

Less “responsible”?  
Assessing the comparative turn in Canadian legislative studies

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## **Abstract**

Repeated reviews of the Canadian legislative studies literature have found it to be both largely atheoretical and isolated from developments in the broader context of comparative politics. This situation is understood to be the result of the “responsible government approach,” which has led legislative scholars to focus more on defending the perceived benefits of Canada’s existing system of parliamentary democracy rather than critically comparing it with others. While other areas of Canadian Political Science are seen to have recently undergone a “comparative turn” characterized by a greater tendency to draw on and contribute to international developments in comparative politics, there has yet to be any exploration of whether this trend extends to legislative studies. This paper conducts such an analysis by studying publication patterns within Canadian legislative studies over the past 25 years. The review reveals that over the last decade legislative scholars have indeed become more likely to both publish internationally and to utilize internationally developed theories in their work. However, the study also finds that Canadian legislative scholars remain primarily limited to being “takers” who apply internationally developed theories to the Canadian context instead of “makers” who develop new approaches by comparing Canada to other jurisdictions. Nevertheless, Canadian scholars do appear to have moved beyond the unquestioned acceptance of the responsible government approach and are actively subjecting several of its core assumptions to rigorous testing and verification.

## 1.0 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

In 1993 Atkinson and Thomas lamented that over the previous decade students of the Canadian Parliament had “been remarkably reluctant to employ the comparative literature on legislatures to illuminate Canadian problems” (423) Moreover, scholars had also showed little interest “in comparing the Canadian Parliament to other parliaments or developing an indigenous theoretical tradition” (425). As such, declared that Canadian parliamentary studies remained “rudimentary.” Surveying the field nearly a decade later, Malloy noted that these “concerns remain more valid than ever, as the study of Parliament... lost further momentum in the 1990s” (2002: 1). He also agreed with Atkinson and Thomas that this bleak situation was due to scholars’ uncritical reliance on the “responsible government approach,” which stressed the organic evolution of the parliamentary system and sought to protect it from change. Nevertheless, Malloy found some grounds for hope in new scholarship by authors like Kam (2000) that had not only a more solid theoretical basis but also a more comparative approach.

These complaints about Canadian legislative studies are reflective of the “insular and largely atheoretical” approach that is seen to have dominated the study of politics in Canada for most of the post-war period (Vipond, 2008: 4). This situation may be changing, however, with recent years witnessing much discussion as to whether Canadian political science has undergone a “comparative turn,” characterized by an increasing tendency to both draw on and contribute to the broader literature on comparative politics. Hard evidence, though, has been hard to find, with a recent collection investigating this trend, *The Comparative Turn in Canadian Political Science*, generated somewhat mixed results. While a quantitative analysis confirmed that Canadians researchers are now publishing more in international journals (Montpetit, 2008), they were judged to have made only a limited impact on the comparative study of federalism, rights, judicial behaviour, political parties, welfare states and political economy (Cairns, 2008). Only in theorizing about justice and the accommodation of racial and cultural pluralism were Canadian scholars found to have made a significant contribution to the international literature.

Canadian legislative studies have so far not been included in any analyses of the comparative turn. This omission is regrettable both given the hints of a new interest in the comparative literature noted by Malloy and since the operation and behaviour of Canadian legislatures have received increased public attention in recent years due to the repeated election of minority parliaments both federally and provincially. Moreover, public debate on the need for democratic reform has also grown rapidly over the past decade (Malloy, 2002; Smith, 2007). Together these developments may have led to an increased desire among scholars to explore how the legislatures in Canada compare to those in other jurisdictions.

This paper uses developments in the subfield of legislative studies as a case study for testing the presence and extent of a comparative turn in Canadian political science. As with *The Comparative Turn* it employs both a quantitative analysis of the extent to which Canadian scholars are publishing internationally as well as a qualitative analysis of the impact that these authors have had on the broader comparative literature. However, it also goes beyond *The Comparative Turn* to conduct a quantitative analysis of whether the degree of comparison in

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Canadian legislative studies has changed over time. Ultimately the paper demonstrates that a comparative turn has occurred in Canadian legislative studies. Canadian scholars have broken free of the responsible government approach and are now both utilizing comparative theories and adding to them with their research. They have also become more likely to publish in international journals. However, the paper also finds that Canadians remain strangely reluctant to compare Canadian legislatures directly with those in other countries. Before beginning this analysis the paper will briefly review the assumptions that guided *The Comparative Turn* and use them to develop the specific hypotheses for this study.

## **2.0 Background to the comparative turn**

Proponents of the comparative turn argue that Canada's initial failure to engage with the comparative literature was the result of three main factors (Vipond 2008, 5-10). First, Canadian political scientists were particularly focused on studies of federalism, which were in turn dominated by questions of national unity, creating the sense that Canada's federal system did not lend itself well to international comparison. Second, interactions with the US literature did not develop first due to a concentration on comparison within the British Empire and later out of the desire to remain free from US influence, both nationalistically and methodologically. Finally, while Canadians failed to look out to other jurisdictions, foreign comparativists also failed to look in at Canada since it seemed to offer few insights for the studies of democratization that dominated comparative political science in the postwar period. Given this lack of interaction, those in Canada who did work comparatively were primarily limited to being "takers" who applied international theories to the Canadian context (2008, 10).

Vipond (2008) asserts that over the past decade this isolation has given way to a growing Canadian engagement with the comparative literature. While federalism remains a major preoccupation in Canadian political science, it is increasingly studied from a comparative approach. Canadians are also less fearful about engaging with the US and are now drawing upon American methodologies. At the same time, the comparative literature has become more welcoming of the historical and institutional approaches traditionally favoured in Canada, increasing the possibility for interaction. Advocates of the comparative turn argue that together these developments have led Canadian political science to become much more integrated into the comparative literature and to become a "giver" of comparative theory instead of just being a "taker" (Cairns, 2008: 243).

