

Why Do Organized Interests Lobby? A Multi-Goal, Multi-Context Theory of Lobbying

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Why do organized interests lobby? Answering this seemingly obvious question has become surprisingly difficult in light of recent research. One essential problem is that virtually all studies of interest organizations begin with the simplifying assumption that they are motivated actors whose prime purpose is to influence public policy. This assumption is incorrect. Rather, interest organizations are motivated actors whose primary purpose is to survive. Using this assumption, I employ niche theory and resource dependence theory to discuss how a more satisfying theory of interest representation might be constructed. This multi-goal, multi-context theory of lobbying would emphasize the importance of context in understanding organizational behavior.

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Why do organized interests lobby?¹ Answering this seemingly obvious question has become surprisingly difficult in light of recent research. One essential problem is that virtually all studies of interest organizations begin with the simplifying

1. The term organized interests is used throughout rather than interest groups. The majority of interest "groups" lobbying today, quite simply, are not groups, but institutions—firms, other governments, and even universities. When lobbying on their own behalf, these institutions pursue relatively narrow corporate interests rather than the collective interests of members, whether they are individuals, as in an environmental group, or institutions, as in a trade association. See Robert Salisbury, "Interest Representation: The Dominance of Institutions," *American Political Science Review* 81 (1984): 64–76.

assumption that they are motivated actors whose prime purpose is to influence public policy. This assumption is incorrect. Rather, interest organizations are motivated actors whose primary purpose is to survive. Using this assumption, I employ niche theory and resource dependence theory to discuss how a more satisfying theory of interest representation might be constructed. This multi-goal, multi-context theory of lobbying would emphasize the importance of context in understanding organizational behavior. I will first discuss why lobbying has become such a puzzle in light of recent research. I will then outline several tentative answers to the question. And third, I will outline a theoretical framework for sorting through these tentative answers. I will conclude with some observations about the potential utility of this framework and, more generally, about the importance of context in understanding organizational behavior.

Before proceeding, however, it may be worth considering who might be interested in determining why organizations lobby and why they might be interested. The politics of organized interests is, of course, a natural, even a core, topic of political science. Accordingly, the initial portion of this paper will necessarily discuss the long-standing debate between those who view organized interests as inevitably corrupting influences on the links between citizens and government within democratic systems and those who view organized interests as essential and healthy parts of that linkage. Thus, determining why organizations lobby touches on a broad array of topics within the study of democratic politics. And the study of lobbying behavior touches each of these issues across nearly all political systems, but in ways we rarely address. We know, for example, that lobbying is different across different democratic political systems; the open pluralist system of the United States seems quite different from the neo-corporatist systems of some European national governments. Such differences are readily attributed to variations in institutions. But we rarely try to understand these institutionally derived differences within a single theory of lobbying, a theory that would explain why different systems develop what on their face seem to be strikingly different answers to the question of why organizations lobby. So, while lobbying is a core topic within political science, fundamental differences in the interpretation of the role of lobbying in democratic systems remain. As well, political scientists have not yet fully explored why different democratic systems generate such divergent interest systems *within* a single theoretical framework.

While the interests of political scientists necessarily frame much of this analysis, there is a second audience—organization theorists—who will be interested in answering the question for quite different reasons. Much of organization theory is concerned about the design and management of individual organizations, and is sometimes called closed or micro-level organization theory. But an extensive literature has now developed taking a more macro-level approach to understand how environmental forces influence

variations in organization behaviors. This approach focuses on the demographic processes of selection and adaptation within communities of organizations and is perhaps best represented by the work of W. Richard Scott, Michael Hannan, John Freeman, and Howard Aldrich.² Their research has generated a number of insights. But empirical analysis of organizational environments has faced a rather severe constraint. That is, organizations come in all sizes and flavors, from tiny mom and pop grocery stores to giants like Ford Motor Company, from voluntary organizations like consumer groups to inherently coercive public institutions like prisons. This very diversity creates an apples and oranges problem, making the task of meaningful comparison at best very difficult.³ But when all of these many different kinds of organizations interface with government via lobbying, they are placed on a common footing by having a common task. Indeed, the lobbying task is perhaps the only arena of activity even potentially common to all organizations. Thus, lobbying provides one of the few venues in which to empirically evaluate theories about the impact of organizational environments while controlling for the inherent diversity of organizations.

The Paradox of Lobbying

The problem of understanding why organizations lobby grows directly from the evolution of the literature on organized interests over the last several decades. Indeed, there have been two broad revolutions in our understanding of the politics of interest representation over the post-War era. The starting point is pluralist theory as developed by Robert Dahl and, especially, David Truman.⁴ In their view, explaining why organizations lobby was not problematic. Like-minded individuals naturally come together in response to disturbances in the policy environment. But in this fundamentally instrumental view, lobbying was highly constrained in a manner that made it an essential support of rather than a threat to democratic government. The population of organized interests formed in response to policy disturbances was assumed to validly reflect the distribution of salient interests in society. While there is surely an inequality of resources available to different organizations, few are without access to any means of pursuing influence.⁵ The influence tactics then employed were viewed as benign,

2. W. Richard Scott, *Institutions and Organization* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001); Michael T. Hannan and John Freeman, *Organizational Ecology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); Howard E. Aldrich, *Organizations Evolving* (London: Sage Publications, 1999).

3. David Knoke, Peter V. Marsden, and Arne Kalleberg, "Survey Research Methods," in *Companion to Organizations*, ed. Joel A.C. Baum (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 781–804.

4. Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961); David B. Truman, *The Governmental Process* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951).

5. Robert A. Dahl, *Pluralist Democracy in the United States* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1967), 130.

largely providing information to elected officials.⁶ Given election-induced attention to constituents' preferences, this information could influence elected officials only insofar as it facilitated a better reflection of those preferences. The resulting policy outcomes thus reflected the will of the public, if perhaps weighted by issue salience.⁷ True to the larger pluralist enterprise, therefore, the formation and operation of organized interests was largely viewed as supportive of democratic government.

The first revolution in thinking about organized interests entailed an almost complete rejection of this benign view. Lowery and Gray have labeled this approach the transactions perspective because narrowly defined exchanges characterize relationships among political actors throughout the influence process.⁸ Perhaps most significantly, Mancur Olson's description of the collective action problem undermined Truman's notion that organized interests form naturally.⁹ Rather, since interests alone provide insufficient incentives to mobilize, selective incentives are traded for participation. But given variations in the severity of the collective action problem and access to resources through which to provide selective incentives, the population of lobbying organizations will almost certainly poorly reflect the distribution of interests in society. Instead, the interest system will be biased in favor of small groups with significant stakes in policy.¹⁰ This nonrepresentative sample of interests in society is then expected to purchase policy via lobbying. The transactions orientation inevitably concludes that government policy is captured by special interests.¹¹ In its most extreme versions, organized interests are assumed to act like shoppers in a grocery store, interacting hardly at all while lining-up to sequentially and with certainty purchasing goods even until the store's shelves are bare.¹² As a result, the transactions perspective viewed organized interests as pervasive threats to democratic governance.

6. Raymond Bauer, Ithiel de Sola Pool and Lewis Dexter, *American Business and Public Policy: The Politics of Foreign Trade* (New York: Atherton Press, 1963).

7. Truman, *The Governmental Process*; Dahl, *Who Governs?* Dahl, *Pluralist Democracy*; V. O. Key, *Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups* (New York: Crowell, 1964).

8. David Lowery and Virginia Gray, "A Neopluralist Perspective on Research on Organized Interests," *Political Research Quarterly* 57 (2004): 163–75.

9. Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965); Truman, *The Governmental Process*.

10. E.E. Schattschneider, *The Semisovereign People* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1960); Kay Lehman Schlozman and John T. Tierney, *Organized Interests and American Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986).

11. George Stigler, "The Theory of Economic Regulation," *Bell Journal of Econometrics and Management Science* 2 (1971): 3–21; Sam Peltzman, "Toward a More General Theory of Regulation," *Journal of Law and Economics* 19 (1976): 211–40; William C. Mitchell and Michael C. Munger, "Economic Models of Interest Groups: An Introductory Survey," *American Journal of Political Science* 35 (1991): 512–46.

12. Mancur Olson, *The Rise and Decline of Nations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); Dennis C. Mueller, *The Political Economy of Growth* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

Much of the empirical research conducted over the last three decades on lobbying impact has been founded to a greater or lesser extent on the transactions perspective of lobbying. When applied to the study of influence, this model is often labeled the “profit maximizing model,” a model in which the few organized interests that are able to overcome problems of collective action pursue quite narrow lobbying objectives. In this view, strong organizations lobby at the expense of the weak in efforts to secure private goods either for an entire industry at the expense of the collective interests of the public¹³ or for the healthiest and largest firms within an industry at the expense of their weaker colleagues.¹⁴ Yet, despite extensive research on corporate political activity,¹⁵ clear and consistent findings remain elusive. As Hansen, Mitchell, and Drope have noted

The [exchange or transactions] story is simple, plausible and set on a solid theoretical foundation. It is significant and worthy of our attention because of the implications for normative democratic theory, and the detrimental impact on economic efficiency and performance. . . . The only real difficulty is that there is, at best, mixed evidence for such an exchange. Scholars have not been very successful in linking the political participation of business to policy benefits.¹⁶

A second revolution—the neopluralist perspective—developed over the 1990s as empirical findings accumulated in sharp contrast to transactions theory

13. Olson, *The Rise and Decline of Nations*; Schattschneider, *The Semisovereign People*; Schlozman and Tierney, *Organized Interests and American Democracy*; Stigler, “The Theory of Economic Regulation”; Peltzman, “Toward a More General Theory of Regulation.”

14. Robert W. Crandall, *Controlling Industrial Pollution: The Economics and Politics of Clean Air* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1983); Ann Bartel and Lacy Glenn Thomas, “Predation Through Regulation: The Wage and Profit Effects of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration,” *Journal of Law and Economics* 30 (1987): 239–64.

15. Gary J. Andres, “Business Involvement in Campaign Finance: Factors Influencing the Decision to Form a Corporate PAC,” *PS* 18 (Spring 1985): 156–81; John L. Boies, “Money, Business, and the State: Material Interests, Fortune 500 Corporations, and the Size of Political Action Committees,” *American Sociological Review* 54 (October 1989): 821–33; Kevin B. Grier, Michael C. Munger, and Brian E. Roberts, “The Industrial Organization of Corporate Political Participation,” *Southern Economic Journal* 57 (1991): 727–38; Kevin B. Grier, Michael C. Munger, and Brian E. Roberts, “The Determinants of Industry Political Activity, 1978–1986,” *American Political Science Review* 88 (1994): 911–26; Marick F. Masters and Gerald D. Keim, “Determinants of PAC Participation Among Large Corporations,” *Journal of Politics* 47 (1985): 1158–73; Timothy McKeown, “The Epidemiology of Corporate PAC Formation, 1975–84,” *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* 24 (1994): 153–68; Craig Humphries, “Corporations, PACs and the Strategic Link Between Contributions and Lobbying Activities,” *Western Political Quarterly* 44 (June 1991): 353–72; Wendy L. Hansen and Neil Mitchell, “Disaggregating and Explaining Corporate Political Activity: Domestic and Foreign Corporations in National Politics,” *American Political Science Review* 94 (2000): 891–903.

16. Wendy L. Hansen, Neil J. Mitchell, and Jeffrey M. Drope, “The Logic of Private and Collective Action,” *American Journal of Political Science* 49 (2005), 150.

expectations.¹⁷ Indeed, neopluralist research undermined the transactions perspective at every stage of the influence production process, although without returning to the overly benign assessment of traditional pluralists. For example, we all now acknowledge Olson's collective action problem. But new research indicates that it is not as severe as Olson thought,¹⁸ and leaders of organized interests employ a variety of creative means to overcome free riding, including reliance on purposive and solidary incentives that tap some of the same motivations cited by pluralists.¹⁹ The conclusions developed by this research program do not mean that the collective action problem is unimportant. But it is not so severe nor solutions so rare that the analysis of mobilization should stop with noting it.²⁰ In broader terms, this means that many different types of organizations will enter lobbying communities reflecting a surprisingly broad array of interests in society.

Even more telling for our purpose, neopluralist research has often highlighted the uncertainty and ineffectiveness of influence tactics. Many who enter the lobbying supermarket to purchase policy are disappointed. Consider some of the key research findings of the last two decades.

- John Heinz, Edward Laumann, Robert Nelson, and Robert Salisbury's 1993 book, *The Hollow Core*, described the world of lobbying as lacking nearly any of the certainty of a supermarket with its well-defined roles, goals, and prices.²¹ Rather, the lobbying environment is one governed by extraordinary uncertainty in goals, means, and the relationships between goals and means.
- Mark Smith's 2000 book, *American Business and Political Power*, found that when business interests are united in actively supporting a policy proposal, the likelihood of Congress acceding to their wishes is markedly diminished.²²
- Ken Kollman's 1998 book, *Outside Lobbying*, highlighted the public opinion context underlying the selection of lobbying tactics, finding that direct lobbying in the face of public opinion opposition has little effect on legislators.²³

17. Lowery and Gray, "A Neopluralist Perspective on Research on Organized Interests"; Andrew S. McFarland, *Neopluralism* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004).

18. John Mark Hansen, "The Political Economy of Group Membership," *American Political Science Review* 79 (1985): 79–96; Terry M. Moe, *The Organization of Interests* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

19. Peter B. Clark and James Q. Wilson, "Incentive Systems: A Theory of Organizations," *Administration Science Quarterly* 6 (1961): 129–66; Jeffrey M. Berry, *The New Liberalism* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1999); Jack L. Walker, Jr., *Mobilizing Interest Groups in America: Patrons, Professionals, and Social Movements* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991).

20. Frank R. Baumgartner and Beth L. Leech, *Basic Interests: The Importance of Groups in Politics and in Political Science* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 75.

21. John P. Heinz, Edward O. Laumann, Robert L. Nelson, and Robert Salisbury, *The Hollow Core* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

22. Smith, *American Business and Political Power*.

23. Ken Kollman, *Outside Lobbying* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

- Benjamin Page, Robert Shapiro, and Glenn Dempsey reported that business lobbying of the public via media advocacy more often than not had the opposite of the intended effect.²⁴
- Nor is this evidence limited to work on the U.S. national government. Virginia Gray and colleagues found that the number and diversity of interests lobbying state legislatures have little influence on overall policy liberalism²⁵ or the adoption of health care policies.²⁶ In terms of policy agendas, the density and diversity of interest communities are far more determined by the size and diversity of legislative agendas than the reverse.²⁷
- Elizabeth Gerber's 1999 analysis of referendum voting in *The Populist Paradox* found that massive infusions of cash into state referendum campaigns by business interests promoting policies favorable to them almost always fail to move voters.²⁸
- Finally, none of these specific studies is at all unique. While the empirical literature remains mixed, with some studies supporting elements of the transactions school's supermarket hypothesis, two major surveys of the literature conducted over the last decade—by Richard Smith and by Frank Baumgartner and Beth Leech—reached remarkably similar conclusions.²⁹ These were best summarized by Baumgartner and Leech's statement that, "the unavoidable conclusion is that PACs and direct lobbying sometimes strongly influence Congressional voting, sometimes have marginal influence, and sometimes fail to exert influence."³⁰

These quite typical neopluralist findings highlight the difficulty of lobbying for narrow advantage in a manner consistent with the profit maximizing model in the face of an attentive public with strong preferences. This conclusion is often viewed as surprising and even implausible by those less familiar with recent work on organized interests. Our general expectation, perhaps based as much

24. Benjamin I. Page, Robert Y. Shapiro, and Glenn Dempsey, "What Moves Public Opinion?" *American Political Science Review* 81 (1987): 23–43.

