

Electoral Cycles, Party Organization and Mobilization in Canada

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Canadian political parties oscillate between periods of inter-election quiescence and electoral year mobilization. In this paper we measure, across a series of elections, organizational activity in inter-election periods as parties develop strategic positions and seek to reshape their bases, and then their subsequent mobilization strategies and successes. Our research strategy employs ecological models rooted in electoral district level data including party resources and activity (from annual financial accounts), census data describing the electoral districts, as well as conventional aggregate electoral data. Our initial models utilise evidence from Ontario, Canada's largest province, and cover several electoral cycles that witnessed a string of governmental turnovers. This analysis provides a more nuanced model of party systems than those based on simple election results. Even in a period of remarkable electoral flux, party activity and success appear to be deeply rooted in the diverse constituency social and political contexts of the system.

Assessments of party strength or weakness are customarily calibrated in terms of votes or seats won at elections. But this provides a punctuated, partial indication. A fuller measure of the vitality of parties requires a continuous assessment of their fortunes, including inter-election as well as electoral indicators. As office-seeking organizations, political parties must organize their activity in terms of the rules of the electoral regime and the imperatives of the election cycle. Canadian parties with cadre-style organizations oscillate between periods of inter-election quiescence and active, election-year mobilization. Many party functions extend beyond election campaigns: organizational maintenance, membership and candidate recruitment, political communication, fund raising, and policy planning, all occur between electoral campaigns. Grassroots party activism in these areas, as well as for more directly campaign-related tasks, are important components of a healthy democratic polity.¹ And the cumulative effect of party organizational activity, in all of these dimensions, inevitably contributes to its local presence and strength.²

Financial resources provide a significant alternative measure to votes won for assessing party organizational vitality. In an era of capital-intensive politics, money may be the most valuable resource a party can command, largely because it is the most fungible. Recognizing the central importance attached to money in the political process (as well its potential to undermine democratic legitimacy), many jurisdictions regulate

¹ See Patrick Seyd, "In Praise of Party," *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 51, 2 (April 1998).

² Justin Fisher, "Small Kingdoms and Crumbling Organisations: Examining the Variation in Constituency Party Membership and Resources" in P. Cowley *et al.*, eds., *British Elections & Parties Review*, Volume 10 (London, 1999), p.77.

the money raising and expenditure activities of parties. Generally, such regimes utilize a system of annual financial reporting from central party organizations and the regulation of election spending by parties and candidates. However, in some jurisdictions parties are required to provide detailed accounts, with each local party unit filing annual reports of receipts and expenditures. These records complement the reporting requirements associated with election campaigns and provide a rich body of information that can be used to map the continuing dimensions of grassroots party life.

In this paper we utilize such detailed annual local records to measure and analyze the temporal and local, ecological variations in both the organizational and electoral lives of the parties that make up the party system in Ontario, Canada's most populous province. Canada's partisan organization is unique in that provincial and national political party organizations, even in the same party family and bearing the same name, are now quite separate and distinct. The result is a set of party systems at the national and provincial level that are disconnected from one another, and driven by their own distinct dynamics.³ This separation of party organization and activity has been institutionalized to such an extent that, in Ontario, parties are forbidden by law from transferring money to their federal namesakes. This produces a set of provincial party systems that serve as excellent laboratories in which to observe and compare the dynamics that drive party organization and activity.

In Ontario, the regime's party-finance and campaign regulatory system generates detailed annual data on fund raising and expenditures for each of 130 constituency party associations of Ontario's three parties — the Progressive Conservatives, Liberals, and New Democrats (NDP).⁴ On the assumption that the parties are strategically adaptive organizations, whose constituency associations necessarily reflect the features of their immediate local contexts,⁵ we can use this data to explore patterns across time, space, and party in grassroots party organizational life. Our analysis covers the period from 1986 to 1996 when constituency boundaries remained unchanged. This was a particularly tumultuous decade for, after four decades of continuous Conservative rule, it saw three extraordinary elections (1987, 1990, and 1995) each of which returned a different party (the Liberals, NDP, and Progressive Conservatives, respectively) to a term in government. Over the period each party also took a turn as the official opposition. This allows our analysis of grassroots political life to be sensitive to the putative effects of governmental office on a party's organizational life and its activity patterns.

Though one might expect that parties which originated as cadre-style organizations like the Conservatives and Liberals would have locally-financed, electorally-focused, and incumbent-dominated local associations, those such as the NDP which originally sought to build mass-based structures should differ considerably. Comparing the three parties over time allows us to examine the extent to which this organizational distinction governs ground-level practice. It demonstrates that there are important transformations in party life associated with election campaigns, but also documents

³ R. Kenneth Carty and David Stewart, "Parties and Party Systems," in Christopher Dunn, ed., *Provinces: Canadian Provincial Politics* (Peterborough, ON., 1996).

⁴ The number of electoral districts changes over time and is currently lower than the 130 in existence during the period covered by our analysis.

⁵ Paul Allen Beck, "Environment and Party: The Impact of Political and Demographic County Characteristics on Party Behavior", *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 63, 3 (1974); and R. Kenneth Carty and Munroe Eagles, "The Political Ecology of Party Organization: The Case of Canada", *Political Geography*, Vol. 17 (1998).

considerable inter-election activity on the part of particular local associations. In the subsequent section, we provide a first analysis of the determinants of constituency-level variations in the activities of local party organizations. Specifically, we develop an ecological model of the determinants of local party expenditures across these three electoral cycles for each of the parties. Since the ultimate goal of the parties is electoral success, our final section explores the relationship between local party expenditure and mobilization success across the three elections. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, our evidence suggests that when it comes to mobilizing voter support, local money matters and makes a difference to local electoral district outcomes.⁶

Party Politics in Ontario: 1986-1996

Ontario contains the heartland of Canadian manufacturing, financial, and service industries, and its residents enjoy above average incomes. Despite vigorous three-party competition over the forty years following the Second World War, the Conservatives easily dominated.⁷ Though they never once won a majority of votes cast, the Conservatives benefited from the almost equal division of opposition support between the Liberals and New Democrats.⁸ And in Ontario's single-member plurality electoral system, that was enough to keep the Conservatives in office. However, changes in the competitive balance, spurred by a growth in Liberal support during the 1985 election, introduced a period of unprecedented political instability. The Liberals formed a minority government (1985-87) and won a majority in their own right in 1987, only to be quickly replaced by the NDP in 1990. Five years later, the surprising re-election of the Conservatives appeared to bring the party system full circle. Figure 1 charts the shifting vote shares of the parties over the decade, providing a conventional picture of shifting party strength in the system.

