

“Getting Better All the Time?”: Leadership Selection and the Manitoba NDP

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Abstract. In the aftermath of its 2009 leadership race, the Manitoba New Democratic Party appeared poised to adopt a new method of leadership selection. Ironically, not only did the contest fail to achieve the benefits typically stemming from delegate conventions, the party also suffered from many of the shortcomings associated with this selection method. Based on the party’s base of support, history, and experiences during the most recent leadership race in 2009, the following analysis suggests NDP members may look most favourably upon a direct selection system to choose their next leader, whether of the one-member, one-vote or “hybrid” variety. Given the party’s resounding victory in the 2011 election, however, the impetus for reform may have waned.

Keywords. leadership selection; New Democratic Party; provincial politics; Manitoba.

Introduction

On October 17, 2009, the Manitoba New Democratic Party (NDP) selected Greg Selinger as its fifth leader, and – in the process -- their province’s twenty-first premier. Little suspense or controversy appeared on the convention floor, as the sea of orange-clad Selinger supporters confirmed the expected outcome. The new leader had garnered the support of 1317 delegates, nearly twice the amount of his only competitor, Steve Ashton (685).

The unified, orderly tone of the convention was a far cry from the events of the preceding weeks, however. It had been over twenty years since the party’s last leadership race, and the party encountered numerous challenges and much criticism. Headlines in the *Winnipeg Free Press* captured the difficulties that characterized the campaign; stories like “The Pas race suffers from poor showing”, “Controversy flares over voting procedure at key NDP meeting”, and “Ashton defends signing up hundreds of Indo-Canadians as NDP members” established a negative media frame for the leadership race, and prompted party officials to consider “overhauling” the leadership process (in Skerritt, 2009).

Résumé. Au lendemain de la course au leadership en 2009, le Nouveau Parti démocratique (NPD) du Manitoba était prêt à adopter une nouvelle méthode de sélection du leadership. Ironiquement, la compétition n’a pas seulement échoué à récolter les bénéfices généralement obtenus lors de conventions de représentants, mais le parti a aussi souffert des défauts liés à la méthode de sélection. Fondée sur la base de soutien du parti, son histoire et son expérience durant la course au leadership de 2009, l’analyse suivante suggère que les membres du NDP peuvent être perçus plus favorablement dans le cadre d’un système de sélection direct pour choisir leur prochain leader, plutôt que le système « un membre un vote » ou le système hybride. Étant donnée la large victoire aux élections de 2011, l’impulsion pour une telle réforme a pu décliner.

Mots clefs. sélection du leadership; Nouveau Parti Démocratique; politique provinciale; Manitoba.

This was not the first time the party confronted the issue of leadership selection. Just two years earlier, delegates to the Manitoba NDP policy convention voted to re-instate the delegate convention system it employed in October, 2009. Sponsored by the party’s labour wing and supported by two-thirds of delegates, the constitutional amendment replaced the universal balloting procedure that had been established, but never employed, following Gary Doer’s convention victory in 1988. Criticism a decade later prompted some party members and political observers to revisit this decision, with many suggesting a reversion to the yet-untested one-member, one-vote (OMOV) system.

That the party failed to achieve any of the benefits typically associated with a delegate convention, while experiencing many of its shortcomings, suggests that the rules may be ripe for reform. Yet, given the party’s objectives, history, the sentiments of its convention delegates, and its most recent election victory, a return to the universal ballot remains uncertain.

Leadership Selection in Canada

Leadership selection is a crucial element of Canadian politics. In representative democracies like Canada, parties hold a prominent gate-keeping role in the political system. At the same time, in parliamentary democracies like Canada, power is concentrated within the executive. Combined, these factors elevate the importance of the party leader, who is in control of the party's message, platform, roster of candidates, strategy, and overall brand. Moreover, in the past decade alone, political parties in six Canadian provinces have selected leaders who immediately became premier (without facing the wider electorate in a general election).¹ Close attention must be paid to leadership selection, as contemporary perceptions of democracy change over time.

The evolution of party leadership in Canada has mirrored the evolution of democracy in general. Both have become more inclusive over time, inviting more diverse groups to participate in, and interests to bear on, the selection process. While variations have existed over time and space, in general, Canadian political parties have employed five modes of leadership selection.² The first – a vote by caucus members – has become obsolete, while four remain in use today. Of the latter, delegate conventions exist alongside three forms of universal balloting: one-member, one-vote systems; weighted-constituency models; and so-called “hybrid” systems.

Canadian parties initially selected their leaders through a vote by all legislative caucus members.³ In the absence of a formal extra-parliamentary apparatus or membership, leadership selection was placed solely in the hands of the parliamentary wing of the party. By the early-twentieth century, the leadership “selectorate” had expanded to include non-elected party notables (Blake et al., 1996: 214-221; Courtney, 1992). Initially held behind closed doors, these traditional conventions were seen as an effective way to bring party supporters together and to allow for regional representation in the selection of the party leader. As parties began developing extra-parliamentary organizations and amassing grassroots members, formal delegates were elected from each constituency association to represent its membership at the convention (Carty, 1992). Ex-officio positions were still allotted to party brass, allowing high-ranking officials to retain at least part of their influence on the outcome (Courtney, 1995: 15). Over time, however, the proportion of ex-officio delegates decreased, as parties added more constituency delegates and began to transition from a traditional

form of delegate convention to a more modern variant (Blake et al., 1996: 221-226).

Each of the four leadership selection methods currently employed by Canadian parties today constitutes a response to the perceived domination of “white, Anglo-Saxon, male and old” Canadians in these earlier processes (quoted in Courtney, 1995). In modern conventions, participation is guaranteed for select groups typically under-represented at traditional conventions. Affiliated groups – or “wings” – that have received representation in modern conventions include women, youth, labour, and Aboriginals. These delegates join ex-officio and constituency delegates in casting ballots at the convention. As in traditional conventions, a candidate must have the support of the majority of all delegates to be named party leader.

The 2009 Manitoba NDP leadership selection process matched this modern convention model. As dictated by the party's constitution, delegate credentials were to be awarded to four main groups: constituency associations, unions, youth, and elected officials (“automatic” delegates) (Manitoba New Democratic Party, 2009).

