Legislative Voting in the Canadian Parliament

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Abstract

The paper applies a Bayesian Markov Chain Monte Carlo estimation methodology to scale roll call votes in the 35^{th} and 38^{th} Canadian Parliaments over a multidimensional policy space. The results clearly demonstrate that policy debates are two-dimensional in Canada. The first dimension represents the classical division between the governing and the opposition parties that has been found in similar Parliamentary systems (Hix and Noury 2007*b*). We also find a relevant second dimension which captures the opposition between Quebec and the Western provinces of Canada. Our results show that there is a clear separation between the Reform Party (and later the Conservatives) and the Bloc Quebecois in both Parliaments; whereas the Liberals and the NDP occupy the center on this regional division issue. We also note that the newly created Conservative Party has moved closer to the center and the governing Liberals in the 38^{th} Parliament. This results is explained by the recent party merger between the right wing political formations in Canada.

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1 Overview

Scaling legislative roll call votes in a multidimensional issue space is a common practice in the United States Congress (Poole and Rosenthal 1997*a*; Poole 2007; Poole 2005; Heckman and Snyder 1997; Clinton, Jackman and Rivers 2004). The idea behind this methodology is that legislators have underlying ideal points over a set of policy alternatives in a low dimensional Eucledian space (Hinich and Munger 1997). Lawmakers will support a new bill if the distance between their own ideal points and the status quo is greater than the distance between their own preference and the proposed policy alternative. Ideal points are usually calculated by aggregating roll call votes to create vote-based scores for each individual legislators. One of the main characteristics of the spatial analysis of roll call voting is that the distribution of ideal point between legislators generally reflects partisan affiliation within the legislature (Clinton, Jackman and Rivers 2004). Party members tend to have similar preferences; hence their votes tend to be clustered together over the course of a legislative session. The second most important finding of the spatial analysis of roll call voting is that much of the voting behavior can be explained by a stable, low-dimensional issue space, which is generally limited to no more than two dimensions. In the United States for example, the first and most significant issue dimension corresponds to the classical left-right ideological continuum; while the second dimension is related to issues of state rights and civil rights (Poole 2007).

Of course the analysis of roll call votes is not well suited for every type of legislatures. In the most perfect scenario, the absence of parties, log-rolls, or other factors affecting legislative preferences could theoretically give us the precise location of a lawmaker's ideal point on a given policy dimension (or a specific policy issue). However, most legislatures have some institutional characteristics that constrain the behavior of its members. Generally, the absence of political parties (Jenkins 1999) allows for the greatest amount of liberty. In this context, legislators have the most opportunity to vote according to their own preferences. But even under these conditions, strategic behavior or position-taking can theoretically lead a representative to vote against his or her own underlying interest.

Nevertheless, in countries like the United States where party discipline is weak, we still find that given a sufficiently large number of roll call votes, the scaling of ideal point estimates can actually represent a legislator's ideology over time (Poole 2007). In Parliamentary systems where party discipline is generally the rule, studies of roll call votes have reached a different conclusion. For instance, in their study of legislative behavior in fourteen Parliaments, Hix and Noury (2007*b*)

have concluded that the dominant feature of voting in most parliamentary systems corresponds to a division between government and opposition members; not the classical left-right conflict which is generally assumed to be found in the first dimension of legislative voting (McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal 2006). Hix and Noury (2007*b*) explain this finding by the fact that parties in the opposition usually vote together against the party (or parties) in government, regardless of whether they prefer a government proposal to the existing status quo. In other words, opposition members vote against the government to signal their opposition rather than their discontent with a particular proposal. One extreme example of such a legislature is the Australian Parliament (Jackman 2001), where party discipline induces little or no variance in the voting profiles of legislators from the same party. In this country, parties can actually look like unitary actors, representing the cumulative interest of its members. On the other hand, we find much more variance in the Brazilian case (Hix and Noury 2007*b*; Desposato 2006), where an important proportion of MPs (Members of Parliament) switch their allegiance between parties when casting votes in the *Congresso Nacional*.

