From the Knowledge Economy to the Knowledge Government: Members of Parliament and Policy Networks in Canada

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Abstract

In the context of a society characterized by an increased production of knowledge, how do Members of Parliament filter the information available to them and attempt to shape public policy? To answer this question, a survey was sent to all backbench members of the Canadian House of Commons. Five "steps" related to the MP's role in the policy process were investigated: interactions, member interest and motivation, knowledge sources, reception and perception of knowledge and, implementation efforts. Results indicate that a policy network dynamic appears to play, with the frequency of contact between MPs and policy actors being linked with the degree to which Members trust various knowledge sources. However, trust in academic and scientific knowledge appears to transcend party membership and to represent the "gold standard" of knowledge production. Other notable findings include the important use of the Library of Parliament by Members and the central place constituency issues take in MPs' motivation for engaging in policy work.

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Introduction

With universities, think tanks, public policy schools, along with the multiplication of private sector research through Banks or consulting firms, much can be said about the nature of policy knowledge now available to decision-makers; its abundance, however, can be left in no doubt. Since Plato's *Republic*, an interest has existed in the way politicians use knowledge (in Plato's case, philosophy) to write the laws of a political community. Modern, democratically elected Members of Parliament are of course, no philosopher Kings, and must navigate an increasingly complex web of knowledge, information, and policy proposals emanating from a variety of sources in order to take decisions (Rich, 1975). Canadian Members of Parliament are in this regard little different from elected representatives in other jurisdictions, especially within the Westminster system. Yet, the Canadian MP is often described as being subject to even stronger party discipline then his or her Westminster counterpart (Blidook, 2012; Docherty, 1997). A number of reasons are offered to explain this state of affairs; the strength of the executive and party discipline in the Canadian legislature (Pelletier, 2005), dependence on party leadership for re-election and career advancement (Cross, 2010, Docherty, 1997), and little opportunity to affect legislation through a relatively weak committee system (Thomas, 1978, Malloy, 2004). That said, a look at the Commissioner of Lobbying's website[1] demonstrates that Parliament is by far the institution most often targeted by lobbyists of all stripes; an indication that Members are frequently solicited on a wide number of policy issues. The present research paper seeks to investigate broadly: what are the roles, perceptions, and actions of Members of Parliament within the network of experts and policy knowledge that exist around the institutions of the federal Parliament in Canada?

[1] The office of the Commissioner of Lobbying posts the communication reports of registered lobbyists on a monthly basis at: https://ocl-cal.gc.ca/app/secure/orl/lrrs/do/cmmnctnsByRprtngPrd

Review of the Literature

Three theoretical approaches are helpful in order to better understand the relationship between knowledge, Members of Parliament and the policy process in Canada. First, the notion of "policy networks" – used by scholars to understand how various governmental and non-governmental actors interact and influence policy-making – second, theories of knowledge diffusion in public policy, and third, descriptions of Canadian parliamentary institutions and their salient characteristics.

Policy networks have become an important framework for explaining the policy process in modern liberal democracies (Hale, 2011). The term usually describes a variety of organized governmental and non-governmental actors who "maintain relations like information or resource exchange, influence attribution, or common group membership" (Schneider and Leifeld, 2012, p.731) in given policy areas. The underlying premise is that in a modern context, office-holders do not take decisions on their own, but navigate an "enlargement of the set of consequential actors" within increasingly specialized policy domains (Pappi and Henning, 1998, p.553). As Atkinson and Coleman explain: "[a]ny actors holding technical knowledge - whether these be expert committees of trade associations, large corporations, universities, private research institutes, or even trade unions – have become potentially crucial participants in the policy process of any advanced capitalist economy" (1992, p. 163). Furthermore, the policy network approach is set within the "pluralist" school of political science which argues that societies are characterized by a number of organized interests attempting to influence the course of public policy (Brooks and Miljan, 2003). The formation, structure and causal force of policy networks has been studied extensively in a number of jurisdictions. In Canada, Bernstein and Cashore for instance studied the influence of international networks on the B.C. forestry industry (2000), while Montpetit has looked at the biotechnology industry in Canada and the US (2005) as well as public consultations over assisted

reproductive technologies in Canada (2003). None of these studies investigated the role of the Member of Parliament in policy networks. Turning to other countries, a substantive body of research exists in the United States at both the federal and state levels (see for instance McDaniel *et al*, 2001; Feller *et al*, 1979), but given the differences between Members of Parliament and Members of Congress, these studies help little in understanding the Canadian context.

