

*Kelly Blidook*

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**Constituency Influence  
in Parliament**  
Countering the Centre



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# Acknowledgments

A few years ago, in the course of conducting the research for this book, I felt that I had a particular story to tell, a story that I believed to be about representation. Putting the story together involved examining Private Members' Business (PMB), and I was asked more than once, "But does it matter?" In other words, does Private Members' Business change anything? I didn't want to spend time focusing upon the policy impact of PMB, as I felt it detracted from the real story. I was interested in legislative behaviour, not in policy outcomes. At one point, I referred to the findings on policy impact found in Chapter 7 of this book as "icing on the cake – but really bad icing on a really good cake." My concern was then, and continues to be, that people would think that I was really talking about PMB when I have always believed that I *really* wasn't. In fact, I still feel that my story is not about PMB.

In the end, oddly, those with more experience than me were correct (or at least more correct than me) – though don't tell my former colleagues that I ever said so. My story, in case it isn't clear later, is about Members of Parliament: why they do the things they do, how one small part of representative democracy functions, and, more broadly, what the implications are for Parliament. As this story depends upon PMB to be told properly, however, then the story of PMB must also be told. I finally believe those who kept telling me that this was so, and I hope that I have done them, my story, and PMB some degree of justice in the pages that follow.

To that end, it is necessary to thank those who were most instrumental in helping this project come to fruition. At the pinnacle, and deserving of greater thanks than I can put into words, is Stuart Soroka. With a few years to reflect on all that he did, I can honestly say that I cannot imagine a time or a circumstance when he could have done a more effective job

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And Christine – I'm the luckiest guy on Earth (or at least there is no logical way of explaining it). This is for you.





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# **Constituency Influence in Parliament**



# 1

## Parliament and Its Members: Representation and Governance

The Canadian Parliament has arguably been both overstudied and understudied: there are a number of things that we study a lot and understand rather well, but there are others that we study very little and understand poorly. The narratives regarding power, politics, and people within Canada's highest political institution are based on the more widely studied components and are widely understood among those who study Canadian government. They point toward a strong executive, a weak legislature, a few powerful people, and many "nobodies," all working in a system where representation is accomplished far more through party leaders and appointments than through mass election.

Nevertheless, there are some curious anomalies that simply do not fit the broader narratives about Parliament and parties. This book began simply as an inquiry into one of these anomalies, but over time became a much broader investigation that, although not directly opposing these narratives, certainly questions the breadth of their assumptions and aims to provide a much finer tuned assessment of Parliament's purpose.

The initial question was why, given the apparent uselessness of Private Members' Business (PMB) in the Canadian system, literally hundreds of bills and motions are introduced during each parliament. Presumably Members of Parliament (MPs) are smart, arguably rational, and even resourceful individuals. What can they possibly be thinking? Is it likely that so many of them simply don't realize the futility of their actions? Or is it possible that some substantive purpose is actually being served?

After some initial investigation, additional questions arose. First, since MPs can, at best, have only a single item debated and voted upon in a given parliament, why do many of them introduce multiple items?

Further, why have both the success rate of items and attention to PMB appeared to increase in recent years?

The conventional response to any questions about PMB (and about a range of other parliamentary avenues) is that *it does not matter*. I view this response in the context of a broader narrative, whose message – intentional or not – is that *Parliament does not matter*. Indeed, we have amassed a good deal of compelling evidence that makes this message of Parliament’s irrelevance increasingly clear. We are left, however, with a number of puzzles in the poorly understood avenues of our Parliament that pose a problem for this narrative. So it is with admiration for, as well as skepticism of, this conventional understanding of Parliament that this book takes a different tack and looks into the ways in which Parliament might matter.

The reason for pursuing these questions is that they highlight an aspect of Parliament that has not been effectively or systematically explored. The reason for questioning the broader narrative is that Parliament, like all political institutions, changes. Sometimes these changes are the result of actors that wish to weaken Parliament; at other times, they are the result of those that wish to strengthen it. Overall, Parliament cannot be entirely powerless, and on some occasions it appears to have a greater effect on how Canadians govern themselves than on other occasions.

