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Abstract

Content analysis of U.S. and Canadian television news from 2004 to 2006 reveals considerable similarities in the volume of news coverage of President George W. Bush and the Iraq War on both sides of the border. Indeed, these data suggest the possibility of an international two-step news flow, where changes in the volume of coverage on NBC frequently were reflected in the news coverage on CBC and CTV during the following days. It is suggested here that this may be attributable to the limitations faced by international reporters, resulting in a “two-step flow” that should be relevant not just for Canadian reporters in the United States, but also for many international reporters elsewhere.

Keywords

journalism, news reporting, television news

Few areas of news reporting of government trigger more criticism than the way television news covers U.S. military policy. Scholars and political figures have found fault with nearly every aspect of this type of coverage. Most significantly, the “rally ‘round the flag” effect found in U.S. public opinion during times of crisis appears to push U.S. reporters in the direction of being highly deferential to the president and the military

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during times of active combat (Entman 2004). Important questions, media observers note, are too often asked only after the fact, if at all (Bennett et al. 2007; Orkent 2004).

Of course, some problems inherent in international reporting are at least partially beyond the control of reporters. Presidents can dominate news cycles, particularly when military matters are under way, reducing the ability and desire of other political actors to be heard (Bennett et al. 2007; Cohen 2008; Entman 2004; Farnsworth 2009; Farnsworth and Lichter 2006). Explicit White House media management strategies, including the selective release of information and tightly controlled media access to the combat zone through “embedded journalism,” can also raise credibility problems for wartime reporting (Graber 2003; Norris et al. 2003). In addition, potential critics of administration policy may silence themselves rather than face charges of disloyalty from the White House, thereby depriving reporters of alternative sources of information and evaluation regarding presidential priorities (cf. Entman 2004; Fisher 2004; Lindsay 2003). Reporters concerned about accusations of bias may feel constrained to do little more than “index” the level of expressed elite disagreement with military policies in a crisis (cf. Bennett et al. 2007). In other words, presidents tend to find themselves at the top of a “cascade” of information in which administration critics and news reporters hesitate to swim against the tide of commander-in-chief spin—and those dissenting voices who try to reframe the news usually fail (cf. Entman 2004).

Domestic news correspondents will accordingly have difficulty finding good official or independent critical sources for stories on military affairs (foreign and otherwise). That said, foreign correspondents are likely to face even greater limitations. In Washington, a reporter from NBC is likely to have a much greater information network than a reporter from the British BBC, French TF1, or Canadian CBC. Moreover, since they speak directly to a domestic audience, reporters at NBC or CBS or ABC are more likely to have their calls returned. There must certainly be exceptions to this rule—some pressure groups may be very interested in speaking with any correspondent, domestic or foreign. Foreign correspondents will for the most part, however, suffer much greater limitations in their access to time-pressed authoritative sources when compared to their domestic counterparts. These limitations may be compounded by a number of other resource-based constraints—for instance, the recent decline in specialized or long-term international correspondents, or the growing reliance on in-country media and Internet-based research. We believe this reduced news-gathering capacity has important implications for coverage of foreign affairs. In particular, it can lead to a “two-step” flow, whereby foreign correspondents follow the news written by domestic correspondents.

We test this possibility below using media coverage from two countries with especially strong links—the United States and Canada. As a key U.S. ally, and one intensely focused on political developments in its much more populated neighbor, Canada’s news reports offer a highly important point of comparison with U.S. news coverage. We accordingly examine news coverage in and of the United States on both (a) *NBC Nightly News* and (b) the flagship news programs of two Canadian networks, the (state-funded) CBC and (private) CTV. With a thirty-six-month, roughly sixteen-thousand-story sample, our data tell us much about the similarities and differences between U.S. and Canadian coverage of U.S. domestic and foreign affairs.

We are particularly interested here in Canadian and U.S. coverage of George W. Bush and the Iraq War. Were Canadian television reporters—given their relative distance from any “rally ‘round the flag” effects and limited vulnerability to White House pressure—relatively independent in the attention they paid to high-priority matters involving Bush and his Iraq policy? Or do Canadian reporters tend to follow the lead of the far more numerous U.S. network news reporters in deciding when (and perhaps also how) to report on Bush and the Iraq occupation? It turns out that our data provide little evidence of independence on the part of Canadian media regarding news coverage of the US. Before we present results, however, we review the relevant literature below.

Canada and the United States: Ambivalence Meets News Coverage

The United States matters greatly to Canada, given the latter nation’s heavy reliance on international trade with the United States, deep cultural bonds, as well as the tight connections between the two countries over security matters dating back decades (Jones 2002; Lindsay 2004; McKenna 2005; Richter 2003). However, the binational relationship is not easily managed, at least from the Canadian perspective. On one hand, nationalist elements in Canadian politics worry about being tied too closely to U.S. government and culture and punish prime ministers, like Brian Mulroney, seen as too cozy with Washington (Miljan and Cooper 2005; Sussman and Glazio 2003). On the other hand, Canadians are well aware of the importance of the United States in terms of both trade and defense, and leaders seen as too combative with the United States, like Paul Martin, also suffer rebukes from the electorate (Keeble 2005; Wells 2006).

