

Senate Occasional Lecture Series 2012

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16 March 2012

Minority parliaments are interesting and when I get the chance to talk, not only about parliament but also about Canada, I never turn that opportunity down. I do hope you enjoy today's lecture.

When I was preparing this lecture, I was struck by a Charles Dickens passage. He begins *A Tale of Two Cities* with 'it was the best of times and it was the worst of times' and it occurs to me that he could have been talking about minority parliaments. Canadian minority parliaments are particularly illustrative of this. We have had some of our best public policy—universal health care comes out of a minority parliament—and we have had some of our most divisive debates in Canada as well—the flag debate comes to mind—and most recently the three minority parliaments that we will talk about today have been particularly contentious and difficult to manage.

I am going to try to answer three questions today:

1. What are some of the major themes that emerge from Canada's most recent period of minority parliaments?;
2. What lessons can Australia learn from our foibles and indeed experiences?; and
3. What is so bad about minority parliament?

In the effort to give away the story early on, the short answer is 'nothing'.

A bit of context, I always find, is helpful, particularly when we talk about Canada. The Liberal Party of Canada is in the middle, the Conservative Party of Canada is on the right and the New Democratic Party of Canada (NDP) is on the left. There is a fourth major party known as the Bloc Québécois (Bloc) and they want to break the country apart.

Canada's electoral system is a plurality system which means you basically have to get more votes than the other guy but not necessarily a majority to win your

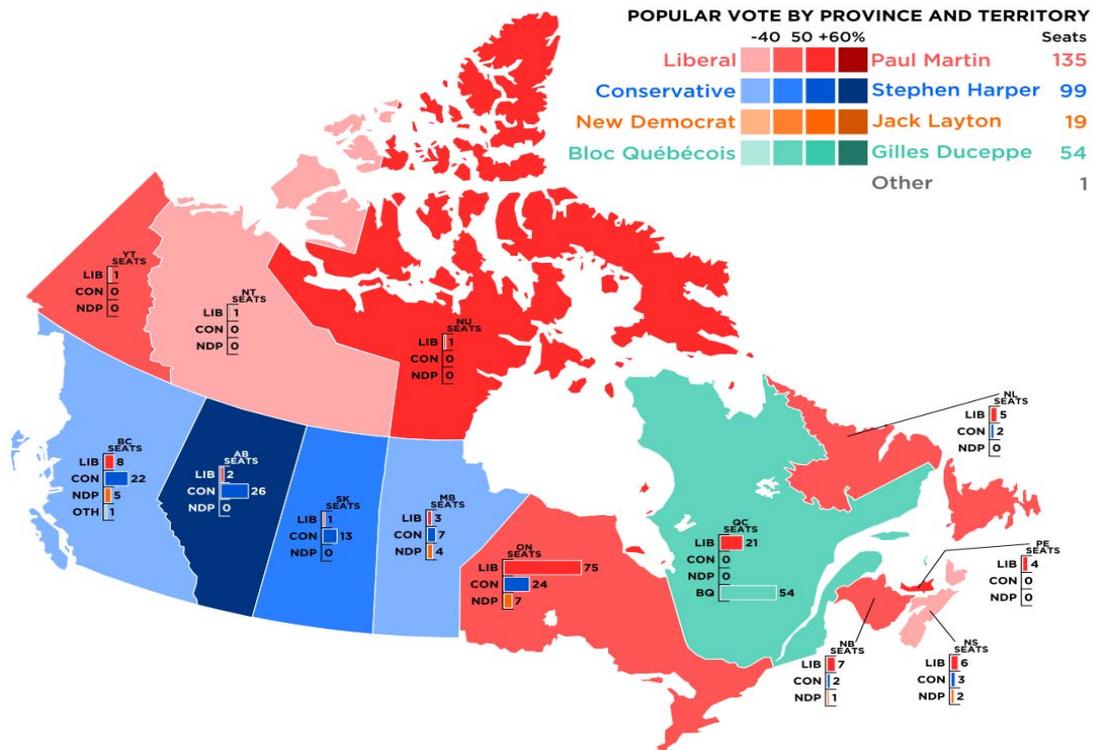
seat. Unlike Australia there is no compulsory voting. Voter turnout in the last federal election was somewhere between 60 per cent and 65 per cent and that is a constant source of angst for Canadian political scientists.

We have had minority parliaments by what I call the baker's dozen, thirteen up to and including the 2008 election, and you can sort of divide them into three distinct time periods which I find particularly helpful: 1921 to 1930, 1957 to 1979 and the 2004 to 2011 period. The average length of a Canadian minority parliament is 18 months. Some go a little longer, and some go substantially shorter. Joe Clark, former Prime Minister, can tell you how much shorter.

There they are, bouncing back and forth between Liberals and Conservatives, the two governing parties as we understand them. Liberals are by far more successful in the Canadian context than are Conservatives. For the purposes of today we are interested in the Martin Liberal minority parliament (2004–06) and the back-to-back Harper Conservative minority parliaments (2006–08, 2008–11).

2004 election

The 2004 election was a moment of remarkable change in Canadian electoral history. I have entitled this the beginning of the Liberal decline, which is probably more overwrought than it needs to be, but it is also useful in all sorts of ways. After a period of almost 16 years in majority government territory, basically uninterrupted since 1988, the Liberals were reduced to minority parliament status. The real story, however, and we will come back to this as an emerging theme, is the declining dominance of the Liberal Party in cities, particularly eastern cities, east of western Canada, which is the remarkably blue bit on the 2004 election map. It is also an electoral landscape change; it is the first election with a newly formed and unified Conservative Party of Canada. For the period of 1993 until 2004 we had two right-of-centre parties who split the vote in all kinds of ways and allowed Liberal Party dominance simply to come up the middle. Stephen Harper, the current Prime Minister, rejoins the parties together and he successfully fights his first election and does remarkably well.



