



verdict of the electorate and work effectively as an opposition. On the other hand,

If governments are not made and unmade in the House of commons what does this mean for the status of Parliament (p.151)

The book concludes, uncharacteristically, on a pessimistic note. Smith suggests that we are embracing irreconcilable principles in our constitution. Ultimately the question is whether members of the House of Commons owe fidelity to their respective constituents or to their sovereign. It cannot be both.

Gary Levy  
Editor

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**Parlementarisme et Francophonie, edited by Éric Montigny and François Gélinau, Québec City: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2012, 341 p.**

This edited volume is a result of an international symposium on francophone parliaments, *Plurielle et fière de l'être: la Francophonie parlementaire*, organized by Laval University's Research Chair on Democracy and Parliamentary Institutions. It took place in the Legislative Council Room of the Québec National Assembly on February 25 and 26, 2011, with over 200 in attendance.

The Francophonie (with a capital F) refers to the institutional structure governing relations among French-speaking states. The parliaments of these states and federations are eligible for membership in an interparliamentary and international cooperative assembly, the *Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie*.

The roughly 70 member parliaments are highly diverse both in how they are organized and how they conduct themselves. Until 2011, no real comparative study of this diversity had been carried out, hence the symposium in Québec City. The aim was to catalogue the various parliamentary practices within the Francophonie, explore the differences between the parliaments and identify where they are similar.

For this summary, we first focus on Canada's various legislatures that were discussed in oral and written contributions (the Parliament of Canada, the Québec National Assembly and the Legislative Assembly of New

Brunswick). We then turn our attention to the Parliament of the French Republic and to the Swiss Federal Assembly.

Chapter 1 deals with the Parliament of Canada. From the outset, author Éric Montigny states that the executive branch plays a leading role in Parliament, the government, through its House leaders, controls the legislative agenda. Then there is the prime minister, who enjoys the powers of an elected monarch. As the head of the government, he is able to make many public appointments: judges (including provincial superior court justices), senior federal public servants, senators and so forth.

In a minority parliament, the opposition parties have significant influence over the fate of the government's legislative program, obliging the government to negotiate passage of its bills one by one. Minority governments occur relatively frequently in Canada; there have been roughly a dozen since 1867.

The author argues that the principle of responsible government in Canada blurs the lines between the executive and the legislative. However, this does not prevent the opposition from exercising meaningful control over the government and the public service, for which it has a number of institutional tools at its disposal.

Chapter 2 looks at Québec's parliamentary system. Professor Réjean Pelletier views ministerial responsibility as paradoxically leading to the government's non-responsibility before the Assembly. In his view, this results in unwavering support for the government by the members of the ruling party due to party

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discipline. The many powers that were at one time exercised by the Queen or King have been handed not to the Assembly, but to the Premier. As a result, the government enjoys tremendous control over the legislature. According to Professor Pelletier, in Québec there is not a cooperation of legislative and executive powers, but rather a blending of powers. He cites the UK Parliament as a legislature that Québec's parliamentarians can use as a model for making changes to Question Period and to issues surrounding party discipline.

Chapter 3 focusses on the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick. Author Roger Ouellette writes that the members of the Legislative Assembly in Fredericton must adhere to strict party discipline. He cites the 2011 report *Proposals for Legislative Reform in New-Brunswick*, which recommends that the Assembly consider adopting the UK's three-line-whip system. However, Professor Ouellette expresses some doubt as to the possibility of reforming free votes given the conventions regarding responsible government in Canada.

The parliamentary systems of several European states and countries are similar to what is in place in Canada, Québec and New Brunswick in that the executive branch predominates over parliament. This is the conclusion of the chapters focussing on the Belgian Federal Parliament, the Parliament of the French-speaking Community of Belgium, Luxembourg's Chamber of Deputies and the Parliament of the French Republic.

In the case of France, Professor Armel Le Divallec writes in Chapter 9 that both assemblies

in Paris—the Senate and the National Assembly—serve mostly as a check on the government's power, essentially limiting it.

The executive exercises significant influence to oversee and direct assembly business. It dominates the Conference of Presidents, which is responsible for parliamentary planning. The government can also rely on the support of a disciplined majority in the National Assembly. Party discipline is the rule for both the majority and opposition parties.

Reforms introduced in 2008-2009 focussed on reducing the priority given since 1958 to government business. Under this reform, one out of four weeks of sitting are now dedicated to assembly business to oversee government and evaluate policies. However, Professor Le Divallec does not believe that this reform will affect the overall balance between the presidency, the government and Parliament. Since 1958, the presidency of the Republic has played a dominant role in the political system, except during periods of cohabitation where the president and the parliamentary majority are in opposition.

As *Parlementarisme et Francophonie* shows, some countries in the Francophonie have political systems that strike a better balance between the government and parliament. Switzerland is one such example. In Chapter 7, Ruth Lüthi and Pierre-Hervé Freléchoz write that the bicameral Federal Assembly occupies a strong position within the country's political system. Roughly 20% of the bills passed into law are private members' bills, and this figure is on the rise. As well, the Parliament in Bern sometimes makes substantial changes to

government bills. Lastly, any federal budget item can be amended via a proposal from one of the two parliamentary finance committees.

Switzerland's political system is not a parliamentary one, even though the authors of *Parlementarisme et Francophonie* refer to it as such in their conclusion (see pages 336 onward); neither is it a presidential system. Francophone authors such as Georges Burdeau and Philippe Lauvaux have called it a "directorial government," meaning that the Federal Assembly and the Federal Council (the Cabinet) exercise only one state function: the government function. There are several ways in which the Swiss political system differs substantially from the Westminster model:

- significant separation of legislative and executive powers
- Parliament cannot bring down the government
- the government does not have the power to dissolve Parliament
- government members are elected by Parliament for the life of that Parliament

In all, the volume edited by Gélinau and Montigny discusses 20 parliaments in the Francophonie, including the legislative bodies of several African countries. Simply from a numerical standpoint, this is a significant sample given the number of sovereign countries (30) and federated states (provinces, cantons – a total of 11) where French is an official or co-official language.

Each chapter broadly describes a legislature, either bicameral or

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unicameral. Contributors to the symposium and the volume were invited to present and analyze the workings of one, two or even several assemblies. They were provided with an analytical framework to use, focussing on four major themes:

- institutional and historical background
- parliamentary organization
- procedure
- parliamentary oversight

This volume helps fill a gap. Not until now has there been a political science monograph providing such a broad survey of Francophone parliaments. Of course, over the years the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie has produced a catalogue of parliamentary procedures and practices (the *Recueil des procédures et des pratiques parlementaires*), which provides information on 33

legislatures, with contributions from officials within the legislatures in question. This document, available only in electronic format, contains chapters presenting the information under 10 major themes.



Sections in the chapters of *Parlementarisme et Francophonie* focus on placing national or subnational legislatures within a broader institutional context. Most of the authors present their country's French-speaking community and its history, institutions, the status of the French language and so forth.

The volume does not contain a summary chapter. Despite the completeness of the national contributions, it definitely lacks a thorough comparative analysis. However, the authors do state that they wish to see a follow-up to their work. They conclude by recommending that further research be conducted into the factors that promote parliamentary reform and institutional arrangements.

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