

It's All Relative: Interest Group Power and Influence Redefined

Adam J. Newmark
Appalachian State University

Anthony J. Nownes
University of Tennessee—Knoxville

Abstract

Interest organizational influence has been a concern dating back to our nation's founding, and scholars have devoted substantial attention to the issue from pluralist, elite, and neopluralist perspectives. We conducted a survey of lobbyists in five states to examine how lobbyists perceive the level of influence of the organizations they represent, organizations with similar goals, and opposing interests. We focus on patterns of influence and how interest systems offer constraints and opportunities for influence. Consistent with neopluralist expectations, we find that rather than systematic elite dominance, perceptions of influence are driven or constrained by lobbyists' partisan congruence with the state, interactions with allies, opponents, and lawmakers, competition, and state laws.

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Western Political Science Association, Seattle, WA, April 17-19, 2014. Please direct correspondence to Adam J. Newmark at newmarkaj@appstate.edu or Dr. Anthony J. Nownes at anownes@utk.edu. Please do not cite without permission.

It's All Relative: Interest Group Power and Influence Redefined

Debates about interest group power are nothing new to the media, pundits, and political scientists, often focusing on undue influence or issues of fairness in the advocacy process. In the past two decades, neopluralists have addressed weaknesses in conceptions of power elucidated by normative scholars, like the pluralists, who argued that interests competed for access to decision-makers (Bentley 1908; Truman 1951; Dahl 1956), as well as those who critiqued them because decision-making was often influenced by businesses, the wealthy, and other elites (Schattschneider 1960; Schlozman 1984). The pessimistic view, of course, is that some interests have disproportionate influence in the political process, and at the same time, other interests have little or no access to decision-makers. Still Lindblom (1977) acknowledged that this does not mean that businesses always get what they want, leading to neopluralist conclusions that the relationship is more complicated than previously thought (Moe 1980; Smith 1995; Gray and Lowery 1996; McFarland 2004; Witko and Newmark 2005). This suggests that influence is contingent on factors such as political climate, an organization's objectives, and the activities of allied and competing interests.

Still, a great deal of discussion tends to view power as something that is definable or at least agreed upon, which overlooks the fact that organizations have different goals and objectives. Some interests pressure government and are strongly influential over a number of policy areas and their influence extends beyond their initial purpose for lobbying. Others have disproportionate influence over competitors for resources with similar goals or opposing interests that want very different policy outcomes. Still others try to influence government in a way that has little impact beyond very specific objectives. This leaves us with several questions, some of which we address in this paper. Among them are the following: How do interest representatives perceive the level of influence wielded by the organizations they represent? How do they perceive organizations with similar goals or those with

opposing goals? Do interests that we have typically viewed as “privileged” see themselves this way? Or are there more or less universal feelings of inadequacy (or adequacy) when it comes to power and influence? Answering these questions allows us to have a better conceptualization of what it means to try to sway government. It will also allow us to see whether or not there are patterns of perceptions of influence, and to discover how the larger lobbying environment affects attempts to influence government.

Conceptualizations of Interest Organizational Influence

Research on interest group influence is varied, but one overarching theme in the literature is the notion that businesses, the wealthy, and elites have an advantage (at least some of the time). But what is interest group *influence*? One conception of influence focuses upon individual group power, and views influence as the ability of a specific group to influence policymakers in a way that helps it achieve its goals. This is a narrow depiction of influence in which individual interest groups have very specific goals, and broader influence outside of a particular policy area is not the objective. Many interest groups themselves conceptualize influence this way, including groups whose primary goal is to influence licensing rules at the state level or to defeat one very specific piece of legislation concerning their interest (Nownes and Newmark 2012). Some interest groups register to lobby only when there are specific issues on the governmental agenda that concern them, and are relatively dormant when the legislature is not considering issues directly germane to their interests.

An alternative conceptualization of power seeks to determine which types of groups are most successful at influencing policy outcomes. The most influential scholars using this conceptualization of power are Clive Thomas and Ronald Hrebenar (1990; 1996; 1999; 2004), who in a series of studies over the past two decades, have examined what they call “overall group power” in the 50 states in an attempt to rank types from most influential to least. In their most recent formulation Nownes, Thomas, and Hrebenar (2007) argue that general business interests are the most powerful types of interests in

the states, while teachers' organizations, utilities, manufacturers, hospitals, insurance-related interests, physicians, contractors, local governments, and attorneys, also have significant influence over policy-makers. The Thomas and Hrebenar rankings have been sporadically updated since their initial appearance in 1990, and they show a large degree of stability over time. There are, however, some obvious perturbations over time, as gaming interests, contractors and developers, tourism-related interests, and hospitals have improved their rankings over the years, while state employees, banks and financial institutions, and the oil and gas industry, have become relatively less influential. The waning power of "heavy hitter" interests such as banks and financial institutions and oil and gas interests contradicts simplistic portrayals of the disproportionate power of such interests often proffered by media and pundits alike. It is also noteworthy that some of these relatively powerful interests are more powerful in some states than they are in others. For example, teachers unions are more influential in the Northeast than they are in the South (where these organizations are limited by both the culture and by state laws). In addition, various methods of assessing interest group diversity across states usually demonstrate substantial variation. So, while states such as Arizona, Pennsylvania, and Texas are dominated by institutions—usually corporate institutions—states such as South Dakota, Montana, and Rhode Island have a more equitable distribution of institutions, associations, and membership groups (Gray and Lowery 1996).

In addition, power can be conceptualized as a systemic-level variable that measures the level of influence interest groups have relative to other political actors and institutions in the political system. Thomas and Hrebenar (1990; 1996; 1999; 2004; Nownes, Thomas, and Hrebenar 2007) have used this conceptualization of power to categorize state interest systems as *dominant*, *complimentary*, or *subordinate* (to other types of political actors). Typically, states with strong party systems have relatively weak interest systems. This research is important because it suggests that competition for access and other political actors affect the overall influence that interests have in the states.

