The Canada-US Security-Migration Nexus and Historical Institutionalism

by Rachel Usher

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Abstract

In looking at the relationship between Canada and the United States after the critical juncture of September 11th, 2001, assessing and evaluating their relative and shared institutions and agreements has merit. Historical institutionalism provides a theoretical framework to elucidate any changes to the nature of the 'special relationship' between the two nations. Disaggregating the policy areas germane to the security-migration nexus within Canada-US relations provides insight into the nature of the institutional interaction within and between the two states. The globalisation of the security-migration nexus has led to increasing complexities in how states react to security-related critical junctures; as such, incorporating the role of moral capital within the ideational relationship between the US and Canada is foundational to this historically path-dependent relationship. Historical institutionalism and moral capital can, therefore, explain how and why the nature of the relationship between the two states has remained relatively insulated from both internal and external institutional shocks in the face of global change.

Chapter 1

Knowledge is the distilled essence of our institutions, corroborated by experience.
— Elbert Hubbard

1.1 Introduction

As the old saying goes, the 49th parallel or the boundary between the United States and Canada is "the longest undefended border in the world" (Bradbury, 2013, p. 140).[1] In the strictly traditional sense, to this day, this is mostly true. There are no military checkpoints between the countries; therefore, the pillars of capitalism — goods, services, capital and people — generally move back and forth across unimpeded. At one point in the history of Canadian-US border relations, there were more border guards in Brownsville, Texas, than along the entirety of the 49th parallel (Andreas, 2005). However, it would be a misnomer to state that this border is undefended, especially since the events of September 11th, 2001. 9/11 was a cataclysmic event that changed how this 'undefended' border was viewed. As such, Canada found itself in a previously never-considered position — that of a potential security threat to the United States.

In the wake of this shift, the United States responded by hardening its outer shell, including towards its formerly unassuming northern neighbour. Immediately after 9/11, and despite the cooperation of the Canadian government during the event, the American government began to look northward with suspicion. Colin Powell, former Secretary of State, even went so far as to comment that "[s]ome nations need to be more vigilant against terrorism at their borders if they want their relationship with the U.S. to remain the same" (quoted by Greg Weston in Andreas, 2003, p. 95). Both the government and the media began to see a direct link between the porous Canadian border and the potential for terrorism, even

[1] This adage is also mentioned repeatedly throughout the literature cited here and is often used colloquially in both Canada and the United States.

going so far as to advocate building a wall.[2] This directly threatened Canadian sovereignty over its territorial integrity, economic decision-making and the movement of its people. It also reignited a longstanding fear by Canadians of American policy encroachment.

Additionally, one of the enduring global consequences of September 11th was the cementing of the post-Cold War shift away from viewing threats to national security as nation-on-nation aggression. Instead, governments and individuals alike became acutely wary of the amorphous transnational threats of terrorism, organised crime, drug trafficking, environmental disasters and international migration. As a result, these policy areas have been reclassified as security issues (Faist, 2004). The main repercussion of this securitisation paradigm has been moving the source of threats away from *nation-states* and locating them in the transnational movements of *individuals* into what is called the migration-security nexus (Faist, 2004).[3] The migration-security nexus extends into all policy areas, albeit differently in different country contexts. The three main policy areas in the Canada-US context most impacted by this nexus are the economy, national defence, and immigration and refugee policy.[4]

Nevertheless, despite this paradigm shift (and the rhetoric in the United States), this thesis argues that very little has changed in the relationship between Canada and the US since 9/11. The institutions that impact and are impacted by the security-migration nexus in Canada and the United States are a manifestation of a level of mutual trust that, on the surface, should be asymmetrical but is actually fairly equitable, longstanding and implicit. In fact, since

[2] For further discussion on this, please see Salter and Piche, 2011 and Frederking, 2012. In fact, this rhetoric persists to this day. As just one recent example of this debate in the public sphere, in 2015 in an interview with Time Magazine, former Presidential candidate Scott Walker suggested building a security wall between Canada and the United States (see Linshi, 2015). For a debunking of the effectiveness of this suggestion, see the Washington Post article by Phillips (2015).

[3] Due to inconsistencies in terminology throughout the literature on the intersection of security and migration, the terms 'security-migration nexus' and 'migration-security nexus' are used interchangeably throughout.

