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**INSTITUTIONALIZED PLURALISM:  
THE PROMINENCE OF INTEREST ORGANIZATIONS IN NATIONAL POLICYMAKING**

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**Abstract:**

How do interest organizations become prominent in the national political debate? What factors enable active involvement in major policymaking venues? Current research, using survey responses or case studies, emphasizes organizational strategy and policy competition. I present an alternative theoretical and methodological approach. Adapting organizational theory, I argue that representatives of social groups or issue perspectives must become taken-for-granted policymaking participants as spokespersons for public constituencies. Using new data on the prominence of 1,710 organizations in Washington media reports and their participation in Congressional testimony, presidential directives, administrative rulemaking, and courts, I demonstrate that representative capacity governs organizational involvement in policymaking.

With the vast array of interest organizations in Washington, whose voice gets heard in the national political debate? Despite the ubiquity of organized representation, not all organizations are equally equipped to participate in policymaking and not all organizations generate equal attention from political elites. Relatively few of the 1,710 organizations representing public constituencies in Washington become prominent players in national politics. Are some types of organized representatives more likely to become prominent? Do organizations need to mobilize their public supporters to be heard? Do they need to hire lobbyists and make campaign contributions?

Answers to these questions could inform ongoing debates about the nature of interest intermediation. Popular and scholarly commentators regularly critique the influence of money in politics and the rise of ‘special interests’ over civic engagement.<sup>1</sup> Claims that interest organizations ‘buy’ influence or subvert democratic participation are central to these critiques. This discussion requires an empirical foundation but the relative political influence of groups is notoriously difficult to measure (see Polsby 1963). Interest group research has been hindered by this difficulty; scholarship on organizational influence consists primarily of case studies and self-reports of organizational leaders (see Baumgartner and Leech 1998). To move forward, we must construct better answers to perennial questions about the sources of interest group success.

Yet interest organizations often compete in multiple policymaking venues and success in one venue does not guarantee influence on policy outcomes. Each venue offers different rules of interaction, different decision-makers, and different sets of regular participants. Which organizations are most involved in Congress? Do the same factors influence participation in administrative rulemaking, presidential directives, and federal litigation? Interest group research has traditionally viewed these questions as a matter of organizational strategy. Scholars have studied how organizational leaders select lobbying targets, often by asking them directly in surveys and

interviews. As a result, we know little about how the capacity of organizations affects their participation in each venue or about which interests are commonly represented in each arena.

I argue that the topic of organizational involvement in policymaking is conceptualized incorrectly as organizational strategy. Since all organizations want to participate in policymaking in whichever venues are addressing the issues of importance to them, we need to know how organizations become prominent in the political debate and what factors enable them to succeed in each venue rather than which targets they choose. Asking organizations how and why they behave might not provide an explanation for whose voices get heard by policymakers. Instead, we should use independent assessments of the prominence and participation levels of interest organizations in policymaking in order to infer the factors that promote active involvement.

### ***The Prominence of Interest Organizations in National Policymaking***

In their review of research on organized advocacy, Andrews and Edwards (2004) argue that too much emphasis has been placed on interest mobilization; they call for more measures of organizational access to policymakers and influence over policy. Unfortunately, that is easier said than done. Research on the success of interest organizations in policymaking has focused on the influence strategies selected by organizational leaders because influence on policy outcomes is difficult to assess (see Schlozman and Tierney 1986, Walker 1991). Attempts to investigate influence have been limited to analyses of specific policy areas (Heinz et al. 1993, Fernandez and Gould 1994), specific sectors of organizations (Skrentny 2002; Berry 1999), or specific tactics of influence, such as Political Action Committee (PAC) contributions.

Case studies of the policy process in specific fields indicate that interest organizations representing public constituencies often play a central role in defining political options and influencing government decisions. Baumgartner and Jones (1993), for example, provide evidence that organized scientists, anti-tobacco and safety advocates, and environmentalists all had major

effects on policy development. Melnick (1994) argues that organizations representing the handicapped, welfare recipients, and anti-hunger activists were instrumental in the development and enforcement of public policy. Skrentny (2002) profiles the success of representatives of ethnic groups and women in achieving fundamental policy change. Berry (1999) reviews the activities of “citizen groups” and concludes that they often direct the Congressional agenda. In their meta-study of research on the influence of political organizations in sociology and political science, Burstein and Linton (2002) find that interest organizations have a substantial impact on policy outcomes in most studies, especially when they represent widely-held perspectives. According to Patashnik (2003), even in the high-profile cases where interest organizations reportedly fail to influence legislation, they alter the policy outcomes after debate moves to other venues.

Despite much progress in identifying the influence of interest organizations, researchers have not successfully outlined the factors that lead to influential organized representation in Washington. Research on the political activity of business has led to some important conclusions about how industry characteristics determine the level of political involvement among business policy offices and trade associations (see Grier *et al.* 1994; Hansen and Mitchell 2000). This research emphasizes the effects of business-specific variables on PAC contributions and the use of lobbying firms, however, and is not necessarily generalizable to other organizations.

We can conclude that interest organizations are often influential in the policymaking process, therefore, but the current literature does not tell us much about how organizations other than business representatives become influential. From mobilization research and analysis of organizational directories, we have identified the factors that enable organizations representing other constituencies to originate, attract financial support, and survive (see Walker 1991; Gray and Lowery 1996). Because we use limited cases to analyze how these organizations move beyond survival to succeed in political influence, however, our knowledge of the causes of success is more limited.

Yet there is an important intermediary step in the process of organizing political interests to influence policy outcomes. Many organizations survive but few become prominent players in the political debate and active participants in national policymaking. To advance the state of the field, we can view prominence in Washington and participation in policymaking venues as important precursors to policy influence. Prominence and active involvement are more reflective of influence than mere presence in Washington but measuring them does not require making slippery judgments about the determinants of policy outcomes. Prominence and participation can be seen as necessary but insufficient conditions for major policy influence. If organizations are regularly included in the events and debates of the Washington political community, they have achieved far more than survival but have not necessarily influenced particular policy outcomes. If an organization participates actively in Congressional committee hearings, presidential directives, administrative rulemaking, and federal court litigation, they have become an active player in national policymaking. Investigating how organizations become prominent and active in policymaking thus offers an alternative method of assessing the causes of interest group success.

### ***Venue Selection and Interest Group Strategy***

Research on participation in policymaking typically assumes that organizations succeed by making independent strategic decisions about venue selection. Hansford (2004), for example, argues that organizations select a lobbying target as a critical early decision:

“When an organized interest participates in the policy process, it has to make a series of tactical decisions. This decision process begins with the organized interest choosing the policy venue, or set of venues, in which to focus its lobbying efforts. For example, the interest could opt to lobby Congress, the courts, a federal administrative agency, or some combination of these venues” (Hansford 2004, 172).

Holyoke (2003) similarly portrays venue selection as an open decision where organizations select both their target of influence and their level of activity directed toward that target. Investigations of organizational activity in each venue take a similar strategy-focused approach. Furlong and Kerwin

(2004), for example, argue that participation in administrative rulemaking requires a separate causal analysis. According to Hansford (2004), analysis of interest group participation in the courts requires knowledge of whether organizations agree with the court's priorities and policies. Wright (1996) argues that the need for information about policy and its electoral consequences governs a unique set of interactions between Members of Congress and interest groups.

Despite these hypothesized differences across venues, almost everyone involved in Washington politics claims to participate in almost every venue. Schlozman and Tierney (1986), for example, find that the vast majority of interest organizations believe that Congress (97 per cent) and executive agencies (93 per cent) are important to their activities. Most organizations also believe that the White House is an important target (87 per cent), though fewer believe that the courts are an important target (49 per cent). Schlozman and Tierney demonstrate that 99 per cent of interest organizations attempt to participate in Congressional hearings. Furlong and Kerwin (2004) find a slightly lower rate of participation in administrative agency rulemaking (82 per cent). Most interest organizations thus attempt to regularly voice their concerns with many types of policymakers.

