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# Contagion in the West: The Survival and Success of the CCF-NDP in Western Canada

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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Contagion in the West: The Survival and Success of the CCF-NDP in Western Canada

by

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A THESIS

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## **Abstract**

The CCF-NDP is the lone survivor of a number of new political parties to emerge in Western Canada around the mid-twentieth century. While most of those parties long ago disappeared, the CCF-NDP has not only survived, but has thrived. The CCF-NDP has successfully formed government in all four western provinces, even as it faces a very different combination of parties in each. In Alberta, the NDP first formed government in 2015, an astounding seventy-five years after its first election in the province. How did the CCF-NDP manage to persist and succeed in Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan for so long when most other parties have failed?

In this thesis, I argue that the CCF-NDP has managed to survive because it possesses certain organizational features that other parties lack. As a social democratic party, the CCF-NDP has maintained a core base of committed activists who sustain the organization even when it is electorally weak. The party competes in elections across multiple provinces and at the federal level, giving it organizational redundancy that most other parties lack. And the party has consistently been willing to reach out to new groups of voters by moderating its policies, but without losing its central identity as a social democratic party. I show this using process tracing by identifying the factors that contribute to the success or failure of several insurgent parties, including the CCF-NDP, at critical moments of electoral dealignment across each of the four western provinces.

## **Preface**

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Connor Molineaux.

## Acknowledgements

This thesis has created innumerable debts. Nonetheless, I will try to enumerate them.

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### **List of Abbreviations**

<b>BC</b>	British Columbia
<b>CCF</b>	Co-operative Commonwealth Federation
<b>ENP</b>	Effective number of parties
<b>ENEP</b>	Effective number of electoral parties
<b>ENPP</b>	Effective number of parliamentary parties
<b>ILP</b>	Independent Labour Party
<b>MGGA</b>	Manitoba Grain Growers' Association
<b>NDP</b>	New Democratic Party
<b>PC</b>	Progressive Conservative
<b>SCEC</b>	Saskatchewan Co-operative Elevator Company
<b>SGGA</b>	Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association
<b>STV</b>	Single transferable vote
<b>UFA</b>	United Farmers of Alberta
<b>UFBC</b>	United Farmers of British Columbia
<b>UFC(SS)</b>	United Farmers of Canada (Saskatchewan Section)
<b>UFM</b>	United Farmers of Manitoba

### **Epigraph**

The trouble is that socialist parties have gone a-whoring after the Bitch Goddess. They have wanted Success, Victory, Power; forgetting that the main business of socialist parties is not to form governments but to change minds. When people begin to concentrate on success at the polls, they become careful and cautious; and when they become careful and cautious, the virtue goes out of them.

– Carlyle King, “What’s Left”

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

On May 5, 2015, Albertans elected the New Democratic Party (NDP) as the province's new government, with forty percent of the popular vote and over sixty percent of the seats in the legislature. The election was considered historic for upending forty-four years of government by the outgoing Progressive Conservative party in what many assumed was Canada's most conservative province. The election was also historic because it meant that the NDP had now formed government in every province in western Canada. What few people asked on May 5 was how a party that had first arrived in Alberta seventy-five years earlier (as the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation) was still around to form government, even when it had not won a single election in all those years. The Alberta NDP had been electorally unsuccessful for a long time, but somehow the party had not disappeared.

As it turns out, Alberta was not unique in this regard. Several decades elapsed between the CCF-NDP arriving and forming government in British Columbia and Manitoba, and it even took a decade in Saskatchewan, where the party has been most successful (see table 1.1). Not only did the party have a slow start in all four provinces, but it has managed to become one of the major parties in each of them. The four provinces are far from being identical. Aside from the NDP, a different set of parties competes for power in each of them and have done so historically. Moreover, many of the parties that once formed government in these provinces, and many more that did not, failed and disappeared from the political scene. This presents a larger puzzle. How did the CCF-NDP manage to survive and eventually succeed in these four different contexts where so many other parties have been unable to do so?

<b>Table 1.1: Year of the CCF-NDP's arrival and first time forming government in the four western provinces</b>				
	<b>Alberta</b>	<b>British Columbia</b>	<b>Manitoba</b>	<b>Saskatchewan</b>
First election contested	1940	1933	1936	1934
First time forming government	2015	1972	1969	1944

This thesis addresses that question. It argues that the CCF-NDP possesses some unique characteristics that make it better able to survive under unfavourable electoral conditions than nearly any other Canadian party. It shows this by tracing the development of the party systems in the four western Canadian provinces, Alberta, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, which have had an unusually large number of insurgent parties emerge over their history. By comparing these parties, including the CCF-NDP, with one another at critical junctures in their development—key realigning moments including party entry and exit—this thesis is able to show that organizational and ideological features of the CCF-NDP not shared by other parties have permitted it to survive.

The four western Canadian provinces shared a common pattern in the development of their party systems that led to the emergence of many new parties, especially in the 1920s and 1930s. These insurgent parties are noted for typically having short lifespans. A few have gone on to form government in one of the four western provinces, but the CCF-NDP is the only one among them to have survived into the twenty-first century not just in one province, but in all four, and to have formed government in each. The CCF-NDP's survival is owed to the party's nature as a social democratic party that extends beyond provincial borders.

The CCF-NDP's core ethos as a social democratic party has made it able to attract and retain a core group of supporters who have remained engaged with the party even when its



electoral prospects are bleak. Even during these periods, the CCF-NDP has shown remarkable success at running candidates in as many electoral districts as possible to a degree unmatched by its competitors. Yet while retaining its core ideological foundation, the CCF-NDP has also shown a willingness to adapt itself in order to earn the support of ever larger groups of people by moderating how it presents itself to the Canadian public. Not only has this prevented the party from fading into obscurity, it has made it electorally successful and triggered the realignment of the party systems across the western provinces, with the NDP occupying a central role in each.

The CCF-NDP's presence in all four western provinces and across the rest of Canada has also contributed to its survival through the redundancy that this arrangement offers. Even when the CCF-NDP is weak, it is less likely to collapse because it continues to operate and compete in neighbouring provinces as well as federally. This aspect of the party also allows the CCF-NDP to draw on resources from other provinces including personnel and ideas that have further helped the party succeed.

### **The Puzzle**

Western Canada has seen insurgent parties come and go over the course of the twentieth century, many of which have had a significant effect on the provincial party systems by forming government or mounting a serious challenge to a province's existing parties (Johnston 2017).<sup>1</sup> For the most part, these insurgents disappear soon after their arrival. The only exceptions are Social Credit, which governed Alberta and British Columbia for several decades but has since disappeared, and the CCF-NDP. In spite of the fact that only one of these twentieth century insurgents has survived, the literature has offered no comprehensive explanation of the CCF-

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<sup>1</sup> The effective number of parties, in legislative and electoral terms, is one way of measuring the effect of these parties. The ENP values for each of the western provinces between the arrival of party politics in each and 2016 are shown in Appendix C. In the mid-twentieth century, the effective number of electoral parties exceeded 3 and sometimes 4 in all four provinces.

NDP's distinctive persistence. Richard Johnston, in his recent survey of the Canadian party system, finds that the CCF-NDP generally behaves like labour parties found elsewhere, except that its support "still seems to be anemic" (2017, 164). In any other political party, consistently anemic support would be enough to kill it. It took only a couple of consecutive election losses for Social Credit for that party to disappear from Alberta and British Columbia. Not only did the CCF-NDP survive many consecutive election losses in all four western provinces, it managed to emerge as a major party on the other side.

Most discussions of the CCF-NDP in Canada focus on the party at the federal level, where the party tends to be weaker.<sup>2</sup> This means that much of our knowledge of the CCF-NDP in Canadian politics focuses on its relative weakness, despite the fact that it is the strongest provincial party in the west. When the provincial CCF receives attention, it often focused on only a single province (Bratt et al. 2019; Hak 2013; Lipset 1968; Wiseman 1983). This makes it difficult to spot patterns that might be common to more than one province and neglects the possibility that events in one province might have an effect on conditions in another. This thesis develops an explanation for the CCF-NDP's unusual persistence in western Canada in order to fill this gap in the literature. It takes account of the fact that the CCF-NDP is a multi-province phenomenon found in four provinces with otherwise different party systems.

### **The Four Western Provinces: Party System Development**

The persistence of the CCF-NDP in Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan is especially interesting because the party systems of those provinces have historically differed in many respects. Not since the beginning of the twentieth century have parties with the same names competed in all four provinces. Even the number of parties that regularly compete with

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<sup>2</sup> A couple of recent examples include Laycock and Erickson (2015) and McGrane (2019).

one another has not been the same.<sup>3</sup> While their party systems differ, the four western provinces share nearly identical institutions, generally similar demographics, and economies driven in large part by natural resource extraction. The similarities that these provinces share make it possible to control for a number of features that might influence the development of their party systems, making the comparison of parties within and across the four provinces easier.

The party systems of the four western provinces look nearly identical at the beginning of the twentieth century. When party politics first arrived in the west, it was structured along the same lines as at the federal level in Canada, with competition primarily between the Liberals and Conservatives. This was due to the manner in which issues involving the federal government structured politics in the new provinces, and the existing party affiliations of western provincial politicians at the federal level.

As these four party systems continued to mature, they began to diverge from one another. Different combinations of parties with different names competed for power. This thesis argues, however, that the four provinces shared a broad common pattern of development that helps explain the CCF-NDP's eventual success there (summarized in table 1.2). Even though the combinations of parties and the timing of their arrival differed across the four cases, the newly arriving insurgent parties were all structured around the same narrow bases of support. They catered almost largely to workers, as part of the labour movement, or to farmers. Whether these parties flourished or quickly failed depended on circumstances unique to each province, and on features of the parties themselves. Eventually, though, they all failed because the narrow bases of support on which they depended made them vulnerable to other parties making appeals to the

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<sup>3</sup> Appendices C and D show the effective number of parties that have competed in each province throughout the history of their respective party systems as well as the number of parties in real terms.

same groups, co-opting the parties' platforms or organizations, and simple electoral failure if their bases of support were too small.

<b>Table 1.2: Periods in the development of the western Canadian party systems by insurgent arrivals</b>				
	Saskatchewan	Alberta	Manitoba	British Columbia
Pre-party system	<i>North-West Territories</i>			1871 – 1903 Labour Socialist
Two-party period:	1905 – c. 1921 Conservative Liberal	1905 – c. 1917 Conservative Liberal	1883 – c. 1915 Conservative Liberal	1903 – 1933 Conservative Liberal
First insurgent wave: Farmer and labour parties with narrow bases of support	c. 1921 – c. 1929 Progressives	c. 1917 – 1935 UFA Labour	c. 1915 – 1932 UFM- Progressives Labour	<i>Mostly arrived during pre-party period</i> Provincial Party: 1924
Second insurgent wave: CCF and Social Credit	c. 1934 – 1967 CCF Social Credit	1935 – 1967 CCF Social Credit	c. 1932 – c. 1969 CCF Social Credit	1933 – 1952 CCF Social Credit
Party system stabilizes	1967 – 1999	1967 – 2015 Wildrose	1969 – Present	1952 – Present Reform Greens
Contemporary party system	1999 – Present Saskatchewan Party	2015 – Present		

The second wave of insurgent parties emerged as a response to the hardship of the Great Depression, which affected some groups in society more than others. These parties learned lessons from the failure of the first wave of insurgents, depending less on narrow bases of support. Social Credit began as a populist party offering an unorthodox alternative economic system that appealed to struggling people from all walks of life. When that economic system proved unworkable, Social Credit became a centre-right party with a populist, anti-socialist character that thrived in Alberta and BC.

The CCF also proposed an alternative economic system in response to the Depression: socialism. As its initial appeals for socialism failed to gain wide enough traction, the party began to moderate into a social democratic party with wider appeal. Outside of Saskatchewan, several decades would pass before the party found widespread enough appeal to form government.

In the second half of the twentieth century, changes to the party system took the form of shifts in support between existing parties rather than the arrival of new ones. Social Credit had quickly failed in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, arriving later than the CCF and having had its economic theories already disproven. In Alberta and British Columbia, where the party developed a centre-right complexion, it ultimately fell to other centre-right parties, the Progressive Conservatives and Liberals respectively. Of all the insurgent parties that arrived in the first half of the twentieth century across the west, only the CCF-NDP endured.

The common pattern of party system development across the west suggests that some characteristic of those provinces made them favourable to the emergence of new parties. Of those new parties, some feature of the CCF must have made it more able to survive. The fact that this pattern looks similar across four provinces that otherwise had differently structured party and electoral systems further suggests that the answer is not idiosyncratic.

This thesis will demonstrate that, in all four provinces, the shallowly rooted Liberal and Conservative parties did not successfully accommodate the interests of two sections of society, farmers and urban workers, which encouraged “sectional” parties based on those constituencies to develop. Later insurgents, like the CCF and Social Credit, continued to earn their support either from these groups, or a perceived failure of any of the existing parties to cater to address some concern, such as the Great Depression. The CCF fared best among these parties because of characteristics of its organization, explained below, that these other parties lacked.

## **The CCF-NDP**

The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation was founded at a 1932 convention in Calgary.

Over the previous few decades, a number of democratic socialist parties coming from the Fabian, social gospel, and labour traditions had contested elections in Canada. They were generally confined to small geographic areas, and there was little co-ordination between them, even within a given province (Avakumovic 1978). This had seriously undermined their prospects for electoral success. The Great Depression, beginning in 1929, served as a catalyst for these organizations to begin co-operating with one another. They were joined by several farmers organizations, including the United Farmers of Alberta (UFA), United Farmers of Canada (Saskatchewan Section) [UFC(SS)], and the United Farmers of Manitoba, who had resolved for the common ownership of natural resources amid the hardship of the Great Depression (Avakumovic 1978). Organized farmers had reluctantly begun to see themselves as an economic group or class much in the same way as workers, driven in large part by the “Group Government” ideas of the farmers’ intellectual leader, Henry Wise Wood (Morton 1977).<sup>4</sup>

The CCF was very much a product of the Great Depression. The economic hardship it caused was experienced across all of society but felt acutely by farmers and the working class. It gave cause to co-ordinate nationally in opposition to the laissez-faire capitalist system that both the Liberals and Conservatives subscribed to, and which these groups blamed for their struggles. The diversity of organizations that met to found the CCF meant that the party took on a unique federal structure. The party’s subtitle was “Farmer-Labour-Socialist”, reflecting the three major

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<sup>4</sup> See chapter four for more on Wood.

This thesis often refers to “sectional parties”, a term used widely in the literature to refer to the farmer and labour organizations of the 1920s, including by Johnston (2017). The use of this term is informed by the self-professed view of these groups of having a common interest united by their economic position as particular sections of society.

traditions of the groups that composed it, and who would continue to organize independently in the short term. The party's first program was resolved a year later in Regina and solidified the tradition of delegate democracy that was developing within the new party.

Ideologically, the range of views in the CCF was diverse, as it continues to be in the NDP (Zakuta 1964). Nonetheless, the party began as an explicitly socialist organization that advocated for the public ownership and collectivization of all natural resources, financial institutions, utilities, and broader economic planning (Avakumovic 1978; Morton 1977; Laycock 2014). The manifesto that emerged from the 1933 Regina convention concluded that:

“No CCF Government will rest content until it has eradicated capitalism and put into operation the full programme of socialized planning which will lead to the establishment in Canada of the Co-operative Commonwealth” (Cross 1974, 23).

The fact that the CCF was a socialist organization gives it a unique ideological character that in turn informs its organization. The party believed that the party's pursuit of equality, economic security, and social justice necessarily required that the party carry out its activity on a “genuinely democratic basis to which others paid only lip service” (Zakuta 1964, 11). The party attracted fervent supporters unmatched by other parties in Canada. Leo Zakuta quotes one CCF activist as saying “for us the CCF was mother, father and the church” (1964, 53). One of the threads that has run through the CCF-NDP throughout its history has been this deep commitment from its activists owing to their commitment to democratic socialist ideals. This is not something that parties with less coherent or unified ideology are able to match.

As a federation, the CCF's organization was carried out by its provincial constituent parties, and particularly in the early days, often by more than one organization in a single

province. Its early federal MPs were drawn from the United Farmers of Alberta and Labour parties (Avakumovic 1978, 71). In addition to contesting elections, the CCF maintained an active agenda in the extra-parliamentary arena, where many of its members were involved in the education of its membership and the public on democratic socialist principles and labour organizing. Many within the party, particularly on its more radical left wing, “considered the dissemination of socialist doctrine as the CCF’s most urgent task” and had a deep scepticism of parliamentary and electoral politics more generally (Zakuta 1964, 16-17).

The CCF increasingly moderated its positions over the following decades, due in part to associations with communism and the images of socialism that emerged in the popular consciousness during the Second World War and the Cold War (Avakumovic 1978). At its core, though, the increasing moderation of the CCF was driven by electoral considerations. By moderating its platform, the CCF would be able to appeal to a wider range of people. This informs the central tension that Zakuta finds within the CCF organization: there are those within the party who wished to see it maintain its ideological purity, and those who wished to see it moderate itself to become more electable. The latter group seems to have won out, at least on the margin. Over time, the CCF-NDP has continued to move in a moderate direction in order to appeal to more voters. In doing so, it has maintained its core commitment to social democracy, if not in the purest form, that motivates its core activists (Laycock 2014).

The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation undertook its biggest transformation beginning in 1961 by becoming the New Democratic Party. It had two goals. First, recognizing that the Canadian electorate was changing, the party wanted to shake its image of a Depression-era socialist party, and instead embrace a more contemporary democratic socialism that could appeal to the middle-class and “liberally minded” in addition to its labour, socialist, and farmer



core (Whitehorn 1992, 51). Second, the party wanted to cultivate a closer relationship with trade unions in order to attract the support of more union members (Avakumovic 1978; Laycock 2014). The CCF merged with the Canadian Labour Congress to form the new party, giving unions membership and voting status in the new party alongside individual members. Almost all of the supporters of the CCF continued on with the NDP. The new organization continued to face calls for radicalism, notably from the Waffle faction of the late 1960s (Laycock 2014). In this way, the new organization continued the radical-moderate dualism that had characterized the old party.

Important to the structure of the CCF-NDP is the fact that the party remains one organization at the federal and provincial level, albeit with different leaders and platforms at each. Membership in the provincial NDP organization automatically entails membership in the federal NDP organization (Dyck 1996b). Provincial offices for the party control fundraising and preparing for elections at both the federal and provincial levels, and there is a significant overlap between those who campaign for the federal and provincial parties (Blake, Carty, and Erickson 1991; McGrane 2019, 42-43).

Like any political party in Canada, the character of the CCF-NDP has a great deal to do with its leadership. This means that the exact character of the party varies from province to province and federally, as well as changing over time. It is telling, then, that the NDP has chosen to remain a single organization. While the exact character of the party varies, across the country the NDP's leadership and membership remain committed to the same basic social democratic principles that have informed the party for decades. This harmony of organization and purpose is the key feature that differentiates the party from its competitors in western Canada.

### **What Makes the CCF-NDP Different**

The CCF-NDP has managed to persist because its organizational and ideological structure grant it more resilience than any other party in Canada. The party has two main organizational benefits: its federal and provincial integration across Canada, and its capacity to organize locally among its many committed activists. Ideologically, the CCF-NDP has had a critical internal tension throughout its history between ideological purity, through which it has been able to retain its activist supporters, and moderation in order to broaden its appeal. This structure has allowed the party to remain well organized and continue to run full slates of candidates across the west even when it has been politically weak. This has been the recipe for its survival.

### *CCF-NDP Organization*

#### Integration

The CCF-NDP is a single political organization across Canada, which has given the party two main advantages. It offers the organization redundancy, and it offers the opportunity to share funds, personnel, and other resources across Canada. By redundancy, I mean that the CCF-NDP is not susceptible to collapse as an organization completely if it loses a few elections in one place. The CCF-NDP spent many years winning few or no seats in Alberta, but the NDP as a whole was never at risk of collapse as a result. As Rand Dyck (1996b) observes, the NDP has more activists who work in the party at both levels than any other in Canada. For those committed to social democracy, there would be nothing to gain by abandoning the party at the provincial level when they continue to organize federally. Moreover, the success of the NDP where it has been successful, like in Saskatchewan, lends credibility to the continued work of the CCF-NDP where it is weaker.

Social democracy is now well-established as an ideology movement throughout the west, with most western countries having parties somewhere in the social democratic constellation of

ideas. If the NDP did not exist in Canada, it would be necessary to create it. For committed activists, the choice is not really between abandoning the CCF-NDP to join the Liberals or Conservatives, it is between organizing within the CCF-NDP or starting a new party. The redundancy offered by belonging to a national organization means continuing with the CCF-NDP offers activists less friction than going it alone.

At times, other parties in Canada have had more deeply integrated organizations (Dyck 1996b). The pressures of Canadian federalism have made this untenable for parties who form government federally, however. The nature of federalism in Canada is that federal and provincial governments find themselves in conflict from time to time—in no small part because the provinces depend on the federal government for federal transfers. To have to first ministers from the same organization challenging one another would be unseemly. The NDP, having yet to form government federally, has not faced this challenge, and so remains integrated. Yet calls in the media for the Alberta NDP under Rachel Notley to abandon the federal NDP shows they too are subject to these pressures (Markusoff 2016)

The second advantage to the NDP's national integration is the movement of resources and personnel this permits. Membership in any of the provincial organizations automatically entails membership in the federal organization. In most provinces, the provincial wings of the party contribute directly to funding the national organization. It has also been the most likely of any of the parties to have activists involved at both levels (Dyck 1996b). Some of the party's leading figures, including Tommy Douglas, Ed Schreyer, and current federal leader Jagmeet Singh, have had careers at both the federal and provincial levels, which is a rarity in most other parties. While McGrane (2019) argues that the NDP's federal structure has made it organizationally stronger in some places than others, he shows that the provincial wings of the

NDP party are integral to the entire organization. We have also seen movement of staff across provincial borders (Cross 2015). Alberta NDP leader Rachel Notley selected a chief of staff who had once belonged to the Alberta NDP, continued working for the BC NDP under John Horgan, and then returned to Alberta (Graney 2016). The outgoing chief of staff, Brian Topp, had worked for the NDP across the country.

### Activists

The CCF-NDP has managed to run a full slate of candidates in more provincial elections across Western Canada than any other party.<sup>5</sup> This is true even during periods where the party has been relatively weak, suggesting that the CCF-NDP remains well organized even when its electoral prospects are poor. At the local level, Sayers finds that “where the NDP has experienced even modest electoral success its associations have a continuous and stable membership unaffected by electoral cycles” (1999, 7) and that candidates are generally recruited from within the existing party membership and affiliated unions. The strength of the CCF-NDP as a membership organization, as a mass party, plays a significant role in its survival. It is made possible through a committed base of activists that, although often small, is truly committed to the success of the party. “For those attached to it,” writes Mildred Schwartz, “the CCF/NDP represents a way of life” (2006, 10).

The CCF-NDP’s insurgent peers, namely the Progressives and Social Credit, were able to match the CCF’s strength as a membership organization to some degree while they were successful. The difference is that those parties were unable to maintain those organizations when their success dwindled, lacking CCF-NDP’s other organizational and ideological advantages.

### *Ideology*

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<sup>5</sup> Refer to the candidacy tables in the Alberta, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba chapters.

The CCF-NDP has had an internal tension throughout its history between those who believe in ideological purity and changing minds, and pragmatists who would see the party evolve in order to win power (Schwartz 2006, 10-11). This tension lies at the heart of the party's success, because it has retained its core principles, and therefore retained its activists, while also evolving in an attempt to grow its base.

The CCF-NDP has a clarity of purpose as the social conscience of Canada, a consequence of its commitment to social democracy. Its adherents have a true commitment to improving society for all that reaches beyond the aims for most political parties. The roots of Canadian social democracy are largely in the labour movement and in organized agriculture, as this thesis shows. Organization is therefore at the heart of the party and the ideology it espouses. The presence of an extra-parliamentary organizations is one of the most important characteristics that differentiated the CCF from the Liberals and Conservatives (Epstein 1964). Azoulay (1999) shows that in the Ontario NDP, it was the commitment of the core leadership and their unshakeable faith in the NDP's ideas that sustained the party through its darkest period. That group committed to basic organization to expand its membership, which is the other principal feature of the CCF-NDP that sustains it. Sayers notes a tendency among activists in constituency associations to support whichever candidate is nominated out of a commitment to the party. By contrast, in elite-driven parties like the Liberals or Conservatives, the candidate is often more important than the party itself for activists (1999, 9).

Yet the party has generally resisted efforts to become *too* ideologically pure at the risk of marginalizing itself. Because the social democratic idea requires a reworking of society for the benefit of everyone, there is room for everyone. The CCF was organized explicitly as a coalition between farmers, the labour movement, and ideological socialists in order to increase their

chances for electoral success and collectively see “the establishment in Canada of a Co-operative Commonwealth” (Melnik 1989). It has sought since then to expand its base beyond purely sectional interests in the belief that the party’s agenda benefits all of society (Azoulay 1999). Purely sectional parties, such as farmer’s parties or labour parties, are in danger of being co-opted by others (Schwartz 2006, 79; 119). This happened to the Progressives in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, with the Liberals adopting their platform in the former case and merging with them in the latter. Once a sectional party’s demands are met, there is little incentive to continue to organize, especially for sectional parties not large enough to form government.

The CCF-NDP resisted the efforts of its Waffle faction to return the NDP to its more explicitly socialist roots. The CCF took the step early in its history to remove references to socialism from its platforms. And the party took the significant step of completely rebranding itself as the NDP, shedding whatever sectional baggage it retained from its early days in order to expand its base. (Whitehorn 1992, 51). The CCF-NDP walked the fine line of retaining enough of its core ideology to retain activists, while evolving in order to have mainstream appeal.

### *Shallowly-Rooted Parties*

Western Canada has been the CCF-NDP’s traditional place of strength in Canada and has been home to an unusually large number of insurgent parties in the early 20th century. While not specific to the CCF-NDP, the fact that the Liberal and Conservative parties lacked deep roots in Western Canadian society created ideal conditions for the emergence of new parties. As Maurice Duverger argues (1964), political parties tend to come, first, from within the legislature, where they serve as an expedient for parliamentary business. Later parties emerge from groups within society. In Central and Eastern Canada, the Liberal and Conservative parties matured with the growing colonies in which they operated. In the West, they were effectively imposed, with those

already existing in the federal parliament. For westerners, the majority of whom were immigrants to Canada, there were no deep attachments to these parties, which at that time had little to differentiate them ideologically; they “effectively lacked principles” (Epstein 1954, 50). The speed at which the CCF and the sectional parties that preceded it found success depended on two things: first, the degree to which sectional organizations were willing to engage in direct political action and, second, the extent to which the Liberals and Conservatives accommodated those sectional interests. Eventually, those sectional parties turned to direct action across the west. And as the preceding section shows, the CCF as the most successful of them, grew beyond a sectional party into a big-tent social democratic party.

### *Summary*

This thesis shows that the CCF-NDP has managed to grow and survive because of its organizational structure, its distinctive ideological characteristics, and favourable political conditions that made the growth of new parties possible. The CCF-NDP has an integrated national organization that offers it redundancy when it is sometimes weak in a given province. It has a committed core of activists, allowing it to organize and field candidates even when politically weak. The party has a core ideology that helps it retain that activist base, but a willingness to make changes in order to court an ever broader base of support. The CCF-NDP is as Leo Zakuta (1964), argues a “protest movement becalmed”, except that it was never completely calmed. What makes the CCF-NDP unique is the combination of populist insurgent characteristics it has maintained even as it has grown into a modern political machine.

### **Plan of Thesis**

In short, this thesis will argue that the CCF-NDP’s noteworthy survival and strength in western Canada is the result of the party’s organizational structure and ideological

underpinnings, which supply the party with the tools to survive even under unfavourable conditions. The shallow roots of the Liberal and Conservative parties in western Canada created the opportunity for insurgent parties to develop, among which the CCF-NDP alone had these strengths. This thesis will test this claim by tracing the development of the party systems of the four western provinces and explaining the factors that produced each critical, realigning juncture in the development of these party systems, including the entry and exit of new parties, significant changes in electoral support, and changes in which parties regularly form government.

The next chapter introduces the key literature on the CCF-NDP and other insurgent parties in Western Canada. It shows that, despite the vast amount written on the topic, the existing literature lacks a comprehensive explanation for the CCF-NDP's distinctiveness, and especially one that takes account of the party's recent successes across the whole of western Canada. Chapter two also introduces the methodological approach adopted by this thesis: process tracing guided by the existing literature to explain the survival or disappearance of the insurgent parties across western Canada at each critical juncture in the development of each province's respective party system.

Chapters three, four, five, and six describe and analyze the development of the CCF-NDP and other insurgent parties within the party system of each respective western Canadian province. The chapters are organized thematically around the key constituencies that led the development of the insurgent parties in each province: farmers in Saskatchewan and Alberta, both farmers and organized labour in Manitoba, and organized labour in British Columbia.

Chapter three explains that the CCF-NDP's success in Saskatchewan set the standard for the party in the rest of Canada. The party found support among farmers, who constituted the majority of the voters in the province at the time, but the party was only able to break through



and form government after it had moderated its professed commitment to socialism.

Saskatchewan has remained a strong province for the NDP, although it now faces the Saskatchewan Party on the right, which has kept the NDP out of government for nearly twenty years.

Chapter four shows how the CCF-NDP managed to survive in Alberta for seventy-five years without forming government while Social Credit, which arrived during the same period, disappeared after just a few elections out of government. The commitment of a core group of activists allowed the party to remain intact in Alberta until the electoral winds of the province shifted, which finally happened in 2015. The chapter also considers the prospects for an enduring realignment of the Alberta party system given the pattern seen in other western provinces.

Chapter five considers the CCF-NDP's rise in Manitoba, where the party managed to survive under competitive conditions that made electoral victories especially difficult. Support for the CCF-NDP came mostly from urban Winnipeg, which constituted a smaller proportion of voters relative to farmers and an electoral system weighted towards rural areas. Manitoba farmers, unlike those in Alberta and Saskatchewan, were more hostile towards the labour movement in Manitoba, giving the CCF-NDP in that province a different set of competitive conditions but still resulting in that party's survival.

Chapter six then explains that the partial early success of the CCF-NDP in British Columbia came as a result of the historic strength of labour and socialist parties in that province relative to the others in the west. The CCF-NDP managed to consistently earn about a third of the popular vote, but further gains required greater moderation from the party through the influence of the national CCF-NDP organization. While BC's politics shows a different character

than the other western provinces, this chapter shows that it also generally fits the larger pattern common to all of the west.

Finally, chapter seven summarizes and compares the conclusions from each of the four provinces.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE AND METHODS**

This thesis argues that the CCF-NDP has distinctive characteristics that make it better able to survive under difficult electoral conditions than other parties. It demonstrates this by comparing the CCF-NDP with other parties in four contexts: the provincial party systems of Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan. Each of these provinces are broadly similar in terms of their institutions, their economies, and their histories, but their party systems have developed differently from one another. Each system had a high number of insurgent parties arriving and usually exiting the system in the twentieth century, but the particular combination of parties differed from province to province. The only feature common to all four was the CCF-NDP, which not only contested elections in all four provinces, but is the only party to have been electorally successful in all four provinces.

The development of these party systems is well documented in the Canadian political science literature, but there has been no explanation made of the CCF-NDP's exceptional survival and success across the west. Guided by the existing literature, this thesis traces the development of the four western party systems looking for causal factors that explain the CCF-NDP's persistence and distinctive success. Consistent with a process tracing approach, this thesis identifies critical junctures in the development of the party system—moments of dealignment when new parties enter or exit the system—and looks for causal factors that explain why a party survives and succeeds or fails and loses. Repeating this process across four different cases quadruples the number of observations and permits this thesis to present a more robust causal story.

This chapter introduces the existing literature on party competition in the west as well as some of the key theory on parties and party system realignments. It then explains the process

tracing method that this thesis has adopted, and details the procedure taken to construct this study.

### **The CCF-NDP and the Party Systems of Western Canada**

Provincial party systems have not received the level of attention afforded the federal system in recent decades. Most studies grapple with covering a significant amount of ground—ten unique provinces—in a small amount of space (Stewart, Sayers, and Carty 2016) or consider the provincial party system as part of a broader introduction to the politics of the provinces (Dyck 1996a; Wesley 2016). Some studies have sought to offer a cohesive analysis of both the federal and provincial party systems, but given the significant differences between the federal and provincial arenas, much of the discussion ends up being about the differences themselves (Johnston 2013b; Johnston 2017).

By contrast, a great deal has been written on Canadian political parties both federal and provincial. Most often this takes the form of a case study without much comparison across jurisdictions. Many of these works are now dated. Barr (1974), Hak (2004), Lipset (1968), Macpherson (1953), Morton (1967b), Smith (1975), Sinclair (1973), Thomas (1947), and Wiseman (1983) each try to explain either the inner workings of a particular provincial party or explain a party's rise and sometimes its fall within a particular province, but there has been little written on the commonalities or differences of these parties as they cross provincial borders. This is in spite of the fact that the CCF has, quite unusually, survived and succeeded in four different provinces with ostensibly unique party systems, and is the only party to have done so. Only a few studies, including Johnson (1974), Smith (1969), Smith (2010), and Wesley (2011) have directly compared the partisan arrangements of the western provinces, but none has attempted to explain the CCF's remarkable success across the entire west. Johnson (1974), for one, offers an

argument for the CCF's failure in Alberta and implicitly Social Credit's failure in Saskatchewan, but with the benefit of greater hindsight we can see that the CCF did not, in fact, fail, or at least not fail to the extent of disappearance like Social Credit. The CCF, as the NDP, eventually went on to form government, an astounding seventy years after they arrived. The most recent work on the topic, Bratt et al. (2019)'s volume *Orange Chinook*, explores this unusual success as mostly in relation to Alberta alone. This thesis argues that, by exploring the continuities in the CCF-NDP's ascent across the west, we are better able to understand its success in Alberta and the implications for the party more generally.

Most writing on the NDP itself in Canada has focused on the CCF's early success in Saskatchewan (Lipset 1969) or the national party (Archer 1990, Avakumovic 1978, McGrane 2019, Naylor 2016, Whitehorn 1982, Young 1969, Zakuta 1964). As Canada's only fully integrated party, focusing on the national party partially reflects the whole organization, but without the necessary context (Dyck 1996b).<sup>6</sup> Even then, the emphasis is generally placed on the party's successes and failures at the national level where the party has been less successful. This leads Archer (1985) to conclude that the New Democratic Party has failed due to a lack of union support without a mention of the party's greater success at the provincial level. Understandably, most discussions of the provincial NDP centre on the provinces where it has formed government and frequently been a major competitor, specifically British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan. But the NDP's win in Alberta in 2015 should prompt us to reconsider our understanding of the NDP and give it more credit for its success. This includes explaining the

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<sup>6</sup> "Fully integrated" refers to the fact that the CCF-NDP organization in each of the provinces and the federal party organization are one in the same, sharing personnel, funds, and other resources. Membership in the provincial NDP organization means one is also a member of the federal party. By contrast, other major parties in Canada now maintain separate organizations. While they have informal ties, the organizations remain distinct. In the case of Canada's conservative parties, even the party names are no longer shared.

NDP's enduring presence in Alberta, which has been too often overshadowed by studies of Alberta's governing political dynasties.

Richard Johnston's (2017) study of the Canadian party system is a concerted attempt to integrate and test much of the existing theory on both federal and provincial party systems. Johnston argues that the character of the federal party system is defined especially by the presence of a party of the centre, the Liberals. In the provinces, the party systems have a character more typical of other Westminster-style systems, with more consolidation of parties into the left and right.<sup>7</sup> Where the NDP is strong—notably in the west—it reshapes the party system by squeezing out competitors on the centre-right (Johnston 2017, 249). Where the NDP is weak, it itself is squeezed out. Part of Johnston's analysis is a brief sketch of some key events in the western provinces' party systems, what he describes as “reactive sequences” in which the early insurgencies in Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan defined the shape that their respective party systems later took (2017, 258). Of note in these sketches is the central role of the NDP. Johnston admits that these “capsule narratives are gleaned from scattered sources and informal observations” and that “closer inspection may prove them wrong... much of the narrative needs to be added. Filling it in should take the form of pursuing the facts relevant to testing propositions with analytical content as well as to identification of key break points in analytically problematic sequences” (2017, 259). In this, the most comprehensive work on the topic, Johnston makes a clear call for further research. This thesis answers that call and does so along the lines Johnston suggests by pursuing facts and testing propositions related to Johnston's claims about the NDP.

### **Party Emergence, Purpose, and Survival**

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<sup>7</sup> This process arguably took quite a bit longer in Alberta, perhaps due to the one-sidedness of its party system for most of the twentieth century.

### *The Emergence of Left-Wing Parties*

There is an extensive literature and ongoing debate on the circumstances that give rise to new parties, particularly on the left. Lipset and Rokkan (1967) argue that parties articulate the interests of particular cleavages of society as they were in the 1920s, following the extension of the franchise to much more of society. They have subsequently “frozen” such that they continue to represent those interests even as the underlying society has changed. In this view, parties reflect the underlying social conflicts of society rather than strategic interaction between parties themselves (Lijphart 1990; Hooghe and Marks 2018). The chief criticism of this view of parties is its difficulty in accounting for change to party systems (Lybeck 1985; Mair 1993; Shamir 1984). In the Canadian context, Cheal (1978) notes the further difficulty that the cleavages Lipset and Rokkan identify tend to be rather weak there. For Kitschelt (2000), the political opportunity structure shapes the development of social movements and the form they take. Movements are subject both to the underlying cleavages of society and the strategic decisions of politicians. Parties bundle the interests of social cleavages into party programs, and on that basis compete with one another.

Another view of left-wing party emergence puts greater emphasis on the strategic coordination of parties. In Duverger’s (1964) view, parties collect the interests of groups in society that they believe will help them win elections. Duverger distinguishes between parties of parliamentary origin, which are elite-driven (cadre parties), and parties of extra-parliamentary origin, which mobilize societal groups and are driven by their membership (mass parties) (Krouwel 2006). The latter type includes labour and socialist parties like the CCF. Driven by the growing success of mass parties, parties on the right strategically adopt the organizational features of left-wing parties in order to remain competitive. This phenomenon has been termed

“contagion from the left”, and highlights the central role that strategic considerations play in this view of party development (Duverger 1964; Katz and Mair 1995). Chandler (1977) suggests that this phenomenon extends beyond organization, and that parties may adopt policies of the left so as to remain electorally competitive. Others have suggested that the growing success of right-wing parties in more recent decades has triggered “contagion from the right”, whereby parties of the left professionalize, become more centralized, and lose their membership driven characteristics (Epstein 1964; McGrane 2017; Panebianco 1988). They begin to rely on professional techniques of campaigning, including hiring pollsters, marketers, and lawyers. Just as the right once adopted characteristics of the left for competitive advantage, so too does the left now. In Kirchheimer’s (1966) view, the eventual result is the “catch-all” party in which ideology takes a back seat to the strategically focused electoral machine.

