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Why Do Organized Interests Lobby?

A Multi-Goal, Multi-Context Theory of Lobbying

Rede uitgesproken door

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bij de aanvaarding van het ambt van hoogleraar
op het gebied van de bestuurskunde
aan de Universiteit van Leiden
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I. Introduction

I am going to talk today about perhaps the most basic question we ask about interest groups – why they lobby. Answering this seemingly obvious question has become surprisingly difficult in light of recent research findings. I will certainly not provide a complete answer today. But I will outline a macro-level theoretical framework for developing such an answer, an approach that can be described as a contextual theory of the politics of organized interests.

Two introductory comments are warranted, however, before continuing. First, to be more precise, I am going to talk about organized interests 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 (Salisbury 1984).

Second, I think it necessary to comment on why the politics of organized interests is an appropriate subject for a Professor of Public Administration. Organized interests, of course, are a natural, even a core topic of Political Science, and both my training and much of my career to date are firmly rooted in that discipline. Still, the discipline of Public Administration has at least two reasons for independently exploring organized interests.

First, perhaps the central issue facing Public Administration over the last century – from Woodrow Wilson’s (1887) initial articulation of the politics-administration dichotomy, through the post-War work of Herbert Simon (1945), Paul Appleby (1949), and Dwight Waldo (1955), to current debates over principal-agent models (Moe 1984) – has concerned reconciling the hierarchical traits of the administrative process with the necessity of democratic control. Public Administration scholars, therefore, routinely discuss the influence of legislatures, judges, and executives on administration (Fredrickson and Smith 2003: 15-40). Yet, despite widespread, if implicit, recognition that organized interests potentially shape both policy agendas and policy implementation, few Public Administration scholars independently consider the structure of interest communities or how organized interests choose among influence tactics. In order to get on to our main topic, I will simply assert that if we are to develop a robust theoretical reconciliation of public administration and democratic legitimation, then we must more actively consider the politics of organized interests.

A second rationale for Public Administration attention to organized interests is a bit more indirect, but firmly rooted in our long-standing, core interest in organization theory. Much of organization theory, of course, is concerned about the design and management of individual organizations. This work has been labeled closed or micro-level organization theory. But an extensive literature has developed over the last thirty years taking a more macro-level approach to understand how environmental forces influence variations in organization structures and behaviors across organizational populations. This approach tends to focus on the demographic processes of selection and adaptation within communities of organizations and is perhaps best represented by the work of W. Richard Scott (2001), Michael Hannan and John Freeman (1989), and Howard Aldrich (1999). Their research has generated a number of interesting 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 (Knoke, Marsden, and Kalleberg 2002). But when all of these many different kinds of organizations interface with government via lobbying, they are all placed on a common footing by having a common task. Indeed, the lobbying task is perhaps the only concrete function 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 within organizational populations.

With these caveats in mind, we can now turn to why organizations lobby. I will first discuss why this has become such an interesting question. 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.

II. 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 organized interests over the post-War era. But the starting point is pluralist theory as developed by Robert Dahl (1961) and, especially, David Truman (1951). 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 than 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 (Dahl 1967, 130). The influence tactics then employed were viewed as benign, largely providing technical information to elected officials (Bauer, Pool, and Dexter 1963; Milbrath 1963). 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 (Truman 1951; Dahl 1961; 1967; Key 1964). 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. Virginia Gray and I (2004) have labeled this approach the transactions perspective because narrowly defined exchanges characterize relationships among political actors throughout the influence process. Perhaps most significantly, Mancur Olson's (1965) description of the collective action problem undermined Truman's (1951) notion that organized interests form naturally. 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 (Schattschneider 1960; Scholzman and Tierney 1986). 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 (Stigler 1971; Peltzman 1976; Mitchell and Munger 1991). 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 purchase goods even until the store's shelves are bare (Olson 1982; Mueller 1983). As a result, the transactions perspective viewed organized interests as pervasive threats to democratic governance.

A second revolution – the neopluralist perspective – developed over the 1990s as empirical findings accumulated in sharp contrast to transactions theory expectations (Lowery and Gray 2004; McFarland 2004). 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 (Hansen 1985; Moe 1980), 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 (Clark and Wilson 1961; Berry 1999; Walker 1991). This research does 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 (Baumgartner and Leech 1998, 75). In broader terms, this means that many different types of organizations will enter lobbying communities reflecting a 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 decade.

