

“Government Success and Legislative Productivity in the Canadian House of Commons:
Does Majority or Minority Government Matter?”*

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ABSTRACT

Scholars have not sufficiently examined minority and majority governing contexts in the Canadian House of Commons. This study assesses the impact of majority and minority governments on legislative success rates and output, two key criteria that have been overlooked in the contemporary literature. The quantitative analysis spans the 22nd to 40th Parliaments (1953-2009) and accounts for institutional factors that interact with government type, including cabinet size, seat ratios in the Commons, length of session, agenda size, as well as economic indicators to explain agenda success and productivity. The study clarifies the conditions under which both majority and minority governments have been most and least successful, and elucidates the basis for differences in success rates and output by government type.

Keywords: Canada, House of Commons, minority government, majority government, legislation

Mots clés: Canada, Chambre des Communes, gouvernement minoritaire, gouvernement majoritaire, législation

Unlike many European parliamentary democracies, Canada does *not* have a tradition of formal coalition politics in the House of Commons, either in election contests or during post-election government formation. The choice has been either majority or minority government with one of the two major parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives anchoring cabinets with a plurality of seats in Parliament. Of course, such minority governments may be considered a type of *de facto* coalition since they must operate by building winning legislative blocs on an ad hoc basis with other select parties. Nevertheless, looming ominously over minority governments are confidence votes at any moment. There is a manifest uncertainty and fear of imminent defeat that threatens their stability and capacity to govern effectively.

A half century ago the frequency of minority governments represented for some a singularly objectionable development—a supposedly menacing harbinger of the demise of the tradition of responsible government. As the eminent scholar Eugene Forsey (1964, 1) noted following the April 1963 federal election, which ousted John Diefenbaker’s Tories from power, Liberals campaigned against minority government as “a nameless, faceless horror,” and a potential political fate “worse than death.” Two months earlier Diefenbaker’s Tory minority government had fallen ingloriously, tearing itself asunder due to internecine conflicts and opposition party consternation over foreign policy vis-à-vis the United States. Nonetheless the pleas of Liberals fell on deaf ears. Prime Minister Lester Pearson found his government seven seats short of a majority after the 1963 election, leaving his caucus and many voters to pose the following questions: Would the Liberals’ claims become a self-fulfilling prophecy? Are minority governments fatally compromised from the outset?

The impressions of the minority governments that followed Diefenbaker’s have indeed been mixed. Forsey (1964, 3-4) argued convincingly against popular misconceptions of minority government in Canada, including notions that governance “was necessarily incompetent, weak,

indecisive, if not worse,” and that such governments were an anomaly and destined to crumble under the weight of opposition pressure. Pearson’s two consecutive Liberal minority governments from 1963-68 appeared to validate Forsey’s arguments. After a few *faux pas* at the beginning of the 26th Parliament, Pearson’s ministry, *au fur et à mesure*, adapted adroitly to the institutional arrangement in the Commons and built a constructive consensus with other parties, namely the New Democratic Party (NDP) on the left. His minority government passed sweeping legislation, including national health care and the Canada Pension Plan, while astutely handling points of controversy such as the flag issue (Kent 2009).

Pearson’s experience may well have been an exception to the rule. Against the backdrop of spiraling inflation and the potential splintering of the country as Québec’s calls for autonomy amplified, Pierre Trudeau managed the 29th Parliament (1973-74) with palpable discomfiture. Dubbed the “House of Minorities,” Parliament had never been so narrowly divided between the Liberals and Conservatives. Paralysis appeared imminent. The task was one of day-to-day survival, and the Trudeau government went so far as to suggest in the Throne Speech that not all votes entailed confidence—and that a single defeat would not perfunctorily force the government to resign. His government survived by tempering its agenda and securing NDP support, which led to some accomplishments, including an increase in old age pensions and the creation of Petro Canada (Stevens and Saywell 1974; Saywell 1975, 4).

If Trudeau muddled through with some success the situation for Joe Clark’s ephemeral Tory minority government in 1979 was untenable. No sooner than the government had been invested did calls for an election resound. Clark’s government only haltingly enacted a budget, aggravated federal relations with Québec, and sat for just 49 days during which pre-election maneuvering trumped legislative accomplishment.

The three most recent federal elections that have left either the Liberals (2004) or the Conservatives (2006, 2008) with only a plurality of seats in the Commons have received mottled, and at times, scathing reviews. As Conservative opposition leader Stephen Harper warned Prime Minister Paul Martin in 2004, “If you want to be a government in a minority Parliament, you have to work with other people” (Harper 2004). Martin found the task difficult, not only due to party infighting but also to the “Sponsorship Scandal” over which Harper and the Bloc Québécois bludgeoned him regularly for alleged misdeeds (CTV News 2004).¹ The scandal, Hébert (2008, 43) notes, “was the Bloc Québécois’ bread and butter for the duration of Canada’s thirty-eighth Parliament,” with leader Gilles Duceppe and his MPs acting as “human megaphones for the findings of the Gomery Commission.” That ethics report ultimately paved the way for the withdrawal of the NDP’s support of the Liberals and a no confidence vote that precipitated the 2006 election and Martin’s ouster.

Ironically, Harper found himself exchanging places with the former prime minister in a minority governing context after the 2006 election, as the Conservatives won only a plurality of seats. The 2008 election was *déjà vu* for the Conservatives, who again obtained only a plurality in the House, despite improving on popular vote and seat totals. As a result Harper has had to confront the considerable challenges of consensus-building across partisan lines. His ministry has been wrought with controversy after proroguing Parliament in 2008 and again in 2010 in order to circumvent potential votes of no confidence. Polls suggest that these polemics have convinced many Canadians that a return to majority rule on Parliament Hill is now in order—despite the fact that no party currently appears poised to secure the votes necessary to attain one, notwithstanding the unlikely weakening or disappearance of the separatist Bloc Québécois (CBC News 2009; Fox 2009).

At the heart of the debate over minority and majority governments are central issues of importance for students of the “new institutionalism”: How do institutional structures and governing contexts intersect to account for variation in legislative outcomes? It is a puzzling artifact of the state of current research on parliamentary politics in Canada that, with few exceptions (Godbout and Høyland 2008; Thomas 2007), scholars have failed to examine systematically the empirical impacts of minority and majority regimes in the legislative realm over time. Are majority governments more successful on the legislative front? Does legislative productivity inevitably suffer under minority cabinets?

The answers to these questions have heretofore escaped scrutiny. The contemporary political science literature on minority governments in Canada has tended to focus on normative arguments concerning ministerial accountability (McCandless 2008). Others have alleged a putative democratic deficit under and Harper (Bonga 2010). Still others have called for parliamentary reform (Aucoin 2003), or have emphasised the nexus between accommodative norms and procedures and representational advantages of minority governments (Strahl 2004-05; Russell 2008; 2010). Finally, students of political behaviour have centred attention on the reasons for shifts in the regional and national electoral landscape that have produced greater voter volatility and the condition of minority government in the past decade (Clarke and Kornberg 2005; Clarke et al. 2006; Gidengil et al. 2006; Rubenson et al. 2007).

This study is the first to rectify a palpable void in the literature by examining how governing contexts have impacted two overlooked yet pivotal indicators of parliamentary activity: Government success rates and legislative productivity. The quantitative analysis spans a broad time frame (1953-2009, 22nd-40th Parliaments),² and considers institutional factors, such as seat ratios in the Commons, cabinet size, agenda size, length of session, and prime ministerial activity in

Parliament, in addition to economic indicators, to explain agenda success and legislative productivity.

The analysis commences with a brief overview of descriptive data that examines parliamentary activity across time by government type. The second section builds a theoretical foundation for analyzing success rates and productivity by detailing the variables employed in the regression analyses that follow subsequently. The concluding section reprises the importance of the findings of the study for the larger debate about institutional settings, political contexts, and successful governance given the electoral landscape of twenty-first century Canada.

