

A Decade of Gun Control in Canada: *Hansard* Debate Then and Now

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Presented at the 78th Annual Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences
(Canadian Political Science Association, Section A13: Parties in Power)
May 29, 2009
Carleton University
Ottawa, ON

Draft Version: Not for quotation or citation without the authors' permission.

The issue here is not gun control. And it's not even astronomical cost overruns, although those are serious. What's really inexcusable is that Parliament was in the dark. I question why the Department continued to watch the costs escalate without informing Parliament and without considering alternatives.

- Sheila Fraser, Auditor General of Canada (2002, December 3)

In late 2002, the Canadian Auditor General Sheila Fraser released her now-famous review of the Canadian Firearms Registry. Fraser's audit of the gun registry helped lead to the end of Prime Minister Paul Martin's short-lived Liberal minority government in the 2006 Federal election (Wells, 2007), mainly because her report identified the poor management of the gun registry's development, which ballooned to nearly \$1 billion over ten years (1996-2006), despite initial estimates that the net cost would be \$2 million dollars per year. In the 2003 election, two "boondoggles" helped to change the minds of many Canadians who had kept the Jean Chrétien Liberals in majority power since 1993: (1) the 2000 loss, by Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), of \$1 billion in employment grants, the first government problem to be characterized by the Canadian Alliance opposition as a "boondoggle," and (2) the now famous "gun registry boondoggle". The new liberal leader Paul Martin was left to pick up the pieces in a minority parliament besieged by questions from opposition members over these lingering scandals.

The language of the "boondoggle" represents a media frame set by particular political actors that are attempting to influence a change in policy based on wider Canadian public opinion, which is often represented in demonstrates, petitions, or polls. The Liberal party original framed the gun registry as a public safety matter in the Canadian media for example; using that media frame, the issue gained popular support to combat the increasing costs and losses from gun deaths and injuries, especially in light of horrific events like the 1989 Montreal Massacre. Theorists argue that if political actors can influence the dominant narrative frames circulating in the media concerning any particular issue, then their agenda has a greater chance of being supported by the public (Soroka, 2002; Marres, 2005).

In this paper, we argue that the gun control agenda-setting frames prior to Sheila Fraser's audit were managed and mainly set by the federal Liberals in the House debate, and were consistently backed by their majority governments from 1993-2003, but this shifted after the audit to the constant frame set by a single opposition backbench MP from

Saskatchewan: Garry Breitkreuz (Canadian Alliance: Yorkton-Melville). Breitkreuz was a steady firebrand on the issue since his election to Parliament as an opposition Reform party member in 1993. Until 2002, Breitkreuz's anti-gun registry message failed to have any lasting impact in the House, but this changed when Fraser's report was released in December. Armed with the report, Breitkreuz extended the newly-formed Conservative party's agenda-setting frame on the gun registry – from calling the registry ineffective and a money waster, to it being a “\$1 billion boondoggle” (*Hansard*, 2002, November 28: 14:20pm), and then a “\$2 billion boondoggle” (*Hansard*, 2003, March 25: 10:25am) – by strategically filling a gap in the Liberals' rather nonexistent agenda-setting frame which was struggling to answer key questions about the costs of the registry. Running into the 2002 Christmas break after Fraser's report, the Liberals could not answer the key questions of how much the gun registry had cost to date, and how much more it would cost to maintain. The Liberals did not have a coherent frame to offer when the party became beleaguered with scandals: the original “\$1 billion boondoggle” as the Reform party characterized the 2000 HRDC mismanagement, and then the Sponsorship Scandal identified in Sheila Fraser's audit released on February 10, 2004.

Without the Liberals offering a strong agenda frame for the issue, the registry as a “billion dollar boondoggle” has continued to be cited in the House and in the media until the present time, despite Fraser's subsequent audits having shown that the registry has actually cost under \$1 billion over ten years and that most of the money was spent on screening and licensing gun owners not registering firearms (Cukier and Thomlinson, 2004). Indeed, the “billion dollar boondoggle” soon became the \$2 billion dollar boondoggle, based on unsubstantiated claims by MP Garry Breitkreuz and this frame is often cited without explanation in the media. More recently, a *Winnipeg Sun* article (Quesnel, 2008) suggested that the gun registry cost is at \$20 billion, but he offers no objective figures to support this case. What forces help such a myth to be perpetuated, even as the Harper's government's support of Secure Channel – another \$1 billion information technology “boondoggle” – has gone mostly unnoticed [“Government to replace \$1B online service ‘boondoggle’” (*Ottawa Citizen*, May, 2008)]?

This paper performs a thorough analysis of the Parliamentary debate on “gun control” and the *Canada Firearms Act*, looking at three key periods in the *Debates of the House of Commons (Hansard)*: (1) the 1995 debate around the Liberals' passage of Bill C-68: *The Canada Firearms Act*, (2) the weeks around Sheila Fraser's audit being released in December 2002, and (3) the Conservative minority government's recent moves as represented in the newly e-indexed *Hansard* from 2006-2008. The following textual analysis of the “gun control” issues in the Canadian Federal Government *Hansard* is provided to inform policy analysis through an examination of dominant actors, stakeholders, and agenda-setting frames in composing the *Canada Firearms Act* in 1995, through to present day debates about whether the long gun registry should be “scrapped”, as proposed by Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservatives with Bill C-21 (2006), and again with Breitkreuz's private member's bill C-301 (2009).

This analysis also answers such questions as whether MPs followed party lines in this debate, and how partisan their comments were concerning particular bills and motions on this issue. Lastly, this analysis is meant to renew debate around the uses of frame setting (Soroka, 2002; Marres, 2005), and the media's responsibility in accurate reporting, especially focusing on the fact that, while the gun registry has not cost anything close to “\$2 billion,” this terminology continues, nonetheless, as a frame in the House and in the

media, thereby misinforming Canadians of this cost and performing a great disservice to pro-gun and gun control advocates alike.

I. BACKGROUND

In 1995, the new gun control system was crafted as part of the *Canada Firearms Act* (Bill C-68), intended to replace an older system that cost \$30 million a year to administer. This included licensing of all gun owners and registering all firearms. Previously, only handguns were registered. Although owners of rifles and shotguns were required to obtain a Firearms Acquisition Certificate (to acquire but not to possess firearms), the only record of long gun ownership was at the point of purchase, where details of gun sold were written down. The new system required renewable licenses for two million gun owners. To reduce the risk that dangerous people would have legal access to guns, Bill C-68 required the registration of the make, model, and serial number of approximately seven million firearms. The registration of firearms was also intended to increase the accountability of gun owners, help enforce the licensing provisions, reduce the chances of diversion to illegal markets and support law enforcement. A new computerized system was developed to support the licensing and registration processes. That system was soon referred to as “the registry” even though most of the activity (and complexity) associated with it related to the screening and licensing processes. For example, interfaces had to be built with hundreds of individual police information systems to gain access to data considered to be important in assessing risk (for example, domestic violence complaints).

The Liberal-led efforts under Chrétien were an extension of stronger gun control initiatives that had been initiated by Brian Mulroney’s Conservative government – Bill C-17 passed in 1991 and strengthened screening for Firearm Acquisition Certificates (among other measures). While in opposition, the Liberal and New Democratic parties (as well as the Conservative dominated Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs) advocated further measures including the registration of all firearms.

