The Group Basis of City Politics

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ABSTRACT

How do nonprofits empower themselves? In this paper we analyze nonprofit advocacy in city politics, emphasizing especially their interaction with local policymakers. First we discuss what we call the "politics of place" in cities, examining the participation of three types of citywide and neighborhood nonprofits. The second section develops two lines of inquiry and articulates a set of hypotheses that grow out of a theoretical construct relating to low barriers to entry. Next, after describing the empirical methodology, those hypotheses are tested with data derived from large scale surveys in 50 of the nation's largest cities. The subjects of these three surveys are city councilors, agency administrators, and interest group advocates. We find that access to policymakers in city politics is relatively easy as the barriers to entry for advocates is quite low. Not surprisingly the evidence points to a privileged position for business, though neighborhood associations also stand out in terms of incorporation into the policymaking process.

The Group Basis of City Politics

Most nonprofits are, of course, local in nature. Indeed, a high percentage are neighborhood-based, serving the interests of a compact and relatively small area of a city or town. Although we don't know what percentage of the nation's more than 1.1 million 501(c)(3) nonprofits operate at the city or neighborhood level, what we do know is that nonprofits are playing an increasingly greater role in urban political systems.[1] In this paper we analyze nonprofit advocacy in city politics, emphasizing especially their interaction with local policymakers. First we discuss what we call the "politics of place" in cities, examining the participation of three types of citywide and neighborhood nonprofits. The second section develops two lines of inquiry and articulates a set of hypotheses that grow out of a theoretical construct relating to low barriers to entry. Next, after describing the empirical methodology, those hypotheses are tested with data derived from large scale surveys in 50 of the nation's largest cities.

Cutting across these specific lines of inquiry is a more normative concern: how might nonprofits empower themselves in city politics? To the degree they're engaged in advocacy, nonprofits often speak for those who are chronically underrepresented in the political process. Are there ways in which nonprofit can design their organizational structures and allocate their resources to maximize their influence in city government? This may seem like a relatively straightforward question, but for nonprofits there are many complicating factors. Resources can be scant—sometimes to the point of amounting to little more than a few volunteers' time. Expertise and experience may be no match for that possessed by city councilors and agency bureaucrats. Nevertheless, nonprofits can and do influence public policy and here we look for patterns that may help us to understand advocacy in the context of city government.

The Politics of Place

It wasn't too long ago that American cities were seen as dying, destined to be repositories of the poorest and most marginal among us. For a variety of reasons the pendulum has swung back and the future seems brighter (Glaeser 2011). Most striking, perhaps, is that many major cities are gaining population after a long period of decline. Rising energy prices and lengthening commutes are among the reasons that make cities more attractive to some who might otherwise choose a suburb. Cities themselves have demonstrated imagination in nurturing neighborhoods with attractive amenities, building light rail systems, adding new parks, and enhancing village-like commercial centers (Glaeser, Kolko, and Saiz 2001). The great variety of neighborhoods and different types of housing and levels of housing price points add to the marketability of city life. Although a sense of community, of belonging and identifying with one's neighbors, can develop in suburbs and cities alike, it's certainly the case for some that city neighborhoods stand out as more inviting, more communal by nature.

The changing face of cities in the postwar era is reflected in the growth of three types of nonprofits that we focus on here: social service providers, environmental groups, and neighborhood associations. The government's response to both central city poverty and the civil rights movement was to move strongly toward an expansion of social services as providing income maintenance came to be seen as insufficient. Beginning in 1962 social policy began to emphasize rehabilitation—giving clients the skills and support they need to enter the work world and provide for themselves. Such services are labor intensive and require either an increased number of bureaucrats or outsourcing. Outsourcing was the choice and nonprofits were the vehicle. As Steven Smith has noted, this shift to delivery of services through nonprofit providers is nothing short of a "transformation" of our welfare system. He writes, "nonprofit social service agencies have a more central role in society's response to social problems than ever before" (2002, 150). But social service nonprofits do more than implement programs. State and local bureaucracies involve nonprofits in planning and depend on them for program evaluation. State and local governments have been forced to lay off more and more employees during our recent economic downturn and as social welfare agencies shrink the remaining bureaucrats may become even more dependent upon assistance from nonprofits.

Second, we look at environmental groups. The environmental movement's emergence in the late 1960s and 1970s was most visible in national politics. A number of venerable, older organizations like the Sierra Club and the Audubon Society experienced skyrocketing membership and many new activist organizations formed as well. More recently cities have become centers of environmental activism. Indeed, a strong environmental profile has become part of cities' attraction and individuals who are concerned about the environment will find a lot to like about many of the nation's central cities. In the area of sustainability cities have taken the lead in this country and impressive, creative policies and programs have been implemented across the nation (Portney 2003). Smart growth initiatives have coupled housing, transportation, and renewable energy endeavors in urban neighborhoods; such efforts build on collaborations with existing environmental groups but they spawn them as well. Another source of new activism is partnerships between nonprofits and government or nonprofits and for-profits in production and promotion of energy efficient goods and "greener" utilities (Fitzgerald 2010). Spurred by the pursuit of climate protection, many national and international organizations have now turned their attention to ensuring that the environment and sustainability are represented in the local nonprofit sectors of cities.

Third, neighborhood organizations have become ubiquitous in cities. Few cities operate effective and comprehensive citywide systems with officially recognized neighborhood associations possessing real authority (Berry, Portney, and Thomson 1993). Even when cities do develop a citywide system, neighborhood empowerment can fall far short of what was envisioned. In Los Angeles, with its recently constructed ambitious citywide system, the results have been mixed at best (Musso, Weare, and Cooper (2004). The city has not given sufficient powers to its many neighborhoods. But across American cities independent neighborhood associations are common and while they are not the most stable organizations in urban society, we have found in our research across different projects that they are regarded as authentic and credible representatives of their neighborhoods.