TRACKING MAJORITY AND MINORITY GOVERNMENTS' SUCCESS AND OUTPUT

In the comparative politics literature single-country case studies of legislative output abound. Legislative scholars on the US Congress, in particular, have followed the work of Mayhew (2005) on a number of accounts to understand how partisan control of the executive and legislative branches has affected lawmaking productivity. Efforts to trace lawmaking have also been undertaken for select parliamentary systems including Ireland (Conley and Bekafigo 2010), Italy (Kreppel 1997; Motta 1985), Germany (Bawn 1999), and Norway (Strøm 1990, Ch. 6). Lamentably, as with these single-country case studies, the most important cross-national studies of legislative productivity exclude Canada's minority or majority governments from their analytical frame. The focus has been largely on European parliamentary democracies (see *inter alia*, Debus 2007; Strøm 1990; Tsebelis 1999; *cf.* Fukumoto 2008). The result is that the researcher interested in what the Canadian House of Commons *actually produces* in terms of legislation, or how successful various governments have been in enacting their agendas across time is hard pressed to locate recent scholarship on the subject.

Quantitative analysis of parliamentary activity in Canada is, indeed, quite limited and dated. Kornberg's (1967) analysis of the inner-workings of the minority 25th Parliament (1962-63) led by

Diefenbaker remains an exemplar of the case study approach that has unfortunately not been replicated. The applicability of conclusions drawn in prior studies to the contemporary era, such as the lower productivity of minority governments between 1945 and 1972, are indeterminate given the recent frequency of minority governments and continued alternation of party control under majority contexts after 1972 (Kornberg 1970; Jackson and Atkinson 1974).

The only recently published study to assess legislative activity during minority and majority governments was penned by a former parliamentary intern (Thomas 2007). In his analysis of sitting days, bills amended, and bills passed during the 36th-38th Parliaments (1997-2005) under the majority Chrétien ministry (1997-2002), majority Martin ministry (2002-04) and minority Martin ministry following the 2004 elections, Thomas found the six sessions of the three Parliaments equally productive in terms of the number of bills passed. Government success (introduction of government bills compared to those receiving royal assent) was lower in the Martin minority government, but commensurate with the levels of success (47-58%) in the closing two sessions of the 37th Parliament that were rocked by scandal.

A comparative examination of minority and majority governments' success and productivity requires guiding Thomas' genre of study forwards in time to include the Harper minority governments and backwards in time to compare the periods earlier scholarship has and has not examined. Most critically it is imperative to move towards systematic analysis using quantitative approaches as a means of bolstering our theoretical understanding of the factors that drive legislative success and output by government type. Let us begin by examining the dynamics of legislative success and productivity from 1953-2009. A brief overview of parliamentary activity lays a foundation for the theory-building for the regression analyses of governmental success and productivity that follow.

Reassessing Parliamentary Activity in Canada: Une Mise à Jour, 1953-2009

Majority governments *are* more successful in passing their agenda than their minority counterparts. The average majority government's success rate (difference between government bills introduced and royal assent), using session as the unit of analysis, is 82 percent (s.d. = 3%) from 1953-2009. Minority governments average 62 percent success (s.d. = 8%). Accounting for unequal variances by government type, a t-test reveals that the 20 percent difference is statistically significant at $p = .03$. The higher standard deviation for minority governments accentuates considerably greater variation in success rates compared to their majority counterparts. In the 1960s the minority government success rates of Lester Pearson ranged from a low of 82 percent to a high of 97 percent. By contrast, the low points include Joe Clark's government at 21 percent in 1979 and 0 percent for Stephen Harper in 2008.

Majority governments *are* also generally more productive in lawmaking. The average number of bills receiving royal assent (by session) for majority regimes is 52 (s.d. = 6). Minority governments produce, on average, 30 bills per session (s.d. = 5). A t-test (controlling for unequal variances) accentuates a strong statistical relationship with $p = .007$.

Several minority governments have been particularly short on the legislative docket. The first session of the 40th Parliament, which lasted only 13 sitting days under Stephen Harper, produced no bills. Joe Clark's ministry in the 31st Parliament passed only six bills in 49 sitting days. That session "produced little in the way of new ideas, and dealt only marginally with the country's most pressing problems," including Québec, inflation, debt, and the oil crisis as parties began jockeying in advance of an imminent election (Fletcher and Wallace 1981, 6). Still, there have been some anomalies for majority governments. Both St. Laurent's ministry in the fourth session of the 22nd Parliament, which sat for only five days, and the first session of the 34th Parliament under Brian Mulroney, which sat for 11 days, passed only a single bill. In the latter

case, the Free Trade Agreement with the US dominated the entire, if brief session in which the Senate ultimately gave its approval in December 1988. Free trade had been the central issue in the prior month's election campaign (Everett 1995, 11-42).

[Figure 1]

How has government success varied more specifically across individual sessions of Parliament in the broad sweep of history? The data in Figure 1 complement the foregoing aggregate analysis by showing the ratio of government bills introduced in the House of Commons to the number of bills receiving royal assent by Parliament/session, beginning with the 22nd (1953). The data illustrate a steady success rate for the governments of Louis St. Laurent and John Diefenbaker until the latter's minority government of the 25th Parliament, which followed the 1963 federal election. Similarly, Lester Pearson's minority governments were consistently successful in marshaling the government's agenda through the Commons with success rates at 80 percent or greater across the parliamentary sessions of the 1960s.

The fourth session of the 28th Parliament (1972) constitutes a clear dividing line in the time series of government success in Figure 1. Pierre Trudeau's minority government was the first to sustain a success rate of less than 50 percent. The 28th Parliament marks a turning point as well with respect to greater volatility in governmental success rates in the 1970s and early 1980s. The Trudeau government's legislative agenda stalled in the wake of a cabinet shuffle and speculations about an early election, relegating to the backburner labour and other social policies that had failed to pass in the prior session (Stevens and Saywell 1974, 3-5).

Trudeau's ability to forge bills through the Commons varied considerably under majority conditions. His ministry's success rate ranged from 87 percent in the first session of the 29th Parliament to just 31 percent in the fourth session of the 30th Parliament. Trudeau's government appeared to lack "vision" as its mandate came to a close in 1978-79 in light of "longstanding

problems such as the structure and performance of the economy, the operation of the federal system, the financing and implementation of desperately needed social programmes and the balance between state power and individual liberty” (Traves and Saywell 1980, 3). His government’s success rate rose, however, to 84 percent in the first session of the 32nd Parliament after the Clark minority government interlude in 1979. After a lackluster start in 1980, the summer session of the 32nd Parliament passed, among other things, the National Anthem, legislation on the access to governmental information, and defeated a NDP amendment concerning the Alaska oil pipeline (Bell and Wallace 1982, 25-8).

There is considerable variation in success rates in the 1980s and 1990s. In the 1980s Mulroney’s government success rates never dropped below 80 percent and reached an acme of 100 percent in the first session of the 34th Parliament (1988-89)—but as noted earlier, only a single bill was in question for the brief session. Mulroney’s conservatives nevertheless top the chart in terms of party discipline leading up to the Progressive Conservative’s rout in the 1993 election.

The election of the Liberals under Jean Chrétien in 1993 marks another break point in the data, ushering in a contemporary era of lower governmental success rates under both majority and minority contexts. Chrétien was most successful in the Liberals’ opening sessions of the 35th and 36th Parliaments with success rates of 77 and 78 percent, respectively. In the intervening second sessions government success rates never climbed above 65 percent, and by 2002 after Chrétien exited from the Langevin Block on Parliament Hill in the wake of the Sponsorship Scandal the government’s success rate had dropped to just 48 percent in the second session of the 37th Parliament. The subsequent ministries of Paul Martin and Stephen Harper underscore success rates for minority governments around 50 percent, notwithstanding the first session of the 40th Parliament in which no bills were passed.

