C. Kam, *Party Discipline and Parliamentary Politics* (Cambridge CUP, 2009), chs 1, 3

**Chapter 1**

**Background**

Theoretical approaches to parliamentary behaviour:

1. The preference-driven approach – takes the view that legislative outcomes (i.e. the result of a parliamentary vote) are determined directly by the aggregation of preferences in the chamber – that is, MPs have certain policy preferences and they simply vote in a way that optimizes those preferences (Krehbiel’s model)

* If one takes this view, then it is not clear a priori whether parties force their members to vote together in spite of their disagreements about policy or whether they vote together simply because they already agree over policy. If the latter is true, then cohesion is entirely and simply a function of the distribution of the MP’s electorally induced policy preferences within and between the parliamentary parties

1. The institutional approach – formal rules and organizations (i.e. the vote of confidence, the electoral system, the internal rules of political parties, etc) alter the manner in which MPs pursue their preferences. In other words, institutions constrain behaviours
2. The sociological approach – both the preference-driven and institutional approaches to parliamentary behaviour are rational choice approaches that assume MPs are strategic utility maximizers. Those who adopt a sociological approach to parliamentary behaviour do not see MP’s actions as being guided by consciously strategic cost-benefit calculations or by formal rules. Instead, the backbencher’s decision to toe the line flow (not necessarily consciously) from internalized norms of party solidarity and loyalty. MPs’ behaviour is constrained – but not determined – by norms

A more useful strategy begins by recognizing that these three approaches are not mutually exclusive – institutional incentives as well as sociological forces can curb dissent.

Kam argues: ideological disagreement and electoral pressures (i.e. differences in electoral environments and incentives across constituencies) set the stage for dissent to occur. Agenda control on its own tends not to be able to offset these divisive forces, and leaders have to rely on other institutional rules of the Westminster parliamentary government to work to contain them. The confidence convention is the most imposing of these rules, but it is a heavy-handed instrument, ill suited for securing members’ loyalty on an on-going basis (and of no use to leaders of opposition parties). Thus, leaders prefer to take advantage of their MPs’ progressive ambitions and use their monopoly control of the recruitment channels that lead to the party front bench to secure unity.

Note: the divergence between this model and a purely preference-driven model is that in this view, ideological differences within the party are necessary, *but not sufficient* to incite dissent, whereas in Krehbiel’s model, such differences are necessary *and* sufficient for disunity

Kam’s model – the LEADS model of parliamentary behaviour: the MP’s Loyalty Elicited through Advancement, Discipline, and Socialization

**Chapter 3:**

* The LEADS model links dissent to a number of variables: the MP’s electoral security, career advancement, etc.
* The confidence convention stands apart from this model – by assumption, the MP’s vote is not critical to the survival of government – however, the confidence convention is a central feature of parliamentary government and one that might be expected to influence the level of dissent that parties experience
* Indeed, the confidence convention is an imposing parliamentary rule but it is a much less rigid constraint on the behaviour of party leaders and ordinary backbenchers than people may believe. At the margin, such as when the govt has an extremely narrow majority govt, and when a division is implicitly or explicitly on a matter of confidence, the convention is certainly all that is required to induce perfect, or near-perfect cohesion among members of the governing party. BUT parliamentary politics is rarely played out under these conditions
* Kam’s results:
  + Even when accounting for the pressures of the confidence convention on parliamentary behaviour, the abundance of career advancement opportunities, the party’s popularity (thus MP’s electoral prospects), and the level of party ID in the electorate (hence incentive to dissent), still influence the pattern of backbench dissent
  + One striking result is how frequent and extensive dissent is in the UK and Canada as compared to Australia and New Zealand. Only dealignment in the party system can account for these differences