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Issue: Volume 37, Issue 4 (October 2006)

Journal: *PS: Political Science and Politics*



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Northern Exposure? The Politics of Canadian Provincial Admission into the United States

In *A Nation Too Good to Lose*, former Canadian Prime Minister Joe Clark worried that the future of Canada was by no means guaranteed: “I am surprised by the number of thoughtful Canadians, particularly outside Québec, who assume that Canada will stay together in the future simply because it has stayed together in the past” (1994, 50). He noted that, “There is no rule that says every country should succeed, and none that requires failed countries to stay together. Divorce is acceptable in international relations. So no one argues that Canada should stay together just because it is here” (125).

Discussions about the future of Canada usually center on Québec. As is well known, the desire for independence is strongly held by some in this francophone province, and the linguistic and cultural differences between Québec and the rest of Canada (ROC) have made the federal partnership uneasy at times. Québec voters have twice rejected independence referenda, but it is never clear when the next round of provincial passions may arise

and once again put Canada to the test. Even seemingly minor events, such as the jokes of a visiting American comedian,¹ have the potential to strain anglophone-francophone relations.

In recent years, some observers have wondered if sovereignty is an issue of the past. The Liberal Party “sponsorship scandal” may have given new life to the movement, however. A 2005 survey in Québec found 54% of the population supported sovereignty,² a high for a non-referendum year, although this received little U.S. notice.

While much of the ROC’s attention has been focused on keeping Québec in the federation, only a few have discussed what to do if these efforts fail. As Banting (1992, 167–8) pointed out, “Canada has not devoted a generation to debating its future without Québec. In part because the possibility of Québec’s separation was often discounted, and in part because of a desire to avoid self-fulfilling prophecies, Canada has not engaged in a collective reflection about how to proceed without Québec.”³

The goal of this paper is not to discuss the likelihood or causes of any future political scenarios that involve the reconstituting of Canada. It is agnostic as to whether such events are likely or unlikely to happen, and claims no

special knowledge about how they might unfold. Instead, it simply posits that a future situation could arise in which some or all of the ROC provinces desire to join the U.S. Given this possibility, it makes sense for scholars on both sides of the border to study how this might transpire.

Some observers north of the border seem to assume that the U.S. would favor absorbing Canadian territory—and may even pessimistically see this as the inevitable outcome of a relationship in which the American economy and culture increasingly grow in importance in Canada. The U.S., according to this argument, has expanded territorially since its founding and might see Canada as the next step in this development. According to Dyment (2004, 1), Holmes (1981) worried that “Americans have never forsaken their aspiration for a united continent” and “Americans have nourished a mission of redemption for North America at large.”

It should be uncontroversial to state, however, that the U.S. would not absorb any territory unless doing so was in its economic interests and did not entail substantial political difficulties. In addition, such a move would have to be supported not only by the Canadians in question but also by the American public and political elites. It is unlikely that any provinces would be admitted, for instance, if one of the American political parties thought it would lose influence as a result.

This paper will discuss these points, particularly the political consequences of provincial admission. The following sections will therefore explore: the lessons to be learned from the long history of U.S. state admissions; the implications of Canadian federal election returns from 1997 to 2006 for how Canadians might vote in U.S. Senate elections; polling data on how Canadians might vote in an American context; and other dynamics relevant to the potential merger of these two nations. The paper will then conclude with an evaluation of the likelihood of any U.S.-Canadian merger. Due to space limitations, some issues are only briefly covered. A more thorough discussion can be found online in a longer version of the paper.⁴

Potential Issues in ROC-American Unification

Canadians and Americans are occasionally polled about their interest in uniting the two

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nations. A Macleans survey in 1989 asked, "Would you favor or oppose Canada becoming the 51st state of the United States with full congressional representation and rights of American citizens?" Sixty-six percent of Americans answered "strongly favor" or "favor," while only 14% of Canadians did so. As Gibson (1994, 295) pointed out, "It is also interesting to speculate on how respondents might have reacted to the prospect of Canada forming not the 51st state, but the 51st through 60th states. Would Canadians have been more enthusiastic and Americans less?" Another poll in 1992 asked Canadians whether they would favor their province joining the U.S. as a regular state after a successful Québec's independence referendum. Seventy-four percent said "no," and other data show that most Canadians believe that the result of Québec's secession would be a "strong united country" rather than multiple small nations or absorption into the United States (Young 1995, 192–4). Young (24) also noted more generally that "a significant proportion of Canadians harbour anti-American sentiments, and they would make unwilling citizens."

