

*Royce Koop*

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**Grassroots Liberals**  
Organizing for Local and National  
Politics



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# Introduction

The years 2006 to 2009 were not pleasant for the Liberal Party of Canada. After having been in office for thirteen years under the leadership of Jean Chrétien and later Paul Martin, the party was defeated in the 2006 election by the rejuvenated Conservative Party. Martin resigned as leader and was replaced by Stéphane Dion, but the party struggled to renew itself under Dion's leadership and was again defeated in the 2008 election. For a party that won eighteen of the twenty-seven Canadian elections held since the expansion of the franchise in 1918, this experience on the opposition benches was a shock, especially to party activists who had commenced their participation during the solidly Liberal 1990s. Nevertheless, just as it had following previous defeats, the party turned its attention to the task of organizational renewal.

In the past, the processes of renewal were often intimately linked to Canadian federalism and the presence of Liberal parties in the provinces. Out of office, the national party was generally able to fall back on its provincial "cousins," particularly when those cousins themselves were in power, and draw on their strength in the provinces to reconstruct a national organization capable of defeating the Tories (Wearing 1981, 13). But that option was no longer available to the national party leadership in the period following the 2006 defeat. Part of one of the party's former rebuilding efforts around the middle of the twentieth century had been a process of organizational disentanglement from provincial Liberal parties, with which the national party had shared important structural linkages. Fifty years later that process seemed to have fully culminated: provincial Liberal cousins in 2006 were seemingly unsympathetic to the national party (Ontario), suspiciously close to the national Conservatives (British Columbia), or, as in Saskatchewan, dead. The

national Liberal Party in 2006 therefore appeared to embark on the process of rebuilding all on its own.

The party focused its rebuilding efforts in this period on the organizations that it maintains in each of the nation's constituencies. Following Dion's departure as leader in 2009, party elites reaffirmed this focus in a report entitled *Every Voter Counts: The 308 Riding Strategy*. "At present," the authors observed, "many of the Party's Electoral District Associations ... are poorly organized, and some are near dormant." The report emphasized "a number of initiatives ... to revive EDAs and rebuild the Party's presence in areas where we are considered weak" (Liberal Party of Canada 2009, 11). Party reformers argued that the Liberal Party as a whole could only be rebuilt on a foundation of strong organizations in the ridings. Michael Ignatieff, the party's next leader, took this advice in the summer of 2010 when he embarked on a cross-Canada barbeque tour, one goal of which was to engage local activists and reinvigorate the party's grassroots organizations.

This discussion illuminates two key aspects of the institutional context within which the Liberal Party organizes for politics in Canada. First, federalism mandates two distinctive levels of electoral competition, and parties can organize themselves to compete at the national and provincial levels in distinctive ways. Some parties adapt through organizations capable of contesting both national and provincial elections, whereas others steadfastly restrict themselves to a single level. Second, the use of geographically defined constituencies to elect members of Parliament means that the parties must maintain local organizations to select and support local candidates if they hope to win overall. Given the diversity of these constituencies, these tasks fall for the most part to grassroots Liberals in the ridings.

On their own, these two topics have received substantial scholarly attention, particularly from analysts of Canadian party politics. Yet they have not, with a few notable exceptions, been studied in an interconnected manner. How are the constituency organizations of Canadian parties linked between the national and provincial levels? What does the organization of these local groups say about the overall integration, or separation, of national and provincial politics in Canada, especially since most Canadians who participate in political parties do so in the ridings? Do Canadians really live in "two political worlds," to use Donald Blake's (1985) phrase? Or do grassroots Liberals and other partisans sometimes construct local political worlds that encompass both national and provincial politics?

Answering these questions requires a re-examination of Canadian parties' organizational adaptation to federalism, with emphasis placed on their organizations in the ridings. *Grassroots Liberals* undertakes such an examination of the Liberal Party in a multi-level context. Rather than investigating formal linkages between national and provincial parties' permanent structures and elite campaign groups, this study turns the spotlight on the activist bases, constituency associations, and campaigns that comprise the parties' local organizations.

This introduction sets the stage for the analysis that follows. First, I account for federalism as an institutional context that shapes the structures of political parties. I then explore the organizational responses of parties, emphasizing how scholars have previously conceptualized and described party organizations at Canada's national and provincial levels. Next I lay out the defining characteristics of the Liberal Party's constituency organizations – particularly their special, autonomous places within the party's wider structures – and raise the broad questions that structure this inquiry. The introduction closes with an outline of the following chapters.

### **Federalism as an Institutional Context**

Political parties organize themselves partially in response to incentives embedded in the institutional environments within which they compete for public office. Much of the academic literature on party organizations situates those parties within a strictly national, unitary context (Deschouwer 2006, 291). Yet federalism constitutes a vastly different institutional environment, so any account of party organizations in such states must take into account the opportunities presented and the challenges posed by multi-level institutions.

In terms of opportunities, federalism adds locations in which political parties can compete for power. This multiplies the sources of office benefits for parties. In addition, federalism provides parties with opportunities to use provincial organizations as building blocks to construct strong national organizations. The result is that national and provincial parties are able to draw on the strengths of one another, particularly while in power at one level but not at the other. And by maintaining linkages with parties in the provinces, national parties are able to maintain organizations that exist close to citizens. In response to these opportunities, parties can compete at both levels of the federal state, and there are numerous organizational forms adapted to do so.

In terms of disadvantages, the prospect of competing for power at both the national level and the provincial level poses the risk of diluting

efforts, exhausting party workers, and depleting donors' bank accounts. National and provincial party elites at the two levels might also come into conflict with one another, straining linkages between the two levels. Such strains are particularly dangerous when elites are in government at both levels and have vested interests in asserting themselves against one another. In response to these disadvantages, some political parties disengage from one level of competition entirely, instead focusing on either one level of partisan activity.

Federal structures themselves contain incentives to certain forms of party organization. Three aspects of these structures can be identified. First, the extent to which taxing and spending powers are centralized or decentralized exercises an influence on party organizations. In general, elites organize parties to maximize their own power given the distribution of resources within federations. Centralization of resources within federations creates incentives for the development of aggregated national organizations (see Chhibber and Kollman 2004). In contrast, decentralization of resources enhances the rewards associated with provincial office and therefore creates incentives for the development of strong, autonomous provincial parties. Canada is a decentralized federation, which should encourage the development of autonomous provincial parties (Thorlakson 2009, 164-65).

Second, the method of multi-level power division – how responsibilities are defined between the national and provincial levels – also contains incentives for the development of different types of party organizations. Overlapping policy competencies and shared administrative responsibilities between the national and provincial levels encourage cooperation between governments. This method of power division encourages the maintenance of organizational and elite linkages that facilitate cooperation between the two levels. In contrast, systems of federalism characterized by largely separate spheres of policy competence for national and provincial governments mean that parties at the two levels are free to operate without regard for the other level of the state (see Chandler 1987). Organizational linkages between parties at the two levels are therefore largely unnecessary within this institutional context. Canada's system of "dual federalism" therefore contains incentives for the development of decentralized party organizations (Thorlakson 2009, 165).

Third, characteristics of the multi-level electoral regime have important consequences for the organizations of political parties, particularly their campaign structures (see Deschouwer 2006, 296). Simultaneous national and provincial elections provide incentives for national and provincial parties to develop common campaign structures to contest elections that

occur on the same day, whereas different election dates entail national and provincial campaign strategies that reflect the realities of “second-order elections” at the provincial level (Reif and Schmitt 1980).

Of more relevance to this study is the drawing of constituency boundaries at the national and provincial levels. Coterminous boundaries at the two levels mean that national and provincial parties can more easily cooperate in performing their duties both between and during election campaigns, so common constituency organizations are likely to result. But different boundaries complicate linkages between the two levels, so national and provincial parties are forced to maintain separate structures in distinctive geographic spaces (also see Bradbury and Russell 2005, 27-28). National and provincial elections in Canada occur on different days, and constituency boundaries are distinctive in every province except Ontario. These electoral regime characteristics therefore contain incentives for the development of separate, autonomous national and provincial parties.