The three parties exhibit an interesting mix of organizational similarities and differences. The Liberals and the Conservatives are best described as Duvergerian cadre-style organizations, while the NDP resembles a mass party.⁹ While this classification draws attention to some important structural distinctions, it understates the extent to which all three parties are actually composites of these two ideal types.¹⁰ Each of the three parties is focused in important ways on its leader and has a cadre of electoral-professionals that attend to concerns such as research, policy development, intra-party communication, fund-raising, and campaign strategizing. However, the core organizational building blocks of each party are its local constituency associations. Whereas Australian parties may have several sub-branches within a single electorate, Canadian parties maintain a single constituency association within each riding. It is these units that members join and through which they participate in party activity. The members of constituency associations jealously defend their right to select (and

⁶ For an analysis of the experience of a small rural province, R. Kenneth Carty and Munroe Eagles, "Party Activity Across Electoral Cycles: The New Brunswick Party System, 1979-94", *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 36, 2 (2003).

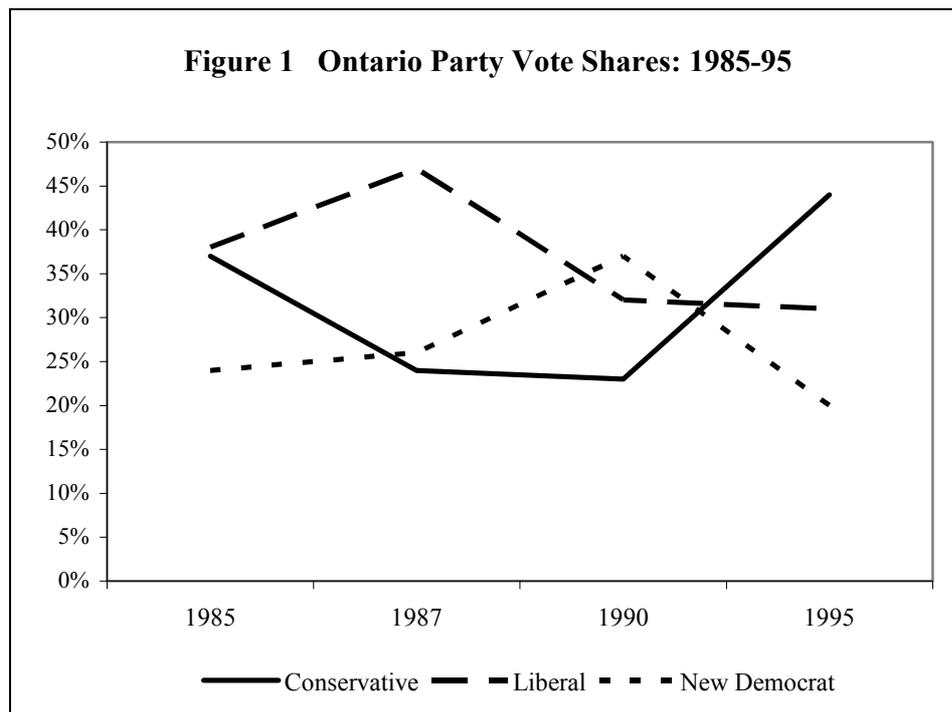
⁷ Robert J. Williams, "Ontario Party Politics in the 1990s: Comfort Meets Conviction", in Graham White, ed., *The Government and Politics of Ontario*, 5th edn. (Toronto, 1997), p. 216. For an account of the character of Ontario party politics in the 1950s and 1960s see John K Morris and Robert J. Williams, "Leslie M. Frost, Patronage, and Grass-Roots Political Work," *Ontario History*, Vol. LXXXIV, 2 (1992).

⁸ Carty and Stewart, "Parties and Party Systems", p. 82.

⁹ Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties* (London, 1964).

¹⁰ Joseph Wearing, "Ontario Political Parties: Fish or Fowl?" in Donald C. MacDonald, ed., *Government and Politics of Ontario*, 1st edn. (Toronto, 1975).

remove) their local candidate, and see to organizing a campaign on his or her behalf. In this respect, all three parties embody the same balancing organizational tradeoff that identifies their federal counterparts, namely “local autonomy for party discipline”.¹¹



While there are significant organizational similarities across the three parties, each has its own identifiable features and unique story. The Conservatives, in office from 1943-85, long presented themselves as a pragmatic center party. They did particularly well among the affluent and self-consciously British elements of the electorate. But after losing office in 1985 the Conservatives underwent a remarkable decade-long process of decline and regeneration, and emerged a very different party. Populist impulses amongst its activists led to a new leader being chosen by a “one-member one-vote” selection process. A massive party debt forced the (temporary) closing of the party’s central office in the early 1990s while the organization put its finances in order, and the new leadership moved to articulate a more ideologically coherent right-wing program.¹² In the context of a very unpopular New Democrat government, these changes were enough to catapult the party from its third place finish in 1990 back to a 45 per cent vote share in 1995, its best showing in a quarter of a century.

For its part, the Liberal party of the early 1980s lacked organizational strength and political vigor after decades in the political wilderness. It had some long-standing rural strongholds, and a tradition of appealing to francophones and new immigrants. The Liberals’ breakthrough after 1985 reflected the vagaries of the electoral system, which

¹¹ R. Kenneth Carty, William Cross and Lisa Young, *Rebuilding Canadian Party Politics* (Vancouver, 2000), p. 155.

