Patronage and Theories of Party Organization:
Canada in Comparative Context

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The paper examines the use of patronage in Canadian party politics in light of theories of party organization. Patronage has been central to the operation of mainstream Canadian parties, past and present. However, the kinds of patronage and ways in which it is distributed have changed over time. In the early years of confederation, the principal forms of patronage were jobs and government contracts. Reflecting civil service reforms and social and economic change, the provision of low-paying jobs has declined in importance, but government contracts, particularly in advertising, have gained in importance in both federal and provincial politics. As a recent inquiry into kickbacks in Quebec demonstrates, advertising contracts can provide important revenue streams for governing parties. Opposition parties, however, find themselves deprived of resources. The emphasis will be primarily but not exclusively on federal party politics.

The paper considers the Canadian case in comparative and theoretical context. Focused on broad changes over time, the literature on party organization says little about the ways in which political parties use patronage. The paper argues that patronage is one of many resources which parties use in order to build and maintain – party organization. Patronage can be a device to recruit, retain and reward active party members or, alternatively, a device used to garner resources – money – which can substitute for formal organization. The forms which patronage takes vary. One form is low level employment. Another includes contracts and preferment for high level employment – e.g., staff positions, positions on the advisory boards, etc. Although civil service reforms and social and economic changes have reduced both the supply and demand for low level employment, preferment for government contracts and high level positions continue to be important in Canada and other political systems.

The paper draws on ongoing research on political parties in Canada, the United States, and Europe for a book, Rethinking Political Parties, to be published by Oxford University Press. This argues that party organization is a product of choices which party officials must make and reaffirm over time.
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Introduction:

Imagine two stories. In the first, an election is held in eastern Canada. The opposition wins and displaces the governing party. The new cabinet takes office within days. Mid and higher level civil servants remain in place, but massive changes take place down below. In the Ministry of Public Works, highway crews lose their jobs and are almost immediately replaced by people no more skilled then those whom they displaced. Supporters of the winning party replace supporters of the losing parties. Few people are surprised by the change. They have seen it before; the shift is no more remarkable than teams changing field positions during a sporting event.

Our second story is different. The setting is federal politics and the year is 2005. A commission of inquiry headed by a judge, John Gomery, makes its initial report. Included in its findings are reports that advertising agencies in the province received inflated payments for minimal work – arranging federal government sponsorship of public events – and that some of the money was used to make payments to people associated with the federal Liberal Party in Quebec. The payments were part of a federal program intended to enhance the presence and image of the Government of Canada in the Province of Quebec in the aftermath of near-defeat in the 1995 referendum on sovereignty. Justice Gomery’s findings were not surprising. Rumours had circulated since the program’s inception in the late 1990s, and in 2002, the Auditor General had indicated that she was unable to trace certain money streams, triggering demands for an inquiry. In addition, testimony from Gomery’s hearings, including spats with former Prime Minister Jean Chretien, had been front page news. According to the Auditor General, $225 million gone astray.
agencies or communications firms, which had received payment for doing little more than writing a cheque or in some instances, producing (or reproducing) a report of questionable value. Parts of those fees, in turn, appeared to have been diverted to Liberal party organizers and bagmen (fund-raisers) and to the Federal Liberal Party of Quebec. (Commission of Inquiry, 2005)

Although the amounts of money were small relative to the size of the federal government’s budget, Paul Martin’s minority government managed to stay in office only by promising to call new elections sixty days after Justice Gomery tabled his final report. Even so, opposition parties put forward and passed a motion of non-confidence in November 2005, triggering new elections in January 2006. Paul Martin’s Liberals went down to defeat, less because of the sponsorship scandal, which was old news by then, but rather because his government appeared directionless and because his principal rival, Conservative Stephen Harper, ran a flawless campaign, staying on message throughout. News that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) were investigating whether information about a key tax change had been passed on to financial interests was a tipping point. Surfacing between Christmas and New Years, when no campaigning was underway, the reports added to a cumulating sense that something was wrong.

Although a composite, our first story is no more fictive than the second. It describes well-established practices which remained in place through the 1970s and sometimes the 1980s in the Maritime Provinces and more broadly, Atlantic Canada, displaced only recently because political norms and values changed and the combination of civil service reforms and public sector unionization displaced more overt forms of patronage politics (Simpson, 1988). Jobs for votes describes an earlier form of patronage pushed aside not only by civil service reforms and hiring according to merit, but also by changing standards of political rectitude in most parts of Canada. Earlier – at the onset of Confederation and well into the 20th century – it had been the norm in
Canadian politics.

These vignettes focus on a facet of party politics not normally highlighted in the parties literature. Even so, the stories are not atypical. Students of Italian politics found it difficult to describe the politics of the First Republic without commenting on the ways in which Christian Democracy (DC) and later its allies colonized the Italian state, turning government jobs into patronage. Parties in Africa and other third world countries are often thought to be built on patronage. Even in countries in which patronage is thought to be a thing of the past, allegations of corruption surface from time to time. The recent accusation that Tony Blair benefitted from loans from wealthy donors and later recommended benefactors for life peerages is one example, the suggestion that firms run by wealthy donors to the Republican Party benefitted disproportionately from contracting opportunities in Iraq is another. Although it was once customary for British parties to auction peerages (Simpson, 1988), such practices were thought to have disappeared. Unlike donations, loans did not have to reported. According to *The Economist*, both Labour and Conservatives have made use of them (*Economist*, March 16, 2006).

