

Calls of the Wild: Resignation Requests in the Canadian House of Commons 1957-2008*

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Abstract

This research focuses on a particular class of parliamentary question: the call for a minister's resignation. First, attention is paid to providing an initial look at where calls for resignation are situated in time and space. The second objective of this research is to examine the real effect of a call for resignation. Do ministers actually resign when they are called to? The answer is "yes, ministers do resign when called to . . . sometimes." However, a closer examination is required to establish the true cause and effect in this relationship. Data drawn from an original dataset which records every call for resignation in the Canadian House of Commons for the period 1957-2008 is used to provide a clearer picture of the nature and relevance of parliamentary questions not only in Canada but in other Westminster parliamentary democracies as well.

If the essence of Parliament is Government accountability, then surely the essence of accountability is the Question Period in the Canadian House of Commons (1985, p.51).

Hon. James Jerome
Speaker of the House of Commons, 1974-1980

1 Introduction

Considerable attention has been directed to the subject of parliamentary questions in Western democracies. Parliamentary questions are visible, they are recorded, they are often linked to contentious political events and actors. Parliamentary questions lend themselves for analysis by single case or large n quantitative studies; they can be treated as dependent or independent variables. It comes as no surprise that political scientists have spent considerable time and resources to study, or at least make reference to and recognize these phenomena (Wiberg, 1994). The general trend, at least within the Westminster parliamentary tradition, highlights Question Period and the questions contained therein, as an essential part in holding the government and its ministers accountable and responsible for their actions and policies (Franklin and Norton, 1993; Bowring and Chester, 1962). In principle, Question Period is the theatre in which governments live or die based on their ability to respond and satisfy the opposition parties and keep the barbarians at the gates. But parliamentary questions serve other functions as well. With respect to opposition parties, Question Period serves as a platform to publicly present alternative policies and to publicize a government in waiting in the event the existing government loses the confidence of the House of Commons. Question Period provides an opportunity for junior ministers and opposition critics to "strut their stuff", demonstrate their abilities and further their career paths within their political parties. Lastly, Question Period also serves a representative function whereby public and group concerns can be transmitted via elected representatives' questions to decision making elites.

*Paper presented to the 2009 Annual Conference of the Canadian Political Science Association: Section A1(a): Political Careers and Party Activists, Ottawa, Ontario, May 27, 2009. Not for reference without permission from the author as this is currently a work in progress. Thanks to Lesley Smith and Mark Williams for their capable research assistance.

Among the ways in which accountability and responsibility can be studied through parliamentary questions, one path entails the examination of a particular class of question – a call for a minister’s resignation. Calls for ministerial resignations, as a subset of parliamentary questions, are an integral part of the principle of responsible government and its twin children: individual and collective ministerial responsibility. This subject has experienced a renaissance in recent years; current studies treat ministerial resignations as a dependent variable and try to explain the causes of turnover with reference to the duration of ministerial careers (Dowding and Kang, 1998; Dewan and Dowding, 2005; Berlinski et al., 2007b; Huber and Martinez-Gallardo, 2008; Kerby, 2007; Dowding and Dumont, 2009). Central to these studies, is the ability to identify when and in what context resignations and “non-resignations” occur. One way to approach this issue is to treat a call for a minister’s resignation as an “opportunity” for the minister to exit the cabinet. Whether the minister exits or not will depend on a number of factors. Alternatively, calls for resignation can be included as an independent variable in a causal model of ministerial duration and turnover. I expect that a study of calls for resignations will feed the current literature on political elite career paths as well as modestly inform at least one aspect of the current study of parliamentary questions.

This paper provides a first glance at a new and complete dataset of calls for resignation in the Canadian federal House of Commons which span the 51 years that begin with the first Diefenbaker ministry (June 1957) and end with the completion of the first Harper ministry (October 2008). The first part of the paper provides an overview of the general pattern of calls for resignations in Canada with respect to their occurrence. The second part of the paper focuses on the effects of calls for resignation by presenting an event history model of ministerial duration which includes calls for resignation as an independent variable. I hope that this initial research will help to generate empirical propositions about the nature and changing conditions of parliamentary institutions with respect to constitutional convention and ultimately ministerial resignations themselves. The goal of this paper is not to build a model which explains the causes of calls for resignation or their occurrence; nor does it purport to develop a complete model of political elite turnover in Canada. Rather, the goal of this paper is simply to elaborate on what these phenomena look like before moving on to the next stage of research.

2 A (brief) history of parliamentary questions in Canada

A review of Canadian parliamentary history reveals that Question Period as we know of it now was not an original feature of the parliamentary process in 1867.¹ Following Confederation, there was no formal requirement for oral questions - only written questions. Nevertheless, oral questions were posed to the prime minister and the ministers during debates and speeches in the early years of the dominion. So much so that the Speaker of the House noted in 1878,

It is customary for hon. members to ask the Government for any special information between the various calls from the Chair for the day, before Notices of Motion or the Orders of the Day. I am not aware that any hon. member has a positive right even to do that; but I think he must confine himself entirely to asking the information from the Government, and he must not proceed to descant on the conduct of the Government (House of Commons, 1878, p.1269).

