Coalition voting and minority governments in Canada

Jean-François Godbout & Bjørn Høyland

a Department of Political Science, University of Montreal, C.P. 6128, succursale Centre-ville, Montreal, QC, Canada, H3C 3J7

b Department of Political Science, University of Oslo, PO Box 1097, Blindern, NO-0317, Oslo, Norway

Available online: 09 Nov 2011

To cite this article: Jean-François Godbout & Bjørn Høyland (2011): Coalition voting and minority governments in Canada, Commonwealth & Comparative Politics, 49:4, 457-485

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14662043.2011.615168

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.
The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.
Coalition voting and minority governments in Canada

Jean-François Godbout and Bjørn Høyland

"Department of Political Science, University of Montreal, C.P. 6128, succursale Centre-ville, Montreal, QC, Canada, H3C 3J7; bDepartment of Political Science, University of Oslo, PO Box 1097, Blindern, NO-0317 Oslo, Norway

Inter-party voting coalitions in three minority cabinets were analysed: the 38th (2004–05), 39th (2006–08) and 40th (2008–11) Federal Canadian Parliaments. The paper begins by developing a simple theory to explain the formation of voting coalitions. The theory predicts that electoral incentives and policy issues drive minority government support. The main contention is that voting coalitions are more likely to form along ideological lines, as proposed by Axelrod [(1970) The Conflict of Interest (Chicago: Markham)]. However, the analysis also demonstrates that voting coalitions form along a second dimension in the Canadian Parliament, mainly on issues related to federalism and the province of Quebec. Some evidence is also provided to show that expected electoral gains could explain why certain parties choose to support the government more, despite ideological incentives.

Keywords: parliament; minority government; legislative voting coalition; Canada

Introduction

It is important to understand the dynamics of parliamentary voting coalitions. Effective representative democracies require not only that the problem of delegation be overcome, but also that agents who are empowered to act on citizens’ behalf find a way to build coalitions in order to effectively govern (Lupia & Strøm, 2008). In the context of minority governments, where no party controls a majority of the seats in parliament, the question of coalition building becomes central to the notion of democratic rule.

Minority governments usually rely on the support of at least one other party to sustain the confidence of the legislature. They are also required to build
winning coalitions with other elected members to pass legislation. Thus, when no party controls a majority of the legislature, certain parties may choose to support the cabinet most of the time, while others may decide to systematically oppose the government’s agenda. What motivates a party’s legislative strategy in this context remains difficult to explain, mainly because we find very few theories or empirical research on coalition voting in minority parliaments; a notable exception here is Strøm (1990). Indeed, most of the existing studies on this topic primarily focus on the causes and the consequences associated with the emergence of minority cabinet, rather than on their internal working.

In this paper, we propose to address this gap in the literature by studying inter-party voting coalitions in three recent minority cabinets: the 38th (2004–05), the 39th (2006–08) and the 40th (2008–11) Federal Canadian Parliaments. What makes the Canadian case interesting is that different parties, the Liberals and Conservatives, successively governed the first two of these three parliaments. In addition, each cabinet has refused to enter a formal alliance with the remaining legislative parties in the House of Commons (the New Democratic Party and the Bloc Quebecois). Rather, the Liberals and the Conservatives opted to govern with shifting majorities, relying on the support of one or more parties depending on the motion raised in the legislature. This apparent strategy is not surprising since no minority government has ever created a formal coalition to resolve legislative stalemates in the Canadian House of Commons.

Unlike in other parliamentary systems, like New Zealand or more recently the UK, the Canadian House of Commons has yet to be officially governed by a cabinet where portfolios are divided among different parties. The country did experience a number of partnerships between distinct parties at the national level, like between the Progressives and the Liberals in the first two minority governments of the 1920s; but, even under these circumstances, there was never any formal exchange of ministerial positions between two or more parties. In short, minority governments in Canada always had to rely on the support of some opposition Members of Parliament (MPs) to maintain the confidence of the House. This type of ad hoc coalition building is not unique to Canada. It is also popular in other parliamentary systems, like in Denmark and Norway, because it usually leaves the government with the highest degree of flexibility in policy-making (Strøm, 1990).

Notwithstanding work on legislative effectiveness and productivity (Jackson & Atkinson, 1980; Franks, 1987; McKelvy, 2009), we know very little about the behaviour of Canadian parties and legislators in minority governments. We know even less about the different legislative voting coalitions that minority governments induce. This is somewhat surprising if we consider that there have been 13 different minority governments since the confederation. Thus, the primary goal of this analysis is to understand how voting
majorities operate in the absence of a formal legislative alliance between two or more parties. Put differently, the paper aims to identify the reasons why certain parti(e)s are more likely to support the Liberal and the Conservative governments over the course of the 38th, 39th and 40th Parliaments.

In order to help us understand the logic behind the formation of voting or supporting coalitions in the Canadian context, we borrow from existing theories of legislative organisation. The first of these theories predicts that coalitions are more likely to occur among parties who share a common ideology (Axelrod, 1970), while the second theory predicts that coalitions form because two or more parties strongly favour a particular position that falls outside of the traditional left–right ideological opposition (Budge & Laver, 1986). We also utilise some of the key predictions of coalition stability theories (Lupia & Strom, 1995; Diermeier & Merlo, 2000) to introduce expectations concerning the outcome of potential elections as an incentive for supporting minority cabinets. To measure these expectations, we analyse the relationship between party popularity, financial resources and the likelihood of an opposition party supporting the government’s legislative agenda.

The paper is organised as follows. We begin our analysis by briefly evaluating the existing literature on cabinet formation and minority governments in parliamentary systems and by formulating a theory of inter-party voting coalitions. In the following section, we discuss the origins of the most recent minority governments in the Canadian House of Commons. In the third section, we introduce our data. In the fourth section, we develop different models to analyse legislative voting in the 38th to 40th Parliaments. In the final section, we conclude.

Theories of legislative coalitions and minority governments

There are only a handful of studies that focus explicitly on explaining legislative voting under minority governments in parliamentary systems, despite the fact that ‘undersised (minority) cabinets are a surprisingly common occurrence across a number of parliamentary democracies’ (Strom, 1990: 8). In fact, Mitchell and Nyblade (2008) calculate that minority cabinets account for about 35 per cent of all postwar governments in Western Europe.

It is generally believed that minority governments emerge in conflicting and fractionalised party systems. It is also commonly assumed that such cabinets are highly ineffective and unstable. However, Strøm (1990) maintains that these expectations are erroneous. The author shows in his analysis of Western parliamentary democracies that minority governments form as the results of rational choices made by party leaders under certain structural constraints, most notably the anticipation of future elections. Strøm also identifies
different strategies that minority cabinets can choose from to build legislative coalitions. These legislative strategies depend mostly on institutional conditions, bargaining power or party objectives. If a minority government is composed of a single party (as in all of the Canadian cases), the pursuit of office (or cabinet seats) by other parties is not an option. Thus, a cabinet is most likely to use policy concessions as a bargaining chip to build alliances around specific legislations. Unfortunately, we have yet to find a theory to explain how minority governments operate in the legislature in order to form these winning voting coalitions.

