

Does Canada Need A New Electoral System?

Queen's Studies on the
Future of the
Canadian Communities

1

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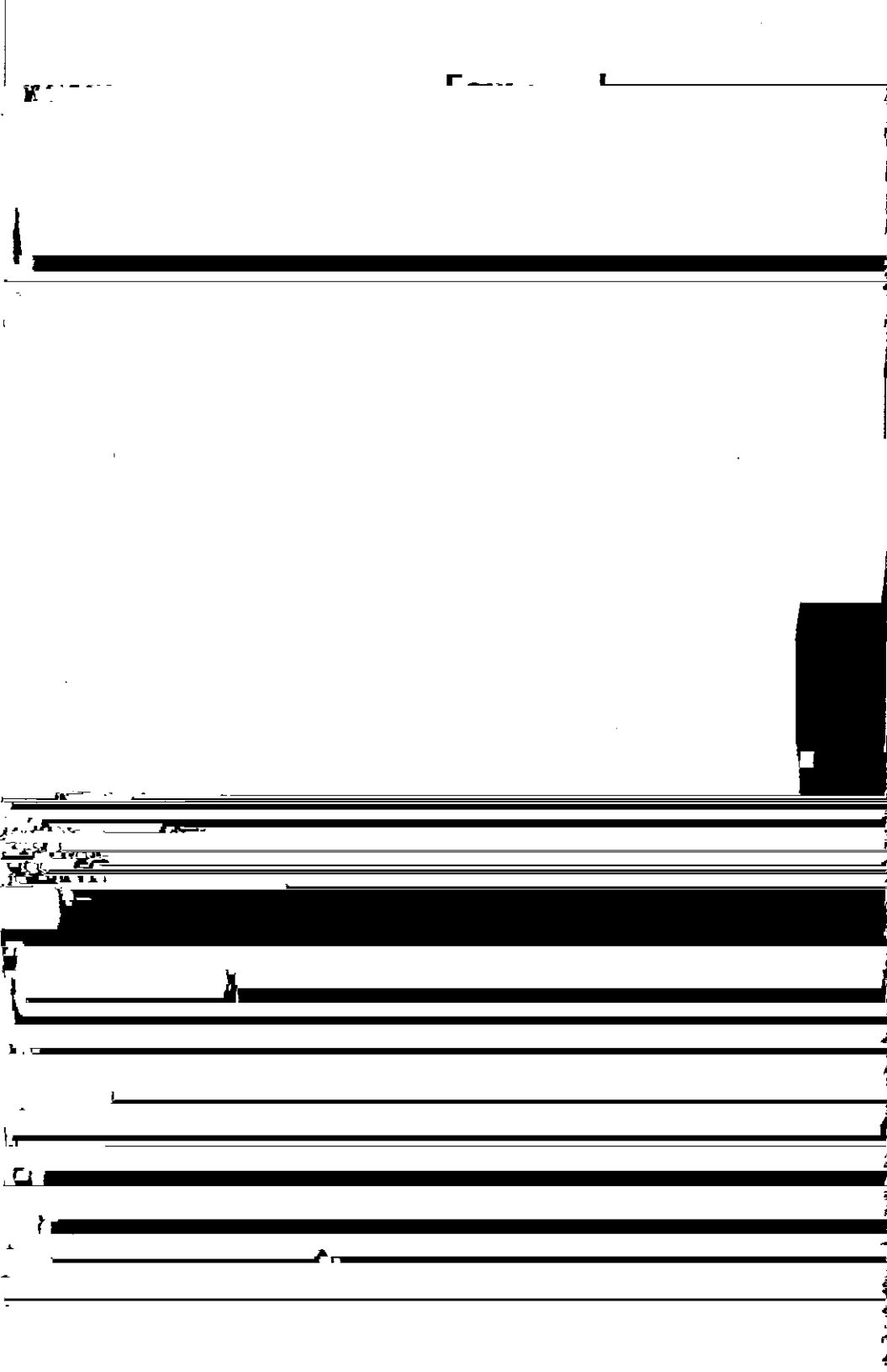
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*To my parents, who have kept Scots and French together
for a long time.*

Contents

Foreword / vii



is most sharply demonstrated by the increasing regionalization of party

will explore the character of the alternatives and proposals that have been put forward; consider the lessons to be drawn from other federations and plural societies; assess the consequences of both existing federal arrangements and possible alternative structures for a wide variety of

Preface

Canada's central institutions face a crisis of representation. This has led to a marked loss of legitimacy and hence authority of the federal cabinet, the federal parliament and the federal judiciary. They are less able to carry through the kinds of accommodation necessary if the country is to survive.