Each of the party's fifty-seven constituency associations received one delegate for every ten party members in its ranks.⁴ Thanks to a membership drive that helped boost the party membership from 5,500 to over 14,000 members, a total of 1400 constituency association delegates were eligible to vote at the convention. Chosen in various constituency association meetings in late-September, those delegates would represent 65 percent of the total selectorate. As a second group, members representing affiliated unions were guaranteed 20 percent of all delegate credentials. Because this figure was indexed to the size of the grassroots membership, as the latter grew, so, too, did the number of labour representatives. Their influence fixed in proportional terms, by the end of the leadership race, union delegates were entitled to cast a total of 433 ballots at the convention. Third, the Manitoba Young New Democrats (MYND) were to select their delegates on the same basis as a constituency association. One youth delegate was allotted for every ten MYND members, and the MYND executive chose to select its delegates by way of a province-wide vote. By the membership cut-off date, MYND was entitled to 107 delegates – a figure amounting to just under 5 percent of the total attendance at the convention. A fourth and final group consisted of “automatic delegates,” whose ex-officio status as members of Provincial Council or elected members of city council, the provincial legislature, or parliament guaranteed them a ballot at the convention. A total of 214 individuals were granted these credentials (Manitoba New Democratic Party, 2009).

Illustrated in Table 1, the Manitoba NDP is one of ten (10) major Canadian political parties to have employed a delegate convention as a means of selecting its current leader. Reflecting the desire to open the leadership selection process to an even larger selectorate, the remaining parties

1 In British Columbia, Christy Clark (2011); in Alberta, Ed Stelmach (2006) and Alison Redford (2011); in Manitoba, Greg Selinger (2009); in Ontario, Kathleen Wynne (2013); in Nova Scotia, Rodney MacDonald (2006); in Newfoundland and Labrador, Kathy Dunderdale (2010).

2 For a more detailed discussion of the various sub-types, see Cross (1996: 299-303), Carty and Blake (1999), and Preyra (2001: 447-454).

3 While both of these early practices faded out of use in the mid- to late-twentieth century, it is worth noting that caucus members and party executives continue to play a significant role in the selecting interim leaders.

4 The party executive elected to use those boundaries in place for the 2007 provincial election, in lieu of the updated boundaries put in place in 2009.

have used some form of universal balloting procedure. Since its adoption by the Parti Québécois in 1985, the one-member, one-vote (OMOV) system has emerged as the most common of these forms. In a “pure” OMOV system, all party members vote directly for a leader and all votes are weighted equally. Successful contenders must receive more than fifty percent of the votes cast to secure the leadership, with different parties applying preferential or run-off balloting to achieve this majority.

The one-member, one-vote system has not suited the needs or interests of all parties, however. First employed by the Ontario PCs in 1990 and the Manitoba Liberals in 1993, the weighted-constituency model selects leaders through an open vote of all party members. Each constituency is assigned an equal number of points, which are distributed to leadership contenders based on the percentage of the vote they receive within the district. In the case of the Conservative Party of Canada, each federal riding is allocated 100 points, meaning that a contender who receives 60 percent of the popular vote in that district receives 60 of its 100 points. Each contestant’s points are tallied across all ridings, and a candidate must receive a majority of points to be declared the victor.

Table 1: Leadership Selection Methods Among Major Canadian Political Parties

Jurisdiction	Delegate Convention	Weighted-Constituency Model	Hybrid model	OMOV
British Columbia		LIB (2011)		NDP (2011)
Alberta	NDP (2004)			PC (2011) LIB (2008) WRA (2009)
Saskatchewan				SP (2004) NDP (2009) PC (2006)
Manitoba	NDP (2009)	LIB (1998)		
Ontario	LIB (2013)	PC (2009)	NDP (2009)	
Quebec	LIB (1998)			PQ (2005) PC (2008) NDP (2007)
New Brunswick		LIB (2012)		
Nova Scotia	PC (2006) NDP (2001)			LIB (2010)
Prince Edward Island				PC (2010) LIB (2003) NDP (2009)
Newfoundland and Labrador	PC (2001) LIB (2001) NDP (2006)			
Canada	LIB (2009)	CPC (2004)		BQ (2011) NDP (2012)

Information compiled from party leadership rules, media coverage, and information obtained from party officials as of February 1, 2013.

Year of party’s most recent, completed and contested leadership selection is indicated in brackets. Uncontested leadership selections (e.g., by convention or caucus) are not listed.

BQ = Bloc Québécois; CAQ = Coalition Avenir Québec; CPC = Conservative Party of Canada; LIB = Liberal Party; NDP = New Democratic Party; PC = Progressive Conservative Party; PQ = Parti Québécois; SP = Saskatchewan Party; WRA = Wildrose Alliance

Just as the weighted-constituency model blends the grassroots input of the one-member, one-vote system with the geographic representativeness of the leadership convention, the “hybrid” model combines the group representation of the modern delegate convention with the direct participation element of OMOV systems. In the hybrid model, all party members are invited to vote directly for a leadership candidate. (This distinguishes it from the modern convention, wherein party members cast ballots for delegates to repre-

sent them in the leadership selection process.) Votes cast by party members and members of the party’s designated “wings” are then weighted according to the rules set out in the party’s constitution. The hybrid model was first employed by the federal NDP in 2003, and has since been used by the Ontario NDP in its 2009 leadership contest. In both instances, the votes of the party membership were weighted at 75 percent of the total, with the remaining 25 percent reserved for the party’s labour contingent. As with all other models of leadership selection, the victor in a “hybrid” system must receive a majority of the (weighted) votes cast.

There are numerous advantages and drawbacks associated with these various leadership selection methods, and parties considering a switch from one system to another are wise to consider the important tradeoffs between them. Discussed in greater detail below, proponents generally prefer conventions for the drama and increased media attention typically associated with the final event; the collective decision-making and party-building that takes place during the campaign and on the convention floor; the inclusiveness associated with the representation of traditionally or numerically-disadvantaged groups in the party’s various “wings”; and the level of commitment to the party among those casting ballots for their eventual leader. By contrast, critics view conventions as being overly elitist, costly, complex, closed-door affairs, with most preferring universal balloting systems for the openness of their selectorate; the more direct access granted to grassroots members; and the boost the party receives in terms of its membership.

Findings

With these trade-offs in mind, the present study examines the 2009 Manitoba NDP leadership race as a case study in the performance of modern conventions. In the sections that follow, we establish a series of hypotheses based on the existing literature on leadership selection in Canada, before testing these against the recent experience of the Manitoba NDP. The analysis reveals that, not only did the race reinforce the various weaknesses associated with the convention model; it also failed to realize many of the benefits typically achieved by parties hosting modern conventions. As a result, the study concludes that the Manitoba New Democratic Party may be ripe for a change in leadership selection methods, its recent electoral success notwithstanding.