Policymakers also have a role in encouraging involvement by some groups and erecting barriers to participation by others. According to Shaiko (1998), both the President and Members of Congress regularly solicit participation from interest group leaders and attempt to win over interest group support for their proposals. The core problem is that each organization has a different degree of overall prominence in the political debate and may be more likely to succeed within certain venues. The current literature demonstrates that organizations want to participate in many venues but does not identify the features that allow organizations to succeed in each venue.

### ***Institutionalized Pluralism: A Theory of the Prominence of Constituency Organizations***

I argue that many interest organizations become prominent players in policymaking by becoming the institutionalized leadership for the concerns of a public faction in national politics. I



label the organizations that seek this route to influence “constituency representative organizations.” This includes organizations that claim to represent social categories, occupational groups, and issue perspectives. My label is synonymous with the category that Andrews and Edwards (2004) call “advocacy organizations” but more expansive than the population that Berry (1999) identifies as “citizen action groups.”<sup>iii</sup> It excludes business political activity, which is not properly treated as constituency interest representation (see Hart 2004).<sup>iii</sup>

I contend that constituency representative organizations are engaged in two interrelated forms of institutionalization: they must become taken-for-granted representatives of a public faction and taken-for-granted participants in the policy debate. Organizations can become institutionalized representatives by developing an internal staff of political spokespeople for a large political agenda and nurturing a large membership structure over an extended period. Organizations can become institutionalized participants in national policy debates by establishing a long-term presence in Washington and involving themselves as representative experts in many policy debates.

I use the institutional theory of organizations as the framework for understanding how this process occurs. Selznick defines the institutionalization of organizations as the “infusion with value beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand.” (Selznick 1996, 271). He argues that the “old” institutionalism, for which he is partially responsible, is not fundamentally different from the “new” institutionalism proffered by Meyer and Rowan (1977). The primary difference is that new approaches conceive of organizational structure as “thickly” institutionalized: “the formal structure must itself be seen as an adaptive product, responsive to environmental influences, including cultural definitions of propriety and legitimacy.” (Selznick 1996, 274).

In this spirit, Meyer and Rowan argue that organizations are subject to pressures that legitimate particular forms and behaviors as the taken-for-granted means to achieve social goals:

“In modern societies, the myths generating formal organizational structure have two key properties. First, they are rationalized and impersonal prescriptions that identify

various social purposes as technical ones and specify in a rulelike way the appropriate means to pursue these technical purposes rationally. Second, they are highly institutionalized and thus in some measure beyond the discretion of any individual participant or organization. They must, therefore, be taken for granted as legitimate, apart from evaluations of their impact on work outcomes.” (Meyer and Rowan 1977, 343-344).

Organizations thus legitimate their behavior by conforming to norms beyond their control about the appropriate method to achieve social goals. Legitimated organizations, according to Meyer and Rowan, are seen as means to collective ends: “Organizations described in legitimated vocabularies are assumed to be oriented to collectively defined, and often collectively mandated, ends.” (Meyer and Rowan 1977, 349). Organizations that adopt these legitimated forms and behaviors will be more likely to survive and succeed.

In representative democracies, the most legitimated goal of political actors is representation of public interests and ideas. As Dahl argues in *Who Governs?*, the political influence of elites stems largely from presumed representation:

“because a democratic creed is widely subscribed to throughout the political stratum... overt relationships of influence between leaders and subleaders will often be clothed in the rituals and ceremonies of ‘democratic’ control, according to which the leaders are only the spokesmen or agents of the subleaders, who are ‘representatives’ of a broader constituency.” (Dahl 1961, 102).

For government officials, the process of legitimating activities through these social goals is straightforward; for unelected organizations, in contrast, legitimation is indirect and difficult.

Constituency organizations must become recognized representatives and policymaking participants without an obvious path. To do so, they take advantage of the holes in a system of interest mobilization and aggregation that relies on geographic representation and party coalitions; they claim to represent other constituency interests or ideas in the political process. As Hertzke (1988) argues, interest organizations are accepted because Congress aims to hear from many constituencies prior to making decisions: “[The] consensus-seeking Congressional process aims to accommodate simultaneously many conflicting interests and values.” This need to hear from

representatives of different interests and perspectives extends to the administrative state (see Kerwin 2003) and to the courts (see Kagan 2001). American political institutions do not always incorporate the many interests and perspectives that they hear but they feel obliged to at least go through the motions of listening to and claiming to be responsive to a wide set of interests and ideas.

As Heaney (2004) argues, interest organizations thus seek to develop an identity as a representative of a social group or an advocate of an issue perspective in national politics.<sup>iv</sup> He finds that most organizations attempt to shape their identities as representatives and adjust their behavior to instill that identity among policymakers. According to Anderson and Loomis (1998), the structural characteristics of organizations, such as their links to members and supporters, often determine how they are seen by outsiders. I extend this analysis: constituency organizations become legitimated representatives of a public faction in policy discussion by convincing outsiders that their structure and purpose fulfill the democratic purpose of interest intermediation.

I label this theory “institutionalized pluralism” to indicate that it is an attempt to synthesize traditional group theories of politics (e.g. Truman 1951) with sociological institutionalism in order to help understand the representation of public factions by entrenched organizations.<sup>v</sup> The theory does not seek to adjudicate in longstanding debates over the sources of political power or the degree of inequality in influence over policy outcomes. It can serve as a guide for understanding a large and important subset of the interest group universe but it does not aspire to explain the workings of the political system as a whole. Kernell (1997), for example, uses the moniker “institutionalized pluralism” to suggest a bygone era where presidents used existing party coalitions to advance their legislative agendas prior to the rise of the “going public” strategy. I do not seek to challenge that set of findings or the research agenda that it spawned. I argue, however, that “institutionalized pluralism” is alive and well in the interest group system: public factions are commonly represented by an organized leadership that serves as an institutionalized player in Washington policymaking.

The theory of institutionalized pluralism implies several hypotheses:

H1: Older constituency organizations will be more prominent and active in Washington policymaking than newly established organizations.

As previous research suggests, organizations with a long tenure in Washington develop representative capacity and become better known as participants (Smith 1984; Schlozman and Tierney 1986). The age of an organization is commonly used as a proxy for institutionalization because older age indicates stable embodiment of organizational purpose.

H2: The larger a constituency organization's internal staff of political representatives, the more prominent and active it will be in Washington policymaking.

Previous research also suggests that a large political staff enables organizations to establish a reputation with many policymakers and to become visible to stakeholders (Schlozman and Tierney 1986; Walker 1991). Larger organizations have mobilized more people to support the organization's goals and can inspire outsiders to take their function and their participation for granted.

In addition to incorporating these common hypotheses of interest group research, institutionalized pluralism makes additional unique predictions:

H3: Constituency organizations that hire a larger number of external lobbyists will not be more prominent or active in Washington policymaking.

Previous research suggests, but does not conclusively show, that mobilizing resources to hire lobbyists will increase the success of an interest organization (Heinz et al. 1993; Wright 1996). Hiring lobbyists, however, does not help create a stable constituency leadership. Attempting to compensate for lack of internal leadership by looking outside organizational boundaries indicates that an organization has not established itself as the site of representative advocacy.

H4: Constituency organizations that found an associated PAC to make campaign contributions will not be more prominent or active in Washington policymaking.

Previous research has suggested, but not demonstrated, that PAC contributions are a route to political influence (see Smith 1995; Grenzke 1989). Starting a PAC, however, conveys the message

that a constituency organization plans to gain influence by providing financial contributions rather than by becoming a participant in policy debates as the representative of a public faction.

