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How Ideas and Strategic Learning Fostered the 2022 Agreement Between the Liberal Party of Canada and the New Democratic Party

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Abstract

Why did the Liberal Party of Canada (LPC) and the New Democratic Party (NDP) enter into a supply-and-confidence agreement in March 2022? Interparty cooperation among federal parties is rare during minority governments, and yet the agreement created a formal alliance in the House of Commons. In this article, we argue that ideational factors led to the 2022 agreement. We examine the role of programmatic beliefs and strategic learning during the COVID-19 crisis and the 2019-2021 election sequence to shed light on changes in federal parliamentary strategies in Canada. From ad-hoc voting coalitions to extended cooperation on social policymaking, the LPC and the NDP learned how to work together in the House of Commons while using the agreement as a tool to compete with each other in anticipation of the next federal election.

Résumé

Pourquoi le Parti Libéral du Canada (PLC) et le Nouveau Parti Démocratique (NPD) ont formé une entente de soutien et de confiance en mars 2022 ? La coopération est rare entre les partis fédéraux durant les gouvernements minoritaires, qui deviennent de plus en plus fréquents, et pourtant cette entente a créé une alliance formelle à la Chambre des communes. Dans cet article, nous étudions le rôle des idées programmatiques et de l'apprentissage stratégique au cours de la pandémie de COVID-19 et de la séquence électorale de 2019-2021 pour observer des changements dans les stratégies parlementaires fédérales au Canada. Plutôt qu'une coalition parlementaire ad-hoc, le PLC et le NPD ont appris à travailler ensemble à la Chambre des communes et à coopérer pour mettre sur pied un programme de politiques sociales, tout en utilisant l'entente comme un outil de compétition partisane en vue de la prochaine élection fédérale.

Introduction

Canada stands out in the literature on government formation for the persistence of single-party minority governments (Stewart, 1980; Godbout and Høyland, 2011; Cody, 2008). In contrast, in Europe and other Westminster legislatures, coalitions and formal support agreements between government and opposition are the norms (Miller and Curtin, 2011, Artès and Bustos, 2008; Muller and Strøm, 1999). Yet, in March 2022, the Liberal Party of Canada (LPC) and the New Democratic Party (NDP) announced the *Delivering for Canadians Now, A Supply and Confidence Agreement,* contradicting recent analysis of the 2021 election that predicted, once again, a single-party minority government (Godbout and Cochrane, 2022; Pammett and Dornan, 2022). Why did the two parties decide to unite, and what is the significance of this parliamentary strategy for Canadian politics? What insights can we draw from this atypical cooperation in the House of Commons regarding the federal party system in Canada? This article answers these questions by proposing an ideational approach for the study of interparty cooperation and opposition. In the following case study, we turn to the role of ideas, framing and strategic learning to explain the emergence of the 2022 LPC-NDP agreement.

Extended cooperation in the House of Commons is a particularly puzzling federal partisan strategy. Recent studies on the federal party system and minority governments, for instance, reveal that political parties have an "aversion" to formal alliances (Godbout and Høyland, 2011; Godbout and Cochrane, 2022). Even in cases of ideological proximity, legislative agreements between federal parties are rare. Most interparty cooperation between the government and the opposition takes the form of "ad-hoc coalitions" and "shifting majorities" with different partners depending on the legislative issue at hand (Godbout and Høyland, 2011; Cody, 2008). Parties during minority parliaments often employ this "ad-hoc coalition" strategy, leading to the tendency to form single-party minority governments. This makes a formal agreement quite exceptional in Canadian parliamentary history (Godbout and Cochrane, 2022). Given the increasing frequency of minority governments in recent decades, and the prediction that they will be the norm in future elections (Pammett and Dornan, 2022), explaining the puzzle of interparty cooperation in the House of Commons can shed light on the recent evolution of parliamentary politics in Canada.

Our argument is that ideas function as essential tools for political parties, enabling them to navigate an uncertain situation, make sense of it and reassess their strategic interests. Specifically, we observe the strategic learning processes of the LPC and NDP during both the 2019-2021 election sequence and the COVID-19 pandemic that culminated in their March 2022 supply-and-confidence agreement. During this period, both parties faced political uncertainty over their policy objectives and their electoral prospects, a situation amplified by the pandemic. Such uncertainty, particularly in the midst of such a large-scale global crisis, underscores the significance of ideas for interparty relations.

As we argue, since 2015, the LPC and NDP have become closer in their programmatic beliefs, but differ in the framing of their ideas. The two parties share more policy prescriptions than in the past, and the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified this ideological proximity as parties cooperated in implementing expansive emergency social policies. In the aftermath of the crisis, they continued to identify similar policy priorities, such as Pharmacare and dental insurance. The COVID-19 crisis thus brought the LPC and the NDP even closer ideologically, which fostered their programmatic alliance.

Moreover, each party has a perceived strategic interest in the formation of the 2022 supply-and-confidence agreement. The 2019-2021 election sequence put both parties in an uncertain position due to the configuration of the party system. Therefore, the agreement helps them to: a) reduce electoral uncertainty; b) accumulate credit-claiming capital through an expansionist social policy agenda; and c) reinforce their partisan identity in the party system. This is the case because the Liberal government can win confidence votes and stay in power with the sole support of the NDP, which agreed to support the Liberal government during confidence votes until the next federal election scheduled for October 2025. Yet, the agreement served distinct goals—staying in power or becoming a legible alternative—and framing objectives for the two parties, which complicate the working of the alliance. This is exemplified by the announcement by the NDP on September 4, 2024 to withdraw from the agreement after both Pharmacare and dental insurance were formally adopted.

The remainder of this article comprises five sections. Section 2 explains what cooperation means in the context of the 2022 supply-and-confidence agreement by engaging with relevant literature on coalition building and political parties. Section 3 introduces our theoretical approach, which draws connections between ideas, framing, political strategies and large-scale crises. In Section 4, we present the empirical evidence supporting our analysis. Section 5 outlines our explanation of the LPC-NDP agreement and discusses how ideological proximity creates favourable conditions for the partisan alliance, but remains insufficient for a robust explanation. We then explore the role of strategic learning as a mechanism that mediates how ideas influence the decision-making of political parties. Finally, the article concludes with Section 6, summarizing our findings.

Cooperation During Minority Governments

What does cooperation mean in the 2022 supply-and-confidence agreement between the LPC and NDP? The NDP promised to support any budget or confidence vote until the end of the legislature in 2025 (PMO, 2022). In addition, both parties have agreed to coordinate on the legislative process, with monthly meetings between party leaders and briefing sessions before bills are introduced to the House of Commons. The agreement therefore creates a formal voting coalition between the two parties (Godbout and Cochrane, 2022). In addition, the agreement includes a mutually approved policy program aimed at expanding social policies. Shared policy goals include healthcare (dental insurance, universal drug insurance [Pharmacare], national norms on long-term health services), housing (involving construction and regulation, as well as housing benefits), family

(entailing a national daycare program), work (including paid sick leave and anti-strikebreaking legislation) and Indigenous reconciliation initiatives (PMO, 2022).[1] As will be argued later, this programmatic component and the shared policy objectives are fundamental to understanding the agreement.

