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Emerging Unconventionally; The Mavericks: An Analysis on the Development of Western Canadian Political Parties through Canada's Newest Federal Party – The Maverick Party of Canada

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Emerging Unconventionally; The Mavericks:
An Analysis on the Development of Western Canadian Political Parties through Canada's
Newest Federal Party – The Maverick Party of Canada

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Completed under the supervision of
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A Major Research Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Chapter 1 – Introduction and Political Context

Born in 2020 Alberta, the Maverick Party is a new regionally focused federal party that advocates for constitutional change that will "benefit the west." This party is being studied to understand better the role it will have in Canadian politics. Despite the straightforwardness of the party's slogan, scholars and the general public do not fully understand the role this new party will play in federal politics. Before I can try to answer this question, I must start by explaining the party's origins and purpose. While I will go into greater detail in Chapter two of this major research paper (MRP), I will provide a brief synopsis to help set the stage regarding the purposes and importance of this topic within this paper and Canadian federal politics.

On the surface, there are numerous direct connections between the Maverick Party and former federal parties. For instance, the Maverick Party is currently being led by Jay Hill, a retired Conservative and Reform Party cabinet member, and Allan Kerpan, a former Conservative and Reform Party Member of Parliament (MP). Under Hill and Kerpan, the party seeks to address the alienation and federal discontent felt by people living in the western Canadian prairie provinces. The leaders plan to address these sentiments by using what they call a twin track approach, where the first track seeks constitutional reform and the second aims at secession from Canada. Interestingly, unknown to many central and eastern Canadians, the west and Alberta, in particular, are no strangers to fringe political parties.

Two historical western-focused federal parties - the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), founded in 1932 and the Reform Party, founded in 1987 - have significantly impacted the Canadian political landscape and moved from being at the fringes directly into the mainstream of politics. At its peak, during the 1940s and 1950s, the CCF held successive majority provincial governments in Saskatchewan and was instrumental in creating Canada's

national health insurance program.¹ The CCF eventually became the New Democratic Party (NDP). The Reform Party, at its peak in the 1990s, rose to official opposition status following the election of 1997 and directly led to the demise of the federal Progressive Conservative Party (PC) in western Canada. After rebranding to become the Canadian Alliance, the Reformers united with other conservatives to become the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC). The perpetual movement of Canadian political parties from the fringes to the mainstream is one reason why the Maverick Party is the focus of this MRP. The exploration of this movement will be undertaken in the form of a thematic discursive analysis that will use both party platform analysis and interviews with party members to gain insights.

The emergence and dissolution of parties are generally precipitated by some naturally occurring or intentionally created critical juncture that sets a chain of events into motion. No such instance has been identified,² yet the Maverick Party has emerged and intends to end CPC supremacy in the western provinces. Why is this the case, what is the nature of the party and are they offering something new to Canadians? These big questions are at the center of this study. My goal here is to provide context, examine the relevant history and significance of the Reform Party, and other right-leaning parties as they relate to these questions, which will be explored in the last section of this chapter. What is important for the reader to understand from the outset is that western focused parties are connected through a central understanding that states the current political landscape unfairly disadvantages western Canada. These feelings of unfairness most

¹ Wiseman and Isitt (2007) expand on the role of the CCF in the development of Canadian social democracy, noting how the party played a pivotal role not in seeking to eradicate capitalism but focused instead on making it more humane (p.583).

² Farney (2019) pushes back against the formalization of critical junctures that precipitate change. Instead, he puts forward that they can be ideationally caused by merging different streams of thought, religious institutions, social movements, and political parties (p.143). Taking this understanding, the Maverick Party may not be preceded by a juncture of some kind, but rather it represents one that will later be identified as a cause of change.

recently were brought to the forefront of Canadian politics in the 1990s, a time of tremendous political change due to the rise of social movements (Wiseman and Issit, 2007, p.567) and the Reform Party and Bloc Québécois gaining federal prominence. Today as well as then, federal politicians seeking to form government must sacrifice policies that benefit the west for policies that cater to the electorally rewarding regions of Ontario and Québec. The Maverick Party is reminding the west that they are "against the rest" and that only Mavericks can raise their voice to better the situation for westerners. How they intend to do this will be explored throughout this major research paper. The following section will specifically identify the research questions and add some additional context as to why these lines of inquiry are under examination.

Research Questions

This study has two main research questions that guide the inquiry into the Maverick Party and two testable hypotheses, which are examined in a later chapter. The first research question asks: what is the nature of the Maverick Party? Since the Maverick Party was established in 2020, it has yet to defend and prove its worth during an election. What is clear is that the Maverick Party has been explicit that it continues to hold the central premise shared by the Reform Party; that western Canada is alienated from the rest of the country and that the west is mistreated. For example, the landing page of the party's official website, in bold text, declares "Our democracy is broken," and it issues statements such as: "It's time for the West to be treated like a true partner in Confederation" (Maverick Party, 2021). The same site issues the following call to action: "It's time to stand up for ourselves and make change happen." (Maverick Party, 2021). These statements highlight the emphasis that the party is placing on ensuring western Canadians associate themselves with unfair treatment by eastern and central Canada. It can be dually assumed through this rhetoric that the Maverick Party sees established parties as an

impediment to progress. Ideally, voters will connect with the association and determine that the Maverick Party is not only a voice for the west in Ottawa but that it is the only party capable of improving the situation for the west. Exploring how the party defines itself, be that as the champions of addressing unfairness entrenched since confederation, or something else, will begin by examining other conservative parties.

The second research question moves beyond deriving a party definition and asks: is the Maverick Party new? Determining the "newness" of an institution, such as a political party, is challenging outside of stating its foundation date.³ It is a much deeper question that focuses on understanding the underlying rationale for the party's existence. Here the implicit connections between the Maverick Party and other parties will be explored through the evolution of Canadian political parties over time. Also, the explicit connections found in party documents will be explored. When political parties emerge, they do not need to be entirely comprised of new ideas and policies. There ought to be apparent and identifiable differences from other parties; otherwise, there would be little to explain why members would defect. This MRP intends to explore the emergence of the Maverick Party and its newness by assuming that it intends to offer something different from existing parties. While the null hypothesis (the secondary assumption under interrogation) would be that there may be nothing new about the Maverick Party. It may be the same old Canadian story of inter-regional conflict as occurred during the 1990s in western Canada with the Reform Party.

³ Mackay (2014) examines the challenge of determining institutional newness by looking at attempts to implement gender reforms in existing political institutions. She notes a propensity for institutional actors to 'fall back' into their ways despite implementing surface level change and notes that organizations that need to fight for their survival, political parties as a relevant example, face this and numerous additional challenges that make determining what exactly is new a challenge (p.556).

In sum, the questions being investigated throughout this paper are: first 'what is the Maverick Party?' and second 'is the Maverick Party new?'. The first question is in search of a definition of the party to understand its nature. It will be informed by locating the party among other existing Canadian federal parties and identifying areas of similarity and/or divergence. The second question, which is more complex, will inform two hypotheses, which will then be tested using methods outlined in Chapter Three, with results shared in Chapters Four and Five. To first gain a better understanding of the conditions in which the Maverick party was created and begin addressing whether this really is a new party, the next section will look at the historical development of Canadian conservatism.

Political Development

The following section seeks to trace the historical development of the Maverick Party. Although this party is barely more than a year old, our story begins with the early social media foundations of the party. Then looks back in history to chart Canadian conservatism more broadly. Founded in 2019 by conspiracy theorist Peter Downing as the Wexit Party (Western Exit), the party draws on a wave of social media-fuelled secessionist movements following the United Kingdom's exodus from the European Union, known as Brexit. The growth of Wexit, however, can be primarily attributed to Downing's ability to tap into deep historical sentiments, and from that, one may question whether this is a new party or another example of the typical protest party that has regularly popped up in western Canada. Wexit rapidly grew within social media channels by tapping into historical disenchantment with the federal government found in the western provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.⁴ The modern version of this

⁴ Taking the western identity as a monolith ignores inter-regional differences, between Manitoba and Alberta for example, or even more specific differences between Calgary and Edmonton. See Cochrane and Perrella (2012) who explore the complexities of Canadian regionalism more deeply by testing for behavioural impacts due to feelings of multi-regional belonging.

party, as stated above, is currently led by Jay Hill. Downing is no longer involved with the re-named Maverick Party (Grafton, 2020, p.1). Its conspiratorial social media origins are one aspect though, that makes for an interesting case study on new Canadian political movements.⁵ What is interesting is the established political rootstock from which the Maverick Party is drawing. Although Jay Hill retired from his role as Conservative Leader of the Government in the House of Commons in 2010, his career began with the Reform Party (Taber, 2010, p.1).

The Reform Party was founded in 1987 as a western Canada-based protest party by Preston Manning, the son of Alberta's longest-serving premier and Social Credit leader Ernest Manning (Cernetig, 1991, p.1). Manning led the Reform Party to propose an agenda of restrained federal spending and called for a variety of policy changes, including democratic reform, to address widespread western discontent with the federal Progressive Conservative (PC) government of Brian Mulroney. Despite running 72 candidates in the 1988 federal election, the Reform Party failed to win a single seat (Palmer, 1999, p.1) until Deborah Grey won a 1989 by-election and became the first Reform Member of Parliament (MP) (Owen, 1989, p.1). This was the launching point for the Reform Party, and its entrance represented a moment that changed the story of conservatism and parties more broadly in Canada as parties now had to be wary of entering challengers with different approaches that can engage membership and win seats (Cross and Young, 2004, p.429).

The Mulroney government pursued many policies similar to those proposed by the Reform Party; their similar ideological positioning had both parties advocating for the

⁵ While this research paper is looking specifically at the Reform Party and its connections to the former Reform and Canadian Alliance Parties, there is some inclination to look at parties' actions by looking at them as they relate to a broader political movement. Assumptions regarding the differences between parties and movements will be explored in a later chapter. Briefly, movements are informal and decentralized, whereas parties are coordinated and abide by formalized rules and norms.

privatization of national enterprise and prioritizing fiscal conservatism to avoid ever-increasing federal debt loads. Mulroney's demise was found in his pursuit of constitutional reform; the breakdown of the Meech Lake Accord and the subsequent failure of the Charlottetown Accord led to the total breakdown of the Progressive Conservative Party following the election of 1993 (Bélanger and Nadeau, 2005, p.123). In the years approaching the election, Mulroney faced further widespread criticism over the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and the fracturing of the Progressive Conservative political coalition when Lucien Bouchard, then a cabinet member in Mulroney's government, defected along with a group of Québec MPs to form the Bloc Québécois, a Pro-Québec independence party (Bauch, 2004, p.1). With rising unpopularity among Canadians and treacherous inter-party disputes, the PCs were concerned with Mulroney's ability to win in the election of 1993. Despite only months before the end of their mandate Mulroney announced his retirement, and following a leadership convention, he advised Governor General Ray Hnatyshyn that, then Defence Minister Kim Campbell had won, making her 19th Prime Minister and the one to lead the party through the election (Stefaniuk, 1993, p.1).

The Reform Party's story begins to accelerate following the election of 1993. As stated, the outcome saw the significant reduction of the Progressive Conservative Party in the House of Commons as it won only two seats. Jean Chrétien's Liberals formed government, winning 177 seats, and Bouchard's newly formed Bloc Québécois became the official opposition winning 54 seats, and the Preston Manning-led Reform Party finally made a significant impact finishing third with 52 seats (Kozak, 1993, p.1). This election represented a turning point for regionalism and conservatism in Canada, with only the governing Liberals now having a national focus and the next two largest parties having an explicitly regional focus. The Reform Party continued to

grow and went on in 1997 to increase its seat total to 60, now assuming the role of official opposition (Scofield, 1997, p.1). Then before an internal realignment for the election of 2000 when then-leader Stockwell Day, with a new national focus intent on forming government, led the newly re-named Canadian Alliance Party to increase its seat total again to 66 but remained in the role of official opposition to the Chrétien Liberals (Laghi, 2000, p.1), much to the disappointment of many members within the Canadian Alliance. Having a new name and now a national focus, many thought the Canadian Alliance would see electoral success in Ontario, finally putting the party in a position to implement reforms that are otherwise impossible in an opposition role. Since this relied on a national rather than regional agenda, some members who continued to hold close the party's pro-Prairie origins were disappointed at both the change in direction and failure to gain traction in central Canada. This perceived failure was the beginning of the end since it led to internal party discontent over Day's inability to lead the party; the Democratic Representative Caucus (DRC) was formed following MP Art Hanger's suspension from caucus for criticizing Day (Cheadle, 2001, p.1). Twelve additional now-former Alliance MPs, Chuck Strahl, Gary Lunn, Jim Pankiw, Val Meredith, Grant McNally, Jim Gouk, Monte Solberg, Andy Burton, Brian Fitzpatrick, Inky Mark, Deborah Grey, and Jay Hill were a part of this dissent filled association (Cheadle, 2001, p.2). The DRC created a loose alliance with the Joe Clarke-led PCs before Day agreed to a leadership race which he ultimately lost to Stephen Harper. Harper and then PC leader Peter MacKay negotiated a merger with the Canadian Alliance to form what is now the Conservative Party of Canada (Heyman, 2003, p.1), ending the story of western representation as told by the Reform Party. Following the election of 2006, the Conservatives and their largely western caucus were in government with Harper as Prime Minister until their 2015 loss to Justin Trudeau's Liberal Party, significantly reducing the west's

role in government. During the Conservatives' time in government, Jay Hill held senior positions serving as Chief Government Whip and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons before retiring from politics in 2010 (Champion-Smith, 2011, p.1). Hill re-entered politics in 2020 as Leader of the Maverick Party though it is unclear what he plans to accomplish or what this means for the party and western representation.