It would be an enormous and probably fruitless task to argue in the next 120 pages that *Parliament matters*, but a more manageable one to attempt to show that *there are policy avenues suggesting that Parliament does matter*, with regard to both how Canadians are represented and how they are governed. In pursuing this goal, this book will introduce empirical evidence never before presented and contribute important insights regarding the motivations for, and the results of, actions by Canada’s elected lawmakers. After all, if Parliament doesn’t matter, then MPs are simply one vote per seat and little else. If, however, we truly examine what MPs do and, more ambitiously, why each MP does it differently, then we find ourselves asking about the effect that each has on the face, the shape, and the output of government. Thus, this book also explores how those who are elected to Canada’s Parliament are important. It is these people as individuals – what they do, why they do it, and on whose behalf they appear to be doing it – that are the focus of this book.

On 14 February 2007, the House of Commons passed Bill C-288, “An Act to ensure Canada meets its global climate change obligations under the Kyoto Protocol” (also known as the Kyoto Protocol Implementation Act), by a substantial majority. The Private Member’s Bill, first introduced

by Pablo Rodriguez of the opposition Liberal Party in May 2006, called on the Conservative government to meet climate change targets set out in the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, an international agreement to which Canada became a signatory under a previous Liberal government. MPs of all the opposition parties supported C-288, as did approximately 63% of Canadians at the time (Laghi 2007). What was so striking about this event, besides the fact that Private Members' Bills rarely become law, was that it directly contradicted the government's stated policy of not meeting the Kyoto targets. What this event signified at the time, and what remains true today, is that MPs, through the use of Private Members' Business, are no longer limited to simply questioning government policies and proposing new ideas; they may now, with enough support, pass legislation that can either affect government policy or, at the very least, force the government to contravene a statute.

Issues of national scope are not the only ones pursued by MPs through the avenue of PMB. Some items are more specific in terms of the region or people of focus, such as Wally Firth's (NDP, Northwest Territories) "An Act respecting increased representation for the Northwest Territories" (C-135, 29th Parliament, 2nd session) or Ronald Duhamel's (Liberal, Saint Boniface) "An Act respecting Iranian New Year's Day" (C-338, 34th Parliament, 3rd session). In some cases, items may be clearly local in nature, as well as competitive. In the 3rd session of the 34th Parliament, Gilbert Parent (Liberal, Niagara Centre) asked the House to pass "An Act declaring the City of Welland to be the mural city of Canada" (C-378), only to be followed after the Christmas recess by Dave Stupich's (NDP, Nanaimo-Cowichan) introduction of the more aptly titled "An Act declaring Chemainus the Mural Capital of Canada" (C-398). Neither bill reached second reading.

MPs may use PMB to pursue a range of purposes. Chantal Hébert, national affairs columnist for the *Toronto Star*, suggested at the conclusion of the spring 2010 sitting of Parliament that PMB was the source of some of MPs' most significant policy debates (Hébert 2010). This is not to say that all PMB items have broad national importance, although certainly many do. Many focus upon very specific or localized interests. Some items gain national prominence, while others remain off the radar screen. Some items spark debate, while others propose policies that have few detractors. And behind each proposal is an MP who has decided that his or her issue deserves a place on a crowded agenda. Some feel that a single issue deserves attention, while others propose many different

items on a range of issues. Many MPs propose nothing at all, although over the past few decades slightly over half of MPs have introduced at least one item.

Why is it, then, that so many items are introduced each parliament through this little-recognized parliamentary avenue, where most observers see little chance of success? This study suggests that there is much more to this peculiarity than MPs' pet projects and one-upmanship. As one of the few, and perhaps the best, avenues for individual action in the House of Commons, PMB is a window into both MP behaviour and, by extension, the broader functions of Parliament.