To govern, minority governments need to secure the support of parties outside of their cabinet. This is usually done by providing some form of policy benefits to opposition parties, pork barrel projects or other types of office spoils (Budge & Laver, 1986). One could think, for example, of an external agreement between the government and one or more parties. In the Canadian context, this type of coalition agreement occurred in the 29th Parliament, when the Liberals and the New Democratic Party formed an alliance to negotiate the content of bills and policy proposals before they were introduced on the floor of the House (but no cabinet positions were shared). As a consequence, the combination of the two parties guaranteed a majority of votes for the governing Liberals from 1972 until the NDP opted to break the coalition and voted against the budget in 1974.

This type of relationship between an opposition party and the government is exceptional in the Canadian case; it is more common in other countries like Israel or Italy. Consequently, in order to remain in power, virtually all Canadian minority governments had to rely on different coalition strategies to secure majorities in the House. Joe Clark’s Conservative government from 1979 to 1980 is a typical example of minority cabinet behaviour in the Canadian context: he chose to govern ‘like a majority’ even though his party could have controlled more than half of the seats by forming a legislative alliance with the handful of Social Credit MPs.

To help us understand these different types of voting coalitions, Strøm (1990) identifies a continuum of majority-building strategies that are available to minority governments. At one extreme, he situates coalitions that are formal and external, basically consisting of the same parties across each legislative vote and that are stable over time. At the other extreme, he positions shifting or ad hoc majority voting coalitions, in which minority cabinets are required to build majorities in the legislature on a vote-by-vote basis. These legislative deals will depend on the type of issue raised, logrolling or on some other variable present in the legislature. The 38th, 39th and 40th Canadian Parliaments fall under this last category.

When dealing with a formal and external coalition between two or more parties (i.e. where one party or a coalition of parties control the cabinet, and
one or more parties enter a formal coalition agreement with the cabinet to give
the government a majority in the legislature), understanding the voting
dynamic within parliament is fairly straightforward. The government will
maintain the confidence of the legislature until the formal alliance ends or a
new alliance is negotiated with one or more other parties. Legislative voting
in this context is also predictable. Assuming a high level of party discipline,
the coalition will support all bills and motions from the cabinet. Thus, analysing
parliamentary voting inside this type of government is simply a matter of exam-
ining the bargaining dynamic of cabinet formation that occurs at the beginning
of the legislature (Müeller & Strom, 2000) or until the legislature experiences a
cabinet reshuffle (Diermeier, 2006).

In the case where a minority government chooses to rely on a shifting
majority strategy instead, the process of bargaining over policy issues can
potentially arise before every single vote. Of course, it is highly unlikely that
parties engage in extensive negotiations whenever parliament divides. However, one can think that the introduction of government or supply
motions requires some sort of agreement between the cabinet and one or
more of the other opposition parties. This is most likely to be true if the adop-
tion of a government bill has the potential to turn into an issue of confidence.
And since these ongoing negotiations take the form of bargaining sessions
between the cabinet and the opposition parties, we can turn to the literature
on government formation and cabinet stability to understand the dynamic
behind the building of legislative voting coalitions.

Even though studies of parliamentary organisation have tended to ignore
the legislative consequences of minority governments, preferring instead to
focus on bargaining and the formation, stability and termination of coalitions,
some of the main conclusions of these theories can also be used to understand
shifting voting majority strategies. For example, in his seminal book, Riker
(1962) predicts that a government coalition will form in order to produce a
minimal winning combination of parties, which will contain the smallest
number of elected MPs from all the potential majority coalitions in the legisla-
ture. The logic behind this coalition-building strategy is that fewer concessions
and cabinet posts will have to be offered when the majority size is close to 50
per cent of the seats. This finding was also later confirmed in a game theory
model of legislative bargaining (Baron & Ferejohn, 1989).

Axelrod (1970) proposed an alternative and more realistic theory of
cabinet formation, stipulating that the parties who will form a winning alli-
ance must necessarily be adjacent to one another along an ideological contin-
num (e.g. left–right); thus, he highlights the importance of party ideology
in predicting coalition formation. The main contention of this body of literature
is that cabinet coalitions should form between parties who share an ideological
common ground (Axelrod, 1970; Laver & Shepsle, 1996). In other words,
parties who enter a formal government alliance should be adjacent to one another on a single policy dimension (Mueller, 2003).

Of course, these theories presuppose a distribution of cabinet seats among the different parties forming the government. However, since minority governments generally exclude the division of ministerial positions among two or more parties, we cannot rely completely on these bargaining models to increase our understanding of voting coalitions in minority governments.

Nevertheless, we can imagine that parties who enter shifting voting coalitions are on average, more likely to be adjacent to one another ideologically. So, for instance, in the Canadian case, it is possible that the left leaning New Democratic Party would have been more likely to support the Liberal Party on economic issues in the 38th minority Parliament. However, the same cannot be said about the Conservative minority governments of the 39th and 40th Parliaments. In these cases, we may find that the moderate parties on economic issues – the Liberals – were more likely to enter a voting coalition with the Conservatives. This ideological proximity hypothesis represents the first theoretical expectation of our analysis.

It is important to note that voting coalitions could also form along other issue dimensions (Budge & Laver, 1986). In a recent study using a spatial model of legislative voting, Godbout and Høyland (2011) demonstrated that the Canadian House divides along a two-dimensional issue space. The first dimension represents the extent to which an opposition party supports the government agenda. The authors show in a spatial model that parties who are located near the governing party are also more likely to support government legislations (see also Hix & Noury (2007) for a similar argument). More importantly, Godbout and Høyland also find that parties split along a second dimension of voting which captures a regional conflict between Quebec and the rest of the Canadian federation (see also Flanagan (1998) for a similar argument). Although this dimension is strongest in the 35th Parliament with the presence of both the Reform party and the Bloc Quebecois, Godbout and Høyland (2011) show that it remains salient today; they claim that this is primarily because the Bloc Quebecois consistently supports legislation in favour of Quebec’s interests, regardless of whether a motion originates from the government or not. This regional proximity hypothesis represents the second theoretical expectation of our analysis.

Aside from ideological considerations, we can also think that minority government support in the legislature could be driven by electoral incentives (Laver & Schofield, 1990; Grofman & Rozendaal, 1994; Warwick, 1994). Indeed, numerous studies related to coalition stability have integrated expectations about future elections to predict coalition termination (Lupia & Strom, 1995; Diermeier & Merlo, 2000). Even if this work does not explicitly focus on legislative voting alliances, it can predict the formation and the
duration of minority cabinets by identifying which opposition party will support the government on critical votes. Unfortunately, these models also assume that the same party will always vote with the government (i.e. unless there is a cabinet reshuffle or a call for new election). This assumption is hard to sustain in the Canadian context, since all three of the opposition parties have at one time or another supported the government’s legislative agenda.

We do think, however, that one of the principal expectations of the coalition stability literature, which predicts that parties will stop supporting the cabinet when they expect electoral gains, can be used to understand the logic behind the legislative decision to vote with a minority cabinet. The underlying assumption is that unpopular opposition parties will be more willing to compromise and support the government in order to avoid losing seats in an election. Indeed, unfavourable electoral prospects could help explain why, for example, the NDP in the 40th Parliament supported the Conservative government, or why the Liberals voted with the Conservatives for most of the 39th Parliament. Finally, we should also expect to find that popular parties, who can afford to pay the costs of a potential election, might even be more inclined to vote against the government. This electoral gains hypothesis represents the third theoretical expectation of our analysis.