Academics who have analyzed Canadian public opinion also chart an ambivalence north of the border. Some scholars (cf. Adams 2003) argue that Canadian public opinion is becoming increasingly estranged from the United States, while others suggest that public opinion in the two countries remains highly similar (cf. Brooks 2006). Given this political and public ambivalence, Canada has allied with its southern neighbor on some, but not all, military matters during the cold war and beyond (Lindsay 2004; Richter 2003). This pattern was also true during the George W. Bush presidency. Successive Canadian governments, including those of two Liberal prime ministers and one Conservative one, refused to commit Canadian military forces to the Iraq invasion of 2003 and the subsequent occupation, decisions consistent with Canadian public opinion (Goldenberg 2006; Haglund 2006; Wells 2006). At the same time, Canada’s roughly two thousand troops now in Afghanistan represent one of the largest NATO deployments there, and those soldiers are patrolling the highly dangerous Kandahar region (Morton 2006).

Analyses of news content show that Canadian media reflect this public and political ambivalence. A detailed study of news content in 2002 relating to the U.S. government on CBC’s *The National*, the network’s flagship newscast, found that roughly half the reports on the United States were neutral, and those with a clear tone were more likely to be negative than positive by a roughly two-to-one margin (Miljan and Cooper 2005). Negativity was particularly apparent in coverage of military matters. The subset of

news reports that focused on U.S. policies relating to terrorism and the buildup to the Iraq War (launched in March 2003) were far more likely (by a margin of eight-to-one) to be negative than positive.

In one of the few comparative studies of U.S. and Canadian television news coverage of U.S. military policy, Soderlund et al. (1994) found few differences in coverage of the 1989 U.S. invasion of Panama (that captured General Manuel Noriega so he could face U.S. drug charges). The leading Canadian networks (CBC, CTV) paid somewhat less attention to the Panama story than did the leading U.S. networks (ABC, CBS, NBC), which is logical given that the invasion was a U.S. military operation.¹ But in terms of story focus, use of sources, and overall tone of coverage, the Canadian networks offered news reports that scarcely differed from the U.S. networks. These similarities were, Soderlund et al. argue, largely the result of reporters in the two countries relying on the same U.S. government sources for news. Of course, it is not clear just how much we can generalize from the Panama invasion. As is the case for Iraq, Canadian forces were not deployed in Panama. Unlike Iraq, the Noriega operation lasted less than a month. Perhaps closer in theme, a study of news coverage of terrorism in both U.S. and Canadian television news during that same year of 1989 found considerable similarities in news coverage, in large part because both countries share a common Western perspective, and much of the terrorism discussion during that year focused on anti-Western movements (Wittebols 1992).

There has, however, been no systematic comparative study of Canadian and U.S. news coverage in the post-9/11 era, a time during which U.S. policy—both domestic and foreign—has been hotly contested. It has also been a period during which foreign countries' attitudes about the United States have become increasingly salient in the United States; and in Canada, relations with the United States have been increasingly scrutinized. There are several reasons to expect similarity in the coverage of U.S. affairs by the two nations. Research that has identified overlaps in the news agendas of the two countries has emphasized the geographic and cultural proximity of the United States and Canada (Soderlund et al. 1994; Soroka 2002; Wittebols 1992, 1996). We might add that, due to the deep penetration of U.S. network television into Canada, Canadian television news reporters compete with U.S. journalists far more than do, for instance, European reporters. Most Canadians have easy access to both Canadian and U.S. networks via broadcast signals as well as cable and satellite services, and competition for the same viewers—at least insofar as Canadians are interested in the news as it is presented on the U.S. networks—may mean the correlation between Canadian and U.S. content is especially high. At the same time, however, there are reasons to expect some coverage differences. Canadians' attitudes about foreign affairs, and of course U.S.-Canada disputes, are regularly different from Americans' perspectives. This may be reflected in news content.

Here we focus on the temporal relationship between Canadian and U.S. media content. In particular, we are interested in the possibility that there is an “international two-step flow”—that U.S. media content, at least where U.S. news is concerned, leads Canadian media content. A “two-step flow” in political communication,

following from work by Lazarsfeld et al. (1944), typically refers to a process whereby information is first received and interpreted by opinion leaders, who then pass that information—along with their own interpretations—to others. The majority of citizens thus receive information through this two-step flow; and through “personal influence” (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955), opinion leaders can have particularly powerful effects on the course of public opinion. Here, we borrow the term “two-step flow” to refer to a cross-border dynamic that may exist between U.S. and Canadian media or, more broadly, between any domestic and foreign media, at least where local coverage is concerned. In short, just as opinion leaders may get information first, so too may domestic media. And domestic media, like opinion leaders, may have an opportunity to filter and/or interpret this information before it is picked up by other media outlets.