Over time the political ecology of cities has changed. Every city has lost many of its long-time corporate citizens as major companies have merged, migrated to the suburbs, or moved their headquarters to reflect a new global focus. There are new, large companies that have established themselves in metropolitan areas but those corporations in the emergent growth sectors of the American economy, such as high tech, telecommunications, and biotechnology, have tended to locate outside the central city. In short, today there are fewer large-scale companies in central cities and those that remain often have less interest in local politics than was true a generation ago. Research on corporate leadership in cities conducted by Royce Hanson and his colleagues concluded, "Our results suggest that the institutional autonomy, time, and personal connections to the central cities of many CEOs have diminished and that the civic organizations through which CEOs work appear to have experienced lowered capacity for sustained action" (2010, 1).

The largest and most prestigious nonprofits—universities, medical centers, local foundations—have moved into this partial vacuum and become increasingly important as both employers and as civic leaders. Smaller nonprofits have, too, benefitted as without strong business leadership of political coalitions, there is opportunity for a new set of activists. Even though they are forbidden from participation in electoral politics, 501(c)(3)s can be links between city hall and neighborhoods. The leadership of nonprofits, including citywide civic organizations, social service agencies, environmental groups, and neighborhood associations, are prized members of any candidate's campaign or governing coalition. They are skilled professionals whose spend a good deal of their time building alliances with other organizations in their neighborhoods. Even though nonprofits don't endorse candidates, it is very easy for leaders to communicate to followers who the organization's friends are. Sociologist Nicole Marwell documents the case of the Lindale Center for Service (LCS), which serves a Latino community in New York. It is part of a "triadic exchange operation" where the state assemblyman (a former director of LCS) provides crucial help to the nonprofit. Reciprocally he benefits as a shadow political institution, the Lindale Democratic Club, draws on LCS' staff and constituency in the community (2004, 280).

The role of nonprofits is greatly enhanced by the "politics of place." In cities most day-to-day decisionmaking by government involves a specific neighborhood or area of the city. Whether it is a school matter, a law enforcement problem, a transportation issue, the siting of a new facility, or the construction of a new office building, the decision to be made typically involves a specific neighborhood. Observe any neighborhood in any city and the organizations the city government must need to consult with, appease, or just simply inform, are primarily nonprofits. By way of comparison a small or midsize nonprofit is much more likely to be in contact with government than a small or midsize business. Nonprofits in health care, social services, and community development are also recipients of government grants, contracts, and in some cases, dedicated income streams (like that for the nation's 4600 Community Development Corporations). City hall finances are thus intertwined with an array of nonprofit organizations. Yet despite the strong rationale for ongoing interaction between city government and nonprofits, it may be the case that either nonprofit passivity or opposition by city policymakers stands in the way of expanding nonprofit advocacy.

Access and Barriers

Interest group influence is built upon access to policymakers and the concept of access is at the core of any analysis of advocacy groups operating at any level of government. If access of all interest group sectors to government is not equal (and it never is), then there is bias in the system. A considerable portion of all interest group research has been built around the measurements of such bias—which sectors and groups are favored by policymakers and which are not. Such inequity has profound implications for democratic theory and the most influential scholars of interest group politics—Mills (1956), Schattschneider (1960), Dahl (1961), Olson (1968), and Lowi (1969), and others—have been preoccupied with the question of equality and inequality in access.[2]

We define interest group access as the opportunity to meet with policymakers on issues of central concern to the organization. Assigning a degree of interaction that demarcates access from lack thereof is arbitrary as there are too many contingencies for each and every issue. An advocacy group may just want to check with a staffer to make sure that the committee is not going to hold hearings on a proposal that the organization opposes. If so, a single phone call may satisfy the group that nothing more needs to be done at the present time. On another issue that group may feel it needs to be in constant contact with the committee as it goes through the painstaking process of marking up a complex piece of legislation. Conceptually it is helpful to think of a continuum, stretching from no access at one end to incorporation and even collaboration toward the other pole. We use "incorporation" to mean that an interest group has an ongoing relationship with policymakers and this regular interaction promotes an exchange of views at all stages of the policymaking process.[3] The optimum relationship for an interest group is a collaborative partnership with policymakers. In such a relationship government officials and staffers will sometimes initiate contact with the advocacy group as they seek out solutions, information, or political support.

In national politics relatively few groups are incorporated into a collaborative relationship. There are simply too many organizations within each policy community. Consequently policymakers are in a position of having to be selective in who they meet with and how much time they spend with client groups and other advocacy organizations. We have no way of knowing how many groups operate in Washington as there is no comprehensive census of organizations that lobby in one form or another. Kay Lehman Schlozman's research has served as a baseline of sorts as she has utilized the *Washington Representatives* directory at four points in time to delineate the evolution of the Washington interest group community. Her latest calculations (for 2006) put the aggregate number of Washington-based organizations at close to 14,000 and that compares to close to 7,000 in 1981 (2010, 443). However, this figure does not include organizations that utilize contract lobbyists or are headquartered in another city. Nevertheless, it is clear that the Washington interest group community is enormous and is continuing to grow.

COMPARISIONS

Even though this paper deals with city level interest group politics, the theorizing that guides interest group scholarship is largely derived from research on national-level groups. The empirical findings that shape our understanding of interest group behavior also follow from studies of Congress and Washington agencies.[4] In the work we've read on city politics there seems to an implicit assumption that interest group politics at the local level is generally just a smaller version of what takes place on the national level. Yet there is no theory of interest group politics that persuades us that city level interest group politics is largely similar to the lobbying world in Washington. Rather, the assumption about cities encompassing a smaller version of national interest group politics appears to be more a reflection of the lack of impact of the research conducted at the local level.