These three aspects of Canada’s multi-level institutions suggest that Canadian parties encounter substantial incentives to foster organizational decentralization or separation between the two levels. But while characteristics of federalism provide incentives to adopt particular forms of organization, party elites might have a fair amount of freedom in choosing how to adapt their parties to these incentives. Although the “ultimate” sources of party adaptation are found outside parties (Katz and Mair 1992, 9), the pre-existing nature of party organizations must also be taken into account, since the extent to which particular multi-level forms can be imposed on parties depends on distributions of intra-party power (see Koelble 1991). Parties characterized by strong hierarchical patterns of power are likely to be characterized by consistent patterns of integration or separation throughout the organization. But more loosely organized parties characterized by devolved locations of power and mutual autonomy – what Eldersveld (1964) refers to as “stratarchical” parties – might be unable to adapt a single organizational response to the opportunities and challenges posed by federalism.

### **Party Organizations in Multi-Level States**

The question, then, is how have Canada’s political parties responded to this multi-level institutional context? Smiley and Dyck provide two conceptual approaches to understanding party organization in federations. Both follow Riker’s (1964, 129) famous contention that political party organization is the key factor influencing the centralization or decentralization of multi-level systems. However, political parties are

not the primary focus of his analysis, and Riker does not rigorously define centralized and decentralized parties.

Smiley (1987, 103-4) operationalizes Riker's independent variable by distinguishing between integrated and confederal party systems. Integrated systems have crucial organizational and behavioural linkages between parties at the national and provincial levels, whereas the parties of confederal systems are characterized by single-level autonomy. In defining organizational indicators of such systems, Smiley argues that parties in integrated systems have shared nomination and policy formulation processes, common campaign organizations, and common mechanisms for raising and spending money between the two levels. Distinctive processes at the two levels, in contrast, characterize parties in confederal systems. Smiley marshals his framework to explore the nature of the Canadian party system and finds that it is, with some exceptions, strongly confederal in comparison with other multi-level systems (117).

Although Smiley examines the nature of the Canadian party system, he is cautious in applying labels to the parties themselves. In contrast, Dyck (1992, 1996) categorizes Canadian parties on the basis of their linkages between the national and provincial levels. Dyck (1996, 160) distinguishes between three types of parties. *Integrated* parties are those with substantial linkages between the two levels; *confederal* parties are those in which national and provincial branches operate separately from one another; and *truncated* parties exist only at a single level. He conceives of these parties as archetypes, with real-world examples occupying a continuum that ranges between them.

These party types are defined by a series of organizational indicators. Strongly integrated parties are characterized by shared party membership, shared staff, common mechanisms for fundraising and spending money, common campaign organizations, and common leadership selection processes. In contrast, confederal parties issue autonomous national and provincial memberships, have distinctive offices and staff, raise and spend money on their own, and campaign without the assistance of the party at the other level (Dyck 1996, 161). With several caveats, Dyck argues that the New Democratic Party (NDP) can be understood as an integrated party, whereas the Progressive Conservative Party was a confederal party. The Liberal Party occupies a middle ground, sometimes semi-integrated and sometimes semi-confederal (163).

These are the findings that one would expect in a decentralized multi-level state where the method of power division and the electoral regime also favour the development of strong, autonomous provincial parties.

Drawing on Smiley's and Dyck's conceptual approaches, other scholars have come to the conclusion that national and provincial parties in Canada have largely separated their organizations since the 1950s and have, as a result, seen the development of distinctive party systems at the national and provincial levels (see, e.g., Wolinetz 2007, 183). Wolinetz and Carty (2006, 54), for example, commence their contribution to a volume comparing national and subnational party organization and competition in a number of multi-level states by clearly setting out this seemingly unique character of Canadian party politics: "Over time, provincial parties and provincial party systems have become increasingly separate from federal parties and the federal party system ... Most provincial parties are now organizationally distinct and feel no obligation to adhere to a common party line ... The result is a series of federal and provincial party systems that are anything but congruent." It appears, then, that Canadian parties have dealt with the challenges of multi-level institutions by simply opting out – by establishing distinctive organizations and, as a result, party systems at each level with few linkages between them. One of the consequences of this bifurcation has been the weakening and fragmentation of party identifications by Canadians so that by 2000 only about a third of respondents to the national election survey reported identification with the same party at the national and provincial levels (Wolinetz and Carty 2006, 64). In other words, Canadian partisans appear to have come to inhabit two political worlds at the national and provincial levels (Blake 1985).

Before accepting this conclusion, however, we should focus on an aspect of Canadian political parties that has been largely ignored: their organizations in the ridings. In neither Smiley's nor Dyck's accounts are the local organizations of Canada's parties examined as indicators of linkage between the two levels. The implicit line of thought appears to be that local organizations will follow the trends of the wider party: separation of national and provincial parties will necessarily be accompanied by separation on the ground. Indeed, Franks (2007, 26) explicitly makes this argument: "There are ... stark separations at all levels from constituency organization to party headquarters between provincial and national parties bearing the same name."

However, empirical evidence calls into question the view that separation in the upper reaches of the party is matched by separation on the ground. There are several examples. First, in his survey, Carty (1991, 49) found that 64 percent of national constituency associations focus to some extent on both national and provincial politics. In contrast, only 36 percent of the associations surveyed reported an exclusive focus on

national politics. Second, in their study of campaign workers in two Ontario constituencies, Jacek et al. (1972, 194) found significant cross-involvement by local activists in national and provincial elections. Third, Smiley (1987, 117) tentatively notes variation within the parties themselves. “Confederalism is most marked at the higher levels of party organization,” he notes. In contrast, “in the constituencies the same persons often carry out both federal and provincial party activity.” Finally, this speculation is borne out by studies of Canadian party membership: in a 2000 survey, 74 percent of national Liberal party members were also members of provincial Liberal parties (Koop and Sayers 2005, 14).

Although Canada’s national and provincial parties have formally separated, many of the constituency organizations of the national parties appear to be making their own way when it comes to establishing linkages between the two levels. These preliminary findings suggest that the loosely structured Liberal Party has been unable to adopt a single response to multi-level institutional incentives from the top to the bottom of its organization. Such intra-party variation indicates that any account of the Liberal Party’s multi-level form requires some examination of its organizations in the ridings as well as the broader party organizational forms that are able to encompass these constituency structures.

### **Constituency Organizations**

Scholars have argued for some time that the changing structure of party politics has rendered the local organizations of political parties and the members that staff them redundant or even a nuisance (Katz 1997, 145). Declining membership numbers, weakened linkages between parties and citizens, the professionalization of parties, and a new dependence of parties on the state rather than members for funding all suggest that local organizations are of little continuing use to political parties. However, a more recent Revisionist School has asserted the important roles played by local party organizations in linking state to society (see, e.g., Clark 2004). Local organizations provide activists with opportunities to select the personnel that staff government and shape party policy. Extensive local organization boosts the public legitimacy of political parties. Well-staffed local organizations also provide parties with personnel to staff campaign organizations and can be tapped for fundraising purposes. And the view that national election campaigns are strictly national events has been challenged by recent work demonstrating that local campaigning has important electoral consequences (see, e.g., Denver et al. 2003; Whiteley and Seyd 1994).

Constituency party organizations in Canada consist of three components. The first component is the local activist base, which encompasses local members and sympathizers. Constituency associations, the structures that the parties maintain in each of the ridings, are the second component of these local organizations. Although constituency associations encompass the entire local membership, they are provided with leadership by their local executives – small groups of local elites – and are sometimes attached to local auxiliary units. Executives organize local contests to nominate party candidates, so local members have retained the right to select the personnel that staff public office. The local campaigns, which manifest themselves in the lead-up to elections as nominated candidates construct organizations, are the third component. Campaigns are staffed by members of the candidate's inner circle who perform specialized tasks, secondary workers who are available on a regular basis to help with labour-intensive tasks, and sympathizers who drift in and out of campaigns (Sayers 1999, 68-71). Although campaigns are formally separate from the local association, in practice many of the personnel that staff the association executive participate in campaigns as well.