justice can build confidence in all parts of the country and the

more sensitive to the feelings and interests of all Canadians

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1 Introduction

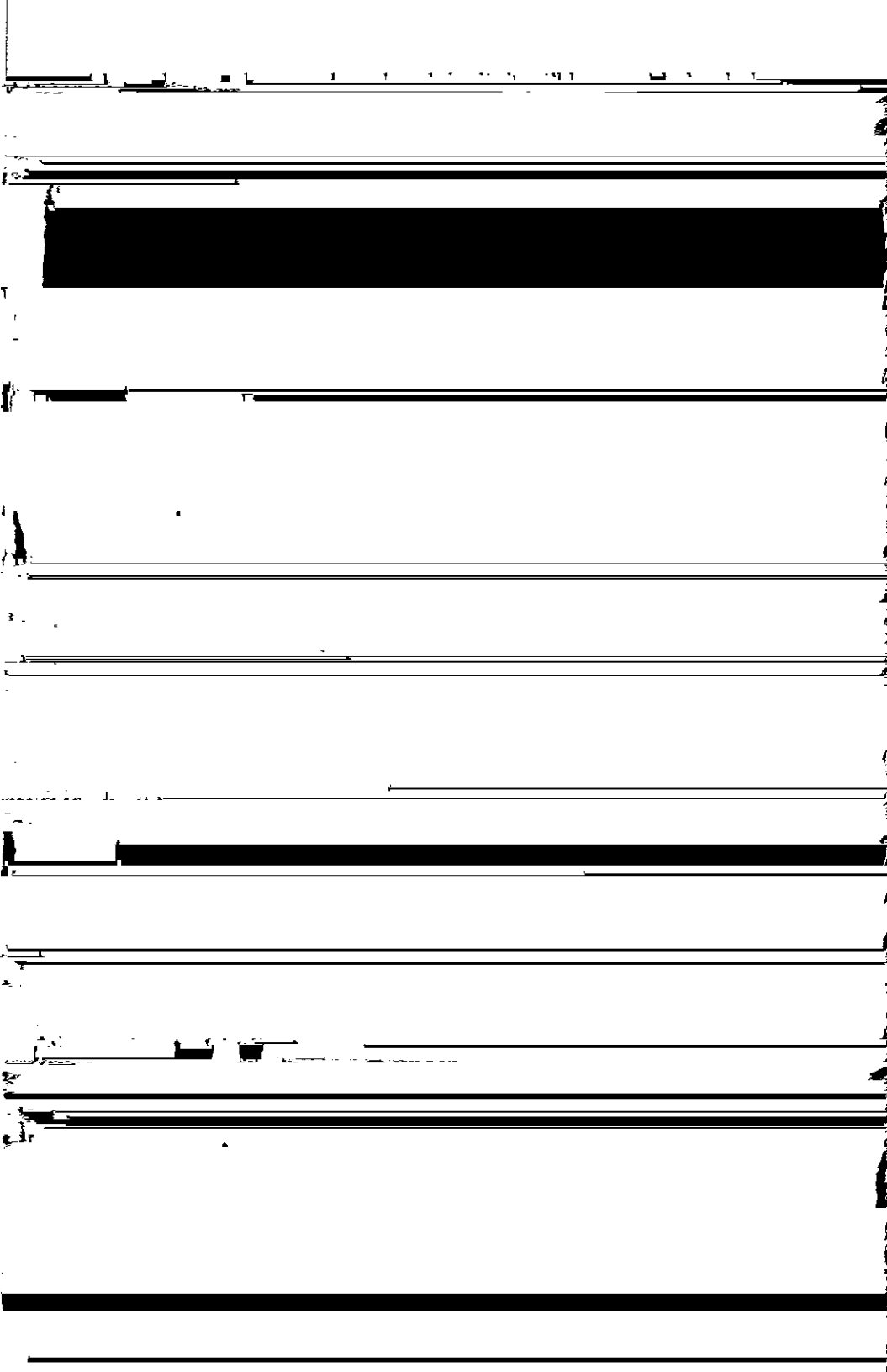
Many features of the Canadian political and constitutional system rest to a large extent on inheritance and tradition. One of the salutary effects of the November 1976 election in Quebec has been to force Canadians to take a second look at these institutions to see if any better justification is possible or to see if modifications might be desirable. In an imperfect world with people neither impartial nor ignorant of their own interests, political institutions raise as many questions of engineering as they do of morals. There is no uniquely and universally desirable constitutional

division of power, method of

are tendencies which have coexisted throughout Canadian history, but have varied in relative force. Most recently, country-building was the dominant force after the Second World War. It began somewhat hesitantly during the Depression but found its major impetus in the mobiliza-

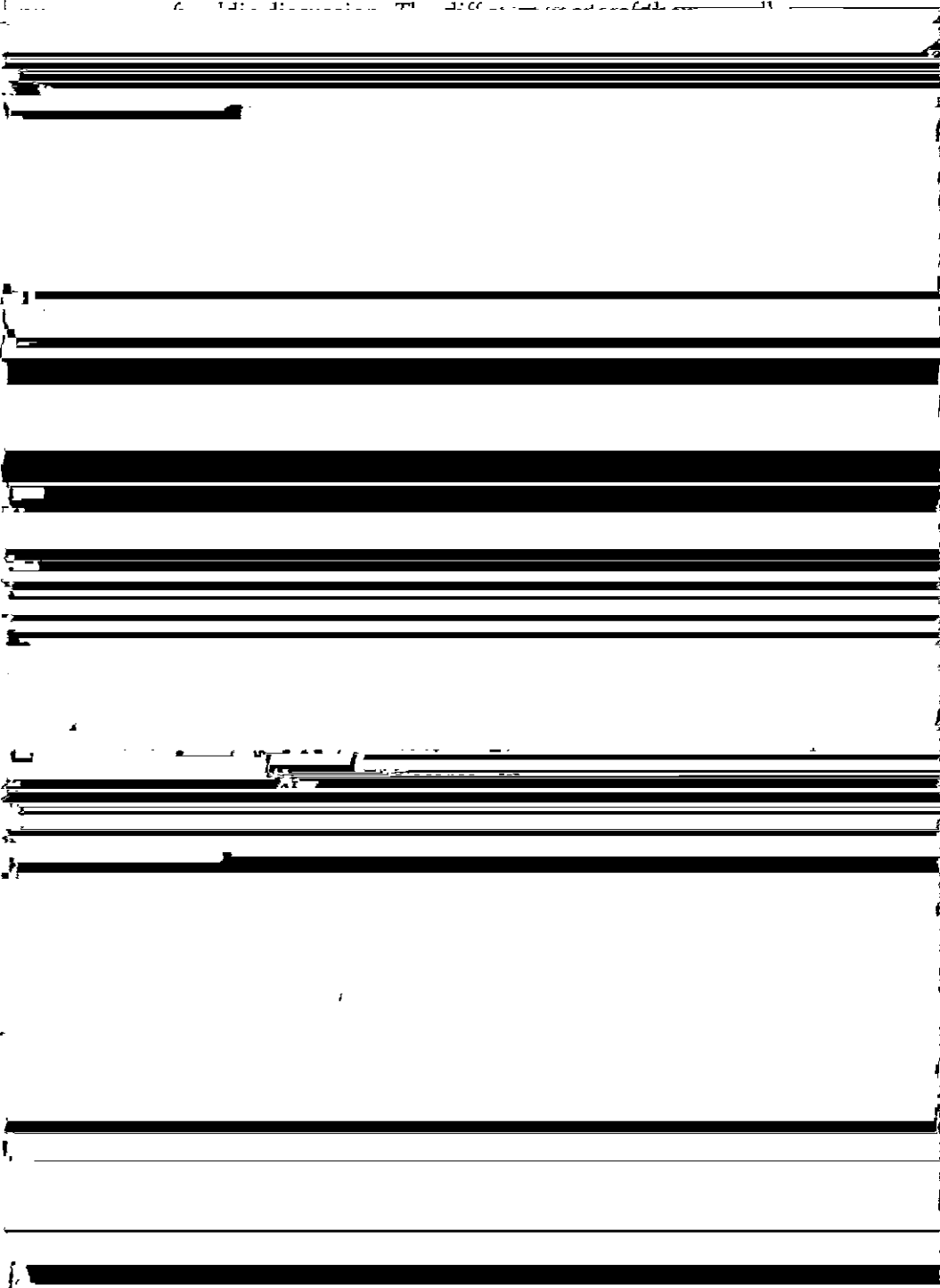
on these moral grounds could possibly be shown to be consistent with self-interest. The liberalism supports a belief that Canadians must have a

By reforming electoral rules, we can provide parties with both the incen-



issues (cont'd)

concerned with the distribution of burdens and benefits between sections than between classes. The poverty of the Maritimes has occupied an honourable place in the foreground



The issues (cont'd)

their rulers. Electoral systems have to be evaluated according to the impact they have on that distance.

