A Little Help from My Friends: The Partisan Factor and Intergovernmental Negotiations in Canada

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This article takes a new approach to the study of federal–provincial relations by arguing that in the conduct of intergovernmental relations in Canada, whether on major constitutional issues or the mundane, ordinary intergovernmental negotiations, partisanship has an effect. An examination of the Meech Lake Accord constitutional negotiations (1987–1990) and the Child Care Agreements (2004–2005) reveals that where traditional factors fail to provide a reason for conflict or cooperation between governments, the partisan variable offers valuable explanatory power. The impact is found in the process of federal–state bargaining and not in the substance of agreements themselves—in other words, partisanship can influence how an agreement is reached and whether it is kept.

The relevancy of partisanship in intergovernmental relations is an under-investigated area of federalism studies. The value of cross-level cooperation between party cousins[1] to facilitate better federal–state relations seems intuitive, yet political scientists tend to dismiss this partisan dimension. On the one hand, cooperation among partisans is taken for granted in most federations where party organizations have strong, formal links across the federal divide. With similar party labels, ideologies, membership, and voting segments, partisan cooperation is more natural in countries such as Germany, Australia, India, and the United States. Perhaps because it is assumed to occur, there is little scrutiny of a partisan factor in intergovernmental relations. On the other hand, in federations such as Canada where party organizations at the national and subnational levels are mostly uncoupled, partisanship also remains on the margins of federalism studies since it is assumed to have no effect on intergovernmental relations (Bakvis and Tanguay 2008, 129; Dyck 1991, 162; Stewart and Carty 2006, 97; Wolinetz and Carty 2006, 54).

The prevailing wisdom in Canada is that factors other than partisanship are better able to explain conflict and cooperation between federal and provincial

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governments. Richard Simeon (1972, 162–200) sets the standard by outlining four factors that are particularly important:

a. interests of the individual province (primarily economic) and its character (population, size, and wealth);
b. ideological position of the government (view of the political system and the role and balance of governments within it) and of the particular issue under consideration;
c. status goals of the government (to gain credit, avoid blame, and enhance its own prestige); and
d. different perspectives of government (especially political interests/perspectives, i.e., in a majority or minority position, proximity to an election, the needs of interest groups to which it must be responsive, etc.).

These traditional factors have dominated examinations of intergovernmental relations in the Canadian context.

There is counterevidence to suggest that partisanship should play a more prominent role in these types of analyses, since political party organizations are not as disentangled as scholars presume. In Canada, for example, the New Democratic Party (NDP) is a fully integrated organization. Joining a provincial NDP results in an automatic membership in the federal party. In the Liberal Party, federal–provincial organizational integration can be found in Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island (PEI), and Newfoundland and Labrador. The unifying links that remain between differentiated federal and provincial party cousins (the Liberal Party in the remaining five provinces and the Conservative Party in all ten) primarily involve sharing party activists, particularly (but not limited to) the grassroots (Koop 2011; Sayers and Koop 2005). Other evidence suggests that political parties in Canada share similar voting segments at the provincial and federal levels; they collaborate during election campaigns to help their cousin at the other level win, and they even provide assistance to one another to help ensure a successful transition to government (Esselment 2009, 2010, 2011).

This article examines the role of partisanship in the process of two federal–provincial negotiations and highlights the "Realpolitik" of federal dynamics by identifying and developing a partisan factor in intergovernmental relations. Put simply, partisanship should matter because governments are composed of political parties. In this view, provincial premiers are not disembodied actors who adhere only to what is in the best interest of their province or country. They are leaders of political parties who must maintain their party organizations, galvanize activists behind them, and rely on partisan supporters at both levels to help win the next election. In other words, partisan considerations are separate from what may otherwise be characterized as "provincial interest" calculations. The argument is

this: if the traditional variables as laid out by Simeon (1972) cannot wholly explain why political actors behave one way or another, we can consider the role of partisanship (the partisan loyalties and party ties of the governments involved in the negotiations) as an additional explanatory factor. In other words, where traditional variables fail to provide an adequate reason for conflict or cooperation, partisan considerations can offer further understanding and may, in fact, override the usual explanatory variables.

Essential to this position is that partisanship is likely to be more important in terms of the *process* of negotiating intergovernmental agreements as opposed to the *substance* of the agreements themselves. More generally, partisanship can shape intergovernmental relations by influencing how political actors will act and react to the behavior of their counterparts when bargaining across the levels. Put another way, as the centre of government (prime minister and premier's offices) and the actors within them (political advisors) have become increasingly influential, so too should the role of partisanship (Aucoin 2008; Eichbaum and Shaw 2010; Noel 2007; Savoie 1999; Zussman 2009). While we might expect intergovernmental cooperation from governments with partisan symmetry, for example, we may also find that where conflict does exists between party cousins, perhaps even for the traditional reasons Simeon identifies, various facets of partisanship can be used to resolve differences and facilitate cooperation. Developed from an analysis of intergovernmental negotiations in Canada, the "partisan factor" can become apparent when:

a. politicians and political staff use political channels across the levels to either help or hinder negotiations;
b. politicians and political staff use political and partisan arguments to bolster their position (this may be accompanied by calling in old debts from a party cousin or using threats against an opponent);
c. appeals are made to a cousin's caucus and/or rank and file members;
d. electoral success could be boosted (or diminished) by forging an agreement (or not);
e. a cousin wants to help or hinder the success of leaders at the other level; and
f. there is a need to maintain party unity, and decisions are made to that effect.

This study finds that in the conduct of intergovernmental relations in Canada, whether on major constitutional issues or the mundane, ordinary intergovernmental negotiations that are commonly forged across the levels, partisanship has an effect. Furthermore, the impact is found in the process of federal–state bargaining and not in the substance of agreements themselves—in other words, partisanship can influence how an agreement is reached and whether it is kept. As a result, we

urge federalism scholars to pay greater heed to the partisan factor when analyzing government-to-government relations in federal systems.