Fitting accounts of patronage into the parties literature is difficult. Although accounts of machine politics in some U.S. cities are integral to the earlier literature on American politics (see for example, Gosnell, 1968) and stories about patronage-client relations are part of the lore of others (e.g, the south of Italy, many third world countries), there has been little room for accounts or explanations of patronage in the comparative and to date, primarily Western European, literature. Here, the central themes have been the transformation of former cadre parties and former parties of mass integration into catch-all and, more recently, cartel parties (Kirchheimer, 1966; Katz and Mair, 1995; Wolinetz, 2002). The principal exception is Shefter (1994). In a broad historical and comparative analysis, Shefter argues that whether parties have extensive
recourse to patronage depends on the timing of state development and civil service reform. Aside from Shefter, however, the principal assumption is that parties in third world, or what might loosely be called developmental circumstances, are far more likely to make use of patronage than parties in more developed or advanced systems. This is reflected in the parties literature. Its main streams rarely focus on patronage. Sub-literatures on campaign finance and political marketing, which might do so, are separate from the broader literature, which emphasizes the ways in which parties have responded to broad social, economic, and political change. Literatures on political corruption (Della Porta and Vannucci, 1999 and clientelism (see for example, Piattoni, 2001) are equally separate. Parties are not central to either literature.

This paper examines the use of patronage in Canadian party politics, past and present, and suggests ways in which we can think more systematically about the uses which political parties make of patronage. Analyses of patronage often proceed from the supposition that there is demand for it in certain kinds of societies and among segments of the population dependent on government largesse for their survival. Another supposition is that in many countries, changing norms of political rectitude, resulting in civil service reform and strict public procurement rules have restricted opportunities for patronage. Both are part of the story, but we also need to consider whether there are other sources of demand and whether there are reasons why political parties choose to make a supply of patronage available, even though it increasingly it may be at some cost to them.

The supply and demand for patronage:

The literature on clientelism suggests that recourse to patronage is most likely in settings in which all or a portion of the population is dependent on political largesse for its survival and well-
being. Examples include rural and remote populations in transitional societies, as well as immigrants to urban centres or receiving societies. No longer self-sufficient, or unable to fend themselves effectively, such people turn to a patron who can work with others, better connected, to provide benefits in exchange for political support. We know, or at least surmise, that clientelistic relationships operate in diverse settings and may be pervasive in third world or transitional societies. The existence of dependent populations provides an explanation why demand for patronage may exist, but not why parties choose to supply it. In order to answer that question we need to consider how parties, past and present, assemble the resources which they need to operate and to contest elections.

*Parties and the resources which they require:*

Like other organizations, parties require resources in order to operate. The most important are people, with different skills and time to commit to the party and its activities, and money to cover operating and campaign costs. The mix, however, has varied over time: many parties have shifted from labour-intensive to capital-intensive campaigns, in the process, substituting money for manpower and skill-sets that volunteers are less willing or able to donate.

Historically, parties have needed manpower not only to provide a base from which they can recruit candidates for public office, but also carry out election campaigns. Effective election campaigning requires workers to staff local headquarters, distribute flyers and posters, ensure that supporters turn out at the polls, and scrutinize voting and counts when they occur. They also need money in order to rent headquarters, print posters and flyers, organize rallies, move leaders and their entourages, and pay for radio and TV spots. Increasingly, parties also hire pollsters, public relations firms, and campaign consultants. We also know that parties in many countries find it
increasingly difficult to attract volunteers and rely more on in-house and hired professionals. At the same time, changes in campaign techniques have made media-centred campaigning increasingly possible. If they choose, parties can rely almost entirely on messages disseminated via radio and TV, direct-mailing and telephone messages, tuned and re-tuned on a daily or weekly basis. However, doing so requires parties to raise vast sums of money. Parties in many countries have voted themselves public funds to finance a portion of their election campaigns, but election finance regimes in many countries allow parties to raise a portion of these funds privately.

It is sometimes assumed that the shift from more labour-intensive to capital-intensive campaigns reduces parties’ need to rely on labour. This is only partially true. Parties still need people, locally and on the ground, in their central offices, and in their campaign teams. Those who become closely involved invariably end up sacrificing a portion of their personal lives. One reason why parties may choose to make a supply of patronage available may be that they need to reward those who become most closely involved. Nor is the amount of public funding provided necessarily sufficient. Nomination and leadership campaigns can generate additional need for cash, and the urge to spend more in order to win elections can be considerable. Control of government can provide parties with opportunities not only to reward their most active workers, but also to raise badly needed cash by rewarding donors with privileged access to government contracts.

*Winning support:*

Parties also need to win supporters. It is sometimes argued that parties and politicians bribe voters with their own money, promising tax cuts and new programs during election campaigns. Parties can attract support by promising broad benefits in the form of programs offering public goods, by targeting specific segments of the electorate with pork-barrel, or by
offering individual benefits to selected people. As table 1 illustrates, these can be narrow or broad, and take the form of specific benefits for individuals, club goods targeted toward specific segments of the electorate or policies applicable to broad segments of the population. Typically offered by parties which are policy-seeking, the latter may be derived from programs or ideologies or, following Downs (1957), may be gambits put forward to win support.

Patronage typically involves individual benefits. Forms which it may take include jobs, made available as rewards for political support, favours and minor payoffs (e.g. assistance rendered by an intermediary in dealing with officials) or, on a higher level, preferments such as government contracts, kickbacks, or privileged access to decision-makers, which can be used to economic advantage. In between are club goods. These are usually derived from policies which although generally applicable to society as a whole, are of greatest benefit to specific segments of the population. These include regional packages, projects benefitting a specific district or region, as well as agricultural or other subsidies. Also included are tax breaks of less benefit to the population as a whole than readily identifiable groups, such as small businessmen, fishers, farmers, as well as tariffs protecting specific industries, etc.