In contrast to this account of developments in Canadian political science as a whole, the isolation seen within the subfield of legislative studies is instead seen to be the result of the dominance of the responsible government approach. According to Atkinson and Thomas (1993), this approach (which they referred to as the "Westminster model") stressed that the various parts of the parliamentary system form an organic whole which requires the leadership of a strong executive. They found that those working within this perspective generally failed to either employ existing theoretical approaches or seek to develop new ones, preferring to rely on instead on "richly textured description" (1993: 424). Building off this analysis, Malloy (2002) argued that the responsible government approach restricted the development and testing of theories by locating power in places that are closed to research, such as parliamentary caucuses. In addition, he contended that the approach's strong emphasis on the need for clear accountability meant

that other questions, especially those pertaining to the representation of citizens and the government's responsiveness to them, went unaddressed.

Atkinson and Thomas argued this lack of theoretical basis limited the subfield's comparative potential by making it difficult for Canadian scholars to import methodological developments from other jurisdictions (1993). Such innovations were instead adopted only on a "piecemeal basis" and even then primarily just from the US. Atkinson and Thomas also found that the possibilities for Canadian interaction with the comparative literature were limited by the responsible government approach's focus on the holistic nature of the Westminster model. For example, they described how Stewart argued against comparisons with the US since Parliament is not an independent "legislature" like the Congress and since parties, not individual legislators, are the primary parliamentary actors (1993: 428). Similarly, Malloy highlighted that scholars were reluctant to explore possibilities for democratic reform since changes to one element of the system were seen to have potentially "dire consequences" for the others (2002: 10).

As mentioned above, Malloy (2000) did find some reason for hope in the form of a number of recent works that were both more theory based and more comparative. He particularly stressed that Kam's (2000) study of the accountability relationship between the executive and the legislature was "unique in Canadian legislative studies" both for employing formal theory and for adopting a comparative approach that also targeted the UK, Australia and New Zealand. Malloy also praised Docherty's efforts to build and empirically test a model of Canadian legislative careers as well as several studies informed by feminist perspectives that examined the behaviour of female legislators (2002, 5). Together, Malloy's findings suggest the possibility of a nascent comparative turn in Canadian legislative studies at precisely the time that one was thought to be taking place in the broader discipline in Canada.

### 3.0 Hypotheses

To assess whether a change from isolation to engagement had occurred, *The Comparative Turn* collection featured both a quantitative analysis of journal publication trends and a series of chapters that conducted a qualitative review of a particular subfield. Curiously, the quantitative analysis (Montpetit, 2008) did not examine the *content* of the articles, instead focusing only on the origin and impact factor of the journals in which Canadians published. Therefore while Montpetit found that Canadians are publishing more articles in international journals it remains unclear whether these articles actually employ a more comparative approach.

This paper explores the evidence for a comparative turn in the subfield of legislative studies by employing and expanding upon the methodology used in *The Comparative Turn*. Section 4 conducts a quantitative analysis seeks to replicate Montpetit's study for the legislative studies subfield and to add to them by examining if there has been a change in the extent of comparison conducted by these publications. This analysis will test three hypotheses:

- *Hypothesis I* – Montpetit's hypothesis that the comparative turn will be manifested by an increase in the tendency of Canadian scholars to publish in international journals.

- *Hypothesis II* – Since proponents of the comparative turn believe that authors publish internationally in order to contribute to the comparative literature, articles published in international journals will be more comparative than those published domestically.
- *Hypothesis III* – Since the comparative turn is believed to have gradually occurred over the past fifteen years articles will become more comparative over time no matter what the venue of their publication.

These quantitative results are then verified through a qualitative review in Section 5. That Section also examines the extent of the Canadian contribution to the comparative literature and how the Canadian case is being studied by those in other jurisdictions. The question of how to operationalize the extent of comparison is dealt with in the next section.

## 4.0 Quantitative analysis

### 4.1 Constructing the dataset

A dataset of Canadian and internationally published journal articles was compiled to test the hypotheses. Given the relatively specialized nature of legislative studies and time constraints the decision was made to look for international articles only in the three journals that appeared to deal directly with the subject matter, namely *Parliamentary Affairs* (PA), *Legislative Studies Quarterly* (LSQ) and *The Journal of Legislative Studies* (JLS). Without a domestic equivalent to these journals, legislative articles published within Canada were searched for in the *Canadian Journal of Political Science* (CJPS). Articles were compiled using journal search engines or, in the case of issues of LSQ published after 2004, reviewed by hand. The three international journals were searched for “Canad\*” while the CJPS was searched for “parliament\*” or “parlement\*” or “legislat\*”. In each instance the key terms were searched in all available fields, including full-text, for the period from 1985 to April 2010.<sup>2</sup>

The search results were reviewed to identify only those that 1) had at least one Canadian author; and 2) dealt with Canadian legislative studies. Regarding the first criteria, the decision was made to define “Canadian author” as someone working at a Canadian university.<sup>3</sup> This choice was made on the grounds that once someone relocates to another jurisdiction their continued study of Canadian politics by definition becomes a matter of comparative politics. Moreover, this definition is congruent with the approach used by Montpetit, who examined only those articles published by faculty at Canadian universities. As for the second criteria, it was difficult to precisely separate articles focused on legislative studies since many pertained to subjects that have a strong impact on the performance or behaviour of legislatures, such as elections, political parties, and the behaviour of executives. To ensure consistency with the broader literature, the Canadian Democratic Audit series and the chapters of the *Comparative*

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<sup>2</sup> All issues of JLS were searched with Informaworld. PA was searched with the Oxford Journals. CJPS and LSQ were searched with JSTOR for 1985 to 2004. Remaining CJPS issues were searched with Cambridge Journals.

<sup>3</sup> Kam’s 2001 article in JLS was included even though worked in the US at the time since he subsequently relocated to the University of British Columbia.

*Turn* were used to determine how to establish dividing lines between subfields.<sup>4</sup> However, an exception was made so that articles pertaining to the executive's relationship with the legislature were included in the dataset, even though they could be seen as pertaining more to executives and cabinets. A full list of the international and Canadian articles included in the dataset are presented in Appendices I and II respectively.