Partisanship and Federalism in the Literature

Scholars in the United States have recognized that the intersection of the party system and federalism can affect the development of federal systems in general. This political approach to the study of federalism was first embraced by William Riker (1964). He argued that:

> [w]hatever the general social conditions, if any, that sustain the federal bargain, there is one institutional condition that controls the nature of the bargain in all the instances here examined and in all others with which I am familiar. This is the structure of the party system, which may be regarded as the main variable intervening between the background social conditions and the specific nature of the federal bargain (1964, 136).

Riker's specific theoretical contribution to this effect was his observation that the party system within a federal polity determined its tendency to either centralize or decentralize. For Riker, the ''centre'' or national government was prevented from ''overawing'' subnational governments through decentralization of the federal party system:

> the decentralization of the two-party system is sufficient to prevent national leaders from controlling their partisans by either organizational or ideological devices. As such, this decentralized system is the main protector of the integrity of states in our federation (101).

The true measure of federalism, then, was effective opposition to the central government by the subnational governments. This was achieved through the partisan control of state governments that differed from the partisan complexion of the federal government. Since Riker's contribution, the nature of party systems and its impact on centralization or decentralization has tended to dominate the study of parties and federations (for a few examples, see Conlan and Dinan 2007; Grodzins 1960; Kramer 2000; Truman 1955; Wildavsky 1961).

This article builds on Riker's theory of partisanship as a factor explaining the degree of harmony or disharmony in intergovernmental relations. Riker and Schaps (1957) explored the hypothesis that governments controlled by partisans of the same party experienced more harmony in intergovernmental relations whereas disharmony would be more prevalent when partisan opponents of the central government controlled the majority of state governments. In their ''index of disharmony'' they found that generally harmony and disharmony in intergovernmental matters could be predicted based on the particulars of partisan control in

the United States. Campbell Sharman's (1994) replication of this index for Australia had mixed results. Periods of intense conflict in the federation corresponded with diverging partisanships at the state level (which accorded with Riker and Schaps' theory), but there was also conflict during the periods when the partisan complexions of the central and state governments were identical. He did find that partisan similarity can predispose a state government to cooperate with the central administration (Sharman 1976). Other studies in Australia have highlighted the role of partisanship in federal–state relations (Stevenson 1987).

Partisanship has been identified as affecting other areas of intergovernmental relations. One is the willingness of the U.S. central authority to either delegate or consolidate policy-making power based on the partisan composition of the subnational units; the federal government appears to have greater confidence in the "faithful representation" of its policy interests in state governments whose partisan complexion is congruent with its own (Krause and Bowman 2005). The placing of blame for government action or inaction at either the state or federal level also has a partisan dimension; Democratic voters will blame the level of government controlled by the Republicans, while Republicans voters will fault the reverse (Brown 2010; Maestas et al. 2008).

By far the most work on partisanship and federalism has been focused on analyzing fiscal transfers between central and state governments. Whereas normative theory of intergovernmental relations has suggested that these transfers should be dominated by considerations of equality and efficiency (Oates 1972), empirical evidence demonstrates otherwise. On the one hand, national to subnational fiscal transfers have been made in the interest of vote-maximization for the incumbent government at the central level. This was true in the New Deal era (Wright 1974) and has also been the case in Sweden (Johansson 2003). On the other hand, research has demonstrated that central governments will also favor subnational units that share their partisan complexion when dispersing discretionary funds. Municipal governments in Spain that shared the partisan complexions of grantor upper-tier governments received more money in grant allocations than unaligned municipal governments (Solé-Ollé and Sorribas-Navarro 2008). This has also been the case in India where aligned swing states (where increased vote share would benefit both levels of government) received 16 percent higher grant allotments than nonaligned states (Arulampalam et al. 2009). Likewise in Israel, city mayors who were members of the national ruling party received a greater share of discretionary grants than those cities whose mayors were nonpartisan allies (Rozevitch and Weiss 1993). Political considerations were also shown to have an impact on the distribution of equalization payments to provincial governments in Canada (Young and Sharman 1996).

Aside from Young and Sharman's 1996 analysis of equalization payments, the role of partisanship in federal–provincial relations in Canada has generally been

neglected. The Senate has long been criticized for inadequately representing regional concerns, and thus provincial governments have consequently become the champions of provincial interests (Smiley and Watts 1985).[2] Analysts have since privileged these interests as the predominant factor determining whether conflict or cooperation will prevail in intergovernmental matters (Meisel 1967, 37; Noel 1971, 131; Smith 1967, 196). Richard Simeon's (1972) seminal work on federal–provincial diplomacy analyzed the negotiations between the federal and provincial governments in their attempts to achieve a pension plan, to rearrange the country's structure for sharing tax sources and revenue, and to agree on amendments to the constitution. Simeon dismissed Riker's theory as too generalized, arguing "... that even the laudable aims of parsimony in political science do not justify sweeping generalizations based on one factor, like William Riker's assertion that one institutional element—the party system—controls the nature of the federal bargain" (Simeon 1972, 306). Simeon may have been guilty of dismissing too quickly any role partisanship may play in intergovernmental relations. That particular factor was not wholly isolated and scrutinized as a major part of his study, although he concluded that "[e]ven a cursory glance at these cases indicates clearly that party differences have very little to do with federal-provincial conflicts. Party, in fact, seems to be almost the least important line of cleavage in the system" (194).

Donald Smiley (1974) and other experts on Canadian federalism tended to agree with Simeon's position. For them, conflict or cooperation across the levels in Canada was due primarily to the weakening of the centralized federal order and the strengthening of the provincial governments (Black and Cairns 1966; Smiley 1974, 1976, 1980). Theories of province-building and provincial interests have since become the prevailing themes of scholarly discussions of federal–provincial relations (Pratt 1977) with notable scholars such as Donald Savoie arguing that "provincial premiers, no matter their political affiliation, stand where they sit" (1992, 4). Ronald Watts (2008) has similarly argued that where different parties control different levels of government, as is often the case in Canada, the party regime has little impact on negotiating cooperative arrangements across the federal divide.