Institutionalized pluralism also directs attention to an organization's support from its constituency. It makes several predictions about the importance of demonstrating that support:

H5: The larger the membership of a constituency organization, the more prominent and active the organization will be in Washington policymaking.

Recent critics of the decline in civic engagement have implied that mass organizations no longer wield the power they once did (Putnam 2000; Skokpol 2003). Institutionalized pluralism suggests that membership will help an organization be recognized as a representative of a public concern.

H6: Federally-structured constituency organizations that have state or local chapters will be more prominent and active in Washington policymaking.

Putnam (2000) and Skokpol (2003) bemoan the decline of locally organized political groups and the shift in emphasis to Washington. Institutionalized pluralism, however, suggests that local organization and national representation are not in conflict. Federal structure indicates that an organization is linked to their constituency via a multi-level structure of representation.

H7: Organizations representing professional groups, rather than other categories of constituencies, will be less prominent and active in Washington policymaking.

Olson (1971) argues that the ease with which small economic groups organize represents a distinct advantage over other social interests. If constituency organizations must be seen as representatives of public factions, however, organizations that arise to promote professional development should face a disadvantage in being seen as representatives of the political ideas of their supporters.

The theory of institutionalized pluralism also offers a different view of how constituency organizations become known as representatives of issue perspectives. It makes two key predictions:

H8: The greater the size of a constituency organization's issue agenda, the more prominent and active it will be in Washington policymaking.

Browne (1990) argues that interest organizations adapt to potential competition by finding a policy “niche,” a smaller issue agenda with a smaller constituency. Institutionalized pluralism suggests, however, that organizations must produce a large agenda of the public policy goals of a political faction rather than a highly specialized set of concerns.

H9: Constituency organizations that establish a reputation as a “think tank” will be more prominent and active in Washington policymaking.

Rich (2004) argues that ‘think tanks,’ providers of expert policy information from a political perspective, have become important in national politics. Since almost all interest organizations claim to produce expert information (see Schlozman and Tierney 1986), however, an advantage will be gained by those that can establish an image as a regular producer of policy information.

Institutionalized pluralism offers a generic theory of how organizations that represent a public constituency become prominent and active in Washington policymaking. The segregation of the study of ethnic organizations, religious organizations, unions, and single-issue groups in political science seems to imply that different processes are at work in each area. Instead, I argue that the same factors will promote success among organizations representing identity groups, occupational groups, and issue perspectives.

### ***Policy Venues and the Limits of Strategic Targeting***

Constituency representative organizations are in the midst of a generalized process of institutionalization as well as specific attempts to become participants in each policymaking venue. Though the benefits of institutionalization should be apparent across the political system, each set of political institutions sets requirements for organizational access. Combined, the factors governing institutionalization and the requirements for each type of participation leave little room for strategic decisions by organizational leaders. Policymakers, when they have a choice, seek to hear from multiple interests of taken-for-granted stakeholders. After organizations have defined their constituency and their goal to influence national policy, remaining strategic choices are limited.

The current interest group literature fails to recognize these limits because it uses either conventional notions of strategy derived from the discourse of political operatives or rationalist ideas about strategic action derived from game theory. I instead adapt theories of strategy used in organizational theory. Kay *et al.* (2003) argue that organizational theorists have moved toward post-rationalist approaches to strategy that emphasize the linkage between the environment of an organization and the information it receives about how to accomplish its objectives.

In the contingency approach to strategy, Thompson (1967) argues that organizations place themselves within a structure, linking their organization and its purposes with outside organizations. Miles and Snow (1978) reframe this model: “organizations within one industry or grouping develop over time a strategy of relating to their market or constituency.” “A given market strategy,” they argue, “[is] best served by a particular type of organizational structure, technology, and administrative process” (Miles and Snow 1978, x). Organizations cycle through entrepreneurship to new tasks, engineering better ways to achieve goals, and administering their existing operations. In settings with highly institutionalized rules, however, the engineering phase is likely to focus on adaptation to norms of behavior and the most institutionalized organizations are likely to be caught up in administration of their operations (see DiMaggio and Powell 1983).

Applied to interest organizations, theories of organizational strategy suggest that the *de facto* strategic decisions are made before the organizations, or the scholars studying them, know that they have been made. All constituency organizations have made the decision to represent particular interests or concerns before government. Since the organizations cannot alter the basic demands of the environment that this decision produces, they are unlikely to be making major strategic decisions each time they act. Instead, their basic structure and external image will provide a certain capacity to be involved in policymaking and the rules governing participation in each venue will affect their differential involvement in each arena of political competition.

These strategic limitations suggest two additional hypotheses:

H10: Constituency organization involvement in Congressional committees and Presidential announcements will be more representative of a cross-section of interests than involvement in administrative agencies and courts.

Congressional committees and the President play an active role in empowering certain organizations to participate in their venues (Shaiko 1998). Administrative agencies, in contrast, are required to publicly announce their rulemaking procedures and proposals and be somewhat responsive to the official comments that they receive (Kerwin 2003). Courts only hear cases that are brought to them by litigants and primarily reference briefs that are submitted by interested parties (Kagan 2001).

H11: Each set of policymakers will be more responsive to a somewhat different type of interest. Congressional committees will be more likely to empower representatives of issue perspectives. Presidents will be more likely to empower representatives of identity groups. Administrative agencies and courts will feature more involvement by constituency organizations with the resources to participate.

Though each policymaking venue will seek recognized voices of stakeholders, each set of political leaders has a slightly different need for organizational participation. Congressional committees are most interested in soliciting information on the issues that they are considering whereas Presidents are most interested in responding to the broad national constituencies that they represent (see Wright 1996). Administrative agencies and courts, which have less control, merely enable participation by those who have the capacity to be involved.

### ***Data and Method***

I investigate the characteristics of 1,710 organizations in Washington that speak on behalf of social groups or public political perspectives. The population includes all organizations with an office in Washington that aspire to represent a section of the public broader than their own institution, staff, and membership. I therefore combine the study of the organized representation of ethnic, religious, demographic, and occupational groups with the study of the organized representation of particular ideological or issue perspectives. The names, reference text descriptions,



and Web sites of the organizations in the population indicate that they seek to represent American public constituencies in national politics. Individual business policy offices, trade associations, charities, and governmental units are not included in the population.

The primary methodological approach of my analysis is data compilation with content analysis from reference sources and organizational Web sites. To identify organizations, I primarily used the *Washington Representatives* directory but I also checked for additional organizations in the *Encyclopedia of Associations*, *The Capital Source*, the *Government Affairs Yellow Book*, *Public Interest Profiles*, and the *Washington Information Directory*. With two research assistants, I content analyzed the reference text descriptions and Web sites of all organizations to confirm that they seek to represent public social groups or issue perspectives in national politics and to categorize them by the constituencies that they seek to represent.<sup>vi</sup> Our categorizations were consistent for more than 90 per cent of the organizations. Where available, we compared our categorizations with those used by scholars of sectors of the interest group universe (*e.g.* Hertzke 1988; Hofrenning 1995; Berry 1999; Shaiko 1999; Hays 2001).<sup>vii</sup> Organizations categorized as representing identity groups include ethnic, religious, and gender representatives as well as representatives of other social categories and intersectional identities. Organizations categorized as representing occupational groups include professional associations and unions. Organizations categorized as representing issue perspectives include those with ideological or single-issue perspectives that do not fall into the other categories.