[Figure 2]

Figure 2 traces two different measures of government success jointly. The first y-axis tracks overall legislative output by session. The second y-axis details the number of bills passed, divided by days in the session. As such, the second y-axis data provide a “standardised” measure of productivity that is more readily comparable across parliamentary sessions. For the entire period (1953-2009) the two measures correlate at $r = .45$.

When juxtaposed with government success rates in Figure 1, a paradox emerges: The most consistently successful governments—those of the St. Laurent/Diefenbaker era—passed the fewest bills overall, but scored highest in terms of bills passed per day. The data accentuate shorter legislative sessions and a more circumscribed government agenda for both cabinet ministries, whether they were under majority or minority contexts. The legislative process was not as complex compared to the latter decades of the twentieth century, nor did either prime minister face the economic constraints and difficulties regulating social policies that their successors would confront.

The correlation between legislative output and bills per day from 1974 to 2009 increases to $r = .60$ from the 32nd Parliament (1974) through the 40th Parliament, second session (2009). Prior to 1974, the House sat an average of 125 days per session. The corresponding figure post-1973 is 201 days (t-test shows $p = .01$). The 32nd Parliament (Trudeau, 1980-83) is the high point of legislative productivity since 1953 at an impressive 144 government bills and an average of one bill passed every four days of the session. The second session of the 33rd and third session of the 34th Parliament under Tory Prime Minister Brian Mulroney also show extraordinary output, at an average of one bill passed approximately every three days. These three parliamentary sessions far outperform all others in terms of legislative yield. Why were they so unique in terms of post-World War II parliamentary activity?

A useful analogy involves high legislative productivity in the US several decades earlier. In Canadian lawmaking terms, the Trudeau-Mulroney ministries in the 1980s compare favourably to

what Mayhew (2005) typecasts a “bulge in the middle” of the post-War legislative output in the US. The burst in laws in the 1960s occurred first under Democratic President Lyndon Johnson (1963-68). Johnson’s agenda was consolidated, begrudgingly at times by his Republican successor, Richard Nixon (1969-74). The parallel in the US case of the 1960s and 1970s and the Canadian case in the 1980s is the *political* and *economic* context of the uptick in legislative output, not any *institutional* similarity in structure of government.³ “Continuing agendas,” legislative impasse broken by liberals’ efforts, and governmental alternation link the two cases in broad theoretical terms. Let us briefly consider in greater depth the comparative contexts.

Much like Joe Clark’s minority government in 1969, President John F. Kennedy, elected in 1960, did not have a majority that supported his agenda in the legislature (see Kilpatrick 1966; Sorenson 1965). Kennedy’s progress in attempting to enact the “New Frontier” agenda was halting at best from 1961-63. The congressional coattails of Johnson’s 1964 electoral landslide, however, were long enough to wrest significant agenda control away from conservative Democrats on Capitol Hill who had thwarted Kennedy’s efforts, particularly on social policy. Johnson seized the moment to break the legislative bottleneck on his predecessor’s stalled proposals (Jones 1994, 174), and the result was an outpouring of legislation with considerable and long-term societal impacts. Nixon, by contrast, was caught in the vortex of the very same congressional liberals’ social and economic agenda, which had carried over into his presidency beginning in 1969. With Democrats firmly in Control of Congress, Nixon made broad overtures to the idea of decentralising power from the federal government to the states (Greene 1992, 23-4), yet he was loathe to cut popular government programs for fear of a backlash prior to his 1972 reelection bid. Nixon engaged in cat-and-mouse game of fending off liberals’ agenda while at times preempting parts of that agenda, like an increase in Social Security payments, for political gain. To the disappointment of many on the right, Nixon

showed himself to be left-of-center, a “progressive-conservative” (Whitaker 1996) despite a period of considerable economic tumult with rising inflation and government debt.

Like the American President Johnson, Prime Minister Trudeau had a fiercely positive view of the role of the federal government. In April 1980 Trudeau’s government announced a five-point plan in the Throne Speech delivered by Governor General Schreyer. One of the first major goals of the Liberal majority was to clear off the docket the surfeit of pending legislation that carried over from Clark’s minority ministry. The agenda then proceeded to “Putting People First” with policies aimed at combating inflation and energy concerns, increasing the federal role in the economy in realms such as agriculture and transportation, transforming the Post Office into a Crown corporation, constitutional reform that would ultimately lead to the patriation of the Canadian Constitution in 1982 as a putative means of thwarting Québec separatism, and a renewed commitment to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) with the procurement of updated fighter aircraft. As the Speech from the Throne elucidated, Trudeau and his cabinet believed that “Canadians want more effective government, not necessarily less government” (Bell and Wallace 1982, 21). The laundry list of 178 bills passed by the 32nd Parliament is much too long to detail, but comprised far reaching measures on the leitmotifs of the Throne speech from the adoption of the National Anthem, regional development initiatives, the Clean Air Act, housing, and veterans to criminal justice reform, unemployment insurance, and court reform (*Hansard*, House of Commons Debates, First Session, 32nd Parliament, xxv-xxx).

When the winds of change swept Mulroney’s Tories into power in 1984, the new prime minister faced his own “continuing agenda” that remained in Ottawa despite Trudeau’s self-avowed exit from politics. Mulroney inherited the continuing dilemma of Québec separatism, contentious intergovernmental relations, and a poor economy, as well as the need to manage the growth of

government programs from his predecessor. Legislative activity consequently proved to be quite above the norm, whether intentional or not.

Mulroney's new government highlighted the broad themes of national unity and "reconciliation" following Québec's rejection of the new Constitution, and specifically vowed to rekindle positive federal-provincial relations. His government also expressed the goal of scaling back and reversing the Trudeau legacy of greater federal intervention in the economic realm through decentralisation. The Throne Speech placed emphasis on squarely on economic policy. Mulroney was bequeathed considerable economic challenges—particularly high unemployment. His government detailed a three part strategy for economic renewal, with particular attention to mounting deficits, the need for greater market competition, and the desire to spur private sector entrepreneurship. Mulroney and his cabinet viewed unemployment "as the most debilitating problem and most critical national challenge" and the deficit as an issue that had to be dealt with "urgently" (*Hansard*, Senate Journals, 34th Parliament, 25-26). Mulroney also stressed a commitment to "law and public safety." Finally, Mulroney took pains to promise to renew Canada's traditionally close relationship with the United States, which had soured under Trudeau. In the 33rd Parliament Mulroney's cabinet moved swiftly with legislation to dissolve Crown corporations in an effort to undo elements of Trudeau's legacy, enacted tax reforms, budget cuts, and employment initiatives, passed a host of criminal justice amendments that stiffened penalties for offenders, and gave particular attention to reforming customs regulations on pornographic material that had been struck down by the Supreme Court (see Boase 1988, 19). But Mulroney's efforts did not supplant the more popular elements of Trudeau's accomplishments in the social realm.

If legislative productivity reached a zenith under Trudeau and Mulroney—however at odds their agendas were—output declined palpably under the ministry of Liberal Jean Chrétien from

1993-2002. Figure 2 underscores a steady decrease in both the number of laws and the pace of lawmaking over the period. It is critical to underscore that Chrétien's Liberals lost nearly 10 percent of the party's seats in the Commons in the 1997 election (from 60 percent to 51 percent). While they made modest gains in 2000, the Liberals were entrapped in numerous controversies that interfered with legislative productivity. Chrétien spent significant time and political capital on the Clarity Act (Bill C-20) in 2000, much to the chagrin of sovereignists and over the objections of the Bloc in the Commons and the Québec *Assemblée nationale*, the provincial legislature (see *Hansard*, Debates of the Senate, 2nd Session, 36th Parliament, 6 April 2000; Dion 2000). The Act outlined the conditions under which the federal government could negotiate Québec's (or any other province's) secession from Canada. Further, by the 37th Parliament controversies over Chrétien's alleged involvement in the "Sponsorship Scandal" diverted attention away from the government's agenda priorities as the embattled prime minister's ethics came under punishing scrutiny (see Greene 2006).