Finally, some studies conceptualize interest group influence as the amount of sway interest groups have over election outcomes (Rozell, Wilcox, and Franz 2012), or lawmakers and their voting decisions (Smith 1995; Wright 1996). These studies, many of which focus on the influence of political action committees (PACs), often find little direct evidence of influence (Chapell 1982; Grenzke 1989; Smith 1995). Still, some scholars have found linkages between campaign contributions and congressional voting (Welch 1982; Peltzman 1987; Saltzman 1987; Fleisher 1993), while others acknowledge that while contributions may not buy votes, they may buy time and energy (Langbein 1986; Hall and Wayman 1990; Conway 1991).

Perceptions of Influence

Perceptions are important in the social sciences. Psychologists regularly study perceptions, as do criminologists who, for example, often examine perceptions of crime. Political scientists routinely use perceptions of the economy to predict public opinion or even election outcomes (MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson 1992; Norpoth 1996; Nadeau and Lewis-beck 2001). Perceptions of power and influence are widely used in the presidential scholarship, international relations (Herrmann 1986; Winter 2003), studies of the media (Cohen, Tsftati, and Sheaffer 2008), and interest group politics (Cooper, Nownes and Roberts (2005). In many of these examples, perceptions can be as important as reality because political actors, in part, base their behaviors on what they believe about the political world, including other actors and institutions.

Significant theoretical attention has been paid to the influences on power and influence. Given that scholars have long asserted that businesses and economic interests are in privileged positions when it comes to attempting to influence policy (Schattschneider 1960; Lindblom 1977; Schlozman 1984; Domhoff 2009), we would also assume that these interests would perceive themselves as having substantial influence over policy-makers. In short, given the “business dominance” hypothesis, we would expect that business firms, professional and trade associations, and contract lobbying firms

representing business interests would perceive themselves as relatively more influential than other types of interests. We would also expect these “privileged” interests to view opposing organizations as less influential. Businesses often have additional monetary resources to hire contract lobbyists, and their campaign contributions may grant them access to lawmakers. Contract lobbyists can utilize their contacts in the legislature to help achieve their objectives. Contrarily, we should expect charitable organizations, citizen groups, and non-profits to view themselves as less influential than business and economic interests. Further, these organizations should more likely view opposing organizations as influential. On the other hand, it is possible that those who argue that the pressure system is dominated by the wealthy, businesses, and elites may have overstated their case. This does not mean that certain interests are not advantaged, but it does call into question whether there is a monolithic business elite that gets its way in every policy debate. If this is the case, we would not expect that these interests would see themselves as more influential, nor would organizations such as charities and non-profits as always see themselves as disadvantaged.

Partisan and/or ideological differences might explain relative perceptions of power by interest groups and their representatives. It is a common assumption that interests favoring the wealthy and businesses are often associated with conservatives and the Republican Party. According to the Center for Responsive Politics, an investigative news organization that examines monetary contributions across numerous sectors, for 2013-2014, over 57 percent of contributions from the largest sector, finance/insurance/and real estate, went to Republicans compared to under 35 percent for Democrats.¹ Aside from Next Generation, which gives primarily to outside spending groups, donors from the 19 top contributors, including Goldman Sachs, Credit Union National Association, the American Bankers Association, New York Life Insurance, the National Association of Realtors, Deloitte LLP, Elliot Management, Bank of America, PricewaterhouseCoopers, and Wells Fargo gave disproportionately to

¹ Center for Responsive Politics, <http://www.opensecrets.org/industries/>. Accessed December 9, 2013.

Republicans. Similarly, nearly 56 percent of donors from miscellaneous businesses gave to Republicans compared to 37 percent, which went to Democrats.

While lawyers and law firms gave disproportionately to Democrats (70 percent versus 30 percent), the next eleven types of interests gave a greater percentage of their contributions to Republicans. Of the top 25 Interests giving to members of the Democratic Party, 14 actually gave a greater percentage to Republicans than Democrats. Comparatively speaking, of the top 25 interests giving to Republicans, 22 gave a greater percentage to Republicans than Democrats.

This does not mean that Democrats do not receive or raise sufficient funds, as the party raised more money than the Republican Party in 2008. Still, the data suggest that Republican and/or conservative leaning interests may have an advantage because of monetary or business advantages (if indeed they have such an advantage). At the very least, there is certainly the perception that interests on the right are in a privileged position. Thus, we would expect that those interests that identify as primarily siding with Democratic or left leaning interests should perceive themselves as disadvantaged. But the relationship is more complex, and is dependent on several considerations. Congruence between an interest's political leanings and that of the majority party at the state level should influence perceptions such that when the lobbyist represents interests favored by the majority party in the state, its representatives are more likely to perceive themselves as advantaged. Thus, Democratic leaning interests should view themselves as in a better position in Vermont and Oregon than Republican-leaning interests. Republican lobbyists should view themselves as more influential in Republican states such as Texas, Alabama, or Missouri compared to Democratic lobbyists. Lobbyists with partisan leanings incongruent with their state should view their organizations as relatively less influential over lawmakers, the executive branch, or public policy more generally.

Experience and time devoted to lobbying should make for better lobbyists. Professional lobbyists should likely have been in the profession longer and should work a greater number of hours

than amateur lobbyists. This increased devotion to the job should result in more proficient lobbying and increased influence, or at least the perception of it. Professional and fulltime lobbyists often have greater resources and contact networks than amateurs and those that advocate part time.

One of the key propositions of neopluralists is that context matters. Thus, we expect the political environment to influence perceptions of influence among lobbyists. Organizations compete for resources (Gray and Lowery 1996), ally with other groups (Hojnacki 1997; Gray and Lowery 1998), and have to contend with the political environment in a state or nationally. Lobbyists sometimes lobby in what Gray and Lowery (1998) called “a flock,” but the decision to join other groups may come with a price. While allying with other groups may benefit all interests in a niche, it may also result in splitting benefits with those with whom they align. Thus with finite benefits, joining with other interests can result in splitting the prize. Accordingly, interests should join with organizations that have some advantage that the former interest lacks, meaning they will ally with those that they see as more influential. At the very least, we know that the decision is based on careful consideration of the costs and benefits of joining with others (cf. Hojnacki 1997). On occasion, interests may join with opposing interests to defeat legislation that may affect interests on multiple sides of an issue. Again, the expectation is that they will only do this with groups that have some resource advantage that they lack or that the benefits outweigh the costs.

