Cross-Border Interest Group Learning

Robert G. Boatright
Department of Political Science, Clark University
rboatright@clarku.edu

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There is ample reason to believe that Canadian and American groups have opportunities to learn from each other; this is indeed a premise of Interest Groups and Campaign Finance Reform in the United States and Canada. Given the high level of awareness of American politics on the part of most Canadians – and the low level of awareness of Canadian politics on the part of most Americans – one might expect that group learning would be decidedly one-sided, that Canadian groups might have the ability to study American groups’ innovations and adapt these to their own situation, but not vice versa. Yet the reader of the book will note that this was clearly not the case in regards to campaign finance reform. Even in instances where groups responded similarly – for instance, in both countries organized labor increased its emphasis on talking to union members about politics – these adaptations were not necessarily undertaken with any reference to what was going on across the border. In short, American and Canadian groups did not report that they spent a lot of time talking with each other about election strategy.

Few of the Canadian groups whom I interviewed expressed much surprise at this finding. Yet given the ties between many American and Canadian groups, it is worth asking what sort of sharing of information does occur. To put matters in the framework of the “experiment” here, one should investigate whether the experiment is contaminated by the fact that one group might have been influenced by the actions of the other.

The answer to this question is dependent, however, on what one defines as “information.” To preview the argument in this supplement to the book, although there is little overt sharing of specific pieces of political information, Canadian and American groups do learn from each other in two ways. First, there is much informal contact through casual political and social networks. Particularly among conservative groups, social contacts are developed through conferences, political training programs, or social gatherings. Longstanding group ties are largely a consequence of personalities; some group leaders develop a rapport with other group leaders, regardless of the logic of or benefits derived from group connections.

Second, there is collaborative work on cross-border issues, but this work is rarely conducted at the federal level. As I argue in a related piece (Boatright 2009), state and provincial interest groups tend to work together on shared problems, and they often work together to lobby organizations of regional governance. For instance, Sierra Club chapters in the United States and Canada have worked with regional organizations such as the New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers Conference, and chambers of commerce have worked together to develop trade policies related to border crossings. Although personalities play a role
here, another major determinant is whether groups truly believe that they are part of a regional, cross-national entity. It is simply more plausible to argue that this is the case at the subnational level; as a consequence, much of the group learning that does take place is relatively immune to changes in campaign finance law. Collaboration depends on a sense of region, but is also undertaken to further advance politicians’ and citizens’ propensity to view the region as a region.

To the extent that groups fail to share information or fail to coordinate strategies, the differences in the relationships between groups and government in the United States and Canada are to blame. On the American side, in particular, many groups and policymakers have contended that Canadian groups are encouraged to communicate their views to government officials or bureaucrats in a private, nonconfrontational manner. On some issues, to be certain, groups might benefit from speaking directly to each other. Yet in others, politicians may take the initiative in developing policy proposals, and may consult with groups before, during, or after the creation of such proposals. Particularly in cases where individual states and provinces are developing regional plans, groups may play a role, but without ever coordinating amongst each other. Where politicians are in agreement with groups in either country, this is not necessarily a problem for groups, but it does serve to diminish one’s ability to identify a role for groups in the process.

In this paper I first summarize prior research on contacts between American and Canadian interest groups at the national level, and I use this information to categorize different types of group learning. Second, I draw upon interviews conducted with leaders of several prominent Canadian interest groups to discern the types of information sharing that take place at the federal level.