[4] Immigration and refugee policy are interconnected in both contexts; therefore, 'immigration policy' will be used to describe both streams.

September 11th, even though very obvious changes have been made to the physical space on both sides of the Canada-US border, the nature of the relationship has changed very little. Both countries have managed to balance their seemingly conflicting needs (i.e., Canadian sovereignty concerns vs. American security requirements) in the interest of mutually beneficial policies. It is argued, therefore, that since 9/11, while Canada has been the US' exception to its border security plans, this, in and of itself, is not exceptional.

1.2 Theoretical Overview

Institutions are the ordering mechanisms for almost all complex social relations and are essential pillars of governance. As pervasive as they are, societies and academics often take institutions for granted in all their various forms. Institutions can be concrete and practical but are simultaneously abstract and nebulous. Nevertheless, they are a useful anchoring point for political and social analysis. Fukuyama's work, "Origins of the Political Order," is an effort to unravel the historical accounting of the role of institutions and their context-specific normative functions as prime drivers of global political evolution. As he writes,

> industrialized countries now suffer from a historical amnesia regarding how their societies came to [have modern political institutions] […] The purpose of this book is to fill in some of the gaps of this historical amnesia, by giving an account of […] three categories of institutions […] the state, the rule of law, and accountable government. A successful modern liberal democracy combines all three sets of institutions in a stable balance. The fact that there are countries capable of achieving this balance constitutes the miracle of modern politics (Fukuyama, 2011, pp. 14-16).

At its core, this seminal work illustrates moments in particular societies during times when institutional and ideational forces at local, state, or supranational levels came together or were pushed apart for perpetuity or change.[5] It also contributes to the discussion that the cycle of

[5] "Ideational" is defined here as the norms and beliefs that underpin decision-making.

institutional development (i.e., creation-perpetuation-change) occurred differently but ubiquitously throughout human history — and not strictly in liberal democracies.

This thesis is focused on the relationship between two liberal democracies whose respective states, rules of laws, and accountable governments have built parallel institutional capacities and have followed similar, but not identical, trajectories in ideational adoption. Most recently, this has culminated in those institutions associated with the globalisation of the security-migration nexus. Canada and the United States have collectively and separately seen institutional changes in areas germane to this nexus — economic, national defence, and immigration policy. These changes reflect the global perceptions of the threat of terrorism, the interdependence of economic globalisation, and geopolitical shifts towards supranational and bilateral institutions. This work focuses on the institutional relationship between Canada and the United States from September 11, 2001, until November 4, 2015, within a historical institutionalist framework.[6] These 14 years had a major impact on Canada's institutionalisation of the security-migration nexus due partly to its proximity and relationship with the United States and to the nine years of Conservative Party leadership in Canada under Prime Minister Stephen Harper. This work argues that the significant institutional changes in the security-migration nexus specifically culminated in immigration policy in Canada. In contrast, the United States made the most substantial changes in terms of national defence policy, specifically regarding border security. This said, these domestic changes on either side of the border had little impact on the relationship between the two countries.

In order to look at these changes and the impact of the security-migration nexus on the Canada-US relationship, this analysis utilises the theoretical framework of historical institutionalism, primarily focusing its attention on the mechanisms and ideation surrounding

[6] In October 2015, Canada elected a majority Liberal Party government under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, ending Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservative Party leadership.

institutional perpetuity and change in a temporal, contextual, and historical way. Historical institutionalism, as a theoretical framework, emphasises the path-dependent feedback loops of time, history, ideation, and other models of institutional change to explicate how and why these variables matter (e.g. Broschek, 2011; Fioretos, 2011; Fukuyama, 2011; Hanrieder, 2014; Hay & Wincott, 1998; Immergut, 1998 and 2006; Immergut & Anderson, 2008; Keohane & Martin, 1995; Mahoney & Thelen, 2010; Martin & Simmons, 1998; Page, 2006; Pierson, 2000 and 2004; Nexon, 2011; and/or Thelen, 1999). While this analysis is primarily under the framework of historical institutionalism, the ideational components of the institutional arrangements are underscored by the global shift towards securitisation that defines the security-migration nexus and Kane's (2001) concept of moral capital.