Our views are also shaped by an earlier study of Massachusetts cities where we found three critical differences between interest group politics at the local and national levels (Berry, Portney, Liss, Simoncelli, and Berger 2006). The first difference is that the mix of groups on the local level is sharply at odds with what is found in Washington. There are very clear measures of the makeup of both the population of interest groups at the national level as well as for the mix of groups that are actually involved in lobbying work. Returning to Kay Schlozman's work, her 2006 calculations reveal that just over half of all Washington lobbies are corporations, business trade groups, and professional associations. State and local governments are another 12 percent. Combining some of her categories, the total of all citizen advocacy groups and nonprofits comes to around just 9 percent (2010, 433). A study by Baumgartner, Berry, Hojnacki, Kimball, and Leech of Washington lobbying that categorized groups actually working on a random sample of 98 issues, found that corporations, business trade groups, and professional associations were 46 percent of all groups lobbying, close to Schlozman's population figure. But citizen groups were fully 26 percent of all groups lobbying, quite a bit higher than Schlozman's aggregate. The Baumgargtner analysis had no separate category for nonprofits (2009, p. 9).

In our earlier study the proportion of business and professional groups that were active in eight Eastern Massachusetts cities was just 20 percent. The remainder were citywide citizen groups (31 percent), neighborhood associations (24 percent), and other types of nonprofits (26 percent). It's important to add that these figures were not the result of a random sample but, rather, are derived from interviews with city councilors, administrators, and representatives of advocacy organizations (Berry et al 2006, 15). We subsequently coded all outside organizations that subjects mentioned in the course of each interview and most references came from a question that inquired about what issue they were spending the most time on that week. Thus, even allowing for the imprecision associated with this method, there is no question that the mix of local advocacy organizations is strikingly different from what can be found at the national level.

The second difference that was highly evident is in the density of the interest group populations. As we noted above the numbers of groups in each policy area at the national level is enormous. In the health care field alone there were 3600 lobbyists working in Washington in

2009, up from 2300 a decade earlier.[5] Unfortunately there are no comparable statistics for local politics. In contrast, though, Paul Peterson has gone as far as to describe local politics as "groupless politics" (1981, 116). There's hyperbole in his assessment but there is also a convincing explanation as to why the overall numbers of groups in a city appear to be modest. As the figures cited above indicate, the largest number of groups in Washington represent business interests. Unlike Washington, though, cities do relatively little in the way of regulation and, therefore, there is much less reason for local businesses to organize (Portney 2007). (An exception to the low level of regulation in cities is in the area of land use and business mobilization in this area is more clearly evident.)

The third difference is largely a consequence of the lower density of groups. At the national level there is a very high barrier to entry for lobbying. There are so many groups competing for attention from policymakers that officials have little choice but to construct high barriers for individual groups to breach. If legislators, agency administrators, and their staffs did not do this, they would be overwhelmed with meetings with interest group representatives. Instead they carefully pick and choose among all who want to see them and ration their direct interaction with client organizations. Although we used different methodologies for the 2006 study and this more current research, we observed the same low barriers to entry for groups wanting access to city councilors or agency administrators. City policymakers do not need to wall themselves off from organized interests because they are not inundated with demands to meet with groups. Rather, there appears to be a manageable equilibrium between interaction with lobbying groups and carrying out the other parts of their job.

LOW BARRIERS, DIFFERENT POLITICS

The theoretical foundation of this paper is built upon the idea of low barriers to entry for city level interest groups (Berry 2010). If we relax the assumption that we would make for Washington politics—that high barriers make it difficult for all but the most influential and important groups to have regular access to policymakers—we anticipate finding a considerably different pattern of political behavior by local advocacy organizations. In Washington, for example, research shows that at any one time a relatively large proportion of interest groups are working hard to find someone in government to simply listen to their concerns. As such many organizations expend a significant amount of their resources working on issues on the periphery of the agenda because they can't find policymakers to take up their cause. Thus a substantial amount of lobbying goes nowhere because policymakers refuse to engage: calls aren't returned, memos receive no response (Baumgartner et al 2009). With the low barrier to entry that we expect to find in city governance, the initial response from local government should look far more welcoming than found in Washington.

We have organized our inquiry around two central hypotheses that can be tested with our survey data (described below). First, if barriers to entry are low, then *all* interest group sectors should have generally high access to city councilors and administrators. Why would we expect this to be true? Without high barriers to entry it certainly becomes more difficult to exclude groups. In Washington, with the barbarians always at the gate, interest groups understand that access is privileged and may be infrequent. In cities norms and expectations

are created out of the high access that exists. Another feature of city politics is that there are formal requirements under federal, state, and even local law for citizen participation opportunities. At the very least such programs create entry points for participation on some issues and raise expectations for meaningful, ongoing dialog.

A second, related hypothesis relates to the opportunity for real collaboration. Organized interests want to be partners in policymaking, not a beseeching entity that is knocking at the door asking for a meeting. But why might some groups be incorporated as collaborators while others aren't asked to the bargaining table while plans are being designed or compromises being negotiated? Aside from the ideology of the councilors or administrators, it could be the case that some groups are more valuable to policymakers because of what they can bring to the table. We'll look here at whether groups that have the capacity to produce research stand a better chance of being incorporated into the policymaking process. Berry and Arons found that the research capacity of nonprofits to be directly related to their access to government (2003, 132-136).

