contender: the proportion of Quebecers who identify very strongly with a political party has risen while the proportion of non-identifiers has dropped dramatically, and more of the non-identifiers admit to feeling a little closer to one of the parties. Finally, in Quebec, the addition of the Bloc has arrested or, at least, temporarily halted the 'disaffection of degree' with political parties. It is, of course, ironic that a party that is committed to the breakup of the country has actually served to connect more Quebecers to the federal party system, at least for now.

Outside Quebec, there is little to suggest that the trend toward increasing disaffection with political parties has been halted, let alone reversed. Turnout has declined sharply since 1988, despite the advent of a political party that has sought to channel disaffection with political parties and give it expression within the party system. The Reform Party *was* successful in attracting 'anti-party' voters, but increasing numbers of Canadians are still choosing to opt out altogether. The advent of Reform did nothing to diminish the proportion of Canadians outside Quebec who lack a sense of party identification. And the proportion of these non-identifiers who lack any residual sense of attachment has actually grown. Even more tellingly, Reform's electoral success did nothing to halt the deepening disaffection with Canada's political parties. Outside Quebec, feelings have gone from being lukewarm or neutral, on average, to being clearly negative.

We can only speculate about the reasons why the option of voting for a party that rejects the traditional party mold did not do more to stem anti-party sentiment. One clue may lie in the relationship between anti-partyism and distance from the incumbent party. Lack of perceived issue representation within the governing caucus spills over into a deeper dissatisfaction with political parties as institutions. This brings us back to the implications of regionalized voting in a multi-party system with plurality voting. If 'anti-party' voters see no prospect of dislodging the incumbent, their frustration with political parties as mechanisms of representative democracy may grow.

It is, of course, also possible that the Bloc's sovereigntist supporters will become frustrated with the party's inability to achieve the goal of separation for which it was founded. The Bloc, though, has been extremely successful in defining itself more broadly as the defender of Quebec's interests, and this may help to deter 'exit'. What is particularly intriguing about anti-party sentiment in Quebec is the high proportion who still see nothing to choose among the federal parties. This requires further study, but one possibility is that some Quebeckers are frustrated by the extent to which party competition at the federal level in Quebec is structured around the sovereignty issue.<sup>56</sup>

Clearly, more work is needed to understand fully how Canadians in different parts of the country view political parties as institutions. One conclusion that we can draw, though, bears on the contours of the emerging party system. The divergent trends in anti-partyism in the 1990s in Quebec and in the rest of Canada reinforce the point that Canada now has, not one, but two party systems, one

in Quebec and one outside.<sup>57</sup> Not only do the identity of the contenders and the salient issues differ, but so does the impact of party system change on feelings about political parties.

## Appendix

### Question Wording

"Some people say that political parties are necessary to make our political system work in Canada. Others think that political parties are not needed in Canada. Using the [5-point] scale below, where would you place your own view?"

"Do political parties keep their election promises most of the time, some of the time, or hardly ever?"

"Some people say that political parties in Canada care what ordinary people think. Others say that political parties in Canada don't care what ordinary people think. Using the [5-point] scale below, where would you place your own view?"

"For each statement below, please indicate if you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree:

All federal parties are basically the same; there isn't really a choice.

Political parties spend too much time catering to minorities."

Note: Except for keeping election promises, the questions come from the self-completion mail-back survey. Despite the drop-off in sample size, the mail-back respondents resemble the campaign respondents in terms of social background. Given the literacy requirements, though, a higher proportion of mail-back respondents had completed high school. A comparison of the campaign-wave and mailback samples on the keeping election promises question confirms the resemblance. 28.1 percent of mail-back respondents (N=1,400) responded 'hardly ever', reassuringly close to the campaign figure of 29.6 percent (N=2,928).

## ENDNOTES

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2. See, Neil Nevitte, Andre Blais, Elisabeth Gidengil and Richard Nadeau, *Unsteady State: The 1997 Canadian Federal Election* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2000).
3. Harold D. Clarke and Allan Kornberg, "Evaluations and Evolution: Public Attitudes toward Canada's Federal Political Parties, 1965-1991," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 26 (1993), 287-311.
4. The Reform Party did run some token candidates in Quebec, but won only a tiny fraction of the vote.
5. See, Elisabeth Gidengil, Andre Blais, Richard Nadeau, and Neil Nevitte, "Making Sense of Regional Voting in the 1997 Canadian Federal Election," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 32 (1999), 247-72.
6. Thomas Poguntke and Susan E. Scarrow, "The Politics of Anti-Party Sentiment: Introduction," *European Journal of Political Research* 29 (1996), 258.
7. Thomas Poguntke, "Anti-Party Sentiment—Conceptual Thoughts and Empirical Evidence: Explorations into a Minefield," *European Journal of Political Research* 29 (1996), 319.
8. See, for example, Poguntke and Scarrow, "The Politics of Anti-Party Sentiment," and, Howard L. Reiter, "Party Decline in the West: A Skeptics View," *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 1 (1989), 325-48.