For each organization, we collected data on the number of internal political representatives on an organization's staff, the number of outside lobbyists that they have hired, the number of members that they claim, the age of the organization, the number of policy issues on which they lobby, whether they had affiliated state or local chapters, and whether they had an associated PAC.<sup>viii</sup> We coded an organization as a think tank if it was identified in Rich's (2004) interview-based study. We collected complete information on 1,454 organizations out of 1,710 in the population.<sup>ix</sup>

To test my hypotheses, I use new data derived from database searches. To assess prominence in the Washington political debate, I analyze the determinants of mentions in Washington media reports. I record the number of times that each organization was mentioned in *Roll Call*, *The Hill*, *National Journal*, *Congress Daily*, *The Hotline*, *Congressional Quarterly*, and *The Washington Post* as recorded in the *Lexis-Nexis* news index from 1995-2004. This Washington political media allows political elites to share information among themselves and reports on the important activities of the Washington political community.

To analyze organizational involvement in policymaking venues, I use one measure for each venue: Congressional committee hearings, Presidential announcements, administrative agency rulemaking, and federal court proceedings. In analyses of particular issue domains, measures of organizational participation in these venues are common (Hays 2001; Laumann and Knoke 1987; Berry 1999; Holyoke 2003; Salisbury 1984). Yet no one has collected general measures of the level of participation across many different types of constituency organizations.

To assess involvement in Congressional committee hearings, I searched for organizational names in the sections describing those who gave testimony from 1995-2004 in the database of *Federal Document Clearing House Congressional Testimony* maintained by *Congressional Quarterly*. To assess involvement in Presidential policymaking, I use a search for organizational names in the *Papers of the Presidents* from 1995-2004. This database includes the writings, press releases, executive orders, nominations, proclamations and other materials issued by the White House in addition to transcripts of radio addresses, Presidential speeches, and news conferences. It is used by scholars of the Presidency to assess each President's attention to various issues and their participation in policymaking. To assess organizational involvement in administrative agency rulemaking, I search for organizational names from 1995-2004 in the database maintained by *Lexis-Nexis* that contains the Final Rules and Administrative Decisions issued by over 100 executive branch decision-making

bodies. Interest organizations commonly appear in these rules and decisions if they are participants in an administrative dispute or if administrators are responding to their written comments submitted in a public review of proposed rule changes or public comment period. To assess organizational involvement in federal court proceedings, I search for organizational names from 1995-2004 in the database maintained by *Lexis-Nexis* that contains case law and legal documents from the Supreme Court, all U.S. District Courts and Courts of Appeal, and several specialty federal courts. Interest organizations commonly appear in these decisions and documents if they are participants in litigation or submitted *Amicus Curae* (“friend of the court”) briefs to federal courts.

This type of data compilation, like all research methodologies, has its strengths and weaknesses. The primary strengths are the breadth of analysis and the reliance on measures of actual behavior. The primary weakness is the reliance on only publicly available data. Yet this research strategy does compare favorably to others pursued in the field and it fills large gaps in our knowledge. In their review of the literature, Andrews and Edwards (2004) argue that survey-based research has had the benefit of large samples but has offered a poor indication of influence whereas other interest group studies have been too narrow. They recommend a new intermediary approach. Baumgartner and Leech (1998) also argue that the small-scale of most interest group research has been a major limiting factor in the accumulation of knowledge and in the ability of scholars to create and test theories of group influence.

In large-n interview and survey-based research on interest groups, response rates are notoriously low. Furlong and Kerwin (2004), for example, report response rates of 15 per cent and 25 per cent for their two surveys of interest organization participation in rulemaking. The two major surveys by Walker (1991) had response rates of 55 per cent and 65 per cent. I collected complete information on a much larger proportion of the organizations in my population (85 per cent).

Below, I present data on the distribution of mentions and testimony as well as models to predict an organization's prominence and involvement. To assess how organizational characteristics affect prominence in the Washington media, I report separate models for representatives of identity groups, occupational groups, and issue perspectives along with a model for all organizations. To assess which kinds of organizations are likely to be more involved in Congressional committees, presidential directives, administrative rulemaking, and court litigation, I present one model for each venue that includes the same organizational attributes as well as three dichotomous variables representing the categories of professional associations, unions, and identity groups. The excluded category in these regressions is representatives of issue perspectives.

Because all four dependent variables are integer counts, I use maximum-likelihood count models to estimate the effects of each variable. To select among count models, Long and Freese (2001) recommend using tests of overdispersion to determine whether to use Poisson or Negative Binomial count models and likelihood ratio tests to determine whether to use the zero-inflated versions of these models. Using these tests, I determined that negative binomial models were most appropriate for analyzing Washington media mentions and zero-inflated negative binomial models were most appropriate for predicting participation in each venue. The negative binomial models to predict media mentions track generalized prominence in the political debate. I include an estimate of the expected factor increase or decrease in mentions for a unit increase in each independent variable.

The zero-inflated models assess the factors that influence both whether an organization participates in each venue and how much they are involved. The results include two coefficients for each variable; the binary coefficients correspond to the model predicting whether organizations will receive a count of zero or a count of more than zero and the other coefficients correspond to the model predicting the number of times that an organization will testify or be mentioned. The procedure is similar to using a logit model to predict whether or not organizations will be involved

at all in each venue and then using a count model to predict how often those that are involved will be involved (see Long and Freese 2001). Negative binary coefficients indicate that an increase in the variable is expected to decrease the chance that an organization receives a count of zero; the two coefficients are therefore oppositely signed if the variable increases the expected count in both cases.

### ***Results***

The average organization in the population was mentioned 94.3 times in the Washington media over the decade. Figures 1 and 2 compare the distributions of constituency organizations and Washington media mentions. The distribution of mentions is generally reflective of the organizational population. The main exception is that professional associations have a much higher share of organizations (16.3 per cent) than mentions (12.2 per cent). Ideological organizations and unions account for a greater share of mentions than organizations.

[Insert Figures 1 and 2]

Yet there are vast differences in prominence among the organizations within these categories. Table 1 reports the results of negative binomial regression models to predict the number of mentions received by each organization over the decade. In the model for all organizations, political staff size, organizational age, breadth of issue agenda, federal organization, and think tank identification all have positive and significant effects on prominence in the Washington political debate. Founding an associated PAC and being a professional association are negatively and significantly related to prominence. According to the model, each additional political representative increases an organization's mentions by a factor of 1.23. Having chapters increases mentions by a factor of more than 1.5 and being identified as a think tank increases mentions by a factor of 3.85. Having a PAC, in contrast, decreases mentions by a factor of less than 0.5.

[Insert Table 1]

In the models for different categories of organizations, political staff size has consistent effects and organizational age has significant effects in most models. Breadth of issue agenda and federal organization are only inconsistently related to prominence. Membership size is only significant for representatives of issue perspectives. Overall, the model for representatives of identity groups is the most consistent with the hypotheses. The model for occupational groups indicates that membership structure may not be as important for these organizations.

The results for involvement in each policymaking venue are similar except that not all organizations participate in all venues. For Congressional testimony, the mean among all organizations was 4.7 appearances; 628 of the organizations did not appear during the period. For Presidential papers, the mean was 1.1 mentions and 1,140 organizations were not mentioned. For administrative rules, the mean was 39.9 mentions and 632 organizations were not mentioned. For federal court documents, the mean was 31.9 mentions and 662 organizations were not mentioned.

Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the distribution of Congressional testimony and Presidential papers mentions among constituency organizations. The proportions are quite similar to the organizational population. The main difference is that organizations representing most types of issue perspectives are overrepresented in Congressional testimony and organizations representing identity groups are overrepresented in presidential papers mentions.

[Insert Figures 3 and 4]

Figures 5 and 6 illustrate the distribution of mentions in administrative agency rules and federal court documents among constituency organizations. These distributions are less reflective of the organizational population. Unions are overrepresented in both rulemaking and the courts. Other social groups, such as veterans, are overrepresented in administrative rulemaking whereas issue groups and many categories of identity groups are underrepresented. Environmental issue groups are overrepresented in the federal courts; there are again few mentions of identity organizations.

