ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS IN THE U.S. POLITICAL PROCESS

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■ **Abstract**   We examine scholarship on the role and influence of advocacy organizations in the U.S. political process. We identify common theoretical questions in the disconnected literatures on social movements, interest groups, and nonprofits, and we propose a unifying conceptual framework for examining advocacy organizations. Focusing on the post-1960s growth in advocacy organizations, we examine major organizational characteristics including organizational structures, membership and participation, resources, and interorganizational networks and coalitions. Our analysis of organizational influence focuses on five dimensions of the policy process: (*a*) agenda setting, (*b*) access to decision-making arenas, (*c*) achieving favorable policies, (*d*) monitoring and shaping implementation, and (*e*) shifting the long-term priorities and resources of political institutions. Finally, we identify recurrent theoretical and methodological problems, including the compartmentalization of research within disciplines, an overreliance on studies of large national organizations, a disproportionate focus on recruitment and selective incentives, and limited research on the influence of advocacy organizations. We conclude by highlighting productive pathways for future scholarship.

INTRODUCTION

Social scientists studying social movements, interest groups, nonprofits, and democratic politics share common intellectual questions about the causes and consequences of collective action in pursuit of social and political change. In this review, we integrate the overlapping research traditions that focus on the role and influence of advocacy organizations in the U.S. political process. We focus on the post-1960s advocacy explosion, examining arguments about the growth, demography, and impact of these organizations. We examine scholarship on the U.S. case, where this phenomenon and the broader questions about advocacy organizations

have received the most sustained analysis.[1] We attempt to bring greater clarity to parallel literatures that are too often fragmented and compartmentalized within disciplinary boundaries. Finally, we identify recurrent theoretical and methodological problems and point to productive pathways for future scholarship.

Within the scholarship on advocacy organizations, sociologists played their most central role from the 1940s through the 1970s in theoretical debates and empirical research (e.g., Mills 2000, Hunter 1969). Since that time, political sociologists have shifted their focus to microlevel questions of individual participation and identity on the one hand and to macrolevel questions of political institutions and culture on the other. Thus, the middle range analysis of group political behavior and ongoing policy dynamics is underdeveloped within contemporary political sociology. Political scientists have sustained a more active research tradition about advocacy organizations, yet political organizations have declined relatively on the intellectual agenda of political science as well. Most research has focused narrowly on the free-rider problem, and existing scholarship does not yield significant consensus on many questions of interest (Baumgartner & Leech 1998).

Nevertheless, scholars in several disciplines, including sociology, political science, and the interdisciplinary field of nonprofit research have returned to questions about the role of political groups, broadly understood. One motivation for recent scholarship derives from the ongoing debates about social capital and civic engagement (Putnam 2000, Skocpol 2003, Skocpol et al. 2000). Arguments about the role of organizations in political socialization along with survey research showing the impact of organizations on individual political participation and political identities have provided a useful corrective to demand-side explanations that focus narrowly on social-psychological characteristics and motivations of individuals (Brady et al. 1999, Edwards & McCarthy 2004, Klandermans 1997, Rosenstone & Hansen 1993, Wilson 1973). This line of research directs our attention to the meso-level dynamics of organizations that generate opportunities for and constraints on participation.

In the following section, we present a conceptual synthesis aimed at bridging parallel but disconnected scholarship, and we summarize the approach and contributions of the three main disciplines that have examined advocacy organizations. We then assess research on the growth of advocacy organizations and their core dimensions that have been studied widely—including organizational structures, membership and participation, resources, and interorganizational networks. Next, we survey recent scholarship on the influence of advocacy organizations on policy, organizing this discussion around major dimensions of the policy process, specifically agenda setting, political access, policy enactment, policy implementation, and long-term institutional priorities and resources. In our conclusion, we elaborate on key problems and highlight productive pathways in the study of advocacy organizations.

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[1]Analyses of the literature on advocacy organizations at the international level and cross-nationally is much needed but beyond the scope of this paper.

ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS: A CONCEPTUAL SYNTHESIS

The first task for this paper is to clarify what we mean by advocacy organizations and show how this concept differs from and overlaps with other concepts that capture a subset of the groups examined here. Various disciplines have weighed in on these questions, resulting in an overlapping array of terms, defining characteristics, and distinctive emphases. Thus, the current literature is confusing as scholars studying similar phenomena in neighboring disciplines fail to learn from one another. We present a synthetic definition in which advocacy organizations make public interest claims either promoting or resisting social change that, if implemented, would conflict with the social, cultural, political, or economic interests or values of other constituencies and groups. As a basis for this synthesis, we briefly review the main lines of research on interest groups, social movement organizations, and nonprofits.

Interest Groups

Interest groups are typically defined very broadly as voluntary associations independent of the political system that attempt to influence the government (Burstein 1998, Walker 1991, Wilson 1973). Using this definition, Walker (1991, pp. 59–60) found that 38% of Washington, DC–based interest groups were from the for-profit sector and comprised of professionals advocating the interests of a particular group of firms on a fee-for-service basis. This includes groups like the Chemical Manufacturer's Association and Mortgage Bankers Association. Another 33% were what Walker called the nonprofit sector. Such groups represent the interests of certain types of government agencies, such as the National Association of Counties, or of nonprofit organizations, such as the American Association of Medical Colleges. In recent years, scholars have studied a subset of these organizations, referred to as citizen groups or public interest groups, that have a closer affinity to the focus of this review. Such groups comprised about 24% of DC-based interest groups at the time of Walker's study. Walker differentiated such groups as having no occupational barriers to membership and being organized around ideas or causes (Walker 1991, p. 61). Berry defines a public interest group as "one that seeks a collective good, the achievement of which will not selectively and materially benefit the membership or activists of the organization" (Berry 1977, p. 3). This is the subset of interest groups that falls within the purview of this paper.

The origins of research on interest groups in political science lie in early scholarship on the pressure group system and lobbyists (Truman 1951, Milbrath 1963). Nevertheless, Moe noted that "very little is actually known about the nature of interest groups as organizations" (Moe 1980, p. 219). The past 20 years have, however, seen a surge of research with many important advances in the literature made by several studies using surveys of national interest groups (Baumgartner & Leech 1998). Among these, Schlozman & Tierney (1986), Berry (1989), Walker

(1991), and Heinz et al. (1993) built large, survey-based datasets of national interest groups, in some cases further limiting their attention to groups reputed to be especially influential in their respective policy domains. Laumann & Knoke (1987) and Knoke (1990) examined large, national organizations, no matter where they were headquartered. More recently, Gray & Lowery (1996) and Nownes & Freeman (1998) have examined interest groups at the state level.