This international two-step flow is likely not a matter of attentiveness but rather of access and resources. Previous studies of foreign news correspondents found that they generally have a more difficult time than domestic correspondents getting access to authoritative local political actors, including leading politicians and the most influential interest group actors (Hess 2005). On the contrary, international reporters have no trouble obtaining news footage of White House briefings, which may give the administration an even greater coverage advantage over its critics in international news reports from Washington. Key political actors will have limited time for media correspondents, and in most cases they will be principally interested in finding a domestic rather than an international audience when they agree to be interviewed. A U.S. politician looking for support for a given bill is not going to benefit much from CBC coverage, after all. The consequence is that U.S. journalists will be more likely to get access to U.S. politicians—particularly the harder-to-reach critics of administration policy—than will Canadian journalists, who may rely more on administration briefings available to all reporters (G. Fraser 2007; Goldbloom 2007). U.S. “news” therefore will be more likely to appear first in U.S. media, and the U.S. interpretation of events may set the tone for subsequent international reporting on U.S. affairs.

There are also several resource-based factors that could explain why foreign coverage may be derived significantly from in-country news reports. First of all, the number of full-time, highly specialized international correspondents has been in decline in recent years, with many experienced international reporters being replaced—if at all—by less trained freelance writers and part-time journalists (Hamilton and Jenner 2003; Hess 2005). A declining number of specialists who can fully immerse themselves in the country where they are posted also makes it more difficult for a foreign bureau to compete with the domestic news production (Hamilton and Jenner 2003; Hannerz 2004; Hess 2005). These reporters also may not have much time to learn about a particular country. Foreign correspondents are frequently moved from post to post, leading to a steep learning curve for the many short-term reporters who only spend a few years in Washington before being rotated elsewhere (Hannerz 2004; Hess 2005; McKenna 2005). In addition, interviews with foreign correspondents reveal that they are increasingly relying on Internet-based research and information retrieval to

build their stories, including information provided by other news services. They therefore have fewer personal interactions with more direct sources of information about new developments (Hess 2005).

There is also the related issue of reduced autonomy for these foreign reporters, which may push Canadian news about the United States in the direction of an international two-step flow. The growing ease of international communications has led to more frequent interaction between home country editors and foreign correspondents, which may increase the pressure on these reporters to follow the lead of the in-country media sources consulted online by their editors back home (Hess 2005).

We are accordingly interested in the possibility that U.S. content (on the United States) leads Canadian content. If Canadian reporters suffer greater limitations on their news-gathering capacity, Canadian reports are likely to lag behind their U.S. counterparts. As noted above, competition for viewers may enhance the need for Canadian journalists to try to keep up with U.S. journalists. But limited access to sources and resource constraints will ensure that they cannot. Canadian content may thus mimic U.S. content, just a few days later. Note that if this pattern holds, then it may have implications for countries other than Canada and the United States. That is, our results may illustrate a more general difficulty with foreign news—a result of the limitations foreign correspondents face throughout the world. This is discussed further in the concluding section. First, we turn to the data.

Data and Measures

We explore these questions using an exhaustive electronic database of television news transcripts from January 2004 to December 2006. This study period covers times of particularly harsh domestic and international criticism of President Bush and the trouble-filled Iraq occupation, as well as the intense debate over future U.S. policies regarding Iraq during both the 2004 and 2006 elections. It begins eight months after Bush declared the end of “major combat operations” atop the USS Lincoln and ends a few weeks after Bush proposed a “surge” of U.S. troops to quell the continuing sectarian violence in Iraq.

Over this thirty-six-month period, we capture (1) all news stories on NBC and (2) every news story discussing President Bush and/or the U.S. government on the Canadian networks’ evening newscasts during the same period. NBC and CTV transcripts are drawn from the Nexis full-text database; CBC stories are drawn from the Virtual News Library. The total number of stories, then, is 16,220, though we exclude the 2,888 snippets of less than eighty words, so as just to capture full news stories. We are left with a total of 10,659 *NBC Nightly News* reports, 1519 CBC stories from *The National*, and 1,154 news stories on *CTV News*.

Note that the data include both public and private broadcasts in Canada. CTV is a private media company, while CBC is a public broadcaster that relies on both public funding and support from advertisers to finance its news and entertainment programming (M. Fraser 2000). Since the need to maximize advertising revenue affects even

public broadcasters in Canada, the CBC sometimes struggles to balance quality news programming and maximizing market share (M. Fraser 2000). This range of funding for the CBC makes it far more dependent on audience market share than other public broadcasters like the BBC, with its far more extensive public revenue stream (M. Fraser 2000). In recent years, the CBC and CTV newscasts have had roughly equivalent market shares, though CBC is more influential in setting the tone for much of the media coverage across Canada (Miljan and Cooper 2005). While one might expect that their different organizational structures would significantly affect coverage, the content differences between the Canadian networks' evening newscasts are marginal at best. So we lump the two broadcasts together for the analyses below.²

NBC News, it should be noted, offered comparatively kind treatment of Bush during some key points during his first term. Past content analysis has found that Bush was treated more positively on NBC's evening newscasts than those of ABC and CBS during three key periods: the weeks after the 2001 terrorist attacks; the six-week-long combat phase of the Iraq War in late March and April 2003; and the first six months of the occupation of Iraq, starting May 1, 2003 (Farnsworth and Lichter 2006).