[Insert Figures 5 and 6]

To draw conclusions about the causes of organizational involvement in each venue, Table 2 presents zero-inflated negative binomial regression models. According to the model for Congressional committee testimony, political staff size, age of organization, breadth of issue agenda, and think tank identification all positively and significantly increase involvement in Congress. Political staff size increases both the chance that an organization will testify at least once and the number of times that those who are involved will testify. Being a professional association rather than an issue organization is negatively and significantly related to testimony.

[Insert Table 2]

In the model to predict mentions in the *Papers of the President*, political staff size and organizational age significantly increase the chance that an organization will receive at least one mention. Founding a PAC significantly decreases mentions among organizations that are mentioned at least once whereas having chapters significantly increases mentions among those that are mentioned. Controlling for other factors, being a professional association rather than an issue group significantly decreases the chance that an organization will be mentioned. Representing an identity group rather than an issue perspective significantly increases the chance that an organization is mentioned but significantly decreases the number of mentions among those that are mentioned.

According to the model predicting organizational involvement in administrative rulemaking, political staff size and organizational age increase both the chance that an organization will be mentioned and the number of mentions that an organization will receive. Among those that are mentioned, breadth of issue agenda and starting an associated PAC are positively related to the level of administrative involvement whereas the number of lobbyists hired is negatively related. Being a professional association rather than an issue group decreases the level of involvement among those

that are mentioned. Among mentioned organizations, being a union or identity group representative rather than an issue group increases the number of mentions that an organization receives.

In the model for federal court documents, I include an additional dichotomous variable for whether or not organizations represent environmental concerns.<sup>x</sup> According to the model, political staff size and organizational age again significantly increase the chance that organizations will be involved and their level of involvement. Among organizations that are mentioned, breadth of issue agenda significantly increases the number of mentions that organizations receive whereas being identified as a think tank significantly decreases the number of mentions. Controlling for other factors, professional associations are significantly less likely to be involved in the courts than non-environmental issue groups. Among those that are involved, being a professional association or identity group representative significantly decreases the number of court document mentions whereas being a union or representing environmental concerns significantly increases involvement.

### *Discussion*

The theory of institutionalized pluralism offers a predictive framework for understanding how organizations become prominent in Washington policymaking. The predictions made by the theory proved mostly correct, though not among all groups in all cases. Some of the theory's most original contributions were consistent with most of the empirical evidence. The models suggested by the theory provide a good starting point for an analysis of the success of constituency organizations in becoming prominent players in national politics and regular participants in policymaking.

The hypotheses offered by the theory were mostly confirmed. H1 proved mostly accurate. Age was positively related to prominence in Washington media reports for all but issue groups. Age increased organizational involvement in all policymaking venues. H2 was universally confirmed. The size of a constituency organization's political staff was always related to their prominence in the Washington political debate and their involvement in every policymaking venue. H3 proved



universally accurate. In every model, the number of lobbyists that an organization hires was insignificantly or negatively related to their prominence and involvement. H4 proved mostly accurate. Starting a PAC may have lead to lower prominence in the Washington political debate but it did not increase prominence. According to the models for each venue, it increased involvement in administrative agencies but decreased involvement in presidential directives. H5 was confirmed only for limited cases. A larger membership base only significantly increased prominence for representatives of issue perspectives. It significantly increased involvement only in the federal courts. H6 was partially confirmed. According to the model for all organizations, federal structure increased prominence in the Washington media but, in the models for each type of organization, it only had a significant effect for identity groups. Federal structure increased involvement in presidential and administrative policymaking but not in other venues. H7 was universally confirmed. Organizations that represent professional groups were less prominent in Washington media reports and less involved in every policymaking venue. H8 proved mostly correct. In the model for all organizations, breadth of issue agenda was positively related to prominence in Washington media reports. In the models for each type of organization, however, it was only significantly related to prominence for representatives of identity groups. Breadth of issue agenda also significantly increased involvement in Congressional committee testimony, administrative agency rulemaking, and federal court litigation. H9 was confirmed in limited cases. Being identified as a think tank significantly increased an organization's prominence in media reports and significantly increased involvement in Congressional testimony but significantly decreased involvement in the federal courts.

My analysis of the limits to organizational strategy and the differences across policymaking venues performed well in the empirical analysis. H10 was also mostly confirmed. The distribution of organizational involvement in Congressional committees and in Presidential announcements was broadly representative of the population of constituency organizations in Washington. The

distribution of administrative agency and federal court participation was less reflective of the organizational population. As expected, administrative agencies and courts did not have a representative cross-section of participants. H11 was partially confirmed. The distributions of involvement in each venue suggested that issue groups were more involved in Congressional committees, identity groups were more involved in Presidential announcements, and resourceful economic groups were most involved in administrative policymaking and the federal courts. Regression analysis indicated that organizations representing issue perspectives did have an advantage over all other categories in committee testimony; think tanks were especially involved. There were mixed results for Presidential attention that did not show a clear pattern of preference for identity groups. Administrative rulemaking was the only venue in which setting up a PAC might result in increased involvement and unions had an advantage in both agencies and courts. Yet there was no clear indication that resources spent on lobbyists or PACs could overcome the structural disadvantages of small, young, narrowly-focused, or professional groups in any venue.

There were some unexpected and interesting additional results. First, unions were more involved in administrative policymaking and the courts but perhaps less involved in other venues. Second, environmental organizations were very active in the courts, despite the minimal participation of other issue groups. Third, some factors were estimated to increase the chance of an organization's involvement in a venue but decrease their level of participation. These findings may indicate that parts of the interest organization universe have pursued different strategic paths to involvement in policymaking and to political influence. Observing that policies on industrial organization are commonly fought out in administrative agencies and courts and that environmental policy is a major area of court intervention, however, does not seem to require a close analysis of strategic decision-making by organizational leaders. Over the course of their development, some

policy issues have migrated to administrative agencies or the courts. Organizational leaders likely had some role in this migration, though the participation requirements of each venue also played a role.

The distributions of participation reported here may serve as proxies for the extent to which policymaking in each venue takes into account a range of views as well as proxies for the types of interests that are advanced in each arena. Scholarship on interest organizations can thus add substance to current debates over the benefits and weaknesses of policymaking in each branch of government. If certain types of organizations are more successful in some venues than others, the explanation may lie in the ‘rules of the game’ in each governing arena rather than the strategic decisions of particular political actors. To move forward in considering the strategies of interest organizations, we must move beyond our portrayal of venue selection and targeting as independent strategic decisions. The American political system offers multiple opportunities for the organized claimants of constituency representation. Each branch of that system is subject to some universal processes and some distinct elements that make policymaking a little different in each competitive arena and policy domain.

The results presented here leave room for further investigation of the factors that influence prominence and involvement in Washington policymaking. Future research could determine why some organizations outperform others with similar characteristics. Other factors may also be relevant to analyzing the involvement of some constituency organizations in only one policymaking venue. Despite the remaining work, however, the results largely confirm a new model of the success of constituency representative organizations in national politics. They leave no doubt that the prominence and involvement of an organization is largely dependent on their structural attributes. Yet the results provide little support for a theory of organizational success that relies only on resource mobilization. According to these data, resources used to build larger constituency

organizations are well-spent but not all expenditures produce prominence in Washington and policymaking involvement, especially those directed toward hiring lobbyists and starting PACs.

Institutionalized pluralism has proven able to incorporate long-standing ideas about how interest organizations succeed and to make original predictions that proved accurate. The initial evidence indicates that the process of becoming a prominent constituency organization actively involved in Washington policymaking involves being recognized as a taken-for-granted participant in national policy debates as the legitimated representative for a public faction. Whether organizations represent identity groups, occupational groups, or issue perspectives, they are subject to similar constraints in their attempt to become prominent players in the national political debate. Their success is not just a matter of deploying the right tactics. It requires articulating a representative purpose and creating a structure to advance that purpose.