9. See, Paul D. Webb, "A-Partisanship and Anti-Party Sentiment in the United Kingdom: Correlates and Constraints," *European Journal of Political Research* 29 (1996), 365-82.
10. A study was conducted for every federal election, except for 1972. The data for 1988, 1993 and 1997 are taken from the post-election surveys. The pre-1988 studies were all post-election surveys only.
11. Nevitte et al., *Unsteady State*.
12. See, Andre Blais and Agnieszka Dobrzynska, "Turnout in Electoral Democracies," *European Journal of Political Research* 33 (1998), 239-61.
13. See, Nevitte et al., *Unsteady State*.
14. Richard Johnston, Andre Blais, Elisabeth Gidengil and Neil Nevitte, "The 1993 Canadian Election: Realignment, Dealignment, or Something Else?," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, St. Catherine's, Ontario, 1996.
15. The dependent variable is a binary variable that takes the value of '1' for those who decided before the campaign began and '0' for those who decided later. The time of decision question was not asked in either the 1965 or 1984 Canadian Election Studies and in the 1968 Canadian Election Study there was no coding category for deciding on the day of the election. In that study, only 30 percent of voters reported having decided on their vote before the campaign began.
16. In 1988, the Canadian Election Study switched from at-home face-to-face interviews to telephone interviews. One effect of this was greatly to reduce the elapse of time between election day and the day of interview. The upward trend since 1980 does not appear to be an artifact of this change in survey format since the West did not register an increase until 1993.
17. It should also be noted that the 1965 and 1968 party identification questions did not differentiate

initially between federal and provincial parties, but instead employed a follow-up question, “When you say you are a (name of chosen party) are you thinking of national politics, politics here in this province, or both?”. We have coded those who only had a provincial identification as non-identifiers.

18. See, Richard Johnston, Andre Blais, Henry E. Brady and Jean Crete, *Letting the People Decide: Dynamics of a Canadian Election* (Montreal: McGill-Queens’ University Press, 1992).

19. It should be noted that Clarke and Kornberg (1993) detected no significant trend for the 1965 to 1991 period. This reflects a difference in the operationalization of identification. Clarke and Kornberg counted 'leaners' (those who initially responded 'none', but then said that they were a little closer to one of the federal parties) as identifiers. They also included data for non-election years (with a control for the mobilizing effects of elections).

20. See, Johnston et al., “The 1993 Canadian Election,” and Nevitte et al., *Unsteady State*.

21. Most of the pre-1990s decline occurred between 1965 and 1974, but even if we control for a possible period effect in the mid to late 1960s, there is still a statistically significant downward trend between the 1965 and 1997 elections.

22. This is again at odds with Clarke and Kornberg’s (1993) conclusion. They detected a significant downward trend in the percentage of very strong identifiers between 1965 and 1991. The difference is not just a matter of operationalization. It also reflects the upward trend in the percentage of strong identifiers in the 1990s.

23. See, Diana Owen and Jack Dennis, “Anti-Partyism in the USA and Support for Ross Perot,” *European Journal of Political Research* 29 (1996), 383-400. This is true of Canada, too. 26 percent of those who identified very or fairly strongly with a political party scored in the top tercile of

our anti-partyism scale (see below) in 1997. Liberal (16 percent) and NDP (20 percent) identifiers were the least negative, while Reform identifiers (47 percent) were the most negative.

24. See, Poguntke, “Anti-Party Sentiment.”

25. See, Arthur H. Miller and Ola Listhaug, “Political Parties and Confidence in Government: A Comparison of Norway, Sweden and the United States,” *British Journal of Political Science* 29 (1990), 357-86.

26. See, Luciano Bardi, “Anti-Party Sentiment and Party Change in Italy,” *European Journal of Political Research* 29 (1996), 343-63 and, Webb, “A-Partisanship and Anti-Party Sentiment.”

27. Although the exact wording of the thermometer questions has varied across election studies, there is no reason to believe that the downward trend is an artefact of these differences in question wording. In particular, the post-1988 drop cannot be attributed to a change in wording since there was no comparable decline in the leaders’ thermometer ratings (see below). The party thermometer questions were not asked in the 1984 Canadian Election Study. It should be noted that the mean leader affect score for that election was appreciably higher (at plus 7.1) than in either the following or the preceding election.

28. Clarke and Kornberg, “Evaluations and Evolution,” 22.

29. Outside Quebec, the mean score barely changes in 1993 (from minus 3.3 to minus 3.1) and actually drops slightly in 1997 (from minus 3.8 to minus 4.7).

30. Cross-time comparisons of mean leader effect are complicated by the use of filters in both the 1988 and 1993 Canadian Election Studies for those who said they knew ‘nothing at all’ about a leader. In 1997, those who said they knew ‘nothing at all’ about a given leader tended on average to give that

leader a lower score. Filtering out these respondents raises the mean leader affect score to plus 3.4.

