

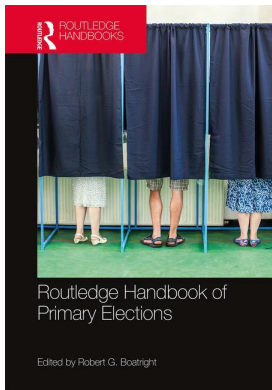
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PARTY PRIMARIES IN CANADA

Scott Pruyers and Anthony Sayers

Personnel selection (i.e., leadership and candidate selection) is among the most important tasks that political parties perform (Kirchheimer 1966; Sartori 1976). Until very recently, parties around the world relied on relatively exclusive selectorates, like the parliamentary party group (PPG) in the case of leadership selection, to make these important intra-party decisions (Pilet and Cross 2014; Kenig 2009). In the last three decades, however, parties in many Western democracies have engaged in an intra-party democracy revolution of sorts, adopting more inclusive and participatory selection procedures, including party primaries. Canadian parties are somewhat anomalous in this regard and have used primaries to select both legislative candidates and party leaders for decades (Cross et al. 2016; Pruyers and Cross 2016).

This chapter explores the development, adoption, and practice of party primaries¹ in Canada. Importantly, we consider primaries for both the selection of legislative candidates as well as party leaders. Although both have resulted in broadly similar processes that invite party members to participate directly in the selection of party personnel, there are several key differences between the two. These differences include a slower path of democratization for leadership selection, as well as institutionalized veto points in candidate selection primaries. We pay particular attention to the inherently self-governing nature of Canadian parties in administering their primaries, considering how the view of parties as private associations allows for frequent rule changes, and even a back-tracking of sorts to less inclusive selection methods. Although the focus is on federal parties, we draw upon the experience of parties at the provincial level throughout the chapter. We end the chapter with a brief discussion of the major challenges that parties face when conducting primary elections, including potential internal divisiveness.

Institutional Context for Party Primaries in Canada

The defining aspect of party primaries in Canada is their self-governing nature. Unlike general elections, which are highly regulated and monitored by the state (i.e., stable electoral rules, wide-reaching financing legislation, spending limits, trained election officers, etc.), parties are generally free to organize and operate as they like. This includes creating (and changing) the rules governing the selection of candidates and leaders. As Pruyers and Cross (2016, 783) write, “parties choose the selectorate, determine when the contest will be held, decide where voting will take place, set eligibility requirements (for both candidates and voters), levy membership

fees, and so on.” Viewing themselves more as private associations than public utilities (van Biezen 2004), Canadian political parties have been reluctant to use the Canadian state to regulate intra-party affairs. In other words, parties have been hesitant to use state legislation to regulate *themselves*, especially when it comes to how they select party leaders and legislative candidates.² Current institutional arrangements allow parties to maintain their preferred balance between central oversight and local input into the selection process without the need for further legislation. As we demonstrate throughout this chapter, this general lack of regulation is a fundamental feature of Canadian primary elections and one that shapes the dynamics of these intra-party elections.

Pruysers and Cross (2016), however, note that there are several caveats to the notion that parties are completely free to conduct their primaries free from state intervention. First, one aspect where the state has been willing to regulate party activities is in their financing. Here party finance legislation has, to some degree, shaped the character of candidate nomination primaries. Introduced into the Canada Elections Act in 1974 (Election Expenses Act, S.C. 1973–1974, c. 51.), limits on spending and provisions regarding reimbursement of candidate expenses marked the first significant regulation of political parties. Administrative demands increased again when in 2004 the Act was amended to outlaw corporate and union donations and placed limits on what candidates could spend in seeking their local nomination (Young and Jansen 2011).³ Such spending limits were adopted, at least in part, to address concerns regarding the ability of historically marginalized groups to raise adequate funds to be competitive. Even here, however, the state has been hesitant and inconsistent to regulate internal party affairs. While candidate primaries have a state-imposed spending limit, parties are free to set their own spending limits for leadership primaries.

Second, the introduction of party labels to ballots in place of occupation and address in the 1970s formalized the definition and registration of political parties and candidacies. Since Elections Canada could not be in the business of verifying who was the “real” party candidate in every constituency, use of a party label required the candidate to provide a document signed by the leader certifying her candidacy. This statutory requirement developed into a means by which a leader’s office could signal who might be acceptable as a candidate. Since then, parties have increasingly required candidates to complete detailed questionnaires and interviews probing their personal and political history in order to avoid selecting a candidate with an embarrassing past. In the last two decades parties have also amended their constitutions, giving the party leader the power to appoint local candidates, in addition to their statutory “veto” (Koop and Bittner 2011). Section 1.2 of the Liberal candidate selection rules, for example, states that: “The Leader has the authority to designate a person to be the candidate in any election, without the need for the conduct of a Meeting” (Liberal Party 2013). Thus, what began as a seemingly mundane legal requirement to allow party labels on the ballot has resulted in considerable central party authority in the selection of local candidates.