The portrait of participation in each policymaking venue presented here demonstrated that each set of policymakers responds to somewhat different types of constituency organizations but that the capacity and the level of institutionalization of these organizations affects their participation in all venues. There are important limits to the current scholarly approach to interest group strategy, which emphasizes the tactical decisions of organizational leaders. Scholars should remember that many basic organizational features affect involvement in all parts of the political system while acknowledging that some different factors govern the interaction between organizations and policymakers in each venue. Rather than asking leaders how and why organizations participate in American politics, we can observe their behavior. Instead of assuming that interest organizations are engaged in constant strategic analysis and asking them to confirm our assumptions, we can examine the factors that influence their active involvement in policymaking.

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<sup>i</sup> Fiorina (2002) presents an overview of the empirical debates. For normative commentary, see Putnam 2000 and Skokpol 2003.

<sup>ii</sup> Andrews and Edwards define advocacy organizations as those 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 or groups” (Andrews and Edwards 2004, 481).

<sup>iii</sup> Business policy offices and trade associations are influential in the policymaking process but not for the same reasons as representative organizations. According to Hart (2004), business organizations mobilize and achieve influence through different processes than organizations that seek to represent public groups or political perspectives. Empirical work on business political activity has largely relied on business-specific factors to analyze relative levels of mobilization. Salaman and Siefried (1977), for example, argue that industry structure is a critical variable for business mobilization, Grier et al. (1994) present a multivariate analysis of business representation focused on factors unique to business, and Hansen and Mitchell (2000) follow up with a similar analysis of domestic and foreign corporate activity.

<sup>iv</sup> In the health care field, Heaney (2004) finds that 78 per cent of advocacy organizations view themselves as representatives of social groups and believe that representation is part of their organizational identity. The most common secondary dimension of organizational identity is issue area, with 50 per cent of advocacy organizations mentioning that they are identified with an issue perspective.

<sup>v</sup> The theory is part of an ongoing research program designed to combine traditional group theories of politics with the contemporary analysis of organizational behavior. This type of theoretical

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approach is typically called the “neopluralist perspective” (see Gray and Lowery 2004; McFarland 2004; Baumgartner and Leech 1998).

<sup>vi</sup> If an organization’s Web site was not listed in reference text descriptions, we searched for the organization’s site using *Google*. If we found no indication that the organization was still in Washington, we attempted to contact the office to ensure that the organization existed. Less than 100 constituency organizations remaining in Washington did not have Web sites.

<sup>vii</sup> Our categorizations were also consistent with those used by other scholars for more than 90 per cent of organizations.

<sup>viii</sup> I use the number of political staff, lobbyists, policy issues, and PACs reported in *Washington Representatives* (2004). I use the membership size and organizational age reported on organizational Web sites and descriptions in reference texts. When unavailable from other sources, I supplemented this information with data from scholarly studies of specific interest group sectors and Washington media reports.

<sup>ix</sup> By removing organizational age and membership information from the models, I can analyze almost the entire population of organizations. The results of the models without these two variables are substantially similar to those presented here.

<sup>x</sup> The excluded category for this model is therefore organizations that represent issue perspectives other than environmental concerns. As seen in Figure 6, environmental organizations appear to be much more likely to use the courts than other organizations and are not properly grouped with other issue organizations when predicting court involvement. Separating environmental organizations in the other models does not substantially change the results or significantly improve the fit.

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Table 1: Models of Prominence in Washington Media Reports

	Prominence in Washington Media Reports			
	Organizations Representing Identity Groups	Organizations Representing Occupational Groups	Organizations Representing Issue Perspectives	All Organizations
Political Staff Size	0.195* (0.042) <i>Factor: 1.216</i>	0.209* (0.030) <i>Factor: 1.233</i>	0.226* (0.024) <i>Factor: 1.254</i>	0.203* (0.016) <i>Factor: 1.225</i>
Age of Organization	0.013* (0.003) <i>Factor: 1.013</i>	0.012* (0.002) <i>Factor: 1.012</i>	0.005 (0.003) <i>Factor: 1.006</i>	0.012* (0.001) <i>Factor: 1.012</i>
Breadth of Issue Agenda	0.089* (0.025) <i>Factor: 1.093</i>	0.005 (0.016) <i>Factor: 1.005</i>	0.017 (0.015) <i>Factor: 1.018</i>	0.023* (0.010) <i>Factor: 1.023</i>
Size of Membership (in Thousands)	0.0000 (0.0000) <i>Factor: 1.000</i>	- 0.0002 (0.0002) <i>Factor: 1.000</i>	0.0010* (0.0003) <i>Factor: 1.001</i>	0.0000 (0.0000) <i>Factor: 1.000</i>
Organization has State or Local Chapters	0.663* (0.219) <i>Factor: 1.940</i>	- 0.059 (0.167) <i>Factor: 0.943</i>	0.425 (0.236) <i>Factor: 1.529</i>	0.436* (0.112) <i>Factor: 1.546</i>
Number of Lobbyists Hired by Organization	- 0.014 (0.040) <i>Factor: 0.986</i>	0.012 (0.019) <i>Factor: 1.013</i>	- 0.019 (0.020) <i>Factor: 0.981</i>	- 0.007 (0.013) <i>Factor: 0.993</i>
Organization Has Associated PAC	0.117 (0.322) <i>Factor: 1.124</i>	- 0.360* (0.163) <i>Factor: 0.698</i>	- 0.036 (0.279) <i>Factor: 0.964</i>	- 0.270* (0.126) <i>Factor: 0.763</i>
Organization Is a Professional Association	-	- 0.660** (0.207) <i>Factor: 0.517</i>	-	- 0.698* (0.096) <i>Factor: 0.497</i>
Organization Identified as Think Tank	-	-	1.422* (0.345) <i>Factor: 4.147</i>	1.347* (0.340) <i>Factor: 3.847</i>
Constant	2.602	3.130	3.115	3.027
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.051	.060	.048	.047
Log Likelihood	- 1579.3	- 2080.6	- 3078.8	- 7001.4
N	341	438	636	1454

Table entries are Negative Binomial regression coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses and incident rate ratios below. The dependent variable is the number of times the organization was mentioned in Roll Call, The Hill, National Journal, Congress Daily, The Hotline, Congressional Quarterly, and The Washington Post from 1995-2004. \* $p < .05$  (two-tailed).

Table 2: Zero-Inflated Negative Binomial Models of Organizational Activity in Policymaking