2004 election. Image source: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7e/Canada_2004_Federal_Election.svg

38th Parliament

Some highlights of the 38th Parliament. For the first time in a long time Canada returned back to minority parliament status. In part, and this is certainly a theme that you find going back through history, minority parliaments chase scandal and most recently the biggest scandal was the sponsorship scandal in Canada. The sponsorship scandal stems out of a policy to celebrate Canadianism, particularly in the province of Quebec in the aftermath of the 1995 referendum.

As some of you know, in the 1995 referendum on the independence of Quebec Canadians came dangerously close to breaking apart their country; somewhere in the neighbourhood of 55 000 votes short, which is remarkable. Prime Minister Jean Chrétien at the time passed a law which funnelled money into a system that says we should celebrate 'Canadian'. So you could dial a 1800 number, a toll-free number, for example, and they would send you a Canadian flag free of charge. This was particularly useful and targeted at the province of Quebec to show that Canada loved them and wanted them to stay. It is the quintessential Canadian group hug, as a good colleague of mine calls it.

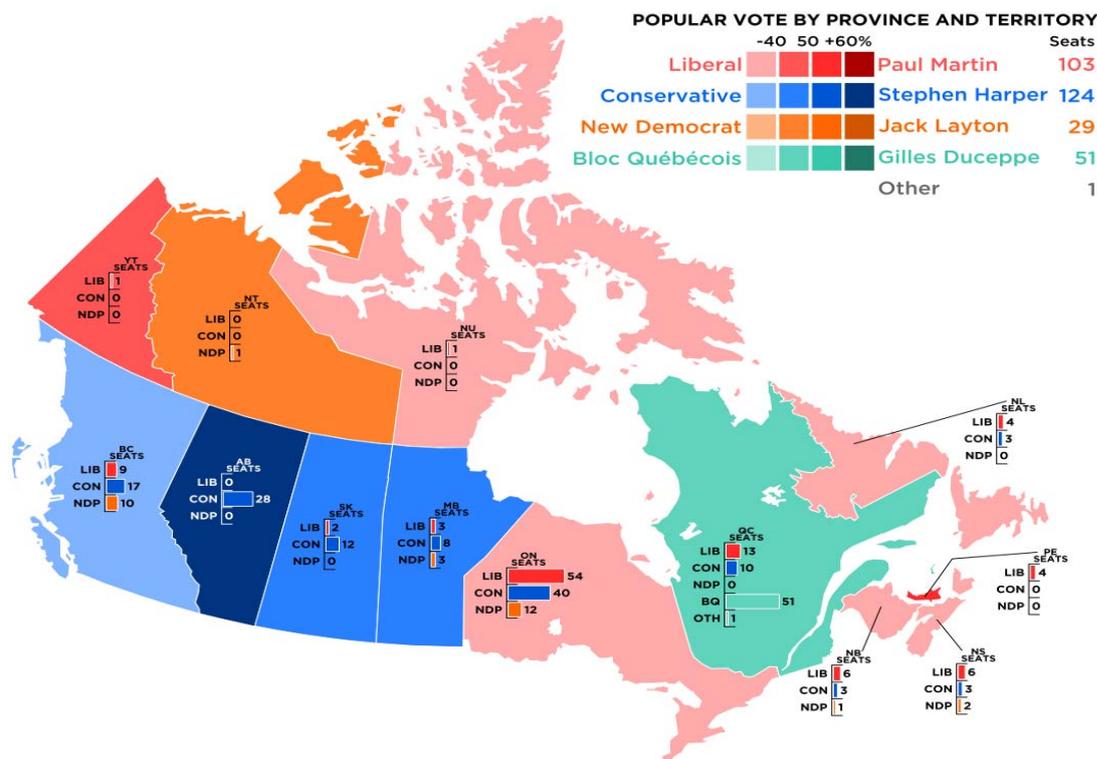
Interestingly, when you funnel large sums of money into a particular program with very little oversight, as it turns out, money happens to funnel in interesting ways. Not least of which was brown paper envelopes back to the Liberal Party of Canada. Indeed most of the sponsorship money or certainly some of the sponsorship money went to Liberal Party friendly advertisers who again came back with the brown paper envelopes under the table. It was the closest to mafia politics that we will ever get in Canada.

So the sponsorship scandal hangs over the Martin Government like a pall, as political scientist Peter Russell called it, and indeed even before the 38th Parliament sits, the opposition leaders including Stephen Harper, Gilles Duceppe and Jack Layton call on the Governor-General to consider all of her options before handing the keys of power to Paul Martin. And indeed, a mere six months into the 38th Parliament we have the motion of confidence that I have called 'that really wasn't'. It was a procedural point that defeated the government 153 to 150 on the floor of the House and generally when the government is defeated on what was deemed early on to be a confidence measure, the government is supposed to resign, at least that is how I teach responsible government.

Turns out that is not how Prime Minister Martin was taught responsible government and he appealed to the Speaker, Peter Milliken, who went 'oh well, it wasn't really a real confidence measure, it was merely on a vote on procedure and we can ignore it'. Six months after that, their first budget comes down to a 152 to 152 tie with independents holding the balance of power. Again we call on the Speaker, Mr Milliken, to break a tie and as precedent dictates the Speaker votes to keep debate open and on the floor so the budget passes second reading. Interestingly, and this is for the historians in the room, this is the first time in Canadian history that the Speaker has ever cast a deciding vote on a confidence measure. We go merrily along, the Gomery Commission (Commission of Inquiry into the Sponsorship Program and Advertising Activities) reports and eventually they get to the point where the Martin Government can no longer carry on. The findings of the Gomery report, the fallout from the sponsorship scandal are scathing and we go to an election.

2006 election

In the 2006 election, something new happens. For the first time in 18 years we get a conservative minority. If you recall back to the 2004 map, that looks remarkably similar to the 2006 map, you will notice that we have gone from very dark red in Ontario and the east to a light pink colour which is indicative of the declining support of the Liberal Party. I have entitled this map the rise of the Conservative Party which is probably again more over dramatic than it needs to be but it is a pithy title.