At the same time, a handful of political scientists have acknowledged partisanship as an important dimension in intergovernmental relations. Michael Stein (1971) agreed with Riker that the party system is a crucial factor in maintaining the federal bargain and that this theory was applicable to the Canadian case. Likewise R. MacGregor Dawson (1949) suggested that:

> [p]arty rivalries not unnaturally play an important part in Dominion-provincial relations, although the way in which these are likely to be affected by party bidding for popular support is by no means clear. It can be assumed

> that normally the maximum co-operation and friendliness can be expected when Dominion and provincial governments are controlled by the same party; and such cooperation will include also the granting of any special favours by the Dominion to the province (578).

Even Donald Smiley and Richard Simeon conceded that partisan political activity could affect intergovernmental affairs. Smiley noted that party politics involved complex interpersonal relations which "can and no doubt do expert important influences on interactions between federal and provincial wings [of parties] and on government-to-government dealings" (1976, 103). Richard Simeon granted that when governments of identical partisan affiliations were engaged in cross-level negotiations there was often less aggressiveness between them. Likewise, when the complexions at each level diverged, communication became less free (Simeon 1972). Partisan rivalry across the levels has also been noted in the negotiations on the Labour Market Agreements and the Social Union Framework Agreement (Bakvis 2002; Gibbins 2003). Smiley and Simeon have maintained however, despite these occasional, marginal effects, "[o]ther factors—regional needs and interests, ideology, and differences in the focus of attention of the various governments—override partisan differences" (1972, 196).

In sum, the role of partisanship has been used as a general explanation for harmony or disharmony between governments, as a way for voters to allocate blame, as a consideration of governments regarding the devolution of policy control, and as a litmus for the allocation of discretionary spending from central to regional authorities. There is, however, very little analysis on partisanship and its impact on the actual negotiation of intergovernmental agreements. The bottom line is this: if party politics does involve complex personal relationships which can "no doubt expert important influences on interactions . . . on government-to-government dealings" (Smiley 1976, 103) then students of federalism should strive to uncover those partisan influences. The following examination makes such an attempt and argues that the partisan factor plays a role in intergovernmental relations in Canada.

Methodology

To illustrate how the partisan factor can be employed in relations between national and subnational governments, this article will examine two Canadian case studies: the Meech Lake Accord (1987–1990) and the Child Care agreements (2004–2005). In both cases, politicians and political staff played important roles in the negotiations. In the debates on the Accord, for example, party channels were used to bring reluctant premiers on side. In the Child Care agreements, politicians and

political staff used their partisan connections to iron out conflicts and provide public support to the federal government.

But why these two cases specifically? In Canadian federalism, two types of intergovernmental deliberations are prominent. The first are mega-constitutional rounds involving high stakes negotiations among and between first ministers, their governments, and their legislatures.[3] The Meech Lake Accord is emblematic of this first type—it was a multilateral, constitutional deal struck by Progressive Conservative (PC) Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and the ten provincial premiers in 1987. This was followed by a three-year ratification process by all eleven legislatures. The Accord's purpose was to amend the 1982 constitution by committing the country to five conditions set out by the province of Quebec: recognition as a "distinct society" in Canada, control over immigration to the province, the entrenchment of three Supreme Court justices from Quebec, restrictions on the federal spending power, and a veto over constitutional amendments to federal institutions. The negotiation and ratification period engendered a passionate and divisive debate about, among other matters, national unity, the place of Quebec and the French language in Canada, equality of the provinces, and the role and reform of national institutions. The pressure to come to agreement and ratify the constitutional deal provided a ripe environment for the employment of the partisan factor in various ways. The two provinces under particular scrutiny are New Brunswick and Manitoba. Both provinces experienced a change of government during the ratification period that affected their support of the Accord and the traditional variables do not provide an adequate explanation for the subsequent conflict in New Brunswick and cooperation in Manitoba. Meech Lake was a pivotal event in the constitutional history of Canada and provides a valuable case through which to analyze the role of partisanship.[4]

The Child Care agreements are a classic example of social and economic policy programs in which (usually) the federal level wants to be involved but is constitutionally prohibited from acting alone due to the division of powers. In 2004 the federal government wanted to spearhead a new social program by providing the provinces $5 billion in funding for regulated, licensed child care at the subnational level. Constitutional constraints required the explicit consent of the provinces in order to proceed; the negotiation of an intergovernmental agreement provides that consent.

In short, these two case studies are different from one another, but representative of the type of intergovernmental negotiations that occur regularly in Canada. Furthermore, these two cases offer:

- a mix of multilateral and bilateral agreements;
- a temporal dimension that includes federal governments of different partisan compositions;

- two different prime ministers;
- the turnover of various provincial governments;
- constitutional versus non-constitutional agreements; and
- a different degree of public awareness of the negotiations.

In addition to the rich secondary literature on the Meech Lake Accord and accounts of the Child Care deals, interviews were conducted with several key informants who were directly involved in the negotiations.[5]

The Partisan Factor and Federal–Provincial Negotiations

The Meech Lake Accord (1987–1990)

At a general level we would expect governments with similar partisan complexions to be amenable to cooperation. Even if cooperation is not forthcoming, or if conflict arises between party cousins, the partisan factor can be used to bring about compliance or resolve disputes. Two examples from the ratification process of the Meech Lake Accord provide some insight into this claim.

After initial agreement to the Accord by the first ministers in 1987, each legislature was required to ''ratify'' the deal within three years. Seven provincial legislatures did so without difficulty by December 1988 and for reasons offered by the traditional variables (e.g., ideological commitment to having Quebec in Canada, prestige for the premiers who championed and passed the agreement, and provincial interest in terms of economic benefits that could accrue for aiding the prime minister in his quest to end the constitutional impasse). Each of the three remaining provinces—New Brunswick, Manitoba, and Newfoundland—experienced a change in the partisan complexion of the governments during the three-year ratification period that affected the vote on the Accord. For two of these provinces (New Brunswick and Manitoba), the partisan factor provides an explanation why support for the Accord vacillated (see table 1).