The content analysis of these data captures topics and actors using a computer-based content analysis procedure based on simple keyword searches.³ We look below at three overlapping samples: (1) all stories on NBC, alongside all stories on the United States on the two Canadian networks; (2) all stories on NBC and the Canadian networks including any mention of President Bush; and (3) all stories on NBC and the Canadian networks including any mention of Iraq. We identify the latter two categories using a computer-based text search to identify stories mentioning the president or Iraq. (Note that these two categories are not mutually exclusive.)

In addition to identifying stories mentioning President Bush or Iraq, we code all stories for broad policy topics. We do so using the subject categories provided by Nexis to assign topics to each article in our database. Nexis has very complex set of subject codes; here, we rely on a comparatively simple twenty-one-topic scheme, which is intended to match relatively easily with the Nexis subject hierarchy. We coded the same twenty-one topics in the CBC data (drawn from the Virtual News Library) using full-text keyword searches based on all publicly available Nexis subject codes.⁴ Topic-based lexicons have been used in a number of studies of news texts to reliably code a range of policy topics and events (cf. Andrew et al. 2008; Schrodt et al. 1994). Though the resulting topic lexicon relied on only a subset of Nexis keywords, note that the text-based coding of CBC data produced topics that were virtually identical in their distribution to CTV data coded using the actual Nexis subject categories.

Results

Iraq dwarfed all other foreign news coverage relating to the United States on CBC, CTV, and NBC during the three-year study.⁵ The Persian Gulf nation was by far the most covered country by those media outlets (not counting the United States and Canada), even though Canadians were not part of the coalition that deposed Saddam

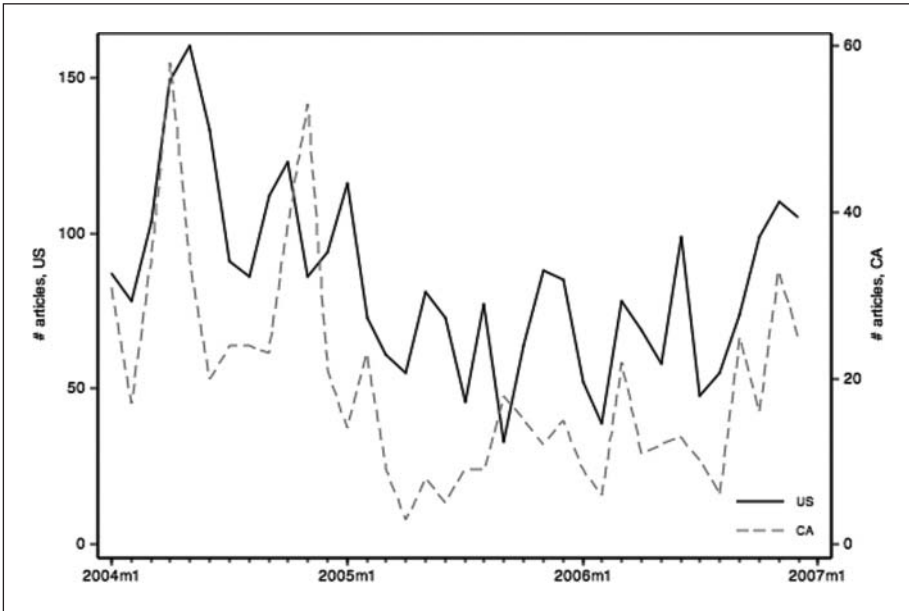


Figure 1. U.S. and Canadian Coverage of Iraq

Hussein. Fully 21.5 percent of the U.S.-related news reports on CBC and CTV dealing with a country beyond either Canada or the United States during 2004 to 2006 focused on Iraq, a more than six-to-one advantage in coverage when compared to Afghanistan. (The latter nation, the location of more than two thousand Canadian troops throughout the study period, was the number two foreign nation in terms of volume of coverage for U.S.-related stories on Canadian television news.) Iraq was a much larger presence on NBC's *Nightly News*, where 43.7 percent of news stories that mentioned a country other than Canada or the United States dealt with the violent occupation.