**Group Learning in a Cross-Border Context: Less Than One Might Think**

As we have seen in throughout *Keeping up with the Neighbors*, most studies of Canadian interest groups agree that Canada has a less powerful constellation of interest groups than does the United States. The absence of anything resembling political action committees, the centralization of power in the governing party leadership, and the level of party discipline in Canada all ensure that interest groups will be less consequential in elections. Canadian groups that seek to directly influence policy tend to work most closely with the federal bureaucracy and with the cabinet (Pross 1992, 42; Presthus 1973, 63); this emphasis, in turn, leads such groups to seek nonideological solutions to problems and to avoid mobilizing the public. This focus on incremental solutions may discourage groups from seeking to develop coalitions with other organizations outside the country, and particularly to avoid relying upon much more political American groups. Where important international decisions are made – for instance, where treaties are signed or regional resources are allocated – politicians may collaborate, but like-minded groups on either side of the border are encouraged to communicate with local politicians or bureaucrats, not with each other. Groups may be brought into the process by politicians, but if so, this takes place only after the international component is introduced.
Although decisionmaking at the federal level is highly centralized in Canada, the federal government as a whole exerts less power than the American federal government. That is, provincial governments are far more powerful in domestic policy matters than are the American state governments (see Smith 2004, 118). Canadian interest groups are thus encouraged to develop federated structures, and, according to some, may make more of an effort to mobilize members and play a visible role at the provincial level than at the federal level (Thorburn 1985, Kwavnick 1975). Groups active at the provincial level might also be more likely to relate to neighboring American groups as equals than would federal groups; the smaller population of Canada and the distance between Washington and Ottawa might preclude many American groups from paying notice to Canadian groups (and vice versa), but groups active in, for instance, Vancouver might more naturally pay heed to groups in Seattle.

Most prior work considering communication between American and Canadian groups has focused either on social movements that have taken place in both countries at the same time or on narrowly defined problems related to border areas. That is, one can distinguish between groups seeking diffuse, largely expressive benefits for their members, and groups that either seek material benefits for members or are addressing a policy problem that is localized enough to provide some form of tangible benefits. In the first type of literature, communication or learning has been largely informal, while in the second type communication has been both formal and informal, involving shared work on issues and more casual contacts.

The most extensive literature on group communication is that on the feminist movement in Canada. Young (2000), Vickers, Rankin, and Appelle (1993), Dobrowolsky (1998, 2000), and Black (1992) all approach the women’s movement in Canada with some consideration of the successes and failures of the women’s movement in the United States. Vickers, Rankin, and Appelle contend that many American expatriates took part in the Canadian women’s movement, and Black notes that many American feminist leaders frequently took part in events related to the Canadian women’s movement. Each of these authors, however, cautions that differences in the receptivity of the federal government to the women’s movement made many aspects of the American experience irrelevant to Canadians.

There is also evidence of collaboration between social conservatives in the US and Canada. Several American groups have established Canadian offices; for instance, the Colorado-based Christian conservative group Focus on the Family has established an office in Vancouver and a smaller lobbying office in Ottawa. Given the variety of smaller socially conservative groups operating in Western Canada (see MacKenzie 2005), one would assume that there is some coordination. Among fiscal conservatives, Jeffrey (1997) and Harrison (1995) have both documented financial ties between American and Canadian conservatives; the Vancouver-based Fraser Institute was modeled on the American Enterprise Institute, and received seed money from several American foundations (Jeffrey 1997, 422). The Fraser Institute, in fact, once maintained a satellite office in Seattle, and currently lists an office in Tampa, Florida on its website. Harrison argues that several other groups were consciously patterned on American groups, citing REAL Women and Renaissance Canada, two social groups patterned on the Moral Majority; the Business Council for National Issues, developed from the model of the Business Roundtable, and the National Citizens’ Coalition, based on the models of the Conservative Opportunity Society and the Heritage Foundation.
All of these studies provide circumstantial evidence of relationships between American groups, but none provide detailed discussions of group learning. Insofar as these are not groups that pursue immediate material benefits for their members, it seems unsurprising that contacts would be more than sporadic; it does not benefit a Canadian group to develop ties to an American group, or vice versa. The Canadian women’s movement would not have been affected by the success or failure of Americans, just as the degree of success Canadian social conservatives have had seems largely unrelated to the fortunes of American conservatives. As such, literature on these groups has noted some suspicion or discomfort in the relations between activists from the two countries; Vickers, Rankin, and Appelle note that there were areas in which American feminists were not particularly helpful, and MacKenzie argues that Focus on the Family’s Canadian activities have been met with some suspicion of “imperialism” in Canada.