Cigler (1991) divides the questions about interest groups into those concerning (*a*) demand aggregation, including how groups mobilize financial and human resources; and (*b*) group impact, including what groups actually do and what impact they have. He further concludes that the gains in the first area substantially surpass those of the second. Recent research has provided insight into how interest groups overcome Olson's (1965) free-rider problem (e.g., Ostrom 1990). The importance of institutional patrons in funding political action is better understood (Baumgartner & Leech 1998). Overall, the large-scale surveys have provided cross-sectional profiles of the organizational structure of national interest groups and the relationship of that structure to broader contextual factors. These studies have documented Schattschneider's (1960) assertion about a "mobilization of bias" in the structure of interest group representation, with businesses and occupations better represented among national interest groups than those with less affluent constituencies or those rooted in moral or ideological appeals (Edwards & McCarthy 2004).[2]

Social Movement Organizations

Definitions of social movement organizations often focus on the pursuit of a collective good, as with Berry's "public interest groups." Zald & McCarthy define a movement organization as "a complex, or formal organization that identifies its goals with the preferences of a social movement or a countermovement and attempts to implement those goals" (Zald & McCarthy 1987, p. 20). They further differentiate these organizations from interest groups by the level of institutionalization and routinization of relations with government (McCarthy & Zald 1977). Similarly, Jenkins treats social movement organizations as seeking changes "outside the institutionalized system of decision making" (Jenkins 1987, p. 298; see also Minkoff 1995). We discuss this distinction in greater detail below. Scholars of social movements have been more likely to focus on organizations promoting precisely the types of claims underrepresented among national interest groups. For example, Tilly's (1978) "polity model" defined challengers as operating outside the polity although frequently working with allies inside the polity to mobilize and secure concessions.

In general, the prevailing research strategies in scholarship on social movements are similar to interest group research, with relatively few systematic analyses of social movement organizations. Substantial analytic attention has focused on issues

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[2]This pattern at the organizational level is mirrored by studies that identify a similar social class bias in individual political participation, especially in political groups (Brady et al. 1995, Verba et al. 1995).

arising from the "iron law of oligarchy" (Lipset et al. 1977, Michels 1958) and the free-rider problem (Olson 1965). Studies of broad populations of organizations are rare, and most have been done on large, national organizations (Brulle 2000, Dalton 1994, Gamson 1990, Minkoff 1995, Mitchell et al. 1992). Systematic treatments of small organizations are limited to specific issues, including environmental, anti–drunk driving, peace, feminist, and homeless groups (Alter 1998, Cress & Snow 1996, Edwards & Marullo 1995, Kempton et al. 2001, Lofland 1993, Martin 1990, McCarthy & Wolfson 1996). As with interest group studies, comparability of findings across studies is limited by differences in conceptualization, measurement, and methodological problems.

In the effort to distinguish social movement organizations from interest groups, some scholars have focused on other characteristics of organizations, such as the moral or ideological content of claims and the use of noninstitutionalized, disruptive, or outsider tactics. For example, Lofland defines movement organizations as "associations of persons making idealistic and moral claims about how human personal or group life ought be organized" (Lofland 1996, p. 3; see also Walker 1991). However, moral and ideological claims are present throughout the political arena and are hardly exclusive to social movement organizations. The use of disruptive forms of action is appropriately considered a defining characteristic of a broader social movement (Tarrow 1998), but this does not imply that all organizations acting on behalf of a social movement will use such tactics themselves. Concepts like "disruption" and "outsider tactics" are used very differently across disciplines, and even across studies within the same discipline. For example, political scientists often consider any effort to appeal to the public or mobilize citizens to contact political authorities (e.g., by mailing postcards) as outsider tactics (Kollman 1998, Walker 1991). In contrast, social movement scholars usually reserve such labels for action that includes or implies threats, disruption, violence, or action that is illegal. Moreover, assuming definitional issues could be resolved, questions remain concerning how often or how recently a group engages in disruption. Thus, suggestions to differentiate movement organizations from interest groups based on characteristics of members, goals, tactics, scope of operations, or organizational form have significant problems demonstrated by existing empirical and theoretical work (Burstein 1998).

The most convincing argument for differentiating interest groups and social movement organizations focuses on the greater institutionalization of interest groups. However, there is no established consensus on how to measure this distinction empirically. Variation in the degree of inclusion or exclusion from institutionalized decision making is most likely one of degree (rather than a dichotomy) that could be measured by the amount of routine interactions with powerful actors, such as funding from government or foundations or collaboration with corporations or public officials. Support for a categorical distinction could be strengthened if measures of institutionalization are highly correlated with other characteristics of advocacy organizations. However, we maintain that a broader focus on all advocacy organizations should be used to test arguments about institutionalization rather than an a priori categorical division of organizations.

Nonprofit Organizations

The nonprofit sector refers to the diverse set of organizations that are neither profit making nor governmental. The three-sector model of "state-market-civil society" upon which these characterizations implicitly rest is a useful heuristic, but as one examines the nonprofit sector more closely, the boundaries between sectors blur rather quickly. Nonprofit scholars often focus on the role of nonprofits in service provision as a core function of the sector, but other scholars highlight the political, representative, or advocacy roles of nonprofits.

Nonprofit scholars have attempted to differentiate and study that subset of nonprofit organizations that engages in advocacy. O'Neill defines such organizations as:

> primarily involved with lobbying or disseminating information directed toward broad societal objectives or collective goods rather than outcomes of benefit only to their own members. Even when advocacy organizations represent a particular group—such as women, members of minority' groups, physically handicapped people, victims of drunk driving, and potential victims of handgun attacks—there is an implicit assumption that actions benefiting these people will benefit all of society (O'Neill 1989, p. 110).

Overall, these organizations have received far less attention from nonprofit scholars than other forms such as hospitals, service agencies, or cultural and art organizations.

In practice, operational definitions for nonprofit research in the United States rely on existing sources of data—most importantly *The Encyclopedia of Associations* and federal and recently state-level databases from tax documents. As a subset of the nonprofit population, organizations that focus primarily on advocacy are a relatively small proportion. Boris & Krehely (2002) found that between 1.2% and 1.5% of all 501(c)(3) organizations reported lobbying expenses between 1989 and 1998. However, J.D. McCarthy and J. Castelli (unpublished manuscript) note that advocacy, if defined more broadly than lobbying, is common across nonprofit organizations.