Further difficulties were experienced in quantifying the extent of the comparison in each article. Following Atkinson and Thomas, an article becomes comparative either by employing "foreign models" or "comparing the Canadian Parliament to other parliaments" (1993, 425). However, it is not possible to quantify the use of foreign models (they are either present or are not). Thus it appeared that the most direct method for quantifying the comparison in each article would be as a function of the number of countries it studied. Unfortunately, while it was quite straightforward to categorize those articles that explicitly compared data or developments from two or more countries (five articles), it was much more difficult to classify those that applied a theory (or theories) developed elsewhere to the Canadian case. For example, Howlett (1998) tested whether Kingdon's theory of agenda setting, developed from observations of the US Congress, can be applied to the Canadian parliament. Similarly, Atkinson and Bierling (2005) examined the applicability to Canada of two internationally developed theories concerning the relationship in views on ethics between politicians and the general public. While Howlett did not explicitly compare the two legislatures, he did identify the origins of the theories, allowing comparisons to be observed. In contrast, no such comparison was evident from Atkinson and Bierling's articles, although a review of their bibliography revealed that the theories they used were developed in the US, meaning that a comparison could have been drawn had they provided more context.<sup>5</sup>

Ultimately it was decided to rely solely on the number of countries explicitly compared rather than risk biasing the data on the basis on a subjective review of the articles' references. While this restrictive approach may cause the dataset to under-estimate the extent to which the comparative literature is now being used in Canadian legislative studies, one benefit is that articles applying foreign theories to the Canadian context are likely instances where Canadians "takers" of comparative theory. Restricting the comparative designation solely to those articles that explicitly focus on multiple countries may therefore provide a better sense of to what degree Canadians have become theory "makers" in comparative legislative studies.

A further challenge in quantifying the extent of comparison stemmed from the fact that several articles examined multiple legislatures within Canada or the country of comparison. Despite not qualifying as comparative politics in the general sense of the comparative turn, such articles were conducted in a more comparative manner than those focusing on a single Canadian

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<sup>4</sup> Articles in the search results pertaining to election outcomes were classified as election studies (Courtney, 2004), those mainly examining candidates, party fundraising or leadership selection as party studies (Cross, 2004), and those concentrating on the relationship between the federal and provincial governments as studies of federalism. Following Hirschl (2008), articles were identified as legal studies if they focused on constitutional changes, rights and freedoms, or the impact of judicial review on parliament. Lastly, articles dwelling mostly on policy choices or government decision-making were identified as policy studies, those on lobby groups were identified as advocacy group studies (Young and Everitt, 2004), and those dealing mainly with cabinets or executives were labeled as executive studies (White, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Atkinson and Bierling found that the "World's Apart" model, primarily derived from Hibbings and Thiess-Moore's work in the US, best explained the Canadian case. However the model's origin was not explicitly stated.

legislature. Moreover, Halligan et al.'s (1987) comparison of constituency engagement in the legislatures of the 10 Canadian provinces and six Australian states seemed to be much more comparative than articles examining only the national legislatures in two countries. A second measurement of comparison was therefore added to quantify the number of legislatures compared. The names of legislature(s) studied are also listed in the appendices if different from the countries of comparison. Curiously, all of the articles comparing multiple provinces were published in the international journals. Table I summarizes the number of articles from each journal that were included in the dataset and the extent of comparison that they contained.

**TABLE I**  
NUMBER OF ARTICLES AND EXTENT OF COMPARISON BY JOURNAL SOURCE

| Journal             | # articles | Countries compared |      | Legislatures compared |      |
|---------------------|------------|--------------------|------|-----------------------|------|
|                     |            | Average            | Max. | Average               | Max. |
| CJPS                | 24         | 1.04               | 2    | 1.04                  | 2    |
| Total International | 16         | 1.25               | 2    | 3.44                  | 16   |
| <i>LSQ</i>          | 2          | 1.50               | 2    | 8.50                  | 16   |
| <i>PA</i>           | 2          | 1.00               | 1    | 1.00                  | 1    |
| <i>JLS</i>          | 12         | 1.25               | 2    | 3.00                  | 13   |
| Total               | 40         | 1.13               | 2    | 2.00                  | 16   |

#### 4.2 Methodology

An SPSS dataset was constructed with the key information on each article, including the year and venue of publication as well as the number of countries and legislatures compared. A variable was also created to group the articles into 5 categories by year of publication. Unfortunately the generally small sample size and the particularly small number of articles found in *LSQ* and *PA* made it necessary to compare the articles published in the *CJPS* against those published internationally as a whole. Independent Samples t-tests were constructed to test whether the year of publication and the extent of comparison varied between the two publication venues. The relationship between year of publication and extent of comparison was tested through Analyses of Variation (ANOVA) using the grouped year of publication.

Notably, Montpetit (2008) argued that just publishing more frequently in international journals does not necessarily indicate a comparative turn since some Canadian journals have a significant international following while some international journals are not well read. As such, he went incorporated journal impact factors into his analysis. Unfortunately, that approach is not possible in this analysis given the smaller number of journals analysed and since there is no impact factor available for the *JLS* (Institution of Scientific Information, 2008). However, Montpetit ultimately concluded that the foreign journals in which Canadians publish tend to have a much greater impact factor than those published domestically. As such, it will be assumed that articles published in the three international journals are more likely to reach an international audience than those published in the *CJPS*.



### 4.3 Results

Table II breaks down the articles by their period of publication. Of the 16 published in the international journals, 13 appeared after 2000, which is highly consistent with the comparative turn hypothesis. The number of CJPS articles also declined in the post-2000 period. As is shown in Table III, the Independent Samples t-Test confirms that there is a highly significant difference in the year of publication between the two groups. Hypothesis I is therefore confirmed.

**TABLE II**  
NUMBER OF ARTICLES PUBLISHED IN THE CJPS AND INTERNATIONAL JOURNALS BY TIME PERIOD

| Period    | CJPS | International | Total |
|-----------|------|---------------|-------|
| 1985-1990 | 8    | 1             | 9     |
| 1990-1994 | 3    | 1             | 4     |
| 1995-1999 | 6    | 1             | 7     |
| 2000-2004 | 0    | 9             | 9     |
| 2005-2010 | 7    | 4             | 11    |
| Total     | 24   | 16            | 40    |

As predicted the average number of *countries* compared was higher among articles published internationally. However, the difference was marginal and as shown in Table III it qualified as statistically significant only at the lowest threshold of  $p=0.1$ . By comparison, the average number of *legislatures* compared was over three times greater among articles in the international journals than in the CJPS, although this is hardly surprising since all of the articles comparing multiple legislatures in the same country were published internationally. Moreover, while the relationship was stronger, it too was significant only at  $p=0.1$ . Therefore while Hypothesis II can be tentatively accepted, the finding should be treated with caution since neither measure of the relationship between publication venue and extent of comparison was significant at the preferred significance threshold of  $p=0.05$ .

