Canada: The Unknown Country

by
David L. Leal,
University of Texas at Austin

The last symposium on Canada in *PS* was published in 1993, but little seems to have changed in the attitude of American political scientists toward this nation. To quote from the previous symposium introduction:

> American political scientists have paid very little attention to our northern neighbor and leading trading partner. Yet . . . Canada poses a number of important issues and concerns to scholars of American and comparative politics, including the difficulty of building coalitions for institutional reform, the development of minority group identities, and the political dynamics of direct democracy institutions such as referenda. (Weaver 1993, 32)

One might also add that Canada is of interest to those who care about parliamentary government; about the efforts of nations to manage regional, ethnic, and linguistic diversity; about cooperation and negotiation in the international arena; about regional economic integration and political cooperation; and about ice sports that involve brooms.

Nonetheless, I have noticed that asking scholars to care about Canadian politics is like asking them to get a physical or eat more vegetables. Everyone agrees these are probably good ideas, but there is often a certain reluctance to comply. If you want someone to look at you quizzically, just say "I've become interested in Canada lately . . ."

Do not blame Canada for such deficiencies. As Peter Jennings said, "Canadians have an abiding interest in surprising those Americans who have historically made little effort to learn about their neighbour to the North." For instance, I receive emails regularly from the Canadian Embassy, and you can too—see Connect2Canada.com. It even sent me a nice poster (now on my office door) that details Canadian trade and security ties with each American state. This is not just because Canadians are nice—although they are—but because Canada knows it needs to educate Americans. The hope is that more information will lead to a better and more sympathetic bilateral relationship.

To better understand how Canadians feel about their relationship with the U.S., consider the following book titles—*Life with Uncle: The Canadian-American Relationship* (Holmes 1981) and *Invisible and Inaudible in Washington: American Policies toward Canada* (Mahant and Mount 1999)—and you will get the picture. In his article in this symposium, Munroe Eagles paraphrases former Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau as saying that Canada is a nervous mouse sharing a bi-national bed with an American elephant. Another former prime minister, Joe Clark, recently said at the U.S. Air Force Academy that, "It's not that we don't like you. It's that we're afraid of you, fundamentally, afraid of having our culture absorbed in yours, of having our interests overwhelmed by yours."

Two good ways to learn about Canada are to live near it and visit it. My own interest in Canada was shaped by living in Buffalo and by the annual visit to Ottawa by the APSA Congressional Fellowship Program. If moving to Buffalo or flying to Ottawa are impractical for you, another way to learn is to read, which *PS* has made possible with the following symposium. The five articles—which are by design short and easy to read—are intended to help you better understand important aspects of Canadian politics. While no symposium can cover all possible topics, these articles discuss key issues and are written by both established and up-and-coming scholars. The authors include Americans and Canadians, and they live in Canada, near Canada, and far from Canada. While the symposium may not convince you to become an expert on Canada, you might see that the study of Canada is relevant to some of your own interests. You might even want to join the APSA Canadian politics group, which is currently working to upgrade its status to that of an organized section.

In the first article, Harold Clarke, Allan Kornberg, Thomas Scotto, and Joe Twyman discuss the recent 2006 Canadian federal election—which saw Stephen Harper and the Conservatives dislodge the Liberal Party. Munroe Eagles then examines the relationship between Canada and the U.S., particularly the strains that have grown since 9-11, as well as the implications of the recent Canadian election. Ken Carty provides an overview of parties and partisanship in Canada, a subject that can daunt Americans because of the changes that have taken place over the last two decades. Mebs Kanji and Antoine Bilodeau discuss the debate on electoral reform and its connection to growing Canadian diversity. Donley Studlar and Kyle Christensen then examine Canada and its political institutions along Arend Lijphart's (1999) dimensions of consensus and majoritarian democracies. Lastly, my article with Dan Lipinski covers the issues that would likely be discussed should all or part of Canada wish—however likely or unlikely this may be—to become part of the United States someday.

