**The Politics of Oil:**

**Interest Groups and Oil Policy in the Beaufort Sea Region**

Melissa Shaffer-O’Connell

Lake Superior State University

[mshafferoconnell@lssu.edu](mailto:mshafferoconnell@lssu.edu)

ABSTRACT

Federalism often creates additional decisions for interest groups in determining how best to advocate for their policy recommendations. Should they focus their advocacy at the local, state, or national level of government? What activities should they use at each level of government? In this paper, the results of sixteen interviews with groups active in Beaufort Sea oil policy in the United States and Canada are used to answer these questions. The results show that in many cases groups are influenced by which level of government has greatest jurisdiction over the policy, at what stage in the policy process the issue is, and the resources and goals of the group.

Prepared for the Western Political Science Association’s Annual Conference, Panel 3.13 on Utilizing Legal/Administrative Pathways and Tools, Seattle, WA,

April 17-19, 2014.

Introduction

Overlapping policies and the influence of binational institutions offer multiple opportunities for interest groups in federal systems, but also increase the costs associated with advocacy. Due to a lack of time and resources, interest groups must act strategically. How do these groups decide at which level of government to target their actions? How do they determine the tactics that they would use? The interest group literature has addressed the organization of interest groups and the tactics they use, but little research has been done on how interest groups choose which level of government to target in federal systems or which tactics to use (Hamm & Hogan 2004). Some scholars have used large-scale studies to try to answer similar questions to these[[1]](#footnote-1), yet, as Andrews and Edwards (2004: 492) point out, studies focused on a narrow issue or policy area can often better test rival explanations and specific causal mechanisms. For this reason, I focus on the intersection of oil policy and environmental policy in the Beaufort Sea region to test multiple explanations of group behavior. I do this through interviews with representatives of 16 interest groups from Canada and the United States that were active on Beaufort Sea oil policies in 2010-2013.

Why the intersection of environmental policy and oil policy in the Beaufort Sea region? Oil policy is quite broad, covering onshore and offshore oil development, taxation, environmental issues, etc. However, focusing on the intersection of oil policy and environmental policy limits the issues while maintaining a wide variety of active groups and retaining current political salience. Throughout this paper I will be using both terms (oil policy and environmental policy), but the focus remains on the point where the two intersect.

One benefit of this case is that it is contained to a specific geographic area and yet crosses the border between the two countries, allowing for natural controls of geographic and issue specific peculiarities. The Beaufort Sea straddles the border between Canada and the United States; thus geography and natural resources are similar in both countries.

In addition, oil policy is shared between the states and the national government in the United States, and natural resource policy is increasingly being shifted to the provincial level in Canada, which has led to a tricky and evolving legislative environment for interest groups. This offers interest groups the opportunity to choose to focus their efforts at either level of government. Finally, there is a wide diversity of groups that are active, ranging from the more traditional business and environmental groups to recreational and Native American/First Nations groups and from small local groups to international interest groups.

The following section details the methodology of the data collection, followed by a section on the hypotheses derived from the following theories: neoinstitutionalism, elite theory, organizational theory, and political opportunity structures theory. I then have a short section describing the range of groups interviewed before moving into the analysis of hypotheses based on the interview data. The analysis is broken into two sections: the first is on the targeted level of government and the second on choice of tactics. The final section discusses the conclusions that can be drawn from the analysis.

METHODOLOGY

As the questions that are the basis of this research are about how groups make decisions, the most direct route to find answers was to ask representatives of the groups, specifically the staff members that make the decisions. First, however, I had to determine what groups to contact. It is exceedingly difficult to define the population of interest groups that are active within a particular policy area (Doyle and McEachern 2001, 61). As Salisbury (1992: 167) found in attempting to delineate the participants in agriculture, energy, health, and labor policy, there is no existing list of participants in most public policy areas, including oil, natural resource, and environmental policy. In fact, it is virtually impossible to define the population of groups involved because it can vary so widely and include groups that have very little interest in the policy area in general but may be active on one particular issue.

So for this research, names of groups active in oil policy were compiled from media accounts[[2]](#footnote-2), coalition listings, and suggestions from prior interviewees.[[3]](#footnote-3) A list of the groups interviewed is in Appendix A. The interviews were conducted by phone or by email with presidents, directors, or individuals in more specialized positions dealing with legislative policy and focused on interest group decisions within the past two years.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The interviews generally followed a questionnaire that was designed to elicit open-ended responses about the two dependent variables. The first dependent variable in this research is the level of government that interest groups target. This was addressed through a series of questions about which level of government the group targeted and why they targeted that particular level or combination of levels of government. Although this research is concerned with the national and state and territorial levels, some of the groups targeted local or international government or institutions as well. These responses are recorded and analyzed even though they do not fit into the levels of government specifically of interest to this research, as the reason groups opt to target those levels may support a given hypothesis.

The second dependent variable is tactics used by the interest group in attempting to influence legislative policy at each level of government. All tactics used were included in this investigation, but three were of particular interest: coalition building, lobbying, and grassroots mobilization. The definition of lobbying varies between scholars. Some scholars consider it to be any activity a group takes in order to be politically represented, which may include grassroots mobilization, donation to PACs, or coalition formation (Graziano 2001). Other scholars characterize lobbying as solely the face-to-face meetings with legislators to convey information and make arguments (Salisbury 1992). Much of this confusion stems from the activities of professional lobbyists, who often do a little of everything. For this research, lobbying includes gaining access to policy makers, creating a favorable view of the group for the policy maker, and influencing the policy maker by a senior member of a group or a paid lobbyist (Thomas 2004). Contact with legislators by the group membership will be considered grassroots mobilization. Grassroots mobilization and coalition building are discussed as tactics separate from lobbying.