In New Brunswick, the provincial government changed from Conservative to Liberal. PC Premier Richard Hatfield had not put the Accord to a legislative vote before plunging into an election. Traditional variables explain why Hatfield had been a supporter of the Accord; most importantly, supporting the prime minister could result in economic rewards, making it in his *provincial interest* to be agreeable. At the same time, however, shared partisanship with the federal government also helped the prime minister's constitutional agenda. In other words, Brian Mulroney could rely on their common party ties. Andrew Cohen (1991) called Hatfield one of Mr. Mulroney's ''marionettes'' (49). Other observers of that period agreed: ''as Tories, they were inclined to go along with Mulroney in seeking a constitutional settlement'' (MacDonald 2002, 247).

Table 1 The partisan factor

Traditional variables	The partisan factor
1. Interests of the individual province (primarily economic) and its character (population, size, and wealth) 2. Ideological position of the government (view of the political system and the role and balance of governments within it) and of the particular issue under consideration 3. Status goals of the government (to gain credit, avoid blame, and enhance its own prestige) 4. Different perspectives of government (especially political interests/perspectives, i.e., in a majority or minority position, proximity to an election, the needs of interest groups to which it must be responsive, etc.)	a. Politicians and political staff use political channels across the levels to either help or hinder negotiations b. Politicians and political staff use political and partisan arguments to bolster their position (this may be accompanied by calling in old debts from a party cousin or using threats against an opponent) c. Appeals are made to a cousin's caucus and/or rank and file members d. Electoral success could be boosted (or diminished) by forging an agreement (or not) e. A cousin wants to help or hinder the success of leaders at the other level f. There is a need to maintain party unity and decisions are made to that effect

During the election campaign in New Brunswick, Liberal challenger Frank McKenna made his position on Meech Lake clear: changes were needed before the Accord could be ratified in New Brunswick. His stance has been attributed to partisanship:

> I think the partisan [factor] played a big role in his initial position on Meech Lake . . . the people around him, people like Francis [McGuire] . . . were *partisan*. And they were going to "show" the Conservatives. They were going to stick it to them (Norman Spector—lead federal official on Meech—in discussion with author, June 2008).

After winning the election, Premier McKenna's position posed a problem for the federal government. McKenna had purportedly based his objections to the accord on New Brunswick's provincial and economic interests but the prime minister's attempt to appease him on those same factors (by offering highway funding and protecting the province from federal budget cuts) did not budge the new premier from his stance (Lee 2001). To help change McKenna's position, Ontario Liberal

Premier David Peterson was dispatched as the emissary to New Brunswick and it is at this point that the nuances of the partisan factor become apparent. Not only did Mr. Peterson believe in the Accord, but the *party channel* was also viewed as an asset, particularly since the Ontario premier had sent Frank McKenna electoral assistance during the New Brunswick campaign to help him defeat the Conservatives and win power, demonstrating the extent of their partisan bonds:

> Scuttlebutt suggests that Peterson was instrumental in bringing McKenna into line. (The Ontario Liberals helped McKenna a great deal during his election.)... At the same time, Peterson had a close rapport with Bourassa and was regarded by Ottawa as a good go-between for the save-the-Accord operations (Coyne 1992, 21).

David Peterson took that role seriously. ''I was one of those... who spent a lot of time saying 'Frank, this is the wrong thing'" (in discussion with author, July 2008). Liberal Premier Joe Ghiz from PEI also spent time with Mr. McKenna arguing against the New Brunswicker's anti-Meech stance and making appeals to change his mind. ''If [partisanship] works for you, you use it'' said David Peterson many years later. The powerful ''provincial interests'' variable is thus indeterminate enough to be subject to interpretation; allies can use their partisan connection as a tool to reshape what those interests might be. In this particular case McKenna had been worried about various effects the Accord would have on New Brunswick; however the premier was eventually persuaded by his Liberal colleagues that securing national unity was in the *better* interests of his province and supporting Meech would ensure this.

> When Frank (McKenna) really understood the difference between opposition and governing, and when you actually have the fate of the country in your hands like that, and *your vote* decides the future of this country and you know the consequences, you think a little differently than you do when you've got the luxury of opposition and being irresponsible (author discussion with David Peterson, July 2008).

Whether McKenna would have come around on Meech without the intervention of Peterson and Ghiz is unclear; clearly a conflict between the two levels of government existed and the prime minister's attempts to resolve them failed. Premier McKenna had just fought an election against the Tories in his province and he was ''standing up'' for the interests of New Brunswick. How to resolve the impasse? The Conservative prime minister employed partisan channels to reach McKenna by requesting Peterson and Ghiz—fellow Liberals—to talk to him. The three had fought elections together, they had common party loyalties, and they had trust among them to facilitate a frank conversation about the

constitutional question that eventually shifted McKenna's position to the pro-Meech side.

In a similar turn of events, the government of Manitoba, led initially by the NDP, developed misgivings about the Accord shortly after the legal agreement was signed in June 1987. The government's growing reluctance was also based on *Manitoba's interests*; it was served best by a strong federal government that could spend in areas in provincial jurisdiction. NDP Premier Howard Pawley was worried the Accord would unduly limit this federal power. In March 1988, before putting the resolution to a vote, Pawley's government fell on a budget motion. In the ensuing campaign the provincial Progressive Conservative Party was elected with a minority government. Arguably, no matter which party governed the province, Manitoba's interests would still be served by a strong federal government. PC Premier Gary Filmon, however, took a different position and strongly supported the Accord and, by extension, the federal PC government. The partisan similarity of the two governments provides an explanation for the change in position. Mr. Filmon wanted to strengthen his relationship with Brian Mulroney and the federal party (Cohen 1991, 193). Filmon was convinced that "Manitoba had suffered under the New Democrats . . . largely because of their frosty relations with Ottawa" (193). He was well aware of the suspicions held by Manitobans towards the Accord and the political risk he would take by backing Meech, but Premier Filmon would do his best to please the prime minister.