The null hypothesis is that research capacity makes no difference. The underlying supposition as to why this hypothesis will be borne out is that for policymakers an efficient path to getting things done is to bring all stakeholders in and create processes that lead participants to buy into an ultimate resolution (Altshuler and Luberoff 2003). The Berry and Arons study included only medium and large-sized nonprofits (more than $25,000 in annual income) and some operated at the state level where barriers to entry are likely higher. Unlike the Berry and Arons study we also have data from the policymakers themselves while their research was restricted to the judgments of only the advocates.

Survey Methods

The data on which this analysis is based come from a 2009 survey of local officials and advocates in 50 of the largest 54 cities in the U.S. The four largest cities, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Houston, were excluded from the survey because the challenges presented by their scale. The 50 surveyed cities have 2007 population sizes ranging from 1.5 million in Phoenix to 336,000 in Tampa. In other words, these cities represent the entire universe of U.S. cities in this population range. Between June and August of 2009, questionnaires were mailed to all city councilors or commissioners, a specific subset of city administrators, and to a selected set of representatives of advocacy organizations in each of these cities.[6] We used a multi-modal approach, offering subjects the choice of filling out a paper questionnaire they received in the mail or going to a web site and answering the same questions online. Follow-up prompts to initial non-respondents took the form of personalized emails and specified the hot-linked URL for the web site.[7] City councilors' and administrators' mailing and email addresses were collected from each city's respective web sites.

Overall, questionnaires were mailed to the entire population of 541 councilors,[8] and 190 responded. Of the 541 councilors identified we were unable to reach 10, yielding an adjusted response rate of 35.9%.[9] The project also involved identifying and surveying an average of

about 18 city administrators in each city. The administrators we targeted were all leading officials at the heads of departments or bureaus with some relevance to environmental affairs or economic development. Titles of such offices and the organization of responsibilities differed from city to city. Generally, though, we identified those in areas such as environmental protection, sustainability, public works, parks and recreation, public utilities, water and wastewater management, office of the city manager, economic development, and planning. Questionnaires were mailed to this entire population of 885 city administrators, and 413 responded. Thirty-seven of these questionnaires were returned as "undeliverable," and we were not able to locate appropriate replacement administrators. The adjusted response rate was thus 48.7%.

Identifying interest group advocates was more challenging. There are no city-level directories of advocacy organizations and there was no easy way for us to ascertain which groups exist in each of 50 large cities. Each member of a small staff of research assistants was assigned a set of cities and set out to determine which groups were active in the political arena. The primary sources of information came from monitoring of each city's newspapers, web-based research, and talking to informants. In the end we assembled a list of approximately 25 leading advocacy organizations in each city.[10] Since we identified the groups, this cohort does not represent a random sample. Although we could not reach the universe of all groups we are confident that we identified organizations that had been active in the immediate period prior to our survey. We mailed 1,250 questionnaires to local group leaders, and 557 responded Perhaps because of the transient nature of many local nonprofit groups, some 119 of these questionnaires were returned as undeliverable without identifiable alternative address or contact information. Thus, the adjusted response rate is 49.2%.

The larger project from which this paper is drawn is particularly focused on sustainability and environmental protection, as well as on economic development. Our researchers paid particular attention to the environmental sector and searched broadly for organizations working on related issues before the city. Since we do not know the population of groups within each city we cannot assess the degree to which environmental groups were oversampled. They also looked aggressively for business groups as we wanted to contrast environmental policymaking and advocacy with economic development policy and business-related lobbying. In the process of simply identifying groups, we found that business advocacy is highly concentrated in local peak associations, principally a Chamber of Commerce and often a real estate developers group.[11] Likewise, the number of labor unions is not great, as local AFL-CIO councils can dominate a city's labor landscape. Other unions identified included municipal workers locals and SEIU locals.

Neighborhood associations were included but locating addresses was a problem and they are surely underrepresented overall. In the context of city governments, neighborhood associations are no one thing. In cities without any rules about neighborhood associations, anyone can organize a group and declare it the neighborhood association for a particular area. In many cities there is at least formal recognition of neighborhood associations with official, city-sanctioned boundaries for each neighborhood. This is the case in Tucson but the

neighborhood associations have no authority beyond a state law that gives associations and their residents certain rights relating to standing in criminal cases. The Barrio Anita Neighborhood Association is one of the many in the city but it has no newsletter and does not seem particularly active. In contrast, the city of Portland, Oregon has a quite well-developed citywide system of 95 neighborhood associations. They are grouped into seven regional coalitions and have power under city law that give them authority in critical areas affecting the quality of life in a neighborhood, including zoning. In Boston, however, the Bay Village Neighborhood Association has no formal standing before the Boston Redevelopment Authority. In this tony neighborhood adjacent to the downtown the Neighborhood Association is highly attentive to any development proposals or licensing petitions that would encroach upon the residential quality of the area. It has standing committees ready to lobby if the need arises.[12]

Data Analysis

As discussed earlier, our expectation is that access to city officials should be universally quite high. But what reasoning may lead us to think that the hypothesis might not be correct? Of course, the urban politics literature is replete with studies documenting the special role of business in policymaking, including Charles Lindblom's argument (1977) that government's door is always open wider to business, regardless of who is in power, because we are all dependent on business for income growth and wealth creation. Likewise, Molotch (1976) argues that the "growth imperative" in cities requires business collaboration. Whether the urban political landscape has changed significantly in recent times, of course, is an open question.

PUBLIC OFFICIALS' PERSPECTIVES

In order to assess the degree of access to city policymakers, we asked city councilors and city administrators similar questions regarding the levels of contact—telephone calls and face-to-face meetings—they have had with different kinds of groups. Councilors were asked whether they had had contact with each of seven different types of groups "over the last month or so," and Table 1 summarizes these results. City administrators were asked to report the frequency of contacts (weekly, monthly, annually, never) with each type of group "over the past year or so," and these results are summarized below.