2006 election. Image source: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/20/Canada_2006_Federal_Election.svg

Prime Minister Paul Martin resigns from the Liberal leadership on the night of the election when he is not soundly defeated, but certainly defeated, and decides to go and sit on the backbench which is again unusual. Most prime ministers or most leaders, once they resign, don't resign to the backbench, they just leave parliament altogether. This leaves the opposition parties, particularly the Liberal Party, in remarkable disarray. Paul Martin had spent the better part of 18 years trying to become Liberal leader and he gets his shot at the reins of power and in fact it goes terribly amiss, he lost the 2006 election.

39th Parliament

Some 39th Parliament highlights. The conservatives come to power in the first time in 18 years in the resulting election of Liberal leader through the semi-presidential style that Canadians have. Stéphane Dion becomes Liberal leader. Stéphane Dion is a known quantity. He is a former Minister of the Federation, he is also former Environment Minister but Canadians I think—and I speak for Canadians as a whole as of right now—Canadians I think went ... Stéphane who? This was in part because Stéphane Dion was everybody's second choice. The battle between Bob Rae, former NDP Premier of Ontario, and Michael Ignatieff split the Liberal Party and allowed Stéphane Dion to come up the middle.

Now Stéphane Dion was not, as it turns out, a particularly effective leader and part of this was framing done by the Conservative Party of Canada. Before I think the ink dried on the contract to take the leadership of the Liberal Party, a scathing series of attack ads were unleashed by the Conservative Party of Canada and we will come back to this notion of the permanent campaign in a minute. The scathing attack ads basically said, you are not a leader and they ran a sound bite which was, if you are trying to attack a party leader, absolutely priceless. The sound bite was during a Liberal leadership debate and Stéphane Dion was standing with his hands on his hips and he says 'Do you think it is easy to make priorities?' His chief rival, Michael Ignatieff, said 'you didn't get it done' and that became a continuing theme through the 39th Parliament.

Again we have the Speaker come into play and I think one of the interesting things that emerge from the Canadian experience is how important a role parliamentary officers and the Governor-General can actually play in a minority parliament. This is back-to-back minority parliaments and again we will see another one where the Speaker plays a very important role in determining the rules.

A Liberal backbencher introduced a motion that required the new Conservative government not only to implement but recognise the Kyoto accord and by extension implement the Kyoto accord and spend money. Again, if I go back to the way I teach responsible government, when I checked the only one that

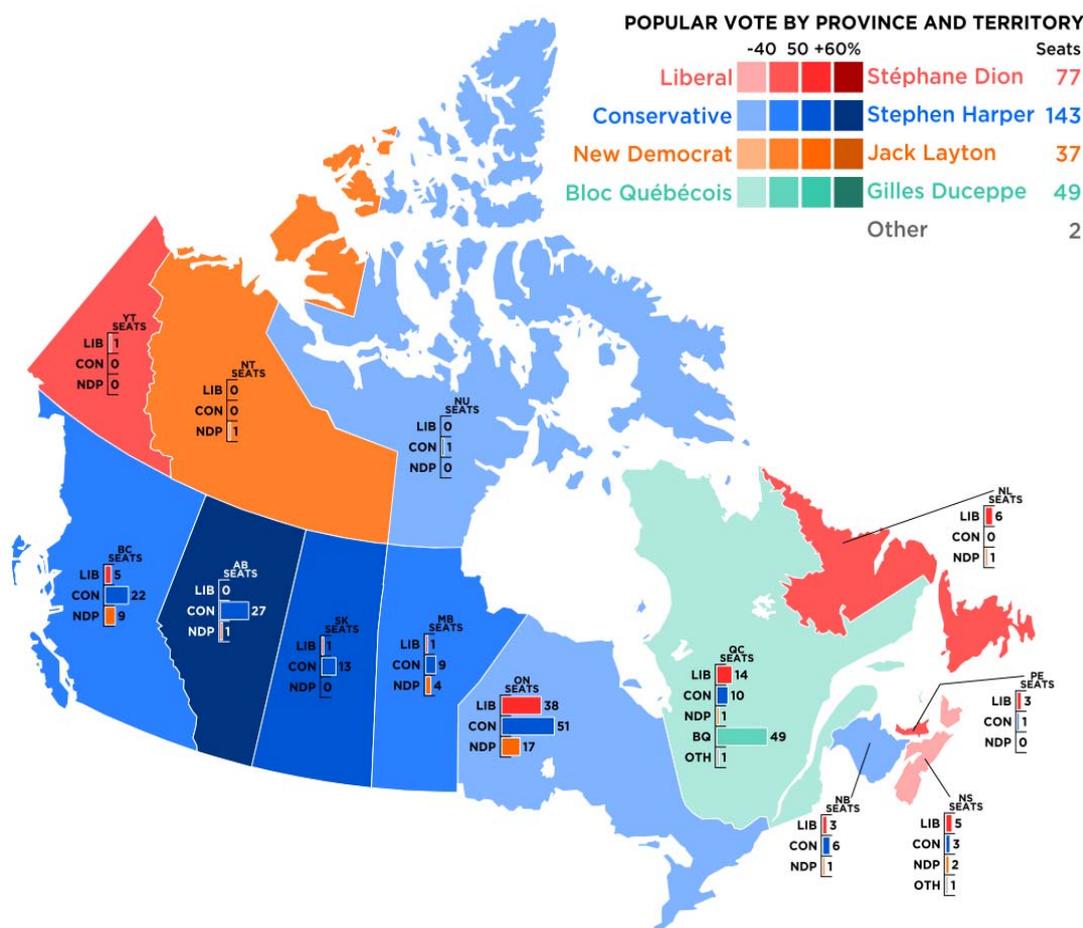
could spend money was the Executive and a Liberal backbencher was certainly not in the Executive. The government challenges the law requiring them to implement and respect the Kyoto accord and Prime Minister Stephen Harper stands up and goes 'wait a minute, we are going to challenge this on a point of order, you cannot compel us to spend money'. Clearly he read the same text books I did on responsible government. The Speaker, Peter Milliken, says 'well no, it is not really compelling you to spend money because it is just saying that you need to meet your obligations but we don't compel you to spend money in any kind of meaningful way'. So the Conservatives lost the challenge.