By 1878, the frequency of oral questions in the House of Commons had set enough of a precedent to establish the principle of asking questions as a convention and from this point until the 1940s, parliamentary questions were governed by informal rules, guidelines and some precedent. By the 1940s, Question Period (Questions on the Order of the Day, as they were known) had become an established part of the parliamentary day. The rules governing Question Period and parliamentary questions were still determined by guidelines established by the Speaker and his interpretation and relative adherence to precedence. There were repeated attempts to codify the rules governing Question Period but they were met with little success. It was not until 1964 that the first written codification of the rules governing the timing, length and content of parliamentary questions was established. In 1975, Speaker James Jerome set an important precedent by stating that asking questions in Parliament was a right and not a privilege, thus establishing the permanence of the institution. Since the

¹ A useful history of parliamentary procedure, including parliamentary questions, can be found in Robert Marleau and Camille Montpetit, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, Canada. Parliament. House of Commons, 2000

1970s, successive speakers have introduced changes to Question Period in order to streamline and speed up the procedure.

Presently, Question Period takes place every weekday that Parliament is in session. It begins at 2:15pm on Monday through Thursday, 11:15am on Friday and it lasts 45 minutes. There is a 35 second time limit on both questions and answers which can be asked and responded to in both official languages. The format of Question Period specifies that the speaker first recognizes the leader of the official opposition who asks a lead-off question. The prime minister or cabinet minister may choose to respond and the leader of the opposition is entitled to ask two supplementary questions. The lead questioners of the remaining opposition parties are then entitled to one initial and one supplementary question each. Once the cycle of opposition party questions is complete then members of all officially recognized parties (including the government party) can ask questions in rotation until the 45 minutes are up. An important feature of the Canadian Question Period, one which differentiates it from its British cousin, pertains to the absence of any requirement to submit written questions to the prime minister or ministers in advance of Question Period. Opposition parties are free to drop question “bombs” and ministers’ staffs spend considerable energy formulating answers to anticipated questions before they arise in Question Period and are then repeated on the nightly news.²

Despite the recognized history of parliamentary questions and the evolution and institutionalisation of Question Period, the academic study of parliamentary questions in Canada is sparse. When raised by the Canadian political scientists, parliamentary questions have been described as an essential and important feature of the parliamentary process, one that is related to the constitutional conventions of responsible government as well as individual and collective ministerial responsibility (Dawson, 1964; Franks, 1987; Docherty, 1997). Some recent research activity has taken a closer and more systematic look at parliamentary questions. Howlett (1998) and Penner et al. (2006), for example, both examine parliamentary questions through the lens of the agenda setting framework. And, it appears that Soroka et al.’s (forthcoming) current work focuses on the relationship between parliamentary questions and constituency representation. However, a detailed or comprehensive treatise of parliamentary questions in Canada in the style of Franklin and Norton (1993) or Chester and Bowring’s (1962) studies of British parliamentary questions has yet to be written.

3 Calls for Resignations

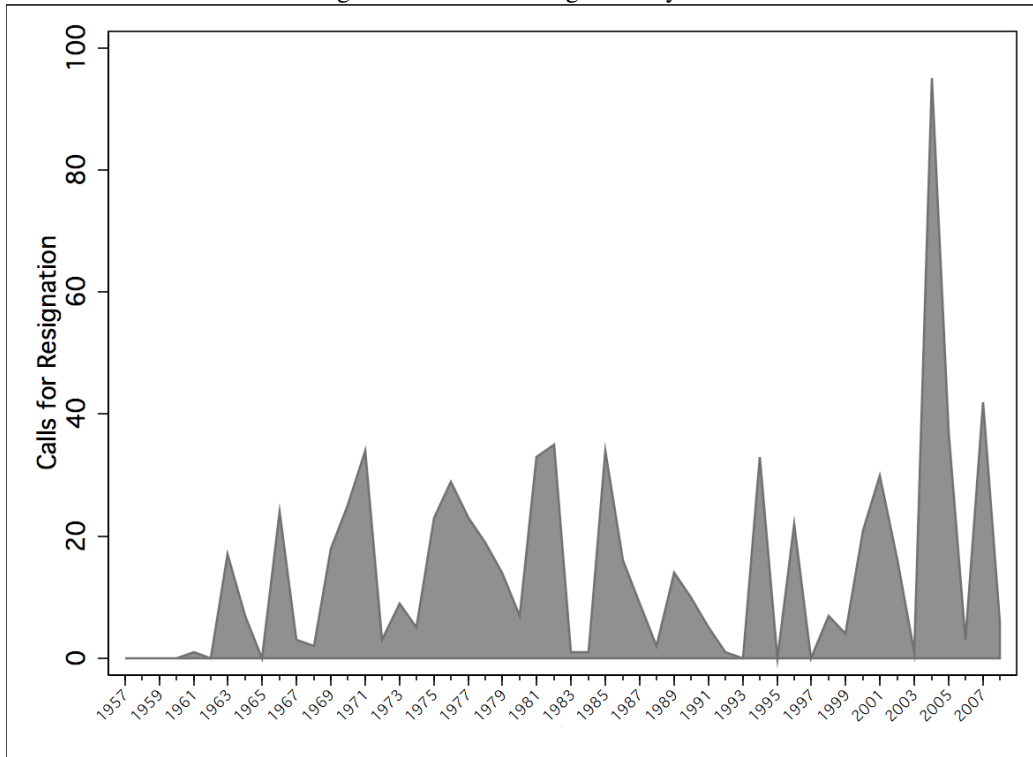
If the study of parliamentary questions in Canada is sparse then one can regard the study of calls for resignation as non-existent. The topic has barely been addressed as a unique subject in the Canadian or comparative literatures. Indeed, this paper presents the first comprehensive collection of calls for resignation in the Canadian political science canon. Part of the reason for the absence of such a study is likely related to the availability of data. Digging and filtering through 141 years’ worth of Hansard to find instances of calls for resignation is no small hurdle to overcome. Nevertheless, the Canadian case may be unique insofar as some early parliamentary librarians had the foresight to include calls for resignation as a required index entry in the House of Commons’ Hansard. As a result, locating and verifying Canadian calls for resignations in the historical record is a time consuming but not unsurmountable task.³ Calls for resignation appear to be attracting some attention in the comparative politics literature, particularly with respect to the current research on ministerial turnover (Berlinski et al., 2007a; Kerby, 2007). However, a detailed breakdown of the frequency, variation and quality of a call for resignation has yet to be compiled in any polity. Certainly, there are no complete or published studies into the causes or effects of calls for resignation. One of the goals of this paper is to provide the first steps in the direction of a systematic analysis of calls for resignation in Canada for the period 1957-2008 with the goal of eventually using this data to build two causal models: one to explore the determinants and evolution of calls for resignations and the second to look at the effects of calls for resignation particularly with respect to cabinet reshuffles and resignations.