③
*electoral
tactics*

What issues to emphasize and what political positions to take are strategic questions. They can only analytically be separated from a number of tactical questions bearing on campaigning. Given that a party has limited money, and that a party leader has only so much time and stamina, how should these resources be deployed during a campaign? Is

the options : 5 types of electoral system

preferences necessary to capture one of the constituency's seats. Surplus votes or votes from low-ranked candidates are redistributed until as many candidates achieve quotas as there are seats to be filled. Seats eventually are allocated roughly proportionately to votes.

3 The Effects of Electoral Systems

A. Representation of the Electorate

The degree of correlation between the distribution of seats and the

fall is not a function of how far behind any particular party may be. Often third-place finishers do better in translating votes into seats than the second-place party. This has been notably the case for Social Credit in Quebec, finishing third in both 1968 and 1974, but winning more than three times as many seats as the Progressive Conservative party which finished second there. In Manitoba, the NDP has been third in the popular vote throughout the 1968-74 period but has had a more favourable seat-to-vote ratio than the Liberal party at each election.

Table 1 also indicates mean scores across of absolute vote ratios

Table 1

The Ratio of Percentage of Seats to Percentage of Votes, Canada and Provinces, 1968-1974

	Lib.	P.C.	NDP	Soc. Cr.	Other
1968 Canada	1.29*	0.87	0.49	1.21	0.22
Newfoundland	0.32	1.62	0/4.4**		0/0.1
Prince Edward Is.	0/45.0	1.93	0/3.2		
Nova Scotia	0.24	1.65	0/6.7		0/0.1
New Brunswick	1.13	1.01	0/4.9	0/0.7	0/0.3
Quebec	1.41	0.24	0/7.5	1.15	0/1.1
Ontario	1.55	0.59	0.38		1.26
Manitoba	0.80	1.22	0.26	0/0.2	0/1.2

again, a sign of minorities

In the Canadian context, it is not this capriciousness which is most offensive. The data in Table 1 confirm the persistence of the effect noted earlier by Cairns: the electoral system exaggerates the regionalism of a regionally divided country. Indeed, by giving the Liberals no seats in

→
candidate outside the mainstream. Because a metropolitan area is cut up into a number of single member constituencies, any group whose mem-

exclusion of certain tendencies: an
advantage?

do plurality systems weaken extremists?

party size, vote concentration and representation under plurality rules has been elegantly demonstrated for Canada by Richard Johnston and Janet Ballantyne (1977).

This evidence does not address the contention that party leaders, as opposed to individual candidates, must search out center opinion if they

Italian example, the excluded parties do sit in Parliament but also engage in street violence. The justification for representing *them* is that moderate

do minorities acquire more extreme leadership under PR?

there" to represent (Hermens, 1941, pp. 13-14). Rather, political groups are created as a by-product of the monopolizing of political space

limits on extent of fragmentation by electoral system
any regional or linguistic community could be totally defeated. In a later

Largest
Remainder

$$\frac{1}{(m+1)}$$
$$\frac{(n-1)/mn}{(n-1)mn}$$

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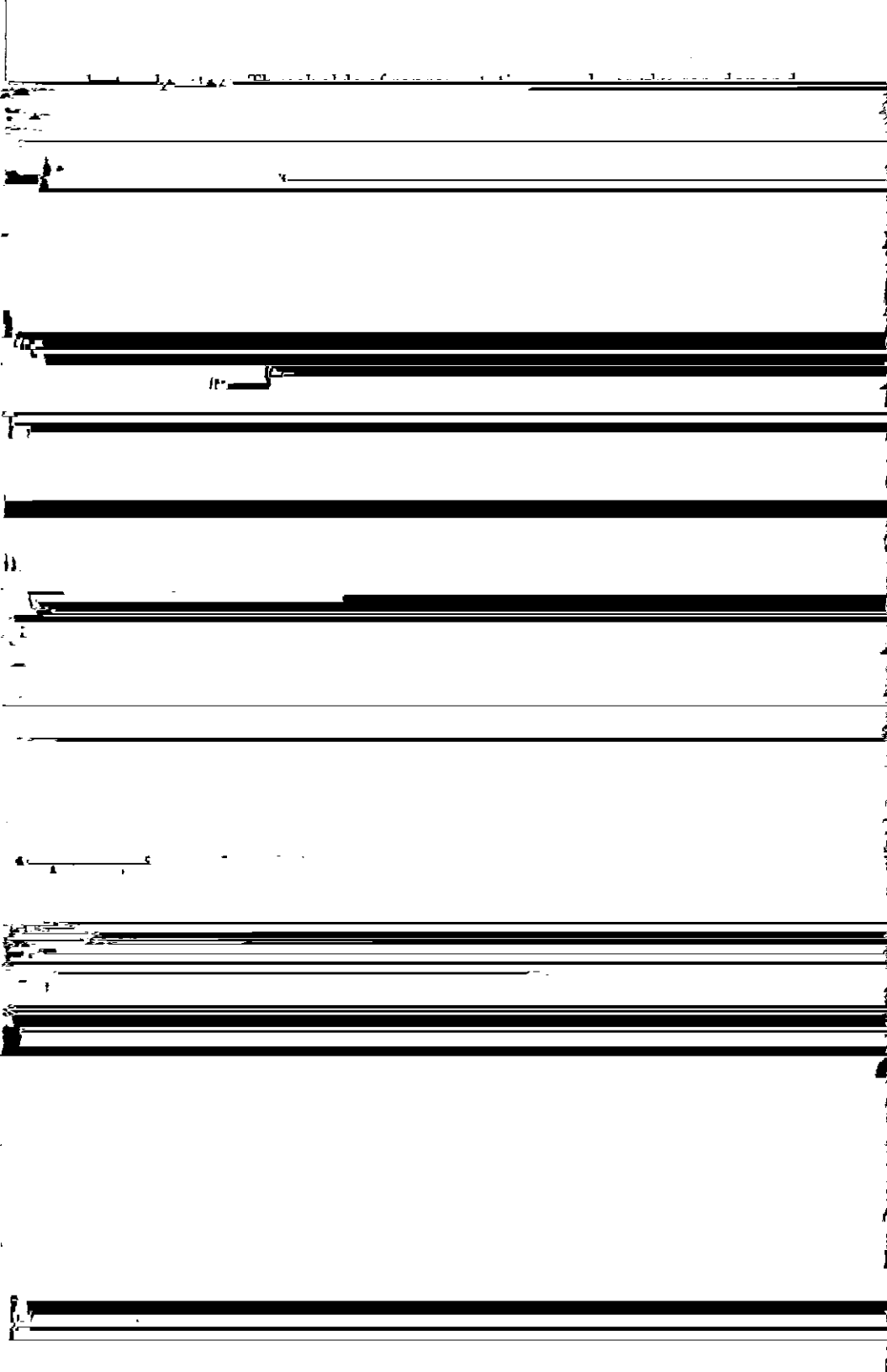
$$\frac{1}{mn}$$