Even if the use of filters had the same effect in the two preceding studies, by 1997 leaders were clearly more popular on average than the parties they led. More detailed analysis confirms that there is more to anti-party sentiment than political malaise, dislike of politicians in general, or dislike of the established parties. See Elisabeth Gidengil et al., "Exit, Voice and Loyalty: The Correlates and Consequences of Anti-Partyism in the 1997 Canadian Federal Election," paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the Atlantic Provinces' Political Studies Association, Sackville, New Brunswick.

31. The mean number of positive party ratings has dropped from 1.44 in 1968 to 1.16 in 1993 and 1.14 in 1997.

32. See, Andre Blais and Elisabeth Gidengil, *Making Representative Democracy Work: The Views of Canadians*. Vol. 17 of the Research Studies of the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1991).

33. On the characterization of the Reform Party as a neo-populist 'new right' party, see Belkhdja (Chapter 6 this volume); Neil Nevitte et al., "The Populist Right in Canada: The Rise of the Reform Party of Canada," in Hans-Georg Betz and Stefan Immerfall, eds., *The New Politics of the Right: Neo-Populist Parties and Movements in Established Democracies* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998) 173-202; and Nevitte et al., *Unsteady State*.

34. See, Gidengil et al., "Exit, Voice and Loyalty."

35. E. E. Schattschneider, *The Semi-Sovereign People* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960) 71.

36. Johnston, et al., *Letting the People Decide*.

37. See, Roberto Biorcia and Renato Mannheimer, "Relationships between Citizens and Political Parties," *Beliefs in Government, Volume One: Citizens and the State* eds. Hans-Dieter Klingemann and Dieter Fuchs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 206-226.
38. This question was only asked in Quebec.
39. For more information, see Richard Nadeau et al., "Perceptions of Party Competence in the 1997 Election," in Hugh Thorburn and Alan Whitehorn, eds., *Party Politics in Canada 9<sup>th</sup> edition* (Toronto: Prentice, Hall, forthcoming).
40. See, Clarke and Kornberg, "Evaluations and Evolution," and Webb, "A-Partisanship and Anti-Party Sentiment."
41. See, Blais and Gidengil, *Making Representative Democracy Work.*"
42. See, Webb, "A-Partisanship and Anti-Party Sentiment."
43. See, Gidengil et al., "Exit, Voice and Loyalty."
44. John Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, *Congress as Public-Enemy: Public Attitudes Toward American Political Institutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
45. See, Norman Nie, et al., *Education and Democratic Citizenship in America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
46. Once other social background characteristics are taken into account, though, Canadians born before the babyboom generation turn out to be a little less critical, presumably because they were socialized at a time when political parties were viewed less negatively.
47. See, David Laycock, *Populism and Democratic Thought in the Canadian Prairies, 1910 to 1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

48. Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Response to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970) and Cas Mudde, “The Paradox of the Anti-Party Party: Insights from the Extreme Right,” *Party Politics* 2: 265-276.
76. Mudde includes a second option under ‘voice’, namely supporting new social movements. Voting for an independent candidate or spoiling the ballot are also possible options.
49. See, Gidengil et al., “Exit, Voice and Loyalty.”
50. The parallels should not be pushed too far, though. The Reform Party is less radical than its European cousins. See, Nevitte et al., “The Populist Right in Canada,” and *Unsteady State*.
51. See, Gidengil et al., “Exit, Voice and Loyalty.”
52. The comparable figures for those who voted for one of the traditional parties was 22 percent outside Quebec and 24 percent within Quebec.
53. See, Bardi, “Anti-Party Sentiment,” Mudde, “The Paradox of the Anti-party Party,” and Webb, “A-Partisanship and Anti-Party Sentiment.”
54. See, Richard S. Katz and Peter Mair, “Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy,” *Party Politics* 1: 5-28.
55. See, Nevitte et al, *Unsteady State*.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.

