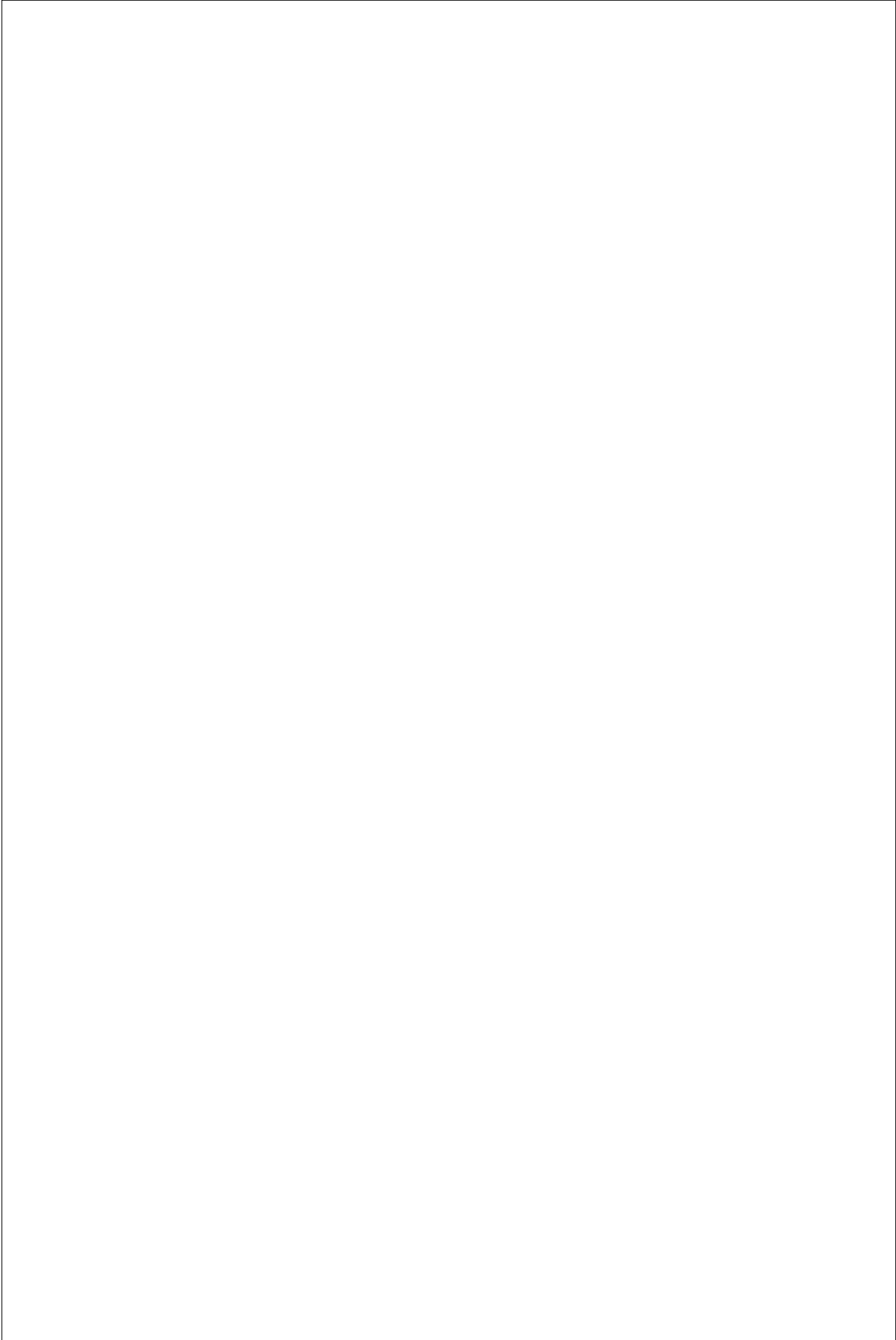

Conventional Choices



1

Choosing Leaders

In representative democracies, leaders matter. They articulate, they persuade, they organize, they represent, and, most significantly, they choose. In some measure, we are all products of the activities of political leaders. Of course, the reverse is also true. Democratic leaders are not imposed from without; rather, they are imbued with the social structure and political culture of their particular body politic, and once elected to office, these pressures are more likely to be magnified than to be diminished. Even so, democratic leaders are not mere epiphenomenal froth driven by structural currents and breaking on institutional shoals; like all human agents, they combine idiosyncratic psychological and attitudinal profiles with a capacity for self-reflection. As a result, leaders can think and act with some degree of personal autonomy, and different leaders will confront the same set of political circumstances in different ways. In representative democracies, it bears repeating, leaders matter.