The context of the lobbying environment limits perceptions of power and influence in other ways as well. Heightened conflict should result in reduced perceptions of influence among lobbyists. Put another way, lobbyists who see themselves as more influential may not view high levels of policy conflict compared to those lobbyists who see themselves as less influential. Moreover, greater competition for access to decision makers should result in lower perceptions of influence, because they likely have less time with lawmakers and are aware that other lobbyists also have access.

Lobbyists also operate within the context of laws designed to regulate lobbying activity. The literature is varied in terms of how lobbying regulations constrain political activity. Brinig, Holcombe, and Schwartzstein (1993) suggested that lobbying regulations limit the number of registered interests. But Hunter, Wilson, and Brunk (1991) and Lowery and Gray (1997) argue that lobbying regulations do not limit the number of interests, nor the diversity of them (Gray and Lowery 1998). Regardless of whether these laws influence the number and type of interest, lobbyists often report that these laws constrain their activities. Newmark (2009), for example, found that lobbying laws influence the behaviors of lobbyists, and thus, we expect that these constraints should limit the perception of influence among lobbyists.

We are interested in how the factors we mention here affect five types of perceptions about influence. The first is relatively straightforward and is designed to capture how much influence lobbyists believe their organization has over legislators, the executive branch, and policy. Second, we are interested in perceptions of lobbyists about the influence of organizations with similar goals over legislators, the executive branch, and policy. Third, we seek to understand the perceptions of lobbyists about the influence of opposing organizations over legislators, the executive branch, and policy. The third and fourth types of perceptions are the relative assessments of influence. That is, how do lobbyists perceive their organizations vis-à-vis organizations with similar policy goals, and how do they see their organization relative to opposing interests when it comes to influence over lawmaker, the executive branch, and policy?

Design

To examine lobbyists' perceptions of influence, we conducted a mail survey of registered lobbyists in five states. The five states—Alabama, Missouri, Oregon, Texas, and Vermont—were purposively selected to obtain some variation in partisan control, partisan competition, population, region, and the number of lobbyists. The number of registered lobbyists in 2013 ranged from 1,858 in Texas to 409 in

Vermont. Oregon had 835, Missouri had 806, and Alabama had 571 registrants. Two hundred lobbyists in each state were randomly selected to complete the survey during the Fall of 2013. Reminder postcards were sent approximately two to three weeks after the initial mailing. The questionnaire was sent to specific lobbyists who registered with their state's Secretary of State's office or relevant Department or agency that handles lobbying registration.² The questions pertained to lobbying activity in the state and with the organization on whose behalf the respondent lobbies the most. Questions were designed to determine opinions on influence, competition, conflict, state regulation, and demographic characteristics of the lobbyists and the organization that they represent.

Nine questions were designed to assess self-perceptions of power, as well as perceptions of power of similar organizations and opposing ones. Three of the questions asked respondents to evaluate *their organization's* influence over the legislature, the executive branch, and policy generally; three questions addressed the influence of *similar organizations* over the same three things; and an additional three questions assessed the influence of *opposing organizations* over these. Respondents were asked about the influence of their organization, similar organizations, and opposing organizations, and a four-point likert scale was used for the response categories, ranging from "none" (coded 0) to "a lot" (coded 3). Hi alpha scores (all above 0.80) were obtained for the three questions corresponding to each of the three components. Accordingly, the three questions corresponding to the respondent organization's influence (alpha=0.823) were summed creating an index; the same procedure was performed on the questions pertaining to similar (alpha= 0.809) and opposing organizations' influence (alpha=0.861). Each resulted in an index theoretically ranging from 0 to 9. The index for the own-organization assessment ranged from 1 to 9 with a mean of 5.86 and standard deviation of 1.91. The index assessing the

² Approximately, 26 surveys were returned undeliverable for a number of reasons, including errors in the lobbying roles. We ended up with 181 useable, returned surveys. Given the variation in the number and type of lobbyists that responded to our survey, we are confident that we have a reliable sample. The response rate of 19 percent is not atypical of a number of lobbying studies (cf. Hrebenar and Thomas 1992; Gray and Lowery 1996).

influence of organizations with similar goals ranged from 0 to 9 with a mean of 5.6 and standard deviation of 1.71, while the index measuring opposing organizations' influence ranged from 0 to 9 with a mean of 5.56 and standard deviation of 2.02. We elaborate on these below.

Two relative influence measures were also created from the data. Given that organized interests often compete with similar organizations for membership and access to decision makers, the first variable is designed to assess the relative influence of a lobbyist's organization compared to interests with similar objectives. The variable is constructed by taking the difference of the two indices measuring perceptions of own organization influence and that of ones with similar goals. This variable ranges from -6 to 6, has a mean of 0.24 and a standard deviation of 1.84. The second is the difference between the respondent's organization and opposing organization indices; it is designed to capture the relative perceptions of influence comparing one's own organization to their competitors. The variable ranges from -7 to 7 and has a mean of 0.29 and standard deviation of 2.79.