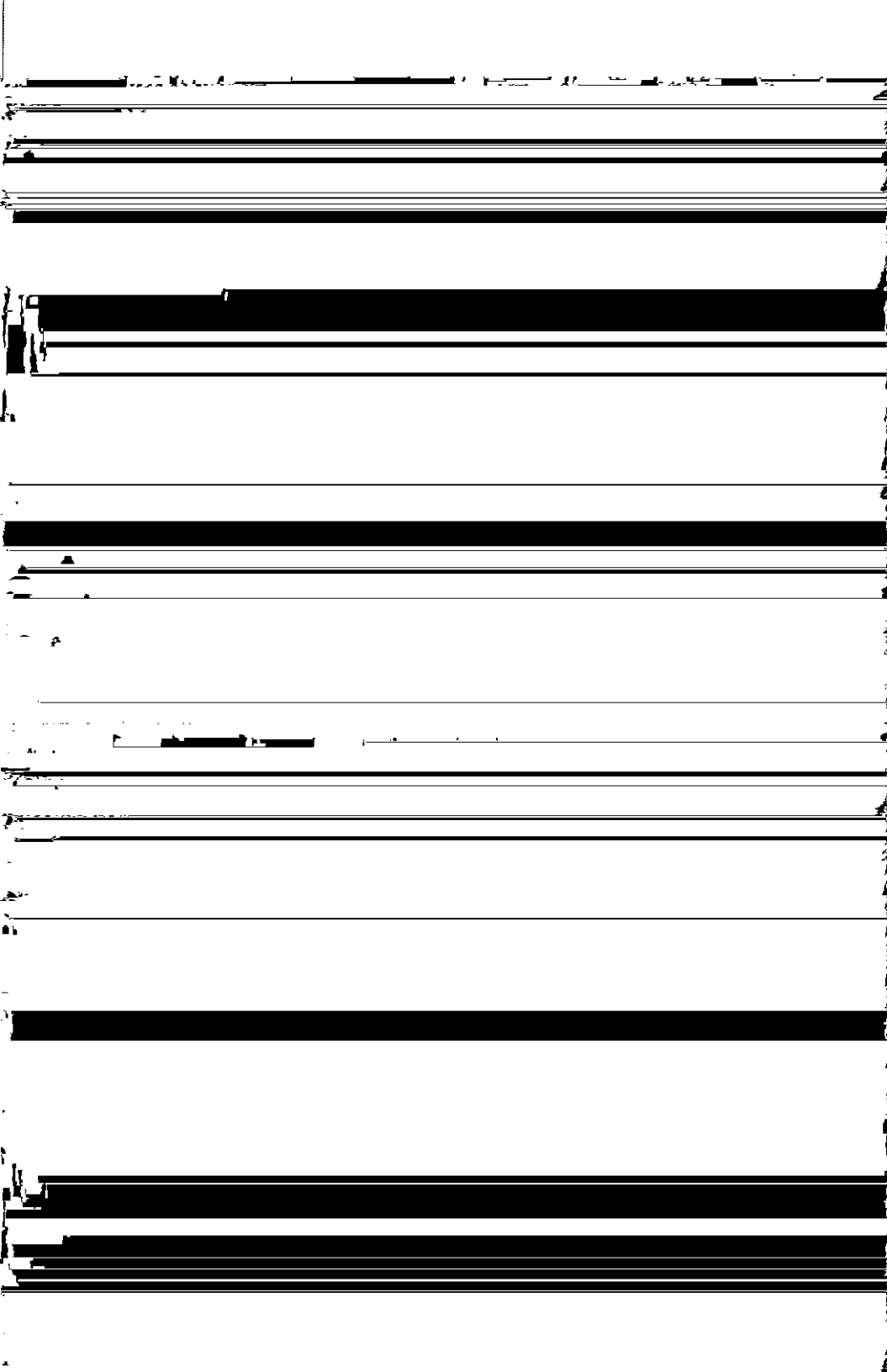
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ntation

ian one

3. where there are fewer parties than constituency seats, the d'Hondt system has the highest threshold of exclusion of any PR system (descriptions of various types of electoral systems can be found in Appendix A);
4. the threshold of representation is highest for plurality elec-





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public process than it is in Canada or Britain. It may disperse influence beyond the parliamentary parties to the executives of party organizations, but probably not so far as to give more influence to voters. All coalitions are ultimately responsible to an electorate which may react

Table 3 examines the parliamentary and cabinet experience of members of the St. Laurent, Diefenbaker and Trudeau cabinets. In appraising these figures, it must be kept in mind that the St. Laurent Liberals were coming to the end of a term which had begun in 1935, that the Diefen-

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parties are less good guides to action, since all seek to maximize their own vote and are loath to admit to not being in contention.

Finally, it is argued that a plurality electoral system or, more precisely, a system of single-member constituencies, is preferable in cementing the link between constituent and representative. An exhaustive discussion of this contention can be found in Crewe (1975). Very briefly, he finds that the impact of a member of parliament on his constituency in Britain

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Table 4

Indicators of Popular Attachment to Federal Political Parties by Region, 1974
 (Numbers in brackets are the base for the percentage)

	<i>Atlantic</i>	<i>Quebec</i>	<i>Ontario</i>	<i>Prairies</i>	<i>B.C.</i>
<i>1974 Liberals Voters</i>					
% Lib. in 1972	74 (91)	81 (335)	68 (376)	72 (95)	63 (73)
% "Always voted Lib."	70 (92)	66 (331)	55 (370)	56 (99)	51 (73)
% "Very strong" or "fairly strong"					
Lib. ID.	82 (92)	83 (355)	73 (376)	57 (99)	66 (73)

Table 4 provides some indicators of the political orientations held by
groups of the most important political coalitions in 1974. Those who

Clearly, Canada's is not the strongest party system to which to suddenly reduce the entry barriers; the more so since one must discount present evidence of fidelity as predictive of behaviour faced with a wider set of parties. Under a new electoral system the race between present parties strengthening their hold on their electorates and new parties trying to attract support would by no means be pre-determined. Still, established parties would be likely to have a significant lead.