The reliance on tax data to define advocacy leads to two gaps in the nonprofits view of advocacy. First, the notion of advocacy is limited to the tax code definition; thus, groups that undertake those legally specified activities are advocacy groups, yet even those groups often engage in a range of other educational and service activities. Second, the nonprofits literature has virtually ignored advocacy organizations that operate outside the confines of the tax code. Smith (2000) demonstrates this pattern across numerous issue arenas where small, volunteer-run organizations are excluded from consideration in most nonprofit research. Moreover, available evidence suggests that such groups comprise a substantial subset of all advocacy organizations (Edwards & Foley 2003). In sum, nonprofit scholarship on advocacy organizations has a great deal of conceptual continuity with related concepts of public interest groups and social movement organizations. This conceptualization

differs in that nonprofit scholars locate advocacy organizations within the broader organizational field of nonprofits rather than in the political process. Another key difference is that nonprofit scholars rely on different sources of data that hold substantial problems and important opportunities for researchers.

Synthesis

Many of the influential definitions of public interest groups, social movement organizations, and nonprofit advocacy organizations share a core focus on the pursuit of a collective good framed in the public interest. Jenkins (1987) refers to this as a substantive definition of advocacy. This conception has had its critics, and alternative criteria have been used in defining advocacy organizations. The procedural view highlights the difficulty in assessing whether claims are in the public interest or represent a collective good. As an alternative, the procedural view conceptualizes advocacy organizations as representing marginalized or excluded interests and constituencies (Jenkins 1987). For example, Lofland's definition of movement organizations requires that a group's claims "are marginal to or excluded from mainstream society—the then dominant constructions of what is realistic, reasonable, and moral" (Lofland 1996, p. 3).

Other scholars have attempted to isolate distinctive characteristics of the organizational form. One of the most common is the notion of a grassroots organization. Smith defines these as "locally based, significantly autonomous, volunteer-run formal nonprofit (i.e., voluntary) groups that manifest substantial voluntary altruism and use the associational form of organization" (Smith 2000, p. 7). This definition emphasizes the territorial scope and the absence of paid staff. Another characteristic that some scholars use to study subsets of advocacy organizations is membership. Both Knoke (1990) and Walker (1991) restrict their studies to groups that have individual members. Yet, as Baumgartner & Leech conclude, membership is a "deceptively complicated concept" (Baumgartner & Leech 1998, p. 33) because it takes different forms by different organizations. Using a single form of membership as a defining characteristic excludes unnecessarily from consideration several increasingly significant organizational forms such as coalitions and federations. These and related efforts narrow the scope of inquiry by imposing a dichotomy on the broader set of advocacy organizations. Although factors such as scope of operations, absence of paid staff, or individual members are all important, these qualities are better conceptualized as variables. The causes and consequences of organizational heterogeneity become key analytic questions for scholars of advocacy organizations.

Overall, there is substantial common ground in conceptual definitions of public interest groups, social movement organizations, and nonprofit advocacy organizations. Most of the divergence comes from differing research strategies and questions. We focus on groups and organizations that make public interest claims either promoting or resisting social change that if implemented, would conflict with the social, cultural, political, or economic interests or values of other constituencies and groups. Thus, we treat as variables some phenomena that other scholars would

use to define a subset of advocacy organizations, such as tactics, strategy, scope, organizational form, and targets. Within that broader population of organizations, we focus on groups and organizations whose primary focus is making public claims and pursuing related social changes. Thus, we do not focus on organizations that provide resources or that facilitate or are intermittently drawn into political debates, social movements, or policy advocacy. With this framework we turn to questions about the emergence and characteristics of advocacy organizations.

Unfortunately, the field of inquiry is hampered by what might be called a "tyranny of existing data." This tyranny is threefold. First, all three fields have been advanced primarily as researchers have taken advantage of data collected for purposes other than theory testing and development, so the biases built into existing databases and directories of advocacy organizations are reflected in current scholarship. Second, there is a relative lack of systematic data on advocacy organizations at the state and local level. Third, in all three areas, the case study has been the predominant type of research. Much has been learned about how advocacy organizations operate, yet there is limited guidance about how to nest specific groups or types of groups within the broader populations of which they are a part. Thus, making clear comparisons across studies and especially across disciplines remains difficult at best.

THE GROWTH AND STRUCTURE OF ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS

Across the literatures described above, there is broad consensus about the massive growth in the sector of advocacy organizations in the period from the 1960s to the present, and scholars have identified major causes of this growth. Most analyses of historical patterns have relied on founding dates of contemporary organizations (Schlozman & Tierney 1986, Walker 1991). Scholars have traced these dynamics more closely for shorter time periods or within specific issue domains, showing rapid growth within such sectors as ethnic and racial, women's, environmental, and gay and lesbian organizations (Armstrong 2002, Brulle 2000, McLaughlin & Khawaja 2000, Minkoff 1995).

Knoke (1986) identified some of the historical reasons for this growth in the United States as: congressional reorganization, post-Watergate election reforms, conflicts over regulation and deregulation, unraveling of the two party system, and ideological polarization. Minkoff's work (1995, 1997) on the growth of racial and ethnic and women's organizations suggests that the institutionalization of the movements of the 1960s and 1970s contributed to this growth as well. Broader data on the growth of advocacy organizations cross-nationally and at the global level suggest that there are more general processes driving this increase as well (Frank et al. 2000, Smith et al. 1997).

Theoretical explanations for the growth in advocacy organizations have focused on social instability, entrepreneurs and resource mobilization, political opportunity

structures, and cultural theories emphasizing values and underlying logics of action (Berry 1997, Jenkins 1987). The claim that broad social and political disturbances create the conditions for the formation of interest groups is the central thesis of Truman's (1951) classic study. The argument for resource mobilization and entrepreneurs focuses on societal affluence at the macrolevel creating the opportunities at the microlevel for leaders to market issues and agendas, creating competition and diversification within populations of advocacy organizations (McCarthy & Zald 1977). Political opportunity structure arguments focus on the stable and dynamic aspects of the political system to explain the emergence of new political challengers (Meyer & Imig 1993, Tarrow 1998). Two lines of cultural argument have been advanced that present additional explanations for a growth in advocacy organizations. Some scholars have pointed to what Inglehart (1989) has called a culture shift in advanced industrial societies, including increased support for postmaterial values and the organizations representing these values (see also Dalton 1994, Rochon 1998). Building on neo-institutional arguments, sociologists have pointed to the diffusion of cultural templates that provide logics of action and legitimation facilitating the growth of advocacy organizations (Armstrong 2002, Lounsbury et al. 2003, McLaughlin & Khawaja 2000).