Finally, parties have, on occasion, been subject to judicial review. In 2004, for instance, a Calgary judge ordered the provincial Progressive Conservative party to hold a new nomination contest in the electoral district of Calgary–Montrose (Heyman and Wilton 2004). Three years later a group of 11 party activists sought judicial intervention against the federal Conservative party in the district of Calgary West. Although the activists were initially successful, the Alberta Court of Appeal ruled in favor of the party stating that “when arranging for the nomination of their candidate in Calgary West, the Party and the Association were essentially engaged in private activities, and their actions, in this case, are not subject to judicial review” (*Knox v. Conservative Party of Canada 2007*). More recently, an Ontario judge ruled that parties are not immune to judicial scrutiny and oversight:

The decisions that political parties, especially the major political parties, make in terms of the candidates they put forward, the policies they adopt, and the leader that they choose, do have a very serious effect on the rights and interests of the entire voting public . . . The voting public, therefore, has a very direct and significant interest in ensuring that the activities of political parties are carried out in a proper, open and transparent manner.

Perkel 2017

While no clear judicial consensus has emerged, it's clear that there are credible challenges to the notion that parties are purely private associations.

Candidate Primaries

Candidate primaries of the nineteenth century reflected the limited character of the state and franchise along with a cadre form of party organization. The candidate was the linchpin of party politics, connecting voters to government and its largesse, and providing party and government with essential intelligence on local affairs. Notable men were selected by a small group of likeminded individuals bound together by personal connection to the candidate and shared experiences fighting election campaigns. While the franchise may have been limited, the selection of local candidates has been relatively democratic for generations. More than a century ago, for instance, Siegfried (1907, 119) noted that “five or six weeks before voting-day the candidates are nominated by a local convention held in each constituency.” This traditional form of candidate primary has persisted for over a century, slowly adapting to the broadening of the franchise and the reformulation of politics in response to the massive growth and formalization of the state. Today, eligible party members in each of the country's 338 electoral districts can cast a ballot for their preferred candidate. Candidate primaries are therefore both inclusive and decentralized (Hazan and Rahat 2010).

As Table 23.1 demonstrates, Canadian parties have taken a very open approach to membership and voter eligibility. Members can often be non-citizens, and as young as 13 years old. The only real barrier to participation is membership, which typically costs a modest fee of about \$25 (although this varies by party and sometimes province). Similar to voting eligibility, candidacy requirements are also very modest. In most parties a candidate needs to pay a small deposit, gather a few signatures, and be a party member for a short period of time prior to the nomination. Only in the Conservatives is there a membership requirement that is longer than 30 days. However, as Sayers' (1999) analysis of local campaigns reveals, the New Democrats, despite not having formal rules, have expectations that candidates will have strong ties to the party and considerable party experience.

Candidate primaries in Canadian political parties are somewhat distinctive, marked by local control set against a highly centralized regulatory regime. As Table 23.1 shows, the central party plays a considerable role in what is typically considered a purely local affair. While the party membership of local associations selects most candidates, this choice is subject to scrutiny by the central party. As Pruyers and Cross (2016, 788) write,

The most onerous eligibility requirement is receiving the central party's authorization after passing a strict screening process. With hundreds of individual campaigns, there are considerable opportunities for potential gaffes and controversy. As a result, each party subjects would-be candidates to extensive vetting and rigorous interviews in an attempt to screen out extreme candidates and potential problems before the election begins.

Table 23.1 Candidate Selection Rules Compared

	<i>Conservative</i>	<i>New Democrat</i>	<i>Liberal</i>
Selectorate	Party members 14 years and older 21-day membership cut-off	Party members 13 years and older 30-day membership cut-off	Party members 14 years and older 2–7-day membership cut-off
Candidate eligibility	Party membership (6 months prior) 25 signatures of members \$1,000 deposit	Party membership (30 days prior) No signature requirement No deposit	Party membership (no length specified) 100 signatures of members \$1,000 deposit
Candidate approval	All candidates approved centrally	All candidates approved centrally	All candidates approved centrally
Rule-making and administration	Central party sets preconditions for nomination	Central party sets preconditions for nomination	Central party sets preconditions for nomination
Gender and diversity	No formal rules	Freeze nomination until adequate search for women and minorities	Freeze nomination until adequate search for women and minorities

Source: Adapted from Pruyzers and Cross (2016).

