

Analyzing Multi-Actor, Multi-Round Public Policy Decision-Making Processes in Government: Findings from Five Canadian Cases

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Introduction

Some public policy decisions made by governments are fairly simple. The parameters and outcomes of a decision may be well known, the number of actors involved quite small and hence the uncertainty and risk associated with different possible courses of action easily calculated (Morgan and Henrion, 1990; Payne, Bettman and Johnson, 1993). Unfortunately these conditions, which may be present in many private and public management situations, rarely hold in practice when it comes to public policy making (Jones, 1994; 2002). Instead, public policy makers typically face situations in which decisions are taken in complex administrative and legislative settings involving multiple actors, often involving multiple levels of institutions, either intra- or inter-governmental or both. In these situations, as Carole Weiss first noted, multiple actors interact in different “arenas” and decision making typically takes place in multiple “rounds” or phases in which individual decisions in each round accrete to generate a final result (Weiss, 1980). These complex settings add a great deal of uncertainty to decision making and affect the nature and type of outcomes which result from such processes. Understanding how decision making in such complex structures occurs, and not mistaking them for simpler processes, is a pre-requisite for understanding policy making in modern societies.

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It is only very recently, however, that public policy researchers have begun to grapple with these complex public policy decision-making processes (Teisman, 2000; From, 2002; Richardson, 1999). Contemporary European, and especially Dutch, analysts have begun to examine the nature of the impasses and break-out processes which characterize decision-making rounds in the effort to better prescribe the kinds of network management activities governments can use to navigate their way through such processes (de Bruijn and ten Heuvelhof, 2000 and 2002; van Bueren, Klijn and Koppenjan, 2003; From, 2002; van Merode et al., 2004).¹ In so doing they have generated a body of concepts, hypotheses and cases which can be compared against Canadian evidence to help shed light on the workings of this understudied decision-making style.²

These studies provide a set of initial hypotheses concerning accretion-type public policy decision-making processes which can be refined and tested in the Canadian case. From, in particular, concluded that in a successful decision accretion process:

- (1) Government actors are the main agenda setters responsible for initiatives and activities which drive decision processes towards their conclusion;
- (2) An initiating government actor takes on different roles at different stages of the decision-making process and behaves differently at each stage; and
- (3) The internal organizational characteristics of the initiating agency play a significant role in affecting the capacity of the agency to successfully undertake these roles and hence shape the final outcome in accordance with their preferences. (adapted from From, 2002)

Although From does not develop similar observations concerning the behaviour of non-governmental actors in these processes, others such as Koppenjan and Klijn (2004) have worked in this area (see also Agranoff and McGuire, 2003; Billings and Hermann, 1998). One of their findings is that while government behaviour may vary by stage of the policy process, it is relatively constant throughout successive rounds compared to non-governmental actor behaviour which can be more volatile and change in different rounds in order to better influence outcomes. Non-governmental actor behaviour, they argue, is linked to the nature of the resources different non-governmental actors have at their disposal, their interest in an issue and the stage at which deliberations on that issue are proceeding (van Bueren, Klijn and Koppenjan, 2003).³

Combining elements of From's observations on the role played by government actors and those of Koppenjan and Klijn on non-governmental ones allows us to set out several testable hypotheses regarding expected patterns of policy actor behaviour in successful multi-actor, multi-round "decision accretion" public policy decision-making contexts:

Abstract. This paper begins the analysis of complex multi-actor, multi-round decision-making processes in Canadian public policy formation. After setting out the notion of a decision-making style and its constitutive elements, the paper identifies research into complex multi-actor, multi-round decisions as a serious lacuna in the literature on public policy decision-making, despite the fact that this type of decision-making is very common in public policy-making circumstances. The paper advances research in this area through the analysis of several hypotheses raised in recent European studies concerning the conditions under which such processes are likely to successfully conclude in a decision, rather than an impasse. These hypotheses are tested against evidence taken from five cases of multi-round decision-making in Canada over the period 1995–2005: amendments to the Indian Act, the creation of Species-at-risk legislation, alterations to the Bank Act, the extension of Privacy legislation to the private sector and efforts to develop a Free Trade of the Americas Agreement (FTAA). Data on actor interactions in these five areas gleaned from on-line newspaper and media index services reveals that Canadian results do not match those arrived at in European studies, showing both different patterns of government and non-governmental activity and less volatility in actor behaviour as rounds evolve over time.

Résumé. Cet article amorce l'analyse des processus complexes des prises de décisions comportant des acteurs et des séries multiples dans l'élaboration des politiques publiques canadiennes. Après avoir établi la notion d'un style de processus décisionnel et ses éléments constitutifs, l'article avance que le manque de recherche sur les décisions complexes à acteurs et séries multiples est une sérieuse lacune dans la littérature sur le processus décisionnel des politiques publiques, alors que ce type de processus décisionnel est pratique courante dans les situations de prises de décisions en politiques publiques. L'article contribue à la recherche dans ce domaine par l'analyse de plusieurs hypothèses proposées dans de récentes études européennes concernant les conditions dans lesquelles de tels processus ont des chances d'aboutir à une décision, plutôt qu'à une impasse. Ces hypothèses ont été testées dans cinq études de cas de processus décisionnels à séries multiples au Canada entre 1995 et 2005 : les amendements de la Loi sur les Indiens, la création de la législation sur les espèces en péril, les modifications de la Loi sur les banques, l'extension au secteur privé de la législation relative à la protection de la vie privée et la conception de l'accord sur la Zone de libre-échange des Amériques (ZLEA). Les données sur les interactions des acteurs dans ces cinq domaines - données obtenues de services de journaux en ligne et de sommaires médiatiques - révèlent que les résultats canadiens ne correspondent pas à ceux des études européennes : elles montrent à la fois des différences dans les formats d'action gouvernementale et non-gouvernementale et moins d'instabilité dans les comportements des acteurs à mesure que les séries évoluent avec le temps.