Regarding MP behaviour as potentially *representative* behaviour, this book addresses a key question at the core of democratic theory: whose interests are pursued through the actions of the representative? For example, does PMB provide evidence of MPs engaging in "dyadic representation" – that is, acting in their constituencies' interests? Or do MPs use PMB to engage in partisan behaviour, or perhaps to affect public policies?

By focusing first on representation of the constituency, this book probes a form of representation that has received little attention in the Canadian context. In cases such as Canada's, where individual members of the legislature are directly elected by geographic constituencies, the dyadic representational relationship is often considered a key one in the broader outcome of democratic responsiveness. In Canada, however, where political decision making has become increasingly centralized (Savoie 1999), power is declining in political institutions (Savoie 2010), and where there is a comparatively limited role for individual MPs (Franks 1987; Docherty 1997, 2005), there is significant concern about the existence of meaningful, substantive representation by these elected members. Indeed, in an era classified by some as one when the "democratic deficit" looms large (Jenson 1995; Martin 2002; Aucoin and Turnbull 2003; Anderson and Goodyear-Grant 2005; Docherty 2005), the degree to which publics are represented by their elected MPs and the degree to which such representation has any impact on governance are of vital importance.

### **Concerns about Democracy in Canada**

The desire to better understand what our MPs do and why they do it stems from a broader concern about public perceptions of Parliament and of the Canadian political process. Over the past two decades, between two-thirds and four-fifths of Canadians have agreed that MPs "lose touch" with those who elect them (Blais and Gidengil 1991; Clarke and

Kornberg 1992; Canadian Election Study 1997, 2000, 2008<sup>1</sup>). This perception regarding the public's interests and the insignificant degree to which elected representatives are aware of or act on them underlies a broader concern about the state of democracy felt by scholars of Canadian politics (Jenson 1995; Howe and Northrup 2000; Anderson and Goodyear-Grant 2005; Docherty 2005; Smith 2007).

The term "democratic deficit" has been used in various contexts, and former Prime Minister Paul Martin used it to describe the state of representative democracy in Parliament (Aucoin and Turnbull 2003, 428). Martin's stated intention was to make Parliament more democratic by empowering MPs both individually and collectively (Martin 2002). He argued that a decline in party discipline and confidence measures, as well as a corresponding decline in what he referred to as "mindless adversarialism" (Martin 2002, 10), were necessary in order to enhance democratic representation.

The 1990s also saw Canadians reject "executive federalism" and national/constitutional politics through the Charlottetown Accord referendum. A broad cross-section of Canadians also rejected the heavily leader-centred "third party system" through the results of the 1993 federal election, and opted for more populist alternatives (Carty et al. 2000). This change in the Canadian electorate's tolerance for executive decision making is part of what Neviite (1996) refers to as the "decline of deference." It has led, some argue, to a significant change in the kinds of politicians who are sent to Ottawa. The new parties that found success in the "fourth party system" were highly regionalized in their support bases, were factionalized in how they communicated with those bases, and called for a more populist style of representation in Ottawa (Carty et al. 2000).

With the landslide Liberal victory in 1993 that saw a 66% turnover in the House of Commons, a significant change in the thinking of MPs was observed. Seventy-four percent of them had perceptions of their roles that were not in line with traditional party discipline, stating that representing their constituencies was their top priority (Docherty 1997, 145). Further, these new MPs were significantly more likely than experienced MPs to perceive independent, constituency-based action as something that could boost a personal vote (220).<sup>2</sup> Indeed, MPs may feel significantly constrained by the institutional structure and therefore look for any opportunities to act in a manner different from the institutional norm – through what Rocca (2007) has termed "institutional safety valves" in the context of the United States.



Docherty's work further suggests that the expectations MPs hold at the start of their parliamentary careers, regarding their roles as representatives of their constituencies, often change once they gain experience. This change in perceived role usually involves MPs' becoming more loyal to their parties and taking less direction from their constituencies.