Hill coming out of retirement to lead the Maverick Party is an occurrence worth better understanding. A skilled former MP, who worked as a political strategist during his retirement (Maher, 2014, p.1), is a skillful political organizer capable of recognizing areas of political opportunity. To borrow from Muldoon and Rye (2020), who attempt to conceptualize party-driven movements, they posit four essential criteria for the emergence of a new entity. First, there must be issues that are underrepresented in current political systems (p.490). Since the current Conservative Party is a national coalition built on the gains of the Reform Party, an obvious issue that this national party would not frequently address are issues of western representation. Second, which builds directly on the first states, a critical mass of people from pre-existing movements must be galvanized to support claims (p.491). Here past Reform members would be the most direct group able to be motivated. Moreover, Wexit had a following on social media, eager to engage outside of established political parties. Third, access is needed to make a difference; this is the most challenging since election rules support existing parties over new challengers (p.491). Hill, though, understands this challenge as an early Reform MP in British Columbia, which represented the party gaining traction outside of the politically abrasive province of Alberta (Harper, 2001, p.1). Lastly, all of these need to be brought together through a unifying figure. One that is not afraid to share their message with an anti-elitist tone (Muldoon and Rye, 2020, p.493) for the Maverick Party, Jay Hill, is that voice.

So then, does Jay Hill's re-emergence show that he plans to build the Maverick Party and intends to achieve the original 'Alberta First' goals set out by the Reform Party that were ultimately derailed by the national focus and leadership of Stockwell Day? Hill, during his time running a political consulting company (Maher, 2014, p.1), would understand the new and powerful role social media plays in political affairs.⁶ Further, it is additionally possible that the Mavericks represent a new era in Canadian politics that sees regionally based parties learning from the Bloc Québécois to better and more precisely represent their constituents. Regional precision was not a problem for the Reform Party when it first emerged. After the party changed to have a national focus as the Canadian Alliance, and eventually merged to become the CPC, much of that regional focus was lost (Toughil, 2000, p.3). While the Conservatives today undoubtedly continue to find their base of support in the western provinces, if they want to regain a position in government, their policies will need to focus on mobilizing voters in central and eastern Canada. If the Maverick Party can recognize this and remain true to their regional mandate, just as the Bloc does, they may be able to seize renewed Reform support in western Canada.

In concluding this introduction chapter, which also serves as a brief overview of the history of conservatism in Canada, it is essential to re-establish the guiding research questions. This major research paper intends to explore the story of Alberta-born conservatism and add to it by beginning to tell the story of the Maverick Party by asking in simple terms, what is the nature

⁶It is possible for Hill that the opportunity to lead a party was too appealing for a political strategist. Imagine that you, as a retired politician, are presented with a party founded using social media's growth, the Wexit Party that is propelled by the oftentimes captivating ramblings of a conspiracy theorist. This occurs during a global health crisis, with voters worldwide seeking change due to exhaustion from months of restricted activity and deeply entrenched feelings of federal alienation. Would taking the reins of a disjointed but emerging party seem opportune, especially seeing the erratic focus towards Ontario and Eastern Canada by Conservative leader Erin O'Toole? A direction that you directly disagreed with when a similar approach was taken by Stockwell Day during your time as a dissenting Canadian Alliance MP.

of the Maverick Party. Could the party really be a part of a new movement in Canadian politics focused on achieving lasting change by using technologies that did not exist the last time this type of movement was attempted during the 80s and 90s? That is unclear through historical analysis alone. There are numerous similarities between the Maverick Party and present and historical political parties. The western focused attitude of the Reform Party, the alienation shared by many, and threats of separatism found with the Bloc Québécois may be an indication that the Maverick Party is not new at all, but rather a resurgence of the Reform Party or perhaps a western Canadian version of the Bloc. To better answer this question, Chapter Two is a literature review; while there is presently little writing on the Maverick Party, the minutiae surrounding the party has a plethora of available scholarship. A small sampling of what exists will allow me to explore the origins of the Maverick Party and Canadian fringe politics. The development of western Canadian ideology will then be examined before concluding with a literature review surrounding topics of populism and nationalism. Chapter Three focuses on theory and methods by specifically outlining the historical and discursive institutionalist approaches that this research has taken. A series of critical assumptions that have guided this research will be summarized, in addition to providing a detailed account of the data sources and methodological choices. This chapter is also where the two hypothesis statements will be explored in further detail. Chapter Four contains the platform analysis that looks at Maverick Party documents against Reform Party and Canadian Alliance documents to evaluate the question of party newness. This analysis uses a thematic bundling technique to note areas of contextual similarity and highlight a key area of difference between the parties. Chapter Five provides an account of the interviews with Maverick Party board members and candidates. The interviews conducted during June 2021 asked Maverick Party members a series of questions about what drew them to join as to question

party newness. These interviews were beneficial in understanding what positions the Maverick's share with other parties while also highlighting additional areas of divergence. Then lastly, Chapter Six concludes the study by summarizing the overall discussion and restating insights before providing a prescriptive take on the Maverick Party.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

In the first chapter, we began exploring the story of the Maverick Party through a broad-reaching historical political analysis. In doing so, the story of various conservative parties were explored to illustrate how intertwined various right-leaning parties are and demonstrate how the Maverick Party does not exist in a vacuum. Understanding the relations between the Maverick Party and past and present parties is a key line of inquiry throughout this study. The first research question asks what is the Maverick Party? To better answer this question, it is pertinent to address some of what has already been studied by academics; that is what this chapter serves to accomplish. First, by looking at the origins of the Maverick Party and its conspiratorial foundation to ground the party in academic discourse, then looking at the broader fringes present in Canadian politics to begin gaining context surrounding nuances of the party. Next, a selection of studies about the specific development of right-leaning ideology will be explored to allow readers to better understand the often-tumultuous nature of these parties before focusing narrowly on the role of populism and nationalism in party development.

Additionally, the second research question, which asks if the Maverick Party is new, requires exploration into the different ways this question has been explored and is continuing to be contemplated in academia. The works explored in this section represent only a small sampling of the available literature on the topics. The selected papers are meant to reinforce the study's findings and identify some important gaps in the literature.

Maverick Party Origins

This first section of the literature review will help examine the Maverick Party's developmental origins. The Maverick Party began as the social media based Wexit Party led by a conspiracy theorist: Peter Downing (Grafton, 2020, p.1). In Canada, conspiracy theories have had little direct involvement in formal politics, unlike elsewhere in the world, where conspiracy theories are a growing issue⁷ that impact formal politics. The impact of these theories is well documented, though scholarship that looks at how conspiracy theories are playing a new role in democracies continues to be an emerging field (Moore, 2016, p.11). Since social media is a forum through which much of modern politics is facilitated, we need to be aware of the content that is being shared as it is a medium that is especially susceptible to the influence of conspiracy theories (Thompson, 2020, p. 20). While the Maverick Party has distanced itself from its conspiratorial origins out of fear of ostracizing voters who saw those positions as too radical, understanding the impact of these theories is vital in better understanding the broader narrative surrounding the Maverick Party.

Conspiracy theories are by no means new; to borrow McCauley and Jacque's 1979 definition, they can be described as attempts to explain the ultimate causes of events as secret plots by powerful forces rather than overt activities or accidents (Jolley and Douglas, 2014, p.35). Alfred Moore wrote a 2016 article providing an overview of the prevalence of conspiracy theories in modern society. His broad-ranging analysis looks at various scholars, including Popper and Hofstadter, who suggest a link between conspiracy theory and democracy. In developed democracies where there is a generally high degree of government capacity, free

⁷ This is not to say that conspiracy theories should not be taken as seriously in Canada. There is documented impact of conspiracies in Canada, such as the Halifax mall shooting conspiracy (Scrivens and Perry, 2017, p.534).

press, and limited degree of political corruption, belief in conspiracies may seem to be foolish; however, to explain ever-present inequities in advanced societies, conspiracy theories may be in reality "an ideological misrecognition of power relations involving a populist identification of believers with 'the people' as opposed to a secret elite power bloc" (Moore, 2016, p.8). Popper and Hofstadter's conclusion is predicated first on the assumption that those who participate in the proliferation of conspiracy theories are first unable to evaluate and confirm information from reputable sources but recognize (usually economic) disparities that should not exist in advanced societies. This "populist identification" is what links this discussion to the definitional question of the Maverick Party and what fuels the Maverick Party's base. The assumption is that there is, in this case, a visible Ontario or, more specifically, Ottawa elite that is preventing prosperity in the resource-rich prairie provinces; a populist thin-centred argument.⁸ The anti-Ottawa sentiments, which are present throughout party documents, have little to do with Ottawa itself but rather feelings of frustration due to less-than-ideal prosperity in the west (Maverick Party Policy Platform, 2021, p.4). The challenge for these supporters is that they, in many cases, lack sufficient political or economic education to identify tangible solutions to addressing inequities and may then be willing to support any group that shares their opinion. The educational lapses are one reason why these theories can spread on social media rapidly.

Western Canadian Sentiments

In the next section, the pervasiveness of western Canadian sentiments, which are found as the central connecting discursive link between the Maverick Party and numerous other western parties, is explored. While the previous section focused heavily on conspiracy theory, this section attempts to shift to better understand the impact of the party's social media origins; however,

⁸ Thin-centred ideologies are put forward by Mudde (2004) and is one of the nine theoretical propositions on populism provided by Wuttke, Schimph, and Schoen's (2018, p.357) article explored later in this chapter.

literature on these two topics borrows heavily from one another, so there will be some additional unavoidable discussion on conspiracy theory. Perceived unfairness in Canada's equalization payment system is the primary driver of anti-Ottawa sentiments among westerners. Using the words 'perceived unfairness' in the preceding sentence was deliberate; while there is debate surrounding the exact formula that should be used to calculate transfer payments,⁹ the idea that the system itself is inherently unfair or biased against the west is a fallacy. The fallacy is rooted in both long-standing flawed economic understandings (Bird and Slack, 1990, p.918) and uncertainty among the populace regarding the capacity for unilateral constitutional change (McWhinney, 1965, p.162).

A lack of knowledge regarding government mechanisms among Canadians is not a new issue. Cited work from the previous century indicates this reality, yet although shortcomings in education have long been identified, little has been done to address these limitations, and because of this, groups can take advantage of this reality. Despite the Maverick Party's conspiratorial origins, it is not actively flouting theories and has actively distanced itself from its founder (Downing). Despite this, there needs to be recognition of the capacity for these theories and misinformation more broadly, to cause harm in the electorate. Daniel Jolley and Karen Douglas conducted a 2014 study published in the British Journal of Psychology that tested the impact of conspiracy theories on voting intention. They found that conspiracy theories directly influence intentions to engage in political processes such as voting (p.37). This denotes that if well circulated and people are consistently presented with confirmatory information, their trust and engagement with established political systems will decrease. When coupled with the recognized

⁹ Policy papers presented by a variety of Canadian think tanks: Ontario 360 (2020), Institute for Research on Public Policy (2007), and Canada West (2020) among others, all lack a uniform vision for what equalization amendments should be prioritized.

understanding that rates of traditional political participation are declining globally (Fiorina, 2002, p.109) and in recognition of the polarizing and echo-chambering effect that is precipitated through algorithm led social media (Wien and Deutz, 2019, p.2, Garimella et al., 2018, p.4), attitudes can push people away from established forms of political participation and increase mistrust with government and major parties.

It is here that it becomes clear why outdated and largely inaccurate perceptions regarding Canada's transfer system remain an issue of concern among many western Canadians. Suppose disenchanted westerners are less interested in established political players and are being consistently bombarded with information, both confirming that everyone shares their perceptions and are presented with a better way. In that case, parties like the Mavericks will suddenly become highly attractive and are a first step in answering what the party is and why it exists. This is why it is likely that social media is a key piece of Maverick strategy and important since it is something that former parties could not rely on. While sowing the seeds of doubt in established federal parties' ability to effectively represent the west is crucial in winning seats away from the Conservative MPs in the region, doing so primarily on social media may limit the degree of impact.¹⁰ Literature surrounding peer-to-peer confirmation biases (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2020, pp.118) on social media and the power of internet images in spreading misinformation (Thomson, 2020, pp.2)¹¹ are also relevant to this discussion as they are tactics used by the Wexit and Maverick social media Facebook pages; however, additional specificity

¹⁰ Globally only around 10% of men and women above the age of 55 are active Facebook users (Tankovska, 2021), given that Elections Canada figures routinely find this age group's voter turn out to be greater than 65%, social media-based strategies would leave major sections of the population uninformed.

