MR. MARTIN'S ACTION PLAN FOR DEMOCRATIC REFORM IN A NORTH AMERICAN CONTEXT

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A major theme in recent international relations literature – economics, business, public administration, and political science alike – is that globalization leads to interconnectedness, which ultimately drives a convergence of systems of governance. While the Canadian and American systems have been tightly interconnected for some time now, this necessarily includes widespread state-province relations because both systems are federations. (Swanson 1978: 22) The extensive power of the provinces, indeed, is one factor that has likely inhibited further harmonization of the two systems (Hale 2004) and, after the failed Meech Lake and Charlottetown processes, this seems likely to remain the norm. Nevertheless, the recent trend is certainly toward convergence, as exemplified by the impact of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, (Aizenstat 2003: 118) the North American Free Trade Agreement, and extensive security cooperation since September 11, 2001.

While contending to become the new leader of the Liberal party in Canada, Paul Martin discovered that fixing Canada's "democratic deficit" was not a hard sell within the Liberal ranks. In particular, he focused on democracy within the House of Commons, largely reflecting the belief that power was overly centralized in the Prime Minister's Office. Martin's approach ignored broader issues of Canadian democracy such as electoral reform, (Studlar 2003) the triple-E Senate, (Joyal 2003) and the immense power of the public service. When he became Prime Minister, Martin acted on this core campaign promise to fellow Liberals by introducing Ethics, Responsibility, Accountability: An Action Plan for Democratic Reform on February 4, 2004. (Canada 2004) Four months later he became the leader of a minority coalition government, not the norm in Canadian parliamentary history, and a particular challenge to parliamentary reform.

With the publication of his democratic action plan, Martin appears – through my admittedly American lens – to have taken a leap toward the Americanization of Canada's parliamentary system. Backbenchers may gain a significant voice and the power of parliamentary committees may, over time, rival Cabinet committees. Parliament may also gain a real voice in the senior appointments process and in budgetary matters through better oversight of the Estimates. I am not suggesting that such changes would be bad, only that they would appear to make the system more like the American system of governance.

This article outlines Martin's proposed changes and passes judgement on whether they represent divergence or convergence between the American and Canadian systems. The general case appears to be a trend toward convergence. However, I am in the midst of analyzing dozens of interviews with Members of Parliament, senior Canadian civil servants, and distinguished academicians as part of my Canada — US Fulbright Research Chair project at the University of Ottawa Centre on Governance. My impressions from the initial interviews are reflected in this article, although the interviews are not complete and a thorough analysis remains to be done. It is possible that outcomes of this

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ongoing research will be mixed, representing both convergence and divergence, or that what is apparently a convergence of governance will look different at the conclusion of this research. In addition, because numerous researchers are focused on the ethics and conflict of interest aspects of this democratic reform effort, in both the House of Commons and the Senate, I have left that important topic outside of my focus.

COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW

Any discussion of convergence and divergence of two systems must start with an understanding of how the systems compare to one another. In particular, the following seven issues highlight the differences between the two systems.

Fused Executive

Canadian and American political systems and public administration are significantly different in that America’s founding fathers created the separation of powers, while their Canadian counterparts maintained the British parliamentary tradition where the executive and legislative are undeniably fused. Numerous researchers have documented the impact of this significant difference.¹

The system of responsible government in Canada holds the collective executive, i.e., the Prime Minister and Cabinet, accountable to the legislative body from which it is formed, thereby allowing for executive federalism, wherein the Prime Minister and provincial Premiers engage in joint decision-making not unlike international negotiations.

Bicamerality

In the United States, the Connecticut Compromise made a lower house represented by population and an upper house with equal representation for each state an essential feature of the American government. The bicameral aspect in the United States requires a real working relationship and compromise between the chambers. This dynamic existed even prior to the 17th Amendment to the United States Constitution, which made the Senate an elected body rather than a body appointed by the state legislatures, because Senators had fixed terms of office and a clear constituency, i.e., the Governor and state legislators were their constituents rather than the voters at large within a specific state.