The MPs elected in this new period in Canadian politics were more predisposed toward constituency-based representation, but we do not have a clear understanding of what forms of representation exist. We do not know, for example, whether constituency-based representation occurs in a significant or substantive manner in Canada. If it does occur, we need to understand what causes it, in what forms it can be observed, and what impact it has on the output of Parliament.

### **Political Representation**

This book focuses on "substantive" representation as defined by Pitkin (1967). Pitkin distinguishes between "substantive" and "descriptive" representation, the former being regarded as "acting for," and the latter as "standing for," a given constituency. Specifically, descriptive representation requires a given likeness or similarity between the electorate and the representative – being male can be seen as being "representative" of males, for instance. In contrast, "substantive" representation involves observable actions that representatives engage in – what the representative *does*, as opposed to who or what the representative *is*. Pitkin argues that focusing upon the substance of representational activities "supplies us with standards for judging the representative's action, for deciding whether he has represented well or ill" (142).<sup>3</sup>

It is this substantive version of representation that occupies the burgeoning literature on public preferences and policy actions, at both the individual and aggregate levels (e.g., Miller and Stokes 1963; Weissberg 1978; Page and Shapiro 1983; Stimson et al. 1995; Erikson et al. 2002; Soroka and Wlezien 2010. For the Canadian case specifically, see Tremblay 1998; Petry 1999; Soroka and Wlezien 2004; Petry and Mendelsohn 2004; Penner et al. 2006; Soroka et al. 2009). And it is this version of *active* representation that is the focus here. Tremblay states: "From an 'acting for' viewpoint, the nature of the issues, policies and legislation an MP pursues determines whether or not representation occurs" (1998, 439).

Wahlke and colleagues (1962) distinguish two dimensions: the "focus" and the "style" of representation. "Focus" is best described as the "who" of representation: for example, does the representative *focus* on a partisan,

geographic, or national constituency in choosing whom to represent? “Style” is best described as the “how” of representation: for example, is the representative a *delegate* who follows orders or acts upon demands, or a *trustee* who acts more independently? Thus, focus and style are two separate (although perhaps related in practice) components of representation.

Edmund Burke makes the apparent distinction between the two styles in his *Speech to the Electors of Bristol*. Advocating the trustee style of representation, he tells his audience: “Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion” (1975, 157). Burke’s “trustee” is understood to be one who should be dutifully aware of constituents’ interests, and maintain those interests above his or her own personal self-interest. Yet the trustee must also give the interest of the whole nation priority over any local or specialized interest.

In a similar vein, John Stuart Mill also felt that elected representatives must be mindful of their constituencies’ interests, but argues that those who hold office are to be those of “superior powers of mind” and that “electors will not do wisely, if they insist on absolute conformity to their opinions” (Mill and Gray 1991, 376).

In contrast, the delegate concept of representation holds that representatives should act primarily upon the opinions of constituents (electorally defined), and that decision making should be based upon expressions of those opinions in the aggregate. Simply put, there is much less independence in this decision-making process. This notion of representation has become particularly dominant in the US and is apparent in the *Federalist Papers*. In considering the House of Representatives specifically, James Madison wrote: “As it is essential to liberty that the government in general should have a common interest with the people, so it is particularly essential that the branch of it under consideration should have an immediate dependence on, and an intimate sympathy with, the people” (Hamilton et al. 2003, no. 52). And although one of the Federalists’ goals was certainly that the institutions of the US federal government would deliberate for the good of the whole (see, e.g., Hamilton et al. 2003, no. 10), the papers did not generally advocate systems to greatly increase the independence of representatives from their constituents. In short, their goal was to avoid having representatives “lose touch.”