Not all of these constitute patronage. Benefits targeted to specific individuals, either as rewards or enticement for support, clearly do. Broad policies from which all citizens can benefit are rarely considered to be patronage. Clubs goods targeted to specific groups may or may not be considered patronage. Pork-barrel – projects located in specific geographic areas such as a region or election district – is typically considered to be patronage. Programs which benefit broad but geographically dispersed groups – farmers, small businessmen, single mothers – are typically not regarded as patronage. Normally, this will depend both on the extent to which an advantage not available to others is conferred and on the degree to which the recipients are groups which can be
expected to respond uniformly and cohesively, repaying or receiving a payment for support or services rendered. Thinking of the two together is useful because it enables us to think of patronage as part of a range of things which parties do as part and parcel of what they are – organizations seeking electoral support in order gain or maintain control of government.

Parties exert some control over the supply of patronage. In government, they have the option to arrogate resources for pork-barrel and distributive benefits, in effect bribing parts of the public with their own money. Parties can also choose to create and maintain a roster of high and low level jobs which they can allocate to friends and supporters. The extent to which they do so varies. In theory, the entire state can be colonized and turned into selective benefits which parties allocate to political friends and keep form their political enemies. In practice, their willingness and ability to use state resources for partisan gain varies. There are costs and tradeoffs which parties in government must take into account. As the Italian system illustrates, a bureaucracy colonized by parties and staffed by political appointees is not necessarily effective or efficient. In addition, civil service laws mandating hiring according to merit restrict the degree to which parties can create patronage. Over time, in most developed countries, merit hiring has reduced the supply of patronage. So too have laws requiring public tendering for most government purchases. Parties must also worry about adverse consequences. Over time the costs may outweigh the benefits. Even so, parties in many countries typically reserve certain positions to reward loyalists. Sometimes this is done despite the risk of opprobrium.

**Canadian parties: distributive politics, past and present**

Canadian party politics is a useful setting in which to study the uses which parties make of patronage. Patronage has been a continuing element, rarely absent from federal or provincial
politics, past or present. However, the forms which it has taken have changed over time. Before proceeding, three caveats are in order. The first is that Canadian parties at both the federal and provincial levels, are pre-eminently cadre parties, thinly organized and relatively inactive, except at election time or when the leadership is at stake. Then the organization is cranked up and goes into high gear, trying to get out the vote or win the leadership for favoured candidates. (Carty, 2002a; 2002b; Carty and Wolinetz, 2006; see also Carty and Eagles 2003; 2004).

The second caveat is that party competition takes place in winner-take-all arenas, following rules derived from two party competition. In both federal and provincial politics, parties compete in single member districts, hoping either to form the government or become the official opposition. More often than not, single member plurality elections manufacture legislative majorities. If this does not occur, the party with the most votes forms a minority government. Coalitions are rare. Winning majorities in federal politics is not easy. Because substantial portions of the population reside in Ontario and Quebec, parties aspiring to parliamentary majorities have had do well in both of these provinces, while winning some support in the Atlantic Provinces, the Prairies, and British Columbia. Doing so has normally required parties to cater to distinct interests, aggregating them into broadly based coalitions. Typically this has been facilitated by catering to local and regional interests while pursing policies in which large numbers of individuals and groups can find themselves. More often than not, this has meant governing from the centre.

Successful federal parties have typically been characterized as brokerage parties, bringing together divergent interests and groups across the country. Demographics and parliamentary arithmetic have made it difficult for more than one party to do this successfully at any one time. Instead, Canada has seen long periods in which one party dominates, successfully forging a ‘national coalition’ which its opponents seek to imitate. Canada took its current form in 1867.
Initially, the Conservatives were the dominant party. In the 1890s, they were supplanted by the Liberals. Although badly split by the conscription issue during World War I, Liberals were the dominant party in the inter-war period, when they yielded power to a Conservative government from 1930-1935, and again in the post-World War II period, when they were displaced by Progressive Conservatives on only three occasions – during the Diefenbaker surge, from 1958 to 1963, briefly from 1979-1980, and during from 1984-1993, when Progressive Conservatives, led by Brian Mulroney, won credible victories in 1984 and 1988.

A third caveat is that Canadian party politics has increasingly become multiparty politics, in which federal and provincial parties and party systems have become increasingly disconnected from each other. Following Carty, Cross, and Young (2000), we divide the time since 1867 into four distinct periods or ‘party systems’. During the first, from 1867 through 1918, the principal competition was between two parties, Liberals and Conservatives, and federal and provincial parties were closely integrated, blending into each other in a way strikingly absent. During the second, from 1918 through 1960, strong third parties appeared in several provinces, surging and in some instances declining, and federal and provincial parties began to diverge, giving the party system a more regionalized character. The third party system, from 1960 through 1993, was less volatile. Three party competition (or for some, a two and a half party system) among pan-Canadian parties was the norm, and the players remained more constant: Liberals, for the most part, dominant; Progressive Conservatives trying to assemble a majority coalition by mimicking the Liberals and the New Democratic Party (NDP), a distant third, strong in some provinces but negligible in others, with more pronounced separation between federal and provincial parties.