**TABLE III**  
INDEPENDENT SAMPLE T-TESTS COMPARING CJPS ARTICLES AGAINST THOSE PUBLISHED INTERNATIONALLY

| Variable tested                 | t value† | Degrees of Freedom | Sig.    |
|---------------------------------|----------|--------------------|---------|
| Year of publication             | -2.503   | 37.986             | 0.017** |
| Number of countries compared    | -1.746   | 19.214             | 0.097*  |
| Number of legislatures compared | -2.067   | 15.039             | 0.056*  |

\*Significant at  $p=0.1$ ; \*\*Significant at  $p=0.05$ ; † variances not assumed equal

Table IV displays how the extent of comparison changed by time period. Contrary to what was expected, the number of countries compared had peaks in 1990-1994 and 2000-2004. The number of legislatures compared also did not match the expected trend, with its highest averages coming in 1985-1990 and 2000-2004. Both measures of comparison were also at their lowest point in 2005-2010. Moreover, this recent decline cannot be easily attributed to a random drop since the 2005-2010 period actually had the greatest number of articles. As could be expected, the ANOVA analysis presented in Tables V failed to find a significant relationship between the period of publication and either the number of countries or legislatures compared. As such, Hypothesis III must be rejected.

**TABLE IV**  
EXTENT OF COMPARISON BY TIME PERIOD

| Period    | # of articles | Countries compared |      | Legislatures compared |      |
|-----------|---------------|--------------------|------|-----------------------|------|
|           |               | Average            | Max. | Average               | Max. |
| 1985-1989 | 9             | 1.11               | 2    | 2.67                  | 16   |
| 1990-1994 | 7             | 1.25               | 2    | 1.25                  | 2    |
| 1995-1999 | 7             | 1.14               | 2    | 1.14                  | 2    |
| 2000-2004 | 9             | 1.22               | 2    | 3.56                  | 13   |
| 2005-2010 | 13            | 1.00               | 1    | 1.00                  | 1    |
| Total     | 40            | 1.13               | 2    | 2.00                  | 16   |

**TABLE V**  
ANOVA TESTS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERIOD OF PUBLICATION AND THE EXTENT OF COMPARISON

| Variable tested       | F value <sup>6</sup> | Sig.  |
|-----------------------|----------------------|-------|
| Countries compared    | 0.698                | 0.598 |
| Legislatures compared | 1.158                | 0.346 |

#### 4.4 Discussion of quantitative results

The results obtained in this study would seem to substantiate some elements of the comparative turn thesis but also cast doubt on some others. While both the dataset and statistical methods employed were not nearly as elaborate as those used by Montpetit, the findings regarding changes in publication venue were quite consistent with his results. Montpetit reported that articles published after 1995 were 2.4 times more likely to be published in an international journal. The results presented in Table II were even more, with a post-1995 article being 4.3 times more likely to be published internationally than those from the earlier period. The data in Table II also suggest that the turn towards international publication in legislative studies actually

<sup>6</sup> The degrees of freedom were 4 and 35 for both tests.

came in 2000, after which point articles published internationally actually began to increase sharply.

However, while the overall results replicate Montpetit's finding, it should also be noted that the increase in international articles is almost exclusively due to the sharp growth of articles in the JLS. This fact could raise some concern since the Journal was only launched in 1995, suggesting that the results could be biased simply through the addition of a new venue. That said, the publication trend in JLS would still appear to support the existence of the comparative turn since only one of the 12 Canadian articles found in the journal were published between 1995 and 1999 while the remainder appeared between 2000 and 2010 (an average of 1 publication per year). Hints of a comparative turn could also be seen in PA, which featured Canadian legislative articles in 2004 and 2008 despite not having published any in the years examined before that point. Nevertheless, expanding the dataset to include additional journals could be helpful, especially since the publication trend in LSQ runs counter to the comparative turn thesis, with its two Canadian articles coming prior to 1993. The situation also becomes more complicated since LSQ published a special edition on the "Contemporary Canadian Legislative System" in 1978 that featured five articles by Canadian academics (Atkinson; Clarke; Kornberg and Campbell; Fletcher and Goddard; Thomas) and another by an MP (MacGuigan). The presence of this special issue suggests that Canadian legislative scholars were interested in publishing their work in international journals long before the premised start of the comparative turn, a possibility that can only be confirmed by expanding the time period analyzed as well as the number of journals. However, these developments in LSQ do not necessarily invalidate the findings from the period of study.

The rejection of Hypothesis III and only tentative acceptance of Hypothesis II indicates that while those studying Canadian legislatures are publishing more internationally, they are not necessarily becoming more comparative. Just five of the 40 articles in the dataset employed an explicitly comparative approach, and even they were not highly comparative, with none dealing with more than two countries. Admittedly, this lack of comparison could reflect the way in which the dataset was constructed since only one CJPS article met the definition of comparison that was employed. However, the results presented here indicate that Canadians working in the area of legislative studies are not undertaking original research that examines multiple countries at once, or at least are not publishing it in the journals examined. It is also striking that of the five comparative articles, the only one to study a country other than the UK was focused on Australia, which is hardly a non-traditional point of comparison.

The most unexpected finding was the sizeable presence in the international literature (one quarter of articles) and complete absence in Canadian literature of articles that compared multiple legislatures within the same country. Interestingly, three of the articles in the 1978 special issue of LSQ also compared provincial legislatures, suggesting that this trend may have endured over the longer term.<sup>7</sup> This finding would seem to be counterintuitive since one would expect that studies of provincial legislatures would be of greater interest to Canadians and so would tend to be published domestically. It also raises the question as to whether articles examining multiple legislatures in the same country should be considered as comparative studies.

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<sup>7</sup> Atkinson compared Ontario and Nova Scotia, Goddard and Fletcher studied Ontario and BC, while Clarke included all provincial legislatures.