Next we turn to a discussion of core characteristics of advocacy organizations—organizational structures, membership and participation, resources, and interorganizational networks and coalitions. We describe debates about these concepts, empirical patterns, and theoretical expectations and arguments regarding the influence of advocacy organizations.

Organizational Structures

Questions about the organizational structures of advocacy organizations connect to a long theoretical tradition. Specifically, the ideas of Weber and Michels have influenced all subsequent work, as scholars have attempted to determine whether organizations suffer from an "iron law of oligarchy" whereby goals of organizational maintenance and career advancement by leaders displace broad social change goals and democratic participation. Research by Knoke (1990) and others have moderated the dire predictions of the Weber-Michels thesis. Jenkins (1983) and Zald & Ash (1966) note that this model assumes the predominance of a single organizational form where movements are characterized by heterogeneity in organizational forms and the trajectories of organizational change (Minkoff 1999).

Bureaucracy and authority are the core elements of organizational structures examined in prior scholarship. Significant debate surrounds questions of the relationship between each and the broader influence of advocacy organizations. Gamson (1975) found that bureaucratization facilitated the success of U.S. challenging groups. This finding has been contested by Piven & Cloward (1978), among others, who point to the ways that mass-based bureaucratic organization undermines mass mobilization. Similarly, there is wide disagreement about the consequences of different forms of authority within organizations.

Membership and Participation

Membership in advocacy organizations is widespread in the contemporary United States (see, for example, Verba et al. 1995, pp. 62–63). Most studies of membership among advocacy organizations have focused on motivations for participation and the influence of organizational incentives on recruitment and retention of members. Thus, Olson's arguments have been influential in structuring research on membership (Knoke 1990, Walker 1991). For example, Knoke reports from his surveys of organizations and members "that individual decisions are affected by rational, normative, and affective components" (Knoke 1990, p. 223). Most studies show that the incentives of members were far more diverse than material incentives including what Wilson (1973) calls purposive and solidary incentives. Rothenberg's study of Common Cause argued that participation is structured by an "experiential search process" where different types of incentives matter at different points (Rothenberg 1992, p. 258). Research on social movements suggests that disembodied recruitment technologies, like direct mail and media appeals, can be successful in generating weaker forms of membership, but technologies that depend on social networks and face-to-face interaction are more successful in recruiting adherents into stronger membership roles (Diani 2004). That literature also suggests that, in general, those who respond to recruitment appeals by advocacy organizations tend to be the more privileged individuals among the movement adherents, thereby exacerbating the impact of privilege on patterns of organizational participation (Brady et al. 1999, Lofland 1996, p. 210).

The predominant emphasis on the free-rider problem carries the implicit assumption that advocacy organization members are individuals, yet recent research has made it clear that advocacy groups use a range of membership strategies (Foley & Edwards 2002, Walker 1991). Recent literature has identified four broad membership strategies: (*a*) no members of any kind, (*b*) individual members only, (*c*) organizational members only, or (*d*) a mix of both organizations and individuals. Walker (1991, p. 65) found that 39% of Washington-based interest groups had exclusively organizational members, 32% had exclusively individuals as members, and the remaining 29% had a mix of each (see also Edwards & Foley 2003). Variations in membership strategy affect the degree of formalization and participation, as well as the range of tactics groups use to pursue their goals (Foley & Edwards 2002, pp. 26–27).

Requirements for organizational members differ substantially from what is required of individual members. Many at the local, state, and national levels require organizational members to agree with their mission statements, with a majority requiring that they pay dues, engage in joint actions, and send representatives to policy and planning meetings (Foley & Edwards 2002). Organizational memberships may not ensure a broad range of face-to-face interaction among individual members, but they do build significant connections among the organizations involved, leading to stronger infrastructures and issue networks.

Resources

Studies of social movement emergence and early mobilization have stressed the importance of pre-existing social and organizational resources (McAdam 1982, McCarthy & Zald 1977, Morris 1984, Oberschall 1973, Schwartz 1988, Tilly 1978). Similarly, the emergence and maintenance of advocacy organizations depend on various kinds of resources.

In the early 1970s, McCarthy & Zald (1973) argued that the emerging trend for U.S. movements was toward professional social movement organizations such as Common Cause or Public Citizen. Professional movement organizations use paid staff to aggregate privately held resources for collective purposes from socially dispersed individuals. As Walker (1991) found, the vast majority of national interest group budgets were devoted to personnel costs. Professional advocacy organizations are particularly vulnerable to criticisms rooted in the "iron law of oligarchy" and the expectation that paid staff will displace movement goals in deference to exigencies of organizational maintenance and career advancement. Such groups were criticized by a range of social movement scholars for undermining protest and disruptive actions considered important to the social change preferences of poor and marginalized groups (Piven & Cloward 1978). In a study of local pro-choice groups, Staggenborg (1991) found that professionals tended to formalize organizations so that they could persist when facing threats or challenges, and professionalized groups were more likely to use institutional tactics and work in coalitions, and, contrary to some expectations, professional staff increased member participation. Jenkins & Halcli (1999) have documented the key role played by philanthropic foundations in the growth of professional advocacy organizations, and they show the role of mass protest in driving the overall expansion of foundation funding. They also contend that professional advocacy organizations (and foundation funding for them) have been critical in the institutionalization of gains by major social movements. Professional movement organizations command greater resources than other advocacy organizations, yet compared to other actors in the national interest group system they are relatively small and underresourced (Baumgartner & Leech 1998, Walker 1991).

Contemporary analysts of advocacy generally take for granted that resource availability enhances the likelihood of collective action with a large proportion of studies focusing on the availability of financial and human resources (e.g., Baumgartner & Leech 1998, Cress & Snow 1996, Edwards & McCarthy 2004). The resources crucial to the initiation or continuation of advocacy are unevenly distributed within societies and among them. Moreover, within a society the control of resources varies from one social group to another, as it does among the various members of each group. Middle- and upper-class groups remain privileged in their access to many kinds of resources, and, not surprisingly, issue advocacy that resonates with the concerns of relatively privileged social groups predominate while advocacy by the poor is much less common in advanced industrial democracies (Edwards & McCarthy 2004).