Taking shape between 1988 and 1993, the fourth party system has been characterized by greater fragmentation, the absence of parties able to win support in all parts of the country, and
growing (and now almost totally complete) separation between federal and provincial party organizations. The most pronounced changes were the electoral demise of the Progressive Conservatives and the emergence of strong regionally or provincially based parties in both the west and Quebec, competing exclusively in federal politics. Initially established in 1988, the Reform Party supplanted the federal Progressive Conservatives in the four western provinces. In Quebec, the 1991 failure to ratify the Meech Lake Accord precipitated the formation of the Bloc Quebecois, a federal equivalent of the Parti Quebecois. Competing for the first time in 1993, the Bloc regularly won two thirds of Quebec’s 75 seats in the House of Commons. One consequence was that the federal Progressive Conservatives were reduced from a majority party in 1984 and 1988 to a rump, able to secure only two seats in 1993, and barely more than a dozen in 1997 and 2000 despite winning nearly 20% of the popular vote. In contrast, the Liberals were able to secure parliamentary majorities in 1993, 1997, and 2000, but they did so without either majorities of the popular vote or substantial support in either the west or Francophone areas of Quebec. As Carty, Cross, and Young (2000) point out, Canada’s dominant party had ceased to be a national party, able to command support in all parts of the country.

The right remained divided until 2003-4, when the Canadian Alliance (the successor to the Reform Party from 1997) and the Progressive Conservatives formed the Conservative Party of Canada, led by Stephen Harper. In the June 2004 federal election campaign, Harper failed to convince voters that he would not take Canada far to the right. The Liberals, under Paul Martin, ended up with a narrowly based minority government. In the ensuing year, testimony from the Gomery Commission and the Commission’s initial report entered the public domain. Opposition parties passed a motion of non-confidence in November, 2005. In the ensuing campaign, Harper
stayed on message and appeared to be more honest and forthright than Paul Martin. Harper’s Conservatives won 125 seats, including some in Quebec.

Patronage past and present:

Both patronage politics and pork-barrel have been staple elements which Canadian parties have used, past and present. However, the uses and character and effectiveness of patronage have changed over time. Canada came together in its current constitutional form in 1867. In the initial decades of confederation, the emphasis was on individual and group benefits, supplemented by donations and kickbacks from firms, large and small, doing business with the government. Over time, both the supply and demand for the low level jobs and preferments which were the stuff of earlier patronage politics have diminished. The combination of civil service reforms and subsequent extension of the principle of merit hiring, along with increasingly stringent public tendering acts, have reduced but not totally eliminated the supply of patronage in both federal and provincial politics. Even so, parties continue to find ways to reward friends, including ex-politicians for services and support, with lucrative appointments. In addition, advertising, consulting, and public relations firms which make services available at election time have enjoyed preferred access to government contracts between elections. Pork-barrel or distributive politics have been more constant. Nevertheless, the content of what governing parties distribute has changed, particularly with the growth of both federal and provincial states, and politics, certainly since the Trudeau era, if not before, has not been solely about who gets, what, when, and how, but also about policy. One indicator of the latter, interesting from a European point of view, is that in the 1990s, the Liberal and Progressive Conservatives began issuing election manifestos detailing
what their policies would be if they won office.

There is little information on the use or scope of patronage in the literature on contemporary Canadian parties. The information we have comes from historical studies, biographies, and diaries, as well as journalists’ accounts of Canadian party politics. The single most important book on Canadian parties’ use of patronage and how it has changed over time is Jeffrey Simpson’s *Spoils of Power: The Politics of Patronage* (1988). Simpson is arguably Canada’s foremost political columnist. His account draws on the principal histories of Canadian parties and how they have governed.

**Forms of patronage:**

Patronage has taken different forms, some more constant than others. Initially, patronage involved a combination of jobs and preferments. Liberals and Conservatives extracted money from firms, large and small, doing business with provincial or federal governments, in turn using funds to finance the costs of election campaigns and other partisan activities. Before civil service reform (1918 for the federal civil service), parties in power could make a wide range of jobs available. Lower level jobs included positions as election enumerators or returning officers, census-takers, positions in the post-office, and work on roads, canals, and harbours. Over time, civil service reforms in both federal and provincial politics reduced the scope of what parties could deliver. However, although a large proportion of jobs in the so-called “Inside Service” became subject to hiring according to merit, jobs in the “Outside Service” – e.g. highway crews -- continued to be excluded in many provinces (Simpson, 1988). Even so, the number of patronage positions declined over time. Political hiring in the post office was eliminated in the 1970s. Although strong
regional ministers could sometimes turn “make-work” programs intended to counter seasonal unemployment into patronage, over time all that remained were occasional positions as census-takers or electoral officers (Simpson, 1988).

Lower level jobs were only part of the picture. Also available to parties in power were a range of more attractive positions which could be used to reward key supporters and friends. These included judicial appointments, staff positions in ministers’ offices and the Prime Minister’s office, places on regulatory boards, jobs with crown corporations, some positions in the foreign service (certain consulates and embassies), and finally appointments to the Canadian Senate, or as Lieutenant Governor of one of the Provinces.