The Liberal party’s “Green Light Committee,” for example, conducts background checks, research regarding financial liabilities, history of contribution to the community/party, as well as a lengthy questionnaire. Candidate screening, however, is not the only role that the central party plays in candidate primaries. The central party governs a variety of administrative aspects of the primary, including when the nomination will be opened. The Conservatives, for instance, have strict rules regarding how much money and how many members a local party has before it is able to hold a nomination.

When considering the dynamics and outcomes of candidate selection primaries in Canada there are a few things worth noting. First is the (uneasy) relationship between the central and local party branches. The organizational form that Canadian parties have adopted to manage 338 diverse electoral districts is labelled strataarchical, in that it provides distinct spheres for local and national party operations (Carty 2002; Carty and Cross 2006). The “organizational bargain” between the central party apparatus and local constituency associations provides the center with authority over policy, governance, and branding while the locals have control over the choice of their local candidate (Carty 2004). Not only does voting occur at the constituency level, but local riding associations take an active role in recruiting potential candidates (Cross and Young 2013). However, given that the leader has the authority to approve candidacies by legal statute, and since parties have moved to allow leaders to appoint candidates, the strataarchical bargain does not always work smoothly in practice. Indeed, tension between local autonomy and the central party’s veto is a core feature of Canadian parties in the electorate, party organization, and in parliament.

Every election cycle features a variety of news stories about each party regarding the central party disallowing certain candidates after reviewing their paperwork, appointing a preferred candidate, or manipulating the timing and details of a primary to ensure a particular outcome (Cross et al. 2016; Pruyzers and Cross 2016). The Conservative party, for instance, disallowed all challengers against its incumbent Member of Parliament in the district of Calgary Skyview

in the lead up to the 2015 election (Wingrove 2014). Likewise, despite having considerable support among local activists and having won the party's nomination twice previously, a prominent Liberal was not authorized by the central party to contest a 2014 byelection (Hume 2014). These kinds of intrusions into local party affairs are often met with considerable criticism from local activists who decry central party interference as "sneaky" and "unethical" and it is not uncommon for members of the party and even local executive to publicly cancel their party memberships in protest. While tension between local and national branches is a regular feature of the nominations, overt intervention is still relatively rare and sometimes ineffectual and counterproductive (Carty and Eagles 2005). Despite the tension, the institutionalized veto and the role of the central party in the selection process has allowed parties to meet their core objectives – to avoid embarrassment and place candidates in certain ridings when they must (i.e., when a local association is unable to do so, or when a star candidate needs a district to run in). At the same time, by keeping the interference to a minimum, local associations are able to attract new members, donations, quality candidates, and energy and excitement as a result of the primary election.

The second dynamic of candidate primaries is the large-scale membership mobilization that takes place. The central role of party members in candidate selection primaries and the ability for candidates to shape their electorate by recruiting new members produces the cyclical pattern in party membership numbers that defines Canadian parties. The mobilization that is necessary for a strong primary showing drives the massive influx of new members and resources to the party that are essential to electoral success – both in the primary and general election. It is not uncommon to see a party's local membership increase by two- or three-fold in contested nominations (Carty, Cross, and Young 2000). Pruyzers and Cross (2016) provide an example from the Liberal party where the party's local membership in the Nickel Belt electoral district increased by 1,000 percent, from approximately 200 members after the 2011 federal election to more than 2,000 for the 2015 candidate primary.

There are two important implications to this growth in membership. First, mobilization from ethnic communities is often used as a means of signing up hundreds or even thousands of new members relatively quickly (Cross 2004). Given the modest membership requirements and the influx of new members, long-time party members often complain that their local association has been "hijacked" or taken over in the process. Calling these new members "tourists," long-term and committed party members often view their role as undermined by new members. Second, once primaries and elections are over, there is little ongoing role for party members, and those recruited to participate in the primary retreat in both numbers and engagement (Cross et al. 2016). Indeed, Young and Cross (2002) report that being able to participate in a nomination election is a primary incentive for joining the party for a significant number of party members. Once the nomination is over, however, these members slowly fade from the party, especially those who supported a losing candidate (Cross and Pruyzers 2017). The parliamentary leadership is therefore left to manage legislative politics unencumbered by party members and the principles and policies they might champion.

Third, the pool of candidates offered to the voters has never reflected the growing diversity of the voting population (Carty and Erickson 1991). As gatekeepers to elected legislatures, the nomination processes of political parties determine the pool of candidates from which voters can choose on election day and therefore limits who can be elected. In this sense, parties play an important role in the degree to which legislatures are representative of the broader society. The 1967 Royal Commission on the Status of Women encouraged party-sanctioned groups as well as civil society organizations to push for greater inclusion of women. Moreover, growing social diversity since the 1970s has accelerated pressure for a more inclusive slate of candidates.