We go merrily along for awhile and just before Parliament is set to resume the Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, calls all of his opposition leader colleagues—and I use colleagues very loosely in this term—to 24 Sussex Drive, which is the official residence of the Prime Minister, and basically asks them directly, as opposed to on the floor of the House, do I have your confidence? Each of the leaders, Stéphane Dion, the NDP Leader Jack Layton and the Liberal Leader Gilles Duceppe and remarkably—and as a political scientist I was very surprised by this—they turned up and went 'no, I don't think we do'. Remarkably again for me, the Prime Minister emerges from 24 Sussex with a very solemn face and says 'I no longer have the confidence on the floor of the House'. Really? We didn't actually have a vote but he toddles off to the Governor-General and the writs are dropped.

In the process, interestingly, Stephen Harper violates his own fixed election law date. He came to power in 2006 saying 'we need to clean up government, we are going to run an open and transparent and clean government' and part of this was fixed election dates. 'We should take the power to call elections out of the hands of the Prime Minister and put it in the hands of Parliament only to go to a specific date, provided I have the confidence on the floor of the House'—which is how he got around it. So interestingly, instead of 'I promise to run an open and transparent and clean government', well 'the three guys that I meet with don't like me very much, so we are going to go and have another election'.

2008 election

This brings me to the 2008 election. Again from the 2004, 2006 to 2008 election maps we see basically all of the red disappear. There is a little bit of pink and you can explain away the outlier of Newfoundland due to the fact that the Premier of Newfoundland, Danny Williams, and Stephen Harper, the Prime Minister, were feuding over offshore oil and gas royalties. Newfoundland, which was of the same political stripe as the Prime Minister (both Conservatives), ran an 'ABC campaign': Anything But Conservative, meaning, I don't care who you vote for as long as it is not Steven Harper. This may explain the six Liberal members from Newfoundland. I have entitled this map Conservatives in control and we thought we were in a perpetual period of minority parliament and it turns out that political scientists really are bad at prediction because three years later we were back in majority parliament territory.



2008 election. Image source: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/72/Canada_2008_Federal_Election.svg

Stéphane Dion resigns the night of the election and he toddles off to the backbenches so there seems to be a recurring pattern here. Michael Ignatieff becomes the new Liberal leader, or interim Liberal leader who becomes permanent Liberal leader later on. Again like Stéphane Dion, the Conservatives paint him as a remarkable individual but his tag line is 'He is only just visiting'. Michael Ignatieff was a former Harvard professor, who spent his time globetrotting the world reporting on current events. He only comes back to Canada, according to the Conservative Party, to become leader because he thinks he has this given right to become Prime Minister. He didn't toil away like all of the good Liberals; he just turns up and becomes the Prime Minister. Again the Conservative Party machine is really good at setting the debate and choosing the agenda.

40th Parliament

Early in the 40th Parliament we have what is known as a parliamentary crisis. Despite what some of my fellow commentators would say it was not a constitutional crisis, these things happen in parliamentary democracies all the time. In late 2008 in a budget update the Finance Minister stood up and said 'we are going to end public subsidies to political parties'. Now that strikes me as an odd place to put such an update. It was sort of an economic update, it wasn't a full budget and as you can imagine the opposition parties, who basically lived off the public subsidy, were particularly upset about this. So there were backroom meetings and power brokers from the big parties, Jean Chrétien, stalwart in the Liberal Party and former Prime Minister, Ed Broadbent, a stalwart in the NDP party and propped up by the separatist Gilles Duceppe and the Bloc Québécois (which was an interesting dynamic to see on TV) basically said at our next opportunity we are going to introduce a motion of no confidence during opposition days and defeat the government.

Now there is a lesson here and the lesson is don't go on national television and announce your plans to the Prime Minister. Particularly because the Prime Minister is ruthless, like I suspect most good prime ministers are at least in terms of a party sense. The Prime Minister says 'OK, we are going to push back your opposition day by a week and we are also going to delay', because they were probably going to lose the vote on the economic update and he wanders off to Rideau Hall, home of the Governor-General. For two hours Canadians

were glued to the TV watching the front door of Rideau Hall. The door would open, people would be excited and some embarrassed-looking security guard would just go 'sorry' and close the door.

Finally after two hours the Prime Minister emerged and he said 'time out', I have asked the Governor-General to prorogue parliament and the Governor-General has agreed and we are all going to go away and reset and come back with a new throne speech—a mere two months after the last throne speech—and just play along. Eventually, after a remarkably rocky start to the 40th Parliament things roll merrily along, in fact it becomes the longest minority parliament in Canadian history.

But the end of the 40th Parliament is just as interesting as the beginning of the minority parliament and again we come back to the Speaker. Same Speaker, Peter Milliken, in his chair. It was requested that the government produce full costing on F-35 fighter jets, the same ones Australians are waiting for. The government goes 'that is national security and we can't let that go', so they appeal to the Speaker and the Speaker says 'Parliament has a right to see this, you should probably let them. But I am going to delay for two weeks and I'm going to allow the adults in the room, the House leaders, to come up with an agreement that makes everybody happy'.

Shockingly, the House leaders couldn't come to an agreement. They go back to the floor of the Parliament, a ruling is put forth, and the Speaker says 'Mr Prime Minister, you and your entire government are in contempt of parliament'. Flick it off to the Procedures Committee; the committee says 'Yes indeed you are in contempt of parliament'. They come back, we have a motion, it is a very simple motion, due to the contempt of parliament charge the Parliament of Canada no longer has confidence in the Prime Minister and he loses.