Conceptually, the process of licensing and registration was similar to many other risk reduction strategies – for example – the licensing of drivers and registration of vehicles. Tracking systems are also used to reduce the chances of misuse of dangerous goods such as harmful chemicals, nuclear material, military weaponry, or pharmaceuticals. Comparable information technology tracking processes have become increasingly important in recent years for recycling and environmental concerns as well. Unfortunately, most large scale information technology projects are late and over budget, and this project was no exception. The initial projections dramatically under-estimated the complexity of the undertaking. The refusal of the provinces to administer the program led to the need to build a more costly centralized system than was initially anticipated. The significant resources required to help firearm owners complete the forms accurately fuelled the ballooning costs of the program at the same time that fees were waived to promote compliance, thus eroding the projected revenues. It has recently become clear that one reason the registry costs have been so high is that – in the face of two Supreme Court challenges, as well as ongoing provincial political efforts to stifle the power of Bill C-68 – the Liberals were forced, as delays ensued, to construct a centralized gun registry system to fulfil their election promise, rather than being able to rely on pre-existing provincial capacity to do the job (Bottomley, 2004; Boyd, 2003).

Fraser argued, at the time of her audit, that the main issue with the program's mismanagement was that Parliament was "kept in the dark" about the increasing costs of the tracking system. Her work did not support gun advocates' claims that the gun registry was ineffective as a gun control mechanism or as an aid in combating gun crime, despite their hopes to prod her in those directions. Police consistently maintained that the registry system is an important tool for police, who use it nearly 10,000 times a day according to Steven Chabot, President of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police ("Public safety will be at risk if gun registry is dismantled," *Toronto Star*, 10 April 2009: A23). Public health analysts maintain that gun-related deaths have decreased in Canada since the new *Firearms Act* became law (Snider et al., 2009; Cukier and Sidel, 2006). Although pro-gun advocates maintain that it has been ineffective and cite costs as the main reason why the gun registry should be dismantled in whole (Breitkreuz, 2008; Mauser, 2001; 2004; 2005; 2007), or in part (Day, 2008: numerous entries in *Hansard*).

On June 14, 1995, Alan Rock stated, "I very much believe in 10 years we'll look back at the registration of all firearms and wonder what the fuss was about" (*Hansard*, 1995). Rock's statement might have become true if not for the work of three people: (1) Sheila Fraser and her Audit, (2) MP Garry Breitkreuz and his extensive anti-gun control work, and (3) extensive anti-registry advocacy by a range of groups and firearms enthusiasts such as Gary Mauser from Simon Fraser University. In the following review, we focus on the role an individual backbench MP like Garry Breitkreuz can have on policy.

Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau famously argued that backbenchers were "nobodies" when they were 50 yards from Parliament Hill (quoted in Atkinson and Docherty, 2000: 15). Interpretative approaches, such as that of Atkinson and Docherty, present the case that backbenchers consistently follow the leadership of their party's elite, otherwise they face expulsion from the party caucus where they actually have the opportunity to speak openly. Backbenchers can also lose out on potential cabinet positions in a governing party that brought them to power if they do not toe the party line.

Atkinson and Docherty (2000: 15) use the example of backbenchers being forced into line under the Chrétien Liberal government during a vote on the tainted blood scandal compensation package. In this case, a number of Liberal MPs were concerned about backlash from their constituents for accepting a compensation package too hastily without further review, and they fought for a better package. In the end, all but one voted in line with the party. From such examples, these authors argue, the Westminster model "is better suited to the development of integrative, national programs than to the cultivation of narrow, special interests" (Atkinson and Docherty, 2000: 20). Counter to Trudeau's comment, Atkinson and Docherty suggest that backbenchers "are better known and are more influential away from Parliament Hill than they are on it" (Atkinson and Docherty, 2000: 14).

Michael Whittington, in his article "The Prime Minister, Cabinet, and the Executive Power of Canada," makes a similar claim that backbenchers predominantly vote with their party or face censure or expulsion (Whittington, 2000: 45). Graham White, too, concurs with the view that backbenchers rarely vote against the party elite (2005: 119). He conducted a survey of the role of backbenchers in government and found that it is generally not a practice in the Federal government and a majority of provincial legislatures to have backbench input into cabinet policies or committees. The question arises then, how can backbench MPs affect public policy?

II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCOPE

This paper examines the role of the backbencher in gun control “issue networks” through an analysis of Hansard debates in three time periods:

1. the 1995 debate around the Liberals’ passage of Bill C-68: *The Canada Firearms Act*,
2. the weeks around Sheila Fraser’s audit being released in December 2002, and
3. the Conservative minority government’s recent moves as represented in the newly e-indexed *Hansard* from 2006-2008.

The following paper answers these research questions for each of those periods:

1. Which parties had the most MPs speak on the issue?
2. Which parties spoke the most words on the issue?
3. Which MPs spoke the most frequently on the issue?
4. Which advocacy groups are named in *Hansard* by each party?
5. Overall, what happened in the Parliament everyday on “gun control,” “The *Firearms Act*,” and now “the long gun registry” debates?

Although it is not the only sphere of debate, *Hansard* is an important technology which is “integrated” into political practices, and there are consequences for the uses of political technologies like it (Marres, 2005: 5). *Hansard* most certainly is a technology that is an open part of the online network of government, media, private, non-profit and citizen interest groups. Backbenchers often use it to demonstrate their commitment to their constituents, for example relaying riding petitions, an action that has a long history in Westminster parliaments. Parties often use the presentation of petitions on specific issues to foster their agenda on issues like gun control and gun crime. As well, criticism of such particular “issue units” as gun control and gun crime by backbench MPs allows parties to test agenda-setting frames. In some cases, parties have allowed backbenchers to present private members bills as trial balloons, and if they gain traction, the government may tacitly promote them. If an issue becomes popular in the House and amplified by the media or the wider Canadian public, the party elite can capitalize on these frames, using them to nudge the national agenda toward their preferred frame.

To date, work on the Hansard debates on gun control, has been primarily qualitative and interpretive (Bottomley, 2004; Pal, 2003), or focused on the how polls have affected the gun control issue (Page, 2006). For example, Page argues that three factors beyond polls helped place gun control on the Liberal agenda: (1) the 1993 Liberal election platform that promised such action, (2) Justice Minister Allan Rock was “a new star in the cabinet and he had the political will to proceed” (Page, 2006: 135), and (3) “an unusually influential interest group” (the Coalition for Gun Control) effectively organized to move the issue forward (Page, 2006: 135). Using “confidential interviews with civil servants,” Page (2006: 238, 14n) found that the Coalition for Gun Control was effective in helping to set the party agenda because the group “offset part of the pressure created by the gun users’ organizations” (Page, 2006: 135). While some may speculate that parties established their positions in response to public opinion polls, Page actually concluded that “Overall, polling had a visible but not a large role in the policy” (Page, 2006: 157), and notes that, instead, polls were employed after the party was already committed to its position. If

polling was not the key agenda-setting tool in this case, then what was?

We argue, of course, that the strategic use of backbench MPs and coordinated media framing were used to set the agenda in this instance. Interpretative research to date offers sound descriptions of the general history of the gun registry's development in the Liberal era and the interest groups involved. Both note significant levels of opposition within the Liberal party and opposition parties but these histories end at 2006. We do not focus here on recounting the entire history of Bill C-68. Instead, we focus on how a consistent agenda-setting frame concerning the gun registry (the "\$2 billion boondoggle") developed in the House, and how, by extension, the media has fostered this value, despite it being inaccurate according to Fraser's official audit.