The dataset compiled for this study consists of a complete tally of every call for a Canadian cabinet minister’s resignation since 1957. The data reveal that there have been 484 such calls. These calls have taken place over the course of 17 parliaments, 40 sessions and 7154 Question Periods. This works out to a mean of 9.49 calls for resignations per year, although the distribution of calls extends from a minimum of zero to a maximum of 95. Calls for resignations arise from any number of issues ranging from personal scandal,

² Television recordings of Question Period were introduced in 1977.

³ Electronic and searchable versions of Hansard are available for the post 1993 period.

Figure 1: Calls for Resignation by Year



policy failure to gross incompetence. A cursory review of the calls for resignation reveals that they vary in nature and content: they have been short, long, mundane and even creatively amusing.⁴

Figure 1 presents a graphical overview of the entire set of calls for resignation for the 1957-2008 period broken down by year. There does not appear to be any obvious pattern to calls for resignation. The peaks largely appear every four or five years; they reach their apex in the year of or the year after an election, at

⁴ By far, the most creative request for a minister's resignation was directed at Liberal cabinet minister Michel Dupuy by Reform Party member Grant Hill in 1994.

A certain minister of the crown
Forgets the simple rule,
That requires him to step right down
If he has been a fool.

"As heritage minister, I hang my head,
I've made a little blunder,
Please just clarify the rules a bit
Don't tear my world asunder."

For what price do we all place
On friendship and loyalty,
In Liberal circles there is a space
For ministers who think they're royalty.

"Above the rules for mortal men,
No way will I resign,
Behaviour like this we see again,
Who cares if the backbenches whine."

"But when we sat across the floor
It was a different story,
Now that we sit upon this side
We act just like a Tory!"

which point they tail off. The peaks occur in 1963 (Pearson) 1966 (Pearson) 1971 (Trudeau) 1976 (Trudeau) 1982 (Trudeau), 1985 (Mulroney), 1994 (Chrétien), 1996 (Chrétien), 2001 (Chrétien), 2004 (Martin) and 2006 (Martin-Harper). Smaller peaks also take place in 1973, 1989 and 1998; each of these minor peaks follow the year of a general election. Almost all of these calls for resignation reflect alleged political scandals, ministerial indiscretions or policy failures in the portfolios over which the minister presides. The dramatic jump in the number of calls for resignation in 2004 is clearly an outlier; the majority of calls here reflects the opposition parties' 77 calls for a single minister's resignation.⁵ Generally speaking, it appears that the calls for resignation increase with a flourish after an election. The number of calls then begins to diminish as the parliament progresses. The peaks at the beginning of each parliament may reflect the enthusiasm of the opposition parties combined with the inexperience and clumsiness of new cabinet ministers and governments. The drop in frequency may occur as the opposition parties realize that their calls are not having an immediate or intended effect, or they do not wish to be labeled as the party that cries wolf each time a possible resignation incident occurs. The drop may also reflect ministers' ability to manage their communications and not make as many visible errors as they become more settled in their portfolios or their roles as cabinet ministers. In part, this is reflected by the wide variety of ministers who are targeted in these early years as well as the variety of issue areas over which ministers are called to resign. The peak in 1997 is somewhat unusual as it deviates from the pattern but it is an outlier in so far as all of the calls are directed at a single minister over a single issue.⁶ The buildup and concentration of calls for resignation in the early 2000s reflects a series of scandals involving Liberal ministers although the focus of the calls is still on a limited number of ministers who are caught up in specific incidents and cases.