Why is this interesting? It was the first time ever in Westminster parliamentary tradition that a government was defeated on a contempt of parliament charge. The British didn't do it, Australians haven't done it, and Canadians haven't done it in the entire Westminster tradition ever. What do Canadians do as a result? Well we go and elect in 2011 a 166-seat majority for the Conservative Party of Canada, the same one that had offended Parliament's deep

sensibilities a mere 36 days earlier. So after four elections in seven years, majority parliament had returned to Canada with a substantial majority, 11 seats clear of what was needed for majority parliament.

Lessons for Australia

So what lessons can be learned by Australians and Canadians in conjunction with minority parliaments? I think the first lesson and the most important lesson perhaps is a question of leadership. Minority parliaments work very well when you have clear, manageable targets. Now it doesn't matter where you find clear manageable targets. If they are in the election campaign, that would be good, but if they make them up out of thin air that is OK too.

A great example is the Accountability Act in 2006 with Prime Minister Harper. He came to power saying he wanted clean, accountable, transparent democracy. And part of this was this big omnibus bill that did all of these things: better reporting, better management of data and tough on crime. When they were on point, they did pretty well. When they run out of stuff to do, usually after 18 months in the Canadian case, is when minority parliaments tend to fall apart because they need to find something new to do and they are not really good at that because they think they have been defeated already.

The second question of leadership is to learn how to manage the House, to make sure you get your ducks in a row. Which is important in all parliaments, don't get me wrong, but it is particularly important if one of your informal coalition partners or someone you are expecting to prop you up, breaks ranks and votes against you. So there is always the surprise factor and it is really important to have a strong House leader.

Finally I think on the question of leadership, you need to set and control the agenda. By setting the agenda you frame the debate in terms that you can win with. So, faced with a new opposition leader, you frame that opposition leader in the public's eye. Stéphane Dion never recovered from 'It's not easy to make priorities'. Michael Ignatieff never recovered from the question of 'well, he's just visiting'. And you also need to find your advantage. The Conservative Party is very good at fundraising and election campaigns. It has become the big blue machine which has replaced the old Liberal big red machine.

The most successful political party in the world was the Liberal Party of Canada and it has fallen into disarray and been replaced with the Conservative Party of Canada. You target your opponent, you raise money better than anybody else and you run election campaigns that are as tight as anything. No one speaks off message without the permission of the Prime Minister and no one gets permission to speak off message.

I think another lesson that is more transferrable, and certainly we are seeing it in Australia, is this notion of the permanent campaign. It is said in Canada that the art, as we call it, of minority parliaments is 'engineering defeat on the most favourable of terms' and we have seen that to a large extent. If you can get defeated on a motion of no confidence or indeed after tea at 24 Sussex, then that's a win for the Prime Minister because he or she starts on the lead foot.

But more importantly, or perhaps more interestingly, it also keeps parties in what a colleague called 'hostile campaign mode'. We stop being conciliatory. We stop trying to make parliament work. Rather we focus on leadership and framing the debate so we can control it, just like we would see in an election campaign. Part and parcel of this is the public subsidies of parties. In the Canadian context until very recently, where it has been phased out, for every vote that a party got they received \$1.75, amortised for inflation, for the four years that they were in opposition. So if you got a million votes you would receive \$1.75 x 1 million x 4 years and that provides a powerful war chest for parties to play with in the interim election period. What this does, however, and particularly when you have a public subsidy, is this limits the need for party members and activists. You can sideline party members, you can sideline party activists because you don't need them for fundraising.

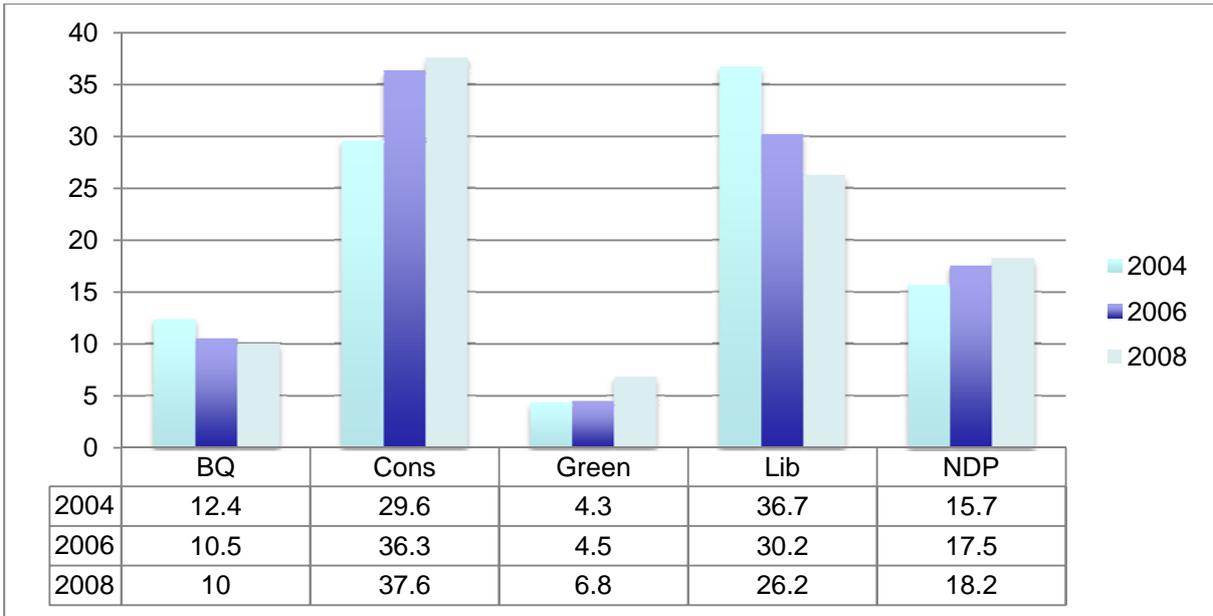
The Conservative Party figured out early on in this public subsidy debate that if they could get close to their party members and party activists and raise money—which they were very good at and we will come to that again in a minute—then they would be way ahead of the Opposition. They would be in a position to cripple the Opposition when they introduce the reduction of subsidies during the parliamentary crisis or indeed when they actually succeed in phasing out the public subsidy when they come to power in 2011. The other bit about the permanent campaign is that it distracts from the House business, so you can just sort of govern like you have a majority because you can focus

the debate somewhere else. For a prime minister who is in a weak position that is a useful tactic to use.