III. METHODOLOGY

This paper employs digital textual analysis methods that allow for some quick quantification of values in *Hansard* to offer credence to the scope and shape of debate in broader agenda-setting discussions. Agenda-setting and issue network research can be represented here by the work of Noortje Marres (2006). Marres argues that "issue networks" can be tracked online using a study of "issue units" which are, at the most basic, key terms or words – like "gun control" (or its synonyms, like "firearms control") – that can be quantified as data online and tracked. The benefits of tracking issue networks over social networks are that (1) people are connected to one another "by way of the particular issue with which it is concerned" (Marres, 2006: 6), and (2) it draws attention to how issue formation and formatting are a part of civil society politics (Marres, 2006: 7). Marres believes that information communication technology helps to facilitate online study of issue networks because of new digital tools and the ubiquity of digital documents.

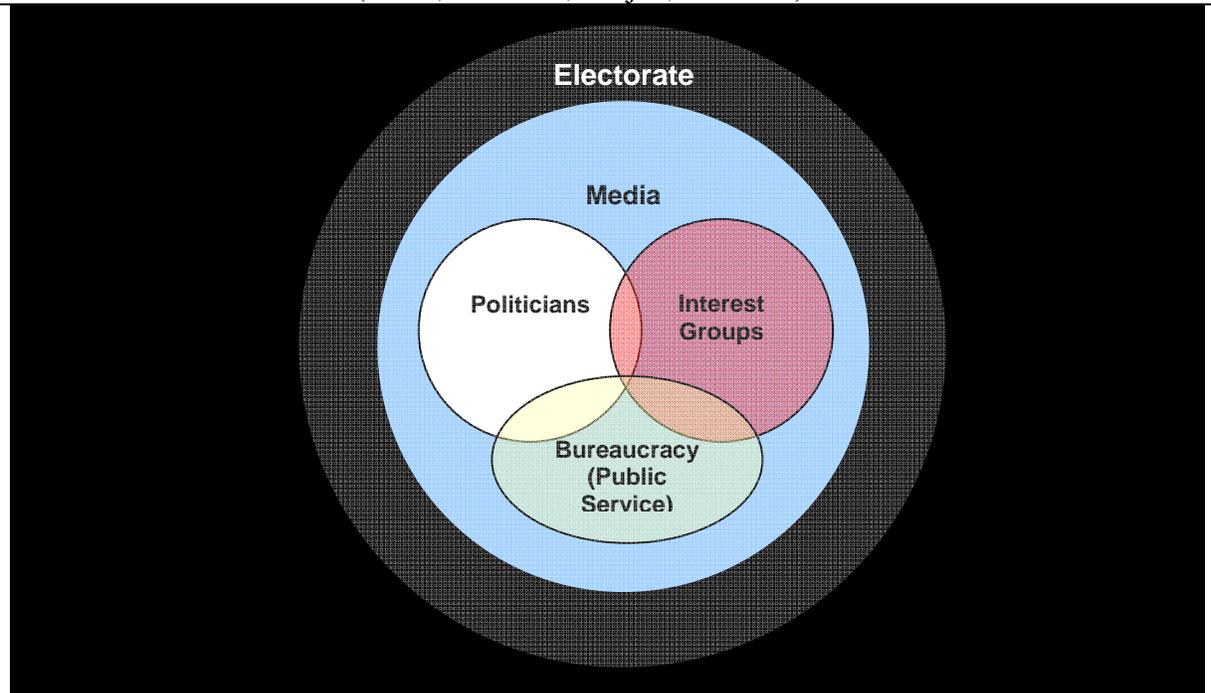
To date, Stuart N. Soroka's *Agenda-setting Dynamics* (2002) is the closest Canadian methodological example for this paper in terms of his focus on tracking agenda setting issue units in the media, polls, and *Hansard*. These are objects of study upon which Marres does not focus. Where Marres focuses on digital fora, Soroka uses statistical methods in an attempt to identify any established patterns that might exist in political agenda-setting dynamics in *Hansard*, media, and opinion polls. He argues that three issue types exist:

- 1) Prominent Issues: those real world events that drive and affect the agendas of media, policy, and the public.
- 2) Sensational Issues: media-driven issues that filter real world events, and affect the other realms of public and policy spheres.
- 3) Governmental Issues: policy-driven issues that interpret real world events and influence the public and media.

This three-part typology provides a new twist on common political decision-making literature that describes the dominant civil institutions involved in power dynamics, like the public choice or pluralist models (see Figure 1 below):

Figure 1

A Visualization of Frames (Dunn, 2006: 11; Miljan, 2008: 39)



The model presented above demonstrates a pluralist model for decision-making influences in that multiple spheres of actors affect policy decisions to varying degrees depending on the issue. Soroka finds, using statistical means, that we cannot assume that media drive political agendas (Soroka, 2002: 117); instead, power dynamics among actors are always on-going, but dominant actors can come to the foreground over time. Put otherwise, he argues that there are limitations in agenda-setting research that just studies one of the above actor groups. He uses the study of *Hansard* by way of example, stating:

An analysis of the relationship between Question Period and other policy indicators [...] demonstrates that a policy agenda measure based only on Question Period content misses part of the picture. If any conclusions can be drawn from this work, it is that different policy venues can exhibit different agendas, and that issue salience in different venues is loosely related at best. It is therefore important to incorporate a variety of policy measures into agenda-setting models [...]. (Soroka, 2002: 115)

Soroka believes it is difficult to establish the dynamics of the policy agenda relationship using statistical methods, because “A Question Period measure can be interpreted only as a measure of Question period; a measure of legislative initiatives measures nothing other than legislative initiatives” (Soroka, 2002: 117). He believes more work is needed in the area of *Hansard* research for this reason. Also, he believes other factors – such as power being concentrated in cabinet and committee meetings – make it difficult when some of these meetings are not open to the public. Private industries’ influence of politics and real world events are similarly difficult to measure using quantitative means. Lastly, *Hansard*

frequently reflects negative public debate, especially when a majority government is in office, because majority governments can push their bills through with less debate. However, negative publicity from pushing through bills can change policy, and this fosters the study of “issue networks” because issues are the focus of negative and critical debate.

It must be noted that Soroka’s content analysis of *Hansard* was based on a manual coding, and he does not share his categorization schema in detail (Soroka, 2002: 138), so it is difficult to assess his efforts. His work also ends in 1995, but the terms we select here would already have been key topics at the time of his study because of the focus on gun control by the Progressive Conservative government of Kim Campbell. Despite these limitations for applicability to this current study, his work provides an exceptional review of agenda-setting literature and methods to date.