Since Canada has a Parliamentary system where strong party discipline is the norm (Kam 2001), it has generally been assumed that any study of roll call votes would only yield a limited amount of information – such as the location of the parties in a single dimensional setting. Yet, closer examination of roll call votes demonstrates that there are indeed cases where MPs vote against their own party. For example, in the 35^{th} Parliament, 95.7% of the Liberals voted with the majority of the party. This number may appear high, but it shows that the support for party leadership is not constant. There are instances where the discipline may be weaker, such as on issues related to private bills or in the rare cases of open votes. In addition, in certain cases abstentions and non-voting in a Parliament may also represent a different type of protest against one's own leadership.

As long as we find some variation in Parliamentary voting in the Canadian legislature, the scaling of roll call votes will identify the location of all MPs (and their party) in a multidimensional issue space. Such an analysis could be really interesting since the Canadian party system has experienced some major transformations in recent years. With the introduction of two new parties in the 35th parliament, the distribution of seat has been significantly altered in the Commons. In addition, the new party system has also been associated with a new salient dimension of conflicts in Canadian politics opposing Quebec nationalists (represented by the Bloc Quebecois) to Western regionalists (represented by the Reform Party which was later renamed the Canadian Alliance)(Flanagan 1998). This new line of conflict goes beyond the traditional division found in the first dimension of roll call votes that usually opposes the governing party to the minority in parliamentary systems. We

can explain this distinction by the fact that Bloc has vowed to support (oppose) any bill in favor (against) the interests of Quebec, regardless of whether the bills originate from the government or not. The opposite pattern of legislative behavior may also be found within the Reform Party since this formation originates from a pro-western, social-conservative and anti-Quebec movement (Laycock 2002). Hence, any study of roll call votes in recent Canadian Parliaments could reveal a clear opposition between these parties and reflect the regional division between western provinces and Quebec. Furthermore, by comparing the location of the Reform and the Conservative Party in a pre and a post-merger Parliament, we could also determine if the recent merger between both of these parties has created a more moderate right wing coalition (Belanger and Godbout 2008).

One of the consequence of the recent party merger has been the formation of to consecutive minority government in the 38^{th} and 39^{th} Parliaments. So a spatial analysis of roll call votes in Canada could also test for the effects of minority government on party discipline. Hence, by comparing the spatial location of the governing Liberals who had a clear majority in the 35^{th} Parliament with the minority Liberal government of the 38^{th} Parliament, we could measure the influence of party size on roll call voting behavior.

The remaining of this paper will attempt to test these two hypotheses by scaling the roll call votes in the 35^{th} and 38^{th} Canadian Parliaments using a Bayesian Markov Chain Monte Carlo estimation methodology. The paper proceeds as follow: in the next section we provide a brief overview of the recent evolution of the Canadian party system; we also introduce the two research hypotheses (the second dimension and party size hypotheses) that will guide our empirical study. In the following sections we present the data and methodology employed in our analysis of roll call votes and review some of the key findings. In the final section, we conclude.

2 The Canadian Party System

The Canadian party system has experienced an important number of transformations in recent years. First of all, the emergence of two new parties following the 1993 election (a nationalist party from Quebec, the Bloc Quebecois, and a Western Regional party, the Reform Party) has precipitated the demise of one of the oldest political party in Canada (the Progressive Conservative Party). The advent of these new parties has not only changed the distribution of seats in Parliament, it has also introduced a new salient dimension of political conflicts at the federal level opposing Quebec nationalists (represented by the Bloc Quebecois) to Western regionalists (represented by the Reform

Party which was later renamed the Canadian Alliance (Flanagan 1998)).