In a diverse country where national electoral victory is dependent on winning in individual ridings, the major parties have always relied on these local organizations to engage grassroots activists, maintain riding-level structures between election campaigns, and nominate and support candidates. An impressive national campaign is useless if the party cannot win in more ridings than the other parties, and doing so requires both competent candidates and local organizations to support them. Because many constituency contests are competitive and there are no runner-up prizes in these plurality races, riding campaigns can impact national election results by altering only a small percentage of local votes (Carty and Eagles 2005, Chapter 8). Recognizing this, Canadian parties often allocate more money for local than for national election campaigns (see, e.g., Stanbury 1991, 586).

Given the diversity of Canadian society, national parties must find ways of appealing to a wide range of frequently conflicting regional and local interests. The decline of national-provincial organizational linkages means that the national Liberal Party has come to rely on its constituency organizations to adapt the party's national appeals to these distinctive regional and local interests. Furthermore, the lack of any substantial extra-parliamentary organization means that the national party must maintain direct linkages with its riding organizations (Sayers

1999, 4, 216). This relationship between the party in central office and the parties on the ground is enumerated through a franchise bargain that grants leaders the power to formulate policy and constituency organizations the right to select candidates for public office (Carty 2002, 733-34). The key to this arrangement is a great deal of autonomy for both actors within their respective spheres.

Local autonomy is assured under the terms of this arrangement in return for the constituency organizations' disciplined support of the party in public office (Carty and Cross 2006, 97). In return for this support, local Liberals enjoy the autonomy necessary to adapt their organizations and operations to the unique ecological, geographic, and competitive conditions of each constituency. This autonomy also allows grassroots Liberals to construct organizations that best reflect their own unique goals as activists, since officials in the upper reaches of the party have little interest in enforcing constituency organizations' compliance with a particular organizational template and virtually no capacity to do so. The result is that different forms of Liberal constituency organization can be observed as one travels from riding to riding.

The Liberal Party's loose, stratarchical structures hold important consequences for understanding how the party is linked between the national and provincial levels. If the constituency organizations of the Liberal Party are relatively autonomous from the national party leadership and exhibit differing organizational forms in response to local demands and activist wishes, then those local organizations also have the capacity to structure themselves in an integrated manner and operate accordingly, with organizational overlap across the national and provincial levels resulting. In short, it is reasonable to expect that some constituency parties will take advantage of their autonomy to organize themselves in ways that link national to provincial when doing so makes sense within the context of their own local environments.

This understanding of the Liberal Party and its local organizations underlies the three sets of questions that structure this inquiry. First, is the national Liberal Party linked to provincial parties through its organizations in the ridings? If so, to what extent? And what are the local behavioural and structural mechanisms through which those constituency organizations integrate national and provincial politics in the ridings?

Second, do the Liberal Party's constituency-level organizations exhibit diversity in how they are linked between the two levels? Variation in the overall organization of these local parties suggests that they do, and preliminary empirical evidence demonstrates that local constituency

associations do differ in their focus on national and provincial politics (Carty 1991, 49). Some local organizations might therefore maintain integrated structures that span national and provincial parties, whereas others confine themselves to the politics of a single level. This then begs the question of what exactly is responsible for the development of integrated local parties in some ridings but not others. Since constituency parties are necessarily adaptive to the conditions of the ridings that they exist within, it is reasonable to expect that the sources of variation can be found mainly in the ridings themselves. As a result, these sources of variation are not easily detectable without close observation in the ridings.

Third, what are the consequences of integrated local organizations for any wider understanding of the Liberal Party and its role in Canadian politics? What lessons do the experiences of the party provide for analyses of political party organizations in other multi-level states, particularly states that employ geographic units of election and representation? Formal processes of national-provincial separation have prompted several scholarly portrayals of the Liberal Party as a single-level organization that disengages entirely from the politics of the provinces, with important consequences for how Canadians identify with and participate in national and provincial politics. But the portrait of the Liberal Party that emerges from this study is significantly more nuanced and demonstrates that the party in fact serves to link national and provincial politics through many of its constituency organizations.

### **The Liberal Party**

This study focuses exclusively on the Liberal Party of Canada and the linkages that it maintains with parties at the provincial level, particularly provincial Liberal parties. Selecting a single national party for analysis was motivated in part by methodological reasons: by doing so, I was able to increase the depth of analysis and construct a richer account of the organization that the Liberal Party has evolved within the context of Canada's multi-level institutions. Many of the findings of this study can be applied to the Conservative Party and particularly the NDP. However, by focusing exclusively on the Liberal Party, this book also makes an important contribution to the limited literature on the Liberal Party of Canada.

Such a contribution is valuable given the electoral success of the Liberal Party and its impact on the development of the country as a whole. Of the forty national elections held since Confederation in 1867, the Liberal Party has won twenty-three (58 percent). This pattern became more

pronounced following the expansion of the franchise in 1918: the Liberals won eighteen of the twenty-seven national elections (67 percent) held since 1918. One might think that political scientists would be intent on understanding the type of organization that the Liberal Party has evolved to attain such a record of electoral success. But this has not been the case; the party has generally been the recipient of less academic attention than the NDP and the minor parties that have occasionally appeared at the national and provincial levels.

When the subject of academic attention, the national Liberal Party is often analyzed as merely one aspect of the wider national party system (see, e.g., Carty, Cross, and Young 2000). Thick descriptive accounts of the national Liberal Party have tended to focus on particular regions and provinces (see, e.g., Smith 1981) rather than on the party as a whole. Whitaker's (1977) and Wearing's (1981) rich accounts of the national Liberal Party organization constitute important exceptions. However, recent accounts of the party have been more focused on party leaders and election campaigns than on the party organization (see, e.g., Clarkson 2005). In contrast, this study explicitly examines the Liberal Party organization in a multi-level context.

### **Outline**

Chapter 1 situates this analysis of the Liberal Party of Canada in a historical context and outlines the empirical framework employed in the book's analytical chapters. Traditional accounts of the relationship between federalism and Canadian parties maintain that the Liberal Party was strongly tied to provincial affiliates until roughly the 1950s, when reformers turned their attention to constructing a single-level national party capable of campaigning on the basis of broad, pan-Canadian themes. The result has been distinctive national and provincial Liberal parties with few organizational linkages between them. But this conception is challenged by the realities of organization and party life in the ridings. I close the chapter by presenting a conceptual continuum used to study the party's local organizations and describing the constituencies that I selected as case studies.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 marshal this conceptual continuum to describe the three aspects of the party's constituency organizations and how they link national to provincial in the ridings. Chapter 2 focuses on local Liberal partisans and the activist bases that they comprise. I pay particular attention to how and why grassroots activists participate in national and provincial politics as well as the consequences of these different forms of participation for the party as a whole. Chapter 3 focuses on

constituency associations and how they are linked between the national and provincial levels, if at all. Chapter 4 concludes the descriptive section of the book by exploring several examples of integrated and differentiated local campaign organizations.

Chapters 5 and 6 turn to explaining variations in local party organization across the ridings. Chapter 5 argues that local integration and differentiation can be traced back to characteristics of the ridings within which these organizations exist. Chapter 6 explores how elected members – national members of Parliament (MPs) and provincial members of legislative assemblies (MLAs)<sup>1</sup> – influence the development of local organizations that are most conducive to their own goals.

Chapter 7 concludes the book by drawing the local narratives contained in previous chapters together into a comprehensive account of the Liberal Party in a multi-level context. Traditional accounts maintain that Canada's national and provincial Liberal parties, like voters, exist in two political worlds (Blake 1985). But Chapter 7 discerns between four distinctive types of local political worlds in the ridings. The chapter constructs portraits of each of these local political worlds – the types of party organizations that they encompass and the factors influencing their development – and explores the consequences of this understanding of the Liberal Party for both Canadian politics and the study of political parties in other multi-level states.

