

## **POLITICAL SCIENCE IN CANADA**

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This essay reviews the study of Canada by scholars in Canada. Other subfields as they are represented in this country are mentioned only in passing. These are branches of global political science, although with local colour and emphasis. Most importantly, perhaps, I claim no expertise in them and could not hope to do them justice. For the same reason, my commentary will be mostly about political science in the English language. In this, I confess to being emblematic of the cultural divide in the country.

The paper presents two roughly parallel accounts. It begins by putting Canadian political science in institutional and historical context. Then follows an account the Canadian discipline's intellectual structure, which shows that ideas and preoccupations broadly reflected the circumstances for their production. Each account portrays successive periods of growth and, at best, consolidation or, in some cases, retrenchment.

### **CONTEXT**

As I write, the Canadian Political Science Association is one of the largest and wealthiest outside the USA. Moreover, the CPSA does not represent all the political scientists in the country, as many in non-Canadian subspecialties choose not to join. This only reinforces the point that, by any reasonable comparative standard, students and scholars of Canadian politics represent a numerically formidable group. It has not always been so. The historical record is one of late and intermittent growth.

Part of the reason for this was university policy in the large. Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Canada found itself with quite a handsome endowment of universities, relatively speaking. The CPSA's very existence was a token of this, as the society was founded as early as 1928. But university development stalled and until roughly the 1960s, the system was frozen in place. Enrolments barely kept pace with population growth and the overall rate of enrolment was much lower than in the USA. University finance was a plaything of federal-provincial conflict, with a high and growing reliance on individual tuition fees and no market for student loans. The 1960s brought an explosion of numbers and money. New universities were founded and old ones grew dramatically. This reflected demography, as Canada participated spectacularly in the postwar baby boom. It also reflected remarkable growth in real incomes, compounded by progressive income taxes in a pre-indexation era. A workable student loan system came into being. Further compounding came from a federal-provincial conditional grant formula that allowed provincial governments to reap \$1 of political credit for each \$0.50 of spending from their own treasuries. This particular golden age lasted less than 20 years. In the late 1970s, the fiscal foundations shifted, double-digit inflation was rampant, and the baby boom faded. Between 1977 and 2000, per student expenditure stalled. In some places, tuition resumed a semblance of its earlier role. In others, tuition income was frozen, such that the financial noose on the classroom tightened. One pattern running through this period was competition between postsecondary education and health care, and spending on the latter was politically more vital. Since the late 1990s, times have gotten better. University construction resumed and new institutions were founded. The federal government, having mastered chronic deficits and mounting debt, decided to spend some of its surplus on postsecondary education and to do so directly rather shackle itself to the whims of provincial governments. Thus emerged programmes such as a Canada-wide

undergraduate scholarship scheme, enhancement of fellowship support for graduate students, an independently financed foundation for capital expenditures, some enhancement of grant council budgets, and the Canada Research Chairs (CRC) scheme. Provincial governments got interested in university education again, arguably for the first time since the 1960s. As important as anything, however, is the fact that the massive faculty cohort recruited in the 1960s began to retire.

Closer to the ground have been the federal research councils. For political science, the relevant council until the late 1970s was the Canada Council. Since then, we have been wards of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). The good news is that the government has recognized functional differences among research communities and has distinguished the research community from the artistic community, which continues to be served by the Canada Council. The bad news is that SSHRC is weakly supported relative to the natural science and medicine councils and still struggles for legitimacy in budget battles even as it is a lightning rod for resentment among its clients. As the Canadian councils do not pay overhead on individual grants, their largesse, although welcome, also strains other aspects of university budgets. That said, an important fact about the Canadian political science research community over the past 40 years is that it has a fiscal basis: the council funds quite a lot of research, including big ticket items like election studies; equally importantly, it is critical to funding the training of new researchers.

Even closer to the ground is the Canadian Political Science Association and its journal. Although the Association dates back to 1928, it underwent a major transformation in 1968. Before that year, the Association was a composite of other specialties. These peeled off over the years, with 1968 signalling the final split, with economists. Before that year the journal was called the *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, and the name fairly captures the dual orientation. So although Canadian political science has had a journal open to its particular perspective for many decades, only in 1968 were the pages devoted exclusively to our discipline. The history of the journal has not been entirely happy, however, for reasons that reflect global trends. In its first year, for instance, the journal published Jean Blondel's seminal paper on party systems. I do not think that any subsequent issue contains an article so influential outside the country. The journal's appearance was part of a global surge in journal titles, reinforced in recent years by consolidation and commercialization of the journal business. Where in 1968 the official journal of a national political science association other than APSA could still be a reasonable outlet for an audience outside the national borders, this has become progressively less true. So the Canadian journal has, in spite of itself, become narrower, more Canadian in focus. Offsetting this in recent years has been the growth of online access to almost all journals. The *CJPS* is now part of the Cambridge University Press stable, and so gets promoted more than in the past, not least because it is available for general-purpose online searches. And the study of Canadian politics is now spilling beyond the pages of *CJPS* into cognate specialty journals.