¹² Christina Blizzard, *Right Turn: How the Tories Took Ontario* (Toronto and Oxford, 1995); and Peter Woolstencroft, “Reclaiming the ‘Pink Palace’: The Progressive Conservative Party Comes from the Cold”, in White, *The Government and Politics of Ontario*.

produced a hung parliament and so, the chance creation of a Liberal minority government dependent upon NDP support. Quickly consolidating their position, and taking advantage of the collapsing Conservatives, the Liberals won a smashing victory in the 1987 election, capturing 95 of the 130 seats (73 per cent) with just 47 per cent of the vote. Their new government was soon tarred by scandal, “misjudgment and arrogance”,¹³ and was defeated by the NDP three years later. In the aftermath, the Liberals, with a new leader, were unable to redefine themselves, and subsequently lost the 1995 election to the resurgent Conservatives.

Perhaps no one was more surprised by the 1990 election result than the victorious NDP. The party, in partnership with the labour movement, had long striven to provide a social democratic alternative but, until 1990, had been unable to attract sufficient middle ground support to form a government. In that year, the NDP capitalized on the Liberal government’s misfortunes and, with only 37 per cent of the popular vote, the workings of the first-past-the-post electoral system gave it 57 per cent of the seats, allowing it to form its first government. An economic recession that was poorly managed, and major spending program cutbacks, soon alienated the party’s traditional base without attracting any additional support from more ideologically moderate voters. Inevitably, the party was badly defeated when it had to face the electorate in 1995.

On the obvious metrics of success, votes and seats, Ontario’s three main political parties experienced an electoral roller-coaster ride over the 1986-96 decade. However, this is only one possible portrait of party activity for it reveals little of their strength and activity in the years between elections. In the following section we turn to an unbroken, less punctuated portrait of the party system, using party finance data as an alternate indicator of party strength.

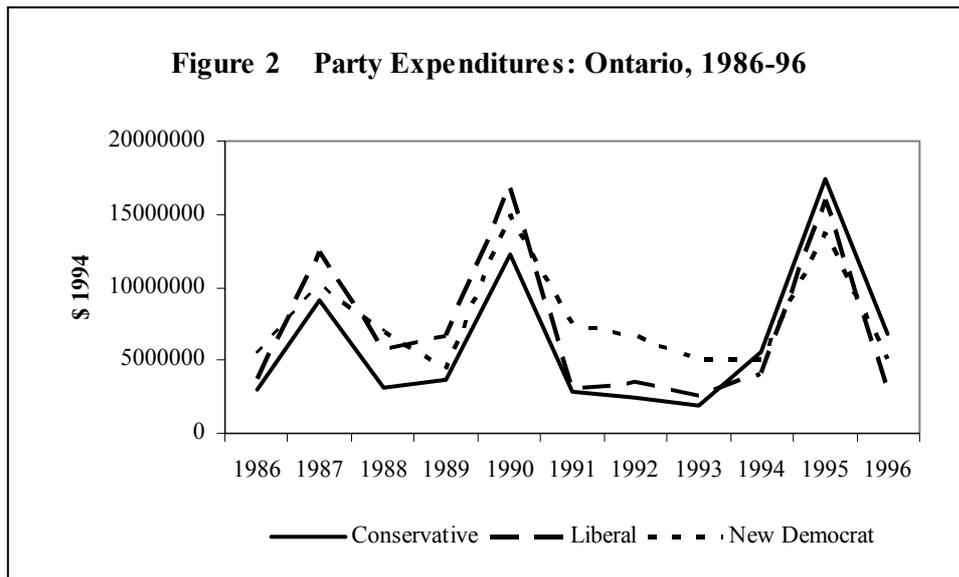
The Financial Basis of Party Organization and Activity

Little can be accomplished by contemporary parties without money and so we can measure a party’s general level of organizational strength, and its ongoing activity levels, by its spending. Figure 2 presents the total — both central office and local association — expenditures for each party over the 1986-96 decade expressed in 1994 Canadian dollars. It provides sharply different portraits of partisan strength than do the electoral profiles of vote shares in Figure 1. The overwhelming message of Figure 2 is that the rhythms of party activity, as measured by their expenditures, closely track the electoral cycle (and each other) in all three parties. Party expenditures, like memberships, peak sharply in election years and then quickly decline to a comparatively low level in the inter-election period.¹⁴ The activities implied by these spending patterns epitomize those associated with Duvergerian cadre parties. Though nominally a mass party, the NDP differs little from this pattern. Its electoral cycle expenditure swings are hardly less pronounced than those of the traditional cadre parties.

¹³ Williams, “Ontario Party Politics”, p. 217.

¹⁴ Party membership patterns exhibit this same electoral-cycle pattern. See R. Kenneth Carty, *Canadian Political Parties in the Constituencies*, Volume 23 of the Research Studies of the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, Toronto. (Dundurn Press and the Minister of Supply, Canada, 1991). Ch. 3. A more general model of the membership cycles is provided in R. Kenneth Carty, “Canadian Parties as Membership Organizations.” Paper presented to the Conference on Party Membership, University of Bologna, October, 1996.

While the comparative strength and competitiveness of the parties appears to differ far less than implied by the vote swings, Figure 2 does provide a clear indication of the general advantage enjoyed by parties in office. The governing Liberals were generally able to spend more in the years after their 1987 election, only to be replaced by the NDP as the most active party after its 1990 electoral victory. The NDP were in turn replaced as the biggest spenders by the Conservatives, the weakest of the three parties for almost a decade until returning to office.¹⁵



Governing parties in Ontario are not only able to exploit the advantages of office but their privileged position clearly allows them to sustain the most active organizations in inter-election periods. The cyclical pattern of party activity in Ontario is clearly a provincial one — the parties are centred on the dynamics engendered by provincial and not national elections. During the decade in question there were two national elections, in 1988 and 1993. Yet no trace of them can be discerned in the spending patterns of these provincial-level parties. Given that Ontario has become the lynch-pin of national election outcomes, this is powerful testimony to the complete organizational separation of federal and provincial level party organization and activity in Canada.