¹¹ Both works, Knobloch-Westerwick et al., (2020) and Thomson (2020), outline how social media-based threats can coopt democratic institutions. They look at foreign election interference, such as Russia's Internet Research Agency (IRA) actions in the US 2016 presidential elections, and domestic interference found in peer-to-peer confirmation of false information on social media feeds, which can spread at alarming rates without intervention by social media companies.

on conspiracy theories is beyond the scope of this project. The selected literature in this section was highly focused since few Canadian political parties have been created in the social media age; understanding their strategy and tactics is not yet well researched, but as the Mavericks attempt to move from the fringes of politics into the mainstream, more will be uncovered.

Unity & Division

This next section will explore the reoccurring problem of unity and division among Canada's big tent federal parties. A propensity for realignment is common, indicating a willingness for change and provides some area for the Maverick Party to gain national recognition. In Canada, the Liberal and Conservative Parties are the only parties that have governed federally, both of which can be categorized as big tent parties. Big tent parties, classified as parties that permit or encourage a broad spectrum of views among their members, which is, in theory, an efficient way of minimizing the effect of the strategically limiting first-past-the-post electoral system and increasing the likelihood of gaining a party position in government (Carty, 2015, p.7). A central issue in big tent politics is that since there is little centralized ideology uniting members, inter-party dissent is common. According to Kenneth Carty, they are "shapeless, heterogeneous coalitions based on continual and shifting compromise" (2015, p.11).

In Canada, the Conservative Party and its variants have had a greater than expected likelihood of splintering and merging overtime throughout its long history. Beginning in 1897 under the leadership of Canada's first Prime Minister, Sir John A Macdonald, the Liberal-Conservative Party was the first iteration of Conservatism in Canada. In 1873 dropping the Liberal name, the party then continued under a Union label following the conscription crisis of 1917 (Morton, 2015, p.99). Eventually, it became the Progressive Conservatives in 1942 (Bliss,

1998, p.1) before its 1993 election defeat, owed much to the rise of the Reform party and a revitalized Liberal Party. To better understand the perpetual transition of conservative parties in Canada, Bratt and Foster's 2019 article *The Dealignment and Realignment of Right-Wing Parties in Canada: The Fragility of a 'Big Tent' Conservative Party* notes their development placing specific emphasis on historical parties stemming from Alberta. The article explores four hypotheses that can explain the reoccurring splintering and realignment within Canadian conservative parties—the first reason for party structure change is the timing and positioning of parties being in and out of government roles. When the political right is occupied by more than one party, dealignment occurs when one party is in power and the other is not (p.19). The most useful example for this study would be the splintering of the Reform Party from the Conservatives that did not occur during successive Liberal majority governments but rather occurred following Brian Mulroney's majority Progressive Conservative governments in 1984 and 1988. The second reason for alignment change looks at realignment that arises when both conservative parties are out of government; this again most directly can be seen with how the Canadian Alliance only merged with the PCs in 2003 after three successive majority Liberal victories in 1993, 1997, and 2000 (p.21). The third rationale for a structural change looks at dealignment for ideological reasons; this is one of the most direct rationales as to why the Reform party took such hold in Alberta (p.22).

MPs are being sent to Ottawa to represent the west but may vote for policies that benefit central Canada, such as during the 1980s when the CF-18 maintenance program was awarded to a Québec-based rather than Manitoba-based supplier. Thus, it created an atmosphere where many felt that MPs were working instead to represent the interests of Ottawa in the west. Lastly, realignment may occur for pragmatic reasons, primarily that of forming government (p.23). Most

notably, this occurred when the Canadian Alliance and PCs merged to form the Conservative Party of Canada, which won a minority government in 2006. Bratt and Foster further their position on the inevitability of splintering in conservative politics by concluding with the words of Preston Manning, who asserts that this phenomenon of splintering and realignment may be naturally occurring (p.25). The possibility of natural realignment proposed by Manning, along with a western perception that the CPC is more invested in central and eastern rather than western Canada, is perhaps the underlying rationale behind the creation of the Maverick Party. Put simply, it is possible that too much time has passed since the creation of this iteration of the Conservative Party, so there must be some internalized desire for change.

In addition to the possibility that splintering and realignment of Conservative parties is a natural occurrence, Bélanger and Nadeau (2005) look at the impact of political trust in multi-party Canadian elections. They find that in the federal elections of 1984, 1988, and 1993 there is an increase in voter abstention rates and rates of political mistrust (p.131). With increasing rates of mistrust Bélanger and Nadeau find, there are dually increasing rates of voters supporting new parties (p.125). The study was able to identify that dissatisfaction provides a more comprehensive account of the success of third or minor parties. This may additionally serve to aid the Maverick party; during the COVID-19 pandemic, trust in government parties globally has fluctuated widely (Schraff, 2020, p.9). This fluctuation due to the ongoing pandemic along with decreasing rates of trust with establish parties and a noted embrace of new entrants may make the Mavericks an attractive alternative to some western voters.

The Fringes of Canadian Politics

This next section looks more deeply at political fringes among Canadian parties. These fringes are a core connection to the discussion on the Maverick Party since regional alienation in

Canada is often a driver. However, there needs to be additional discussion regarding historical Canadian division since these issues are not solely drawn on regional lines. Canada's federalism is inherently alienating due to the distinct cultural and industrial differences between the vast regions. Amplifying feelings of alienation are an effective driver of societal division, a tool often used by extremist groups as well as established political parties. Scrivens and Perry (2017, p.534) found that right-wing, largely populist, extremist groups are highly complex and multifaceted, not simply reactionary in pursuit of a single policy goal. As such, right wing-extremism needs to be countered with equally complex integrative policies (p.547). Parties must avoid tapping into the emotionally divisive drivers that these groups use, even though they can be politically rewarding. Many of these groups find supporters through communicating on the internet, often in social media groups away from the public eye, where they create or frequently share misleading information meant to divide or achieve a specific goal (p.551). Understanding if the Maverick Party will conduct itself in a similar way is key question for their identity and is why this section warrants exploration. While a contemporary topic, right-wing extremism is not new but rather a clear demonstration of Canada's unwillingness to acknowledge its historic origins built on ideals of white supremacy. This is by no means meant to purport that the Maverick Party is running on a white-nationalist agenda, but rather to highlight that when a party is focused on dividing a populous on arbitrary lines, there are stark similarities to the vitriol used by more dangerous groups.

Ideological Development

Thus far, the literature review has focused on gaining a better understanding of the broad roots of the Maverick Party, first in looking at the role of its social media origins and the digital ramifications for political parties more broadly and then explored long-standing perceptions

regarding Canada's political system. I also looked at both the uniqueness of Canadian parties on the fringes and the story of perpetual change in alignment found through the iterative nature of Canadian conservatism. This next section focuses more narrowly on the Maverick Party itself and the development of its ideology to truly gain a better sense of what the party is while also grounding their ideology to create a foundation on which newness can be evaluated.

Having been founded in 2020, there is little at this point in terms of background theory to explore the Maverick Party without directly linking it to the Reform Party. The Reform Party can be understood through four theoretical thematic lenses that have been drawn from party documentation specifically for this study: populist democratic institutional reform; Alberta fiscal conservatism; Anti-Ottawa sentiments; and social conservatism in North America.¹² These four themes are broad, but they have been specifically chosen to link with the previous section to allow for a historical connection between the Reform Party and the Maverick Party. Focusing now on populism, identifying root sources of populism is a well-studied area but inexact since it takes many forms globally. Wuttke, Schimpf, and Schoen provide a widely accepted academic definition, "Populist attitudes [are] a multidimensional construct comprising anti-elitist attitudes and further orientations about the role of the people" (2020, p.358). This definition is vast in what it may be able to represent; it also places a direct connection in the early discussion on the role of conspiratorial thinking that precipitates a change in political action. This link is essential in understanding not only how the Maverick and Reform parties are similar but also in understanding what types of people are moved by these vague and often irrational policy positions. In their article, Wuttke, Schimpf, and Schoen go on to state, "populist attitudes are an

¹² These themes were drawn from Reform Party platform documents. The method through which these themes were derived will be outlined in Chapter Three on theory as it was created specifically for this study. In short, it is a discursive institutional approach that seeks to understand a deeper meaning context behind party communication.

attitudinal syndrome with non-substantive subdimensions ... [and] at the mass level represents more than the sum of its parts" (p.370). This secondary piece that of non-substantive subdimensions is crucial in understanding the fragility on which populist identities are held. It indicates a serious likelihood for future party splintering or realignment due to underlying attitudes that do not make for party cohesion, directly linking this work with the previous section. Wutke, Schimpf, and Schoen are but a single contribution on populism, there is a vast array of work in this area, but their article represents a solid foundation that links the Maverick and Reform parties.

Providing an alternative outlook and shifting slightly to the long-term function of parties, Hopkin and Blyth (2019) analyze the growth of regimes and how party systems change concerning European populism. They find a wide potential for partisan political change when facing a populist threat; however, they note that due to the lack of precision amidst populist movements, determining their precise impact across nations is challenging (p.15). They additionally find that even established parties are susceptible to these dramatic shifts in their positions and may embrace populist demands regardless of ideological positioning (p.22). This was seen in the US with the Republican Party and in the UK with the Labour Party. Which may indicate that there is either some degree of ideological resiliency preventing movement or an inherently fragile sense of partisanship with Canadian parties due to observed party dissolution and realignment instead of a willingness to embrace competing populist threats. As such answering, what is the Maverick Party, requires further exploration of additional subdimensions.

The Political "Isms" Populism, Nationalism, and Conservatism

Wuttke, Schimpf, and Schoen have established a base on which populism can be examined, and Hopkin and Blyth have identified the fragile footing on which parties sit in their

ability to resist populist threats. It remains to be clear what causes voters to abandon their long-standing partisan ties and embrace a populist challenger, which is crucial in ascertaining if the Maverick Party will become a new and relevant challenger. Insight on this topic comes from Gordon (2021) in her analysis on the use of discursive victimhood in Canadian conservatism by looking at two key pieces of Harper government legislation that relate to mandatory sentencing and sex work. Gordon finds that while all populist rhetoric involves some degree of victim identification, as do conservative ones, "the people" are not being treated fairly; Conservative rhetoric alone uses villainization of groups to elicit a response from within the base (p.42). Voters may feel that they are the victims against the established political elites but may not be willing to villainize opposition, preferring to reject established players on masse. Gordon concludes by drawing on Tännsjö (1990), who notes how conservatism is flexible in core commitments and lacks substantive ideals that require borrowing political concepts from progressive opponents (p.55), thus aligning conservatism more closely with populist stances than previously anticipated among academics. This rethinking of conservative alignments can make changing party positions more attractive to sitting politicians and allow populist movements to grow more rapidly. Lastly, Gordon draws on Freeden (1996), who provides a short descriptor as to the perpetual shortcomings of big tent conservatism by calling it "the chameleon of political ideologies" (p.55), meaning that when facing threats, parties may be willing to do whatever is necessary to survive an election. This comment is exceptionally important to the discussion; since the Maverick Party presents itself as the alternative to the Conservative Party, the CPC may have to consider a drastic but not unprecedented realignment to avoid a catastrophic loss. That being said, the advent of the internet may have changed the expected behaviours among Canadian conservative parties. Established parties may be more prepared to adapt to a Maverick

threat as opposed to the crumbling that occurred with the Progressive Conservatives during the Reform era.¹³

Moving now to Alberta fiscal conservatism, which while distinct, has evolved throughout various waves of social movements. These movements are crucial in understanding the degree of success that may be expected from the Maverick Party. A central piece that facilitated the Reform Party's rise to prominence was their specific brand of Alberta fiscal conservatism. The party led by Preston Manning was able to build on his historical legacy, being the son of one of Alberta's most influential premiers, Ernest Manning. Preston laid the groundwork for an 'Alberta First' approach to politics, similar to what was seen during the oil boom era amid Manning's successive Social Credit provincial governments.¹⁴ An 'Alberta First' approach can be characterized as a rejection of federal authority when faced with apparent regional discrepancies (Parizeau, 2017, p.53). The focus becomes no longer about national objectives and instead is a complete focus on policies that would benefit Alberta. The Alberta fiscal conservatism that occurred during this era can be seen as akin to a nascent form of Alberta nationalism. In John Richards and Larry Pratt's 1979 work *Prairie Capitalism*, they noted explicitly how, despite a constitutionally affirmed provincial right to manage natural resources, provinces were limited during the 1940s in what degree of capital could be raised by provincial governments (p.83). The expectation was that the federal government would be able to use its income-raising potential to finance exploration (p.85); the federal government was largely unwilling to fund these

¹³ The CPC's ability to adapt and remain resilient or rapidly decline when facing a new threat has yet to be truly tested. There is a wealth of scholarship regarding the institutional resiliency of political parties in other countries that demonstrates the complexities. See Webb 2002 for the UK, Jesudason 1999 for Malaysia and Singapore, or Gilley 2003 for China.