The selection of leaders is typically a two-stage process. The leadership of a political party is usually secured before the stewardship of the body politic can be won, although occasionally the former is a sufficient, as well as a necessary, condition of the latter. This is a book about the first of these stages, about the intraparty, rather than the interparty, struggle for power. In order to understand better their choices, we explore the backgrounds, the attitudes, and the motivations of those who select party leaders. We also consider what distinguishes winners from losers, what separates the few who succeed from the many who fail in their quest for party leadership. Parties and their leadership elections are an important part of political life in Canada, and relevant divisions in the wider polity are likely to animate leadership elections as well.¹ Analysis of leadership elections thus provide us with insight into political life more generally.

Leadership selection has been extensively scrutinized by the Canadian scholarly community. As Anthony Sayers notes: "Given that voters indirectly elect first ministers from among the leaders selected by their parties,

this selection process has been a key concern of the study of leadership in Canada."² Beginning in 1968 with Donald Smiley's path-breaking article,³ a number of this country's top political scientists have concentrated their analytical attention on the matter of leadership selection. We now know a great deal about the representativeness of convention attendees, about candidate motivations and career patterns, and about the influence on voting behaviour of money, ideology, the media, social structure, institutional rules, and a host of other variables. Indeed, the literature on leadership selection in our national parties grew so rapidly that, as early as 1976, Stephen Clarkson was openly questioning whether additional research would be "of any interest."⁴

Studies of provincial leadership conventions, however, were slower to emerge. In 1973, Courtney had reminded scholars that "the selection of provincial party leaders deserves nothing less than separate and complete studies."⁵ Thirteen years later, however, Gibbins and Hunziker were still lamenting that "provincial leadership conventions have been ignored despite their greater frequency, their growing size and complexity and their growing importance to provincial political life."⁶ Only in recent times has this disciplinary lacuna begun to be filled, most notably with two volumes from Carty, Erickson, and Blake and the Stewart and Archer treatise.⁷ Even so, there remain vast gaps in our understanding of leadership selection in the provinces. Here, our focus will be on leadership selection in the three Maritime provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island.

Since 1971, members of the Department of Political Science at Acadia University have been surveying participants at Maritime leadership contests.⁸ As a result of this effort, a rich data set spanning twenty-five conventions over thirty-two years has been gathered (Table 1.1 provides an overview). As can be seen, the data set, while extensive, is not complete; data collection has been most comprehensive in Nova Scotia. In fact, from John Buchanan's second ballot victory in 1971 through to 2003, only one of that province's leadership contests (the 1997 Liberal gathering)⁹ is absent from the data set. In the other two provinces, however, surveys have been conducted more sporadically. There have, for example, been no surveys of the New Democratic Party (NDP) in New Brunswick and only one in Prince Edward Island, omissions that speak volumes about the importance of the NDP in the political life of those provinces. However, a number of leadership elections held by major parties were not surveyed. For instance, the 1971 and 1978 gatherings of the New Brunswick Liberals (which elected Robert Higgins and Joe Daigle, respectively) and the 1989 (Barbara Baird-Filliter), 1991 (Dennis Cochrane), and 1995 (Bernard Valcourt) conventions of the New Brunswick Tories were not studied. And in Prince Edward Island, where the tenure of party leaders has typically been far briefer than that

enjoyed by their counterparts in the other two Maritime provinces, the list of omissions includes the 1990 (Pat Mella) and 1996 (Pat Binns) Tory conventions. Nevertheless, one must not overreact to these lacunae; the data may not be completely comprehensive, but they afford unparalleled opportunities to examine thirty-two years of Maritime leadership conventions.