Just as we see peaks, similarly, we see troughs in 1965, 1968, 1972, 1974, 1980, 1983, 1984, 1988, 1993, 1995, 1997, 2003 and 2006. General elections took place in each of these years with the exception of 1983, 1995 and 2003. The absence of calls for resignations in 1995 is likely explained by the occurrence of the Quebec separation crisis and referendum which dominated political discussion and debate. All opposition parties with the exception of the separatist Bloc Québécois appear to have refrained from casting the government in a negative light for fear of providing ammunition to the separatist cause. The dearth in calls for resignation during the trough years may also be explained by the reduced number of opportunities to ask questions. In addition to the regularly scheduled holidays and recesses, election years see additional periods of time in which the House of Commons does not sit due to the election campaign as well as the recess that takes place prior to the first sitting of Parliament after an election. In the event that a new government party takes power, this recess may be rather long. The new government may also experience a honeymoon effect in the public opinion polls which may soften the attempts by opposition parties to demand for ministers' resignations immediately after taking the job. Furthermore, opposition parties may take time to lick their post election wounds and reorganize. Perhaps a more useful indicator of the frequency of calls for resignation can be found in Figure 2.

Figure 2 presents the annual sum of calls for resignation divided by the annual sum of Question Periods which is then divided by the effective number of parties in a given parliament. This provides a more accurate picture than simply presenting the ratio of calls for resignation to parliamentary questions as it controls for the number of political parties which vary by parliament. The peaks visibly occur in the year after an election and gradually drop off. Similar caveats still apply to the outliers and troughs. Figure 3 presents the count of calls for resignation smoothed by three year periods to see if there are any detectable trends in the numbers of calls for resignation over time. Leaving aside the low number of calls for resignation at the beginning of the series, Figure 3 suggests that the frequency of calls for resignations increased from the late 1950s until the early 1980s at which point the frequency dropped. The level jumped and then fell in the 1992-1994 period (the end of the Mulroney and the beginning of the Chrétien ministries) and then began an upward climb after 1995-1997. Once again, the outlier in 2004 dominates the right hand side of the series. However, when Sgro's total number of calls for resignation are converted to the average number of calls experienced by ministers who were called to resign that year, then the line still suggests that there was an upward trend which levels off during the 2007-2008 period. The calls for resignation can be broken down further into parliaments as in Figure 4 and associated Table 1.

⁵ Judy Sgro was put on the defensive after it was revealed that she had hired an immigrant stripper to work on her campaign - this was referred to as "Strippergate" in the media.

⁶ Minister of Defence David Collinette came under attack by opposition parties for his role in curtailing an investigation/inquiry into the torture and death of a Somali teenager at the hands of Canadian soldiers.