Finally, Figure 2 shows that the minority governments beginning with Martin (2004) have consistently passed fewer bills, with the high water mark in Martin's ministry at 46. The four sessions of Parliament under Harper's ministry (through 2009) averaged 24 bills per session. For each of the recent minority governments it has taken much longer to build consensus for bills in ways that were not true for Pearson in the 1960s. Pearson had to manage selective partnerships with the NDP and Social Credit—parties with only a handful of seats.

In the Martin and Harper ministries roughly five to seven days per session were required to pass a single bill. The data underscore the difficulties for either minority government to find reliable partners, and the tight-rope of brokering legislative support on an issue-by-issue basis with parties such as the NDP, which has improved its electoral appeal in the last half century. Potential alliances with the Bloc Québécois, which has held approximately one-sixth of seats in the

Commons since 1993, have also proven problematic. The Bloc's rationale for representation is to highlight the defects of the Canadian Confederation, and remove its constituents from it. For all their controversy and scandals, the minority governments of Martin and Harper provided opposition parties plenty of fodder for inter-party discord rather than consensus—to the detriment of lawmaking output.

TOWARD A THEORY OF GOVERNMENT SUCCESS AND PARLIAMENTARY ACTIVITY IN CANADA: DATA, METHOD, AND ANALYSIS

The analysis that follows examines systematically the institutional, electoral, and economic factors that elucidate government success and legislative output from 1953-2009. The absence of any prior models in the literature on Canada necessitates borrowing theoretically-justified variables employed in other cross-national and single country case studies of legislative success and productivity (e.g., Bawn 1999; Conley and Bekafigo 2010; Kreppel 1997; Tsebelis 1999). Further, one must consider factors hypothesised as unique to the Canadian parliamentary context. The unit of analysis is parliamentary session ($n = 47$). The explanatory variables included in the unified models for both dependent variables—success and output per days in session—are as follows:

Days in parliamentary session. The sitting days for each parliamentary session are included in the models to test the effects of government longevity. In the post-World War II era Canada, like the United Kingdom, has a history of frequent government alternation and relatively stable cabinets (Mershon 2002, 3-5). As a control variable, days in session enables a test of how briefer durations affects success. The variable is excluded from the analysis of productivity, since the dependent variable in that model is the standardised score of bills passed by days in session.

The expectation is that as the days in session diminish, so too do governments' success and relative output. Since 1953 minority governments have averaged 125 days per session, with a standard deviation of 73 days. Majority governments averaged 181 days per session with a large standard deviation of 119 days. The shortest minority government was the first session of the 40th

under Stephen Harper, which sat for only 13 days. The longest was 591 days in the second session of the 31st Parliament (1980-83) under Pierre Trudeau.

Session of parliament. The number of the session for each Parliament in the analysis is also employed as a control variable for temporal effects. Sessions were rather long and adjournments (typically through prorogations) were erratic until the House of Commons adopted a standing order in 1982 that aimed to routinise the time frame of sittings (Marleau and Montpetit 2000).

Number of bills introduced, divided by days per session. This standardised measure captures agenda size and is therefore a critical control variable. The introduction of a high number of bills may overwhelm cabinet and parliamentary committees, and confuse the majority in the Commons about the government's agenda priorities unless the appropriate pace is set by the cabinet and prime minister. Minority governments tend to introduce about the same amount of legislation, per the standardised measure, as their majority counterparts—but with slightly greater variation. The mean for minority government is .40 (s.d. = .14). The corresponding figure for majority governments is .40 (s.d. = .12), which equates to a single bill every two and a half days.

Number of votes per session, divided by days per session, for which the parliamentary majority voted against one or more cabinet members (or vice versa), notwithstanding confidence motions. This standardised variable is a measure of conflict between the cabinet and the Parliament. Cabinet members may vote against the majority (or vice versa) due to constituency or other interests (Franks 1987, 260). However, in the overwhelming share of cases in Canada the situation arises when an opposition party sponsors a motion and is met with cabinet resistance. The cabinet minister whose portfolio is affected instructs the cabinet how to vote on the matter.

Governmental success and productivity should decrease as the proportion of these types of division votes augments. Such votes expose open conflict in Parliament, delay consideration of other parts of the government's agenda, and have become commonplace in the Martin and Harper

minority governments. The mean number of votes per session for the 15 minority sessions in the analysis is 14.4 (s.d. = 23.91). The average for the 32 majority sessions is just .93 (s.d. = 2.12), reflecting the tradition of party discipline or “party government” (Rose 1976) model in Canada.

Percent government seats in the House of Commons. This variable enables a straightforward test not only of whether majority or minority governments are more successful and productive than minority governments, but also how the *magnitude* of seats held by the government affects the dependent variables. From 1953-2009 minority governments had a minimum of 40 percent of seats in the Commons and a maximum of 49 percent. Majority governments ranged from a minimum of 51 percent to a maximum of 78 percent of seats. For the entire period, regardless of government type, the mean was 59 percent (s.d. = 12%).

Government’s unidimensional ideological placement. The government ideology estimates are derived from Budge et al. (2001) and Volkens et al. (2010). The estimates are based on textual analysis of parties’ and governments’ statements of policy, election programmes or party manifestoes, and declarations in parliamentary debate before investiture. The ideological scores are arranged on a single dimension with –100 at the extreme left of the spectrum and +100 at the extreme right. The indicator employed is the overall scaled ideological measure or “total Right-Left,” not specific policy areas (e.g., “planned economy,” “international peace,” etc.).

It is unclear whether to anticipate governments situated to the right or left should enjoy higher success levels or output, particularly given the data in Figure 2 that show peaks of success and productivity under Trudeau *and* Mulroney and considerable variation by government alternation. Further, for much of the post-War period Canada’s cleavages between the parties have been over economics and regionalism, and general cleavage levels rank well below most European parliamentary democracies (Clarke and Stewart 1998; Dodd 1976; Lijphart 1984, 129-31). This fact is borne out in the ideology data employed in the model. Canadian governments are not nearly

as polarised as their European counterparts. The most conservative governments have averaged a score to the right of the spectrum of about 15 (Clark, Mulroney, Harper). Yet other Conservatives, such as Diefenbaker, were actually to the left of the scale (-2.9 and -8.7 in the 24th and 25th Parliaments, respectively). Similarly, the governments under Pearson were only slightly to the left at -2.9, and Trudeau's governments alternated between the left at -10.4 in the most extreme case (29th Parliament) and the right at 3.4 (30th Parliament).

Percent change in seats for the government from last election. Measuring the percent change of seats for the government majority or minority compared to the last election represents an effort to link party policies and platforms with the notion of an electoral "mandate" in Westminster systems (Rallings 1987, 1-14 Hofferbert and Budge 1992), as well as the impact of smaller victories or declines in voter support. Logically, governments with sizable increases in representation after elections that alternate power should have a stronger basis for success and productivity than incumbent governments that lose ground in the Commons after an election. The average change in seats for each government is 23 percent (s.d. = 36%). The minimum is a loss of 29 percent (1972 election of Trudeau's minority government) and a maximum gain of 119 percent (1957 election of Diefenbaker's minority government).

Prime ministerial activity by government type. The models integrate a proxy variable for prime ministerial activity in the Commons. It is reasonable to expect that prime ministers who engage in the Commons (e.g., question period) more frequently are likely to contribute to enhanced governmental success and legislative productivity. Notwithstanding arguments about executive domination leading to a "decline of Parliament" in Westminster systems (see Elgie and Stapleton 2006), prime ministerial activity may indicate greater leadership commitment to the government's agenda with concomitant payoffs in success and productivity.