Despite regular calls for a widening of the types of candidates offered to voters, however, the state has been reluctant to use legislation to regulate party nominations to achieve representational outcomes. Parties have been comparatively slow to respond to these demands, and rather than choosing to regulate primaries more tightly, have used internal, and informal, processes to increase diversity. As demonstrated in Table 23.1, both the Liberals and New Democrats have rules regarding the “freezing” of nominations until a proper search can be done for women and ethnic minority candidates. Section 1.7 (a) of the 2013 Liberal nomination procedures asserts that no nomination meeting shall be issued until:

the EDA has demonstrated to the satisfaction of the Provincial or Territorial Campaign Chair that the association has conducted an acceptable search for Nomination Contestants, including documented evidence of a thorough search for potential candidates who are female and who are reflective of the demographic and linguistic makeup of the local electorate.

Liberal Party 2013

Various provincial parties have rules aimed at increasing both gender and minority representation in their candidate pools. Given the informal and voluntary nature of these approaches, however, it is not surprising that the underrepresentation of women in the candidate pool continues. By the 2015 election, 43 percent of NDP, 31 percent of Liberal, and 20 percent of Conservative candidates were women. Visible minorities made up about 15 percent of candidates overall, about their proportion of the voting population, and at nearly 6 percent, Indigenous candidates did somewhat better than their proportion of the voting population.

The final outcome worth discussing is the “types” of candidates selected – beyond their descriptive characteristics. The intersection of local competitive dynamics and party organizational norms leads to four main types of candidates (Carty, Eagles and Sayers 2003; Sayers 1999) – high profile/incumbents, local notables, party insiders, and stop-gaps.

Sayers (1999, 51), for instance, writes that “in choosing a nominee, nomination meetings are also harbingers of the type of election campaign a party will run in a riding.” Stop-gap candidates, those often appointed in undesirable ridings where the local party is moribund and unable to attract a candidate of their own (Pruysers and Cross 2016), have very few resources and receive very little campaign support. When a high-profile candidate wins the primary, however, the campaign that follows tends to be professionalized, run by trusted party strategists, well-funded and staffed, and the recipient of additional news coverage and central party attention.

Leadership Primaries

Like candidate selection, leadership selection in Canada is highly inclusive and participatory. In fact, as Cross et al. (2016, 82) write, “Canadian parties were first among their Westminster counterparts to expand their leadership selectorates beyond those serving in Parliament and to include party members.” Despite expanding the selectorate early on, leadership primaries emerged slowly over the course of the twentieth century. For the first five decades after Confederation the Liberal and Conservative parties selected their leaders in a similar fashion as their British counterparts of the time: through caucus (Cross 2014). By 1919, however, the Liberals had moved to a more inclusive selection method in which leaders were to be chosen at a party convention by delegates. The convention process made leadership selection more inclusive as, for the first time, the grassroots of the party had a role. The Conservatives soon followed suit and began selecting leaders at conventions in 1926 (Courtney 1995; Cross 2004).

Selection by convention delegates evolved over a number of decades (more delegates, greater representation of historically marginalized groups, etc.), and this became the norm from the 1920s to the 1980s. When new parties emerged during this period, for instance, they too adopted the convention model. By the 1980s, however, there was widespread criticism of the party convention, especially around the delegate selection process and membership recruitment practices (Carty 2007). The Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing recommended the direct election of party leaders via membership ballot as it was viewed as a “credible mechanism for rebuilding public confidence in the leadership selection process” (1991, 280). With mounting criticism of the convention process, Canadian parties began adopting membership ballots for the selection of party leaders in the late 1980s.

Interestingly, the movement towards primaries was pioneered by political parties at the provincial level. In 1985 the Parti Québécois was the first major Canadian party to broaden its selectorate beyond delegates to a party conference. A survey of selection methods in the late 1990s identified a clear trend towards primaries at the provincial level as parties in Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Ontario had abandoned leadership conventions in favor of closed party primaries (Cross 1996). By 2017 at least one major party in each of the ten provinces selected their party leader through a primary (Cross et al. 2016, 83). Though provincial parties pioneered the move towards primaries, a number of parties at the provincial level continue to select their leaders at delegated conventions (i.e., Nova Scotia Liberals, Manitoba, NDP). Furthermore, several provincial parties have, after selecting leaders through a primary, moved back to the delegated convention format (see Stewart and Stewart 2008, 196). The Nova Scotia Liberals, for example, moved back to selecting party leaders at delegated conventions after conducting four party primaries as did the Nova Scotia PCs and the BC Reform after each conducting one primary. The experience at the provincial level demonstrates that while the trend is towards more inclusive selectorates, change is not completely unidirectional. This speaks to the self-governing nature of Canadian parties and their freedom to change their selection methods quickly and from one election to the next. Without state-imposed rules regarding selection methods, parties are able to completely overhaul their processes, even moving back to less inclusive selectorates.