Table 5

Panel A: CH \rightarrow C (M) in Party Conventions (1976-2000) Control Subsequent Elections

Year	Control	Subsequent Elections
1976	CH	C
1980	CH	C
1984	CH	C
1988	CH	C
1992	CH	C
1996	CH	C
2000	CH	C

are not political careerists, they have no incentive to be bridges between the party and local elites or local interest groups. They do not

good example would be the very destructive air-traffic control dispute of 1976. At the overt level, the meaning seems very straight-forward: there was a question of the safety of bilingual traffic control which was eminently a debatable matter since there was no good evidence about how bilingual control under instrument rules would work in a Canadian setting (though it apparently was safe enough in other countries). However, two other sets of meanings were quickly attached to the dispute, and, while it was possible to find out on an intellectual plane what these meanings were, parties could easily fail to appreciate them. A party with few

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consequence

The final component of strength was party direction. A party that is to have impact on government must have not only a policy character, but good information about the environment in which it governs. Only this permits them to come up with what Rose calls "not unworkable" means to achieve desired ends (Rose, 1976, chaps. 15 and 16). A party uninformed about its environment is as vulnerable as a party devoid of

histories of each country. While it is true, for example, that the European

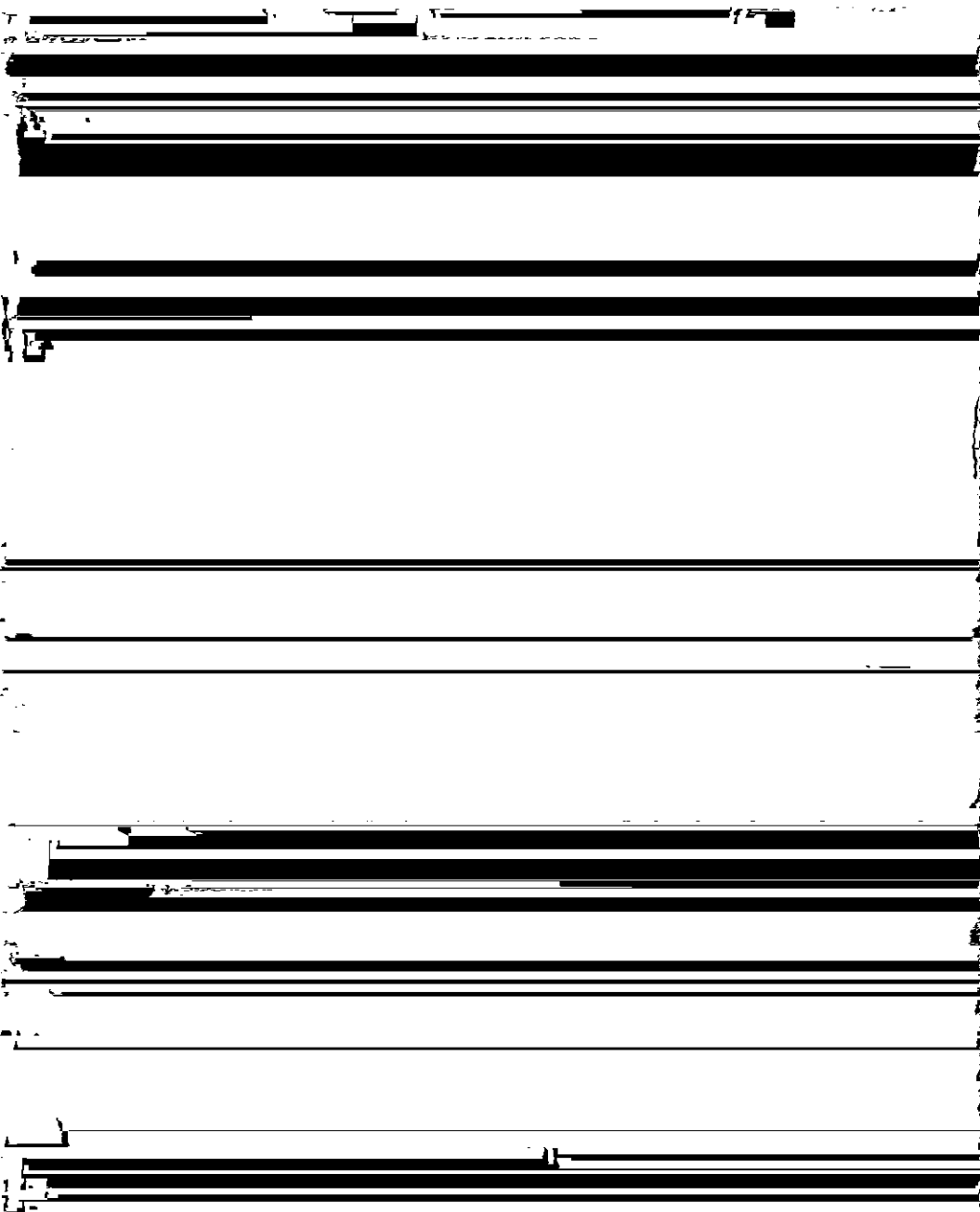
consequence of party organ

taken to avoid a "packing" of the primary. Candidates with lots of resources could call memberships to large numbers of people with no

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The fragmentation of party systems issue

strong organizations as a reaction to its disaggregative effect, and as an attempt to maximize party advantage. Australia does have a strong party system, and in this setting there is very little cross-party voting or slippage between candidates of the same party in Australian Senate elections (Aitken and Kahan, 1974, p. 440). Given the present weakness



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part to arise under proportional representation. The major contribution

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to the sensitivity of the party caucus, and encourage parties to establish closer links with their electorate. Are these gains costless?