In contrast, Canada’s upper chamber serves as a nominal chamber under a principle frequently referred to as “sober second thought.” The Canadian Senate may slow down legislation on occasion, but generally cedes to the wishes of the House of Commons at the end of the day. A significant exception is that the Senate frequently performs exceptional service by reviewing specific legislative language and driving significant and often technical amendments to proposed legislation. The Canadian Senate is ostensibly divided into regional blocks, but the life-long appointments are controlled by the central government.

The difference between cabinet styles is noteworthy. The Canadian cabinet is a collegial decision-making body. It is more centralized and unified as a source of executive leadership than the President and his executive appointees, and more capable of generating legislative action, since the members are also Members of Parliament. (Franks 1993: 13) Franks stressed, “Canada was the first country with a parliamentary form of national government to also become a federation.” (15) The inherent conflict between the two is that a cabinet must be responsible to one chamber and hold the confidence of that one chamber, and so Canada’s upper chamber is often considered to be largely symbolic.

¹ See, for example, Franks 1993; Holmes 1976; Lipset 1990; Swanson 1978; US 1981.
Representation in the National Bureaucracy

The Canadian bureaucracy is based on non-partisan expertise in the public service and is much less politicized than the American bureaucracy. The Pendleton Act in the United States, officially the Civil Service Act of 1883, established the Civil Service Commission and the idea of a well-qualified and non-partisan civil service. The percentage of federal employees covered within this civil service system has grown extensively since that time. However, the literally thousands of political appointments that an incoming President can make still ensures that the civil service is deeply infused with the values of the President's political party and with loyalty to the President. Both national bureaucracies are free to work together extensively on most issues. This federal-to-federal interaction is characterized by a high degree of informal activity for an international relationship. (Swanson 1978)

Distribution of Powers

Both Canada and the United States have federal systems that divide power, so that each level of government has both policy-making and implementation powers within particular, assigned functional areas. Subnational interests in both nations appear to demand attention and influence national action. As Brian Hocking (1993: 7) reminds us, "The management of foreign relations demands cooperation between levels of government. ... Within the context of federal states, as in the domestic sphere, this has involved overcoming the constraints imposed by constitutional norms through processes of intergovernmental negotiation and collaboration." States and provinces are thus frequently co-equals with their national governments in the international sphere, and extra-constitutional means for collaboration have been developed to recognize the valid interests of all levels of governmental actors in global issues. In practice, both nations have developed extensive intergovernmental cooperative programs that blur these jurisdictional lines—particularly in health care, social services, and retirement programs—but the boundaries are probably hazier in the United States. Now that the American Senate is elected, the state and local governments have become, more or less, influential interest groups within national policy-making.

The dominant view in the literature is that Canada has become more and more decentralized because of the insistence on the part of Quebec for a distinct status within the federation. What Quebec gets, every other province wants, and so the trend toward decentralization continues unabated. Watts described the current status quite well. "In Canada regional interests have become the source of heated contention at federal-provincial summit conferences, and it is in this arena that the primary efforts to reconcile them occur. To Prime Minister Trudeau's question 'Who speaks for Canada?' the commonly understood answer now appears to be Premier Lougheed's response: 'The eleven heads of government: the prime minister and the premiers.'" (Watts 1993: 296)

Franks emphasized this comparison by stressing, "The federal-regional relationship in Canada is concentrated in the executive; in America, it is dispersed through the entire political and governmental structure." (Franks 1993: 22) The failed Charlottetown Accord in the 1990s furthered the push toward decentralization in Canada. As one provincial intergovernmental relations director told me, "... virtually every policy now involves concurrent jurisdiction".