However, despite this interprovincial comparison, the findings from the dataset indicate that the field of legislative studies in Canada has yet to become overly comparative in terms of the number or diversity of the countries that it engages with.

## **5.0 Qualitative Analysis**

### *5.1 Introduction*

While the quantitative analysis has found some indications of a comparative turn within the Canadian legislative studies literature, the difficulties experienced in quantifying the extent of comparison cast some doubt on the findings for Hypotheses II and III. This section therefore undertakes a qualitative review of the Canadian legislative studies literature, beginning with an examination of the articles in the dataset. It then continues with an assessment of the broader Canadian contribution to the comparative literature and concludes with brief study of how the Canadian case is being used in the comparative literature. Since the assessments by Atkinson and Thomas (1993) and Malloy (2002) analyze the subfield up to the year 2000, the review only focuses on works appearing after that point.

### *5.2 Verifying the findings of the quantitative analysis*

As noted above, an article is considered as comparative either if it employs theories from the comparative literature or compares a Canadian legislature to one in a foreign country. While there are only two articles in the dataset published after 2000 that explicitly compared multiple countries (Kam, 2001; Malloy, 2004), several others based their analysis on comparative theories. Atkinson and Bierling (2005) tested two models from the comparative literature for explaining the differences in views on political ethics between politicians and the general public, concluding that Canada best conforms to the “Worlds Apart” model. Kerby (2009) used the international literature on government and ministerial survival to develop and test a model exploring what factors determined which MPs would be appointed to cabinet, allowing him to show that MPs who are female, lawyers, university educated, possess past ministerial experience, and from regions with few government seats are more likely to receive cabinet appointments. Scholars also seemed to overcome their fear of American influence. Research on “dyadic representation” from the US Congress was adapted by Soroka et al. (2009) to investigate the extent of constituency concerns on MPs’ participation in Question Period, finding that they play a larger role in MPs’ behaviour than predicted by the traditional literature on party discipline. Likewise Pond’s examination (2008) of the Ontario legislature’s scrutiny of government appointees was informed by an analysis of the US Senate’s review of presidential nominees. The impact of comparative theory was also evident among those studying Parliament from a feminist perspective, with Tremblay and Mullen (2007) drawing on international studies of representation by women legislators to conclude that the Committee on the Status of Women provided substantive representation of women’s interests during the 38<sup>th</sup> Parliament. Comparative influences could also be seen in the articles by Ferris and Voia (2009) and Blidook (2010).

This overview suggests that comparative approaches were more evident among the articles in the dataset published after 2000 than one would predict from reading of Atkinson and Thomas or Malloy. That said, several articles did continue to show the isolation from the

comparative literature that they described. In some cases this lack of comparative engagement was appropriate, such as Heard's (2007) investigation of the attempted confidence vote that occurred in May 2005. The same could also be said of White's (2006) analysis of the incorporation of traditional Inuit values into the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut and Pond's (2005) study of the remaking of the Ontario legislature under the neoliberal ideals of Premier Mike Harris. Both articles were descriptive case studies examining how the Westminster model could be moulded to fit different values, and so did not have a specific theory to test. However, several other works could have benefitted from the application of comparative theory or methodology. For instance, it was surprising that Docherty (2002) reviewed the state of the Senate and possibilities for its reform without looking at the broader literature on bicameralism or considering Australia's reform experience.<sup>8</sup> Similarly Malloy, while calling for future comparisons with other jurisdictions, could have employed internationally developed theories in his study of discipline and cohesion in party groups at the federal Parliament.<sup>9</sup> Lastly, Docherty and White's (2004) discussion of the state of the Canadian Parliament was largely descriptive and could have benefitted from a comparison with the challenges facing democratic institutions in other jurisdictions. The use of comparative theory in articles published after 2000 is noted in the summary of articles in Appendices I and II.

Nevertheless, despite these few non-comparative articles, overall this review suggests that the extent of comparison among Canadian legislative studies articles has in fact increased over time. In contrast to the minimal engagement with the comparative literature described by Atkinson and Thomas and Malloy, the majority of works in the post-2000 period feature at least some comparative element. The responsible government approach also appeared to be in retreat with two articles looking specifically at behaviour and influence of MPs as individual legislators separate from their parties (Soroka et al., 2009; Blidook, 2010). Moreover, Docherty and White's survey of Parliament was also open to the benefits of electoral reform (2004). It should also be noted that Kam's (2000) article is no longer unique on the basis of its rigorous theoretical framework, with several works such as Kerby's study of ministerial survival (2009) employing a similar quantitative approach based in formal theory. Together these observations suggest that Hypothesis III can in fact be accepted, indicating that Canadian legislative studies has undergone a comparative turn in recent years both in terms of content as well as publication patterns. As for Hypothesis II, contrary to expectations and to the quantitative results, the proportion of articles employing comparative theories was greater among those published in the CJPS than the international journals. CJPS articles also tended to have more elaborate theoretical frameworks and to employ quantitative analysis.

However, the findings of this qualitative review should also be regarded with some caution given that while Canadian legislative scholars were found to be increasingly *taking* comparative theory and applying it to the Canadian case, it is less evident whether they are *making* theories of their own. Even Kam's study of the link between ideology and parliamentary behaviour in Canada and the UK (2001), while comparative in both theory and scope, is based on Krehbiel's model of "parties vs. preferences" developed in the US. However, given that they were confirmed in two countries, Kam's findings would appear to be of greater theoretical

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<sup>8</sup> Smith's *The Canadian Senate in Bicameral Perspective* (2003) provides a good example of this kind of comparative analysis.

<sup>9</sup> Comparisons with the UK were made but not in a systematic way.

importance than those obtained by applying a US developed model to Canada alone, as was done by Aktinson and Bierling (2005). This question of “takers versus makers” will be discussed further in section 5.4. It should also be noted that none of the articles from 2001 onward conducted a comparison between subnational legislatures.

