R. Johnston, “The Structural Basis of Canadian Party Preference: Evolution and Cross-National Comparison,” unpublished ms

**Overview**

The chapter argues that seemingly contradictory patterns of parties and elections in Canada can be reconciled – arguing that (once the evidence is properly arranged), the wide cleavages in Cdn party preference is typical for the consolidated party systems of Anglo-American democracies. It also reveals the domination of Canada’s cleavage structure by cultural forces.

**Background**

* Widely circulated image of Cdn party system is one of “stable de-alignment” – the system exhibits shocking electoral swings – though this stylization sits uneasily with the routine nature by which the Liberal party has dominated, suggesting deep roots
* The true Cdn peculiarity is threefold: (1) the system is dominated by cultural factors; (2) the key cultural factors interact with residence in or out of Quebec; combining to yield (3) a system uniquely dominated by a party of the centre.

**Conclusions**

The liberals are the sole party of the centre (in comparative perspective) – since the 1970s since the Conservatives took a sharp right turn. The Liberal command of the centre has forced the Conservatives to alternate between me-tooism, which implicitly concedes Liberal ownership of the issue, and the internally centrifugal strategy that can deliver power, but as a poisoned chalice.