Lobbying is an important tactic for groups: Schlozman and Tierney (1986: 150) found that over 95 percent of groups use lobbying tactics. According to Browne (1998: 360), federalism allows for more opportunities to lobby at all levels or “all-directional advocacy”: “there always is someone who occupies a political office who will eventually listen to nearly any interest”. Groups do not just lobby allies, but may spread lobbying across allies, opponents, and legislators that are still undecided about a piece of legislation (Leech & Baumgartner 1998).

Grassroots mobilization is the exertion of pressure on lawmakers by citizens and has become more popular with advances in communications technology (Berry 1997; Cigler & Loomis 1995; Goldstein 1999; Kollman 1998). It is used frequently in the United States and Canada (McCarthy 2005), even though it has been found to be less effective with large-scale, impersonal mail and email campaigns (Berry 1997). It is also an important tactic for interest groups: Schlozman and Tierney (1986: 150-55) found that 80 percent of the groups that they surveyed use grassroots lobbying and that use has increased among those groups.

Coalition building is an influential tactic for groups because it shows unity of purpose, combines resources and abilities, and also activates a larger “reference public”, or group of constituents (Lipsky 1968). Lawmakers are more likely to listen to a large coalition than to a small, independent interest group. This is especially true with the plethora of groups that exist in the United States and Canada since the 1960s (Hula 1995). For these reasons, more groups are showing an interest in forming and working within coalitions (Rochon & Meyer 1997). However, due to the diversity in goals and resources within a coalition, these coalitions are often difficult to form and maintain (Duffy 2003, 113; Hula 1995). Even with these drawbacks, Milne et al. (1996) found that at least two-thirds of environmental interest groups form coalitions with other groups.

There were two primary questions during the interviews designed to determine use of tactics: a question about what tactics the group uses in general and another question about whether and how those tactics are tailored by the level of government. The first question gets to the issue of which tactics are utilized most frequently by the groups, while the second determines whether different tactics are used at different level of governments.

In addition to those questions, other information was collected during the interview, including the organization’s purpose and goals, how many paid staff members the group employed, what the budget was, how many members and what types of members the group had, and what year the group was created. To conclude, the group representative was asked to describe a recent campaign dealing with oil policies in the Beaufort Sea region that illustrated the responses given prior to that point. Some of this data are expressly required to test specific hypotheses detailed below, while the rest are used for control variables.

HYPOTHESES

Neoinstitutionalism, elite theory, organizational theory, and political opportunity structures theory all propose different answers to the research questions. Neoinstitutionalism suggests institutions are the driving explanatory variable behind individual and group behaviors. Elite theory places elite interactions at the forefront of investigation. Meanwhile, organizational theory suggests tradition and resources of the organization are the primary determinants of organizational behavior. Political Opportunity Structures theory states that political variables, such as the party in power, are the important variables in group decision-making. Each of these will be described in more depth below, with hypotheses on targeted level of government number *H1* to *H4* and hypotheses on tactics number *H5* through *H8*.

*Neoinstitutionalism*

There are several variations of neoinstitutionalism. What each of these types of neo-institutionalism share is an emphasis on institutions as important variables in political research (Peters 2005) and an “opinion that institutions can and should be seen as ‘rules’ which, in one way or another, influence behaviour of political and social actors” (Keman 1998: 110). It recognizes the agency of individual groups while emphasizing that their behaviors are constrained by institutions and context (Thelen and Steinmo 1992).

Federalism, especially, is important in the environmental arena, as “whether people live in healthy or polluted environments depends very much on the joint activities of local state, and national officials” (Anton 1989, 1). The term ‘federalism’ is used to describe the division of powers between national and subnational governments (Riker 1975). Which level of government has the most authority over a particular issue depends on the level of policy centralization. The level of policy centralization is a result of the division of powers in a federal system and the way the courts interpret that division. It is usually specified in the constitution, although there is often jurisdictional overlap with more than one government having authority within an issue area (Bowman 2002).

In addition to the impact federalism has on environmental policy and resultant environmental conditions, it also allows for multiple venues of participation for interest groups determining policy, so it is important to interest groups as well. However, as mentioned above, the level of centralization is not static, but rather it changes over time with court decisions and shifts in jurisdiction. It is important to recognize the impact of these on interest group behavior.

Due to the division of power in federal systems, interest groups must apportion their time and resources between regional and national governments when jurisdiction is split between the two (Pross 1975; Schultz 1980). Most research on interest groups has focused on interest group activity at one level of the federal system, without analyzing why interest groups chose to target that level rather than other levels of government (Thomas 2004). Shaffer[[5]](#footnote-5) (1995), in a survey of 94 environmental groups in the United States, found that approximately twenty-five percent focus on the national and state levels each, while nearly half focus on the local level. However, in further analysis, Shaffer combines national and state lobbying into one category, thereby losing the ability to determine why interest groups chose to lobby one level of government over the other.