Earlier, we hypothesized that certain groups would likely see themselves as more influential than similar and/or opposing interests, while others would see themselves as disadvantaged. In order to examine how the issues presented above influence assessments of power, we constructed a number of independent variables from the survey questions. For each lobbyist we have data on the type of group he/she represents, the type of lobbyist he/she is, and personal characteristics including political leanings. Thus, we were able to classify those lobbyists that work for professional/ contract firms and those who represent non-profits. We were also able to tell whether or not each lobbyist was a full-time lobbyist. We asked each respondent to indicate what type of organization he/she worked for so we could determine if certain interests were advantaged or disadvantaged. A dummy variable was created for those lobbyists who represent nonprofit corporations such as hospitals. The variable is coded 0/1 and has a mean of 0.1 and standard deviation of 0.3. A dummy (coded 0/1) was also created for each lobbyist who was deemed a professional or contract lobbyist. The mean on this variable was 0.31 and

the standard deviation was 0.46. Lobbyists were also asked about the percentage of time that they devoted to state lobbying. The variable ranged from 0 to 100, had a mean of 77.3 and standard deviation of 22.9. We also asked whether each respondent worked full time as a lobbyist. This variable is a dummy variable coded 0 or 1, with a mean of 0.56 and standard deviation of 0.5. To capture the level of experience of lobbyists, we asked the number of years they have in the profession. The variable ranged from 1 to 52 years, with a mean of 14 and standard deviation of 10.2.

Two variables examine the role of partisanship in the state. The first is a measure of the partisanship of the lobbyist, and is a seven-point measure ranging from 1 to 7 with a mean of 3.56 and standard deviation of 2.07. The second partisan measure, party congruence, is a dummy variable coded 1 if the lobbyist's party identification matches the dominant party in government in the state, and 0 otherwise.³ The variable has a mean of 0.3 and standard deviation of 0.46

Several variables were constructed to measure the context in which lobbyists operate. Each of these was derived from survey questions asking respondents whether in policy areas in which they are most active, a given statement was a *poor description*, a *good description*, or *somewhere in between*. Lobbyists were asked if there were lobbyists on both sides of issues, and the variable ranged from 0 to 2 with a mean of 1.77 and standard deviation of 0.52. Variables were also constructed assessing whether they *rely upon allied groups* (mean=1.3; std. dev.=0.74), whether they *rely on opponents to stop legislation* (mean=1.8; std. dev.=0.47), and whether *state lawmakers sought advice* from them (mean=1.2; std. dev.=0.68).

Additional contextual variables were measured on a four-point scale asking respondents whether they agreed with statements ranging from "not at all" to "a great deal." The variable asking whether they compete with others for access ranged from 0 to 3, had a mean of 1.41, and had a

³ Vermont and Oregon were considered Democratic states, while Texas, Alabama, and Missouri were considered Republican states. Missouri's governor is a Democrat, but both legislative chambers are Republican controlled. Since the state generally leans Republican, it was coded as such for the partisan congruence measure.

standard deviation of 1.1. Other variables were designed to assess whether state laws constrained interactions with lawmakers and/or make lobbyists' jobs more difficult. These included variables derived from questions asking whether interactions were constrained by state lobbying laws (mean=1.15; std. dev.=1.01), whether registration laws makes their job difficult (mean=0.32; std. dev.=0.62) , and whether disclosure requirements make their job difficult (mean=0.42; std. dev.=0.65).

Findings

We begin by looking at how lobbyists perceive the influence of interests. Table 1 provides a preliminary look at how lobbyists view their own influence, that of organizations with similar goals, and their competitors. With a few exceptions, lobbyists tend to view their organizations as more influential than similar or opposing interests. For example, when asked about the extent of a lobbyist's influence over legislators, 28.9 percent of respondents indicated "a lot" in regards to their own organization, compared with only 19.9 percent for organizations with similar goals, and 24.4 percent for opposing organizations. The surveyed lobbyists were also more likely to indicate "a lot" of influence over policy for their own organization (25.4 percent) compared to organizations with similar goals (14 percent) or opposing interests (14.9 percent). If we look at the mean scores on a four-point scale (last column) ranging from no influence ("none") to "a lot" of influence, it is clear that stated influence for one's own organization is generally higher than perceptions of organizations with similar goals or opposing ones. The mean score for one's own organization's influence over lawmakers was 2.13 compared to 2.00 for similar organizations and 1.96 for opposing interests. Difference of means tests comparing one's own organization's influence over lawmakers with, first, organizations with similar goals, and second, opposing interests, yielded significantly different mean values for each comparison. There was little difference comparing mean influence over the executive branch, but there was a statistical difference when it came to influence over policy. The mean score for respondent's organization was 1.98 compared to 1.87 for organizations with similar goals, and 1.8 for the opposition. In regards to influence

over policy, T-tests revealed significantly different mean values comparing one's own organization to organizations with similar goals and comparing own organizations to opposing interests. The data suggest that, systematically, lobbyists report that their own organizations are more influential than other organizations, at least when it comes to influence over lawmakers and policy more generally. Why they have this inflated sense of power is unclear, however.

Table 1 about here

We wanted to determine whether appraisals of lobbyists' own organizations, those with similar goals, and opposing interests are part of a common factor, or rather three distinct assessments. Principal component confirmatory factor analysis revealed that there were three factors corresponding to the influence of the lobbyist's own organization, that of organizations with similar goals, and opposing organizations. The pattern matrix shown in Table 2 uses oblique rotation (Oblimin) and converged in 11 iterations. The high loadings presented in Table 2 indicate that one factor corresponds to the influence of *your organization* (0.941, 0.801, and 0.768), one corresponds to *organizations with similar goals* (0.879, 0.900, and 0.882), and one corresponds to *opposing interests* (-0.833, -0.769, and -0.898). Accordingly each of the three questions corresponding to each of these factors was summed to create an index assessing each of these constructs. As noted earlier, reliability analysis revealed alpha scores of 0.823, 0.809, and 0.861 for each set of three questions, so we are confident in our construction of our indexes assessing perceptions of influence.