For its part, the federal government also wanted to get the PCs on side early. After Mr. Filmon had formed the government, Progressive Conservative Senator Lowell Murray used *party channels* across the levels and met with the Manitoba provincial Conservative caucus to help convince them of the virtues of the Accord and appeal for their support. Senator Murray explained that it was important to rally the troops, to appeal to their party loyalty, to their partisanship as Conservatives especially since Meech Lake was becoming a tougher sell to the public as the ratification period wore on:

> I might have been a little more political than I would be in a public statement but I said "here are the politics of it, we're in office . . . we need to move on and this is important" . . . [T]hese were backbenchers coming from ridings whether urban or rural and that was fine and I think they understood what I was telling them, but how do they tell that on the hustings if there's opposition [to Meech]? (author discussion with Lowell Murray, June 2008).

Gary Filmon pressed forward with a Meech resolution. In his speech to the Manitoba legislature, Filmon brought up the importance of party links to garner support for the Accord:

> [I]f we in this House agree, *I believe that all of the party leaders could use our influence with our supporters, with members of our parties in other provinces,*

> *including other provincial governments, and with the leaders of our national parties.* We could work together to ensure that the Canadian partnership as a whole embraces the enlarged agenda for constitutional renewal that we will propose (Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, 1988, December 16, emphasis added).

In short, the speech provided strong, solid support for Meech and the partisan factor provides an explanation for Filmon's behavior. Like the traditional variables, however, partisanship is not unfailing and Filmon's support for Meech was undermined by actions of the Quebec government, a matter we will address in the conclusion.

The Child Care Agreements (2004–2005)

Unlike Meech Lake, the child care agreements were bilateral deals made between the federal government and ten provinces over the span of a year. The shape of Canada's institutions was not at stake, nor was the question of national unity. At issue here was an initiative by the federal Liberal government to provide $5 billion of funding for regulated child care to be delivered by the provinces based on key principles and required reporting features. It would be expected that, considering the federal flow of dollars for a program popular with parents, little intergovernmental conflict should emerge in the process of inking these deals. For the most part that was true, save for the curious case of New Brunswick where none of the traditional variables offers a reason for its uncooperative spirit.

Of the ten provinces, six were quite cooperative and signed their agreements early[6]; traditional variables provide reasons why. Most were in favor of regulated, licensed child care for *ideological* reasons, especially the NDP governments in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Cooperation was also aided by *provincial interests*. Traditional areas that usually anchored the economy in Ontario, such as a strong manufacturing base, were shifting. Early childhood education has been cited as an important building block for a knowledge-based economy (Mustard and McCain 1999) and the Liberal government in Ontario had a keen interest in supporting policies that would help rebuild the province's economic engines. For the two agreeable Atlantic provinces—Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador (both led by Progressive Conservative governments)—most new social programs along these lines had to be initiated by the federal government since their small populations and tax base provide limited resources to do so on their own.

It is notable that the partisan factor did emerge in one respect with the cooperative province of Ontario. While the government had traditional reasons to facilitate an agreement, shared partisanship meant there were preexisting relationships between political staff in the prime minister's office and the offices of the premier and minister responsible for social services. ''The party connection helped tremendously,'' noted an Ontario official. ''In terms of 'who are the players',

just knowing them I think is a huge, huge advantage.'' As in New Brunswick among the three Liberal premiers, the relationships between the staffers also implied trust—their offices were able to have frank, honest, and open conversations about the substance of the agreement and were consequently able to negotiate to the satisfaction of both sides. There was also a keen desire by the provincial political staff working on the agreement *to help the federal Liberals electorally*:

> [I]t was critically important for this agreement to pass so that it was part of the [federal Liberal] re-election plank. And certainly the timing for when Ontario signed certainly was very critical on that front . . . [f]or the benefit of the federal Liberals (author interview with Ontario official, June 2008).

The official signing ceremony was indicative of this intent. Well advertised to the media, the signing of the agreement was held at a child care centre in Hamilton, Ontario, the home town of Marie Boutrogianni, the provincial minister responsible for children's services. While the premier was not in attendance, both the prime minister and the federal Social Development Minister Ken Dryden were on hand. Minister Boutrogianni also ensured that invitations were extended to other federal and provincial Liberal members of parliament from the area to give them wide visibility (Faulkner 2005). Manitoba and Saskatchewan had similar splashy ceremonial signings, whereas Nova Scotia and Newfoundland had more subdued events.

Partisan effects can be seen at the margins here since, politically, these events are important. The provincial Liberal and NDP governments ensured that the federal Liberals received free media and high visibility. The provinces led by Progressive Conservative governments were not as keen on helping the federal Liberals look as positive to their publics.

Partisanship was also a factor for the federal Liberals in Ontario. They needed to have a deal with Ontario in order to boost their electoral chances in that province. Ontario was the largest province and a targeted one for federal seats. The federal Liberals were also going to need the provincial Liberal machine to help them fight the next election and the provincial officials were aware of this: ''I think [the federal government] saw us as one province that they wanted to check off. Obviously Ontario's a big ticket so they wanted to secure our [agreement]'' (author discussion with official, June 2008). A federal official in Ken Dryden's office concurred: ''We *had* to have a deal in Ontario.'' We see here the conundrum facing governments of the same partisan stripe in terms of getting a policy win or a political win (Esselment 2011, 478–79). A ''win'' on policy is the usual goal—each level can claim some degree of credit for a new initiative. If a policy win does not materialize, governments can aim to ''win'' in the political arena by attacking the government that derailed the deal (either real or perceived). This is clearly easier

when the two governments are partisan opposites and not reliant on organizational support from one another to fight elections. For party cousins, the political win is fraught with problems and therefore must aim for policy harmony wherever possible.[7] Had the Ontario government refused the child care deal in this case, the shared partisanship of these two governments (and the general commitment of aiding one another during elections) would severely limit a federal political attack on the provincial government. If, however, the provincial government had been Conservative, the federal Liberals would not have felt as pressured to get an agreement. Where the policy win may have been elusive, the federal government could have scored a few political points by "bashing" the Conservatives. One federal staffer put it this way:

> Not having a deal with [former Progressive Conservative premier] Mike Harris would've been good because you could turn to the proponents of the child care agreement and say "we're going to hold out until we get the right deal and we're not going to give in to this ideological x, y, and z." Ralph Klein is a great foil, Mike Harris is a great foil . . . a PQ premier is a great foil. Using [Liberal premier] Dalton McGuinty as a foil? Wasn't gonna work. It wouldn't be in your interest, wouldn't be in their interest, it wouldn't work (discussion with author, June 2008).