In some cases, groups may react to disliked legislation at one level by attempting to change venues. Pralle (2006: 26) studied interest groups involved in forestry policy in California and British Columbia and found that the groups practice venue shopping: “venue shopping refers to the activities of advocacy groups who seek out a decision setting where they can air their grievances with current policy and present alternative policy proposals.” Pralle (2006) found that interest groups changed venue when they perceived that they would have more success in a different venue and avoided government venues with little authority over the issue of concern. This leads to the neoinstitutional hypothesis:

*H1: Interest groups are more likely to target the level of government which has the greatest jurisdiction over environmental policy in the group’s issue area than a level with less authority.*

For groups in the United States, this would be the national level for most environmental policy issues and for oil development in the Beaufort Sea region. Yukon Territory has recently (in the 1990s and 2000s) had jurisdiction over natural resources transferred to territorial control, so Canadian groups in the case study should focus on the territorial level.

The degree of centralization within federal systems also has an effect on the choices made by interest groups in terms of tactics. Interest groups have a variety of tactics to choose from and it is reasonable to believe that they will use the most influential for the level of government at which most legislation is passed. Personal lobbying has been shown to be one of the most influential tactics at both the national level (Berry 1977; Milbrath 1963) and state level (Zeigler & Baer 1969).

Interest groups are also expected to reserve the more expensive tactics for the level of government with greatest jurisdiction. Even when interest groups may be attempting to influence a level of government that has lesser jurisdiction over the issue, they will be less likely to use resource-intensive tactics at that level. If this is the case, then interest groups would be more likely to use expensive tactics, such as personal lobbying, at the targeted level of government than at an alternate level of government. While personal lobbying is influential, it is also quite expensive, especially at the national level (Schlozman & Tierney 1986); one of the most expensive tactics for interest groups to pursue. However, inexpensive tactics, such as grassroots mobilization can be expected at both the targeted and non-targeted venues. This leads to neoinstitutional hypothesis regarding tactics:

*H5: Interest groups are more likely to use the most influential, but expensive, tactics, such as personal lobbying, at the level of government that has the most jurisdiction.*

Thus, we would expect that interest groups are more likely to use personal lobbying on the targeted level of government than a secondary level. If groups do not use personal lobbying at the targeted level, use it at the secondary level, or use it at both levels, then this hypothesis will be shown false.

*Elite Theory*

Elite theory disregards the impact of institutions and focuses on elites as explanatory variables. Elite theorists posit that most governmental decisions are centralized, made by the elites in government and society (Bachrach & Baratz 1962). While Presthus (1973) includes leaders in the non-profit sectors as members of the elite, many elite theorists focus on economic elites as dominant decision makers (Bachrach & Baratz 1962, 1970; Bond 2007). Presthus (1973) has argued that elite theory is especially useful for understanding the Canadian political system and interaction with interest groups due to the centralization of power in the cabinet, cleavages in the society, and the culture of deference to authority. Traditionally, elite theory has focused on who the elite are, what their policy stances are, how representative of the masses they are, and how elite accommodation affects policy outcomes (Higley & Pakulski 2000, 35); however, it also suggests a few hypotheses regarding my research questions as well.

In order to avoid societal conflicts, elites discuss issues and make decisions among themselves, therefore relying on more interpersonal means of communication and decision making. Rather than constant interaction about specific legislation, elites rely on frequent social interaction with occasional lobbying or pressure on important legislation by a united coalition (Presthus 1973, 61). For this reason, and because they often want to keep a low profile, economic elites are most likely to intervene when the status quo is being threatened (Bachrach and Baratz 1970, 49-50). Rather than appear demanding by constantly pressuring political elites, economic elites typically wait until their interests are being threatened by environmental legislation to make their voices heard. Thus, according to elite theory, corporations and businesses would be most likely to target the level of government where they perceive a threat to the status quo, in the form of perceived anti-business legislation.

*H2: Corporate and business elites target the level of government that is making pro-environment or perceived anti-business legislation.*

The expectation is that business groups mobilize when pro-environment or anti-business legislation is being introduced or debated at either level of government, but otherwise maintain a low profile. If there is mobilization to introduce pro-business legislation or no action when pro-environment legislation is introduced then this theory will be disproven.

According to elite theory, members of the elite share many common characteristics, such as education, socio-economic class, membership in associations, etc. This leads to a connection among the members of the elite (Farazmand 1999; Presthus 1973). They are more comfortable conversing privately among themselves and making decisions outside of the public sphere. In terms of tactics, this would suggest a prominence of lobbying over more public activities such as grassroots mobilization (Doyle & McEachern 2001). This is confirmed in the finding by Presthus (1973) that Canadian groups were more likely to use personal lobbying over grassroots mobilization, especially business groups. Thus,

*H6: Business and economic groups will be more likely to use personal lobbying at all levels of government.*

This hypothesis would be quickly disproven if groups used grassroots mobilization more frequently or rarely used lobbying.