Figure 2: Proportion of calls for resignation of total parliamentary questions

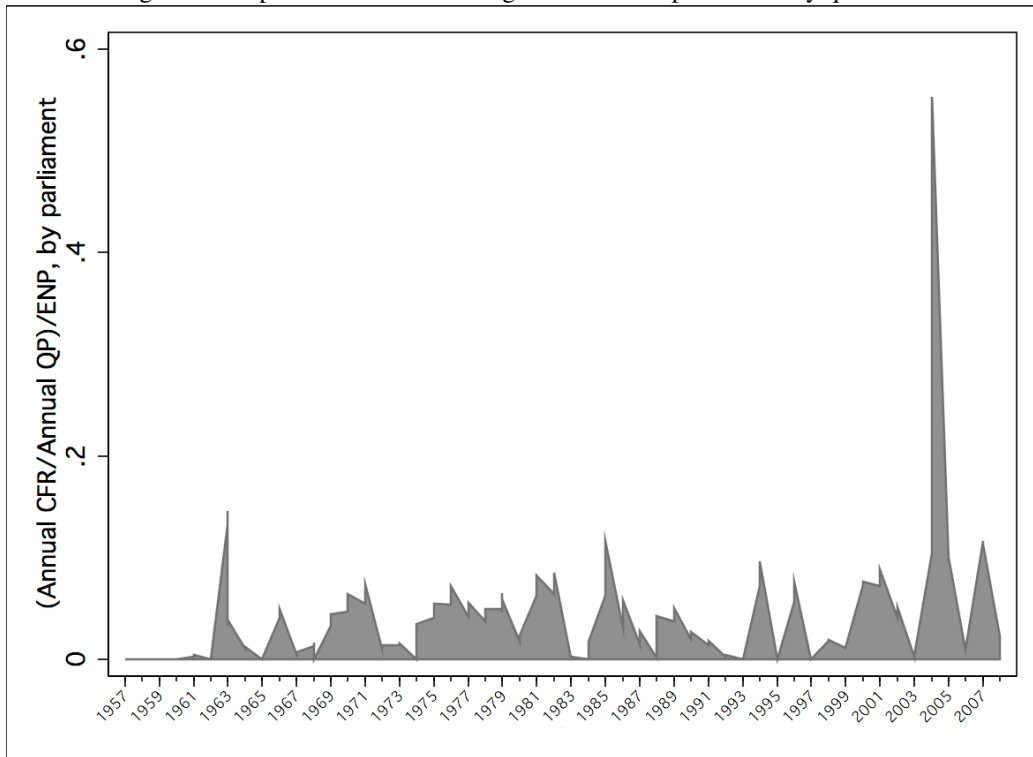


Figure 3: Average number of cases by three year period

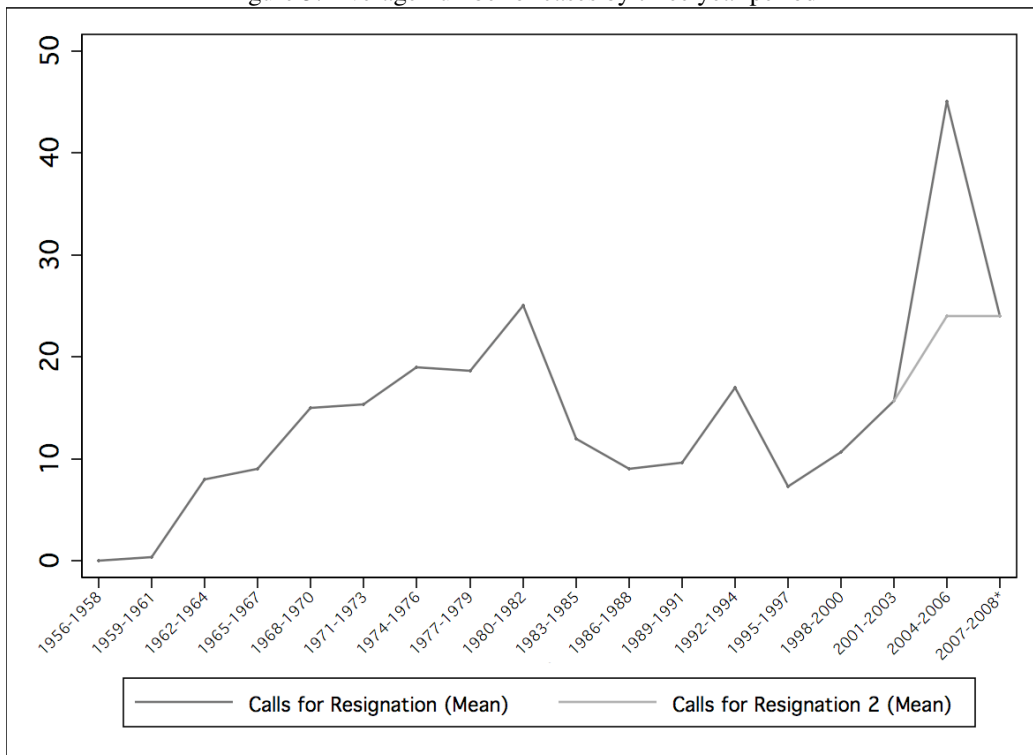
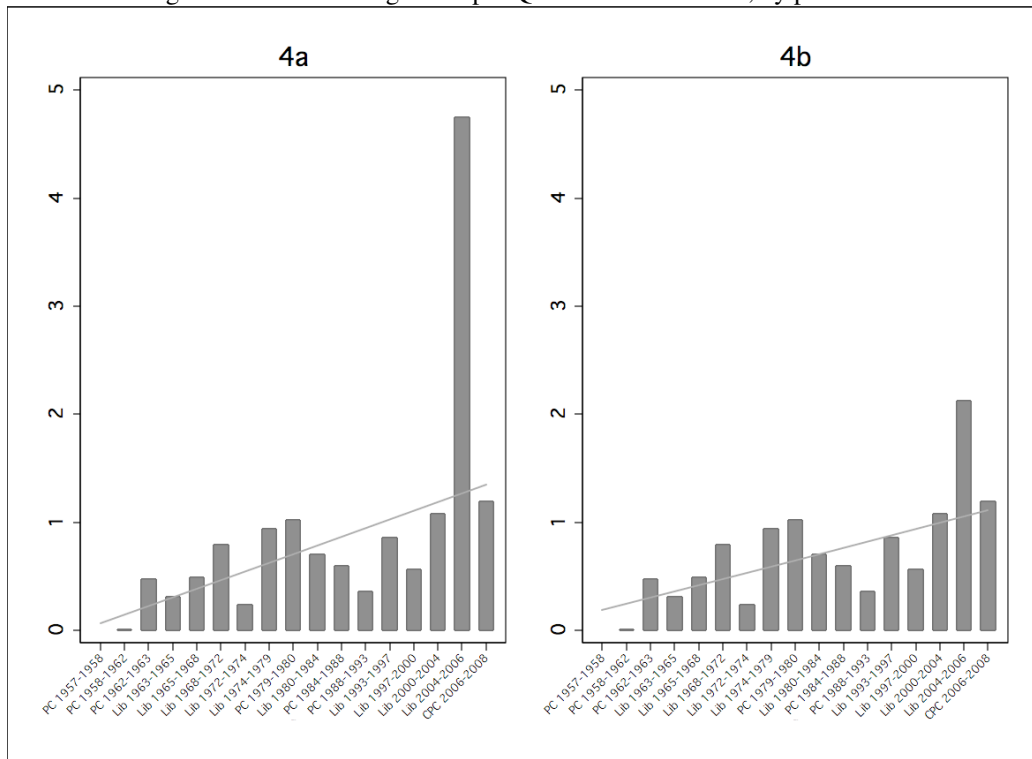