The data for the measure were derived from Crimmins and Nesbitt-Larking (1996), who traced prime ministers' overall interventions in parliament, including question period, speeches, etc., by parliamentary session through the Mulroney period. The Crimmins-Nesbitt-Larking data form a baseline for the variable. Activity was judged higher (coded 1) or lower (coded -1) for each session of Parliament based on prime ministers' standardised score of activity. The data were updated by the author for the Chrétien-Harper governments by parliament/session.

Cabinet size. Canada is the archetype of a parliamentary system with cabinet domination of the legislature that has become institutionalised (Robertson 1971; Savoie 2009). As Franks (1987, 211) contends, however, there is a “danger in creating a large political ‘bureaucracy’ within central agencies, particularly the prime minister’s office and the privy council office, to enable prime minister and cabinet to control bureaucracies.” The danger is likely to augment in proportion to the number of ministerial portfolios. Both the number of cabinet committees and parliamentary committees may be expected to rise and fall with the size of the cabinet, increasing the complexity of the legislative process. It is reasonable to anticipate that the greater the size of cabinet and its bureaucratisation, the more government success and output may decline.

The size of Canadian cabinets grew dramatically from the early post-World War II period until 1993, when there was a “rationalisation” of ministerial portfolios. Still, Canadian cabinets are among the most sizable in economically advanced countries (Manning et al. 1999). Cabinet sizes have averaged approximately 28 (s.d. = 6). They have ranged from a low of 19 during the St. Laurent governments of the 1950s to a high of 39 during the 33rd Parliament led by the Mulroney ministry. Although the Liberals under Chrétien and Martin reduced the size of cabinet by nearly a third, it is worth noting that under the Harper ministry the size of cabinet has rebounded to 38 through the second session of the 40th parliament.

Cabinet scandal resignation. This dummy variable measures whether or not, during a parliamentary session, a cabinet minister resigned due to scandal. As such, the variable captures potential cabinet instability that is likely to garner media attention, and on which opposition parties are likely to seize for political gain. Resignations due to scandal are hypothesised to lower success and output. Such resignations have taken place in 12 of the 47 sessions included in the analysis.

Unemployment and inflation. These two variables capture the broad economic context surrounding governmental success and output. For parliamentary sessions that span only a single year or less, the appropriate annual figure from Statistics Canada is employed.⁴ For sessions that straddle two or more years, the average of unemployment and change in inflation for the years of the session is utilised. Following prior models the expectation is that higher levels of economic hardship and uncertainty complicate the enactment of government programmes. Cabinet ministries and opposition parties are more likely to struggle to find acceptable responses, driving down government success and productivity.

Unemployment averaged 6.8 percent (s.d. = 2%) for all sessions, reaching a peak in the early years of the Mulroney ministry at 11.7 and 10.5 percent, respectively, in the first and second sessions of the 33rd Parliament (1984-88). For the entire period inflation averaged 3.6 percent (s.d. = 2.9%). Inflation reached the highest levels in the 1970s under Trudeau, and crested at 9.6 in the first session of the 30th Parliament (1972-74).

The Determinants of Governments' Legislative Success in Canada

Table 1 shows the robust regression analysis for government success.⁵ Ten of the 13 variables in the model are statistically significant at $p < .10$ (one-tailed). The R^2 statistic shows a high goodness-of-fit, as the model explains 63 percent of the variance. The more important questions, however, involve the substantive significance of the results.

Time and agenda size variables have expected effects and are “signed” in the hypothesised direction. Government success rates fall by about 3 percent for each additional session of Parliament. By contrast, longer sessions yield somewhat higher success rates as governments have more time to push their agenda through the parliamentary process. For each one standard deviation (106 days) increase above the mean days in session (152), government success rates mount by 4.2 percent. The number of bills introduced (by days in session) is negatively related to success. Government success falls by 3.4 percent for every increase in one standard deviation over the mean (one bill every three and a half days). There is no discernible pattern to majority or minority governments over time. However, Diefenbaker’s minority government in the 31st parliament introduced, on average, more than one bill every two days, lowering success rates by over 4 percent. Similarly, Chrétien’s least successful sessions of Parliament include those in which the government introduced nearly one bill every one and two-thirds days in sitting. The data confirm that the cabinet’s failure to synchronise the legislative agenda with the parliamentary process yielded somewhat lower success rates.

[Table 1]

Conflict in the House of Commons between the cabinet and majority voting coalitions has a more strikingly deleterious impact on government success. Division votes that entail the cabinet voting against a majority, whether that majority belongs to the government or is an assortment of opposition parties under a minority government context, have a substantively negative effect. Each time such a vote occurs every 10 days of a session, success rates drop off by 7.7 percent. Opposition parties’ engagement in amendment and procedural tactics is a phenomenon that is largely an artifact of the last three minority governments. Under Paul Martin such votes took place, on average, slightly more than once every four days, which the model estimates diminished the Liberals’ success rates by 21 percent, holding all other variables constant. More dramatic is the

effect on the success rates of Stephen Harper's ministry. In the first session of the 39th Parliament and again in the second session of the 40th such votes occurred, on average, once every two to two and a half days of House sittings, lowering success rates by approximately 32 percent, *per se*. Minority governments may have to allow opposition parties latitude in offering amendments to avoid confidence votes much more than majority governments, but such a concession comes at a high price.

The findings accent the interaction with minority governments' longevity. The shorter the sitting days and greater the conflict over amendments, the less likely the government is to enjoy much success. Compared to majority governments that have typically sat for over 200 days in a session and have had few, if any conflictual votes minority governments' success rates have fallen between a third and half. The model accentuates that in the last decade the interplay of these variables is a chief source of paltry government success.

The percent seats held by the minority or majority party has one of the most significant impacts on legislative success in the model. It is not simply a matter of majority or minority government, but rather the *magnitude* of seat margins in the Commons that is critical to both government types. As the percentage of government seats rises from 45 percent (the average minority government) to 51 percent, success rates increase by 6.2 percent. All other things being equal, a minority government cannot expect success rates higher than 49 percent. *Ceteris paribus* the forecast success rate based on the coefficient corresponds almost directly to the percent of seats in Parliament. Further, larger majorities are clearly more successful across time than their razor-thin cousins. Compared to the minimal majority of Chrétien's ministry from 1997-2000 (51% of seats), the model forecasts success rates 13-29 percent higher for the much larger majorities of the St. Laurent/Diefenbaker era, as well as for the Tories under Mulroney who held the nearly three-quarters of the seats in the Commons after the 1984 election.

Several institutional variables, as well as the economic variables brought to bear in the model are statistically insignificant. The sign for government ideology suggests that ministries on the right of the scale have been more successful, but the coefficient does not have a substantive impact. Similarly, cabinet size has the expected negative coefficient, but does not have any tangible effect on government success. The economic context, as measured through unemployment and inflation, does not appear to affect success rates, though the coefficients are “signed” as hypothesised.

What matters more is prime ministerial activity and scandal within the cabinet. Interestingly, prime ministerial activity in the Commons is *not* a correlate of success for majority governments. In fact, the negative sign suggests activity is a potential sign of weakness: The more the prime minister must defend himself and/or his majority from opposition procedural tactics and attacks on government policy, the more success may decline—though the coefficient is statistically insignificant. However, the more *minority* prime ministers intervene, the greater their government’s success rates. The Trudeau and Clark minority governments evidenced lower than average interventions in the Commons compared to the Diefenbaker, Pearson, Martin, and Harper governments. The coefficient shows that the governments of the latter, more active prime ministers under minority contexts enjoyed success rates about 21 percent higher.