Uncommon in Canada, supply-and-confidence agreements are a type of support agreement between the government and an opposition party, in which the opposition party agrees to vote with the government on any confidence vote in parliament in exchange for concessions. Scholars typically classify this support as a party "in" government without being "of" government (Dunphy and Bale, 2011; Miller and Curtin, 2011). This implies that the party formally remains in the opposition but actively contributes to the implementation of key policies, participates in decision-making and claims credit for ensuring a stable and efficient government (Miller and Curtin, 2011).

In Canada, Godbout and Cochrane (2022) identified several factors explaining why federal parties have an aversion to such legislative agreement. The informal convention that the party with the most seats should form government and govern alone fosters a perception of single-party government as the default mode of governance (Stewart, 1980). Institutions further reinforce this convention, including the strong position of the executive, high party discipline and the likelihood of re-election for minority governments (Godbout and Cochrane, 2022). Moreover, there exists a deeply embedded norm to seek compromise on more consensual proposals and refrain from opposing the government during the first confidence vote (the Speech of the Throne) following an election. The structure of the federal party system also favours an ad-hoc style of majority building in the House of Commons. In the case of minority governments, alliances can form along the left-right axis or the centre-periphery axis (related to federalism) to pass legislation, due to strong regionalist parties or the NDP often holding the balance of power (Cody, 2008). Thus, interparty cooperation almost never takes the form of formal agreements during minority governments in the federal parliament.

We can nonetheless identify two cases of legislative agreements in Canadian federal politics: the 1972 LPC-NDP agreement and the failed attempt to form a tripartite coalition LPC-NDP-Bloc Québécois in 2008 to displace the Conservative government of Stephen Harper. In 1972, factors such as ideological proximity, poor party finance and the imperative to avoid an early election that could have led to the return of the Progressive Conservatives were pivotal in the emergence of the agreement (Stewart, 1980), but the NDP withdrew from the agreement to cause an election in 1974, which led to a Liberal majority (Godbout and Høyland, 2011). A similar situation occurred in 2008, when the LPC, the NDP and the Bloc Québécois negotiated a coalition agreement in which the LPC and the NDP would share government positions with the parliamentary support of the BQ (Godbout and Cochrane, 2022). This time again, the agreement was meant to avoid a Conservative government and was fostered by a shared criticism of its handling of the 2008 financial crisis, but Harper prorogued the parliament to escape from a confidence vote, which derailed the LPC-NDP agreement over partisan disputes, particularly cooperation with a Québec autonomist party (Godbout and Cochrane, 2022). In both cases, opposing the Conservative government using parliamentary leverage and proximity in policy ideas were important factors leading to interparty cooperation.

At the provincial level, we can also find similar factors, such as the 1985 Liberals-NDP agreement in Ontario. Although the Ontario Progressive-Conservative (PC) party arrived first in the 1985 election, the Liberals and New Democrats wished to end the reign of the PC, which had governed the province since 1943, and negotiated a legislative agreement (Cody, 2008). Cody (2008) found "unusually similar" electoral platforms and promises between the Liberals and the New Democrats during the 1985 election, which helped both parties to cooperate with the Liberals forming the government and the NDP supporting it. Yet, the Liberals withdrew from the agreement in 1987 for electoral reasons in the face of advantageous polls (Cody, 2008). In 2017, the British Columbian NDP and the Green Party of British Columbia entered into a supply-and-confidence agreement over their conjoint majority of one seat over the BC Liberals, after their 12-year-long reign (McElroy, 2017). Ideological proximity was also detrimental to the forming of their agreement, which contained policy proposals related to electoral reform, extensive climate policies, Pharmacare and investment in healthcare, childcare, poverty reduction and a basic income pilot, among others (BC NDP Caucus, 2017). Yet, the NDP withdrew early from the four-year agreement in 2020 to bring about a snap election, in which the party won a majority. More recently, a supply-and-confidence agreement occurred in Yukon between the Liberals and the NDP in 2021 and was renewed in 2023 until the next Yukon general election in 2025 (CBC, 2023b), which is the only case of a non-terminated legislative agreement ever observed in Canada. This agreement clearly states that "The Yukon Liberals and the Yukon NDP campaigned on policy proposals that included points of agreement across multiple themes" (Yukon Liberal Caucus, 2021), revealing the role of electoral platforms and promises in the forming of the agreement. Other than these rare agreements either at the federal or provincial level, however, minority parliaments lead to an ad-hoc majority strategy, as explained by Godbout and Cochrane (2022).

In fact, minority governments are often understood by parties and political pundits as elections in waiting (Cody, 2008; Pammett and Dornan, 2022), and yet the 2021 federal election resulted in a supply-and-confidence agreement between the LPC and the NDP. Since 2019, the LPC has been at the helm of a minority government, having lost its majority due to a negative campaign and political scandals that eroded Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's popularity (Brooke, 2022). The NDP has since held the balance of power and has pressured the LPC government to adopt a more left-leaning stance on social policy (Béland et al., 2022; see Maioni, 1998 for an historical analysis of LPC-NDP interactions regarding health care policy). During the COVID-19 crisis, the Liberal government implemented large, expansive —yet temporary—social policy measures, strongly supported and pushed by the NDP (Béland et al., 2020). Prime Minister Trudeau triggered an early election in August 2021, believing that a "majority [government] was within reach" (Dornan, 2022). The 2021 federal election yielded results remarkably similar to those of the 2019 election (although 40 ridings changed seat), with the LPC winning three seats and maintaining a minority government, and the NDP securing one seat (Clarke et al., 2022). Unlike the situation in 2019, this time a supply-and-confidence agreement was within reach, despite the majority formed by the LPC and the NDP in the House of Commons remaining almost unchanged.

Nevertheless, cooperation is a constant dilemma for political parties. In Muller and Strøm's (1999) traditional framework, political parties typically seek offices,

policies or votes, and their choices involve trade-offs between these three goals. In the context of interparty cooperation during minority governments, particularly in Europe and other Westminster systems, the governing party aims to remain in office and implement its program to claim credit in the next election. Meanwhile, support parties seek proximity to decision-making (and offices in the case of a coalition), policy concessions and public prominence (Miller and Curtin, 2011; Artès and Bustos, 2008; Dunphy and Bale, 2011). The bargaining power of each party stems from its strategic position after the election, especially for smaller parties. For example, in the German parliament, Abed and Siaroff (2011) differentiate between an influential small party that holds a majority with the larger party but is not the sole influential party, a crucial party that holds a majority alone with the larger party, and a pivotal party that holds a majority with either large party—a kingmaker.[2]

Building on this literature, Godbout and Cochrane (2022) outlined three factors that lead parties to cooperate in ad-hoc coalitions during minority government in Canada: ideological proximity along the left-right axis, alignment on regionalization-centralization and electoral incentives. Parties with similar policy preferences tend to cooperate more, and the history of minority governments suggests that the LPC and the NDP naturally align as voting coalition partners (Stewart, 1980; Cody, 2008). Electoral incentives influence coalition building, with unpopular parties or those facing leadership challenges or financial issues aiming to avoid an early election. Simultaneously, strong parties seek policy gains by using their parliamentary influence to obtain concessions from the governing party. But cooperation entails strategic risks for supporting parties, as opponents can negatively frame their voting alliance with the government.