Recruitment and training of Canadian political scientists has been profoundly conditioned by the cycles of institutional boom and bust described a few paragraphs above. Before 1960, during the long decades of institutional stasis, there was very little in the way of indigenous training. The trickle of recruitment mainly drew on US and UK sources.

Political scientists were typically situated in joint politics and economics departments, an arrangement that was aligned with the CPSA and its journal. Economists tended to be unhappier than political scientists with this situation (partly because they believed that their salary prospects were hindered by association with the likes of us). Important parts of the politics canon in this period were the product of other disciplines. The most influential study of the federal system was by an economist, WA Mackintosh. The most important multi-volume research project, studies of Alberta Social Credit—its precursors, the circumstances of its birth, and its implication for the larger system—mostly comprised works by non-political scientists: institutional historians, economic historians, sociologists, and psychologists. Only one volume was by a political scientist, JR Mallory of McGill.

This changed radically in the 1960s. The massive growth in every aspect of Canadian universities created a recruitment crisis. The response was a massive importation of talent, inevitably mostly from the largest producer of PhDs, the US. The years that followed were arguably the high point of US influence on Canadian political science. This in turn provoked a nationalist reaction, which led to a tightening of the screws on PhD immigration. The growth surge also produced a cadre of mainly US-trained Canadians as well, and these persons were arguably the key contributors to this generation's research product. But the nationalist reaction extended even to the attractiveness of US graduate programmes to Canadians. One alternative was to attend the newly burgeoning Canadian PhD programmes. Another was to retreat to the old imperial metropole, the UK. The more basic reality was that by the late 1970s, recruitment was winding down, stalled by a perverse combination of the post-1977 fiscal crunch (described above) and the bloated ranks of still-young 1960s recruits. The 1980s and 1990s saw a slow drip of replacement, mainly from Canadian and UK graduate programmes.

The 2000s have been better times, superficially at least. Hiring picked up dramatically. Some of this reflected a renewed interest in post-secondary education on the part of the main paymasters, the provincial governments. The preceding two-plus decades of neglect began to be remedied. The federal government helped out with its CRC programme. Most important, arguably, was simple demography: the massive 1960s cohort that stood in the way of steady turnover in earlier decades now began to retire in a rush. This opened avenues for recruitment from abroad, helped by loosened immigration restrictions. But demand was also increasingly met from within the country. The preceding decades had seen a growth and consolidation of Canadian graduate programmes. As I will illustrate more concretely below, this also reflected development of research infrastructure that facilitated graduate study at home. And Canadian universities, following the lead of the University of Toronto, worked hard to fully finance PhD students. The federal government helped by dramatically expanding the number of fellowships on offer, and some of these were tied to graduate study in Canada. Complementing this was an increased rate of application to the SSHRC for research programmes that had graduate training as a critical component. The recognition had spread that the PhD was *the* strategic degree, the conduit for creating a truly indigenous political science and for training the next generation of scholars

## CONTENT

The substance of Canadian political science cannot be detached from the institutional cycles described in the previous section. The ebb and flow of money and recruitment interacted with domestic political pressures and international intellectual trends.

### *Early Years*

Before 1960, two strands in the literature stand out. At least they do with hindsight. Whatever their influence at the time, these strike me as carrying impact into subsequent decades. One is a combination of political sociology and political economy. This reflects, unsurprisingly, the domination of scholarship on political questions by persons whose primary identification was with some other discipline. As it happens, in the years before 1960, economic history was also a peculiarly Canadian strength. Much of this was the extended shadow of Harold Adams Innis, who produced a staggering body of scholarship in spite of a premature death. This scholarship articulated the “staple” thesis, that the production and shipment of export staples critically shaped the policy agenda. This in turn underpinned constitutional controversy and imperial relations. Work in this spirit was important to interpretation of third-party insurgency in the Prairie Provinces. The sociological strain was reflected in work on the religious roots of political action. Most influential in the realm of sociology, however, was a happy accident: Seymour Martin Lipset’s PhD thesis, published as *Agrarian Socialism*, was a study of the rise of the CCF in Saskatchewan. That the first socialist government in North America should appear in the Canadian West rather than in Manhattan struck him as a thunderbolt. Lipset continued to be a major commentator on Canadian political trends. Indeed, his critical review of CB Macpherson’s *Democracy in Alberta* (itself a major contribution to the study of third-party insurgency) was the genesis of his important comparative work on the interaction of electoral systems and party systems, of which the most famous instance was the seminal chapter with Stein Rokkan. Finally, the combination of political sociology and political economy can be seen in influential early edited volumes of the University League for Social Reform, roughly speaking, the Canadian variant of the Fabian Society.