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SYMPOSIUM AUTHORS' BIOS

Antoine Bilodeau *is assistant professor in the department of political science at Concordia University. He has a Ph.D. in political science from the University of Toronto (2004). His research interests include Canadian politics, immigration, political behaviors, elections, and voting. He can be reached via email at abilodea@alcor.concordia.ca.*

R. Kenneth Carty *is professor of political science at the University of British Columbia where he currently holds the Brenda & David McLean Chair in Canadian Studies. A former president of the Canadian Political Science Association, Carty has published widely on questions of party organization and activity in Europe, Canada, and Australia. His most recent book, with Munroe Eagles, is* Politics is Local: National Politics at the Grassroots *(Oxford University Press, 2005).*

Kyle Christensen *is a Ph.D. student in the department of political science at West Virginia University. His research interests include foreign policy analysis, comparative political behavior, and military manpower systems. He has presented research papers at meetings of the Canadian Political Science Association, Southern Political Science Association, and Middle East and Central Asia Conference.*

Harold D. Clarke *is Ashbel Smith Professor of Political Science, University of Texas at Dallas, and adjunct professor, University of Essex. He is currently a principal investigator of the Political Support in Canada project and the 2005 British Election Study. He is co-author of* Political Choice in Britain, *and his next book,* Performance Politics: The British Voter *is forthcoming with Cambridge University Press.*

Munroe Eagles *is professor of political science and adjunct professor of geography at the University at Buffalo-SUNY, where he has taught since 1989. His primary research interests fall in the areas of political geography and Canadian and American politics. He has published extensively on these topics, and his most recent book, co-authored with Ken Carty, is entitled* Politics is Local: National Politics at the Grassroots *(Oxford University Press, 2005).*

Mebs Kanji *is assistant professor in the department of political science at Concordia University. His research interests include Canadian politics, comparative politics, values diversity, social cohesion, political support, and democratic governance. He can be reached via email at mkanji@alcor.concordia.ca.*

Allan Kornberg *is Norb F. Schaefer Professor of Political Science, Duke University. He is the author of numerous books and articles, and is a principal investigator of the Political Support in Canada project. His most recent book, with Harold D. Clarke and Peter Wearing, is* A Polity on the Edge: Canada and the Politics of Fragmentation *(Broadview Press, 2000).*

David L. Leal *is associate professor of government at the University of Texas at Austin. He is interested in North America, particularly Latino/Hispanic politics and public policy. He has published over 30 articles and book chapters on these topics and is the co-editor of the forthcoming* Latino Politics: Identity, Mobilization, and Representation *(University of Virginia Press) and the author of* Electing America's Governors *(Palgrave-Macmillan, 2006). He received a Ph.D. in political science from Harvard University in 1998.*

Dan Lipinski *currently represents Illinois' 3rd District in the U.S. House of Representatives. He received his Ph.D. in political science from Duke University and has taught at the University of Notre Dame and the University of Tennessee. His articles have appeared in journals including the* British Journal of Political Science *and* Legislative Studies Quarterly, *and he is the author of* Congressional Communication: Content and Consequences *(University of Michigan Press).*

Thomas J. Scotto *is assistant professor of political science, West Virginia University. He has published articles in the* American Review of Canadian Studies, Journal of Politics, *and* Electoral Studies, *and is co-author with Harold Clarke and Allan Kornberg of* Political Choices: Canada and the United States, *forthcoming with Broadview Press.*

Donley T. Studlar *is the Eberly Family Distinguished Professor of Political Science at West Virginia University and visiting professor at the University of Aarhus, 2006–2007, partially under the auspices of his second Fulbright award. His research on political behavior, political institutions, and public policy in Western democracies has appeared in practically every major journal in the discipline. His most recent book is* Tobacco Control: Comparative Politics in the United States and Canada *(Broadview Press, 2002).*

Joe Twyman *is special projects director at YouGov. In 2000, he became one of the founding directors of YouGov with responsibility for developing the company's online research operations. He now concentrates on sampling and data analysis, as well as on major project solutions. He has spoken at conferences across the world and is co-author of a series of academic papers exploring online research.*

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