Still, the task for recent minority governments is analogous to Sisyphus rolling the boulder up the hill only to have it clobber him mid-way to the top. Taking the reigns of question period may help their probability of passing bills. But minority governments struggle to handle conflict with the opposition on contentious votes and generally shorter general sessions, all while introducing a similar number of bills relative to majority governments. Defeats are simply more imminent. At best, these factors temper the otherwise positive effects of prime ministerial “rhetorical” activity in Parliament.

Finally, scandals are negatively related to success regardless of government type. In 12 of 47 sessions one or more cabinet ministers has resigned or been forced out of the government due to investigations of wrongdoing, allegations of financial improprieties, violating other ethics rules, or making embarrassing comments. Any such scandal lowers success in a session by approximately 8 percent. Minority governments can ill afford the negative attention of scandals. The situation surrounding Judy Sgro in Martin's minority government is an exemplar. Opposition parties utilised question period to criticise the government and Sgro, forestalling legislative work in which the government otherwise wished to engage. In 2004 Sgro, the Minister for Citizenship and Immigration was first accused of political favouritism during her campaign in a scandal the media dubbed "Strippergate."⁶ Thunderous and frequent opposition calls for Sgro to resign dominated Parliament in 2004 until she ultimately succumbed to political pressures and left the cabinet in early 2005. In large measure, the damage to Martin's governmental agenda was already done.

Majority governments have also suffered their fair share of scandal in ministries such as Trudeau's and Chrétien's that contributed to lower success rates compared to their majority counterparts (Figure 1). Trudeau lost his Ministers of Labour and Consumer and Corporate Affairs over their personal conduct. It is no coincidence that Trudeau's least successful legislative sessions in the House of Commons also came on the heels of no less than three other ministers who disagreed with the government's policies and resigned in protest. Further, the data convey that it was not solely the "Sponsorship Scandal" that diverted parliamentary attention away from the Chrétien ministry's legislative agenda from 1997-2002. The Chrétien cabinet suffered three resignations altogether in the two sessions of the 37th Parliament: two Solicitor Generals and his Minister of National Defence, for untoward comments or alleged ethics violations.

The Foundations of Legislative Productivity and Government Success: Are They Similar?

The robust regression analysis in Table 2 provides a mechanism to compare whether the variables that affect government success have an equivalent effect on legislative output. The dependent variable is the standardised measure from Figure 2, or the number of bills passed divided by days in session.⁷ The outcome variable is the average time, expressed as days in sitting, required to pass a bill. The average for the time series of .40 conveys that two and one half days are required to pass a bill ($1/.40=2.50$).

As a result of the methodology employed to measure success as a function of sitting days, the coefficients in the model are not *directly* interpretable. Table 2 provides, therefore, the *mean effect* for each variable to facilitate interpretation of its impact on productivity. The mean effect is calculated as the highest and lowest values of each explanatory variable multiplied by the coefficient, subtracted from one another, and then divided into one (1). By dividing the difference into one (1), the mean effect furnishes the variable's relative impact on productivity expressed as days in sitting. The key to interpreting the mean effects is the following: The lower the *absolute* value in the mean effect, the greater its influence. For example, if the mean effect of a hypothetical continuous variable is 150 the interpretation is the following. Given the difference in a change between the minimum and maximum values, the variable's impact is a net increase of one bill per 150 days per session. By contrast, if the mean effect is 11 the interpretation is that the difference between the minimum and maximum change in the explanatory variable's value is an increase of one bill every 11 days in session. Obviously the latter example has a greater net effect on legislative output.

[Table 2]

Table 2 reports the data from the robust regression analysis. The explained variance is commensurate with the analysis of government success, if slightly lower ($R^2 = .55$). The focus is on

the seven variables that are statistically significant. Time does take a toll on productivity. The mean effect for session shows that the difference in bills per day for a government with five sessions is approximately one bill less every 13 and a third days. Put another way, as a government moves from the first to third sessions before an election, productivity declines by one bill every 26 days—a slight but significant decrease.

Two key variables with a far greater substantive significance, however, are the number of bills introduced and the percent seats for the government's party in the Commons. Unlike the parameters for government success, the greater proportion of bills introduced during the session the more legislative productivity is *augmented*. The mean effect shows that the difference between introducing a bill once every three days and once every eight days (the minimum and maximum) is a net increase of a single bill nearly every 3 days. Minority governments introduce similar numbers of bills as their majority counterparts. But the latter are better placed to see the bills to fruition, as long as the pace is proportionate to the capacity of the cabinet and parliamentary committees that must carry the legislation through the process.

The model confirms that the magnitude of seats held by parties matter to legislative output, just as they do to government success. The difference between a minority government with 40 percent of the seats in the Commons and a majority government with 79 percent of the seats (minimum and maximum values) is a net increase of one bill every 4.46 days. To state the impact in a different fashion, as the percentage of seats for the government rises from a minority with 40 percent to a majority of 51 percent legislative productivity increases by about one bill every 15 days. For a majority session lasting 150 days, the net increase in actual bills is forecast at 10 compared to a government with an historically minimal plurality of seats (40%)—scarcely a negligible boost in output.

As for government success, open conflict between the cabinet and majority on division votes in Parliament drives down legislative productivity conspicuously. The mean effect shows that the difference between no such conflict and the maximum (one conflictual vote every two and a half days) is a decrease in a single bill approximately every four and a half days. The data underscore that the basis of the lower success rates of the Martin and Harper governments were substantively different from their predecessors. The proportion of division votes pitting the cabinet against the majority in the minority governments of Diefenbaker, Pearson, Trudeau, and Clark was never higher than a single vote in a 50 day period. As norms have changed within Parliament, open conflict via procedural tactics (if not warfare over scandals in question period), is far more acceptable. The data convey that compared to the earlier minority ministries, Martin and Harper failed to pass a single bill approximately every 9 days because of the barrage of opposition amendments on the legislative calendar against which the cabinet took a stand.

The model accentuates that the rate of prime ministerial activity in Parliament is positively correlated with legislative output—but, as with the analysis of legislative success, only for minority governments. The government of an active prime minister under minority conditions produces an additional bill approximately every 4 days. Thus, the data point to the ability of minority prime ministers—even in the contemporary era—to offset some of the negative effects of the procedural constraints of Parliament by intervening more frequently in debate, and through formal statements and speeches that may galvanise intra-party and public support. The goal is to win over the necessary support of key opposition allies, issue-by-issue, which can push the legislation over the threshold of victory. Prime ministerial intervention in Parliament may provide the necessary “cover” for opposition parties to lend their support to legislation, but such activity is, at best, a fleeting hedge against other institutional factors that decrease the likelihood of legislative success in the long run.

Finally, the analysis corroborates the hypothesis that as the cabinet grows unwieldy, legislative productivity declines just as success does. The mean effect shows that as the cabinet increased from 19 members in the St. Laurent era to more than 35 in the Trudeau and Mulroney period the result was a decrease of a single bill for every eight and one-third sitting days. It is thus a paradox that after Liberals attempted to rationalise cabinet portfolios in the 1990s the two minority governments of Harper included an additional 11 portfolios—perhaps under the misguided belief that a larger cabinet equates to better fortunes in the legislative realm. The analysis in Tables 1 and 2 suggests just the opposite.

CONCLUSIONS

The foregoing analysis lends substantial evidence to prior research that found minority governments are generally less successful and less productive compared to majority governments in Canada. At the same time, the models highlight that minority governments are not doomed to failure, either in terms of longevity or a complete lack of parliamentary activity. Pearson's several minority governments were far more successful and somewhat more productive than the most recent governments of Martin and Harper, and equal if not better when compared to some majority governments. Similarly, majority government is not always a panacea. Some, including those of Trudeau and Chrétien, performed fairly poorly due to scandals and intergovernmental and constitutional crises. The impact of looming elections and sessions overwhelmed with a single issue (e.g., Mulroney and the Free Trade Accord) are difficult for the models to capture adequately in the quantitative analysis, but point to a key element of governing contexts.