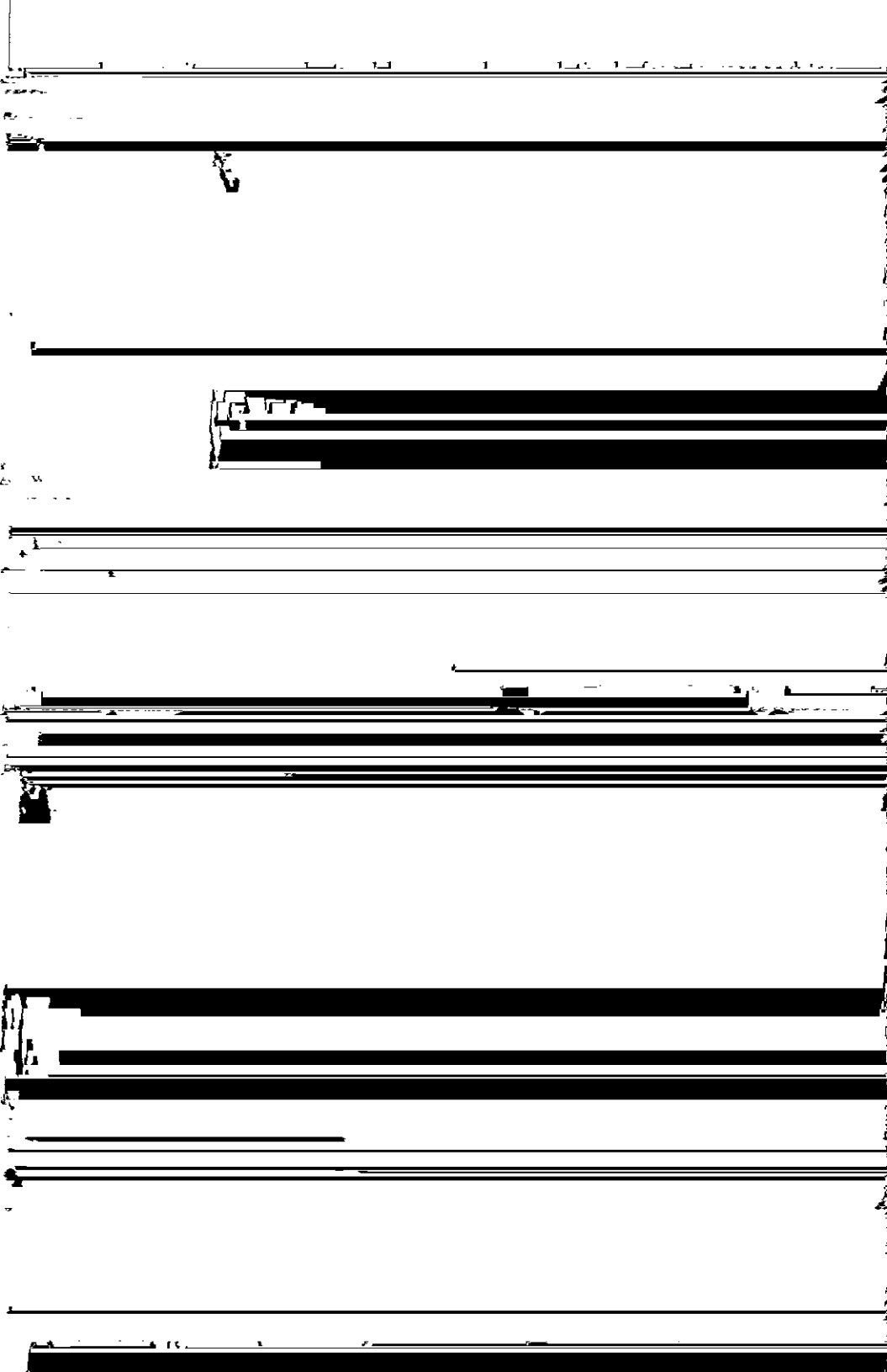
systems. (Calculated from data presented in the appendix to Blondel, 1968).

Whether this means that bargaining costs are higher within governments of PR rather than plurality systems is a question we shall not off for

fact that parties have separate identities may make it more difficult for
agreements to be achieved out of doors. (On the increasing...

tions, coalition partners would be tempted to pull out of a coalition, and leave to others the odium of being associated with unpopular measures.

[REDACTED]



What is less clear is the role of the electoral system in all of this. Commentators anticipate that, with a change in electoral systems, British governments would either be longer lived or would, at least, have more cabinet continuity than is now the case (Elliott 1977: 22). It is not clear

parties needed to sustain a government and create a pattern of institu-

one of its members by other groups, the new parliaments would allow much more innovative response, at least initially, than seems possible under the present system.

E. Selecting Campaign Tactics

Campaign strategy and tactics are difficult to disentangle from governing strategy and tactics. Many of the topics included under earlier headings

Socialist party leader, den Uyl, was a very strong one during the course of his prime ministership and in the subsequent election campaign. German companies also seem to be

4 A New Electoral System for Canada

Electoral systems produce, or tend to produce, many different kinds of outcomes. Different observers would value each differently but few would be perfectly satisfied with any single system. This, in itself, might be a sufficient argument for the adoption of a mixed electoral system such

constituency level and at large seats. Part of the calculation also involves consideration of the total size of the legislature. One could, for example, take the current size of the House of Commons as fixed and simply

Table 6

Current and Proposed Distribution of House of Commons Seats Among the Provinces

Province	Current Seats	Proposed Seats
Alberta	7	7
British Columbia	6	6
Manitoba	6	6
Ontario	12	12
Quebec	7	7
Saskatchewan	6	6
Atlantic Provinces	6	6
Total	50	50

but Prince Edward Island. The caucuses of the major parties are much more representative of the whole country. While MPs from Quebec actually made up 43% of the Liberal caucus but only 3% of the PC caucus in 1974, under the proposed scheme Quebec would have 33% of the Liberal caucus, 16% of the PC caucus plus seven NDP members (13% of

a candidate. Very attractive candidates lose to even more attractive candidates as in the 1978 Rosedale by-election. Winning candidates can

1

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5 Other Proposed Electoral System Reforms

Before introducing and commenting on other electoral system reforms proposed for Canada, it is perhaps worth noting the three main departures of the preceding proposal from the West German electoral system.

In the Federal Republic of Germany, each voter casts two votes, one for

Land list with the second highest quotient, and so on. (For a fuller
description see Roberts, 1975) The ~~land list~~ ~~land list~~ ~~land list~~ ~~land list~~ ~~land list~~

1971 census would gain two seats under my proposal the provincial members would be those who had come nearest to capturing the seven seats in the province" (C-333, 1970)

In the Smiley proposal, the ratio of seats to population is 1:1

national campaign, would be no stronger than under the present plurality system, but would be greater than under the proposal made in the previous section. In that system, constituency candidates would always keep an eye on party preferment — on seeking a favourable spot on their

The Broadbent proposal can be criticized for its abandonment of

12

One could only justify abandoning this principle by the claim that

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LIBERAL

Atlantic Quebec Ontario Prairies B.C. Total

party, and it is for that reason that the Irvine proposal is so much more

percentages. Not only does this not encourage local campaigns, it does not even require parties to campaign seriously in areas of weakness. In

6 Would the Proposed System Do What We Want?

Although this monograph has, at various points, made reference to the

added to the economic ones then brewing. The renegotiation of the relationship between Quebec and the rest of Canada complicates the

cultural goals and fears of French-Quebeckers. This introduces less "bargainable" dimensions and results in an easy, if largely spurious, concretization of economic issues. It makes it all too likely that economic frustration can be attributed to the "imperialism" of English Canadians or to the lack of patriotism of French-Canadians. The potential thus exists for a much more overtly racist party politics than has marked Canadian politics in recent years.

