

Party Structure and Backbench Dissent in the Canadian and British Parliaments

CHRISTOPHER GARNER *University of Oxford*

NATALIA LETKI *University of Oxford*

Introduction

Writing in the late 1980s, C.E.S. Franks argued that party discipline is stronger in Canada than it is in the British House of Commons. Whereas Canadian MPs are largely “trained seals” following the direction of their party leaders, British MPs demonstrate a tendency to vote against the party line (1987: 100–14). A decade later, a comparison of the levels of backbench dissent in the Canadian Liberal government with those of the British Labour government seems to support Franks’s observation. The 1997 Parliament in the UK, which has been considered to be relatively “quiet,” witnessed 96 rebellions by backbench Labour MPs. Moreover, “the number of [Labour] MPs prepared to vote against the Government at some point in the Parliament was 133, around half of Labour’s backbenchers” (Cowley and Stuart, 2003: 318). The figures from Canada’s 36th Parliament show a striking contrast, as the total number of Liberal backbenchers who dissented from the party line on at least one occasion is 16. Thus, while in the UK the total percentage of Labour backbenchers dissenting from party lines exceeded 40 percent, for the same time period in Canada the total percentage of Liberal backbench dissenters was 13 (16 out of 124).

Another way of looking at dissent in the two Parliaments during this period is by reference to the total number of government bills that attract dissenting votes. Between 1997 and 2001, the Labour Government intro-

Acknowledgments: We would like to thank Matthew Gabel, Sharon Gilad, Lauren McLaren and two anonymous JOURNAL reviewers for their helpful comments and advice.

Christopher Garner, Nuffield College, Oxford UK OX1 1NF, UK; christopher.garner@nuffield.oxford.ac.uk

Natalia Letki, Nuffield College, Oxford UK OX1 1NF, UK; natalia.letki@nuffield.oxford.ac.uk

duced 154 bills into Parliament, of which 23 (15%) attracted dissent from the backbenches, while in Canada the Liberal Government introduced 134 bills into Parliament, with 4 bills (3.7%) attracting dissent.

The fact that the levels of backbench dissent differ between the two Parliaments would not be particularly interesting, if not for the high level of similarity between all other aspects of these two systems (Kam, 2001). The two countries' Houses of Commons operate along similar lines, with similar rules and procedures. In fact, from the late 1960s onward, the push in institutional reforms to the Canadian House of Commons has been that of emulating Westminster. As a result, the Canadian House of Commons, as it is presently constituted in terms of the vast proportion of procedures and institutional structure, mirrors that of Westminster.

This paper aims to explain why the voting behaviour of MPs operating within two almost identical institutional systems differs so radically. Building on management and organizational behaviour literature, we shift the focus from the parliamentary tradition, conventions, rules, procedures and party systems, to the effect of the internal organization of a party. The approach taken in this paper is broadly neoinstitutional and comparative. It is institutional in both the conceptual and empirical tools that are brought to bear on the research question, and in its search for an understanding of how institutions (in this case, government party organization) affect individual attitudes and behaviours. In particular, we focus on the role of the culture of an organization—the belief sets, communication networks and perceptions. It is comparative in so much as it is designed to seek an answer to a comparative question: Why is there a different level of dissent among the government party MPs of two like systems?

In this article, we reconstruct the major theoretical approaches to studying cohesion and dissent in parliaments, and show that only some of them may be relevant for explaining the difference between the levels of dissent in Britain and Canada. We will also discuss the perceptions of internal party structure as a factor determining MPs' behaviour, and pose it as a major hypothesis for this research. Later, we will introduce the data and measures used to test this proposition. Finally, we will explore the empirical explanatory value of the discussed approaches.

Explaining Cohesion/Dissent

The institutional approaches to cohesion and dissent in legislative bodies usually refer to two main groups of factors: features external to party, and features of a party as a discrete system. The first group of factors invokes the type of governmental system (parliamentary vs. presidential) or the levels of inter-party competition within Parliament. Compar-

Abstract. In this paper we analyze intra-party determinants of dissenting behaviour using samples of British and Canadian government backbenchers. Controlling for the range of factors traditionally considered to be important predictors of dissenting behaviour, we find that the major factor determining cross-voting, next to MPs' tenure, is perceptions of isolation from party communication and influence channels. This effect is particularly visible among Labour MPs with long tenure, as their ideological position is more extreme than that of party leaders, which reinforces the effect of isolation. The results suggest that the difference of dissent levels between the Canadian and British Houses of Commons can be explained by the frontbenchers' approach to managing the major resource of the party, i.e., the backbenchers.

Résumé. Cet article traite des déterminants intra-partis du comportement de dissidence en examinant des groupes de députés d'arrière-ban des gouvernements britannique et canadien. En contrôlant pour la gamme de facteurs qui sont traditionnellement considérés comme étant les prédicteurs importants du comportement de dissidence, nous trouvons qu'à part la durée de service du député, la perception d'isolement des voies de communication et d'influence du parti constitue le principal facteur incitant le député à voter pour un autre parti. Cet effet est particulièrement visible parmi les députés du Parti travailliste ayant de longs états de service, car leur position idéologique est plus extrême que celle des chefs du parti, ce qui renforce l'effet d'isolement. Les résultats suggèrent que les différences de niveaux de dissidence entre les Chambres des communes canadienne et britannique s'expliquent par la façon dont les députés de premier plan gèrent la ressource principale du parti, c'est-à-dire les députés d'arrière-ban.

ative research has demonstrated that, in parliamentary systems, leaders of governing parties have more resources through which to reward loyal MPs (e.g., through promotion to government positions) and to discipline backbenchers (e.g., removal from positions, denial of questions at Question Time, etc.). Moreover, in many ways the backbencher's own political survival and re-election is largely dependent on the government's performance (Cox, 1987; Diermeier and Feddersen, 1998; Huber, 1996).