H1: That (a) the number of governmental actors and their activity level will remain relatively constant throughout successive rounds while (b) non-governmental actors flow in and out of different rounds depending on their perception of their interests, their resource capacities, their estimations of likely policy outcomes and their interpretations of the existing state-of-play of ongoing policy processes;

H2: That the participation of major non-governmental actors in successive rounds is inversely related to their congruence with government aims. Issue areas with significant discordance between government and non-governmental actors aims and interests will witness higher levels of non-governmental participation;

H3: That the activities of non-governmental actors will change as rounds progress from a focus on influencing the context or environment of decision making (e.g., public opinion or media) in early rounds to one concerned with influencing decision makers in later rounds as discussions become more detailed, focused, technical and legalistic.

In what follows below, these hypotheses are tested against evidence gleaned from online newspaper and media index services concerning actor interactions in five cases of multi-round decision making in Canada over the period 1995–2005: amendments to the Indian Act, the creation of species at risk legislation, alterations to the Bank Act, the extension of Freedom of Information legislation to the private sector and efforts to develop a Free Trade Area of the Americas Agreement (FTAA). The reasons for choosing these cases and the methods followed in collecting the data are set out below.

The Concept of a Public Policy Decision-Making Style

In his early work on the subject of public policy decision making, John Forester argued that a limited set of contextual variables led to a distinct set of discrete decision-making “styles” with significant impact of the nature and type of decisions which emerged from each decision-making process. As he put it in a 1984 article:

Depending upon the conditions at hand, a strategy may be practical or ridiculous. With time, expertise, data, and a well-defined problem, technical calculations may be in order; without time, data, definition, and expertise, attempting those calculations could well be a waste of time. In a complex organizational environment, intelligence networks will be as, or more, important than documents when information is needed. In an environment of inter-organizational conflict, bargaining and compromise may be called for. Administrative strategies are sensible only in a political and organizational context. (1984: 25)

Forester suggested that, ultimately, decision-making styles varied according to six key contextual variables: first, the number of *agents* (decision makers); second, the organizational *setting*; third, the degree to which the organizational setting is *isolated* from other organizations; fourth, the degree to which the *problem* is well defined; fifth the availability of complete, accessible and comprehensible *information* on the problem and potential solutions and, finally, the amount of *time* available to make a decision (Forester, 1984). To the extent these six conditions define the context of a decision-making process, he argued, different styles of decision making, and different results, would prevail.

Forester’s model generates too many possible permutations to be of much use in empirical studies. However, more recently, Howlett and

Ramesh (2003) proposed a simplifying taxonomy of decision-making styles based on Forester's work which is more useful in this regard. Combining "agent" and "setting" into a single variable related to the *complexity of policy context*, and the notions of the "problem," "information" and "time" resources into a single variable relating to the *severity of the resource constraints* placed upon decision makers, this model provides a clearer portrayal of the impact of contextual variables on decision-making styles and outcomes. Table 1 below outlines the four basic decision-making styles that emerge on the basis of this analysis.

In this model, traditional *rational decision making*, in which outcomes are expected to be optimal or maximizing, occurs only in a type I environment where "bounded rationality" prevails and the policy context is simple and constraints are low (Simon, 1991). Lindblom-style *incremental decision making*, where the outcome is likely to result only in a marginal shift from the status quo, is more likely to occur in a type II environment where the policy context is still fairly simple but constraints on decision makers are higher. Both of these styles, of course, are well known and their parameters and consequences have been more or less fully explored (Lindblom, 1959; Hayes, 1992; Berry, 1990; Weiss and Woodhouse, 1992; Bendor, 1995; Simon, 1991; Carley, 1980; Cahill and Overman, 1990).

While these two types of decision making may be quite common in routine business and public administration, however, they are much less common in public policy decision making where decisions typically involve multiple actors in multiple settings (Howlett and Ramesh, 2003). Decision making in more complex environments falls into types III and IV and is much less well studied and understood. When these complex

TABLE 1

Basic decision-making styles after Howlett and Ramesh

Severity of Constraints on Decision-Makers	Complexity of the Policy Context	
	Low (Single or limited actor, single setting)	High (Multi-actor, multi-setting)
Low (Clear problem definition, available information, available time)	TYPE I "Rational" decision making	TYPE III Multiple round, "decision accretion" decision making
High (Poor problem definition, limited information, limited time)	TYPE II "Incremental" decision making	TYPE IV Heuristic, bureaucratic politics or "garbage can" decision making

Adapted from Howlett and Ramesh, 2003

multi-actor, multi-setting processes have been examined, it has often been in the case of heuristic-driven foreign policy decision making, especially decisions to go to war, which are often severely time-constrained and hence fall into type IV (Mintz, 1997; Mintz and Geva, 1997). Alison's work on the Cuban missile crisis and the subsequent research it engendered on bureaucratic politics is an example of work which has dealt with decision making in this environment (Allison, 1969, 1971; Allison and Halperin, 1972; Bendor and Hammond, 1992). Cohen, March and Olsen's work on *garbage can decision making* is probably the best known in this area (March and Olsen, 1979; Cohen, March and Olsen, 1979; see also Mucciaroni, 1992; Bendor, Moe and Shotts, 2001; Olsen, 2001). All of these analyses emphasize the contingent and somewhat unpredictable, or "irrational," nature of the decisions which emerge from these processes. However, again, while it is clear that type IV processes may characterize some public policy decision-making contexts, it is not clear that these are in any way typical of decision making in this area.