To address these questions from the delegates’ perspective, a research team at the University of Manitoba conducted an online survey of participants in the aftermath of the convention.⁵ All delegates were eligible to take part, with invitations being included in their convention packages and sent to them through two rounds of email reminders. A very

⁵ The survey was administered by Prairie Research Associates, between October 16th and December 1st, 2009. The New Democratic Party declined the researcher’s request for a mail-out survey, and did not grant direct access to the delegates via email.

low response rate (150 of 2002) leaves us with little confidence in the representativeness of the sample, particularly as relates to the quantitative components of the survey. This said, the qualitative responses do lend some insights into the delegates' sentiments about the leadership selection process in which they had just participated.⁶

"Conventional" Advantages

According to proponents, delegate conventions tend to be more *exciting and dramatic events* than those selection processes employing universal ballots. When competitive, conventions make for good television, particularly on the day of the vote. The intrigue and suspense of conventions attract political and apolitical viewers alike, as observers can witness the energy and excitement of the candidates' supporters, peer into negotiations between eliminated candidates and those still in contention, and watch as competitors lead their supporters dramatically across the convention floor to crown the victor. Television networks employ colourful analysts and commentators to deliver their "insider" perspectives of the convention to viewers, and the comments of these professionals have even been used by leadership rivals to influence the delegates at the convention (Courtney, 1995: 83). Parties employing OMOV systems have attempted to create similar media spectacles at the culmination of their leadership campaigns, but with limited success (Kenig, 2009; Latouche, 1992: 185; Woolstencroft, 1992: 218). Critics of the supposed media advantage of delegate convention contests caution that a convention is only as entertaining as it is competitive, with research indicating that many recent convention races have been decided on the first ballot or by acclamation (Cross, 2004: 82).

Considering that the New Democrats were selecting not only a party leader, but the next Premier of Manitoba, a certain level of intrigue accompanied the opening days of the 2009 Manitoba NDP leadership race. This was especially true as observers waited to see who would enter the contest. Many names were suggested as potential candidates for the position, but in the end, three MLAs committed to run for party leadership. The first to declare his candidacy was Andrew Swan, the province's Competitiveness, Training and Trade minister. Swan's relatively young age and history of community involvement reminded many within the party of Doer in 1988, and many within the NDP caucus declared their support for him. Next to enter the leadership campaign was Steve Ashton. An MLA since 1981, he had held many cabinet posts over his years with the party. Ashton was considered a longshot from the beginning of the campaign, but his success in selling and renewing party memberships in the opening weeks of the campaign quickly made

him a contender. The eventual victor, Greg Selinger, was the last to declare his candidacy. As Doer's only finance minister, Selinger had managed to deliver ten consecutive balanced budgets, appearing to subscribe to the former premier's moderate brand of incrementalism (Wesley, 2011).

Once the field narrowed to three, speculation turned to whether there would be substantive policy debate or ideological disagreement among the contenders. There was little of the former, and a muted element of the latter, as the media's attention soon focused on the "horserace" elements of the campaign. In particular, questions surrounded the effect the third-place candidate would have on the outcome of the October 17th vote. Hopes of a dramatic convention were dampened three weeks before the final event, however, as Swan announced he was bowing out of the race. Citing failures to mobilize supporters in the early part of the election as his main reason for dropping out of the contest, Swan immediately threw his support behind Selinger, a move repeated by many of his own high-profile endorsers (Kusch and Owen, 2009). As the day of the convention drew closer, Selinger's reported lead among constituency, labour, and automatic delegates appeared insurmountable. Instead of a being filled with drama and suspense, the convention floor was filled with orange-shirted Selinger supporters, leaving those in attendance with little doubt as to the outcome of the vote. As summarized by one respondent to the delegates' survey, the convention was "a little underwhelming and lacked excitement." In this sense, the final event resembled more of a coronation. Perhaps for this reason, the media's presence at the convention was quite limited, with only two radio stations (CBC and CJOB) and one online video feed (the *Winnipeg Free Press Online*) covering the event live. In the end, the 2009 Manitoba NDP leadership race failed to attract the amount of positive media coverage typically associated with conventions.

More than this, the media attention the party *did* receive was often very critical of the process, itself. When the outcome of the convention appeared obvious, journalists and columnists soon turned their attention to a more exciting story developing during the campaign: the inconsistencies and controversies surrounding a small number of key constituency meetings. These gatherings were criticized by the media from the outset, with one columnist calling an early selection meeting a "melee" (Welch, 2009b). As the campaign continued, further difficulties were reported. According to several stories, the length and apparent inefficiency of selection meetings encouraged some members to leave without voting; voting procedures were altered for some constituency meetings, and the Manitoba Young New Democrats had their procedure overturned by the party executive; and low turnout rates at the polls were met with complaints about the integrity and complexity of the delegate convention system (Santin, 2009). These difficulties came to the fore in the Maples constituency meeting, when nine registered voters were forced to leave the meeting due to its length.

6 The low response rate is largely attributable to the inability of party officials to devote enough resources to assist with contacting delegates. As volunteers in the midst of the party's first leadership campaign in two decades, in a compressed timeframe, party workers were unable to provide researchers with a complete list of delegates at the time the survey was conducted. The party also refused to release a contact list directly to researchers, meaning that delegates were asked to participate via a letter included in their convention packages.

These issues prompted the Ashton team to appeal the results of four delegate selection meetings, claiming that “the party executive just decided to make up the rules on their own” (Owen, 2009a). In sum, the potential media advantage granted to parties that employ delegate conventions was nullified by the negative coverage. Thus, as Cross (1996: 308) explains,

Media coverage of campaigns leading up to the direct election does not appear to be as extensive as that in campaigns leading up to delegate conventions, because such conventions generate significant press coverage during the delegate selection period. It should be noted, however, that this coverage is not universally favourable, as much of it recounts party in-fighting over the various tactics employed by candidates in attempting to gain an edge in delegate conventions.

In other words, if leadership conventions are only as compelling as they are competitive, they are also only as beneficial to the party as they are uncontroversial.

Proponents of delegate conventions also highlight the level of party-building and *collective decision-making* that takes place during the lead-up to the final vote, both during the campaign and on the convention floor. The entire process allows party members to interact with and identify the concerns of fellow partisans from across the electorate, while oftentimes meeting and comparing the visions of the various leadership contenders (Courtney, 1995: 246). Members can then participate in constituency selection meetings, and delegates may cast their ballots, in an informed manner. Furthermore, according to proponents, conventions allow party activists to build organizational networks and form bonds with members of other constituencies, both of which may prove useful in future campaigns (MacIvor, 1994: 23). These advantages are not typically associated with universal balloting processes. Woolstencroft (1992: 224) suggests that, under OMOV rules, party members “approach political questions from the parochial perspectives of local areas and constituency associations, and without the broadening effect that comes from meeting members from other parts of the system.”