I think one of the lessons that Canadians learned from Australians is the importance of marginal seats. For the Conservative Party there was limited room for growth. They were very strong in the west and we saw on all three of those maps that the west was a deep dark blue. They were weak in the east and sort of marginal in the cities, but on that very first map in 2004, Ontario—the big middle bit—was a deep dark red and that is where the Liberal Party base really was. They claim they were a national party and they certainly got national votes but what really happened was that they won 103 out of 103 seats in Ontario. That is a good shot in the arm for a 155-seat majority.

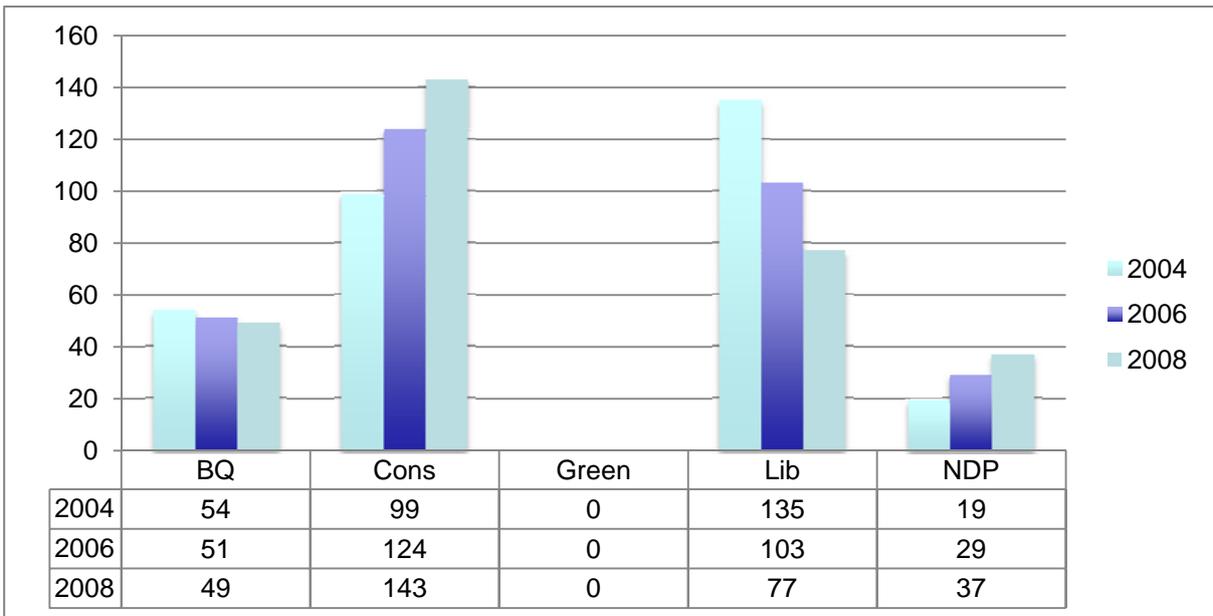
The Conservative Party is weak but there is room for growth outside basically Toronto—the 905 area code, the suburbans, all the rest of the cities—and we see this by the time we get to 2008 that they actually make up real ground in suburban Ontario. In the Liberal Party, also known as the natural governing party, we see a declining support base. They were never very strong in the west after the Pierre Trudeau era. They were strong in cities and they were declining in the east. This is compounded across four elections where the entire support base falls apart. The Liberals are now the third party behind the Conservative Party of Canada, the government and the Democratic Party who had never come close to opposition status in the past.

Let's look at this a little bit closer. In party votes since 2004 you will see that the Bloc Québécois, which is the separatist party here on the left, their vote share is declining slightly. This is a bit misleading because the Bloc only runs candidates in Quebec, so they are a national party. It is amortised across but it is misleading slightly. You see the Conservative Party; they certainly grow their party vote. The Green Party vote grows slightly and the Liberal Party declines slightly, so the combination of the slight decline in the Bloc and the bigger decline in the Liberals plus the Liberals having bled off votes to the left results in the new election dynamic that we have seen.