Wahlke and colleagues’ “style” (1962) captures much of this trustee-versus-delegate distinction. At the same time, “focus” centres on the

population of citizens that an elected official chooses to represent. This focus can be upon only those who voted for the official, upon the constituency as a whole, or upon some larger constituency, such as the region or nation.<sup>4</sup>

In reality, individual lawmakers do not only make decisions based upon these two simplified dimensions. Most legislators are members of political parties, and are often expected to act within the constraints that the political party places upon them. In some cases, the party makes decisions for them, which can often present the individual MP with a distinct complication beyond focus and style.

Beer (1969) effectively captures this third dimension in his description of “party representation,” where elected members are primarily representatives of their party, chosen by the electorate principally because of the party’s platform. Voters in constituencies may elect individuals to office, but their reasons for choosing any particular individual may have little to do with the individual himself or herself. Party representatives thus take office with the understanding that they have committed to a course of action by being elected under the party banner: “According to this theory, voters organize or join a political party and by means of its conference agree on a program; they then nominate candidates who advocate this program before the electorate at large. Candidates elected on this program must stand by it. This is precisely how they fulfil their responsibility to the electorate” (Beer 1969, 90).

More recently, Carey (2009) distinguishes between the collective accountability of parties and the individual accountability of legislators, and notes how the two present different expectations and may result in different pressures for action at the individual level. Party behaviour, or a lack thereof, is therefore another dimension along which representatives may vary. In the Canadian case, this can often result in the party taking priority over the individual. As Hockin (1966) puts it: “If an MP is a ‘delegate’ at all in the Canadian political process, he is not so much a delegate of his constituency, as a ‘delegate’ of his party to his constituency” (176; see also Hoffman and Ward 1970, 67-69).<sup>5</sup>

This third dimension of the political party places some constraints upon both style and focus. A party might encourage MPs to focus more collectively on the group of geographic constituencies that elect it, and to act in a delegate-like style in representing those interests. On the other hand, the party facilitates a broadly national focus, which may coincide with a stronger collectivist form of party behaviour – or “party delegate” behaviour by MPs – whereas the representative’s style as it relates to his

or her constituency alone would best fit the definition of a trustee. In short, the same possibilities that are open to individuals are also open to parties, and elected members of these parties must constantly decide how much direction to take from the party in choosing their actions. As party discipline increases, the ability to act individually and upon the wishes of the constituency generally decreases.

In their roles – most unflatteringly described as “trained seals” (Aiken 1974) or “nobodies” (Trudeau 1993) – MPs have, for the most part, acted principally as delegates of parties, with a national focus and a trustee style with regard to public preferences.<sup>6</sup> MPs are seen as having relatively few opportunities to act as individuals. Smith (1999, 405) states: “The disciplined character of parliamentary parties helps to strengthen their capacity to advance national policies while at the same time to resist the importunities of those seeking policy decisions that favour only themselves.” This mode of representation has certainly characterized the party structure of the first three party systems in Canada, and to a lesser extent the fourth party system (Carty et al. 2000).<sup>7</sup> There is clear evidence of this in Canada’s tradition of executive-centred government and collectivist policy making (Franks 1987). In short, most Canadian MPs tend to be *party delegates* for most of their legislative duties. With regard to government legislation, for example, there are extremely few votes in which parties do not vote as cohesive units. According to Franks (79), “The honourable member is the basis of the system of representation, but in comparison with the prominence of party leaders, and the clarity of the contest between parties, his role is confused and obscure. The prime minister and party are the central, stable elements of representation.”

Ward (1963, 13) brings together the possibilities as well as the realities of individual representation in the House of Commons as follows:

[MPs] are free to define their own functions as they like. They are free to follow their leaders blindly, free to bolt the party, free to vote as their constituents want them to, or free to consider their constituents mistaken, and on each of these matters the responsibility is entirely their own. Yet this apparent freedom ... becomes illusory when one considers the nature of party organization ... the freedom of parliamentary representatives is ordinarily incompatible with the workings of the cabinet system of government, and the theory that a representative is free to use his personal judgment ... can remain acceptable only so long as the majority of representatives identify the national interest with their

party's interest; in effect, they must use their freedom to subjugate themselves.