Again the Manitoba case does not entirely support this adage. During the lead-up to the convention, an overwhelming majority of delegates selected at constituency meetings were “slated” – that is, pre-committed to supporting a candidate on the first ballot of the convention (Owen, 2009a). If apparel was any indication, these positions changed little as nearly all delegates on the convention floor wore t-shirts declaring their support of either of the two remaining candidates. On the surface, most delegates entered the convention with their minds set – a conclusion supported by several recent studies in other parties and jurisdictions. Research on the 1985 Alberta PC and 2006 Nova Scotia PC conventions also suggested that the majority of delegates were elected from candidate slates, having made their decision long before the day of the convention (Archer and Hunziker, 1992: 86; Stewart and Stewart, 2010). In this sense, the Manitoba New Democrats were not alone in missing out on the collective decision-making benefits typically associated with delegate conventions. Yet, as one respondent

to the delegates’ survey put it, “there was [still] no opportunity to discuss/debate the kind of leader we wanted.”

While traditional conventions made no formal provision to represent the party’s various “wings”, modern delegate conventions are specifically designed to permit *traditionally disadvantaged or under-represented groups* greater influence over the leadership process. Proponents identify this component as a key advantage over more majoritarian OMOV systems, wherein all members’ votes are counted equally. For instance, a study of the 1998 New Brunswick PC universal ballot shows that women and young voters were underrepresented in that race, although it has been suggested that this result could be attributed to the specific balloting process used in that election (Cross, 2002: 47). The research record is mixed on this count, however. Other studies of OMOV campaigns have shown that direct membership votes have actually involved *more* inclusive selectorates than delegate conventions. An analysis of the 1992 Alberta PC leadership campaign revealed that both women and seniors were better represented under an OMOV system than at previous delegate conventions (Stewart, 1997: 122). By the same token, women and those without university degrees were better represented in the 1995 Nova Scotia PC universal ballot than its 2006 delegate convention (Stewart and Stewart, 2010: 38). While the unique results of different OMOV campaigns call into question the criticisms of delegate convention advocates, the *guaranteed* representation of under-represented groups remains as a considerable advantage of delegate conventions.

Along these lines, the Manitoba NDP did ensure the presence of labour and youth at its 2009 Leadership Convention – two groups with a long history as affiliated groups within the New Democratic Party. As mentioned above, a 2007 amendment to the party’s constitution guaranteed that “affiliated organizations” (unions) would once again receive 20 percent of all delegate credentials, while the Manitoba Young New Democrats (MYND) would be treated as a separate, province-wide constituency association. Due largely to events outside of the party’s direct control, neither “wing” received this type of representation at the actual convention.

The selection of union delegates was most contentious. First and foremost, some New Democrats opposed the presence of labour as a separate entity in the leadership selection process. One survey respondent felt there was, “too much union involvement. Having so many delegates be given to the unions made me feel that this is not Manitoba’s party, but the unions’ party. I would not expect the PC [party] to give 400 seats to corporations, so why do we give them to unions? It’s not the 60s anymore.” Wrote another, “Assignment of votes to Labour is antiquated and tends to confuse NDP voters and puzzle [or anger] non NDP voters.” A letter to the editor in the *Winnipeg Free Press* (October 7, 2009: A13) summarized the concerns:

As a rank and file member, I spoke out at the 2007 policy convention on a delegate system that gave unions an extra 20 percent weighted vote, because of the same exact problems that are occurring now. Why? Because unions were scared that rich people would hijack the leadership process if one member, one vote (OMOV) was implemented as they did in the Alberta Pro-

gressive Conservative leadership race in 2006. The delegate system for electing the current leader favours unions, party establishment figureheads. At the same time the delegate system hurts those who are rank and file members, students, poor, small business owners, environmentalists and more centre-left members, who are the bread and butter of the NDP.

In defence of the 2007 change to the party's constitution, Manitoba Federation of Labour (MFL) President Darlene Dziejewicz responded by citing her critics as desperate "to paint labour as some sort of bogeyman." She noted that the forty labour representatives present at the 2007 convention constituted only ten percent of the 400 total delegates. Other participants who supported the amendment touted the merits of conventions in terms of increasing the amount of substantive dialogue during the campaign, bringing together Manitobans from across the province to foster debate and shared understandings. As then-Conservation Minister Stan Struthers put it, "There's more to democracy than just marking an X on the ballot... It's just as important that we get to look at our candidates eyeball to eyeball to debate the issues" (in Welch, 2007a).

Second, when it came to delegate selection, several labour organizations proved unable to recruit enough volunteers to participate in the convention. The exponential growth of the party's grassroots membership during the campaign meant that unions were required to fill a total of 433 delegate spots. A shortage of participants led some organizations to appoint non-labour representatives to serve as delegates. Even then, nearly a quarter of the credentials allotted to unions were returned to the party for redistribution to other party members (Wesley, 2010). That labour had a presence at the convention is undisputed; that unions had the 20 percent influence guaranteed by the party's constitution remains contentious.

At the center of the controversy were ninety unclaimed delegate credentials, which were being distributed by the Manitoba Federation of Labour to non-union members of the New Democratic Party. Launching an official appeal in the closing week of the campaign, the Ashton team argued that these credentials should remain unclaimed, as opposed to being given to alleged "rental delegates" who supported his opponent. "How on earth can we go into a leadership convention with people that are going to show up as affiliated union delegates who quite clearly have no connection to unions?" Ashton asked in a newspaper interview. "All we're asking is for a fair process that reflects our constitution as a party but also what most Manitobans would consider to be a fair process," Ashton stated. "For me making sure that the delegate selection process is above and beyond reproach is absolutely critical. I keep stressing we're not just electing a leader, this is not just an internal election, the leader is going to be the premier" (Owen, 2009b). The Convention Committee dismissed Ashton's appeal, prompting the only comment by the Selinger team on the issue: "While the leadership selection process has not been perfect, we are confident that it has been fair – and the independent rules committee has consistently agreed with that view" (in Owen and Kusch, 2009).