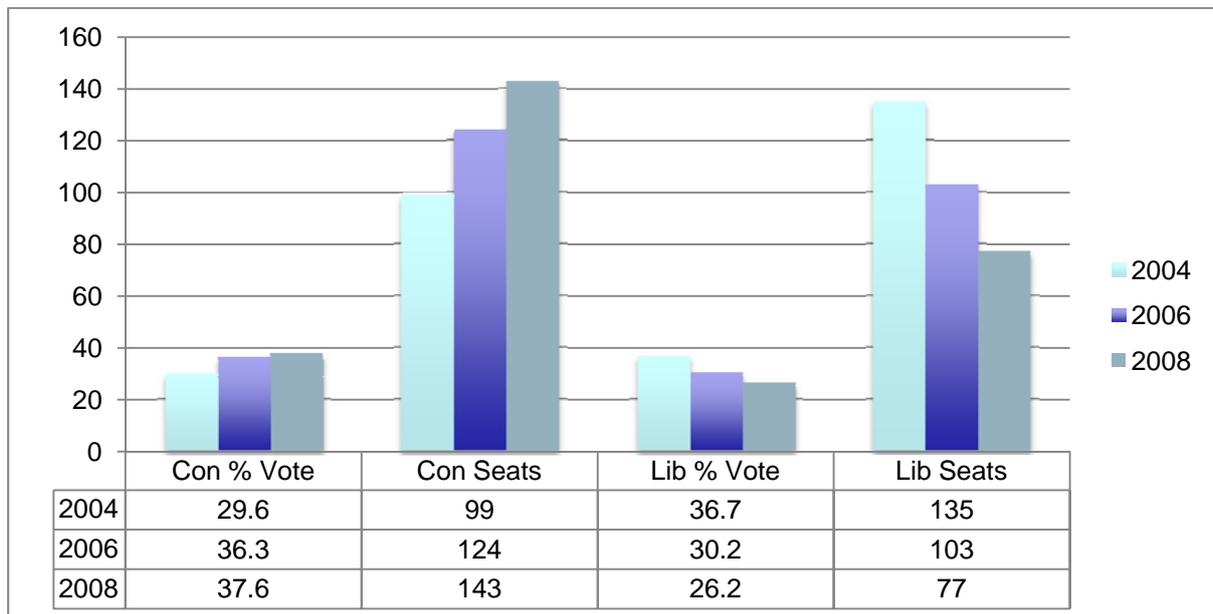
Party vote since 2004

But keep this in mind when we look at the federal seats won since 2004. A slight decline in the Bloc and the Bloc falls off in 2011. Increase remarkably for the Conservative Party with only a small increase in vote share. Precipitous decline by the Liberal Party with only a small decline in vote share. If I put up the majority government from 2011 election you would see that basically the Liberal Party fall off the map, the NDP skyrocket and the Bloc basically disappears and the Greens would have one seat.



Federal seats won since 2004.

So if we put those two things together, I think it becomes even more stark. Small increases in vote share, 8 per cent by the Conservative Party over four years, and eventually over time you end up with 44 extra seats, which is stark.



A closer look: votes/seats

The Liberal Party is the flip side of that of course and their vote share declined by a slightly larger margin of 10.5 per cent in part because the NDP keep bleeding off support to the left. But their vote share fell 38 seats, so I mean it is stark when you put it into those terms. Very small increases in vote share because you focus on marginal seats results in remarkable seat projections.

Finally, I think the lesson we have to learn is beware the floor crosser. And there are two examples I would like to give and this is really interesting in the Australian context because in a minority parliament situation, particularly in a minority parliament as close as Australia is, you have to offer incentives for someone to join your team or at least support your team. In 2004 Belinda Stronach crossed the floor from the Conservative Party to join the Liberal cabinet. She was the first runner up behind Stephen Harper for the leadership of the new Conservative Party and the only reason it is suggested that she crossed the floor, even if that was probably closer to her ideological home, was that she was promised the Human Resources Development portfolio which was huge, with something like a \$2.4 billion annual budget.

More interesting for me, because I am a political scientist, was the David Emerson floor crossing. David Emerson was hand selected by Prime Minister Paul Martin in the 2004 election in Vancouver because he needed a strong business person to run for his cabinet. Emerson gets elected to cabinet as a Liberal in 2004, they go back to an election and he runs in the Vancouver Kingsway electoral district again as a Liberal in 2006, never sits as a Liberal, crosses the floor, joins the Conservative Party and becomes Foreign Affairs Minister in the new Conservative cabinet. To which his response was, 'I ran for parliament to be a cabinet minister. I thought at the time the Liberals had the best chance of allowing me to do so. I was wrong, now the Conservative Party has the best chance for me to do so'. So beware the floor crosser because there is a certain amount self interest in all of this.

So the big finale, what is so bad about a minority parliament? After almost 40 minutes I think the answer is nothing. Minority parliament is simply a different managing mechanism. It is difficult for Australians and Canadians and indeed the British to understand because it happens so rarely but really managing competing interests and trying to find winning coalitions is how parliamentary government works in basically the rest of the world. The one sort of negative that I can find about minority parliament is the short-term focus that all of the parties have, including the government. The focus in the Australian sense is not two to three years or four to five years in the Canadian Parliament but really two to three months and perhaps more cynically two to three weeks or two to three days. What does the next poll tell us?

Again, that is not necessarily negative and I don't want to attach a normative response to it, but it is a different way of managing parliamentary systems. Really, I think Australians and Canadians should look to comparative examples and we are sitting in one now. There is a history of cooperation in chambers lacking a majority party. The Australian Senate provides a great example of how to work that coalition to make sure things are successful and dare I say the Australian states also provide a very useful examination. Thank you.

Questions

Question — You presented a theme of the rise over the last ten years of the Conservatives and the decline of Liberals. Has this phenomena been reflected in the elections of the provincial assemblies?

Andrew Banfield — No, it warms my heart to no end to know that federalism actually works. When the Liberal Party is in charge, Conservative parties dominate provincial legislatures. With the Conservative Party coming to power, Liberal parties have begun to dominate provincial legislatures. Proof that not only federalism works—and there is a check off between central and state or central and provincial—but also that Canadians, I think, and again I am speaking on behalf of all Canadians, are smart enough to go ‘hmm maybe we don’t want everybody in charge’. We saw a similar phenomenon during the Howard reign when state Labor parties came to power.

Question — I was intrigued when Mr Emerson decided to cross the floor to become the cabinet minister. What was the public reaction to that?

Andrew Banfield — If I recall, the general public reaction was moral outrage. Whether that was genuine or faux I’m not entirely sure and it lasted for a couple of weeks until we sent Mr Emerson overseas and he was out of sight and out of mind. I think parliamentary watchers and political scientists like me paid much more attention to the Emerson floor cross than the average Canadian.

Question — I was very interested to hear your remarks about the role played by the Speaker especially during that decade after 2000. Could you describe his background and any other interesting facets of his character and behaviour?

Andrew Banfield — That is slightly loaded isn’t it? Peter Milliken was a Liberal Party Member for Kingston and the Islands. Kingston is a small city. Milliken is a long-term party member and I believe his father was MP for Kingston and the Islands as well and he is the only person who I have ever read about, heard about or met that grew up dreaming and wanting to be the Speaker. He is the most well-versed individual on parliamentary practice that I have certainly come across. He lived, breathed and embodied the role of Speaker down to

the house in the Gatineau Hills and he actually lived in the little apartment given to the Speaker at Parliament.

On parliamentary tradition and parliamentary procedure he was spot on with an encyclopedic memory. It was remarkable. In the House—and this is clearly my view not anyone else’s view—he left a little bit to be desired in terms of Speaker. He let the rabble get a little too loud for my liking and occasionally I would have liked him to go ‘Shoo’ but he never did that. So if I have one complaint about Peter Milliken it is his laid-back nature.