Why did the LPC and the NDP decide to cooperate in a formal supply-and-confidence agreement after the 2021 election? In the next section, we turn to the role of ideas in politics as they relate to programmatic beliefs, strategic learning, frames and large-scale crises. The ideational literature provides analytical tools to explain how parties navigated the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2019-2021 election sequence, resulting in a unique scenario where a formal agreement emerged in the House of Commons. Thus, our conclusions align with both ideological (policy ideas) and strategic (electoral gains) explanations for coalition building during minority governments.

Ideas, Strategic Learning, and Large-Scale Crises

Over the last three decades, much has been written about the role of ideas in politics and public policy (for example, Béland, 2019; Béland and Cox, 2011; Hall, 1993; Berman, 1998; Blyth, 2002; Campbell, 2004; Mehta, 2011; Parsons, 2007; Schmidt, 2008). According to Craig Parsons (2007), this scholarship emphasizes "the logic of interpretation," focusing on how particular political and social actors interpret the world around them in ways that can influence their behaviour, alone or in conjunction with other factors. This means that the ideational scholarship we draw on operates from the assumption that ideas are not mere epiphenomena purely derived from the institutional and/or material position of actors (Berman, 1998; Campbell, 2004). Rather, the ideational approach recognizes the interpretive

capacities of parties in relation to the political context they confront (Mudge, 2015a). This leads to a more sophisticated analysis of parties' motivations and strategies that deepens the traditional framework of "offices, policies, and votes" (Muller and Strøm 1999). We thus follow Béland and Cox (2016) in arguing that ideas act as "coalition magnets" for policymakers.

As Sheri Berman (1998) reminds us, scholars turning to the role of ideas in their empirical work must define precisely what these ideas are. Simultaneously, as highlighted by Daniel Béland and Alex Waddan (2015), these scholars need to break down the concept of ideas to study specific ideational processes. This is crucial because the term "ideas" encompasses various ideational processes that must be distinguished from one another (Béland and Waddan, 2015; see also Campbell, 2004). In this article, we focus on one main type of idea—the "programmatic beliefs" of political parties. We study these beliefs in relation to both framing and strategic learning during the 2019-2021 election sequence and the COVID-19 crisis.

In her book *The Social Democratic Moment*, Berman (1998) turns to the role of ideas to explain the behaviour of Social Democratic parties in Germany and Sweden between the two World Wars. Specially, she turns to what she calls "programmatic beliefs," situated "between ideologies and policy positions" (Berman, 1998: 21). In contrast to ideologies as broad world views, programmatic beliefs "are directly relevant only to particular categories of human action" (Berman, 1998: 21). In that, "programmatic beliefs provide guidelines for practical activity and for the formulation of solutions to everyday problems," which can be aggregated in specific political programs and party platforms (Berman, 1998: 21). In other words, programmatic beliefs "provide a relatively clear and distinctive connection between theory and praxis" (Berman, 1998: 21; see also Mudge, 2015a), making them practical ideas that enable political parties to align their broad ideological and strategic orientations with concrete policy prescriptions featured prominently in their political platforms.

In this article, we claim that the strategic beliefs of political parties evolve over time through a process known as "strategic learning" (Hay, 1995: 201–202; Béland and Marier, 2006). In contrast to policy learning, which involves experts, politicians and other actors drawing lessons from existing policies to improve or discard them over time (Hall, 1993; Heclo, 1974), "strategic learning takes place when elected officials constantly learn about political risks and opportunities related to timing, institutional structures, and the anticipated behaviour of other social and political actors" (Béland and Marier, 2006: 300). More specifically, within the context of this article, strategic learning revolves around extracting electoral and political lessons from changing circumstances that may reshape the programmatic beliefs of political parties and the frames they articulate in public discourse to support or oppose specific policy proposals (Campbell, 2004).

Intrinsically strategic, "frames" are widely studied within the political science and public policy literature concerning the role of ideas, although they are sometimes conflated with the concept of discourse (Schmidt, 2008). According to John L. Campbell (2004: 94), frames are "symbols and concepts" that political actors deploy to justify their policy proposals and promote themselves among voters and/or specific interest groups. Framing is an essential ideational process during the policy cycle because it contributes to the definition of the policy problem, the

interpretation of the larger social and political context and the prescription and justification of proposed policy solutions (Béland, 2019). Frames enable political parties to actively tap into existing cultural and ideological categories when formulating public statements about the policy proposals they support or oppose in close relationship with the discourse and strategies of their political opponents and competitors (Béland, 2005). Thus, frames serve as essential analytical tools for understanding the interrelation between programmatic beliefs and strategy-building in the partisan arena, which is especially useful during the coding of qualitative data (see the online Appendix).

Programmatic beliefs, strategic learning and frames are analytical tools to make sense of how political parties interpret changing social contexts, notably in situations of uncertainty (see Mudge, 2015b). Uncertainty is a fundamental aspect of political reality, rendering outcomes challenging to predict for actors and underscoring the important role of ideas in explaining how parties navigate the opportunities and constraints within political equilibriums and elections, serving as mechanisms for change in these equilibriums (Blyth, 2011). Large-scale economic, political and/or public health crises rank among the circumstances most likely to induce acute uncertainty, prompting strategic learning and the revision of programmatic beliefs and framing tactics (Pontusson and Raess, 2012; Hall, 1993; Bremer and McDaniel, 2020; Farrell and Quiggin, 2017; Hutter et al., 2018; Roberts, 2017). According to Mark Blyth (2002: 37), large-scale crises and their acute uncertainty create space for new ideas which, in turn, help lower the uncertainty faced and "[narrowing] possible interpretations of the crisis, and hence courses of action, to a significant degree." This article demonstrates how, through strategic learning, political parties can alter their programmatic beliefs in the context of the COVID-19 crisis and the political uncertainty surrounding the 2019-2021 election sequence. Simultaneously, we acknowledge that strategic learning and changes in programmatic beliefs and framing tactics can occur both during and outside large-scale crises, although such changes are more likely to emerge during them.

Empirical Evidence[3]

To study programmatic beliefs, framing tactics and strategic learning, we compared the party manifestos of the four major parties in the House of Commons (LPC, the Conservative Party of Canada [CPC], NDP, and the Bloc Québécois [BQ]) for the 2015, 2019 and 2021 elections. We chose to focus on the LPC, CPC, NDP and BQ, as they collectively hold nearly all the seats in the House of Commons during the period studied (336 of 338 in 2021). Party manifestos serve as reliable indicators of the concessions, policy ideas and strategies that parties bring to the table during coalition or support agreement negotiations[4] (Artès and Bustos, 2008; Matthews, 2011). Moreover, electoral platforms are valuable data sources for analyzing the language through which parties articulate their programmatic beliefs. According to Stephanie Mudge (2015a), this language comprises policy prescriptions, the framing of policy programs and the social categories targeted by political parties. In our analysis, we utilize these dimensions to understand the beliefs of the four major parties in the House of Commons during this election sequence and the interpretation of the COVID-19 pandemic as a large-scale crisis that required a social policy response.