- 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. Rather, the lobbying environment is one governed by extraordinary uncertainty in goals, means, and especially the relationships between them.
- 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 are markedly diminished.
- Ken Kollman's 1998 book, *Outside Lobbying*, highlighted the public opinion context behind the selection of lobbying tactics, finding that direct lobbying in the face of public opinion opposition has little effect on legislators.
- Benjamin Page, Robert Shapiro, and Glenn Dempsey's (1987) analysis of business lobbying of the public via media advocacy more often than not had the opposite of the intended effect.
- Nor is this evidence limited to work on US national government. Virginia Gray and I, with several of our students, found that the number and diversity of interests lobbying state legislatures have only a marginal influence on overall policy liberalism (Gray, Lowery, Fellowes, and McAtee 2004) or the adoption of health care policies (Gray, Lowery, and Godwin 2004; 2005). In terms of agendas, the density and diversity of interest systems are far more determined by the size and diversity of legislative agendas than the reverse (Gray, Lowery, Fellowes, and Anderson in press).

- Also, 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.
- Finally, none of these specific studies is 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 (1995) and Frank Baumgartner and Beth Leech (1998) – reached remarkably similar conclusions. These were best summarized by Baumgartner and Leech's (1998, 134) 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."

These findings highlight the difficulty of lobbying 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 the recent work on organized interests. Our general expectation, perhaps based as much on a steady diet of journalistic horror stories as on theoretical arguments of the transactions model, is that special interests routinely exercise undue influence. Yet, 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 (Smith 1995; Smith 2000; Witko in press). This is especially true for venues that are less accessible to public inspection, such as regulatory decisions implementing legislation (Yackee 2004) or when programs are revised rather than when they are adopted (Gray, Lowery, and Godwin 2004). Also well funded business interests seem to be more effective at stopping threatening proposals than in promoting favorable policies (Gerber 1999).

This, then, is the paradox of lobbying; beyond a threshold of an 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 (1970) argued that one of the essential hallmarks of healthy research programs is the generation of new research problems. 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 in turn influence and are influenced by the selection of influence tactics and strategies. We will, in fact, 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* (1993, 369) wrote, “Given the uncertainty of the benefits, why then should interest groups continue to invest in private representation?” Lobbying makes little sense if, when entering the transactions theorists’ supermarket with an ever larger shopping cart and ever fatter wallet, one leaves the store with ever fewer goods.

III. Several Candidate Explanations

So, why do organized interests lobby? Consider four types of answers. The first is perhaps the most surprising in the face of the seemingly exponential growth of interest populations in recent decades (Gray and Lowery 1996). 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, for example, registered to lobby the California legislature in 1997 (Lowery, Gray, Anderson, and Newmark 2004), 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 (Lowery and Brasher 2004, 85). Lobbying is a rare event too if we switch our attention to the issues being lobbied. Baumgartner and Leech’s (2001) analysis of lobby disclosure reports on 137 issues considered by the US Congress found that the modal number of organizations lobbying on an issue was zero, a mode applicable to over 40 percent of legislative proposals. Indeed, most lobbying is concentrated on only a few proposals considered by legislatures.

Most organizations eschew the status of interest organizations and most issues are not lobbied. This is not surprising from Truman’s (1951) pluralist model or, if one needs a modern formal reinstatement of pluralism, Denzau and Munger’s (1986) analysis of how the unorganized are represented. 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 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 are not uncommon.

Second, much of lobbying is instrumental in a narrow sense. While Microsoft did not lobby prior to 1995, by 1998 it had a Washington Office and spent \$2.12 million in lobbying using nine different 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 (Lowery and Brasher 2004, 85). This was all clearly instrumental behavior given Clinton Justice Department efforts to prosecute Microsoft as a monopolist. Similarly, severe policy threats to tobacco companies had to be answered, even if the prospects of success were low (Wright 2004). Indeed, 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 (Gray and Lowery 1995). 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. A more complete answer is needed.

So, a third set of answers 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 (1965), for example, viewed lobbying as a by-product of reliance on selective incentives to overcome free riding. 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 Coshatta Tribe while claiming to protect their gambling interests (Schmidt 2005), 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 (Gerber 1999, 137), then even rare victories may act as a variable reinforcement schedule, whereby it pays to always try to influence policy because one can never know when such efforts might be successful.