Based on this brief overview of the literature, we can begin to outline a theory of legislative voting coalitions under minority governments. We expect that an opposition’s party decision to support a specific government motion will be a function of both policy content and expected electoral gains. In this study, we propose to validate this theory by studying legislative voting in the Canadian House of Commons. Our main contention is that voting coalitions are more likely to form along ideological lines, which will be measured by the level of support for the government legislative agenda (Axelrod, 1970; Budge & Laver, 1986; Hix & Noury, 2007). We also expect to find coalition voting along another issue dimension that will be related to federalism and Quebec’s provincial interests (Godbout & Høyland, 2011). Finally, we expect to find that unpopular or underfunded parties will be more likely to vote with the government, regardless of the policy content of specific legislations.

The 38th Liberal and 39th—40th Conservative minority governments

In this study, we focus exclusively on the Liberal minority cabinet of the 38th Parliament (2004–05) and on the two Conservative minority cabinets of the 39th (2006–08) and 40th (2008–11) Parliaments. The roots of these three recent minority governments can be traced back to a resurgence of a multiparty
system after the emergence of the Bloc Quebecois and the Reform Parties in the 1993 election (Carty et al., 2000; Johnston, 2008). Both of these new political formations relied on a strong regional basis of support, the Reform Party in Western Canada and the Bloc in the province of Quebec. This fragmented party system was to remain in place for two subsequent elections (1997 and 2000). It finally took a merger of the Reform Party (renamed the Canadian Alliance) and the remaining members of the Progressive Conservative Party in 2003 to precipitate a return of minority government rule in the House (Bélanger & Godbout, 2010). By consolidating the vote on the right, the new Conservative Party forced the Liberals into a minority cabinet in 2004, the first such government since 1979. The 38th Parliament was short-lived and two consecutive Conservative minority governments followed suit after the 2006 and 2008 elections. Table 1 presents an overview of the party standings in the House following the 2004, 2006 and 2008 elections.

As we can see from Table 1, the NDP failed to hold the balance of power by one seat in the 38th Parliament. Thus, a majority voting coalition between the governing Liberals and the NDP proved impossible in the first few months of this legislature. We note that the Conservative Party was the official opposition and the natural opponent of the Liberal government in this parliament. In order to effectively govern, it was expected that the Liberals would ‘loosen’ the federal purse strings to please the NDP, and ‘loosen’ the strings of federalism to please the Bloc Quebecois. However, this government proved to be short lived. Following the publication of a report related to a sponsorship scandal under the former Liberal government of Jean Chrétien, the Conservative Party, the NDP and the Bloc Quebecois united over a motion of non-confidence to defeat Martin’s cabinet almost a year after the beginning of the 38th Parliament.

An election ensued and a Conservative minority government was formed in January 2006, the first since 1979. Unlike in the previous parliament, the new

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Party</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDP</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bloc Quebecois</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: The table shows composition of the 38–40th Parliaments. There are 308 seats in Parliament requiring a majority of 155 seats or more.
Conservative Party could count on a majority in the House by simply forming a coalition with either the Bloc or the Liberals; the NDP remained two seats short of holding the balance of power. Harper’s minority government managed to last two parliamentary sessions (from April 2006 to September 2008). The parliament dissolved after the Tories triggered an early election in September 2008 claiming that the legislature had become ‘dysfunctional’ and unproductive.

Harper’s government returned to power in the 40th Parliament with some additional seats, but not enough to secure a majority. After a disappointing fiscal update to address the economic crisis in November of 2008, the Conservatives were unanimously condemned by the opposition parties who proposed to form a formal Liberal–NDP coalition (with the implicit support of the Bloc Quebecois) to replace the incumbent government. However, Stephen Harper was able to retain control of the government by proroguing the first session of the legislature and by proposing a more generous economic stimulus in the subsequent legislative session, with the support of the newly elected leader of the Liberal Party, Michael Ignatieff. The 40th Parliament became the longest uninterrupted minority government in Canadian history.

In March 2011, the Conservatives lost the confidence of the House in a 156–145 vote after the government was found in contempt of Parliament by all of the opposition parties. The fall of the second Conservatives cabinet can be explained by a series of minor scandals. Officially, however, it was their refusal to provide the opposition with the costs of some of their more controversial budgetary proposals that led to this motion. The Conservatives won their third consecutive election on 2 May 2011. And for the first time since the 2000 election, one party was able to win a majority of the seats in the House of Commons.

In terms of coalition voting in the 39th and 40th Parliaments, many in Ottawa expected that the Bloc Quebecois and the Liberal Party (the official opposition) would be more likely to support the Conservative minority government. The Bloc Quebecois, with 51 and later 49 MPs, had the potential to give a conformable majority to the cabinet. Indeed, the Bloc was the only opposition party to support the 2006 and 2007 Conservative budgets. On the other hand, the Liberals voted in favour of the 2009 budget. They also implicitly supported the 2008 and 2010 budgets by officially voting against the estimates with the other opposition parties, but by having enough abstentions to ensure passage. This strategy was clearly used to avoid an early election.

Data

In order to analyse coalition voting in the House of Commons, we have collected all of the available division votes (i.e. roll call votes) of the 38th, 39th
Table 2. Recorded divisions, 38th–40th Parliaments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Votes</th>
<th>38th</th>
<th>39th</th>
<th>40th</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government motions</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private member motions</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition motions</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>363</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: The table shows the number of divisions in the 38–40th Parliaments by types of motions. Divisions are automatically collected from the Hansards. Government motions include general and ways and means motions, as well as government bills. Private member motions include general motions and bills introduced by private members. Opposition motions include motions made in response to the speech of the throne, and general opposition motions (such as amendments to government bills). The last category includes motions related to committee reports and votes on adjournment of debates.

Table 3. Party loyalty scores 38–40th Parliament.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bloc</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDP</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: The table shows party unity scores for the 38th, 39th and 40th Parliaments. Each row represents the average party loyalty score by type of motion/bill (government or private), which is obtained by averaging the percentage of times members voted against a majority of their own party. Averages are rounded to two decimal points.

One of the underlying assumptions of the ideological proximity theory of coalition formation is that parties have a high degree of voting discipline. Hence, we begin by reporting the party loyalty scores in Table 3. These loyalty scores are obtained by averaging the total number of votes in which
an individual member of the House voted against a majority of his or her party. Overall, the model computes the loyalty scores of the 313 MPs on 190 divisions in the 38th Parliament, 324 MPs on 380 divisions in the 39th Parliament, and 314 MPs on 363 divisions in the 40th Parliament.

The table groups legislative motions into three categories: all motions, government motions only and private member motions only. The logic here is that party discipline may be weaker when the House divides on private member motions, especially if we consider the three line whipping system introduced by Liberal Prime Minister Paul Martin. Thus, we expect party unity to be higher when dealing with government business and lower when dealing with private member business.

At first glance, it would appear that party discipline is quite high for all the parties – except for the Liberals in the 38th Parliament. The 95 per cent loyalty score for this party implies that in each division, at least 1 out of 20 Liberal MPs voted against the leadership. It is even much lower (89 per cent) when we consider private member motions: more than 1 out of 10 Liberal MPs voted against the majority of their own party when the House divided on private member’s business in the 38th Parliament. But these numbers are the exception.

By looking at the other two parliaments, we can clearly see that party discipline is much stronger when the Conservatives control the cabinet. The Liberals still have the lowest loyalty scores in the government and private member motions categories. Nonetheless, these numbers are higher than in the previous legislature. We also note that the Conservative Party, the Bloc and the NDP have almost perfect party discipline. In short, the preceding measures of party loyalty provide us with enough evidence to treat parties as unitary actors in the remaining of this study.