#### *The Purpose of the Party and its Survival*

There are many competing definitions of what constitutes a political party, especially based on the activities that an organization engages in (White 2005). This question has been a perennial source of division within the CCF-NDP itself. One of the most widely accepted views of parties is that their primary purpose is to compete for power—in Westminster-style systems, by earning enough seats in the legislature to form government. In the view of Carlyle King and of others within the CCF-NDP, the purpose of social democratic parties in particular is not to form government, but to generally influence policy by changing minds and influencing those who actually hold the reins of power. In this view, the CCF-NDP is better described as a protest movement or a social movement, which Schwartz defines as groups that represent collective efforts to bring about major change even if that takes them outside of established institutional processes” (2006, 7). In Zakuta’s (1964) view the CCF may have once been a social movement,



but ultimately became a true political party. This is borne out by the fact that the CCF-NDP has now formed government in all four western provinces, its increasingly pragmatic approach to policy, and the effect the CCF-NDP has had in reshaping the provincial party systems. But the fact that the CCF-NDP once had life as a social movement differentiates it from the early Liberal and Conservative parties in the west which emerged through the federal affiliations of western politicians. Duverger expects exactly this: when a party system is new, parties arise from within the legislature itself, while new parties thereafter arise from society itself (1964, xxxvi-xxxvii).

In the broader view that political parties can meet their ends not only by pursuing power, but by influencing other parties, voters, and public policy, the CCF-NDP's enduring presence across Canada in the twentieth century must be judged a success. A number of schemes first proposed by the CCF-NDP, most notably including Canadian medicare, are now commonplace. Even taking the narrower view that holding the reins of power is the only relevant measure of a party's success, the CCF-NDP's strength in the western provinces has not been given enough weight. It is only possible for a party to form government if the party in question continues to exist. This is how the CCF-NDP is different than its insurgent competitors: when they lose a number of elections, they disappear, while the CCF-NDP does not.

The literature on party organization as it effects the prospects for a party's survival is limited, except for the recognition it is essential (Art 2018). Parties rely on their organizations and the work of activists to sustain parties, particularly in parties that have not yet amassed significant representation in the legislature. The focus in the majority of works on party organization is on the factors that cause new parties to emerge (Hug 2001; Tavits 2006), new parties following their electoral breakthrough (Bolleyer and Bytcek 2013), or on regional and niche parties (Spoon 2011). The CCF-NDP is clearly an exceptional case: it has never been a

small nor regional party and has seen a considerable delay between its arrival and electoral breakthrough in many cases.<sup>8</sup>

## **Method**

One of the most interesting features of Western Canadian politics in the twentieth century is the proliferation of insurgent parties that met with a high degree of success, and their eventual decline and disappearance.<sup>9</sup> The NDP, we now know, is the sole exception. The puzzle of this thesis is to determine why. As Schattschneider claimed, “democracy is unthinkable save in terms of parties” (1942, 1). While parties in the plural might be inevitable, the success of a given party is far from it. As Aldrich (2011) shows, much of our theorizing about parties makes significant room for the possibility of their failure. Duverger’s Law, he notes, supposes the effects of possible a third-party challenger in a two-party system: a return to an equilibrium in which there are only two parties (61). The aim of this thesis is to determine why the NDP has proven to be the sort of party that can survive and reshape a system where the rest of its contemporaries were not through process tracing under a most similar systems design.

The conditions in Western Canada lend themselves especially well to a most-similar systems design where the goal is “to keep constant as many extraneous variables as possible” (Anckar 2008, 389). As Anckar notes, the biggest shortcoming of this particular design is that there are relatively few countries, and it is therefore extremely difficult to keep variables constant. By comparing parties in the four western Canadian provinces, we come as close to mitigating this problem as possible. Case studies within subnational units is an underutilized tool

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<sup>8</sup> Indeed, these facts have been key to the CCF-NDP’s success.

<sup>9</sup> Much of the literature on parties, particularly in the United States, refers to insurgent parties as “third parties”—a term which virtually presupposes their unimportance and eventual failure (see, for example, Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus 1984). This makes it all the more remarkable that four Canadian provinces were (or still are) at some point governed by some such party.

of comparative politics (Snyder 2001; Zuo 2015). The four provinces of Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan have as similar of institutions, cultures, and even timing on the variables of interest as can reasonably be expected from any set of cases. Quadrupling the number of observations across four cases instead of within a single case study permits a more robust research design and allows us to more clearly identify shared causal processes.

Process tracing is, according to Mahoney, a tool by which causal inferences are made by “looking at diagnostic pieces of evidence—usually understood as part of a temporal sequence of events—that have probative value in supporting or overturning conclusions about descriptive or explanatory hypotheses” (2012, 571). As Falleti (2006) explains, process tracing differs from statistical methods in that it attempts to establish the causal mechanism that links two events where the former methods identify only the presence of a causal link. George and McKeown elaborate that the process attempts to identify, in an organizational context, the stimuli that lead to a decision, the decision-making process, and the result (1985, 35). For the purposes of this thesis, the goal is to identify the differences in the circumstances of parties (which may be described as the decisions taken by parties) to determine which choices were made that led to the ultimate survival of a party, or ultimately its failure. Mildred A. Schwartz (2000) applies this approach to one of the parties in question: the Alberta Social Credit party. She seeks to identify the strategies employed by the party that enable the party to survive. While Schwartz identifies (and elaborates on in a later work, Schwartz [2006]) a number of tactics that, deliberately or not, contribute to the survival of a party, her study takes the form of a case study rather than a comparison.

Instead, I compare parties that successfully survived with those that failed in order to determine what causal events contribute to its survival or demise. By examining the

circumstances under which each insurgent in the four western provinces forms, grows into a major party, forms government (or fails to do so), and its ultimate fate, I identify patterns in the organization and competitive circumstances of parties that correlate with their success or failure. This requires taking a careful accounting of the ways in which parties and the conditions in which they operate may differ and constructing a causal explanation of each party's success or failure at each of these key junctures based on the key variables I identify. Choosing the correct variables requires having already developed a working understanding of the cases, and a willingness to introduce additional variables if additional factors emerge in the course of the analysis. In particular, I focus on the capacity of the parties to field candidates; differences in the organizational and ideological structure of the parties, particularly as they affect each party's ability to adapt to changing electoral circumstances; the competitive landscape in which each party operates; and any major events, such as war, scandals, or rule changes, that may affect a party's fortunes. I do this by combining electoral data from the *Canadian Elections Database* that has never before been applied to these cases with the rich narrative literature on Western Canadian parties to systematically identify the factors that have facilitated the CCF-NDP's survival and the corresponding factors that led to other insurgents' failures.

I use three main measures in this thesis: the vote and seat shares held by each party over time, and the number of candidates fielded by each major party over time as a percentage of the total number of seats in each province. The vote and seat shares belonging to each party are used to identify periods in the development of each party system. Shifts in the vote or seat share between parties that last for several elections are evidence of realignment or dealignment of the system, depending on the duration of the shift (Key 1959). The points at which these shifts occur are the critical moments at which I then look for factors that contribute to a party's success or

failure. Because this thesis is concerned with the competitive dynamics between parties, it is appropriate to use both vote and seat share as measures. The nature of the single member plurality electoral system and its tendency to favour parties with regionally concentrated support means that aggregate shifts in one measure do not always correlate directly with shifts in the other, though both can reflect a party's relative strength or weakness (Cairns 1968). Additionally, vote and seat shares are useful for determining the number of parties that regularly compete with one another to form government: those that regularly earn the largest seat shares.

The size of the slate of candidates fielded by each party, or the percentage of seats in the legislature that each party contests, is used in this thesis as the central measure of a party's organizational coherence. Parties that are able to find candidates to run in every seat show greater organizational depth than parties that are not able to do so. A party able to run candidates in every seat requires enough committed activists to fill every seat, and to mount at least the bare minimum of a campaign even in areas where the party is electorally weak. The use of this measure is analogous to the use of geographical spread in the literature on party system nationalization, where the presence of a party's candidates across an entire country is nationally stronger than parties that compete only in a particular region (Caramani 2004; Chhibber and Kollman 2004; Pruyssers, Sayers, and Czarnecki 2020).

## **Procedure**

I began this study by immersing myself in the data and literature of Canadian party politics, looking for patterns and gaps. One particular puzzle that I found was the remarkable persistence of the NDP in the west in the electoral data, but I found no thorough explanation of the provincial NDP's exceptional position in the west in the existing literature. This is in spite of the fact that Western Canada contains some of the most well documented political phenomena in

Canada, including the rise of the Social Credit in Alberta and the early success of the CCF in Saskatchewan.

Guided by the existing literature, I took in as much material as I could find on the parties and party systems of Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan, and built a model of their development. These four provinces make excellent comparators given the similarity of their institutions and cultures, but most notably that each developed their party systems at around the same time, as new provinces after Canada had already been established. Both the similarities and differences of the four provinces are striking. First, as we can see today, the party systems of all four provinces developed differently. In no two of these provinces does the same combination of major parties compete, and nor have they for more than one hundred years. The only element currently common to all of them is the NDP, which I found is not only present in all four provinces after more than eighty years, but is the only party to have found success in all four.<sup>10</sup>

Aside from the NDP, each province has seen a variety of parties contest elections, and with their support often isolated to only one or two provinces. Social Credit, for example, was almost an entirely Albertan phenomenon until a different incarnation of the party broke through in British Columbia. Various parties affiliated as part of the Progressive movement were among these, including a party under that name in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and United Farmers parties in Manitoba and Alberta. These parties can generally be characterized as insurgents: parties that quickly organize and can exert a significant effect on the party system, but that usually disappear as quickly as they arrived (Johnston 2017). In Western Canada, I found that these parties generally organized around a “sectional” interest or to propose significant social

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<sup>10</sup> Depending on one’s definition of success and the chosen timing, the Liberals are a possible exception, having formed government in all four provinces at some point. Since the arrival of the CCF, however, this claim holds. With the NDP’s 2015 victory in Alberta, that party has now formed government in all four western provinces, and is the only to have done so.

change, often in response to an economic crisis.<sup>11</sup> By sectional, I refer to an economic group that shares, for a time, common political interests, often due to a social or economic crisis. The salient examples in western Canada were farmers and urban workers, who faced significant economic pressure first from the First World War and later from the Great Depression.<sup>12</sup> Examples of the latter type of insurgent include various communist, socialist, and social credit parties that developed across the west, with their growth again generally precipitated by economic turmoil. These parties arrived in two broad waves, with the first culminating in the 1920s and the second between the 1930s and 1950s.<sup>13</sup> The CCF-NDP was in all but one respect an insurgent party arriving during the second wave. Its difference was its persistence. Where all the other insurgents sooner or later disappeared, the CCF-NDP did not. The party also had some organizational differences that we shall see later prove to be important. The party was explicitly organized as a coalition between the sectional interests of farmers and labourers and social reformers, specifically socialists.

The exact pattern by which the NDP survived and succeeded differs in each province, as does the fate and degree of success earned by other insurgents. The CCF quickly formed government in Saskatchewan and rose to official opposition status in British Columbia, but its ascent in Alberta and Manitoba was more gradual. Meanwhile, the success of other insurgents was sometimes short lived, as in Manitoba, where the Progressives were quickly co-opted by the Liberal Party. In others it was enduring, such as in Alberta and British Columbia, where Social

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<sup>11</sup> Johnston notes the resistance of insurgent parties to a single theoretical explanation because the reasons that insurgents appear are usually somewhat idiosyncratic.

<sup>12</sup> Labour politics began earlier in British Columbia than elsewhere in response to rapid industrial growth and poor working conditions, followed by a depression in the 1890s (Hak 2013).

<sup>13</sup> The reason for the extended ranges is British Columbia, which fits the pattern but does not line up with the others temporally. Insurgent parties, especially of the latter social change type, organized early in British Columbia, even before the rest of the party system had fully emerged. The second wave also came late, not really taking hold until the Social Credit party formed government in 1952.

Credit governed until 1971 and 1991 respectively. In general, I found that parties on the right tended to come and go more frequently than on the left, where the NDP remained dominant. This trend continues today with the Saskatchewan Party, Wildrose Party, and even the BC Liberal party being notable examples of relatively recent arrivals.

In short, recognizing an apparent gap in the literature on the NDP's unusual persistence, I developed a broad account of the systems in which the NDP has persisted based on the existing literature and newly compiled electoral data in the *Canadian Elections Database*. Based on patterns of the arrival and exit of parties from their respective systems and corresponding shifts in the vote and seats shares belonging to each party, I periodized the development of the Western Canadian provincial party systems into four periods common to each that takes account of the differences and similarities of each.<sup>14</sup> These are periods of dealignment, when we see a shift in the aggregate seat shares of each province towards new parties, and periods of realignment, where the system shifts in response to these new parties.<sup>15</sup>

This is useful for organizing the various factors that contribute to a party's success or failure and comparing events and parties with one another across provincial boundaries. There are four common periods. First, a formative period during which party competition emerges and is principally between the Liberals and Conservatives. This period is unique to Western Canada and one of the reasons that the four western provinces make ideal comparators: we can easily evaluate the development of their party systems from the beginning, and all four got their start at around the same time. Second, a first wave of insurgent parties during which time at least one of

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<sup>14</sup> The vote and seat shares earned by new arrivals are significant: if a new party arrives but captures no support from the existing major parties, it is effectively irrelevant. In most elections across all provinces, there are a number of such parties that exert little influence on the competitive dynamics of the party system. See Appendix C.

<sup>15</sup> The most notable pattern of realignment we see is the consolidation of parties on the right once the CCF-NDP becomes a regular, major competitor for forming government. If the current party arrangement in Alberta holds, we see a similar pattern in three of the four provinces in this study.



the Liberal or Conservative parties are threatened by a new party. In all cases, the insurgent parties of this first wave eventually fail. Third, another wave of insurgent parties that notably includes the CCF-NDP. Most of the parties of this era eventually fail, again with the exception of the CCF-NDP. Finally, a period of consolidation during which new parties emerge less frequently and the number of existing ones declines.

Having identified the patterns of party system development and appropriate analytical periods, I then turned to identifying factors that contributed to the CCF-NDP's survival in each province. I do this by building a narrative of the events that occurred at critical junctures in the CCF-NDP's development to identify causal factors. These critical junctures are the realigning and dealigning moments of the party system's development, where we see a significant shift in the seat or vote share held by each party, or a party exiting the system. Because I can compare events with those in other provinces and in other parties, I am able to narrow down the range of explanations considerably. If I propose a factor that contributes to the CCF-NDP's survival found also, say, in the Social Credit party, this casts doubt on its validity as a causal explanation.

Stated generally, parties require both activists and voters to survive. Politics generates various stressors that threaten to cleave voters and activists from a party. These might include the natural competitive dynamics generated by political campaigns, scandals or changing economic and social conditions. This thesis is relatively agnostic as to what sorts of misfortunes might befall a party, except to say that parties inevitably face challenges that can cost them support. If a party loses enough voters or activists, it may dissolve, choose to merge with another party, or wither on the vine with too little support to be of real consequence. I argue that the CCF-NDP had several factors making it better able to weather these political storms by retaining activists and at least a small but loyal contingent of voters. To risk an analogy: all things being equal,

houses made of better materials are more likely to survive a visit from the Big Bad Wolf than the ones made from sticks or straw. The factors I identify are in effect the NDP's bricks.

I found several factors that together set the CCF-NDP apart from other parties by permitting its survival. First, the CCF's organization as a coalition of social reformers (socialists) and sectional interests, specifically organized farmers and workers. Most insurgents depended on just one base of support or the other, with reformers generally limited in their capacity for growth, and sectional parties subject to highly volatile swings in support. The CCF could depend on some support from both in its early days, making it less susceptible to several existential threats. Second, as a party of the left, the CCF-NDP gained several advantages. The CCF-NDP was able to define itself as the natural home for socialists and social democrats, and as the party grew, it became less susceptible to other challengers on the left. Left-wing parties like the CCF-NDP present a particular, coherent vision of society to which parties on the right are forced to respond, further entrenching the CCF-NDP as *the* party of the left. Third, the party has shown a willingness to adapt to changing electoral conditions that set it apart from many insurgents.<sup>16</sup> The most significant example of this is the party's evolution from the CCF into the NDP as its support began to wane. The party retained its core ethos, but defined itself by new issues to keep step with the times. Finally, the CCF-NDP had the benefit of a federal organization. This is true in two senses. The CCF itself was itself a federal organization to which various groups, particularly labour unions, belonged, and who had a vested interest in the party's success. More importantly, though, the CCF-NDP in each province is part of a network of nodes that constitute one organization, allowing money, personnel, and other resources to flow across provincial

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<sup>16</sup> The Alberta Social Credit is another good example. Once the social credit system proved unworkable, the party evolved into something resembling a mainstream conservative party. Lacking some of the other features described here, however, that party succumbed to a challenger, the Progressive Conservative party.

borders as necessary. Perhaps just as important is that the CCF's early successes showed its potential as a vehicle for political organization in other provinces where it was initially less successful. Turning to Saskatchewan or British Columbia, for example, Alberta activists were likely to have a better go remaining with the CCF organization and its accordant brand recognition than forming a brand new party.

At the centre of these factors is the organizational redundancy of the CCF-NDP as compared with other parties. As explained in the previous section, the main indicator of organizational strength used in this thesis is the size of the candidate slates that each party is able to field. In the CCF-NDP's case, the party was regularly able to run entire or nearly entire slates of candidates in elections throughout its history, even at times and in provinces where it had little electoral success. As Johnston (2017) notes, running everywhere is key for presenting a party to voters as a viable electoral choice. The fact that the CCF-NDP is regularly able to mount full slates reflects the fact that the party has enough strongly committed activists to run even at times and places where the party is electorally weak, which is in turn evidence of the organizational redundancy within the party. The CCF-NDP organization is not directly dependent on finding electoral success everywhere at once. The party is able to draw on its strength where it exists in order to present itself everywhere, and in that way remain an electorally viable option available to voters when competitive conditions improve. Additionally, running full slates of candidates exposes parties to a greater variety of interests than they would face in, for example, only working class ridings alone. By coming into contact with more of society, the the party is better able to construct platforms that reflect all of society, and thereby improve their odds of electoral success.

Process tracing requires me to, then, show how these factors, found through an initial assessment of the case, build a narrative to show that they are in fact causal factors of the NDP's success. I do this both by showing their applicability to the CCF-NDP's success at key dealigning and realigning moments, where new parties arrive and earn a large share of seats or the popular vote, or there is significant movement of the aggregate seat or vote share between parties in each of the four provinces. I also present counterfactuals in the form of other Western Canadian parties that lacked these same factors, and thus eventually failed. For the CCF, I look at the party's formation, and moments at which its activist and voter support substantially grew or weakened. I use the number of candidates fielded by the party as a proxy for activist support. For other parties, I look additionally at their moments of failure and ultimate fates to determine what happened in those parties so differently.

### **CHAPTER THREE: SASKATCHEWAN**

Saskatchewan is the historical centre of the CCF-NDP's strength in Canada. It is the first place where the party formed government, and the first place in North America to elect a socialist or social democratic party. Most impressively, the party has sustained itself as one of the province's two largest political parties for its entire 86-year history. But the CCF-NDP was not the lone insurgent in Saskatchewan politics. Social Credit, the Progressives, and various minor parties also competed, but their success was short-lived if it came at all. The CCF-NDP has outlasted these all of these insurgents by decades. It has also outlasted both the Liberal and Conservative parties, which one dominated the province's politics and continue to do so today at the federal level. Today's party system in Saskatchewan is unrecognizable from that of a hundred years ago, due in large part to the CCF-NDP's success.

This chapter explains the circumstances that permitted the CCF-NDP's rise and endurance in Saskatchewan by tracing the development of the province's party system from its beginnings in 1905 through to the current Saskatchewan Party and NDP-dominated period. By describing the organization and competitive position of Saskatchewan's major parties at several critical junctures, this chapter shows that the CCF-NDP had several characteristics lacked by other parties which, together, permitted its rise and continued strength. The CCF-NDP was able to deliver a more stable base of committed activists and run candidates every district more consistently than other parties as a result of the imperatives its commitment to social democracy (Cochrane 2010; Duverger 1959). Yet the party's willingness to be moderate has allowed it to reach a broad base of voters not available to narrowly constructed farmers parties or socialist parties. The CCF-NDP's success in Saskatchewan has served as a template for the party's

success elsewhere by showing that electoral success for a social democratic party was possible in Canada.

First, this chapter will analyze the formation of Saskatchewan's earliest party system, and the circumstances that caused it to give way to some of the province's early insurgent parties. The fact that the province's first parties came first from the federal arena proves especially consequential for the arrival of the province's first insurgents, and in turn the CCF-NDP. Because the parties lacked deep roots in Saskatchewan society, they were especially vulnerable to competition from new parties. Saskatchewan's economy was by a large margin dominated by agriculture, and wheat farming in particular. This meant that early insurgents were especially likely not to come from the left or the right as such, but to be agrarian populist parties catering specifically to farmers' interests.

Second, this chapter considers the first insurgent wave in the province: the circumstances that drove farmers to political action, and the reasons for the insurgents' ultimate failure. Compared with Alberta, the first insurgent wave was rather weak due to a concerted effort by the Liberals to court the farmers' vote. Changing circumstances, and especially the aftermath of the Great Depression, made this position untenable in the long run, and set the stage for the arrival of the CCF.

Third, the arrival of the CCF is analyzed with particular attention to the ways in which the emergence of the party differed from the Progressives in the first wave, and from both the Liberals and Conservatives before them. In addition, the CCF is compared with its contemporary, the Social Credit party, which managed to form government in Alberta but presented little more than an abortive effort in Saskatchewan. The CCF basically ran on a social democratic platform that emphasized agrarian issues, but it was not exclusively a farmer's party.

The party was established as an explicit coalition between farmers, urban workers, and socialists, and showed a commitment to staying relevant in an increasingly urban, and more economically diversified province by moderating its platform and extending itself beyond farmers' issues.

Fourth, this chapter examines the CCF-NDP's growth and transformation from an avowedly socialist farmers party into a contemporary big-tent social democratic party. The CCF-NDP was never committed to a single segment of society or unorthodox economic system. The early coalitional nature of the party made its gradual transformation more palatable to activists and voters generally alike. As the CCF-NDP grew, it increasingly came to define the left in Saskatchewan, eventually triggering a party system realignment through the consolidation of parties on the right. Today, the CCF continues to define the left with the centre-right Saskatchewan Party presently its sole major competitor.

Finally, this chapter ties together this sequence of events with an explicit comparison of the parties at the critical junctures they each faced to build a causal model of the CCF-NDP's success and, conversely, the failure of its predecessors.

## **Overview of Saskatchewan's Party System**

### *The Demographics of Party System Change*

In its early years as a province, Saskatchewan had a unique combination of demographic circumstances that made it well suited to the emergence of new parties, and particularly parties of the left. Saskatchewan's population was chiefly rural, its economy agricultural, and dominated largely by the production of a single commodity: wheat. Most of Saskatchewan's population was composed to recent European settlers who had little exposure to the existing Canadian political parties. Those parties themselves had yet to really establish themselves in Saskatchewan, with parties only arriving in 1905. These economic and social conditions made the province well

suited to the emergence of new parties, particularly parties of the left, that could cater to the interests of farmers.

From its establishment in 1905, the economic and social conditions of Saskatchewan meant that agricultural concerns dominated the province's politics. Saskatchewan, like Alberta, was established as a province in 1905 from a portion of the North-West Territories. Until the discovery of oil and gas in Alberta, Saskatchewan was the more prosperous and populated province of the two, with Saskatchewan's population exceeding Alberta's as recently as the 1941 census (Statistics Canada 2014).<sup>17</sup> Saskatchewan, on the other hand, remained primarily an agricultural economy significantly longer, with other sectors overtaking agriculture only in the last few decades (Dyck 1996a; Stirling 2001). Not until 1971 did the urban areas of Saskatchewan overtake the province's rural areas for share of the population (Courtney and Smith 1978, 310). Compared with Alberta, where ranching played a more significant role in the agricultural sector, the bulk of Saskatchewan farming was of a single crop: wheat (Dyck 1996a). Seymour Martin Lipset (1968) rightly identifies that this particular structure of the province's economy lent itself especially well to organization and collectivization. Organizations like the Saskatchewan Grain Growers Association (SGGA) and the Saskatchewan Co-operative Elevator Company (SCEC) advocated for the interests of farmers to the provincial government and collectivized the distribution of the farmers' product.<sup>18</sup>

This economic arrangement had two main effects on the party system. First, it gave farmers and farmers' organizations an enormous amount of political power. The SGGA's decision to remain out of electoral politics, until it later reversed that decision, had a significant effect on the shape of the party system in the early 20th century. Second, the single-dominant

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<sup>17</sup> By 1910, Saskatchewan was the third largest province in Canada.

<sup>18</sup> The SGGA was an advocacy group, while the SCEC was for most of its history a provincial crown corporation.



commodity economy of wheat lent itself especially well to collectivization and nationalization. It exposed most of the Saskatchewan economy to the same pressures, like the Great Depression, in a similar way. In short, the wheat economy created especially fertile ground for the later arrival of social democracy.<sup>19</sup>

Saskatchewan, and Western Canada more generally, was settled mostly by European immigrants.<sup>20</sup> Their exposure to the existing Canadian federal parties—the Liberals and the Conservatives—was limited, and new immigrants had no cause to develop strong attachments to them. Prior to 1905, the North-West Territories, including Saskatchewan, did not have parties in its legislature. The Liberal and Conservative parties would have been known to voters from their role in federal politics, but those parties were not organized locally. As Duverger suggests, the early parties in a system tend to be of parliamentary origin, being groups of politicians organized for the expedience of legislative business (1959, xxiv-xxxvii). Such organizations were already in place by the time the North-West Territories was settled in earnest. Politicians would join them for their parliamentary function, not because they had any roots in Saskatchewan society. Later, Duverger explains, we see the emergence of parties from civil society. Organized groups like labour unions—or, say, farmers organizations—are frequently among those who move into the realm of politics. With the Liberals and Conservatives poorly rooted in Saskatchewan society, new parties of extra-parliamentary origin had an especially good opportunity to be competitive in the new provincial politics. Recent immigrant voters from Britain and continental

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<sup>19</sup> Lipset (1968) develops this argument at length but overstates the point. As the subsequent history of Saskatchewan has shown, farmers did not really achieve any sort of class consciousness except as to vote in a manner as aligned with their interests.

<sup>20</sup> According to Courtney and Smith (1978, 308), Anglo-Saxons constituted about fifty-three percent of the population in 1921, with the next largest groups being German, Scandinavian, and French (“Other” makes up 18.9% of the population for that year).

Europe would have been more likely to have exposure to various socialist parties which had already begun to flourish in Europe than the Canadian Liberals and Conservatives.

Nothing is inevitable in politics. Manitoba and Alberta, with similar demography and institutions, demonstrate that. But the social and political conditions in Saskatchewan in the early twentieth century were especially favourable for the development of new parties, and given the relative weakness of the existing ones, there was ample opportunity for new parties to succeed. As the remainder of this chapter illustrates, having the right background conditions is not enough. Features of the parties themselves, as well as changing social and economic circumstances, directly affect the fortunes of new parties and explain why most insurgents fail but the CCF-NDP did not.

### *Literature*

Lots has been written on political parties in Saskatchewan, but there is no consensus on why the CCF-NDP arrived there first, succeeded, and continued to thrive after decades. The explanations that do exist rarely put events in Saskatchewan in a broader context with comparisons to neighbouring provinces and the federal arena. As a result, the explanations are often idiosyncratic. Lipset's *Agrarian Socialism*, first published in 1950, finds a political climate especially favourable to agrarian socialism because of the political and economic conditions of the province, and therefore the CCF succeeds.<sup>21</sup> For Courtney and Smith (1978) and Smith (1975), the CCF's success comes from the Liberal and Conservatives' own failures to ameliorate the concerns of farmers and run effective political machines. Among more contemporary

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<sup>21</sup> As I explain in the previous section, the pre-existing political, economic, and social conditions in Saskatchewan are significant, particularly because Saskatchewan is the first place that the CCF finds real success. But the analysis cannot end there, because the CCF survived long after those conditions changed, and they were never really matched in neighbouring provinces. Lipset's greatest deficiency, through no fault of his own, is that his analysis was written too soon after the events in question to put them in sufficiently broad perspective.

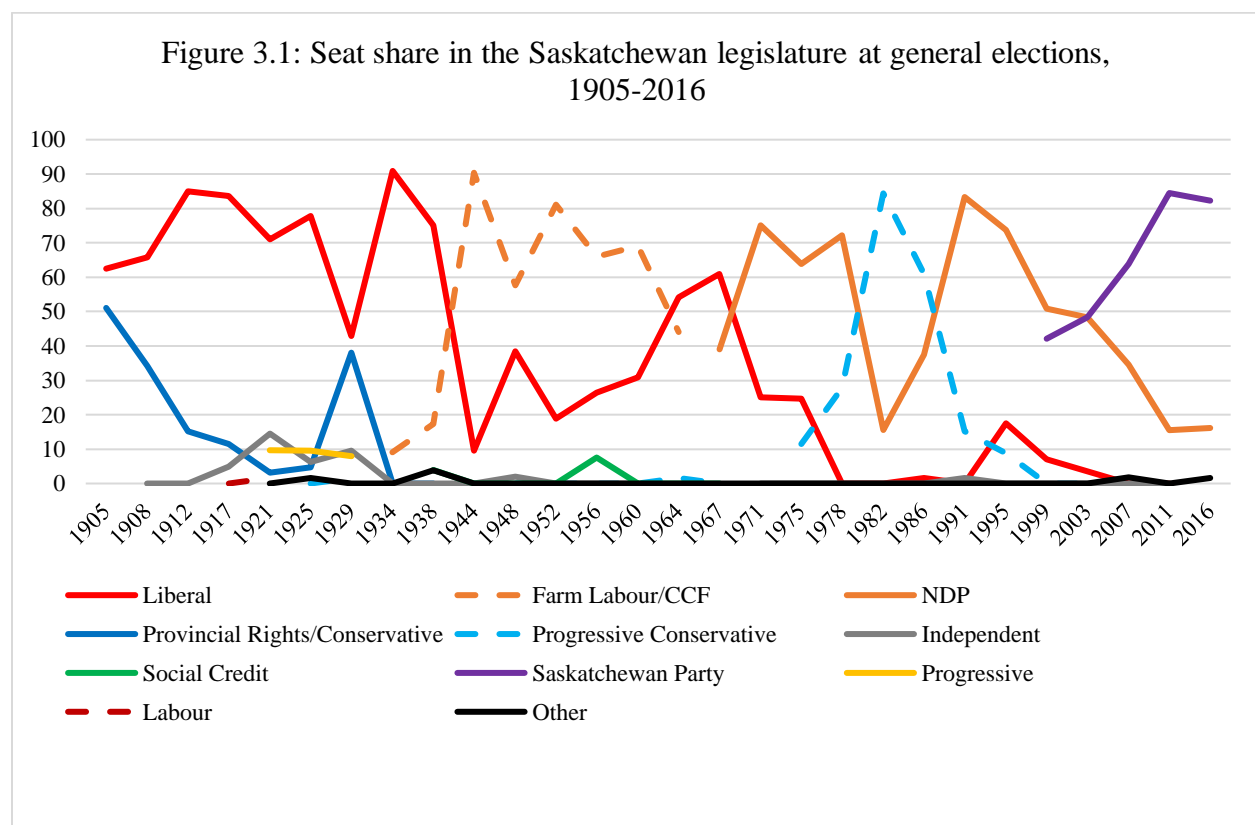
accounts, Dyck (1996a) instead highlights the fact that Saskatchewan has had more robust two-party competition than most provinces where one party is often significantly stronger. The CCF-NDP's enduring success was in large part a rejection of the Liberals due to their association with the federal Liberal party. Eager emphasizes the CCF-NDP's flexibility, initially running on a populist agrarian platform and by 1971 having a "basically conservative platform" (1980, 43). A number of analyses of the Saskatchewan party system take the place of the CCF-NDP as given, instead emphasizing the greater volatility seen on the right with the decline of the Liberal and Progressive Conservative parties (Rasmussen 2016).

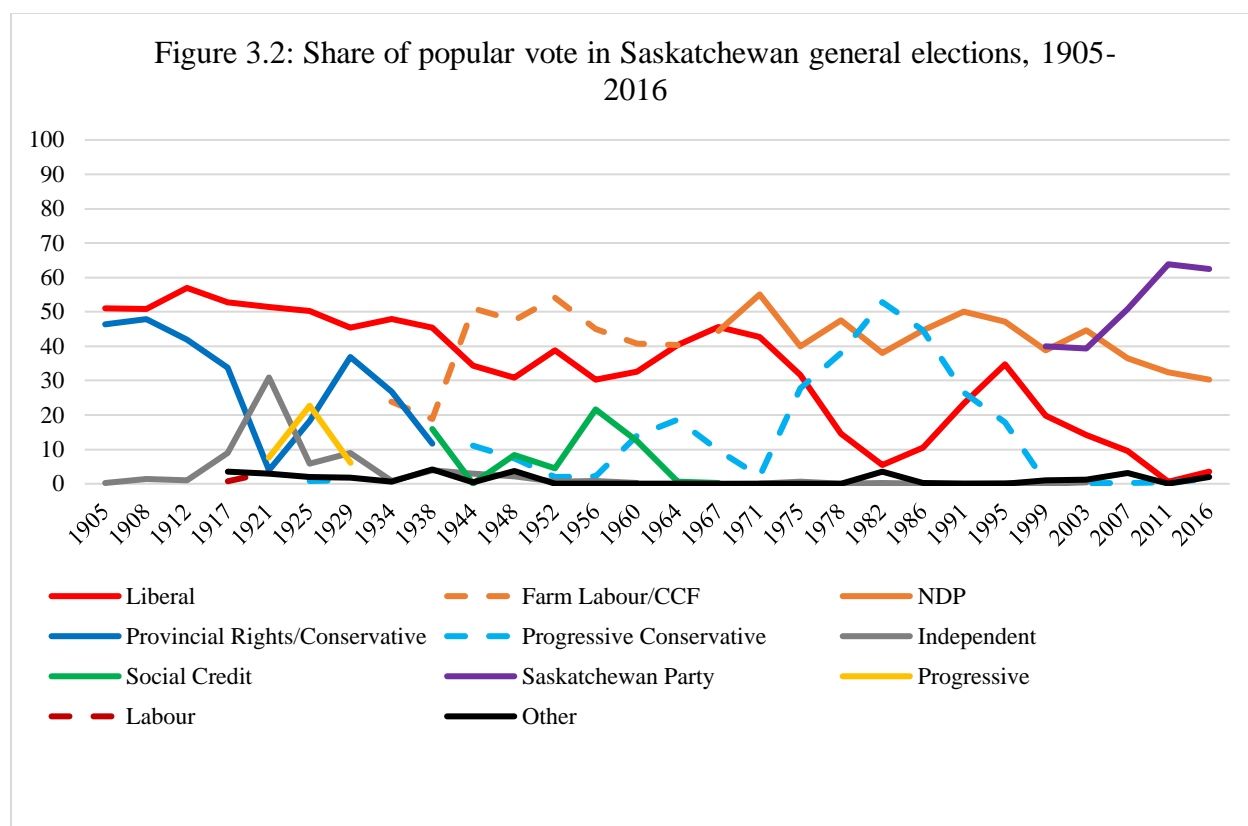
None of these accounts are incorrect, but they emphasize different aspects of the CCF-NDP's breakthrough and subsequent success. None of them offer an explanation fully generalizable to other provinces where the CCF met with similar success not long after. By combining these accounts and comparing the explanations with other parties both within Saskatchewan and across the west, we can distil an explanation that takes account of all of these factors.

### *Critical Junctures and Periods*

As this chapter argues, the CCF-NDP's enduring commitment to social democracy allowed it to maintain a stable base of support, organize sufficiently to run candidates across all electoral districts more often than others, and act as a template for the success of the party in other jurisdictions. Some of the key assumptions behind this are that the default state for any party is failure except as specific contribute to its survival, and that these factors are most clearly observable at certain key junctures in the development of the parties and the party system in which they participate. Such junctures include the point at which a new party arrives, when it fails, and when parties capture an enduring share of seats or the aggregate vote from other

parties. Additionally, moments such as a new party forming government for the first time, or a governing party being reduced to only a handful of seats are critical moments at which to observe a party's strengths and weaknesses. Such moments are usually described in the party systems literature as moments of realignment or dealignment: points at which the support of voters shifts between parties en masse, or towards new parties (Johnston 2013a; Key 1959). The circumstances that precipitate these events, and how parties respond, are the observations introduced here to build a causal model of the CCF-NDP's survival, and in doing so, other parties' failures.





Figures 3.1 and 3.2 show the seat and vote shares held by each major party from 1905, when Saskatchewan was organized as a province, through the 2016 provincial election.<sup>22</sup> Dyck (1996a), O’Fee (2008), Rasmussen (2016) among others have used data similar to these to periodize the Saskatchewan party system based primarily on the number of major competitors in each era. I repeat this exercise here with the emphasis on the arrival and departure of major parties from the system. Across the west, there is a common pattern to the development of the party system on this measure, even as other aspects of party competition differ.<sup>23</sup> In each case we

<sup>22</sup> In these figures and throughout this thesis, I use a consistent threshold to determine which parties are included and which are grouped as “other”. A party must earn either 3 seats *or* ten percent of the popular vote in at least one election. On this threshold, the literature has not made consequential reference to any party not included in these figures, so I consider them to be comprehensive for the purpose of this thesis.

The source of this and other figures in this thesis is Sayers (2021), *Canadian Elections Database*.

<sup>23</sup> The emphasis, that is, is on the movement and survival/death of parties rather than on the number and combination of parties that compete.

see, first, a pattern of two-party competition between the Liberals and Conservatives. Second, an initial insurgent wave during which a new party (or parties) emerge and challenge the two dominant parties.<sup>24</sup> The insurgents of this period fail, and eventually give way to a second insurgent wave. One or more parties from this period endure for a period of time, but only the CCF-NDP remains through to the present. Finally, there is a period of consolidation from which the current party system results.

<b>Table 3.1: Periods in the development of the Saskatchewan party system</b>			
<b>Era</b>	<b>Dominant parties at beginning of period</b>	<b>Arriving insurgents</b>	<b>Result</b>
1905 – c. 1921 (Two-party competition)	Conservative Party Liberal Party	—	—
c. 1921 – c. 1929 (First insurgent wave)	Conservative Party Liberal Party	Progressives	Progressives form coalition government with Conservatives, exit system when coalition fails
c. 1934 – 1967 (Second insurgent wave)	Conservative Party Liberal Party	CCF Social Credit	CCF displaces (Progressive) Conservative party Social Credit exits system
c. 1967 – 1999 (Consolidation)	CCF-NDP Liberal Party	(Progressive Conservatives displace Liberals) Saskatchewan Party	Saskatchewan Party consolidates most of Liberal and Progressive Conservative vote
1999 – Present	NDP Saskatchewan Party	—	—

<sup>24</sup> The pattern looks slightly different in British Columbia where a variety of insurgents emerge before party politics was even firmly established in the province. I explain in greater detail in chapter six.

In Saskatchewan, these periods generally correspond to the dates shown in table 3.1. From Saskatchewan's establishment as a province through 1921, with the arrival of the Progressives, competition is generally between the Liberals and Conservatives, with a handful of minor parties and independents contesting a few seats. This period serves as a baseline for the future development of the party system. To understand how it changes, it is important to observe the circumstances that led the Liberals and Conservatives to dominate the provinces politics for two decades, when the North-West Territories had no parties at all in the period prior. Also important here is what *did not* happen. Courtney and Smith (1978) and Smith (1975) both emphasize the deliberate choice made by farmers in the SGGa not to engage in direct political action. This is an important question raised by the literature worthy of special consideration.