25. Virginia Gray, David Lowery, Matthew Fellowes, and Andrea McAtee, "Public Opinion, Public Policy, and Organized Interests in the American States," *Political Research Quarterly* 57 (2004): 411–20.

26. Virginia Gray, David Lowery, and Eric Godwin, "Democratic and Non-Democratic Influences in Health Policy: State Pharmacy Assistance Programs as Innovations," Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago (August 2004); Virginia Gray, David Lowery, and Eric Godwin, "The Political Management of Managed Care," Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago (August 2005).

27. Virginia Gray, David Lowery, Matthew Fellowes, and Jennifer Anderson, "Understanding the Demand-Side of Lobbying: Interest System Energy in the American States," *American Politics Research* 33 (2005): 404–34.

28. Elisabeth R. Gerber, *The Populist Paradox: Interest Group Influence and the Promise of Direct Legislation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

29. Smith, "Interest Group Influence in the U.S. Congress"; Baumgartner and Leech, *Basic Interests*.

30. Baumgartner and Leech, *Basic Interests*, 134.

on a steady diet of journalistic horror stories as on the theoretical arguments of the transactions model, is that special interests routinely exercise undue influence.

On the other hand, the large-*n* studies of the 1990s almost uniformly failed to find consistent evidence of extensive influence on the part of organized interests. Or rather, they failed to find evidence of significant influence where we might expect it to be most likely—when vast numbers of organizations engage in titanic battles over large, new issues, spending fortunes and employing hundreds of lobbyists to influence public officials. In contrast, our best evidence of influence arises from quite different settings—when only one or a handful of organizations lobby on a narrow, technical issue of little concern to the public.³¹ But in many such cases, the term “influence” as it is typically employed in the literature on lobbying provides a very poor understanding of the actual nature of the relationship between organized interests and government representatives, especially legislators. Typically, “influence” connotes either the purchase of policy from politicians or, from the perspective of an older tradition, the coercion of politicians by “pressure groups.” But rather than lobbying in the sense of a commercial exchange or a battle of opposing forces attempting to shape public policy, many of these interactions may involve little or no conflict at all and few direct and explicit exchanges. Many of these thousands of relatively quiet interactions between single or a few organizations and single or a few politicians may better be described as *casework* by legislators on behalf of constituents. There is certainly influence in these kinds of interactions. But it is not influence as pressure or purchase. It is influence as government officials serving the democratic demands of constituents, a wholly legitimate type of interaction within democratic political systems.³²

Not all such quiet interactions, of course, are best understood as casework. Indeed, even where there is at least potential conflict among different interests, lobbying events in which there are few active participants may provide an especially fruitful setting for the exercise of influence on the part of private interests that does entail purchase or pressure. This is especially true for venues that are less accessible to public inspection, such as regulatory decisions implementing legislation³³ or when programs are revised rather than when they

31. Smith, “Interest Group Influence in the U.S. Congress”; Smith, *American Business and Political Power*; Christopher Witko, “PACs, Issue Context and Congressional Decision Making,” *Political Research Quarterly*, in press.

32. Michele L. Chin, Jon R. Bond, and Nehemia Geva, “A Foot in the Door: An Experimental Study of PAC and Constituency Effects on Access,” *Journal of Politics* 62 (2000): 534–49.

33. Susan Webb Yackee, “Interest Group Influence and Bureaucratic Responsiveness in Policy Implementation,” Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago (April, 2003).

are adopted.³⁴ Also well-funded business interests seem to be more effective at stopping threatening proposals than in promoting favorable policies.³⁵ But the balance of research reports suggests something of a paradox in our understanding of lobbying. *That is, beyond a threshold of an absence or near absence of lobbying, the influence of organized interests—all other things equal—seems to be negatively associated with the scope of lobbying battles as measured by the number of organizations involved, the intensity of their lobbying, and how attentive the public is.*

Imre Lakatos argued that the hallmark of healthy research programs is the generation of new research problems.³⁶ The neopluralist research program has no shortage of these. The most important include a new appreciation of significant linkages and feedbacks between the stages of the influence process—how mobilization processes influence and are influenced by the demography of interest populations and how both influence and are influenced by the selection of influence tactics and strategies. We will return to these linkages and feedbacks a bit later. For now though, I wish to focus on perhaps the most significant research question raised by the neopluralist research program. It is really the most basic question of all. Why do organizations lobby? Or as the authors of *The Hollow Core* wrote, “Given the uncertainty of the benefits, why then should interest groups continue to invest in private representation?”³⁷ Lobbying makes little sense if, when entering the transactions theorists’ supermarket with an ever larger shopping cart and an ever fatter wallet, one leaves the store with ever fewer goods.

Several Candidate Explanations

So, why do organized interests lobby? I will consider four types of answers. But before doing so, it is important to note something that may be surprising in the face of the seemingly exponential growth of interest populations in recent decades.³⁸ That is, while lobbyist populations have doubled and then doubled again over the last 25 years, few organizations that might lobby actually do so. Less than half of one percent of California’s nearly 50,000 manufacturing firms,

34. Gray, Lowery, and Godwin, “Democratic and Non-Democratic Influences in Health Policy.”

35. Gerber, *The Populist Paradox*; Virginia Gray, David Lowery, Eric Godwin, and James Monogan, “Incrementing Toward Nowhere: Universal Health Care Coverage in the States,” Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago (August 2005).

36. Imre Lakatos, “Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes,” in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, ed. Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 91–196.

37. Heinz *et al.*, *The Hollow Core*, 369.

38. Virginia Gray and David Lowery, *The Population Ecology of Interest Representation: Lobbying Communities in the American States* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996).

for example, registered to lobby the California legislature in 1997,³⁹ and the California Manufacturing Association still has fewer than 900 members. The missing-in-action can include even very large corporations. Until the mid-1990s, for example, Microsoft—the largest corporation in the world by some measures—did not lobby.⁴⁰ Lobbying is a rare event, too, if we switch our attention to the issues being lobbied. Baumgartner and Leech's analysis of lobby disclosure reports on 137 issues considered by the U.S. Congress found that the modal number of organizations lobbying on an issue was zero, a mode applicable to over 40 percent of legislative proposals.⁴¹ Indeed, most active lobbying is concentrated on only a few proposals considered by legislatures.