Analysis

We begin our analysis by measuring cross-party voting coalitions in each parliament in Table 4 to test for the ideological proximity hypothesis. Since we are interested in government support, we only focus on analysing potential motions of confidence, such as regular government motions, ways and means motions, government bills, responses to the speech of the throne and motions introduced by the opposition. These cross-party voting scores are obtained by averaging the percentage of times all members of one party voted with the majority of another party in the Commons. Hence, the higher the value, the higher the level of legislative support for a given party. Thus, if there is a strong level of coalition stability in the Canadian Parliament, we should find that certain parties are more likely to support the government (like the NDP in the 38th Parliament) on potential issues of confidence.
The cross-party voting scores of the first column of Table 4 imply that a majority of the members of the Bloc Quebecois voted 34 per cent of the times with a majority of the Progressive Conservative Party, 42 per cent with the Liberal Party and 62 per cent with the NDP in the 38th Parliament. Not surprisingly, the NDP supported the Liberal government 62 per cent of the time, followed by the Bloc (42 per cent) and finally the Conservatives (29 per cent) in the 38th Parliament. In the 39th Parliament, the Liberals and the Bloc Quebecois voted with the Conservatives 49 per cent and 48 per cent of the time, respectively. As for the NDP, the party supported the Conservative government in only 24 per cent of the votes. The order of support towards the Conservative government in the 40th Parliament remains unchanged, with the Liberals supporting the Conservative 62 per cent of the time, followed by the Bloc (17 per cent) and the NDP (10 per cent). Note here, however, that the proportion of support of the NDP and especially the Bloc Quebecois towards the Conservative government has dropped dramatically, while it has increased for the Liberals in this last parliament.

At first glance, it would appear that the ideological proximity thesis has some validity in explaining coalition voting in Canadian minority governments. If we only focus on the proportion of each party’s support for the government, we can see in Table 4 that the NDP is more likely to vote with

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bloc</th>
<th>Conservative</th>
<th>Liberal</th>
<th>NDP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>38th</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bloc</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDP</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>39th</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bloc</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDP</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>40th</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bloc</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDP</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: The table shows cross-party voting scores for government support motions only. Each row represents the proportion of times a majority of the party voted with another party (including their own).

### Ideological proximity

The cross-party voting scores of the first column of Table 4 imply that a majority of the members of the Bloc Quebecois voted 34 per cent of the times with a majority of the Progressive Conservative Party, 42 per cent with the Liberal Party and 62 per cent with the NDP in the 38th Parliament.

Not surprisingly, the NDP supported the Liberal government 62 per cent of the time, followed by the Bloc (42 per cent) and finally the Conservatives (29 per cent) in the 38th Parliament. In the 39th Parliament, the Liberals and the Bloc Quebecois voted with the Conservatives 49 per cent and 48 per cent of the time, respectively. As for the NDP, the party supported the Conservative government in only 24 per cent of the votes. The order of support towards the Conservative government in the 40th Parliament remains unchanged, with the Liberals supporting the Conservative 62 per cent of the time, followed by the Bloc (17 per cent) and the NDP (10 per cent). Note here, however, that the proportion of support of the NDP and especially the Bloc Quebecois towards the Conservative government has dropped dramatically, while it has increased for the Liberals in this last parliament.

At first glance, it would appear that the ideological proximity thesis has some validity in explaining coalition voting in Canadian minority governments. If we only focus on the proportion of each party’s support for the government, we can see in Table 4 that the NDP is more likely to vote with
the Liberal government in the 38th Parliament, followed by the Bloc and the Conservatives. On the other hand, the subsequent two Conservative minority cabinets relied mostly on the support of the Liberal party, followed by the Bloc and the NDP. Thus, we can summarise the preceding order of support in the 38th Parliament as follows: Liberal > NDP > Bloc > Conservative. In the 39th and 40th Parliaments this order changes to: Conservative > Liberal > Bloc > NDP.

We note that the order of support towards the government in the 39th and 40th Parliaments corresponds exactly to the left–right ideological ordering of parties observed by Cochrane (2010) in his historical analysis of Canadian party manifestos. However in the 38th Parliament, the ordering is different, with the NDP and the Bloc having closer ideological ties with the Liberals than the Conservatives. This is because the Liberal Party is not located at one of the extremes of the Canadian ideological spectrum (like the NDP or the Conservative Party). Since the Liberals are somewhat in the centre of the party system, support can either come from the left (Bloc–NDP) or the right (Conservative). Unfortunately, the simple cross-party voting coalition scores do not allow us to determine whether the Liberals were strictly governing by pandering to the left.

In order to get a better sense of the Left–Right ordering of parties in the Canadian Parliament, we need to establish a more precise measure of voting coalitions since these cross-voting scores do not report which other party may have voted with the government. For example, it is possible that most cross-voting between the NDP and the Conservatives occurred with the support of the Bloc Quebecois, or that the NDP voted with a majority of the Conservatives whenever a motion by the Bloc Quebecois was supported by the Liberals. These two cases imply that parties may select voting coalition partners based on some other actors than the ideological content of a specific legislative proposal.

To investigate this possibility, we report in Table 5 the average proportion of time a given party voted in all of the possible combinations of coalitions in the House. These coalitions are mutually exclusive and occur when a majority of one party votes with the majority of either one, two or three of the remaining parties. With four parties in the House of Commons, we have identified seven legislative voting coalitions: \{L + B + C + N\} or the unanimous coalition; \{L + C + N\} vs. \{B\}; \{L + B + C\} vs. \{N\}; \{L + B + N\} vs. \{C\}; \{B + N + C\} vs. \{L\}; \{L + B\} vs. \{C + N\}; \{L + C\} vs. \{N + B\}; \{L + N\} vs. \{C + B\}. For example, \{L + C + N + B\} represents the proportion of all the votes in which the majority of all four parties voted together; \{L + C + N\} represents the proportion of votes that were supported by a majority coalition of Liberal, Conservative and NDP only; \{L + N\} represents the proportion of votes that were supported by a majority coalition of Liberal and NDP (this
coalition is thus different and is not counted in the previous two coalitions); and finally \{L\} represents the proportion of votes that were only supported by a majority of the Liberals and opposed by the remaining parties.

The results of Table 5 show that less than 1 per cent of all the votes were unanimous in the three parliaments. We also find that more than 16 per cent (\{L\}) of the motions in the 38th Parliament, and 19–31 per cent (\{C\}) of the motions in the 39th and 40th Parliaments were defeated by all of the opposition parties in the House (i.e. since we are dealing with two minority governments).\(^15\) Some of these votes could have potentially precipitated a change in government. However, most of these cases did not constitute explicit motions of non-confidence. This is because an important proportion of the votes are related to minor proposals introduced by the government, such as amendments to certain bills or other minor motions. We also count in this table opposition motions that could lead to votes of confidence as well, such as in the case of the end of the 38th and 40th Parliaments. However, like with government votes, these motions are generally related to amendments or to non-biding declarations made by one or more of the opposition parties.