Both Canada and the UK are traditionally two-party parliamentary systems with a strong history of one party, majority-rule governments. Thus, competition from coalition partners and the "to-and-fro" of policy making in coalitions are not factors that would be useful for explaining variations between these countries. There is also little difference between the two countries in terms of the levels of inter-party competition during the 1997 Parliaments. In Canada, the Liberal party won a strong and decisive victory at the polls, and faced opposition parties that were fractured and in disarray. In Britain, Tony Blair's Labour party faced a heavily weakened Conservative opposition, as well as the Liberal Democrats who seemed, for the time being, appeased by Labour's manifesto pledges on health, education and constitutional reform.

The second group of explanations considers party as a discrete system that affects MPs' attitudes and behaviour.¹ We discuss below the main *intra*-party factors hypothesized to influence MPs' voting behaviour, such as the socializing effect of the party on MPs, the institution of the party whip, or the ideological distance of the backbencher from the party lead-

ers. We will also add another, new, dimension to the problem: we believe that the internal party structure and backbenchers' perceptions of the opportunities for voicing their concerns and objections *prior* to voting is crucial for the levels of dissent presented in the Parliament. Cowley (2002) has recently suggested the importance of the internal party structure for MPs' dissenting behaviour. In this project we will build on Cowley's work, focusing on how backbench MPs view their opportunities for influence within their party.

Tenure/Socialization

S.H. Beer argues that cohesion is due to "the like mindedness of Party MPs" (1969: 350–51). This argument reflects the role that psychological affection to group goals, norms and symbols can have on the actions of individual actors. Similarly, A. King defines party as an "organised opinion ... a community with a particular structure" and interests (1969: 113). When we speak of beliefs and values, we are also speaking of the role of socialization. MPs operate not only as constituency representatives, but also as members of a party group. As a result, over time they are socialized into norms and develop certain heuristics, which effectively determine their behaviour. The result should be "deradicalization" of MPs: "political socialisation is prominent ... its consequences are to buttress existing institutions by encouraging defenders and re-training insurgents" (Searing, 1986: 341, 372).

D. Docherty shows that this is indeed the case in Canada: long-serving MPs "are more inclined to hold party solidarity in higher regard than are junior members." He argues that "veteran legislators" are less likely to act as "blind" constituency delegates at the expense of party cohesion, and links this to the MPs' career ambitions and/or their recognition of the complexity of their representative function (1997: 148–50). P. Cowley offers an opposite argument for the effect of tenure on the behaviour of Labour MPs. According to his research, of those MPs elected for the first time in 1997, 28 per cent rebelled, with the comparable figure for long-serving MPs being 54 per cent (2002: 110). Moreover, "newly elected MPs are more likely to adopt a 'delegate role' and to rely on the whips" (2002: 173).

Ideology

A discussion of socialization brings us to the issue of how an MP's ideological stance influences his or her behaviour: the stronger the ideological attachment of an MP, the less deradicalized that MP will be, with the same holding true for institutional support (Searing, 1986: 369–72). Furthermore, Cowley finds a correlation between the ideological leanings

of MPs and their dissenting voting behaviour: Labour MPs who are left-leaning dissent more often than all other Labour MPs.² This leads him to conclude that “what appears to be driving rebellion is the basic left/right division within the PLP [Parliamentary Labour Party]” (2002: 105). Moreover, not only will ideological self-placement influence an MP’s position on a given issue, but his or her relative ideological distance from party leaders is likely to contribute to dissenting behaviour. Cowley has observed that the bills that attracted dissent in Britain’s 1997 Parliament are those that take the Labour party ‘rightward’ in terms of policy preference and ideology—a move that undoubtedly left a number of Labour backbenchers rather dissatisfied. A conclusion about the relevance of an MP’s ideological distance from the party leaders has been confirmed empirically by C. Kam’s (2001) study of British and Canadian Parliaments.

There also exists evidence that ideology may be correlated with tenure. First, I. Budge et al. suggest that the longer the tenure of an MP, the greater the chance of his or her being on the ‘fringe’ of the party’s ideological position due to recent shifts in policy preferences of the respective Parliaments’ parties (2001: 24–29). Second, in the UK, Cowley observes that those Labour MPs who have served longer tend to be left-leaning and are more likely to be less ‘Blairite’ in their views and approaches to politics (2002, see also Norris, 1998).

The Power of the Party Whip

Another common rationale that is given for the level of cohesion in Westminster parliamentary systems is the power of the Whip’s Office: it can impose sanctions in punishing truant MPs, and reward those who vote the party line, as well as threaten deselection, thus rendering the MP virtually unelectable (Franks, 1987). Another commonly cited power of the Whip’s Office is the ability to withdraw the ‘whip’ from the dissident MP, thus depriving him or her of the right to attend party meetings and receive direction and information on upcoming parliamentary business. The effect of this sanction is argued not only to be a diminishment of the opportunities for influence within party and Parliament, but also an infliction of psychological and social punishment, leaving the MP ostracized socially.