According to Weible *et al.* (2012) there are two basic elements to the public policy process: individuals and context. While the importance of individual action is easy to grasp, "macro-level factors" (Atkinson and Coleman, 1990) such as the political culture of a country or constitutional divisions of power also influence the organization of policy networks. In Canada, the work of a federal Member of Parliament is often described as to include budgetary, legislative and representative functions as well as keeping the government accountable (Montigny et Pelletier, 2005). Members hail from a variety of backgrounds and have numerous and wide-ranging goals when coming to Ottawa. Yet, they must operate in an environment with a set of both formal and informal rules which may either help or hinder them in achieving their goals. As David Docherty's (1997) study of Canadian parliamentarians illustrates, after having been elected, MPs find themselves frustrated by the power held by party leaders in the Westminster system. Discovering how public policy decisions are made in the offices of the Prime minister or party leaders, Members often turn their focus away from national policy issues and towards constituency work. The centralization of power around the Prime minister and senior public servants is a common theme in Canadian political science (see for instance Savoie, 2008), and while this poses serious restraints on the participation of Members of Parliament in the policy-making process (Blidook, 2012), opportunities such as committee work, Private Members Business as well as unofficial influence through the party caucus (see Samara, 2011)

are available to MPs as possible avenues for participation in policy work.

The first two theoretical perspectives may provide insights on the structure of policy networks around the Canadian federal legislature, but they do not explain how knowledge is transferred or used in crafting policies. Research on the "knowledge diffusion model" initially proposed by Knott and Wildavsky (1980) provides a framework for better understanding this very question. Based on Knott and Wildavsky's conceptualization, Landry *et al.* (2003) developed a six-step knowledge diffusion model to explain how academic information reaches decision-makers and is implemented or rejected. The six steps are the following: reception, cognition, discussion, reference, effort and influence. Other theories proposed to describe knowledge diffusion include the *interaction model*, the *demand-pull model*, the *science-push model* and the *dissemination model*, yet only Knott and Wildavsky incorporate these different elements and attempt to explain knowledge diffusion as a process, rather than a discreet event (Landry *et al*., 2003, p.193). Furthermore, a number of factors have been identified as influencing successful knowledge diffusion and policy implementation. These include, amongst other things, linkages between decision-makers and the knowledge producers (Landry *et al.,* 2003), trust (Weible *et al.*, 2012), as well as the ideology and belief system of the actors (Henry, Lubell and McCoy, 2011).

As previously discussed, the role of Members of Parliament in policy networks has not been investigated in Canada, and the present research attempts to fill this gap by describing the MP as both a recipient of knowledge and an actor in the policy process. Following Weible *et al.* (2012), Members of Parliament are understood as individuals with goals and emotions acting within a Parliamentary institution that both limits and provides opportunities for action (see also Docherty, 1997). Following the suggestions of Mintrom and Vergari (1998), elements of both

policy network and knowledge diffusion theories are used to conceive a step-based model of knowledge use. However, due to the exploratory nature of the research, this theoretical model is applied as an analytical and descriptive tool rather than a formal causal model. The different steps are only disaggregated for analytical purposes as the process is undoubtedly "messy" and iterative in nature (see Albaek, 1995). The elements of the model are explored in the following order: interactions, member interest and motivation, knowledge sources, reception and perception of knowledge and, implementation efforts.

Methodology

The present study aims to describe both Members of Parliament's place within policy networks in Canada and their efforts to participate in the policy-making process. While this could be deemed an exploratory study as no existing research has looked specifically at parliamentarians' work in this way, there is a large body of more general knowledge on which to build. Consideration was also given to the generalizability of results and the time available to complete the research project. On this basis, the survey method was selected.

A mail survey was sent to 239 MP offices in Ottawa, a list which excluded the Cabinet, Parliamentary secretaries, party leaders[2], Whips, House Leaders, and the Speaker. Parliamentarians were instructed to complete the survey themselves. 64 questionnaires were returned, of which one had to be eliminated due to an exceedingly high number of missing answers. This yielded a total of 63 completed surveys or a response rate of 26.4%. In total, 29 Members of the New Democratic Party (NDP), 18 Conservatives 13 Liberals, 1 Green and 2 independent or Bloc Québécois Members responded.

[2] The Leader of the Green Party is the only elected member representing this party and was therefore included in the sampling frame.

Interactions

As previously alluded to, Landry *et al.* (2003) found that the intensity of links between researchers and decision-makers is one of the most important variables for predicting knowledge utilization in the public service. Interpersonal contacts in particular are identified in the literature as being critical for facilitating the exchange of information (Mintrom and Vergari, 1998). This observation can be explained by Leifeld and Schneider's claim that "contact-making" "serves to gather information, disseminate information (and thus exert influence), and team up with allies against political opponents" (2012, p.733). While the present research project makes no *a priori* assumptions about Members' links to particular policy actors, MPs were asked about their contact with four types of external policy actors in Canada: Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), private companies and industry associations, academia and think tanks. These four organizations are commonly discussed in the literature on interest groups and policy networks in Canada (Cohn, 2006; Lindquist, 1993, Young and Everitt, 2010). Moreover, given significant differences in the form and purpose of their communications with decision-makers (see Monpetit, 2002), these policy actors offer sufficient diversity to provide theoretically interesting grounds for comparison. Table 1 provides the mode, or most common response, for each of the

Table 1: Frequency of Contact between MPs and Policy Actors (Most common answer)

	Conservatives	**Liberals**	**NDP**
Academics	A few times a year	Once or twice a month	Every week
Think Tanks	A few times a year	A few times a year	Once or twice a month
Industry	Every week	Every week	Once or twice a month
NGOs	Once or twice a month	Once or twice a month	Every week

three main parties[3]. This statistic corresponds fairly closely to the median.