Lower level jobs and higher sinecures were only part of the booty available to governing parties. Access to government contracts was and is another. Small businesses, such as office supply firms donated services or cash in the hope of gaining contracts after elections. Law firms benefitted from the opportunity to provide legal services. Particularly in the earlier years of confederation, parties in power took the liberty of ‘tollgating’ firms selling liquor through provincial government outlets or otherwise doing business with the government. Charged with building a railway linking Canada from coast to coast, the Canadian Pacific Railway contributed generously to Conservative Party coffers during the years when Sir John A. MacDonald was in power. A similar relationship existed between Sir Wilfred Laurier’s Liberals and the Canadian National Railway. (Stewart, 1986; Simpson, 1988)

Under Liberal Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King, it became common practice to levy a tax on firms doing business with the government. Contracts would be awarded to the lowest bidder, but suppliers of goods or services were expected to pay back a proportion (typically
2-5%) of the value of the contract to the governing party (Whitaker, 1977). Particularly close
time and to receive a share (but never all) of
the Liberal’s small extra-parliamentary arm, the National Liberal Federation, typically received a 5% kickback on fees.
(Whitaker, 1977, p. 245) Similar practices existed in many provinces. Synergies between
advertising, polling, public relations, or consulting firms continue. Such firms supply services or
staff in exchange for preferments at a later date. (Simpson, 1988; Whitaker, 1997)

Who, how, and where:

The forms, modes of delivery, location, and extent of patronage have changed over time.
Initially, patronage politics was not only a central feature of Canadian party politics, practiced
unabashedly by Conservatives or Liberals, whenever and wherever they were in power, but also
used a central tool with which to build political parties. Canada was governed by the
Conservatives under Sir John A. MacDonald for all but a brief interval during its first two decades.
MacDonald paid intimate attention to the allocation of patronage, often promising more than he
was immediately prepared to deliver, delaying and procrastinating as long as he possibly could
before delivering. As Simpson (1988) points out, there were reasons that MacDonald was
nicknamed “Old Tomorrow.” In office from 1896 through 1911, Sir Wilfred Laurier, paid almost
as much attention to who was getting what. In addition, both MacDonald’s Conservatives and
Laurier’s Liberals made extensive use of pork-barrel, trying to provide something for every part of
the country. Under MacDonald, protective tariffs, building infrastructure, and particularly the
Canadian Pacific Railway – promised to lure British Columbia into confederation – were the
centrepiece of the National Policy, designed to ensure self-sufficiency, while delivering something
for everyone. Laurier continued the national policy, albeit in a slightly different guise, using the
Grand Trunk Railway (later Canadian National) as his vehicle. Distributive politics helped unite a
far-flung federation, then as now prone to centrifugal tendencies. With the exception of the Pacific
scandals, which briefly brought the opposition Liberals to power in 1873, it did little to harm
MacDonald’s Conservatives. Only when the Conservatives failed to find a successor to
MacDonald did the Liberals come to power in Ottawa. Under Laurier, they followed much the
same strategy, with similar results: Laurier’s Liberals governed from 1896 to 1911.

Over time, the scope and form of patronage have changed. Lower level preferments such
as low paying jobs dried up, largely because civil service reforms in federal and provincial politics
decreased and eventually eliminated opportunities to reward followers. To some extent, the
disappearance of lower level preferments paralleled changes in the demand for patronage. In the
19th century, industrialization and economic development in Canada lagged behind that of the
United States. In predominantly agrarian and small-town economy of late 19th and early 20th
century Canada, minor sinecures provided an important channel of advancement. The wartime
economy and postwar economic boom changed this dramatically, but by no means uniformly. In
the industrial heartlands of Ontario and parts of Quebec, a vibrant economy eliminated dependency
on government jobs. (Whitaker, 1977). However, the same was not true in parts of Quebec, the
Maritime Provinces or Newfoundland, which joined Canada in 1949. In each of these peripheries,
substantial portions of the working age population remained dependent on government largesse
and the favour of the party in power. Patronage and distributive politics lasted longer in these areas. (Simpson, 1988)

Other changes were taking place: In the interwar period, a succession of protest parties swept the Canadian prairies. In power, the protest parties were less likely to rely on patronage, or if they did, to use it or distribute it in the same way as the parties which they displaced. In Alberta, Social Credit governments held sway from the 1930s to the 1960s. In Saskatchewan, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), the forerunner of the today’s New Democratic Party, displaced Jimmy Gardiner’s Liberals. Both in provincial politics and later as Minister of Agriculture and regional minister in Mackenzie King’s government, Gardiner headed up a classic political machine, rewarding friends and punishing enemies (Whitaker, 1977; Simpson, 1988; Bakvis, 1991). In contrast, CCF politics was policy-oriented; under Tommy Douglas, the CCF introduced the first medical and health insurance and pioneered a variety of reforms, many taken over by the governing Liberals in Ottawa. On taking office, the CCF removed many Liberal appointees, but once a civil service commission was in place, backed off from widespread use of patronage. (Simpson, 1988)

Increased state involvement in the economy during World War II and in the postwar decades altered both the demand for and supply of patronage. As we have already argued, decreased economic dependency in many but not all parts of the country reduced the demands for lower level jobs and sinecures. At the same time, however, increased state involvement in the economy opened up a new supply: more active governments let more contacts and created more positions which could be allocated to political friends. These included jobs on regulatory boards, immigration boards, and positions in crown corporations, a favorite vehicle of federal and
provincial governments through the privatizations of the 1980s and 1990s. Under Mackenzie King, and Louis St. Laurent, powerful regional ministers distributed booty in provinces or regions for which they were responsible. (Whitaker, 1977; Bakvis 1991). Although the power of regional ministers has ebbed and flowed (Bakvis, 1991), subsequent governments have continued to pay attention to distributive politics and maintain a certain amount of patronage despite changing norms of political life. Although patronage politics, or what Mackenzie King referred to as “the business side of politics,” seemed more and more at odds with the more technocratic, policy oriented politics of governments since the 1930s, federal politicians ended up relying on it. Politicians such as Pierre Elliot Trudeau initially eschewed patronage politics in favour of participatory democracy, but in the face of Quebec separatism, regional demands, and in particular, after the Liberals failed to secure a majority in the 1972 elections, sanctioned its use. (Simpson, 1988)

