Building the Parliament of 2042: Fostering cross-party cooperation

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Building the Parliament of 2042: Fostering cross-party cooperation

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Governments should have to negotiate their policy decisions with other parties in Parliament, even if it is less clear who is accountable for the resulting policy.

Source: Vox Pop Labs, 2017, MyDemocracy.ca Final Report
A party that wins the most seats in an election should still have to compromise with other parties, even if it means reconsidering some of its policies.

Source: Vox Pop Labs, 2017, MyDemocracy.ca Final Report
It is better for several parties to have to govern together than for one party to make all the decisions in government, even if it takes longer for government to get things done.

Source: Vox Pop Labs, 2017, MyDemocracy.ca Final Report
Members of Parliament should always act in the interests of their constituents, even if it means going against their own party

Source: Vox Pop Labs, 2017, MyDemocracy.ca Final Report
Lessons learned

- Electoral reform unlikely
- Canadians want more inclusive decision making
- Canadians want more independent MPs
All-Party Groups: characteristics

- Voluntary
- Informal
- Backbench driven
- Two types
  - Inter-country
  - Subject
- Externally supported
APG growth in Canada

Subject groups
Inter-country groups
Method

- Catalogued which groups were in operation over time and tracked their activities
- Interviews with 20 MPs, one former MP, seven Senators, 12 lobbyists, three journalists, and others
All-Party Groups: activities

- Distribute information
- Meet with stakeholders
- Travel
- Symbolic activities
- Conduct inquiries
- Lobby ministers
- Introduce motions and bills
- Diplomatic advocacy
A week in the life

Wednesday, May 6, 2015

• Peter Stoffer MP made Knight in Order of Orange-Nassau for work with Canada-Netherlands Friendship Group

• Anti-poverty Caucus receives 5000 postcards calling for anti-poverty plan
A week in the life

Thursday, May 7, 2015

- Canada-Hong Kong Friendship Group hosts networking breakfast

Saturday, May 9, 2015

- Patrick Brown, Chair of Canada-India, Canada-Vietnam, Diabetes Caucus, Malaria Caucus, etc. wins Ontario PC leadership
Reasons for growth

- Rising policy complexity
- Electoral incentives and constituent expectations
- Policy influence and advocacy
Lobbyist view

“Well, part of what changes public policy is when you have enough legislators, whether it’s among all parties, or the governing party, that agree that the change is needed. Could you achieve your goals without it? Maybe, probably. Not always though. So it certainly doesn’t hurt to have a group of MPs who understand what you’re trying to do… In a minority government, you’ve got to convince at least two parties that’s good policy. In a majority government, it’s less critical to have opposition support, but it never hurts. The government would prefer to have opposition support for a number of things.”

- Corporate Lobbyist
“So all party caucuses are always to the opposition parties’ advantage because it gives us an opportunity to talk to the government in a way that we would not ordinarily be able to do. And it often gives external organizations a mechanism to get to the government in a way that they couldn’t ordinarily do, in a less confrontational, less partisan approach. So the objective underlying this, whether people will acknowledge it or not, is to influence government policy. But that is always an unacknowledged objective, because they [government MPs] would not join these caucuses if it was explicitly stated objective.”

- New Democratic MP
Reasons for growth

- Rising policy complexity
- Electoral incentives and constituent expectations
- Policy influence and advocacy
- Career fulfilment and personal enjoyment

“A white male, aged [in his 60s] with cabinet aspirations? That’s a huge oxymoron right there. From an area that already has a cabinet minister, geographically?”

– Conservative MP
Reasons for growth

- Rising policy complexity
- Electoral incentives and constituent expectations
- Policy influence and advocacy
- Career fulfilment and personal enjoyment
- Demonstration effects
- Repertoires of action

“Benskin recalled the memorable moment when he told his parents he had become the co-chair... it was significant. ‘They know about all the other stuff...but I think this one was probably closer to the heart that their son is in there and speaking for their home country and raising the profile,’”

– Duggal, 2013
“Let's not sugar coat it; he doesn't like the bill. To be candid, I'm not sure he appreciates or even likes the initiative of the sugar caucus itself, because it's not necessarily within our tradition of Canadian parliamentary democracy to have caucuses that bridge party lines… The only other example in this House is a steel caucus.

So we are attempting, in my view, to show, to the Canadian public at least, that there are a number of members of Parliament from different regions, from different provinces, representing different political parties, who regularly have focused on a very specific problem: the Canadian sugar industry.”

- MP Paul Zed, 1995
Conclusion

• Growth resulted from a convergence of interests between lobbyists and MPs

• MPs achieve re-election, influence, relevance, enjoyment

• Lobbyists attract influence, or create appearance of activity
Conclusion

- Expansion of All-Party Groups could help Parliament look more like system Canadians want
- Builds cross-party culture, increases engagement with external actors
- However, partisan resistance continues
- Also some concerns:
  - Some issues receive attention, others don’t
  - May not represent public priorities
  - Little transparency on support from lobbyists
APG growth in the United Kingdom