<sup>1</sup> Members of provincial legislatures in Canada have several titles. I use the term “MLA” to refer to these representatives from all provinces.

# 1

## Multi-Level Politics and the Liberal Party

The focus of this book is on how the Liberal Party of Canada is organized between the national and provincial levels of political competition. Many comparative studies have developed ideal-type categories designed to conceptualize the organizational diversity of multi-level political parties (see, e.g., Deschouwer 2006, 292). But these categories necessarily represent snapshots in time; the structures and power relations of party organizations evolve in response to both internal and external influences. A rich understanding of the relationship between federalism and the organization of the Liberal Party therefore requires an accounting of the historical processes that led to the party's current organizational form.

This chapter accordingly charts the organizational evolution of the Liberal Party from a multi-level perspective. It explores how the party has been linked to provincial affiliates in the past and how these linkages have transformed over time. Most accounts of the national Liberal Party maintain that it was largely integrated with provincial cousins until roughly the 1950s, when internal reformers in the party and party leaders in the provinces began to encourage the development of a single-level, pan-Canadian party. This chapter provides an alternative account of the recent historical development of the party by focusing on its local organizations. I argue that the national Liberal Party is best understood not as a single-level party but as an *unevenly integrated party*, integrated in some aspects of its organization but not others. This historical discussion leads into the empirical framework that is marshalled in subsequent chapters to examine the party's constituency organizations as well as a justification of the cases selected and the methodology employed in this study.

### **The Liberal Party as a Traditionally Integrated Party**

The development of Canadian political parties is typically understood within the context of three (and perhaps four) historical party systems. The major parties were organized and appealed to Canadians in quite different ways in each of these systems (Carty 1992, 583). The first system, which existed from 1867 to 1917, was characterized by organizationally weak cadre parties and strong leaders who relied on patronage to sustain the efforts of partisans. The second party system, from 1921 to 1957, was dominated by Liberal Mackenzie King, who practised a unique form of regional brokerage during his long tenure as prime minister. To support this balancing of regional interests, the Liberal Party developed a ministerialist model of party government – characterized by powerful regional ministers and an enmeshing of party and state – that would sustain King in power until the late 1940s but that ultimately weakened the overall party organization (Whitaker 1977). The third party system, beginning in 1963, was characterized by newer professionalized parties and leaders such as Pierre Trudeau and Brian Mulroney, who made personal, catch-all electoral appeals to Canadians. Carty, Cross, and Young (2000) also argue that Canada entered a fourth party system in the 1993 national election, which saw the Conservatives reduced from 169 to 2 seats in Parliament. This conceptualization of Canadian parties' organizational evolution provides a useful context within which to describe the Liberal Party's development from an integrated party to an unevenly integrated party.

The organization of the Liberal Party in the first and second party systems was weak, so the national party often relied on the organizations of provincial parties for support, particularly during election campaigns. With no meaningful extra-parliamentary structures in place, national party leaders allowed provincial elites to oversee local nominations and provide the machinery necessary for national election campaigns (Wearing 1981, 9-10). National campaigns in this period were therefore agglomerations of provincial organizations. Indeed, national dependence on provincial campaign organizations formed the basis for the Liberal victory in the 1896 national election, and Wilfrid Laurier was sworn in as prime minister for the first time partially as a result of the strength of this federalized arrangement.

This decentralized form of party organization – “the use of the cabinet as the mode of organizing the country” – soon took root (Regenstreif 1963, 216). National ministers under this arrangement were linked to

provincial organizations that conducted national election campaigns in their respective provinces. These regional ministers drew on their access to patronage to construct formidable regional and local organizations. As a result, the national and provincial parties maintained linkages with one another, since the national party was largely dependent on provincial organizations to contest election campaigns (Reid 1972, 32). In this period, then, the Liberal Party can be thought of as a *traditionally integrated party* in which there existed organizational ties between the two levels that were crucial to the success of the national party.

Traditionally integrated parties were also characterized by local organizations that the parties relied on to select and support candidates during both national and provincial election campaigns. In traditionally integrated parties, the crucial organizational linkage between the national party and these organizations in the constituencies was routed through intermediary provincial parties. Although differences between national and provincial constituency boundaries mandated formally distinctive national and provincial local organizations, it was usually difficult to distinguish these riding-level organizations from one another (Perlin 1980, 22). These local groups were informally organized, fuelled by patronage, and dominated by groups of local notables who involved themselves in both national and provincial election campaigns. In other words, the personnel of Canada's traditionally integrated Liberal parties coordinated their local structures and resources.

This traditionally integrated party form was well adapted to the incentives offered by federal institutions, where resilient subnational organizations can act as building blocks for a strong national party. Just as patronage fuelled the parties throughout the first party system, so too did it buttress the survival of traditionally integrated party organizations. The crucial "reciprocal benefit" of this arrangement for provincial elites was access to patronage while they were out of power but the national party was in government and vice versa (Smith 1981, 52). Local Liberals could count on largesse from either the national or the provincial government, with the exception of those dark periods when the party sat on the opposition benches at both levels.

Nor was this form of organization embraced by only the Liberal Party; the Conservative Party evolved a similar structure early in the century. Conservative leader Robert Borden, for example, prepared for the 1911 election by reinforcing the national party's ties with provincial affiliates and allies, hoping that premiers and provincial party leaders might strengthen the resolve of their organizations to aid in the national Conservative effort (English 1997, 46-52). As with Laurier in 1896, the

effort paid off, and Borden formed a Conservative government following the 1911 election.

Given these advantages, this traditionally integrated organizational arrangement continued into the second party system during Mackenzie King's lengthy period in office and in fact became formalized as regional ministers oversaw the development of resilient sectional organizations rooted in the politics of the provinces (Smiley 1987, 121). Indeed, the dominance of the regional ministers meant that the position of national organizer was effectively abolished in 1940 (Wearing 1981, 21).

There was, however, always a tension intrinsic to traditionally integrated parties. National parties that are reliant on provincial organizations for campaign personnel and resources inevitably find themselves in a position of weakness compared with provincial elites, who necessarily exist closer to the constituency organizations and grassroots activists that are crucial to success in both national and provincial elections. The national party might therefore be at a disadvantage compared with provincial partners. This tension in the party's traditionally integrated arrangements manifested itself in the 1930s and 1940s when Prime Minister King and Premier of Ontario Mitch Hepburn publicly feuded. As Whitaker (1977, 327) observes of this dispute,

The most immediate weapon which Hepburn could utilize was the control of the provincial leader over the party organization in the province, and the exclusion of the federal party from direct access to the party machinery. Since the Liberal party had never developed separate federal and provincial organizations to any extent, a strong provincial leader could squeeze the federal leaders out of the picture by the simple expedient of dominating the existing party machinery.

When Hepburn ordered his organization to withhold support from national Liberal candidates, activists in the constituencies were placed in a conflicted position, and King was deprived of a large section of the Ontario electoral organization.

The Liberal Party in the second party system was generally understood to be a brokerage party, and the label is sometimes still applied (see, e.g., Merolla, Stephenson, and Zechmeister 2008, 690). Brokerage parties are tasked with standing above the divisions of Canadian society – particularly the sectional divisions nurtured by federal institutional arrangements – and brokering rather than articulating these competing interests so as to avoid exacerbating regional conflicts and thereby threatening the integrity of the state (Carty 2006, 5). But the King-Hepburn conflict

illuminates the inherent contradiction between (1) national parties that are charged with brokering provincial interests and (2) the organizational dependence of these national parties on provincial campaign organizations. This was a paradox that would eventually be resolved for the Liberal Party as the 1950s ushered in a new national party system.