Political Parties and Interest Groups

Political parties in the United States developed as loose confederations of state and local interests, and have become more nationalized along the way. In contrast, Canadian political parties are virtually autonomous at the federal and provincial levels, so that the Liberal party, for example,
stands for different things in some provinces than in Parliament. More regional parties exist in the Canadian system as well. (Watts 1993: 306) The political parties in Canada thus reinforce regional distinctiveness rather than develop a national identity. One of the clearest examples of this is the Saskatchewan Party, which now holds a very slim minority (28 members to the NDPs 30 members) in the Legislative Assembly. According to party founder, Elwin Hermanson, this party was formed by members of several conservative parties as well as the Liberal Party.

In addition, the parliamentary system of responsible government calls for a system of strong party discipline, whereas Congressional representatives in the United States vote with their own beliefs much more frequently, rather than sacrificing those beliefs for the party. Interest groups in Canada have much less impact because they have fewer useful points-of-access, e.g., less politicized bureaucracy, elected representatives who vote along party lines, and more political parties to seek to influence. Jennifer Smith argues that there are two theories of representation, and that responsible government in a Parliamentary system requires the representative theory, wherein an elected official considers the constituents’ needs as one among several important considerations, rather than the delegate theory, wherein the elected official would vote as the majority of his or her constituents desired. (Smith 1999: 402)

**Electoral Systems**

The US courts have imposed nationally uniform elections laws on the federal system, whereas in Canada, the provinces control provincial elections and the central government controls parliamentary elections. According to Watts, Canada and the United States stand alone in the world among developed federations by having single-member plurality systems, thus avoiding forms of proportional representation. While discussion of this system as a problem in the United States occurs among academics, a more far-reaching discussion of changing this system exists in Canada. (Studlar 2003) In fact, British Columbia and Ontario have moved to fixed term elections — a novel idea in Parliamentary systems, which presumably reduces the power a prime minister or premier holds over the members of his or her own party and the legislative body in general. The Commission on Legislative Democracy (2004) called for this change in New Brunswick, as well as implementation of a modified system of proportional representation. British Columbia held a referendum on moving away from the first-past-the-post system in May 2005, as did Prince Edward Island in November 2005, and Ontario is likely to have one by 2007. At the federal level, the Law Commission of Canada (2004) has prepared an excellent analysis of the issues and options for reform.

An analysis of “safe seats” suggests that the existing system should be less of a concern in Canada than in Britain and the United States because estimates of safe seats are over 80 percent in Britain and the United States, but roughly 20 percent in Canada. (Franks 1993: 11) This suggests that, while these two systems share this basic electoral approach, the danger of single-member plurality districts is actually lower in Canada than in the United States. This is in reference to the national system rather than specific provincial systems.

**Unified Head of State**

The President has come to serve as the focal point of American society in serving as the political Head of State, and the Electoral College may force presidential candidates to be regionally sensitive to garner majorities in states rather than just a national majority. Recent elections show that not all regions must be captured in order to become President, while the Prime Minister of Canada
increasingly has become a nationalizing leader. (Studlar 2003: 324) The Canadian system avoids the election of the head of state, opting instead for the British monarchical principle, wherein the Governor General appoints a Prime Minister who must be capable of forming a government after an election. Obviously, this fits with responsible government. Watts (1993: 310) argues that this decision was made partially because Canada saw the partisan nature of the American head of state as a defect in the American system.

In summary, these seven categories – the fused executive, bicameralism, representation in the national bureaucracy, distribution of powers, political parties and interest groups, the electoral system, and unified head of state – form a useful approach for discussing the differences between the Canadian and American governance systems. Every important issue is not included, such as the role of the judiciary, yet these categories prove useful for discussing the democratic deficit and Martin’s plan to bring it into the black.

**PRIME MINISTER MARTIN’S ACTION PLAN FOR DEMOCRATIC REFORM**

There are essentially five components to Martin’s plan, and they are centred on Parliament and on the relationship between the Parliament and the Government. Each component is briefly outlined in this section, followed by commentary on whether it appears to represent convergence, divergence, or no real change between the American and Canadian systems of governance. The concluding comments also consider the package as a whole.