Up until the 1990s, the Conservative and the Liberal parties have always been the two historically dominant political formations in the House of Commons. However, this dominance soon ended after the 1993 election – an election where the Tories lost 167 of their 169 incumbent seats. The roots of this defeat can be linked to the constitutional crisis in Canada. After the failure of the 1980 referendum on secession in Quebec, the Liberal government of Pierre Trudeau proposed a series of amendments to the Canadian constitution in order to resolve some of the issues raised by Quebec nationalists. Although this new constitution was adopted in 1982, it was never ratified by Quebec. And the failure of the federal government to meet Quebec's demands antagonized a majority of the province's French speaking population. The Conservatives who received most of their electoral support in Western Canada, saw this as an excellent opportunity to gain an important number of seats in the Commons. Their leader, Brian Mulroney, proposed to amend the newly adopted constitution in the 1984 election campaign. This strategy proved successful since the Conservatives won the following two elections (1984 and 1988). However, once in power, the Mulroney government organized two constitutional conferences (in 1987 and 1992) that produced a set of amendments to change the 1982 constitution. However, both proposals ultimately failed to be ratified by a majority of the Provincial legislatures and the Canadian population.

The failure to amend the constitution can partially be explained by the heterogeneity of the coalition of interest constructed under the Mulroney government. The strong contingent of Conservative Quebec MPs was at odds with the traditional western Canadian right wing ideology. The rest of the Conservative caucus had some reserve in granting additional constitutional power to Quebec. Consequently, dissension grew among the ranks of the Tories, and many western Canadians voters opted to support a new political formation in the 1988 election - the Reform Party. As a result, the Tories gradually lost ground in the Canadian west (Woolstencroft 1994). It was the Reform Party who ultimately addressed the issues of alienation and disenchantment left by the Conservative Party in this region (Bernard 1996). And following the rejection of the second round of constitutional negotiations in 1992, six member of the Conservative caucus from Quebec resigned and formed a new political party, the Bloc Quebecois, which was to be principally devoted to the defense of the French speaking population of Quebec in the Canadian Parliament.

These two political formations competed against each other for the first time in the 1993 election, which brought forth a new fundamental political cleavage in the Canadian party system. By focusing the 1984 campaign on the issue of constitutional reform, Brian Mulroney introduced a new salient

political dimension in the minds of the Canadian electorate related to the rights of the French speaking province of Quebec (Johnston, Blais, Brady and Crte 1992; Nevitte, Johnston, Blais, Brady and Gidengil 1995). The electoral defeat of the Old Tories in 1993 can be explained by the fact that the Bloc Quebecois outflanked the Conservative party on this issue and captured its share of the votes in Quebec. Likewise, the Reform party captured the traditional support of the Conservative in the West by focusing its campaign on similar regional appeals (western alienation, traditional conservatism) that disadvantaged the Tories.

The subsequent 1997 and 2000 elections have somewhat consolidated the regional support for both the Reform party and the Bloc Quebecois. In an attempt to broaden the Reformers' electoral base and to replace the Progressive Conservatives as the new right wing party in Canada, the Reform party was renamed the Canadian Alliance before the 2000 election; it also adopted a softer right-wing policy platform and changed leader. However, these efforts proved insufficient. In the 2000 election, the Canadian Alliance only gained six additional seats than it won in 1997. The previous result can be explained by the fact that the Canadian Alliance was still perceived as too extreme by a majority of the Canadian population (Blais, Gidengil, Nadeau and Nevitte 2002). It finally took a merger with the remaining members of the Progressive Conservative Party in December 2003 for the Canadian Alliance to shake its reputation of being a regional based populist party from the west. Renamed the Conservative Party of Canada, the merger between the Progressive Conservative Party and the Canadian Alliance was a success because it provided the former Reformers with a more moderate platform and a more moderate pool of candidates (Belanger and Godbout 2008). It also provided the Progressive Conservative Party with much needed liquidity; the old Tories basically faced bankruptcy after the 2000 election. The merger was enough to force the Liberals into a minority government after the 2004 election, the first such government since 1979. The situation didn't improve in the subsequent 2006 election. However, this time it was the Conservative Party who won and formed a minority government.