Subsequent governments have taken different attitudes toward patronage. In the 1984 election campaign, the Progressive Conservative party leader, Brian Mulroney, pummeled Trudeau’s recently anointed successor, Prime Minister John Turner, for appointing a number of outgoing Liberals to comfortable sinecures, at the request of his predecessor. Retiring in 1984, Trudeau hadn’t gotten around to making the appointments. Turner, Mulroney argued, didn’t have to do as Trudeau had requested. In office, however, one of the first things that Mulroney – conscious that his predecessor, Joe Clark, had not gotten around to rewarded in the party faithful during his short-lived minority governments – was establish patronage committees of party faithful from each province. Although regional ministers eventually ended up in control of patronage, Mulroney had no compunction about using it. (Simpson, 1988). Nor did Jean Chretien from 1993 to 2003.
Patronage and Canadian party politics:

Our brief survey indicates considerable change in both the demand and supply of patronage. Almost all Canadian government have engaged in distributive politics, allocating lower and higher level jobs to political friends, until recently extracting contract levies from firms doing business with the government, and at the same time, trying to do spread political benefits to all parts of the country.

Several things are striking about the use of patronage in Canadian party politics. In the first and second party systems, there was little compunction about its use: patronage, along with pork-barrel, was a legitimate tool with which parties could be built and was used accordingly. Its use had roots in the colonial period, in which British governors used it to cultivate support for their policies. Later, it was expected that governing parties would reward friends and punish political enemies. Government jobs, even if little more than minor sinecures, were an important source of income in an economy which had yet to become diversified. (Stewart, 1986; Simpson, 1988)

Distributing largesse was prerogative of governing parties. Opposition parties were frozen out unless they happened to control provincial governments. However, the willingness and ability of politicians to transfer from resources from federal to provincial politics or vice versa has changed dramatically. During the first party system, federal and provincial parties were largely symmetrical: the same parties competed in both federal and provincial politics, drawing on the same cadres of supporters and party workers. Formal organization at either level barely existed (Whitaker, 1977; Azoulay, 1999; Wearing, 1981). Crossovers between federal and provincial politics continued for a time during the second party system – Jimmy Gardiner of Saskatchewan could still run his province’s Liberal Party as federal minister of Agriculture – but federal and
provincial party and federal and provincial governments were increasingly at odds with each other and unwilling to lend support. In addition, the penetration of third parties in Western Canada reduced the symmetry of the party system.

This was not the only change. In both federal and provincial politics, civil service reforms were reducing the supply of minor jobs and sinecure, and the economic takeoff during World War II and afterward was reducing demand for such jobs. Low level patronage remained important for people in Canada’s many peripheries – Atlantic Canada, substantial parts of the Quebec, Northern Ontario and other parts of the north – but ceased to be important for most residents of the industrial heartland (Southern Ontario and parts of Quebec), where large portions of the population lived. In addition, increased state involvement in the economy increased both the opportunities to practice distributive politics, and through contract levies, the supply of money for more capital intensive campaigns. Even so, changing norms generated tensions about its use. Increasingly politics was not only about distribution but also policy. Changing norms of rectitude reduced the ability of parties to levy taxes on government contracts without fear of adverse consequences if the practices came to light. The principle of public tendering was well-established. Canada’s first election finance law was passed in 1974. This encouraged smaller donors by allowing them to deduct decreasing percentages of their contributions, and required public reporting of election expenditures. Unlike the most recent (2003) legislation, it did not restrict corporate or union donations.

Exchange of services for government contracts continued to be an important source of funds or support in kind. In office, governments could avail themselves of the state apparatus and government commissioned polls to gauge their popularity, bending public tendering rules here and there, and occasionally, as in the sponsorship scandal, diverting larger streams of funds to the
parties. Even so, the total amount of patronage available to governing parties was becoming smaller relative to parties’ needs and total spending. To be sure, governments could reward trusted aides with staff positions and could reward friends – often ex-cabinet ministers – with sinecures such as ambassadorships or appointments to the boards of crown corporations, but even here, privatization reduced the number of positions available. So too did the fact that Senators, once appointed could serve until age 75.

Until recently, governing parties in Canada continued to reward friends and receive services in kind from friendly advertising agencies, unions, or firms whose business might be affected by the government. However, recent finance legislation limits the amounts which individuals or groups can contribute, assuming of course that contributions are reported at all. The sponsorship funds presumed to have been diverted to the Liberal Party of Quebec were under the table and others may be as well, making it difficult to estimate the actual size or scope of patronage. The evidence suggests that it is relatively limited. Even so, it can come back to haunt parties if it becomes public in any way. John Turner’s decision to carry out Trudeau’s last minute patronage appointments may not have cost him the 1984 election, but it did not help him either. Accusations of corruption and kickbacks from lobbyists swirled around Brian Mulroney and did his successor, Kim Campbell, no good. More recently, the sponsorship scandal, coupled with Jean’s Chretien’s allocation of sinecures to his controversial public works minister, Alfonso Gagliano, ended up as a millstone around the neck of his successor, Paul Martin. Martin found himself compelled to investigate scandals under his predecessor’s government, which benefitted not the Liberal Party of Canada as a whole, but only the Federal Liberal Party of Canada in Quebec. In retrospect, the whole affair cost the Liberal Party dearly.