Question — How was Peter Milliken able to secure the Speakership across both governments?

Andrew Banfield — For the Liberal Government it was really easy. He was one of the few who actually ran for it. For the Conservative Government it was pure strategy: take him out of the voting benches and put him in the Speaker’s chair. Plus you need a steadying hand as we saw he played a very important role across all three of the minority parliaments and it is nice to have a steady hand on the tiller but don’t downplay the strategy move to take him off the cross-bench.

Question — You talked a bit about the importance of being able to set clear and manageable targets that you can then go ahead as a government to achieve. Do you have any thoughts about how you actually go about setting that agenda and setting those targets in the context of a minority government where the government is dealing with a number of different agendas?

Andrew Banfield — I think it is really important to have a clear set of policy goals at the beginning whether those policy goals appear from the policy conference or from the election platform. It doesn’t really matter but they have to be written down somewhere so you can fall behind them as a shield. I think the other part is that you have to be a little bit flexible on what your goals are. So if your goal is X and your opponent’s goal is B then maybe the least offensive position is Q and you can bring in one of the minor parties. So there has to be some flexibility built into it but you need to speak with one voice, saying this is what we want to do and we might not be able to do it in this Parliament but if we can get half way there then we are more than half way home when we get to be in charge. I think that is the advice I have.

Question — It is not compulsory voting in Canada; we do have it in Australia. Can you indicate the change in party support in Canada with a change in the number of people or percentage of people who cast a vote?

Andrew Banfield — ‘No’ is the short answer. When voter turnout federally was 75 per cent or 80 per cent the Liberal Party won. When voter turnout was 60 per cent the Liberal Party still won. I suspect if the voter turnout turns down to be 50 per cent the Liberal Party will win again. I think it is tenuous to draw a bright white line between voter turnout and party change. There is some interesting work being done at my Alma Mater at the University of Calgary that says even non-voters—and it turns out that non-voters are also non-survey-filler-outerers—are generally happy, at least in the Alberta context with the governing party and voter turnout in Alberta is appalling with somewhere around 50 per cent. But the governing party is closest to the median voter on all issues except government intervention, I think. ‘I don’t have a good answer’ is the short answer.

Question — In the context of minority government, comparing Australia and Canada, would you comment on the role of the upper house in both countries?

Andrew Banfield — The upper house in Australia actually plays a role as opposed to the upper house in Canada. They are elected, they have democratic legitimacy in Australia and they provide a very good checking component. The upper house of Canada, much to my chagrin, is the last bastion of appointed party hacks. Very rarely, even when Stephen Harper came to power in 2006, faced with a Liberal-dominated upper house, things might have been slowed down a little bit but certainly nothing was ever knocked back to them. So the Senate actually plays a role in managing minority parliament in Australia whereas in Canada the upper house is just the rubber stamp.

Question — We have seen at the last federal election in Canada that the Conservative Party has been able to win a majority but without Quebec seats. Do you think that we have entered a new era in Canadian politics so you can win a majority government without winning any province seats?

Andrew Banfield — Maybe. This is probably not the answer you wanted to hear. I don’t know, one election is an anomaly, two elections are a trend, and

three elections is a proven fact. So I am going to fall behind my shield of 'we need more research and talk to me in 2020'. I think the real answer is 'perhaps', particularly with the left splitting the vote between the Liberals and the NDP and with an increased power base movement towards the west. There is something like 35 additional seats being added in as a result of the next census and none of them for the first time will be in Quebec. Very few will be in Ontario. All kinds will go to Alberta and British Columbia. The real answer may be 'maybe', but there will never be a day where you can form legitimate government without Quebec involved, at least one or two members at least.

Question — One of the features of minority government here has been the role of independents who because the government has needed their support to form government have been able to exercise significant influence on policies in which they have particularly interests. From your presentation I gather that there haven't been independents in the Canadian Parliament. Can you comment on what difference that makes and why there haven't been independents in the Canadian Parliament?

Andrew Banfield — In the 2004 election there were three independents, two former Conservatives and a former Liberal, all of which were booted out of caucus and had to sit as independents and they played an invaluable role in securing the budget for the Martin Government. I think part of the answer for the lack of independents in Canadian parliaments is the control of the party leader and people vote by party label. So it is 'I'm a Liberal, my grandfather was a Liberal, his grandfather's grandfather was a Liberal and I'm going to vote Liberal. I sort of know this guy but he is not going to do anything for me'. You have more power to your local MP inside a party than outside a party so I think that is certainly part of the story. I don't have more of an explanation than that but I think that is a good chunk of the explanation.

Question — With the change in the numbers across the country from the east to west, is there a fixed number of parliamentarians so is there an increase in the numbers in the west as there is a decrease in the east?

Andrew Banfield — No, the seat distribution is based on the census, so there is a constitutional reason, particularly in Quebec you can't fall below a certain

number because of the founding fathers. So there is just increased addition to seats as opposed to subtraction of seats.

Question — What will the number be at the next election?

Andrew Banfield — 156, something like that. That is a big increase because there has been a big population growth.

Question — Do you think the NDP will replace the Liberal Party?

Andrew Banfield — I don't know, which is probably a remarkably unsatisfying answer. It will depend on any number of things, not least of which who the NDP select as their new leader. The real question that I think the NDP has to face going forward is: was the surge in party support a vote for Jack Layton or was it a vote for the New Democratic Party because of the surge in Quebec and the progressive left that dominates Quebec? I think you can make an argument that it was a vote for probably both but at least it is a plausible argument to be made that it was a vote for the New Democratic Party. You cannot downplay the importance of Jack Layton in Quebec. The Liberal Party are still in disarray, they still can't raise money. The NDP is much better at raising money than the Liberals at this time. They don't have a particularly effective leader either; they have an effective interim leader but they don't have a permanent leader. 'Maybe' is the long short answer to your question.