However, studies of the whips in the UK suggest that their power is in fact minor (Searing and Game, 1978). The role of the Whip’s Office is mostly found in serving as a liaison between the front- and back-benches; managing the party’s business in Parliament; and, lastly, party discipline. There is also evidence that the sanction of losing the whip is largely a formality (Butler and Butler, 2000; Jackson, 1968). In the case of Canadian parties, there are only a few occasions since 1945 that an MP has been punished by means of exclusion from the party caucus, with only

one MP being denied the reinstatement of the whip before the next general election. Much like in the UK, this particular threat seems to lack teeth (Docherty, 1997).

Perceptions of the Party Organization

Channelling MPs' disparate preferences into a coherent and focused political will is a large task for party leaders, and if the threat of exclusion from the party caucus or loss of the party whip is no longer credible, then political parties must find another way to manage MPs' aspirations and expectations. Here, we offer a new approach that has not been fully discussed or tested before. Building on institutional theory, management and organizational behaviour literature, we propose that parliamentary parties are organizations like any firm or corporation. They compete in the marketplace of Parliament, with certain goals in mind. This marketplace is given over to formal and informal rules of behaviour that structure the interactions of the actors (parties and MPs). As such, like any other firm, they require productive workers. Loyalty is an important factor in the pursuit of productivity, as it guides the individual actor's behaviour away from open dissent and funnels it into supportive channels (Kato, 1998).

As with most firms that seek to enhance the loyalty of workers, the frontbench (management) establishes opportunity channels through which the backbench (workers) may exert influence and participate freely, both as individuals and as autonomous work groups. Such opportunity channels include personal correspondence and contact with frontbenchers through backbench committees, which allow policy ideas and direction to be filtered upward (Berkley-Thomas, 1988; Fradette and Machaud, 1998; Murakami, 1998; Williams, 1998). It must be noted, however, that the reality of influence is secondary to the apparent existence of influence (the perception or illusion) in the achievement of loyalty. In short, the MP will react to the immediate organizational structure, and the structure that offers greater apparent accessibility and influence will be less alienating for the MP and more effective at inducing general patterns of loyalty.³ Management deficiency can lead to alienation through an ineffectual "harnessing" of the firm's workers. Such alienation is at best a waste of a resource, and at worst a factor contributing to the decay of the firm (Hirschman, 1970). Labour economics and management studies present empirical evidence that the firms able to provide channels for voicing opinions have high worker satisfaction and retention rates (Cannings, 1989; Withey and Cooper, 1989).

Thus, if political parties seek to maximize their cohesion in the House of Commons, and also present a united front in the country, then the structure of the party should be used to induce loyalty. If we assume that

the party organization may provide the individual MP with a sense of efficacy to the system through party opportunity channels (e.g., party caucus meetings, committees and meetings with ministers), and that these channels allow MPs to feel that they have an effective voice, then this perception of influence will assist in the building of party cohesion and loyalty. Thus, the following hypothesis can be posited: MPs who perceive their influence within the party as being effective and the channels of communication between the backbenches and frontbenches as being accessible, dissent less often than the MPs who feel isolated from the communication channels and detached from the party leaders.⁴

Data and Methodology

The analyses in this paper utilize 68 surveys completed by British Labour and Canadian Liberal MPs. All backbench MPs who comprised the two countries' samples (150 Canadian MPs and 151 UK MPs) were contacted in the autumn of 1998, with second and third attempts made throughout the winter of 1998/1999.⁵ Notably, some Labour and Liberal MPs withdrew their initial consent to participate, offering the reason that the Caucus/PLP had issued a directive that they were not to speak to anyone regarding such matters, or take part in surveys.⁶ Nevertheless, 68 surveys with MPs were completed and they will be used to investigate the research questions of this paper. Analysis of the samples shows that they are representative of the respective Parliaments' populations in terms of tenure, regional distribution and majority wins.

Measuring Dissent

Cohesion is defined as a situation in which a majority of the party votes cluster together to support the party leadership's policy direction and decisions. Dissent, on the other hand, is defined as a particular MP's failure (or unwillingness) to vote with the majority of his or her party and/or demonstration of a lack of support for the party leadership's directives and policy. Hoffman and Ward (1970) developed a simple "cohesiveness rating" for the Canadian 26th Parliament (1963–1965), while Norton (1978) developed a number of measurement tools for cohesion that have been applied to the UK. The Rice Index is commonly applied to examinations of cohesion in the American Congress (Rice, 1925). However, while cohesion and dissent may be considered to form two dimensions of the same phenomenon, and they are both appropriate for aggregate-level studies of voting behaviour, in this paper we seek to examine determinants of voting behaviour at the individual level. Therefore, the concept

of cohesion will not be useful for our analysis, and our interest here is in the measure that captures the individual's level of dissent.

We recorded the position of the MPs on all the government's bills voted on during the parliamentary term in which the MPs were interviewed, in cases where one or more government party backbenchers dissented.⁷ This meant four bills for Canada and eight for the UK (the list of bills can be found in Appendix B). To reflect the true extent of dissent on government bills, we included data for all stages in a bill's progress through Parliament, from first to third reading. To measure the MPs' propensity to dissent, we created additive indices, separately for each country, that recode the levels of dissent on the scale from 0 to 1, where '0' means no dissent, and '1' means voting against government on every bill at every stage (there were no such respondents in our sample).

Before the levels of dissent are discussed, certain caveats should be made. The period of the study (1997–1999) somewhat underestimates levels of dissent in the UK and, accordingly, overestimates dissent in Canada. In fact, in Canada there were no instances of dissenting behaviour beyond those experienced within the research period, while in the UK during the research period a total of eight government bills attracted one or more dissenting votes from backbench Labour MPs, which constitutes only 34.8 per cent of all the bills that attracted dissent during the entire Parliament. Had the research been conducted in an earlier/later/longer period, the differences in the levels of dissent between Canadian and UK MPs in our sample would have been much more pronounced.