In this view of Parliament, the concepts of focus and style are meaningful only at the margins, but are informative nevertheless. Recognizing that the behavioural norm in Canada across the three dimensions is that of *party/national/trustee*, this book seeks evidence of behaviour that is exactly the opposite: *individual/constituency/delegate*. This distinction matters because it lies at the heart of how citizens are likely to view those who govern them. Put another way, the former behavioural norm is likely to elicit a response that an MP has "lost touch" with his or her constituency, whereas the latter should indicate that an MP is "in touch" with his or her electors.

### **The House of Commons**

For the most part, research on Canada's legislature goes only so far as to highlight the limited role of Canada's MPs in actually legislating. Some researchers have discouraged moving beyond simply looking at the role of institutions in facilitating collective behaviour in Canada.<sup>8</sup> Although there is certainly value in this form of research, I disagree with the view, widely found in the literature, that it is the "right" approach. With only a few exceptions, the role of individual MPs, both as representatives and as policy actors, is virtually ignored. Probing the purposive and representative roles of a large number of individual MPs – as was done by Kornberg and Mishler (1976) regarding perceptions of influence of (and by) individual MPs, and Hoffman and Ward (1970) regarding the difference in perception of representational roles (or lack thereof) among French and English MPs<sup>9</sup> – has been criticized as inappropriate in the Canadian context (Stewart 1977). Consequently, there has been a substantial void in research on the individual parliamentarian in Canada. Why is this the case?

Among the most important factors shaping Canadian policy and government is the powerful position of the executive vis-à-vis the legislature. Even on a collective basis, the House of Commons is not seen as wielding significant power in terms of either representation or governance, except insofar as party leaders put it to use. Atkinson and Thomas (1993, 425) state that "Parliament's role in lawmaking is restricted to refining, ratifying, and legitimating decisions." Pross (1992) similarly points to the legislature's function as simply bestowing democratic legitimacy upon decisions made elsewhere.

When it comes to governance in Canada, it is the executive that fills the major decision-making and policy roles. It is Cabinet that presents most legislation and that must maintain the confidence of the House. It is also Cabinet that is empowered to propose the raising and spending of money, an exclusive power not permitted to backbench government MPs or opposition MPs (Franks 1987, 11). As Stewart (1977, 75) stated: “The remorseless slaughter of private members’ motions and public bills reveals the modern constitution. It is the ministers, not the private members, who are held responsible for the governing of the country. They are expected to take the initiative.”

Savoie (1999) traces the declining role of both Parliament and even Cabinet in recent years to the centralization of power within the Prime Minister’s Office and other central agencies.<sup>10</sup> He refers to Cabinet as simply a “focus group” for the prime minister, and questions the very relevance of Parliament as a collective body, let alone the relevance of individual members (339).<sup>11</sup> He also points out that confidence measures, which are meant in theory to keep the executive accountable to the legislature, often work in reverse in practice. MPs in the government backbench rarely withdraw support for government policies for fear of having to fight another election, or at the very least of being punished by their party leader.

It is the confidence principle, then, that can be, and often is, effectively used by the executive to shape policy outcomes to its liking, and to ensure that proposals are passed by the legislature.<sup>12</sup> Critics, including the former Reform Party, which rose to prominence in Canada in the 1990s, have suggested that this principle be relaxed to allow MPs to be more independent (Savoie 1999; Smith 1999). Although there have been recent changes in how votes in the House are classified for the purpose of confidence, the prime minister still decides in many cases whether to make any given vote one of confidence, which in practice results in the confidence principle’s becoming a means by which the executive exerts power over the legislature instead of one by which the legislature keeps the executive accountable to it.<sup>13</sup>