The concept of resources is central to any analysis of power and conflict relations. Yet by the mid-1990s, Cress & Snow (1996) could still argue persuasively that little progress had been made in anchoring resources empirically or explicating them conceptually. Cress & Snow developed an inductive taxonomy of moral, material, informational, and human resources from their analysis of homeless organizations in eight U.S. cities. Edwards & McCarthy (2004) have developed a more general theory of resources and access to them. Their differentiation of moral, cultural, human, social-organizational, and material resources draws upon recent scholarship of advocacy, social movements, and beyond (Bourdieu 1986, Coleman 1988, Lin 2001). They argue that advocacy organizations rely on multiple means of gaining access to needed resources, discussing four predominant modes: self-production, resource aggregation, resource appropriation, and patronage. The four modes of access are discussed in conjunction with the five resource types—moral, cultural, social-organizational, human, and material. From this standpoint the long-standing debates over financial patronage represent one among many distinct exchange relationships through which advocacy organizations access or create resources. This line of analysis inevitably raises the question of the kinds of effects those exchange relationships have on movement goals, activities, and broader influence.

Interorganizational Networks and Coalitions

The development of network analysis has enabled more focused treatment of a long-standing insight into the importance of social networks within and between advocacy organizations. The importance of networks to a social movement's form has been recognized since Gerlach & Hine's (1970) discussion of movements as segmented, polycephalous, and reticulate forms. Gerlach & Hine demonstrated the advantages of this network form of organization in the context of the Black Power movement and Pentecostal religion, and they contrasted it with large, hierarchical, and bureaucratic organizations. Social networks may be conceived of as preconditions capable of either constraining or facilitating movement mobilization and also as the outcomes of movement mobilization (Diani 1995, p. 7). In either case, the narrower and more isolated networks are, the less useful they are expected to be in sustaining the mobilization of advocacy.

In recent years the application of network analysis to social movements and advocacy organizations has grown rapidly (see Diani 1995, Diani & McAdam 2003, Gould 1991, Kitts 2000). Knoke & Wisely (1990, p. 70) argue that there is an inverse relationship between social homophily and networked access to resources whereby the like-attracts-like principle of homophily leads advocacy groups over time to develop more homogeneous memberships that leave them relatively isolated from the surrounding social structure.

Network relations can also provide access to key resources needed to sustain advocacy (Lin 2001). Advocacy groups that choose to have organizational members formalize network ties and create institutionalized ties through which resources

can be shared. Diverse organizational leaders or participants can provide connections beyond the advocacy organization, thus establishing weak ties that broaden the movement's capacity (Ganz 2000). Arguably, network ties between organizations lack strong mechanisms of accountability and responsibilities that come with formal coalition participation. Coalitions have become a widespread advocacy strategy and interest in coalition formation, management, and effectiveness is growing (Rochon & Meyer 1997). For example, environmental groups in North Carolina have formed more than a dozen distinct issue coalitions through which to coordinate advocacy, lobbying, and protest activities (Andrews & Edwards 2002). In general, there is strong consensus about the importance of research on this area of organizational networks, but there is relatively weak evidence for assessing research questions.

Summary

The preceding sections have reviewed current knowledge about the growth and characteristics of advocacy organizations along several key dimensions, including: organizational structures; membership and participation; resources, including staff and funding; and interorganizational networks. Overall, the research reviewed here presents promising leads but few conclusive patterns. We examine research and debate concerning the strategies and tactics of advocacy organizations alongside research concerning organizational influence in the policy process. Although these are the aspects of advocacy organizations that have been studied most closely, we also note that several areas should receive greater attention, including leadership in terms of individual characteristics and structures that channel or facilitate specific leadership models. In addition, scholars of advocacy organizations have only begun to examine the cultural components of organizations—either in the goals, values, and claims making, or in the logics of action that shape the rituals and taken-for-granted models of organizational practices.

THE ROLE AND INFLUENCE OF ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS IN POLITICS

Analysis of the role and influence of advocacy organizations in politics has been limited by methodological challenges and abstract debates detached from strong empirical research. Overall, the limited systematic research has helped to reinforce concerns about the difficulties of studying the influence of advocacy organizations. That said, important conceptual and empirical work has been done that establishes a foundation for future scholarship. Given the significance of these questions, the potential benefits are well worth the challenges.

The major challenges in research that attempts to gauge the influence of advocacy organizations are (*a*) conceptualizing influence, and (*b*) accounting for additional explanatory factors and rival theories. The strongest basis for examining the potential influence of advocacy organizations is through measurement

across different dimensions of the policy process, and this is how we organize the following sections. Our conceptualization identifies five major categories: (*a*) agenda setting, (*b*) access to decision-making arenas, (*c*) achieving favorable policies, (*d*) monitoring and shaping implementation, and (*e*) shifting the long-term priorities and resources of political institutions.[3] This conceptualization builds on prior models of the policy process (Amenta et al. 1999, Andrews 2001, Burstein et al. 1995, Giugni 1998, Kingdon 1984).[4] This type of model assumes that each part of the policy process is shaped by different explanatory factors. As such, the role and influence of advocacy organizations should vary in magnitude and form depending on which component of the policy process is being examined.

The second challenge is examining rival explanations and the complex causal patterns that could undermine any significance attributed to advocacy organizations. In research on the population of advocacy organizations, surveys based on large samples of organizations have provided some of the clearest contributions to intellectual progress. Yet when scholars attempt to assess the influence of advocacy organizations, this type of research design is often much weaker than studies focused more narrowly on a specific policy domain, where rival explanations can be tested more systematically and specific mechanisms of influence can be observed (Amenta et al. 1999, Andrews 2001, Banaszak 1996, Burstein & Freudenberg 1978, Burstein 1985, Lauman & Knoke 1987, McAdam & Su 2002, McCammon et al. 2001). This divergence in research strategies poses challenges for linking scholarship on the structure and influence of advocacy organizations. Gamson's (1990) study of challenging groups is one of the few efforts to systematically examine influence across a representative sample of advocacy organizations. However, the study is criticized for relying on limited indicators of success (Amenta & Young 1999, Andrews 1997). An additional problem emerges in studies that gauge the influence of a specific organization because most political outcomes derive from the cumulative influence of multiple organizations as well as other explanatory factors such as the characteristics of political institutions, public opinion, opponents, and allies.

Agenda Setting

Many scholars of social movements and public interest groups assume that agenda setting is the arena where advocacy organizations will have their greatest influence. Through demonstrations, education campaigns, and lobbying, advocacy

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[3]The major alternative to organizing this discussion around components of the policy process would be focusing on different aspects of advocacy organizations (such as bureaucratization, resources, etc.). We discuss these explanatory factors in the context of different aspects of the policy process.