*Organizational Theory*

Organizational studies argue, in part, that groups become bureaucratized and professionalized over time, often relying on tradition to determine action (Campbell 2005). Additionally, conflict within the group over how decisions are made and by whom they are made, lead to prescribed rules of action and routine decision making (Olsen 1998). Organizational studies also emphasize the role of organizational resources (Campbell 2005). The overall resources of the group may determine which level of government a group is able to target. For example, it is more expensive for a small group to target the national government than to target the state legislature, especially if there is physical distance with which to contend (Kolby 2009). This leads to the hypothesis:

*H3: Groups with more resources are more likely to target the national government than groups with fewer resources.*

If all groups, regardless of resources, target the same level of government then that would indicate that this hypothesis is incorrect.

Tradition plays an important role in the choice of tactics, according to organizational theorists. Groups have the tendency to use those tactics which they have always used because the organizational capabilities related to those tactics are already developed. For example, Staggenborg (1991) found, in a study of pro-choice groups, that leaders tended to bureaucratize and formalize operations of a group, which often meant a reliance on the same tactics over time. The hypothesis derived from this theory is:

*H7: Group tactics do not change over time.*

This differs from institutional theories which posit that group tactics will shift for different levels of government and changes in jurisdiction.

*Political Opportunity Structures Theory*

The Political Opportunity Structures (POS) literature within social movement literature focuses on the influence of political institutions on social movements and social movement organizations (SMOs) (McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald 1996; Tarrow 1994). POS posits that movements and groups act within a set of political conditions that influence their behavior through constraints on action and the opening of opportunities (McAdam et al. 1996). In many ways, this theory would produce similar hypotheses as neoinstitutionalism; however there are a few differences that would generate competing hypotheses. The primary component of the political environment that may impact which level of government a group may target is the presence or absence of political allies within elites (Campbell 2005). Political allies can refer to individual persons or to a party that is receptive to the goals of the group. Young and Everitt (2004) found that the receptivity of the government is directly tied to the party in power and the correspondence between the goals of the interest group and those of the party. Many scholars recognize that Leftist governments are more receptive to environmental groups, while parties toward the Right are more receptive to business groups (Dalton et al. 2003). Interest groups recognize this receptivity and are more likely to focus their attention on receptive lawmakers rather than those that are not receptive to the group’s goals (Milbrath 1963; Bauer, Pool, and Dexter 1963). A hypothesis derived from this is:

*H4: Groups are more likely to target the level of government in which there is a political party receptive to their goals.*

If groups target a level of government with a party in power that is not receptive to their goals then that would disprove this hypothesis.

POS scholars argue that groups should, and do, use tactics which are more likely to bring them success within a system (Dalton et al. 2003). However, in challenging the status quo of the current system, groups would be more likely to use grassroots mobilization to show broad support, while groups working to maintain the current system would be more likely to use more conventional methods such as lobbying. As advocacy groups are more likely to be challenging the status quo and business groups more likely to support the state quo:

*H8: Advocacy groups are more likely to use grassroots mobilization at all levels of government than business groups.*

If business groups are found to use grassroots mobilization at the same, or at higher levels, than advocacy groups, then this hypothesis will be shown false.

Before testing these hypotheses, it is important to know the number and types of groups in the analysis, especially since many of the hypotheses are specific to a type of group or the location (Canada or the United States) of the group. The following section gives an overview of the type, origin, membership, and age of the groups in the sample.

THE GROUPS

While there is a large literature on interest groups, there is no single agreed-upon definition of interest group among interest group scholars. A broad definition, and the one used for this research, is offered by Thomas (2004: 4): “An interest group is an association of individuals or organization… that, on the basis of one or more shared concerns, attempts to influence public policy in its favor.” This definition includes a wide variety of groups which may be active within environmental policy, including traditional membership groups, organizational interests and for-profit groups.

Ten of the groups I interviewed were citizen groups: nine conservation groups and one environmental group. The remaining six groups were industry groups. Although there are fewer industry groups interviewed, there are also fewer industry groups contacted, so the response rate for industry groups (40% response rate) was not significantly different from that of citizen groups (44% response rate). No indigenous groups agreed to an interview.

This is a comparative study of United States and Canada and groups from both countries were interviewed. Additionally, binational and international groups that operated in one of the two countries were included in the sample pool. Of the 16 groups that I interviewed, two were based in Canada, 13 were from the United States, and one was international. A much higher number of groups in the United States than in Canada can be expected: the United States has a larger population and more interest groups in general than Canada.

The groups ranged in age, with the oldest group established in 1927 (Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers) and the youngest in 2001 (Oceana); however half of the 16 groups were established during the environmental movement in the 1960s and 1970s. The resources of the groups (membership, paid staff, and budget) were also very different. Membership variance was difficult to capture in a graph as it varied from groups with no formal membership (for example, Canadian Arctic Resources Committee) to groups with individual members in the millions (Defenders of Wildlife) to groups made up entirely of groups or businesses (Alaska State Chamber of Commerce) or a combination of individuals and groups (Arctic Power). As Baumgartner and Leech (1998: 33) found, membership is a “deceptively complicated concept”. Similarly, paid staff varied from having only one paid staff member (Canadian Arctic Resources Committee) to groups with staffs into the hundreds (National Audubon Society). However, six of the 16 groups in the sample had staffs between 1 and 20 people. Finally, budgets of the groups range from the hundreds of thousands up into the millions, although seven of the 16 groups are between $1 million and $20 million. Six groupa declined to give a budget and several gave a range rather than a number.

