C. Kam, “Do Ideological Preferences Explain Parliamentary Behaviour? Evidence from Great Britain and Canada,” *Journal of Legislative Studies* 7 (2001)

**Overview**

Are parliamentary parties cohesive because leaders successfully impose discipline on their MPs or because MPs prefer – hence support – the same policies as their leaders do? If the latter is correct, and party cohesion is produced largely by members’ concordant preferences, then models that explain cohesion as a function of the disciplinary mechanisms available to parties once the MP is in Parliament are not useful. The article illustrates that MPs’ preferences on these ideological dimensions only partially explain how often they vote against their parties. Party affiliation remains a powerful predictor of the MP’s loyalty or dissent – suggesting that party discipline does, in fact, contribute to cohesion.

**Background**

* Political scientists tend to view legislative behaviour as the result of the interaction of preferences and institutional rules, however, not all agree that parties’ rules matter
* There is debate over whether parties constrain (or even have the capacity to constrain) their members’ behaviour
* It is not clear *a priori* whether party rules force their members to vote together *in spite of their disagreement* about policy, or whether they vote together simply *because they already agree* over policy. If the latter is true, then cohesion is largely independent of parties.
* The ‘parties vs. preferences’ debate has been a major player in American political science. Compared to parliamentary parties, US parties are not highly cohesive, which invites skepticism over their ability to compel disciplined behaviour from their members
* The high level of cohesion displayed in parliamentary parties implicitly discourages scholars from questioning their ability to enforce discipline among members: if parliamentary parties are highly cohesive it must be because they can and do enforce discipline. 4 problems with this:
  + Parliamentary parties are less cohesive then one might think
  + It ignores the fact that cohesion produced by members’ shared preferences is observationally equivalent to cohesion produced by a party’s rules/actions
  + Due to observational equivalence, there is a high opportunity cost to investigating this
  + The implicit belief that parliamentary parties can and do compel or organize cohesion could just be wrong
* Research compares UK and Canada

**Conclusion**

* Krehbiel’s preference-driven model of legislative behaviour is designed to drive home 2 points: (1) parties are not necessary for cohesion, and (2) party-based models of legislative behaviour do not produce unique observable implications driven solely by the preferences of individual parliamentarians
* Evidence in this paper suggests this null model can be safely rejected (as far as parties are concerned)
  + MP’s ideological preferences effect their behaviour (naturally) but one cannot go beyond this to declare that parties do not matter once individual preferences are taken into account – parties are more than just shared preferences.
  + An MP’s affiliation provides vastly more information about how that MP is likely to behave than do his or her preferences
* Implications of research: in addition to legislative and electoral rules, pay attention to the ways in which parties condition and constrain their members’ preferences.