



Conversion and Replacement: Interest Group Strategies and Polarization

Elizabeth Baisley (University of Toronto)

Thursday, February 6, 2020 | 2:30 pm | Dunning Hall, Room 12

Abstract: Over the past several decades, Canadian parties have grown increasingly polarized on abortion and LGBT rights. Existing work points to cross-country differences in public opinion to explain why it took longer for partisan conflict on these issues to emerge in Canada than in the US. Based on extensive primary sources from the 1960s until today, I argue instead for the importance of interest group strategies: when some socially conservative groups became disheartened with traditional lobbying and began to work more within party politics, they began a chain of events that resulted in party position change.

From the Canadian case, I develop a more general theory of the relationship between interest group strategies and party position change. I distinguish between conversion strategies, which aim to persuade or convert existing political actors to take the interest group's position – and replacement strategies, which aim instead to replace unfavourable party personnel and policies with ones that are more favourable to the interest group. Unlike conversion strategies, replacement strategies disrupt internal party processes. As a result, replacement strategies force party actors to decide whether to shun or embrace a group. No matter how parties respond, they contribute to processes of party position change. This work contributes to both popular and scholarly debates about polarization, interest groups, and political parties.

Courts, federalism, and minorities: The case of language rights at the Supreme Court of Canada

Stéphanie Chouinard (Royal Military College of Canada)

Thursday, February 27, 2020 | 2:30 pm | Dunning Hall, Room 12



Abstract: Minorities' relationship with the judiciary, in any given democratic country, is a complex one. The judiciary is often portrayed as the counter-majoritarian branch, one where the law levels minorities' lack of political power. However, it is widely recognized that the judiciary's decisions continue to be orientated by the values and norms of the broader society. Is it possible, then, for minorities to be granted the recognition they are seeking from society through judicial mobilization?

The talk will discuss the case of official-language rights interpretation at the Supreme Court of Canada. It will show that certain norms underlying the Canadian constitutional order, notably the notion of a political compromise that led to the adoption of a federal system, has informed the Court's response to minority-language groups claims, leading to a partial response to those claims and an evolution of the federal regime. This case study contributes to broader debates on minority rights, notably the role of courts in multinational states and the adaptability of federal structures when confronted by minority claims.



Local Party Organization and Representational Outcomes: Evidence from Canada

Scott Pruysers (Dalhousie University)

Thursday, March 5, 2020 | 2:30 pm | Dunning Hall, Room 12

Abstract: It is well established that political parties play a key role as gatekeepers to elected office. This talk explores the local determinants of a diverse candidate pool. In particular, I consider the district or riding specific party factors that are related to women's participation in the parties' candidate nomination processes. That is, why do some nomination races in a party have no women contestants, while others have many? Using data from an original survey of party constituency association presidents, extensive nomination data from Elections Canada, and a novel experiment with more than 400 undergraduate students, I will demonstrate that a number of local factors are related to the presence of women contesting a party's nomination. Local party associations with a woman serving as president, as well as associations that hold earlier and longer nominations, are significantly more likely to see a woman enter the contest. The results are important as they call attention to what parties do at the grassroots, as well as highlight practical solutions for parties seeking to have more diversity in their candidate pool.

Courting Diversity: the contradictions and implications of a representative Supreme Court of Canada

Robert Schertzer (University of Toronto)

Thursday, March 12, 2020 | 2:30 pm | Dunning Hall, Room 12



Abstract: This talk explores representative dynamics on the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC). While we tend to focus on courts as legal institutions, they also serve a critical function as venues representing the diverse interests and needs of many different constituencies. The most established expression of this function across federations – and in Canada – is the practice of appointing judges from different regions.

The talk will seek to answer two related questions about the practice of regional representation: why do federations do this, and does it matter? To answer these questions, the talk first challenges the notion that federal high courts are centralist by design. Then, focusing on Canada and the appointment of justices from Quebec, the talk examines the conceptual and empirical contradictions of justices acting as both independent legal actors and representatives of a national minority group. Through this examination – which includes an in-depth review of every federalism case over the past 35 years – it is clear that while we can understand SCC justices from Quebec as representatives, their influence on the decision-making of the Court is not necessarily what some would expect.