For their part, the Manitoba Young New Democrats intended to hold a province-wide election, through which each MYND member would cast a series of votes in favour of 107 delegate-hopefuls. In week three of the leadership race, the party's Convention Committee overruled the MYND executive. Deeming their chosen process too cumbersome and unwieldy, the Committee replaced it with a modified one-member, one-vote system in which all MYND members would vote directly for their preferred leadership contender. Convention delegates would then be distributed by the Committee, in coordination with the leadership campaigns, according to each candidate's share of the province-wide youth vote. The move upset many MYND members and organizers, who defended their executive's autonomy and framed the decision as one based on narrow, competitive interests. "We as an executive voted to do basically the same thing as every constituency association is doing and we were basically told that we were not allowed to do that because two of the leadership camps [Selinger and Swan] complained...," said one Young New Democrat. "I'm all in favour of democracy... But to have different rules for the Young New Democrats because they don't trust who we're going to vote for or whatever is ridiculous. If you're going to do a delegated convention, then treat us the same way as you're going to treat labour and the constituencies" (in Kusch, 2009b).

In these and other ways, critics of the 2009 Manitoba NDP leadership selection process suggest that it failed to achieve the full benefits of group representation guaranteed by the rules of modern conventions.⁷

The convention process is also designed to ensure that the future leader of the party is chosen by a *committed electorate*. In this vein, convention delegates are often individuals with considerable party experience, and participants in the delegate selection meetings tend to be more active and longer-serving, compared with the members involved in most universal ballot races. While new members may bring new faces with new ideas to the party, studies have shown that those who buy memberships during the leadership campaign period are not likely to maintain an allegiance to the party. In the 1992 Alberta PC leadership campaign, for example, only 26 per cent of members said that they planned to work for the party in the next election, while 55 per cent admitted that they had bought a membership just to vote for the leader of the party (Stewart, 1997: 122). Research in other OMOV contests, like those in New Brunswick, supports these findings (Cross, 2002: 46). These new participants, known as party "tourists" or "instant members", can have a profound impact on the selection of a new leader, as OMOV campaigns are known to generate many new mem-

7 Unlike other Canadian political parties, the Manitoba New Democrats make no provision for the representation of women or Aboriginals in their leadership selection process. This is not entirely responsible for the fact that no female leadership candidates emerged as contenders in the race, but it is significant to note that this marked the first time since 1969 that the party did not have a woman on the ballot. This said, the province's political geography dictates that northern Aboriginal peoples are represented, de facto, by the presence of several large constituencies in that region of the province.

berships (Stewart and Stewart, 2007: 49). By contrast, in convention systems, delegate positions are viewed by most party members as a reward for the party faithful, providing incentive for younger partisans to commit their time and energy in the hopes of attending a convention in the future.

The Manitoba NDP constitution guaranteed that party brass would play an influential part in the selection of their new leader, granting credentials to 214 ex-officio delegates (including all members of the Provincial Council and all New Democrats elected at the provincial, municipal, and federal levels). These provisions granted the party's most committed members a say in determining the leader of the party, yet they did not prevent the party from almost tripling its grassroots membership. That the Manitoba NDP was able to sell or renew nearly 9000 memberships in less than three weeks is remarkable, given this context. Growth of this magnitude is generally associated with universal balloting systems, not conventions (Carty and Blake, 1999: 217-219; Cross, 1996: 303) (Archer and Hunziker, 1992: 86)

In the end, the influence of "new" party members in the Manitoba NDP race was one of the greatest sources of controversy, both inside and outside the party. It must be stressed: without a detailed survey of the party membership, and without data from the party, researchers cannot distinguish "new" members (who have never belonged to the New Democratic Party of Manitoba) from those who had their previously-lapsed memberships renewed during the campaign period. Nonetheless, according to party rules that allotted each constituency association one delegate for every ten members, the addition of about 9000 new or renewed members translated into approximately 900 more delegates at the convention than would have been expected given the party's membership rolls at the start of the race. These figures suggest that, despite the fact that new party members did not get to vote directly for the leader, they had a potentially significant effect on the composition of the convention. Indeed, the high number of memberships sold or renewed over the course of the campaign challenges the claims of proponents of delegate conventions that their system mitigates against the influence of new members and allows committed party members to have the greatest say in determining the leadership of the party.

Some long-time New Democrats expressed concern with influence of so-called "party tourists" on the selection of the next leader. Several respondents to the delegates' survey indicated that their involvement was purely for the purposes of selecting the next leader, rather than contributing to the long-term interests of the party. "I was interested in providing input on the choice of leader, but generally do not have a strong sense of active involvement with party matters," wrote one respondent. "I wanted to participate in the leadership selection process, but I have little interest in other conventions (policy, etc.)," said another. Still others reported little to no attachment to the party; according to one delegate, "My involvement was largely because of my personal relationship with Greg Selinger."

The participation of these individuals in the convention raised the ire of other delegates. "Simply purchasing a

membership to cast a ballot in favour of a delegate is an unsatisfactory option and encourages 'instant memberships' and skews the political dynamic. While signing up new memberships may be a sign of membership renewal, it can be illusory. True renewal involves member participation in policy and constituency affairs of the party over time." Another respondent repeated these criticisms, claiming that the leadership selection process "didn't really renew the party because it only encouraged new members to sign up for political promises rather than caring about the party now and in the future." In reference to the rules surrounding delegate selection, one respondent suggested, "It appears it was intended to appeal to high-echelon party insiders, by giving them a process that would disproportionately amplify the rewards of being well-organized and selling lots of memberships to people who ordinarily aren't involved in the party between elections." This led to calls for loyalty requirements, as discussed in greater detail below.

In these ways, the 2009 Manitoba NDP Leadership race did not shield long-term party members from the influence of new members, the way modern conventions typically do.

"Conventional" Disadvantages

At the same time, the 2009 Manitoba NDP Leadership race encountered many of the challenges and weaknesses typically associated with delegate conventions. First and foremost, critics view delegate conventions as *exclusive, elitist events* at which grassroots members are not permitted to participate. "Conventions are boring, highly controlled affairs," wrote one respondent to the delegates' survey. "I didn't think my presence made any difference anyway, as the whole thing felt like it was orchestrated from the top," described another. Other respondents questioned "the 'openness' of the process. I feel it is 'controlled.' Many resolutions do not reach the floor and others approved are not acted on unless sanctioned by the 'centre'." In this sense, the guaranteed presence of ex-officio members at the convention – as "automatic" or "super" delegates – raises the spectre of paternalism. Discussed above, this limited role did not prevent thousands of Manitobans to sign up as new members of the provincial NDP. Yet, in most cases, their participation in the selection process was limited to a single constituency association meeting.