George W. Bush also played a prominent role in news coverage. Of the NBC reports, roughly 21 percent of all stories mentioned the president. In U.S. coverage on CBC and CTV, George W. Bush was mentioned 50 percent of the time. Bush mentions were frequently, but not always, in conjunction with Iraq. In the United States, we have 26 percent of stories mentioning Iraq, 21 percent mentioning Bush, and 9 percent of all stories mentioning both. In Canada, we have 27 percent of U.S.-related stories mentioning Iraq, 50 percent mentioning Bush, and 22 percent mentioning both. The overlap in Canada is greater, as we should expect—particularly during this period, Canadian coverage would have focused more extensively on U.S. foreign policy.

Figures 1 and 2 show monthly trends in network coverage of Bush and Iraq. Coverage of both was clearly greater in the United States than in Canada, so for the sake of comparability the two series are plotted on different axes. In both figures, the U.S. data are plotted against the left y-axis, while Canadian data are plotted against the right

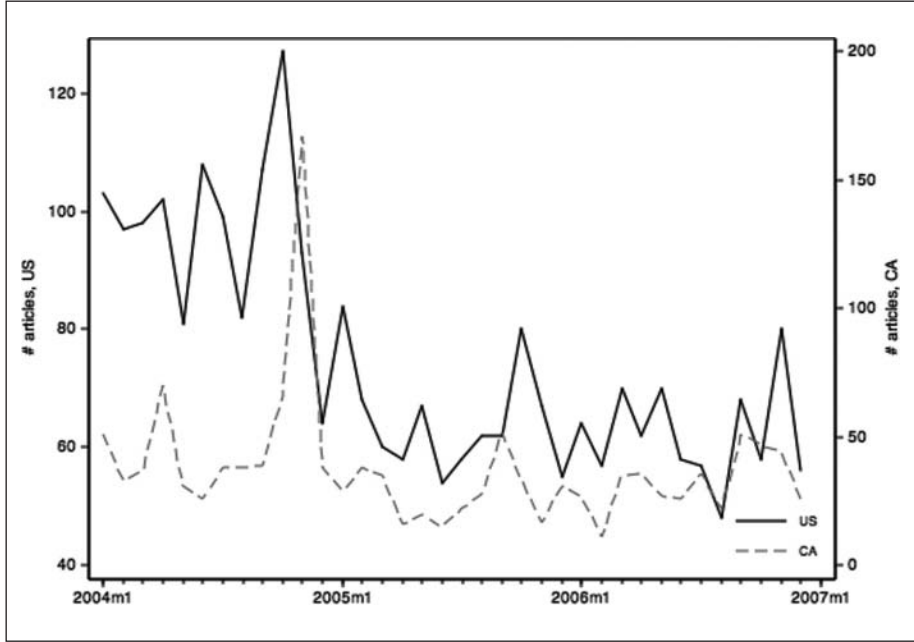


Figure 2. U.S. and Canadian Coverage of George W. Bush

y-axis. Plotting the monthly data in this way serves to emphasize the relatively strong relationship between the U.S. and Canadian series. There are differences in month-to-month trends, to be sure. But general patterns are similar in the U.S. and Canadian samples, for both topics.⁶

What accounts for this similarity in Canadian and U.S. coverage? Both are following real-world events, of course—both provide coverage of major press conferences, for instance, and of events in Iraq and in Washington. But the connection between Canadian and U.S. coverage is remarkably similar here, not just in the two broad themes reflected in Figures 1 and 2, but across the various topics listed in Table 1 as well. Table 1 shows coverage for the ten most-covered topics in each of our three (overlapping) samples—all coverage, Bush coverage, and Iraq coverage. There are some notable, and predictable, differences in coverage in the first sample. In particular, Canadian coverage of the United States dealt more with foreign affairs, while U.S. coverage includes a somewhat greater proportion of stories on (its own) domestic policy issues. Relatedly, there is a higher proportion of stories on crime in the United States in each sample. This should not be surprising, given the high salience of violent crime in U.S. domestic politics. Purely domestic matters in any nation would be of modest, if any, news value across national borders. Notwithstanding these basic differences, however, the leading topics covered in Canadian and U.S. media are very similar. Coverage of Bush is, in Canada, only marginally different topic-wise than

Table 1. Topics, by Country and George W. Bush/Iraq Mentions

	All stories		Stories mentioning Bush		Stories mentioning Iraq	
	Canada	United States	Canada	United States	Canada	United States
Foreign affairs	22.34	15.62	30.26	19.96	49.35	31.18
Politics	14.12	13.18	22.2	28.34	16.26	18.37
Defense	11.96	10.35	14.13	12.17	17.71	23.99
Crime	11.92	18.42	6.91	13.11	5.81	14.71
Environment	5.7	12.16	4.38	6.9	0.87	2.76
Health	8.5	10.67	4.45	4.48	1.89	2.28
Energy	2.32	2.61	1.84	2.02	1.16	1.09
Transportation	3.23	3.39	1.61	0.74	0.58	0.86
Immigration	2.95	1.22	2.3	1.38	1.02	0.62
Economy	2.36	1.74	1.15	1.58	0.87	1
N	2,542	7,130	1,302	2,029	689	2,101

Cells contain percentage of stories in each topic (looking only at stories with more than eighty words).

coverage of Bush in the United States. Nearly all of the major issues in the U.S. news are also major issues in Canadian news relating to the United States. This, already, suggests a stronger connection between Canadian and U.S. coverage than work on different international news values might lead us to suspect (cf. Gilboa 2005; Hallin and Mancini 2004; Palmer 2000; Stromback 2007, 2008).