The fourth type of decision making, that of complex multi-actor, multi-setting *decision accretion decision making* in a relatively unconstrained environment (type III) remains very much underinvestigated (Agranoff and McGuire, 2003), despite its very common appearance in governments, especially multi-level ones featuring legislation-based policy making (Weiss, 1980; Steunenberg and Schmidtchen, 2000). This is a significant lacuna in the public policy literature since this decision-making style, like the others, can be expected to carry its own consequences for the nature of the policy outcomes which emerge from such processes.

That is, each of these four styles carries with it important implications for the types of decisions likely to emerge from public policy decision-making deliberations. Type I, rational decision-making, as discussed above, attempts to maximize or optimize resources and generate technically efficient solutions to public policy problems (Sanderson, 2002). Type II, incremental processes are biased towards conservatism or the marginal adjustment of the status quo (Hayes, 1992). And type IV, garbage-can processes are, at best, satisficing and also possibly chaotic and random (Mucciaroni, 1992). But what of decision-accretion processes? While deliberative, they are inherently political and hence can be expected to combine rational and irrational elements in final decisions, as does incrementalism, but with less consistently predictable results, allowing for large swings in decisions depending on the nature of the "vetopoints" and other characteristics of actor behaviours available and exercised in each round (Tsebelis, 1990; Scharpf, 1991). Unlike garbage-can processes, however, these rounds are structured and formalized and outcomes are neither random nor purely contingent but rather

the result of careful but complexly structured multi-actor deliberations. But is this all we can say about this very common public policy decision-making style and its likely impact on policy outcomes?

Public policy making in Canada provides a good test case for advancing our understanding of these type III processes. With its complex legislature-based federal system, multi-actor, multi-level, multi-round decision making is quite common (Grande, 1996; Peters and Pierre, 2001; Scharpf, 1994; Howlett, 1999). Analyzing such processes in Canada can help us understand the factors which contribute to type III policy outcomes and the implications and impact such processes have on subsequent policy outcomes.

Method and Case Selection

The research program for this study is based upon that set out by European analysts, such as van Bueren, Klijn and Koppenjan (2003) and From (2002), in their studies of Dutch multi-round decision making. Using newspaper accounts of policy development “events,” it traces the pattern of development of specific policy outcomes and decision processes at the federal level in Canada and assesses the accuracy of existing conclusions in the literature regarding the structuring and outcomes of multiple arena decision making.⁴ It identifies common patterns of actor behaviour in each round in order illuminate the variables and factors which facilitate or inhibit successful decision-accretion decision making and tests the extent to which the hypotheses derived from European cases can be transferred to different national contexts.

Methodology

The methodology followed in this investigation involved (1) identifying a number of cases to be investigated as examples of existing Canadian multi-actor, multi-round policy decision-making processes; (2) constructing chronologies and descriptions of those processes over the past decade; (3) constructing databases of actors and actor activities in each selected case; and (4) analyzing the results against the expectations derived from the existing literature on the subject.

The research program proceeded in two stages. In phase I, chronologies of selected public policy decision-making cases were constructed and inventories of the actors and activities involved in each decision-making round were established. In phase II, the main activity involved testing several of the observations generated from European cases against evidence from the Canadian cases. The similarities and discrepancies between the hypothesized and observed decision-making behaviour were then analyzed.

Case selection criteria

The policy domains chosen for examination in this project were environment, aboriginal affairs, trade, banking and privacy. Decision-making processes in these areas related to adoption of (1) species at risk legislation (SARA); (2) reforms to the Indian Act (DIA); (3) the development of the Free Trade Area of the Americas Agreement (FTAA); (4) reforms to the Bank Act; and (5) the extension of freedom of information (FOI) and privacy legislation to the private sector.

The choice of cases to be examined in this evaluation is, of course, critical (George, 1979; Eckstein, 1975). A number of criteria determined the selection of cases. First, all featured ongoing and active multi-actor, multi-round decision-making processes. Second, the selection of policy domains reflected processes for which at least one round was well under-way rather than those still under consideration or just beginning. Third, given the need to compare Canadian cases with the results of similar studies in other countries, case selection included examples of cases examined in other countries using similar methodologies. Fourth, case selection related to the ease of availability of current and historical data on activities in the area concerned.

Data

Chronologies of decision-making processes in each domain were gleaned from records of legislative activity in each of the five issue areas covering 1988–2005, the period for which electronic records of actor activity are available (see appendix A for sources and keywords searched). Inventories of policy actors and actor activities in each round were established through the coding of newspaper reports and records of parliamentary, judicial and administrative activity in the domain over the period. Subject searches of media indices generated lists of reports related to each topic. Reports which mentioned specific policy actors were retained. Each report was coded for, among other things, the number, nature and type of actors involved in an event, the type of event, the target of policy-relevant activity and other information related to policy activity and actor behaviour. Duplicate reports of the same event were combined to identify additional actors. In total 2654 discrete actor-events were identified in the five subject areas (see appendix D).