The centrality and pre-eminence of the executive vis-à-vis the legislature are complemented by a second institutional feature of similar (and related) importance: the powerful role of political parties and their leaders (Franks 1987; Docherty 1997). Again, this is a result of the confidence principle and how it is put into practice in Canada. Thomas (1985, 43) notes that “the Canadian cabinet parliamentary system elevates parties over individual politicians ... and most actions by individuals are, in fact,

forms of party behaviour.” Rewards and punishments are used by each party’s leadership to maintain party discipline, with the most powerful rewards resting in the hands of the prime minister, including patronage and ministerial appointments. Punishments might include demotion from ministerial positions or committee chairs for government MPs and from critic portfolios for opposition MPs, as well as expulsion from caucus in extreme cases.<sup>14</sup> MPs from all parties are held in check because they may risk losing their party’s electoral candidacy if they lose favour with the party leader (Docherty 1997; Savoie 1999; Carty et al. 2000).

The result of all this is a form of MP behaviour that rarely deviates from partisan lines. With the clear-cut division of individual members along such lines, Stewart (1977) suggests that prioritizing constituency comes in conflict with traditional understandings of political representation in Canada.

The House also depends strongly upon the role of the “the Opposition,” whose normative role it is to check, to prod, and to ultimately replace the government (Hockin 1966, 191-91a). The democratic function that is served by the “adversarialism” in the House (Hockin 1966, 1979; Franks 1987; Smith 1999) – where the Opposition virtually always opposes the government – is not trivial. Nevertheless, it tends to result in parties that represent positions on topics of broad and national significance that the party leadership takes notice of, often, as Hockin notes, for electoral reasons (1966, 9). The issues addressed may be those that fit into a larger philosophy or system that is adhered to by a party in the longer term. This type of representation necessarily differs from the democratic function of representing and debating topics of localized interest at the federal level, where the role of the MP does not need to conform to the adversarial nature of partisan politics. Thus, one dominant form of representation tends to hold the attention of most students of the Parliament of Canada, to the exclusion of any other forms.

Further, the type of change advocated by Paul Martin as well as other political parties following the 1993 federal election required an adjustment to the powers of individual members to enhance the representative function of Parliament. In other words, the role of partisan opposition and the strict confidence measures that accompany it must be weakened to some degree in order to enhance MPs’ representative roles. Martin (2002, 10) highlights the importance of the electoral constituency and of individual MPs in suggesting that such adversarial roles are “out of step with what their constituents want, and where their own instincts lie.”

The purpose of this book, however, is not to argue for change but to provide a more complete account of what actually occurs, and to understand what some recent changes have wrought. If we seek to change Parliament further through intentional adjustments, we need to better understand the “instincts” of its members and how the current structure shapes or conflicts with them. The modern MP is constantly under pressure to make different choices, represent different constituencies, and serve different outcomes. The following chapters will explore both the institutional structure that creates these cross-pressures and the decisions that MPs make.

### **Data**

In order to investigate MP behaviours in the current parliamentary era, I examined representative legislative behaviour using a combination of datasets that track legislative activity, constituency characteristics, and MP characteristics and institutional positions. Briefly, these included election and MP data, census data, MP interviews, and legislation data. These datasets are described in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Interviews with sixteen MPs in the 39th Parliament are a unique component of this study, and focused on understanding the factors that explain the prioritizing and style of legislative actions and constituency representation. The interviews were conducted in a manner similar to that described by Kingdon (1989, 1995) in order to permit open answers to most questions yet probe specified measures of key variables that are believed to affect the style and substance of representation. Such variables include: representative role orientation, issue priorities, constituency contact and perception of constituency preferences, and principal actors that influence the individual’s resulting actions (see Appendix 1 for the interview procedure and questions). These interviews provide qualitative measures unavailable in existing datasets, and complement the evidence from the statistical analyses. They are used, for the most part, as informative and illustrative examples rather than as primary data for theory testing.

Census data are also used to measure demographic characteristics and their matching policy and political preferences within geographic constituencies. On their own, the census data permit a high degree of accuracy in measuring socio-demographic characteristics of electoral constituencies and regions. The Library of Parliament provided complementary data that included constituency-level electoral results (which permit measurement of the closeness of electoral races and the partisan



distribution of votes in each constituency) and MP data (which provide measures of experience and institutional positions held).