Supplementing Soroka’s work, this paper argues – using Marres’s newer work (2005; 2006) – that an interpretative textual analysis approach is needed for understanding how agenda-setting frames are constructed and later become viable in the media and in public opinion. We demonstrate that tracking the example of the “\$2 billion boondoggle” in *Hansard* using a manual scrape of the terms “firearms,” “firearms act,” “gun(s),” and “gun control” provided a more nuanced issue-based approach than Soroka’s method, which would definitely have missed this particular issue’s agenda-setting frame, mainly because his “crime” analysis units tracked the key words “crime,” “criminal,” “murder,” “murderer,” “rape,” “rapist,” “robbery,” “robber,” “theft,” and “thief” in both English and French (Soroka, 2002: 133). The issue here is that agenda setting language changes over time, and different frames appear that might not be captured in smaller samples of data. Soroka is aware of these limitations and suggests that “Yearly analyses might find more success in tracking general policy trends using a single series” (Soroka, 2002: 156), but we believe the interpretational qualities of language might make even long term studies extremely difficult using quantitative means alone.

This paper offers the first computer-assisted textual analysis of *Hansard* on gun control issues in Canada to address this issue of accurately tracking agenda-setting issues. Moreover, this work also provides an up-to-date summary of what has happened with the gun registry since the 2002 Fraser Audit and the Conservative minority government’s assumption of power in 2006 with a mandate to scrap the long gun registry. Daily newspapers have made a common practice of using computer-assisted textual analysis, and have described it as simply counting words in a document. For example, a recent *Ottawa Citizen* article “Parties let loose the buzzwords” counts key issue words in the House of Commons Question Period records (Glen McGregor, 2008). McGregor finds that “[w]hile Conservative MPs and ministers use the words ‘crime,’ ‘terror’ and ‘terrorism’ in question period more than any of other three parties, they get their grass mowed by the NDP when it comes to dropping ‘accountability,’ ‘ethics/ethical’ and even ‘taxes/tax/taxation.’” The one line description of his methodology is “Keyword counts were drawn from electronic versions of *Hansard*, the official record of House of Commons debates,” and his methodology is a simple enough description that can also be used to describe our own method in its most basic form.

Our analysis looks at three particular periods in *Hansard* to compare the language used by actors over time. These three periods are:

- 1) **February 14, 1995 to June 21, 1995:** the readings and debate of Bill C-68.
- 2) **November 18, 2002 to December 6, 2002:** the lead-up to, and release of, Auditor General Sheila Fraser’s report.

- 3) **April 5, 2006 to June 6, 2008:** includes committee and House debates of Bill C-21, the Conservative Government's push to scrap the long gun registry component of the Canadian Firearms Registry.

For these periods, two types of scraping techniques were required to focus on the phrases "Firearms Act" and "gun control" in *Hansard*. For the first two periods, simple searches for the issue units "firearms," "gun," "Firearms Act," and "gun control" were conducted manually and completely cut and paste into a Microsoft Excel file. For the 2006-2008 period, we conducted a test for bias in the new 2006 federal *Hansard*'s indexing system by simply copying any e-indexed files there. In other words, the 2006-2008 period does not include the entire text on "firearms" and "gun control" as do the earlier two periods.

The main reasons for the second scraping technique are the size of the period studied and the change in *Hansard*'s indexing system that facilitated its possibility. At present, the Federal public service does not offer any thorough explanation of its indexing system online, but officials indicated that the approach is based on subject analysis from a common political user's perspective (Wallner, 2008).

Notably, the Canadian *Hansard* subject analysis and metadata system is behind other countries in terms of democratic access to information. Australia, for example, has converted its e-records of House debate using the newest interoperability capabilities available, which affords users the advantages of easily tracking every word their MP states in Parliament on a daily basis. Such changes functionally make *Hansard* a giant database organized by MP, party and dates, but at present, Canada has not made such a transition. The newest Canadian change has allowed all MP voting records to be included as of April, 2009, so this new extensibility could be tested in future research. Our current database was completed using the two scraping methods described above, and we used free, open and commonly used software to complete quantitative analyses; specifically, the HyperPo e-concordance tool and Hugh Craig's Intelligent Archive were used.

IV. MPs AND THE FEDERAL PARTIES IN HANSARD: THEN AND NOW

At its most basic, textual analysis can offer quick answers to questions about the sample taken over these three periods such as which parties spoke the most frequently on "gun control". Table 1 and Table 2 below present two quantifiable ways of understanding the work of MPs on this issue.

1. Which parties had the most MPs speak on the issue in each period?

Party	1995-1996	Fraser Audit 2002	2006-2008
Bloc Quebecois	16	5	22
Canadian Alliance	-	20	-
Conservatives	-	-	59
Liberals	69	11	39
NDP	5	3	11
Progressive Conservatives	0	6	-
Reform	46	-	-

2. Which parties spoke the most words on the issue?

Party	1995-1996	Fraser Audit 2002	2006-2008
Bloc Quebecois	14730	2883	24138
Canadian Alliance	-	13725	-
Conservatives	-	-	86519
Liberals	101014	6146	49339
NDP	5792	588	20620
Progressive Conservatives	0	2572	-
Reform	93825	-	-

We might be tempted to look at the division of power based on electoral seats in each of these periods as an explanation of why one party has a higher frequency of speech or words spoken:

- 1) 1995: BQ = 54 (seats) | Liberals = 177 | NDP = 9 | PCs = 2 | Reform = 52
- 2) 2002: BQ = 38 | Canadian Alliance = 66 | Liberals = 172 | NDP = 13 | PCs = 12
- 3) 2006: BQ = 54 | Conservatives = 124 | Liberals = 103 | NDP = 19

Considering that the distribution of seats in these periods does not match the proportions of speech, except in 1995, there is a story here that needs more exploring to explain these numbers. From these numbers, we can see that an imbalance exists in 2002 particularly in that the Canadian Alliance spoke more frequently than the Liberals who were in power at the time. Drilling into *Hansard*, we can see that the Liberal Minister of Justice and Attorney General for Canada, Martin Cauchon, spoke the most frequently for the Liberals on this subject (29 times), but his answers are mostly short deflections of opposition attacks.

During the period, Prime Minister Chrétien is not registered as speaking in the House on the topic of the Canada Firearms Registry audit until Monday, December 9th, when he responded to opposition leader Stephen Harper and defended the gun registry's administration based on the government having another surplus in 2002. In comparison, Stephen Harper spoke ten times. Until Friday, December 13th, when the House closed for the winter holiday break, the "boondoggle" attacks continued on all fronts for the Liberals from the opposition parties, but no further responses came from the Liberals as the House was awaiting a second audit from a private firm.

3. Which MPs spoke the most frequently on the issue?

Textual analysis allows us to search the database of these periods' samples to quickly answer questions such those above. At another level of scale, we can track the individual ministers, identify who spoke the most frequently and what they consistently said concerning gun control. The tables below present such information. In the following Tables 3 to 5, we can note the dominant players and key agents in each party. The story

mirrors accounts of the partisan east/west split on the vote, as well as the urban/rural split in terms of who speaks during each period.