### 5.3 *Canadian contributions to the comparative literature*

Even when the literature beyond the dataset is included, Canada’s most significant contributions to comparative legislative studies over the past decade appear to be those that either examine the influence of independent legislators or seek to verify assumptions about the Westminster system through empirical testing. Although they borrow from the US literature, Soroka et al.’s study of the extent of constituency influences on MPs’ behaviour in Question Period restores some measure of agency to individual legislators separate from their partisan affiliations (2009). Likewise, Blidook’s analysis of private members’ bills indicates that MPs’ activities can influence government policy choices (2010). Together these articles are a direct challenge to the responsible government approach and, in the words of can hopefully lead to “reviving the notion that individual MPs can matter in the Canadian political process” (Soroka et al., 2009: 584). Unfortunately it is too soon to measure these articles’ impact on the broader comparative literature, but their findings should be testable in other parliamentary setting.

Besides redeeming some autonomy for MPs, Canadian authors have also been successful in finding ways to test some of the key assumptions of the Westminster model. Kam’s comparison of candidate preferences and voting records found that the ideological cohesion of MPs from a particular party is insufficient to explain the unity in their voting behaviour, indicating the independent influence of party solidarity and discipline (2001: 115-6). Kerby’s review of cabinet appointments also verified several long-held assumptions about what sort of people were likely to become government ministers (2009). Looking beyond the dataset, Penner et al. confirmed that the issues raised by opposition parties during Question Period are driven by public opinion, and more particularly by the issues that they feel will be relevant to their core supporters (2006). While none of these studies are overly surprising, the theory and data they generate enable systematic comparisons with other jurisdictions as well as the capacity to detect variations that may occur between different actors, time periods or issues. Moreover, these articles do seem to have made an impact on the comparative literature, with Google Scholar reporting 22 citations for Kam (2001) and 20 for Penner et al. (2006).

Canadians have also made a significant contribution to the comparative literature on the international trend toward the concentration of power within the executive, a development sometimes referred to as the “presidentialization of politics.” Savoie contends that in Canada this phenomenon has been characterized by the gradual transition of executive decision making from the cabinet to the Prime Minister and a small “court” of trusted advisors, a development that significantly reduces the executive’s accountability to parliament (Savoie 1999a). Several works by Canadian writers (e.g. Savoie 1999b; Simpson 2001) have been extensively cited within the international literature.<sup>10</sup> However, Canadians have also directly contributed to the comparative debate, with Savoie (2008) extending his analysis of the rise of “court government” to the UK

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<sup>10</sup> E.g. Patrick Weller, 2003, “Cabinet Government: an Elusive Ideal?” *Public Administration* 81(4): 701-22.

context. A major collection examining the trend towards Presidentialization in more than a dozen countries also included a chapter by Canadians on the Canadian case (Bakvis and Wolinetz 2005).

A further Canadian contribution to the international literature lies in demonstrating the adaptations possible in the Westminster system. With 14 Westminster-style legislatures across the country, Canada is an ideal laboratory for testing parliamentary innovations. As mentioned above, the works by White (2006) and Pond (2005) demonstrated how the Westminster system could be moulded to conform to different values. Pond's (2008) study of Ontario's experience with the legislative scrutiny of government appointments also demonstrates the potential hazards of employing tools of accountability from a congressional system within a Westminster context. Notably, Canadian scholars have also begun to examine reforms adopted in other Westminster systems and how they could be applied here (Docherty, 2003).

#### 5.4 *Insights drawn from Canada*

In addition to the sharp increase in Canadian contributions to the comparative legislative studies, foreign scholars have also drawn a number of insights from the Canadian experience. Moreover, as with the newer Canadian scholarship, these articles help to further breakdown or at least to test the assumptions of the responsible government approach. Heitshusen et al. (2005) studied the Canadian House of Commons and five other Westminster legislative chambers (Australian House of Representatives and Senate, Irish Dáil, New Zealand House of Representatives, and UK House of Commons) to examine the relationship between electoral system and constituency services. They concluded that the extent of constituency service offered is primarily based on election concerns, with legislators elected in mixed member districts being less likely to focus on constituency services than those elected in single member districts. The question of what factors influence backbench dissent was explored by Garner and Letki (2005) using a study of the Canadian Liberal Party and the British Labour Party. Despite operating within very similar institutions, the two parties exhibited highly divergent patterns of dissent, with the difference being attributed to the opportunities for influence and communication that are available to backbenchers within each party. Kaiser (2005) also examined the operation of parliamentary opposition in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the UK, investigating the opportunity structure for opposition influence within the legislative chamber, the patterns of policy cooperation among opposition parties, and the availability of "veto-points" outside the chamber, such as those provided by a bicameral or federal arrangement. Kaiser found that these three factors varied widely not only between the different countries but also over time, leading him to conclude that "There is no such thing as a Westminster pattern of parliamentary opposition" (2008: 37).

While the international literature does not appear to be markedly different from domestic publications in terms of the subjects of study, it does seem to be significantly more comparative. Although the three international articles discussed above are not a representative sample, no article by a Canadian scholar is close examining the same number of countries as Heitshusen et al. (2005). Admittedly, this increased comparison may come at a cost, with Kaiser's contention that Canadian "opposition parties on the federal level may simultaneously function in government at the sub-national level" greatly overestimating the interconnectedness between the

federal and provincial parties (2005: 35). Nevertheless it is often only through international comparison that the performance of one system can be properly assessed. For example, Kaiser's overall finding that there are different patterns of opposition in each jurisdictions opens the door to a more meaningful analysis the strength of the parliamentary opposition in Canada. Moreover, the ability to demonstrate that their results apply in multiple jurisdictions increases the theoretical weight of their research. However, it should be noted that the international literature also appears reluctant to compare Westminster parliaments to other types of legislative assemblies.

## **6.0 Conclusion and discussion**

In a sharp contrast with the isolated, atheoretical subfield described by Atkinson and Thomas (1993) and Malloy (2002), this paper has demonstrated that those working in Canadian legislative studies are now actively engaging with the comparative literature. Canadian scholars no longer appear to be limited by the descriptive and defensive confines of the "responsible government approach" and but instead are freely utilizing models from the comparative literature in their work. Most importantly, Canadian scholars' success in testing the assumptions of the Westminster model, demonstrating the agency of individual MPs, and mapping the presidentialization of politics has opened the door for further studies, suggesting that this comparative trend will continue for some time to come.