The preceding brief description of the recent changes in the Canadian party system have highlighted two important characteristics of its legislative organization. To begin, any study of recent roll call votes should clearly identify at least two voting dimensions in this legislature. We should find 1) a clear opposition between the governing MPs and the members of the opposition (the first dimension) and 2) a clear opposition between the Reform Party and the Bloc Quebecois (the second dimension, the Pro-Quebec/Pro-western regional dimension). The second dimension of conflict will also be salient in the post-merger party system since the Bloc Quebecois remains the third

largest party group in the Canadian Parliament. However, like Belanger and Godbout (2008), we believe that the merger will have moved an important proportion of Conservatives MPs closer to the Liberals (and the New Democratic Party) on that second issue dimension. We can explain this movement by the fact that the main objective of the merger has always been to create a more moderate coalition of former western Reformists and Conservatives MPs. On their own, the Reformists could not break outside of the west because of their stance on Quebec which was perceived to be too extreme by a majority of Canadians (Blais et al. 2002).

The Reformist made their first significant gains by politicizing the cleavage between Quebec and the rest of Canada in the 1993 campaign, and they followed suite in the 1997 election by capitalizing on the antipathy that many voters still felt toward this province (Nevitte, Blais, Gidengil and Nadeau 2000). And later, the Canadian Alliance failed to distance itself from this image in the 2000 election. As Belanger and Godbout (2008) demonstrate, it was only after the merger with the Progressive Conservative Party that the former Reformists lost this reputation in the minds of the Canadian electorate. So by comparing the the roll call votes of individual MPs in a pre and a post-merger Parliaments, we should find that the spatial location of the new Conservative Party is more moderate than the Reform Party on the issue dimension opposing Quebec nationalists to western regionalists.

The second characteristics of the party system relates to the effects of minority governments on roll call votes and party discipline. Since the Liberals formed a minority government in 2004, we should also find a significant shift in the location of parties on the first dimension representing the support/opposition towards the governing party. We expect this change because a minority government has to collaborate with legislators from the opposition in order to pass any legislation. Thus, an increase in intra-party voting between the government and the opposition parties could theoretically move them closer together in the first dimension. But this should be observed on this dimension alone. In this context, it will be impossible to determine if any observed moderation in the voting record of new Conservative MPs was caused by the merger or by an increase in intra-party cooperation. It is quite possible that some Conservatives will have displayed a more moderate legislative record to avoid the fall of the minority government. However, the same cannot be said about a second dimension of voting, which represents a division of roll call votes that fails to correctly classify MPs on the government/opposition issue dimension.

The analysis presented below tests for these two hypotheses by analyzing all roll call votes from the 35th (January 1994 to April 1997) and the 38th (October 2004 to November 2005) Canadian

Parliaments. However, before proceeding with the empirical analysis, we present a brief overview of the general roll call scaling methodology used in this study.

3 Method

The spatial model of politics arranges both actors and policies geometrically in a low-dimensional Euclidian space. The standard interpretation, common in the U.S. literature, is that this space represents ideology (Poole and Rosenthal 1997*b*). An alternative interpretation is that it is only representing the revealed positions of the legislators, when ideological, strategic and other considerations have been taken into account (Hix and Noury 2007*a*). In this paper, we subscribe to the latter interpretation. We estimate the model using a standard simulation based Bayesian approach (for an introduction to the Bayesian framework, see for example Gelman, Carlin, S. and Rubin (2004), Gill (2002) or, Jackman (2000)).