Moreover, in convention systems, party members are unable to vote directly for a leader, but rather choose someone to represent them in the selection process. According to one respondent to the delegates' survey, this method is

not very democratic - the slate system (a seemingly inevitable outgrowth of the delegated convention process) makes it common for one candidate to take 100% of the delegates in a riding without having anywhere near 100% of the support. This system also pressures people to make up their minds before full information about each candidate's beliefs and abilities may be available. The convention itself was a sham exercise - no participation in policy debates at all, not even a question-and-answer session with the candidates, just a couple of speeches to a room full of people who had already made up their minds. Even though my candidate won, I found the whole process depressing.

In terms of their exclusivity, conventions are also criticized for the high costs associated with participating as a delegate. Attending a convention is often expensive – delegate fees, airfare or transportation costs, lodging, meals, and other living expenses alone can cost hundreds of dollars. Constituency associations, affiliated organizations, and leadership contenders often offer to cover some of the delegates' expenses, and some parties have set up satellite locations to minimize travel costs for delegates. Yet, the costs of participation remain far higher than the cost of a simple party membership – the only requirement for full participation in most universal balloting contests. Delegates must also make a substantial time commitment to the race, including the effort required to register as a delegate, participate in the delegate selection process, and travel to the convention, itself (Stewart, 1988: 169). These resources may be beyond the reach of many party members, and aspiring delegates may be dissuaded from participating for these reasons.

In these ways, universal balloting processes are widely viewed as more accessible and inclusive events, as they provide incentives for a wide variety of people to participate, provided they are willing to pay the nominal, one-time fee associated with purchasing a party membership. Because party members do not need to gather in a central location, parties employing direct membership votes have been able to utilize advanced technologies to encourage voter participation, from allowing members to mail in ballots, to establishing a toll-free number that voters can call to cast their vote, to providing participants with the opportunity to vote online (Cross, 2004: 85). These mechanisms have allowed more members to participate in the campaign and have significantly decreased the cost of participation in the leadership selection process, relative to conventions.

In addition to the cost of an annual party membership (\$20.00), to cast a ballot in the 2009 Manitoba NDP Leadership Convention, delegates were required to travel to Winnipeg or one of two northern satellite locations (in Thompson and the Pas), and to pay a \$100 delegate fee. To witness the event, non-delegate (observer) fees were set at \$50 for party members, and \$300 for the general public. This financial burden was not insignificant, particularly for seniors. As one respondent to the delegate survey reported, "It was pretty expensive for a pensioner on a fixed income to attend." In sum, several respondents reported that, while "the delegate selection process is democratic, [it also] excludes some people who can't afford to pay the fees." In response to criticism that the party was preventing low-income Manitobans from attending the convention, Provincial Secretary Sonia Kowalewich acknowledged that the observer fees were "probably a little bit higher than what we would normally charge our members at a regular policy convention. But this is also a very different kind of convention. There's more cost involved in putting it on, it's at the [Winnipeg] Convention Centre instead of a hotel" (Kusch, 2009c).

For these reasons, critics of modern conventions often cite the process as being "old-fashioned, elite controlled, and generally out of step with evolving democratic norms" (Cross, 2004: 82). Several respondents to the delegates'

survey concurred, with one suggesting "delegated leadership selections are a pre-technological relic of the Nineteenth Century." Along these lines, another called for a "more open process that engages grassroots members... We are the only party in this country moving backward on internal party democracy." If conventions are rooted in the principles of party loyalty and collective decision-making, universal balloting processes are grounded in the values of egalitarianism and equality. In a pure OMOV system, for instance, there is no difference between the votes of party elites and new party members, as each possesses the same influence in determining the new leader of the party.

By the same token, convention critics often point out the inequalities that exist among different types of delegates. At first glance, it would appear as if the Manitoba convention values member equality by maintaining a formula in which constituencies with the most members send the most delegates to the convention. However, the inequalities of the system come to light when the number of delegates in a particular constituency nearly exceeds the number of voting members at the delegate selection meeting. Consider the delegate selection process as it was conducted in the party's two largest constituencies – the Maples and The Pas. Based on the size of their memberships, the two constituencies were entitled to 138 and 120 delegates, respectively. This reflected the notion that each constituency delegate across the province ought to represent ten party members. The number of members who turned out to vote in each district's delegate selection meeting varied greatly, however. Approximately 700 voters attended the Maples event, meaning that each delegate represented an average of 5.07 voting members (Santin, 2009). Meanwhile in The Pas, a total of 120 members cast ballots, establishing a one-to-one member-to-delegate average (Welch, 2009a). The vote inequality in this situation is evident, as votes in The Pas had more than five times the influence as votes in the Maples constituency. (Party memberships in The Pas appeared inflated due to a by-election earlier in the year, and candidates were unable to mobilize these party members to support their causes.) These two constituencies provide an extreme example, yet the Manitoba case does support the contention among convention opponents that OMOV systems are better at preserving member equality.

An additional critique of delegate conventions surrounds the relative *complexity and logistical challenges* involved in organizing a two-stage voting process. In comparison, universal balloting provides parties with a relatively more straightforward and easily-administered process. Direct membership votes give organizers an opportunity to coordinate staff and polling stations across the province on election day – the only time at which a large number of party volunteers is needed. This criticism of conventions is not intended to value simplicity and expediency over effectiveness and democracy. Nor does it downplay the immense amount of coordination required to stage a universal balloting campaign; parties experimenting with tele-voting in the mid-1990s can attest to the challenges involved in hosting a province-wide vote (Stewart and Archer, 2000). Rather, critics note that orchestrating a convention process adds an extra

layer of organization to an already complex process. Funds and volunteers are needed to operate both delegate selection meetings and the leadership convention, stretching the resources of party organizers. In some cases, thousands of party members need to be registered before the long voting process can begin, resulting in delegate selection meetings that last for several hours. Moreover, parties that achieve political success may have several years between leadership races, leaving them with few experienced organizers and little institutional memory to guide this process. When these challenges are combined with a short leadership selection campaign, parties may encounter confusion, divisiveness, and even discord over the convention process.

All of these challenges came to the fore during the Manitoba NDP's most recent leadership race. Convention organizers faced a steep learning curve, considering this was the party's first leadership race in over two decades. (As an observer, one respondent to the delegates' survey noted, "21 years without a leadership race, things were pretty rusty.") While self-imposed, the compressed timeframe also left party officials with little time to plan effectively for the obstacles that they would soon encounter. Outgoing premier Gary Doer's sudden resignation on August 27, 2009, forced them to organize in earnest for a fall leadership vote. After some debate, the NDP Convention Committee decided upon an October 17 convention date, requiring all memberships to be sold or renewed one month in advance (see Table 2).