In terms of publication trends, the quantitative analysis confirmed Hypothesis I that Canadians are now publishing more articles in international venues than they did in the past. However, the effort to expand the quantitative methodology to incorporate an analysis of content was not successful, with the conclusions from the quantitative analysis that articles published internationally were more comparative (Hypothesis II) and that the extent of comparison had not increased over time (Hypothesis III) being rejected by the qualitative analysis. Nevertheless, the finding that articles published in the CJPS tended to have a higher comparative content than those published internationally confirms Montpetit's (2008) assertion that rising international publication rates are not necessarily a sign of the comparative turn. This result also raises questions about exactly what classifies as comparison given that all articles performing a comparison between multiple Canadian legislatures were published internationally. The situation in which articles published in Canada make better use of comparative theory while articles published internationally focus more on provincial legislatures was unexpected to say the least.

Furthermore, the quantitative analysis also drew attention to the curious lack of Canadian scholarship that tests theoretical models in multiple legislative contexts. The absence of such contributions is particularly surprising given that foreign scholars have conducted a number of studies that compare Canada against several other countries. This lack of cross-jurisdiction comparison would appear to reduce the theoretical impact of Canadian legislative scholarship and may hinder our ability to become "makers" of comparative theory. Notably, this situation may remedy itself in the coming years as Canadian scholars take their findings from the Canadian context and apply them internationally. However, should this broadening of horizons fail to take place it may be necessary to explore if Canadian legislative scholars are facing some deficit (e.g. a lack of methodological training, access to data, or funding) that prevents them from researching multiple jurisdictions.



While this analysis would appear to support the finding that legislative studies in Canada have undergone a comparative turn, further research is still required before reaching a final conclusion. The range of scholarship analyzed should be expanded to include both additional Canadian journals that deal significantly with legislative studies, such as *Canadian Public Administration*, *Canadian Public Administration*, and the *Canadian Political Science Review*, as well as books that have been published on the subject. Moreover, it is particularly important to conduct a review of articles in *Politique et Sociétés* to see if the changes observed in the English literature are also evident among French Canadian scholars. Examining additional international journals, such as *Governance*, will also provide a better understanding of the changes in publication trends. Furthermore, it may also be helpful to expand the scope of the study to include the year of graduation of each scholar as this will make it possible to isolate whether the comparative turn is being driven by the entry of new researchers or whether it is the result of a change in the field as a whole. It would also be enlightening to investigate what major developments have taken place within comparative legislative studies over the past decade so as to determine whether the Canadian subfield is leading, following or isolated from international trends.

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<sup>11</sup> To avoid duplication articles included in the quantitative analysis are listed only in the appendices.

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**Appendix I - Articles published in *Parliamentary Affairs*, *Legislative Studies Quarterly* and the *Journal of Legislative Studies* between 1985-2010 found with search for “Canad\*” and categorized as being primarily focused on legislative studies**

| <b>Author(s)</b>  | <b>Title</b>   | <b>Journal</b> | <b>Vol(Iss)</b> | <b>Year</b> | <b>Countries compared</b> | <b>Legislatures compared</b>                       | <b>Comp. theory (post-2000)</b> |
|---|--|----------------|-----------------|-------------|---------------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| Halligan, John*<br>Krause, Robert<br>Williams, Robert<br>Geoffrey Hawker*   | Constituency Service among Sub-National Legislators in Australia and Canada  | LSQ            | 13(1)           | 1988        | 2<br>(Australia)          | 16<br>(10 Canadian provinces; 6 Australian states) | NA                              |
| Atkinson, Michael M.<br>Thomas, Paul G.   | Studying the Canadian Parliament   | LSQ            | 18(3)           | 1993        | 1                         | 1  | NA                              |
| Crimmins, James E.<br>Nesbitt-Larking, Paul   | Canadian prime ministers in the House of Commons: Patterns of intervention   | JLS            | 2(3)            | 1996        | 2<br>(UK)                 | 2  | NA                              |
| Studlar, Donley T.*<br>Alexander, Dianne L.<br>Cohen, Joanna E.<br>Ashley, Mary Jane<br>Ferrence, Roberta<br>Pollard, John S. | A social and political profile of Canadian legislators, 1996   | JLS            | 6(2)            | 2000        | 1                         | 13<br>(All except Nunavut)                         | NA                              |
| Michaud, Nelson   | Designating the official opposition in a Westminster parliamentary system  | JLS            | 6(4)            | 2000        | 1                         | 7<br>(Federal, AB, BC, NB, NS, SK, YK)             | NA                              |
| McKenzie, Judith  | Political biography and autobiography and the study of women in politics in Canada: The case of political ambition | JLS            | 6(4)            | 2000        | 1                         | 4<br>(Federal, BC, MB, QC,)                        | NA                              |
| Kam, Christopher  | Do Ideological Preferences Explain Parliamentary Behaviour? Evidence from Great Britain and Canada                 | JLS            | 7(4)            | 2001        | 2<br>(UK)                 | 2  | Yes                             |
| Docherty, David   | The Canadian Senate: Chamber of Sober Reflection or Loony Cousin Best Not Talked About?                            | JLS            | 8(3)            | 2002        | 1                         | 1  | No                              |
| Malloy, Jonathan  | High discipline, low cohesion? The uncertain patterns of Canadian parliamentary party groups                       | JLS            | 9(4)            | 2003        | 1                         | 1  | No                              |

| <b>Author(s)</b>                  | <b>Title</b>   | <b>Journal</b> | <b>Vol(Iss)</b> | <b>Year</b> | <b>Countries compared</b> | <b>Legislatures compared</b> | <b>Comp. theory (post-2000)</b> |
|-----------------------------------|--|----------------|-----------------|-------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Tremblay, Manon<br>Trimble, Linda | Still different after all these years? A comparison of female and male Canadian MPs in the twentieth century                             | JLS            | 10(1)           | 2004        | 1                         | 1                            | No                              |
| Jonathan Malloy                   | The executive and parliament in Canada   | JLS            | 10(2)           | 2004        | 2<br>(UK)                 | 2                            | Yes                             |
| Docherty, David<br>White, Stephen | Parliamentary Democracy in Canada  | PA             | 57(3)           | 2004        | 1                         | 1                            | No                              |
| Pond, David                       | Imposing a neo-liberal theory of representation on the Westminster model: A Canadian case  | JLS            | 11(2)           | 2005        | 1                         | 1                            | No                              |
| White, Graham                     | Traditional aboriginal values in a Westminster parliament: The legislative assembly of Nunavut   | JLS            | 12(1)           | 2006        | 1                         | 1<br>(Nunavut)               | No                              |
| Pond, David                       | Legislative Control of Cabinet Appointments to the Public Service: A Canadian Case-Study in the Political Limits to Parliamentary Reform | PA             | 61(1)           | 2008        | 1                         | 1<br>(Ontario)               | Yes                             |
| Blidook, Kelly                    | Exploring the Role of 'Legislators' in Canada: Do Members of Parliament Influence Policy?  | JLS            | 16(1)           | 2010        | 1                         | 1                            | Yes                             |