Table 2 about here

We now turn to a multivariate examination of the determinants of influence and relative influence of organizations on lawmakers, the executive branch, and policy. All models are estimated with ordinary least squares regression, given the distribution of the dependent variables. The first data column on Table 3 presents the effects on respondent's assessments of their own organization's influence. As expected, if the views of the lobbyist's organization are congruent with the majority party

in the state, they perceive themselves as more influential compared to those organizations that either do not have political leanings or oppose the majority party in the state. The coefficient on the congruence variable is reasonably large (0.72), significant at the .05 level, and it is in the expected positive direction. We also find that a lobbyist's interaction with other interests affects their perceptions of power. The assumption is that there is strength in numbers, as multiple interests may band together to help pass or defeat legislation. It also appears that relying on allies or opponents to help defeat legislation reduces a lobbyist's own assessment of their organization's influence. The negative coefficients (-0.391 and -0.598) are both significant at the 0.05 level and suggest that those organizations that rely on other groups may do so because they view their organizations as relatively disadvantaged. As expected, lobbyists who report that lawmakers seek them out for advice relatively often are more likely to view their organizations as influential than are lobbyists who do not report that they are sought out for advice often. The coefficient is in the expected positive direction and is significant at the 0.001 level. In contrast, but consistent with predictions, competition for access is expected to reduce perceptions of own organization influence. Despite mixed evidence in the literature that lobbying registration matters in terms of affecting lobbying behavior, respondents at least perceive that these laws matter in assessment of influence. Those who indicated that registration requirements made their jobs more difficult also suggested that their organization was less influential compared to other interests. Surprisingly, for those lobbyists who report that state laws constrain their interactions, we see the opposite effect. Further, lobbyists reporting that disclosure requirements made their jobs difficult also indicated that their organizations were more influential.

Table 3 about here

The second data column in Table 3 reports lobbyist's views of power of organizations with similar goals. This analysis is largely exploratory, but the most important thing to note is that the congruence variable is positive and statistically significant indicating that lobbyists who represent

organizations with political leanings that are consistent with the state's partisanship assess their allies as influential over lawmakers, the executive branch, and policy. We also expect that those lobbyists who report that they more likely rely on allies also view organizations with similar goals as influential. The variable assessing whether state laws constrain relationships was also positive and significant.

But how do lobbyists judge the opposition when it comes to power? Turning to the last column in Table 3, we find that lobbyists who spend a greater percentage of time on state lobbying are expected to report greater influence of opposing organizations than those who devote less time to state lobbying. Additionally, those who report that there are multiple sides to the issues on which they lobby, those who rely on opponents, and those who report that there is policy conflict with other organizations view opposing interests as more influential. Thus, there is some support for our competition-related hypotheses. These are intuitive observations, as we would expect these factors to increase the perceptions of opposing organizations' power. As we should expect, the congruence variable is negatively signed, and it is significant at the 0.05 level. Lobbyists who represent organizations with congruent views as the state can be expected to evaluate opposing interests as less influential over lawmakers, the executive branch, and policy in the state. So, when lobbyists and the organizations have similar political views as those of government officials in the state, they likely view their opponents as disadvantaged.

Table 4 presents two models examining the effects of the independent variables on two relative measures of influence. Again, the models are estimated with ordinary least squares. The first model assesses the relative influence of lobbyists compared to organizations with similar goals. These organizations may compete with each other for resources such as members or access. Organization type, experience, and the party variables are not expected to influence relative power assessments. Reliance on allies or opponents, however, can each be expected to result in relatively lower assessments of power. Both variables are negatively signed and are statistically significant. Notably, when a lobbyist

relies on allies, we can expect that he/she will view interests with similar goals as more powerful relative to his/her own, and the coefficient is fairly large (-0.83). On the other hand, lobbyists who indicate that lawmakers seek their advice view themselves as significantly more influential than organizations with similar goals. The effect of lobbying laws was mixed when it comes to relative influence. Lobbyists that report that registration laws make their job more difficult are expected to report relatively less influence than similar organizations, but those that report that disclosure requirements make their jobs more difficult can expect to see nearly a point increase in their relative influence for a one unit change in the independent variable ($p < 0.001$).

Table 4 about here

Turning to relative influence of one's own organization compared to competing interests, we examine the same set of predictors on this dependent variable (Table 4). As expected, lobbyists for nonprofit corporations view their organizations as relatively less influential than competing interests; lobbyists for professional or contract firms see themselves as more influential than opposing organizations, though the magnitude of the coefficient is a bit smaller. Full time lobbyists and those with a greater number of years of experience view their organizations as more influential than their competitors compared to part-time lobbyists and those with fewer years of experience. Unexpectedly, those lobbyists that devote a greater percentage of their time to state lobbying, are also expected to view their organizations as relatively less influential in comparison to those lobbyists who devote less time to state activity. Those lobbyists devoting a greater amount of time to their profession may do so because they lobby on complex and competitive issues and are fully aware of the multitude actors involved and difficulties in influencing lawmakers, the executive branch, and policy.

We hypothesized that lobbyists whose partisan leanings were congruent with the partisanship of state government, would view themselves as more influential than lobbyists incongruent with their state, and the results confirm this expectation. The party congruence variable is in the expected positive

direction, and it is significant at the 0.001 level. Not surprisingly, lobbyists who report that lawmakers seek their advice see themselves as more influential than their competitors. It is likely that legislators are more likely to seek the advice from partisan allies, so it is not surprising that we can expect nearly a full point increase in the dependent variable for a unit increase in the seeking advice measure.

On the other hand, lobbyists relying on opponents view their rivals as relatively more influential than their own organizations, and the coefficient is quite large (-1.4) and highly significant ($p < 0.001$). Lobbyists reporting competition for access and greater levels of policy conflict also view their organizations as less influential than those who do not witness substantial competition or levels of policy conflict.

Again, the results are mixed when it comes to lobbying regulations. Like the previous model, we find that those lobbyists reporting that registration requirements make their jobs more difficult indicate their organization at a disadvantage when it comes to influence. Disclosure laws, on the other hand, have the opposite effect; lobbyist reporting that this makes their job more difficult are expected to view their organization as more influential than opposing interests, and the coefficient indicates nearly a point increase on this index ($p < 0.01$).