As the table indicates, there are some clear party differences with regard to the frequency of contact between MPs and policy actors. A possible exception is the case of representatives from think tanks, since MPs of all parties generally meet least often with this group. Given the relatively weak presence of think tanks in Canada (Lindquist, 2006) and their broad target audience (Lindquist, 1993), the low level of connections between their representatives and Parliamentarians is perhaps not entirely surprising. Contrasts do appear between the parties however: Conservatives meet with industry associations and private companies more than any other policy actor, with the most common response being once a week. The most frequent answer for Liberals is also once a week, but the mean indicates that the Conservatives meet slightly more often with actors from the private sector than the Liberals. Members of the NDP on the other hand have strong ties with both the academic community and NGOs, but meet less often with industry than Liberal and Conservative Members. A final observation is that the Liberals meet only a little less often with academics than NDP MPs, (the median is the same) and more often than Conservatives.

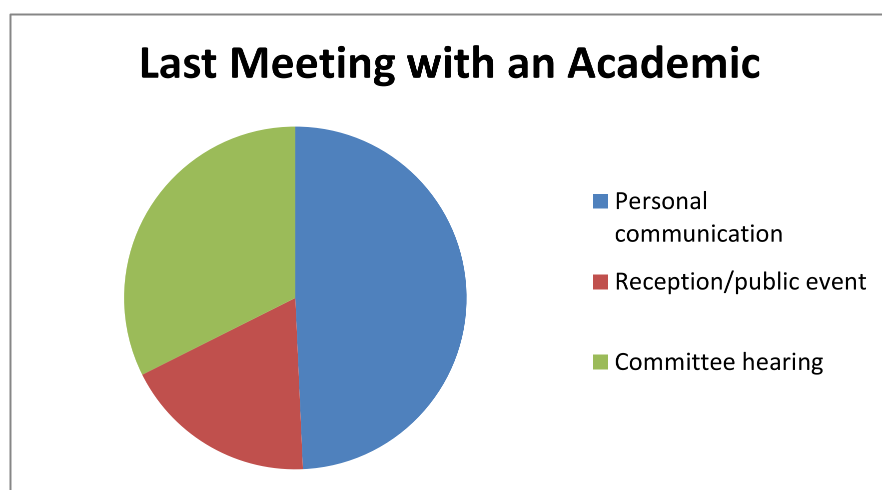
A number of possible explanations exist as to why "tie-formation" occurs, but in the case at hand, ideology is certainly a plausible explanation given what is known about policy networks and the nature of partisan politics in Canada (Henry, Lubell and McCoy, 2011). The NDP's fewer links with the business community is a case in point given the party's centre-left ideological orientation. Observations about Conservative parliamentarians are a little more difficult to interpret as there is no other Government party to compare with in order to assess whether the observed patterns are a function of membership in the Government or the party's

[3] Due to the low number of Independent (1) Bloc Québécois (1) and Green Party MPs (1), they are omitted from the party-level analysis but are included when results are presented in aggregate.

ideology. “Perceived influence” (Weible and Sabatier, 2005) has been identified as an important factor in predicting the formation of networks for instance, and could explain the importance of links between the Conservatives and industry. However, such an explanation cannot account for the finding that Liberal MPs meet more often with this group of actors than Members of the NDP. As the Liberal Party is generally considered to represent the middle ground between the Conservatives and the New Democrats, the presence of shared beliefs may thus be a better explanation of tie formation between MPs and external policy actors.

The survey also sought to understand in what context Members of Parliament met specifically with academics as according to Cohn, “[s]cholars today commonly see the relationship between academia and the state […] in terms of the difficulties they face in influencing policy-making.” (2006, p.9) and “[academics] can best [advocate for their work] by forging links between academia and the world of public policy-making at a general level” (p.16). Through the survey, Members were asked about the circumstances of their *last* meeting with an academic. Amongst all MPs the most frequent form of contact was a personal communication between the Member and the academic at 49%, followed by meeting in the context of a House of Commons Committee (32%) and a public event or reception (18%).

Figure 1



Comparing the parties, NDP MPs had most often communicated with an academic personally, while the Conservatives met less often in person and more often through Parliamentary Committees, demonstrating perhaps less of a personal connection with the academic community. Liberal MPs had most commonly last been in touch with academics through a personal communication and in a Committee setting about equally. Formal institutions such as Standing Committees present interesting opportunities to form ties due to the low level of transaction costs involved (Leifeld and Schneider, 2012). Yet having met personally with an academic resulted in a higher propensity for MPs to claim that the information transmitted would be used at a later date. This is expressed by a statistically significant 0.6 points difference on a scale of 1 to 5 and corresponds to previous findings in the literature (see Mintrom and Vergari, 1998). Further investigations are needed, however, to determine what the causal mechanism is; do Members meet personally with academics because they are already interested in using the knowledge, or are they more easily convinced when the interaction takes place in person?