A key issue is how to integrate Canadian voters and provinces into the U.S. political system. American politicians may be most worried about Canadian voters changing the partisan balance in the U.S. Would George W. Bush have been elected president if Canadian provinces could vote in the Electoral College? Would the Republicans maintain their majorities in the Senate and the House? Such concerns would be especially strong given the Canadian reputation in the U.S. as being a more liberal version of the United States. When George H. W. Bush referred to a "kindler, gentler nation," some thought this was a workable definition of Canada.

Young (1995, 24) pointed out that, "the admission of another 21 million citizens in several new states could change the balance of power in the republic (although some Democrats might favour this tectonic change)." Lamont (1994) made the same point but suggested that some in the U.S. might favor provincial admissions in order to gain control over Canadian natural resources.

Banting (1992) observed that U.S. senators might not be willing to dilute their power, and that the provincial parliamentary system might prove an obstacle to Americans who often seem to like divided government. The result might be no deal: "Canadian nationalists, conditioned by memories of Manifest Destiny and '54-40 or fight,' have long suspected the American eagle of predatory instincts whenever it circled North. They might get a surprise if the issue of statehood were put to the test" (178).

Doran (2001, 213) pointed out that, "The trepidation that the United States is about to 'take over' Canada has been part of the Canadian psyche at least since the exodus of the United Empire Loyalists after the American Revolution. The problem is that this interpretation does not conform with the facts on either side of the border today." He also discussed the partisan obstacles to statehood.

Weaver (1992, 1) noted that Americans view Canada very favorably despite knowing relatively little about it, and a common complaint in Canada is that Americans are largely unaware of the cultural and political complexities north of the border. Americans, upon learning of such issues, might not want to become involved. There are also a number of fundamental policy differences between the U.S. and Canada, particularly social safety net programs.

Of the points above, it is the partisan concerns that would likely loom largest in the face of provincial applications for admission. According to McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal (1999, 4), "how statehood changes the political balance in the short run is the key to understanding when and which new states are added to the Union . . . conflicts over entry always relate to the important political issues of each era."

American Admissions Dynamics

The Articles of Confederation specifically provided for the expedited admission of Canada into the new union. According to Article XI:

Canada acceding to this confederation, and adjoining in the measures of the United States, shall be admitted into, and entitled to all the advantages of this Union; but no other colony shall be admitted into the same, unless such admission be agreed to by nine States.

This language was not included in the Constitution adopted in 1789. Formal requirements for state admission were not specified in the Constitution and have never been codified. The admission decision is made by Congress and the president and does not require a constitutional amendment.

Two admission guidelines emerged in early America. The first suggested that a territory wait until it had a population equal in size to that of the average House district. This was called the "ratio of representation" rule. The second suggested that a minimum number of inhabitants be reached, usually 60,000. This number reflected the population of Delaware, the smallest state at the time, and was intended to prevent even smaller states from joining. Nevertheless, state admission in the 19th century was widely recognized as a political question with no binding, objective standards.

Weingast: Antebellum Admissions

Weingast (1998) discussed how the Senate in the antebellum years was carefully balanced between free and slave states. This concept of balance was clearly understood and articulated at the time and was called "sectional equilibrium." This was critical because a number of anti-slavery provisions had passed the Northern-dominated House in the first half of the 19th century, and it is likely that even more anti-slavery legislation would have been attempted in the absence of the deterrent of Senate balance. Without this balance, the South knew that slavery would be in jeopardy. The balance therefore gave the South a *de facto* veto over national legislation, although the agreement required occasional renegotiating and new legislation as political circumstances changed.