The proportion of MPs who have not dissented is much higher in Canada than in the UK (81.1% and 61.1%, respectively), and the range of dissent for UK Labour MPs is almost twice as large as for the Canadian Liberal MPs (0.75 and 0.47, respectively). Moreover, the average level of dissent in the UK sample is as high as 0.146 ($SD = 0.235$), while among Canadians it is only 0.063 ($SD = 0.141$). These results correspond with the observations by other authors (Cowley, 2002; Docherty, 1997; Forsey and Eglington, 1985; Franks, 1987; Norton, 1978; Stewart, 1977), and follow in the expected direction, if on a smaller magnitude due to the factors discussed above.

Analyzing Communication Channels and Policy Influence

To explore the MPs' perceptions of party structure, we developed four survey questions that probe their opinions about opportunities to exert influence through party structure. Table 1 presents the responses of MPs from both countries as pooled 'agree' percentages. The exact wording of each question can be found in Appendix A.

TABLE 1
Attitudes Toward Backbench Influence

	Agree:	
	% Labour MPs	% Liberal MPs
Frontbench rarely canvasses backbench opinion (Q. 3a)	47.2	37.6
Backbench cannot influence government policy (Q. 10)	47.2	12.5
Caucus is not an effective forum (Q. 15)	52.8	15.6
Leadership is unresponsive to backbench opinion (Q. 18)	41.6	12.5

(Labour *N* = 36; Liberal *N* = 32)

Here we find that the percentage of British Labour MPs who believe that the party does *not* allow them influence is much larger than that found in the Canadian Liberal party. Opportunities for influence are seen to be elusive for Labour MPs (question 10), and the ability to consult the frontbench is unsatisfactory, due to the perceived unresponsiveness of leadership (question 18). Comparing the Labour party respondents with those in the Liberal party, we find a clear difference in attitudes: there is little indication of great dissatisfaction with party opportunity channels amongst the Canadian Liberal MPs. The greatest contrast between the two countries' MPs is seen in the perception of PLP/Caucus (question 15), with over 52 per cent of Labour MPs feeling it to be an ineffective forum, while only 15.6 per cent of Liberal MPs feel similarly. In fact, the only area in which Labour and Liberal backbench opinion seems to converge is in the overall view of the degree to which the respective leaderships canvassed for backbench opinion (question 3a).

Table 2 presents factor loadings from the unrotated solution in principal component analysis for the respective parties. In both cases only

TABLE 2
Backbench Influence: Principal Component Analysis

	Labour MPs	Liberal MPs
Frontbench rarely canvasses backbench opinion (Q. 3a)	.862	.761
Backbench cannot influence government policy (Q. 10)	.804	.723
Caucus is not an effective forum (Q. 15)	.694	.816
Leadership is unresponsive to backbench opinion (Q. 18)	.906	.886
Eigenvalue	2.691	2.551
Variance explained	67.3%	63.8%
Cronbach's Alpha	0.802	0.790

(Labour *N* = 36; Liberal *N* = 32)

one factor was extracted with an eigenvalue well above 2.5, and explaining as much as 67.3 per cent of variance in the UK and 63.8 per cent in Canada. All this indicates that the four questions we have chosen to measure MPs' opinions about backbench influence tap the same underlying dimension: both the Labour and Liberal backbench MPs are consistent in their answering of questions. The questions also demonstrate high Alpha scores when subjected to reliability analysis.⁸ Thus, there is reason to believe that we have a powerful tool that will be useful in the analysis of the linkage between attitudes and behaviour.

Party Opportunities and Dissenting Behaviour: Exploring the Link

Using the four questions discussed above, we created an additive index for isolation from opportunity channels.⁹ We also created three variables based on the explanations of dissenting behaviour discussed earlier: ideological self-placement (ideology), power of the party whip (whip's power), and tenure of the MP in Parliament (tenure).¹⁰ Ideological position is measured by means of a seven-point left-right self-placement scale. Attitude toward the power of the party whip is captured by the MP's answer to the following question: "In your experience as an MP, how would you rate the actual power of the whips?" Tenure contains information about the number of parliamentary terms served as MP. Table 3 below presents the means of answers to these three variables for both parties. We also include the isolation index, for comparison.

The results of Table 3 show that while all four factors may well be related to dissenting behaviour, only one of them may be responsible for the difference in the levels of dissent between the two analyzed

TABLE 3
Determinants of Dissenting Behaviour

	Labour MPs		Liberal MPs	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Ideology	3.56	1.61	4.00	1.39
Tenure	2.38	2.66	2.04	0.64
Whip's power	1.92	0.77	1.97	0.65
Isolation	3.41	1.15	2.50	0.94

*This variable is coded (1) for "Whips are very powerful," (2) for "Whips' power is limited" and (3) for "Whips' power is overrated." For simplicity's sake, we present here an arithmetic mean instead of distribution, yet we should note that Chi² for the crosstabulation of political party with this variable was extremely small and statistically insignificant.

parties: isolation. Only this variable varies significantly between the Labour and Liberal parties, with Labour MPs feeling, on average, significantly (over 36%) more isolated than their Liberal counterparts. This difference, unlike the remaining three effects, is highly statistically significant at $p = 0.001$.