Table 1: City Councilors' Contact with Groups "Over the Last Month"

	Business Groups	Nonprofit Organizations	Neighborhood Associations	Environmental Groups
Contact over the last month	42.1	28.6	56.8	11.9
No contact	57.9	71.4	43.2	88.1
Totals	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
N	190	185	185	185

Table 1 shows that city councilors report substantial contact with all four types of groups examined here. Business groups, by which we mean both business associations and specific corporations, show a high level of contact. Over forty-two percent of city councilors reported having contact with business groups over the previous month. Yet contact with neighborhood associations is actually higher at 56.8 percent. Nonprofit organizations don't fare quite as well, with councilors reporting contact about half as often as with neighborhood associations. And environmental groups fare considerably worse, with only 11.9 percent of councilors reporting contacts in the previous month.

Table 2 shows a similar pattern for city administrators. Keeping in mind that this table shows contact "over the past year or so," business contact seems quite high. Nearly 90 percent of the city administrators we questioned reported contact with business. Neighborhood associations came in second, with a little over three-quarters of the administrators reporting contacts. Nonprofits came in third, with just over two-thirds, and environmental groups had the least contact with administrators at just over half.

From their own perspective local public officials believe that they offer high levels of access. Business enjoys a privileged position but that access is not entirely closed off for other kinds of organizations. Neighborhood associations, in particular, seem to enjoy nearly equal access, even if nonprofits, and especially environmental groups, do not. Barriers to entry appear low, though we need to also examine group advocates' perceptions as policymakers could exaggerate their openness as a means of promoting a positive image of themselves.

Table 2: City Administrators Contact with Groups "At Least Once a Month" Over the Past Year

	Business Groups	Nonprofit Organizations	Neighborhood Associations	Environmental Groups
Contact at least once a month	89.1	67.8	76.0	52.4
Contact less than once a month	10.9	32.2	24.0	47.6
Totals	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
N	368	404	404	401

THE GROUPS' PERSPECTIVE

Our effort to measure access from the perspective of local nonprofit and advocacy groups relied on a different question. We asked our sample of advocates in the 50 cities "When you pick up the phone and call a city official, how likely is it that you'll either get through to that person or that your call will be returned?" The results are revealing, as summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Likelihood of Group Leader Having Phone Call Returned

	All Groups	Business Groups	Nonprofit Organizations	Neighborhood Associations	Environmental Groups	All other groups*
Almost always	40.9	50.8	43.4	40.9	36.0	28.1
Usually	51.2	43.4	51.2	40.9	53.9	63.2
Usually not	6.6	5.7	5.4	13.6	7.9	5.3
Almost never	1.3	0.0	0.0	4.5	2.2	3.5
Totals	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
N	557	122	166	22	178	57
		Significance of chi-square = .038				

*Includes faith-based and church groups, labor unions, and "others"

Fully 92 percent of all respondents said that it "almost always the case I'll get through or my call will be returned" or that "Usually I'll get through or my call will be returned." Under 7 percent said they "usually don't get through" and only 1 percent said they "almost never get through." When we divide the respondents according to the type of group they represent, the three different types of nonprofits show only modestly lower levels of access than that possessed by business. Compared to access in Washington, this represents an impressive level of group access.

The issue of having a phone call returned, of course, does not tell the whole story, and may not represent a very high or demanding level of access, since this presumes that the group initiates contact. Might the story look different if the issue turns to contacting in the other direction, where city officials initiate contact? To examine this, we asked leaders to report how often, on average over the past year, the executive director, staff, or members of the board of the organization were approached by city officials to discuss policy decisions of mutual interest. These results are reported in Table 4.

When the measure of access is perhaps a little more demanding, the frequency of contact is not nearly as high. Across all groups, only a little over 30 percent of the group leaders report contact with the group being initiated by city officials twice a month or more, and only a little over 11 percent report contact four or more times a month or more. When this is broken down by the type of group, the role of business groups becomes somewhat clearer. According to the groups themselves, city officials initiate contact with business groups more frequently than with other kinds of groups, and these differences appear to be statistically significant. Yet a relatively small proportion of all types of groups report that they are "never" contacted by city officials, again suggesting that the overall level of access of groups is fairly high.

Table 4: Frequency of Group Leader being approached by city government

	All groups	Business Groups	Nonprofit Organizations	Neighborhood Associations	Environmental Groups	All other groups*
Never	22.5	22.1	20.1	31.8	26.4	14.3
Once a month	47.2	33.6	48.2	31.8	57.9	46.4
2-3 times a month	19.0	27.9	18.9	36.4	9.6	23.2
4+ times a month	11.3	16.4	12.8	0.0	6.2	16.1
Totals N	100.0% 542	100.0% 122	100.0% 164	100.0% 22	100.0% 178	100.0% 56
		Significance of chi-square = .000				

*Includes faith-based and church groups, labor unions, and "others"

The bottom line on access, whether seen from the perspective of city officials or group leaders, whether involving contacts initiated by groups or by city officials, is that groups appear to have significant opportunity to affect local policy. Is that access equal across all types of groups? The answer would appear to be no, as business organizations occupy a preferred position. Even so, other types of groups also enjoy some level of access to local officials. Even environmental groups, which demonstrate the lowest levels of access, are not entirely barred from access. Barriers to entry in the policymaking process are truly low in city politics.

Inclusion and Incorporation

The second broad hypothesis involves a more challenging test for advocacy groups—collaboration and incorporation into the policy making process. To what degree are local groups part of collaborative policy making, and are some types of advocacy organizations more likely than others to be included in policy and program decision processes?