The adoption of primaries at the federal level began a decade after many provincial parties did so, starting with the Bloc Québécois in 1997. The party primary format was then adopted by the Progressive Conservatives in 1998, the Canadian Alliance in 2000, the New Democrats in 2003, the Conservative Party of Canada in 2004, and the Liberals in 2013.⁴ Although considerably slower to adopt primaries than their provincial counterparts, today all of the major federal political parties select their leader through closed or semi-open primaries – either inviting all members or members and supporters to directly cast a ballot. Unlike the adoption of primaries at the provincial level, membership votes have been more firmly established at the federal level, with no significant movement back towards less inclusive selectorates.⁵

Table 23.2 reveals the considerable diversity that can be found in the current rules governing party leadership primaries in Canada. Both the New Democrats and the Conservatives use a closed primary method where participation is limited to dues-paying members. Both parties have relatively modest requirements for participation: for the Conservatives, membership must be obtained 60 days prior to the primary to be eligible to vote whereas this cut-off is 30 days for the NDP. Not all Canadian parties require prior membership. The Alberta PCs, for instance, routinely allowed membership to be purchased on voting day and even between rounds of voting (Stewart 1997). In contrast to the closed primaries used by the Conservatives and New Democrats, the Liberals use semi-open primaries in which members as well as registered supporters are eligible to vote. Although the registration/membership cut-off was initially set to 30 days for the party’s 2013 primary, this was changed to 15 midway through the campaign.

Table 23.2 Leadership Selection Rules Compared (Most Recent Primary)

Party	NDP	Conservative	Liberal
Contest year	2017	2017	2013
Selectorate	Party members	Party members	Party members and supporters
Membership cut-off	30 days	60 days	15 days
Ballot type	Ranked ballot; voting occurs once per week until a candidate meets the threshold	Ranked ballot; one member one vote weighted by constituency	Ranked ballot; one member one vote weighted by constituency
Membership fee	\$1–25 (depending on province)	\$15	\$10 for members; no fee for supporters
Spending limit	1,500,000	5,000,000	950,000
Entrance fee	30,000	100,000	75,000
Candidate eligibility	Party membership; 500 member signatures	Party membership of at least 6 months; 300 member signatures	Party membership; 300 member signatures

Source: Compiled by authors.

Membership fees that serve as a prerequisite for participation have often been criticized as a “poll tax” (Cross 2004) that may deter participation from lower income and marginalized Canadians. Interestingly, we have seen some movement towards the lowering of membership fees in recent years and even their complete removal in some cases. During the 2013 Liberal primary, for instance, the party lowered the price of party membership to a modest \$10, and implemented an entirely free category of party “supporter” which had the same voting privileges as dues-paying members.⁶ While the Conservatives initially raised their fee to \$25 for the 2017 leadership primary, the decision was met with widespread criticism that it would dissuade potential participants. Following the criticism, the party lowered the fee to \$15. Membership fees in the NDP are somewhat different, given the party’s multi-level organizational structure (see Pruyers 2014). As membership in the federal party is obtained provincially (then automatically granted federally), the provincial branches of the party set the rate for party membership. As a result, fees can range from \$1 in the province of Alberta to \$25 in Ontario. Beyond the minor hurdles of joining in advance and paying a small fee, all of the major parties have taken an inclusive approach to party membership and therefore participation in internal decision-making. In fact, given that non-citizens and those younger than 18 can typically join and vote in a leadership primary, these intra-party elections are in some ways more inclusive than the general election.

Without state-imposed limits, each of the parties is free to adopt its own internal spending limit, although this differs dramatically by party. While the 2013 Liberal primary set a limit of \$950,000 per candidate, Conservative candidates are able to spend five times as much with a cap of \$5,000,000. This, however, changes with each primary. The previous Conservative primary that was held in 2004, for instance, had a spending limit of \$2,500,000. The absence of state mandated rules, however, does more than simply ensure variation among parties. There is good evidence that candidates often spend in excess of the stated limit without any consequences (Cross and Cryslar 2009, 2011; Cross et al. 2016). Parties have few incentives to punish a candidate, especially if they happened to win the primary and will be leading the party into a general election. As a result, the enforcement of party rules is relatively lax.