It seems that we have successfully identified a very strong determinant of MPs' behaviour, thus confirming our initial intuition that the key to the puzzle of the different levels of dissent between the two countries being analyzed should be linked to the perceptions of internal party structure. Our next step is to test the individual-level effects of the above-mentioned variables on MPs' behaviour to determine to what extent ideological position, tenure, fear of losing the whip and sense of isolation influence MPs in deciding to cast a dissenting vote. Since one of our assumptions in this paper is that the institutional structure of Parliament within which MPs operate is broadly similar for both countries, for multivariate analysis we pool all the respondents together, controlling for the potential party-specific effects by means of a dummy variable. The remaining explanatory factors entered are isolation, whip's power, ideology and tenure. Table 4 shows the results of the regression models testing our predictions.

In Model 4.1 we regress dissent on a party dummy and variables that represent explanations present in the existing literature: whip's power, an MP's ideological stance and the number of terms he/she has spent in

TABLE 4
Party Opportunities and Dissenting Behaviour
Unstandardized OLS estimates (*SE in parentheses*)

	4.1	4.2
Constant	0.021 (0.096)	0.088 (0.094)
Political party: Labour	0.064 (0.044)	0.014 (0.046)
Whips' power	-0.007 (0.031)	-0.002 (0.029)
Ideology	-0.023 (0.015)	-0.001 (0.016)
Tenure	0.037 ^a (0.011)	0.034 ^b (0.011)
Isolation		0.064 ^b (0.024)
Adjusted R^2	0.197	0.273
F	5.050 ^a ($N = 68$)	5.957 ^a ($N = 68$)

^a $p \leq 0.001$; ^b $p \leq 0.01$; ^c $p \leq 0.05$

office. This equation explains almost 20 per cent of the variance, but out of the three variables only tenure has a statistically significant effect on dissent. This effect is strong and positive: every additional term spent in office increases the level of dissenting behaviour by almost 4 per cent. In model 4.2 we add isolation, which increases explained variance by a further 7 per cent. Isolation turns out to be the strongest predictor, as an increase of one point on the isolation scale (one to five) increases the level of dissent by 6.4 per cent, and this effect is highly statistically significant. The difference in dissent between the least and most isolated MP is 32 per cent.¹¹

Socialization and experience may explain why the MPs' levels of dissent are so strongly related to tenure. However, it seems that, contrary to what Searing and Docherty suggest, and in line with Cowley's findings, MPs are being socialized into independence from the party rather than into compliance. Being more established in their job may mean that they know when to exit from the party line, and thus know when to try and force a change of government policy direction, or at the very least, to flaunt a symbolic independent stance for electoral and constituency reasons.

Our hypothesis stated that if an MP perceives his or her influence within the party as being effective, and further perceives the channels of communication between the backbenches and frontbenches as being accessible, then dissenting behaviour will be kept to a minimum. This hypothesis is confirmed by the present results—perceptions of the opportunities and constraints placed upon the MPs by their respective political parties within Parliament are an extremely powerful predictor of dissenting behaviour. MPs who feel isolated from the opportunity channels within their party are significantly more likely to dissent. Furthermore, the effect of perceptions of influence is even stronger than the influence of tenure. Moreover, both ideology and whip's power turned out to be statistically insignificant.¹²

Isolation, Ideology and Tenure: What Happened in the UK?

When introducing the potential determinants of cohesion and dissent, we noted that some researchers dealing with the UK Parliament have identified a correlation between ideology and tenure: due to the evolution of the Labour party's policy preferences, longer-serving MPs will tend to lean more to the left in their ideological position in comparison with the party leaders (Budge et al., 2001; Cowley, 2002). As a result, those who have a longer tenure take a more extreme ideological position and thus are more likely to dissent. Despite the fact that ideology as a predictor in Models 4.1 and 4.2 did not perform well, we may follow I. Budge et al.

and Cowley in suggesting that the combination of tenure and ideological position contributes to the likelihood of MPs’ dissenting behaviour in the UK. Moreover, the Canadian Liberal party has been perceived as a “brokerage party,” whose goal has been to win and retain the reigns of government, thus making the MPs favour a pragmatic rather than an ideological stance. This would mean that the effect of ideology is specific to the Labour party.

We analyze this issue in Table 5, below. At the same time, building on Budge et al., Cowley and Kam’s observations we can also hypothesize that it is not the ideological distance from the party leaders *per se* that makes MPs vote against their party, but rather that their ideological position makes them feel additionally isolated from the party channels and opportunities. Thus dissent becomes the only opportunity to voice dissatisfaction. Also, owing to the “brokerage” approach to politics of the Canadian Liberal party in comparison with the more ideological nature of politics within the UK Labour party, and a resulting smaller ideological distance between front- and back-benchers on average in Canada than

TABLE 5
What Happened in the UK?
Unstandardized OLS estimates (*SE in parentheses*)

	5.1	5.2
Constant	0.005 (0.072)	−0.045 (0.081)
Political party: Labour	0.145 ^c (0.068)	0.285 ^c (0.109)
Isolation	0.052 ^c (0.024)	0.082 ^a (0.024)
Whips’ power	0.013 (0.029)	0.001 (0.029)
Ideology	0.019 (0.019)	0.031 (0.019)
Tenure	0.079 ^a (0.020)	0.032 ^b (0.011)
Ideology*tenure*party: Labour	−0.017 ^c (0.007)	
Ideology*isolation*party: Labour		−0.026 ^b (0.009)
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	0.304	0.314
<i>F</i>	5.871 ^a (<i>N</i> = 68)	6.103 ^a (<i>N</i> = 68)

^a*p* ≤ 0.001; ^b*p* ≤ 0.01; ^c*p* ≤ 0.05

in the UK, we expect that the combination of Ideology and Isolation should have a greater effect on levels of backbench dissent in the UK than in Canada. Model 5.2 tests this proposition empirically.