[4]We focus on the first four in greater detail because the fifth form of influence derives from the broad and enduring influence of advocacy organizations on earlier components of the policy process. We do not discuss the influence of advocacy organizations in the courts or on elections (see Burstein 1991, McCann 1994 on courts, and Andrews 1997 on elections).

organizations attempt to bring greater attention, raise awareness, and create urgency around claims. These efforts are conducted in a dense environment of competing issues and ideas, and the mass media is an important intermediary institution that shapes the agenda-setting processes. Scholars often distinguish between the "public agenda" of preferences held by broad sectors of society and the "formal agenda" of decision makers (Jenkins 1987). Thus, within democratic theory the obvious question concerns the extent to which the formal agenda reflects the broader public agenda (Page 1994). From the perspective of research on advocacy organizations, the question is whether (or under what conditions) the arguments and action of advocacy organizations influence either the public or formal agendas. If many advocacy organizations compete with better funded opponents who have greater influence on public officials and policy, then mass mobilization and/or disruption may provide the best strategic opportunities for these organizations.

The mass media and public opinion are important venues for gauging the influence of advocacy organizations on the public agenda, and each is a potential mediating factor that shapes the broader influence of advocacy organizations. Rochon (1998) claims from his research on civil rights, women's, and environmental movements that a major source of shifts in the public agenda are the ideas developed in what he calls "critical communities"—clusters of intellectuals providing persuasive critiques and advocating fundamental changes in society. He argues that broader movements and advocacy organizations are the carriers of these transformative ideas found, for example, in such texts as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* or Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. The frames that movements and related advocacy organizations articulate and champion are one possible way that movements exert influence. In a study of advocacy by homeless movement organizations in U.S. cities, Cress & Snow (2000) found that the presence of what they call diagnostic and prognostic frames were critical in securing resources, rights, and relief. Diagnostic frames focus on defining issues and can assign blame, and prognostic frames identify possible remedies and solutions to existing problems. Thus, advocacy organizations may be able to shape whether and how their claims influence the broader society, including the mass media and public opinion.

Although the way that organizations articulate their claims may account for variation in influence, most scholars suggest that influence is constrained by additional movement characteristics and conditions in the broader social environment. This claim is supported by Cress & Snow's (2000) findings, which show the importance of strong organizations across different types of outcomes and the role of political institutions and disruptive tactics under certain conditions.

Research on the mass media coverage of collective action events and advocacy organizations points to the selectivity of the media in shaping the amount and form of coverage for different types of collective actors and issues. Research on collective action (or protest events) has shown the clearest patterns of selection bias in the reporting of collective action. The size of events is, not surprisingly, a strong predictor of coverage, but "issue attention cycles" and news routines have

also been found to structure news coverage (Downs 1972, McCarthy et al. 1996, Oliver & Maney 2000).

On the media coverage of organizations, Danielian & Page (1994) studied 893 television news stories involving interest groups between 1969 and 1982, and they found that business and corporate groups were mentioned most frequently, followed by citizen action groups, 36.5% and 32% respectively. They also found that most coverage (79.6%) of business and corporate groups was based on "statements" such as press releases, in comparison to citizen action groups who were covered most frequently when they held demonstrations. Their study suggests that, even though advocacy organizations do get coverage, news stories about them present minimal content by focusing on the event rather than the issues and that stories tend to present advocacy organizations in an unfavorable light, blunting their potential impact. This finding is supported by Gitlin's (1981) study of the New Left, which showed that media coverage had a dramatic influence on the internal operations of movement organizations, shaping the strategic decisions and leadership dynamics in ways that undermined the movement's efficacy.

Baumgartner & Jones's (1993) influential study treats media coverage as the public agenda, measuring the amount and "valence" of coverage.[5] Even though public opinion and the mass media may be highly correlated, there is good reason to examine them independently, as well as the relationship between them. Turning to public opinion, we find relatively few studies and significant disagreement about the impact of advocacy organization on public opinion.

In one of the most influential analyses, Burstein (1985) found that, during the effort to pass and implement equal employment opportunity laws, the attitudes of white Americans were becoming more supportive of racial equality before the civil rights movement. Instead of shifting the direction of public opinion, the civil rights movement influenced the salience of racial inequality, thereby creating greater political urgency to develop favorable policies.

The debates and research about the relationship of public opinion and policy are beyond the scope of this paper (see Burstein 2003, Manza & Cook 2001), but several points should be highlighted. Certainly, there has been extensive research on whether public officials are responsive to public opinion. Page (1994), one of the leading scholars, argues that the correlation between public opinion and policies is generally high, but this does not necessarily indicate a causal relationship because public opinion could be influenced by policies, a problem for all cross-sectional studies of this relationship. Time-series analyses examining U.S. states have provided the strongest support for the causal link between public opinion and policy because the sequencing of change can be studied (Erikson et al. 1993, Fording 2001, Radcliff & Saiz 1998). One limitation of these comparative state studies is that they rely on general measures of political liberalism rather than issue-specific measures of public opinion. Qualitative studies of decision making

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[5]Similarly, some scholars of social movements have argued that only protest that gets covered has the potential for broader societal influence (Lipsky 1968).

by public officials can also contribute to this debate. In a study of state legislative staff, Herbst (2001) argues that political actors lack polling data on their constituents and distrust polls, so they rely on what interest groups tell them about constituency preferences and what the media reports to gauge public opinion (see also Mansbridge 1986). Thus, advocacy organizations may play an important role in interpreting or even constructing public opinion. In addition, when we consider that public opinion cannot provide detailed information about the content of policy alternatives, these findings suggest that advocacy organizations, among others, play a potential mediating role between public opinion and policy.

In recent years many advocacy organizations have attempted to influence public opinion through education and awareness campaigns. These are some of the most labor and capital intensive of the technologies employed by advocacy organizations. Gaining media attention to a movement's issues and goals is an important aspect of defining issues and creating consensus. Some evidence indicates that media coverage is influenced by the amount of material resources an advocacy organization has and the amount allocated toward achieving coverage (Barker-Plummer 2002).

Scholars of grassroots lobbying argue that this strategy has grown in recent years as organizations mobilize citizens to write, call, or visit public officials (Kollman 1998, Goldstein 1999). Kollman argues that these efforts are most successful when they "seem to lack orchestration" (Kollman 1998, p. 75). Based on his study of liberal advocacy organizations, Berry (1999) makes the conflicting argument that grassroots lobbying is often ineffective because citizen mobilization occurs after policy alternatives have been considered and specific legislation is under consideration. Berry contends that professional lobbyists can have much greater substantive impact than mass mobilization by participating at earlier stages and shaping the content of legislative proposals.