Most organizations eschew the status of interest organizations and most issues are not actively lobbied. This is not surprising from Truman's pluralist model or, if one needs a more modern, formal restatement of pluralism, Denzau and Munger's analysis of how the unorganized are represented.⁴² Organizations need not lobby if they are satisfied with the *status quo* or if governmental actors have sufficient incentives to represent their interests *even without active lobbying*. This means, of course, that some of the most effective "lobbying" in terms of policy success will be essentially unobservable, a point raised earlier by Bachrach and Baratz in their analysis of community power.⁴³ This also means that we will have to reframe our question to some extent. That is, rather than all or many organizations becoming trapped in the paradox of lobbying, why do some organizations engage in titanic influence battles that are more often lost than won? This reformulation is still an important question given that it is on such battles that the bulk of lobbying takes place, the largest sums spent, and the public's suspicions most focused. As an aside, however, it is worth noting that this picture of lobbying as a somewhat rare phenomenon hints at its real, if hidden, effectiveness. The neopluralist model does not deny that lobbying is effective, only that it is most likely to secure policy returns when few organizations are engaged on issues out of public sight. Such situations may not be uncommon.

Let us turn, then, to explaining why some organizations lobby. First, some lobbying surely *is* instrumental in the narrow sense suggested by the profit maximizing model. While Microsoft did not lobby prior to 1995, by 1998 it had a Washington office and spent \$2.12 million on lobbying using nine different

39. David Lowery, Virginia Gray, Jennifer Anderson and Adam J Newmark, "Collective Action and the Mobilization of Institutions," *Journal of Politics* 66 (2004): 684–705.

40. David Lowery and Holly Brasher, *Organized Interests and American Government* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2004), 85.

41. Frank R. Baumgartner and Beth L. Leech, "Interest Niches and Policy Bandwagons: Patterns of Interest Group Involvement in National Politics," *Journal of Politics* 63 (2001): 1191–1213.

42. Truman, *The Governmental Process*; Denzau and Munger, "Legislators and Interest Groups."

43. Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz, *Power and Poverty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

contract lobbying firms. This might seem like a lot of activity, but by 2000, expenditures increased to \$6.36 million with 15 lobbying firms working for Microsoft. From 1994 to the 2000 election cycle, Microsoft's soft money, PAC, and individual employee contributions to political campaigns increased from \$109,134 to \$4,701,631.⁴⁴ This was all clearly instrumental behavior, given Clinton Justice Department efforts to prosecute Microsoft as a monopolist. Microsoft was eventually successful in its efforts. But even when organizations face uphill battles that they are unlikely to win, purely instrumental lobbying may be necessary. If, for example, core interests are threatened, even slim chances of success may necessitate lobbying. Thus, severe policy threats to the very survival of tobacco companies had to be answered, even if the prospects of success were low.⁴⁵ More generally still, most lobbying organizations are short-term visitors to the policy process, entering the world of politics for quite specific reasons and then leaving as the policy cycle is completed.⁴⁶ As noted above, when essentially uncontested, such "lobbying" might be better understood as a form of casework than as a form of pressure group politics or exchange. But such instrumental behavior does not account for repeat participation in major policy struggles in which vast sums of money are spent and armies of lobbyists are deployed, especially when prospects for success are limited. A more complete answer is needed.

A second reason why organized interests might leap like lemmings into the melees of major lobbying events addresses not their reasons for doing so, which are typically understood as explained by the assumptions of the profit maximizing model, but the reasons for why such glorious struggles so often fail to produce favorable policy outcomes. In competitive lobbying struggles, at least one party must, by definition, lose. Thus, as we move from the sheltered venues of lobbying as casework, through mid-level conflicts between sets of economic interests, to open battles among perhaps hundreds of lobbying organizations, with united business interests often arrayed against social or environmental interests, the probability of a positive outcome from lobbying for those promoting policy change likely declines. Lobbying is a risky business, especially when two sets of economic interests lobby against each other.⁴⁷ But this explanation, too, provides an insufficient account of participation in truly major lobbying events. Even if we acknowledge the privileged position of the status quo in such battles,⁴⁸ unified business interests seem remarkably unsuccessful in major legislative

44. Lowery and Brasher, *Organized Interests and American Government*, 85.

45. John Wright, "Campaign Contributions and Congressional Voting on Tobacco Policy, 1980–2000," *Business and Politics* 6 (2004): 1–26.

46. Virginia Gray and David Lowery, "The Demography of Interest Organization Communities: Institutions, Associations, and Membership Groups," *American Politics Quarterly* 23 (1995): 3–32.

47. Smith, *American Business and Political Power*.

48. Gerber, *The Populist Paradox*.

struggles pitting their preferences against those of an attentive public.⁴⁹ So, why do business interests participate and even initiate such struggles when prospects for success are limited? Why do they not exclusively pursue the quiet politics of lobbying as casework where prospects for success are so much more promising? It is difficult to answer these questions within the implicit assumptions of the profit maximizing model in which such organizations are assumed to coolly calculate benefits and costs and sometimes assumed to rarely interact.⁵⁰

A third set of answers, accordingly, views lobbying as essentially non-rational activity, non-rational at least in terms of the narrowly instrumental interpretations of the pluralist and transaction models. Olson, for example, viewed lobbying as a by-product of reliance on selective incentives to overcome free riding.⁵¹ If lobbying is a by-product of non-issue based mobilization, then organization leaders are free to lobby on whatever ideological hobbyhorse interests them with little need to provide policy returns to members. Alternatively, as illustrated by lobbyist Jack Abramoff's fleecing of the Louisiana Coushatta Tribe while claiming to protect its gambling interests,⁵² lobbying may be a scam perpetuated by highly informed agents on poorly informed principals with the object being extracting cash more than changing public policy. It is also possible that current lobbying may be merely a legacy of past instrumental lobbying. We have seen that Microsoft transformed itself from a lobbying pygmy to a giant when faced with real threats to its existence. But Microsoft did not leave town when the incoming Bush team stopped the prosecution. Surely, Microsoft retains its lobbying capacity primarily as a form of insurance against future threats. But once established, these resources might as well be used to lobby on a wide variety of issues—none of which alone might have been sufficient to induce Microsoft to begin lobbying in the first place. Finally, well-funded lobbying battles do not always fail, even if success is far from guaranteed. If so, and with sufficiently large stakes,⁵³ then even rare victories may act as a variable reinforcement schedule, whereby it pays to always try to influence policy because one can never really know when one might hit the jackpot.

There is, I think, much to be said for this third set of explanations. We can easily point to examples that are consistent with each element. But while neopluralist research, especially that reported in *The Hollow Core*, suggests that interest organizations, their members and patrons, and their lobbyists are

49. Smith, *American Business and Political Power*, Page, Shapiro, and Dempsey, "What Moves Public Opinion?"

50. Olson, *The Rise and Decline of Nations*.

51. Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action*.

52. Susan Schmidt, "Casino Bid Prompted High-Stakes Lobbying," *The Washington Post*, 13 March 2005, 1.

53. Gerber, *The Populist Paradox*, 137.

uncertain about their goals and are less than fully informed about the governmental process and the actions of their policy adversaries than is commonly assumed in the transactions model,⁵⁴ it would seem implausible to assume lobbying is dominated by non- or extra-rational considerations. Contrary to by-product theory, membership groups do not commonly lobby on issues wholly tangential to the interests of their members. And those participating in lobbying typically have large stakes involved and spend considerable resources in trying to influence public policy. While sometimes ideologically driven, lobbying has become a highly professional activity in which knowledge and information are vital resources to be developed and nurtured. It seems, then, that this should be an arena in which some level of rational linkages of means and ends should, at least broadly, govern behavior. Thus, I think it unlikely that we can fully account for why organizations lobby by simple reference to extra- or non-rational considerations.