A closer examination of the parties' financial records indicates that, excepting election years, they generally live within their means. Both at the provincial and local association level, party expenditures closely reflect incomes. Locally, annual income and expenditures correlate, on average, at about .90 to .95. During election years spending bursts have expenditures exceeding receipts in all three parties, but this is inevitably followed by sharp cut-backs as the parties struggle to again balance their accounts. Over the three elections held between 1986 and 1996 election year deficits grew as the parties threw everything they had, and more, into the competitive battles of the newly volatile party system. This was particularly the case of the traditional opposition parties (the Liberals in 1990 and 1995, and the New Democrats in 1995) as they attempted to establish themselves as governing parties. The detailed records reveal

¹⁵ Also see Robert H MacDermid, "Funding the Common Sense Revolutionaries: Contributions to the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario, 1995-97." Unpublished manuscript, 1999, p.9.

that the NDP enjoyed their greatest income, and hence expenditure growth, between 1989 and 1990. The same was true for the Conservatives from 1994 to 1995. In both cases, these shifts presaged the only election wins by those parties during the decade. This suggests that our measures of partisan activity not only track the organizational vitality of the parties but may also help account for their voter mobilization successes.

The structure of party organization in Canada guarantees a considerable local autonomy for constituency associations, far more so than, say, Australian parties allow their local sub-branches.¹⁶ Hence central party organizations and their local associations operate in distinct, though obviously related, financial worlds. Internal differentiation of this sort can be conducive to the intra-party movement of funds as central party organizations manoeuvre strategically to maximize their competitive position in particular electoral districts.¹⁷ Previous studies of Ontario parties' central expenditures have pointed out that the Liberals and the NDP have been more generous than the Conservatives in transferring funds into local associations.¹⁸ Nevertheless, intra-party tensions over money do erupt when one part of the organization (usually the central office) attempts to impose a tax on other party units (usually local associations). This has been a particular problem for the NDP as transfers from constituency party associations have always been an important source of funds for its central Ontario organization. Problems also bedevilled the Liberals in the early 1980s, and the Conservatives in the late 1980s, when their central organizations attempted to use funds raised by constituency associations to reduce central party debts.¹⁹

While a full analysis of intra-party transfers is beyond the scope of this paper, it is possible to compare the patterns of central and local party expenditures over the three election cycles of the decade. Examining party expenditures at the provincial and local level demonstrates that the electoral cycle effect is far more pronounced at the local level. This is what one would expect of cadre-style parties whose principal interest in their local memberships and associations is as electoral vote-vacuum machinery. Yet on this there appears to be no significant difference between the parties. Central party expenditures vary less, and fall off less steeply in non-election years, than do local party expenditures. Despite its mass-organization structure, this was particularly the case for the NDP during the years it governed.

It is also the case that the total expenditure of each party's constituency associations exceeded that of its central offices during election years. The relative importance of local associations in the electoral lives of the provincial parties is clearly demonstrated by Figure 3, which records the share of total party expenditures spent by the local associations. In each party, local association spending sharply increased during election years to over half of all party expenditure, then fell back to between 30-40 per cent in inter-election years. Over the decade, the Liberals were the party whose local associations regularly accounted for the highest proportion of their party's total expenditures. (The singular exception was the Conservatives in 1992 and 1993 when

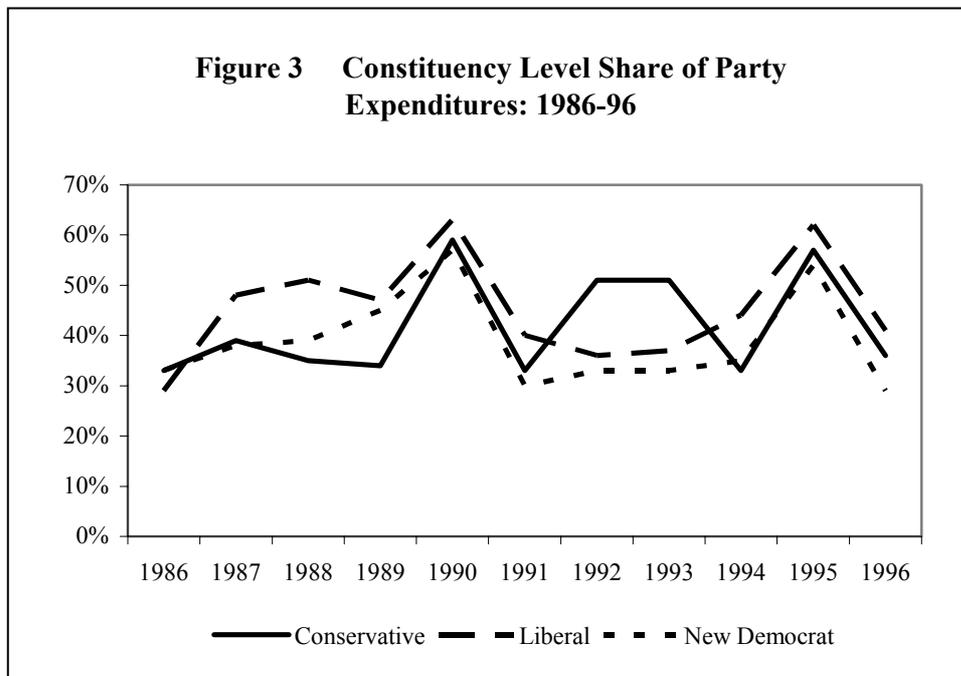
¹⁶ Carty, *Canadian Political Parties*, pp.209-17.

¹⁷ Mildred A. Schwartz "Electoral Success versus Party Maintenance: National, State, and Local Party Contributions to Illinois Legislative Races," *Publius*, Vol. 24, 1 (Winter, 1994).

¹⁸ Robert J. Drummond and Robert MacDermid, "Elections and Campaigning: 'They Blew Our Doors Off on the Buy'", in Graham White, ed., *The Government and Politics of Ontario* (Toronto, 1997), p. 207.