As has always been the case with the Liberal Party, organizational deficiencies were ignored until the party suffered at the ballot box. The party's defeat in the 1957 national election spurred an internal re-examination of the traditionally integrated party model and especially of regional ministers' influence over the campaign machinery in the provinces. Electoral disaster in the subsequent 1958 election both marginalized the regional ministers, nine of whom went down to defeat in their own ridings, and lent new urgency to the internal reform program. Party reformers were intent on constructing a pan-Canadian organization that would be capable of contesting national election campaigns without the support of provincial organizations, thus overcoming the paradox of national brokerage parties that are reliant on provincial organizations for their success (Smith 1981, 52).

The key to organizational renewal was to loosen the grip of the old, sectionally oriented regional ministers over the national party organization. Cutting ties with the provincial organizations and constructing an autonomous national campaign organization allowed the national party to run on broad, pan-Canadian themes without fearing Hepburn-style retaliations from provincial allies. Even the quintessential regional minister, Jimmy Gardiner of Saskatchewan, recognized in this period that the party's traditionally integrated structures desperately required reforms, if only because the failing provincial Liberal parties represented poor organizational bases for the national party (Smith 1981, 53).

The influence of these reformers – particularly Keith Davey as national organizer from 1961 to 1966 – meant that the party began the process of extricating itself from dependence on provincial party organizations following the 1958 defeat. What the reformers advocated and what developed was a parallel set of national and provincial Liberal organizations. The reformers, for example, developed new mechanisms for policy formulation at the national level without input from provincial elites. In addition, national campaigns were run by a centralized campaign committee as well as campaign chairpersons in each province, all appointed by the leader. Notes Smiley (1987, 10), “this centralized pattern of control left little decisive influence in federal campaigns for the provincial wings of the party.” Indeed, there was little room for the influence of regional ministers and the provincial organizations in a

national party that was increasingly embracing modern techniques of organization and campaigning. Although national and provincial party leaders could construct informal alliances prior to election campaigns (Clarkson 2005, 41-42), the deep-seated linkages between the central components of the national and provincial parties were dissolving.

Some provincial elites were caught off guard by the initiative of reformers in the national party. This was especially true for provincial Liberals in Saskatchewan, where the national and provincial organizations had previously been strongly integrated (Smith 1981, 65). But other provincial elites encouraged separation, since formal affiliations between parties at the two levels were increasingly problematic by the 1950s for provincial leaders. This was because the evolution of provincial societies had led to the rise of successful third parties at this level and, consequently, the development of new provincial party systems. Cairns (1977, 715) observes that “parties at different levels of the federal system exist in different socioeconomic environments, respond to different competitive situations, and are products of particular patterns of historical development, and historical accidents.” Incongruence between the national and provincial party systems in British Columbia and Quebec, for example, strained traditionally integrated party organizations in those provinces as far back as the 1940s as provincial leaders struggled to respond to distinctive provincial demands while maintaining friendly relations with the national party (Black 1972, 122; Rayside 1978, 508). Provincial party leaders wished for free rein in responding to the distinctive incentives embedded in their respective party systems without having to account for the wishes and actions of the national party. The leader of the provincial party in Alberta, for example, argued for organizational separation so that he would be freed from “the albatross of having to explain every asinine move Ottawa makes” (quoted in Smiley 1987, 111). Provincial elites were increasingly likely by the 1950s to approve of and encourage processes of disentanglement.

Old party hands, confronted with the 1958 election defeat, argued that the best way to regroup was to elect provincial Liberal governments that would in turn act as building blocks on which the national party could be rebuilt – in other words, a return to the traditionally integrated party form (McCall-Newman 1982, 18). This argument did not carry the day, and in fact party reformers ruled out any return to the traditionally integrated organization following the party’s return to office after the 1963 election (Smiley 1987, 110). As a result, the third party system beginning in 1963 differed from the two previous systems in that national and provincial party organizations appeared for the first time in Canadian

history to be disentangling. A key point not explored in previous accounts of Canada's historical party systems is that the pan-Canadian electoral appeals that characterized this system were made possible by the separation of the national Liberal Party from its previous benefactors in the provinces.

Since Canadian parties are dominated by their leaders, separation was assured once those leaders came to identify their own interests with the disentanglement of national and provincial organizations. Formal separation was therefore reinforced by the increasing importance of inter-governmental negotiations that were a characteristic of the third party system, for national and provincial government leaders were keen to minimize partisan obstacles to effective negotiations at first ministers' conferences (Painter 1991, 284). Cairns (1977, 716) argues that in the third party system "party solidarity across jurisdictions [was] sacrificed for the greater good of intergovernmental agreement." Incongruence between the national party system and those of several of the provinces also reinforces the organizational separation of parties at the two levels, since the differing competitive demands placed on national and provincial Liberal parties means that they might in fact have little in common. Many national Liberal activists in British Columbia, for example, argue that the provincial party in that province has more in common with the national Conservative Party than the national Liberal Party; given such perceptions, a return to any form of traditionally integrated organization is out of the question.

It therefore appears that Canada's national and provincial Liberal parties have evolved from traditionally integrated to single-level parties and that any meaningful organizational linkages between the parties have been severed. Whereas provincial organizations had previously acted as intermediaries between the national party leadership and the organizations in the ridings, Lester Pearson's goal of "a direct link between federal electoral districts ... and the national office of the party" appeared to have been realized (quoted in Smith 1981, 53). This process of organizational separation culminated in the formal separation of the national and provincial Liberal parties in Quebec in 1964, Ontario in 1976, Alberta in 1977, and British Columbia in 1993 (Smiley 1987, 111). Formal separation was largely a symbolic acknowledgment of the practical separation of the national and provincial parties that had already taken place.

### **The Liberal Party as an Unevenly Integrated Party**

What was taking place in the constituencies while these dramatic processes of national-provincial disentanglement were playing out? As it

turns out, not a great deal, for the fundamental aspects of constituency organization and campaigning in Canada have never changed significantly. Constituency associations still consist of groups of local elites who come together occasionally to organize picnics and nomination meetings; local candidates still shake hands, drop in to local establishments, give speeches, and encourage supporters to get out to the polls on election day. In other words, there is not much about Canadian party organization “that would surprise constituency politicians of earlier generations” (Carty 1991, 184).

In the same way, many of the ridings’ entangled national and provincial organizations did not change significantly throughout the twentieth century. As events swirled around them, the constituency parties tended to retain their old integrated organizations. The result has been that the Liberal Party in many ridings has maintained organizations that span national and provincial politics in terms of both local structures and personnel. These organizations are integrated between the two levels rather than divided between them. The result is that the Liberal Party can be understood as an *unevenly integrated party*, integrated between the national and provincial levels in some aspects of its organization but not others.

There are two interconnected reasons why many national and provincial groups in the ridings have not disentangled their organizations. Local organizations within the overall structure enjoy the necessary autonomy to withstand any attempts by the party in central office to impose particular forms of organization on them. Constituency party activists are typically resistant to reform efforts imposed from the outside, and the freedom of grassroots Liberals to structure their organizations in the ways that they choose to do so are enumerated in the party’s franchise bargain. Cut off from the pressures facing the party in Ottawa, the local groups have maintained organizational forms that are best adapted to their own particular needs, and this extends to their organization between the national and provincial levels. Local party activists are generally somewhat conservative in their “fondness ... for existing practices” and in the sense that they tend to stick with what has worked in the past; for many grassroots Liberals, what works are local structures that are integrated between the national and provincial levels (Russell 2005, 214).

Integrated organizations work for many Liberal activists because these organizations have several advantages over local parties that are differentiated between the two levels. This is true with respect to local structures, personnel, resources, and party life. Integrated organizations are

better suited to coordinating the efforts of local personnel and directing local activists to service at the level where they are most needed. Integrated constituency parties also make more efficient use of local resources than do differentiated organizations. Rather than marshalling dual sets of resources at the national and provincial levels, integrated organizations meet demands at both levels with the same resources (see Carty 1994, 138; Whitaker 1977, 416). Integrated organizations offer (1) enhanced opportunities for grassroots activists to pursue their own goals at both levels and (2) an expanded party life that encompasses both national and provincial politics in the ridings. So, though party leaders might face incentives to achieve disentanglement, elites in the ridings frequently face incentives to foster integration.