Next is the first insurgent wave, during which the Progressives arrive and shortly thereafter disappear again. There are three moments to be explained: why the Progressives emerged, what led to their coalition with the Conservatives, and why they ultimately failed.

In the second insurgent wave, both the CCF and Social Credit parties enter the scene; the latter several years after the former. The critical junctures in this period are the arrival of both insurgent parties, the CCF forming government and effectively displacing the Conservatives, and Social Credit's demise. Implicit here is the question of why the CCF proved successful where Social Credit did not, especially when the reverse seems to be true in Alberta.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, in the period of consolidation, we see the CCF transform itself into the NDP, the Progressive Conservatives displace the Liberals as the CCF-NDP's primary competitor, and eventually the Saskatchewan Party largely displacing both the Liberals and PCs. By this point, the CCF-NDP has clearly established itself as a fixture of the party system. The CCF-NDP

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<sup>25</sup> I say "seems" to be true because I argue the CCF was actually successful in Alberta: the NDP is still there, and has formed government, decades later. See chapter four.

transition suggests some willingness to transform in order to survive, which contrasts with the Liberal-Progressive Conservative-Saskatchewan Party dynamic. The critical junctures here are the entries and exits of these parties, and the CCF-NDP's gradual evolution.

The following section considers each of these junctures in detail to establish what their causes and effects were, and in turn what differentiated the CCF-NDP from the province's other parties. It shows that the CCF-NDP was able to leverage its early success as an agrarian populist party to build a big-tent left-of-centre party able to adapt to changing conditions. The CCF's early success in Saskatchewan helped grow the party across the country, which in turn helped sustain the Saskatchewan party even in its weaker moments. Saskatchewan's other insurgents had narrower bases of support or unorthodox economic ideas that made them less able to adapt and attract continued support in the form of voters and candidates. The Liberals and Conservatives, for their part, faced competitive pressures from one another and the added challenge of political baggage from their counterparts in government in Ottawa. The result has been consolidation on the right leading to a two-party arrangement between the NDP and Saskatchewan Party, which increasingly resembles the arrangement in the other Western provinces.

## **Party System Development**

### *Non-Partisan Government and the Origins of the Saskatchewan Party System*

Early events in Saskatchewan played a significant role in shaping those that followed. Johnston (2017, 258-259), drawing on Mahoney (2000), observes the importance of these reactive sequences in shaping the history of the west, including Saskatchewan. All four provinces share in common that their party systems developed *after* they emerged as political units within Canada, which already had a national party system, and the sequence of events that follows has been



shaped by this fact. The relative strength of the NDP in Western Canada compared with the East is an indirect result of the fact that those provinces' party systems developed within Canada, rather than emerging from pre-existing colonies like the other provinces. In Eastern and Central Canada, the parties grew with the population; in the West, the first parties were already organized well before responsible government and provincehood arrived. Duverger's (1964) observation that the first parties emerge from within the legislature is true at the federal level in the west, and almost doubly so provincially.

The provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan were not formed through formerly independent colonies uniting like most other provinces in Canada.<sup>26</sup> Instead, they were created from portions of the sparsely populated North-West Territories.<sup>27</sup> Prior to becoming provinces in 1905, the North-West Territories enjoyed a non-partisan tradition of government, sustained by an unusual alignment of interests on the question of greater autonomy and provincehood, in opposition to a strong Dominion government (Eager 1980, 45; Lingard 1946; Smith 1975). The territory first won responsible government for itself by 1891, and provincehood by 1905 (Lingard 1946). The new provinces lacked control over their own natural resources, despite those resources being the basis of their economies, and freight rates for the provinces' exports were a constant source of contention (Elton 1979; Mallory 1954; Rasmussen 2016). J. R. Mallory concluded that Alberta and Saskatchewan "were not provinces in the same sense as were Ontario and Quebec, but in the Roman sense" (1954, 10)—the more or less explicit purpose of the North-West Territories was to direct wealth and resources back to Central Canada.

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<sup>26</sup> All other provinces save for Manitoba, including British Columbia and Newfoundland and Labrador. The reasons Manitoba became an independent province differ somewhat from Alberta and Saskatchewan. See Morton (1967a)

<sup>27</sup> The focus of this thesis is evidently on colonial institutions. I by no means intend to suggest that the North-West Territories were unpopulated or ungoverned, as Indigenous people have resided there for thousands of years.

While the North-West Territories had a non-partisan tradition at the territorial level, parties were well established in the territory's federal electoral districts along the same lines as elsewhere in Canada. The fact that they had not previously contested elections in the territory meant a place for them in the new provinces was no certainty. The new province needed a caretaker government to administer the province until its first election could be held. The responsibility for appointing that government fell to the province's Lieutenant Governor, Amédée Forget, himself appointed by the federal (Liberal) government. Forget appointed Liberal Walter Scott as the new province's first premier, passing over outgoing premier of the North-West Territories Frederick Haultain. Haultain had been a strong advocate of the non-partisan form of government at the territorial level, but in federal politics was a Conservative. Haultain attempted to capitalize on his previous success in non-partisan government by organizing his party under the name "Provincial Rights" rather than Conservative (Eager 1980, 46), but the party adopted the latter name after Haultain left the leadership in 1912.

Parties emerged in Saskatchewan because of the federal affiliations held by its early leaders, due in part to the involvement of the federal government. The Liberals and Conservatives alike might be described as elite-centred or cadre parties that developed at the provincial level because of existing relationships the new province's political elite had to the federal system, and not through organic growth in the legislature or society. As later events prove, it is not inevitable that the party system be structured the same at the federal and provincial level, but the fact they were proves important for its subsequent development.

### *Two-Party Competition*

For Saskatchewan's first sixteen years, it was governed by the Liberal Party with the Conservatives in opposition. The Liberals had the advantage of incumbency, having several

months in government before the first election to demonstrate their program. The Conservatives, under the Provincial Rights name, “usually elaborated their campaigns with general attacks on partisanship and demands for provincial control of resources” (Courtney and Smith 1978, 286). As the Conservatives, the Courtney and Smith argue that the party had little to offer “as an alternative to the government other than more efficient administration” (1978, 286). So the period styled here as two-party competition really amounted to domination by the Liberals with the Conservatives cast as the perennial opposition.

The Liberal government, for its part, was focused on remaining in power. Recognizing the importance of farmers to the province’s politics, it cultivated a close relationship with the SGGA, going so far as to include SGGA members in cabinet (Courtney and Smith 1978, 286). Having their interests well represented in the government, the majority of farmers in Saskatchewan resisted direct political action longer than they might have otherwise, and longer than they did in Alberta by several years (Morton 1967b, 106). The pressures of representing Saskatchewan farmers’ interests against a federal government of the same partisan stripe forced the Liberals to distance themselves from the federal party, with Premier William Martin declaring in 1920 that he “would not be responsible for the organization nor for the policies of any federal political party” (quoted in Morton 1967b, 98).<sup>28</sup>

The period of Liberal–Conservative competition is really the story of the Liberal party’s dominance, and as Smith describes it, a “well-oiled machine” (1975, 25). Because of the good fortunes of the federal government’s involvement, the Liberals found themselves in power, and made the best of the situation. The Liberals developed an effective political machine that doled

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<sup>28</sup> The Liberals and Conservatives would eventually face this pressure throughout the country, with separate organizations now the rule rather than the exception (Carty and Cross 2010). The NDP is, of course, the exception, having not yet governed federally and faced the pressure of opposing interests at the other level.

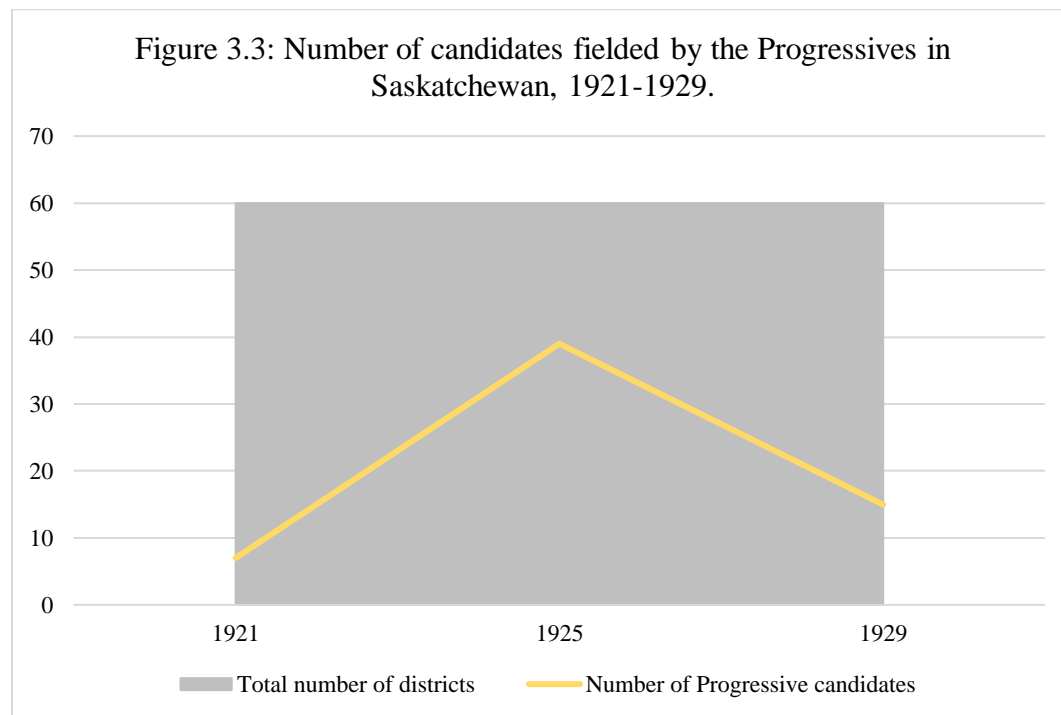
out patronage, preserved local autonomy in constituencies, courted farmers and immigrants, distanced themselves from the federal party, and developed close ties with the SGGA, which proved to be a kingmaker organization. The success the Liberals had here prevented farmers from organizing in politics directly sooner—and once they did organize, they did so in fewer numbers than in either Alberta or Saskatchewan. But all good things must end. Gradually through the 1920s, farmers' support was drained from the Liberals, with some leaving for the Progressives and many more for the Farmer-Labour party, later the CCF, by the 1930s.

### *The First Insurgency*

Compared with Alberta and Manitoba, the first insurgent wave in Saskatchewan was less successful. Both affiliates of the Progressives, the United Farmers of Alberta and the United Farmers of Manitoba formed governments in those provinces in those provinces in 1920 and 1921 respectively. In Saskatchewan, the Progressives earned just 7.52 percent of the popular vote. Returning to figure 2, this share came largely at the expense of the Conservatives, with support for the Liberals remaining high.

The Progressive Party of Canada was a political movement led primarily by farmers in response to an unfavourable freight tariff system for farmers during the First World War (Leithner 1993; Morton 1967b). It was a truly sectional party, concerned with the specific interests of farmers and little else. The party never ran a full slate of candidates at the federal level, and it is not clear that the party had any interest in governing. Rather, its goal was to exert political pressure for the interests of farmers. While the principal issues for the party were federal, the party maintained provincial wings connected with provincial farm organizations. The character of these wings was variable, with a struggle between the Manitoba and Alberta sections defining much of the party's internal politics (Morton 1967b). Both the UFA and UFM were

affiliates of the Progressives, spurred to direct political action by the increasing militancy of those provinces' farmers organizations (Morton 1967b, 96).



In Saskatchewan, organized farmers were less willing to engage in direct political action given their close relationship with the Liberals and that party's willingness to distance itself from its federal wing. As with any societal group, farmers are not completely homogenous, however. Some farmers did choose to engage in direct political action through the vehicle that the national Progressive Party offered. Courtney and Smith note that this group of farmers "was characterized by demands for governmental and electoral reform as by promotion of particular farmers interests", suggesting that its support may have been composed largely of social reformers instead of farmers generally (1978, 291). As figure 3.3 shows, the party never fielded a full slate of candidates across the province, in stark contrast with their equivalents in Alberta and Manitoba. Most farmers evidently remained comfortable in their relationship with the Liberals throughout the 1920s.

The Progressives earned enough support to, combined with the Conservatives, displace the Liberals and form a co-operative government. New leadership in the Liberal party meant again closer connections between the federal and provincial Liberal wings, along with a host of other issues, including a hostility towards the Liberals from the burgeoning Ku Klux Klan (Dyck 1996a, 463; Smith 1975, 149ff).<sup>29</sup> The Progressives found themselves in government not by cultivating a well-oiled political machine as the Liberals had, but through the failure of the Liberal machine and the relative weakness of the Conservatives that made support from a third party necessary. The influence of federal politics on the province made that party the Progressives. It is telling that by the time the Progressives helped form government, their support was already on the decline, earning only 6 percent of the popular vote and eight percent of seats in the legislature respectively. At the federal level, the party had completely dissolved by the following year, 1930. The 1929 election shows that even successful parties like the Liberals do not remain in power forever, and that other parties will accordingly benefit even if they do not out-perform.

The Conservative-Progressive coalition, and in turn the Progressives as an organization, failed for three main reasons. First, they had the misfortune of being elected to office just as the Great Depression began. No government had the policy tools to effectively deal with the Great Depression, but that did not prevent voters from blaming governments for the crisis (Achen and Bartels 2016, 177-212). Saskatchewan was hit especially hard by the Depression due to drought and a decline in the price of wheat (Dyck 1996a, 463). Income for Saskatchewan farmers was 1.5 percent in 1933 of what it had been in 1928 (Horn 1984). Progressive supporters were

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<sup>29</sup> While I emphasize the central role of farmers in Saskatchewan politics, it bears repeating that they were not a homogenous group, nor the only group. Other issues including race and language had important effects in shaping the provinces politics.

increasingly unimpressed with the policy choices of their own members in the legislature, no doubt exacerbated by the exigencies of co-operating with another party in government (Courtney and Smith 1978, 292). Second, the national Progressive organization collapsed. A large proportion of the party was reluctant to have the Progressives function like a political party, due especially to the influence of the party's Alberta membership (Morton 1967b, 170).<sup>30</sup> It also suffered from its success: as a sectional party, it had little reason to continue after many of its demands had been met (Morton 1967b, 266). Without the national movement that fuelled it, the provincial organization, too, had little reason to continue. Third, the Depression had finally spurred the majority of organized Saskatchewan farmers to direct political action. The United Farmers of Canada (Saskatchewan Section) (UFC[SS]), successor to the SGGA, had finally resolved to engage directly in politics, culminating in the organization of the Farmer-Labour Party (Lipset 1968, 90-9; Smith 1975, 211).<sup>31</sup> What residual support the Progressives had moved to the new political organization, or returned to the Liberals.

In summary, the Progressive moment in Saskatchewan was short-lived from a combination of structural shortcomings in the party and political circumstance. As a sectional party with no strong ideological commitment, the party was susceptible to the implementation of its ideas by other parties. As a party with a largely federal orientation, it depended on the success of its national wing which soon faltered. And without the support of the majority of Saskatchewan farmers, it simply lacked the organizational resolve to continue through the political storm wrought by the Great Depression. The CCF clearly learned much from the Progressive movement, as the latter's shortcomings proved to be the new party's strengths.

### *The Second Insurgency: CCF Arrival and Breakthrough*

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<sup>30</sup> See chapter four for more on the UFA, Henry Wise Wood, and its ideas of group government.

<sup>31</sup> For Lipset, this is the point at which farmers achieved "class consciousness".

Saskatchewan was hard hit by the Depression, and this demanded a political response. It was the key event that finally drove Saskatchewan's farmers to engage directly in politics, first on their own but soon joining forces with Saskatchewan's small labour party, the Independent Labour Party (ILP) (Sinclair 1973). A number of key figures in the farmer and labour parties brought ties from socialist parties in Europe, and socialist ideas lent themselves well to the problems farmers were experiencing (Sinclair 1973; Smith 1969).<sup>32</sup> In any case, the experience of the Progressives in Saskatchewan and the UFA in Alberta demonstrated the shortcomings of a quasi- or non-partisan orientation, and the Liberals and Conservatives had capitalism well covered. From the beginning, the CCF (as it quickly became known after affiliating with the new national party, which required only a broad commitment to socialist principles) was a true party with ideological principles to match.<sup>33</sup> It formed not just to air the grievances of farmers, but to govern, and offer an alternative social vision (Courtney and Smith 1978; Sinclair 1973; Smith 1969). From the start, the CCF was more successful than the Progressives had ever been, earning nearly a quarter of the vote in their first showing in 1934.

The CCF immediately showed its capacity to organize and adapt. As figure 3.4 shows, the party quickly managed to court enough candidates to run in every electoral district. This is a testament to the organizational capacity of farmers in the province, and another indicator of the marked difference between the CCF and the Progressives. The 1934 election proved to be a referendum on socialism to a certain extent (Sinclair 1973). The presence of the CCF forced the Liberals into the position of defending the status quo against an alternative social and economic vision (Dyck 1996a, 464). The CCF's position was bold, calling for "the social ownership of *all*

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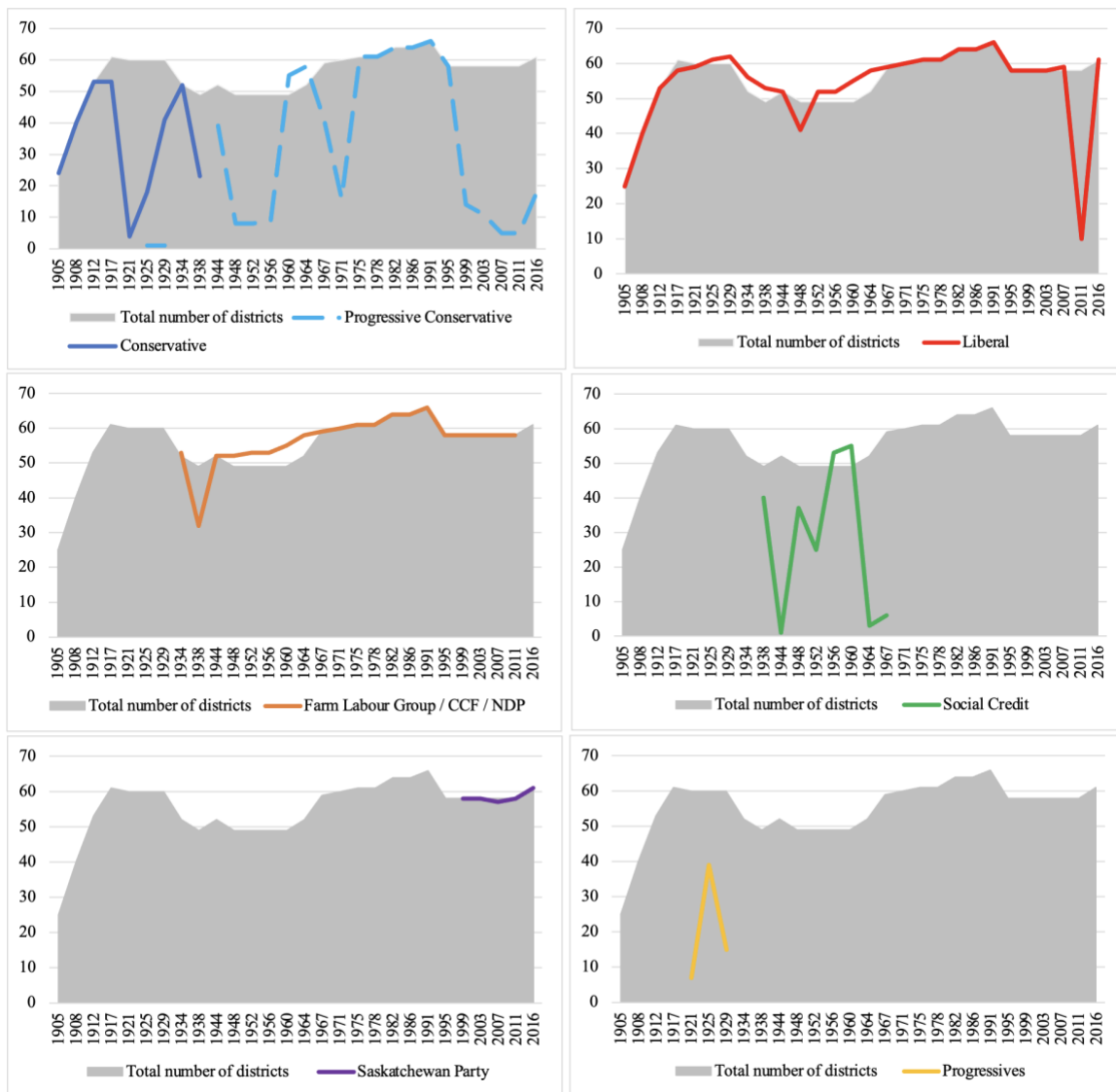
<sup>32</sup> Wheat is transported and sold in bulk. It finds itself in grain cars through the use of grain elevators, which operate well as state-owned enterprises or co-operatives.

<sup>33</sup> Throughout this section I use the CCF to refer to both it and the Farmer-Labour Group for clarity's sake, and given that the latter name was used only for a short time.



resources and the machinery of wealth production” (quoted in Sinclair 1973, 423; emphasis in source). While this proved popular enough to earn them the role of opposition but was evidently too radical for some.

Figure 3.4: Number of candidates fielded by each major party in Saskatchewan versus total number of districts, 1905-2016



Over the next several years, the CCF removed explicit references to socialism from its platform and no longer advocated for the collective ownership of all resources. Instead, the party proposed a platform of social planning rather than social ownership (Dyck 1996a, 465; Sinclair

1973). While much of its platform was aimed directly at farmers, the party did not limit itself to farmers alone, offering a broad social vision. The party was increasingly populist, without losing its general left-of-centre orientation. The CCF became increasingly credible as a challenger to the Liberals, and with the collapse of the Conservatives, the only challenger. They were rewarded with a successful 1944 election during which they earned 51 percent of the popular vote and more than ninety percent of the seats in the legislature.

The CCF was not the only party to present an alternative economic vision. Social Credit contested its first election in Saskatchewan in 1938, arriving later than the CCF and three years after forming government in Alberta. That party found some support, earning 16 percent of the popular vote in its first showing. It faced additional challenges in Saskatchewan that the CCF did not, however. First, the CCF had the benefit of its longstanding association with Saskatchewan farmers. By contrast, Social Credit was not only not rooted in the farmers movement, but deeply associated with another province altogether. Social Credit found more resonance in the western part of the province that received Alberta radio broadcasts but was received by many in the rest of the province as something akin to an invasion (Andrews 1982; Sinclair 1972). Social Credit also had to grapple with the problem of having already formed government in Alberta three years prior, with its utopic vision nowhere in sight. Much of the Social Credit platform had been disallowed by the federal government in the same year (Andrews 1982; Sinclair 1972). Social Credit also continued to subscribe to a somewhat more technocratic form of quasi-partisanship as had been followed by the Progressives and UFA, and already rejected by Saskatchewan voters. Lastly, Social Credit arrived after the CCF had begun to establish itself as a challenger. It is not inconceivable that, had the parties' timing been reversed in both provinces, Saskatchewan might have found itself with a Social Credit government and Alberta with the CCF (see Johnson 1974).

The parallels between the CCF and Social Credit are worth noting. Both parties presented a new social and economic vision in direct response to the events of the Great Depression. While they differed greatly in the specifics, they shared their opposition to the status quo parties, and saw little differentiation between the Liberals and Conservatives. The parallels were great enough that the parties actively considered co-operation with one another in Saskatchewan, but the ideological differences between the leadership, rather than the membership, proved too great (Andrews 1982). Social Credit would retain a minor presence in Saskatchewan for several decades following, but lacked the capacity to organize effectively, unable to consistently present a candidate in every district. It never held a significant nor stable role in the province's politics.

The arrival of the CCF highlights most of the characteristics of that party that differentiated it from the Progressives and Social Credit, and that would allow it to survive in the following years. Those characteristics are, namely, its capacity for organization, its capacity to adapt, and its presentation of a social vision for all of society rather than list of grievances from a few. The party benefitted in its organizational talents from its origin amongst organized Saskatchewan farmers and affiliation with a growing national organization. Its adaptability came in part from its foundation as a coalition between farm and labour interests, and the strong embrace of partisanship by the Liberal Party it was forced to compete against. Finally, among the lessons learned from the Progressives was the importance of growing beyond one's base by embracing a whole-society vision of change.

The Saskatchewan CCF, along with the other provincial CCF organizations, embraced a range of extra-parliamentary activities matched only by Social Credit in Alberta. The CCF maintained its own publishing arm, given a perceived bias against the party from the mainstream press, active discussion groups and a youth league, and CCF clubs in as many electoral districts

as possible (McHenry 1950). The CCF earned a higher degree of engagement from its members than other parties could match as a direct result of its commitment to social democracy. The existence of an active and democratic membership organization was an essential ingredient in putting the social democratic idea into practice (Zakuta 1964).

### *CCF-NDP Transformation*

With the election of the CCF, Saskatchewan now had the first social democratic government ever elected in North America. The CCF governed the province for 20 consecutive years, losing to the Liberals in 1964. The Conservatives stopped being a political force after the 1934 election, changing their name to the Progressive Conservatives by 1944. That party continued to amass twenty percent or less of the popular vote—about the same as the residual Social Credit party—but failed to translate this support into seats in the legislature. The presence of the CCF on the left led to the effective consolidation of the Liberals and Conservatives on the right, leaving Saskatchewan with a competitive two-party system.<sup>34</sup> Within a decade of its arrival, the CCF established itself as a central feature of the Saskatchewan party system, and despite the continued presence of multiple parties to its right until 1999, only one party at a time has been able to mount an effective challenge.

The CCF's election and its time in government are well documented (Higginbotham 1968; Lipset 1968; Johnson 2004). The party never implemented a truly socialist program, instead experimenting with different combinations of government resource ownership and development, new social programs, famously including medicare, which proved popular enough to keep the CCF in government for twenty years (Praud and McQuarrie 2001). This is the adaptability of the CCF on full display. What began as an avowedly socialist party catering

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<sup>34</sup> The CCF was ascendant throughout this period, but the Liberals consistently commanded a third or more of the popular vote.

primarily to farmers transformed from the 1940s through the 1960s into a left-leaning, big tent social democratic party. The CCF ceased to be a farmers' party early on by forming an alliance with labour. It continued on this trajectory through the 20th century, by the 1990s becoming "a coalition of 'progressive' farmers, urban unions, middle-class professionals, and public sector workers" (Dyck 1996, 450). The party also managed to balance central leadership with internal democracy, the former necessary to maintain an effective political machine, and the latter necessary to maintain grassroots activist support (Dyck 1996a, 444-445).

The CCF faced its first real test for long-term survival when it lost the 1964 election to the Liberals and remained out of government for two election cycles. By the standard of other insurgent parties in the west, this should have been enough to kill it. No other insurgent party other than the CCF-NDP has returned to government after more than two consecutive election losses. To do so requires enough organization to keep the party machine intact even in the face of disappointing results, and to be open to changes in strategy to recapture support it has lost. The Saskatchewan CCF managed to do both of these things, while remaining true to a broadly social democratic vision.<sup>35</sup>

Even after the rest of the CCF in Canada had adopted the New Democratic Party name in the early 1960s. The Saskatchewan CCF held out given its success and its ability to present itself as a homegrown Saskatchewan party (Courtney and Smith 1978, 295). When the party faltered, it re-evaluated this position, adopting the New Democratic name. This is the clearest example of the party's capacity to adapt to changing circumstances, shedding the branding of the old farmer-labour coalition even after it had proved successful for so many years. Strategically, the party

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<sup>35</sup> That the CCF-NDP remained social democratic may seem obvious, but as the experience of Social Credit in Alberta and British Columbia shows, it was not inevitable. Those parties effectively became run-of-the-mill conservative parties. The CCF might have easily become an ordinary liberal party.

also sought to make changes, with many in the party championing a return to traditional CCF values and towards socialism—the so-called Waffle (Praud and McQuarrie 2001). The Waffle was partially successful, and with the election of Allan Blakeney as leader, the party embarked on another wave of economic intervention and new social programs. By the 1990s, new leader Roy Romanow introduced a degree of fiscal conservatism to the party and returned it to government. The province had previously been led by the Progressive Conservatives through the 1980s.

The Liberals and Progressive Conservatives, for their part, fought with one another to capture the right-of-centre vote. Both parties' fortunes were affected by ties to their federal counterparts, real or perceived (O'Fee 2008). The Liberals in particular struggled with federal Liberal policies, including freight tariffs and the National Energy Policy, that were perceived to be harmful for Saskatchewan. Riding the wave of growing federal support for the Progressive Conservatives, the provincial PCs usurped the Liberals as the main challenger to the NDP by the late 70s, only to again face a threat from the Liberals after a scandal embroiled the PCs in the early 1990s (O'Fee 2008). The ties between the federal and provincial wings of these two parties had a different effect than the ties between the federal and provincial NDP. While the NDP could depend on the national organization for support and personnel, the federal party was not as often a liability as for the Liberals and PCs.<sup>36</sup> This is because the NDP did not have to face the pressures of being in government at the federal level, which invariably creates conflict between the federal and provincial parties from time to time. It is doubtful, though, that any of these parties could have survived significant periods out of government or official opposition without federal counterparts in place.

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<sup>36</sup> This proves to be more important in other provinces. The Saskatchewan NDP was probably a net contributor to the viability of the NDP nationally because of its early and sustained success there.

### *Saskatchewan Today*

Friction within both the Progressive Conservative and Liberal parties in the 1990s gave cause for much of their caucuses and support to consolidate as the Saskatchewan Party in 1999 (O'Fee 2008). The NDP had clearly benefitted from vote splitting on the right to some extent, as with the formation of this new party the NDP has been perennially relegated to official opposition status. Even with diminished electoral support, the NDP organization has remained strong. The party continues to put forward a full slate of candidates in every election, which no other party save for the Saskatchewan Party itself has been able to do. It remains to be seen how long the Saskatchewan Party can maintain these significant majorities. So far, though, no party has emerged to challenge the NDP on the left. The experience of the NDP in Saskatchewan and throughout Western Canada has shown the NDP is well positioned to survive through such downturns in popularity through its capacity to adapt, the support of the national party, and its ability to cultivate a broad base of support.

### **Analysis**

The CCF-NDP has outlasted all other parties in Saskatchewan, a fact that bears repeating. The CCF emerged as an insurgent party, but unlike other insurgents, including the Progressives and Social Credit, it has shown incredible staying power. Certain characteristics of the CCF-NDP have made it better able to weather political storms than those parties, and also better than the Liberals or Progressive Conservatives. First, the party has shown a capacity to adapt to a changing social, political, and economic landscape while still retaining a core ideology. Second, the party did not limit itself to a single section of society like the Progressives did by remaining a farmers' party or a workers' party. Third, the CCF-NDP had the benefit of a national organization behind it to offer support and sustain the brand in times of provincial weakness.

This is arguably less important in Saskatchewan than in other provinces given the party's longstanding success, but the transformation from the CCF into the NDP shows it still mattered. And finally, the CCF along with Saskatchewan's other insurgents arrived in a party system that had not yet fully matured, making the breakthrough of new parties possible. I now briefly consider each of these factors in turn.

### *Adaptability & Core Ideology*

From the beginning, the CCF-NDP has shown a willingness to change in order to broaden its appeal in a manner not matched by all of its peers. The CCF was organized first as the political arm of organized agriculture, but quickly expanded its base to include organized labour supporters, and eventually oriented itself as a big-tent social democratic party with support across many demographic groups. Importantly, the party remained committed to social democracy, though in varying strengths over time. This allowed the CCF-NDP to own the left-flank of Saskatchewan's party system. The experience of Social Credit in Saskatchewan and Alberta shows this outcome was not inevitable. Once that party dropped its core ideology to become a run-of-the-mill conservative party, it had greater trouble differentiating itself from other such parties. By remaining committed to being *the* social democratic party, the CCF-NDP maintained a dependable base of activists, running a full slate of candidates in all but one election, unlike almost all other parties (figure 3.4).

### *Not Just a Sectional Party*

The CCF-NDP's ideology was important, but so was its choice not to remain a farmers' party in the first place. The Progressives and the tiny Independent Labour Party both structured their appeals around particular segments of society, which limited their potential for growth in a



largely agrarian but urbanizing province. Moreover, the CCF-NDP was from its early days interested in the business of governing, and not simply seeing particular policies implemented. This differs most markedly from the CCF-NDP's insurgent predecessor, the Progressive Party of Saskatchewan. The Progressives were a purely sectional party, which necessarily limited their reach beyond certain rural seats and hampered its long-term viability once the party's demands were met. Instead, the CCF-NDP put itself in the company of political machines like the Liberals and Conservatives. Rand Dyck says of the 1990s NDP that the party "is less preoccupied with policy making and more with winning elections and is thus less distinct in its organization from other parties in the province" (1996a, 445). While this was often a source of contention within the party, Dyck's claim holds true today.<sup>37</sup>

#### *Redundancy and Contributions of the National Party*

The CCF-NDP had the benefit of a national organization on which it could lean for organizational support and to sustain its brand in times of weakness. Compared with other provinces, this feature is relatively unimportant in Saskatchewan given the enduring strength of the provincial party in its own right. Nevertheless, we see that the CCF adopted the identity of the national party in its moment of weakness. If the national party were not to its benefit, we would expect to see the CCF completely distance itself from the national party as the Liberals and Conservatives have done at various points.

Federalism cuts both ways for political parties. While a national organization can lend organizational support and broader pathways for political careers, it can also create some difficult situations when the provincial and national interests of a party do not align (Filippov, Ordeshook, and Shvetsova, 2004, 177-225). The Liberals and PCs both had to deal with federal

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<sup>37</sup> I would direct the reader towards the epigraph of this thesis.

governments of the same partisan stripe at odds with the Saskatchewan wings on various issues. This has hurt those parties in provincial elections and forced them to decouple themselves from the federal parties, thereby losing any benefits federalism might offer. The CCF-NDP in effect received all of the benefits without most of the drawbacks. Because the CCF-NDP has never formed government in Canada at the federal level, it has not found itself at odds with its provincial organizations to the same degree. The CCF-NDP's provincial strength might have actually come as a result, in part, of its federal weakness.<sup>38</sup>

### *Favourable Conditions*

The party systems in each of the western provinces were still only a few decades old when the CCF and other insurgents arrived. Compared with Central and Eastern Canada, the system was still much more malleable, as evidenced by the number of insurgent parties those systems hosted. It is unlikely the CCF would have ever met with the same success across Canada had it got its start in Ontario. In addition to these circumstances that benefitted all insurgents, the fact that Saskatchewan in the early 20th century was so dependent on the success of a single agricultural commodity that lent itself especially well to collectivization was to the particular benefit of a left-wing party like the CCF. The Great Depression offered an opportunity to experiment with new economic schemes. The CCF had an important advantage over Social Credit here, because its program had not already been tried and largely failed in the province next door.

### *Summary*

These four factors did not make the CCF-NDP's success inevitable. The CCF-NDP was not magic, and its success or failure depended on a combination of good leadership in the moment,

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<sup>38</sup> It is an interesting recent trend in Canada that party labels once common to both arenas are gradually disappearing on the right, perhaps for this reason. The United Conservative Party (Alberta), Saskatchewan Party (Saskatchewan), Progressive Conservative party (several provinces) are all independent from and differently named than the Conservative Party of Canada.

the calibre of competition from other political parties, and changing economic and social conditions. In other words, the NDP behaved and was subject to the same forces as an ordinary political party. Instead, the four factors I outline here made the party more durable in times of political weakness, especially when compared with other insurgent parties. Because party systems are dynamic, this is not a recipe for success in the future, either. Particularly now that the right wing has consolidated in Saskatchewan, the NDP will have to work harder to retain its position.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has argued that the CCF-NDP's arrival and remarkable endurance in Saskatchewan are the result of four particular advantages the party held: its adaptability within a core ideological space, the breadth of its support, certain aspects of federalism, and sociopolitical conditions in the province that were amenable to its growth. By tracing the development of the Saskatchewan party system, this chapter has shown how the CCF-NDP differed from other parties in these particular respects, especially when compared to its peer insurgent parties, the Progressives and Social Credit. As the following chapters show, these factors recur across the west to varying degrees. Saskatchewan was also the first place that the CCF-NDP established itself as a major party, and so events there influenced those in the remainder of the cases.

## CHAPTER FOUR: ALBERTA

Before the party's breakthrough election in 2015, the NDP might have looked like a failure in Alberta. The party had never formed government and was frequently in third place or lower for number of seats in the legislature. How did this seemingly unimportant party come to lead the province?

On closer inspection, the CCF-NDP in Alberta has shown a remarkable talent for organization that should be rightly envied by other parties. The party has contested every single election since it first arrived over eighty years ago and has more consistently fielded a full slate of candidates than almost any other party. In Saskatchewan we saw that the CCF-NDP managed to remain one of the two largest parties for its entire history. In Alberta, the party survived despite consistently losing. This is a much more difficult feat, and one that other insurgent parties including Social Credit and the United Farmers of Alberta were unable to equal.<sup>39</sup> The CCF-NDP's capacity to survive proved fortuitous, as when the political circumstances were finally right, the party was ready for its moment after eighty years.

This chapter explains the circumstances that led to the arrival of several insurgent parties to Alberta, including the United Farmers of Alberta (the UFA), Social Credit, and the CCF. Analyzing the pattern of the Alberta party system's development since 1905, this chapter explains why the UFA and Social Credit parties found greater success in Alberta, yet the CCF-NDP proved to be the party that survived. The same four factors that contributed to the CCF-NDP's success in other western provinces did so in Alberta, too: conditions favourable to the emergence of insurgents, the CCF-NDP's adaptability within a consistently left-wing framework,

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<sup>39</sup> As a point of historical curiosity, it is worth noting that the UFA found another way to survive: as a farm supply and fuel co-operative. This surely ranks among the more unusual fates for an organization once engaged in politics.

an embrace of partisanship and willingness to construct a broad coalition of support, and certain aspects of federalism, including belonging to an organization with a presence beyond Alberta.

First, this chapter recounts the arrival of party politics in Alberta and how the province's first party system created conditions favourable to the development of future insurgent parties. As in Saskatchewan, the role of the federal government in constructing the first party system in Alberta set the stage for the emergence of new parties from within Alberta society itself. Like in Saskatchewan, the Liberals and Conservatives lacked deep roots in Albertan society. The parties that emerged in Alberta had a different character than those in Saskatchewan, however, with significant emphasis on their supposed non-partisanship.

Second, in the first insurgent wave, this chapter shows how Alberta farmers made a quicker and stronger leap into direct political action than in Saskatchewan. This produced Alberta's first major insurgent and its government through the 1920s, the UFA. The combination of scandal, an unorthodox approach to government, and the onset of the Great Depression brought that party to an end, ushering in a second insurgent wave featuring the CCF and Social Credit parties.

Third, this chapter explains the circumstances that gave rise to both of its second wave insurgents, and why Social Credit found greater success than the CCF. The CCF's association with the UFA, and the charismatic presentation of a new economic system amid the depression by Social Credit's William Aberhart put that party in power but was not enough to kill the CCF completely. That party was sustained by its association with the national party, and by cultivating a consistent base of support on the left that at times left the CCF as the only credible opposition.