This combination of census, electoral, and legislative datasets, along with the complementary MP interviews, enabled this study to cover a wider range and gain a more nuanced view of legislative behaviour and representation than any empirical study completed in Canada.

### **Outline of this Book**

Chapter 2 takes a deeper look at the theoretical and empirical literature on political representation, with a specific focus on two of Canada's more relevant comparative cases: the United Kingdom and the United States. It provides a thorough account of how electoral motivations may affect the representational behaviour of Canadian MPs, and why one should expect to find a form of dyadic representation among these MPs. The main factor that is probed is electoral motivation based on an individual "electoral connection" between the MP and his or her constituency. The manner in which both institutional structure and rational choice behaviour inform the analysis in the Canadian context is further discussed.

Chapter 3 gives an overview of the rules and process surrounding Private Members' Business, which permits bills and motions on matters, usually of a more limited scope, that are often not on the government's radar. It describes what PMB is and how its rules have changed in recent years, and discusses whether PMB provides a meaningful measure for further study of individual legislative behaviour. It also provides an overview of the legislative data used in subsequent chapters and identifies broad trends in PMB activity over time and across parties, shedding light on the role of PMB as it relates to both governance and representation. Thus, this chapter indicates where the greatest amount of attention lies with regard to these activities, and who is most likely to be successful in proposing items for Parliament to consider.

Chapter 4 begins to answer the question of what drives individual participation. It focuses on understanding who participates in PMB and why. This focus stems from an empirical irregularity, highlighted earlier, in terms of expected rational behaviour: Why are literally hundreds of Private Members' Bills and Motions drafted and introduced in the House of Commons in a regular session of Parliament if the process, according to most academic observers, serves so little purpose?

The first step in assessing the importance of PMB is to determine why MPs introduce bills and motions in the first place. Regression analysis is used to assess the impact of relevant variables upon participation in

PMB, including riding competitiveness and election proximity. The focus is on whether electoral motivations affect certain forms of participation. Data from MP interviews are also instructive here, as they provide direct responses regarding the perceived value of PMB and enable us to determine to what extent PMB may serve the needs of some MPs more effectively than those of others.

Chapters 5 and 6 tackle the question of who is best represented by the participation of MPs in PMB. Chapter 5 looks at whether electoral constituencies are represented by the legislative actions of individual MPs. This is done by assessing constituency preferences and determining correlation with legislative actions. The issue topics of introduced bills and motions are used to determine whether these constituency interests are represented on both general and specific levels. The MP interviews are also used to check whether representative relationships are apparent at a qualitative level and to determine whether responses about role orientation or policy/personal priorities relate to individual actions on specified topics.

Chapter 6 expands on the findings in Chapter 5 by focusing on whether MPs represent the interests of the nation as a whole or of partisan groupings. An MP's focus may be particularly narrow (the constituency) or much broader. Although Chapter 5 indicates how and why MPs are representative of their constituents, this is not the only possible story behind participation in PMB. Indeed, many MPs choose topics that are much broader, and the analysis in Chapter 6 takes on the different perspective and approach necessary to weed out possible representational differences.

Finally, Chapter 7 looks at whether the actions of individual MPs have any meaningful impact on policy outcomes. It is true that a small number of Private Members' Bills and Motions do pass, and this is happening more and more with items that are not always supported by the sitting government. This occurs during both majority and minority governments, which indicates that MPs from the governing party are sometimes instrumental in facilitating such legislation and that there is a willingness to charge the executive with administration of a statute that was not its own.

Not as readily apparent as the actual passing of bills is whether the ideas presented by individual MPs have any meaningful impact on the actions of the executive. Chapter 7 indicates that the participation of individual MPs in Private Members' Business does indeed have an impact on Canadian government policies that is potentially significant in both size and scope.

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