Discussion and Conclusion

Lobbyists appear to perceive their organizations as more influential than organizations with similar goals or those on the opposing side of policy debates. What we do not know is why this is the case. Are lobbyists simply immodest, overestimating their abilities? Perhaps they surround themselves with like-minded lobbyists and public officials, resulting in perceptions that they are more influential than they are in reality. Or maybe the propensity to report their own organization as more influential is a function of wanting to appear that way on a survey. Obviously, all lobbyists cannot be more influential than their counterparts within other organizations. We expected that lobbyists representing certain types of interests would clearly recognize their relative advantages and disadvantages. In only one model did we

find that professional/contract lobbyists reported higher levels of influence, while lobbyists representing non profit corporations had lower relative assessments of influence. Several models not shown in this manuscript examined lobbyists in trade associations, businesses, charities, and religious organizations; the commonality was a lack of statistical difference in perceptions of influence across organizational type. These null findings may be a function of the fact that groups that are often viewed as disadvantaged focus on a relatively narrow set of goals that are achievable, instead of attempting broad ranging influence. Thus, when asked about their influence, they report their limited successes within their niches, instead of overall perceptions of power. With limited resources, most interests focus lobbying efforts on only those things most important to them. We also fail to find systematic and monolithic dominance of interests often portrayed as advantaged on every issue.

Rather than simple black and white conceptions of power, influence is contingent on a number of factors in the states and political environment. By themselves, the partisanship of lobbyists and their organizations had no impact on perceptions of influence. Republicans did not see themselves as advantaged, nor did Democrats see themselves as disadvantaged (or vice versa). Instead, context mattered, as party congruence was an important determinant of perceptions of influence in four out of five models. As expected, lobbyists with partisan leanings in states with similar partisanship view themselves and interests with similar goals as more influential. These lobbyists likely have greater access to decision-makers and are probably on the same side of issues with lawmakers more times than not. This also suggests that lobbyists allying themselves with the minority party are aware of their disadvantages. Further, when lobbyists' partisanship aligns with the dominant party in the state, they view their opponents as less influential in both absolute and relative terms, suggesting that they are aware of their advantages.

Other contextual factors appear to provide opportunities and constraints on perceptions of influence, as well. Relying on allies is not uncommon for interests, as they often have mutual concerns

including regulations, taxation, or the receipt of government benefits. And the rationale is that there is strength in numbers. We certainly do not dispute this point, but we do offer a few observations. It may be the case that lobbyists only resort to banding together under certain circumstances such as when they cannot achieve their objectives on their own. It is also likely that lobbyists band together with other organizations that they perceive as having greater levels of influence. These may be organizations with greater resources or additional contacts. This is also consistent with expectations given Hojnacki's (1997) work on the conditions under which organizations will join coalitions. Further, there are times when lobbyists may have to rely on opponents to kill legislation or agency rules/ regulations that might be a threat even to interests on opposite sides of an issue. But making a deal with the devil also comes with a cost, and organizations should only do it with those interests that have some relative advantage that they lack. Similarly, competition and policy conflict appears to have some depressing effect on lobbyists' perceptions of their own influence and their influence relative to other organizations. Conversely, we would expect that a lack of competition would increase the probability that interests will be influential over policy outcomes (Nownes 2001). This fits nicely with the notion that interest communities influence lobbying activity.

Finally, lobbying laws had some mixed effects when it came to perceptions of influence. Lobbyists who reported that lobbying registration requirements made their jobs more difficult also viewed their organizations as less influential. This is not surprising given the scholarship that suggests that these requirements do make a difference. While these laws may not actually affect the density (Gray and Lowery 1998b) or diversity (Gray and Lowery 1998a) of interests, lobbyists still think they matter, and this may influence behavior. But those who felt that disclosure requirements were a burden indicated that their organization was more influential. It may be the case that lobbyists believe that these reporting requirements have greater constraint on other organizations, perhaps leveling the playing field. They may believe that other lobbyists utilize questionable practices, and requiring

disclosure restricts opponents who would otherwise use these tactics. This is speculative and further research is necessary to unpack these seemingly contradictory findings. At the very least, we can conclude that lobbyists perceive regulations as influencing behaviors (Newmark 2009).

This study is of course limited in that we assess perceptions of influence, and it is uncertain whether this equates to actual power and influence. We have reason to believe that perceptions of power are important and do serve as a useful measure of actual power. Many lobbyists have on-going relationships with fellow lobbyists and lawmakers, and they likely have a pretty good idea of who the key players are in interest communities. But as we know from decades of research on the study of influence, measuring this concept is extraordinarily difficult. Understanding how lobbyists perceive their influence, and that of other organizations, are important considerations for understanding the lobby process. And this is likely one of those areas where perceptions of influence are actually important, because how lobbyists assess themselves relative to other organizations may influence their decisions about what strategies to use, whether they pursue inside or outside strategies, and whether they lobby alone or seek out allied groups or opponents.