Inspection of legislative policy chronologies constructed for each case identify several key rounds in each issue area in the discussion, and ultimately adoption, of legislation in these areas (see Table 2 below and appendix B for a description and characterization of these changes). Key points in rounds coincide with the introduction or withdrawal of

TABLE 2
Keys dates of legislative activity for five Canadian cases

Issue Round	Bank 1	Bank 2	Bank 3		FOI 1	FOI 2	FOI 3
Legislation/proposal Date	Pre-1992 changes Pre-1992	C38/C8 1993–2001	2006 Post-2001		1993 Pre-1993	c-6 1994–2001	c-201 2002–2005
Issue Round	FTAA 1	FTAA 2	DIA 1	DIA 2	SARA 1	SARA 2	SARA 3
Legislation/proposal Date	Pre 1999 Pre-1999	Post 1999 Post-1999	c-31 Pre-2002	c-31, c-7, c-6 Post-2002	c-65 Pre-1997	c-33 1998–2000	c-5 2001–2002

legislative proposals which, ultimately, are the focus of actor activity in these spheres.⁵

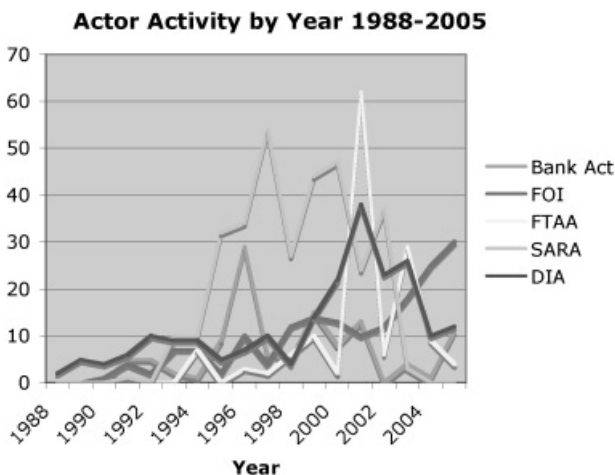
Appendix C records the aggregate level of actor activity in each unique event or instance of actor policy-oriented behaviour coded in the database. Each of these cases is either left- or right-censored, or both, in the sense that the evaluation was driven by the availability of online data, so each record provides a snapshot of an ongoing policy process. However in all cases at least a 10-year record was available and evidence of round-type activity was observable in each case. As Figure 1 shows, *prima facie*, each case involves significant fluctuations in the level of actor activity over the time period examined, consistent with the basic rounds hypothesis and the number of rounds identified in Table 2. As expected, SARA shows three peaks, FTAA one, the Bank Act three, DIA one and FOI three.

Analysis

Evaluating Hypothesis 1

Evaluating H1 requires first establishing that decision rounds in the Canadian federal context are linked to different levels of governmental and non-governmental activity. The initial description provided in Figure 1 and Table 2 shows that there are definite patterns of increased and de-

FIGURE 1
Actor Policy Activity for Five Canadian Cases—By Year



creased activity in each issue area linked to legislative timetables. However this does not in itself reveal the extent to which each cycle is affected by either or both of increased/decreased governmental or non-governmental actor activity. In order to answer this concern it is necessary to disaggregate each case by actor and look at patterns of activity on the part of each category of actor in each year (see appendix C). Table 3 provides measures of dispersion and range of actor activity.

As Table 3 shows, the mean number of government actors in all but one case (FOI) is less than that of non-governmental actors. In some cases (SARA, FTAA, Bank Act) this volatility is quite pronounced, with NGO activity exceeding that of governments by a factor of two or more, while in one case (DIA) it is only slightly greater. The apparently anomalous FOI case can be explained by the primarily intra-governmental nature of this issue, meaning that, in this case, many of what would typically be outside interests affected by government actions are, in fact, governmental ones. This suggests that rather than a consistent pattern, as From and others have suggested, the variation in actor activity in different issue areas per round varies with the type of issue at stake and the interest actors have in it.⁶

Figure 2 sheds more light on these patterns of activity, breaking down government and NGO involvement in policy events on an annual basis. It reveals a more complex pattern of interactions in each issue area than is revealed by simply examining the range of overall level of actor behaviour over the entire period examined. With the exception of the Bank Act, it shows that in most cases—SARA, DIA and FTAA—government

TABLE 3

Range and variation of government and NGO actors 1988–2005

Field/Actor	N (Years)	Minimum # of actors per year	Maximum # of actors per year	Mean	Std. Deviation	Govt mean as a % NGO
SARAGOV	11	2.00	18.00	10.2	6.3	51.56
SARANGO	12	1.00	36.00	17.4	12.2	
FOIGOV	16	1.00	17.00	6.8	5.3	137.13
FOINGO	13	1.00	14.00	4.82	3.8	
FTAAGOV	10	1.00	20.00	6.5	6.8	52.33
FTAAANGO	9	1.00	42.00	8.33	13.00	
DIAGOV	16	1.00	14.00	5.7	4.14	74.26
DIANGO	18	2.00	25.00	6.9	5.6	
BANKGOV	13	.00	6.00	2.5	1.8	28.33
BANKNGO	13	.00	23.00	6.3	6.4	
Total Govt					17.63	75.34
Total NGO					23.40	