FIGURE 1: Turnout in Federal Elections, 1945-1997

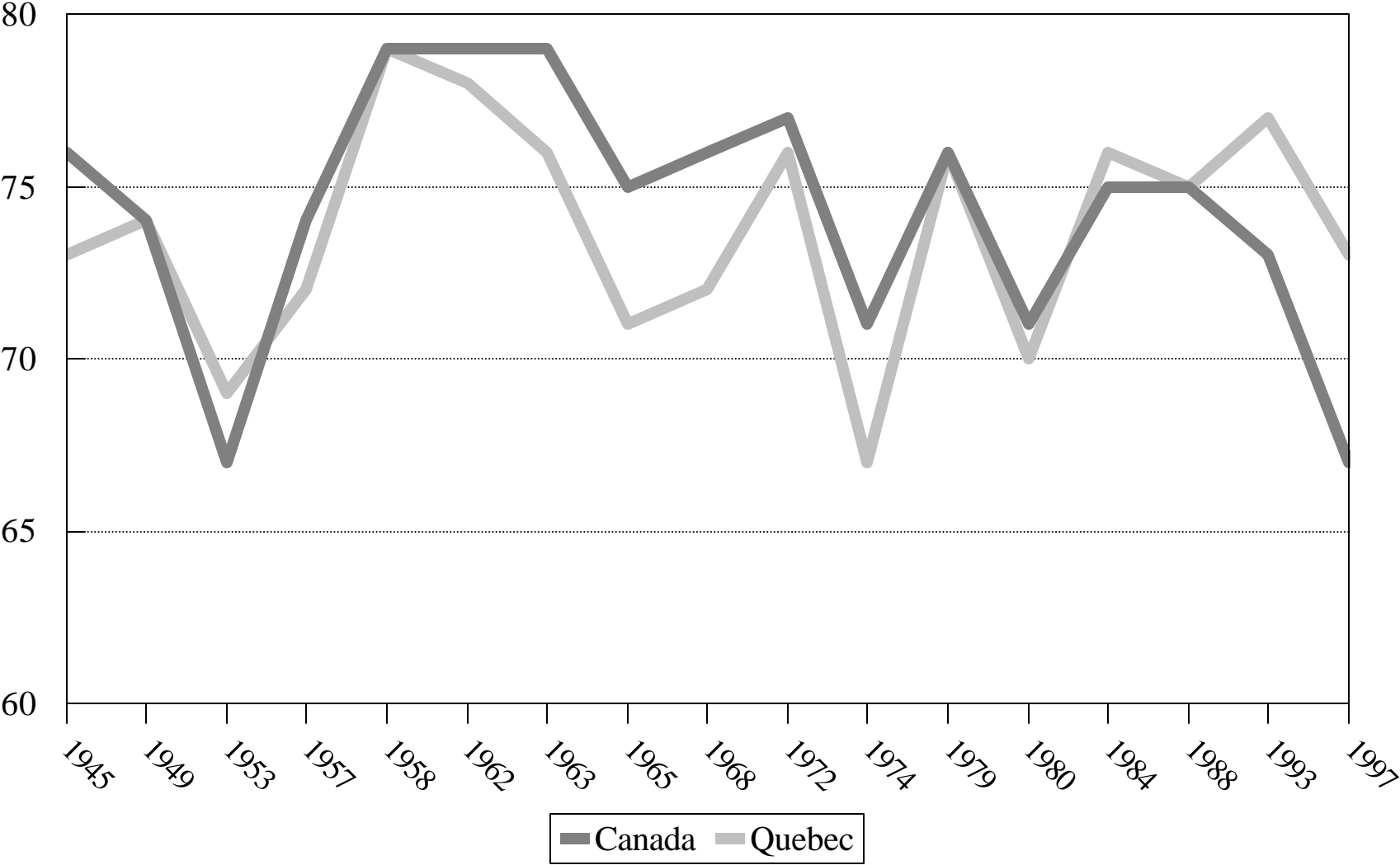


FIGURE 2a: Percentage of Voters Deciding Before the Campaign Began, 1974-1997

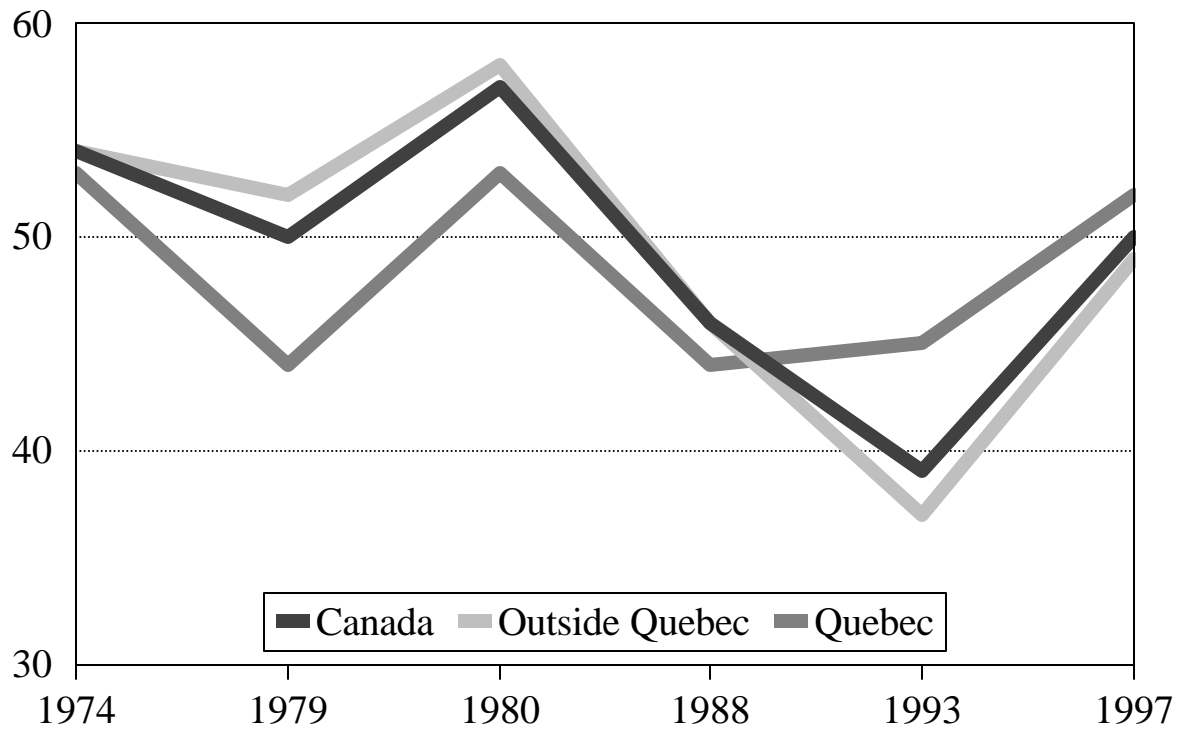


