

Appendix B: Legislative Agendas in the Canadian House of Commons, 1st-10th Parliaments

Figure B1 shows the distribution of recorded divisions by types of votes in the first ten Parliaments. It provides evidence of the increasing amount of government business on the legislative agenda. The plot does not capture all the bills and motions debated in the legislature (some of them were adopted by unanimous consent, or by unrecorded hand divisions). However, it does summarize the distribution of votes on what probably were the most divisive issues of the period. The three lines in the plot show the proportion of recorded votes that were originally related to either government business, private member's business (which include all public bills and motions introduced by non-Cabinet members), and private bills (affecting individuals or specific groups). We can clearly see that the majority of recorded votes in the Commons is associated with the government. The overall proportion of government vote is high at first, and then declines gradually before expanding again at the end of the period. The gains made by the government appear to be mainly at the expense of private member business. At the time, the recorded journals did not differentiate between opposition and private member business. Most of the motions in this category were from opposition party members (and their leadership). However, we also find amendments and public bills introduced by backbench MPs from the governing party. This shows that any member could present a motion or a bill on a matter of national interest—*jus generale publicum* (O'Brien and Bosc, 2009). As with the British parliamentary procedures, these public bills introduced by backbench members could not raise taxes, or spend public money. However without an analysis of the actual content of these votes, it is impossible to determine whether the capacity of the government to control the agenda has actually kept potential divisive issues from the floor.

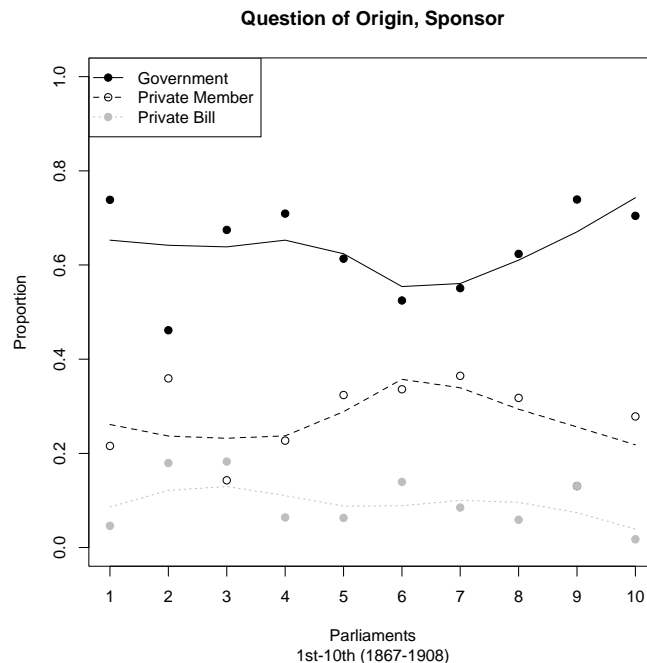


Figure B1: The points in the plot report the proportion of recorded votes in each Parliament related to government business, private member's business (which include all public bills and motions), or private bills for individuals or groups. The lines are Loess curves following the trend of the data.

Figure B2 shows the development of party unity for different types of recorded divisions, as captured by the Rice index (Rice, 1925). The Rice index is obtained by taking the average of the absolute value of the difference between the percentage of ayes and nays in all the votes for a given party in a legislative term. We report the score for each major party as well as for the Cabinet (that is, the percentage of Cabinet members voting together). The plots in figure B2 demonstrate that voting unity increased over time. It is highest for the Cabinet, followed by government votes, then by non-government public motions or bills (what we label opposition votes), and finally by private bills. Note that at the time, private bills included such issues as divorce and proposals to incorporate businesses.

Since Westminster-style parliamentary systems provide most incentives for members to be loyal when they are forming the government, it is not surprising that we find that cohesion is higher if a party won a majority of the seats. Notice, for example, that the voting cohesion of the Conservative party declines when they are in the opposition for the first time in the third Parliament. While being in the majority seems to improve the level of unity for the first Liberal government in the third Parliament, it cannot be the whole story because party unity continues to increase after this term. At the end of the period, we note that both parties are able to present a unified force in the vast majority of the votes.

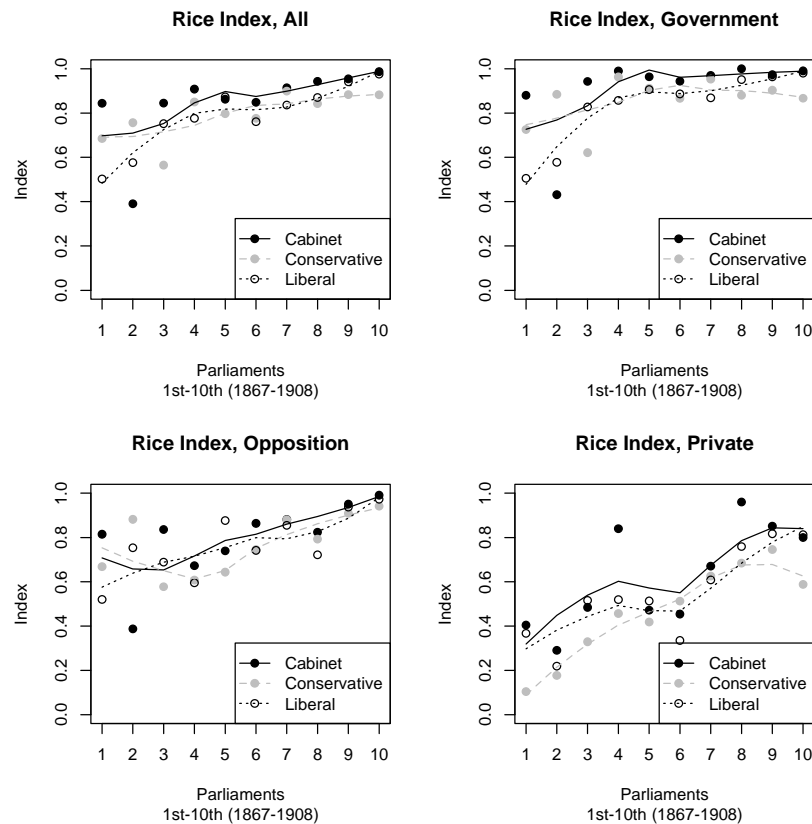


Figure B2: The points in the plots report Rice index in each parliament for the Cabinet, the Conservative and Liberal parties by type of divisions. The divisions can either be related to government business, opposition motions (which include all public bills and motions) or private bills. The lines are Loess curves following the trend of the data.