Table 2: Campaign Timeline

Gary Doer announces impending retirement	August 27, 2009
Leadership race officially begins	August 31, 2009
Membership deadline	September 17, 2009
Constituency delegate selection meetings	September 20 to October 3, 2009
Leadership Convention	October 17, 2009

Respondents drew attention to the party's logistical challenges, citing the

very cumbersome process, which led to long, crowded delegate selection meetings. [It also] led to people not getting in to vote, or needing to leave without the opportunity to vote [and a] long, noisy registration procedure. [It was] very difficult to understand the voting process... voting for over 100 delegates and needing to vote for the exact number, led to spoiled ballots. But I think given the circumstances, the organization of the meetings was maintained very well, and organization improved because of what was experienced at earlier meetings. All campaigns put up with the same problematic issues, and we just dealt with it.

In the end, several respondents to the delegates' survey reported that the two-stage selection process was "interesting but a bit baffling"; to others, "the system was professionally administered, but in nature was cumbersome and not user-friendly for the average constituency member."

Regardless of their suggestions for reforming the leadership selection process, most respondents felt that the 2009 race was well-run and impartial. Of the 150 delegates who responded to the survey, an overwhelming majority either

strongly agreed (46 percent) or agreed (37 percent) that "This year's NDP Leadership Convention was administered professionally." Similar proportions of respondents believed that the convention "produced a fair result;" 85 percent either agreed (24) or strongly agreed (61) with the statement, compared with just 11 percent who disagreed or strongly disagreed. "From a state of surprise and disarray," wrote one respondent, "an amazing job was done in short order. Kudos to all the volunteers and paid employees." Said another, "I think that all things considered (short time frame, the fact that no one saw Doer's retirement coming, the fact that the Party hasn't had to hold a leadership convention in 21 years), the selection process worked adequately."

Nonetheless, NDP President, Lorraine Sigurdson addressed these concerns at the midpoint of the campaign. Referring to the possibility of once again abandoning the convention process in favour of an OMOV system, she said, "I'm sure some people will want it... I think we'll wait for the dust to settle and have a look at it" (in Skerritt, 2009).

Discussion

The foregoing analysis has established a strong case against maintaining the use of delegate conventions as a means of selecting the next leader of the Manitoba NDP; the party neither received the benefits, nor escaped the drawbacks, of that particular leadership selection method. Should the party opt for reform, direct selection systems present themselves as alternatives.

A return to the (yet untested) one-member, one-vote system appears to be a leading avenue for reform – whether due to its prominence across Canada, its reputation as the newest (and, by extension, most democratically-evolved) process,⁸ its simplicity, or the fact that it was once incorporated in the party's constitution. Among respondents to the delegates' survey, a majority (51 percent) supported the adoption of OMOV – a relatively high proportion, considering the many options presented⁹ and the fact that the respondents, as delegates, would relinquish their gate-keeping role under this reform. Among all respondents, the existing system received the second-highest level of support (22 percent), followed closely by a "modified" version of the convention process (21 percent).

Despite OMOV's relative popularity, a balanced examination must begin by revisiting the last instance in which the Manitoba NDP changed its method of leadership selection. On February 4, 2007, delegates to the NDP's annual convention abandoned the "one-member, one-vote" process that had been established in the aftermath of Doer's victory in 1988. The motion to return to the delegate convention for-

⁸ See Cross (1996:308-313) and Mair (1994: 15).

⁹ Respondents were asked "In the future, how do you think the Manitoba NDP should select its next leader?" The following five options were provided as part of the survey: through the same delegated convention process this year; using a one-member, one-vote system; allowing elected caucus members (MLAs) to select the leader; using a modified delegated convention process; or other (please specify).

mat was introduced by representatives from the Manitoba Federation of Labour and, while carrying the two-thirds majority necessary to make changes to the party's constitution, was criticized by grassroots members, opposition parties, academics, and the media as a "Power grab by big labour" (Welch, 2007b).¹⁰ New Democrat Jim Maloway, then-MLA for Elmwood, suggested that the reversion to a convention process "takes us back to the 1970s." Progressive Conservative party leader, Hugh McFadyen, also characterized the move as "an attempt by special interest groups to reassert their authority" following the expansion of the leadership selectorate decades earlier (in Welch, 2007b). These criticisms were echoed in the delegates' survey, where negative comments about the role of labour in the leadership contest outnumbered positive responses by a significant margin. The role of unions within the Manitoba NDP remains a highly divisive issue, one that will be central to any discussion about how the party selects its leader in the future.

Support for a return to a delegated convention amongst attendees of the 2007 annual convention was primarily concerned that their leaders could be chosen by "party tourists". Conventions were viewed as a means of mediating the influence of new members, such that their support for leadership contenders was filtered through delegates, most of whom had dedicated significant, long-term support to the party.

As discussed earlier, this same series of concerns was raised repeatedly by delegates to the 2009 Leadership Convention. Considering the resistance reflected in the results of the Manitoba NDP convention survey, an earlier membership cut-off date may help to assuage these concerns. Of those respondents to the delegates' survey who indicated a preference, the vast majority suggested a one-year or six-month membership period for new members, with provisions made for membership renewals. This would necessitate lengthier leadership campaigns, if the party wished to take full advantage of the opportunity to recruit new members. At worst, a pre-campaign cut-off date would prevent any sort of drive for new members. Presuming that most leadership campaigns take place over a six to eight week period, however, the party is left with few options when it comes to early membership deadlines. One respondent highlighted the dilemma: "I was at MANY delegate selection meetings and the problems lay in so many unexperienced [sic] and new party members not understanding or being familiar with process. I feel the delegate meeting problems could be solved by not having members newer than, say, six months participating... however this hampers fundraising and 'party renewal'. So it is not a real solution."

Given the representational concerns with a pure OMOV system, reformers may find a popular compromise in a process employed by the federal New Democratic Party in 2003. At that time, members representing labour maintained a proportion (25 percent) of the total votes, leaving the remainder (75 percent) to be decided through a traditional

one-member, one-vote process. The federal NDP model may be adapted to the Manitoba context, by allowing labour (20 percent) and youth (5 percent) a fixed proportion of the final vote. Doing so would allow rank-and-file members to vote directly for the next leader, without having their influence mediated through delegates. At the same time, the process preserves the influence of affiliated groups, at a smaller proportion than the general membership.