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. But while neopluralist research, especially that reported in *The Hollow Core*, suggests that interest organizations, their members and patrons, and their lobbyists are 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 (Ainsworth 2002), it would seem implausible to assume the lobbying is dominated by non- or extra-rational considerations. Contrary to the by-product theory, membership groups do not commonly lobby on issues 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 rational linkages of means and ends should govern behavior. Thus, I think it unlikely that we can account for why organizations lobby by simple reference to extra-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 final 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 (Lowery and Gray 1998b), which in turn strongly influence the range of lobbying tactics that can be employed effectively (Hojnacki 1997; Kollman 1998; Goldstein 1999; Gerber 1999; Gray and Lowery 1997a; 1998). Moreover, there are significant feed-

backs among these activities. Thus, the size and structure of the interest community acts in a density dependent manner to relax or intensify constraints on mobilization (Lowery and Gray 1995; Gray and Lowery 2001b). There is also evidence that use of particular lobbying tactics can influence the life chances of organizations, thereby influencing the structure and size of interest communities (Gray, Lowery, and Wolak 2004). And echoing Truman's (1951) disturbance theory, 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 (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Heinz et. al. 1993; Lowery and Gray 1995). 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 is not a sausage that can be neatly sliced to isolate single, final issues.

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 members and securing new members.
- When Christian Right organizations lobby the US Congress in support of President Bush's proposal 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 (Peterson 1992).
- When Common Cause abruptly switched its lobbying agenda from good government reform issues to opposing the MX missile program, it likely did so 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 share of the organization's funds did care deeply (Rothenberg 1992).
- 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. But its opposition 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 are also 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 (Baumgartner and Leech 1998, 177-180). Choices about what issues to lobby and what tactics to employ as well as the likelihood of their success depend on the institutions that allow or impede access, the public opinion context in which debates take place, and what 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 (1998, 176) 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 note, “for the creation of a contradictory and noncumulative literature.” In other words, the research designs of many studies of interest organizations defined away critical elements of context.

In contrast, the large-n studies of neopluralist research, precisely because they look at many organized interests, many jurisdictions, and/or many issues, are inherently attentive to context. Consider three key findings of this research.

- First, public opinion matters. We have already discussed Ken Kollman’s (1998) work which demonstrates that the effectiveness of inside and outside lobby tactics depends greatly on how popular and salient issues are. But popularity and salience are not constants. Baumgartner and Jones’ (1993) 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. And such variation is at least potentially subject to at least some manipulation via framing. Jack Wright (2004), for example, examined the impact of PAC contributions on dozens of Congressional votes on tobacco policy. 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.

- 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 (Green and Bigelow 2005). Similarly, while business interests often fair poorly in legislative settings (Smith 2000) and referendum voting (Gerber 1999), they are far more successful in influencing the design of implementing regulations, a setting in which technical information carries far more weight than salience and popularity (Yackee 2003). 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, 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 (Hall and Wayman 1990; Hojnacki 2000; Hojnacki and Kimball 1998; 1999; 2001; Witko in press).
- Third, size matters. 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 that I have conducted with Virginia Gray and our students, for example, demonstrate 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 (Gray and Lowery 1996a; 1997; a Lowery and Gray 1998a; Lowery, Gray, and Fellowes 2005). These in turn influence the kinds of influence tactics organizations employ (Gray and Lowery 1995a; 1998) and the difficulty of passing legislation (Gray and Lowery 1995b). Holding institutions and opinion constant, the mix of organized interests promoting alternative policies, the tactics they use, and the difficulty of passing legislative will change moving from a smaller to a larger state.

So, why do interest organizations lobby in the face of considerable uncertainty that their efforts will succeed in terms of securing or preventing desired 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 opinion, institutional, and jurisdictional size contexts in which they lobby.

IV. 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 their inconsistency 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 who 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 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. It is the organizations that have multiple goals that specify a variety of purposes for lobbying. Accordingly, as Kenneth Goldstein (1999, 128) noted, “Future work on interest group strategies must proceed from a proper theoretical understanding of exactly what lobbyists are trying to accomplish.” Indeed, a theory of lobbying grounded on the incentives of organizations should parallel David Mayhew's (1974) theory of legislative behavior, which is founded on the pursuit of electoral security. 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 necessarily secondary considerations since failure to survive will preclude achieving any of them.

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 (Baum and Singh 1994; 1996), and Virginia Gray and I

(1996a) and others (Wilson 1973; Browne 1990) 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 (1957, 416), “an n-dimensional hypervolume is defined, every point of which corresponds to a state in the environment which would permit the species S1 to exist indefinitely.” The space so defined constitutes the “fundamental niche” of the species, the space in which it might survive. But given competition with similar species or organisms or organizations over 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.

As applied to organized interests, niche theory requires that we specify the resources that might enable a lobbying 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.

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 which goal or goals come to dominate the selection of lobbying targets and lobbying tactics depends critically on which of the several resource arrays the organization 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 decision 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 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 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 is 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 do not so much see on-going competition as the 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 direct threat to an environmental group's existence 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 interests 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. As developed by Jeffrey Pfeffer and Gerald Salancik in their 1978 book, *The External Control of Organizations*, resource 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 environ-

ment (Mizruchi and Yoo 2002, 602). 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 an organization's behavior by threatening to withhold access to them. Indeed, those controlling vital external resources can exercise considerable control over an organization.