Figure 4: Calls for resignation per Question Period week, by parliament



The graphical representation of the average number of calls for resignation per Question Period week found in Figure 4 does not reveal any discernible trends. When examined on a parliament by parliament basis there are peaks and troughs that roughly correspond to the pattern established in Figure 1. Nevertheless, a trendline suggests that the average number of calls for resignation per Question Period week is increasing, even when the 2005 outlier is taken into consideration. There may be several explanations for the increasing trend. First, the changes in the party system which took place following the 1993 election have resulted in a transformation in the number and variety of political parties (Carty et al., 2000). The traditional two and half party system has been replaced by a collection of political parties with strong regional interests. The fragmentation has provided more vessels in which calls for resignation can take place: multiple parties may make identical calls for resignation in order to claim a piece of the “kill.” Also, and related to the post 1993 legislative transformation, federal politics in Canada has seen the reemergence of successive minority governments. Government can less easily ignore a call for a resignation as the failure to comply may result in a more severe withdrawal of confidence on other more salient issues (Page, 1990; Woodhouse, 1994; Dowding and Kang, 1998; Kerby, 2007; Russell, 2008). Lastly, although the pattern has not been established or recorded in Canada, it is possible that the number of resignation issues or opportunities has increased thus resulting in a corresponding increase in the number of calls for a minister’s resignation by opposition parties (Dowding and Kang, 1998). The increase may also be a result of the extremely high level of turnover that took place in 1993 which resulted in a large number of “amateur” MPs being appointed to cabinet as well as a large number of “new” MPs elected to a more partisan, angry/offended and regionalized collection of opposition parties which were particularly eager to decry the one established and remaining cartel party (Atkinson and Docherty, 1992; Atkinson and Thomas, 1993; Docherty, 1994, 1997; Matland and Studlar, 2004). This is demonstrated more clearly in Table 1 which presents the average number of calls for resignation per Question Period week. The first 36 years prior to the 1993 election have a mean of .55 calls for resignation for each week (seven days) of Question Period. The mean more than doubles to 1.29 calls for each week of Question Period in the period 1993-2008. Even when the abnormal Paul Martin Jr. ministry is controlled for, the average number of calls for resignation per Question Period week for the 1993-2008 period still jumps to .83. Whether this is a result of a higher number of resignation opportunities, more frequent minority governments

Table 1: Average number of calls for resignation per Question Period week

Period	CFR per QP Weeks (Mean)	QP Weeks	CFR
1957-1993	.55	774.57	424
1993-2008	1.29	247.43	320
1957-2008	.72	651.85	399

Table 2: Calls for resignation per Question Period week, by prime minister

PM	QP Weeks	CFR	CFR/QP Weeks
Diefenbaker 1957-1963	103.71	6	.06
Pearson 1963-1968	119.42	48	.40
Trudeau 1968-1979	250.43	196	.78
Clark 1979-1980	6.86	7	1.02
Trudeau 1980-1984	107.14	76	.71
Turner 1984-1984	0	0	0
Mulroney 1984-1993	187	92	.49
Campbell 1993-1993	0	0	0
Chrétien 1993-2003	172.86	134	.76
Martin 2003-2006	31.86	132	4.14
Martin* 2003-2006	31.86	69	2.17
Harper 2006-2008	42.71	51	1.19

or a more fragmented party system has not been determined.

4 Differences between prime ministers and parties in power

Table 2 presents the number of calls for resignation by prime minister. Once again, the most striking feature of the table relates to Paul Martin Jr.'s short and troubled 2003-2006 minority government. 132 calls for resignations were leveled at ministers in the Martin government; this produced an average of slightly over four calls a week for each week that the House of Commons sat and held a Question Period. I indicated above that the majority of the calls in the Martin government were directed towards a single minister. However, even when the calls for Judy Sgro's resignation are reset to the average number received by ministers called to resign, Martin's government still tops the list as the government which experienced the heaviest barrage of calls for ministers' resignations. The high number in Martin's government may indeed be the culmination of a kind of perfect storm in Canadian legislative politics. Martin inherited a divided, tired yet popular Liberal government from his predecessor Jean Chrétien. He also inherited the party at precisely the point in time when a newly formed and united Conservative Party of Canada chose its new leader. This new party was much better organized and considerably more partisan than its predecessors: the Reform Party and the Conservative Alliance. Martin also inherited a number of lingering and simmering scandals left behind by the Chrétien ministry. Finally, the effects of ruling a divided party came home to roost once many Chrétien loyalists were excluded from cabinet and Martin, an inexperienced prime minister presided over an equally inexperienced and cumbersome cabinet. The drop in the polls and the result of the 2004 election - a strong result for the Conservative Party and a minority government for the incumbent Liberals - gave off enough of the scent of blood for the official opposition to send them into a feeding frenzy. The Martin government survived one complete parliament and was succeeded by the recently concluded first Conservative minority government led by Stephen Harper which experienced an average of 1.19 calls per week of Question Period.

Looking back, the Chrétien government possessed an average of .76 calls for resignation per question period week while fellow liberal Pierre Trudeau's government's average was .71. Surprisingly, both Lester Pearson's Liberal government and Brian Mulroney's Progressive Conservative government, both of which have been popularly depicted as scandal-plagued and at times corrupt, faced low levels of opposition attention with respect to calls for ministerial resignations. Neither John Turner nor Kim Campbell, both of whom

Table 3: Average number of calls for resignation per Question Period week, by party

	QP Weeks	CFR	CFR/QP Weeks
Liberal	681.71	586	.86
Liberal*	681.71	523	.77
Non-Liberal	340.29	158	.46

Table 4: Average number of calls for resignation per Question Period week, by party and pre/post 1993

	1957-1993			1993-2008		
	QP Weeks	CFR	CFR/QP Weeks	QP Weeks	CFR	CFR/QP Weeks
Liberal	477	320	.67	204.7	266	1.3
Liberal*	-	-	-	204.7	203	.99
Non-Liberal	297.57	105	.35	42.7	53	1.24

became prime minister at the end of their party’s ministries had the opportunity to face a call for resignation as parliament was never in session during their prime ministerial tenures. John Diefenbaker’s governments faced the least number of calls for resignation per Question Period week.