The Bayesian approach to the analysis of roll call votes is implemented and well documented in the *pscl* package in R (Jackman 2006).[1] The description of the item response model is taken from (Clinton, Jackman and Rivers 2004). A thorough discussion of practical issues related to fitting this type of models can be found in (Bafumi, Gelman, Park and Kaplan 2005). The model can be describes as follows. The data has n legislators. They vote on m proposals. On each vote *j=1,...,m*, legislator *i=1,...,n* chooses between a "Yea" position ζ_j and a "Nay" position ψ_j located in the Euclidian space, $\mathbb{R}^d$ where d is the number of dimensions. Then, $y_{ij} = 1$ if legislator i votes Yea on roll call j and $y_{ij} = 0$ if she votes Nay. The revealed position of legislator i is $\theta_i \in \mathbb{R}$, while η_{ij} and ν_{ij} are stochastic elements whose distribution is jointly normal. Assuming quadratic loss functions, the utility for legislator i of voting Yea on proposal j is $U_i(\zeta_j) = -||\theta_i - \zeta_j||^2 + \eta_{ij}$. Similarly, the utility of voting no is $U_i(\psi_j) = -||\theta_i - \psi_j||^2 + \nu_{ij}$. The variance of the stochastic elements is $(\eta_{ij} - \nu_{ij}) = \sigma_j^2$. The Euclidean norm is $\| \cdot \|$. Utility maximizing implies that legislator i votes "Yea" on vote j if $U_i(\zeta_j) = -\|\theta_i - \zeta_j\|^2 + \eta_{ij} > U_i(\psi_j) = -\|\theta_i - \psi_j\|^2 + \nu_{ij}$ and "Nay" otherwise. The model can be re-parameterized as a hierarchical probit model $P(y_{ij} = 1) = \Phi(\beta_j'\theta_i - \alpha_j)$, where $\beta_j = \frac{2(\zeta_j - \psi_j)}{\sigma_j}$ and $\alpha_j = \frac{(\zeta_j'\zeta_j - \psi_j'\psi_j)}{\sigma_j}$. $\Phi(\cdot)$ is the standard normal function. θ_i is legislator i's revealed position.

[1] See also (Martin and Quinn 2006).

3.1 Data

We analyze all roll call votes from the 35^{th} and the 38^{th} Canadian Parliaments. The data of the 35^{th} Parliament was taken from Kam (2001) while the data for the 38^{th} Parliament was taken directly from the Canadian Hansard records which can be found online [2]. Overall, the 35^{th} Parliament included 735 roll call votes while the shorter 38^{th} Parliament recorded 190 roll call votes.[3] Table 1 shows the composition of the two parliaments.

Party	35^{th}	38^{th}
Liberal Party	177	135
Bloc Quebecois	54	54
Reform	52	
Conservative		99
NDP	9	19
PC	2	
Independent	1	

Table 1: The table shows composition of the 35^{th} and 38^{th} Parliaments

We use the pscl package in R to estimate two-dimensional item response models for the two parliaments. Following the conventional practice in research on roll call voting in Parliaments we drop votes with fewer than 5 legislators on the losing side. We do this to ensure that the results are not driven by extreme lopsided votes. We drop 36 votes in the 35^{th} Parliament. This takes the number of analyzed votes down to 699. By the same criterium, we drop 9 votes in the 38^{th} Parliament. This means that we have 181 votes we can analyze. To ensure that the the estimated Euclidian space is comparable we start three legislators, Solberg-Reform/conservative (-1,-1), Volpe-Liberals (1,0) and Bergeron-Block Quebecois (-1,1) at the same location in both session. This permits us to compare the relative positions of MPs in the 35^{th} and 38^{th} Parliaments [4].

The Gibb sampler ran for 100,000 iterations. Only every 100^{th} iteration was stored. The first 10,000 iterations are discarded to ensure that the results are not influenced by the starting values. The inferences are from 900 relatively independent samples of the posterior distribution. We estimated several versions of the models with and without identifying constraints. The substantive results are robust to reasonable specifications of priors and starting values.

4 Results

[2]The Hansard can be found at http://www.parl.gc.ca/

[3]A roll call vote in the Canadian Parliament occurs after a request is made by 5 or more MPs.