Standing and Participation in Decision Making

Although agenda setting is important, many scholars focus on the more proximate mechanisms of influence that derive from participation in decision-making processes. As Knoke observed, "studies of collective decision-making at both local and national levels often find extensive collaborative efforts, suggesting that networks of interorganizational exchange may be a significant factor shaping the dynamics and outcomes of influence activities" (Knoke 1986, p. 17). Direct participation in decision making indicates a level of legitimacy and recognition for advocacy organizations that differs from agenda setting. Sabatier (1991) argues that understanding the policy process requires focusing on an "intergovernmental policy community or subsystem—composed of bureaucrats, legislative personnel, interest groups leaders, researchers, and specialist reporters within a substantive policy area—as the basic unit of study" (Sabatier 1991, p. 148). Under conditions of relative stability, these relationships within a policy domain are the primary venue through which the content of policy is defined. Advocacy organizations can

influence actors in policy domains indirectly, but in such cases there is greater likelihood that the content and implementation of policy will be less favorable or even antagonistic to advocacy organizations and their constituencies (Andrews 2004, Browning et al. 1984, Jaynes 2002, Santoro & McGuire 1997).

Many advocacy organizations, like other interests, view lobbying as important and have ongoing relations with public officials. For example, Walker's (1980) survey of Washington, DC–based interest groups found that the majority lobbied administrative agencies (80.1%) and legislative bodies (78.0%). This finding is confirmed in other surveys of national and state-level advocacy organizations. Other common political behaviors reported in these surveys include testifying at hearings, presenting research results, working in coalitions, drafting legislation and regulations, and talking to reporters (Berry 1977, Heinz et al.1993, Schlozman & Tierney 1986). Nownes & Freeman's (1998) survey of state-level interest groups provides a very similar profile based on the frequency of reported activities.

Walker identified two important subsets of groups based on insider strategies ("lobbying, litigation, and electioneering") and outsider strategies ("efforts to generate publicity and mold public opinion") (Walker 1991, p. 110). Edwards & Foley's (2003) analysis of peace movement organizations found that national organizations are significantly more likely than others to engage in national insider tactics, although only 30% of national peace groups did so. National outsider tactics are much more widespread among peace groups, with as few as 63% of national and as many as 71% of small local organizations using them. Andrews (2001) found that local civil rights movements had greater influence on the funding and content of poverty programs when they were able to engage in direct negotiation with government agencies as well as disruptive and persuasive protest.

The federalist political institutions in the United States maximize opportunities for advocacy organizations to find allies at some level of government. In an analysis of multiple target lobbying, or what he calls "all-directional advocacy," Browne argues that "there always is someone who occupies a political office who will eventually listen to nearly any interest" (Browne 1998, p. 360). Thus, the amount of lobbying may be too crude a measure to provide any insight about the potential influence of organizations. This raises the question of whether advocacy organizations primarily attempt to communicate with allies. If so, we might expect that politically weak advocacy organizations secure relationships with politically weak allies in government such that lobbying adds little to the overall efficacy of organizations. Based on a 1996–1997 survey of Washington area interest groups, Leech & Baumgartner (1998) found that nonprofits (like other interest groups) attempt to influence a mixture of political actors who are allies, opponents, and undecided targets. They contend that these targets play quite different roles. Groups collaborate with allies early in the policy process to influence content while legislation is in committee, and they shift their strategy to focus primarily on key undecided legislators when trying to build broader support for passing or defeating legislation. This finding supports the general claim that organizations benefit most from a combination of weak and strong ties that multiply the likelihood of group

influence through multiple mechanisms (Andrews 2001, Ganz 2000). Although most nonprofits in Leech & Baumgartner's (1998) sample use indirect lobbying (asking a government official to contact another government official on the organization's behalf), it is important to note that this strategy is used much less frequently by nonprofits (61%) than other lobby groups (e.g., 89% for business corporations and unions). This pattern suggests the more modest levels of access enjoyed by advocacy organizations compared with other political actors.

Efforts to examine the participation of advocacy organizations in the decision-making process need greater sensitivity to the specific venues in which organizations work and to their collaborators. However, there are limitations to relying exclusively on measures of "access" to assess broader influence. The most important limitation is the difficulty in distinguishing between cooptation or symbolic achievements and more substantive influence on political institutions and policies.

Policy Enactment and Implementation

The most visible and celebrated indicator of influence in the policy process is the achievement of favorable policies. Far-reaching, landmark legislation such as the major civil rights and environmental legislation of the 1960s is the result of multiple causal factors and varies across policy domains. However, the primary strategy that scholars have used to study legislation is to examine the various components of the legislative decision. This includes the earlier dimensions of the policy process as well as studies of roll-call voting and state-level ratification of constitutional amendments. Other strategies include research assessing the impact of endorsements by advocacy organizations on the success of candidates for elected office or ballot initiatives (e.g. Gerber & Phillips 2003). In a review of interest group influence on the U.S. Congress, Smith reports that interest groups have "low to moderate levels of success in influencing congressional outcomes, although the nonacademic, narrative case studies tend to depict interest groups as far more influential" (Smith 1995, p. 117; see also Fowler & Shaiko 1987).

In many recent U.S. social movements, protest can be conceived as a product of advocacy organizations, given their role in organizing and sustaining demonstrations, rallies, and other forms of protest. Sociologists have examined the impact of protest on congressional voting in several cases, finding a modest positive influence in most cases. Burstein & Freudenberg (1978) found that antiwar protest increased slightly the number of pro-peace votes in the Senate between 1964 and 1973. McAdam & Su (2002) studied the same case but distinguished between the effects of disruptive protest and large but moderate antiwar protest on the direction and pace of congressional voting. They found that disruptive protest increased the likelihood of pro-peace voting but depressed the amount of congressional activity on the issue. Finally, Soule et al. (1999) examine the effect of women's collective action on congressional hearings and roll-call votes, finding minimal evidence that collective action influenced political outcomes. Arguably, the quantitative studies of roll-call voting may overlook the prior role of advocacy organizations in framing

and ensuring that policy issues are considered in the first place. A broader limitation of the studies of protest impact is the aggregation of data to the national level because elected officials may be more sensitive to mobilization within their districts than to annual shifts in protest across the United States. Nevertheless, these findings on protest influence do provide additional insight into the effect of group mobilization on legislative action. In combination with the findings on the influence of interest group lobbying, current scholarship indicates a modest role at best for advocacy organizations on congressional voting patterns. However, research has been limited to a very small number of issue domains. This literature would benefit from studies that specify the conditions under which advocacy organizations and protest activity have greater or lesser influence.

Although securing policies is the most visible achievement, policies can be reduced to symbolic politics through unfavorable implementation. Thus, one of the key questions about the influence of advocacy organizations is the extent to which the ongoing implementation of policies is favorable to the goals and broader constituency of the group.