In *Conventional Choices*, we intend to utilize this incredibly rich data set to illuminate the nature and dynamics of Maritime leadership politics. Some generalizations across the data sets certainly emerge. But much of the story focuses on sources of variation. Table 1.1 reveals, for example, that, while many of the conventions were single-ballot coronations, others were close and protracted struggles. We anticipate that the voting calculus of delegates¹⁰ will differ under different competitive circumstances. As well, six of the twenty-five conventions in Table 1.1 represent leadership changes in the governing party. Again, the task of choosing a premier, as opposed to an opposition leader, is likely to alter the convention dynamics. Moreover, it is apparent that the surrounding electoral contexts for these conventions varied widely. Those Nova Scotian New Democrats who gathered in the spring of 1996 to elect Robert Chisholm should have had no realistic ambitions that their party would soon escape decades of electoral oblivion. Two years later, by contrast, the New Brunswick Liberals who elected Camille Theriault as leader (and premier) were supremely confident that their stranglehold on provincial power would not soon be broken. One might reasonably anticipate, therefore, that patronage considerations, for example, would be more prominent among members at the Liberal rather than the NDP convention. Ironically, both sets of delegates were labouring under erroneous assumptions. The landscape soon shifted dramatically in both Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and successive elections left Robert Chisholm far closer than Camille Theriault to the premiership of his province. We use the opportunities afforded by our analysis of these elections to address the region's political life more broadly.

Clearly, there are many potential sources of variation among the twenty-five leadership conventions under scrutiny. We pay particular heed to four key variables: (1) province, (2) time, (3) party, and (4) method of election. With regard to the first key variable, grouping Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island (PEI) into a single analytical unit (the Maritimes) is a common practice. In reality, a variety of interprovincial differences exist in the region, and some of these are bound to affect leadership politics. In the three Maritime provinces, for example, only New Brunswickers must struggle to build bridges across a persistent and, at times, acrimonious ethno-linguistic divide. Prince Edward Islanders, by contrast, have the particular need to balance a xenophobic and pastoral self-identity with the economic and social consequences of tourist and development dollars "from away."

Table 1.1

Maritime leadership elections in data set

Year	Province	Party	Winner	Losers	No. of ballots	Surveys sent	Surveys returned	Response rate (%)
1971	NS	PC	Buchanan	Doucet, Thornhill	2	736	405	55
1976	PEI	PC	MacLean	Lee	1	500	142	28
1978	PEI	Liberal	Campbell	Mitchell	1	480	163	34
1980	NS	Liberal	Cameron	MacInnis, MacLean, Mooney	3	914	437	47
1980	NS	NDP	McDonough	Arsenault, MacEachern	1	320	212	64
1981	PEI	Liberal	Ghiz	Clement	1	375	168	45
1981	PEI	PC	Lee	Driscoll, Clark, Binns	2	600	203	34
1982	NB	Liberal	Young	Day, Frenette, Maher	1	867	366	42
1985	NB	Liberal	McKenna	Frenette	1	550	274	50
1986	NS	Liberal	MacLean	Cowan	1	1,803	941	52
1988	PEI	PC	Gass	Walker	1	500	211	42
1991	NS	PC	Cameron	Thornhill, McInnis, Callaghan	3	2,434	1230	51
1992	NS	Liberal	Savage	Downe, MacInnis, Drish, Hawkins	2	3,500	1802	52
1993	PEI	Liberal	Callbeck	Creed, Campbell	1	1,800	984	55
1995	NS	PC	Hamm	White, MacDonald	1	1,800	957	53
1996	PEI	Liberal	Milligan	Cheverie, MacDonald, Mullen	1	1,000	365	37
1996	NS	NDP	Chisholm	Atwell	1	300	159	53
1997	NB	PC	Lord	Betts, Allaby, Blaney	2	2,000	593	30
1998	NB	Liberal	Theriault	Byrne, Richard	1	2,000	730	39
2000	NS	NDP	H. MacDonald	Deveaux, M. MacDonald, Peters, Bitter-Suermann	3	602	306	51
2002	PEI	NDP	Robichaud	Bingham, Hawkes	1	82	47	57
2002	NS	Liberal	D. Graham	MacKenzie, B. Graham	1	900	151	17
2002	NB	Liberal	S. Graham	MacDougall	1	1,500	166	11
2002	NS	NDP	Dexter	MacDonell	1	1,200	497	41
2003	PEI	Liberal	Gliz	Buchanan	1	1,800	248	14