While the sample size is small, as shown above, there is a range of groups represented. There was variation of type, origin, age, membership, and budget. This is important in order to be able to test the hypotheses described in the section above. The sample is too small to have statistically significant findings, but as the interviews were meant to get at the reasons for the decisions rather than correlations between factors, it still led to some fascinating and telling results.

RESULTS

This section begins with a general discussion of which level of government groups targeted and then moves on to a more detailed analysis of the results in relation to the hypotheses. For targeted level of government, the neoinstitutional and organizational hypotheses have the greatest support. This is followed by a general discussion of choice of tactics, followed by analysis of the hypotheses for choice of tactics. For tactics, no one hypothesis was strongly supported, although the organizational theory hypothesis is best supported by the interview data.

Most groups are active at both the national and state/territorial levels of government. However, if one level of government was targeted more than 50 percent of the time then the group's response was coded as targeting that level of government. Three groups responded that either they are active equally at each level of government or that they do not target one level of government over another. More groups targeted the national level than state/territorial: eight groups target the national level and four target the state/territorial level. One group split its time equally between the national and territorial level: Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers.

The neoinstitutional (*H1*) and the organizational theory (*H3*) hypotheses were best supported by the interviews. The aggregate data from these interviews (Figure 1) support *H1* in both countries, and many of the individual responses support the hypothesis. Seven United States' groups did target the national level. However, three U.S. groups also targeted the state level of government; while another two split their time equally between all levels of government (this includes the international level). Of the groups that do target the national government in the United States, four indicated that the reason for that is because that is where the legislation is being passed. As one representative stated (who asked not to be identified): “the federal government is the one that makes the decisions, so that is where we are active.” Adrian Herrera, the DC Coordinator for Arctic Power, a group that is focused on gaining approval for oil exploration within the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, put it succinctly: “the decision has to be made by Congress, that’s why” (2013, March 12. Telephone Interview).

Figure 1: Targeted Level of Government by Country (n=16)

One problem that came up with the interview methodology had to do with multi-tiered organizations. In the case of a group with a national group and subgroups, I chose to interview the level of the organization that did the most work within the Great Lakes region. The national League of Conservation Voters handles the oil policy activism for the arctic region, so I interviewed the national group for that case study. This does impact the rationale of the groups for targeting a certain level. The legislative director of the National Audubon Society, Brian Moore, reaffirmed this: “they [state Audubon Societies] work with their state legislature and state agencies on a regular basis and then when it comes to doing things nationally or coordinating nationally or working here in Washington with the Congress... we do that” (2013, May 21. Phone Interview.). I interviewed three multi-tiered groups in the United States (there were no multi-tiered Canadian groups): two national level groups and one state level group. If these groups are eliminated from the analysis, then three groups would have targeted the state level and five the national level. This still supports the hypothesis in the U.S.

No Canadian groups exclusively targeted the territorial level of government. Both Canadian groups targeted a combination of the territorial and national governments or all levels of government (this included local and international). The reason given by both groups was that both levels are currently involved in oil policy. As Aaron Miller, of CAPP, pointed out, “devolution is not going to happen overnight” (2013, April 11. Telephone Interview).

Organizational theory was supported in the aggregate for staff members (Figure 2), but not for budget. No responses supported the theory. The one group with staff of over 200 did focus on all levels of governments. A plurality of groups with staffs of 1 to 20 people targeted the state level, but groups with that staff size also targeted the national and all levels of governments.

Figure 2: Targeted Level of Government by Staff (n=15)

The results for targeted level of government by budget were inconclusive. While, in general, larger groups target higher levels of government, some of the smallest groups target the national government and some of the largest groups target the state/territorial governments. Groups with mid-range budgets are spread across all levels. As with staff size, no groups indicated that this factor was important in deciding which level of government to target.

Political Opportunity Structures theory (*H4)* posits that groups target the level of government at which there is a party receptive to the group’s goals. At the time of the interviews, in Canada the Conservatives were in power at the national level and while Yukon was dominated by the Yukon Party, which is a conservative party, it had only a slim majority of seats. In the United States, a divided government existed at the national level with the Senate and presidency held by Democrats and the House of Representatives held by Republicans. Alaska remained Republican during the interviews. In general then, according to this hypothesis, citizen groups in the United States are most likely to target the national government, while industry targets the state level. In Canada, it is expected that industry groups may target either level, while citizen groups may be more likely to target the territorial level. However, there was no clear pattern for either citizen groups or industry groups in either country. In Canada, the industry group targeted both the territorial and national government, but so did the citizen group. In the United States, a higher number of citizen groups targeted the national government and a higher number industry groups targeted the state level, but the responses indicate it has more to do with the favorability of the level of government than the party in power. However, one environmental group representative, who asked not to be named, responded that the state government (under a Republican administration) was not supportive of their work, so they focused almost entirely on the national government. This was the only response by a U.S. group that supported this hypothesis and referenced the party in power as playing a role in decision-making about which level of government to target. The fact that the representative did not want to be directly quoted or named when giving their response seems to indicate a reticence on the part of groups to give that particular response, which may bias the data.