	Testimony in Congressional Committees	Mentions in Papers of the President	Mentions in Administrative Agency Rules	Mentions in Federal Court Documents
Political Staff Size	0.1423* (0.0169)	0.0288 (0.0224)	0.0476* (0.0135)	0.1068* (0.0248)
<i>Binary Coefficients</i>	- 0.652 (0.144)*	- 0.316 (0.118)*	- 0.552 (0.204)*	- 0.469 (0.161)*
Age of Organization	0.0050** (0.0018)	0.0055 (0.0029)	0.0142* (0.0014)	0.0196* (0.0026)
<i>Binary Coefficients</i>	- 0.005 (0.006)	- 0.014 (0.005)*	- 0.051 (0.024)*	- 0.051 (0.016)*
Breadth of Issue Agenda	0.0262* (0.0109)	0.0183 (0.0186)	0.0267* (0.0087)	0.0580* (0.0192)
<i>Binary Coefficients</i>	- 0.203 (0.196)	- 0.033 (0.047)	- 0.055 (0.093)	- 0.109 (0.094)
Number of Lobbyists Hired by Organization	- 0.0215 (0.0162)	0.0035 (0.0337)	- 0.0529* (0.0119)	- 0.0124 (0.0311)
<i>Binary Coefficients</i>	- 0.414 (0.301)	- 0.059 (0.066)	- 0.023 (0.093)	- 0.001 (0.056)
Organization Has Associated PAC	0.0617 (0.1404)	- 0.6184* (0.3013)	0.4900* (0.1207)	- 0.2277 (0.2076)
<i>Binary Coefficients</i>	- 0.154 (0.623)	- 0.391 (0.549)	- 0.697 (0.885)	- 1.825 (1.541)
Size of Membership (in Thousands)	- 0.00004 (0.00002)	0.00006 (0.00003)	0.00003 (0.00002)	0.00010* (0.00004)
<i>Binary Coefficients</i>	- 0.005 (0.005)	- 0.006 (0.004)	- 0.028 (0.037)	- 0.005 (0.004)
Organization has State or Local Chapters	0.1480 (0.1365)	0.9262* (0.2700)	0.4462* (0.1137)	- 0.0552 (0.1807)
<i>Binary Coefficients</i>	0.515 (0.375)	0.322 (0.389)	0.599 (0.612)	- 0.157 (0.541)
Organization Identified as Think Tank	1.384* (0.3342)	1.0931 (0.5531)	0.3537 (0.3859)	- 1.9084* (0.5818)
<i>Binary Coefficients</i>	- 2.914 (8.484)	- 2.424 (2.024)	- 7.705 (36.351)	0.243 (1.746)
Organization is a Professional Association	- 0.3370* (0.1293)	- 0.4982 (0.3114)	- 0.2831* (0.1145)	- 0.5923* (0.1879)
<i>Binary Coefficients</i>	0.762 (0.359)	0.941 (0.384)*	- 0.270 (0.500)	0.884 (0.413)*
Organization is a Union	0.0761 (0.2270)	- 0.6256 (0.4223)	1.1519* (0.1612)	1.4250* (0.3093)
<i>Binary Coefficients</i>	- 0.621 (1.645)	- 1.315 (1.194)	- 5.936 (15.668)	- 2.687 (4.344)
Organization Represents Identity Group	- 0.2162 (0.1281)	- 0.5806* (0.2440)	0.3457* (0.1384)	- 0.5248* (0.1777)
<i>Binary Coefficients</i>	0.263 (0.350)	- 0.926 (0.346)*	0.598 (0.361)	- 0.025 (0.358)
Organization Represents Environmental Concerns	-	-	-	0.7606* (0.2896)
<i>Binary Coefficients</i>	-	-	-	- 0.203 (0.561)
Constant	0.874 Binary: 0.109	- 0.4594 Binary: 2.055	1.2115 Binary: 1.044	1.786 Binary: 1.256
Log Likelihood	- 3063.3	- 1240.7	- 4173.7	- 3872.9
N	1412	1412	1411	1411

Table entries are Zero-Inflated Negative Binomial regression coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses. The binary coefficients correspond to a model predicting whether organizations will have zero testimony or zero mentions. Negative binary coefficients therefore indicate that a variable decreases the chance that an organization will receive zero testimony or mentions and increase the chance that an organization will receive at least one. \* $p < .05$  (two-tailed).

Figure 1: Distribution of Washington Constituency Organizations

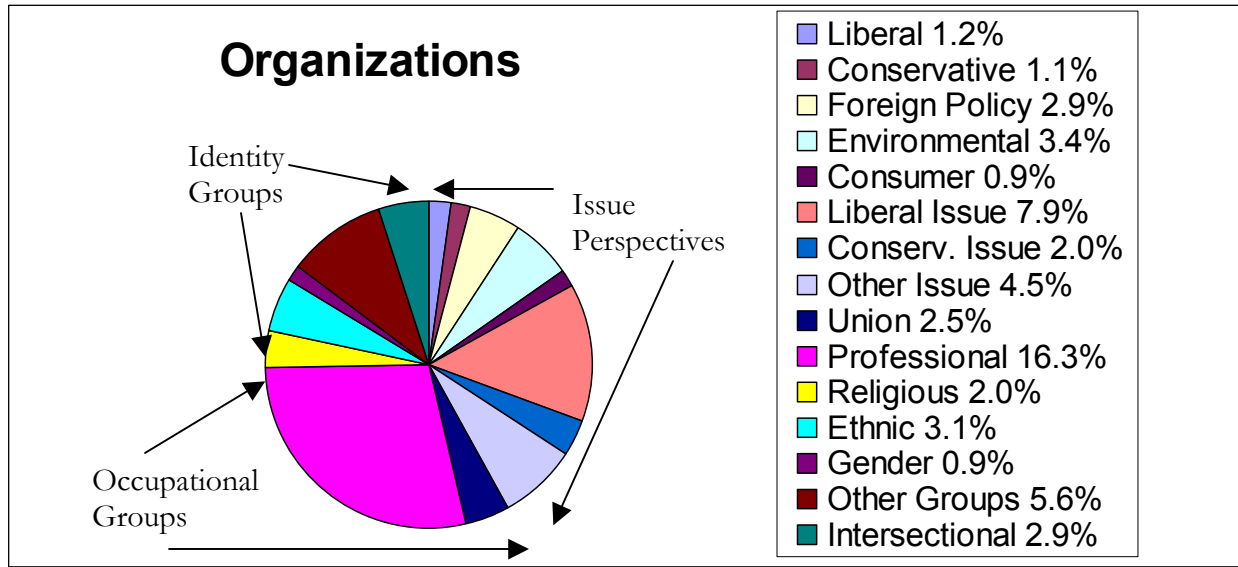


Figure 2: Distribution of Washington Media Mentions among Constituency Organizations

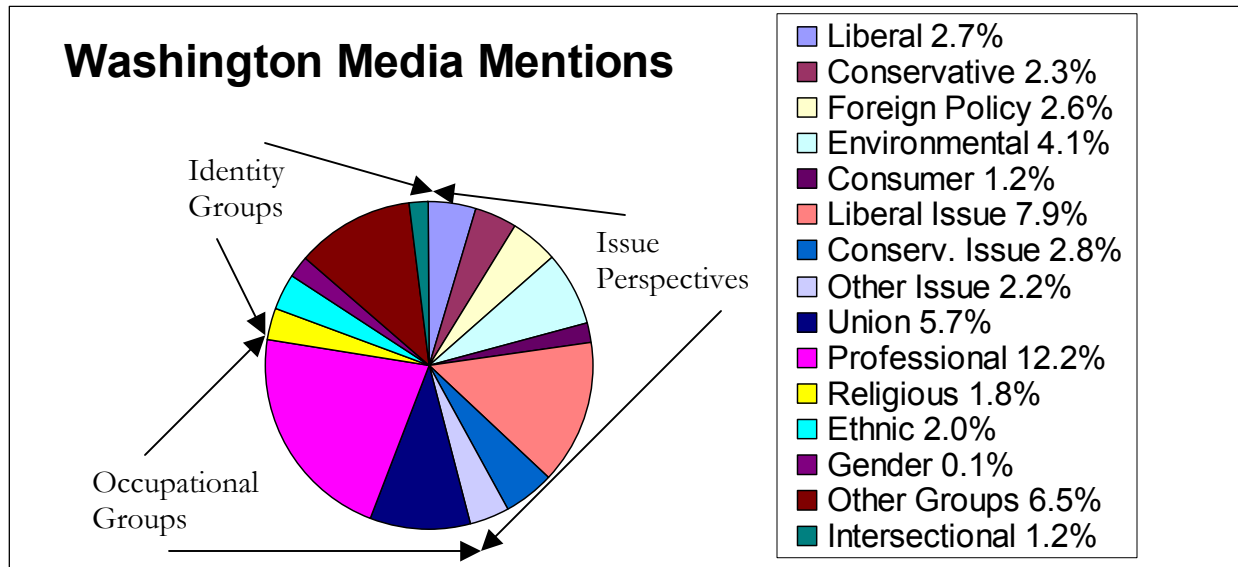


Figure 3: Distribution of Congressional Committee Testimony among Constituency Organizations