¹⁴ Alberta's Social Credit Party held nine successive majority provincial governments from 1935 until 1971, the seven later led by Ernest Manning (Flanagan, 2010, p.1).

exploratory projects.¹⁵ As such, development largely came under American influence and investment. Albertans now facing a partner to the south and perceived inattention from central Canada developed a serious negation of conceptions of national identity to be associated with the natural resource potential in the province. This change can be accredited as the source of Albertan's widely held understanding that oil is a birthright available exclusively for their exploitation (p.62).¹⁶ These isolationist attitudes were only furthered when the then United Farmer government fell to successive Social Credit governments. The province now following a different ideology, and a healthy dose of Christian fundamentalism by original party leader William "Bible Bill" Aberhart (p.54) created an environment where Alberta nationalist sentiments could grow. These sentiments related to oil use are also an origin of Anti-Ottawa attitudes, as central Canada was perceived as having control of the capital.¹⁷

Additionally, Canada's social movement history is far greater than examples found exclusively in Alberta. Wiseman and Isitt (2007) analyzed Canadian social democracy in the twentieth century by creating four distinct categories. The earliest of which is the Social Gospel, which critiqued industrial capitalism among Christians (p.572). Then Social Planning asked why sacrifice required to win wars was not sustained to pursue economic security and end poverty (p.576). Social Security is a direct response but a less state-directed version of socialism (p.576). Lastly, Social Movements sought to address the internalization of capital (p.581). All four of these categories were focused on addressing some degree of overt inequalities; the challenge for

¹⁵ An unwillingness for federal funding is a common theme throughout Richard and Pratt's (1979) exploration of the economic development in the prairies; the perception that the federal government is more inclined to fund projects in eastern or central Canada is a driver of western sentiments (p.39).

¹⁶ It should be noted that alienation predates the discovery of oil in Leduc in 1947 due to the geographic isolation of the Western provinces.

¹⁷ A valid assumption since Ottawa as the seat of power is in Ontario, and four of Canada's five big banks have their headquarters in Toronto, with the fifth in Montreal. Central Canada is then seen as eager to take money out of the province to fulfill goals of more significant national objectives rather than those purely for the benefit of Alberta.

social democrats then and what continues to be is "[a challenge] to re-examine both their internationalism and their economic nationalism striving toward a synthesis of the two in order to articulate a coherent alternative to globalized capitalism" (p.586). Understanding varying conceptions of the state is helping shed light on the exact nature of the Maverick Party. The various social leanings show temporally where specific movements were born, and then it can illuminate if the Maverick Party is putting forward something new or if they are chasing a long-outdated role for the state.

Lastly, the Reform Party, as with many present-day and historical parties from Alberta, is rooted in social conservatism. While social conservatism emerged during the 1960s in Canada and the United States, there was a different degree of development. Jim Farney (2019) explains why this is the case through a process-tracing approach that looks at the development of social conservatism in North America. Farney begins by highlighting the challenge of social conservatism, noting how in North America, there is a prevalence of free-market conservative preferences and a degree of traditionalism often coupled with religious appeals but lacks a unified ideology among various actors (p.141). Additionally, he highlights how there is no monolithic origin of conservatism in Canada or the United States (p.154). Instead, a series of critical junctures surrounding moral issues such as abortion or LGBTQ+ rights represent a series of path-defining moments that have altered present-day conservatism. Farney points out how in Canada, politicians have been selective in how they have applied principles of social conservatism in an attempt to distance themselves from American prominence (p.143). This is especially important in any discussion on Alberta's development since there are deep American economic ties in the province's oil sector (as detailed in Richards and Pratt, 1979, p.75). As societal attitudes surrounding social issues in Canada change, there may present an identity crisis

and fuel further splintering among conservative groups providing space for the Maverick Party to assert itself as a legitimate challenger depending on their degree of social openness.

This literature review has served to ground the MRP in existing literature by exploring some of the nuances through which the Maverick Party can be studied. While the sampling has been a limited selection of available literature, it has managed to take a top-down approach by increasing in specificity to touch on the major relevant areas for this project. Beginning in its most broad form with the origins of the Maverick Party, the conspiratorial origins and their impact on modern politics were briefly explored alongside discussion on the social media age of politics. Next, increasing in specificity and stepping into the national focus, Canadian political fringes were briefly analyzed while attempting to demonstrate the proximity of some parties to extremism. Then to provide context on the creation of the Maverick Party, the story of modern conservatism was explored while also looking at the role of voter trust in established parties. Finally, focusing most directly on the Maverick Party, the ideological development of the party on the lines of populism, Alberta fiscal conservatism, and social conservatism were all explored. One obvious gap to the reader would be the lack of any scholarship directly pertaining to the Maverick Party. Since the party is at this point less than two years old, no such literature exists and represents a serious gap. As the party continues to develop and if they prove themselves to be a legitimate challenger in upcoming federal elections, it is felt that more precise scholarship will undoubtedly develop. The following section uses the foundation set out in this literature review to form a detailed hypothesis statement that will be tested in later chapters.

Chapter 3 – Theory & Methods

This chapter outlines the overarching theoretical approaches guiding this study, and it sets out a series of key assumptions made at the outset. To remind the reader of the research

questions put forward in the first chapter, this study asks: what is the nature of the Maverick Party, and is the Maverick Party new? This chapter builds on these questions and puts forward two hypothesis statements that drive the study design. Lastly, this chapter also contains an overview of the methodological choices and describes the data collection methods used to examine the hypotheses.

Theoretical Approaches

To begin as broadly as possible, at the level of the discipline, locating this study within the field of political science is challenging as this project draws its influence from numerous sources. Jack Lucas, in a century-long analysis of Canadian Political Science Association literature, puts forward that multifaceted studies may not be uncommon (2013, p.92). Lucas found that the discipline has gone through numerous waves of change and, as a result, is highly fragmented (Lucas, 2013, p.104). Through borrowing some of the categories put forward by Lucas, this study can be located both within two institutionalist understandings while also being influenced by behavioural tradition.

Beginning broadly, the institutional nature of this study is due to the notion that political parties themselves are institutions and not coordinated groups of actors. Parties are formalized structures that adhere to formal and informal norms of behaviour; they have become so crucial to democracy that it is nearly inconceivable without them (Lipset, 2000, p.49). For this study, there are two pieces of theory regarding parties informing the inquiry. First, looking at how an emerging party will upset existing power dynamics among established parties is vital in understanding the definition of a party. The positions the Maverick Party challenges are crucial in understanding its nature. Second, understanding how parties influence and interact with each other, and more broadly, Canadians can reveal its newness. How the Maverick Party

differentiates itself from other parties is fundamental in determining if the party is new. More specifically, this study employs historical institutionalism, which draws specific attention to the role of temporal phenomena in influencing change in institutions (Fioretos, 2016, p.8). It is assumed that the development of institutions, in this case, the Maverick Party, can be best understood through the identification of critical junctures in its history. These junctures can be represented through various social, political, or economic interactions that limit the range of action due to underlying exogenous pressure. Since the Maverick Party has recently been created, this method lends itself to crafting a historical narrative that tells the story of its development and interactions with other institutions.

Understanding the interactions with Canadians are wherein lie the secondary influence of behaviourism, the specific factors that elicit change in party reception are under interrogation. Behaviourism is a part of a broader change in social science that took influence from natural sciences, attempting to examine phenomena with a greater degree of precision through the systematic identification of political behaviour (Guy, 2010, p.59). The behaviouralist tradition in Canada is often seen to be at odds¹⁸ with traditional institutionalist approaches (Lucas, 2013, p.101). While this study seeks to understand the motivating factors for action by taking influence from behaviourism, it does so by setting aside the associated quantitative focus. Instead, it draws from discursive institutionalism and generates somewhat of a hybrid theoretical underpinning. Discursive institutionalism is a new institutionalism that takes ideas and discourse as a key piece of inquiry by seeking to understand the deeper meaning context (Schmidt, 2008, p.308). This

¹⁸ The American behavioural invasion during the 1970s was a mass influx of young American-trained faculty in response to massive increases in Canadian undergraduate enrollment. This meant that behaviourism was no longer a matter of preference but directly impacted hiring rates across departments creating working environments scholars were often at odds with one another over differing views on how research should be conducted and taught (Lucas, 2013, p.101).

theoretical lens does not just consider discourse as what has been said but also the broader context of what is being said and the power behind it, which is a more dynamic construct.¹⁹

Lastly, this study looks at the role of party communications by looking at the nexus between political communications and political action/agenda setting. For this study, communications are understood as authentic extensions of party platform agendas. Parties are faced with numerous issues that require their attention and must balance and adapt their election mandate with the emergence of new issues (Froio et al., 2017, p.695). This balancing act for parties makes deciphering true party intentions challenging. Regardless, this study assumes that party documents, be that platforms or policy booklets are extensions of true party intentions. Since the Maverick Party has only recently been founded, the creation of the policies themselves is dually assumed to be primarily informed by the party leader, which implies a great deal of agency for the leader. In contrast, some studies have suggested that party leaders have a limited role in setting the party's direction and may act more like a figurehead serving the interests of a hidden elite (Bittner, 2011, p.95), which would negate the importance of Jay Hill emerging as the leader. Further, this assumption would counter the application of contextual party analysis since it implies constant hidden meaning. Ignoring the legitimacy of textual context, which is a key element of discursive institutionalism that informs much of this study, would contradict all political party platform analysis.

One additional area that needs to be clarified before moving on is the assumptions surrounding the conduct of the study as it relates to the delineation between political parties and political movements. While these terms may be similar and while parties' actions may often represent a critical juncture in the development of a movement, they are different in several key

¹⁹ Opposed to more structured ways of understanding behaviour, such as a rational choice analysis.

ways. The first is formal coordination; parties in Canada must abide by both formalized roles set by federal or provincial election bodies (Muldoon and Rye, 2020, p.494). Additionally, with an institutional understanding, political parties will have internal structures governing their actions: boards of directors, party constitutions, and policy conventions that all limit the direction of a party.²⁰ Whereas movements are primarily informal, a movement generally represents an idea.²¹ While there may be a coordinated effort, there are no formalized structures governing the direction or actions of a movement. It is possible, though for a movement to implement formal structures and then develop into a political institution (Muldoon and Rye, 2020, p.487). Lastly, while movements may have leadership in inspirational voices, these individuals are usually playing a role rather than directing a movement. Movements and parties are closely related, but political parties are different since they abide by informal norms and are regulated by controls.

Hypotheses

So far, this paper has introduced two guiding research questions; first, what is the nature of the Maverick Party, and second, whether the Maverick Party is new. Before I can answer these two questions, or address how they will be answered, I must first address several assumptions that relate to both definitions and newness, which are used to ground the proceeding statements.

This first set of assumptions relates to definitions since the first research question is in search of determining the nature of the party. A definition can be drawn by looking broadly at the party's positioning on various issues concerning other parties. To summarize what has been

²⁰ The movement of parties is further limited though historical intuitionist understandings that assume actions are predicated on previous decisions that set the institution on a defined path.

²¹ Many contemporary social-political movements, such as the 2020 Black Lives Matter movement, are extensions of other historical events, such as the 1960s civil rights movement.

uncovered so far, the Maverick Party is on the right,²² giving some sense of the ideological space the party is entering. Currently, the CPC occupies the political right in Canada and entering this space is challenging since, as illustrated previously, the CPC is a big tent coalition.

During his 2019 attempt with the far-right People's Party, Maxime Bernier learned; winning over voters in this section of the ideological spectrum is no easy undertaking. Despite Bernier having name recognition from recently finishing second in the Conservative Party's leadership race, his party failed to win a single seat (Berthiaume, 2019, p.1). Parties often need to act intentionally divisively to draw people away from what, in many cases are, long-standing political allegiances in addition to providing something unique not currently offered by other parties. The challenge experienced by the People's Party during the election of 2019 may indicate that loyalties in that area of the spectrum are somewhat secure or that far-right ideals are less common in Canada at this time.

Whatever the reason, the Maverick Party is now attempting to enter a crowded political right. To be successful, it then has to position itself either somewhere between these two parties or in line with the Conservatives ideologically, potentially making the only difference in their definition a regional rather than national focus. This is to say that once the Maverick Party makes more of their policy positions clear, determining its definition may be relatively straightforward from an academic standpoint. The average voter, however, may find this challenging due to the nuances and anti-party sentiments that are often present (Bélanger, 2004, p.1057). Currently, Elections Canada lists 19 federally registered political parties; this would, to many Canadians, be a shock, as many voters struggle to name even the five main parties holding seats in the House of Commons. Likely, even fewer could name a fringe group that, despite fervent attempts, has

²² The focus on restrained spending is not something that is seen on the contemporary Canadian political left.

never elected an MP to the House of Commons, like how the Reform Party did not gain significant recognition until after successfully electing Deborah Grey in the 1989 by-election. The Maverick Party is trying to, however, elect candidates in the 2020s, a different era from when the Reform Party initially emerged. The party is seizing on an international wave of populism spurred from Brexit (Carreras et al., 2019, p. 1400) and is doing so led by Jay Hill, a recognized political figure. Since the party is less than two years old at the time of conducting this research, its exact definition will continue to develop over time. As such, for the remainder of this study, we will use a working definition that states the Maverick Party is a new regionally focused, right-leaning, quasi-separatist federal party. This definition is left somewhat intentionally vague since conducting a study on a party this early into its existence requires accepting a degree of uncertainty in the research process. The above definition relies on normative understanding of parties and is inexact. This norm-driven understanding of institutions, which dually encourages uncertainty in discourse by stepping away from rigid analysis, relies heavily on discursive institutionalism (Schmidt, 2008, p.318).