Environmental groups represent a middle “type” among the two categories I have established here. That is, air or water quality is not a material benefit for group members, but insofar as environmental problems can be met and addressed in a defined geographic area, they are somewhat localized in nature. As a result, many larger groups, such as Greenpeace and the Sierra Club, maintain operations in both countries. Magnusson (1996) maintains that the Canadian environmental movement has always been largely international in its focus. Hoberg (1997) concurs, although he notes that greater economies of scale in the United States have enabled American groups to conduct more research. He also argues that the greater dependence of Canada on natural resource extraction has, in recent years, led many Canadian environmental activists to increase their focus on domestic policy. Despite shared work by larger groups, however, many local groups have engaged in less collaborative work than one might expect; Pierce, Steger, Steel, and Lovrich’s (1992) study of smaller environmental groups in Michigan and Ontario concludes that differences in institutions and political culture have reduced cross-border cooperation, and more recent studies of the Cascadia region (Alper 1997) and the New England/Maritime Canada region (Bantjes 2004) concur.

It is, then, groups that pursue material benefits that may have the greatest need to engage in activities in both countries. There is, of course, no prohibition on having groups merely set up operations in both countries. Given that many American manufacturers operate plants in both countries, there is no reason why they cannot simply lobby both governments. This has been discussed in other contexts; for instance, studies of lobbying in the European Community (Mazey and Richardson 1993, 7) have discussed the establishment by American groups such as the Chamber of Commerce of European lobbying offices. Yet American corporations have been criticized at times for seeking to become involved in Canadian politics, as some accounts of the 1988 Canadian election show. The major peak business organizations in Canada – the Canadian Council of Chief Executives, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters – have clear American analogues, but are not directly affiliated with American groups.

Finally, many of the most prominent labor unions in Canada are US-based internationals; currently, these include the United Steelworkers, the United Food and Commercial Workers, and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. There has, however, been a strong movement toward disaffiliation from international unions; the percentage of Canadian union
members of US-based internationals fell from 70 percent in 1951 to 39 percent in 1986 (Tuohy 1992), and now stands at 28.1 percent.¹ This movement was led by the split between the Canadian Auto Workers and the United Auto Workers; the CAW concluded that the economic circumstances of Canadian and American auto workers were sufficiently different that an international union, especially one dominated by Americans, could not help Canadians (Yates 1993, 217). By the late 1980s, the relationship between the CAW and the UAW had become quite conflictual; Yates argues that this was a rooted in the fact that the major auto manufacturers were American, and thus received more sympathy from American unionists than they did from Canadians. Among the unions that maintained their international status, the ties between American and Canadian unions are still somewhat weak. Canadian unions tend to have substantial autonomy and few financial obligations to the international; membership generally involves participation in annual conferences and other events, and participation by Canadian leaders on the international’s executive board.

This literature shows the difficulty of drawing conclusions about the relationship between American and Canadian interest groups; the various studies all draw parallels between American and Canadian groups, but the details on how groups work together are often scarce. This may be in part a consequence of limited interactions between groups; that is, there simply may not be much to report. I would contend, however, that this limited literature points to the difficulty in measuring group learning. This is a problem in studies limited to American groups as well; innovations in group activities can spread from one organization to the next without any sort of well-documented coordination. Particularly as regards political activities or arguments, groups may emulate each other without ever having direct contact. Consider three examples drawn from studies of American interest groups in recent years:

- Rimmerman (1994) summarizes the diffusion of “bundling” techniques among American interest groups, beginning with EMILY’s List, an organization that sought to elect pro-choice Democratic women candidates. First, groups that might be expected to have discussed politics with EMILY’s List members, such as the Republican-leaning WISH List, adopted their own bundling programs; later, organizations such as the Club for Growth, which almost assuredly did not discuss politics with EMILY’s List, adopted the same tactic (see also Thomas 1980; Malbin, Rozell, Skinner, and Wilcox 2002). Group learning began within well-defined policy networks, but spread to groups that stood in almost diametrical opposition to EMILY’s List but observed the success of the group’s tactic.