According to elite theory, *H2,* business and industry groups should target the level of government that is passing unfavorable legislation. The targeted level of government would shift with the type of legislation. However, with the exception of one industry group (in Canada), the industry group representatives clearly indicated that they targeted one level of government more than any other. However, there was some indication that it played a role in the decision-making for some groups. For example, a few industry groups cited legislation as issues the group was active on rather than a broad issue area, which seems to indicate a reaction to legislation rather than proactive measures on an issue area. Again, while not explicit, it does seem to indicate a reactive stance. If this offers any support for this hypothesis, it is only weak support in that it was deduced from responses rather than clearly stated.

For targeted level of government, neoinstitutionalism and organizational theory had the most support, but what about for the choice of tactics? First, a discussion of what tactics the groups used in general. When asked to give the top two or three tactics used by the group in general, not all groups answered with specific tactics. One group representative emphasized that they did not lobby legislators but rather educated them on the issues. This distinction is important for charitable groups, especially in Canada, as they are limited in what they can do. However, for the sake of this research, those responses have been coded as lobbying of legislators, as I use a broader definition of lobbying which includes educating legislators.

Lobbying was the number one tactic mentioned: every group mentioned lobbying as one of the top two or three tactics. Grassroots mobilization was also listed frequently, with ten of the 16 groups listing it among the top two or three tactics. Only three groups listed coalition-building as a tactic; however, it was not because they are not members of coalitions. In one of the interview questions, I specifically ask if they are part of any coalitions or formally affiliated with other groups. Almost all of the groups responded affirmatively to this answer, some with multiple coalitions. I see three possible reasons for this. First, it may be that the question order led groups to believe it was unnecessary to include coalition-building as a tactic since they had already responded about affiliations and coalitions in an earlier question. Second, it could be that many groups do not consider coalition-building a tactic. Lastly, if groups do consider it a tactic, they may not consider it one of the top two or three tactics and thus not include it for that reason.

Group representatives were also asked whether they use different tactics at different levels of government. Ten of the respondents said no, five said they do at least some tailoring of tactics by level (one did not give a clear answer). Most of the representatives that said they did not change tactics by level, did tailor tactics based on issue or campaign.

The organizational theory hypothesis (*H7)* that groups will rely on the same tactics over time seems to be best supported, though not strongly supported. All groups still appear to rely on traditional lobbying as the tactic of choice. In addition, many groups continue to rely on grassroots mobilization. However, at least for citizen groups, how they mobilize the grassroots has changed. Those groups frequently mentioned using newer forms of grassroots mobilization (through social media, for example) that have sprung up in recent years. Two groups mentioned having staff members whose roles are exclusively to update social media and communicate with members through this social media. None of the industry groups interviewed mentioned using social media as a tactic.

The neoinstitutional theory hypothesis, *H5*, posits that groups will use personal lobbying and other expensive tactics at the level of government with the most jurisdiction. The results are inconclusive for Canada and are not supported for this hypothesis in the United States. In Canada, this would be the territorial level. Of the two Canadian groups interviewed, both listed the territorial level in combination with one or more other levels of government. In the United States, most jurisdiction is at the national level. None of the group respondents (who target more than one level of government) stated that they are more likely to use lobbying at the national level than the state level.

The similar rate of usage of grassroots mobilization by citizen groups and industry groups (Figure 3) does not support the political opportunity structures theory that advocacy groups are more likely to use grassroots mobilization than industry groups (*H8).* Additionally, representatives of advocacy groups did not emphasize grassroots mobilization in their responses.

Figure 3: Tactics by Type of Group

For the elite theory hypothesis (*H6),* the aggregate data does show that industry groups are slightly more likely to use lobbying, but not significantly more. Additionally, two industry groups emphasized that lobbying is influential because of the personal relationships: “it's about communication and relationship and you need to be able to establish a relationship with either a federal legislator or a state legislator... it's all about building trust and relationships so that you can forward what in your view is the best way forward for the industry or for the government” (Moriarty, K. 2012, October 15. Telephone Interview). This is done both formally and “a lot of informal conversations, and informal meetings and phone calls” (Buckner, K. 2013, March 22. Telephone Interview). Both of these statements would fit the expectations of elite theory; that industry groups would rely on relationships with decision-makers. Like many of the theories on tactics, there were one or two comments that supported the hypothesis or some weak support in the aggregate data, but no one theory explained the choice of tactics well.

One frequent response for the decision of which tactics to utilize was not covered well by these hypotheses: variance by issue. A number of groups said that tactics depend on the issue, or a similar expression, in describing how they made the decision of which tactic to use. When asked to explain what this meant, group representatives often had a difficult time explaining how and why it varied by issue. For some, it had more to do with the status of the legislation and the stage in the process. For others it seemed to do more with the salience of the issue. As Adrian Herrera explained, Arctic Power relies more heavily on lobbying than other tactics, but also utilizes grassroots mobilization when an issue is particularly salient for the population: “you go for the heart of the matter, operating outside the beltway when an issue is hot. That's when you do that.” (2013, March 13. Telephone Interview). Conversely, the issue may not be salient for legislators. David Gladders, of the Canadian Arctic Resources Committee, described their work mapping caribou calving grounds and caribou movements in the arctic region and stated that “you have to put this into perspective: we're dealing with caribou in terms of caribou vulnerability, we would probably never talk to Stephen Harper” (2013, April 4. Telephone Interview.). It may also have to do with the amount of resources they were willing to devote to a particular issue. This seemed to be as much about how important the group saw the issue as how many resources the group had.