It should be first explained that neither the interaction between ideology and tenure nor that between ideology and isolation was statistically significant before the effect of party was added to the interaction terms.¹³ An “ideology*tenure*party” interaction term in model 5.1 tested whether the Labour MPs’ relative ideological position, related to their long tenure, resulted in a lack of approval for new policies, and thus was a determinant of dissenting behaviour. As we can see, this effect was negative and statistically significant at $p < 0.05$, which means that the long-serving MPs who are more centrist are less likely to dissent than long-serving left-wing MPs. As an example, we might say that the ideological difference between two Labour MPs that is equal to half of the ideological spectrum, combined with the same tenure of both MPs (for example, 14 terms, which is the maximum in the present sample) would result in a 71.4 per cent difference in their levels of dissent, where a more right-wing MP would dissent less.¹⁴ The party dummy used in this model shows Labour MPs dissent, on average, 14.5 per cent more often than Liberal MPs. Tenure maintains the high predictive power demonstrated in the previous models, as every term in office increases the levels of dissent by 7.9 per cent. Isolation is also a strong and significant predictor, as a one-point increase on the five-point isolation scale increases the dependent variable by 5.2 per cent. We can also see that while the relative ideological position related to an MP’s tenure is relevant for explaining dissenting behaviour, on its own, ideology does not have any predictive power. The model explains 30.4 per cent of total variance.

Model 5.2 presents a more interesting and conclusive picture. It introduces an “ideology*isolation*party” interaction term, which tests for the impact of the sense of isolation related to an MP’s ideological position. Again, the interaction term is negative and statistically significant. It indicates that, for example, an extreme left-wing Labour MP who feels very isolated (five on the five-point scale of isolation) dissents 39 per cent more often than an equally isolated MP who places him- or herself in the middle of the left-right scale.¹⁵ All this supports our hypothesis (based on Budge et al., 2001 and Cowley, 2002 observations) that in the Labour party, due to recent policy shifts, more MPs with left-wing inclinations will feel particularly isolated from the party organization and express this by voting against the party line. In the present equation, the isolation variable, despite being included in the interaction term, is a very strong predictor: the difference in dissent between the most and least isolated MPs is as high as 41 per cent. The model has a very high predictive power, explaining over 31.4 per cent of total variance.

Conclusions

A management consultants' report, commissioned by the Labour party, makes the following observation regarding the party's backbenchers:

They are by far the largest resource available to the party. Yet backbenchers are not organised into any formal policy and campaigning structure as such [through] which they can help the party.... In effect the formal structure of the party ignores more than half the resources which are at its disposal to help it achieve its goals. This problem can only be solved if the talent of the backbenchers is harnessed and effectively managed. (Mitchell, 1994: 694)

As in the consultants' report, the present research favours the approach of treating a political party within Parliament as if it were a firm. We have presented a puzzling observation about the radically different voting behaviour of parliamentarians within two parties operating in the near-identical environments of the British and Canadian Parliaments. Since the existing approaches referring to the institutional structure of the Parliament as a main determinant of MPs' behaviour clearly were not going to be useful in answering the question of why British Labour MPs vote against their party's line far more often than Canadian Liberal MPs, we referred to the party structure, and in particular to MPs' perceptions of their access to opportunity channels within their party.

We have revealed the concomitant differences in perceptions that the MPs have of their influence in their respective parliamentary parties. We have shown that Labour backbenchers feel that they are isolated from party leadership and left without resources or opportunity channels through which to effectively influence the policy process. Moreover, this perception of isolation from influence results in a greater willingness to engage in dissenting voting on the floor of the House. The general feeling of the MPs appears to be that giving voice to their views through dissenting votes in the House of Commons is the only effective method of being heard by frontbench management.

We have also explored other potential determinants of dissenting behaviour and found that, against a popular socialization and de-radicalization thesis (Searing, 1986), and in line with Cowley's findings, long tenure in Parliament increases backbench MPs' independence from the party, making dissenting behaviour more likely. We have also demonstrated that in the Labour party, right-wing MPs dissent less often than left-wing MPs, and that this effect is magnified by tenure. We believe that this can be explained by the relative ideological distance of MPs to their leaders and, in the UK, by their level of approval for "Blairite" policies (Cowley, 2002; Norris, 1998).

Testing the empirical linkage between the feelings of isolation from party influence channels and actual observed dissenting voting behav-

ious in the House of Commons highlighted the effect that party organization can have on behaviour. The Labour party's top-down management system produces far more dissatisfaction and dissent among MPs than the Liberal party's democratic management system: around 50 per cent of interviewed Labour MPs (in comparison with less than 16 per cent of Canadian MPs) stated that backbenchers have little influence on government policy or on the party leadership's decisions, and that the PLP is not an effective forum. As a result, the level of dissent in the UK Parliament has been significantly higher than that found in Canada.

In summary, through the examination of MPs' perceptions of intra-party management of opportunity structures, we have demonstrated that the institution of the party in Parliament does affect behaviour. The differences revealed by the two countries' government parties highlight strong evidence for an understanding of why intra-party dissent is more common in the UK than in Canada. In effect, the evidence before us shows that party leadership, through the determination of party organization, can have a significant impact on managing backbench behaviour.