This chapter, fourth, analyzes the transformation of the CCF from a farmer-labour coalition into the big-tent social democratic NDP, capable of challenging, and ultimately

defeating, the Progressive Conservative dynasty. It considers the potential realignment of the Alberta party system this may have triggered, and briefly considers the party's prospects for the future. Finally, this chapter closes with a comparison of the CCF-NDP and its competitors to draw conclusions on the CCF-NDP's survival, delayed success, and the failure of its insurgent opponents.

## **Overview of Alberta's Party System**

### *Similarities and Differences from Saskatchewan*

Before the discovery of oil and gas in Alberta, the province had a primarily agricultural economy similar to Saskatchewan's. The two provinces both arose from portions of the North-West Territories, and there was serious consideration given to organizing them as one province instead of two (Lingard 1946).<sup>40</sup> The circumstances that made Saskatchewan especially amenable to the emergence of insurgent parties began similarly, but with different personnel and a different population, their political development soon parted ways.

As in Saskatchewan, farmers held significant political power in Alberta, but differences in personnel meant that it manifested in different ways. Just as the farming of wheat east of the border led itself well to organization and collectivization, so too it did in Alberta. But the relationship between the farmers and the government took a different form. Alberta farmers were more amenable to direct political action than their Saskatchewan counterparts, and Henry Wise Wood, leader of the UFA, was opposed to participation in the Liberal cabinet in the same manner as the SGGA in Saskatchewan on principle (Smith 1969). On the whole, the social and economic circumstances in these two twin provinces were nearly identical. These cases serve as a reminder that political institutions do not have a deterministic role in shaping the politics of a place. The

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<sup>40</sup> Most of the details around the organization of Alberta and Saskatchewan and the involvement of the federal government are the same. See chapter three for a more detailed account.

personalities, and in time the sets of issues that they faced, differed and meant that their politics would soon take different forms. Variation in the timing of resource discovery and an advantage for Alberta in its mineral endowments would later come to matter (Emery and Kneebone 2008), but in the early days of the provinces, the dispositions of their leaders were the only significant thing that divided them.

### *Literature*

The rise and fall of Social Credit in Alberta is probably the best documented phenomenon in Canadian politics. Barr (1974), Caldorola (1979), Irving (1959) and Macpherson (1953) have each extensively chronicled the events and their preconditions. This is because the social credit phenomenon has unmatched novelty. Alberta was the first place that the unorthodox economic ideas of C. H. Douglas were implemented, and perhaps the fullest expression of them. The charismatic personality of William Aberhart and the particulars of social credit monetary theory occupy much of the focus on the topic. That these ideas proved unworkable, and provoked a hostile reaction from the federal government, no doubt further contributes to the attention this period in Alberta history received (Mallory 1954).

The question of why Social Credit succeeded in Alberta instead of the CCF has received comparatively little attention, but the problem has received frequent acknowledgment. Johnson (1974, 1979) and Melnyk (1986) argue the CCF might well have succeeded if not for the timing of Social Credits arrival and an unseemly relationship with the floundering United Farmers of Alberta. Cairns (2007), Smith (1969) and Smith (2010) are among the few works that address the CCF's apparent failure in direct comparison with Saskatchewan, which is a serious deficiency of the literature given the institutional similarity and early history that the two provinces share in common. Many of the myths and assumptions now held about Alberta are traced back to this

treatment of Social Credit, including the apparent failure of the CCF. One of the risks of studying a novelty like Social Credit in isolation is that patterns and parallels with other cases are easy to miss. Social Credit succeeded on an unorthodox monetary reform platform but transformed itself into an ordinary conservative party. It was followed several decades of Progressive Conservative dominance. On that basis, there is a tendency to treat Alberta as a fundamentally conservative, individualistic place, unique from the other western provinces (Wiseman 2001; Wesley 2011).<sup>41</sup> Coupled with this is a tendency to assume the CCF “failed” in Alberta, in spite of its endurance. As Johnston points out, “there were many... elections in which the NDP’s Alberta share [of the popular vote] was greater than any share east of Ontario” (2017, 167).

This chapter re-examines the literature in light of Laycock’s (1990) observation that the Progressives (the UFA in Alberta), Social Credit, and the CCF all belong to a broad populist tradition. The failure of the CCF in Alberta was neither inevitable, nor complete. The CCF lost to Social Credit not through a fundamental rejection of socialism, but through an interplay of timing, connections with the outgoing UFA, leadership, and the true novelty of the social credit system. No account of Alberta politics has adequately explained why the CCF-NDP survived as a perennial opposition party under these circumstances where no other insurgent party has managed to survive more than a handful out of government at all.

### *Critical Junctures and Periods*

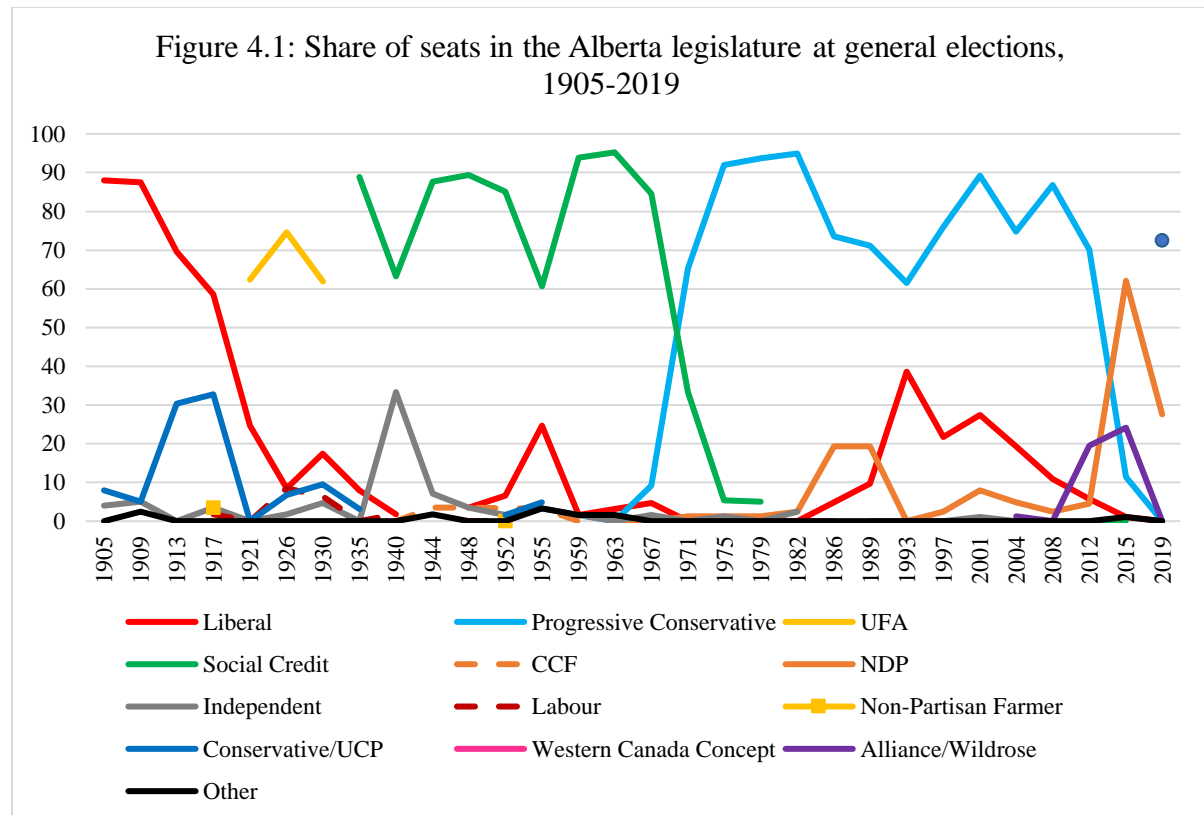
This chapter explains the circumstances that produced the UFA, Social Credit, and the CCF, and why the latter endured despite the much greater early success of the former. It does so by comparing these parties at crucial junctures in their development; namely, their arrival, their failure or disappearance from the party system, their first time forming government, and

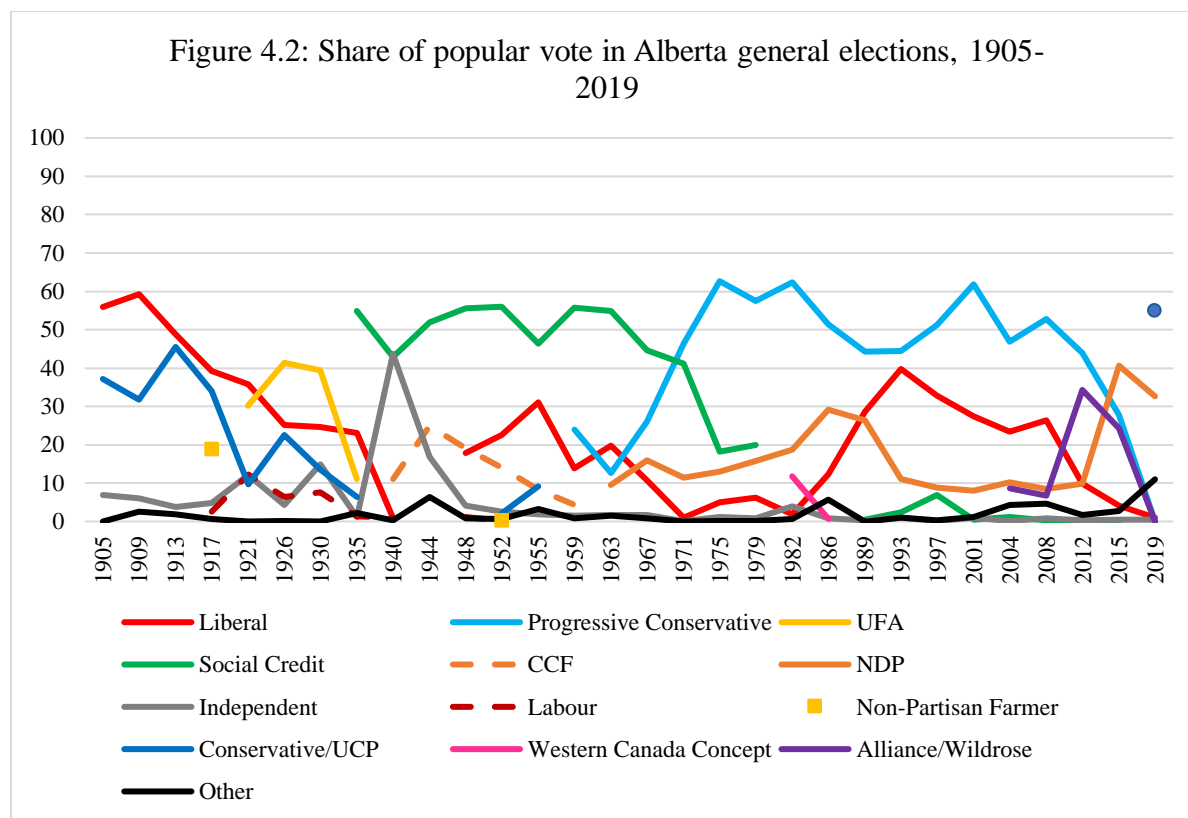
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<sup>41</sup> Long periods of dominance by a single party are frequently associated with Alberta but are not altogether unusual in the west. See Appendix A.



significant swings in their support. As in Saskatchewan, these constitute moment of realignment for the Alberta party system: significant movement of support from one party to another, and usually enduring. These junctures point to the CCF's adaptability, ideology, broad coalition of support, and federal nature offering it advantages lacked by other insurgents and mainstream parties, including late arriving insurgents like the Wildrose Party.





Figures 4.1 and 4.2 show the vote and seat shares of Alberta's major parties from 1905 through the most recent election in 2019.<sup>42</sup> Consistent with the other western provinces, we see five broad eras in the party system's development, with some unique features. The approximate dates at which these periods began and ended are noted in table 4.1. Alberta underwent the same two insurgent waves in the early 20th century also seen in British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan, but its tendency to be dominated by a single party at the time makes the failure of Social Credit and growth of the Progressive Conservatives more significant.

<sup>42</sup> As in the previous chapter, these figures are developed from Sayers (2021).

<b>Table 4.1: Periods in the development of the Alberta party system</b>			
<b>Era</b>	<b>Dominant parties at beginning of period</b>	<b>Arriving insurgents</b>	<b>Result</b>
1905 – c. 1917 (Two-party competition)	Conservative Party Liberal Party	—	—
c. 1917 – 1935 (First insurgent wave)	Conservative Party Liberal Party	UFA Labour	UFA forms government reducing Liberals to opposition Labour exits with arrival of the CCF
1935 – 1967 (Second insurgent wave)	UFA Liberal Party Conservative Party	Social Credit CCF	Social Credit displaces the UFA and that party exits system. Most of Liberal and Conservative caucuses join Independent movement to challenge Social Credit and CCF CCF earns some popular support but few seats.
1967 – 2015 (Progressive Conservatives ascendant)	Social Credit	1982: Western Canada Concept 2004: Wildrose Alliance	Social Credit unable to adapt to changing province under new leadership. Displaced by Progressive Conservatives
2015 – Present (Consolidation)	UCP NDP	—	NDP leverages PCs weakness and growth of Wildrose to form government. PCs and Wildrose consolidate as a result

First, there is a period of two-party competition between the Liberals and Conservatives. This established a baseline for the Alberta party system, from which we see periods of enduring realignment (the arrival of the UFA and subsequently Social Credit).

Second, a first insurgent wave during which the United Farmers of Alberta and a Labour party arrive, with the former forming government. The UFA is initially successful but fails by the mid-1930s. The critical moments here are the arrival of these two insurgent parties, the election of the UFA to government, and the point at which both parties finally dissolve.

Third, a second insurgent wave during which the Social Credit and CCF parties arrive, and the Liberals and Conservatives attempt to reconfigure to block them. The parties of this era experience greater success, with Social Credit holding government for thirty-six years until it also fails. The CCF and its successor the NDP persists, though with modest electoral support and even fewer seats. The critical junctures are the arrival of the CCF and Social Credit, the point at which Social Credit formed government, and the evolution of both parties into the NDP and a mainstream conservative party respectively.

Fourth, the growth of one of Alberta's traditional parties, now under the Progressive Conservative banner and the failure of Social Credit. The PCs dominate the province's politics for over forty years, until it is ultimately challenged by the NDP and the newly arrived Wildrose Party on its right. Critical junctures here include the Social Credit to PC transition and the arrival of the Wildrose as an insurgent challenger.

Finally, since 2015 we see a realignment of the party system into one dominated by the NDP and another party on the right, the UCP, similar to the systems in British Columbia and Saskatchewan. The two critical moments here are the election of the NDP to its first government

and the establishment of the United Conservative Party through the merger of the PCs and Wildrose Party.

The following section traces the development of the Alberta party system with special attention to each of these key moments to determine which features of the CCF-NDP permitted its survival, if not its electoral success, for most of its history by comparing it with Alberta's other parties at similar moments. The story in Alberta shows significant parallels with the CCF-NDP across the west. The CCF began in Alberta as a federation of several farmer, labour and socialist groups that had met with varying degrees of political success, united to propose an alternative economic system in the context of the Great Depression. It would eventually grow, as elsewhere, into a big tent social democratic party, but not by moderating itself in government. The fact that organized farmers already held office in Alberta, and were quickly becoming discredited, prevented much of the CCF's early electoral growth. But by building a broad coalition of supporters on the left, the party managed to establish itself as *the* party of the left in the province, fuelled by the growing success of the party across the country. Eighty years after its arrival and under new political circumstances, the party was able to present itself as the only credible alternative to Alberta's conservative government. Alberta's other insurgent parties lacked the same combination of adaptability, organization, and integration with a national organization that permitted the CCF-NDP to succeed.

## **Party System Development**

### *Politics before 1905 and Two-Party Competition*

Most of Alberta's formative period follows the same pattern as its twin province, Saskatchewan, as detailed in chapter three. Both provinces were organized simultaneously out of the North-West Territories, which had lacked political parties in its legislature. The first Lieutenant-

Governor of Alberta, George H. V. Bulyea, was a federal Liberal chosen by the federal government, who in turn asked the Liberals to form the first government in Alberta until elections could be held. Thomas argues that, since most of those advocating for the maintenance of the NWT's non-partisan system were of a conservative stripe, the first election was implicitly fought along partisan lines (1979, 3-4). There is no obvious reason aside from naked partisanship that the first government should have been a Liberal one, but the choice proved significant for establishing Alberta's early party system and the dominance of the Liberals.

The Liberals adopted most of the contents of the Conservatives platform in the first election, leaving no basis to challenge the government except on "promises and personalities" (Thomas 1979, 5). The Liberals won a significant majority and managed to retain it with the platforms of the Liberals and Conservatives offering little difference, and the Liberals charging the Conservatives with an unseemly cozy relationship between themselves and the Canadian Pacific Railway (Thomas 1979, 8). Thus began a pattern of political dynasties that held in Alberta until 2015: a single party holding government for a long period of time, never returning to power once they eventually lost.<sup>43</sup>

While agriculture the backbone of the provincial economy and demography, the Liberal Party and organized farmers did not develop the same relationship as they had in Saskatchewan. The United Farmers of Alberta was organized not initially as a political organization, but gradually acquired the role of a pressure group for farmers' interests after its establishment in 1909 (Long and Quo 1978, 3). According to Morton (1967b), the organization self-consciously did not form itself in the same mould as the SGGA in Saskatchewan, and never developed the

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<sup>43</sup> The period of Liberal domination differs somewhat from the later domination by Social Credit and the Progressive Conservatives because the style of politics in this era was completely different. With the Liberals and Conservatives almost undifferentiated, building a broad coalition of support as Social Credit and the PCs had to was less important than simply discrediting the (only) alternative.

close relationship that that organization maintained with the Saskatchewan Liberals. For their part, the Alberta Liberals were conscious of the importance of farmers to their success and acceded to as many of the UFA's demands as were in its jurisdiction (Thomas 1979). But unlike Saskatchewan farmers, the UFA carried a distrust of politicians, and never participated in the Liberal government's cabinet.

The most decisive event in defining Alberta's early politics was the Alberta and Great Waterways Scandal of 1910, which related to the allocation of contracts to the Alberta and Great Waterways Company that hinted at corruption (Smith 1969; Thomas 1979). The scandal divided the Liberal party and led to the resignation of many of its members. More importantly, it planted seeds of distrust within the Alberta voter towards politicians generally (Thomas 1979).

Recognizing the fragility of their organization, the Liberals courted the support of farmers even more assiduously in 1913. They were rewarded with another term in government, but facing growing opposition from the Conservatives, who garnered forty-five percent of the popular vote in that election. Overt partisanship was briefly suspended with the arrival of the First World War, and a new political landscape awaited the province on the other side.

### *The First Insurgency*

The circumstances that led the United Farmers of Alberta to direct political action are intimately connected with the thought of its president, Henry Wise Wood. Wood served as the president of the organization for its entire political history, 1916-1931, and shaped the unorthodox view of partisanship and politics that the UFA brought to the fore (Morton 1948). At first, Wood greatly resisted direct political action, believing that the interests of farmers were still best addressed through the existing party system (Betke 1979; Long and Quo 1978, 3). Even at that, he was unwilling to cultivate the sort of relationship that the SGGa had with the government in

Saskatchewan with the inclusion of its personnel in cabinet. Wood's initial belief was that the best way for farmers to exercise power was to apply pressure to whoever was in charge (Smith 1969, 22).

By 1917, an American organization called the Non-Partisan League was actively organizing on the Canadian prairies. It had achieved some success electing apparently non-partisan candidates in the Dakotas but realized it would need to enter Canadian politics as a third party given the structure of the parliamentary system. On its arrival in Alberta, that organization was determined to cultivate a relationship with farmers. Perhaps capitalizing on the growing resentment of politicians generally in the aftermath of the Alberta and Great Waterways scandal, the organization achieved some success, electing a couple candidates to the legislature in the 1917 election and earning nearly twenty percent of the popular vote.<sup>44</sup> Rather than supporting their efforts for the creation of yet another party, Wood thought it better for the UFA to enter politics directly—not as a party, but as proponents of Wood's unusual theory of group government (Morton 1967b, 87; Smith 1969). Given the size of the UFA organization, David E. Smith explains, once it had committed to entering politics, it was virtually guaranteed victory (Smith 1969, 22).

Another insurgent group has a parallel history with the UFA in Alberta: organized labour. Labour candidates began contesting elections in Alberta in 1917, with a provincial branch of the Dominion Labour Party formally established in 1919 (Finkel 1985). The Dominion Labour Party in Alberta leaned socialist, and in 1919 adopted the socialist program of the British Labour Party. The party restricted itself mostly to urban areas of the province and managed to win a handful of seats in the legislature in the 1921 election.

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<sup>44</sup> See "Non-Partisan Farmer" in the above election results figures.



The UFA ran in the 1921 election and was swept to power with 62 percent of the seats in the legislature (though only 30 percent of the popular vote; less than the Liberals).<sup>45</sup> The new government was tested with applying the theory of group government to a Westminster-style parliamentary system. In short, the idea of group government was that each occupational group, such as farmers, urban labourers, and so on, should collectively represent its interests to government. Members of the legislature were to act as instructed delegates to implement the wishes of these groups (Betke 1979; Long and Quo 1978). With the UFA—farmers—constituting the majority of the legislature, there was no mechanism to represent the other groups except through the UFA’s convention. The whole system quickly proved unworkable, and the UFA governed as an agrarian populist party, establishing the Alberta Wheat Pool, pressuring the federal government on freight rates, and ending prohibition (Dyck 1996a). C.B. Macpherson (1962) argues that in spite of these failings, the party remained principled at least in its commitment to farmers, and reluctance to become an electoral machine. The UFA proved successful enough at this approach to earn re-election twice more, in 1926 and again in 1930.

Labour, recognizing the potential harmony of interests between itself and the UFA as sectional parties, established an alliance with the UFA, supporting one another’s candidates (Finkel 1985). The UFA went so far as to include a member of the Labour party in its cabinet following the 1921 election. Relations later soured under the premiership of John Brownlee, who became premier in 1925, and who opted to exclude Labour from cabinet. Labour maintained a

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<sup>45</sup> The United Farmers of Alberta were associated with the federal Progressive party and are thus related to the Progressive parties seen in other provinces. Given the strength of the UFA’s own ideas about group government, it was something of an uneasy alliance at times, with UFA members of the federal government being intensely critical of the party system, and others less concerned. The UFA members eventually left the Progressive caucus as part of the Ginger group that was instrumental in the creation of the CCF (Morton 1967b).

modicum of popular support through the 1920s, but Social Credit captured most of the former labour vote once it arrived in 1935.

The UFA eventually collapsed through a combination of a sex scandal that embroiled UFA Premier John Brownlee, and Social Credit's arrival (Betke 1979). The sex scandal destroyed Brownlee's career, and as its central figure, undermined the UFA's credibility generally. Meanwhile, the Depression demanded a response. Among farmers, monetary reform was gaining an increasing amount of support as the preferred solution, given that debt had been their central financial concern for much of the preceding decade (Betke 1979). The new social credit theory of William Aberhart, a teacher and evangelist lay-preacher with a significant radio audience, presented one option. He had originally presented the social credit concept to the UFA government in hopes they would adopt it, but the party leadership rejected it as being unworkable, in part because much of the program was outside the province's jurisdiction (Caldarola 1979; Macpherson 1953, 146-147). Without the UFA, Aberhart proceeded to establish Social Credit as a political party, which he had done in time for the 1935 election.

The UFA instead pursued another monetary reform option of sorts: socialism, by way of the CCF. In 1933, it had resolved to co-operate in the creation of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, going so far as to host its inaugural conference in Calgary (Johnson 1979). By 1935, the UFA was a full-fledged affiliate of the CCF, though its candidates and that of Labour elected to run under their own banners in that election as they had done before. The UFA ran mostly on its record in government in the 1935 election (United Farmers of Alberta 1935), but Johnson (1974, 1979) argues the association with socialism may have turned off some farmers if they were not already inclined to support Social Credit instead.

The UFA and Labour were both sectional parties: parties whose chief concern was the interests of the economic group they represented. Notwithstanding Henry Wise Wood's ideas of group government, the UFA governed as a populist farmers party in a primarily agrarian province. Labour put forward a similar effort in the cities, but its potential base of support was much smaller. The parties arose out of the feeling that the interests of workers and farmers were inadequately represented within the existing party system. Distrust of the party system was the explicit appeal of the UFA, which effectively wanted to expand the sectional style of politics to encompass all of society along economic lines. Because Alberta was heavily dominated by one industry, agriculture, a sectional farmers' party had significant appeal, as it represented the interests of a majority of the population. The challenge is that, in government, a party must govern for everyone, and not just a single economic group.

The proximate cause of the UFA's failure was bad timing and a leadership scandal. The party lost every seat it held in the legislature. More broadly, the UFA's defeat highlights one of the limitations of sectional politics: if another party makes a better appeal to the one group you represent, your support can dry up completely. Social Credit did exactly that. The party offered desperate farmers a path out of the Depression with a promise of no less than \$25 a month to every adult Albertan.<sup>46</sup> That both the UFA and Labour agreed to co-operate in the organization of the CCF shows that they recognized the limits of being beholden to one group, and the advantages that co-operation could offer.<sup>47</sup> As in Saskatchewan, the CCF organization learned from the failure of the UFA and Progressives, which contributed to a more robust organization in the decades that followed.

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<sup>46</sup> Nearly \$500 in 2021 dollars.

<sup>47</sup> In a sense, the failure of the group government idea shows the limitations of sectionalism, too. That approach would only be viable if *every* section of society were somehow represented.

### *The Second Insurgency: CCF and Social Credit*

The second insurgent wave in Alberta saw the introduction of two new parties: Social Credit and the CCF. The CCF's roots were in organized agriculture and labour, with the UFA and Dominion Labour Party being two of its founding constituent organizations. Social Credit had no such roots. It was driven almost entirely by the charismatic leadership of William Aberhart, who had a large radio audience in the province as a Sunday evangelical preacher (Caldarola 1979). The CCF was a product of several groups with narrow electoral support—farmers, organized labour, and socialists—recognizing that they needed to find broader appeal if they were going to be electorally successful. Especially in the case of the socialists, one of their core ideological beliefs was that the socialist message ought to reach as many people as possible (Zakuta 1964, 17).<sup>48</sup> Social Credit's immense success, on the other hand, was the direct result of a province facing a desperate situation, and a charismatic figure offering a path out.<sup>49</sup> The Liberals and Conservatives had nothing better to offer and nor did the UFA. Those parties all recognized the practical impediments to radical reform, with the limits of the province's jurisdiction being foremost among them. Social Credit proposed to steamroll any obstacles. For voters, it was the only game in town.

The Social Credit League was elected in 1935 with almost 55 percent of the popular vote, and the remainder divided between the Liberals, UFA, and Conservatives respectively. Social Credit effectively leveraged the crisis of the Depression to come to power and managed to remain there even after the social credit program proved unworkable. A great deal of core social

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<sup>48</sup> Zakuta also notes the nearly religious character of socialism, especially the strand of socialism that emerged from the social gospel movement. It was a moral imperative for many early CCFers to disseminate the "good news" of socialism (Zakuta 1964, 12-17).

<sup>49</sup> Not coincidentally, the social credit message was also spread with a religious fervour by its evangelical leader (Caldarola 1979).

credit legislation was reserved by the Lieutenant-Governor, disallowed by the federal cabinet, or declared *ultra vires* by the courts (Mallory 1954). The party pivoted its focus from the implementation of social credit to the delivery of “good and honest government”, and with the arrival of World War II, contributing to the war effort (Caldarola 1979, 42-43).

The CCF first contested elections under that name in 1940, having run separate UFA and Labour candidates in the election prior. The CCF earned just eleven percent of the popular vote and elected no members to the legislature. The Liberals and Conservatives, along with some former members of the UFA who rejected its socialism, ran as independents as part of the Unity movement (Garstin 1940).<sup>50</sup> Social Credit and the Unity candidates virtually tied for the popular vote, but Social Credit was rewarded with more seats.<sup>51</sup>

It is difficult to imagine the CCF arriving under less favourable circumstances. Social Credit had five years in office, and while the actual social credit program had proven largely unworkable, the government and Aberhart remained popular. They had successfully captured most of the labour and farm vote with ideas not totally unlike what the CCF had on offer (Laycock 1990). Meanwhile, the rest of the opposition parties had consolidated into one, leaving little space for the CCF to carve out a position of its own except for its commitment to socialism and pacifism in the face of World War II. To make matters worse, the CCF still carried the baggage of its association with the UFA, still burdened with the scandal that led to its political downfall. The CCF was also late to organizing because of UFA dallying, as not all in that organization believed in the CCF cause (Johnson 1979). Under these circumstances, the CCF had

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<sup>50</sup> The literature is ambiguous on the exact structure of this coalition, and even its name is uncertain. It is variously referred to as the Unity Movement, Unity Party and Independent Movement. It may have been an attempt to unite in response to the crisis of the Second World War, or it may have been an attempt to “contain the left” (and Social Credit) by presenting a single alternative.

<sup>51</sup> Refer to figures 4.1 and 4.2.

little hope, allowing Social Credit to become more entrenched and further hampering the CCF's prospects of election in the future.

As Myron Johnson (1979) argues, the early failure of the CCF in Alberta was not the result of any deep-seated resistance to socialism in Alberta's political culture. The CCF's principal problem is that its largest potential constituency, farmers, had already gone into politics and failed a decade earlier. By the UFA failed, Social Credit was already ready to take up its mantle. Social Credit and the CCF largely appealed to the same types of voters (Melnik 1986, 47). With Social Credit already capturing most of the agrarian populist vote and Unity earning the anti-government vote, the CCF could only appeal to hardcore socialists. The Alberta CCF was slow to organize, facing recalcitrance from what remained of the UFA organization whose members had unevenly committed to the new organization (Johnson 1979, 102-103). The entry of farmers into politics in 1919 had a significant effect on the CCF's prospects a decade later. Had farmers entered politics at the same time as they had in Saskatchewan, it is conceivable that the CCF would have found success in Alberta as well (Johnson 1979).

Instead, the CCF continued through the 1940s with few members elected to the legislature and declining support over time. The CCF reached its peak level of success in 1944, when it earned a quarter of the popular vote but returned just two seats. Where the Saskatchewan CCF realized that dropping overt references to socialism was its path to success, the Alberta CCF continued to actively preach public ownership of many sectors (Melnik 1986, 48-49). Ernest Manning, who had been William Aberhart's chief lieutenant became the new Social Credit leader and premier in 1943, shifted the party's focus from implementing social credit to standing as defenders of free enterprise against the threat of socialism (Caldarola 1979). Manning was nearly as charismatic as Aberhart, and with the growing prosperity of the province through the

discovery of oil, Social Credit managed to remain in power through his retirement in 1968. The party was ultimately defeated in 1971 by the Progressive Conservatives ending thirty-six consecutive years in office.

The Social Credit years were fuelled first by crisis and charismatic leadership, and then by charismatic leadership, an established track record, and an electoral system that tended to produce huge legislative majorities (McCormick 1980). The opposition to Social Credit never really consolidated as it had in some other provinces. The Liberals, Conservatives, and CCF-NDP all remained present, with weak leadership and little to differentiate the former two parties. The failure of Social Credit after the departure of Ernest Manning shows the weakness of that party: by abandoning the social credit ideology, the party had little to differentiate it from another conservative offering, like that of the Progressive Conservatives, except the strength of its leadership (Long and Quo 1978, 2-3). Without Manning, Social Credit lost its strong leadership, and the PCs found themselves a capable leader in Peter Lougheed. There were few committed Social Credit partisans after the party abandoned the social credit ideology, especially given that many Social Credit activists were engaged with the Progressive Conservatives at the federal level (Long and Quo 1978, 7-8). In transforming itself into an orthodox conservative party, Social Credit hollowed itself out, lacking strong leadership, committed activists, or unique ideas to differentiate itself from its challengers.

#### *The NDP Bides Its Time*

The CCF-NDP was electorally unsuccessful but successful organizationally through the Social Credit and Progressive Conservative eras. Nearly every account of Alberta politics describes the CCF-NDP from 1940 through the 1990s as weak (Dyck 1996a; Johnson 1979; Long and Quo 1978; Melnyk 1986). From 1945 through 1986, the party never held more than two seats in the

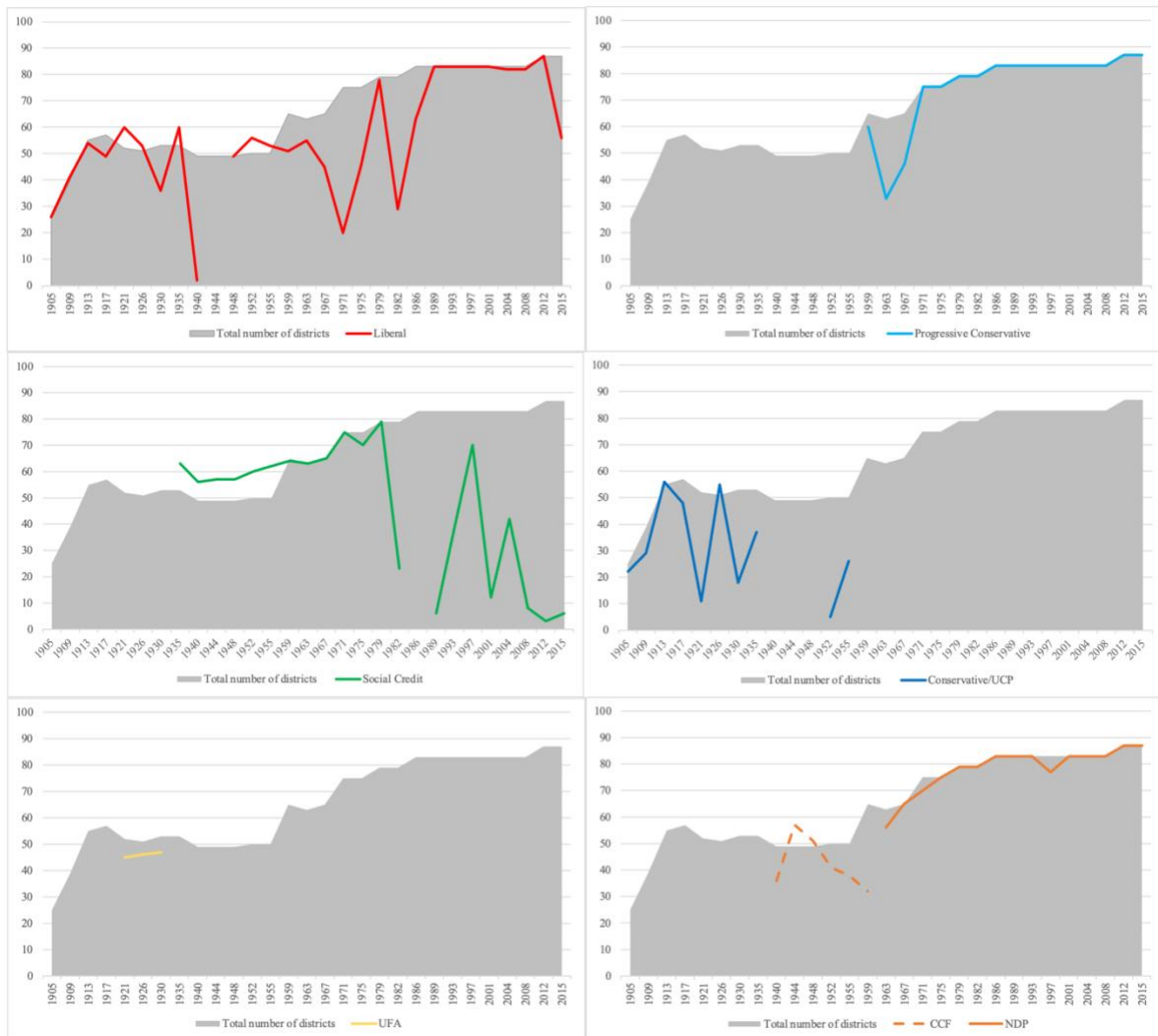
legislature at once, although only in three elections during that period did it earn less than 10 percent of the popular vote.<sup>52</sup> Considering its electoral weakness, the party's organizational strength is impressive. The party has always managed to contest a majority of the seats in the legislature and since in 1963 has contested nearly every seat in every election. As figure 4.3 shows, the CCF-NDP has more consistently ran full slates of candidates than any other party in Alberta except for the PCs since 1971. It did this even in the face of failure. By contrast, Social Credit quickly lost its ability to run full slates of candidates soon after its 1971 defeat and has never been able to fully recover. The CCF-NDP's organizational and ideological structure allowed it to stay organized in Alberta even at its weakest point, in hopes of sunnier days to follow.

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<sup>52</sup> 1955, 8.24%; 1959, 4.33%; 1963, 9.45%. The party would drop back below 10% again in 1997 through 2012, except for 2004.



Figure 4.3: Number of candidates fielded by each major party in Alberta versus total number of districts, 1905-2015.



The Alberta CCF-NDP has always been able to maintain a small core of activist supporters, though the number of them has fluctuated over time. Olga Melnyk credits this to a “firm belief in the righteousness of their cause” that could not be met by any other party (1986, 50). The Alberta CCF was actually one of the more radical wings of the national CCF and one of the most resistant to becoming the NDP, with many of the activists having grown accustomed to electoral failure (Melnyk 1986, 53-54). Robin Hunter suggests that during the darkest era, “it was hard to avoid the feeling at CCF meetings that membership had become an end in itself” (1986, 59). But even in the face of failure, there was never any serious plan of quitting. The

Alberta CCF had, at the very least, successfully consolidated the left-wing of Alberta politics, holding court over what had once been separate farmer, labour, and socialist parties.

On their own, many of the Alberta activists of the late CCF era might have been content to remain an outsider party, contesting elections with little hope of success like the Communists or the Green Party more recently. But the Alberta CCF was not on its own. The national CCF organization drove the transition to the NDP, which kept the CCF-NDP relevant through the following decades (Hunter 1986). The CCF's core founding constituency had been farmers, and it found most of its success in rural areas. In an increasingly urbanizing province, though, the NDP found more success in urban areas through its connection to the labour movement. The broad coalition the CCF-NDP was constructed from and the influence of the national party allowed the NDP to return to political relevance in the 1980s under the leadership of Grant Notley.<sup>53</sup>

Grant Notley adapted the NDP to meet the needs of a changing Alberta. Larry Pratt argues that for Notley the NDP "was not an extension of the old CCF alliance of agrarian populists and urban intellectuals; it was a different organization reflecting changing social and political circumstances" (1986, 1). Yet Notley was committed to the core principles that those parties shared. Even in the face of overwhelming electoral odds, he helped build up the party's organization "to secure a base for the party from which it would expand when conditions proved more favourable" (Archer 1992, 121-122). Notley focused the party's efforts on issues where they had a significant difference from the government, and popular issues like child care and dental care (Archer 1992, 121). The NDP was rewarded with 30 percent of the popular vote in

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<sup>53</sup> Robin Hunter finds that "the impulse for the creation of the New Democratic Party is to be found almost entirely outside Alberta" (1986, 64). The Alberta CCF was seen to be preoccupied with ideological debates. Notley took a leadership role in the transformation of the Alberta CCF into the NDP, believing the party needed both machine and movement qualities (Hunter 1986, 83).

1986, and was the province's strongest opposition party between 1979 and 1989. Notley successfully put the infrastructure in place to keep the party afloat even when it was politically weak.