Beyond the difference in the selectorate where the Liberals allow non-members to participate, perhaps the biggest difference in the rules can be found in how the votes are counted. In the New Democratic Party, primaries are conducted using ranked ballots and every member's vote counts equally, regardless of where they live. The Liberals and Conservatives, by contrast, use a uniquely Canadian method that seeks to address the issue of regionalized support. While these parties also use ranked ballots, each member's vote does not count equally in the final decision. Take the Conservatives as an example. In 2017, as in 2004, each electoral district is allocated 100 points in the final decision. Candidates earn a total based on their percentage of the vote in each of the country's 338 electoral districts and require 16,901 points to win. While such a system violates the principles of one-member-one-vote, it ensures that the various regions of the country are represented in the decision. Such an approach may also have practical benefits for the party as it ensures that the winning candidate has a broad base of support across the entire country, which of course is important for the subsequent general election.⁷

It is important to note, however, that had Table 23.2 been created for previous primaries it would look very different. This is because parties routinely change the rules for their leadership primaries with every election (Cross and Blais 2012). When the New Democrats chose their leader in 2003, for instance, the party used a weighted primary (or electoral college) in which the vote was divided between party members (75 percent) and affiliated unions (25 percent). The party has also doubled its entrance fee for every leadership primary since 2003 (starting with \$7,500 in 2003, then \$15,000 in 2012, and finally \$30,000 in 2017). Such changes, of course, are not limited to the New Democrats. Prior to 2013, Liberal leadership elections did not include a supporter category and limited participation to dues-paying members. Changes around spending limits, membership cut-offs, and entrance fees frequently routinely change in all of the parties.

In terms of the campaign dynamics, the defining feature is the recruitment campaign that accompanies every leadership primary.⁸ Since the selectorate is not defined at the outset, candidates have the ability to shape and construct a selectorate that is favorable to them by recruiting new members before the deadline. It is not uncommon to see a party's entire membership double during the course of the primary campaign. The Liberals, for instance, witnessed their membership surge from 55,000 prior to their 2013 primary to more than 127,000 members who were eligible to vote by the end of the campaign (and this does not include supporters who also joined to participate). Likewise, the Conservatives recruited 100,000 new members for both their 2004 and 2017 leadership primaries. The potential to shape the selectorate, however, raises a number of concerns regarding how members are recruited and mobilized (discussed below).

The Challenges of Party Primaries

Primaries for candidate and leadership selection offer parties a wide range of benefits. Membership recruitment provides the party with an army of potential volunteers and donors for the general election, grassroots participation provides democratic legitimacy to party decision-making, and the inclusive nature of the contests create excitement and energy for the party in general. There are, however, a variety of concerns associated with primaries in Canada. Since primaries are not administered by the state, parties often lack the resources necessary to meet the standards that are customary for general elections. Although these practices are not limited to Canadian primaries, selection of both leaders and candidates often suffers from a lack of proper oversight, voter fraud, and frequent manipulation of selection rules (Cross et al. 2016).

It is not uncommon, for instance, to have hundreds (and often thousands) of new members signed up to participate in a manner that violates the party's internal rules and sometimes without their knowledge. The 2017 Conservative leadership primary is illustrative in this regard.

More than 1,300 individuals were fraudulently registered as members (Zimonjic 2017). Since primaries are often recruitment/mobilization contests, there are incentives for candidates to recruit thousands of new members using questionable recruitment tactics. Large-scale “ethnic mobilization,” for instance, has been a defining feature of candidate and leadership contests for decades. Vote-brokers in hierarchical religious and ethnic communities often mobilize thousands of new members into the party (Cross 2004; Courtney 1995). As Cross et al. (2016, 138) write about candidate primaries, “this can result in a local party association seeing its membership swamped by busloads of new members arriving at their first party meeting for the sole purpose of supporting a particular candidate.”

Leading candidates and their supporters also routinely fight over the rules as well. Because Canadian primaries are organized by the parties themselves, they are free to change the rules surrounding leadership elections as frequently as they wish. As such, it is not uncommon to have new rules from one election to the next, even within the same party as demonstrated in previous sections. In recent years, for instance, the New Democrats have removed the vote allocation for union members, and the Liberals have added an entire “supporter” category of voters. While these are examples of large-scale change, more minor aspects of the selection process are routinely changed. Seemingly mundane aspects like the number of polling stations as well as their location can favor one candidate over another. Similarly, membership cut-off deadlines are often the subject of considerable debate as this has the ability to shape the electorate. Candidates with support from the existing membership prefer to have a longer cut-off whereas outsiders and those with little support from the current membership seek to mobilize new members into the party and therefore prefer shorter cut-offs. Given that the rules of the game can shape the outcome, candidates often position their supporters on the party executive in order to influence the new rules (Cross et al. 2016).