FIGURE 2b: Percentage of Voters Deciding on Election Day, 1974-1997

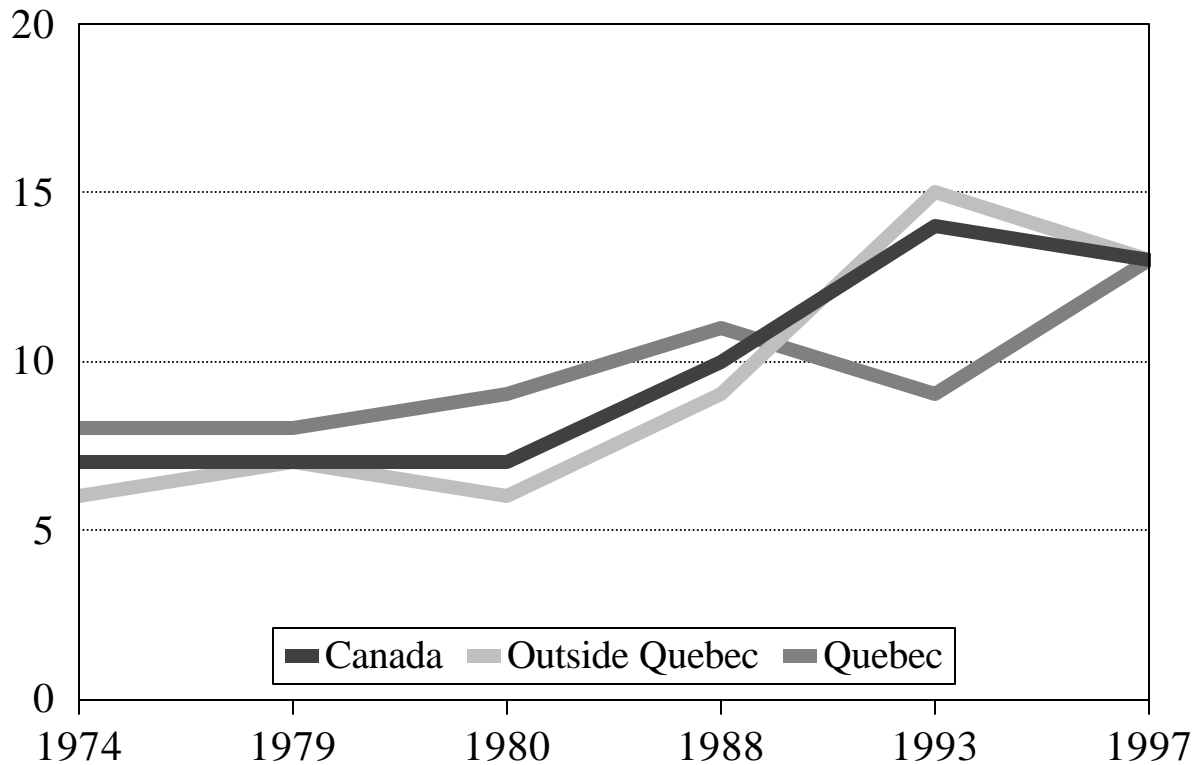


FIGURE 3a: Percentage of Non-Identifiers, 1965-1997

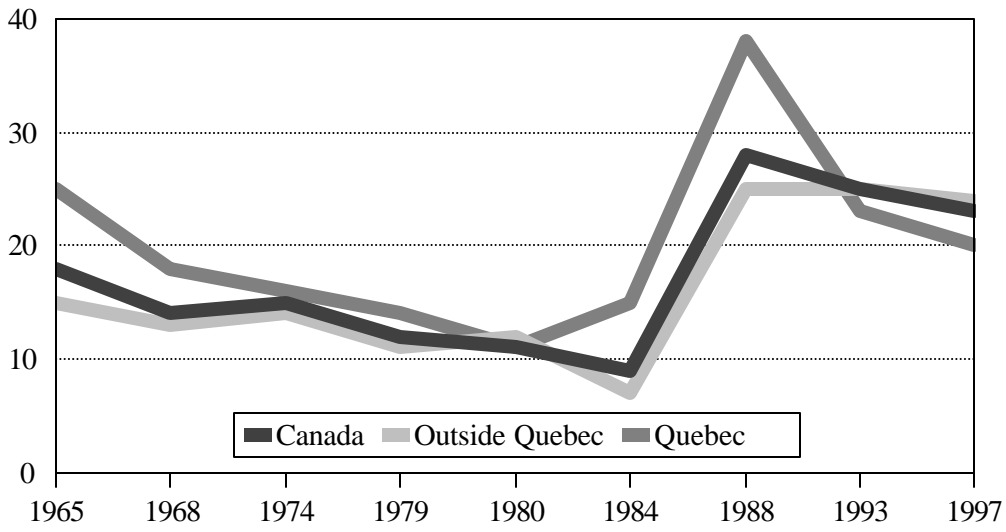