The results confirm most of the findings presented in Table 4. For instance, the primary voting coalition in the 38th Parliament appears to be between the Liberals and the NDP (15 per cent) and between the Liberals, Bloc and the NDP (36 per cent). It is also very interesting to note that there is very little Liberal-Bloc versus Conservative-NDP coalitions (3 per cent). The results show that most votes were supported by a tri-partisan coalition made up of NDP, Bloc and Liberal MPs. This is not surprising if we consider that for over half of the 38th Parliament, the NDP did not have a sufficient number of seats to form a majority coalition with the governing Liberals.\(^16\) Still, the NDP is

### Table 5. Coalition voting 38–40th Parliament: government support.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coalition</th>
<th>38th</th>
<th>39th</th>
<th>40th</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>{L + B} vs. {C + N}</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>{L + N} vs. {C + B}</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>{L + C} vs. {B + N}</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>{L + C + B} vs. {N}</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>{L + B + N} vs. {C}</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>{L + C + N} vs. {B}</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>{C + N + B} vs. {L}</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>{L + C + N + B} vs. {\phi}</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The table shows voting coalitions for government support motions only. Each entry represents the proportion of votes that were made by a specific coalition. A coalition occurs when a majority of a party votes with the majority of one or more of the other parties. Averages are rounded to two decimal points.
almost always included in coalition votes with the governing Liberals. In fact, only 32 per cent of all divisions on government or opposition-related business excluded this party. On the other hand, more than 70 per cent of the votes excluded the Conservative Party, which clearly shows their opposition towards the government in the 38th Parliament.

Similarly, the ideological proximity hypothesis appears to be confirmed when the Conservatives are in power. In the 39th Parliament, a majority of the legislative voting coalitions occurred between the Conservatives and Liberals (17 per cent) or between the Conservatives, Bloc and the Liberals (26 per cent). However, in the subsequent 40th Parliament, the Conservative and Liberal coalition now represented more than 46 per cent of the votes. We can clearly see from these numbers that the main opposition party was the NDP in the 39th Parliament, and the Bloc and the NDP in the 40th Parliament. In this last parliament for example, the NDP was excluded in over 92 per cent of all coalition votes with the government.

So far, the results suggest that supporting the cabinet is primarily a function of ideological proximity: the Conservatives were the least likely to obtain the support of the NDP when they were in power; similarly, the NDP was more likely to collaborate with the governing Liberals in the 38th Parliament. However, the latest findings presented in Table 5 also highlight a certain number of puzzles that warrant further investigations. For instance, we still find that in the 39th Parliament the NDP and the Conservative parties voted in a two-way coalition in more than 8 per cent of the divisions. This represents examples where both extreme parties voted against the middle. We also find a lot of variance between the voting coalitions of the 39th and the 40th Parliaments. Although both legislatures were governed by a Conservative minority, the proportion of coalition votes with the government have decreased in size, except in the case of Conservative–Liberal votes which have surged by more than 29 per cent in the 40th Parliament. Each of these examples highlights that ideological proximity cannot on its own explain the dynamic of legislative voting in minority governments.

**Regional dimension**

Of course, as we indicated earlier, it is also important to consider the possibility that legislative alliances between opposition parties and the government occur in more than one policy dimension (Budge & Laver, 1986). The voting coalitions we have just described can also be represented within a spatial model of legislative voting. These spatial models generally classify voting along a single line where divisions between MPs and their parties are determined by the extent to which they support or oppose the government (Hix & Noury, 2007). However, it is also possible that parties divide over other
issues in a legislature. Thus, voting cannot always be explained in terms opposition to the cabinet. Godbout and Høyland (2011) have indeed shown that classifying legislative voting in the Canadian Parliament works best in a two-dimensional model.

In order to test this dimensionality hypothesis, we operate within the framework of the spatial theory of voting, where both actors and policy alternatives are located in a low-dimensional policy space. To obtain a legislator’s location in this spatial mapping, we calculate individual coordinates using the Optimal Classification model (Poole, 2005). This algorithm estimates the fixed locations of the legislators in order to maximise the proportion of correctly classified votes in a given parliament.20

Normally, when we scale parliamentary divisions in a spatial model of legislative voting, the outcomes of most votes can be explained along a primary dimension that measures the level of support or opposition towards the cabinet. Based on our previous analysis, we could think that in the context of the 39th Parliament for example, the NDP will be further away from Conservative MPs on the government–opposition voting dimension because they are the least likely to vote together, followed by the Bloc and the Liberals. However, there is also a strong possibility that on certain specific votes related to issues of regional or provincial interests, the ordering of support towards the Conservative Party will be reversed with the Bloc Quebecois located at one extreme, followed by the Conservatives, the NDP and finally by the Liberals (i.e. they have generally been more favourable to a strong and centralised government). In this context, it will be necessary to include a second dimension of voting in the spatial model to correctly predict the outcomes of these votes.

Because we expect that legislative alliances will vary depending on the type of issues raised in the House, we present in Figure 1 two-dimensional spatial maps for each parliament. In these three plots, the dots represent the two-dimensional coordinates of MPs obtained with the Optimal Classification algorithm.21 We ran the model on government and opposition motions only, as in the previous analyses. In order to get a sense of the content of these voting dimensions, the figures also plot the cutting line of six specific divisions. The lines separate MPs who support and oppose particular motions as predicted by the model.22 The addition of a second dimension to the model increases the accuracy of the prediction by 6.2 per cent, 4 per cent and 1.6 per cent, respectively, for a total combined prediction score of 99.4 per cent, 99 per cent and 99.8 per cent in the 38th and 39th and 40th Parliaments, respectively.

As we can see in Figure 1, the spatial mapping of the 38th Parliament is clearly two dimensional, with the Liberal Party at one end of the spectrum, the Bloc and NDP in the middle, and the Conservative Party at the opposite extreme. We also see that the Bloc Quebecois occupies the top position of
the second dimension, closely followed by the NDP, and by a cluster of both Liberal and Conservative MPs at the other extreme. To help illustrate the content of these two dimensions, we also report in the plot the outcome of two votes. The first division (number 91, represented by a diagonal line) reports the final vote over an amendment to the Liberal budget made by the NDP, which would have increased spending by $4.6 billion. This motion passed because of the defection of Stronach and the tie-breaking vote made by the Speaker of the House. The division represents a good example of a separation between a Liberal–NDP and Conservative–Bloc voting coalitions.

On the other hand, division number 92 clearly demonstrates the existence of a

Figure 1. This plot shows the cutting lines for two specific votes in each Parliament. The dimension on the x-axis corresponds to the level of Cabinet support. The y-axis corresponds to the regional dimension. The plots are based on optimal classification of government support motions only. The location of the legislators indicates their optimal location given their voting behaviour on all votes in the 38th–39th–40th Parliaments.
second issue dimension in which the remaining parties oppose the Bloc Quebecois. This vote relates to Bill C-9, which aimed to establish an Economic Development Agency of Canada in Quebec. Not surprisingly, this bill was supported by all parties, but opposed by the Bloc Quebecois.23

The second plot of Figure 1 summarises legislative voting in the 39th Parliament. The plot shows that the Conservative cabinet occupies the right end side of the spatial mapping, while the opposite extreme is occupied by the NDP. The Bloc is located to the right of the NDP, followed by the Liberals who are spread out in the middle of the first dimension (but ultimately closer to the Conservatives). The votes reported in this Parliament also confirm that the first and second dimension appears to be related to the government opposition and regional conflicts in Parliament. For example, the first dimension division plots a Conservative motion that aimed to extend the deployment of Canadian troops in Afghanistan.24 The motion passed, but discipline broke down within the Liberal Party and the model correctly predicts two party factions for this vote. Division 24 is also another good example of a regional split because it relates to an amendment of Bill C-5, which aimed to create a federal Public Health Agency.25

Finally, we note the similar configuration of parties in the 40th Parliament. Indeed, the regional polarisation is also present in this legislature, with the Bloc Quebecois and the Liberals located at both extremities on the second dimension. However, it is important to note that very few votes are predicted on a regional basis in this parliament (i.e. a two-dimensional model increases accuracy by only 1.6 per cent). An example of such a vote relates to the Bloc Quebecois’ reply to the Throne Speech at the beginning of the legislative term. This motion required the House to recognise that the Bloc unanimously opposed the government because it reflected a Conservative ideology that was rejected by Quebec’s population. The second vote represented in the plot corresponds to the confidence motion introduced by the Liberal Party in March 2011 that argued that the Conservatives were in contempt of Parliament and that the House had lost confidence in the government. The motion passed with the support of all opposition parties, thus signalling the end of the 40th Parliament.