**More Free Votes**

The idea of a free vote in a parliamentary system has to do with party discipline and confidence in the Government. This plan establishes a three-tiered system for votes in Parliament so that MPs may have more freedom to represent their constituents.

- One-line free votes, where all MPs may vote as they see fit.
- Two-line free votes, where Ministers and affected Parliamentary Secretaries must support the Government’s recommended position.
- Three-line votes, where all government MPs will be expected to support the Government.

Significantly, “... most votes will be either two-line or one-line free votes”, meaning that Ministers will need to build coalitions within Parliament to assure approval of their legislative plans. (Canada 2004: 4)

This process is intended to reduce the number of matters of fundamental importance to the Government, and to open up a participatory role for, at the very least, all Government MPs. The danger, not discussed in Martin’s press releases, is that Ministers will also need to recruit substantial support for their initiatives from opposition parties. Such cross-party approaches may prove necessary, especially because an individual Minister will have only a limited number of policy items to make trade-offs in his or her effort to garner a majority vote for priority items. One aspect of this component that becomes clear is that the opposition parties and media must allow it to work by not seeking to turn one-line and two-line losses into votes of confidence. (Aucoin and Turnbull 2003)

Another aspect is whether the culture of control via unified party votes can be suspended so that the Government actually allows numerous two-line votes, and government bills are even occasionally defeated through the combined powers of backbenchers and the opposition. (Ibid.)
In terms of political parties and the role of interest groups, this idea could lead to convergence of the two systems. In addition, it calls into question the basic function of the fused executive and collective voice of the cabinet. Essentially, the argument can be interpreted as saying that responsible government is only about a few core issues and that the fused executive becomes mute — an American free-for-all approach — for most other issues. Only time will tell the extent to which three-line votes are actually abandoned. However, the extent to which they are abandoned for issues other than moral issues, where Government MPs should be allowed to vote their conscience, the system would appear to converge with the American system. Martin’s first-year review on democratic reform showed that there were not any one-line votes since the government took office. Likewise, no clear evidence exists that any disciplinary measures have been used because of how a government MP voted on any of the 82 percent of votes considered to be two-liners. (Canada 2005: 3)

The impact of the current minority governments is that party discipline on voting has been quite strong among all parties. Can the government really have a free vote if the other parties are going to treat it like a confidence vote? Not really. In addition, most of the Parliamentary Secretaries I interviewed questioned the idea that they would not vote the way the government votes on all issues, even during a time of majority government. They have revealed a political culture that pushes for party discipline and could overwhelm any move for this particular change, unless it is sustained over a long period of time.

**More Active Role of Parliamentarians in Government**

In keeping with the idea that Ministers will need to rally support within Parliament for their initiatives, both from governing and opposition MPs, each Minister’s Office is asked to establish a Director of Parliamentary Affairs, and to meet regularly with relevant House committees for input on initiatives and to discuss annual priorities. In addition, the role of Parliamentary Secretaries has been expanded so that each Minister has a Parliamentary Secretary. These individuals have specific policy responsibilities in support of the Ministers they assist (although they are assigned by the Prime Minister), and they have Privy Council status, i.e., increased access to information and responsibility for cabinet secrecy. While the Minister remains “fully accountable and retains overall responsibility for the direction of public servants and departmental resources”, the Parliamentary Secretaries are intended to support a Minister by driving departmental legislation through this more open parliamentary process. (Canada 2004: 11)