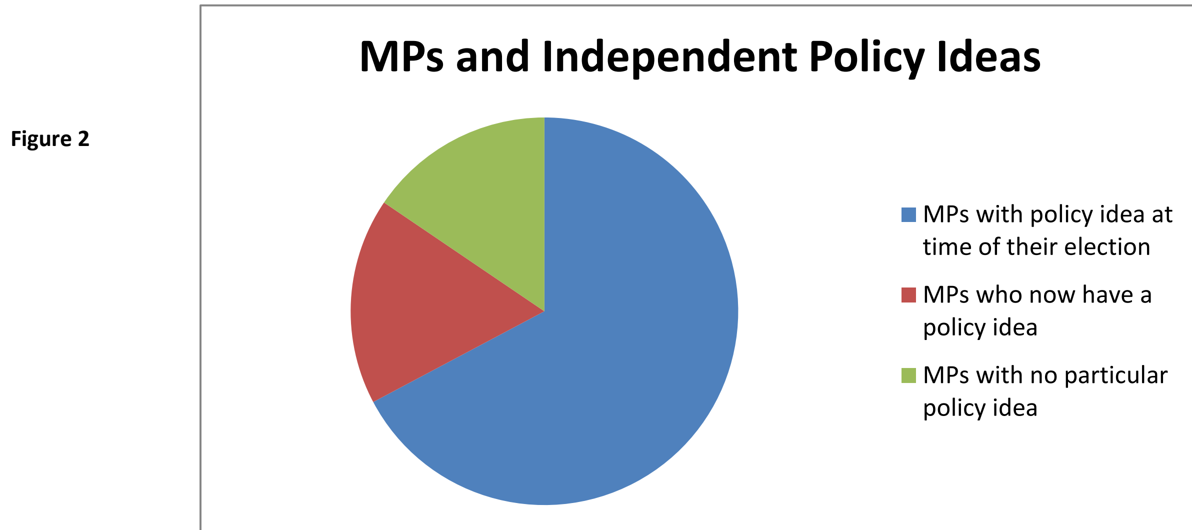
Member Interest and Motivations

While policy is increasingly achieved through networks and coalitions, "the vast majority of research on the policy processes assumes that individuals […] are the agents who create or change policies" (Weible *et al.* (2012). The career of Canadian MPs, like that of most politicians, involves a number of goals and motivations upon which the individual attempts to act (Docherty, 1997; Weible *et al*, 2012). Constituency issues, career, and questions of national interest have all been identified as important motivations held by MPs in Canada (Docherty, 1997). In addition, beliefs are also one of the most important predictors of network formation (Henry, Lubell and McCoy, 2011, p. 427). Thus, it appears logical to suggest that if a policy outcome is sought, either by an MP acting as a policy entrepreneur or by external stakeholders attempting to

influence a Member, no action will be undertaken if the MP is not interested by a policy idea.

In order to better understand this vital element in the policy process, it is important to assess whether Members actively participate in policy-making and what motivates these efforts. For this reason, parliamentarians were asked through the survey if they arrived in Ottawa with a policy idea in mind that was not part of their party's platform.[4]

Figure 2



As Figure 2 indicates, 67% of MPs came to Ottawa with an interest in policy that was not part of the package defended by their party. Out of the remaining 33%, 17% now have a policy idea in mind, leaving only 16% of Members who, at the time of the survey, did not have a particular policy or program idea beyond their party platform. These were disproportionately Conservatives, with a third of respondents from this party providing such an answer. No Liberal stated that they did not have a policy idea, while amongst NDP MPs, 37% did not have a policy idea when they started, but the vast majority (92.6%) *currently* had an issue not part of their party's platform they wanted to see implemented. Experience may be the explanation, as 69% of NDP Members had been in office for 3-5 years, while this was only the case for 23% of Liberals.

When asked about their motivation for policy work in the House (see Table 2 below),

[4] Given the strength of parties in the Canadian House of Commons, it was necessary to find a way to enquire about MPs personal interest in policy-making.

Members of all parties generally placed "opinions or issues in their constituency" at the top of their list. The slight exception are the Liberals who give equal weight to "achieving your party`s agenda". This, in fact, is the third most important priority for both NDP and Conservative Members, suggesting that party discipline is not a form of pure tyranny and that MPs embrace at least to some degree the importance of parties in the policy process.

Table 2: Average Rank of Motivations for Policy Work (by party)

	Conservatives	Liberals	NDP
1.	Constituency	Constituency/ Party agenda	Constituency
2.	Requests from NGOs		Requests from NGOs
3.	Party agenda	Requests from NGOs	Party agenda
4.	Moral or religious beliefs	Moral or religious beliefs	Ideology
5.	Ideology	Requests from industry	Requests from Industry
6.	Requests from industry	Science/evidence based results	Moral/religious beliefs
7.	Science/evidence based results	Ideology	Science/evidence based results

A final and perhaps surprising observation given recent enthusiasm for evidence-based policy-making[5], is the low priority attributed to science or evidence-based results as a motivation for policy work. This could possibly relate to Max Weber's observation that science cannot provide answers to questions of morality (1919), meaning that it may be more useful for explaining how to achieve a particular policy outcome rather than providing motivations. Nevertheless, in-depth interviews should be conducted with parliamentarians to better understand this question.