FIGURE 3c: Leaners, 1965-1997 (as percentage of non-identifiers)

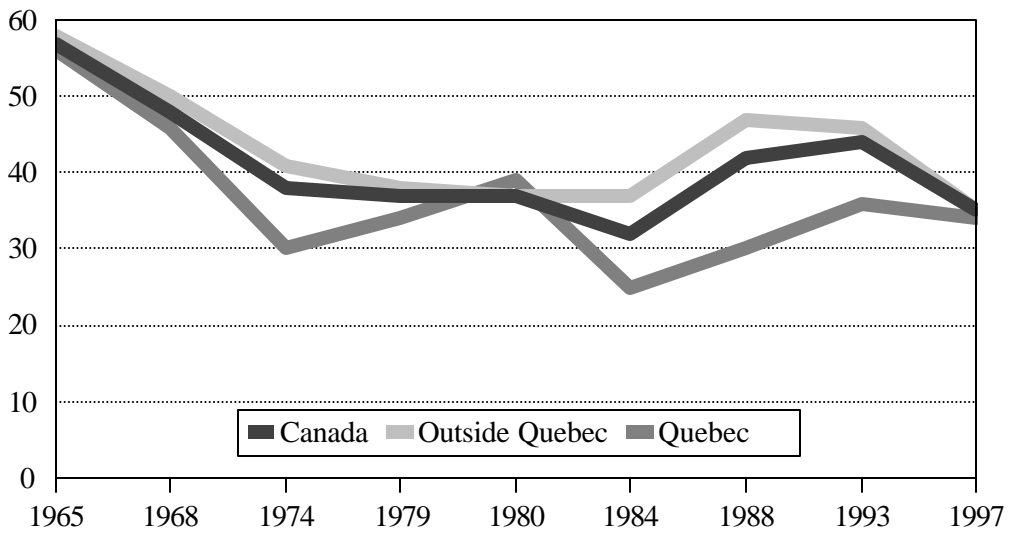


FIGURE 3c: Very Strong Identifiers, 1965-1997 (as percentage of identifiers)