As was evident in the emotional power released by the air traffic

Professor Hermens rightly stressed that one of the greatest threats to a democratic system comes when the extremist parties can monopolize the

the enlarged parliament would number 55. Its gain under the worst

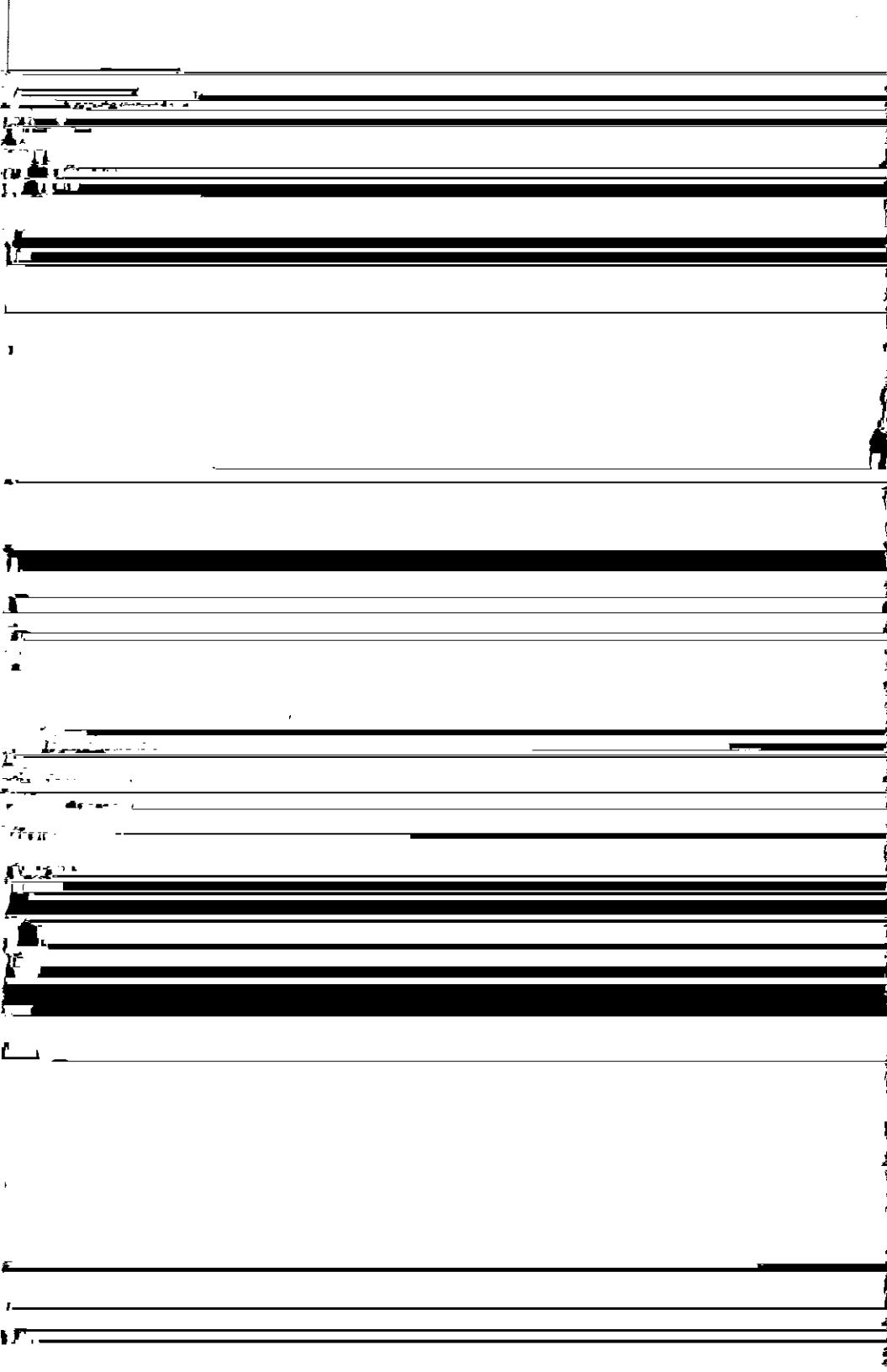
possible assumption would not be more than 600,000.

Canadian political agenda? The following situations could be crucial:

1. a sustained period of minority government:

reform would be the most effective and visible short-term response in a

Though the question was not designed specifically to tap evaluations of parties, we should recall from Table 4 that westerners were, if anything, *more* likely to feel that it made a difference which party formed the government. Whatever the strength of the tradition, our proposal is aimed against neither Quebec nor the west. Either would have the option of supporting new parties if they found that they could not work



between French Canadians and the Conservative party with all the implications that has for national unity. Electoral reform proposals are, in good part, attempts to moderate the continuing consequences of the

in Canada. A large measure of the current alienation from federal government comes from the fact that its formal power exceeds its moral power.

power. Governments act, and must act, on behalf of the whole country

nowadays. The real value of strengthening parliaments is that these
make policy relatively openly. They cannot dispense with expert advice.
It is quite conceivable that a coalition could develop as trustees of a

and an official opposition with twenty members from Quebec. This, or something like it, is what would occur under a reformed system of allocating seats in parliament. The party system would not fragment in the short run. It need not in the long run and certainly need not produce unworkable parliaments. By assuring better representativeness to our parliamentary parties, a reformed electoral system would accomplish two things:

1. elections would no longer imply the virtual exclusion of Quebec or of the west from power;
2. interests which can now only make themselves heard through provincial governments, if at all, would find they had increased weight in Ottawa. These at least are prerequisite to revitalizing the central government and harnessing it to serve the common interests of Canadians.

Appendix A

Types of Electoral System

Our present electoral system is a plurality system such as currently exists

Table A1

Table A1 is a table with multiple rows and columns. The content is almost entirely obscured by heavy black redaction bars. Only a few faint lines of text are visible, including a header row at the top and a few lines of text in the lower half of the page. The table structure is otherwise illegible.

Mr. Green and she is declared elected. Note that she does not have

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surplus votes and of the votes of lowest ranked candidates proceeds until

the quota has been attained (which may have been revised

reflect the proportion of the vote won by each party. If party A gets 40%, party B 33%, party C 16%, and party D 11%, and the district returns ten members, the top four candidates on the A list will be declared elected. So will the first three names on the B list, the first two names on the C list, and the first name on the D list.