This brings us back to the contextual forces influencing lobbying. Resource dependence theory may allow us to consider the influence of other actors in accounting for why organizations lobby as they do. 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 interest in society that might be represented politically is largely a fixed attribute of lobbying environments, 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.

- 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 and an interest organization cannot survive. Resource dependency theory suggests that political elites who, at the constitutional level, specify how decisions are made and then make those decisions should exercise considerable control over the life prospects of organizations, thereby determining which organizational goals will most closely guide decisions about lobbying.
- Similarly, 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 and may influence which goals govern decisions about lobbying.
- 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 with-

in 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 both 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.

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 in-side to out-side lobbying and anti-gun interests from out-side to in-side lobbying. 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 the theory I have outlined. What is novel is seeing that they all result from a common underlying process of resource dependence associated with organizational survival.

Also, abstractness is one of the potential strengths of the theory I have outlined 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 (Lehmbruch and Schmitter 1982), 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 certainly 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. I think that 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. More to the point, as illustrated by the work of Alan Sairoff (1999), corporatism is a variable on which the United States and other pluralist countries merely have very low scores. 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. This suggests that an especially useful aspect of building a multi-goal, multi-context theory of lobbying is that it might allow us to construct a genuinely comparative literature on the politics of organized interests.

V. Conclusion

So, why do organizations lobby in the face of great odds against their ever being successful in securing final policy outcomes? Organizations lobby for many different reasons, not all of which concern the immediate passage of laws or the adoption of regulations. As with simple instrumental lobbying, 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 turnover 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 (Gray and Lowery 1996b; 1997b). 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 is not successful in terms of securing or blocking instruments of 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 interest organizations from relying on the same issue agenda, membership base, or patrons or any number of other goals, all of which help the organization survive. If lobbying helps to accomplish these other goals, it must be counted as successful irrespective of the outcome of a final vote on a policy proposal.

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 transactions model's supermarket of strangers, where each interest organization pursues narrow and discrete policy commodities while hardly interacting with each other 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.

I will end this lecture by taking the opportunity to thank some family, friends, students, and colleagues from whom I have learned a lot. First in line, of course, are my parents, Donald and Joanne Lowery, who I am delighted are here today. They had only two rules for their seven children: find something you really like and work really hard at it. It seems to have worked.

I had three inspiring teachers – Jack Lynch, Paul Savage, and Charlie Press – whose evident joy in politics and the scholarly life was contagious. I have had wonderful colleagues at the University of Kentucky and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Many – Bill Berry, Ruth Hoogland DeHoog, Stan Brunn, Bill Lyons, Gordon Whitaker, Caryl Rusbult, and Lee Sigelman – became co-authors. My friend and sometimes colleague Virginia Gray deserves special thanks for teaching me about the politics of interest representation and forgiving me for leaving Carolina. We are approaching our 20th anniversary working on organized interests together.

Collaboration is fun and something I look forward to continuing here at Leiden. Some of my most enjoyable collaborative work has been with some outstanding students – Jim Garand, Tom Konda, Sam Bookheimer, Jerry Webster, Jim Cox, Jenny Anderson, Holly Brasher, Christine Keller, Susan Yackee, Jim Malachowski, Greg Hager, Matt Fellowes, Andrea McAtee, Adam Newmark, Jenny Wolak, and Eric Godwin.

Now, to Leiden. I like being here. But I was not surprised by the curiosity of the undergraduates or the professionalism of the AiOs. I was not surprised to find colleagues doing very interesting and important work. This is all as it should be, and it played a significant role in making Leiden a very attractive setting in which to work. I was, however, surprised to find that everyone – from the support staff (which is the most professional of any institution I have been affiliated with), the undergraduate students, the AiOs, Dean Theo Toonen, the UDs, the UHDs, the other Professors in our Department, to Chairman Mark Rutgers – has been so open to a new arrival with

a very different set of career and life experiences, so generous with time and energy (even to correcting my Nederlands Haiku), and so welcoming. Thank you all, but special thanks to Willeke van Heyningen. If you enjoy the events following this lecture, it will be due mostly to Willeke's efforts.

Finally, I thank my wife, friend, collaborator, and fellow adventurer, Professor Caryl Rusbult. Her professional work as a scholar is on close personal relationships and how partners help each other realize their individual and collective dreams. I have been undeservedly fortunate that this is also her consuming hobby

Ik heb gezegd.

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