There are also concerns regarding the “divisiveness” of primaries (Johnson and Gibson 1974; Southwell 1986; Ware 1979; Wichowsky and Niebler 2010). Cross and Pruyers (2017) demonstrate that losers of candidate nomination primaries in Canada are significantly less satisfied with their role as members, less active in the general election that follows the primary, and less likely to retain their membership in the future. We provide additional evidence of this “sore loser” effect below. To explore this question, we draw upon financial donor data derived from Elections Canada. In doing so, we utilize a unique and novel operationalization of political support, namely an examination of political contributions during primary elections and the months that follow the internal election. Do party members (or supporters) who donated to a primary contestant continue to donate to the party even if their preferred candidate is defeated in the intra-party election? Public disclosure of political contributions is mandatory at the federal level in Canada. As a result, Elections Canada maintains detailed, publicly available data concerning political donations during both general and intra-party elections. Based on this financial data, donors can be matched to their preferred intra-party contender (i.e., the candidate to whom they donated). We then examine donations after the primary and during the months following the primary to see if those individuals whose preferred candidate lost continue to contribute to the party and how this differs from those who won.⁹

Table 23.3 provides the breakdown of financial contributions for four recent Canadian leadership primaries, highlighting the extent to which supporters of winners and losers made a donation to the party in the following calendar year. While the number of supporters who contributed to both a contestant and the party is relatively small, an identifiable gap between those who donated to the winner and those who donated to a losing candidate is evident in three of the four primaries. Take, for example, the 2012 NDP leadership primary. More than one-third of those members/supporters who donated to Tom Mulcair’s primary campaign also donated

Table 23.3 Primary Result and Continued Party Contributions (Recent Canadian Leadership Primaries)

Party	Election result	Donated to the party in the following year	Did not donate to the party in the following year	N
Green (2006)	Supported loser	6% (13)	94% (210)	223
	Supported winner	10% (19)*	90% (170)	189
Bloc (2011)	Supported loser	9% (33)	91% (345)	378
	Supported winner	23% (47)**	77% (157)	204
NDP (2012)	Supported loser	27% (2374)	73% (6412)	8786
	Supported winner	36% (1174)**	64% (2094)	3268
Liberal (2013)	Supported loser	24% (1826)**	76% (5615)	7441
	Supported winner	21% (2493)	79% (9561)	12054
Total	Supported loser	25% (4246)	75% (12582)	16828
	Supported winner	24% (3733)	76% (11981)	15714
				32542

Note: Comparisons in columns between winners and losers. * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0$.

to the party in the year that followed. By contrast, only slightly more than one quarter of those who donated to one of the losing candidates continued to support the party financially afterwards. This represents a not unsubstancial 9 percent difference. Transforming this into an odds ratio reveals that those who donated to the winning candidate in the 2012 New Democratic Party leadership primary were 1.5 times more likely to continue to donate to the party in the following year compared to those supporters who supported a losing candidate during the internal party election.

Likewise, those who donated to Daniel Paillé during the 2011 Bloc leadership election were more than three times as likely to donate in the following year than those who supported a losing candidate. And while the gap between winners and losers is smaller in the 2006 Green contest, it is evident nonetheless. A challenge for parties conducting a primary election is therefore to keep losing members engaged with the party rather than allowing them to withdraw after their defeat. Only in the 2013 Liberal leadership election do we not find the same general trend. Here those who supported Justin Trudeau are no more likely to remain party contributors compared to those who supported one of the losing candidates. In fact, we find the opposite: losers continue contributing to the party at a slightly higher rate than winners do.

One potential explanation is that the 2013 Liberal primary was not a “divisive” primary at all. In terms of competitiveness of the race, for instance, Justin Trudeau easily won the Liberal leadership on the first ballot with 80 percent of the vote. Indeed, the margin of victory over the second-place contestant was a staggering 70 percent. The other primaries included in Table 23.3, however, were much more competitive. Tom Mulcair, for example, only received 30 percent in the first ballot of the 2012 NDP election. Moreover, the difference between the top two candidates after the first round of voting was only 9 percent – considerably closer than the Liberal contest. Thus, not all primary losses may cause the same disillusionment among members and party supporters. It is likely the case that divisive and highly competitive primaries have greater implications for the health and stability of a party organization compared to internal elections where there is a very clear frontrunner and little meaningful competition between candidates. With that said, more cases need to be added to the analysis before we can draw firm conclusions in this regard.