The remainder of the chapter pivots to the second research question: newness. While the above definition does assert that the party is new, the use of the word, in this case, refers only to the recent date of founding, whereas the research question seeks to understand the degree of newness. While it may seem somewhat pedantic to differentiate between being new and a degree of newness, it is a significant difference to understand. In probing the party's newness, I seek to understand in what ways the Maverick Party may be providing something unique in Canadian politics. This asserts a multidimensional understanding of newness in politics that accepts parties can be different in numerous ways (Beyens, 2017, p.390). It is possible that outside of being something completely new in Canadian politics, the Maverick Party could be a resurgence of the

Reform Party, a regional version of the Conservative Party, or a western version of the Bloc Québécois, to name a few possibilities.

The first assumption informing the second question is that political parties can be new. Sikk (2011) draws on previous literature to assert that emerging parties generally fall into two groups. The first one is where motivating ideology is present but currently underrepresented by established parties, and the second is that an entrant may represent something new entirely (p.466). Sikk goes on to say, to be considered as new, they do not have to provide something entirely new to be still considered a viable political entity (p.480), clearly asserting that parties can be new. Both groupings provided in Sikk rely on analyzing party ideology, and one method of doing so is the examination of party documentation. Since it has been outlined how, for this study that party documents are assumed to be an authentic expression of party intention (Froio et al., 2017, p.700), documentation is then considered to be one of the most reliable ways to understand what a party plans to accomplish. Through a systematic exploration of these documents, insights can then be retrieved. Now that it has been demonstrated that it is both possible for political parties to be new and that parties are best understood by examining its released documentation. The comparison of party platforms between parties is the best way to determine if a party is new or a resurgence of some other party. Therefore, the first hypothesis statement posits, if the Maverick Party is new, then its party documents will share little in common with those of former parties.

To further ground this hypothesis in theory, a historical institutionalist approach would find little surprise if Maverick documents take a wide degree of influence from Reform documents since the Reform Party's dissolution was not caused by an attitudinal change among the populace but rather was reactive to (Canadian Alliance) ambitions of forming government.

This means that if taking a path dependant look at historical institutional development (Fioretos, 2016, p.9), the dissolution of the Reform Party would have exerted causal force on future parties. It as such would be unsurprising to find a high degree of similarity in Maverick Party documents due to the direct connections in leadership. This is further informed by Sikk's analysis on the importance of uniqueness among new parties (2011, p.468). Sikk's analysis, as previously detailed, puts forward that a presently underrepresented ideology can spur the creation of new parties. The Maverick Party is likely trying to seize the focused 'Alberta First' approach, which was lost after Stockwell Day took on a national focus with the Canadian Alliance. Those 'Alberta First' sentiments have not disappeared among the electorate, which indicates a possible area of connection with voters. Lastly, to ground this in a final theoretical perspective, the analysis of ideology through party platforms seeks to understand not only the surface-level content but the deeper meaning in context. The power of language, as understood through context, lends itself to a discursive institutionalist approach. Drawing mainly from Schmidt (2008), who asserts that this approach builds on historical analysis to explain the unexpected to draw various insights (p.319).

While the first hypothesis seeks to look at newness through party platforms by focusing on understanding its context, the second hypothesis takes a different approach by looking at the Maverick Party directly and pushing linguistic analysis to its limits. The first assumption here is that beyond party documentation, to understand the party on a deeper level, participant interaction is a richer data collection method. People, when sharing their insights, can provide more robust insight since it is an interactive medium. Like in the previous hypothesis, discursive institutionalism is driving this analysis, informed still by Schmidt's (2008) assumption that nuances in language are discreetly observable (p.319). The nuances under interrogation here are in what exactly is influencing people's interactions with the party. Textual analysis would not

provide clear insight into why someone chooses to join a party, nor would it shed light on the emotion behind these decisions. By embracing this discursive institutional approach to understanding change that looks at the nature of actions by asking people involved with the party what drove them to join, deep insights can be ascertained. Additionally, regarding Sikk's (2011) assertions on types of new political parties, which at this point, have been well explored. The reader should be reminded that parties do not need to be entirely new to be considered a viable entrant. He expands on this notion by stating how the essential factor in determining if a party is new is if it can mobilize voters (p.478). This is the last piece; if the Maverick Party mobilizes voters away from existing parties, it shows that not only it is new but also that it matters. The second hypothesis states that if the Maverick Party is new, then it will be treated as a new entity.

This second hypothesis is undoubtedly less rigorous than the first since it is driven entirely through a discursive, institutional approach, one that, according to Schmidt (2008), largely embraces uncertainty (p.317). There is much that can be uncovered when using a line of inquiry that seeks to understand what is influencing people's interactions with a party. The interviews will be a task in observation, which is a deductive reasoning approach that will confirm if people are treating the party as new by asking what is driving their mobilization. When asked why participants are supporting the Maverick Party, answers may vary from Reform Party name recognition of Jay Hill to a loss of faith in the Conservative Party or preference for a regional focus somewhat akin to the Bloc's brand of politics. All these scenarios, be that a rejection of current parties or embracing past ones, assume that there is little new about the Maverick Party and lean towards more of a rebranding or regional repositioning rather than something of inherent newness, something for Sikk (2011) that makes the party none the less new. These interactions will also reveal how the party building is going and from what groups

they are drawing supporters. Suppose the Maverick Party is drawing support away from the Conservative Party alone, or it is building a more robust political coalition. In either case, it changes the implied degree of newness since the answer may be complex and multifaceted.

The final section in this chapter explores in-depth the methods that are being used to answer the hypothesis statements—first exploring how Maverick Party documents will be used and compared against Reform and Canadian Alliance Party documents²³ and then outlining the analysis methods that were used to derive insights.

Data and Methods

The first part of this study is a comprehensive historical document analysis centred on Reform and Canadian Alliance Party platforms²⁴ against the Maverick Party. Reform platform documents and policy booklets from 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1995, 1996, and 1997 were included in the analysis. In addition, the Canadian Alliance platform document from 2000 was also analyzed.²⁵ All platforms were retrieved from the POLTEXT Electronic Manifestos database at the University of Laval. POLTEXT is an electronic repository of policy documents of all major Canadian federal parties from 1972 to the present. The Maverick Party, being recently founded, has limited official documentation available; their finalized policy booklets will not be available until after completing this study during their August 2021 convention. Three draft documents were retrieved from their website: Maverick Party Policy Platform, Maverick Party Mission Statement, Maverick Party Twin Track Approach. These three documents were chosen since, first, the policy platform is the most exhaustive piece of party

²³ As has been explained, the other parties under interrogation here are the Reform and subsequent Canadian Alliance parties, chosen partly to understand Jay Hill's role and re-entrance to politics.

²⁴ The Reform and Canadian Alliance Parties have been chosen since they both have a direct connection with Jay Hill and Alan Kerpan and are rooted in sentiments of western alienation.

²⁵ Since the party existed only from 2000 to 2003 before merging with the PCs, they only produced a single document.

documentation available. Second, mission statements are a strategic tool that works as a heuristic to define behaviour (Mullane, 2002, p.449). Lastly, the twin track approach was the first completed policy document released by the party.

The data analysis for this chapter was a qualitative thematic grouping task created specifically for this study. As with all qualitative analysis forms, I, as the researcher, was the primary means of data collection and analysis. This requires a heavy reliance on my skillset and intuition; while this method is not without limitations, it can produce interesting results when done carefully. I began by carefully reviewing Reform Party platform points and assigned them a category based on contextual themes. The construction of the categories began in broad terms with what would be expected having nothing more than a rudimentary knowledge of the Reform Party. The first categories were points that reflected western alienation or points that referenced the West's positionality; all other points were left for later categorization. The points, now grouped and categorized, are referred to as thematic bundles. As the evaluation continued, one additional category emerged that influenced much of the party's economic policy, fiscal conservatism. Now having a clearer picture of the ideological positioning of the party, a final category emerged that was felt to be worth exploring due to its vagueness, reference to reform tradition. The same method was used for the single Canadian Alliance document and three Maverick Party documents. The thematic bundles were then compared between parties through an inductive reasoning approach by taking general observations about the documents to draw a conclusion on newness. Then reoccurring promises were drawn from the platforms to understand what key areas the parties continue to emphasize. Next, the location of blame was analyzed; this was focused on understanding if the west is seen as the victim (Gordon, 2021, p.42) of a deal of misfortune inevitable since confederation or if the actions of the villainous elite in Ottawa are to

blame for the current mistreatment. Overall, this strategy was informed by a multi-disciplinary approach to conducting qualitative document analysis (Bowen, 2009, p.36). This was selected as a contextual overview since while there are instances of undeniable similarity of the texts between parties, exact text matching is uncommon. Further, the choice to draw themes is a discursive analysis that was informed by Schmidt's (2008) emphasis on the explanatory power of ideas and discourse. Schmidt stresses the importance of understanding both the context of ideas and the role of agency (p.314). This steps beyond a norm-based logic of path-dependent decisions and encourages looking at the context to understand why specific ideas are being shared (p.317). To relate this to the study, if the Maverick Party has a significant degree of similarity with the Reform Party, then it shows that the context surrounding those ideas have been "locked-in" which indicates that the party, from a conceptual perspective, is limited in what new ideas it is bringing forward. Additionally, the discursive nature of this analysis, focusing on the power of language, was concluded to be sufficient since there is an imbalance one what is presently available to be examined.

The second part of the study is a series of semi-structured interviews with current Maverick Party members and is meant to provide insight into the second hypothesis. The inclusion criteria for participation in the interview portion of the study is that interviewees were either senior members of the Maverick Party board or nominated candidates. The whole set of available participants is less than twenty-five, from which 14 were contacted to participate.²⁶ Due to the present context of conducting political research during the COVID-19 pandemic, participant access is the most challenging element of this study; the anticipated rate of participation was less than 50%. Before contacting study participants, this research received

²⁶ Since the Maverick party is new and since there is no urgency to drastically increase the rate at which the party is being built since no election has been called, there is a small set of total possible research participants.

ethics approval from Western University's Non-Medical Ethics Review Board to ensure the ethical and professional conduct of the study.

Participants were recruited via email and received virtual communication with the researcher to schedule the interview and receive information related to consent. Interviews were conducted via the Zoom teleconferencing software, but phone interviews were available for those lacking sufficient technical capabilities. The semi-structured interviews were conducted using a standardized set of five interview questions²⁷ with follow-up questions prepared depending on the quality and content provided by participants during their answers. The questions are divided into three sections: the party, policy, and strategy. Following the interviews, the audio recordings were transcribed,²⁸ and thematic textual analysis was conducted to answer the research questions. Here the thematic analysis was not meant to group like answers but rather highlight the key insights from the interviews. To remain transparent on the answers provided during the interviews, names and professional titles have been used throughout the discussion and analysis. Research participants, however, were given the option to remain anonymous. The investigation is focused primarily on evaluating the newness of the party, placing specific focus on how candidates and board members are presenting the party to a politically neutral interviewer and if they can provide succinct answers as to why they are choosing to work with the party.

Lastly, the discussion sections in Chapters Four and Five will focus on how the Maverick Party tells their story or how its members are framing the party. This looks at the interview responses as a whole to determine in what ways responses from the Maverick Party are in line

²⁷ The exact list of questions is in the appendix at the end of this text.

²⁸ The transcription was completed automatically using Zoom's live transcription feature. Participant audio is transcribed and provided as live closed captioning as well as a full transcript after the meeting. Following the meeting the transcription files were edited for clarity.

with expectations and where there are areas of notable divergence. As stated, the expectation is that answers will thematically match rhetoric from the Reform Party. In cases where there is a divergence from expectations, insights will be highlighted as identifying these areas is a key goal for this study. Lastly, party coordination is under interrogation; messaging between members should largely remain consistent. If there are points where members' responses are not uniform, broader conclusions regarding the party's preparedness can be discerned.