This result is obtained by allocating the seats to minimize vote-to-seat ratios. The three principal ways of calculating these are the d'Hondt method, the St. Lagüe method, and the modified St. Lagüe method. The first illustrated in appendix B begins with the total vote for each party

party in the district, which could be the whole country, a whole state or province, or some other area, and divides the vote by successive integers

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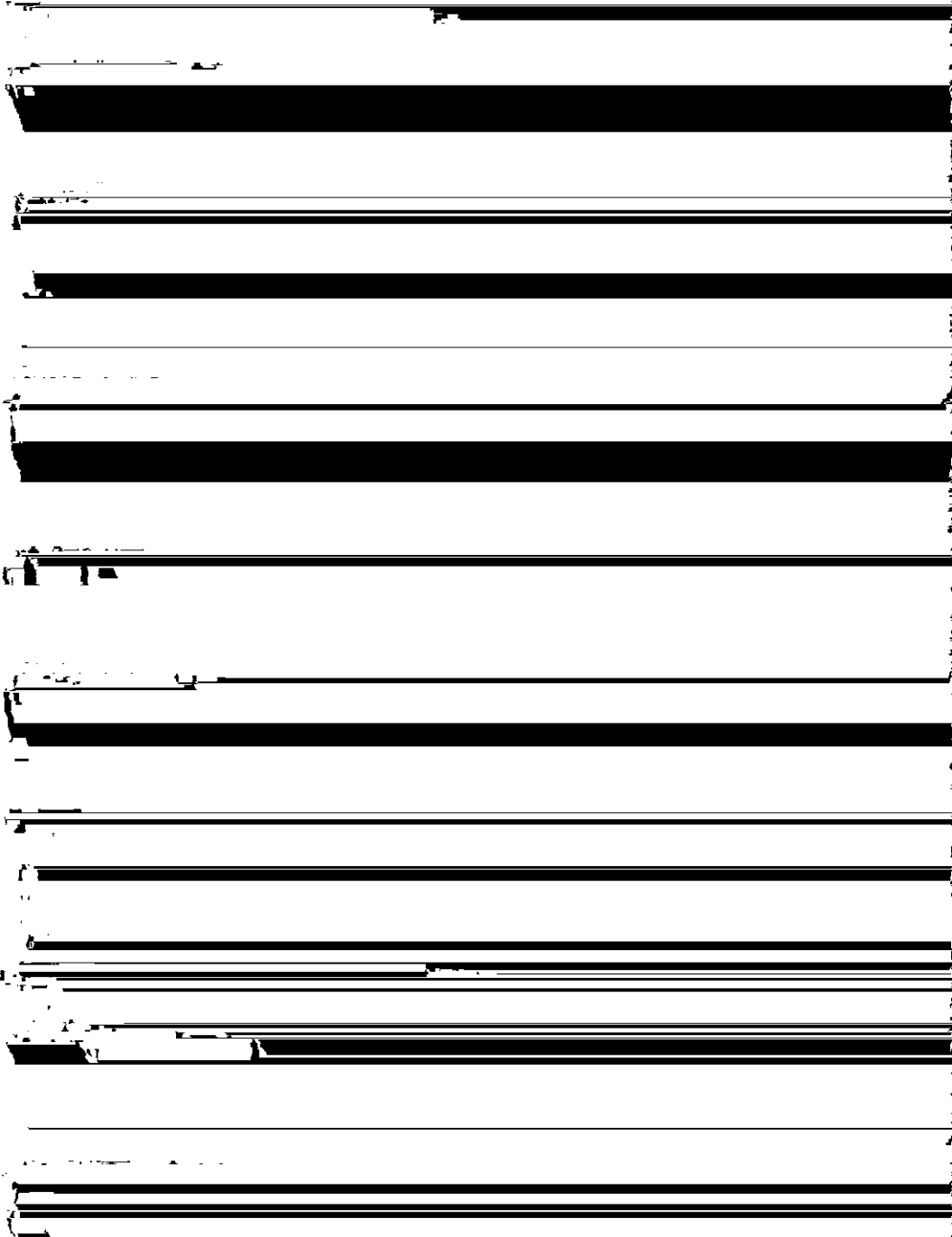
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Conservative Vote, 1974

I.	N.S.	N.B.	QUE.	ONT.	MAN.	SASK.	ALTA.	B.C.
4	20433	23733	130158 ^a 104126 ^b	48157 ^h 46373 ^j	21299	16761	20871	30282 ^{cc} 28263 ^{jj} 26497
			86722 ^c 74376 ^d	44717 ^k 43175 ^m				
			65079 ^e 57848 ^f	41736 ⁿ 40390 ^o				
			52063 ^g 47330 ⁱ	39128 ^q 37942 ^r				
			43386 ^l 40049 ^p	36826 ^t 35774 ^u				
			37189 ^s 34709 ^w	34780 ^v 33840 ^x				
			32540 ^z 30625 ^{cc}	32950 ^y 32105 ^{aaa}				
			28924 ^{hh} 27402	31302 ^{bb} 30539 ^{dd}				
				29811 ^{ff} 29118 ^{gg}				
				28456 ^{ll} 27824				

ASK.	ALTA.	B.C.
3463 ^o	63310 ^f	77516 ^c
2598	31655	58137 ^h
		46509 ^m
		38758

ASK.	ALTA.	B.C.
39	22909	12433

Liberals led in popular vote in Newfoundland, New Brunswick and Quebec. In those provinces, and only in those provinces, did they obtain a bonus of parliamentary seats (indicated by asterisks greater than 1 in the

Table C-2

*A Simulation of the 1979 Federal Election
under the System Proposed in the Test*

Prov.	MP TYPE	LIB.	P.C.	NDP	S.C.	OTHER	TOTAL
NFLD.	const.	3	1	1			5
	prov.		2	2			4
	total	3	3	3			9
P.E.I.	const.		3				3
	prov.	2					2
	total	2	3				5
N.B.	const.	4	3				7
	prov.	1	2	2			5
	total	5	5	2			12
N.S.	const.	2	4	1			7
	prov.	3	2	2			7
	total	5	6	3			14
QUE.	const.	45	1		4		50
	prov.	13	12	5	11	3	44
	total	58	13	5	15	3	94
ONT.	const.	21	38	4			63
	prov.	23	12	21			56
	total	44	50	25			119
MAN.	const.	1	5	3			9
	prov.	3	3	3			9
	total	4	8	6			18
SASK.	const.		7	2			9
	prov.	3	1	5			9
	total	3	8	7			18
ALTA.	const.		14				14
	prov.	6	3	3			12
	total	6	17	3			26
B.C.	const.		14	5			19
	prov.	8	2	6			16
	total	8	16	11			35
NORTH	const.		1	1			2
	prov.	1	1				2
<hr/>							
CANADA	seats (%)	39.2	37.0	18.6	4.2	0.8	
	vote (%)	39.9	36.1	17.9	4.5	1.5	
	seats (%) (actual)	40.4	48.2	9.2	2.1	0.0	

They are, nonetheless, quite interesting. The Progressive Conserva-

system, the Progressive Conservatives would have had only to maintain their 1974 vote in Quebec to have been the largest parliamentary party. Under the new electoral system, as under the old, the Progressive Conservatives could have earned the right to form a government.

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