[4]As opposed to their absolute numeric positions

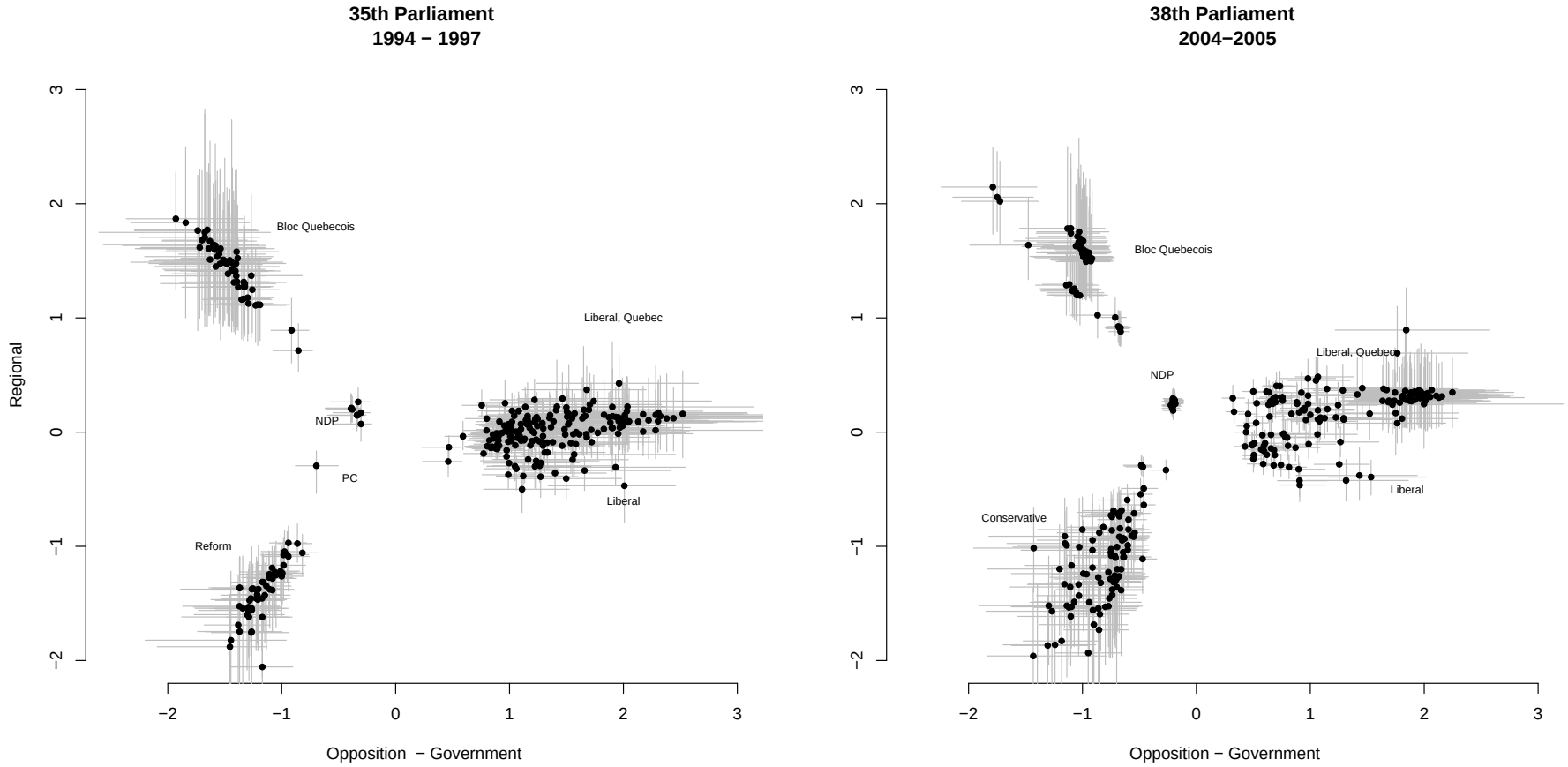

Figure 1: The left side of the figure shows the revealed ideal points of the legislators in the 35^{th} Canadian Parliament. The right side of the figure shows the revealed ideal points of the legislators in the 38^{th} Canadian Parliament. The black circles represents the median location of each member, while the grey lines show the 95% Bayesian credibility interval surrounding these points.