Before we proceed with the last series of analyses, we can confirm that in all three spatial representations, coalition voting is best explained along a two-dimensional policy space. The models demonstrate that parties in the House primarily divide to support or oppose the cabinet. Of course, this simple classification model cannot perfectly predict the outcome of each individual vote in the legislature. Although the second dimension of voting seems to explain regional splits in the 38th and 39th Parliaments, this dimension does not appear to improve our understanding of legislative voting in the 40th Parliament by much. It is possible that other factors influenced the opposition
parties’ decisions to vote against the government. And, as we will see in the next section, electoral incentives played an important role in explaining legislative voting in all three parliaments.

**Electoral gains**

So far, we have been able to explain legislative voting coalition by focusing on the policy content of certain government motions. But as was noted earlier, it is also important to consider electoral incentives in order to fully understand coalition voting in the context of minority governments. Since one of the main predictions of the literature on coalition stability is that parties will oppose the cabinet when they expect to make electoral gains, we should find that parties are more likely to vote with the government when they are unpopular. Of course, we could think that other factors besides popularity enter in a party’s calculus to support or oppose the government. The most obvious of these is the costs of a potential election (Diermeier & Merlo, 2000). The logic here is that an opposition party will want to trigger an election, not only because it has become more popular, but also because it can afford the costs of a campaign.

In order to test for these claims, we measure the influence of public opinion polls on government support in a multivariable model, controlling for party popularity and electoral costs. In each parliament, we conduct a specific analysis for all three opposition parties in which we estimate their legislative support towards the cabinet. In the analysis, the dependent variable measures the proportion of all members of an opposition party that voted with the government for each specific vote. This variable is estimated with a weighted agreement index to account for dissenting votes and abstentions (Hix et al., 2007). When a party is voting with (against) the government and there is no abstention, the variable is coded 1 (0). Whenever there are dissenting votes or abstentions within a party, the value of the government support index is reduced proportionally. To control for popularity at the time of a vote, we computed the monthly average support for each party using all available national polls. We also include a time component that is the logarithm of the number of months since the last election and a variable indicating whether the motion being voted on could theoretically become a motion of confidence. Note that the time variable also indirectly captures the cost of having an election. Indeed, it takes time to raise campaign funds and Election Canada distributes quarterly allowances to parties based on the proportion of votes they obtained in the last election. Therefore, the greater the value of this variable, the lower the financial cost of an election. Tables 6–8 present nine Tobit regression models to measure the relationship between government support, party popularity and time.
The results in Table 6 show that there is a negative relationship between the popularity of the Bloc and support towards the Liberal government in the 38th Parliament ($\Pr(>|z| = 0.02)$). In the case of the NDP, we can see that time (and indirectly campaign resources) has a negative effect on the likelihood of voting with the government ($\Pr(>|z| = 0.01)$). However, the NDP remains a strong supporter of the government, especially after they had enough seats to form a majority coalition with the Liberals ($\Pr(>|z| = 0.00)$). The results also show that the NDP is more likely to vote with the Liberal Party on government-related business ($\Pr(>|z| = 0.02)$), or when their popularity increases in the electorate ($\Pr(>|z| = 0.01)$). Finally, the model does not tell us much about the behaviour of the Conservative Party when they are in the opposition, only that it was less likely to vote with the government after the defection of Belinda Stronach ($\Pr(>|z| = 0.07)$).

In the subsequent parliament, we find in Table 7 that the Bloc is more likely to vote with the cabinet over government-related issues ($\Pr(>|z| = 0.00)$). Likewise, both the Liberals and the NDP also appear to support the government...
on potential issues of confidence (Pr(>|z| = 0.00)). Note also that in this parliament, the Liberal Party is the only party to increase its support of the government over time (Pr(>|z| = 0.02)). We can explain these results by the fact that this party had some serious financial troubles following the 2006 election. For example in 2007, the Liberal Party was the only one with a budgetary deficit, while all of the other parties showed surpluses.32

Finally, the results for the 40th Parliament reported in Table 8 demonstrate that the Liberals are still more likely to support the government on potential issues of confidence (Pr(>|z| = 0.00)). However, we see that the voting coalition between the Liberals and the Conservatives decreases over time (Pr(>|z| = 0.06)). This constitutes an important change from the last parliament. Indeed, this voting strategy is confirmed by the party’s declarations in the fall of 2009 that it would stop supporting the Conservative government in the House.

To summarise the preceding analysis, it appears that the NDP was the strongest supporter of the government in the 38th Parliament, even after it became more popular in public opinion polls. This is probably explained by the fact that the NDP could extract more policy concessions from the Liberal cabinet in exchange for their support, such as in the 2005 budget.

Table 7. Tobit regression 39th Parliament, 350 votes.

|        | Estimate | Std. error | z value | Pr(>|z|) |
|--------|----------|------------|---------|----------|
| **Bloc** |          |            |         |          |
| Intercept     | −0.01    | 0.40       | −0.01   | 0.99     |
| Government motion | 0.29   | 0.04       | 6.81    | 0.00     |
| Log months    | 0.01     | 0.05       | 0.19    | 0.85     |
| Bloc popularity| 1.78    | 3.05       | 0.58    | 0.56     |
| Pseudo $R^2$ | 0.23     |            |         |          |
| **NDP** |          |            |         |          |
| Intercept     | 0.07     | 0.19       | 0.35    | 0.73     |
| Government motion | 0.07  | 0.04       | 1.67    | 0.09     |
| Log months    | −0.04    | 0.05       | −0.91   | 0.36     |
| NDP popularity| 1.39     | 1.09       | 1.28    | 0.20     |
| Pseudo $R^2$ | 0.04     |            |         |          |
| **Liberal** |          |            |         |          |
| Intercept     | −0.29    | 0.35       | −0.83   | 0.40     |
| Government motion | 0.27 | 0.05       | 4.89    | 0.00     |
| Log months    | 0.13     | 0.06       | 2.28    | 0.02     |
| Liberal popularity | 0.56  | 0.86       | 0.65    | 0.51     |
| Pseudo $R^2$ | 0.11     |            |         |          |

Note: The standard errors are adjusted using heteroskedasticity and autocorrelation consistent estimators.
In return, these concessions may have increased the party’s popularity. However, as time went by and as the party’s finances improved, the NDP became less likely to vote with the government. In the subsequent two parliaments, the models do not tell us much about this party’s strategy. The NDP systematically voted against the Conservatives on most motions until the fall of 2009 when the Liberal Party announced that it had lost confidence in the government. This shifted the balance of power to the NDP and the Bloc Quebecois.