This component has mixed implications. On the one hand, the Government may have more control over more MPs, potentially offsetting any impact of the component on free votes. On the other hand, it may reduce the power of the Ministers within the Parliament and within their departments by transferring some responsibilities and resources away from them, and thus weakening the total reach of the Cabinet. The goal is to achieve parliamentary consent on one-line and two-line votes by providing an effective three-way conduit for communications between Parliamentarians, the Minister, and the department. Another step in achieving this goal is to end the traditional two-year terms for Parliamentary Secretaries to allow for policy continuity. While it may be too early to know what the new lifespan will be for Parliamentary Secretaries, an October 7, 2005, news release from the Prime Minister’s Office announced the appointment of three new Parliamentary Secretaries, re-assigned two existing ones, and thanked two others for their service. This suggests that even during the short tenure of Martin’s minority government, he was not able to stick to this basic principle.
Parliamentary Secretaries are paid more than other MPs, have more access to Cabinet-level information because they are sworn in as Privy Councillors, may enjoy a significant one-on-one relationship with one or more Minister, and may develop stronger relationships with the public service. Opposition parties argue that the current number of MPs firmly under government control – 37 Ministers and 30 Parliamentary Secretaries – has grown too large under democratic reform. However, 25 years ago these numbers were 31 and 27, respectively, and so the change has not been that dramatic. (Mallory 1979: 29) For these reasons, on balance it seems that this component will likely offset some of the challenges to party discipline that are implied by other components of the democratic action plan. It could thus be classified as a component that will likely challenge the overall trend toward convergence more than one that particularly leads to divergence.

One caveat is that the frequently expressed notion that all Parliamentarians should have a voice would clearly represent convergence. Individual power can challenge the Canadian system, particularly during a minority government. Recall when Vermont Senator Jim Jeffords switched from the Republican party to being an independent in May 2001. Because the United States Senate was in a 50-50 deadlock at the time, his decision forced a change in party control of all the Senate committees. First-term MP, Belinda Stronach, was this pivotal link in May 2005, when she switched parties to support the Liberals in a vote of confidence, and was rewarded by immediately becoming a Cabinet Minister. This was critical because the House had a tie vote and Speaker Peter Milliken had to break the tie. While such extreme examples are rare, relaxed party discipline means that a Minister might eventually choose to vote against a two-line party vote without resigning from Cabinet.

**Expanded Role of Parliamentary Committees**

The first step in providing expanded authority and independence for committees is that bills subject to one-line and two-line votes will be referred to the relevant committee prior to the second reading. Other relevant ideas include making committee membership for Government members more static through each legislative session, creating the expectation that Ministers will work with these committees early in the policy process, and having secret ballots for election of committee chairs (rather than de facto government appointed chairs). Finally, an all-party National Security Committee of Parliamentarians will be established and sworn in as Privy Councillors. This establishes the seriousness of parliamentary reform by suggesting that democratic reform will also include one of the highest priority items of the day, even if that priority is heavily influenced by those South of the border. (Clarkson and Banda 2004; O'Keefe 2004) An interim committee was established and the leaders of two opposition parties became Privy Councillors so they could receive national security briefings. (Canada 2005: 5)

This component is perhaps the clearest case of convergence, especially since it reinforces the importance of committee chairs and seeks to provide actual power to committees. The previous role of these committees was largely to propose minor amendments and improvements to legislation. Parliament could reinforce this convergence by fully implementing this idea through such rule changes as requiring committee approval of bills before House debate may proceed, and establishing criteria, such as seniority, for people to be on the ballot for committee chairs. Even without rules changes, however, the idea of an active committee structure seems to question the power of Cabinet committees and, thus, the power of the Government. Such movement is clearly in the direction of convergence with the American system of governance by challenging the notion of the fused executive. On the other hand, numerous interviewees have suggested that the secret ballot for committee chairs is a falsehood and that committee members wait for the names to come
down from the Leaders or the Chief Whips. Other similar comments are reflective of the fact that the potential for convergence may be high, but that implementation of this component remains challenging, given the current environment of successive minority governments.