- When the NAACP National Voter Fund began its program of contacting “infrequent” voters in the 2000 election, the group’s political director, Heather Booth, reportedly developed the groundwork for her program by paying a visit to friends at the Sierra Club and learning about the Sierra Club’s member contacting programs (Malbin, Rozell, Skinner, and Wilcox 2002). The NAACP and the Sierra Club have at times worked together on policy matters, but the agendas of the two organizations (civil rights and the environment) are hardly a natural fit; the resemblance of the NAACP’s political program was largely a consequence of social ties between NAACP and Sierra Club leaders. The Sierra Club’s strategy was complex enough that it could not be learned merely through

observation, but it was information that could be shared in a relatively informal manner, and could be adapted across a variety of policy domains.

Groups on the political left and right have developed their own annual conferences designed to assist those who share their partisan goals in developing effective campaign and lobbying strategies. On the left, the annual “Take Back America” conference, run since 2003 by the Campaign for America’s Future, has attracted dozens of left-leaning interest groups and has featured workshops on various different aspects of laws governing group activities and group techniques. On the right, the Conservative Political Action Conference, conducted since 1973 by the American Conservative Union, also features workshops on fundraising and other group maintenance issues, as well as seminars on policy issues and speeches by leading conservative activists and politicians. Both conferences provide a forum for groups to share information, and can lay the groundwork for ongoing collaboration.

These anecdotes illustrate three ways in which groups can learn from each other: through observation, without communicating at all; by communicating through informal social networks; or through formal, group-specific channels. As the discussion below shows, the ways in which groups learn across borders are dependent on the type of issue and the type of group.

**Group Learning at the Federal Level**

American and Canadian peak business associations tend to be quite familiar with each other’s activities, but this familiarity is primarily a consequence of repeated work on relatively narrowly defined issues of shared concern. Despite the aggressive campaign activities of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the National Federation of Independent Businesses, leaders of these two groups’ Canadian counterparts have expressed little interest in adopting these groups’ activities. Although the Canadian and US Chambers meet twice a year, the focus of most discussions between the groups over the past five years has been on issues relating to the Security and Prosperity Partnership and to issues related to border crossings. Likewise, the CFIB has found that it has had increased contact with the U.S. Embassy but only sporadic communications with the NFIB. The Canadian Council of Chief Executives, perhaps because of its smaller size and ability to “cherry pick” issues, has been more involved in working with American business groups; the group’s leader, Tom D’Aquino, has been in his position long enough to have longstanding ties with American group leaders.

The primary venue for the CCCE’s involvement in cross-border issues has been the North American Competitiveness Council (NACC). The NACC was established in 2006, one year after the creation of the US-Canada-Mexico Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP). The SPP appoints task forces to study issues relating to trade and security issues in the three countries and holds regular meetings of national political leaders. The NACC was created, at the behest of the SPP, to provide business input into SPP decisionmaking. Each of the three nations has a secretariat in the NACC; the CCCE holds the Canadian secretariat and the US Chamber of
Commerce holds the American secretariat. Because the SPP has no statutory authority, the existence of the NACC does not obviate the need for lobbying each nation’s government, but it does ensure that a unified business agenda is presented to leaders of the three countries before any political decisions must be made. The 2007 NACC recommendations concerned border crossing issues, standardized regulations, and energy issues. The NACC is not, then, part of the SPP but serves a regular advisory function. The SPP also conducts what it terms as “consultations” with other organizations, including organized labor and business groups not represented in the NACC, but these are not as formalized as are those with the NACC businesses. Consultations are driven more by the SPP agenda and the specific informational needs of the SPP than are interactions with the NACC.