Leaving the sponsorship scandal aside, it is clear that the scope and character of patronage
in Canadian party politics have changed. In the late 19th and early 20th century, government largesse in the form of jobs, minor preferments, and pork-barrel projects was a not only central facet of the ways in which parties did business, but also a key device to build voters loyalties and maintain loosely structured and largely informal party organization. Rewarding friends and punishing enemies was part and parcel of normal party business. In small towns, rural Canada, and to a limited extent, such largesse was an important source of benefit for the party faithful in an economy which had yet to diversify and provide a wide range of alternate sources of income. In Atlantic Canada – a part of the country which lost industry to a growing industrial heartland in the centre – patronage continued to be important well into the 20th century. The same was true of rural Quebec before the Quiet Revolution of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Federal and provincial governments obliged, even as the merit system and civil service reform proceeded, by retaining a stream of jobs, often seasonal, which could be used as patronage. Even so, over time, the streams of minor jobs and sinecures shrank relative not only to the size of the economy, but also the size of federal and provincial states. At the same time, increased use of public tendering limited the amount of favouritism which could be offered to businesses willing to provide parties with either cash or services. Jeffrey Simpson (1988) sums up the change:

In Jimmy Gardiner’s day, patronage could be for everyone with the proper political credentials. The party elite got patronage (senatorships, judgeships, presidencies of Crown agencies, etc.), and the rank and file received their rewards (postmasterships, inspectorships, etc. (Big companies could get on the government’s patronage list for major projects; little companies could supply everything from cutlery to coal. As the years wore on, spreading bureaucratization both eliminated much of the small patronage for the party rank and file and expanded patronage opportunities for the elite. Eric Kierans’ placing of postmasters under the public service commission symbolized and furthered the shift from patronage to bureaucracy. (Simpson, 1988, p. 348)

These changes limited but did not preclude such exchanges: tenders could be structured so
that only one firm or supplier was likely to win them. What remained were higher level positions: staff positions in ministers’ offices, appointments to regulatory boards, provincial and federally owned crown corporations, judicial appointments (although these were increasingly scrutinized by bar associations), the Senate, and a scattering of ambassadorships and consular positions made available to ex-politicians. Engaging in what S.J. R. Noel (1996; forthcoming) has called “entourage politics,” parties continue to make these positions available, even though by doing so, they run the risk that rewards offered and debts paid may come back to haunt them, if not in question period, then in subsequent election campaigns.

These uses of patronage are very different than in the earlier days of confederation. Under MacDonald and Laurier, and in many provinces, patronage and pork barrel were used both to build parties not only by rewarding stalwarts who helped in election campaigns, but also by forging allegiances. Over time, we have seen a marked change. Contract levies in Mackenzie King’s time provided the Liberals with the financial resources they needed to operate and bring its message to voters. Entourage politics is different: Voters are more remote. Instead, it is hangers-on, staff, and long-serving politicians who are rewarded. Whether this does anything to build parties as organizations is questionable. Previously, patronage was a device used to attach voters in disparate parts of the country to political parties. As used it is used today, patronage allocated to stalwarts and retiring politicians may be one more factor reinforcing the distance between citizens and parties. (Noel, 1996: forthcoming)

**Patronage, pork-barrel, and forms of party organization:**

Why do parties bother with patronage? Our analysis suggests that the amount that they can make available is insufficient to reward everyone who might want to benefit from it, and in any
case, an uncertain, if not risky, tool for building political support. Politicians who make use of patronage risk not only backfire, but making more enemies among those whose demands go unsatisfied than the number of friends that they actually win. Another consideration which they may have to deal with is built into a perennial political question, “What have you done for me lately?” Dealing with ingratitude is one of the reasons why Sir John A. MacDonald, master of patronage games, delayed and procrastinated, answering inquiries with promises to do it tomorrow. Delaying appears to have worked well enough for MacDonald. Today, however, political standards have changed. Appointing someone solely on political grounds flies in the face of merit hiring, and governments which do it—and many do so to some extent—risk political opprobrium.

Why do they do it? There are a number of possible reasons. One is that a week can be a long time in politics, and people forget, and even if they don’t, may be willing to hold their noses if they like other things that the government is doing. However, parties still have to make a supply of patronage available. One reason why they do so may be that there is continuing demand for government largesse and that ex-politicians, such as former Liberal cabinet minister David Dingwell – chased from the directorship of the Canadian Mint – believe that they are “entitled to their entitlements.” Politicians may find it difficult to say no to former party stalwarts. The question is whether there are other reasons, related to party building, as well.

Let us return to questions posed earlier. Asking what use it is to them, we have tried to look at patronage from the perspective of parties and people within them, but we have said very little about the kinds of parties most likely to use patronage and pork-barrel or the circumstances under which they more likely to employ it. The models of party organization prevalent in the literature say relatively little about when or how parties use patronage. The model most commonly used is a composite model, positing transformation of parties from cadre or mass parties to catch-
all and cartel parties (Wolinetz, 2002). The principal emphasis is about the mobilization and
demobilization of class and religious cleavages. We can surmise that loosely structured cadre
parties used patronage to reward aides and win support, but there is little attention to how they
might have done this. In contrast, we know that mass parties relied primarily on numbers,
rewarding followers with a sense of identification, solidarity and belonging and the promise of
payoffs should they gain power. According to Kirchheimer (1966), catch-all parties – unable to
mobilize solidarities in the same ways are their predecessors – bid for the support of interest
groups. Although the use of patronage and pork-barrel by such parties has not been explored in
detail, we can assume that the principal emphasis of such parties is providing benefits, broad and
narrow, to different kinds of followers. It is also conceivable that such parties derive funds needed
for more capital-intensive forms of campaigning from the groups which they champion. The cartel
model argues that when contributions from members and rents derived from interest groups prove
to be insufficient parties solve financial problems by voting themselves public funds. (Katz and
Mair, 1995). It is conceivable that cartel parties share not only power, but also access to
patronage, but the use of patronage is not a central characteristic of such parties.