Figure 1 summarizes the results in both Parliaments. The two-dimensional models fits the data extremely well. In both plots, the first dimension reveals itself as being the pro-government/opposition while the location of the parties in the second dimension lead us to conclude that it represents the regional division between western provinces and Quebec. The model correctly predicts about 98% of all voting decisions in both parliaments. The one-dimensional model does substantively better in the 38^{th} than in the 35^{th}. The one-dimensional model is correctly predicting 88.96% of the voting decisions in the 35^{th} and 91.67% of the voting decisions in the 38^{th} Parliament. The proportional reduction of error are 20.55 and 32.58 for the one and two dimensional models in the 35^{th} Parliament. It is 39.69 and 49.39 in the 38^{th}.

Figure 1 clearly shows that policy debates are two-dimensional in Canada. The first dimension representing the government/opposition division has been found in similar parliamentary systems (Hix and Noury 2007*b*). In both Parliaments, we identified a distinct separation between the voting records of the governing Liberals and the remaining opposition parties (the NDP, the Bloc Quebecois, the Reform, and the Conservative). This division is somewhat less clear in the 38^{th} Parliament when the Liberals formed a minority government. In this period, it was necessary for the Liberals to collaborate with either one of the three opposition parties in order to pass any bill. We believe that this sudden surge in intra-party cooperation partially explains why all three parties are much closer to the Liberals on the first dimension issue space in the 38^{th} Parliament. Figure 1 shows that the NDP occupies the center on this same dimension [5]. It also appears that the Conservatives have moved toward the center. This represents a clear departure vis-à-vis the Reform in the 35^{th} Parliament. The Liberals have also moved closer to the other parties in the 38^{th} Parliament. Unlike in the earlier sessions where they had a clear majority, we can clearly distinguish a smaller gap between their position, and the location of both the Bloc Quebecois and the Conservative party on this issue vector.

An example of roll call votes which clearly fits on the first dimension relates to Bill C-37 of the second session of the 35^{th} Parliament. This bill, which was supported by all the Liberals, and opposed by the minority parties, approved the budgetary policy of the Government for the 1997 fiscal year. In the 38th Parliament, certain bills were also only supported by the Liberal minority (and thus failed to be adopted). Their government lost their first vote just a month after taking office. The defeated bill which was jointly opposed by the Conservatives, the NDP, and the Bloc by

[5] One thing is clear, the closest party to the governing Liberals in both the 35^{th} and 38^{th} Parliament is the NDP. This party appears to be voting with the Liberals most of the time, and it also seems to have adopted a similar position on the regional conflict opposing Quebec to western Canada

a vote of 150 to 125, aimed to separate the departments of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (Bill C-31). An even more serious attempt to dissolve the Parliament occurred on May 10, 2005 when the opposition parties in the Commons passed a motion of no-confidence. The vote had the support of the majority: the Conservatives and the Bloc (153 votes) voted against the Liberals and the NDP (150 votes). However, the Liberal government refused to resign, and a crisis was avoided when a second definitive confidence vote passed with a 153-152 vote on May 19, 2005. This outcome wouldn't have been possible without the defection of Belinda Stronach (a Conservative MP) to the Liberal Party.

Looking now at the second relevant dimension of Figure 1 which captures the division between Quebec and the western provinces, we find that the spatial location of the party groups demonstrates that there is indeed a split between Reformists (and later Conservatives) and the Bloc Quebecois; whereas the Liberals and the NDP occupies the center on this issue. Clearly, the division between Quebec and the west is strongest in the 35^{th} Parliament. This should come as no surprise if we consider the fact that both the Bloc and the Reform focused their 1993 election campaigns on the failure of the previous constitutional conventions. In addition, the fact that Quebec held a second referendum on secession in the middle of the 35^{th} Parliament probably increased the salience of the constitutional issue in this Parliament.