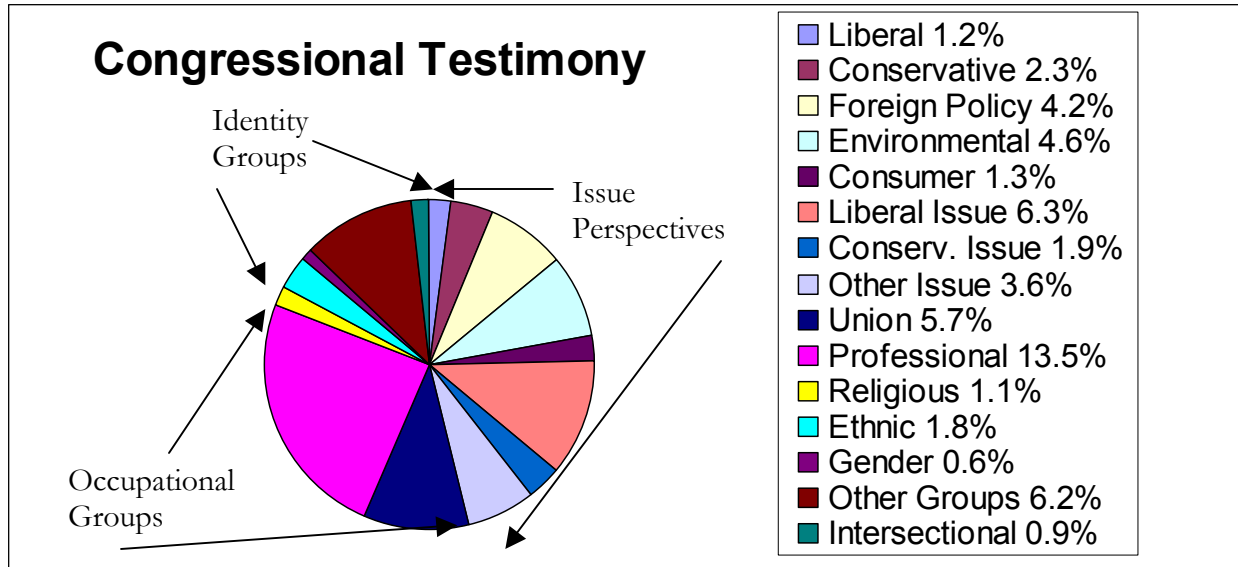




Figure 4: Distribution of Presidential Papers Mentions among Constituency Organizations

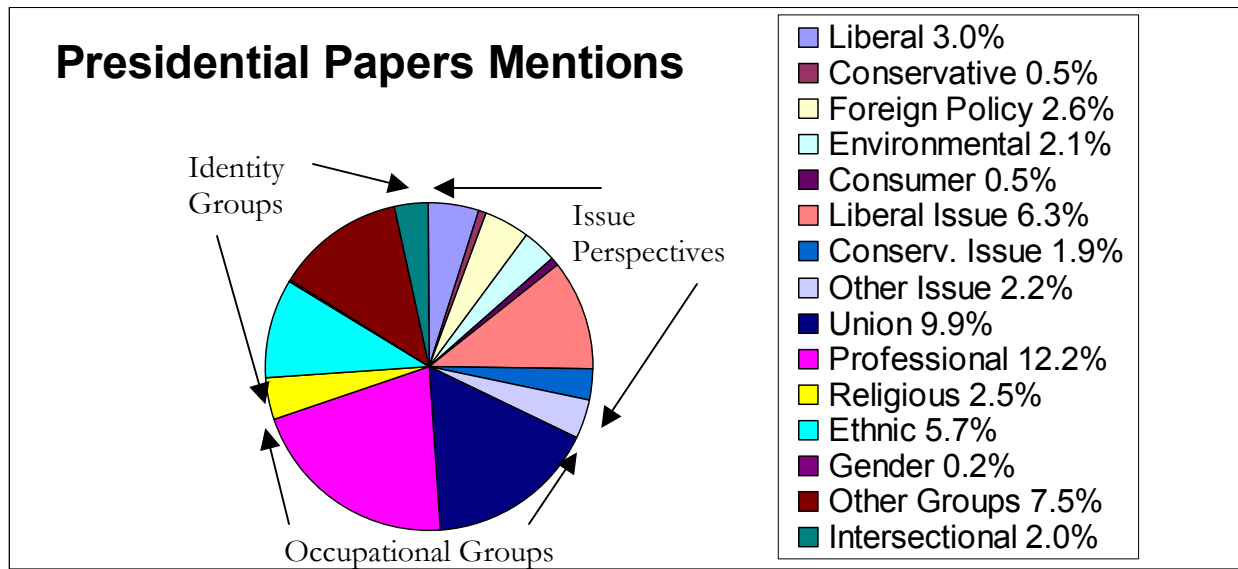


Figure 5: Distribution of Administrative Agency Rule Mentions among Constituency Organizations

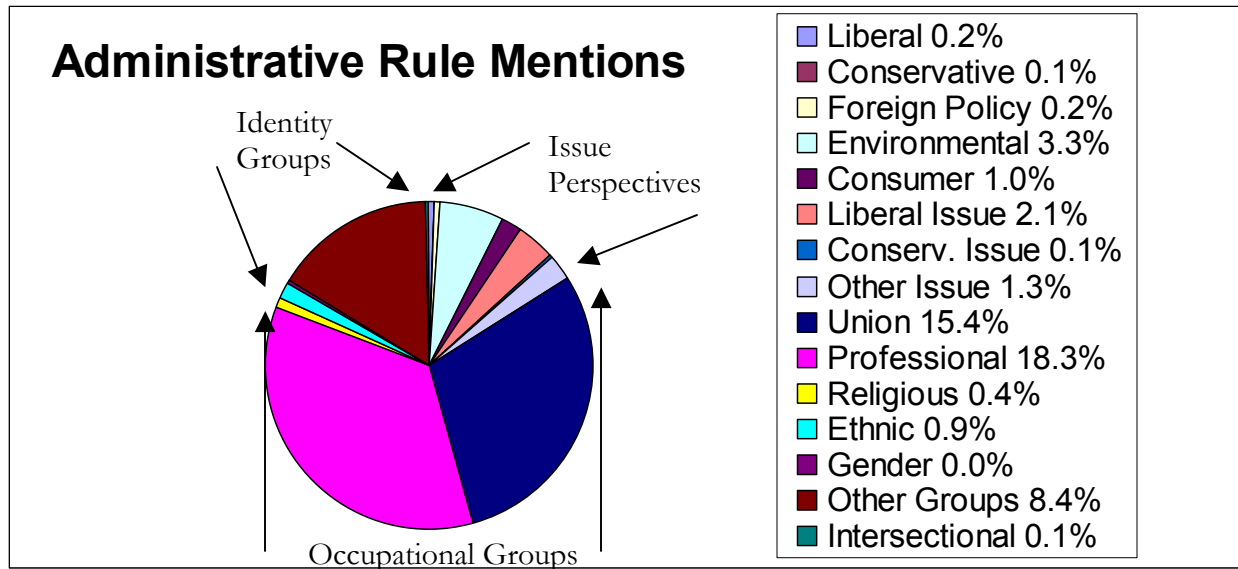


Figure 6: Distribution of Federal Court Document Mentions among Constituency Organizations