References

- Austen-Smith, D. (1995). Campaign Contributions and Access. *The American Political Science Review*, 566-581.
- Baumgartner, F. R., & Leech, B. L. (1998). *Basic Interests: The Importance of Groups in Politics and in Political Science*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Bentley, A. F. (1908). *The Process of Government: A Study of Social Pressures*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Brinig, M. F., Holcombe, R. G., & Schwartzstein, L. (1993). The Regulation of Lobbyists. *Public Choice*, 377-384.
- Chappell, H. W. (1982). Campaign Contributions and Congressional Voting: A Simultaneous Probit-Tobit Model. *Review of Economic and Statistics*, 77-83.
- Cohen, J., Tsifti, Y., & Sheafer, T. (2008). The Influence of Presumed Media Influence in Politics: Do Politicians' Perceptions of Media Power Matter? *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 72: 331-344
- Cooper, C.A., Nownes, A.J., & Roberts, S. (2005). Perceptions of Power: Interest groups in Local Politics. *State and Local Government Review*, 206-216.
- Conway, M. M. (1991). *Political Participation in the United States*. Congressional Quarterly.
- Dahl, R. A. (1956). *A Preface to Democratic Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Domhoff, G.W. (2009). *Who Rules America?* Prentice Hall.
- Fleisher, R. (1993). PAC Contributions and Congressional Voting on National Defense. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 391-409.
- Gray, V., & Lowery, D. (1993). The Density of State Interest Group Systems. *Journal of Politics*, 191-206.
- Gray, V., & Lowery, D. (1996). *The Population Ecology of Interest Representation: Lobbying Communities in the American State*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Gray, V., & Lowery, D. (1997). How Some Rules Just Don't Matter: The Regulation of Lobbyists. *Public Choice*, 139-147.
- Gray, V., & Lowery, D. (1998a). State Lobbying Regulations and Their Enforcement: Implications for the Diversity of Interest Communities. *State and Local Government Review*, 78-91.
- Gray, V., & Lowery, D. (1998b). The Density of State Interest-Communities: Do Regional Variables Matter? *Publius*, 61-79.
- Grenzke, J. M. (1989). PACs and the Congressional Supermarket: The Currency is Complex. *American Journal of Political Science*, 1-24.
- Hall, R. L., & Wayman, F. W. (1990). Buying Time: Moneyed Interests and the Mobilization of Bias in Congressional Committees. *The American Political Science Review*, 797-820.

- Herrmann, R. (1986). The Power of Perceptions in Foreign-Policy Decision Making: Do Views of the Soviet Union Determine the Policy Choices of American Leaders? *American Journal of Political Science*, 841-875.
- Hojnacki, M. (1997). Interest Groups' Decisions to Join Alliances or Work Alone. *American Journal of Political Science*, 61-87.
- Hunter, K. G., Wilson, L. A., & Brunk, G. G. (1991). Complexity and Interest-Group Lobbying in the American States. *The Journal of Politics*, 488-503.
- Langbein, L. I. (1986). Money and Access: Some Empirical Evidence. *The Journal of Politics*, 1052-1062.
- Lindblom, C. E. (1977). *Politics and Markets: The World's Political-Economic Systems*. New York: Basic Books.
- MacKuen, Michael B., Robert S. Erikson, and James A. Stimson. 1992. "Peasants or Bankers? The American Electorate and the U.S. Economy." *American Political Science Review* 86:598-611.
- McFarland, A. S. (2004). *Neopluralism*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.
- Moe, T. M. (1980). *The Organization of Interests: Incentives and the Internal Dynamics of Political Interest Groups*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Nadeau, Richard and Michael S. Lewis-Beck. 2001. "National Economic Voting in U.S. Presidential Elections." *The Journal of Politics*. 63:159-181.
- Newmark, A. J. (2009). Personal Relationships and Information as Lobbying Strategies: Adaptation in the Context of the American States. In C. McGrath, *Interest Groups and Lobbying in the United States and Comparative Perspectives*. Edwin Mellon Press.
- Norpoth, Helmut. 1996. "Presidents and the Prospective Voter." *The Journal of Politics*. 58:776-792.
- Nownes, A. J. (2001). *Pressure and Power: Organized Interests in American Politics*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Nownes, A. J., & Newmark, A. J. (2013). Interest Groups in the States. *Politics in the American States*. . In *Politics in the American States*. Eds. Virginia Gray and Russell L. Hanson. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.
- Nownes, A., Thomas, C., & Hrebentar, R. (2007). Interest Groups in the States. *Politics in the American States*, 98-126.
- Peltzman, S. (1987). Regulation and Health: The Case of Mandatory Prescriptions and an Extension. *Managerial and Decision Economics*, 41-46.
- Rozell, M. J., Wilcox, C., & Franz, M. M. (2012). *Interest Groups in American Campaigns: The New Face of Electioneering*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Saltzman, G. M. (1987). Congressional Voting on Labor Issues: The Role of PACs. *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 163-179.
- Schattschneider, E. (1960). *The Semisovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Schlozman, K. L. (1984). What Accent the Heavenly Choir? Political Equality and the American Pressure System. *Journal of Politics*, 1006-1032.
- Smith, M. A. (2000). *American Business and Political Power: Public Opinion, Elections, and Democracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Thomas, Clive S., & Hrebener, R. J. (1990). Interests Groups in the States. *Politics in the American States*, 123-158.
- Thomas, Clive S., & Hrebener, R. J. (2004). Interest Groups in the States. *Politics in the American States: A Comparative Analysis*, 100-128.
- Thomas, C. S., & Hrebener, R. J. (1996). Interest Groups in the States. *Politics in the American States: A Comparative Analysis*, 122-158.
- Thomas, C. S., & Hrebener, R. J. (1999). Interest Groups in the States. *Politics in the American States: A Comparative Analysis*, 113-143.
- Truman, D. B. (1951). *The Governmental Process: Political Interests and Public Opinion*. New York: Knopf.
- Welch, S., & Combs, M. W. (1982). Blacks, Whites, and Attitudes Toward Abortion. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 510-520.
- Winter, D. G. (2003). Asymmetrical Perceptions of Power in Crisis: A Comparison of 1914 and the Cuban Missile Crisis. *Journal of Peace Research*, 251-270.
- Witko, C. and Newmark, A. J. (2005) Business Mobilization and Public Policy in the U.S. States. *Social Science Quarterly*, 356-367.
- Wright, J. R. (1996). *Interest Groups and Congress: Lobbying, Contributions, and Influence*. Needham Heights: Allyn and Bacon.