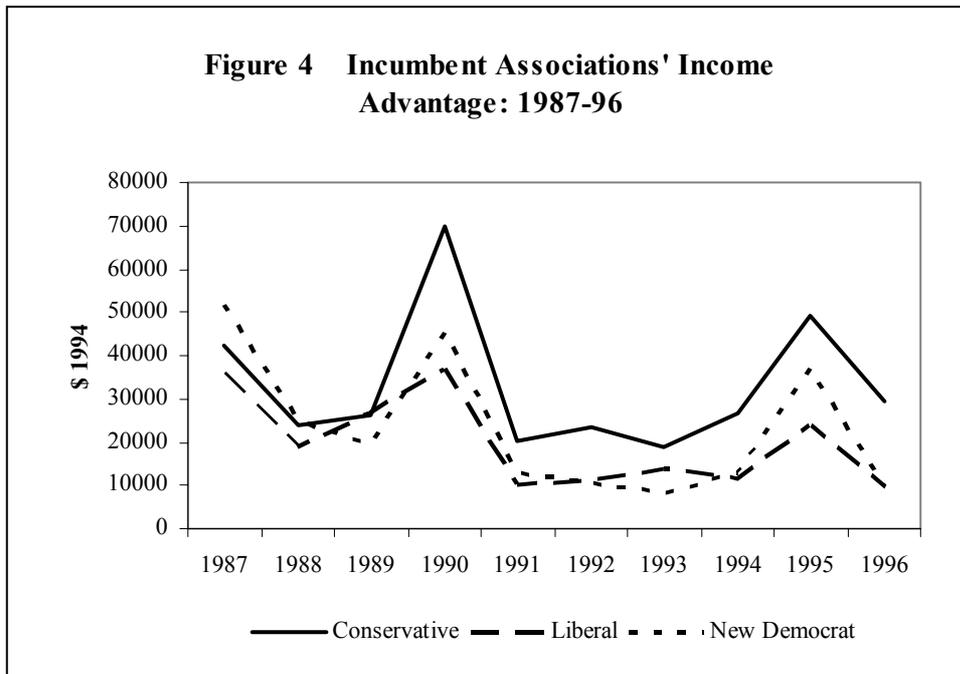
¹⁹ David Johnson, "The Ontario Party and Campaign Finance System: Initiative and Challenge," in F. Leslie Seidle, ed., *Provincial Party and Election Finance in Canada*, Volume 3 of the Research Studies of the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing (Toronto and Ottawa, 1991), pp. 55-56.

that party's local associations accounted for a significantly higher proportion because the party had closed its central office in a desperate money-saving exercise). As a party which had been the victim of long decades in opposition, and so dependent upon its local associations for survival, the Liberals epitomize what it is to be a cadre party. However, the existence of these distinct cycles within all the parties suggests that voter mobilization is deeply rooted in the constituencies, and that most partisan activity is profoundly episodic. Despite the often-alleged, growing centralization of election campaign planning and activity, Ontario parties are clearly locally oriented and structured money and vote-gathering machines.



As a locally based cadre-style organization we should expect that a party's local financial resources would be considerably strengthened by the presence of an incumbent. Certainly at the national level incumbents stimulate and reinforce their local party organization, activity and fund-raising, giving them an advantage both in the inter-election period as well as in fighting election campaigns.²⁰ Figure 4 charts the average difference between the annual income of the Ontario parties' constituency associations with and without an incumbent member of the provincial parliament. Given the decentralized cast to Canadian party structures, it is not surprising that incumbents' associations regularly enjoy a significant financial advantage over others. Although the Liberals are the most local of the three parties (Figure 3), their localism seems a comparatively consistent feature of their organization. It is in the Conservative party that incumbents hold the greatest advantage over their non-incumbent colleagues. This suggests that the Conservatives are the most notable-driven of these cadre parties. Figure 4 also confirms that, despite its mass-organization structure, the NDP's *modus operandi* is really little different from the other parties in Ontario.

²⁰ See Carty, *Canadian Political Parties in the Constituencies*, *passim*.



The Political Ecology of Local Party Expenditures

The aggregate patterns identified above underscore a punctuated quality to party activity focused around the electoral cycle. They also illustrate the independent financial life of local party associations, as well as the significance of the amounts spent by local party associations during elections. This indicates that tracking local party spending can reveal much about the activity, strategy and bases of the parties and the party system. In this section, we identify patterns in the local ecology of party spending. Since election periods are clearly distinctive moments in the organizational and financial life of the parties, we utilize different dependent (financial) variables for election and non-election years. During elections, parties are focused on communicating with voters and so we measure local party spending in terms of the amount spent per elector for each of the three election years, 1987, 1990 and 1995. In the longer inter-election periods the kinds of internally-focused organizational maintenance activities parties engage in will be less sensitive to the population size of the riding, and for that reason we use unadjusted average annual spending figures for these years.

The general ecological model we specify is developed from hypotheses concerning the constituency foundations of a party's support. Since we know that a party's local income is an indicator of its level of support, we expect that a local party association's expenditures (which are very strongly correlated with receipts) will vary along with its overall level of support in the district. In other words, in specifying our model we understand that a party's ability to spend locally is, in large measure, a function of the level of support it enjoys locally. Specifically, we expect spending, our indicator of grassroots activity, to be higher in ridings where the party is locally popular as measured by the proportion of the vote it won at the prior election. Beyond this, since incumbents typically work to build strong local associations, and we know that their

associations have marked income advantages over associations without an incumbent (Figure 4), we expect that spending will regularly be higher in constituencies held by the party.