PUBLIC OFFICIALS' PERSPECTIVES

We asked city councilors and city administrators how likely different kinds of groups would be "included in informal bargaining and negotiation with city officials" on issues of economic development and environment. Presumably this question moves beyond simple contacting and interaction to tap a more active and influential role of groups in actual policy decisions. The responses from city councilors are summarized in Table 5. Once again we observe a highly privileged position for business with a much lesser role for other types of groups. City councilors report that environmental groups are the least likely to be included in policy discussions, followed by other kinds of nonprofit groups, and neighborhood associations.

Table 5: City Councilors' Reports of the Likelihood of Groups Being Included in Informal Bargaining and Negotiation

	Business Groups	Nonprofit Organizations	Neighborhood Associations	Environmental Groups
Very likely to be included	92.6	35.2	57.1	45.0
Maybe included, maybe not	4.7	50.8	32.8	38.3
Not very likely to be included	2.7	14.0	10.2	16.7
Totals n	100.0% 150	100.0% 179	100.0% 177	100.0% 180

When administrators were asked which groups are likely to be involved in policy decisions, the pattern of responses was almost identical to those of city councilors. The preeminent position of business in terms of incorporation into city policymaking could not be more clear. A more surprising finding is that neighborhood associations also score highly on incorporation. Exclusion is minimal across the board.

THE GROUPS' PERSPECTIVE

The question posed to group leaders asked how open and inclusive, or closed, the decision process in the city is. Specifically, group leaders were asked "When your city's government is formulating new policies, how would you describe this process?" Respondents were offered response categories that "policymaking is usually inclusive with all the stakeholders brought into the process. Sometimes the process is inclusive; other times participation by stakeholders is limited or nonexistent. In most cases the process is closed to some stakeholders while open to other stakeholders who are favored by city officials. Or the process is generally closed off to all stakeholders." The picture in Table 6 looks very different from that painted by city officials.

The vast majority of group leaders from all types of groups consider the policy making process in their respective city to be "sometimes inclusive" and sometimes "participation by stakeholders is limited or nonexistent." Business leaders and nonprofit leaders see the process as most inclusive, with neighborhood association and environmental group respondents seeing the process as more limited. But the differences are not great and the chi-square test fails to reach statistical significance.

Table 6: Group Leaders' Description of the Policy Making Process

	All groups	Business Groups	Nonprofit Organizations	Neighborhood Associations	Environmental Groups	All other groups*
Always Inclusive	16.6	19.8	18.2	13.6	11.2	23.2
Sometimes inclusive, sometimes limited	58.1	57.9	55.2	59.1	61.8	55.4
Mostly closed	24.2	20.7	25.5	22.7	27.0	19.6
Very closed	1.1	1.7	1.2	4.5	0.0	1.8
Totals n	100.0% 542	100.0% 121	100.0% 165	100.0% 22	100.0% 178	100.0% 56
		Significance of chi-square = .360				

*Includes faith-based and church groups, labor unions, and "others"

Are some kinds of groups more likely to be incorporated into the policy making process than others? The answer depends on whom you ask. According to local public officials, business groups enjoy a privileged position. Yet when you ask business leaders whether the policy making process is open and inclusive, they are no more likely than leaders of other kinds of groups to say it is. Clearly, none of the types of group leaders we surveyed seems to has a majority willing to report that the policy making process is" always inclusive" or "mostly closed." In a survey of national and local business leaders Sidney Verba and Gary Orren found that these executives rated their own influence with government as quite modest, part of a pattern they called "influence denial" (1985, 189).

<u>Explaining Group Access</u>

The cross-tabulations provide a basic description of differences in access by different types of groups, but by themselves provide little or no information about what actually accounts for this variation in access. The data at hand permits us to build a more detailed picture. In order to accomplish this, we construct some simple multivariate regression models. This allows us to determine whether there are specific variables that explain a significant amount of the variance in access. This also enables us to see whether any observed business advantage is produced by other variables.

Earlier analysis (Table 1) showed that business groups and neighborhood associations shared unusually high access to city councilors, at least in terms of councilors reporting frequent contact with them. How do we begin to explain differences across councilors? Why do some councilors report more frequent contact with business or with neighborhood associations? Our focus here is on a small number of potential explanatory variables. First and foremost, does the ideology of the councilor and of the city play a role in determining access? We might expect conservative councilors to be more receptive to business contacts than moderate or liberal councilors. Of course, if the need to cultivate business transcends ideology, then it should not just be conservative councilors who report greater contact. We also look at the quality of information that business groups provide when contact is made, as reported by the councilors.

Table 7 shows that the explanatory power for contacts with business and contacts with neighborhood associations is not strong. Contacts with business groups seems to be driven more by the perception that business groups provide high quality information that by either the ideology of the individual councilor or the perceived ideology of the city as a whole. Controlling for the ideology of the councilor, the quality of information provided by business groups seems to be a primary reason why councilors are in contact with business groups. The results for contacts with neighborhood associations show a different pattern. Here, perceptions of the quality of information provided by neighborhood groups do not explain contacts one way or another. However, it does seem to be true that conservative councilors are more likely to report such contacts than liberal ones. Thus, recent contact with neighborhood associations seems more influenced by political ideology of the individual councilor than by the other factors.

Table 7: Explaining City Councilors' Contacts with Business and Neighborhood Associations

	Contact with Business		Contact with Neighborhoods	
	Beta	Significance	Beta	Significance
Quality of information provided by group (business or neighborhood)	**+.182**	**.021**	+.133	.088
Conservative political ideology of councilor	-.099	.222	**+.144**	**.069**
Conservative political ideology of city as a whole	+.076	.342	-.064	.421
R^2 Significance	.039 .090		.034 .122	

Patterns for city administrators' business contacts are also not very strong, as shown in Table 8. None of the variables is correlated with business community contacts. Such contacts

are not related to the quality of information provided, nor to either the ideology of the administrator or of the city as a whole. The results for contacts with neighborhood associations are considerably stronger. Both the quality of information and the liberal ideology of the administrator seem to help explain administrators' contacts with neighborhood associations.