Additionally, we traced the legislative process that led to emergency policymaking during the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic. We selected a total of ten bills introduced in the House of Commons between March 2020 and November 2021 for analysis. Specifically, our focus was on examining the votes and "major speeches"[5] during the debates on the second reading of these bill proposals. The choice of the second reading is deliberate, as it relates to debates on the principles and substance of the policy proposals. These debates give each party the opportunity (and time) to formulate a statement detailing their position on the proposed policies. Given the increasing significance of procedural speeches in the House of Commons in recent years (Vallée-Dubois et al., 2021), analyzing the second reading allows us to focus on the discursive efforts of parties regarding policymaking and the expression of programmatic beliefs. These two data sources—party manifestos and the speeches at the House of Commons—assist us in understanding the ideas and strategies of the four major parties (and their relations with opponents or allies in the party system) since 2015, with a particular focus on the COVID crisis.

In Table 1, we present the ten bills selected along with the corresponding policies proposed and the adoption process. The sequence begins with C-13, which implemented the Canada Emergency Response Benefit and ends with C-2 (after the 2021 election), enacting the final emergency measure, the Canada Worker Lockdown Benefit. These selected bills comprise the most extensive emergency social policy measures either implemented or modified by the federal government during the COVID-19 crisis. Of the ten bills, seven were adopted without formal opposition to the Liberal government. The remaining three underwent debate in the House from April 2021, over a year after the first wave of the virus in Canada. In these non-consensual bills, the CPC opposed all, the NDP voted against the last proposal (C-2), and the BQ consistently supported the government. However, votes,

Table 1. Bill Proposals and Social Policy in Canada during the Pandemic

First reading	Bill proposals	Social policy	Adoption/vote
March 24, 2020	C-13	Canada Emergency Response Benefit	Unanimity, without vote
April 11, 2020	C-14 (43, 1)	Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS)	With dissension, without vote
April 29, 2020	C-15	Canada Emergency Student Benefit	With dissension, without vote
July 20, 2020	C-20	Extension CEWS	Unanimity, without vote
September 28, 2020	C-4	Canada Recovery Benefit (CRB)	Unanimity, vote 2nd reading unanimous
November 2, 2020	C-9	Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy	With dissension, vote 2nd reading unanimous
December 2, 2020 (adopted on April 15, 2021)	C-14 (43, 2)	Modification of existing programs (Canada Child Benefit, Students Loans)	Vote 2nd and 3rd readings, CPC against
February 25, 2021	C-24	Modification Employment Insurance	With dissension, without vote
April 30, 2021	C-30	Extension CEWS	Vote 2nd and 3rd readings, CPC against
November 24, 2021	C-2	Extension CEWS and CRB, Worker Lockdown Benefit	Vote 2nd and 3rd readings, CPC and *NDP against*

especially in the context of emergency parliamentarism, characterized by accelerated procedures, heightened control from party leaders and a reduced number of MPs and sitting days in the House, may not provide a comprehensive understanding of the programmatic beliefs of the four parties (Malloy, 2020; Turnbull and Bernier, 2022; Lozano et al., 2021; Rayment and VandenBeukel, 2020).

A study of policy ideas and (policy and strategic) learning processes would typically benefit from interviews with key political actors (Campbell and Pedersen, 2014). In our case, party staff and MPs that negotiated in the backstage of the supply-and-confidence agreement could inform our analysis and help confirm or disconfirm our conclusions. Yet, the LPC-NDP deal was still in effect and a contentious issue on the federal political scene at the time of the research, limiting our access to key informants. Considering this, to stay as close as possible to the actors at hand and start mapping the political terrain of the supply-and-confidence agreement, we decided to adopt a different research strategy and analyze documents and speeches produced by parties and MPs. This lack of interviews with the main brokers of the agreement does limit our detailed understanding of the LPC and the NDP during the period we cover. Yet, our analysis identifies ideational and strategic processes that could be further deepened through future interviews.

In the next section, we turn to party manifestos and speeches in the House of Commons to explore programmatic beliefs, framing tactics and strategic learning from 2015 onward and throughout the pandemic. Specifically, we coded the policy proposals, the frames deployed by parties to foster political support, the targeted constituencies and the political lessons learned by parties. Analyzing political lessons can be difficult as they pertain to the internal decision-making processes of actors. In the case of political parties, complex social networks and power dynamics among MPs, party experts, intellectuals, and others influence how parties interpret evolving political contexts (Mudge, 2015a). By focusing on parties' official positions in the political arena (during elections and in parliament), we use frames to infer how parties draw lessons from the political context and strategically deploy them. Frames typically relate to the broader economic and political context and the party system, serving as useful tools for analyzing the dynamics of parliamentary and electoral competition or cooperation.

Explaining the 2022 Supply-and-Confidence Agreement

In this section, we outline our ideational argument to explain why the supply-and-confidence agreement took shape in the LPC and NDP response to the COVID-19 crisis and the 2019-2021 election sequence. First, we present the programmatic language of the four parties in their manifestos from 2015 to 2021 (see Table 2). Then, we ask whether ideas explain the formation of the LPC-NDP alliance. In response, we find that strategic learning from the 2019-2021 election sequence serves as a mediating factor, linking programmatic beliefs and political strategies.

Programmatic beliefs since 2015 and into the pandemic

Under the leadership of Justin Trudeau, the LPC is best characterized by the programmatic belief in *social investment* (Béland et al., 2021: 17). Social investment

Table 2. Programmatic Language in Party Manifesto, 2015-2021

Manifesto	Policy prescriptions*	Framing[1]	Targeted social category
LPC 2015	Canada Child Benefit Increasing Guaranteed Income Supplement and Canada Student Grant Tax Cut	*Social frame*: Investing in Canadians / Giving opportunity to all / Fighting poverty and inequality *Economic frame*: Grow the economy	Middle class and all those working hard to join it
LPC 2019	Tax break for the first 15,000$ of income Increasing Old Age Security and Canada Student Grants **Intention to create: National childcare program and Pharmacare**	*Social frame*: Keep moving forward and build on the progress we've made / Helping hard-working Canadians / Making life affordable and accessible *Economic frame*: Grow the economy / Job creation	Middle class and all those working hard to join it
LPC 2021	National childcare program Universal Pharmacare Increasing Guaranteed Income Supplement and Old Age Security, Student Loans, and Employment Insurance	*Social frame*: Give everyone a real and fair chance at success / Keep moving forward and build back better / Support and protect Canadians *Economic frame*: Job creation and economic recovery	Middle class and people working hard to join it
NDP 2015	National childcare program Universal Pharmacare Increasing child benefits, parental benefits, minimum wage, Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplement, student grants, serious illness, caregivers	*Social frame*: Repair the damage done to the country by the Conservatives / Eliminate poverty and solidarity with the most vulnerable / Affordable life *Economic frame*: Fighting benefits to high earning and corporations / Create and protect good job	Middle-class families Workers The most vulnerable
NDP 2019	National childcare program Universal Pharmacare Rent benefit for low-income people Removing interest on student loans Increasing Guaranteed Income Supplement, Employment Insurance and minimum wage **Intention to create universal health insurance programs for**: dental care, mental healthcare, infertility, auditory care, and eye care	*Social frame*: Making a New Deal for People to "put people and the solutions families need first" / Build opportunity for people from every background / Fighting inequality, poverty, and social vulnerability / Reinvesting in public services *Economic frame*: Government should protect and create good jobs	Ordinary, hard-working people Vulnerable people Unionism
NDP 2021	National childcare program Universal Pharmacare Mental health insurance Dental care insurance Increasing existing programs (paid sick leave, minimum wage, student grants, Employment Insurance) **Intention to create** a Guaranteed livable income	*Social frame*: Getting more help to more people faster / Reinforcing a vulnerable social safety net to achieve dignity and security to everyone / Protecting the people in times of crisis / Affordable life *Economic frame*: COVID-19 as an opportunity to make the economy fairer and more equal by investing in workers, their communities and families	Workers Vulnerable people Unionism
CPC 2015	Tax Cut Fiscal dispositions (tax credits for	*Social frame*: Supporting families and seniors	Hard-working Canadians *(Continued)*

Table 2. (Continued.)