The NACC itself seems to correspond more closely with American politics than Canadian politics, insofar as it establishes peak business organizations as regular consultants to politicians; that is, it gives them the initiative to suggest, rather than merely to respond to politicians’ requests. The Canadian-American Business Council (CABC), a Washington-based organization founded in 1987 which represents several businesses with operations in the United States and Canada, has worked to coordinate business groups’ strategy in regards to the SPP and in lobbying the US government in general. According to Maryscott Greenwood, director of the CABC, the NACC was formed at the impetus of American firms such as UPS, who sought to establish an organized means for American or multi-national firms to have an ongoing means of reconciling the “prosperity” and “security” functions of the SPP. The Canadian government preferred at first to name the members of the NACC based on recommendations of several associations including the Canadian Chamber, the Canadian Manufactures and Exporters, the Canadian Council of Chief Executives and others, before ultimately designating the CCCE as the Secretariat. American groups may play a larger role in shaping border policy in part because the US has been the leading player in pushing for greater border regulation and synchronization of trade, and in part because American groups are simply more effective at lobbying their own government than Canadian groups could be expected to be. In part, this is simply a matter of identifying access points in the American system. Greenwood emphasizes that making the link between American employers and policy toward Canada can expand the number of access points for the group; while some Canadian groups have reported that Senators or Representatives from border states can have the most immediate need to study border issues, linking border to policy to American firms located elsewhere in the country can lead other legislators to pay attention. Indeed, the “Friends of Canada” caucus in the House of Representatives is currently co-chaired by Representative Harry Brown, Republican of South Carolina. The statistics of South Carolina - Canada trade bear out the importance of commercial ties, but Brown might not have been aware of those statistics prior to the appointment of his friend David Wilkins as US Ambassador to Canada; hence, Brown’s initial interest in Canada appears to have been largely personal. Brown, and others in Congress who have taken an interest in Canadian policy, are evidence that a focus by American groups (and perhaps the Canadian government) can yield a broader range of sympathetic legislators and can provide a sort of inside lobbying that Canadian groups could not hope to replicate.

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Is there equivalent business activity in Canada? That is, do American groups have a need to coordinate in approaching the Canadian government? Clearly businesses that have employees within Canada have standing to appeal to politicians. Yet the ability of American politicians to pitch their ideas to Canadian audiences is sharply different from the ability of Canadian politicians to do the same. While groups such as CABC and the New England/Canada Business Council have encouraged networking among groups and have sponsored events featuring premiers or members of the cabinet, the lesser attention paid by Americans to Canadian politics may diminish the effect of these events. CABC’s recent events featuring, for instance, New Brunswick Premier Shawn Graham or NECBC events featuring Québec Premier Jean Charest could not be expected to garner extensive press coverage. Greenwood noted that a recent CABC event in Ottawa featuring Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano was sold out far in advance. She contends that there is a sense of novelty in US politicians paying attention to Canada that makes them much more effective in appealing to the Canadian government or the Canadian public than is the case for Canadians in the United States. Canadian groups such as the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies have argued much the same thing.

Beyond these larger collaborative ventures, many of the relationships between Canadian and American business groups have, according to Greenwood, been based largely on personalities and pre-existing relationships. She cites collaborations between the CME and the NAM, between the Canadian and American Trucking Associations, and between Refreshments Canada and the American Soft Drink Association as some of the more established of these. In the case of smaller organizations, lobbying in the United States is often coordinated through provincial governments. The Harper government has encouraged the provinces to establish their own offices in Washington; to date, Alberta, Québec, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan have done this, although some of these in fact preceded the Harper government.

Canadian labor unions tend to have relatively formal ties with American unions, either by virtue of their membership in international unions or their membership in the Canadian Labour Congress, which provides member unions with access to the AFL-CIO. Despite these close ties, however, most Canadian unions have reported that communication with the AFL-CIO is relatively ad hoc, through participation in conferences or in instances where the unions share a common employer. The CLC, for instance, has coordinated its campaign to publicize Wal-Mart’s employment practices in Canada with that of the American Service Employees International Union. Communication between Canadian and American unions tends not to take place solely, or even primarily, between similar unions. For instance, the Canadian Auto Workers, whose acrimonious break with the UAW was discussed above, has, according to the CAW’s Jim Stanford, developed closer ties with progressive American unions such as UNITE HERE than it has with the UAW. According to Stanford, the most progressive unions in Canada are not the same as those in the United States; to cite a few examples, Stanford contends that the American SEIU chapters are more progressive than their Canadian counterparts, while the United Steelworkers in Canada are more progressive than their American counterpart. The autonomy that exists within internationals can lead to divergent political paths for the same unions in the two countries. Canada has much higher union density than does the United States, a circumstance which has led the CLC to call for greater autonomy on the part of Canadian chapters of international unions, and which has led American unions to readily agree to allow Canadian unions to fund their own political activities independently of their internationals.
From an attitudinal standpoint, this may lead Canadian unions to turn away from American unions simply because they are more successful and need little guidance. At a minimum, unions, like peak business associations, have formal means of regular interaction in the form of the annual meetings of the various unions and of the AFL-CIO but may not go beyond this.