Table 8: Explaining City Administrators' Contacts with Business and Neighborhood Associations

	Contact with Business		Contact with Neighborhoods	
	Beta	Significance	Beta	Significance
Quality of information provided by group (business or neighborhood)	+.064	.235	**+.232**	**.000**
Conservative political ideology of councilor	-.074	.170	**-.127**	**.015**
Conservative political ideology of city as a whole	-.008	.877	-.072	.167
R^2 Significance	.008 .387		.076 .000	

Explaining Incorporation

Earlier analysis documented the advantage that business organizations have in terms of being included and incorporated in policy decision making processes. Inclusion of neighborhood associations also exceeded that of other kinds of groups except business groups. Can incorporation of business and of neighborhood associations be explained in terms of political ideology? Or are other factors at work?

Turning first to city councilors, Table 9 looks at inclusiveness of the business community and of neighborhood associations. Inclusiveness of the business community is not related to the quality of information provided by business groups, or by political ideology, per se. Councilors in cities that are highly committed to the private sector report greater inclusion of the business community. The strongest relationship that we have found is with the length of service of the councilor. Councilors who have served for a longer period of time are much less likely to report that business is included, and more recently elected councilors report greater inclusiveness for business. Analysis of inclusiveness of neighborhood associations shows an absence of statistically significant findings. None of the variables in the model helps to explain inclusiveness of neighborhood associations in policy decisions.

Table 9: Explaining City Councilors' Reports of Inclusiveness of Policy process to the Business Community and Neighborhood Associations

	Inclusiveness of Business		Inclusiveness of Neighborhoods	
	Beta	Significance	Beta	Significance
Quality of information from group	+.085	.321	+.065	.432
Conservative ideology of councilor	-.097	.280	+.052	.527
Conservative ideology of city as a whole	-.042	.642	-.068	.409
City commitment to the private sector	**+.160**	**.062**	+.079	.344
Years served on city council	**-.259**	**.003**	-.002	.981
R^2	.112		.020	
significance	.009		.684	

Results for city administrators look very different from those for city councilors, as presented in Table 10. First, neither of the models is terribly robust. In other words, it seems much more difficult to explain the variance in administrators' reports of inclusiveness. Second, none of the explanatory variables is correlated with inclusiveness of business. Variation in the inclusiveness of the policy process to the business community cannot be explained by political ideology, by the quality of information offered by business groups, by administrators' views on how committed the city is to the private sector, or by the length of service of the administrator. Third, in a slightly stronger model, inclusiveness of neighborhood associations does seem to be related to the quality of information these kinds of groups provide to administrators. When administrators report that neighborhood associations provide high quality information, they also report that neighborhood associations are very likely to be involved in policy decisions. Neither of the models is terribly robust.

Table 10: Explaining City Administrators' Reports of Inclusiveness of Policy Process to the Business Community and Neighborhood Associations

	Inclusiveness of Business		Inclusiveness of Neighborhoods	
	Beta	Significance	Beta	Significance
Quality of information from group	+.095	.116	**+.185**	**.001**
Conservative ideology of councilor	+.024	.692	-.065	.235
Conservative ideology of city as a whole	+.094	.112	-.038	.490
City commitment to the private sector	+.036	.543	+.074	.172
Years served on city council	-.059	.313	+.013	.807
R^2	.025		.046	
significance	.196		.008	

Implications

The future for America's cities is bright. In increasing numbers Americans are deciding that urban living is the best option at the price they can afford and most cities have grown in recent years, many by double digit increases (Glaeser and Shapiro, 2003). The variety of neighborhoods, housing options, cultural amenities, and availability of mass transit are appealing qualities for many. Suburban living remains attractive to be sure and large-scale employers often find office parks off the interstate to be their best choice. Still, young people starting out in their careers, entrepreneurs, and others who find networking a necessary component of their work lives may find cities to be attractive for their professional pursuits. Any enduring rise in energy prices will surely accelerate urban population growth. Cities are far better than suburbs in terms of energy consumption, both in terms of home life and commuting.

Population growth, even that from a skilled and professional workforce, does not in and of itself create a greater role for nonprofits in the governance of cities. The changing ecology of cities has, however, created greater opportunities for nonprofits to become instrumental parts of the policymaking process. We see this as a positive development but not because the partial vacuum created by a lower density of large corporate entities headquartered in cities and active in their politics. Rather, as students of both nonprofits and city politics, we believe that a pluralistic city is desirable as all sectors of the city should be vigorously represented. Not all nonprofits work with low-income and disadvantaged populations but those that do are of critical importance in the vitality of our democracy. The reality of the collective action problem means that among all advocacy sectors, it is only nonprofits supported by contracts, fees for service, or philanthropy that have a strong interest in speaking on behalf of the disadvantaged.

The evidence in this paper is based on three separate surveys and we believe that the numbers tell an important story about advocacy. Four findings stand out:

First, unlike national politics, the barriers to entry into the urban policymaking system appear to be quite low. Access to policymakers is easily available. Not all types of groups enjoy the same level of access, but no particular type of group among those examined here are totally shut out. Incorporation is more selective but there are a large number of nonprofits from various advocacy sectors that have ongoing collaborative relationships with city officials.