These inherent benefits of local integration, however, are not experienced equally across all constituencies. This is because other factors rooted in the politics of the ridings can themselves render local integration either undesirable or unworkable. Research in the ridings revealed three such factors.

The first factor is the structure of national and provincial party systems, which constitute the key competitive context within which integrated and differentiated organizations develop. There are three aspects of this context that can complicate local integration. First, parties might be present at both the national and provincial levels, but their competitive positions within these systems might be vastly different. In some provinces, the national Liberal Party is a force to be reckoned with, yet provincial Liberals struggle to win votes; the inverse is also true. Second, parties might be truncated: successful at one level but entirely absent from the other (Thorlakson 2009, 161). Such truncation can be a result of electoral decimation at a single level (the Saskatchewan Liberal Party, for example, was historically dominant but is now uncompetitive) or of deliberate design by elites at one level, as was the case with the national Reform Party (Stark 1992, 144). Third, parties might be present at both levels but nevertheless advocate quite different policies (Blake 1982, 710). Given that the competitive demands confronting leaders of national and provincial parties can be distinctive, ideological dissimilarity between the two levels often occurs naturally since Canadian parties do not have common policy formulation processes. Even if such processes existed, party leaders would pick and choose the parties' policies and campaign themes. As will be seen, British Columbia's national and provincial parties are typically viewed as ideologically distinctive.

When the same parties are competitive at both levels, and those parties are ideologically similar, then activists face few party system obstacles

to becoming involved at both levels. It is also easier for local organizations to build linkages between the two parties in the ridings. But when there are competitive differences between the two levels, and parties of the same name are ideologically distinctive, then activists confront obstacles to participation at the two levels. Local activists who wish to construct linkages between national and provincial organizations must find new ways of bridging differing competitive situations at the two levels and of reconciling parties that occupy different spaces on the ideological spectrum. These are daunting tasks, and differentiated local parties are more likely to result when the national and provincial systems differ.

The second factor that complicates local integration is found in the ridings themselves. Geographic characteristics of constituencies as well as the manner in which their boundaries are drawn between the national and provincial levels can evoke practical obstacles to the development of integrated local parties.

Coterminous national and provincial constituency boundaries encourage the development of integrated local organization in three ways. First, coterminous boundaries provide a common base of operations for both the national and the provincial organizations, facilitating cooperation between them. In these cases, national and provincial organizations service identical geographic areas and respond to identical local demands at both national and provincial levels. Second, since there is only a single national and a single provincial organization in each riding, any cooperative processes are simplified. National and provincial organizations might come to be seen as partners, pursuing identical goals in different electoral realms – this equality is an extension of the relationships between MPs and MLAs in coterminous ridings, which stand in sharp contrast to such relationships in small provinces such as New Brunswick, where MLAs might be viewed as “poor cousins” to MPs (Franks 2007, 38). Third, activists in coterminous ridings that participate in national events and campaigns are able to do so at the provincial level among the same friends and activists. The result is that common riding boundaries decrease the costs of local cooperation and encourage the development of integrated constituency organizations.

Conversely, distinctive national and provincial riding boundaries are obstacles to local integration. When national and provincial boundaries are distinctive, local parties must organize themselves in different spaces and in response to differing demands (Bradbury and Russell 2005, 27-28). The presence of several provincial organizations within the boundaries of a single national riding means that a range of local actors must

be recruited to create integrated organizations – the process of cooperation between the national and provincial levels is therefore complicated. Rather than a federal-provincial partnership, integrated organizations in this context must take on the form of an agglomeration of one national and up to eight provincial organizations all operating in different geographic spaces and facing distinctive local demands. And distinctive boundaries also mitigate against participation at both levels, for activists who participate as a group at the national level can find themselves split up into several provincial ridings and therefore unable to participate as a group during provincial elections. For these reasons, distinctive national and provincial boundaries raise the cost of local integration, and differentiated local organizations can result.

The third factor influencing the development of integrated and differentiated local organizations is the preference of MPs and/or MLAs in the ridings. Once elected, MPs wield a significant degree of influence over local organizations, and the paid staff whom they maintain in the ridings often become involved in constituency associations (Sayers 1999, 62). The result is that incumbents play important, though not decisive, roles in shaping the character of their local organizations. This influence extends to whether the organizations are integrated or differentiated. In some cases, MPs encourage the development of integrated local organizations because it suits their electoral goals to do so. But in other cases, for a variety of reasons, MPs are cool to the idea of local integration and act as obstacles to national-provincial cooperation. In these cases, grassroots activists find it very difficult to construct integrated local organizations in direct opposition to the wishes of the local MP. For this reason, MPs and MLAs can significantly raise the costs of local integration.

However, the extent to which incumbents can influence their organizations is limited by local traditions. In some ridings, a long tradition of local integration makes it difficult for incumbents to craft differentiated local organizations. But the absence of such a tradition means that incumbents have greater influence.

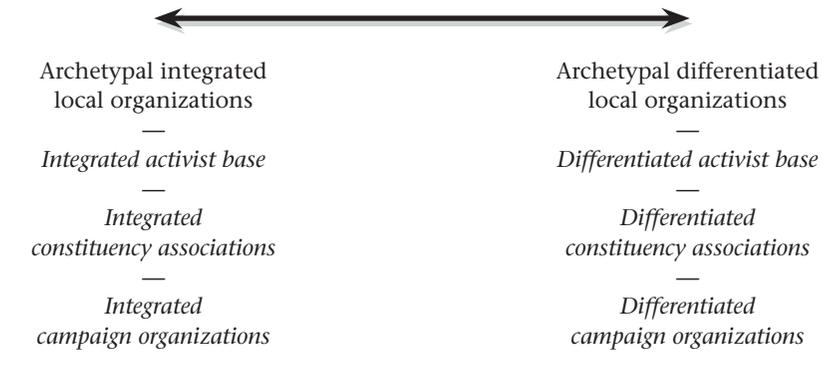
Local electoral strength is also related to the development of integrated and differentiated organizations. Integration requires committed local activists willing to reach out to the association at the other level. As a result, ineffectual “paper” organizations are very unlikely to be integrated. However, though local competitiveness is a prerequisite for integration, it is not a sufficient condition. As we will see, some strong local organizations remain differentiated between the national and provincial levels.

Figure 1.1

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**A continuum of local party organizations**


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These factors manifest themselves in varying combinations across the constituencies. Some ridings will be within provinces where the national and provincial party systems are identical; where the policies of parties at the two levels are similar; where national and provincial riding boundaries are congruent; and where the incumbent MP and MLA do their part to encourage cooperation between the two levels. In other cases, there are few similarities between the politics of the national and provincial levels; national ridings are splintered into numerous provincial constituencies; and MPs and MLAs are hostile to one another as well as to organizational cooperation. In the former riding, the costs of integration will be very low. It is therefore possible, even likely, that local activists will pursue organizational integration given its advantages. But the system, regime, and political conditions of the latter riding increase the costs of local integration, perhaps to prohibitive levels. This riding is therefore likely to see the development of differentiated local organizations.

The result is significant diversity in the relative integration and differentiation of local party organizations. Figure 1.1 captures this diversity through an inductively formulated continuum that ranges between two organizational archetypes and lists how three aspects of these local organizations – the activist base, constituency association, and local campaign – manifest themselves in these archetypes.

It is possible to plot constituency parties somewhere on this continuum based on the extent to which their different aspects link national to provincial or differentiate those two levels. Fully integrated constituency

organizations exist where all local activists participate in both national and provincial politics, where the constituency associations of the national and provincial parties are fused, and where national and provincial campaign organizations draw on identical personnel and resources. In sharp contrast, fully differentiated constituency organizations are characterized by distinctive activist bases, no linkages whatsoever between the national and provincial constituency associations, and fully separate national and provincial campaigns.

