

INCENTIVES FOR ACTIVISM IN A MORIBUND POLITICAL PARTY:

THE CASE OF THE BC LIBERALS

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explains why individuals are active in the British Columbia Liberal Party, considering it was finished as a viable force in BC politics following the 1975 election. What are their motivations and incentives, and the factors that govern them, given the party's inability to reward its workers in terms of winning elections? The analysis is conducted using a two-pronged theoretical approach. This approach posits first, that incentives are dependent on, and independent of, the Liberal Party's ends, including its political principles and its goal of being elected. Second, it posits their incentives arise from both personal gain and psychological needs.

Using survey data collected from the BC Liberal Party 1987 leadership convention, I demonstrate that activists are inspired by a variety of motivations that are both dependent on, and independent of, the party's ends. Due to their distinct ideological orientation and purposive concerns, the activists would not fit in any other provincial party. Analysis also reveals that there are two groups of Liberal activists--optimists and realists regarding the future success of the party. Paradoxically, the least optimistic are the most involved in party activity, and the most hopeful are the least involved. Evidence derived from the data supported my explanation that optimists are motivated by false beliefs engendered by biased cognitive inferences. I demonstrated that closeness to the federal Liberal party influences the realists' activism in the provincial party.

The existing literature on incentives for political party activism tends to focus on patronage, ideology and party-related concerns, such as policy, issues, leaders and candidates. As such, it diminishes the importance of psychological motivations, particularly cognitive biases. This thesis found they played an equally powerful role in governing motivations for political party activism. In this regard, this thesis has contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of party activism.