Table 3				
Top Five MPs's Frequency 1995 <i>Hansard</i> on "Gun Control"				
No.	Party	MP Name, Region/Position	Freq.	Frame
1	BQ	Pierrette Venne, Saint-Hubert	29	Pro gun control, but critical of cost accounting.
2	BQ	Michel Bellehumeur, Berthier-Montcalm	11	Pro gun control.
3	BQ	Paul Crête, Kamouraska-Rivière-du-Loup	5	Pro gun control.
4	BQ	Osvaldo Nunez, Bourassa	5	Pro gun control.
5	BQ	André Caron, Jonquière	4	Pro gun control.
6	BQ	Jean-Paul Marchand, Québec-Est	3	Pro gun control.
NOTE: 16 BQ MPs are listed in this sample in total.				
1	Lib	Allan Rock, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada	92	Pro gun control.
2	Lib	Russell MacLellan, Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada	16	Pro gun control.
3	Lib	Don Boudria, Glengarry-Prescott-Russell	9	Pro gun control.
4	Lib	Andy Mitchell, Parry Sound-Muskoka	8	Critical of gun control, but voted for it.
5	Lib	Jack Iyerak Anawak, Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development	7	Pro gun control.
5	Lib	Peter Milliken, Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons	7	Pro gun control.
NOTE: 69 Liberal MPs are listed in this sample in total. 51 are backbenchers.				
1	NDP	Len Taylor, The Battlefords-Meadow Lake	5	Against Bill C-68.
2	NDP	Nelson Riis, Kamloops	5	Against Bill C-68.
3	NDP	Audrey McLaughlin, Yukon	2	Against Bill C-68.
4	NDP	Chris Axworthy, Saskatoon-Clark's Crossing	1	Against Bill C-68.
5	NDP	Simon de Jong, Regina-Qu'Appelle	1	Against Bill C-68.
NOTE: 5 NDP MPs are listed in this sample in total.				
1	Ref	Jack Ramsay, Crowfoot	64	Against Bill C-68.
2	Ref	Garry Breitkreuz, Yorkton--Melville	36	Against Bill C-68.
3	Ref	Val Meredith, Surrey-White Rock-South Langley	19	Against Bill C-68.
4	Ref	Jay Hill, Prince George-Peace River	18	Against Bill C-68.
5	Ref	Lee Morrison, Swift Current-Maple Creek-Assiniboia	11	Against Bill C-68.
NOTE: 46 Reform party MPs are listed in this sample in total.				

Table 4				
Top Five MPs's Frequency 2002 <i>Hansard</i> on "Gun Control"				
No.	Party	MP Name, Region/Position	Freq.	Frame
1	BQ	Odina Desrochers, Lotbinière—L'Érable	2	Searching for links to Groupaction scandal.
2	BQ	Réal Ménard, Hochelaga—Maisonneuve	2	Pro gun control.
3	BQ	Antoine Dubé, Lévis-et-Chutes-de-la-Chaudière	1	Critical of Liberal government spending.
4	BQ	Gilles Duceppe, Laurier—Sainte-Marie	1	Pro gun control.
5	BQ	Yvan Loubier, Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot	1	Critical of Liberal government spending.
NOTE: 5 BQ MPs are listed in this sample in total.				
1	CA	Garry Breitkreuz, Yorkton--Melville	12	Against Bill C-68.
2	CA	Stephen Harper, Leader of the Opposition	10	Against Bill C-68.
3	CA	Grant Hill, Macleod	3	Against Bill C-68.
4	CA	Andy Burton, Skeena	2	Against Bill C-68.
5	CA	Bob Mills, Red Deer	2	Against Bill C-68.
5	CA	Charlie Penson, Peace River	2	Against Bill C-68.
5	CA	John Williams, St. Albert	2	Against Bill C-68.
5	CA	Monte Solberg, Medicine Hat	2	Against Bill C-68.
5	CA	Vic Toews, Provencher	2	Against Bill C-68.
NOTE: 20 Canadian Alliance MPs are listed in this sample in total.				
1	Lib	Martin Cauchon, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada	29	Pro gun control.
2	Lib	David Collenette, Minister of Transport	7	Pro gun control.
3	Lib	Paul Harold Macklin, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada	4	Pro gun control.
4	Lib	Geoff Regan, Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons	2	Pro gun control.
NOTE: 11 Liberal MPs are listed in this sample in total, only 2 are backbenchers.				
1	NDP	Libby Davies, Vancouver East	2	Pro gun control.
2	NDP	Alexa McDonough, Halifax	1	Pro gun control.
3	NDP	Bill Blaikie, Winnipeg—Transcona	1	Pro gun control.
NOTE: 3 NDP MPs are listed in this sample in total.				
1	PCs	Peter MacKay, Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough	9	Against Bill C-68.
2	PCs	Joe Clark, Calgary Centre	3	Against Bill C-68.
3	PCs	Gerald Keddy, South Shore	2	Against Bill C-68.
4	PCs	Rick Borotsik, Brandon—Souris	2	Against Bill C-68.
NOTE: 6 PC MPs are listed in this sample in total.				

Table 5				
Top Five MPs's Frequency 2006-2008 <i>Hansard</i> on "Gun Control"				
No.	Party	MP Name, Region/Position	Freq.	Frame
1	BQ	Serge Ménard, Marc-Aurèle-Fortin	70	Pro gun control.
2	BQ	Benoît Sauvageau, Repentigny	16	Work on the Public Accounts Committee here.
3	BQ	Richard Nadeau, Gatineau	10	Pro gun control.
4	BQ	Jean-Yves Laforest, Saint-Maurice--Champlain	9	Pro gun control.
5	BQ	Gilles Duceppe, Laurier--Sainte-Marie	7	Pro gun control.
5	BQ	Carole Freeman, Châteauguay--Saint-Constant	7	Pro gun control.
5	BQ	Réal Ménard, Hochelaga	7	Pro gun control.
NOTE: 22 MPs are listed in this sample in total.				
1	CPC	Stockwell Day, Minister of Public Safety	128	Against Bill C-68.
2	CPC	Brian Fitzpatrick, Prince Albert	83	Against Bill C-68.
3	CPC	John Williams, Edmonton--St. Albert	76	Against Bill C-68.
4	CPC	Garry Breitkreuz, Yorkton--Melville	39	Against Bill C-68.
5	CPC	Mike Lake, Edmonton--Mill Woods--Beaumont	23	Against Bill C-68.
NOTE: 59 MPs are listed in this sample in total.				
1	Lib	Yasmin Ratansi, Don Valley East	34	Pro gun control.
2	Lib	Marlene Jennings, Notre-Dame-de-Grâce--Lachine	27	Pro gun control.
3	Lib	Shawn Murphy, Charlottetown	22	Pro gun control.
4	Lib	Navdeep Bains, Mississauga-Brampton South	18	Pro gun control.
5	Lib	Roy Cullen, Etobicoke North	17	Pro gun control.
NOTE: 39 MPs are listed in this sample in total.				
1	NDP	Joe Comartin, Windsor--Tecumseh	56	Pro gun control.
2	NDP	David Christopherson, Hamilton Centre	17	Pro gun control.
3	NDP	Paul Dewar, Ottawa Centre	10	Pro gun control.
4	NDP	Dennis Bevington, Western Arctic	7	Against the long gun registry.
5	NDP	Olivia Chow, Trinity--Spadina	7	Pro gun control.
NOTE: 11 MPs are listed in this sample in total.				

From these quick summaries, an immediate question that arose in our research was why a backbench MP like Garry Breitkreuz played such an influential and dominant role in the House debates on gun control during all three periods. At present, Breitkreuz has no party or committee duties in the Conservative party, and it appears that his sole stated purpose in seeking re-election (as posted on his personal website) was: "BILL C-68 STILL ISN'T REPEALED, SO I'M RUNNING FOR MY 6TH TERM!" (2006, November 25). In the past, Breitkreuz has been Deputy House Leader of the Opposition (Reform party), Conservative Party Deputy House Leader, Deputy Whip of the Official Opposition (Reform party), and Chief Opposition Whip (Reform party), and most recently he sat on the Security evidence committee investigating the gun registry overruns (39:1 Committee Evidence – SECU-5 in June, 2005 and SECU-8, in July, 2006). Since 2006, he has frequently claimed, "There's no evidence that with the registry we've saved any lives" (House debate: 2006, July 11), and this has been his common frame for denouncing the registry.