In conclusion, while most MPs are interested in independent policy-making, their motivation is most often derived from issues in their constituency and party agenda. An important lesson can be drawn from this observation, as arguments presented by policy actors may be more convincing if they correspond to parliamentarians' most important interests.

[5] See for instance the Coalition for Evidence-based Policy at http://coalition4evidence.org/

Knowledge Sources

As Knott and Wildavsky_explain,"[i]nformation is one, but only one, input into the bargaining process that yields policy decisions. Political power, special skill, and organization capabilities to act all enter in to the final outcome" (1980, p. 545). Despite all this, "learning" (Weible *et al*., 2012) represents a possible way to shape an individual's perspective on a policy issue. In their study, Landry *et al.* (2003) show that the utilization of knowledge in the Canadian public service is explained by variables such as the user`s context and the effort required to acquire knowledge. The *type* of knowledge (theoretical, qualitative or quantitative) as well as knowledge specifically adapted to the public servant's needs matter little. In another perspective, Albaek argues that that the greatest use policy-makers find for knowledge is "in its conceptual and valuational dimensions" (1995, p.92) rather than through a direct application of observations or recommendations. Be that as it may, knowledge must be transferred one way or another before such a process occurs. In attempting to identify what knowledge Members of Parliament use in their work, the survey asked MPs what knowledge sources they were likely to consult in their policy-making efforts. These are ranked by party in the table below

Table 3: Sources of Knowledge likely to be used by Members of Parliament (in order or frequency)

	Conservatives	**Liberals**	**NDP**
1	Library of Parliament	Acad. and sci. publications	Library of Parliament
2	Constituents	Library	Constituents
3	Academic and scientific publications	Party research and Leader's office	Academic and scientific publications
4		NGOs	Party research and Leader's office
5	Party research / Private Research	Think Tanks / Government / Industry	NGOs
6	Industry		Think Tanks
7	Think Tanks / NGOs		Government / Unions

8		Private sector / Constituents	
9	Government publications		Industry
10	Labour unions	Labour Unions	Private sector research

The top three knowledge sources likely to be used by NDP and Conservative Members are the same. The Library of Parliament is the most frequently used knowledge source by these two parties, and is ranked second amongst Liberal parliamentarians. This is can be explained fairly easily by the Library's role in creating knowledge free of charge and specifically geared to Member's needs[6], and the low transactions costs involved in obtaining this information. The only exception to this trend is the use of academic and scientific publications by Liberal Members which is ranked above the Library (albeit only marginally). A plausible explanation could be the Liberals' high level of education – the median for Liberal MPs is between a Masters and a professional degree/PhD, while the Median for the NDP and Conservatives is a Bachelor's degree. The very low correlation between education level and use of academic sources could point against such a conclusion however, but the very small number of MPs who do not consult academic knowledge makes it difficult to draw clear statistical inferences on this matter. On another note, the use of industry knowledge is higher for both the Liberals and the Conservatives, in line with the frequency at which MPs from these parties communicate with private companies and industry associations.

Finally, it is interesting to observe that constituents are also an important knowledge source for both Conservatives and NDP MPs, while this is much less the case for the Liberals. In fact, as observed in the previous section on motivations, Members from this party appear to be somewhat less concerned about local constituency issues and more likely to have a policy

[6] For more information on the Library: http://www.parl.gc.ca/About/Parliament/Publications/LOP/lop-e.asp

interest through either an academic lens or that of their party. This could be linked to the fact that the Liberals are the last of the "brokerage parties": In Canadian politics, the two historically dominant parties (the Liberals and the Progressive-Conservatives) have traditionally been coalitions of regional and other interests which attempted to resolve their divergences through a common national vision. For this reason, party positions in Canada have mostly been crafted by party elites who argue that they are in a position to transcend regional conflicts (see Cross, 2010, p.145-146). As both the NDP, and the Conservative's Reform wing support more direct popular involvement in policy and governance, this could explain Liberal Members' relatively lower interest in consulting with constituents.

Reception and Perception of Knowledge

As Landry *et al*. explain "[t]he mere reception of knowledge by the potential user does not imply its "use" (2003). A variety of factors have been identified in the literature as explanations for knowledge implementation (Landry et al, 2001; 2003, Mintrom and Vergari, 1998), and while the goals and motivations of parliamentarians in policy-making have been identified, an element which may be just as important in predicting whether knowledge will be used or not are *emotions* – namely, fear and trust (Weible et al. 2012). Fear may not be as relevant in the case of knowledge use, but trust appears to influence the way policy makers use different sources of information in policy network situations (Mintrom and Vergari, 1998, p. 128). The survey asked MPs how they perceived different knowledge sources in terms of trust and usefulness. Both were measured on Likert scales between one and ten (see Figures 3 & 4).