Manifesto	Policy prescriptions*	Framing[1]	Targeted social category
	youth, families, seniors, saving accounts)	*Economic frame*: Protect the economy / Fiscal responsibility / Job creation	
CPC 2019	Family benefits Tax Cut Fiscal dispositions (tax credits for maternity benefits, Registered Education Savings Plans, housing, health care, child activity, seniors)	*Social frame*: Put more money in your pocket by reducing imposition *Economic frame*: Fiscal responsibility to fight cost of living / Economic growth in times of uncertainty / Economic freedom by reducing government regulation	Hard-working families
CPC 2021	Fiscal dispositions (tax credits for childcare, mental health, sale tax vacation for a month) Subsidizing new hires Canada Seniors Care benefit Increasing Canada Workers Benefit and Employment Insurance	*Social frame*: A society where everyone can fulfill his or her potential / Fighting inequality and protecting the vulnerable *Economic frame*: Recovering jobs lost during the pandemic / Secure economic recovery / Fighting inflation by lowering government expenses	Working Canadians Middle class
BQ 2015	Transferring all federal social programs to Québec legislature Protecting the funding of Québec social policies	*Social frame*: Protecting Québec distinct welfare state / Protecting Québec constitutional rights *Economic frame*: Workers are the foundation of Québec society	Quebecers Workers Vulnerable people
BQ 2019	Right of withdrawal with compensation from Federal programs that interfere with Québec constitutional rights Tax credit for caregivers Increasing Guaranteed Income Supplement and Employment Insurance	*Social frame*: Protecting Québec constitutional rights / Protect the funding of Québec's welfare state / Solidarity as Quebecers' value *Economic frame*: Well-being of Quebecers and an economy that serves the population of Québec	Quebecers Workers Vulnerable people
BQ 2021	Right of withdrawal with compensation from Federal programs that interfere with Québec constitutional rights Tax credit for caregivers Increasing Old Age Security, Employment Insurance, Federal health transfers	*Social frame*: Protecting Québec constitutional rights / Protecting the funding of Québec welfare state / Solidarity and unity as Québec nation's values / Compassionate approach to social vulnerability in times of crisis *Economic frame*: Adapting our economic model to new social risk	Quebecers Workers Vulnerable people

*Note:** Main expenses and proposals presented in the manifesto
[1]The distinction between social framing and economic framing derived from the coding, see the online Appendix.

promotes social spending and the development of individual competences as a means to achieve economic growth and full employment (Jenson, 2010). The Liberal's policy proposals revolve around expanding social policy and government intervention, introducing new social programs such as the Canada Child Benefit

and expanding existing ones for youth, families and seniors. The LPC frames these proposals around the notions of progress, cost of living, equality of opportunity and economic growth. The middle class "and all those working hard to join it" have been fundamental to the LPC's party identity since 2015. The LPC emphasizes a belief in balancing self-development, economic development and state intervention. These beliefs influenced the Liberal government during the COVID-19 crisis, leading to the implementation of significant (albeit temporary) new social policy measures and increased emphasis on the social policies outlined in its platform. Aligned with the social investment programmatic belief, Liberal MPs expressed the need to orient people toward the labour market and develop their human capital to stimulate economic recovery. Nevertheless, in their speeches, we found an openness to further expanding the welfare state. The 2021 electoral platform saw several policies that were only intentions in 2019 become formal proposals (for example, Pharmacare and subsidized childcare). The COVID-19 crisis gave the LPC a new opportunity to advance its redistributive agenda (Brooke, 2022) and promote its social investment belief that a strong welfare state contributes to economic growth, societal fairness and individual well-being.

The Conservative Party, for its part, stands in stark contrast to the social investment programmatic belief of the Liberals. Under three different leaders—Stephen Harper, Andrew Sheer and Erin O'Toole—the party has consistently adhered to the programmatic belief that fiscal responsibility and government spending control are pathways to a successful and free-market society. The majority of the CPC's policy prescriptions rely on tax credits and cuts rather than direct benefits, primarily targeting families. The party's dominant expressed priorities revolve around the economy and the labour market, framing recessions, economic uncertainty and unemployment as critical threats facing Canada since the 2008-2009 financial crisis. Unlike the LPC, the CPC places greater emphasis on working Canadians over the middle class as a targeted social group in the platforms analyzed. Although marginal changes emerged in the 2021 electoral platform following the first waves of the pandemic, with increased integration of inequality and social policy in the framing, along with the prescription of benefit-oriented proposals (though tax credits remain predominant).

In fact, the CPC supported the majority of the legislative proposals during the first year of the pandemic, agreeing with the need for extensive emergency social policy. However, parliamentary debates centred around government spending control and mechanisms for oversight of recipients. The party was the first to oppose federal emergency policies at the outset of 2021, evident in speeches in the House of Commons that framed the situation as a serious risk for the federal government in terms of public debt and money creation, advocating the need for austerity. In this sense, the programmatic beliefs of the CPC show continuity throughout the pandemic. While the 2021 platform adopts a more socially framed approach under Erin O'Toole, the core belief in reducing government intervention remains strong.

The New Democratic Party's programmatic beliefs are typical of social democratic parties (Berman, 1998), emphasizing universal social policies, expanded state intervention and reduced inequality. New social policies (or the expansion of existing ones) have been central to the NDP's platforms since 2015. These proposals are framed within the context of addressing economic insecurity, inequality

and compromised living conditions resulting from previous governments. As a result, the NDP's programmatic beliefs are rooted in reinvestment in direct and expanded public services, aimed at fostering social solidarity. The primary focus of these platforms is on workers, vulnerable populations (low income, disabled persons and sickness) and unions—a departure from the LPC's party identity, which focuses on the middle class. While the 2015 platform (under Thomas Mulcair) mentioned the middle class, subsequent platforms in 2019 and 2021 (under Jagmeet Singh) shifted emphasis to the potential beneficiaries of proposed policies (see also McGrane, 2022). This points to the role of leaders in the orientation of political parties and the influence of a new leader, Jagmeet Singh, in the turn to more expansive social policies proposed by the NDP (Bittner, 2018, 2021). This influence has been even stronger throughout COVID-19, as the NDP sought to pressure the Liberal government toward more expansive and universal emergency measures. This commitment was evident in their support for all bills before C-2 in late 2021, which reduced emergency assistance. In fact, the NDP saw the pandemic as a strategic window of opportunity to enhance federal social policy, exposing discrepancies in existing programs. The pandemic reinforced the NDP's programmatic belief in equality and solidarity, bringing the welfare state to the forefront of federal politics.

