



Canadian Study
of Parliament Group

Party message discipline at the federal and provincial level

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Over the past year, I conducted in-depth interviews (n=131) with current and former parliamentarians across Canada, as well as political staff. The interviews explored the nuances of party message discipline at the federal and provincial level. A book manuscript is currently under review with a Canadian publisher (see Appendix for the table of contents). New data are required in order to publish the remaining information compiled during the interviews.

1) *Review of Hansard Debates*: The purpose of this phase is to identify an expected increase over time in parliamentarians making allegations of centralized message coordination. A student will conduct a keyword search of the Hansard record of legislative debates in the House of Commons, provincial legislatures and the territories to compile frequency counts of words and expressions associated with party message discipline (e.g., messaging, script, speaking notes, talking points), including French variations. The student will also identify some poignant examples of parliamentary exchanges on the topic. In a party system it is expected that members 2

of the opposition are far more likely to make allegations of message coordination than government-side members do. We can hypothesize there are fewer complaints about message coordination in a system of consensus government in Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

2) *Review of Election Platforms*: The purpose here is to identify trends and themes about demands for parliamentary reform. A student will manually review federal and provincial political parties' election platforms that are archived with www.poltext.org to compile instances (or lack thereof) where promises are made to give parliamentarians more freedom. Special attention will be paid to proposals to change the standing orders, to grant legislative committees more authority, and other ways that private members could obtain a greater ability to contribute to parliamentary activities. It is expected that opposition parties and parties with new leaders are most likely to pledge more independence for private members.

3) *Review of Governing Party MP Tweets*: This phase will identify message coordination and repetition (or lack thereof) among ministers and government-side backbenchers. A student will use a Twitter extractor to scrape and archive what the MPs tweeted in July and August 2019 when there was a flurry of spending announcements during adjournment and in the lead-up to the dissolution of Parliament. The tweets will be coded to identify repetition and will pay special attention to key words, to retweets of ministerial posts and to hashtags. Human coding is required because MPs and their staff rephrase messaging to avoid media stories about parroting. It is expected that certain private members are prone to behave as brand ambassadors who amplify government information as part of a permanent campaign, particularly parliamentary secretaries and MPs in marginal seats. If necessary, adjustments will be made to the sample timeframe to stay within budgeted work hours.