Notes

- 1 The influence of Parliament on MPs' values is also a recognized explanation of voting behaviour (see Crowe, 1983, 1986; Searing, 1982, 1986; Searing and Game, 1978). However, it will not be useful here, as the British and Canadian Parliaments are almost identical, and therefore their structure cannot be used to account for the differences in their MPs' behaviour.
- 2 He uses measures of ideology that examine the MPs' self-reported positions on a number of different questions, e.g., their position on fighting inflation (Cowley, 2002).
- 3 Dowding et al. suggest that "group loyalty" is dependant on "first, one's identification with the object of loyalty, and secondly, the amount one has invested in that object. We identify with something to the degree that it is tied to our personal history" (Dowding et al., 2000: 12).
- 4 It should be noted that this perception of influence is what Kornberg and Mishler attempt to examine in their 1972–1974 survey of Canadian MPs, using a behavioural model (Kornberg and Mishler, 1976).
- 5 All the MPs who responded to the survey were also later interviewed in-depth; however, this information will not be used in the present paper.
- 6 The authors are in possession of copies of these directives.
- 7 To make the samples of acts comparable between the two studied countries, we used three main criteria: 1) time limit (from the beginning of the parliamentary term to the end of our study, i.e., July/October 1997 to March 1999), thus excluding any bills initiated during the previous parliamentary term; 2) authorship (government bills only), thus including only those bills that theoretically should have been supported by the backbenchers; and 3) contentiousness (bills contested by at least one government MP), thus controlling for the level of contentiousness for the discussed period in both Parliaments.

- 8 Reliability is further confirmed by the fact that the questions used were asked at differing points in the survey questionnaire and have different directions.
- 9 The index ranges from one to five, with the highest value representing high levels of isolation. In question 10, "very much influence" was coded as one, "somewhat influential" as three, and "not enough influence" as five. In question 15, "disagree" was coded as one, "don't know" as three, and "agree" as five. Questions 3a and 18 kept their original coding.
- 10 We use tenure as a proxy for socialization, as the longer an MP is exposed to the legislative and party environment, the greater the influence that environment should have on both her values and her behaviour.
- 11 Despite the hypothesis of a relationship between some of the independent variables, collinearity diagnostics did not detect any problems. Moreover, we performed the analysis separately for the variables whip's power, ideology and tenure (accompanied by isolation and a party dummy) and these models also showed that only isolation and tenure have significant predictive power.
- 12 Following Franks' argument (1987), the phenomenon of "safe seats" should be a relevant factor in explaining high levels of dissent in the British Parliament. According to Franks, a high proportion of British MPs, in contrast to their Canadian counterparts, are secure in their re-election prospects, due to lower levels of electoral volatility. Therefore, they are not strongly bound to party discipline. We identified 11 constituencies in our sample that can be classified as safe Labour seats (i.e., continuously held by Labour since the 1987 election). Analysis has shown that there is no difference in the levels of dissent between Labour MPs from safe and non-safe constituencies, and, when entered in the multivariate analysis, safe seats have no statistically significant predictive power. Therefore, we concluded that the phenomenon of safe seats cannot be used to explain the difference in the levels of dissent between the studied government parties.
- 13 Separate analysis of ideology and tenure as determinants of isolation showed that while neither had any effect on isolation in the Liberal party, for the Labour party, ideology is an extremely strong predictor, explaining almost 60 per cent of variance. Thus, an MP who is one point more left-wing (on a seven-point left-right scale) is 11 per cent more isolated (0.550 on a five-point scale of isolation). This effect is statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. Bivariate correlation for this relationship is -0.768 , significant at $p < 0.001$. Tenure was not a significant predictor of isolation.
- 14 The effect of the interaction term for a left-wing Labour MP serving 14 terms, holding all other variables constant, is $b = -0.238$, while for an equally long-serving centrist MP the effect is $b = -0.952$.
- 15 The effect of this interaction term for a left-wing extremely isolated Labour MP, holding all other variables constant, is $b = -0.130$, while for an equally isolated centrist MP it is $b = -0.520$.

References

- Beer, S.H. 1969. *Modern British Politics: A Study of Parties and Pressure Groups*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Berkley-Thomas, A. 1988. "Does Leadership Make a Difference to Organizational Performance?" *Administrative Science Quarterly* 33: 388–400.
- Budge, I., H.D. Kingemann, A. Volkens, J. Bara and E. Tanenbaum. 2001. *Mapping Policy Preferences: Estimates for Parties, Electors, and Governments 1945–1998*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