As for Nova Scotians, they have been far more receptive to social democracy than have their counterparts elsewhere in the Maritimes. We anticipate that these and other provincial idiosyncrasies will impinge significantly upon our analysis; to paint the picture of “Maritime leadership conventions” with a needlessly broad brush would obscure as much as it would reveal. In light of this, an important part of our task is the identification of political phenomena of special relevance in only one of the provinces. As we show, PEI’s leadership elections and politics are heavily influenced by the province’s overwhelmingly rural nature. Linguistic divisions in New Brunswick animate political contests and attitudes in that province in a way that is simply irrelevant in the rest of the region. Finally, the space carved out by the NDP in Nova Scotia, and the challenges it has overcome to become a contender for power, reveal much that is unique about Nova Scotia.

With regard to time, the second key variable, it is something of a cliché to speak of exponential rates of political change in the modern world. Nevertheless, much has altered in the over three decades since John Buchanan was elected as leader of the Nova Scotia Progressive Conservatives: separatist provincial governments, patriation, an entrenched charter of rights, free trade, stagflation, an end to the Cold War, energy crises, neoconservatism, constitutional failure, fiscal crises, populism, 9/11, and, of course, globalization. A leadership convention may be akin to a cocoon, a place of partial and temporary insulation for attendees. Even so, the outside world inevitably comes crashing in on these gatherings. Neither candidates nor electors can check their socially laden conceptions at the gate; even if it were possible, few would do so willingly since social reference points often permit the attachment of meaning to convention events and outcomes. If the external milieu of Maritime leadership conventions has changed significantly over the three decades of our data collecting, and there seems to be little doubt on that score, we would expect to find evidence of same in our analysis.

The search for temporal change in our data, however, is less straightforward than one might have hoped. Predictably (and lamentably), different principal investigators have altered the research instrument over the years, dropping a few questions, adding many more, and tinkering with the wording of some of those that have endured. Even if the most recent iteration of the questionnaires provides optimal purchase on the perceptions and motivations of party members, longitudinal consistency has been sacrificed. Cognizant of the dangers of methodological artefacts, we interpret with caution any changes over time in our data.

With regard to party, the third key variable, our data set includes five leadership conventions from provincial New Democrats (all but one, alas, from Nova Scotia), seven from provincial Conservatives, and thirteen from provincial Liberals. Would one anticipate the emergence of interparty differences in our analysis? With respect to the NDP, with its distinctive traditions

of electoral oblivion and social democratic ideology, convention delegates would presumably think and behave in a manner unlike their counterparts in either the Liberals or the Progressive Conservatives. With respect to differences between the two mainstream parties, however, our expectations would be more uncertain. After all, the Maritime branches of the Liberals and Tories are conventionally regarded as similarly pragmatic, vote-maximizing, brokerage parties. In Nova Scotia, for example, Murray Beck has observed that “differences in principle between the old parties are practically, non-existent”¹¹ and that the Liberals and Conservatives may be “a case of Tweedle-Dum and Tweedle-Dee.”¹² Nevertheless, there is at least some evidence to the contrary. Elsewhere, we have argued that, contra Beck, the views of Nova Scotia Liberals and Conservatives differ at every level of political involvement – from voters to activists to candidates.¹³ In New Brunswick, the notorious northwest to southeast diagonal line that divided the province into French, Roman Catholic Liberal and English, Protestant Tory fiefdoms has faded somewhat in modern times.¹⁴ Nevertheless, as we demonstrate, the demographic makeup of the two parties’ membership rolls remains easily distinguishable.