New Democrats may also consider a weighted-constituency model, appealing to those who seek to expand the party's support base or the visibility of its next leader. Under this system, leadership candidates would compete for "points" – an equal number of which are distributed among all constituencies. By encouraging leadership contenders to visit all constituencies, not just those with large existing membership rolls, this form of direct selection may hold certain party-building appeal. This is especially true for New Democrats in regions where the party is historically weak, including Manitoba's rural south. Said one rural respondent to the delegates' survey: "I was offended that my constituency did not have the opportunity to hear leadership candidates speak (even by video tape or streaming) at the delegate selection process. Some constituencies heard the leadership candidates, some even had opportunities to ask questions." According to another, who may favour the adoption of a weighted-constituency model, "Rural Manitoba is already on the outs with the NDP due to policies (or should I say lack of) policies both at the Provincial and Federal levels."

Outside a limited number of proponents in rural areas, however, few Manitoba New Democrats have an incentive to equalize the influence granted to each constituency. Doing so may help to broaden the party's support base, but – given the province's deep geographic cleavages – the electoral benefits may be outweighed by the costs to member equality. Furthermore, at present, no New Democratic Party in Canada employs a weighted-constituency model for selecting its leader.

While the merits of direct selection models address several of the challenges the Manitoba NDP faced in its 2009 convention, the party faces few of the pressures typically associated with a move to a universal balloting system. As Cross (1996: 296) concluded in his historical analysis of leadership selection methods in the Canadian provinces, "The primary motivations behind adoption of direct election have been a desire to revitalize a party following either a disappointing election result or a sharp decline in public support, and to adopt a system that more closely parallels popular perceptions of participatory democracy."¹¹ While the former conditions were present when the Manitoba NDP

10 The motion carried by a vote of 263 to 123 (71% in favor).

11 Cross (1996: 297) continues: "Only two of the twelve parties were in power when they decided to select their future leaders through direct election, the Alberta PCs and the PQ. While both held a majority of seats in their respective provincial legislatures, both trailed opposition parties in published public opinion polls. Of the other ten parties to adopt direct election, six formed their province's official opposition and four were third-place parties. It is significant that none of these twelve parties was a clear favourite to win the subsequent election when they decided to opt for direct selection... Many of these parties saw direct leadership selection as a way to attract new members and generally to revitalize."

changed its constitution in the aftermath of the 1988 election, they certainly do not apply in 2011. Probe Research polls dating back to the 2007 Provincial Election indicated that support for the New Democrats remained consistently above 40 percent – more than enough to guarantee a legislative majority in Manitoba's two-and-a-half-party system.¹² This was confirmed by the results of the 2011 provincial election, which saw Selinger's NDP not only retain government, but in fact earn the largest majority in modern Manitoba history. It is safe to say that any negative attention to its 2009 leadership selection process has not affected the popularity of the New Democratic Party.

Of course, the Manitoba New Democrats may opt to retain the delegate convention model. A universal ballot is not without its detractors, many of whom cite the majoritarian nature of the process (including the potential marginalization of traditionally- and numerically-disadvantaged groups, like women, members of visible minority groups, and rural Canadians). While research suggests these fears are unfounded (Cross, 1996: 308-315), the perception may remain real for many Manitoba New Democrats. Second, previous studies *do* suggest that, while members require fewer resources to participate in a universal ballot campaign versus a convention, the costs are shifted to the leadership contenders, who must now appeal to a far broader electorate (Archer and Whitehorn, 1997-253; Cross, 1996: 315).

For these and other reasons, one in five respondents to the delegates' survey remain in support of the system. One proponent argued that the delegate convention model is

better than [a] one-member, one-vote system and any other system I can think of because it 1] energizes party members collectively; 2] provides more good publicity and media attention than paid advertising could ever provide; 3] obliges candidates to focus their ideas and "sell" them to the general population, including party members who might be delegates; 4] follows long-established tradition in a democratic process with a high degree of acceptance in many sectors (e.g. churches; unions), thus mirroring the democratic process at work in the legislature where "delegate" MLAs make decisions and referendums are rare.

Resistance to the move to a one-member, one-vote system will come from the party's labour contingent – a group that stands to lose most from the abandonment of the delegated convention model. Given that a two-thirds majority is required to make the necessary amendments to the party's constitution, and given labour's guaranteed presence at the convention (20 percent of delegates), success may be challenging for would-be reformers.¹³ Moreover, the super-majority required to change the party's constitution requires reformers to agree upon a single alternative model. This may divide opponents of the current system, and, despite all of the shortcomings associated with the status quo, institutional stasis may prevail. As one survey respondent charac-

terized the convention process, "I don't think it was perfect but I can't come up with a better system." It was "the best of imperfect systems," said another.

Conclusion

The 2009 Manitoba NDP leadership race did not accrue many of the benefits typically associated with delegate conventions. The contest demonstrated that uncompetitive leadership races can struggle to maintain the focus of the public, and that media attention can be a double-edged sword when negative coverage outweighs the positive. The Manitoba case also provided evidence that collective decision-making does not necessarily occur at leadership conventions, and that the constitutionally-prescribed representation of traditionally- or numerically-disadvantaged groups is not necessarily guaranteed. Lastly, the NDP race illustrated how new members can become a sizeable force during a convention-style leadership campaign – an observation that refutes suggestions that the delegate-selection process permits committed party members to control the system, to the exclusion of potential party "tourists".

At the same time, the Manitoba NDP leadership race also confirmed many of the negative stereotypes associated with delegate conventions. According to the results of our delegates' survey, many participants viewed the system as exclusive and elitist, characterizing the delegate selection process as paternalistic, unequal, and antiquated. Many within the party and provincial media also criticized the convention process as complex and unwieldy.

While the 2009 experience may suggest the party is ripe for reform of its leadership selection process, a move to direct selection is by no means guaranteed. The impetus for reform has likely waned, given the party's continued electoral success and a diversity of opinion as to a preferred alternative. Nonetheless, the party's abandonment of the direct selection method in 2007 raises real questions as to whether the NDP really is "Getting Better All the Time," as its convention slogan suggested. A closer look at its history and sentiments of its convention delegates suggests that the NDP may once again consider adopting a one-member, one-vote or hybrid model.

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¹² Probe Research posts the results of its quarterly "Provincial Party Standings" polls on its website: <http://probe-research.com>.

¹³ Reasons for reformer optimism include the fact that labour was unable to fill all of its delegate spots at the last, high-profile convention, at which the leadership of the party was at stake; with this in mind, questions surround the ability of unions to muster enough support at a convention to stall a concerted attempt at reform.

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