A fourth and more comprehensive explanation highlights the complexity of the influence process. More specifically, the large-*n* studies associated with the neopluralist research program have routinely emphasized two observations. The first is that lobbying behaviors are often driven by multiple goals, all of which, however, are closely related to each other. This claim may seem, on its face, obvious. It is not at all obvious, however, given prior empirical analyses embedded in the pluralist and transactions models, which typically focus on a final decision on a single policy where competition is typically defined quite narrowly as between, for example, environmental groups and manufacturing firms. Moreover, issues associated with earlier stages of the influence process, such as mobilization or maintenance issues or securing agenda space in which to consider a proposal, are assumed to have been solved in ways that have little bearing on the politics surrounding final policy decisions.

The neopluralist perspective, in contrast, has found significant linkages among the various stages of the influence production process. For example, differential rates of mobilization strongly structure the density and diversity of interest communities,⁵⁵ which in turn strongly influence the range of lobbying tactics that can be employed effectively.⁵⁶ Moreover, there are significant feedbacks among

54. Scott H. Ainsworth, *Analyzing Interest Groups* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002).

55. David Lowery and Virginia Gray, "Representational Concentration and Interest Community Size: A Population Ecology Interpretation," *Political Research Quarterly* 51 (1998): 919–44.

56. Marie Hojnacki, "Interest Groups' Decisions to Join Alliances or Work Alone," *American Journal of Political Science* 41 (1997): 61–87; Kollman, *Outside Lobbying*; Kenneth M. Goldstein, *Interest Groups, Lobbying, and Participation in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Gerber, *The Populist Paradox*; Virginia Gray and David Lowery, "To Lobby Alone or in a Flock: Foraging Behavior Among Organized Interests," *American Politics Quarterly* 26(1998): 5–34; Virginia Gray and David Lowery, "Reconceptualizing PAC Formation: It's Not a Collective Action Problem, and It May Be an Arms Race," *American Politics Quarterly* 25 (1997): 319–46.

these activities. Thus, the size and structure of the interest community acts in a density-dependent manner to relax or intensify constraints on mobilization.⁵⁷ There is also evidence that use of particular lobbying tactics can influence the life chances of lobby organizations, thereby influencing the structure and size of interest communities.⁵⁸ And echoing Truman's disturbance theory,⁵⁹ neopluralist research is strongly grounded on the notion that policy outcomes influence mobilization rates, the structure of interest populations, and levels and types of influence activities.⁶⁰ Further, lobbying on one issue that may be less than central to an interest organization may be vital to securing support from political elites or coalition allies on issues the organization does care about. In short, the influence production process cannot be represented as a simple path diagram that can be neatly decomposed to identify separate and isolatable behaviors and decisions.

If the several stages of the influence production process are linked in complex ways, then it is quite plausible that lobbying may be less about winning than some other purpose.

- When the National Organization for Women lobbies on a highly salient issue like President Bush's judicial nominations, it almost certainly realizes that it will lose many more votes than it wins. But maintaining a fierce profile on judicial nominations has proven to be a very effective tool in retaining current members and securing new members.
- When Christian Right organizations lobby Congress in support of President Bush's plan to privatize Social Security, it is likely less a consequence of any deep commitment to dismantling the New Deal program than in exchange for more energetic support by the Bush Administration of proposals to limit abortion and restrict gay rights, a type of relationship between the White House and organized interests observed in previous administrations.⁶¹
- When Common Cause abruptly switched its lobbying agenda from good government reform issues to opposing the MX missile program, it likely did so

57. David Lowery and Virginia Gray, "The Population Ecology of Gucci Gulch, or the Natural Regulation of Interest Group Numbers in the American States," *American Journal of Political Science* 39 (1995): 1-29; Virginia Gray and David Lowery, "The Expression of Density Dependence in State Communities of Organized Interest," *American Politics Research* 29 (42001): 374-91.

58. Virginia Gray, David Lowery, and Jenny Wolak, "Demographic Opportunities, Collective Action, Competitive Exclusion, and the Crowded Room: Lobbying Forms Among Institutions," *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* 4 (2004): 18-54.

59. Truman, *The Governmental Process*.

60. Frank Baumgartner and Bryan Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Heinz *et al.*, *The Hollow Core*; Lowery and Gray, "The Population Ecology of Gucci Gulch."

61. Mark A. Peterson, "The Presidency and Organized Interests," *American Political Science Review* 86 (1992): 612-25.

not because its leaders expected to win or because its members cared deeply about the proposal, but because a few patrons who supplied the lion's share of the organization's funds did care deeply.⁶²

- When the National Rifle Association lobbied in opposition of the initial Brady Bill ban on assault weapons, it was unlikely to win, given strong public support for the proposal, support that diminished by the time of its renewal. But its opposition to initial passage surely pre-empted several smaller, even more radical gun rights organizations from securing more prominent roles in representing what they assert to be the interests of gun owners.

In short, because the processes of mobilization, organizational maintenance, and political influence are related to each other, and because political behaviors by interest organizations on different issues can also be linked to each other for strategic reasons, identifying a simple and straightforward relationship between lobbying and final policy decisions may prove elusive.

The second observation of the neopluralist research program questions a key element of the lobbying paradox as defined earlier, that the influence of organized interests—all other things equal—is negatively associated with the scope of lobbying battles. The part questioned is the assumption that all things are equal. They rarely are. Indeed, if there is a central message in neopluralist research, it is that context matters.⁶³ Choices about what issues to lobby and what tactics to employ, as well as the likelihood of their success, depend on institutions that allow or impede access, the public opinion context in which debates take place, and which other organized interests are also lobbying the issue. Again, this may seem very obvious. But such attention to context was, in fact, quite uncommon until recently. As Baumgartner and Leech noted from their survey of articles in the *American Political Science Review*, “the modal type of interest group study in the premier journal of political science over the postwar period is a cross-sectional comparison of a few groups working on a single issue at one point in time. Such a research approach seems a perfect strategy for producing unexplained variation between studies. It is a recipe,” they further note, “for the creation of a contradictory and noncumulative literature.”⁶⁴ In other words, the research designs of many studies of the politics of interest representation essentially defined away many critical elements of context.

In contrast, the large-*n* studies of neopluralist research, because they look at many organized interests, jurisdictions, and/or issues, must be attentive to context. Consider three findings.

62. Lawrence Rothenberg, *Linking Citizens to Government* (New York: Cambridge University, 1992).

63. Baumgartner and Leech, *Basic Interests*, 177–80.

64. Baumgartner and Leech, *Basic Interests*, 176.

- First, public opinion matters. Ken Kollman's work demonstrating that the effectiveness of inside and outside lobby tactics depends greatly on how popular and salient issues are has already been discussed.⁶⁵ But popularity and salience are not constants. Baumgartner and Jones's punctuated equilibrium theory of the policy process, for example, highlights how the changing salience and popularity of issues alters venues and the prospects of success in lobbying over time.⁶⁶ And such variation is at least potentially subject to at least some manipulation via framing. Jack Wright, for example, examined the impact of PAC contributions on dozens of Congressional votes on tobacco policy.⁶⁷ Consistent with much of neopluralist work, the millions of dollars spend by Big Tobacco on campaign contributions and lobbying had almost no impact on voting, in large part because bashing tobacco is popular. The few exceptions, however, concerned agriculture bills where support could be framed in terms of a rival popular issue—support for family farms. Another way of saying that public opinion matters is, of course, to say that issues matter, given that some issues are inevitably more salient and popular than others.⁶⁸ Organized interests tackling some issues will necessarily have a more difficult task than when trying to influence policy outcomes on others.
- Second, institutions matter. Perhaps most importantly, the venue in which lobbying takes place matters a great deal, as illustrated by the tremendous success of the religious right in the United States in lobbying via electoral campaigns, but its relative failure to turn that success into legislation. In the former venue, the drag of the general unpopularity of the policy agenda of the religious right could be avoided by targeting selective Congressional campaigns, but not so in legislatures.⁶⁹ Similarly, while business interests often fare poorly in legislative settings⁷⁰ and referendum voting,⁷¹ they are far more successful in influencing the design of implementing regulations, a setting in which technical information carries far more weight than do salience and popularity.⁷² The importance of venue becomes especially clear when we consider the sequencing of the series of decisions required to change policy. Indeed, the lobbying task, and, thereby, the definition of lobbying success,

65. Kollman, *Outside Lobbying*.

66. Baumgartner and Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics*.

67. John Wright, "Campaign Contributions and Congressional Voting on Tobacco Policy, 1980–2000."

68. Kollman, *Outside Lobbying*.

69. John C. Green and Nathan S. Bigelow, "The Christian Right Goes to Washington: Social Movement Resources and the Legislative Process," in *The Interest Group Connection*, ed. Paul S. Herrnson, Ronald G. Shaiko, and Clyde Wilcox (Washington: CQ Press, 2005), 189–211.