The Bloc Québécois stands out for its small number of policy proposals, primarily centred around its principal demand—a right of withdrawal for Québec, accompanied by financial compensation, from all federal programs related to social assistance, education, health and employment. The protection of Québec's constitutional power is the main frame behind all of the BQ's proposals. Quebecers are the primary constituency targeted in the party's platforms, forging the BQ's partisan identity as a nationalist party exclusively fielding electoral candidates in one province. Yet, despite its focus on provincial autonomy (and full sovereignty), the BQ advocates for the expansion of federal programs such as Old Age Security and Employment Insurance. This framing strategy positions the party as the "protector" of Quebecers' well-being. In fact, social solidarity and the welfare state—combined with a nationalist vision that includes economic development—are central to the BQ's programmatic beliefs. During the COVID-19 crisis, the party supported any bill introducing emergency social measures (while advocating for a balance between work incentives and income protection) but criticized any measures that encroached upon Québec's provincial power. For instance, the party strongly criticized the LPC and the NDP proposals to permanently expand federal social policies. The BQ's solidaristic yet nationalistic programmatic beliefs remained steadfast during the pandemic and continue to guide how the party collaborates with or opposes the federal government.

Overall, the COVID-19 crisis reinforced the programmatic beliefs of each of the four political parties under consideration. The policy ideas of the Liberals, the New Democrats and the Bloc Québécois show an increased focus on social policy and the welfare state, although the parties differ in terms of the scope of the social policy expansion they supported and how it was framed. Specifically, both the LPC and the NDP perceived the social context as particularly conducive to advancing new permanent federal policies. In their 2021 election manifesto, they both elevated policies that were previously presented as intentions into official prescriptions, with the

NDP taking a more expansionist stance. As a result, higher ideational compatibility is observed after the COVID-19 pandemic between the LPC and the NDP. This progressive front, which aims to expand social policy, stands in clear contrast to the CPC's discourse on fiscal austerity and reducing government intervention. This leads to a "conservatives-against-the-rest" configuration of the party system along the left-right axis (VandenBeukel et al., 2021), yet the BQ is also distinct from the LPC-NDP front due to its decentralizing position. In the next two sections, we argue that this party system configuration constitutes a favourable context that led to the LPC-NDP agreement.

Do programmatic beliefs explain cooperation?

Ideological proximity stands out as a factor driving parties to work together in the House of Commons during periods of minority government (Godbout and Cochrane, 2022). Similarly, in instances such as the Liberals-Conservatives 2010 coalition in the United Kingdom (Matthews, 2011), the National Party-Liberal Party quasi-permanent coalition in Australia (Botterill and Cockfield, 2015) and the Liberals-New Democrats 1985 coalition in Ontario (Cody, 2008), policy convergence, overlaps and congruent electoral promises played pivotal roles. Therefore, the heightened alignment in programmatic beliefs between the LPC since 2015 and during the COVID-19 crisis created favourable conditions for expanded cooperation between the two parties.

Both parties advocated for such cooperation during debates on emergency measures in the House of Commons. Liberal MPs consistently called for broader parliamentary collaboration to overcome uncertainty and propel progress in the country. This call was reiterated in the 2021 Speech of the Throne, where the presented legislative agenda included policy tools that appealed to the NDP, such as subsidized daycare, affordable housing and Pharmacare. Indeed, on several occasions during the pandemic, the NDP expressed its intention to collaborate with the Liberal government, not only to expedite emergency policymaking but also to reform existing programs and implement new *permanent* social policies.

As both parties aim for policy changes in the post-pandemic social context, articulating their programmatic beliefs publicly helps them clarify and signal their goals to others (Berman, 1998). This is fundamental to political coalition building, as sharing policy prescriptions and interpretations of a given context "enable agents to overcome free-rider problems by specifying the ends of collective action" (Blyth, 2002: 39). In fact, the shared policy prescriptions presented in their 2021 electoral manifesto serves as a strong programmatic basis for their agreement—defining the essence of their political alliance and outlining the policy concessions and gains each party can anticipate in an expanded and formal cooperation (Artès and Bustos, 2008).

However, despite the proximity in programmatic beliefs and electoral promises, the 2022 supply-and-confidence agreement remains puzzling. Since 2019, the NDP has adopted a strong oppositional stance against the LPC, framing its discourse as a personal contest: "Singh versus Trudeau" (McGrane, 2022). While the NDP is generally understood as policy seeking (Cody, 2008), the party still strives to be seen as a potential governing party, not solely a supporting one (McGrane, 2022).[6] Given

that cooperation entails significant potential trade-offs between policy gains and future electoral success, and thus offices (Muller and Strøm, 1999), why would the NDP agree to formally support the LPC until 2025 and be "in" government without being "of" government? Even more puzzling, the Liberals hold a strong position in Canadian institutions, which typically fosters an aversion to formal legislative alliances (Godbout and Cochrane, 2022). Why would the LPC choose to share policymaking responsibilities in a "string-attached" agreement with the NDP rather than opting for an ad-hoc voting coalition? In the next section, we delve into the role of strategic learning in mediating how shared ideas led to the emergence of the LPC-NDP agreement following the 2019-2021 election sequence and the COVID-19 crisis.

How strategic learning mediates programmatic beliefs in the formation of the 2022 agreement

We argue that, in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis and the 2019-2021 election sequence, the 2022 supply-and-confidence agreement was understood by the LPC and the NDP as a means to strengthen their position in the party system and materialize key aspects of their programmatic beliefs. The Liberal's victory secured the means to fulfill their main social electoral promises, as the NDP commited to supporting any confidence vote until the next federal election scheduled for October 2025, contingent on the LPC government adhering to the terms of the agreement. For the New Democrats, the agreement formalized and rendered more visible their role as legislative brokers while enhancing their perceived influence on federal social policy expansion. Strategic learning is manifest in this situation, as the 2022 agreement served a threefold purpose for the parties:

a) Reducing electoral uncertainty following the 2019-2021 election sequence;
b) Accumulating credit-claiming capital for the next federal election; and
c) Strengthening partisan identity in a competitive left.

The 2019-2021 election sequence placed both parties in a precarious position in the event of a snap election. The LPC, having secured the lowest share of votes for a minority government in Canadian history in both elections, has witnessed a decline in the popularity of its leader since 2019 (Brooke, 2022). The 2021 election did not yield significant gains for the LPC, resulting in the re-election of the same minority government. Moreover, the timing of the 2021 election faced heavy criticism, although the party framed it positively as a pathway to recovery after the first waves of COVID-19 (Dornan, 2022). In this case, the reduction of electoral uncertainty led to a blame-avoidance situation for the Liberals (Weaver, 1986), as the 2022 agreement ensured they will not be blamed for another snap election.

For its part, the NDP has seen a decline in its share of the vote since 2011, coupled with diminished staff and finances, despite holding the balance of power since 2019 (McGrane, 2022). However, its electoral results remained stagnant in 2019 and 2021. In a 2021 post-election document, the party acknowledged the disappointment of the election and expressed a commitment to focus on improving the lives of Canadians (NDP, 2021). It also recognized that the population had

an "appetite" for New Democratic ideas and that the party needed time to turn that appetite into votes (NDP, 2021) despite being a weak party with high potential legislative influence (McGrane, 2022). Yet, a lack of material resources and a weak electoral position are key incentives for an opposition party during minority parliaments to cooperate with the government and reduce electoral uncertainty (Godbout and Cochrane, 2022). This is insufficient to explain its participation in a formal supply-and-confidence agreement, however, as ad-hoc agreements also reduce electoral uncertainty for the first years of a minority government.