The larger point remains that nothing guarantees that majority governments will produce vast numbers of laws. Nor does a mere plurality of seats in the House of Commons warrant that minority governments are destined to simple “caretaker” status, incapable of policy action. Institutional context matters. This analysis has shown how the *interplay* of contextual factors, from

cabinet size and conflictual votes to days in session and prime ministerial activity, contributes to the relative success of governments by type. In an earlier era governments such as Diefenbaker and Pearson had more room to maneuver vis-à-vis opposition parties under minority conditions. In the last decade, Martin and Harper have found coalitions difficult to build as the party system has fragmented to such a degree that steady partners are harder to secure and issue coalitions are much harder to build.

It is vital to accentuate that this analysis addresses just two select criteria on which majority and governments may be evaluated—government success and lawmaking productivity. These criteria are not all-encompassing. The aggregate analysis does not speak to the *substance* or significance of legislation produced, as many studies of the US Congress have attempted to quantify (Binder 1999; Kelly 1993; Mayhew 2005). Future research would do well to address whether Canadian majority and minority governments are equally capable of producing legislation with long-lasting societal impacts as scholars of the US Congress have endeavoured to undertake. The brief analysis of the Trudeau and Mulroney period of the 1980s provides some evidence of majority governments' prowess on this front. A different course of analysis might focus solely on budget bills, and the trials and tribulations of passing such legislation by government type to ferret out the underlying contextual patterns. Minority governments spend much more additional time per days of sitting in the bid to pass budgets, but majority governments have varied quite considerably as well in marshaling intra-party assent. Economic factors, which this analysis shows are of little *direct* significance for success or productivity, may play a much greater role in budget legislation. Finally, an alternative analysis might consider how minority and majority governments operate to pass legislation with parochial benefits aimed at specific MPs' constituencies as a means to aid their reelection chances, as Kreppel (1997) performed for the Italian case of coalition government.

Minority governments in Canada, as elsewhere, *are* legitimate in Westminster systems. However, their functionality, like that of their majority counterparts, is in the eye of the beholder. Some have decried alleged “democratic deficits” in the Harper ministry, begging the pivotal question of whether circumventing potential no confidence votes by proroguing Parliament is appropriate, constitutional, or in violation of historical norms. Additional controversies in the Trudeau and Harper ministries include the question of what actually constitutes a confidence vote in the first place—and how much forbearance with government policies the opposition parties must exercise before a government is compelled to resign. The boundaries vary considerably from country to country, as European democracies with a history of minority government, particularly in Scandinavia, remind us. Regardless, some may regard minority government as an adaptation of Madisonian checks and balances to the responsible government model in the Westminster tradition. To those distrustful of single-party majorities, the constraints on minority government may be perceived as a mechanism that tempers a “tyranny of the majority” in terms of policy outcomes in much the way advocates of “divided government” in the US contend that split-party control of the presidency and Congress leads to more balanced policy outcomes.

In light of the frequency of minority governments in the last three Canadian elections, normative questions must naturally remain front and centre in the ongoing debate about proposals to reform internal procedures in Parliament as well as the age-old controversy over the translation of votes to seats in Canada’s first-past-the-post electoral system with single member constituencies. The adoption of proportional representation in the future might well yield minority governments with even greater frequency, necessitating a far greater understanding of *informal* coalition politics or the ways in which *formal* coalitions might form pre- or post-election. But the last three elections in Canada underscore that minority government is likely to remain a viable and likely outcome in the future.

It is therefore incumbent upon scholars to theorise in greater depth about the typology of minority governments in Canada given those that have already occurred. As Strøm (1990, 40) posits, party behaviour in government formation is influenced by policy as well as power motivations. What is required is a better grasp of the “proximate conditions” Strøm (1990, 66-8) of external party support in Canada, such as electoral and policy calculi as well as ideological distance between parties for *informal* coalitions willing to support minority cabinets on a long-term or ad hoc basis, and the timing of their decision to withdraw their support. A more in-depth analysis of Pearson’s ministry in the 1960, Clark’s ministry in 1979, and Martin’s ministry from 2004-06 could prove useful on this account. Moreover, the “self-destruction” of minority governments, as occurred under Diefenbaker in 1963 and to some extent under Clark in 1979, must be placed into comparative context with European cases to identify the opportunities and constraints on plurality ministries.

Finally, tracing the process of successful or failed formal agreements for minority governments in the Canadian case opens up endless possibilities for game theorists, in particular. Such an approach may be complemented by the type of empirical analysis Godbout and Høyland (2009) have recently undertaken relative to division votes to locate variation in sources of support for minority governments among opposition parties. It is equally vital to comprehend the conditions under which formal *coalitions* might arise in the Canadian setting. In 2008 the Harper government came perilously close to losing confidence, and the scattering of parties with seemingly little ideological or policy commonality—from the Liberals and NDP to the Bloc Québécois—stood poised to come to an arrangement to oust the Conservatives. The situation resembles closely the Irish case in 1994 when a “Rainbow Coalition” of an equally ideologically diverse group of parties including Fine Gael, Labour, and the Democratic Left successfully assumed control of the *Dáil*. The withdrawal of Labour’s support of Reynold’s government proved critical, and that party’s

renegotiation of a new coalition ousted his cabinet without precipitating an election (Coughlan 1994). At root cause of the collapse of Reynold's government was a scandal involving a public inquiry—scarcely an unknown feature of recent Canadian governments.

On the floor of the House of Commons in 1962 the Right Honourable John Diefenbaker, leading an embattled minority government, commented in a candor for which the "Chief" was surely renowned that "Governments propose, and oppositions dispose." Diefenbaker's words should resonate with scholars. Future avenues of research on the dynamics of minority government are critical in understanding the development of institutions in the Canadian polity in the twenty-first century.

NOTES

¹ The sponsorship scandal involved efforts under Liberal Prime Ministers Chrétien and Martin to enhance the awareness of Quebecers of the federal government's role in education, arts, etc. through advertising in Québec Province. The objective was to counter the momentum of the provincial sovereignist Parti Québécois government among francophones. Allegations of illegal activity and corruption were investigated by the auditor general and, ultimately led the establishment of the Gomery Commission. Although the Commission cleared Chrétien and Martin of wrongdoing the public inquiry faulted Chrétien's Prime Minister's Office (PMO), and Martin's lack of oversight while Minister of Finance under Chrétien, for financial and other irregularities in the programme.

² The availability of economic indicators from Statistics Canada and international sources is limited prior to 1950. It is for this reason that the analysis commences with the government of Louis St. Laurent in 1953.

³ The separation of the executive and legislative functions in the United States, and the frequent condition of "divided government" in which the president's party does not have a majority in Congress, clashes mightily with the fusion of the executive within the legislature, as well as foundational principles of responsible government in Canada's Westminster tradition.

⁵ Both government success (Table 1) and government productivity (Table 2) evince some heteroskedasticity or non-constant variance at $p < .01$ (Breusch-Pagan test). This artifact of the data distribution renders ordinary least squares (OLS) regression problematic, as non-constant variance violates OLS assumptions. By the same token, neither dependent variable demonstrates serial correlation (Durbin-Watson > 1.8 and < 2.0).