Media reports have recently suggested that Breitkreuz's voice has been stifled by the notorious Harper Prime Minister's Office (PMO) communications machine – the same machine that has severed ties with the national media during several widely reported

occasions since coming to power in 2006. For instance, Tim Naumetz of *The Ottawa Citizen* reported that the PMO had silenced Breitkreuz on the gun registry issue until it could “decide how to deal with a promise to scrap the costly registry” (“Tory MP, staff not allowed to discuss gun registry: aide,” 2006, March 29). Naumetz demonstrated that Breitkreuz was deflecting “e-mails and letters to Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day and Justice Minister Vic Toews,” and he found corroborating stories of this account such as one from the managing editor of *Outdoor Canada* magazine, “who also confirmed Mr. Breitkreuz’s office denied an interview request this week after being denied permission by both the PMO and Mr. Day’s office.” Such actions would demonstrate Breitkreuz’s submission to the party leaders on the issue that he once championed. His drop in *Hansard* mentions in the 2006-2008 period compared to previous periods also supports such a reading. 29 of his 39 indexed mentions in *Hansard* on this topic came as the Chair of the Security Committee, which might limit the extent to which he could comment on the topic without presenting outright bias as a chair.

Dennis Young, Breitkreuz’s Assistant, posted a response to *The Ottawa Citizen* story on Breitkreuz’s website, stating “His fight to implement the party’s firearms and property rights policies continues as always but most of his work is now done behind closed doors with his Conservative colleagues (sic) in caucus and by talking directly to Ministers, the Prime Minister and their political staff” (2006).

4. Which advocacy groups are named in Hansard by each party?

	1995					2002					2006-2008			
	BQ	Lib	NDP	PC	Ref	BQ	CA	Lib	NDP	PC	BQ	CPC	Lib	NDP
Aboriginal(s)	0	121	5	0	39	0	6	0	0	0	5	4	3	4
Boondoggle	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	0	0	0	0	7	0	0
Garry Breitkreuz	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wendy Cukier	0	2	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
First Nations	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
Coalition for Gun Control	2	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	2
Hunter(s)	2	67	2	0	9	0	3	0	0	0	19	47	12	2
“Law abiding” gun owners	0	43	1	0	134	0	8	0	0	0	4	52	5	1
MP, Yorkton-Melville	0	9	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	2	0	7	8	0
Police	7	152	9	0	182	0	29	10	0	0	72	327	251	34
“Public Health” and “Hospital(s)” Groups	4	10	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	3	0
RCMP	0	4	6	0	10	0	17	2	0	0	8	76	20	4
Women	26	70	17	0	12	0	0	5	9	0	42	46	27	16

NOTE:

RED = the most frequent use of a term by a party in each of the three time periods

BLUE = more than 1 use.

* Words must be put into lower case formations using HyperPo to find instances (e.g.) “rcmp”.

The words listed above have been searched for in *Hansard* exactly as they are typed. Breitkreuz’s name not appearing in *Hansard* follows the practice of not mentioning an MP by their name in the House, and instead only their riding or position is used. Using words as “issue units,” we can see how readily particular actors or groups are used at different periods in the *Hansard* debate. From these raw quantities, we can easily dive into the text to interpret how each party uses these actors to support their cases. For now, we will focus on “Boondoggle” as a key issue unit to understand who used the term and how it affects the case for gun control.

5. Conclusion: Overall, what happened in the Parliament everyday on “gun control,” “The *Firearms Act*,” and now “the long gun registry”?

Overall, our analysis identifies Breitkreuz as the main, consistent opposition actor driving change in the “gun control” policy, starting back in 1995. Eventually, his framing language gains traction with the term “boondoggle” in 2002, and the Reform party elite builds on his earlier work as many other Reform MPs begin to use the “boondoggle” term. Further, we can see that *Hansard* presents the first instance of the “\$2 billion boondoggle” on December 3, 2002, coming directly from Breitkreuz in the following statement: “How much is the government willing to pour down the drain before it admits this is a failure, \$1 billion more, \$2 billion more, or \$3 billion more? What will it be?” (House Debate, December 3, 2002: 14:20). Knowing this date, we can then search in other media for how this frame was constructed to be a dominant frame for the Conservative party until the present day.

V. THE “\$2 BILLION BOONDOGGLE” AGENDA-SETTING FRAME

Before discussing the “\$2 billion boondoggle” it is important to place this cost into context, not as a support of the Liberal party’s mismanagement of public funds, but instead to understand the importance of cost in this debate. The known costs of the registry from Sheila Fraser’s work have been outlined by others, but are listed here as follows:

- 1) **1995:** Initial estimates of the cost were \$119 million, but revenues generated by registration would mean costs to the taxpayer would be in the \$2 million range.
- 2) **December 3, 2002:** Sheila Fraser’s first audit suggests the gun registry could cost \$1 billion by 2005, with registration fees offsetting \$140 million.
- 3) **March 25, 2003:** “Without an infusion of an additional \$59 million the registry would not have enough money to make it to the end of the fiscal year” (Bottomley, 2004).
- 4) **February 13, 2004:** French CBC’s *Zone Libre* claims that the registry has cost \$2 billion so far (citing Gary Breitkreuz).

5) **May 18, 2006:** Fraser's latest report states:

The program's total net cost to March 2005 was reported by the government as \$946 million, a little under its earlier estimate of \$1 billion. But operational problems remain. For example, there are still problems in the registration database – the Centre does not know how many of its records are incorrect or incomplete. As well, the information system it is developing is three years late, its costs have grown from the original budget of \$32 million to \$90 million, and it still is not operational. (39:1 Committee Evidence - PACP-4)

At this point, according to Fraser's latest work, the Firearms Registry management costs issues have been corrected and the registry is costing about \$80 million a year, with the cost trend decreasing. Despite these objective accounts and Fraser's audit, a *Winnipeg Sun* article claims that the registry now has cost "\$20 Billion," but provides no cost breakdown for the claim (Joseph Quesnel, 2008, October 25).

The cost of the registry in terms of public safety is difficult to quantify. Some might feel – as Liberal MP Susan Kadis does – that if the \$1 billion saved one life, then it was worth it (House Debate, June 19, 2007). Conservative MPs definitely do not feel this way, given the frames presented above. MP Sue Barnes (Liberal: London West) framed the *Canadian Firearms Act* in 1995 as a public safety issue in terms of costs:

When law-abiding, responsible gun owners kill and injure themselves and others, aside from the lost lives of 1,400 Canadians there is a very real dollar figure, \$70 million a year in primary health costs and related public services in this country paid for by Canadian taxpayers. (House debate, June 13, 1995: 13746).