Table 1. Influence of Own Organizations, Organizations with Similar Goals, and Opposing Organization

How much influence do you believe...	None	A little	Some	A lot	Mean (S.D.)
a. ...your organization has over legislators in your state? (N=180)	0.6	15.0	55.6	28.9	2.13 (0.67)
b. ...your organization has over the executive branch in your state? (N=181)	7.2	27.1	49.7	16	1.75 (0.81)
c. ...your organization has over policy in your state? (N=181)	1.7	23.2	49.7	25.4	1.99 (0.75)
d. ...organizations with similar policy goals to yours have over legislators in your state? (N=181)	1.1	18.2	60.8	19.9	2.00 (0.65)
e. ... organizations with similar policy goals to yours have over the executive branch in your state? (N=181)	3.3	29.8	54.1	12.7	1.76 (0.71)
f. ... organizations with similar policy goals to yours have over policy in your state? (N=179)	1.1	25.1	59.8	14.0	1.87 (0.65)
g. ...opposing organizations (that is, organizations that generally take policy stances different from yours) have over legislators in your state? (N=180)	1.7	25.0	48.9	24.4	1.96 (0.75)
h. ...opposing organizations (that is, organizations that generally take policy stances different from yours) have over the executive branch in your state? (N=180)	4.4	28.3	47.8	19.4	1.82 (0.79)
i. ...opposing organizations (that is, organizations that generally take policy stances different from yours) have over policy in your state? (N=181)	2.2	30.4	52.5	14.9	1.80 (0.71)

Table 2. Factor Loadings of Influence of Own Organization, those with Similar Goals, and Opposition

How much influence do you believe...	1	2	3
a. ...your organization has over legislators in your state?	.941	-.050	.098
b. ...your organization has over the executive branch in your state?	.801	-.023	-.092
c. ...your organization has over policy in your state?	.768	.085	-.168
d. ...organizations with similar policy goals to yours have over legislators in your state?	.047	-.008	-.833
e. ... organizations with similar policy goals to yours have over the executive branch in your state?	.129	.055	-.769
f. ... organizations with similar policy goals to yours have over policy in your state?	-.058	-.036	-.898
g. ...opposing organizations (that is, organizations that generally take policy stances different from yours) have over legislators in your state?	.165	.879	.133
h. ...opposing organizations (that is, organizations that generally take policy stances different from yours) have over the executive branch in your state?	-.041	.900	-.023
i. ...opposing organizations (that is, organizations that generally take policy stances different from yours) have over policy in your state?	-.157	.882	-.122

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 11 iterations.

Table 3. Influence over Legislators, the Executive Branch, and Policy

Variable	Own Organization	Organizations with Similar Goals	Opposing Organizations
Nonprofit Corporation	-0.471 (0.457)	-0.107 (0.476)	0.744 (0.523)
Professional/Contract Lobbyist	0.334 (0.338)	0.487 (0.352)	-0.525 (0.387)
Percent time spent on State Lobbying	-0.012 (0.006)	-0.004 (0.007)	0.017* (0.007)
Full Time	0.440 (0.301)	0.244 (0.313)	-0.309 (0.345)
Years Experience	0.014 (0.015)	0.012 (0.015)	-0.021 (0.017)
Party ID	-0.023 (0.068)	-0.047 (0.071)	-0.035 (0.078)
Party congruence	0.722* (0.312)	0.577* (0.325)	-0.656* (0.357)
Multiple Sides to Issue	0.308 (0.302)	0.133 (0.315)	1.030** (0.346)
Rely on Allies	-0.391* (0.190)	0.438* (0.198)	0.002 (0.218)
Rely on Opponents	-0.598* (0.327)	-0.023 (0.341)	0.841* (0.375)
Lawmakers Seek Advice	0.793*** (0.210)	0.115 (0.219)	-0.129 (0.241)
Competition for Access	-0.292* (0.129)	-0.020 (0.135)	0.066 (0.148)
Policy Conflict with Other Organizations	-0.057 (0.208)	-0.271 (0.219)	0.576** (0.238)
Interactions Constrained by State law	0.368* (0.158)	0.316* (0.164)	0.015 (0.181)
Registration Laws Make job Difficult	-0.598* (0.273)	0.029 (0.285)	0.242 (0.313)
Disclosure Requirements Make Job Difficult	0.803** (0.252)	-0.125 (0.263)	-0.173 (0.289)
Constant	6.157*** (0.851)	4.622*** (0.886)	1.106 (0.975)
Adjusted R-Square	0.267	0.004	0.164
Std. Error of the Estimate	1.645	1.714	1.885

Models were estimated with ordinary least squares. *= $p < 0.05$; **= $p < 0.01$; ***= $p < 0.001$

Table 4. Factors Influencing Relative Influence to Other Organizations

Variable	Relative influence to Organizations with Similar Goals	Relative Influence to Opposing Organizations
Nonprofit Corporation	-0.365 (0.457)	-1.215* (0.648)
Professional/Contract Lobbyist	-0.153 (0.338)	0.860* (0.480)
Percent time spent on State Lobbying	-0.008 (0.006)	-0.029*** (0.009)
Full Time	0.196 (0.301)	0.749* (0.427)
Years Experience	0.002 (0.015)	0.035* (0.021)
Party ID	0.024 (0.068)	0.013 (0.097)
Party congruence	0.145 (0.312)	1.378*** (0.442)
Multiple Sides to Issue	0.176 (0.302)	-0.722* (0.429)
Rely on Allies	-0.829*** (0.191)	-0.393 (0.270)
Rely on Opponents	-0.574* (0.328)	-1.438*** (0.465)
Lawmakers Seek Advice	0.678*** (0.210)	0.922*** (0.298)
Competition for Access	-0.272* (0.129)	-0.358* (0.184)
Policy Conflict with Other Organizations	0.214 (0.208)	-0.633* (0.295)
Interactions Constrained by State law	0.052 (0.158)	0.353 (0.224)
Registration Laws Make job Difficult	-0.627* (0.273)	-0.841* (0.388)
Disclosure Requirements Make Job Difficult	0.928*** (0.253)	0.976** (0.359)
Constant	1.535* (0.851)	5.051*** (1.208)
Adjusted R-Square	0.253	0.318
Std. Error of the Estimate	1.645	2.336

Models were estimated with ordinary least squares. *= $p < 0.05$; **= $p < 0.01$; ***= $p < 0.001$