Another potential convergence is Martin’s notion that Ministers, Parliamentary Secretaries, and these substantive parliamentary committees will seek public input. Embedded in this notion is the idea that recent large-scale public consultation by departments has challenged the legitimacy of Parliament as the representative institution, and that Parliament must seize this power by having committee hearings and expanding e-consultation to gain direct voter input after introduction of legislation. (Aucoin and Turnbull 2003) This may challenge the power in the national bureaucracy, thus potentially moving it toward the slightly less powerful American public service, and also provide a more American-like platform for interest groups to access the system. Parliamentary committees have been holding more public hearings on legislation, but my interviews also reveal that committee votes are extremely partisan. For example, opposition leaders may replace an MP on a committee at the last minute in situations where the committee member wants to vote with the government. Committee testimony is also staged and highly selective, as with congressional committee hearings.

**Increased Analytical Capacity of Parliament**

The above changes in parliamentary structure and operations might not go far without increased resources, but with increased resources they may be more likely to lead to convergence. The democratic action plan includes three items to bolster the resources — essentially the analytical capacity — at the disposal of Parliamentarians.

1. Allow committees greater authority to allocate their budgets, to provide some additional funds to allow committees to commission independent studies, and to develop new methods for e-consultation with citizens.

2. Increase resources for the Library of Parliament, the House Law Clerk, and the parliamentary Counsel Office. These moves have the ability to provide greater access to relevant expertise in terms of policy and legal research.

3. MPs will have increased training to help them review the Estimates, i.e., the annual budget, as well as continued implementation of the department-level Management Accountability Framework that is to be managed by Treasury Board Canada.

Attempts to allow the House of Commons standing committees to take on this research and hearings role might marginalize the Senate even more, thus maintaining the divergent systems on the issue of bicameralism. The extent of convergence on this component depends on the extent that the proposed ideas become a trend, thus creating equivalent analytic functions and powers to the Congressional Budget Office, General Accounting Office, and Library of Congress. Combined with the extensive committee and subcommittee staff in Congress, many who are long-term civil servants, these three organizations are able to prepare Congress to challenge virtually any idea coming from the executive branch or elsewhere in society. While an informed and intelligent Parliament is in everyone's best interests, Parliament may not be the best place in the Canadian system for professional policy analysis. The national bureaucracy, already an expert-based system, could be tasked with many research projects, while various think tanks and the Senate might be a more appropriate incubator for policy ideas to be developed and explored. (Joyal 2003)
So far, my interviews have not revealed that Cabinet committees are concerned about any potential or real loss of power. They have revealed that the Library of Parliament research must be non-partisan, meaning that its usefulness may be limited from the perspective of various party caucuses. The Government included increased resources in the 2005-06 Main Estimates of $7.6 million to support increased committee travel and operational expenses, e-consultation, the use of outside experts, and the Library of Parliament. (Canada 2005: 4) This means that the promise of increased resources to support the new role of standing committees was maintained.

**Prior Review of Appointments by Parliament**

Martin is calling for prior parliamentary review of key appointments, including Supreme Court Justices and the heads of Crown Corporations and agencies, in order to “ensure that citizens have confidence that the best people to serve Canadians are being appointed to public institutions”. (Canada 2004: 12) The suggestion here is that the review will be done at the committee level and that committees will first be consulted to determine which appointments are key and, therefore, within their mandate. Interestingly, this part of the action plan specifically suggests that Senate committees may also have a role in this process, if that can be negotiated with the Standing Committee on Procedures and House Affairs.

On the surface, this all reads very much like the American model of senatorial confirmation. Article II, Section 2, of the US Constitution states that the President “shall nominate, and by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate, shall appoint Ambassadors, other public Ministers, and Consuls, Judges of the Supreme Court, and all other officers of the United States whose appointments are not herein otherwise provided for . . .”. The precise wording suggests two things:

1. Martin’s plan was to leave the power in the House, rather than the Senate, because of the significant difference in bicameralism; and
2. the scope of appointments that Martin had in mind is likely much more narrow than that provided for in the US “advice and consent” clause.

