To Preserve What is Best of the Past: Network of Actors and Identity Analysis of Moral Conservatism in Canada

Charles Breton, University of British Columbia

Abstract: Since the election of Stephen Harper and the Conservative party in 2006, Canadian media regularly link the policies put forward by the government with what they call the religious right groups. Literature on this type of movement in Canada being very limited, this research aims to identify these groups as well as to elucidate what they may have in common. My goal is to determine if it is possible to describe these groups as an organized movement. I answer these questions with semi-directed interviews conducted with the leaders of ten groups associated to the religious right by the media. With a structural analysis of the links between these groups, I show that they form a densely-knit network. The semi-directed interviews also show that the network finds its meaning in the moral conservatism idea rather than in the religious or Christian right appellation and that it has the characteristics essential to form a movement

Introduction

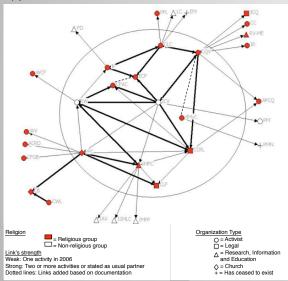
This research seeks to address two dimensions of what has been called the religious right: Who are these groups and what do that they have in common? More precisely, can we see the religious right as a social movement with religion at its basis?

To do so I use the concept of social movement as defined by Diani : (1) A network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals or groups, that are engaged in (2) a cultural or political conflict on the basis of (3) a shared collective identity.

Methods

- *Each group named at least once in 2006 by the media as being part of the religious right, the Christian right or the moral conservatism movement was added to the sample.
- *Groups named during interviews were added to the sample. Groups had to be active at the federal level.
- *Ten semi-directed interviews (averaging 1hr15) were conducted with the President or the Executive director of these groups.
- *Two groups that were part of the network refused to be interviewed (ECP, CFAC). Information on these groups comes from their documentation.

(1) The Network



Is this network a movement?

(categories are based on interview answers on goals, objectives, and sense of solidarity)



Different views = Internal tensions

Fiscal matters

Some groups want to take a stand for fiscal conservatism, others do not want to address this issue.

The status question

Charity groups cannot take an active political stance thus creating an imbalance in actions taken.

olitical Parties

Some groups want to actively promote a particular party, others see impartiality as essential.

(3) On the basis of a shared identity and solidarity



Solidarity

Tab. 1- A Comparison of Density and Strength of Links

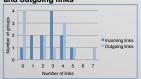
Network	Sample	Density	Strength
Canadian Moral Conservatism Network	12	23.5%	53% of strong links
Canadian National Women's Movement (Phillips 1991)	29	17.7%	33% of strong links
Milan's Environmental Groups Network (Diani 1995)	42	6.7%	N/D

•Density is measured by dividing the number of possible links inside the network by the number of existing links.

•The circle delimits groups part of what I called the Canadian Moral Conservatism Network. Groups outside of it are not pursuing action at the federal level or have only one link with members of the CMCN.

•There is clearly something happening inside the circle with 17 strong links. Only one strong link exists between a group of the CMCN and a group outside the circle.

Fig.1-Groups participation: Incoming and outgoing links



•No group is clearly central in the network since 6 groups have either 3 or 4 incoming links

•ICV and CCRL are the most active with a total of 7 links. While CCRL has 5 incoming links, all of ICV's links are outgoing.

•The number of groups having no out-degrees is influenced by the fact that two groups refused to be interviewed. Their relations are not included.

Conclusion

Even in the presence of some internal tensions, the Canadian Moral Conservatism Network is brought together by a common fight for morality. This morality rests on religious principles only for some groups but is understood in the same way all across the network. Groups do not see the need for change in the same manner but are nonetheless feeling that a sense of solidarity exists within the network. This sense of solidarity is not always salient but can be "awakened" when a moral question comes to the forefront. This "activation" is made easier by the high density and high intensity of relations inside the CMCN. The network can thus be mobilized and possess the capacity to be a movement.

Selected references

Diani, Mario. 1995. Green Networks. A Structural Analysis of the Italian Environmental Movement. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Herman, Didi. 1994. "The Christian right and the politics of morality in Canada". Parliamentary affairs 47 (2): 268-279.

Knoke, David et James H. Kuklinski. 1982. Network Analysis. Beverly Hills: Sage publications.

Melucci, Alberto. 1996. Challenging codes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Phillips, Susan D. 1991. "Meaning and Structure in Social Movements: Mapping the Network of National Canadian Women's Organization", Canadian Journal of Political Science 24 (4): 755-782.