A first observation is that the parties present similar patterns of trust for different knowledge sources, with academia, generally followed by think tanks, judged to be the most trustworthy. There are variations of course, with academics considered to be more trustworthy by

Liberal and NDP Members than Conservatives, and industry being more trusted by the Conservatives than either of the other two parties. The only exception to the pattern is found amongst NDP MPs, whereby NGOs are considered to be more trustworthy than think tanks.

Figure 3

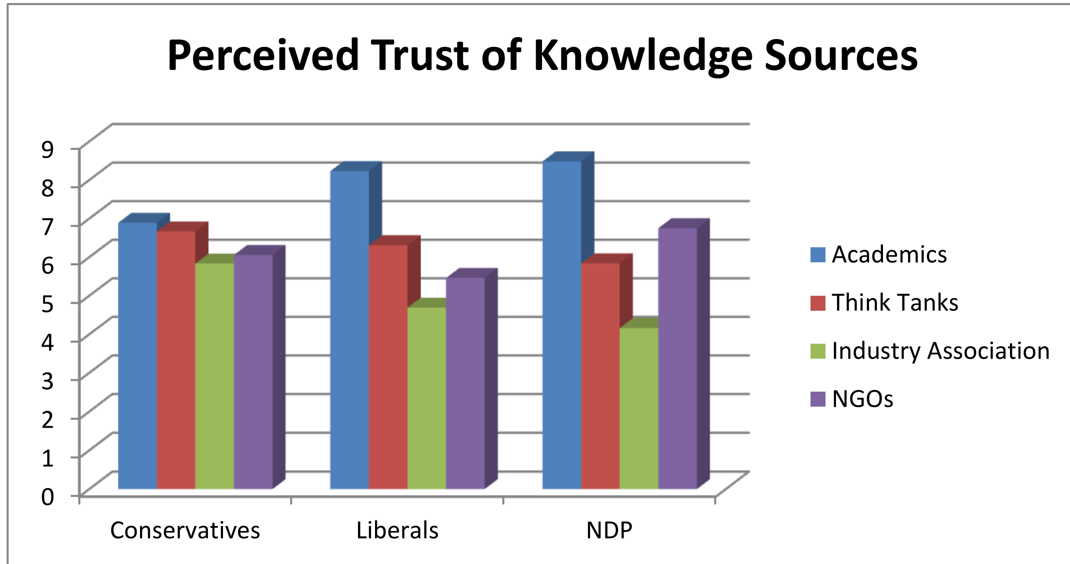
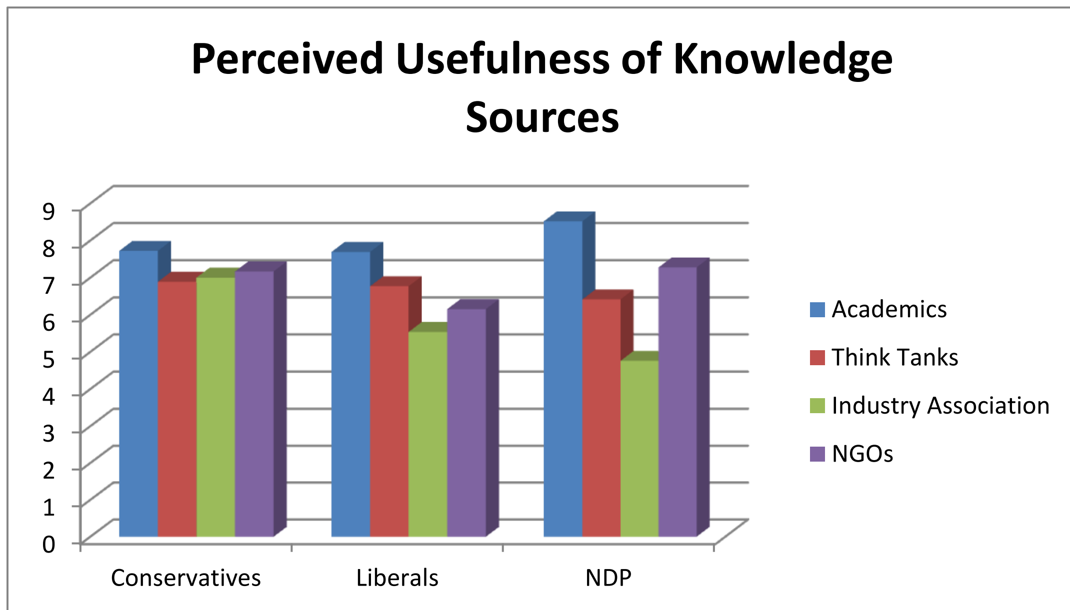


Figure 4



If Figure 4 and 5 are compared, one may note that there is little difference between perceptions of trust and usefulness, perhaps indicating that these views are part of a general belief system applied to knowledge sources rather than the artificial distinction between trust and usefulness used for the survey (Henry, Lubell and McCoy, 2010). While Hale (2011) identified

synthesized knowledge as being especially useful, and Cohn argued that academic knowledge may have more influence through a "third community" of think tanks, public officials and other intermediaries, the fact that information is inherently value-laden and political in nature may not make this distinction completely appropriate (Albaek, 1995). In fact, usefulness and trustworthiness were highly correlated for all sources of knowledge: academic (0.68 *r*) think tanks (0.56 *r*), industry (0.68 *r*) and NGOs (0.63 *r*). Nevertheless, some differences do appear. Liberal MPs consider academic research to be less useful than trustworthy, while NGOs and industry associations are attributed a higher score for usefulness than perceived trust. Finally, industry associations and private companies were deemed more useful than trustworthy by all parties, yet NDP and Liberal MPs still ranked this source of knowledge as being the least useful.