Media reports almost immediately questioned the extent that Martin sought to implement this action item. (CanWest News Service 2004; Dawson 2004)

Noticably absent from this discussion was the appointment of senators themselves, although some means for Parliament to review potential senators, according to transparent criteria, is an active topic in Canadian democratic reform. (Corbella 2004; Joyal 2003) Ministers and Deputy Ministers are specifically excluded from review. While the idea of legislative consent to executive appointments sounds much like the American system, it is important to remember that the legislative and executive are fused in the Canadian system, and that political appointments into the Canadian public service is not very deep. In fact, reforms enacted after release of the Red Book by the Liberal Party in 1993 eliminated 665 appointed positions, thus clearly diverging from the American model. (Averill, Murphy, and Snider 2004: 14) The main focus will likely be on heads of Crown Corporations and on the Supreme Court, although the appointment process in the United States serves as a regular reminder of what Canada seeks to avoid as change is implemented in this area. The thinly veiled reference to troubles with the American system is that any changes toward prior review must “not be implemented in such a way as to deter qualified candidates from public office”. (Canada 2005: 11)
From February 2004 through January 2006 the House of Commons and its committees did not accomplish the first step in this plan, which would be deciding which appointments are considered key and how they would be reviewed. Perhaps because of this, the Martin Government said, "the Government’s policy will be to refer all nominations for key appointments – such as heads of Crown corporations, agencies, and boards – to committees for prior review". (Canada 2005: 11) One step further is their commitment that the selection criteria will also be referred, and that standing committees may review other appointments for post-appointment review. Is it possible to force democracy on a reluctant elected body? My sense from interviews is that because of the minority government situation, the appointments have continued to be made as usual. Committees may receive information about those being appointed, and have the opportunity to question the appointees, but they are not vetting candidates in advance or gaining any substantive power to refuse appointments. In fact, numerous editorials and commentaries have focused on appointments that have been made even when the appointee was roundly rejected at the committee level.

CONCLUSION

Canadian federalism is not a significant issue in Martin’s plan, although the number of federal-provincial meetings has increased under Martin’s leadership. This is not a surprise, given Geoffrey Hale’s recent research concluding that “Canada’s growing economic integration within North America has not resulted in parallel trends toward greater political integration” within Canada. (Hale 2004: 497) Many of the provincial governments are moving forward relatively quickly with democratic reform initiatives, including citizen-driven approaches to electoral reform, and see little need for these to mirror federal efforts. A common sentiment of interviewees at the provincial level is “we’re certainly not waiting around to see if they make any progress.”

Martin’s core focus was on democracy within the national government, and particularly within the House of Commons. Criticism abounds for what was left out, but the criticism did not deteriorate to the level of saying, “he’s Americanizing Parliament!” While this article suggests that might be the case to some extent, the lack of this particular criticism was good news for Martin, because that could have been the death knell of democratic reform. My initial interviews, however, seem to suggest that implementation to date has only changed the functioning of the system in a negligible manner, and thus much potential convergence remains just that, potential. The minority government situation was cited frequently as a reason why elements did not move forward, although it was also plausible that the Prime Minister quickly grew to appreciate the power of the PMO, and thus wished to retain the concentration of power that is a hallmark of the Canadian system.

While there are some other details that are treated as minor items in Martin’s democratic action plan, such as a new annual report on the state of federalism that is required from the Minister for Intergovernmental Affairs, and some general language about the need to increase consultation with Provinces and with Canadians, five aspects accurately reflect the focus of the plan. Overall, the discussion reveals the potential for convergence in the areas of the fused executive, representation in the national bureaucracy, and the role of political parties and interest groups. Martin’s plan seems to have little likelihood of impacting the distribution of powers and electoral systems, and some possibility of divergence with regard to bicameralism by strengthening the strongest chamber even more. Four of the five components appear to reflect some movement toward the American system
of governance, yet it is uncertain how the “more active role for Parliamentarians” will look if fully implemented.