Finally, method of election is a key source of potential variation at leadership conventions. For over six decades, the institutional framework of leadership conventions in Canada was relatively stable. First adopted by the national Liberals in 1919 to select a leader after the sudden death of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, most subsequent rule changes amounted to tinkering at the margins, decreasing the role played by ex officio attendees, increasing the proportion of women or youth delegates, or controlling the extent of campaign expenditures (to take just three examples). None of these alternations, however, prevented leadership candidates from becoming progressively more skilful at manipulating the election of constituency delegates. Brazen machine politics became commonplace, and by the mid-1980s, Canada had both a prime minister and a leader of the opposition whose leadership triumphs had been secured, in part, through the effective organization at the delegate selection stage of ethnic blocs, children, non-residents, and even the homeless.¹⁵

Despite these unedifying features, the traditional leadership convention might have persisted in the absence of changes in the surrounding social context. The Canadian political culture, however, has altered significantly since the years immediately after the First World War. As the architects of the Meech Lake Accord were soon to discover, by the mid-1980s Canadians were growing suspicious of the mechanisms of representative democracy. Political elites were no longer the objects of deference, and an increasing populist enthusiasm for the devices of direct democracy could be detected. The Parti Quebecois was the first party to adapt to this social change. In 1985, it essentially cut out intermediaries by giving all registered party members a

vote in the election of the new leader. The universal ballot, as it came to be known, was soon adopted by other parties, and, by the end of the twentieth century, it had become the norm.

Our thirty-two-year data set provides ample evidence of this transformation. The universal ballot was first employed in the Maritimes by the PEI Progressive Conservatives in 1990; although we lack survey data from that gathering, we do have information from eight other similarly structured conventions. Fortunately, for our purposes, not all of the recent leadership contests in the region have used the universal ballot. The PEI Liberals (in 1993), the Nova Scotia New Democrats (in both 1996 and 2000), and the New Brunswick Liberals (in 1998) elected their leaders through traditional delegated conventions. These conventions, and particularly that of the New Brunswick Liberals, help us to distinguish the impact of institutional change from the impact of time.

That there will be some effect from widening the franchise seems almost certain. Other studies of single leadership conventions have suggested that giving the vote to all party members changes the electorate's demographic composition, partisan commitment, and pace of decision making.¹⁶ Our more comprehensive data set should permit us, with some degree of confidence, to establish the validity of these and other hypotheses.

Disentangling the impact of our four key variables (province, time, party, and method of election) is rarely straightforward. In a perfect world, one would have enough cases to hold the other three variables constant while scrutinizing the impact of change in the fourth. Even our data set of twenty-five different conventions falls far short of that ideal. In a perfect world, as well, the list of secondary variables that might impinge on the convention outcome would not be so extensive. Mention has already been made of governmental status, likelihood of electoral success, and number of ballots, but to that list could be added candidate personality types, nature and extent of media coverage, proximity of the next election, circumstances of the federal party wing, and many more. We allude to these factors on occasion but do not attempt a comprehensive overview of their impact.

There is, however, no need to be apologetic about the scope of this study. Twenty-five surveys over more than three decades may not be ideal, but they afford an unprecedented opportunity to examine the phenomenon of Maritime leadership conventions. Almost as important, this data set also enables us to speak more widely about the politics of Nova Scotia, of New Brunswick, and of Prince Edward Island. In contrast, for example, to the academic attention historically accorded the Prairie provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba,¹⁷ the literature on the three Maritime provinces (both separately and as a grouping) remains lamentably sketchy. In part, this scholarly neglect may be rooted in a defensible commitment to methodological rigour: national public opinion soundings (including the