Other contextualizing costs we could include here are as follows:

- 1) A Canadian Medical Association article placed the costs of gun death and injury in Canada at \$6.6 billion (1993 Canadian dollar value) in 1991 (Miller, 1995).
- 2) The Geneva Small Arms Survey states that productivity losses due to firearms are \$1.6 billion annually (Small Arms Study, 2006).
- 3) Comparison to other safety investments: A Coalition for Gun Control report "Continued funding for the Firearms Program is essential to public safety" (2004) provides the example that \$400 million was used to fix a stretch of road in New Brunswick where forty-three lives were lost between 1996 and 2000. By comparison, Canada has more than one thousand gun deaths every year.
- 4) Per Capita costs of Other Government Programs: Legal Aid spending in Canada per year (2008, Thursday, July 31), which arguably is very low compared to other Western nations, totalled \$583 million (02-03) and \$659 million (06-07). The per capita cost was \$18.59 (02-03) and \$20.19 (06-07) (Tyler, 2008). By comparison, the gun registry costs every Canadian \$2.81/year at its current cost.
- 5) Canada's Passport Office costs \$125 million a year (over ten years = \$ 1.25 billion) to register travelers.
- 6) The old gun registry system cost \$30 million a year, and was definitely in need of an upgrade, which Bill C-68 was attempting to provide.

In this context of government costs, the following analysis of *Hansard* and the media in 2002 demonstrates how the “\$2 billion boondoggle” catch phrase was strategically created by MP Garry Breitkreuz as agenda-setting language to frame debate around the national gun registry after Sheila Fraser released her audit on December 4, 2002. The phrase “\$2 billion boondoggle” is directly identified as starting with MP Garry Breitkreuz specifically because of his strategic use of a report he requested from the Library of Parliament during the time that the Liberal party was not answering the key questions of registry costs in 2002. This report was written by Anthony G. Jackson, is entitled “Estimates of Some Costs of Enforcing the Firearms Act,” and it can still be found in the Parliamentary Research Bureau, Library of Parliament, Ottawa (March 20, 2003b) The report’s first page includes a letter from Jackson to Breitkreuz that states:

Further to your request, enclosed is a paper entitled *Preliminary Estimates of Some Costs of Enforcing the Firearms Act*. The paper uses standard cost allocation methods to estimate the police, court and corrections services. This method is very similar to the exercise that your Assistant Mr. Young suggested in his e-mail of 4 March. As always caution should be exercised when estimating something by the average of a wider group. It is never known how close the item of interest is to the mean. This final version differs from the preliminary results I discussed with Mr. Young by the addition of non-*Criminal Code Firearms Act* offences and a related new cost scenario.

Breitkreuz did not heed the estimate warnings when he used the report, as the following analysis outlines. It must also be emphasized that he certainly did not state that the report included the “non-*Criminal Code Firearms Act* offences” when sharing information from the report after its release. The following sequence of events outlines how the “\$2 billion boondoggle” came into existence from Breitkreuz’s fabrication:

1) IN THE HOUSE: On March 24th, 2003, Breitkreuz demanded to know the cost of the registry in the House of Commons debates. Martin Cauchon, Liberal Minister of Justice and Attorney General for Canada, assured him that everyone knows the costs are under \$1 billion over ten years because of Fraser’s audit, and more information will be coming on her work shortly.

2) IN THE MEDIA: On March 25th, 2003, a story appeared in *The Calgary Herald* stating that a Library of Parliament report estimates the registry will cost “\$2 billion” (“Critics warn gun registry tab may reach \$2 billion”). The story states:

Canadian Alliance MP Garry Breitkreuz said Monday a Library of Parliament research paper suggests the cost of enforcing the Firearms Act could easily top \$1 billion.

That’s on top of the estimated \$1 billion the Auditor General has warned the registry could cost to implement within five years.

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation has released its own cost estimates for the troubled gun registry.

It projects implementing the act alone could cost \$2 billion by 2012.

There is no reference to Breitzkreuz having requested the report in this article. Today, if you search the Web, this report can only be found in three places, two of which are owned by Garry Breitzkreuz and one by Simon Fraser University Professor Gary A. Mauser, a well-known opponent of gun control. Mauser cites the report in his 2007 Fraser Institute paper, “Hubris in North America” in order to still call the gun registry a “\$2 billion blunder.”

Mauser’s report was published well after Fraser’s official reports had been released. Given that those reports by the Auditor General stated that the registry costs were officially under \$1 billion, his analysis calls into question his academic honesty – or his competence as a researcher. The outcome should not, however, cause undue surprise, given that both he and Breitzkreuz have links to the US (United States) National Rifle Association and the powerful gun lobby, facts which are often not reported when he is described as an expert or criminologist in media accounts. Neil Boyd, a professor of criminology at Simon Fraser University, wrote: “Mauser’s unpublished study is best understood as a political intervention” (Boyd, 1995). Mauser is a former American gun collector, target shooter, and gun enthusiast who strongly endorses the right to bear arms as an important community initiative (Mauser, 2001). Mauser’s 1988 study “Ownership of Firearms in British Columbia: Self Defense or Sportsmanship?” was partly funded by the National Rifle Association of America (NRA) (Mauser, 2006). Indeed, Mauser posed for a photograph (Image 1) for the Canadian NRA web-site, but the photograph has been removed, presumably to influence media framing.

Image 1

Professor Gary Mauser from the Canadian NRA Website (since removed)



Source: Plawiuk, Eugene. (2007, June 12). “Gun Nutz.” *La Revue Gauche*.
<<http://plawiuk.blogspot.com/2007/06/gun-nutz.html>>.

Breitzkreuz is also on record as being an avid hunter which was his inspiration to go into politics to tackle the gun control issue, and he has “shared the stage with the president of the National Rifle Association” in the past (Belinda Stronach, *Hansard*, November 26, 2006). Further, the gun lobby’s support of Conservative party is on record as totalling “\$133 000” in the 2006 election (Marlene Jennings, *Hansard*, September 18, 2006).

Another interesting note from the March 25, 2003 *Calgary Herald* article is the links between the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, a conservative Alberta/Saskatchewan-based interest group formerly headed by Stephen Harper, that created a separate report criticizing the gun registry costs, the current Conservative government, and MP Jason Kenney. Kenney, who spoke in the House 16 times on Gun Control from 2006 to 2008, was previously the Federation's CEO. Kenney is currently Canada's Secretary of State (Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity), and his most common frame for this issue follows the party line and not Breitkreuz's (with respect to the cost total). In his own words, that frame is:

Mr. Speaker, I am sure that as taxpayers, Quebeckers – like all Canadians – do not want their money wasted. The firearms registry was a huge waste of money, a waste of over \$1 billion dollars, according to the Auditor General. That is why the government will focus on fighting organized crime and gun related crime. This is why we will keep the handgun registry and increase prison terms for such crimes. (House Debate: May 19, 2006)

3) THE HOUSE AND MEDIA: After the March 25, 2003 *Calgary Herald* article, the "\$2 billion" price tag became a standard catch phrase in Parliament and in the media, continuing unabated to present day. Before the article appeared, the phrases "\$2 billion" and "gun registry" only appear in the news twice together: in two *Winnipeg Free Press* articles that appeared immediately after Sheila Fraser's first audit report was released on December 3, 2002. Fraser's report cautioned that the registry cost might be close to \$1 billion, but indicated that her audit needed to be completed to be certain of the costs. As well, she warned that the registry might cost near to \$1 billion more in the next decade if left unchecked, and this is the closest to a \$2 billion price tag ever being mentioned in official reports. Despite the clarity of her report, the *Winnipeg Free Press* got it wrong ... twice. The first article, titled "Gun-law flaws 'tragic' Auditor fears lives at risk, says hiding costs from MPs 'inexcusable'," appeared on December 4, 2002 and cites MP Garry Breitkreuz in formulating the first mention of the "\$2 billion" price tag:

Alliance MP Garry Breitkreuz called on the Liberals to pull the plug on the program.