Reducing electoral uncertainty also held ideological appeal for both the LPC and the NDP, aligning with their programmatic beliefs. The CPC, serving as the official opposition and the main electoral foe of the Liberals, consistently communicated to the House of Commons its commitment to government spending control and adherence to fiscal austerity principles if it assumed power following the COVID-19 crisis. For example, after the 2021 election, MP Pierre Poilievre said:

> We need to restore sound money. We need to stop printing cash, get the Bank of Canada focused on its real mandate, which is low inflation, bring government spending under control, cancel the hundred-billion-dollar slush fund the government has created for the post-COVID period, and return the cost of government to pre-COVID levels. Simply put, a more affordable government will mean a more affordable cost of living for Canadians, and that is what Conservatives support. (House of Commons, 2021)

This possibility of fiscal austerity in the aftermath of the pandemic, coupled with the substantial expansion of social spending and public debt, was recognized by both the Liberals and the New Democrats and incorporated into the framing of their 2021 electoral manifesto. The uncertainty surrounding whether the Conservatives would win an early election, given the narrow margins of Liberal victory in 2019 and 2021, and the popularity of the CPC on economic issues amid unfavourable economic conditions (Clarke et al., 2022), prompted the LPC and the NDP to strategically learn to work together by drawing on their shared policy and programmatic ideas. This situation is similar to precedent cases of LPC-NDP cooperation in the federal parliament, as the programmatic gap between the CPC and the former creates an impetus for cooperation (Stewart, 1980; Cody, 2008).

By postponing the next federal election, the 2022 supply-and-confidence agreement provided the LPC and the NDP with an opportunity to accumulate credit-claiming capital and framing resources for the next electoral contest (Mayhew, 1974; Weaver, 1986). Each party held a strategic interest in implementing the policy provisions outlined in the agreement, though their credit-claiming objectives differ. In the 2021 election, the Liberals aimed to capitalize on their policymaking agenda during the COVID-19 crisis to pursue a social post-pandemic agenda with a majority government (Brooke, 2022). Their framing strategy focused on presenting the government's accomplishments and progress made since 2015, exemplified by the party's 2021 "build back better" rhetoric, which underlies the proposals constituting the 2022 supply-and-confidence agreement.

On the other hand, the NDP sought greater visibility for its role as a legislative broker and a source of progressive pressure on the government, compelling the

Liberals to "do the right thing." This effort was particularly crucial during the pandemic when the executive, especially the Prime Minister, held a high public and media profile (Lozano et al., 2021). Post-election analysis revealed that voters did not recognize the NDP's legislative role during the pandemic and that the party was perceived as lacking concrete policy proposals to challenge the Liberals (NDP, 2021). Smaller parties often struggle to claim credit for their policy achievements, a recurring challenge during interparty cooperation, especially for left-wing parties to the left of a progressive party (Dunphy and Bale, 2011; Dunphy, 2007). Thus, the highly public 2022 supply-and-confidence agreement with the LPC provided the NDP an opportunity to formalize its role as a legislative broker and a significant source of political pressure on the Liberal government. It allowed the party to promote its commitment to expanding social policy by leveraging its status as a "kingmaker" (NDP, 2021; McGrane, 2022).

In the absence of the 2022 agreement, however, both parties would have faced uncertainty regarding their ability to claim credit for progressive measures. The Bloc Québécois, a potential legislative partner on the centre-left of the Liberal government, opposed the expansionary federal social policy agenda of the Liberals and the New Democrats in the name of decentralization and provincial autonomy. On several occasions during parliamentary debates, the party criticized that the "Liberal Party has in its DNA an outrageous obsession with centralization," and that the NDP "act like the Liberals' lackeys, always eager to gather the crumbs that their masters leave behind in exchange for an ideological promiscuity" (Maxime Blanchette-Joncas, C-14, 43-2). This reinforced the NDP's position in the House of Commons, as the BQ, an influential party due to its share of seats, clearly opposed the LPC agenda. In this case, the LPC was left uncertain about its capacity to accumulate credit-claiming capital before the next election. Due to its ideological proximity with the LPC, the NDP became a *crucial* supporting party, and implementing social electoral promises without their support becomes unthinkable (Abedi and Siaroff, 2011).

While both parties perceived the agreement as a strategy to achieve their programmatic goals, it also provides them with the opportunity to compete—both with each other and with the BQ—within the centre-left of the party system. The configuration of the left-right axis as "conservatives-against-the-rest" (VandenBeukel et al., 2021) with three major parties on the centre-left means that each party must differentiate itself from the others and define its own partisan identity. In the realm of interparty cooperation, whether in a coalition government or support agreement, partners navigate a constant dynamic of unity in governance and competition for votes (Sagarzazu and Klüver, 2017). Research on the cooperation of radical left parties and social democratic parties in Europe emphasizes the role of party identity as a particularly salient strategic struggle for parties during their collaboration (Muller and Strøm, 1999; Dunphy, 2007). European radical left parties often struggle with maintaining their identity as a credible alternative to their social democratic partner, emphasizing their own policy ideas over those proposed by the mainstream left party (Dunphy and Bale, 2011).

This identity struggle was already recognized by the NDP following the 2021 election, specifically the need to better differentiate itself from the Liberals to embody a true political alternative on the left (NDP, 2021). In the 2021 election, both the NDP and the LPC were addressing the same social issues, albeit with

different approaches; the NDP aimed to tax more, spend more, and design policies more rapidly (McGrane, 2022). Since the election of Trudeau as the leader of the LPC in 2015, both parties have been engaged in a "bidding-up" logic regarding social proposals (Béland et al., 2021), pushing the party farther to the left. In response, the NDP sought to accentuate its framing of "class politics" opposing the rich to workers, the poor, and the most vulnerable (McGrane, 2022).

For their part, the Liberals have a clear middle-class party identity while promoting an expansive social policy agenda since 2015 (Brooke, 2022). Cooperating with the NDP becomes a means for the Liberals to assert dominance on the centre-left, appealing to a broader electorate than a "worker" partisan identity and framing the 2022 agreement as a continuation of their approach since 2015. Conversely, the NDP endeavours to distinguish itself from the Liberals' belief in the idea of social investment and its more economic framing by promoting an even more expansionist social agenda and emphasizing its identity as a labour party (McGrane, 2022). The NDP's support of the Liberals is framed as a strategy to push the government's agenda to the left and compel the LPC to work for the people, not the privileged, aligning with the claims in its manifestos and parliamentary speeches. This represents a classic framing strategy by a left-wing party stuck to the left of a mainstream progressive party, aiming to overcome the identification as a supporting party rather than a potential governing party (Dunphy and Bale, 2011; Abedi and Siaroff, 2011).

Although both parties share a progressive partisan identity that has facilitated the formation of their partnership, their shared policy prescriptions served different partisan identity claims. The paradox of this agreement lies in the fact that, by working together, the parties wielded the 2022 supply-and-confidence agreement as a tool for competition. The operational dynamics of this bipartisan alliance are shaped by a logic of electoral and partisan competition. In this case, both the LPC and the NDP sought to utilize the other party involved in the deal as a legislative ally, aiming to garner credit for the implementation of new social policy measures. Simultaneously, each party aimed to position itself as the true instigator of the progressive aspects of the agreed program. For example, to strategically frame itself as the true progressive party and exert additional public pressure on the Liberals to take more action in the area, the NDP introduced its own Pharmacare bill in June 2023 (CBC, 2023a).