Second, neighborhood associations, which tend to possess very little in the way of resources other than the time of their volunteers, are highly valued by city policymakers. The surveys do not tell us exactly why but we believe that the "politics of place" that characterize city politics is a large part of the reason. So many important decisions facing policymakers involve a specific neighborhood, whether it be a matter involving resource allocations, project siting, zoning, economic development, or schools. Councilors and administrators know that gaining approval (or at least acquiescence) from residents is highly desirable if not effectively required. Neighborhood associations are a means to that end. For neighborhood associations there is great opportunity to become involved but considerable challenge as well. Volunteers

must be mobilized on an continuing basis and effective advocacy requires more than simply stating a neighborhood preference.

Third, business remains in a privileged position in city politics. This is hardly surprising and big business's reduced footprint in city politics has made the cooperation of remaining business entities all the more valuable. There are times when business is aligned against some nonprofits, such as a firm wanting to develop a particular parcel of land and environmental groups trying to stop the company. Often, though, business and nonprofits are aligned together. Peak civic associations are composed of leaders from both the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. Individual firms and nonprofits might work together, for example on neighborhood economic redevelopment. It's common for private developers and a local CDC to collaborate in planning a project. Business leaders populate the boards of nonprofits (DeSocio 2007) and these relationships offer 501(c)(3)s more entrée into government.

Fourth, the specific attributes of nonprofits that city policymakers find valuable are not clear. In particular we explored whether the quality of information transmitted from nonprofits to policymakers, as reported by policymakers, made a difference in terms of access and incorporation. There are some signs that suggest that a real research capacity could be beneficial, but the findings differ depending on whether the policymakers are city councilors or city administrators. Among councilors, the quality of information of business organizations affects contacts with business, but the quality of information of neighborhood associations does not seem to affect contacts with such organizations.

The opposite pattern seems to be true for city administrators. When administrators report that business has high quality information, they do not necessarily have greater contact with businesses. Yet when they report that neighborhood associations have high quality information, they have significantly greater contact with neighborhood associations. Taken together, this suggests that neighborhood associations (and perhaps other nonprofit organizations) that have the ability to generate high quality information might be better advised to seek interactions with city administrators than with city councilors. Indeed, the quality of information also seems to bear some relationship to how inclusive city administrators are with respect to neighborhood associations.

For nonprofits the greatest challenge to becoming involved in city policymaking is the decision to try to become involved in city policymaking. Nonprofits tend to think of themselves as nonpolitical and are acculturated by the limits on lobbying in section 501(c)(3) to believe they should be nonpolitical (Berry 2003). Yet at the city level 501(c)(3) should not present any problem for advocacy as lobbying before city councils appears to fly under the radar of the IRS. Moreover, lobbying by nonprofits is perfectly legal and the legal limits on lobbying do not even apply to advocacy before administrative bodies. Rather, the constraint is a self imposed one as nonprofits are often poorly prepared for advocacy. In a small organization overwhelmed by the demands of clients, government relations may simply be a job that belongs to no one. What we have found in this paper is that the door to government is wide open. Nonprofits may want to walk though it.

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ENDNOTES

[1] This figure is for 2009 (from the Urban Institute's National Center for Charitable Statistics). There are close to 1.6 million nonprofits of all types.

[2] Let us be careful to say that not all forms of interest group influence are directly exerted through access to policymakers. Most fundamentally, dominant societal values are transmitted through political socialization.

[3] The concept of "incorporation" in urban politics is most closely associated with Browning, Marshall, and Tabb's study of city councils. They were focused on minority representation on councils and they defined incorporation as "the extent to which group interests are effectively represented in policy making" (1984, p. 25). We focus on frequency of interaction as a meaningful indicator of effective representation as this operationalization lends itself better to the limitations of survey research.

[4] This has not always been the case. The central work in the debate over pluralism, Robert Dahl's *Who Governs?* (1961), was based on his study of local politics in New Haven, Connecticut.

[5] These numbers were calculated by the authors from OpenSecrets.org and aggregate the following categories: pharmaceuticals/health products, hospitals/nursing homes, and health professionals.

[6] The three questionnaires can be found at http://ase.tufts.edu/polsci/faculty/berry/ under "Cities Face the Future." The administrator questionnaire is found at http://ase.tufts.edu/polsci/faculty/berry/question-admin.pdf, The councilor questionnaire is found at http://ase.tufts.edu/polsci/faculty/berry/question-city.pdf, and the group leader questionnaire is found at http://ase.tufts.edu/polsci/faculty/berry/question-group.pdf.

[7] To incentivize respondents to fill out the questionnaire, we offered them the opportunity to win one of three $100 gift cards from Amazon.com. The mailings included a pre-paid (stamped) postcard allowing the respondent to provide his/her name and to be entered into the gift card raffle. This mailing also included a new $1 bill, which Dillman, Smyth and Christian (2009, 238-242) suggest exerts significant influence on the response rate.

[8] We use the generic term "councilor" here, although some cities may refer to their representatives as Aldermen (as in Milwaukee), Supervisors (as in San Francisco), or Commissioners (as in Portland).

[9] Numerous city councilors in Columbus, OH, declined to participate cited a local ordinance that prohibits administration of such surveys. Even so, one councilor responded.

[10] The instructions to our research assistants are recorded in a detailed memo that we prepared, "Strategy for Developing List of Advocacy Organizations," which is available by request.

[11] Individual corporations also fell outside of the set of organizations targeted for the survey of advocates. However, the surveys sent to city councilors and administrators included questions that asked respondents to evaluate corporate activities along with those of other advocacy sectors.

[12] See http://cms3.tucsonaz.gov/hcd/neighborhood-associations; http://www.portlandonline.com/oni/index.cfm?c=28385; and http://www.bayvillage.net/.