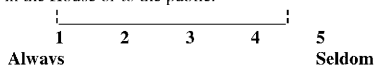
- Butler, D. and G. Butler. 2000. *Twentieth Century British Political Facts*. London: Macmillan.
- Cannings, K. 1989. "An Exit-Voice Model of Managerial Attachment." *Journal of Economic Behaviour and Organisation* 12: 107–29.
- Cowley, P. 2002. *Revolts and Rebellions: Parliamentary Voting Under Blair*. London: Politics Publishing.
- Cowley, P. and M. Stuart. 2003. "In Place of Strife? The PLP in Government, 1997–2001." *Political Studies* 51: 315–31.
- Cox, G.W. 1987. *The Efficient Secret: The Cabinet and the Development of Political Parties in Victorian England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Crowe, E. 1983. "Consensus and Structure in Legislative Norms: Party Discipline in the House of Commons." *Journal of Politics* 45: 907–31.
- Crowe, E. 1986. "The Web of Party Authority: Party Loyalty and Social Control in the British House of Commons." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 11: 161–85.
- Diermeier, D. and T.J. Feddersen. 1998. "Cohesion in Legislatures and the Vote of Confidence Procedure." *American Political Science Review* 92: 611–21.
- Docherty, D. 1997. *Mr Smith Goes to Ottawa: Life in the House of Commons*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Dowding, K., P. John, T. Mergoupis and M. van Vugt. 2000. "Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Analytic and Empirical Developments." *European Journal of Political Research* 37: 469–95.
- Forsey, E. and G.C. Eglinton. 1985. *The Question of Confidence in Responsible Government*. Ottawa: Special Committee on Reform of the House of Commons.
- Fradette, M. and S. Machaud. 1998. *The Power of Corporate Kinetics: Create the Self-Adapting, Self-renewing, Instant Action Enterprise*. New York: Simon & Shuster.
- Franks, C.E.S. 1987. *Parliament of Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Hirschman, A.O. 1970. *Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations and States*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hoffman, D. and N. Ward. 1970. *Bilingualism and Biculturalism in the Canadian House of Commons*. Ottawa: Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism.
- Huber, J. 1996. "The Impact of Confidence Votes on Legislative Politics in Parliamentary Systems." *American Political Science Review* 90: 269–82.
- Jackson, R.J. 1968. *Rebels and Whips: An Analysis of Dissension, Discipline and Cohesion in British Political Parties*. London: Macmillan.
- Kam, C. 2001. "Do Ideological Preferences Explain Parliamentary Behaviour? Evidence from Great Britain and Canada." *Journal of Legislative Studies* 7: 89–126.
- Kato, J. 1998. "When that Party Breaks Up: Exit, Voice and Loyalty among Japanese Legislators." *American Political Science Review* 92: 857–70.
- King, A. 1969. "Political Parties in Western Democracies." *Polity* 2: 111–41.
- Kornberg, A. and W. Mishler. 1976. *Influence in Parliament: Canada*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Mitchell, A. 1994. "Backbench Influence: A Personal View." *Parliamentary Affairs* 47: 687–704.
- Murakami, T. 1998. "The Formation of Teams: A British and German Comparison." *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 9: 800–17.
- Norris, P. 1998. "New Labour, New Politicians?" In *Contemporary Political Studies*, eds. A. Dobson and J. Stanyer. Nottingham: Political Studies Association Meetings.
- Norton, P. 1978. *Conservative Dissidents: Dissent within the Parliamentary Conservative Party 1970–74*. London: Temple Smith.
- Rice, S.A. 1925. "The Behaviour of Legislative Groups." *Political Science Quarterly* 40: 60–72.

- Searing, D. 1982. "Rules of the Game: Can the Politicians Be Trusted?" *American Political Science Review* 76: 239–58.
- Searing, D. 1986. "A Theory of Political Socialization: Institutional Support and Deradicalization in Britain." *British Journal of Political Science* 16: 341–76.
- Searing, D. and C. Game. 1978. "Horses for Course: Recruitment of the Whips in the British House of Commons." *British Journal of Political Science* 7: 361–85.
- Stewart, J. 1977. *The Canadian House of Commons: Procedures and Reform*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press.
- Williams, T. 1998. "Job Satisfaction in Teams." *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 9: 782–99.
- Withey, M.J. and W.H. Cooper. 1989. "Predicting Exit, Voice, Loyalty and Neglect." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 34: 521–39.

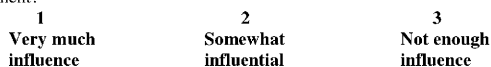
Appendix A

Survey questions used:

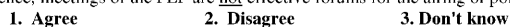
- 3a. The front bench of the Labour Government canvasses input from backbench MPs on policies prior to presenting them in the House or to the public.



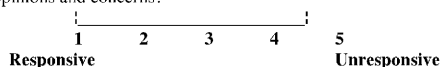
10. In general, how much influence do you think backbench MPs in your party have into the decisions made by your Government?



15. In my experience, meetings of the PLP are not effective forums for the airing of policy issues.



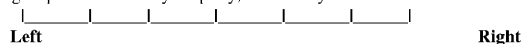
18. In your experiences as an MP, how would you rate the overall responsiveness of the party leadership to backbench opinions and concerns?



20. These days it seems common to talk about the omnipresence and often omnipotence of the Whip's Office. In your experience as an MP, how would you rate the actual power of the Whips? (Please check the statement that best describes your opinion.)

- **The Whips are very powerful; they have the ability to make life exceedingly difficult for MPs if they don't toe the party line.**
- **The Whips have the ability to reprimand so-called "deviant" MPs but their power is limited to relatively minor punishments.**
- **The Whips are not very powerful. In fact, the myth of the omnipotent Whip is just that, a myth.**

26. On the left-right spectrum within your party, where do you think other Labour MPs would place you?



Appendix B

Sample of votes used to measure dissent

UK Government Bills:	Canadian Government Bills:
1. Lone Parents Vote	1. Bill C33: Human Rights Act and Gay Rights
2. Lords Bill Vote	Time Allocation Second Reading
3. Disability Bill	Second Reading
4. Higher Education Bill	Time Allocation on Committee Report
5. Competition Bill	Committee Report
6. Terrorism Bill:	Third Reading
Terrorism Tabling Motion	2. Bill C32: Environmental Rights
1st Amendment Second Reading	Time Allocation at Second Reading
2nd Amendment Second Reading	Committee Report
3rd Amendment Second Reading	Third Reading
7. Asylum Bill:	3. Bill C67: Citizenship
Second Reading	4. Bill C78: Omnibus Bill on Public Service Pensions:
Third Reading	Time Allocation at Second Reading
8. Sexual Offences Bill:	Second Reading
Amendment Second Reading	Time Allocation at Committee Report
	Motion to amend definition of "spouse"
	Committee Report
	Third Reading