Kaare Strøm’s (1990) supposition that parties are predominately office-seeking, vote-
seeking, and policy-seeking allows greater room for patronage. Office-seeking parties want to
gain control of government in order to distribute political largesse to their followers; as such, they
are by definition, patronage oriented. In contrast, vote-seeking parties want to win for the sake of
winning. Patronage and pork-barrel can be important tools, but could just as readily be ignored if
the costs of using them were too great or they were unlikely to achieve their purpose. Policy-
seeking parties should be least likely to make use of patronage or pork-barrel. Because their
raison d’etre is achieving well-defined policy goals, the principal goods which they deliver should
be the policies – broad public goods – which they put in place when they are in office.

Unfortunately, Strøm’s approach has had wider application in formal modeling and rational choice analyses than in empirical research. We still need to know more about how and why such parties use patronage.

In order to answer this question, we need to know more about the ways in which parties are constructed. Increasingly, we are confronted with the problem of comparing political parties across a wide range of political systems. The composite model in use in the comparative literature has been particularly useful in comparing ways in parties have changed in over time in Western Europe, but it has always been difficult to fit parties, like those in the United States, which are differently constructed. The Canadian parties which we have been considering can be made to fit by describing them as cadre parties, but this misses key characteristics such as the breadth of their construction or the intermittent character of their organization. Nor can we readily compare parties in many newly established or transitional democracies.

One solution to this problem is to compare parties along two broad dimensions, allowing us to explore differences in the ways in which they are constructed. In very simple terms, parties must make decisions and come up with solutions about how they will achieve horizontal and vertical bargains. The horizontal bargain describes the breadth of the party and its potential appeal – whether it attempts to appeal to a broad or narrow portion of the electorate. The vertical bargain comprises decisions about whether the party will organize across all or only some levels of government. Debates about the horizontal bargain should be more familiar to students of party organization. The transformation from mass party to catch-all party describes attempts to broaden the appeal of class or denominational parties, in effect widening the horizontal bargain. Attempts by American and Canadian national parties to offer something to broad swaths of their potential
electorates represent attempts to maintain broad, nearly inclusive horizontal bargains. Vertical bargains – or what it takes to build and maintain party organization across levels of government – have been less thoroughly researched or considered. Our standard presumption is that parties organize or compete across all levels of government, but the phenomenon of disconnected competition in Canada (Carty and Wolinetz, 2006) shows that this is not necessarily the case.

We can use these tools to think about the uses which political parties make of patronage and pork-barrel. Both are devices which can be used for achieving and maintaining horizontal and vertical bargains. Patronage, in particular, is a device which can be used to bring together people at different levels of government and party organization. Patronage can serve an alternate form of glue or cement used in circumstances when there is little agreement on policies or issues. The literature on clientelism suggests that this can be done with or without formal party organization. In the former instance, clientelistic exchanges inform bargain among people at different levels. In the latter instance, patron-client relationships substitute for formal organization.

Pork-barrel or distributive politics is more likely to be a solution to horizontal bargains in large countries in which parties seek to weld disparate interests into a broad coalition. Canadian and American parties have fit this mold, sometimes bearing greater resemblance to containers in which disparate interest and factions compete for power and influence. Under such circumstances, recourse to patronage becomes a device to reward friends who have assisted in the battle as well as generate resources, through donations of cash or services-in-kind, of use to the party or factions within it. In a similar vein, pork-barrel and distributive politics become devices to keep the coalition together.

If our analysis is correct, then recourse to patronage and distributive politics should be more common in parties attempting to maintain broad horizontal bargains in larger, more
heterogenous societies, or alternatively in societies in which there is no readily usable issue or ideological base on which parties can be constructed. However, this is only part of the story. Institutional arrangements, electoral systems and conditions of competition also make a difference. Forging workable vertical bargains may be more difficult in large federal systems. Similarly, the need to build and maintain broad coalitions in order to win the top office in presidential systems may encourage greater recourse to patronage and pork-barrel than in parliamentary systems. Other things being equal, we should expect greater recourse in patronage in single-member and other winner-take-all systems than in proportional electoral systems.

Even so, these are not only considerations which parties must take into account: In some societies, expectations that parties will deliver patronage and pork-barrel may be so great that parties stand little chance of success unless they employ them. Alternatively, changing societal norms may restrict or impede the effective use of patronage. If these are translated into strong civil service and public procurement regimes, then parties may find it difficult to generate a sufficient supply of patronage to use it effectively as tool to build and maintain the party as an organization. In addition, they may find that the risks of using it extensively outweigh the potential benefits.
Table 1. Forms of patronage

<table>
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<tr>
<th>breadth</th>
<th>use in election campaigns</th>
<th>forms of patronage</th>
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<tr>
<td>individual benefits</td>
<td>rewards for specific individuals</td>
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<td>privileged access to decision-makers</td>
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<td>group benefits/club goods</td>
<td>rewards for groups:</td>
<td>porkbarrel</td>
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<td>regional aid</td>
<td>benefits targeted to specific districts or areas:</td>
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<td>programs targeted at specific groups</td>
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<td>– tax breaks</td>
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<td>– loan guarantees</td>
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<td>– agricultural subsidies</td>
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<tr>
<td>broader benefits, public goods</td>
<td>policies with general application, perhaps fitting into a broader program or ideology</td>
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Sources


Bakvis, Herman. 1991 Regional Ministers: Power and Influence in the Canadian Cabinet. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.