CONCLUSIONS

What can be concluded from this research? No one theory was strongly supported for both targeted level of government and choice of tactics, although organizational theory had weak support for both. This is most likely because there are multiple factors influencing group decision-making rather than just one or two factors. As noted above for tactics, one of those reasons were not covered by any of the hypotheses.

The factors that seemed to have the most influence in choosing the level of government to target were institutional features (level of centralization) and organizational capacity. Groups appeared responsive to which level had jurisdiction over the issue with which they were concerned, but were also cognizant of the capabilities of their organization. This implies that federalism and institutions do matter, but are not the only variable that matters.

For choice of tactics, there are more variables that influenced the groups in this sample. Institutions (level of centralization) did matter for some groups, as well as capacities (tactics used traditionally). I did not find a lot of variation between industry and citizen groups; however, only six industry groups were included in the sample so that may be a function of sample size rather than a concrete result. A similar research design in a larger issue area with a larger sample may be able to pinpoint which of these variables is more important or which variables are more important for different types of groups.

APPENDIX A: LIST OF GROUPS INTERVIEWED

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Interest Group** | **Country** | **Type** | **Interview Method** |
| Alaska Oil and Gas Association | United States | Industry | Phone interview |
| Alaska State Chamber of Commerce | United States | Industry | Phone interview |
| Alaska Support Industry Alliance | United States | Industry | Email interview |
| Alaska Wilderness League | United States | Conservation | Phone interview |
| Arctic Power | United States | Industry | Phone interview |
| Canadian Arctic Resources Committee | Canada | Multi-issue | Phone interview |
| Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers | Canada | Industry | Phone interview |
| Center for Biological Diversity | United States | Conservation | Phone interview |
| Defenders of Wildlife | United States | Conservation | Phone interview |
| League of Conservation Voters | United States | Conservation | Phone interview |
| National Audubon Society | United States | Conservation | Phone interview |
| Northern Alaska Environmental Center | United States | Environmental | Phone interview |
| Ocean Conservancy | United States | Conservation | Phone interview |
| Oceana | International | Conservation | Phone interview |
| Resource Development Council | United States | Industry | Phone interview |
| Wilderness Society | United States | Conservation | Phone interview |

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Andrews, K. T., & Edwards, B. (2004). Advocacy organizations in the U.S. political process. *Annual Review of Sociology 30,* 479-506.

Bachrach, P., & Baratz, M. S. (1962). Two faces of power. *APSR 56(4),* 947-952.

Bartley, T., Andersson, K., Jagger, P., & Van Laerhoven, F. (2008). The contribution of institutional theories to explaining decentralization of natural resource governance.” *Society and Natural Resources, 21(2),* 160-174.

Bauer, R. A., Pool, I. S., & Dexter, L. A. (1963). *American Business and Public Policy: The Politics of Foreign Trade.* Chicago, IL: Aldine Atherton.

Baumgartner, F. R., & Leech, B. L. (1998). *Basic interests: The importance of groups in politics and in political science.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Berry, J. M. (1977). *Lobbying for the people: The political behavior of public interest groups.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Berry, J.M. (1989). *The interest group society: 2nd Edition.* Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, & Little, Brown.

Berry, J. M. (1997). *The interest group society (3rd Ed.)* New York, NY: Longman.

Bond, M. (2007). Elite social relations and corporate political donations in Britain. *Political Studies* 55, 59-85.

Bowman, A. O. (2002). American federalism on the horizon. *Publius 32(2),* 3-22.

Browne, W. P. (1998). Lobbying in the public: All-directional advocacy. In Cigler, A. J., & Loomis, B. A. (Eds.). *Interest group politics* (pp. 343-63). Washington, DC: CQ Press.

Caldwell, L., & Bartlett, R. (Eds.). (1997). *Environmental politics: Transnational issues and national trends*. Westport, CT.: Quorum Books.

Campbell, J. L. (2005). Where do we stand? Common mechanisms in organizations and social movement research. In Davis, G. F., McAdam, D., Scott, W. R., & Zald, M. N. (Eds.). *Social movements and organization theory (pp 41-68).* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Cigler, A. J., & Loomis, B. A. (Eds.). (1995). *Interest group politics (4th Ed.)* Washington DC: CQ Press.

Dalton, R. J., Recchia, S., & Rohrschneider, R. (2003). The environmental movement and the modes of political action. *Comparative Political Studies 36*, 743-771.

Doyle, T., & McEachern, D. (2001). *Environment and politics* *(2nd Ed.)*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Duffy, R. J. (2003). *The green agenda in American politics: New strategies for the Twenty-first Century.* Kansas City, KS: University Press of Kansas.

Farazmand, A. (1999). The elite question: Toward a normative theory of organizational elite. *Administration and Society 31 (3),* 321-360.

Goldstein, K. M. (1999). *Interest groups, lobbying, and participation in America*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Gray, V., & Lowery, D. (1996). *The population ecology of interest representation: Lobbying communities in the American states.* Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Graziano, L. (2001). *Lobbying, pluralism, and democracy.* New York, NY: Palgrave.

