**Question:** The recently published book on Canadian political science, *The Comparative Turn*, has chapters on federalism and on the courts, but nothing on other Canadian governmental institutions. If you were asked to write a chapter for the second edition of the book, rectifying this oversight, what would you say about the Canadian literature on governmental institutions in terms of how non-Canadian literature has influenced it and what it has to offer the study of other political systems?

In distilling the topic down to a salient sub-field on governmental institutions, the chapter would primarily focus on the literature developing on Legislatures and Executives. This is a particularly good literature to choose from, as it has begun to undergo its own comparative turn. The chapter would be broken up into two main components: the first section of the chapter would focus on the reliance in the Canadian literature (until recently) on what has been termed the “Responsible Government Approach”; while the second half of the chapter would focus on the comparative turn currently underway. These two components will be briefly outlined here.

The responsible government approach has really defined the literature on legislatures and the executive in Canada. Though it originally borrowed from an older British tradition (Dicey), it since became the core component in legislative studies in Canada. The approach is characterized as being strongly normative in its defence of the existing parliamentary system. The responsible government approach has been widely utilized in Canadian political science. White, in his article “The Coalition that Wasn’t” describes himself as an “unabased” fan of the Westminster system, while others, such as Jennifer Smith and S. Sutherland, have invoked the responsible government approach in defending Canada’s institutions from reform.

However, the criticisms of this approach (the Canadian approach) to the study of legislatures and the executive are long-standing. In 1984, Sroule-Jones complained that Canadians uncritically accept the Westminster system without considering alternative arrangements or exploring the principles of institutional design. Nearly a decade later, Atkinson and Thomas in argued that Canadian legislative studies remain primarily descriptive, atheoretical, and isolated from the comparative literature. They critique the literature on a number of fronts, arguing that (1) there is no theory of legislative influence; (2) that Canadians fail to employ a well-defined definition of representation within their system of governance; (3) that there is little understanding about the legislative careers of members of parliament; and that (4) there is little understanding of how party discipline has eroded responsible government.

Nearly a decade following Atkinson and Thomas (presumably because their advice was not adequately followed), in 2002, Jonathan Malloy built on these arguments in his article “The ‘Responsible Government Approach’ and its effect on Canadian legislative studies,” arguing in turn that the Responsible Government Approach is hindered by two key problems. The first is that many of the key tenets or claims of RGA are hidden out of sight, and are thus very difficult to test empirically (i.e. that backbenchers have policy or caucus influence). The second problem is that the approach emphasizes accountability so strongly that it appears to undervalue such complementary principles of representation and responsiveness.

In considering, now, where the study of Legislatures and Executives sits in 2012 (again, a decade after the last critical essay by Malloy), some significant moves forward can be seen. Malloy, in the conclusion of his article, pointed to a “few glimmers of hope” in the work of Kam and Schneider. These works, and others, have begun to truly change the face of this sub-field. In work of these – and other – authors, a truly comparative turn is underway. Soroka is in dialogue with the US, while Kam is with the British empire – UK, Australia, NZ – Kam looks at when do legislators vote against their parties, while Soroka looks at constituency influence on question period (as a proxy for legislative/parliamentary life). Meanwhile, in the same vein as Kam, Garner and Letki consider intra-party determinants of dissenting behaviour of government backbenchers. Kam and Indridason consider the timing of cabinet reshuffles.

Change is possible from within – something that White insists on