An International Two-Step Flow?

Where coverage of major issues in U.S. government policy is concerned, the U.S. media may well lead their Canadian counterparts. We expect that part of the story is general, extending beyond the specific comparison here of U.S. and Canadian news. As discussed above, almost any foreign correspondent in any country will suffer greater limitations on their news-gathering capacity than will local correspondents. Part of the story may also be unique, however, and related specifically to the Canadian and U.S. media markets: because of the deep penetration of US television into Canada, Canadian television news reporters compete with U.S. journalists far more than do other foreign reporters.⁷ As a result of the widespread availability of U.S. network television news in Canada, the similarity between Canadian and U.S. coverage of U.S. affairs may be especially pronounced.⁸

The importance of the U.S. relationship in domestic Canadian politics may also help explain the presence of a two-step flow in news content. The close ties between the two nations means that Canadian political elites are often asked to comment on major U.S. political developments, particularly as they relate to Canada's interests. Since these elites are likely to learn at least part of the information they use to assess south of the border developments from Canadian television—and they need to tread very

cautiously—any lag in news coverage may also reflect a two-step flow time delay as it relates to policymakers in Ottawa learning of the latest news from Washington on CBC and CTV and then taking time to decide how to comment on that news to CBC and CTV. This potential delay, though, may increase the vulnerability of Canadian reporters working in Washington to White House spin along the lines suggested above, as real-time critics in either country may be tough to find for a given night's presidential news story on CBC and CTV.

Note that the two explanations produce slightly different expectations where the relationship between U.S. and Canadian media is concerned. If competition is the principal dynamic, then there is no reason to expect either country's media to lead the other—they should simply produce similar material at roughly the same time. If Canadian reporters suffer greater limitations on their news-gathering capacity, however, Canadian reports may lag behind their U.S. counterparts. There may be, in effect, an "international two-step flow" in television news reports from these two nations.

This possibility of a two-step flow is empirically testable. We do so here by generating time series at various intervals (see below) of the total coverage of Bush and total coverage of Iraq, for both NBC and the two Canadian networks. We then examine the temporal relationship between, for instance, total coverage of Bush on the U.S. network and total coverage of Bush on the Canadian networks.

We do so collapsing our data in two ways—by week and by three-day intervals. The advantage of aggregating stories weekly and by three-day intervals is that we have very few cases in which there were no stories on Bush or Iraq on the Canadian news programs. This would become a significant problem if we were to examine and compare news content one day at a time.⁹ We have, rather, grouped days to create a data set in which the values for both the U.S. and Canadian media fluctuate regularly. The disadvantage of using weekly data is that much of the effect of one network on another almost certainly happens in less than a week. If the CBC is indeed "following" a story broadcast on NBC, they are most likely doing so one or two days later, not an entire week later. This is less problematic, of course, using three-day intervals. Moreover, using weekly and three-day intervals need not preclude a causal relationship that is even faster. Suffice it to say that the results for both weekly and three-day data are very similar and that a narrower time frame would increase considerably the number of missing cases on the Canadian side of the equation.

For both the weekly and three-day data, we examine the temporal relationship between U.S. and Canadian coverage using a relatively simple Granger causality test. First, total current coverage of Bush on NBC is regressed on the previous week's coverage of Bush on NBC and on CBC/CTV. Results show, controlling for past NBC coverage, whether CBC/CTV coverage systematically leads NBC coverage. The same process is repeated for CBC/CTV: CBC/CTV coverage is regressed on the previous week's coverage of Bush on CBC/CTV and on NBC. We repeat the process for coverage of Iraq. And we then have a good sense of the extent to which NBC leads CBC/CTV, and vice versa.¹⁰ We then repeat the entire analysis using three day intervals.

Both weekly and three-day results are presented in Table 2. Regression models are shown in rows. The first row shows results for a model predicting current (at t) U.S.