\*Denotes a non-Canadian co-author

**Appendix II - Articles published in the *Canadian Journal of Political Science* between 1985-2010 found with search for “parliament\*” or “parlement\*” or “legislat\*” and categorized as being primarily focused on legislative studies**

| <b>Author(s)</b>                           | <b>Title</b>  | <b>Vol(Iss)</b> | <b>Year</b> | <b>Countries compared</b> | <b>Legislatures compared</b> | <b>Comp. theory (post 2000)</b> |
|--|---|-----------------|-------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Pross, A. Paul                             | Parliamentary Influence and the Diffusion of Power  | 18(2)           | 1985        | 1                         | 1                            | NA                              |
| Atkinson, Michael M.<br>Mancuso, Maureen   | Do We Need a Code of Conduct for Politicians? The Search for an Elite Political Culture of Corruption in Canada | 18(3)           | 1985        | 1                         | 1                            | NA                              |
| Skogstad, Grace                            | Interest Groups, Representation and Conflict Management in the Standing Committees of the House of Commons      | 18(4)           | 1985        | 1                         | 1                            | NA                              |
| Dacks, Gurston                             | Politics on the Last Frontier: Consociationalism in the Northwest Territories                                   | 19(2)           | 1986        | 1                         | 1<br>(NWT)                   | NA                              |
| Resnick, Philip                            | Montesquieu Revisited, or the Mixed Constitution and the Separation of Powers in Canada                         | 20(1)           | 1987        | 1                         | 1                            | NA                              |
| Barrie, Doreen<br>Gibbins, Roger           | Parliamentary Careers in the Canadian Federal State   | 22(1)           | 1989        | 1                         | 1                            | NA                              |
| Heard, Andrew D.                           | Recognizing the Variety among Constitutional Conventions  | 22(1)           | 1989        | 1                         | 1                            | NA                              |
| Massicotte, Louis                          | Cohésion et dissidence à l'Assemblée nationale du Québec depuis 1867  | 22(3)           | 1989        | 1                         | 1<br>(Quebec)                | NA                              |
| Sutherland, S. L.                          | Responsible Government and Ministerial Responsibility: Every Reform Is Its Own Problem                          | 24(1)           | 1991        | 2<br>(UK)                 | 2                            | NA                              |
| White, Graham                              | Westminster in the Arctic: The Adaptation of British Parliamentarism in the Northwest Territories               | 24(3)           | 1991        | 1                         | 1<br>(NWT)                   | NA                              |
| Atkinson, Michael M.<br>Docherty, David C. | Moving Right along: The Roots of Amateurism in the Canadian House of Commons                                    | 25(2)           | 1992        | 1                         | 1                            | NA                              |
| Pétry, François                            | The Party Agenda Model: Election Programmes and Government Spending in Canada                                   | 28(1)           | 1995        | 1                         | 1                            | NA                              |
| Smith, David E.                            | Bagehot, the Crown and the Canadian Constitution  | 28(4)           | 1995        | 1                         | 1                            | NA                              |
| Flanagan, Thomas                           | The Staying Power of the Legislative Status Quo: Collective Choice in Canada's Parliament after Morgentaler     | 30(1)           | 1997        | 1                         | 1                            | NA                              |
| Howlett, Michael                           | Predictable and Unpredictable Policy Windows: Institutional and Exogenous Correlates of Canadian                | 31(3)           | 1998        | 1                         | 1                            | NA                              |

| <b>Author(s)</b>                                    | <b>Title</b>   | <b>Vol(Iss)</b> | <b>Year</b> | <b>Countries compared</b> | <b>Legislatures compared</b> | <b>Comp. theory (post 2000)</b> |
|---|--|-----------------|-------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
|   | Federal Agenda-Setting   |                 |             |                           |                              |                                 |
| Tremblay, Manon                                     | Do Female MPs Substantively Represent Women? A Study of Legislative Behaviour in Canada's 35th Parliament  | 31(3)           | 1998        | 1                         | 1                            | NA                              |
| Savoie, Donald                                      | The Rise of Court Government in Canada   | 32(4)           | 1999        | 1                         | 1                            | NA                              |
| Anderson, Cameron<br>Goodyear-Grant,<br>Elizabeth   | Conceptions of Political Representation in Canada: An Explanation of Public Opinion  | 38(4)           | 2005        | 1                         | 1                            | Yes                             |
| Atkinson, Michael M.<br>Bierling, Gerald            | Politicians, the Public and Political Ethics: Worlds Apart   | 38(4)           | 2005        | 1                         | 1                            | Yes                             |
| Heard, Andrew D.                                    | Just What is a Vote of Confidence? The Curious Case of May 10, 2005  | 40(2)           | 2007        | 1                         | 1                            | No                              |
| Tremblay, Manon<br>Mullen, Stephanie                | Le Comité permanent de la condition féminine de la Chambre des communes du Canada : un outil au service de la représentation politique des femmes? | 40(3)           | 2007        | 1                         | 1                            | Yes                             |
| Kerby, Matthew                                      | Worth the Wait: Determinants of Ministerial Appointment in Canada 1935–2008  | 42(3)           | 2009        | 1                         | 1                            | Yes                             |
| Soroka, Stuart N.<br>Penner, Eric<br>Blidook, Kelly | Constituency Influence in Parliament   | 42(3)           | 2009        | 1                         | 1                            | Yes                             |
| Ferris, J. Stephen<br>Voia, Marcel-Cristian         | What Determines the Length of a Typical Canadian Parliamentary Government?   | 42(4)           | 2009        | 1                         | 1                            | Yes                             |