FIGURE 2
Governmental and Non-governmental Actor Activity by Issue Area and Year

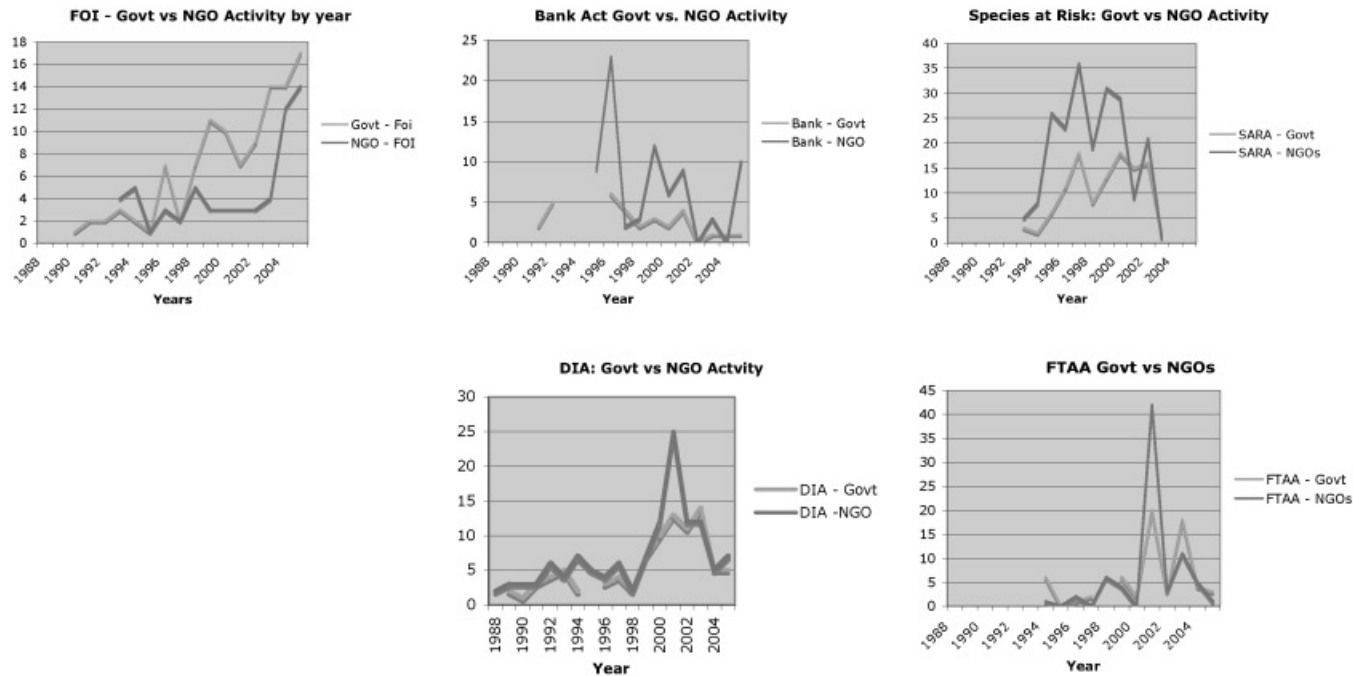


TABLE 4
Actor Type and Issue Support by Round

Issue	SARA			Bank			FOI			DIA		FTAA	
Round	1	2	3	1	2	3*	1	2	3	1	2	1	2
Govt Pro	11	16	5	3	10	0	4	23	23	28	28	9	41
Govt Con	18	22	24	4	0	0	2	20	23	6	1	0	14
Total Govt	29	38	29	7	10	0	6	43	46	34	29	9	55
NGO Pro	9	5	15	2	14	0	3	16	19	7	13	5	13
NGO Con	78	73	10	1	8	0	1	7	10	64	19	5	51
Total NGO	87	78	25	3	22	0	4	23	29	71	32	10	64
Total N (Actors)	116	116	54	10	32	0	10	66	75	105	61	19	119

*Note: Bank Act revisions round 3 samples very small and statements neutral or too vague to code.

and NGO activity closely parallel each other each year, with levels of NGO activity usually greater than government activity. Even in the FOI case, of course, governmental activity also moved cyclically, although remaining greater than NGO activity except for the earliest (pre-1996) phase of activity.

These patterns reveal the general ebb and flow of governmental and NGO activity anticipated in hypothesis 1, with governmental actors remaining generally less active than non-governmental ones in all issue areas except FOI.

Evaluating Hypothesis 2

Evaluating this hypothesis requires a comparison of the level of NGO support/opposition to a proposal vis à vis that of governments. The general situation is set out in Tables 4 and 5, first in absolute terms and then expressed as a percentage of each actor's activity.

TABLE 5
Actor Type and Issue Support by Round (per cent)

Issue	SARA			Bank			FOI			DIA		FTAA	
Round	1	2	3	1	2	3*	1	2	3	1	2	1	2
Govt Pro	38	42	17	43	100	0	67	53	50	82	97	100	75
Govt Con	62	58	83	57	0	0	33	47	50	18	3	0	25
Total Govt	100	100	100	100	100	0	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
NGO Pro	10	6	60	67	64	0	75	70	66	10	41	50	20
NGO Con	90	94	40	33	36	0	25	30	34	90	59	50	80
Total NGO	100	100	100	100	100	0	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

* Note: Bank Act revisions round 3 samples very small and statements neutral or too vague to code.

The figures show, for each case, that:

- (1) SARA had the highest level of participation in rounds 1 and 2 when both government and non-governmental actors opposed the bill being presented. However in round 3 the NGOs supported the bill and the number of actors dropped dramatically.
- (2) Banking had its highest level of participation in round 2 when both governments and NGOs supported the proposed bill.
- (3) FOI participation was highest in rounds 2 and 3 when NGOs generally opposed proposed legislation.
- (4) DIA participation was highest in round 1 when NGOs were completely opposed to the bill being put forward and governments overwhelmingly in favour.
- (5) FTAA activity was highest in round 2 when governments were highly in favour of the bill and NGOs were overwhelmingly opposed.

This means that only two cases—DIA and FTAA—fit the expected relationship of governmental and non-governmental incongruence set out in the hypothesis derived from From's work. FOI also fits the pattern, but reversed, as would be expected given the findings related to hypothesis 1, with higher levels of activity when NGOs were in favour of the legislation and governments opposed. In the other two cases, banking and SARA, NGO opposition also resulted in high activity rates, but in conjunction with government opposition.

This provides only partial confirmation of hypothesis 2, that is, in all cases the most significant determinant of high levels of NGO activity was opposition to proposed legislation. However, this appeared to be a factor regardless of the level of government support or opposition; actor interests may be seen as an important determinant of activity levels, but in an absolute fashion, rather than a relative one. The positions held by governmental actors did not appear to be a major determinant of NGO activity levels.