The Senate balance was occasionally upset in favor of the North, but never for long. From 1792 to 1858, the free states of the North never had more than a one-state advantage, and in those instances it was always balanced in the following year by the admission of a slave state. The South even had a two-state advantage for a year, which was consistent with the balance strategy. In 1800, the balance was eight free and eight slave states; in 1825, the balance was 12 to 12, and in 1850 the balance was 16 to 15.

Many of the well-known laws of the 19th century were passed in order to balance Northern and Southern control of the Senate, including the Missouri Compromise of 1819, the Compromise of 1850, and the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854.

Stewart and Weingast: Civil War and Third Party System Admissions

Stewart and Weingast (1992) observed that at the end of the Civil War, the Republican Party was not entirely secure in its hold over the federal government. Despite almost complete Republican control during the Civil War, the Democratic Party (called the War Democrats during that period to emphasize their patriotism and support of the union) continued to receive significant support in some regions of the North.

A number of states were therefore admitted in the 1860s that were expected to vote Republican, including West Virginia, Nevada, Kansas, and Nebraska. Irregularities in admission were not uncommon. For instance, the admission of Nevada entailed a clear break from precedent because of its low population. Bryce (1888, 219) referred to Nevada as a “rotten borough”⁵ and Stewart and Weingast called it “the most egregious effort in the nation’s history to disregard population and economic criteria to admit a state for political reasons” (232). Nevertheless, the few residents of the territory were thought to be Republicans and Congress voted for admission in a largely party-line vote in 1863.

Estimating Potential Provincial Senate Delegations

Predicting how Canadians would behave politically as Americans is a difficult exercise. Nevertheless, such estimations may have to be done in the future. Although the following efforts are exploratory, they are likely to be of the kind made by American political elites when faced with political turbulence to the north. We will therefore examine the 1997, 2000, 2004, and 2006 national parliamentary election outcomes by province⁶ in order to fashion a rough estimate of the partisanship of future provincial Senate delegations in an American political context.

The Canadian Parties

For the 1997 and 2000 elections, we suggest that Reform/Canadian Alliance Party (Reform/CAP) and Progressive Conservative (PC) supporters would have generally voted Republican while Liberal and New Democratic Party (NDP) voters would have largely voted Democratic. The 2004 and 2006 federal elections were different because the CAP and PC merged to form the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC). This election also saw the emergence of the Green Party (GP). We posit that CPC voters would likely become Republicans, while Liberal, NDP, and Green voters would probably become Democrats.

There are, to be sure, some limitations to such an analysis. First, Canadian party allegiances may not easily transfer to American parties, and while one might reasonably surmise that Reform/CAP and CPC voters are likely Republicans, and NDP and Green Party members are likely Democrats, what about Liberal and PC supporters?

As Horowitz (1996, 156–7) pointed out, “In the United States, the liberal Democrats are on the left. There is no doubt about that. In Canada, the Liberals are a party of the centre, appearing at times leftist and at times rightist.” If the Canadian center is to the left of the American center, as is generally perceived, then we may well suppose that most Liberal Party voters will migrate to the Democratic Party. American Republicans may also worry that some Canadian conservatives are similar to liberal Republicans.

Second, estimating future territorial partisanship has historically been risky. It would similarly be difficult to ascertain how Canadian voters would act in an American political environment. Third, there is the possibility that Canadians might maintain their unique parties as Americans. A number of electoral and institutional features in American politics would make this difficult, however. Democrats and Republicans would also undoubtedly pour substantial resources into party building, and Canadian party allegiances are comparatively weak (Clarke, Kornberg, and Wearing 2000).

Canadian Election Results

We assign Democratic or Republican senators to a province depending on the difference between the combined votes for the

parties that would be left of center in the American context—Liberal, NDP, and Green—minus the combined votes for the parties that would be right of center—Reform/CAP, PC, and CPC. If the value is 10 percentage points or greater, the province is assigned two Democratic senators. If -10 or lower, the province is assigned two Republican senators. If the absolute value of the difference is less than 10%, then the state is assigned a mixed delegation. Because of space considerations, we only present the table for the 2006 elections.⁷

This exercise suggests that Canadian provincial Senate delegations would largely consist of Democrats. In the first election we examined, 1997, if each province were admitted as a state, the result would likely advantage the Democrats in the Senate (14 new Democrats to 4 new Republicans). If the four Atlantic provinces⁸ were combined, the Canadian Senate delegation would consist of eight Democrats and four Republicans. The results from the 2000 elections suggest the Democrats would have an 11 to 7 advantage, although no party would experience a net gain (six to six) if the Atlantic provinces became a single state.