Why then is industry knowledge considered so negatively and academic knowledge so positively? Another survey questions asked Members of Parliament *why* they trusted certain knowledge sources over overs. On this front, there is unanimous agreement amongst the parties that the most important factors are the "non-partisan and neutral" nature of the organization, that "the research is scientific and verifiable", followed by "I understand how the results were obtained". Amongst NDP Members, this last category was the second most popular, but nevertheless, these results highlight how the scientific method and neutrality are more important than "sharing the organization's views" or "trusting the individual researcher". Hence, it may be reasonable to assume that industry associations and private companies are not perceived to be objective. This is not entirely surprising given companies' ultimate goal in advocating for their own interest (or the interest of Members in the case of associations) (Lindquist, 1993, p. 570).

As a brief conclusion, two dynamics appear to be at play. On the one hand, there are indications that policy networks are present, since perceived trust for industry and NGOs

correspond to the frequency of meetings between this category of policy actors and parliamentarians from each party. On the other hand, academic and scientific knowledge remains highly regarded by Members of Parliament, demonstrating that academia remains the "gold standard" of knowledge for all MPs – albeit with some variation between the parties.

Implementation Efforts

Kelly Blidook offers that MPs "are not, […] generally seen as significant actors in the policy process outside of their function as members of political parties, meaning that policy advocacy (Searing 1994) is not generally regarded as being a fruitful role for a Canadian MP" (2010, p.753). Yet Blidook's research focuses on a particular aspect of parliamentary process – private members business – which is shown to have both potentially direct and indirect impacts on policy-making. Furthermore, many of the claims made surrounding the MPs role as "trained seals" (Aiken, 1974) discount other unofficial channels through which MPs may participate in policy-making such as party caucuses and parliamentary committees (Samara, 2011). The survey attempted to find out which methods – both official and unofficial – MPs found most effective in achieving their policy goals. The survey question sought out MPs views on the effectiveness of a wide variety of methods of influence. The selection of methods is based on observations of behaviour in Parliament acquired through a year-long internship in the House of Commons and a number of additional sources (Docherty, 1997, Savoie, 2008, Samara, 2011).

While other aspects of the MP's role within policy networks demonstrated little variation between political parties, the effectiveness of different methods in achieving policy goals varied widely. This concerned differences between both the government and the opposition and between the Liberals and the NDP. First, the Conservatives are more likely to consider that

unofficial channels within the institution of Parliament and especially, within their own party,

Table 4: Average Rank for Most Effective Way to Achieve a Policy Goal (by party)

	Conservatives	Liberals	NDP
1	Lobbying a Minister	Lobbying your own caucus	Public campaigns
2	Lobbying your own caucus	Lobbying party leadership	PMB
3	Ministerial Caucus Advisory Committees	Lobbying Members from other parties	Lobbying your own caucus
4	Lobbying senior PMO/Party Officials	Introduction of a PMB	Committee
5	Lobbying the Prime minister	Lobbying a Minister	Lobbying Party Leadership
6	Introduction of PMB	Public campaigns	Lobbying Members from other parties
7	Parliamentary associations / caucuses	Lobbying the Prime minister	A speech in the House
8	Committee work	Committee Work	Lobbying a Minister
9	Public servants	Public servants / A speech in the House	Lobbying senior public officials
10	Lobbying Members from other parties		Parliamentary associations / caucuses
11	Public campaigns	Lobbying PMO officials	Lobbying the PM
12	A speech in the House	Parliamentary associations/caucuses	Lobbying senior PMO officials

were the most effective ways to achieve their policy goals. Lobbying a Minister was deemed the most effective method, followed by party caucus and interestingly, the Ministerial Advisory Committee – a recent development introduced by the Conservatives.[7] Lobbying both the Prime minister and his officials are next, and Private Members Business – the clearest avenue for individual policy work – is number six out of twelve possible methods of influence.