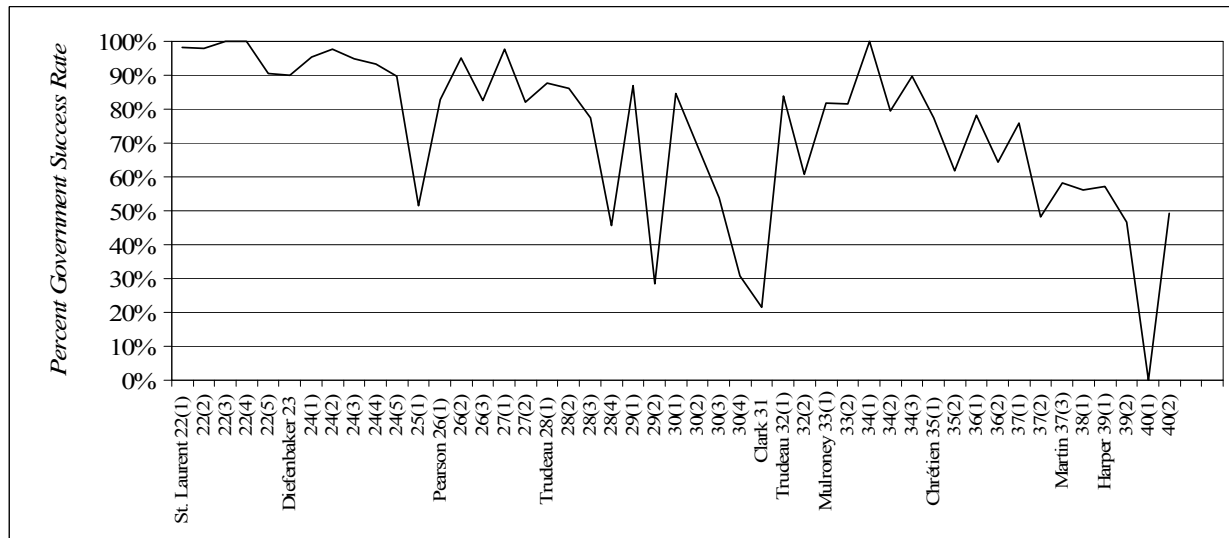
Analysis of residuals and leverage points for both dependent variables shows three to five significant "outliers" in each model. In several cases the outliers are minority governments of interest to the analysis. Natural log and other transformations were unsuccessful in reducing the impact of these outliers.

Rather than censor the outliers robust regression was employed to analyse the data. Robust regression is a form of weighted least squares, but makes no theoretical assumptions about the cause of the non-constant variance. The method is one of reiteratively reweighting least squares and assigning a "weight" to each observation. The observations with "normal" distributions in the data set are assigned higher weights, whereas the outliers are assigned lower weights. For both dependent variables, the method proves satisfactory in its explanatory and predictive capacity.

⁶ Sgro was alleged to have hired a Romanian immigrant and stripper to work on her campaign, and to have personally intervened to "fast track" her permanent residency status. See CBC (2004).

⁷ The standardised calculation of bills receiving assent divided by sitting days was used as the dependent variable because of modeling problems with the simple number of bills passed per session. The number of bills receiving royal assent has a more profound problem of non-constant variance and overdispersion.

Figure 1
Government Success Rates by Prime Minister & Parliament/Session



Source: Parliament of Canada;
<http://www2.parl.gc.ca/parlinfo/compilations/HouseOfCommons/BillSummary.aspx>

Figure 2
Bills Passed and Bills Per Day/Session, by Prime Minister & Parliament/Session

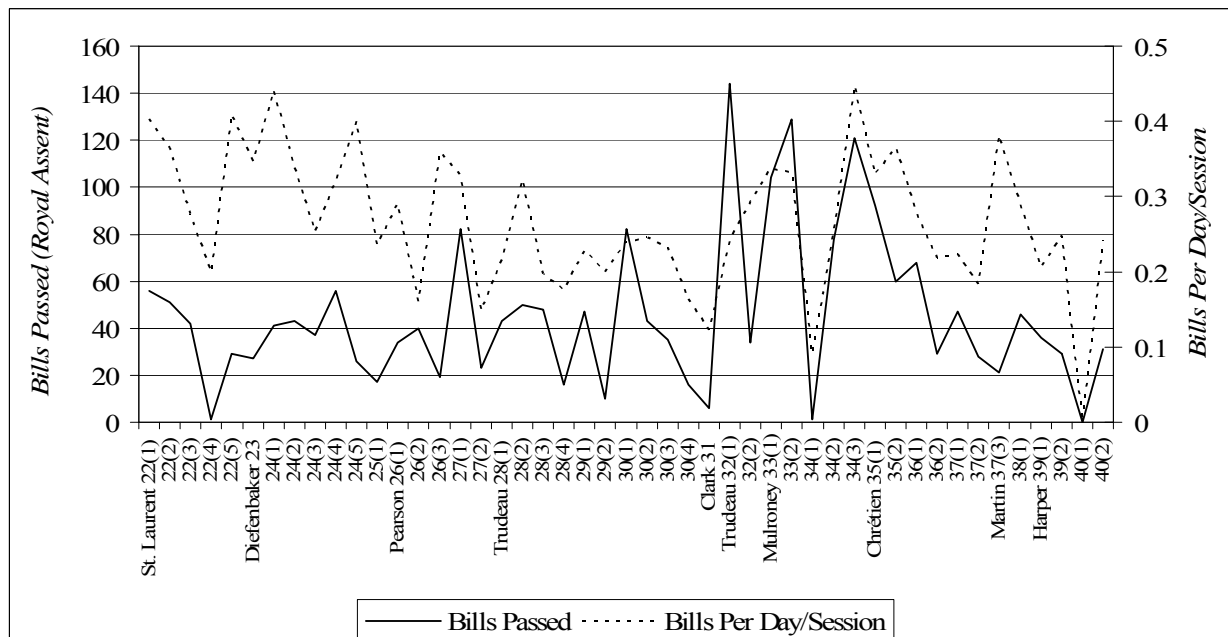


Table 1
Robust Regression Analysis of Government Success, 1953-2009[^]

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>
Session	-.028	.017*
Days in Session	.0004	.0002**
Bills Introduced [‡]	-.271	.161*
Votes – Cabinet against Majority [‡]	-.767	.205****
% Government Seats in Commons	1.032	.248****
Government Ideology	.004	.002**
% Δ in Government Seats from Last Election	-.001	.0006**
Prime Ministerial Activity (1, -1)	-.029	.025
Prime Ministerial Activity x Minority Government	.206	.053****
Cabinet Size	-.007	.005**
Cabinet Scandal/Resignation over Policy	-.079	.043**
Average Unemployment During Session	-.007	.014
Change in Inflation During Session	-.005	.010
Constant	.599	.186****
<i>N</i> = 47 <i>R</i> ² = .63		

**** $p < .0001$ *** $p < .01$ ** $p < .05$ * $p < .10$ (one-tailed)

Dependent variable is percent government success.

[^] R^2 derived from *rregfit* in STATA

[‡] Data for independent variables standardised by days in session

Table 2
Robust Regression Analysis of Legislative Productivity, 1953-2009[^]

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Mean Effect</i> [†]
Session	-.019	.010**	-13.15
Bills Introduced [‡]	.568	.089****	2.88
Votes – Cabinet against Majority [‡]	-.312	.116****	-7.63
% Government Seats in Commons	.594	.138****	4.46
Government Ideology	.001	.001	37.03
% Δ in Government Seats from Last Election	-.0006	.0003**	-11.23
Prime Ministerial Activity (1, -1)	-.016	.014	31.25
Prime Ministerial Activity x Minority Government	.129	.030****	3.88
Cabinet Size	-.006	.003**	-8.33
Cabinet Scandal Resignation	-.003	.022	166.67
Average Unemployment During Session	.009	.008	13.89
Change in Inflation During Session	-.002	.006	-45.45
Constant	-.140	.106*	
<i>N</i> = 47 <i>R</i> ² = .55			

**** $p < .0001$ *** $p < .01$ ** $p < .05$ * $p < .10$ (one-tailed)

Dependent variable is number of bills passed divided by days in session

[^] R^2 derived from *rregfit* in STATA

[†] See text for details on calculation and meaning

[‡] Data for independent variables standardised by days in session

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