Beyond differences between winners and losers, Table 23.3 reveals something troubling about party support and the quality of participation in primaries more generally. While these open and participatory primaries allow parties to recruit and mobilize tens of thousands of new members and supporters,¹⁰ this support does not appear to be long lasting. When considering financial contributions, only a quarter of those individuals who were mobilized to contribute to a recent leadership primary continued to donate to the party (regardless of whether they won the internal election or not). In other words, three-in-four individuals who donated to a primary were not active party donors in the following year. The “instant members” who sign up to participate in the primary have very little attachment to the party itself and become inactive quickly after the contest has concluded.¹¹ The “party” that makes personnel selection decisions is therefore very different than the “party” that continues to exist between these selection events.

Conclusion

Primary elections in Canada are highly inclusive and participatory events. Not only are non-citizens often invited to participate, the age requirements for party membership mean that those who are not yet able to vote in the general election may nonetheless vote for their preferred candidate or leader in the internal party election. As a result of this inclusivity, hundreds of thousands of Canadians routinely cast a ballot in party primaries – more than 130,000 party members, for instance, voted in the 2017 Conservative leadership primary. Although there are concerns regarding the representational outcomes of these internal elections (Pruysers et al. 2017; Rahat, Hazan, and Katz 2008), primaries represent a transfer of meaningful decision-making authority to ordinary grassroots party membership.

While the view of parties as private associations has been challenged in recent years (i.e., minor financial regulations, judicial review, etc.), the defining characteristic of parties, and therefore the primaries that they conduct, is still their self-governing nature. The autonomous nature of Canadian parties to set their own rules and guidelines is illustrated by the fact that each of the federal parties has adopted a somewhat unique leadership selection method that highlights its own organizational ethos: the Liberals invite non-members to vote, the Conservatives weight votes by constituency, and the New Democrats have often provided a special role for organized labor. Evidence of this freedom is further illustrated by the fact that a number of provincial parties have abandoned the use of primaries in favor of less inclusive selection methods. This self-governing nature raises concerns regarding proper oversight and accountability as parties may lack sufficient resources or incentives to conduct internal contests with the rigor expected of general elections. Finally, primaries may come with an organizational cost if sore losers choose to distance themselves from the party.

Notes

- 1 For a definition and typology of party primaries in parliamentary democracies see Kenig et al. (2015).
- 2 This, of course, is in contrast to parties in other countries where the state has taken a more active role in the primary process (i.e., the United States) or where the state has broad regulations regarding personnel selection (i.e., German Party Law).
- 3 The need to meet regulatory requirements along with knowledge of local financial resources has encouraged central parties to pay more attention to local affairs (Coletto et al. 2011). Nonetheless, local associations continue to find ways to act independently of the central party (Currie-Wood 2016) and the removal of state subsidies may well limit the capacity of the national party to intervene in local affairs.

- 4 In both 2003 and 2006 the Liberals invited party members to vote for their preferred leadership candidate. These votes, however, were translated into delegates who attended a leadership convention. While delegates were bound to vote in the manner specified by the membership on the first round, they were released on subsequent rounds. Given that delegates or members could be decisive, we cannot label these elections as primaries (see Cross et al. 2016). In fact, the membership vote portion was decisive in 2003 as Paul Martin was selected on the first ballot in accordance with the membership's preference but not in 2006 when Stéphane Dion was selected on the fourth ballot by convention delegates.
- 5 The Progressive Conservatives briefly abandoned the party primary in 2003, only to return the following year. This, however, is the only case at the federal level.
- 6 There is one caveat. Party members can be as young as 14 whereas supporters had to be 18.
- 7 Using an example from the 1998 PC primary, Stewart and Carty (2002) illustrate the trade-off between equality of members and regional representation. The party had 1,300 members cast a ballot in the district of Kingston and the Islands compared to eight in Bellechasse-Etchemins-Montmagny L'Islet. In practice this meant that some votes counted 100 times more than others in the final decision (see also Cross (2014) for a discussion of this tradeoff).
- 8 For a discussion of the outcome of Canadian leadership primaries see Cross et al. (2016, chapter 6).
- 9 Despite being publicly available, only aggregate results are presented and no data is reported in any form that allows for identification of any individual.
- 10 For a more detailed discussion of these recruitment patterns see Carty (1991), Sayers (1999), or Pruyers and Cross (2016).
- 11 See Rahat and Hazan (2007) for a broader discussion of this uncommitted (and often uninterested) layer of party members who are mobilized for a leadership election but become inactive shortly thereafter. Orr (2011, 980), for instance, writes that "parties are considering primaries as a lure, to reach out to supporters who are not interested in joining or committing to the party, with the promise of a say in the party's seminal activity: candidate selection."

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