Evaluating Hypothesis 3:

The final hypothesis to be tested concerns what kinds of resources actors bring to successive rounds in a decision-accretion decision-making situation. The general types of activities all actors engaged in are set out in absolute terms in appendix D in terms of the type of actors targeted by these activities. The data show that most actors engaged in multiple activities and that the most frequently used appeals were directed towards the media, public and directly at decision makers. Much less frequent were appeals to parliamentary committees, Parliament itself, and the judiciary. These last three areas in total involved little more than 15 per cent of all actor activity.

TABLE 6
Aggregated Types of Actor Activity by Rounds and
Issue Areas (per cent)

Issue Area	Rounds	Public/Media	Comm/Dec./Parl/Jud
DIA	1	46	54
	2	53	47
FOI	1	40	60
	2	40	60
	3	44	53
Bank	1	57	43
	2	55	45
	3	42	48
FTAA	1	17	83
	2	64	36
SARA	1	63	37
	2	60	40
	3	36	64

Table 6 aggregates activities directed at the public and media and those more directly focused on decision makers, including those directed at committees, decision makers themselves, parliamentarians and members of the judiciary, by issue area. The figures for these two remaining categories of activities are displayed as a percentage of total actor activity by round.

With the exception of the FTAA and SARA cases, the overall pattern that emerges shows little variation in the targets of activities by issue area, despite the very different overall levels of activity found in each round. On average, activities were directed almost evenly between the public at large and political elites, regardless of the stage of the decision process. In the SARA case more attention was paid in earlier rounds to the public and more towards elites in the last round, as might be expected if hypothesis 3 was correct. The FTAA case also shows some evidence of this occurring.

However it is also necessary to examine these findings in terms of each major category of actor involved. This data is set out in Table 7 below.

These data show that there are some significant differences in the use of public and elite influencing resources on the part of the two major types of actors involved in these decisions. In all cases, there is no evidence of substantial changes in NGO strategy between earlier and later rounds. With the exception of the FOI case the NGO focus was always on the public/media regardless of the issue area or round, ranging from a high of 75 per cent in round one of the Bank Act revisions

TABLE 7

Aggregated Types of Actor Activity by Rounds and Main Category of Actor (per cent)

			Public/Media Target (%)	Comm/Dec./Parl./Jud. Target (%)
SARA	C-65	Gov	54	46
		NGO	65	35
	C-33	Gov	56	44
		NGO	62	38
	C-5	Gov	39	61
NGO		66	34	
DIA	C-31	Gov	65	35
		NGO	53	47
	C-7, C-6	Gov	52	48
		NGO	58	42
FTAA	pre-1999	Gov	59	41
		NGO	60	40
	post-1999	Gov	49	51
		NGO	62	38
FOI	1993	Gov	30	70
		NGO	50	50
	2001	Gov	40	60
		NGO	43	57
	c-201	Gov	41	59
		NGO	53	47
BANK	1992	Gov	78	22
		NGO	75	25
	2001	Gov	51	49
		NGO	70	30
	2006	Gov	100	0
		NGO	58	42

in 1992 to a low of just under 60 per cent in several cases. The FOI case remains anomalous but still has NGO activity evenly divided between public and elite influencing during all three rounds of the decision process.

Government activity shows more variation, ranging from a low of 30 per cent of efforts directed towards the public in the first round of the FOI case, to a high of 100 per cent in the final round of the Bank Act case. However with the exception of the Bank Act case (and less so the FOI case), there does appear to be a trend in government activities away from the public in earlier rounds of decision making towards decision makers themselves in later rounds.

Hence this analysis, too, provides only partial confirmation for the suppositions contained in hypothesis 3.

Conclusion: Findings and Future Research Directions

Multiple decision-making styles exist in government and it is important to understand their dynamics and modes of operation (Lustick, 1980; Thomson, Stokman and Tornvlied, 2003; Heikkila and Isett, 2004; Weirich, 2004; Mintz, 2005). Depending on the number and type of actors involved in a decision and the kinds of resources they possess, public policy decisions can proceed in one of several different styles or fashions. Rational decision making can proceed when, for example, the number of actors is small and the parameters well enough known to allow more or less unconstrained decision making. However, as these challenges accrue, different modes or styles are adopted.

This discussion suggests that since the publication of Forester's groundbreaking work, at least three of the four basic public policy decision-making styles that can be identified on the basis of his analysis have been investigated, including the well-known incremental and rational models, as well as others, such as the highly contingent heuristic or garbage can models. Through a process of empirical and conceptual conjecture and refutation, the theory has now been developed to the point where it is possible to conclude with some certainty when a specific decision-making style is likely to prevail and, hence, in three of four cases, what the general character of outcomes from that process is likely to be (Bendor, Moe and Shotts, 2001; Jones, True and Baumgartner, 1997; Lustick, 1980; Mucciaroni, 1992). This understanding remains incomplete, however, as long as knowledge of a common type of public policy decision making—that of multi-actor, multi-round decision-accretion decision making—remains inadequate.

This paper advances analysis of public policy decision making in Canada through the replication and development of recently published European studies of government decision making in this third “ideal” multi-actor, multi-round type. It set out several key hypotheses derived from the emerging European literature on the subject and tested the generalizability of the findings of these studies outside the European context. It did so by tracing the behaviour of governments and non-governmental policy actors involved in five multi-actor, multi-round processes in Canada over the period 1988–2005.