Table 2. Two-Step Flow: Effects of/on U.S. and Canadian Media

Dependent variables	Independent variables			R^2
	U.S. media _{t-1}	Canadian media _{t-1}	Constant	
Weekly: Frequency of coverage				
Bush				
U.S. media _t	.558** (.082)	-.115** (.056)	8.639** (1.300)	.244
Canadian media _t	.230* (.132)	.142 (.091)	3.508* (2.103)	.069
Iraq				
U.S. media _t	.578** (.076)	.066 (.156)	8.049** (1.360)	.361
Canadian media _t	.118** (.041)	.317** (.083)	0.787 (0.728)	.243
Three-day intervals: Frequency of coverage				
Bush				
U.S. media _t	.426** (.052)	-.025 (.031)	4.300** (0.386)	.170
Canadian media _t	.359** (.091)	.046 (.055)	0.900 (0.690)	.055
Iraq				
U.S. media _t	.534** (.048)	.063 (.088)	3.763** (0.409)	.304
Canadian media _t	.103** (.030)	.155** (.055)	0.777** (0.257)	.084

$N = 155$ for weekly data and 365 for three-day intervals. Cells contain coefficients from an ordinary least squares (OLS) vector autoregression, with standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$.

coverage of Bush, as a function of the previous week's (at $t - 1$) U.S. coverage of Bush (column 1) and the previous week's (at $t - 1$) Canadian coverage of Bush (column 2). We see that past U.S. coverage is systematically related to current coverage, as we might expect. This is reflected in the significant coefficient (.558) in column 1. The coefficient in column 2 suggests that Canadian coverage does not systematically lead U.S. coverage—it is statistically significant in this case, but negative.

The second row shows results for Canadian coverage of Bush. Here, the coefficient for U.S. media is positive and statistically significant, suggesting that U.S. content leads Canadian content, at least where the volume of Bush coverage is concerned. These two models thus fit with our expectations regarding a two-step flow, from the United States to Canada, and not the other way around.

Weekly results for Iraq coverage are if anything somewhat stronger, at least where evidence of a unidirectional effect is concerned. Again, Canadian coverage does not precede U.S. coverage, but U.S. coverage at $t - 1$ is systematically related to Canadian coverage at t .

The second half of the table demonstrates that the results are stronger still when we examine these relationships using three-day intervals. U.S. coverage at $t - 1$

consistently drives Canadian coverage at t ; the opposite is never true. We take this to be strong evidence that the relationship between U.S. and Canadian coverage of the United States is unidirectional—U.S. coverage tends to lead Canadian coverage, just as we might expect given the limitations on foreign correspondents.

Conclusions

Our results are strongly suggestive of an international two-step flow in news content. There are three caveats, however. First, our results suggest, but clearly do not prove, that such a flow exists—it may be that Canadian media are independent but slower to respond, a consequence of a much smaller number of journalists, for instance. If the micro-level dynamic is more about slower reporting than a two-step flow, however, the overall result is the same: the prominence of Bush and Iraq in Canadian media follows, temporally speaking, the prominence of those issues in U.S. media.

Second, it is important to note that nothing we have presented here speaks to the *tone* of coverage, in the United States or Canada. This is an important part of a full test of the two-step flow hypothesis, which placed great emphasis on interpretation as part of the process (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944). As such, tone should be a key part of subsequent studies in this research area. While international news media—particularly the CBC—have been criticized for their alleged anti-American tendencies, these data neither support nor refute that hypothesis. The existence of a two-step flow in coverage is suggestive, however. Given the same limitations of foreign correspondents that we suspect drive the results above, Canadian networks may be restricted in their ability to criticize U.S. foreign affairs. At least for the CBC and CTV, the carefully managed and extraordinary well-funded White House efforts at spinning reporters and intimidating potential dissenters within the United States do not suddenly become irrelevant when news reports cross the U.S. border (cf. Cohen 2008; Entman 2004; Farnsworth 2009).

Indeed, to make matters worse for Canadian reporters trying to file a Washington story for that night's newscast, it may take Canadian political elites some time to learn about and evaluate new developments and to explain to reporters what the latest news from the White House means for Canadians. Future researchers might examine the extent to which this apparent international two-step flow is the result of limited access to official U.S. sources, how much is the result of any delay in interpretation of ongoing events from Canadian officials, and how much is the result of resource-based constraints such as the decline in the number and quality of foreign correspondents and the growing reliance on in-country media and Internet-based research. Future researchers may also be interested in the extent to which technological changes, particularly the rise of new media, may be altering the speed and scope of this apparent two-step communication flow in international news.

As a result of these factors, Canadian reporters may be less resistant to the considerable White House pressure applied to all television reporters. This is not because Canadian reporters are less sophisticated in the ways of Washington but, rather, because of the greater difficulties they face in getting information from the most

newsworthy sources beyond those promoted worldwide by the White House video briefings and statements (cf. G. Fraser 2007; Goldbloom 2007).

For the time being, the question of cross-border tone is speculative, though the changing volume of news coverage is no more important than the changing tonal nature of that news. To what extent might the international two-step flow pattern observed for the amount of coverage in these two nations also address tonal changes in the news? Future researchers of cross-border news in the United States and Canada, and in other comparative contexts, might consider this question as well.

Third, the evidence of an international two-step flow uncovered here may not be generalizable but rather unique to the Canadian media environment. The dynamic may be a result of the geographic and cultural proximity of the United States and Canada and the partial overlapping of the two nations' media markets. We suspect otherwise, however. The storyline we have highlighted suggests that, in the course of stable domestic politics, at least, foreign correspondents—almost anywhere—will face greater limitations than their domestic counterparts.