In practice, few local organizations resemble these archetypes; they must therefore be placed on the continuum somewhere between purely integrated and purely differentiated local parties. By investigating the extent to which local organizations are integrated between the national and provincial levels, one can use this continuum to plot local party organizations relative to one another and compare their characteristics across the ridings. The following three chapters explore the three aspects of local organizations summarized in Figure 1.1: Chapter 2 focuses on party activists, Chapter 3 on constituency associations, and Chapter 4 on campaigns. One implication of the academic view that national and provincial parties are separated is that those parties have contributed to the creation of two political worlds for Canadians (Blake 1985). As we will see, integrated and differentiated party organizations engender several different types of political worlds in the ridings.

### **The Provinces and Ridings**

Since this is a study characterized by intensive study of a relatively small number of cases, the selection of ridings in which to explore local party organizations was crucial. Case selection was guided by my initial and ongoing suspicions about which factors influence the development of integrated and differentiated local organizations. Some case ridings were abandoned and others added during the course of the field research as I gained a clearer understanding of the factors involved in developing and maintaining integrated and differentiated organizations. This method of case selection reflects Fenno's (1978, 3) experiences as a participant researcher observing members of Congress in their districts: "I spent a lot of time trying to figure out a priori what types of [constituencies] ... might pose serious tests for, or exceptions to, whatever generalizations seemed to be emerging ... Data collection and data analysis ... proceed simultaneously." Table A.1 in the appendix lists the New Brunswick, Ontario, and BC constituencies studied along with the characteristics that are relevant to this study.

Table 1.1

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**National and provincial ridings in Ontario, British Columbia,  
and New Brunswick**


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Province	National ridings	Provincial ridings	Provincial ridings per national riding
Ontario	106	107	1.0
British Columbia	36	79	2.2
New Brunswick	10	55	5.5

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The inclusion of a Maritime province in this study was necessitated by the prevailing academic view that national and provincial parties in those provinces are somewhat more integrated than those in other provinces (see, e.g., Smiley 1987, 117). This is certainly the case in New Brunswick, where the national and provincial Liberal parties continue to share a common party office (also see Whitaker 1977, 389). New Brunswick provides opportunities to explore the Maritime brand of national-provincial party cooperation and to clarify what exactly that cooperation entails.

Ontario ridings were included as case studies because Ontario is the only Canadian province with identical national and provincial constituencies. Table 1.1 contrasts the number of national and provincial ridings in Ontario at the time of this study with those of British Columbia and New Brunswick.

The 1996 Fewer Politicians Act in Ontario linked provincial constituency redistributions to national redistributions (Pond 2005, 171). This means that, with the exception of some northern ridings, national and provincial constituencies in Ontario are identical. National and provincial parties in Ontario therefore organize in identical geographic spaces, organize themselves in response to the same local imperatives, encounter similar obstacles, and compete for support from the same voters. Including Ontario case studies allowed me to explore the impact of co-terminous national and provincial constituency boundaries on local party organizations.

Conversely, including ridings from British Columbia and New Brunswick allowed me to explore the impact of distinctive national and provincial riding boundaries. In contrast to Ontario, British Columbia's national constituencies contained roughly two provincial ridings at the time of analysis; New Brunswick's national constituencies were splintered

Table 1.2

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**National and provincial election results and effective numbers of elective parties**

Province <i>Most recent election</i>	Liberal vote	Conservative vote	NDP vote	Effective number of elective parties
Ontario				
National	33.8	39.2	18.2	3.3
Provincial	42.2	31.6	16.8	3.2
<i>Difference</i>	8.4	7.6	1.4	0.1
New Brunswick				
National	32.5	39.4	21.9	3.1
Provincial	47.1	47.5	5.1	2.2
<i>Difference</i>	14.6	8.1	16.8	0.9
British Columbia				
National	19.3	44.5	26.1	3.8
Provincial	45.8	n/a	41.5	2.6
<i>Difference</i>	26.5	n/a	15.4	1.2

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into five or six provincial ridings. Whereas identical ridings facilitate processes of local integration, dissimilarity complicates these processes, so local activists in British Columbia and New Brunswick must adapt new strategies to construct integrated local organizations. The selection of ridings from these three provinces allowed me to explore the adaptive behaviours of local activists in three contexts: Ontario, where national and provincial ridings are identical; British Columbia, where national ridings are divided; and New Brunswick, where national ridings are splintered into several provincial constituencies.

Case studies were selected from British Columbia in order to explore the impact of distinctive national and provincial parties and party systems on local organization. To approximate the similarity of the national and provincial party systems in the three provinces studied, Table 1.2 lists the vote shares of the major parties in the 2008 national election; the provincial elections that immediately preceded it; and the effective number of elective parties in each of these elections.<sup>1</sup> These are crude measures of similarity between the two levels, but they do provide an

<sup>1</sup> The effective number of parties summarizes the number of parties in a system and weights the count by their relative strength. I summarize the effective number of elective parties ( $N_v$ ) (Markku and Taagepera 1979).

approximate picture of national-provincial differences in the three provinces studied.

Canadians in Ontario confront very similar choices at the national and provincial levels, and party competition at the two levels in the provinces studied is also comparable. In these provinces, the Liberal and Conservative parties are the major contenders, and the NDP constitutes a third party. This is true at both the national level and the provincial level of electoral competition: the effective numbers of parties at the two levels are nearly identical. The result is that participation at one level in Ontario is easily transferred to the other level, and many Liberals therefore participate in both the national and the provincial parties.

New Brunswick displays similarities between the two levels, but there are also differences. To a large extent, these party system differences between the two levels are due to the differing competitive situations of the national and provincial New Democratic parties in the province: whereas the party is not successful in provincial elections, it collects a respectable number of votes (if not seats) in national elections. This is reflected in the effective number of parties: the national system contains approximately one more party than the provincial system. Although there are differences between patterns of competition at the two levels, the difference for the national and provincial Liberal parties is not extreme.

Ontario and New Brunswick differ sharply from British Columbia, where there are important competitive and ideological differences between party competition at the national and provincial levels. This is particularly true for Liberal partisans. The provincial party system in British Columbia is dominated by two parties, the Liberals and NDP, and the Green Party is somewhat competitive. The situation is starkly different at the national level, where all three major parties are competitors; indeed, British Columbia's leading party at the national level is essentially a fringe party at the provincial level. Of particular note is the different competitive situations of the national and provincial Liberal parties; whereas the provincial party has formed the government in the past three elections, the national party regularly garners fewer votes in the province than the Conservatives and NDP. Given the lack of continuity between the two levels, non-NDP supporters and activists in this context are unable to rely on party labels as heuristics to guide their support for national and provincial parties (Thorlakson 2006, 43).

In addition, the national and provincial Liberal parties in British Columbia are generally perceived to be ideologically distinctive, with the provincial party assuming a right-of-centre position following the

collapse of the provincial Social Credit Party in the early 1990s. Cross and Young (2004, 429), for example, note an “affinity” between the provincial Liberal Party and the national Canadian Alliance, a predecessor to the national Conservative Party. Differences between these parties and party systems serve to confuse linkages between the two levels for many activists and voters and are therefore obstacles to the development of integrated local organizations. Including BC ridings as case studies allowed me to explore how activists cope with distinctive national and provincial systems of partisan competition in the process of constructing their own local organizations.

Within each of these provinces, ridings that differ in their geographic, ecological, competitive, and political characteristics were selected. Both urban and rural constituencies were selected in each province. The dilemmas of local party organization differ markedly in these constituencies. So do processes of local integration, for national and provincial parties attempt to engage with one another within either vast, sparsely populated rural ridings or small, diverse urban constituencies. Chapter 5 explores how these riding conditions affect local integration and differentiation.