Three specific hypotheses concerning expected actor behaviour in multi-round, multi-actor decision-making processes were examined:

H1: That (a) the number of governmental actors and their activity level will remain relatively constant throughout successive rounds while (b) non-governmental actors flow in and out of different rounds depending on their perception of their interests, their resource capacities, their estimations of likely policy outcomes and their interpretations of the existing state-of-play of ongoing policy processes;

H2: That the participation of major non-governmental actors in successive rounds is inversely related to their congruence with government aims. Issue areas with significant discordance between government and non-governmental actors aims and interests will witness higher levels of non-governmental participation;

H3: That the activities of non-governmental actors will change as rounds progress from a focus on influencing the context or environment of decision making (e.g., public opinion or media) in early rounds to one concerned with influencing decision makers in later rounds as discussions become more detailed, focused, technical and legalistic.

While it was found that different rounds could be identified in the five policy areas under consideration and that actor activity varied across rounds, the direction of these changes was not straightforward and the analysis found only limited support for these hypotheses.

With respect to hypothesis 1 it was found that both governmental and NGO activity fluctuated greatly over different rounds. The continual anomaly of the FOI case illustrates that different patterns of activities are present in different issue areas and suggests that this has to do with the nature of the “publicness” of the issue area in question. With respect to hypothesis 2, it was found that (in)congruence of government and NGO interests was only a secondary factor explaining variations in actor behaviour. NGO activity in particular was in all cases driven by opposition to proposed bills. And with respect to hypothesis 3 virtually no evidence was uncovered of NGO actor behaviour changing in the expected direction of targets anticipated by Koppenjan and Klijn, but rather remained steadily focused on the media and public.

Taken together, these findings suggest the workings of multi-actor, multi-round decision making may be both more and less predictable than earlier works would suggest. A pattern in which governmental and non-governmental actors react to each other in an inverse way has been observed—in Europe, in particular—with government and NGO behaviour establishing predictable patterns by round, with controversy-laden early rounds leading to more focused interactions in later ones. In the five Canadian cases examined, however, non-governmental actors tend to remain in opposition to governments through successive rounds and both governments and non-governmental actors tend to always target their activity towards influencing the public (and media) rather than proximate decision makers inside Parliament or the judiciary, regardless of the stage of a multi-round process.

These results are consistent with the idea of European policy-making behaviour being more corporatist and less antagonistic than pluralist systems such as Canada’s and, indeed, perhaps it should be expected that lengthy, multi-actor policy processes should come to approximate

overall policy styles in government (Howlett and Ramesh, 2003). That is, round behaviour in each system suggests that some predictability of outcomes may exist in each case, linked to larger socio-political institutional arrangements.

More specifically, though, with respect to the Canadian case, itself, the findings suggest rounds are more likely to succeed or proceed more quickly when their subject matter either is largely internal to governments or where it has non-governmental support at the outset. Round behaviour does not seem especially propitious for removing or altering initial opposition to policy initiatives, which continues to manifest itself throughout each round in a multi-round process and features a highly politicized atmosphere in which there is a continual effort on the part of both governmental and non-governmental actors to appeal to the public to support their position(s). This suggests that events occurring in the pre-decisional stages of the policy cycle may be critical to the outcome of multi-round decision processes and understanding the manner in which rounds commence, especially, should be a focus of future research efforts investigating this decision-making style.

Notes

- 1 European observers, for example, have found it to be quite common for multi-actor, multi-round decision-making processes to result in deadlock and never ultimately reach a final decision (Williams, 2004). In groundbreaking case studies of complex multi-actor, multi-round decisions in Holland and Belgium, van Bueren, Klijn and Koppenjan (2001; 2003) and Verhoest et al. (2004), for example, suggested a number of hypotheses affecting the ability of such decision-making processes to arrive at some result, rather than simply degenerate into an impasse. These relate to the social, cognitive and institutional causes of impasses and the (in)ability of network management efforts on the part of governments to overcome them. Hall and O'Toole (2004) in the US, similarly, have highlighted the importance of the actual stage of the policy process involved in each round—(e.g., formulation of options, their assessment, or arrival at a final choice of instrument)—as a key factor affecting the number and type of actor present in each round.
- 2 In Canada, some work in this area exists, but most has tended to be somewhat partial or concerned with questions other than those related to explicating the relationships existing between policy environments and decision-making outcomes. For example, Michaud (2002) has worked on multi-round “white paper” policy processes but within the context of a study of power relationships in Canadian defence policy formation. Salter (1981), and Pross, Christie and Yogis (1990) have worked on various Royal commissions, which are also often a significant part multi-round decision-making processes, but from the perspective of their organizational characteristics and investigative activities, rather than from that of decision making per se.
- 3 Other such hypotheses include Bueren, Klijn and Koppenjan's finding that cohesive policy networks operating across multiple arenas overcome fragmentation and promote more rational outcomes, a finding which is consistent with other European studies, such as Teisman's (2000).

- 4 While these processes are more complex when they occur within a multi-level governance framework, these can be seen as either incrementally more sophisticated decision-making contexts or as two (or more) separate rounds processes temporarily separated from each other (Bache and Flinders, 2004; Hooghe and Marks, 2003). In either case, the analysis of single-level multi-actor, multi-round processes serves as an initial building block required for the analysis of even more complex decision-making situations.
- 5 As Klijn, Koppenjan and others suggest, the start and end point of each round is somewhat arbitrary but can be linked to what they term “crucial decisions,” that is:

a round opens with an initiative or policy intention of one of the parties that serves as a “trigger to the others... Each round ends with a *crucial decision*, a decision that offers a solution for the question that is central in the particular policy round... A crucial decision heralds a *new round* where it guides the subsequent policy game. (2004: 60;)

In the policy case, a crucial decision is usually one in which the formalization of an issue in an established legal or authoritative decision-making body proceeds or does not proceed (Serdult and Hirschi, 2004). As Teisman (2000) has pointed out, this usually means deciding to proceed or not with the introduction or passage of legislation or regulatory changes in a formal decision-making body such as a parliament or legislature.