Chapter 4 – Platform Analysis

The purpose of cross-party platform analysis is to understand better the connections between parties; this chapter details the platform analysis between the Reform/Canadian Alliance Parties and the Maverick Party and associates with the research question that asks is the Maverick Party new? The hypothesis statement being tested in this chapter states, if the Maverick Party is new, then their party documents will share little in common with other parties. The analysis focuses on identifying areas of similarity and then exploring areas of divergence between the parties; the areas of divergence are what can be attributed as new for the Maverick Party. The exact conditions of analysis will be more deeply outlined in the next section, but there are two key points the reader should keep in mind. First, the evaluation of newness, in this case, is focused on determining if the party is providing a new perspective, ideology, or more general platform to voters, or if it is a resurgence of a former party. To conduct this evaluation, Reform and Canadian Alliance Platforms have undergone a thematic grouping analysis that sought to sort platform points by their underlying context. These points were compared against three Maverick Party documents that were subjected to the same thematic analysis. Second, to review theory in broad terms, the analysis takes form through a thematic analysis, which draws heavily on discursive institutionalism to explore the power of language (Schmidt, 2008, p.318). This also

relates to behaviouralist understandings of political science as it is explored through a neutral perspective (Guy, 2010, p.59). Reform Party and Canadian Alliance platform and policy booklets from 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1995, 1996, 1997, and 2000 have been downloaded from the University of Laval's POLTEXT database. The database is an electronic repository of policy documents from all major Canadian federal political parties from 1972 to the present.

Reform Party documents vary exhaustively from outlined party documents similar to what was produced by other major parties to smaller 'Blue Books' that gave potential voters a series of simple reasons to vote for the party. These less formal policy booklets contain more party rhetoric making drawing themes from these documents an especially fruitful undertaking. The following draft Maverick Party documents have been used for this paper: Maverick Party Policy Platform, Maverick Party Twin Track Approach, Maverick Party Mission Statement. The documents were obtained from their website and are versions from March 30, 2021²⁹. The draft policy platform is the document most adept for direct analysis since, as its namesake would suggest, it is an assemblage of various party platform points from which themes can be drawn. The other documents are somewhat different. The twin track approach document is prepared like an in-depth press release, so it is not subjected to a thematic analysis, but since it only covers one policy point, its content and context can be analyzed. Lastly, the mission statement is a series of commitments to members; it works as a heuristic to define party behaviour, from which themes regarding context can be drawn. The scanned PDF copies ensure that there was no missing data

²⁹ While the analysis used March 30, 2021 versions, surface-level analysis has only found minimal difference between the March versions of the documents and ones available upon completing the study. Any differences are based on content and do not affect findings since the thematic bundles control minor content-related changes as it looks at the broader context.

from the documents.³⁰ The Maverick Party has yet to release a full platform document; only draft versions and core principles are presently available. While this, for some, would limit the degree of analysis, since the focus for this study is not on exact matching but rather on deriving themes, this method works well as described above.

Conditions of Analysis

The choice to group by context rather than content was influenced by discursive institutionalism (Schmidt, 2008, p.316), which recognizes that while the actual text of a platform point may change, the underlying idea over time remains consistent. The construction of the categories began in broad terms by starting with what would be expected, having nothing more than a rudimentary knowledge of the Reform Party. The first categories were points that reflected western alienation or points that referenced the west's positionality or fairness; all other points were left for later categorization. The points, now grouped and categorized, are referred to as thematic bundles. As the evaluation continued, one additional category emerged that influenced much of the party's economic policy, fiscal conservatism. Now having a clearer picture of the ideological positioning of the party, a final category emerged, which was a reference to reform tradition. The same method was used for the single Canadian Alliance document. The thematic bundles were then compared between parties through an inductive reasoning approach by taking general observations about the documents to draw a conclusion on newness. The below table is an itemization that provides more detail on the exact documents that were analyzed.

³⁰ Parties generally only release official documents before elections, which is why there are not documents released every year. Major parties at this time, Liberal, PC and NDP, only released documents in 1993, 1997, and 2000.

Year	Party Name	Document Title	Number of Pages ³¹
2021	Maverick Party	Maverick Party Draft Policy Platform	9
2021	Maverick Party	Mission Statement	1
2021	Maverick Party	Maverick Party Twin Track Approach	4
2000	Canadian Alliance	A Time for Change: An Agenda of Respect for All Canadians: The Plan	23
1997	Reform Party	A Fresh Start for Canadians	23
1996	Reform Party	Blue Book Principles and Policies of the Reform Party of Canada	42
1995	Reform Party	63 Reasons to support the Reform Party of Canada	21
1992	Reform Party	56 Reasons why you should support the Reform Party of Canada	5
1991	Reform Party	Principles and Policies the Blue Book	40
1990	Reform Party	Platform Pamphlet	4
1989	Reform Party	Platform & Statement of Principles	30

Figure 1. Overview of platform documents.

³¹ To give the reader a better sense of the documents, Reform 1990 was formatted like a brochure and Reform 1991, 1992, 1995, and 1996 were all printed on half-fold paper.

The above table summarizes the findings to give the reader a better sense of the analysis that was undertaken. The table also demonstrates how these documents vary widely in length and in what they plan to achieve. Through a surface level analysis on the document titles alone, one can see a change from the original 1989 Reform document titled "Platform & Statement of Principles" to the final 1997 Reform document titled "A Fresh Start for Canadians." This change illustrates not only the development in how the party frames itself but also the role it intends to play. This conceptualization of language parties are using is key to the central analysis and informed the thematic bundling, results of which will be discussed in the next section. Following the bundling, reoccurring promises were drawn from the platforms to understand what areas the parties continue to emphasize. After this analysis, there was investigation on where blame was being placed (Gordon, 2021, p.42); this was focused on understanding if the west is seen as the victim of a deal of misfortune inevitable since confederation or if the actions of the villainous elite in Ottawa are to blame for current mistreatment. Lastly, direct connections with the Maverick Party were explored by subjecting the three Maverick Party documents to the same analysis as outlined above.

On the whole, this chapter is meant to provide a contextual overview. While there are instances of undeniable matching between the parties, there is no exhaustive outline of all such instances. Overall, this strategy was informed by a multi-disciplinary approach to conducting qualitative document analysis (Bowen, 2009, p.36). Much of this research relies on the researcher's intuition to create links across data sources; while not perfect, any conducted analysis aids in better understanding the party. The assumption was that rhetoric between parties would largely remain consistent, which indicates that there is little new about the Maverick Party. This dynamic approach to understanding links between parties over time is challenging in

deriving exact findings. It does manage to, however, take a look at the parties from a higher level to provide insight into the development of the party and, due to discrepancies in available data, is the only way to have retrieved significant results.

Discussion

From the Maverick documents that have been released, thematic analysis can find several similarities between the parties and only a few key differences. Early in this project, it was pointed out by Maverick Party Leader Jay Hill how they would primarily be drawing on Reform Party electoral strategy (Personal Interview, April 5, 2021).³² Most notably, they intend to run candidates solely in the western Canadian provinces³³ to focus their narrative on framing central Canada as the enemy to the west (Maverick Party Policy Platform, 2021, p.2). This is the first explicit connection between the parties, as this is what the Reform Party did early in its development. Additionally, the Mavericks intend to run candidates exclusively in ridings where 2019 election results had the Conservative Party candidates win by such a wide margin that any vote-splitting would not allow a Liberal or NDP candidate to break through and win the riding. The Maverick party is beginning with this strategy understanding that the initial break-through with the electorate is most challenging,³⁴ Hill recognizes that despite the eventual massive Reform impact in federal elections, in the beginning, they failed to elect a single candidate. This

³² The phone interview with Jay Hill was highly informal. After contacting the party requesting additional general information, Hill phoned me directly and shared some brief insights on the party. During this short conversation, he also stated that he was comfortable with additional party members being interviewed for this study.

³³ This was later specified to mean that the party will never run candidates east of Manitoba, which includes the territories.

³⁴ Hill shared this insight during the April 5th phone conversation. He specifically highlighted how while during the Reform days they ran many 70 candidates they initially failed to elect a single MP. Once though Deborah Grey won her 1989 by-election (Owen, 1989, p.1), he noted how the atmosphere changed and the party's growth began rapidly accelerating.

strategy, while focused, may be naïve as it is predicated on the assumption that zero Liberal or NDP gains will be made while targeting Conservative-held ridings.³⁵

Now to focus on Reform and Canadian Alliance Party documents, unsurprisingly, the first major thematic bundle is perceived widespread alienation. There is frequent reference to alienation and lack of attention given to the west by central Canada throughout the documents.³⁶ To address this alienation, the party proposes, as their namesake would suggest, a series of governmental, economic, political, and environmental reforms. To ground this in theory, discursive and behavioural tradition can look at the power of language which comes through here, framing policy proposals as reforms rather than change or demands is a notable theme that is meant to show how the party wants to work to better the west's position within the federation, rather than an outright rejection of Canada.³⁷ This idea of the positionality of the west in relation to the rest of Canada is another key theme; put more simply, it seeks to address fairness. Fairness is used frequently by both parties, along with a populist connection in calls for common-sense policy. The challenge with both of these themes is that there are no agreed-upon definitions for fairness nor common-sense, resulting in limited movement in issue areas when one side is convinced they are being mistreated. Additionally, seen throughout Reform documents is an entrenched mistrust of Québec. Reform Party frequently calls for Canada to be one nation, and calls to recognize the federation's indivisibility are frequent.³⁸

³⁵ While this may not be a concern for rural Alberta ridings that saw upwards of 80% of the 2019 vote share to the Conservatives, some ridings with nominated candidates in areas of Calgary or British Columbia failed to surpass 60% CPC vote share, making splitting a possible concern.

³⁶ Interestingly, only in Reform, 1989 is alienation explicitly addressed in the foreword. Other documents use differing language to get a similar idea across.

³⁷ This may be the only option for the Maverick Party, there presently in the west, according to the 2020 Canada West Foundation Confederation of Tomorrow report, is only 2 in 5 people supporting an independent western nation (p. 10). This indicated this despite disgruntlement there is a strong preference to remain as Canadians.

³⁸ While every document references Québec in some capacity, it varies from providing as fierce rejection of Québec sovereignty (Reform, 1992, p.2) to a softer and more common rejection of national bilingualism.

Fiscal conservatism is another theme that is frequently mentioned and focuses on the need to address wasteful spending. The Reform Party sees all government service areas that would not likely create public uproar if reduced as an area of wastefulness. Heritage preservation, international development, indigenous affairs, and crown corporations are felt by the party as better left defunded and privately coordinated.³⁹ This connects more broadly to a frequent right-leaning Americanized call for privatization of services to reduce government size and create short-term cash windfalls that can lower federal debt loads (Canadian Alliance, 2000, p.5; Reform, 1989, p.16; Reform, 1991, p.15; Reform, 1996, p.5; Reform, 1997, p.3).

Additionally, a frequent theme throughout is embracing and respecting what is vaguely referred to as a 'reform tradition.'⁴⁰ Although vague, the party does mention historical parties stemming from the CCF to show how often, when stepping outside of the fold of traditional federal parties, great change for Canada has been able to occur. Examples they cite include the implementation of Canada's socialized medical system, which would not have been possible without early movement by the CCF government in Saskatchewan (Reform, 1996, p.6; Reform, 1991, p.5; Reform, 1990, p.3; Reform, 1989, p.3).

Now moving away from the thematic bundles and into the identification of blame in the party documents, there is a constant state of flux. Generally, there is a reluctance by both the Reform and Canadian Alliance to place direct blame on the Liberals and Conservatives who have held government. This may be dually strategic since emerging parties may be drawing voters from various sources, some of whom may be off put if their past voting behaviour is scrutinized. Additionally, villainizing the opposition may galvanize their supporters, making it challenging to

³⁹ Canadian Alliance (2000, p.4) shifts to explicitly outline these planned service reductions, whereas Reform (1997, p.3), while mentioning spending waste reductions, does so in vague terms.

⁴⁰ The first official statement of core principle states, "We believe in dynamic and constructive change - in a renewal of the "reform tradition" of Canadian politics." (Reform, 1989, p.26).

break through by creating an inverse effect where there would be an increase in their voter turnout (Gleditsch and Rivera, 2017, p.1126). There are, though, several instances where there are vague attacks on opposition parties. For example, citing Liberal mismanagement is frequently seen in the documents,⁴¹ likely meant to vaguely align themselves with the traditional anti-Liberal attitudes of many western Conservative supporters. That being said, in later documents, there is reference to both Liberal and Conservative governments and their perpetual reluctance for change,⁴² in stark contrast to the Reform movement's goals. Lastly, there are a few overt references as well; names of past Prime Ministers are found primarily in the Canadian Alliance document in an attempt to discredit Trudeau, Mulroney, and Chrétien for leaving Canadians with federal debt (2000, p.20). This late-stage finger-pointing was likely meant to motivate Canadians by capitalizing on specific past disgruntlement to demonstrate that the party understands their strife and represents a viable alternative.

According to discursive institutional analysis, repetition holds weight. There are several reoccurring promises found throughout the Reform documents; while this may have indicated their confidence in what needed to be done to change Canada, it could also have limited the impact they made with Canadians who lack the necessary political sophistication for many of their points. First, there is near-constant advocacy for the blanket cutting of taxes.⁴³ With this there is limited explanation of who will benefit from these tax changes; while vague, it serves as a foundational argument, which would see major uptake and very little vocal opposition among the electorate. While somewhat opposed to the first, a second reoccurring commitment is

⁴¹ Reform, 1989 mentions Liberal schemes that have failed Canadians, but it is not until Reform, 1996 is Liberal mismanagement is specifically cited.