Indeed, our results confirm this reversal of support for the Liberal Party, which was the strongest backer of the Conservative Party in the previous parliament. The high level of coalition votes between the two parties in the 39th Parliament is most likely explained by the debt the Liberals incurred after the 2006 election. Once the party put its finances in order, the Liberals began to increasingly vote against the Conservatives in the 40th Parliament.

As for the Bloc Quebecois, the three models show that this party seemed to be more likely to support the government on potential issues of confidence when the Conservatives were in power. This result is not surprising if we consider the fact that Harper vowed to improve relations between Quebec and the federal government at the beginning of the 39th Parliament, by pledging for

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bloc</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government motion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bloc popularity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo $R^2$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NDP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government motion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDP popularity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo $R^2$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Liberal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government motion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal popularity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo $R^2$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The standard errors are adjusted using heteroskedasticity and autocorrelation consistent estimators.

Table 8. Tobit regression 40th Parliament, 336 votes.
example to give Quebec a greater voice in UNESCO. On the other hand, the finding that the Bloc was more likely to vote with the government in the later part of the 40th Parliament is more troubling. The theory predicts the opposite. In this case, the positive effect of time could be explained by the Liberal Party’s decision to systematically oppose the Conservatives in 2009. It seems that the Bloc Quebecois was forced to collaborate more with the government in order to avoid an early election.

Discussion

This study analysed parliamentary voting coalitions in three recent Canadian minority governments. Because very little is known about the working of voting coalitions, the paper relied on bargaining theories of cabinet formation to account for the dynamics of party voting in the 38th, 39th and 40th Parliaments. The analysis demonstrated that the formation of voting coalitions is best explained by the ideological orientation of parties, as Axelrod (1970) proposed. The paper also highlighted the importance of expected electoral gains, such as the popularity of a party and the potential costs of an election, in the decision to support or oppose the governing party.

The study also spatially analysed legislative voting using Poole (2005) Optimum Classification methodology. The analysis confirmed that MPs aligned on a two-dimensional issue space in all three parliaments. One of the most interesting findings of this spatial analysis relates to the ordering of the parties (Conservative–Liberal–Bloc–NDP) on the first dimension of the model in the 39th and 40th Parliaments. This ranking corresponds to the traditional left–right classification of party platforms that we find in the Canadian party system. However, unlike in the US Congress, we cannot conclude that the first dimension of legislative voting is a direct representation of ideology. Rather, this dimension represents the extent to which an individual MP, and by extension their party, supports the cabinet. When the Liberals controlled the cabinet, we saw that this ordering changed to a Liberal–NDP–Bloc–Conservative ranking. In this context, one could think of the ordering as a measure support towards government-sponsored policies.

We also confirmed the existence of a series of coalition votes that were best classified along a second dimension. Although we did not review the content of all the divisions, the OC plots clearly demonstrated that MPs from the Bloc Quebecois occupied a polarising position in all three parliaments. As Godbout and Hoyland (2011) demonstrate, the conflict related to these votes represents regional divisions in the Canadian federation; mainly because the Bloc Quebecois prioritises the interests of Quebec in parliament, regardless of whether a bill originates from the government or not. In the 40th Parliament, the second dimension does not appear to have an important role in
explaining legislative voting. Indeed, the addition of a second dimension increases the prediction accuracy of the model by only 1.6 per cent. Identifying which factors best account for the declining role of this dimension of conflict in the Canadian House is beyond the scope of this paper and warrants further investigation.

In this study, we have explained coalition formation by focusing on legislative voting and party ideology. We have also considered the possibility that coalition voting is related to electoral incentives. The logic being that less popular parties could be more likely to compromise with the government in order to avoid facing the electorate. We saw that electoral considerations provided some clues as to why certain parties, such as the Liberals in the 39th Parliament, chose to support the cabinet more when it was clearly not in their policy interests to do so. Indeed, in more than 15 votes of this legislative term, the Liberal Party either abstained *en masse* or presented a reduced coalition of MPs to vote against a government proposal with the remaining three opposition parties; they were motivated to do so as to provide the Conservative with a majority while avoiding a vote of confidence.

The electoral calculus of parties probably also explains why the Liberals ended up collaborating more with the Bloc and the NDP in the 38th Parliament, when they could have very well chosen to form a series of legislative alliances with the Conservative Party instead. Since the Liberals occupy the centre of the Canadian political landscape, this party can theoretically choose to form a legislative alliance with any of the remaining opposition parties in the House (Johnston, 2008). Yet, in most votes of the 38th Parliament, the Liberals generally opted to form voting coalitions with the NDP, or with the NDP and the Bloc (i.e. more than 51 per cent of the government motions in the 38th Parliament were made with these two coalitions). This result is not surprising. According to Stewart (1980), we should find that third parties, like the NDP or the Bloc, will be more willing to enter an alliance with a major party (like the Liberal or Conservative) in minority governments, since this often represents their only opportunity to have a significant impact on public policy. It is also possible that minority governments usually make more concessions over policy and legislation to gain ‘third party’ support (Franks, 1987).

On the other hand, we believe that it was in the Conservative Party’s interest to clearly establish itself as an opposition to the government and collaborate less with the Liberals in the 38th Parliament. For the NDP and especially the Bloc Quebecois, the price of collaborating with the government was not as high, since minority governments provided these parties with an opportunity to extract policy concessions and to enact more private member motions and bills. Ironically, the Liberals had fewer options in the 39th Parliament. They had to increase their support for the Conservative government because they could ill afford an early election. On the other hand, in the 40th Parliament
the Liberals began to increasingly vote against the Conservatives as their financial situation improved.

Obviously, we cannot establish with certainty that supporting the government is a function of party finance and party popularity in the restrictive context of this study. We realise the limitation of using a measure of time as a substitute for campaign finance resource. Although the Canadian party finance data are available on a quarterly basis, party spending records are only provided in annual reports, and the availability of bank loans and different lines of credit for the parties makes the estimations of these assets and debts very difficult. In further work, it would be interesting to include a better measure of party finances. More importantly, we also think that it would be interesting to test whether our theory can be exported to other parliamentary systems to explain legislative voting and government support in the context of minority or even majority cabinets.

Still, our empirical results show strong evidence to support the ideological and regional hypotheses, and some confirmation of our third hypothesis on electoral gains and coalition voting under minority governments. Based on this analysis, we have reason to expect that an opposition party’s decision to support or oppose a specific government proposal in the context of a minority parliament is a function of both policy content and expected electoral gains.