- 6 It is also suggestive that long-established sectors such as banking exhibit the greatest amount of government stability, while newer areas with a directly governmental focus such as FOI legislation, engender the greatest amount of volatility among governmental actors vis à vis their NGO counterparts.

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Appendix A

Data Sources and Coding

FTAA Case

Document source: CBCA and Summit of the Americas website with FTAA documents.

Date range: January 1, 1994–October 1, 2005. The last Summit of the Americas meeting in November 2005 was not included as database research ended October 15, 2005.

Keywords: FTAA, Free Trade Agreement of the Americas, free trade, Summit of the Americas.

Records examined: 155.

Records coded: 140.

DIA Case

Document source: “CBCA Complete” database.

Date range: The range of dates includes June 1988–August 2005.

Keywords: “Indian act” and “Canada” and “federal” and not “land claims” and not “treaties” and not “rights.”

Records examined: This combination extracted 231 records as of October 15, 2005, and generated 216 usable records of policy relevant actor activity.

FOI Case

Document source: “CBCA Complete.”

Date range: February 1990–August 2005.

Keywords: “Canada” and “federal” and “freedom of information.”

Records examined: This combination extracted 188 records on June 17, 2005 (date of first access), and 194 records in August 2005. Thus the total number of records examined is 194. Of these 171 referred to policy relevant actor activity.

Banking Case

Document source: “CBCA Complete.”

Date range: The time range comprised 1991–2001.

Keywords: “Bank AND act AND Canada, citation and abstract” only.

Records examined: As the result 1696 documents (mainly Canadian national and local newspaper articles) were found and examined. Only 114 dealt with policy relevant actor activity.

Species at Risk Case

Document source: “CBCA Complete.”

Date range: 1990–2005.

Keywords: The parameters of the keyword search were “(species) AND (risk) AND (act) in citation and abstract” only and “(Canada) AND (endangered species) OR (extinct species) in citation and abstract.”

Records examined: Initially 510 documents representing mainly articles from national and local Canadian newspapers were found and examined. Additional searches led to 1163 results. Ultimately 321 instances of policy-relevant actor activity were found to be relevant and coded.

Appendix B

Description of key legislative changes by issue area

Issue	Round		Description	Substance of Change	Character of Changes
	Key Points				
Bank Act	1992	Bank Act revisions	De-pillarization. Banks allowed to purchase securities firms and brokerages. Foreign ownership levels changed.	Major	
FOI	2001	C-38/C-8 Bills	Changes to cross-pillar ownership regulations	Minor/Housekeeping	
	2006	Proposed Bank Act revisions	Complete de-pillarization of insurance companies. Allow bank mergers	Major, if passed	
	1993	Parliamentary Committee review	First major (10-year) review of Access to Information and Privacy Act. Recommends major extensions.	Major, but failed to pass	
	2001	C-54/C-6	Extension of Access to Information to private sector through personal information protection and electronic documents act.	Major	
FTAA	2005	C-201	Open Government/Government Accountability Act (2006) extensions	Major but failed to pass/if passed	
	1999	Toronto Summit	FTAA ministerial meeting in Toronto following 1998 Santiago commitment to proceed with talks.	Major	
DIA	2002	c-7/c-6	Reforms to 1985-86 c-31 altering band status and membership. Prescribes adoption of governance codes for Indian bands and other aspects.	Major but failed to pass	
SARA	1997	c-65	Consolidation of existing statutes and coverage on federal lands	Major but failed to pass	
	2000	c-33	Similar to C-65 but with provincial coverage	Major but failed to pass	
	2001	c-5	Similar to c-33	Major	

Appendix C

Governmental and non-governmental actor activity by issue and year

	SARA		Bank Act		FOI		FTAA		DIA		
	Govt	NGO	Govt	NGO	Govt	NGO	Govt	NGO	Govt	NGO	
1988										2	2
1989									2	3	5
1990					1				1	3	5
1991		1	2	3	2				3	3	14
1992		0	5	0	2				4	6	17
1993	3	5	0	2	3	4			5	4	26
1994	2	8	1	0	2	5	6		2	7	34
1995	6	26	0	9	1	1	0	0	0	5	48
1996	11	23	6	23	7	3	1	2	3	4	83
1997	18	36	4	2	2	2	2	0	4	6	76
1998	8	19	2	3	7	5	0	6	2	2	54
1999	13	31	3	12	11	3	6	4	7	7	97
2000	18	29	2	6	10	3	2	0	10	12	92
2001	15	9	4	9	7	3	20	42	13	25	147
2002	16	21	0	0	9	3	3	3	11	12	78
2003	2	1	1	3	14	4	18	11	14	12	80
2004			1	0	14	12	4	5	5	5	46
2005			1	10	17	14	3	1	5	7	58
Total N	112	209	32	82	109	62	65	75	91	125	962
		321		114		171		140		216	962

Appendix D

Types of actor activity by rounds

Issue Area	Rounds	Total	Public	Media	Comm.	Dec	Parl.	Jud
DIA	1	240	73	39	5	72	4	47
	2	162	39	47	11	43	8	14
FOI	1	20	4	4	2	6	2	2
	2	142	29	29	16	38	11	19
	3	150	33	36	15	38	14	14
Bank	1	37	8	13	3	8	3	2
	2	353	83	109	44	81	17	19
	3	220	64	50	29	49	14	14
FTAA	1	51	17	15	0	18	1	0
	2	333	95	117	0	114	6	1
SARA	1	385	110	129	19	120	7	0
	2	389	106	128	11	121	14	9
	3	172	36	58	17	50	10	1
TOTAL		2654	697	774	172	758	111	142
PER CENT		100	26.2	29.1	6.5	28.5	4.2	5.3

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