If there was a body of scholarship in this period that was clearly initiated by political scientists, it was in the study of federalism. This reflected a real or apprehended crisis in the organization of the Canadian state. At the time, the problem often seemed that industrial society required centralized policy-making. But the federal organization of the state militated against this. The literature was commonly prescriptive and was often insensitive to the linguistic underpinning of the federal bargain.

### *US Influences and Nationalist Reaction*

The sudden expansion of Canadian universities provoked an equally sudden transformation of Canadian political science. The small and weak PhD programmes were unable to meet the demand for new faculty. The vacuum was filled by an influx of mainly American-trained—and mainly American—new faculty. As it happens, this was the period in which US-based political science was undergoing the behavioural revolution, so as a byproduct Canadian political science underwent that revolution as well. As an example, the study of elections was kick-started by the founding of the Canadian Election Study in 1965. Although the Principal Investigator for the study, John Meisel, was a British-trained Canadian, the supporting cast was US-tinged. Notable among the co-

investigators was Philip Converse, one of the founders of the “Michigan school” of election research. Another co-investigator, Maurice Pinard, was arguably the last representative of the “Columbia School”.<sup>1</sup> In the 1970s, the Canadian Election Study gravitated clearly in the Michigan direction as two of the four co-investigators in that decade held Michigan PhDs. One preoccupation was locating the psychology of the Canadian electorate in relation to US models. Another was with plumbing the party system’s social foundations, or the lack thereof.

But the arrival of American-style political science provoked some backlash even as indigenous modes of investigation found—or regained—their feet. The institutionalist tendency that found expression in 1950s studies of federalism deepened its hold. Alan Cairns’ work in this period should be seen as both part of and an inspiration for the global renewal of state-centred analyses. Cairns’ work mixed the two emphases that came to characterized state-centric analyses: structural constraints and political actors’ motives. Richard Simeon’s *Federal-Provincial Diplomacy*, which started life as a Yale PhD thesis, was for decades the country’s single most influential book-length study of public policy. It made a convincing case that the shape of Canadian pension policy could not be understood without reference to the interjurisdictional bargaining that lay behind it. The institutionalist emphasis was sustained by two decades of nearly continuous constitutional crisis. To an extent, the crisis was given its rhetorical content by some of these very analysts, in their identification of the “structural problem of Canadian federalism” (the expression originated with Donald Smiley). If institutionalists helped identify the problem, the problem itself kept them busy. The peak of crisis in 1981-2 was itself a major focus of analysis but so was its aftermath, the successive failed Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accords. The 1982 entrenchment of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms shaped much subsequent discourse. The political science contribution, as opposed to the legal or philosophical ones, tended to concentrate on the political uses of the Charter and its political impact. The Charter was seen not so much as the implementation of a global postwar project of rights consciousness as a mechanism for shifting Canadian political discourse away from corrosive zero-sum federal-provincial conflict. That the political aftermath of the Charter included two “Accords” in which Canadians—including Canadian political scientists—were reminded the country was still a federal system only reinforced the general emphasis on institutions.

This period also witnessed a pointed reaction to US influence, expressed as a rediscovery of political economy. This rebirth was quite separate from the parallel renewal of interest in political economy in the US. Where the US movement tended in an increasingly formal and methodologically self-conscious direction, to the extent that the boundary with the international economics has been largely effaced, the Canadian movement was more aligned with radical and structural tendencies more prevalent overseas. Certainly, the Canadian school saw its task as critical and on the left, although some protagonists were concerned to link themselves to the older Canada-focused project exemplified by Innis (see above). Whatever the orientation, analytical formalism and systematic quantification were sternly resisted.

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<sup>1</sup> Pinard was student of James Coleman at Johns Hopkins and Coleman in turn had been a student of Paul Lazarsfeld at Columbia.