70. Mark Smith, *American Business and Political Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

71. Gerber, *The Populist Paradox*.

72. Yackee, "Interest Group Influence and Bureaucratic Responsiveness in Policy Implementation."

shifts as organized interests move from initially competing for the scarce time and energy of legislative champions with other organizations and issues also supported by the legislator to persuading the undecided and even policy opponents as final voting nears.⁷³

- Third, it seems that size does matter. There are quite real variations in the economies of scale governing how the number and distribution of interests in society are translated into numbers and distributions of lobbying organizations. A series of studies conducted by Virginia Gray and her colleagues, for example, demonstrated that the severity of the collective action problem, the mortality of organized interests, and the composition of interest communities varies systematically—if in complex ways—with the size of political jurisdictions.⁷⁴ These in turn influence the kinds of influence tactics organizations employ⁷⁵ and the difficulty of passing legislation.⁷⁶ Holding institutions and opinion constant, the mix of organized interests promoting alternative policies, the tactics they use, and the difficulty of passing legislative will vary depending on the size of the state.

So, why do interest organizations lobby in the face of considerable uncertainty that their efforts will succeed in terms of securing desired or preventing threatening legislation or regulation? To date, neopluralist research suggests that organizations lobby for many different reasons, not just to pass or block policy initiatives. Moreover, the severity of these several lobbying tasks and, therefore, the likelihood of their efforts being successful are highly contingent given variation in the public opinion, institutional, and jurisdictional size contexts in which they lobby.

73. Richard L. Hall and Frank W. Wayman, "Buying Time: Moneyed Interest and the Mobilization of Bias in Congressional Subcommittees," *American Political Science Review* 84 (1990): 797–920; Marie Hojnacki, "The Changing Process of Direct Lobbying," Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, (April 2000); Marie Hojnacki and David Kimball, "PAC Contributions and Lobbying Access in Congressional Committees," *Political Research Quarterly* 54 (2001): 161–80; Marie Hojnacki and David Kimball, "The Who and How of Organizations' Lobbying Strategies in Committee," *Journal of Politics* 61 (1999): 999–1024; Marie Hojnacki and David Kimball, "Organized Interests and the Decision of Whom to Lobby in Congress," *American Political Science Review* 92 (1998): 775–90; Witko, "PACs, Issue Context and Congressional Decision Making"

74. Virginia Gray and David Lowery, "A Niche Theory of Interest Representation," *Journal of Politics* 59 (1996): 91–111; Gray and Lowery, "Reconceptualizing PAC Formation"; David Lowery and Virginia Gray, "The Dominance of Institutions in Interest Representation: A Test of Seven Explanations," *American Journal of Political Science* 42 (1998): 231–55; David Lowery, Virginia Gray, and Matthew Fellowes, "Sisyphus Meets the Borg: Economic Scale and the Inequalities in Interest Representation," *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 17 (2005): 41–74.

75. Virginia Gray and David Lowery, "The Demography of Interest Organization Communities: Institutions, Associations, and Membership Groups," *American Politics Quarterly* 23 (1995): 3–32; Gray and Lowery, "To Lobby Alone or in a Flock"

76. Virginia Gray and David Lowery, "Interest Representation and Democratic Gridlock," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 20 (1995): 531–52.

A Theoretical Framework

As plausible as this answer is, it is as yet unsatisfactory. The problem is that our explanation emphasizing multiple goals and contextual forces is largely an *ad hoc*, retrospective reinterpretation of a variety of empirical findings whose only truly shared characteristic is the inconsistency of their findings with transactions model expectations. As a result, we have a laundry list of goals and contextual factors that seem to be important without any general theoretical framework within which to think about these and related variables in the prospective sense of suggesting testable hypotheses. At present, in fact, we cannot answer several very basic questions about how multiple goals and contextual forces influence lobbying. For example, we have no theory that can tell us when a particular goal—mobilizing members, securing patron financial support, gaining access to legislative champions, or winning a final policy vote—will come to dominate an interest organization's decisions about whom to lobby on what and how. Similarly, we have no theory accounting for variation in contextual forces and how they come to dominate these and related decisions. So, while the neopluralist research program has done a great deal to highlight the importance of multiple goals and contextual forces, much remains to be done if we are to develop a useful multi-goal, multi-context theory of lobbying.

Critically, such a theory should be constructed from the perspective of the organization. This may be a controversial recommendation since scholarship on organized interests employs a variety of sampling frames, more often focusing on the issues being lobbied, the lobbyists themselves, or decisions at specific stages of the policy process than on the organizations doing—or, importantly, not doing—the lobbying. But it is organizations that make decisions to lobby and how to do so. This is an absolutely critical point. It is the organizations that lobby that have multiple goals that specify a variety of purposes for lobbying, not issues, not institutions, not public opinion, not venues, nor even the lobbyists per se. These other variables represent aspects—albeit important aspects—of the context or environment within which organizations pursue their multiple goals. Accordingly, as Kenneth Goldstein noted, “Future work on interest group strategies must proceed from a proper theoretical understanding of exactly what lobbyists are trying to accomplish.”⁷⁷ Indeed, a theory of lobbying grounded on the incentives of organizations should parallel David Mayhew's theory of legislative behavior, which is founded on the pursuit of electoral security.⁷⁸ In the same manner, the most fundamental goal of organizations must be to survive as organizations. All of the other goals that organizations might have are

77. Goldstein, *Interest Groups, Lobbying, and Participation in America*, 128.

78. David R. Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

necessarily secondary considerations since failure to survive will preclude achieving any of them.

This concern for organizational survival need not, of course, be defined so narrowly as to emphasize only life and death concerns on the part of whole organizations, although these may well lead a firm like Microsoft to enter the lobbying community in the first place. More narrowly defined benefits might also influence the level and intensity of lobbying activity. Indeed, the focus on the organization suggested here is quite compatible with the implicit view of lobbying of the profit maximizing model. Organizations lobby for a reason, although we have seen that these reasons may encompass a broader variety of concerns than is usually assumed by the transactions perspective. Just as importantly, survival concerns need not be restricted to the organization as a whole. For organizations whose primary business is producing cars or providing religious services, lobbying may not be central to their work. But once lobbying is undertaken through the establishment of a public affairs office, that office will almost certainly have powerful incentives leading it to undertake activities that will allow it to continue to survive. And organizations whose primary business is lobbying, including many membership groups and trade associations, may find that the survival of the organization as a whole and survival of the lobbying function are inextricably conflated.