While most studies of voting behavior in Ontario rightly emphasize the comparative weakness of the socio-economic bases of party support, several cleavages do provide some structure to voter choice.²¹ The ethno-linguistic cleavage is one determinant of party support. Conservatives traditionally have drawn support from those of British backgrounds, while linguistic minorities and those of other ethnic backgrounds have supported Liberals. As a proxy for the presence of linguistic minorities in electoral districts, we include in our model a measure of the non-English speaking population in a riding (percentage non-English mother tongue). The second cleavage of relevance is social class and the voting choices that flow from the consequent economic inequalities. New Democrats have historically claimed to represent the organized working class and the less affluent. By contrast, both the Liberals and the Conservatives appeal to voters that are more affluent and of higher socio-economic status. Though these class dynamics are comparatively mute in Canada, we seek to capture the effects of complex social and economic inequalities through a parsimonious indicator based on a principal components (factor) analysis of the proportion of riding residents with university degrees, the proportion of managers, and average household incomes.²² The resulting socio-economic status (SES) factor scores for each riding are incorporated in our ecological model, with high scores representing higher status constituencies.²³

Tables 1 through 3 present the estimated parameters of these ecological models for local association spending in each of the Conservative, Liberal and New Democratic parties over the election and non-election periods of the decade. Electoral boundaries changed before the 1987 election, so that we do not have measures of prior vote or incumbency for that year and are thus limited to a partial model for that election in our tables. Looking first at the adjusted-R² figures, it is clear that our ecological models perform reasonably well in explaining constituency level variations in spending. The comparatively weak explanatory power for the 1987 equations in the case of all three parties, which lack both the prior vote and incumbency measures, provides strong evidence of the overwhelming power of political factors in shaping party activity patterns.

The results of these analyses point to several important features of each of the individual parties. First, it is clear that the Conservatives spend more in their electoral strongholds. Of the ten coefficients in Table 1 measuring the impact of political factors (party seat and prior electoral support), nine are significant and in the expected positive direction. Note that both the presence of a significant voter base and an incumbent matter, each making separate and distinctive contributions. With respect to the social foundations of the Conservative party's support, the significant positive coefficients for

²¹ Robert J., Drummond, "Voting Behavior: The Blueing of Ontario," in Donald C. MacDonald, ed., *Government and Politics of Ontario*, 1st edn. (Toronto, 1975), pp. 307-312.

²² The factor analysis yielded a single-factor solution: factor loadings for the variables are 0.883 for household incomes ('91), 0.903 for university degrees ('91), and 0.978 for managers ('86). The constituency level socio-economic data is from the transpositions of census data onto provincial electoral districts by the Department of Finance of the Government of Ontario, 1986 and 1991.

²³ Constituency-level data are from census data. Variables that might provide a measure of local economic conditions, such as unemployment rates, vary too much over the year to be included in these equations.

the SES factor scores in all the analyses (except that for the 1990 election) demonstrates that Tory spending is highest in more affluent, higher status ridings. As we expected, spending by a local Conservative party association is not significantly related to the presence of non-English speaking residents in the riding.

Table 1: Ecology of Local Party Spending — Ontario Conservatives, 1986-1996

Unstandardized OLS Coefficients (t-statistics)*

	1987 C\$ Per Elector	1988-89 Mean Annual Expenditure	1990 C\$ Per Elector	1991-94 Mean Annual Expenditure	1995 C\$ Per Elector	1996 Mean Annual Expenditure
Party seat		15,429.23 (4.14)	.78 (3.28)	11,135.99 (3.18)	-.23 (-1.05)	11,275.54 (2.00)
% Prior Vote		237.45 (1.96)	.03 (3.97)	425.26 (3.17)	.03 (3.75)	338.19 (1.68)
SES	.14 (2.09)	3,304.08 (3.21)	.02 (.25)	2,006.59 (1.91)	.13 (1.99)	6,342.61 (3.40)
% non- English	-.008 (-1.50)	28.23 (0.35)	-.008 (-1.49)	-8.92 (-1.10)	-.002 (-.39)	98.68 (.65)
Adj. R²	.032	.350	.435	.439	.272	.315

* Coefficients significant at the .05 level or better for a one-tailed test highlighted in bold face.

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Table 2: Ecology of Local Party Spending — Ontario Liberals, 1986-96

Unstandardized OLS Coefficients (t-statistics)*

	1987 C\$ Per Elector	1988-89 Mean Annual Expenditure	1990 \$ Per Elector	1991-94 Mean Annual Expenditure	1995 C\$ Per Elector	1996 Mean Annual Expenditure
Party seat		12,176.81 (2.49)	.75 (4.29)	6,856.01 (4.75)	.03 (.20)	8,581.52 (2.38)
% Prior Vote		448.89 (1.95)	-.02 (-1.77)	266.61 (3.20)	.004 (.38)	288.31 (1.99)
SES	.14 (2.06)	208.23 (.12)	-.03 (-.49)	-259.43 (-.52)	.03 (.59)	2,361.44 (2.38)
% non- English	.01 (2.29)	138.26 (1.10)	.02 (5.22)	-1.63 (-.04)	.02 (4.84)	30.41 (.37)
Adj. R²	.059	.183	.250	.428	.203	.272

* Coefficients significant at the .05 level or better for a one-tailed test highlighted in bold face.

Table 3: Ecology of Local Party Spending — Ontario NDP, 1986-96

Unstandardized OLS Coefficients (t-statistics)*

	1987 C\$ Per Elector	1988-89 Mean Annual Expenditure	1990 C\$ Per Elector	1991-94 Mean Annual Expenditure	1995 C\$ Per Elector	1996 Mean Annual Expenditure
Party seat		3,382.19 (.87)	-.02 (-.07)	5,396.49 (2.58)	.46 (2.97)	-320.39 (-.16)
% Prior Vote		776.32 (6.58)	.05 (8.02)	460.37 (5.34)	.04 (5.75)	602.31 (8.70)
SES	-.19 (-2.81)	4,309.58 (4.33)	.09 (1.60)	5097.82 (6.09)	.10 (1.56)	2,915.75 (5.02)
% non- English	.02 (4.45)	-46.96 (-.64)	.01 (2.37)	41.82 (.75)	.02 (4.61)	-65.30 (-1.58)
Adj. R²	.16	.493	.609	.439	.558	.497

* Coefficients significant at the .05 level or better for a one-tailed test highlighted in bold face.