In 2004, the data indicate the Democrats would have done even better than in 1997. We estimate that the provinces would have sent 15 Democrats and 3 Republicans to the U.S. Senate. Even if the Atlantic provinces were merged into one, the Democrats would still have a nine to three advantage. Lastly, Table 1 indicates that the 2006 elections would have likely resulted in the same overwhelmingly Democratic set of Senate delegations—despite a stronger Conservative party vote in comparison to 2004.

Data from recent Canadian elections therefore suggest that the incorporation of Canadian provinces into the U.S. would be a significant political boon to the Democrats and dramatically change the political landscape. Such figures, despite their exploratory nature, would likely give pause to any Republican considering a northern expansion.

Polling Data

In 2000, Environics Research asked two presidential preference questions for its Focus Canada Report. The first asked which candidate the respondent preferred,⁹ and the second asked which candidate would best serve the interests of Canada.¹⁰

For the former, the results show strong support for Democratic nominee Al Gore. He would likely have won Canada as a whole (by a 19-point margin) as well as every province surveyed. The latter is the more significant finding because of the Electoral College system used in American presidential contests. While Gore’s margin of 33 points in Ontario is not surprising, fewer might have predicted his 7-point margin in Alberta, reportedly the most conservative province. Furthermore, Gore won among identifiers of all parties except the PC, among whom he lost by only 5 points.

For the second question, Canadians of all the surveyed regions and provinces believed that Gore would best serve the interests of Canada, typically by double-digit margins. Respondents of all but one party (the Bloc Québécois) saw Gore as better for Canada, including an 18% margin for PC identifiers and 8 points for CAP supporters.

A July 2004 Ipsos-Reid/CTV/*Globe & Mail* survey found that 60% of Canadians reported they would vote for John Kerry, 22% for George W. Bush, 2% for Ralph Nader, 8% supported neither, and the remainder were unsure. Kerry also led by large margins in many provinces, including 35 points in Alberta, 37 points in British Columbia, 38 points in Ontario, and 14 points in Atlantic Canada.¹¹

Table 1
Canadian Provincial Vote Percentage in the 2006 Federal Elections

	1 st Place	2 nd Place	3 rd Place	4 th Place	Left-Right Vote ¹	Anticipated U.S. Senate Delegation
Alberta	Conservative 65.9	Liberal 15.5	NDP 11.9	Green 6.7	-31.8	2 Republicans
British Columbia	Conservative 37.8	NDP 28.9	Liberal 27.9	Green 5.4	24.4	2 Democrats
Manitoba	Conservative 43.6	Liberal 26.5	NDP 25.9	Green 4.0	12.8	2 Democrats
Ontario	Liberal 40.3	Conservative 35.4	NDP 19.6	Green 4.7	19.4	2 Democrats
Saskatchewan	Conservative 49.6	NDP 24.4	Liberal 22.7	Green 3.3	0.8	1 Democrat 1 Republican
New Brunswick	Liberal 39.5	Conservative 36.0	NDP 22.0	Green 2.5	28	2 Democrats
Newfoundland	Liberal 42.8	Conservative 42.7	NDP 13.6	Green 0.9	14.6	2 Democrats
Nova Scotia	Liberal 37.4	NDP 30.0	Conservative 29.9	Green 2.6	40.2	2 Democrats
Prince Edward Island	Liberal 52.8	Conservative 33.6	NDP 9.6	Green 3.9	32.8	2 Democrats
{combined Atlantic provinces}	Liberal 40.5	Conservative 34.0	NDP 23.2	Green 2.3	32	{2 Democrats}
TOTAL					15 3	Democrats Republicans
TOTAL {with combined Atlantic provinces}					9 3	Democrats Republicans

¹(Liberal + NDP + Green) – Conservative
 Votes for smaller parties are not included.
 Source: Elections Canada (www.elections.ca).