Table 3 suggests that there is considerable difference between the parties when it comes to the frequency of calls for resignation, even when the Martin government is taken into special consideration. The thirty to forty percent difference in the number of calls for resignations per Question Period week is likely explained by both the Martin minority government as well as the continuous Liberal government presence throughout the 1990s and the 2000-2006 period which has been characterised by the fragmentation of the party system. Table 4 reformulates the information in Table 3 but breaks it up between the pre and post 1993 periods where we can see closer similarities between the governing parties with respect to the frequency of calls for resignation, particularly in the post 1993 period.

5 The impact of calls for resignation on actual ministerial duration.

Drawing on methodological developments made in the government and ministerial survival literatures (Berlinski et al., 2007b; Huber and Martinez-Gallardo, 2008; King et al., 1990), this study employs an event history model to explore the determinants of ministerial duration and exit with specific reference to calls for resignations. Event history models are particularly useful when examining phenomena where duration and the transition from one state to another are the subjects of investigation; they are a more appropriate set of tools than ordinary least squares regression due to their ability to accommodate censored data as well as the violation of the assumption of normally distributed errors which typically arises when working with time-to-event data (Box-Steffensmeier and Jones, 2004).

A key element in event history analysis is the hazard rate, which refers to the instantaneous probability that an individual will experience an event at a point in time given that the individual has “survived” up until that point in time. The hazard rate is expressed as

$$h(t) = \lim_{\Delta t \rightarrow 0} \frac{\Pr(t \leq T \leq t + \Delta t \mid T \geq t)}{\Delta t} \quad (1)$$

which is the probability that an individual will survive until time t given that they have not experienced an event up to that point in time. By focusing on the hazard rate one is able to ask, “what is the likelihood that a cabinet minister will exit the cabinet at any point in time since becoming a minister, given how long he or she has served in cabinet?”

A useful feature of event history models relates to their ability to assume different parametric shapes for the hazard rate. Depending on the phenomenon under investigation one might assume that the hazard rate increases, decreases or remains constant as time progresses; one can then assign a parametric shape to the hazard rate. However, assigning a parametric shape to the hazard function can be difficult when working with social and political data because the shape of the hazard may not be obvious. For this reason most

Table 5: Cox Proportional Hazards Model of Canadian Ministerial Turnover 1957-2000

	Haz. Ratio	Std. Err.	P> z
Age	0.85	.097	0.156
Age2	1.00	.001	0.081
Female	0.90	0.295	0.745
Lawyer	0.84	0.178	0.407
Prov. Seats	2.40	1.009	0.036
Francophone	1.84	0.399	0.005
Leadership	0.20	0.121	0.008
Portfolio	0.95	0.199	0.812
Prev. Experience	1.03	0.018	0.106
Prev. MHA/MNA	1.30	0.444	0.446
Minority Government	2.14	.539	0.002
Public Opinion	3.24	2.294	0.095
Calls for Resignation	1.01	0.002	0.000

political scientists who use event history models choose to employ a Cox proportional hazards specification. Cox proportional hazard models are particularly useful when there are no ex ante assumptions about the parametric shape of the distribution of time of an individual's risk of experiencing a terminal event. Cox proportional hazard models have been widely employed in the social sciences and by political scientists in particular. The Cox proportional hazards model of ministerial appointment can be expressed as

$$h_i(t) = h_0(t) \exp(\beta'X) \quad (2)$$

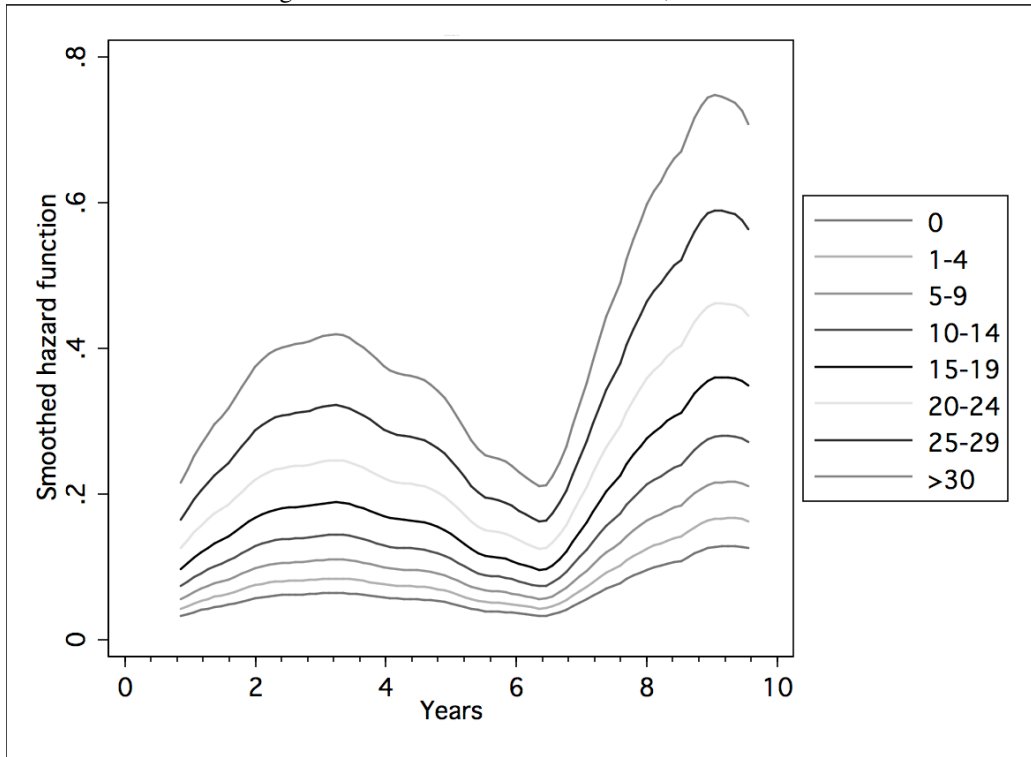
where $h_0(t)$ is a cabinet ministers baseline hazard at t ; $(\beta'X)$ are the covariates and regression parameters characteristics which may affect the minister's durability. The purpose of the event history model then is to relate cabinet ministers' individual and political characteristics as well as the characteristics of the political environment in which they serve to the time it takes for them to exit the cabinet. Duration is recorded as the span that elapses from the time that a cabinet minister is appointed to cabinet until he or she exits the cabinet by way of a cabinet reshuffle, a patronage appointment or a voluntary exit from federal politics. Ministers who die in office, are defeated in a general election or exit the cabinet when their party ceases to be the government party are treated as censored.