Spending patterns of Liberal local associations (Table 2) also appear to be related to the political and socio-economic nature of their constituencies, although the range of variation in the adjusted-R² figures across the models (leaving aside the incomplete 1987 equations) is somewhat greater than it is for Conservatives. Similarly, there is more variation in the coefficients measuring the impact of the different variables in the model, evidence that there is less consistency to the structuring of local spending by Liberal party associations over time. As with the Conservatives, political success does make a difference to the party's activity patterns: Liberal associations spend more in areas of electoral strength and those where they have an incumbent. Curiously enough, however, this pattern seems attenuated during election years. There appears to have been no relationship between local spending and an existing political base in 1995, an election the Liberals were expected to win, but lost. More curious was Liberal behaviour in the 1990 debacle when their first majority government in several decades tumbled to an unexpected defeat at the polls. In 1990 spending per elector was actually lower in ridings where the party had been stronger in 1987 (*ceteris paribus*)! It seems that local Liberal associations were crumbling even as voters were abandoning the party's candidates. It is striking that the concentration of non-English speaking residents contributes positively to Liberal spending in all of the election years, but in none of the non-election year periods. This suggests that the party exploits its long-standing connections to these communities for vote mobilization purposes, but ignores them at other times. Taken together, these results provide a portrait of local Liberal riding associations that are less firmly rooted, in either their political or social environments, than their Conservative counterparts. The Liberals' grassroots base appears to have been in considerable flux over the period, and this undoubtedly accounts for some of the general volatility and governmental turnover across the three electoral cycles.

The same cannot be said for the NDP (Table 3). As one might expect of a more ideological and coherent party that seeks to represent a distinctive interest, and which formally maintains a mass-style organizational structure, the vitality of NDP local associations is more closely related to local environmental factors than is the case for either of its two cadre-style opponents. This is reflected in the adjusted-R² figures for

the ecological models that are higher than are those for the Liberals and Conservatives in each of our six periods. NDP local association spending activity largely tracks areas of pre-existing party electoral strength. The robust coefficients for prior vote imply that the NDP is organizationally vigorous where it is electorally strong. While the local associations of NDP incumbents are not generally more active than those in non-incumbent constituencies during inter-election periods, the one time their spending was significantly greater was when the party was in office after its surprise 1990 election victory. After 1995, when the NDP returned to opposition, incumbents' associations quickly surrendered that advantage. As a social democratic, labour party, we might expect local NDP spending to be negatively related to the socio-economic status of the electorate in the riding. While this may have been the case in 1987 (for which we have only the truncated model), the analysis reveals a more ambivalent pattern: there is no significant pattern during election years and NDP spending is actually higher in more affluent, higher status ridings between elections. This unexpected finding may simply reflect the relatively greater availability of local party funds in more affluent areas of the province. It might also be a function of the distinction between those who are able to contribute to the party (and hence make spending possible) and those who vote for it. Whatever the explanation, it implies that the decidedly decentralized character of party activity and spending makes it more difficult for the NDP to expand its base into those districts where it might expect to find a natural constituency.

The Electoral Impact of Local Party Associations' Spending

Using money as a measure of organizational vitality and strength, the preceding section demonstrated that variations in the activity of Ontario's constituency party life are related to immediate features of their local political and social context. The primary objective of all of these parties is the election of their members to political office. This leads us to ask to what extent does constituency-level electoral support for a party vary in relation to the ability of its local associations to spend during an election year? And then, recognizing that the other parties are also mounting campaigns, we ask: does a party's electoral fortune also vary as a function of the local spending of its rivals? Answering these questions requires adding measures of spending (per elector) for each party to the four variables used in the ecological models of local activity. In this second set of models the parties' local vote share now becomes the dependent variable and our guiding expectation for all parties is that their own spending will be positively related to their vote share, while the spending of competitors will normally diminish their electoral support.

This proves to be the case for the Ontario Conservatives (see Table 4). In each of the three elections, local party associations' spending significantly increased local Conservative vote shares. For the most part, spending by rival local party associations depressed Tory voting. This was consistently the impact of NDP spending and of Liberal spending in 1995, although Liberal spending apparently had no significant impact in either 1987 or 1990 when Conservative electoral fortunes were at their nadir. Over and above its relation to local party financing, both having won the seat in the past election and prior Conservative support also made a positive contribution to the party's electoral successes. Thus, even in a period characterized by extraordinary political change, the constituency foundations of the party system continued to exert a powerful stabilizing influence on electoral outcomes. Finally, the evidence reveals that electoral support for the Conservatives is also strongly conditioned by the social characteristics of riding environments. As might be expected, Tory support is consistently higher in high socio-economic status ridings. Furthermore, as revealed in

its general spending patterns, the electoral basis of the party is situated in its more homogeneously English-speaking districts.

Table 4: Local Campaign Spending and the Conservative Vote in Ontario

Unstandardized OLS Coefficients / (t-statistics)*

	1987	1990	1995
PC Spending (per elector)	6.69 (6.41)	2.29 (2.86)	2.49 (2.30)
Liberal Spending (per elector)	-28 (.27)	.57 (.74)	-3.04 (-2.70)
NDP Spending (per elector)	-4.61 (-4.61)	-4.05 (-5.83)	-2.24 (-2.49)
Party seat	na	8.49 (3.82)	5.84 (2.41)
Prior Vote	na	.17 (2.22)	.52 (4.48)
SES	1.62 (2.11)	3.61 (6.18)	1.44 (1.88)
% non-English	-.23 (-3.72)	-.21 (-4.26)	-.20 (-3.42)
Adj. R²	.526	.754	.763

* Coefficients significant at the .05 level or better for a one-tailed test highlighted in bold face.