The tendencies described in the last two paragraphs also tended to be emblematic of graduate education in Canada, in contrast to the US focus on quantitative approaches. The harsh reality, however, is that none of these schools was able to sustain itself healthily. By the 1980s the rate of new recruitment had slowed down. Canadians were less likely to go south for graduate study even as those who went to Canadian schools found it hard to secure academic employment. But all these disputes and their protagonists now seem remarkably remote.

*Diversification, Interest Group Politics, and a New Internationalism?*

Even before the rate of new hiring picked up, Canadian political science was undergoing a sea change that would move it back in line with global tendencies. Attention shifted away from specifically Canadian projects to studies of new lines of political division. As these divisions were emerging in most democracies, this made non-Canadian models relevant even as the Canadian case now seemed available for comparison.

For studies of gender and sexuality, Canada was a case like the others. On their substance, the Canadian issues were local instances of universal questions. Canada was also a site for public policy analysis. One consideration was the gender and sexuality impact of policy choices. Another was how institutions affected the implementation of policy. Increasingly, the work was explicitly comparative, as with Lisa Young's comparison of the Canadian and US party systems for the place of women or David Rayside's work on gay rights. In general, on these questions Canadian political scientists are now strikingly prominent in an increasingly North American political science.

For studies of diversity and multiculturalism, Canada has emerged as something of a special case. The country has one of the world's highest rates of immigration and is now over 10% nonwhite. This racial and ethnic diversification sits in tension with the ancient and highly politicized French/English or Quebec/Canada divides. Notwithstanding this diversification, the country seems able to maintain a high degree of social peace and has experienced little specifically diversity-related pressure on its welfare state. These patterns make it seem like the deviant case in cross-national diversity studies. Canadian work on diversity, trust, and the welfare state seems relevant for European social democrats, although the implications of the case never seem immediately clear. Both things also seem to be true for US audiences. The domestic debate is, unsurprisingly, more conflictual, with disagreement over the facts of immigration, equity, and incorporation and over the wellsprings and the merits of multicultural policy.

Canada is also a critical case for studies of aboriginality. This reflects the size of the country's aboriginal community, its degree of politicization, and the relative prominence of aboriginal issues in public debate. The Canadian case is also an obvious case for comparative analysis. So far, this seems to be most advanced for the Anglo-American settler societies. The next frontier may be comparisons with Latin America.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that investments starting in the 1960s seem to be bearing fruit for that most "mainstream" of scholarship, the study of elections and public opinion. As mentioned, the first Canadian Election Study was undertaken in 1965. In only one election, 1972, was there no CES, so we now have twelve such studies in the bank. The mere continuing existence of the studies has underpinned the creation of an indigenous research community. A critical mass of university-based researchers has been achieved,

many of them products of Canadian graduate programmes. The cumulation of these files makes new kinds of analysis possible, spanning more than forty years of electoral history and commonly linking survey data to aggregate quantities. Canadian data sets now find their way into multi-country studies and Canadian election study teams have been important in promoting cross-national designs, as with the CSES common-content packages. Additionally, since 1988 the CES has been the leading edge of the study of campaign phenomena, including communications factors. The post-1988 Canadian model has been adopted in New Zealand, Great Britain, and Germany for their national studies, and in the United States in the guise of the National Annenberg Election Study at the University of Pennsylvania. And expertise built around these bodies of data is being cashed out in other, related empirical enterprises. Some of these are comparative as with the World Values Survey or the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), while others are specific to Canada, as with the Equality, Security, and Community survey (ESC).<sup>2</sup>

## DISCUSSION

In one sense, then, Canadian political science has come of age. Notwithstanding lean years and intense cyclicality in its development, the study of Canadian politics has achieved considerable sophistication. Graduate training, which for decades was ill-funded and intellectually defensive, now seems able to fill most of the country's recruitment needs. Indeed, the worry persists that the supply of skilled scholars will exceed demand. And the Canadians who go abroad seem more likely than ever to stay abroad. But passage to the US in particular no longer seems guaranteed for even the best Canadian undergraduates, so great is the pressure on US graduate admissions from China, India, and Russia. Thus, Canadian political science is probably more on its own than ever. The prospects are also better than ever that it can rise to the challenge. That said, Canadians will need to remain open to external influence, as the centre of gravity of intellectual innovation still is fated to lie outside our borders.

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<sup>2</sup> Although the ESC has strong parallels, many of them the product of direct consultation, with the US Social Capital Benchmark Study.