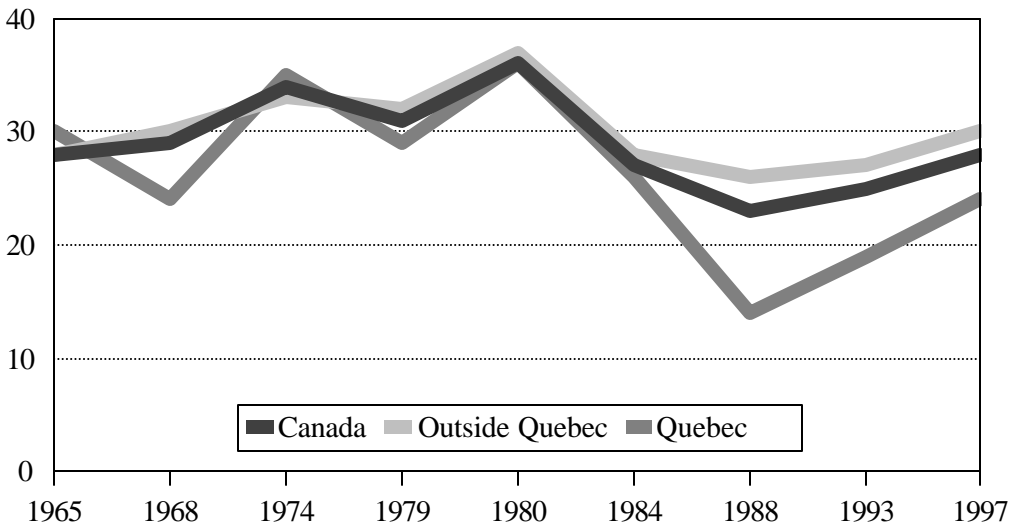


FIGURE 4a: Mean Leader and Party Ratings, 1968-1997

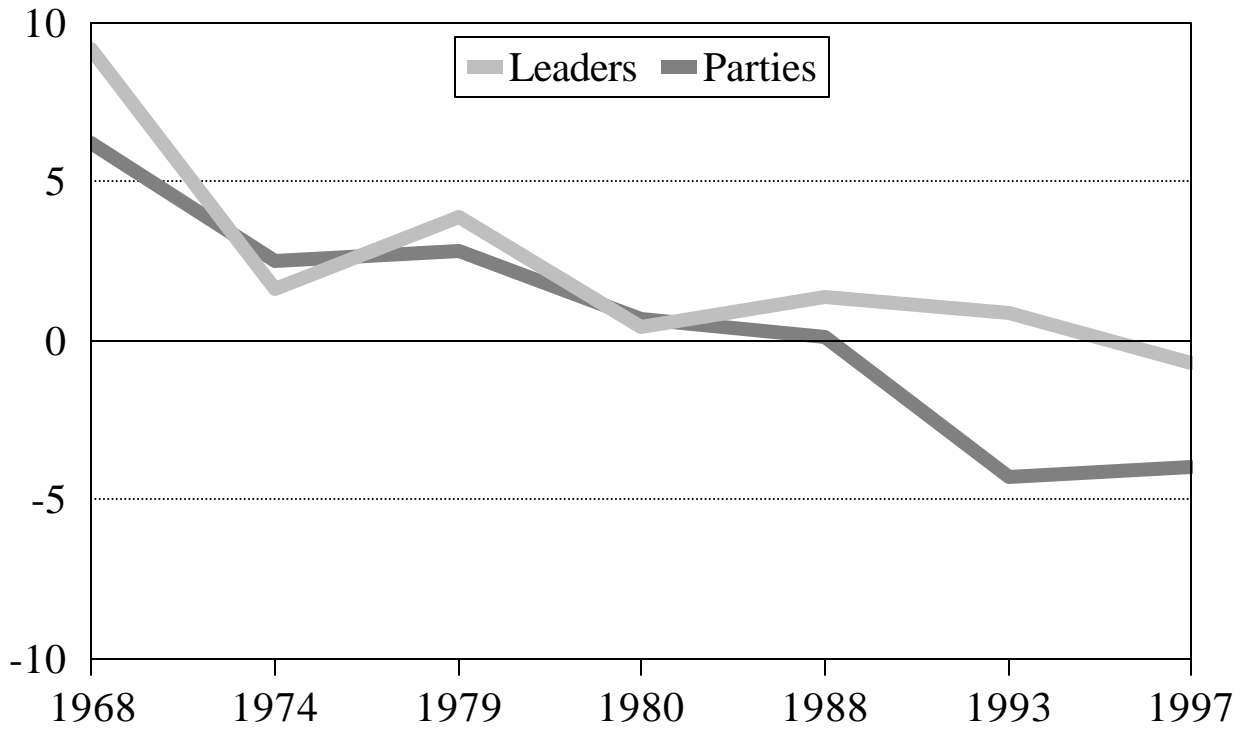
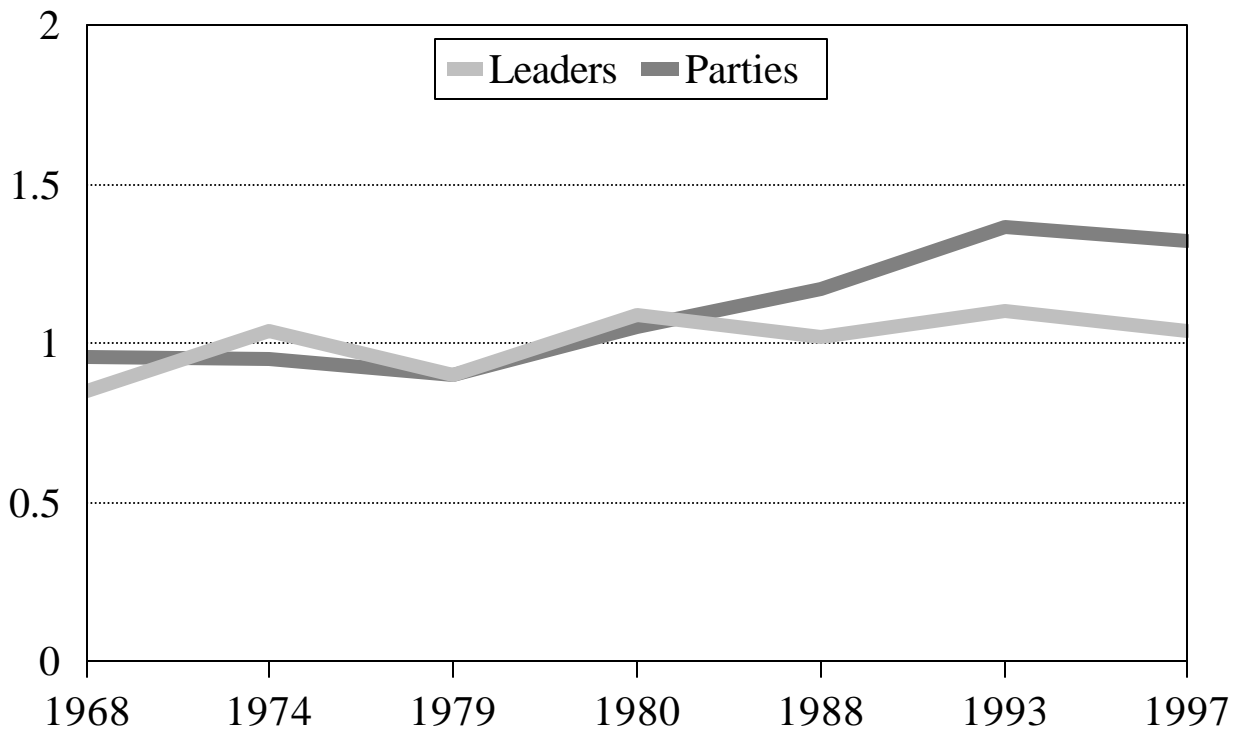
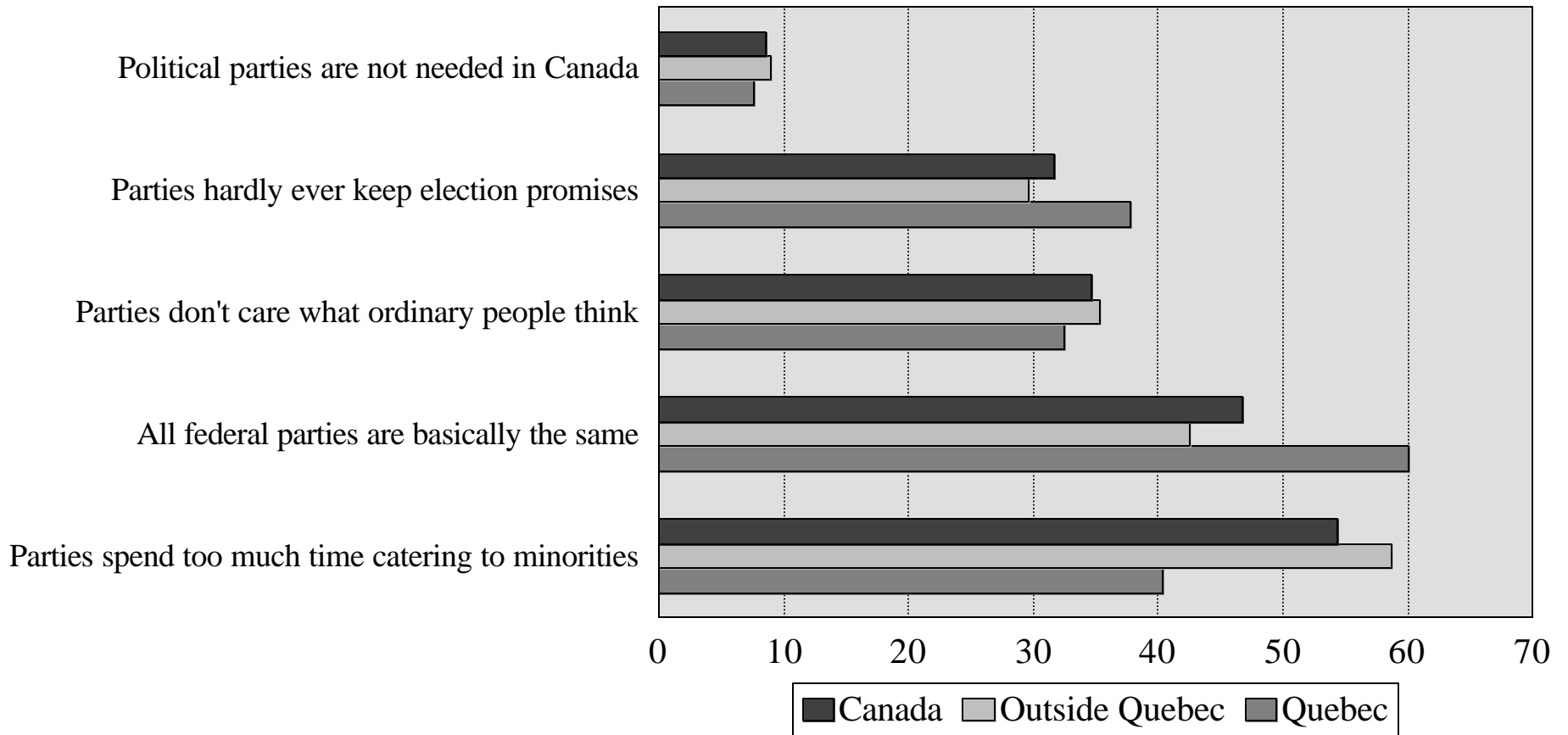


FIGURE 4b: Mean Number of Negative Leader and Party Ratings, 1968-1997



Note: Ratings are for the Liberals, Conservatives and NDP only. No party thermometer questions were asked in 1984.

FIGURE 5: Evaluations of Political Parties in the 1997 Federal Election  
(% agreeing with statement)



See Appendix for full question wording

FIGURE 6: Perceived Party Competence in the 1997 Federal Election  
(% responding none or don't know)