Ridings were also selected based on the competitive situations of the Liberal Party in each of them. There is significant regional variability in the Liberal Party’s competitiveness, with the result that some candidates regularly garner a majority of votes cast while others stand in as “stop-gap candidates” for a party with no real organization or chance of winning (Sayers 1999, 79). A crucial finding of Carty’s (1991, 71) study of Canadian constituency associations is that many are in fact “paper associations,” groups that exist only on paper so that the parties can make claims of a pan-Canadian presence. Local competitiveness matters for the subject addressed here because national-provincial integration requires some degree of organization in the ridings. Since paper associations struggle to maintain any viable organizational presence, they lack the ability to maintain integrative linkages with organizations at the other level. In most cases, integration requires that local party officials reach out to the party at the other level to construct linkages, and paper associations and other weak local parties lack the personnel to do so. In contrast, more competitive organizations will have sufficient personnel and therefore the capacity to do so. The expectation is therefore that electorally strong parties are more likely to be integrated, whereas weak organizations are more likely to be differentiated.

Tables A.2 and A.3 in the appendix list the most proximate national and provincial election results to the period when I conducted fieldwork.

The national ridings include Liberal strongholds such as York West (in which Judy Sgro won 64.7 percent of the vote in the 2004 national election) and wastelands such as Kootenay-Columbia. Most ridings selected range between these two extremes. There is similar diversity among the provincial constituencies studied, sometimes even within the boundaries of the same national ridings. Within New Brunswick's Acadie-Bathurst, for example, Liberal candidates in the 2003 provincial election won with a clear majority of votes cast in Nepisiguit; narrowly won by less than a single percentage point in the neighbouring riding of Centre-Péninsule; and were decisively defeated in Lameque-Shippagan-Miscou with a margin of 24 percent for the Tory candidate. Including a diversity of competitiveness among the local organizations studied allowed me to explore the effect of electoral strength on local integration and differentiation.

Finally, ridings with and without Liberal MPs and MLAs were selected. The presence of incumbents is naturally related to the competitiveness of local party organizations. However, incumbents play special, privileged roles in shaping the party organizations in their constituencies. Incumbents can be expected to "use the perks of political success to strengthen the organizational resources of [the] local party," with "strong, often highly personal, local organizations" resulting (Carty and Eagles 2005, 37). They result in part from the influence of incumbents on elites in the local party – although these elites cannot always be dictated to – as well as incumbents' willingness to involve their paid constituency staff in the affairs of the party organization (Sayers 1999, 62). The implication of this influence is that, though competitiveness is expected to be related to local integration, incumbents can use their influence over the local party to encourage the development of either integrated or differentiated constituency parties. The questions, then, are why incumbents take these different approaches and how they go about getting their way when it comes to organization in the ridings.

Table A.1 in the appendix lists the partisan affiliations of national and provincial incumbents in each of the ridings studied. In some ridings, such as Ajax-Pickering and Don Valley East, there are Liberal incumbents at both the national level and the provincial level. This raises the question of relations between incumbents at the two levels and their effects on local integration or differentiation. Other ridings have incumbents at one level but not the other (e.g., Richmond Hill and Perth-Wellington). This particular configuration provides opportunities for incumbents at one level to encourage integration by assisting the organization at the other level; however, incumbents might not embrace these opportunities.

Still other ridings have Liberal incumbents at neither level, and the local organizations are accordingly deprived of the perks associated with having an MP or MLA of their own. In New Brunswick and British Columbia, distinctive national and provincial constituency boundaries mean that there will likely be a combination of Liberal and non-Liberal incumbents at the two levels.

Any study that examines a small number of cases inevitably raises questions about why some cases were chosen and others were not. For this study, ridings in British Columbia, Ontario, and New Brunswick were selected for three reasons. First, as described above, they were ideal provinces to explore the factors that appeared to influence the development of integrated and differentiated local organizations.

Second, focusing on a small number of cases allowed me to develop a deeper understanding of how constituency organizations function in each of these provinces. Including more provinces in the analysis would have expanded the width of the analysis but at the cost of depth. And since the question of how the parties organize between the national and provincial levels in the ridings is largely unexplored, it is appropriate to focus on a small number of cases to generate theory about the phenomenon (Small 2009).

Third, qualitative research is costly in terms of time and resources. By limiting the provinces in which I conducted field research, I was able to maximize the number of interviews conducted in each. And by conducting research in only three provinces, I was able to explore several different types of ridings within each. The result is a rich exploration of local party organization in the three selected provinces. The price of this depth is that other provinces with interesting national-provincial party dynamics – particularly Quebec and Saskatchewan – are left out of the analysis. However, the framework of analysis developed in later chapters can and should be applied to party organizations in these provinces. I tentatively explore the implications of this framework for several provinces in the concluding chapter.

The same can be said of the decision to study a single party rather than all three major national parties. The primary drawback of this research design decision is that variability in national-provincial integration among the parties cannot be observed. Since previous studies have demonstrated that such variability does exist, with the NDP more integrated and the Conservatives more decentralized than the Liberal Party (Dyck 1992), this decision prevents this work from exploring the causes of these differences. Furthermore, the effect of different types of party organizations – predominantly cadre for the Liberal and Conservative

parties and mass for the NDP – on integration and differentiation cannot be explored. However, the focus on a single party allows for a deeper understanding not only of the Liberal Party but also of the ways that integration takes place in the constituencies. This study draws on observation of a single party to develop inductively an empirical framework that can be applied to other parties, even in other institutional settings outside Canada.

### **Watching and Talking to Grassroots Liberals**

The empirical research for this study consisted mostly of watching local party organizations in action and talking to party activists themselves. The fieldwork for this project took place between January 2006 and June 2007. Participant observation was an important aspect of this field research. I attended association executive meetings, inter-election maintenance events, information meetings, fundraisers, informal functions, and outings of local activists. I also attended nomination contests and worked on a local election campaign.

In addition to this participant observation, I conducted seventy-six semi-structured interviews and engaged in a great deal more informal conversations with local party activists. Most interviewees were members of constituency association executives or had been active in local campaigns. I also interviewed former MPs and MLAs, officials with the national and provincial parties, and a few activists from the national Conservative Party.

The interviews themselves consisted of a combination of scripted and non-scripted questions. The early interviews were largely unstructured as I explored the nature of local party organization. No set interview schedule was ever developed. Instead, prior to each interview, I planned a series of questions and probes specifically for that activist in light of his or her own knowledge and experiences (to the extent that I knew what they were ahead of time). Activists were able to clarify accounts provided in previous interviews and provide fresh perspectives on occurrences within the riding, contributing to the development of several local narratives that make up the case studies contained in the chapters that follow.

### **Conclusion**

Prior to the 1950s, Canada's national and provincial Liberal parties maintained deeply intertwined organizations as the national party relied on its provincial cousins to provide the electoral machinery necessary to win national elections. Following the 1957 and 1958 defeats, the party

appears to have moved closer to a single-level archetype as successive party leaders sought to construct a pan-Canadian national party free from the grip of regional ministers and organizations. Yet the party's riding organizations have been free to retain their old integrated forms and in many cases have done so given the inherent advantages of integrated constituency organizations.

One result of many local activists' stubborn attachment to integrated local structures has been the development of an organizational incongruence between the central component of the Liberal Party, which is largely separated from those of the provincial Liberal parties, and the local components in many of the ridings, which are often linked between the two levels. While the Liberal Party in Ottawa has evolved an essentially single-level organization, the Liberal Party in many of the nation's communities has retained organizations rooted simultaneously in both national and provincial politics. This incongruence between the central and local components of the Liberal Party is the defining characteristic of what I refer to as unevenly integrated parties: a type of multi-level party that is integrated between the national and provincial levels in some aspects of its organization but not others.

If Canada's Liberal Party does fit the unevenly integrated party model, then we know a great deal about how the party's central components are separated but little about how its local components remain, to a significant extent, integrated between the national and provincial levels. Accordingly, the chapters that follow analyze the local organizations that the party maintains in the ridings. The next chapter turns to the grassroots activists who staff those local organizations and explores how these activists both identify with and participate in national and provincial politics.

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