influential Canadian Election Studies) typically contain too few respondents from any single Maritime province (and, especially, from PEI) to permit valid intraregional comparisons. In part, however, the academy's inattention can also be traced to a less defensible reliance on antiquated stereotypes about Maritime politics. Thus, the politics of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island have been perceived to be characterized by traditionalism, conservatism, stability, patronage, and dependence. This understanding, which regards Maritime politics of the early twenty-first century as different only in degree from the region's practices and mores of the late nineteenth century, is flawed in two important respects. First, it rests on an increasingly flimsy empirical base: exposing the shortcomings of these stereotypes has provided ample grist for some academic mills.¹⁸ Second, it homogenizes that which is heterogeneous; that is, the traditional view of Maritime politics glosses over the fundamentally distinctive politics of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island. In *Conventional Choices*, we emphasize this latter shortcoming. Our twenty-five conventions over thirty-two years provide us with a series of windows through which we may regard the political cultures of the three Maritime provinces. There are, of course, alternative ways to gain some purchase on the political orientations of Maritimers, although it is worth noting that wide-ranging public opinion questionnaires have been quite uncommon in these three provinces. The validity of our particular measure, however, is easy to defend. Leadership conventions in the Maritimes, as we demonstrate, have brought together a diverse (albeit well-educated) cross-section of the provincial populace. These politically active and aware citizens should be particularly attuned to provincial orientations and mores. And in some instances, at least, the numbers involved have been quite impressive. Thus, approximately one out of every twenty adult Prince Edward Islanders attended the 1996 Liberal leadership convention. Ultimately, our twin purposes for this book work closely together. We are able to use data gathered from our leadership surveys to understand better the individuated political natures of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island. At the same time, this heightened awareness of provincial distinctiveness provides an illuminating backdrop for our close scrutiny of particular leadership contests.¹⁹

The twenty-five data sets also provide us with an opportunity to look at features of the leadership selection process in Canada that, previously, have not been examined in detail. We use this opportunity to look at the voters who backed fringe candidates and at attempts made by eliminated candidates to deliver their support to other candidates.

Our plan for *Conventional Choices* is straightforward. Combined with the appendix, the next two chapters provide overviews of the leadership elections, of the seventy-five candidates who sought their party's leadership, and of the tens of thousands of ordinary Maritimers who cast ballots in

these contests. In Chapter 4, we systematically compare the political backgrounds and process involvement of those who participated in conventions with those who voted in universal ballots. We explore whether the change from delegated conventions to universal ballot has revolutionized the nature of leadership decision making. We note, in particular, that the substantial increase in the number of participants has not been accompanied by corresponding declines in political interest and activity.

The next three chapters demonstrate the impact of socio-economic variables on voting behaviour. Chapter 5 emphasizes the continuing importance of region, religion, and language, while Chapters 6 and 7 focus on community size and sex, respectively. We then consider, in Chapter 8, the role of party ideology. Using a range of measures, we demonstrate that activists in the Liberal, Progressive Conservative, and New Democratic parties have clearly different ideological perspectives.

Chapters 9 and 10 look at two aspects of convention dynamics that our extensive data set render susceptible to in-depth analysis. In the former, we analyze the process by which many voters (at the eleventh hour and with little conviction) come to support fringe candidates; in the latter, we highlight the limited extent to which eliminated candidates can “deliver” their supporters to another contestant.

The next section builds on our analysis of the twenty-five elections and scrutinizes phenomena that have emerged as peculiar to individual Maritime provinces. In Chapter 11, we discuss the garden myth on Prince Edward Island and conclude that Islanders are continuing to define themselves as an independent farming people in an unspoiled cocoon. In Chapter 12, we highlight the continuing power of language to animate New Brunswickers, while in Chapter 13 we trace the evolution of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation-New Democratic Party (CCF-NDP) in Nova Scotia from a minor Cape Breton-centred party to a major political force based principally in metropolitan Halifax. In these three chapters, we use our leadership data to speak to broader political phenomena in each of the provinces.

In Chapter 14, we reflect on the enthusiasm academics retain for the leadership convention. While party activists have whole-heartedly embraced the all-member leadership vote, academics have, for the most part, been decidedly less enthusiastic about the change. Finally, in Chapter 15 we conclude with a summary of our major findings.