⁴² Both Reform, 1997 and Canadian Alliance, 2000 issue direct attacks on both the Liberal and Conservative parties.

⁴³ All documents mention either a broad reduction of taxes or the collapsing of tax brackets to make tax burdens the same regardless of income.

maintaining stable access to social services. An interim measure proposed in Canadian Alliance (2000, p.15) is to fund the services Canadians care about by eliminating wasteful spending in many areas that they do not. This is not a long-term solution and one that will ultimately see the cutting of the services they claim to be protecting or an eventual needs-based increase in taxes, the anthesis to many of their core supporters.

Next, and one of the most well-understood Reform positions, is that of a Triple E Senate. A senate that is equal, elected, and effective was a key advocacy promise of the Reform Party.⁴⁴ The Senate of Canada, in its current state, as unelected and neither equal nor proportional, is seen as mainly as a rubber stamp on government bills rather than the source of sober second thought as it ought to be. It is largely felt within the party that if the population-dense Ontario and Québec who overpower the House of Commons had a counter-voice elsewhere in the legislative process, the west's interests would be safeguarded (Reform, 1991, p.5). An additional somewhat ambiguous promise is the recognition and desire to strengthen property rights by codifying their importance in the constitution.⁴⁵ It is unclear the rationale behind this, other than that it would appease many of their rural supporters who own vast swaths of prairie land and fear federal land acquisition. This again is an example of a policy area where it is unclear how most Canadians would be better off with its inclusion but represents a policy that would find little direct opposition among the electorate. Another promise frequently found within Reform Party documents surrounds expanding referenda as a political decision-making tool. Plebiscite usage is

⁴⁴ This is one of the most well recognized Reform Party platform points. While never being accomplished, many felt Stephen Harper as Prime Minister speaking about the idea was a big win for long time supporters.

⁴⁵ Reform, 1996 goes most in-depth and extreme on this issue by saying “The Reform Party supports amending the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to recognize the right of every person to own, use and enjoy property (including real, intellectual and personal property) and to contract freely. The Charter should state that no person shall be deprived of the ownership, use or enjoyment of property or contract without full, just and timely compensation and the due process of law” (p.23)

recommended for a whole host of areas, such as moral issues, secession, and in some cases, any increases in taxation (Reform, 1996, p.11). The proposition that increasing the degree of direct democracy involved in Canadian political society is not unexpected since a final reoccurring promise is an MP recall procedure; this vague policy would focus on creating a system where members are beholden to their constituents rather than a party or its national leader.⁴⁶

Before I can relate this discussion back to the Maverick Party, a few fundamental limitations need to be made clear. First, while thematic analysis can identify numerous interesting similarities or areas of divergence, this is far from an exhaustive investigation. Since the Maverick Party lacks formalized documents on their various policy positions, directly contrasting many reoccurring Reform promises is not possible; only on a higher thematic level can discursive analysis occur.

The first theme that most directly connects between parties is that of western alienation, mainly due to the Maverick Party holding true that numerous federal policies unfairly disadvantage the west (Maverick Party Policy Platform, 2021, p.1). Additionally, the Maverick Party maintains that western environmental standards are under greater scrutiny despite oil revenues being a major economic driver (p.2). These two points, be that policies that directly disadvantage the west or highlighting otherwise prejudicial policies are a direct connecting piece to Reform Party rhetoric. (Reform, 1997, p.9). The idea of western alienation being present is the fire that lights both parties and is the central argument as to why a regional rather than nationally focused party is better suited to represent the people of western Canada (Maverick Party Policy Platform, 2021, p.2).

⁴⁶ The policy stresses the need to ensure that the system would not be abused by disgruntled opponents but instead serves to ensure that the people are being represented in a manner best suited to their views.

This connects to a second theme that stresses the positionality of the west in a perceived subordinate position to central Canada (Maverick Party Twin Track Approach, 2021, p.4). Understanding the difference between these themes is crucial. The first speaks to a perceived lack of representation for the west in Ottawa due to both the House of Commons being overrepresented by Ontario and Québec and is furthered by a perceived ineffective senate.⁴⁷ While the second is a generalized disconnect between the national ambitions of Ottawa that disproportionately benefits central Canada and sees the west as good for nothing other than their economic outputs. When both are present, alienation and positionality, an appetite for secessionist politics is fuelled (Anderson, 2004, p.5). Perceptions of unfairness compound this, and fairness is incredibly challenging to navigate as it is emotionally divisive. In any event, the Mavericks routinely cite Canada's federal fiscal transfer payment system as a root cause of this unfairness (Maverick Party Policy Platform, 2021, p.2). These equalization payments, specifically the Canada Health Transfer, are meant to ensure that Canadians, regardless of the revenue-generating capacity of their provincial governments, can always receive a similar level of health care through predictable long-term funding.⁴⁸ Still, this rationale rooted in levelling the playing field is beyond that of many Alberta populists. Populism and populist rhetoric, seen most visibly through the advocacy of common-sense policies, is another area of apparent policy convergence between the present and former parties.

Finally, the most notable area of policy divergence between the Reform and the Maverick Party are on views regarding Québec. The Reform Party textually places Québec as the enemy of

⁴⁷ The Senate is organized into regions with the purpose of providing regional representation in parliament, in contrast to the popular representation in the House of Commons.

⁴⁸ When figures on the system are deliberately selected to demonstrate a position, transfers can appear to demonstrate how money is being drained from the Parries to fund, for example, hospitals in the Atlantic region.

the people of Canada and a threat to the federation (Reform, 1989, p.8). They called for promises of a unified Canada and spoke of the need never again to enter a referendum unprepared (Canadian Alliance, 2000, p.20). The Mavericks, however, have chosen to embrace this Québec brand of politics by being a secessionist party themselves. Although 'the west against the rest,' sentiment is powerful, it is also potentially misleading.⁴⁹ Presently, there is little debate if Québec receives special treatment; instead, the discussion is around what is the role moving forward of a more politically stable Québec? The Maverick Party has created their twin track approach; the first track seeks to pursue constitutional amendments, whereas the second seeks secession (Maverick Party Twin Track Approach, 2021, p.2). This approach both diverges from Reform intentions and Bloc-style politics. The party has made it clear that they intend to pursue constitutional change alone at this time, a move that shows some degree of internal conflict, lack of coordination, and unclear motivations to their voters. The Maverick Party, as true separatists, remains to be clear, and as such, its position on the matter merits further exploration. However, political opposition would be foolish not to see this twin track policy proposal as a possible attempt to mislead Canadians into supporting something they do not fully understand. Something, if not managed carefully, could be a detriment to the Maverick Party.

All in all, this platform analysis was meant to illuminate the connections between the Maverick Party and the former Reform and Canadian Alliance parties. Through thematic bundling, it became clear that there are deep connections between the parties; alienation, the positionality of the west compared to other regions, and fiscal conservatism all remain consistent across parties. The main area of divergence is found in perceptions related to Québec. The

⁴⁹ Québec did not achieve its heightened status within the federation overnight; decades of disgruntlement, and the political extremists known as the FLQ (Front de libération du Québec), committed various terror acts meant hard-fought and sorely won victories were few and far between.

Reform Party believes that the discussion surrounding Québec secession limits the progress of a strong national government. In contrast, the Maverick Party takes inspiration from Québec and feels that better treatment for the west may be achieved through similar discourse. To bring the reader back to the research question that investigates newness, this chapter sought to test the hypothesis that stated if the Maverick Party is new, then their party documents will share little in common with other parties. The analysis demonstrated that there is little new about the Maverick Party when looking at document analysis alone. Since there are notable differences that without a doubt indicate some degree of newness, and it can be confidently said that this party should not be simplified to a resurgence of the Reform Party. At this time, findings on newness overall are, however, inconclusive. Additional research needs to be conducted to answer the broader questions of determining newness. As such, Chapter 5 contains interviews with representatives of the Maverick Party to help gain deeper insight and illuminate this discussion further.

Chapter 5 – Interview Discussion

This chapter details the insights and findings obtained from interviews conducted in June of 2021 with Maverick Party candidates and board members to understand what the party stands for and evaluate what may be new about the party. The interviews are the second test used within this study to help answer questions on the newness of the Maverick Party. The mere fact that people are joining the party indicates some degree of newness, and this chapter seeks to better understand why people choose to do so and what the party has done to raise their interest. To remind the reader, this chapter is testing the second hypothesis that states if the Maverick Party is new, then it will be treated as a new entity. This statement is informed by Sikk (2011), who notes that the key factor in determining party newness is whether a party can mobilize support (p.478).

As with all studies relying on human research participants, the research is limited first by response rates. In total, 14 members of the Maverick Party were contacted for participation, five board members and nine candidates. All their email addresses were retrieved from the Maverick Party website. Two candidates replied indicating their willingness to participate within an acceptable time range, Dave Jefferies contesting the Prince George - Peace River - Northern Rockies riding in British Columbia and Mark Wilcox contesting the Red Deer – Mountainview riding in Alberta. Only one board member was made available for an interview; Randy Fernets, Vice President of Policy Development, scheduled an interview.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the three participants managed to provide a great deal of insights for the study and allowed for a decent sampling of the party.

Conditions of Analysis

As already mentioned, the broad goal of the chapter is to further address the question of party newness through the second hypothesis test, which assumes that if people are treating the party as new, then it is in some way new (Sikk, 2011, p.478). The idea behind this is that it must be offering something that other parties are not to gain membership. This analysis will be accomplished by drawing broad themes from the interview transcripts, with thematic identification closely mirroring the method of thematic bundling undertaken in the previous chapter on platform analysis. Then this chapter outlines the findings by first sharing where expectations were met and then noting areas of divergence. Thus far, the platform analysis has found that the Maverick Party draws much of their positions from the Reform/Canadian Alliance parties. The major differentiating factor for the Maverick Party so far relates to perceptions

⁵⁰ Party leader Jay Hill indicated an early willingness to participate during a March phone call but replied, stating how since the board is busy building the party and preparing for their August 2021 convention, only Fernets would be made available.

regarding Québec. A key line of inquiry for the interviews is understanding if this is a position held by all party members. So far, identifying connections between these other parties has aided in understanding what the Maverick Party is. However, the results related to the secondary research question, which seeks to understand newness, have been inconclusive. There needs to be a deeper exploration of how the Mavericks plan to differentiate themselves from other parties. If the party is not seen as different from past or present parties, there will be little incentive for voters to support them; this chapter intends to uncover how the party is mobilizing support.

During the interviews, a new line of inquiry on what is driving party membership was included to gain insight since this was not found in party documentation. Moving beyond official documents and working to understand why members have joined is a critical insight that would not be derivable from other sources. Finally, a host of deductive insights can be drawn that relate directly back to evaluating the degree of party newness. If people join the party in droves, ergo treating it as a new entity, then the party is new. If people from a wide array of sources are joining the party, then again, there must be something new about the party. Here newness moves beyond perceptions concerning other parties and instead embraces that it is individuals who determine what is new and what is worth their attention. This assumption again draws on discursive institutionalist understandings; in this case, discourse is given a much broader understanding to focus on engagement (Schmidt, 2008, p.310).

Discussion

To begin the analysis, we will focus on some themes that the party highlights to create a base understanding of the Maverick Party. Our expectations can then be compared with the previous chapter to uncover what positions are new or unexpected. These new positions are captivating since it illustrates the merits of this data collection method and makes for compelling

insights about the party. The party has a high degree of coordination, and their talking points regarding what they plan to fight for remained relatively consistent. Members spoke about various issue areas: unfairness, a regional focus, and social openness - the first two of which were expected based on findings in the previous chapter. The most directly addressed point, and the one that the Maverick Party is truly focused on, is that of frustration due to unfairness towards the west. All participants remarked on how western Canada feels isolated and stressed the need for fair treatment. For instance, when asked about the reason for joining the party, candidate Dave Jefferies responded, "Frustration with our current political system is the main reason [I joined]. I think other parties lack awareness of what is fundamental to achieving prosperity for our country. The Maverick Party is about establishing a fair and equitable voice for the west" (Personal Interview, June 23, 2021). With Jefferies highlighting fairness as a core concern for the party, westerners may be easily swayed to support them as the focus is relating to widely held emotional beliefs. Jefferies dually notes how other parties lack awareness about western Canadian issues, which connects to the expected feelings of western alienation.⁵¹

When respondents were asked what specifically differentiates the Maverick Party from other parties, all participants eagerly shared their skepticism surrounding national parties and focused on how when the Canadian Alliance took a renewed national focus; it was from then on doomed for failure. When asked about the former party's decline, Dave Jefferies stated, "[The Canadian Alliance] made one fatal mistake, they went national. As soon as you want to form government, you have to run in that 199-seat trench [Québec City-Windsor Corridor], which

⁵¹ The Conservative party is focusing on gaining support in central and eastern Canada to regain a position in government, something that those in the west feel would mean putting priorities there instead of where support has remained consistent.

means foregoing all of the principles that you started with" (Personal Interview, June 23, 2021).⁵² The reluctance for a national focus means that the party can additionally focus on being more in tune with the needs of their voters. Randy Fernets took this point further by stating, "We're looking to influence government, being that kind of force. When you take [ambitions of forming government] out of the equation, it makes it a lot easier for you to operate, knowing that you aren't beholden to a certain province or a certain building block in the east" (Personal Interview, June 22, 2021). Mark Wilcox provided some insight on this as well when asked what the goals for the party are and the temptations of a national pivot by saying, "There is likely a significant portion of people from Ontario and Québec who would fall right in line with our platform. So, there will be a temptation to run candidates in those provinces, but we will not give into it. Our only goal is a fair voice for the west" (Personal Interview, June 22, 2021). His sentiments further the position that the Maverick Party is clear in their intentions, becoming a stronger voice for the west, which seeks to address, most importantly, unfairness.