"How much is the government willing to pour down the drain before it admits this is a failure?" the Saskatchewan MP said. "One billion dollars more, \$2 billion more, \$3 billion more? What will it be?"

It must be noted that Breitkreuz's catch phrase "One billion dollars more, \$2 billion more, \$3 billion more? What will it be?" became a common Canadian Alliance chant from that point on.

The second article is an editorial entitled "Rock has squandered \$2 billion," which appeared on December 7, 2002. This article does not cite any references for the "\$2 Billion" price tag, and simply criticizes Rock and the registry stating, "when you add it all up, it comes close to a proudly defended \$2 billion waste, the kind of credentials the Liberal left might look for in a leader."

In short, this analysis demonstrates the agenda-setting use of the "\$2 billion" language linked with the gun registry was strategically created by MP Garry Breitkreuz

and some Conservative peers, who developed the frame from the time he was a Reform party member until his Conservative membership today.

Going into the back story on the “\$2 billion boondoggle”, we can also see that “boondoggle” is in fact an American term that was eventually taken up by the US National Rifle Association’s efforts against gun control. The Oxford English Dictionary (2008) provides the following history of the term:

A. n. a. (See quots. 1935.) b. A trivial, useless, or unnecessary undertaking; wasteful expenditure. B. v. intr. To engage in trifling or frivolous work. Hence {sm}boondogger, {sm}boondogging.

1935 R. MARSHALL in N.Y. Times 4 Apr. 2 ‘Boon doggles’ is simply a term applied back in the pioneer days to what we call gadgets today.

1935 Word Study Sept. 2 Boondoggle was coined for another purpose by Robert H. Link of Rochester. Through his connection with scouting the word later came into general use as a name given to the braided leather lanyard made and worn by Boy Scouts. [...]

1937 Amer. Speech XII. 6 [In the 1936 American election] boondogging became the current term for describing the waste assertedly evident in government agencies and bureaus. Administrators of relief became boondoggers to the Republican press and orators.

1947 *Chicago Tribune* 8 June I. 22/2 The cost of this boondoggle has been estimated at perhaps 50 million dollars.

1949 R. K. MERTON *Social Theory* (1951) vi. 178 This eliminates the very rationale of the intellectual's work and dissipates his interest in his work, leading to the ‘boon dogging neurosis’.

1969 N.Y. Rev. Books 2 Jan. 5 (heading) Nixon and the arms race: the bomber boondoggle.

In the US media, “boondoggle” was particularly linked to gun control issues in Washington, DC, and Chicago, Ill., which the NRA campaigned to end.

However, there were six stories that linked the “gun registry” with the term “boondoggle” until the Fraser audit was tabled in Canada according to the Factiva search engine from November 30, 1998-June 12, 2002. The stories are listed as follows:

1. Fisher, D. (1998, November 30). Gun registration system is one more costly crock. *Sun Media Newspapers*.
2. High noon at high court for gun law Doer government, five other provinces start to fight Bill C-68 at SCOC today. (2000, February 21). *The Winnipeg Free Press*. A1.
3. Corcoran, T. Perennial author of policy fiascos. (2001, October 23). *National Post*, FP15.
4. American hunters fearful of anti-gun moves abroad. (2001, July 8). *Washington Times*.

5. Sask. Alliance MP says federal government has lost track of foreigners' guns. (2002, January 9). *The Canadian Press*.
6. OK, partner, draw your weapons and register: Gun owner shoots a few holes in the federal government's latest make-work project. (2002, May 4). *Calgary Herald*.

In these articles, Breitkreuz is the voice of anti-gun control whenever a reference was needed, even for the *Washington Times* article, “American hunters fearful of anti-gun moves abroad” (2001). After the audit was tabled, “Kicked in the boondoggles” in the *Globe and Mail* (2002, December 6) started off the use of the term that has taken off as the agenda-setting frame in the House. In Canadian House debates, “Boondoggle” was only used to refer to the HRDC scandal up until Fraser's audit. Immediately after the audit was released “boondoggle” shifted into high gear as referring to the gun registry, and was also used to describe anything else in the Liberals mandate that had cost Canadians money for that matter, including the sponsorship scandal, the GST not being cut despite an election promise, and the Health CIHR funding issue.

VI. CONCLUSION

From completing this frames analysis, we can now better understand what has changed in the gun control debate in Parliament. In analyzing *Hansard*, a few clear patterns of agenda-setting language changes within political cultures have emerged when comparing these three periods above. First, the Conservative party currently has two competing messages that are represented in House debate: (1) the party platform to tear down the long gun registry represented by Stockwell Day and David McKenzie's statements in *Hansard* (2006), and (2) the promise to tear down the entire registry as represented by MPs such as Garry Breitkreuz and Ken Epp. The other parties clearly support the gun registry remaining now that it is functional and can be maintained at an acceptable cost under the RCMPs' care. Whether, after the Fall 2008 Canadian election, a second minority government can pass legislation like the Conservative-backed Bill C-21 remains to be seen, but this issue may be too hot for a minority government to tackle when the Bloc Quebecois, Liberals, and NDP could combine to stop any such Bill from being passed. Indeed, a recent motion by the Bloc Quebecois was approved with support from the Liberals and NDP, which restricted the government from extending the amnesty on gun control requirements set to expire on May 16, 2009, and stated the government should maintain the registration of all types of firearms in its entirety (Vongdouangchanh, 2009).

The language of the “gun control” issue unit, as Marres would call it, was best identified using a mixture of interdisciplinary methods in *Hansard* and the media. For example, Soroka's broad method for measuring changes would have lacked the particular frames to establish a small change over time – a switch from “a waste of money” to a “\$2 billion boondoggle” – especially based on a backbencher's remarks. In the most recent period, we found 17 indexed uses of the “\$2 billion” figure linked with the gun registry, which were made by 14 different Conservative MPs, including top party officials Jay Hill, the Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip; Lawrence Cannon, the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities; and Tom Lukiwski, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform.

In this way, using Marres's methods, we can critique agenda-setting language and better understand how some myths come to circulate and are taken up in discourse in the House and media as fact. This gives new credence to the adage "When the legend becomes fact, print the legend" (*The Man Who Shot Liberty*, 1962). Our research findings demonstrate the complex agenda-setting dynamics between media and party members that exist based solely on the interpretative qualities of language. This supports Marres' definitions of "issue networks" being aligned among human actors and technologies.

What purpose does *Hansard* debate serve in agenda setting then? In this case, House debate was a major piece of a larger campaign that reverberated into other parliamentary committees and public media. The House debate is identified as the starting point of Breitzkreuz's extending the frame for the anti-gun control campaign to a "\$2 billion boondoggle," but his campaign was coordinated with other actors outside of the House, like the Canadian Tax Federation and Western Canadian media that were favourable to his frame. We can see here that the backbench MP's own campaign from the margin was extended to the dominant party frame after it proved a successful test for garnering media and public support.

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