Hamm, K. E., & Hogan, R. E. (2004). Legislative lobbying: Placing research on legislative lobbying in a comparative context. In C.S. Thomas (Ed.), *Research Guide to U.S. and International Interest Groups* (pp.167-75)*.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Heinz, J. P., Laumann, E. O., Nelson, R. L., & Salisbury, R. H. (1993). *The hollow core: Private interests in national policymaking.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Higley, J., & Pakulski, J. (2000). Epilogue: Elite theory versus Marxism: The twentieth century’s verdict.” In Higley, J., and Lengyel, G. (Eds.). *Elites after state socialism: Theories and analysis (pp 229-242).* New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Hula, K. (1995). Rounding up the usual suspects: Forging interest group coalitions in Washington. In Cigler, A. J., & Loomis, B. A. (Eds.). *Interest group politics (4th Ed.) (pp. 55-76).* Washington DC: CQ Press.

Inscho, F. R., & Durfee, M. H. (1995). The troubled renewal of the Canada-Ontario Agreement respecting Great Lakes Water Quality. *Publius,* *25*(1), 51-70.

Kelemen, R. D. (2004). *The rules of federalism: Institutions and regulatory politics in the EU and beyond*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Keman, Hans. 1998. “Public Institutions and Public Governance.” In *Institutions and Political Choice: On the Limits of Rationality.* Amsterdam: VU University Press.

Kollman, K. (1998). *Outside Lobbying.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Leech, B. L., & Baumgartner, F. R. (1998). Lobbying friends and foes in Washington. In Cigler, A. J., & Loomis, B. A. (Eds.). *Interest group politics* (pp. 343-63). Washington, DC: CQ Press.

Lipsky, M. (1968). Protest as a political resource. *APSR* *62*, 1144-58.

McAdam, D. W., McCarthy, J. D., & Zald, M. N. (Eds.). (1996). *Comparative perspectives on social movements.* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

McAdam, D. W., & Scott, R. (2005). Organizations and movements.” In Davis, G. F., McAdam, D. W., Scott, R. W., & Zald, M. N. (Eds.). *Social movements and organization theory (pp 4-40)*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

McCarthy, J. D. (2005). Persistence and change among nationally federated social movements. In Davis, G. F., McAdam, D., Scott, W. R., & Zald, M. N. (Eds.). *Social Movements and Organization Theory* (pp.193-225)*.* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Milbrath, L. W. (1963). *The Washington lobbyists.* Chicago, IL: Rand McNally.

Nownes, A. J., & Freeman, P. (1998). Interest group activity in the states. *Journal of Politics 60*: 86-112.

Peters, B. Guy. 2005. *Institutional Theory in Political Science: The ‘New Institutionalism’, 2nd Edition.* New York: Continuum.

Pralle, S. (2006). *Branching out, digging in: Environmental advocacy and agenda setting.* Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press.

Presthus, R. (1973). *Elite accommodation in Canadian politics.* Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Pross, P. (Ed.). (1975). *Pressure group behavior in Canadian politics.* Toronto, ON: McGraw-Hill Ryerson.

Rabe, B. G. (2000). Power to the states; the promise and pitfalls of decentralization. In Vig, N. J., & Kraft, M. E. (Eds.). *Environmental* *Policy: 4th Edition* (pp. 32-54). Washington DC: CQ Press.

Riker, W. (1975). Federalism. In Greenstein, F., & Polsby, N. (Eds.). *Handbook of Political Science (pp 93-172).* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

Rochon, T. R., & Meyer, D. S. (1997). *Coalitions and political movements.* Boulder, CO: Lynne Reinner.

Salisbury, R. H. (1992). *Interests and institutions: Substance and structure in American politics.* Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Schlozman, K. L. , & Tierney, J. T. (1986). *Organized interests and American democracy.* New York, NY: Harper and Row.

Schultz, R. J. (1980). *Federalism, bureaucracy and public policy: The politics of highway transport regulation.* Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen’s University Press.

Shaffer, M. B. (1995). The internal dynamics of environmental organizations: Movement interest groups, communal advocacy groups, and the policy process.” *Policy Studies Review 14*, 183-194.

Staggenborg, S. (1991). *The pro-choice movement.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Tarrow, S. (1994). *Power in movement: Collective action, social movements and politics.* Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Thomas, C. S. (Ed.). (2004). *Research guide to U.S. and international interest groups.* Westport, CT: Praeger.

Walker, J. L., Jr. (1991). *Mobilizing interest groups in America.* Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Young, L., & Everitt, J. (2004). *Advocacy Groups.* Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.

Zeigler, L. H., & Baer, M. A. (1969). *Lobbying: Interaction and influence in American state legislatures.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

1. For studies focused on national groups, see Schlozman & Tierney 1986, Berry 1989, Walker 1991, Heinz et al. 1993, and Baumgartner & Leech 1998. For studies on groups at the state level, see Gray & Lowery 1996 and Nownes & Freeman 1998. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Prior research on the history of group activities used newspaper accounts spanning 1940-2000. Names of groups mentioned in those accounts were compiled and then the groups that were no longer active in 2010 were eliminated. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This list included 59 interest groups that were active on Great Lakes water quality policies in 2010. Of the 59 groups, 26 were interviewed and 33 declined to be interviewed for a response rate of 42 percent. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The interviews, for the most part, were conducted in 2011 to 2013 and reported political conditions reflect that time period. Follow-up email discussions occurred for some of the interviews and secured additional information or clarified earlier comments. These email conversations happened between 2011 and 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Shaffer and I are of no relation. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)