Given a focus on organizational survival, two theories seem especially useful vehicles for constructing a theory of lobbying. The first is niche theory, which was initially developed by Evelyn Hutchinson to understand the diversity of biological species. Niche analysis looks at the relationship between a population or organism and variables in the environment that bear on survival. Niche analysis has since become common in organization ecology,⁷⁹ and Virginia Gray and David Lowery⁸⁰ and others⁸¹ have already applied it to the study of organized interests to some degree. In niche analysis, each vital environmental resource is conceptualized as an array. "In this way," noted Hutchinson, "an n -dimensional hypervolume is defined, every point of which corresponds to a state in the environment which would permit the species S_1 to exist indefinitely."⁸² The space so defined constitutes the "fundamental niche" of the species, the

79. Joel A. C. Baum and J. V. Singh, "Organizational Niche Overlap and the Dynamics of Organizational Mortality," *American Journal of Sociology* 100 (September 1994): 346–80; Joel A. C. Baum and J. V. Singh, "Dynamics of Organizational Responses to Competition," *Social Forces* 74 (June 1996): 1261–97.

80. Gray and Lowery, "A Niche Theory of Interest Representation".

81. James Q. Wilson, *Political Organizations* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); William P. Browne, "Organized Interests and Their Issue Niches: A Search for Pluralism in a Policy Domain," *Journal of Politics* 52 (1990): 477–509.

82. G. Evelyn Hutchinson, "Concluding Remarks," *Population Studies: Animal Ecology and Demography. Cold Spring Harbor Symposia on Quantitative Biology* 22 (1957): 416.

space in which it might survive. But given competition with similar species or similar organisms or similar organizations over space on shared resource arrays, the realized niche of most species is merely a portion of each resource array defining its fundamental niche. The niche concept serves as a capstone concept in population biology by linking many other core ideas such as competition, selection, the isomorphism principle, fitness, selection, and adaptation.⁸³

As applied to organized interests, niche theory requires that we specify the resources that might enable a lobbying organization and/or the lobbying function within an organization to survive, such as members if the organization is a membership group or patrons if an institution, financial resources, access to decision makers, and issues on which to lobby. Given competition over these resources with other organized interests, an organization's core task is to construct a viable realized niche comprised of some portion of each of the resource arrays constituting its fundamental niche. Should its space on any one resource array shrink below the level sufficient to sustain the organization, it will cease to exist. If, for example, the membership base of an organization falls below the level at which it can sustain itself, it will not matter how many great issues it might have lobbied on or whether it had access to decision makers.

Two aspects of niche theory are important for our current purpose. First, the several resource arrays of the fundamental niche can be viewed as defining the multiple goals that the organization might pursue when lobbying—retaining old members while encouraging new members to join, securing patron financial support, securing the services of a legislative champion, maintaining a favorable public opinion climate, or even securing a final policy outcome. Second, niche theory suggests that the determination of goals that come to dominate the selection of lobbying targets and lobbying tactics depends critically on which of the several resource arrays upon which the organization depends faces the most severe challenge from competitors.

- Thus, a membership organization that is hemorrhaging members may have to shift from lobbying on narrow but potentially achievable policy goals to lobbying on hot button issues that stimulate joining, even if moving those issues in a favorable direction is unlikely.
- An organization with starkly weak public opinion support may have to shift from direct or inside lobbying on issues the members really care about to long-term, fuzzier outside lobbying in order to create a more favorable public opinion environment.
- A membership organization with a solid membership base but weak finances may have to tailor its selection of lobbying issues so as to better reflect the

83. Gray and Lowery, "A Niche Theory of Interest Representation."

preferences of a few deep-pocket patrons rather than issues preferred by mass members or organization leaders.

- Indeed, if the existence of an organization, like Microsoft or a tobacco company, is in fact fundamentally threatened by a proposed change in policy, it will have no choice but to lobby in pursuit of final policy outcomes irrespective of the odds going into the fight. In this sense, purely instrumental policy lobbying can be accounted for as merely one of a broader range of lobbying modes, each determined by the search for a viable realized niche.

In sum, the nature of the competition on the several resource arrays will determine which of several lobbying goals actually guides the decision to lobby, the choice of lobby targets, and the selection among available influence tools. Thus, niche theory—by linking lobbying goals and resource arrays—can do much of the work of transforming our *post hoc* suspicions that lobbying is conducted for multiple purposes into a prospective tool with which to extract testable hypotheses.

As currently framed, however, niche theory can be quite static. Arrays of environmental resources and competition over them are largely viewed as fixed. This is fine for the biological sciences in which niche theory developed, given that sponges and snails are generally thought to be in relatively stable long-term relationships with their environments. This is population biology's isomorphism principle. In such settings, we see less on-going competition than a temporally stable outcome of past competition. Political environments, however, are much more dynamic. Also, niche theory is fundamentally about competition among similar organizations or organisms. This is an important corrective to most of the literature, which often frames competition solely in terms of final policy opponents, such as between environmentalists and manufacturers, when the most serious threat to an environmental group's existence or survival as an organization is another environmental group. Still, there are other actors involved in lobbying—the public, political elites, policy opponents, and so on—who may well influence the structure of the resource arrays comprising an organized interest's fundamental niche and, thereby, the level of competition it faces from similar organizations in constructing a viable realized niche.

To address these limitations, we can turn to some of the insights of resource dependency theory (suggested independently by Grote and Lang⁸⁴; also see Wamsley and Zald⁸⁵). As developed by Jeffrey Pfeffer and Gerald Salancik in their

84. Jürgen R. Grote and Achim Lang, "Europeanization and Organizational Change in National Trade Associations: An Organization Ecology Perspective," in *The Politics of Europeanization*, ed. Kevin Featherstone and Claudio M. Radaelli (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 225–54.

85. Gary Wamsley and Myer N. Zald, *The Political Economy of Public Organizations* (New York: Praeger, 1973).

1978 book, *The External Control of Organizations*, resources dependency theory shares much with niche theory. Both assume that organizations must first survive to accomplish any other task, that securing environmental resources is essential for organizations to survive, and that, therefore, organizations must interact with their environment.⁸⁶ To this, resource dependence theory adds the insight that those who control vital external resources—whether they are similar organizations or some other set of actors—have at least the potential to shape the behavior of an organization by threatening to withhold access to them. This is a fundamentally political view of organizations, a perspective that emphasizes how external actors influence the behavior of organizations.⁸⁷ Indeed, those controlling vital external resources can potentially exercise considerable control over an organization. Thus, the resource dependency model can be readily applied to the analysis of lobbying efforts as a means by which organizations try to shape their competitive environment. Not surprisingly, then, many of the examples used by Pfeffer and Salancik highlight lobbying activity by organizations.⁸⁸ But environmental actors, in turn, can potentially influence what organizations lobby for and how they lobby.

This brings us back to the contextual forces influencing lobbying, which is our primary concern. Resource dependence theory may allow us to consider the influence of other actors in accounting for which organizations lobby and why they lobby as they do.⁸⁹ The contextual forces of public opinion, institutions, the density and diversity of interest communities associated with jurisdiction size, and perhaps other variables, can be viewed from the perspective of niche theory as either lengthening or shortening the resource arrays from which organized interests must construct viable realized niches. Some of these contextual influences are, of course, fixed by the environment. Public opinion on at least some issues, for example, is determined exogenously and only weakly subject to political manipulation via framing. The jurisdictional boundaries that delimit the number and diversity of interests in society that might be represented politically is largely a fixed attribute of lobbying settings, if no less important for being so. Still, other contextual forces are more subject to design and manipulation. Resource dependency theory suggests that such dependence may give other actors considerable influence over an interest organization's lobbying decisions.⁹⁰

86. Mark S. Mizruchi and Mina Yoo, "Interorganizational Power and Dependence," in *Companion to Organizations*, ed. Joel A. C. Baum (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 602.