This study introduces a calls for resignation variable to a general event history model of Canadian ministerial duration. The hazard ratios are estimated from an original dataset which includes the complete career paths of all 449 Canadian cabinet ministers who served during the period 1957-2008 as well as a series of individual, institutional and political variables.⁷ The calls for resignation variable records a running total of calls for resignation that a minister receives so that by the time he or she exits the cabinet a total number of calls for resignation can be tallied. A positive relationship should exist between the number of calls for resignation that a minister faces and ministerial exit. Should the calls for resignation variable prove insignificant then one may need to reconsider the principle of individual ministerial responsibility and its place as a central convention in Canadian political life. While many observers are willing to admit the core of the principle that requires that ministers resign for the fault of both their own and their subordinates' inadequacies has withered, the convention nevertheless lives on in so far as severe enough lapses in judgment or management may force a prime minister to sack a minister in order to preserve the integrity of the ministry. It is a circuitous route to accountability, but a route nonetheless. The absence of an effect associated with the calls for resignation variable would also point to a severe curtailment of the powers of parliament to influence and pressure the prime minister.

Table 5 presents the Cox proportional hazards model of Canadian ministerial duration. Leaving aside the results for the individual and institutional variables for the time being, the result for the calls for resignation variable is encouraging. The expectation that ministers who face calls for their resignation in the House

⁷ Senators and prime ministers are excluded from the dataset as senators are not elected members of parliament and prime ministers are the agents of ministerial turnover.

Figure 5: Ministerial Hazard Function, 1957-2000



of Commons are more likely to exit than those ministers who face more favourable criticisms from the opposition benches turned out as expected. The calls for resignation variable was statistically significant at the .001 level and positively related to hazard of ministerial exit. For each additional call for resignation that a minister receives, the hazard of ministerial exit increases by one percent. However, the model results should be cautiously interpreted given that the terminal event indicator pools multiple types of ministerial exit (voluntary and involuntary exits) which are likely competing risks (see Diermeier and Stevenson, 1999). Nevertheless, the positive and strongly significant results for the calls for resignation variable are encouraging and they suggest that further research in this area should be pursued. A graphical representation of the hazard function for the calls for resignation variable at different frequencies is presented in Figure 5.

6 Conclusion

The study of calls for resignation further expands our understanding of parliamentary process as well as elite career paths. The research introduced in this paper takes the first step into a deeper examination of calls for resignation in a single case - Canada. The initial results of the descriptive analysis for the time period 1957-2008 suggest that there are some patterns which warrant closer examination. For example, why do calls for resignation explode out of the gate after an election and then dwindle as a parliament progresses. To what extent is the frequency of calls for resignation determined by the opposition parties that deliver the calls or the government ministers who receive them? Also, what explains the variation in their frequency? Relatedly, how are calls for resignation and their consequences linked to parliamentary roles and political careers. Finally, one needs to look at what triggers calls for resignation. Do opposition parties haphazardly call for ministers' heads or can patterns in the timing and style of calls for resignation be identified?

The results of the initial event history model are encouraging. The calls for resignation variable proved to be related to a curtailment of ministerial duration and the coefficients were statistically significant at the .001 level. Nevertheless, further elaboration of the relationship between calls for resignation and the model's other variables should be explored and explained. Specifically, variables to explore interactions between political

and individual characteristics need to be developed and refined.

At the other end of the analysis, the basic construction of the event history model of ministerial duration requires refinement. There is a need to more carefully specify what constitutes a ministerial exit/resignation. The current model pools all forms of ministerial exit together. However, one can easily argue that calls for resignation may have opposite effects on different kinds of exit: backbench demotion vs. appointment to the Senate or a patronage position, for example. Despite these challenges, the study of calls for resignation appears to be moving forward. Further attention paid to data collection, model building and continued debate and discussion will only help to better understand this phenomenon.

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