In summary, the CCF-NDP remained constituted in Alberta through its politically weakest period through a combination of a core base of activists committed to the party's cause, support from the national organization, particularly as it pertained to the future growth of the party, and transformation under the capable leadership of Grant Notley, who exemplified the NDP activist spirit but also laid the foundations for a political machine. The NDP's support waned again in the 1990s and early 2000s, but it persisted as ever through the commitment of its activists, and additionally, growing ties to the labour movement (Stewart and Archer 2000).

#### *NDP Breakthrough*

The Progressive Conservatives dominated Alberta on a massive scale between 1971 and 2015. At no point did the party hold less than sixty percent of the seats in the legislature, and they regularly earned more than half of the popular vote. Sayers and Stewart (2016) argue that one of the effects of the PCs' dominance has been to mask many of Alberta's political cleavages, making the province appear more homogenous politically than it really is. The PCs faced occasional challengers on the right and faced both the NDP and Liberals on the left. Opposition to the Progressive Conservatives never managed to consolidate the way it has in other western provinces, where governments typically face one standout challenger.

The Progressive Conservative party sustained itself in no small part through strong leadership under Peter Lougheed and Ralph Klein, echoing Social Credit's leader dominance. By the mid-2000s, the party was struggling to find a leader who could unite the Progressive Conservatives' various factions. In addition, the party was facing a challenge on the right, first

from the Alberta Alliance and later from the Wildrose Party (Sayers and Stewart 2011). The Wildrose Party emerged from a perceived failure of the Progressive Conservatives conservative values, and particularly its fiscal conservatism (Bratt 2019). Wildrose materialized in a manner different from earlier Alberta insurgents, which were mainly sectional parties concerned with the interests of a particular segment of society. It differed also from the Saskatchewan Party, which was established as a practical effort to consolidate Saskatchewan's opposition to the governing NDP. Instead, the Wildrose Party emerged as a result of factional politics within the PC party. The floor crossing of leader Danielle Smith and eight other Wildrose MLAs to the PC party demonstrates this relationship between the two entities (CBC News 2014).

Three events coincided to bring the NDP to government in Alberta in 2015. First, the presence of both the Wildrose and PC parties divided the right-of-centre vote. Second, PC leader Jim Prentice proved unpopular with voters, making several miscalculations that hurt the PCs in the 2015 election (Bratt 2019). Third, the NDP found a strong leader and ran a strong campaign in Rachel Notley, the daughter of former leader Grant Notley. Melanie Thomas (2019) argues that the NDP was particularly effective in 2015 at recruiting "anchor candidates", and at presenting themselves as the only credible alternative to the PCs. Impressively, the CCF-NDP endured *seventy-five years* in the province of Alberta before forming government for the first time. They earned over sixty percent of the seats in the legislature and more than forty percent of the popular vote in 2015. The proximate causes of their win aside, the NDP's victory was only possible because it survived long enough to come to power. The CCF-NDP maintained the organizational infrastructure and activist support to come to remain in Alberta politics until conditions were more favourable, just as Grant Notley had hoped three decades earlier. The 2015 victory also highlighted the extent to which the Alberta NDP continued to benefit from the

federal party: much of the government's transition team and staff was brought in from the federal NDP or from other provinces. And as Brownsey (2019) shows, the NDP's transition was in fact modelled on Tommy Douglas's first victory in Saskatchewan.

### *Reconfiguration and Looking to the Future*

After one term in government, the NDP lost to the United Conservative Party in 2019, but it is not yet clear that the NDP's moment in the spotlight is over. Jason Kenney was elected as leader of the Progressive Conservatives in 2017 and committed to facilitating a merger between the Wildrose and PC parties with the express purpose of defeating the NDP in the next election. They did so in 2019, relegating the NDP to Official Opposition, but leaving the two parties as the only parties in the legislature. Whether the NDP can make a comeback is not yet known. But as Sayers and Stewart (2019) observe, a more polarized party system is likely in store for Alberta.

With the consolidation of the parties of the right in Alberta, the party system as intriguingly taken on a resemblance to that of British Columbia and Saskatchewan and, increasingly, Manitoba. The CCF led the consolidation of the left-wing across the west in the 1930s, uniting formally disparate farmer, labour, and socialist parties. Without doing so, the left was too divided to effectively challenge the dominant parties to their right. In recent decades, and now in Alberta, the right appears to be doing the same thing in response to the strength of the NDP on the left provincially. It will take some time to see whether this pattern holds in Alberta, or the pattern of one-party dominance reappears under the UCP.

### **Analysis**

Despite its electoral weakness for most of its history, the CCF-NDP has shown more resiliency than any other party in the province. The CCF-NDP's organizational structure and the nature of its ideological alignment have made it better equipped to survive even through adversity than any

other party. The party has maintained the support of a core group of activists while also growing its base as the province has changed. It has benefitted from a national organization that has provided support in the form of personnel and pushed the party to evolve when its local membership was at their weakest point. The presence of other strong insurgents in Alberta, namely the UFA, Labour, and Social Credit, serve to highlight the characteristics that made the CCF-NDP strong by showing how they factored into each of their eventual failures.

### *Ideology and Organization*

The strongest advantage the CCF-NDP has possessed is its commitment to social democracy and the activist support that has allowed the party to survive even when it has been electorally weak. The party's activists believe deeply in its cause and are unlikely to abandon the CCF-NDP for another party even when the party's odds of winning an election, or even a single seat, are low. The flip side of this is that the CCF-NDP at times resembled an intellectual society or debate club more than a political party, with some activists resigning themselves to defeat and blaming the capitalist system. Compared with the Saskatchewan CCF, the Alberta wing of the organization remained somewhat more radical absent the pressures of having to govern or even recruit a broader base of supporters to their cause. Social Credit specifically targeted many of their attacks at the CCF and socialism generally, and the CCF was not the sole source of opposition to the government. Consequently, the party's support remained limited to its ideological core supporters at certain points.

Fortunately, the national CCF-NDP organization exerted influence over the CCF in Alberta and helped shift the party towards a big-tent version of social democracy as the NDP. As the national party cultivated a closer relationship with the labour movement, so too did the Alberta NDP. In an increasingly urban province, this helped the NDP find a new core

constituency as agriculture became less politically important. In addition to the ideas supplied by the national party, the NDP organization in other provinces was also able to lend material support, such as personnel, to the Alberta party. When the NDP came to power in 2015, it was able to draw on talent from the federal party and other provincial wings with previous experience in government.

As with any political party, the CCF-NDP has also benefitted from having strong leadership. Grant Notley embodied the qualities that have allowed the CCF-NDP to endure by committing the party to growing its base, core organization, and presenting themselves as a credible opposition to the government. The party was able to put the infrastructure in place to be ready for more favourable political conditions. Rachel Notley was able to draw on this three decades later and bring the party to power, presenting the NDP now not just as credible opposition, but as a credible challenger.

### *The Limitations of Sectionalism and Abandoning Ideology*

The CCF-NDP learned valuable lessons from the failure of its predecessors that helped it survive. The UFA and Dominion Labour Party in Alberta were both sectional parties concerned with representing the interests of particular segments of society. Sectional parties are limited by their nature in their potential bases of support and are vulnerable to co-optation or others claiming to better represent their core constituencies interests. The labour movement in Alberta was necessarily limited in size by the small size of industry in Alberta relative to agriculture. The party's potential bases of support were limited to urban areas, which were under-represented in the province's electoral system. With this in mind, Labour embraced co-operation with the UFA, gaining a seat in the UFA cabinet. The formation of the CCF was the natural conclusion of this sort of co-operation, helping both parties grow their potential base of support.

The UFA had the misfortune of holding the reins of power when the Great Depression hit. As Achen and Bartels (2016) show, governments all over North America were swept aside by this simple fact. The Alberta electorate had an appetite for populist reform, and William Aberhart arrived at the right time to attempt to deliver it as Social Credit. For desperate farmers, Social Credit offered a path out of the Depression. Unlike in Saskatchewan, where farmers could turn to direct political action for a solution, they had already done so in Alberta. UFA support splintered, with some going to the CCF and some to Social Credit. Timing, and the unorthodox ideas of Henry Wise Wood and William Aberhart both played a significant role in defining Alberta's second insurgent wave. Had farmers organized later, or Social Credit arrived later, the CCF's fate may have been quite different.

Social Credit was not a sectional party, but analogously lacked a "hook" to retain supporters and activists. After the social credit program proved unworkable, Social Credit became dependent on claims of sound government, charismatic leadership, and cultivating fear of the (socialist) alternative to keep itself in power. There was little to differentiate Social Credit from another mainstream conservative party like the Progressive Conservatives. When that party gained capable leadership, Social Credit's support dried up virtually overnight. This is in marked contrast with the NDP, which *because* of the core ideological vision shared by its activists is able to weather the sort of political storm that Social Credit faced. Social Credit was unable to continue to consistently field a full slate of candidates within a couple elections of its defeat.<sup>54</sup> The CCF-NDP has generally been able to do so for its entire history, reflecting the strength of its organization.

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<sup>54</sup> The same thing would recur in British Columbia during the 1990s, where a conservative incarnation of Social Credit analogously lacked differentiation from another centre-right party in the province, the Liberals. See chapter six.



### *(Somewhat) Favourable Conditions*

In Alberta and across the west, the Liberal and Conservative parties had shallow roots that allowed new challengers to thrive. Largely because of personalities, farmers in Alberta were drawn to direct political action more quickly than they were in Saskatchewan where farmers instead cultivated a close relationship with the government. As explained in the previous section, this seriously hampered the CCF's efforts to grow a decade later. Conditions that were to the benefit of insurgents generally proved a hindrance to the NDP.

Beyond the scope of this thesis but also worth mentioning is the role the electoral system played in shaping the CCF-NDP's fate. The system has tended to produce very large legislative majorities and kept single parties in power for long stretches of time. As Macpherson (1954) would have it, this is the "quasi-party system", a result of a strong independent producer class and a quasi-colonial relationship with Ottawa. Disproportionality and experiments with the electoral system in Alberta also played a significant role in shaping this state of affairs (Jansen 1998). The effect of the electoral system was to disadvantage all parties in Alberta, save for the one in power, including the CCF-NDP. As the events of 2015 have now proven, the CCF-NDP finding a home in Alberta was never an impossibility. The party has survived and done remarkably well under some, at times, truly inhospitable conditions.

### **Conclusion**

Ten years ago, one might have concluded the CCF-NDP was a political failure in Alberta. The 2015 election of the NDP under Rachel Notley has forced us to reconsider the CCF-NDP's place in Alberta, how it compares to other parties, and how it compares to the CCF-NDP elsewhere in the west. The CCF had a more complicated start in Alberta than in other western provinces because farmers were already in power when it was organized, and another party appealing to the

same sort of voters arrived slightly sooner.<sup>55</sup> In spite of the CCF's electoral weakness, the party found a small but committed base of activists to sustain it. The party also had the benefit of belonging to the federal CCF organization, which pushed the CCF towards moderation when some of its Alberta activists were growing defeatist. The party continued to build the necessary infrastructure to organize and survive until political conditions were more favourable. It was able to do so, and ultimately formed government seventy-five years after it contested its first election in the province.

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<sup>55</sup> The situation was somewhat similar in Manitoba with the Liberal-Progressives, but that party was the result of a merger between the Progressives and the Liberals, so the situation is not directly analogous.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: MANITOBA**

Manitoba is one of the NDP's strongest provinces, having been the governing party for just over half of the previous fifty years. Jared Wesley (2016b, 132) and Nelson Wiseman (2012) go so far as to argue that the NDP might be Manitoba's "naturally governing party" as the Liberals are sometimes called at the federal level. Yet the party only formed government for the first time in 1969, thirty-three years after contesting its first election in the province. Manitoba has had a strong tradition of organized labour and agriculture for most of its history, so the CCF-NDP's delayed success raises two questions: what kept the CCF-NDP from power for so long, and what sustained the party in the interim?

This chapter argues that the CCF-NDP grew and succeeded in Manitoba for generally the same reasons as it did throughout the west: the ideological and organizational strength of the party owing to its social democratic ideology. Tracing the development of the Manitoba party system, this chapter shows that Manitoba had both a strong farmers' and labour movement emerge from a shallowly rooted and late arriving two party system. As in Alberta and Saskatchewan, the sectional farmer and labour parties looked for ways to extend their reach. They accomplished this, in the case of farmers, by merging with the provincial Liberal Party, and by joining the CCF in the case of labour. Hampered by the strength of the dominant Liberal-Progressive party and an unfavourable electoral system, the CCF survived through the 1940s and 1950s on the strength of the commitment of its activists to the party's social democratic cause. With stronger leadership and new electoral rules, the CCF-NDP was able to break through in 1969 and establish itself as a pillar of the provincial party system. The CCF-NDP contrasts with other Manitoba insurgents that allowed themselves to be subsumed by Manitoba's coalition

politics of the 1940s. Retaining its own identity, the NDP continued to evolve into the big tent social democratic party it remains today.

This chapter will first outline the character of the Manitoba's party system development, especially as it contrasts with Canada's other western provinces. It will then introduce the literature on Manitoba party politics, noting the lack of direct comparisons made to other Western Canadian jurisdictions. Highlighting critical moments in the growth of Manitoba's party system, this chapter then traces the circumstances that permitted the CCF-NDP's survival and led to the failure of its insurgent rivals, namely the UFM-Progressives, Social Credit, and a number of urban labour parties. Next, this chapter outlines the changing circumstances that permitted the nascent NDP organization to finally challenge the province's major parties, and how this has caused a re-alignment of the province's politics in last few decades. Finally, this chapter draws conclusions on the conditions that allowed the CCF-NDP's survival, kept it from power, and offers comparisons on how the CCF-NDP differed from other parties.

## **Overview of Manitoba's Party System**

### *A Province Divided*

Manitoba is unique in the west for being a primarily rural province dominated by a single urban centre, Winnipeg. This has heavily influenced the development of the province's politics, which neither completely resembles the primarily agrarian politics of Alberta and Saskatchewan nor the labour and commerce politics of British Columbia. As with all things Canadian, Manitoba is somewhere in the middle. Winnipeg served, and continues to serve, as an important rail hub for Western Canada, and has also had a large manufacturing sector (Dyck 1996a). In the early 20th century, Winnipeg was Canada's third largest city. The internal geography of Winnipeg divided the city into a primarily working-class north end, with the south having a larger proportion of

business owners and professionals (Adams 2008). The remainder of the province was primarily fuelled by agriculture, which was historically the province's largest industry (Dyck 1996a). Farmers and the labour movement have both played important roles in the province's political development. Unlike in Alberta and Saskatchewan where the CCF was organized as a coalition of farmers and members of the labour movement, farmers in Manitoba instead merged with the Liberals to broaden their potential base of support. This left the labour parties and ideological social democrats to organize the CCF in Manitoba, giving the party a different character in that province than it had elsewhere on the prairies. Instead there are closer parallels with British Columbia, except that farmers were not a politically salient group in that province.<sup>56</sup>

The political fortunes of Manitoba's parties have been strongly affected by these urban-rural and class divisions and their interaction with the province's electoral system. Two features are worth noting. First, Manitoba employed a proportional representation system in Winnipeg, with a single transferable vote (STV) used between 1920 and 1953. In rural areas, Manitoba employed a ranked ballot, as did Alberta (Jansen 1998). Second, the electoral system in Manitoba was heavily weighted to favour rural areas before an independent boundary commission was established in 1960 and the boundaries again revised in 1969 (Adams 2008). This had the effect of favouring parties with primarily rural support, like the United Farmers of Manitoba-Progressives and Liberal Progressives. While the Manitoba CCF made good use of the STV system in urban areas, the system tended to concentrate their support in Winnipeg and, along with the over-representation of rural areas, severely undermined their capacity to grow (Jansen 1998). The electoral system is therefore an important contextual variable in explaining

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<sup>56</sup> See chapter six.

the development of the party system in Manitoba, especially as it pertains to sectional insurgents like the Progressives or CCF-NDP.

### *Literature*

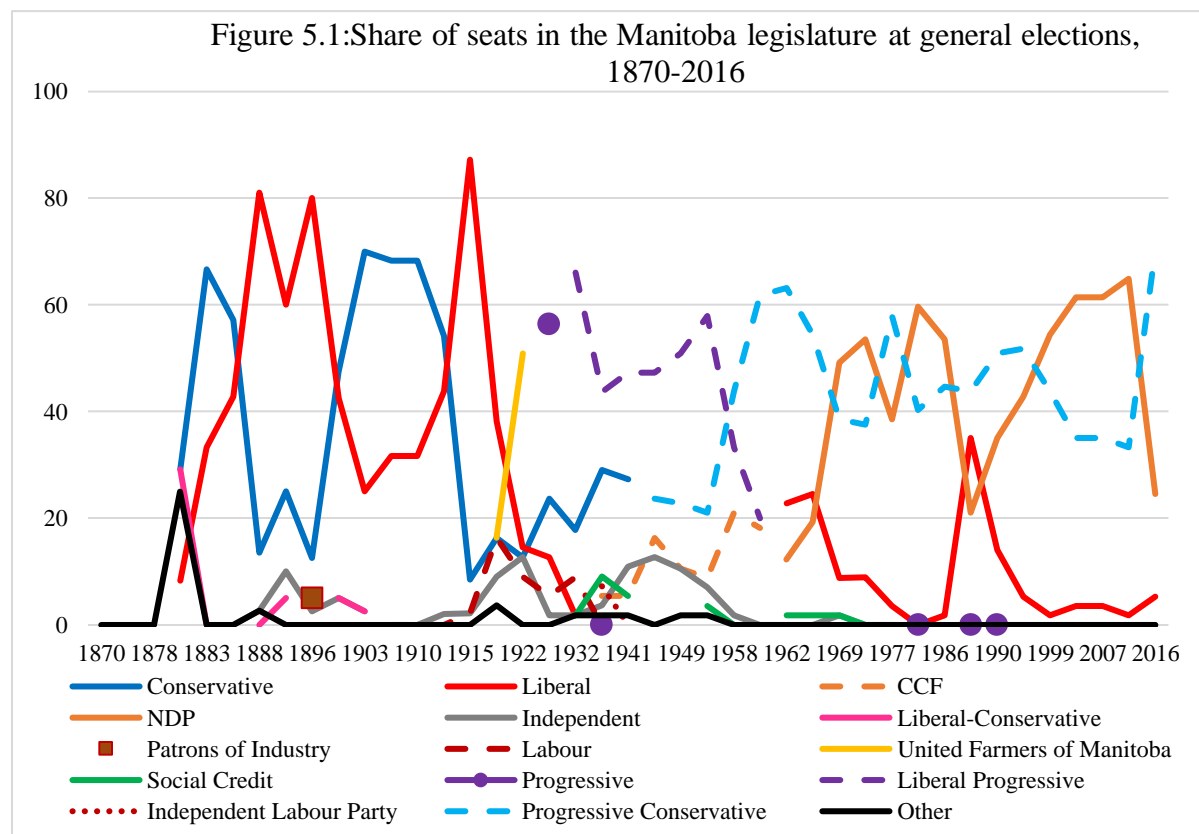
The rise of the CCF-NDP in Manitoba has been well documented by Nelson Wiseman (1983; 2010), but there has been no systematic effort to compare the CCF-NDP's experience in Manitoba with other provinces or with other insurgents in the Manitoba system. This may make the case appear more idiosyncratic than it really is. Aside from Wiseman's study, there has been a dearth of scholarship on Manitoba parties, though some recent works have begun to fill the gap (Adams 2008, Ferguson and Wardhaugh 2010, Thomas and Brown 2010).

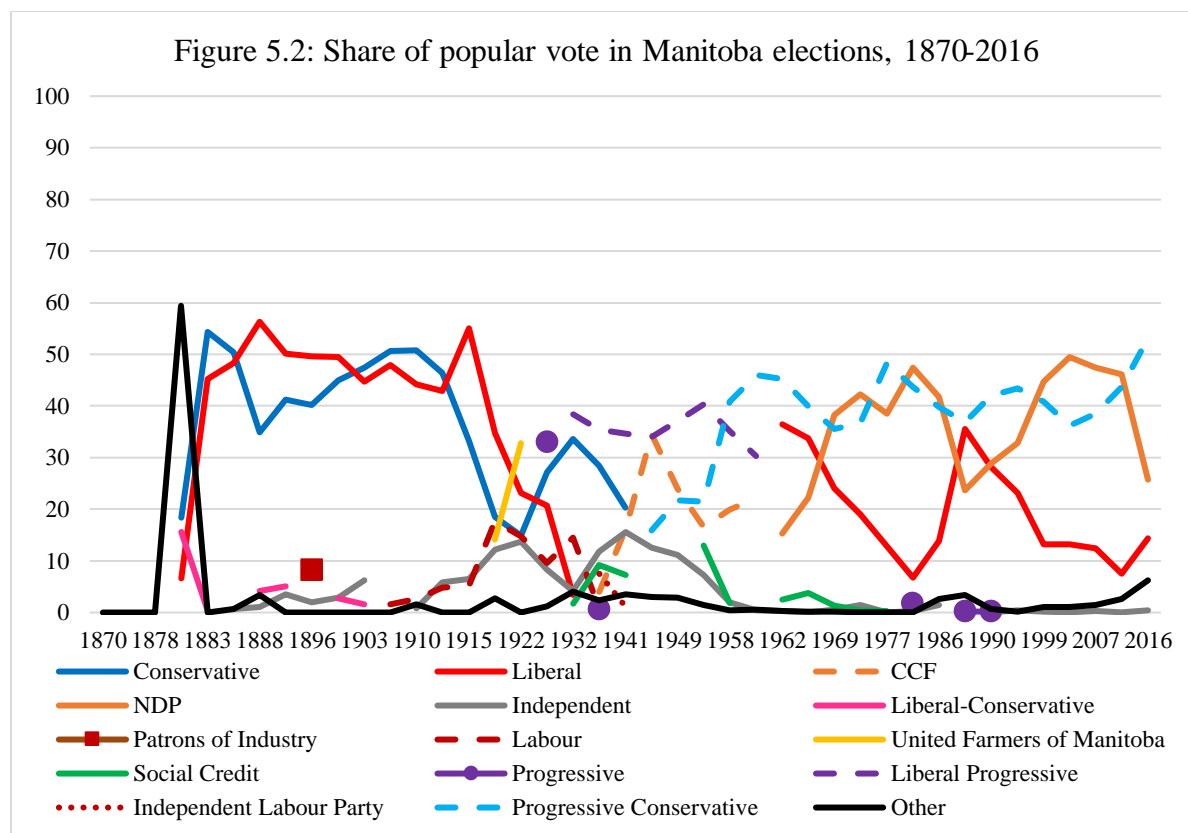
Wiseman's account of the CCF-NDP's rise is highly critical of the party's finances, membership, and internal democratic practices during the period prior to its 1969 breakthrough. Wiseman argues that the party's extra-parliamentary organization was weaker than in most other provinces, and that the party was more heavily leadership-driven than the usual view of the CCF-NDP as a mass party would suggest. Wiseman credits strong leadership, redistricting, the support of ethnic minorities in Winnipeg's north end for its rise to power. Missing is a structural explanation of the CCF-NDP's survival and rise to power that takes account of the pattern we now see across the Canadian West: the CCF-NDP is remarkably capable of surviving through periods of low electoral support and still emerge as a major party on the other side. An explanation of the survival of the CCF-NDP in Manitoba must therefore take account of the similar pattern seen in Alberta, British Columbia, and Manitoba, even if the timing and some of the specific conditions were different. This chapter argues that the CCF-NDP's organizational and ideological strength gave the party enough momentum to survive until electoral conditions changed in its favour. Even if, as Wiseman argues, the extra-parliamentary organization of the

CCF-NDP was weak in Manitoba, it still appears stronger than the other cadre and insurgent parties that composed the Manitoba party system.

### *Critical Junctures and Periods*

The key moments of realignment in the Manitoba party system closely resemble the western provinces. These are indicated by the arrival and disappearance of new parties from the system, the first point at which new parties form government, and significant changes in support. There are two waves of insurgent parties, with the first one generating the UFM-Progressives and several labour parties, and the second generating Social Credit and the CCF. The first wave ultimately fails, though under different circumstances than elsewhere in the west, and CCF proves to be the survivor of the second insurgent wave. As this chapter explains, this is because of the CCF's unique organizational and ideological structure that allows the party to survive under difficult political conditions until circumstances ultimately improve.





Figures 5.1 and 5.2 show the vote and seat shares of major parties in Manitoba from the province's establishment in 1870 through 2016.<sup>57</sup> There are six broad eras in the development of the party system which are summarized in table 5.1. First, a period before the arrival of parties, where candidates identified themselves either as “government” or “opposition” (Adams 2008, 1). Second, a period of two-party competition between the Liberals and Conservatives. Third, the arrival of sectional insurgent parties, namely the UFM (later the Progressives) and Labour.<sup>58</sup> The UFM ultimately merges with the Liberals creating the Liberal-Progressive party, which dominates provincial politics for the next thirty years. This brings us to, fourth, the arrival of Social Credit and the CCF, with the latter being directly descended from labour. The Liberal-

<sup>57</sup> Figures created from Sayers (2021).

<sup>58</sup> There is evidence of earlier labour parties, including the Patrons of Industry (see figures X and X) Because they received little support and seem to have had little direct effect on the party system not later exerted by the major insurgents, I exclude them from this analysis.



Progressives organize a large governing coalition in which most parties participate, which serves to stymie threats to their dominance. The breakdown of the coalition, growth of the Progressive Conservatives, and then the growth of the NDP lead to, fifth, the current two-and-a-half party system. Manitoba has resisted the consolidation to the right of the NDP seen in Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia. The NDP has managed to remain since 1969 one of the two largest parties in the province nevertheless.

<b>Table 5.1: Periods in the development of the Manitoba party system</b>			
<b>Era</b>	<b>Dominant parties at beginning of period</b>	<b>Arriving insurgents</b>	<b>Result</b>
1870 – c. 1883 (Pre-party competition)	—	—	The same parties that predominate at the federal level arrive to Manitoba.
c. 1883 – c. 1915 (Two party competition)	Conservative Party Liberal Party	—	UFM and Labour arrive; UFM forms government by 1922.
c. 1915 – 1932 (First insurgent wave)	UFM- Progressives/Liberal- Progressives Conservative Party	Labour (c. 1907) UFM	Social Credit and CCF arrive and enter into coalition with Liberal-Progressives and Progressive Conservatives. CCF later withdraws and becomes de facto opposition.
c. 1932 – c. 1969 (Second insurgent wave)	Liberal-Progressives Conservatives	Social Credit CCF	Social Credit's participation in coalition means social credit program discredited before party can gain relevance. CCF support grows but is undermined by electoral system
1969 – Present (Two-and-a-half parties)	NDP Progressive Conservatives Liberals	—	New leadership, broader ideology, and new electoral rules permit NDP breakthrough. Both PCs and Liberals persist.

The following section considers the development of Manitoba's party system at critical junctures in its development during each of these eras. Critical junctures are the parties in the above table arrive, disappear, experience a significant increase or decrease in their support, or enter into agreements with other parties. While the Manitoba case generally resembles the other western provinces in the development of its party system, the electoral system and the maintenance of a multi-party coalition by the Liberal-Progressives undermined the CCF's opportunities for growth in its early history. Consistent with the experience of the CCF in the other western provinces, though, the party managed to survive through this period and, with the right circumstances in place, grow to become one of the province's dominant parties.

### **Party System Development**

#### *Manitoba's Early Party System*

Manitoba became a province in 1870 and party politics emerged gradually. Manitoba was the first of Canada's provinces to be established by an act of parliament rather than by admitting a previously independent colony. Prior to 1870, the territory that became Manitoba was administered by the Hudson's Bay Company and, later, by the provisional government of Louis Riel. Initially, the province and its legislature were controlled by its lieutenant-governors, who were "in essence, their own Premiers [sic]", which permitted the dominion government to exercise some control over the province as it controlled that appointment (Ferguson and Wardhaugh 2010, ix). Once responsible government emerged, candidates for the legislature at first identified themselves as either "Government" or "Opposition" as was also the case in the North-West Territories and British Columbia until 1903.

Party politics arrived when Thomas Greenway consolidated the legislatures opposition into a Provincial Rights party, opposed to disallowance of provincial legislation by the federal

Conservative government (Morton 1967a, 220). Most of that organization's supporters were Liberals. This forced the government into the role of defenders of the federal government until, by 1883, both groups simply adopted the federal party lines (Morton 1967a, 220-221).<sup>59</sup> The early party system was more competitive than in the other prairie provinces, with both the Liberals and Conservatives occupying the role government for stretches before the arrival of the UFM. Because the two-party arrangement had longer to develop in Manitoba, the Liberal-Conservative party lines may have culturally solidified more in that province than in Alberta and Saskatchewan, perhaps explaining the failure of the PCs and Liberals to consolidate in opposition to the NDP decades later. Most of the early division between the Liberals and Conservatives concerned the rights of the new province, with little substantive ideological disagreement (Adams 2008, 2-3; Donnelly 1963, 29-30). Most of the disagreement between the two parties continued to directly involve federal politics, and support for the two parties split primarily along ethnic, linguistic, and religious lines (Adams 2008; Peterson 1978).

Labour organization began in Winnipeg in the 1880s and 1890s, but generally remained out of the realm of electoral politics. The labour movement was driven largely by immigrants from Britain and Europe who had had formative exposure to the growing labour and socialist movements there (Donnelly 1963; Peterson 1978; Wiseman 1983). Organized labour remained "comparatively mild and orthodox" until after 1914 and the arrival of the First World War (Masters 1973, 5). Labour remained out of the realm of direct political action for nearly forty-five years after the foundation of the province.

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<sup>59</sup> It is interesting to note that the Provincial Rights groups in Alberta and Saskatchewan were conservative in character while the federal government was Liberal. "Provincial rights" seems to really mean "opposed to the federal government".

The situation for farmers was similar, but the influence of American organizations encouraged more political organizing. One group that organized was the Patrons of Industry, which contested the 1896 Manitoba election and earned one seat in the legislature, but quickly collapsed. It was later reorganized as the Manitoba Grain Growers Association (MGGA), which in turn evolved into the UFM two decades later (McCutcheon 1978). The MGGA found the provincial government to be delivering satisfactorily for the interests of farmers until at least 1910 (Orlikow 1955). Afterwards, the farmers spent most of a decade debating the merits of direct political action versus continuing to work through the existing parties. Ultimately, farmers elected to engage in politics directly, culminating in the arrival of the UFM in government.

#### *Farmers Come to Power*

The end of the 1910s brought both the labour and farmers movements to the fore in Manitoba politics. The demographics of the province, and a lack of cohesion between farmers and the labour movement, meant that the farmers would be the ones to come to power first. Farmers were increasingly dissatisfied with the both the federal and provincial government's handling of farmers issues. A recession followed the First World War and caused a collapse in the price of agricultural commodities and considerable protest in urban areas. Farmers and workers alike were increasingly convinced that the existing party system no longer represented their interests, and that only they could represent their own interests (Wardhaugh and Thistlewaite 2010, 168).

The Manitoba Grain Growers' Association renamed itself the United Farmers of Manitoba to reflect its commitment to direct political action. This brought them in line with the successful United Farmers organizations in Ontario and Alberta, which they hoped to emulate. The UFM initially had no intention of challenging the government, which remained popular. The farmers simply wanted to directly represent their own interests. The UFM initially resisted co-

ordinated political action, leaving the choice to run candidates up to individual constituency associations (Morton 1967b, 97-99). The farmers managed to win 9 (of 55) seats in the 1920 election, having only ran candidates in 24 ridings. This forced the Liberal government into a minority position, and another election was held just two years later. The UFM was at this point highly sectional in character, lacking co-ordination between its members let alone a shared ideology.

In Winnipeg, the labour movement was also on the upswing. Complaints about labour conditions produced a series of strikes, eventually culminating in the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919 (Morton 1967a, 363). As David Bercuson (1990) explains, the combination of Winnipeg's location and the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway line made Winnipeg an industrial centre of the prairies. The arrival of industry brought many immigrants to the city to construct and operate factories. These immigrants, particularly those from Britain, brought with them the ideology of the labour movement and socialism that was growing in that country. It was readily absorbed into the city's social fabric. By the time of the General Strike, Winnipeg had experienced an economic depression and the effects of the First World War, with industrial work in support of the latter producing poor pay and work conditions in the eyes of organized labourers. The growing radicalism of urban workers translated electorally into growing success for the Independent Labour Party (ILP), which reached a peak of fourteen percent of the popular vote and sixteen percent of the seats in the legislature in 1922.

The General Strike proved extremely unpopular in rural Manitoba, given that farmers had their own demands, and their belief that many of the labourers' demands were senseless (Wiseman 1983, 8). For several decades to follow, there would be a marked divide between urban Winnipeg and the rural parts of the province in terms of their support for the province's

political parties. Once the decision was made to organize politically, agrarian interests through the UFM had a particular advantage over urban labour. The electoral system favoured rural voters, who had more representatives per person than those living in Winnipeg, where several experiments with the electoral system took place (Adams 2008, 12).<sup>60</sup> Peterson claims that “a 1920 statutory ratio making each rural voter the equivalent of two city voters assured the over-representation of British farming districts in the southwest” and made a significant contribution to the UFM’s success in the 1922 election (1978, 77). In addition to the challenge that the electoral system presented for the province’s Labour party, the UFM managed to earn the support of much of Winnipeg’s business community, giving the latter party both an urban and rural foothold (Wardhaugh and Thistlewaite 2010, 169).

The UFM won the 1922 election, as M. S. Donnelly puts it with “no leader and only the barest excuse for a platform” (1963, 57). Yet the farmers managed thirty-two percent of the popular vote and half of the seats in the legislature, with the remainder divided between the Liberals, Conservatives, Labour, and a number of independents. Only after the election did the UFM select John Bracken, a professor of agriculture, as its leader and thus the province’s premier. Bracken’s approach to governing has some parallels with the group government ideas of Henry Wise Wood in Alberta in that Bracken emphasized the non-partisan nature of his government and regularly encouraged the use of free votes to reflect the will of each constituency (Wardhaugh and Thistlewaite 2010, 171-182).

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<sup>60</sup> Adams (2008) outlines some of the key changes in Winnipeg’s electoral system. In brief, in 1914-1915 the city was divided into three districts, containing two seats each. Each voter cast two ballots in their respective district. After 1920 the city adopted proportional representation, with the city becoming a single electoral district containing ten seats. Voters then cast ranked ballots. PR was maintained until 1958.

The UFM was as a farmers' party, intended to represent farmers interests.<sup>61</sup> But Bracken set about a campaign in the following years to shore up the party's support and prevent "party politics" from regaining a foothold in Manitoba. Bracken's government was, in his view, a "business government". The party became known as the Progressives, after the federal party, only a couple of years after its arrival and the UFM itself had less and less influence. Bracken instead courted the Liberal Party, which had begun supporting the Progressives on most government business in the legislature. The Liberals and Progressives had begun to co-operate at the federal level as the latter party disintegrated, and Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King thought it would be disadvantageous for them to continue to face one another in Manitoba provincially (Donnelly 1963, 63-64). The two parties effected a merger with the express purpose of keeping the Conservatives out. As Bracken's government grew more and more distant from the sectional mandate of the UFM, farmers were returning to their former party affiliations. In 1928, the UFM resolved to withdraw from direct political action altogether, meaning the new Liberal-Progressive party was by no means a farmers' party any longer (Panting 1954).

The sectional insurgent parties, farmer and labour, of the 1920s failed in Manitoba just as they had throughout the west. Labour lacked the support outside of Winnipeg necessary to be politically viable, but labour supporters and activists would be instrumental in organizing the CCF. Manitoba farmers entered politics without direction. They found a leader who offered direction, but one that left the farmers behind. The Progressives, later the Liberal-Progressives abandoned sectionalism and agrarian politics for a return to party politics. Ironically, Bracken's government claimed to be a non-partisan business government, but the effect of the Liberal-Progressive merger was to keep the Conservatives out and cause farmers to abandon sectional

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<sup>61</sup> In other words, a sectional party that depended on a narrow base of support for its success, and that was chiefly concerned with representing that single, usually economic, constituency.

political action (Wardhaugh and Thistlewaite 2010, 179). The adversarial relationship between farmers and labour in Manitoba differs markedly from the other prairie provinces where the two movements acknowledged some harmony of interest. This reflects the fact that the labour movements of Alberta and Saskatchewan were much smaller given the smaller size of the cities in those provinces. When the CCF arrived, these divisions, the breadth of the coalition Bracken had built, and the electoral system made inroads for a farmer-labour-socialist coalition extremely difficult.

### *The Second Insurgency*

Neither the CCF nor Social Credit, the two insurgents of Manitoba's second wave to arrive in 1936 and 1932 respectively, began as Manitoba phenomena. The meetings to organize the CCF took place in Calgary, hosted by the UFA, and involved labour and socialist groups from across the country. Social Credit was also an Albertan phenomenon, and its presence in Manitoba was essentially an offshoot of its Alberta success (Morton 1967a, 427). The place of Social Credit in Manitoba politics is poorly documented, except to note that its success was fleeting and primarily among farmers (Wiseman 1983, 19). Social Credit participated in Bracken's 1940 coalition government and were apparently subsumed by it. By the end of the decade, they ceased to have an independent presence in Manitoba politics.

The CCF had a gradual arrival in Manitoba. While the national party and especially its Alberta and Saskatchewan wings were conceived of as a coalition between farmers, the labour movement, and socialists, Manitoba farmers had an antagonistic relationship with labour and did not participate in the CCF's organization in that province.<sup>62</sup> While the UFM was no longer

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<sup>62</sup> The CCF would continue to try to court farmers, but to little avail. The UFM had withdrawn from politics by the time the CCF arrived, and some farmers later belonged to the CCF directly rather than through a constituent organization (Wiseman 1983, 14).



synonymous with the Progressive government, organized farmers were no more interested in joining a new political organization. As it happened, then, the CCF in Manitoba began as a principally urban labour phenomenon. The existing labour party in Winnipeg, the Independent Labour Party (ILP), was reluctant to commit to the new organization, with candidates in the 1936 election running under the label “ILP-CCF”. Activists in the ILP took issue with the CCF attempting to broaden its coalition of support beyond urban labour activists, including to farmers (Wiseman 1983, 20). This shows that, from the beginning, what made the CCF different from its sectional predecessors was also true in Manitoba: a willingness to move beyond sectional politics and extend the CCF to the masses.

#### *Coalition Government*

The Liberal-Progressive government took great lengths to stay in power beyond simply appealing to voters in elections. The Progressives merger with the Liberals served to keep the Conservatives out of power, and to expand the Progressives base of support significantly. The government also proposed, and then implemented, a coalition government with the majority of the other parties in the province, which served to minimize party competition altogether and, again, ensure the Liberal-Progressives remained in power. The coalition cemented the fate of one of Manitoba’s second-wave insurgents, Social Credit, while it also serves to highlight the characteristics of the CCF-NDP that have made it a robust organization.

In 1931, just before the arrival of the CCF and the merger of the Liberal and Progressive parties, Bracken’s government first proposed a broad coalition of the Progressives, Liberals, and Conservatives. Bracken argued that a united front of all major parties would help the government obtain relief from Ottawa with regard to the Great Depression (Dyck 1996a, 402). Bracken was rebuffed by the Conservatives, and the Liberals ended up uniting with the Progressives anyway.