Conclusion

Why did the 2021 Liberal minority government not simply become another election in waiting as predicted (Pammett and Dornan, 2022)? And why, instead, it resulted in a supply-and-confidence agreement with the New Democratic Party? Our argument draws on the study of policy ideas, framing, political strategies and the unique context of the COVID-19 crisis and the 2019-2021 election sequence.

First, the pandemic heightened the ideological proximity between the LPC and the NDP. Both parties perceived this large-scale crisis as an opportunity to permanently expand the welfare state, drawing on the large number of electoral promises and policy proposals they had shared in their 2021 electoral platforms. This convergence laid the foundation for a shared legislative agenda embedded in the 2022 supply-and-confidence agreement. Second, the 2019-2021 election sequence

fostered strategic learning from the two parties, mediating the role of ideas in the emergence of the 2022 agreement. This agreement served multiple purposes: reducing electoral uncertainty (by maintaining power for the LPC and securing a crucial position in the House of Commons for the NDP), accumulating credit-claiming capital for the next electoral contest (particularly against a Bloc Québécois not always cooperative on federal social policy expansion) and reinforcing their party identity by framing the agreement in line with their own representation as a progressive party. Thus, the LPC and the NDP interpreted the agreement as an ideologically appropriate and strategically viable political strategy until the next federal election planned for 2025.

We argue that the context of the COVID-19 crisis and the 2019-2021 election sequence is crucial for understanding this recent agreement. The pandemic produced a convergence of shared policy prescriptions and a mutual understanding of the crisis as a window of opportunity to expand federal social policy. This alignment brought the LPC and the NDP closer ideologically and distanced them programmatically from the CPC. The COVID-19 crisis also played a key role in shaping the path to the 2021 election. The Liberals perceived their handling of the pandemic as an opportunity to regain their majority in the House of Commons lost in 2019. Indeed, the pandemic featured prominently in the 2021 federal campaign (Clarke et al., 2022) maintaining the salience of the welfare state and social policy in federal politics. During minority governments, interparty cooperation is typically driven by the appeal of offices, policies and votes (Muller and Strøm, 1999), but these motivations emerge within a political context that can either facilitate or impede cooperation. Concerning the 2022 supply-and-confidence agreement, the COVID-19 crisis and the 2019-2021 election sequence amplified the ideological and strategic determinants of federal interparty cooperation in Canada (Godbout and Cochrane, 2022).

Theoretically, this article stresses the value of adopting an ideational perspective on cross-party alliances, focusing on programmatic beliefs, framing processes and strategic learning as they intersect with large-scale crises and the acute political uncertainty they generate (Blyth, 2002; Berman, 1998; Mudge, 2015a; Schmidt, 2008). This approach enhances our understanding of how political parties rely on their core ideas to adapt to a changing social and political landscape and develop strategies that reinforce their perceived position in the partisan arena. An ideational approach leads to a fine-grained analysis of the motivations behind political parties' decisions to compete or cooperate within a specific party system, especially during minority parliaments, enriching the traditional focus on offices, policies and votes (Muller and Strøm, 1999).

As explained in our methodological section, interviews with the main brokers of the 2022 supply-and-confidence agreement would likely improve our understanding of it. Future research could feature such interviews to explore questions like: How did the experience of the pandemic help party staff and MPs to push for a formal agreement? How did they make sense of the opportunity window opened by the pandemic for social policy expansion? Why did the agreement not produce a coalition government? What lessons did both parties draw from this experience of legislative cooperation? We invite scholars of Canadian politics to address these questions, and others, notably through interviews with officials involved in the making of the supply-and-confidence agreement, now that it ended.

In conclusion, two and a half years after the advent of the agreement, we can better understand how it worked and why it ended. Despite shared policy ideas and common strategic interests in interparty cooperation, political tensions had been at the core of the agreement since March 2022. The supply-and-confidence agreement did not dampen the adversarial partisan dynamic between the NDP and the LPC. On the contrary, each party continued to battle the other on the terrain of progressivism, notably with the NDP issuing deadlines on the implementation of every social policy item contained in the agreement. The last year of the agreement, we saw increasing uncertainty over its survival, with the NDP loosing patience on the speed of welfare state expansion and the LPC facing persistent criticisms over its leadership and the level of federal spending. One might argue that the very same dynamics that led to the agreement could also explain its dramatic termination. The shared policy priorities remain between the two parties, but strategic learning once again plays a central role in understanding the role of ideas. The NDP perceived the need to distance itself from the Liberals, whose government was increasingly unpopular, and prepare for the next federal election. The NDP thus regained its full freedom to forge and promote its own policy agenda and frame the previous two and a half years to its advantage. In the end, the 2021 federal election did not lead to another single-party minority government in the Canadian tradition but, when the supply-and-confidence agreement ended, Canada was yet again back to a traditional election-in-waiting situation.

Notes

1 We note the absence of gender and diversity in the agreement, which are only mentioned in relation to Indigenous reconciliation. This is surprising regarding the importance of these issues in both the LPC and NDP's platforms and Justin Trudeau's framing since 2015 (Pammett and Dornan, 2022). In particular, since Justin Trudeau became leader of the LPC, feminism and diversity have been central to the LPC's political program and Trudeau's image (Findlay, 2022). Exploring why gender and diversity are not included in the agreement and its policy agenda point to an interesting research agenda. We thank reviewer 4 for this blind spot in our analysis.

2 Strengthened by its position as *kingmaker*, the NDP after the 1972 federal election famously published a "shopping list" of policy gains regarding cost of living, prices, pensions, taxation, unemployment and Indigenous rights to negotiate its support in the new minority parliament (Stewart, 1980: 475).

3 See the online Appendix for more details on sample selection and coding.

4 It should be noted that we are using election promises independently of the fact that they are acted upon or not by political parties. In our framework, election promises are mere indicators of the ideational orientations of parties in the context of legislative negotiations, but it can then lead to interparty conflicts during agreements when promises are not respected. The case of Pharmacare and the dissatisfaction of the NDP since the summer of 2023 is an example of such conflicts. Leaders also influence the orientation of political parties (Bittner, 2018, 2021), which we address in the next section.

5 The major speeches include the Sponsor's speech, delivered by the minister responsible for the bill proposal, expressing the government's official position, and the Response speeches from each opposition party. These documents were sourced from Hansard and LEGISinfo.

6 This opens an interesting research agenda on the history of political parties in Canada and the balancing between electoral and political strategies, on the one hand, and policy ideas and programs, on the other. While we mobilize these two dimensions conjointly and our theoretical framework focuses on the interaction between strategies and partisan ideas (programmatic beliefs), we could hypothesize that a variation might exist among parties and throughout time in what matters most (offices, policies, votes, c.f. Muller and Strøm, 1999). Especially, the difference between brokerage parties (LPC and CPC) anchored in pragmatism, and more ideologically driven parties (such as the NDP) is a long research interest of Canadian scholars (Carty and Cross, 2010; Bélanger and Stephenson, 2010), as well as the role of leaders in parties' orientations (Bittner, 2021). We encourage scholars to investigate further the history of political strategies and partisan ideas in explaining interparty competition and cooperation in Canada. We thank reviewer 4 for this insight.

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