Part of the regional division in the second dimension also appears to cross party lines. We notice in Figure 1 that MPs from Quebec in the Liberal party have a tendency to side along the Bloc Quebecois on votes related to Quebec. However, the division is less clear when we consider MPs from the rest of Canada. Western and Eastern MPs outside of Quebec indistinctively cluster together when it comes down to votes on the second dimension. There just doesn't seem to be a strong Western/Eastern division among NDP and Liberal party members on this issue. Put differently, no one is as extreme as the Reformists on this issue in the 35^{th} Parliament.

An example of a vote that clearly fits on the second dimension in the 35^{th} Parliament relates to Bill C-41, which aimed to authorize the construction of a high-speed train linking the cities of Windsor and Quebec. This vote was supported by all the MPs from the Bloc but opposed by almost everyone else in the Chamber. In the 38^{th} Parliament, we find another example in this private Bill C-260 proposed by a member of the Bloc which aimed to require the Government of Canada to consult the provincial governments before negotiating or concluding a treaty with a foreign nation. It should come as no surprise that this bill was supported by the Bloc, and opposed by all the other parties in the Commons.

Since one of the primary goal of the recent fusion between the Progressive Conservative Party and the Canadian Alliance (the re-branded Reform Party) was to create a more moderate permanent right wing coalition, we can determine using Figure 1 if the difference in the position of MPs in the pre and post merger party system has significantly changed. To begin, when we look at the first dimension, we see that the new Conservatives are somewhat closer to the Liberals compared to the Reformists in the 35^{th} Parliament. But as was indicated earlier, it is impossible to disentangle between the moderating effects of the merger or the minority government on the voting records on the government/opposition dimension. However, the same problem should theoretically be absent from the second dimension, since the divisions found on this dimension cannot be explained by the government/opposition issue vector.

Figure 1 shows that there is a lot more movement on the second dimension in the 38^{th} Parliament. It appears that the legislative behavior of the newly formed Conservative party is closer to the Liberal on the regional division issue. This sudden shift can both be explained by the moderating influence of the merger on the former Reform/Alliance Party as well as the influx of newly elected Conservative MPs in the 38^{th} Parliament.

What remains harder to explain is the polarization between the Bloc Quebecois and the other three parties on the second dimension in the 38^{th} Parliament. The extreme location occupied by the Bloc is probably a consequence of their permanent opposition status in the Canadian Parliament. However, without a clear mandate for secession from the provincial government of Quebec, the second dimension seems to have lost some of its salience among the remaining parties. One thing is clear, if the new Conservative party wishes to replace the Bloc Quebecois in the near future, it needs to move even closer to the center on the second dimension. It would be interesting to see just how much has changed in the 39^{th} Canadian Parliament, which is led by a Conservative minority. The first dimension would obviously be reversed with the Conservatives on the right end side. But it is much less clear what may have actually happened to the second regional conflict dimension.

5 Conclusion

This leads us to conclude by arguing that to fully validate the previous hypotheses, we need to increase the number of Parliaments in our roll call analysis. It would have been interesting to see how these parties behaved in the 36^{th} and especially the 37^{th} Parliaments, when the Reform Party changed its name to the Canadian Alliance and elected a new leader. One of the principal aim of

this re-branding was to offer a viable governing alternative to the Liberal Party. Yet, it took the merger with the Progressive Conservative Party to reach this goal. A common explanation for the failure of the Canadian Alliance in the 2000 election was that it was perceived as too extreme by a majority of Canadians (Blais et al. 2002). So by studying the Alliance's roll call behavior in the 37^{th} Parliament, we could actually measure and compared its location with the other Canadian parties. We plan to add this data in a subsequent iteration of this paper.

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