If unions and business groups have the opportunity to have somewhat structured contacts, however, issue-oriented groups do not. The Canadian issue groups that reported frequent contacts with American groups tended to do so through social networks. To cite a few examples, the Canadian Taxpayers’ Federation’s John Williamson reported that he has a standing invitation to the regular meetings that Americans for Tax Reform’s Grover Norquist holds for conservative political leaders; Williamson said that he attends when he is in Washington. The CTF has had the opportunity to develop social ties with like-minded American groups such as ATR and the National Taxpayers Union. The National Citizens’ Coalition, another conservative issue group, has not developed such close ties, but it shares a regular political consulting and polling firm (John McLaughlin and Associates) with several American conservative groups and Republican candidates. Many Canadian organizations that do employ political consultants tend to employ American consultants (Cross 2004, 111), and thus may adopt similar strategies to those of American groups without necessarily learning about the groups.3

Similarly, Canadian social conservatives tend to operate within social networks that enable frequent contacts with American groups. In the case of Campaign Life, the preeminent Canadian anti-abortion group, these networks often enable sharing of information on particular issues, such as gay marriage. In contrast to the networks established by fiscal conservatives, however, social conservatives’ networks can exist at both the federal and local level. In the case of Campaign Life, group leaders have taken part in Washington-based events run by American social conservative leader Gary Bauer; they have taken part in the American national March for Life; and members have trained at the Morton Blackwell Leadership Institute in Arlington, Virginia, a political training institute that has received support from American social conservatives. Many Canadian social conservative leaders, such as Campaign Life’s director Jim Hughes, have been politically active for long enough to develop ties with many American leaders. Yet the anti-abortion cause also lends itself to more local communication; Campaign Life’s Aidan Reid reported that he had worked closely with anti-abortion activists in Michigan, simply because it was relatively easy to travel from Ontario to Michigan.

Finally, environmental groups present a hybrid case. For the Sierra Club, in particular, the relationship between the Canadian and American chapters resembles that of Canadian and American unions; while they share the same name, they are largely autonomous and do not share administrative activities or funds. The Canadian Sierra Club was started as a chapter of the American Sierra Club but was incorporated on its own in the 1980s. Few formal communication opportunities exist between the groups’ federal offices, but because the Sierra Club has a relatively decentralized structure, state or provincial chapters can develop collaborative relationships with their cross-border counterparts on issues of shared concern. There have been longstanding working relationships between the Ontario, Michigan, Ohio, and New York

3 One of the most obvious examples of the importance of consultants, although it does not involve interest groups, is the adoption by the Liberal Party of Barack Obama’s fundraising software in 2009, as described in Valpy 2009.
chapters regarding the Great Lakes, and in recent years the Maritime Chapter and the New England chapters have begun to develop working relationships on issues related to oil shipments, wilderness preservation, and endangered species in the Atlantic Ocean (see Boatright 2009).

Labor unions and advocacy groups do not have the sort of seat at the table at the federal level that the NACC provides for business groups. The CABC’s Greenwood notes that this has been a frequent source of complaints among unions, in particular, but sees no deliberate effort to exclude; in her recounting of the formation of the SPP, business input into joint decisions is largely something that has been pushed by business groups, not solicited by politicians. Other types of groups, she argues, did not organize when the SPP was being developed, and have not pushed for a formal role. Some groups have since been brought into decisionmaking, but not necessarily on a formal, regularized basis.