These changes potentially threaten the key role of Cabinet secrecy in allowing collective decision-making. “The legitimacy of cabinet secrecy depends foremost on the most fundamental of building blocks of the Westminster constitution: that the executive is collective, made up of ministers exercising their individual responsibilities in a concerted way that maintains the support of the House of Commons.” (d’Ombrain 2004) Secrecy is accepted to maintain responsible government, according to Nicholas d’Ombrain, and therefore expanding it to Parliamentary Secretaries and opposition leaders may draw the whole principle into question.

Martin put a lot of eggs in this basket, perhaps without realizing that two likely outcomes are either the model of responsible government prevails and shuts down democratic reform, or democratic reform prevails and shuts down the model of responsible government. Canada succeeded in creating the first federal parliamentary system in the world, and they may yet succeed in establishing a model that enhances democracy within that parliamentary system. The challenge of popular legitimacy looms large for many modern governments, and so it was reassuring to see a national leader seeking to address the challenge.
RÉFÉRENCES


directly on the concept of belonging as a way to encourage newcomers to participate in politics. I suggest four policy proposals that focus on erasing this sense of exclusion, and thus on generating a sense of belonging, among newcomers to Canada and the United States. These policies, I hope, will encourage political participation among newcomers.

Les minorités ethniques, au Canada et aux États Unis, qui pour beaucoup sont composées de citoyens récemment naturalisés, participent en général peu à la vie politique. Ces faibles taux de participation s'expliquent par le sentiment d'exclusion dont souffrent ces minorités. D'autres explications — matérielles, contextuelles et institutionnelles — reviennent toutes à ce problème d'exclusion. Il faut ainsi mettre directement l'accent sur le concept d'appartenance si l'on veut encourager les nouveaux immigrants à participer à la vie politique. Je suggère quatre orientations qui permettraient d'éliminer ce sentiment d'exclusion et d'engendrer un sentiment d'appartenance parmi les immigrants récents au Canada et aux États Unis. Je pense que de telles politiques favoriseraient la participation politique de ces nouveaux venus.

**MR. MARTIN'S ACTION PLAN FOR DEMOCRATIC REFORM IN A NORTH AMERICAN CONTEXT**

*Matthew S. Mingus*

The success of Prime Minister Paul Martin's *Action Plan for Democratic Reform* will only be revealed with time, as we see what items survive changes in the shape of Canada's Parliament. This plan attempted to reform the House of Commons to create more free votes, a more active governance role for Parliamentarians, an expanded role for Parliamentary committees, increased analytical capacity for Parliament, and prior review of key Governor-in-Council appointments by Parliament. On the surface, these changes have the potential to weaken Cabinet secrecy and the role of responsible government, and perhaps even to "Americanize" Parliament. Mingus reports on early interview-based research to assess the impact of this plan, and discusses the extent to which it represents a convergence between the United States and Canadian systems of governance.

L'avenir nous dira ce qu'il restera du *Plan d'action pour une réforme démocratique* du Premier ministre Paul Martin dans la nouvelle configuration du Parlement. Ce plan visait une réforme de la Chambre des communes où il y aurait davantage de votes libres, où les Parlementaires joueraient un rôle accru dans la gouvernance du pays, où le rôle des comités parlementaires se trouverait élargi, de même que les capacités d'analyse du Parlement qui serait en outre invité à examiner les nominations importantes faites par le Gouverneur en conseil. À première vue, de tels changements pourraient limiter la confidentialité des délibérations du Conseil des ministres et le rôle d'un gouvernement responsable, voire « américainiser » le Parlement. Mingus présente ce constat préliminaire après avoir interviewé certains intéressés et montre dans quelle mesure on peut parler de convergence entre les systèmes américain et canadien de gouvernance.