The election of 1936 produced only a minority government for Bracken, who promptly offered a coalition to the other parties again. He was refused by all except five members of the Social Credit caucus, who consented to joining with the approval of William Aberhart in Alberta in hopes that the coalition would lead to monetary reform (Donnelly 1963, 64).<sup>63</sup> The Bracken government ultimately obtained an additional seat, making further negotiations unnecessary that year.

In 1940, Bracken offered a coalition once more, and his offer was this time accepted. Bracken now argued that a coalition was necessary to lobby the federal government on the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations, and in the interests of solidarity during the war (Donnelly 1963, 64-65; Dyck 1996a, 403). The Conservatives, Social Credit, and CCF all agreed to join, but the CCF agreed to do so only if the government was indeed non-partisan as it had frequently claimed.<sup>64</sup> The CCF withdrew from the arrangement in 1942 upon the departure of John Bracken from provincial politics, having never been totally comfortable with the arrangement. Until the collapse of the coalition, the CCF would remain the principal opposition party in the province, actually *exceeding* the Liberal-Progressive's share of the popular vote in 1945 (though returning just seven percent of the seats versus the Liberal-Progressive's sixty, again highlighting the significant disproportionality faced by urban parties).

The Liberal-Progressive led coalition served to keep that party in power until 1958. The coalition era had seriously undermined the party system and institutions of the province. It lasted as long as it did, Donnelly argues, to keep a particular group of MLAs in office for as long as

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<sup>63</sup> The fact Aberhart was even consulted is indicative of the relationship between the Manitoba and Alberta social credit. The Manitoba party seems to be a vassal of the Alberta one.

<sup>64</sup> See Appendix A.

possible (1963, 66-67). The 1945 and 1949 elections had a significant number of seats filled by acclamation. The extra-parliamentary organizations, such as they existed, of the coalition members atrophied significantly during this period, and their eventual success in the late 1950s came largely on the coattails of John Diefenbaker federally.

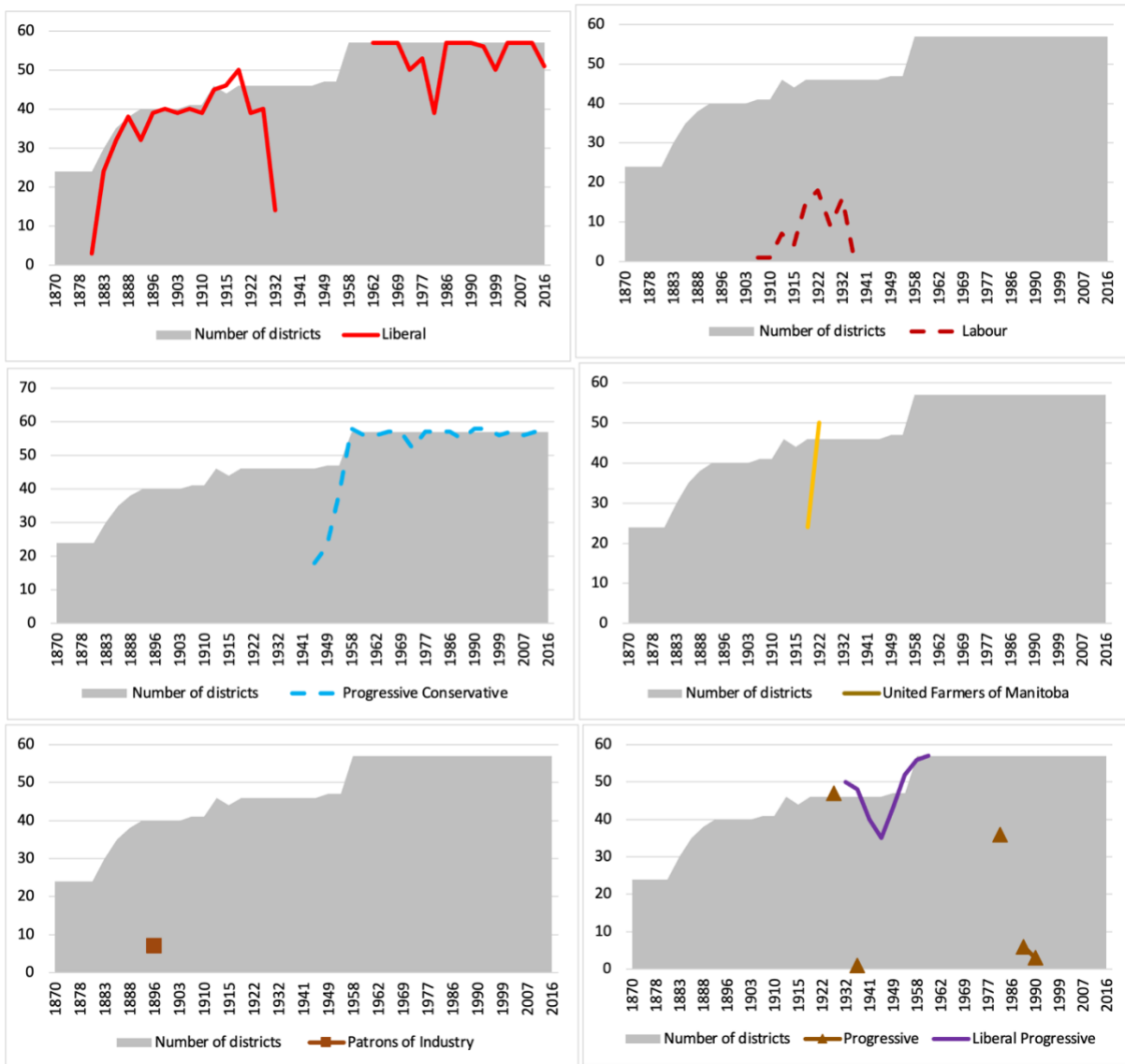
The uncomfortable participation of the CCF in the governing coalition highlights what differentiates that party from others. The CCF agreed to participate in the coalition for fear that, if it truly were a non-partisan government, it would reflect poorly on the party to be the sole organization not participating. When this turned out not to be the case, they promptly left. Social Credit, on the other hand, never returned from its participation in the coalition and essentially lost its identity as an independent organization. The same thing might have happened to the CCF. As long as the coalition continued to exist, participating in it would be as close as the CCF could get to the levers of power. The CCF took a more principled stand and kept its organization and identity intact. As one of the coalition's purposes became keeping the CCF out of power (Wiseman 1983, 70), its survival through the 1940s was no easy feat.

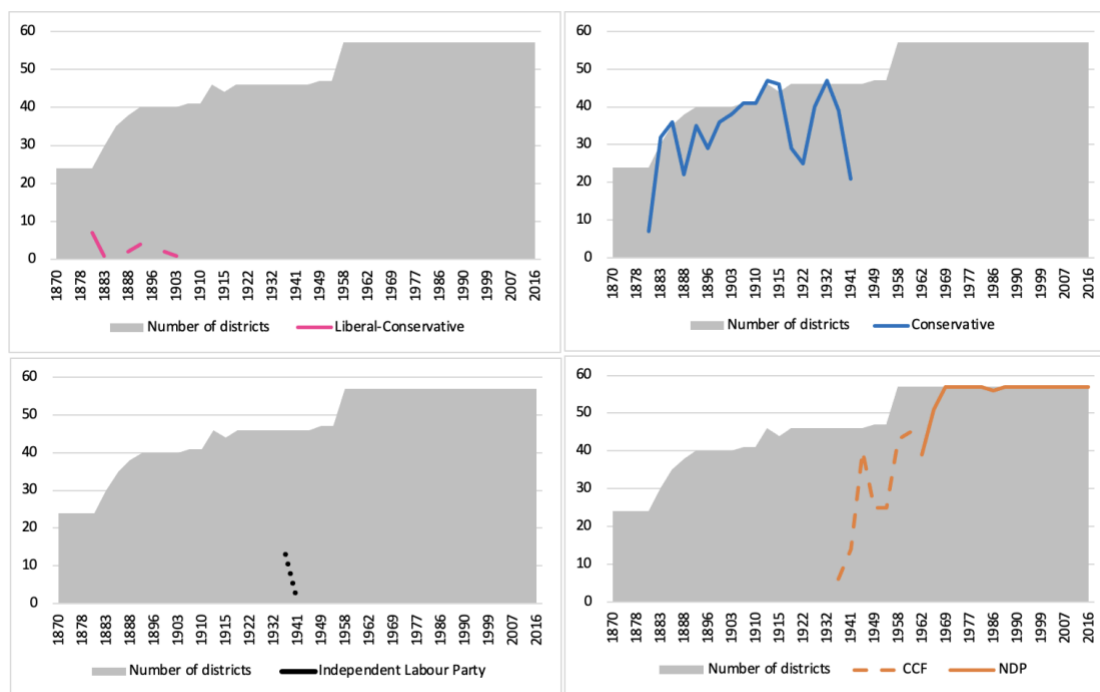
#### *The CCF-NDP Organization in the 1950s*

The 1950s almost as challenging for the CF as the 1940s had. Membership in the Manitoba CCF dwindled significantly and remained lower than even in Alberta for the entire decade 1947-1957 (Wiseman 1983, 66). As Wiseman points out, however, the CCF played an outsized role in provincial politics considering the size of the party membership. To compensate for the low levels of activist support, the CCF made a concerted effort to run as many candidates as possible, including reaching out into rural Manitoba, beyond its traditional urban base of support in Winnipeg. As figure 5.3 shows, the CCF was unable to run full slates during the early 1950s, but then no other party save for the Liberal-Progressives were able to, either. Nonetheless, the CCF

contested well over half of the electoral districts in each election during the 1950s, and nearly all by the early 1960s. This suggests the organization was not as weak as Wiseman have it. The number of activists involved in the organization may have been small, but the party's ability to find and recruit candidates and continue to win seats in Winnipeg requires a certain degree of organization to be possible. The CCF earned over twenty percent of seats and the popular vote in 1959. That the CCF did it with so few active members reflects the commitment of those few to the organization, and is what differentiates the CCF from its competitors. One advantage the CCF had in this regard was its connections to labour unions. The endorsement of unions relieved the CCF of some of its organizational burden, with a great many union members being active supporters of the party (Wiseman 1983, 81). The party continued attempts to establish a similar relationship with farmers, but never met with the same degree of success.

Figure 5.3: Number of candidates fielded by each major party in Manitoba versus total number of districts, 1870-2016.





The Liberal-Progressive coalition came to an end by 1958 with the withdrawal of the Conservatives—now the Progressive Conservatives. The PCs successfully returned a plurality of seats on their own. This was aided by electoral reform that finally saw a decrease in the overrepresentation of rural voters, which would be repeated just before the NDP's victory in 1969. The new electoral boundaries and the PCs withdrawal led to a return in the normalcy of Manitoba politics, with the Liberal-Progressives reverting to the Liberal name by 1962. The Liberal-Progressive (and Progressive) efforts to co-opt all opposition successfully kept the party in power for decades, but left the party in an atrophied state by the late 1950s, and it struggled through the 1960s to identify an ideological position for itself (Barber 2010). This would prove to be to the NDP's advantage later.

### *The Growth of the NDP*

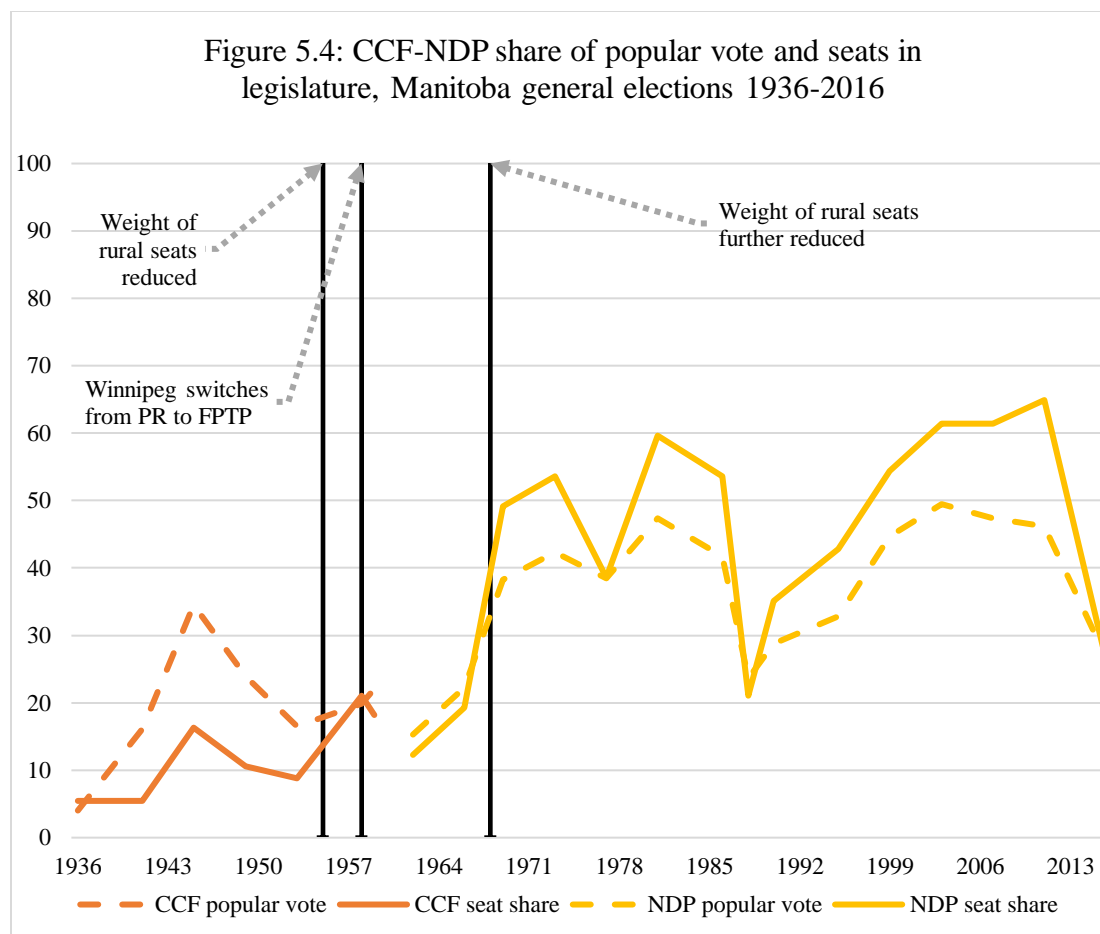
By 1961, the Manitoba CCF was joining the charge led by the national CCF organization to transform into the NDP. This consisted of a merger with the Canadian Labour Congress, an association of Canadian trade unions, and an effort to broaden the party's support beyond its traditional base. The transition of the CCF into the New Party and ultimately the NDP was well supported in by members of the Manitoba CCF (Adams 2008, 112). Adams notes that there was some "resistance from younger and more radical members", which is in line with the tension that has helped sustain the CCF-NDP more broadly: an activist core committed to social democracy within an electoral machine (2008, 112). As figure 5.4 shows, the CCF-NDP had more successful efforts recruiting candidates for most districts after 1960, reflecting the party's increasingly moderate stance and a population more amenable to social welfare programs (McAllister 1984).<sup>65</sup> Wiseman (2010) argues that the NDP was also aided by the rightward drift of both of its principal opponents, the Liberals and Progressive Conservatives.

The 1969 election was the NDP's breakthrough moment. A strong contributor to this success was a change to the electoral system that more efficiently translated the NDP's votes into seats. Figure 5.4 shows that prior to 1968 the CCF-NDP consistently received a larger share of the popular vote than the number of seats it earned might suggest.<sup>66</sup> After 1968, the electoral boundaries were adjusted from a system that heavily favoured rural constituencies to a more equitable one. Where the previous system favoured rural seats by seven to four, under the new system, "adjustments to enhance rural representation were restricted to a 25 percent level of tolerance" (Adams 2008, 118). Now almost half of the provincial seats were in Winnipeg, which provided a huge advantage to the NDP with its still principally urban base of support.

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<sup>65</sup> The data for this figure is from Adams (2008) and Sayers (2021).

<sup>66</sup> This is not to suggest that this is unusual. Such effects are standard under first past the post. Changes to this formula, though, clearly worked in the NDP's favour. See Cairns (1968) for the seminal discussion of such effects.



Ed Schreyer became leader of the Manitoba NDP just eighteen days before the 1969 election, suggesting the foundations the NDP had laid over the previous decade were crucial to the party's success, though most accounts give Schreyer significant credit as well (McAllister 1984; Wiseman 1983). The real key to the NDP's success was the appeals it made beyond its traditional base of support among urban workers of north Winnipeg. According to McAllister (1984) and Wiseman (1983), the NDP did this by capturing the "ethnic vote", which it was evidently able to do by offering a more moderate platform. Far from offering pure socialism, Schreyer "only endorsed state intervention when and where the private sector was demonstrably not serving the public interest" (Marchildon and Rasmussen 2010, 288). The NDP barely won enough seats to form government in 1969, and the Liberals and Conservatives seriously



entertained forming another coalition to keep the NDP out. With the floor crossing of one Liberal MLA, Schreyer was able to govern with a majority and win a true majority in the following election of 1973.

### *Manitoba Today*

The NDP has maintained a relatively moderate policy agenda since its 1969 victory. The NDP has found increasingly more support in northern Manitoba and has even been able to make inroads into some agricultural communities (Adams 2008, 122-123). More recently, Gary Doer, premier from 2009 to 2016, pursuing a “third way” style platform in the model of the British Labour Party (Wiseman 2010, 129). The party has positioned themselves as the defenders of Manitoba’s welfare state and has continuously been willing to engage new groups for support instead of relying exclusively on its traditional urban-labour base.

The Progressive Conservatives returned to power in 1977, but the party system never returned to its previous arrangement. Instead of the PCs and Liberals alternating in power with the CCF-NDP in third, now the Liberals were the usual third-place party. Aside from two years where the Liberals overtook the NDP and formed the official opposition, the NDP has consistently remained either the first or second largest party in Manitoba politics. The Progressive Conservatives have governed Manitoba since 2016 and support for the NDP has dropped. The Liberals have not been the beneficiary, however, suggesting that the NDP’s time in government is not over. In Manitoba and throughout the west, once the NDP arrives, it becomes a pillar of the party system. In the other three western provinces, the parties of the right have consolidated to oppose the NDP, but Manitoba continues to support both the Progressive Conservatives and the Liberals.

The experience of the Manitoba CCF-NDP exemplifies the winning formula for the party across the west. It first cultivated a diehard base of supporters, principally among urban workers in Winnipeg, that allowed the party to survive even when it was politically weak. The party became electorally viable by moderating itself and once given the opportunity to prove itself to voters in government has remained one of the province's dominant parties.

### **Analysis**

Manitoba is was only the second province in Canada where the CCF-NDP formed government, and it still took thirty-years after the party contested its first election there to get to that point. In McAllister (1984) and Wiseman's (1983) view, the CCF-NDP was an anaemic organization for most of that intervening period, with low levels of membership support, a poor financial situation, and its electoral success confined mostly to working-class portions of Winnipeg. McAllister goes on to criticize the party for neglecting its social democratic principles, identifying "many instances where [Schreyer's] government could have taken measures in line with democratic socialist ideology but did not do so" (1984, 163).

Taking a view of the CCF-NDP's development across Western Canada, these apparent weaknesses should be reinterpreted as evidence of the Manitoba party's strength. As this chapter has shown, the CCF-NDP had to contend with brutal competitive conditions. Farmers, who constituted the vast majority of the CCF's early support in Alberta and Saskatchewan, were set against the party in Manitoba. The electoral system, both its voting system and the drawing of electoral boundaries, worked so as to disfavour parties with concentrated urban support like the CCF-NDP. And the dominant party in Manitoba politics, the Liberal-Progressives, spent most of the mid-twentieth century constructing broad multiparty coalitions to keep itself in power, and later, to keep the CCF-NDP out of government. If the CCF-NDP organization was really as bad

as McAllister and Wiseman suggest, there is no way the party should have survived. Social Credit, which also offered an alternative economic vision in the wake of the Depression and formed government in two of four western provinces, provides the counterfactual. In 1936, that party had more support than the CCF-NDP. The majority of Social Credit members remained with the Liberal-Progressive governing coalition for its entire duration, and the party lost virtually all traces of an independent identity, as evidenced by its virtual absence from the historical record.

In nearly any other party, the organizational weakness the CCF-NDP experienced in the 1940s and 1950s would have been the end of that party. The CCF-NDP instead survived because of the organizational and ideological strengths it has that have enabled its survival across Western Canada. These are the commitment of its core base of supporters to the CCF-NDP's social democratic project, the involvement of the national CCF-NDP organization, the party's moderation and willingness to grow beyond just being a labour party, and social and political conditions that permitted the rise of new parties in the first place.

### *Ideology and Organization*

During the CCF-NDP's least politically successful period, the party maintained a small but committed base of support, primarily among trade union members in Northern Winnipeg. They managed to maintain this support because the core CCF-NDP activists remained passionate about the social democratic enterprise, with some always remaining involved in the party even when fortune was set against it (Zakuta 1964). This was probably a small minority of its potential support even among this base, to be sure, but it was enough to sustain the party. The CCF-NDP also had the advantage of its connection with the trade union movement in Manitoba. Among participants in those unions, support for the CCF-NDP was high (Wiseman 1983, 81).

Endorsement from unions likely compensated for some of the CCF-NDP's financial weakness by providing some consistent support without the expense of heavily campaigning.

The CCF-NDP also had the benefit of belonging to the national CCF-NDP organization, which helped motivate much of the party's growth and transformation. In the absence of support from organized farmers, the Manitoba CCF was the direct continuation of the province's Independent Labour Party, which had a more radical character and a smaller potential base of support. The CCF was conceived of outside of Manitoba, but with it apparent that the CCF would be the new national vehicle for labour, the leadership of the Manitoba ILP participated. This set the party on a course of expanding beyond its urban labour base with varying degrees of success over its history. When the national CCF organization pushed for the creation of the New Party and ultimately the NDP, it again had a moderating effect on the Manitoba party that some of its core supporters fought against. The tension between ideologically committed activists and those who wished to see the CCF-NDP grow its support has been crucial to the party's success with both camps supplying necessary ingredients.

#### *Withstanding Sectionalism and Coalition Government*

The experience of the UFM-Progressives shows what can happen when a party does not strike the right balance between maintaining its core program and seeking new bases of support. When John Bracken took the leadership of that party, he set about implementing a "business government" rather than a farmers' government. The farmers quickly lost their close relationship with the government as the Progressives in Manitoba became a creature of their own and the UFM decided to withdraw from politics. In effect, the farmers' organization was co-opted by the Liberal Party in an effort to prevent their partisan opponents, the Conservatives, from coming to power. The UFM-Progressive case highlights the limits of sectional politics in a different manner

than we have seen in Alberta and Saskatchewan. In those provinces, the electoral machine of the UFA, and the Progressives lost steam once the platforms of the political needs of farmers had been met. In Manitoba, the machine was co-opted and farmers were instead cast aside. From early on, the Manitoba CCF rejected sectionalism and sought new bases of support without completely abandoning its urban labour base as explained in the previous section.

The CCF also resisted remaining in John Bracken's governing coalition despite the fact that this put them much closer to the levers of power than they would otherwise be for several decades. In Alberta, the Labour Party contented itself with a seat at the cabinet table to address sectional labour issues, and the CCF might have easily done the same in Manitoba. Instead, the CCF withdrew from the governing coalition and acted for several legislative sessions as the coalitions only real opposition, helping the party earn credibility. The experience of Social Credit shows what might have happened if the party remained. That party lost its independent identity by participating in the coalition and prevented Social Credit from making greater inroads in Manitoba despite its early support.

#### *Favourable Conditions for the Emergence of New Parties*

Manitoba, like the other western provinces, proved fertile ground for the emergence of new political parties. The party system in Manitoba emerged slowly after responsible government had arrived, and the divisions were drawn along federal lines and on issues almost always involving the federal government. Without close ties to the Liberals and Conservatives, both farmers and urban workers believed that they could better represent their own interests, leading to the creation of sectional parties. As we have seen, however, sectional parties tend to lack dependable bases of support. The most successful of them expand beyond the sections of society they first

formed to represent and develop full-fledged electoral machines. The CCF-NDP managed to do this in Manitoba without one of its usual bases of support, farmers.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has re-evaluated our understanding of the CCF-NDP's growth in Manitoba. The CCF-NDP has typically been portrayed as an organization that suffered from a failure to thrive for much of its early history. The standard accounts argue that the CCF lacked consistent membership support and succeeded largely on the basis of the Liberal and Progressive Conservative party's movement to the right, along with changing demographics that became more amenable to a brand of watered-down social democracy. Instead, this chapter has shown that the CCF-NDP's survival was no accident, and in fact fits a pattern that explains the party's growth across the west. The claims that McAllister and Wiseman make about the CCF in Manitoba hold true, but are true because the party was up against enormous odds, including unpopularity among farmers, a disadvantageous electoral system, and coalitions designed to keep them from power. The CCF-NDP owes its survival to a small but committed base of supporters and a national organization that helped moderate the party and grow support among the groups that McAllister and Wiseman identify. The survival of the party was far from inevitable, but the CCF-NDP has managed to climb out of a desperate situation in Manitoba into one of the most comfortable positions for the party anywhere in the country.

## CHAPTER SIX: BRITISH COLUMBIA

British Columbia was the first place in Canada where the CCF-NDP contested an election, in 1933. It gave the party a strong start. The BC CCF earned thirty-one percent of the popular vote and fifteen percent of the seats in the legislature—enough for the party to become the province's Official Opposition. Yet it would take nearly forty years, until 1972, for the CCF-NDP to form government. In the intervening period, Social Credit, another insurgent party, would arrive and dominate the province's politics for decades. Social Credit ultimately disappeared from the political scene in the 1990s, yet the CCF-NDP has remained and continued to grow in strength. How did the CCF-NDP manage to survive when the once stronger Social Credit League did not?

Electoral strength alone is not enough to explain a party's survival or demise as the case of the CCF-NDP and Social Credit shows. Instead, the CCF-NDP has benefitted from a much stronger extra-parliamentary organization and the historical strength of the labour and socialist movements in BC. The national CCF organization, which arose outside of British Columbia, helped unite and moderate disparate socialist and labour groups that would be unable to attain power on their own. Social Credit, a right-wing populist party that a solid ideological foundation deeply committed activists, easily faded away amid scandal and a stronger centre-right offering from the BC Liberals.

This chapter argues that the same fundamental ingredients that permitted the CCF-NDP's rise and survival throughout the west are also responsible in British Columbia, but in different proportions to reflect the strength of the left in BC. The party's robust organization grounded in a commitment to social democracy from its activists, and the moderating effect of the national CCF-NDP organization on the party's radical elements in BC, are together the reasons the CCF-NDP has endured and grown instead of some other party of the left. The big-tent nature of the

BC NDP also helps explain why the BC Greens, which still remains a primarily single-issue party, has been unable to consistently challenge the NDP on the left.

This chapter will first explain the ways in which British Columbia differs from the other western provinces, and how this has affected the development of the province's party system. The nature of the BC economy means that farmers exercised little influence over the province's politics. British Columbia was instead one of the strongest places in Canada for labour and socialist politics, with left-wing parties such as these emerging in the late 19th century. This chapter then highlights the critical moments in the development of the BC party system central to this analysis, including the arrival and exit of several insurgent parties, most notably including Social Credit and the CCF-NDP.

Second, this chapter shows that the early arrival of labour and socialist parties to British Columbia closely resembles the first insurgent wave of farmer and labour parties seen in the other western provinces. These parties ultimately failed for similar reasons: their narrow bases of support, whether on sectional or ideological lines, prevented them from earning enough votes to have a significant effect on the party system. Labour lacked the absolute numbers of farmers on the prairies, who also tended to be more geographically dispersed than workers in cities. Consequently, there was no first wave insurgent government like in Alberta or Manitoba.

Third, this chapter explains the circumstances that led to the arrival of the second insurgent wave which consisted of the CCF and Social Credit. The CCF managed to consolidate the left-of-centre vote previously earned by several labour and socialist parties. Combined with the complete collapse of the Conservatives, the CCF managed to establish itself as the official opposition and remained in that role for decades. Social Credit, when it arrived, offered a less radical populist platform that proved popular with voters, including many of the same voters who



might otherwise support the CCF. An attempt by the Liberals and Conservatives to keep the CCF from power produced a new electoral system and in turn a reconfiguration of the party system, with Social Credit and the CCF being the two main contenders for leading the government.

Fourth, this chapter considers how the CCF-NDP managed to survive yet not win elections for several decades while Social Credit dominated the province's politics. Social Credit and the CCF appealed to many of the same kinds of voters, but the CCF had to cope with anti-socialist rhetoric. Social Credit could not remain in government forever, and the CCF was their only credible challenger, in part due to Social Credit's own messaging (Blake 1985, 20-21). Social Credit returned to power, but ultimately failed after the 1991 election. The Liberals had never disappeared from BC politics completely owing to their presence at the federal level and provided a home for disaffected Social Credit supporters. Without the clearly defined social democratic ethos that enables the CCF-NDP to retain its core support even in times of weakness, Social Credit was highly susceptible to having its supporters co-opted by another party of the centre to centre-right. The recent growth of the Green Party in BC is one of the few recent examples of the CCF-NDP facing a challenger on the left, but it has so far failed to credibly rival the NDP because of the narrow focus of the Greens when compared with the mass party the NDP have constructed.

Finally, this chapter with a direct comparison of the CCF-NDP and other insurgents to draw conclusions about the CCF-NDP's proclivity for survival unmatched by its challengers.

### **Overview of British Columbia's Party System**

#### *A Province Unlike the Others: The (Mostly) Unique Politics of BC*

British Columbia's geography differs significantly from the prairie provinces, with noticeable effects on their different economic and political development. Owing to the mountains, mostly

impassible in BC's early years, the province was settled from the west coast rather than the east and was settled mostly by people from Britain rather than Canada. While agriculture is not absent from BC, the provincial economy was not dominated by it like Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan in their early years. Other extractive industries, including forestry, fishing, and mining played a more significant role in the economy instead (Dyck 1996a). The domination of the economy by larger companies rather than independent producers as on the prairies leads Martin Robin (1978) to style British Columbia "the company province".

This difference in the structure of the economy when compared with the prairies means that farmers did not play the pivotal role in the development of BC's party system as they did on the prairies. In addition to there being numerically fewer farmers, they lacked the harmony of interest in BC as they did on the prairies and their efforts to organize politically ultimately failed (Ormsby 1953). The industrial nature of the BC economy instead made a natural home for labour politics through trade unions and electoral politics (Hak 2013). Even before BC developed a Liberal-Conservative party system, labour candidates were running for election to the legislature. The early success of the CCF-NDP, as this thesis has so far shown, is directly affected by the degree to which farmers and the labour movement engage in politics directly and the degree to which they are willing to get behind the CCF organization.

Compared with farmers, workers in the sectors that dominated the BC economy, including forestry, fishing, mining, and manufacturing, found themselves in a more consistently precarious political and economic position. Farmers on the prairies generally owned their own land. They were small independent producers, and petite bourgeois (Macpherson 1953). Workers in British Columbia were at the mercy of their bosses and a political system that would have appeared to cater only to their bosses' interests. Farmers were driven to direct political action by

extrinsic phenomena: drought, depression, or issues like the tariff that arose from time to time. Their motivation to be involved in politics varied with the proverbial seasons. For workers, political issues were a more consistent concern. In British Columbia, they therefore turned to politics in addition to union activism as a path towards better working conditions (Hak 2013).

### *Literature*

The politics and history of British Columbia have received a significant share of scholarly attention, most of which emphasizes the uniqueness and apartness of British Columbia from the rest of Canada (Blake 1985; Carty 1996; Robin 1978; Summerville 2016). Donald E. Blake's *Two Political Worlds* (1985) supposes that BC voters exist in a world apart from the rest of Canada except for their participation in federal politics. Dyck argues that British Columbia's political culture, owing to its "wealth and isolation," has an "optimism, self-centredness, and self-satisfaction" not shared by other provinces (1996a, 579). Most accounts of the development of BC's party system emphasize the local economy, demographics, and the province's efforts to extract what it is owed from the bargain of Confederation (Black 1996). The theme of isolation that suffuses accounts of British Columbian politics is matched by a literature that generally only examines the province in isolation. This is surprising given that all four major parties in the province's history, the Conservatives, CCF, Liberals, and Social Credit, had their origins outside of British Columbia. The federal and provincial worlds of BC politics may be separate as Blake suggests, and the politics of the province may be more highly polarized. But British Columbia is not hermetically sealed from the rest of Canada. Increasingly the party systems of the other western provinces are taking on a character that resembles BC's. Saskatchewan and now Alberta both appear to have polarized two-party systems, and the four western provinces together remain the only place in Canada that the NDP is a regular and credible contender for forming

government. As the following sections show, the CCF-NDP's arrival and survival in BC closely mirrors the prairie provinces except for the absence of farmers.

### *Critical Junctures and Periods*

The development of the British Columbia party system generally follows the same pattern as the other three western provinces, except that the first wave of insurgents, arrived much earlier. On the same basis as the prairies, then this chapter outlines and compares the province's parties at the same critical junctures: their arrival or disappearance, their first time forming government, and significant changes in the level of support they receive. Doing so shows that the CCF-NDP survives for the same reason in British Columbia as it did on the prairies. The party has the unique combination of its left-wing core ideology that helps it attract and retain a committed base of activists, but more moderation and breadth of support across society than other socialist, labour, and sectional parties.

Figure 6.1: Share of seats in the British Columbia legislature at general elections, 1871-2017

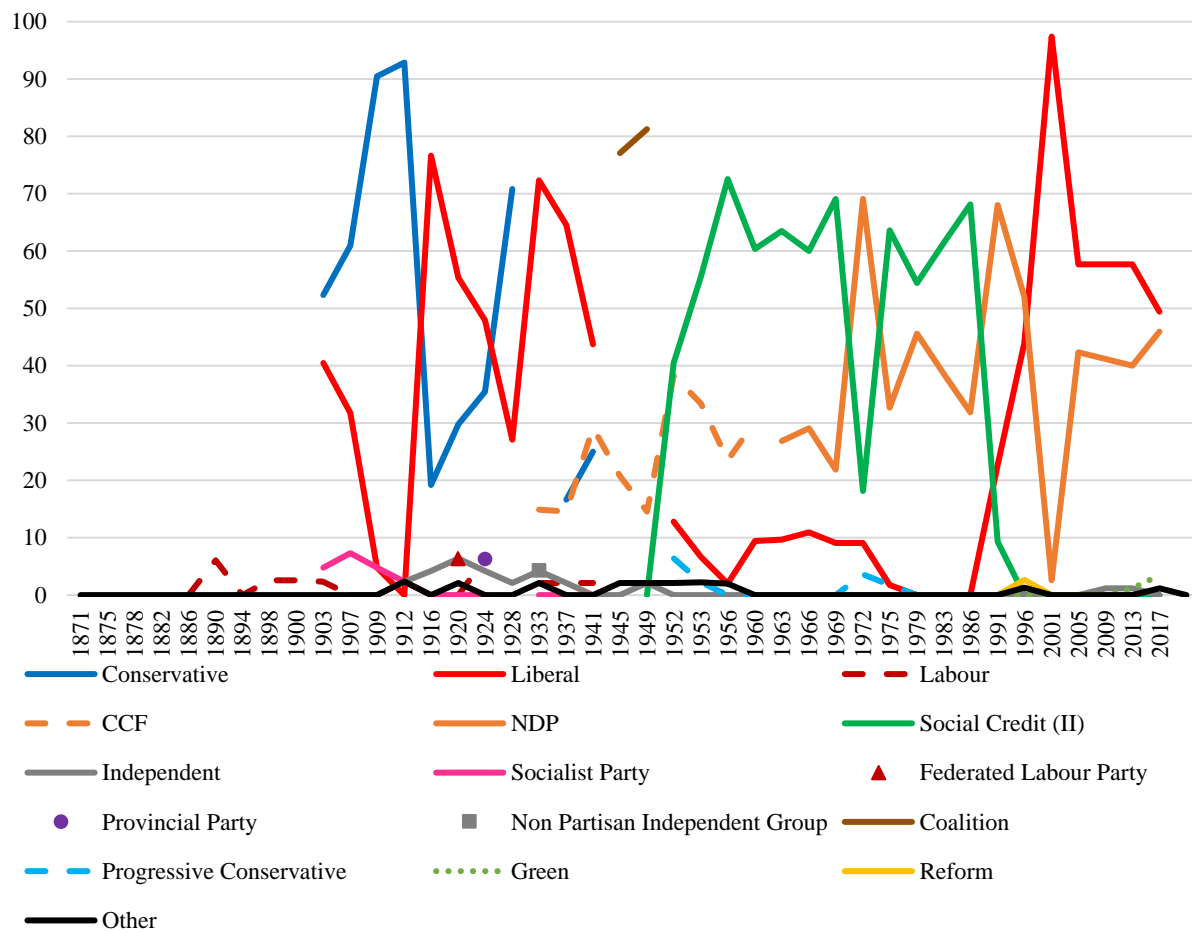
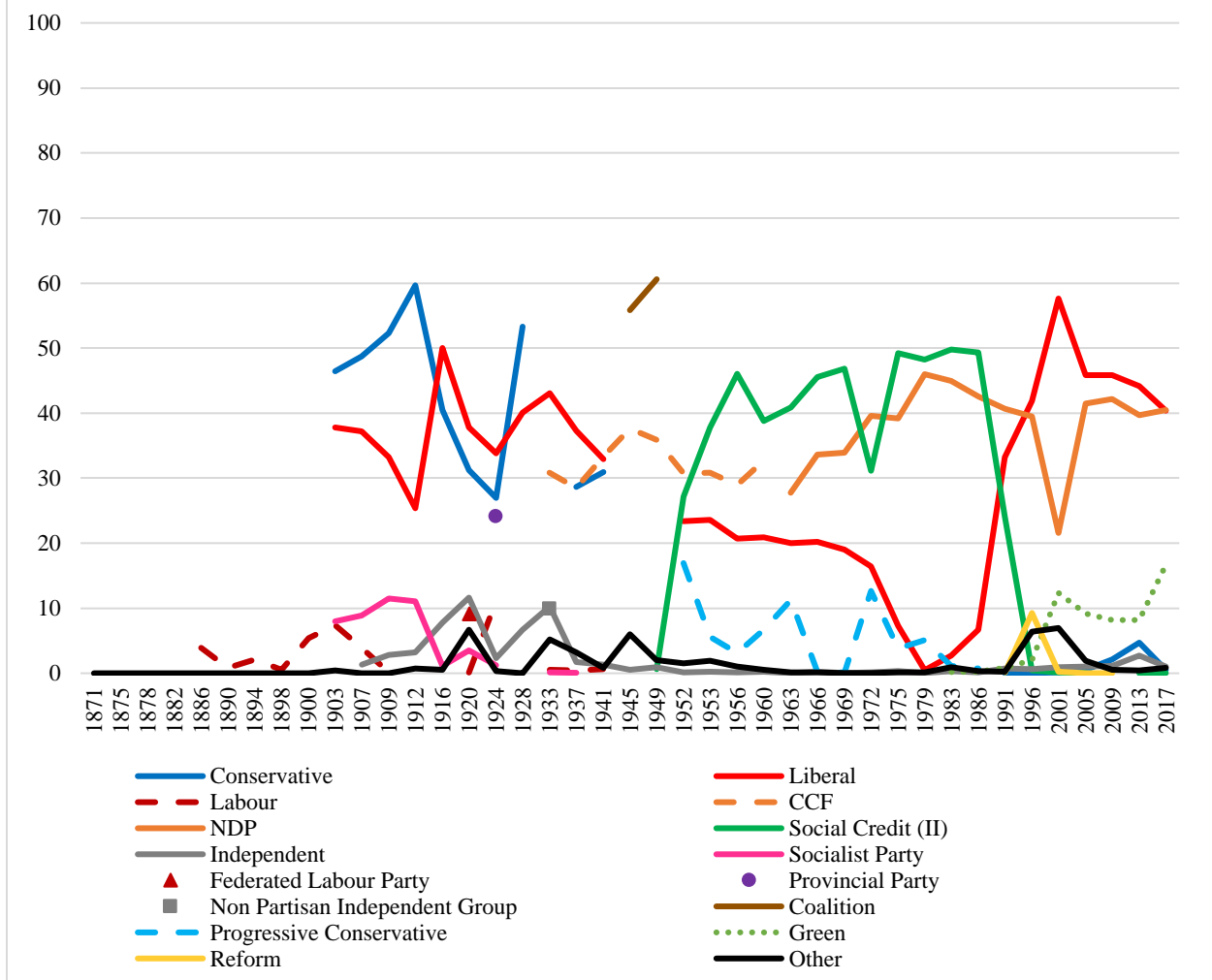


Figure 6.2: Share of popular vote in British Columbia general elections, 1871-2017



Figures 6.1 and 6.2 show the percentage of seats in the legislature and share of the popular vote received by each major party between 1871, when the province joined Canada, and 2017. The same general eras that define the development of the party systems on the prairies are present except for the partial reversal of two-party competition and the first insurgent wave. These periods are summarized in table 6.1. Labour parties arrived before party lines had solidified in response to governments that were generally dominated by business elites and concerned with the conduct of business (Howlett and Brownsey 1996, 20). The Liberal and Conservative parties, on the other hand, in response to federal issues, as they had throughout the

west. As far as issues that might concern labour go, the Liberals and Conservatives were basically undifferentiated (Blake 1996, 69). Aside from a faction of the Conservative Party that contested one election as the Provincial Party in 1924, the period 1903-1933 saw mostly two-party competition between the Liberals and Conservatives with some labour and socialist support in the background. In 1933 the CCF arrives and effectively consolidates the left-wing parties. After a period of coalition government between 1945 and 1952, Social Credit also arrives. In an attempt to keep the CCF out of power, the Liberal and Conservative coalition implement an alternative vote system in hopes that voters will list those two parties as their first and second choices. The plan backfires, and Social Credit and the CCF instead become the new dominant parties of the province for the following decades. Social Credit ultimately fails in 1991 and is replaced by the Liberals, but this pattern of two-party competition has otherwise remained basically unchanged since 1952.