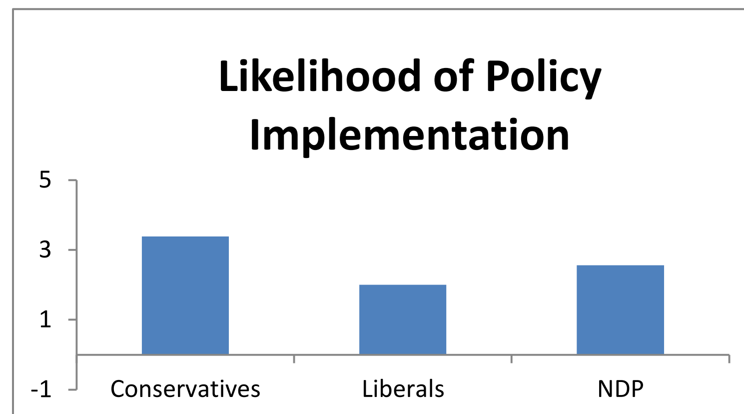
NDP Members stand in stark contrast and select "public campaigns" as the most effective policy-making tool, while this is ranked second to last by the Conservatives. With Private Members Business ranked number two and Committees number 4, it is clear that NDP MPs rely much more on the official channels of the House of Commons than the Conservatives, as these opportunities for policy-making are enshrined in the rules of the House and do not depend on

[7] "committees of six MPs and three Senators [which] have input into newly tabled legislation with a dedicated page in the minister's submission to cabinet" (Innes, 2010).

personal relationships. Members of the NDP also attribute an important role to lobbying within their own party, but less so than the Conservatives and the Liberals. While many of these judgments can be explained by greater access to the levers of power held by the party with the majority of seats in Parliament, things are complicated by the fact that Liberal Members present a very different pattern from New Democrats. They attribute a higher effectiveness to acting through internal party structures, and rank cooperation with Members from other parties (#3) higher the NDP (#6) and the Conservatives (#10). Moreover, lobbying a Minister (#5) is ranked higher than the NDP (#8) as a method for influencing policy-making. Whether this is because of greater ideological proximity to the Conservatives or some other reason is unclear, but one element worth investigating concerns the experience of Liberals, as they have generally been in office longer than NDP MPs, and may have better tacit knowledge of the parliamentary institution (see Docherty, 1997). In order to test this proposition, two dummy variables, being Member of the Liberal party or the NDP (0 = NDP, 1 = Liberal) and more or less than five years' experience as MP (0 = less than five years, 1 = more than five) were correlated with the effectiveness of public campaigns and lobbying a Minister (1-12, 12 being least effective). Membership in the Liberal Party was correlated negatively (0.56 r) with the effectiveness of public campaigns, while length of tenure was only correlated by 0.17 r with the same variable. Moreover, while the perceived effectiveness of lobbying a Minister was related to membership in the Liberal Party (0.26 r) there was no correlation between lobbying a Minister and length of experience as parliamentarian. This is somewhat surprising, but another explanation for the differences between Liberal and NDP Members could be linked to experience in *Government*. Although no variable could be used to test this, the majority of Liberal Members had a chance to be in Government, while this was not the case for Members of the NDP.

Finally, another question attempted to assess MPs perception of their potential policy success, and although the question is highly subjective, results indicate that being part of the governing party increases the chances of successful policy advocacy. While this is far from a guarantee (the Conservatives' average score is barely over 50%), it is higher the NDP and the Liberals by around 20%. There is, however, a highly subjective element to this question and results may reflect an overly optimistic perception within the Conservative ranks.

Figure 5



Conclusions

In an attempt to link theory with the results outlined above, a few conclusions should be discussed. First, there appears to be a link, perhaps only a small one, between trust levels and frequency of contact amongst MPs of certain parties and participants in Canada's policy community. The best example of this may be the NDP's strong association with the not for profit sector. This is also indicated by the Liberals and the Conservatives relative trust in private companies in comparison to NDP Members. While such a finding appears to point to the existence of policy networks, future studies should focus on what *causes* the formation of networks. Nevertheless, this dynamic does not explain everything, as Conservative Members, who while meeting frequently with industry associations and private companies, consider academic knowledge the most trustworthy source of information. A continued belief in the

principles of scientific and objective methods was in fact identified as the crucial reason for MPs to trust certain knowledge sources over others. A third very interesting finding concerns the importance of constituents as a motivation for policy work, and more surprisingly, as a source of knowledge. David Docherty's research has indicated how Members of Parliament in the Canadian context tend to devote increasing amounts of time to constituency rather than policy work as their tenure in the House of Commons lengthens, but the results of the survey appear to indicate that many Members also think of their *policy-making role* through their function as the representative of a constituency. Finally, important differences were identified with regard to the effectiveness of different advocacy tools available to MPs within the institution of Parliament. Unsurprisingly, important variations between government and opposition were present, yet a number of differences between Liberal and NDP Members indicate that having been a Member of the Government may play a role in parliamentarians' subsequent perceptions of the effectiveness of various avenues for policy-making. Liberals were much more likely to consider unofficial methods as most effective, even by reaching out to the other side of the floor to lobby Ministers and Members of the Government. NDP MPs on the other hand consider official parliamentary channels such as Committees and Private Members Business as very useful methods, and public campaigns are deemed to be the best tool for achieving policy goals.

As a final remark, while this research paper studied the influence of different policy actors individually, the literature on policy networks reveals that the most effective method for achieving certain policy goals may be through building "advocacy coalitions" (Cohn 2006, Sabatier, 1987). Thus, perhaps an industry association supported by academic research and constituents would more effectively influence an MP than an industry association acting alone. Be that as it may, this fascinating topic would require a study all of its own.

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