87. Lex Donaldson, *American Anti-Management Theories of Organization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 129–63.

88. Jeffrey Pfeffer and Gerald R. Salancik, *The External Control of Organizations* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978).

89. Grote and Lang, "Europeanization and Organizational Change in National Trade Associations."

90. Grote and Lang, "Europeanization and Organizational Change in National Trade Associations," 233–36.

- For example, institutions specify who may have access to decision makers, the order in which they must be addressed, the kinds of evidence that can be used, and so on. At the extreme, access may be defined so narrowly that there is no viable space on the access array on which an interest organization can survive. Resource dependency theory suggests that political elites, who, at the constitutional level, specify how decisions are made and then make those policy decisions, should exercise considerable control over the life prospects of interest organizations, thereby determining which organizational goals will most closely guide decisions about lobbying.
- More broadly, whether interest systems are designed in a manner allowing many similar organizations to compete or are structured so that only a few have access is likely to have a significant impact on the life chances of an organization. The political elites who design these institutions so that few or many competitors materialize necessarily exercise some degree of control over the organization by defining its competitive environment and the severity of its survival problem, which then may influence which goals govern lobbying decisions.
- And institutions are designed so as to allow greater or lesser popular influence on policy via requiring voting in referendums or legislative bodies or decisions within a bureaucracy. The design of these institutions significantly influences the nature of the lobbying task. When designed so that public opinion matters a great deal, the public is likely to exercise significant control over lobbying outcomes and thereby how lobbying organizations define the lobbying task and implement lobbying strategies.

The key point is that resource dependence theory allows us to add contextual forces to niche theory in a way highlighting the importance of a wider array of actors in the political environment. These actors influence contextual forces, thereby altering the resource arrays of niche theory, which in turn influence the order of priorities among goals that organizations must pursue if they are to survive.

This combination of niche and resource dependence theory is, of course, extremely abstract. It is not so abstract, however, that testable hypotheses cannot be derived. For example, political elites should have a greater ability to mobilize organized interests to lobby on behalf of the elites' preferred policy agenda rather than that of the interest organization itself when institutions limit access to the political process. In large, dense interest communities, enhanced organizational mortality rates should encourage membership groups to lobby more on hot button issues to enhance membership rolls. Prominent events crystallizing public opinion—such as the Columbine school shootings in the United States—should compel pro-gun interests to shift from inside to outside lobbying and anti-gun

interests to do the reverse. And most commonly, when public policy or the pursuit of public policy is not vital to an organization, it will not become an interest organization. These and related hypotheses are perhaps not strictly novel insights of this theoretical framework. What is novel is seeing that they all result from and reflect a common underlying process of resource dependence associated with organizational survival.

Also, abstractness is one of the potential strengths of this theoretical framework in terms of comparative analysis. By and large, research on the politics of organized interests has relied on quite concrete theories not far removed from the cases used to probe them empirically. This has had a number of unfortunate consequences. One that I am most interested in is the sharp separation between the European continental and Anglo-American literatures on organized interests. The former is deeply rooted in corporatist and neo-corporatist theories,⁹¹ while the latter has roots in the open systems of traditional pluralism and transactions models. On the surface, there seems to be good reason to rely on fundamentally different kinds of theories to account for behavior in what appear to be two very different interest systems. Lobbying in Washington does not look like lobbying in Vienna. Still, interest representation is a task all democratic states must undertake, which suggests that we should develop a general theory of interest representation. Combining niche theory and resource dependency theory might provide such a framework. That is, corporatist arrangements are systems of interest representation in which the access resource array is so shortened by design that only a few organized interests survive—the peak associations in tri-partite bargaining.⁹² More to the point, as illustrated by the work of Alan Sioroff, corporatism is a variable on which the United States and other pluralist countries merely have very low scores.⁹³ Pluralism, too, is a variable on which corporatist nations have comparable low scores. The full range of both should be the focus of our theories of interest representation. And this range matters for lobbying behaviors typical of different political systems. Privileged interests in corporatist systems need not worry about the access array of their niche, allowing them to emphasize lobbying goals attentive to other resource arrays defining their realized niches. The reverse will be true for interests excluded from corporatist arrangements. All of this suggests that an especially useful aspect of building a multi-goal, multi-context theory of lobbying is that it might allow us

91. Gerhard Lembruch and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Patterns of Corporatist Policymaking* (London and Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1982).

92. Grote and Lang, "Europeanization and Organizational Change in National Trade Associations," 233.

93. Alan Sioroff, "Corporatism in 24 Industrial Democracies: Meaning and Measurement," *European Journal of Political Research* 36 (1999): 175–205.

to construct a genuinely comparative literature on the politics of organized interests

Conclusion

So, why do organizations sometimes lobby in the face of great odds against ever being successful in securing final policy outcomes? Organizations lobby for many reasons, not all of which concern the immediate passage of laws or the adoption of regulations. As with simple instrumental lobbying associated with the profit maximizing model, these other purposes come to the fore when they are related to scarce resources that are vital to an organization's survival as an organization. Indeed, resources are scarce in a world in which lobby registrants turn over at a tremendous rate. For example, nearly half of all lobby registrants in the American states disappear from lobby rolls in only a few short years.⁹⁴ Under such conditions of pervasive resource threat, non-instrumental reasons for lobbying—non-instrumental at least in a final policy sense—are likely to be quite common. Among the forces determining the scarcity or abundance of an organization's resource environment are a variety of contextual forces, including the level of competition expected from similar organizations, the substantive content of public opinion, how the decision process accommodates its influence, and institutional rules that regulate access. Extra-organizational actors who exercise some control over these contextual forces have the potential to shape the goals of lobbying organizations and, thereby, their definition of the lobby task and their selection of influence tools.

A key implication of this interpretation is that lobbying success needs to be redefined. Sure, most lobbying in contentious settings is not successful in terms of securing or blocking public policy. This is the paradox of lobbying. But much of lobbying is probably not about securing or blocking specific laws or regulations. It may well be about maintaining membership rolls *or* securing access from political elites on other issues the organization cares about *or* changing the salience and popularity of the issue over the long haul *or* blocking rival organizations from relying on a shared issue agenda, membership base, or patrons *or* any number of other goals, all of which help the organization survive. If lobbying secures these other goals, it must be counted as successful irrespective of the outcome of a final policy vote.

In the end, lobbying is far more uncertain, far more socially determined, often less simply instrumental, and more interesting than is allowed for in the

94. Gray and Lowery, "A Niche Theory of Interest Representation"; Virginia Gray and David Lowery, "Life in a Niche: Mortality Anxiety Among Organized Interests in the American States," *Political Research Quarterly* 50 (1997): 25–47.

transactions model's supermarket of strangers in which narrow, short-term profit maximization dominates, where each organized interest pursues narrow and discrete policy commodities while hardly interacting with one another or with other political actors. This complexity, in and of itself, does not necessitate our eschewing reliance on relative simple and elegant models of lobbying. Indeed, sometimes very simple models can clarify quite complex reality. But a useful theory in the sense of accounting for the multi-goal and multi-context nature of lobbying is, I think, unlikely to be overly simple. The combination of niche and resource dependence theory I have offered is likely to be about as simple as such a theory might get, and only then by framing the discussion at a very high level of abstraction.

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