As one might expect in a study of this magnitude, there are a number of methodological issues to keep in mind. For instance, there were minor methodological variations over this period. Typically, samples of convention attendees received mail questionnaires, and between one-third and one-half of these were generally returned. Until June 2002, the smaller scale of New Democratic Party gatherings obviated the need to draw a sample; prior to that time, all NDP delegates received a questionnaire. As well, the 2002

*Table 1.2***Maritime leadership elections in data set: actual vs. reported vote totals**

Year	Province	Party	Candidate	First ballot		Difference
				Actual	Reported	
1971	NS	PC	Buchanan	33	33	0
			Doucet	38	39	+1
			Thornhill	29	27	-2
1976	PEI	PC	MacLean	47	47	0
			Lee	43	43	0
1978	PEI	Liberal	Campbell	72	71	-1
			Mitchell	28	29	+1
1980	NS	Liberal	Cameron	37	40	+3
			MacLean	27	29	+2
			Mooney	21	17	-4
			MacInnis	15	15	0
1980	NS	NDP	McDonough	74	80	+6
			Arsenault	13	14	+1
			MacEachern	13	6	-7
1981	PEI	Liberal	Ghiz	65	68	+3
			Clement	35	32	-3
1981	PEI	PC	Lee	40	44	+4
			Clark	24	25	+1
			Driscoll	20	17	-3
			Binns	16	14	-2
1982	NB	Liberal	Young	51	56	+5
			Day	31	27	-4
			Frenette	12	11	-1
			Maher	6	5	-1
1985	NB	Liberal	McKenna	69	79	+10
			Frenette	31	21	-10
1986	NS	Liberal	MacLean	60	62	+2
			Cowan	40	38	-2
1988	PEI	PC	Gass	51	53	+2
			Walker	49	47	-2
1991	NS	PC	Cameron	32	35	+3
			Thornhill	31	27	-4
			McInnis	29	29	0
			Callaghan	8	8	0
1992	NS	Liberal	Savage	47	51	+4
			Downe	41	38	-3
			MacInnis	11	8	-3
			Drish	1	1	0
			Hawkins	1	1	0
1993	PEI	Liberal	Callbeck	79	88	+9
			Creed	16	10	-6
			Campbell	5	2	-3

▶

◀ Table 1.2

Year	Province	Party	Candidate	First ballot		Difference
				Actual	Reported	
1995	NS	PC	Hamm	54	56	+2
			White	37	34	-3
			Macdonald	10	9	-1
1996	PEI	Liberal	Milligan	52	50	-2
			Cheverie	42	46	+4
			Macdonald	5	3	-2
			Mullen	1	1	0
1996	NS	NDP	Chisholm	77	79	+2
			Atwell	23	21	-2
1997	NB	PC	Lord	37	37	0
			Betts	32	31	-1
			Allaby	17	21	+4
			Blaney	14	11	-3
1998	NB	Liberal	Theriault	56	55	-1
			Byrne	27	25	-2
			Richard	18	20	+2
2000	NS	NDP	H. MacDonald	32	32	0
			Deveaux	29	29	0
			M. MacDonald	26	26	0
			Peters	8	8	0
			Bitter-Suermann	5	5	0
2002	PEI	NDP	Robichaud	73	84	+11
			Bingham	22	13	-9
			Hawkes	5	2	-3
2002	NS	Liberal	D. Graham	60	74	+14
			MacKenzie	33	20	-13
			B. Graham	7	6	-1
2002	NB	Liberal	S. Graham	75	77	+2
			MacDougall	25	23	-2
2002	NS	NDP	Dexter	63	70	+7
			MacDonell	37	30	-7
2003	PEI	Liberal	Ghiz	52	55	+3
			Buchanan	48	45	-3

Nova Scotia Liberals were surveyed electronically, while questionnaires were distributed on site without return postage to both the 2002 New Brunswick Liberals and the 2003 PEI Liberals. That these three surveys had many of the lowest response rates in our data set reveals the danger inherent in these cost-cutting initiatives. Although relying on party activists to answer a mail survey introduces an element of self-selection to the process, we nonetheless have good reason to be confident about the “representative” nature of our respondents. As Table 1.2 illustrates, the variation between the actual