This motivated the Liberal federal government, in particular, to ensure a deal was signed with Liberal-led Ontario.

Of the four remaining provinces with which the federal government experienced conflict—Alberta, Quebec, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick—traditional factors can explain the behavior of three governments. While only the government of Quebec shared the political stripe of the federal government, much of this province's history in Canada shows that the partisan complexion is often less important than the political positioning of the government (either federalist or separatist). Mused one federal staffer involved in the negotiations: "I think any provincial government in Quebec of any stripe would've acted the same way. They act the same on any federal-provincial file no matter what it is." The main stumbling block in the Quebec case was the reporting requirements requested by the federal government. The province would only agree to report on general child care funding investments and improvements to the public, not the government of Canada. To do otherwise would make it appear supplicant to the federal administration and this would have negatively affected its domestic *political interests*.

The PC government of Alberta was *ideologically* opposed to the agreement—it wanted the flexibility to use the federal funding for nonregulated child care; the federal government refused. Eventually, Alberta agreed to channel the dollars to the regulated child care sector. Prince Edward Island held off signing an agreement for

provincial interest reasons. While not ideologically opposed to federal spending in its jurisdiction, Canada's smallest province was concerned about the funds available to set up the program. Like many national programs emanating from the federal government, the child care agreements were based on per capita funding. Because PEI's population is so small, the amount of funding it would receive under the agreement was much less than the larger provinces. It attempted to hold out for base funding that would be in addition to the per capita amount; enough to hire an Assistant Deputy Minister or Director to set up and administer the program. The federal government also refused. None of these traditional variables posed enough of a barrier to ultimately prevent agreements on the program—the sheer amount of funding on offer from the federal government was incentive enough.

The Progressive Conservative government of New Brunswick provides the most striking example of the partisan factor at work in the child care negotiations. As a Maritime province, it makes intuitive sense that *provincial interests* would compel cooperation in order to fund a new social program since the province would have few resources to launch one on its own. For the entirety of the negotiations, the social services minister raised no objections to the amount of funding, the funding allocation formula, or the compliance and monitoring requirements. Neither were *ideological* reasons raised against the program either, at least not initially. There was also a *political interest* at stake—with only a one-seat majority in the legislature and a declining opinion of Premier Lord by the public (there had been criticism within the media about the inability of Mr. Lord to "get along" with the Liberal federal government), it was arguably in the best political interests of Mr. Lord to sign an agreement. Signing a deal early would also have enhanced the premier's *prestige*. This could have resulted in positive headlines for a premier who desperately needed them.

On the traditional variables the government of New Brunswick had every reason to make a child care deal. A signing ceremony involving the prime minister and premier lord had in fact been planned for May 13, 2005 when it was suddenly cancelled by the premier's office. This came as a complete surprise to the federal officials. There had been no warning from the deputy minister of social services in New Brunswick about rumblings of discontent.[8]

> I mean, if it was a surprise to me the day before, it must have been a surprise to him as well because I'd talked to him on the phone three times that afternoon. That's when I think the partisan side of it came to be (discussion with author, June 2008).

The premier's office linked the signing of the child care agreement to a funding "ask" for the Point Lepreau Nuclear plant. The provincial government wanted $400 million to help refurbish the facility.

> If [the federal government] is asking for us for a favour on daycare, I'm sure we're prodding them back, saying 'Can you move Lepreau along a little further?' said Chrisholm Pothier, Lord's press secretary (Mills 2005).

Here we see the impact of the partisan factor. The premier's office, using a thinly-veiled *partisan argument*, characterized the child care agreement as a "favor"; this helped position Point Lepreau as *partisan threat* against the federal Liberals. If the federal government would provide $400 million to the nuclear station, the provincial government would sign the agreement. This would give Mr. Martin the opportunity to announce publicly that another province had signed on to his new social program. If funding was not forthcoming, the New Brunswick government would stall signing an agreement and possibly cost Mr. Martin an effective and palatable election platform item, thereby *diminishing his chances for re-election*.

Furthermore, in the same article, it was pointed out that premier lord had spoken with federal Conservative leader Stephen Harper a day in advance of cancelling the federal agreement. If he didn't make a deal with the prime minister and the federal Liberals, Mr. Lord inquired, would Mr. Harper provide for a similar arrangement? Indeed he would, was Mr. Harper's reply (Mills 2005). In this way, Bernard Lord used his *party channel* to the Conservative leader to hinder the negotiation with the ruling Liberals. Premier Lord himself was a proud warrior for the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC) (Ibbitson 2006). He was unhappy with the federal Liberals and was loathe to give the governing party positive visibility in his province:

> This New Brunswick thing . . . was out of the blue. I mean, it was 24 hours ahead of Lord's attachment to funding for the nuclear plant. We had a plane booked, prime minister's day booked, and all that kind of thing. So, it may have been political posturing looking for funding for the nuclear stuff, but it wouldn't surprise me also that there were probably a number of partisans in the province that did not want to give Martin a photo opportunity (federal official in discussion with author, June 2008).