State institutions structure opportunities for influence by advocacy organizations. For example, school desegregation was implemented throughout the South in a relatively closed process involving federal and local government officials, in contrast to poverty programs that established local community boards that became venues for wide-ranging community conflict concerning representation and racial inequality (Andrews 2004). Rochon & Mazmanian (1993) found that antitoxic groups generated significant political leverage through participation in local regulatory bodies, in contrast to the antinuclear movement, which pursued a single, overarching goal. Sabatier (1975) reports that administrators in the National Air Pollution Control Administration actively cultivated community support from advocacy organizations to generate a constituency that could legitimate tougher enforcement of environmental laws through the funding of local workshops on air quality.

From the perspective of advocacy organizations, ongoing effort to monitor policy implementation requires sustained activity, and in many cases this requires highly professionalized work. Such efforts may have important consequences when favorable implementation requires advocacy organizations to act as whistleblowers. Thus, the periods following policy enactment and preceding it may be the most decisive for the broader influence of advocacy organizations. Analyses of these periods before and after enactment require more subtle measurement and pose additional challenges to studying these questions.

The broader influence of advocacy organizations on the resources and priorities of political institutions reflects the cumulative influence of the policy process as a whole. Such assessments are constrained by the overall limitations of research in this area. Nevertheless, it is important to note some suggestive findings in work by sociologists and political scientists on this question. Although most studies of legislative voting find minimal effects for advocacy organizations, some studies of policy outputs across U.S. states, municipalities, and counties, such as funding

or enforcement, find that advocacy organizations play an important role in securing favorable outcomes (Andrews 1998, Andrews 2001, Hays et al. 1996, Radcliff & Saiz 1998).

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have reviewed recent scholarship on advocacy organizations focusing on the fields of political science, sociology, and nonprofit research. Each discipline has attempted to make sense of the emergence, characteristics, and influence of advocacy organizations. Yet scholars rarely learn from important studies in neighboring disciplines. We introduce a conceptual synthesis and identify areas of convergence and divergence.[6]

We find several major factors limiting advance in this area. The reliance on public directories and lists of organizations has facilitated numerous studies, but limitations with these sources are also reflected in current scholarship. Studies of interest groups have used directories of organizations as the primary basis for identifying groups. In some cases, media coverage or reputation have been used to supplement published lists in constructing sampling frames for large surveys. Sociologists have tended to focus on specific issue arenas or movements. One important exception is Gamson's (1990) study of U.S. challenging groups between 1800 and 1945. Gamson compiled a list from available historical studies of all known challenging groups, and he selected a random sample of cases from this broader population. Two sources of existing data have been used widely. First, *The Encyclopedia of Associations* provides a comprehensive directory of nonprofit associations of various kinds that operate at the national level (Baumgartner & Jones 1993, Minkoff 1995). One limitation is the lack of sources for independently validating the directory, and another limitation is the lack of comparable sources for information about state and local groups.[7]

Recently many nonprofit researchers have placed great hope in the systematic collection of IRS 990 data derived from quarterly reports submitted by nonprofit groups with annual budgets in excess of $25,000. Such data can potentially provide a map of the nonprofit advocacy terrain across groups and serve as a sampling frame for collecting more extensive data in specific geographic or issues areas. Yet recent studies have begun to document problems with both the validity and reliability of these sources (Grønbjerg 2002, Reid & Krehley 2001).

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[6]Our attempt to bridge scholarship from neighboring disciplines parallels and builds directly on the work of McAdam et al. (2001) to integrate scholarship on contentious politics. Efforts to connect scholarship on social movements with organizational theory represents another attempt to facilitate learning across traditional disciplinary or subfield boundaries (McAdam & Scott 2002).

[7]It remains to be seen whether other national directories used singly or in concert can provide reliable and valid sampling frames for studies of state and local advocacy groups (Edwards & Andrews 2002).

With a few recent exceptions, these empirical patterns and theoretical arguments about them are based on large, national organizations, so there is less evidence about the long-term trends for local and state groups. Social scientists have speculated that policy shifts favoring decentralization and deregulation may have spurred a growth in organizations at the local and state level (Kempton et al. 2001, Lester 1994, Rabe 2000, Sirianni & Friedland 2001). For example, Gray & Lowery (1996) found that the average number of interest organizations registered to lobby in state legislatures more than tripled between 1970 and 1990. In addition, the preference within some recent movements for small, local, and voluntary organizations may have facilitated the growth of subnational organizations during this period (Ferree & Martin 1995). Although there is some evidence for a parallel process of organizational growth, these dynamics are not as well understood and merit substantially more research because smaller, locally oriented advocacy organizations may differ along important analytic dimensions from national organizations.

As we have already noted, the compartmentalization of research within subfields and disciplines means that core ideas and findings go unnoticed by scholars studying similar phenomena. In addition, scholars tend to focus on a small subset of advocacy organizations carrying biases of overemphasizing the distinctiveness of interest groups, social movement organizations, and nonprofits. We also find in each discipline a bias toward studies of large national organizations that limits our ability to make assessments across levels of the political system. Current evidence is limited, but it does suggest that organizations operating at the national, state, and local levels differ in important ways. The focus on questions about selective incentives has produced more sophisticated understanding of microlevel patterns of participation in advocacy organizations, but this effort has come at the expense of sustained research on all the other theoretical questions about advocacy organizations. At this point, the intellectual yield for research on incentives and individual participation in advocacy organizations is minimal compared with other important research questions. Finally, we suggest that the area most lacking in contemporary scholarship is the influence of advocacy organizations on politics. The efforts by scholars to understand the characteristics of advocacy organizations, such as their patterns of member involvement, decision making, and resources, are assumed to have some relationship to the influence of advocacy organizations, but any conclusions about such relationships are limited given the state of current research. Moreover, existing studies are rarely designed in ways that facilitate comparability across studies.

We make several suggestions for advancing scholarship in this area. First, greater efforts to study populations of advocacy organizations will allow scholars to answer many basic questions, such as the prevalence of various organizational characteristics. These studies will also facilitate stronger qualitative research on advocacy organizations by identifying broad patterns within which case studies can be located and better understood. Second, multiple research strategies (often in the same study) should be pursued. This includes case studies of single organizations, issue domains, political territories, and geographic areas. The effort to

examine and specify patterns of influence requires detailed case studies in which mechanisms of influence can be observed. Third, examining these questions about organizations over extended periods provides the ideal framework to understand complex dynamics and causal processes. Finally, our core suggestion is a major reorientation of scholarship. Researchers should pose questions about the interactions between advocacy organizations and political institutions to understand better the patterns of influence and to answer core questions about democracy and government responsiveness.

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