Table 5: Local Campaign Spending and the Liberal Vote in Ontario

Unstandardized OLS Coefficients / (t-statistics)*

	1987	1990	1995
PC Spending (per elector)	-5.51 (-6.04)	-.82 (-1.30)	-3.07 (-3.70)
Liberal Spending (per elector)	2.70 (3.02)	.48 (.62)	2.15 (2.22)
NDP Spending (per elector)	-7.19 (-8.23)	-1.49 (-2.05)	.30 (.39)
Party seat	Na	6.22 (3.89)	9.77 (6.11)
Prior Vote	Na	.19 (2.53)	.51 (5.52)
SES	1.14 (1.70)	.71 (1.36)	-1.56 (-2.62)
% non-English	.19 (3.50)	.26 (5.56)	.03 (.52)
Adj. R²	.448	.581	.701

* Coefficients significant at the .05 level or better for a one-tailed test highlighted in bold face.

As with the portrait provided by local party expenditures, the vote mobilization story for the Liberals (see Table 5) is somewhat more complex than for that of the Conservatives. Local spending by the Liberals did increase its vote in two of the three elections (1987 and 1995), but there was no significant relationship between its own local campaign efforts and its vote in the party's 1990 electoral debacle. Apparently, the circumstances of that election, when the party's overall vote share dropped by 32 per cent (fifteen percentage points), were such that they overwhelmed the normal relationships of party spending and electoral response in the constituencies. Spending by competitors diminished Liberal support in all elections, but was particularly significant (if politically ineffective given the Liberal win) in 1987, when both its opponents were able to hurt it. In addition to the effects of local spending, Liberal success was consistently greater in seats that the party occupied from the previous election and in ridings where they had done well before. The social structure of the constituency also plays a role in shaping Liberal electoral outcomes. As hypothesized, the proportion of non-English speakers is positively associated with Liberal voting, although the relationship was not statistically significant in the 1995 election. The link between Liberal voting and constituency socio-economic status appears to have changed over the decade. Whereas in 1987 the Liberals drew support more heavily from affluent electoral districts, by 1995 that relationship was reversed. This picture supports our earlier impression that the Liberal party's shifting relationships with the grassroots contributed much to the volatility in the party system during the decade.

Table 6: Local Campaign Spending and the NDP Vote in Ontario

Unstandardized OLS Coefficients / (t-statistics)*

	1987	1990	1995
PC Spending (per elector)	-1.36 (-1.65)	-1.64 (-2.50)	.22 (.35)
Liberal Spending (per elector)	-1.98 (-2.43)	-1.38 (-1.72)	-.38 (-.51)
NDP Spending (per elector)	12.37 (15.64)	4.18 (4.29)	6.56 (9.10)
Party seat	Na	1.52 (.63)	5.40 (4.46)
Prior Vote	Na	.54 (6.08)	.14 (2.56)
SES	-2.71 (-4.46)	-1.83 (-3.09)	-1.50 (-3.17)
% non-English	.07 (1.43)	-.09 (-1.84)	.14 (3.87)
Adj. R²	.764	.801	.840

* Coefficients significant at the .05 level or better for a one-tailed test highlighted in bold face.

By contrast, it is the New Democrats' support that is most powerfully explained by our ecological model (Table 6). Local party spending was a particularly potent determinant of NDP support in the three elections: increases in constituency association spending significantly increased the party's proportion of the vote on each occasion. At the same time, spending by its two rival parties generally depressed the NDP vote, though not in 1995 when the party's unhappy record in government was enough to drive its vote

collapse. As with the other two parties, NDP support was clustered most heavily in seats previously won and in which the party had its highest levels of electoral support in the preceding election. Even after the impact of prior support and party spending was controlled for, the expected relationship between a constituency's low socio-economic standing and increased support for the NDP is evident. There was, however, no consistent relationship across the three elections between the concentration of non-English speakers and NDP support.

To investigate the extent to which the parties behave strategically during the electoral campaigns, or their attempts to engage in permanent campaigning, we reran the models including a measure of the marginality of the district and the party's spending during the previous inter-election period. Neither were significant nor added much to the explanatory power of the model. This suggests that local associations are so quiescent during inter-election periods that they must reestablish themselves for each new campaign. In so doing, they are driven more by their own situation than the competitive context of the immediate contest they face. Given the importance of these local campaigns (Figure 3) it is perhaps small wonder that Canadian election results are so volatile.

Despite the tumult in the provincial party system of Ontario over the decade of our study, this analysis indicates how deeply rooted the province's major political parties are in their local associations. Leadership changes, the rise and fall of party popularity, government successes and failures and other system-wide influences all surely play some part in explaining the high levels of electoral volatility, but they cannot account for the significant intra-party variations in financing and electoral support that we have documented. Those realities explain much of the persistence of the parties even in a period of extraordinary volatility and change in the party system as a whole, and point to the impact of local constituency environments in structuring electoral mobilization.

Conclusion

The picture of Canadian party life that emerges here is one of organizations firmly grounded in the geographic units of the electoral system. At the grassroots, party organizations clearly respond to the powerful rhythms of the electoral cycle. Of course, this reflects their primary objective, which is to attract votes and win seats. While important organizational and strategic operations extend into the inter-election period, local associations of all parties in the system subsist in a political world that is characterized by periods of relative quiescence punctuated by short bursts of intense mobilization during election campaigns. Understanding the constituency-level continuities in the organizational lives of these parties underscores the stabilizing effect that the grassroots politics can exert, even in a period that is remarkable for the extent of aggregate political change. Of the three parties in the Ontario system, the Liberals appear to have experienced the greatest instability and change over the over the decade, while the roots of the other two parties seem to have been more consistent and enduring.

We have explored both the electoral and non-electoral phases of organizational life through the lens provided by the record of local party finances. In both contexts, patterns in party financing and electoral mobilization are clearly related to aspects of the socio-economic, ethno-linguistic, and political environments in which the parties are embedded. It is also clear that, in single-member electoral systems, the presence of an incumbent has a direct, positive impact on a party's local existence and resources. Moreover, beyond the influences attributable to these contextual features, it seems evident that the financial health and capacity of local party associations has a

measurable and significant impact on a party's local electoral fortunes. Even within the framework of province-wide election campaigns centred on party leaders defending or attacking a government's record, local parties can win votes by spending more. Money matters for grassroots political organizations and their electoral success. Understanding how and why it does opens another window on the forces of stability and change that mark a dynamic party system.