The following section outlines each of these eras in greater detail with attention to the moments at which new parties arrive, disappear, form coalitions, or see a significant increase or decrease in their support, like the return of the Liberal Party. The CCF's organizational and ideological advantages are the key feature of that party that differentiates it from the other insurgents in the province that have mostly disappeared from the province.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> In recent years, British Columbia has seen a rapid proliferation in the number of minor parties contesting a handful of seats, but they have received very little support and generally not made it into the legislature. In 2005, for example, 25 separate parties contested at least one seat. See Appendix D.

<b>Table 6.1: Periods in the development of the British Columbia party system</b>			
<b>Era</b>	<b>Dominant parties at beginning of period</b>	<b>Arriving insurgents</b>	<b>Result</b>
1871 – 1903 (Pre-party competition & First insurgent wave)	—	Labour Socialist Party	Federal party lines develop in response to federal issues, while left-wing parties emerge early due to dominance of business interests in government.
1903 – 1933 (Two party competition)	Conservative Party Liberal Party	Provincial Party	The Liberals and Conservatives generally dominate the province's politics with a continued background presence from left-wing parties. Provincial Party also contests one election as a wayward faction of the Conservatives.
c. 1933 – 1952 (Second insurgent wave)	Conservative Party Liberal Party	CCF Social Credit	CCF arrives and becomes official opposition as the Conservative organization collapses briefly. Following a period of coalition between the Liberals and Conservatives, Social Credit arrives and both Liberals and Conservatives are displaced
1952 – Present (Two-party competition)	Social Credit (later Liberals) CCF-NDP	Reform Party Green Party	Competition settles into two party pattern between Social Credit and CCF-NDP. Social Credit later replaced by the Liberal Party. Insurgents continue to arrive but fail to gain significant traction.

## **Party System Development**

### *Early Politics and Two-Party Competition Plus the Left*

The Liberal and Conservative party labels did not arrive in British Columbia until 1903. Early political affiliations in the province were structured primarily around common interest regarding



business and local communities. “Government” and “opposition” labels were used beginning in 1875, similar to what briefly prevailed in Manitoba (Barman 1996, 102-103). The Liberal and Conservative party labels were introduced for three reasons. First, scandal in the outgoing government made the non-partisan system unworkable without labels on which to mount campaigns and differentiate candidates (Robin 1978, 42-43). Second, the federal party affiliations of BC’s provincial politicians became readily apparent as federal politics was becoming more competitive. When Richard McBride became the province’s premier, he only admitted committed Conservatives to his cabinet (Blake 1996, 68-69). Third, it was thought that bringing the federal labels into provincial politics might help contain the left-wing parties which had enjoyed some modest support since 1886 (Blake 1996, 68-69; Dobie 1980; Robin 1978, 42-43).

According to Blake, the “differences between Liberals and Conservatives proved to be based on little more than the distinction between being in or out of office” (1996, 69). With British Columbia’s ethnically and religiously homogenous population, the majority being British Protestants, the new province lacked some of the key grounds for partisan division that characterized the two parties elsewhere in Canada. The Conservatives governed the province between 1903 and 1916, and again from 1928 to 1933. The Liberal-Conservative two-party system lasted only thirty years, and with little dividing them, the two parties did not become deeply ingrained in British Columbia society, leaving room for insurgent challengers.

The industrial nature of the BC economy and the business-oriented nature of its government made the province a natural home for the labour movement. Beginning in the 1880s, the Knights of Labor, an American labour federation, began organizing in British Columbia, fighting for workers’ wages, shorter working hours, and better working conditions (Hak 2013).

In addition to union activities, the labour movement became involved in electoral politics by 1886, with candidates running under the Labour banner before the Liberal and Conservative labels had even been adopted. The number of candidates elected was few. In 1890, Labour held just two seats in the legislature, and its peak share of the popular vote was seven percent in 1903.<sup>68</sup> As an actual threat to the dominant factions in the BC legislature, Labour's role was minor. The party was successful in extracting concessions from the government, however, which sometimes depended on the Labour members for support (Blake 1985, 14). By the time party politics arrived after 1903, both the Liberals and Conservatives were making appeals to workers, and union action remained the labour movements primary method of bringing about change (Hak 2013).

The Socialist Party of British Columbia emerged as another left-wing party in 1903, dividing support on the left. The Labour and Socialist parties combined received fifteen percent of the popular vote in that same year. Over the next three decades, several small labour and socialist parties would come and go, still only earning a small proportion of the popular vote. The left was hampered both by its internal division, and by the fact that many workers did not share the anti-capitalist ideals of those parties (Blake 1985; Hak 2013). While short on electoral success, these movements established an activist core of committed socialists on the left who, if nothing else, met to debate the finer points of the socialist program (Young 1977).

The emergence of labour and socialist parties so early in British Columbia reflects the difference in the structure of the BC economy when compared with the prairies, but otherwise resembles the sectional politics of the 1920s, and the first wave of insurgent parties, that emerged

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<sup>68</sup> Labour did not run candidates everywhere, focusing instead on core working-class where the party was likely to have its strongest appeal (McDonald 2013). If, as in 1890, Labour ran in two ridings and won in both, it might be judged a success.

there. Likewise, this first wave of insurgent parties failed in BC for one of the same reasons: as a sectional movement, and one with a radically unconventional ideology at that, its potential base for electoral support was narrow. This was, it should be added, well before the Great Depression and emergence of the welfare state in the popular consciousness. For the parties of this era, there was little space between radical Marxism and better working conditions for labourers (Hak 2013, 36-37). The fact that the labour movement failed to consolidate around a single organization for any length of time further amplified the problem by splintering an already narrow coalition. But just as the farmer and labour parties of the prairies set the stage for the emergence of the CCF on the prairies, they did so as well in BC.

*The Absence of Farmers and the Strength of Labour in BC's Early First Insurgent Wave*

The first wave of insurgent parties across Western Canada was composed primarily of farmers parties with labour also receiving some support in Alberta and Manitoba. In British Columbia, agriculture played a significantly smaller role in the economy, with only sixteen percent of the population employed in agriculture in 1921 (Dobie 1980, 71). Unlike the prairies, agriculture in BC was not dominated by a single commodity, meaning that the somewhat smaller number of farmers in BC did not share the same harmony of interests. Where an elevator co-operative and a favourable tariff appealed to almost all farmers on the prairies, BC farmers had a variety of concerns that differed based on their crop and location (Ormsby 1953). Nonetheless, the province's farmers did organize into the United Farmers of British Columbia in 1917, but repeatedly declined to become involved in electoral politics (Ormsby 1953).

Farmers were briefly driven to political action by a rift within the provincial Conservative party just as the UFBC organization was winding down. Major-General A. D. McRae, an industrialist and former administrator in both the Canadian and British governments, attempted

to organize farmers into the Provincial Party in an effort to keep former premiers John Oliver and William Bowser, both of the Conservative party, from returning to power. The party had little direct involvement from farmers, and with both Oliver and Bowser losing their seats, lasted only for one election before McRae left for federal politics (Ormsby 1953). Farmers' involvement in politics, such as it was, was short-lived and changed little.

On the labour front, the 1920s brought some greater efforts to unify British Columbia's left wing. Angus MacInnis, who would go on to become a member of the Ginger Group and the CCF in the federal parliament, saw to the creation of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) with the explicit purpose of bringing together the province's various labour groups (Young 1977, 141). Labour parties had traditionally found their greatest strength in Vancouver, and among mine workers in the Kootenays and on Vancouver Island (Hak 2013). All groups agreed to join except the Socialist Party, which continued on its own until 1932. The ILP was significant because, according to Walter D. Young, "it provided an active core that maintained the semblance of a vital left in British Columbia, serving as a point of contact for the other left-wing groups in the country" (1977, 142). In many respects, then, it laid the foundation for the CCF in the province. The ILP's membership grew significantly with the onset of the Great Depression in 1929, and the organization was among those that participated in the conference that organized the CCF in Calgary in 1932.

The first insurgent wave on the prairies was driven by farmers who found that the existing party system inadequately accommodated their interests. They entered politics to represent themselves, and in the process, caused (in Alberta and Manitoba) a temporary dealignment of the party system. Without farmers engaging in politics the same way in BC,

opposition to the existing party system instead coalesced around socialists and labour. These groups faced significantly more challenges than farmers.

*The Second Insurgency: CCF and Social Credit*

The British Columbia labour movement's participation in the formation of the CCF was reluctant. The BC wing was among the most militant sections of the CCF, and their hopes for participation in the new party were to ensure it "would remain as doctrinally pure as their efforts could make it" (Young 1977, 146). The CCF was a federation of organizations, including multiple in BC. It contained varying degrees of radicalism, but the party generally remained more radical in British Columbia than the national CCF (Hak 2013, 83). The British Columbia CCF came from a more activist tradition of socialism than on the prairies, having coalesced around the active union movement in BC (Hak 2013). Socialists on the prairies, on the other hand, were more strongly influenced by the social gospel movement that informed the thought of figures such as J. S. Woodsworth in Saskatchewan.

In their very first electoral showing in 1933, the party managed to field a full slate of candidates and won seven seats, almost entirely concentrated in Vancouver and Victoria, with an incredible thirty percent of the popular vote. There remains some debate on the extent to which the BC CCF won as a populist party rather than a socialist party: whether the CCF managed to offer a third of the population a persuasive solution to the Depression or cultivated working-class consciousness (McDonald 2013; Naylor 2013). In either case, a significant portion of the population was clearly attracted enough to the CCF's platform to support a "radical transformation of society" in an unmoderated form (quoted in Blake 1985, 16).

The CCF also had the advantage of arriving in a moment of Conservative weakness, meaning that the CCF was the only viable alternative to the Liberals. The Conservatives had the

misfortune of being in power for the start of the Great Depression, and this left the party with considerable internal disagreement as to how it ought to be managed. The Conservatives attempted to form a coalition with the Liberals but were turned down. Instead, leader Simon Fraser Tolmie decided that the party would not take part in the election, leaving its candidates to run under whatever label they saw fit, and hopefully sparing the Conservative party from any reputational damage (Dobie 1980). The result was, in addition to the Liberals and CCF, a mishmash of labels including Non-Partisan Independent and Unionist that had been tied to the Conservative party previously. In the end, the Conservative plan to avoid reputational damage apparently worked to the benefit of the Liberals and CCF alike, with the Conservatives the majority of their seats in that election and never forming government again.

The 1937 elections saw the Conservative organization return and reduced the CCF to third place in the legislature, but without losing any seats and only a three percentage point drop in their share of the popular vote. The Liberals and Conservatives made no strong effort to contain the CCF's advances, except with the Liberals proposing significantly more state intervention in the social and economic spheres in 1933 and 1937 (Blake 1987, 16-17; Cairns and Wong 1985, 283).

The three-party arrangement proved to be short-lived. The Liberals were losing electoral ground to both the CCF and Conservatives, with the CCF actually finishing slightly ahead of the other two parties for share of the popular vote during the 1941 election. With the province in the midst of the Second World War and the Liberals barely earning enough seats to sustain a government, the party entertained the formation of a coalition government between all three parties, although they in fact hoped the CCF would not join. The CCF had already publicly declared that they were unwilling to join a coalition like their Manitoba counterparts, believing

instead that a coalition would show “there was no real difference between the Liberal and Conservative parties” (Abbott 1994, 34).<sup>69</sup>

The coalition proved popular with BC voters, and was re-elected twice in 1945 and 1949 with strong support. The coalition put the CCF back in the position of official opposition and presented them with exactly the opportunity they had wanted: to present a socialist alternative to the united capitalist parties. The coalition gradually transformed into an anti-socialist organization and presented itself as the defender of free enterprise (Cairns and Wong 1985, 288-289).

Unlike the Liberal-Progressive merger in Manitoba, the governing coalition in BC remained very much a coalition of two parties rather than a union of them. The Liberals and Conservatives continued to maintain separate organizations, held independent caucus meetings, and each held their own conventions (Cairns and Wong 1985). Both parties remained affiliated with their federal counterparts, who had very much not entered into a coalition. The dissolution of the coalition was inevitable, and it finally collapsed in 1951.

The Liberals and Conservatives both realized the precarious position that breaking the coalition might land them in with the CCF already commanding a third of the popular vote. A scenario in which the CCF ended up in government was possible. The two parties therefore sought a solution to prevent this from happening. The result was that, prior to the election of 1952, the province adopted a ranked ballot voting system endorsed by both the Liberal and Conservative parties (Angus 1952; Robin 1973, 120). The explicit purpose of the change was to prevent the CCF from coming to power, with the Liberals and Conservatives assuming that

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<sup>69</sup> Blake (1985) claims that the formation of the coalition had nothing to do with the CCF and was instead the result of the exigencies of war. This claim is suspicious in light of the election results and Abbot’s (1994) evidence. While the Liberals and Conservatives wanted to avoid publicly excluding the CCF from a coalition, their participation was never really on the table.

supporters of each party would rank the other as their second choice. The Liberals further anticipated that CCF voters might rank the Liberals as their second choice in view of the government's attempt at implementing social programs (Angus 1952). This expectation turned out to be wrong, partly because of the arrival of an unanticipated challenger.

That challenger, and the winner of the 1952 election was the British Columbia Social Credit party led by W.A.C. Bennett. Bennett had formerly been a member of the Conservative party in the BC legislature, but left the party after his failed leadership bid to sit as an independent. Social Credit had existed in the form of three competing factions in the province since the mid-1930s, but altogether they won no seats and no more than two percent of the popular vote between them (Hak 2004). Social Credit lacked any real infrastructure in British Columbia, and effectively became a vehicle for Bennett supported by the Alberta Social Credit party when he assumed the leadership in 1952 (Hak 2004). Bennett was inspired by the Alberta Social Credit government of Ernest Manning much more because of that party's success as a right-wing populist party than as peddlers of Douglas's social credit ideas that the Alberta party had long ago since abandoned. Bennett saw Social Credit as an explicitly populist party, but a free enterprise one, in contrast to the CCF, which he saw as a left-wing populist party (Elkins 1977). Bennett differentiated himself from the Liberals and Conservatives mostly on the basis of "political disillusionment" rather than the economy (Robin 1978, 48). The government maintained some unseemly patronage appointments, failed to implement hospital insurance, and Bennett made them the target of a host of other criticisms of the coalition record in government.



The Liberals and Conservatives had not factored Social Credit's presence into their calculus for the new voting system scheme.<sup>70</sup> As David J. Elkins (1977) shows, Liberal and Conservative supporters did generally rank those parties as their first and second choices, but so too did Social Credit and CCF supporters. Hak (2004) and Sanford (1961) suggest that the two parties shared a populist-protest quality that contrasted with the attempts at sly manoeuvring of the coalition partners. Social Credit won a narrow majority in 1952 with 19 seats, the CCF earned one fewer, and the Liberals and Conservatives each earned six and four seats respectively. Social Credit solidified its majority in an election the next year and relegated the Liberals and Conservatives to the sidelines. The Liberals left with only three seats and the Conservatives with just one. Once confidently in power, Social Credit abandoned the electoral system experiment, returning to first past the post and ushering in a new era for BC's party system.

Elkins (1977) notes that between the 1952 and 1953 elections, the preference orderings changed for Social Credit and CCF supporters. Instead of being one another's first and second choices, Social Credit supporters now mostly marked the Liberals in second place, with CCF supporters doing the same. Where protest versus establishment may have been the salient political division in 1952, the system now returned to a familiar pattern of the free enterprise-defending Social Credit against the Socialist CCF. Returning to the first past the post electoral system would have been to the advantage of both Social Credit and the CCF because it permits a more polarized system. Social Credit could present itself as the confident defenders of free enterprise rather than also having to vie with the Liberals and Conservatives for the right-of-centre vote.

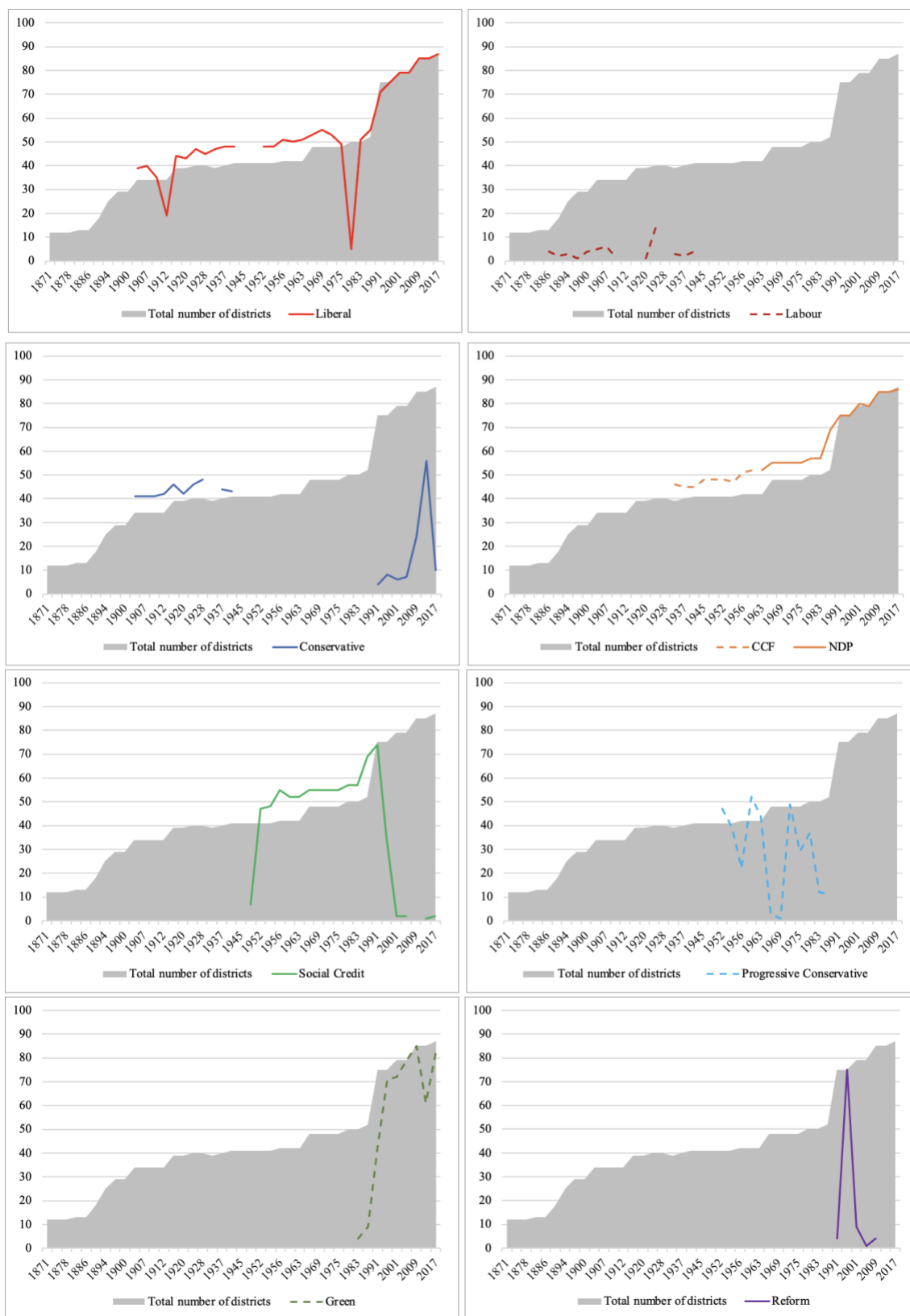
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<sup>70</sup> The reasons that the 1952 election produced Social Credit as the winner are difficult to determine. What the results show, however, is a dissatisfaction with the existing party system arrangement and an electoral system with a different institutional logic.

*The CCF-NDP in Opposition, and Finally in Government*

Social Credit and the CCF-NDP firmly established themselves as the pillars of the British Columbia party system until Social Credit's collapse in 1991. Social Credit governed the province for all but one interlude, where the NDP formed government between 1972 and 1975. The Liberals managed to retain a minor presence, and as figure 6.3 shows, was generally able to maintain its organization and field full slates of candidates except in 1979. The Progressive Conservatives retained a latent and uneven presence, earning between five and fifteen percent of the popular vote between 1952 and 1980, and no more than five percent thereafter. Organizationally, the Progressive Conservatives and the Conservatives since 1991 have been unable to consistently run full slates of candidates, having only managed to do so once since 1969.

Figure 6.3: Number of candidates fielded by each major party in British Columbia versus total number of districts, 1871-2017



With Social Credit adopting a mostly right-of-centre orientation and the continued minor presence of the Liberals, there was simply no room for the party system to support all four parties. Social Credit ran on a consistent message of “free enterprise versus socialism” and made a concerted effort on developing the province’s natural resources (Blake 1996; Dyck 1996a). The government also introduced the province’s first medicare plan and increased social spending. While running on a free enterprise platform, W.A.C. Bennett’s government saw considerable growth of the state reflecting the party’s populist approach to politics. According to Resnick (1977), British Columbia saw far greater growth of the state between 1964 and 1967 under Social Credit than between 1972 and 1975 under the NDP.

Compared with the provinces where the party was less successful, the CCF-NDP in British Columbia had little trouble maintaining a robust party organization. Key to the CCF-NDP’s success during this period was the growth of the public sector, expanding rapidly through Bennett’s efforts to grow the welfare state and economy, and the growth of union membership. According to Gordon Hak, just 110 thousand workers belonged to unions in 1945 while forty percent of the workforce did in British Columbia by 1972 (2013, 116). Particularly as the CCF transformed into the NDP and became more directly tied to the labour movement, the growth in union support contributed to the CCF’s membership.

Compared with the other western provinces, the CCF in British Columbia remained more radical for longer. Where the Saskatchewan dropped references to socialism and social ownership from its platforms almost immediately, the BC CCF was much slower to do so. This perhaps owes to the orientation of the labour activists who made up the core supporters of the party—with the BC labour movement remaining stronger than the other western provinces, owing to the differences in the structure of BC’s economy. Electorally, this proved enough for

the CCF to maintain the support of about thirty percent of the electorate like clockwork. A significant number of voters remained wary of socialism, however. While the circumstances allowed British Columbia to retain a larger share of the electorate without moderation than elsewhere, it was not enough for the party to break through. The British Columbia CCF, as a constituent of the national CCF organization, followed the rest of the country in its shift towards moderation, from socialism to social democracy or radicalism to reformism (Hak 2013, 121; Resnick 1977, 7). Activists in the BC CCF frequently opposed the increasing moderation of the party, which culminated in the CCF's transformation into the NDP in 1961. Electorally, the moderation led by the national party made the NDP more electable in British Columbia by helping the party appeal to voters who were still wary of its socialist image.

The NDP got its chance to prove that the “socialist hordes” were not, in fact “at the gates” in 1972 when the NDP defeated Social Credit and spent a three-year term in government. The conventional view of this election is that the NDP won not on its own merits, but that Social Credit lost on its failings (Blake 1985, Resnick 1977). No democratic party can govern forever, and Social Credit's time was up, with the party having picked fights with large groups of public sector workers including doctors and teachers. In power, the NDP demonstrated the moderate party it had become. There was no radical economic reform, but instead an emphasis on increased social spending. Under leader Dave Barrett, the party showed greater distance from labour, which helped it appeal to more voters who shared the anti-union sentiment of Social Credit (Dyck 1996a; Resnick 1977). The NDP again lost power in 1975, and in doing so solidified the polarized nature of the province's party system. After that point, the Progressive Conservative and Liberal parties were mostly drained of support, with the NDP having some success in picking up Liberal voters and Social Credit earning the rest (Hak 2013). While the

NDP would not return to government until the 1990s, its support continued to increase after the 1975 election, regularly earning more than forty percent of the popular vote and at times approaching the levels of Social Credit (see figure 6.2).

The most significant development for the CCF-NDP during the period 1952 through the 1970s was the party's increasingly moderate position. As the experience of the labour movement in BC before the CCF's arrival shows, the province is capable of sustaining a radical labour or socialist party with stronger electoral support than virtually anywhere else in Canada. This base of support is narrow and is not enough to support forming government alone. The fact that the BC CCF was part of a national organization that moved in an increasingly moderate direction allowed the party to overcome the more radical tendencies of BC's CCF activists. Because the CCF is one organization, the BC wing generally followed suit as the national party adopted the Winnipeg Declaration in 1956, and transformed into the NDP in 1961. The effect was to increase the breadth of support available to the NDP enough that, in 1972, the party was finally able to form government. While it would take two decades to repeat that feat, it is unlikely that it would have ever been possible without the moderation that the party's structure encouraged.

The CCF-NDP's moderation dovetailed with changes in British Columbia itself. Values in the province have changed. As Tracy Summerville (2016) notes, resource extraction went unchallenged in the province's economy for most of its history but has become an important issue since the 1990s. Where towns and resource extraction once defined British Columbia, the British Columbia economy is increasingly concentrated in cities and more heavily dominated by services. Where labour was once what gave the CCF-NDP its strength in BC, it is increasingly its social democratic commitments on issues like equality and social services that give the party its strength.

### *What Went Wrong with Social Credit?*

Judging from the CCF-NDP's electoral record alone, the party appears to have never been in serious danger of collapse. Unlike Alberta, where the party's electoral strength was often tenuous, the CCF-NDP managed to maintain a consistent amount of electoral support, which makes sustaining a party organization less challenging. The NDP's survival between 1952 and the 1990s did not hang on a small group of activist supporters to sustain the party against the odds. By the same logic, Social Credit should have never been in danger of collapse, either. That party dominated the provincial party system throughout *its* entire existence and surpassed the CCF-NDP's level of support in all but one election. Yet the party almost completely collapsed after its second ever electoral defeat in 1991. The party fielded half as many electoral candidates in 1996 as it had in 1991, and only a handful thereafter. Meanwhile, the CCF-NDP had been able to consistently run full slates of candidates for its entire history even despite being cast as the perennial opposition party. Electoral success is, evidently, not a perfect predictor of organizational success.

The reasons for the difference between Social Credit and the CCF-NDP relate to the organizational and ideological character of both parties. Social Credit lacked the strong commitment from its activists that is characteristic of left-wing parties. Social Credit only competed at the provincial level, while the Liberals, Conservatives and the CCF-NDP continued to compete, more or less, at both the federal and provincial levels throughout Social Credit's tenure. This means that Social Credit activists necessarily had divided partisan loyalties where CCF-NDP members were much more likely to not only belong to but organize for the party at both levels (Young 1971; Blake, Carty, and Erickson 1991).

NDP activists, according to W. D. Young (1971), have a much greater commitment to their party organization than is typical of other parties. This has produced consistency in electoral support that is unmatched by other parties. Of the activists Young surveyed at the 1966 NDP convention, eighty-seven percent had never held membership in another party, and over half spent some time of every single week on the affairs of the party. While the British Columbia NDP was not as dependent on its core activists for its survival from election to election, the commitment of NDP activists meant that the threat of party members abandoning the organization *en masse* was low. Until the arrival of the Greens, the NDP had never faced a challenger on the left in BC politics except for the Liberals. But Blake, Carty, and Erickson (1991) show a notable degree of ideological cohesion among NDP activists. In the absence of another social democratic party arriving late in the game, The NDP remains the only option for most of its activists at both the federal and provincial levels.

Social Credit, by its nature, competed in significantly more crowded ideological space. The party inherited the mantle of defender of free enterprise from the Liberal and Conservative coalition by proposing a slightly more populist alternative. Owing to their continued presence in federal politics, neither of those parties would have disappeared from voters' minds completely, and the majority of Social Credit activists held loyalty to and membership in another party at the federal level (Blake, Carty, and Erickson 1991). The Liberals and Conservatives alike had the advantage of redundancy also shared by the NDP: even when those parties are unsuccessful or absent from a given province, their organizations do not evaporate completely. They continue at the federal level and in other provinces.

As Social Credit began to weaken amid scandal involving former premier Bill Vander Zalm, voters and activists alike abandoned the party for the Liberals. Social Credit also faced the



challenge of accommodating both federal Liberals and federal Conservatives within the same party, whose relations were becoming increasingly acrimonious. The Liberals, led by Gordon Wilson, presented an alternative. The Liberals had persisted in BC politics as an elite-driven organization sustained by its own core group of activists who supported that party in federal politics, and who saw themselves largely as centrists (Blake and Carty 1996; Sayers et al. 1991). Under Wilson, the party made a shift to the right and distanced itself from the federal party. It continued this shift under Gordon Campbell and brought in many more supporters in the process. The Liberals benefitted from a combination of good timing, with the collapse of the CCF, and leadership that allowed the party to shift to the right and consolidate the right-of-centre vote. The increasingly moderate NDP under Mike Harcourt did the same on the left. Social Credit, lacking both the commitment from activists characteristic of the NDP and the left generally and the advantage of redundancy, the party was reduced to virtually nothing within a few elections.

#### *The Survival of the NDP Against Challengers on the Left*

Since the 1990s, the Liberals and NDP have alternated time in office. The NDP governed for most of the 1990s, the Liberals for most of the 2000s and 2010s, and since 2017 the NDP has again led the province under John Horgan. The NDP was strengthened in the 1990s through its continued moderation and the growing importance of green and postmaterialist issues (Summerville 2016, 172). The Liberals subsequently built a broad neoliberal coalition under Gordon Campbell in the 2000s, capturing all but two of the seats in the provincial legislature and an absolute majority of the popular vote. The BC party system was the first indication of the trend that is increasingly common across the west: the NDP dominating the left-wing and facing a single challenger on the right.

BC has had a recent development that might be subverting this trend, however. In 2017, the NDP entered into a confidence and supply agreement with the burgeoning Greens. The Greens have been earning an increasing share of the popular vote in recent elections, including sixteen percent of the popular vote in 2017. Historically the Greens have been a mostly single-issue environmentalist party but have been trying to expand their reach. If the Greens succeed in the long run, they may yet be the first challenger that the NDP has faced on its left flank. The viability of the Greens will test the extent to which the activist phenomena described in this thesis are truly unique to the NDP, or whether the Greens might be able to court and retain traditional NDP activist supporters.

As of the most recent British Columbia election in 2020, the Greens have been able to retain their vote and seat share in the legislature. The NDP made gains from the Liberals, meaning that the government is no longer dependent on the Greens for support. Whether the Greens constitute a long-term threat to the NDP, and how that party reacts, remain to be seen, but the answer will be an important test for several of the claims made in this thesis.

## **Analysis**

The same factors have sustained the CCF-NDP in British Columbia as throughout the west but in different proportions, owing to the party's sustained electoral success in the province. The party has maintained a core base of activists and voters alike that have allowed the party to contest every seat in every election since the party's arrival in 1933. The national organization helped moderate the CCF-NDP and permitted it to grow beyond a relatively narrow base of activists and voters by appealing to new segments of the population and adapting to changing social and economic conditions. And the CCF-NDP emerged in a political landscape particularly favourable to the arrival of insurgent parties of the left given the structure of the early BC economy. The

decline of the Liberals and Conservatives, the rise and fall of Social Credit, and the failure of the province's various labour and socialist parties to consolidate before the CCF-NDP's arrival demonstrate these characteristics that set the CCF-NDP apart.

### *Ideology and Organization*

The CCF-NDP, by virtue of the strength of the left in British Columbia even before its arrival, had a dependable base of electoral and activist support. The party has experienced only one moment of electoral weakness in 2001 when the BC Liberals swept the legislature, but the party rebounded quickly and continued to put forward full slates of candidates in subsequent elections. The nature of CCF-NDP activists differs from that of other parties. CCF-NDP activists are more likely to commit to the party completely, federally and provincially, and tend to participate in the party more actively. This has helped make the party less susceptible to the mass departure of activists that the Progressive Conservatives, Liberals, and Social Credit experienced when their electoral fortunes declined, as evidenced by the inability of those parties to mount full slates of candidates consistently.

Supporters of parties on the centre-right have shown a willingness in British Columbia to readily move their support to another party under the right circumstances. Politicians on the centre-right, likewise, have been willing to seek out new political vehicles when there is dissent within their parties. Examples of this include the momentary success of the Provincial Party in BC's early history, the rise of Social Credit, and the momentary insurgency of Reform in the 1990s. Until the arrival of the Greens, this appeared to be a phenomenon restricted to the centre-right. It remains to be seen whether the NDP could undergo the same sort of activist or electoral desertion that has been so common on the right.

The flaw of the CCF-NDP's dedicated activists has been their tendency towards radicalism in BC, albeit proving electorally viable for longer than it did in other provinces. The Saskatchewan CCF quickly dropped references to socialism from its platform, and the Manitoba CCF-NDP moderated considerably before it finally held government. Because a significant electoral base in British Columbia was amenable to a slightly more radical version of social democracy than in these other provinces, the party had less pressure from within to moderate itself toward further electoral gains.

Leading the charge to moderate the party has been the most significant contribution of the national CCF-NDP organization to its British Columbia wing. In order to be electorally viable nationally, the CCF-NDP was forced to moderate, and the BC wing experienced enough pressure to follow suit. The reluctance of many of the BC activists to do so and the failure of the labour and socialist parties that existed before the CCF-NDP's arrival to moderate themselves suggest that, without the influence of the national organization, the party might not have done so. The national CCF-NDP has been less significant for British Columbia in its supply of personnel and resources given the strength of the party in that province. As this example shows, however, the effect of the national party has more to do with the party's success than just money and meetings.

The existence of a national organization has also been to the benefit of the Liberals and Conservatives, even if those parties no longer share formal links. Because voters remained familiar with those parties on the federal scene and activists often remain involved at both levels, neither party has disappeared from the provincial scene in British Columbia completely. This allowed the Liberals to mount a comeback when Social Credit began to flounder. Social Credit could not repeat this itself, lacking the activist support to retain even a modicum of an organization in the province over the long term.

### *The Risks of Becoming Undifferentiated*

The failure of the Alberta and British Columbia Social Credit parties have strong parallels. In both cases, the parties presented themselves as mainstream centre-right parties. Blake, Carty, and Erickson (1991) ask, for example, whether Social Credit is the Conservative party of British Columbia. There was little to differentiate Social Credit in BC from the parties it replaced, the Liberals and Conservatives except the strength of its leadership, nor was there much to differentiate Social Credit from the Liberals who ultimately replaced them. The Liberals and Conservatives found themselves in an analogous situation when they participated in the coalition together. The parties had actually hoped that voters would find the two parties similar enough to rank the other as their second choice over the CCF during the province's voting system experiment of 1952 and 1953. They were right, but still miscalculated when voters preferred the protest-populist alternatives. The CCF-NDP, for its part, has had the advantage of being the defining party of the left. Even when the party has taken efforts to moderate itself, it has never rejected the social democratic ethos that most strongly sets it apart from other parties.

### *Favourable Conditions*

Insurgent parties all across the west had the advantage that the Liberals and Conservatives were less well established in the political fabric of the province than in eastern and central Canada. Particularly as it pertained to the sectional interests of groups like farmers and workers, voters were willing to put the specific interests of their segment of society ahead of any party affiliation. BC turned out, as a result of the structure of its economy, to be a poor home for farmers parties. For the same reason, it ended up being strongly amenable to labour and socialist parties, which had a strong start in the province even before the Liberals and Conservative party labels had arrived.

The presence of these labour and socialist parties meant the province had especially favourable conditions for the growth of the CCF-NDP as a labour party, analogous to the Saskatchewan CCF's early development as a farmers' party. The federal nature of the CCF allowed the party to completely consolidate the various organizations that comprised the labour and socialist movement in the province. The ILP had attempted to do this several years earlier but encountered resistance from some factions. The CCF-NDP has been particularly effective at dealing with internal dissent, no doubt rooted in this early period of the party's history.

## **Conclusion**

When a political party is winning, or at least maintaining some degree of electoral support, it can appear to be an inevitable fixture of the party system. The CCF-NDP has maintained a consistent presence in British Columbia for so long that it might look to some as if it is part of the furniture. This chapter has shown that the survival of the CCF-NDP was neither inevitable nor accidental. The same characteristics of the party that allowed it to survive in Alberta and Manitoba, provinces where the party had periods of relative electoral failure, helped the party do so in British Columbia. Its future in the province, particularly as it relates to the growing Green Party, will serve as an important barometer in the future of just how embedded in western society the NDP has become.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

### Summary

The twentieth century saw an explosion of new political parties across Western Canada. Most have long since disappeared, and their shelf lives have tended to be short. The CCF-NDP has stood apart from them by virtue of its unusually long survival and its high degree of success across the west. In the four distinct party systems of Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan, the NDP is at present the only common feature.