The blatant linkage to the nuclear facility was received unfavorably by the public, the opposition party, and the child care lobby in New Brunswick. Mr. Lord's government had to change tack and link its resistance to the spending of funds on regulated child care by arguing there were complications associated with this because of the province's rural character. The reliance on this provincial interest factor did not emerge until the end of June, well after the initial connection to the nuclear plant (Galloway 2005; Laghi 2005). In fact, the premier's "interests" argument received little traction because Manitoba and Saskatchewan had signed similar deals and both had rural populations to take into account (Ferns 2005). It was clear to many that the conflict between the province and the federal

government was based solely on partisanship. The uproar in the province, combined with the fact that the other provinces had made agreements with the federal Liberals, meant that Premier Lord could not hold out forever. On November 24, 2005, New Brunswick was the last province to sign on to the child care accords.

Discussion

By examining aspects of the Meech Lake Accord and Child Care Agreement negotiations in Canada, this article attempts to identify and develop the partisan factor in intergovernmental relations. It provides evidence that partisanship has a valuable independent explanatory power that exists alongside the traditional variables that are often employed to explain conflict or cooperation between national and subnational governments. Partisanship is often present, but not always obvious to scholars; the challenge is isolating its effects in the process of federal–state relations.

First, we see partisanship as providing a natural channel of communication. This is true between leaders, caucuses, parties, and political aides and advisors. The advantage of ''knowing the players'' in the provincial Liberal governments helped federal Liberal staffers negotiate the child care agreements. Likewise, the New Brunswick premier used party channels to consult with the federal leader of the opposition, Stephen Harper, who indicated another child care deal could be worked out between their two Conservative governments if the CPC won the next election. For Meech Lake, Liberals David Peterson and Joe Ghiz were the emissaries to Liberal premier Frank McKenna. Conservative Senator Lowell Murray made numerous trips to speak to the Conservative caucuses (whether in government or opposition) in Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, and PEI to help build support for Meech. While not described here, political aides and advisors were also dispatched using party channels during the Meech Lake round. Partisan allies were more likely to make connections and talk with one another; they were far less likely to make connections with their partisan opposites. The natural line of communication tends to flow through shared partisanship.

Second, partisanship groups people with broadly similar orientations and ideologies. In accordance with Kirchheimer's (1966) ''catch-all'' party model, political parties in Canada tend to hold broad ideologies, most of which cluster around the centre of the political spectrum. But political parties of the centre-left and centre-right can bring together people who share a philosophical outlook. This has the effect of helping to buttress attitudes towards the issues. David Peterson recalled that a number of the Liberal premiers were very constructive during the Meech negotiations and this, in part, had to do with their similar philosophical

beliefs. Coincident with the grouping effect of partisanship, friendships also tended to fall along partisan lines. Again, Mr. Peterson recalled that:

> [Joe] Ghiz was a great friend of mine. You know, of all my friendships it would've been Frank [McKenna] and Joe. And you know what, they're Liberals right? So, you say well it's partisanship and it probably is [. . .] I have a hell of lot more friends in the Liberal party—I mean, close friends—I don't know, for the same reason I have more close friends that are Democrats in the States! We see the world in the same way; it's just easier to be with them (personal interview, July 2008).

Partisan bonds provided for introductions between leaders and a common base of beliefs on which the friendships could grow.

Third, partisanship unites interests regarding political calculations. It is much easier to have a frank discussion about difficulties or barriers with someone of the same party than of the opposite partisan persuasion. On the child care agreements, a federal official acknowledged that conversations between Liberal political staffers were entirely different from conversations with staffers from a government with the opposite partisan stripe: "we never had a frank conversation" with a provincial government led by Progressive Conservatives, particularly in PEI and New Brunswick. In the Meech case, David Peterson and Joe Ghiz spent a lot of time with Frank McKenna to convince him of the merits of Meech and to see the "error" of his ways. They were friends, they were Liberals, and they were committed to put in the effort to convince the New Brunswick premier to support the Accord.

Finally, partisanship can be used as a political resource where the traditional factors fail to have an impact. If needed, parties that share a label can threaten to pull electoral support from one another or, conversely, promise to provide campaign resources. Partisanship can also be a resource to support the traditional factors: David Peterson had an ideological commitment to the Accord and it was in his province's interests to keep Quebec in Canada. The common partisanship between Mr. Peterson and Mr. Bourassa, the Liberal premier of Quebec, was a positive factor that simply reinforced and maintained David Peterson's support for Quebec's minimum conditions. Likewise Saskatchewan Conservative premier Grant Devine assumed the province's interests would be served by committing to Meech, but his loyalty to the PC party at both the provincial and federal levels underpinned his stance in favor of the Accord.

The partisan factor, while often underestimated in federal–provincial relations, is not unfailing. Partisanship cannot prevail when personal political interests are at stake. We saw how the partisan factor fueled the position taken by Manitoba premier Gary Filmon to support Meech. This changed dramatically when the government of Quebec passed a law mandating French-only commercial signs in

the province, notwithstanding Canadian constitutional language guarantees (National Assembly of Quebec 1988). Outcry in Manitoba and elsewhere over this action further eroded what was already fragile support for the Accord and, with just a minority government, personal political interests took precedence over considerations of a partisan nature. Because Filmon's own re-election chances were threatened, he refused to put the resolution on the Accord to a vote.

Likewise, partisanship tends to be overwhelmed by provincial interests, the factor that often carries the most weight in intergovernmental bargaining. This is evident in the child care agreements where premiers of all stripes ultimately signed deals with the federal government. In other cases, provincial interests and political interests can intertwine. What is good for a province may also pay political dividends to the party in power. In New Brunswick, for example, Frank McKenna was affected by federal economic offers if he decided to favor the Accord, even if these did not comprise his principal reasons for becoming part of the pro-Meech forces.

But it is important to reiterate that provincial interests, however powerful, are also indeterminate enough that they are subject to interpretation. Frank McKenna had initially been convinced that the Accord was not in New Brunswick's interest. He worried, among other things, about the effects of the Accord on women's rights in New Brunswick, on the ability of the federal government to "promote" the French language and what that could mean for the Acadian population, and on the prospect of federal institutional reform if any province was given a constitutional veto. After several visits from David Peterson, however, Premier McKenna was persuaded that securing national unity was in the better interests of New Brunswick and supporting the Meech Accord would ensure this. Opinions of what was "good" for New Brunswick initially differed between the two Liberal premiers. But their partisan connection brought them together for numerous discussions on the matter and David Peterson's interpretation soon prevailed. Had the partisanship of the two men not been shared, it is questionable whether Frank McKenna's position would have shifted so dramatically.