To test this possibility, future researchers might examine the extent to which the two-step flow found in this study of U.S. and Canadian news can also be found for other international media outlets reporting on the news from Washington. Would Australian or British journalists cover the United States differently than their Canadian counterparts, given the greater separation of those island nations from U.S. culture and politics? Or would coverage be similar, given similar—or perhaps even greater—limitations on access to foreign sources? In addition, the international two-step flow pattern may not be limited to television news. To what extent did the *New York Times* influence international news coverage during the Bush years in Canada and elsewhere, a relationship identified in previous studies of U.S. and Canadian news (cf. Soroka 2002)?

What do these findings suggest for Canadians consuming news of the United States north of the border? Though preliminary, our findings suggest that Canadians receiving news about the United States via CBC and CTV are learning about many of the same issues that Americans are learning about their own country on NBC. These similarities set the stage for more effective cross-border communication. Given the close ties between the two nations, it is perhaps just as well that Canadian reporters are not routinely given the mandate to search largely for the bizarre in the United States, as some reporters from other nations are encouraged to do (cf. G. Fraser 2007). Canadian political elites who use their own media to keep tabs on U.S. politics would likewise be focusing on many of the same issue priorities concerning their southern neighbors as they would from watching the U.S. news, though the NBC would tell the story sooner. U.S.-Canadian relations would not be undermined, and might even be aided, by Canadian news of the United States that nearly mirrors the agenda revealed by U.S. news content. We are, at a minimum, focusing on similar matters relating to the United States on both sides of the border.

If foreign correspondents do face greater limitations, and if the consequence is that foreign news takes its lead from domestic news, then there would seem to be at least

one other potentially important implication for foreign news content. To be clear: domestic journalists would play an important role in defining the focus and likely the tone of coverage for foreign journalists. This is perhaps as it should be—those most familiar with domestic news are able to play an important role in establishing the focus and tone of coverage. However, it also suggests some obvious limitations where critical foreign journalism is concerned.

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Notes

1. There were also slight differences between the Canadian news outlets, with CBC slightly more negative in its treatment of President George H. W. Bush than was CTV.
2. Separate analyses of CBC and CTV are available upon request, though the two do not differ significantly on any of our measures.
3. There are many different programs available to implement computer automation. Here we use Lexicoder, a java-based multiplatform software that implements frequency analysis. The program is available for academic use at lexicoder.com.
4. The twenty-one topics are as follows: agriculture, banking, civil rights, crime, defense, economy (general), education, employment, energy, environment, foreign affairs, health, immigration, international trade, law, legislation, politics (general), poverty and welfare, primary resources, taxation, and transportation. Stories that do not fall into one of these topics (roughly 20 percent of the total sample) are coded “other.” The topic dictionary used in the full-text analysis contains 4,626 Nexis subject keywords organized into the twenty-one categories above; it is available upon request.
5. Separate comparisons of U.S. and Canadian news coverage of U.S.-related news involving other nations beyond Iraq and other leading topics beyond foreign and military policy confirm this article’s findings of considerable overlap in the U.S.-related news agenda in the two countries. Eight of the top ten nations covered by NBC and eight of the top ten issue areas covered by NBC are also found on the comparable top ten lists of CBC/CTV news relating to the United States during this three-year period. Further details can be found in Farnsworth et al. 2007, particularly Tables 1 and 2.
6. A more systematic measure of the relationship between U.S. and Canadian series is presented below, where we test directly the temporal relationship between the series.
7. One former Washington correspondent for the Toronto-based *Globe & Mail* noted in an interview, with apparent envy, that his British counterparts were given a much freer mandate to cover cultural matters in the United States, while his editors expected him to keep much closer track of ongoing political developments in Washington (G. Fraser 2007).

8. Previous research has indicated that the *New York Times* may also exercise an influence over television news reports in Canada (see Soroka 2002), but a study of that paper's influence in setting the agenda of U.S. and Canadian television news is a research question beyond the scope of this article.
9. Over the 1,091 days in our sample, for instance, 186 days have no coverage of the United States at all, 453 have no coverage of Bush, and 667 have no coverage of Iraq. There are accordingly a good number of zeros in those Canadian time series.
10. Granger tests can of course be conducted with more than one lag of each series. We might test the possibility that the past two weeks' coverage on one network leads current coverage on another, for instance. All of our initial tests suggested that significant results were restricted to lags of one week or less, however. More specifically, diagnostic tests (e.g., examination of autocorrelations and partial autocorrelations) showed that all media series examined here exhibit strong first-order serial correlation; cross-correlation functions (CCFs) also suggested that the relationships between the series occurred mainly within one time period. This makes good sense—if one network is following another, we expect it to do so promptly. Our use of a single lag reflects not only the belief that effects should occur within a short time period, then, but also the structure of the data.

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