In the four preceding chapters, this thesis outlined the development of the four western Canadian provincial party systems from their inception through to the present in order to determine what features of the CCF-NDP permitted that party to survive where every other insurgent party, and in some cases even the Liberals and Conservatives, have ultimately failed. It found that the CCF-NDP possesses a unique organizational structure and a core ideology that make it better able to survive under adverse political conditions than most of its peers. These features are:

- **Redundancy.** The CCF-NDP is an integrated party. Even when the CCF-NDP has struggled electorally in a given province, the organization does not collapse completely because it continues federally and in other provinces. Other branches of the CCF-NDP have also been able to lend material and personnel support when branches are struggling or find themselves in power for the first time.
- **Committed activists** and a commitment to run candidates everywhere. CCF-NDP activists, as W. D. Young observes, “make a more specific commitment than do individuals who join ‘non-ideological’ parties: they must embrace an ideology which is more specific and which is, in North America certainly, opposed to the

prevailing value structure” (1971, 19). In the absence of another social democratic party, NDP activists are unlikely to go to another party. This has provided the NDP with a consistent base of electoral support and permitted the party to run full slates of candidates more consistently than any other party across the west.

- **Core ideological purpose.** The NDP retains some of the character of a social movement that Leo Zakuta (1964) describes in *A Protest Movement Becalmed*. The CCF-NDP have sought to challenge existing power structures and have continuously maintained ties to historically disadvantaged groups (Schwartz 2006, 9). Even as the party has expanded its coalition of support and built an electoral machine, it has never disavowed its central social democratic identity (Laycock 2014). This has, firstly, helped the party retain its social democrat activists and in turn present itself everywhere even when the party is electorally weak. Secondly, it has made the party less susceptible to other parties drawing off support by adopting the same set of policies. While we see evidence of contagion from the left in Canada (Chandler 1977), no party has attempted to match the CCF-NDP’s commitment to social democracy.
- **Commitment to staying relevant.** The CCF-NDP has made many efforts to expand its potential base of electoral support. It has done this primarily by moderating its policies and how it presents itself to the public (Laycock 2014). The party has also found new constituencies among historically disadvantaged groups through its commitment to equality.

No other political party shares these four characteristics. This thesis has shown that they have not only helped keep the CCF-NDP afloat, but that their absence has contributed to the failure of



other parties. This is especially apparent with the other insurgent parties that have emerged in the west like Social Credit, the Progressives, and the various labour parties that preceded the CCF.

The competitive conditions that the CCF-NDP faced also, as this thesis has shown, varied from province to province. Accordingly, while the same features have contributed to the CCF-NDP's survival across western Canada, the particular circumstances and timing of the CCF-NDP's arrival and breakthrough have varied considerably:

- In **Saskatchewan**, the CCF-NDP found its initial support among farmers seeking an alternative to the economic system amid the desperate conditions of the Great Depression. The CCF had to moderate its early commitment to socialism, turning instead to the language of social democracy, before the party received enough support to form government 1944. The party has continued to moderate itself to appeal to more voters in an increasingly diverse and urbanized province. Since 1944, the CCF-NDP has remained one of the two largest parties competing to form government.
- In **Alberta**, the CCF initially failed to find widespread support because of its association with the outgoing UFA government and the timing of Social Credit's arrival. The CCF-NDP managed to maintain a core membership base to sustain the party even during periods of electoral failure and financial strain. This allowed the party to stay viable until more favourable competitive conditions materialized. Through the weakness of other parties and by moderating itself, the NDP was able to form government in 2015, and has remained one of the two largest parties since. The NDP was able to draw on personnel in other provinces and the model of the CCF-NDP in Saskatchewan to transition to power.

- In **Manitoba**, the CCF-NDP's early support came from supporters of the labour movement. An unfavourable electoral system and the manoeuvrings of the Liberal-Progressive government kept the party from finding greater success. By moderating itself to appeal to more rural constituencies and historically disadvantaged ethnic groups, the party was able to form government under more proportional electoral rules in 1969. Since then, the NDP has been one of the two largest parties in Manitoba in all but one election.
- In **British Columbia**, the CCF-NDP found significant early support within the province's historically strong labour movement. This gave the CCF-NDP enough support to consistently earn about thirty percent of the popular vote in every election. Historically one of the most radical wings of the CCF-NDP, the national party organization helped drive the BC party to become increasingly moderate and allowed the party to first form government as the NDP in 1972. For the CCF-NDP's entire history in the province, it has been one of the two largest parties.

In general, the CCF-NDP built its earliest coalitions of support primarily from either organized farmers (as in Alberta and Saskatchewan), or organized labour (as in British Columbia or Manitoba). Both groups had already engaged directly in politics during the first insurgent wave but failed. The first wave insurgents were constructed on narrow bases of support, limiting their potential electoral reach beyond the core economic groups of farmers or workers. The farmers parties, namely the Progressives and its affiliates, generally lacked a core ideology to underpin their programs. They were essentially vehicles for particular demands of farmers, including a lower tariff and debt forgiveness.<sup>71</sup> This made them susceptible to co-optation in one

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<sup>71</sup> It is probable that one of the reasons the CCF had greater success among Alberta and Saskatchewan farmers was the unique nature of grain as a single dominant crop. Grain distribution lends itself well to collectivization, and

of two forms. First, by having the key policies of the farmers' parties incorporated into the platforms of one of the mainstream parties, leaving the farmers parties with little reason to continue. This was the case with the Progressives in Saskatchewan, where farmers were mostly accommodated through the Liberal Party. It was also the case with the UFA in Alberta, where farmers largely transferred their support to Social Credit when that party offered a better solution to the Great Depression. Second, co-optation by merger. The Liberals and Progressives merged in Manitoba, meaning the Progressives no longer continued as an independent political party. Even before that point, farmers held increasingly little influence in John Bracken's "business government" Progressives.

Early labour movement suffered from another set of problems. With their key constituency mainly in cities, their capacity to grow in the still largely rural Canadian west was limited. The socialist or social democratic ideology that labour parties tended to espouse further limited their mainstream appeal, although it gave them fervent activists. And unlike farmers, whose political action tended to be directed through a single major provincial organization, the labour parties tended to be more fragmented, competing both with one another and with mainstream parties.

The CCF's genesis was as a federation of farmers parties, and labour and socialist parties united by the hardship those groups experienced amid the Great Depression. The harmony of interests between farmers and labourers is not natural or obvious except in the context of the Great Depression where a new economic order was to the benefit of both groups. The character of the new party, uniting several different interests and factions, organizing nationally, and

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farmers who all farm the same crop have a general commonality of interest that may not be shared by all farmers generally. Macpherson (1953) and Lipset (1968) both touch on the unique nature of this crop. On the other hand, farmers in BC had a greater variety of products, and therefore lacked the shared interests that made farmers powerful politically on the prairies (Ormsby 1953).

adopting a core ideology, addressed many of the shortcomings suffered by its predecessors. The party has always had competing factions, with some calling for greater moderation and some for greater purity. Together, these factions have helped the party grope towards survival and success. Survival has been driven by the committed social democratic activists in the party who have been able to sustain the organization in times and places when it is electorally weak. Success has been driven by those who would see the party moderate itself to increase its electability. This has been most visible at the Winnipeg Declaration, and the transformation into the NDP. This conclusion shows continuity with Leo Zakuta's findings in *A Protest Movement Becalmed*. The CCF-NDP is distinctive because it retains some of the qualities of a social movement or minor party while also having constructed a powerful electoral machine.

The CCF-NDP has been sustained not just by local activists, but by the fact that the CCF-NDP is a web of constituent units. A few significant election losses in a party can be enough to disengage activists and ruin a party's financial viability. When Social Credit lost two consecutive elections in Alberta and Saskatchewan, the party essentially lost its capacity to run candidates in all districts and most of its supporters moved to other right-wing parties. With almost no one left to sustain the organization in either province, they collapsed. The same thing would not happen to the CCF-NDP. Even if it loses a few (or many) elections in a given province, the same organization continues in other provinces and federally. The electoral machine has redundancy that parties competing in only one place do not share.

As stated at the outset, this thesis makes no claim to fully explaining what causes a party to win elections. The potential factors are many: the strength and weakness of leadership, the quality of election campaigns, scandals, economic and social change, and much more can all play a decisive role. Instead, this thesis has shown which features of the CCF-NDP have allowed

that party to stick around in order to contest *more* elections, even when it loses. Richard Johnston (2017) argues that the CCF-NDP is “qualitatively distinct from other new parties”, insurgents, and their tendency to fail almost as quickly as they arrive. This thesis has shown how the CCF-NDP differs from those parties, which has permitted it to become a major party across the west.

### **The Effect of the NDP on the West**

This project began with the observation that the NDP is now a major party in all four western provinces, usually occupying the role of government or opposition. In the rest of Canada, the NDP has experienced some moments of success as in Ontario and Nova Scotia, but not the enduring dominance found in the west. As each chapter has shown, this is because the west was uniquely amenable to the arrival of new parties because the Liberal and Conservative parties were less embedded in western Canadian society than in central and eastern Canada. East of Ontario, the Liberal and Conservative parties developed alongside the provinces as they grew. By the time party politics emerged in western Canada, those two parties were already well established, but lacked roots in the west. They found currency in the provincial party systems of the four western provinces because of the centrality of federal issues to the newly formed provinces, and because of the personal connections of provincial politicians to the federal parties. As local issues became more salient and the welfare state grew, new parties rooted in western social organizations emerged. The effect of the CCF was to consolidate a number of these groups into a single party, and thereby become the dominant party of the left.

The CCF-NDP has continued to be a force for consolidation. Once the CCF-NDP forms government, there is a tendency for the parties of the right to consolidate in opposition to it. As Johnston notes, “recasting of the centre-right is most of the story of Duverger’s Law in action” (2017, 249). In British Columbia, the NDP has long been matched by a single major party on the

right: first Social Credit, and since the 1990s, the Liberals. In Saskatchewan, competition was historically between the NDP and the Liberals alongside a vestigial Progressive Conservative party, then the NDP and the Progressive Conservatives ahead of a weak Liberal party. Since 1999, the Saskatchewan Party has dominated the centre-right, leaving that province with an arrangement much like British Columbia's. The election of the NDP in Alberta in 2015 triggered a merger of that province's two major centre-right parties, the Progressive Conservatives and Wildrose Party, to form the UCP. If the NDP's strength endures in Alberta, it too will look like its neighbours to the east and west.

Only Manitoba deviates from this pattern at present, with both the Liberals and Progressive Conservatives retaining some strength. In Adams' (2008) view, the province has a "two-and-a-half party" system akin to the one that prevails at the federal level, except with the roles of the Liberals and NDP reversed. The continued presence of the Liberals and Conservatives in Manitoba might be because Manitoba had the most time for its party system to mature before the CCF's arrival, having had a party system since the late 1870s, or it may be the province's proximity to central Canada. In any case, the fact that the NDP is one of the strongest parties there is cause to reiterate the uniqueness of western Canada and of the NDP itself.

Another effect of the NDP, though largely beyond the scope of this thesis, is how the party has had on the policies of other parties. Maurice Duverger (1964) coined "contagion from the left" as the phenomenon by which parties on the right adapt to more closely resemble the left, especially as it relates to organization.<sup>72</sup> William Chandler (1977) finds evidence, however, that the presence of the CCF-NDP on the left has changed the policies of parties on the right. There

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<sup>72</sup> Leon D. Epstein (1967) finds limited evidence that Canadian parties became more like the CCF as membership driven organizations. This is probably no longer true, however, given that all major parties in Canada now have active policy conventions and frequently choose leaders on the basis of member votes.

are several examples in Western Canada of parties other than the CCF-NDP pursuing new social schemes like hospital insurance that were first articulated in CCF-NDP platforms. While not definitive, this suggests that the CCF-NDP still had an important role in shaping the parties and party systems of the west even when the party was removed from power.

### **The NDP's Future Prospects**

The prospects for the NDP's future survival and electoral success depend on the extent to which the party continues to reflect the characteristics this thesis has addressed as well as the usual factors that can affect a party's fortunes: leadership, the economy, the strength of other parties, and so forth. The party continues to be relatively strong in the western provinces, although it remains to be seen if the NDP can challenge the Saskatchewan Party and the United Conservative Party in Alberta, both of which appear to have constructed very broad right-of-centre coalitions. There are two scenarios in particular that might jeopardize the survivability of the NDP going forward, however. First, if the western branches of the NDP find it necessary to distance themselves from the federal party in order to remain electorally viable. Second, if support for the Greens continues to grow, it may risk ending the NDP's long tenure as Canada's only major left-wing party outside of Quebec.

### *Federal-Provincial Interparty Relations*

There has been frequent speculation in the media that it may become necessary for the Alberta NDP to distance itself from the federal party (Fawcett 2021; Thomson 2018). The logic is that the Alberta wing of the party may find it necessary to cut ties with the federal party in order to win the support of moderate voters in the province given the federal NDP's stance on certain oil and gas issues like pipeline construction. This has long been a problem that the Liberals and Conservatives had had to confront across the country: the interests of the federal

and provincial parties are sometimes not aligned and can even be in opposition to one another. The result is, for the most part, the Liberals and Conservatives have severed formal links between the federal and provincial organizations (Dyck 1996b).

As this thesis has shown, however, that the NDP remains an integrated organization has been key to its survival. This is not so much because the provincial wings of the NDP are linked to the federal wing as that they are all linked to each other. The organization is able to stay intact when the party's electoral fortunes are poor in a given jurisdiction, and the various branches can lend material support to one another as necessary. If the NDP in Alberta or elsewhere cuts these ties, it may undermine its long-term survivability in the name of short-term political gain.

One of the key differences between the NDP and the Liberals and Conservatives, though, is that the NDP has not governed federally. The party has therefore not had to directly confront itself in settings like first ministers' conferences. If the NDP's federal prospects improve, it may change the calculus for these links between parties. As it stands, however, the provincial wings of the NDP may in fact benefit from the federal party's relative weakness.

#### *Growth of a Challenger on the Left*

The growth of the Green Party in recent elections in British Columbia raises the possibility of the NDP encountering a threat on its left flank, similar to the threat that conservative parties have recently had to face on the far right. If the Greens are able to present themselves as the sort of mass party that the NDP has become—left-wing, but moderate enough to accept many kinds of voters—it may jeopardize not only the NDP's electoral prospects, but it could cost it some of its committed activists. So far, this sort of threat has not materialized outside of British Columbia. It may serve as an important reminder to the NDP, however, of the strength it has begotten from adapting to a changing electorate in the past. While this has previously meant moderation, in the



future it may mean adapting to a different sort of left-wing concerns if some post-materialist issues further supplant the party's traditional emphasis on labour.

### **Future Research**

This thesis is a first pass over very expansive terrain. It has addressed two shortcomings in the literature. First, no recent study has developed a comprehensive explanation of the CCF-NDP's survival in the provincial arena in western Canada. No other party in Canada, and indeed few in the world, have had over seventy years elapse between their arrival and first term in government as the NDP has in Alberta, and the puzzle of the NDP's persistence deserves wider recognition. Second, most accounts of the provincial NDP have limited themselves to a single province, or occasionally a two-province comparison (Smith 1969). The provinces are not watertight compartments. The fortunes of the NDP in one province can affect another and, as this thesis has shown, there is a common trajectory for the CCF-NDP's growth across all four western provinces that has not been previously described.

Further research into this topic ought to take an in-depth look at the CCF-NDP's organizational structure, historical and current, in order to gather further evidence on the role that links between the wings of the party may play in the party's survival. Of particular interest would be the exchange of material and personnel support between the different provincial wings of the party, particularly when one is experiencing a moment of weakness. Future research should also continue to explore the existence of patterns that stretch across provincial borders.

### **Conclusion**

The CCF-NDP is perhaps the most studied political party in Canada currently in existence. As this thesis has attempted to show, we should not assume that our understanding of even a well-documented topic is complete. New events, like success of the Alberta NDP in the 2015

provincial election, can often cast historical events in a different light, and should cause us to re-evaluate some of our assumptions. This thesis has shown that the CCF-NDP holds a special place in the political development of Canada, possessing qualities that differentiate it from other insurgent parties and also from the traditional parties, the Liberals and Conservatives. Its social democratic ideology, willingness to evolve, and the redundancy that its organizational structure offers have helped the party survive through a constantly changing political landscape. In doing so, the CCF-NDP has made a rich contribution to the health of Canadian democracy.

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## Appendix A: Governments and Official Opposition Parties in Each Province

<b>Table A.1: Governments and official opposition parties in Saskatchewan</b>		
<b>Period</b>	<b>Governing party</b>	<b>Official opposition (Second largest party)</b>
1905-1921 (16 years)	Liberal Party	Conservative Party
1921-1929 (8 years)		Progressives
1929-1934 (5 years)	<i>Co-operative government</i> (Conservative Party and Progressives)	Liberal Party
1934-1944 (10 years)	Liberal Party	CCF
1944-1960 (16 years)	CCF	Liberal Party
1967-1971 (4 years)	Liberal Party	CCF
1971-1978 (7 years)	NDP	Liberal Party
1978-1982 (4 years)		Progressive Conservative
1982-1991 (9 years)	Progressive Conservative	NDP
1991-1995 (4 years)	NDP	Progressive Conservative
1995-1999 (4 years)		Liberal Party
1999-2007 (8 years)		Saskatchewan Party
2007-Present	Saskatchewan Party	NDP

Table A.2: Governments and official opposition parties in Alberta		
Period	Governing party	Official opposition (Second largest party)
1905-1921 (16 years)	Liberal Party	Conservative Party
1921-1935 (14 years)	United Farmers of Alberta	Liberal Party
1935-1940 (5 years)	Social Credit League	
1940-1944 (8 years)		Independent Movement
1948-1952 (4 years)		<i>Tie</i> (CCF/Liberal)
1952-1959 (7 years)		Liberal Party
1959-1963 (4 years)		<i>Tie</i> (Liberal/Progressive Conservative)
1963-1967 (4 years)		Liberal Party
1967-1971 (4 years)		Progressive Conservative
1971-1982 (11 years)	Progressive Conservative	Social Credit League
1982-1993 (11 years)		NDP

1993-2012 (19 years)	NDP	Liberal Party
2012-2015 (3 years)		Wildrose Party
2015-2019 (4 years)		
2019-Present	United Conservative Party	NDP

<b>Table A.3: Government and official opposition parties in Manitoba (Adapted in part from Adams 2008, 79)</b>		
<b>Period</b>	<b>Governing party</b>	<b>Official opposition (Second largest party)</b>
1870-1888 (18 years)	Non-partisan	—
1888-1899 (11 years)	Liberal Party	Conservative Party
1899-1915 (16 years)	Conservative Party	Liberal Party
1915-1920 (5 years)	Liberal Party	Conservative Party
1920-1922 (2 years)		United Farmers of Manitoba
1922-1927 (5 years)	United Farmers of Manitoba	Liberal Party
1927-1932 (5 years)	Progressive	Conservative Party
1932-1941 (13 years)	Liberal-Progressive	
1941-1945 (4 years)	<i>Coalition government</i> (Liberal-Progressive, Conservative, CCF, Social Credit Independent)	<i>Anti-coalition opposition</i> (Conservative, Social Credit, Independent, Communist)
1945-1949 (4 years)	<i>Coalition government</i> (Liberal-Progressive, Progressive Conservative, Social Credit, Independent)	<i>Anti-coalition opposition</i> (CCF, Social Credit, Labour-Progressive, Independent)
1949-1953 (4 years)	<i>Coalition government</i> (Liberal-Progressive, Progressive Conservative, Independent)	<i>Anti-coalition opposition</i> (CCF, Independent)
1953-1958 (5 years)	Liberal-Progressive	Progressive Conservative
1958-1962 (4 years)	Progressive Conservative	Liberal-Progressive
1962-1969 (7 years)		Liberal Party
1969-1977 (8 years)	NDP	Progressive Conservative
1977-1981 (4 years)	Progressive Conservative	NDP
1981-1988 (7 years)	NDP	Progressive Conservative
1988-1990 (2 years)	Progressive Conservative	Liberal Party
1990-1999 (9 years)		NDP
1999-2011 (12 years)	NDP	Progressive Conservative
2011-Present	Progressive Conservative	NDP

<b>Table A.4: Government and official opposition parties in British Columbia</b>		
<b>Period</b>	<b>Governing party</b>	<b>Official opposition (Second largest party)</b>
1871-1903 (32 years)	Non-partisan	—
1903-1916 (13 years)	Conservative Party	Liberal Party
1916-1928 (12 years)	Liberal Party	Conservative Party
1928-1933 (5 years)	Conservative Party	Liberal Party
1933-1937 (4 years)	Liberal Party	CCF
1937-1941 (4 years)		Conservative Party
1941-1945 (4 years)		CCF
1945-1952 (7 years)	<i>Coalition government</i> (Liberal Party, Progressive Conservatives)	
1952-1972 (20 years)	Social Credit	CCF (to 1960) / New Party (to 1961) / NDP (1961 onwards)
1972-1975 (3 years)	NDP	Social Credit
1975-1991 (16 years)	Social Credit	NDP
1991-2001 (10 years)	NDP	Liberal Party
2001-2017 (16 years)	Liberal Party	NDP
2017-Present	NDP	Liberal Party



## Appendix B: Effective Number of Parliamentary Parties (ENPP) and Effective Number of Electoral Parties (ENEP) in Each Province

NB: The marked diamonds indicate the first election the CCF-NDP contested in each province.

The marked circles indicate the first election in which the CCF-NDP formed government.

Calculated by author from Sayers (2021).

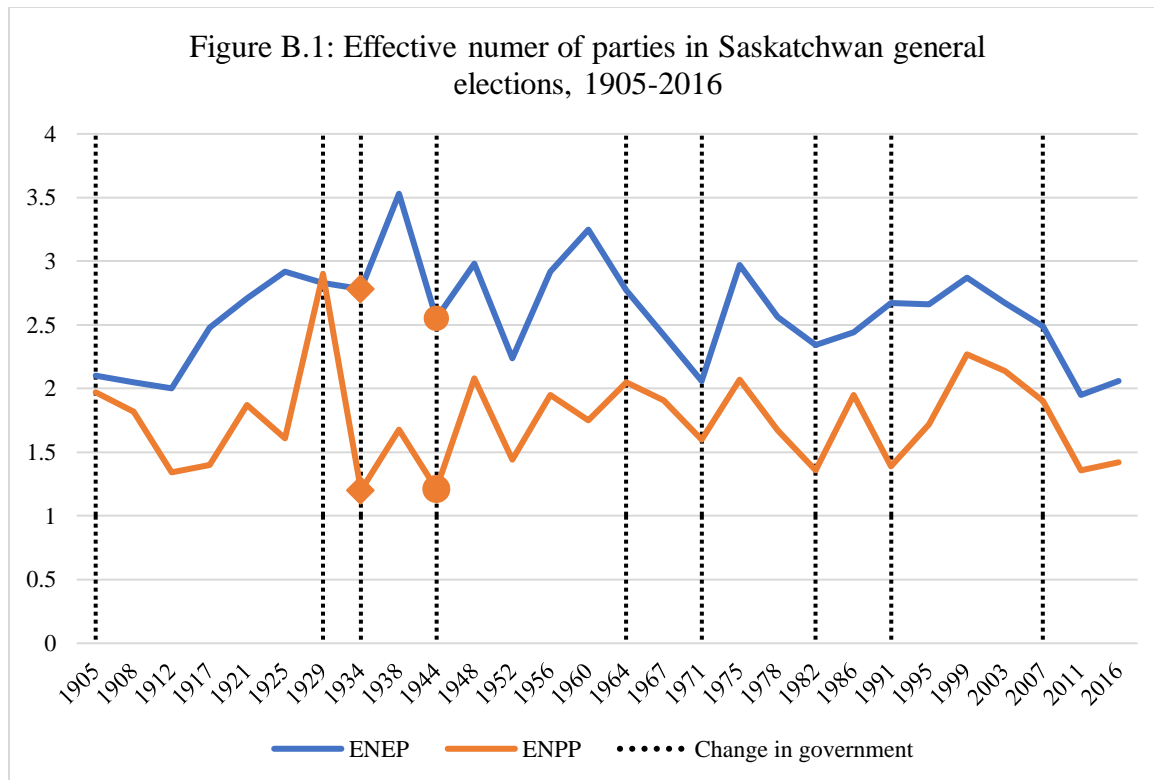


Figure B.2: Effective number of parties in Alberta general elections, 1905-2019

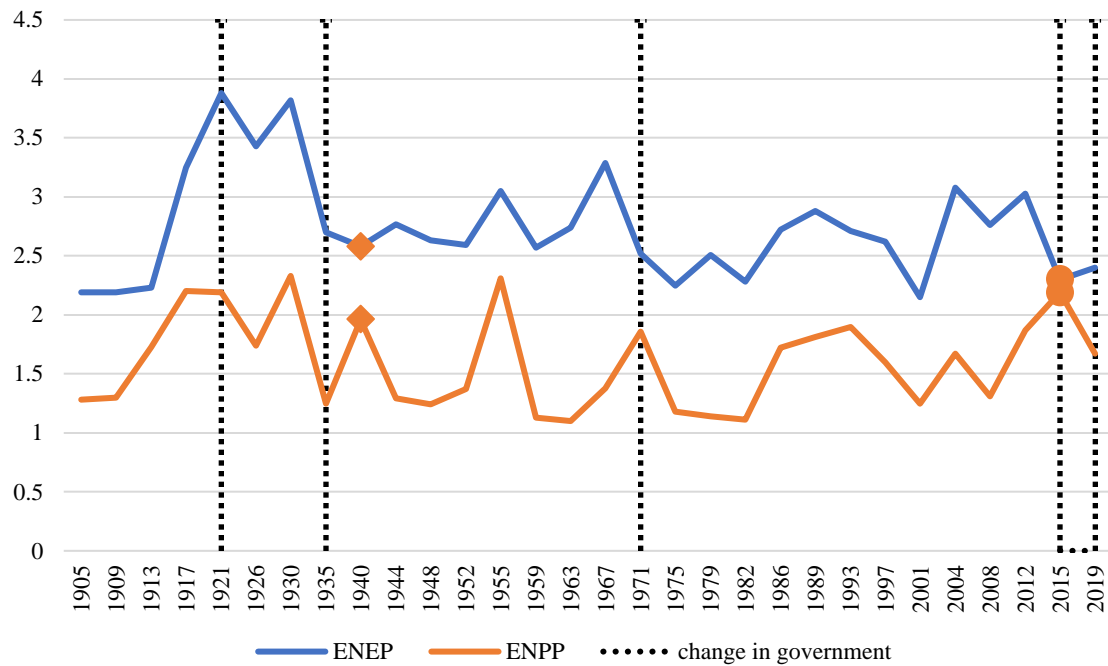
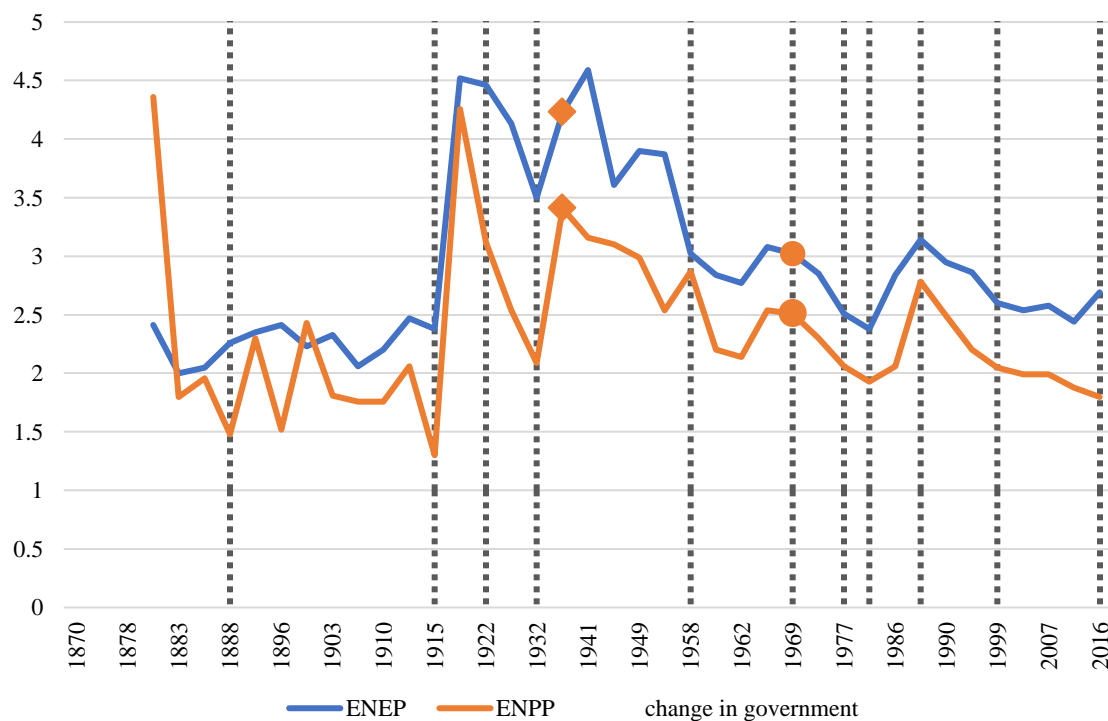
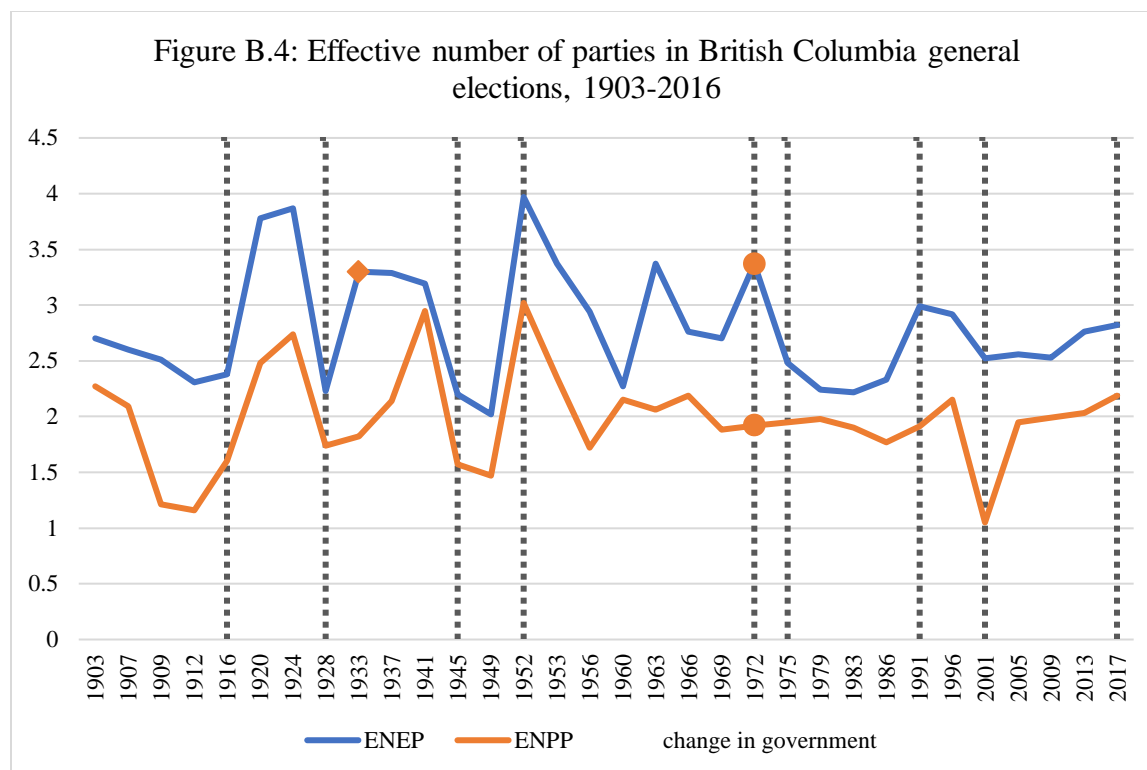


Figure B.3: Effective number of parties in Manitoba general elections, 1870-2016





## Appendix C: Number of Parties in Each Province in Real Terms

Source: Sayers (2021).

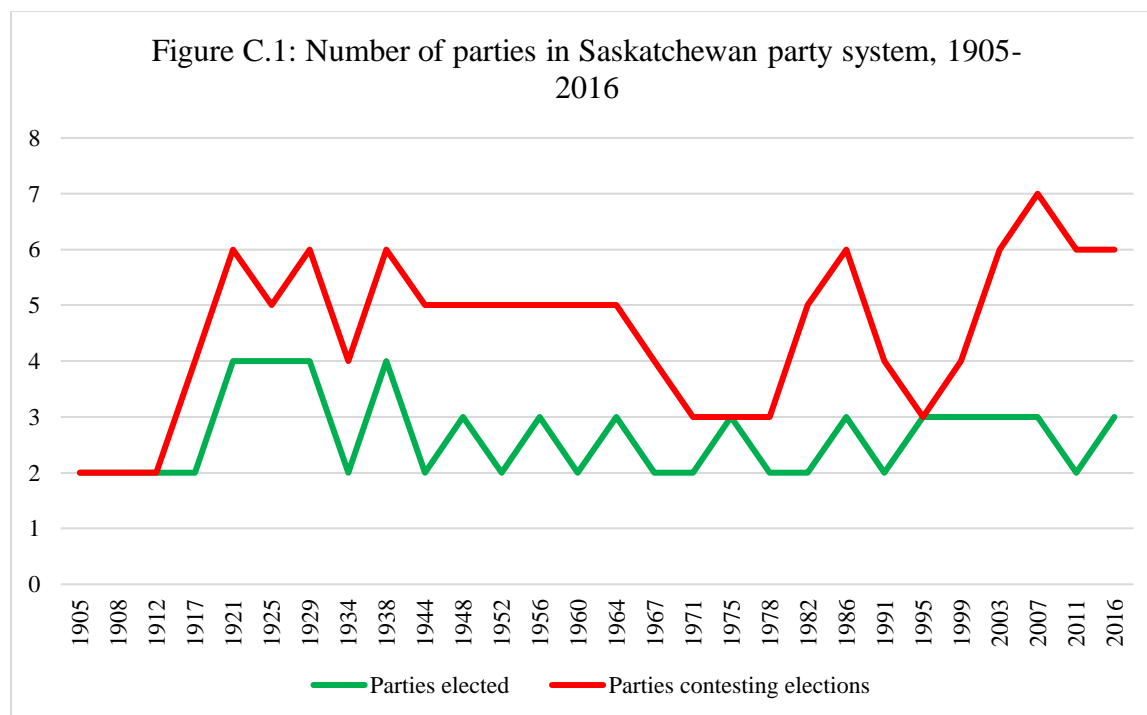


Figure C.2: Number of parties in Alberta party system, 1905-2019

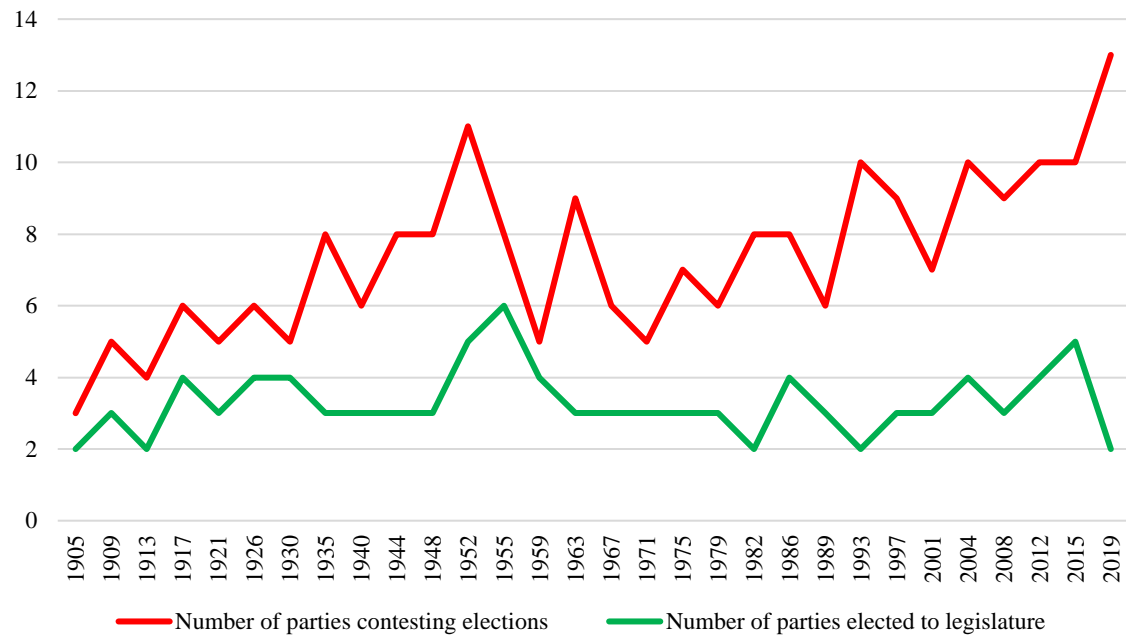


Figure C.3: Number of parties in Manitoba party system, 1870-2016

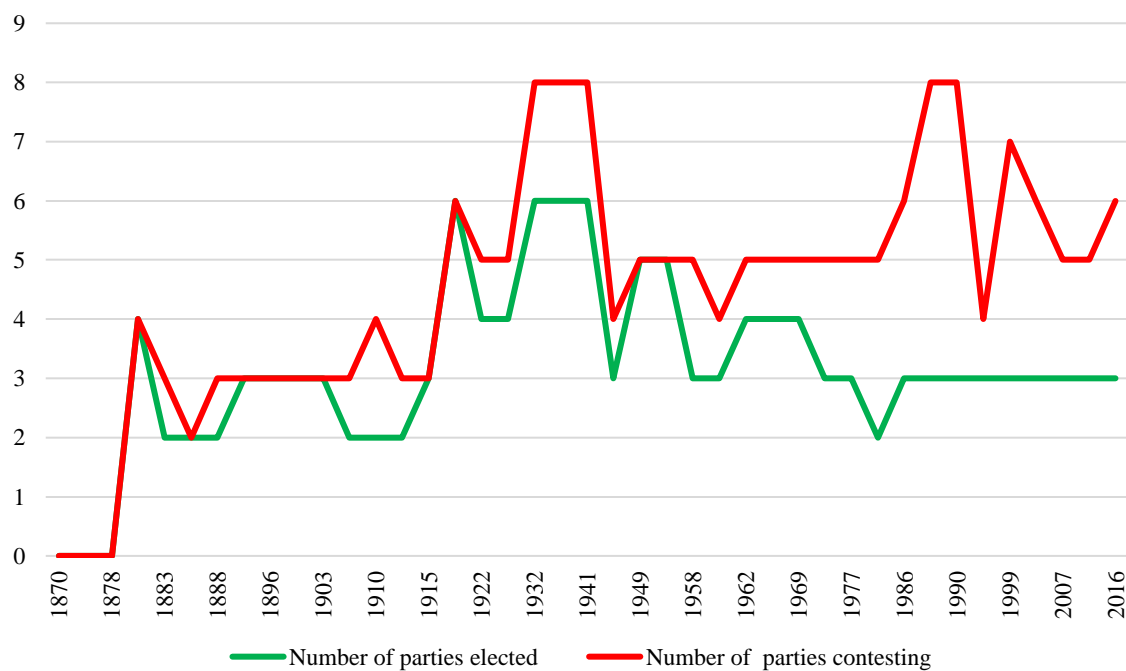


Figure C.4: Number of parties in British Columbia party system, 1871-2017