Conclusions

Judging by the history of American territorial admissions, partisan considerations will inescapably influence any admission decision. If Canadians at some point in the future wish to join the U.S., they will need to address the worry of some political actors—particularly Republicans—that they will tilt the American political scene to the left. The 1997 election results suggest that Canada would likely send more Democrats than Republicans to the U.S. Senate (and also to the House). The 2000 election results suggest that the partisanship of Canadian senators might be evenly balanced, but it requires the merging of the four Atlantic provinces into a single entity. The 2004 and 2006 elections, by contrast, indicate that Senate Democrats would gain substantial reinforcements from the admission of the provinces. Furthermore, the 2000 polling data reveal a strong baseline of support for Al Gore among Canadians.

Even if the data were able to clearly conclude that the provinces would likely send balanced partisan delegations to the Senate, their admission would still be a risk because future partisanship cannot be guaranteed. As noted earlier, parties in the 19th century were not always accurate in their partisan predictions for newly admitted territories.

What alternatives might be considered by America? The longer version of this paper discusses several possibilities, such as merging provinces in order to reduce their impact on the Senate, admitting the ROC as a single state, admitting provinces perceived as the “most American,” and admitting only some provinces after an economic cost-benefit analysis.

In the end, the key obstacle to the unification of the U.S. and the ROC is likely to be a partisan one. American political institutions are closely balanced today, and the admission of just one additional Democratic-learning state could have important implications. The past two decades have also been the era of divided government (Fiorina 1992), and while neither party enjoyed this stalemate, they would likely fear any plan that could put them at risk of permanent minority status.

This has significant implications for the future of Canada, particularly the debate on the status of Québec. Some have thought that the independence of Québec would start a political domino effect that ends with the incorporation of the ROC into the United States. This paper suggests that anglophone Canada does not have an easy American option, however. Even if Canadian provinces sought admission, the United States would likely say “no” or impose conditions that many Canadians would not want to accept. Similarly, there is little justification for the long-standing concern that the U.S. might have territorial designs on Canada. While it is possible that U.S. influence will grow in economic and cultural realms, the political incorporation of provinces is not on the American agenda and is unlikely for the foreseeable future.

If Québec left the union, the only choice for the ROC would likely be unity or fragmentation. While it is uncertain which option anglophone Canada would choose, this paper suggests that the future of Canada will be decided by Canadians and will remain “Canadian”—either as a smaller nation with the same name or as independent successor states.¹² The secession of Québec might pose a number of difficulties for the ROC, but it would not likely lead to the political incorporation of all or part of the ROC into the United States.

Notes

1. "An Insolent Puppet Roils Canadian Politics." *New York Times*, February 16, 2004, B3. The lead sentence stated, "Conan O'Brien came to Toronto last week, and he nearly started a civil war. Just kidding, sort of."
2. "Referendum as 'Rapidly' as Possible." Rhéal Séguin, *Globe and Mail*, Friday, May 13, 2005, A5.
3. Although some scholars have explored the contours of a post-Québec Canada (Covell 1992; Monahan and Covello 1992; Gibson 1994; Lamont 1994).
4. The longer paper (a revised version of Leal and Lipinski 2002) can be found at: www.la.utexas.edu/~dlead.
5. Quoted in Stewart and Weingast (1992).
6. While the Yukon Territory, Nunavut, and the Northwest Territories send one representative each to Parliament, they are not analyzed because of their very low populations.

7. The tables for the other election years are included in the longer paper on the first author's web site.
8. New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island.
9. "An American Presidential Election will be held in November 2000. Which candidate would you most like to see win: the Democratic Party candidate Al Gore or the Republican Party candidate George Bush?"
10. "An American Presidential Election will be held in November 2000. Which candidate would best serve Canada's interests as president: the Democratic Party candidate Al Gore or the Republican Party candidate George Bush?"
11. See www.queensu.ca/cora/polls/2004/July27-canadians_support_democrat_john_kerry.pdf.
12. See Grabell (1995) for a discussion of the issue of successor states.

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