In seeking to understand how the Maverick Party is differentiating itself from other parties, the party seems to be aware of the importance of social openness to Canadians since it was highlighted by all members. According to Randy Fernets, the party policy is that MPs will vote according to their beliefs on all issues of conscience and instead encourages voters to focus on the 'Alberta First' policies they are putting forward (Personal Interview, June 23, 2021). While not a perfect solution, as it creates the potential for MPs to hide their beliefs and puts the burden of uncovering the truth on the electorate. It did diverge from expectations as social openness was not something seen in Reform documents. The candidates interviewed all indicated their

⁵² The Maverick Party recognizing this critical juncture as the point of failure for the former party demonstrates their awareness. Since they are beginning with a commitment never to run candidates east of Manitoba, it further indicates their commitments to core principles.

acceptance of people regardless of gender identity, sexuality, or ethnicity (Personal Interviews, June 22-23, 2021). This insight is important since it steps away from previous expectations regarding the potential for a far-right alignment of the Maverick Party. It indicates a possibly more progressive party made of members aware of the sensitivity required on these issues long thought to be rested in Canada.⁵³ While this last point alone does not make the party new, nor does it prove social openness, it does begin to differentiate the Maverick Party from other parties on the Canadian political right.

Further, on points of differentiation, the Maverick Party appears to be committed to distancing itself from the radical origins of Wexit while also identifying the dangers of populism as propagated in Canada by the People's Party. On the Wexit origins of the party, Randy Fernets shared how "The former Wexit movement was too radical for many voters, we are trying to show that we have good common-sense policies that will protect the livelihood of western people, there is nothing radical about them" (Personal Interview, June 23, 2021). The deliberate distancing from Wexit based on responses from among the electorate indicates that the party plans to be perceptive to their members' preferences and return to expected western party rhetoric of common-sense policies that benefit livelihoods. This shows their focus is on appealing to the average western voter through populist like rhetoric.

While any discussion around common-sense policies brings forward questions relating to populism, the party pushes back against this association and appears to be deliberate in choosing to stay away from this term. When asked if the Maverick Party could be identified as populist, Mark Wilcox responded, "No, I see it as grassroots ... I don't have a lot of time for distractionary

⁵³ "On issues including abortion, doctor-assisted suicide, and same-sex marriage, the Maverick Party and its MPs commit to not bringing forward party or private member's legislation on these public policies that reflect Canadians most deeply held personal values" (Maverick Party Policy Platform, 2021, p.6).

politics like Maxime Bernier getting arrested to gain press for populism. We've seen enough theatrics from politicians. We need people working hard behind the scenes, people who aren't in it for fame and fortune" (Personal Interview, June 22, 2021). Wilcox's sentiments are similar to others, and while appeals to "the common-man" are a key tenant of populism (Passareli, 2015, p.3), they are also important in winning elections regardless of ideology.⁵⁴ Interestingly, all members instead chose to identify the party as "A grassroots movement" and indicated how they are not only forming their coalition of supporters from disgruntled ultra-conservative westerners but instead are drawing supporters from all of the major parties. When speaking about engaging with constituents, Dave Jefferies shared how "I've had past Liberal candidates in the office to sign up to the party, Green Party members have been in and are highly supportive. I think there is a negative connotation for the Conservative Party, and we being a new party, aren't pigeonholed by any past reputation" (Personal Interview June 23, 2021). It appears at this point that the Maverick Party has created an identity for itself and is actively working to be distanced from other parties despite occupying a similar space along the ideological spectrum. This idea that mobilization is being aided by the party being unincumbered with previous perceptions indicates the party is in some way new.

Now the most apparent point of newness for the party, albeit unusual, is the twin track approach to constitutional reform. The twin track approach was one of the first completed policy documents released by the party and offers two solutions to address sentiments of western alienation: the first being constitutional change and the second secession. It is challenging to determine if this policy makes the party new since the party is being intentionally ambiguous on

⁵⁴ Numerous studies have shown people, regardless of income, identify with the label middle class. This means that parties are best suited to aim their policies towards appealing to the median voter; however, due to educational lapses, voters may not always determine what parties' policies will turn into material benefit due to a class misidentification. (Kelly and Enns, 2010, p.867)

its intentions. It is unclear where the party stands on this issue or if there are factions within the party with a strong preference for one option. When asked about the challenges of the dual-track approach, Randy Fernets replied that "[The best track for the party] is an area of divergence among our members, there is survey data that shows most western Canadians want to be Canadians,⁵⁵ and we recognize that, but people feel that they aren't being treated fairly. What we're trying to do is raise the profile of the west, similar to what the Bloc Québécois did for Québec. All we are looking to do is be seen as equal partners. Our challenge and preference is to see if we can put policies forward to achieve constitutional change" (Personal Interview, June 23, 2021). This is an important insight since both the Reform and Canadian Alliance parties presented Québec as the enemy to a unified Canada. Fear of separation destroying the federation was present throughout party documents, indicating disdain for their politics (Reform, 1992, p.2). However, the Maverick Party has positioned itself to become what the Bloc is for Québec for the west.⁵⁶ They appear to idolize how focused on the needs of Québec the Bloc is and see themselves playing a similar role for the western provinces.

All in all, this chapter was focused on better understanding if the Maverick Party is new based on interview responses from both candidates and board members. The eagerness of their responses can be inferred as a relevant finding under this discursive institutional approach. While the party certainly shares many of its positions from both past and present parties, the party has managed to craft a less radical identity than their Wexit origins, appear less populist than both the Reform and People's parties, more present as open than the Conservative Party, all while

⁵⁵ Randy is referring to the Canada West survey documents that found less than half of the Albertans think the province should become independent, a figure that has been declining over the last three years.

⁵⁶ While this phrase is not explicitly stated in their platform documents, it does get to the core of what the Maverick Party is trying to be, a regionally focused party. During the interviews, all participants responded positively to this notion, indicating that this simplification was correct in identifying what the party is trying to become.

being embraced by a wide range of new members. For voters, this question of exactly how new the party is may not matter, so long as the party can present itself as tuned into the issues they care about. Being free of the past weight of party decisions appears to be refreshing for many westerners. Having the political expertise of former politicians, the party appears coordinated while entering the political arena with somewhat of a blank slate, ready for its story to be told. Is the Maverick Party new? It likely does not matter. In any event, what is new about the Maverick Party is that they are speaking loudly about how the Conservative Party cannot balance the needs of the west while wanting to win government in the east and central regions - something that the people of the west are keen to hear.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

In conclusion, this major research paper began by looking at the newly formed Maverick Party and investigated what the Maverick Party is and if it is new. These questions were formed due to the unanticipated occurrence of Jay Hill, a former Reform, Canadian Alliance, and Conservative Party MP coming out of retirement to take over the Wexit Party (Western Exit) and refocus it as the Maverick Party. The emergence of this party in itself was not intriguing as it, on the surface, tapped into long recognized sentiments of western alienation and, as such, could have been simplified to a resurgence of the Reform Party. Upon further examination, one of the first documents the party released was their twin track approach to constitutional reform. The first of these tracks seeks to undertake constitutional reform to address western discontent, closely aligning with the Reform Party, indicating there may be some merit in classifying the party as a resurgence. The second track, though, seeks independence for the west, breaking away from Reform Party expectations and embraces the Wexit origins of the party. This divergence from expectations is what makes the Maverick Party worth better understanding. If the party is

not a clear-cut resurgence of the Reform Party, and it is also not entirely separatist either, what is it? Could the party represent something new entirely in Canadian politics, or is it some hybrid party that draws influences from a wide array of sources? The question of newness was the main point of inquiry in this study as it stepped beyond seeking a rigid definition and took a broad discursive understanding of the party to learn what is driving its growth. Whatever the answer, the intrigue was apparent, and this study formed two hypotheses to test if the party is, in fact, something new. The first looked at newness by examining what the Maverick Party shares with past parties, specifically the Reform Party and Canadian Alliance, due to the connections with the party leader. The second looked at newness in a broader sense by examining if people treat the party as new, then there must be something new about the party.

To answer this papers' two research questions, I began by tracing a broad historical narrative on conservatism in Canada to understand better the context in which the Maverick Party is entering politics. Then, a broad-reaching literature review was conducted to explore the party's nuances. Populist, conspiratorial, and extremist party development were examined to ground the party in its Wexit origins. Western Canadian historical expectations were also investigated to highlight the deep roots of anti-Ottawa sentiments present in the region, perpetuated partly due to educational lapses among the electorate that in turn allow for massive growth among social media-based parties. Lastly, Canadian political fringes were also more deeply explored to identify where the Maverick Party would situate itself along the political spectrum and highlight the perpetual movement of parties in Canada.

To ground this paper for a final time, a discursive analysis was conducted to understand the power of language as it relates to both party platform and discourse through various mediums. Additionally, a historical institutional approach that stresses the importance of

historical path dependency underpinned this study. This meant that in testing the first hypothesis, Maverick Party and Reform Party documents underwent a thematic bundling analysis to discover areas of commonality and divergence. This test was somewhat inconclusive in determining party newness since while there were numerous areas of similarity between the parties, one core area was different. Perceptions regarding Québec changed from a Reform disdain of any question that threatened Canadian unity to a Maverick embrace of highly focused regional representation that also entertains discussions of separatism. This difference is felt to be so paramount to the party's identity that while it cannot be concluded on this alone if the Maverick Party is new, it can be concluded that the party is not a simple resurgence of the Reform Party.

The second test used personal interviews with Maverick Party members to gain deeper insight beyond what is available through text analysis. The discussions with party members followed an expected trajectory by focusing on unfairness towards the west while remaining regionally focused; there were some interesting areas of divergence. Most interesting of which again relates to Québec. When asked about secession, members commit that they favour first attempting to pursue constitutional reform but entertained the idea that becoming a version of the Bloc for western Canada is present in their minds. While this area of divergence may not be paramount to the question of party identity, it now is made apparent that labelling the Maverick Party as a Reform resurgence is an oversimplification. What is additionally clear is that the party is building, rapidly adding candidates, and growing its membership from a broad array of sources meaning that people are treating the party as new. Which, per the hypothesis, means there is something new about the party.

Overall, while it can be confidently said that the Maverick Party is regionally focused, there remains much to be uncovered. Since the party is still in its infancy, the exact definition of

the party is likely to evolve over time with an increase in membership. What can be said, however, is that the party is more than a simple resurgence of the Reform Party. Whether the party is, in fact new, may not actually matter, so long as people see something in the party and are willing to give them their support. But that is something the next election can help shed light on—at which point more exhaustive academic engagement on the party ought to be conducted.

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ⁱ A note to the reader, all of the news article documents were retrieved using Factiva database searches. During their digitization, articles were modified and no longer contain original page numbers from publication.

Appendix

Appendix 1 – Interview Questions

Party

1. Tell me what about the Maverick Party attracted you to join?
 - What do you think is the purpose or goal of the Maverick Party? Changing minds or winning power?
 - What do you think makes the Maverick Party unique compared with other western Canada-born movements?
 - Push on the origin of anti-CPC sentiments, push on the origin of anti-Ottawa sentiments.

Policy

2. What are some of the things you want to fight for as a Maverick?
 - What are some of the specific policy positions of the party?
 - What role will the membership play in policy development?
3. The Maverick Party has ambitiously created a dual-track approach to constitutional reform or pursuing separation; which track is your preferred policy direction?
 - Do you think all those share this position in the party?

Strategy

4. So far, what developments that you're aware of has the party made in terms of recruitment, fundraising, and membership development?
 - From where is the strategy playbook being developed?
5. What will be the strategy be for the Maverick Party in the next federal election?
 - Are you putting yourselves forward as the only alternative to the CPC?
 - Have you held any other federal party memberships?
 - Why do you feel Erin O'Toole's conservatives are no longer capable of effectively representing the West?
6. The Reform and Canadian Alliance parties are somewhat similar to the Maverick Party; why do you think they no longer exist in Canadian federal politics?
 - What are the long-term prospects or ambitions for the Maverick Party?