Conclusion

Examining partisanship in intergovernmental relations requires us to confront the true "politics" at the core of many federal–provincial interactions. This article has identified and isolated the effects of the partisan factor in two Canadian cases, finding that partisanship does play a role in understanding policy outcomes. Specifically, partisanship aids in communication, promoting ideological grouping and uniting interests. It also serves as a political resource when more traditional factors fail. While the analysis is embedded in Canada, it is important to ponder

the contribution of this particular study to the examination of federalism generally. Three points are important.

First, analyses of how intergovernmental relations are affected by partisan considerations have not been extensively scrutinized by students of federalism. While we have examples of partisanship playing a role in the propensity to devolve power when governments are congruent, in laying blame on one level over another for policy action or inaction, and in discretionary spending decisions between the levels, there is very little on the partisan factor as it affects the behavior of political actors in terms of conflict and cooperation between national and subnational governments in the negotiation of accords. As Weissert (2011, 970) astutely observes:

> The linkages between national and state parties simply have not been systematically applied to the United States even though hypotheses might be tested here on cooperation, and types of federalism issues on the agenda when national and state party control is congruent and alternatively when states resist federal mandates or preemptions.

Why this is the case may be a matter of assumptions: in federations where party organizations are tight across the levels, we simply assume that partisanship matters and is employed in different ways between and among partisan friends and enemies—consequently, federalism scholars have chosen not to study the phenomenon in depth. Similarly, in federations where party organizations are differentiated, we assume that partisanship has no role in center–state negotiations and that conflict or cooperation between political actors is based on other variables, such as the predominant regional interests factor.

These assumptions must be questioned and examined more closely since, as a second point, it is clear that in the Canadian case, partisan effects can be found whether the negotiations were of the ordinary, run-of-the-mill kind or the mega-constitutional sort. This is an important discovery, since it implies that partisanship can play a role in any type of government-to-government negotiation.

Third, this particular study should be interesting to federalism scholars because the partisan factor was not found in the *substance* of the agreements, but instead in the *process* of their being negotiated. In other words, partisanship was not going to affect the shape of Meech or the contents of the Child Care agreement; partisanship did affect whether an agreement was reached in the first place and, more significantly, whether it was kept. Ronald Watts (1999) has noted that much of the process of intergovernmental agreements (IGAs) is conducted informally and most often through channels of ''executive federalism.'' The advent of executive federalism and the prominent role it gives to ministers, their political staff, and other officials is ubiquitous in Canada, but it is also common in other federations such as Australia, Germany, India, and Malaysia (58). While gaining access to these particular political actors can be difficult, there are clearly

opportunities to pursue the scrutiny of the partisan factor in government-to-government negotiations in other jurisdictions.

In summary, since the purpose of this article was to identify and develop the partisan factor, it is obviously preliminary in scope. Future research could examine whether or not this variable influences national-subnational relations in other negotiations, be they multilateral, bilateral, or inter-provincial. Different issues and sites of negotiations may affect the prevalence of partisanship, as might the country in which they occur. The partisan factor is present in the Canadian context and there are mostly informal ties between political parties; in federations with integrated party organizations, the partisan factor may be more effectively isolated for scrutiny. Similarly, in party systems more polarized than Canada's, the role of partisanship may be even more apparent. We trust that this factor will generate enough interest that future research in intergovernmental relations will include partisanship as an independent variable worthy of serious consideration.

Notes

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1. By ''cousins'' we mean political party organizations with identical partisan complexions that operate on both the federal and provincial level (e.g., the Liberal Party). While some ''cousins'' may be organizationally integrated, others may be organizationally distinct.
2. ''Provincial interests'' can be defined as the different geographic, economic, cultural, and historical backgrounds of the provinces that have influenced their development in Canada. These differences remain an integral part of their continual development and the assertion of these interests (e.g., the historic demand for economic protections in the central provinces versus free trade in the western provinces or the promotion of French language rights in Quebec) has often led to conflict between provinces and between the provinces and the federal government (Simeon 1972, 20–25).
3. Since the Meech Lake Accord, mega-constitutional agreements also involve Canadian citizens through the process of referenda.
4. That twenty-five years have passed since the introduction of the Accord may call into question its relevancy. Unquestionably, the Accord and its eventual failure cast a large shadow on the study of Canadian politics. The journal of *Canadian Public Policy* (Norrie 1988) dedicated an entire issue to Meech, and prominent texts and personal accounts emerged during the time of the negotiations and after the Accord's demise (e.g., Cohen 1991; Fournier 1991; MacDonald 2002; Monahan 1991). Academics continue to discuss the Accord's legacy (Prairie Political Science Association 2010) and

the "Quebec question" is still debated in Canadian newspapers (Studin 2012; Cohen 2010).

5. In-depth interviews were conducted with three key players from the Meech Lake round and four from the Child Care agreements.
6. BC (Liberal), Saskatchewan (NDP), Manitoba (NDP), Ontario (Liberal), Nova Scotia (PC), and Newfoundland and Labrador (PC).
7. This is not always the case. An obvious exception in the Canadian context was the ferocious battle between Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper and the Conservative Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador Danny Williams over changes to the equalization formula and offshore revenue resources (LeBlanc 2006). Personality and policy clashes can certainly occur, although it is noteworthy that the prime minister still appealed to Atlantic Canadian Conservatives that their shared partisanship was a bond even when policy differences become glaringly apparent (Canadian Press 2007).
8. Unlike many of the other provinces where relationships are generally forged based on similar roles (political staff to political staff and bureaucrats to bureaucrats) the political staffer assigned to handle the child care agreements in Ottawa dealt primarily with the deputy minister in New Brunswick.

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