This summary indicates that group learning is most likely to take place when there are issues of shared concern, and that it takes different forms depending on the type of group involved. For the most part, cross-border learning takes place within informal networks or in more formal, government-initiated organizations. Another defining feature, however, is that group collaboration is most likely when there is a shared governing agency toward which any group lobbying is directed. That is, American groups have minimal clout or advice to give Canadian groups in lobbying the Canadian government; even a substantial reservoir of political information is of limited use in such different sets of political institutions. Where groups can work together to lobby a regional organization or an international governing body, they have more of an incentive to learn from each other. The SPP is one such example; as we shall see below, the New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers Conference is another. And even a common employer, as is the case for the Wal-Mart-related activities of American and Canadian unions, can provide groups with an incentive to work together.

The reader will recall from Chapter 5 of Keeping up with the Neighbors that there were several campaign-specific group activities that had obvious American analogues. In the case of labor unions, the emphasis on mobilization is one such point of comparison, and it is one where group-specific communications might have led to a detailed comparing of notes. Although I turned up no “smoking gun” here, such conversations seem plausible. There is, however, not very much “information” here, in the sense that I have used it; the incentives of American and Canadian unions to do member work seem plain enough that parallel strategies still make sense. In the case of business, expanded Internet use is a common response, and the formal channels to discuss this are there, but the value of any information here again seems limited because the partisan context for business groups is so different. The most obvious examples of Canadian “borrowing,” the electioneering work of the NCC or the targeted advocacy of Campaign Life, almost certainly are instances where groups in a common network were able to observe American group strategies. These examples stand out, however, because they seem relatively foreign to the Canadian electoral environment – they don’t appear to work particularly well, and they seem to have prompted enough of a backlash among politicians to have been somewhat counterproductive. So yes, some learning clearly occurred in a narrower, election-oriented framework, but the value of what was learned seems low enough that one has to turn away from federal elections to see what sort of learning across borders actually has value in a political context.
Conclusions

In regards to federal groups, Canadian advocacy groups have often taken part in the same social networks as American groups, and they may develop useful contacts should they have shared political concerns, even though these contacts are not necessarily frequently drawn upon. Business groups find themselves in a similar situation, although they are more likely to identify shared concerns. Often, however, these shared concerns stop short of political engagement by business groups; individual businesses may develop competitive or cooperative arrangements, but these often require little concerted political activity. Do Canadian groups learn about campaign work from their American counterparts? They clearly observe what American groups do, but they do not necessarily apply it in Canadian politics because of the nature of the party system and the relationship of groups to government.

In addition, cross-national group work is often undertaken at the mercy of politicians. To return to the distinction between learning by observation, group-specific contact, and networking, it is clear that American and Canadian groups tend to collaborate most completely when they have the networks to do so, and that these networks precede any direct contact. Yet these networks are largely created by politicians; they are created either because the networks themselves serve the interests of politicians or because politicians choose to collaborate on issues which, in turn, prompt groups to lend their expertise. There is little evidence here of group initiative in creating cross-border networks independently of regional political agreements or initiatives. Groups may develop their own social ties, but these ties have not necessarily been consistent or enduring. This likely comes as no surprise to observers of interest group politics in the United States or Canada, but it does indicate that when issue arise, groups often fail to have the institutional knowledge or the standing relationships to serve as effective advocates. Canadian and American politics are similar enough that groups might benefit from knowing more about what is taking place on the other side of the border, but Canadian and American groups tend not to have the resources or the initiative to make such knowledge a priority.

Cross-border learning, then, is something best left to analyses of policy issues and networks. To the extent that similar campaign tactics are used by American and Canadian groups, this may be testimony not to group learning, but to the fact that these are not difficult tactics to develop – Canadian groups did not “learn” to turn to mobilizing their members or increasing Internet use in the post-reform years, and they did not learn about electioneering strategies from American groups in the pre-reform years. They clearly observed that this was taking place to a greater extent in the United States than in Canada, but this is not indicative of any sort of inside information or coordination. In both nations, groups have a similar slate of options for their campaign work, and can be expected to consider the same types of strategies, with or without direct communication. More specialized information tends to be directed not toward campaigns, but toward policymaking.

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Interviews


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