Notes
1. For recent reviews, see Diermeier (2006) and Müller (2003).
2. We exclude the union government of World War I, which was an extraordinary coalition of Conservative and Liberal party members, who ran under a pro-conscription platform.
3. Notable exceptions are the work of Kornberg (1967) on the 27th Parliament and of Stewart (1980) on the 29th Parliament. Hence, this study represents the first attempt to study parliamentary voting under multiple minority governments.
4. In the House Commons, minority cabinets basically govern without effectively controlling a majority of seats.
5. This was true unless the independent MP Chuck Cadman (a former Conservative) voted with the government (Russell, 2008). However, the defection of Belinda Stronach (a Conservative MP) to the Liberal Party created a bare majority coalition in May 2005, allowing the government to pass the budget with the NDP in a 153–152 vote. On this vote, one of two independent MPs voted to support the budget, as well as Chuck Cadman the only independent MP.
6. However, the Liberal defections of David Emerson and Wajid Khan before the beginning of the 39th Parliament were enough to give a hypothetical NDP–Conservative coalition the balance of power. This potential majority coalition ended when the independent Garth Turner joined the Liberals. Nevertheless, Prime Minister Stephen Harper opted not to engage in any formal discussion of external alliances with the opposition parties, preferring instead to form specific voting alliances to enact government legislations.
This cabinet was relatively more successful than the previous one since it enacted three federal budgets, an Accountability Act (in response to the sponsorship scandal), an omnibus crime bill and a bill to fix future election dates. The government also failed when the opposition parties adopted a motion to force the government to implement its climate change obligations under the Kyoto Protocol and refused to reopen a debate over the recently adopted same-sex marriage act.

In the same fiscal update, the Conservative government proposed to limit the ability of women to sue for pay equity and to suspend the ability of civil servants to strike for three years. Finally, the government also wanted to eliminate the federal campaign subsidies for all political parties. All of these decisions were highly unpopular with the opposition parties.

Incidentally, the second session of the 40th Parliament was also prorogued abruptly to prepare for the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver.

In the 2008 budget, only 16 Liberal MPs voted against the budget, the remaining 87 Liberals abstained. In 2010, only 47 of the 77 Liberals voted against the bill. In both cases, virtually all NDP and Bloc MPs opposed the two bills.

It is similar to the one computed by Poole and Rosenthal (2007) for the US Congress.

There are more than 308 MPs because of party switchers and replacements whose voting records either needed to be re-estimated or added to the file; with switchers (counted twice) and new entrants, we have a total of 313 MPs in the 38th, 324 MPs in the 39th, and 311 in the and 40th Parliaments. In the subsequent analyses, we removed unanimous votes from our data set.

It is possible that the preceding calculations introduce a small bias because we do not take into consideration voting abstention in the legislature. One could think, for example, that certain parties (or MPs) prefer to abstain rather than to vote against the government, especially if they want to avoid an early election but disagree with a particular motion. Unfortunately, the Canadian Hansard does not report abstention votes in their records. There is however some evidence of party abstention in all three Parliament. This was the case when every member of the Conservative Party abstained from voting against the Liberals when they presented their first budget in 2005 (division no. 43). We also find more examples of party abstentions in the 39th Parliament. In more than 15 votes (all in the second session), the Liberal Party either abstained en masse, or presented a reduced coalition of MPs to vote against a government proposal with the remaining opposition parties, so as to provide the Conservative with a majority in the House while each party opposed the government. In 7 of these 15 votes, the Liberals abstained totally. We believe that this particularity does not affect our results, since they represent only one case in the 38th Parliament, 6% in the 39th Parliament (1 NDP vote; 9 Liberal votes) and no case in the 40th Parliament. Nevertheless, in the last section of the analysis, we introduce a series of models to control for abstentions by including a measure of party voting weighted by the number of abstentions.

Note however that the support of the Liberals and the Bloc Quebecois towards the Conservative government in the 39th Parliament is basically equal with a difference of 1 point (49% vs. 48%). However, this left–right ideological ordering is definitely confirmed in the subsequent parliament (64% vs. 15%).

However, as was previously noted, this number is somewhat lower in the 39th and 40th Parliament if one considers the Liberal abstentions.
16. Stronach defected to the Liberals before the 90th division. However, the Liberals still required the support of at least one independent to obtain a majority.

17. In the second column of Table 5: $\{L\} + \{L + C\} + \{L + B\} + \{L + B + C\} = 32\%$.

18. In the second column of Table 5: $\{L\} + \{L + N\} + \{L + B\} + \{L + B + N\} = 70\%$.

19. In the third column of Table 5: $\{C\} + \{C + L\} + \{C + B\} + \{C + L + B\} = 92\%$.

20. See Poole (2005) for a detailed account of the Optimal Classification (OC) methodology and Godbout & Høyland (2011) for an application in the Canadian House. OC is design to optimally locate legislators in a low-dimensional space on the basis of all individual recorded votes such that the number of correctly classified voting decisions is maximised. The model is non-parametric, no explicit utility form is specified. We have processed the voting data to exclude lop-sided votes (in which all but five MPs vote similarly on a motion). MPs who participated in fewer than 25 division votes were dropped from the analysis since their estimates were associated with a large degree of uncertainty.

21. These estimates correspond to the locations of all MPs which maximises the proportion of correctly classified votes in a given parliament. Correctly classified means in this context that the model can predict the vote outcome of different MPs within a two-dimensional spatial model.

22. We use the OC package in R (Poole et al., 2010) to calculate the coordinates and compute the figures.

23. This result can be explained because the agency represents a clear intrusion of the federal government in what has traditionally been a provincial power.

24. All of the divisions in this figure are from the first session. However, the location of all MPs is calculated from the legislative votes of both parliamentary sessions of the 39th legislature.

25. Once again, given that health care has traditionally been a provincial power in Canada, it is not surprising to see that the Bloc Quebecois was the only party to oppose this amendment.

26. The first model measures Bloc support towards the government, while the second model measures NDP support. On the other hand, in the 38th Parliament, the third model measures the Conservative support towards the Liberal government and in the 39–40th Parliaments, the third model measures the Liberal party support for the Conservative government.

27. The agreement index is described in Hix et al. (2007: p. 91). It is coded to account for abstentions. The index equals 1 when all members vote together and 0 when they are equally divided. Abstentions can also reduce the value of the index. In the Canadian Parliament, there is no explicit abstention vote, such as in the European Union Parliament. Therefore, we consider that absent members abstained from voting.

28. These numbers are based on an average of all published national polls between October 2004 and December 2010.

29. The logarithm values range from 1 to 3.3 (the maximum in the 40th Parliament) while the government motions variable is coded 1–0 and follows the same codification as in the previous analysis.

30. We use a Tobit regression model because the dependent variable (support for government party) ranges from 0 to 1. Since $y$ takes on the value 0 with positive probability (not voting with the government) and is a continuous variable over
strictly positive values ($y < 1$), a corner solution response model is more appropriate (Wooldridge, 2002). Formally we have:

$$y_i = x_i \beta + e_i \text{ where } y_i = y_i^* \text{ if } y_i^* > 0 \text{ or } 0 \text{ if } y_i^* = 0$$

In this equation, $\beta$ is a vector of unknown parameters that is to be estimated on the basis of $x_i$ a vector of independent variables (i.e. party popularity, party voting and the logarithm of the number of months before the last election). The errors, $e_i$, are assumed to be independently and normally distributed, $e_i \sim N(0, \sigma^2)$. Following standard practice for panel data, we adjust the standard errors to account for heteroskedasticity and autocorrelation. Therefore, we use heteroskedasticity and autocorrelation consistent estimations of the covariance matrix in all Tobit models.

31. This event is captured by the NDP + Liberal Majority dummy variable in the model.

32. In the 2007 fiscal year, the Liberal party had net revenues of $-1,480,163$, while the NDP, Bloc, and Conservative parties had surplus of $1,410,320$, $2,639,788$ and $1,682,215$, respectively. The data are from Elections Canada http://www.elections.ca

References


